

Wanlapha Phongphan¹
Prapassornkunnatham School
Thailand

Overview paper
<https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1602239p>
Date received: November 25, 2021
Date accepted: February 9, 2022

Mia Borromeo-Eballo²
De La Salle University - Integrated School
Philippines

REALIZING SELF-SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY THROUGH THE EIGHTFOLD PATH: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN THE THAI ROYAL GOVERNMENT AND THE BUDDHIST FAITH

Abstract

It can be noticed that the practice of Buddhism in Thailand goes beyond the four walls of a Buddhist temple simply because members are expected to incorporate their faith into their way of life. Such being the case, this article examines how the Eightfold Path of the Buddhist tradition is being integrated into various aspects of Thai life especially when His Royal Highness King Bhumibol Aduljadej initiated in 1997 the philosophy of Self-Sufficiency Economy and inspired His people to fulfill it. The said model puts a high premium on living and behaving for the people by considering moderation, rationality, immunity (prudence), and the use of knowledge guided by moral precepts from the family level as components necessary for surviving crises and achieving sustainability amidst social, political, economic, and environmental concerns due to the impact of globalization. This article substantiates how the Self-Sufficiency Economy has been realized in different areas of Thai society by presenting holistic efforts or concrete cases that indicate the Eightfold Path among Thais using aesthetic appreciation theory. Thus, this paper describes how the Thai Royal Government and Buddhism fulfill their shared responsibility in maintaining balanced economic forces, environmental preservation, cultural and spiritual values, and good governance.

Keywords: Self-sufficiency Economy, moderation, Buddhism, Eightfold Path, Royal Government, Thailand

- 1 Wanlapha Phongphan is the Deputy Director of the the Prapassornkunnatham School (Thailand). She specializes in teaching Chinese, and her doctoral dissertation 'The Competency Promotion of Chinese Language Teachers in Secondary Schools in the Eastern Region of Thailand' was dedicated to this issue. Contact E-mail: E-mail: huiiping_th@yahoo.com
- 2 Mia B. Eballo is a Doctoral student at the De la Salle University (Philippines), where she works on the popular piety and devotion. She is particularly interested in pedagogy and intercultural practices of Filipino Catholics. Contact E-mail: mia.eballo@dlsu.edu.ph

Introduction

In Thailand, Buddhism is being taught, particularly the teachings of the Lord Buddha, as a way of life. This belief system represents neither a religion nor a philosophy simply because faith, belief and ritualized expressions are not making sense without actual application or praxis in conformity with the *Dhamma*.³ It does not only contain revealed set of rules that must be strictly followed, but it serves as a means through which individuals can discover truth for themselves needed in acquiring self-knowledge and self-transcendence. Followers are called to witness Buddhist teachings by developing virtues in their lives such as ethical integrity, meditation, stillness, and self-inquiry in their lives.

Self-Sufficiency Economy as an initiative of the Royal Family, especially King Bhumibol Aduljadej Himself, is a practical philosophy that suggests choosing the Middle Path or moderation as an overarching principle for proper living by the people from all strata of Thai society. Middle Path refers to a peaceful way of life which negotiated the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. It is designed to apply first from the level of families to the level of communities, and to the national level where people are reminded not to be negligent, not greedy, and consider moderation, rationality, and immunity (prudence). Followers are called to employ knowledge and morality as the basis for surviving socio-political, economic, and environmental crises toward sustainability and resiliency.⁴

Families have an important part in social development because they assume the fundamental obligation for the children to inculcate values of social responsibility and belonging in society through education and socialization. Families also provide physical, moral, and spiritual utmost care to their members, from toddlers to elders or those experiencing poor health, protecting them from suffering in the best way possible. Indeed, charity begins at home.

Sufficiency means moderation, rationality, and the need for self-immunity (prudence) attribute that serves as a protection to withstand the impact of various influences in the daily lives of Thais. To achieve this, an application of knowledge with humility, respect, and prudence is essential. Utmost care is needed in the utilization of theories and methodologies from planning to implementation in every step. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation so that everyone, especially political and public officials including the academe and

3 For a better articulation of the meanings of *dhamma*, categorizing them into two: external or physical meanings and internal or spiritual meanings is helpful. External meanings of *dhamma* refer to matters external to and independent from the individual human mind and judgment, for example, the law of cosmic order, natural phenomena, or the way things really are. This can be also called the ontological meaning of *dhamma*. The internal meanings of *dhamma* depend on the human mind and construction such as moral law, righteousness, duty, truth, and norm. These meanings of *dhamma* are epistemological and moral. See: Pataraporn Sirikanchana, "The Concept of 'Dhamma' in Thai Buddhism: A Study in the Thought of Vajiranana and Buddhadasa", Unpublished Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1985, p. 2.

4 Phra Dhammamolee Phrakhrusatugitgosol, Phramaha Sombat Thanavaro Phrakhruviriyapanyapiwasat, and Sompong Thitajitto Phramaha, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: From the Buddhist Notion to Survival in Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis, *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, Vol. 12, No. 8, 2021, pp. 2435-2436.

businessmen, adheres basically to moral principles such as honesty and truthfulness. In addition, a way of life characterized by patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable to create balance and be able to cope properly with critical challenges arising from massive and rapid socio-economic, political, and environmental changes and challenges in the global community.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, adopted by the United Nations Development Program, adhere to the worldwide call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.⁵ All countries are called to execute an integrated action in various aspects where the quality of life of people will improve. The Self-Sufficiency Economy approach is doable in three fundamental principles such as moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity (prudence) or capacity to deal with changes and challenges brought about by globalization.⁶

Thailand perceives Self-Sufficiency Economy on a positive note since it does not reject the reality of globalization but rather it encourages and empowers the people to counteract the detrimental effects of globalization. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej proposed it in 1997 and reiterated it in 2005 due to the good effects of the said philosophy such as holistic and sustainable improvement of the quality of life especially of those in the peripheries.⁷

Backed by a strong political policy, this article verifies how the Self-Sufficiency Economy has been realized in different areas of Thai society by presenting holistic efforts or concrete cases that indicate the Eightfold Path based on existing narratives and reports provided by the Thai government.

Research Methodology

This research article employs the theory of aesthetic appreciation as a method of understanding how the Eightfold Path has been realized by the people of Thailand in the pursuit of development in different realms of life such as economic, political, environment, and spiritual through the implementation of the Self-Sufficiency Economy model endorsed by the Royal Government as a national policy.

Modern western aesthetics has been preoccupied with the study of arts and artworks. As a result, we associate aesthetics mainly with the study of artworks such as paintings, music, literature, dance, and theater. Obviously, aesthetics today engages with the study of contemporary arts such as happenings, chance music, installation, and interactive art, and of popular arts such as popular music, video game and cartoon. There is, furthermore, the development of environmental

5 "The Sustainable Development Goals", UNDP, available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> (accessed January 14, 2022).

6 "United Nations Sustainable Development (Sufficient Economic Philosophy)," available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=2126> (accessed January 14, 2022).

7 "United Nations Development Programme (Human Development Reports)," available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/thailand_2007_en.pdf (accessed January 14, 2022).

aesthetics and its relation to everyday social life. There are various possibilities for understanding aesthetics beyond the arts and pointed out a way for social aesthetics focused on human relations or social situations such as relations among members of a community. Likewise, the everyday aesthetics expands the scope of aesthetic inquiry to various ingredients of everyday life such as interactions with other people and workday activities like going to work, walking, dealing with other people, and attending an important event.⁸

Some approaches to social sciences may not suit for understanding and improving the qualities of the social life of the people. Aesthetic appreciation is recommended so that the qualitative characteristics of social life can be identified and examined as well. The consideration of the qualities of social life can lead us to the question of a 'good society' in the aesthetic sense. Aesthetic appreciation gives emphasis on *ajiwau* which means to taste, experience, and appreciate a particular environment. *Ajiwau* as the point of reference in qualitative research takes additional inference of "knowing" more than just tasting, and experiencing, thus, it postulates a further way of gaining a deeper understanding of an experience of a phenomenon that brings about realizations and insights more than the affective sensing of an object.⁹

Using this method, indicators of concrete expressions of the Eightfold Path through Self-Sufficiency Economy which highlight the efforts to improve the political, economic, ecological, and spiritual conditions of the people of Thailand are presented and discussed by the authors. Narratives from literature serve as references in this article to corroborate with the authors' usage of *ajiwau*.

Literature review

The Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is the heart and soul of the traditional practice of Buddhism since time immemorial. The Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths which consist of the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.¹⁰ The following are the traditional Buddhist expressions of the Eightfold Path:

1. Right View (*Sammāditthi*) sometimes translated as "right perspective" denotes the right way of seeing the Four Noble Truths,
2. Right Aspiration (*Sammāsaṅkappa*) or "right intent" implies the renunciation from the mundane life, a commitment to non-violence, or harmlessness towards all sentient beings,

8 Kojiro Miyahara, Exploring Social Aesthetics: Aesthetic Appreciation as a Method for Qualitative Sociology and Social Research, *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2014, p. 2.

9 Ibidem, p. 1.

10 Sanu Mahatthanadull, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Buddhist Middle Way for Mankind*, Selected Works in Buddhist Scriptures, Teaching Document (Mimeographed) International Buddhist Studies College, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2014, p. 1.

3. Right Speech (*Sammāvācā*) presages the avoidance the four kinds of speech,
4. Right Doing (*Sammākammanta*) can also be translated to “right action” or “right conduct” which deals with avoiding the four kinds of doing,
5. Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*) means supporting oneself by an ethical livelihood, or wealth obtained through rightful means,
6. Right Effort (*Sammāvāyāma*) or “right endeavor” means the effort to prevent and abandon the unwholesome and to develop and maintain wholesome,
7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammāsati*) or “right awareness” suggests the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, and
8. Right Rapture (*Sammāsamādhi*) or “right meditation” or “right concentration” involves the significance of serene contemplation attained by meditation.¹¹

Pragmatic and suited to people’s day-to-day life, the threefold training in conjunction with the Eightfold Path provides an avenue for a faith-in-action experience. The right view and right thought encourage the development of wisdom (*panna*). Wisdom necessitates a wise understanding of reality and having the conviction to an appropriate goal that will lead to a holistic life. Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood encourage the development of Ethical Conduct (*sila*). This necessitates compassion, selfless treatment of others, and integrity in one’s occupation, and the Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation encourage Mental Development (*samadhi*). Mental development necessitates a mind that is full which means maintaining the motivation to reach a goal and having a non-judgmental attitude while being aware of the present. Self-Sufficiency Economy as a framework for living out the Middle Way addresses development challenges to improve human well-being.¹² This was developed from the introduction of the King which states that: “Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that stresses the Middle Path as the overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct at the level of the individual, families, and communities, as well as to the choice of a balanced development strategy for the nation to modernize in line with the forces of globalization while shielding against inevitable shocks and excesses that arise. Sufficiency means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, as well as the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks. To achieve this, the application of knowledge with prudence is essential. Great care is needed in the utilization of untested theories and methodologies for planning and implementation. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation, so that everyone, particularly political and public officials, technocrats, businessmen and financiers, adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a balanced

11 Ibidem, pp. 2-3.

12 Mongsawad Prasopchoke, The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy: A Contribution to the Theory of Development, *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2010, pp. 127-129.

approach combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable to cope appropriately with the critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-economic, political and environmental changes taking place due to globalization."¹³

Sustainable Development

The most common understanding of sustainable development springs forth from a report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 which states that sustainable development is a kind of development that meets people's needs. It presents a framework that is aimed at creating and achieving balance in the social, economic, and environmental aspects. It represents an ideal life that is achieved through a long-term and well-thought plan that secures the future of a holistic life.¹⁴ In Buddhism's Middle Way, sustainable development is seen both in the individual and communal levels. To be sustainable is equivalent to a life lived in moderation and frugality.

Discussion

In 1997, Thailand entered its most serious economic crisis since World War II. It was the irony of Thailand history, which has always been reputed for its financial orthodoxy and macroeconomic stability, that should appear as the weak link in the Asian financial chain.¹⁵ During that crisis, an intervention was introduced that is close to the hearts and minds of the Thai people. The influence of the King, who is loved by the Thai people ignited their love for their identity fueled by a collective desire to abide by the rules of the Eightfold Path in attaining the Middle Way. "Let us live happily then, not hating those who hate us! among men who hate us let us dwell free from hatred!"¹⁶ These words serve as a motivation for the Thai people to become optimistic in life and to live happily amidst the economic recession. Since its introduction in 1997, the Self-Sufficiency Economy philosophy has been used as the paradigm to understand how the Eightfold Path can be realized. In business and economics that shed light on institutional approaches to sustainability.¹⁷ Issues that address environmental concerns highlight the significance of the Middle

13 Ibidem, pp. 127-129.

14 Kotchaworn Chuymanee and Gary McLean, *Buddhist Sustainable Development: Sufficiency Economy as an Alternative Approach*, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand, 2014, p. 4.

15 The financial crisis in Thailand was fundamentally not a case of state failure/negligence nor originating in the alleged statism, cronyism, and capitalism but mainly in careless lending/borrowing and the accumulation of nonperforming loans in the financial sector. See: Laurids Lauridsen, *The Financial Crisis in Thailand: Causes, Conduct and Consequences?*, *World Development*, Vol. 26, No. 8, 1998, p. 1575.

16 A passage taken from *The Dhammapada* (chapter 15, verse 197). See: *The Dhammapada*, A Collection of Verses Being One of the Canonical Books of the Buddhists translated from the *Pali* by F. Max Müller 1881, p. 53.

17 Song Hee-Chan, *Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Buddhism-based Sustainability Framework in Thailand*, 2020, pp. 5-7.

Way through moderation, rationality, and self-immunity (prudence) as essential elements in the process of adaptation.¹⁸ Even in the field of the tourism industry, Self-Sufficiency Economy was also used as a framework for validating sustainability in this aspect.¹⁹ The following are concrete realizations of the Eightfold Path through the application of Self-Sufficiency Economic model as proposed by the King Himself embedded in the culture of Thai people:

Politics

The idea of a Self-Sufficiency is the realization of the Thais that their lives should be driven by a purpose that is individualistic in embodiment yet collectively in existence. The standard upon which it was founded can be found in the Eightfold Path in Buddhism, as taught by the Lord Buddha. It also espouses one of the basic tenets of how to live a meaningful life as prescribed by King Bhumibol, who turned this principle into a political doctrine known as the Self-Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. It can be said that the acceptance of this ideology into the mainstream consciousness has encouraged many people from all walks of life to give more attention to their relationship with their fellow human beings and nature.

However, the eagerness of the King to implement that kind of economic model has become an inspiration and battle cry of the government leaders when talking about integral development. Likewise, as an ideal model of development, it gives communities, especially in rural areas a beacon of hope and perseverance. The prominent form of Buddhism practiced in Thailand is Theravada Buddhism. It has been considered as a state-controlled religion with its community of state-sponsored monks known as *Sangha*. Thus, Buddhist principles are certainly intertwined with the affairs of the state and Theravada Buddhism is explicitly involved in the socio-political undertakings of the state.²⁰

The Self-Sufficiency economic concept was introduced by Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1997 as a respond to the challenges caused by globalization and the ASEAN economic crisis. It has been politicalized in three periods: First, during the King's term, second during the term of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and third during current Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's administration as an antidote to neo-liberalism by emphasizing moderation and stability. The Self-Sufficiency Economy is closely associated with the Social Development Goals (SDG) under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Both are related to Theravada Buddhism since they are in consonance with the teaching of the Middle Way.

18 Kulvadee Kansuntisukmongkol, Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change: Lessons Learned from Thai Case Studies, *Kasetsart Journal of Social Science*, 2017, pp. 56-61.

19 Bung-on Chartrungruang, The Model of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Application for Tourism Industry in Chian Mai, Thailand, *International Journal of Asian Management*, Vol. 2, 2011, p. 136.

20 Wolfram Schaffar, Alternative Development Concepts and Their Political Embedding: The Case of Sufficiency Economy in Thailand, *Forum for Development Studies*, 2018, p. 5.

Economy

A lot of books and articles have been written about Thailand's articulation of its economic progress in relation to the Buddhist faith. Thailand, a predominantly Buddhist country, has done a lot of significant research to discover alternative ways of sustainable human development, e.g., sustainable agriculture, including initiatives explicitly inspired by the Buddhist way of life. Buddhism maintains that prioritizing the essential needs of the people is only the first step in avoiding human suffering which depends upon fostering a sense of detachment and spiritual fulfillment. It also talks about contentment which refers to the adequate provisioning of the things that every human needs to live as the goal of economic development.²¹

Economic growth from the Buddhist perspective should be inclusive, equitable, and fair. It should not result in a 'two-tier society' between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' The Buddhist approach to economic development demands the improvement of rational behavior of the people through the attainment of 'right views' or understanding. This is the first step on the Eightfold Path of the Buddha which promotes a series of personal progress known as the threefold training: (1) to develop the higher wisdom essential to understand the nature reality known as *sila*, (2) to develop the higher mentality necessary for mindfulness or concentration known as *samadhi*, and (3) to develop the higher morality necessary to conduct one's actions, speech, and livelihood in a moral and proper way known as *prajna*.²²

By practicing Buddhist principles of sufficiency (*pho yu pho kin*) and self-reliance, integral development can transpire within Thailand's limit and individuals can consume to their needs without having to waste resources. As a result, supplies can be available for the people, and they can benefit from their own work. Therefore, it is important to apply the principle of contentment in life and wise consumption in contrast to the conventional economic equation of maximum consumption leading to maximum satisfaction. By averting greed that stems from the capitalist system, the improvement of life in Thai society is within reach. Self-reliance (*phung ton eng*) refers to the capacity to stand on one's own feet, the ability to make sound judgments and decision-making, and not to be dependent on others. In the 1990s, several scholars integrated these two concepts in contemplating about the role of society, by maintaining that society is the social unit within which these concepts could be realized.²³

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) admits that human solidarity is imperative in addressing contemporary societal problems.²⁴ Thus, each person should take some responsibility for the good of his or her society,

21 See: "Bhutan National Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan", United Nations Development Programme, 2019.

22 Prayukvong Wanna, A Buddhist Economic Approach to the Development of Community Enterprises: A Case Study from Southern Thailand, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 29, 2005, p. 1174.

23 "Thailand Human Development Report", United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2003; See also: "Thailand Human Development Report Sufficiency Economy and Human Development", United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2007.

24 *United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 2007, Making Globalization Work for All.*

for maintaining the society in a situation wherein the common wellbeing of the people and development are attainable.²⁵ The vigor of Buddhism in praxis inspires its followers to engage in social, political, and environmental concerns. In these concerns, personal and social goals are closely connected since the practice of *Dhamma* can lead to the development of oneself and others. Indeed, *Dhamma* is doable by empowering oneself to help others. Buddhism is not a passive belief system, rather it positively encourages every person to practice giving and helping.²⁶

Thailand's self-sufficiency economy is a Buddhist tradition (Fifth Path of enlightenment) that has been accepted as both ethical and economic concept related to the principle of *Right Livelihood*. This is a practical philosophy suggesting that if one wishes to achieve Buddha's Middle Path, he or she should opt to live harmoniously and peacefully. His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej did propose the concept of the 'Self-Sufficiency Economy' which is aimed at guiding us all in living our lives in accordance with the Middle Path as the overarching principle for the proper conduct of the Thai people.

Cases of *Right Livelihood* were evident in the self-reliant approach implemented by the Thai Government. For example, an endogenous development theory was introduced as an alternative paradigm projected to prioritize community development and human empowerment in the production of local products when the country was hit by the economic crisis in 1997. This alternative model known as *One Tambon One Product* (OTOP) was designed to develop and promote potential products of the locals in the municipalities and aimed to generate income.²⁷ The OTOPTOP movement intends to promote rural development through community-oriented ventures that maximize local resources and knowledge. Studies show that this OTOPTOP has impacted the producers in terms of income generation and created job opportunities for the local community.²⁸

In addition, the economic ordeals experienced by Thailand prompted the people to be more mindful of their misery and of others. In conjunction with their religious practice is the motivation to be self-reliant. Families have focused their attention in providing their needs through sorts of livelihood projects. In Rayong, east of Bangkok, families have their own backyard gardens that produce fruits and vegetables. In Bangkok, rooftops of buildings have been converted into a communal urban gardens where residents are responsible for planting, growing, and harvesting of their crops.

25 Rajavaramuni Phra, "Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics," in: *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, R. F. Sizemore & D. K. Swearer (eds.), University of South Carolina Press, 1990, p. 37.

26 Devedhi Phra (Prayudh Payutto), *Helping Yourself to Help Others*, Buddhadhamma Foundation, Bangkok, 1990, p. 3.

27 Thi Anh Nguyen, One Village One Product (OVOP) in Japan to One Tambon One Product (OTOP) in Thailand: Lessons for Grass Root Development in Developing Countries, *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, Vol. 4, No 12, p. 532.

28 Kaoru Natsuda, Igusa Kunio, Wiboonpongse Aree, and John Thoburn, One Village One Product- Rural Development Strategy in Asia: The Case of OTOPTOP in Thailand, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2012, p. 370.

Environment

Thailand faces the dilemma of a fast-disappearing forest base. The rate of deforestation in Thailand is higher than in any Asian country except Nepal and probably Borneo. An aerial survey was conducted in 1961 by the Royal Forest Department (RFD) to determine Thailand's land mass which recorded 53% was forested and by 1985 the land was 28% forested. These figures represent a decrease from approximately 75% forest cover since 1913.²⁹ Regretfully, the forestry sector is Thailand's second largest industry after tourism. Two major historical factors responsible for this environmental crisis have been identified. The first factor was the reform of the bureaucracy in 1892, resulting in the establishment of strong and centralized state control. The second factor was the direction of the government economic development policy known as modernization that began in 1961.³⁰

Thailand has been a major player in Asia's economic boom over the past three decades. With its economic growth, deforestation has become an increasing problem. More than 20 million acres of forest were lost between 1988 and 2001. Much of this is due to contract farming and manufacturing. Government has to make way for new factories, roads, and drainage facilities, causing soil erosion, and massive flooding during the rainy season.³¹

Buddhism has always been associated with forests. It can be recalled that the Lord Buddha Himself, dressed as a monk, went to meditate under a Bodhi tree where He realized that there was a way for people to end their pain and sadness. As a result of His meditation, he became wise and enlightened. Thus, it is safe to say that the forest is part and parcel of Buddhist practice. Situated in the deep forest of Thailand, Buddhist ecology monks persist to defend the forests and the rural people, worn out for the sake of development and modernization. In Thai, they are called, "phra nak anurak thamachat," a popular term meaning monks who conserve nature.³²

The persistence of Thai Buddhist ecology monks is a concrete example of how Engaged Buddhism responds to contemporary issues, particularly concerning rural people, poverty, and environmental degradation in the peripheries.³³ These monks are eyewitnesses of forest destruction caused by people acting through greed, ignorance, and hatred motivated by economic gain and the material benefits of development, industrialization, and consumerism. As monks, they realize that it is their responsibility to act against these wrongdoings. Their actions bring them into the sphere of political and economic discourses, specifically the dilemma between

29 Susan Darlington, *The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand*, *Ethnology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Winter 1998, p. 2.

30 Apichai Puntasen, *The Tambon Council and Community Forest Management*, Silkworm Books, Bangkok, 1997, p. 72.

31 Kiley Price, "Ecology Monks in Thailand Seek to End Environmental Suffering", *Mongabay Series*, August 13, 2018.

32 Susan M. Darlington, *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2012, p. 10.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 142.

the development of the Thai economy and the preservation of natural resources. These Thai Engaged Buddhist monks have responded to the said dilemma through action at rural sites such as temple schools and forest monasteries.³⁴ They use rituals and creative teaching approaches to counteract the three roots of perpetual suffering (greed, anger, and ignorance) that hold all beings within a never-ending cycle of death and rebirth based on Buddhist belief. Here, this Buddhist path is interpreted as a responsibility to resist the globalization forces that have brought about the Thai environmental crisis.

This is of particular concern to Buddhist monks, so they perform environmental rituals such as the *Tree Ordinations* (consecrating trees with a religious ceremony), weekly Long-Life ceremonies for local rivers and their inhabitants, and wearing of robes made from plastic bags as a symbolic protest against pollution. These two ceremonies draw on traditional Buddhist teachings as well as indigenous beliefs in spirits as a response to the current situation of rapid deforestation of Thailand's forests.³⁵ Tree ordination usually combines local spiritualism along with Buddhist rituals and recognition of Buddhist and Thai values of correct behavior toward the environment. Occasionally, if a community is not Buddhist, a ceremony might be conducted to dedicate a forest to the Lord of the land spirit, or to God as defined by Christians because these efforts are supported at a national and international level by much of the population, different government offices and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Thus, tree ordinations give local people a way to define and defend their interests in a larger political and economic sphere. Generally, ordaining trees makes them into monks wherein an orange or yellow robe is tied around them to designate a whole forest area as being ordained.³⁶

In 1997, to commemorate his 50th accession anniversary, His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej endorsed tree ordinations and enjoined the people to ordain 50 million trees. Indeed, this practice has become politically and ecologically acceptable for local, regional, and national polities due to its noble purpose of protecting and preserving the environment.³⁷ Indeed, an ideal approach in protecting and preserving the environment that has been proven possible and doable is through concerted efforts or collaboration among the locals, private institutions, government agencies, Churches, media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).³⁸

34 Ibidem, p. 2.

35 Marieta Rose Bialek, *Thai Buddhist Ecology Monks: Competing Views of the Forest*, doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2014, p. 3.

36 Nicola Tannenbaum, [Protest](#), Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of [Political Ritual](#), *Ethnology*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2000, p. 123.

37 Ibidem, p. 109.

38 Arvin Eballo, Contextualizing Laudato Si' through People's Organization Engagement: A Kalawakan Experience, *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, p. 25.

Spirituality

The Thai Self-Sufficiency Economy sustainability paradigm directly reflects the concept of Buddhist spirituality. In fact, the word Dharma (from the root *dhar*) can also mean to “sustain.”³⁹ One of the core teachings of Dharma is to opt for the Middle Path between the two extremes of continuum such as increasing growth and minimizing utility or indulgence and asceticism, in terms of people’s daily activity and community development also known as right livelihood.⁴⁰ The notion of Middle Path is directly reflected in the core theory of Self-Sufficiency Economy model through three practical principles such as moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity (prudence). These principles encourage sufficiency rather than efficiency and maximization mentality.

The compatibility between the Self-Sufficiency Economy model and the notion of the Middle Path in Buddhist tradition can be gleaned from the everyday life of Thais. In fact, this paper claims that the Self-Sufficiency Economy sustainability paradigm directly reflects the Thai Buddhist spirituality. The word “Dharma” (from the root *dhar*) can also mean to sustain. Moreover, one of the core teachings of Dharma is to opt for the Middle Path between the two extremes of continuum such as increasing growth and minimizing utility or indulgence and asceticism, in terms of people’s daily activity and community development also known as Light Livelihood. The notion of Middle Path is directly reflected in the core theory of Self-Sufficiency Economy model through three practical principles such as moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. These principles encourage sufficiency rather than efficiency and maximizing mentality.

‘Sufficiency’ means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, as well as the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks. To achieve this, the application of knowledge (reasonableness) with prudence (self-immunity) is essential. Great care is needed in the utilization of untested theories and methodologies for planning and implementation. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fiber of the nation, so that everyone, particularly political and public officials, technocrats, businessmen, and financiers, adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. Likewise, the critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-economic, environmental, and cultural changes happening because of globalization will be dealt with balance approach integrating patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence, to cope appropriately with such challenges.⁴¹

39 Edward Shils, “Charisma,” in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills (ed.), Vol. 2, Crowell Collier and Macmillan, Inc., 1968, p. 387.

40 Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, Blond and Briggs, 1973 (reissued 1989), p. 66.

41 Prasopchoke Mongsawad, *The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy: A Contribution to the Theory of Development*. . . p. 127.

Thai Venerable Monk *Phra Shakyavongvisuddhi (Anil Sakya)*, Deputy Rector for Foreign Affairs of Thailand, more explicitly stated the following principles known as dependent co-arising (*paticca samuppada*) in connecting Buddhism to sustainability:

“Buddhism sees that everything on this earth is existed nature and it operates according to the law of causality. Human is just part of this natural law of causality. Human beings are part of nature just like any other creatures or environment.”

“Being a part of the natural law of causality what human acts do have direct repercussions to other parts of natural law. Equally, changes in nature do have a direct impact upon human life both internally and externally as well as on the relationship between humans and nature.”⁴²

As such, the pertinent proposition of dynamic connectivity among business, society, and ecosystem is consistent with Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist economics.⁴³ The notion of “moderation” derives from a Middle Path known as *Majjhimapatipada* in *Pali* which refers to one of the day-to-day Buddhist moral tenets. Institutional theory suggests that an informal institution revolves around moral norms, which is a culturally learned social structure formed over a historical time in a particular societal system. At an individual level, moral norm influences one’s mindset that governs the perception of right or wrong, good or bad, and just or unjust. In other words, a moral norm is not a law-like regulation that enforces people to follow, but instead, it is a normative criterion for people to act mindfully and rightfully.⁴⁴

Buddhism, which lays a strong emphasis on leading a life of moderation, has grown to be deeply ingrained in the Thai way of life. Apparently, the Buddhist Middle Path has operated as such a normative criterion in the corners of Thai society where local communities are historically formed around Buddhist temples. In the communities, people are called to practice the Middle Path through various meditative methods that aim to reduce one’s desire, self-interest, and overindulgence while pursuing appropriate consumption and satisfaction.⁴⁵

In the framework of the Self-sufficiency Economy, the second element of “reasonableness” expresses awareness of system thinking inherent in Buddhism. It suggests that one should realize how one’s action can influence even invisible entities and cyclically return to oneself over time. In Buddhism, such cyclical thinking is considered Karma (*Kamma* in *Pali*) which literally means an action intended to

42 This speech was delivered at the Symposium on Sustainable Development at Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn University on August 17, 2015. See: Hee-Chan Song, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Buddhism-based Sustainability Framework in Thailand, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, June 2020, p. 7.

43 Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. . . p. 63.

44 Hee-Chan Song, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Buddhism-based Sustainability Framework in Thailand. . . p. 5.

45 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

happen and the outcome of the action, which turns back to one's suffering or happiness over time. Therefore, in comparison with the Middle Path, which is an ethical principle or moral criterion, the concept of *Karma* signifies a worldview, knowledge, and a Buddhist approach to recognize relationships of entities that prevent wrongdoing. For example, a manager recognizes that organizational members constitute a single organizational identity. It reflects the manager's mindset that individuals' actions, feelings, and emotions, which are apparently independent, cause collective outcomes that influence all the individuals in an organizational setting. Reasonableness, in this sense, is mostly reflected in Thai organizations' code of conduct behind their strategic decision and important organizational decision-making.⁴⁶

The third element of the Self-Sufficiency Economy is "self-immunity." It characterizes the capability of people and organizations to protect themselves from external disturbances and shocks. The concept is particularly related to the community sustainability of the rural economy in Thailand. To illustrate, the resilience of the farm-based Thai community is an important sustainability issue in North-East Thailand. Nonetheless, climate change issues, disastrous floods, and fine dust from Southern China significantly impact the rural economy, which in turn makes the farm-based community less resilient. Self-immunity is the element that particularly encourages the local communities and people to appropriately respond to external shock and quickly return to the pre-disturbance state. From Buddhist perspective, self-immunity emerges in one's mind through a combination of mindfulness and *Karma*. Although *Karma* acts as a worldview, mindfulness (*Sati* in *Pali*) is a kind of habit that aids the meditation of the practitioners to understand stimuli in less routinized manners and, thereby, quickly respond to external threats. Perhaps, mindfulness is one of the most important spiritual exercises in Buddhist ascetic life. This concept has evolved and finetuned over 2,500 years of Buddhist existence. From the Buddhist view, mindful people observe the cognitive process of perceiving phenomena, such as sight, texture, sound, and smell, and assign appropriate meanings to them to make sound and prudent decisions. On the contrary, less mindful people experience more difficulty in controlling their habitual and superficial cognitive processes and often fail to figure out the abnormality in the external environment. Buddhist mindfulness signifies how people use their minds fully to address external changes by observing the operation of their minds in relationship to the external world. Hence, self-immunity is identical to mindfulness in the Self-Sufficiency Economy framework.⁴⁷

46 Ibidem.

47 Ibidem, p. 7.

Conclusion

The citizens of Thailand and politicians (public servants) including the Royal Family are conscious of the principle of shared responsibility necessary in realizing their vision of making their beloved country the best place to live in. This is the reason why they actively participate in the purposeful projects of the state related to the improvement of their wellbeing. The collaboration of the Royal Government and Buddhist tradition is beneficial to both institutions and to the people. On one hand, the encouragement of the Royal Government to carry out the Self-Sufficiency Economy model is an indicator that the state is doing its duty of administering and ministering to the people appropriately by 'walking their talk,' (model of good governance). On the other hand, the Buddhist faith serves as the fountain of virtues, values, and moral principles needed by the people as their guide in the everydayness of their life and encouragement in surviving difficult times such as economic recession, calamities, and health crisis through the spirit of sharing. The interplay of state (Self-Sufficiency Economy) and religion (Eightfold Path) in Thailand is beneficial to the people in attaining holistic development characterized by balanced economic forces, environmental preservation, cultural and spiritual values, and good governance. Finally, grounded on the same faith, Thai people work toward personal and communal happiness that fuels national economic progress: "Let us live happily then, not hating those who hate us!"

References

Bialek Marieta Rose, "Thai Buddhist Ecology Monks: Competing Views of the Forest," Unpublished Dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2014.

Bung-on Chartrungruang, The Model of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Application for Tourism Industry in Chiang Mai, Thailand, *International Journal of Asian Management*, Vol. 2, 2011.

Darlington Susan, The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand, *Ethnology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1998.

Debvedi (Prayudh Payutto), *Helping Yourself to Help Others*, Buddhadhamma Foundation, Bangkok, 1990.

Eballo Arvin, Contextualizing Laudato Si' through People's Organization Engagement: A Kalawakan Experience, *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2018.

Kojiro Miyahara, Exploring Social Aesthetics: Aesthetic Appreciation as a Method for Qualitative Sociology and Social Research, *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2014. doi: 10.1111/ijjs.12025

Kotchaworn Chuymanee and McLean Gary, *Buddhist Sustainable Development: Sufficiency Economy as an Alternative Approach*, National Institute of Development Administration Thailand, 2014.

Kulvadee Kansuntisukmongkol, Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change: Lessons Learned from Thai Case Studies, *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2016.03.002>

Lauridsen Laurids, The Financial Crisis in Thailand: Causes, Conduct and Consequences?, *World Development*, Vol. 26, No. 8, 1998. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(98\)00069-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00069-2)

Low Kim Cheng Patrick, "Proactive Leading, The Buddhist Way, Country: Thailand, Business Environment Living, 2010", available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1638331 (accessed December 21, 2021).

Mongsawad Prasopchoke, The Philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy: A Contribution to the Theory of Development, *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2010.

Natsuda Kaoru Natsuda, Igusa Kunio Wilboonpongse, and John Aree Thoburn, One Village One Product- Rural Development Strategy in Asia: The Case of OTOP in Thailand, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2012. doi 10.1080/12255189.2012

Nguyen Thi Anh, One Village One Product (OVOP) in Japan to One Tambon One Product (OTOP) in Thailand: Lessons for Grass Root Development in Developing

Countries, *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, Vol. 4, No 12, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.22610/jsds.v4i12.794>

Phrakhrusatugitgosol Phra Dhammamolee, Phrakhruviriyapanyapiwasat Phramaha Sombat Thanavaro, Phramaha Sompong Thitajitto, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: From the Buddhist Notion to Survival in Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis, *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, Vol. 12, No. 8, 2021.

Prayukvong Wanna, A Buddhist Economic Approach to the Development of Community Enterprises: A Case Study from Southern Thailand, *Cambridge Journal Economics*, Vol. 29, No. 6, 2005. doi: 10.1093/cje/bei071 2005

Price Kiley, "Ecology Monks in Thailand Seek to End Environmental Suffering", *Mongabay Series*, August 13, 2018.

Puntasen Apichai, *The Tambon Council and Community Forest Management*, Silkworm Books, Bangkok 1997.

Rajavaramuni, "Foundations of Buddhist Social Ethics," in: *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, R. F. Sizemore & D. K. Swearer (eds.), University of South Carolina Press, 1990.

Sanu Mahatthanadull, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Buddhist Middle Way for Mankind*, International Buddhist Studies College, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2018.

Schaffar Wolfram, Alternative Development Concepts and Their Political Embedding: The Case of Sufficiency Economy in Thailand, *Forum for Development Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2018. doi:10.1080/08038410.2018.1464059

Schumacher Ernst Friedrich, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, Blond and Briggs, 1973 (reissued 1989).

Shils Edward, "Charisma": in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 2, David L. Sills (ed.), Crowell Collier and Macmillan, Inc., 1968.

Sirikanchana Pataraporn, "The Concept of 'Dhamma' in Thai Buddhism: A Study in the Thought of Vajiranana and Buddhadasa", *Unpublished Dissertation*, University of Pennsylvania, 1985.

Song Hee-Chan, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy: Buddhism-based Sustainability Framework in Thailand, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, Vol. 29, No. 8, 2022. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2553>

Tannenbaum Nicola, Protest, Tree Ordination, and the Changing Context of Political Ritual, *Ethnology*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2000.

Teachings of the Buddha, Kornfield Jack and Fronsdal, Gil (eds.) Shambhala, Boston & London, 1991.

The Dhammapada: A Collection of Verses Being One of the Canonical Books of the Buddhists, translated from the Pali by F. Max Müller, 1881. Available at: <http://www.discoveringbuddha.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Dhammapada-A-Collection-of->

Verses-F-Max-Muller-1898.pdf (accessed January 14, 2022).

“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”, UNDP, available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> (accessed January 14, 2022).

“United Nations Development Programme (Human Development Reports)”, UNDP, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/thailand_2007_en.pdf (accessed January 14, 2022).

“United Nations Sustainable Development (Sufficient Economic Philosophy)”, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=2126> (accessed: January 14, 2022).

Ванлапфа Фонгфан, Миа Боромео-Ебаљо

**ДОСТИЗАЊЕ САМО-ОДРЖИВЕ ЕКОНОМИЈЕ КРОЗ
ОСМОСТРУКИ ПУТ:
ПОДЕЉЕНА ОДГОВОРНОСТ ТАЈЛАНДСКЕ КРАЉЕВСКЕ
ВЛАДЕ И БУДИСТИЧКЕ ВЕРЕ**

Сажетак

Да се приметити да практиковање будизма на Тајланду иде изван зидова будистичких храмова, због тога што се очекује да чланови заједнице инкорпорирају веру у свој начин живота. Овај чланак анализира како је Осмоструки пут интегрисан у различитим аспектима живота Тајланђана, посебно од како је краљ Бхумибол Адуладеј 1997. године иницирао филозофију само-одрживе економије и тражио од људи да живе по њој. Овај модел подразумева живот умерености, рационалности, разборитости, и употребе знања вођеног моралним принципима на нивоу породице – што су компоненте неопходне да се преживе кризе и достигне одрживост упркос друштвеним, политичким, економским и изазовима у оквиру заштите животне средине који су изазвани глобализацијом. Овај чланак објашњава како се идеја само-одрживе економије реализује у различитим деловима тајландског друштва тако што показује холистичке приступе и случајеве који указују на овај приступ. На тај начин, овај чланак описује заједничку одговорност краљевске владе Тајланда и будизма испуњење одговорности у одржавању баланса између економских сила, заштите животне средине, културних и духовних вредности, и добре владавине.

Кључне речи: само-одржива економија, умереност, будизам, осмоструки пут, краљевска влада, Тајланд