PRACTICAL BUDDHIST ECONOMICS: APPLYING TO THAI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the public organization applied the economic Buddhist principles to make a practiced in Thai society. The concepts of “right livelihood”, “wisdom in three studies” and “social responsibility” were employed to study the policies and activities of this phenomenon. The study shows the meaning, purpose and values of administrative organizations make a practiced to the society. In order that the Buddhist organizations emphasized to expand the Buddhist concepts and boundary of religion duty to society for re-build a new faith in Thai society. And they make responsibility to circumstance their community; the education organizations develop the social responsibility to requisite Thai society as a real owner of public university. The most of activities attempt to make a process and develop public consciousness of their students, such as supporting student clubs to go rural area for build and join social development programs. For making a paradigm shift of university, philosophy was to develop an identity of university and contains the public consciousness concept to them; and business organizations emphasized to apply the economic Buddhist principles to make social responsibility activities such as environmental prevention, sustainable development and supporting knowledge management. Finally this article presents the model of applied economic Buddhist principle to practical in Thai society. In order that this model shows factors that can make a success of applied economic Buddhist principle were change leader, social and cultural innovation, cooperation of organization and well-known target group.

Keyword: Economic Buddhist, Buddhist and Social Development, Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

BACKGROUND

The article emphasizes to explain the principle of Buddhist economics to Thai society. The principle of Buddhist economics based on integrate among principle of Buddhist and economic thought. In order that describe the process of model organizations in this study. The model organizations process took into consideration in sustainable development, community and environment in their working area. Also used and promoted right livelihood concept for administer and employee. In case of Thai economic system after the first national economic and social development plan in 1962. Thai society was into capitalist economic determinate. Most of development policies were persuade to extend cultivate agriculture area. Indisputable for expanded economic growth particularly agriculture products export sector. In addition Thai government sector precipitate into country to manufacturing base and commercial investment market. Mode of these polices initiate Thailand was push development policy to respond the capitalist economic, also in education and social development.

In contrast of capitalist economic. Policy maker and economist in Thai society try to apply moderate practice to balancing the economic policy. E.F. Schumacher one of has acknowledged economist who first mention Buddhist economics that the implementation of economic development plan of developing country always used economic model from developed country. Mostly expect to advance economic as role model country. By the way many plans of developing country were still without Buddhism path. In his book “Small is Beautiful” was debate and represented the right livelihood in the Noble Eightfold Path\(^1\).\(^2\)

Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto. mentioned to Buddhist economics that this principal and practice of Buddhist economics have moderate practice. The main idea was make balancing among life quality and individual satisfaction. So Buddhist economics practical means individual satisfaction by self-responded in everyday life action. According

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\(^1\) the Noble Eightfold Path one of Buddha teaching were Right View; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

to Buddha teaching that passions have two perspectives were; satiate material and life well-being. Applied of Buddhist and economic principle was compared as basic concept to framework of this research. Including fieldwork data from selected organizations entire Buddhism, social and business will explain pattern and path of practical Buddhist economics in Thai society.

The Objective and methodology

The objective of this study was to observe the working process and policy of Buddhist, business and education organization. Because of the data were collected through participant observation, depth interview and also documentary research can explained pattern and the path of applying Buddhist economics principle to organizations practical.

Buddhist Economics in Thai Society

Buddhism based on Buddha teaching and his disciple interpretation. One of his key teachings is that suffering is caused by the way we perceive things and ourselves. Things appear to us as if they have the ability to provide us lasting happiness and comfort, so we become attached to them and we develop desire for them. P.A. Payutto one of the great monk thinker in Thailand mentioned about Buddhist Economics that a true Buddhist person not only seeks wealth lawfully and spends it for the good, but also enjoys spiritual freedom. The Buddhist Pali canon states that such person acts as follows: Seeking wealth lawfully; Making oneself happy and cheerful and Sharing with others and doing meritorious deeds. All of them making use of one’s wealth without greed and longing possess of the insight that sustains spiritual freedom.

In addition to these principles provide the ground for attempts to define Buddhist economics. But Buddha himself made it very clear: real happiness does not come from acquiring or consuming material things. Happiness is essentially a state of mind, and mind is distinct from matter. Thus, Buddhism considers the path of mental or spiritual development superior to that of material development. What really matters is to psychologically detach oneself from matter, and strive for liberation and enlightenment, which is considered the ultimate state of happiness and fulfillment. This is achieved by the cultivation of values within one’s mind, such as insight, compassion, tolerance and detachment. Only this will bring true happiness, both for the individual and society.

In Thailand many studies try to find the pattern and path of solution to apply Buddhist economic to Thai society. The study of Suwida Sangsehanat (2004) show that the Asoke Buddhist Community. One of new religious movement in Thailand and they have leader that well known in the name “Samana Phothirak”. The Asoke Buddhist Community was a model of self-sufficient economy, natural agriculture, alternative education, empowerment, and a utopian Buddhist community for academics, both Thai and international, as well as contemporary Thai government. And they claimed to be superior to the old systems.

However from this study found that business and social organizations making a social development policy. The result shows organizations that applied 4 bases of social solidarity for practical also contributed equality development in social structure as well as good governance and peaceful.

CONCLUSION

Buddhist Economics: Challenge for Sustainable Development

Within the context of Thai economic and social development, laissez-faire economic development and alternative development are still debatable issues. There are no clear indications that the former is more appropriate for Thailand than the latter or vice versa even though recently alternative development has gained greater popularity. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board has addressed the well-

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5 Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, the Art of Happines, Coronet Books, UK, 1998
being and the sufficiency in the 10th and the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan. The sufficiency philosophy, the development concept based on Buddhism, the principles of Buddhist economics and the well-being index are integrated and used as indicators for assessing the country’s development. All government units play a major part in shaping the country’s economic and social development. It is a good sign that from now on the assessment of economic growth is based mainly on an increase in export volume and the expansion of business tourism. The laissez-faire approach, adopted by the country’s economy, has been challenged by a change in the assessment of the country’s economic growth. Plus, the collapse of the laissez-faire economy has repeated itself in many countries including Thailand, leading to economic recession adversely affecting financial institutions, large-scale businesses, bonds and the stock exchange markets. As a result, there is a doubt as to whether Thailand’s development will be sustainable if it still adheres to this economic concept.

Although the alternative development concepts, in particular, Buddhist economics, have not been recognized, a study conducted by Pichet Tangto (2557) explored the application of Buddhism to economic management. The study reveals that Buddhism can be successfully applied in three domains: 1) Sajja Sasomsup Group (savings with honesty), 2) savings and credit co-operatives and 3) Buddhism banks. Each institution has to promote good governance in its management. However, this study did not mention economic progress. This progress will significantly contribute to the monopoly of business and capital by only a few financial institutions especially in the era of the borderless economy. The introduction of Buddhist economics into the economic and social development requires planning and application guidelines and there should be measures to determine its success in improving society and creating more bargaining power.

Considering Buddhist Economics and Current Thai Society

“Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered” by E.F. Schumacher (1973) and “Settasart Naew Phut (Economics according to Buddhism)” by Phra Phromkunaporn (2548) provided reasons why Buddhism can be a solution to creating a balance between economic development and social development in Thailand. Phra Phromkunaporn points out that Buddhist economics is actually a part of human activities, a part of human knowledge. The application of Buddhist economics, therefore, involves the understanding of Buddhism in relation to other social aspects. The institutions involved in social development are Buddhism institutions, educational institutions and business institutions. These institutions have to support one another in developing society since each specializes in its field, is accustomed to its geographical areas and has an insight into its local culture.

More activities are carried out to improve society in the forms of individual volunteer work, corporate social responsibility and Buddhist activities aiming to improve social well-being and sustainability. One of their aims is to promote harmonious co-existence – without exploitation. Each member in society has to learn to live sufficiently and peacefully. More institutions working towards this goal to cover more areas serve as proof that Buddhist economics is a means to developing society. Corporate social responsibility is more like a form of business or a social rule while Buddhist activities are not. Buddhist activities are motivated by devotion to social improvement, which is the key element leading to the success of the activities.

As a result, the challenge for putting Buddhist economics into use is the continuation and sustainability of creating a network of organizations carrying out this concept. Such a network includes all sectors of society and they have to help each other develop the country based on this concept and disseminate it to every part of

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6 The development of the Thai Well-Being Index is based on three concepts: (1) the accordance with ‘Thailand Vision’ in the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan that gears towards a ‘Green and Happy Society’, (2) the sufficiency philosophy and (3) human-centered development. In addition, the majority of society has to acknowledge that happiness is a common value and the index will reflect the ends of development and the mean to achieve well-being. The index covers three categories: society, community and family/individual.
society. However, to achieve appropriate social development, these organizations have to take the dynamics of economy, society and culture into consideration in order not to overexploit this concept.

**Buddhism and its application according to economic principles**

The Threefold Training in Buddhist economics refers to the use of the intellect along with ways of production and consumption and this use focuses on the benefits for all. As a result, intellect is an essential production factor.

Avihimsa – one of the Virtues of the King – means to not cause harm. Buddhist economics stresses taking the middle way by balancing the production and the consumption and not focusing on self-interest that will lead to taking advantage of oneself and others as well as using resources wastefully.

The right view and right livelihood in Buddhist economics refers to earning a right living and not causing problems to oneself, others and the environment. Selling arms, human trafficking, selling animals, selling spirits and narcotic drugs and selling poisons such as insecticides and chemicals that adversely affect the human body and environment are not advisable. In addition, activities that waste natural resources and destroys the eco-system should be avoided.

Sharing and having responsibility according to Sangkawahawattu and Pokaartiya play an important role in economic development because when a person, an organization or a business have responsibility towards society by sharing what they have, looking for sustainable ways to produce and consume items, following good governance, and conserving the environment. All these elements contribute to appropriate economic management.

Peace or happiness according to Pavana (prayer) 4. According to Buddhist economics, the goal of consumption is happiness arising from the insight into working and living – not craving for more or not having enough to subsist. Those who can follow this will have happiness in life, resulting in improvements in physical, mind and intellectual aspects.

**The Application of Buddhist economics in Thai Society**
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