TOWARDS BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORK AND HAPPINESS*

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ABSTRACT

Not only be one of the crucial bases for accomplishing merit, but "social work" is one of the names for "happiness" — that is, the "meritorious deed" in the Buddha's discourses or *suttas* as well. With a long distance to its origin, social work, in its first reference as *dāna* (giving), was expressed in the Buddha's time as a spiritual force for the creation of social conditions favourable to tackle such critical social *dukkha* (problems) as poverty, hunger, wars and the suffering resulting from these problems. Up to our days, these same old problems have continued to exist with other new social problems and risks. In the turn of the twentieth century, however, there emerged the social-environmental-economic development crisis along with those problems such as ecological catastrophe, environmental degradation, climate change, drugs, human trafficking, resulting in the paradox of happiness in developed nations. In other words, their current economic situations do not really make people happy, although the countries have much succeeded in industrialization and modernization guided by the "pursuit of happiness," an economic ideology used in search of an affluent 'welfare state' of *Homo economicus* of the mainstream economic paradigm. This paper aims to search for Buddhist solutions concerning those contemporary problems, to analyze their causes, and to consider the 'Buddhist social work' as a way to pursue real happiness via the Buddhist economics of happiness standpoints.

Keywords: Buddhist economics, *Homo economicus*, happiness paradox, social work

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*This article was initially delivered at the International Buddhist Conference on "Buddhist Social Work and Education in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)," organized by the International Buddhist College (IBC) and Than Hsiang Foundation, held at Than Hsiang Temple, Penang, Malaysia, July 25-28, 2015.

1. INTRODUCTION

Not solely one of the crucial bases for accomplishing merit, the social work is one of the names for 'happiness,' that is—*puñña*—the "meritorious action" in the Buddha's discourses (*sutta*). As a so-called 'the good,' social work is a common aim of all Buddhists and a 'method' or 'means' to an end goal of life—that is, 'happiness'. Nonetheless, happiness is not always the good, while the good, according to the Buddhist ethics, is certainly happiness. Although impermanent and liable to change, happiness of social work causes the seekers a lot more benefits than threats.

On the contrary, happiness of *Homo economicus*, the economic man, although transient, changeable, and worldly the same nature as that of social work, it yields seekers more threats than benefits. Besides, it arises when want or craving (*taṇhā*) is satisfied. Thus, it is unfinished or boundless and can lead a community to the social and economic injustice, political corruption, poverty, hunger, financial crises, environmental deterioration, and climate change. In short, happiness of *Homo economicus* and its pursuit always ends up with *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness. Owing to *Paṭiccasamuppāda* or the Dependent Origination, it appears in the cycle as the cause of the seeker's unlimited want or craving (*taṇhā*) and craving causes all pursuits (*pariyesanā*) that lead the whole process to an end with the kinds of societal problems or suffering because of an inability to see the dependent origination of happiness as it actually is.

And after more than 2,600 years, individuals and their societal *dukkha* have continued. In the last couple of decades, there exists the paradox of happiness in the affluent and developed nations—the capitalist societies where most people follow the "pursuit of happiness" slogan as the way to satisfy their wants or desires. In quest for the Buddhist doctrine relevant to solve those structural problems, this article starts with an analysis of the core causes of the problems and considers the Buddhist social work as a secure path for the right pursuit of happiness through the Buddhist economics of happiness standpoints.

2. HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK

With a long distance to its origin, social work was in its first reference as *dāna* (generosity, charity) and *veyyāvacca* (offering the service). Both meanings were expressed in the Buddha's time as the spiritual force for the creation of social conditions favourable to deal with the critical social *dukkha* (problems) such as wars (among states), poverty, hunger, and the suffering caused by these problems. In line with the traditional story, such

distinguished individuals as Sudatta-Anāthapiṇḍika[1] and Visākhā (Migāra's Mother);[2] were householders who situated at the upper class of society and very wealthy chose to follow the spiritual path and became the noble ones through 'generosity' or *dāna* and 'rendering the service' or *veyyāvacca*. Not only these two celebrity of the time, but such other generous householders as Meṇdaka, Suppiyā,[3] Ugga of Hatthī village,[4] as well.

Thus, the history of philosophical idea of eastern social work has its beginning with the great contribution of the Buddha. The Blessed One understands the major cause of social problems within the individual. By focusing on the human being, even though he also knows how much culture and the structure of society (caste system) have influence upon individuals; his Dhamma can cure the social problems of his time.[5] This is because to serve a society in a real and long term is difficult, if the person is devoid of 'individual or self development'. Hence, the Buddha urged his sixty disciples who had attained the *arahantship* to travel from village to village, city to city, to teach his Dhamma[6] to people for their welfare and happiness:

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[1]F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Aṅguttara-nikāya: The Gradual Sayings**, vol. 1, (no. 18), [Part I: The Book of the One, (f) Lay-follower, men], (Oxford : PTS, 1995), p. 23.

Sudatta-Anāthapiṇḍika, the lay-follower, chief (*etadagga*) among men disciples of alms-givers.

[2]*ibid*., p. 24. Visākhā (Migāra's Mother), the lay-follower, was praised by the Buddha as chief among women disciples who minister to the Order (and of performing *dāna*).

[3]*ibid*., p. 25. Suppiyā, the lay-follower, chief among women disciples who nurse the sick.

[4]*ibid*., p. 23. Ugga of Hatthī village, the householder, chief among disciples who give pleasant gifts.

[5]This is evidenced by some major indications told by King Pasenadi of Kosala in the Dhammacetiyasutta that the king praises and thanks the Buddha of his *Dhamma* which have brought peace and happiness to his country.— I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhima-nikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 2, (no. 11), [89: Dhammacetiyasutta], pp. 298-302.

[6]The word *dhamma* (Sk. *dharma*) has several definitions. The most common are: teaching (as contained in the scriptures), Ultimate Truth (to which the teachings point), law, doctrine, nature, phenomenon, and a discrete 'moment' of life, seen as it really is.—Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto (Phra Phrabrahmaguṇābhorn), **Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality**, tr. by Robin Moore, (Bangkok : Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2011 / B.E. 2554), p. 9.

> Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of *devas* and men. Let not two (of you) go by one (way) Monks, teach *dhamma* which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending. Explain with the spirit and the letter the Brahma-faring completely fulfilled, wholly pure.[7]

Those suggestive words not only instigate the strategic age of social work in the world, but also signify the first Buddhist thought of the kind of social work and duty in a humanitarian sense that is found in the sacred history of humankind.

3. HOMO ECONOMICUS: THE ECONOMIC MAN

As mentioned earlier that early social work in the East (and so does the West's) has its main focus and origin in 'poverty' and its economic and social consequential problems such as disease, lack of education, prostitutes, crime, etc. Actually, these problems are closely linked to notion of *homo economicus*: the economic man of western mainstream economics paradigm. Actually, *homo economicus* is the one who is always rational, self-interested, and stresses on individualistic preferences via his/her 'pursuit of happiness'. *Homo economicus* is one of most important and powerful tenets of the Neoclassical Economics.

This humanistic model was thought to be proposed by John Stuart Mill in 1836.[8] In Mill's opinion, the economic man is "solely as a being who *desires* to possess wealth, and who is *capable of judging* the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end."[9] [italic added] Such a 'desire' is 'unlimited want' or 'self-interest' in a human's nature, although it is nothing new, it can appear in the position of power and control over humanity, natural resources, economic and political systems.

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[7]I.B. Horner (tr.), **Vinaya Piṭaka: Book of Discipline**, vol. 4, (no. 4), [I: The Great Section], (Oxford : PTS, 1993), p. 28.

[8]John Stuart Mill, "On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It," **London and Westminster Review**, October 1836. Reprint, Mill, **Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy**, 1844. Reprint, **Collected Works**, vol. 4, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), pp. 120–64. See, Joseph Persky, "The Ethnology of Homo Economicus," **Journal of Economic Perspectives**, vol. 9, No. 2, (Spring 1995): 221-231.

[9]*ibid*, (1836, p. 321); (1995, p. 223).

Pertaining to Venerable Buddhadāsa, the human desire is *taṇhā* or craving that has many dimensions. In addition to the three levels on which it operates, craving disturbs the mind in three basic directions or ways: "There is the desire to get, have, possess, and enjoy material things. There is the desire to be this, to be that, to become somebody or something. And there is the desire to not be, to no longer exist, to be annihilated, to become nothing."[10] Craving then has many ways to disturb the mind and ruin its 'natural ecology'—the spiritual realm of mindfulness and wisdom—that has no chance of being healthy.

Additionally, as the institutional structure, David Brandon argues:

> These cravings have become cemented into all forms of social structures and institutions...These structures and their protective institutions continue to exacerbate and amplify the basic human inequalities in housing, health care, education and income. They reward and encourage greed, selfishness, and exploitation rather than love, sharing and compassion. Certain people's life styles, characterised by greed and over-consumption, become dependent on the deprivation of the many. The oppressors and oppressed fall into the same trap of continual craving.[11]

As a product of the economic and social theories that support capitalist society, the *Homo economicus* model is a basis on which modern economic theories are built as well. The model ensures an individual's free will to pursue one's own interests. It also deeply rooted in the East with the West tradition of capitalism. People in such a model only seem to think, as affluence creeps in, they can become happy if they get their desires fulfilled. As GDP swells, therefore, their lives turn around cash. They worship money. Not solely that developed capitalist countries have fallen into such a pursuit of happiness (material wealth), but the many Asians as well.

Although achieved much, capitalism does not actually make people happy because the life of *homo economicus* is paradoxical in many senses. The greater quantity of

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[10] Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, "Conserving the Inner Ecology (1990)," tr. by Santikaro Bhikkhu, Suan Mokkhabalarama, November 1997.

[11] David Brandon, **Zen and the Art of Helping**, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 10-11, in Ken Jones, **Access to Insight**, (Legacy edition), 30 November 2013.

happiness (goods and services) they pursue, the fewer amount of utility and life satisfaction they obtain. This implies that: "getting what ones want does not always lead to wanting what ones get (getting)". All these paradoxical phenomena actually can be realized only by the wise. Happiness has transient (*aniccaṁ*) nature; it is unsatisfactory (*dukkhaṁ*), and non-self (*anattā*). When one expects it to satisfy oneself, one solely suffers from it.

Therefore, the economic man, when reach the societal level, reacts efficiently to the tremendous economic and political pressure from the forceful capitalist-driven ideology. People acquire more power, more materials, and become caught up in boundless routines of "getting more and spending more". They exploit others as well as destroy the ecology and nature for ages—undoubtedly, devoted to "happiness" which is not that far from 'money' or 'wealth'. These irrational behavior and selfishness (craving) have instigated new social problems and risks, as mentioned, human trafficking, children on/of the street, family violence, drug abuse and juvenile justice that emerged in Thailand and the ASEAN since the 1990s. Certainly, these problems have increased the demand for social work too. For example, the creation of more ecosystem restoration program, the opening of more homeless programs, more refugee resettlement programs, more drug rehabilitation programs, and more mental hospitals, etc.

All problems have human 'desire,' which is selfishness or greed in the old-time view as their origin. Thus, why do we still keep it and not get rid of it? or, why do we accept the use of *homo economicus* as an analytical tool in the economic analysis and not reject it?

4. THE WESTERN SOCIAL WORK

Social work in the western society, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is "any of various professional activities or methods concretely concerned with providing social services and especially with the investigation, treatment, and material aid of the economically, physically, mentally, or socially disadvantaged." Although it has been a humanistic social action since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, social work nowadays concerns various procedural forms and reports to characterize ways of relieving suffering and enhancing people well-being, rather than direct interacting with clients or the needy.

According to Soydan,[12] the theoretical idea of social work initiates with the contribution of two classical theorists: Mary Richmond (1917)[13] who seeks the main causes of social problems within the individual by focusing on the individual in order to remedy social problems; and Jane Addams (1902, 1960)[14] who focuses on the structure and culture of society and their influence upon the individual.

Today, social work in the West is: "A business agency with the highly procedural forms. Its organization and education are subordinated to and transformed by the imperatives of managerialism."[15] In other words, it is the job done by someone who works for a government or private organization that helps people who have financial or family problems.[16] From a Buddhist standpoint, this nature of the agencies has worsened the true spirit of social work. As seen by the frustration the workers felt, when they were dealing with a barrage of forms that their work currently took:

> We are now much more office based…The whole team was in the office working at their desks. We have loads more forms which take time to complete. But we social workers also do less and less direct work with clients. Increasingly the agency buys in other people to do the direct work and we manage it.[17]

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[12] Haluk Soydan, **The History of Ideas in Social Work**, (Birmingham, UK: Venture, 1999), quoted in Silvia Staub-Bernasconi, "Social Work as a Discipline and Profession," p. 12, published in Vesna Leskosek (ed.), **Theories and Methods of Social Work: An Exploring Different Perspectives**, (Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljublijana, 2009), pp. 9-30.

[13] M. Richmond, **Social Diagnosis**, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917).

[14] J. Addams, **Democracy and Social Ethics**, (New York: Macmillan, 1902); and J. Addams, **A Centennial Reader**. (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

[15] J. Harris and V. White, **Modernising Social Work: Critical Considerations**, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2009), quoted in Iain Ferguson, "'Another Social Work is Possible!' : Reclaiming the Radical Tradition" p. 90; published in Vesna Leskosek (ed.), *op.cit.*, Chapter 5, pp. 81-98.

[16] More detail—see Morley D. Glicken, "An Introduction to Social Problems, Social Welfare Organizations, and the Profession of Social Work," in Social Work in the 21st Century, 2nd ed., Chapter 1, (Phoenix, USA: Arizona State University, 2011), pp. 3-20.

[17] Chris Jones, "The Neo-liberal Assault: Voices from the Front-line of British Social Work," in I. Ferguson, Lavalette, M., Whitmore, E. (eds.), **Globalisation, Global Justice and Social Work**, (London: Routledge/Telor & Francis Group, 2005), p. 98.

Another worker condensed the frustration which seems the same experience as the first worker's:

> I feel so deskilled because there are so many restrictions over what I can do. Yes I go out and do assessments, draw up care plans, but then we aren't allowed to do anything. I can't even go and organise meals on wheels for somebody without completing a load of paperwork, submitting a report to a load of people who would then make the decision as to whether I can go ahead and make the arrangements. I just wonder why I am doing this. It's not social work.[18]

Although stresses on 'poverty' as its birth, social work in the Western economic world and the rise of its philosophical idea are greatly different from the Eastern tradition.

5. TOWARDS BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORK: AN ANALYSIS

In the East, that is to say—Buddhism—social work is defined as 'human flourishing' or 'happiness'. It is an action which is said to be 'good' or 'right' when it has tendency to augment happiness and welfare or well-being of a community or a society. Not only be synonymous to human happiness, social work is an 'advantage' or 'merit' (*puñña*) stated in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* by the Buddha, thus: "Monks, be not afraid of deeds of merit. It is the name for happiness, that is, meritorious deeds."[19]

Also, the Blessed One has restated such the meritorious deeds to an angel named 'Lāja' to be pursued and done repeatedly since its result is happiness: "If a person were to do good, he should do it again and again; let him delight in it. The accumulation of good is happiness."[20] Based on such the Teaching, happiness of one who performs social

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[18] *ibid*., p. 100.

[19] E.M. Hare (tr.), **Aṅguttaranikāya**, vol. 4, (no. 21), [The Book of the Sevens, v, § ix a (59a): Amity], p. 54. (A 6.54)

[20] K.R. Norman (tr.), **Khuddakanikāya** (The Minor Anthologies)**: Dhammapada** (The Word of the Doctrine), (no. 30), [118; Ch. IX: *Pāpavagga*], (Oxford : PTS, 1997), p. 18.

work (its quality) is totally opposed to that of the *Homo economicus* since it ends up with genuine happiness. In opposite, happiness of *Homo economicus* generally arises when want is satisfied. Thus, it is unfinished and ends up with suffering due to its impermanent and non-self nature.

As a task that takes the good of society, the Buddhist social work constitutes "human flourishing" as the core of "human happiness" which is subscribed to its philosophy. As it is evidenced that the Buddha after his enlightenment had encouraged his 60 disciples who were the *Arahants* to serve a society for the benefit and happiness of the greatest number of people.[21] His action not only explains the value of social work and benevolence, but also expounds social work as a 'duty' that must be guided by Dhamma. And his Dhamma has become a primary axis for cultivating virtue. It is defined as morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The threefold training which is generalized from the Noble Eightfold Path can treat the ills of life: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) and enable people to live their lives properly as well as do not harm others.

There are ten virtuous actions where the Buddha defined as the pursuit of right (ordinary) happiness known as *Dasa-puññakiriyāvatthu*.[22] This Pāli term is composed of four small words: *dasa* (ten) + *puñña* (merit) + *kiriyā* (action, deed) + *vatthu* (bases, ways) that is rendered the 'Ten-Bases of Meritorious Action'. All ten-bases are peaceful action for attaining the right 'worldly happiness'— a kind of 'feeling good' (*sukha-vedanā*), and also the ground practice for higher training, the "threefold training," that can remove those ills of life. And, *puñña* (Sk. *puṇya*) is a popular term for wholesome (*kusala*) action.

The Ten-Bases of Meritorious Action, in group, are called as the 'Three-Bases of Meritorious Actions' (*tīṇi-puññakiriyāvatthu*)[23] which can be applied to explain the human's behaviour and societies. The three-bases are defined as: 'generosity' (*dāna*), 'morality' (*sīla*), and 'mental development' (*bhāvanā*). They are the triad of volitional

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[21] I.B. Horner (tr.), **Vinaya Piṭaka: Book of Discipline**, vol. 4, p. 28.

[22] Pe Maung Tin (tr.), **Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā: The Expositor** (Buddhagosa's Commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*), (no. 48), vol. 1-2, p. 209.

[23] F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Khuddakanikāya** (The Minor Anthologies)**: Itivuttaka** (As It Was Said), vol. 2, (no. 24), (Oxford : PTS, 1996), p. 154; See also, A IV 164-6.

deeds. Not only can produce good effects, they can also give social workers the highest blessing known as *maṅgala* or "the auspicious".[24]

Besides, the Three-Bases can provide a strong foundation for the higher levels of Dhamma—that is, "the Threefold Training" (*ti-sikkhā*)—namely, morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). They are the core of which involves the good practice called as *Ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* (the Noble Eightfold Path)[25]—to perform in a firm and secure manner. All in all, these two levels of Dhamma: the Three-Bases of Meritorious Actions and the Threefold Training are inter-correlated.

Besides, the Three-Bases and Ten-Bases are signified in Tipiṭaka, as follows:

Three Bases of Meritorious Action	**Ten Bases of Meritorious Action** (Merit acquired by…)
1. Generosity (*Dāna*)	1) *Dānamaya*: generosity, giving, sharing material things
	2) *Pattidānamaya*: sharing others in merit or good deeds
	3) *Pattānumodanāmaya*: rejoicing in others' merit
2. Morality (*Sīla*)	4) *Sīlamaya*: observing the precepts or moral conduct
	5) *Veyyāvaccamaya*: rendering services and assistance
	6) *Apacāyanamaya*: respecting the elders, the holy ones; and honoring others
3. Mental Development (*Bhāvanā*)	7) *Bhāvanāmaya*: mental development (meditation)
	8) *Dhammassavanamaya*: listening to the Teachings
	9) *Dhammadesanāmaya*: instructing others the Teaching
	10) *Diṭṭhujukamma*: straitening one's own views in accord with the Teachings of the Buddha

Source: Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto, **Dictionary of Buddhism,** [89], (B.E. 2551 / 2008), pp. 93-94.

[24] Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), **Khuddakanikāya** (The Minor Anthologies)**: Khuddakapāṭha** (The Minor Readings), (no. 23), [V: *Maṅgalasutta* (The Good Omen Discourse)], (Oxford : PTS, 1991), pp. 2-4.

[25] That is evidenced by the saying of the Buddha to Venerable Ānanda, "What is that good practice? It is the Noble Eightfold Path … which leads to complete disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*."— I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhimanikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 2, (no. 11), [83: *Makhādevasutta*, par. 2], p.272 (M 83.21)

For *Diṭṭhujukamma*, it is not fixed to be with the third group. It can be with any one of those three groups. For those Ten-Bases, only two of them—*dāna* and *veyyāvacca*—which imply to the society and social work, will be taken into consideration.

5.1 Dāna

The Pāli *dāna* is derived from the root *dā* as in *dadāti* "to give" and in *dāti*, *dyāti*, meaning "to deal out". Thus, *dāna* is defined as giving, generosity, dealing out, gift, almsgiving, liberality, and munificence, especially, a charitable give to the community of bhikkhus, the *Saṅgha*.[26]

> *Dāna* in the Buddha's time was social activities or actions made distinctly by *seṭṭhī*, the rich householder, who is comparable to a 'capitalist' (Thai: *nai-thun* นายทุน) in our modern world. Nevertheless, the value gaining from their 'generosity career' is dissimilar. Venerable Buddhāsa once explained the difference:
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> A *seṭṭhī* is a wealthy person who uses his/her accumulated wealth to build a *rong-than* [โรงทาน] for the sake of social welfare. The status of *seṭṭhī* was measured by the number of their *rong-than*. It is an almshouse or a communal place where the poor could come and receive what they lacked materially…The more *rong-than* one had, and the wealthier one was considered to be.[27]

In such a way, generosity a *seṭṭhī* performed implies a great deal of load of social work he or she did through building and operating numerous *rong-thans*. Also, the wealth he or she properly obtained and used has been seen as a 'sign of virtue' and 'happiness' or a 'gift' for themselves and everyone. His or her generosity not only creates opportunities to benefit the greatest number of people, but also being used as the solution to help the needy provide for their basic needs, material things, and well-being. By cultivating generosity or *dāna*, those *seṭṭhī* can develop "non-attachment" to their wealth and property—as the 'special wealth' they gain in return as well as become the 'enlightened being'.

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[26] T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), **The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary**, (London : PTS, 1979), p. 356.

[27] Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, **Dhammic Socialism**, 23, tr. by Donald K. Swearer, "Dhammic Socialism," quoted in Tavivat Puntarigvivat, "Toward a Buddhist Social Ethics: The Case of Thailand,"notes: 22.

In other words, value of money and economic wealth they earned cannot be compared to the supreme goal of enlightenment and cannot obstruct them to follow the spiritual path via social work called *dāna*.

On the contrary, "a capitalist," according to Venerable Buddhadasa, "is a wealthy person who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he or she really needs."[28] In reality, much money and 'surplus' in capitalist society usually feed over-consumption and over-capital accumulation. This results in consumerism and the pursuit of happiness led by self-interest of *homo economicus* to grow: the more one buys and has; the more one wants. This tendency has gradually aggravated the real Buddhist concept of *dāna* to 'quantity' or 'things' that can be compared.

Thus, a capitalist today understands *dāna* as making merit in terms of money.[29] This understanding, however, is not for moving people out of poverty to increase his or her freedom and peace of mind as the *seṭṭhī* in former time had done. More often, he or she donates money for 'status survival' and for 'prestige-oriented comparisons with others' known in economic term as the 'conspicuous consumption'. In such a manner, *dāna* is no longer an act of social work as its sense of circulating *puñña* (merit or happiness) because 'the gift' or 'benefit' from social work is being lost, while attachment to 'self' and 'wealth,' alienation, individualism, and selfishness have enlarged. Moreover, these problems can stimulate social and economic injustice and prolonged poverty.

5.2 Veyyāvacca

The Pāli, *veyyāvacca*, and Sanskrit *Vaiyā + pṛtya* from *vyāpṛta* mean "active" or "busy". It was later translated into Pāli-Sanskrit as *vaiyāvṛtya* [as *vi* + ā + *vṛt*] means service, attention, rendering a service; commission, labour, work, or duty.[30] This paper prefers using the translation of *veyyāvacca* as 'rendering the service'.

The Theravāda Buddhist seems to think that an individual without 'mental development' or 'self-cultivation' is not easy to serve a society or 'render the service' in a real meaning of term. In other words, social work must be rooted in *sīla*

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[28] *ibid.*

[29] *Dāna* (generosity) is not confined to the donation of money and material things. It embraces such various forms as teaching, training, helping, working, giving, organizing services, political; environmental; or natural disastrous actions, etc.

[30] T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), *op.cit.,* p. 720.

(morality). And, the 'cultivation of *sīla*' must be observed at the same time, or even before the person does rendering social service, or else he or she might fail or corrupt his or her social duty.

The Five Precepts are basic Buddhist *sīla*. The Precepts are one kind of social work taken upon in order to abstain from some types of actions. They signify relationships and activities that do not take advantage of others, and that are for the mutual benefit of themselves, of others, and of the public. Besides, the Precepts advise to people how 'the wise' behaves ahead of any sense of 'self' and selfishness. Moreover, as Ken Jones explains:

> The Precepts invite us to loosen the grip, unclench the fist, and to aspire to open-handedness and open-heartedness. Whether, and to what extent, he keeps the Precepts is the responsibility of each individual.[31]

Besides, the Precepts advise to people how 'the wise' behaves ahead of any sense of self and selfishness.

Sati (mindfulness), furthermore, is a key instrumental Dhamma for 'mental development' (*bhāvanā*) aside from the practice of *dāna* (generosity) and *sīla* (morality). Regarding Venerable Payutto: "*Sati* (mindfulness) aids the arising of wisdom (*paññā*). It helps the mind not to fall into the past or float into the future with delight and aversion, but seeing things as they are." [32] Pertaining to the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, the practice, the development, and the cultivation of mindfulness through its four foundations is also the development of concentration (*samādhi*) therein.[33]

When seeing the Dhamma and things 'as they really are,' from the training of insight, ones see the existence of themselves and things that they are related to each others in the framework of the Dependent Origination or *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Individuals voluntarily work for the welfare and happiness of others, while the

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[31] Ken Jones, "Buddhism and Social Action: An Exploration," Wheel Publication No. 308/331, (Kandy, Sri Lanka : Buddhist Publication Society), section 2.7: Violence and non-violence, p.18.

[32] Phra Debvedi (P.A. Payutto), **Helping Yourself to Help Others**, tr. by Puriso Bhikkhu, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1990), pp. 37-8.

[33] I.B. Horner (tr.), **Majjhimanikāya: The Middle Length Sayings**, vol. 1, (no. 10), [44: Cūḷavedallasutta], pp. 363. (M 44.12).

work they performed has tendency to augment *puñña* that is happiness and benefits to the society. They then realize the higher meaning of social work which means 'mind(ful) training'—the practice of Dhamma.

Those will bring them to the true nature of worldly and spiritual life that enables them to realize impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anattā*)—the three qualities stated as the 'beneficial' (*sappāya*) for *nibbāna*—the supreme happiness.[34] Then, the social worker is unperturbed by gain or lost, praise or blame, fame or defame, and sorrow or happiness. This is the highest form of rendering the service or *veyyāvacca* in the philosophy of Buddhism.

6. CONCLUSION

The Buddhist social work is an action that is no longer developed in the context of *homo economicus*—where his or her behaviour is driven by self-interest or greed. The core philosophy of Buddhist social work which is for the individual and social transformation has to deal inter-dependently among individuals, the economy, ecology, environment, society, and morality. Its idea is based on awareness-understanding of inter-dependence among individuals and those surrounding systems—which all are in unity. Besides, its central philosophy needs people to work together, care for each other, make sacrifices, let go of 'self' and give up self-interests for the sake of Dhamma, the welfare of others, the happiness of the greatest number of people, and finally, the good of society.

[34] F.L. Woodward (tr.), **Saṁyuttanikāya: Book of Kindred Sayings**, vol. 4 (Saḷāyatana Vagga), (no. 16), [Ch. xxxv, iii, 5, § 146 (2): Helpful (i)], p. 86.

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