

ปัญหาสิ่งแวดล้อมในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้:
การวิพากษ์และแนวทางแก้ไขปัญหาเชิงบูรณาการ
ผ่านมุมมองเชิงพุทธและมาร์กซิสต์
Environmental Problems in Southeast Asia:
Integrated Critiques and Resolutions through
Buddhism and Marxism Perspective

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บทคัดย่อ

ถึงแม้ว่าประเทศและองค์กรต่าง ๆ ทั่วโลกต่างพยายามอย่างต่อเนื่องในการเรียกร้องให้มีลดการใช้ทรัพยากรธรรมชาติที่ไม่เหมาะสมให้เป็นไปตามเป้าหมายของการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน (Sustainable Development Goals: SDGs) เพื่อให้แน่ใจว่าทรัพยากรธรรมชาติยังคงอยู่อย่างยั่งยืน แต่ดูเหมือนว่าสถานการณ์ปัญหาสิ่งแวดล้อมในปัจจุบันก็ยังคงไม่ได้รับการแก้ไขอย่างจริงจัง ในบทความชิ้นนี้จะวิเคราะห์พิจารณาประเด็นปัญหาดังกล่าวด้วยแนวคิดมานุษยวิทยาเชิงพุทธและมาร์กซิสต์ ซึ่งวางอยู่บนฐานของวัฒนธรรมของเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้และใช้สถานการณ์ปัจจุบันของสภาพแวดล้อมในพื้นที่เพื่อชี้ให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญในการเพิ่มความตระหนักรู้

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รับผิดชอบต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมและการปฏิบัติเพื่อประโยชน์ของแต่ละประเทศในภูมิภาคแห่งนี้ในระยะยาว

คำสำคัญ : พุทธศาสนา, มาร์กซิสม์, สิ่งแวดล้อม, ธรรมชาติ, ภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

Abstract

Although the countries and organizations around the world have had a lot of effort trying to call for reducing abuse of natural resources in order to precede the Sustainable Development Goals (known as SDGs) and ensure the sustainability of environment, the current environment problems have not been seriously solved. On the perspective of Anthropology of Buddhism and Marxism, based on the culture of Southeast Asian countries and the current state of the environment in this area, the article gives some opinions to further enhance environmental responsibility and action for the benefit of each country in the region.

Keywords: Buddhism, Marxism, Environment, Nature, Southeast Asia

1. Introduction

At present, the world is concerned about the environment. Every day on the mass media, it seems that more and more environmental warnings, the level of danger of polluted environment threatens to human life more and more serious such as the ozonosphere is expanding; global climate change; overpopulation; loss of forest resources; marine pollution and positive oceans;

the decline of freshwater resources; soil pollution and desertification; biodiversity loss; the depletion of mineral resources; increased waste.

In discussions on the global environment, Southeast Asia occupies an important place as it is a region with high biodiversity and high species prevalence. As the land occupies 4 of the 20 biodiversity hot spots, the rate of deforestation in Southeast Asia is also highest in major tropical regions. These studies suggest that the area could lose 75% of primary forest cover and 42% of biodiversity by 2100; There are about 20 endangered species, 686 species of vascular plants, 91 species of fish, 23 species of amphibians, 28 species of reptiles, 116 species of birds and 147 species of mammal are threatened.

What solutions for Southeast Asia countries to overcome environmental problems in order to realize the ASEAN Vision 2025: "A clean and green ASEAN with fully set up mechanisms for sustainable development. To ensure the environmental protection of the area, the sustainability of natural resources and the quality of life of every person?"

In addition to the technical measures, environmental legislation, the role of state management, education issues from schools in Southeast Asian countries, this article would like to add some idea of raising awareness of environmental protection based on Buddhism's perspective because of talking about Southeast Asia, it can't help to mention the role of Buddhism and the mark of Buddhism in shaping the cultural identity of Southeast Asia (most notably mainland Southeast Asia countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam).

2. Environmental issues and the importance of the environment for sustainable development for Southeast Asia Nations

Today, many scientists (as Temp R. Ture, Anjali Goel and Ranjana Bhatt), leaders (PM of Bhutan-Lyonpo Tshering Tobgay, Valerio De Luca,...) and intellectuals (Prof. Dr Tran Tho Dat and Dr. Vu Thi Hoai Thu are the pioneer scientists of Vietnam to issue the book on Economy and policies for Climate changes on 2017) from all over the world share the same view that climate change and the global environment are not only natural changes but also big impact on human beings. In order to save the situation, many conferences and forums have taken place all over the world to transmit messages, warnings about environmental issues, environmental protection, green economy, etc.

Typically the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro adopted the United Nations Framework Program on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992); in order to strengthen the legal basis for the implementation of the UNPCC, the Tokyo Protocol has also been agreed by many signatories to cut environmental protection; The Bali Roadmap, an international commitment to quantitative emission reductions, was also launched at the 13th UNFCCC in Bali, Indonesia, replacing the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

In 2009, the 15th edition of the Copenhagen Declaration on Climate Change affirmed that climate change was one of the greatest challenges of the century and that countries must have strong political will in against climate change on the basis of shared responsibility.

Recently, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change was held in New York (United States) on 23 September with the participation of

125 countries. This is a special forum for leaders from countries around the world to come up with plans for dealing with climate change, as well as an opportunity for the United Nations to push for political momentum towards a global agreement on reducing emissions by 2015.

In Vietnam, there are many programs and actions to bring signed international commitments on climate change, the Kyoto Protocol (KP), etc. to the reality of life. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) was designated as the focal point of the Government of Vietnam to participate and implement UNFCCC, KP. The Government has issued directives, decisions and resolutions to assign MONRE and relevant ministries, sectors and localities to implement these commitments.

In the past time, under the spirit of the Government's Resolution No. 60/2007/NQ-CP dated December 3, 2007, MONRE has coordinated with relevant ministries and agencies to develop the National Target Program Climate Change (CTMT). The program was approved by the Prime Minister under Decision 158/QD-TTg dated December 2, 2008 and became the national basic orientation and strategy for responding to climate change.

On December 5, 2011, the Prime Minister issued Decision 2193/QD-TTg on approving the National Strategy on Climate Change, stating that the overall goal of the strategy is to promote the capacity of all over the country, simultaneous measures to adapt and mitigate climate change, aiming at sustainable development.

On 30 August 2012, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 1183/QD-TTg on Approving the National Target Program to respond to climate change in the period 2012-2015. The program is a step by step implementation of the National Strategy on Climate Change, enhancing awareness and capacity to adapt to climate change, reducing greenhouse

gas emissions, building a low carbon economy, actively with the international community to protect the earth system.

In particular, in 2014, National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Sinh Hung approved the Law No. 55/2014/QH 13, promulgating the Law on Environmental Protection, effective from 1 January 2015 consisting of 20 chapters, 170 articles with important principles: Article 4, point 1: Environmental protection is the responsibility and obligation of all agencies, organizations, households and individuals; environmental protection is in harmony with economic development, social security, child rights, gender and development, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation to ensure the right people live in a healthy environment (point 2); Environmental protection must conform to the law, natural characteristics, culture, history and level of socio-economic development of the country (point 5); national environmental protection attached to regional and global environmental protection ... (point 4). And more important point 6: "environmental protection activities must be conducted regularly and priority prevention of pollution, incidents, environmental degradation.

Spotting important milestones, conferences, domestic and international environmental laws; given the current status and environmental status of the continents, it is clear that although countries and organizations around the world have made a great deal of effort to call for reductions exploitation of natural resources, in order to reach a SDGs, to ensure the sustainability of the environment, but the current environmental situation has not improved significantly. Water, forests, and ores continue to be exploited by the full capacity of modern machinery. People try to make much, fast material things but only to meet a minority of people. Every year results show that the level of environmental pollution, the exploitation of natural resources is

getting higher and higher, but more importantly, the pollution, the depletion of fresh water resources in the ground.

Some researchers as Lim Chong Yah, Thomas Homer-Dixon, ... have shown that Southeast Asia succeeds in economic development but sacrifices its environment. Of these, the two most serious problems are air pollution and water pollution. Air quality is worsening as fossil fuel consumption increases due to industrialization, population boom accompanied by real incomes and rapid urbanization (Yah, 2002: 35). Urban consumption can account for three-quarters of the nation's total energy consumption. Lim Chong Yah, Professor of Economics, Nanyang University of Technology, Singapore, cites 13 major issues (13 chapters) on the difficulties of "Southeast Asia-Long Way Forward" environment and attach it to the anti-poverty solutions, specifically: "Exploiting resources effectively" (Yah, 2002: 435).

Currently, with a population of 90 million (1/11/2013), Vietnam is the third most populous nation in Southeast Asia and the 13th in the world. Vietnam has 765 cities with an urbanization rate of 32.45% (12/2012) (Yah, 2002). In big cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, ... every day, the number of people riding motorcycles discharged tons of toxic smoke causing bad effects on the environment. According to the Department of Environmental Protection City, In Ho Chi Minh City, 98% of the city's households own motorbikes (2007). In Hanoi, motorbikes account for more than 87% of total traffic in Hanoi (Ha Noi Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2006).

The main culprit is air pollution outside the motor bike, automobile emissions also have industrial emissions because the country's socio-economic development is increasingly concentrated in urban areas. Nearly

three quarters of GDP in ASEAN countries and about two thirds of total national exports come from urban areas. For example, Metro Bangkok alone (44%) contributed 44% of Thailand's GDP, while Metro Manila (2006) contributed 37% to the Philippines's GDP. In Vietnam, the urban area contributes about 70% of GDP to the whole country. This shows that: for sustainable development, countries must pay attention to urban environmental protection because the use of energy resources will cause ecological imbalance; Moreover, most major cities and industrial centers in Vietnam are concentrated in areas vulnerable to climate change. According to Do Viet Chien, the quality of urbanization in Vietnam has not kept pace with the number and pace of urbanization in our country is about 15 years slower than the average urbanization in Asia (2007). The number of cities in Asia has exceeded 50%, Malaysia: 69.3%, Philippines: 64.2%, Indonesia: 50.4% and Thailand: 32.9%).

As we all sense development is not only increasing the gross national product, increasing material wealth, but increasing the level of human well-being. If wealth increases, but health costs increase significantly because of severe pollution and increased disease risk and because health care is too expensive, total output per capita It has doubled in 10 years but welfare has not increased, and in this case development has serious problems. For sustainable development, we can not ignore the environment, health, education. These factors are, on the one hand, an essential part of human wellbeing, on the one hand the factors contributing to the improvement of the quality of human resources for development, which are indispensable in the development problem and development strategy (Dang, 2010: 17). Native American expression: "Until the last tree of forest is cut down, the last river is poisoned, the last fish caught, will we realize we can not eat money" is again

“showing the importance of protecting the natural resources for our lives today and tomorrow.” (Xuan, 2015: 212)

3. How to interact with our natural environment in the viewpoint of Buddhism and Marxism

A teaching from Buddha himself to Rahula said, “Before doing anything, you should consider if that would cause us, or cause others, or cause both us and others any harm. If there is any harm involved, then it is an unkind thing to do. It brings sadness and sorrow. Anything as such requires your consideration. That you should not do. On the other hand, if your contemplation leads you to conclude that such actions do not trouble yourself, nor others, nor both yourself and others; then it is a deed of kindness. It brings joy and peace. That you should do.” (Samyutta Nikāya).

According to Buddha, because of our doings, our life is intertwined with karma. The truth of Origin, Anatta (Non-Self) taught by Buddha indicates that every action and matter is woven together to exist. The being of this leads to the being of that; the changing of this also leads to the changing of that. Buddha said: *“That is there because this is here. That is born because this is born. That is not there because this is not here. That is not there because this is gone. That is gone because this is gone.”* (Udāna, Khuddaka Nikāya). Through his teachings, it is easy to see that between humans and the natural environment, there is an organic connection which cannot be separated. Moreover, humans are only a part of nature. The movements of the eco system, the environment has led to humans’ evolution. As a result, humans cannot surpass natural rules. We, however, force nature to serve our daily life out of our desire to transcend everything. In Dhammapada, Buddha taught us:

"Those who are greedy would end up hurting themselves and others; Only fools reap unripe fruit. When karma comes, they end up suffering" (Dhammapada). Additionally, Buddha also stated: *"If every being continues to drown in the Ten Abominations, consequences are that environment is going to suffer."* (Sukha Sutra).

We can see that there is an agreement between the viewpoint of Buddhism and Marxism on eco system and humans. In "Dialectics of Nature," F. Engels stated that: *"There is nothing happening alone in the nature. This event affects the other and vice versa"* (1); therefore "we humans should not be too proud of our victories against the nature because with each triumph comes each revenge from the nature against us." (2) According to Engels, the nature is where humans seek for materials to turn into assets. Nevertheless, if we break the balance between humans and nature out of short-term benefits, we are to shoulder unexpected unpleasant aftermath. Engels also cited that in Mesopotamia, Greece, when they cut down forests for cultivation, they did not know that doing so would destroy water holders, resulting in unimaginable overwhelming deluges which caused countless fatalities. *"And those events keep reminding us every minute that it is impossible for us to completely control nature like invaders to another people, like an outsider from nature itself"*. All of the above-mentioned ideas highlight that the viewpoint on ecosystem and environment of Buddhism thousands of years ago was scientifically based.

In fact, when Buddha was still with us, environmental problems were not really challenging to humans, yet with his mercy on all beings, Buddha taught his disciples to cherish the life of other beings, not to deforest without reasons. He even taught that *"If a Bodhisattva came across a barren*

land without any trace of plants or wells, he would have to dig a well and plant a tree for the sake of all beings.” (Suru of Fifty Encounters).

As humans and the environment are inseparable - proven with the term “the net of Indra” in Avatamsaka Sutra, Buddhism is considered the religion with a superior application of its philosophy into environmental problems, compared with other religions. This is not a subjective view of Buddhists, but a shared view of many, including Western Christian historians (Hiep, n.d.). The life-respecting, environment-loving, equality-appreciating among beings spirit is Buddhism’s values which are very much welcomed in environment protection nowadays.

4. Some ideas to raise awareness of environment protection through Buddhism and Marxism approach

4.1 Educating on interactions towards the environment through the Origin theory

In a recent talk at TED - an academic community, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay rendered the world speechless with his story about the people of humble Bhutan and their efforts to help it become a greenhouse gas-free country. What this friendly Prime Minister shared became the focal point of many newspapers which stated that Bhutan was an excellent epitome of “the most livable country” in the world.

Throughout his speech, the highlight was the story of climate change and Bhutan’s attempts to prevent and alter the consequences of global warming. The astonishing speech of Prime Minister Tshering was an alarm to wake the whole world up.

"Like other underdeveloped countries, which are still shrouded by forests, the Bhutanese are suffering from natural consequences such as landslides, floods, ice melting, yet the ones at fault here are industrial countries which "boil" our atmosphere with an excessive amount of exhaust fumes every day."; "Governments are too busy fighting and blaming one another on climate change," "We promise to always stay a country which will never emit exhaust fumes,... commit to reducing industrial fumes despite our underdeveloped industry..." (Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's speech).

To honor his commitment, Bhutan's government is planning to "green-cover" the whole country with using clean energy, bio-fuel systems, and many other methods to build a sustainable country.

Apparently, the speeches, the measures taken, as well as the "green-covering" plan of Bhutan is the mark of Buddhism which we have discussed above. In other words, Bhutan Prime Minister has skillfully applied Buddhism's Origin theory to educate his people on environment and to urge other countries to join hands for a common goal - our green planet - our happy life on Earth.

Environmental problems are currently very much concerned by people. Living environmental crises are living environmental pollution caused by radiation, nuclear fission, natural dust, depleted natural resources, alarming air-water-soil pollution. All the nuclear bomb experiments, chemical weapons, poisonous gases leaked out from industrial factories, deforestation, and poaching lead to disasters like conflagrations, droughts, deluges, plagues, ... These are the ramifications of technology development, overexploitation of mines, fossil fuels, ores. Therefore, living environmental protection should be executed thoroughly as soon as possible. A philosophy, which is the Origin theory, concerning living environmental protection should

be developed and popularized to people. As we have mentioned before: this theory was deduced from Buddha's observation that naturally, that is born because this is born; and that will not be there if this is not here. This is the supporting relationship among all things co-living, without subjects nor objects. With this theory, people are able to learn to voluntarily protect our living environment, as well as ourselves. Also with Origin theory, we can explain the risk of living environmental pollution directly affecting humans because humans negatively affect the natural world (Chon, 2014).

The Origin theory also educates people to understand karma, that "what goes around, comes around," that "we reap what we sow." As a result, we can adjust our behavior towards the natural world.

In the education of the founders of Marxism, education is not only regarded as a means of enriching knowledge for the human being, serving the society, but more importantly, education as a means of making Humans are fully developed in their capacities. This has long been considered by Viet Nam as a cornerstone of human being as both a target and a driver of socio-economic development. To achieve that goal, Vietnam needs reform in education strongly, especially in environmental education (Hang, 2008).

The goal of education is not just only to provide human resources for the economy. If so, the purpose and function of education is to teach one to exist, not to live. Actually, more importantly, education is to create people with creativity and self-control; Education is the development of human beings themselves. "Understanding the world, transforming the world" has genuinely summarized the purpose of human life: "to know the world (both natural and social) and to fight for the world" Let the world fully serve the needs of human happiness (Marx). UNESCO recently issued a statement on education, which included the four pillars of education as the main goal of modern education in

the 21st century. These are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. This statement has received much sympathy from the nation's peoples, scholars around the world.

2. Educating people with Buddhism and Marxism on environment through practicing compassion

It is safe to say that Buddhism is a key figure in the spiritual life of the Southeast Asians. In some countries like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar,... Buddhism has enormously contributed to building a cohesive culture. In other words, Buddhism bonds closely with Nation and People. (Cambodia, Thailand).

From our childhood to adulthood, from the moment of birth to the moment of death, they all connect with pagodas and Buddhism. New born babies are brought to a pagoda for their fortune to be told and for them to be named. When they come of age, they go to pagodas for their 3-year training as a duty. When they get married, they go to a pagoda to perform the Ba Xi ritual (where a string of thread is tied around their wrist). When they head to Nirvana, they'll be cremated and placed in a pagoda. Buddhism also affects the life of the whole society from kings, officials, to common folks, from the central to the smallest local units like villages... (Viet, n.d.).

We believe that the more advanced current technology and economic development is, the more we need to pay heed to educating people and society; because a humane education requires to educate people themselves. The society is only good, the world is only peaceful when the people in it are kind. To be kind is to practice compassion, affection, mutual understanding, respect for others' life as their life is also ours, as nobody exists alone. Humans themselves are humans understanding their own truth

and how to achieve happiness here and now: *"We are our own master, nobody else is. Those who are able to control themselves will see the well-hidden master."* (Dhammapada quoted in Chon, 2014).

Buddha also taught about compassion: *"Resentment never erases hatred; only love erases hatred."* He also advised humans to *"control hatred with love."* Besides, Compassion not only helps us respect one another, but also respect both sentient and ruthless beings (the natural realm). Buddha advised his disciples not to dirty plants, not to step on plants, not to break branches. Especially when he reached illumination, Buddha sat and adored the Sacred Fig for a whole week to express his thankfulness for its protection during his days of meditation and seeking illumination (Chon, 2014).

Compassion is also indicated through controlled diets. In my opinion, vegetarianism is one of the practices to protect the environment. Looking from a certain angle, not consuming meat means indirectly reducing water pollution (caused by liquid waste from production, breeding units, and slaughterhouses.)

Looking back on the history of humanity has passed, it can be said, the concept of the founders of Marxism on education for the development of human comprehensiveness as the main purpose of showing the correctness of it. In their thinking, education is not only a necessary condition for the development of society, but more importantly a precondition for the full development of human capacities, education for the development of human beings themselves.

3. Educating people with Buddhism and Marxism on environment through practicing moral disciplines

So far, there are still different opinions, even opposites the role of religion. However, the schools of theories of religion now recognize the duality of religion. As the form of social consciousness, religion is considered universal value reflects faith of human being, sometimes played an active role, can sometimes become a factor impede the development.

With the active role of religion, composer Trinh Công Sơn in one of his works *"Wait For A Day"* wrote: *"Wait for love on the Cross, Wait to erase greed under the shade of the Sacred Fig..."*

Considering the phrase "erase greed," I believe that to erase greed is a way to strengthen one's morals and to complete one's self.

It is wrong to be greedy and unintentionally destroy natural resources. We should respect, care for, and maintain the life of vegetation.

Beside, do not lie to yourself because of greed: senselessly cut down, dig, exploit natural resources to depletion.

Sometime, some people usually quote Karl Marx: "Religion is the opium of the people" (C. Mác-Ph. Ang ghen, tap 23, 1993). In my opinion, it maybe mentions one side of religion as preventing a change of the socialisation by the way of to support suffering people to think of unreal life, instead of change, remove poor poverty... This saying of Karl Marx not totally mention on Buddhism because based on Albert Einstein's view: "The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific

needs, it would be Buddhism. Buddhism requires no revision to keep it up to date with recent scientific finding. Buddhism need no surrender its view to science, because it embraces science as well as goes beyond science.”

5. Conclusion

In modern societies, to maintain the greenness of our planet, each individual is expected to keep Buddha’s teachings in mind. In the perspective of Buddhism, moral values are not only viewed from the prism of right and wrong, but also are analyzed according to mental states. Societies and living environment are no other than expanding perception of humans and their communities; a combination of individual karma and collective karma. In other words, regarding the problems of environmental morals, there are three concerns: first and foremost, morals should be a general matter, a common matter of the whole human race which is not region-restricted nor geographically limited; secondly, morals should not be constrained within this contemporary life but also extended to the upcoming generations; and thirdly, morals should transcend human boundary which means it should cover other inhuman entities like animals, plants, and ecosystem. (Hiep, n.d.).

The protection of the environment for human life (as the perspective of Buddhism and Marxism alike) should be decided and be controlled by humans themselves. Protecting the environment is protecting the life and the future of the whole world, so it is essential to increase the responsibilities in management of governments, organizations, religions (typically Buddhism), to pay attention to the effectiveness of education, manners towards national and international social issues.

We believe that the ASEAN Community in the future with the deep-seated foundation and mark of Buddhism (continuously progress from the past to the present) will commit ourselves to becoming: “A sustainable community, boosting social development and environment protection through efficient mechanisms to fulfill the present and future demands of people.” (Article 11.3, ASEAN Cultural and Social Community Vision 2025, ASEAN Community Declaration, December 22, 2015, Kuala Lumpur) (ASEAN Community Vision Statement: Community Realization, 2013).

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