

南華大學 102 學年度 博士班 招生考試試題卷

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科 目：管理論文評析（一）

請參考隨卷所附之 SSCI 論文一篇：(請以中文答題，否則不予計分)

"Toward a Buddhist Systems Methodology 2:An Exploratory, Questioning Approach"

請仔細回答下列問題，回答的內容須具有學術性的批判論述並且可加入個人的見解。

壹、

- (1)請論述本篇論文之研究目的與研究架構內容。
- (2)請探討本篇論文所運用之研究方法為何？

(10%)

貳、

- (1)請探討本篇論文主要內容旨在探討什麼？其學術意義與貢獻為何？
- (2)請敘述本篇論文的研究與結論主要希望傳達給讀者什麼訊息？

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參、

- (1)請試著論述，你認為本論文與企業管理有什麼樣的關聯或貢獻。
- (2)請試著論述，你認為佛教思想與系統管理思考是否有互相借鏡交流之處？是什麼？

(20%)

肆、

- (1)請以管理科學觀點，探討佛教思想裡的「因、緣、果」對組織管理的意義及運用。
- (2)請探討你認為佛教思想裡的什麼概念對組織管理經營會有貢獻。

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伍、

- (1)請敘述東方管理思想與西方管理思想之差異性？產生此種差異性的歸因為何？
- (2)請論述你認為管理科學還可以與什麼學科做結合？對於跨學門來做研究的益處或缺點？
- (3)請闡述你對跨學門研究的價值觀為何？

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Toward a Buddhist Systems Methodology 2: An Exploratory, Questioning Approach

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Abstract This paper presents a Buddhist systems methodology (BSM) designed for problem prevention and problem solving in Taiwanese Buddhist organisations. Three sets of twelve questions based on Buddhist concepts are offered to (i) support explorations of boundaries and values in problematic situations; (ii) guide the choice of methods for intervention; and (iii) support the evaluation of recommendations for change. The paper argues that the BSM has advantages in Taiwanese contexts compared with Western systems approaches. The latter can appear threatening to organizational harmony and can therefore be regarded negatively. In contrast, the BSM uses Buddhist concepts that are closely associated with the practice of harmonious living. Thus, it reframes systems thinking as the exercise of Buddhist discipline applied to organizational life, and is likely to be viewed as a co-operative and culturally valued endeavour.

Keywords Boundary critique · Buddhism · Buddhist systems methodology (BSM) · Culture · Critical systems thinking · Methodological pluralism · Systemic intervention · Systems methodology · Systems thinking.

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1. Introduction

This is the second part of a trilogy of papers describing the research underpinning our development and application of a Buddhist systems methodology (BSM) for problem prevention and problem solving in Taiwanese organisations that have an explicitly Buddhist philosophy. The first paper (Shen and Midgley 2007a) outlines the motivating rationale for our research program. It also explores the similarities between Buddhist philosophy and various systems perspectives in order to demonstrate that there are possibilities for synergy that make the development of a BSM a reasonable prospect. This second paper describes the methodology itself. The third paper (Shen and Midgley 2007b) details how we used the BSM in partnership with stakeholders to address a significant issue that threatened the future of a large Buddhist non-governmental organisation in Taiwan.

We ended the first paper by reflecting on the many concepts in Buddhism and systems thinking that appear to have similar meanings or aims, and we concluded that there is indeed a basis for developing a new BSM of relevance to organizations in Taiwan. However, we also acknowledged a potential problem: there are a number of different schools of Buddhism (Bapat 1956), and many different systems paradigms (e.g. those represented in the books edited by Midgley 2003a, 2003b, 2000c, 2000d). It is therefore necessary to be specific about what exactly we are drawing ideas from in creating a BSM.

We dealt with the diversity amongst Buddhist perspectives by concentrating on Humanistic Buddhism and some core concepts of relevance across the various Buddhist traditions (see Shen and Midgley 2007a, for details). However, we said that we wanted to preserve the insights that come from a variety of systems theories and methodologies. The consequence of this is that we need a *pluralistic* BSM: i.e., one that offers a rationale for drawing on a range of systems theories, methodological ideas and methods according to the purposes being pursued in an intervention.

Below, we review some of the systems literature on methodological pluralism to identify an appropriate pluralistic approach that our BSM can draw upon. Following this, we present details of the BSM itself, focusing on the need for an exploratory, questioning approach. We also provide a list of questions, informed by Buddhist thinking, that can help people explore boundaries and values in problematic situations; guide the choice of methods from other systems approaches (or inform the design of new methods); and support the evaluation of new ideas for change.

2. Methodological pluralism

Much of the systems research on methodological pluralism has been undertaken under the banner of critical systems thinking (CST). A number of different CST approaches to pluralism have been developed (see Midgley 1997a, for a review of most of these; and Mingers and Gill 1997, for some additional perspectives). To keep matters simple, we first focus on the work of Flood and Jackson (1991a, 1991b), whose approach has been one of the most widely used, before subjecting this to critique. We then move on to discuss Midgley's (2000) 'systemic intervention,' which we argue is a better candidate for providing the pluralistic component of our Buddhist systems methodology.

2.1. Some early work in critical systems thinking

The subject of methodological pluralism occupied a great deal of research attention in the systems community in the 1980s and 1990s, and there are two reasons for this. The first is

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practical: experience tells us that drawing upon multiple methods from different paradigmatic sources makes for a more flexible and responsive systems practice than adherence to a methodology that prescribes the use of only a narrow range of tools. Nevertheless, in the 1980s this flew in the face of scientific convention, which was highly prescriptive about what methods could be considered scientific—and in many research communities *intervention* methodologies were still judged using criteria developed for ensuring good quality scientific *observation* (Midgley 2000). Methodological pluralism also met resistance from a number of systems thinkers working in different paradigms who were arguing that they alone had the best approaches, instead of acknowledging the possibility that they all had something useful but different to offer (Jackson 1987a). Arguing against these authors was important so that the practical benefits of methodological pluralism could be realised.

The second reason why methodological pluralism became a major concern in the 1980s and 1990s was theoretical. Authors like Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Jackson and Carter (1991) proposed that the various different paradigms that people work in are incommensurable: i.e., they are based on irreconcilable assumptions about the nature of the world and human knowledge, so working across paradigms involves accepting intolerable theoretical contradictions. These arguments were picked up and used by those wanting to justify scientific conventions or argue that there is a 'one best way' for engaging in systems practice, so again counteracting them was important for those wanting to realise the benefits of methodological pluralism. It was also important because there is some truth in the incommensurability thesis: once a researcher becomes immersed in a set of paradigmatic assumptions, it becomes very difficult for him or her to accept the legitimacy of any other paradigm (Brocklesby 1995, 1997; Mingers and Brocklesby 1996). Therefore the search was on for a coherent pluralist philosophy that could make sense of the idea of drawing upon methods from multiple paradigms—i.e., there was a need to develop a *new* set of paradigmatic assumptions that would underpin the practice of methodological pluralism (again see Midgley 1997a, for a review of how different pluralist perspectives address paradigm incommensurability).¹

In making their own contribution to the debate, Flood and Jackson (1991a) apply Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests as a potential solution to overcome the paradigm incommensurability problem. Habermas (1972) argues that human beings have three interests: technical, practical, and emancipatory. The technical interest concerns the prediction and control of natural and social systems to achieve goals and bring about well-being. The practical interest concerns the need to communicate successfully with other human beings, which requires the development of inter-subjective understanding orientated toward consensus. The emancipatory interest concerns the need to escape from constraints imposed by power relations which prevent free and open discussion. Flood and Jackson (1991b) identify three major systems paradigms (which they label 'hard,' 'soft'

¹ Tsoukas (1993) argues that a single researcher cannot create a new paradigm because the nature of a paradigm is that it is widely shared, and to some extent taken for granted, across a sizable research community. Gregory's (1992) and Midgley's (2000) position on this is that it is possible to *propose* a paradigm, even if the individual does not have the ability to generate one on his or her own. Understanding how this works requires a shift in focus from the scale of the research community to the scale of individual learning and interaction between researchers: the individual can learn from a variety of people making different paradigmatic assumptions (in the knowledge that s/he will only be able to appreciate their assumptions from his or her own perspective) in order to propose fresh ideas that have the potential to become a new paradigm (Gregory 1992). Building on this shift of focus, Yolles (1996) distinguishes between *actual* paradigms (that are widely shared) and *virtual* paradigms (that seem to work from an individual perspective and can be communicated to others).

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and ‘emancipatory’) and they align hard systems approaches (i.e., those methodologies that focus primarily on modelling social and ecological systems) with the technical interest; soft approaches (i.e., those mainly dialogical methodologies that enable debate on assumptions between stakeholders to find an acceptable way forward) with the practical interest; and emancipatory systems approaches (i.e., those providing tools for people to challenge restrictive power relations) with the emancipatory interest. Because Flood and Jackson (1991a, 1991b) say that their approach has the potential to support all the areas of human interest with different methodologies, they argue that this overcomes the paradigmatic divisions between them.

Moving on to operationalise this theoretical perspective in what Flood (1990) calls a ‘meta-methodology,’ Flood and Jackson (1991a) propose ‘total systems intervention’ (TSI). TSI has four principles: being systemic; achieving meaningful participation; being reflective; and enhancing human freedom. It involves three phases (creativity, choice, and implementation) in a cyclical process (Flood and Jackson 1991a; Flood 1995a, 1995b). During the creativity phase, metaphors and idea generating techniques are used to challenge preconceived ideas, to generate new perspectives on problems and the ways they interact, and to reveal key causes of problems. The choice phase is used to identify the most appropriate methodologies to tackle the issues already revealed. There are many systems methodologies, each mainly representative of one of the paradigms mentioned earlier, and the most appropriate methodologies must be determined from the metaphors generated during creativity and using the ‘system of systems methodologies’ framework (Jackson and Keys 1984; Jackson 1987b, 1990), which links methodologies and appropriate contexts.² It is important to identify the most appropriate methodologies to avoid a waste of resources and any prolonging of the problem being tackled. The implementation phase involves intervention using the chosen methodologies with the aim of producing co-ordinated change.

2.2. Critiques of early critical systems thinking

However, TSI has been criticized. Only some of the critiques are covered here, and for more detailed reviews (particularly of Flood and Jackson’s approach to the paradigm incommensurability problem) see Midgley (1996, 1997a, 2000). The framework used by Flood and Jackson (1991a) seems to limit the interpretation of the methodologies to what is prescribed by the system of systems methodologies: no alternative interpretation can be entertained without challenging the framework (Gregory 1992, 1996). Also the meta-methodology is said to oversimplify intervention by focusing on too few contingencies (Mingers 1992). Finally, choosing only one or two methodologies for application limits practice: the potential inherent in creatively mixing multiple methods is missed (Midgley 1990, 1997b, 2000; Dutt 1994).

All of the above problems stem from the use of the system of systems methodologies within TSI, but simply abandoning this aspect of it (as Flood 1995a, 1995b, does) will only be partially useful. This is because Flood and Jackson’s version of CST (the foundation of TSI) faces a further criticism. Flood and Jackson (1991a) indicate that Ulrich’s (1983, 1987) critical systems heuristics (CSH), which they class as an emancipatory methodology, is only applicable for dealing with coercive situations. The basis of Ulrich’s approach is *boundary critique*: exploring different possible boundaries that define what should be included in the definition of a problematic situation and whose views count, and also probing the values that lie behind people’s preferences for particular boundary judgements. Saying that CSH

² It should be noted that Flood (1995a, 1995b) later abandoned this framework.

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is only useful when coercion is encountered limits the application of boundary critique to a narrow field of situations. We should not assume that, in the absence of coercion, everybody has sufficient systemic awareness to adequately tackle the difficulties they face. As a means of enhancing systemic awareness, boundary critique can still be useful. Indeed, if there is only a limited application of boundary critique, there may be underlying coercion in organizations and society that is not dealt with (or even seen) because of superficial diagnoses of problematic situations (Ulrich 1993; Midgley 1996, 2000; Han 2000). In order to overcome this problem, Midgley (2000) argues that an element of up-front boundary critique is needed in all interventions.

In our view, the above criticisms of earlier work in CST/TSI are significant and need to be taken seriously. Therefore, we choose to set aside Flood and Jackson's perspective as a candidate for providing a pluralist theory for our BSM. In particular, we believe that a more up-front focus on boundary critique is needed. It seems that there are two approaches that might achieve this: Ulrich's (1983) CSH and Midgley's (2000) systemic intervention. However, Ulrich's approach does not explicitly advocate the use of methods from a wide range of other positions (Flood and Jackson 1991b). Therefore, Midgley's systemic intervention looks like the best candidate to inform our BSM (and we can also draw in some ideas from Gregory 2000).

2.3. Systemic intervention

Midgley (2000) proposes that a systemic intervention methodology should encourage change agents (both the systems practitioner and other participants) to do a minimum of three things:

- (1) *Reflect critically upon, and make choices between, boundaries.* This is because human beings cannot even be aware of, let alone deal with, full systemic interconnectedness. Reflection on and discussion of boundary judgements is an activity that helps people to develop greater systemic awareness than taking boundaries for granted, and includes consideration of the ethical consequences of framing problematic situations in particular ways. Importantly, this is a key means by which the interconnectedness recognized by both Buddhism and systems thinking may be addressed.
- (2) *Make choices between theories and methods to guide action.* This requires an emphasis on theoretical and methodological pluralism. It is through this pluralism that people using a BSM may draw upon a wide range of theoretical insights and methods from systems (and other) paradigms, reinterpreting them as necessary to address particular purposes of intervention.³ However, this requires an attitude of openness and on-going learning in relation to other systems paradigms.⁴
- (3) *Be explicit about taking action for improvement.* Improvement needs to be defined locally and temporarily (but without ignoring the dimension of sustainability) because any understanding of it inevitably assumes value and boundary judgements. It is necessary

³ Midgley's (2000) approach to the problem of paradigm incommensurability is to provide a theory of boundaries, showing how different paradigms are based on different implicit boundary judgements. Once the exploration of, and choice between, boundaries is placed centre-stage in a methodology, then the idea of choice between theories and methods drawn from differently-bounded paradigms becomes perfectly reasonable. Nevertheless, Midgley also acknowledges that advocates of a pluralist systemic intervention methodology will make different paradigmatic assumptions to others who believe that they have found the 'one best way,' so there is no pretence that his systemic intervention approach unites the field of systems thinking—just an argument that systemic intervention is more flexible and responsive, and therefore more useful, than narrowly prescriptive methodologies.

⁴ Midgley (2000) provides a set of concepts to support methodological learning.

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to make understandings of improvement explicit, partly so that people can be accountable for them in discussions with others, and partly because human beings cannot do everything—they need to make choices between the different possible improvements that they can pursue. Only if definitions of improvement are made explicit will people be able to identify when they are pursuing something relatively trivial at the expense of something more important. Shen and Midgley (1997a) argue that the concept of social usefulness is part of Buddhist philosophy, so there is an important connection between Buddhism and systemic intervention here.⁵

It should be clear from the above that the *change agent* (whether defined as a practitioner, a participative group, or in any other way)⁶ is pivotal in systemic intervention. It is the agent who undertakes boundary critique, chooses methods and works toward improvement. Self-reflection on the part of the agent, especially in light of power relations and ideologies in wider society, is therefore crucial.

While Midgley (2000) discusses the importance of self-reflection, this is a theme that is covered in more detail in the related work of Gregory (2000). She suggests that self-reflection and ideology-critique are complementary concepts and should be viewed as interdependent. Self-reflection is necessary because hidden assumptions may constrain people's understandings of problem situations, and exposing these to analysis can help to 'free the mind' (not totally, because there will always be hidden assumptions, but to a greater degree than unreflective practice will allow). However, wider social forces may prevent or frustrate action being taken in relation to the enhanced understanding that self-reflection can yield. This is why ideology-critique is also necessary. Ideology-critique involves identifying wider social constraints and considering how they might be addressed. By looking at the connections between one's own assumptions (through self-reflection) and wider ideologies (through ideology-critique), a more 'liberating' approach may be taken. Gregory (2000) proposes a linking of self-reflection and ideology critique with empirical-analytic observations of problematic situations and stakeholder dialogue to enhance critical research practice.

2.4. A provisional summary

To summarise the above, systemic intervention emphasizes pluralism at the methodological level (which involves respecting the insights of others when developing methodological ideas), and also talks in terms of pluralism at the level of methods (which can involve using and reinterpreting a range of methods, including those from outside the systems paradigms, to include in an intervention). Furthermore, self-reflection and ideology-critique on the part of the agent are necessary. Importantly, systemic intervention prioritizes boundary critique, thereby addressing systemic interconnectedness. Therefore we argue that it is appropriate to use this as the main pluralist systems perspective informing the development of our BSM, allowing other systems ideas to be interpreted through it when they become relevant.

We have now settled upon Humanistic Buddhism and systemic intervention as core influences in constructing our BSM. The BSM itself is presented in the next section.

⁵ Being explicit about improvement does not mean that the trajectory of an intervention can be completely pre-planned (Midgley 2003e): understandings of improvement may evolve over time, and in some contexts an appropriate definition of improvement may be the creation of space to allow the emergence of stakeholders' own understandings of improvement.

⁶ Midgley (2000) writes extensively on the nature of the agent, and how agents can be defined pluralistically.

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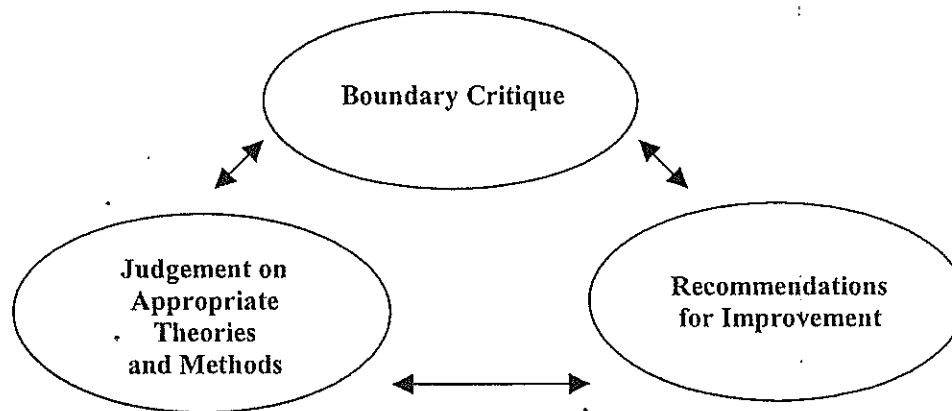


Fig. 1 The essence of systemic intervention (adapted from Midgley, 2000: 132)

3. A buddhist systems methodology

The BSM that we have developed can be operationalized in either of two modes: mode 1 is concerned with intervention for problem prevention and problem solving, while mode 2 is about evaluating the conduct and outcomes of a BSM intervention. This is a distinction we have borrowed from Flood (1995a), and it means that the BSM can enable reflection on its own use. However, for the sake of brevity, mode 2 will not be discussed any further in this paper. For full details, including a generic set of evaluation questions, see Shen (2006).

3.1. Overview.

The BSM consists of two component structures: the first, detailed in Fig. 1, is adapted from Midgley's (2000) systemic intervention, and it interactively combines boundary critique, choice between theories and methods, and recommendations for improvement. The emphasis in the BSM is on *recommendations* for improvement, rather than *taking action* for improvement, because recommendations are essentially proposals for action that can usefully be subjected to critical analysis using the Buddhist concepts represented in Fig. 2.⁷

The second component structure, represented in Fig. 2, encapsulates the five concepts that are common to all schools of Buddhism, and are a particular focus of Humanistic Buddhism. These concepts are the eightfold noble path; middle path; cause-condition-effect; space (context); and time. They have been discussed in detail by Shen and Midgley (2007a), and summaries will be provided shortly.

Figure 1 therefore represents the three main aspects of a Buddhist systemic intervention (understanding, of course, that we can cycle backwards and forwards between the aspects—they will not necessarily be implemented in a linear sequence). Figure 2 provides the concepts that are to be used *within* all three aspects, making this a thoroughly *Buddhist* systems methodology. Introducing the five Buddhist concepts into each of the aspects of systemic intervention gives rise to a highly flexible methodology to promote Buddhist reflection, and this is represented in Fig. 3.

⁷ The actions that are actually taken can be evaluated using the BSM mode 2.

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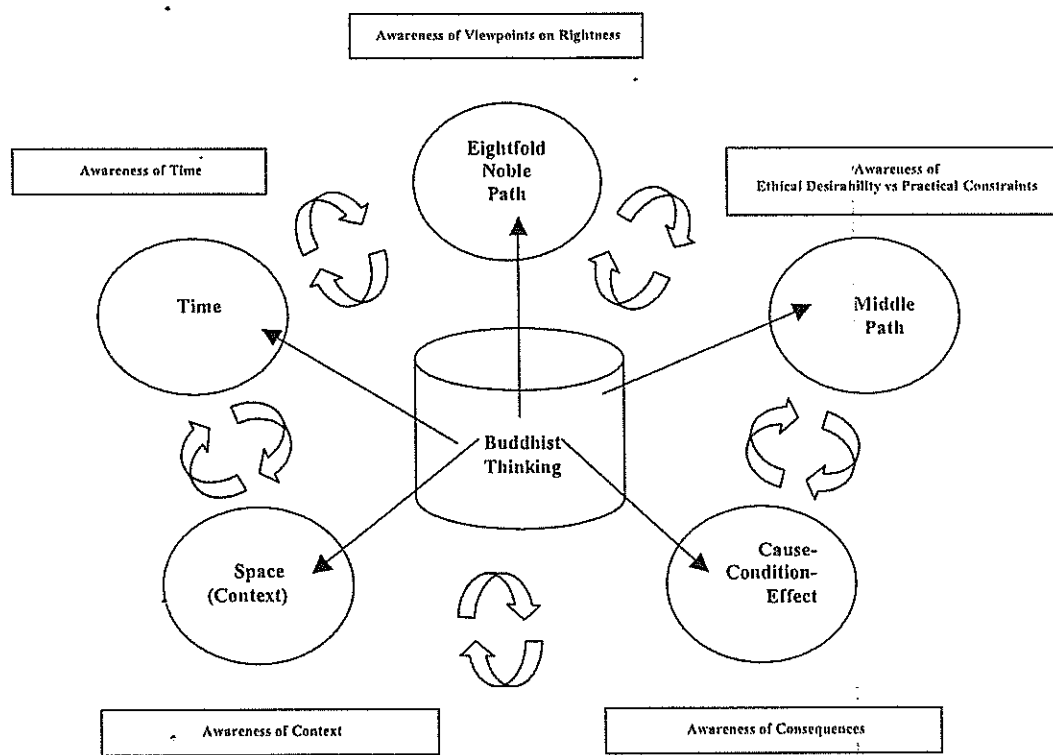


Fig. 2 Five key Buddhist concepts

3.2. The five major buddhist concepts

Summary explanations of the five concepts represented in Fig. 2, and a discussion of their relevance to the BSM, are provided below.

3.2.1. The eightfold noble path

The eightfold noble path emphasizes awareness of different viewpoints and boundaries. Reflection is encouraged on what might be 'right' for the context in terms of view, thinking, speech, action, living, endeavour, memory and meditation (see Shen and Midgley 2007a, for full definitions, and the discussion below for short statements about each of these concepts). While in the original Buddhist philosophy the emphasis is on individual reflection on these matters, this is complemented in the BSM by dialogue between stakeholders within and beyond organizations. In our view, dialogue can be useful because in Buddhist organizations people are generally accepting of authority and tend to try to cooperate even when facing serious adversity. The shadow side of this is that, in order to preserve organisational harmony, people may try to avoid critique and challenges to established patterns of thinking, even when these are required to deal with the adversity (Shen and Midgley 2007a). To counter this tendency, dialogue can be presented as a cooperative activity in which critiques can be *collectively* developed. It introduces the possibility of transcending narrowly defined interests based on restricted individual perspectives (Churchman 1970; Checkland 1981), which is culturally valued.

Exploring the 'right view' involves the critique of purely selfish attitudes and drives, so it can enable greater openness to the viewpoints of others. It can also contribute to conflict resolution and conflict prevention if people are willing to review their own personal

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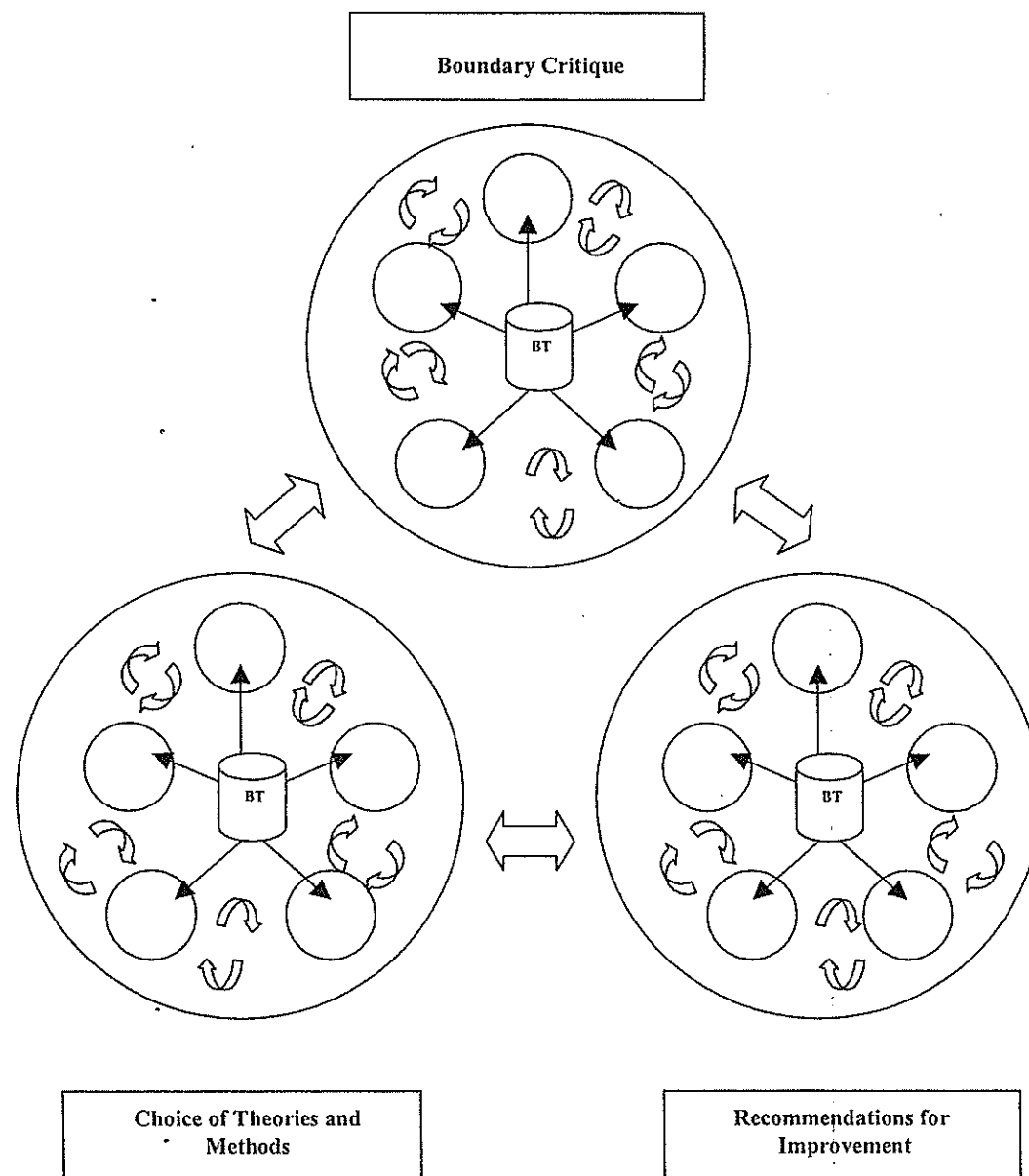


Fig. 3 BSM Process of Intervention

interests in the light of other perspectives. The exploration of 'right thinking' encourages avoidance of covetousness, resentment and malice, thereby also helping people build more productive relationships. Reflecting on 'right speech' involves the avoidance of lying, deceitfulness, slander and 'improper' language. So this encourages truthfulness and openness in dialogue, enhancing trust. Thinking about 'right action' encourages the avoidance of killing, stealing and other major misconducts. This not only helps to build trust but also introduces an action-oriented ethic into the picture. Likewise, exploring 'right living' involves thinking about what it means to work usefully for society, encouraging social and environmental awareness. Reflection on 'right endeavour' encourages the avoidance of idleness and apathy, thereby promoting constructive engagement. Considering 'right memory' encourages the fair representation of self, others and the wider world. It also enhances trust. Thinking about 'right meditation' encourages the practice of Buddhist reflection, which promotes mental discipline in people's lives.

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3.2.2. *The middle path*

The middle path emphasizes avoidance of extremes, particularly concerning ethical principles versus the acceptance of practical constraints in making decisions. In Buddhist philosophy, extreme views are regarded as arising from incomplete or distorted knowledge, so a 'middle way' between the extremes (or involving a new synergy) is sought. However, the 'middle way' is not a rigid compromise path, but involves assessment in decision making of local influencing factors, which can be surfaced through dialogue. This means that the methodology recognizes that, although some decisions can appear unethical or extreme at first sight, this perception may change following critical reflection because the reflection may give rise to an understanding that there are worse extremes, or that the supposedly extreme option is necessary for the longer-term good. An example is when a business organization may need to accept making redundancies in the short-term to enable longer-term viability for the benefit of the customers it serves and the remaining and future employees.

3.2.3. *Cause-condition-effect*

The concepts of cause, condition and effect are interrelated and inseparable in Buddhist thinking. Most readers will be familiar with 'cause' and 'effect,' and the term 'condition' essentially refers to the context that facilitates the cause-effect relationship. The same cause given different conditions may not lead to the same effect. However, what counts as a 'cause,' 'condition' or 'effect' is dependent on local interpretation because complex interrelationships mean that each effect may be a cause of, or a condition for, some other interaction. Inclusion of this concept in the BSM places an emphasis on awareness of the systemic, contextual and interpretive nature of both causation and consequences in the dealings of an organization. It brings recognition that situations can be complex, and that a sole focus on limited causation may be inappropriate for finding solutions because deeper understanding about the interaction of cause, condition and effect is often needed to avoid unwanted side-effects of intervention. Therefore the cause-condition-effect concept can promote more careful decision making than thinking in terms of linear cause-effect relationships.

3.2.4. *Space (Context)*

Space is usually viewed in Buddhism in terms of context, not just geographical space. The concept of space emphasizes the need to be aware of local issues in decision-making, especially cultural and ecological factors. Space/context is closely related to 'condition' in cause-condition-effect. The BSM asks people to consider local circumstances in decision making, including the views on these of both the involved and the affected (and surfacing these will usually involve dialogue).

3.2.5. *Time*

The final concept in Fig. 2 is time. The BSM encourages the awareness of time issues because Buddhists believe we must think about, and engage in dialogue about, the past, present and future as if we live in all three simultaneously. Tomorrow's experiences can be created by today's actions, and today's actions are inevitably influenced by the past. By learning from the past, and by considering possible future consequences of our actions today, we can minimize future problems (but not eliminate them altogether because of the inevitable limitations of

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the human ability to grasp complexity). Here, the idea of sustainability becomes important: the potential needs of future generations need to be accounted for today.

3.3. Interactivity

Within each aspect of systemic intervention, the five Buddhist concepts are linked interactively, so thinking moves back and forth from concept to concept until the people involved believe that all of them have been adequately addressed. The sequence in which the concepts are used will depend on the issues that are being explored and the interconnections that are made through reflection and discussion.

4. A questioning, exploratory approach

An important aspect of Buddhist thinking is that insight can be achieved through analysis, and the production of knowledge is from both self and other because of their interaction (Fenner 1995; Shen and Midgley 2007a). Given this, it makes sense to operationalize the BSM as a series of questions, based on the five Buddhist concepts represented in Fig. 2. These questions can be addressed in a process of personal reflection, a one-to-one conversation or in a group context. They can be asked about the situation at hand, including ethical concerns being expressed about that situation (boundary critique); the possible consequences of using particular theories and methods; and the possible consequences of recommendations that might arise from using those methods.

The idea for operationalizing the BSM using an exploratory, questioning approach came from reading Ulrich (1983). However, his questions are designed primarily for boundary critique during planning. Also, they are based in a Western philosophical tradition, drawing on Kant's (1788) 'categorical imperatives' to inform the formulation of questions. Future research might usefully compare our questions with those developed by Ulrich (1983).

4.1. Boundary critique questions

There are twelve questions for boundary critique, many of which have sub-questions within them. Eight of the questions are based on the concerns of the eightfold noble path. Each of the other four relate to the middle path, cause-condition-effect, space (context), and time. See Table 1 for details.

4.2. Choice of theories and methods

There are also twelve questions about choosing theories and methods. Again, eight are based on the eightfold noble path and the other four relate to the middle path, cause-condition-effect, space (context), and time (see Table 2).

4.3. Recommendations for improvement

Finally, there are twelve questions for use in reflecting on the possible consequences of recommendations for improvement arising out of the use of the chosen methods (see Table 3). These questions can be used to evaluate recommendations after they have been generated, and when the practitioner becomes fluent in their use s/he should also be

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Table 1 Twelve buddhist questions for boundary critique

Eightfold Noble Path

1. What currently motivates you and others to define the issue at hand? What ought to be your/their motivations?
2. Is covetousness, resentment or malice influencing you or others in defining the issue? If so, what might the issue look like from yours or other points of view if these were removed?
3. Is lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language involved in the way this issue is being defined by you or others? If so, what might the issue look like from yours or other points of view if these were removed?
4. Is there any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) linked with the issue? If so, should this be included as an integral part of defining the issue?
5. Is the issue being defined in a way that privileges your own concerns over wider social concerns? Is there a way to define the issue in a way that includes a wider set of concerns, without making the issue impossible to address?
6. Is there idleness, apathy or avoidance of the issue? Who should be engaged with the issue and how?
7. Are there any misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world in the definition of the issue? Have you tested out what you attribute to others by asking them? Should you do so, and if not, why not? If there are misrepresentations, what might the issue look like from yours or other points of view if these were corrected? -
8. Has the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking been applied sufficiently in defining the issue? If not, can further Buddhist systemic investigation be undertaken?

Middle Path

9. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what are the different possibilities for defining 'middle paths' between their ethical and practical concerns? What risks might be associated with different middle paths, and which one should be chosen?

Cause-Condition-Effect

10. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what cause-condition-effect relationships are important to understanding this issue? What are their potential consequences and the risks of ignoring them? Which should therefore be accounted for, and what conditions make this choice the right one?

Space (Context)

11. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what cultural and ecological contexts are relevant to understanding the issue? What is your view in relation to these other views, and why?

Time

12. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what time scale for dealing with this issue should be adopted, and why? What is your view in relation to these other views?

able to start using them alongside, or integrated with, the chosen methods to ensure that inappropriate recommendations are not produced in the first place.

5. Relevance to Buddhist organizations in Taiwan

The Buddhist culture in Taiwan encourages a deep respect for age and authority. Consequently, it is very difficult for people in Taiwanese organizations, especially Buddhist ones, to challenge prevailing authority structures, even when they believe that serious mistakes are being made. While surreptitious sabotage is possible (Ho 1997), the open voicing of disagreement is usually viewed as threatening organizational harmony, which (according to the norms of Buddhist culture) should be avoided. Even the open recognition of problems is

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Table 2 Twelve Buddhist questions for reflecting on choices of theories and methods

Eightfold Noble Path

1. What method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through boundary critique)?
2. What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or malice you have identified?
3. What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you have identified?
4. What method(s) will tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you have identified?
5. What method(s) will help in preventing a narrow set of concerns being privileged over wider social concerns, but without making the issue impossible to address?
6. What method(s) will work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you have identified?
7. What method(s) will help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world?
8. What method(s) will help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking, if this is not sufficiently in evidence?

Middle Path

9. What method(s) will support people in developing the middle path between ethical and practical imperatives identified through the boundary critique?

Cause-Condition-Effect

10. What method(s) will help people account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships identified through the boundary critique?

Space (Context)

11. What method(s) will help people account for the key cultural and ecological contexts identified through the boundary critique, and will they work in those contexts?

Time

12. What method(s) will work in the time scale specified in the boundary critique?

generally avoided for fear that pointing to a problem could be construed as blaming someone. It was Chao-Ying Shen's concern about the unwillingness of Taiwanese Buddhists to acknowledge the existence of even quite significant organizational problems, and the seeming inability of Western systems approaches to address this issue (Shen 1996, 2006; Shen and Midgley 2007a), which was the launch-pad for our own research program to develop a specifically Buddhist systems methodology that might have more success in this regard.

We believe that the principal strength of the BSM is that it introduces a route for people in Taiwanese Buddhist organizations to identify issues, critique the status quo, and consider how things ought to be done *using familiar Buddhist concepts that are closely associated with the practice of harmonious living*. Because the questions will be culturally familiar to Taiwanese Buddhist participants, we believe that their use (either with a researcher acting as a go-between, or in open debate when sufficient trust has been established) is more likely to be viewed as a co-operative and therefore culturally valued endeavour, compared with using less familiar Western systems concepts that can be interpreted as threatening organizational harmony. In our view, even questioning whether there is serious misconduct (e.g., killing or stealing) can be reframed in a positive light if it is seen as the exercise of Buddhist discipline applied to organizational life.

6. Conclusion

The BSM presented in this paper combines systems thinking, as represented by systemic intervention and all the available systems (and other) methods that can be selected through

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Table 3 Twelve Buddhist questions for reflecting on recommendations for improvement

Eightfold Noble Path

1. Are positive motivations embodied in the recommendations? If not, can they be improved?
2. Do the recommendations stem from covetousness, resentment or malice? If so, can they be improved upon in this regard?
3. Do the recommendations stem from lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language? If so, can they be improved upon in this regard?
4. Do the recommendations involve any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.)? If so, can this be eliminated?
5. Do the recommendations reflect wider social concerns either as well as, or instead of, narrower personal concerns? If not, can they be improved upon in this regard?
6. Do the recommendations identify the means to tackle idleness, apathy or avoidance (if these are potential problems)? If not, can they be improved upon in this regard?
7. Are the recommendations based on any misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world? If so, can they be improved upon in this regard?
8. Do the recommendations reflect the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking? If not, can they be improved upon in this regard?

Middle Path

9. Do the recommendations reflect the middle path between ethical and practical imperatives identified through the boundary critique? If not, should they simply be improved, or is there a need to return to boundary critique to define a new middle path?

Cause-Condition-Effect

10. Do the recommendations account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships identified through the boundary critique? Do they identify ways to change these where possible and desirable?

Space (Context)

11. Will the recommendations work in the cultural and ecological contexts identified through the boundary critique? If not, is there scope for changing these contexts (which could involve making further recommendations), or should the contexts be left as they are and the recommendations changed?

Time

12. What time scale is needed to implement the recommendations, and is this realistic? If not, should the recommendations be amended to fit the time scale, or could they be extended to enable the adoption of a new time scale?

it, with five key Buddhist concepts. We have offered a list of thirty six Buddhist questions (in three sets of twelve) that can help people explore boundaries and values in problematic situations; guide the choice of methods for intervention; and support the evaluation of new ideas for change.

We argue that the BSM offers a new way forward, and this has the potential to introduce a more critical and systemic process into organizational decision making in Taiwanese Buddhist contexts. The third paper in this trilogy (Shen and Midgley 2007b) tests our claims in practice. In that final paper we describe an intervention in a Taiwanese Buddhist non-governmental organization that involved people identifying and addressing a major issue that threatened the organization's viability. Through this example we demonstrate that it is indeed possible to surface problematic issues using the Buddhist questions, and it is even possible to address them openly (albeit not always comfortably) if people are able to experience the process as the practice of Buddhism within an organizational context.

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