

# BOONNOON'S CRITIQUE OF THAI SANGHA

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## **Abstract**

*This article analyzes and articulates in the language of hermeneutics the contributions of an important Thai Buddhist scholar, Channarong Boonnoon, who studies the Thai Sangha's responses to the hermeneutically challenging issues—such as Santi Asok, Phra Dhammakaya Temple and Bhikkhuni ordination—and comes up with the problematic of the Sangha's identity comprising paradoxes of 'disrespectful devotee to the Buddha,' and 'disrespectful devotee to the elders.' Moreover, he also reinterprets the concept of 'sangiti' and derives its significant implication as an act of collective hermeneutical practice, which is also offered to the Sangha as a method to deal with the present situation.*

## **Introduction**

In the past two decades, Thai Sangha<sup>1</sup> has been confronted with 3 significant challenges posed by the cases of 'Santi Asok,' 'Phra Dhammakaya Temple,' and 'Bhikkhuni Dhammananda,' the latter two of which have not yet ended. The subjects of these cases apparently attack the Sangha on different fronts. Santi Asok redefines the Vinaya, especially its insistence on vegetarian practice for both monks and laity. Phra Dhammakaya Temple announces the Ultimate Truth of Self in contradiction with the traditional Doctrine of Non-Self. And Bhikkhuni Dhammananda revives woman ordination in Thai Theravada. However, a closer look discloses that they all contested the traditional hermeneutical framework held by the Sangha. All were engaged in hermeneutical endeavors to provide themselves with justified foundations for their movements. Their attempts were mainly to authenticate their practice by showing that they could be traced back to the Word of the Buddha, recorded in the Tipitaka (or Tipitakas and other religious texts, in the case of Phra Dhammakaya Temple).

These cases were handled with demonstrations that their interpretations were wrong or suspicious. The main figure to play this role is not the Sangha but the Venerable P. A. Payutto<sup>2</sup>, praised as 'the reincarnated Sariputra.' For general public, monks and most scholars, the focus is on the results of counter interpretation even though what is more important in these cases is their problematization of the Thai Theravadin hermeneutical principles. This is true even for the Sangha who does not seem to be aware of the existence of traditionally sanctioned hermeneutical practice, let alone the principles.

Among these, Channarong Boonnoon, is an exception for he is a Buddhist scholar who is now seriously engaged in the study not only of the interpretative results but also the interpretative framework itself, through which these results were reached and justified. Actually, his prominence lies in his critical discussion of the latter, the Thai Theravadin hermeneutics. This paper is about his contributions in this respect. Other Buddhist scholars who also touch on the subject of hermeneutical principles are of

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<sup>1</sup> The term, "Thai Sangha," or "Sangha" (with capital 'S') here does not mean an aggregate of monks, but the Council of the Elders, the ecclesiastical administrative body. Later, "Sangha" may mean those monks in the sangiti councils. As a whole, it refers to the elite with influence on the direction of the religious institution's policy and practice.

<sup>2</sup> The Venerable Payutto has been promoted to higher ranks and so has more than one ecclesiastical title. Therefore, in this paper, he is addressed by his ordination name that always remains the same.

course the Venerable Payutto, and his antagonist, the Venerable Mettanando Bhikkhu, in his “The Incidents Occurred in B.E.0001,” whose ideas will be drawn upon when relevant, especially those of the former.

### ***Thai Sangha’s Hermeneutical Consciousness***

It can be said that Thai Sangha and monks in general lack hermeneutical consciousness. The reason is their advocacy of ‘naive realism,’ the belief that meanings of texts are something given, equally accessible to all with qualified language competence (and sufficient effort to read and remember all the texts). For them, conflicts seem to arise because of some political motives or personal predicaments. They do not seem to have an inkling idea that textual meaning comes through mediation of an interpretative tradition, rather than a direct access.

The work of Gestalt psychology should help us appreciate that the whole is not merely the sum of its part. Likewise, the meaning of a text is not the aggregate of its composing sentences—it must be conceived on the basis of these sentences, and more. Texts, like other things, are capable of diverse holistic conceptions. The reason why scriptures of a particular religion are understood in such a consistent way that a sect is formed is the development of interpretive community, wherein a hermeneutical tradition is formulated and transmitted. Therefore, the meaning of Tipitaka that the Thai Theravadin monks perceive to be constant are products of the hermeneutical practice of the community, to which they belong. Yet, this precondition of scriptural understanding, the hermeneutical tradition, is just completely overlooked.

Boonnoon pointed out signs of their ignorance. The naive realist attitude has long existed since Early Rattanakosin Era so that this satirical phrase, ‘repeating the indent of the letter Ta,’<sup>3</sup> was used among old Buddhist scholars to call the Sangha’s deliverance of ‘sangiti’<sup>4</sup> because of its working solely on spelling checking, rather than a consideration of any substantial matters. And this is true even with the latest 1987’s edition of Thai Tipitaka (Boonnoon, 2004a: 49-50). This is not hard to understand; since they believe that the scriptural meaning are lucid, they take it to be their task to make sure that there is nothing wrong with the medium of the meaning, letters.

Moreover, when the traditional scriptural interpretations and the interpretative framework itself were seriously challenged by Samana Phothirak—the head of Santi Asok—and those militants from Phra Dhammakaya Temple such as Phra Somchai Thanawuddho, the Sangha simply took no action until the Venerable Payutto stepped out and offered point-by-point defenses, which reappeared later in publications. These are not hard to understand: They believe that the meanings are there in the Tipitaka waiting to be extracted by a scholar well versed in Pali and learned in the Scriptures. That widely accepted scholar is no one else but the Venerable Payutto whose book, “The Case of Santi Asok,” was even used by the Sangha as a basis in its disciplinary measure to drive Samana Phothirak out of monkhood (Boonnoon, 2004a: 46-47). However, it was not also the case when the book, “The Case of Dhammakaya,” was available. The reluctant Sangha then made a move after public pressure (Ibid.: 47-48). Because some high-ranked members of the Sangha have a close tie with the temple,

<sup>3</sup> Letter *Ta* looks just like letter *Ka*. The only difference is that the former is indented. Therefore, the indent is repeated with ink to make it clearly distinct (Boonnoon).

<sup>4</sup> This term means “rehearsal, council, or general convocation of the Sangha in order to settle questions of doctrine and to fix the text of the Scriptures.” (P.A.Payutto. (2000). *Dictionary of Buddhism*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, p. 407.). Some say it is analogous to ‘Vatican Council.’

the reason is partly believed to be political of the Sangha's inertia in the case of Phra Dhammakaya Temple in stark contrast to its enthusiasm in the case of Santi Asok.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of hermeneutical consciousness leads the Sangha to identify the Thai Theravadin interpretation as the authentic meaning of the Tipitaka. It also closes off any opportunity to discuss about the Thai Theravadin hermeneutical framework itself, which is essential to self-understanding. Boonnoon (2005: 24) derives there from a negative consequence that can be empirically attested to. That is, Thai Theravada strongly believes it is the only one who holds the Absolute Truth and thus the owner of Buddhism. Lacking self-understanding, the Sangha under the influence of Thai Nationalism identifies itself with the State—one that was founded thousands of years after the death of Gotama Buddha.<sup>6</sup> This, in conjunction with the belief in religious ownership, drives the Sangha to utilize the State's power to protect its own ideology in the name of the true Buddhism, which results in marginalization and oppressions (Ibid: 25).

### ***What is Sangiti?***

The Venerable Payutto (2000: 6-7) defines sangiti as a process whereby the Buddha's word are compiled and preserved in the most pure form. An effort is mainly directed to ascertaining with all available evidences that what is compiled truly belongs to the Buddha and those words so ascertained must not be changed even slightly.<sup>7</sup> The *raison d'être* of the Tipitaka is that it is the most complete collection of authentic words of the Buddha. Thus, any changes will contradict this goal and turn the Scriptures into a mixed record of the words of the Buddha and the opinions of members in the sangiti council. Worse still, it will be hardly possible for later generation to distinguish the Buddha's word from those of the council members (Ibid.: 46-47). The distortion will certainly affect later interpretations and therefore mislead Buddhists out of the way. This understanding can explain why the Sangha did nothing other than proofreading in their deliverance of sangitis—they believe that the sole goal of sangiti is preservation.

This is the point of departure between the Venerable Payutto and Boonnoon. The former seems to treat the sangiti as the process of preserving the Buddhist hermeneutical resources, which should be separated from hermeneutical practice, while the latter argues that the sangiti itself is also a process of hermeneutical practice. Boonnoon (2004a: 17-18) justifies his stance by reminding that the third sangiti involves an addition of *Kathavatthu* that is clearly not an inscription of the Buddha's word but a composition of the Venerable Moggaliputtatissa, the head of that sangiti council. Boonnoon (2004a: 33) raises a significant point asking why the composition

<sup>5</sup> There are yet other reasons, especially one about the Thai Sangha's protectiveness toward the Vinaya. This will be discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sangiti when King Asok took part in religious affairs is believed to set a model of 'Sangha-under-State patronage' for Theravadin monks in different countries. However, in case of the Thai Theravada, it is much more than mere patron-client relationship. The Thai nationalism that is constituted by the symbiosis, "Nation-Religion-King," permeates through the Thai Sangha's lifeworld so that Buddhism is understood to be part of the nation itself. The religion's stability is identified with that of the State and vice versa. Therefore, it is not unusual to generally witness monks' patriotic tone of voice.

<sup>7</sup> He later acknowledges on page 47 that the disciples' words are also compiled in the Tipitaka. The reason why this is not included in his definition of sangiti is believed to be a matter of convenience. Anyway, when the Tipitaka is mentioned, all people think of is the Buddha's teaching.

could be integrated as part of the Tipitaka—in other words, why something that is not the Buddha's word was given the same status as the Buddha's Dhamma and Vinaya.

It is not that the Venerable Payutto overlooks the *Kathavatthu*. He simply does not consider it to be a work of an individual author for he sees that it is composed of the Buddha's word selected and arranged such that misunderstandings that were one of the causes of the third sangiti can be explained away (Payutto, 2000: 48). In other words, the Venerable Moggaliputtatissa is not the author but the 'facilitator of right understanding.'<sup>8</sup> However, I think that the point raised by Boonnoon concerns the authority of the Sangha in relation to the Tipitaka. It is strongly held today that the sole thing that the later Sangha can do to the Scriptures is to keep them as they are. But, if the inclusion of *Kathavatthu* is taken into account, this belief is put into doubt. The Sangha responsible for this addition is one that existed around 200 years after the 'primal' Sangha that conducted all the compilation whose result was the Tipitaka. Boonnoon (2004a: 37) argues that the only thing that can explain this inclusion is the authority of Sangha embedded in the process of sangiti. That is because it was the Sangha that reached an agreement in the third sangiti to add the *Kathavatthu* into the Scriptures, as part of it.

The characteristics of *Kathavatthu* is that it is a set of answers to problems of understanding the Doctrine that gave rise to a religious crisis, which sets it apart from others in the Abhidhamma. It can be considered to reflect a hermeneutical practice that brought the texts from the past to bear on the present situation (Boonnoon, 2004a: 33-34). Of course, the Venerable Payutto (2000: 51) never missed the point about hermeneutical practice—though the emphasis is on its products rather than praxis—when he points out another set of exegeses, atthakathas (commentaries). Also, there are exegeses of later generations called tikas (sub-commentaries) and anutikas (sub sub-commentaries) (Ibid.: 53). Moreover, all later interpretations are attanomati—personal judgments (Ibid.: 54). One thing that can be learned from this is a reason why the present Sangha leaves to the Venerable Payutto all the responsibility in resolving hermeneutical crises. That is, they believe this is the age when there can be only attanomati.

The Venerable Payutto's above delineation is crucial and lends support to Boonnoon's insight since it bears out the distinction between the personal and the collective judgments, the latter of which allowed an integration of a text as part of the Scriptures whereas the former produced only texts clearly separate from the Scriptures. Therefore, two kinds of hermeneutical practice are brought to light. One is implicit in the sangiti; another is explicit in the form of exegeses. Note that, in the final analysis, even the 'personal' judgements are actually 'collective' for they are mediated by the tradition of the interpretative community to which the interpreters belong.

In fact, the Venerable Payutto (2004: 67) does insist that the hermeneutical practice is acceptable. He suggests that, if any monks' interpretations or opinions are significant, they may comprise supplementary notes to the Scriptures. This sounds like an innovation because there has never been such a thing. Yet, it is not totally new; evidences for a similar way of practice are available. For instance, once upon a comparison between the Thai, Burmese and Roman Tipitakas,<sup>9</sup> a term was found in the Thai version, but not in the other two. No change (e.g. deletion of that term) was

<sup>8</sup> The fact that *Kathavatthu* is included in *Abhidhamma* should give weight to such consideration. However, this may also be objected with the text's dialogical structure.

<sup>9</sup> Pali Tipitakas incised with Thai, Burmese, and Roman letters.

made. Instead, a note about this was added to the Thai Tipitaka (Ibid.: 66). Note that his tone of voice is not strong when he gives that innovative suggestion. He merely says that it can be so done in a sangiti if wished. The point to derive from his suggestion is that the hermeneutical practice is acceptable as long as they are clearly marked as personal interpretations. His idea about hermeneutical practice is thus confined to individual level, which goes hand in hand with his idea about the Tipitaka as the hermeneutical resources.

What then is the position of the Sangha? Is this course of practice acceptable wherein the Tipitaka is the resources; the Sangha protects the Tipitaka in its concrete form; and monks, especially the intellectual kind, individually practice interpretation by their voluntary choice? The answer from one side is negative and the reason is clear. The Venerable Payutto wrote two books in response to two religious crises caused by Santi Asok and Phra Dhammakaya Temple. Even though both had great effects on public understanding especially through the press, only one about Santi Asok became effective in the resolution of the crisis. The role of the Sangha is obvious here. It can sanction and bring into effect those interpretations by individual monks. That is why a doubt still arises in people's mind about the truth in Phra Dhammakaya Temple's Doctrine of Self. If it is against the Buddha's teaching as demonstrated in the Venerable Payutto's book, why did the Sangha not adopt his judgments as the basis for handling the case of Phra Dhammakaya Temple? Does this imply that the Venerable Payutto's interpretations are not accurate for this time? Actually, the Sangha did not even give an official order to bar the dissemination of the Phra Dhammakaya Temple's teaching (Boonnoon, 2002: 23).

The Sangha's reluctance simply leaves the Venerable Payutto and his advocates almost helpless in dealing in doctrinal terms with hermeneuts from the side of Phra Dhammakaya Temple, whose interpretations are still considered equal to those by the Venerable Payutto, technically speaking. The hesitation turns the conflict of interpretations into a contest in individual level between the two sides even though the implications of each interpretation are deep and wide since it has been pointed out that, without the Doctrine of Non-Self, the heart of Buddhist practice, especially meditation, goes down the drain, and this heart is also that of Buddhism as a whole.

The question has been posed about the Sangha's duty to protect the religion. Is a protection of the Tipitaka sufficient for the task? No one dare give an affirmative answer. Sangiti was proposed as the solution but it did not seem to have a reasonable ring for the Sangha with such understanding of sangiti as above. The above course of practice does not hold. The Venerable Payutto's awareness of the Sangha's important role is practically eclipsed with his explications of sangiti and hermeneutical practice that support the Sangha's (mis?)understanding. Shedding light on its implicit hermeneutical practice, Boonnoon's analysis shows us that the sangiti is essentially an act of collective judgment in a hermeneutical endeavor to achieve textual meaningfulness in response to new problematics in the present situations faced by the community constituted by its interpretative tradition of the Tipitaka. His recommendation to revive the legitimizing role of the sangiti process seems to provide a way out of the impasse.

If Boonnoon's proposal is implemented, the process can accommodate the Venerable Payutto's insistence that no alteration of the Tipitaka should be made. Results of the process may be reported in an official announcement of the Sangha. They need not be included in the Scriptures because the point is the Sangha's retrieval of its missing role in the interpretative community. Actually, later when Phra Paisarn Wisalo voiced that his proposal was impossible under the present ecclesiastical structure of administration, Boonnoon gave another suggestion that a Buddhist

academic center be established to mind exegetical tasks and give prima facie judgements in the name of the Sangha (Boonnoon, 2004a: 74). The center's works will of course carry no weight equal to the sangiti process and may not touch the hermeneutical principles, but the suggestion highlights the call for the Sangha's hermeneutical consciousness and practice.

### ***Purity and Authority of the Sangha***

A further point that should be given a brief consideration is why the hermeneutical practice is finally limited to attanomati after the gradual decline from the inclusion of *Kathavatthu* to the compositions of atthakathas, tikas and anutikas. This implies the absence of collective hermeneutical practice. I think the reason seems to be because the present Thai Sangha is aware of its status as conventional sangha, not ariyasangha—the true assemblage of enlightened individuals—and thus is very unsure about its judgments. Moreover, its conventionality puts a demand on it that it has valid conventions to base its authority, which leads to a focus on the Vinaya.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, this reason gets along well with what I term “monastic individualism,” which does not only express itself in form of ‘autonomy’ fully granted to each abbot in managing his temple in his own style so that the nature of a temple varies according to its abbot's characteristics, but also an openness to sort of ‘personality cult,’ with which a monk having exceptional qualities, be it psychic or spiritual, becomes ‘celebrity’ with influences to mobilize a group of people and raise funds. Evidences for the latter are huge and elaborate temples almost deserted after the charismatic monks passed away.

Boonnoon (2002: 23) remarks that the Thai Sangha has a liberal attitude when it comes to the matter of ascetic practice, which is quite contrary to “disciplinary protection.” Partly, it is because of the nature of the practice that requires a degree of freedom to experiment; otherwise, a fruitful effort is not possible. The practice for spiritual attainment is not just a mechanistic implementation of principles; its nature involves an act of interpretation that mediates the Dhamma and personal experience to eventually come up with ‘the way’ suitable for a particular individual. In some case, the ‘discovered’ path, the fruit of appropriation, may be passed on so that a school of practice is formed.<sup>11</sup> Whence comes individualism, the freedom granted to monks in terms of religious practice.

On the other hand, the awareness of its spiritual impoverishment motivates the Sangha to maintain its authority by affirming its purity through the claim of its unbroken lineage to the historical source, not the demonstration of its members' arduous ascetic practice and spiritual attainment.<sup>12</sup> That is why it lays much importance on the strict observance of the Vinaya, the means to sustain the claim. Boonnoon (2002: 17-22)'s detailed analysis shows that the claim of authenticity through the purity of ordination lineage was the point of rivalry between monastic orders in the country's Theravadin history— e.g. between Suandok Temple and Padaeng Temple in Lanna period and between Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika around the reign of King Rama IV in Ratanakosin period. And it does not need more than to say

<sup>10</sup> Other explanations may also be given. For example, ‘sangha’ has an implication of universality or totality. The spread of Buddhism to different lands may result in a sense of lacking total collectivity. Therefore, collective interpretation is avoided.

<sup>11</sup> This is of course a simplified picture for even the students themselves have to make such a hermeneutical detour.

<sup>12</sup> This is unlike Zen tradition, whose focus seems to be on spiritual achievements. cf. Robert E. Buswell. (1992). *The Zen Monastic Experience*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

that ordination is a process defined by the Vinaya. An emphasis on the validity of ordination is at the same time one on the Vinaya. Boonnoon (2002: 23) explains that this is the reason why the disciplinary process against Santi Asok, which challenged the Vinaya or even began a new order, was very quick while the treatment of Phra Dhammakaya Temple's reversal of the core dhamma was unbelievably lenient.

The Sangha's disciplinary orientation contributes to its radical conservatism, whose rigidity now gives rise to a question of its legitimacy as the followers of the Buddha. This point will be returned to below. Before we leave this part, let's touch on how Boonnoon treats the present Sangha's conventional status in his proposal about sangiti. Drawing on the hermeneutical structure of existence, he reminds us of the ongoing task of interpretation that the community can not avoid if the Tipitaka is to remain meaningful at all. Chances of error perceived to be the stake in allowing the conventional Sangha to deliver a sangiti therefore give rise to a lesser cause of concern. That is not only because interpretation has to take place any way even in the individual level, but also because sangiti is not a once-and-for-all process. Instead of relying on individual hermeneuts' works that are no less prone to errors and change, the Sangha themselves should conduct the hermeneutical practice to reclaim its lost authority as the representatives of the Buddha, who prescribed it to be a self-organizing body that carries on his propagation of Dhamma. This ensures more thorough and participatory interpretation as the work of the Buddhist collectivity (Boonnoon, 2004a: 67-69).

### ***The Elders' Resolution***

Apart from the awareness about the conventional status, the strict adherence to the Vinaya can also be traced back to the first sangiti, where the defining feature of today's Theravadin identity is found. After the compilation that resulted in Tipitaka finished, the Venerable Anandha informed the sangiti council that, before his departure, the Buddha gave a permission that the sangha might discard some minor rules. However, the Venerable Ananda did not ask the Lord to define the scope of 'minor.' The assembly was not able to reach an agreement on the matter. As a result, the Venerable Kassapa, the head of the council, suggested everything the Buddha had prescribed remain untouched, in which the assembly was unanimous (Boonnoon, 2004a: 7).

Boonnoon (2004a: 9) pointed out that it was not easy for the assembly to decide upon the scope of minor rules because the social condition at the time was not far from that in which the Buddha lived and issued all the Vinaya rules. Even though the Venerable Kassapa was aware of the Buddha's insight into futurity, he chose to ignore the Lord's will to relegate to the later sanghas, the one who actually face the changing contexts, the duty to decide for themselves what minor rules should include. Thus, the Venerable Kassapa's recommendation to the reverse and the assembly's acquiesce to it were quite misplaced.

Anyway, whence came the resolution that defines Theravada, the framework for all later sangitis and interpretation in the tradition (Ibid.: 9). It is simply reduced to "Never Change a Thing; Keep it pure" and hence an attitude of radical conservatism. It is undeniable that changes do take place in reality, but this is the matter of attitude, which is well mirrored in the Venerable Payutto's definition of sangiti. Boonnoon draws attention to breaches of the resolution from the first sangiti council. One has already been mentioned above, an inclusion of Kathavatthu in the third sangiti, where another deviation is also found—originally covering only the Vinaya, the resolution was extended to the realm of Dhamma in the sangiti council's effort to keep the Buddha's instructions untouched by excluding ideas judged not to belong to him (Ibid.: 16). This is, as has been seen, overlooked. The third sangiti is still perceived as an

activity of making sure that nothing changes. The resolution is the most explicit hermeneutical principle that constrains all interpretations. Things are a little complicated here. The principle itself is subject to interpretation by different Theravadin communities and therefore yields interpretations that vary from one to another. An ordination of women by Sri Lankan Sangha is a case in point. By the lack of hermeneutical sensitivity, the Thai Sangha believes that the meaning of this principle is fixed and it is just like what they understand. They demand that the principle as they understand be applied to all cases that need judgements.

Boonnoon (2002: 29) problematizes the taken-for-granted resolution by raising the question why the agreement from the first sangiti has been given a priority over the Buddha's permission.<sup>13</sup> Why the disciples and not the master that the Sangha has been so determined in obeying. It is an irony that, in order to preserve the Buddha's word, they have to ignore his word of permission. After the scandal of Phra Dhammakaya Temple, the case of Bhikkuni Dhammananda gives another turn of the screw. The reasons raised to bar women from receiving an ordination to become Thai Theravadin nuns are essentially disciplinary. The Vinaya rules are interpreted within the framework defined by the resolution and the only answer is negative. The Venerable Dhammananda is an academic turned nun, who has launched a movement for women's right to ordination. She received her ordination from the Sri Lankan Sangha, which is also classified as Theravada utilizing the resolution as the hermeneutical principle, but the fruit of their interpretation about woman ordination is quite contrary to the Thai Sangha's.

The rallying point of the Venerable Dhammananda and her advocates is just this problematic of the Theravadin identity, the disrespectful devotee—her case is pressing the point of priority setting. Boonnoon (2004b: 93) sums up the thrust of arguments against the strict observance of the Vinaya with the question why the doctrine of human capacity for enlightenment, the model set by the Buddha in his kind treatment of women despite social context, and the concept of *nanasamvasa* that Buddhism is beyond all sects have to give way to the adherence to the Elders' resolution. This does not include the point of social benefits that the advocates of woman ordination give in support of their stance.

The question is begged when the conservative side rebuts these reasons because they do so within the framework, which has been challenged. This is when a hermeneutical endeavor is required to reinterpret the resolution from the first sangiti council within the context, doctrinal and social. This is not easy for it involves self-criticism and a risk of disorientation because the object of this endeavor is what constitutes the Sangha's identity. This is quite complicate because at the same time they have to struggle after self-understanding for the process will force them to reflect on their own understanding of the resolution. Moreover, since the resolution was obtained through the sangiti, the same kind of process is required in its reinterpretation.

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<sup>13</sup> cf. a textual analysis with conspiracy theorist's tone of voice in Mettanando Bhikkhu. (2002: 67-73). Note that this problematization of the resolution by either Boonnoon or the Venerable Mettanando was not addressed at all by the Venerable Payutto in his critical responses given to them. For his responses to Boonnoon, see Payutto (2004); for his detailed criticisms of the Venerable Mettanando, see Payutto. (2001). *The Mystifying Case: What Disease Killed the Buddha*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.. Bangkok: Pimsuay., and (2005). *Wake up! from Falsity of the Book 'The Incidents Occurred in B.E.0001'*. Bangkok: Sahadhammic. In addition, this is also the case with another thorough critic of the Venerable Mettanando, Tongyoi Saengsinchai. See his books on the subject.

### Conclusion

Boonnoon's critique exposes the Sangha's lifeworld whose themes consist of naive realism and conservatism, both of which contribute to their outstanding characteristic, chauvinism that leads to a serious lack of flexibility, and marginalization. Naive realism bars a meaningful talk about collective hermeneutical practice through the process of sangiti that the founders of Theravada tradition used. Conservatism that identifies Buddhism with the Vinaya gives rigid hermeneutical constraints despite the challenges on the basis of the Buddha's permission and his doctrine against its foundation, the adherence to the resolution from the first sangiti.

Boonnoon critiques this lifeworld by showing us serious paradoxes in the Sangha's self-identity that is embedded in it. While the Sangha gives the Elders' resolution the top priority over the Buddha's permission, they ignore the authority of sangiti process that the elders and later Sangha relied on, including the sense of responsibility that motivated the process in the first place. In other words, they are not only the 'disrespectful devotee to the Buddha,' but also the 'disrespectful devotee to the elders.' Boonnoon has offered the Sangha—and us—a solution, the sangiti process whose nature and significance have been reinterpreted through his historical textual analysis.

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