

***Maejo International
Journal of Science and Technology***

ISSN 1905-7873

Available online at www.mijst.mju.ac.th

Invited Article

The role of Science and Technology for Thailand

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It can be said that every human being has three needs, namely, material need, social need, and spiritual need. The most basic need is, obviously, the first one, as it is the most pressing of the three. This need is satiated, directly or indirectly, by the environment. As man is also a part of the environment and nourished by it, he cannot live without or apart from it. As the most extreme example, just think of what will happen if suddenly there is no air for him to breathe just for a few minutes. Sadly, however, we tend to take the environment for granted and treat it as if it were valueless, a thing that just receives our wastes of all kinds imaginable. Thus for the tangible material need alone, we can see that man has undermined his very own welfare due to his wrong views and thoughts, which translate into wrong deeds and actions.

In Buddhism, it is regarded that the most deadly sin of all is the holding of wrong views and thus, by corollary, the highest merit possible is to hold the Right Views or Sammaditthi. Science also, in its noblest form, is an embodiment of the spirit in quest of Truth, which is more or less a form of Sammaditthi. Lord Buddha once said, in effect, that you should not believe what you have heard, or what you have read, or even what you have seen. You should neither believe in anything because it is a custom, a theory, or even your own reasoning. So, in a way, the Buddha can be called the first scientist of the world.

What has all this got to do with the role of Science and Technology for Thailand? Well, for one thing as mentioned above, Science at least seems to be very compatible with Buddhism, the oldest religion of Thailand. The principle of Science and Buddhism is definitely in common, but differences surely exist in the two disciplines regarding the way of attaining the goal. These differences, however, are rather complimentary than in opposition to each other. Einstein once said that religion without

science is blind, and science without religion is lame. (In fact, however, it should be the other way round, viz. religion without science is lame, while science without religion is blind!)

Maybe because of this factor at least, that the Thai people tend to accept Science and Technology readily, or in fact too quickly or even indiscriminately, the so-called pendulum phenomenon. What should happen though, is that Science and Technology for the Thai society should complement and be in accordance with Thai culture or original Thai way of life, which has been intrinsically and practically a Buddhist culture since times past. As well-known throughout the world, the prominent characteristics of atheistic Buddhism are, among others, compliance with Dhamma or the Law of Nature according to the Buddha, and also attainment of Nirvana or Absolute Freedom, which is the highest goal in Buddhism. As a result, the Buddhists have been normally mild, peace-loving and nature-loving people who tend to lead a life of self-sufficiency with a high degree of independency.

Desirably then, Science and Technology for the Thai society should not be those of the aggressive type, both to life and the environment, directly or indirectly. It should not be the type that ‘conquors Nature’ or promotes or stresses material dependency. Instead, Thai scientists should focus more on researches that lead to self-dependency with a certain degree of freedom and on how to live a moderate life that is friendly with nature.

And last but not least, Science and Technology should be used as a tool that, together with the Thai Culture and Dhamma, helps ushering the Thai people toward a noble society of the New Age in future. To make this possible, scientists and technologists should first admit their intrinsic limitations and that they themselves cannot know everything, no matter how hard they try with their physical methods. However, together with other disciplines, they can contribute a large part of their share of the role of helping the present society toward a better status for all of its members.

