

Majjhimāpatipadā: The Buddhist Perspective on Political Conflict Solution in Thailand

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Abstract

According to Chaiwat Satha-Anand, since earliest times, human societies have always had conflict; since human beings lived in different social-cultural environments. Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso also gives his opinions that in our present world, with its diversity of cultures, languages, philosophy and religions, it is possible for conflict to arise between two people or two groups. There are many reasons why human beings and societies are driven to conflict. In fact, conflict that arises in this context could even be a natural and necessary thing in human life. (Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso, 2009)

There are many kinds of conflict. But the conflict which has more power to destroy the people is the political conflict. The political conflict in the world from the past to the present has killed people in a very large number.

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Political conflict, nowadays, is found in many countries around the world. National political conflict leads to suffering and may bring society to a civil war. International political conflict between two countries may lead to world war. For political conflict in nation has negative impact on the country's development. It affects human well-being and peacefulness. Thailand is one of those countries which have been facing political conflict since 2548 B.E. to present day. As the result, the country cannot be effectively developed such as in economic and social dimension. No one knows when the political conflict will be solved. For a long period of time, Buddhism has contributed peacefulness to Thailand. The recent political conflict challenges Buddhist worldview and its contribution to the solution of the current crisis. How does Buddhism consider the conflict and solve it? The aim of this paper is to analyze the political conflict in Thailand with the help of Buddha's teaching of *Majjimāpatipadā* (Middle Path) which is, I believe, the Buddhist way out of political conflict in Thailand.

Political Conflict in Thailand

As I am writing the article, Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, is in crisis of political conflict because of more than ten thousands of protesters around November 2013-February 2014. Since around 150,000 of protesters led by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)'s leader, Mr. Suthep Thaugsuban protest against the PM Yingluck Shinawatra. The first main reason of the protesters is that the PM Yingluck Shinawatra's government attempted to pass a political amnesty bill in October-November 2013 and her government is controlled by her brother, ousted leader Thaksin Shinawatra. (Jonathan Head, 2013). Hence PM Yingluk dissolved the parliament on December 9, 2013 and called election on February 2, 2014. The perceptual beginning of the political conflict now in Thailand can be traced back to political conflict in 2006 while the former PM Thaksin Shinawatra's government was protested against by large number of protesters led by Mr. Sondhi Limthongkul, and followed by military coup in September 9, 2006. Since 2006 to 2013, more than 8 years ago Thailand falls into the dark whole of political conflict, then nearly faced a civil war for many times. What is the cause of political conflict? To respond to the question the author will quote the concerned answers of some scholars as follows:

According to Prof. Dr. Somparn Promta, the phenomenon of the political conflict in Thailand is caused by the conflicts between the village and the city. As he said “So, it can be said that a serious political problem in Thailand is—people from the villages choose unqualified persons to act as national politicians and the city people see that these politicians should not be allowed to represent the whole nation. The villagers think that the politician that they choose represents only their village. They do nothing about being representative of the whole nation as the city people think. And this is a root of conflict that causes a long-standing suffering in Thai politics.” (Somparn Promta, 2009:194) In addition, Prof. Dr. Somparn Promta has given a reason to support his above view by saying that behind the conflicts between these two groups there are two different worldviews regarding two different things and they do not know they are using different things to support their views. The first thing is a political theory. The second thing is a meta-political theory. The first is the political theory of Democracy which is based on the voice of majority. If there is any crisis, the only way of Democracy to solve such problem is required. The second is the way which is not in Democracy that those believe in it to be efficiency of the problem solution in politic. (Somparn Promta, 2009:198-199)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso has given his view about the cause of political conflict in Thailand that usurpation benefits, demand, value, and structural inequity of economy, politics and society, are the main causes of the conflict. He also supports Somparn Promta’s view of different worldviews regarding Democracy as he said that an important variability of the conflict and violence was different views of the meaning and interpretation of Democracy. (Hansa Dhammhaso, 2555:13)

Responding to the said views, political conflict in Thailand in the author’s view is a problem of economy which is the basic need of the people as the Buddhists saying in the technical term *“Kāmatanḥā*. This makes them have bias ideas towards political worldview and be one major condition of the conflict between the village people and the city people. The majority of the people live in the villages and they are poor. The minorities of the people live in the cities and they are rich. The villagers think that the cities have more rights, power

and verities of infrastructures in the country. These inequalities lead to the political conflict rooted in Thailand.

The Buddhist Perspective on Political Conflict Solution in Thailand

Some scholars said that it was very difficult to apply the Buddha's teaching to solve political conflict because the Buddha taught people cessation of individuals' life suffering, not for social suffering like the political conflict. To apply the Buddha's teaching to solve political conflict in Thailand in the current time is a mere dream which can only be a highly impossible dream. I do not absolutely agree with this view. I think it can also be a hopeful dream. Since the Buddha's teaching is rooted in Thailand for a long time and has influence on the Thai people's mind. Thailand has been known as "Siam's Smile" because Thai people have compassion, kindness and sharing, etc. which are the strength that may unite them in the end. And Buddhist philosophy of *Anattā* (selflessness) which is the special characteristic of Buddhism can remind them to realize that they are all the same Thai, then the civil war may not arise.

The ideal to resolve the political conflict in Thailand, in the Buddhist worldview as the author's interpretation, I agree with the decentralization which is a practical compassion (*Mettā*) and a practical loving-kindness (*Karunā*) in the basic teaching of Buddhism. The centralization is a cause of inequality between those who have power to centralize the countries and those ordinary people. Ven. Thich Nhat Tu (2549:6) writes: "The Buddha's teachings are strongly against all forms of social inequality. The Buddha gives equal opportunities to all those who are willing to enter his *Saṅgha*, regardless of their castes, creed, race, social status, and sex." The Politicians ought to decentralize economy, education, political power, and basic infrastructures which are the basic needs of the people. If the basic need has been equally shared between the village people and the city people, the bias view of political conflict can be solved. Those people who hold the political power ought to realize that all people in the country are their own relatives and friends. Since for a long time politicians who govern the country have not much worldview as such, therefore most people are still poor, economical conflict has arisen

and led them to political conflict as happened recently. Thailand has faced the crisis of the political conflict. In December 2013-January, Cambodia also faced the crisis of political conflict. More than 100,000 protesters protested against the government to give them a chance for new clean election and unfortunately the numbers of protesters have been killed. Again more than 20 people were killed by those who do not want election in the crisis of political conflict in Bangladesh. In nutshell, the problem of centralization is the root cause of political conflict in these three countries. The centralization is not the middle way (*Majjimāpatipadā*) in Buddhist worldview, but it is an extreme way, because the rulers have a lot of attachment (*Taṇhā*), ego (*Māna*) and wrong view (*Micchādiṭṭhi*) as *Papañcadhamma* in the Pāli technical term. Therefore they have no compassion for their own people and centralize their own country. Here it can be concluded that the lack of equality and fairness in distribution of all basic needs makes people upset, and they easily follow the politicians who offer them a good chance of acquiring the basic need. Then the conflict of those people, namely, the village and the city leads to political conflict.

Most Thai people are Buddhist, they must be the real Buddhist in which they must learn, understand and live in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. For Buddhism I may say that all of Buddha's teaching of morality is *Majjimāpatipadā* in which it is the means that lead people who appropriately apply it, to the goal i.e. cessation of suffering in different levels of the degree of *Dhamma* practicing. In analyzing the influence of Buddha's teaching on Thais in case of the crisis of political conflict in Thailand in the recent around November 2013-February 2014, I believe that the Buddha's teaching of *Aviḥimsā* (Non-violence), has been applied by both PM Yingluck and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC)'s leader, Mr. Suthep Thaugsuban. Both claimed not to do violence to each other. Since, the government of PM Yingluck strongly commanded the policemen not to commit violence at all to the protesters. Owing to the fact that more than 3 months PDRC has protested against government, the government still does not commit violence to the PDRC protesters. On the contrary, when we look at the cases of political conflict in other countries, in the same time, numbers of protesters have been killed. Here I may say that democracy in Thailand has been more developed. For Thailand now the recent crisis of political conflict has

been solved by applying *Majjhimāpatipadā* in case of *Samṃāvēcā* (Right Speech). *Samṃāvēcā* is only way out of the conflict without violence. Truth is the basic morality that all humans need it. Political conflict has increased because of wrong speech. What is the nature of *Samṃāvēcā*? *Dhammapāda* writes “Speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness follows like a never departing shadow.” *Samṃāvēcā* is abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, and from idle chatter. In *Samṃāvēcā*, one of the practices of the Eight Fold Noble Path, there are four parameters: telling the truth, not creating discord between others, not speaking cruelly and not exaggerating (Nhat Hanh, 1999). Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso strongly recommended the significance of *Samṃāvēcā*: “I may say, *Samṃāvēcā* plays a dominant role in the real daily life of people in society, but most people do not realize its significance.” (Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso,2554:11)

Lastly, because capitalism and dictatorship have been extremely accepted in Thailand, then they lead Thais to crisis of political conflict. Thailand should not extremely develop economy following capitalism. As Buddhism holds the middle view about concept of man in which man consists of both mind and body, neither mind nor body. Extreme economic development can serve only man’s body, but cannot serve man’s mind. Man needs to be moderately developed both in mind and body. Fortunately, Thai people believe in Buddhism. Buddhism has contribution teaching or *Dhamma* to Thai people for long a long time, therefore Buddhism has given worldview to them. The best example of the influence of Buddhism on the Thai people is the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy that Thai people ought to learn to live moderately, not to be the slave of the extreme desire (*Taṇhā*). The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy has been explained by the *Chaipattana* Foundation that the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and its three pillars:-

1. Moderation: Sufficiency at a level of not doing something too little or too much at the expense of oneself or others, for example, producing and consuming at a moderate level.
2. Reasonableness: The decision concerning the level of sufficiency must be made rationally with consideration of the factors involved and careful anticipation of the outcomes that may be

expected from such action.

3. Risk Management: The preparation to cope with the likely impact and changes in various aspects by considering the probability of future situations.

Decisions and activities must be carried out at a sufficient level depending on two conditions:

1. Knowledge, comprising all-round knowledge in the relevant fields and prudence in bringing this knowledge into consideration to understand the relationship among the field so as to use them to aid in the planning and ensure carefulness in the operation.
2. Virtue to be promoted, comprising the awareness of honesty, patience, perseverance, and intelligence in leading one's life.

Sufficiency Economy can be applied to all levels, branches, and sectors of the economy. It is not necessarily limited to the agricultural or rural sectors, or even the financial, the real estate, and the international trade and investment sectors by using similar principles of emphasizing moderation in performance, reasonableness, and creating immunity for oneself and society. (The *Chaipattana* Foundation)

In nutshell, to live moderately is to live with the capacities of right knowledge, right action or virtue. If Thai people can appropriately apply the Sufficiency Economy, they can avoid the negative impacts of recent political conflict, and also in the long term.

Conclusion

Although political conflict in Thailand has arisen since 8 years ago, it still continues and is the main cause of the country not availing the opportunity to be one of leader in Asian Community. However, this situation can be learnt by people, especially politicians that they should not do whatever they want to do for maintaining their own power and interest. If politicians only work for their own self interest, they will face the crucial problem as happened in the recent. Politics without ethics is sinful. Since politic of

Thailand is democracy, therefore Thai people must learn and understand the meaning and essence of democracy. Mahatama Ghandi said about the essence of democracy: “Democracy must in essence... mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.” (H,27-5-1939,p.143) “The very essence of democracy is that every person represents all the varied interests which compose the nation. It is true that it does not exclude and should not exclude special representation of special interests, but such representation is not its test. It is a sign of its imperfection. (H, 22-4-1939,p.99. As quoted in www.mkgandhi.org) Finally, the author thinks that the Thai people have learnt lessons from the political conflict and will reach the real democracy as Mahatama Ghandi said.

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