BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU'S CONCEPT OF EMPTY-MIND (CIT-WANG)
A CRITICAL STUDY

CHAIRAT NAENGSAKON

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND
ACADEMIC YEAR 2012
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CHAMNIEN SAENG SIN

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2012
DISSERTATION TITLE: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Concept of Empty-Mind (Cit-Wang): A Critical Study

RESEARCHER NAME: Ms. Channian Saengsin

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: Dr. Veerachart Nimanong

DISSERTATION CO-ADVISOR: -

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012

The Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, has approved this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies.

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel)
Dean of the Graduate School of Philosophy & Religion

Approval Committee:

[Signatures and names of the committee members]

Chairman
Member/Advisor
Member
Member
Member

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf)
(Dr. Veerachart Nimanong)
(Subhavadee Numkanisorn)

(Dr. Joseph I. Fernando)
(Prof. Dr. Sompam Promta)
There are three main objectives for this research paper. Firstly, it aims at studying Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s view of empty-mind (cit-wang) and also the Canonical Theravāda texts. Secondly, it examine Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” with the idea of suññatā in the Canonical Theravāda texts. Lastly, it aims to study the view of other scholars with regard to “cit-wang” and to examine the application of “cit-wang” in Thai society. This thesis proposes that Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “empty-mind” or “cit-wang” corresponds to the Buddha’s teaching as appears in the Pāli Canon, and is a practical means that is also relevant to the everyday life of modern day people. The methodology employed is the Netipakaraṇa, a Buddhist hermeneutical theory used as a means for eliminating wrong understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. This theory includes the research and analysis of primary and secondary texts, such as books, journals and internet resources.

This study shows that there were two major causes leading to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s formulation of the concept of empty-mind or “cit-wang”, namely, national problems and Buddhist problems. The national problems arose due to the government policy which placed high importance on material development which led people into an age of materialism. The other cause was Buddhist problems, because Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu saw that teaching religion with these old-fashioned methods was not able to satisfy the deeper spiritual needs of human beings in this modern society.
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu explained that he coined the term “cit-wang” as an alternative to the word suññatā. This study found that the concept of “cit-wang” does not stray from the theme of suññatā as found in the Canonical Theravāda texts. Both “cit-wang” and suññatā cover the same concept of truth, namely, that all states are empty of a self or things related to the self. However, the states of “cit-wang” and suññatā (emptiness) also have some differences. Suññatā is a state of being empty of creatures, people, self, me, him, and her. In other words, the word suññatā means emptiness, because of the fact that there is no self to be found in the world. On the other hand, the specific term “cit-wang” varies slightly from traditional Buddhist teachings in that it is a state of mind that is accompanied by wisdom and is therefore free from the feeling of ‘me’ and ‘mine’. The concept “cit-wang” is a basis of practice that can be applied in everyday life for both lay and monastic practitioners. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s presentation of the concept of “cit-wang” rested on the explanation of all things (including the mind) having emptiness as their fundamental nature and the potentiality for everybody to be enlightened.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teaching of “cit-wang” met with a variety of both positive and negative criticism, because people’s intellectual capacities and realization of Dhamma are not all of the same degree. Many people were not able to understand the subtleties of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teaching method. In fact, when people study the Buddha-Dhamma in the Pāli canon deeply and truly, they will find that Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s reinterpretation and teaching did not stray from the essence of the Buddha-Dhamma, since the conception of “cit-wang” is consistent with the theme of suññatā and anattā in the Pāli canon. The presentation of linguistics may be different but the purpose it not different.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is my pleasure to thank the many people who made this thesis possible.

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Veerachart Nimanong, for his continuous support of my Ph.D. study and research, and also for his patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. His guidance has helped me throughout the course of my research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my Ph.D. study.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Dean of the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, Assistant Professor Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel, who untiringly and constantly provided his assistance and advice for this research study.

I would like to express my deep gratitude and thanks to all my respected lecturers in the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, namely Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf, Dr. John Giordano, Dr. Subhavadee Numkanisorn, Dr. Joseph Fernando, Dr. Kajornpat Tangyin and Dr. Nghi Van Dinh who have passed on their knowledge and experience throughout the various courses I have undertaken.

I would like to thank the many people who have taught me Pāli such as Ven. Phramahā Sern Chinavaro at Watsuwanapum of Suphunburi province, and my Sanskrit teacher Asst. Prof. Dr. Chirapat Prapanvidayā at Silpakorn University.

I am grateful to the committees, secretaries and librarians, St. Garbriel’s Library and laboratory assistants in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Assumption University for helping the departments to run smoothly and for assisting me in many different ways. Mrs... Mr., and, also deserve special mention. I am also grateful to Sweets Shop who supplied me with a copy of all necessary books during the research and production this work.
In addition, a very special word of thanks is due to Samañeri Yanthe Vecellio from Australia who very kindly assisted me with correction and translation of English. I also want to thank Maechee Margo Somboon from USA who also helped me with English.

I wish to thank the following people for their cooperation and assistance during the research and production this work. First of all, Venerable Phramahā Chan Cittrong who supplied me with the Computerization of the Pāli Canon for reference to Tipitaka, Maechee Wilai Lukkaewmanisri, my close friend in nunnery, and all the nuns at Wat chanasongkram who have supported me with the four requisites and have given me emotional support during the course of my research. In addition I wish to thank Madam Kunnika Sākhet who supported me with a computer for production of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my most grateful thanks to my loving father Venerable Chiak Khosadhanno and both of my older brothers: Phra Pranus Sangsin and Mr. Somwang Sangsin for their financial support and also Mr. Rapipath Ketkaew. Furthermore, I wish to thank the scholarships of my preceptor Venerable Phrakhru Vichitdhammawipach, the Ecclesiastical District Officer of Huahin District and Abbot of the Wat Busayabanpata in Prachuap Khilkhan province, and I wish to thank Venerable Phravimolpāvanānusit the Ecclesiastical District Officer of Bangplāma District and Abbot of the Wat Klang in Suphanburi province, I wish to thank the scholarships of Wat Raiking Foundation, Nakhonprathom Province and Wat Palelaiyaka Scholarship, Suphanburi Province.

I would like to share the merits of this research project with my mother Mrs.Pien Sangsin and my spiritual teacher (Upajjhāya) Venerable Sawaeng Katapuñño who has already passed away. I would also like to share the merits with the late Bhikkhu whose concept of “cit-wang” spurred me to begin my research.

Without the assistance, support, encouragement, understanding and patience of all the above mentioned persons, this research would not have been completed. From the bottom of my heart, I once thank them all for making my dream come true.
## ABBREVIATIONS

(In italics are canonical works)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.</th>
<th>Ariguttaranikāya (5 vals.)</th>
<th>KhA.</th>
<th>Khuddhakapāṭha Āṭṭakahā (Paramattha jotikā)</th>
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<td>A.</td>
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<td>(Manorathātūrani)</td>
<td>M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ap.</td>
<td>Apadāna (Khuddakanikāya)</td>
<td>MA.</td>
<td>Majjhimanikāya Āṭṭakahā</td>
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<tr>
<td>ApA.</td>
<td>Apadāna Āṭṭakathā</td>
<td>Nd1</td>
<td>Mahāniddesa ((khuddakanikāya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Visudhajanavilāsini)</td>
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<td>Nd2</td>
<td>Cūlaniddesa ((khuddakanikāya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cp.</td>
<td>Cariyapitaka (Khuddakanikāya)</td>
<td>Ud.</td>
<td>Udāna (Khuddakanikāya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CpA.</td>
<td>Cariyapitaka Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>Ps.</td>
<td>Patisambhidamagga</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Paramatthadīpāni)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(khuddakanikāya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Dīghanikāya (3 vals.)</td>
<td>S.</td>
<td>Saṃyutanikāya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA.</td>
<td>Dīghanikāya Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>PsA.</td>
<td>Patisambhidamagga Āṭṭakahā</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Sumaṅgalavilāsini)</td>
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<td>Sn.</td>
<td>Suttanipāta (Khuddakanikāya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dh.</td>
<td>Dhammapada (khuddadani kāya)</td>
<td>Vin.</td>
<td>Vinaya Pitaka (5 vols)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DhA.</td>
<td>Dhammapada Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>Vbh.</td>
<td>Vibhaṅga (Abhidhamma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dhik.</td>
<td>Dhammapada Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>VbhA.</td>
<td>Vibhaṅga Āṭṭakahā</td>
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<tr>
<td>DhikA.</td>
<td>Dhammapada Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>(Sammodavinodani)</td>
<td>V ism.</td>
</tr>
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<td>(Paratthadīpāni)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kh.</td>
<td>Khuddhakapāṭha Āṭṭakahā</td>
<td>(khuddakanikāya)</td>
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Throughout this work all references to the Tipiṭaka are from the Pāli Text Society (PTS) of The Computerization of the Pāli Canon and Buddhist Reference Suite, published by Mahidol University Computing Center in B.E. 2550 (A.D.2007). All references to the Tipiṭaka follow the universal system of citing discoursed or suttas by volume/verse.

For example, (A. I.87), is used to refer to the Ariguttaranikāya. Volume I/Verse 87. Due to the lack of an English version of the commentaries all references to commentarial literature are from the Thai edition.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Background and Significance of the Research Problem

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993), was a highly important Thai monk. He spent most of his life researching Buddhist scriptures, the Pāli Tipiṭaka and the teachings of Buddhism from other schools, because he wanted to develop and open up Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. Buddhadaṭa Bhikkhu was the first Thai Theravāda thinker who explicitly used materials from Mahāyāna for his own teaching. He used the Mahāyānist concept of “empty-mind” (cit-wang) as one of his key concepts for interpreting Buddhism. He asserted that “empty-mind” (cit-wang) is the central realization of Buddhism. He stated that “empty-mind” (cit-wang) can be applied in daily life, for example when working, eating, socializing, and so on, which enables people to lead their lives in peaceful happiness.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu reinterpreted the Theravāda doctrine using his own terminology, his own structural metaphor, and his own hermeneutic theory. He adapted concept of “cit-wang”, making it relevant to modern social conditions and contemporary living. He believed that Buddhism is relevant to human life by providing a moral and ideological basis for action in the social world in order to promote the progressive development of society and also individual attainment of spiritual salvation. This ideology has encouraged many people including monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen to aspire to the attainment of Nibbāna. (Shih You Fang. 2011).

Through studying Buddhadaṭa Bhikkhu’s application of the concept of empty-mind “cit-wang”, it can be seen that there were two major causes leading to the conception of this teaching. One was problems with regard to the nation and the other was problems with regard to the Buddhist religion. The national problems arose from various crises, both social and political. The cause of the crises being the government policy which placed such high importance on material development so as to lead the
country into an age of materialism. In 1963 western customs and culture spread into Thailand under the government slogan: "Work is money and money is work in order to create happiness." In reaction to this blatant materialism, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu began to try to spread the core teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu saw the big picture. He realized that this attempt to endow life with more and more material comfort would finally lead to suffering, both at the individual level and the societal level, because such a way of life neglected the far more important aspect of mental development. When humanity becomes the slave of materialism, competition, conflicts and cruelty arise. There comes about a decline in morality and society becomes permeated by agitation and aggravation. This lack of peace in society prompted Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu to put forth the core teaching of the Buddha in order to help people to not become slaves to material things. This could be achieved by teaching them to live with "cit-wang" which is empty of clinging and would therefore help them to live their lives in a basic, simple manner.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu stated that, "this new wave of development has increased Buddhists' interest in politics until they lose themselves in the motives of the nation. They get lost in reputation and titles, get attached to material pleasures and forget basic goodness, rightness and fairness." People losing themselves in the motives of the nation means that they get lost in the power of the nation. For this reason, politicians tried their hardest to turn the minds of people to follow the nation's ideals. This new consumerist society was described by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu as a society of eating, sensuality and reputation, or a profit-oriented society that knows only to derive happiness from more and more consumerism. The more they could acquire as 'me and mine' (tua ku khong ku) the more they felt a sense of achievement. Also, depending on this mentality, supernatural arts still had their place in modern consumerist society because they helped to build up people's hopes for material good fortune or a feeling of material security.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu did not observe this slavery to materialism in the sphere of the government only. He also looked deeper into the sphere of Buddhism.
He saw the monastic order in charge of ecclesiastical affairs as a group of people also brainwashed by this new materialism. The dissemination and transmission of the religion was no longer being carried out correctly or effectively. The monks were not up-to-speed with the charges occurring in the modern age, which caused them to disseminate the teachings in a way that conflicted with the basic principles of Buddhism. They were presenting things that actually led to an increase in defilements as though they were things that led to the elimination of defilements; things that led to suffering as though they were things that led to freedom from suffering; and things that increased one’s journey in the cycle of birth and death as though they were things that led to Nibbāna.

Moreover, these out-of-date teachings and methods of teaching were not able to satisfy those who were highly educated, highly intelligent and accustomed to the use of reason. Using their intelligence as the basis for discrimination, they did not believe in any form of teaching that could not stand up to reason. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu saw that teaching religion with these old-fashioned methods was not able to satisfy the deeper spiritual needs of human beings in this new modern society. He summarized the state of the religion as follows:

"Because of the profundity of the religion itself, because the way of the world is becoming more and more at odds with religion and because there is a malignant growth arising within the religion itself, the teaching and dissemination is like turning the bad things into good things as though they are equal. Regardless of whether they are teaching theory to promote understanding, or practicing as examples for others to see in order to motivate them to practice - this is the sickness in the religion, which has led to the arising of confusion and has left the religion drowning in this static state" (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 2010, pp.8-9)

The English Buddhist scholar Rhys David stated that, “Buddhist scholars should only accept the original Tipitaka texts, and should deny later texts that have been composed subsequently and do not conform with the original ideal monk (bhikkhu). She believed that Theravāda scholars muddled up the Buddha’s teachings
by giving too much importance to the value of monastic life. This aspect has been researched very well, but in the end all you get are the various customs that have been handed down across the generations of monks. However, it is not possible to use profound wisdom to interpret these texts. She believed that the true meaning of Buddhism disappeared because later generations of monks sullied the original teachings with their own monastic culture that veered away from the initial model.” (Quoted in Veerachart Nimanong, 2009, p. 253).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu stated that in terms of modern society, it is apparent that ‘religion’ still has effects on behavior, beliefs and lifestyle. Those effects are both positive and negative in nature. As such, when the true heart of Buddhism disappears, then supernatural sciences and external religious forms become more influential, leading to negative consequences and an increase in blind faith.

In this respect Buddhadasa Bhikkhu played a very important role. He helped to transform religion to help display its creative power to society. He took the Absolute Truth (paramatthadhamma) aspects of Buddha-Dhamma and tried to make them more accessible. He received much criticism for this approach with claims that his teachings were far too difficult and unintelligible, or that he was teaching in the style of the Mahāyāna. This is because in Thai society the study of the ‘three-fold training’ or virtue (sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Paññā), was more or less restricted to the first two factors of virtue and concentration. The aspect of wisdom had been neglected to a large extent.

As a result of rapid social change in Thailand, from the late nineteenth century up to the early twentieth century, people have become confused about their lifestyles. They are under the control of capitalism, consumerism, egoism, and materialism which cause the mind to be full of ‘money consciousness.’ Ethical ideas in our social and living spaces are disregarded and attention is given only to material needs while ignoring spiritual needs. These are the causes of the problems arising in terms of spiritual values and morality. Rushing to achieve and to accumulate more and more material possessions causes social inequality where some people hoard wealth while others go in need. When there is hoarding by the “haves” there will be
attempts by the “have-nots” to gain access to that stored wealth, and so social conflict and confusion arise.

In the Anguttara Nikāya, the Buddha mentioned that poverty is a type of suffering for one still engaged in sensual pleasures (A. VI. 45). The basic idea of Buddhism giving to charity is one way to reduce the amount of greed in oneself, while increasing one’s quality of spiritual development — a means to decrease one’s ego-centeredness and therefore increase one’s spiritual capital. (Academic papers presented, 2008, P.40).

With regard to the Buddhist attitude toward wealth, Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer additionally mentioned that this non-attached orientation towards life does not require a flat renunciation of all material possessions. Instead one should find another approach to express attitudes toward possessions (Loy, 2003, p.25). Strictly speaking, to be non-attached is to possess and use material possessions wisely without one’s mind being possessed by that wealth.

Therefore, the meaning of renunciation in this regard is not renunciation in its gross meaning, as in the absolute renunciation of worldly life—but the meaning dealing directly with the mental attitude: renunciation of the state of attachment towards wealth and material possessions through wise usage and distribution. Here, the issue in not how wealthy or poor one is, but how one responds to the situation (Loy, 2003, p.73). Payutto calls this state as spiritual freedom (Payutto, 1994, p. 64).

According to Buddhādaśa Bhikkhu, confusion and disorder result from undertaking social development with an immoral attitude of craving or attachment to material results:

“The world now aims only for material development because of cowardice and the fear of not keeping up with “them,” of not having the equipment to fight “them” or to live well….Consequently, the whole world is in a state of disorganization and confusion. There are complicated problems
without end which have arisen from moral degeneration.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, pp.75-76) cited in Peter Jackson, 2003, p.205)

Presently, people are having face up to these materialistic problems. They are attached to and give great significance to the accumulation of wealth. Luxurious consumption has become the mainstream culture of society as opposed to contentment or santutthi, which is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. This is the transformation from need-based economy to want-based economy and then to greed-based economy. The people are affected by the propaganda of this new value system. Thus they become increasingly greedy and their lifestyles become increasingly luxurious, requiring expensive cars, big houses, fashionable clothes, multi-stylistic mobile-phones and so on. The Buddha stated that the capacity for human desire is unlimited, because it can never be really satisfied. The more it is fed, the more desire grows in degree and quantity. Therefore people become stuck in an endless cycle of seeking happiness in order to satiate their unlimited hunger.

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu the fundamental cause of these social problems, and of the disorder and confusion which hinders the realization of Nibbāna as a social goal, is inadequate or improper morality: “All disorganization (wunwai) is the result of a lack of morality” (Blofeld, 1958, pp.109-110). Moral failure, or in other words not maintaining “cit-wang” or detached mindfulness, leads to the self-centered attitude of “I” and “mine,” which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu regarded as the immediate cause of social problems: “self-centredness is the basic cause of suffering, both individually and socially” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, p.12).

In addition, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu further explained that in the modern world people seek for material pleasures and wealth, but they ignore the needs of their communities. They live with a lack of essential knowledge of important Buddhist teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, namely, the knowledge of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. People also fail to realize the three core characteristics of existence, which are the state of impermanence, the state of suffering, and the state of not self. Without
this basic foundation of understanding people lose their direction in life, misinterpret the world and fall victims to delusion. Thus they become slaves to their own created world, clinging to the objects of their desires.

In Buddhism there are four different kinds of attachment, namely: attachment to sense objects, attachment to opinions, attachment to rites and rituals, and attachment to the idea of selfhood. These attachments, which are born of ignorance, lead people to seek happiness in a way that can never lead to satisfaction. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu realized these problems and tried to guide everyone towards right understanding, avoiding these four forms of attachment. He remarked that:

"These four forms of attachment are the only problem that Buddhists or people who wish to know about Buddhism have to understand. The objective of living a holy life (Brahmacariya) in Buddhism is to enable the mind to give up unskillful grasping. You can find this teaching in every discourse in the texts which treat of the attainment of Arahantship. The expression used is “the mind freed from attachment.” That is the ultimate. When the mind is free from attachment, there is nothing to bind it and make it a slave of the world. There is nothing to keep it spinning on in the cycle of birth and death, so the whole process comes to stop, or rather, becomes world transcending, free from the world. The giving up of unskillful clinging is, then, the key to Buddhist practice.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2009, p.56)

With regards to the aforementioned issues, this study proposes the concept of “empty-mind” (cit-wang) according to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu as a way of solving the problem of social suffering for the contemporary world. While more traditional Theravāda Buddhism emphasizes mental purification by the methods of cittadevelopment (mind development) or meditation as the only way to overcome suffering and to realize Nibbāna, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized the selflessness of acting with “cit-wang” as the way to reduce self-centeredness and therefore solve social problems. As such, the divisiveness and greed behind so many problems of poverty and oppression could be ameliorated.
In 1962 (2505 BE.), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu clearly expressed the concept of "empty-mind" (cit-wang) in terms of "working with "cit-wang". Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s new attempt at social change occurred during the government of Prime Minister Gen. Sarit Thanarat (1908-1963) who attempted to promote a government project to aid the development of the country with the slogan, "Work is money and money is work in order to create happiness." At that time the Thai economy was in a state of depression. Thus the government wanted to encourage people to work hard for the results of money and material gain.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argued that the Prime Minister’s slogan was incorrectly worded and stated by an ignorant person. He proposed the alternative slogan, "Work for the work, not for the money" and further argued that if people worked with their focus only on money, they would in fact promote the self-centered attitude that leads to attachment, craving and suffering. So finally the fruits of their effort, rather than bringing about happiness, actually lead to deeper misery. He wrote a now very well-known poem expressing this sentiment:

"One should perform all kinds of work with an “empty-mind.” All the results of work should be given up to “emptiness.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p. 6)

Using this concise verse as a basis, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argued that people should work with a empty-mind and warned that the busy and agitated mind and clouded by attachment, delusion, worry and fear would lead people to become more and more gloomy and insecure. People who insisted on pursuing such behavior patterns would simply set themselves up for a neurotic breakdown or some other kind of illness.

Regardless of whether one is specifically engaged in training the mind to be unattached and calm, or whether one is working to earn a living in some occupation or another, if one does so with an empty mind that forms no attachments, that is the practice of Dhamma. It does not matter if one is in an office, a factory or a cave, to work without getting involved in attachments, obsession, and ego is what is meant by
the statement, "Do work of all kinds with a mind that is empty." The result of working this way is that one enjoys oneself while working and that the work is done well because the mind is very clear and sharp, unclouded by worries about things like money. One's material needs are satisfied all the same without the attachment and consequent suffering forged by grasping and straining to get what one wants.

The second line of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's verse is, "And to the emptiness surrenders all of the fruits." When one's work bears fruit in the form of money, fame, influence, status, and so forth, one must give it all up to emptiness. To cling to these things as "belonging to me", "my money," "my success," "my talent," or "my" anything would be simple stupidity. Therefore people should not be attached to the results of their work.

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's proposal for living and working with "cit-wang" is similar to what the Lord Buddha designated "Suññatā vihāradhamma", which means living life with mindfulness and clear comprehension (Satisampajjāna) that sees that everything is empty of "self". This concept appears in the Majjhima Nikāya wherein the Lord Buddha said to the Venerable Ānanda, "Ānanda both in the past and in the present I abide in Suññatā vihāradhamma. Every day the Buddha had to meet with great numbers of people in order to teach the Dhamma to the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. He had to meet with kings and ministers, practitioners of different religious sects, and proponents of other doctrines whose views were in contradiction to those of Buddhism. Those proponents of other doctrines had both friendly and malicious intentions. When they met with the Buddha they would ask him questions and engage in ideological disputes about the teachings. The fact that the Buddha abided in Suññatā vihāradhamma did not mean that he tried to escape to some empty, secluded place. These many everyday confrontations did not have any effect upon his abiding in "Suññatā vihāradhamma", because his mind was pure and always empty of the inclination to gain anything for himself. (M.III.104).

Even in the case of disputing with proponents of other sects, the Buddha's mind did not cling to his own view as correct or the view of others as wrong. He simply knew which things were not true and so stated the truth according to reality.
This behavior is different to that of ordinary people who act with the feeling of “me” and “mine”, and therefore, “I am right, you are wrong.” However, that does not mean that ordinary people cannot practice to realize such an attitude. “Cit-wang” is indispensable for everyone. Anyone can apply “cit-wang” in daily life and finally achieve the eradication of all suffering.

**Interpretation of “empty-mind” (cit-wang) with regards to Suññatā of Anattā**

The concept of “empty-mind” (cit-wang) encompasses the relationship between aniccam, dukkham, anattā and suññatā. The term suññatā of anattā is used by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to clarify the meaning of “empty-mind” (cit-wang). Here I will explain the relationship of “cit-wang” and suññatā. Detailed explanations of the three characteristics will be studied in the next chapter.

The Pāli term Suññatā and the Sanskrit term Śūnyatā literally mean “emptiness” or “voidness,” while “cit-wang” is a Thai term meaning “empty-mind,” “void-mind” or “freed-mind”. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu used the term “cit-wang” as the Thai rendition of suññatā. In this study I will use the English word “empty-mind” as a translation of the Thai term “cit-wang”, because it is the generally accepted translation and will facilitate easy understanding for the reader.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained the relationship between the word suññatā and “cit-wang” in the following statement:

“The word suññatā means ‘emptiness of the sense of me or mine’. As for the term “cit-wang”, it refers to the mind that is without clinging to the sense of me and mine. The word “cit-wang” does not mean some complete empty vaccum, but simply a state that is empty of clinging to anything as being “me” or “mine”. However, that so-called “empty-mind” will paradoxically be “full” of mindfulness and wisdom, which understands the fact that everything is empty of self-existence. The relationship between suññatā and “cit-wang” is the factor of the emptiness. That state of mind could be called “suññatācit,” but it is more easily expressed as “cit-wang” or “empty-mind.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, n.d., p.325)
The word suññatā means emptiness. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu says:

"The subject of emptiness (suññatā) is simply the fact of not-clinging, which is the very heart of Buddhism, as shown by the Buddha when he taught "sabbe dhamma nalam abhinivesāya" which means "there is absolutely nothing that should be clung to." Or sometimes he stated, "sabbe dhammā anattā," meaning "All things are not-self." This means that there is no self in anything, that is, all things are empty of self." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1992, p.828)

As pointed out by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, in Theravāda Buddhism the Buddha used the term suññatā in a similar sense to anattā. For example, the state of anattā, or not-self, could otherwise be expressed as "empty of a self," which is essentially the meaning of suññatā. As such, the two statements "sabbe dhammā anattā" (all things are not-self) and "sabbe dhammā suññatā" (all things are emptiness) actually have an equivalent meaning. It is generally accepted by all Buddhist that the three core teachings in Buddhism are: Abandon evil - Do good - Purify the Mind, but for Buddhadasa Bhikkhu the core teaching was "sabbe dhammā nalam abhinivesāya" - "there is absolutely nothing that should be clung to."

The subjects of anattā (non-self) and suññatā (emptiness), and especially suññatā, are considered to be the highest level of teaching when compared with other Buddhist teachings. The Buddha confirmed this by saying that all of his teachings are related to suññatā. The teaching of suññatā is very commonly seen in the Tipitaka, both in teachings for the monastic Sangha and teachings to the laity. For example, in the Samyutta Nikāya, Salāyatana Vagga, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha, "It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, lord. In what respect is it said that the world is empty?" The Buddha replied that, "The eye is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Forms... Eye-consciousness... Eye-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. The ear is empty... The nose is empty... The tongue is empty... " (S.IV.54).

In the Khuddaka Nikāya, Mahaniddesa the Buddha taught that seeing the world as empty depends on mentally determining that nothing is under our control,
and contemplating conditioned phenomena as empty. As such one should see that Form is not-self, because if it were self, then it would not deteriorate or be subject to disease, and one should be able to determine: “may my form be like this, like that. May it not change to be otherwise."

But because it is not-self form changes according to the laws of nature, it does not proceed according to our wishes. Likewise, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness are all not-self for the very same reason that they are not under our control. When one contemplates in this way, one will be able to see the world as empty.

Moreover, the subject of suññatā has been taught by many distinguished philosophers, such as Nāgarjuna, who lived in southern India around the second century CE and was an important figure in the development of the Mahāyāna schools. Nāgarjuna explains the concept of suññatā as

“...The non-existence of inherent self-nature, that is, there is nothing in the world that exists independently of itself, without being related to other things. All things are interrelated. Therefore, whatever phenomena are empty (suññatā), these phenomena are the middle way (majjhima patipadā).”

(Sathiera Bhodinuntha, 2518 P.126)

Nāgarjuna’s meaning is that suññatā is the non-existence of inherent self-nature. This can be easily understood through comparing longness and shortness. According to ordinary everyday people the state of being ‘long’ seems to be an actually existing phenomena, the state of being ‘short’ seems also to really exist, but indeed that is not the truth. We can know that something is long only when it is compared with something shorter. And vice versa, we know that something is short only when it is compared with something longer. It can therefore be seen that longness and shortness exist in relation to each other. If they were not interrelated, then longness and shortness would not exist. Independent of self-nature, longness and shortness do not exist. They are therefore called suññatā (empty).
To capture the ‘essence’ of Nāgarjuna’s worldview one must go one step further to understand that even ‘emptiness’ itself is empty. This is known as the doctrine of “the emptiness of emptiness.” (CF.MK 13.8, 2003). Nāgarjuna argued that Emptiness is not itself a constitutive essence of things, but is rather the absence of essence. He stated that Emptiness is nothing but the state (or process) of being dependently co-arisen and dissolved, that is, dependent upon causes and conditions, of compounded parts and wholes, of which all parts are momentary constitutive elements. Thus all things in the perceptual realm receive their individual identity simply by means of the formulation of conceptual designations. Nāgarjuna then makes the kind of radical turn which is characteristic of his methodology, by declaring that the causal principal, which is the explanation of everything, is itself Empty. (J. Bruce Long, 2008, pp. 427-428).

The views of traditional Theravāda Buddhism, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and Nāgarjuna are all similar. They all stem from right understanding simply emphasizing different aspects according to causes and conditions. When one contemplates according to any of these philosophies one will be able to see the world as empty. As a result, defilements will not arise, because one sees that “I” and “mine” are illusions that arise through the process of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda). When sense contact gives rise to feeling, the condition for craving comes into being. However, if one is aware of the nature of that feeling as dependently arisen, the arising of craving is avoided, then clinging to the concepts of “I” and “mine” does not take place.

Seeing its potential for practical application, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu proposed the idea of empty-mind in a systematic form, both in regard to the theory, the method of presentation, and the application in everyday life for all people, no matter what age or sex. In summary the subjects of suññatā or “cit-wang,” which are traditionally considered to be a highly profound teachings that are difficult to learn and even more difficult to practice, actually turn out to be very practical means for skillful, peaceful and effective living for all people.
1.2 Thesis Statements

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “empty-mind” or “cit-wang” corresponds to the Buddha’s teaching on the subject of suññatā (emptiness) as appears in the Pāli Canon, and is a practical means that is relevant to everyday life for modern people.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study will emphasize three main points:

1. To identify the meaning of “empty-mind” or “cit-wang” as presented by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu and also the Canonical Theravāda texts.

2. To examine Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s concept of “empty-mind” or “cit-wang” with the idea of suññatā in the Canonical Theravāda texts.

3. To study the view of other scholars with regard to “empty-mind” or “cit-wang” and to examine the application of “cit-wang” in Thai society.

1.4 Research Methodology

This research is taken as qualitative based on the analysis of documents from both primary and secondary texts. The theoretical framework for guiding the conducting of research is in accordance with Desanāhara in Nettipakarana, in which the conveying of teachings consists of 6 gradual interpretations, namely: (1) Gratification (assāda) (2) Disadvantage (ādīnava) (3) Renunciation (nissarana) (4) Consequence (phala) (5) Skillful means (upāya) (6) Persuasion or instruction (ānatti); together with an appreciation of Phāsā-khon Phāsā-tham (Everyday Language, Dhamma Language) as a means of conveying a message. Relevant books, journal articles, internet resources, and Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings will be analyzed.
1.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will use the Nettipakarana text which is about hermeneutical theories in Buddhism. The Nettipakarana sets forth sixteen ways of explanation as follows:

1. **Teaching** (*desanā*) in which the conveying of teaching consists of 6 gradual interpretations, namely (1) Gratification (*assāda*), (2) Disadvantage (*ādinava*) and so on as above.

2. **Investigation** (*vicaya*) means finding out about Buddhist doctrine through studying or researching the path to liberation from suffering. It also involves making critical interpretations of important terms in the Suttas.

3. **Construing** (*yutti*) means understanding the meaning of terms within the Suttas in order to avoid contradictions. It is a verifiable method of interpreting Buddhism.

4. **Footing** (*padatthāna*) means a base for the interpretation of Dhamma

5. **Characteristic** (*lakkhana*) means to present methods of interpretation which focus on general characteristics or similar states without referring to the singular condition.

6. **Fourfold Array** (*catubhyuha*) means a way of organizing the four grammatical derivatives. These are (i) Linguistics, (ii) purport which is the speaker's intention, (iii) utterance and (iv) consecutive sequence which is coherence. The last point is further divided into four which are sequence of meaning, of phrasing, of teaching and of demonstration.

7. **Conversion** (*avatta*) means a way of converting similar and dissimilar ideas are converted, or the act of converting, thus allowing a cause and effect of interpretation of terms in the Suttas.

8. **Analysis** (*vibhatti*) means to analyze planes of shared and unshared ideas, of defilement and of cleansing. An analysis here refers to a critical interpretation.

9. **Reversal** (*parivattana*) means the way ideas stated in the thread are reversed by way of contrary-opposites or otherwise the 'reversal' is derived directly from the Suttas. A moralist involves himself in a contradiction by denying a right
idea (preached by another) and consequently praising the contrary-opposite wrong
idea.

10. **Synonym** (*vevacana*) means there is only one meaning but the wording is
diverse, thus it is synonymous.

11. **Description** (*paññatti*) means the meanings of some dhammas are made
known in some important contexts. They are ways to concretely describe Dhamma.

12. **Ways of Entry** (*otarana*) means they are ways of entry that present
methods for giving appropriate ingress in the instances of Dependent Arising. Thus it
is interpretation of relationship between cause and effect.

13. **Clearing Up** (*sodhana*) means issues are cleared up, are put right, thus is
it a clearing up. The term is used in late Pāli for the ‘correction’ of wrong reading of
the texts.

14. **Terms of Expression** (*adhiṭṭhāna*) means ideas that can be both general
and particular are expressed, and occur accordingly, without disjunction (which might
affect the ideas so expressed).

15. **Requisites** (*parikkhāra*) means the presence of a requisite actively
determines the resulting fruit. The subject matter is in terms of ‘cause and condition’.

16. **Coordination** (*samāropana*) means ideas are co-ordinated under the four
heads, which are Footing; Synonym; Keeping-in-being; and Abandoning, (Kaccāyana
Thera, 1962, pp. 36-41).

1.6 Preceding Relevant Researches

in the Theravada Buddhist Texts”, is to search for hermeneutical theories in
Buddhism for the purpose of solving the conflicts among religions. This is especially
important in resolving differences between the many Buddhist sects that result from
different fundamental interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings. Hermeneutics in
Buddhism is characterized as ‘Interaction-ism’, which is of ‘interpretation-
exploration combined’ theory, and has been exemplified in the *Netipakarana* text and
in the work of Thai Buddhist scholars, both ordained and lay. One example is the
debate over ‘Whether Nibbāna is Self or Not-Self’. Further research has found that
Hermeneutics could help support mutual understanding among religions better than Aristotle’s logic. Some great example of this are Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s hermeneutics that is based on two kinds of language, and that of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which has been summarized by David E. Klemm in a well-known phrase, ‘I understand you’.

2. Piyadee Prasertsom (2007) “Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s Concept of “Manusya” or “Human Being” in Modern Age: A Critical Study”. This dissertation is about search in the modern world. Most people completely lose touch with a pure and ethical way of life because of their insatiable desire. They are trapped in the world of materialism, accumulations, and possession. This paper offers a practical transformation of intellectual capacity and spirituality from ignorance to wisdom, based on realistic aspects of Buddhism and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s reinterpretation of Buddhadhamma. This study employs the methodology of descriptive method to critically analyze Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s reinterpretation of the Buddhist concept of “manusaya” or “human being”.

3. Peter A. Jackson (2003) “Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Theravāda Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand”. In this book Peter Jackson examines Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s life, work and thought, placing them in the context of the political, economic, and intellectual changes that transformed Thailand in the twentieth century. Combining biographical studies with critical philosophical and sociological analyses of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s reforms of Thai Buddhist teachings, Peter Jackson emphasizes the path-breaking and often radical ideas of one of the greatest Buddhist thinkers of the last century.

The methodological approach of this study is complex in two senses. Firstly, it involves appreciating Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s work both as a theoretical system and as a social phenomenon. And secondly, this social-philosophical analysis is undertaken in a way that sympathetically engages Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s work, evaluating it both in terms of the Buddhist tradition from which it is drawn and the Western intellectual tradition which has significantly influenced it.
4. Phra Fong Sawasdee (1993). “An Analytical Study of Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu’s Conception of “The Empty Mind (Cit-Wang”)”. This dissertation studies the meaning of empty-mind according to Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings. The results of this study can reveal that “cit-wang” is the mental detachment from the concepts of “me and mine” which leads to freedom from all suffering. This concept of “cit-wang” is consistent with that of suññatā in the Tipitaka in which the Buddha warns all bhikkhus to mindfully cultivate Right View which sees the world as empty or void. Similarly, Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu taught all Thai Buddhists to apply “cit-wang” in daily life so that they might understand the true meaning of their activities, and thus lead their lives in peaceful happiness.

5. Tavivat Puntangvivvat (1994). There is an empirical study of the concept of Dhammic Socialism entitled “Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu’s Dhammic Socialism in Dialogue with Latin American Liberation Theology”. This dissertation presents Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu’s social theory of dhammic socialism, a form of socialism based on Buddhist religion and culture. Buddhāsāsa Bhikkhu emphasized the problem of “surplus” and the ethical tools for fair distribution, but he failed to respond to the global market economy. This dissertation is an attempt to address Dhammic socialism from a Third World Buddhist perspective in response to the social and economic injustices that exist under the global market economy.

6. Melford E. Spiro (1982) “Buddhism And Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes”. Spiro is an American cultural anthropologist specializing in psychological anthropology, in his book, Spiro separated Burmese Buddhism into three groups: Apotropaic Buddhism (concerned with providing protection from evil spirits), Kammatic Buddhism (concerned with making merit for a future birth), and Nibbānic Buddhism (concerned with attaining the liberation of Nibbāna, as described in the Tipitaka). These categories are not accepted by all scholars, and are usually considered non-exclusive by those who employ them. (Spiro, 1982, pp. 12-13).
1.7 Definitions of Terms

Some terms used in this research are technical Buddhist terms. Therefore, I will make clear the definition of these keywords.

1. **Anattā** denotes the nature of all things as being fundamentally void of any self or being. It is anattā or “non-self” which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu refers to in Thai as “cit-wang”.

2. **Upādāna** means attachment or clinging. There are four types of clinging: (i) clinging to sensuality, (ii) clinging to views, (iii) clinging to mere rules and rituals, and (iv) clinging to the ego-belief.

3. **Cit-wang** is the Thai term means “empty-mind,” “void-mind” or “freed-mind.” It is used by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu as the Thai rendering of suññatā, which can be approached from many different perspectives, such as:

   1. **Cit-wang** (empty-mind) means the state of mind when it is free from craving and clinging to the sense of self. In such a state, the mind is able to curb the fabrications arising from ignorance and wrong view. It is full of mindfulness and wisdom guiding towards Right View, which enables one to see the world according to reality.

   2. **Cit-wang** means empty or free from Lobha (greed), dosa (hatred) and moha (delusion), or in other words empty of clinging to anything as being the self or empty of a self and anything pertaining to a self.

4. **Detachment** means the even-minded stillness of non-attachment. It means simply not to attach, not cling, not to regard anything as “I” and “mine.”

5. **Egoism** means excessive preoccupation with one’s own well being and interests, usually accompanied by an inflated sense of self importance and conceit.

6. **Ignorance** refers to the lack of essential knowledge of the Four Noble Truths which are ignorance of suffering, of the cause of suffering, of the cessation of suffering, and of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

7. **Kilesa** means a mental defilement or impurity which leads to suffering.

8. **Suññatā** means emptiness, which can be approached from many different perspectives, such as:
1. The state that is empty of being a creature, a person, a self, me him, her or in other words the state of the Five Aggregates as not-self.

2. The state that is empty of defilements, namely, rāga (lust), dosa (hatred), moha (delusion)

3. Lokuttara dhamma or Supra-mundane dhamma, in other words Dhamma that helps on to go beyond the world or Dhamma pertaining to a state already beyond the world.

9. The Nettipakarana is a text attributed to Mahākaccāyana, an immediate disciple of the Buddha. It is not regarded as canonical by the Sinhalese and is not part of the Thai Tipiṭaka, but is included in the Burmese Canon.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the research

This thesis will be limited to the study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” with regard to a wider Theravāda Buddhist context. The theory and practice required to attain the status of “cit-wang” will also be addressed.
CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF SUÑNATĀ AND ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

In the Pāli texts of Theravāda Buddhism, the term Suñña, meaning empty or void is the adjectival form, while the term suñnatā is an abstract noun meaning emptiness or voidness. The Sanskrit equivalents are Śūnya and Śūnyatā. ‘Emptiness’ or ‘voidness’ is a characteristic of all phenomena, since the impermanent nature of all things means that nothing possesses essential enduring identity. According to Buddha’s teaching, contemplation of the emptiness of phenomena (suññatānupassanā) is an aspect of the cultivation of insight (vipassanā-bhāvanā), which leads to wisdom and inner peace. The importance of such insight is given special emphasis in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Suññatā signifies the absence of absolute identity, permanence, or an inherent ‘self’. This is because everything is inter-related and mutually dependent, never wholly self-sufficient or independent. All things are in a state of constant flux, with energy and information forever flowing throughout the natural world giving rise to new phenomena and themselves also undergoing major transformations with the passage of time.

This teaching, however, does not connote nihilism. In the English language the word ‘emptiness’ suggests the absence of spiritual meaning or a personal feeling of alienation. But in Buddhism the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena at a basic level enables one to see that all these things, which ultimately have no substance, are trivial and not worthy of worry, conflict or antagonism. At an ultimate level, true realization of emptiness brings complete liberation from suffering in the cycle of birth and death. (Wikipedia, 2011).

1 The belief that nothing has any value, especially that religious and moral principles have no value.
2.1. The Origin and Development of *Suññatā*

The concept of *Suññatā* emerged from the Buddhist doctrine of *Anattā* (Pāli, Sanskrit: *Anatman*) the ultimate nonexistence of the self (Pāli: *atta*, Sanskrit: *Atman*) and *Paticcasamuppada* (Pāli, Sanskrit: *pratityasamutpāda*), Dependent Origination. The Cūlasuññatā Sutta in the Pāli Canon relates that the monk Ānanda, the Buddha’s attendant, asked, "It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, Lord. In what respect is it said that the world is empty?" The Buddha replied, "Insofar as it is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Thus it is said, Ānanda, that the world is empty." He goes on to explain that what is meant by "the world" is the six internal sense media and their objects, and elsewhere says that to theorize about something beyond this realm of experience would put one to grief (S.IV.54).

Over the passage of time, many different philosophical theories and resultant schools have developed within Buddhism in an effort to explain the exact meaning of emptiness. (Klein, Anne C., 1991) After the Buddha’s final cessation (*parinibbāna*), the theme of Śūnyatā was further developed by Nāgarjuna and the Madhyamaka school, which is usually regarded as an early Mahāyāna school. Śūnyatā is also an important element of the Tathagatagarbha literature, which played a formative role in the evolution of subsequent Mahāyāna doctrine and practice. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, detailed dialogues between the various schools are preserved in order to train students. (Heng-Ching Shih, 1993).

Further, the Lotus Sutra of the Mahāyāna schools states that seeing all phenomena as empty is not the highest, final attainment: the bliss of total Buddha-Wisdom supersedes even the vision of complete emptiness.

2.1.1 The Different Names of *Suññatā* in Mahāyāna Schools

In the Mahāyāna Schools there are a number of different terms used to refer to the concept of “*suññatā*” (emptiness) or Śūnyatā (the Sanskrit equivalent employed by the Mahāyāna schools). These terms include *Nirvāṇa*, *Tathata* (suchness), *Idappaccayatā* or *Pratitya-Samutpāda* and *ālayavijñāna* (realism as the store-
consciousness). The meaning of suññatā also covers the concepts of aniccarh (impermanence), dukkhāṃ (suffering) and anattā (non-self) and is the basis for the notion of "citra-wang."

Mahāyāna Buddhism is divided into two main systems of thought, namely, the Madhyamika and the Yogacara. The Madhyamika school is said to have originated with the teacher, Nagarjuna in the second century A.D. It teaches that Śunyatā is the absolute state of reality. In other words, there is no difference between samsāra (phenomenal world) and nirvāna (liberations) or Śunyatā (reality). Śunyatā or the absolute corresponds to the nirguna Brahman of the Upanisads. At the beginning of his work, Nagarjuna gives the fundamentals of his philosophy in a nutshell. He describes Pratitya-Samutpāda (Dependent Origination) by means of eight negatives: 'There is neither origination nor cessation, neither permanence nor impermanence, neither unity nor diversity, neither coming-in nor going-out, in the law of Pratitya-Samutpāda.'

Essentially, there is only non-Origin which is equated with Śunyatā. Elsewhere he also states that the Pratitya-Samutpāda is called Śunyatā. Hence Śunyatā, referring as it does to non-Origin, is in reality the middle path which avoids the two basic views of existence and non-existence. Śunyatā is rather the relative existence of things. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes that, 'by Śunyatā, therefore, the Madhyamika does not mean absolute non-being, but relative being.' The Madhyamika holds Śunyatā as the central tenet of its philosophy and is therefore designated the sunyavāda. The Pratitya-Samutpāda explains worldly phenomena, but looked at from the absolute standpoint (paramartha), it means non-Origin at all times and is equated with nirvāna or Śunyatā.

The Yogācāra school, on the other hand, was founded by Maitreya or Mitreyanatha in the third century A.D. This school was called Yogacara because it emphasized the practice of yoga (meditation) as the most effective method for the attainment of the highest truth (bodhi). All the stages of spiritual progress (dasa bhumi) of Bodhisattvahood must be passed before bodhi can be attained. The school is also known as the Viśaṇavāda on account of the fact that it holds Viśnaptimatra (noting but consciousness) to be the ultimate reality. In short, it teaches subjective idealism, or that thought alone is real. The Yogācara brings out the practical side of
philosophy, while Vijañavāda brings out its speculative features. The Lankavatara-sutra, an important work of this school, maintains that only the mind (cittamatra) is real, while external objects are not. They are unreal like dreams, mirages or “sky-flowers”. Vasubandhu’s Vijñaptimatrata-siddhi is the basic work of this system. It repudiates all belief in the reality of the objective world, maintaining that citta (cittamatra) or vijñana (vijanamatra) is the only reality, while the ālayavijñana contains the seeds (bija) of phenomena, both subjective and objective. Like flowing water ālayavijñana is a constantly changing stream of consciousness. With the realization of Buddhahood its course stops at once.

The Yogācāra differs from the Madhyamika only in that it attributes qualities to reality. The former holds that reality is pure consciousness (vijñanamatra) while the latter believes it is suññatā. (BAPAT, 1987, pp.106-109).

In conclusion, the concept of Suññatā is referred to differently by the various sect and schools of the Mahāyāna, but the essential meaning is the qualification of the realization of emptiness of all phenomena. All things are in a state of constant flux where energy and information are forever flowing throughout the natural world giving rise to and themselves undergoing major transformations with the passage of time. Ultimately, true realization of the doctrine of Suññatā can bring liberation from the limitations of form in the inexorable cycle of rebirth and death.

2.1.2 Suññatā in Pre-sectarian Buddhism

According to AK Warder, the term ‘pre-sectarian Buddhism’ is not entirely agreed upon by Buddhist scholars. Pre-sectarian Buddhism is the Buddhism presupposed by the early Buddhist schools as existing about one hundred years after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha. It is probably substantially the teaching of the historical Buddha himself, although this cannot be proven. (AK Warder, 1999).

According to the MacMillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism, the term ‘pre-sectarian Buddhism’ refers to Buddhism in the period between the first discourse of
the Buddha until the first enduring split in the Sangha, which occurred (according to most scholars) between the second Buddhist council (381 B.C. or 100 B.E.) and the third Buddhist council (246 B.C. or 235 B.E.). (MacMillan, 2004, p. 502).

In the Sarīyutta Nikāya (S.IV.295), it is explained that a bhikkhu can enter into a state in which perception and feeling cease. When he emerges from this state, he recounts three types of "contact" (phasso), namely, "emptiness" (suññato), "signlessness" (animitto) and "undirectedness" (appanihito). The meaning of "emptiness" in this context is explained at M.I.297 and S.IV.296-97 as the "emancipation of the mind by emptiness" (suññatā cetovimuttī), which occurs upon the realization that "this world is empty of self or anything pertaining to self" (suññham idam attena vā attantyena vā). The term is also used in two suttas in the Majjhima Nikāya in the context of a progression of mental states to refer to each state’s emptiness of the coarser state that preceded it.

The stance that nothing contingent has any inherent essence forms the basis of the more sweeping 'suñyavāda' doctrine. In Mahāyāna, this doctrine, though it does not deny their value, denies any absolute essence even in the Buddha’s appearance and in the promulgation of the Dhamma. (Buddhachannel, 2011).

2.1.3 Suññatā in Post-Canon of Theravāda

The Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka) assumed its final form at the Third Buddhist Council (ca. 250 BCE) and was first committed to writing sometime in the first century BCE. Shortly thereafter Buddhist scholar-monks in Sri Lanka and southern India began to amass a body of secondary literature, that is, commentaries on the Tipiṭaka itself, historical chronicles, textbooks, Pāli grammars, articles by learned scholars of the past, and so on. Most of these texts were written in Sinhala, the language of Sri Lanka, but because Pāli, not Sinhala, was the lingua franca of Theravāda, few Buddhist scholars outside Sri Lanka could study them. It wasn’t until the 5th C. CE, when the Indian monk Buddhaghosa began the laborious task of collating the ancient Sinhala commentaries and translating them into Pāli that these books first became accessible to non-Sinhala speakers around the Buddhist world.
These commentaries (Atthakatha) offer meticulously detailed explanations and analyses — phrase-by-phrase and word-by-word — of the corresponding passages in the Tipiṭaka.

After Buddhaghosa’s time, the catalogue of post-canonical Pāli literature continued to grow with the addition of commentaries by both Buddhadatta (5th C. CE) and Dhammapāla (6th C. CE), and sub-commentaries (Tika) by Dhammapāla on several of Buddhaghosa’s commentarial texts. During this time, and in the centuries that followed, other writers composed Pāli translations of additional early Sinhala texts. These ranged from poetic hymns in celebration of the Buddha, to chronicles tracing the first millennium of Buddhist history, to detailed Abhidhamma textbooks. Most of the major post-canonical works, including the sub-commentaries, were completed by the twelfth century.

Emptiness is not taught as often by Theravāda teachers as it is by Mahāyānists. One reason for this is that emptiness is seen as a liberating insight in the Theravāda tradition, rather than a philosophical view one needs to understand intellectually. Therefore, emptiness is often not taught until the teacher decides the student is ready. Another reason is that in some circumstances where a Mahāyānist would use the word "suṇyatā," a Theravādin would instead use the words "aniccātā" or "anattā" to mean the same thing. A third reason is that in the Theravāda tradition, understanding emptiness is subordinated to the ultimate goal of liberation.

Another view is that in advancing personal growth, it is not metaphysics but phenomenology that is required. Metaphysical views are often irrelevant, or even harmful if the intrinsic emptiness of the fruits of an unskillful act provide a rationale for performing that act. (Buddhachannel, 2011).
2.1.4 The Views of the Six *Samaṇa* (religious people) in the Samaññaphala Sutta in the Pāli Canon.

One of the main topics discussed in *Samaññaphala Sutta* is the doctrine of *Suññatā* and the doctrine of *Anattā* as propounded by the six famous teachers who were contemporaries of the Buddha. These are Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belatthaputta, and Nigantha Nātaputta who variously advocated wrong views of amorality, fatalism, materialism, eternalism and agnosticism. (D.I.32).

There are three views of not-self that are classified as wrong views according to Buddhism, namely, the view of inefficacy of action (*akiriyadīṭṭhi*), the view of non- causality (*ahetukadīṭṭhi*), the view of nihilism (*nathikadīṭṭhi*). Within the doctrines of the six heretical teachers mentioned above there were extreme concepts of not-self scattered throughout. However, some of these views were so subtle and profound that they were accepted by the royal family and the upper classes and thus became rival doctrines of Buddhism even to this day.

Here, I will examine only the wrong views of Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala and Ajita Kesakambali. Pūraṇa Kassapa taught a theory of "non-action" (*akiriyavāda*) whereby the body acts independent of the soul, merit or vice. This view indicates the characteristic of not-self and denies the existence of self on all levels. Buddhism, on the other hand, does not deny self, but merely points out that it is not the ultimate reality. In comparison with Buddhism this view is extreme, since it denies merit and vice, even for those beings who still cling to self. Even on the level of rejection of self, it merely focuses on external phenomena. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1939, pp.20-21).

Makkhali Gosala taught a theory of non-causality (*ahetukadīṭṭhi*), which proposes that there is no cause for all phenomena. This view is favored by some people who do not want to do anything and just let things run their course. The view is that there is no self in the worldly sense which produces good or bad causes.
Ajita Kesakambali’s view is called *natthikadīṭṭhi*, which means the view that regards that there is nothing at all; there is nothing that can be defined as this or named as that because everything is destined to final dissolution. It is a view of not-self that denies everything, thus allowing one to satisfy one’s desire and to do as one likes. This view can also be called *ucchedadīṭṭhi*, or nihilistic view, since it holds the belief that all traces of individual entity cease absolutely at one’s death. (D.149).

To give a brief summary, all of these views can be divided into two groups: the *atta-vādī*, which proposed the existence of the self or ātman and the *anatta-vādī*, which denied it.

Among the *atta-vādī*, there were some views that denied the selfhood of certain things, saying that such things are not-self, but considered other things to be the self or to possess a self. For example, both Ajita Kesakambali and Pūraṇakassapa denied self on a mundane, worldly level, but regarded deliverance or escape from worldly states as self. This is similar to the view of Padudha Kaccāyana who also proposed the existence of ājīva (soul), which is probably a concept of an immortal self.

2.2 The Concept Of Empty-Mind or (Cit-Wang) in traditional Buddhism

2.2.1 The Characteristics of The Mind (Citta)

The characteristics of the *citta* (mind) can be divided into two types of character: general character and unique character.

According to the Cittavagga of the Dhammapāda, the Buddha’s description of the general character of the mind is as follows:

“The mind wanders far, wandering alone, being formless, dwelling within the cave. Whoever can restrain it will be delivered from the bonds of Mara.”

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2 “Dūraṅgamaṁ ekacaraṁ asarīram guhāsayam
Ye cittam saññamessanti mokkhanti māra bandhanā.” (Dh.37).
From the above, the Buddha stated that the mind is:

1. *Dūraṅgamāraḥ* means wandering far; the *citta* can go wherever it wants to, no matter how far. While one sits in one place, the *citta* can think of any country in the world or any galaxy in the universe.

2. *Ekacarāraḥ* means wandering alone. This refers to a profound analytical truth that the *citta* arises, exists for a moment, and then immediately falls away before another *citta* arises. Thus it is shown that one *citta* exists for one moment and that there can be no two *cittas* (of one person) existing simultaneously. Each *citta* is also only able to be aware of one experience at a time. It cannot receive or be aware of more than one experience simultaneously. The feeling that the *citta* is aware of several incoming contacts at the same time is due to the process of rising and falling-away of the *citta* being too rapid for our untrained consciousness to perceive. Thus the average, uninstructed worldling deludedly concludes that there is an uninterrupted stream of what is called the *citta* and that the *citta* can be receptive of many incoming contacts (through the senses) at the same time. Based on this profound Truth, the Buddha called the *citta* ‘the lone wanderer’.

3. *Asarīram* means formless. *Citta* is an abstract phenomenon, which has no form to show. It cannot be touched in the same way as the body because it is shapeless and colorless. *Citta* is not material or corporeal, being imperceptible through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch. There is no material apparatus that would be capable of taking hold of or measuring the mind. Only its behavior or reaction can be detected, and indeed it can be detected only by the mind. Hence the Buddha described the *citta* as *Asarīram*, formless. Nevertheless, the *citta* does exist within its own plane, being capable of recording and storing *Kamma* and *Kilesa* (defilements of the mind, which cause beings to perform further kamma and thus extend the round of rebirth and death).

4. *Guhāsayaḥ* means having a cave (body) as its abode. This refers to the fact that the mind dwells within the body which, according to the Buddha, serves as its cave. There is, however, no specification as to what particular part of the body the *citta* dwells in.
Although the mind is formless, wandering far and alone, dwelling within the body, yet the Buddha also said that whoever can restrain and tame their *citta* will be able to be delivered from the bonds of Māra, meaning that they will be able to purify their *citta* of the defilements. Here there may be some who doubt how the *citta*, being formless and dwelling in no specific part of the body, can be trained and tamed. The answer lies in the fact that, although it is formless and does not dwell in any specific part of the body, yet it has six “outlets” called *dvāra*, by means of which it can come into contact with the world. The six outlets or doors are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

It is through these six ‘doors’ or outlets that *citta*-training can be done. The controlling factor in the course of training is mindfulness (*sati*), which functions at the six doorways that are utilized by the *citta* to express itself. The functioning of mindfulness is supported by pursuing a theme of meditation suitable for *citta*-development. The *citta*, being so trained and developed, will become clean, clear and calm. (Phra Debvisuddhikavi, 2005, pp. 4-9).

**Unique Character of Citta**

According to the Cittavagga of the Dhammpada, the Buddha’s description of the unique character of the *citta* is as follows:

> “The *citta* is restless, vacillating, difficult to control and desist. A wise man knows how to straighten it like an arrow-maker straightening his arrows.”

In this verse, the Buddha stated that the *citta* is:

1. *Phandanam* means restless. It gets excited whenever *citta* is contacted through the sense-doors. The Buddha compared the *citta* in that moment to a fish on land which is trying to get into the water.

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3 “*Phandanam capalam cittam* durakkham dunnivarayam

*Ujuna karoti medhāvī* usukārova tejanaṁ.” (Dh.33)
2. **Capalam** means vacillating, which refers to the unsteadiness of the *citta*. Even though sometimes the *citta* seems stable, in actual fact whenever it contacts sense objects through sense doors it becomes unsteady.

3. **Durakkharṇ** means difficult to control. It is difficult to make the *citta* obedient to the will or to keep the *citta* within the boundaries of wholesome action.

4. **Dunnivarayam** means difficult to desist. It is difficult to prevent the *citta* from straying into useless and unwanted thoughts.

However, the Buddha did not stop there. He also encouraged and inspired his disciples, giving them hope through teaching the way to train the *citta*.

Again, in the *Cittavagga*, the Buddha gave another description of the mind as follows:

"It is a good thing to train the mind, which is difficult to be taken in hand, always flitting, falling into what it takes delight in, (for) a well-trained mind brings happiness." ⁴

From the above, one is able to further understand the nature of the *citta*.

1. **Dunniggaharṇ** means difficult to taken in hand or difficult to control.

2. **Lahu** means being light or swift in the succession of arising and falling away. This is like the light of a candle or electric current, which is continuously undergoing a process of arising and passing away with extreme rapidity. This rapid succession gives the impression of continuity and deludes one into believing that the light is steady. In the same manner, the *citta* arises and ceases with such rapidity that it appears stable.

3. **Vatta kāmanipāti** means always falling into or bending towards whatever it takes delight in, heedless of whether it is good or evil, proper or improper.

Despite the above-mentioned characteristics, the Buddha encouraged his disciples to learn how to train the *citta*, because its nature is that it can be trained.

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⁴ "Dunniggahassa lahuno yatta kāmanipātīno
Cittassa damatho sādhu cittam dantam sukhāvaham." (Dh.35).
Importantly, when the mind is well-trained, happiness will arise as the result of that training. (Phra Debvisuddhikavi, 2005, p.p. 4-9).

2.2.2. The Meaning of Empty-Mind (Cit-Wang) in the Theravāda Canon.

The Thai term “cit-wang” is adapted from the Theravāda notion of suññatā and means empty-mind. In shaping the concept of “cit-wang”, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu drew much on the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, which is actually not in conflict with the teaching of Theravāda Buddhism. In the Theravāda texts the Buddha exhorts the Bhikkhus that they should mindfully cultivate right view, which sees the world as empty or void of a self. (Vin.I:14).

In Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s opinion, the term ‘suññatā’ and “cit-wang” are closely related. He explained that:

“...The word ‘suññatā’ means emptiness, the emptiness of the world which is the fact that there is no self to be found in the world. The emptiness of the mind means that the mind is accompanied by wisdom or that it is free from the feeling of “me”, which is in fact the perfection of mindfulness and wisdom”. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1976, p.16)

Definitions of the term Empty-Mind (Cit-Wang)

For Buddhadasa Bhikku, “cit-wang” refers to the state of mind that is free from craving and clinging to the sense of self. In such a state, the mind is able to curb the fabrications arising from ignorance and wrong view, it is full of mindfulness and wisdom guiding towards right view, which enables one to see the world according to reality

In other words, “cit-wang” means empty or free from lobha (greed), dosa (hatred), moha (delusion), or in other words empty of clinging to anything as being the self or empty of a self and anything pertaining to a self. (Buddhadasa Bhikku, 1976, vol.2 p.48).
Definitions of the term *Suṇñatā*

The word *suṇñatā* means emptiness, Bhaddadāsa Bhikku said that the subject of emptiness (*suṇñatā*) can be approached from many different perspectives:

1. The state that is empty of being a creature, a person, a self, me, him, her or in other words a state where in the Five Aggregates are not-self.
2. The state that is empty of defilements, namely, *rāga* (lust) *dosa* (hatred) *moha* (delusion).
3. Lokuttara dhamma or Supra-mundane dhamma, in other words Dhamma that helps on to go beyond the world or Dhamma pertaining to a state already beyond the world.
4. The emptiness that happens from the strong attention on something until one becomes free from that thing. (Buddhadāsa Bhikku, 1976, vol.2 p.48)

The Thai-Magadha Dictionary translates the word *suṇñatā* as “the fact that is an empty phenomena.” Here it does not specify which thing is empty, which points to the fact that *suṇñatā* can be used in a number of different contexts. When it is used to refer to an animate object, such as a person, then it would mean “the fact that a person is an empty phenomenon”. However, if it is used to refer to an inanimate object, such as a house, then it would mean “the fact that the house is an empty phenomenon.” Since this word is composed of *tā* ending in the * Bhāva Taddhit*, it is used as a noun. (P. longsompon, 1997, p. 757).

The concepts linked with *suṇñatā* in Theravāda Buddhism are summarized in the Buddhist Dictionary thus, “*suṇñatā* (emptiness) in the Theravāda points to the concept of *anattā*, the corelessness of nature... the emptiness of the world, because it is empty of a self or things related to the self (*suṇñatā atena vā attaniyena vā...*).” (Ñyanaponika, 1980, p.216).
The doctrine of Suññatā is raised in various suttas in the Pāli Canon. In the Uparipannāsā Sutta and the Culasuññatā Sutta the Buddha’s attendant Ānanda asked, "It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, lord. In what respect is it said that the world is empty?" The Buddha replied, "Insofar as it is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said, Ānanda, that the world is empty". He further explained the meaning of "the world" as the six sense media and their objects, and elsewhere in the Canon states that to theorize about anything beyond this realm of experience would put one to grief. (S.IV.54).

In the Culasuññatā Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya it is related that once the Buddha was residing at the castle of Mikārāmatā in the Pubbarama Monastery in the city of Savatthi. The Buddha said to the Venerable Ānanda that, “most of the time I dwell in the liberation of emptiness, suññatā-vihāradhamma (the emptiness dwelling)”. On Ānanda’s request, he explained that liberation of emptiness meant liberation through insight that discerns the emptiness of self. (suññata-vihārena pahuram vihārami). Each day the Buddha had to meet with a great number of people. When they met with the Buddha, they would ask him questions and very often ideological disputes about the teaching arose. But the Buddha confirmed that he abided in Suññatā vihāradhamma, which did not mean that he tried to escape from anybody. These many everyday confrontation did not have any effect upon his abiding in “Suññatā vihāradhamma”, because his mind was pure and always empty of the inclination to gain anything for himself. Even at the time of disputing with proponents of other sects, the Buddha’s mind did not cling to his own view as correct, and the view of others as wrong, but he simply knew which thing were not accurate according to reality. He then simply stated the truth according to that reality. This behavior is different to that of ordinary people who act with the feeling of “me” and “mine”, and then think “I am right, you are wrong” (M. III.104.).

In the Dhammadinna Sutta the Buddha taught Dhammadinna Upāsaka who came to him in Deer Park Grove. He taught that ye te sutantā tathāgatapāsītā gambhirā gambhiratathā lokutarā suññatappatisangyuta “whatever Suttas that the Tathāgata taught that are profound, have a deep meaning, are supra-mundane
(lokuttara), are linked to emptiness. You should train yourself to think thus ‘I will study those suttas continously’ (A.III.108).

In the Pindapataparisuddhi Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha asks Sariputta:

“Sāriputta, your faculties are bright, and your complexion is pure and clear. In which abode do you often now abide, Sāriputta?”
Sāriputta replied: “Venerable Sir, I often now abide in the abode of emptiness (suññatā-vihāra).”
Good, good, Sariputta. Surely you, Sariputta, now abide in the abode of great men. For this, Sariputta, is the abode of great men (mahāpurisa-vihāra), namely, emptiness (suññatā). (M.III.293)

In the Pheriṇipātivipaṭīma Sutta, the Buddha taught the Bhikkhus to see the Five Aggregates as being empty as follows:

“Form is like a glob of foam;
Feeling, a bubble;
Perception, a mirage;
Mental Formations, a banana tree;
Consciousness, a magic trick
However you observe them, appropriately examine them, they're empty, void.
Thus a monk, with persistence aroused, should view the Aggregates.” (S.III.140)

Also, in the Dhammapada the Buddha taught that the body (which is indeed one of the Five Aggregates) is ‘like foam because it can’t be sustained for a long time. This body has the character of a ray of sunlight (it appears to be tangible, but when one goes to touch it, they see that it is empty). When one can cut away the flower chain of Māra, one will go to the place where the Lord of Death cannot find them.” (D.25).

Also, in the Mogharāja Sutta the Buddha taught us to know how to look on the world as being empty. For example, there is the phrase, “Suññato lokam
**Avekkhassu mogharāja sadē sato.** Essentially, this means, “You should look on the world as being empty. When you are always mindful of the suññatā of the world, death will not find you.” The meaning also can be taken as, “When anyone sees the world as being empty, they will be above the powers of dukkha, the chief of which is death.”

These words of the Buddha, enjoining us to see the world as being empty, show that suññatā is the highest thing. Anyone who wants to be without problems concerning dukkha (suffering) and death, should look on all things, as they truly are, as being empty of “I” and “mine.” Two more quotes show the benefits of emptiness:

“Nibbāna is the supreme emptiness
Nibbāna is the supreme happiness
Nibbāna is the supreme emptiness
Nibbāna is the supreme happiness.” (Dh.204.205, M.I.509)

To say that the supreme emptiness is Nibbāna, or is identical to Nibbāna, means that suññatā is the final quenching of all compounded things that are spinning and changing in streams and whirlpools. Thus, the supreme emptiness and the supreme quenching are one and the same.

The saying that, “Nibbāna is the supreme happiness” is an expression in the language of relative truth, a sort of enticing, propaganda in the language of ordinary people, used because people are generally infatuated with happiness and want nothing else. So it is necessary to say that Nibbāna is happiness, and what’s more, that it’s the best happiness. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1994, pp.. 32-33).

Therefore, it can here be summarized that suññatā already appeared in the Theravada scriptures, with mention of the emptiness of three things. In other words, the Five Aggregates are empty, the world is empty (this term being synonymous with

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5. “Suññato lokāṁ avekkhassu mogharāja sadā sato
   attānudīṭṭhim evaṁ maccutaro siyā
   evaṁ lokāṁ avekkhantaṁ maccurāja na passati” (Sn.217).
the Five Aggregates), and suññatā-vihāradhamma, the supreme emptiness is Nibbāna, which refers to the mind being empty of the various binding defilements.

In Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s opinion, the term “cit-wang” means the state of mind that is free from craving and clinging to the sense of self. In such a state, the mind is able to curb the fabrications arising from ignorance and wrong view, it is full of mindfulness and wisdom guiding towards right view, which enables one to see the world according to reality. In other words, “cit-wang” means empty or free from lobha (greed), dosa (hatred) and moha (delusion), or in other words empty of clinging to anything as being the self or anything pertaining to a self.

2.2.3 The Concept of Suññatā in the Theravāda Canon.

2.2.3.1 A Scholarly Perspective on the Subject of Suññatā

The word suññatā is composed of the root suñña (empty) and the tā ending, which is an Abstract Representative (Bhāva Taddhīt). The tā ending performs the function of making the root word into a noun. Therefore, the adjective suñña, meaning empty, becomes the noun suññatā, meaning emptiness.

According to the principles of Buddhism, emptiness has a very broad meaning, but does not mean non-existence or annihilationism (ucchedadīthi). The term emptiness has two meanings. Firstly, the emptiness of the world refers to the fact that there is no self to be found in the world. There is merely the meeting together of elements, which give rise to the mundane concept of ‘self’, ‘person’, me, him, her. Secondly, the emptiness of the mind has the meaning that wisdom (paññā) is present in the mind (that is, the mind is free from defilements (kilesa)). This means that one does not cling to these concepts of ‘self’, ‘person’ me, him, her, as being their own individual self or the selves of others. It is a state of mind that understands that those concepts are merely natural phenomena, both conditioned and unconditioned.

Apart from these two meanings, the word emptiness can also be used synonymously with other concepts in Buddhism. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu proposed that
"This word brings together the meaning of aniccam, dukkham, anattā completely." (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, nd., BE., p.32). Therefore, it would seem that the word suññatā has an all encompassing meaning, including even the concept of anattā. Or in another sense, the meaning of the word anattā is not as all-encompassing as that of suññatā.

The word suñña (and sometimes even suññatā) is used as an adjectival quality of various phenomena. However, since the word suññatā is composed of the tā ending in the Bhāva Taddhīt (grammatical Pāli) it is generally used as a noun. Therefore it can also be used in the sense that it actually "is" that phenomenon, without having to further elaborate its meaning, further interpret or give some standard definition. Rather it is simply understood that suññatā "is" that phenomenon.

I will analyze the sense that suññatā "is" with regard to the Theravāda first. The Buddhist thinker Vasin Intasara said that "this word suññatā is the name of the true nature of various phenomena, which is unable to be determined or explained. All phenomena appear as though they exist, but when we try to understand the true nature of their existence, then we cannot understand, or otherwise understand with difficulty." (Vasin Intasara, 2532, BE. p.212).

The concepts linked with suññatā in the Theravāda Nikāya are summarized in the Buddhist Dictionary thus, "suññatā (emptiness) in the Theravāda points to the concept of anattā, the corelessness of nature ... the emptiness of the world, because it is empty of a self or things related to the self." (Suññam attena vā attaniyena vā...). Nanaponika, 1980, p.216).

His Holiness Somdet Phra Ṅnasomvaro, Supreme Patriarch of the kingdom of Thailand, further explained the subject of suññatā or emptiness. He said that the term Suññatā or emptiness was employed by the Buddha ever since he began to teach the Dhamma and is related to the level of samādhi (concentration) and onwards step-be-step until the very end of the Buddhist path (that is the attainment of Nibbāna or Absolute Freedom). The Supreme Patriarch used the following discourse from the Pāli Canon to demonstrate the teaching on emptiness:
The Venerable Ānanda heard that the Buddha most usually abided in the meditative dwelling of emptiness (suññatā-vihāra). The Buddha confirmed that both in the past and in the present he abided in the meditative dwelling of emptiness most of the time. After that, he taught about the practice of suññatā or emptiness step-by-step, from the very beginning, by separating each step out as an individual stage.

In the first stage the Buddha taught that, just as the Pubbārāma Monastery is empty of elephants, horses, cows, buffaloes, empty of money earned through prostitution, that is, empty of household ways, and empty of ordinary lay people, likewise one should wisely attend inwardly in the same manner. This means that one should not attend to perceptions of the village, one should not attend to the perception of people, but one should attend to the absence of the village, the absence of humans. In this example, the Pubbārāma Monastery is empty of the village and empty of ordinary lay people, but there is one thing that it is not empty of, which is the Saṅgha of Bhikkhus, because the Saṅgha of Bhikkhus lives in Pubbārāma. Therefore, attending to the forest is a more refined perception of emptiness because the forest is empty of the village, the ordinary lay people and the Saṅgha of Bhikkhus. However, in the same manner, the forest is still not empty of one other thing, which is the earth that is composed of low-lying land, elevated land, trees, hills, streams and so on, which all together are what is called the forest.

This is the first point taught by the Buddha for training the mind, which should be understood and applied by everyone wishing to develop samādhi (concentration) In other words, even if one lives the lay life, one is still able to practice samādhi, that is, one does not attend to the perception of the village, one does not attend to the perception of people, but one attends to the perception of the forest, just as if there was no village and no people. That forest is a place composed of trees, hills, streams, canals, swamps, low-lying land, elevated land and many different creatures. When one attends to the forest like this, it is considered to be the first step towards the realization of suññatā or emptiness. And in such a case, it is possible to make the mind calm as though one were actually in the forest.
Therefore, this shows that the important thing is the mind. When the mind does not attend to a certain thing, it is as though that thing does not exist. Even though it might still be there, it is as though it is not there. And even if one actually does go to the forest, where there is no village and no people, if the mind still thinks about the village and the people, then the village and the people come and establish themselves in the mind. So even though one is in the forest, the mind is still not calm. This is just the opposite of the case where one stays in the village with all the people, but the mind does not pay attention to them, and instead attends to the forest. Then the forest establishes itself in the mind, and the mind is able to be calm.

In succession to this first point, the Buddha further taught not to attend to perceptions of the forest, which is composed of trees, hills, streams, canals, swamps, low-lying land, elevated land and so on. But instead one should only observe the four elements (dhātu) that is the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the wind element, which are even more basic than the forest.

This is like descending to a deeper level of suññatā, a higher level of emptiness. The mind therefore becomes more calm and concentrated stage by stage.

(Somdet Phra Nanasomvara, The Sheet of the Lecture)

2.2.3.2 The Concept of Suññatā in the Theravādan Buddhist Philosophy

There are many statements of the Buddha, both in the Suttas and the commentaries, that maintain that suññatā is a very important teaching, like the heart of the Buddha-sasanā. This emphasis shows that the teachings brought forth by the Buddha all depend on the principle of suññatā or are specifically related to the principles of suññatā. Evidence for this appears in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Tikanipāta where the Buddha says that there are no words spoken by the Tathāgata that are not concerned with suññatā:

"Of these discourses the most profound teachings are those which deal with emptiness and everything else is superficial." ⁶

⁶ "Ye te suttantā tathāgatabhāsitā gambhīrā gambhīrātthā lokuttarā suññatappaṭisamīyuttā" (A.III.108, A.I.73, S.II.267, S.V.408).
Similar teachings also appear in many other places in the suttas, which shows that the Buddha’s teachings must either be about the subject of emptiness or be related to the subject of emptiness. The Buddha would not teach about topics not related to emptiness, because the principle of suññatā is about ending suffering. The Dhamma teachings in the suttas appear very varied, but in reality they all aim towards the same principle, namely, the subject of suffering and the cessation of suffering, as can be seen in the Sarīyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana Vagga:

“...Anurādha in the past and in the present time I only contemplated the subject of suffering and the cessation of suffering.”

This signifies that ever since the Buddha realized perfect enlightenment by Himself, He thought only the subject of suffering and the cessation of suffering. The cessation of suffering is the highest goal in Buddhism. The absolute eradication of suffering is called “Nibbāna,” which is described as being the most empty state or extreme emptiness. Emptiness is about Nibbāna. In the Theravādan Buddhist philosophy the state of nibbāna is a state of emptiness, as shown in the Buddha’s phrase “paramartha suññatāṁ nibbānati” (Ps.II.240). The greatest emptiness is Nibbāna.

It is notable that in different suttas the Buddha used different words to label the state of the cessation of suffering. Those words all have a meaning related to emptiness or the calming of defilement. Some examples are nirodha, santi, khema, mokkha, vimokkha, paramasacca, nibbuti, suññatā etc. It is generally known by Buddhist practitioners and academics that the cessation of suffering is directly related to emptiness. The Buddha did not teach anything apart from the cessation of suffering and emptiness.

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7 “Pubbe cāhaṁ Anurādha etaraṁ ca dukkhaṁceva paññapemi dukkhasa ca nirodham.” (S.IV.384).
Everything taught in the Suttas aims towards the goal of suññatā, the cessation of suffering or Nibbāna. There are many instances in the Tipitaka where Nibbāna is designated by anattā or suññatā, which means empty of self. When used in this context the word suññatā as appears in the suttas is synonymous with anattā and Nibbāna, as will be seen in the texts presented from the Tipitaka.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said that, "the subject of emptiness (suññatā) is about not clinging, which is the heart of Buddha-sāsanā, for example, the Buddha declared, "sabbe dhammō nālam abhiniveseyā" meaning 'there is absolutely nothing that should be clung to', or otherwise "sabbhe dhammā anattā," which means 'all things are not-self,' signifying that there is no self in that thing or that thing is empty of self". (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1992, p.828).

Based on this perspective, emptiness means not clinging to anything as having a self, or in other words, not having upādāna (clinging) to the Five Aggregates. Buddhist philosophy holds that all things are coreless that is, it is impossible to find a self in them. The state in which one does not cling is called emptiness or suññatā. An explanation of the state of suññatā appears in the sutta called suññakathā. The way in which the Buddha used the word "suñña" can be observed as follows:

"...Ānanda, because the world is empty of self and of things related to the self, I therefore call the world empty. What things are empty of self and of things related to the self? The eye is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Forms... Eye-consciousness... Eye-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self.
The ear is empty...
The nose is empty...
The tongue is empty...
The body is empty...
The mind is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Mind-
objects... Mind-consciousness... Mind-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Thus it is said that the world is empty." 8

In this sutta, the intended meaning of the word "loka" (world) is the Five Aggregates. Therefore, the Five Aggregates are suññatā, that is, they are empty of self. These Five Aggregates, consisting of both name and form, are usually apprehended together as being a "human". However, when separated into individual components one cannot find any trace of a hidden self in any of them. There is no such thing as a permanent self that maintains itself in the background. All phenomena including the Five Aggregates of humans and all external phenomena are merely things that arise and cease continuously all the time. There is no self or real eternal essence that is maintained permanently.

As such, the above sutta shows that the Buddha used the word "suññatā" as having the same meaning as "anatta". The word anattā or "suññatā" can be used instead of the phrase 'empty of self or things related to the self.' For example, one could either use the phrase 'sabbe dhammā anattā' or 'sabbe dhammā suññatā'. The Theravāda Buddhist philosophical texts often specify that Nibbāna is not-self. Sometimes when explaining the meaning of nibbāna as empty of self, some Pāli texts use the words "suñña" or "suññatā", such as "attā suñña" meaning 'empty of self' or "free of self" or "without self." One example appears in the Patisambhidāmagga:

"Nibbāna is empty of self because it does not have a self." 9

In the same text it is also stressed that both conditioned things, namely:

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8 "...ekamantarā nisinno kho āyassamā ānando bhakhavantam etadavoca suñño loko suñño lokoti bhante vuccati kittovatā nu kho bhunte suñño lokoti vuccatī...yassama kho ānanda suññham attena vā attaniyena vā tassma suñño lokoti vuccati kiccaṅhanda suññham attena vā attaniyena vā cakkhaṁ kho ānanda suññham attena vā attaniyena vā rupā suññā...sotam suññham...ghānaṁ suññham... jivhā suññā... kāyo suñño... phoṭhabba suññā... mano suñño attena vā attaniyena vā tassamā suñño lokoti vuccati." (Ps.II.177).

9 "nibbānadhanno attasseva abhavato attā suñño." (PsA.2.288).
“All formations or all things, and unconditioned things, namely, 
nibbāna are all without a self.”

There are many instances in the Buddhist philosophical texts that show that 
the word ‘suññatā’ or emptiness has a broad and all-encompassing meaning, as can be 
seen in the following textual examples:

“All truth is permanent and manifests harmoniously without any 
aberrations. Truth has the ultimate state 
of being empty of self and is 
difficult to be completely comprehended.”

The above passage from the Visuddhi Magga describes the Four Noble 
Truths as being without self. The third Noble Truth, nirodha, is indeed a synonym for 
Nibbāna and has the meaning of the deathless. In summary, emptiness in terms of the 
Four Noble Truths affirms that on their realization one is no longer subject to 
continued rebirth. Therefore, because the Buddha realized the Four Noble Truths, he 
then attained the stated of anattā, realizing emptiness of self and emptiness of 
clinging (upādāna) to the Five Aggregates as having a self. In short, he attained the

10 “sarīkhathā pana sabbepi dhammā attasarīkhathāassa puggalassa abhāvato 
attasunnāti.” (PsA.2.288).

11 “dhūvasubha sukhatta suññām purimadvāya matta suññama matapadam 
dhūvasukhaattavirahito maggo iti suññatā tesuti.” (PsA.2.202).

12 “sabbāneva saccāniaññamaññasaphākani avitathato 
attasuññato dukkharapativedhato ca.” (PsA.1.108).
state of Nibbāna. According to the agreement of Theravāda Buddhist philosophy, all conditioned things are impermanent, suffering and not-self or empty. Furthermore, the unconditioned state, Nibbāna, is also suññatā (emptiness). In the Patisamphidāmagga it is stated that:

“One contemplates the Five Aggregates as being empty phenomena ... One contemplates the Cessation of the Five Aggregates as Nibbāna, the supreme emptiness ....”¹³

This sutta shows us that contemplating the Five Aggregates and the cessation of the Five Aggregates as being empty, as being not-self, is the state of Nibbāna which is extremely empty, that is, it the state of not having a self or being empty of self.

As can be gleaned from the above information, Theravāda Buddhist philosophy depends on contemplation that separates the various components of all things into the Five Aggregates thus allowing one to observe that each Aggregate is impermanent, suffering and not self or empty. In Buddhist philosophy the view is that all things arise dependent on the coming together of causes and conditions. When one contemplates and separates things out, one does not see anything that maintains its own individual independence. Buddhist philosophy thus concludes that all things are not-self. The subject of anattā is indeed the same as the subject of suññatā, because Buddhist philosophy sees the world and life as being conditioned or formed from causes that arise from the Five Aggregates, which have no self. The world and everything (within it) is thus an empty phenomenon, meaning that it is empty of self and of anything related to the self, just as the Buddha taught the Venerable Ānanda: “I say the world empty, the world is empty, because it is empty of self and of anything related to the self (suññatā attena vā attaniyena vā).

¹³ “pañcakkhandhe suññato passanto...pañcannam khandhānāṁ nirodho paramāṁ suññam nibbānanti passanto...” (Ps.II.240).
It can therefore be said that Theravādan Buddhist philosophy uses the words *nibbāna*, *anattā* and *suññatā* synonymously. The commentators summarized the meaning of *suññatā* in the following verse. One should known all of these truths in the highest way, that is as empty (*suñña*) because there is no one who experiences, no one who makes, no one who ceases, no one who goes:

“Suffering exists, but there is no one who suffers, Doing exists, but there is no doer, Nibbāna exists, but there is no one who realizes Nibbāna, The Path exists, but there is no one who walks it.”

Each line in this verse successively explains Suffering (*dukkha*), the Cause of Suffering (*samudaya*), the Cessation of Suffering (*niruddha*), the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*magga*) on a mundane, conventional level as things that exist. Afterwards each line explains the supra-mundane level, starting with the fact that there is no being, person, self, we, him, her. Everything is in fact not self (*anattā*) and empty (*suññatā*).

2.2.3.3 The Development of *Anattā* into *Suññatā*

When he first declared the Dhamma, the Buddha used the word *anattā*. The word *suññatā* was not yet employed. The word *anattā* first appeared in the second sermon to the group of Five Bhikkhus, namely the Anattalakkhana Sutta.

In this Sutta, the Buddha asks the Group of Five Bhikkhus whether Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness (that is, the Five Aggregates) are permanent or impermanent. The Group of Five Bhikkhus reply that

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14 “Dukkhameva hi na koci dukkhito, Kārako na kiriyā na vijjati, Athi nibbuti na nibbuto pumā, Maggamattī gamako na vijjati.” (PsA.1.108).
they are impermanent. The Buddha further asks since Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness are impermanent, are they suffering or happiness. The Group of Five Bhikkhus reply that they are suffering. Then on the basis of their impermanence and suffering the Buddha asks whether form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness are self or not. The Group of Five Bhikkhus reply that they are not self, because they are not within anyone's control, but rather they are prone to sickness and decay. (Vin.I.14).

In order to make apparent the change or progression from using the word anattā to using the word suññatā, it is first necessary to know where and when the Buddha spent each Rains Residence (vassa). As such, it might be possible to deduce when the Buddha changed from using the word anattā to using the word suññatā. In order to work out when this change or progression occurred I will compare some of the Suttas that the Buddha expounded in light of the location they were taught in.

In the Dhammadinna Sutta the Buddha taught Dhammadinna Upāsaka who came to him in the Deer Park Grove. He taught that “whatever Suttas that the Tathāgata taught that are profound, have a deep meaning, are supramundane (lokuttara), are linked to emptiness. You should train yourself to think thus ‘I will study those suttas continuously’ (S.V.408). Even though this Sutta was taught at Varanasi, it probably was not in the initial period that he spent the Rains Residence there and taught the Group of Five Bhikkhus and the venerable Yasa. But if we contemplate the period in which the Buddha stayed in various places as recorded in various texts, there is no mention that the Buddha returned to the Deer Park Grove again, unless he simply passed by again without spending time at the Rains Residence.

In the Majjhima Nikāya Atṭhakathā, Pindapadaparisuddhi Sutta, the Buddha asks Sariputta:

“Sāriputta, your faculties are bright, and your complexion is pure and clear. In which abode do you often now abide, Sāriputta?” Sāriputta replied: “Venerable Sir, I often now abide much in the abode of emptiness (suññatā -vihara).”
“Good, good, Sāriputta. Surely you, Sāriputta, now abide in the abode of great men. For this, Sāriputta, is the abode of great men (mahāpurisa-vihāra), namely, emptiness (suññatā).”

This sutta was expounded in the time that the Buddha was staying at the great vihāra of Veḷuvana in Rājagaha. If we follow the Nāṇodaya Scripture, the earliest time it could have been taught was during the second Rains Residence, or at the latest, in the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth Rains Residence. (Nāṇodaya Pakaraṇa, 1991, pp. 1-6). But if we follow the record in the Manorathapūraṇī Scripture, then the earliest date would be the second, third or fourth Rains Residence, and the latest would be around about the seventeenth rains residence. (Manorathapūraṇī, 1980, pp.44-45). And if we follow the record of the rains residences in the Pathama Sambodhikathā, the earliest date would be the second to fourth Rains Residence, and the latest date would be the sixteenth to eighteenth Rains Residence. (Pathama Sambodhikathā, 1988, pp.360-361).

In Phenaṇḍupama Sutta, the Buddha taught the Bhikkhus to see the Five Aggregates as being empty as follows:

“Form is like a glob of foam;
Feeling, a bubble;
Perception, a mirage;
Mental Formations, a banana tree;
Consciousness, a magic trick.
However you observe them, appropriately examine them, they are empty, void.
Thus a monk, with persistence aroused, should view the Aggregates.”

15 “sādu sādu Sāriputta mahāpurisa-vihārena kira tvam etarahi bahurāṁ viharasi. mahāpurisa-vihāro hesa Sāriputta yadidam suññatā.” (M.III.293).
16 “phe(napi(1¢J,pamarh ruparh vedana pubpu/upamii mari::kupamii saili.Q sali“icharii kadalupamii miyupamaiica viiiiiiinarh desitiiticcabundhunii yathii yathii nijjhayati yoniso upparikkhati rittakarh tucchkarh hoti yo narh passati yoniso.” (S.III.140)
The Buddha taught this sutta when staying among the Ayujjhāns on the banks of the Ganges River. This town, according to historical evidence, was in the Kosala region of King Pasenadi of Kosala. When comparing the various scriptures that record the Rains Residences of the Buddha, it appears that he never spent the Rains Residence here at all. It can thus be assumed that the Buddha taught this sutta to the Bhikkhus as he was passing by. It is therefore very difficult to guess when this sutta may have been taught.

Also, in the Dhammapada the Buddha taught that the body (which is indeed one of the Five Aggregates) is 'like foam because it can't be sustained for a long time. This body has the character of a ray of sunlight (it appears to be tangible, but when one goes to touch it, they see that it is empty). When one can cut away the flower chain of Māra, one will go to the place where the Lord of Death cannot find them.'

In the Dhammapada Commentary, (Dhammapad-Āṭṭha-kathā) Book III., it is written that the Buddha taught this poem when staying at Sāvatthī, (DhA.3.3-4), which according to the record of Rains Residences in the Nāpodaya Scripture would be dated at the earliest the fourteenth Rains or the twenty-third to twenty-fifth Rains and at the latest in the nineteen Rains Retreats that were spent at the Jetavana vihāra or the six Rains Retreats that were spent at the Pubbarāma (Nāpodayaapakaraṇa, 1991, pp.1-6). But if we follow the Manorathapūrāṇi, then at the earliest it would be dated in the fourteenth Rains or in the twenty-fifth Rains during the time that the Buddha stayed in both monasteries. (Manorathapūrāṇi, 1980, pp.44-45). And if we follow the Paṭhamasamodhikathā the earliest date would be the thirteenth Rains and the latest would be around the twenty-fifth Rains after the time that the Buddha spent in both of the aforementioned monasteries (Paṭhamasamodhikathā, 1988, pp.3 60-361).

17 "phe(pupamaṁ kāyamīmāṁ vihitavā
maricidhammaṁ apoṣaṁbudhāno
chetavāṁ māraṣsa ṁpupphakāṁi
adassanaṁ maccurājāsa gacche." (Dh.46).
The Buddha taught the *Cūlasuññatā Sutta* to the Venerable Ānanda while he was staying in the palace of Visākhā Migāramātā in the Pubbārāma Monastery in the territory of Sāvatthī township. There the Buddha stated that “most of the time I dwell in the liberation of emptiness, *suññatā-vihāradhamma* (the emptiness dwelling)” *suññata-vihārena pahurath viharāmi* (M.III.104).

Furthermore, the Buddha taught the *Mahasuññatā Sutta* to the Venerable Ānanda while he was staying at the Nighrodharama Temple in the territory of Kapilavatthu township, while he was resting during the day in the vihāra of the Sakyan Prince named Kālakhemaka. In the evening, the Buddha went to the Viham of the Sakyan prince name Ghaṭaka. (M.III.109). It can be inferred that likewise, this must also have been at Nighrodhārāma Temple, with the Buddha teaching about *suññatā-vihāradhamma* (The meditative dwelling of emptiness).

With regard to *suññatā-vihāradhamma* (The meditative dwelling of emptiness), if we go by the order of places in which the Buddha spent the Rains Residences as appears in the Nāṇodaya Scripture, at the earliest it would have been the third or fourth rains or at the latest around the fifteenth rains. If we follow the Manorathapūran Scripture, it would have been around the fifteenth Rains Residence, or from Paṭhama-sambodhikathā at the earliest it would have been the fourteenth Rains Residence. (Phraparamānujita-jinorasa, 1988, 360-361).

The above evidence has been inferred from the material that is available for research. It cannot be confirmed as certain, because there is much conflict between the various sources. Therefore, it is not possible to draw any certain conclusion. But one thing that we may assume is the this line of thought regarding *suññatā* definitely appeared in the Theravāda scriptures from an early date.

Therefore, examining the order of the Buddha’s Rains Residences shows that the Buddha taught the subject of *anattā* in the first Rains Residence, but if we follow the Piṇḍapādaparisuddhi Sutta and evidence from the Nāṇodaya Scripture, the Buddha
probably taught about suññatā in the second Rains Residence at the earliest. We can also confirm with certainty that the subject of suññatā appeared within Buddhism since the time of the Buddha himself.

2.2.4 The Three Characteristics of Existence in the Theravāda Canon.

2.2.4.1 The Concept of Anicca or “Impermanence”

According to the Theravāda tradition, anicca is the first of what are often called in Buddhist literature the "Three Characteristics" (tilakkhaṇa) or the "General Characteristics" (sāmaññalakkhaṇa) of existence. Anicca is usually treated as the basis for both dukkha and anattā. However, anattā is sometimes founded on dukkha alone. The standard English translation of anicca is impermanence, dukkha is suffering and anattā is not self.

Definitions

In the Sutta Piṭaka the Lord Buddha categorically defines all conditioned phenomena as impermanent as can be seen in the following suttas. In the Khandha Sarīyutta the aggregates are illustrated as being impermanent, "'Impermanent, impermanent' it is said, Lord. What is impermanent?" — "Form (rūpa) is impermanent, Rādha, and so are Feeling (vedana) and Perception (saññā) and Mental Formations (sankhāra) and Consciousness (viññāna)" (S.IV.1). One Canonical commentary summarizes this statement thus: "What is impermanent? The Five Aggregates (pancakhandha) are impermanent. In what sense are they impermanent? They are impermanent in the sense of rise and fall (udaya-vaya)” (PsA.I.230). Similarly in the Saññayatana Sarīyutta, "All is impermanent. And what is the all that is impermanent? The eye (cakkhu) is impermanent, visual objects (rūpa) ... eye-consciousness (cakkhu-viññāna)...... eye contact (cakkhu-samphassa)... whatever is felt (vedayita) as pleasant or unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, born of eye-contact is impermanent. (Likewise with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind)” (S.IV.35). This is expressed even more succinctly in the Majjhima Nikaya, "All formations are impermanent" (M.I.35) and "Whatever is subject to origination
(samudaya) is subject to cessation (niruddha)" (M.I.56.). The Canonical commentary adds that "Form (etc.) is impermanent in the sense of exhaustion (khaya)" (PsA.I.37).

The commentaries of Ācārya Buddhaghosa further elaborate the Sutta definitions, distinguishing between "the impermanent and the characteristic of impermanence. The Five Aggregates are impermanent. Why? Because their essence is to rise and fall and change, and because, after having been, they are not. But the characteristic of impermanence is their state of rise and fall and change, or it is their mode-transformation (ākāra-vikāra) called non-being after having been" (Vism.21.640). Also the commentary to the Abhidhamma explains that "The eye (etc.) can be known as impermanent in the sense of its non-being after having been; and it is impermanent for four reasons as well: because it has rise and fall, because it changes, because it is temporary, and because it denies permanence" (VbhA.41, M.II.22.), and "Since its destiny is non-being and since it abandons its natural essence because of the transmission (of personal continuity) to a new state of being (on rebirth), it is 'subject to change,' which is simply synonymous with its impermanence" (VbhA.49).

Impermanence as a subject for contemplation and basis for judgment refers to the necessity of deliberate reasoned investigation as a basis for the true nature of impermanence to become manifest. For this reason, the Buddha famously cautioned his disciples before his parinibbāna as follows: Indeed, bhikkhus, I declare to you: All conditioned things are subject to dissolution; strive on with diligence. ^18

In short, it is from the fact of impermanence that the other two characteristics, namely, duxkha (suffering) and anattā (not-self), are derived. Whatever arises and passes away is aniccā. Whatever is aniccā is suffering and whatever is suffering is also not-self. Impermanence is the natural law of the universe. Everything, be it animate or inanimate, mind or matter, is subject to

^18 "Handadāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo: vayadhāmmā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetā." (D.II.120).
change. In the Law of Kamma (cause and effect), everything is the creation of their preceding causes and is in turn a cause for the after-effects.

Therefore, everything in existence is an ever-changing state of flux. It is not impermanence that causes suffering but the clinging and craving for the permanence that causes suffering. The last word of the Buddha was, “All conditioned things are subject to dissolution. Strive on with diligence.”

2.2.4.2 The Concept of Dukkha or “Unsatisfactoriness”

Du (difficult) + Kha (to endure) = suffering, ill, incapable of satisfying, a state of dis-ease in the sense of comfort, frustration and disharmony with the environment. Birth (Jati) is suffering, so is aging (Jara), sickness (vyādhi), death (maraṇa), disassociation from the liked, association with the disliked and not getting what one wants are all suffering. In short, the Five Aggregates (pancakhandha) subject to clinging are suffering. The influence of sensuality is so tempting that we believe in the “Self”. And the more we attach to it the more suffering it will be.

The attachment to sense objects and ignorance (avijjā) of their impermanence is the heart of the cause of dukkha, which is manifested as craving (tanhā). The three types of dukkha are:

1. suffering of the mind and body in the ordinary sense such as pain, discomfort, etc.
2. suffering due to the momentary rising and ceasing of the Aggregates
3. suffering caused by change or transience.

The Buddha explained:

The Five Aggregates, monks, are anicca, impermanent; whatever is impermanent, that is dukkha, unsatisfactory; whatever is dukkha, that is without attā, self. What is without self, that is not mine, that I am not, that is not myself. Thus should it be seen by perfect wisdom (sammappaññāya) as it really is. Whoever sees
with perfect wisdom, as it really is, their mind not grasping, detached from taints; they are liberated. (S.III.68).

2.2.4.3 The Concept of Anattā or “Non-self”

Anattā is the last of the three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) or general characteristics (saṁmañña-lakkhaṇa). Like the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, it is a "teaching peculiar to Buddhas" (buddhānam samukkaṇāsikā desanā: M. I.56).

The most usual English rendering of the term anattā is not-self (or non-self). There are also alternative translations such as the words "soulless," "egoless," and "impersonal".

Anattā as it appears in the Suttas usually refers to the Five aggregates not having a real self or not being a real self. For example, in the Anattalakkhana Sutta the Buddha taught as follows, "Bhikkhus! Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness are not-self (anattā)." 19

Apart from demonstrating that the Five Aggregates are not-self, the Buddha also taught that the conditions that give rise the Five Aggregates are also not self, as is shown in this teaching to the Venerable Rāhula:

"Rāhula! The earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the wind element, both internal and external. are simply the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the wind element and that's all. One should see those natural phenomena with right wisdom according to reality like this: "That is not mine; I am not that; that is not my self." 20

The four elements are the conditions that give rise to the Five Aggregates, because the Five Aggregates are the meeting point of the Four Elements. When the Five Aggregates come together, the assumption of a being a person, a self, me, him,

19 "rūpāṁ...vetanā sañña...saśkhārā ca viññāparō bhikkhave anattā." (Vin.I.14).

20 "netam so mama na meso attā netam mama." (A.II.165).
her arises. However this is a deluded assumption, because in fact these things are not *attā* (self). A true permanent self is simply an assumed concept.

In other words, both form and mentality are *anattā*, not-self, meaning that they do not have a true permanent self, they are simply the coming together of various components. Apart from this, dhamma or nature is likewise not-self. The Buddha stated that:

"When a wise person sees with correct wisdom that all dhammas are not-self, then he will get bored with suffering. That is the path to purity."  

The phrase "All dhammas are not-self" refers to the Five Aggregates. In the commentarial literature it is explained that, "All dhammas are not self, they are an empty state, they do not have an owner, they are not free because they are not under anybody's control to order these Five Aggregates not to get old, not to die."

Furthermore, the word dhamma in some instances does not only refer to the Five Aggregates, but it also refers to *Nibbāna*, as can be seen in this teaching of the Buddha:

"All conditioned things, formed through causes and conditions, are impermanent, suffering and not-self. Both *Nibbāna* and conventional reality are not-self. This is the conclusion."  

The Venerable Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto) translated and explained this verse as follows, "All conditioned formations are impermanent, suffering and not-self. (Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto, 1999, p.56). This is the conclusion." Also in the

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21 “Sabbe dhammā anattāti yadā paññāya passati

*Attha nibbindati dukkhe* esa maggo visuddhiyā.” (Dh.279).

22 “mā jīrantu mā mīyāntāti vaste vattetum na sakkāti avasavattanatthe na anattā suññā assāmikā anissarā.” (Dh.279).

23 “Anicca sabhasanakkhārā dukkhānattā ca sakkhitā

*nibbānanceva pappatti* anattā iti nicchayā.” (Vin.V.86).
Tipitaka (Patisambhidamagga book 31). Nibbāna is used synonymously with the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Nirodhariyasacca) which is also not-self\(^{24}\) which in his book Nibbāna Anattā, the Venerable Dhammapitaka translated as “the Four Truths are pierced by one knowledge with the meaning of not-self, in four ways namely...the meaning of nirodha (cessation) is the meaning of anattā (not-self)”

“Also in many other commentarial texts it is specified that Nibbāna is not-self, such as the Pāli phrase, “All dhammas are not-self, the Buddha included Nibbāna as well”\(^{25}\)

“All dhammas taught (by the Buddha) including Nibbāna are not-self because they are not in anyone’s power”\(^{26}\)

“Things that are impermanent, things that are suffering and things that are not-self include the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (nirodha-ariyasacca), as well as Suffering (dukkha), the Cause of Suffering (samudaya) and the Path (magga). In fact, all four Noble Truths are not-self”\(^{27}\)

The above information demonstrates that the material linked with not-self as appears in the commentarial texts does not conflict with not-self as appears in the Tipitaka, such as the Anattalakkhana Sutta, the Yadaničca Sutta and the Dukkha Sutta. These suttas from the Sānīyutta Nikāya, Khandha-Vagga and the other texts about not-self quoted above are merely few out of many texts that have been used as an example to demonstrate the features of not-self as appear in conditioned things (sankhata-dhamma), such as the Five Aggregates, and also in unconditioned things (asankhata-dhamma), namely, Nibbāna.

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\(^{24}\) “catuhākārehi anattaṭṭhaṇa cattāri saccāni ekativedhāni nirodassa nirodhaṭṭho anattaṭṭho.” (Ps.II.106).

\(^{25}\) “sabbe dhammā anattā ti nibbānāṁ antokariyā vuttaṁ. (DhA.7.62).

\(^{26}\) Sabbe dhammāti nibbānaripī antokariyā vutta anattā avasavattanathena.” (DhA.7.62).

\(^{27}\) “Yam aniccāna ca dukkhaṇa ca anattā cātārī tehi tīhi saha nirodhasaccaṇa saṅghāhitām cattāripī hi anattāyeva.”(Ps.II.106).
2.3. The Theory and Practice Required to Attain the Status of Empty-Mind “Cit-Wang” in the Theravāda Canon.

In the Theravāda Canon the practice for attaining the state of suññatā (or “cit-wang”) is detailed in the Majjima Nikaya, Uparipaṇṇāsaka, in which five principles of practice are expounded as follows:

1. “A bhikkhu establishes his mind internally and makes it calm. He makes one-pointedness arise and concentrates the mind. That is, a bhikkhu in this Dhamma-vinaya secluded from sensual pleasures and all unwholesome states enters the first jhāna...the second jhāna...the third jhāna...the fourth jhāna...

2. That bhikkhu attends to internal emptiness (suññatā) and trains until he has clear comprehension (sampajāñña) internally.

3. That bhikkhu attends to both internal and external emptiness and trains until he has clear comprehension externally.

4. That bhikkhu attends to both internal and external emptiness and trains until he has clear comprehension both internally and externally.

5. That bhikkhu attends to the imperturbable attainment (ānenažsamāpatti or arūpasamāpatti) and trains until he has clear comprehension on the imperturbable attainment.28

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28 “kathāṇcānanda bhikkhu ajjhattameva cittam saññapeti sanniṭādehi ekodikaroti samādahāti. idhānanda bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhamhehi savitakkham savicāram vivehajaṁ pītisukham pāṭhamam jhānāṁ...catuttham jhānāṁ upasamāppajja viharati...so ajjhattam suññataṁ manasikaroti. tassa ajjhataṁ suññataṁ manasikaro ajjhattam suññatā cittām na pakkhandati na passidati nasantithatho nakhippucatī. evaṁ santa metaṁ ānanda bhikkhu evaṁ pājānati ajjhattaṁ suññataṁ kho me manasikalo ajjhattam suññatāya cittām na pakkhantati na passidhatho na santithatho nadhippucatī...” (M.III.112).
The phrases “establish the mind internally”, “attend to internal emptiness” and “attend to external emptiness” are glossed by the commentators as follows, “internal emptiness is the meditation object (ārammaṇa) that depends on one’s own Five Aggregates. External emptiness is the meditation object that depends on the Five Aggregates of others.” This practice aims to train the mind to see emptiness both internally and externally. In other words, it is about having on empty mind, which is the same as the idea that appears in the Vajraprajñāpāramitāsutta of the Mahāyāna sect.

In the Vajraprajñāpāramitā Sutta, just as in the Theravāda Canon, there is discussion of the practice of being empty or entering upon the state of emptiness. In this Sutta it is stated that, “the great being should control and tame his mind in the following manner...if the Bodhisattva still clings to and is bound up by the features of the self...the features of a person...the features of a being...the features of a living creature, then that one cannot be called a Bodhisattva” And “Form in reality has no condition (sabhāva), it’s just a name used to classify the great mass of Form that’s all. (Satian Bhodhinunda, 1983, pp.10,28).

In the Pakaraṇavisesa visuddhimagga there is the commentarial explanation that, “The practitioner, once he can determine that all formations are empty phenomena with the knowledge of Contemplation (patisaṅkhārānupassanāñāna), should then further determine suññatā in two more ways, namely that these formations are empty of self (attā) and empty of anything belonging to the self (attaniya)”. This is a confirmation that those who can enter upon (the state of) suññatā must practice until they reach The Knowledge of Contemplation (patisaṅkhārānupassanāñāna).

29"attano pañcakkhandhesu nissitaṁ...parassa pañcasu khandhesu.”
(MA.3.116).
30 so evam patisāṅkhārānupassanāñānaṁ sappe saṅkhārā suññāti
parighahetavā pūna suññamitàṁ attena va attaniyena vāti davikośikāṁ
suññatam parigghanati.) (Vism. 3, 293).
Therefore, the important essence of suññatā (or emptiness) first appeared in the Theravāda Canon, such as in the Buddha’s teaching to the ascetic Bāhiya Dārucariya:

“Bāhiya, when you see forms then simply see, when you hear sounds then simply hear, when you contact tactile objects then simply contact them, when you cognize mind-objects then simply cognizing exists. When you do not exist, then you won’t cling to anything. When you don’t cling to anything, then you will not exist, both in this world and the next world, then or in between both worlds. This is the end of suffering.”

In this teaching, the practice for entering upon the state of suññatā is to abandon perceptions of self when experiencing all forms of contact. In the phrase “then you will not exist,” and will see the fruits of emptiness, that is, the end of suffering or the final goal of the holy life.

2.4. Concluding Remarks

The origin and development of suññatā, as already described, suññatā (emptiness) is a synonym of anattā (not-self) and refers to the Five Aggregates not having a real self or not being a real self. As in the Anattalakkhana Sutta the Buddha taught as follows, “Bхikkhus! Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness are not-self (anattā). When the Five Aggregates come together, the assumption of a being a person, a self, me, him, her arises. (Vin.I.14). However this is a deluded assumption, because in fact these things are not atta (self). A true permanent self is simply an assumed concept.

31 “yato kho te Bāhiya ditṭhamattarā bhavissati, sute sutamattarā bhavissati, mute muttamattarā bhavissati, viññāṭamattarā bhavissati, tato tavaṁ Bāhiya natthi. Yato tavaṁ Bāhiya nevathī, tato tavaṁ Bāhiya na tattha. Yato tavaṁ Bāhiya na tattha tato tavaṁ Bāhiya nevidha na hurathī na ubhayamantare.” (Ud.8).
With regard to the concept of empty-mind (*cit-wang*), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu interpreted the word “sūññatā” as meaning “emptiness of the sense of me or mine.” As for the term “*cit-wang*”, it refers to the mind that is without clinging to the sense of me and mine.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu gave the following reasons for using the term *cit-wang*:

First, the subject of *sūññatā* is used by the Buddha in the Sāriyutta Nikāya wherein he states that it is a profound topic and that it is the heart of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu used the word “empty” which is the translation of the original *sūññatā*. However, whereas most people would be unfamiliar with and uninterested in the word “sūññatā” the term “*cit-wang*” is more easily accessible and catches people’s attention. Once their attention has been captured, people might be more interested in realizing that emptiness with their own minds, and then they would gain greater understanding of the meaning of “*cit-wang*” through their own personal experience.

Second, the term “*cit-wang*” is more convenient for the ordinary person, and helps them to understand that the original nature of their mind is actually radiant (*pabhassara*), free from ignorance, craving and clinging. But this original nature is still obscured by the fabrication of thoughts and defilements, so it takes investigation to discover its true nature.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said that he chose the term “*cit-wang*” after a detailed process of selection and thorough contemplation. He also pointed out that the term had a sacred or holy feeling to it, that it was indeed a term conveying the heart of Buddhism and that it would be the most useful term to promote understanding. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1981, pp.21-22).

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32 *Pabhassara* means radiant, because it is pure and free from defilement.”

(A.I. 10)
CHAPTER III.

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU’S INTERPRETATION OF

THE CONCEPT OF “CIT-WANG”

3.1 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and Buddhism in Thailand

3.1.1 The Life and Works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born on May 27, 1906 (2449 BE.) in a business family at Phumriang District of Chiya in Suratthani Province in the South of Thailand. His given name was ‘Nguam Phānīt’ and his parents were called Mr. Sieng and Mrs. Kluan. During the early part of his life the young Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu helped out at his father’s store until he realized his religious calling. He left his work and family to follow his own path in the footsteps of the Buddha. On July 29, 1926 (2469 BE.), at the age of 20, he was ordained as a monk (bhikkhu) in the Mahānikāya Order at Wat Nok. His preceptor Phra Khru Sophon Cetasīkārām gave him the religious name Indapāṇī (Wisdom of Indra). The name that he is popularly known by, Buddhadāsa, was self chosen with the explanation that:

“I devote my body and life to the Buddha, I am the dāsa (servant, slave) of the Buddha, the Buddha is my master. Hence my name is Buddhadāsa.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1933, p.2)

In 1928 (BE. 2473), Venerable Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu went to Bangkok to study Dhamma and Pāli language. He had a studious nature and quickly developed an understanding of academic Buddhism. In 1930 (BE. 2475), he passed three of the nine levels in Pāli Studies. However, he failed the fourth level Pāli examination, which was not unexpected since he had given up studying in a serious manner. This was because after independently reading the Tipiṭaka, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu felt that there were significant differences between the commentaries upon which his clerical examinations were based and the actual canonical scriptures. He realized that if he answered questions on doctrine which he regarded as being correct he would fail the
Pāli examinations, because his views differed radically from the orthodox interpretations taught in Bangkok. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was also dissatisfied with the clerical education of the time and complained that:

"In studying the pariyattidhamma (study of the Scriptures) in this period we don’t truly study the Tipitaka itself, we study only the commentaries." (Quoted by Jackson, 2003, 11): Dusadi Angsumethangkun, Buddhāsa and religious reform, Bangkok: Komon Khimthong Foundation, 1983)

After a few years of study in Bangkok, Buddhāsa Bhikkhu was convinced that “purity is not to be found in the big city,” he was inspired to live close to nature in order to investigate the Buddha-Dhamma. During that time, he devoted himself to the practice of meditation along with studying the Buddhist scriptures. Afterwards in 1932 (BE. 2475), he established Suan Mokkhabalārama (The Grove of the Power of Liberation) near his hometown of Phumriang (now in the Chaiya District). At that time, it was the only forest Dhamma Center and one of the few places dedicated to vipassanā (insight) meditation in Southern Thailand. Suan Mokkh Temple aimed at introducing Buddhism to people in the modern world.

After the founding of Suan Mokkh, Buddhāsa Bhikkhu studied all schools of Buddhism, as well as the other major religious traditions. This interest was practical rather than scholarly. He sought to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help, as he put it, “drag humanity out from under the power of materialism.” This broadmindedness set him to work with Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and other religious people around the world. He set himself three main objectives to be worked towards for the world’s benefit. The first objective was that people, regardless of their religion, should truly understand the principles of their religion. In this way they might be able to genuinely realize spiritual liberation. The second objective was to create mutual understanding among various religions. All religions teach the concept of unselfishness, but there are many differences in methodologies. When people understand the heart of religious teaching, they will be able to live together in peace. The third objective was to drag human beings away
from the tyranny of materialism, which would lead to cleansing and calming of this presently troubled world. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 2).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is widely regarded as modern Thailand’s most influential Buddhist philosopher. His thought had a profound intellectual impact in Thailand in the second half of the 20th century. His life mission was to undertake a complete re-examination of Theravāda Buddhist teaching by returning to the Buddha’s original teaching in the Suttapitaka and by drawing on aspects of Zen Buddhism. Buddhāsa Bhikkhu crafted a vision of Thai Buddhism as a socially, politically, and intellectually progressive force. This vision of a modern Theravāda Buddhism in line with a modern, democratic, and socially just Thailand continues to inspire large numbers of Thai people even after Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s death. He has had a very important role in motivating the Thai people and in interpreting and explaining the Buddha’s teaching in order that the Thai people might have a clear understanding of Buddhism. Of special mention is the concept of suññatā (emptiness) which he loosely translated as “cit-wang” (empty-mind). His interpretation of this concept attracted many people to sincerely practice this teaching.

During his lifetime Buddhāsa Bhikkhu wrote a great number of books and his legacy as an important Thai reformer and scholar continues to have an impact on society. Many of his writings have been translated from his native Thai into other languages including Chinese, Japanese, French, German, Spanish and English. Fifteen years after his death they continue to be sold in bookshops throughout the world. Santikaro Bhikkhu, the main English translator for the last part of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s life, notes that “although his formal education only went as far as ninth grade and beginning Pāli studies, he was given five Honorary Doctorates by Thai universities. His books, both written and transcribed from talks, fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Thai Buddhists. Doctoral dissertations are still being written about him and his legacy. His books can be found in bookstores around the country and are favorites as gifts at cremations”. (Vipessays, 2003).

Buddhāsa Bhikkhu wrote more than 140 books. Some of the more well-known ones are: Handbook for Mankind (1958), Buddha Dhamma for Students
(1966),  *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree* (1962),  *The Buddha's Doctrine of Anattā* (1939) and  *Mindfulness of Breathing* (1987). The foreword to  *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*, written by Jack Kornfield, states that "Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu teaches us beautifully, profoundly, and simply the meaning of suññatā or emptiness, which is a thread that links every great school of Buddhism....He teaches us the truth of this emptiness with the same directness and simplicity with which he invites us into his forest. He shows how a teaching that has become central to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna is also profoundly expressed in the earliest words of the Buddha...." (Quoted from the Foreword by Jack Kornfield 1962, p. xii)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu passed away on July 8, 1993 (BE. 2536) at the age of 87, after a series of heart attacks and strokes. In 2006, UNESCO recognized Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu as an important person of the world and benefactor of Buddhism. The news of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, his work and Suan Mokkh has spread widely over the years. The life and works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and the establishment of this temple are all important aspects in the history of Buddhism in Thailand, and indeed the world.

### 3.1.2 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and Buddhism in Thailand

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu emphasized the importance of making Buddhism relevant and appropriate to modern society and applicable to everyday life for modern day people. This is because he realized that social problems result from an inadequate level of understanding about morality and consequent lack of moral practice in the society. The cause of this lack of morality stems from inefficiency and inadequacy within the Buddhist clerical institution. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu proposed that Buddhism failed to efficiently fulfil its social purpose because it promoted an erroneous interpretation of the doctrine. The popular promotion of Buddhist doctrine failed to show the relevance of religion to modern life, and so was not only unable to attract people to Buddhism but also turned people away from the religion. This in turn rendered Buddhism and the Buddhist clerical institution socially and politically impotent (Jackson, 2003, p.213).
Since the establishment of Suan Mokkh, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was constantly studying, writing and giving Dhamma talks. His interpretation of Buddha-Dhamma was quite challenging for the mostly conservative Thai clergy. He became famous as a radical and was branded a heretic for his new interpretation of the ancient Pāli suttas.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was interested in teaching Buddha-Dhamma in a way that was accessible to laypeople, something that the traditional clergy considered impossible. He also rationalized Theravāda Buddhist doctrines and the Thai Buddhist tradition in general in response to modern scientific empiricism and the growing Thai middle class of professionals and intellectuals. He produced a great deal of literature aimed at reforming Thai society’s understanding of Buddhism in a way that would lead to positive social change. As the book *Buddhadasa: Theravāda Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* written by Peter Jackson has observed the results were as revolutionary as the project. In this book Peter Jackson examines Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s works in two as a theoretical system and as a social phenomenon. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu draws on the philosophy of Zen and on modern science to reinterpret Buddhism, while at the same time his explanations of Buddhist principles are supportive of an active philosophy of social and economic development.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu invented a method of teaching, *phāsā khon phāsā tham* (Everyday Language, Dhamma Language), which claimed to find the higher meaning buried within the early texts and express it in everyday language. Utilizing this method, he made three major propositions:

First, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argued that the original human condition is not characterized by defilement but by an “empty-mind” (*cit-wang*). The purpose of Buddhist practice is to recover that state. Moreover, he said that realizing such a state of purity is not impossible, not limited only to the ordained clergy and not necessarily brought about through strenuous asceticism. Lay people are also capable of such attainment through the practice of insight meditation. Furthermore, he claimed that the ultimate goal of nibbāna is simply a deepening of this “empty-mind”
Next, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu interpreted the Buddhist cosmological concepts of heaven, hell and rebirth to be simple metaphors for psychological states. By doing so he rejected mystery and the supernatural and could claim that Buddhism was rational and consistent with modern science. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu maintained that the terms “heaven” (sugati, svarga) and “hell” (dugati, naraka) in the Buddhist scriptures are merely metaphors for mental states of pleasure and of suffering. Similarly, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argues that references to heavenly realms such as the heavens of sensuality, of form, and of no-form, and the woeful states of hell, hungry ghosts, and cowardly demons do not denote actual supernatural realms but rather refer to human beings who experience either “heavenly” states of pleasure or “hellish” states of suffering. (Donald K. Swearer, 1998, p.79). This non-mystical interpretation of Buddhist doctrine is associated with an emphasis on human spiritual life in this world here and now.

Finally, without a concept of rebirth, the whole notion of storing up merit for a future life no longer had any meaning. This world therefore becomes the focus of attention and forces one to take responsibility for their actions here and now. So the duty of a good Buddhist should be to create suitable conditions for the attainment of Nibbāna. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu observed that Nibbāna had traditionally been regarded as a spiritual goal appropriate for ascetic monks, but he and other reformists maintained that Nibbāna should be a universally accessible goal for all, both monks and laity.

With these propositions, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu had done a lot to change the landscape of Buddhism in a modernizing Thailand. He created an interpretation of Buddhism which could coexist with modern science and paved the way for lay people to participate fully in Buddhist practice and even to attain Nibbāna. He also emphasized that the proper duty of a good Buddhist was not to escape this world but to improve it.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s ideas met a demand among a new educated elite who feared that old-fashioned Buddhism would wither in the face of modernity, and who sought religious justification for greater social and political activism.
Despite his eventual success and popularity, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu achieved his new interpretation with not a small amount of difficulty. He had to cherry-pick his texts, putting aside some statements attributed to the Buddha which seemed at odds with his psychological interpretation. He had to study widely and borrow from other Buddhist traditions, especially Zen. This laid him open to attack from conservatives who were outraged at the idea of any such reinterpretation, and who feared the political implications. They branded Buddhadasa Bhikkhu as a Mahayanaist Trojan Horse who would destroy the Theravada tradition. (Mindbuddhabooks, 2011).

Venerable Santikaro Bhikkhu, an American who ordained as a monk in 1985, lived with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and also studied his work. He states that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was an important member of the Thai Sangha, because he undertook a thorough re-examination of the literature and principles of Theravada Buddhism with the aim of making the religion accessible to the laypeople and relevant to the problems of the modern world. Santikaro Bhikkhu stated that:

"Progressive elements in Thai society, especially the young, were inspired by his teaching and selfless example. Since the 1960s, activists and thinkers in areas such as education, ecology, social welfare, and rural development have drawn upon Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s teaching and advice. He provided the link between the scriptural tradition and engaged Buddhist practice today.” (Santikaro Bhikkhu, 1993, p.39)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu attempted to integrate Buddhist practices for salvation with the layperson’s hope for well-being and fulfillment in this world here and now. In the process, he laid a theoretical framework for the study of the Pali Suttas based on sammā dītthi or “Right View”, that is, view informed by clear insight, not the worldly perspective. He was one of the Buddhist teachers who gave special emphasis to the centrality of paññā or wisdom. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu defined Buddhism in the following way:

"Buddhism" means "the Teaching of the Enlightened One." A Buddha is an enlightened individual, one who knows the truth about all things, one who knows just what is what, and so is capable of behaving appropriately with respect to all things. Buddhism is a religion based on
intelligence, science and knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the causes of suffering." (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 2)

Buddhism teaches that to realize salvation from suffering (dukkha) one must know the root cause of suffering, and through the extinction of the cause so the ending of suffering can be brought about. That root cause of suffering is delusion, the wrong understanding that leads to attachment and clinging to the feeling of "I" and "mine." The delusion of self and things which belong to the self are what must be purged completely in order to reach the cessation of suffering. Enclosed within this principle lies the complete understanding and practice of all the Buddha’s teachings without exception.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu emphasized that Buddhism is a practical method for liberating oneself from suffering by means of realizing the true nature of things, just as the Buddha himself did. Though a person may never have seen or heard of the Tipiṭaka, if they carried out a detailed investigation of their mind every time suffering arose, and were successful in eliminating suffering and its causes, this would be infinitely more useful than learning the theory from the Tipiṭaka. A far deeper and indeed more correct appreciation of Buddhism comes through practical experience rather than theoretical knowledge. Buddhism can be studied through the lens of many different systems, for example, in terms religion, morality, truth, psychology, philosophy, culture, the art of living, and so on. However complex and variegated Buddhism has become, the real meaning of Buddhism and the true Buddhist can be summarized quite simply as follows:

"Real Buddhism is not books, not manuals, not word for word repetition from the Tipiṭaka, nor is it rites and rituals. These are not real Buddhism.

Real Buddhism is the practice by way of body, speech, and mind that will destroy the defilements, in part or completely." (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 15)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu interpreted Buddhism not only from the religious point of view but also from the Thai social perspective. He based his theory of dhammic
socialism on observation of nature. To him, nature represents a state of balance for the survival and well-being of human beings, animals, plants, and the ecology of the world. In the state of nature, every being produces according to its capacity and consumes according to its needs. No being, whatever form it has, hoards “surplus” for its own sake. Philosophically speaking, dhammic socialism is based on this principle: no one should take more than they really need. They should share whatever extra they have with those who have less. Social problems are fundamentally a result of greed. In other words, greed is the heart of scarcity and poverty. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, p. 107). In this respect, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was individualistic in the sense that he proposed that social and economic problems could be solved by the personal practice of self-restraint and giving (Pāli: dāna). To maintain control over society and to limit defilement (kilesa) or human greed, laws of nature and moral systems are developed. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu says that:

“This Dhammic socialism is not a system which should be abandoned and it is not the absolute monarchy which is so hated. Perhaps this system will be able to remedy the world’s problems better than other system.”

(Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, p. 53)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu concluded that the fundamental cause of social problems arises when human beings act against this original intention of nature, and that all problems result from the self-centred delusion of “I” and “mine.” He observed that this is the primary cause of social problems both individually and socially. He proposed to solve all these problems through emphasizing mindfulness and self-restraint as involved in moral practice.

The Buddha discovered the principle of Dependent Origination (pāṭicca-samuppāda), which details the step by step sequence of cause and effect that begins with ignorance and finally gives rise to suffering. A profound, detailed explanation of the pāṭicca-samuppāda is quite a painstaking and time-consuming task, however for the sake of simplicity we may focus on some of the aspects that have and important practical application. Namely we see that when consciousness (viññāna) meets with a sense object there is sense contact, feeling (vedanā) arises in dependence on sense contact, and craving (tanhā) arises in the case where feeling is accompanied by
ignorance and is not apprehended by its true nature. This process is what is responsible for the arising of the ego or "self" and all the consequent associated suffering.

In studying the patīcca-samuppāda, one must inevitably encounter the natural truths of impermanence, suffering and not-self. The proper understanding of these Three Characteristics of Existence releases the mind from subjective perceptions related to 'I' and 'mine', and allows it to see reality as a dynamic and fluid series of causes and conditions not in any way under the control of the imagined self. In terms of the arising of the delusion of self, its cessation and the method leading to its cessation. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained that:

"... practicing according to the principle of Dependent Origination (patīcca-samuppāda) ... is the kind of right living by which defilements cannot arise, because we see that "I" and "mine" are mere illusions that only arise when sense contact gives rise to feeling, which then concocts craving. If the concocting of craving is avoided, clinging to "I" and "Mine" does not take place.... Seeing the "I" and "mine" as an illusion by practicing the principle of Dependent Origination is one path to understanding suññatā." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1994, pp. 101,105)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu pointed out various ways of interpreting and applying the patīcca-samuppāda. He stressed that one can apply this principle in their everyday life through the practice of Right Mindfulness (sammā sati). This means that we must remain attentive at the moment that sense objects come into contact with eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. One must observe that the feeling that results from that contact is simply feeling and not follow through with the ignorant identification with 'my feeling', which would then give rise to craving. In the case of unpleasant feeling there would be the craving to get rid of it, and in the case of pleasant feeling there would be the desire to prolong it. However, in the case where Right Mindfulness is present instead of ignorance one sees that feeling is feeling, and understands it according to its nature as impermanent, suffering and not-self. Thus the process of Dependent Origination is cut off before it can give rise to suffering.
3.1.3 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s View of Tipitaka

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was not only a well-know meditation master, but he also worked painstakingly to establish and explain the correct and essential principles of what he called “pristine Buddhism”. He defined this as the original realization of the Buddha before it was buried under commentaries, ritualism, clerical politics, and the like. His work was based on extensive research of the Pāli texts (canon and commentary), especially of the Buddha’s Discourses (Suttanta Piṭaka), followed by personal experiment and practice of these teachings. Then he taught according to what would most effectively eliminate dukkha (suffering). His goal was to produce a complete set of materials for present and future research and practice.

According to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, Buddhism is a practical method for liberating oneself from suffering through realizing, as did the Buddha himself, the true nature of things. In his book Handbook for Mankind he claims that all ancient religious texts are bound to contain material which has been tampered with by succeeding generations, and the Tipitaka is no exception. People have across time added sections based on then current ideas, either in order to boost people’s confidence, or out of excessive religious zeal, and in some instances some passages may have also been removed. Another problem is that culture becomes mistaken for religion. Rites and rituals which have developed over time with regard to religious practice are often accepted and recognized as Buddhism proper. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu says:

“The re-editing of all that is available of the Tipitaka should be made particularly fitting for this nuclear age. Pull out 30 % for the intellectuals, another 30 % for the scientists and anthropologists, and the remaining 40 % is purely matters about the cessation of suffering. And yet we can still find that in the Pāli Canon, the Tipitaka, there are more chapters dealing with suffering (Dukkha) than in the religious texts of other religions. All that has been mentioned here is not aiming of finding faults with the “Tipitaka”, but rather the purpose is to “re-adjust” it to suit the present era.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 2010, p. 45)
Furthermore, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argued that all homage to sacred objects by means of performing rites and rituals, making offerings, or praying is not Buddhism. The Buddha rejected the notion of some celestial being who was the creator of all things and of the deities who were supposed to dwell in each star in the sky. He commented critically that:

“\text{This sort of thing is a tumor which has developed in Buddhism and thrived. The tumor takes hundreds of different forms too numerous to name. It is a dangerous, malignant growth which by degrees has completely overlaid and obscured the good material, the real pith of Buddhism, and quite disfigured it.}” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2010, p.2.8)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu further proposed that the presentation of the “Tipitaka” to the modern world in this advanced nuclear age demands the service of people brave and sincere enough to apply the principles of Kālāma Sutta as the tool of selection and allocation in the edition of the “Tipitaka” so that only the “heart-wood” or essence of true Buddhism remains. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2010, p.46).

The Buddha said that the deciding criterion when judging competing views should be whether a doctrine is dosa (morally corrupt) or adosa (free of moral corruption). Some Buddhists, selectively reading the Kālāma Sutta, have said is a Buddhist scriptural license for free intellectual enquiry, this sutta in fact presents a highly pragmatic approach to rational activity which gives ethical considerations primacy over logical or rational debate. According to the principle presented in the sutta, a logically “valid” theory would have to be rejected as “unprofitable” if it is morally corrupt or does not promote virtue and moral attainment, and thereby the attainment of nibbāna (Jackson, 2003, 45).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu referred to the Kālāma Sutta as warning not to believe blindly in either the Tipitaka, a teacher, what is reported or rumored, what has been reasoned out, or what has been arrived at by logic. He says,
“Although we may have read, listened and heard, we should not simply accept what is offered in these ways unless we have first thought over, considered it carefully, fathomed it out, examined it, and seen clearly that it really is so.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.46)

In summarizing Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s view of Tipiṭaka, it can be seen that he pointed out that the essence of Buddhist teachings relates purely to matters pertaining to the cessation of suffering. Only this is in accordance with the original realization and intention of the Buddha. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu rejected all rites, magic and supernaturalism outright. He stated that the right and full application of the ten aspects of the Kālīma Sutta is a sure method for preserving Buddhism in a truly reliable form so that it continues to flourish just in the way the Buddha intended.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was such an important member of the Thai Sangha because he was the first Thai monk who tried to cut through the many beliefs, stale thought patterns and antiquated traditions within Thai Theravāda Buddhism. In fact, he spent all of his life researching the Pāli Tipiṭaka, other Buddhist scriptures, and the teachings in other schools of Buddhism with the express intention of developing and opening up Buddhism in Thailand.

3.1.4 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu as a Leading Reformist Figure

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was a famous and influential ascetic-philosopher of the 20th century. Known as an innovative re-interpreter of Buddhist doctrine and Thai folk beliefs, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu fostered a reformation of conventional religious perceptions in his home country Thailand as well as abroad. Although he was a formally ordained ascetic, or "monk," Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu developed a personal view that rejected specific religious identification and considered all faiths as principally one. His ground breaking thought inspired such persons as the French schooled Pridi Phanomyong (1900-1983), leader of Siam's 1932 revolution, and a group of Thai social activists and artists of the 1960s and 70s.
Since 1932, during the political crisis after a change of the Thai government system from absolute monarchy to monarchical democracy, many complicated problems and temptations occurred. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu saw a close relationship between the political revolution of 1932 and his own mission to reform Buddhist teachings and practice, which began in the same year:

"In the country there was a revolution, a reform concerning the governance of the land. For we temple-dwellers, we religious, there was the intention to revolutionize or reform activities relating to religion. We wanted the revival, promotion, study and practice of religion, to improve it to the extent that it could be called a reform." (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982)

As a consequence, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's reformist views have been more and more widely recognized. Although they were not always in agreement, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu enjoyed the company of two generations of liberal democratic politicians, indicated by his meetings with Pridi Banomyong and his sometimes stormy interactions with Khukrit Pramoj. During the Second World War a politician from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's home province of Suratthāni, Mr. Wut Suwanaraksa, came to know of his ideas and gave some of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's books to democrat and former prime minister, Pridi Banomyong. Pridi Banomyong invited Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to Bangkok and when the two met they spoke from 1 p.m. till 10 p.m. on three consecutive days. The content of their conversations related to Buddhist engagement. Pridi was also inspired to consider arranging for a temple like Suan Mokkh to be built in his home province of Ayutthayā, but because he was forced into exile after the death of King Rama VIII in 1947 the plan was never realized. (Peter Jackson, 1987, p. 15).

At the same time, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was also invited to give a series of addresses to the Buddhāsammākham (Buddhist Society of Thailand). The content of his talks and responses set a pattern for his relations with the Sangha hierarchy which has by and large continued to the present day. He entitled one of his addresses, "The Mountainous Methods of Buddhist Dhamma-Things Which Obstruct People From Obtaining Buddhist Dhamma." It was a criticism of the practice of Thai Buddhism which in turn drew vehement criticism both from lay and clerical members of the
audience. A Thai monk, Phra Thipariñña accused Buddhadasa Bhikkhu of debasing the Theravāda tradition by his views and likened him to a communist. Indeed, as Sulak Sivaraksa notes, “The work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has never received any encouragement from ecclesiastical circles.” (Sulak Sivaraksa, 1979, p. 233).

However, while drawing severe criticism from some, even being labeled heretical, the Sangha was not able to ignore Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, for as Sulak glowingly reports:

“At the present time, his impact is nation-wide. It is largely due to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu that the younger generation in Siam now turn to Buddhist values and take Buddhism seriously. He has written more books on Buddhism than any other scholar-past or present-and his thought continues to become even more profound.” (Sulak Sivaraksa, n.d., p. 2)

Recent years saw Buddhadasa Bhikkhu receive increasing public recognition, being the first monk to be made an honorary member of the widely recognized academic body, The Siam Society. During the 1973-76 period Buddhadasa Bhikkhu received nationwide coverage when he debated with the senior Thai politician Khukrit Pramoj on television and radio. In 1980 the Mahāchulalongkorn Buddhist University conferred on him an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhism, the first it had presented in its ninety-year existence. This degree was conferred by none other than the supreme patriarch of the Thai Sangha. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was also awarded the honorary clerical title of Phra Ratchawisutthimethi.

3.1.5 The Influence of Socioeconomic Change in Thailand on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s Thought

Peter Jackson observes that the intellectual impact of the West induced social changes in Thailand, which also had a significant impact on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s thought. The relations between social and economic change and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s reinterpretations of Buddhist doctrine are complex. But in general his views can be seen as responses to the religious and moral dilemmas facing the modernist, educated sections of the Thai elite, who made up Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s main audience in Thailand and of which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was himself by birth a
member. However, to detail these social and intellectual relations it is first necessary to describe the dynamic socio-economic situation in modern Thailand. (Peter Jackson, 1988, p.49)

While modernization is affecting the lives of all Thai people, it is nevertheless only a relatively small urban elite of military and government bureaucrats, influential businessmen, teachers, students, writers, and artists who have any significant decision-making power in the process of modernization. In this study, I will focus on Buddhadasā Bhikkhu’s view regarding the problem of degeneration in Thai Buddhism.

Buddhadasā Bhikkhu was influenced by the reformist, rationalist approach of religious events during his stay in Bangkok at the beginning of the 1930s. While he was staying in Bangkok Narin Phāsit, a Thai revolutionary, arranged for his daughters to ordain as samaperti or novice nuns, something which had never before occurred in Thailand. Narin wished to promote the Dhamma, which he regarded as having decayed because the Sangha no longer had the full complement of both monks and nuns as it did in the Buddha’s time, the official order of Theravāda nuns having fallen into decay before Buddhism came to Thailand. Notably, Buddhadasā Bhikkhu disagreed with Narin’s move, not because of doctrinal differences but because he felt the way Narin had gone about his project of reestablishing the Theravāda order of nuns amounted to an attack on the sanctity of the Sangha.

Buddhadasā Bhikkhu appears to have been deeply affected by the Narin episode. He became concerned that people like Narin could so easily criticize the Sangha and was led to consider what deficiencies there were in the Thai monkhood that left it open to attack. The problem of the degeneration of Sangha occupied Buddhadasā Bhikkhu more and more and he began a deeper personal study of the scriptures in an attempt to glean the Buddha’s actual intentions and teachings, and to judge the modern Sangha against them. This was the motivating force behind his reformist efforts.
In his reformist efforts, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized the notion of ‘benefit’ to justify his reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu argued that Buddhism must be interpreted so that it would be beneficial for modern people, in other words it should be appropriate and relevant to contemporary concerns. For example, he demythologized the interpretation of Nibbāna (liberation), shedding light on it as a spiritual condition attainable in and relevant to this life here and now. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu said, “what benefit is there in teaching that we will attain Nibbāna after we have died? Because of teaching like this modern people are not interested in Nibbāna. Moreover, Buddhism is made barren by such teaching” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1981, p.118).

When Buddhadasa Bhikkhu died in 1993, he was regarded as the leading reformist monk in the country by members of the country’s middle class. His teachings were widely publicized and many of his friends followed in his footsteps, engaging themselves with religious, social and environmental issues.

Besides, Suan Mokkh “Garden of Liberation” was extended into an international meditation centre. To this day, 10 day meditation courses are offered to students of all races at the beginning of each month. With the help of the internet, other forms of media and through various Buddhist associations, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s teachings have spread around the world.

3.1.6 Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in the Thai Doctrinal Context

In this section, I propose to present Buddhadasa Bhikkhu within the framework of Thai Theravāda Buddhism, more specifically within the context of modern Thai Buddhism. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu rationalized Theravāda Buddhist doctrines and the Thai Buddhist tradition in response to modern scientific empiricism and the growing Thai middle class of professionals and intellectuals. In the process, he laid out a theoretical framework for an alternative social and political order. From a doctrinal perspective, his emphasis on the study of the Pāli Suttas and on “Right View” (sammā dīthi) have identified him as a representative of the Buddhist emphasis on the centrality of wisdom (pātañā) in Buddhist praxis.
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu represents the wisdom (paññā) aspect of the Thai Buddhist tradition. As a leading reformist monk, he has rationalized and internalized the teachings from the Tipiṭaka and Thai Theravāda culture as a whole. According to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, in directing oneself towards Nibbāna (cessation of suffering), a practitioner acquires paññā through studying the scriptures, reading and listening to Dhamma teachings, observing nature (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu often says that “Dhamma is nature, nature is Dhamma”), living a moral life, as well as practicing ānāpānasati (awareness of the breath).

3.1.7 Influences of Other Religions on Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s Interpretation of “Cit-Wang”

Even though Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was essentially a Theravāda monk, he also drew upon the teaching of Mahāyāna, something quite peculiar in Thailand. Therefore, this movement of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is very interesting for Thai Theravāda Buddhism. With his research of various Buddhist scriptures, he was interested in getting back to the core teachings. His research extended across the various Buddhist Schools, including the teaching of Mahāyāna (including the Chan or Zen School) and the teaching of Vajrayāna. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu appears to have been most influenced by the teaching of the Chan School. The teaching of the Chan School included the possibility of sudden enlightenment. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said, “The teaching of Chan School lets people realize samatha and vipassanā in the same moment. The Chan School uses a question or Koan as a method to make people concentrate to one object. Thereafter people may become enlightened from concentrating on the Koan. The teaching of Koan made Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu interested in the teaching of Chan School. Its influence can be seen in the method of teaching and Buddhist culture in the “Garden of Liberation” (Suan Mokkh). This can be seen in his teaching on suññatā (emptiness), empty-mind (cit-wang) and non-clinging. (Shih You Fang, 2011). The influence of Chan Buddhism is also reflected in the style of living simply with nature, such as having a natural Upāsātha hall and arranging rock and flower gardens. (Nongkhai, 2011)
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu considered *suññatā* as the heart of Buddhism, for it corresponds with the teaching of Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamuppāda*) and not-self or non-essentiality (*anattā*) in Theravāda Buddhism. The realization of “empty mind” is the central facet of Buddhist Dhamma in practice, which can be authenticated in the immediate experience of here and now.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu advised, for example, “to do work of all kinds with a mind that is void”, this means to act with a pure mind, without clinging to anything as ourselves or ours. Such a state of mind would necessarily be accompanied by mindfulness and wisdom. Therefore, daily life would become fruitful and happy. That is why Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu held the view that non-clinging is mindfulness and wisdom, and it is a supra-mundane state that discards all suffering.

Peter Jackson described Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of Mahāyāna as follows:

“...The ideas Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu has borrowed from Chan (Zen) all fit into the pattern of his reformist ideology, and they all buttress his attempts to develop a modernist interpretation of Buddhism.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. 1988, p.228)

3.1.8 The Notion of Cit-Wang with the Zen Idea of One Mind

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu adopted the interpretation of the Chan teaching in Thailand. He also interpreted the teaching of One Mind, which relates to the concept of emptiness. However, the concept of One Mind can also be understood to contradict the teaching of *anattā* in Thai Theravāda.

The description of One Mind refers to an origin of nature that exists in this world before everything else arises. It also exists within everything. Indeed the conception of one mind is indeed the illusion. One mind is emptiness. From this point Chan master Huang-Po interpreted it as the reality of the world. When further explaining Huang Po’s ideas Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said that before birth, “One Mind
already exist: no-one knows how long it has been in existence.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1977, p.3). Huang Po means by this that One Mind is the pre-existing ground of all being, while it must be recalled that for Buddhadasa Bhikkhu "birth" means the arising of the self-centred sense of “I”:“mine” or of ego-centredness, a psychological rather than a metaphysical phenomenon. Thus in terms of phāsā tham (Dhamma Language), to say that One Mind exists before “birth” is in contradistinction with the Zen view. “Cit-wang” is simply the mental state which pre-exists the arising of self-centred defilements. (Jackson, 1988, p.218).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu maintained that the original Chinese expression for the term Mind is in fact ambiguous in that it could be rendered as either “original mind” or “true mind.” He decided to translate it as “true original mind,” cit doem thae in Thai and admitted that “these words, ‘original mind’ or ‘pure original mind,’ are found in the Dhyāna Sect (i.e. Zen). They don’t occur in our Theravāda Sect. However, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu goes on to equate this Zen notion of “pure original mind” with the Theravāda Pāli term pabhassara (Sanskrit: prabhasara), literally “to shine very brightly,” saying that like “true original mind” this denotes the original mental state which is free from unwholesome defilements:

“The mind is naturally Pabhasara. That is, it is without defilements (kilesa) and is not saddened or clouded because of kilesa. That original mind shines as pabhassara but when kilesa enter it changes into a (morally) clouded mind.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.226)

In an article comparing Zen and Theravāda, Walpola Rahula refers to the term pabhassara as demonstrating the existence of a link between the two schools. Rahula offers the following explanation of the Zen symbolism of a black ox which through taming and training gradually becomes white:

“The underlying idea is that the mind, which is naturally pure, is polluted by extraneous impurities and that it could and should be cleansed through discipline and meditation.

“There are in the Anguttara-nikāya two very important and essential suttas which serve as an index to the concept of the black ox gradually becoming white. One sutta says: “Bhikkus, this mind is luminous and it is free
from adventitious defilements” \textit{Pabhassaram idam bhikkhave attam, tan ca kho agantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttam.”} (A.1.10)

That is, there is a Theravāda scriptural basis for Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s view that the mind is originally pure and only “adventitiously” or incidentally clouded and so not fundamentally defiled. Walpola Rāhula also notes that the Pāli term \textit{pabhassara} is found in its Sanskrit form, \textit{prabhaśvara}, in the important Zen text, the Laṅkavatara Sutra, where mind is described as \textit{prakṛti-prabhaśvara}, “luminous by nature,” a description which is paired with \textit{prakṛti-prarūriṇḍhi}, “pure by nature.” Thus, in addition to having a basis in the Theravāda canon, Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s view that mind is originally pure also bears some relation to the Zen view. But despite these scriptural precedents for Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “\textit{cit-wang}” as denoting \textit{pabhassara} or the Zen “true original mind,” it is nevertheless still the case that “\textit{cit-wang}” is an incomplete rendering of the Zen notion of mind. As Bolfeld notes:

“Zen adepts, like their fellow Mahāyānists, take \textit{anatman} to imply, “no entity to be termed an ego,” naught but the One Mind, which comprises all things and gives them their reality.” (Bolfeld, John, \textit{trans.}, 1958, p.110)

Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s interpretation of \textit{anattā} as “\textit{cit-wang}”, or the absence of the self-centredness of “I”-“mine,” catches the Zen emphasis on the absence of ego as a psychological function but not the Zen view of One Mind as ultimate reality. Buddhāsā Bhikkhu nowhere talks in terms of entities or of the mind or “Mind” as a basis of reality. (Peter Jackson, 1988, p.217).

Buddhāsā Bhikkhu defines \textit{anattā} as the absence of the defiling or immoral quality of self-centredness, and mistakenly represents this as being the central teaching of Zen:

“The Chinese Buddhist Sect of Zen teaches us to live without needing to have a self...to eat without there needing to be an eater, to work without there needing to be a doer. That is, to have a mind suffused with wisdom.” (Buddhāsā Bhikkhu, 1965, p.10)
As a consequence, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained the normality, as expressed in terms of impermanence, suffering and not-self, as pure nature. All sentient beings have the state of pure nature in the mind. The characteristics of everything are transformed by the rule of nature. When one contemplates the play of world, they cannot escape the truth of anattā. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, p.16). The interpretation of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is in this point similar to the teaching of Chan master Huang-Po. He also compared the One Mind to the sun shine. Huang-Po says:

“You must get away from the teachings of existence and non-existence, for mind is like the sun, forever in the void, shining spontaneously, shining without intending to shine.” (Blofeld John,1958, pp.61-62)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu adopted the teaching of Chan to clarify the ideology of anattā in Thai Theravāda. The aims of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu were to help the Thai people understand the core of Buddhism. The core of Buddhism is inherently entwined with the ideology of emptiness and anattā. The linguistic presentation may be different, but the purpose is not different. (Shih You Fang. (2003).

In short, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu adopted the Zen interpretation of One Mind or Original Mind as being equivalent to suññatā, and thus to “cit-wang”. One mind has the meaning equivalent to being free from all distracting things. Similarly “cit-wang” denotes a mental state which is free or empty of defilements. Both denote the absence of psychological and moral defilements, not the absence of conceptual dualities. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu goes on to equate this Zen notion of “pure original mind” with the Theravāda Pāli term Pabbassara, which denotes the original mental state which is free from unwholesome defilements. However, the concept of One Mind can also be understood to contradict the teaching of anattā in Thai Theravāda. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu interpreted the concept of anattā as “empty-mind” (cit-wang) or the absence of the self-centredness of “I”-“mine,” catches the Zen emphasis on the absence of ego as a psychological function.

In summary, the teaching of Theravāda is based on the Pāli Canon and commentaries, and emphasizes traditional practice, especially the practice of the Vinaya. Thai monks usually teach about the importance of merits, morals, heaven,
hell, and so on. This leads to a sometimes unskillful emphasis on the result of merits. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu sought to reform this attitude through emphasizing the importance of the here and now. His teaching therefore became an alternative to standard Thai Buddhist teaching. Importantly, his teaching was also useful for the socially active layperson, not only for those in the monastic life, such as himself. Also, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s application of the teaching on emptiness was highly useful for reawakening Buddhism, making it relevant to the modern person, and making Theravāda Buddhism once more an important aspect of social life in Thailand. If this approach was more widespread within the conservative Thai clergy, Buddhism would be highly effective in alleviating suffering, both on a personal and social level. There is a famous Mahāyāna saying that, “Because of emptiness all things arise.” This means that if we understand emptiness, then we can also understand everything that has arisen. Therefore, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s adoption of the teaching of Mahāyāna into Thai Theravāda was actually not in contradiction to the original Buddhist teachings as they appear in the Pāli Canon, and in a pragmatic sense it helped Buddhist practitioners to realize the elimination of suffering from the gross to the subtle levels.

3.2 The Meaning of “Cit-Wang” as Defined by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

There are many types of empty mind

It is possible to say there is only one type of empty mind and also to say that there are many types, it depends on how broad or narrow one’s perspective is. If one decides that there is only one type of empty mind it means that in that moment there is no clinging to the sense of self or things belonging to the self. It maybe means that clinging has not yet arisen in the mind or that it might not arise at all. However we can also divide empty mind into a number of different categories, namely, 1. Completely empty such as the mind of an arahant. 2. Partially empty such as the mind of anyone who is not an arahant. 3. Naturally empty because there is no disturbing stimulus. 4. Empty because one is in a state of samādhi (concentration). 5. Empty because there is nothing to excite craving and clinging. 6. Empty because one is resting or sleeping. 7. Empty because of peaceful music which pacifies the mind.
As can be seen above, there are many types of empty mind, but when we come down to the root of the matter the important fact is that the mind is empty of clinging to the sense of self and things belonging to the self. This state is the natural condition of the mind, which is in itself naturally free of suffering.

According to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu “empty-mind” (cit-wang) means having a mind (citta), which is free from the possessive and deluded attitude of “I” and “mine.” That is, “cit-wang” denotes a mind in ethical equilibrium which is free from disturbing moral stains or hindrances to liberation. “Empty-mind” (cit-wang) is therefore as much an ethical as a psychological notion, denoting the state of mind which should be established if one is to attain Nibbāna. He makes the psychological and ethical character of “cit-wang” clear in the following statement:

“Mental emptiness is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present (and being perceived) as usual but none of them is being grasped or clung to as “mine.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974: 6). Thus “cit-wang” is not a vacuous mental state. It is not “void” of content. Thinking, mental formations and perceptions of the external world are all present as usual. All processes are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of “I” and “mine.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, pp. 6-7)

For Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu “empty-mind” (cit-wang) is central to understanding the religious goal of Buddhism and is the basis of the practice to attain that goal both in individual life and in social life. But while Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “empty-mind” (cit-wang) is based upon notions found in the

33 It is interesting to note that Peter Jackson disagreed with the translation of wang as “empty” or “emptiness” because this misleadingly implies that cit-wang is a state of mental vacuity. However, where others have used the term “empty” in translating Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s work, as here, he retained it the for the sake of faithfulness to the cited text (Jackson, 1988, p.181).
canonical literature, in particular the notion of suññatā or “emptiness,” it has not historically received much attention in Theravāda Buddhism. Suññatā or “cit-wang” has in general been a secondary concept used to explain more central notions such as anattā, not-self, and anicca, impermanence. The notions of suññatā and “cit-wang” have a notably peripheral character in the traditional readings of the Tipitaka in Thailand. (Peter Jackson, 2003, p.69).

Apart from this, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gave the following reasons for using the term “cit-wang”:

1. The subject of suññatā is used by the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikāya wherein he stated that it is a profound topic and that it is the heart of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu used the word ‘empty,’ which is the translation of the original Pāli term suññatā. However, whereas most people would be unfamiliar with and uninterested in the word “suññatā” the term “cit-wang” is more easily accessible and catches people’s attention. Once their attention has been captured, people might be more interested in realizing emptiness with their own minds, and then they would gain greater understanding of the meaning of “cit-wang”

2. This term is more convenient for the ordinary person, and helps them to understand that the original nature of their mind is actually radiant (pabhasara),34 free from ignorance, craving and clinging.35 But this original nature is still obscured by the fabrication of thoughts and defilements, so it takes investigation to discover its true nature. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1981, pp.21-22).

34 Pabhasara means radiant, because it is pure and free from defilement.

35 “Avijjā, Tathā and Upādāna are all interrelated defilements. When we speak about upādāna, then we are automatically including both avijjā and tathā. In other word, avijjā creates the causes for the arising of tathā, craving (both in its negative and positive aspects), which then causes the arising of upādāna or clinging to the sense of self, which is ultimately suffering in itself.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1981, pp.21-22).
Some might ask why Buddhadasa Bhikkhu chose the term "cit-wang" (empty-mind) as opposed to some other word. He quoted a Buddhist saying that appears in the following couplet:

Conditioned things are the supreme suffering, Nibbāna is the supreme happiness

With regard to the first line, it is useful to note the etymology of the Pāli word *saṅkhāra*. It comes from the prefix *saṃ* meaning 'together' and the verb form *khaṛa* meaning ‘doing’. Therefore *saṅkhāra* means ‘doing together’ or in other words, doing non-stop. This constant mental ‘doing’ is what gives rise to a chaotic-mind. When there is chaotic-mind (*cit-wun*), there is no possibility of empty mind (*cit-wang*), and when the mind is not empty, that is the greatest suffering.

As for the second line, expounding the opposite state to the suffering of fabrications, we come to the subject of Nibbāna. Nibbāna is total cessation or total coolness or the greatest emptiness, which is another phrase appearing in the Tipitaka:

"Nibbānāṁ paramāṁ suññāriti" (kh.203-4). Nibbāna is the greatest emptiness. Therefore taking the essence of both these statements on Nibbāna, we can deduce that since Nibbāna is emptiness, then emptiness is also the greatest happiness.

The Buddhist notion of "world," *lōka*, is often described in the scriptures as being "voidness," ‘emptiness’ or, *suññatā*. The notion of *suññatā* (Thai: *wang*) has often been misinterpreted as denoting a literal void or vacuum. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu continued the tradition of describing the world as being *wang*, but he clarified that by this he meant that the world is "empty" or "void" of moral defilements, not that it is a literal "emptiness."

"The Lord Buddha said, ‘suññato lokam evēkhassu moharāja sadā sato’- "One should be constantly maintain mindfulness, always seeing the world in the condition of being an empty-thing *(khwam wang)*."... Whoever sees the world in the condition of being an empty thing will not have suffering because they will see it (the world) as something completely without birth and

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36 "saṅkhāraṁ paramā dukkhā, nibbānāṁ paramāṁ sukhāṁ." (kh.203-4).
extinction, and so there cannot be suffering.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.29)

In interpreting the expression “the world is suññatā,” one must remember that in Buddhist thought the notion of “world” does not denote an objective reality totally independent of consciousness. Although Buddhism does not deny that there is an external world, the term “world” is always conceived in terms of its relation to human experience and desires. There may well be an external world independent of human experience but insofar as it is external to human experience such a world is, according to Buddhist teachings, irrelevant to any human concerns. The Buddhist “world,” loka, is that part of the external cosmos which can be perceived and which can therefore become an object of human sense-based experience. Sunthorn Na-Rangsi says,

“The existence of the world according to Buddhism is nothing apart from the existence of sentient beings and vice versa... When a man is no more in the world, the world is no more for him.” (Na-Rangsi, 1976, p. 68)

Therefore when the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu called the world an “empty-thing” he did not mean that it is a literal void but that it is a realm of experience empty of clinging and so of suffering. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu made this clear when he says,

“The suññatā of the Buddha means the absence of anything that we might have a right to grasp at and cling to as an abiding entity or self... The world is described as empty because there is nothing whatever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope with and empty world, with a mind that does not cling.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.64)

Thus Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s description of the world as an “empty-thing” is not a comment on the character of the external world but is an injunction about the non-attached state of mind which should be brought to bear in relation with the world in order to attain salvation from suffering.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu limited the definition of the word emptiness in order to prevent its misinterpretation. Emptiness has many levels, namely:
1. Material emptiness, which is the absence of anything physically apprehendable. People unfamiliar with the concept of suññatā might consider that emptiness would mean that they completely vanished or their possessions completely vanished, which would make them not very interested in further pursuing this practice.

2. Mental emptiness, meaning that the mind is completely empty of thoughts and feelings. It doesn’t perform any functions as though it were already dead, or as though it were a piece of wood. This type of mental emptiness can arise from deep meditative absorption states.

3. Emptiness arising from wisdom - one’s mind performs its usual functions and thoughts and feelings still occur, but one knows that there is no real self, they have no clinging to a self, the mind is empty of the sense of self due to the presence of mindfulness and wisdom.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu did not elaborate much on the first two meanings of emptiness, instead he have importance to the third meaning in which emptiness arises through wisdom. He also talked of a fourth meaning of emptiness, which should be mentioned here, namely:

4. The distorted meaning of emptiness- Here Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu used as an example the teaching of Ajita kesakambala, one of the six heretical teachers contemporary to the Buddha. His teaching stated that there is no such thing as killing, there are no fruits arising from an actions. This is called a view of action, which is free from the idea of fruits of action because of a belief that nothing has moral value. For example, generosity only has value to the extent that the receiver might derive benefit from what they have been given, but there is no accumulation of merit accruing to the giver. The practice of evil is the same; he taught that the negative effects finished with that action but there was no accumulation of evil karma. For example, killing a person simply ended in that person’s death. There would be no evil karma and no possibility of ending up in the hell realms as a result of one’s actions. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu pointed out that such a teaching gives people free license to do
as they please in a selfish manner without having to worry about the long-term consequences of their actions.

As for the term “cit-wang”, Buddhāsā Bhikkhu did not intend a state of mind that is empty of all thoughts and feelings. Rather this word has the special meaning: “Emptiness from the meaning or the feeling of being me or mine is called “cit-wang” (Arun Vejsuwan, 1984, p.164).

To summarize, according to Buddhāsā Bhikkhu “empty-mind” (cit-wang) means the state of mind which free from egoism and all desires, or in other words a mind which is free from moral impurities. His concept of empty mind is based upon the belief that all minds are naturally radiant (pabhassara). There is the potentiality to be enlightened in everybody. Buddhāsā Bhikkhu recognized that “empty-mind” (cit-wang) is based on the everyday experience of mental calm and peace available to all, whether monk or layperson. It also follows that the possibility for enlightenment in this lifetime is also available to all who are interested. Furthermore, the concept of the “empty-mind” (cit-wang) is a reflection of the attempt to interpret and apply the essence of Buddha-Dhamma in a way that would be useful in everyday life.

But Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s presentation of a model where one works and practices Dhamma at the same time are not accepted by the majority of Theravādan Buddhists, particularly the more conservative faculties. According to the majority of Theravādans, each person is unequal in potentiality for reaching enlightenment. This inequality is attributed to each person’s abundance or lack of meritorious actions in their past lives.

3.2.1. The Theory and Practice Required to Attain the State of “Cit-Wang” as Presented by Buddhāsā Bhikkhu

In terms of the practice of “cit-wang”, Buddhāsā Bhikkhu gave the concise instruction to maintain the feeling that ‘there is nothing worth having, there is nothing worth being.’ If one contemplates skillfully, they will in this manner be able to enter upon the state of samādhi (concentration), because at that moment the mind is pure, free from all defilements and craving. The mind is also steadily centred upon a single
object, which is called upasamānussati (recollection on calmness) and wisdom is fully present in the mind. This wisdom is the fruit of the clear vision of impermanence, suffering and not-self. One therefore understands that there is nothing worth clinging to. As such the practice of “cit-wang”, based on the mentality that “there is nothing worth having, there is nothing worth being” encompasses the entire spectrum of sila, samādhi and paññā. This form of practice can be categories as “paññā-vimutti” (liberation through wisdom), because wisdom leads before concentration.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu understood suffering as caused by attachment or clinging, as a means of alleviating suffering and realizing the empty mind. He suggested a method of elimination clinging and attachment through the practice of the sixteen steps of ‘anāpānasati’ or mindfulness of in-and-out breathing. This Buddhist method of practice aims in itself to bring about the arising of mindfulness and wisdom, clear comprehension (sampajañña) and concentration (samādhi). With these tools in hand one is then prepared to cut the stream of the Dependent Origination, eliminating the causes that might produce clinging and therefore suffering.

Apart from this Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also taught a ‘short-cut’ method of vipassanā (insight) so that those with limited time might be able to practice more conveniently. In the beginning one must maintain awareness of the in-and-out breathing, until one sees that it is just breathing – it is not a person, a creature, a self, me him or her. Then one acknowledges the breath as being simply nāma-rupa (mentality-form) or the Five Aggregates (khandhas); as being impermanent; as being not-self; as leading to dispassion; as being subject to cessation and as being something to be renounced. The aim is that through observing the fundamental nature of the breath, or other bodily positions, one may destroy the deluded clinging to the sense of self in all aspects of one’s life.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu does not dispute the traditional gradation of Buddhist practices into sila-samādhi-vipassanā, but he proposes that the mindfulness gained through the practice of “cit-wang” provides sufficient concentration to operate as a
basis for insight practice, thus rendering the elaborate jhanic concentrations and their supernatural products irrelevant:

“If we set the mind right or prevent it from craving and clinging then that is samādhi, it is the very essence of samādhi itself. Then whether we are working, speaking, walking, eating or whatever, we will remain in that samādhi. That is, the mind is free from “I” and “mine.” We will have both the well-being and the penetrating keenness to think, consider and work with our heart and mind in everything. Hence I say that to have samādhi is easy, as easy as rolling a stone down a hill.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, n.d., pp.48-49)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu emphasized the general accessibility of the practice of “cit-wang,” or non-self-centred mindfulness, and thus the accessibility of the practice of salvation, by maintaining that if it is practiced correctly the mindfulness of “cit-wang” can itself lead to Nibbāna. Buddhist doctrine details a series of stages on the path to ending suffering and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu claimed that each of these stages follow on from one another in a natural succession, starting from the fundamental mindfulness practice of “cit-wang” or non-self-centredness. He claimed that liberation is effected simply by making our own daily living so pure and honest that:

“There develop in succession spiritual joy (piti, pāmoda), calm (passadhi), insight into the true nature of things (vathabhutaṭṭha/tadassana), disenchantment (nibbidā), withdrawal (virūga), escape (vimutti), purification from defilements (visuddhi), and peace or Nibbāna.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1984, p.84)

3.2.2. The Method of the Practice Presented by Traditional Sources

The Buddha taught a standard pattern for practicing mindfulness of breathing in the Ānāpānasati Sutta (M.III.79) and the Satipatthāna Sutta (D.II.124). This has been used as a reference point from the time of the Buddha until the present day. One is to go into the forest and sit beneath a tree and then to observe the breath, and to adjust the form of the observation according to a series of 16 different instructions. These instructions however are not black and white, there still exists much room for
personal interpretation, and for adapting the practice according to one’s character or inclination.

These sixteen instructions or stages can be divided into four tetrads (sets or groups of four). The first four steps involve focusing the mind on the breath, which is the 'bodily-formation' (Pāli: kāya-sankhāra). The second tetrad involves focusing on the feelings (vedanā), which are the 'mental-formation' (Pāli: citta-sankhāra). The third tetrad involves focusing on the mind itself (Pāli: citta), and the fourth on 'mental qualities' (Pāli: dhamma).
The practice of Ānāpānasati in S.V.312 is as following:

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<th>Ānāpānasati</th>
<th>Tetrads</th>
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<td>1. Breathing long</td>
<td>First Tetrad</td>
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<td>2. Breathing short</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Experiencing the whole body</td>
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<td>4. Tranquilizing the bodily activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Contemplation of feelings</td>
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<td>Second Tetrad</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Experiencing mental formations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Tranquilizing mental formations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Contemplation of the mind</td>
<td>9. Experiencing the mind</td>
<td>Third Tetrad</td>
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<td>10. Gladdening the mind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Centering the mind in samadhi</td>
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<td>12. Releasing the mind</td>
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<td>14. Contemplating fading of lust</td>
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<td>15. Contemplating cessation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16. Contemplating relinquishment</td>
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Table 1. The Four Satipatthānas and the Sixteen Phases of Ānāpānasati.

With regard to the above method, Buddhādāsa Bhīkkhu explained that the last tetrad is about Dhamma: nature and the Truth of nature. When the citta is under control and has an adequate level of samādhi one uses it to perform the highest spiritual duty, which is developing wisdom into the nature of things. Through vipassanā, by observing carefully with a concentrated mind, one may realize the
Truth of all things. One sees that everything is aniccam or impermanent. The single exception is Nibbāna, the only thing that does not change. Furthermore, the realization of impermanence necessarily leads one to see suffering or dukkha. This state of dukkha actually refers to the impermanence of things, that there is nothing that can endure. There is nothing that can provide beings with any form of everlasting satisfaction that they instinctually seek. And even this phenomena we deludedly refer to as a self is also itself impermanent and suffering. In other words, there is no aspect of either this mind or body that can be recognized as enduring, there is only a state of continual flux and change. There is no way to stabilize one’s situation, wishing that it may occur according to one’s wishes. There is no real person in there who can control anything. This is the realization of the truth of anatta or not-self. Thus the truths of aniccam-dukkham-anatta are all intrinsically woven together. Together they can be referred to as suññatā, voidness of self. This is the first step of the fourth tetrad (observation of Dhamma). It is called "anicca-nupassi."

Once aniccam or impermanence is realized, attachment begins to fade away. This is called realizing virāga. The fading of attachment gives rise to the realization of nirodha: the utter extinction of all defilement and dukkha. Once dukkha is ended, one’s duties are fulfilled and finished. There is nothing further to be done. There is no dukkha or problem remaining that one needs to deal with. This is called patinissagga: throwing it all away. There is nothing left. This is the final tetrad, dhammanupassanā, concerning the Truth (sacca) of all things. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1981, pp.132-134).

Conclusion, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu understood suffering as caused by attachment or clinging and explained both the arising and cessation of suffering in terms of Dependent Origination (paticcasamuppāda). He taught a method for stopping the flow of Dependent Origination in order to eliminate clinging and attachment through the development of ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) and a ‘quick’ system of vipassanā. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu understood the mind as being originally pure by nature, but having been contaminated by the defilements (kilesa). Therefore, it is everyone’s task to strive to truly purify the mind. A fundamentally
important feature of the teaching of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is the importance of practicing to eliminate suffering in daily life.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu taught ānāpānasati employing all four foundations of mindfulness. For contemplation of the body as a foundation of mindfulness, he employed a ‘quick’ style of vipassanā based on noting breathing and bodily movements, observing them as nāma rūpa (mind and body) without attachment, the Five Aggregates (pañcakkhandha). In such a way one can realize impermanence, dispassion and the cessation of clinging, that is, contemplation of mind-objects as a foundation of mindfulness (dhammānupassana satipatthāna).

*The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: Reinterpretation by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*

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<th>THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS</th>
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<td>Study and Observe the truth of nature, the Law of Change</td>
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<td>I desire</td>
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<td>3. What is the cessation of suffering?</td>
<td>Freedom from desire, Nibbāna (Paññāvimuttikakaccakṣudraya)</td>
<td>Abandoning the concept of “I”</td>
<td>Free from desire, “momentary or Full Nibbāna” in this life. (Paññāvimuttikakaccakṣudraya)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3.2.3 "Cit-Wang" as a Spiritual Guide

In the past it was widely held that "cit-wang" is a practice only suitable for those practicing the monastic life, however Buddhāsā Bhikkhu taught that "cit-wang" is indispensable for everyone. He taught all Thai Buddhists to apply "cit-wang" in daily life so that they might understand the true meaning behind their everyday activities, such as working, talking, eating and so on. In such a manner they could be capable of leading their lives in peaceful happiness. Spiritual practice based on "cit-wang" is of central importance to Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s system of doctrinal reinterpretation and reform. "Cit-wang" is the basis of Buddhist spiritual practice aiming at the attainment of Nibbāna which, while preserving the traditional graduated sila-samādhi-vipassanā schema of Buddhist practice, also purges Buddhist meditation of the supernatural emphasis associated with samādhi meditation. Mindfulness or sati based on "cit-wang" also provides a meditative system which bypasses the complexities of the monastic oriented samādhi system, which is not accessible to the layperson who has little free time available for meditative practice.

Buddhāsā Bhikkhu said that once the basic practice of "cit-wang" is established, the entire process of liberation culminating in Nibbāna is set in motion: "Because the fruit of the path arises automatically once the path is established, the attainment of the path is regarded as the culmination of the practice." (Buddhāsā Bhikkhu, 1980, 87). Thus, just as there is no need for special concentration, liberation develops as a natural consequence of establishing the mindfulness of "cit-wang". (Jackson, 2003, P.163).

3.2.4 "Cit-Wang" in Social Life

From Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s point of view, the return to what is right is an admission that all human beings face the same basic problem: overcoming suffering (dukkha). This basic problem is not a materialistic matter, such as the problems of overpopulation or poverty, but more a matter of the mental defilements, craving and ignorance, within the minds of human beings themselves. The right approach to solving social problems must therefore be directed to these internal causes of
suffering. As a result, real social service for the well-being of mankind is to help one another overcome this suffering. He reflects:

“It is almost laughable simply to speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness. These are not the real problems at all; they are only symptoms. The root of the problem has not been addressed. The root of the problem is that people have no morality (śīladhāma), have no religion (sāsanā) and have strayed beyond the bounds of religion. If we were to solve these problems—illiteracy and hunger—would people be happier? There are many people who have never learned to read and who are happier than the most literate among us.” (Bhikkhu Buddhāsā, 1986, p. 45)

For Buddhāsā Bhikkhu, social problems need to be solved by social ethics. This means that people should act for the benefit of the community, avoiding excessive consumption, and sharing what they have with others. If people followed this course, solutions to political, social, and economic problems could be found.

While Buddhāsā Bhikkhu believed that the essence of society is human inter-relationship, and he supports ‘social preference’ rather than ‘individual preference,’ his methods are quite individualistic. For him, personal greed is the root of social problems. No matter how hard one may try to change social systems, if they do not apply the Buddhist ethical principle of self-restraint to themselves and to others in society, they will fail to solve social problems. Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s individualist method might be effective in societies with simple structures and which stand on tradition, as in societies of the past and rural societies, but it would not be effective in complicated societies such as that existing in modern Thailand, which is moving and changing according to world market changes and under the influence of capitalism. (Tavivat Puntarigvivat, 2003)

Consequently, Buddhāsā Bhikkhu pointed out that solving social problems could be effected through people actually practicing “cit-wang” and lessening the power of self-centredness in their lives. The selfless actions that would arise from “cit-wang” are regarded as solving social problems in two ways. Firstly, the divisiveness and greed behind so many problems of poverty and oppression would be ameliorated. And secondly, the welfare-minded practice of aiding those in need,
while lessening personal self-centred concerns, would also concretely help the victims of injustice and poverty overcome the social barriers which prevent them from following the path to end suffering. “Cit-wang” or the elimination of self-centredness is therefore the pivot both of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of the Theravada doctrine of liberation and of his socially-engaged thought. “Cit-wang” not only has subjective benefits in leading the practitioner towards salvation but it also has objective social benefits in promoting the realization of Nibbāna as a social goal. (Peter Jackson, 2003, pp.130-131).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu said that by removing the confusions caused by self-centredness, social goals would in fact be attained more efficiently and with less suffering:

“I want the layperson to be able to work with less suffering and to have completely successful results. By what means will we attain this? Will it not be done with cit-wang, or would a confused mind be better?” (cited in Pun Congprasoet, 1982, p.22)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu recognized that our highest purpose is to bring about the ending of suffering. Consequently, people must turn around all their hopes, desires, and interests towards spiritual matters, in ways that everyone can follow. Whoever is interested in leading a life free from suffering need only learn how to work with an empty mind (cit-wang). As a result, work could be fun and the results would be excellent.

Working with a busy mind always leads to carelessness. This is because the mind is not one hundred percent settled on the work. It is busy with thoughts swayed by one’s desires and hopes. Thus if one seeks to work with good results, they must always work with an empty mind, that is, empty of me and mine, and the consequent attachment to gain and loss and the like. Then work would no longer have the meaning of work; it would become something pleasurable, like a hobby. (Theravaḍa-dhamma, 2011).
3.2.5 “Cit-Wang” as Above and Beyond Good

Here it is necessary to address two important questions. First, what type of actions are good and bad in Buddhist ethics? Second, what is the universal standard for determining that one action is good and another bad? The answers to these questions can be found in the Aṅguttara-Nikāya where the Buddha says:

“When a man’s deed, O Monks, is performed under the influence of lust (lobha)... under the influence of hatred (dosa)... under the influence of ignorance (moha), born of moha, caused by moha, originated by moha, it is demeritorious (akusala), unprofitable it has suffering for its result, it conduces to the arising of further actions not to the ceasing of actions.”

From this, it can be said that a good action must always be in accordance with the principle of righteousness, conditioned by non-greed (alobha), non-hatred (adosa) and wisdom (amoha). Thus, the good action may be defined as:

1. An action, in order to be righteous, must be meritorious.
2. Such a meritorious action must not be harmful either to the doer himself or to others,
3. Such an action, if performed in full, conduces to benefit and happiness to both the doer and others. (Sunthorn Na-Rangsi, 1976, p.126)

Any action performed in accordance with these three principles can be considered as a good action, and that which is contrary to them can be regarded as a bad action.

However, with regard to the concept of goodness, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu stated that grasping and clinging even to goodness is in itself suffering (dukkha),

37 “Bhikkhave eva rupon puggalo lobhajehi pāpakehi akusalehi dhammehi abhibhuto pariyādinnacito diṭṭheva dhamme dhukkham viharati savighātan saupāyāsati saparīṭhān kayassa bhedā patammaratā dhuggati paṭikarkhā dosajehi...mohajehi...” (A.1.203)
and therefore regarded as a bad action. In this sense, that which the world assumes to be goodness is actually keeping them away from true happiness, because people do not abandon the problem of grasping and clinging. Goodness is still suffering, it has the suffering appropriate to it because it’s not yet empty of the delusions of I and mine, in other words it is still busy and disturbed. Only when there is suññatā, and one is beyond both goodness and evil, can there be freedom from suffering. Therefore, the main principle of Buddhism is elucidated in the phrase “Sabbe dhammā nām abhinivesāya” (M.I.251). There is absolutely nothing that should be clung to.

The following quotation from Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu further explains what is meant by the terms ‘good’ or ‘evil,’

“If a certain person, when making contact with the world, increasingly develops along the lines of mindfulness and wisdom, we call that “goodness” or “virtue” (puñña). If another person, when making contact with the world, increasingly develops along the lines of stupidity and delusion, we call that “evil” (pāpa). (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1994, p.48)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also clarified what is meant by the term “best,” or literally speaking “most good”. He stated that the “best” has no end point; it should not be taken as the final goal. In general, people continuously talk about “the best” or about the summum bonum, but their intended meanings are so very different: the best of children, of teenagers, of adults, of the elderly are all different depending on the varying causes and conditions at play. Yet the problem is that each of these visions of “the best” renders one “the hungriest” – and at its most dangerous one becomes hungry in refined, profound, subtle ways. It is not right to stop and rest with any of what the world defines as “the best,” for each of these ideals are still within the scope of lokiya-sukha (worldly happiness), which is fickle and uncertain.
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu further explained that “the best” cannot stand alone. It does not go anywhere without its counterpart “the worst.” Through grasping at “the best” people are also burdened with “the worst.” As such, the fixation on “the best” becomes an inexorable, self-perpetuating hunger. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained the transcendence of good and bad in the following way:

“To be free of all dukkha, the mind must be beyond good and evil, above best and worst, that is, it must dwell in emptiness. This is the opposite of worldly happiness. It’s the lokuttara-sukha (supra-worldly happiness) of freedom from the self that hungers. There’s no other way out of dukkha than from evil to good and then from good to emptiness. In emptiness hunger stops and there is true happiness.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1999, p.126)

On the same note, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s viewed purification of the mind in the sense of eliminating attachment to both good and evil. When the mind has been purified of these emotional reactions, it can become independent of things. It is the means towards the ultimate goal, which leads to freedom from all suffering. For this reason, in the Anguttara-Nikāya, the Buddha states “when the mind is empty of greed, hatred, and delusion, is empty of “I” and “mine,” then kamma ends by itself.” (A.I.I)

3.2.6 The Practice of “Cit-Wang” as Above and Beyond Good

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the meaning of “cit-wang” or true insight into the nature of things refers to seeing impermanence, suffering, and not-self, seeing that nothing is worth having, nothing is worth acquiring, nothing is worth being, seeing that no object whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to as being a self or as belonging to a self, as being good or bad, attractive or repulsive. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu stated that:

“We must go on to know fully that good and evil cannot be attached to. It is our duty and responsibility to learn this. Don’t attach to good and evil because they are impermanent (anicca) unsatisfactory (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). Good and evil are anicca, dukkha, and anattā. When there’s this
correct knowledge of good and evil, there’s no attachment.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1999, p.130)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained that this attachment to goodness is right practice at the intermediate level, but it does not lead to the highest level of spiritual development. At the lowest level one avoids evil, at the intermediate level one emphasizes doing good, while at the highest level one learns to go beyond the domain of both good and evil. The condition of attachment to the fruits of goodness is not yet complete liberation from suffering, because while an evil person suffers in a way befitting evil persons, a good person suffers also, in a way befitting good person. But complete freedom from all suffering will come only when one has broken free and transcended even that which is called goodness. This is what is know as an arahant, one who has gone beyond the world. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2009, pp.25-26).

In addition, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized the practice of “cit-wang” to help to realize that all worldly phenomena have no absolute meaning and are incapable of providing any sort of stable happiness:

“One must always be aware of the true nature of dhamma: that in reality there is no duality of any sort - no gain, no loss, no happiness no suffering, no good, no evil, no merit, no sin, no male, no female - here is absolutely nothing at all that can be divided and separated into opposite poles. This dualism is the basis of all attachment...be detached. Try to understand that these things can never be seized and held onto because they are impermanent. (They are only relative to the moment).” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1969, p.19)

1. “Cit-Wang” with Happiness and Hunger

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, there are two levels of hunger. First, there is physical, material hunger, which is a natural process of life. The body instinctually feels hunger regarding its natural needs: clothing, food, shelter, medicine, exercise. This kind of hunger is no problem. It does not necessarily cause dukkha (suffering) and can be satisfied without causing dukkha. Then, there is the
second kind of hunger, which is mental, that we call "spiritual hunger." This is the hunger of thinking born out of attachment. Physical hunger really has no meaning, for it causes no problems. Spiritual hunger, however, being tied up with ignorance (avijja) and attachment (upādāna), destroy the coolness and calm of the mind, which is true happiness and peace, thus bringing suffering (dukkha). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu says that:

"Hunger is solely a mental problem. The highly developed human mind develops hunger into the spiritual hunger that results in attachment. There are mental phenomena-tanha (craving) and upādāna (grasping and clinging, attachment)- which aren’t at all cool." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1999, p.133)

In addition, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu recommended that “whenever one is hungry and thirsty (whether for body-food or ego-food) to such a degree that one can never be satiated - that person is born as a hungry ghost (petta, or preta). When one is overly cautious and timid for no reason - one is born as a cowardly titan or demon (asura).” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1999, p.13)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu presents peace of mind in terms of the Pāli term 'viveka' translated as solitude, seclusion and detachment. In Buddhism the idea of true solitude necessarily depends on the development of wisdom. True solitude is the state mind where one gains “insight into the true nature of things” (yathābhutayāsana-dasana). The result of such insight is that one understands that nothing is worth getting, nothing is worth being. There must be no feeling of “I” or “mine” interfering. Then there will be no hunger of any kind disturbing the mind. This is solitude. The mind is perfectly alone. This happiness is the highest aim of Buddhism. The ultimate goal is total freedom from all attachment, from any clinging to “I” or “mine.” Based on the teaching of Buddha, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu presents the idea of viveka (solitude) in three levels:

1. Physical Viveka (kāya-viveka) means that nothing disturbs the physical level of life.
2. Mental Viveka (citta-viveka) is when no emotions disturb the mind, when the citta is not troubled by things like sexual lust, hatred, fear, frustration, envy, sentimentality, and love. This Mental Viveka can occur even in a crowded noisy room, it is not dependent on physical solitude.

3. Spiritual Viveka (upadhi-viveka) is when no feeling or thoughts of attachment to "I" and "mine", "soul" or "myself" disturb the mind. If all three levels happen, one can truly be alone and free. (Nd 1.27)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu taught that the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom would lead to clear realization the three kinds of solitude (viveka), the final or highest level being the happiness of never being tormented by hunger again. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1999, p.136).

2. Positive and Negative Mind from the Christian Perspective

How does the view of Positive and Negative Mind in Christianity differ from the view of Positive and Negative Mind in Buddhism?

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu studied all schools of Buddhism as well as the major religious traditions. He wanted to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help free humanity by destroying selfishness. He reminded Buddhists that we should not think that the teaching of non-attachment is found only in Buddhism. In fact, it can be found in every religion, although many people do not notice because it is expressed in Dhamma language. Its meaning is profound, difficult to see, and usually misunderstood. He further said thus:

“In the Christian Bible, St. Paul advises us: 'Let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those that buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it." (Cor. 7:29-31)

It should be understood in the same way as our basic theme of Buddhists non-attachment. That is if you have a wife, do not attach to having her; if you have a
husband, do not cling to having him. If you have painful or sorrowful experiences, do not cling to them as "I" or "mine" and it will be as if they never happened. That is, do not be sad about them. Do not attach to joy, goods, and worldly dealings, either. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1969, p. 24, or Toward the Truth, n.d., p.97).

As we can see from the above example, even in Christianity there is the concept of non-attachment. However, as in Buddhism, it is not a teaching for those who are not truly interested in spiritual development. On a superficial level, it may seem as though Christianity propounds a doctrine where the 'good' is to be attained, the 'bad' to be eliminated. As such the average Christian endeavors to do good and not to do anything bad. This is parallel to the Buddha's command in the Ovāda-pātimokkha Sutta:

"Refrain from all evil, bring the practice of goodness to perfection." 38

For one who is practicing religion on this level, whenever something bad happens then suffering occurs, because they are still clinging to the concept of goodness. This is the same both in Christianity and Buddhism. However, in the Buddhist Scriptures, the next instruction to go beyond this type of suffering is explicit in the Ovāda-pātimokkha Sutta, namely to 'purify the mind' (sacittapariotappanāti). To purify the mind essentially means to purge ignorance and craving out of the mind, thus eliminating the fundamental causes of suffering. This is emphasized time and again by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu when he exhorts us to let go of the delusions of 'I' and 'mine', which are conditioned by ignorance and are the basis of all craving. Many Buddhists, including the educated monastic clergy, claim that the path of mental purification, which will lead one to the complete transcendence of suffering, is only present in Buddhism and not in the other religions. However, the quotation from St. Paul above demonstrates that the teaching of 'emptiness' is also present in Christianity. That is, even in Christianity one must surpass or transcend good and evil in order to reach a state of true unification with God. To equate unity with God with

38 "sabba pāpassa akaranāthi, kusalasupasampadā." (D. II.49, Dh.183).
the Buddhist goal of *Nibbāna* is another question that could be infinitely debated, but it is not the purpose of the argument here to come to such conclusions. Here I simply aim to present the similarity between Buddhism and Christianity in requiring, in the more advanced stages of practice, that both good and evil must be let go of. That does not mean that people should stop doing good, or stop abstaining from evil, but simply that, with a purified mind, they should not attach to both good and evil. In such a way they will be capable of realizing supreme peace.

3.3 The Significance of Having "Cit-Wang"

The importance of having empty mind (*cit-wang*) is to render human beings free from egoism and all desires. Thus the mind can be full of mindfulness and wisdom, which can penetrate the reality of the world as being naturally empty. With such a mindstate daily life would necessarily be fruitful and happy. That is why Buddhāāsa Bhikkhu held the view that non-clinging is actually the same thing as mindfulness and wisdom, and it is the supra-mundane state in which all suffering is discarded.

Furthermore, Buddhāāsa Bhikkhu defined *cit-wang* as the fundamental condition of the mind:

"I consider a mind freed from defilement (*kilesa*) to be fundamental...Normally the mind is fundamentally free from *kilesa*; hence our only (spiritual) duty is to wall and block their way with mindful wisdom. Don’t give them (*kilesa*) the chance to arise. Let there continually be the emptiness of the fundamental, original empty-mind." (Buddhāāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p. 84)

3.3.1 "Cit-Wang" and Work in Daily life

Ordinarily, people only desire their own personal benefits, which makes it impossible for them to understand emptiness. Also, if one studied emptiness for selfish purposes, for building up their ego, for the sake of "me" and "mine," there
would never be a day that they could really understand it. If they were unable to understand it, there is no way that they could practice it. The starting point of the practice of *cit-wang* is unselfishness. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized this aspect, pointing out that it was the most fundamental aspect of practice, which must be incorporated into the teachings of every religion if they are to be at all successful in bringing true happiness to their adherents.

Some people might raise the objection that if there is no selfishness, then what would push people and motivate them to work. They claim that a state of unselfishness is only appropriate for those who have withdrawn from the world, but not for those who are living an ordinary lay life and are in fact responsible for the progress and improvement of society. Moreover, some propose that within the Buddhist framework, if there are still defilements remaining, then it is impossible to do anything without clinging. They assume that the natural mental state is thick with defilement and that clinging is continuously occurring. From such a perspective, the instruction to "work without clinging" seems crazy and ridiculous.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, on the other hand, argued that if one is going to understand this matter, they must understand that in fact the mind is regularly empty of clinging. Such emptiness is the mind’s basic foundation. Clinging only arises occasionally and temporarily. For example, when one is doing anything important, they would be careful to prevent clinging from arising. But as soon as they are absentminded, then clinging arises again. For those who are careless, clinging often arises. But for those who are careful, it has no opportunity to arise. (März, 2010).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu defined work as an inherently liberating activity because it is related to the practice of *Dhamma*, and he maintained that “the actual practice of *Dhamma* is the work” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1974, p.10). The basis of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s notion of work is “*cit-wang*” or, more precisely, the non-self-centred activity which he interpreted as meaning to work for the sake of *Dhamma* rather than for any self-interested motivation. His ideal was to be able to “work for the work, to work the sake of *Dhamma*”. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p.40).
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu instructed to work with an “empty-mind.” Likewise, all the results of work should be given up to “emptiness.”

One should eat the food of “emptiness” the way a monk eats. One should die to oneself completely from the beginning. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1978: 6). To give up the results of working to “emptiness” means not craving for or clinging to those results but, like an ideal monk, eating with the awareness that he is merely consuming a conglomeration of essenceless (anattā) elements. Working with “emptiness” is like eating without “tasting” the food, or acting without “tasting” the fruits or results of that action. That is, to act with “cit-wang” is to maintain equanimity and not to be perturbed by either the good or bad results of acting, and so not to suffer from the vagaries of impermanent existence. It was Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s intention to render all human activity, including mundane material work, into a pleasant experience free from suffering: “If we have Dhamma it will make working or development free of suffering. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1932, p.18).

Similarly, the Satipatthāna Sutta says that when eating, one should not like or dislike the taste of the food. It doesn’t matter whether it be junk food or health food, delicious or awful, when it is tasted one should simply observe the act of knowing the taste. That is the middle way, not veering towards both liking and disliking. When one touches something, they should simply observe the feeling of contact. When thinking, they should simply know that there is thinking. It is not necessary to get involved with the content of the thought. If it is a pleasant thought, it should not be clung to. If it is a negative thought, it need not be pushed away. One should simply know, “Thinking is happening now.” That is the Middle Way. (Vipassanādhura, 2011).

Yet Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu promised more than a simple absence of suffering as the result of working with “cit-wang”. He maintained that work carried out with “cit-wang” would also be successful, because activity is no longer confused by the delusions of “I” and “mine,” and that working would be a pleasurable rather than just a neutral or suffering-free experience:
"We will consequently feel successful in our work. That is, the work will go well and the person who does it will be happy and want to work because he or she enjoys working. If we act in this way it is Buddhism or going to the heart of Buddhism." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p. 40).

He maintained that spiritual practices and principles should guide and be integrated with worldly activities, including activity associated with socioeconomic development:

"Development which gets results must have the lokuttara type of Dhamma integrally governing it. That development will as a consequence be correct and will not proceed to create ongoing crises or to cause corruption." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1932, p.55)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu made no distinction between work defined as a spiritual activity to establish oneself in "cit-wang" or the mundane activities of everyday life and making a living. For him the two amount to the same thing: "Working is the same thing as practicing dhamma, there are no ways of the world (distinct from) the way of dhamma" (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1982, pp.88-89). This is very much a philosophy of action in the world which brings the possibility of freedom from suffering into the domain of everyday life while also imbuing mundane work and activities with a religious or sanctified quality. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu did not distinguish between mundane and spiritual activity but only between correct and incorrect activity, a distinction based not on the objective character of action, such as its location within or without the temple precincts, but rather on the psychological attitude which is brought to bear on an action. All actions performed with "cit-wang" are regarded as giving the same spiritual status on the path to Nibbāna.

Thus, in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's system the "temple" or the site of spiritual practice is no longer a geographical location but a state of mind. This integration of work with spiritual activity is made manifest in the following definition:
"The word "working" if it were rendered into Pāli it would be the word sammā kammanto, which translates as having Right Livelihood. When there is Right Livelihood then it is one component of the Noble Path's (ariyamagga) set of practices for advancing towards the blessed Nibbāna."  
(Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.3)

Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu described "cit-wang" as being both a development of the everyday experience of mental calm and the direct precursor of Nibbāna. That is, "cit-wang" is the link between the world of everyday mundane awareness and the supramundane condition of spiritual salvation. According to Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu, "cit-wang" provides even the layperson with direct access to Nibbāna. Similarly, the practice of "cit-wang" or the conscious development of mindfulness or sati, is interpreted as being integral to activity and work in the social world. Indeed, Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu regarded working and "cit-wang" as integrally related. Consequently, for Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu "cit-wang" is the key to the resolution of the theoretical problem of developing a lay-accessible interpretation of both the theory and the practice of doctrinal Buddhism. Just as the theory of phāsā khon, phāsā tham (Everyday Language, Dhamma Language) is the basis of Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu's methodological approach to the task of reinterpreting Theravada Buddhism, so is the notion of "cit-wang" the conceptual hub of that reinterpreted system. (Jackson, 1988, p.203).

In summary, Buddhidāsa Bhikkhu was trying to help Thai people understand the way of working with "cit-wang" in order to lessen the power of self-centredness. As noted above, self-centredness and greed are the fundamental cause of modern social problems, so in eliminating them, then modern society should function more efficiently on both material and spiritual levels.

3.3.2 "Cit-Wang" with Relation to Social Development

The importance of "cit-wang" is not only limited to Buddhist doctrine in relation to liberation, but it is also important in terms of socioeconomic development and politics.
Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu believed that the essence of society is human interrelationship, and he supported ‘social preference’ rather than ‘individual preference.’ Also, his methods are quite individualistic in that he sees the greed of the individual as the root of social problems, regardless of the social system. If people do not apply morality to themselves and to others in the society, social problems cannot be solved.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu criticized modern attempts to solve social problems as mostly being influenced by personal interests or fame. Thus the solutions have not been effective.

“How can the same selfish people who created the problem possibly solve it? No matter how many selfish people get together to form how many world organizations, since those organizations are full of selfish people, how can they solve the problems of the world created by selfishness?.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, p.46)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu points out that most of the trouble, decline, suffering and social problems in the world at present are caused by lack of morality, which is in essence lack of the observance of “cit-wang” or detached mindfulness. The self-centred attitude of “I”-“mine,” which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu regarded as the immediate cause of social problems, is therefore prevalent. He stated that “self-centredness is the basic cause of suffering, both individually and socially.” Therefore, in order to alleviate suffering both on an individual and social level, it is necessary to return to the spirit of sharing and loving-kindness accompanied by the practice of “cit-wang” or sati (mindfulness).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu stated that the development of “cit-wang” is the key to Buddhist spiritual practice and he says that once “cit-wang” or the attitude of non-self-centredness is developed the rest of Buddhism’s spiritual practices are developed automatically:

“Not to hold that there is selfhood (atta) in eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind, causes the arising of the entire Noble Eightfold Path (and thus of Samadhi) in a single moment.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.20)
In this way peaceful life would be the result both individually and socially and on a world-wide scale. In addition, the mindfulness attained through the practice of “cit-wang” curbs the flourishing of mental defilements that harm both oneself and others.

Moreover, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also demonstrated the necessary relation between social and spiritual practice by proposing that not to help or assist others who are in need is to suffer from the same self-centredness which bars one from spiritual attainment:

“Religion doesn’t only mean the actions of individuals to pass beyond suffering. We must still help others to pass beyond suffering also. That is, we must have loving-kindness (karunā) towards our fellow man and towards all sentient beings, because if we are completely without loving-kindness we will be a self-centred person.... As is said in the Pāli words of the Lord Buddha in the Nipāta Sutta of the Khuddaka Nikāya..., “A person who only has wisdom in seeking out his own benefit is an impure human being...” Hence a religious person must assist others as one type of necessary human duty, or else it will be to have a religion in words only.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, pp.26-27)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu claimed that a purely mental or spiritual approach to social problems and to the issue of development is equally inadequate, saying that: “In fact it is impossible for us to live by either mind or matter alone. Development has to involve both aspects.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982: 74). But he still considered that spiritual factors have the greater importance and are the main determinants for attaining successful, problem-free development: “It must be the correct and important things that lead. For example, the mental, the intellectual, the spiritual should lead the material.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1978 p.12).

By way of example of what he regards as a correct approach to development, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu proposes Japan, the home of Zen, as evidence for the productive power of social activity informed by the spiritual condition of “empty-mind” or cit-wang to provide a basis for all-round welfare. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, pp.84-85).
3.3.3 The Relationship Between Suffering (dukkha) and Sun劫 or Cit-Wang

The concept of dukkha or suffering is a Pāli word derived from the prefix du (difficult) and the verb root kha (to endure). It can be translated as suffering, inability to satisfy, a state of dis-ease in the sense of discomfort, frustration and disharmony with the environment. The Three Characteristics of Existence, namely aniccam (impermanence), dukkha (suffering) and anattā (not-self), are closely interrelated and an understanding of each characteristic will further a comprehensive understanding of the other characteristics.

Aniccam means that all compounded things are constantly changing. When one clearly sees the characteristic of anicca, it is easy to understand the second characteristic of dukkha – suffering or unsatisfactoriness. If one wants things to go according to their own desires, they will inevitably experience dukkha. When things change from what they like or what they want, they will likewise experience dukkha. In fact, there is never really any possibility that things can be the way one wants them to be, because they never stop changing long enough to really be something. Thus the problem of dukkha becomes endless. Amidst all the shifting causes and conditions that make up existence the characteristic of dukkha seems insurmountable.

When the characteristics of impermanence and suffering are thoroughly understood then one will automatically see that everything is indeed not-self (anattā). Amid all the change and conditioning, there is no individual entity or eternal substance that can be called a self or be identified with the self.

Understanding of aniccam, dukkham and anattā is fundamental in understanding the all-encompassing subject of emptiness or suññatā. When one understands that everything is not-self, is empty of anything that could be grasped at as self, they will also comprehend the truth of emptiness. This single characteristic of emptiness gathers together and caps the previous three characteristics.
The meaning of suññatā is better, broader, easier and more useful than any other word to take as a principle of practice and life, but only if it is profoundly understood. It should not be understood through materialistic interpretations, such as, ‘nothing exists’ or ‘all is a vacuum.’ In actual fact, everything exists, but is empty of any self or things belonging to the self.

When one sees emptiness in all phenomena then there is no love and no hate, no liking and no disliking, no happiness and no suffering (dukkha). If one does not see the emptiness of all things, they will love some things and hate others. While love and hatred remain, the mind is enslaved by attachment to the things loved and hated. With full penetration of suññatā, the mind is free and no longer a slave to those things. True freedom from suffering is found in the realization of emptiness.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu clearly elaborated on the relationship between dukkha and suññatā in a talk he gave in Bangkok on January 8, 1966. He stated that when the mind knows that the world is empty, then the mind will also be empty (of craving, clinging and defilements). The empty-mind or “cit-wang” does not cling to anything and therefore does not experience any suffering. On the other hand, if one has wrong view and does not understand the world in terms of its inherent emptiness, then the mind will fabricate endless stories and problems which lead to a state of attachment and suffering. He used the opposite term of “cit-wun” (chaotic mind) to describe this mental attitude.

He moreover stated that the mind that perceives the world in terms of its emptiness will necessarily be in possession of mindfulness and wisdom that understand the truth of reality. He therefore emphasized to his audience that their state of mind was directly a result of their perception of the world. Through correct understanding of the world, gradually achieved through the practice of “cit-wang” all suffering could be eliminated.

On another level, however, it must be understood that even the suffering mind is also by its very nature empty. This is similar to the Mahāyāna philosophy that states
that both *nibbāna* and *samsāra* are indeed one and the same because they are bound by the fundamental characteristic emptiness. If one tries to separate these concepts, or tries to separate happiness and suffering on an ethical level, they simply fall into the trap of conventional reality, missing the point that indeed nothing has any inherent self-existence. Only with such a broad and all-encompassing perception of emptiness can suffering really be overcome, through understanding that indeed even that suffering is subject to the law of emptiness.

In short, a comprehensive, unlimited and profound understanding of the truth of suffering will lead to an understanding of emptiness, and that very understanding of emptiness will finally lead to the eradication of all suffering.

In summary, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s solution for social problems is effective through people actually practicing “*cit-wang*” and lessening the power of self-centredness in their own lives. The selflessness of acting with “*cit-wang*” is regarded as solving social problems in two ways. Firstly, by reducing self-centredness through the practice of “*cit-wang*” the divisiveness and greed behind so many problems of poverty and oppression will be ameliorated. And secondly, the welfare-minded practice of aiding those in need, while lessening personal self-centredness, also concretely helps the victims of injustice and poverty overcome the social barriers which prevent them from following the path to end suffering. The practice of “*cit-wang*” not only has subjective benefits in leading the practitioner towards personal liberation but it also has objective social benefits in promoting the realization of *Nibbāna* as a social goal.
CHAPTER IV

A COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU’S CONCEPT OF “CIT-WANG” WITH REGARD TO THE THEME OF SUÑÑATĀ IN THE TIPITAKA

4.1. A Comparison and Evaluation of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s Concept of “Cit-Wang” with Regard to the Theme of Suññatā in the Tipitaka

The matter of “cit-wang” has already been addressed in Chapter 3, section 3.2 and the concept of suññatā was covered in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I will focus on comparing the notions of “cit-wang” and suññatā by setting forth the aspects in which they are both similar and different. This comparative analysis will be divided into three major bases of investigation, namely:

1. The Similarities and Differences between “Cit-Wang” and Suññatā
2. The Similarities and Differences between “Cit-Wang” and Anattā
3. The Similarities and Differences between “Cit-Wang” and Nibbāna

4.1.1 The Similarities and Differences between “Cit-Wang” and Suññatā

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s explanation of “cit-wang” and suññatā designates both concepts as being closely related. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained the themes of suññatā and “cit-wang” as follows:

“...suññatā means emptiness, the emptiness of the feeling or idea of “me” and “mine.” This word refers to the fact that there is no self to be found in the world. The emptiness of the mind has the meaning that wisdom (paññā) is present in the mind (that is, the mind is free from defilements (kilesa). Lit: empty of defilements).” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1976, vol.2, p.48)

From this viewpoint, emptiness has two meanings. The first is the emptiness of the world, emptiness of a ‘real’ self. There is simply a meeting together of the four elements, which gives rise to the mundane concept of ‘self’, ‘person’, me, him, her. The second meaning of emptiness is the state of mind that is free (lit: empty) of
defilements that cling to those concepts of ‘self, ‘person’, me, him, her, as being their own individual self or the selves of others. If is a state of mind that understands that those concepts are merely natural phenomena, both conditioned (sankhatadhamma) and unconditioned (asankhatadhamma).

The word emptiness, apart from the meaning given above, can also be used synonymously with other concepts in Buddhism. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu noted that “this word brings together the meaning of aniccam, dukkham, anattō completely.” It thus seems that the word suññatā has an all encompassing meaning, including even the concept of anattā. Or in other words, the meaning of the word anattā is not as all-encompassing as that of suññatā.

The Thai-Magadha Dictionary translates the word suññatā as “The fact that is an empty phenomenon.” Here it does not specify which thing is empty, which points to the fact that suññatā can be used in a number of different contexts. When it is used to refer to animate objects, such as a person, then it would mean “the fact that a person is an empty phenomenon.” However, if it is used to refer to inanimate objects, such as a house, than it would mean “the fact that the house is an empty phenomenon”. Since this word is composed of tō ending in the Bhāva Taddhit (grammatical Pāli) it is used as a noun. (P. Longsomboon, 1997, p.754).

Suññatā, apart from being used as an adjectival quality of various phenomena, can also be used in the sense that it actually “is” that phenomenon, without having to further elaborate its meaning, further interpret or give some standard definition. Instead it is the fact that suññatā is that phenomenon, without having to depend on anything or anyone else wanting it to be so; it is that phenomenon itself. In the sense that suññatā “is”, I will analyze with regard to the Theravāda first.

Vasin Intasara said that “this word suññatā is the name of the true nature of various phenomena, which is unable to be determined or explained. All phenomena appear as though they exist, but when we try to understand the true nature of their
existence, then we cannot understand, or otherwise understand with difficulty. (Vasin Intasara, 1989, p.212).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also stated that “suññatā (emptiness) is a quality that makes people become enlightened.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1977, p.35). In this case, suññatā is not only shown as a special quality, but it is also shown to have great benefit because it can cause ordinary unenlightened people to lift their states to that of a noble person or an arahant (a fully enlightened being).

In the same manner, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also supports the original conclusion that “suññatā is a means for making the “person” disappear, with only the Five Aggregates remaining. These Aggregates are no longer subject to suffering or death anymore, because there is no longer the wrong view of a self.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1977, pp.40-41).

The concepts linked with suññatā in the Theravāda Nikaya are summarized in the Buddhist Dictionary thus, “suññatā (emptiness) in the Theravada points to the concept of anattā, the corelessness of nature....The emptiness of the world, because it is empty of a self or things related to the self (suññatā atmāna vā attaniyena vā...).” (Nanaponika, 1980), p.216).

In short, the word suññatā points to two things, or two characteristics (lakkhana). First, suññatā refers to the characteristic or fundamental nature of all things. In other words, the fact that all things are fundamentally empty through their own very nature. The term “all things” must be understood correctly as encompassing every single thing, both physical things (rupadhamma) and mental things (namadhamma), everything from a speck of dust to valuable things, to immaterial things, up to Nibbāna. Each and every thing has the quality of emptiness. This is the first meaning of suññatā.

The word suññatā in its second application points to the quality of the mind when it isn’t grasping and clinging at anything. The character of the mind when it isn’t attaching to anything is also called “emptiness”. The first meaning of suññatā
points out that all things are empty, that emptiness is the inherent characteristic of all things. The second meaning points to the mind that isn’t grasping or clinging at anything.

Even though the mind is truly empty of self, the mind doesn’t realize that it is empty, because it is constantly enveloped and disturbed by conceptual thoughts, which are concocted due to seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and physical experiencing. Consequently, the mind is aware neither of its own emptiness nor of the emptiness of all things. However, when the mind completely throws off the things enveloping it, when it removes the grasping and clinging caused by delusion and ignorance, then the mind has the character of suññatā through its non-clinging. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1994, pp.70-71).

In comparing suññatā and “cit-wang” (empty-mind) it must be understood that the emptiness of the non-clinging mind and the emptiness of all things are different but related. Because all things truly have the characteristic of being empty of self, and because they are empty of any permanent, independent entity to be grasped at or clung to, we are able to see the truth of their emptiness. If in fact they were not empty of self, then it would be impossible to see that they are empty.

Both suññatā and “cit-wang” have differences. “Cit-wang” means that the mind is empty of the feelings of “self” and the sense that anything belongs to self. In the crude forms these are referred to as “ego” and “egoism.” In the subtle forms they are called “self” and “pertaining to self.” If the mind is void to the degree of being free of even refined concepts of self, it is said that the mind is itself suññatā.

It must be understood that “suññata” is first the essence of all things and, second, it is the character of the non-clinging mind. The first meaning of emptiness is an object of knowledge or realization. The second meaning of emptiness is this empty mind, the quality of the mind that is empty through realizing the truth of suññatā, which is the result of correct Dhamma practice. Thus, the mind that sees suññatā in all things disintegrates of itself, leaving only emptiness. It becomes emptiness itself and sees everything as empty, everything from a speck of dust up to and including
nibbāna. Material objects, people, animals, places, time, space - all dhammas melt into one, into suññatā, through the knowing of this truth. This is the meaning of the word “suñña” or “suññatā.”

4.1.2 The Similarities and Differences between “Cit-Wang” and Anattā

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teaching often focused on the subject of anattā, not-self or “selflessness,” and the subject of “cit-wang” or “empty-mind.” Buddhaddāsa Bhikkhu remarked that the ordinary person usually lives life by attaching to “I” and “mine”, “we” and “ours,” to that which is called “attā” or self. The germ that is already in the mind develops first into the feeling of “I” and “mine” and then, acting through the influence of self-centredness, becomes greed, hatred, and delusion, causing trouble for both oneself and others. Therefore Buddhaddāsa Bhikkhu regards “self-centredness” as the basic cause of suffering. Without the mindfulness and self-restraint involved in moral practice, the truths of anattā and anicca are lost sight of.

Anattā refers to the notion of “not-self”. It is the absence of limiting self-identity in people and things. In fact, in the Saṃyutta Nikāya Khandhavagga, the Buddha rejected both of the metaphysical assertions "I have a self" and "I have no self" as extreme views that bind one to suffering. The conglomeration of constantly changing physical and mental constituents comprising a human being is thoroughly analyzed until it can be concluded that there is no self therein. (S.33.3).

The Buddha advised those in search of highest truth to note the present changing materialities and mentalities (nāma and rupa). The Buddha emphatically taught that if there is impermanence then there must also be egolessness.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s defined attā as “self-centredness” and anattā as “non-self-centredness.” The latter of which he identified as being more helpful to humanity and the world. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1968, p.14).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu understood suffering as being caused by attachment or clinging. He taught a method to eliminate clinging and attachment through the development of basic samādhi, and a ‘quick’ system of vipassanā. This teaching is
similar to the Tipiṭaka of Theravāda Buddhism. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu identified the condition of “insight into the true nature of things” as the state of “empty-mind” (cit-wang). The specific term “cit-wang” is simply an adaptation of Dhamma Language which has a different style of teaching from traditional Buddhist Scripture, but the essence is the same.

Both Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teaching of anattā and that in the Tipiṭaka use different language but their meaning is similar. In both contexts the principle of not-self denies true existence of a self in all respects. There is no ‘I’ or ‘you’ or ‘him’ or ‘her’ who likes this or dislikes that. There is only the existence of dhamma. The dhamma of lust (lobha-raga) only enjoys. The dhamma of hatred (dosa-patigha) only hates. Attachment and irritation are understood simply as "dhammas."

Therefore, although Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of anattā may be expressed differently according to the principle of phāsā-khon – phāsā-tham, but the essential teaching and the ultimate goal are in fact very similar with the doctrine of anattā in Tipiṭaka.

4.1.3. The Similarities and Differences Between “Cit-Wang” and Nibbāna

For Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, the meaning of the word Nibbāna is clearly defined as freedom from suffering (dukkha) and as freedom from the mental defilements, which are the causes of dukkha. He states that at any moment that our minds are void of “I” and “mine,” that is Nibbāna. For example, at this moment, as one sits reading one probably has a mind void of the feelings of “I” and “mine,” because there is nothing engendering those feelings. There are just the words that the person is reading for the sake of abandoning the notions of “I” and “mine.” If there is some emptiness (note the use of the word “some,” that is, we are not referring only to the perfectly purified being) then one is dwelling within the sphere of Nibbāna. Even though it is not absolute or perfect Nibbāna, it is Nibbāna just the same.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu pointed out that Dhamma has many meanings, levels, and stages. The dhamma which is Nibbāna lies in the mind of each person at the
moment that they are to some degree free from the sense of “I” and “mine.” He claimed that one can abide with a mind void of the delusions of “I” and “mine” at all times. This can be likened to taking Nibbāna or suññatā as a holy charm to hang constantly from one’s neck. The comprehension of suññatā is a protection against every kind of suffering, danger, and misfortune. It is the genuine holy charm of the Buddha, anything else is just a fake. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1994, pp. 58-59).

The doctrine of Nibbāna is raised in various suttas in the Pāli Canon. In the Khuddhaka Nikāya Cullanidesa, the term Nibbāna means the absence of any source of torment and burning, freedom from all forms of bondage and constraint, that is, extinction with no fuel for the further arising of suffering. This indicates a condition of complete freedom from suffering. There are several other useful meanings for the word Nibbāna. It can be taken to mean the extinction of suffering, or the complete elimination of defilements, or the state, realm, or condition that is the cessation of all suffering, all defilements and all karmic activity. (Nd2.33).

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, “cit-wang” denotes having a mind which is free from the possessive and deluded attitude of “I”-“mine.” That is, “cit-wang” denotes a mind in ethical equilibrium which is free from disturbing moral stains or hindrances to liberation. “Cit-wang” or empty-mind is therefore as much an ethical as a psychological notion, denoting the state of mind which should be established if one is to attain Nibbāna. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu defines “cit-wang” as the fundamental condition of the mind:

“I consider a mind free from defilement (kilesa) to be fundamental... Normally the mind is fundamentally free from kilesa, hence our only [spiritual] duty is to wait and block their way with mindful wisdom. Don’t give them (kilesa) the chance to arise. Let there continually be the emptiness of the fundamental, original freed-mind.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1974, p.11)

As Peter Jackson has observed, in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s system “cit-wang” is defined as the immediate precursor of Nibbāna and he defines both conditions in the same terms, as the absence of “I”-“mine” or self-centeredness:
“Nibbāna is translated as “extinction without remainder” but, one may well ask, extinction without remainder of what? It is simply the extinction without remainder of “I”-“mine,” which is simply the feeling of attached clinging...That is, the state in which there is nothing to be taken or to be.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, n.d., p.79)

That is, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu regards Nibbāna, like “cit-wang”, as being a condition in which there is neither identification or “being someone,” nor possessive attachment or “taking something.” And like “cit-wang”, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu defines Nibbāna as the fundamental or natural condition of the mind:

“The blessed Nibbāna is the destination point of every person. There is an attraction towards the condition of Nibbāna, or to put it another way, the inherent tendency of desire is always towards a naturally existing emptiness (khwam wang). But this tendency suffers some kinds of interfering influences, such as the fruit of action (kamma), which retard it and pull it off its natural course.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1981, p.25)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of Nibbāna as being a “natural” goal of every person, which is founded upon the everyday state of mental equilibrium that he calls “cit-wang”, is fundamental to his attempt to make mental liberation a universal goal accessible to all, whatever their life circumstances:

“This is a Nibbāna in which everyone should be interested. It is a natural matter, something that everyone can understand and do. It is of many kinds and levels of calm and we can attain it according to our own ability.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, n.d., p.14)

In comparing these two terms, it is found that “cit-wang” and Nibbāna have similar meanings even though they are expressed differently, that is Nibbāna is absolutely void of “I” and void of “mine,” in every possible respect, without any remainder. Emptiness is also called Nibbāna, as in the phrase, “Nibbāna is the supreme emptiness” (Nibbānam paramām suññam, (Dh.203-4). Similarly, “cit-wang” is a mind that is void of craving and grasping at the feeling of “I” and “mine,” and is therefore free from all moral impurities.
4.2 An Evaluation of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s Concept of “Cit-Wang” with Regard to the Theme of Suññatā in the Tipiṭaka

4.2.1. An Application of the Nettipakaraṇa Text to Understand Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s Interpretation of the Concept of “Cit-Wang”

The Nettipakaraṇa is a Theravāda method of interpretation leading to “right construing” of the Buddha’s words. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s conception of “cit-wang” is based on the Buddha’s teaching but rephrased using Phāśā Khon, Phāśā Tham (a Thai phrase meaning Everyday Language, Dhamma Language). This Everyday Language is used to teach ordinary moral lessons to people deluded who do not see clearly according to reality and maintain deep-rooted mental clinging. On the other hand, Dhamma Language is used to teach people who are mildly deluded in order that they might understand the Absolute Truth (paramattha-sacca). The doctrine of empty-mind (cit-wang) is an Absolute Truth; therefore, Dhamma language must be used to explain it. It is contrary to the teaching of morality, which emphasizes worldly goodness and supports the concept of an ego. In the past Everyday language was not used to discuss the doctrine of emptiness. Only the Dhamma language was used, which meant that ordinary people could not understand it. Therefore, by introducing the concept of “cit-wang”, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu brought the profound concept of suññatā into the realm of everyday life, using Everyday Language as the medium of communication.

In Everyday Language the term “cit-wang” implies zeroness, vacancy or nothingness, which gives the impression of valuelessness or worthlessness. But Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explains that the concept of suññatā had been improperly translated because it was incorrectly understood. And because it was misunderstood, nobody gained any benefit from it. The Dhamma-application of this word had been lost. In fact, it ought to be understood simply as void or empty of self. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p. 50)
In terms of Dhamma Language, “cit-wang” denotes a mind that is free from moral impurities. In other words, “cit-wang” is the mental detachment from “me” and “mine” which leads to freedom from all suffering as mentioned earlier.

4.2.2 An Interpretative Method in the Nettipakaraṇa

According to George D. Bond, the Nettipakaraṇa is Theravāda’s first solution to the problem of interpretation (Bond, 1980, p.34). It seems that once the Buddhist scriptures were committed to text, the interpretative principle laid down in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta was considerably revised. The Nettipakaraṇa therefore became one of the most important methodological texts of traditional Theravāda Buddhism for leading to “right construing” of the Buddha’s words: “The terms and phrasing (in question) must be placed beside the *sutta*, compared with the *vinaya* and patterned after the essential nature of Dhamma.” (Bond, 1980, p.20). The principle that interpretations of the doctrine should be patterned after the essential nature of the Dhamma’ is more general than that put forward by the Buddha, proposing that a view or opinion should be theoretically consistent with the doctrinal basics of the religion, rather than being a literal restatement of the Buddha’s words, as required by the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta the Buddha says:

“Then you should study well those (disputed) paragraphs and words, and investigate whether they occur in the sutta, and compare them with the *vinaya*. If having investigated the sutta and compared with the *vinaya* they can neither (be found) in the sutta nor (be found to be) comparable with the (teachings in the) *vinaya*, then you should reach agreement on these points that they are certainly not the words of the Blessed One (the Buddha), and that the Bhikkhu in question (who made the disputed statement) has incorrectly remembered (the Buddha’s teaching), you should discard those statements completely.” (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, D.II.124)

The principle of interpretation laid down here is that disputed or dubious statements on the doctrine should be compared with the recorded words of the Buddha in the Suttas, and with the ethical principles recorded in the *vinaya*, to gauge whether they are accurate and in accord with Buddhist ethical principles.
However, the Nettipakaraṇa develops this canonical interpretative principle into a form more appropriate for a literary tradition in which the demands of simple memorization have been lifted and detailed textual analysis can be undertaken. The principle that scriptural interpretations should be patterned after the Dhamma amounts to a recognition that in literary tradition faithfulness to the Buddha’s teaching no longer necessitates a strictly literal adherence to his actual words but may also be based upon views which follow the spirit of the Buddha’s teachings. This more liberal principle of interpretation is thus very similar to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s method of interpreting the scriptures. (Jackson, 2003, P.84).

George Bond proposes that the interpretative method put forward in the Nettipakaraṇa:

“Not only requires the interpreter to elicit from a text the semantic essence of the Dhamma (phrasing), but also to indicate how a text points to the goal of the Dhamma (i.e. Nibbāna).” (George Bond, 1980, p.20)

That is, the Nettipakaraṇa teaches that the scriptures can be interpreted at two levels: at the level of understanding the literal meaning of statements and terms, and at the level of understanding how those terms and statements point towards or are suggestive of Nibbāna. These two levels closely parallel Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s distinction between phāsā khon, as the literal sense of a term, and phāsā tham, as the transcendent insight alluded to by what otherwise can be read as quite an ordinary expression. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu proposed that those lacking spiritual insight may read the scriptures in terms of phāsā khon while missing their higher import as communicated through phāsā tham. Similarly, Bond says that:

“The Netti implies that every authentic text implicitly points to the atttha (sense or meaning) of the Buddha’s teachings, but unless an interpreter is aware of the guidelines this indication of the goal could be overlooked or misunderstood.” (Donald K. Swearer p.5)

Thus, the basic similarity between the method of the Nettipakaraṇa and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s interpretative theory is, as Bond puts it, the proposition that
“the interpreter must not only understand the words of the Buddha’s teaching, but must also grasp how they point to the aim of the Dhamma” (Pun Chomprasoet.).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu aims to present the doctrines of Buddhism in a way that clearly reveals their relevance to contemporary life. In attempting to fulfill this aim by using the interpretative license conferred by his notion of phāsā tham or Dhamma language, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is in fact re-expressing the interpretative principle which the author of the Nettipakarana implored all interpreters of the Buddha’s words to adhere to: namely, to go beyond the immediate sense or presentation of a term to appreciate its underlying spiritual import. (Jackson, 2003, pp.83-85). Therefore, the interpretative approach of Phāsā Khon, Phāsā Tham finds backing in the interpretative method put forward in the “Nettipakarana”.

4.2.3 History of the Nettipakarana

The Nettipakarana is recognized as being compiled after the Tipitaka but before the Commentaries. It proposes the format of hermeneutics into 3 types, namely, five methods (naya), sixteen kinds of conveying (hāra) and sixteen patterns of dispensation (sāsanapatthāna). The word Netti means ‘regulation’, ‘example’ or ‘custom’ and the word pakarana means ‘scripter’ ‘textbook’ or ‘book’. (Phra Thepveti (P. A. Payutto), 1990,) When these two words are put together then the meaning is “Book about regulations or principles for explaining the word of the Buddha,” or principles for correctly explaining “the Nine-fold teaching of the Buddha” according to the intention of the Buddha. It is a textbook in the form of the “Sarvanaṇanāvisesa.” This means that it is not directly the words of the Buddha. It is just an explanation of the word of the Buddha as recorded in Pāli, the same as the Mahāniddesa in the Khuddhakanikāya which was composed by the Venerable Sāriputta. In this case the Venerable Sāriputta asked for permission from the Buddha to conduct a recital of the Buddha’s teachings, which the Buddha supported in order to set an example for future generations. The Venerable Sāriputta conducted this model recital by gathering the basic teachings of the Buddha into categories, that is, the teachings that consisted of two factors were categorized into one group, three
factors into another and so on, up until those that consisted of 12 factors. And after the Buddha’s *Parinibbāna* the Venerable Mahākassapa Thera gathered the Sangha together for the First Council following the Venerable Sāriputta’s example. (Phra Thepveti (P. A. Payutto), 1990).

The Venerable Mahākaccāyana, the composer of the Nettipakaraṇa lived in the time of the Buddha and was praised by the Buddha as being the foremost disciple who could explain in detail the statements that the Buddha spoke in brief. In the Netti. Atṭhakathā textbook, the Venerable Dhammapāla Thera of the Badratitthavihāra in Southern India, stated that this scripture was composed by the great disciple known as Mahākaccāyana, and was approved by the great Teacher. (Chamroon Dhammadā, 2003, p.2), cited in Veerachart Nimanong, 2009, p.190).

4.2.4 The Special Characteristic of Nettipakaraṇa

There is a special characteristic of the Nettipakaraṇa, which when understood can be applied in all situations especially when people do not understand the Buddha’s teachings in the Tipiṭaka. According to some thinkers, “the Netti can be compared to a compass needle that points the way for Buddhist Academics and practitioners to understand Dhamma teachings correctly according to technical principles, until finally they will be able to attain the Noble Paths (*magga*), fruits (*phala*) and *Nibbāna*.” (Chamroon Dhammadā, 2003, p.5). If life is compared to a journey, the Buddha’s teachings can be considered to be like a map and the “Netti” is like a compass needle which points the way. In order to get the best results from using a compass needle, one must know well the features and properties of that compass beforehand. Likewise, the outstanding features of the Nettipakaraṇa can be divided into 3 categories:

1. The outstanding feature regarding the scriptures - the Nettipakaraṇa has a similar character to a grammar textbook, because it lays down the principles for explaining the Dhamma in the Tipiṭaka, and it suggests those principles in terms of
explaining the Suttas, which is a special case, different from grammar textbooks in general.

2. The outstanding feature regarding interpretation - the Nettipakarana shows the method for separating the word and the meaning of the Nine-fold teaching of the Teachers (Navanaksatdhusata), which is the basis for all the succeeding atthakatha texts.

3. The outstanding feature regarding meaning – the Nettipakarana talks about the guidelines (naya), modes of conveying (hara) and patterns of the dispensation (sasa-patthana) which lead the student to correct understanding of the Tipitaka and also leads the practitioner to deliverance and Nibbana. For this reason it is called a golden key to the treasury of the Tipitaka which can be compared to a treasure of wisdom. (Mahakaccayana, 2003, p.24).

In the research paper: An Analytical Study of Hermeneutics in the Theravada Buddhist Texts 2009, by Veerachart Nimanong, it is stated that an application of the interpretative methods of ‘conveying of teaching’ (desana-hara) and ‘Dhamma Dialogue’ (vicaya-hara) in the Nettipakarana is a way of presenting dhamma that demonstrates the advantages, disadvantages, benefits and down-sides with regard to the understanding of “cit-wang.” This is a means for eliminating delusion and doubt or wrong understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. (Veerachart Nimanong, 2009, pp. 193,201, 205)

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1. Sutta is talk on discourses 2. Geyya is talk on discourses mixed with verses 3. Veyyakara is talk on prose-expositions 4. Gath is talk on verses 5. udana is talk on exclamations, verses of uplift 6. Itivutaka is talk on Thus-siad discourses 7. Jataka is talk on birth-stories 8. Abhutadhamman is talk on marvellous ideas 9. Vetalla is talk on question and answer. (Vin.III.8).
4.2.5 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and the Application of the Conveying of Teaching (desanāhāra) in the Nettipakaraṇa

The interpretative approach of Phāss Khon, Phāss Tham finds backing in the interpretative method put forward in the Nettipakaraṇa. This text proposes the format of hermeneutics into three types, namely, five methods (naya), sixteen kinds of conveying (hāra) and sixteen patterns of dispensation (sāsanapatṭhāna).

Here, I will explain the conveying of teaching (desanāhāra), one of the sixteen types of conveying, with relation to the idea of “cit-wang”. The conveying of teaching consists of six gradual interpretations, namely: 1 Gratification (assāda), 2. Disadvantage (ādinava), 3. Renunciation (nissarana), 4. Consequence (phala), 5. Skillful means (upāya), 6. Persuasion or instruction (ānatti), (Pravisuddhacariya, 1990, p.4).

Veerachart Nimanong states that this process of gradual instruction may be used to analyze all manner of events and occurrences. This type of instruction must also be able to be examined with regard to the Four Noble Truths and categorized in the ‘Graduated Sermon’ (anupuppikathā), (Veerachart Nimanong, 2009, pp. 408-409). As Bond puts it, “the interpreter must not only understand the words of the Buddha’s teaching, but must also grasp how they point to the aim of the Dhamma,” (Bond, 1980, p. 20). For example, with regard to the concept of “cit-wang”, the Nettipakaraṇa presents methods of interpreting Buddhism that consists of gradual interpretations, namely:

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The gratification (assāda) of “cit-wang” is a pleasant happiness (sukhasomanas) that results from the absence of greed, hatred and delusion. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu maintains that work carried out with “cit-wang” will be successful, because activity is no longer confused by the wrong conceptions of “I” and “mine”. Thus the performing of one’s duties would become a pleasurable rather than just a neutral or even unpleasant experience.

However, if the gratification is still tempered by craving (Taṇhā) ‘the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering’ (Dukkhasamudayāriyasañca), then according to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, that craving may lead people to do harm to themselves, others and society at large. Ignorance and desire are the fundamental sources of human suffering. As a consequence, people become attached to existence. By its very nature existence is uncontrollable, so people suffer when things do not happen in the way they wish. If human beings are to be free from suffering they need to rectify this erroneous conception.

2. Disadvantage (ādinava): The Disadvantage of “Cit-Wang”

The disadvantage (ādinava) is rebirth in the three worlds after death, leading to a continuation of ‘suffering in the wheel of life’ (samsāra-dukkha). This is what is called the First Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkhāriyasañca). In the Buddhist view, suffering comprises undesirable conditions such as birth, old age, illness, and death. In general people fail to realize the causal nature of existence, and the three characteristics of life which are the state of impermanence, the state of suffering, and the state of non-self. These three characteristics are experienced as suffering in the wheel of life. Buddhadasā Bhikkhu’s interpretation of suññatā or “cit-wang” is used to explain more central notions such as anattā, non-self and aniccā, impermanence.

With regard to the disadvantage of “cit-wang”, Buddhadasā Bhikkhu notes that suññatā has often been translated into Thai as “sun plao” (zeroness, vacancy,
nothingness), which gives the impression of valuelessness or worthlessness. He further explains that it was improperly translated because it was incorrectly understood. And because it was misunderstood, nobody gained any benefit from it. The Dhamma-application of this word had been lost. In fact, it ought to be understood simply as void or empty of self”. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1978, p.50).

Thus, if one correctly understands the practice to attain “cit-wang”, this will lead directly to the cessation of rebirth and liberation from suffering.

3. Dissolution (Nissarana): How “cit-wang” leads to renunciation of defilements?

Nibbāna is known as “dissolution” (nissarana) and this is taken as “the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering” (nirodha-yasacc). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu claims that “cit-wang”, when practiced correctly, with understanding and mindfulness, can itself lead to Nibbāna.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu suggested the practice of the sixteen steps of Ānāpānasati or mindfulness of in-and-out breathing. This Buddhist method of practice aims in itself to bring about the arising of mindfulness and wisdom, clear comprehension (sampajñā) and concentration (samādhi). With these tools in hand one is then prepared to cut the stream of the Dependent Origination, eliminating the causes that might produce clinging and therefore suffering.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu does not dispute the traditional gradation of Buddhist practices into sila-samādhi-vipassanā, but he proposes that the mindfulness developed through the practice of “cit-wang” provides sufficient concentration to operate as a basis for insight practice, Therefore we can see that “cit-wang” a method for eliminating suffering has been presented systematically in terms of the four noble truths by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. It starts off by identifying that the problem of clinging is suffering (dukkha), the Thai people’s slavery to materialism is the cause of suffering (samudaya), the abandoning of clinging to the sense of self is the cessation
of suffering (*nirrodha*), and the practice of *Anāpānasati-samādhi* is the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*maggā*).

4. Consequence (*phala*): Results of “Cit-Wang”

The result (*phala*) of “cit-wang” is the liberation from suffering evident in work and daily life. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu concentrates much on Right View or Right Understanding. He said that: “It is possible to overcome all suffering because of the practice of Right View (*Sammā-dīṭṭhi*).” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2003, p.38).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained that Right View and Right Aspiration (*Sammā-sankappa*) are categorized as insight training within the Noble Eight Fold Path. Buddhist insight must be intuitive, clear, and immediate. Thus, the threefold method of *sīla, samādhi* and *vipassanā* is a practical path for the elimination of all suffering:

“Buddhist practice, based on morality, concentration, and insight, is a tool to be used for completely cutting away grasping and clinging. The objects of our clinging are the Five Aggregates: Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations, and Consciousness. When we come to know the true nature of the Five Aggregates, we understand all things so well that desire gives way to disenchantment, and we no longer cling to any of them.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1965, p.125)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized that one should not stress the importance of results but rather “work for the sake of work, work for the sake of *Dhamma*” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p. 40). He instructs that:

“We should do every kind of work with “cit-wang”. All the results of work should be given up to “emptiness.” We should eat the food of “emptiness” the way a monk eats. We should die to ourselves completely from the beginning.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1978, p.6)
5. Skillful means (upāya): The use of “cit-wang” as a skillful means

The Buddha taught that suffering is caused by attachment or clinging. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu advised the development of Ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) and a ‘quick’ system of vipassanā as the Path Leading to the Extinction of Suffering’, that is, as a means to eliminate clinging and attachment. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu understood the mind as being originally pure by nature but having been contaminated by the defilements (kilesa). It is everyone’s task, then, to strive to truly purify the mind. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu gave a great deal of importance to a way of practice for the elimination of suffering in daily life.

Therefore, the practice of Ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) is the cause for the attainment of the result. It is the skillful means (upāya) in desanāhāra of Nettipakaraṇa, which is synonymous with the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering’ (Maggariyasacca).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu rejected the intricacies of the samādhi system of meditation and claimed that the Buddha also provided a short-cut system to enlightenment. He maintained that the practices detailed in the Noble Eightfold Path or ariyamagga, which culminate in sammā-samādhi or “Right Concentration”, is for people who will not take short-cuts. It is not the wrong path; it is the right path, but it is on the ordinary level, and takes a long time (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.15).

The Lord Buddha also gave much importance to Ānāpānasati as a way of practice:

“Bhikkhus, Mindfulness with Breathing that one has developed and made much of has great fruit and great benefit. Even I myself, before awakening, when not yet enlightened, while still a Bodhisatva (Buddha to be), abided in this dwelling (way of life) for the most part. When I abided mainly in this dwelling, the body was not stressed, the eyes were not strained, and my mind was released from the āsava (corruptions, cankers) through non-attachment. For this reason, should anyone wish, "may my body not be stressed, may my eyes be not strained, may my mind be released from the āsava through non-attachment," then that person ought to attend carefully in his mind to this Mindfulness with Breathing meditation.” (S.V.314)
6. Persuasion or Instruction (Ānatti): in how to practice “Cit-Wang”

This is called ‘instruction’ (Ānatti), and is taken as ‘the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering’ (Maggāriyasacca). Phravisuddhācariya stated that:

“Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu reminded us all that khanti (patience, endurance) is a necessary spiritual tool. When we have more patience and endurance in our Ānāpānasati practice, then that patience and endurance also carry over as a part of our daily lives. They help us to live a clean, clear, calm life. So please be very, very patient. Learn to sit still. Learn to keep plugging away at step one until it is complete. The training must endure until the goal is achieved.” (Phravisuddhācariya, 1980, p. 4)

These are some practical hints and tips used for establishing the practice of Ānāpānasati. The rest is about Right View (samma-ditthi). The more one’s attitude is correct, the more one’s practice of Ānāpānasati will be correct, that is, it will lead to the quenching of all suffering (dukkha) through the ending of attachment.

The purpose of studying Dhamma is to develop the Four Satipatthana (the Foundations of Mindfulness) and studying, discussing and investigating the truth in order to give rise to wisdom. The cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom will lead to the clear realization of the Three Characteristics of Existence, giving insight into the true nature of reality.

According to the above information, we can see that Buddhadasa Buhikkhu’s application of ‘conveying of teaching’ (desanāhāra) in the Nettipakaraṇa on idea of “cit-wang” is relevant to the core of the Four Noble Truths. “Cit-wang” as a method for eliminating suffering has been presented systematically in terms of the Four Noble Truths by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. It starts off by identifying that the problem of clinging is suffering (dukkha), the Thai people’s slavery to materialism is the cause of suffering (samudaya), the Thai people’s abandoning of
slavery to materialism is the cessation of suffering (nirōdha), and the practice of ānāpānasati-samādhi is the path leading to the cessation of suffering (magga).

In short, according to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of ‘self’ is an imaginary, false belief which has no absolute reality, and produces harmful thoughts of “me” and “mine,” selfish desire, craving, attachment, impurities and problems. But human beings have the potential to develop their intellect and quality of mind from a state of ignorance to a state of wisdom, or from being an ordinary person to being a holy person. Buddhāśa Bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” is relevant to Buddhist teaching, because all things are empty of self-nature. Emptiness, the true nature of existence, cannot be grasped through mere words or concepts but must be directly realized through paying sustained attention to the voidness of self (suññatā samādhi) that is beyond the realm of conventional thought.

Buddhāśa Bhikkhu’s teaching did not stray from the core teaching of the Buddha, since the conception of “cit-wang” is consistent with the theme of suññatā in the Tipitaka, in which the Buddha warns all bhikkhus to mindfully cultivate Right View that sees the world as empty or void. Similarly, Buddhāśa Bhikkhu taught all Buddhists to apply the practice of “cit-wang” in daily life so that they might understand the true meaning of their activities (working, eating, living and so on) and finally lead their lives in peaceful happiness.

Thus, “cit-wang” is not a practice restricted to the holy (ariya) as is understood by most people. Buddhāśa Bhikkhu teaches that “cit-wang” is an indispensable dhamma-tool for everyone.

4.2.6 Buddhāśa Bhikkhu and the Application of “Vicayahāra” in the Nettipakaraṇa

The form of Dhamma questions and answers can be considered to be one type of interpretation, which is called the vicayahāra method in the Nettipakaraṇa. This method can be seen in the Dhamma discussion titled “how should we understand
Buddha’s dhamma?" between Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and a former Thai Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot:

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: I maintain that even when working as a layperson one must still try to overcome suffering within that working environment more and more. In doing so, they should take the principles of Buddhism which are to make the mind empty of attachment (upādāna). People need to cultivate mental detachment from the wrong views of “me-and mine”, which will lead them a state of emptiness from all suffering. At the same time, they can forget all about being a layperson or a monastic and simply be aware of whatever occurs in the present state of mind. If there is suffering, then they have to fix the problem according to the principle that all things arise from causes. Like this they will be like “monks in houses” more and more until one day they won’t be able to stand it anymore, they will have to ordain.

Khukrit: If it’s like that, then I agree. Listening to the beginning, it is as though you would have them ordained as “monks in houses”, without there being any need to ordain afterwards. If they continually practice, making ‘emptiness’ arise more and more, then I agree.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: They should try every method to come closer and closer to that emptiness more and more, whether they are working, eating, or breathing, they should use skillful methods in order to break through to the state of emptiness while still living as a lay person. These are my views, although they are a bit different.

Khukrit: They are very different. That is, the more “empty” one becomes, success in the way of the world will have to become less for sure.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: If that’s the case, then its still not “emptiness” (suññatā) in the sense that the Lord Buddha taught for lay people.

Khukrit: Being the great millionaire and also a man of integrity (Sappurisa), this certainly isn’t the way to success. Because of the suffering of the millionaire, the concept of “empty mindedness” is not possible.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Being a millionaire who is also a noble person (ariya puggala), like this, would it be possible?

Khukrit: If one had received a great inheritance, then they could also be a noble person. But if they had to find all that wealth for themselves like this they
couldn’t be a noble person, because if they were a noble person then they wouldn’t think about wanting to be a millionaire anymore.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: Being a noble person on one of the stages of the path and also being a millionaire, wouldn’t that be possible?

Khukrit: I disagree. You don’t even have to be a noble one. Even people who are a little bit empty such as myself understand that possessions are impermanent, money is impermanent, everything is impermanent, it’s not self. I’m not yet a millionaire, I earn a living just enough to be able to eat and live. In reality, I have my own principles, that I won’t make money in advance. Only if I need something, then will I go and make money to buy it. Once I have bought it then I stop making money. I wouldn’t have “free” time to be able to come and speak with you, if I set myself up with the intention just to make money, because I desire to be a millionaire. Under those circumstances, I wouldn’t have come today. I wouldn’t have been free (wang or “empty”).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: Those who are already millionaires, but who also feel they have enough, would they be able to get interested in Dhamma, especially about emptiness?

Khukrit: They can say that they are empty, but as soon as they have to deal with money, emptiness disappears straight anyway. I definitely disagree. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu and Khukrit Pramot, 1999, pp.37-57), cited in Veerachart Nimanong 2009, pp.353-354).

This interpretation can be compared to the interpretation in the Milinda Pañhā, which emphasized questions and answers about the investigation (vicayahāra) in Nettipakaranā.
4.3. An evaluation of other Scholars’ Opinions on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s the Matter of “Cit-Wang” and the Compatibility of “Cit-Wang” with Social Action

4.3.1. Negative Opinions on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s “Cit-Wang” and Its Incompatibility of with Social Action

As a result of his presentation of “cit-wang”, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu met with many obstacles and objections both from parties who agreed with this teaching and parties who disagreed. The monastic order, politicians and scholars all turned their interest to this new teaching of “cit-wang” asking all the while where did Buddhadasa Bhikkhu get this teaching from.

The debate between M.R. Khukrit Pramot and the reverend Buddhadasa Bhikkhu on matter of “cit-wang” made suññatā and “cit-wang” become well-known among Buddhist practitioners in Thailand. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu once said that, “before I used to think that it would take about 20 years to teach suññatā or (cit-wang) and make people understand, but now I don’t think it will take so long, because M.R.Khukrit Pramot has helped out a lot.” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, cited in Pun Congprasote, 1975, p.59).

M.R. Khukrit Pramot (1911-1995), the thirteenth prime-minister of Thailand from 1975-1976, did not see eye to eye with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, especially regarding the subject of “cit-wang”. The pair were once invited to speak at the ‘Kurusapa’ (The Teachers’ Council of Thailand), (on July 6, 1963), in order that they could publicly exchange views and debate the matter. At one point Khuekrit Pramot expressed his objections with regards to “cit-wang” as follows:

“The word “cit-wang” means “empty of clinging” (or “free from clinging”). The word ‘empty’ has a very broad meaning. It could maybe mean not clinging to anything at all. The phrase “working with an empty-mind.” An ordinary person would say that once their mind was ‘empty,’ what would they work for? There has to be some reason to work, some aim. You (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu) said that the more you learn about the world and
suffering, the more you will understand Buddhism. Well I have seen a lot people who learn about the world and suffering, without even a thought for Buddhism. The majority just understand incorrectly and go off in the wrong direction. I would like to suggest that people who are going to learn about the world and suffering at least have to think in line with Buddhism to some extent. That is, they at least have to know that they are learning in order to realize the elimination of clinging (upādāna). If that person has a firm belief in their mind that, for example, there is an all-powerful creator God, then I think that no matter how much they study the world and study suffering until they die, the will not realize liberation and they will not understand Dhamma. If they don’t know they teaching of the Buddha there is no way for them to succeed. I know many people of different religions, they have a different refuge. When we study Buddhism, we see that their taking refuge is still laced with unseen clinging. At most they revere the Buddha as one of their gods and see the monastic order as Messengers between the Buddha and humanity.” (Arun Wejsuvan 1984, pp.96-98)

Nevertheless, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu replied that:

“When dealing daily with different forms of contact, don’t let the mind slip into clinging to anything as being ‘me’ or ‘mind’. As such, the mind that doesn’t cling will be ripe with mindfulness and wisdom, and clear comprehension. It’s only when our mind is empty (cit-wang) that there is the possibility for mindfulness and wisdom, and for clear comprehension. The ‘empty-mind’ refers to a mind that has no selfishness, but is clear, bright and cool with the power of mindfulness, wisdom and clear comprehension. This is what is called an ‘empty-mind’ according to the principle of Buddhism.” (Arun Wejsuwan, 1984, pp.105-106)

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu both defined and explained the term “cit-wang” in his Dhamma lecture (Pathakatha-Dhamma) under the heading “Dhamma to be used when working with “cit-wang” as follows,

“The word “cit-wang” here means empty or free of defilements, empty or free of the feeling “me” or “I”... When the mind is free of the concept of “me”, that thing which is called “me”, which is only a delusion, ceases to exist. There is only the clear mind that remains. Whenever something contacts us and the defilements of craving (taṇhā) or clinging (upādāna) arise in the form of “me” or “mine”, or in the form of what we will get, what we will lose,
or in the form of love, anger, hate, fear and anything along these lines—that is called a mind full of clinging to the concept of “me”. This is called “cit-mai-wang” or not-empty-mind, because there is the presence of “me”. (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1992, pp.112-3)

It is important to note that in using the term “cit-wang”, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu did not intend a mind that was empty of all feelings and thinking. The meaning of “empty” in this instance refers specifically to the lack of identification with a sense of “me” or “mine”. Or to phrase it another way “the mind that is not overpowered by defilements and exists in its natural condition, namely, with mindfulness and wisdom. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also coined a term to express the state opposite to “cit-wang”, namely “cit-wun”, which is a mind swayed by the defilements lost to its original nature (which is naturally empty) and completely lacking in mindfulness and wisdom. The mind is therefore chaotic (“wun-wat”) because it is overpowered by the feeling of “me” and “mine”.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s opening up of Buddhist spiritual practices to the laity was not universally welcomed. The former Thai Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot voiced the following objection:

“In olden times when a child asked its elders about vipassanā (insight meditation)...no one spoke. They said it was a secret. The instructors ordered not to let just anyone be taught, the student had to be chosen. It was not a widespread teaching. Hence up until now, Buddhism has not gone against national development or the foundation of government.” (Khukrit Pramot, 1975, p. 7)

Khukrit believed that the attainment of higher spiritual states is incompatible with worldly involvement and so he lauded the traditional practice of restricting access to the soteriological aspects of Buddhism to the few, that is, to monks. Khukrit was consequently ambivalent towards the popularization of Buddhist meditation techniques among the lay populace, maintaining that if people attained “cit-wang” through meditation they would be in no position to aid the development of the country:
"Because the person who has no cravings or attainments, the person whose mind is freed (that is, "cit-wang"), holds to nothing as himself or as his own he is in no condition to be able to develop the country, develop the land or even to develop himself." (Khukrit Pramot 1982, p. 2)

Khukrit was expressing the widely held view that the spiritual path to Nibbāna and the path of worldly involvement cannot both be traversed at the same time. A Sri Lankan monk, Soma thera, makes a similar comment:

"In those who seek immortality (Nibbāna), all kinds of endeavour and exertion to acquire worldly power and possessions become slack through the perception of death. Everything they do has to be done for attaining the deathless state." (Soma thera, 1978, p. 4)

But Buddhāsak Bhikkhu claimed that the emotional detachment and calm of "cit-wang" is not the same as the social disinterestedness which Khukrit and others maintain follows from the cultivation of "empty-mind." Rather than hindering the attainment of social or material goals, Buddhāsak Bhikkhu says that by removing the confusions caused by self-centredness such goals will in fact be attained more efficiently and with less suffering:

"I want the layperson to be able to work with less suffering and to have completely successful results. By what means will we attain this? Will it not be done with "cit-wang", or would a confused mind be better?" (Cited in Pun Congprasote, 1982, p. 22)

Buddhāsak Bhikkhu appears to take his lead on this point from the Subha Sutta, (M.II.198). where the Buddha is asked about the relative statures of the work of a layperson, who has many concerns and of a monk who has few distractions, regarding their relative abilities to follow the path to Nibbāna. The Buddha replied that work undertaken with great desire and great effort, if struck by disaster, will come to nothing. On the other hand, work undertaken with little desire and little confusion, if fortuitous, can produce grand results. Therefore, working in an unattached way, as in working with "cit-wang", does not in itself prevent "great results," of whatever kind, from being produced.
But Khukrit remained skeptical of the possibility of work or worldly activity for social development being pleasurable:

“I think that if one wants to obtain successful results in the world those results must be bought with suffering... (if one wants) true freedom (emptiness) from suffering one must completely sacrifice worldly success... When one is a layperson there must be some happiness and some suffering, it is not a state of emptiness (freedom).” (Cited in Pun Congprasote, 1982, p.52)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu retorted that the example of the Buddha’s great effort in teaching the Dhamma after his enlightenment shows that having the mental peace of “cit-wang”, and of Nibbāna, in no way hinders the fulfillment of demanding worldly tasks:

“There has never been any evidence anywhere (for the supposition that) those who are free of kilesa will not work. The Lord Buddha and the arahants worked more than us, sacrificed more than us and became more tired than us, and all their work was for helping others.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1932, p.19)

But Khukrit held fast to his traditionalist views for, unlike Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, he did not regard the Buddha’s life as a realistic model for the average person. Talking of Nibbāna he says:

“The person who reaches a state such as this naturally cannot live in the world like an ordinary person. They cannot live as a householder in the society of householders...They must try to get away from society. This is the usual thing upon attaining the fruits of the path.” (Khukrit Pramot 1982, p.4)

Khukrit’s criticisms of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s abolition of the lokiya-lokuttara distinction and of the propagation of the notion of “cit-wang” may, however, be motivated by political considerations as much as by religious conservatism. Khukrit maintains that monks should have no mundane associations or direct social involvement whatsoever:
"It is an offence for a monk to establish a foundation, even if that foundation has the object of helping our fellow man, because the establishment of a foundation would cause attachment and craving to arise. When there is not enough money there is suffering, doing anything will lead to suffering." (Khukrit Pramot 1982, p.5)

Here Khukrit was assuming that involvement in the world is intrinsically linked with suffering, and the moment a saint (that is, one who is free from suffering) enters the mundane domain, even to help another, that worldly involvement must have the unwholesome or akusala effect of causing the saint to suffer or fall from his state of spiritual attainment. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, however, maintained that it is not worldly involvement itself but the attitude of attachment when acting in the material world which leads to suffering.

However, Khukrit’s assertion that a saint cannot enter the world without soiling his saintly status - coming from a seasoned politician and former prime minister - may have been as much a call for the complete separation of church and state as an expression of religious belief. There are several reasons why politicians might seek to keep the Sangha (the community of monks) out of politics, not the least of which is to ward off the development of a potential alternative source of power in the country. As a strongly organized body, the Sangha would be a potent political force if its energies were directed into the mundane realm. Thai governments have maintained tight control over the Sangha to strip it of effective power and to prevent the order of monks from using its strong organization and prestige in Thai society against those governments. In addition to the explicit legal and political controls on the Sangha’s activities, the doctrines that the worldly domain is the sinful antithesis of the spiritual realm and that a monk’s entering the social world entails a spiritual pollution which destroys his spiritual authority also function as ideological barriers to the expansion of the Sangha’s activities into the socio-political realm.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s views threatened this traditional isolation of the Sangha from politics and Khukrit’s criticisms can be read as an attempt to maintain the ideological status quo. But despite the criticisms of traditionalists, Buddhadasa
Bhikkhu insisted that his interpretations were in strict accordance with the Buddha’s teachings. In replying to criticisms that the doctrinal teachings of anatta or “cit-wang” are too abstract or remote for the average person, he retorted,

“I have tried to do what is best, to follow just what the Lord Buddha suggested, that the lay people should know about suññatā or “cit-wang” is appropriate for them.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.55)

The average person should know about the central doctrines of Buddhism because “It is clearly written in Pāli, in the blessed scriptures, the Lord said suññatā is a matter having eternal benefit in helping the laity.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p. 61-62).

There are also varying opinions between the laity who studied Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s teaching. Bunmi Methangkun, who is learned in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, criticized Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s claim that “cit-wang”, a pure mind completely free of any moral impurities, is the fundamental condition of mind. Bunmi observes that,

“There are anusayakilesa, that is, a fine kind of defilements (kilesa) which hide, completely obscured inside the mind, and which no one anywhere can comprehend.” (Bunmi Methangkun, 1979, p. 68).

In Buddhist doctrine anusaya are regarded as latent or subconscious morally unwholesome (akusala) propclivities with underlie the observable expressions of kilesa. The following passages from the Visuddhimagga reveal the non-conscious nature of anusaya and their fundamental role in perpetuating the clinging which creates kamma and which leads to rebirth:

41 Traditionally seven anusaya or anusayakilesa are listed: (1) kāmarūpa-sensual greed, (2) patigga-irritation, (3) ditthi-false view, (4) vicikicca-skepticism and doubt, (5) māna-conceit, (6) bhavārūga-craving for continued existence, (7) avijjā-ignorance. (DN.III.254.282).
"The defilements (anusayakilesa) that are the roots of the round (of rebirth) are inherent in one's Aggregates (khandhas), not fully understood by insight from the instant those Aggregates arise." (Vism, xxii, 83)

Elsewhere in the Visuddhimagga it is said, "These things are called proclivities (anusaya) since, in consequence of their pertinacity, they ever and again tend to become the conditions for the arising of ever new sensuous greed (kamarāga), etc." (Vism, xxii, 60)

These passages suggest, in contradiction to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's contention that the mind is fundamentally pure, that moral impurities are inherent in the factors of the Aggregates from which the mind is constituted. Bummi claims that "cit-wang" cannot be the basis of Nibbāna because even when the mind is free from explicit kilesa (i.e. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's definition of "cit-wang") the implicit or unexpressed anusayakilesa still remain, potentially capable of becoming manifest and of destroying the mental peace of "cit-wang" as the fundamental condition of the conscious mind.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu did not deny that morally unwholesome kammic residues may remain subconscious or latent. Indeed, he invoked the notion of latent anusaya when explaining why the sakidagami, the enlightened Buddhist saint who is "reborn" only once more before attaining salvation, must yet still take one more "birth:"

"Sakidagami translates as "a person who will return once more," meaning that the sakidagami already traverses the correct path (towards nibbāna) but because of the germs of some kinds of original kilesa (i.e. anusaya) which remain he still reverts once more to recollecting and missing the condition of living like an average person." (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1965, p. 7)

The debate over whether the mind is fundamentally pure or defiled, and over whether "cit-wang" should, as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu maintained, denote only the conscious mind or, as Bummi held, should also include the sub-conscious mind, is at root a disagreement over the definition of Nibbāna. It is a debate over the degree of mental purity which must be developed before it can be said Nibbāna has in fact been
attained. If, as Bunmi maintained, Nibbāna is defined as the absence of all disturbances or kilesa, even including potential anusaya, then such a state of mental purity could only be attained after considerable spiritual effort. However, if, as Buddhāsā Bhikkhu held, Nibbāna is simply the absence of impurities from the conscious mind, i.e. “cit-wang”, then Buddhist liberation is not only readily accessible to both the layperson and the monk, but is also a mental state that each person experiences whenever they are not angry, hateful or desirous. (Jackson, 1988, p. 165).

Bunmi Methangkun and Anan Senakhan accused Buddhāsā Bhikkhu of seeking to destroy Buddhism and the Sangha. Bunmi criticized the abolition of the traditional monk-lay distinction saying that Buddhāsā Bhikkhu had put forward his teachings in order to “destroy Buddhism and to have the monks go out to till the fields.” (Bunmi Methangkun, 1979, p. 94). However, because his ideas had not yet led to any action which concretely affected the status or role of the Sangha, Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s doctrinal declericalization of Nibbāna had not yet met any practical opposition from without the Sangha hierarchy, although individuals did attack his views.

Many religious scholars and thinkers have commented that Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “cit-wang” is an heretical teaching. They claim that the notion of “cit-wang” is external to the Pāli Canon (Tipitaka) and that any monk who propounds it is destroying Buddhism. Newspaper journalists criticized that, “the teaching of “cit-wang” or suññatā in Buddhism would create an opening for the arising of communism. Some remarked that Buddhāsā Bhikkhu would bring about the downfall of Buddhism.

Buddhāsā Bhikkhu’s interpretation of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine, in particular his emphasis on “cit-wang” has been significantly influenced by the teachings of Zen Buddhism. (Jackson, 1988, p. 207). The term “cit-wang” actually does not occur within the Buddha’s teachings:
“This Theravāda section of Buddhism does not talk about “cit-wang”. In the Tipitaka...nothing at all is indicated about the matter of “cit-wang”. The Buddha’s words in Pāli show nothing like it ... “Cit-wang” is a matter outside of the blessed Tipiṭaka. It is not a principle of this pure Theravāda section of Buddhism but is an opinion of the Mahāyānists.” (Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, 1982, pp. 128-130)

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu defended himself against such criticisms by claiming that “cit-wang” is the heart of all Buddhism, (having existed) since before the separation into Theravāda or Mahāyāna.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1978, p.33). In opposition to critics like Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu claimed that suññatā is not only a term used by the Buddha but that in the Dhammadinna Sutta the Buddha calls it the basis or heart of Buddhist practice. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu also cited other suttas as providing support for his emphasis on suññatā on “cit-wang”. He maintained that in the Mahāvara Vagga of Samyutta Nikāya the Buddha says:

“Emptiness (suññatā) is what I teach. A teaching that does not treat of emptiness is someone else’s teaching, an unorthodox teaching composed by some later disciple.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1982, p.68)

And he quoted the Buddha as saying in the Pancaka Nipāta of Anguttara Nikāya that:

“A discourse of any kind, though produced by a poet or a learned man, versified, poetical, splendid, melodious in sound and syllable, is not in keeping with the teaching (of the Buddha) if not connected with suññatā.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu,1982, p.68)

After claiming that “cit-wang” is at the heart of Buddhism, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu further attempted to weaken Kittiwuttho Bhikkhu’s attack by saying, “True Buddhism is neither Theravāda nor Mahāyāna” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1978, p.33). He opened the way for the further incorporation of Mahāyāna ideas into Theravāda by saying that, “We should not regard Zen as being Mahāyāna.” (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1977, p.1) This last claim was based on a rather narrow and chauvinistic definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism as being concerned more with the worship of Mahāyāna saints or bodhisattvas than with following the practical teachings of the
Buddha. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu attempted to show that Zen does not fit this narrow definition and so should not be called a part of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In trying to dissociate his borrowing of a Zen concept from what most Thai Buddhists regard as being Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu claimed that:


It was Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s own translation into Thai of various Zen works which has led the popularization of that sect’s ideas among a formerly uninterested Thai readership. Chamnong Tongprasert, a scholar at the Royal Institute, says that:

"It is Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s borrowing from other traditions - Mahāyāna, Zen and Taoism - that has made his teachings too deep for the matter of fact approach of traditional adherents to Theravāda Buddhism and has left him open to criticism.” (Sivaraksa, 1990, p.259)

"The difficulties facing this morality in contemporary Thailand have been noted by critics of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Some, who say it will bring Buddhism to its end, mean an end of the traditional religious system focusing on merit making for the benefit of the monks. Other critics say it is impossible or even dangerous to ask the laity to behave with and empty mind (cit-wang) because lay persons would not fulfill their social duties. Sivaraksa mentions this aspect to Bodhirak in his book claiming that it is not realistic because it does not take into account the fact that people need norms, markers, and precise precepts. He sees its effect as already having caused immorality in Thai society.” (Sivaraksa, 1990, pp.223-224)
4.3.2 The Positive Opinions on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s “Cit-Wang” and it’s Compatibility with Social Action.

From this critical study Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s re-interpretation of Dhamma has received much criticism from writers, monks, religious teachers and students, and laity who both agree and disagree with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Therefore in this section I will examine the positive opinions of other scholars in reaction to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s presentation of empty-mind (cit-wang) in Thai society.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s methods of teaching about empty-mind (cit-wang) emphasized different things depending on the period he was teaching in. These can be broken down into four main periods. In the first period, when Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat (1908-1963) was resisting Communism, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized emptiness suññatā, not clinging or “cit-wang.” In the second period, after the time of Gen. Salit until Mahāvīpyāyoga Day 14 October 1972, (2516 B.E.), he still emphasized the practice of “cit-wang”, but criticized Thai society with even more clarity. In the third period, after Mahāvīpyāyoga Day until the tragedy on October 6, 1976, (2519 B.E.), he emphasized the necessity of developing oneself and using peaceful methods to overcome problems. Finally in the fourth period, after the 6 October until the time of his death, he emphasized the analysis of belief systems and the practices of Buddhists (Bhadraporn Sirikanchana, The core of Buddhism in the View of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu). Cited in Veerachart Nimanong, 2009, p.269).

There was much criticism about the presentation of the concept of empty-mind (cit-wang), with claims that this teaching was far too difficult and unintelligible, or that it was teaching in the style of the Mahāyāna. People claimed that the notion of “cit-wang” was external to the Pāli Canon (Tipitaka). The following are some positive opinions from well-know religious persons (both lay and monastic) in reaction to Buddhadasa’s works:
The scholar Peter Jackson described Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “cit-wang” in his book *Buddhāsa: Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World* in the following manner:

“For Buddhāsa Bhikkhu, “cit wang” is the key to understanding the religious goal of Buddhism and it the basis of the practice to attain that goal both in individual life and in social life. But while Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “cit-wang” is based upon notions found in the canonical literature, in particular the notion of suññatā or “voidness,” it has not historically received much attention in Theravāda Buddhism. Suññatā or “cit-wang” has in general been a secondary concept used to explain more central notions such as anattā, not-self and anicca, impermanence.... Buddhāsa Bhikkhu cannot justify his emphasis on them by referring to either the Thai tradition of scriptural interpretation or to the later commentary literature used to support that Tradition.” (Peter Jackson, 1988, p.89)

There is interesting quotation from Phra Phromkhunāporn (P.A. Payutto), the abbot of Nānvesakavan Temple:

“When we analyze the teaching of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu, we must have a meritorious mind. It means we have to learn his work, to apply it for the real practice and teaching, and to share it with others in order to give happiness to them... Buddhāsa Bhikkhu serves the Buddha. When we study his works and have an opportunity to organize the 100th Year Anniversary of his Birth, we also serve Buddhāsa Bhikkhu. It means we serve both the Buddha and Buddhāsa Bhikkhu.” (Sukhapab Jai, 2006, p. 14-15)

Another great Buddhist monk, Phra Phrohm-mangkalājarn (Paññānanda Bhikkhu), a well-known contemporary of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu said that:

“One day Buddhāsa Bhikkhu was invited to speak about “What are Suññatā and the Abhidhamma” at the ‘Buddhasamākām’ (The Buddha Association of Thailand). He mentioned that, “the Abhidhamma is not the word of Buddha.” This statement received strong criticism from the Abhidhamma’s followers, both lay and ordained. They claimed that Buddhāsa Bhikkhu had distorted the Buddha’s teachings and argued that the
term “suññatā” does not exist in the Tipiṭaka. Later at Dhammasat University, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu taught the same topic of suññatā and handed out a number of Tipiṭaka book reference to the audience, the opposing audience realized that the word “suññatā” genuinely exists in Tipiṭaka....Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu did not write a new Dhamma, but simply clarified the original scriptures where the real meaning is hidden. No one realizes this, but he tried to pick it up and make it more attractive for everyone. If there was no Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu in Thailand, we would not be able to study this profound Dhamma.” (Sukhapab jai, 2006, pp. 7-8). Cited in Supavadee pp.82-83

In the research paper: The Study of Suññatā in Theravāda Buddhism, 1982 written by Phrathephodhivides (Thongyod Bhuripalo), the Official Chief Abbot of the Royal Thai Monastery in the Eastern Zone (Wat Thai Buddhgayā, India), it is stated about Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu that:

“Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu may be regarded as a conservative and rational thinker, for as a conservative thinker, he holds the view that all the teaching of the Buddha are including in suññatā (Stp.ii.pp.261-62), and suññatā is the heart of the Buddha’s teachings (Stp.II.pp.264-65). The Buddha never taught anything but suññatā (Stp.ii.p.273)...and as rational thinker, he holds the view that practice of the Dhamma and day-to-day work must go together side by side, they should not be separated from each other as some ignorant people hold: “to practice Dhamma one must be at Temple, and do the work one must be at home (Nr.pp.21-22) ....For this reason he encourages all old and young Buddhists to perform every kind of task with an empty mind (cit-wang) either at the office or at home (Nr.p.19).” (Phramaha Thongyod Bhuripalo, 1962, pp.316-317)

At the same time Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was fortunate to be supported by Somdej Phrabuddhaghosajāra (Charoen ṇānavorathera) who at that time was essentially the highest-standing member of the monastic order. However, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu himself was not interested in whether people supported him or not. He taught the Dhamma with an empty-mind (cit-wang) and so did not have to waste time worrying about keeping up his image or protecting his reputation. In fact he said that to protect one’s reputation was the behavior of a corrupt and deceptive person. People with pure intentions should not have to protect their reputation even a little bit. (Siamrat weekly journal, Issuse 53, Sunday 6-12 June 1993).
Another Thai scholar Suwanna Satha-Anand, the writer of *Thesis of Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand*, referred to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu as follows:

"Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu presented the Buddhist teaching very perfectly, because he approached the philosophical explanation of the core of Buddhism. Thus Thai Theravāda is able to develop the explanation of Buddhist teaching in a different way." (Suwanna Satha-Anand, 1990, p.10)

Sathirapong Wanapok's (another famous commentator) stance towards Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu seems to have been driven more by a genuine concern for Buddhism, rather than any actual objection towards Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. When asked whether it was correct that he disagreed with Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's interpretation of Dhamma, he replied that that was not the case, Sathirapong actually wrote positively about Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu in many instances, such as the following extract:

"Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's style of teaching is not the same as anyone else. He speaks slowly and goes on and on, but it doesn't make you bored or restless. In fact it's the opposite. The more you listen the more excited you get because he uses strong language that touches the mind. Sometimes he is strict and severe, stimulating you to think about certain points at certain intervals. Each word that comes out of him is powerful and challenges one's understanding in strange ways. For example, the phrases "tua ku khong ku" (me and mine) or "tai sia gorn tai" (to die before you die). There was one time that he really stimulated his audience, really stimulated their nerves, when he gave the talk "The Mountain of Buddhist Methods." He said, "Buddha statues are a Mountain blocking the way to realization of Dhamma." His talks on suññatā or "cit-wang" were another subject that caused agitation until important people such as M.R. Khukrit Pramot and some columnists of Siam Rat Newspaper continually stuck him on the front cover of their newspapers. This reaction actually turned out to be a good thing, that is, it made people become more interested in the things that he taught. His style stuns people with its enigmatic Dhamma riddles that force people to stop and think - the effect is immediate. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu summarized the core of Buddhism in few words, but it covers the entire scope of pariyatti (theory), patipatti (practice) and (pativedha) (true knowledge), namely, "there is absolutely nothing that should be clung to" (sabbe dhamā nalam abhinivesāya)." (Sathirapong Wanapok, 2006, p.183)
From this critical study, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's presentation of "cit-wang" met with a variety of feedback both in agreement and disagreement, until the conflict became a very heated matter. Those who expressed their opinion on the matter were not enlightened and simply used their worldly wisdom to analyze transcendent matters, which are indeed not the territory of rational thought. Since the multiplicity of rational thought is unlimited, the natural consequence is conflict of opinions.

According to the standard Theravāda position, "cit-wang" is not possible, because unless one is enlightened there will always be latent defilements influencing the mind.

The Zen school of the Mahayāna sect claims that it is possible for the mind to be temporarily free from defilement, namely "cit-wang," because the mind is fundamentally of a pure and radiant nature. The adventitious defilements arise subsequent to the pure mind.

If one understood all the different sects and schools of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy, there would be no need to waste time arguing over such matters, because we would understand that, "This sect thinks like this, that school thinks like that" and so on.

In fact, when people study the pure Buddha-Dhamma in the Tipiṭaka deeply and truly, they will find that Buddhādasa Bhikkhu's interpretation and teaching do not stray from the essence of Buddha-Dhamma, since the concept of "cit-wang" is consistent with the theme of suññatā in the Tipiṭaka. Buddhādasa Bhikkhu aimed to help Thai people understand the core of Buddhism. The core of Buddhism is indeed not else from the ideology of suññatā and anattā as captured in the concept of "cit-wang". The presentation of linguistics may be different, but the purpose is not different.
4.4. The View of Academics Regarding Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s Influence on Buddhist Reformation in Thailand

The origins of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s reformist intention and of his break with the doctrinal conservatism typical of Thai Buddhism are complex. Political, economic, and cultural influences from the West triggered the development of Buddhist reform movements in modern day Thailand. These reform movements acted as bases for reinterpreting Buddhist doctrines and views, which led Buddhāsa Bhikkhu to declare a return to the original wisdom and insight of the Buddha. Indeed, it was his reformist views rather than the precise details of his ascetic practice that have drawn the most praise and are therefore the primary object of this study. Donald Swearer stated that,

“Buddhāsa Bhikkhu has been called a reformer... a reformer is someone astute in returning to the ancient teachers and in returning to the original teachings. Such a person is an opponent of teachings which have been so embellished as to lose the way, interpreting the original teachings so that they are in line with the changing society and with the new generation. A reformer communicates the culture and basic institutions of old by steadfastly keeping to their core and to saccakhamma, interpreting appropriately for the situations which actually arise in the new society.” (Swearer, 1982, p.7).

Moreover, Peter Jackson noted that the key to understanding the significance of much of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s doctrinal reinterpretation lies in realizing that both his teachings and his personal history as a renunciate monk meet the pressing social and religious needs of that group of educated Thai Buddhists who desire a religion which is consistent with their modernist view of the world and with their roles as agents of their country’s socioeconomic development. Peter Jackson stated that,

“While sections of Buddhāsa Bhikkhu’s work can be seen as straightforward attempts to demythologize or rationalize Buddhist teachings,
other sections of his work are explicitly concerned with the social and political role of Buddhism in modern Thailand.” (Jackson, 2003, p.64)

Furthermore, a significant determinant of the high degree of support for Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s reinterpretative work from progressive sections of the elite derives from his dissociation from the conservative Sangha hierarchy. Progressive Thai Buddhists support Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu because of his commitment to a Buddhist-based notion of development which is founded upon a critique of traditional interpretations of religion sponsored by both the official Sangha hierarchy and the majority of the traditionalist sections of the elite. Seri Phongphit, and academic philosopher, characterized Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s popularity among progressive intellectuals as follows:

“His (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s) line of thought has an influence on a large number of Thai intellectuals, thinkers and writers and he seems to be accepted and admired by intellectuals more than by other groups, especially since 14 October 1973 when his thought-as presented by himself and by others-has become increasingly clearly concerned with social and political affairs.” (Seri Phongphit, 1982, p.33)

The progressives seek a new Thai Buddhist identity which both defines their cultural uniqueness and their place in the world. Phra Pacha Pasanadhammo, a follower of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, explained the cultural importance attached to Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s work as follows,

“Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu is an important person who points out the true core of being Thai that we should protect, that we should be proud of and should support and nurture. At the same time, he does not refrain from criticizing our weak points ... But what is even more important is that he is a person who can progress from “Thai-ness” through Buddhism to also be a universalist.” (Pacha Pasanadhammo, 1983, pp.1-61)
There is a notable lack of criticism from members of the Sangha with regard to the work of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Peter Jackson explains that the reason for this is that the official Sangha body in Thailand only spoke out against work that either was in direct contradiction with the laws or was detrimental to the well-being of the state. The Sangha had no authority to proscribe the interpretation of Buddhist texts. And since Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu himself carefully practiced according to the disciplinary code for monks, there was therefore no reason to make any criticism of his work.

In conclusion, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s work exists at a juncture of trends: of Buddhist reform movements, of the rationalization of the religion due to the impact of Western notions, and of the need of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s own social stratum of the educated Buddhist elite for an alternative Buddhist ideology to promote their interests within the Thai social order. The details of his reinterpretations have their source in both theoretical and social influences, which must be taken into account in order to comprehensively understand Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s work.
5.1 Conclusion

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” has been systematically presented step-by-step and soundly linked together with reasoning. He stated that the important causes of modern problems were 1. People, 2. Linked to the state of Buddhism, 3. Materialist thinking and 4. Weakness in Dhamma teaching as theory but not as practice. He also proposed a number of methods for dealing with these problems. In terms of people, since there are a great variety of characters and ways of thinking then it is necessary to adapt the method of teaching to suit the particular group one is targeting. The principles of Buddhism must be explained in a way that they can be absorbed by all people. He also proposed that to aim for sensual gratification superior to what is necessary according to nature was caused by deluded clinging to the sense of self. This delusion then gave rise to increased materialism, which in turn produced a more and more selfish attitude until one began to harm oneself, others and the environment. As for education about morality and virtue, this was simply limited to the theoretical aspect, because in practice these qualities were nowhere to be found. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu advocated theoretical knowledge only in small proportion and only to the extent that it could be usefully put into practice, For example, a lot of scholastic or academic knowledge did not lead one to practice any better. Also, practice must go beyond rites, rituals and ceremonies, and all supernatural sciences. And if there were no shortcut or secret hint then practice would be difficult.

It can also be seen that “cit-wang” as a method for eliminating suffering has been presented systematically in terms of the Four Noble Truths by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. It starts off by identifying that the problem of clinging is Suffering (dukkha), people’s slavery to materialism is the Cause of Suffering (samudaya), the abandoning of clinging to the sense of self is the Cessation of Suffering (nirodha),
and the practice of Ānāpānasati-sāmaññhī is the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (magga).

Four main conclusions have been reached through this research. Firstly, regarding the debate over the term “cit-wang” and its origins, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained that he created this term as an alternative to the word suññatā as it was easier to understand, remember and speak about. He said that the origins of this term were in fact canonical, but it was simply reworded to make it more accessible to the ordinary person.

This study of the concept of “cit-wang” is an application of the interpretation methods of desanābāra and vicayāhāra in the Nettipakaraṇa, which is a way of presenting Dhamma that demonstrates the advantages, disadvantages, benefits and down-sides with regard to the understanding of “cit-wang.” However, my research has been based on the theoretical aspects of “cit-wang” which appear in books and documents. In order to render this study more complete it would be necessary to specifically study the real-life practice of “cit-wang”. There are in fact many ways of practicing “cit-wang,” such as “cit-wang” for the development of the mind, “cit-wang” applied when performing work in everyday life, “cit-wang” for the development of society and the nation, “cit-wang” for the attainment of enlightenment and so on. A more complete study would have to include a detailed investigation of the results of the real-life practice of “cit-wang” to see whether it really does give fruits in everyday life as claimed. Such practical research might help Buddhists to better understand “cit-wang” and would help to provide clarity and depth to this much debated topic.

The teaching of “cit-wang” by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is very similar to the teaching of suññatā in the Tipiṭaka. Their meaning, their importance, the way of practicing them and the fruits arising from that practice are all more or less the same, but the state of “cit-wang” and suññatā (emptiness) are also different. Suññatā is a state of being empty of creatures, people, self, me, him, her, or in other words the state in which the Five Aggregates are not-self. As for “cit-wang”, this term was used only by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and is a state of mind that is empty of defilements that
cling to the Five Aggregates as ‘me’ or ‘mine’, which leads to selfishness. This Dhamma teaching was intended by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to be a way of practice that could be applied in everyday life.

The term suññatā (emptiness) has two meanings. Firstly, the emptiness of the world refers to the fact that there is no self to be found in the world. There is merely the meeting together of elements, which gives rise to the mundane concept of ‘self’, ‘person’, me, him, her. Secondly, the emptiness of the mind has the meaning that wisdom (pañña) is present in the mind, or to use congruent terminology it is empty of defilements. This means that one does not cling to these concepts of ‘self’, ‘person’ me, him, her, as being their own individual self or the selves of others. It is a state of mind that understands that those concepts are merely natural phenomena, both conditioned and unconditioned.

Therefore, it can be summarized that the concept of “cit-wang” already appeared in the Theravāda scriptures under the name of suññatā. There is mention of the emptiness of three things, namely, the Five Aggregates are empty, the world is empty, (this term being synonymous with the Five Aggregates) and suññatā-vihāradhamma, which means living life with mindfulness and clear comprehension (satisampajāñña) that sees that everything is empty of “self”, and the supreme emptiness is Nibbāna, which refers to the mind being empty of the various binding defilements.

Secondly, it is important to note that in using the term “cit-wang”, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu did not intend a mind that was empty of all feelings and thinking. The meaning of “empty” in this instance refers specifically to the lack of identification with a sense of “me” or “mine”. Or to phrase it another way the mind is not overpowered by defilements and exists in its original, natural condition, namely, with mindfulness and wisdom. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also coined a term to express the state opposite to “cit-wang”, namely ‘cit-wun’, which is a mind swayed by the defilements lost to its original nature (which is naturally empty) and completely lacking in
mindfulness and wisdom. The mind is therefore chaotic ("wun-wai") because it is
overpowered by the feeling of "me" and "mine".

Another meaning of "cit-wang" is empty of lobha (greed), dosa (hatred) and
moha (delusion) or in other words empty from clinging to anything as being "mine"
or empty of self and anything pertaining to the self.

It can also be seen that the ideas of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu have been influenced
by the Zen view of One Mind or Original Mind as being equivalent to suññatā, and
thus to "cit-wang". In other words, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu equates the Zen notion of
"pure original mind" with the Theravāda Pāli term Pabhassara, which denotes the
original mental state which is free from unwholesome defilements.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's presentation of the concept of "cit-wang" rests on the
explanation of all things (including the mind) as having emptiness as their
fundamental nature. With respect to the mind, not only is it fundamentally empty, but
it also has a basic original nature of radiance (pabhassara). This means that it is
naturally equipped with mindfulness and wisdom that understands the truth that all
things have a fundamental nature of emptiness. But the reason that the mind sees
things in contradiction to the reality is because it fabricates and clings to the delusion
of "me" and "mine". Under the influence of the defilements of craving (taṇhā),
mindfulness and wisdom are covered over and not able to exhibit their radiance
(pabhassara). When people go clinging to a feeling of "self" or things belonging to
that self, then that is considered as the arising of suffering (dukkha) in itself.
Therefore the most direct way to alleviate suffering that arises from the delusion of
self is to turn the mind back to its original state before it began to fabricate the
delusion of self, or before it began to be clouded by craving. According to the theory,
this can be done by going backwards on the chain of Paticca-samuppāda (Dependent
Origination), that is to stop the process of fabrication that occurs upon making contact
with the world, which leads one in to the "arising of suffering" chain of Dependent
Origination. One has to completely cut the progression of the Dependent Origination,
so that suffering has nothing to "depend on" to cause it to arise.
Thirdly, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu recognized the Dependent Origination as being a process that demonstrated both the arising and ceasing of suffering, in terms of causes and conditions that are systematically linked and dependent on each other. The most prominent causes of suffering are *avijja* (ignorance), *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging). These three defilements both cause each other to arise and depend on each other. Ignorance or not knowing the truth is a subtle defilement and exists on the root level. Ignorance creates the conditions for the arising of craving which has both a positive and negative tendency, and craving produces the conditions for clinging, which grasps to the feeling of a self and thus creates the conditions for further suffering. The Lord Buddha taught that the Five Aggregates, when grasped at, are the cause leading to suffering. (S.III.68). Therefore, in concord with the words of the Buddha, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu claimed that clinging is the most direct cause of suffering and was the starting point of all problems.

This line of reasoning leads to the search for a means to return to the pure, original mind. Therefore, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s method of practice emphasized a path to realize the original, eternal purity of the mind, free from clinging. This original mind, when discovered, will no longer be susceptible to the corrupting influence of ignorance and craving.

As a means of alleviating suffering and realizing the empty mind, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu suggested the practice of the sixteen steps of Ānāpānasati or mindfulness of in-and-out breathing. This Buddhist method of practice aims in itself to bring about the arising of mindfulness and wisdom, clear comprehension (*sampajāññā*) and concentration (*samādhi*). With these tools in hand one is then prepared to cut the stream of the Dependent Origination, eliminating the causes that might produce clinging and therefore suffering.

Apart from this Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also taught a ‘short-cut’ method of *vipassanā* (insight) so that those with limited time might be able to practice more conveniently. In the beginning one must maintain awareness of the in-and-out breathing until one sees that it is just breathing – it is not a person, a creature, a self, me, him or her. Then one acknowledges the breath as being simply Nāma-Rupa.
(mentality-corporeality) or the Five Aggregates; as being impermanent; as being not-
self; as leading to dispassion; as being subject to cessation and as being something to be renounced. The aim is that through observing the fundamental nature of the breath, or other bodily positions, one may destroy the deluded clinging to the sense of self in all aspects of one’s life.

Lastly, studying and analyzing the subject of “cit-wang” we can see Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s display of genius. He was able to take fundamental principles from the Tipiṭaka and adapt them so as to be suitable for a much changed society, directly responding to the new climate of globalization. Even though the practice of “cit-wang” could potentially lead one to at least partial realization of Dhamma (truth), but since it conflicts with the basic mind-state of many Thai people and their basic understanding of Buddhism, then perhaps the Thai society is not ready to reap the benefits that might be had from the practice of this teaching. Even though the concept of “cit-wang” may not be able to realize its full potential as a method of practice amongst many social groups, but at least if it is able to transform people’s experience of work from being a chore to being a form of practice, then it can be considered that it is fulfilling the aims of the Buddha to a certain extent.

In my point of view, the empty mind is impossible for one who is not a Noble One (ariya-puggala). However, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was aiming to help ordinary Thai people understand the core of Buddhism. Even though practicing according to the concept of empty mind (cit-wang) can only temporarily alleviate suffering on some occasions, it is still very useful. The presentation of linguistics is different, but the purpose is not different. If we employ the standard that the Buddha aimed to teach only what is practically beneficial in real life, that could solve life’s real problems and that could be practically applied, then Buddhadāsa Bikkhu noted that the Buddha-Dhamma could potentially benefit everyone. It would be better to expand the sphere in which the Buddha-Dhamma could be of practical benefit to all, and not just the monastic order as had previously been the case. The concept of “cit-wang” is therefore a clear way of presenting Buddhist practice for the ordinary person.
This study found that in terms of the conception of empty-mind (cit-wang), Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu employed two methods of interpretation in Buddhism, namely Desanāhāra (conveying of teaching) and Vicayahāra (investigation), which appear in the theory of interpretation in the Nettipakarana text. There is also an example of the use of 'Dhamma Dialogue' (Dhammasākacchā) in the debate between Khukrit Pramot with Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu on the matter of “empty-mind” (cit-wang). This is a means for eliminating delusion and doubt or wrong understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. This type of instruction must also be able to be examined with regard to the Four Noble Truths and categorized in the “Graduated Sermon” (anupuppikathā). Therefore, Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” is based on the Buddha’s teaching but rephrased using Phāsā Khon, Phāsā Tham, finds backing in the interpretative method put forward in the “Nettipakaraṇa”.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis focused on Buddhadāsa bhikkhu’s concept of “cit-wang” with relation to Theravāda Buddhism. There are many important teachings that are related to concept of “cit-wang”, such as Nibbāna, anattā (not-self), suññatā (emptiness), Tathata (suchess) and Idappaccayatā (Paticca-samuppāda). Of special importance is the subject of suññatā, whose meaning covers also the concepts of aniccām (impermanence), dukkham (suffering) and anattā (non-self), and is the basis for the notion of “cit-wang.” Most Buddhists believe that the teaching on suññatā or “cit-wang” is a very profound teaching only suitable for those who have renounced worldly life. However, even though it is a profound subject dealing with supra-mundane matters it is also suitable for the average person who still has to earn a livelihood. If all people studied and correctly understood the subject of suññatā or emptiness, they would probably very much appreciate this teaching, because their minds would be undisturbed and un-chaotic. As stated by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu himself, “Everyone likes emptiness, no-one likes chaos.” Since mental chaos and irritation are causes for people’s suffering, if people do not want to suffer, they should thoroughly understand the subject of emptiness. The Buddha taught emptiness to people without discriminating upon whether they were a monk or a lay person, because he saw that an understanding of emptiness could be of great benefit to anyone who sincerely practiced it.
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Name Surname Maechee Chamnien Saengsin
Date of Birth March 12, 1963
Place of Birth Amphur Ampavā, Samut Songkhram Province
Present Place of Residence: Wat Chanasonkhram-rajavoramahāvihāram, Phranakorn District, Bangkok 10200
E-mail: nunchamnien48@hotmail.com, Tel.085-1403186

Educational Status
1969-1974 Primary School Education at Wat ladpeng School, Amphur Muang, Samut Songkram Province
1977-present Ordained as a nun at Wat Busayabunpata, Phrachuabkirikhun Province
1984-1986 Non-formal high school Education Center Suphunburi Province
1987 Completed the highest grade of Abhidhamma Studies at Wat klang, Ampur Bangplāma at Suphunburi Province, branch of Abhidhammashotikavidya1aya
1997 Completed the nine levels of Pāli Studies at Wat suwannaphumi Suphunburi Province
2000 Received Bachelors Degree in Religious Studies at Mahidol University
2004 Received Master of Arts in Sanskrit majoring in Department of Oriental Language at Silpākorn University
Present Currently completing in Ph.D. Degree in the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University (ABAC) of Thailand, majoring in Religious Studies

Working Experience
1998-2001 Committee Member of the Thai Nun Institute
2003- 2004 Graduate volunteer teaching Social Science and English in the Primary
School at Wat Chanasongkram, Phranakorn District, Bangkok

2006-Present  Assigned to teach third Language (Pāli) of the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion of Doctoral Degree Programs, Assumption University (ABAC)

2009-Present  Teach Abhidhamma at Sunday Buddhist Center of Mahāmakut Buddhist University

2007-Present  Appointed as the Chairperson of Pālisikkhā Association

2011–present  Teach Buddhadhamma at Wat Chanasongkram School, as a part of the Project of The Monk Teacher of Buddhadhamma teaching in School of Mahāmakut Buddhist University