BUDDHIST GOALS OF JOURNALISM AND THE NEWS PARADIGM

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Abstract

This essay compares and contrasts the *goals* of Buddhist journalism with the general *traits* of the dominant/Western news paradigm to demonstrate the gap between the moral aspirations of the Orient and the instrumental materialistic traits revealed through the performance of the dominant/Western paradigm, which has even marginalised the moral imperatives of the Decalogue The essay goes on to assess the unique opportunities offered by Buddhist journalism, which no other genre of journalism – developmental, civic/public, peace – is able to offer to improve the quality of journalism, journalists and their profession.

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American journalist Doug McGill (2008) says that in Buddhism he "finally found ... explicit and practical morals of human communication." A journalism grounded in Buddhist morals, McGill asserts, would produce (1) a *journalism of healing* because the goal of Buddhism is achieving the end of "suffering," which connotes many facets of existence, and (2) a *journalism of timely, truthful, and helpful speech* based on the Noble Eightfold Path.

This essay attempts to explore how a genre of journalism based on original Buddhist philosophical principles – whose ethical-conduct component is similar to that of the Decalogue common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – would look like in a secularised world dominated by capitalism. Because Buddhism follows the middle path between capitalism and socialism, a comparison and contrast of Buddhist *goals* with *traits* of the contemporary mainstream news paradigm seems quite appropriate. Some may, however, question such juxtaposition inasmuch as goals are normative while traits denote performance with all its warts and shortcomings. Yet, pinpointing the gap between traits/performance and goals/aspirations is vital because we need to understand journalism practice in the context of a set of underlying but transformative beliefs and values, which engender normative journalistic goals.

Buddhist Approach to Journalism

The search for a Buddhist-oriented journalism should start with the Four Noble Truths, the foundation of Buddhist philosophy. The *first truth* (about existence) is that there is *dukkha* (suffering/sorrow). As McGill explains:

> *It is ordinary everyday suffering, aches and pains, mental moods and afflictions, sickness and death. On a social level, suffering in Buddhism is defined as any harshness, violence, and division of the community. A Buddhist journalism would therefore be aimed at helping individuals overcome their personal sufferings, and helping society heal the wounds caused by injustice, hatred, ostracism, and physical violence. Such a defined professional purpose would give the Buddhist journalist a measuring stick for each word and story produced: does it help overcome individual and social suffering?* (McGill 2008)

Existence has two other characteristics: *anicca* (impermanence), and *anattā* (no-selfness). Impermanence is usually treated as the basis for the other two. The timeless wheel of existence represents these three functionally related characteristics. Because everything is impermanent, there cannot be an unchanging or fixed self. Sorrow arises with impermanence. Where all is process, so is the self, which is not separable from its experience. Buddhism rejects "the conceit of enduring selfhood" associated with substantialism and reification (Macy 1991, 109).

In short, Buddhism does not recognise a separate individual self to be actualised in contrast to the Western "external integrity" model, which conceptualises moral agency as a measure of external relations (R's) between autonomous self (a) and others (b-i). The Buddhist view of *anattā* (no-selfness) also contrasts with the Hindu belief in self (*ātman* or *attā*) as the ultimate reality (*brahman*) –eternal, distinctionless, and absolute. The notion of *anattā* (no-selfness) takes us even beyond the "intimacy" model built on internal relations, where self still occupies a little space (a), to a unique Buddhist model, which eliminates even that little space (Kasulis 2005).

Important journalistic principles that we can dig out of the first truth may take the following forms:

- Concede that everything is subject to ongoing change (anicca), the first of the three characteristic of existence (ti-lakkhana), and assume the role of constructive change agent rather than that of the defender of the status quo.
- Concede that no-selfness (anattā) is the reality of existence, and refrain from over-emphasising individualism, which has a causal link with egocentrism (e.g., celebrity pitfalls). Focus more on cooperative efforts highlighting mutual interdependence at different levels – international/global, national, or local. "Where minds interact, they mutually create" (Macy 1991, 186).
- Understand the reasons for the existence of dukkha (sorrow/suffering), and desist from using journalism to knowingly promote attachment to desire.

We now turn to the next two truths: The *second truth* asserts that suffering arises from attachment to desire, and the *third truth* asserts that suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases. In "primitive" Buddhism, these two truths are succinctly expressed in the doctrine of *paticca samuppāda* (dependent co-arising). The early texts (e.g., *Samyutta Nikaya* and *Majjhima Nikaya*) describe dependent co-arising as a four-part formula expressed in four succinct lines:

> *This being, that becomes;*
> *From the arising of this, that arises;*
> *This not being, that becomes not;*
> *From the ceasing of this, that ceases.*

Buddhist texts also explain dependent co-arising in terms of an interdependent chain of 12 conditional factors known as *nidānas*, *upathis*, or *paccayas*. These factors, referred to as *this* and *that* in the four-part formula, are:

> *avijjā* (ignorance)
> *sankhārā* (volitional, or karmic formations)
> *viññāna* (consciousness or cognition)
> *nāmarūpa* (name and form, or the psycho-physical entity)
> *satāyatana* (the sixfold senses)
> *phassa* (contact)
> *vedanā* (feeling)
> *tanhā* or *trsna* (craving)
> *upādāna* (grasping)
> *bhava* (becoming)
> *jāti* (birth)
> *jarāmarana* (decay and death)

Some scholars have erroneously presumed *avijjā* (ignorance), which often begins the *nidāna* series, to be "the first act" of the not-yet-individualised soul, or "the primary cause of all existence" (Macy 1991, 49). Buddha has repeatedly asserted that an absolute first beginning of existence is something unthinkable. As *Anguttara Nikaya* attests, *avijjā* is not a causeless first principle inasmuch as it "is causally conditioned" (p. 50). Many metaphors and analogies in the early scriptures clearly convey the interrelatedness of all causes. Textual evidence abounds that the relationship of the *nidānas* is one of mutual dependence. For example, *nāmarūpa* (name and form) arises conditioned by *viññāna* (consciousness) while *viññāna,* in

turn, is conditioned by *nāmarūpa*. Thus the cybernetic feedback loops attached to the notion of mutual causality makes dependent co-arising an "interdeterminative" process (p. 54).

The doctrine of impermanence (*anicca*) is integral to apprehend the meaning of dependent co-arising. "No factor external to change, no absolute that is not definitive of process itself, secures our existence" (Macy 1991, 34-35). Existence is suffering as it is associated with the mutual causality of the12 conditional factors, which represent attachment to desire. Furthermore, the appearance of continuity ("order") occurs within the reality of change ("chaos"). This contrasts with the linear view of causality that order requires permanence (equilibrium conditions). Trinh Xuan Thuan explains:

> *The world is a vast flow of events that are linked together and participate in one another. There can be no First Cause, and no creation ex nihilo of the universe, as in the Big Bang theory. Since the universe has neither beginning nor end, the only universe compatible with Buddhism is a cyclic one* (Thuan 2001, 206).

Matter/energy and consciousness have co-existed, co-exist, and will co-exist for all times. They are co-arising. They rise from infinite potentiality into the phenomenal world, go through the cycle of birth, growth, and death just like other living systems, and return to infinite potentiality. Let us dig out some more principles appropriate for journalism from the doctrine of dependent co-arising subsuming the second and third truths:

- Understand the significance of mutual causality for journalistic interpretation and analysis. Refrain from extensive use of linear cause-effect reasoning. Keep in mind that feedback loops condition both "causes" and "effects" and blur the conventional distinction between the two. Therefore, analyse problems and solutions within "articulated integration" (Macy 1991, 185) – the middle path between atomism and holism.
- Advocate the need for humanity to work in harmony with Nature, including all its flora and fauna, because everything is functionally interrelated, and nothing is entirely independent. "There is no aspect of 'I'… that is not conditioned or not interconnected with at least something else" (Kasulis 2005, 398-400).
- Discourage conspicuous consumption "since consumption is merely a means to human well-being" and our "aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption" (Schumacher 1973, 47-48).

We must now turn to the *fourth truth*, which asserts that freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way or the Middle Path. This path has three functionally interdependent areas for practice: *paññā* (wisdom), *sila* (virtue or ethical conduct), and *samādhi* (concentration or mental development). It provides the Buddhist ethical guidelines, which journalism could adapt. As an overall ethical guideline, journalists should:

- Follow the Middle Way, and avoid the extremes on any issue. Journalism should convey the idea that people mattered. This is the approach that Schumacher (1973) proposed for economics more than three decades ago:

Now, we shall examine each of the paths enumerated under the three co-arising categories. *Paññā* (wisdom) involves two paths: right understanding/view and right

thoughts/conceptions. These provide the practitioners of journalism (including public relations and advertising) the means to cultivate moral principles such that their output does not contribute to increasing *dukkha*. Therefore, the practitioners should

- Follow the path of right understanding/view (*samma ditthi*): the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (that is, the understanding of oneself as one really is). "Buddhist's intimacy orientation says I am moral when I am most truly myself" (Kasulis 2005, 301).
- Follow the path of right thoughts/conceptions (*samma sankappa*) in its three-fold form: thoughts of renunciation as opposed to those of sense pleasures; kind thoughts as opposed to those of ill-will; and thoughts of harmlessness as opposed to those of cruelty. This involves a *commitment* to ethical and mental self-improvement.

Sila (virtue or ethical conduct) involves three paths: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. These provide the essential ethical guidelines for a journalism based on Buddhist goals. The practitioners should relate these guidelines not only to their own actions but also to the actions of those who consume their output. McGill asserts that the Right Speech doctrine provides many of the tools and materials necessary for the healing purpose of suffering:

> *The midway place of Right Speech along the Noble Eightfold Path is interesting, because speech is the first action to follow the gaining of wisdom and positive intention, as developed in meditation. By this view, speech is a person's very first chance to act morally in the world. It is followed then in the Noble Eightfold Path by "Right Action" and "Right Livelihood." Also, very helpfully for journalists, the identifying traits of Right Speech are specifically defined as "timely, truthful, helpful, and spoken with a mind of good will." Likewise, the five main types of speech to avoid are lies, divisive speech, harsh and abusive speech, and idle and distracting speech* (McGill, 2008).

Let us now interpret these three *Sila* paths to fit journalism practice:

- Follow the path of right speech (samma vaca): abstinence from lying, divisive speech (e.g., biased opinion writing), abusive speech (e.g., defamatory writing), and idle chatter (e.g., gossip writing). However, Asanga, the fifth-century author of several Mahayana texts, maintained that a Bodhisattva will lie to protect others from death or mutilation (Harvey 2000, 139).]
- Follow the path of right action (samma kammanta): abstinence from taking life (e.g., harming sentient beings intentionally), stealing (including robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty), and sexual misconduct. [Some Mahayana texts, e.g., Upāya-kausalya Sūtra, justify killing a human being on the grounds of compassion in dire circumstances" (Harvey 2000, 135). Similarly, a Bodhisattva may break the precepts of stealing and celibacy on compassionate grounds].
- Follow the path of right livelihood (samma ajiva) by personally avoiding and discouraging others from activities that may harm others (e.g., trade in deadly weapons, trade in animals for slaughter, trade in slavery, and trade in intoxicants and poisons). Some may include public relations and advertising also as harmful to the extent that they are seen "as encouraging greed, hatred and delusion, or perverting the truth" (Harvey 2000, 188).

Samadhi (mental development) requires the practitioners to improve their moral discipline as an ongoing activity through three mutually interacting paths: right effort/ *endeavor*, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Kalupahana 1995). Accordingly, the practitioners should:

- Follow the path of right effort (*samma vayama*), which has four steps: the effort to (a) discard evil that has already arisen, (b) prevent the arising of unrisen evil, (c) develop the good that has already arisen, and (d) promote the good that has not already arisen.
- Follow the path of right mindfulness (*samma sati*), which has four foundations: reflection relating to the body (*kāya*); feeling (*vedanā*) – repulsive, attractive, or neutral; thought; and ideas (*dhammā*) pertaining to the experienced phenomena. (Such reflection enables one to overcome covetousness and discontent.)
- Follow the path of right concentration (*samma samadhi*), which consists of the attainment of the four preliminary stages of contemplation, which culminate in the development of unprejudiced perception or equanimity with regard to what is perceived. (This is also considered a middle standpoint in the way in which we perceive ourselves in the world.)

We have outlined the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path as a set of goals for practitioners to judge their inputs and outputs. The perfection of all eight paths means reaching enlightenment. The characteristics of existence – *anicca* (impermanence), *anattā* (no-selfness), and *dukkha* (suffering/sorrow) – imply that a perfect journalism is not attainable. However, the Middle Path points out the multiple pathways available to practitioners to aim at reaching the ever-elusive equifinality. One should note that the Buddhist approach requires the journalists to improve (or purify) their minds through the paths of *paññā* (wisdom) and *samādhi* (mental development).[1] The presumption here is that journalists with "impure" minds would produce "impure" journalism that would increase *dukkha* (suffering/sorrow) no matter what awards they receive.

Traits of Mainstream Journalism

Western scholars tend to overlook the long history of *Jing Bao*, block-printed in China from the Tang dynasty onwards (Gunaratne 2001), when they assert that press history usually starts with Gutenberg in the 1440s and that the concept of newspapers was invented in 1605 in Strasburg (Stöber 2005). Rather than disputing or confirming the historical development of the news paradigm by a number of Western scholars (Høyer & Pöttker 2005), this essay will focus on the contemporary situation. It will draw the principal traits of mainstream journalism implicit in the dominant Anglo-American news paradigm and examine how they differ from those of a journalism based on Buddhist goals outlined in the previous section.

Høyer (2005) analysed the mainstream news paradigm in terms of five elements: the event, news value factors, the news interview, the inverted pyramid, and journalistic objectivity. For analytical convenience, we will sequentially examine each of these elements in relation to Buddhist goals.

The event: The mainstream paradigm thrives on "newsworthy" events, which must fit the 24-hour news cycle (gradually adopted by the wire services). News is ephemeral because an event is not a fixed entity. Høyer (2005) states that "an event

comprises actors, a situation, linkages and a time frame" (p. 11), and that journalists must have an understanding of how society in general works before they can establish an event as news.

- The news paradigm and the Buddhist perspective both recognise that news is *anicca* because the elements of a "newsworthy" event change every moment. The two approaches differ to the extent that the news paradigm treats the event as a fixed entity whereas the Buddhist approach sees it as a continuing *process*, which becomes increasingly complex as it reciprocally interacts with other factors.

News value factors: These are the criteria that journalists apply to determine "newsworthiness" of events and processes. In his widely used textbook in the United States, Mencher (2006) lists eight news values : impact or importance (the predominant factor), timeliness, prominence (of the people involved), proximity (to the audience), conflict, the unusual, currency (or the sudden interest people have on an ongoing situation), and necessity (a situation the journalist feels compelled to reveal).[2]

One should also note that Galtung and Ruge (1965), in a path-breaking study of foreign news, unraveled a set of 12 news values: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, personalisation, and negativity. Their hypotheses of selection, additivity, and replication were backed by several subsequent studies (e.g., Harcup & O'Neill 2001; Schwarz 2006). Other scholars who pursued the study of news values include Fathi (1973), Atwood and Grotta (1973), Eberhard (1982), Singletary and Lamb and Singletary (1984), Straughan (1987), Westerstahl and Johansson (1994), Higgins (1995), and Vines (2001). Masterton (2005) refers to his own 1991 doctoral thesis based on an international survey of the criteria of newsworthiness to contend that six news values – consequence, proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty, and prominence – possess universal acceptability irrespective of cultural or religious differences. Although this may well be the case because of the emergence of less orthodox Mahayana strands of Buddhism and the spread of secular capitalism introduced by the East India companies of the Dutch and the British, this paper attempts to set the scenario for a new genre of journalism reflecting orthodox Buddhist ethical goals, some of which are shared by all major religions, that may change and further diversify all genres of journalism through mutual causality.

Reinemann and Sshulz (2006) implicitly take a Buddhist-oriented view when they say that "although there are various models identifying a multitude of influences on news decisions, a theory capable of exactly predicting the news selection of tomorrow's newspapers and news programs is still missing" because "the media, journalism, and the factors shaping them are constantly changing." (p. 1). Keeping their warning in mind, we shall go on to examine the news factors that tyro journalists are taught.

The first factor, *impact*, relates to events that are likely to affect many people. (Galtung and Rouge call it *threshold* while Masterton calls it *consequence*.) Mencher (2006) says, "The more people that are affected by the event, the bigger the story" (p. 59). Although this criterion *per se* does not contradict Buddhist goals, the doctrine of dependent co-arising requires placing it in context with the other co-arising factors.

An event by itself is a news "atom" that does not explain the ongoing interaction and interdependence of relevant factors behind the event. For example, the reporting of violence and killings in Iraq as daily events attributable to the Sunni-Shiite rift fails to analyse the mutual causality of many co-arising factors: U.S invasion of the country on false pretences; resentment against Judeo-Christian domination; religious and ethnic rivalry triggered by "democratic" elections, the social and economic disparity between the invaders an d the invaded, psychological trauma of a war-weary people, and so on

The second factor, *timeliness*, relates to events that are immediate or recent. (This is similar to Galtung and Ruge's *frequency*.) Mencher says that timeliness is important in a democracy because the public has to react quickly to the activities of their officials. Mencher adds that timeliness is also important because "media are commercial enterprises that sell space and time on the basis if their ability to reach people quickly with a perishable commodity" (p. 58). The Buddhist perspective sees news as a social good, not as a commodity serving the profit-maximising desire of businesses. Although both perspectives agree on the impermanence or perishability of news "atoms," Buddhism views time as infinite whereas the news paradigm views time as bounded (Galtung 1996). Thus the Buddhist approach, which is more concerned with process, does not see the need for immediacy at the expense of accuracy and analysis of the functional interaction of co-arising factors. The notion of bounded time (derived from the Judeo-Christian belief in the genesis-apocalypse-catharsis sequence) calls for the fastest possible reporting of news "atoms" lest they become ephemeral.

The third factor, *prominence*, pertains to events involving well-known people or institutions. (Galtung and Ruge see this as a two-pronged factor: *reference to elite persons* and *elite nations*.) Mencher says, "Names make news, goes the old adage, even when the event is of little significance" (2006, 59). Thus, mainstream journalism is a journalism of personalities. This news value is antithetical to Buddhist values, which see no-selfness (*anattā*), impermanence (*anicca*), and sorrow (*dukkha*) as the three characteristics of existence. Personality journalism signifies individualism or atomism, which breeds egocentrism and sorrow.[3]

The fourth factor, *proximity*, relates to events that are geographically or emotionally close to people; Galtung and Ruge call this *meaningfulness*. Emotional closeness may arise from ties to religion, ethnicity or race. Buddhadasa Bhikku's view (cited in Sivaraksa 2002, 58) that the entire cosmos is a cooperative is clearly antithetical to proximity as a news value.

The fifth value, *conflict*, pertains to stories about "ordinary people confronting the challenges of daily lives," "conflicts that divide people and groups," or strife, antagonisms, and warfare (Mencher 2006, 60-61); Galtung and Ruge's *negativity* partly reflects this value. Journalists have applied this news value to write narrative-style features incorporating the three elements of drama: man vs. man, man vs. self, and man vs. nature. The Buddhist view on applying this criterion depends on the purpose of the story. Event-oriented stories on violence, war, and crime – news "atoms" based on conflict – are not an essential part of Buddhist-oriented journalism. Buddhism holds that an interdependent society should bear equal responsibility for the social deviance of an individual whose existence has no self (*anattā*). Therefore, reporting conflict-based stories highlighting individuals is inappropriate. However, process stories analysing the co-arisng factors for increase

or decrease in crime and violence may be appropriate for society to take steps to rehabilitate wrong-doers.

The sixth value, *the unusual*, concerns events "that deviate sharply from the expected," or "that depart considerably from the experiences of everyday life" (Mencher 2006, 61). Galtung and Ruge call it *unexpectedness* while Masterton calls it *novelty*. These include the bizarre, strange and wondrous. Journalists have applied this news value to write brights, sidebars, and features. The Buddhist perspective does not approve the use of this value to project any person, group, nation, or race in a negative light by deviating from the path of right speech and resorting to idle chatter. Too much emphasis on the unusual may mean a higher priority for event reporting (news as a commodity) than for process reporting (news as a social good).

The last two, *currency* and *necessity*, are more recent additions to the repertoire of news values. When a long-simmering situation will "suddenly emerge as the subject of discussion" (Mencher 2006, 61), the journalist applies the *currency* news value to report that situation. Galtung and Ruge refer to it as *continuity*. The *necessity* news value is applied when "the journalist feels it is necessary to disclose something that s/he has discovered," which is essentially a "journalism of conscience" (Mencher 2006, 62-63). (Galtung and Ruge's *consonance* factor, media's readiness to report an item, may be stretched out to resemble *necessity*.) These two factors are compatible with the Buddhist perspective when journalists write process-oriented news as a social good without the intention (*cetana*) of deviating from the eight paths subsumed under *sila* (virtue), *samādhi* (mental development), and *paññā* (wisdom).

Mencher asserts: "These eight news values do not exist in a vacuum. Their application depends on those who are deciding what is news, where the event and the news medium are located, the tradition of the newspaper or station, its audience and a host of other factors" (2006, 65). However, the preceding analysis leads us to the conclusion that:

- Buddhist goals and mainstream news values/traits do not see eye to eye in relation to three factors – prominence, proximity, and the unusual; are ambiguous in relation to three other factors – timeliness, impact, and conflict; and are potentially compatible with the last two factors – currency, and necessity.

The News Interview. This is the third element of the news paradigm. Schudson (2005) contends that the journalistic interview was all but unknown in 1865, had become a common reportorial activity in the 1870s and 1880s, was widely practiced by 1900, and had turned into a mainstay of American journalism by World War I. Other scholars claim that the interview was introduced into tabloids by the 1830s along with police reports. Today, the interview is used to update news, as well as to provide multiple views on issues. However, what Galtung and Ruge (1965) call *personalisation* occurs because of the reliance of mainstream journalism to interview individuals to create human interest stories and to give the hard copy a sense of timeliness.

- Buddhist goals do not encourage the interviews that promote excessive individualism at the expense of the collective good. Building up personalities through journalistic interviews violates the truth of no-selfness linked with impermanence and sorrow. Interviews that elicit group thinking are preferred. Follow the middle path by not favoring specific sources for regular attribution.

The Inverted Pyramid. Galtung and Ruge's (1965) *unambiguity* and *composition* factors are more or less associated with this structure of news presentation, an invention to sell news as a more profitable commodity. Some believe that its invention was inadvertent. During the American Civil War, journalists were forced to file the essential facts first because of the unreliability of the telegraph facilities at the time. This practice became formalised as the structure of straight news writing from then on until readership surveys revealed almost a century later that many readers preferred the suspense of the narrative style. Interpreting this element of the news paradigm, we can conclude that:

- Buddhist goals emphasise process reporting to explain the mutual interaction of multiple factors. By revealing the essence of the story first, the inverted pyramid structure encourages people to consume news very superficially and not read any further thereby nullifying the purpose of process reporting.

Journalistic objectivity. Stensaas (2005) says that the notion of *objectivity* is at the core of the mainstream news paradigm. The American press discarded partisan journalism toward the late nineteenth century as it became politically independent through higher circulation and advertising revenue. Objectivity became the shared professional norm in the 1920s (Schudson 2005). As empirical science became widely accepted, journalism used objectivity, just as science did, to present a "truthful" account of events to the public. American journalism tried to achieve objectivity, *inter alia*, by using the interview to present all sides of an issue; by conducting scientific opinion polls on significant issues; by discouraging reporters from injecting their opinion into their stories; and by using computer assisted reporting to analyse and interpret data related to numerous matters of public interest. How does objectivity fit into a journalism based on Buddhist values?

- Because Buddhist epistemology asserts that the knower (observer) and the known (observed) are interdependent, "this causal interplay renders it impossible to claim or prove an ultimate truth… Data gathering and interpretation are not value free, but freighted with emotional predispositions and cognitive preconceptions" (Macy 1991, 196).

This perspective of Buddhism is compatible with that of quantum physics – "that a straightforward description of the world in terms of objects, independent of how they are being observed, is untenable. The observing subject … plays an essential role in defining even how an object can appear" (Hut, 2003, p. 413). Contemporary science has no criteria for objective truth.

Jayatilleke (1963) points out that in Buddhism "verifiability is a test of truth but does not itself constitute the truth." Many truths in Buddhism "are considered to lie midway between two extreme points of view" (p. 359). The Buddhist theory of truth, as Jayatilleke explains, makes it clear that truth and therefore knowledge is "objective," as telling us the nature of "things as they are," which consists of knowing "what exists as 'existing' and what does not exist as 'not existing'" (p. 428). This is the highest knowledge. Claiming that beliefs based on authority and reason may turn out to be true or false, Buddha said that one should accept a proposition as true only when one has "personal knowledge" of it, taking into account the views of the wise (p. 416). Thus, Buddha claimed himself to be neither a traditionalist nor a rationalist, but an experientialist. What the Buddha meant by objective knowl-

edge was experiential knowledge that one could acquire through concentration and mental development (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). This interpretation is far different from the notions of objectivity and truth in the news paradigm.

Buddhist Strand vs. Other Strands

The preceding two sections examined the principles of a journalism based on Buddhist goals, and how the structural elements of the news paradigm deviated from or agreed with those principles. It is appropriate now to reiterate the major differences between these two approaches before we bring in other strands – peace journalism, developmental journalism, and public/civic journalism – for comparison.

The two perspectives that we have discussed represent the views of two mega-civilisations defining Orient and Occident respectively. Galtung points out that Buddhism defines the Orient while Christianity (with Judaism and Islam) defines "the hard Occident" (1996, 81). The *time* cosmology and *social* cosmology of these two civilisations fundamentally differ. Buddhist time is infinite because "there is no beginning or no end, although there is the transcendence of *nirvana*" (p. 81). Christian time "is bounded with a beginning, a *genesis*, and an end with *apocalypsis-catharsis*" (p. 81). The social cosmology of Buddhism emphasises "individual connectedness" whereas Christianity emphasises "separable and eternal, individual souls" (p. 81). Although one might argue that the West has replaced religion with the secular legal tradition, the similarities in all essentials have not changed (p. 83). Admittedly, secularisation has weakened the Buddhist values of the Orient with creeping globalisation (meaning Westernisation and reification of capitalism).

The news paradigm of the Occident (*yang*) – which evolved in practice as the mirror of Western cosmology – emphasised atomism, individualism, finite time, center-periphery space, subordination of nature to man, and reification of news values (Galtung & Vincent 1992). This emphasis increasingly epitomised the needs of capitalism rather than the morals of the Decalogue. Thus, it was able to gloss over the potential challenge of a news paradigm based on the goals of a Buddhist/Oriental journalism (*yin*) that exemplified holism, interconnectedness, infinite time, diversity within unity, harmony with nature, and flexibility of news values. One could envisage the performance-based mainstream (Western) news paradigm and the goal-based (normative/ hypothetical) Buddhist/Oriental news paradigm as complements/ opposites that flow in parallel directions to control each other – a presumption of the *yin-yang* theory. It is now the collective responsibility of the Orient to move from the goals assigned to the Buddhist paradigm to goal implementation thereby propelling the two complementary paradigms to interact with each other and improve the quality of contemporary journalism.

Let us now examine how a journalism based on Buddhist goals relates to three other strands of journalism – developmental, public/civic, and peace – that emerged because of dissatisfaction with the mainstream news paradigm. Lee and Maslog explain that "like public journalism and developmental journalism, peace journalism is grounded in communitarian philosophy – namely the commitment to the idea of civic participation, the understanding of social justice as a moral imperative, and the view that the value and the sacredness of the individual are realized only in and through communities" (2005, 312).

Gunaratne (1998) argues that the new strands of journalism represent phases of the evolution of the social responsibility theory, which arose as a reaction to the excesses of a journalism based on libertarian principles. Developmental journalism coincided with the end of colonialism in the 1960s, when the newly independent countries realised that the news paradigm had to be adjusted to meet the needs of development. The debate on the New World Information and Communication Order exposed the weaknesses of the news paradigm, which failed to awake the public from the slumber of civic and political apathy. This gave rise to the public journalism movement at the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. Zelizer (2004) clarifies that public journalism "evolved from a sense of public despair with the news media following the U.S. political campaigns of the mid-1980s" (p. 104). Peace journalism – first proposed by Johan Galtung in the 1970s as a self-conscious, working concept for those reporting on wars and conflicts – fits into the framework of both developmental and public/civic journalism. These strands do not uphold the myth of objectivity for they justify "the nonobjective, self-conscious intervention by journalists" to reach the objectives of the particular strand (Lee & Maslog 2005).

From the Buddhist perspective, all strands of journalism are interrelated and interdependent. They are the outcomes of dependent co-arising. All strands, including the mainstream, agree that the mass media must go beyond traditional news values to provide a more useful service to the community. The news paradigm itself has added new factors, such as currency and necessity, as news values; and it has become much more flexible on objectivity. The new strands have influenced the traditional news paradigm itself to embrace the vision of communication as conversation thereby recognising the importance of bottom-up participation. If mutual causality has conditioned all strands of journalism, what is the need for a journalism based on Buddhist goals?

Conclusion

A Buddhist-oriented journalism goes well beyond journalism *per se* for the journalist must acquire the right understanding about the functional interdependence and interaction of mass media with all other social subsystems – legal, economic, religious, educational, administrative, political, etc. It is incumbent upon the journalist to make journalism the right livelihood and follow the paths of right action, and right speech. To do this, and to acquire inner peace, the journalist must also improve his/her mind through the paths of concentration and wisdom. The journalist's obligation is to promote social well being, not the capital accumulation of conglomerate media. The existing strands of journalism pay no attention to building the power of the journalist's mind, which cannot be done by scholarship alone.

The Buddhist-oriented journalism model, as outlined in this essay, provides a normative model for those who aspire to elevate news from a commodity to a social good. A Buddhist-oriented journalism is incompatible with advertising-dependence but cyberspace offers it a fertile ground for goal implementation intended to circumvent *dukkha*. The focus of the putative Buddhist newspapers, as it has been since 1880s when the theosophists kick-started engaged Buddhism in Japan and Sri Lanka, continues to be on Buddhism and related activities rather than on the application of process journalism to explain the mutual causality of co-arising factors related to various phenomena over time.[4] Because of the belief

in mutual interdependence, Buddhism holds both the individual and the society responsible for an individual's deviance. It prefers rehabilitation of the deviant rather than imprisonment and execution. Thus violence, war, crime, and punishment are not newsworthy from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy although explaining these phenomena as a mutually interacting process is permissible. It does not pass judgment on the Occidental news paradigm, which may continue with event-oriented reporting, as a functionally interdependent category (or shade) of the continuum of journalism

A Buddhist-oriented journalism cannot depend on revenue from advertising, which is instrumental in increasing *tanhā* (craving) and other *nidānas*, which are linked to *dukkha* (suffering/sorrow). Therefore, it cannot thrive as a competitive private enterprise. It can succeed only as a community enterprise supported by ordinary people, global civil society, and foundations committed to Buddhist values. In short, Buddhist-oriented journalism must move on to situate itself within the framework of interdependence (or no-self), a vital aspect of Oriental cosmology,

Buddhist nations should be the trailblazers of a Buddhist-oriented journalism although the "new" Buddhists in the West have shown a greater interest in using cyberspace, as well as newspapers, to promote Buddhist views (cf. McGill 2008). The state (in Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) could support Buddhist-oriented journalism through a modest tax specified for the purpose. Engaged Buddhists, like those in the Fo Guang Shan movement in Taiwan (Berkson 2005), can play a major role in elevating the existing form of Buddhist-oriented journalism to the level of process reporting. Inasmuch as mutual interdependence is a verifiable fact, Buddhist-oriented journalism would be an interdependent, rather than an independent journalism. It would take the Middle Path, following neither the authoritarian nor the libertarian proclivities. Because diversity and unity are complementary (as illustrated in the *Yijing* model of 64 hexagrams), mainstream journalism should accommodate and support the practice of Buddhist-oriented journalism.

Adherence to Buddhist goals does not make it a religious journalism for its allegiance is only to the Buddhist philosophy. Anyone from any religion could do Buddhist-oriented journalism to promote the collective good, not individualism or vanity of celebrities. Its supreme purpose is to create a healthy environment for all living beings who could live in harmony with Nature because everything grows together in the manner of a web (Galtung et al 2000, 82). It cannot be the purveyor of titillating news intended to arouse the darker side of human beings.. Ethical action is much more important than legal justification as required by right action, right speech, and right livelihood – paths that receive endorsement from the Decalogue as well. Last, but not the least, the purification of human character is more important than "a multiplication of wants" (Schumacher 1973, 46). The "new" American Buddhists are striking a careful balance between meditational training and political activism (Prebish and Tanaka 1998). Buddhist journalists, both in the Orient and the Occident, can do the same.

Notes:

1. Clarke (1997) points out that in recent years meditation has become popular as a psycho-physiological therapy both at the professional and popular levels. He cites Gestalt theorists Claudio Naranjo and Robert Ornstein who say that "oriental meditation techniques give importance to

psycho-physiological factors and to the experience of everyday sounds, images, movements, and bodily functions" (p. 161).

2. In the early 1930s, American journalist Stanley Walker said news was based on the three W's: "women, wampum, and wrongdoing" (Mencher, 2006, p. 56), by which he meant news related to sex, money, and crime. These three factors, which are antithetical to Buddhist goals, can easily fit into the eight news values that Mencher lists. Tabloid journalism thrives on the three W's.

3. Note that Islam, an Abrahamic religion, also has always considered individualism as subordinate to the collective community (Denny 2005, 269).

4. Some examples are *Budusarana*, a Sinhala weekly (with random articles in English and Tamil) published in Colombo by Sri Lanka's state-owned newspaper company; *Merit Times*, a daily published in Chinese (in Taiwan) and English (in California) by Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order and the Buddha's Light International Association in collaboration with the *Chinese Daily News*; and several U.S. publications—the quarterly *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review,*: the bimonthly *Shambhala Sun*, and *Turning Wheel*, the journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. The *Merit Times* does not publish news about violence, war, accidents, and the like; it focuses on Buddhism related events, and interesting events that occur around the world.

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