BUDDHISM IN THAILAND AND THE ETHNIC COEXISTENCE

Bhatskorn Piyobhaso (Kota),[1] Sura Charnatharo,[2] Punvalee Sermsupt,[3]

University of Oxford,
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,
United Kingdom of England,[1] Thailand[2-3]

Email: piyobhaso@gmail.com[1] Suracharn2022@gamil.com[2-3]

Abstract

This article aimed to point out how Buddhism can be one of the approaches to the generous coexistence of ethnic groups in Thailand in the aspect of social, economic, and politics. This article also reviews the sustainable practices of the ethnic groups, generous coexistence of ethnic groups, and protection of ethnic rights for coexistence in Thailand. Buddhism for the generous coexistence of ethnic groups in Thailand will support them to live with their own unique cultures and customs while contributing certain benefits to the community both in business and socio-economy. This article gives suggestions on a Buddhist approach to develop generous coexistence of Thailand's ethnic groups, conserve their sustainable way of life which teaches us about how to live in multi-culture, and finally protect ethnic rights for coexistence in the future world.

Keywords: Buddhism, Coexistence, Ethnic groups

Introduction

This article explores Thailand's largest ethnic groups, their way of life, their worldview, and what they can teach us about sustainability and conservation (Benjamin Rujopakarn,2020). On the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, celebrated each year on 9 August, and with the theme of "Leaving no one behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a

new social contract", the exhibition highlights the importance of genuine participation to promote equal opportunities and respect for all human beings' rights, dignity, and freedom. Most importantly, building a concrete and mutual understanding between the people, including people from ethnic groups, and the state is the main goal of the exhibition. Building trust and strengthening social cohesion is a key enabler for the achievement of the sustainable development goals to support ethnic minorities in multiple ways, one of them through advocacy to increase the public's knowledge and awareness of the challenges they face.

Ethnic groups are considered some of the best stewards of nature, and there is much we can learn from them about ways to live harmoniously with nature and each other. Though their way of life grows more and more dominated by modern cities and industrial expansion, many ethnic groups still keep to their traditional lifestyles in their ancestral homelands both with and without influence from modern societies. There are 3 largest ethnic groups in Thailand; Karen, Hmong, and Moken. Each group has its unique way of life as described below. The Karen is the largest ethnic group in Thailand, with an estimated population of around one million. Originally, they lived in eastern Tibet and China, but after being invaded, they migrated to live along the Mekong and Salween Rivers. There too, however, they faced oppression and even slavery under the rule of Burma, Siam, and British colonization. Eventually, they migrated from Myanmar and are now widely spread out across 16 different provinces in western and northern Thailand, which contain large areas of mountainous and dense forest. While they are best known for the neck rings worn by Karen's women, that only represents one of the many tribes which compose their diverse community.

The Hmong originally migrated from southern China into what is now Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, with some having migrated further to the United States. In Thailand, they make their homes in the mountainous North. They are highly distinguishable by their traditional clothing, which often displays colorful, sophisticated patterns as art pieces unto themselves. The Moken live along the ocean, the Moken people, or "people immersed in water," have never placed their roots in a single region. Sometimes glossed over as "gypsies of the sea," they are a nomadic seafaring tribe who once traversed the Andaman Sea, living on wooden Kabang boats and diving to fish for food and

sometimes trade. However, since the horrific tsunami hit Thailand in 2004, they've been forced onto land-primarily residing in the South and are now limited in their mobility and traditional way of life.

Buddhism: The Ethic Coexistence

Every individual is valued and should be treated fairly and therefore with justice. Mahayana Buddhists believe that everyone should be treated equally because we all have Buddha Nature that is the ability to become enlightened. It does not matter about our culture, race, or background.

Theravada Buddhism is often practiced in contexts of significant ethnic diversity in Southeast Asia, but much scholarship has not sufficiently accounted for the role of this diversity in shaping the imagination of Theravada Buddhism among its practitioners in the region. Examination of Theravada Buddhist communities in the three very different contexts of Singapore, Southwest China, and Thailand serves as the basis for consideration of this role. Despite the differences among these settings, Theravada Buddhism in each is shaped by state discourses on race and religion. Theravada Buddhism and ethnicity in both local and state forms mark each other merits more attention (Thomas Borchert,2014).

Dhamma is a way of life, mental cultivation, and a deep awakening with the ultimate goal of self-transformation. So, the main question for discussion in this paper is: Is Buddhism the root for development in a multicultural society? Multiculturalism is the co-existence of different races and ethnic groups of different languages and religions in society with their cultural heritage and beliefs. In other words, multiculturalism is associated with cultural and religious diversity. In the following sections, we explore Singapore's approach to diversity and draw lessons on how the social strategies and government policies help to build a cohesive multicultural society. Whereas Pascal Boyer (2001) argues that since religion is a cultural construct, it cannot fit into any definition of religion. To him, religious ideas are created inside individual minds because concepts in the mind are constructed due to external influences. The result may fail or succeed during cultural transmission, if a cultural phenomenon takes place, the result is a successful selection. Boyer asserts that all religions share a common characteristic, that is, the belief in supernatural agents, for instance, God, spirit or ancestor; and that people have religious ideas and beliefs since

they acquire such concepts from others. The supernatural agent definition of religion by Boyer is based on the concept of an unknown agent with strength and power, which is beyond the understanding of an individual (Boyer, Pascal. 2001).

Culture and Buddhism are interrelated and interdependent n each other. The social development of multiculturalism may contain elements of Buddhism, but it is impossible to conclude that Buddhism is the root of multiculturalism for societal development. As the Buddha taught about the paticcasamupada (Interdependent Co-arising), some conditions lead one factor to the arising of another, some conditions lead one factor to the ceasing of another (Lim 2019). This core principle of Buddhism on the interconnected relationship of everything in reality and the world can be expressed in the formulae below: When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases (Bodhi 2012). Finally, it is meaningful to look at the reason why Buddha gave the spiritual path he taught as Dhamma-Vinaya. The goal of the Buddha is to teach Dhamma in its practicality and applicability way to benefit sentient beings and lead them to liberation. The goal of the teachings is to offer the truth and morality as a guide in a relevant way, to motivate one to live life to the fullest in every mindful way. and to transform oneself towards the path of awakening. The history and evidence have indicated that both the teachings and discipline are inseparable and interdependent, suggesting a strong foundation in understanding and practice is needed in transforming oneself. In other words, given any cultural context, the importance of the relationship between Dhamma and Vinaya cannot be underscored (Bodhi, Bhikkhu,2012).

The vast majority of people, both ethnic and indigenous peoples of the world, have different lifestyles, different people, different origins, and what everyone can do in the same way. Respecting Buddhism as a tool to hold people's minds in the community born of faith and respect This Buddhist doctrine will help build good relations among people in the community. It is also a tool that will help create peace and order in a sustainable community coexistence model which is consistent with the concept of Phra Phromkunaphorn (Ph.D. Payutto (2012) said that living together as a community makes us feel that we have friends that we know first and foremost is our own family. Next are the neighboring families, villages, sub-districts, provinces, and

finally the country, and usually people live together well. only when there is one belief or one that binds the mind the same is like a rod or string that is strung harmonized among beliefs or devices hold all those minds It can be said that religion is the most powerful creed and the strongest and most profound anchor of the mind. This is consistent with Mon Thongchat's research (2010), which states that, in addition, religion helps build good relationships with each other, helps to eliminate social gaps, and builds mutual trust. It is the foundation of unity and unity in community development. and create peace and stability for the community. Social coexistence is a group of at least two or more people living together in a certain area that has both direct and indirect relationships. Direct relationships such as speaking, greeting, working together, trading, and giving each other generosity. For the indirect relationship walking through people, we don't know but he is from the same province. caused by the fact that all parties come to understand each other and find a way to live together peacefully and orderly within a clearly defined framework. There are meetings to discuss with various departments to organize activities to build relationships. to create awareness, understand and implement as a guideline for sustainable development Under the participation of all people in the community This is consistent with the research of Anand Kanjanaphan (2015) which found that another duty of society is to take care of members to live together in peace and to create fairness by coordinating benefits for members to perform their duties efficiently. fit to drive creative thinking and invent new things for the advancement of society including creating awareness allowing people in society to conserve and preserve their own culture.

Buddhism: Contribution to Sustainable Ethnic Coexistence

As a major result of the Earth Summit, the Earth Charter listed guiding principles of sustainable development. It contains a broad array of economic, social, political, and environmental policies and acknowledges the interdependence between these elements in addressing the peoples' well-being. Both approaches are consistent with the importance of satisfying present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, they differ in "how" this sustainable development mandate can be achieved (Mukesh Kumar Verma, 2019). According to the teachings of Buddhism, human beings are born in a state of ignorance. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge, and it is this lack of knowledge that causes problems in life". This is because people

without knowledge or wisdom simply follow their desires or cravings for sense pleasures. When people act in a blind craving manner, they are unable to perceive what is of true benefit. However, "when ignorance is replaced with wisdom, it is possible [for people] to distinguish between what is of true benefit and what is not". Wise actions occur when people's efforts and actions are founded on intelligent reflection. If not, people's actions will too often be based on self-interested feelings and ignorant reactions. When people acquire knowledge and wisdom during their lives, they can become more skillful and improve their relationships with people and the things around them. Then they are much more inclined to act out of a desire for the well-being of others (Payutto, 1998).

Buddhism deals with the spiritual realm. It concerns wisdom about how best to live one's life in light of the realities of human existence. To understand the essence of Buddhism, it is important to start with the most basic teachings of the Buddha, i.e., the Four Noble Truths. The first of these truths is the existence of suffering. Suffering includes birth, old age, sickness, and death as well as anger, jealousy, worry, anxiety, despair, dissatisfaction, and discontent. The second truth is the cause of suffering. Suffering occurs because of ignorance of important life truths that cause people to cling, crave, or otherwise become attached to external worldly phenomena in the erroneous belief that their possession will bring sustained consummate happiness or satisfaction. The third truth is that there is a way out of suffering. We can free ourselves from attachment and clinging by making transformative life changes. To make such changes requires us to gain an understanding of important life truths, gaining the wisdom that not only enables us to cease suffering but to realize the rise of peace and joy. To overcome suffering, people may need training and changes in their mental attitudes. Old harmful habits of thought and action need to be dissolved. The fourth truth is that there is a path (along with particular practices) that leads to the cessation of suffering. This path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path. "The Eightfold Path details the multifaceted nature of changes in understanding, mental processes, patterns and thoughts, and actions and behavior that are required for progress towards reducing suffering" At the heart of this path is living mindfully. Mindfulness involves the kind of concentration and understanding about oneself and others that helps us live compassionately and with peace and joy. The teaching of Lord Buddha on leading life along the middle path is therefore teaching on choices in life. The Dhammacakkapavattna

Sutta presents the Noble Eightfold path which is described as the Noble Truth of the practice leading to the cessation of suffering. The practice of the middle path consists of eight deeds of righteousness. The following eight factors are 1) Right View, 2) Right Thought, 3) Right Speech, 4) Right Action, 5) Right Livelihood, 6) Right Effort, 7) Right Mindfulness, and 8) Right Concentration. Buddhist lifestyle aims to improve these three synergistic abilities to perfection by ongoing practice, which is a development process. Nevertheless, in this case, development is just a by-product of Buddhist practice, not a direct aim that must be attained. The development process is an inner spiritual advancement, which is emerging through ongoing practice and leads to liberation (Mukesh Kumar Verma, 2019).

According to the research conducted by Natthapas Yot-Arlai, Ethnic Groups' Participation in Sustainable Tourism, the important findings were the popular trend in visiting the area induced the utility system development to facilitate the traveling and the better way of life of the hill tribes in the area. They not only acquired extra income from tourism activities, but also learned, realized, and comprehended the significance of maintaining, preserving, and conserving the natural resources, culture. and tradition of the ethnic groups. Additionally, participation in the implementation level by taking part in the Area development, cooperation with the Project's operation, or evaluating the tourism activities in the community were scanty. This was because the majority of them were hill-tribe people having a low level of education. Some of them were not able to read, write or communicate in the Thai language and held highland identity cards or nationality unproved. Therefore, they had limitations in accessing data and information from public organizations (Natthapas Yot-Arlai,2018).

Sustainable practices and livelihoods, modern technology, and ethnic groups have been able to utilize and manage natural resources with methods that are scientifically proven to be more sustainable and more effective than many "modern" practices.While each village has its unique principles and practices, we will explore some useful examples relevant to our changing climate and society, drawing upon the Hmong, Karen, and Moken. These examples are by no means representative of the entire spectrum of ethnic lifestyles and cultures.

Thailand: Reviewing the Circumstances of the Ethnic Coexistence

In the economic view, Waraporn Cherdchoo found out in his study of Tai-Yuan Ethnic Group: Conceptual Framework for Creation and Product Development that the Yuan origin has a sense of belonging in cultural heritage, especially the senior members who were more customary and pursued inheritance passed on from their predecessor. They look for the development of a locally unique identity that would sustainably bring back a sense of awareness and appreciation for the local wisdom. Textiles and outfits were demonstrations of the local identity as they reflected sentimental and cultural values as well as history, and Tai-Yuan identity was represented as a creation of new products. The finding showed that workshops would increase the cooperation between researchers and local people. The young generation could generate the newer contemporary patterns, adding value to the existing product. The young generation will become more aware of the sustainable preservation of their cultural inheritance as well (Waraporn Cherdchoo,2020). This can indicate that the ethnic coexistence in Thailand is one of the factors to generate a unique product that brings income both domestically and internationally as well as other businesses could do.

In the social view, prejudice and language barriers are still the obstacles between ethnic groups and government officials as they cannot understand ethnic languages, while the ethnic groups cannot communicate in Thai. Incomplete communication often led to misinterpretation and can result in maltreatment; mistaken diagnosis and incorrect prescriptions. Additionally, those who lacked the confidence to communicate in Thai tend to be afraid to ask questions, and in many cases where men with ID cards ignore women's health, many pregnant women cannot access prenatal care. In several ethnic communities, their knowledge about giving birth is not relevant to modern practices. Some families prohibit their women from coming to the hospital for delivery. The rationale includes beliefs such as that the baby may have deformed eyes if their head was exposed to the wind. Some refuse the food arranged by the hospitals. For the women who chose to come for services at the hospitals, they face unfriendly service and the service providers' ignorance of ethnic

diversity. This shows that ethnic peoples are concerned about losing their cultural identity, including their mother tongue, rituals, and other traditional practices. Although efforts were made to revitalize their culture, traditional practices decreased at the household level.

In the view of politics, the report to the Thai Government on the human rights of ethnic minority women reflects some consequences of the prejudice and discrimination caused by the traditional belief system that leads to rights violations in several aspects, including a lack of opportunity and rights in making decisions in their own lives. Critical areas of concern for ethnic minority women are namely regarding socio-economic issues; access to nationality and political participation; education and training; lack of reproductive health and protection from violence committed against women. The reality and frequency of these situations reflect that the Thai government does not develop appropriate policies or measures to mitigate discrimination against ethnic minority women. Moreover, most data collection has not been done using a gender-specific approach although specific ethnic information exists. Responsible offices have not been aware of the importance to follow up on whether ethnic minority women were benefitting from the government policies and measures. Moreover, these offices are not aware of specific issues that ethnic minority women are facing. Ethnic minority women are under the protection of Thai laws, however, the Thai government has failed to provide effective law enforcement to protect them from being discriminated against and from gender-based violence. The Thai government should promote gender equality in a formal and informal education system and address the issues of harmful traditional beliefs and practices. Ethnic minority women also have no access to information that can help ensure their rights to health including sexual and reproductive rights. Ethnic minority women are still facing risks of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions, and HIV infections from their husbands. Lastly, we very much hope that the recommendations for all five issues will be considered by the Thai government and turn into appropriate measures to create positive changes for ethnic women. Moreover, people who belong to certain ethnic groups in Thailand have struggled for decades against restrictions on accessing ancestral lands and public services. This is because many ethnic groups have not yet been granted Thai citizenship. The Synthesis Report on Marginalization of Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples in Thailand accessed in August 2020 found that the study in 2018, indicated that the ten indigenous groups–Mlabri, Kaw (Umpi), Bisu, Chong,

Yakrul, Tai-saek, Moken, Moklen, Urak Lawoy, and Mani–have faced problems of rights to nationality, land and access to natural resources, including the recognition of their identity.

Many ethnic people have not yet been granted Thai citizenship, which means that they are excluded from the government's basic welfare services. The indigenous peoples' movement is expected to help Indigenous leaders regain political power with the aim of self-governance, self-determination, and self-identification. National policy and legislation changes have considerable impacts on the livelihoods of these ethnic groups, including the resettlement of the ethnic communities. Based on the collected data, the report emphasizes a concern over land use insecurity, restrictions to access and manage natural resources, and unsecured income from becoming seasonal hired labors, in particular for those ethnic groups of fisher folks in southern Thailand.

Thailand: Overview of the Ethnic Rights for Coexistence

Over recent decades, ethnic groups in Thailand and around the world face growing threats to their traditional way of life from industrial expansion, human rights abuses, and climate change. Disappearing with them are their invaluable ingenuity, wisdom, and culture. Accumulated over hundreds and thousands of years, this wealth of past and evolving knowledge can provide us with lessons on how to progress toward a better future in which humans and nature can co-exist and thrive alongside one another. Whether it's in being resourceful and respectful of nature or valuing generosity and compassion as a community, there's much that urban dwellers can learn from ethnic groups and local communities.

To head toward truly sustainable and equitable development, it's important to recognize the value and contributions of ethnic groups, protect their rights, and preserve their rich culture, so they can continue to flourish and safeguard natural resources and environments that we all depend upon. To this end, the Thai government has made several legislative and policy changes to address civil rights problems surrounding ethnic groups and stateless persons in Thailand, including drafting the Protection and Promotion of Ethnic Groups Act to guarantee that ethnic groups enjoy equal rights without discrimination; implementing the Plan to Promote Coexistence under a Multicultural Society in Thailand 2018-2021 to promote coexistence in a multicultural society; and

amending the Registration of Residential Inhabitant Act and Civil Registration Act to provide pathways to citizenship for the children of foreign or stateless inhabitants.(Benjamin Rujopakarn,2020).

Buddhism: The Path for Generous Ethnic Coexistence

There are at least three important areas in which Buddhist teachings could contribute to a generous ethnic coexistence. Moral discipline is the first. In this area, the market economy seems to be quite indifferent as long as our activities are legally permissible. The second important contribution of Buddhism is the teaching of selflessness (Pali: Anattã). While the market economy focuses on the self as the operating entity, the Buddhist teaching on dependent arising (Pali: Paticcasamuppãda) posits that there is no real self-entity independent of other conditions. Our happiness and well-being are inseparable from those of our past, present, and future generations, our natural environment, and the rest of the ecosystem. We cannot survive and operate in a vacuum. With this Buddhist perspective, we should abandon the silo mentality and see others' problems as our problems, and embrace their challenges as our challenges. It is a transformation from self-centeredness to selflessness. In a sharing economy, we need to share good fortune and bad fortune. Without this sense of commonality, the third Buddhist contribution is that changes at the individual and societal levels are inseparable. Bhikkhu Bodhi argued: "Two dimensions of our lives; the internal and the external, the personal and the social] are inseparably intertwined and mutually conditioning, so that our values reflect social and economic realities, while social and economic realities are shaped by our values at the individual level. Thus, while it is in our personal lives that we have the most power to instigate direct change, any alternations in our lifestyles must also reach outwards and exercise an impact on our interpersonal relations, our social order, our political agenda, and our relationship to the natural environment" (Bodhi,2000).

Moreover, the four noble truths and the eightfold path connect well with sustainability. The first and the second o of noble truth explain about causes of suffering and unsustainability whereas the third and the last of the four noble truths explain about the effect or the way of achieving sustainability. The explanation of suffering and causes of suffering enable one to realized that unsustainability is cause through excessive greed or carving.

A change towards investment in goods and services with a minimum impact on nature, in term of more careful use of resources and the creation of less waste would make for an economic system aligned with sustainability. The

path of cessation of suffering which is the noble eightfold path defines the way toward sustainability. The noble eightfold path accentuates the value of moderation. To moderate and make full use of any resources drawn from the Earth is strongly emphasized as the remedy for exploitation of natural resources (Danniel, 2011). Right livelihood is the core aspect of the noble eightfold path that is pervasively used in showing the connection of achieving sustainability. The right livelihood means a life that conform to be five precepts that related to the morality and ethics. Danniel (2007) explained that right livelihood as wellbeing that emphasizes earning one's living in the ways that do not harm, deprive or exploit other people, animals and nature. The right view and the right conduct provided a sense of responsibility to one's self and towards socio-economy in enjoying the liberty of prosperity and happiness.

Muyzeberge (2011) noted that Buddhism encourages the creation of wealth as long as it is done honestly without harming the people besides making positive contribution to society. Wealth creation should encourage selflessness and cooperation rather than capitalist value of self-interest and competition. Another key attribute that explicates the connection between Buddhism and sustainability is the value of interconnectedness of all living beings. This means that both human and non-human being, including nature, cannot exist in their own right, but they coexist. The Buddhist   principles pervasively adopted in making this connection with sustainability with law of Karma. It explains that mutual interaction between causes and effects that help understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. For example, nature is threatened due to ignorance of the interconnectedness of human and nature. If the human realized that the importance of saving nature for their existence, they would not destroy it. Thus, anything that has impact on the self, also has an impact on society and nature. The law of Karma enables individuals to infer their responsibility to find the balance between self-interest and the society that they live in. This understanding brings ethics and morality to the activity through the awareness of consequence emphasized by the law of Karma that are causes and effects. Wellbeing is also stressed in Buddhist socio-economic supposed to be driven by ethical motivation that seek to cause no harm to individual, to create no agitation in society and to have a beginning impact on socio-economy. The value of interconnectedness is stressed in initiatives to preserve the environment. Buddhist principle of compassion adds the value of empathy to the notion of sustainability. Gaining the capacity to be considerate of others and of their feelings allows one to respect each other. Compassion application in organization context enables better understanding of connections with stakeholders strengthening collaboration and harmony. Compassion also underlines the value of nonviolence. Moreover, the biodiversity conservation

efforts set forth towards ensuring sustainability are driven by the need for nonviolent coexistence between human and non-human.

Conclusions

Buddhism inspires interconnectedness among all beings, moderation, and empathy in relation to sustainability at socio-economical level. Such relation made in light of Buddhism and value is different to the competitiveness of economic rationality. Mukesh Kumar Verma (2019) mentioned that Buddhism has the potential to link sustainable development at all levels–individual, national and global. A beginning can be made from anywhere. It also provides the reasons why doing so will not only make a world better but also a man happier. Buddhism can be one of the approaches to the generous coexistence of ethnic groups in Thailand in the aspect of social, economic, and politics. This article also reviews the sustainable practices of the ethnic groups, generous coexistence of ethnic groups, and protection of ethnic rights for coexistence in Thailand.

Buddhism for the generous coexistence of ethnic groups in Thailand will support them to live with their own unique cultures and customs while contributing certain benefits to the community both in business and socio-economy. This article gives suggestions on a Buddhist approach to develop generous coexistence of Thailand's ethnic groups, conserve their sustainable way of life which teaches us about how to live in multi-culture, and finally protect ethnic rights for coexistence in the future world. Everyone should come forward to save those people of the ethnic groups, not only in Thailand but also all over the world so that the society and mankind of all races can live peacefully in a sustainable way.

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