

THAI BUDDHISTS-MUSLIMS CUSTOMS IN DIALOGUE FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN THE SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

The religiously and culturally or traditionally pluralistic harmony and tolerance of Buddhists and Muslims in the southern part of Thailand is the necessary condition for the ever lasting peace, for it is based on the mutual respect for the diversity of pluralistic harmony between two religions. Tolerance is the essential condition of harmony in Buddhism as well as in Islam. Tolerance as the essence of sustainable harmony can be conducted through the method of inter-religious dialogue of life. To solve the problem in the Deep South of Thailand, both Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims and Thai-Malay-Muslims, who have been living there in the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, for many decades, will have to build their trust through the dialogue of life through traditions or customs based on their religious doctrine of tolerance. Dialogue of life entails dialogue of action, religious doctrine and religious experiences.

บทคัดย่อ

เงื่อนไขจำเป็นที่จะก่อให้เกิดสันติภาพถาวรในภาคใต้ คือการที่ชาวพุทธและชาวมุสลิมต้องนำหลักขันติธรรมซึ่งมีอยู่ประจำในศาสนาของตนเองแล้วมาใช้ ทั้งพุทธศาสนาและศาสนาอิสลามต่างก็ยอมรับว่าหลักขันติธรรมเป็นเงื่อนไขสำคัญสำหรับความสามัคคี หลักขันติธรรมนี้จะปฏิบัติให้ได้ผลดีโดยอาศัยวิธีการศาสนสัมพันธ์แบบการสานเสวนาเชิงชีวิตร่วมกันฉันเพื่อนหรือฉันพี่น้องระหว่างศาสนิกของทั้งสองศาสนา ดังนั้น เพื่อให้เกิดความสงบในสามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ คือ ปัตตานี ยะลา และนราธิวาส ศาสนิกของทุกศาสนา กล่าวคือชาวพุทธไทยและชาวไทยมุสลิม

รวมทั้งชาวมาเลย์มุสลิมต้องร่วมมือกันสร้างความเชื่อมั่นซึ่งกันและกันให้เกิดขึ้นตามหลักศาสนสัมพันธ์เชิงชีวิตร่วมกันฉันเพื่อน ที่ตั้งอยู่บนฐานแห่งหลักขันติธรรมของแต่ละศาสนา การสานเสวนาแบบใช้ชีวิตร่วมกันฉันเพื่อนครอบคลุมการสานเสวนา ที่เหลืออีกสามอย่างคือการสานเสวนาแบบร่วมมือกันทำกิจกรรมสังคม สงเคราะห์ การสานเสวนาแบบแลกเปลี่ยนเรียนรู้หลักคำสอนของแต่ละ ศาสนา ร่วมกัน และการสานเสวนาแบบเขาร่วมการปฏิบัติศาสนธรรมระหว่างศาสนา

I. Introduction

My attempt in this paper is to explore the role of the *dialogue of life* in connection with the spirit of Buddhism in pacifying conflict and supporting peace throughout the world. My purpose is to show how this dialogue of life can strengthen the relationships between Buddhists and Muslims in the Deep South of Thailand in particular. This paper is not intended to be an elaborate discussion of the details of the conflict between the Buddhists and Muslims in the deep southernmost provinces of Thailand, but intends to suggest a religious and philosophical solution to the problem. However, to fulfill the objectives of this paper, some necessary information on the nature and structure of the political conflict and violence must be given so that clear connection of the two aspects of religious doctrine and political conflict can be properly understood.

II. Buddhist-Muslim Conflict in Southern Thailand

2.1 Historical Background of the Conflict:

As we have already known that Thailand has been experiencing unprecedented escalation of political unrest in its three Malay-Muslim-dominated provinces, namely Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, where 80 percent of the total Thai Muslim population today about 8-10 million (Oknation, 2552) are experiencing ethnic, lingual, cultural and political conflict. The incidents of unrest in the Deep South were particularly se-

vere from January 2004 to January 2010.

From the database of Deep South Watch, it was found that over the past 73 months, there were a total of 9,446 incidents of unrest, *resulting in approximately 4100 deaths and 6,509 injuries*. The total casualties resulting from this unrest over the past six years has been more than 10,609 individuals. If the family of the deceased and the injured are included as those affected by the mentioned loss, then it is estimated that the number of people who were directly affected by loss would be approximately 53,045 persons. It is interesting to note that the victims – those who lost their lives as well as those who were injured from the violence in the southern border provinces – consist of various backgrounds. There are Muslims as well as Buddhists. Among the dead, the Muslims outnumbered the Buddhist, while among the injured, the majority are Buddhists. Statistics showed that 58.95 percents (2,417 individuals) of the deceased were Muslims, while 38.02 percent (1,559 persons) were Buddhists. Among the injured, 59.82 percent (3,894 persons) were Buddhists, while 32.17 percent (2,094 persons) were Muslims, (*Srisompob Jitpiromsri, 2011*).

Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf is right in saying “The unrest in Thailand is rooted in historical grievances and the rise of the ideology of Malay ethno-religious nationalism leading to the rise of mass-based insurgency”, (2006, p. 189). Michael K. Jerryson, suggests “Some southern Thai Buddhists perceive the violence in their villages as a product of the conflict between radical Islam and Thai Buddhism; conversely, many southern Malay Muslims perceive the conflict to be between Malay Islamic separatism and a hegemonic Buddhist State” (Jerryson, 2011, p. 12).

Vanchai Vatanasapt in his research entitled “Citizens Dialogue: The Way Out Of the Southern Thailand Violence”, also agrees with Imtiyaz Yusuf, and summarized the origin and development of the conflict:

1. The issue of conflict in southernmost provinces, Thailand is a chronic problem that several governments have attempted to resolve, but day after day acts of violence still occur.
2. From research done by the King Pradjadhipok Institute, we have summarized the following: the conflict

in Southern Thailand stems from the desire of the ethnic Malay-Pattani people to preserve their unique language, religion and culture.

3. There is evidence of, and an expressed desire for separatism, but it is probably not the view of the vast majority of those in the region.
4. The state must understand that Game Theory will probably have a part in creating a united front and trust building measures.
5. The life of every citizen whether Buddhist or Muslim which become the capital cost of the Game Theory needs to be reduced effectively.

2.2 Conflict Analysis:

My observation drawn from the data received from the DeepSouthWatch agency can be expressed in the following points.

Firstly, the number of incidents has decreased due to the new measures rendered by the government. Instead of using military action, the government is now using peaceful dialogue of life and action, which was used previously during the time of Former Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. DeepSouthWatch therefore claims that “Thailand attributed the success to the “Tai Rom Yen” amnesty programme”. (DeepSouthWatch, 2011a). And this peaceful dialogue has been maintained by the former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva up to the present period of Prime Minister Yingluck Chinavat. (DeepSouthWatch, 2011b).

Secondly, the numbers of ordinary Muslims killed, outnumber those of Buddhist monks, Islamic leaders, teachers, policemen and soldiers, and leads to a conclusion that the separatists are trying to kill those Muslims villagers who do not cooperate with them (DeepSouthWatch, 2010). This also suggests that the majority of Thai Muslims do not want separation from Thailand.