

THE
SOUTH EAST ASIAN
REVIEW

VOL XXI

NOS. 1 & 2

JAN-DEC 1996

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT FROM
A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

by

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ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

SULAK SIVARAKSA

I

EUROCENTRICISM

MOST Siamese elites like to compare their country with Japan, claiming that Siam, like Japan, was not colonized by the West. However, both were forced to open their countries at about the same time. Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in 1853, while Sir John Bowring went to Siam in 1855. Until then, Asian countries did not welcome the Western powers. The ruling Asian elites distrusted Europeans. They felt the Europeans would destroy their culture, religion and identity.

As late as 1910, before Bali lost her independence to the Dutch, a Balinese prince knew that the Dutch with their superior weapons could conquer his country easily by force. Yet he would not yield to their demands. Instead he led his people, armed only with their *kris* — the traditional sword — against the modern weapons of the Dutch. Dancing beautifully they faced death with dignity. Before the battle, he is to have said:

"I have looked about me and I cannot believe there is a country on earth as beautiful as Bali. I cannot give it away or sell it to foreigners. I cannot and may not. What would they make of it once it was in their hands? They do not know our gods and they do not understand the laws by which mankind must live. They would pull down the temples, and the gods would forsake our island. Soon it would become barren and ugly as the deserts of China. They would grow sugar-cane but not as our peasants do which is just enough to sweeten their food and for their children to enjoy. The foreigners would cover the whole country with sugar-cane and boil it down into sugar and store it in large buildings until the villages stank of it. They would take the sugar away in great steamers and change it into money. They would plant trees, a row after row and take rubber from them. They would lay the sawahs to waste, and cut down the beautiful palm and fruit trees to make room for their towns. They would turn our peasants into slaves and brutes and leave them no time for cockfights and festivals and music and dancing. Our women would be forced to cover their breasts as if they were whores, and no one would wear flowers in their hair anymore or bring offerings to the temples. They would squeeze the joy from the hearts of our children. They would tear the patience and tolerance and

The hope for several nations to awaken so that the world could be saved and we would reach the state of universal awakening for all, *Sarvodaya*, is very remote. Yet, we must not despair, and we must live in hope and practice what we can.

In the Buddhist experience of Sri Lanka, the driving force to develop from the village level upward comes from the Buddha's teaching of the Four Wheels. As a cart moves steadily on four wheels, likewise human development should rest on the four dhammas, namely, Sharing, Pleasant Speech, Constructive Action, and Equality.

1) One must share (*dana*) what one has with others — be it goods, money, knowledge, time, labour, etc. This is still practiced in most village cultures. We should strengthen the Buddhist concept of *dana* practised in the villages and spread it to counteract the invasion of materialism and the new value system of competition, by sharing, by giving freely rather than by buying and selling. In Sri Lanka they share labour, with Buddhist ceremonies in the background, as the Siamese still do in remote villages where they find such fun in work.

2) Pleasant Speech (*Piyavaca*) not only means polite talk, but means speaking truthfully and sincerely, regarding everyone as equal. This is also strong in village culture, although villages have been prey to glamorous propaganda. Politicians and advertisers try to deceive them by convincing them to buy things they don't really need, or make them hope for things that aren't possible.

3) Constructive Action (*atthacariya*) means working for each other's benefit. Here Schumacher's recommendation for intermediate technology and the proper use of land would be relevant.

4) Equality (*samanattata*) means that Buddhism does not recognise classes or castes, does not encourage one group to exploit the other. So Buddhist socialism is possible, without state capitalism or any form of totalitarianism.

The development towards Buddhist socialism means that equality, love, freedom, and liberation should be the goal. A Buddhist community, a village or a nation, would work for harmony and for awakening, by getting rid of selfishness of any kind, be it greed, hatred or delusion. Such development would involve truth, beauty, and goodness, large or small. These are high sounding words and if it could become a reality, it would extend beyond social welfare to include the entire society.

The reigning Thai military officials regard such development models as dangerous because they challenge the military's entire concept of modernisation. The military argues that the CIA has used the author to preach a kind of primitivism, because the U.S. is afraid that Siam will catch up with other developed countries, and they want Thailand to remain underdeveloped and I am one of the best advocates. In June 1992 an article was published in an American

magazine called the *Executive Intelligence Review*, a month or so after the Thai Democracy Movement was founded. The magazine is published by the Lyndon H. LaRouch organization. LaRouch is a former Trotskyite currently serving a jail sentence for fraud. He identifies himself as the leader of a Platonic 'humanist' elite battling a centuries old conspiracy to subjugate the planet. He identifies Henry Kissinger as a Soviet agent, and Queen Elizabeth II of England with the international narcotics trade. Other targets include the United Nations, the Ford Foundation, environmentalists and, not surprisingly, the 'synthetic' Thai Democracy Movement, which is seen as being organised by U.S. AID, the Ford Foundation and other conspirators. Its 'point man' was the 'Jacobin' Sulak Sivaraksa. Unfortunately, the spurious article was taken seriously by the top Thai establishment. According to some Western diplomats, this article was very influential in Thai military circles and those with connections to the Palace. The article circulated widely in Siam and as a result, there was an unwillingness to drop the charge of lese majeste against the author. At the last UN regional conference on human rights in Bangkok in June 1993, a former cabinet minister even accused Amnesty International and Asia Watch of being CIA agents, and thus appears to be no different from Lyndon LaRouche.

For more information about Lyndon LaRouche, read Dennis King's *Lyndon LaRouche and the New American Fascism* (Double Day N.Y. 1989) and *When Loyalty Demands Dissent: Sulak Sivaraksa and The charge of Lese Majeste in Siam 1991-1993*, Bangkok 1993.