

CHAPTER SIX



CONCLUSION

The material in this study has been organized in such a way that each chapter is able to stand as an independent unit which deals with a specific aspect of the investigation. Explanations and interpretations have been given along with the results of the teacher interviews. This chapter will only elaborate on some significant points and offer final conclusions and suggestions.

6.1 Discussion of Results of the Study

In considering the teacher's motivation as it relates to merit making, one must be careful not to make too many distinctions which are based exclusively on definitions and conceptions which may be clear only in the mind of the observer. In section 5.8 when asked for a definition, a compelling majority of Bangkok's teachers assimilated the concept of *witthayadana* with giving and teaching. These concepts were not seen as independent, but complementary. While there may be some variation between the normative and operative beliefs regarding the philosophy of Alms of Knowledge, it is more likely that the results of this study indicate considerable overlap between the concepts of *dana* and *witthayadana*.

With this basic understanding in place, current teachers can be identified as highly motivated individuals who see life in a big picture where *dana*, not *witthayadana*, is a controlling factor. Remembering the emphasis placed on *dana* in early Buddhist thought (section 3.2) it should be obvious why Bangkok teachers follow the same path, given their religious preference as stated in section 4.3. The resulting self-satisfaction claimed by those interviewed must be assumed to stem from this same value system.

Starting with their current feelings and motivations as examined in section 5.2, more than 90% of the teachers had positive feelings about their jobs. More than 60% of them freely admitted that the opportunity to work with young people in an educational setting was the main reason for their dedication to the task.

In section 5.2.3, teachers were given an opportunity to rank a number of potential motives as to their importance. If a strict interpretation of *witthayadana* were to be used as a benchmark, then only 4% of the teachers would be teaching for meritorious reasons. If, however, a more liberal view is taken where love for the nation, concern for the disadvantaged, and a desire to help students are grouped together as expressions of *dana*, the percentages change drastically. When the emphasis is thus put on alms, two-thirds or 66% of the teachers can be understood to be making merit by giving.

The same principle can be used to understand the results from section 5.3.1, where teachers were asked for examples of how they make merit. Strictly speaking, less than 5% listed the action of imparting knowledge as their prime method of making merit. But when the definition is broadened and the action of *dana* is identified--whether it be the giving of money, knowledge, food or energy--approximately 90% of the teachers claimed it as their chief motivation.

When asked about teaching being a source of merit, more than 80% replied in the affirmative and about 85% of the teachers agreed that the principle of Alms of Knowledge applied to what they were doing. These figures support previous data only if the definitions of *dana* and *witthayadana* are allowed to blend into a concept where all forms of giving are encouraged and accepted.

6.2 Insights Gained from the Study

From a personal perspective, this project has proven to be a source of new appreciation for those who have dedicated themselves to educating Bangkok's children. Even though this writer's grandparents were both public school teachers in the United States, his father's degree was in Secondary Education and his wife is currently an elementary school classroom teacher, he had allowed himself to be influenced by critics. It became easy to assume that only family members were genuine teachers in the traditional sense and agree with those who were eager to berate other teachers for a lack of commitment. Although there is a certain sense of

urgency felt when statistics are quoted which chronicle the departure of so many of the nation's educators from the classroom, these statistics do not address the resolution of those who remain. If individuals are not driven by an intense desire to teach, perhaps it is better for them to rotate to more lucrative positions elsewhere, but it is improper to assume that all other teachers have the same irresponsible feelings.

While each of the educators met during the course of this project were uniquely different, with a wide variety of skills and abilities, there were none of them who indicated a cavalier or disdainful attitude toward their occupation. There were some voices of concern which spoke out against student attitudes, administration mistakes and the inconsistencies found in society, but almost all were unified in a desire to place the process of education in a most favorable light. While many continued to teach at considerable personal sacrifice, all portrayed an admirable commitment to what they were doing.

A second revelation dealt with the pervasive influence of *dana* in Thai society. Thailand has long been known as the "Land of Smiles" and a favorite destination for world travelers who are attracted by the gracious hospitality found here. In contrast to equally beautiful countries south of this nation, there has developed a real appreciation for the way in which visitors are treated in this society. The possibility that the Buddhist concept of *dana* could be the major factor which makes the Thai people so charming has been, until now, overlooked. Assuming that teachers are representative of society as a whole, this research has opened the door to a

deeper understanding of how Thai people are able to get along so well in traffic, business, politics and other competitive endeavors. If the teachers approach to *witthayadana* is typical of the ways in which other parts of society deal with their own motivations, then *dana* is indeed a most important element for students of the culture to understand.

6.3 Suggestions

For the benefit of school children in Thailand, the two issues of merit and motivation must continue to be fused to form an attractive base for the training, recruitment and maintenance of quality educators. Following are some ideas which might help reduce the gap between teachers who accept the principle of *witthayadana* and those who do not yet understand the premise.

First, the profession of educator must be again lifted to its deserved lofty level. This process can be initiated by the immediate increase in the flow of money available for the Ministry of Education to use as teacher support. Salaries must be raised to a level high enough to attract a larger number of qualified individuals. Benefit packages must be generous enough to relieve the undercurrent of dissatisfaction now flowing through some of the nation's campuses.

In addition, such concerns as the Office of Research Fund Promotion and the National Institute of Development Administration must work together with the Ministry of Education to help plot educational

development in this era of globalization. By listening to and following their reasoned arguments, quality staff can be retained and confidence in the Thai educational system will be restored. When teachers are again held in honor and the destructive pattern of brain drain is arrested, it will no longer be necessary for Thai students to travel abroad to get what they conceive to be a “good education”.

While this institutional approach will be necessary for long-term improvement, one must not overlook the importance of individual motivation. All teachers must once again be attracted by a social conscience which provides meaning and satisfaction in return for the offering of their lives in service of the nation’s school children. In a classic school administration text dealing with the issue of teacher motivation and performance in the United States, the first principle listed was “Belief of the worker in the importance of his work socially.” (Hagman, 1951) Although times have changed and the culture is different, the importance of this motive for Thai teachers cannot be overstated.

Currently, many teachers in Bangkok appear to have been first attracted to their occupation for less-than-noble reasons. These methods of stimulation can be altered to produce teachers who are gratified to see themselves as important and respected links in the nation’s social fabric. Just as elite military forces are able to generate a positive identity which attracts others who are willing to make significant sacrifices, so teachers can lead the way as men and women who fill important roles in the development of the country.

As soon as practical, standards for teacher recruitment must be raised to reflect their renewed level of respect. While it remains possible for teachers to “get lost” in a city the size of Bangkok, administrators must encourage their faculty to live on a moral plain which is higher than other segments of society. Although this disparity will likely meet some resistance from teachers already caught-up in the fast lane of modern life, it will help to restore the traditional sense of respect which has recently been lacking. Students will once again have opportunity to be impressed with the old-fashioned values which have served previous generations so well, and open the door for continued renewal of the concept of *witthayadana*.

The acquisition of merit via *dana* and *witthayadana* is a primary motivation for the capital’s teachers following the historical foundation which has been laid. As long as any aspect of this notion is allowed to remain dormant, however, a viable source of motivation is being wasted. If the Ministry of Education can further cultivate the concept of *witthayadana* as a major benefit of teaching, it is believed that an increase in the number of dedicated teachers would be realized and the quality of education as seen in the classroom would improve.

At a recent seminar which discussed the matter of Alms of Knowledge, Dr. Ekavidya Nathalang made the succinct observation that there are currently four different types of persons teaching in Bangkok today. They are:

1. The Teacher who genuinely cares for the student and provides everything necessary in the classic educational sense. This relationship is based on individual concern and transcends the classroom setting.
2. The Professor has a contractual relationship with his students, suggesting that “I will teach and you will learn.” This approach is educationally sound, but lacks personal interaction.
3. The Lecturer is a temporary visitor to the school who has no relationship with the students outside the classroom. He can visit briefly and leave without making a significant impact on those listening.
4. The One Who Sells His Voice will talk on any topic desired, whether he is competent to do so or not. This person has a mercenary outlook on his work.

Almost all teachers should be able to fit into one of the above classifications. Early forms of Thai education were fortunate to have a large percentage of men who were Teachers (group #1 above) in the traditional sense. Their association with the Sangha encouraged selfless dedication to their students which resulted in the making of personal merit. Fortunately, many educators of this quality are still in place. Although they may not be exactly like the early teachers who wore the saffron robes, they show a very similar desire to share their knowledge with others. A realistic goal of the Ministry of Education should be to encourage the less

dedicated teachers to work their way up this ladder of classification by changing their approach to tutelage. Those who are merely Selling their Voices could become Lecturers, Lecturers could turn into Professors, while Professors strive to be real Teachers. A clear understanding of the concept of *witthayadana*, Alms of Knowledge, would be an important factor for those serious about making such a pilgrimage.



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