ABSTRACT

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Abortion, the practice of removing a fetus, has been practiced by societies for centuries, and within each society has been based upon the beliefs, traditions, religions, and moral perspectives of the people involved. The number of abortions currently carried out worldwide is high, and this stimulates considerable debate as to whether abortion should always be considered wrong or whether it can ever be acceptable.

The law and restrictions for performing abortion are clearly defined in Article 305 of the Criminal Law of Thailand, where abortion can be done only if the pregnancy resulted from rape, from being lured as a prostitute, and in regard to concern for the health of the mother. However, in 2010, the news of the recovery of 2,002 illegally aborted fetuses at a Buddhist temple in Bangkok provoked the debate on whether abortion should be freely performed. The circumstances also brought criticism of how this huge number could happen in a Buddhist country like Thailand.

According to Buddhist ethics, the first precept instructs lay Buddhists to abstain from killing or harming any living being or destroying living creatures. In Buddhist beliefs, a life begins from the first moment of conception, therefore, abortion, which is obviously an act of harming and killing an innocent life, is definitely wrong and sinful. The majority of Buddhists therefore agree that abortion is equal to the killing of a human being, and is a form
of sinfulness that should be avoided. On crucial issues, like the danger to a mother’s health, a sinful abortion is acceptable to save the mother’s life.

The question is what ‘other things’ can come to outweigh this sin, so that abortion comes to be seen as ‘Necessary Sinfulness’ in certain circumstances? ‘Necessary Sinfulness’ on abortion may include the criteria of high risk of defects or abnormalities of the fetus that will result in a seriously sick baby which requires extra cure and medication.

It seems that in Japan, almost any grounds for abortion can be seen to make it a ‘Necessary Sinfulness’. At the opposite end of the spectrum, where strictness is maintained, are Tibetan Buddhists, Myanmar Buddhists and a number of Theravada Buddhists in Thailand. While Buddhism takes the view that abortion is inevitably wrong, this position does not take into account any legal considerations about when or how abortion may be permissible.