

The Buddhist Middle Path for Sustainable Economic Practice *

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the Buddhist Middle Path for sustainable economic practice. According to Buddhist economics, *santosa* and *mattaññutā* could be applied as the Middle Path for sustainable economic practice. *Santosa* or contentment means satisfaction with whatever is one's own under which one should be happy with what he can get and doesn't want or perform anything beyond his capacity and appropriateness. As a result, one should stop his desire and economic practice at a point beyond which danger or damage could happen or when it is enough according to one's condition and capacity. This means our economic practice should be done in moderation or balance; nothing should be done to the extreme. Therefore, *Santosa* must be accompanied by *mattaññutā* or knowing what is one's moderation; one could be content correctly if he knows when to suffice. The Buddhist Middle Path focuses on moderation or balance, sufficiency, and simplicity because sufficiency is the condition that must be present when one makes any economic practice in moderation or it may be seen as the minimum criterion of moderation while simplicity is in line with moderation and gives good support to a self-reliant economy that is the suitable economic form for general people, especially in the poor country.

Keywords: the Buddhist Middle Path; *Santosa*; *Mattaññutā*

Introduction

According to Buddhist economics, many Buddhist principles are useful for the promotion of business and other economic practices in our everyday lives. Among them, *Santosa* or *Santutti* (contentment) and *Mattaññutā* (moderation) are two important principles

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that are taught to be performed together. Both principles constitute the middle path for sustainable economic practice.

Santosa as the Middle Path for Economic Practice

Santosa, generally rendered as 'contentment' in English, is a necessary tool for the safety and stability of the economic practice. When it is applied, we will be able to control our working and consumption of various desirable objects in the right way without which our work and economic life may be negatively affected or even destroyed. Even though the principle of contentment is generally taught by the Buddha to the monks, it is also applied to the laymen since it is taught as one of the 38 maṅgala or blessings which are taught to everyone and sadāra-santosa or contentment with one's wife (or husband) is another kind of santosa taught for the laymen only.

Santosa refers to satisfaction with whatever is one's own. According to the Buddhist doctrine of santosa, there are 3 kinds of santosa as follows:

First, yathālābha-santosa or contentment with what one gets and deserves to get. It means one should be satisfied with whatever he deserves to get, either rough or refined, without interest and anxiety in anything else that he doesn't deserve to get. Following this contentment, one doesn't want what belongs to others and is not jealous of others. This contentment prevents people from being possessed by greed that may lead them to wrongdoing either in terms of economic practice or morality and law. For example, a monk follows yathālābha-santosa when he is satisfied with whatever food he gets righteously from laypeople; while, for a layman, when a taxi driver is satisfied with the money, no matter how much or how little it is, he gets from his driving service, he is said to follow yathālābha-santosa.

However, this doesn't mean that a layman should not try to increase his income or profit because according to this santosa, a layman can and should try his best to earn money as far as he is satisfied with whatever he gets righteously and his performance is not immoral and is appropriate with his strength or capacity which is the second kind of santosa.

Second, yathābala-santosa or contentment with what is within one's strength or capacity. It means satisfaction or rejoicing according to one's strength or capacity, that is, being content with what one can get by one's physical strength, health, and capacity. Following this contentment, one should accept one's limit and shouldn't want or perform anything beyond one's strength or capacity. This contentment prevents people from doing and consuming more than their strength or capacity. For example, a monk follows yathābala-santosa when

he eats an appropriate amount of food, not beyond the limit of his stomach or body capacity; while, for a layman, when a taxi driver accepts the limit of his capacity in driving service each day and is satisfied with the money he gets from his effort, he is said to follow yathābala-santosa.

Third, yathāsārappa-santosa or contentment with what is befitting. It means satisfaction with what is appropriate for one's self, i.e. appropriate to one's status, the way of life, and the purpose of performing their duties. For example, a monk should not want what is not suitable for the monks. And for a layman, a taxi driver doesn't want a passenger's lost property in his car. When this contentment is performed in the broad sense, it prevents people from doing things that negatively affect or harm their daily life and religious practice including morality.

These three kinds of santosa are closely related and become twelve when applied to the four paccaya or requisites, viz., clothing, food, dwelling, and medicine. (See Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2551: 105-106)

According to this principle of santosa, one should be satisfied or happy with what he can get and doesn't want or do anything beyond his capacity and appropriateness; he must accept his situation. As a result, by santosa, one must stop his desire and economic practice at a point beyond which danger or damage can happen or when it is enough according to his condition and capacity. This means our economic practice should be done in moderation or balance; nothing should be done to the extreme. Therefore, santosa must be accompanied by Mattaññutā or moderation which refers to knowing when it is enough or what is moderation or balance for each person.

As one of the 38 maṅgala or blessings, santosa or contentment leads one to a prosperous and happy life, especially in the consumption of the four requisites and other economic practices. One who knows that enough is enough will also have enough. Many people want to live to such high standards that they are seldom content. The need can easily be satisfied, but greed is insatiable.

Mattaññutā as the concomitant of santosa

While santosa is contentment which is an emotional state of satisfaction, mattaññutā as the concomitant of santosa is a kind of knowledge or wisdom that deals with moderation of what santosa is concerned with.

Mattaññutā, generally rendered as ‘moderation’ in English, means knowing moderation or balance. According to the principle of moderation, one should know when it suffices and he should not go further so that he can be happy and stop at the right point. Though the doctrine of moderation is generally taught to be the moderation in eating (bhojane-mattaññutā) or in consumption and acceptance of four requisites especially for the monks as explained in Khuddakanikāya Mahāniddeśa (the Tipitaka, vol.29, sect. 206, pp.600-601). It is also taught to be the moderation in other things such as the moderation in the supportive factors that are the causes of long life as appeared in Aṅguttaranikāya Pañcakanipāṭa (the Tipitaka, vol.22, sect. 125, p. 205) and thus can be also used by laymen.

Mattaññutā is usually taught by the Buddha together with contentment so that it seems to be the concomitant of contentment. However, their relationship is made clearer when the Buddha said that monks should know moderation for the sake of satisfaction as in Khuddakanikāya Suttanipāṭa (the Tipitaka, vol.25, sect. 978, pp.600-733). These Buddha's words show that Mattaññutā is the tool on which santosa must rely to work properly; without awareness of moderation or balance, contentment cannot be rightly done because one doesn't know when to suffice or stop one's desire and action.

As Somdet Phra Buddhakosajarn (P.A. Payutto), an eminent Thai Buddhist monk scholar, explained it in the context of bhojane mattaññutā, mattaññutā or knowing moderation means knowing the optimum amount, how much is ‘just right’. Knowing the right amount in consumption refers to an awareness of that optimum point where the enhancement of true well-being coincides with the experience of satisfaction. (Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2016, 32-33)

Santosa and Mattaññutā as the Buddhist Middle Path for Sustainable Economic Practice

Thus, these two principles are used together as the middle path for economic practice according to which nothing should be done to the extreme; all economic activities must not be too rigid, lax, or greedy; the focus is on balance, sufficiency, and simplicity. For example, a balanced diet is an example of the middle path, and excessive investment beyond a person's capacity is discouraged. Investment must be manageable, and consumption kept within the bounds of reason, both financially and physically, with all the values kept in check in line with the Middle Path concept. This approach is based on balance and sufficiency. It involves satisfaction when it is enough or sufficient (the principle of contentment) and knowing

when to suffice (the principle of moderation). This is in line with His Majesty King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Therefore, one could call Buddhist economics "sufficiency economics"

Sufficiency is then closely related to moderation or balance. It can be seen as the minimum measurement or criterion of moderation and must accompany moderation because, to decide when and where the moderation lies, one must consider whether it is sufficient or not for one's practice and capacity.

Moreover, the middle path focuses not only on moderation and sufficiency but also on simplicity because it is in line with moderation and sufficiency and gives good support to the self-reliant economy which is a suitable economic form for general people, especially in the poor country as explained in Schumacher's viewpoint on Buddhist economics. According to Schumacher, the keynote of Buddhist economics is simplicity and non-violence and from an economist's point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern-amazingly small mean leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results (Schumacher, 1973: 169). In addition, complexity, as opposed to simplicity, could lead to the extreme.

This middle path brings about benefits for both oneself and others as well as society as a whole. This is because economic practice based on the middle path focuses on cooperation and mutual support like the practice of community economy or cooperatives. It is in line with the win-win principle proposed by Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize-winning Indian economist.

According to the middle path, economic practice is based on virtue and morality by which business and other economic practices have never been done out of the motive of selfishness. Consequently, there is no cut-throat competition designed to take the form of utmost advantage for self; rather the competition takes the form of producing quality goods and services for the benefit of the consumers rather than taking away customers and destroying competitors.

Therefore, the economy based on the Buddhist middle path is a balanced or righteous one consisting of moderation and contentment regarding the amount and kinds of objects consumed or economic practice, and thus any economic practice based on the middle path is sustainable because it relies on morality and right way of economic practice. This sustainable economy is part of sustainable development which is the development of economy and society with emphasis on life quality of most people in the long term and

avoidance of destruction of natural resources and environment. (Witthayakorn Chiangkoon, 1999: 22)

Therefore, according to the Buddhist Middle Path for sustainable economy practice, to achieve a sustainable economy, one should apply both *santosa* and *mattaññutā* to economic activities concerning working and consumption. To take an example, a businessman runs his enterprise according to the Buddhist Middle Path for economic practice in such a way that his business is carried out according to his capacity and financial background or investment capital as well as concerned knowledge, avoiding any unnecessary or uncontrollable risk; while his daily consumption is also performed under the appropriate way that is suitable for his health and affordability or economic background.

At any rate, apart from *santosa* and *mattaññutā*, this Buddhist Middle Path for sustainable economy practice requires also other virtues such as diligence and good company according to other Buddhist doctrines without which this Buddhist Middle Path cannot be successfully applied.

Conclusion

As part of Buddhist economics, *santosa* and *mattaññutā* form the middle path for any activities concerning economic practice. This middle path is consistent with other Buddhist socio-economic principles and thus is the right way for all economic practices including business and consumption. As a result, economic practice based on the Middle Path becomes sustainable because of its stability in terms of economy and morality and thus gives rise to a sustainable economy.

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