

Finding Peter Singer's Sentientist Ethics in the Buffalo Suukhwan Rite

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Abstract

The Muang people are indigenous people living in the Northern part of Thailand. Important cultural religious rites and rituals performed by them annually depicts of their sensitiveness and moral responsibility towards the nature or environmental surroundings. Buffalo *suukhwan* rite is one of them. In this rite, we see the recognition of other sentient beings' sentiments, sufferings and even the belief in the power to either bless the crops' yield and curse is expressed. The buffalo, being a sentient being, is not to be harmed or inducing sufferings has to be minimized as is found in the philosophical ethics of Peter Singer in his notable work *Animal Ethics*. The buffalo here, is being thanked, revered, given a good feast and most importantly invoke the mystical power that is believed to be present in

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the buffalo, not to leave but to inhabit and bless the people with good crops.

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บทคัดย่อ

คนเมืองคือกลุ่มคนท้องถิ่นซึ่งอาศัยโดยรวมอยู่ทางพื้นที่ภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย พิธีกรรมสำคัญต่าง ๆ ทางวัฒนธรรมเชิงศาสนาอันได้ถูกประกอบขึ้นประจำทุกปีโดยพากເຫາเหล่านั้นสามารถแสดงน้ำความรู้สึกและหน้าที่ความรับผิดชอบเชิงศีลธรรมของพากເຫາต่อธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อมรอบตัว พิธีกรรมสู่วัญญาณเป็นหนึ่งในพิธีกรรมอันสำคัญเหล่านั้น จากการวิเคราะห์พื้นที่ในพิธีกรรมสู่วัญญาณนี้ เราได้ประจักษ์แจ้งถึงการรับรู้ความรู้สึกทางอารมณ์ และภาวะความเจ็บปวดของสิ่งมีชีวิตอื่นซึ่งมีความสามารถรับรู้ความรู้สึกได้ และแม้กระหั่งทั้งความเชื่อในพลังซึ่งสามารถอำนวยพรแก่การเจริญ.org งามแห่งพีชผล และความสามารถสถาปัตย์แห่งแก่พีชผลได้ปรากฏในพิธีกรรมนี้ เช่นกัน ความในฐานะสิ่งมีชีวิตซึ่งสามารถรู้สึกได้ ย่อมไม่ควรถูกทำให้เจ็บปวดทรมาน หรือในกรณีที่หลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้การทำให้เกิดความเจ็บปวดนั้นจำเป็นต้องถูกลดให้น้อยที่สุด ทัศนะต่อสัตว์ดังกล่าวสอดคล้องกับแนวคิดที่พับในงานเขียนเรื่อง “จริยศาสตร์สัตว์” ที่มีชื่อเสียงของ ปีเตอร์ ซิงเกอร์ ที่พยายามเรียกร้องสิทธิสัตว์ผ่านกระบวนการทำความเข้าใจทางจริยศาสตร์ อย่างไรก็ตามพิธีสู่วัญญาณก้าวข้ามไปมากกว่านั้น ความ ณ ที่นี่ได้รับการขอบคุณ ได้รับความเคารพ และย่อมได้รับการประกอบพิธีกรรมสำหรับเรียกขวัญซึ่งถูกเชื่อว่ามีอยู่ในความ มีให้จากไป แต่ให้อาศัยอยู่ และอย่างพรผลผลิตอันงอกงามแก่ผู้คน

คำสำคัญ: แบบประเพณีคนเมือง, ภาคเหนือประเทศไทย, พิธีกรรมสู่วัญญาณ, จริยศาสตร์ความรู้สึกของปีเตอร์ ซิงเกอร์

Introduction

The whole world is now linking together and getting much closer than ever before. The North, the South, the East, and the West are connecting each other. The problems of each have become the problems for all, especially the environmental problems. It is thus a proper time for man to understand, realize and recognize the brotherhood of man; each other, each other's nature, culture, worldview or philosophy. Northern region of Thailand is an oriental community compounded of the world and historically the center of ancient federation of Thai people with their old capitals of contemporary kingdoms, located at Chiang Saen, Lamphun, and Chiang Mai. The Northern Thai (Muang) are one member of the groups of Tai ethnic from mainland Southeast Asia. They dwell mostly in Northern provinces of Thailand and call themselves as Khon Muang². They definitely possess their own language (Kam Muang), culture and tradition. (Forbes, Andrew. & Henley, David., 1997, p. 7) The Northern Thailand hereby, especially Northern Thai Tradition, is attractive to study, by its nature, and would be worth to delve into it in order to get proper understanding in the context of contemporary society.

The philosophical discussion of the moral status of animals has a long history in western society. Many ancient Greeks were vegetarians on primarily ethical grounds, and many later philosophers, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill, contemplated the normative dimensions of the human-animal relationship. In the 1970, the discussion about animals became more central, so animal ethics in its contemporary form took shape. The general interest in animal issues can be traced to various factors, such as growing concern for the environment and the ensuing criticism of anthropocentric values, along with new trends in political and moral thinking that underlined nonviolence together with equality and the rights of all human beings regardless of race, sex, religion, or other incidental

² *Khon* means “people”, and *muang* means “principality” or “territory”.

characteristics. Because the cultural climate was filled with criticism of inherited values and with advocacy of equality, it is hereby, an attempt is made to reinvestigate on the moral status of animals. (Aaltola, Elisa., 2009, pp. 42-43)

Animal Liberation, a work by Peter Singer was first published as a review essay in 1973 by The New York Review of Books. In 1975, a full-length *Animal Liberation* book was published and has become the influential and effectual “Bible” of the animal rights movement. It stated the detailed descriptions of animal production and experimentation with moral analyses. Besides, it provoked the animal advocacy and more philosophical investigation into the moral status of animals, for example *The Case for Animal Rights* published by Tom Regan in 1983. So, the moral position of nonhuman animals and the human-animal relationship have become main topics in western academic philosophy.

In Northern Thailand, there is evidently not much philosophical and ethical discussion concerning animals and the relationship between human and animals found. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no behavioral pattern concerning animals and Northern Thai people’s (Muang) relationship. To assemble the scattered Muang’s perspective for animals and their relationship to them, I recommend, it is necessary to study what Muang people have believed and performed to animals by the way of their traditional rituals. As a ritual is a highly symbolic behavior, and the performance of rituals projects gathering of the relationships, social situations, principles, and values from the social activity and condense them into powerful symbols, consequently it needs an approach which is more interpretive than definitively explanatory to the rituals.

Peter Singer, as a contemporary philosopher, is very famous for developing animal moral consideration and can described as both a thinker and a doer, a philosopher and an activist. He is at once a reformer involved in making a moral problem public, a professional exercising cognitive authority, and a philosopher writing moral theory. His *Animal Liberation* has manifested his ethical arguments for animals and become a foundation for further supporting and motivating animal

rights movement. The buffalo *suukhwan* is a Muang traditional ritual, which is rendered after the agricultural works of the year is completed (especially of paddy/rice farming). It expresses the Muang's attitudes, gratitude and remorse towards their buffalo. Therefore, this paper is to draw a hermeneutic approach of interpreting the “buffalo *suukhwan*” or “*suukhwan khwai*³” from Peter Singer's sentientist ethics' perspective.

Peter Singer's Sentientist Ethics

In contemporary ethics, “sentient” generally means that it is conscious of pleasure and/or pain. However, etymologically, the term “sentient” refers more widely to consciousness of something or other, rather than to consciousness of pleasure and pain, (Varner, Gary., 2001, p. 192) and it pervades broadly in the works of the contemporary sentientist ethics supporters. Peter Singer, the most famous one, uses this term to refer to consciousness of pleasure and pain. Joel Feinberg and Tom Regan defend sentientist ethics but make animals' moral standing depending on their consciously striving for things in the future, a capacity which may be less widespread in the animal kingdom than a bare consciousness of pain. So here, the sentientist ethics of Peter Singer is surveyed in this section.

Peter Singer begins his ethics for nonhuman animals by mentioning LD50 or “lethal dose 50 percent” in his essay *Animal Liberation* that:

A standard test for foodstuffs is the LD50. The object of this test is to find the dosage level at which 50 percent of the test animals will die. This means that nearly all of them will become very sick before finally succumbing or surviving. When the substance is a harmless one, it may be necessary to force huge doses down the animals, until in some cases sheer volume or concen-

³ *Khwai* is a northern Thai word which means buffalo.

tration causes death”.

(Singer, Peter., 1994, p. 70)

Although, due to the protests of animals moral activities, the LD50 test is legally prohibited in some countries and suspended for using until alternative research methods can be developed in many companies, however, Peter Singer still finds further other cases that animals are mistreated and abused. He, then, looks at the animals for food such as veal calves, beef herds and sows, and mentions concerning “Animal Factory Farming” in his essay following:

Factory farm animals need liberation in the most literal sense. Veal calves are kept in stalls five feet by two feet. They are usually slaughtered when about four months old, and have been too big to turn in their stalls for at least a month. Intensive beef herds, kept in stalls only proportionately larger for much longer periods, account for a growing percentage of beef production. Sows are often similarly confined when pregnant, which, because of artificial methods of increasing fertility, can be most of the time. Animals confining in this way do not waste food by exercising, nor do they develop unpalatable muscle.

(Singer, Peter., 1994, p. 72)

In his full-length *Animal Liberation*, he lays emphasis on, in chapter 2, a discussion of the use of animals in research, and summarily tells that “the tens of millions of experiments performed, only a few can possibly be regarded as contributing to important medical research”. (Singer, Peter., 1990, p. 40)

Therefore, Singer's essay and his book *Animal Liberation* have done much to criticize and publicize the detailed description of the “modern factory farming” and “research experimentation” on animals. As he declares that:

Animal Liberation will require greater altruism on the part of mankind than any other liberation movement, since animals are incapable of demanding it for themselves, or of protesting against their exploitation by votes, demonstrations, or bombs.

(Singer, Peter., 1994, p. 73)

Peter Singer starts his sentientist ethics with the argument that our exclusion of animals from moral considerability is similar with the earlier exclusions of Black and women, in which he stated the phrase “speciesism” to draw a parallel with racism and sexism. According to him, it is wrong to deny equal moral standing on the basis of race and sex, Singer hereby argues that it is also wrong to deny equal moral standing on the basis of species membership.

In *Animal Liberation*, Singer has based his thought on the classical utilitarian, and proposes his criticisms on the base notion of equal consideration of interests. He follows Jeremy Bentham’s the famous formal principle: “each to count for one and none for more than one”. In the other words, the interest of every being that has interests are to be taken into account and treated equally with the like interest of any other being. (Singer, Peter., 1994, p. 67) He, therefore, states that all interests of any being are to be given equal consideration. Furthermore, any being that has interests, in his view, hereby qualifies for the moral standing.

The further doubt is arisen that what is the characteristic which qualifies any being for equal moral standing. Singer, in his *Practical Ethics*, mentions a passage from Bentham’s writing at a time when African slaves in the British dominions were still being treated much as we now treat nonhuman animals:

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number

of the legs, the villocity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison, a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?.

(Singer, Peter., 1993, pp. 56-57)

In this passage above, Bentham points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that entitles a being to equal consideration. Therefore, Singer, in his book *Animal Liberation*, states that:

The capacity for suffering and enjoyments is a prerequisite for having interest at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way. It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is, however, not only necessary, but also sufficient for us to say that a being has interest-at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering. A mouse, for example, does have an interest in not being kicked along the road because it will suffer if it is.

(Singer, Peter., 1990, pp. 7-8)

In the quotation above, Singer applies the concept of “interests” to explain moral standing: the capacity for suffering (and enjoyment), in Singer’s view, is utilized to state that a being has interests. In the other words, the capacity to experience pleasure and/or pain is both necessary and sufficient for having morally considerable interests.

Because any animal being, for an example a mouse, possesses the capacity to suffer and/or experience enjoyment, so it has an interest, at least an interest not to suffer. Any or only being having the interest occupies the moral standing. Because any animal being has interests, it is no apparent reason not to take animal into moral standing, so animal being with interests deserves equal consideration of interests. As a quotation is cited on his book:

If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account.

(Singer, Peter., 1993, pp. 57-58)

Therefore, according to Singer, the capacity for consciousness of pain (or pleasure) would suffice to give an animal moral standing, and we should treat animals with equal moral consideration of interests.

This, then, is the argument for extending the principle of equality to non-human animals, but also leads to some doubts about what this equality amounts to in practice. An example, a case described that the human cancer victim normally suffers more than the nonhuman cancer victim. This means that the human cancer victim gets the quantities of pains more than nonhuman cancer victim. Singer accepts and replies that in some situations a member of one species will suffer more than a member of another species, and in these cases the principle of equal consideration of interests is to be given priority to relieving the greater suffering. Then he gives an example to demonstrate this issue in his *Animal Liberation*, that:

If I give a horse a hard slap across its rump with my open hand, the horse may start, but it presumably feels little pain. Its skin is thick enough to protect it against a mere slap. If I slap a baby in the same way, however, the baby

will cry and presumably does feel pain, for the baby's skin is more sensitive. So it is worse to slap a baby than a horse, if both slaps are administered with equal force. But there must be some kind of blow that would cause the horse as much pain as we cause a baby by a simple slap. That is what I mean by "the same amount of pain" and if we consider it wrong to inflict that much pain on a baby for no good reason then we must, unless we are speciesists, consider it equally wrong to inflict the same amount of pain on a horse for no good reason.

(Singer, Peter., 1990, p. 15)

This above sample and earlier quotations from Jeremy Bentham possibly might lead widely to the interpretations of *Animal Liberation* based on utilitarianism which has discussion on that what equal consideration amounts to. A sample of the criticisms is called "the argument from social bondedness" stated by Mary Midgley. In a qualified endorsement of the idea that the needs of those closest to us have moral priority over the needs of those less close, she invokes social bondedness: "the special interests which parents feel in their own children is not a prejudice, nor is the tendency which most of us would show to rescue, in a fire or other emergency, those closest to us". (Midgley, Mary., 1984, p. 102) Another sample for challenge to equal consideration is all investigations associated to the deep problems for any view that gives the interests of individual animals serious moral weight, the relationship between humans and animals or between animals of different species, for example a question about a human's interest in fencing off prairie land for agricultural purposes override a wild animal's interest in unobstructed habitat or the doubt that how does the spotted owl's interest in old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest compare with human interest in lumber. (Desjardins, Joseph R., 1993, p. 130)

However, in the article *The Moral Framework of Peter Singer's Animal Liberation: An alternative to Utilitarianism*, Renzo Llorente revises the interpretation and suggests the view defended for *Animal Liberation* that the interpretations of *Animal Liberation* based on utilitarianism have been misinterpretations. Llorente

argues that *Animal Liberation* is rather derived from the principle of non-maleficence, i.e. “not causing harm”, and the principle of “equal consideration of interests”, (Llorente, Renzo., 2009, p. 62) surely than based on utilitarianism. As, Llorente claims, Peter Singer writes in the first chapter:

The conclusions that are argued for in this book flow from the principle of minimizing suffering alone.

(Singer, Peter., 1990, p. 21)

The Llorente’s re-interpretation view that *Animal Liberation* is based on the principle of non-maleficence has shown the correspondence linking to the essential suggestion by Singer in *Animal Liberation*. As the passage states:

It may be objected that comparisons of the sufferings of different species are impossible to make, and that for this reason when the interests of animals and humans clash, the principle of equality gives no guidance. It is true that comparisons of suffering between members of different species cannot be made precisely. Nor, for that matter, can comparisons of suffering between different human beings be made precisely. Precision is not essential. As we shall see shortly, even if we were to prevent the infliction of suffering on animals only when the interests of humans will not be affected to anything like the extent that animals are affected, we would be forced to make radical change in our treatment of animals that would involve our diet, the farming methods we use, experimental procedures in many fields of science, our approach to wildlife and to hunting, trapping and the wearing of furs, and areas of entertainment like circuses, rodeos, and zoos. As a result, a vast amount of suffering would be avoided.

(Singer, Peter., 1990, pp. 16-17)

Furthermore, Singer himself admits, above-mentioned citation, it can be very difficult to make comparisons between sufferings. Peter Singer with the em-

phasis on minimizing the amount of suffering hereby recommends to restrict ourselves to only particular cases that harshly cause suffering to animals for only humans' benefits.

The Buffalo *Suukhwan* Rite

According to Muang's tradition, glutinous rice is the major of Muang nourishment, and so rice is the supreme source of sustenance. For example, according to Northern Thai language, "Food" really means rice, "To have a meal" is literally meant "to eat rice".

Due to the important of rice in the Muang diet, Muang people hereby hold reverentially that rice cultivation is the only form of agriculture involving a complex set of rituals and that rice is the only agricultural product that is apotheosized. (Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 149)

All of the ploughing and harrowing of the paddy fields for the rice cultivation were done by water buffalo in Northern region of Thailand in the past three decades ago. The major works of the water buffalo, which are plowing and harrowing of the inundated rice fields, would finished by the late August (the end of the first-planting) for a year, although using of the buffaloes would still continue for plowing the lands for plantations of cash crops later in the past of the year but much lesser.

In the study of Richard B. Davis, in *Muang Metaphysics*, states that the buffalo can be either owned or rented by the cultivators. The rental fee of lending is ten baskets of rice per area of ploughed land requiring one basket of seed rice. If a tenant uses his own buffalo, he subtracts this amount from the half-share of the harvest accruing to the landowner, unless another arrangement has been made. In some area, the harvest of a tenanted field is divided into three portions, one accruing to the tenant, another to the landowner, and the third to whichever party

owns the buffalo. (Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 165) So, buffalo ownership is an important factor in determining the rice-apportion.

After all ploughing and harrowing of the rice fields are implemented by the buffaloes, the cultivator has to realize that he owes the buffalo for all they have done in the rice fields, and must return to the buffalo through feasting. This rite is called “the buffalo *suukhwan*” or “*suukhwan khwai*” and applied whether the buffaloes are actually owned or leased by the cultivator.

First of all, the conception of *khwan* has to be elucidated here. Later, the *suukhwan khwai* rite will be described below. The *khwan*, as vaguely understood in a confused way, is an unsubstantial thing supposed to reside in the physical body of a person. When it is there the person enjoys good health and happiness. If it leaves the body the person will be ill or experiencing some undesirable effects. The *khwan* is not confined to human beings only. There are some kinds of animals, trees and inanimate objects useful to man have individual *khwans*. For example: an elephant, a horse, a buffalo or bullock, a certain house post, bullock cart, a paddy field or paddy, and even a city, each has a *khwan*. The *khwan* may, therefore, be described as something in the nature of a principle of life, vital to the welfare of man and animals. Certain inanimate things *also* have *khwan* because such inanimate things have their particular spirit or genius residing in them. (Rajadhon, Phya Anuman., 1988, pp. 228-229) Furthermore, in the research of Franco Amantea, *Dress and Identity among the Black Tai of Loei Province in Thailand*, reveals that the Black Tai of Ban *Napanad* believe that the human body is composed of 32 *khwan* which are located in 32 important organs of the body. In this research also, it mentions that the *khwan* are said to be very sensitive beings and may leave the body for any given reason. Therefore, Black Tai, when they are sick, perform a ceremony to recall the person’s missing *khwan*. (Aaltola, Elisa., 2007, p. 77) Therefore, the *khwan* is implicitly linked to the aboriginal Black Tai.

The buffalo *suukhwan* evidently belongs also to the archaic Tai substratum of Muang culture, since a similar rite is also practiced by the Black Tai. The cere-

mony should not be performed on a Lost Day, Brunt Day, Buddhist holy day, or Day of Destruction by Disease.

In the ritual performance, the objects used in all *suukhwan* rites are called the *phaakhwan* or set of offerings to feed and pamper the *khwan*. The *phaakhwan* for *suukhwan khwai* consists of a pair of boiled chickens, a slice of areca nuts, a leaf of betel, a native cigarette, a quid of *miang* (fermented tea leaf, chewed like tobacco), some sweets, a pair of dwarf bananas, two large balls of glutinous rice, and a cup of water. A shirt and pair of trousers are added if the buffalo is male, or a blouse, a skirt, and hairpin if it is a female. All these items are to allure and refresh the buffalo's *khwan* which are weakened after the rigours of the plowing season and recall which have fled from its body. The *phaakhwan* articles are placed on a *kradong* or winnowing basket. Alongside the tray are placed the other articles which will be used during the rite: an empty banana-leaf cup, two *suay tian*, two coils of white thread, a cup of *sompauy* water, and a bunch of freshly cut grass. (Premchit, Sommai. & Dore, Amphay., 1992, p. 270)

Generally, the rite is organized in the cultivator's yard, and only the officiant and an assistant, who is usually a young man in the cultivator's household, usually participate the rite. Facing the animal with the offerings, the officiant reads loudly the buffalo *suukhwan* text to convoke and soothe the buffalo *khwan*.

The fancy speech and words for embellishments of the buffalo *suukhwan* text varies from version to version, generation to generation, and place to another place, whereas the main meaning of the text is always the same. The major messages of the text is to humbly beg forgiveness of the animal for the rigours that it has been forced to go through and for the impatience and beatings that it has suffered at the hands of the cultivator. As a part of a buffalo *suukhwan* text (*kam suukhwan khwai*) was addressed in *Muang Metaphysics*, as it found in the research of Richard B. Davis. It states that:

Glory and the greatest prosperity! When you were born forth as a buffalo

your merit was so great that you are given to pulling the harrow and the plough. When they curse and beat you unceasingly, you never utter a word of protest but only keep up your brisk pace without wavering. It is to your everlasting credit that when they thrash you smartly with ropes you are able to keep going without a word, suffering hunger and exhaustion. For that reason you were born into the world to support and nourish humankind.

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 177)

Moreover, animal's *khwan* are promised a magnificent feast of *phaakhwan* offerings and are entreated to remain within the animal's body. The *khwan* are repeatedly urged not to wander into the forest and consort with wild animals but to take comfort and pleasure in the seductive young heifers and fields of tender grass which abound in the animal's proper domestic habitat. Another passage of the buffalo *suukhwan* text goes as:

We have gathered and arranged all sorts of offerings in goodly supply to convoke and rejuvenate the *khwan* of the buffalo. We have liquor, boiled chicken, and various other types of edibles, including fruits and sweets fit for a king. All these we have prepared for you. We have tied grass into bunches and placed these on the offering tray in waiting for the buffalo *khwan* to assemble here.

We have now passed the season when men beat and thrash you (buffalo) and have arrived at that auspicious moment when your *khwan* are to be rejuvenated. Don't go off and lie down by the termite mounds where there are stakes and logs. That is not the proper place for you to recline, as it is the sleeping-place of the giant centipede, the scorpion, and other poisonous creatures. Don't go skirting any hollow logs, for the same season. Don't wander away, but graze here within twenty fathoms distance, for I will now convoke the *khwan* of all buffaloes, be the black, white, young, old, male, or female. Let them come!

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 177)

During the rite performance recorded in the field-work of Richard B. Davis, after the end of reading the buffalo *suukhwan* text by the officiant, the young assistant places the *miang*, cigarette, betel, areca nut, and bits of rice banana, and chicken meat into the banana-leaf cup on the *phaakhwan* tray, into which he also sprinkled a few drops of water. This was to feed the buffalo *khwan* which have been attracted by invocation and were dressing and primping themselves on the tray, while the officiant recites a stylized invitation which is different from place to place, version to version, and relies on the style that the officiant uses, for the *khwan* to accept their offerings as follows:

When the 32 *khwan* of the buffalo have all arrived here at the auspicious moment, I will feast them to their hearts' content and feed them to their fill.

Whatever you should desire I will give you, whatever your taste I will feed you, for I have everything herein abundance. There are steamed round sweets and boiled flat sweets, betel and areca, banana and sugarcane, and bunches of fine green grass. May I reverently invite the 32 *khwan* of the buffalo to hasten and begin their feast. When the 32 *khwan* of the buffalo have arrived together, let them partake of this precious pair of boiled chickens named Golden Marrow. These we now break apart and offer to you, along with balls of fragrant glutinous boiled sweets mixed with pea seeds, steamed sweets of black sesame, gorgeous golden dwarf bananas, and tiny sweet-tasting bananas, which even we human beings use to feed our own beloved young along with their mother's milk. May I reverently invite the 32 precious *khwan* of the buffalo which are rollicking and playfully dancing all about us here to take my words to heart and reside forever within the body of this buffalo.

When you have eaten, come and drink of this water which I have drawn from my magic jeweled well. Whoever partakes of this water is as blessed as a man who drinks the magic potion of the great Doctor Kummarapanca, which is as strong as Inda's magic elixir of life. Whoever drinks of this potion will be rid of all disease. Any misfortune, illness, or danger will be expelled from you forthwith and dispersed forever.

When you have taken food and drink, come chew this handsome quid of areca and betel taken from the very tip of the vine, sprinkled with lime powder by widows and maidens, flavoured with pungent tobacco sliced into shreds as thin as red ants' legs, along with fine catechu brought all the way from Muang Lau ⁴, altogether a quid as potent as any you might find. There are also a cigarette and miang in addition to all the other delicacies which the 32 khwan of this animal are invited to feast upon.

Then, at a sign from the officiant, the assistant then sprinkles the *sompauy* water onto the back of the animal and ties a *suay tian* to each of the animal's horns with a length of the thread from the offerings tray. At the same time the officiant recites an extemporaneous speech begging the buffalo's blessing upon its master. The speech usually runs:

Today is a glorious and auspicious day, a day of the most precious magical portent. At this time I have honey, cooked rice, flower, puffed rice, candles, and lustral water to pay you homage and beg your forgiveness. From this time forth may we have plenty to eat, store, and trade. If we should take up any of the following three paths may the results of our effort befit our station and ability. In industry, if we try to support ourselves by our savings, may these come easily. In commerce, if we go off trading across the land, may our charm attract many customers, lords and shield princes, may the softness and deference of our manner be pleasing to our masters. Wherever and whenever we go off trading in the world may we be blessed to all people and celestial beings and loved and cherished by them. Let it truly be so!

Finally, when the assistant places the cup filled with bits of offerings onto the head of the buffalo, the officiant recites a final speech indicating that both beast and taskmaster are dependent on each other for their well-being uttering:

⁴ An old ***Muang*** (town) in present-day is Chiang Rai province, formerly the closest major source of catechu to Nan.

I now bind the buffalo khwan to their owner and bid them reside within its flesh and body. From this time forth may you know no pains and fevers, ills, and chills. May you flourish strong, well, and happy, firmer and more stable than ever before. May the rice in our fields ripen quickly into a rich green with long sturdy stalks. From this time forth may you nourish and sustain all of us with your beneficence. May this truly be so!

The buffalo is given the bunch of grass from the offering tray. Within seconds the cup of offerings falls its head, and the *sauy tian* are irritably brushed away. The animal's *khwan* have been mollified and the chances of a good harvest have been bettered, and human guilt has been palliated. (Davis, Richard B., 1984, pp. 167-169)

The rice farming method has been changed since the invading of modern technology and consequently, the aboriginal rice cultivation method is banishing soon, and the buffalo no longer plays the vital role due to the using of modern plowing machine or tractor. Even though the buffalo *suukhwan* rite is not widely performed in the modern time by the cultivator in Northern Thailand, yet, it can still be found in a few cities of the North of Thailand such as Chiang Mai, Nan, Lampang, etc. The ritual performed by Muang people still expresses the important status of buffalo on Muang society and the way with which, it is treated by Muang people.

Peter Singer's Sentientist Ethics in the Buffalo Suukhwan rite

In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer's arguments with the wealth of factual information relevant to the moral considerability for treating particularly animals in factory, farming and medical research is based on "speciesism" which is similar to the earlier exclusions of the Black and women, and then he expresses his sentientist ethics significantly linked to the utilitarian perspective, the principle of "equal consideration of interests" and minimizing the amount of suffering.

The buffalo *suukhwan* ritual performed by Muang is implicitly on expression of the Muang people's relationship to their buffalo and clarifies the buffalo status in Muang tradition.

The performance of buffalo *suukhwan* rite is to ask forgiveness from the buffalo because the cultivator feels guilty for his harsh treatment to the buffalo during rice cultivation. The cultivator thus performs *suukhwan* ritual in virtue of convoking the buffalo's *khwan* as it found in the following passage:

Do not hold anything against us. Only think that we have brought you offering and that we humbly beg your pardon. I have brought tasty blossoms of sathaan and cowslip.... All this in humble offering to that animal of ancient and nobler descent, the water buffalo.

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 179)

During the process of cultivating rice, using buffalo especially during plowing the rice fields, the buffalo sometimes used to walk slowly and strayed off to graze. The cultivator used to punish the buffalo by lashing with rope and jabbing them with a Pa-tak (a goading stick). The buffalo used to suffer but could not complain, so it used to endure the pain. We see a quotation cited from the following text:

There are bunches of tasty green grass and...., and forgiveness for having beaten and cursed you (buffalo) because you turned left when I shouted Right, because you stood stock still when I told you to go, or because you brushed against me when I tried to hold your neck. I have brought candles, flowers, and puffed rice in supplication and raise my palms to plead forgiveness from my courageous water buffalo.

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 178)

As it is evidently shown during the rice cultivation that the buffalo is subject to be suffering with cursing and beating unceasingly by the cultivator, and the passage from the text of buffalo *suukhwan* coherently mentioned that “*you (buffalo) are sapped of strength, toiling alone without a friend, suffering the beating of your master*”. (Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 178) The buffalo hereby, in Muang’s perspectives, is capable of suffering or experiencing sufferings, and surely can be identified as a “sentient being” which is similar to Peter Singer’s view of the conception of “sentience”. According to Singer, the term “sentience” is used in referring to having the capacity to suffer and/or enjoy. Sentience is necessary for having interests, for example a rock, an object without sentience, cannot be said to have interests, in contrast, a mouse that possesses the capacity to perceive sensations, so it can be said to have an interest, at least an interest not to suffer. Besides, Singer also believes that sentience is sufficient for having interests. A being that is sentient has at least a minimal interest: the interest in not suffering. (Desjardins, Joseph R., 1993, p. 124) Therefore, according to Singer’s term “sentience”, the buffalo is subject to have a moral standing because it possesses the capacity to suffer, it hereby is a sentient being and necessary for having interests. Further, the buffalo is required to be treated with the equal moral consideration of interests.

In Muang tradition, there is not any direct discussion on moral standing for buffalo. Nevertheless, the buffalo *suukhwan* ritual has shown the relationship between Muang people and their buffalo which can be applied for interpretation.

The relationship between Muang people as the cultivator and his buffalo as an employer and his hired hand is filled with kindness, gratefulness and respect as his buffalo is considered as one having senses and feelings. The buffalo works for its master and is subject to intense significance of activity at one point during the rice cultivation, the cultivator in turn must recognize his debt to the buffalo by feasting the buffalo’s *khwan* once the work is completed. In the other words, the works of the cultivator in the paddy fields on the rice cultivation are accomplished by the support of buffalo, therefore, it means that the cultivator has to lean on the buffalo for his source of sustenance. Although, it was recorded in field-work of

Muang Metaphysics that the officiant recited a final speech indicating that both beast (buffalo) and its taskmaster are dependent on each other for their well-being, but I recommend that only the cultivator (the taskmaster) took unilaterally rely on the buffalo, and not both of them were dependent on each other.

Of course, the ritual is not only obviously to ask for forgiveness from the buffalo but also to show gratitude to the buffalo (animal), or literally “to know its *punn* and *guna*” (*huu bun huu kun man*). (Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 165) Consequently, the buffalo is, in Muang’s attitudes, considered to be a large animal deserving kindness and thankfulness because it not only possesses the capacity to perceive sensations but also the buffalo has served them in the rice fields since the beginning of time and that too without complaint. As the two flowery messages composed to describe the origin of buffalo are declared in the text of buffalo *suukhwan*:

Today is a day of supreme victory! This pious and most excellent beast (buffalo) is a boon to all humankind in its labours for us.

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 178)

All kinds of buffaloes have been working for people from the very beginning. When you were first born on earth, the creators Puu Sangsii and Nyaa Sang-sai⁵ made some of you thin, some plump, some black, and some white. But you are all descended from that same source of all buffaloes, the old couple who first created you and sent you to the fields.

(Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 177)

⁵ This couple are identical to Old Thaens, the old creators of aboriginal *Tai Dam*.

According to the above-messages mentioned, the buffaloes were created by the old creators and have been serving humans since the very beginning of time. It shows significantly that the buffaloes are sentient beings and truly they occupy venerable status in Muang tradition. Additionally, concerning buffalo is also found in *Tai Dam* mythological creation story stating:

The original state of the creation of the cosmos as one where the Earth and the Heavens or Skies were joined by a chord that held both so close together that daily activities like pounding rice were impeded. The sky was so low that the upward-pointing horns of the buffalo got entangled whenever it tried to walk.

(Schliesinger, Joachim., 2016, pp. 37-38)

So, in Muang's aspect, the venerable status of buffalo is sometimes higher than Muang people, not amazingly the field-work of Richard B. Davis has recorded the begging of people to the buffalo to bless upon its master is found. Because, in Muang's view, humans are indebted to buffaloes, and the buffaloes have served us and advocated for the rice cultivation. Besides, in *Muang Metaphysics*, he reveals that failure on the part of a cultivator to reciprocate his animal's labours can be disastrous. Normally a buffalo is the most peaceful and harmless animal, however, it is to believe that this creature holds the power to curse its taskmaster with a poor harvest if it is not granted the proper ritual attention at the end of plowing. (Davis, Richard B., 1984, p. 165) This expresses Muang's perspective that the human-buffalo relationship can be both way; a great labour to support and evil creature to ill its taskmaster. This expresses that not only Muang people curse and beat the buffalo during rice cultivation season but buffalo can also curse and cause poor harvest to its taskmaster if they fail to perform the reciprocated ritual.

Therefore, according to Muang's perspective, the buffalo is surely the subject as sentient being because it can perceive sensations, and possibly the buffalo has its own inherent value. Moreover, the buffalo, as more than a sentient being,

obtains the venerable position in relationship with its master. The buffalo supports Muang people helping in the rice fields since the beginning. This shows the instrumental value of buffalo for Muang people, so Muang people acknowledge their debt to buffalo and ask for forgiveness for bad treatments that they had done to buffalo in rice seasonal cultivation process. Besides that, in Muang's literatures, buffalo is placed at a respected position being a creature of an ancient couple creator, and the subject to be beg for blessing by its master.

Let's deliberate into the principle of equal consideration of interests and the term "speciesism" used by Peter Singer in deliberating his moral standing for animals. The term "speciesism" of Peter Singer is to give attention to argue against the practice of experimentation on animals and the rearing of animals for food in his book:

Those prejudiced toward the interests of members of their own species and against those members of other species are guilty of speciesism, just as those prejudiced toward the interests of members of their own race or sex and against those members of other races or sexes are guilty of racism and sexism respectively. It is on the basis of the principle of equal consideration of interests that speciesism, by analogy with racism and sexism, rests.

(Singer, Peter., 1976, p. 9)

According to Muang's tradition, glutinous rice is the major source of sustenance. So, in the period of rice seasonal cultivation, Muang cultivator puts the buffalo as his helper, because sometimes the buffalo walks slowly and strays off to graze, the cultivator punishes it by cursing and beating with rope. Speciesism is briefly human prejudice or bias towards the interests of our own species and against those of non-human animals. Hence, it is necessary to accept the term "speciesism" in the sense that the Muang people recognize their interests: to produce glutinous rice which is the major source of sustenance by cursing and beating (causing sufferings) to the buffalo though only during rice cultivation. Nevertheless, the Muang cannot chose any better choice than this, they, after all of the ploughing and har-

rowing of the rice fields are done, do the ritual for begging forgiveness and to show their appreciation to the buffalo. Moreover, the ritual expresses the venerable standing for the buffalo that is conversely to the “speciesism” which is referred to the exclusion of animals from moral considerability, including race and sex.

Using the buffalo during the rice cultivation leads inevitably to the interpretation in the principle of equal consideration of interests. Singer writes in his book concerning this principle cited below:

If a being can suffer, the principle of equal consideration of interests demands that that being's suffering be “counted equally with the like suffering—in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being”. Sentience then, understood in the very basic sense of the capacity to suffer and/or experience enjoyment, is the marker by which concern for the interests of others is made.

(Singer, Peter., 1976, pp. 8-9)

Of course, the principle of equal consideration of interests has obviously not been recorded in any philosophical and moral discussion of Muang tradition. However, we can deliberate more to that what Muang do treat to buffalo after they cause sufferings to it. Muang people feel guilty for they had beaten and cursed the buffalo during their rice seasonal cultivation. It is possible to interpret that if Muang people are forced to be beaten and cursed, like buffalo, they surely will feel suffer and pain. So they perform the ritual to ask for forgiveness and show the gratitude to the buffalo. This is surely not close to the concept of Peter Singer's principle of equal consideration of interests but only a phenomena like the idiom mentioned that “put your foot in someone's shoes”. Nonetheless, let's do more exercise in comparing between a species and another species, as Peter Singer gives an example, which has been already cited above about the comparison between the same amount of hard slap on the horse and on baby in this article, in his book for considering his principle of equal consideration of interests.

The buffalo is cursed and beaten by its master with the object to complete the work and for the source of sustenance on rice field during rice cultivation. The buffalo presumably feels little pain. Its skin is thick enough to protect it against a mere beating. This situation leads to a sample that if a coach beat up/a bit scold his player because he/she does not focus on game properly, the player may cry and presumably does feel pain. Is it therefore particularly unethical? Because the player sometimes losses his/her concentration on game and needs to be forced by his/her coach. So, if we consider it, we find a little beating up or scolding the player during game administered with equal force are with good intention. The same amount of pain will cause suffering to both the player and buffalo. Then we consider it right to inflict that pain on the player for good reason, so we can consider it equally right to inflict the same amount of pain on buffalo for good reason also.

It is admitted by Singer that it can be very difficult to make comparison between sufferings, especially between species and another species. Singer hereby recommends to restrict ourselves causing suffering to animals only for humans' benefits with the emphasis on minimizing the amount of suffering.

Actually, the buffalo *suukhwan* ritual performance is merely to palliate the human's guilt not to minimize the animal's suffering which is one of the aims of Peter Singer for publishing the *Animal Liberation*. As he writes in his book "*pain and suffering are bad and should be prevented or minimized, irrespective of the race, sex, or species of the being that suffers. How bad a pain depends on how intense it is and how long it lasts, but pains of the same intensity and duration are equally bad, whether felt by humans or animals.*" (Singer, Peter., 1993, p. 61) However, the ritual manifests the higher venerable status of buffalo to Muang people and certainly inspire to avoid causing suffering to buffalo excepting on rice cultivation process as it is almost unavoidable to till the land and grow without doing it. So in this, I find, *Suukhwan* ritual performance is a means to minimize the suffering of another sentient being as people are made to understand the pain and sufferings of other species and also to pay the price for it in return like asking forgiveness and giving a good treat, and performing ritual indicating many values

above material values.

Conclusion

The buffalo *suukhwan* rite performed by Muang people reveals the buffalo status drawing on Muang society and the relationship between buffalo and them. Although Peter Singer deliberates moral consideration for animals against the practice of medical experimentation on animals and rearing of animals for food based on the utilitarian perspective and the principle of equal consideration of interests, and aims to minimize the amount of suffering, but the sentient ethics of him can be found in the buffalo *suukhwan* rite.

The term “sentient being” is manifested in the ritual that the buffalo, in Muang’s aspect, is sentient being because buffalo feels pain and suffer due to beating during rice cultivation, and surely Muang people perform the ritual in order to beg for forgiveness and appreciate the buffalo’s advocacy. This shows that buffalo possibly has its own inherent value in Muang’s view because it can perceive the sensations, and the instrumental value for Muang people as it supports them in rice cultivation, and it is also believed as one who can bless or curse the crops’ yield if it receives unfair treatment.

The principle of equal consideration of interests is not able to be found directly in the ritual, but it is taken into considerations and led to interpretative explanation in sentientist ethics of Peter Singer in order to find the moral consideration for buffalo. Although it cannot find an absolute answer to the moral standing for buffalo in the ritual, but it shows that Muang people recognize their own interests which is producing the source for sustenance: rice. So, they place the buffalo as the helper for supporting them and surely beat and curse the buffalo while working on rice fields. This is “speciesism” called by Peter Singer, but Muang people do not show the exclusions of moral consideration for buffalo, in contrast they express the venerable status for buffalo as it can be found in the ritual and

relationship between buffalo and the its master.

Moreover, the relationship of Muang people and buffalo manifests the higher venerable position for buffalo in Muang's perspective, so this possibly paves the way to avoid and minimize causing suffering to animal and in this case, the buffalo.

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