

## Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's Concept of Empty-Mind (*Cit-Wang*): Analytical Study

### แนวคิดเรื่อง “จิตว่าง” ของพระพุทธทาสภิกขุ: ศึกษาวิเคราะห์

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#### ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are, firstly, to analyze Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's view of empty-mind (*cit-wang*) in relation to the wider context of Theravāda Buddhism. Secondly, this paper will then examine Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's concept of “*cit-wang*” in connection to the idea of *suññatā* in Theravāda Buddhism. Lastly, this study will detail the view of other scholars with regard to “*cit-wang*” and examine the application of “*cit-wang*” to Thai society. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu coined the Thai term ‘*cit-wang*,’ or empty-mind as a modern application of the original Buddhist term ‘*suññatā*’ as found in the Pāli Canon. Nevertheless, there has been a great deal of controversy as to whether Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's reinterpretation is in fact an accurate representation of the Buddha's teachings. Many critics and scholars praised Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu for his genius in bringing the obscure Buddhist term of *suññatā* into the forefront of Buddhist practice, while others branded him a heretic who would herald the downfall of the Buddhist religion. This study has concluded that Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's interpretation of “*cit-wang*” or “empty-mind” does in fact correspond to the concept of “*suññatā*” as found in the original Pāli Canon, the most authoritative text in Theravāda Buddhism. Both “*cit-wang*” and *suññatā* cover the same concept of truth, namely, that all phenomena are empty of self or things related to the self. Moreover, since the concept of “*cit-wang*” is expressed through the more accessible medium of ‘Everyday Language’ (as opposed to ‘Dhamma Language’) it has succeeded in making Buddhist spiritual practice applicable in the everyday life of modern day people in Thai society.

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### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์วิเคราะห์แนวคิดเรื่อง “จิตว่าง” ในวรรณคดีของพระพุทธทาส และในคัมภีร์ศาสนาพุทธเถรวาท และวิเคราะห์ “จิตว่าง” ของพระพุทธทาส และ “สุญญตา” ในคัมภีร์ศาสนาพุทธเถรวาท รวมทั้งศึกษามุมมองของนักวิชาการบนแนวคิดเรื่อง “จิตว่าง” และการประยุกต์ใช้ “จิตว่าง” ในสังคมไทย คำว่า “จิตว่าง” เป็นคำไทยใช้เฉพาะพระพุทธทาส ประยุกต์มาจากคำว่า “สุญญตา” ในคำสอนศาสนาพุทธดั้งเดิมที่พบในพระไตรปิฎก อย่างไรก็ตาม มีการถกเถียงกันมากกว่า การตีความของพระพุทธทาสถูกต้องตามคำสอนของพระพุทธเจ้าหรือไม่ นักวิเคราะห์และนักวิชาการบางคนยกย่องพระพุทธทาสว่า เป็นผู้เฉลียวฉลาดสามารถนำ “สุญญตา” ซึ่งเป็นคำสอนลึกซึ้ง มาเป็นสิ่งที่ชาวพุทธสามารถปฏิบัติได้ ฝ่ายตรงกันข้ามวิจารณ์ว่า พระพุทธทาสเป็นพระภิกษุผู้ทำลายพระพุทธศาสนาให้เสื่อม การศึกษานี้สรุปว่า การตีความเรื่อง “จิตว่าง” ของพระพุทธทาสมีความสอดคล้องกับคำว่า “สุญญตา” ในพระไตรปิฎก ซึ่งเป็นตำราที่มีเชื่อถือได้ในศาสนาพุทธเถรวาท ทั้งคู่ของ “จิตว่าง” และ “สุญญตา” ครอบคลุมแนวคิดของความจริง คือ สภาวะทั้งหมดเป็นความว่างจากตัวตน และสิ่งที่เนื่องด้วยตน เนื่องจากแนวคิดเรื่อง “จิตว่าง” ใช้สื่อโดยภาษาคน (ตรงข้ามกับภาษาธรรม) ที่เข้าถึงได้ง่ายในการปฏิบัติทางด้านจิตใจของชาวพุทธ ซึ่งสามารถประยุกต์ใช้ในชีวิตประจำวันของคนสมัยใหม่ในสังคมไทยปัจจุบัน

คำสำคัญ : จิตว่าง สุญญตา ศาสนาพุทธเถรวาท

**Key Words :** Empty-mind (*cit-wang*), *Suññatā*, Tipiṭaka

### Introduction

According to the *Cittavagga* of the *Dhammpāda*, 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.” [1]. 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. Importantly, when the mind is well-trained, happiness will arise as the result of that training.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (1906-1993), was the first Thai Theravāda thinker who explicitly used materials from Mahāyāna for his own teaching. He borrowed the Mahāyānist concept of “empty-mind” (*cit-wang*)

as one of his key concepts for interpreting Buddhism. He asserted that “empty-mind” (*cit-wang*) was a 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 ease.

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*. [2].

Through studying Buddhādāsa 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. One cause of crisis was the government policy which placed such high importance on material development thus 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, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu began to try to spread the core teachings of the Buddha.

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 *saṇtutṭhi*, 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. 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. [3]. 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.

In 1962 (2505 BE.), Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu clearly expressed the concept of "empty-mind" (*cit-wang*) in terms of "working with "*cit-wang*". Buddhādāsa 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."

Buddhādāsa 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, would lead to deeper misery. He wrote a now very well-known poem expressing this sentiment: "One should do all kinds of work with an "empty-mind." The fruits of one's work should be given up to "emptiness"." [4].

Using this concise verse as a basis, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu argued that people should work with an empty-mind and warned that a busy and agitated mind clouded by attachment, delusion, and fear could lead to an increase in depression and insecurity. The pursuit behavior patterns would eventually cause neurotic breakdown or other kind of mental and physical of such illness.

Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu played a very important role by transforming religion and displaying its creative power in 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, notions of *suññatā* and “*cit-wang*” have a notably peripheral

character in the traditional readings of the Tipitaka in Thailand.

According to Buddhādāsa 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*.

The concept of “empty-mind” (*cit-wang*) encompasses the relationship between *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā* and *suññatā*. Buddhādāsa 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 vacuum, 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”. [5].

## The Significance of This Work

Traditionally the concept of *suññatā* has been considered a very profound teaching only suitable for those who have renounced worldly life. However, as a result of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's ingenuity in creating the more easily accessible notion of "*cit-wang*" the concept of *suññatā* has thus also become suitable for the average person who still has to earn a livelihood. This research paper defends Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's reinterpretation of the original Buddhist teachings on the basis that what has been changed is only the method of presentation, while the essence remains the same. By popularizing the concept of *suññatā* or "*cit-wang*" for all Buddhist practitioners, the benefits to be gained by the application of this teaching will therefore be widespread and have a noticeable effect on ameliorating social problems and promoting well-being.

## Research Objectives

1. To identify the meaning of "empty-mind" or "*cit-wang*" as presented by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu in relation to the Canonical Theravāda texts.

2. To examine Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's concept of "empty-mind" or "*cit-wang*" in connection to 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.

## 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 *Desanāhāra* in Nettipakaraāa, 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 have been employed.

The Nettipakaraāa is a Theravāda method of interpretation leading to "right construing" of the Buddha's words. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's conception of "*cit-wang*" is based on the Buddha's teaching but rephrased using *Phāsā Khon*, *Phāsā Tham* (a Thai phrase meaning Everyday Language, Dhamma Language). This Everyday Language is used to teach ordinary moral lessons to more or less ignorant people who do not see clearly according to reality and who 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*). Since the doctrine emptiness or empty-mind

(*cit-wang*) is an aspect of Absolute Truth, it would ordinarily need to be explained in terms of Dhamma Language. However, by introducing the concept of “*cit-wang*”, Buddhādāsa 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. Conversely, 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. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu presented this teaching in terms of the latter application.

The interpretative tools of ‘Method of Teaching’ (*desanāhāra*) and ‘Method of Analysis’ (*vicayahāra*) in the Nettipakaraāa are a way of presenting Dhamma that demonstrates the advantages, disadvantages, benefits and down-sides with regard to the notion of “*cit-wang*.” They can therefore be used as a means for eliminating delusion and doubt or wrong understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. [6].

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 ‘Progressive Sermon’ (*anupubbikathā*)

[7]. 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,” [8]. For example, with regard to the concept of “*cit-wang*”, the Nettipakaraṇa presents methods of interpreting Buddhism that consists of six gradual interpretations, namely: 1 Gratification (*assāda*): the gratification of “*cit-wang*”, 2. Disadvantage (*ādīnava*): the disadvantage of “*cit-wang*”, 3. Renunciation (*nissarana*): How “*cit-wang*” leads to renunciation of defilements , 4. Consequence (*phala*): Results of “*cit-wang*”, 5. Skillful means (*upāya*): The use of “*cit-wang*” as a skillful means, 6. Persuasion or instruction (*ānatti*): in how to practice “*cit-wang*”.

According to the above information, it can be further asserted that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s application of ‘conveying of teaching’ (*desanāhāra*) in the Nettipakaraṇa to the idea of “*cit-wang*” is relevant to the core of the Four Noble Truths. In other words, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu systematically presented “*cit-wang*” as a method for eliminating suffering in terms of the Four Noble Truths. 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 (*nirodha*), and the practice of *Ānāpānasati-samādhi* is the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*magga*).



## The Meaning of “*Cit-Wang*” as Defined by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

According to Buddhādāsa 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.” [9]. 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.” [10].

In terms of the practice of “*cit-wang*”, Buddhādāsa 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 centered 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 *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. This form of practice can be categorized as “*paññā-vimutti*” (liberation through wisdom), because wisdom plays the leading role over concentration.

To summarize, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu recognized that “empty-mind” (*cit-wang*) is based on the everyday experience of mental calm and peace available to all, whether they be a monk or a layperson. It also follows that the possibility for enlightenment in this lifetime is also available to all who are interested. Furthermore, the concept of “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.

## 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*”, Buddhādāsa Bhikku 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* (monks) that they should mindfully cultivate right view, which sees the world as empty or void of a self. [11].

It can also be seen that the ideas of Buddhādāsa Bhikku 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, Buddhādāsa Bhikku 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.

Buddhādāsa Bhikku 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 vacuum, 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.” [12]

As pointed out by Buddhādāsa Bhikku, 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 “*sabbhe 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 Buddhādāsa Bhikku the core teaching was “*sabbe dhammā nalam abhinivesāya*”- “there is absolutely nothing that should be clung to.”

The subjects of *anattā* (not-self) and *suññatā* (emptiness), but especially *suññatā*, are considered to be the most profound of all the Buddha’s 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 Tipiāaka, both in teachings for the monastic Sangha and teachings to the laity. Take for example the following teaching in the Samyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana 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... [13]

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, when apprehended collectively are what is referred to as a sentient being. 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 sentient beings and all external phenomena are merely things that arise and cease continuously all the time. There is no core self or real eternal essence that is maintained permanently.

### **The Negative and Positive Opinions on Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s “*Cit-Wang*” and its Compatibility with Social Action**

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s re-interpretation of Dhamma has received much criticism from scholars, monks, religious teachers and students, and laity who both agree and disagree with his perspective. They have commented that Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “*cit-wang*” is a heretical teaching, claiming that the notion of “*cit-wang*” is external to the Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka) 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 Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu would bring about the downfall of Buddhism.

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine, in particular his emphasis on “*cit-wang*” has been significantly influenced by the teachings of Zen Buddhism. In fact, 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 Tipiṭaka...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.” [12]

Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu defended himself against such criticisms by claiming that “*cit-wang*” is the heart of all Buddhism, (having existed) before the time of the separation into Theravāda and Mahāyāna.” [14].

The following are some positive opinions from well-known religious persons (both lay and monastic) in reaction to Buddhādāsa’s works. The scholar Peter Jackson described Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of “*cit-wang*” in his book *Buddhādāsa: Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World* in the following manner:

“For Buddhādāsa 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 Buddhadaśa 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 *aniccā*, impermanence.... Buddhadaśa 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." [15]

Phra Phromkhunāporn (P.A. Payutto), the abbot of Ñānvesakavan Temple, has a positive attitude towards Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu's work, praising it in terms of service to the Buddha:

"When we analyze the teaching of Buddhadaśa 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... Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu serves the Buddha. When we study his works and have an opportunity to organize the 100<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary of his Birth, we also serve Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu. It means we serve both the Buddha and Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu." [16].

From this critical study, it can be seen that there are many religious scholars, thinkers, writers and ordinary people who both agreed and disagreed with Buddhadaśa

Bhikkhu's interpretation of the concept of "*cit-wang*" In fact, when people study the pure Buddha-Dhamma in the Tipiṭaka deeply and truly, they will find that Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu's interpretation and teaching does not stray from the essence of Buddha-Dhamma, since the concept of "*cit-wang*" is consistent with the theme of *suññatā* as found in the Tipiṭaka.

### **The Application of *Cit-wang* in Thai Society**

Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu believed that human inter-relationship is the essence of society, and he supported 'social preference' as more beneficial than 'individual preference.' And since personal greed is the root of all social problems, if one does not apply the Buddhist ethical principle of self-restraint to oneself and to others in society there will be no end to social problems.

Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu pointed out that solving social problems could be effected through the actual practice of "*cit-wang*," which would then lessen the power of self-centeredness in their lives. The selfless actions that arise from the state of "*cit-wang*" can be 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-centered 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-centeredness is therefore the pivot both of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of the Theravāda doctrine of liberation and of his socially-engaged thought. “*Cit-wang*” not only has subjective benefits in leading the practitioner towards personal salvation but it also has objective social benefits in promoting the realization of Nibbāna as a social goal and leading to the well-being of the populace as a whole.

### **The Application of *Cit-Wang* in terms of Work**

Buddhādāsa 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” [17]. The basis of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu’s notion of work is “*cit-wang*” or more precisely, the non-self-centered 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” [18]. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu instructed to work with an “empty-mind.” Likewise, all the results of work should be given up to “emptiness.”

Yet Buddhādāsa 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.” [19].

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

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The researcher’s conclusion is that the concept of “*cit-wang*” already appeared in the Theravāda scriptures under the name of *suññatā*. There is mention of the emptiness in three major aspects, 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 (*satisampajañña*) that sees that everything is empty of “self.” This final aspect relates to the supreme emptiness is *Nibbāna*, which refers to the mind being empty of the various binding defilements.

This study of the concept of “*cit-wang*” is an application of the interpretation methods of *desanāhāra* and *vicayahāra* in the Nettipakaraa, which is a way of presenting Dhamma that demonstrates the advantages,

disadvantages, benefits and down-sides with regard to the understanding of “*cit-wang*.”

This research paper 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 also study the real-life practice of “*cit-wang*”. There are indeed 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.

## Recommendations

This thesis focused on Buddhādāsa 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* (suchness) and *Idappaccayatā* (*Paticca-samuppāda*). Of special importance is the subject of *suññatā*, whose meaning covers also the concepts of *aniccā* (impermanence), *dukkha* (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 suitable only for those who have renounced the 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 Buddhādāsa 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 be a monk or a lay person, because he saw that an of emptiness would be of great benefit to anyone who sincerely practiced it.

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