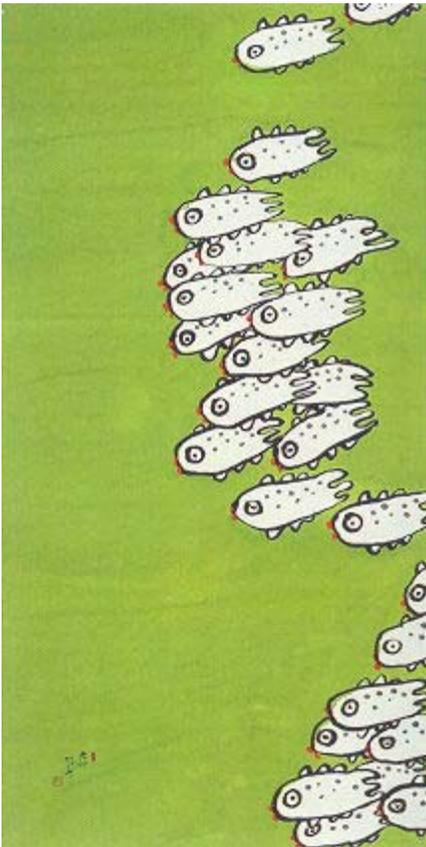


Research Article

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***SULAK SIVARAKSA AND BUDDHIST ACTIVISM:
Translating Nativist Resistance in the Age of
Transnational Capital***

By

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars generally accept that indigenous culture, especially religion, is one major asset locals can count on in their struggle for survival amidst the incursions of transnational capital in the contemporary world. (1) Among nativist resisters, some have developed an internationalist and transnational approach to the defense of tradition. (2) Well-established is the fact that quite a few Asian Engaged Buddhists, ranging from Bhikkhu Buddhadasa to A. T. Ariyaratne, can be counted as cosmopolitan nativists, offering to the world their re-invented Buddhism as plausible paths to a historical trajectory different from "development." (3) How, with their agency, do these cosmopolitan Buddhist nativists establish their faith-based resistance - including critiques of and actions targeted on transnational capital - in the international community? (4) The present article addresses this issue by focusing on Sulak Sivaraksa and his publications in English since the 1980s. (5)

I conceptualize Sivaraksa's introduction of Buddhist activism as a project of translation, or rather self-translation. (6) The act of

translation is defined by the relationship between a notion of the foreign and a notion of the domestic. (7) When translators create their own versions of the culture that they translate, they in fact reveal the choices they make or reject. Self-translation for outsiders is therefore a process in which the translator reforms - selects, preserves and (re)arranges elements of - the domestic so as to build a culture with traits s/he wants foreign readers to see. Analyzing Sulak Sivaraksa's translation project, I find it important to delve into how he selectively expands on traits which he hopes others to accept as authentically Buddhist, and then uses these "true" Buddhist elements to construct Buddhist activism, encompassing both his critical theory on and prescription for the problems of capitalism. (8)

It must be noted, in addition, that translation takes place in what Pratt conceptualizes as the "contact zone" - an "in-between" area where people of different historical and geographical backgrounds, including the oppressors and the oppressed, co-exist, interact, and compete. According to Pratt, in the contact zone, cultures often meet in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. (9) To be sure, as King puts it, Sivaraksa, is one of those leading Asian Buddhists who are capable of holding their own in the face of pressure and force. (10) It is also clear, however, that in offering his own religion to the world, Sivaraksa has to take up the challenge of securing Buddhist resistance in the contact zone where nativists meet - or rather fight - the titanic force of transnational capital, whose values, practices and institutions are sweeping across the globe. For cosmopolitan nativists, the effort to go to the world is closely entwined with the endeavor to fend for their traditions' survival. Therefore, in addition to analyzing how Sivaraksa selects from and rebuilds Buddhism, I also examine how he

attempts to crack open a space for Buddhist activism in the contact zone: in his translation project, I shall argue, he underscores the bond between the local and translocal by translating his Buddhist account of modern Thai history into a critique of modern world history, and his originally culture-bound "true" Buddhist principles into actions of defiance marked by transcultural practicability. By analyzing Sivaraksa, I also intend to question some post-colonial thinkers' view that not only nativist discourses but also nativists' self-translation projects are essentialist in nature. (11) According to these post-colonial writers, by celebrating the unique, pure, and unitary nature of their heritages, nativist writers and translators are unable to see the historicized fluidity of their beloved traditions, and the hybridity of their cultures under colonial influences. (12) Focusing on Sivaraksa, I contend that he is far from essentialist while defending staunchly his religious tradition. He recognizes the complexity and ambiguities rather than the purity and unity of premodern culture; he sees the historicity and malleability of tradition; and last but not least, he moves beyond an exclusivist fixation on the uniqueness of his own religion. (13)

TRANSLATING BUDDHISM SO AS TO INTERPRET THAI HISTORY

To pilot international readers through Buddhism, Sulak Sivaraksa differentiates what he identifies as essential Buddhist elements from what he regards as unimportant. The components identified by him as fundamental are foundational for his critique of modern Thai history. (14) Undoubtedly, to represent tradition - or parts of it - as indispensable could be considered ahistorical and therefore essentialist. However, in the writings of Sivarkasa, to identify the indispensable is to assume the complexity and historicity of the Buddhist tradition.

Rather than representing Buddhist tradition as a tradition of unity and purity, Sivakrasa reveals the lack of cohesion of Buddhism. According to him, myths, rituals and ceremonies, which seem to be fixtures of Buddhist culture, are by no means relevant to true Buddhism. He points out, in addition, that many local cultural elements incorporated in the Buddhist tradition in the course of history are non-Buddhist in nature, and that Buddhism itself contains an egocentric tendency which goes against the true Buddhist spirit. (15) More importantly, he refuses to incorporate the Buddhist establishment in his reformed Buddhism. Observing his own country, Siam, (16) he certainly notices how religious authorities like Kitthiwuttho use the concept of karma to legitimize social-economic hierarchy and the notion of *kilesa* (impurity) to suppress opposition. (17) For him, the Buddhist establishment must also be criticized for its conformity to the government and financial influence. (18) Particularly unacceptable is its view that exploited peasants "are now reaping the results of their bad deeds committed in the past life." (19)

After scrutinizing his own religion, Sivaraksa declares in a reformist spirit that the essence of the Buddhist tradition is Buddhism with a small "b" - concepts and praxis which guide individuals to fight self-centeredness, and steer them towards selflessness and compassion. (20) As he sees it, we should appropriate Buddhism with a small "b" to appraise history and society. (21). He points out that historical changes driven by or engendering human beings' egocentric desires for wealth and power are undesirable, for they are bound to create suffering, in the forms of insatiable pursuit of wealth, discontentment, and poverty. (22)

On the surface, writing the national history of modern Siam,

Sivaraksa seems conventional. It seems that his narrative of the modern history of Siam reiterates what sounds familiar for the Thai - that is, under the pressure of Western imperialism, the Thai (Chakri) monarchs strove effectively to maintain the political independence of Siam. King Mongkut skillfully employed diplomatic strategies to create a balance of power among Western nations, a situation which prevented any single foreign nation from dominating his country. (23) The monarchs then launched a series of reforms, aimed at changing various aspects of the Thai nation and culture, including the administrative structure, the educational process, and the military system. The whole reform process served the purposes of self-preservation vis-à-vis the West. Siam, under the Thai elite's leadership, underwent a process of emulation so as to become the modern West's equal. (24)

This, however, must not be mistaken for what Thongchai Winchakul calls "royalist-nationalist history." (25) If King Mongkut succeeded in preserving the political independence of Siam, Sivaraksa also notes, Westerners enjoyed privileges in his kingdom: during this celebrated king's reign, Western subjects, a category also including Chinese, Indians, and Vietnamese, were beyond the reach of the Thai legal process; and Siam could not raise tariff barriers against imported goods. (26) More importantly, not only does Sivaraksa's historical narrative remind the readers of the limits of the imperial house's success in retaining Siam's independence; it also concentrates on the elite's intellectual-emotional subjugation to the West. Although the elite wanted very much to resist Western imperialism, its modernization project was, in both substance and aspirations, oriented towards the West. While the Thai elite was bold enough to imagine resistance to imperialism, they dared not imagine

divergence from Western-style modernity.

In Sivaraksa's historical narrative, the Thai elite's project of modernity rests upon the notion of historical discontinuity. Imitating powerful imperialist nations, the members of the elite celebrated the rupture between the past and the present. A key element of the past from which they did not hesitate to depart was Buddhism - so Sivaraksa argues. Despite their public embrace of the Buddhist tradition, the elite's admiration for the West eroded government support for the Buddhist *sangha*. (27) Moreover, the Thai elite also subjected Buddhism to the dictates of Western-style science. (28) The tidal wave of modernization has not subsided since the end of the Second World War. In the contemporary age, modernity has concealed itself behind the masks of "development" and "globalization," asserted itself through such U.S.-dominated inter-government institutions as SEATO and ASEAN, and shaped people's lives through mass media under American influence. (29) In Sivaraksa's view, individuals of his generation admire only those Asians who are capable of adopting a Western model of modernity. In other words, so deeply entrenched is imperialism's hegemonic status, and so pervasive is the influence of its trajectory of history, that Thais fail to move beyond the possibilities of the modern as set by Western imperialist culture.

By distancing themselves from the Buddhist tradition, Sivaraksa contends, the Thais have built a modern society and culture which are far from admirable. In the hybrid - or Westernized - culture of Siam, Buddhism has been losing out to a new type of cultural leadership, comprising Westernizers who are from Harvard Business School, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and London School of Economics. In short, capitalist-style development, supported by a Western-oriented

educational system, has made massive inroads into Thai society. Whereas Westernizers in Siam celebrate the "progress" that signifies the defeat of "backward" traditional Thai culture, Sivaraksa, committed to small "b" Buddhism, grieves over the fact that discontinuity means the forgetting of the Buddhist position which embraces unselfishness and respect for others. (30)

Through translation Sivaraksa constructs his small "b" Buddhism: for non-Thai readers, he identifies ideas and practices battling self-centeredness as true Buddhism. Upon doing so, he introduces to them the disposal of the essence of Buddhism as the theme of modern Thai history. But as he expands on the details of a national history characterized by the decline of tradition, he translates Thai history into world history by uncovering the parallels between Siam and other parts of the world. (31)

TRANSLATING THAI HISTORY INTO WORLD HISTORY

Siamese history as world history I: A Buddhist analysis of capitalism

Sivaraksa begins by showing how Siam and many other places are subject to the storm of capitalism, supported by a psychology which is the complete antithesis of the Buddhist ideal of selflessness. Among the three poisons - greed, hatred and ignorance - he identifies as the psychological conditions which shape the capitalist world, (32) he focuses on greed, representing it as the main subjective source of capitalism.

In wrestling with greed, Sivaraksa has to engage with the very complex Buddhist orientation towards wealth. According to Sizemore and Swearer, while Buddhism emphasizes that

prosperity has no ultimate value, and, worse still, encourage cravings, it also states that virtues will bring prosperity. (33) Although Buddhism in a strict sense does not call for the renunciation of wealth, some Buddhist thinkers strive to build a Buddhist-inspired tradition of critical theory on capitalist economy. In so doing, they appropriate Buddhism's unfavorable view on cravings (34) Sivaraksa admires and he thinks along the same lines as theorists such as Schumacher and Buddhadasa who subscribe to this view. He therefore attacks capitalist-style greed which for him always manifests itself in an acquisitive obsession with profits. (35) According to him, greed has lured Westerners to create, and Westernized Asians to adopt, the Think Big Strategy (TBS) for maximizing gains in economic pursuits. (36) Capitalist-style greed has also led to a quantitative approach to development, as "[e]conomists and politicians are fond of using growth in the GNP as a positive economic indicator." The influence of the quantity-based notion of development is globally pervasive. "Every country," Sivaraksa has found, "aims to increase the gross national product, to increase the trade balance, to increase exports, to expand its industry, to expand building construction, etc...." (37)

In Sivaraksa's analysis, motivated by greed and spurred on by the Think-Big Strategy and the preoccupation with quantifiable success, the rich have been responsible for creating what he calls "structural violence," including phenomena like the exploitation of natural resources and the gap between the rich and the poor. (38) What marks the economic history of the modern world is the fact that the economic elite has unleashed deterritorialized economic forces which, by crossing the boundaries of the nation-states, intrude into the local peoples' life worlds.

To illustrate how transnational capitalism causes suffering to the

world, Sivaraksa focuses on Siam. A resister apt to display how economic oppression poses a threat to local life, he does not mind giving himself as an example. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) intended to help the Japanese corporations to enter Siam, thereby endangering small bookshops and publishing houses. He was, he stresses, already kicked out by the proprietors of the building in which his bookshop had been located, since they decided to build a high-tech center in the name of development. (39)

But what happens to Siam, Sivaraksa is quick to add, also occurs elsewhere. The suffering of the Thais under the system of transnational capital is shared by the people of the Third World: "When one looks deeply at Southeast Asia, one can see the entire planet. Rural exploitation and poverty is rampant throughout the Third World." Accompanying Third World poverty is the gap between the affluent North and the struggling South. (40) People of the Third World suffer from deterritorialization as a two-dimensional process: they first encounter the entering of geographically unobstructed economic processes, and then face their own deterritorialization in the forms of uprooting, displacement and defeat. (41)

In addition, transnational capital does more than exploit the Third World-so Sivaraksa says. He believes that transnational capitalism is impoverishing the First World as well. Quoting Kirkpatrick Sales, he argues that if the Industrial Revolution in England erased the English farmers, the "new empire of globalization" will eventually "make the members of the middle class jobless." (42) Reflecting on the international impact of transnational capital, he may not view the problems of the First World as precisely the same as those of the Third World. But he

surely emphasizes the comparability between the two worlds' trials and tribulations, showing the linkage between transnational capital and poverty-related phenomenon ranging from dislocation to unemployment.

Sivaraksa also depicts how transnational capitalism reduces individuals into desire-driven beings. (43) In Bangkok, he observes, "the department stores have become our shrines.... [T]hese stores have replaced the Buddhist temples as centers of social life." (44) But once again, he stresses that reality of Siam mirrors that of the world. In both the "developed" and "developing" worlds, consumerism gives rise to a global monoculture, dominated by technology, fast food, junk food, the cola, and the jean syndrome. (45) In fact, Sivaraksa is concerned not so much about the global visibility of capitalist-style commodities as about the psychology conditioned by monoculture. According to Sivaraksa, transnational capital "uses the media to create a sense of lack," luring people to purchase and yet never allowing them to feel contentment. Big corporations' advertisement campaigns tempt people to buy by teaching them to consume conventionally acclaimed traits - status, glamour, and so on.-associated with goods and fashion. In addition to being based on greed, the capitalist system is also responsible for generating more greed. (46)

Apart from manufacturing the desire to shop, Sivaraksa says, the capitalist system has also encouraged individuals to covet a form of "success" measured by monetary and material gains. In addition to introducing a quantitative approach to development and pursuing profits, multinational corporations also induce people to conceptualize success by counting-in other words, by "quantifying" - how much they have earned. (47)

In Sivaraksa's view, by creating the voracious appetite for goods and quantifiable success, capitalist culture has led to a values crisis. In Asia in general and Siam in particular, people depart from their community-based tradition, as they strive "[to climb] on top of others to better oneself." (48) In the West, capitalist values dismantle individuals' traditional commitment to the community, and lure them to appreciate acquisitiveness. (49) Looking at the recent history of the whole world, Sivaraksa in fact draws attention not to the decline of the Buddhist tradition, but to the defeat of traditions: "[w]ithin my lifetime, there has been a complete reversal of almost all of these [traditional] values. All over the world, self-supporting, self-sustaining societies have not been able to resist the pressures of consumerism." (50)

Siamese history as world history II: Who supports capitalism?

Why is it that so many fail to resist capitalism, if they were, to begin with, endowed with non-capitalist and community-oriented traditional values? When Sivaraksa contemplates this question, he assumes the complexity, but not the purity, of traditional culture.

In Sivaraksa's analysis, despite its non-aggressive and communitarian values, traditional culture could not rid itself of psychological traits rooted in self-centeredness. Even a heavily Buddhist culture is marked by the uneasy co-existence of Buddhist philosophy and transcultural psychological tendencies departing from the Buddhist ideals of selflessness and compassion. Sivaraksa envisions the psychology of an unenlightened human thus: "[He] is addicted to pleasure and is at the mercy of his senses.... He welcomes personal fame and praise and resents obscurity and blame....He is greedy and

lustful." For such a person, he does not know how to fight misfortune: "when afflicted with pain, he is distressed and overcome with bewilderment." (51) The other side of the coin is that he succumbs easily to the temptation of the delight of the senses, affluence and success. Accordingly, in the course of development, these individuals fail to critique, and are strongly attracted to, material comfort, business, money, and any form of quantitative success. Greed, Sivaraksa argues further, resides in all humans, the oppressed included. (52)

Focusing on undesirable human conditions that Buddhist philosophy cannot eliminate, Sivaraksa's non-essentialist dissection of traditional culture leads him to examine the complicity of the oppressed in the rapid spread of transnational capital. He identifies the U.S. and Japan as the leading capitalist nations causing problems to the world. (53) But he also stresses that the success of transnational capital is buttressed by other countries' acceptance of capitalism. In Siam, the members of the elite-ranging from the royal family which initiated the process of modernization to the present Western-educated experts-have played a substantial part in fostering worship of the Western mode of growth. (54) Generally, the non-Western elite, assuming the backwardness of their countries, perceive(d) capitalist-style of modernity as the path to progress. (55) Nevertheless, in his view, the elite's adoption of the capitalist vision of the modern was motivated not only by their aspirations after a strong nation but also by greed: the desire for self-expansion has induced the elite to endorse capitalism (56)

But if the non-Western elite was/is guilty of adopting capitalism, the non-elite granted/grants significant support for it. Sivaraksa recounts the success story of Kukrit, a Thai aristocrat turned entrepreneur who, celebrating greed and rejecting his own

cultural tradition many years ago, said: "If we work against greed, there is no capital growth! ... If we are not greedy, how can my bank exist?" Sivaraksa observes: "Unfortunately, most Thais agree with him." Their support has helped the banker's enterprise soar: beginning with one branch in Chiangmai thirty years ago, the branch offices of his bank are now all over the place. (57)

Complicity, of course, was not a problem unique to Siam. Sivaraksa finds to his dismay that as Southeast Asian culture has become increasingly Westernized, the majority of the local people have failed to interrogate the capitalist definitions of development, success and a good life. Instead they have chosen to conform to them. In order to pursue a "good life," many individuals adopt the strategy of procuring a Western-style education, which enables them to go for lucrative professions in the corporate world, and thus to enjoy Western-style materialist success. Viewing education as the gateway to affluence and prestige, people worship the degrees and diplomas issued by Western/Westernized institutions, but ignore those issues essential for humanity, including interpersonal relationships and ethics. (58)

In Sivaraksa's analysis, even the poor - those who have very little chance to benefit from development - lack the consciousness to confront capitalist culture. Quoting a Filipino observer, Frankie Jose, he points up that not only the multinational corporations but also people at the grassroots are greedy. (59) Indeed, analyses of the greed of the poor abound in Sivaraksa's works. According to him, knowing all too well that they belong to the disadvantaged echelon of society, the poor believe that they are indeed inferior, feeling ashamed of their poverty and define equality as their share of affluence. (60)

Eager to rid themselves of their inferiority, they thirst to purchase consumer goods.

To illustrate the greed of the poor in developing countries, Sivaraksa gives Thai examples. He states: "In the past, ... villagers were proud to serve a guest a glass of rainwater. But not today. With the presence of Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola throughout the countryside, the villagers feel ashamed if they do not offer something in a bottle." (61) The desire for capitalist life-style is so strong that the poor sometimes reprioritize their needs. Some farmers give up what is essential for their everyday survival in order to pursue these modern-day luxuries. Observing the grip that the capitalist vision of affluence has on the impoverished, Sivaraksa tells his readers: "[W]herever electricity is introduced, no matter how poor a family is, it feels it must buy a television set...[P]eople will sell their land if necessary to buy a TV." (62) According to him, the desire for material well-being has lured some of the poor to maximize their gains at considerable cost to their families: "people have been taught, in the name of globalization and development, to worship money so much so that they even sell their daughters into prostitution, and sell their children as labor to Saudi Arabia...." (63)

In analyzing the non-elite, I would like to note, Sivaraksa focuses on what happens outside of the birthplaces of multinational corporations. In translating Thai history into world history, he represents Thai experience as a reflection of what transnational capital has done to the Third World. However, his view that the forsaking of traditional values is a worldwide phenomenon, together with his Buddhist critique of human nature, also implies that the non-elite in developed countries granted/grants support to capitalist values as well. As he aligns

Siam, Asia, and developed countries in terms of the loss of tradition, he does not presume the contest between the colonizers and the colonized to envision a struggle against transnational capital. He creates the resistance to transnational capital as a process which is much more complex than just the East's or the Third World's fight against imperialist oppression: it is a war of the human collective on an unjust economic system and an undesirable way of life.

TRANSLATING BUDDHIST IDEAS AND PRAXIS INTO TRANSCULTURAL ACTIONS

Not only does Sivaraksa translate Thai history into world history to call for an international front to fight transnational capital; he also argues, by positing the fluidity and historicity of his religious tradition, that Buddhism with a small "b" is vitally relevant to contemporary social agents' actions against economic justice. More importantly, whereas essentialist thinkers tend to contend for the exclusivity of the tradition they defend by spotlighting its uniqueness, Sivaraksa chooses to imagine the blurred boundary between Buddhism with a small "b" and other pre-modern spiritual traditions. In addition to acknowledging non-Buddhist influence on his faith-based thought, he also translates his Buddhist path to resistance into one that can be trod by non-Buddhists.

Returning to tradition

According to Sivaraksa, if the Thais want to put up a powerful resistance to capitalism, they must recover their cultural - that is, Buddhist-identity. His attention to cultural identity by no means suggests his neglect of the importance of class-based identity for the confrontation with global capital. In his writings, class

identity - especially the group-based consciousness of oppression - is crucial in cultivating the motivation for resistance. He notes local people's group-based critical awareness of capitalist oppression, and speaks highly of some local projects aimed at fighting capitalism. (64) It is clear, however, that Sivaraksa focuses on the importance of cultural identity for resistance. For him, the true recovering of Buddhist identity is much deeper than one's identification of oneself as Buddhist: it means one's adherence to Buddhist concepts and praxis fighting self-centeredness - in other words, small "b" Buddhism - for the purpose of confronting transnational capital. To illustrate his point, he gives as an example the Surin project which was initiated by a monk called Luang Po Nan in Northeastern Siam. To cultivate the local people's non-egocentric, community-oriented spirit, he encouraged them to meditate together. (65)

However, Sivaraksa renders the returning to the Buddhist tradition not as the only way to challenge - but as an example demonstrating the power of religious traditions to brave - transnational capital. In fact, he refrains from representing the embrace of the Buddhist identity as superior to that of other non-modern religious-cultural identities. For him, just as the Thais can equip themselves to fight transnational capital by returning to their Buddhist roots, others can prepare themselves to undertake the same mission by re-embracing their own religious traditions. In his analysis, all world religions value the idea of universal love. (66) To be sure, he believes that all major religions' institutional leaders have succumbed to capitalism. But he insists that if revitalized, a true commitment to love, which is now suppressed by the religious establishment, can generate prophetic voices for the struggle for a just society. (67)

As expected, Sivaraksa believes in the resistant power of religious-cultural traditions of the Third World. He deeply admires Gandhi, and represents him as a prophet fighting both the global economy and imperialist culture of the British Empire. Gandhi's view on the village republic, Sivaraksa says, echoes the Buddha's understanding of the *sangha*. Quoting his own mentor Buddhadasa, he pictures this ideal community as one where humans live according to the deep understanding of the world as a cooperative enterprise. (68) Sivaraksa invests hope in the religious tradition of the West as well. Although he is highly critical of a hybrid culture in which Westernized values are on the ascendant and traditional Asian/Thai values wane, he is by no means hostile to the building of a hybrid culture of resistance where Buddhism and Christianity join hands in confronting injustice. (69) He states: "I feel that if our Christian friends would extrapolate Christ's teachings on love and morality as expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Sermon on the Mountain, we would have a lot in common." (70) Attracted to the mystic tradition of Christianity, he agrees with Edward Conze that the characteristics that according to Christian mystics define Godhead are comparable to those features that constitute Nirvana. (71) While recognizing and feeling encouraged about the spread of Buddhism in the West, (72) he also believes that Westerners, too, should return to their tradition to confront capitalism. He envisages, in addition, that Westerners can battle capitalist values by renewing the legacy of such figures as St. Francis of Assisi. (73)

Sivaraksa translates the returning to Buddhism into a case in point to emphasize the significance of religious traditions for anti-capitalism. In so doing, he links Buddhist resistance to other faith-based activisms. Through the translation process, Buddhist

and other religion-inspired projects are united under the mission of confronting capitalism. More importantly, they are united under the same approach - that is, the reliance on spiritual values and practices - to the fulfillment of their shared mission.

Blurring the Buddhist and other faith-based ways I: tackling complicity

A devout Buddhist practitioner, Sivaraksa also explains specifically how the Buddhist paradigm of actions operates. But instead of emphasizing the uniqueness of Buddhism, he is keen to show that as a form of religion-based activism, Buddhism with a small "b" can be, and, in fact, has been practiced by those from other religious backgrounds.

In Sivaraksa's analysis, as greed leads to the non-elite's conformity to transnational capital, they must confront their own greed if they want to rebel against capitalist values. (74) Although he definitely does not think that people should accept their poverty, he makes it clear, for his dislike of greed and desire for wealth, that they should be content with a simple life with adequate supplies of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. (75) In advocating simplicity, he contends that the non-elite, especially the poor, must fight their own thirst for capitalist affluence, which always accompanies their group-based consciousness as the underprivileged.

For Sivaraksa, Buddhism with a small "b" is a remedy for greed. He argues that to combat greed, historical actors must achieve mindfulness - the ability to diagnose deeply one's body, feelings, and mental state - through meditation. (76) Mindfulness involves the cultivation of tranquility, which helps develop the critical self-awareness enabling individuals to appraise themselves honestly and penetratingly. It is through critical self-awareness

that resisters can understand the psychological conditions which leads to their complicity with the capitalist system. In order to maintain critical self-awareness, however, activists must remain vigilant. The struggle against greed is not to be straightforward. Sivaraksa says: "[w]e who work in society must be careful. We become polluted so easily.... Sometimes, we feel... greed [;] sometimes we wish for more power and wealth." (77)

In Sivaraksa's imagining, critical self-awareness liberates individuals from the attachment to pleasure and gain. (78) It can, according to him, also free individuals from a sense of hierarchy, cultivating their humility and purging their elitist impulse to stand out. (79) With these admirable qualities, individuals can resist the glamour of a materialist lifestyle at the personal level. Better still, they will be able and willing to engage transnational capitalism at the social level: with freedom from desires for pleasures, gain, and social superiority, individuals will become less self-centered and more compassionate, thereby feeling compelled to undertake social acts in removing the miseries of the world.

As King notes, Sivaraksa is known for his "commitment to moving the practice of Buddhist morality from the level of avoiding evil to the level of doing good." (80) Therefore, he is keen to explain concretely how activists can convert compassion into activism. And in doing so, he sounds non-essentialist, introducing his reformist theory that a religion must evolve to ensure its relevance to the world. To maintain the relevance of Buddhism to contemporary society, his Buddhism with a small "b" introduces a reinvented version of the Five Precepts. He transforms the Five Precepts into criteria that agents for change can use to identify unacceptable phenomena, and into a guide to defiant actions. For instance, he re-creates the First Precept - to

abstain from taking life - by contrasting the past and the present. In pre-modern societies, practicing this rule, people refrained from killing animals and eating meat. But in the contemporary world, the principle of non-killing should take a different form - one must look into all those social, economic and political structures which produce materials, policies, and practices harmful for human life, and think about what one can do in order to help create a non-violent and egalitarian society. Reflecting on the Fourth Precept, the abstinence from false speech means he encourages his readers to fight wrong views on the world. He reinvents other precepts along the same lines. (81)

Sivaraksa, however, does not stress the uniqueness of Buddhist praxis. By noting how social movements inspired by non-Buddhist religious traditions confront development, he asserts that non-Buddhist faith-based actors have the capacity for practicing the Buddhist mode of action. He represents other faith-based agents as role models for Buddhists, pointing out that Buddhists are in fact falling behind Christians and Muslims in applying Buddhist praxis. For instance, some Muslims built their educational institutions in Indonesia to implement what the Buddhists call the fourth precept, as they confront institutions like the media which is aimed at shaping knowledge in support of development. Observing the Quakers, he believes that they do the same. (82) Sivaraksa also argues, in addition, that non-Buddhist religious actors are capable of living the Buddhist ideal of selflessness when they battle capitalism in their own contexts. For instance, fisherman living along the shores of the Andaman Sea in southern Siam found their livelihood threatened by the incursion of commercial fishing ventures into their area. They united to press the government to take action. Identifying with people from other villages, they declined the government

proposals which gave them the opportunity to control fishing grounds adjacent to their own areas. (83) In his view, this transcommunal solidarity is Buddhist in nature.

Blurring Buddhist and other faith-based ways II: the tranquility of vehemence

In addition to tackling complicity, Sivarakasa also believes Buddhism with a small "b" can help the non-elite resist transnational capital by cultivating non-violence. And he translates Buddhist-based non-violence into a translocal practice.

Reflecting on non-violence, Sivaraksa appreciates peace-building, which he defines as the attempts to create conditions preventing the emergence/growth of structural violence and therefore forestalling conflicts. And he hails the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka as an excellent example of peace-building based on Buddhist principles. But in the face of transnational capital whose existence has already engendered discontents and conflicts, he also expands on peace-making which he understands as the process of negotiation between the contestants. (84)

According to Sivaraksa, non-violence means much more than the rejection of the use of brute force. When individuals grasp the interconnection between their existence and all other things in the universe through spiritual practices, they attain the state of true non-violence. (85) This psychological state is crucially relevant to peace-building, for it helps resisters to implement the reinvented Five Precepts. Feeling deeply the interconnection between self and others, Buddhist-inspired agents cannot stand the idea that they partake in social, economic or political processes which are harmful to others.(86)

But more importantly, the resisters' profound understanding of the interconnection between self and other forms of existence is vital for peace-making. Though determined to fight oppression, they will not be driven by those emotions - anger, hatred, the urge to avenge their suffering, and so on - that are always associated with their identity as the exploited. In this respect, mindfulness, as part of the praxis of Buddhism with a small "b" is essential: not only does it help one to fight greed and complicity; it can also help one to fight anger. With mindfulness, Sivaraksa is confident, one can gradually become more self-reflective, and let go of one's anger at the enemy. (87) In his imagining, Buddhist resisters can become selfless to the extent that they refuse to inflict pain on those who oppress them or threaten their survival. For him, non-violence is *metta karuna*, as he says, "It is not right to hate our oppressors; by doing so, we would become hateful. And then, even if we would be able to defeat our oppressors, we would still hate people...." (88)

According to Sivaraksa, attaining and practicing nonviolence, grassroots agents are able to develop a new approach to conflict resolution - this is, entering a dialogue with the oppressor. By delivering themselves from anger and hatred, grassroots activists liberate themselves from the habitual reactive mode in the face of oppression, and therefore will be able to understand better those conditions creating the other side's oppressive tendencies. (89) Only with a non-violent empathetic understanding of the other is a dialogue possible.

Sivaraksa's commitment to grassroots movements' dialogue with the Establishment comes from his assumption that the effectiveness of resistance can be augmented with a joint effort of the oppressed and the privileged. (90) In fact, as early as the early 1980s, he emphasized: "I believe in working with the

system to improve things." (91) The same attitude is revealed in his speech delivered at the Global Dialogue Conference in 2001. In the conference, he contended: "[T]hose of us of the faith have dialogue with the World Bank, not only with Mr. Wolfensohn, but with top economists too. Because the economists...control the World Bank, IMF, and so on. But I think if we have dialogue with them, we can be friends, and perhaps try to share with them the attitude to be more humble." (92) In a conversation with Buddhist activists in Oregon, he points out that people from the Establishment could offer information and assistance useful for the resistance. (93)

But to attain and sustain the state of non-violence is no easy task. Sivaraksa admits that the struggle against oppression always arouses violent emotions in the agents for change: "[W]hen one tackles the causes of suffering, especially in an oppressive social system, one usually gets hit by those who wish to maintain the status quo." (94) Indeed, discussing how one can strive to understand the enemy, he says: "You may need to practice this exercise [contemplating the other side's prejudice and biased views] many times on the same person..." (95) But at the same time, he also assures his readers that non-violence is possible by appropriating the image of the Dalai Lama: "however violent and ruthless the Chinese aggressors have been to his country, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has never said a harmful word against them." (96)

In addition to believing that non-Buddhists are able to adopt Buddhist-like praxis to tackle the issue of complicity, Sivaraksa is also confident that those who live outside the Buddhist tradition can practice non-violence. Quoting his teacher Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, he argues that Buddhists should work with non-Buddhists so as to fight capitalism non-violently. (97) He even

contends that non-Buddhists serve as inspirations for Buddhists, for they can be more admirable than the latter in actualizing non-violence. He once said, "there are many non-Buddhists who are compassionate and filled with forgiveness towards others. They are more Buddhist than the Buddhists." (98) He specifically identifies the Quakers as an important model of non-violence for the Buddhists.(99)

When Sivaraksa translates Buddhist praxis into a translocal mode of action, he deepens the relationship between Buddhist activism and other faith-based anti-capitalist movements. In addition to arguing that they are united under the mission of anti-capitalism and the spiritual approach to change, he now asserts that they are also connected by the same specific set of spiritual practices and values, which encourage non-compliance with capitalist lifestyle and cultivate non-violence, in transforming the world.

EPILOGUE

In his translation project, Sivaraksa introduces to foreign readers Buddhism with a small "b" as "true" Buddhism. On the basis of his true Buddhism, he critiques modern Siam's pursuit of capitalist modernity and reinvents Buddhist principles as a course of action against capitalism. In addition, he strives to establish Buddhist activism in the contact zone by stressing the bonds between the local and the global. By translating the national history of Siam into world history, he argues that Siam and the non-Thai world suffer together and therefore call for an international front for anti-capitalism. By translating the returning to Buddhism into an example of showing how traditions could combat capitalism, he invites his readers to imagine that Buddhist activists join up with other religion-

inspired agents by relying on the same approach - the use of spiritual values and practices - to anti-capitalist struggle. And by translating Buddhist principles into a culturally unbound mode of action, he envisions how faith-based activists of various religious backgrounds can work in tandem as they are all able to cultivate non-conformity and non-violence vis-à-vis the lures and oppressive power of transnational capital.

On the surface, Sivaraksa translates Buddhism from an essentialist position, as he believes in the presence of an indispensable "core" of Buddhism. However, what shines through his self-translation is his non-essentialism, as he recognizes the historicity, complexity, changeability, and non-exclusivity of his own beloved tradition.

First, assuming the integration of non-Buddhist elements into the historical formation of Buddhism, and seeing the irrelevance of some Buddhist components to economic justice, Sivaraksa selects from and thus reforms the Buddhist tradition so as to identify its "essence." Second, in translating the national history of Siam into a narrative on world history, Sivaraksa is not content with just displaying the miseries caused by capitalism to the world. Instead, accepting the complexity of traditional culture, he notes the egocentric psychological conditions which Buddhist or any traditional religion-based culture could not eliminate, and shows how the non-elite and even the oppressed granted/grants support to capitalism. Third, Sivaraksa's Buddhism with a small "b" contains a reinvented version of the Five Precepts as resistant actions, as he insists that Buddhist practices should and could evolve in response to conditions of modernity. And fourth, by stressing the inclusiveness of Buddhism, he converts Buddhist-based resistant acts - marked by practices and concepts aimed at tackling complicity and

aspiring after non-violence - into a mode of rebellion transcending national and cultural boundaries

Sivaraksa's translation of Buddhist activism is recognized by many interested in contemporary Buddhism in general and Engaged Buddhism in particular. In addition he has been offered visiting positions by many prestigious colleges and universities in the capitalist world. To a significant extent, it should be noted, Sivaraksa's success is based on his Westernized education. More interestingly, his influence cannot be divorced from the symbolic and cultural capital with which his career is endowed - his ability to communicate with readers of the more affluent part of the world, his effectiveness in winning their respect and material support, and his knowledge about science, culture and history of the modern world. (100) These forms of capital are shared as well by other eminent Asian Engaged Buddhists who believe in the contribution that their religion will make to economic justice. Speaking of how Buddhists go global, what is worth studying is the irony that cosmopolitan nativists depend on their association with the capitalist world to revitalize their suppressed traditions in the contact zone.

One key characteristic of Sivaraksa's translation project is his transformation of Buddhist praxis into a translocal mode of action. The refashioning of the Buddhist approach to change into a non-Buddhist one can be regarded as a strategy, instrumental in enhancing the influence of Buddhist activism. But Sivaraksa has been regarded as a Buddhist thinker who believes in the spiritual unity of religions. (101) And his ecumenism is echoed by Buddhist activists. For one, fighting economic injustice, Ariyaratne advocates "Buddhist culture without labels." (102) Has ecumenism made it easier for Asian activists to translate their Engaged Buddhism into a culturally unbound activism? Or

do they take an ecumenist position to cement an alliance between various religions for their cause for economic justice? While these questions await further study, what is certain is the tension between prominent Asian Buddhists' Buddhist position and their proclaimed commitment to ecumenical spirituality. How do they legitimize their Buddhist identity if they believe in the sameness of all religions? How do they respond to differences between religions when differences refuse to be neglected? How do they cope with non-Buddhist activists' challenges to Buddhism? The ways in which Asian Buddhists deal with these issues will, to some extent at least, determine the prospects of Buddhist translation projects in the contact zone. (103)

Also relevant to the international influence of Buddhist translators is how, through their translation projects, they tackle the questions of wealth and affluence. Savakis is highly critical of capitalism and advocates a simple lifestyle focused on meeting basic needs. It is obvious, however, that in his country or beyond, many others differ from him quite significantly. In Siam, although many Buddhists worry about the loss of traditional values, they still remain enamored of capitalist-style life style. Their psychology explains the influence of Wat Phra Dhammakaya movement, which has enjoyed rising popularity despites controversies and scandals surrounding it. The movement promises both economic and spiritual salvation. According to one observer, its members "see no incongruence between pursuing/enjoying a prosperous lifestyle and developing in meditation prowess." (104) Internationally, even those who are identified as Engaged Buddhists may not agree with Sivaraksa regarding capitalism. An important example is Soka Gakkai, which has hundreds of thousands of followers

outside Japan. Although not uncritical of capitalist-style competitiveness, it also appreciates the opportunities capitalism creates for people to gain the best from life. The Soka Gakkai teaching stresses that economic prosperity is one key factor defining happiness, the pursuit of which is the goal of human life. Indeed, recent research notes the similarity between Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Soka Gakkai in terms of attitude towards wealth. (105)

The contrast between Sivaraksa and these Buddhist movements leads us to think about what Sivaraksa has to deal with in expanding his influence as a nativist activist in Siam, and, more importantly, a nativist translator in the contact zone. His critical stance on capitalism, his moral courage to suffer incarceration, and his acts of civil disobedience - all this contributes to his image as a determined warrior vis-à-vis "development." However, swimming against the tide in his own country and in both the developing and developed worlds, his unflattering view on capitalism and emphasis on simplicity may not endear him to many readers who are not ready to give up their dream of affluence. As far as his translation project is concerned, in the contact zone, he may need to compete for influence with other Buddhist translators whose visions of change non-Thai readers find more congenial. Granted, Sivaraksa may target a select group of readers, but formidable is indeed is the task of how, in the age of transnational capital, cosmopolitan nativist translators can strike a balance between their attempt to win support and their commitment to uncompromising resistance.

1. Transnational capitalism is defined as a cluster of interconnected processes, including multi-national corporations' expansion, technological revolution, the imposition of

Western/capitalist values on others (and others' adoption of these values), the blurring boundaries of nation-states which have exposed people to the onslaught of transnational capitalism, and so forth. Another term used to describe the aforementioned processes is globalization. But globalization is also used to signify other phenomena which are different from (though may be related to) what is called transnational capital here. For instance, some scholars study globalization in terms of connectivity. See Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 4-5. Also see David Harvey, *The Post-modern Condition* (London: Basil and Blackwell, 1989). When researchers discuss transnational capitalism, they generally attend to the post-war period. But it is obvious that many events and factors related to transnational capitalism have been present for more than a century. [Return to Text](#)

2. Arif Dirlik, *Postmodernity's Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project* (Lanhan: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), pp. 203-228; Tavivat Puntarigivivat, "Toward a Buddhist Social Ethics: The Case of Thailand," *Cross Currents* 48 no. 3 (1998), <http://www.crosscurrents.org/buddhistethics.htm>. In this article, I use the term "cosmopolitan" to refer to historical agents' attitude - that is, their concern about, and willingness to fight for, those who live outside their own nations and/or cultural spheres. As for the term transnational, I refer to events, processes, activities, ideas that move across the national and cultural borders. Cosmopolitan nativists are different from fundamentalist nativists, who react to Western influences by setting boundaries between the in-group and the others. In addition, fundamentalist nativists proclaim the intention of preserving the whole of the pure past (though the ways in which they preserve and represent

their pure past can be regarded as their own reinvention). But cosmopolitan nativists are inclined to be "reformist," in the sense that they emphasize the importance of re-creating tradition to engage with the problems of the present. See Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), pp. 12-13 & 84-96. In fact, scholars have long noted the presence of the reformist approach to the re-creation of tradition among nativists. See Donald Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision" in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher King and Sallie King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) pp. 195-235

[Return to Text](#)

3. David Loy, *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist Social Theory* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), p. 78; George Bond, *Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment and the Sarvodaya Movement* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004); Sallie King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 218-224. [Return to Text](#)

4. Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of Buddhist agency in the unfolding of Engaged Buddhism. Sally King argues that Engaged Buddhism should not be viewed as a product of Christian influence born against the background of modern Western imperialism. She asserts that Engaged Buddhism develops when preeminent Asian Buddhists enter an ongoing dialogue with Christianity not as the colonized encountering and mimicking the West, but as thinkers learning about Christianity from their own Buddhist position (See King, 2005: pp. 2-5). In her view, the dialogue model illuminates the importance of Buddhist agency in the formation of Engaged Buddhism vis-à-vis Christianity and imperialism. I find the concept of agency

germane to this article, as it focuses on Asian Buddhists' efforts to create influence for themselves. [Return to Text](#)

5. Much has been said about Sivaraksa's basic ideas, and the differences/parallels between him and other prominent engaged Buddhist such as Thich Nhat Hanh. For instance, see Christopher Queen, "Gentle or Harsh? The Practice of Right Speech in Engaged Buddhism," pp. 2-10 in *Socially Engaged Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sulak Sivarksa on His 70th Birthday*, ed. David W. Chappell (Bangkok: Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 2003). Also see Swearer, 1996. [Return to Text](#)

6. Translation here is not defined as converting a text in another language. It is broadly conceived as the process in which history, artifacts, texts, ideas, concepts, and discourses of one culture are processed and interpreted for those who do not partake in that culture. This definition of translation covers self-translation - that is, insiders' introduction of their culture to outsiders. Sometimes, self-translation is done in a foreign language. But when insiders interpret their cultures for others, they may also do so in their native languages. A good example is the famous Thai critic, Buddhadasa, who introduced Buddhism and highlighted its importance for the world in the Thai language, but did not translate his own ideas. See Donald Swearer, *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1989). [Return to Text](#)

7. Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. xi. [Return to Text](#)

8. I do not mean to suggest that Sulak Sivaraksa reinvents different versions of Buddhism respectively for domestic and

foreign readers. But it is safe to assert that Buddhist elements that he expands on in his English publications are those he wants his international readers to see. [Return to Text](#)

9. Pratt defines "contact zone" as the space of colonial encounters. See Mary Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 4-7. It can certainly be said that the cultural zone where contemporary nativists work is post-colonial in nature. However, Sivaraksa works in a contact zone where transnational capital, which has been regarded by him and many others as a form of imperialism, is a significant force shaping how cultures interact. Scholars have for a while noted how dissenting voices fighting dominating groups assert themselves in the contact zone. See James Clifford James, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1997).

[Return to Text](#)

10. King, 2005: p. 4. [Return to Text](#)

11. Swearer uses the term "essentialist" to describe the core of Buddhist doctrine as defined by Sivaraksa (Swearer, 1996: p. 215). What he means by essentialism is different from essentialism in the post-colonial context. [Return to Text](#)

12. Niranjana and Bhabha represent this critical post-colonial position on nativism. Bhabha discusses the renewal of the past. By defining renewal, he by no means envisions the attempts to reinvigorate time-honored values, ideas, and practices. He understands it as a restructuring which welcomes the new - as a process in which "the native people construct their culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of information technology, language, dress." See Homi Bhabha, *The*

Location of Culture (London: Routledge 1994) pp. 7 & 38-39. And also see Niranjana, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Some scholars and thinkers contend that such post-colonialist critiques do the oppressed a disservice by suppressing nativist discourses as rebellious voices. For instance, Dirlik criticizes the post-colonialist writers' attack on nativism as both intellectually simplistic and politically naive, failing to make a distinction between nativism mobilized to support capitalism and nativism aimed at challenging transnational capital (Dirlik, pp. 203-228). It has also been said that strategic essentialism—that is, idealization of the pre-colonial unitary past in the face of imperialism - is a powerful tool to resist colonial oppression. For example, Stuart Hall recognizes the use of strategic essentialism, although he regards the hybrid position as more useful in cultural/ethnic minority groups' self-empowerment. See Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, [1990] 1996), pp. 110-121. While I do not object to these politics-oriented efforts to defend nativism as a form of resistance, I think that they do not shed much light on the complex nature of cosmopolitan nativism. I therefore intend to argue for the non-essentialist nature of Sivaraksa's nativist thought from an intellectual perspective. [Return to Text](#)

13. Quite a number of modern and contemporary Buddhists regard, implicitly or explicitly, their tradition as a historical formation, during which the believers transform(ed) their practices in response to historical conditions. See Stephen Batchelor, "The Lessons of History" (2000), Martine and Stephen Batchelor, <http://www.stephenbatchelor.org/lessons.html>. In

addition, quite a bit has been said about how Asian religious agents or non-Asian believers transform Buddhism in the Western or "international" context in the contemporary age. See James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also see Cristina Rocha, "Being a Zen Buddhist Brazilian: Juggling Multiple Religious Identities in the Land of Catholicism," in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 140-161.

Regarding Buddhist activists, people like Buddhadasa and Sivaraksa are described as "reformist," a term connoting their assumption that tradition is changeable in relation to historical change. But I find it important to confront the post-modern critics' critical view on nativism for two reasons. First, since post-colonial critics' categorization of nativism as essentialism has been influential in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences, it is about time we examined nativist thought rigorously to see whether it is as intellectually simplistic as many post-modernists assume. Second, the well-established view on people like Sivaraksa as "reformist" is not discussed in relation to post-colonialist theory, and therefore does not engage with post-colonialism's critique of essentialism. [Return to Text](#)

14. It is said that Siam's economy remained static from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to the 1950s. See David Wyatt, *Siam in Mind* (Chiangmai: Silkworm Books, 2002), p. 98. A great many researchers have focused on the post-war economic growth, in particular the leap from the 1970s to the 1990s, in this country. What accompanies the scholarship on economic growth is a huge pool of works on various problems caused by development. These problems include the division between the upper and

middle classes on the one hand and the lower class on the other, the annihilation of the natural habitat, the dislocation of people, the exploitation of women, and the rise of consumerism. See the following sources: Leslie Ann Jeffrey, *Sex and Borders: Gender, National Identity, and Prostitution Policy in Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. xi-xv; Sanitsuda Ekachai, *Seeds of Hope: Local Initiatives in Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Development Support Committee, 1994); Donald Swearer, "Center and Periphery: *Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand*," *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London: Continuum, 1999), p. 218; Kaslan Tejapira, "The Post-modernism of Thainess," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Tanabe Shigeharu and Charles Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 202-227. Also see Thann-Dam Trong, . *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitutes and Tourism in Southeast Asia* (London: Zed, 1990).

Since the 1970s, NGOs, academics, public intellectuals, professionals, monks, and the farmers have launched or participated in many projects which claim to mobilize Buddhism to struggle against the capitalism. See Susan Darlington, "Buddhism and Development: The Ecology Monks of Thailand," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 96-109; Juliana Essen, *"Right Development": The Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement of Thailand* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005); Sanitsuda Ekachai, *Seeds of Hope: Local Initiatives in Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Development Support Committee, 1994), pp. 72-83 & 116-117; Donald Swearer, "Center and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand," pp. 194-228 in *Buddhism and Politics in*

Twentieth-century Asia, ed. Ian Harris (London: Continuum, 1999), pp. 194-228. [Return to Text](#)

15. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Change* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992), pp. 57-68. [Return to Text](#)

16. Sivaraksa prefers to call his country Siam, mainly because Luang Pibulsongkram, who adopted the name of Thailand, promoted Western values and even admired Fascism, Nazism and expansionism (Sivaraksa, 1992: 16). I respect his preference in my own analysis. [Return to Text](#)

17. Phra Kitthiwuttho was a Buddhist monk who led the state-established school to train monks in Chonburi. In the 1970s, he took an antidemocratic position and became quite infamous for his declaration that killing Communists was not demeritorious. For relevant information, see Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-political Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 138; Sivakrasa, 1992: 80; Swearer, 1999: p. 214. [Return to Text](#)

18. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 59 [Return to Text](#)

19. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Global Healing: Essays and Interviews on Structural Violence, Social Development, and Spiritual Transformation* (Bangkok: The Inter-Religious Commission for Development, Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1999a), p. 62. [Return to Text](#)

20. Donald Swearer, 1996: pp. 218-221. [Return to Text](#)

21. Sivakrasa, 1992: 68-69. [Return to Text](#)

22. Sivarkasa, 1999a: p. 64. [Return to Text](#)

23. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 3 & 12. [Return to Text](#)
24. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 12; and also see Sivaraksa, *Alternative Politics for Asia: A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue* (Malaysia: International Movement for a Just World, 1999b), pp. 4-5. [Return to Text](#)
25. Patrick Jory, "Problems in Contemporary Thai Nationalist Historiography" in *Kyoto Review* (March 2003) http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-n.ac.jp/issue/issue2/article_251.html. [Return to Text](#)
26. Sivaraksa, 1999b, p. 4. In Swearer's analysis, although Sivaraksa criticizes Mongkut's and Chulalongkorn for their failure to invoke the democratic elements of Buddhism, he views Mongkut, as a leader who was able to preserve the core of Thai tradition rooted in Buddhism. See Swearer, 1996: p. 209. But for the change of Sivaraksa's attitude towards the monarchy, please see Aewsriwong Nidhi, "Sulak Sivakrasa: An Appreciation," in *Trans-Thai Buddhism and Envisioning Resistance: The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivarkasa*, ed. Sulak Sivaraksa (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 2004), pp. 76-82. [Return to Text](#)
27. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 4; and also see Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture and Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), p. 91. [Return to Text](#)
28. Sulak Sivaraksa, 2004: pp. 20-21. [Return to Text](#)
29. Sivaraksa, 1999b, p. 23. [Return to Text](#)
30. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 5-7. [Return to Text](#)
31. Sivaraksa has already recognized the comparability between Siam and others while interpreting Siam's national history of

imperialist domination. He points out, for instance, that Siam shared with Meiji Japan the same vision of modernity (Sivaraksa, 1992: 12), and that King Chualongkorn was so committed to the modernization project that he has been frequently compared to the Meiji Emperor of Japan. (Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 10-12). But in this article, I focus on how he focuses on the parallels between Siam and other parts of the world in terms of capitalist influence.

[Return to Text](#)

32. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 8. [Return to Text](#)

33. Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer, introduction to *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, ed. Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 4. [Return to Text](#)

34. For instance, see E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks Publisher Inc., [1973] 1999); also see Loy: p. 55. [Return to Text](#)

35. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Religion and Development* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, [1976] 1987 3rd edition), pp. 18-19; Sivaraksa, *A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Bangkok: Tienwan Publishing House, [1981] 1986 reprint), p. 62; Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 40. [Return to Text](#)

36. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 24-25 & 59. [Return to Text](#)

37. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: p. 57; Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 39. [Return to Text](#)

38. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 11. [Return to Text](#)

39. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 26. [Return to Text](#)

40. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 33. [Return to Text](#)
41. I define deterritorialization as the loss of the relation of culture/way of life/experience to geographical/social territories. The definition is borrowed but modified from Tomlinson. See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999): p. 107. [Return to Text](#)
42. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 65. [Return to Text](#)
43. Sivaraksa, 1999a: pp. 71-76. [Return to Text](#)
44. Sivaraksa, 1992; 1999b: p. 10. [Return to Text](#)
45. Sivaraksa, 1999b: pp. 65-66. [Return to Text](#)
46. Sivaraksa, [1976] 1987: pp.17-19; Sivaraksa [1981] 1986: p. 17; Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 5-6 & 39-40. [Return to Text](#)
47. Sivaraksa [1976]1987: pp. 13-14; Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 37-38. [Return to Text](#)
48. Sivaraksa, 1976 [1987]: pp. 33-34; Sivaraksa 1992: p. 5. [Return to Text](#)
49. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 72. [Return to Text](#)
50. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 8. [Return to Text](#)
51. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: p.170. [Return to Text](#)
52. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: pp. 179-180; also see Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 95. [Return to Text](#)
53. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: pp. 28 & 40-41; Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 10-23 . [Return to Text](#)

54. Sivaraksa, *A Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1988a), pp. 177-178; *The Value of Human Life in Buddhist Thought*. Bangkok: Thai Inter-religious Commission For Development, 1988b), p. 192; 1992: p. 4. [Return to Text](#)

55. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 24. [Return to Text](#)

56. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 24. [Return to Text](#)

57. Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 18. [Return to Text](#)

58. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 4-7. [Return to Text](#)

59. Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 95. [Return to Text](#)

60. Sivaraksa, [1976] 1987: p. 33; Sivaraksa, 2005: p. 39. [Return to Text](#)

61. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 31. [Return to Text](#)

62. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 40. [Return to Text](#)

63. Sivaraksa, [1976] 1987: p. 20; Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 10. In *Seeds of Hope*, Sanitsuda Ekachai documents the farmers' conformity to the model of development and the unfortunate outcome of their attempts at replicating Western-style affluence. See Sanitsuda, pp. 11 & 20-21. [Return to Text](#)

64. For instance, Sivaraksa introduces a local project in Surin, Northeastern Siam. The project was launched to confront the invasion of capital in the form of the modern banking system. It lured many farmers to the Western technology and concept of development, thereby destroying the rural area's independence from the financial Establishment. [Return to Text](#)

65. Sivaraksa, 1999a: pp. 50-51. Another example is what happened in Yasothorn, where to develop their healthcare program, local people work together with a local abbot, Phra Khru Supa (see Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 50-51). [Return to Text](#)
66. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 56-59. [Return to Text](#)
67. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 56-59. [Return to Text](#)
68. Sivaraksa 1999b: p. 49. [Return to Text](#)
69. Swearer, 1996: pp. 221-222. [Return to Text](#)
70. Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 81. [Return to Text](#)
71. Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 81. [Return to Text](#)
72. For instance, Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 67; and Sivaraksa, 1999a: pp. 91-92 [Return to Text](#)
73. Interview's with Hung-yok Ip in Corvallis, 2003. [Return to Text](#)
74. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: pp. 179-190. [Return to Text](#)
75. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 48; Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 120. [Return to Text](#)
76. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 64 & 72. According to Baumann, the emphasis on the value of meditation for lay people is a modern - therefore, a non-essentialist - reinvention of the Buddhist tradition. See Martin Baumann, "Global Buddhism: Developmental Trends, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective," *Global Buddhism 2* (2001): pp. 26-29. [Return to Text](#)

77. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 71. [Return to Text](#)

78. Sivaraksa, 2005: pp. 36-37. [Return to Text](#)

79. Sivaraksa, 2005: pp.38-39. [Return to Text](#)

80. King, 2005: p.83 [Return to Text](#)

81. This is how Sivaraksa reinterprets the Second Precept - to abstain from stealing: living in a world dominated by the capitalist Establishment, we should not be content with not stealing, but should engage the theft embedded in the very structure of the economic order (Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 75-92). For Sivaraksa, to abstain from sexual misconduct should be reformulated as one's willingness to confront patriarchy and the exploitation of women during the contemporary age. One important issue, certainly, is prostitution in the third world (Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 10). And in introducing how one could apply the Fifth Precept in capitalist society, Sivaraksa impels us to "overturn forces that encourage intoxication, alcoholism and drug addiction." These forces are many, including drug trades controlled by various political agencies, the economic structure and process forcing peasants to grow coffee or tea, or the flooding of cigarette production in the Third World market (Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 77-78). [Return to Text](#)

82. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 77. [Return to Text](#)

83. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 74. [Return to Text](#)

84. Sivaraksa, 2004: p.67-9; Sivaraksa, 2005: p. 9. [Return to Text](#)

85. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: p.104. [Return to Text](#)

86. Sivaraksa, 2005: pp. 14-15. [Return to Text](#)

87. Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 60-64 & 72. [Return to Text](#)

88. Sivaraksa, 2005: pp. 3-19. [Return to Text](#)

89. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 92. [Return to Text](#)

90. Should the Establishment and grassroots organization be regarded as equally important for the struggle for economic justice? In 1999, in a blunt manner, Sivaraksa states, after expressing his appreciation of the World Bank President's interest in faith: "I have my doubts whether the mainstream is capable of changing. I feel that the change has to be an alternative" (Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 91). It seems that recently he has more confidence in the capacity of the Establishment for self-reform (Sivaraksa, 2003). But such an emphasis does not logically annul the earlier attitude. [Return to Text](#)

91. Sivaraksa, [1981] 1986: pp. 16-18. [Return to Text](#)

92. Sivaraksa, speech in Global Dialogue Conference, <http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org/web/docs/speeches/GlobalDialogueConference.pdf>
[Return to Text](#)

93. Sivaraksa, 2003; also see Sivaraksa, 2005: 10. It should also be noted that according to Sivaraksa, non-violence promises to do more than enable a constructive dialogue between resisters and transnational capitalist institutions. He seems to believe that a sincere commitment to non-violence can yield amazing results, even when one does not estimate the outcome of one's peaceful approach to oppression. He quotes a story told by the historical Buddha to two feuding monks. It is about a young prince who

was enslaved by the king of a rival state. But by overcoming his vengeful spirit, the Buddha said, the prince moved his enemy deeply and eventually became the king's successor. If the story told by the Buddha highlights the value of a peaceful psychology, what happened to the two monks to whom the story was told shows the ruinous consequences of emotional violence: as they did not listen to the Buddha and kept on fighting, others refused to give alms to them (Sivaraksa, 1992: pp. 87-92). [Return to Text](#)

94. Sivaraksa, 1999a: p. 60. It should be noted that while aware of human imperfection, Sivaraksa believes in the presence of enlightened individuals, whose actions contribute greatly to their communities (Sivaraksa 1992: pp. 68-70). [Return to Text](#)

95. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 92. [Return to Text](#)

96. See Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 91. Sivaraksa's representation of Dalai Lama and the Tibetans is corroborated by other sources. For instance, see Thomas Merton, Thomas, *The Asia Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions Books, [1968] 1974), pp. 336-337. [Return to Text](#)

97. Sivaraksa, 1999a: pp. 92-93. [Return to Text](#)

98. Sivaraksa, 1992: p. 90. [Return to Text](#)

99. Sivaraksa. 2005: p. 54. [Return to Text](#)

100. Drawing on Bourdieu, I define symbolic capital as prestige which wins support, trust and awe. Cultural capital refers to knowledge and skills which are not subsumed under mere educational credentials. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood Pres,

1986), pp. 248-249. [Return to Text](#)

101. Swearer, 1996: pp. 221-223. [Return to Text](#)

102. Bond, 2004: pp. 13 & 98-102. [Return to Text](#)

103. It should be noted that Sivaraksa is not unaware of the differences between different religious traditions (for instance, Sivaraksa, 1999b: p. 56). In fact, quoting Robert Traer, he emphasizes that the project of manufacturing similarities through a process of contrived selection from various religions might offend those embracing their faiths totally and entirely (Sivaraksa, 2005: p. 51). It is just that he chooses to focus on spiritual unity. [Return to Text](#)

104. Rory Mackenzie, *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 58-65 & pp. 69-70. [Return to Text](#)

105. Daniel Metraux, "The Soka Gakkai: Buddhism and the Creation of a Harmonious and Peaceful Society," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* ed. Christopher Queen and Sallie King (Albany: State University of New York Press. 1996), pp. 385-386. Also see, Mackenzie, 69-70. [Return to Text](#)