

Peace Making: Religions diversity in the midst of Peace Case study in Samudsongkram Province

Dr.Wanpen Worawongpongsa*

Passanan Assavarak*

Abstract

Religious differences sometimes are used for construction of a prejudice which leads to a religious war. Furthermore, in a globalizing world where the information is part of a weapon system could frame more violence toward race, ethnic and religion. This study aims to analyze the factors that lead three religions which are Buddhism, Christianity and Islam live in one harmoniously community, simultaneously, to describe the obstruction to disunity. This study is based on seminar, gathered the information from distinguished scholars from each religion, and focus group which collected from the villagers in Samudsongkhram province, Thailand. The data are analyzed and interpreted by content analysis. The result shows that Thai-ness, neighborhood, way of life, adherence to virtue and activity play important role to peacefulness. On the other hand, external community as well as mistake and incomplete information can lead to disunity.

Keywords: Peace making, Religious diversity, Samudsongkhram

* lecturer at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand

Introduction

Religious beliefs offers an explanation for the fundamental meaning of life (Stark,1999) however, in a present day, religion becomes an excuse of creating violence to each other. In the view of many political analysts and social scientists, the era of Cold War and ideological conflict has given way to an era of ethnic wars and cultural conflicts. (James Kurth, 2001) For instance, Crusade War, US-Iraq war and violence in three southern border provinces of Thailand, these situations have created a great number of losses to life, properties and mentality. The linkage between violence and religion is like creating righteousness in fighting. Moreover, nowadays is an era of globalization in which the information is flowing swiftly all the time therefore the ideological conflict is widely stimulated in a form of racial, religious discrimination and ethnic bias which are rapidly dispersed in the pattern of boundless violence which may lead to mistrust, fighting and revenge.

In the book “The Clash of Civilization and Remaking of World Order”, Huntington states that the collision becomes a conflict between states of different civilizations causing the clash of civilization and world new order arrangement (Huntington, 1997) Pivotal to the Huntington argument is the claim that as globalization, the process of social, economic and cultural modernization, Swept around the world in the second half of the twentieth century, so too did a religious revival. (Oliver Mcternan, 2003) Peace making hence is an urgent matter for world community. Reconciliation is such a way to implement this process. Reconciliation necessitates that people come together and agree on the future of our world (David Tombs, 2006). Consequently, living peacefully in society of cultural diversity is a new challenge in achieving world peace.

Samudsongkram province has completely connected itself to globalization when it comes to terms with tourism

which has a number of sightseeing. It is a province where Buddhists, Christians and Muslims live together in harmony with social and economic interaction. As a result, Samudsongkram is considered to have high cultural diversity but this diversity does not create any condition of contradiction whatsoever, on the contrary, they can peacefully get along. In this violent world, I would like to take Samudsongkram province as a case study due to a prototype of peaceful living with cultural diversity especially religious diversity.

Research Objectives

To study the factors contributing to peacefulness and the obstacle in the community with religious diversity

Literature review

Pluralism

There is pluralism in the world which can be seen from the diversity of human, animal, plant and things. The diversity has taken place prior to the industrial society such as various tribes, local tradition and subculture. In addition, the foundation of individualism attributes to the fact that new generation places importance to themselves rather than the bond to their community. Individualism is seen to be both the dominant ideology of capitalist society and a corrosive belief system which stands in opposition to collective and traditional modes of existence (Bryan S. Turner, 1991). No matter it is Neitzche, Sarte or Kiekegaard's philosophy or post era of philosophy such as phenomenology or Postmodern (Teerayut Boonmee, 1997), emphasis on identity and individuality seems to promote more diversity in the society.

Religion itself has the state of pluralism. Religious pluralism is a term which simply describes the fact that

there are many different religious; how one understand the existence of these religious depends on the standpoint one adopts. (Royer Boase, 2006). This perspective, state-nation establishment process has construct main culture and centralization, causing some parts of minority group facing violence by discriminating policy, ranging from massacre, deportation, pushing to restricted zone. Some state applies assimilation policy by facing change of language, religion and culture. Some state uses slowly assimilation process allowing to adopt subculture in their group but main culture is used in public sphere (Teerayut Boonmee, 1997). This subculture be pressured by the state has affected discontent and later turned to ideological violence.

Conflict Theory

Cultural diversity, especially religious aspect, can lead to violent conflict, although an important function of religious groups is providing support and social integration (Durkheim, 1951) as well as regarded as a central component of this integrative value system (Parsons, 1991) but religion can develop stress anxiety and nervous as well. This perspective also emphasizes the competition and antagonisms, even outright physical conflict, that exists among individuals and subgroups in a society, even among religious people and their groups. (Ronald L. Johnstone, 1997) The religious conflict still exists in society and ready to control or exploit the others.

Reconciliation

Societies evolve and “tolerance” gradually replaces exclusivist hostility towards the other (Henry Munson, 2005). Consequently, reconciliation will be employed as a way to peace making because reconciliation requires nine concepts to alleviate the frame of violence as proposed by Chaiwat SathaAnand (Imbiyaz Yusuf, 2006) as follows:

1. Disclosure of “Truth”: emphasizing “truth” both in terms of instrument and target of reconciliatory society for making sustainable peace.
2. Justice: emphasizing restorative justice in addition to learn the viewpoint of violence problem in the context of structure and culture and to comprehend groups of innocent people victimized by violence dispute.
3. Accountability: promoting accountability system in public, having a chance for people to have full access to the information.
4. Forgiveness: being fully aware of the distress of the violence’s victim, meanwhile, also realizing potential of ordinary people to forgive the assassinant who attacking them and their family, to get through the hatred over people different from them.
5. Respect of religions and cultural diversity as well as promoting dialogue between each other: emphasizing tolerance as political value, learning about various religious existing in Thailand both on the practice and moral principle. Religious dialogue will be regarded to create profound knowledge in each doctrine, at the same time other faith will still be honored as a factor enhancing strength of Thai society on platform of cultural diversity.
6. Clinging to nonviolence as an alternative way to against conflict: promoting Thai society’s awareness to realize a harm of violence toward society and seeking peaceful solution as main alternative when confronting with conflict.
7. Uncover an area for painful memory: by giving the space for local history to be part of Thai history, Thai society should understand politics of history to acknowledge that history is not always record of “truth” but it is “political truth” selected by knowledge system supported by the party being in power.
8. Try to solve the problem by using imagination: because new political imagination is important instrument in

building sustainable society to be ready to face the new problem, especially a number of various social construction, race prejudice and class prejudice must be reduced to enhance self-esteem. Consequently, Thai society will full of cultural and intellectual resources and be stable to face the new challenge.

9. Accept the social risk to enhance trust between each other (risk-taking): this is meaningful because risk-taking is condition of human relation on base of trust which is important character of reconciliation concept.

Scope of research

This is a study of community in Samudsongkram province having religious diversity which consists of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. There are social and economic interactions among these three faiths. The study has been conducted at Plai Phongphang sub-district, Amphawa district and Bang Nokkwack sub-district, Bang Khontee district, Samudsongkram province from February 2008 to May 2008.

Methodology

Triangulation was used by this study, the multiple data collection procedures, multiple analysis techniques and multiple theoretical perspectives, because these techniques can be able to provide the understanding of social phenomenon. The multiple data collection procedures consist of documentary, focus group and seminar.

Seminar is divided into two sessions of which the first one is a special lecture in the topic of religious diversity in a unified society from distinguished scholars who are representative of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. The second session will be subgroup seminar categorized by religion, six persons per religion. Buddhism representative consists of monk, academic scholar and Buddhist. Christianity representative consists of Catholic priest, academic scholar and Christian. Islam representative consists of Imam, Islamic teacher, academic scholar and Muslim. The result from this seminar will be used as framework to apply for interview in Samudsongkram province.

Focus group at Plai Phongphang sub-district, Amphawa district and Bang Nokkwack sub-district, Bang Khontee district, in Samudsongkram province is a case study to seek for factor of harmonious living by selecting focus group participant by coordinating with community leader of Plai Phongphang sub-district, Amphawa district and Bang Nokkwack sub-district, Bang Khontee district. The community people are the Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim. There are about twenty seven persons. This study divide into three groups which are consist of nine persons with similar religion.

The data analysis will be conducted by content analysis and descriptive data analysis.

Study Result

Peace making: Religious diversity in the midst of peace, case study in Samudsongkram province. I will present the study result into two parts, part one is peace making for harmonious living with religious diversity and part two is the obstacle of peace making in harmonious living. The study result is as follow:

Samudsongkram province is near Bangkok Metropolitan and its significant to Thailand featuring tourism, this province is the place where there is abundance of tourist places. In Samudsongkram province, there is a high level of racial, religious and cultural diversity but with a few religious conflicts. They live in a serene and peaceful town. Also, people in the community live a simple life. Regarding their occupation, they are mostly gardener and agricultural monger. Due to its proximity to the capital, it is the destination for one-day tour or homestay accommodation. In the past not more than ten years, there is a great amount of homestay lodging. The major product of the province is fruits and OTOP (One Tambun, One Product) products.

Part One: Peace making for harmonious living with religious diversity

Thai-ness

With Thai-ness, Thai people can live in harmony with people of different faith because everyone in the neighborhood feels that they are Thai, they do not sense any discrimination despite their dissimilar religion. Muslim people feel that they are Muslim-Thai, Christian people think that they are Christian-Thai. Therefore, Thai-ness helps for harmonious living and relieve in the time of frustration. It is connected to loyalty in the same King, King Bhumobol Adulyadej (Rama IX). Every year all three religions will pray and give a blessing to His Majesty the King in the occasion of His Majesty Birthday. Moreover, the feature of Thai culture that blends harmoniously with other religions is an act of “wai” (pay respect to elder). Even Muslim, Christian, Buddhist wai whenever they meet. Besides, another Thai identity is forgiveness, kindness and politeness which have three features, namely, do not misjudge that we are better

than other, do not misjudge that we are equal to other, and do not misjudge that we are below other.

Neighbourhood

People in a community are a native people, they have good relationship to others and everyone acquaintance and understands the lifestyle of people in different faith. In their childhood, there has been intimacy among friends with dissimilar faith. Among the elderly, there has also been good communion and interaction for a long time. To live together, the important thing is everyone has sense of appreciation to each other which causing peaceful livelihood. Everybody has honor, prestige, respect and the sense of equality. This leads to love and understanding that they can live together harmoniously. Normally, in the community it is hard to tell who Buddhist, Christian or Muslim, except from the veiling which is the Muslim's symbol. In this respect, people in community perceive a principle and practice of Islam, for example, they acknowledge that Muslim must perform la-maat (Islamic rites of worship performed five times a day), so that during a community meeting, time and place will be arranged for la-maat performance. Furthermore, living together in a community, there must be some conflict between each other therefore the solution to ease this problem is to commune with others and have mediation as a means to solve this conflict. The community usually arranges meeting both formally and informally, this will make good relationship among the community.

Way of life in the community

Samudsongkram is a province having reputation in tourism which is very popular causing some influence emerged from the outside; however people in the community of Plai Phongphang district, Amphawa district and Bang Nokkwack sub-district, Bang Khontee district still

have occupation as farmer and gardener. They grow fruits such as lychee and coconut. They live in small community. They are dependent, kind and unity, also they are taking care of each other. As a result, Muslim here differ from those at three southern border provinces whose human rights are violated and their culture be suppressed. In contrast, Muslim who lives in this community has equality and the leader impartially treats everyone in the community, such as listens to their problems and their suggestion.

Adherence to virtue

The reason why the community lives in harmony is due to the fact that each faith adheres to its own virtue and honors other faith, not offends to each other. Living in harmony is natural reconciliation in which Buddhism has principle of living together called Saraneeyadhamma (dhamma for recalling each other) which consists of 6 practices, namely, benevolence, calisthenics, speech, obstinacy, ordinary precept and giving featuring three aspects which are things giving, virtue giving and forgiveness giving.

Christianity faith has principle of harmonious living, which are *sacrifice* which mean sacrifice your own happiness for the sake of the weaker and the poor, equivalent to Christian doctrine that says, if you wish someone do something for you, do that for him first. *Forgiving* which mean to forgive, it is not necessary to say you are sorry but you may forgive by having forgiveness in your mind all the time. Jesus Christ teaches that Befriend to The enemy, Bless the one who scolds you, there is no enemy, make friend with the enemy, be kind to others, Christianity faith spreads this principle by giving education. *Justice* which means if there are justice and reconciliation, impartiality shall exist in society.

Islam faith has principle of harmonious living which is Muslim must always realize that they should be kind,

compassionate and merciful. Muslim has relationship with three things in their life; God, Fellow man and Environment. Comparing Islamic faith to a triangle, the base of two sides of the triangle will be faith and consciousness. On top of the triangle is Islamic culture. On an aspect of faith and consciousness, Islam teaches that Muslim must have a consciousness all the time in every action because their words and thought acknowledged by God. Therefore consciousness is embedded in all Muslims both to themselves and society. About Islamic culture, there are several practices that Muslim have to follow which are Muslim shall make reverence to God only, La maat (warship of the Allah's ki) must be performed five times daily, after la maat, forgiveness will be accepted, Ramadon must be practiced once a year in order to acknowledge other's distress and Sa-kaj donation is to give charity to others.

Taking part in activities

The community in Samudsongkram province, there are many working groups such as co-operative group jointly established by three religions, Credit Union group is a saving group which supports people financially and socially and occupational group such as coconut sugar group. There is ritual jointly performed such as cremation, marriage which everybody is invited as a way of expressing honor to the host. Besides, there are other activities such as arrangement of the general meeting, public opinion and meeting for making community plan. Furthermore, this community will arrange joint activities in other form in the future, such as, environment reservation and activities for good relation between districts.

The factors that contribute to harmony with religious diversity are Thai-ness, neighborhood, way of life, adherence to virtue and taking part in activities. On the other hand, I have found the obstacle of peace making in a harmonious living, as follow.

Part Two: Obstacle of peace making

External Community Factor

According to the community that becomes developed to the modern society, the tourism is promoted. Popularity of homestay tourism has leading to inflow more people from the outside, both Thai and foreigner. This has changed the way of living especially in the youths because of the temptation causing change in youth behavior such as addicted to drug and gambling. This is one problem affecting harmonious living because drug and gambling brings about the stealing problem such as motorcycle theft. This kind of problem could also lead to other social problem.

Obtaining mistake and incomplete information

If community people obtain mistake and incomplete information, they will think that they were treated unfairly which is contributing to conflict. Thence, it will be a number of sanctions such as gossip, discontent and favoritism. Mostly, the community leader spread the news by directly informing to the local people and publicizes news in public places, but sometime the news are misinterpreted and delayed. This causes misunderstanding between people, community and religious.

Summary and suggestion

This research is conducted to study the factor which contributed to peace making in the community with religious diversity and to study the obstacle to peace making in Samudsongkram province. The findings are as follows:

Harmonious livings with different faiths are caused by Thai-ness, neighborhood, way of life, adherence to virtue and joint activities. By contrast, the obstacle of peace making

is found to have two points which are the factor outside community and obtaining mistake and incomplete information.

Suggestion

Peacemaking should be done by implanting consciousness of Thai-ness to the youth but must stress for the importance of the diversity of ethnic, gender, cultural and local intellectual. Besides, good relationship among people in community should be promoted by arranging activities for people of different faith, Family institution should also be promoted in which youth, adult and the elderly should adhere to doctrine of their faith. Simultaneously, they should appreciate and revere to other faith.

Suggestion for further research

The further research should be study on the role of state, Multinational Corporation, community leader and community people on peaceful living because in globalization era, the four factors have influence over the peaceful community. On the contrary, they could have influence over the violence community as well. Moreover, the way of living with religious diversity in agriculture and industrial society in other regions should also be studied to compare the similarities and the differences in the factors affecting harmonious living on basis of diversity.

References

Bryan S. Turner, **Religion and social theory**, Second edition, London: Sage Publications, 1991, p.155

David Tombs and Joseph Liechty, **Explorations in reconciliation: new directions for theology** , Aldershot, England : Ashgate, 2006, p. 78

Durkheim, Emile, **Suicide: A study in Sociology**, In: G.Simpson (Ed.), vol.III. Glencoe: Free press.1951

Henry Munson, **Religious and violence**, Religious, vol.35, 2005, p.243

Imtiyaz Yusuf and Lars Peter Schmidt (Editor),
UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND APPROACHING PEACE

IN SOUTHERN THAILAND, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.,
Bangkok 2006

James Kurth, **Religion and Ethnic Conflict – in Theory**,
Elsevier Science Limited, 2001, p.281

Oliver McTernan, **Violence in god's name : religion in an
age of conflict**, London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003,
p.2

Parsons, Talcott, **The Social System**, London, 1991

Roger Boase, **Islam and global dialogue : religious
pluralism and the pursuit of peace**, Aldershot : Ashgate,
2005, p. 14

Ronald L. Johnstone, **Religion in society : a sociology of
religion**, Upper Saddle River, N.J. : Prentice Hall, 1997,p. 114

Samuel P. Huntington, **The clash of civilizations and the
remaking of world order**, London : Touchstone Books,
1998

Stark, R., **Micro foundations of religious: A revised
theory**, **Sociological Theory**, 17(3), 1999, 264-289

Teerayut Boonme, **Pluralism**, National Research Council of
Thailand, 1997, p.22

Ibid,p.17