

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Towards a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM):  
Developing the Theory of BSM and Testing it in  
a Taiwanese Buddhist Organization**

being a Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Hull

**By**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                    |              |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>TITLE OF THE THESIS</b> .....   | <b>i</b>     |
| <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....     | <b>ii</b>    |
| <b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> ..... | <b>xiii</b>  |
| <b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....        | <b>xiv</b>   |
| <b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....       | <b>xv</b>    |
| <b>DECLARATION</b> .....           | <b>xvii</b>  |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....      | <b>xviii</b> |
| <b>DEDICATION</b> .....            | <b>xxi</b>   |
| <b>SUMMARY</b> .....               | <b>xxiv</b>  |

## PART A : CAUSATION (緣起)

### BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....                                | <b>2</b> |
| 1.1 The Initial Motivation for this Research .....                    | 2        |
| 1.2 Systems Thinking .....  | 4        |
| 1.3 Buddhism .....  | 5        |
| 1.4 Buddhism and Systems Thinking .....                               | 7        |
| 1.5 The Purpose of this Research .....                                | 9        |
| 1.6 Research Questions and Explicit Research Aims .....               | 10       |
| 1.7 A Brief Introduction to BLIA .....                                | 12       |
| 1.7.1 Foundation and Purposes .....                                   | 12       |
| 1.7.2 The BLIA Organizational Structure at the Start of this Research | 13       |
| 1.8 Overview of the Following Chapters .....                          | 16       |

## **PART B : KNOWLEDGE (知識)**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY EXPLORATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: PREVIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN<br/>SYSTEMS THINKING AND BUDDHIST THINKING . . . . .</b>                      | <b>23</b> |
| 2.1 Introduction . . . . .   | 23        |
| 2.2 Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory . . . . .  | 24        |
| 2.3 Reasoning into Reality: A Systems-Cybernetic Model . . . . .   | 27        |
| 2.4 The Embodied Mind . . . . .  | 31        |
| 2.5 Preliminary Conclusion . . . . .   | 37        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: A FURTHER COMPARISON BETWEEN ST<br/>AND BT TO EXPLORE THE BASIS FOR A SYNERGY OF<br/>IDEAS . . . . .</b> | <b>39</b> |
| 3.1 Introduction . . . . .   | 39        |
| 3.2 The Buddhist Theory of Conditional Causation (緣起論) . . . . .   | 40        |
| 3.2.1 Dependent Origination . . . . .  | 40        |
| 3.2.2 Buddhist Belief about Cause (因), Condition (緣) and Effect<br>(果) . . . . .   | 41        |
| 3.2.3 The Law of the Twelve Causes (十二因緣法) . . . . .   | 45        |
| 3.2.4 Choice in Relation to Causality . . . . .  | 47        |
| 3.3 The Buddhist Theory of the Three Dharma Seals (三法印) . . . . .  | 49        |
| 3.4 The Buddhist Theory of Emptiness (空) . . . . .   | 55        |
| 3.5 The Buddha World ( Tri-sahasra-maha-sahasra-loka-dhatu )<br>(三千大千世界) . . . . .   | 60        |
| 3.5.1 The Boundless Universe . . . . .   | 60        |
| 3.5.2 The Buddhist Living World . . . . .  | 61        |
| 3.5.3 The Buddhist Utensil World: the ‘Hard’ Buddhist Worldview . . . . .  | 62        |
| 3.6 The World in our Minds: the ‘Soft’ Buddhist Worldview . . . . .  | 63        |
| 3.7 The Buddhist Theory of Time and Space (時間與空間) . . . . .  | 64        |
| 3.8 Buddhist Thinking about Desires (慾) . . . . .  | 66        |

|   |   |           |
|---|---|-----------|
| 3.9   | The Buddhist Concept of the Origin of Problems: The Three Poisons and Eight Distresses (三毒八苦) ..... | 67        |
| 3.9.1   | The Three Poisons of Buddhism (三毒) .....  | 67        |
| 3.9.2   | The Eight Distresses of Buddhism (八苦) .....   | 69        |
| 3.9.3   | The Interrelation of the Eight Distresses and the Three Poisons ..                                  | 70        |
| 3.10  | The Buddhist Middle Path (中道) .....   | 71        |
| 3.11  | Conclusion.....   | 73        |
| <br><b>CHAPTER FOUR: POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OF THE ST AND BT DIALOGUE .....</b> |   | <b>74</b> |
| 4.1   | Introduction .....  | 74        |
| 4.2   | Problems of Dialogue within ST .....  | 74        |
| 4.2.1   | Different Paradigms in ST .....   | 74        |
| 4.2.2   | Dialogue Problems between Different Paradigms .....   | 77        |
| 4.2.3   | Comment .....   | 78        |
| 4.3   | The Situation Concerning Dialogue Problems within BT .....  | 79        |
| 4.4   | Dialogue Problems between ST and BT .....   | 80        |
| 4.5   | Conclusion .....  | 82        |
| <br><b>CHAPTER FIVE: SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION .....</b>                        |   | <b>83</b> |
| 5.1   | Introduction .....  | 83        |
| 5.2   | Critical Systems Thinking (CST) .....   | 83        |
| 5.3   | Critique of Flood and Jackson's version of CST .....  | 85        |
| 5.4   | Systemic Intervention .....   | 87        |
| 5.5   | Conclusion .....  | 89        |



## **PART C : DEVELOPMENT (發展)**

### **DESIGNING A NEW METHODOLOGY**

#### **CHAPTER SIX: THE BUDDHIST SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>(BSM)</b> .....  | <b>91</b> |
| <br>  |           |
| 6.1 Introduction .....  | 91        |
| 6.2 Description of the BSM Content .....                        | 92        |
| 6.2.1 The BSM Overview .....                                    | 92        |
| 6.2.2 Detail of the BSM Content .....                           | 94        |
| 6.3 Operationalization of the BSM .....                         | 97        |
| 6.3.1 Overview of How the BSM can be operationalized .....      | 97        |
| 6.3.2 Detail of How the BSM Mode 1 can be Operationalized ..... | 99        |
| 6.3.2.1 Boundary Critique Questions .....                       | 99        |
| 6.3.2.1.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop .....                       | 100       |
| 6.3.2.1.2 Middle Path .....                                     | 101       |
| 6.3.2.1.3 Cause-Condition-Effect .....                          | 101       |
| 6.3.2.1.4 Space (Context) .....                                 | 101       |
| 6.3.2.1.5 Time .....  | 102       |
| 6.3.2.2 Choice of Theories and Methods .....                    | 102       |
| 6.3.2.2.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop .....                       | 102       |
| 6.3.2.2.2 Middle Path .....                                     | 103       |
| 6.3.2.2.3 Cause-Condition-Effect .....                          | 103       |
| 6.3.2.2.4 Space (Context) .....                                 | 103       |
| 6.3.2.2.5 Time .....  | 104       |
| 6.3.2.3 Recommendations for Actions for Improvement . . . .     | 104       |
| 6.3.2.3.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop .....                       | 104       |
| 6.3.2.3.2 Middle Path .....                                     | 105       |
| 6.3.2.3.3 Cause-Condition-Effect .....                          | 105       |
| 6.3.2.3.4 Space (Context) .....                                 | 105       |
| 6.3.2.3.5 Time .....  | 106       |
| 6.3.2.4 Interactivity .....                                     | 106       |
| 6.3.3 BSM Mode 1 Implementation .....                           | 106       |
| 6.3.4 BSM Mode 2 Implementation .....                           | 112       |
| 6.4 Some Examples of Potential BSM Applicability .....          | 113       |
| 6.4.1 BSM and Power Issues .....                                | 113       |

|  |  |            |
|--|--|------------|
| 6.4.2  | BSM for Organizational Learning .....  | 114        |
| 6.4.3  | BSM used for Prevention and Problem Solving in<br>Organizations .....                                      | 115        |
| 6.5  | Conclusion .....   | 115        |
| <br><b>CHAPTER SEVEN: BSM EVALUATION SYSTEM (BSM MODE 2) .</b> |  | <b>116</b> |
| 7.1  | Introduction .....   | 116        |
| 7.2  | Description of the BSM Evaluation System .....   | 117        |
| 7.2.1  | Boundary Critique Stage .....  | 117        |
| 7.2.2  | Choice/Design of Methods Stage .....   | 117        |
| 7.2.3  | Evaluation of Impacts Stage .....  | 118        |
| 7.3  | Process of the BSM Evaluation System .....   | 118        |
| 7.3.1  | Boundary Critique Stage .....  | 119        |
| 7.3.2  | Choice/Design of Evaluation Methods Stage .....  | 121        |
| 7.3.3  | Evaluation of Impacts Stage .....  | 123        |
| 7.4  | Boundary Critique and Choice/Design of Methods for Evaluating the<br>Intervention with BLIA .....          | 123        |
| 7.4.1  | Answers to the Boundary Critique Questions .....   | 124        |
| 7.4.2  | Answers to Choice/Design of Evaluation Methods Questions ..  | 133        |
| 7.4.3  | Design of an Evaluation Method to be Implemented after the<br>Main Body of the Fieldwork is Complete ..... | 139        |
| 7.5  | Conclusion .....   | 141        |

## **PART D : ACTION 1 (行動 1)**

### **LEARNING PROJECT TO TEST THE NEW METHODOLOGY**

|   |                               |            |
|---|-------------------------------|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER EIGHT: FIELDWORK – ISSUE IDENTIFICATION IN</b> |                               |            |
|   | <b>BLIA .....</b>             | <b>144</b> |
| 8.1   | Introduction .....            | 144        |
| 8.2   | Fieldwork Research Plan ..... | 145        |
| 8.2.1   | Planning .....                | 145        |

|       |  |     |
|-------|--|-----|
| 8.2.2 | Proposed Fieldwork Steps .....                           | 146 |
| 8.3   | Issue Identification: First Actual Fieldwork Steps ..... | 150 |
| 8.3.1 | Step 1 .....   | 150 |
| 8.3.2 | Step 2 .....   | 151 |
| 8.4   | Issue Choice .....                                       | 153 |
| 8.5   | Issue Intervention Plan .....                            | 155 |
| 8.6   | Conclusion .....   | 157 |

**CHAPTER NINE: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM**

**MODE 1 STAGE 1 IN BLIA: BOUNDARY CRITIQUE ..... 158**

|       |  |     |
|-------|--|-----|
| 9.1   | Introduction .....   | 158 |
| 9.2   | Interviewees for the Issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? .....  | 159 |
| 9.3   | Interview Process .....  | 160 |
| 9.4   | Summaries of Information from the Transcripts of the Interviews . . . .  | 162 |
| 9.4.1 | Summary of the answers to Q1 - What currently motivates you and others to define the issue at hand? What ought to be your/their motivations? .....   | 163 |
| 9.4.2 | Summary of the answers to Q2: Is covetousness, resentment or maliciousness 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? .....  | 168 |
| 9.4.3 | Summary of the answers to Q3: 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? ..... | 172 |
| 9.4.4 | Summary of the answers to Q4: 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? .....   | 175 |



|        |   |     |
|--------|---|-----|
| 9.4.5  | Summary of the answers to Q5: 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? .....  | 176 |
| 9.4.6  | Summary of the answers to Q6: Is there idleness, apathy or avoidance of the issue? Who should be engaged with the issue and how? .....  | 180 |
| 9.4.7  | Summary of the answers to Q7: 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? ..... | 183 |
| 9.4.8  | Summary of the answers to Q8: Has the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking been applied sufficiently in defining the issue? If not, can further Buddhist systemic investigation be undertaken? .....  | 185 |
| 9.4.9  | Summary of the answers to Q9: 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? .....  | 187 |
| 9.4.10 | Summary of the answers to Q10: 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? .....      | 190 |
| 9.4.11 | Summary of the answers to Q11: 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? .....  | 192 |



|        |  |     |
|--------|--|-----|
| 9.4.12 | Summary of the answers to Q12: 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? ..... | 194 |
| 9.5    | Conclusion.....  | 195 |

**CHAPTER TEN: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM**

**MODE 1 STAGE 2 IN BLIA: CHOICE OF THEORIES AND METHODS .....**

**198**

|        |  |     |
|--------|--|-----|
| 10.1   | Introduction .....   | 198 |
| 10.2   | BSM Mode 1 Stage 2: Process .....  | 198 |
| 10.3   | BSM Mode 1 Stage 2: Choice of Theories and Methods . . . . .   | 199 |
| 10.3.1 | What method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through boundary critique)? .....  | 199 |
| 10.3.2 | What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you have identified? .....   | 200 |
| 10.3.3 | What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you have identified? .....                         | 202 |
| 10.3.4 | What method(s) will tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you have identified? .....   | 203 |
| 10.3.5 | 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? ..... | 204 |
| 10.3.6 | What method(s) will work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you have identified? .....   | 205 |
| 10.3.7 | What method(s) will help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world? .....  | 207 |
| 10.3.8 | What method(s) will help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking, if this is not sufficiently in evidence? ...  | 208 |
| 10.3.9 | What method(s) will support people in developing the middle path between ethical and practical imperatives identified through the boundary critique? .....             | 208 |

|         |  |     |
|---------|--|-----|
| 10.3.10 | What method(s) will help people account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships identified through the boundary critique? .....                                 | 209 |
| 10.3.11 | 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? ... | 211 |
| 10.3.12 | What method(s) will work in the time scale specified in the boundary critique? .....   | 212 |
| 10.3.13 | Testing the Stage 2 Recommendations with Stakeholders ..   | 214 |
| 10.4    | Finalizing the Set of Methods .....  | 217 |
| 10.5    | Conclusion .....   | 218 |

## **PART E : ACTION 2 (行動 2)**

### **MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE CHANGES**

|   |   |            |
|---|---|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER ELEVEN: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM</b> |   |            |
| <b>MODE 1 STAGE 3 IN BLIA: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR</b>        |   |            |
| <b>ACTION .....</b>                                       |   | <b>221</b> |
| 11.1  | Introduction .....  | 221        |
| 11.2  | Application of the VSM .....  | 221        |
| 11.2.1  | Structure Problems .....  | 221        |
| 11.2.2  | The Structure Before the Application of the VSM .....                     | 223        |
| 11.2.3  | Procedure for the VSM Application .....                                   | 224        |
| 11.2.4  | The Viable System Model (VSM) .....                                       | 225        |
| 11.2.5  | Recommended Structure After Application of the VSM ....                   | 227        |
| 11.3  | Recommendation for Action - Wider use of the BSM in Decision Making ..... | 240        |
| 11.3.1  | How Wider Use of the BSM Came About .....                                 | 240        |
| 11.3.2  | Individual BSM Usage .....  | 240        |
| 11.3.3  | Organizational BSM Usage (at April 2004) .....                            | 242        |
| 11.4  | Conclusion .....  | 243        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER TWELVE: FIELDWORK - THE IMPLEMENTATION<br/>OF BSM MODE 2 IN BLIA: EVALUATION .....</b> | <b>245</b> |
| 12.1 Introduction .....   | 245        |
| 12.2 Methods for ‘Evaluation of Impacts’ .....  | 245        |
| 12.3 Evaluation Procedure for BSM in BLIA .....   | 246        |
| 12.4 BSM Mode 2 Implementation - Evaluation Outputs .....   | 248        |
| 12.4.1 Outputs from Part A: Effectiveness .....   | 249        |
| 12.4.1.1 Answers to the Twelve Buddhist Questions . . . .   | 249        |
| 12.4.1.2 Answers to the Other Twelve Questions on<br>Effectiveness .....                          | 253        |
| 12.4.1.3 Quantitative Data .....  | 256        |
| 12.4.2 Outputs from Part B: Acceptability of the BSM Methods . .                                  | 258        |
| 12.5 Conclusion .....   | 260        |

## **PART F : REFLECTION (反思)**

### **REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REFLECTIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR<br/>NEW DEVELOPMENTS .....</b> | <b>263</b> |
| 13.1 Introduction .....   | 263        |
| 13.2 Reflection on Gaining Access to BLIA .....                                   | 263        |
| 13.3 Reflection on the BSM Intervention .....                                     | 265        |
| 13.4 Reflection on the BSM Methodology .....                                      | 268        |
| 13.5 Reflection on the Evaluation (BSM Mode 2) .....                              | 270        |
| 13.6 Reflection on Ethical Considerations in the Intervention .....               | 271        |
| 13.7 Proposals for New Developments .....   | 276        |
| 13.8 Conclusion .....   | 278        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER FOURTEEN: CONCLUSION</b> .....                           | <b>280</b> |
| 14.1 Introduction.....  | 280        |
| 14.2 Points of Connection between ST and BT.....                    | 281        |
| 14.3 The Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM) .....                   | 284        |
| 14.4 Field Trial of the BSM.....                                    | 285        |
| 14.5 The Potential for Widening the Use of the BSM in the East..... | 289        |
| 14.6 Summary.....   | 290        |
| <br>  |            |
| <b>APPENDIX</b> .....   | <b>292</b> |
| <br>  |            |
| Appendix I. Interview questions.....                                | 292        |
| Appendix II. BSM Fieldwork Evaluation Sheet.....                    | 294        |
| <br>  |            |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....   | <b>299</b> |



## List of Abbreviations

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| BLIA:             | Buddha's Light International Association   |
| BLIA, R.O.C.:     | Buddha's Light International Association, Republic of China.                       |
| BLIA YAD:         | Buddha's Light International Association, Young Adult Division.                    |
| BLIA YAD, R.O.C.: | Buddha's Light International Association, Young Adult Division, Republic of China. |
| BLYC:             | Buddha's Light Youth Centers   |
| BSM:              | Buddhist Systems Methodology   |
| CSH:              | Critical Systems Heuristics (Ulrich, 1983).  |
| IP:               | Interactive Planning (Ackoff, 1981).   |
| NGT:              | Nominal Group Technique (Higgins, 1994).   |
| R.O.C.:           | Republic of China (Taiwan).  |
| SAST:             | Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (Mason and Mitroff, 1981).              |
| SSM:              | Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1981).  |
| VSM:              | Viable System Model (Beer, 1985)   |
| YAD:              | Young Adult Division of BLIA   |

## List of Tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 2.1. The Eightfold Noble Path .....                       | 31  |
| Table 4.1. Paradigmatic assumptions .....                       | 77  |
| Table 9.1. BSM Stage 1 Interview Start Dates and Duration ..... | 161 |

## List of Figures

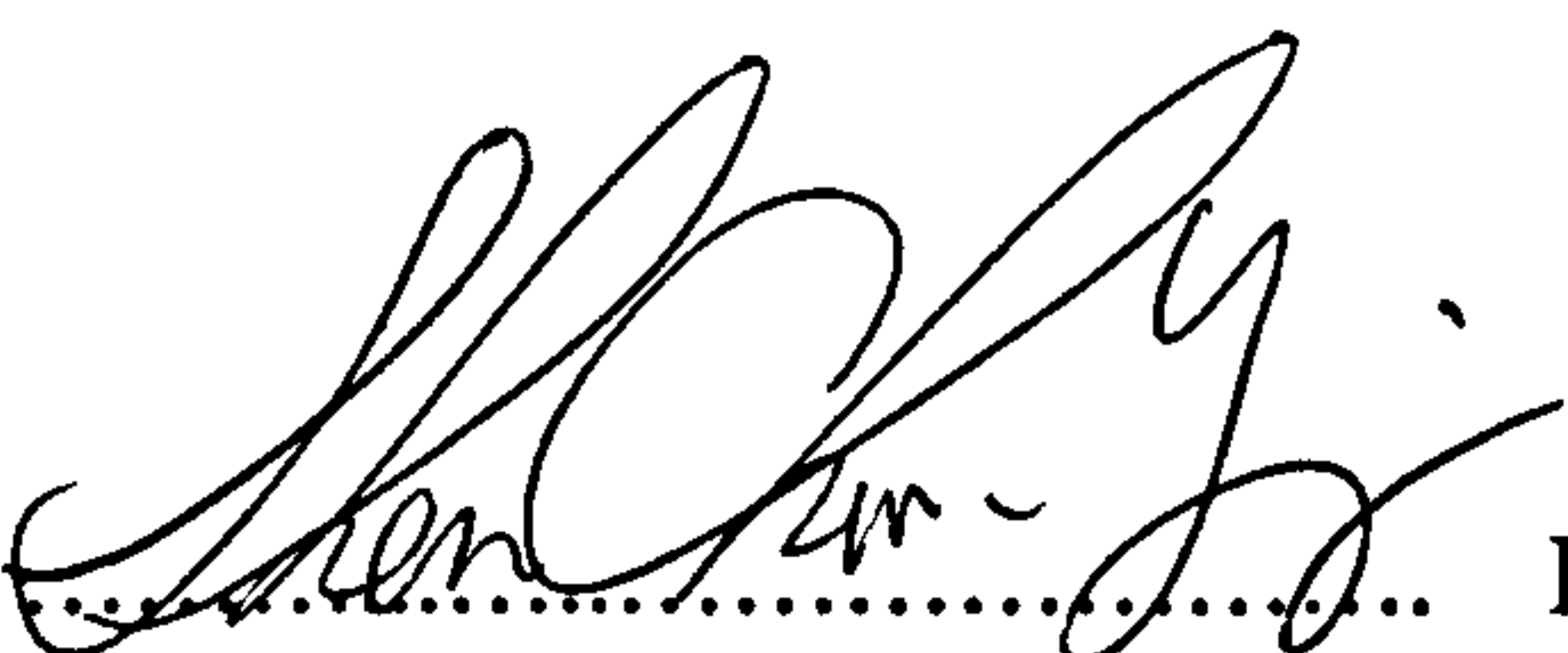
|              |  |     |
|--------------|--|-----|
| Figure 1.1   | BLIA Organization Structure showing how BLIA World HQ links to each BLIA country chapter at start of BSM Intervention .....              | 14  |
| Figure 1.2   | Organizational Structure of BLIA YAD showing BLIA YAD World HQ links to each BLIA YAD country chapter at start of BSM Intervention ..... | 15  |
| Figure 5.1   | Systemic Intervention Methodology .....  | 88  |
| Figure 6.1   | BSM Component Structure 1 - 5 Buddhist Concepts .....  | 93  |
| Figure 6.2   | BSM Component Structure 2 - the 3 loops of SI methodology  | 93  |
| Figure 6.3   | BSM Mode 1 Process of Intervention .....   | 98  |
| Figure 6.4   | BSM Mode 2 - Process of Learning From Practice .....   | 99  |
| Figure 11.1  | The Relationship of BLIA HQ, BLIA YAD, and BLYC (Before the BSM and VSM were introduced into this organization) .....                    | 224 |
| Figure 11.2  | The Viable System Model (VSM) .....  | 228 |
| Figure 11.3  | New Relationship between BLIA, R.O.C. HQ, Youth Section, BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ and the Regional Area Office .....                          | 231 |
| Figure 11.4  | New Relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ and the Regional Area Offices .....   | 232 |
| Figure 11.5  | New Relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C., the Regional Area Office, Local Branches and Members .....                                    | 233 |
| Figure 11.6  | Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Headquarters and the Area Offices .....   | 234 |
| Figure 11.7  | Proposed organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Headquarters .....  | 235 |
| Figure 11.8  | Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Area Offices and their regional Branches .....  | 236 |
| Figure 11.9  | Proposed new organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Area Offices .....  | 237 |
| Figure 11.10 | Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. local branches and their members .....  | 238 |
| Figure 11.11 | Proposed new organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. local branches .....  | 239 |
| Figure 12.1  | The number of BLIA young members' meetings and other activities each year from 1997 to June 2004 .....                                   | 257 |

|             |  |     |
|-------------|--|-----|
| Figure 12.2 | Income v. outgoing expenditure in NT\$ (million) for BLIA young members each year from 1997 to June 2004 . . . . . | 257 |
| Figure 12.3 | The number of new members in branches from 1997 to June 2004 . . . . .   | 258 |



# DECLARATION

I, Shen, Chao-Ying, hereby declare that the work contained within this thesis is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any University for a degree.

Signed:  Dated: 07. Oct. 2005

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family time to supervise me.

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I have to express my deep respect and gratitude to all people from BLIA, R.O.C. who contributed their knowledge and information to help me complete my PhD study. Without them, this PhD thesis would not be finished. Especially, the founder of BLIA, a great and well known Buddhist monk, Venerable Master Hsing-Yun (星雲大師), Venerable Man-Chien (Leader of BLIA YAD, R.O.C.), Venerable Chueh-Yu (Vice Leader of BLIA YAD, R.O.C.) and all the members of Fo-Guang Shan Temple, without whom, this study would not have been possible.

In here, I would like to indicate in a few lines to express what I have learnt during the past 10 years in the U.K. and when obtaining my Master degree and PhD degree. When studying in a foreign country, the most important thing is not just to speak the language, but also one needs to learn its culture. Information and knowledge do not always come from textbooks, from your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your mind. Learning comes from our daily life.

It was a wonderful experience live and study in a foreign country, especially in the U.K. I will never regret my decision to choose to study in the U.K. over other

countries.

I will never forget being a PhD student, I experienced and walked ten stages during the process of my PhD study. I hope I can share this personal experience with my friends and those who want to become a PhD student. They are:

- (1). Hesitation
- (2). Bravery
- (3). Enthusiasm and excitement
- (4). Busy but isolated
- (5). Widened mind and vision
- (6). Becoming freakish
- (6). Becoming independent
- (7). Tiredness and boredom
- (8). Frustration
- (9). Self-encouragement
- (10). Drive to finish the work



## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my dearest grandmother who is nearly 90 years old, my parents, my two younger brothers and all my family and friends. Without their love, encouragement and support, both financially and spiritually, I could not have completed this endeavour. Their patient waiting, made me strong and brave during these years. I want to say: “Thank you for everything, and I will succeed in making you all proud of me”.

Also I want to dedicate this thesis to my best friend Chi-Ying. Without her encouragement and loving care, I could not have finished this study and fulfilled my hopes. I want to say: “Thank you for your loving support”.

Finally, I want to dedicate this glory to four and half years of my hard work.

感謝諸佛菩薩慈悲加持保佑,讓我有好因好緣,找到一個這麼好的指導教授,並使我開智慧,賜予我有了勇氣,能順利走過艱難的攻讀博士歲月,順利完成這本論文,並拿到管理博士的學位.

謹以此博士論文獻給佛光山開山大師 星雲上人,沒有師父您慈悲創辦“國際佛光會”(BLIA)的因緣,以及叮囑各單位人事,對我的研究要全力支持配合,沒有師父,我相信我的博士論文也就無法能這樣順利的進行,謝謝師父的慈悲宏願!!!

更以此博士論文及學位獻給我親愛的外婆呂幼,父親沈尤成,母親洪金娥,弟弟沈坤龍,沈坤興,姨丈,阿姨及舅舅,舅媽們,及一切我的親朋好友,感謝您們一路來的愛護,鼓勵及支持.尤其是我親愛的爸爸媽媽,我相信沒有您們就沒有現在的我,您們的栽培及成全我們,讓我們家小孩個個都能讀碩士博士,更讓我們自在無憂的生活,我們能生在這個家庭,實在是我們的福報.還有高齡的外婆時常問我何時可以趕快讀完博士回去陪她,以及親友們的鼓勵與關心,也讓我能在唸書的困難中告訴自己要堅強熬過,一定要成功,不能讓您們失望.一路來的點點滴滴,心中的感謝千言萬語,卻是無法只用言語去表達的,惟有在心底深深的感恩,並且期許自己將來有好成就,讓您們引我為榮,以報答您們對我的關心與疼愛,願佛菩薩加持保佑,讓您們身心安康,事事順意!!!

在此,我也要把這博士學位送給我的小表弟,小表妹們,總聽到他們說:“昭吟姊姊怎麼唸那麼久,還沒唸完?!” 對此類問題,我都不知道該如何回答,現在昭吟姊姊終於完成了,博士不好唸,但希望你們個個都能唸到博士,來體會看看為什麼昭吟姊姊會唸那麼久.弟弟妹妹們要加油!希望他們未來都能有所成就!!!

我還要感謝也開心有季盈,這開心果的出現,讓我在博士生涯中有了精神上的鼓舞及快樂堅持的動力,否則以我孤僻的個性,這苦悶的博士生涯及生命或許會像少了些顏色的圖畫般,沒有那麼生動好看.謝謝,也願她未來的願景及留學的生涯都能身心自在,理想能順利成功,需要我幫忙什麼的,我將給予支持與協助!!!

最後,我要把這本博士論文及管理博士學位獻給我自己,四年半在英國攻讀博士生涯,回顧這一路走來,不知自己是怎麼熬過來的,在學術領域上,從無知懵懂,到沉

浸在浩瀚的書海,求取知識化爲智慧.在智慧的成長上,我學到了一山比一山高,學海無涯的道理,更應該開闊視野,放大心胸,虛心學習.

終於,博士論文已完成,學生的生涯告一段落,然而,拿到博士學位,並不是求知的結束,而應該是學習人生的開始,回饋父母親友的開始,貢獻社會的開始.

永遠記得家中的一塊牌匾,上面寫的:

“種瓜得瓜, 種豆得豆, 有耕耘必有收穫,  
成功不必在我, 而耕種是我們的責任”

學習猶如耕耘,沒有把握當下,沒有用心下工夫,沒有勤勞學習,知識將如水一般倒入無底的瓶子,必將流失.沒有縮小自己,放大視野,知識將如水一般,倒入封閉的瓶子,無法吸收,必將無法收穫智慧的果實.

願以此座右銘,永遠伴隨我這一生 - 一個“開始學習”的人生!!!

## SUMMARY

In the twentieth century, systems thinking developed in the West from a recognition that a new way of thinking was needed to deal with complexity. In the East, Buddhism offers a powerful perspective to observe the world and its problems, and has been successfully helping people in their daily lives for nearly two thousand five hundred years. This research develops and tests a new perspective for problem solving and problem prevention by integrating selected ideas from Buddhist thinking and systems thinking. The purpose is to generate a methodology of specific relevance to Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. Similarities and differences between aspects of Buddhist thinking and systems thinking are examined to reveal potential synergies. However, difficulties in integrating various Buddhist and systems perspectives are also identified. The chosen solution is to establish synergies via the “systemic intervention” perspective that provides a rationale for allowing theoretical and methodological pluralism in the development of locally relevant approaches to intervention. Therefore a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM) is proposed which combines systemic intervention with Buddhist concepts and which appears to offer a new systemic perspective for problem solving and problem prevention in organizations in Taiwan. The BSM methodology is field tested by carrying out an intervention in Buddha’s Light International Association, Republic of China (BLIA, R.O.C.). The intervention identifies and tackles an issue of major concern to the organization. An evaluation of the BSM intervention by stakeholders, carried out six months after implementation, reveals significant progress towards resolution of the issue and wide acceptance of the usefulness of the BSM.

**PART A : CAUSATION (緣起)**

**BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE  
OF THE THESIS**



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Initial Motivation for this Research

In 1996, as part of my MA dissertation at the University of Hull (Shen, 1996), I carried out case study research at Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA R.O.C.; see Section 1.7 for further details) in Taiwan. The research involved applying soft systems methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990) in BLIA, R.O.C. to explore whether it could be used in a Buddhist organization and to see what could be learnt. My experience from this study was that the culture of the Buddhist organization obstructed the surfacing and recognition of problems. In particular, the members of the organization found it difficult to voice subjective views to identify concerns because the BLIA, R.O.C. culture emphasizes belonging to one large 'family' and respecting roles and norms – in particular the organizational hierarchy. Therefore it was difficult to surface problems because no one would admit any weaknesses for fear of being seen as challenging the hierarchy, or threatening the coherence of the organization. In my view, this was the organizational problem, and it was an obstacle to applying SSM. I also recognized that this was an obstacle to applying systems thinking (ST) more widely in Buddhist organizations and other organizations in the East because systems methodologies

generally require people to discuss issues or problems.

Another obstacle which I experienced in BLIA, R.O.C. when trying to apply SSM was that the people in the organization did not regard the methodology as in any way special. They stressed that Buddhism is already systemic in its orientation, and could not see how SSM could add value. Furthermore, they saw it as a business management approach which may be useful in other organizations (particularly commercial ones) but which, they argued, would not be applicable to a non-profit making religious organization such as BLIA. Thus, SSM was not special or useful to their way of thinking.

The way I made progress to overcome these obstacles was to explain SSM in terms of ideas from Buddhism, i.e. to communicate systems thinking (ST) via Buddhist thinking (BT). Thus, I used their own language to frame the SSM approach which enabled me to win their attention and participation. Therefore, the idea came to me that if BT and ST could be connected, and a systemic BT methodology could be developed, then it would be more useful than existing ST methodologies alone, particularly in Buddhist organizations, and would have potential for widening the application of ST for problem solving in the East. This is the rationale underlying my PhD study. In my Masters research I translated SSM into the language of Buddhism in an intuitive manner during the application itself, with only limited opportunity for theoretical and methodological reflection. Also, although the application of SSM in 1996 generated some progress in exploring different perspectives, it failed to tackle

the major problem of silence about problems that resulted from the top-down management hierarchy in which decisions went unquestioned, and this observation is supported by my finding that the same top-down autocratic decision making was still continuing in 2003 (prior to my Ph.D. fieldwork). The task of this Ph.D. research is to work out a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM) in a more theoretically informed manner than I was able to do in 1996, and then test it in practice.

## **1.2 Systems Thinking**

Systems thinking developed during the 20th Century from a recognition that a new way of thinking was needed, involving the science and philosophy of synthesis, to deal with complexity (Davidson, 1983; Flood and Carson, 1993). Many issues were found to be too complex for the traditional analytical scientific problem solving approach alone because problems in seemingly different aspects of life (e.g. social, financial, ecological) are interrelated. They do not exist in isolation. Interrelatedness leads to particular difficulties when intervening to solve problems rather than merely to observe them. The effects of intervention are not always easy to predict, and narrowly bounded interventions may have surprising side-effects. Systems thinking became a significant management approach in the twentieth century because of its holistic intent and its recognition of and ways of dealing with complexity (Flood and Carson, 1993; Jackson, 2000).

In the 21st Century, the systems approach continues to be recognized as valuable because of the phenomena (amongst others) of interconnectedness, scepticism about value-neutral science, and the politics of social exclusion (Midgley, 2000). Interconnectedness arises because of the linkages between problems and the difficulty of boundary definition in problem solving interventions. The scepticism of the public concerning scientific and technological developments has highlighted that scientific research cannot easily be isolated from public debates about morality. Also, in the 21st Century, governments are aiming to counter the social exclusion of marginalized groups from mainstream society, which is introducing a wider arena for the application of systems thinking ideas.

### **1.3 Buddhism**

In contrast to systems thinking, Buddhism has developed and grown over a period of two thousand five hundred years and (in my view) it offers a powerful perspective from which to observe the world and its problems. In the Far East, Buddhism is widely respected and it continues to play a very important role in society and daily life. Many people believe it gives them spiritual sustenance and hope. The Buddhist view is that not only are man and nature a unity, but also spirituality is viewed as an essential aspect of human thought and is not separated from it as often happens in the West (Koizumi, 1997).



While the primary goal of this research is to make ST more relevant to Buddhist organizations, I also believe that, in the longer term, we may find that Buddhist concepts have the potential to be adopted by systems thinkers to improve systemic intervention in the West (and Varela et al, 2000, also advocate importing Buddhist ideas into Western thought).

Buddhism originated in India with Siddhattha Gotama (Shakyamuni Buddha) and has spread across much of the Far East. It has also begun to penetrate the West, and is therefore a notable global achievement. The precise date of the Buddha's life is not known, but it is thought to be about 480-400BC (Harvey, 1990). Gotama visited many teachers to learn about philosophy and religious practices in a search for the truth of human existence and to find release from the suffering of life (Kalupahana, 1976). He eventually attained what is known by Buddhists as 'enlightenment' and realized the limitations of sense perceptions as knowledge sources.

Originally, the Buddha's teachings were passed from teacher to disciple orally. However, insufficient care was taken to preserve the Buddha's original words, and some changes were introduced through interpretations into new languages, so the geographic spread of Buddhism led to different schools with some different emphases in teaching (Bapat, 1956: 89). For example, the Theravadins, the Mahisasakias and the Sarvastivadins are all important schools in India, which have each divided into many sub-sects. The Theravadins emphasize that worldly phenomena are subject to three characteristics: impermanence (anitya), suffering



(duhkha), and the absence of an essence of self (anatma). The Mahisasakias emphasize the importance of the present, but not the past and the future. The Sarvastivadins emphasize that all things exist, in past, present *and* future.

The adoption and geographic spread of Buddhism was helped when there were parallels with existing beliefs such as Hinduism, Bon, Taoism, and Confucianism (Harvey, 1990: 145-151), and the spread of Buddhism into China and Japan led to eight main Buddhist schools (Bapat, 1956: 110). Therefore the geographic spread of Buddhism has involved the emergence of several different strands of Buddhism in different countries and different cultures. Buddhism is not a monolithic religion, but a philosophy which has adapted to different cultures.

#### **1.4 Buddhism and Systems Thinking**

Shakyamuni Buddha offered an explanation about both the universe as a whole, and the problem situations we experience within this world. He also offered various methods to prevent and solve problems. Buddhists believe that the Buddha was the greatest enlightened man (who enlightened himself and others) and I argue that he can also be called the greatest systems thinker, because two thousand five hundred years earlier than systems thinking, the Buddha already observed the universe as a whole supra-system, and proposed that everything within this supra-system is related together.

There appear to be significant similarities between concepts in systems thinking and Buddhist thinking: as I will show in Chapters 2 and 3, Buddhist thinking is full of “systemic” wisdom and methods for “problems solving”, which is what systems thinkers also seek to design. From the Buddha’s teaching, Buddhists believe that all problems come from people’s behaviours and activities; therefore their philosophy concentrates on peoples’ minds which guide these behaviours. As I see it, Buddhism has been a successful part of daily life and problem solving in the East for thousands of years, and therefore has much to offer.

However, I recognize that there are weaknesses in Buddhism. For example, although it is a philosophy which can help in daily life, it is also regarded by many people as a religious doctrine and as such relies on belief and acceptance rather than questioning of the reasons for, and underlying assumptions of, its practices. This creates particular problems in Buddhist organizations such as BLIA in Taiwan, with monks and nuns in positions of authority, because the Buddhist culture coupled with the Chinese culture leads to a top-down autocratic management hierarchy with avoidance of conflict (Leung et al, 2002), and no criticism, or questioning, of practices. People commonly believe that criticizing monks and nuns goes against their religious beliefs. However, monks and nuns are not professional managers and often do not realize how their decisions will be interpreted by others, nor what the likely impacts may be. Also, in BT there is an absence of methods which can be used to explore interconnectedness in organizational (rather than just personal) contexts. This, coupled with the culture of acceptance of decisions, prevents dialogue and

discussion between the religious and the lay members of the organization, so very often there is only a narrow boundary of consideration in decision making. In these areas in particular I believe that BT can learn from ST. Hence the potential usefulness of a Buddhist systems methodology for organizations in Buddhist countries.

## **1.5 The Purpose of this Research**

The purpose of my research is to integrate selected ideas from Buddhist thinking with systems thinking in order to contribute a new perspective for systems problem solving of specific relevance to organizations in Taiwan. Some of these have a culture that is strongly influenced by Buddhism already. Others might be less strongly influenced, but may employ some Buddhists amongst their staff. I accept that knowledge and acceptance of Buddhism will probably be a prerequisite for successfully using the ideas, but they may have value for other organizations too - although assessing this is beyond the scope of the present research.

My overall objective is to try to develop a methodology, I call it a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM), which combines Buddhist concepts and the strengths of systems theories to provide people with a better approach in the Taiwanese context than either could offer in isolation. In my view, in the Buddhist organization BLIA, the BSM will have succeeded if it can create dialogue and discussion among the monk and nun decision makers and the lay members on issues of concern in BLIA in

order to enlarge the boundary of consideration during decision making. The BSM will then be breaking down the existing top-down power structure by widening the consideration process of the senior religious people and, simultaneously, bringing in the lay people to contribute their ideas to decision making (i.e. helping the people at the 'top' to make better decisions, and the people at the 'bottom' by sweeping in their ideas, thereby helping the whole organization).

## **1.6 Research Questions and Explicit Research Aims**

Research questions which are raised by the preceding introduction are:

- (1) What are the points of connection between ST and BT that may allow ST to be perceived as relevant in Buddhist organizations?
- (2) Is it possible to develop a Buddhist systems methodology (BSM) based on these points of connection that can enable systems thinking to be made relevant to Buddhist organizational contexts?
- (3) Could this Buddhist systems methodology be useful for the BLIA organization in Taiwan (which I will use as an example of a Buddhist organization for the purposes of testing BSM in my fieldwork)?

(4) Could the availability of a Buddhist systems methodology potentially widen the use of ST in the East?

Based on these research questions, I propose the following explicit aims for this PhD research. Only the first three research questions are tackled in full. I begin to address the fourth research question, but to answer it in any way that could be described as comprehensive would require a much longer research program.

- (1) To investigate the points of connection between ST and BT, acknowledging that there will also be tensions and disconnections.
- (2) To seek to develop a systems methodology which can use ideas from both ST and BT for problem solving and prevention. I call it the Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM).
- (3) To carry out a fieldwork application of the BSM within BLIA, in order to assess the applicability and the extent of the usefulness of the BSM for this organization.
- (4) To use all the research outcomes from my theoretical investigations and fieldwork to generate a new understanding of the potential for using BSM more widely in Buddhist organizations.



## **1.7 A Brief Introduction to BLIA**

### **1.7.1 Foundation and Purposes**

In 1957, the Ven. Master Hsing-Yun established a Buddhist cultural center in Taiwan (R.O.C) which became very popular. Subsequently, in 1967, he founded the Fo-Guang Shan Buddhist Order (BLIA, 2004; Fo-Guang Shan, 2004). Since then, over one hundred and fifty branch temples have been established worldwide. “Buddha’s Light International Association” (BLIA) was officially inaugurated in Los Angeles, California on May 16, 1992.

I see Ven. Master Hsing-Yun as a reformer, an innovator, and an educator. Under his leadership, Buddhism has extended beyond traditional temple life to integrate and further enrich the modern living of city dwellers. Today, it has transcended national boundaries and has afforded people from all over the world the opportunity to be a part of it (BLIA, 2004).

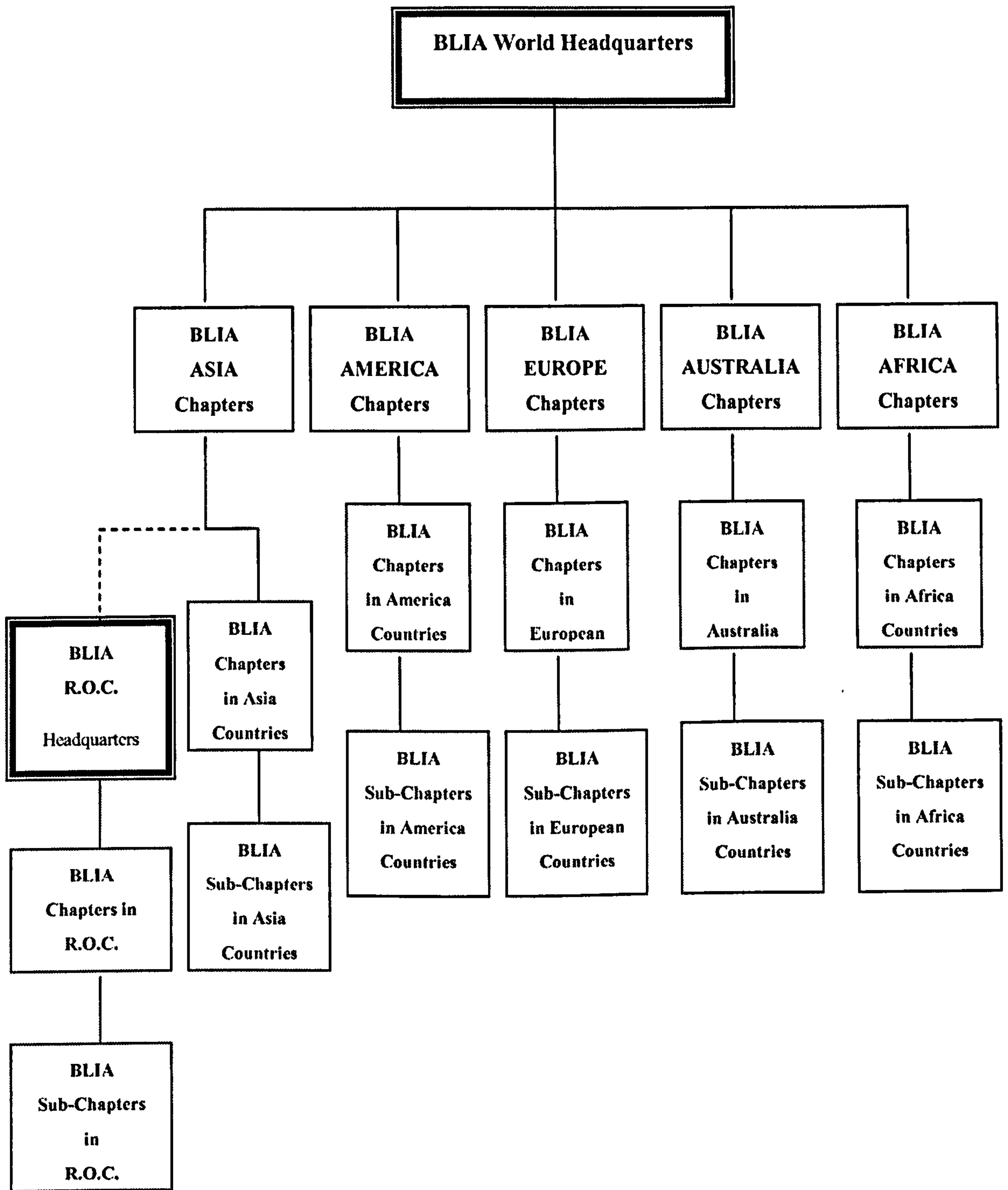
The purposes of BLIA include encouraging the study of Buddhism; supporting cultural, educational and career programs; organizing social activities; developing Buddhist educational institutions; and disseminating Buddhism internationally.

## **1.7.2 The BLIA Organizational Structure at the Start of this Research**

BLIA has grown quickly and has evolved the organizational structure represented in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 BLIA World Headquarters (WHQ) has chapters divided into five continents: Asia, America, Europe, Australia, and Africa. Of all the countries, only BLIA, R.O.C. (Taiwan) makes its own decisions and does not report to the Asia Chapter HQ section because it was formed before BLIA WHQ. However it does take policy from, and exchanges information with, BLIA WHQ Asia on a voluntary basis.

BLIA YAD, R.O.C., the Young Adult Division in Taiwan (where I ended up conducting my fieldwork), is part of BLIA, R.O.C. Adult Division within BLIA, R.O.C (this contrasts with all other YAD chapters in all other countries which are part of BLIA YAD WHQ). Nevertheless, BLIA, YAD, R.O.C. takes policy from, and exchanges information with, BLIA YAD WHQ (Asia). Other relevant information includes the fact that BLIA YAD, R.O.C. sub-chapters are located at Buddhist Temples, and that BLYC (Buddha's Light Youth Centers) is directed by the BLYC Head office which reports directly to BLIA, R.O.C. HQ.

This research is only concerned with BLIA, R.O.C. and BLIA YAD, R.O.C.. Therefore, for easier reference throughout Chapters 2 - 14 of this thesis, I do not use the R.O.C. initials. I just write about BLIA and BLIA YAD.



*Figure 1.1 BLIA Organization Structure showing how BLIA World HQ links to each BLIA country chapter at the start of BSM intervention (as described by Fo-Guang Shan, 2004).*

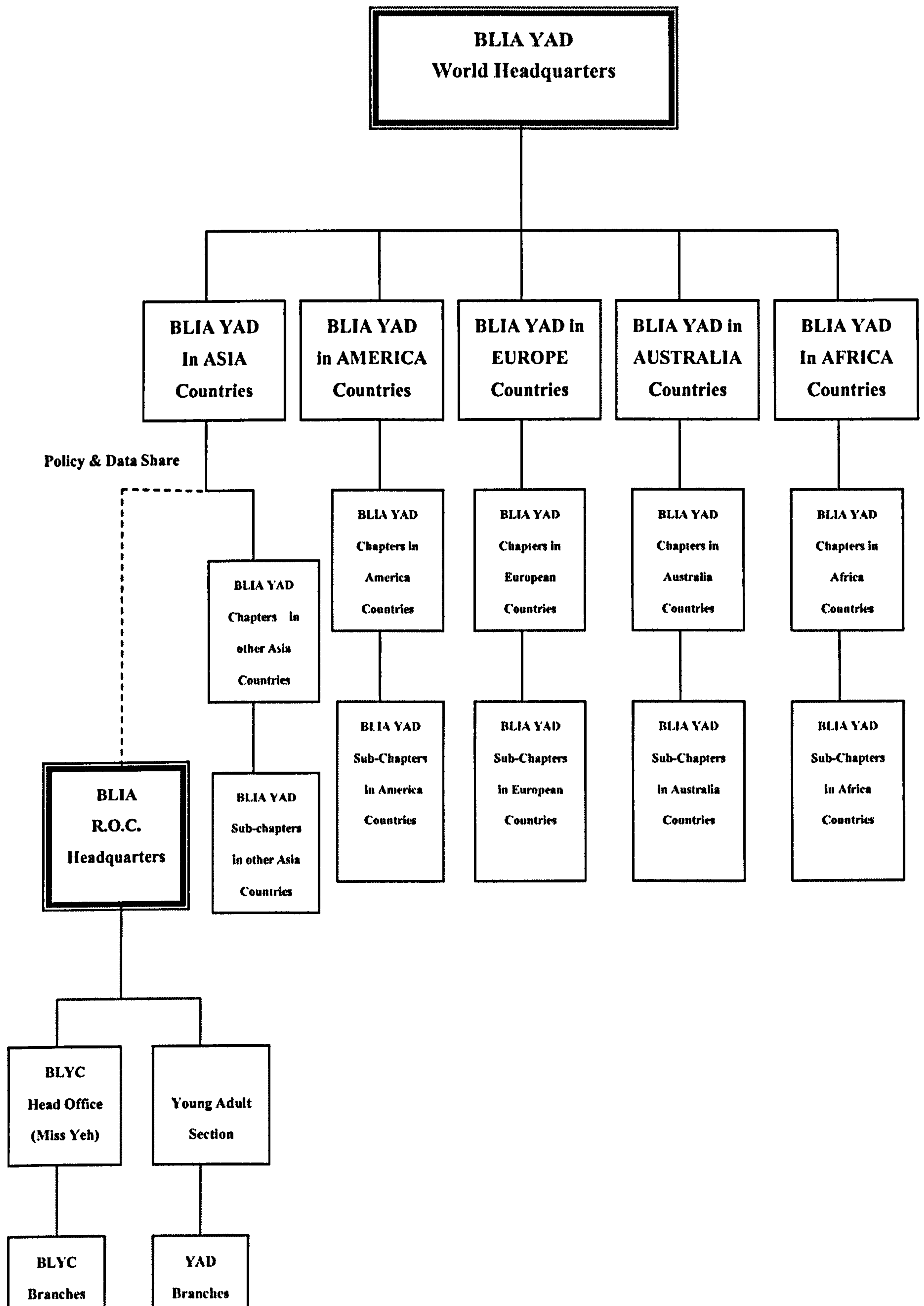


Figure 1.2 Organizational Structure of BLIA YAD showing BLIA YAD World HQ links to each BLIA YAD country chapter at the start of BSM intervention (as described by BLIA YAD, 2004).



## **1.8 Overview of the Following Chapters**

In order to develop my argument following this introductory chapter, my thesis is presented in thirteen further chapters:

### **CHAPTER TWO: PREVIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN SYSTEMS THINKING AND BUDDHIST THINKING**

In chapter 2, I discuss similarities which have been brought out between ST and BT by previous researchers, simply to show that there is indeed a basis for dialogue between the two perspectives and methodological synergy. However, this chapter goes on to critically reveal some limitations of those various ideas in order to establish that a further, more extensive examination of the potential synergies between ST and BT is needed.

### **CHAPTER THREE: A FURTHER COMPARISON BETWEEN ST AND BT TO EXPLORE THE BASIS FOR A SYNERGY OF IDEAS**

Chapter 3 contains my own comparison between BT and ST (beyond the work of previous authors). Buddhism contains a great many religious concepts, so I focus on several main ideas which I believe are most relevant for my comparison. The focus is on points of similarity that offer the potential for translating systems ideas into a

language that is culturally relevant to Buddhist organizations, and which could, later in the research, form the basis for a new methodology (the BSM).

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OF THE ST AND BT DIALOGUE**

Chapter 4 examines existing problems of dialogue within ST and within BT, and surfaces potential problems facing a dialogue between ST and BT dialogue. Issues of diversity within ST and BT are discussed, as are potential problems of incommensurability between ST and BT.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION**

Chapter 5 identifies and discusses a solution to the problem of multiple perspectives and diversity within ST (raised in Chapter 4) to avoid undermining the dialogue with BT. CST, in the form of “Systemic Intervention”, is chosen as an adequate pluralist approach for dialogue with BT because it is capable of representing a sufficient diversity of ST ideas and also incorporates a useful focus on boundary critique.

#### **CHAPTER SIX: THE BUDDHIST SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY (BSM)**

In chapter 6, I explain and describe my proposed Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM), which draws ideas from both Humanistic Buddhism and Systemic

Intervention in order to be particularly relevant for Taiwanese contexts. The BSM content and operationalization (including details of modes and component structures) are presented.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: BSM EVALUATION SYSTEM (BSM MODE 2)**

In chapter 7, I explain the evaluation system element of the BSM. Given that the BSM embodies insights from Buddhism within a framework of Systemic Intervention in order to be appropriate for Taiwanese contexts (BSM Mode 1), an evaluation approach along similar lines (BSM mode 2) is developed. The evaluation system involves boundary critique, choice/design of evaluation methods, and implementation.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: FIELDWORK – ISSUE IDENTIFICATION IN BLIA**

Chapters 8 to 12 present my fieldwork intervention in BLIA. In chapter 8, I report on how I gained access for my fieldwork in order to test the BSM in practice, and I outline my fieldwork research plan. This leads on to explaining how several possible issues for the intervention were identified, and how and why one issue was chosen. My proposed intervention plan, agreed with BLIA, is then presented.

**CHAPTER NINE: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM MODE 1  
STAGE 1 IN BLIA: BOUNDARY CRITIQUE**

In chapter 9, I report on my application of BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 (boundary critique) in BLIA for the chosen issue. The chapter describes the interview process I used and the outcomes of using the BSM Stage 1 with several individuals and a group in BLIA. The aim of this BSM stage is to help people become more aware of, reflect critically upon, and make judgements between, boundaries relevant to the issue in order to help decide on inclusions and exclusions, given that complete comprehensiveness is recognized as unattainable (Churchman, 1970).

**CHAPTER TEN: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM MODE 1  
STAGE 2 IN BLIA: CHOICE OF THEORIES AND METHODS**

In chapter 10, I describe how I carried out BSM Mode 1, Stage 2 (choice of theories and methods for intervention), and the outputs from it. This stage generates a list of management systems methods which the interviewees agree to be appropriate for tackling the concerns they raised in the boundary critique.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN: FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM  
MODE 1 STAGE 3 IN BLIA: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

In chapter 11, I present the BSM Mode 1, Stage 3, Recommendations for Action, which is the application of the chosen methods agreed with the participants to problems. This produces proposals for immediate implementation.

**CHAPTER TWELVE: FIELDWORK - THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BSM  
MODE 2 IN BLIA: EVALUATION**

In chapter 12, I explain the application of the BSM evaluation system in BLIA, which was carried out six months after the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 interviews. The chapter provides more details of the evaluation methods first described in Chapter 7, and contain a discussion of the findings of the evaluation.

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REFLECTIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR NEW  
DEVELOPMENTS**

In chapter 13, my reflections on the research are presented, to see what can be learnt from considering strengths and limitations of the research. Also, suggestions are made for further research.



## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: CONCLUSION**

Chapter 14 contains the conclusions of the research and an assessment of how it met the original research aims. The potential for widening use of the BSM in the East is also considered.

**PART B : KNOWLEDGE (知識)**

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY EXPLORATION  
FOR THE RESEARCH**

## CHAPTER TWO

# PREVIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN SYSTEMS THINKING AND BUDDHIST THINKING

### 2.1 Introduction

Here I discuss the similarities between ST and BT as revealed by previous research, simply to show that there is indeed a basis for dialogue and methodological synergy between the two perspectives. There are of course significant differences between ST and BT too, and there are always difficulties in creating a dialogue between worldviews (Gregory, 1992), but this issue will be dealt with later. In the course of examining previous research I will seek to show the limitations of the various ideas that have been proposed. This will lead, in Chapter 3, to my own analysis of the similarities between BT and ST.

Here, I examine the ideas of three books which have proposed links between Buddhism and systems thinking: 'Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General System Theory' by Macy (1991); 'Reasoning into Reality' by Fenner (1995); and 'The Embodied Mind' by Varela et al (2000).

## **2.2 Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory**

Macy (1991) compares Buddhism and General System Theory (GST). GST was proposed by von Bertalanffy (1950) because, based on his work in biology, he considered that it was essential for organisms to be studied as complex wholes rather than as simple collections of parts. In GST, Bertalanffy postulated that all systems obey the same laws of organization, and that there are similarities between all systems. Thus, isomorphies between systems are the focus of GST, and GST requires a mathematical language to express laws of organization.

Bertalanffy distinguished between two types of system: closed systems and open systems. Closed systems do not exchange matter or energy with other systems or the environment. Open systems exchange matter or energy with the environment and other systems, and they depend on this exchange for their survival. In closed systems the final state is unequivocally determined by the initial conditions, while in open systems the final state may be reached from different initial conditions and in different ways. This is the principle of equifinality. From this open systems perspective, analysis of simple components, though useful on occasion, is limiting because features of the whole are lost. Consequently, a system cannot be fully comprehended by analysis of its components.

Macy (1991) points out that linear one-way causal interpretations then prove inadequate, and a more complex causality is needed which is mutual and contains interdependence and reciprocity between causes and effects. Matter, energy and information do not take a fixed path through an open system: they are dynamically influenced by the internal structure of the system. The open system is not passive: “it is not the input that determines its action, but what happens to the input within the system” (Macy, 1991: 93). Thus the same environmental forces can have different effects on different systems. Also in GST, processes of feedback are recognized in which information about performance is transmitted back to the system because this is essential for the maintenance of a balanced steady state. The system maintains its existence through structural relationships and a dynamic balance of building up and breaking down components, informed by feedback. This means that cause and effect cannot be isolated, because the feedback introduces circular loop interactions. Causality in the open system is not seen as a simple linear unidirectional connection. Rather it is characterized by dynamic interdependence involving mutual interactions and reciprocal effects. Macy (1991: 1) points out that:

“Causality, usually defined as the interrelation of cause and effect, is about how things happen, how change occurs, how events relate. The Buddhist term Dharma carries the same meaning. It also refers to the Buddha’s teachings as a whole.....for the ways that life is understood and lived are rooted in causal assumptions”.



Thus, causality in the open systems perspective has similarities with the Buddhist teaching about causality. The Buddhist causal view is variously translated by different authors (e.g. Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966; Harvey, 1990; Macy, 1991; Dumoulin, 1994) as “mutual causality”, “dependent co-arising”, “dependent origination”, “conditioned arising” or “conditional causation”. This doctrine states: “that being, this comes to be; from arising of that, this arises; that being absent, this is not; from the cessation of that, this ceases” (Harvey, 1990: 54). The belief is that everything, mental and physical, comes into being owing to certain conditions, and disappears when the conditions disappear, so nothing is independent. Reality is viewed as a dynamically interdependent process. Everything exists in a web of mutual causal interaction, and nothing, whether mental or physical, whole or part, is immutable or fully autonomous.

In Buddhism, however, cause does not necessarily link directly to effect. Instead the effect depends on the conditions. A cause can only produce an effect given the right conditions. This is similar to the open systems concept that a system behaves differently in different environments if it has the internal capacity to do so. Internal capacity is a mediating condition between cause and effect. Therefore, the cause-effect relationship is not as simple as was assumed by Newtonian science (here Macy cites Prigogine and Stengers, 1984).

Thus, Macy (1991) has surfaced some interesting similarities between the ideas of GST and the Buddhist viewpoint of mutual causality, which to me indicates potential for the development of a Buddhist Systems methodology (the aim of this research). However, there are limitations to Macy's analysis. Although GST is an important systems perspective, systems thinking today encompasses a much richer array of concepts (see Midgley, 2003a-d, for just some of the variety). In particular, GST seeks to explain something about the natural world, but does not offer a methodology for organizational problem solving and problem prevention, which is what is needed for my research (other systems paradigms do this). Therefore, I do not believe that GST is sufficient as the basis for developing a Buddhist Systems Methodology. Furthermore, Buddhist thinking involves many other concepts in addition to mutual causality, so a much wider consideration of potential connections between Buddhist thinking and systems thinking will be needed.

### **2.3 Reasoning into Reality: A Systems-Cybernetic Model**

Another author who has linked systems thinking and Buddhism is Fenner (1995). He draws out a similarity between Buddhism and the systems-cybernetic approach by examining the Buddhist concept of the Middle Path, which is about the gradual development over time of the 'insight of openness' and the avoidance of 'extreme' positions (those based on overly restricted understandings of phenomena).

The Buddhist Middle Path is related to the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path (Niwano, 1980). The Eightfold Noble Path means having the right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right living, right endeavour, right memory, and right meditation. But what is 'right' from a Buddhist perspective is locally determined. It can depend on whether people's intentions are interpreted as 'good' or 'bad', and these interpretations involve local assessments which may change from culture to culture, time to time, or context to context. Thus, 'right' in the Eightfold Noble Path is not absolute but needs interpretation. The eight parts of the Eightfold Path are explained in Table 2.1.

The eight aspects of the Eightfold Noble Path are considered in three groupings: wisdom (right view and right thinking), ethical conduct (right speech, right action and right living), and mental discipline (right endeavour, right memory and right meditation). These concepts distinguish Buddhism from every other religion and philosophy.

The Buddhist Middle Path, which involves treading the Eightfold Noble Path too, is a way to aim for perfection, and it involves avoiding extremes. However, this is different from a rigid compromise path exactly in the middle of two extremes, because the Buddhist 'middle' has a similar meaning to 'right' (Niwano, 1980). It is locally assessed. The Buddha highlights, as examples, the two extremes of

indulgence in sensual pleasures and self torture (Buddhist Missionary Society, 1996). The Middle Path avoids the extremes of unnatural asceticism and self-indulgence (Humphreys, 1954). Buddhism defines extreme views held by human beings as incomplete knowledge. They are one-sided obsessions deriving from strong and often unconscious emotion, and following the Buddhist Middle Path can allow the individual to transcend them. The Middle Path means not to be one-sided but to adopt a more balanced approach by correcting any strong deviations to either the 'left' or the 'right' away from the 'middle' course, locally interpreted in context. Thus, the Buddhist Middle Path is not a 'static' middle. Rather it is a 'dynamic' middle that has "no beginning and no end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overflows" (Combs et al, 2002: 90).

In my view, this is similar to the concept of negative feedback in cybernetics because any deviation to the right (away from the middle path) is corrected by a movement left, and alternatively a movement too far left is corrected by a movement right. In this sense it is easy to see why Fenner (1995) recognizes similarities between the Buddhist Middle Path and the systems-cybernetic approach.

In the interpretation of Fenner (1995), insight is seen to arise from analysis, so insight is about identifying particular antecedent causes and conditions of a given phenomenon. The production of knowledge is both from self and other because of



their interaction. Buddhism talks in terms of a dynamic interplay between opposing habituating and de-habituating forces. Habituating forces come from action (karma) and its residues (vasana; samskara) while de-habituating forces come from analytical insight (vipasyana). Liberation comes from removing cognitive, perceptual and emotional limitations, which can be achieved by a process of contemplative exercises, including meditations. So the Middle Path involves the gradual obtaining of greater and greater 'openness' over time, acknowledging that perfect insight (enlightenment) remains an ideal to strive for, rather than a state that can easily be reached through meditation (a common misconception), because of the inevitability of local contextual assessment in determining the 'right' Middle Path.

Fenner's connection of the ideas of systems-cybernetics and the Buddhist Middle Path again indicates to me the potential for the development of a Buddhist Systems methodology. However, just like GST, although cybernetics is an important part of systems thinking, there is also a wider set of ideas that needs to be considered (e.g. those represented in Midgley, 2003a-d, and others). In addition, Buddhism consists of much more than just the Middle Path. Therefore, it will be necessary to look beyond cybernetics when conducting my own comparison of BT and ST.



|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Right View       | To abandon purely selfish attitudes and drives, and adopt a more altruistic attitude to existence. This requires the individual to have full belief in the Buddha. |
| Right Thinking   | To avoid the three evils of the mind (三毒) – covetousness (貪); resentment (嗔); and ignorance (痴) – and to think as generously as the Buddha.                        |
| Right Speech     | To use ‘right’ words in daily life, in particular avoiding the four evils of the mouth – lying; deceitfulness; slander; and improper language.                     |
| Right Action     | To observe the precepts of the Buddha in daily life, and avoid the three evils of the body – needless killing; stealing; and sexual misconduct.                    |
| Right Living     | To do work which is useful to society, and not to do work which makes trouble for others and is useless to society.  |
| Right Endeavour  | To maintain a ‘right’ course, never being idle and avoiding the evils of the mind, mouth, and body.  |
| Right Memory     | To always have a fair and right mind towards ourselves, others, and all things.  |
| Right Meditation | To always believe in the teachings of the Buddha, and to practice them.  |

*Table 2.1 The Eightfold Noble Path.*

## 2.4 The Embodied Mind

The final work to be discussed here is “the Embodied Mind” by Varela et al (2000).

The purpose of their book is to establish and explore the “deep circularity” between cognitive science and human experience. They point (p.218) to the observation of

Putnam (1987: 29) that:

“science is wonderful at destroying metaphysical answers, but incapable of providing substitute ones. Science takes away foundations without providing a replacement. Whether we want to be there or not, science has put us in the position of having to live without foundations. It was shocking when Nietzsche said this, but today it is commonplace; *our* historical position - no end to it is in sight - is that of having to philosophize without ‘foundations’.”

Varela et al (2000) point out that, ever since the writings of Descartes, Western philosophers have argued about whether the body and mind are a single unity or two distinct entities. They conclude that Descartes’ statement “I think therefore I am” indicates a belief in disembodied reflection, leading to the conclusion that there is a dualism of mind and body. Subsequently, however, they argue that the inseparability of subject and world has been recognized by thinkers in the West. For example, the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote:

“the world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Varela et al, 2000: 4).

But Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out that reductionist science has largely ignored the above insight. This may well have been the case in Merleau-Ponty’s time (his work was first published in 1945), but Varela et al point out that modern neuroscience provides empirical evidence to support it. Since in neuroscience cognition is investigated by looking for links between biologically based properties and behaviour, Varela et al argue that cognition and biological properties can only be linked *through* behaviour. Experience links to specific brain structures, and vice

versa. The observer must use his or her own cognitive system (s/he cannot escape this), so reflection is not independent of the background of biological, social and cultural beliefs and practices. Hence we are embodied minds, indicating the inadequacy of the assumption of a disembodied observer or of a mind detached from the world. In the new cognitive sciences, it is assumed that there is circularity between human cognition and human experience. Cognition and the mind cannot be separated from experience: they are essentially interdependent. This is the insight that runs through all of Varela's work, including his earlier writings with Maturana proposing the theory of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1992) - a biological theory about the self-producing nature of organisms that roots the mind in the dispositions of the body as an autopoietic system.

Although modern neuroscience challenges Cartesian dualism and accepts the idea of the embodied mind, Varela et al (2000) claim it is nevertheless the case that the dominant paradigm in Western *philosophy* is still primarily concerned with 'disembodied' analytical reasoning. Therefore, they contend that Western philosophy is in need of enrichment by Asian philosophy, in particular Buddhism, because Asian philosophy "never became a purely abstract occupation. It was tied to specific disciplined methods for knowing - different methods of meditation" (p.22).

Buddhism teaches that there is no abstract knower of experience that is separate from the experience itself. The Buddhist *Abhidharma* texts provide the basis for a tradition of analytical investigation of the nature of experience, concerning the search for how the self arises. There are five aspects of experience (Varela et al call them “aggregates”) consisting of:

1. Forms (given by the six senses)
2. Feelings/sensations (pleasant/unpleasant)
3. Perceptions/impulses (recognition of difference)
4. Dispositional formations (habitual patterns)
5. Consciousness (mental awareness of the other aspects)

The Buddha described the pattern of human life as a never-ending circular journey: each step taken by oneself is conditioned by past steps and steps taken by others in the world. This is called codependent arising (*pratityasamutpada*). Nothing arises independently: the arising of the self is always in relation to other phenomena and their own patterns of arising. The cycle of conditioned human existence (*samsara*), which is subject to causation and gives rise to suffering, can only be changed by disciplined ‘mindfulness’ to every moment. The tradition of mindfulness/awareness, which Varela et al say requires meditation (and I would add pursuit of the Eightfold Noble Path), represents the attempt to find a (temporarily) stable ego-self in order to limit suffering and frustration.



However, since there is more to systems thinking than the theory of autopoiesis and the findings of neuroscience, the perspective of Varela et al might have limitations for realizing the development of a Buddhist systems methodology.

Also, as Combs et al (2002: 90) point out, Varela et al may be knowledgeable concerning cognitive science, but in their book they reveal an inadequate understanding of Buddhism, probably because they have not consulted the original sources. For example, there is a narrow focus on the work of Nagarjuna (the influential second century Indian Buddhist philosopher [see Inada, 1970]), as though this represents all Buddhist thought when in fact it is only one perspective. Nagarjuna offers what I would call a reductionist, logical approach to Buddhism, which results, for example, in a 'static' view of the 'middle' in the Middle Path. As I see it, what constitutes the 'middle' may change as people's understandings develop over time. This problem, combined with the relatively narrow focus on autopoiesis and cognitive science, suggests the need for a wider set of systems perspectives to use as the basis for my own comparison with Buddhism, and ultimately the production of a Buddhist Systems Methodology.

Another issue with the work of Varela et al (2000) is their interpretation of the work of Descartes, and also of subsequent Western philosophers. It is arguably problematic to sweep aside most of Western philosophy as primarily being



concerned with ‘disembodied’ analytical reasoning.

Descartes expressed the view that the existence of the soul depends on God rather than the body (James, 2000). This has led to the common misperception that Descartes viewed the mind or soul and the body as entirely independent. However, Descartes actually said that

“Nature teaches me by these sensations of hunger, thirst, pleasure and pain that I am not merely present in the body like a sailor in a ship, but that I am very closely conjoined and intermingled with it so that I and the body form a unit (Sixth Meditation; Cottingham, 1999: 64-5).

It would appear that Varela et al (2000) have simply reproduced the common misunderstanding of Descartes’ thinking, and did not account for his recognition of embodiment.

Furthermore, subsequent writers (e.g., Locke, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche) also acknowledged embodiment. Locke’s empiricism was advanced in contrast to Descartes’ ‘rationalism’ (Kenny, 1998; Woolhouse, 1999), and it emphasizes that knowledge comes from the senses. Of course, the whole idea of the pivotal role of the senses is founded on the assumption of embodiment. Taking this idea forward, Hume argued that the mind contains both ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’ (Broackes, 1999). Impressions are sensations, passions and emotions, while ideas are the *faint images* of these sensations, passions and emotions. Clearly, given these arguments, the

dispositions of the body are absolutely foundational for the mind in the view of Hume.

For Kant, we can know objects only as they appear, not as they may actually be (Allison, 1999). Thus, Kant reversed the usual view of cognition – knowledge does not come from objects but rather objects come from our ways of knowing through sensory experience, and from pure concepts through which they are thought. Consequently, in Kant’s thinking there is necessarily interaction between bodily senses and mind.

Finally, it should be noted that Nietzsche, a later influential Western philosopher, considered that “the soul is only a word for something about the body” (cited in Schacht, 1999, p. 179), indicating a complete denial of the ‘radical’ dualism associated by Varela et al (2000) with the history of Western philosophy. It would appear that Varela et al have simply invented a ‘straw man’ of Western philosophy based on the idea of disembodied analytical reasoning to contrast their own approach with.

## **2.5 Preliminary Conclusion**

The above brief discussion has pointed out some immediately apparent similarities

between BT and ST identified by other authors, particularly involving systems ideas about GST, cybernetics and autopoiesis. Macy (1991) surfaced some interesting similarities between the ideas of GST and the Buddhist viewpoint of mutual causality, and Fenner (1995) connected systems-cybernetics with the Buddhist Middle Path, indicating (to me) the value of further research to connect ST and BT, and the potential for the development of a Buddhist Systems methodology. Also, the inseparability of cognition and experience discussed by Varela et al, and expressed in the theory of autopoiesis, indicates that Western approaches may potentially be enhanced by Buddhist concepts. However, since GST, cybernetics and autopoiesis are just three aspects of the systems thinking literature that may contribute to the development of a Buddhist Systems Methodology, in the next chapter I begin to make connections between BT and a wider set of systems ideas.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A FURTHER COMPARISON BETWEEN ST AND BT TO EXPLORE THE BASIS FOR A SYNERGY OF IDEAS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains my first attempts at making my own comparison between BT and ST (beyond the work of Macy, 1991, Fenner, 1995, and Varela et al, 2000). Buddhism contains many religious concepts and beliefs which are written as sermons, sutras, holy truths, noble paths, etc. It is obviously necessary to be selective, so I have chosen several main concepts which I believe are most relevant for this discussion. At this point I am still concerned with showing that there is a basis for a dialogue between ST and BT and some synergies, so will leave the discussion of problems with the comparison until Chapter 4. The focus is on points of similarity that offer the potential for translating systems ideas into a language that is culturally relevant to Buddhist organizations.

I should make it clear at this point that I am *not* proposing a synthesis between BT and ST as complete systems of thought. The differences make this a hugely difficult, if not impossible, task. Rather, my more limited objective is to identify points of connection that might provide the basis for a new methodology drawing together insights from both traditions. Points of difference, such as the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, will therefore not be discussed.

## **3.2 The Buddhist Theory of Conditional Causation (緣起論)**

### **3.2.1 Dependent Origination**

According to the Buddha's path of enlightenment, his search for and discovery of the nature of things led him to describe the uniformity of the causal process (Kalupahana, 1976). The Buddha proposed the universal truth of 'conditional causation' or 'dependent origination'. This is the theory that no thing arises out of nothing, and that no thing can exist alone and by itself. Things can only exist because of conditioned circumstances: "When this is present, that comes to be; on the arising of this, that arises. When this is absent, that does not come to be; on the cessation of this, that ceases" (Kalupahana, 1976: 31). Hence, once the essential conditioned circumstances scatter and disappear, things themselves cease to exist.

As we saw in the last chapter, this Buddhist teaching bears comparison with the ideas of General System Theory (Macy, 1991), but it also connects with complexity theory. Complexity theory recognizes that complex systems involve large numbers of elements with rich non-linear interactions and feedback loops. They are open to environmental influences, and their history contributes to their present behaviours (Cilliers, 1998):

"Complex systems have a history. Not only do they evolve through time, but their past is co-responsible for their present behaviour. Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the dimension of time is incomplete, or at most a synchronic snapshot of a diachronic process" (Cilliers, 1998: 4).



One important principle in complexity theory is that minute environmental variations may give rise to major divergencies in system behaviour:

“Such systems have unique properties, reminiscent of turbulence which we encounter in everyday experience. They combine both fluctuations and stability. The system is driven to the attractor still, as this one is formed by so ‘many’ points, we may expect large fluctuations. One often speaks of ‘attracting chaos’. These large fluctuations are connected to a great sensitivity in respect to initial conditions” (Prigogine, 1987: 100).

This is similar to the Buddhist concept that present existence depends on prior and present conditioned circumstances: small changes in the conditions may substantially change a cause-effect relationship.

### **3.2.2 Buddhist Belief about Cause (因), Condition (緣) and Effect (果)**

Buddhists believe that everything that happens has its cause, condition and effect (Shih, 2000). Cause is the ‘inner’ (or immediate) requirement, while conditions are the ‘outer’ (or contextual) requirements for the effect. Therefore, in Buddhism, the cause is primary and the condition is the secondary requirement leading to the effect. However, people do not always understand that these three factors are interrelated and inseparable. So when people face complicated problems, they merely see the limited cause, and cannot or do not want to see greater complexities - including their own role in the problematic situation. They only try to solve problems by changing external factors. It is often when problem situations have already become very serious and complex that people start to seek solutions. For instance, now people are aware of the impact of deforestation on human life, they have begun to complain about tree felling for paper factories, though people’s desires actually provide the

conditions for such consumption. Generally people lack sufficient understanding about the interaction of cause, condition and effect. If they were more careful in their decision-making, and thought more about the effects of their decisions and the conditions they contribute to rather than just short-term benefits to themselves, problems might be prevented more effectively.

This Buddhist concept can be connected with the systems thinking of Churchman (1979a) and Ackoff (1981); with Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) (Ulrich, 1983); and with the value of critical appreciation (Gregory, 2000). These connections are explained below.

As Churchman (1979a: 5-6) observed:

“Fallacious, all too fallacious. Why? Because in the broader perspective of the systems approach no problem can be solved simply on its own basis. Every problem has an “environment”, to which it is inextricably linked. If you stop x from growing (or declining), you will also make other things grow (or decline), and these changes you have created may very well be as serious, and as disastrous, as the growth of x”.

Thus a central idea in the systems thinking of Churchman (1979b) is that the effects of decisions are rarely fully considered and appreciated. Every decision has consequences, and not only in the system in focus but also in other systems. This is also a Buddhist insight. For instance, Kalupahana (1976) explains how ignorance about what we might term ‘systemic causality’ creates problems:

“In this special application of the causal principle, ignorance heads the list of the twelve factors. It is not the beginning of the cycle of existence, but is one of the most important factors that contribute to evil or unwholesome behavior....Ignorance is said to condition the dispositions (sankhara) which play a significant role in determining the nature of man’s behavior (kamma)” (Kalupahana, 1976: 32).

There are also potential connections with the work of Ackoff. Ackoff (1981) emphasizes the systems view that planning should not be a once-and-for-all activity. Rather, it should be an on-going *process* which is at least as important as the plan that is written on paper. Ackoff criticizes *reactivism*: planning with a focus on past events. Reactivists erroneously assume that the future will have the same character as the past. He also criticizes *inactivism* because this is showing satisfaction with things as they are, rather than considering how they will become. Also Ackoff criticizes *preactivists* who accelerate change in the uncritical belief that it will be better than the past or the present. Ackoff proposes that *interactivism* is needed in planning, using the principles of participation, continuity and holism. An holistic approach is needed because:

“...a threat or an opportunity that appears in one unit may best be treated in another unit or in several of them simultaneously. This should be as apparent as saying that the best way to treat a headache is not necessarily brain surgery. The producer of a threat or an opportunity may not be located where the symptoms appear. When we label a problem as a production or marketing problem, this does not mean that the appropriate way of treating it is within that function” (Ackoff, 1981: 72).

Using Buddhist terminology, if people think holistically, they are more likely to take into account wider causes and conditions when considering effects. Thereby, they may prevent problems more effectively.

Another author whose systems thinking can be connected with Buddhism is Ulrich (1983), who proposes to make planning more considerate of all stakeholder positions and of longer-term consequences by examining the normative content of proposed plans. He advocates asking a set of twelve questions with those involved in planning and those affected by it but not already involved. The questions can be asked in two modes, exploring 'what is' and 'what ought to be' from different points of view. Through this process, assumptions about causes and effects can be surfaced and debated. Note that, in talking about 'assumptions', Ulrich takes a similar view to the Buddhist one that causes, conditions and effects are interpreted. They are not unequivocally objective because the limitations of the human mind make complete causality unknowable.

As I see it, the final work in systems thinking that we can connect with the Buddhist idea of cause, condition and effect is proposed by Gregory (2000). Gregory advocates using a critical appreciation model to transform self and society by a combination of self-reflection and ideology critique. Critical self-reflection allows the development of new thinking to refashion the self in relation to the world, while ideology critique can tackle the constraining patterns of thought in the wider social context. By engaging in processes of reflection, discourse and action, change can become more meaningful at both individual and societal levels because decisions can be based on (amongst other things) more careful considerations of longer-term effects. Most importantly, and this is the main connection with Buddhism, Gregory recognizes the central role played by the human mind (in social context) in the creation of problems. Gregory draws on the work of Habermas (1972) and Fay (1987) to argue that: "Both the arena of human communicative interaction and that of human action are subject to systematic distortions which have to be revealed so that



humans can create their own history through ‘will and consciousness’” (Gregory, 1992: 204) and “humans do not only create their social reality, they are constituted by it” (Gregory, 1992: 208). Hence the emphasis on self-reflection in her methodology, tied into dialogue with others.

### **3.2.3 The Law of the Twelve Causes (十二因緣)**

Buddhism has the doctrine of the “Law of the Twelve Causes”. The twelve causes are - Ignorance; Actions; Consciousness; Name and Form; Existence; Six Entrances; Contact; Sensation; Desire; Clinging; Birth; Old Age and Death (Niwano, 1980). The logical relationships between these concepts are explained below.

*Ignorance* arises from not having the ‘right’ view of the world (remembering that what is seen as ‘right’ requires local interpretation), as explained in Chapter 2. Ignorance of the ‘right’ view means that what one does, one’s *Actions*, are not ‘right’. *Consciousness* is the human awareness of discerning, which depends on accumulated experience. *Name and Form* are mind and body (i.e. mental functions and matter) which refer to our *Existence*. The *Six Entrances* refer to the six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, mind<sup>1</sup>) which allow knowledge of our existence. This produces the ability to discern, which is *Contact* with existence. Discerning involves experiencing pain and pleasure, which is the quality called *Sensation*. This leads to *Desire* which is expressed in terms of preferences, likes and dislikes. Desire can lead to a state of *Clinging* to what is liked and avoidance of what is disliked. Clinging and

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<sup>1</sup> Mind is viewed as an aspect of the senses in Buddhist philosophy.



the discriminating mind only emerge after *Birth*. Once born, time leads us to *Old Age and Death*.

The Law of the Twelve Causes points out that the basic cause of a life of suffering is ignorance, which was the starting point in the above line of reasoning. Suffering occurs because human beings do not have the ‘right’ view of the world, or disregard the right view. The Law teaches that if humankind eradicates ignorance in the present then a brighter and more serene life can unfold:

“Thus, a fundamental aspect of Right View is the willingness to question ourselves and especially to question our behaviour. Most people spend enormous amounts of time justifying what they have done or what they want to do. As Buddhists, we must begin to reverse this process; instead of justifying our transgressions we must begin discovering what they are and learning how to change them” (Shih, 2000: 55).

However, Buddhists acknowledge that, because the ‘right’ view needs to be locally defined, different views of rightness will exist. Therefore, overcoming ignorance is an ongoing process requiring dialogue, not an end state that can be achieved once and for all.

This Buddhist concept is, in its emphasis on the problem of ignorance, similar to Churchman’s (1970) view that systems thinking can increase the comprehensiveness of planning decisions and that the defeat of ignorance can lead to improvement in society. Churchman (1979b) recognizes that that each worldview is terribly restricted, and that worldviews are resistant to change. Only by bringing together different subjectivities can the restrictions of one worldview be overcome.

“The idea behind this “dialectical” information system is to make clear to the user the basic assumptions that go into the support of any proposal. By becoming self-conscious about his assumptions, the manager is supposed to become a better decision maker, for his sensitivity to the world is increased. This might happen when the manager recognizes some common underlying assumption on both sides of the debate” (Churchman, 1979b: 123).

This insight is common to most soft and critical systems theories (e.g. Checkland, 1981; Ackoff, 1981; Mason & Mitroff, 1981; Ulrich, 1983; Gregory, 1992; Midgley, 2000).

### **3.2.4 Choice in Relation to Causality**

Causality is a key principle in Buddhism, but choice can play a part (Shih, 2000). The belief is that things will happen only when the cause and conditions are propitious. If the cause and conditions are not propitious, no matter how hard one tries, nothing will happen through the simple exercise of choosing a particular path. It must be emphasized, however, that Buddhist thinking does not accept the idea of ‘destiny’, because if all has been decided by destiny, nothing would exist that has not been foreordained, and there would be no purpose in evaluating actions as right or wrong. Therefore all human plans and efforts for improvement would be in vain and humanity would be without hope. The Buddhist position is that, although we cannot change what we have done in the past and we deserve the effects that come our way, we can now work in wider systems to change our conditions, thereby bringing about at least some desired effects. Thus the causality principle in Buddhism moves more towards free will than determinism, but without slipping into a solipsist view that everything is in the mind and can therefore be controlled by the exercise of it.

This links with the observation in Prigogine's (1987) complexity theory that, because cause can lead to a multiplicity of possible effects, we should no longer talk about the mechanistic pre-determined universe proposed by Descartes and others at the beginning of the 'enlightenment' period in the West. Complexity theory allows human choice to re-enter the scientific picture. Indeed, Prigogine (1987) claims that, for the first time, we have a vision of science that is consistent with our subjective experience of choice:

“Today a far reaching reconceptualisation of science is going on. Wherever we look, we find evolution, diversification and instabilities. We long have known that we are living in a pluralistic world in which we find deterministic as well as stochastic phenomena, reversible as well as irreversible. ....What has changed since the beginning of this century is our estimation of the relative importance of irreversibility versus reversibility, of stochastic versus determinism” (Prigogine, 1987: 97).

This new view of the universe is quite consistent with the Buddhist explanation of choice and causality.

Also, the Buddhist concept of people having some freedom to create their own futures connects with the emancipatory dimension of critical systems thinking (CST). CST recognizes the constraining effects of existing power structures and ideology in social contexts and recommends that people should challenge the prevailing power structures and conditions when they desire to do so in order to improve both the social context and their own and others' situations (Jackson, 1991). In both Buddhism and CST, existing inequalities of wealth, status, power and authority are not regarded as fixed and permanent, and the status quo can be challenged in order to bring changes to the future (given that Buddhism first emerged in the Hindu culture, where status is determined through birth, this idea was a radical challenge to the

status quo). In both perspectives bringing about change requires an exercise of will, which is why Gregory (1992) views exploring ideological constraints on the mind as a key aspect of emancipatory practice. There is also a connection with the CST idea of methodological pluralism, in that the latter assumes that the agent is free to choose an appropriate method from a set of alternatives (Flood and Jackson, 1991b; Gregory, 1992; Flood and Romm, 1996; Midgley, 2000).

### **3.3 The Buddhist Theory of the Three Dharma Seals (三法印)**

The ‘Three Dharma Seals’, which are the only ultimate truths according to Buddhism, are: impermanence (諸行無常); no autonomous identity (諸法無我); and nirvana (涅槃寂靜) (Shih, 2000).

#### **(1) Impermanence (諸行無常)**

The first Dharma Seal emphasizes that all phenomena are impermanent. This means that everything is changing; nothing will stay the same. All phenomena are constantly interacting with and influencing each other. These constant activities cause phenomena to change from one moment to the next.

When phenomena exist, they follow the law of cause, condition and effect. Existence, change and death depend on cause and condition. For example, a seed requires fertile soil and water to grow. The existence of the plant is therefore dependent on these conditions, and they change in interaction with the plant. The world’s external environment also changes from season to season, year to year. Planets are born,



abide and then die. Also thoughts are produced, abide and disappear. Therefore, the phenomena of the world are constantly moving among three states: being born, abiding, and dying from moment to moment. Nothing is permanent.

The Buddha's final sermon to his disciples reflects this view of change and impermanence. He said to his disciples:

“[You must] consider your “self”; think of its transiency; how can you fall into delusion about it and cherish pride and selfishness, [if you know] that they must all end in inevitable suffering? [If you] consider all substances, can you [really] find among them any enduring “self”? Are they not all aggregates that sooner or later will break apart and be scattered?” (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966: 20).

He also directed his disciples about the way of dealing with daily matters. He pointed out to people:

“...[control] your own mind. Keep your mind from greed, and you will keep your behaviour right, your mind pure and your words faithful...[always think] about the transiency of your life.. ...Life is ever changing; none can escape the dissolution of the body. This I am now to show by my own death, my body falling apart like a dilapidated cart; ...realize that nothing is permanent and learn from it the emptiness of human life. Do not cherish the unworthy desire that the changeable might become unchanging” (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966: 20-24).

The term “emptiness” used to describe human life in the above quotation has a specific meaning in Buddhism (different from the usual Western meaning) that will be explained later.

The Buddhist concept of all phenomena constantly interacting with and affecting each other is similar to the basic systems idea of interconnectedness (Bertalanffy,



1968; Churchman, 1968), as we saw in Chapter 2 when discussing Macy's (1991) ideas. On the world scale, ecological problems interact with social problems producing complex interactions of feedback loops which means that everything continues to change, often with hard to predict consequences (Midgley, 1992; Fuenmayor, 2001). Also the Buddhist concept of impermanence, change and interaction of phenomena compares, in my view, with the ideas of Whitehead (1929), an important antecedent of modern systems philosophers (Gare, 1996), who put forward a philosophy of relation; that no element is permanent and that each receives its identity from its relations with others: "The character of an organism depends on that of its environment" (Whitehead, 1929: 154), and "...time is a 'perpetual perishing'....There is a unison of becoming among things in the present" (Whitehead. 1929: 482).

Finally, there is a connection with the complexity theory of dissipative structures (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984): all complex systems have a brief negentropic life, but ultimately dissipate (die).

## (2) No Autonomous Identity (諸法無我)

Buddhists claim that not only are all things impermanent, but also the second Dharma seal argues that they are all devoid of an autonomous identity. Buddha's teaching, as discussed in Chapter 2, is that nothing in the world has an isolated existence, because all things exist in relation to each other and are interdependent. To some people there may appear no connection between the land on which we stand, the sea stretching to the horizon and the clouds in the sky. But the clouds come from

water in the sea, the earth receives rain from the clouds, and the rivers run to the sea. The Buddha teaches that all phenomena, all events, all mental acts, all laws, and anything else that people can think of, depend on other things for their existence.

The Buddhist concept of 'no self-nature', or lack of autonomous identity, is not attempting to deny the 'physical' existence of things or phenomena. It actually means that "nothing has any attribute that endures over long periods of time" (Shih, 2000) (again we see the principle of impermanence), and nothing has its own 'self', or its own 'nature', that is independent of its environment and/or an observer.

This Buddhist concept connects with open systems theory (e.g. Bertalanffy, 1950), where no system exists in isolation. Bateson's (1973) cybernetics makes a similar assumption. Indeed, Bateson (1970) talks about the concept of "difference" which points to the fact that something is only perceptible because it differs from (or has been transformed from) something else.

"A difference is a very peculiar and obscure concept. It is certainly not a thing or an event. This piece of paper is different from the wood of this lectern. There are many differences between them....But if we start to ask about the localization of those differences, we get into trouble. Obviously the difference between the paper and the wood is not in the paper; it is obviously not in the wood; it is obviously not in the space between them, and it is obviously not in the time between them...A difference then is an abstract matter....Difference travels from the wood and paper into my retina. It then gets picked up and worked on by this fancy piece of computing machinery in my head" (Bateson, 1970: 7).

In other words, things cannot be known "in themselves" but only in relation to what they are different from. They have no independent being.

A similar point concerning the origins of meaning is also made in interpretive systemology (Fuenmayor, 1991: 471):

“A thing is not a thing-in-itself. A thing is a holistic transcendental phenomenon whose transcendental can be understood in terms of the essential recursive form of Distinction. Since the unitary being of the thing is essentially rooted in its scene, it is obvious that the collection of parts cannot explain such unity”.

### (3) Nirvana (涅槃寂靜)

Nirvana, which is the third Dharma Seal, means the ‘cessation of suffering’. However, because suffering is caused by delusion, nirvana also means the cessation of delusion. It is the Buddhist view that suffering comes from a belief in duality, of a separate self. Also suffering can come from disharmony with other people and things. Too much self-centeredness, with a focus solely on personal profit, one’s own welfare and own comfort, produces disharmony because, by only thinking of ourselves, we disregard impacts on others who are then likely to react. Thus, both self and others suffer. Harmony comes from respecting and helping one another. People undergo various sufferings, influenced by gain or loss and changing phenomena, but by attaining spiritual peace, people can see the sufferings as temporary and superficial. Nirvana is the answer to the question of how people should put the truths of impermanence and no autonomous identity to practical daily use (Niwano, 1980). In this sense it is very different to the Christian notion of Heaven because Nirvana is obtainable in this world and is not an absolute state - it is defined as an absence of suffering and its associated delusions, so requires constant spiritual work to attain it.

Turning to systems thinking, the idea of challenging delusion is also present in Gregory’s (1992) critical appreciation perspective in the form of ideology critique



connected to critical self-reflection and dialogue. Gregory is particularly concerned with the delusion that the political status quo is inevitable and necessary:

“Given the limitations of the processes of ideology-critique and critical self-reflection explored earlier, I now want to look at why it is that they ought to be used *together*. I intend to show that individualistic life planning, which does not incorporate ideology-critique, can become *status quo* reinforcing rather than challenging. Similarly, I will demonstrate that ideology-critique cannot bring about the required social transformation when used without corresponding critical self-reflection by individuals” (Gregory, 1992: 354-356, emphases in the original).

The illusion of the self/other division is likewise challenged in Bateson’s (1973) theory of mind, and Midgley’s (2000) philosophy of systemic intervention: both talk about how the ‘mind’ or the ‘self’ extends beyond the boundaries of the body.

Bateson (1973: 436) writes:

“The cybernetic epistemology which I have offered you would suggest a new approach. The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This larger mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by ‘God’, but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology”.

Finally, the fact that nirvana is not an absolute state, but an absence of suffering that requires on-going work, is reflected in some systems methodologies that talk in terms of on-going learning rather than one-off problem solving using a fixed approach (e.g. Ackoff, 1981; Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). For example, Ackoff (1981: 70) stresses continuous planning in his Interactive Planning methodology: “..no plan, however carefully prepared, works as expected. Therefore, the effects expected from implementing plans and the assumptions on which these are based should be continuously reviewed.” Likewise, Checkland (1981: 241) notes that, in

SSM, “Problem-solving is seen as a never-ending process in which changes are made, problems are redefined and situations, or views of them, change.” And Checkland and Scholes (1990) point out that SSM “...can itself be viewed as the operation of a cyclic learning system” (p.7).

### **3.4 The Buddhist Theory of Emptiness (空)**

As we have already seen, Buddhism asserts that everything existing in this world depends on causality and conditioned phenomena, and nothing has an inherent property or unchanging character separate from the conditions that bring it into being (Kalupahana, 1976). This distinguishing feature, Buddhists call ‘Emptiness’.

The theory of ‘Emptiness’ is how Buddhism describes the phenomena existing in this world. There are many misunderstandings of this idea. Some people think emptiness is too passive and negative a concept; some people are scared because they associate it with death, etc. Usually the assumption is that ‘emptiness’ means nothing. However, this is an inaccurate interpretation. Buddhism explains that *only true emptiness can bear and propagate things*. The Buddhist doctrine, as expressed in *Mādhyamikaśāstra* (中論), says that, by having the concept of emptiness, everything can be formed; without the concept of emptiness, nothing can exist (Shih, 1995). This key Buddhist concept can be interpreted as meaning that *nothing exists in isolation*, which as we have already seen is the basis of the open systems theory put forward by Bertalanffy (1950). Things are ‘empty’ only in the sense that they are not autonomous: their existence, identities, actions and meanings are always *in relation*.



The nature of ‘Emptiness’ can be more fully understood by appreciating the following six concepts:

- (i) *Change*. Everything is constantly changing. There is nothing which can permanently exist in this world. For example, all living matter undergoes a process of metabolism: it grows, reproduces and perishes. The old is superceded by the new, like the changing of personnel in an organization. I have already made a link between this idea and systems theory (see Section 3.3).
  
- (ii) *Condition*. Nothing in this world can escape from the principle of ‘cause, condition and effect (因,緣,果)’. This has already been discussed in Section 3.2.2, so will not be repeated in detail. Cause via condition can produce effect, and effect can be a cause. For example, a fruit seed (cause) meets light, water and soil. The seed then sprouts, blossoms, and bears fruits. The fruits are an effect. However, if the fruit meets new soil, it will become a new cause. Since cause and effect are difficult to distinguish, the concept of ‘emptiness’ can be realized.

This Buddhist concept can be linked to the circular feedback of cause and effect in the work of Bateson (1973). Bateson’s causality challenges subject/object dualism by recognizing that “if you want to explain or understand anything in human behaviour, you are always dealing with total circuits” (Bateson, 1970: 465-466). Bateson proposes that the human mind is not restricted to the internal organic body but links to the external natural world by feedback loops. Thus the consequences of a causal action can feed back information which can then influence future actions. Causation is not autonomous, but a systemic property, and intervention should focus on

*relationships between* entities, not on the entities themselves (Midgley and Ochoa-Arias, 2001).

(iii) *Organization*. Everything exists because it is organized, and as existence cannot transcend organization, therefore it is emptiness. For example, the human body is an assembled system of skin, bones, blood...etc. If we separate the components, the body will not exist.

This Buddhist concept can be linked to the systems concepts of emergence and hierarchy, and the Skeleton of Science theory of Boulding (1956). The concept of emergence recognizes that the whole has properties which the parts do not possess (Flood and Carson, 1993; Emmeche et al, 1997), and that the parts can be subsystems of the whole system in a hierarchy of systems, with new emergent properties at each higher level (Bertalanffy, 1950). The higher level system cannot exist without the lower level systems being properly organized (Boulding, 1956).

(iv) *Relativity*. Everything in this world (including the specific nature of systemic organization in any particular case) is relative to a point of view. For example, take a three-floor house. B lives on the second floor. Another two people, A and C, want to visit B. A lives on the ground floor, and C lives on the third floor. A walks up from the ground floor to the second floor. Hence, to A, the second floor is the 'upper level', and the ground floor is the 'lower level'. However, from C's point of view, he needs to go down from the third floor to the second floor to visit B. Then, in his eyes, the second floor is actually the 'lower level' and the third floor is the 'upper level'. From this example it can be said that once there is

the condition of relativity, there is emptiness. Everything is seen from a situated perspective.

This Buddhist concept connects with the systems theory of autopoiesis which emphasizes the biology of the observer (Maturana and Varela, 1992). Maturana and Varela argue that genuine objectivity (true knowledge that is separate from the positioning of the observers generating it) is impossible, because all knowledge is known from particular perspectives. Also this Buddhist concept is similar to the soft systems idea of situated knowledge, because the basis of the soft systems approach is the recognition that different perceptions of systems exist in different people's minds (Churchman, 1979; Checkland, 1981; Ackoff, 1981; Fuenmayor, 1991). Checkland (1981: 279) writes that soft systems methodology (SSM):

“..works with the notion of *a situation* in which various actors may perceive various aspects to be problematical.....Its emphasis is thus not on any external ‘reality’ but on people’s perceptions of reality, on their mental processes rather than on the objects of those processes” (emphasis in the original).

Also, Jackson (1982: 18), in assessing the nature of soft systems thinking, notes that:

“An individual’s appreciative system will determine the way he sees and values various situations and hence how he makes ‘instrumental judgements’ and takes ‘executive action’ - in short how he contributes to the construction of the social world”.

In addition, the concept is similar to the idea of contextual knowing in CST: Jackson (1991) recognizes that there are organizational and societal pressures which can affect problem solving, so contextual knowing is important. “For example, it was inconceivable that soft systems thinking could ever flourish in Eastern European

countries dominated by the bureaucratic, “rational” dictates of the one-party system” (Jackson, 1991: 185). Indeed, these pressures can result in the construction of ideologically non-neutral methodologies, making ideology critique a useful aspect of exploring contextual knowing (Gregory, 1992).

(v) *Relative Criteria*. If things are without objective standard, they are empty in themselves. For example, the brightness of light is not objective. If we look at the brightness of a candle, we think it is bright. Then once we look at an electric lamp, the brightness of the candle cannot compete with it. Therefore, ‘brightness’ is not objective. Measurement is possible, but then brightness is relative to the measuring instrument so again it is not intrinsic to the light alone. As far as I am aware, no systems theory accepts naïve objectivism, and several - such as the theory of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1992; Mingers, 1995) - propose a quite sophisticated understanding of the relativity of phenomena to the positioning of the observer.

(vi) *Name*. Once things have a name, they are empty. The same thing may be perceived in different ways giving rise to more than one possibility for naming. Also words only make sense in relation to each other. They define each other. There is no meaning of a name or a word in and of itself.

This Buddhist concept relates to von Foerster’s (1981) cybernetic self-referential language idea in which words refer to other words but not necessarily to an external reality.



“To this end let me paraphrase (>) “cognition” in the following way: COGNITION > computing a reality.....I appear to replace one unknown term, “cognition”, with three other terms, two of which, “computing” and “reality”, are even more opaque.....Finally one may argue that cognitive processes do not compute wristwatches or galaxies, but compute at best *descriptions* of such entities....yielding to this.....COGNITION > computing *descriptions* of a reality. Neurophysiologists, however, will tell us that a description computed on one level of neural activity, say a projected image on a retina, will be operated on again on higher levels, and so on.....Consequently, I have to modify this paraphrase again to read: COGNITION > computing descriptions of (descriptions), (suggesting) infinite recursions of descriptions of descriptions..... Reality appears only implicit as the operation of recursive descriptions. Moreover... computing descriptions is nothing else than computations. Hence: COGNITION > computations of (computations) “(von Foerster, 1981: 294-296, my emphases).

In von Foerster’s view, because there is no such thing as a word that has meaning without any connection to other words, there is always an implied reference to another descriptor in any description - hence the phrase “computations of (computations)” which allows no independent reference to an essence that is being computed (i.e. reality itself).

### **3.5 The Buddha World ( Tri-sahasra-maha-sahasra-loka-dhatu )** (三千大千世界)

#### **3.5.1 The Boundless universe**

Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Buddha set out to describe the universe in its entirety and claimed that this world is a supra-system formed by countless worlds. It is called the *One Buddha-World*. The universe and life are called “*the finite impermanent worlds*” which are characterised by two factors: time and space.



The universe is seen as consisting of innumerable small worlds. These worlds are described as 'Mountain Sumeru' and its seven surrounding continents, eight seas, and a ring of iron mountains forming one small world. One thousand of these worlds form a small chiliocosm; one thousand of these small chiliocosms form a medium chiliocosm; a thousand of these medium chiliocosms form a great chiliocosm. Therefore a great chiliocosm consists of 1,000,000,000 small worlds. In all, there are three thousand great chiliocosms, which as indicated above are called One Buddha World.

A "world", as described above, is arguably a poetic notion compared with the planetary "worlds" to be found in Western cosmology. However, this Buddhist view of the Universe, based around the supra-system formed by countless subsystems, is a foundation concept of Buddhism within which everything is related together. This is also the case for systems theories about the natural world (e.g. Bertalanffy, 1968). It is similar to the systems concepts of hierarchy and emergence (e.g. Boulding, 1956; Miller, 1978). Each solar system is part of a galaxy, and each galaxy is a system within the total universe (Miller, 1978). The *form of organization* of the universe is similar in Buddhism and systems theory, even if "worlds" are described differently.

### **3.5.2 The Buddhist Living World**

Buddhism distinguishes living entities which experience birth and death from the Utensil World of land, rivers, mountains, etc, which are needed by the creatures on the Earth. Buddhist Thinking claims that the living (especially human beings) ought to consider the Utensil World in their daily decision making. Yet, human

understanding of the broader universe is limited. Thus, it is not surprising that Buddhist Thinking claims that humans need to explore the truth within their own minds rather than only exploring the world as if it has an objective reality. In other words, people should take account of wider systems, but need to recognize the inevitable limitations of personal knowledge and expose these to scrutiny. The end result will not be perfect objectivity, but an enhanced understanding of the role of the self in constructing knowledge of the wider universe.

This is consistent with the view of Churchman (1979b) who brings the systems view of the world together with a focus on the mind of the analyst. The latter cannot have a totally objective viewpoint so should reflect on the contingences of his/her own positioning and values. By acknowledging our limited perspectives, we can begin to transcend them by exploring other possible boundaries for our awareness. This is my understanding of what Buddhists mean when they talk of *the developed mind having the capacity of the universe*.

### **3.5.3 The Buddhist Utensil World: the ‘Hard’ Buddhist Worldview**

The Utensil World not only offers the living a space in which to act, but also supplies everything that the living need, e.g. mountains, land, seas, rivers, minerals, wind, fire, the heat from the sun, etc. Without the world, where do we live? How can we survive if there is no world - if there is no ground to stand on, no air to breath, no water to drink? Through these questions, the concept of our relationship with the world is easy to understand. We all depend on the world to sustain our physical needs in order to survive. However, we also transform the world through our actions.

This concept of interrelatedness between the living and non-living worlds has a parallel with Lovelock's (1979) Gaia theory, in which the Earth and all its parts are viewed as a whole system. Indeed Lovelock argues that biological, atmospheric and geological forms co-evolve:

“The keynote, then, of this argument is that just as sandcastles are almost certainly not accidental consequences of natural but non-living processes like wind or waves, neither are the chemical changes in the composition of the Earth's surface and atmosphere which make the lighting of fires possible. All right, you may say, you are establishing a convincing case for the idea that many of the non-living features of our world, like the ability to light a fire, are a direct result of the presence of life, but how does this help us to recognize the existence of Gaia? My answer is that where these profound disequilibria are global in extent, like the presence of oxygen or methane in the air or wood on the ground, then we have caught a glimpse of something global in size which is able to sustain and keep constant a highly improbable distribution of molecules” (Lovelock, 1979:38-39).

### **3.6 The World in our Minds: the ‘Soft’ Buddhist Worldview**

The Buddhist view is of a global system. Although Buddhist scriptures talk about physically existing worlds, giving their names, location, their status, etc., Buddhism nevertheless claims that human understanding of this broad universe is limited. Buddhism asserts that human beings should explore the truth within their own minds rather than exploring the outer world as an absolutely objective reality. This has already been discussed in relation to the Buddhist view of the living world. However, this is not merely a theoretical point: it has practical significance. The stance taken by the human mind influences our actions in the world and thereby the world itself. Ultimately, the effects of these actions can return to us. Therefore, to explore the world in our minds prior to action is essential.



It is also important to mention the Buddhist doctrine of the “Three Thousand Realms in One Mind” (Niwano, 1980). This doctrine teaches that our minds revolve constantly in the six states of anger, covetousness, ignorance, dispute, normality and joy. However, even the ordinary person can rise out of these states (albeit temporarily) by determining to live for the benefit of wider society. Earlier, I discussed the Buddhist notion of nirvana, and this is a related idea. By transcending the self in one’s mind and actions, the suffering of the self is likewise transcended.

This ‘soft’ Buddhist worldview connects with the CST link between self-reflection and ideology critique (Gregory, 2000). Through critical self-reflection human beings can become more aware of their own assumptions on an on-going basis and learn to create a new, more satisfactory life. Critical self-reflection and ideology critique are usually treated as separate and independent, because the former is used at a micro-level and the latter is applied at a societal level. However, Gregory asserts that “to change the way we are” it is necessary to operate at both levels. The interaction between the two levels is termed “self-society dynamics”, and purposefully engaging in them can help in challenging illusions created by the artificial separation of self-knowledge and social ideology.

### **3.7 The Buddhist Theory of Time and Space (時間與空間)**

In Buddhist Thinking, time is important. People can ignore this issue, for instance by wanting returns on physical or financial investment as soon as possible without considering the longer term consequences. Confusion about fairness in relation to quality of life and business affairs often results from failure to take time into account.

Buddhist Thinking sees both ‘cause, condition and effect’ and ‘past, present and future’ as necessary concepts. The principle of linking cause and time is central. The living undertake action for a reason (cause, condition and effect), within a certain time frame. Buddhism talks about the past life, the present life, and the future life, but emphasizes *this* life. The Buddhist view is that we should think about the past, present and future as if we lived in all three simultaneously, because if we don’t care about the future how can we live a good life now? What counts as a ‘good life’ has to be judged in terms of human intentions and projected consequences. Our experiences tomorrow can be created by our actions today, and our actions today are inevitably influenced by the conditions established in the past. Buddhists talk about ‘living for the present moment’, but this can be misunderstood. It does not mean neglecting the future consequences of today’s actions. Rather, it means treating the future as simultaneous with the present: taking action with both in mind. Ultimately, if we are able to live our lives in ways that are designed to minimize future suffering, we will actually have less need for tools of prediction. These are only really necessary when we suspect that future negative consequences might result from our actions and we want to test this. Living more harmoniously (in both ecological and social terms) limits the need for this type of analysis.

The importance of time and space in systems thinking is illustrated by Ulrich’s (1983) construction of his critical systems heuristics (CSH) methodology using the philosophy of Kant. Kant was concerned with human knowledge about the world and the production of this knowledge. He proposed the theoretical necessity of three sets of concepts. The first set were space and time (just like Buddhism). The second set were twelve “categorical imperatives”. The third were the set of World, Man and God. However, Buddhism does not propose the existence of a creating God, and in



this respect is different from Kantian philosophy. The connection with Kant (and hence Ulrich) is just in the importance of Time and Space as necessary concepts.

Another connection is with systems theories of the need for sustainable living. It is interesting that Meadows et al (1972) use system dynamics to predict a global economic and ecological collapse, and thereby reinforce the message of sustainability. Were our actions sustainable now, there would arguably be less need for this kind of predictive systems analysis.

### **3.8 Buddhist Thinking about Desires (慾)**

Concerning Buddhist thinking about our global world-systems, the most important argument for Buddhism is to show people that if they want to solve problems, they must focus on their minds, activities, etc., rather than merely exploring 'external' issues as if they were disconnected from themselves. From the Buddhist description of the world we live within, we realize that human beings live much of the time within a desire-based world, and the nature of people is always creative concerning their desires. People are continually seeking something to fulfil their desires. When desires are not satisfied, then they often increase. The more that desires increase, the more people busy themselves to fulfil them. Hence they become slaves to their desires. However, were they to limit their desires, then many problems would be prevented from happening. One could, of course, argue that limiting desires would create *new* problems as people making 'unnecessary' products begin to lose their jobs. This would undoubtedly be an effect of limiting desires within the existing economic system that is dependent on their continual expansion. Nevertheless,

Buddhists argue that the continual expansion of desires is more problematic *in the longer term* than their limitation. There is, however, a recognition in Buddhism that limiting desires is not easy:

“The self and its desires are not in perfect harmony. The “higher self” may understand that desire produces karma and suffering, but that does not mean that it will be able to control itself easily. Self-control is difficult precisely because what we know to be best for us is not always what we most want. If we do not bother to control our desires, but instead give them free rein, then the self will suffer even more” (Shih, 2000: 32).

Again this links to systems theories of sustainability. The need to limit desires, expectations and hence energy-consuming and polluting forms of economic growth in the Northern hemisphere is recommended by Meadows et al (1972) as a consequence of their analysis of global trends.

### **3.9 The Buddhist Concept of the Origin of Problems: The Three Poisons and Eight Distresses (三毒八苦)**

#### **3.9.1 The Three Poisons of Buddhism (三毒)**

Buddhism claims that three poisons are the sources of all passions and delusions. Due to these three, problems are produced. They are identified as “concupiscence (wrong desire) (貪)”; “resentment (嗔)”; and “ignorance (痴)” (Niwano, 1980).

The Buddhist recognition that problems are produced from wrong desires and ignorance connects with core ideas in soft systems methodology (Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990) that setting the right objectives (defined through

exploring viewpoints) in local situations is important, and that ignorance in decision making (defined in terms of non-systemic thinking) results in unanticipated side-effects. The main criticisms of the 'hard' systems thinking methodologies come from the recognition that these approaches tend "to select an efficient means of achieving a known and defined end" (Checkland, 1978:109). The problem for the hard approaches is that they have no way to define the objective in messy problem situations other than to take a manager's stated desire as given. In applications, the hard approaches are able to find efficient means to achieve the objective, but if the objective is problematic for some stakeholders then this creates rather than solves problems (Checkland, 1981).

Flood and Romm (1996) use the phrase "locally decided but widely informed" to indicate that their systems thinking approach refuses to take an absolute stance on what a 'right' objective is, but also refuses the absolute relativism of purely local decision making. The idea of being "widely informed" is similar to the Buddhist desire to avoid the 'poison' of ignorance. Indeed, the Buddhist recognition of ignorance as a source of problems aligns with the ideas of most systems thinkers. For example, Ulrich (1983) claims that his CSH methodology can reveal the normative content of planning in terms of both the involved and the affected, and it attempts to draw in the views of all relevant stakeholders during the planning process so that ignorance (seen as the neglect of other views) and one-sided solutions can be avoided. Also soft systems thinkers such as Churchman (1979b) aim to 'sweep-in' viewpoints, even from enemies of the systems approach, in order to overcome ignorance. Again, ignorance is defined here as learning what others may usefully contribute from their own points of view.

### 3.9.2 The Eight Distresses of Buddhism (八苦)

The Eight Distresses are birth; age; sickness; death; parting with what we love; meeting with what we hate; unattained aims; and all the ills of the five squanders (五蘊)<sup>2</sup>. The five squanders are: form or matter (色), the reception or sensation of feeling (受), conception or discerning (想), The functioning of the mind (行), and mental faculty with regard to perception and cognition (識). Further explanation is provided below.

The first squander, form or matter (色), is anything in physical form in the world that can be perceived by the senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body). The second, reception or sensation of feeling (受), is the functioning of the senses which connect with external affairs and things. The third, conception or discerning (想), is the functioning of the mind in distinguishing what is perceived by the senses. When people's minds follow the changing of external matter with their senses, their minds start to form concepts, they begin to think, to remember, to dream, etc. The fourth, the functioning of the mind (行), comes into play when, in processes of thinking, people make judgments such as like and dislike, good and bad, etc. The fifth is mental faculty in regard to perception and cognition (識). It is the capacity of self-reflection on the other four squanders. Only the first squander is said to be at all physical, and only those physical aspects that are open to the senses are relevant. The other four are entirely mental qualities.

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<sup>2</sup> This term is usually translated as "squander" but could be translated as "levels of interpretation" to avoid the other connotation in English: to waste. Unfortunately, there is no direct translation from the Chinese term.



This Buddhist concept of distresses and squanders connects with the systems concept of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1992). Using a different language, the latter talks about squanders 2 to 5. In the theory of autopoiesis, squander 1 (anything in the physical world that can be perceived by the senses) has to be defined in terms of squander 2 (reception of sensation) because we cannot distinguish the physical world from sense data. Our sense data is all we can know.

Interestingly, it is Maturana and Varela's (1992) refusal to talk about an external world that has led Mingers (1995) to propose an alternative ontology for the theory of autopoiesis - one which says that perceptions *do* reflect a real world (albeit imperfectly). Thus, in Mingers' version of the theory, the first squander is recognized.

### **3.9.3 The Interrelation of the Eight Distresses and the Three Poisons**

From these 'eight distresses' (explained above) and 'three poisons' (wrong desire, resentment and ignorance) a variety of problems can flow. Thus people make claims about reality when it is only their own perception, or there are mismatches between desires and behaviours. For example, people pray to God to give them long life, but they do not take care of their bodies, or they are always angry and nervous; or people hope to be rich, but they do not work hard, and so on.

The outcome is that people can become confused, and sink into the sea of distresses, starting to cling to impermanent phenomena as 'real' and sources of hope. Furthermore, problems occur because people use their thoughts, words and deeds to create many different causes and effects of physical and mental suffering. Thus the

complexity of problem situations is formed. Then people tend to focus on the surface, seeing what is before their eyes, but do not explore what might lie behind. They therefore only address the symptoms in front of them, and ignore deeper issues.

This Buddhist thinking connects with many systems ideas which seek to make progress by creating a deeper contextual understanding. A single example is critical appreciation theory. The value of the critical appreciation theory of Gregory (2000) is that this combines self-reflection and ideology critique in order to explore problem situations at the levels of both self and society (taking account of multiple interpretations). Self-reflection brings new insights and learning which can lead to new paths for action. Ideology-critique can reveal how problems perceived by stakeholders might have deeper roots in wider social and economic systems.

### **3.10 The Buddhist Middle Path (中道)**

As already discussed in Section 2.4, the Buddhist Middle Path involves taking a course which avoids perceived extremes. The two extremes highlighted by the Buddha are indulgence in sensual pleasures and self torture (Buddhist Missionary Society, 1996; Niwano, 1980). Indulgence is to succumb to greed, while self torture is to succumb to self hatred. Buddhism defines extreme views as distorted or incomplete knowledge seized upon by human beings. The Buddhist Middle Path aims to transcend all extreme views (defined in local contexts) because they are one-sided obsessions connected with strong and often unconscious emotion. But the Middle Path is not a rigid, static half-way position between the extremes. Rather it is a dynamic middle position (Combs et al, 2002). Finding it requires on-going acts of

interpretation and communication with others. There is also the idea of being guided by the 'right' view, thinking, speech, action, living, endeavour, memory and meditation (the Eightfold Noble Path discussed in Chapter 2). Again what is 'right' needs to be determined locally, but in a widely informed manner. The Middle Path is an important concept in Buddhism and is referred to in many different teachings. It is synonymous with knowing what constitutes moderation and balance, knowing what is optimum, so that "the enhancement of true well-being coincides with the experience of satisfaction" (Payutto, 1994: 69). Therefore, in economic terms, the Middle Path represents a path of wise consumption rather than the classical economic assumption that maximum consumption equals maximum satisfaction.

The notion of finding a way between, or transcending, bi-polar extremes is apparent in the dialectical systems thinking of Mason and Mitroff (1981) (following Churchman, 1979a). Mason and Mitroff (1981:37) note that their methodology of strategic assumption surfacing and testing (SAST) adopts the adversarial principle, "based on the premise that the best judgement on the assumptions necessary to deal with a complex problem is rendered in the context of opposition." Their mentor, Churchman, also advocates the exploration of opposites. He asks systems thinkers to find enemies of the systems approach and enter into debate with them: "To me these enemies provide a powerful way of learning about the systems approach, precisely because they enable the rational mind to step outside itself and to observe itself (from the vantage point of the enemies)" (Churchman, 1979a: 24). All these authors believe that debate between polarized views can liberate creative energy to help people find, not necessarily a compromise, but a new path they can commit to.

The idea of ‘right’ speech, action, etc. (understood in a non-absolute manner) is also important to many authors of CST (e.g. Ulrich, 1983; Midgley, 2000): exploring what people *ought* to be doing is considered to be an essential aspect of systemic intervention, and judgements about the ought are not regarded as absolute and immutable.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

On the basis of particular ideas and concepts in BT and in ST which appear to have similar meanings or aims, I conclude that there is indeed a basis for dialogue leading to the possible production of a new methodological perspective of relevance to Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. However, in order to further our understanding, it is now necessary to consider the potential problems that might arise in such a dialogue. This is done in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OF THE ST AND BT DIALOGUE**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 3, potential differences between ST and BT were set aside in order to show that there are points of connection forming a basis for dialogue. However, it is acknowledged that any dialogue between different positions is potentially problematic (Gregory, 1992). Consequently, in this chapter, some of the potential problems of ST and BT dialogue are examined. The chapter firstly examines problems of dialogue within ST itself; secondly we look at the situation concerning dialogue problems within BT; and thirdly potential problems of dialogue between BT and ST are reviewed.

#### **4.2 Problems of Dialogue within ST**

##### **4.2.1 Different Paradigms in ST**

The development of systems thinking has led to a range of different systems methodologies based in different paradigms (Jackson, 2000). For example, the hard systems thinking paradigm is distinguished from the soft systems thinking paradigm by Checkland (1978). Similarly, Jackson (1991) distinguishes emancipatory and critical systems thinking from both hard and soft.

Checkland (1978; 109) recognizes that the distinguishing characteristic of 'hard' systems thinking (HST) methodologies is the selection of "an efficient means of achieving a known and defined end". According to Checkland, the HST methodologies (e.g., systems analysis, system dynamics and systems engineering) attempt to optimize the use of people, machines, materials, money and information flows to achieve the system objectives. The HST methodologies focus on rational observation, objectivity, modeling, and feedback loop analysis to optimize the use of system resources. In HST the assumption is that there is an objective truth towards which human beings should strive in representing the world, which can be understood through the scientific approach involving systematic observation, quantification and statistical analysis of causal relationships (O'Brien, 1993; Wright, 1993). The HST methodologies are criticized because modeling is considered as representing reality and aiding prediction rather than as helping people explore assumptions and supporting learning (Checkland, 1981).

Churchman (1979b), Checkland (1981), Ackoff (1981) and others introduced 'soft' systems methodologies, representing the soft systems thinking (SST) paradigm. Soft systems methodologies recognize that social life is the shared creation of people in a social context (Checkland, 1981). Thus problems are seen to arise because of the different worldviews of participants, and soft methodologies are designed to be appropriate for interventions in social contexts arising from differences in viewpoints and differences in understandings between participants (Jackson, 1991). The methodologies include processes of inquiry to support learning among participants in order to reach accommodations so that feasible and desirable changes can be designed and implemented. However, these SST methodologies are criticized for

failure to tackle power inequalities and structural conflicts in interventions and in society more generally (Thomas and Locket, 1979; Mingers, 1980; Jackson, 1982).

Emancipatory systems thinking represents another paradigm which recognizes the possibility of conflict and the importance of power in social systems. According to Jackson (1991), an example of an emancipatory methodology is Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH; Ulrich, 1983; 1996). CSH is a methodology for revealing the value assumptions underlying proposals and for exploring the social consequences for all identified citizens. The aim is to make people more critically and socially aware by asking questions concerning the motivations for, the control of, the expertise in, and the legitimacy of any given social system. This represents a route to overcome problems of power inequalities built into planning situations where 'expert' planners marginalize the views of ordinary citizens.

Table 4.1 summarizes the different assumptions underlying the 'hard', 'soft' and 'emancipatory' systems thinking paradigms. Some of the terminology in the 'emancipatory' column (e.g. 'communicative action') is borrowed from Habermas (1984). The work of Habermas has influenced Ulrich substantially, which is why his terminology has been used, but it would be an unnecessary digression to explain it further here.

| <b>HARD SYSTEMS THINKING</b> | <b>SOFT SYSTEMS THINKING</b>                     | <b>EMANCIPATORY SYSTEMS THINKING</b>   |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Objectivity                  | Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity              | Inter-subjectivity incorporating dialogue on claims to objectivity, normativity and subjectivity |
| Functionalist                | Interpretive                                     | Emancipatory   |
| Instrumental rationality     | Practical rationality                            | Communicative action   |
| One viewpoint (unitary)      | Many viewpoints (pluralist)                      | Conflicting viewpoints   |
| Quantitative                 | Qualitative (with a minor role for quantitative) | Qualitative (with a defined role for quantitative)   |
| Machine system               | Human social system                              | Human social system  |
| Easily defined aim           | Difficult to define aim                          | Difficult to define aim  |

*Table 4.1 Paradigmatic assumptions*

**4.2.2 Dialogue Problems between Different Paradigms**

Kuhn (1970: 150) recognizes the problem of paradigm incommensurability, which occurs “when different groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction”. Burrell and Morgan (1979) propose that theories about the social world can be categorized according to their assumptions concerning the nature of the world and their political orientation towards society. They propose four sociological paradigms to analyze social theory: functionalist; interpretive; radical structuralist; and radical humanist. Flood (1989) recognizes great difficulty for dialogue between different paradigms because of their different ontological, epistemological and political assumptions.



However, though dialogue can be difficult, it is not impossible. This can be illustrated using the model of communication between alien paradigms (Gregory, 1992). Gregory points out that when a person whose thinking is based in one paradigm listens to a second person whose thinking is based in another paradigm, then the second person can only interpret what is said through their own paradigm of reference. Therefore some communication is possible, but full understanding may not be achieved. However, if it is appreciated by the two parties that full understanding is not being achieved, then their learning can be increased through mutual exploration, which has the potential to transform their paradigms of thinking.

The fact that dialogue may be difficult across systems paradigms, but not impossible, is evidenced by particular instances of learning. A good example is Espejo and Harnden's (1989) reinterpretation of Beer's (1981) viable system model (originally structuralist) in terms of the interpretive paradigm. Here, sufficient cross-paradigm learning has taken place to enable a new practice using the old model to emerge.

### **4.2.3 Comment**

The above discussion indicates that the contrasting theoretical assumptions of different systems intervention methodologies can introduce dialogue problems within ST. However dialogue is not impossible, and inter-paradigmatic conversation and learning can occur. Nevertheless this does not mean that systems thinking will ever be one single unified perspective. The philosophical and theoretical differences between paradigms are, in my view, significant enough to maintain the differences despite dialogue and learning. The implication for my research is that there is no

single ST to compare BT with, making comparison potentially problematic. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3, elements of BT seem to align with hard systems thinking while others align with soft. This is not an insurmountable problem, however, as I will show in the next chapter.

### **4.3 The Situation Concerning Dialogue Problems within BT**

The word 'God' has different connotations for different people in different cultures. In Judaeo-Christianity, the term usually refers to one supernatural eternal being. In contrast, Buddhism believes in a great number of impermanent gods (devas, subject to birth and death) and men who became gods at some point in ancient history. There is no creator in Buddhism. For this reason some European analysts regard Buddhism as a philosophy and not a religion (Von Glasenapp, 1970). Buddhism is a philosophy of *becoming*, and therefore positing the existence of a permanent, eternal God is deemed inappropriate. Clearly, it is difficult to define a theological position without controversy when different belief systems enter a dialogue, and even within Buddhism there are different schools of thinking with different interpretations and emphases.

As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, there are eight main schools of thinking in Chinese Buddhism (known as Mahayana Buddhism) which have different interpretations of Buddha's teachings, and as a result there are some different religious practices (Bapat, 1956: 110). My organization, the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS), originally belonged to the Ch'an school of Chinese Buddhism (known in the West as Zen Buddhism), but the religion of my

organization has now developed into what is called 'Humanistic Buddhism'. I have been schooled in Humanistic Buddhism which attempts to embrace the concepts and practices of all eight Mahayana schools. I suggest that, for the purposes of this research (developing a Buddhist Systems Methodology for use in Taiwanese organizations), it is sufficient to work with the Humanistic Buddhist perspective. This is widely known and respected in Taiwan. Also, I have tended to concentrate on those elements of Buddhism that are common to the other traditions too, even if they may (on occasion) be interpreted differently. To widen the boundary of this research to all eight traditions would make my task too complex, especially as I have made the decision to work with a plurality of systems perspectives (a substantial proportion of my research time has therefore been used to explore the systems literature). It may be the case that future researchers will find it useful to explore the differences between Buddhist perspectives in relation to systems thinking, but for the purposes of this thesis I do not believe it to be necessary.

#### **4.4 Dialogue Problems between ST and BT**

In Chapter 3, when I was looking for the similarities between BT and ST (putting aside the differences), many BT concepts were outlined and commonalities with various perspectives in ST were drawn out and discussed. However, I acknowledge that there are elements of Buddhist thought (e.g. the belief in reincarnation and the fact that Buddhists claim that 'truth' can only be discerned in relation to the Buddha's teachings) that do not immediately connect with systems thinking ideas. However, the fact that there are some differences does not mean that there cannot be dialogue if, as Gregory (1992) advocates, we are prepared to be sensitive to the

possibilities for misinterpretation. However, I acknowledge that the potential for problems of dialogue between ST and BT could be even greater than within ST because of the following four factors:

- (a) *The differences between Western and Eastern theologies and philosophies.* For example, in Buddhist philosophy the concepts of reincarnation and Karma are important, yet these are alien to Western religious thought. For Christians, Heaven comes after death, while for Buddhists nirvana can come in life from the cessation of delusion. Also Western philosophies make a strong distinction between the 'objective', 'subjective' and 'inter-subjective' (Midgley, 2000), which is reflected in the different paradigms of systems thinking. In the West it is often viewed as contradictory to talk about the universe as a system structured into hierarchies *and* the idea that problems stem from the human mind (Midgley, 2000). However, in Eastern philosophies (in particular Buddhism), these ideas coexist, and this coexistence is not viewed as problematic.
- (b) *Different meanings.* Kuhn (1970) highlights the fact that different perspectives may use the same language in different ways. Therefore, there is a question that needs to be considered about whether the systems views in BT and ST are actually the same, or whether superficial similarities are undermined through further study.
- (c) *Cultural differences.* For example, Buddhist culture tends to respect and revere the aged and financial altruism, while many Western cultures revere youth and individual monetary accumulation. The West tends to stress individuality, while the East emphasizes collectivism. It remains to be seen how transferable some



ideas are across cultural contexts. Also, it may transpire that some systems and Buddhist ideas that were originally viewed as universal may turn out to be culturally relative.

(d) *Language differences.* Translation between different languages can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. This is a potential issue for my research because I am drawing upon both English and Chinese texts.

However, while acknowledging these difficulties, I prefer to see them as opportunities for learning rather than as barriers, because what I am looking for is learning from both discourses which will enable the development of a systems approach of greater relevance to Taiwanese organizations. In developing a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM), exploring some of the above issues may be very useful.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed problems of dialogue within both ST and BT, and also potential problems of dialogue between ST and BT. This examination has shown that, although there may be dialogue problems, dialogue is not impossible because interparadigmatic conversation and learning can occur. Therefore, this is not an insurmountable problem and this is demonstrated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to address the problem of multiple perspectives within ST so this does not undermine the dialogue with BT. What is required for this research, which seeks to combine Buddhist ideas with the strengths of systems thinking, is a systems perspective which is pluralist enough to represent a sufficient diversity of ST ideas in my dialogue with BT.

There is indeed a systems perspective that emphasizes pluralism: critical systems thinking (CST). Several different CST approaches to pluralism have been developed, and some of these are reviewed below in order to find an appropriate candidate for the dialogue with BT.

#### 5.2 Critical Systems Thinking (CST)

Flood and Jackson (1991a) apply Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests as a potential solution to overcome the paradigm incommensurability problem in systems thinking. 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. The emancipatory interest concerns the need to escape from constraints imposed by power relations which prevent free and open discussion. Flood and Jackson (1991b) align the HST approach with the technical interest, the SST approach with the practical interest, and emancipatory systems thinking with the emancipatory interest.

Flood and Jackson (1991b) indicate that CST is based on three commitments: 'complementarism', 'sociological awareness', and 'human well-being and emancipation'. Complementarism is a recognition that different systems methodologies represent different paradigmatic rationalities which must all be respected and theoretically developed in partnership. The commitment to sociological awareness recognizes that interveners in social contexts must be aware that organizational and societal pressures exist which can influence choices of methodological approach, and that the consequences of using particular methodologies must be considered. The principle of human well-being and emancipation aims to achieve maximum development of the potential of all individuals in the social context by overcoming ideological and power constraints. Because CST advocates complementarity between all three systems paradigms (hard, soft and emancipatory), it would appear that CST has the potential to support all the areas of human interest with different methodologies, thereby overcoming the paradigmatic divisions between them.

Flood and Jackson (1991a) propose that CST can be operationalized using the metamethodology of 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, 1995). 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, 1987, 1990) which links methodologies and appropriate contexts (although it should be noted that Flood, 1995, has abandoned this framework). It is important to identify the most appropriate methodologies to avoid a waste of resources and any prolonging of the problem. The implementation phase involves intervention using the chosen methodologies with the aim of producing co-ordinated change.

### **5.3 Critique of Flood and Jackson's version of CST**

TSI has been criticized however. 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). Also the metatheory 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, 1997a).

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, 1995, 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) critical systems heuristics (CSH) is only applicable for dealing with coercive situations. This potentially limits the application of boundary critique to a narrow field of organizational situations. If there is only a limited application of boundary critique, there may be underlying coercion in organizations and society which is not dealt with (or even seen) because of superficial diagnoses of problem situations (Midgley, 2000). In order to overcome this problem, Midgley (2000) argues that systemic intervention should practice boundary critique up-front in all interventions.

In my view, the above criticisms of CST/TSI are significant and need to be taken seriously. Therefore CST/TSI offers insufficient attractions for being the appropriate systems perspective to allow the pluralist use of other systems ideas for dialogue with BT. In particular, I believe that a more up-front focus on boundary critique is needed. It seems to me that there are two approaches which achieve this: Ulrich's (1983) CSH and Midgley's (2000) systemic intervention. However, Ulrich's methodology does not 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 represent ST in the dialogue with BT (and we can also draw in some ideas from Gregory, 2000).

## 5.4 Systemic Intervention

Midgley (2000) proposes that, to be adequate, a systemic intervention methodology should encourage agents to address a minimum of three things:

(1) *Agents should reflect critically upon, and make choices between, boundaries.*

This is because human beings cannot deal with full systemic interconnectedness.

Reflection on the making of boundary judgements is an activity to develop understanding and includes consideration of the ethical consequences of actions.

Importantly, this is a key means by which the interconnectedness recognized by both ST and BT may be addressed.

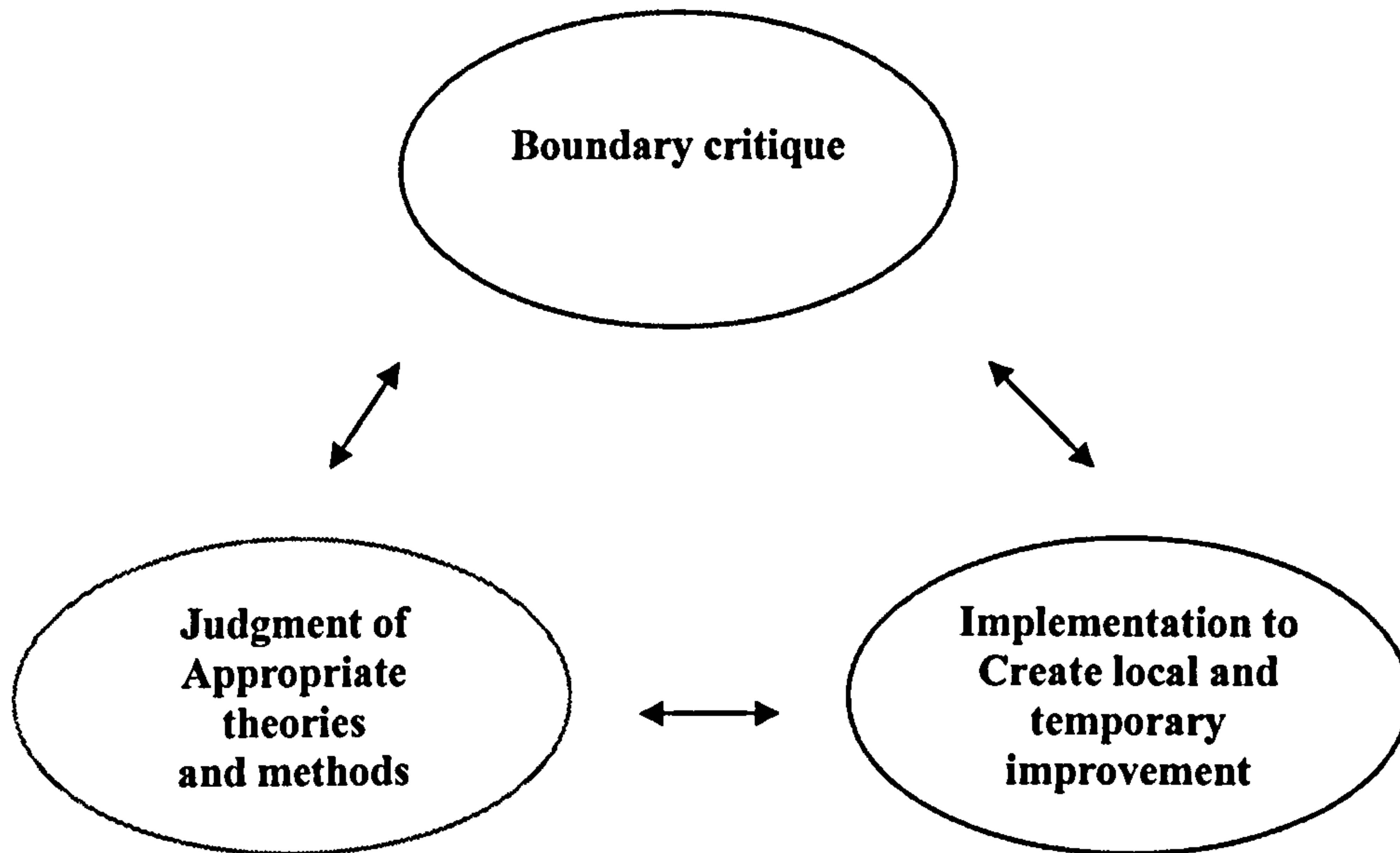
(2) *Agents should make choices between theories and methods to guide their actions.*

This requires an emphasis on theoretical and methodological pluralism. It is through this pluralism that other systems approaches may enter the dialogue with BT.

(3) *Agents should be explicit about taking action for improvement.* Improvement is

defined locally and temporarily because any understanding of it inevitably assumes ethical and boundary judgements. However, to account for the needs of future generations, the idea of *sustainable* improvement is important.

Figure 5.1 shows the three aspects of systemic intervention methodology (adapted from Midgley, 2000: 132).



*Figure 5.1 Systemic Intervention Methodology*

It should be clear from the above that *agents* are pivotal in systemic intervention. It is the *agent* who undertakes boundary critique, chooses methods and works towards improvement. Self-reflection on the part of the agent, especially in light of power relations and the pervasiveness of 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 linking self-reflection and ideology critique with observations of the problem situation (using empirical-analytic methods) and two-way communication (using historical-hermeneutic methods) to enhance critical research practice. Clearly, self-reflection and sensitivity to ideological concerns on the part of the agent is pivotal in Systemic Intervention.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

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, even from outside the systems paradigms, to include in an intervention). Furthermore, self-reflection and ideology-critique on the part of the agent are a crucial part of Systemic Intervention, particularly because of the possibility of affective power relations and the pervasiveness of ideologies in contexts. Importantly it also prioritizes boundary critique, thereby addressing systemic interconnectedness. Therefore I argue that it is appropriate to use this as the main pluralist systems perspective in the dialogue with BT, allowing other systems ideas to be interpreted through it when they are perceived as relevant. This will simplify the ST-BT dialogue, making it more manageable than it would be if the totality of systems ideas in their original forms had to be reviewed and related to BT.



**PART C : DEVELOPMENT (發展)**

**DESIGNING A NEW METHODOLOGY**

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE BUDDHIST SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY (BSM)**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 4, the potential problems for dialogue between BT and ST were outlined. In Chapter 5, I made the case for solving these problems by narrowing the focus of the dialogue to Humanistic Buddhism and Systemic Intervention. Now it is time to present an outline of what a Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM) might look like, drawing upon selected ideas from both Humanistic Buddhism and Systemic Intervention. In this way, I should hopefully be able to develop a methodology that is particularly relevant to Taiwanese organizations.

The BSM methodology is operationalized in two modes- Mode 1 and Mode 2 - and is constructed from two component structures, called component structures 1 and 2. The description of the BSM content and operationalization (including details of the modes and component structures) are presented in this chapter.

## 6.2 Description of the BSM Content

### 6.2.1 The BSM Overview

The BSM mode 1 (concerned with intervention for problem prevention and problem solving) consists of two component structures: 1 and 2.

Component Structure 1 is shown in Figure 6.1 It consists of the five key concepts of Buddhist thinking - the Eightfold Noble Path; Middle Path; Cause-Condition-Effect; Space (Context); and Time - which are common to all schools of Buddhism and which I think can usefully contribute to problem prevention and problem solving in Taiwanese organizations.

Component Structure 2 is the three loops of systemic intervention (SI) which interactively combines boundary critique, choice of theories and methods, and recommended actions for improvement (Figure 6.2). In component structure 2, for the third aspect of SI, the emphasis for the BSM is on *recommendations* for improvement rather than on *taking action* for improvement, which was the emphasis shown in Figure 5.1 This is because recommendations are essentially proposals for action, which can usefully be the subject of critical analysis using the Buddhist concepts.

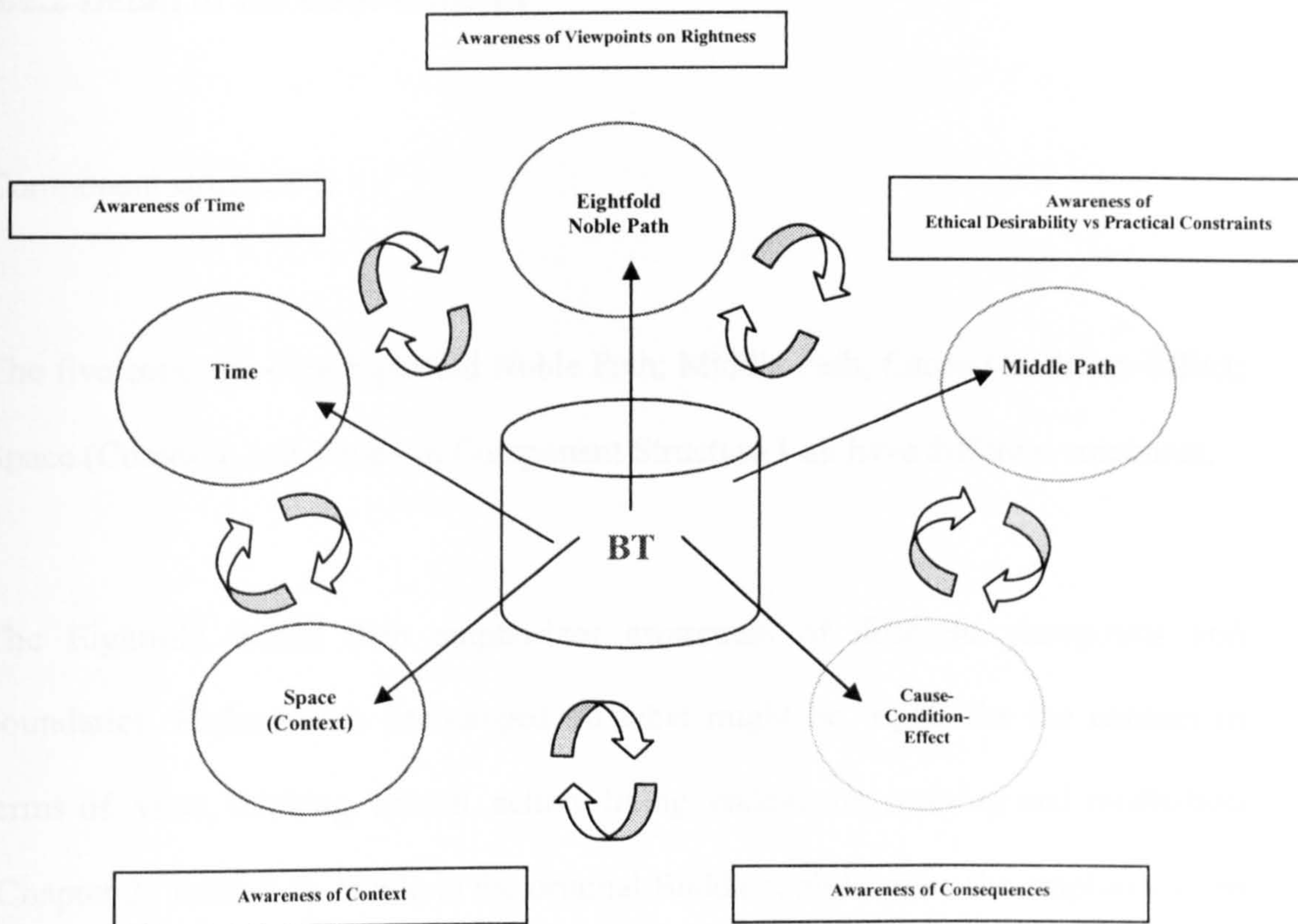


Figure 6.1 BSM Component Structure 1 - 5 Buddhist Concepts

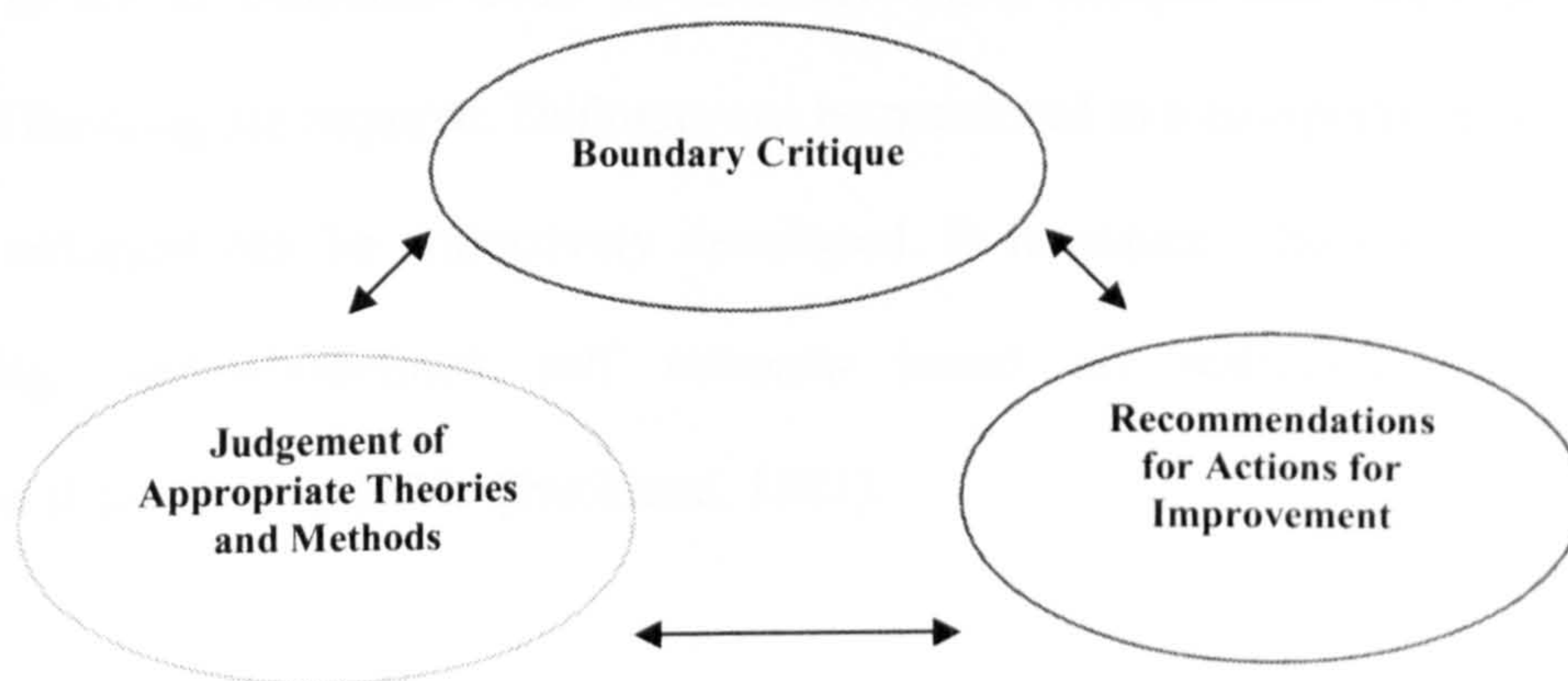


Figure 6.2 BSM Component Structure 2 - the 3 loops of SI methodology (adapted from Midgley, 2000: 132).



## **6.2.2 Detail of the BSM Content**

Component structure 1:

The five concepts - the Eightfold Noble Path; Middle Path; Cause-Condition-Effect; Space (Context); and Time - in Component Structure 1 all have different emphases.

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 (Chapter 2; Table 2.1). While in the original Buddhist philosophy the emphasis is on individual reflection on these matters, this is complemented in BSM by dialogue between stakeholders within and beyond organizations. In my view, dialogue can be useful because in Buddhist organizations people are generally accepting of authority and tend to try to cooperate even in adversity when critique and challenges to patterns of thinking are required. Dialogue can be presented as a co-operative activity in which critiques can be collectively developed. It introduces the possibility of transcending narrowly-defined self interests based on restricted individual worldviews (Churchman, 1970; Checkland, 1981).

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 interests in the light of other perspectives. The exploration of ‘right thinking’ encourages avoidance of covetousness, resentment and maliciousness,

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 BT, which promotes mental discipline in people's lives.

The Middle Path emphasizes avoidance of extremes, particularly concerning ethical principles versus the acceptance of practical constraints in making decisions. In BT, extreme views are regarded as arising from incomplete or distorted knowledge, so a 'middle way' is sought. However, the 'middle way' is not a rigid compromise path, but involves assessment in decision making of local influencing factors, usually 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 customers and the remaining and future employees.

Cause-Condition-Effect are interrelated and inseparable in BT. Therefore inclusion of this concept in Component Structure 1 places an emphasis on the awareness of conditions and consequences in the dealings of the 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 because of better awareness of consequences.

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

The final concept in component structure 1 is Time. 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 the human ability to grasp complexity). Here, the idea of sustainability becomes important: the potential needs of future generations should be accounted for today.

The five areas are linked interactively, so that thinking can move back and forth between them.

### Component Structure 2:

This is the three loops of systemic intervention (SI) which interactively combine boundary critique, choice of theories and methods, and recommendations for actions for improvement (Figure 6.2). Systemic intervention has already been described in Chapter 5. In brief, boundary critique is essential because people cannot deal with full systemic interconnectedness (the complexity is too great). Reflection on making value and boundary judgements is necessary to minimize uncritical and narrow understandings of improvement. However, the methodology recognizes that a second loop of consideration is also needed, and this involves the understanding and choice of appropriate theories and methods. The third loop of SI is about recommending plans for action using the methods.

## **6.3 Operationalization of the BSM**

### **6.3.1 Overview of How the BSM can be operationalized**

The BSM methodology can be operationalized in two modes - Mode 1 and Mode 2. Mode 1 is the process of using it for intervention within an organization, and Mode 2 is the process of learning from that practice. Mode 2 can be used by a researcher (such as me) in evaluating an intervention. The idea that the same methodology can be implemented in both these ways has been borrowed from Flood (1995).



BSM mode 1 is illustrated in Figure 6.3 It consists of the three loops of systemic intervention (Component Structure 2) - boundary judgement, choice of theories and methods, and recommendations for action for improvement. Inside each of the three loops there are the five concepts of BT (Component Structure 1). By introducing the five BT concepts into each of the loops of SI (which will be explained in more detail in Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3) a very reflective and flexible methodology is produced. Also, the three loops of SI are made more accessible to a Buddhist Taiwanese audience.

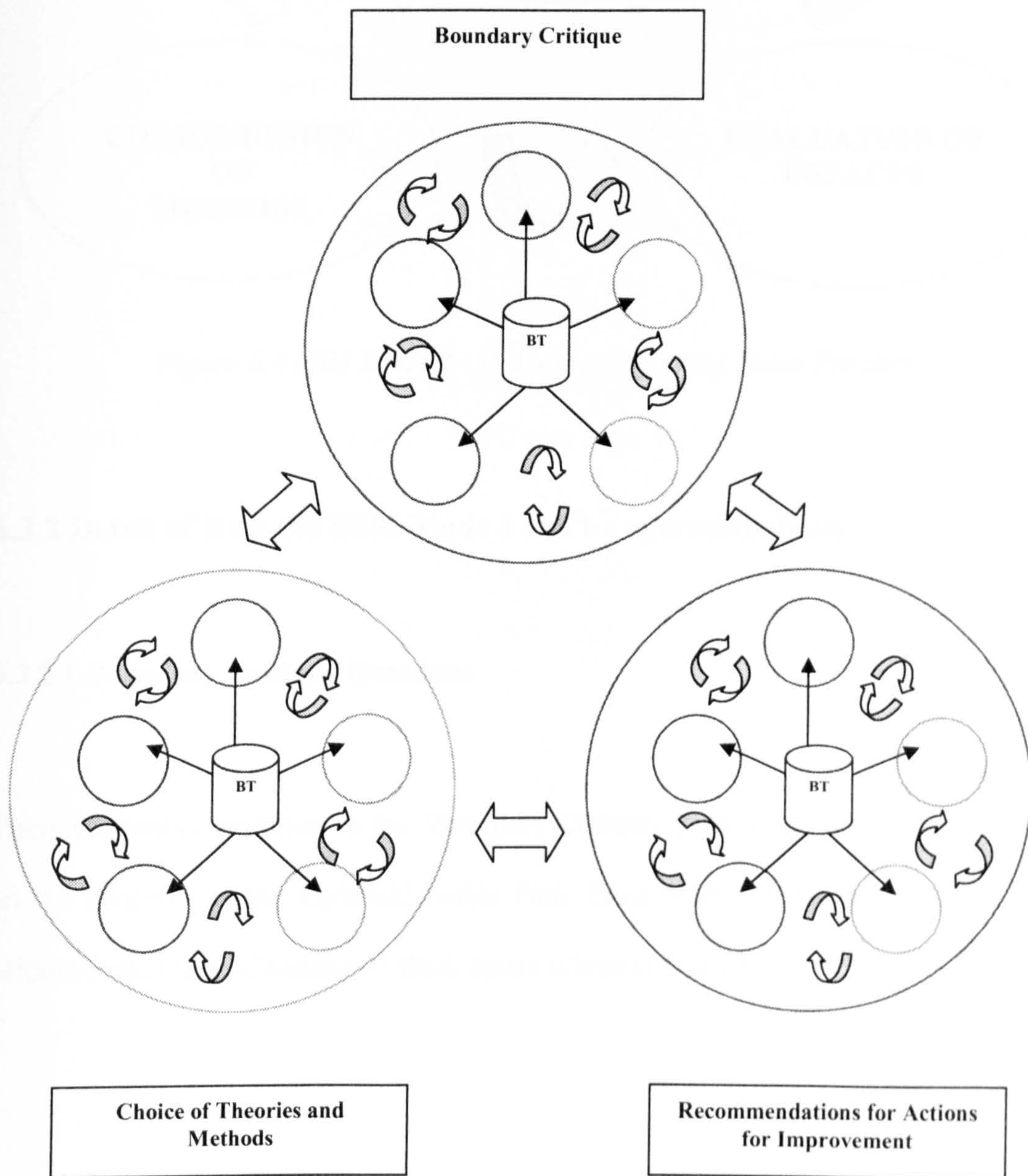
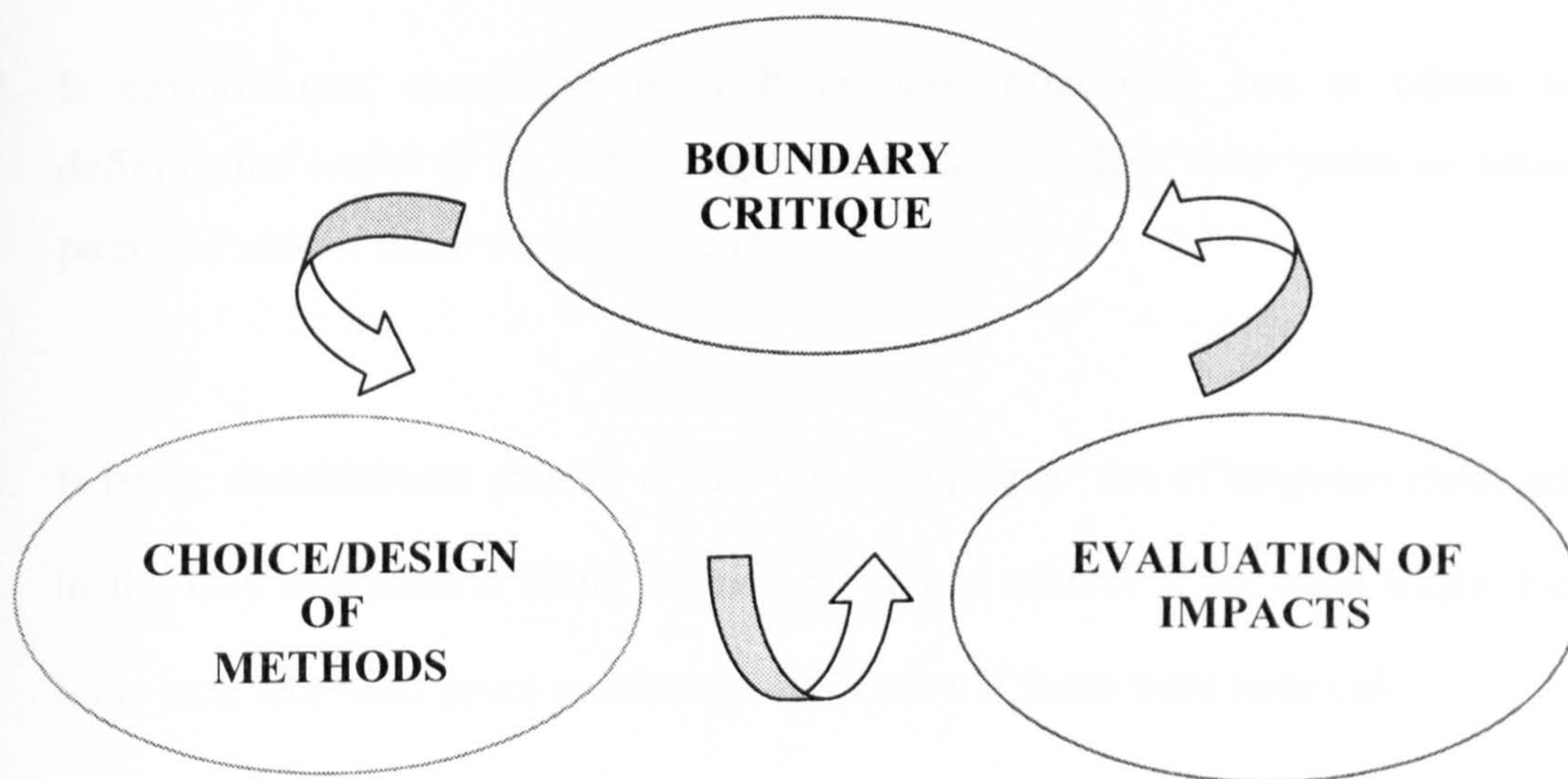


Figure 6.3 BSM Mode 1 Process of Intervention



BSM Mode 2 is shown in Figure 6.4. This consists of three interactive loops – boundary critique, choice/design of methods, and evaluation of impacts - which are interactively linked to enable critical evaluation. BSM Mode 2 is further explained in Section 6.3.4, and Chapter 7.



*Figure 6.4 BSM Mode 2 - Process of Learning From Practice*

### **6.3.2 Detail of How the BSM Mode 1 can be operationalized**

#### **6.3.2.1 Boundary Critique Questions**

There are twelve questions in the ‘Boundary Critique’ loop. Eight of these 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.

**6.3.2.1.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop**

- 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 maliciousness 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?

#### 6.3.2.1.2 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?

#### 6.3.2.1.3 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?

#### 6.3.2.1.4 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?



### **6.3.2.1.5 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?

### **6.3.2.2 Choice of Theories and Methods**

There are also twelve questions in the ‘Choice of Theories and Methods’ loop. 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.

#### **6.3.2.2.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop**

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 maliciousness 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?

#### **6.3.2.2.2 Middle Path**

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

#### **6.3.2.2.3 Cause-Condition-Effect**

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

#### **6.3.2.2.4 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?

### **6.3.2.2.5 Time**

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

### **6.3.2.3 Recommendations for Actions for Improvement**

Finally, there are twelve questions in the ‘Recommendations for Actions for Improvement’ loop.

#### **6.3.2.3.1 Eightfold Noble Path loop**

1. Are positive motivations embodied in the recommendations? If not, can they be improved?
2. Do the recommendations stem from covetousness, resentment or maliciousness? 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?

#### **6.3.2.3.2 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?

#### **6.3.2.3.3 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?

#### **6.3.2.3.4 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?



#### 6.3.2.3.5 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?

#### 6.3.2.4 Interactivity

The five BT concepts are linked interactively, within each SI loop, so that thinking should move back and forth from concept to concept in order that all concepts and questions are addressed. It is important that managers consider all the questions so that the process of critique is sufficiently comprehensive to generate adequate systemic awareness. To begin with, it is recommended that managers should cover them all in one go, but as they internalize the concepts it can become more intuitive and fluid, in a similar manner to the practice of Mode II SSM (Checkland and Scholes, 1990) and the use of intuition in Systemic Intervention (Midgley, 2000).

#### 6.3.3 BSM Mode 1 Implementation

BSM mode 1 (Figure 6.2) consists of the three loops of Systemic Intervention (SI) (Component Structure 2) - boundary critique, choice of theories and methods, and recommendations for action for improvement - and inside each loop there are the five concepts of BT (Component Structure 1).

The first SI loop is boundary critique which involves reflecting critically upon, and making judgements between, boundaries. Boundary critique is essential in intervention because complete comprehensiveness is unattainable (Churchman, 1970; Ulrich, 1983; Midgley, 2000). Therefore it is necessary to decide the ‘cut-off’ points for focus, which means considering the boundary between inclusion and exclusion. However, as Midgley (1997b) points out when first formulating SI, participants in a context generate different boundaries in relation to their knowledge, so dialogue is necessary to explore consequences of possible boundary choices. Therefore, to enhance the consideration process in a manner that is relevant to the context of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations, the questions (Section 6.3.2.1) related to the five BT concept loops are used to enhance reflection.

The process of boundary critique in SI already covers many aspects of reflection and judgement concerning boundaries. However, these do not explicitly relate to Buddhist thinking. The latter suggests a different set of questions that are culturally relevant in Taiwan. Employing the BSM, the practitioner can use the questions proposed for each BT concept (Section 6.3.2.1) to ensure that these considerations are not omitted when reflecting on boundaries concerning a particular decision or issue. For example, the practitioner can start with the eight questions based on the Eightfold Noble Path (Section 6.3.2.1.1). The first question asks “What currently motivates you and others to define the issue at hand?; followed by “What ought to be your/their motivations?” From this the practitioner can generate awareness of viewpoints and motivations concerning the decision/issue, and compare this with what ought to be. “What ought to be” is of course the ‘right’ view of Buddhist thinking, but I acknowledge that in many circumstances there may be more than one right view, especially when multiple stakeholders are involved. Next the practitioner

can consider “Is covetousness, resentment or maliciousness 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?” This aims to reveal the Buddhist ‘right’ thinking about the issue by removing any strongly negative influences on judgement that may possibly be present. The practitioner must then consider the other six questions based on the Eightfold Noble Path. If these considerations raise other issues such as time or context, the practitioner can move on to the questions in the relevant BT loop, and interactively move back and forth between loops. Otherwise, on completing the consideration in the Eightfold Noble Path loop, the practitioner should move on to another BT loop, such as the Middle Path loop. In the Middle Path loop, people should reflect on the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, and 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? From this consideration process, a ‘best’ way can be identified.

The practitioner and involved stakeholders then continue the consideration process using the questions in the Cause-Condition-Effect loop, the Space loop, and the Time loop. When this process has been carried out the outcomes will be taken forward to the second SI loop.

The second SI loop is choice making about methods. This involves choosing the most appropriate theories and methods for the intervention. SI recognizes that different methods can be based on different theoretical assumptions, making the methods appropriate for different circumstances understood through different theoretical ‘lenses’ (Midgley, 2000). Consequently theoretical and methodological

pluralism is respected. However, SI also recognizes that choosing particular methods means promoting particular aspects of knowledge, albeit temporarily. Therefore, in the judgement process, the questions from the five BT loops (Section 6.3.2.2) are used to interrogate each decision/issue concerning the choice of appropriate methods, as explained in the following paragraphs.

When trying to choose the most appropriate theory/method (or more usually which combination of methods) to help to improve the situation concerning the relevant decision/issue, the practitioner will use the questions from the five BT concepts to bring focus to the choice-making. From the Eightfold Noble Path, there are eight questions. The practitioner will ask, concerning each potential method or theory and possible alternatives, “What method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through boundary critique)?” This will support consideration of the assumptions underlying the method; allow reflection on prior experiences of the self or others using the method; and lead to a decision on which method(s) are ‘right’ for the present decision/issue in terms of people’s motivations. The other seven questions in the Eightfold noble Path will consider the method, and possible alternatives, in terms of thinking, speech, ethics, usefulness, endeavour, memory, and mental discipline. Then the practitioner will move on to the next BT loop. For example, the Middle Path question (number 9) will surface concerns about the balance between issues relating to each theory or method under consideration. Then the practitioner will consider the Cause-Condition-Effect implications of the potential theory or method (and its alternatives), particularly concerning causation, influencing factors, consequences, and risks of using each theory or method. Consideration of the Space BT loop brings reflection on the appropriateness of the



theory or method and alternatives, concerning the cultural and ecological contexts. Consideration of the Time BT loop introduces the issue of time constraints. It is proposed that systems thinking (especially critical systems thinking) can contribute something important at this stage: an awareness of the possibility of drawing methods from any of the three paradigms referred to in Table 4.1. If the initial selection appears to be problematic, then explicit awareness of the variety of methods across the paradigms should help.

The third SI loop is recommendations for taking action for improvement. This involves a specific commitment to eventually applying the methods resulting from the boundary critique and choice of methods in order to bring about improvement. Improvement is locally and temporarily defined because different choices of boundaries, theories and methods can affect its meaning (Midgley, 2000: 130). can be said to have resulted if a desired consequence is achieved, and this can be called *sustainable* improvement (at least temporarily) if no negative consequences can be discerned into the future (Midgley, 2000). During the ‘recommendations for actions for improvement’ loop, the questions related to the five BT concepts (Section 6.3.2.3) are used to reflect critically upon the appropriateness of the proposed actions, and to recommend re-appraisal of boundary critique and choice of methods if necessary, as explained in the following.

When making the recommendations for action in the third loop of SI, resulting from the judgments made in SI loops 1 and 2, the practitioner using the BSM mode 1 will use the five loops of BT to enhance consideration of whether the planned implementation can bring about the desired improvements. In other words, the questions from Buddhist thinking will be used to ‘double-check’ the systemicity of

the action plans. For example, the practitioner will use the eight questions based on the Eightfold Noble Path (Section 6.3.2.3.1). The first question is “Are positive motivations embodied in the recommendations? If not, can they be improved?” The practitioner will then ask the other seven questions of the Eightfold Noble Path to discern if there are any potential problems of thinking, speech, ethics, conduct, endeavour, memory, and mental discipline. The practitioner should then consider the action-taking plans in terms of the question from the Middle Path BT loop (Section 6.3.2.3.2), to discern if the action-taking plan(s) accord with the ‘middle’ way between ethical and practical imperatives. Next the practitioner should consider whether the recommendations account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships identified through the boundary critique and specify ways to change these where possible and desirable. If this consideration raises particular issues concerning another BT loop, the consideration would need to switch to that loop, otherwise the practitioner would move on to the Space loop. This directs consideration to the appropriateness of actions in the identified cultural and ecological contexts. The practitioner could then consider the Time issues concerning the recommendations for action: What is the timescale and is it realistic? Would alternative recommendations be more appropriate? Should the timescale be changed? If the plans have previously unforeseen consequences, then there should be either a brief or extended re-appraisal of boundary critique and choice of methods, depending on the seriousness of the surfaced consequences.

### **6.3.4 BSM Mode 2 Implementation**

BSM Mode 2 (Figure 6.4) consists of three interactive loops – boundary critique, choice/design of evaluation methods, and the evaluation of impacts - to enable critical evaluation and reflection.

Following the BSM mode 1 implementation described in Section 6.3.3, the practitioner should carry out the BSM Mode 2. This is because there will inevitably be limitations to the anticipation of consequences in the implementation of BSM mode 1 which only become apparent when action is taken (as noted by Ulrich, 1983, systems thinking approaches can eliminate some negative consequences, but cannot help falling short of total comprehensiveness). This evaluation mode can feed learning back to improve the BSM and future interventions (its use in my fieldwork contributed to my own reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the BSM and other systems approaches for Taiwanese Buddhist organizations – see Chapter 12 of this thesis for details). BSM Mode 2 is presented as the BSM Evaluation System in the next chapter of this thesis (Chapter 7).

Boundary critique will involve deciding on the scope of the evaluation which is to be carried out after the BSM Mode 1 intervention. This will include deciding whose views are important for evaluating the intervention; motivations; ethical considerations; etc.



Choice/Design of Methods will involve deciding on, or designing, the methods which will be most appropriate for evaluating the BSM Mode 1 intervention in the organizational context (in this study, BLIA YAD, R.O.C.).

Evaluation of Impacts will involve use of the chosen evaluation methods to examine the consequences of the BSM Mode 1 implementation. I have talked in terms of evaluating ‘impacts’ rather than ‘improvements’ because it is important to try to consider as many relevant consequences of the BSM Mode 1 intervention as possible, some of which may be seen as improvements and some as negative consequences. Ideally, examination of both qualitative and quantitative data should be carried out over several different time periods to build up a rich appreciation of any changes in the context, and whether these can be interpreted as improvements. However, in my own fieldwork, my doctoral research imposed a strict time limitation on the follow-up I could conduct: I was restricted to a single evaluation approximately six months after the BSM Mode 1 implementation (see Chapter 12 for details).

## **6.4 Some Examples of Potential BSM Applicability**

### **6.4.1 BSM and Power Issues**

The Buddhist culture in Taiwan encourages respect for age and authority. Consequently it is very difficult for people in Taiwanese organizations, and particularly Buddhist ones, to challenge the prevailing power structures within organizations. The principal strength of the BSM is that it introduces a route for people in organizations in Taiwan to critique the status quo and to reflect on whether



this is “what ought to be”, while viewing this as a co-operative (and therefore culturally valued) endeavour. As I explained in Section 1.1, trying to use ST ideas alone in the Taiwanese context is not as straightforward as it appears to be in the West. People are often constrained in voicing their sincere opinions. Potentially, the combination of Buddhist concepts with SI to form the BSM provides a useful way to introduce a more systemic process of critique into organizational decision making in Taiwanese organizations without threat, because it uses familiar and well-accepted concepts. Some examples of the potential scope of the BSM for helping with power and other issues are briefly considered in the following.

#### **6.4.2 BSM for Organizational Learning**

It should be possible to look at ongoing projects in an organization and use the BSM to bring greater awareness in order to decide if the present choices are adequate or whether they take insufficient account of the viewpoints of different stakeholders. If a project lacks something, the BSM can be used to bring in appropriate methods to correct the problem. For example, if a project lacks consideration of people's viewpoints, then the BSM can bring in methods to create improved inter-subjective dialogue. If a project appears to have previously unanticipated consequences, then it can be delayed to allow time to make it more comprehensive. If a project has problems with communications and control, the BSM can be used to bring in methods to improve this (e.g. Beer's, 1985, viable system model).

### **6.4.3 BSM used for Prevention and Problem Solving in Organizations**

The organizational leader, or other stakeholders, may recognize a threat to the organization. The BSM can be used to consider how to face the threat in order to prevent or minimize the negative effects. Prevention may require radical change away from the status quo, and the BSM can bring in appropriate methods, actions and evaluation.

For organizational problems, originating from internal and/or external sources, the BSM can be used to decide boundaries, choose methods, derive recommendations, analyze the acceptability of methods, and evaluate outcomes.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The BSM combines systems thinking ideas (as represented by SI and all the available ST methods which can be selected for use) and questions derived from five Buddhist concepts. I suggest that my presentation of the BSM, its operationalization, its ability to deal with power issues (especially those with a basis in Taiwanese culture), and the proposed scope of its applicability, shows that the BSM offers a new way forward which has the potential to introduce a more critical and systemic process into organizational decision making in Taiwanese Buddhist contexts. Much of the rest of the thesis has the aim of testing this claim.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BSM EVALUATION SYSTEM (BSM MODE 2)

#### 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described BSM Mode 1 and mentioned BSM Mode 2. In this chapter, I present BSM Mode 2 as the evaluation system of the BSM. I describe the development of this evaluation system, and detail the start of its operationalization, ready for implementation in Chapter 12.

I had to develop an evaluation approach which would be appropriate for this first application of my Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM). Given that BSM embodies insights from Buddhism within a framework of Systemic Intervention (as explained in Chapter 6), it seemed appropriate to develop an evaluation approach along similar lines. The aim of this evaluation system is therefore to ensure that consideration is given to boundary critique before the evaluation methods are selected or designed. These methods can then be implemented.

This approach raises the issue of whether it is preferable to evaluate a methodology from the same paradigmatic stance (as I have chosen to do), or whether it is better to use a different methodology that might surface “bad news” about areas that the original methodology does not address (Romm, 1996). Romm argues that the latter is preferable. My own view is that both can be useful for different things. While evaluating from a different paradigmatic stance may show up considerations that



have been missed, evaluating from the same one may provide an effective test of the explicit claims of the methodology in question. As this is the first test of BSM, I argue that a BSM-based evaluation is most appropriate. Other forms of evaluation might be applied in future studies when the basic claims of BSM have been properly tested.

## **7.2 Description of the BSM Evaluation System**

This consists of three interactive stages – boundary critique, choice/design of evaluation methods, and the evaluation of impacts - to enable critical evaluation and reflection (as already presented in Figure 6.4, in the previous chapter).

### **7.2.1 Boundary Critique Stage**

This stage is necessary because BSM recognizes that it is essential to decide on the scope of the evaluation in a critical manner, exploring different possibilities for inclusion and exclusion. Evaluation of everything affected by an intervention is not possible because human beings cannot deal with full systemic interconnectedness (Churchman, 1970; Ulrich, 1983; Midgley, 2000). Therefore, it is necessary to reflect critically upon, and make choices between, boundaries for the evaluation.

### **7.2.2 Choice/Design of Methods Stage**

This stage is introduced into the BSM evaluation system in order to decide on the most appropriate evaluation methods for the particular organizational context. The



BSM evaluation system recognizes that in some contexts there may be factors (e.g. cultural sensitivities and power relations) which make the use of particular methods unacceptable or unworkable because of objections from some, or all, participants; because some people may withdraw their participation; because of the prevailing ideology; or because of the deeply entrenched power structure. However, the BSM recognizes that surfacing and considering the possible consequences of using different methods at least represents a step forward in an organization - particularly one where evaluation is not usually openly carried out (if it takes place at all). In short, BSM recognizes that evaluation methods are likely to be context sensitive, and so require careful choice or design.

### **7.2.3 Evaluation of Impacts Stage**

In this stage, the evaluation methods that have been chosen, or designed, in the previous stage are implemented by the BSM user (with appropriate input from stakeholders).

## **7.3 Process of the BSM Evaluation System**

The processes involved in each of the three stages of the BSM evaluation system are described in the following three sections.

### **7.3.1 Boundary Critique Stage**

The ‘boundary critique’ stage uses the five loops of the BSM: Eightfold Noble Path; Middle Path; Cause-Condition-Effect; Space (Context); and Time. There are a series of twelve questions (as with the BSM Mode 1) for consideration. Eight of these 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. The reader will notice that these questions are adapted from the original BSM questions to make them relevant to the evaluation.

#### **Eightfold Noble Path loop**

- 1. What currently motivates you and others to choose the boundaries of the evaluation? What ought to be your/their motivations?**
- 2. Is covetousness, resentment or maliciousness influencing you or others in defining the boundaries of the evaluation? If so, what might the evaluation 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 evaluation is being defined by you or others? If so, what might the evaluation 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 evaluation? If so, should this be included as an integral part of defining the evaluation?**

5. Is the evaluation being defined in a way that privileges your own concerns over wider social concerns? Is there a way to define the evaluation in a way that includes a wider set of concerns, without making the evaluation impossible to conduct?
6. Is there idleness, apathy or avoidance of the evaluation? Who should be engaged with the evaluation and how?
7. Are there any misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world in the definition of the evaluation? 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 evaluation 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 evaluation? If not, can further Buddhist reflection 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 in relation to the evaluation? What risks might be associated with different middle paths for the evaluation, 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 evaluation? 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 evaluation? 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 evaluation should be adopted, and why? What is your view in relation to these other views?

### **7.3.2 Choice/Design of Evaluation Methods Stage**

There are also twelve questions for consideration in the ‘Choice/Design of Evaluation Methods’ stage. Again the twelve questions relate to the five aspects of Buddhist Thinking focused on in the BSM. Eight are based on the Eightfold Noble Path and the other four relate to the Middle Path, Cause-Condition-Effect, Space (Context), and Time.

#### Eightfold Noble Path loop

1. What evaluation method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through the boundary critique)?
2. What evaluation method(s) will eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you have identified?



3. What evaluation method(s) will eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you have identified?
4. What evaluation method(s) will tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you have identified?
5. What evaluation method(s) will help in preventing a narrow set of concerns being privileged over wider social concerns, but without making the evaluation impossible to conduct?
6. What evaluation method(s) will work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you have identified?
7. What evaluation method(s) will help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world?
8. What evaluation method(s) will help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking, if this is not sufficiently in evidence?

#### Middle Path

9. What evaluation method(s) will embody the middle path between ethical and practical imperatives identified through the boundary critique?

#### Cause-Condition-Effect

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

### Space (Context)

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

### Time

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

### **7.3.3 Evaluation of Impacts Stage**

The process for this stage is decided by the outputs from the first two stages – it involves implementing the chosen methods.

## **7.4 Boundary Critique and Choice/Design of Methods for Evaluating the Intervention with BLIA**

In order to decide on an appropriate way to carry out the BSM Evaluation (BSM Mode 2) for the BLIA context, I held some individual consultations with a small number of key stakeholders. I actually consulted these stakeholders in summer 2003, before undertaking the main body of my fieldwork – the implementation of BSM Mode 1. Although I realised that greater familiarity with BLIA and its problems might require changes to the evaluation approach later on, it became apparent through my first contacts with people in the organization that they wanted to know

up-front how I was going to evaluate the BSM. I therefore needed to provide some answers, so I consulted with three stakeholders: a senior religious person, a lay staff member, and myself. It may seem unusual to view myself as a stakeholder, but of course an intervener inevitably becomes part of the situation that he or she intervenes in (Flood, 1990; Midgley, 2000). In Ulrich's (1983) terms, the three people listed above (including me) corresponded to the roles of client/decision maker, witness and planner respectively. Through these consultations, I operationalized the first two loops of the BSM evaluation system: boundary critique and choice/design of methods. This procedure generated the answers presented in sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 to the twelve 'boundary critique' and twelve 'choice/design of evaluation methods' questions. Some of these answers were quite general, because the focus of a BSM Mode 1 intervention had not yet been determined and, without information about what would be done with BSM Mode 1, the exact evaluation approach could not be accurately specified. However, this exercise gave me sufficient information to answer questions put to me by people in BLIA. I present the stakeholders' answers to my questions below, first of all explaining what the religious and lay interviewees said before detailing my own reflections.

#### **7.4.1 Answers to the Boundary Critique Questions**

Eightfold Noble Path loop:

1.  
Q. What currently motivates you and others to choose the boundaries of the evaluation?



The senior religious person thought long and hard about this question and how she should best answer it, and eventually decided that the evaluation of impacts should include talking with the people involved in the intervention, and with others who might experience its effects. However, she recognized that the time available for evaluation could limit what it would be possible to do. The lay person tended to put a slightly different emphasis on defining who should be involved by pointing out that the effects on both religious people and lay people should be examined.

My reflection on these two answers was that I should indeed take account of the involved and affected, and both religious and lay perspectives (as far as possible), but the evaluation boundaries would inevitably be influenced by issues of knowledge and time. Although I had some prior knowledge of BLIA, I had less knowledge of their specific issues. I therefore determined that I needed to learn about these through my intervention, and I realized that the boundaries of the evaluation would be influenced by who would be willing to talk with me, and the limitations imposed by my fieldwork timescale.

Q. What ought to be your/their motivations?

Regarding motivations, the senior religious person pointed out that, provided Buddhist principles were respected, the evaluation should at least be satisfactory. The lay person focused on the need to avoid creating disharmony, as this could have adverse long-term effects on the atmosphere in BLIA. Clearly, my own motivation needed to be testing the BSM in an effective manner. While I shared the desire to respect Buddhist principles in my evaluation, it would be difficult to say in advance



whether I could also avoid creating disharmony (different perspectives on the BSM might be surfaced).

2.

**Q. Is covetousness, resentment or maliciousness influencing you or others in defining the boundaries of the evaluation?**

The senior religious person did not think that these problems could exist in BLIA because it is a Buddhist organization. However, the lay person indicated that even if these factors did exist, they would not influence her own boundary definition because she believed that all relevant factors should be assessed. My own view was that I wanted an effective and practical evaluation that would produce the best outcome for BLIA – whether or not the BSM was found to be successful through that evaluation. I recognized that, if the BSM proved to be problematic, the best outcome for BLIA might be to abandon it. I did not believe that a negative evaluation would threaten my doctoral studies because a conversation with my supervisor confirmed that exploring the reasons for failure can still generate a contribution to knowledge. As far as I was concerned, I therefore had no covetous, resentful or malicious intent. It appeared that the stakeholders were all in agreement that these forms of intent were not relevant to defining the evaluation boundaries.

3.

**Q. Is lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other ‘improper’ use of language involved in the way this evaluation is being defined by you or others?**

The senior religious person was adamant that these were not involved in her assessments because of her Buddhist commitments. The lay person also excluded use of these improper behaviours, but emphasized that the evaluation should be a fair

assessment, taking account of all relevant perspectives. I reflected that I was not aware of any 'improper' uses of language, but I recognized that, when I conducted the evaluation, I might need to look out for 'insincere' communications: I thought that some people may simply not be willing to admit to the existence of problems. I determined that I needed to remain aware of this issue throughout the evaluation.

4.

Q. Is there any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) linked with the evaluation?

Both the senior religious person and the lay person were adamant that no major misconduct would be linked with the evaluation, and it was also my view at the time of the consultations that encountering major misconducts would be unlikely. However, I realized that it would be necessary to remain aware of the issue in case I became aware of a major misconduct through my fieldwork with BLIA (again, a conversation with my supervisor had alerted me to the possibility that researchers can sometimes uncover surprising findings).

5.

Q. Is the evaluation being defined in a way that privileges your own concerns over wider social concerns?

The senior religious person indicated that she did not believe so, because her concerns are always for BLIA. The lay person also thought that this would not be the case because fairness in the evaluation is a paramount concern, and a fair assessment must include words from all those who want to speak. However, in my own reflections I recognized that the danger of narrow interests being privileged over wider concerns did exist because of time pressures on me: I needed to finish my

evaluation in six months. Inevitably, the limitations imposed by the timescale of my Ph.D. studies would curtail the evaluation, even if it would be in the interests of BLIA to extend it further.

Q. Is there a way to define the evaluation in a way that includes a wider set of concerns, but without making it impossible to conduct?

The senior religious person suggested that the evaluation must reveal the concerns of all relevant people, and address as many of these as possible. The lay person said that this may depend on the BSM intervention issue, but there was certainly a need to talk to many people, both religious and lay members. My own view was that, within the time constraints I would be subject to, I should do what I could to address the widest possible set of concerns.

6.

Q. Is there idleness, apathy or avoidance of the evaluation?

The senior religious person indicated that there was no idleness, apathy or avoidance, as far as she was aware. The lay person gave a negative response, because she believed that evaluation is important and people would want to do it. My view was “not by me”, but I was aware that a few of the people I had contacted had already chosen not to participate in my intervention, so the same could be true later on for the evaluation.



7.

Q. Are there any misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world in the definition of the evaluation?

Both the senior religious person and the lay person answered negatively to this question. This was also my answer because, as far as I knew, I had not heard what I considered to be factually inaccurate statements, contradictions or insincere remarks in my consultations with the stakeholders.

Q. Have you tested out what you attribute to others by asking them?

The senior religious person stated that she had not done this: she believed what people in BLIA said because they are Buddhists. The lay person said that she had only asked her closest friends. For my part I answered “yes”, but I recognized that my awareness of other people’s perspectives might be incomplete, because at this early stage I could not know where my information might be lacking. I recognized that I needed to pay attention to testing my attributions over time. My view was that any misrepresentations would seriously devalue the evaluation, so this issue must be considered in an ongoing manner.

8.

Q. Has the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking been applied sufficiently in defining the evaluation?

The senior religious person replied that more Buddhist thinking would always help. However, the lay person thought that there had been sufficient Buddhist thinking. I felt that it had been adequately applied because the questions I was using were based on the five core Buddhist ideas already discussed earlier in this thesis. At the time of



my consultations this appeared to be sufficient, and both of my interviewees expressed satisfaction with the exploration.

Middle Path:

9.

Q. 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 in relation to the evaluation?

The senior religious person suggested that, most importantly, I should respect Buddhist teachings because they cover both ethical and practical aspects. The lay person indicated that the middle path for her would be harmony in BLIA for both religious and lay members. For me, it seemed that this would require some discussion and agreement both before and after the intervention, when it would be clearer what evaluation criteria would be important to different people.

Q. What risks might be associated with different middle paths for the evaluation, and which one should be chosen?

The senior religious person pointed out that the biggest risk would be failing to remain true to our Buddhist principles. This could result in losing everything. The lay person stressed that harmony and people's dignity are both important to maintain, even at the expense of complete openness. My perspective was that the main risk was missing important information. For example, accepting the necessary time constraints of the evaluation (inevitable in the context of my doctoral research) might result in failure to adequately consider issues of the sustainability of solutions to

people's problems. I realized that a significant compromise here may be unavoidable, given that only a portion of my research time could be spent on fieldwork.

Cause-Condition-Effect:

10.

Q. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what cause-condition-effect relationships are important to understanding this evaluation?

This was a difficult question for people to answer given that the focus of my intervention had not yet been determined. The senior religious person suggested that, if the aim of my evaluation is to uncover past cause-condition-effect relationships and blame people for problems and mistakes, then she didn't think that people would want that. It would be better to learn from what is discovered without pointing the finger of blame. The lay person indicated that the evaluation may teach us what effects have come from which causes, and whether other conditions would have been better.

My reflection on this was that some people would not wish to expose their past and present decision making to be tested by a method (the BSM) which may reveal inadequacies in their previous decision making. This cause may condition their participation, or the boundaries of the issues to be tackled, and influence the apparent effectiveness of the intervention.

Q. What are their potential consequences and the risks of ignoring them?

The senior religious person pointed out that, if a finger of blame was going to be pointed, very few people would want to participate in an evaluation. The lay person suggested that if mistakes have been made, and are ignored, then the risk is that they may be repeated. My view was that the consequence of ignoring important cause-condition-effect relationships in the evaluation could be the production of an inadequate understanding of the success or failure of the BSM.

Space (Context):

11.

Q. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what cultural and ecological contexts are relevant to understanding the evaluation?

The senior religious person highlighted BLIA's Buddhist culture and Chinese traditions. The lay person also mentioned these two factors, and added the top-down authority of the Buddhist culture as also being relevant. My view was that these were all relevant factors.

Time :

12.

Q. From the various points of view of those involved and (potentially) affected, what time scale for dealing with this evaluation should be adopted, and why?



The senior religious person suggested that we should allow a short space after the intervention for people to reflect, then carry out interviews with all participants and others. The lay person indicated that the evaluation period should be long enough to talk individually to all those who were involved and affected, and had something to say. My view was that only a few weeks would be available for this part of the fieldwork, because it would be about six months after the BSM Mode 1 application, and I would need to move on to writing up. I explained this to the interviewees, and they agreed to cooperate with the demands of my timescale.

#### **7.4.2 Answers to the Choice/Design of Evaluation Methods Questions**

Having undertaken the preliminary boundary critique presented above, I then went on to look at what methods would be most appropriate for the evaluation.

Eightfold Noble Path loop :

1.  
Q. What evaluation method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through the boundary critique)?

The senior religious person simply suggested that I needed to talk with people, ask them questions and listen carefully to their words. The lay person admitted that she knew very few management or evaluation methods, but advocated using one-to-one meetings because these would allow people to feel less constrained than group discussions. My view was that individual interviews would indeed be most appropriate for this reason, and they would need to include space for discussion so



that people would feel free to raise their own issues as well as respond to my questions. I thought that it would be important to make these interviews as informal as possible to facilitate the open sharing of information (I reflected on my experience in Taiwanese organizations, which indicated that formality can lead to closure of discussion).

2.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you have identified?

The senior religious person simply stated that she had not identified any of these. The lay person pointed out that the evaluation methods should involve all the religious and lay people who wanted to contribute, and should focus on discovering if there are different views. My own view was that the latter could be achieved most productively through semi-structured interviews, given the need to give people private space to articulate their perspectives.

3.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you have identified?

The senior religious person replied that she had not identified these things, but that in order to eliminate or minimize them the method ought to give people space to talk. The lay person suggested using a method capable of gathering views from "all sources". I thought that using questions related to Buddhism would help focus people's minds on the importance of avoiding 'improper' language, given that this is proscribed by Buddhist doctrines.

4.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you have identified?

No such misconducts had been identified, so this question was set aside.

5.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will help in preventing a narrow set of concerns being privileged over wider social concerns, but without making the evaluation impossible to conduct?

The senior religious person thought that it would be important to allow people to talk of Buddhist principles in relation to evaluating my work, which would naturally allow wide boundaries to be established. The lay person simply said that the chosen method should help people to express their genuine beliefs. My view was that the method should allow the surfacing of issues other than those raised by any pre-set agenda I might have, and should also perhaps enable an examination of ‘is’ and ‘ought’ perspectives (Ulrich, 1983). I speculated that, by focusing on what ‘is’ the case following my intervention and what ‘ought’ to be done with the BSM, I could stimulate discussion of possibilities for improvements that would have social benefits for BLIA.

6.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you have identified?

The senior religious person suggested that it is important to sit down and talk with people – open communication being the best means to overcome avoidance. The lay person put the emphasis on arranging individual meetings, and conducting telephone

interviews if people say they are too busy to meet face-to-face. My own concern was similar to that of the lay person: I was worried that some people may be quick to say that formal methods will take too much of their time, which is a culturally acceptable means of avoiding the discussion of issues. This again suggested to me the utility of semi-structured interviews, allowing time for open discussion so that I could legitimately describe the meetings as informal reviews rather than formal interviews. Again, I felt the emphasis needed to be put on one-to-one meetings rather than group methods: one kind of avoidance is people being unwilling to share information sincerely in meetings that bring together people from different levels of the power structure. I recognized that my methods would need to be sensitive to these power issues.

7.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world?

No misrepresentations were identified in our discussions, so the use of specific methods to minimize these was not discussed. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the senior religious person expressed the view that taking an explicitly Buddhist perspective in the evaluation would minimize the likelihood of misrepresentations occurring in the future because of the obligation in Buddhism to make fair representations.



8.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking, if this is not sufficiently in evidence?

The senior religious person was the only one to say that more Buddhism would always be useful, and she suggested that people could discuss some Buddhist sutras that are relevant to their issues. The lay person simply recommended that I employ the Buddhist principles I was already using to inform the evaluation. My own concern was to evaluate the adequacy of the BSM questions developed from the five core Buddhist ideas. I needed to find some way to find out whether people felt that the Buddhist content of the BSM could be improved. I determined that this kind of questioning would have to be done in one-to-one interviews because people would be unlikely to deliver ‘bad news’ about my methodology in an open discussion forum where I might lose face.

Middle Path :

9.

Q. What evaluation method(s) will embody the middle path between ethical and practical imperatives identified through the boundary critique?

The senior religious person simply asserted that the best way to find a middle path would be to remain close to our Buddhist ideas at all times. The lay person emphasized the need to avoid disharmony, and suggested that some simple questions which could help people express their thinking in a non-blaming manner should keep harmony. Given that my own concern was to avoid taking the ‘wrong’ middle path because I had missed important information, I needed to identify a means to sweep in



this information. All the discussion so far had pointed to the utility of semi-structured interviews, so I thought this would be the best means to surface issues, but I also realized that, when I conducted the evaluation, I would need to be explicit about identifying people's ethical and practical concerns in order to find the 'right' middle path between them.

Cause-Condition-Effect:

10.

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

This was a difficult question to answer in the abstract: the specific cause-condition-effect relationships that would be relevant to the evaluation would be more or less wholly dependent on the issues addressed using the BSM, Mode 1. As a result, people's answers to my question were very general, about avoiding blame and maintaining harmony, and I did not feel that our discussion of cause-condition-effect relationships gave me any additional information upon which to base the choice of evaluation methods.

Space (Context):

11.

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

The senior religious person pointed out that both Buddhism and Chinese culture must be respected, in all the interviews and questioning. Again, the lay person emphasized the importance of individual meetings because of the need to avoid group situations where people would not be prepared to talk openly. I reflected that the method should therefore involve individual interviews with questions based on Buddhist concepts, which would meet the need to respect Buddhist culture while avoiding the difficulties associated with open communication in group settings.

Time:

12.

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

There seemed to be agreement across the three perspectives that semi-structured interviewing, incorporating time for people to raise their own concerns as well as addressing my own, would be a realistic approach given the timescale of my doctoral studies. Of course, I was unaware at this stage of the research how many interviews would be needed (this would partly be determined by the focus of BSM Mode 1), but I discussed with my two interviewees the need to keep the evaluation within bounds.

### **7.4.3 Design of an Evaluation Method to be Implemented after the Main Body of the Fieldwork is Complete**

It appeared from my consultations with stakeholders that it would only be realistic to consider carrying out discussions in the context of individual interviews, because the

prospect of group discussion of an individual's past and present decision making is too great a disincentive for potential participants. Also, from the answers generated in the previous two Sections, 7.4.1 and 7.4.2, it seemed that the most appropriate way to approach the interviews would be to make them semi-structured, using guiding questions based on Buddhist principles, but allowing plenty of time for open discussion to allow people to surface their concerns in their own terms. I designed the guiding questions (see below) based on the five core Buddhist concepts already discussed extensively in this thesis. I planned to supplement these with further questions of specific relevance to the intervention in BLIA, but additional questions of this kind could not be specified in advance: their content would depend on how the fieldwork unfolded. The supplementary questions can be found in Chapter 12, and my questions based on Buddhist principles are as follows:

1. Did the BSM foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through boundary critique) compared with your usual procedure?
2. Did the BSM eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you identified compared with your usual procedure?
3. Did the BSM eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you identified compared with your usual procedure?
4. Did the BSM tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you identified compared with your usual procedure?
5. Did the BSM help in preventing a narrow set of concerns being privileged over wider social concerns, but without making the issue impossible to address, compared with your usual procedure?



6. Did the BSM help you work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you identified compared with your usual procedure?
7. Did the BSM help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world compared with your usual procedure?
8. Did the BSM help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking compared with your usual procedure, if this was not sufficiently in evidence?
9. Did the BSM support people in expressing a better or more explicit middle path between ethical and practical imperatives compared with your usual procedure?
10. Did the BSM help people account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships compared with your usual procedure?
11. Did the BSM help people account for the key cultural and ecological contexts, and will it work in those contexts compared with your usual procedure?
12. Did the BSM work in the time scale specified for the intervention compared with your usual procedure?

Chapter 12 reports the actual conduct of the evaluation using these (and supplementary questions.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the BSM evaluation system that will allow my intervention in BLIA to be evaluated from a BSM point of view. I have presented a



preliminary boundary critique and design of evaluation methods, based on consultations with two key stakeholders in BLIA plus my own critical reflections.

The evaluation system described in this chapter will be used to evaluate the fieldwork application of the BSM at BLIA. See Chapter 12 for details of its implementation (following presentation of the fieldwork in Chapters 8-11).

**PART D : ACTION 1 (行動 1)**

**LEARNING PROJECT TO TEST THE NEW  
METHODOLOGY**

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **FIELDWORK - ISSUE IDENTIFICATION IN BLIA**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Applying my BSM through the fieldwork in BLIA was always going to be a key part of this research, as I wanted to subject the BSM to a practical test, not just develop it in theory. However, gaining entry to BLIA was a great potential obstacle to carrying out the fieldwork. In order to gain this access, I prepared a fieldwork proposal (in Chinese) and sent it to Founding Master Hsing-Yun, who is the CEO of BLIA. I visited BLIA and gave a presentation of my proposal. The reason I think they gave permission for my fieldwork was firstly because my BSM contained Buddhist concepts which they welcomed (they were not keen on SSM again, which I had used previously in my MA degree), and secondly because I, and all my family, are Buddhists and have been members of BLIA since the organization was established. After receiving permission to carry out my fieldwork, I devised a fieldwork research plan prior to going to BLIA, which is described in the first part of this chapter. The chapter then moves on to report the first stage of the actual fieldwork - issue identification.

## **8.2 Fieldwork Research Plan**

### **8.2.1 Planning**

There are obviously questions when undertaking fieldwork which need to be decided upon, like the number of people to involve, and from which levels of the organization (e.g. senior management, middle management, operational, strategic or operational planning, etc). The answers to these questions are contingent on the nature of the problems to be subject to intervention using BSM. In the case of BLIA, I proposed to the CEO that these could be surfaced through an initial round of interviews and discussions with BLIA senior management, because they are the decision makers concerning whether or not I can apply the BSM in BLIA (I also involved my supervisor in these discussions). My initial plan saw the fieldwork progressing in five steps, detailed below (I translated these steps into Chinese for consideration by the BLIA CEO), but I explicitly said that I would need to be flexible about the effort put into each step depending on the outcomes of my interviews and discussions with people at lower levels in BLIA. This is because I recognized that, while the senior management would want to approve the focus of my research (and I needed their assent for any intervention), they would not want to be involved in the details of planning my engagements in the organization.



## **8.2.2 Proposed Fieldwork Steps**

**Step 1: Familiarization and observation (weeks 1 - 7).**

My plan (prior to commencing the fieldwork) was to enter the organization and learn about the organizational structure, decision making bodies and information flows of BLIA headquarters, and to discover what quantitative data was available and accessible to me which could potentially be useful for my fieldwork. Then my plan was to observe how the organizational structure worked, how decisions were made and distributed, and whether and how the impacts of people's decisions were assessed. From this observation period I planned to identify the most appropriate people (decision makers and action takers) for my interviews and try to obtain their agreement to participate in my fieldwork.

**Step 2: Issue identification and intervention - Ask, apply and monitor (weeks 8 - 17).**

I planned to talk to the different identified stakeholders within BLIA, particularly the decision takers and action takers identified in Step 1, and see if they were experiencing any problems, or had experienced problems in the past. I intended to start by looking for one or two big strategic issues to tackle, but if this was not a feasible option, I would seek out common issues between branch leaders or focus on the individual concerns of the members. Then I would apply the BSM mode 1 with the stakeholders on their past and/or present problems to see if it could bring (or could have brought, if we were looking at a past problem) any different recommended courses of action for improvement compared with people's usual

decision making procedures or methods. This would involve applying the methodology (mode 1); analyzing the recommendations; interviewing stakeholders about their thoughts on, and reactions to, the BSM; and learning about the potential utility of the BSM and its application.

I proposed that the initial facilitation of the BSM (up to the point of choosing methods, and possibly beyond depending on the methods chosen) would involve groups, if possible, in order to meet more people and foster learning between stakeholders. I knew that the lay people could be overawed by the Buddhist priests, and the presence of latter would probably inhibit the surfacing of opinions from the former. Therefore, my plan was to set up groups which would separate priests and lay people, thereby allowing freer discussions of the applicability and utility of the BSM and how and where it could most appropriately be applied.

**Step 3: Issue Identification using problems I had already recognized in BLIA (weeks 18 - 27), only to be undertaken if step 2 produced too little data.**

Owing to the Buddhist desire for harmony (which encourages people not to speak of problems and to accept all decisions coming down the hierarchy), I anticipated the possibility that people may refer to only a few problems in BLIA. While I suggested in my proposal to the CEO that even a few problems could be used as a starting point to surface connected issues, I nevertheless recognized the need for a contingency plan in case people were altogether reluctant to discuss problems. Step 2 above could have failed, in which case I wanted to have a fall-back strategy in place.



I have been a member of BLIA for about ten years, and have become aware that there are indeed problems within BLIA, and some of these have existed for many years. If my interviews in Step 2 surfaced too few problems, I decided that I would try to apply the BSM modes 1 and 2 to problems I had already identified. However, since I recognized that other people would have only limited commitment to my own issues, I determined that this would be done purely as a last resort option. Two existing problems I had already recognized were:

(a) I had heard complaints from many different members of the organization over the years, but these complaints were rarely if ever passed up the hierarchy of the organization, so they were never resolved. The ‘whisperings and grumbles’ that were communicated between the members of the organization were not passed on to the priests because it is the Buddhist way to seek harmony and peace, and complaints would imply disharmony. The problem, the lack of a way to address and resolve problems identified by anyone outside the priesthood and senior management, caused many members to leave the BLIA organization (higher than necessary turnover of members), and members had been known to say that the organization was uncaring. Therefore, I intended to look for ways to apply the BSM to help introduce a way for complaints to be surfaced, thereby bringing about an improvement.

(b) High competition existed between branches to recruit members, and because there were no set boundaries to regional recruitment territories, these territories were significantly overlapping. The problem was that new members paid a membership fee to join, but then often found that the branch was too far away for them to attend. However they could not go to a nearer

branch without paying another membership fee. Then people stopped attending and members were lost. This problem had not been brought to the attention of the senior priests because powerful branches thought they would lose an aspect of their powerbase, so the problem continued to be perpetuated for years and showed no signs of being addressed. I intended to look for ways to apply the BSM to try to bring critical reflection to bear to resolve this organizational problem.

Step 4: Monitoring the use of BSM by people other than me (weeks 28 - 39).

Presuming that people were willing to engage with the BSM, I proposed using the final 11 weeks of my fieldwork to support others to apply the methodology for themselves in BLIA and observe progress and outcomes. I would need to identify people interested in using the BSM in their decision making. This would involve teaching receptive stakeholders about the BSM to try to get them, firstly to use the BSM mode 1 as part of their daily problem solving and problem prevention activities, and subsequently to use the BSM mode 2 evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of the methodology. Then I would monitor and learn from these applications of the BSM. The idea was that use of BSM by people themselves would, as a minimum, engage people in systems thinking and critical thinking about consequences, which would in turn generate more awareness of interactions, more discursive rationality and (in the language of Habermas, 1984) improve 'communicative competence' within BLIA.



Step 5: Follow up.

The main part of the fieldwork was scheduled to last nine months. However, I planned to make a brief follow up visit to BLIA half way through my write up year (after six months) to see how users of the BSM were progressing in order to further assess the utility of the BSM after longer term use.

### **8.3 Issue Identification: First Actual Fieldwork Steps**

#### **8.3.1 Step 1**

Step 1 (familiarization and observation) was carried out as proposed in the previous section. However the timescale was about three weeks longer than expected owing to (a) the SARS problem in Taiwan at that time, which closed down many of BLIA's activities for a few weeks, and (2) BLIA staff were too busy to meet me immediately. I went to BLIA HQ for three days every week during this period (except when SARS was at its peak) in order to set up meetings, conduct semi-structured interviews and undertake 'free observation' within the organization. I observed activities, roles, interrelations between hierarchical levels (HQ and branch managers), and attended meetings, such as breakfast meetings, committee meetings, and branch meetings (about nine meetings in total). I made interview appointments by telephone or by writing letters. I also made three presentations of my research plan to key members in order to gain final permission to carry it out. I had already gained 'in principle' approval, but these three presentations enabled me to answer some remaining

questions from the senior management and I thereby secured their full commitment to me to proceed with an intervention.

Each initial interview with BLIA staff was carried out by asking a series of key questions (Appendix I). The aim of this series of interview questions was to surface the roles of staff in BLIA, their decision making and problem solving methods, and the types of issues faced by both them as individuals within the organization and by BLIA as a whole. I also wanted to ascertain if individuals had considered, or monitored, the consequences of their decision making, whether they had quantitative records that could be useful to my fieldwork, and whether they would participate in my fieldwork application of BSM. The answers to the questions were used as the basis for selecting the particular issues and staff for trying out the BSM in BLIA.

### **8.3.2 Step 2**

Seven people identified in 8.3.1 were interviewed from various levels in BLIA in my initial series of interviews to surface issues that could be the subject of intervention using the BSM. I explained the nature of my research to them prior to starting the interview. From the interview data, I discerned seven particular issues which could be tackled by the BSM. These were:

- (1) A conflict situation in the BLIA Young Adult Division (YAD) in Taiwan in which there was resistance to integration between the worker members (BLIA YAD) and the student members (Buddha Light Youth Centers, BLYC).

- (2) Organizational structure problems in BLIA: in particular, staff at HQ said they were overloaded with work; and communications with YAD were said to be poor.
- (3) A problem of inaccurate membership records at HQ.
- (4) On many occasions, decision making was said to be too quick, with decisions taken before the full plan had been considered.
- (5) Little evaluation of results in BLIA.
- (6) How to use those people who had once been Chapter Advisors given that these roles had been abolished (Chapter Advisors were retired chairpersons whose services had been retained in an advisory capacity).
- (7) Staff were said to be insufficiently trained in their job areas because they were moved around a great deal.

Interestingly, my initial fear that nobody would surface problems proved to be unfounded. Given the contrast with my previous attempt to implement a systems approach in BLIA (soft systems methodology, during my Masters fieldwork), I took this as an initial positive sign that having an explicitly Buddhist methodology would indeed make a significant difference.



## 8.4 Issue Choice

I had to choose just one issue to work with out of the above list. My reasoning on each of the options was as follows.

The inaccurate membership records were only known about by a few people and, although it is an important problem for BLIA, this no doubt required a technical solution, which I determined from the interviews was within the existing capabilities of the organization. In my judgement, BSM would not have added much value to solving such a circumscribed problem. The question of how to use former chapter members, although a human problem with wider implications for organizational change, may not have drawn in many participants: it was really a minority concern within BLIA, mentioned by only a couple of people. Hasty decision-making was a problem mentioned by only one interviewee, so again I categorized it as a minority concern. I was also aware that it might be addressed indirectly through the use of BSM in relation to some other more substantive issue. Lack of professional training was an issue that was raised by some more junior managers, but this was not appreciated by many people in more senior positions because they had managed without training so often that they thought that others should manage without it too. In my judgement, focusing on this issue could have been blocked by senior management. Conversely, the lack of evaluation was not appreciated at lower levels, and I was concerned that a sole focus on this would be seen as an agenda imposed by senior management. As Ho (1997) has argued, within Taiwanese culture, it is not impossible for junior employees to silently sabotage senior management decisions if they strongly disagree with them, and I did not want to risk my fieldwork meeting



this kind of resistance. Also, I judged that the importance of evaluation may be revealed by the BSM intervention anyway.

The final choice for me was between the conflict in BLIA YAD and the organizational structure issues. The organizational structure problem was raised by three interviewees in different roles in BLIA, so clearly this was a good candidate for the intervention and (in my opinion) it would require a systems approach. However, I suspected that this was an issue that could be resolved with recourse to a single existing systems methodology with a functionalist or structuralist orientation, and would therefore be only a limited test for the BSM. I really wanted to work on a conflictual issue that might require me to address the reluctance of Buddhists to acknowledge discord and differences of opinion. The BLIA YAD conflict issue met this criterion, and the senior management approved it. A possible interpretation of this is that this issue was seen as important by the power hierarchy, and therefore I needed to self-reflect on it in the light of power relations. I also had a personal interest in the issue in that, as a young person who participated in YAD prior to starting my Ph.D. research, I was acutely aware of the seriousness of the problem and wanted to restore harmony to the movement. Furthermore, I was aware that the new YAD Division Leader considered this issue to be important and urgent, and was unsure how to proceed to improve the situation.

From reading through the interview transcripts, it seemed to me that the issue concerning the conflict situation could be rephrased as: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?

This issue appeared to be pressing, with existing conflict, and was clearly a major strategic concern for BLIA. My interviews suggested that resolving this issue would potentially be of great benefit to both BLIA and my research. I therefore thought it would provide a worthwhile subject for my BSM intervention. Also, as a young person in BLIA, this issue was of particular interest to me personally. I therefore formulated the intervention plan outlined in the next section (8.5), which was approved by the leader of BLIA YAD before implementation.

## **8.5 Issue Intervention Plan**

The execution of the following fieldwork intervention plan was begun using the BSM in October 2003 on the issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?

The intervention was undertaken in the following phases:

- (1) First, I used the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 (boundary critique) with a key decision maker: the previous person in charge of the youth section, who was now an Assistant Divisional Leader of BLIA YAD, responsible for policy and decision making.
- (2) I then used the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 with a variety of other individuals and a group. The individuals included – the Division leader, the previous BLYC Leader, key staff, Monastic advisors, and others identified by my first interviewee as relevant stakeholders (the actual roles of individuals involved are explained in

Chapter 9). The group was composed of BLYC students. I always tried to include voices from both sides of the conflict among worker members and students of BLIA Young Adult Division.

(3) I initially carried out BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 (Choice of theories and methods) on behalf of each person and group based on their BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 answers. I did this because they were unfamiliar with management systems methods, and wouldn't know about the strengths and weaknesses of different methods that could be accounted for. However, I went through my BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 answers with each individual and group to check that my choices of methods would be appropriate for tackling the concerns they had raised in their Stage 1 interviews.

(4) I carried out and monitored BSM Mode 1 Stage 3, application of methods chosen in BSM Mode 1 Stage 2.

(5) Six months after the intervention, I used my BSM Mode 2 Evaluation System to evaluate the process and outcomes of using the BSM.

(6) As part of writing this thesis on my return to the UK, I reflected on the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the BSM intervention.

Details of the intervention and its evaluation are provided in Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12.



## **8.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described how an issue was chosen as the focus of my intervention using BSM: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?

This appeared to be a major strategic issue for BLIA which would provide a worthwhile subject for my BSM intervention because 'improvement' of the conflict would benefit both BLIA and my own research. I therefore formulated an outline intervention plan for the issue. The fieldwork application of BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 (boundary critique) is reported in Chapter 9; the use of BSM Mode 1 Stages 2 and 3 (choice and implementation of methods) are reported in Chapter 10 and 11; and my evaluation of the BSM intervention (BSM Mode 2) is reported in Chapter 12.



## **CHAPTER NINE**

# **FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM MODE 1 STAGE 1 IN BLIA: BOUNDARY CRITIQUE**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I reported how the output from my initial fieldwork was the identification of a major strategic issue in BLIA which could be the focus of my first application and testing of the BSM. The identified issue was: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? This chapter presents details of the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 interviews with several individuals and a group in BLIA.

The aim of BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 is boundary critique and judgement. Five major concepts of Buddhist thinking are included in this (refer back to Figure 6.3). These are covered in a series of twelve questions with the aim of producing a reflective and flexible methodology particularly suited to Buddhist contexts (as explained in detail in Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3).

## **9.2 Interviewees for the Issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?**

Initially, when I talked with people to decide what issue to focus on (see Chapter 8), the interviewees suggested that, if I wanted to look at the YAD/ BLYC problem, it would be useful to involve seven particular individuals (mostly key decision makers) and the young people who were being affected by the conflict over whether or not the two institutions should be amalgamated. The seven individuals included people on both sides of the conflict. These people all agreed to be interviewed by me using the BSM, and I conducted seven individual interviews and one group meeting. I found these interviews to be quite useful for gaining a better understanding of the situation, and their words also revealed many problematic issues within the organization. I asked the interviewees if they had any more suggestions for other people to interview, but they pointed to each other. Midgley and Milne (1995) argue that, when this happens, it is reasonable to assume (at least provisionally) that a sufficient set of relevant perspectives have been covered.

The seven people and one group were:

1. BLIA YAD Assistant Division Leader
2. BLIA YAD Division Leader
3. BLIA, Pin Dong Youth Center Worker
4. BLIA YAD Teacher/Guide
5. BLIA YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer

6. BLIA YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader
7. BLIA YAD Supervisor of Shan-Chong Temple
8. A BLYC group consisting of three middle managers and two young members.

The teacher/guide was a lay person whose role was to assist the priest to teach members Buddhism and other aspects of life, and speak to the priest on behalf of members, who do not generally like to speak to the priest directly. The middle managers involved in the group meeting were not just administrators: they also had leadership roles in relation to BLYC activities. The Division leader and Assistant Division Leader were senior managers. It should be noted that during the interview with the Assistant Division Leader, the secretary of the Assistant Division Leader was present and so was also exposed to the BSM. This person was interviewed with others in the evaluation, reported in Chapter 12.

### **9.3 Interview Process**

Each Stage 1 interview was arranged to start on a Monday, because initially I had no feeling for how long the interview process would take to complete, and I wanted to avoid scheduling problems. I was prepared for the possibility that interviews would have to be reconvened the next day (and the next) if they needed to be long and people only had an hour per day set aside for me. One interview had to be rearranged to start on a Tuesday. In practice, the interviews did indeed spread themselves over several days in order that all the questions could be completed. The start dates and times taken on the Stage 1 interviews with each person or group are given in Table

9.1



| <b>Person or Group</b>                       | <b>Interview Start Date</b> | <b>Duration</b>                                    |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. YAD Assistant Division Leader             | Monday, 27 Oct 2003         | Period 4 days, total 6.5 hours.                    |
| 2. YAD Division Leader                       | Tuesday, 4 November 2003    | Period 4 days, total 5 hours, 1 hour by telephone. |
| 3. Pin Dong Youth Center Worker              | Monday, 17 November 2003    | Period 2 days, total 5.5 hours.                    |
| 4. YAD Teacher/Guide                         | Monday, 24 Nov 2003         | Period 2 days, total 4 hours.                      |
| 5. YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer   | Monday, 1 Dec 2003          | Period 4 days, total 6 hours.                      |
| 6. YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader           | Monday, 8 Dec 2003          | Period 3 days, total 7 hours.                      |
| 7. BLIA, YAD Supervisor of Shan-Chong Temple | Monday, 15 Dec 2003         | Period 4 days, total 5 hours.                      |
| 8. BLYC group                                | Monday, 22 Dec.2003         | Period 2 days, total 8 hours.                      |

*Table 9.1 BSM Stage 1 Interview Start Dates and Duration*

All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. I explained the BSM to each interviewee, including why I developed it, and the function and process of the methodology. Some people asked me if what they said would go into my PhD thesis, and whether it would be published. I told them that their confidentiality was protected because I would only report people's roles, and the interview transcripts would only be summarised, not published completely. Thus, I explained that people's names would not be revealed in my PhD thesis, but that I would attribute quotations to people's roles in the organization. Each interviewee was given a typed list of my BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 questions. Then I read each question to the interviewee and let them read the question at the same time. They gave me their answer to each question in turn, and I used a digital pen to make a recording. As soon as possible, usually each evening but always during the interview week, I translated



all the answers into English and transcribed them onto my computer. The translation took a long time because exact meanings are difficult to reproduce in a second language which has evolved in a different cultural context. If there were answers which were not clear, I usually telephoned the interviewee (even if it was only a small thing), or made another appointment in order to clarify details.

#### **9.4 Summaries of Information from the Transcripts of the Interviews**

The following sections contain summaries of the information and supporting quotations from the transcripts of the interviews with the individuals and BLYC group in order to try to present a general picture of the problem situation containing all the different perspectives, as expressed by the interviewees. In order to facilitate understanding for the reader, each section summarizes the answers given by all the interviewees to each boundary critique question from the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 to reveal the views surrounding the issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?

It is important for me to note that, at the time these interviews took place, a decision to integrate had already been taken by a senior nun, but no moves to implement this decision had yet been made. Only the name of the BLYC was in the process of being changed. This nun was one of the people I interviewed when surfacing issues in BLIA, and it became clear in our discussions that she had not closed her mind to alternative courses of action given her awareness, since making the decision, that it had caused some disquiet in the organization. Therefore, my judgement was that the

question about YAD and BLYC being integrated or separate was still genuinely open to influence.

#### **9.4.1 Summary of the answers to Q1 - What currently motivates you and others to define the issue at hand? What ought to be your/their motivations?**

The responses regarding people's motivations revealed that the different individuals had different motivations concerning the issue, so their boundaries of consideration were inevitably different. Some felt that the young people needed to learn more about Buddhism, and integration of the youth and student groups would help this:

“My motivation is just wanting to help young people, especially those young people still studying in schools. Let them know...how Buddhism can make them happy and have a good spiritual life” (Pin Dong Youth Center Worker).

Similarly, the Division Leader said “I am sure they both [YAD and BLYC] want good things for BLIA YAD: they both want young people to know and learn Buddhism”.

However, a view was also expressed that there were problems in the management of the separate student and youth groups, and this is why an integration agenda was being proposed. A member of the BLYC group claimed “I think the current motivation of integration is because [named person] did not manage BLYC's activities as BLIA wanted”.

Likewise, the management of BLIA YAD was criticized:

“I do not like the way they [BLIA YAD] lead young people...[they want young people] only to be volunteers, or hope they will enter into Buddhist college or become priests. Many young people will not be interested...Therefore, if we are not clear about this situation and find the right way to recruit BLIA YAD members, I think BLIA YAD recruitment will decline in the next generation”.

One interviewee, the YAD Young Ho Subdivision leader, was not only critical of the two groups, but also of the approach to integration taken by BLIA:

“BLIA YAD and BLYC have already caused BLIA financial and personnel waste. Therefore, those at the top of BLIA want these two to be integrated. But the integration was not well planned and a command was issued too quickly without open discussion...it has caused problems of conflict”.

However, in contrast with the above, a couple of people simply accepted the autocratic nature of BLIA’s decision to integrate, and adopted this as their own motivation: “Since the decision to integrate has already been made, my position is that I can only follow” (Assistant Division Leader), and “I must follow the monastery system because it is important, essential actually, and very strict” (YAD Supervisor, Shan-Chong Temple).

Accepting the decision, however, did not mean people saw it as unproblematic:



“I think what currently motivates me to define this issue is because the decision maker wants BLIA YAD and BLYC integrated. But problems stem from this – the conflict between BLIA YAD and BLYC” (Guidance Officer, YAD Taipei Subdivision).

A final, different point of view was expressed by a young person in the BLYC group who was unclear about why integration was on the agenda: “I really have no idea. I felt very shocked, and I believe no members of our BLYC group understand the reason, and they feel very upset like me”. It became clear in our discussion that the perceived need for integration had not been explained to the young people.

Also, regarding responses about *others'* motivations, there were a range of views, suggesting the potential for misunderstanding of others' motivations, which could be a source of disharmony or conflict. The BLYC members indicated that they would have liked to have been consulted before the integration decision was made. One BLYC member said: “I am angry that they don't even have a good plan about how to integrate, and they are going ahead without communicating and discussing the reason and detail with us”.

Three people expressed the view that the motivation of BLIA senior managers was that they did not want two separate groups of young people, perhaps to avoid resource wastage or conflict: “I think the motivation for integrating BLIA YAD and BLYC now is because... they don't want young members to belong to different groups” (YAD Teacher/Guide), and “(it) is because BLIA's young members split into two kinds of groups.... It would cause serious problem if these two confront each other, and also organizational resources are an issue” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor). Also the BLYC group members all agreed with one person



who said “I think it’s because they don’t want two similar functioning groups in the same organization”.

However, there appeared to have been no consideration that integration without consultation could actually create disharmony. For example, the Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer pointed out: “I think the decision maker doesn’t know that these two groups are not compatible, and she made the decision without consulting people - especially young members”.

The Pin Dong Youth Center Worker thought the real motivation for integration was to recruit young people into the BLIA college or monastery: “Fo-Guang Shan Monastery ....hopes to get more young people to enter the Buddhist college, even more ....to join the Buddhist monastery”.

However, the Assistant Division Leader said the “motivation [for making integration an issue] was affected by other peoples’ unfair reports or one-sided observation”, which seems to indicate a belief that the decision maker was not fully aware of all the angles on the situation before the decision was made. A member of the BLYC group expressed the view that the Buddhist priests in the Temples had influenced the decision maker because: “Buddhist priests want us to integrate...then we can learn more Buddhist behaviour”. It would appear that there was a view held by several people that the decision maker had been influenced by others with a different agenda to that of the decision maker herself.

However, the view of the Assistant Division Leader was that actually the branch temples did not want the existing BLYC student members. They also did not want a

separate group of young members, because this reduced the number of young members who came directly to them and thereby reduced their overall membership:

“The branch temples’ motivation is against integration because they don’t like the quality of those BLYC student members... [because their] motivation is only to develop their own temple rather than contribute to others”.

Concerning what the interviewees said their motivation *ought* to be, all of them, whether originally from YAD or BLYC, agreed that the BLIA organization’s future well-being was the single most important consideration. However there were some different foci revealed in their words. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said: “[to help] BLIA YAD become a well-formed organization for all.. its members”, and the Division Leader said “the motivation for integration should be BLIA’s healthy future”, indicating that their focus indeed appeared to be on the organization. However, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker thought the emphasis should be put on the needs of the young people: “[consider] young peoples’ needs, and help them fulfill their needs, then this will encourage them to learn Buddhist thinking, and will help them establish good living with a spiritual attitude”.

The words of the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer indicated a focus on resources: “I don’t agree that BLIA YAD and BLYC should be integrated...but if it has to happen then it should be for the better development of BLIA YAD.....and save resources by preventing wastage”. He also said that this would need careful planning: “[we] should have a good plan...because these two groups are basically very different”. This view was supported by the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader: “the best motivation...[will come from forming] a good plan with debate leading to



agreement between people.....This will be in the best interests of the development of BLIA YAD...[we can] share resources and keep balance”.

The importance of sharing experience, avoiding personal interest and fostering harmony were pointed out by other interviewees. The YAD Teacher/Guide said: “integration... should be done to build on and combine the benefits of BLIA YAD and BLYC and share their experience”. The Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor argued that “We must consider what decision is the best for our whole organization’s benefit, not individual or personal interests”, and the BLYC group agreed that “the real motivation should be whatever is good for our organization’s development and harmony”.

So, overall, the interviewees’ comments (plus the open-mindedness previously expressed by the decision taker) encouraged me to believe that a satisfactory accommodation (using a term from Checkland and Scholes, 1990) could eventually be reached through a BSM systemic intervention process.

#### **9.4.2 Summary of the answers to Q2: Is covetousness, resentment or maliciousness 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?**

Some people thought that there was indeed covetousness, resentment or maliciousness influencing the decision, partly because BLYC had been existing and growing outside the main BLIA power hierarchy. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said:

“Yes...there is covetousness, resentment *and* maliciousness influencing the situation ...BLYC maybe has grown too big, and the decision maker wants to take back some power and control”, and “[named person] really lets people think she is obsessed with ambition”.

A member of the BLYC group said:

“I think there is some resentment and maliciousness influencing the situation...I am angry that they don’t even have a good plan about how to integrate and...[BLIA YAD Headquarters] made the decision without communicating and discussing the reason and detail with us”.

Furthermore, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer indicated a possible reason for these feelings:

“Yes, because they [BLYC] are spending a large amount of resources to conduct their activities...[however] through integration, BLYC’s financial resources can be shared with BLIA YAD members”.

The other interviewees said that they did not think that covetousness, resentment or maliciousness could actually exist in the Buddhist community. For example, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said “I don’t think we could use the words covetousness, resentment or maliciousness to express any matter in our Buddhist organization”. It is interesting to note that the focus of this expression is on the use of the *words* in relation to BLIA. One interpretation of this is that for some people it is simply not legitimate to acknowledge the existence of such feelings. Also regarding covetousness, resentment and maliciousness, the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said:



“[no] intentional covetousness, resentment and maliciousness exists in our Buddhist society. But I think the main problem is *misunderstanding*...We should not use the culture of the monastery to run a lay organization”.

Some interviewees went on to suggest that, rather than covetousness, resentment or maliciousness, differences in thinking had arisen from poor communications and an inappropriate organizational structure. For example, the Division Leader said:

“there is no covetousness, resentment or maliciousness... I think the problem is lack of understanding and communication. Actually, the whole organizational structure is not right. The culture is unhealthy and communication channels are missing. People don't know what others are thinking”,

and the YAD Teacher/Guide said: “I don't think there is covetousness, resentment, or maliciousness influencing viewpoints. I think there are just communication problems and differences between how different people think”. This was also a viewpoint shared by the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader.

These answers revealed that the different people within BLIA viewed other people's motivations quite differently, indicating that this was not a one-dimensional problem. Some people saw maliciousness at play, while others simply thought that there had been misunderstandings and people were acting in good faith.

I asked those who thought there was covetousness, resentment or maliciousness involved what they believed would happen if this could be removed. Some thought that there would be a better solution, even within the existing autocratic decision

making system: “If there were no covetous, resentful or malicious influences, I think the decision maker would be able to think more carefully and understand what is the real problem, and why this problem happened” (Assistant Division Leader).

However, some people suggested that removing the covetousness, resentment and maliciousness would need to be supplemented by discussion or consultation, challenging the traditional decision-making system. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said:

“without covetousness, resentment and maliciousness we would be able to think more carefully and understand what is the benefit of integration and what is the weakness of integration. Then discussions should be held with relevant people before a decision is made”.

A member of the BLYC group also said: “I hope our anger and protest can reach our decision makers and they can reflect that our organizational decision making system is wrong”.

The Division Leader, on the other hand, was less interested in participation than in communications within the existing decision making system: “focus on the organizational structure and especially its communication channels...to avoid the possibility of covetousness, resentment, and maliciousness”.

**9.4.3 Summary of the answers to Q3: 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?**

Regarding lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other ‘improper’ use of language, there were different perspectives indicating different boundaries of consideration.

Some people stated that this kind of ‘bad’ behaviour had indeed occurred in the organization in relation to the issue. For example, the YAD Teacher/Guide said:

“I think ‘improper’ use of language really is involved in this issue...since a Buddhist priest made the integration decision without consulting other people, this could cause problems [of the ‘improper’ use of language] later on”.

Also, the Assistant Division Leader said:

“there is lying and deceitfulness involved in this matter...I heard many different voices...Accordingly, this problem became complicated...the decision maker didn’t let [named person] know the real reason for this decision”.

While one person (the Division Leader) did not agree that strong words like lying, deceitfulness or slander were appropriate, she nevertheless said: “Some people may want to protect themselves. I think many emotional words may be involved”.



However, most interviewees did not think that this kind of 'bad' behaviour existed. Rather, they thought that the situation was a result of the Buddhist/Chinese culture of only saying 'good' words to people's faces rather than expressing true feelings. For example, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said "The decision to combine...was phrased in different words to what was really being felt or thought", and the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader said "I do not think there is lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language involved...[but]...Buddhist people always say 'good words' to people".

The YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer thought the problem arose because of poor communication practices in the organization:

"I cannot imagine lying or deceitfulness within our organization...[but if] people only listen to certain opinions without consulting with others...[then] unfair judgements, 'improper' language and incomplete views can effect the decision making of senior management".

Also, the words of the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor supported this view:

"there is no lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language involved in this problem. The reason why the problem happened, is the way we communicate within our organization and make decisions".

A BLYC group member thought that the focus on maintaining harmony was the source of this kind of difficulty:



“I think nobody lies, it’s just that we don’t express our true feelings to others...if we try to keep harmony and not tell others what we think or express our true feelings, in my opinion...it is another kind of ‘lying’...but no one in our organization *intends* to lie or slander. I think there are many misunderstandings and a lack of communication within our organization”.

To me, these answers indicate the value, in the Buddhist context, of exploring views using questions like those I have designed for the BSM, because otherwise I believe that the tendency to only speak ‘good’ words would have glossed over the problems. It is because I was using Buddhist concepts to inquire into the situation that people felt the need to respond more openly than they would normally. Taking their Buddhist obligations seriously is important to people, so they were able to accept talking about the issues in this context.

If lying, deceitfulness and slander could have been removed, the interviewees generally thought that the problem would have been avoided or at least reduced. The way to avoid these things was thought by the interviewees to be better communications between people. However, different people emphasised different thing in relation to communication.

Two interviewees indicated that they viewed this as primarily an issue of organizational structure because a solution would result if a communication channel existed: “If the communication channel between the top and bottom of our structure can change to be more effective, we could avoid this kind of conflict situation” (YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer), and the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said “I think if BLIA can have a better communication

channel...then everybody can know the true reason for making any decision. Then issues like integration will have better and smoother results”.

However, other interviewees indicated that it was the *quality* of the communication which was important: “I think if the communication channel between top and bottom is clear *and honest*... I think this problem will not happen again” (Assistant Division Leader), and “if I can know what people are really thinking and feeling...by building a communication bridge between us, this could create understanding and change viewpoints” (Pin Dong Youth Center worker).

Finally, the organizational culture was cited as being important (linked into a more general issue to do with Buddhist/Chinese culture): “if our organization can face the truth and ...avoid using ‘good words’ in the wrong places, then problems like this issue will be reduced” (YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader).

#### **9.4.4 Summary of the answers to Q4: 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?**

None of the interviewees thought there was any major misconduct like killing or stealing, but three people saw waste of resources as a kind of major misconduct. For example, the Division Leader said: “No misconducts...but there is waste. I think the financial budget is a big issue”. Likewise, the YAD Teacher/Guide said: “I think there is a waste of resources going on... For example, both groups have different uniforms. Also every time they start a new activity they make new uniforms again”. The YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer thought that the fault lay in the



existence of two separate groups because two groups inevitably mean increased operational costs: “I believe that waste of resources should also be treated as misconduct. I think BLYC’s separate existence actually makes BLIA need to spend double resources on two similar groups”. The YAD Teacher/Guide also said: “I do hope once BLYC and BLIA YAD are integrated, these resources can also be integrated and properly allocated”.

**9.4.5 Summary of the answers to Q5: 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?**

Regarding whether the definition of the issue was privileging people’s own narrow concerns, the senior managers put forward the view that integration was for the wider benefit of all BLIA members. For example, the Division Leader said “BLYC focuses on students more than those people who work in society. But both students and young people who work should be taken care of, not just students”.

Also, the YAD members tended to express the view that they thought they were seeing the ‘bigger’ picture. From their perspective, BLYC had been conducting its activities selfishly and wastefully, and therefore integration would reduce costs. Consequently, for YAD members, integration would benefit all of BLIA. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said:

“I don’t think this decision to integrate privileges BLIA YAD’s concerns....because the benefits from integration are more than the shortcomings...after integration, we will have a more sufficient budget and use more appropriate methods to serve both groups of members”.

This was supported by two other YAD interviewees: “I think that if BLIA YAD and BLYC can be integrated, of course it will benefit BLIA YAD, but I do believe BLYC [members] can also gain some benefit” (Young Ho Subdivision Leader), and “it may appear that the top management of BLIA has made a decision privileging its side more than another...but actually this could help BLIA cut costs and reduce disharmony” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor). The YAD Teacher/Guide stated his view very simply: “in my thinking, ‘wider social concern’ means the organization should be one, not divided into two”.

However, the BLYC members saw the integration issue differently. Some of them acknowledged that their thinking was focused narrowly on BLYC because integration, for them, meant the loss of their organization. For example, a BLYC group member said: “I admit that what we do now, complaining to BLIA and refusing to go to joint meetings, is privileging our own concerns over wider concerns. But why should BLYC be eliminated?”. Also, “if these so called ‘wider social concerns’ are just the expression of Buddhist priests’ invisible power, then it is unfair to say we privilege our own concerns”. Finally, “I want to fight for the life of our group BLYC. Is this privileging my own concerns?”

The legitimacy of this concern over the death of BLYC was acknowledged by the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader: “after integration, the name will be BLIA YAD



so the members of BLYC might think that they have been eliminated. Also they think that their resources (especially their special funds) will be taken away”.

Also, BLYC member thought the integration decision was privileging the ‘wrong’ narrow motive of recruiting young people into the BLIA college: “I focus on young people’s needs...but BLIA headquarters, even the Fo-Guang Shan monastery, wants young people to enter into the Buddhist college...to become Buddhist monks or nuns” (Pin Dong Youth Center worker).

These findings clearly demonstrate that people were using different boundaries of analysis to frame the issue, with each side seeing the other as having a narrow or unfair concern with just some of the BLYC members accepting that they had a narrow focus, but justifying this.

Regarding a way to define the issue more widely, there were again different opinions. Some people thought that this would be helped by better communication channels. For example the YAD Teacher/Guide thought it was mainly an organizational structure problem:

“integrated is better than separated, and an integrated structure can include a wider set of concerns. The integration needs to involve building a good organizational structure and communication channels in order to combine the strengths of both BLYC and BLIA YAD”.

Other interviewees emphasised that there was a need to exchange viewpoints between people to create more inter-subjective understanding (and therefore a shared boundary judgement). For example, the Assistant Division Leader said: “if the

different viewpoints could be exchanged and discussed concerning whether to be integrated or separate...this could bring progress towards solving the problems”, and the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said: “in order to prove whether our decisions are good and represent wider members’ thinking, we need to set up better communication paths than before, and really ask what are people’s ideas and accept people’s challenges”.

However, the BLYC group emphasised that increasing inter-subjective understanding should involve explanation of the reasoning behind the integration decision: “we want the top management to know that their decision has been made for no-reason. Or maybe they have their reason, but only they know what their reason is. We have no idea”.

The Pin Dong Youth Center worker thought the issue should be reframed in terms of what Buddhism can offer the young people, and she said this (rather than an organizational focus) is the only way to widen people’s considerations: “let these young people know that Buddhism...can help them live a happy and good life...they can decide to study more Buddhist thinking or...even become Buddhist priests”.

Only one interviewee (the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer) refused to accept the possibility that there could be any way to widen the boundary of consideration: “If people think we as BLIA YAD are only concerned for ourselves, then they are simply wrong. We really don’t like those students’ attitude”.

With the one exception above, there did seem to be a willingness to see the issue in terms of wider social concerns and other people’s perspectives. Nevertheless, it



seemed to me that the meaning of 'wider social concern' and transparency of decision making were both issues needing further work.

#### **9.4.6 Summary of the answers to Q6: Is there idleness, apathy or avoidance of the issue? Who should be engaged with the issue and how?**

Concerning whether there was avoidance, most interviewees thought there was indeed avoidance, but that this was the result of the Chinese and Buddhist culture in BLIA of not expressing 'true' feelings in order to preserve harmony (rather than being a problem of idleness). For example, the Assistant Division Leader said: "Yes...The BLYC leader avoids expressing her true thoughts and clarifying her needs. [While] BLIA...avoids admitting their mistake", and the YAD Teacher/Guide said: "I think avoidance is a normal phenomenon in our organization...to keep a harmonious environment". These opinions were supported by other interviewees from both YAD and BLYC. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said: "There are actually some avoidances involved....they don't want to break the 'harmony' of the organization", and the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said, "Yes, I think 'avoidance' is the main problem within our organization...because we live in both a Chinese and Buddhist society".

The BLYC group said: "I think avoidance is a big problem within our organization...They should open discussion with people and seek and gather different people's perspectives and opinions", and "Buddhist priests avoid expressing their thinking". The BLYC members all thought that more open discussions would help.

However, there were also some indications of apathy around the issue. For example the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said: “Since they have decided on integration...I don’t think I need to think hard or work hard now. I can focus on my own life”, and the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader said “I think there are avoidances involved in the integration... the enthusiasm in BLIA YAD for integration has reduced now”.

Regarding who should be involved in the issue and why, there were some different views. Two interviewees thought that the new BLIA YAD leader alone could plan and execute a successful integration. One thought that she would be able to handle it as a sole decision maker, while the other said she would be successful if she built better communications: “The new YAD Division leader needs to face this kind of problem [avoidance] and build communication channel with members” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor).

However, other people thought that the new YAD Division Leader and Assistant Division Leader should discuss the situation with the BLYC Leader in order to find the best solution. For example, the YAD Young Ho Subdivision leader said: “The new BLIA, R.O.C. YAD Leadership and the Assistant Leader positions should directly communicate with the BLYC leader straight away, and the three of them should seek a better plan for integration or cooperation”.

The YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer supported this view, but also thought the BSM could help the process:



“The decision makers (the Division leader, the Assistant Division Leader, and the BLYC leader) really need to be engaged together in this issue and discuss with each other what the needs of young people actually are... the BSM is a good method to let them communicate with each other”.

The Assistant Division Leader suggested that a much wider involvement would be necessary, but agreed that the BSM process could help in the discussion:

“I think BLIA Headquarters, decision makers, the BLYC leader, branch temples, young members, and maybe me need to be engaged in this issue. The most important thing is that people usually don’t talk or discuss problems with each other...I think by using your BSM, maybe they will be able to communicate”.

The YAD Teacher/Guide also thought that a method was needed to help people express their thinking because: “people avoiding the expression of personal thinking and feeling is quite a big problem. I hope we can think of a method to build up this [communication] channel”.

The Division Leader expressed the view that it was essential for young people to be involved in the discussions about their part of BLIA: “I think young members should be engaged...we need to take time and develop a good plan”. However, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker expressed the opinion that the boundaries of involvement had already been determined: “It is the new BLIA YAD Division Leader and BLIA YAD Assistant Division Leader who are planning to carry out the BLIA YAD integration”.

**9.4.7 Summary of the answers to Q7: 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?**

Regarding misrepresentations, all the interviewees thought these existed in BLIA. While the YAD Teacher/Guide thought misrepresentation was widespread, most interviewees suggested that any misrepresentations which occurred were not intentional because they arose from the culture of failing to express 'true' feelings in order to preserve respect, peace and harmony. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said:

“there are a lot of misrepresentations of self and others happening. Sometimes because of a desire to ‘respect’ others or keep things peaceful, people do not correctly express their real thinking.... That’s why people misunderstand the situation and each other”.

The BLYC group members pointed out that even if misrepresentation was happening because of the culture it was not acceptable because it harms the achievement of mutual understanding, and therefore is the enemy of real harmony. They also said that it was widespread: “I think so. Especially people misrepresenting their views makes me misunderstand what people think”; “we only use ‘good words’ when we talk to others”; “the problem of misrepresentation is very common...in this organization”; and “As Buddhists, when we have different perspectives on, or make different observations about, a problem situation, then of course we pretend there is no problem there at all”.



In relation to testing out others' attitudes, some interviewees indicated that the culture in BLIA does not encourage questioning others because it is generally assumed that decisions just have to be accepted and carried out. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said "I don't ask people [when I make a decision], especially members, because I must listen to what the senior managers are saying". However, the senior managers said exactly the same thing about the leader of the organization: "Morally, I should not ask people too much and I need to follow her direction without question. This is the way in BLIA" (Assistant Division Leader).

One interviewee had tried discussing her own ideas with superiors but had found this difficult because they were too busy: "I did try...to discuss my ideas with BLIA Headquarters, but...they didn't have time to talk" (Pin Dong Youth Center worker). However, it would be wrong to think that the culture of harmony in BLIA led to a happy situation because, as the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said:

"many young members have started to leave this organization...so I asked one of the young members in my branch and he told me it is because they think they don't feel that they can achieve what they want. They are unhappy".

Only one interviewee indicated that he consulted other people before making some decisions: "...so I do ask for people's ideas if I want to make a decision, or I ask for suggestions" (YAD Teacher/Guide).

If the misrepresentations could be removed, most interviewees thought that the problems would be reduced or avoided because people would know what people really wanted, and why. For other interviewees, however, the removal of

misrepresentations would not simply *solve* the problems. Rather it would allow people to better understand the *real* problems of the organization, which could then be tackled. One interviewee claimed that the removal of misrepresentation would actually lead to a *more genuine* happiness and harmony, which is an aim of Buddhism. From his point of view, misrepresenting oneself only gives rise to an illusion of harmony that most people know is false.

#### **9.4.8 Summary of the answers to Q8: Has the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking been applied sufficiently in defining the issue? If not, can further Buddhist systemic investigation be undertaken?**

Regarding the sufficiency of Buddhist thinking (BT), the interviewees expressed different perspectives. Some thought BT had not been properly applied otherwise the problem would not have arisen in the first place: e.g. “if people bear Buddhist thinking in mind to view this issue, conflict should not happen” (YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer).

One interviewee thought that more Buddhism in the organization would be helpful, and cited the BSM as an example of something that would be useful in that regard. However, many new young recruits initially know very little about Buddhist thinking, so this may not help them immediately. A comment made by a young person at the BLYC group meeting confirmed this “we don’t really know much about Buddhist thinking at all”.

One view was that although Buddhist thinking had been applied, people had not properly considered the waste of resources. Only two interviewees thought that the



sufficiency or otherwise of BT was irrelevant: “I think this is a normal management problem but it just happened to crop up in a Buddhist organization” (YAD Teacher/Guide).

Regarding whether, and how, more BT can be carried out, the majority of interviewees thought that using the BSM could help with this. They said it was suitable for a Buddhist organization because it combined management systems methods with BT. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said “We know about the Eight-Fold Noble Path, Middle Path, Cause-Condition-Effect...etc., so the BSM may help create a good communication channel”. The key factor for some interviewees was that they considered ordinary management methods to be unsuitable for a Buddhist organization. Therefore, the BSM was considered by several people to be the way forward for BLIA. The YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said “I had not really heard of using Buddhist concepts and management together until your BSM. I believe it can help in our Buddhist organization”, and the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said “Your BSM really focuses on important Buddhist concepts and also uses systems thinking and brings these together in a managerial tool. I think we can start to use BSM in our society”. Even the young people in the BLYC group were in favour of widening the use of the BSM in BLIA because it is based on Buddhist ideas but is able to address organizational problems too: “we do need Buddhist discipline, but also suitable business management methods in support”.

**9.4.9 Summary of the answers to Q9: 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?**

Concerning middle paths, the interviewees had some different but interesting ideas. The chosen middle path for some interviewees, particularly those from YAD, was to continue with integration of the two groups but with a better plan. For example, the YAD Teacher/Guide said: “we should look at both BLYC and BLIA YAD - their individual interests and the benefits they can bring to a united organization. Then we should seek a balance [middle path] between these interests and benefits as we integrate them together”. The middle way for several other interviewees involved organizational re-structuring: they thought that a new structure would be able to preserve the best of the old while allowing new benefits to emerge from integration.

However, some other interviewees thought that the middle way forward should be to appreciate the different needs of the students and the young working members in order to reach a position acceptable and attractive to both sides, probably by exchanging viewpoints: “I think we need to realize the differences between students and young people who work... let people sit down and talk” (Division Leader).

However, another view was that there were actually two choices, which could both be acceptable solutions: “Firstly, if we [BLIA YAD] remain under BLIA R.O.C.’s controlling structure [but not within the Adult Division] ..[or].. The second way is to separate our BLIA YAD, R.O.C. from BLIA R.O.C, and then join BLIA YAD WHQ



directly like all other parts of YAD worldwide” (Assistant Division Leader). My inference from this comment was that a decision was needed concerning which link is likely to be the most important to BLIA YAD and its future, and what is the most practical solution.

There were risks involved in these different choices according to the interviewees. It was pointed out that leaving YAD, unchanged was not a real option because a new YAD was needed to be attractive to student members: “Otherwise, I believe that BLIA will lose all BLYC’s young members” (BLYC group). Also, if the integration proceeded through re-structuring then it was important that the new structure be designed to take account of the needs of both joining groups (i.e. find a middle path between these needs): “If we only consider onside, the conflict will always exist” (YAD Teacher/Guide).

The Assistant Division Leader thought that her two middle way choices (i.e. being independent of BLIA R.O.C. Adult Division, and either being inside BLIA R.O.C. or inside BLIA YAD WHQ) involved different risks:

“The first middle way can help prevent [this] ‘problem’ happening again because there would be better contacts with the decision maker [i.e. not indirectly through Adult Division]. But the risk is we would still be under the control of BLIA R.O.C., for example, concerning the financial budget.....But the second middle way’s risk is the effect on BLIA R.O.C.’s whole future- handing down the organization for a new generation”.

The second option is a non-return option because once BLIA YAD joins BLIA WHQ directly (like all other YADs in all other countries worldwide), it will not be able to return to the BLIA R.O.C. structure if things do not turn out to their liking.

Another person expressed the view that if the re-structuring was very radical and resulted in a new independent YAD (i.e. independent of BLIA R.O.C.), then BLIA's future was at stake:

“if BLIA YAD R.O.C. becomes independent, then BLIA R.O.C.'s activities.. will lack young members' involvement and I worry that young people will no longer find their way into a Buddhist youth society”  
(Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor).

One interviewee recognized that the timescale of the change was important to consider because: “more time is needed to get this beyond the act of integration itself” (YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader). Thus, there were risks involved in the integration project, particularly that more young members would be lost from BLIA if one side was favoured more than the other.



**9.4.10 Summary of the answers to Q10: 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?**

Regarding the cause-condition-effect relationships thought to be important, the interviewees suggested several different relationships, indicating some totally different boundaries of consideration.

Some interviewees identified the cause of the integration problem as the existing top-down decision making system in BLIA, while others saw this as a condition rather than a cause: “ A cause was that [named person] personally allowed...the set up of the youth center” (Pin Dong Youth Center worker), and “the cause was when [named person] said ‘yes’...to establishing BLYC; the condition is the decision making process we have; and the effect is two groups” (YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer). This was supported by the YAD Teacher/Guide who said:

“The cause is that this...Buddhist organization’s decision making is often influenced by a single person’s suggestion; or the Founding Master or Buddhist priests make decisions based on their own thinking alone; or lay people directly recommend something to the Founding Master or Buddhist priests and they just accept this. The condition is that the head of BLYC is in southern Taiwan, and the top of BLIA YAD is in northern Taiwan [the effect being poor communications]”.

However, some other interviewees identified the cause in terms of the existing culture in BLIA which they said resulted in poor treatment of young people: “The cause was the way that BLIA treated YAD young people merely as volunteers in Buddhist temples...and the condition was...BLIA YAD’s organizational culture” (YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader).

Also, according to one interviewee, the fact that the BLIA Headquarters only allows a few people to influence the decision maker adds to the conditions that enable autocratic decision making to stimulate conflict:

“BLIA, R.O.C. staff use ‘improper’ observation and thinking to judge the BLYC Leader. Then they pass their views to the decision maker. [The effect is] the decision maker and the BLYC Leader don’t get along well” (Assistant Division Leader).

The recruitment policy of the Buddhist College was also identified as a cause: “BLIA YAD youth members are the source of students for our colleges” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor), and:

“The top management of BLIA hope they can recruit more young people for the Buddhist college. But...BLYC never helped the Buddhist college recruit students. That’s why the Buddhist priests and the top management of BLIA think BLYC is not useful and is redundant” (BLYC group).

These quite different views on the relevant causes and conditions indicate the multidimensional nature of the issue, and they no doubt go some way to explaining why the conflict has been so persistent.



Different potential consequences and risks associated with ignoring these cause-condition-effect relationships were identified by the interviewees. Some people thought that the main consequence would be that the conflict would simply continue. However, some others emphasised that a loss of members would be the most serious consequence of neglecting the cause-condition-effect relationships. For example, the Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor said: “if we keep treating young people as potential Buddhist college students or potential priests, then many young people will be scared and will not want to stay in our society”, and the BLYC group concurred saying: “If the purpose of our group is mainly to recruit for the Buddhist colleges...then we believe that many young people will not be interested in joining”.

**9.4.11 Summary of the answers to Q11: 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?**

Regarding the cultural and ecological contexts relevant to understanding the issue, I have already extensively discussed the issue of the Buddhist/Chinese culture which requires people to remain silent about their thoughts and feelings when they believe others will disagree with them. This is in the interests of preserving harmony. However, the interviewees also pointed out that BLIA YAD was mainly located in North Taiwan, while BLYC was principally located in the South, and this gave rise to geographical and cultural differences, creating the conditions for communication problems.



“BLYC HQ is located in Southern Taiwan, and they usually conduct activities based in the South...Northern Taiwan is more modern and has an international. More cosmopolitan culture” (YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer), and “BLYC was set up in Southern Taiwan...where they have different thinking and needs compared with us in Middle and Northern Taiwan. BLYC’s activities are more fun and interesting than BLIA YAD’s.” (YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader).

However, one interviewee pointed out that there was also a further difference: the BLIA decision makers are monks and nuns while the BLYC Leader is a lay person. According to this interviewee, the differences in status added an extra layer of complexity to the cultural and geographical communication barriers.

When discussing the issue of North vs South Taiwan, some people made what are in my view quite sweeping generalizations: e.g. “People in Northern and Middle Taiwan particularly like cultural and educational activities, but people in the South are more unsophisticated”. Nevertheless, reflecting on the geographical divide made others consider the potential implications for any restructuring activities: “to solve this problem we must restructure BLIA YAD. We must keep a balance between Northern and Southern Taiwan, perhaps by setting up sub-HQs in different areas” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor).

**9.4.12 Summary of the answers to Q12: 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?**

Regarding the time scale for dealing with the issue, most interviewees said things like, “I hope this problem can be sorted out as soon as possible, maybe within two months, because if this problem continues it will affect the future development of BLIA YAD” (Assistant Division Leader), and “We hope that in three to four months everything will have settled down and we can enjoy new activities when the summer vacation comes” (BLYC group).

However, other interviewees pointed out that re-structuring was needed, so it could take a little longer. For example, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said:

“BLIA YAD’s organizational structure needs to be resolved; and the organizational scope and purpose should be reviewed; and short term, middle term and long term plans should be established. I hope in six months, everything can be running smoothly”.

A couple of people expressed some words of caution: “I do hope we don’t rush to make a decision without a good plan” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor), and “I don’t want to rush and set a time limit” (Division Leader).

Other interviewees recognized the importance of leaving the conflict in the past: “I believe two or three months is realistic...if we can forget about the anger and conflict, and then conduct meetings to discuss things and make a new start” (YAD Taipei

Subdivision Guidance Officer). In general, people were more optimistic than cautious:

“I think the project of integration can now be completed and succeed in a very short time. There are two reasons. One is that we now have a new leader, and also your research and your BSM can help us....if you help us, the time scale could be around three months, and we will then have a better organizational situation” (YAD Teacher/Guide).

Similarly, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said “if people start to co-operate with each other, in a very short time we can change this bad situation into a better one”, and the YAD Young Ho Subdivision Leader said “with your help using the BSM, people will learn more about management and how to form a good structure and build up communications in our organization”.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported the interview process and outcomes for BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 for the issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? The aim of this first BSM stage was to help people become more aware of, and reflect critically upon boundaries relevant to the issue - to help decide the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, given that complete comprehensiveness is recognized as unattainable (Churchman, 1979b, Ulrich, 1983; Midgley, 2000). The participants' answers confirmed that there were several significantly different boundary judgements in play, so dialogue with the stakeholder representatives was necessary to explore the consequences of possible boundary choices.



The boundary critique aspect of BSM included questions derived from five Buddhist concepts (the Eightfold Noble Path, Middle Path, Cause-Condition-Effect, Space and Time) in order to make it more relevant to the participants' context than a more generic systems methodology might have been. The question is, was it successful in this regard? Certainly, there is evidence that when people were told that the BSM was based on Buddhist concepts it stimulated their interest and inspired them to participate: a number of people told me that they were encouraged by the thought that the methodology would be relevant to their practices and existing knowledge, in contrast to other management methods, many of which they said they found off-putting. One example was SSM, which I had used previously in BLIA in 1996. Some people still remembered this and said it was an unsuitable methodology for a Buddhist organization.

Also, in terms of judging success, the participants were willing to put a substantial amount of time into answering the questions, and these questions generated a lot of information relevant to the issue. Furthermore, the answers were useful in highlighting people's different perspectives. My initial fear that people were going to be unwilling to reveal or discuss problems was clearly unfounded, and in this sense the BSM can be said to offer significant added value in the Taiwanese Buddhist context compared with SSM and possibly other Western methodologies that do not explicitly use Buddhist concepts.

However, for me the experience of facilitating this boundary critique posed a difficult dilemma. I was happy that the BSM seemed to be able to help people 'open up' their thinking about problems caused by their top-down decision making and communications structure, but I sensed that some people thought I was challenging

the Buddhist power structure, and I was aware of some worry and insecurity around this. A couple of people raised this explicitly with me in conversations early on in my fieldwork, asking whether I really respected the Buddhist organization. I therefore asked myself “am I doing the right thing?”, “am I paying sufficient respect to Buddhist priests?”, and “will I have bad karma?” So conflicting feelings filled my heart, and I felt some guilt. I had to try to conquer these negative feelings by telling myself that this was only a temporary 'misery' for them and me, and that greater harmony and good will come from it. Whenever doubts were raised about my attitude in relation to the Buddhist power structure, I took as much time as was needed to explain that my involvement was not designed to damage the Buddhist organization but to aid it. Then they ‘opened’ their hearts and accepted my explanation. This certainly helped in terms of my own conscience, but I realized that I needed to reflect very carefully as I proceeded with my research to be as sure as I could be that the longer-term benefits of using the BSM were going to outweigh the short-term costs to harmony within BLIA.

In the next chapter, I discuss the operationalization of BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 (Choice of theories and methods).

## **CHAPTER TEN**

# **FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM MODE 1 STAGE 2 IN BLIA: CHOICE OF THEORIES AND METHODS**

### **10.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I report the carrying out of BSM Mode 1, Stage 2. I also describe the outputs from it: a set of recommended methods to support action for improvement in BLIA.

### **10.2 BSM Mode 1 Stage 2: Process**

I started by taking the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 outputs (Chapter 9) and identified the main foci of people's concerns raised by the BSM questions. Then, understanding and accepting the need for theoretical and methodological pluralism in the choice of theories and methods to guide action for improvement (previously discussed in Chapter 5), I selected the method(s) which seemed to me to be capable of tackling the main foci of concern. I did the initial selection of methods myself using the BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 questions (see Chapter 6) as discussion with the participants revealed that they did not initially have enough knowledge of management systems approaches to make an informed choice. Nevertheless, after carrying out Stage 2, I took the outputs and talked them through with all the participants involved in Stage 1,



briefly describing the chosen management systems methods and my answers to the BSM Stage 2 questions to discover whether each interviewee agreed that these methods would be appropriate for tackling the problems raised by them in Stage 1. At this juncture, the methods I presented were not an integrated set to be operationalized all in one go. I simply set out which methods I thought would be best in terms of the BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 questions, realizing that I would generate more options than could actually be implemented in the Ph.D. research timescale. I did not want to propose a final set of methods to be operationalized until I had a better picture of how the various options might be received. The Stage 2 outcomes are reported in Section 10.3, and these are then summarized in Section 10.3.13.

### **10.3 BSM Mode 1 Stage 2: Choice of Theories and Methods**

Below, each BSM Mode 1, Stage 2, question is dealt with in turn.

#### **10.3.1 What method(s) will foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones (as defined through boundary critique)?**

The Stage 1 outputs indicated that there were different motivations and different boundaries of consideration among the interviewees, and misunderstandings between YAD and BLYC members. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said that the decision-maker “was affected by other peoples’ unfair reports and one-side observations”; and the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said “I don’t think BLIA and Fo-Guang Shan Monastery have the same motivation as me”; and the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer indicated that “she [the decision maker] made this decision without consulting other people, especially young members”. Some

members of the BLYC group did not know the motivations behind the decision. The Shan-Chong Temple Supervisor said “we should look at the big picture. We must consider what decision is the best for our whole organization, not just look at individual or personal interests”. The different people seemed to be in conflict with one another because of a lack of any meaningful exchange of viewpoints within BLIA.

All these points indicated to me the need for a method which can surface different perspectives, preferably anonymously so that people do not reject views on the basis of their source. For example, Nominal Group Technique (NGT) can help with this (Delbecq et al, 1975). This can then provide the basis for a discussion, perhaps facilitated using soft systems methodology (SSM) (Checkland and Scholes, 1990), to encourage a more considered exchange of viewpoints. This could help people widen the presently narrow boundaries they tend to be using, thus reducing misunderstandings and helping to create movement away from individual or sectional interests to what is best for BLIA as a whole.

### **10.3.2 What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you have identified?**

Stage 1 revealed that the interviewees thought that covetousness, resentment or maliciousness, if it was occurring, arose mostly from poor communications and a poor organizational structure that makes misunderstanding easy to occur and difficult to rectify. For example, the Division Leader said “the problem is lack of understanding and communication.....The culture is unhealthy and the necessary communication channel is missing. They don’t realize what each other is thinking.”



The YAD Teacher/Guide said “there are just communication problems and differences”, but the Shan-Chong Temple Supervisor highlighted a power issue:

“I think the main problem is misunderstanding.....the culture of Buddhist organizations, especially a Buddhist monastery, is very powerful. The decision making power always falls into the hands of the top Buddhist priests.....but we need a decision making system for a lay organization”.

A further problem of communication was between priests and lay people: “the communication channel between us and the top Buddhist priests is very difficult” (BLYC group member).

As a step towards creating a better quality communication channel, I proposed that an improved organizational structure is needed, with better information flows, and suggested use of the viable system model (VSM) (Beer, 1981; 1985). The lack of understanding of different viewpoints indicates that the application of a soft approach may be needed as a partner to the VSM, such as SSM or strategic assumption surfacing and testing (SAST) (Mason and Mitroff, 1981). However, the BSM, if this is more acceptable to people in BLIA, could also help to improve inter-subjective understanding and be used as a decision-making method with some ability to counter the negative effects of an authoritarian poor structure (particularly the unwillingness of subordinates to talk about problems). I speculated that the series of questions from the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 (boundary critique) would be particularly useful here, because using this would make the asking of questions into an acceptable behaviour within BLIA, as the BSM questions are based on Buddhist concepts.



### **10.3.3 What method(s) will eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other ‘improper’ use of language you have identified?**

The Stage 1 outputs revealed that most interviewees, including both YAD and BLYC members, thought that ‘improper’ use of language arose from ‘poor’ communications, stemming from the Buddhist/Chinese culture of people not expressing their ‘true’ thoughts, rather than from intentional ‘bad’ behaviour. For example, the Pin Dong Youth Center worker said “people should tell me the truth about what they think, not just good words or respectful words... this can create understanding and change viewpoints”. Likewise the Young Ho Subdivision Leader said “really, problems are created by using ‘good words’ in the wrong places”. One suggested method for redressing the problem was to build a “good communication channel within the organization” (Shan-Chong Temple Supervisor).

However, it was pointed out that the power hierarchy and autocratic decision making are significant issues too. For example, the YAD Teacher/Guide said that “power cannot be neglected... in this case a Buddhist priest made the integration decision without consulting with people”, and the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer claimed that “within our organization there is a lack of communication...it is too hierarchical and power is held only in the hands of top management”. The problem with simply building a new communication channel without careful thought about the construction of this is that openness and effective consultation using the new channel could be inhibited by people’s perceptions of their hierarchical relationships with others. It is for this reason that the VSM has been criticized as an inadequate response to dealing with problematic power relationships (Jackson, 1991).

The lack of open communication suggested to me that an anonymous surfacing of views would be needed to uncover underlying issues and different people's 'truths' so there could be discussion about them. I thought that NGT might help here, as a way to start working towards the design of new communication and control systems using the VSM. I suggested that power issues might also be tackled using critical systems heuristics (CSH) (Ulrich, 1983) so that people could explore what currently is the case in BLIA and what ought to be done in relation to decision making in the organization. Again, anonymity would need to be granted to participants to enable them to honestly express their views. This would mean using CSH in the same way that I used the BSM in Stage 1: when I communicated the results back to the participants I anonymised people's viewpoints.

#### **10.3.4 What method(s) will tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you have identified?**

None of the interviewees thought that there was any major misconduct except waste of resources. Some people claimed that having two groups meant double the financial costs, and also making new uniforms for each activity was wasteful. Presuming that the most effective means of minimizing waste is to integrate the two groups, I thought about what systems methods might help, not only in creating an efficient and effective combined youth organization, but also in delivering what both YAD and BLYC members want from such an organization. I decided that interactive planning (IP) (Ackoff, 1981) offers some useful methods because it is enacted participatively and it asks people to transcend narrow viewpoints in specifying the "desired properties" of the ideal system. IP also has an added advantage: it can be used to plan for the future without asking people to attribute blame for current



problems. Given the Buddhist desire for harmony, I thought this focus might be welcomed by BLIA.

### **10.3.5 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?**

The Stage 1 outputs revealed that YAD and BLYC members were using different (narrow) boundaries of consideration regarding the issue, probably because there had been no exchange of viewpoints between the two groups in order to create an understanding of other perspectives. Most interviewees thought that more and better communication channels were needed to create inter-subjective understanding and prevent a narrow focus. For some, the emphasis was on encouraging an exchange of viewpoints. The Assistant Division Leader said “if different viewpoints could be exchanged...I think this could bring progress towards solving the problems”. However, one person also talked about the need to question the underlying reason for bringing a new integrated organization into being:

“If BLIA YAD merely wants to enroll new students into our Buddhist college or recruit more Buddhist priests, then young people will not be interested. Also.. parents might be scared...and stop their children joining BLIA YAD.” (Pin Dong Youth Center worker).

From this point of view, it was important to transcend such narrow motivations and decide on new, more expansive purposes.



To my mind, these responses mainly indicated the need for a mechanism to improve communications and a method to exchange different viewpoints and enable discussion. I proposed that the VSM would be able to help with the communication structure, and a 'soft' methodology could usefully be used to facilitate an exchange of viewpoints and design an 'ideal future'. I proposed IP as a first choice, primarily because it can focus attention on the "desired properties" of an organization (Ackoff, 1981), or the reason for its existence. I also suggested that continued use of the BSM questions might be useful in helping people explore motivations. This would principally be operationalized by people using the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 (boundary critique) questions. My assumption here (supported by feedback from the participants) was that the BSM can make asking questions culturally acceptable, hence facilitating wider considerations and softening the authoritarian decision making process.

### **10.3.6 What method(s) will work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you have identified?**

In Stage 1, most interviewees thought that there was avoidance because of the Chinese and Buddhist culture of people not expressing their 'true' feelings. For example, the Shan-Chong Temple Supervisor said:

"I believe that there is some avoidance within our organization, otherwise we would not have conflict and misunderstanding...a new way of decision making needs to be designed for running our lay organization".

This type of avoidance was also recognized by young members: “I think ‘avoidance’ is a big problem within our organization....maintaining harmony on the surface does not address the problem inside” (BLYC group member).

Some people thought that more open discussions would help and proposed that the new YAD Division leader and Assistant Division Leader should talk about the situation with the BLYC leader, including young people in discussions, to create the required dialogue and reach a better solution. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said “there is some avoidance involved...BLIA Headquarters, decision makers, the BLYC leader, branch temples, young members, and the new Assistant Division Leader need to be engaged in discussing this issue”, and the Division Leader said “The conflict (effect) has happened because of a lack of communication and inadequate planning (cause)...but it is important that young members should be engaged”.

The YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer highlighted the importance of considering “what are *actually* the needs of young people.... I think BSM would be a good method to help them [BLIA YAD and BLYC] communicate with each other, taking proper account of young people’s needs”. These points indicate the need to engage leaders and young members together in producing plans that can command widespread support. I suggested that the BSM could particularly help with boundary critique, and IP could potentially help with the exchange of viewpoints as part of planning.



### **10.3.7 What method(s) will help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others and/or the non-human world?**

The Stage 1 outputs indicated that interviewees thought that misrepresentations often arose from the Buddhist and Chinese culture in BLIA in which people hide their 'true' feelings. Most thought that problems could be reduced or avoided if this kind of misrepresentation could be lessened. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said:

“If all misrepresentations could be removed, of course we would know what is really happening and what people want. But...in a Buddhist organization, this is quite a challenge”.

Arranging proper meetings could help reduce misrepresentations: “if we could have proper meetings and communication, then everything would become smoother and conflict between individuals might be avoided” (Pin Dong Youth Center worker). However, the Division Leader pointed out that it was not only poor communications between individuals that was a problem: “poor communications between different parts of BLIA need addressing too”. She saw this as an issue of organizational structure as well as communications.

Again, I suggested that the use of NGT could help to surface more 'genuine' feelings and viewpoints, primarily because this method grants anonymity to individuals. In stressing the need for anonymity, I acknowledged that widespread culture change is unlikely in the short term. Also, I proposed that the VSM could be used to design the necessary information links between units. Furthermore, I suggested that BSM or



CSH could be used to help reveal and critique misrepresentations taking the form of artificially narrow boundary judgements.

### **10.3.8 What method(s) will help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking, if this is not sufficiently in evidence?**

Most interviewees thought that use of the BSM would help to promote Buddhist thinking while simultaneously giving attention to boundary critique and management methods. For example, the Young Ho Subdivision Leader said “Your BSM can hopefully help us define what is the best for the future of BLIA YAD and BLYC”, and the suitability of BSM for BLIA was stressed: “this is a normal management problem but...ordinary management methods are not suitable for Buddhist organizations” (YAD Teacher/Guide). Therefore, I proposed the wider use of BSM (subject to confirmation of its potential usefulness through this research) because this combines BT and a pluralist management systems approach.

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

The outputs from the interviewees mostly suggested that a new organizational structure for BLIA YAD was required which would satisfy the needs of both working young people and students, otherwise there could be a further loss of members. Also the need for a new decision-making system was suggested. For example, the YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance Officer said “a middle path which

can solve this issue must firstly involve changing our old organizational structure and the way of making decisions”.

Some interviewees pointed out the need for a middle path involving wider consultation and involvement. For example, the Assistant Division Leader said “I think if the decision maker can lower her position and try to listen to different people’s ideas, not just think by herself, I think she might prevent the problem happening”, and “really let us know what are the reasons for why the integration of BLIA YAD and BLYC can produce a better result than us being separate” (BLYC Group member).

As mentioned in relation to previous questions, I proposed that the VSM could help with the redesign. However, I also suggested that the BSM could help with the concerns about the need for wider involvement during decision making.

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

In response to the boundary critique question about cause-condition-effect relationships, the interviewees suggested a number of different explanations, several of which were quite lengthy. However, I think that I am doing justice to all contributions if I summarize them into four main points:

- (1) the existing top-down autocratic decision making system with little or no involvement leads to dissatisfaction with decisions,

- (2) the lack of communication within BLIA leads to differences of thinking which are never resolved,
- (3) the poor treatment of young people in YAD led to the setting up of BLYC originally (and these causes and conditions still exist),
- (4) the BLIA 'top' management and the founder of BLYC had different reasons for setting up BLYC (the 'top' management wanted to increase recruitment to the Buddhist Colleges, and the BLYC founder wanted to bring young people together for 'fun' activities), and the overall effect was that BLIA YAD and the founder of BLYC were always looking for different outcomes.

The solutions from interviewees involved:

- (i) A better decision-making system: "a good 'decision making process' should be built...(with) a communication channel between the top management and ordinary members" (YAD Taipei Subdivision Guidance person).
- (ii) Better communication channels and organizational structure: "lack of effective communication and lack of time caused the problem to happen. Also organizational structure is very important" (Division Leader).
- (iii) A new culture, particularly in order to make BLIA YAD more 'fun': "I think the main cause of the problem is BLIA YAD's organization culture...BLIA treated YAD young people merely as volunteers in Buddhist temples. The [BLYC founder] wanted to help young people have a better and happy life" (Young Ho



Subdivision Leader). A young BLYC group member said “our aim was to join BLYC and have good spiritual experience”.

(iv) Better project planning: “this problem has arisen because of BLIA’s decision making system..... Many aims are announced and decisions are made without full and clear project planning” (YAD Teacher/Guide).

I suggested to the participants that these points indicated the need to improve communications, widen consultation, and hold more and regular meetings. I proposed use of the VSM to create a better structure and improve communications; widen use of the BSM to improve the culture of consultation; and adopt IP to help with participative (or at least more consultative) planning. I also expressed my view that if the lack of consultation continued, this would indicate a power problem, and I argued that critical systems heuristics (CSH) might then be useful to support people in highlighting the key issues and what relationships ought to be like.

### **10.3.11 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?**

The responses of the interviewees highlighted the low frequency of communications, cultural differences and the almost total lack of collaborative activities between the Northern, Middle and Southern Taiwanese Buddhist communities associated with BLIA. For example, the Shan-Chong Temple Supervisor said: “geographical distance and lack of communication channels are the main reason for the conflict.....Therefore...we must re-structure BLIA YAD.” and the YAD

Teacher/Guide said: “I think culture and geography.....both cause communication difficulties”. Also, the geographical separation made it difficult to hold joint activities: “...we conduct activities...in the South, and they conduct their activities mainly in the North” (BLYC group member).

These points indicate the need for better structure and communications linking different groups across the country to bring more coherence and reduce misunderstandings. I therefore proposed use of the VSM to develop better information flows, and strategic assumption surfacing and testing (SAST) to foster debate between the different regions, each of which has its own preferred activities, to see if there is scope for more interaction. I judged that SAST would be most useful for this because there was a clear disagreement with sides being taken by known advocates. This is precisely the kind of situation where SAST comes into its own (Flood and Jackson, 1991a).

### **10.3.12 What method(s) will work in the time scale specified in the boundary critique?**

Most interviewees suggested that an intervention would need to be undertaken within a time scale of a few months, but some interviewees emphasised the importance of more careful longer term planning and policy making: “...don’t rush to make a decision without a good plan” (Shan-Chong Temple, BLIA YAD Supervisor).

The proposed timescale of a few months had several implications. The recommended methods during this BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 were: VSM, BSM, IP, NGT, CSH, SAST and SSM. Assuming that the use of all these methods would be permitted, I reasoned



that the implementation timescale requirements could be as follows. I thought that I could apply the VSM on the integration of BLIA YAD and BLYC, focusing primarily on structural issues and the main communication channels, and would be able in the course of a few weeks to come up with a design which could be an improvement on the present set up. However, actually applying the design and educating people in the new roles and responsibilities would take much longer. Nevertheless, I suggested that this would be a good start because potentially a better structure and especially better communication channels could aid the implementation of the other methods too.

I thought that progress towards widening the use of the BSM could also be achieved in a few months, because if people accepted it in the same way as the interviewees had already done, and people became more familiar with it, wider spread could occur by a 'snowball' effect.

In contrast with the above, I suggested that implementation of IP would need my full attention over a period of many months, and might actually need a year or two to actually work through. I judged this to be the case because IP has several stages requiring widespread participation across the whole organization; it was largely unknown to people and, like SSM, might be perceived as culturally alien (so dialogue around the approach would be required); and Ackoff (1981) talks about interventions that took over a year. If Ackoff needs this time to work with an organization, I thought that, as a new IP user working in a difficult cultural context, I would need at least as long, if not longer. I judged that similar time problems would also occur with SSM, SAST and CSH: while these can conceivably be operationalized using narrower boundaries of participation, I guessed that it would



take months to convince sufficient numbers of people from different parts of BLIA that these culturally alien approaches would be useful, despite the goodwill that I had already built up through use of the BSM. I wanted to take a cautious approach here given my previous, strongly negative experience of using SSM in BLIA (Shen, 1996).

The only 'soft' approach that I thought might be immune from this problem was NGT. My experience in my Masters studies was that NGT can be taught and implemented very easily in a matter of a few days, and because it allows anonymity I thought that it might be culturally acceptable.

I spoke to people in the individual interviews about some of my ideas around timescale, and in general there was little enthusiasm for another long intervention. Plus there was still my evaluation to carry out. People clearly wanted fast ways of making progress and bringing improvement. Therefore, given the above reasoning and the required timescale, it was my opinion that it was probably only realistic to think in terms of applying the VSM, BSM and NGT. Nevertheless, I still wanted the stakeholders to hear about the other approaches because they might be useful to BLIA in the longer term.

### **10.3.13 Testing the Stage 2 Recommendations with Stakeholders**

For different aspects of the problem situation characterized by the question, should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?, I suggested the following possible methods: NGT, VSM, SAST, SSM, IP, CSH, and BSM.

Follow-up individual meetings were then carried out with each of the seven interviewees (and another BLYC group meeting was held), to discuss whether the methods could address their concerns. After briefly describing the methods so they could understand them, everybody confirmed that my representation of their concerns in my answers to the BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 questions was accurate, and the methods chosen seemed appropriate.

The number of times each method was chosen was as follows: VSM (7), BSM (7), IP (4), NGT (3), CSH (3), SAST (2) and SSM (2). As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I knew that I would be generating more options than could actually be used, but it was important in terms of BLIA's 'ownership' of the outcomes of an intervention that the stakeholders should have the final say on the actual set of methods, and approaches not used now might be adopted in future years. The number of times (7) that the VSM was recommended reflected the fact that the design of a new structure for BLIA YAD had been raised most often by the interviewees during the boundary critique, and the participants were clear in their feedback that this was the most urgent consideration for them. The other equal-top chosen method was the BSM. Many of the interviewees had suggested this themselves (without any prompting from me) during the boundary critique because they said that they had found it useful, and some had said that they thought it was the most appropriate method for a Buddhist organization.

At this point I should mention that an important change had taken place in people's perspectives. During the boundary critique, the issue of whether or not BLIA YAD and BLYC should be integrated still seemed open, but when I conducted these Stage 2 interviews it became clear to me that everyone had now accepted the inevitability



of the integration. One possible interpretation of this is that the principal decision maker had already made her own preferences apparent, and so some people followed this lead (as was their usual practice). Also, the BLYC Leader had by this time been given a new role, moving her out of the student organization, so the decision may have seemed irreversible to some people. According to this interpretation, the shift in attitudes resulted solely from power relations.

However, there is also another possible interpretation. It was apparent to me that people generally seemed more confident than previously that they would be able to work constructively with those with whom they had previously disagreed, so the prospects of integration didn't seem so bad. It is arguably the case that both interpretations have some validity, but my own view (although I cannot provide cast iron evidence to support it) is that improvements in constructive engagement were a more significant factor than power relations. I say this because several people in my interviews attributed the emergence of a more conciliatory attitude to use of the BSM: they said that answering the BSM questions had prompted them to self-reflect, which seemed to make them see the situation more clearly, and the BSM intervention was allowing viewpoints to be aired which would otherwise not have received a hearing. In relation to this, it was arguably significant that the decision maker had allowed a process of inquiry (the BSM) that did not pre-judge the necessity of integration, despite having expressed her preference for the latter. In my view, the result of this openness was a greater willingness to listen to and accept her views.



## **10.4 Finalizing the Set of Methods**

Before I could start to initiate Stage 3, one more task relating to Stage 2 was necessary. Stage 2 had yielded a long list of methods that could be implemented for different purposes, and because of the time restrictions of my fieldwork these needed to be prioritized. This was done using the following process.

A meeting was held involving all seven individuals and the BLYC student group to discuss the chosen methods and their possible implementation. Following a short debate on the urgency of the problems facing the organization, people agreed to use a voting system in order to decide on what should be done. A vote was used as this was thought to be the most democratic alternative to a top-down decision. I proposed that the voting should be anonymous and could be carried out in a similar way to NGT by writing on slips of paper. However, the 'top' management suggested that in order to be more 'open' we should have a show of hands, because they did not like the secretive NGT process. This is what happened.

Firstly, it was agreed by all that it was most important and urgent to tackle the organizational structure issue, so I should apply the VSM to recommend a new structure for BLIA R.O.C., particularly concerning how BLIA YAD and BLYC should be unified. Secondly, it was agreed by all that it would be beneficial to use the BSM more widely in decision making in BLIA R.O.C. as the people saw its value from their involvement in the intervention. Thirdly, people accepted that the use of a 'soft' systems method (no preference for a particular one was expressed) would probably be useful in many circumstances to aid inter-subjective understanding, and

it was agreed at the meeting that a soft method would be used to tackle the differences in viewpoints between BLIA YAD and BLYC members. Fourthly, it was decided at the meeting to try some of the other chosen methods later if they were still needed.

Overall, I left the meeting with a strong impression that people were committed to using the VSM and BSM, but less interested in 'soft' (or other) methods. NGT appeared to be regarded as too secretive. Although they had agreed with me that a 'soft' method would be useful to aid inter-subjective understanding, there wasn't the same level of enthusiasm, and this was reflected in their use of the general term 'soft method' rather than a more specific instance of a method (e.g. SSM, SAST). I wondered whether some people were still remembering my original use of SSM in 1996, which they had not liked. I tested this interpretation in informal conversations with two of the participants, and they confirmed that it was correct. As a result, I decided to focus in a short intervention just on the VSM and BSM. I wrote to the participants suggesting that, after seeing the outcome of using both the VSM and the BSM, we could then revisit the question of whether a 'soft' method was still necessary. Everybody agreed.

## **10.5 Conclusion**

This Chapter has presented my use of the BSM, Stage 2. Initially, my Stage 2 analysis resulted in the production of a list of possible management systems methods to use: VSM, BSM, IP, NGT, CSH, SAST and SSM (arranged in order of the number of times the method was chosen as appropriate for a concern that had been

raised). Follow up individual meetings were carried out with each of the seven individual interviewees and the BLYC group to see if the methods could address their concerns. The methods were briefly described to them, and they confirmed that the methods chosen seemed appropriate to tackle those concerns. Nevertheless, a prioritization exercise conducted with the group of stakeholders resulted in a resurfacing of people's doubts about 'soft' methods, and it was decided to focus on the VSM and BSM in Mode 1, Stage 3 (Recommendations for Action). The next chapter reports the implementation of these approaches.



**PART E : ACTION 2 (行動 2)**

**MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE CHANGES**

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **FIELDWORK - THE APPLICATION OF BSM MODE 1 STAGE 3 IN BLIA: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

#### **11.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 10, I reported how a list of management systems methods were generated which seemed appropriate for tackling the concerns which had been raised by participants, and how these were prioritized. This chapter reports the carrying out of the final stage of the BSM intervention (Mode 1 Stage 3 “Recommendations for Action”) for the issue “should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?”

#### **11.2 Application of the VSM**

##### **11.2.1 Structure Problems**

Prior to attempting the VSM re-design of BLIA YAD, I again consulted with all the interviewees to identify the particular structure-related problems they thought existed in BLIA. The problems are summarized as follows:

- (1) The BLIA, R.O.C. headquarters had many sections directly reporting to it. The ‘Adult’ section was just one of many, and the ‘Young Adults’ section was part of

this. Usually there were only one or two Buddhist priests and a few part-time volunteers in the 'Young Adults' section to help it deal with all matters and conduct activities for all the branches throughout Taiwan.

- (2) BLIA HQ was directly leading all the local branches in Taiwan, resulting in a lot of direct contacts which caused a heavy workload.
- (3) The heavy workload meant that the people working in the HQ perceived themselves as chronically short staffed with no obvious way to handle all the necessary tasks.
- (4) Because of the staff shortage at HQ, Buddhist priests were appointed as supervisors in local branch temples but this created another problem because they did not know the mission of BLIA YAD and each supervisor guided young members in their own way and established their own local power base.
- (5) In BLIA there was a staff rotation rule, which led to uncertainty, loss of 'organizational memory' and inefficiency. Every three years or less, the Buddhist priests were transferred to other posts. The interviewees claimed that each time this happened, it took a new person coming in a long time to get to know all the branches. Also the people in the branches changed periodically so maintaining contacts and information flows was difficult.
- (6) Working young members (YAD) and students (BLYC) were in two separate groups for several years, which increased problems of communication between them and allowed inefficiencies to develop (as already reported earlier in the

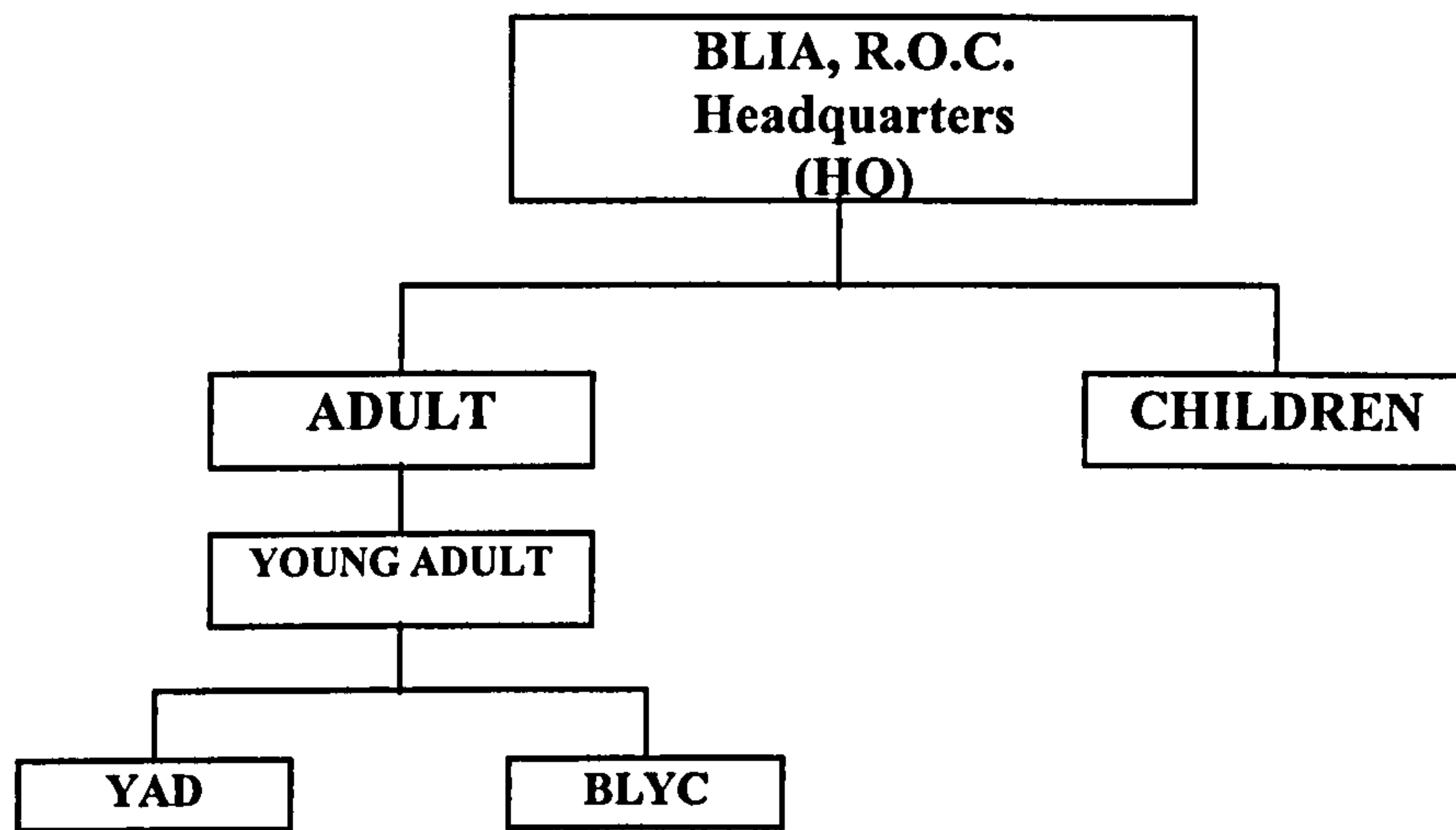


thesis). However, as revealed during my BSM intervention, the top-down decision to merge BLIA YAD and BLYC had created unhappiness and conflict between the two sections. Although there was now some acceptance of the integration decision, they were unsure how to manage their combined organization in order to put the conflict behind them.

### **11.2.2 The Structure Before the Application of the VSM**

The diagram of the organizational structure used by the BLIA, R.O.C. headquarters, before my BSM/VSM intervention, shows both its internal relationship with BLIA YAD and BLYC and its external relationship with other parts of BLIA. This can be found in Figure 11.1.

The 'Young Adult' members were aged 16-35, the 'Adult' members were older than this and the 'Children' were younger. The Adult division had many sections directly reporting to it (not shown in Figure 11.1). One of these was the 'Young Adult' section. This 'Young Adult' section was in two parts - the YAD (Youth Adult Division) and the BLYC (Buddha's Light Youth Centers). As revealed during the interviews in Chapter 9, the YAD did nothing other than help the priests and Monastery Temples set up youth-related activities. The BLYC organized mainly social activities for its members. Just prior to my BSM intervention, the BLIA, R.O.C. headquarters had, without consultation, given the command that the YAD and the BLYC had to merge together.



*Figure 11.1 The Relationship of BLIA HQ, BLIA YAD, and BLYC (Before the BSM and VSM were introduced into this organization)*

### **11.2.3 Procedure for the VSM Application**

The BSM intervention (Stage 1) had revealed that those associated with YAD and BLYC had different aspirations and perspectives; there were poor information flows; problems arose from the geographical spread and cultural differences between branches; people felt that the organizational structure was inadequate; and there were a lack of appropriate activities being organized in YAD, particularly for students.

I offered to carry out the re-design for BLIA myself, consulting with other stakeholders along the way. The alternative would have been a fully participative process, but several factors led me to believe that an 'expert led' approach would work best. First, I was the only person with knowledge of the VSM, and I did not have time to train others. Second, I was concerned about using a 'soft' process (other than the BSM) given people's attitudes to my previous use of SSM. Third, I had

clearly gained the confidence of all the stakeholders, from the senior managers of BLIA YAD through to the students in BLYC, so I thought an 'expert-led' approach would be effective (provided that I still maintained communications with others). Fourth, the Division Leader specifically asked me to play this role in the organizational re-design, confirming that I had the confidence of the senior management. Fifth, several stakeholders said to me that I was the only person who could truly see the 'big picture' of all the problems that the different interviewees had raised.

Since there was only limited time available for this VSM work, I kept the recommendations reasonably general, allowing the stakeholders to take ownership over the details of implementation. The new design was accepted by the stakeholders with only minor adjustments to the functions at each level. This 'expert-led' but consultative approach is in-line with other applications of the VSM in the literature (Espejo and Harnden, 1989).

#### **11.2.4 The Viable System Model (VSM)**

The VSM was proposed by Beer (1979, 1981, 1985). It is a systemic design for organization viability using cybernetic principles. Viability is defined as the ability to respond effectively to even unpredicted environmental changes. The VSM is briefly explained below.

The VSM contains five functional parts (Figure 11.2): implementation, co-ordination, control, intelligence and policy. These five parts are linked by essential



communication flows, including feedback loops within the organization and with its environment. They are called systems 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. For viability, a system must contain all five functions with the defined communication links.

System 1 carries out the task of the viable system - the operations. There are usually several operational units. Each unit is also a viable system itself, and can be modelled using the VSM. The idea that different levels of organization can be modelled in the same manner is called “recursion” by Beer (1979, 1981, 1985). Each system 1 has its own autonomous management, and is in contact with its environment. Each unit management reports only relevant information to higher levels, and is given instructions and policy from these higher levels.

System 2 is the co-ordination function for the activities of all System 1 units, to produce greater harmony and efficiency for the whole viable system. System 2 provides a ‘corporate regulatory center’ for the managements of System 1 operational units, and it links to System 3.

System 3 provides control and is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the viable system. In order to provide this control, System 3 receives and transmits three types of information. Firstly, it sends and receives information to all of the System 1 operational units, and upwards to higher functions. Secondly, it receives information from System 2. Thirdly, it receives information from System 3\*, the audit channel. The task of System 3 is to distribute policy and monitor implementation; allocate resources; monitor the performance of system 1 units; and transmit information to, and receive orders and information from, the higher level functions.

System 4 is the intelligence function, and it has two main tasks. Firstly, System 4 passes and filters information between System 5 and Systems 1 to 3. Secondly, System 4 gathers relevant 'intelligence' information from the external environment. Inside System 4 internal and external information is brought together, analyzed and then distributed to other parts of the viable system. System 4 must identify threats and opportunities.

System 5 directs the whole system and supplies policy, decided with reference to the internal and external information. System 5 also has to arbitrate between Systems 3 and 4 to ensure whole system efficiency.

### **11.2.5 Recommended Structure After Application of the VSM**

Figures 11.3, 11.4, and 11.5 represent different levels of recursion of the viable system (recursion levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively using Beer's, 1985, terminology). The recommended new structure for BLIA YAD, R.O.C. and its relationship with BLIA, R.O.C. headquarters is given in Figure 11.3. Figure 11.4 presents the recommended new structural relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ and its regional Area Offices. Figure 11.5 shows the recommended new structural relationship of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Regional Area Offices and its regional local branches.

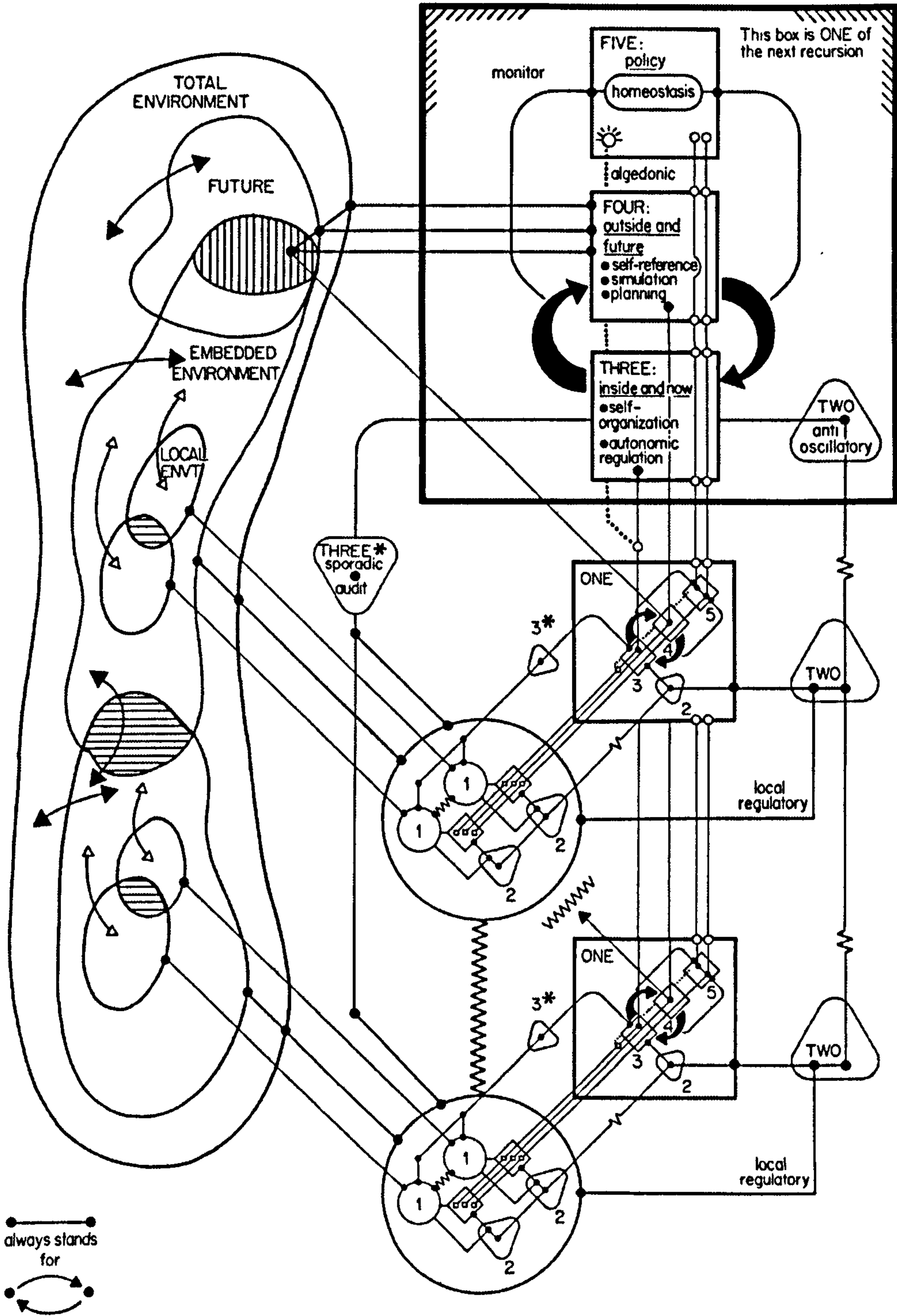


Figure 11.2 The Viable System model (VSM) (Beer, 1985: 136)



Six main changes were proposed in the recommended re-design:

- (1) BLIA YAD should have its own headquarters, its own leader and its own team who form the 'Policy' function of the VSM. This team should liaise with BLIA R.O.C. headquarters via the BLIA R.O.C. headquarters Youth Section.
- (2) External information should be collected by HQ middle managers and Area middle managers, and should be passed to relevant people at each level, to provide the VSM 'Intelligence' function.
- (3) There should be four area offices - North, Middle, East (including some small islands), and South. These should be the 'operational units' of the VSM. These area offices should be in contact with appointed HQ middle manager members who can perform the VSM 'Control' function. All information should be distributed and collected through these offices to all branches in their areas. This should address the problem of all the branches being controlled by HQ, causing a heavy workload and perceived staff shortages, with HQ being unable to deal with everything they are required to manage. Each Area Office should only need to deal with about one-quarter of the number of branches that HQ had to deal with, and this should be their main function (in contrast with the HQ which should focus primarily on strategic planning, or System 5 level activities). Also, this should overcome the problems associated with staff rotation at HQ, because the Area Offices can have more continuity of staff who can pass on relevant information to new people.

(4) BLIA (HQ) Buddhist supervisors and Youth Advisors should ensure that there is coordination between the four areas. This is the VSM 'Coordination' function. The Youth Advisors should undertake a training programme to learn more about Buddhist Thinking and also about the management skills of coordination – how to coordinate, what to coordinate, and with whom. The Youth Advisors should monitor viewpoints in BLIA YAD in order to balance this with feedback from the Buddhist priests in the Temples.

(5) Organization sections should be re-designed and given clear aims. Due to the post rotation rules in BLIA (I was informed by the senior management that I would have to accept these as a constraint in my redesign), the new simplified structure and clear aims should nevertheless help increase effectiveness.

(6) Under the new amalgamated structure, both working young members and students should be considered equally important and receive the same level of consideration. The amalgamation should help reduce financial expenditure and enable a critical mass of appropriate activities (both religious and fun) to be provided for all young members. I recommended that there should be a balance between religious Temple activities, including Buddhist teaching, and non-religious social activities, which my earlier BSM intervention had suggested would be more attractive to student members.

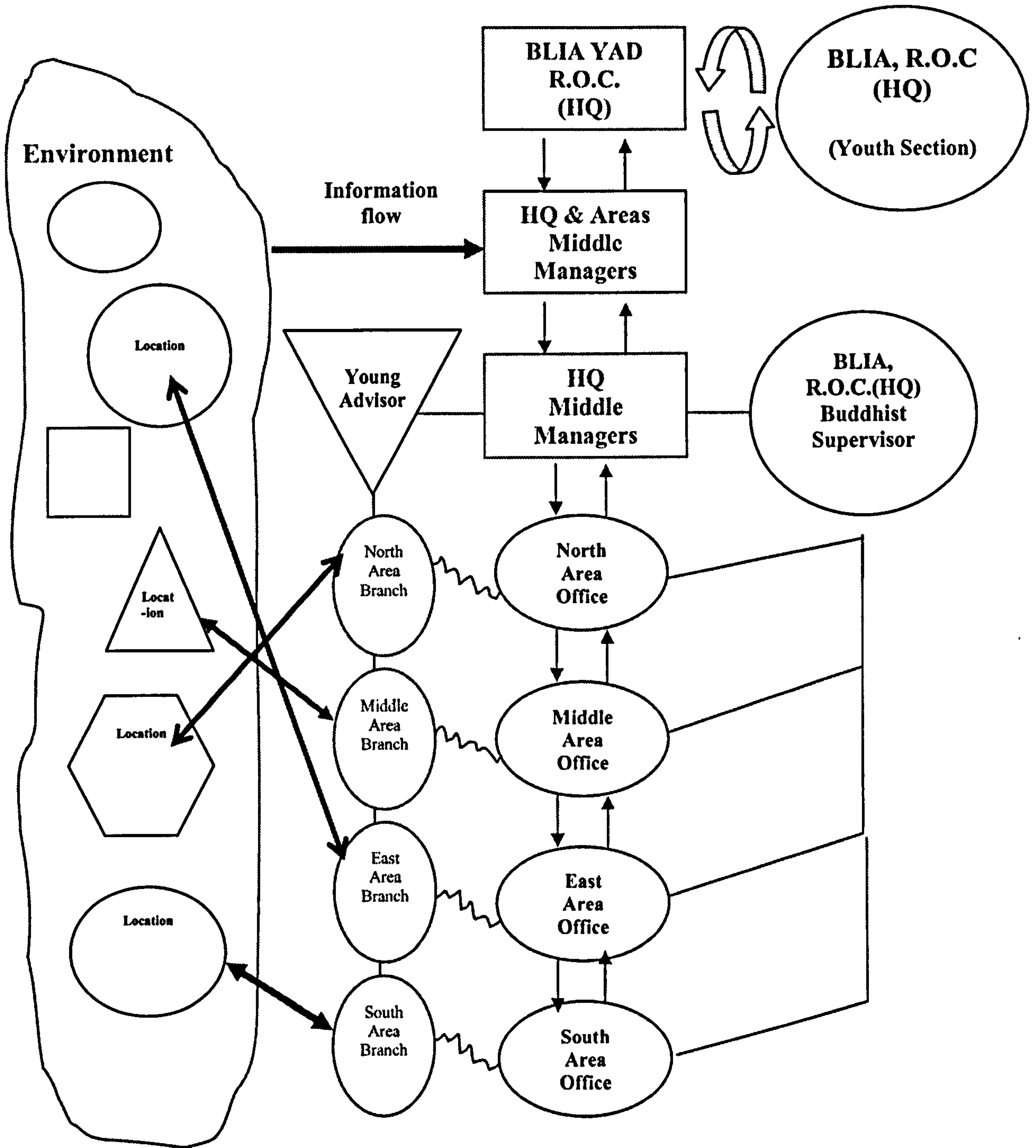


Figure 11.3 New Relationship between BLIA, R.O.C. HQ, Youth Section, BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ and the Regional Area Office



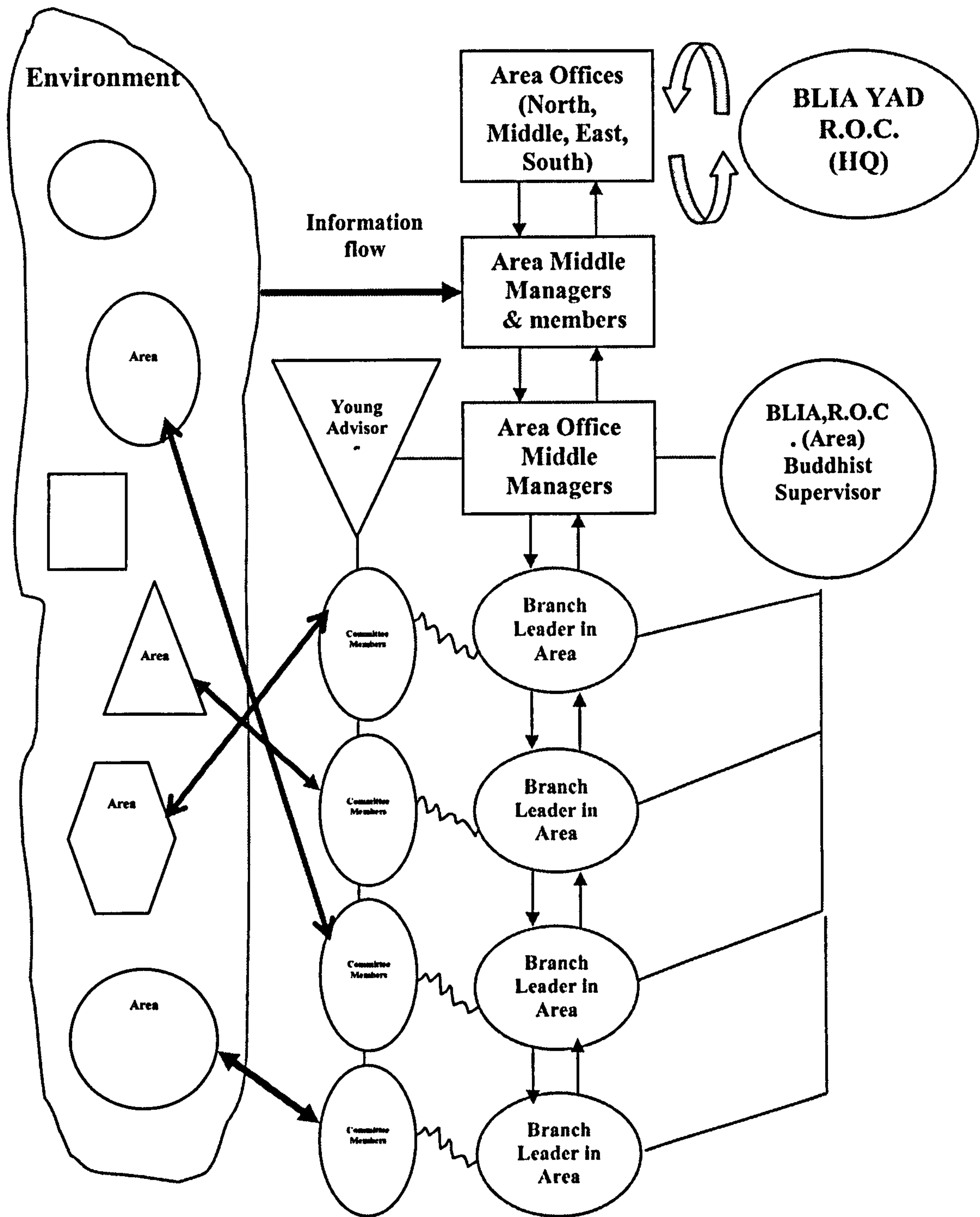


Figure 11.4 New Relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ and the Regional Area Offices

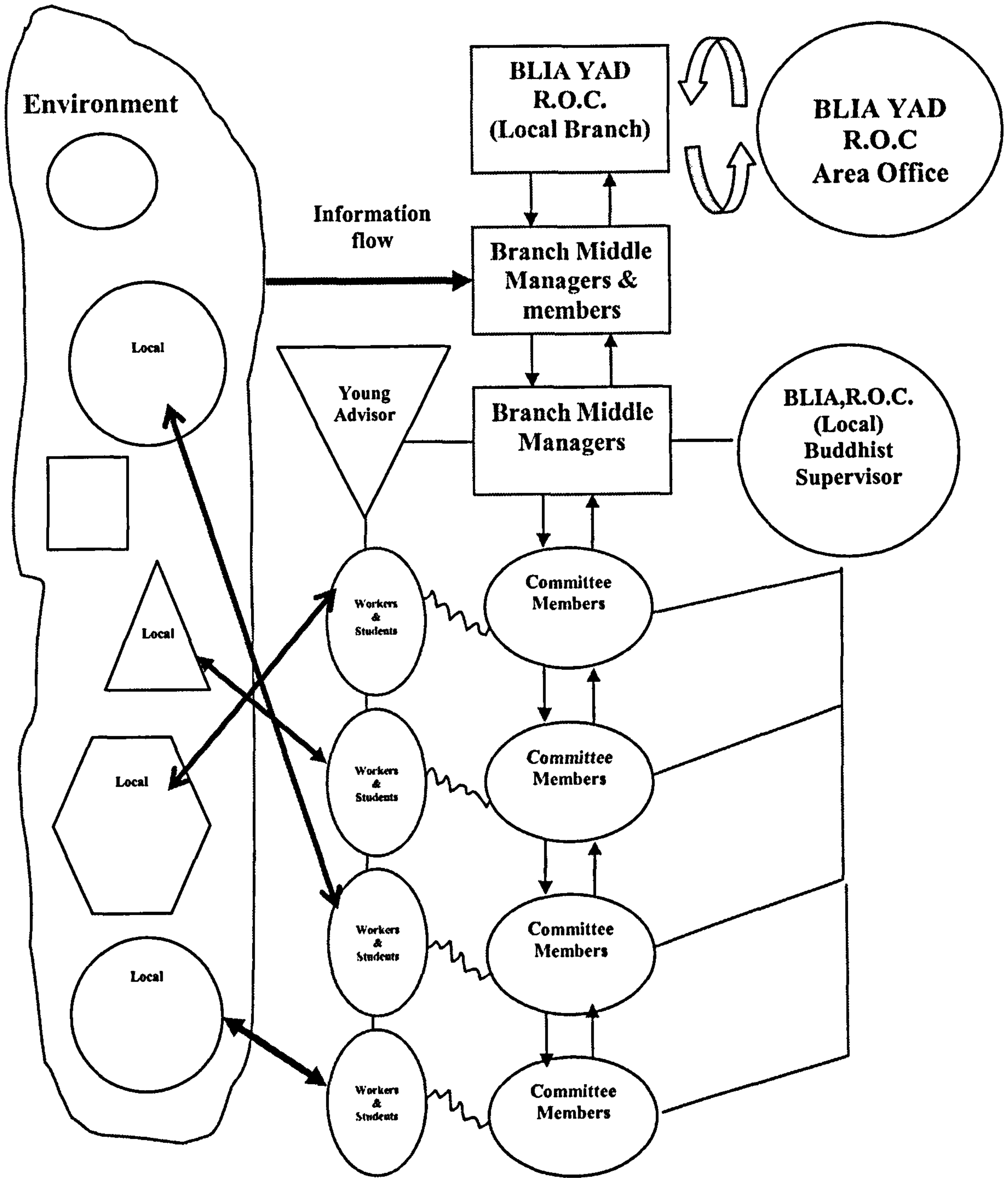


Figure 11.5 New Relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C., the Regional Area Office, Local Branches and Members

The structure of the proposed relationship between BLIA YAD headquarters and the Area Offices is given in Figure 11.6. This shows the two-way flow of information, upwards as well as downwards. The kind of information to be passed should include relevant policy and international BLIA information (downwards), and information about local meetings, planned activities, members' views and local membership changes (upwards).

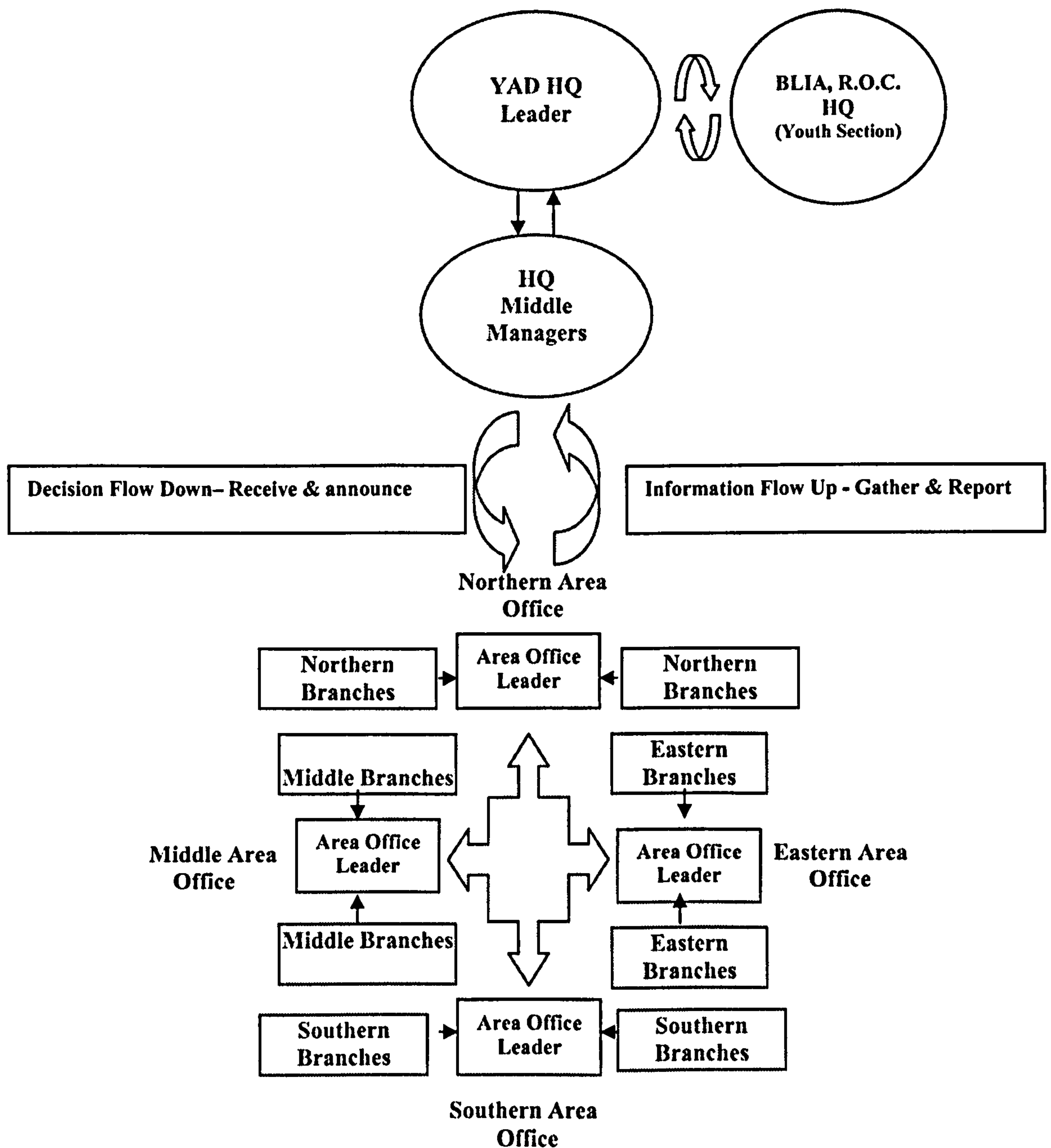


Figure 11.6 Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Headquarters and the Area Offices



The proposed structure and relationship between functions in BLIA YAD headquarters is presented in Figure 11.7. This shows that there should be five functions - Information Maintenance, Activities Planning, Secretary, Financial Control, and Organization Development. This should mean that there is good information flow; that there are appropriate activities for all young people; that the budget is controlled; and that the organization can develop effectively.

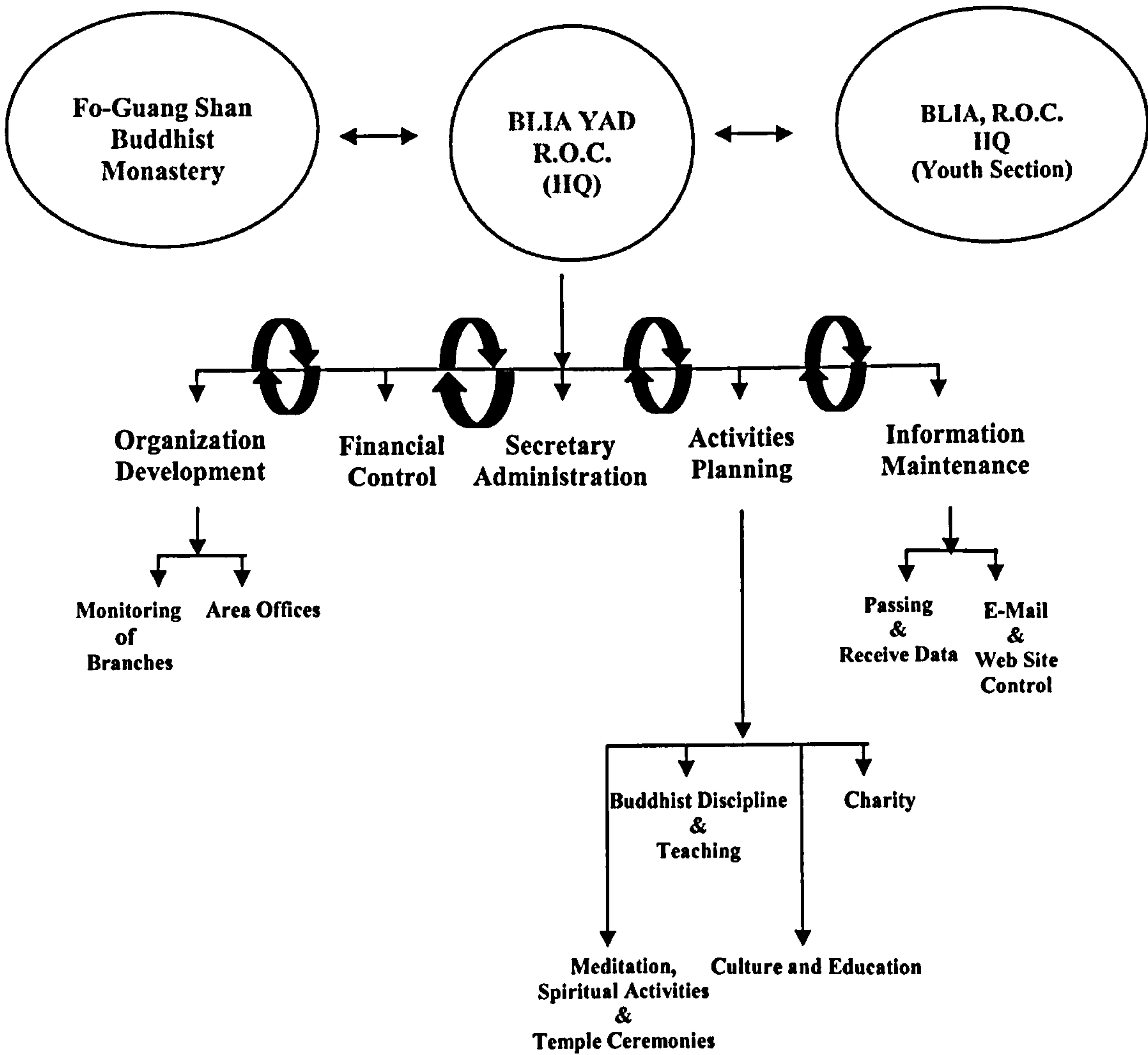
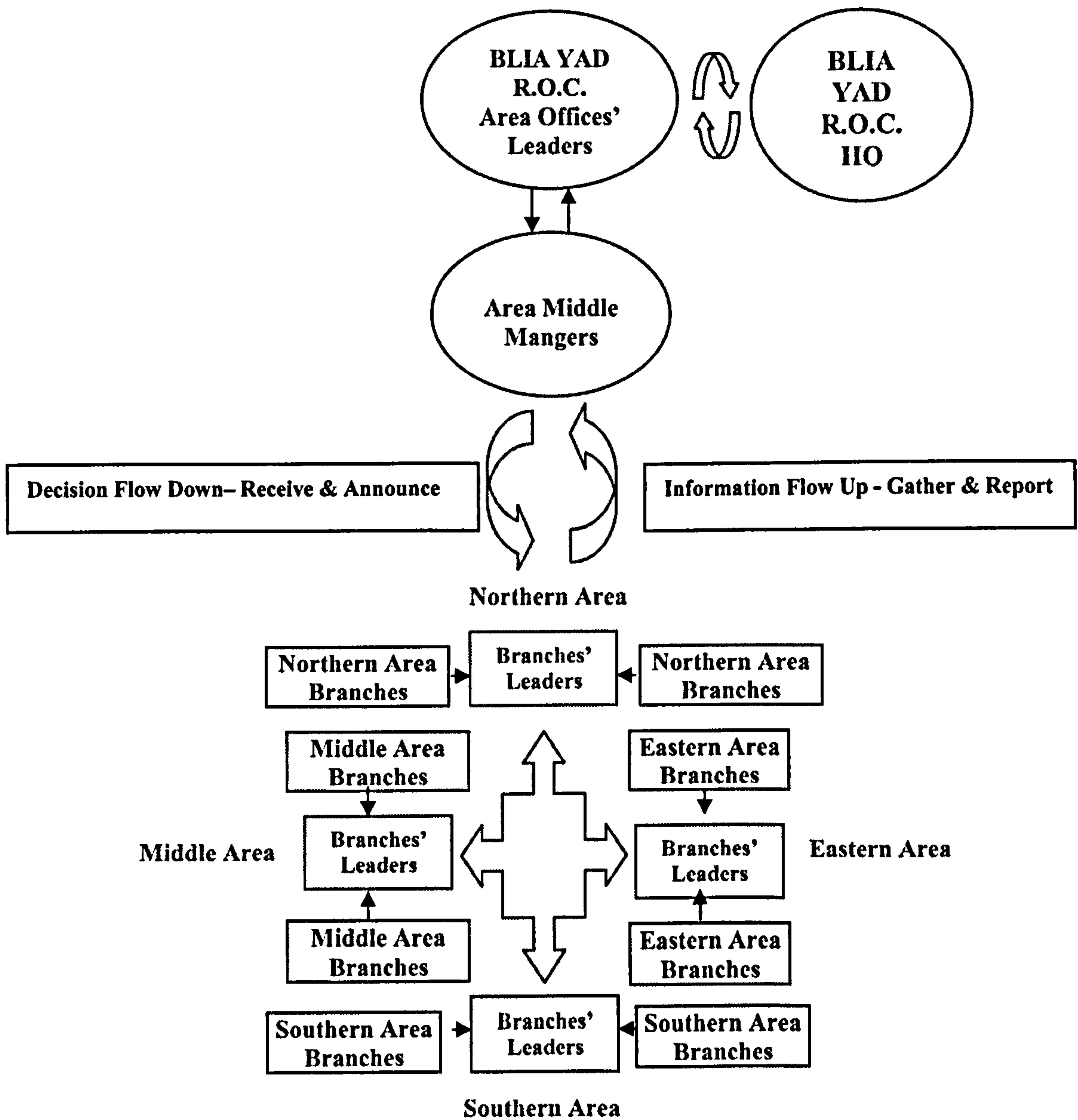


Figure 11.7 Proposed organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Headquarters

Figures 11.8 and 11.9 explain the proposed relationships between BLIA YAD Area Offices and Branches and Area Offices' functions. Figure 11.10 presents the proposed relationship between BLIA YAD local branches and their members. The proposed functions of the local branches are shown in Figure 11.11. These diagrams indicate how functional activities can exist at the different levels of recursion in order that national, regional, local and individual member matters can be dealt with.



*Figure 11.8 Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Area Offices and their regional Branches*

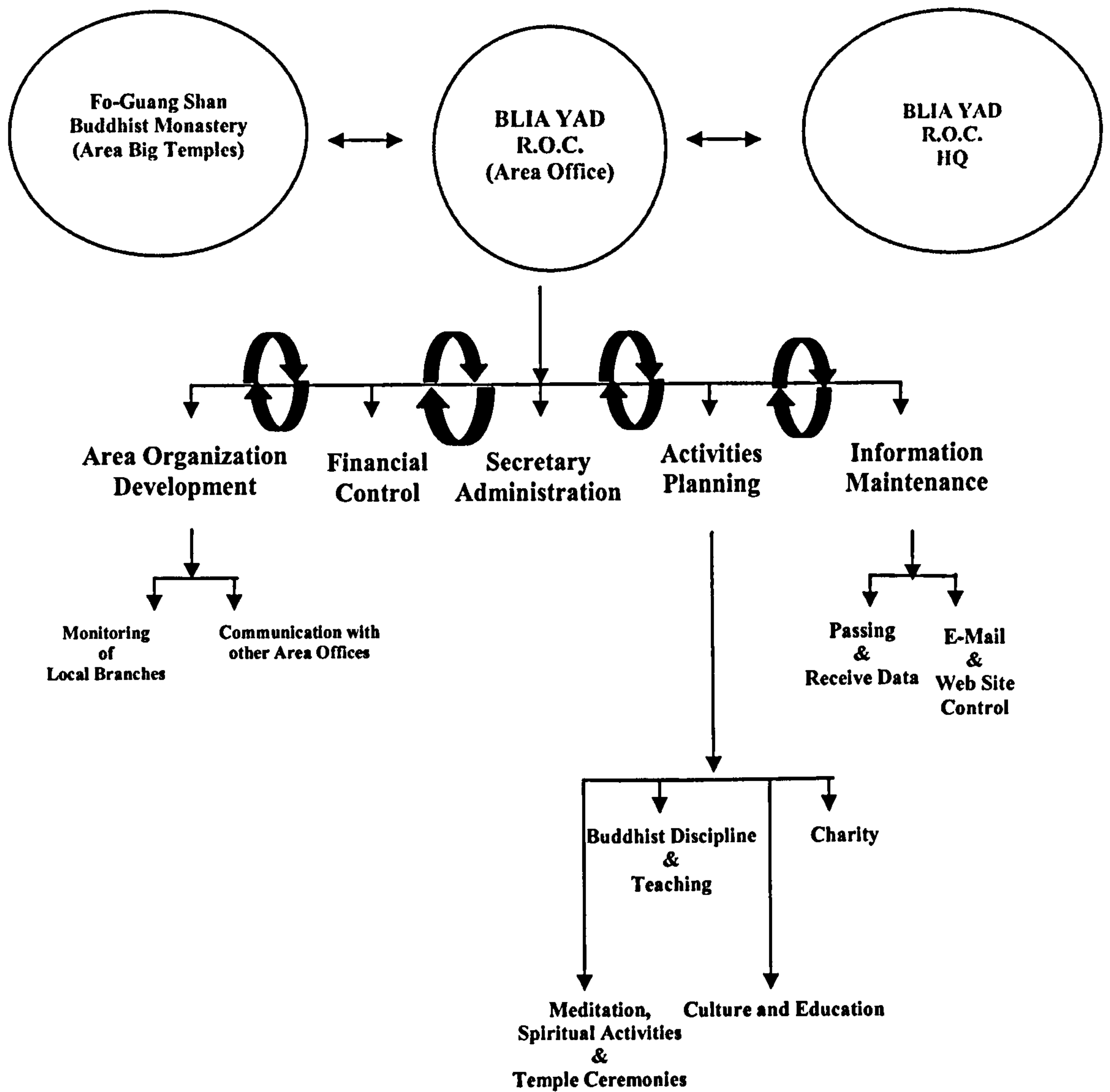


Figure 11.9 Proposed new organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Area Offices



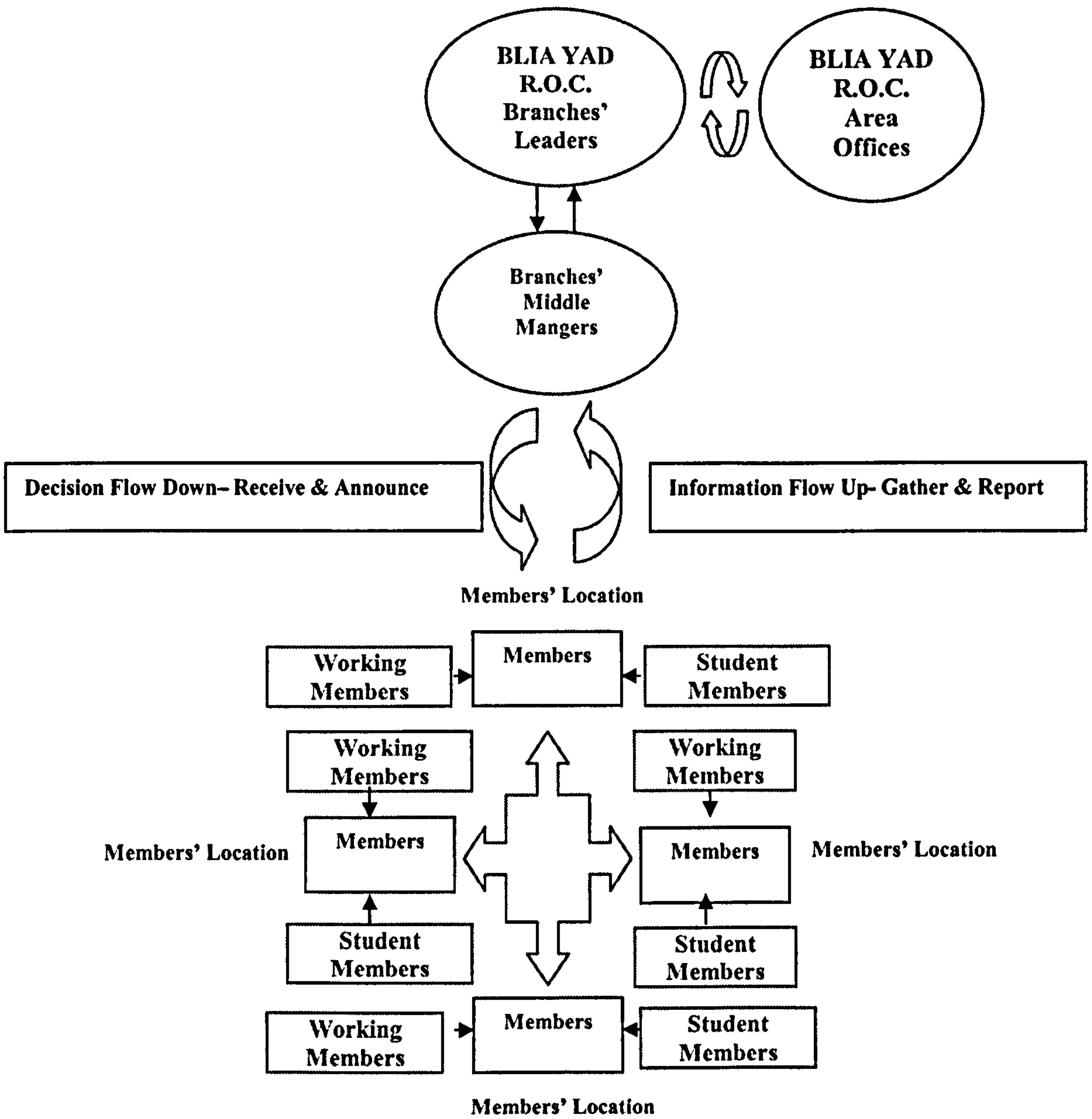


Figure 11.10 Proposed new relationship between BLIA YAD, R.O.C. local branches and their members

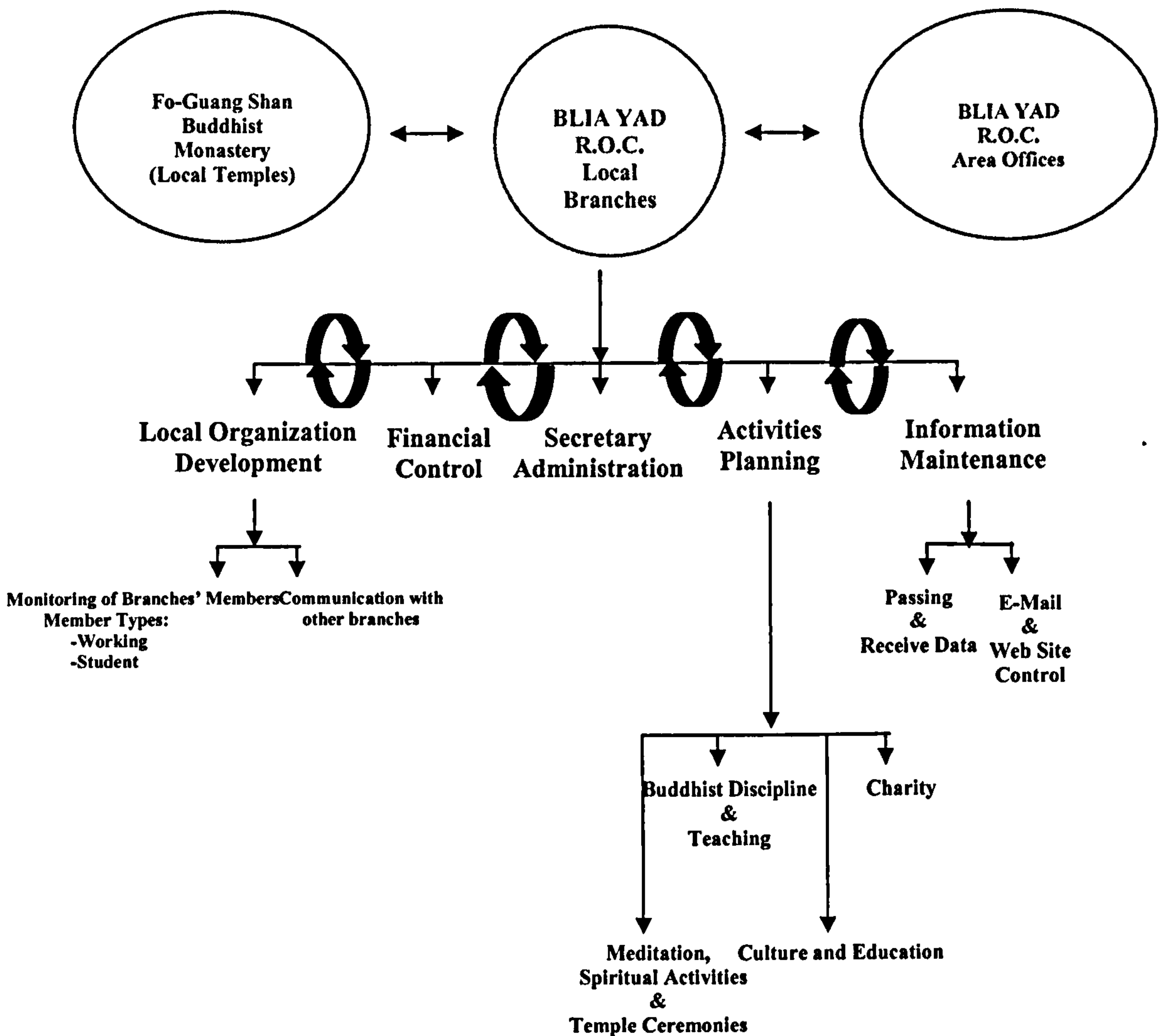


Figure 11.11 Proposed new organization of the functions of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. local branches

In Spring 2004, the above redesign based on the VSM was implemented in BLIA YAD. Having explained my use of the VSM, I will now go on to discuss the wider use of BSM in BLIA YAD.

## **11.3 Recommendation for Action - Wider use of the BSM in Decision Making**

### **11.3.1 How Wider Use of the BSM Came About**

During the BSM intervention interviews, firstly, the Division Leader and then the Assistant Division Leader asked me to teach them how to use the BSM. The Division Leader found the BSM useful and taught several other people both in Temples and in the Adult section where she has an important position. I know this because some of these people telephoned or emailed me to ask some questions about the BSM.

In the following two sections, I present some feedback I received about the wider use of the BSM in terms of both individual and organizational usage.

### **11.3.2 Individual BSM Usage**

The BSM has been adopted for use in decision making by several key individuals in BLIA. Two examples are given below.

#### **(a) The Assistant Division Leader: Telephone conversation 28 March 2004**

The Assistant Division Leader told me that, in January 2004, she was informed that she needed to quickly organize a very important activity which was the first BLIA YAD R.O.C. members' party after the BLIA YAD and BLYC integration. She was still concerned about the conflict between the BLIA YAD and BLYC members. She used BSM Mode 1 Stage 1's twelve questions to identify and then meet with as many



relevant stakeholders as possible. By using the BSM together, she said that they really communicated and cooperated, and they decided on a suitable time and way to make this party succeed. The final result was that the party was held in a big Buddhist temple, and nearly 50% of BLIA YAD branch members joined in (including previous BLYC student members). The party was held in February 2004, and it was very successful. The Assistant Division Leader has informed me that, following this experience, she now uses the BSM whenever there is a major decision to be taken.

**(b) Division Leader: Telephone conversation, 29 March 2004**

In our telephone conversation, which took place nearly five months after I introduced the BSM to her, the Division Leader explained to me that she usually keeps BSM Stage 1's 12 questions in her mind and considers them when she makes decisions. She uses BSM Mode 1, Stage 1, to locate which people she needs to put within her decision boundary. She then discusses the decision with relevant stakeholders. She sets aside her right to autocratic decision making, and also uses the BSM to discuss the right methods to use before she makes decisions. She told me that she experiences decision making differently, and thinks differently now.

In my telephone conversation with her, she claimed that no 'ordinary' management method could move Buddhists in Taiwan away from their autocratic decision making culture, and neither would any 'ordinary' method be accepted by Buddhist priests. She said that only the BSM, with its synergy of Buddhist thinking and systems thinking, offers an acceptable (she called it "ideal") method to change the Buddhist culture around power relations without making Buddhist priests feel antagonistic.

She also said that, after she had used the BSM, she finally found out there are many good opinions out there in peoples' minds, she makes decisions more successfully, and earns more support from people than before.

Now she uses the questions from BSM Mode 1, Stages 1 and 2, when she conducts every breakfast meeting. She has also used the BSM process and questions when she has made decisions in partnership with the senior management of BLIA, R.O.C. HQ.

### **11.3.3 Organizational BSM Usage (at April 2004)**

1. The BSM has now been publicly adopted as 'the main Decision-Making System' within the BLIA YAD, R.O.C. HQ, the BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Area Offices, and the BLIA YAD, R.O.C. Local Branches. Furthermore, the young members of BLIA YAD, R.O.C. have adopted the BSM process to organize their own activities.
2. BSM is now used by 'some' people at the top of BLIA, R.O.C. HQ. Nobody has been able to give me a precise number, and discovering this had to be put beyond the scope of the research given my need to write up, but I have been informed by the Division Leader of BLIA YAD that the influence has been significant. For some other people top-down power is still preferred, and this is especially so for some of the older Buddhist priests, but most of the younger priests are happy to use the BSM when they have meetings and make organizational decisions. For example, the BSM is used in the BLIA, R.O.C. HQ monthly meeting, which is mainly to make decisions for monthly activities. Also, people generally seem to be happy and willing to be participants when other people apply the BSM.



3. BSM is now used by some Buddhist branch temple priests, because since BSM has been adopted as the main decision-making system of BLIA YAD, R.O.C., they need to learn and use it to supervise young members. Initially, they reported that the BSM is good for supporting them in making decisions, so now some priests want to adopt it as the official management method for the Buddhist temples.
  
4. Since the BSM is now the main decision making system for the youth groups, and appears to be working well within them, the CEO of BLIA, R.O.C. HQ has expressed his approval and has officially sanctioned its use within the society. Now the senior management of BLIA, R.O.C. is planning to introduce the BSM into the Adult groups, but of course the Adult groups may present a new and complex context. More time may no doubt be needed to train the adults to use the BSM and then possibly it may be spread more widely still.

## **11.4 Conclusion**

This Chapter has presented my use of BSM Stage 3 (“Recommendations for Action”), in relation to the issue “should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?” The Stage 3 outcomes were firstly urgent application of the VSM to re-structure BLIA, and secondly wider usage of my BSM to provide a more rounded (systemic) decision making process.

In Spring 2004, the recommended re-design based on the VSM was implemented in BLIA, and the BSM was adopted as the official BLIA YAD decision-making system.



My evaluation of the intervention, including feedback about the success (or not) of the use of the VSM and BSM in BLIA, is presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

# **FIELDWORK - THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BSM MODE 2 IN BLIA: EVALUATION**

### **12.1 Introduction**

BSM has its own evaluation system, called BSM Mode 2, which was described in Chapter 7. In that chapter I made a general case for the most appropriate methods to use to evaluate the BSM intervention in BLIA (Section 7.4.3) and this is briefly reviewed in Section 12.2. In this chapter, I go into more detail on the evaluation methods (Section 12.3). Then the results of applying my evaluation procedure in BLIA are reported and discussed in Section 12.4.

This field work evaluation (BSM Mode 2) was carried out in June/July 2004 approximately six months after the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 interviews had been completed, and about four and a half months after completion of both BSM Mode 1, Stages 2 and 3.

### **12.2 Methods for ‘Evaluation of Impacts’**

In Chapter 7, I argued that it would only be realistic to undertake the evaluation of the BSM intervention by carrying out individual interviews, because the prospect of a group discussion of an individual’s past and present decision making could be too

great a disincentive for potential participants (they might lose face), and could harm my intervention using the BSM by discouraging participation in both BSM Modes 1 and 2. Also, the consultation with stakeholders (reported in Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2) suggested that individual interviews involving semi-structured guiding questions, some based on Buddhist principles but supplemented with further questions of specific relevance to the intervention and including an opportunity for open discussion to allow people to surface any other concerns in their own terms if necessary, would be most appropriate (also see Section 7.4.3).

### **12.3 Evaluation Procedure for BSM in BLIA**

It is essential to discover the impacts that resulted from BSM being introduced and implemented in BLIA, R.O.C., in order to evaluate whether or not BSM has been, and can be, an effective methodology which can help to deal with problematic issues in this, and other, Buddhist organizations. This relates to the *effectiveness* of the BSM.

It is also important to find out whether or not BSM can be easily understood, successfully introduced and make people interested to use it in BLIA YAD, R.O.C., and whether or not the chosen methods were acceptable. This relates to the *acceptability* of the BSM and the methods chosen through it.

I therefore decided that the procedure for the ‘evaluation of impacts’ (Section 12.2) would consist of semi-structured interviews, but with the opportunity for open discussion, divided into two sections. First, evaluation of the *effectiveness* of the



BSM following application within the organization, and second, evaluation of its *acceptability*. An interview schedule was drawn up (Appendix II) comprised of two parts (A and B). These are reviewed below:

Part A: Evaluation of the effectiveness of the BSM Intervention in BLIA YAD, R.O.C.

From the output of the boundary critique and choice/design of methods in Chapter 7, the evaluation of effectiveness of the BSM intervention in BLIA YAD, R.O.C. used two kinds of semi-structured questions (Part A of the Fieldwork Evaluation Sheet shown in Appendix II), as follows:

- (a) Twelve Buddhist questions - based on the BSM five core Buddhist concepts
- (b) A series of twelve more general questions, related to the BSM intervention.

However, following each question, there was an opportunity for 'any comments' by respondents.

By using the BSM twelve questions as the basis to develop this questionnaire. I was making the judgement that it would be more easily understood in the BLIA context than an entirely new set of questions, because the interviewees would be familiar with the Buddhist concepts, and the questionnaire answers could be compared (if necessary) with the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 answers about the problem issue. The aim of my questions was to reveal the differences between 'before' and 'after' use of BSM from the perspectives of interviewees.

Part B: Evaluation of acceptability of the BSM intervention within BLIA YAD, R.O.C.:

Questions were asked to find out whether BSM was perceived as a good methodology; could be easily understood; and could therefore expect wider usage. Five questions were asked about methods in Part B of the BSM Fieldwork Evaluation Sheet (Appendix II).

## **12.4 BSM Mode 2 Implementation - Evaluation Outputs**

Fifteen people either in BLIA YAD ROC or with knowledge of it (Respondent number 15 was an ex-YAD Branch Leader who had recently left BLIA) completed the Fieldwork Evaluation Sheet during either face-to-face or telephone interviews with me. I carried out the interviews during late June and early July 2004, and approached the people who had been involved in the BSM Mode 1 intervention and other people I thought most affected by the intervention at different levels in the organization, including both priests and lay members. The fifteen included the people interviewed in the BSM Mode 1 stages who were still accessible (but several had changed roles) and some other people who agreed to participate only in the evaluation, so I could sweep in wider opinions about impacts. The respondents came from a range of levels in BLIA HQ, YAD, and the former BLYC (now amalgamated with YAD). Their roles in BLIA were as follows:

- (1) YAD Assistant Division Leader
- (2) YAD Division Leader

- (3) A Headquarters Secretary General
- (4) Two Headquarters staff members
- (5) A former BLYC Leader
- (6) A YAD Young Branch Leader
- (7) Two YAD Branch members
- (8) Two former BLYC Branch Leaders
- (9) A YAD Temple Supervisor
- (10) A YAD Teacher/Guide
- (11) An Adult Group member
- (12) An ex-YAD Branch Leader (now outside BLIA).

#### **12.4.1 Outputs from Part A: Effectiveness**

##### **12.4.1.1 Answers to the Twelve Buddhist questions**

Thirteen respondents answered the twelve questions based on Buddhist thinking by reflecting on their own experiences with the BSM in my intervention. The other two respondents had not used the BSM, so could not answer these questions from their own experience (although respondent 15, the ex-YAD member, said he had heard that more people, especially young members, were now being listened to, which arguably indicates that the BSM had successfully prevented the privileging of a narrow set of concerns over wider concerns).

All thirteen respondents thought that the BSM fostered desirable motivations. Six of these indicated that using the BSM had helped them in considering other people's



motivations (compared with the approach they might have taken without the BSM) and they said that it led to a better understanding of desirable motivations than existed previously.

Eleven of the thirteen thought that the BSM had eliminated covetousness, resentment or maliciousness. The other two thought that there had been no change. Four of the respondents commented that this was achieved because using the BSM had widened their appreciation of others' concerns, which reduced the influence of 'negative' emotions.

Seven respondents thought that the BSM had been successful in eliminating or reducing deceitfulness and 'improper' use of language, while the other six thought that there had been no change. Seven respondents also indicated that the BSM aided people in communicating their 'true' thinking, and so helped to minimize misrepresentation.

Eleven respondents thought that the BSM produced no change in regard to tackling major misconducts, but two respondents thought the BSM did actually help in this regard. This result was probably due to the fact that major misconducts were not an issue for most of the participants, other than a couple of people who thought that wasting resources constituted a major misconduct. It was indeed these people who answered that the BSM was effective in reducing major misconducts.

All thirteen respondents thought that the BSM helped in preventing the privileging of narrow concerns over wider concerns. Six respondents commented that previously decisions were made only by those at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, and these people

did not consult others. However, now that the BSM had been adopted as the official decision making method, a wider range of people's views were regularly sought before decisions were taken.

All thirteen respondents answered that the BSM helped counteract 'idleness, apathy or avoidance'. Nine of these indicated that using BSM's step-by-step questions *requires* people to participate and is therefore effective in this regard. One person thought that there had been a major change with respect to avoidance of issues, and another commented that young members were now much more willing to contribute than previously.

Twelve respondents thought the BSM minimized misrepresentations, while one respondent thought that there had been no change. Six respondents pointed out that the BSM process helps minimize misrepresentations by widening the set of people involved in the decision making process, and the specific questions help by highlighting many factors to consider.

All thirteen respondents answered that the BSM helped promote Buddhist thinking. Six respondents commented that I had given them a management tool which includes important Buddhist principles, so they can practise Buddhism as they manage. This was important to them because, in their view, most management methods have little or no relationship with Buddhist thinking and are therefore frowned upon in the organization and are unlikely to be used.

All thirteen respondents thought that the BSM supported them in expressing a better middle path between ethical and practical imperatives. Four respondents indicated

that, in their view, the BSM allows more choices to be considered, which results in a more practical, less conflictual, course of action at the end of the day.

All thirteen respondents answered that the BSM had helped them account for key cause-condition-effect relationships. Three respondents commented that the BSM process increases awareness of consequences, which improves decision making. One respondent pointed out that making better decisions avoids the creation of new problems.

All thirteen respondents thought that the BSM had helped them account for key cultural and ecological contexts, although one respondent thought that this was no different for her personally than she would have expected had the methodology not been used (perhaps because she had already been very aware of the impacts of Chinese Buddhist culture prior to my intervention). Comments from six respondents indicated that the BSM had helped them widen consideration from a previous focus on the interviewee's own concerns, particularly when these related to a geographical region, and encouraged people to consider others' concerns in different areas.

All thirteen respondents answered that the BSM had worked better in the specified time scale compared with their previous procedures. Six respondents commented that using the BSM questions has increased the efficiency of their decision making. One respondent said that BSM reduces 'nonsense' conversation and they can now make a better decision in two meetings, than they could previously in four or five less well structured meetings.



#### **12.4.1.2 Answers to the other twelve questions on effectiveness**

Thirteen of the fifteen respondents had been directly involved in the BSM intervention on the issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? The two respondents who had not been involved had, however, been affected by the changes that resulted from my intervention and were therefore able to contribute useful answers to my evaluation questions.

Twelve of the thirteen who had been involved in the BSM intervention indicated that the BSM had provided a useful process to consider the issue. One person commented that the BSM offered a clear logic of analysis; two respondents noted that the BSM had helped them learn about others' views; six people commented that the BSM had broadened their understanding of the issue, helping them to think through the benefits and disadvantages of different courses of action.

All fifteen respondents were able to identify impacts in BLIA during the approximately six months since the BSM intervention. Twelve respondents pointed out that the conflict in BLIA YAD had either ended or been significantly reduced. They all said that there had been a successful integration into one group. Four people remarked on the wider contribution of viewpoints to decision making with not only 'top-down' but also 'bottom-up' communications and two-way listening. One respondent also noted the creation of four new area offices and websites to aid communications; the voluntary reduction of the senior management power base; the new YAD structure outside the BLIA Adult group; and use of the BSM as the

official BLIA YAD decision making system. She said that all of these changes could be traced directly back to the BSM intervention.

Almost everybody said that the most important impact was the ending of the conflict in YAD, followed by the improved communication channels creating better inter-personal and inter-group understanding, especially encouraging bottom-up information flow. The new independent structure of YAD and a reduction in the rate at which members were being lost (meaning that membership gains were now significantly outpacing losses, which was not the case previously) were also mentioned.

All fifteen respondents were able to point out consequences of the changes in organizational structure brought about by the VSM re-design, in particular the fact that BLIA YAD ROC now had a new structure independent of the BLIA Adult division with its own HQ, four area offices (North, Middle, East [including some small islands], and South), and better communications. Four respondents noted that members were more enthusiastic now that they were allowed to plan their own activities, and they now appeared keener to stay in BLIA YAD. All fifteen respondents answered that the structural changes had been positive.

All fifteen respondents indicated that there had been changes in communications in BLIA since the BSM intervention. They noted that using the BSM as the main decision making system in YAD had 'pushed' people to express their views and listen to others' views, which increased mutual awareness. Furthermore branches and people could communicate and receive information more quickly and more accurately, particularly using websites and emails.



Twelve of the fifteen respondents thought that, since the structural changes, the number of contacts (meetings, inter-communications and information exchanges) in BLIA had increased. One respondent thought that there had been no change, and one respondent noted fewer contacts. Also, twelve respondents thought that the quality of the contacts had improved, but three respondents thought that they were worse. Thirteen respondents thought contacting other people was easier, while one respondent indicated that contacting others was more difficult. Eight respondents thought that there was more 'top-down' communication, five respondents reported that there was less, and one person thought that there had been no change. However, all fifteen respondents noted more 'bottom-up' communication. While there was clearly still dissatisfaction in some circles around contacts and communications, the situation appeared to have improved for the majority of the respondents.

Fourteen respondents said that they knew of no other methods which could have produced equal or better results than the BSM in BLIA. Ten respondents thought that the BSM could not be improved, and three did suggest improvements. Two respondents thought fewer questions would produce a better BSM, while one respondent thought it could be improved by including more Buddhist concepts. Only four of the fifteen respondents had used the BSM entirely by themselves. The step-by-step process was reported to be useful and helped to speed-up decision making by those who had used it.



### **12.4.1.3 Quantitative Data**

Five respondents supplied me with quantitative data from their records which showed differences between 'before' and 'after' the BSM intervention on the issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?

The records indicated that the number of meetings or other activities held by young people in each year from 1997 to 2003 had ranged from 0 (2000, which was a year in which a major earthquake had happened) to 12 (in 1998). However, so far in 2004 (January to June) there had already been 13 meetings and other activities (Figure 12.1). Other records revealed that from 1999 to 2003, spending had exceeded income. However, with the integration of BLYC into BLIA YAD, spending during 2004 (up to June) was only about one-third of income, indicating a huge change in the organizational finances compared with 1999 to 2003 (Figure 12.2). One respondent had noted fewer complaints during 2004 than before, although she did not provide me with the precise figures to reproduce in my thesis. A number of respondents were particularly pleased that many more new members had joined branches in 2004 than in previous years (Figure 12.3), and one person noted (anecdotally) that two to three times as many members were now attending each activity.

It appears that the new structure had allowed people to define roles and responsibilities more clearly, and the use of the BSM in decision making had increased involvement and participation and led to more popular activities in the new YAD. This had reduced the rate of members leaving, which meant increased membership income. Also, the fact that attendance at each activity had increased



(because the activities had become more attractive to members, who were able to participate in their planning) had meant that the income from the activities had been more than sufficient to make them self-financing. Previously, the activities were regarded as a cost liability because of low attendance.

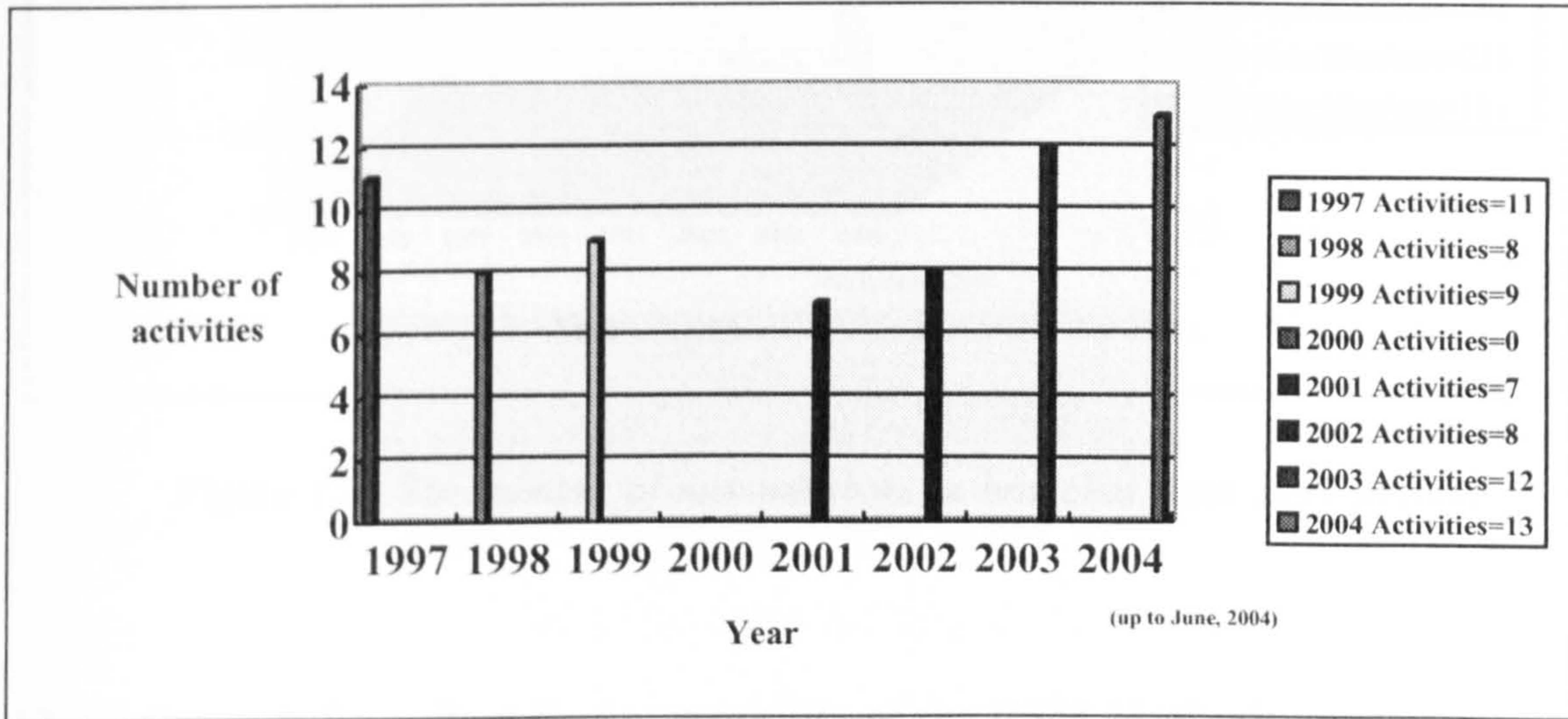


Figure 12.1 The number of BLIA young members, meetings and other activities each year from 1997 to June 2004

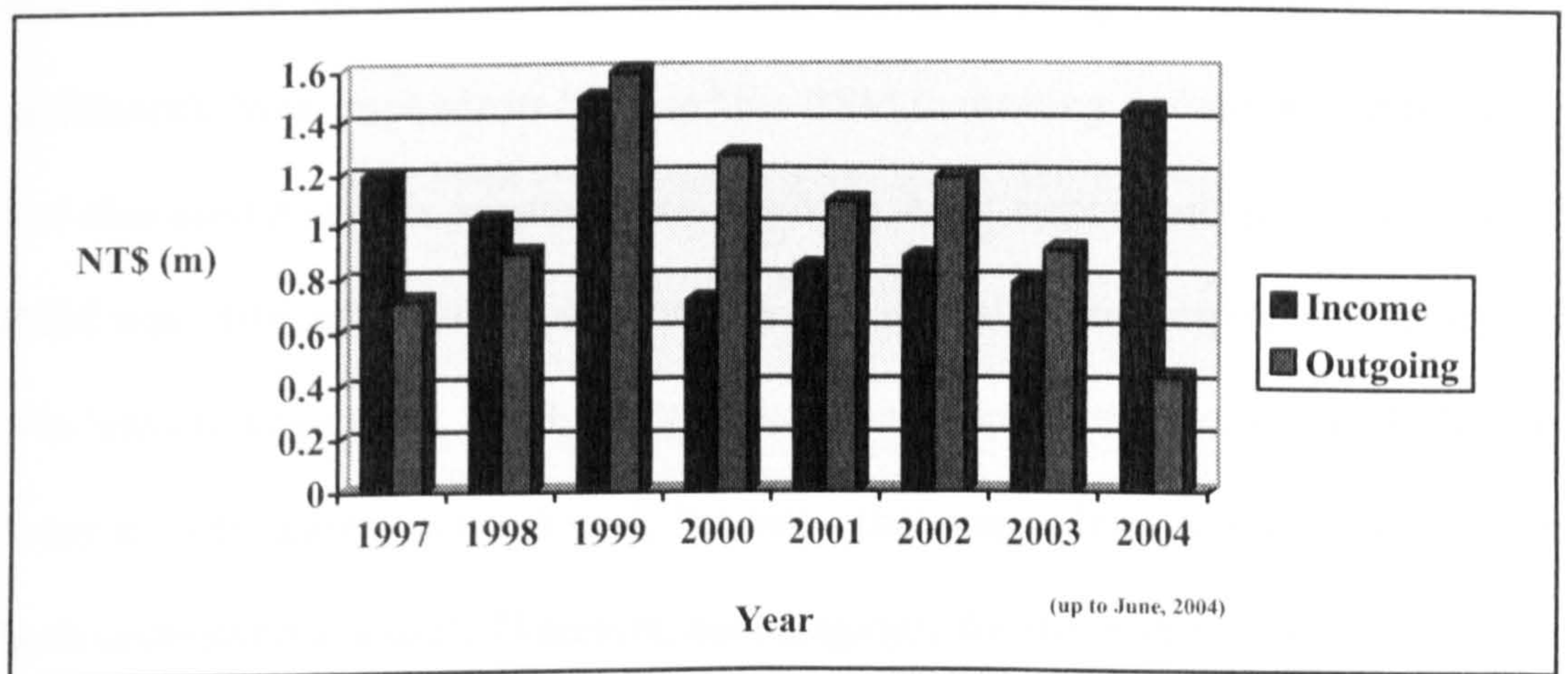


Figure 12.2 Income v. outgoing expenditure in NT\$(million) for BLIA young members each year from 1997 to June 2004



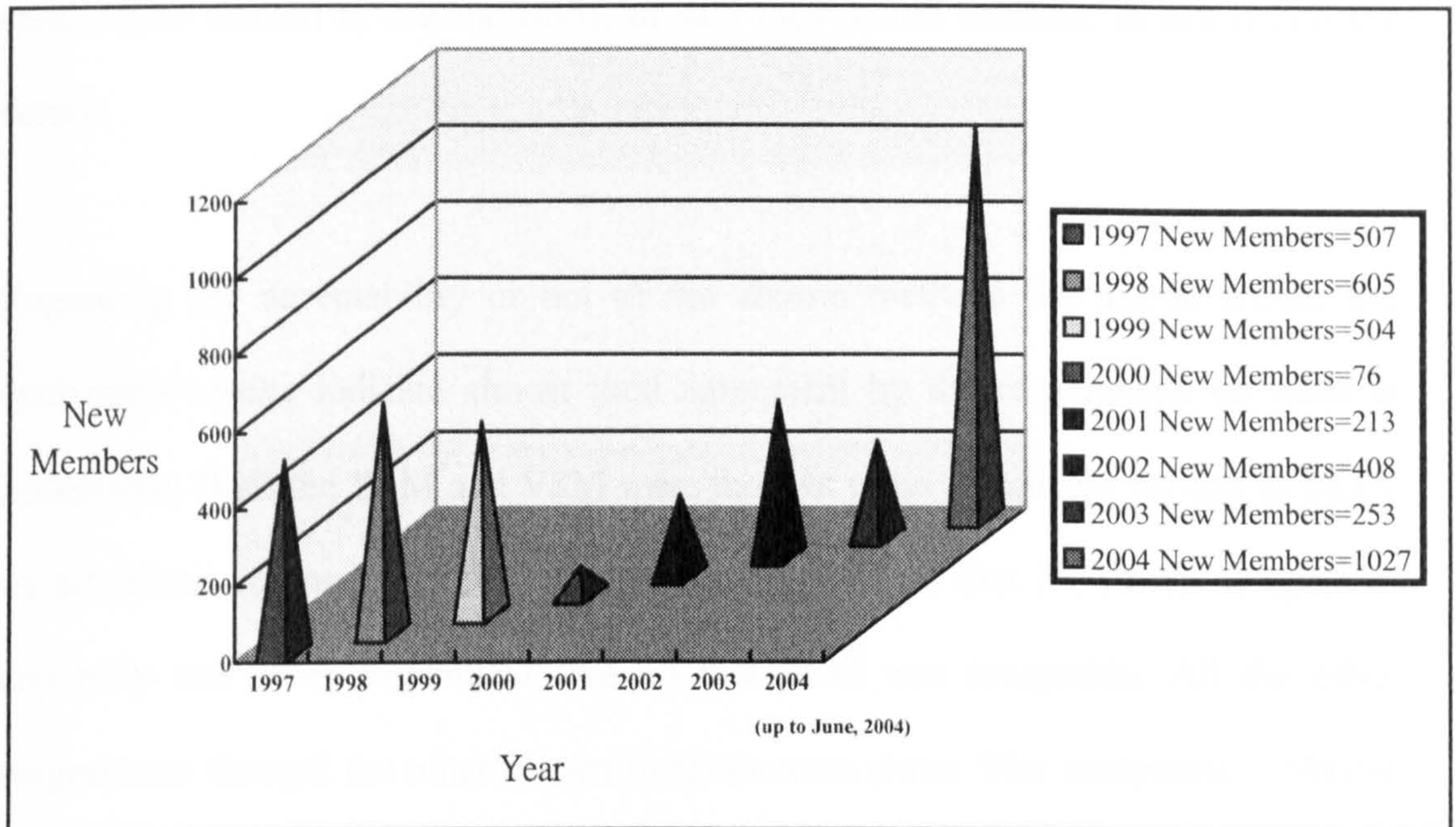


Figure 12.3 The number of new members in branches from 1997 to June 2004

#### 12.4.2 Outputs from Part B: Acceptability of the BSM Methods

Of the fifteen respondents, eleven said that they had used, or tried to use, the BSM. Four respondents indicated that they had not used the BSM at all (however two of these had been involved in the BSM intervention in the group discussion which I facilitated). Nine respondents had used the BSM in meetings, while two respondents had also used it in their private decision making. Most respondents (five) thought the BSM was 'difficult to understand but easy to use', while three respondents thought it was 'easy to understand, but difficult to use'. Two respondents thought the BSM was 'easy to both understand and use', but two other respondents found it 'difficult to both understand and use'. Therefore, encouragingly for the intervention, seven of the eleven users (64 per cent) had found the BSM easy to use. Even more encouraging for the intervention was the finding that thirteen of the fifteen respondents (87 per



cent) either wanted to use the BSM, or said they would continue to use it into the future.

Regarding the acceptability or not of the chosen methods for use in BLIA, the evaluation results indicate almost total agreement by the respondents on what is acceptable. Both the BSM and VSM were thought to be acceptable for use in BLIA by all fifteen respondents. Only one respondent thought that NGT was acceptable, and only one other respondent thought that SSM was acceptable. All the other respondents thought the other chosen methods were either 'Not acceptable', 'Maybe acceptable later', or 'Don't know'. The chosen method with the highest 'Not acceptable' response (nine from fifteen, or 60 per cent) was SSM. Perhaps this highly negative response arose because I had used SSM during my MA fieldwork and some people had remembered this, while other people may have heard about it. IP received seven 'Not acceptable' responses; both CSH and NGT received six; and SAST received five 'Not acceptable' responses. This basically indicates a mistrust of soft methods, probably because of the prevailing Buddhist and Chinese cultures, which stress respect and the unacceptability of challenging authority. However, it was encouraging that the BSM, which itself provides a soft method (in the sense that it structures participative debate), was acceptable to all respondents, and that the response 'Maybe acceptable later' was received for IP (seven respondents), NGT (four respondents), SSM (three respondents), and CSH (three respondents). Also encouraging was the 'don't know' response concerning SAST (nine respondents), CSH (six respondents), and NGT (five respondents), because this indicates possible later acceptability. However, having said this, I would not want to underestimate the scale of the task facing anyone wanting to overcome the cultural resistance in BLIA

to using soft systems approaches, especially if they are not reframed in a culturally relevant methodology (such as the BSM).

One general comment was that the “BSM has Buddhist concepts, VSM was needed for re-structuring, NGT is not needed as people have expressed their views, and other methods bring the risk of creating conflict and unhappiness” (Assistant Division Leader). Similarly, the Division Leader said that “Only BSM and VSM are acceptable now because we need these methods. Other methods may bring disharmony.” An HQ staff member added “we did not have a good experience with SSM before...it’s better to make change slowly to keep harmony.” A further comment was “try other methods later when the BSM and VSM have been proven to be effective” (Former BLYC Leader). The overall message seemed to be that too many methods, too soon, may risk creating disharmony which must be avoided, so the ‘middle way’ is to apply a few essential methods now and to consider the effects over time.

## **12.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported the procedure used to evaluate the BSM intervention in BLIA and the results of the evaluation. The evaluation has included asking respondents about both the impacts of the intervention and about the acceptability of the BSM and the methods chosen through it.

Both qualitative and quantitative evidence was presented as part of the evaluation of impacts. All respondents had recognized impacts of the intervention: in particular the

reduction of conflict in BLIA YAD was widely appreciated. Respondents also talked about improved 'real' communication between people, more awareness of others' views, and increased 'bottom-up' communication. Also, the structural changes from application of the VSM had produced positive consequences according to all fifteen respondents. The new BLIA YAD structure with their own HQ independent of the BLIA Adult division, four area offices and websites had improved communications and morale. The BSM intervention appeared to have had immediate impacts in BLIA because, during 2004, there were increases in the number of branch members and in the number of meeting activities. Also, financial resources were being used more efficiently following the reorganization. For the first time in a number of years, income outstripped expenditure on activities.

The respondents indicated the acceptability of the BSM and VSM, but the other methods chosen using the BSM (NGT, SSM, IP, SAST, and CSH) were identified as unacceptable for use in BLIA, at least at the present time. The main comment was that too much change may create disharmony, therefore slow change was preferred, but that these other methods may become acceptable later.



**PART F : REFLECTION (反思)**

**REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **REFLECTIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

#### **13.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains reflections on the research, to see what can be learnt from considering various strengths and limitations. It also puts forward suggestions for further research in future years.

#### **13.2 Reflection on Gaining Access to BLIA**

The fieldwork testing of the BSM methodology was a key part of this research since, without field testing, the BSM would remain theoretical, without any evidence of whether it is appropriate and effective in practice. Gaining access is a well-known problem in social research (Hornsby-Smith, 1993). For the field test, my first choice was to gain entry to a Buddhist organization in the East because this is precisely the type of organization for which the BSM was designed. This posed specific problems because, in Eastern cultures (and in Taiwan in particular), issues of status can be significant. The idea of a doctoral student gaining any kind of access to a Buddhist organization, let alone access that will allow some influence through a systemic intervention, might have been difficult for anyone in the Buddhist hierarchy to contemplate had I not approached this very tactfully. I decided that a careful and

‘correct’ (in terms of Buddhist Taiwanese culture) approach to Founding Master Hsing-Yun of BLIA was my best route because he knows that I, and all my family, are Buddhists and have been members of BLIA since the organization was established. Also, the existing autocratic power structure in BLIA meant that if the Founding Master gave permission then everyone else would be obliged to follow his decision.

As reported in Chapter 8, I prepared an intervention proposal and sent it to the Founding Master, and was invited to make a personal presentation. In this, I described the BSM and stressed that it was a new approach to management, and all the questions were based on five core Buddhist principles - Cause-condition-effect, Eightfold Noble Path, Middle Path, Space and Time. I think that the Buddhist content of BSM was the deciding factor in the decision to grant permission for the intervention, and of course it was a great personal relief that I was given access to BLIA.

It is perhaps ironic (and not altogether insignificant) that the existing top-down power structure in BLIA, which I had to use to gain access, has been somewhat eroded in BLIA YAD following the BSM intervention. This is arguably a case of needing to work from the ‘inside’ of an organization in order to effect the kind of change that would not only benefit that organization, but would also make a difference to the very relationships that allowed access in the first place. Midgley and Milne (1995) talk about the importance of involving stakeholders with decision-making power (as well as marginalized stakeholders) in interventions. I suggest that this kind of involvement is particularly important in Eastern contexts, but my



experience indicates that it does not necessarily mean (once critical engagements are opened up) that the status quo will remain untouched.

### **13.3 Reflection on the BSM Intervention**

The first dilemma of the intervention concerned the choice of issue. Seven issues in particular were identified in the issue identification interviews which were thought potentially worthy of fieldwork investigation and action. There was the conflict in YAD, organizational structure problems, inaccurate membership records, hasty decision-making without holistic thinking, little evaluation of results, how to use former chapter advisors, and lack of professional training amongst staff. However, a choice had to be made, and my reasoning was outlined in Chapter 8, section 8.4.

The final choice for me was between the conflict in YAD and the organizational structure problems. I considered that organizational structure was an issue that could be resolved with recourse to a single existing systems methodology with a functionalist or structuralist orientation, and would therefore only pose a limited test for my BSM. I therefore chose the conflictual issue which I realized might require addressing the reluctance of Buddhists to acknowledge discord and differences of opinion, and it appeared multi-dimensional and an urgent concern for an organization which values harmony. I also judged that successful progress would potentially be of great benefit to BLIA. The progress towards resolving the conflictual issue in the intervention and the fact that some organizational structure problems have been dealt with as a 'spin-off', seems to have justified my choice.

There were several potential difficulties involved in carrying out this intervention in BLIA, especially in 2003. Firstly, it followed the 2003 SARS crisis in Taiwan, and consequently some people were reluctant to have meetings because how the disease spread was still unknown. Secondly, this was a 'management' intervention so it raised suspicions that it would bring organizational change, which is often unwelcome to some people. Thirdly, there was a limited time-scale to complete each interview with these often busy people, so arranging dates and times was potentially problematic. Fourthly, there are thirty-six questions in the BSM Mode 1, which might have seemed too many and could have discouraged participation. I learnt that I had to persuade people to participate by stressing the positive possibilities that could emerge from an intervention. I emphasized the need for them to participate so that their concerns could be included, and I also promised that any recommendations would be discussed fully with them and, as far as possible, I would try to proceed on the basis of mutual agreement. I therefore argued that it would be best for them to be involved so their voices could be heard, and that change could reduce their workload and increase organizational harmony. Since the intervention, not one person has complained to me about their participation in the intervention.

Seven individual and one group were interviewed using the BSM questions. These were senior, middle, and ordinary members, including priests, nuns and lay people, staff and volunteers, from different parts of BLIA YAD and the former BLYC. They agreed to participate and, importantly, I knew this meant that they would almost certainly complete the BSM process and not drop out part way through: having made a promise to participate, dropping out would have incurred a 'loss of face'. Therefore, being careful about my initial engagements with people, persuading them of the value of interventions, in order to secure their participation paid off in terms of



ensuring that the research could be completed with the full co-operation of the key stakeholders.

There can be no question that the BSM intervention process represented a major step forward for BLIA in terms of wider consultation on an issue, even with only seven individuals and one group. Previously, traditional BLIA decision-making was 'top-down', with little or no consultations with those at the 'bottom', and decisions were simply passed down for implementation. For example, each year there was an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of BLIA YAD R.O.C. The official function of this was to make and agree plans for the next year and decide the location of next year's meeting. Each year the plan was devised by the senior management prior to the AGM, and it was simply announced at the AGM with no consultation or discussion. Neither was it conceivable that there could have been a vote, even on something relatively straight-forward such as the location of the next meeting.

My view going into the intervention, and confirmed by it, was that this kind of thing caused problems in BLIA because senior management decisions often took no account of different perspectives, leading to unforeseen side-effects; dissatisfaction among members; unhappiness, disharmony, and the resignation of many people who might otherwise have made a valuable contribution to the organization. Therefore the traditional decision-making process was often 'bad' for the ordinary members, 'bad' for the top management, and 'bad' for BLIA as a whole. As discussed in my MA research (Shen, 1996), the senior management perspective on this was that asking for opinions would make other people view them as weak or unfit to hold important ruling positions. As elder priests they believed that they were expected to be all-knowing and wise, but their knowledge was of Buddhism not organizational



management. Also, because the Taiwanese Buddhist culture regards money-making business as inappropriate for religious people, the priests have to consider traditional management systems methods (associated with profit-making business) as inappropriate for a non-profit-making Buddhist organization of priests, nuns, workers and volunteers. To do otherwise might result in the priests losing their religious standing. Hence, my idea for a management systems method containing Buddhist concepts (the BSM). But could such a method be designed, and would it work effectively? This was a central question for my doctoral research, and is the subject of the next reflection (below).

### **13.4 Reflection on the BSM Methodology**

From the 1960s onwards, systems thinking has become a significant management approach because of its holistic intent, usefulness for dealing with complexity (Flood and Carson, 1993), and the recognized weaknesses of the traditional scientific management and human relations theories (Jackson, 2000: 62). Hence, systems thinking appeared to hold most promise for the BSM design. However, the fact that there was little published material meaningfully linking ST and BT ideas, indicated that this research area was under-explored. In addition, the research already in the literature (Macy, 1991; Fenner, 1995; Varela et al, 2000) was largely theoretical. It discussed the relationships between BT and ST (general system theory, cybernetics and autopoiesis) in general terms, but did not cover much of the *management systems literature* (especially ‘soft’ and ‘critical’ approaches). I suggest that the research reported in this dissertation includes two main contributions: firstly, it relates BT to a much broader ST literature than previous authors achieved, and

secondly it includes the design of a Buddhist Systems Methodology (and associated methods).

As described in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, I put considerable time and energy early on in my doctoral research into thinking through some of the theoretical issues associated with designing the BSM, and the output is a Buddhist systems approach with emphasis on boundary critique, incorporating a series of questions drawing on five core Buddhist principles (common to all the different Buddhist schools).

Some people may say that the thirty-six questions in the BSM represent a daunting prospect for users (although only twelve questions are used at any one time, making it easier). This may appear to be so, but the evaluation (Chapter 12) showed that, for people in BLIA with only a limited experience of the BSM, 64% found it easy to use (and I would argue that more practice would increase this percentage); 71% thought the BSM could not be improved; and 93% thought that no other method could have produced the same or better results. Furthermore, the fact that the BSM has been adopted and used by BLIA YAD as their official decision making system must be regarded as a strong 'vote-of-confidence' for the BSM.

As with all social research, the question arises, were the responses meaningful? The validity and reliability of data is often a concern (Fielding, 1993). During the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 interviews, I did wonder sometimes whether people were always answering the question asked (either intentionally or unintentionally straying into other territory); whether they were always passing on their own opinion or were sometimes offering 'received wisdom'; and whether they were sufficiently considering both 'is' and 'ought' senses of the questions. However, I did not interject



at these times because I wanted to be careful not to guide them towards particular answers. Also, I did not want to discourage them by intimating that they were not answering the questions ‘properly’. Instead, I simply recorded the answers for later analysis. My reflection on this is that, since different relevant and interesting subjective perspectives were surfaced which allowed progress to be made towards resolving the issue, and the evaluation (Chapter 12) revealed significant positive impacts, then it is reasonable to conclude that, overall, the responses were meaningful for the issue and the context.

### **13.5 Reflection on the Evaluation (BSM Mode 2)**

Another concern might be, was the evaluation effective? One criticism could be that only fifteen people were involved, which may seem a small number for a large organization. However, a major constraint on the evaluation was time. The BSM Mode 1 intervention and interpretation had taken longer than planned, and there was realistically only one month to carry out the evaluation. The evaluation sheet involved twenty-nine mainly open-ended questions, so even fifteen people generated a lot of data for the final analysis. Also, the fifteen respondents gave diverse and valuable feedback because they were from different levels and parts of BLIA; from users and non-users of the BSM; from priests, nuns, workers and volunteers; and from one former member of BLIA. My only ‘regret’ is that I did not identify a respondent who thought the BSM impact had been negative. This may have surfaced more suggestions of ways to improve the BSM, giving rise to further research.



The fact that people were willing to participate in the intervention, and apparently meaningful and consistent results were generated by it, suggests that the evaluation sheet design, and the process, was successful (at least for the context of my research).

### **13.6 Reflection on Ethical Considerations in the Intervention**

Critical systems thinking (CST) suggests that it is important to apply the ‘right’ methodologies or methods to improve a problem situation (e.g. Flood and Jackson, 1991a; Midgley, 2000). Using the ‘wrong’ method could be like using a hammer to ‘nail’ in a screw: although the screw can be forced into the wall, both screw and wall may be damaged. As I saw it, with my BSM methodology, I had an ethical obligation to avoid any damage to BLIA, and preferably do some good in the eyes of stakeholders - although, given that the design and implementation of BSM was a research project, the capacity for it to do good was an unknown when I started out.

Cordoba (2000) has considered the ethics of systems practitioners in some depth. He comments that “when dealing with ethics, individuals need to be aware of themselves, their concerns and how they interact with others, as well as what happens in any interaction” (Cordoba, 2000: 265). CST is rich in awareness of the need for reflections on interactions with others (e.g. Flood, 1990; Flood and Romm, 1996; Gregory, 2000). In particular, there is the recognition that practitioners should reflect on the impacts of any changes promoted by their intervention. Some CST researchers (following Foucault, 1980, amongst others) have commented on the relations between power and knowledge (Flood, 1990; Fairtlough, 1991; Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996; Valero-Silva, 1996; Midgley, 1997b; Vega, 1999; Cordoba and

Midgley, 2003). While all these authors view power as something that inevitably shapes knowledge (and vice versa), Flood (1990) points to one particular issue of relevance to systemic intervention that he says we have an obligation to do something about when we are able to identify it: the “suppression” of knowledge through the silencing of marginalized perspectives.

The question is, was knowledge intentionally suppressed in BLIA? Different people commented that they did not know the reason why the decision to integrate BLIA YAD and BLYC had been taken. In the replies to the BSM questions, they put forward their individual ideas, or the ideas that they had heard from others, but they had received no explanation from the senior management for the decision. If we take seriously for a moment the possibility that knowledge was indeed suppressed (shortly I will provide an alternative interpretation), then the implication is that the senior management had something in their minds that they did not reveal so that they could make changes which they felt would have met resistance if the ‘knowledge’ had actually been shared. In BLIA, the culture of top-down power was deeply entrenched, having presumably existed from the creation of the organization, and people regarded the exercise of power as inevitable. The senior management had lived within a Buddhist power culture for most of their lives, and within Chinese culture for all of their lives, so I think that autocratic top down decision making was simply taken for granted. Given this scenario, even though the stakeholders suggested in my interviews that the main problem was poor communications rather than the deliberate suppression of knowledge, it is conceivable that they felt they had to make this ‘excuse’ because they couldn’t accuse the senior management of manipulation, even in a confidential interview.



However, there is a possible alternative interpretation. As a Buddhist I generally believe that other Buddhists have ‘good’ intentions, so I tend to view the answers given in response to the BSM Mode 1 Stage 1 questions as an indication that knowledge was perhaps ‘opaque’, as the interviewees had indicated, rather than suppressed. There is no single moral view that can claim universal acceptance, so ethics can reasonably be seen as a contract between parties to act on the basis of ‘shared standards’ defining what is acceptable (Thyssen, 1995). This view of ethics implies that what is ‘acceptable’, and even the ‘facts’ about what is occurring, will depend on one’s viewpoint. Therefore, as I see it, from an Eastern Buddhist point of view, ‘opacity’ is a logical explanation for the lack of a reason given by senior management for the decision to merge BLIA YAD and BLYC. However, from a Western perspective, this might well be seen as an issue of the suppression of knowledge because of the context – a strong organizational hierarchy where only those in a senior position knew why the decision had been made. Different cultural interpretations are at work here, and it becomes difficult to decide between them. What both Eastern and Western observers might agree, however, was that the result of the lack of transparency was a knowledge vacuum which people filled with their own conjectures, and almost inevitably these conjectures led to disquiet and the creation of an issue that then needed to be managed.

It may appear that complete transparency would have existed in BLIA if the senior management would have been prepared to provide better explanations of their thinking and the assumptions underlying their decisions. However, this would not necessarily have provided a solution in BLIA because, even then, the ‘wrong’ decision could have been made (as seen from perspectives other than the one being used by senior management), and the people would still have had to implement it. So



decision transparency would have been insufficient to avoid the creation of problems, and (given the expectation that senior managers in Taiwanese Buddhist organizations are all-knowing and wise) it could even have undermined the standing of the decision-maker in BLIA who had called for the merger of YAD and BLYC. An ethical and practical solution appeared to be to introduce a way to achieve wider involvement in decision-making, so people could understand the assumptions and influencing factors on the decision, and contribute their own thinking and desires *without discrediting the views coming from the senior management.*

In East Asia, the avoidance of conflict is a common characteristic which is sometimes attributed to the Confucian emphasis on harmony (Leung et al, 2002), or to the Chinese 'middle-way' preference for integration and peaceful co-existence (Chen, 2002). It is normal for people to keep things in their own minds, not to speak out or make complaints. In Buddhism, one belief is that the world is full of suffering so if people experience a 'bad' feeling, they think they must 'deserve' this. If the Buddhist priest makes a decision, then people usually feel they must respect the decision and obey without comment because to complain is to question whether they deserve to be suffering. The prevailing belief is that to refuse to accept suffering (especially when it comes from the decision of a priest) will provoke a 'bad' outcome in a future life. Furthermore, in Chinese culture, people do not only seek to maintain their own 'face', but also they are obliged to try to maintain the 'face' of other people, especially elders or people in positions of authority. So people are not used to expressing their opinions publicly, and they just devote themselves to follow the decisions that have been made by 'higher authorities'. Finally, the whole picture is complicated by the fact that BLIA is a non-profit organization, so a common assumption is that the people within it, and all their decisions, must inevitably be

good. In such a situation, introducing an ethic of consulting others must depend on preserving the existing ethic of respecting authority.

In BLIA, the Buddhist priests and nuns were generally receptive to the idea of consultation because the Master had instructed them to co-operate with my research and they trusted me. This trust partly stemmed from the long membership and respected position of my parents in BLIA, and partly from the fact that several senior priests had known me for most of my life. The lay people were more difficult to persuade because they had received no instruction from the Master, and they did not know me (only my parents) There was also a legacy of scepticism to overcome with the lay members because their opinions were not usually requested, and it was initially hard for them to believe that this would ever change. Therefore, before designing the BSM, I gave careful thought to Buddhism, BLIA, BLIA's objectives and purposes, and to the ethical dimension of whatever intervention I was going to undertake. I did not want to 'push' a methodology on the BLIA organization which could be harmful. In any case, my experience of trying to use SSM in BLIA (Shen, 1996) indicated that such a strategy would be futile. In practice, BSM helped people express themselves because it had a framework of questions that allowed them to ask in a step-by-step manner, that which needed to be asked from all the different angles suggested by the five core Buddhist concerns. The BSM gave them a way to ask questions and think more systemically, and the Buddhist concepts helped them practice Buddhist thinking in their decision making. Fundamentally, it is because the ST aspect of the methodology could be fused with BT that people liked it.

However, to be accepted, the methodology had to leave people in the context to make *their own* choices of what was acceptable or unacceptable. Promoting the



participation of stakeholders could not be portrayed as a *replacement* for senior management decision-making: the latter needed to be free to make their own judgements on the utility of wider participation. Reflection and learning from the intervention suggests that the BSM design and application was successful because, in the end, the senior management *voluntarily* opened themselves to the perspectives of others (and continue to do so). Arguably, the major contribution of this research has been to find a way that is acceptable to senior management (as well as other stakeholders) to enable the surfacing of problems and the promotion of dialogue about solutions within a Taiwanese Buddhist context that normally prevents either of these taking place.

### **13.7 Proposals for New Developments**

Although 71 per cent of respondents thought that the BSM could not be improved, and 93 per cent thought that no other methodology could have produced the same or better results, some respondents did say that fewer questions or the inclusion of more Buddhist concepts would have been useful. Most management systems methodologies undergo change over time from the initial design in response to practical experiences (e.g. Checkland and Scholes, 1990), and in my view the BSM should not be an exception. There appear to be four main ways to look into how the BSM could be further developed:

Firstly, since the BSM has now been accepted in BLIA YAD as their main decision-making methodology, it would be interesting and informative for research to be undertaken to monitor its usage, and the effects of this. Perhaps practice and frequent



use will reveal that the number of questions could be reduced, the phrasing simplified or improved, or perhaps that more questions are needed, in order to increase its utility.

Secondly, so far the BSM has only been applied to one issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? Although the 'spin-off' of tackling this issue was progress towards resolving a second identified issue of organizational structure, the domains of application in which it has been tried are still limited. It needs to be tested out on more diverse issues to further evaluate its effectiveness and acceptability, and hopefully this will also lead to the successful resolution of other issues in BLIA.

Thirdly, it would be worthwhile trying out the BSM in another Buddhist organization in order to test for the possibility that BLIA has particular characteristics making the BSM work where it might not do so elsewhere. This could better indicate the scope of its usefulness, and point to ways it may need to be modified in order to extend its applicability.

Finally, my use of the BSM in BLIA identified concerns which gave rise to my recommendation of several other systems methods that were not implemented in the intervention because they were considered unacceptable by people at that time (i.e. NGT, SAST, SSM, IP, CSH). It would be worth following up the issues I identified, either to implement the methods I recommended (if people's negative perceptions soften), or to find ways of translating them through my Buddhist framework in order to expand the BSM tool kit. The latter may well be the most feasible option, given people's continuing scepticism about Western management systems methodologies.

## **13.8 Conclusion**

My overall reflection on the BSM intervention is that members of BLIA YAD (which now includes the previous members of BLYC) are now treated as self-conscious actors capable of reading different meanings into the organizational context rather than as members to be controlled. I consider this is a major step forward for BLIA.

My reflections have indicated that this was enabled because of several factors. Firstly, I successfully gained access to BLIA for my intervention because I approached to Founding Master (thereby showing respect for the existing hierarchy) and stressed the Buddhist content of the BSM. Secondly, I put time into creating a synthesis of BT and ST, enabling systemic awareness to be enhanced using a familiar and accepted Buddhist language. Thirdly, I was able to persuade people to participate by stressing the positive possibilities that the intervention offered for them. However, the fourth and arguably the most important influence on the organizational culture of BLIA was that both the conflict between YAD and BLYC and the problems of organizational structure were demonstrably improved, leading to significant, positive outcomes for BLIA. Perhaps more than anything else, this success gave people confidence that accounting for multiple perspectives can benefit the organization, and this can be done using a methodology based on Buddhism.

Although it would appear that the BSM has brought about benefits for BLIA, four suggestions to further develop it have been identified: to monitor BSM usage in BLIA to identify ways to increase its utility; to test BSM out on more diverse issues

to further evaluate its effectiveness and acceptability; to try out BSM in another Buddhist organization (in case the positive results of my research were due to the peculiarities of BLIA); and to implement the other methods recommended through my intervention, or find ways of translating them through my Buddhist framework to expand the BSM tool kit.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 14.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, four explicit aims for this research were proposed:

- (1) To investigate the points of connection between ST and BT, acknowledging that there will also be tensions and disconnections.
- (2) To seek to develop a Buddhist systems methodology (BSM) which can use ideas from both ST and BT for problem solving and prevention.
- (3) To carry out a field work application of the BSM within BLIA, in order to assess its applicability and the extent of its usefulness for the organization.
- (4) To use all the research outcomes from my theoretical investigations and field work to generate a new understanding of the potential for using the BSM more widely in Buddhist organizations.

It was acknowledged at the outset that during the time-scale of my doctoral studies it would be possible to tackle only the first three aims in full, because to completely address the fourth one would require a much longer research programme. One case

study is insufficient. Below I draw some conclusions about whether, and to what extent, the above aims have been met, focusing primarily on aims 1 to 3.

## **14.2 Points of Connection between ST and BT**

Many points of connection between ST and BT were identified or proposed in Chapters 2 and 3. A small selection are reviewed below.

In Buddhism, reality is viewed as dynamically interconnected: everything exists in a web of mutual causal interaction and nothing is fully autonomous. Similarly, systems thinking is frequently legitimated by people saying that linear one-way causal interpretations are often inadequate, and a more complex view of causality is needed involving interdependence, feedback and reciprocity between causes and effects (Macy, 1991). The Buddhist view that all phenomena constantly interact with each other has some similarity with the basic systems idea of interconnectedness (Bertalanffy, 1968). Thus, for both BT and ST, ecological problems can interconnect with social problems through complex feedback loops with hard to predict consequences.

In the BT concept of mutual causality, everything is viewed as existing in a web of mutual causal interaction, so all effects are dynamically interdependent. But a cause can only produce a particular effect given the right conditions. This is the Buddhist concept of 'conditional causation' which (briefly) states that no thing arises out of nothing, and that no thing can exist alone and by itself. Thus, in Buddhism present existence depends on prior and present conditioned circumstances, which again is

very similar to the systems perspective, and it is a conclusion of this research that this connects particularly with the systems thinking of Churchman (1968; 1979a), Ackoff (1981), Ulrich (1983), and Gregory (2000). These systems thinkers have stressed that the effects of decisions are rarely fully considered and appreciated; that many decisions have consequences not only in the system-in-focus but also elsewhere; that planning should be on-going because 'conditions' change; that planning should consider stakeholders, assumptions and longer-term consequences; and that problems can arise in social contexts because of differences between different (limited) human perspectives.

In Buddhism, enlightenment is aided by removing cognitive, perceptual and emotional limitations, generally through contemplative exercises, including meditations. Complete knowledge of reality remains out of reach, but *greater* enlightenment than we have at any particular moment is always possible. This connects with the notion of 'enlightenment' embraced in soft systems thinking, which relies on the exchange of viewpoints in order to gain a more complete understanding of a context (Churchman 1979a; Checkland, 1981).

Connections were found between the Buddhist Middle Path, the Buddhist Eightfold Noble path and cybernetic concepts. In the Buddhist Middle Path, extremes are avoided by finding a 'right' view which represents a 'balanced' position involving local assessments of what is 'right', influenced by culture, time and context. A deviation towards an extreme is corrected by a shift back towards the 'middle' way. I concluded that this connects with the concept of negative feedback in cybernetics in which deviations away from the required conditions are corrected by an opposite movement (as in constant temperature systems). See also Fenner (1995).



According to BT, the universe, and more specifically life, is characterized by space and time. The utensil world offers humans living space, which they can transform by their actions. BT emphasizes the *relationships between* humans and the world. Concerning time, the Buddhist view is that we should simultaneously think about the past, present and future, because tomorrow's experiences are inevitably influenced by present and prior actions. These views on space and time accord with the ecological systems view of the structural coupling of living beings and their environments and their co-evolution over time (Wheatley, 1992; Capra, 1996).

Buddhism teaches that there is no abstract knower of experience that is separate from the experience itself. Buddhists believe that problems originally come from relationships between people's thoughts, behaviours and their environments. Buddhist philosophy therefore pays particular attention to people's minds which guide their behaviours. Buddhists believe that, if minds can be changed, problems may be dissolved. This links with concepts of systemic learning which focus on people developing their perspectives on issues (e.g. Churchman, 1979a; Checkland, 1981; Mason and Mitroff, 1981; Ulrich, 1983).

While the above (and many other) connections between BT and ST have been identified through my research, in Chapter 4 I acknowledged that there were also points of divergence and potential difficulties in creating a dialogue. Examples of the Buddhist ideas that do not connect with systems thinking include the belief in reincarnation and karma; and the Buddhist belief in 'truth' coming only from Buddha's teachings. There are also broader differences between Western and Eastern cultures and philosophies. However, while acknowledging these divergences, my research has concluded that the points of connection make the prospect of a Buddhist

System methodology (BSM) worth exploring further. A BSM may represent a way forward for organizations in the East which have previously viewed 'traditional' management systems methods as inappropriate.

Based on the above, I argue that the first aim of this thesis, to investigate the points of connection between ST and BT (acknowledging that there will also be tensions and disconnections), has been achieved.

### **14.3 The Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM)**

In order to develop a BSM it was concluded that a systems approach was needed which could overcome the dialogue problems within ST itself, and critical systems thinking (CST) was chosen as being sufficiently pluralist to achieve this. However, there are different approaches to CST in the literature.

I concluded that Total Systems Intervention (TSI) suffers significant limitations, and that an approach is needed that promotes boundary critique. This is because boundaries are inevitable in intervention, and greater comprehensiveness can be gained by exploring them than taking them for granted. In my view, just two CST approaches have an adequate focus on boundary critique: Ulrich's (1983) Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) and Midgley's (2000) Systemic Intervention (SI). However, since CSH is not methodologically pluralist, SI was chosen as the framework for the BSM.

Systemic Intervention interactively combines three stages - boundary critique, choice-making between theories and methods, and recommending actions for improvement. Within each of these three stages the BSM includes five concepts of Buddhist thinking - the Eightfold Noble Path; Middle Path; Cause-Condition-Effect; Space (Context); and Time. These five core concepts are common to all the different schools of Buddhism, and as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, they all connect with systems thinking.

The BSM is operationalized through a series of twelve questions for each of the three stages. BSM has two modes of operation: Mode 1 and Mode 2. Mode 1 has three stages: Boundary judgement, Choice making on theories and methods, and Recommendations for action. BSM Mode 2 has three stages: Boundary critique, Choice/Design of evaluation methods, and Evaluation of impacts - to enable critical evaluation and reflection.

This BSM meets the requirement of the second aim of the thesis: to develop a Buddhist Systems Methodology which can use ideas from both ST and BT for problem solving and prevention.

#### **14.4 Field Trial of the BSM**

The fieldwork reported in this thesis was carried out in Taiwan during 2003 and 2004. The focus of the BSM intervention was the issue: should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD) and the BLIA Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? Seven individuals and one group from different parts of the organization



and levels of the hierarchy were interviewed using the BSM. The twelve boundary critique questions prompted the interviewees to give answers which revealed multiple viewpoints concerning the issue.

The BSM opinion gathering represented a major contrast to the 'traditional' BLIA procedures and culture in which most viewpoints remained unheard by senior management. Autocratic, 'top-down' decision-making inevitably left many people excluded or marginalised from decisions, and this (I would suggest) had given rise to the conflictual situation over the proposed merger of BLIA YAD and BLYC. However, the BSM process was accepted by all the interviewees and provided a way to gather viewpoints around the issue. Thus, the BSM offered a framework for engaging people in a critical way, allowing the surfacing and tackling of areas of concern which would otherwise not have been discussed and resolved, or which would have been resolved in a manner resulting in dissatisfaction and a further decline in membership of the organization.

From the satisfactory outcome of the BSM intervention, evidenced through the evaluation reported in Chapter 12, I conclude that the boundary critique stage of BSM was effective in helping the interviewees to cast a sufficiently extensive boundary of consideration, without this becoming impractical or unmanageable.

The BSM Mode 1 Stage 2 resulted in recommendations of methods with the capability of dealing with issues of organizational structure, communications, inter-subjective (mis)understanding, planning, power, and decision making (NGT, VSM, SAST, SSM, IP, CSH, and BSM). Of these recommendations, only VSM and the BSM were accepted for immediate implementation by BLIA. The other methods

were de-prioritized because their use was not viewed as urgent by stakeholders, or their cultural acceptability was in question. The reason given during the evaluation was that it was better to see the outcome of applying the BSM and VSM first, because too much change too soon could risk creating disharmony (Leung et al, 2002, suggest that organizational harmony is highly valued in the East, and I would say that this is particularly so for Buddhist cultures). While the continued resistance to ‘soft’ methods in BLIA could be seen as a problem by some, I argue that the organization’s acceptance of the BSM is significant: at the time of my evaluation (Chapter 12) it had already increased inter-subjective exchanges, and I believe its usage may well expand further within BLIA as other divisions hear of its benefits. Certainly, having the BSM accepted as the main decision making methodology for BLIA YAD will result in many more people using it.

BSM Mode 1 Stage 3 involved making recommendations for action using the chosen methods. Applying the VSM resulted in the proposal of a new organizational structure for BLIA YAD, which was implemented. The BSM was also taken up and used as the main BLIA YAD decision-making system.

The BSM Mode 2 (evaluation) was based on semi-structured interviews using a sheet of questions in two parts. The first part assessed the effectiveness of the application of the chosen methods and the BSM intervention overall. The second part assessed the acceptability of the BSM and the methods used (and others that were chosen and not used) during the intervention.

Concerning usability, the BSM was found to be ‘easy to use’ by 64 per cent of users, even after relatively little practice. Concerning effectiveness, 93 per cent of



respondents in BLIA replied that no other method that they knew of could have produced the same or better results; the same number replied that the BSM helped their consideration process; and the impacts of the BSM intervention were identified as reduced conflict, more listening and/or an improved organizational structure. 100 per cent of respondents identified positive outcomes such as these.

Concerning the acceptability of the methods, only the BSM and the VSM were acceptable to most respondents in BLIA. The BSM appeared acceptable because it contained many Buddhist concepts familiar to people. The BSM had allowed a lot of opinions to be voiced and heard in BLIA which would not otherwise have been listened to. The general acceptability of the VSM was probably a result of the structural changes which use of the VSM had brought about, and which were viewed as 'positive' by all fifteen respondents (100 per cent). The general non-acceptability of the other methods chosen by the BSM process appears to have come from a preference to avoid the risk of creating disharmony.

The BSM was rated as highly effective, and participants said that it widened consideration of others' motivations and concerns; led to a better understanding of desirable motivations; helped promote more genuine communications; 'pushed' people to participate (which minimized misrepresentation); and increased decision-making efficiency. The most important impact of the BSM intervention, according to 80 per cent of the respondents, was the ending, or reduction, of the conflict in BLIA YAD.

The new structure for BLIA YAD was evaluated positively by all respondents. The quantitative data suggested a growth in the number of new members in branches; a



large reduction in financial waste; more activities; and higher attendance at activities during 2004 following the changes recommended by the BSM intervention.

Based on the above, I conclude that the BSM is an effective and acceptable methodology for members of BLIA, and I am also hopeful that use of the BSM as the main decision-making system in BLIA YAD will mean that members of YAD will continue to be treated as self-conscious actors capable of reading different meanings into their context, and as valuable contributors to decision making, rather than simply as 'difficult' subjects to be controlled (which is how I believe they were viewed by many of the senior priests and nuns prior to my intervention).

The fieldwork and evaluation summarized above meets the third aim for my research: to carry out a fieldwork application of the BSM within BLIA in order to assess its applicability and the extent of its usefulness for the organization.

#### **14.5 The Potential for Widening the Use of the BSM in the East**

My evaluation has revealed that the BSM was viewed as highly effective, and (in the opinion of over 90 per cent of interviewees in BLIA) led to positive outcomes. The Buddhist concepts in the BSM were already a familiar and accepted part of the lives of the members of BLIA, and this appears to have made the BSM appropriate for their use. However, the step-by-step series of questions in the BSM gave the users a way to look at an issue from many angles, which people in BLIA are not used to doing. The systems methods drawn from the Western literature were much less acceptable to those same people in BLIA, and it is unlikely that any of these methods

will be used unless they can be reinterpreted through the framework of the BSM. Therefore, these findings suggest that there is indeed significant potential for the wider use of the BSM in Buddhist organizations (or organizations with a significant proportion of Buddhist members) but a single case study is insufficient to base strong conclusions about wider applicability upon. Further research to test the BSM more extensively is needed. This could focus on evaluating the wider use of the BSM in BLIA; reinterpreting other systems methods through the BSM for use in BLIA; testing in other Buddhist organizations (in Taiwan and elsewhere); and even possibly investigating whether the methodology has any utility in Taiwanese organizations without a strong Buddhist orientation. Through these kinds of investigations, the strengths and limitations of the BSM can be more fully determined.

Although it was never my intention to *comprehensively* address the fourth aim of this thesis (to generate a new understanding of the potential for using the BSM more widely in Buddhist organizations), I have taken a step towards this by confirming through the evaluation of my intervention that the success of the BSM in BLIA was largely due to its reframing of systems ideas in the language of Buddhism, allowing a previously unknown level of consultation to be accepted. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the same effects would be experienced in other Buddhist organizations too.

## **14.6 Summary**

This research has achieved three of its research aims, and has partially achieved the fourth. Firstly, significant points of connection were identified between ST and BT.

This laid the foundation for the development of a systemic methodology appropriate for problem solving and prevention in Buddhist organizations - the Buddhist Systems Methodology (BSM). The field testing of the BSM in Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) in Taiwan indicated that the BSM was acceptable and useful in the eyes of key stakeholders. The success of the intervention, and acceptance of the BSM by both priests and lay people, suggests that it could be appropriate for other Buddhist organizations, particularly in East Asia where traditional 'top-down' decision making persists and where conflict avoidance is the norm (Leung et al, 2002).

Future work with the BSM could focus on monitoring the on-going usage in BLIA to see if its utility could be improved; applying the BSM to a wider set of Buddhist organizations to more fully assess its usefulness; testing the BSM in non-Buddhist East Asian organizations; and finding ways to implement other systems methods, probably reinterpreted through the framework of the Buddhist methodology to make them more culturally acceptable. This is the research agenda that I intend taking forward once my doctoral studies are complete.



# APPENDIX

## Appendix I - Interview Questions

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>[Interview Questions]</b>   |              |
| <b>Interviewee name:</b>   | <b>Date:</b> |
| <b>Position:</b>   |              |
| (1) How long have you been at BLIA?  |              |
| (2) What is your present role and title at BLIA?   |              |
| (3) Is this full time, part time or voluntary?   |              |
| (4) Do you expect to continue to be at BLIA for the next twelve months (because this is the length of my study)?     |              |
| (5) Do you have staff reporting to you? How many staff?  |              |
| (6) Do you make:   |              |
| (a) Strategic decisions (months and years) (what timescale?)   |              |
| (b) Operational decisions (days and weeks)   |              |
| (c) Both?  |              |
| (7) How are strategic and operational decisions made in BLIA? Who makes them?  |              |
| (8) When you face a decision/problem, what do you do?  |              |
| For example, do you:   |              |
| (a) Use your previous experience?  |              |
| (b) Refer to established procedures of intervention and transformation in the organization? What are the procedures? |              |
| (c) Use a problem solving method/methodology? Which ones?  |              |
| (d) Refer to books. Which books?   |              |
| (e) Consult with superiors? Who?   |              |
| (f) Consult with peers. Who?   |              |
| (g) Consult with your staff. Who?  |              |
| (h) Consult with outside people. Who?  |              |
| (i) Make a different choice other than (a) to (h) above? Specify other choice:                                       |              |
| (9) What methods/methodologies have you used? How long have you been using these methods?                            |              |
| When did you use them? What was your experience? What were the impacts?  |              |
| How do you know these impacts arose from the method? Would you be interested in finding a better method?             |              |
| (10) Have you found any limitations or difficulties with alternative approaches?                                     |              |

(11) Have you looked into the consequences/impacts of your decisions/problem solving? Have you asked other people about the consequences for them?

(12) Do you think any of your previous decision making/problem solving would have been more successful (or turned out differently) if you had consulted more widely or used a different approach? Can you explain this to me?

(13) How do you measure the success of decisions/problem solving?

(14) Do you keep quantitative records which can indicate success or failure? e.g. such as growth of membership, turnover of members, output, productivity, complaints, disputes, absenteeism rates, efficiency figures, accident rates, pollution, waste generation?

(15) Do you think that all BLIA decision making/problem solving, both your own and others, has been completely successful during your time at BLIA? Yes  or No

If No, can you give me some examples of decisions taken by yourself or others, which you think could have produced a better outcome?

If Yes, surely there must have been some decisions taken where the results turned out differently to the stated original intention? Yes  or No.

If Yes, can you tell me about them?

(16) Do you have any decisions or problems concerning BLIA which are facing you at the present time?

Yes  or No.

If Yes, can you discuss any of them with me? How do you plan to carry out your decision making, or what actions are you planning to take? What are your objectives and measures of success?

(17) Would you consider permitting me to apply a decision making methodology which I have developed, called the BSM, to one or more of the decisions presently confronting you? (I can apply the methodology step-by-step alongside your usual decision making if you prefer)

(18) Are there any decisions/problems which faced you in the past which we could discuss in depth and on which I could apply my BSM methodology to see if a different course of action and different consequences could have resulted?

(19) Would you be interested in learning how to use the BSM, and then using it yourself?

(20) Do you have a preference for individual or group meetings concerning discussion of decisions/problems, and use of BSM?

Appendix II - BSM Fieldwork Evaluation Sheet

**PART A.**

**Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the BSM Intervention -Impact Evaluation**

**(a) Twelve questions based on the BSM five core Buddhist concepts, as follows:**

**1. Did the BSM foster desirable motivations and inhibit undesirable ones compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**2. Did the BSM eliminate or minimize any covetousness, resentment or maliciousness you identified compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**3. Did the BSM eliminate or minimize any lying, deceitfulness, slander or any other 'improper' use of language you identified compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**4. Did the BSM tackle any major misconduct (killing, stealing, etc.) you identified compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**5. Did the BSM help in preventing a narrow set of concerns being privileged over wider social concerns, but without making the issue impossible to address, compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**6. Did the BSM help you work to counteract any idleness, apathy or avoidance that you identified compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:



**7. Did the BSM help to minimize misrepresentations of self, others or the non-human world compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**8. Did the BSM help promote the mental discipline of Buddhist thinking compared with your usual procedure, if this was not sufficiently in evidence?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**9. Did the BSM support people in developing a better or more explicit middle path between ethical and practical imperatives compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**10. Did the BSM help people account for the key cause-condition-effect relationships compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**11. Did the BSM help people account for the key cultural and ecological contexts, and will it work in those contexts compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**12. Did the BSM work in the time scale specified for the intervention compared with your usual procedure?**

Answer: Yes  No  No change

Any comments:

**(b) General questions**

**1. Were you involved in the BSM intervention on the issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD, R.O.C.) and the Buddha's Light Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, can you tell me how you were involved?

Answer:

If NO: Do you think you ought to have been involved in the intervention?

Answer:

Any comments:

**2. Did the BSM questions help with your considerations of the issue?**

Answer: Yes  No

Any comments:

**3. In your view, what have been the impacts (if any) over the last six months since the BSM intervention on the issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD, R.O.C.) and the Buddha's Light Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate?**

Impacts:

Any comments:

**4. What is the order of importance of those impacts in your view?**

Answer:

Any comments:

**5. There have been changes to the organizational structure in BLIA, R.O.C. What have been the consequences of these?**

Answer:

Any comments:

**6. In your view, have the changes to the organizational structure produced positive or negative consequences overall?**

Answer: Positive  Negative

Any comments:

**7. Have there been any changes in communications inside BLIA since the BSM intervention?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, what has changed in terms of communications in BLIA, R.O.C.?

Any comments:

**8. For the following (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), tick which box is most true in your view regarding communications since the changes in organizational structure have been introduced:**

Answer:

(a) Number of contacts? - More  Less  No change

(b) Quality of Contacts? - Better  Worse  No change

(c) Ability to contact others? - Easier  More difficult  No change

(d) Top-down communication? More  Less  No change

(e) Bottom-up communication? More  Less  No change

Any comments:

**9. Could any other methods you know have produced the same or better results as the BSM?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, explain the methods:

Any comments:

**10. Do you think the BSM can be improved?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, explain how:

Any comments:

**11. Have you used the BSM yourself?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, was it useful and can you explain how?

Any comments:

**12. Do you know if any quantitative data and/or analyses exist which can show differences between before and after the BSM intervention on the issue: Should the BLIA Young Adult Division R.O.C. (BLIA YAD, R.O.C.) and the Buddha's Light Youth Centers (BLYC) be integrated or separate? Examples might be increase or decrease of membership, turnover of members, output, productivity, complaints, disputes, absenteeism rates, accident rates, pollution, waste? Can you provide this data or analyses?**

Answer: Yes  No

If YES, explain:



**PART B**

**Analysis of the Acceptability of the BSM Methods**

**1. Have you used the BSM?**

Answer:

Yes I have tried to use it  Not at all  (Please explain why\_\_\_)

**2. In what circumstances have you used the BSM?**

Answer:

To make private decisions   
 To make decisions with other people (in a meeting)   
 To make both types of decisions

**3. What was your experience of learning about, understanding and using the BSM?**

Answer:

Easy to understand and use   
 Easy to understand, but difficult to use   
 Difficult to both understand and use   
 Difficult to understand, but easy to use

**4. Will you continue to use BSM in the future?**

Answer:

Yes, I want to  No, I don't want to  (Please explain why\_\_\_)

**5. Indicate the acceptability or not of the chosen methods for use in BLIA?**

Answer:

|      |                                     |   |   |                                     |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| NGT  | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VSM  | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SAST | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SSM  | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IP   | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CSH  | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BSM  | Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Not acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> | Maybe acceptable later <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please explain:

Any further comments:

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