



SOME THOUGHTS ON THE BEHAVIORAL PRINCIPLES AMONG RELIGIONS IN PLURALISTIC SOCIETY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BUDDHIST TOLERANCE

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Abstract

Nowadays, under the influence of modernization, industrialization and especially globalization, many problems of value, belief and custom have raised and caused many cultural, religious, race conflicts in the pluralistic society. Therefore, tolerance comes to be an influencing approach to solve such problems of modern society. This article analyses the basic thoughts of Buddhism on tolerance, then pointing out the behavioral principles among religions from the perspective of Buddhist tolerance in order to lead to religious solidarity, common peace and harmony society.

Keywords: Buddhist tolerance, religious tolerance, pluralistic society



1. INTRODUCTION

At the present, globalization not only creates the common values on culture, morality and religion which become the standards in community behaviors but also forces diverse values, identities of different cultural, ethical or religious groups to face the risks of disappearance in pluralistic society. Some researchers believe that globalisation might lead to extreme conflicts among the different religions. S.Huntington, an American political scientist assumed that wars between countries derive from the contradictions of civilizations in which religion takes core position. “Civilisations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion... Over the centuries, however, differences among civilisations have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflict” (Huntington,1993,p.25). And in those clashes, some religions will lose and be replaced by other ones. Besides, many others said that, in the globalization, it is impossible for religions to eliminate different values, instead, such diverse religious values still co-exist peacefully (*see* Lehmann, 2002, p.299-301).

Additionally, in the past decades, a number of religious conflicts have been on the rise with higher frequency that proved the fact that religions in general and religious harmony in particular are becoming the global issues that all countries now have to solve together. As the result, it is said that many international forums on social have discussed on the issue of tolerance in development, especially religious tolerance.

This article from the perspective of Buddhist tolerance, some thoughts of behavioural principles among religions in the pluralistic society are proposed.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The paper has used a combination of methods in theoretical and practical research. Method of logic - history, method of analysis – synthesis, method of structure – function was used in order to point out the basic thoughts of Buddhism on tolerance due to Buddhist writings (Sutta, Pitaka) and scientific researchs on Buddhism.

In addition, these methods help to study Buddhist tolerance thought in relation with other Buddhist thoughts comprehensively and inclusively. In the mean time, by analysing the history of Buddhism and its propagandas throughout the world, the origins and development of Buddhist tolerance thoughts are clarified, then, its values to the contemporary progress of the modern society have been proved also.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



3.1 Tolerance from perspective of Buddhism

Tolerance in general and religious tolerance in particular, had been a question of humanity discussed by both West and the East from ancient times until our times. In the East, the earliest well-known example is found in Siddhartha Gautama (the 6th century BC), the founder of Buddhism, who did pay attention to tolerance and religious tolerance in his teaching on human suffering and emancipation. “In the West, the subject of tolerance began about the 16th and 17th centuries, in response to the Protestant Reformation and the War of Religion and religious persecution that followed the breaks with the Catholic Church headed by Martin Luther (1483-1546). Then John Locke developed a theory of tolerance, which consists of a principle of Separation of Church and State, Letter Concerning Tolerance and Two Treaties of Government” (Hoang Thi Tho, 2019, p.212). In this sense, tolerance emerged not only as a moral issue but also a socio-political issue.

In the 20th century, tolerance becomes an urgent issue of modern world, and then in 1995, UNESCO declared the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the International Day for Tolerance as well as in auguration of the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance on 16 November, in the same year. According to United Nations Declaration: “Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference”(UNESCO,1995). According to UNESCO, tolerance is not only a cultural approach to common behavior among individuals in a community, among communities but also a political responsibility of all governments. In other words, tolerance is both an ethical responsibility and legal requirement.

Buddhist thought of tolerance was recorded in a lot of academic Buddhist writings, for example, Kālāmā Sutta, Dighajanu Sutta, Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta, Vatthūpama Sutta, Brahmanaggo... Infact, in Buddha’s teaching, there are at least three terms concerning the internal content and deep notion of “tolerance”, and even more meaningful in aspect of philosophy and ethics, such as: karuna (Karunaa) means altruism, benevolence, compassion, kindness, sympathy, pity, the aspiration to find a way to be truly helpfulo oneself and others. Dana (daana) is the name of the first theme in the Buddha’s system of gradual training ten perfections (paramis) of a Bodhisattva. Dana means generosity, liberality, offering, alms, giving without expecting any form of repayment from the recipient. Metta (Metta, Maitri) means loving kindness, goodwill,



benevolence, love, sympathy, kindness, benignant, amity, friendship, friendliness, and active interest in others (Hoang T. T., 2019, p.217). These ideas share the content similar to the current view of tolerance in Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995).

3.1.1 Tolerance is the basic virtue of individual person seeking his original nature - the non-self (Anattan/ anatman)

Buddhist thought of tolerance is based on the philosophical theory of nothingness, voidness (Pāli: Sunyata), the theory of Causation (Pratīyasamutpada), the theory of Impermanence, Pāli: Anicca) and theory of Non-self (Pāli: Anatta). Accordingly, suffering is the nature of human existence; good and evil, right and wrong are not created by God, but by ignorance (Pāli: Avidya) of the self and non-self. To attain emancipation, all beings must eradicate completely ignorance; must be enlightened about the non-self. They have to control the Ego by focusing internally the acts (body, speech, and mind) and cultivate their soul properly (called Zen). Reaching ultimate enlightenment also means returning to the original nature, which is non-self. As Buddha said every human being is equal and has ability to attain enlightenment because there is no difference between the salty tears and the red blood.

On that basis, compassion (S: maitrī-karuṇā; P: mettā-karuṇā;), charity (Maitrī, Karuṇā, xót thương)), almsgiving (Bồ thí, P: dāna;) are the key for people to dismiss all intolerances such as selfishness, pettiness, and animosity in order to cultivating generosity as one of the perfect moral qualities. The meaning of those words is not limited to the relationship between human and human but also between human and nature.

"Buddhism believes that the greatest challenge of one's life is living with the spirit of true altruism, devoting his whole life for others without the expectation of repaying" (Renard, J., 2004, p.349). Thus, these qualities are also considered as a moral standard of each Buddhist follower on the path of liberation. On this basis, tolerance is concretized into humanistic spirit namely "the absence of hate, hating, hatred; love, loving, loving disposition; tender care, forbearance, considerateness; seeking the general good, compassion; the absence of malice, of malignity; that absence of hate which is the root of good (karma)" (Rhys, D.T.W., 2002, p. 275-76.). Then from right perception to the right action with the 'ten good acts.' (1) not killing; (2) not stealing; (3) not committing adultery; (4) not lying; (5) not speaking harshly; (6) not speaking divisively; (7) not speaking idly; (8) not being greedy (9) not being angry; (10) not having wrong views.

3.1.2 Tolerance is acceptance of somebody's dissimilarity in views and actions



Such kind of attitude called religious tolerance can be seen in the Buddha's teachings. For instance, on one occasion, Sīha, a general, who is a follower of another religion came and asked to the Buddha what he wanted to know. After listening the Buddha's answers, he converted to Buddhism. At that moment, the Buddha said; "Your family, Sīha, for many a day has been as a well-spring to the Nigaṇṭhas, wherefore deem it right to give alms to those who approach you" (as cited in Hare, E.M., 2006, p.127)

In this sense, tolerance in Buddhism embraces the suffering of displeasure, jealousy, prejudice from others aiming at his religion. In particular, Brahma-Jala Sutta of Digha Nikaya delivered a profound message on tolerance: "Should those who are not with us, O Bhikkhus, speak in dispraise of me, or of the Dhamma, of of the Shangha, you are not on that account to give away to anger, heartburning or discontent. Should those who are not with us, O Bhikkhus, speak in dispraise of me of the Dhamma, or of the Shangha, you were on that account to be either enraged or displeased, it is you (not they) upon who the danger would fail; for would you then be able to discriminate whether what they had spoken was right or wrong?" (Rhys, D.T.W., 2002, p.229). Normally, it is difficult for people to accept opposite views which easily bring about conflicts, especially when those ideas relate to their belief or religion. Therefore, mercy to opposers manifests the great spirit of Buddhist tolerance which surpasses the common sense.

3.1.3 In relation to other religions, tolerance is respecting other religions and promoting peaceful coexistence with other religions.

Initially, in the system of nine schools of Indian ancient philosophy, Buddhism was classified as unorthodox because of its resistance to Brahmanism. During Buddha's time (6th century BC), Brahmanism was a theocratic, orthodox but extremely harsh and intolerant religion in India. Witnessing the austerity which is reigned by Brahmanism, Buddhism expressed its resistance to that inequality and injustice, simultaneously, started a new religion in which all beings are equal on the way to liberation. With the spirit of religious tolerance, Buddha did not deny or antagonize the whole Brahman tradition. In contrast, he selectively inherited the quintessence values of ethics, philosophy from Brahmanism, in order to establish an equal, de – theocratic and tolerant religion. Additionally, Buddha always asserted that he had the quality of a Brahman (Brahama-bhuta). It means the Buddha not only did not negate but also promoted the Brahman's path and way of cultivating the morality as well as many basic virtues of a Brahman. Of course, the concept of Brahman in Buddhist teachings brought new content. According to the Buddha:



"Whoever wins the bond, the rules of this earthy world are called Brahman. The name is not due to the background or lineage..." (see Thera, N., 2005, p.395-396). This attitude towards Brahmanism's values is very consistent with Buddhist perspective of religious tolerance.

Not only with Brahmanism, with other religions, the Buddha called any religion that the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are found, where there is a true practitioner to attain liberation, that is true religion for people to follow. Buddha do not persist that Buddhism as the only true religion in this world, but he encouraged people to accept and respect any religion where the truth is found. Such a clearly attitude shows that Buddhism never had any prejudice against other religions, nor hold the truth absolutely.

A famous Buddhist monk scholar, K Sri Dhammānanda's answer to this question is as follows: "Buddhists belong to the religious group that accepts and appreciates the reasonable teachings of every religion. Buddhists can also tolerate the practices of other religious, cultural traditions and customs, although they may not necessarily wish to emulate them. In other words, Buddhists respect the other man's views and appreciate other practices without harbouring any religious prejudices." (Dhammānanda, K. S, 1974).

Inheriting the mind of Buddha, in the year 256 BCE, the concept of "Buddhist tolerance" was highly accepted during Emperor Ashoka reign. As he mentioned: "One should not honor only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honor others' religion for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honors his own religion and condemns other religions, does do indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking "I will glorify my own religion". But on the contrary in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely (as cited in Rahula, W., Demiéville, P., 2007, p.7). Hence, it is the best solution to create the harmony among religions: "Listen to all and be willing to listen to the teachings that other religions transmit" (as cited in Rahula, W., Demiéville, P. (2007). p.7).

With the spirit of religious tolerance, Buddhism has broadened its belief boundary, and all social classes who were marginalized by Brahmanism were accepted by Buddhism. As a result, after about two centuries, Buddhism gradually expanded throughout the northern India.

At the same time, Buddhism not only prosperously existed in India but also developed throughout Southeast Asia and East Asia. According to the Sri Lankan chronicle, during the reign



of Asoka – the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty as well as one of the most excellent disciple of the Buddha, nine of the missionaries went abroad to propagate Buddhism. All of them are monks who are well versed in the Tipitaka, professors of the Buddha-dharma and are capable of teaching the teachings in a proficient manner. This is the first time in the history of Indian Buddhism that Buddhism is spread out of the territory. Since then, Buddhism began to appear throughout the continents of Asia and Europe (now as a world religion). During those journeys, all missionaries generally followed the principle of religious tolerance, so Buddhism was universally accepted peacefully by the natives in all countries where they came. As a result, Sri Lanka became a center to spread Theravada Buddhism to Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos ... China became another center of spreading Mahayana Buddhism to Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, Tibet ... And Buddhism has still been the orthodox national religion in many countries now.

As a national religion, Buddhism often maintains the spirit of religious tolerance, generally did not discriminate and repress other indigenous religions. Even, Buddhism integrated and easily adapts to circumstances existing in a country, for instance, it adjusted to Indian Hinduism, the cults of spirits in South-Eastern Asia, Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, Japanese Shinto, Tibetan Bön and Mongolian Shamanism. In the 20th century Buddhism adapted to Marxism (for example in Birma), to Christianity and to Western liberal humanism.

Thus, even though it has been established for more than 2500 years, the spirit of Buddhist tolerance value has still remained in the pluralistic society now. As UNESCO affirmed in The Declaration of Principles on Tolerance that: " Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human " (UNESCO, 1995).

3.2 Four principles for behavior among religions from the Buddhist approach on tolerance

“The past decade has witnessed a sharp increase in violent sectarian or religious tensions. These range from Islamic extremists waging global jihad and power struggles between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East to the persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar and outbreaks of violence between Christians and Muslims across Africa” (Muggah, R., Velshi, A., 2019). According to Pew, in 2018 more than a quarter of the world's countries experienced a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred, mob violence related to religion, terrorism,

and harassment of women for violating religious codes. In another statistics conducted by *RELAC* (see Figure 1), conflicts over non-religious issues have tendency to decline gradually since 1995 whereas the frequency of religious conflicts has increased, and with accelerated speed since 2010. In 2015, religious issue conflicts were the majority (56%) of all armed conflicts. Research suggests that such conflicts are more intractable than other types of conflicts and are less likely to be solved through peace settlements. This indicates that existing conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms may not be adapted to this particular type of armed conflicts.

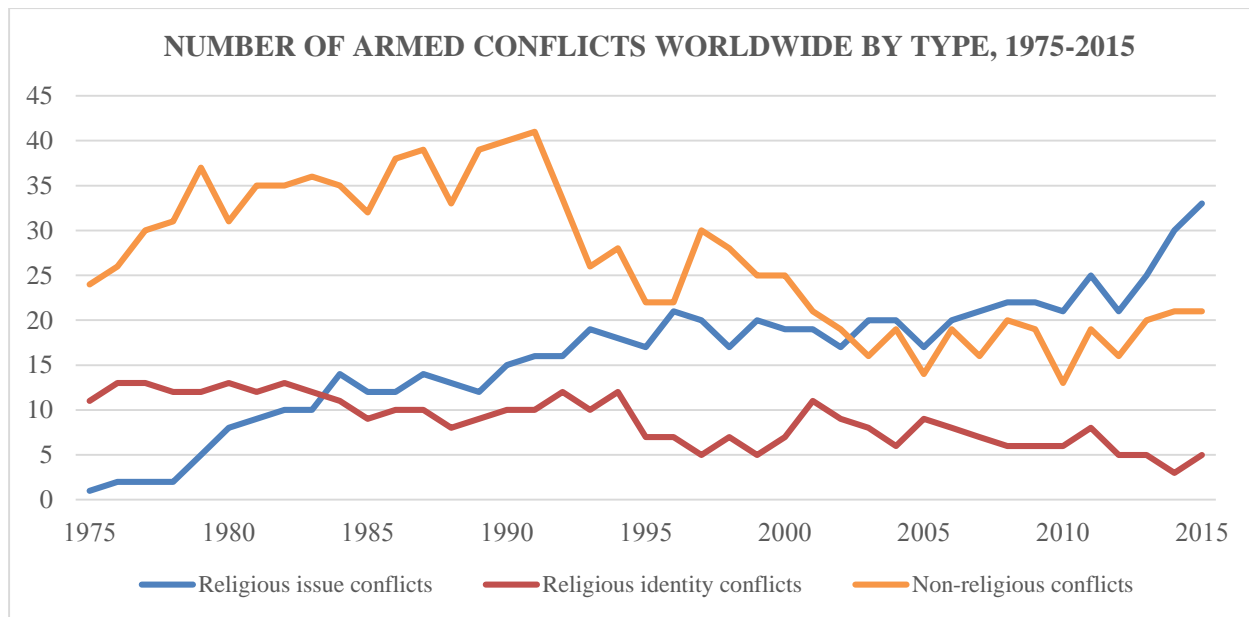


Figure 1: Number of armed conflicts worldwide by type, 1975-2015

(Source: Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, Svenson Isack and Nilsson esirée)

Since the 18th centuries, Montesquieu indicated that it was intolerance that be the deep root of religious conflicts. “History is full of religious wars; but, we must take care to observe, it was not the multiplicity of religions that produced these wars, it was the intolerating spirit which animated that which thought she had the power of governing... It is, in short, the spirit of enthusiasm, the progress of which can be confidered only as a total eclipse of human reason” (Montesquieu, (n.d), p.253). Therefore, tolerance in general and religious tolerance in particular are gradually becoming a prerequisite for solving the issue of religious, ethnic and cultural conflicts today. It is also the principle for religions to coexist peacefully, to integrate without dissolution, to grow without destroying the uniqueness and the specificity.

As a major religion in the world, accounting for 6.9% of the world's population according to Pew's statistics (see Figure 2), Buddhism has a relatively peaceful development history. It has

spread from Asia to almost every continent. Until now, this religion has developed in 124 countries around the world. In the process, with its tolerance, Buddhism adapted with the cultural and religious values of the native land. Therefore, it is possible to inherit the fundamental values of Buddhist tolerance in dealing with today's religious issues.

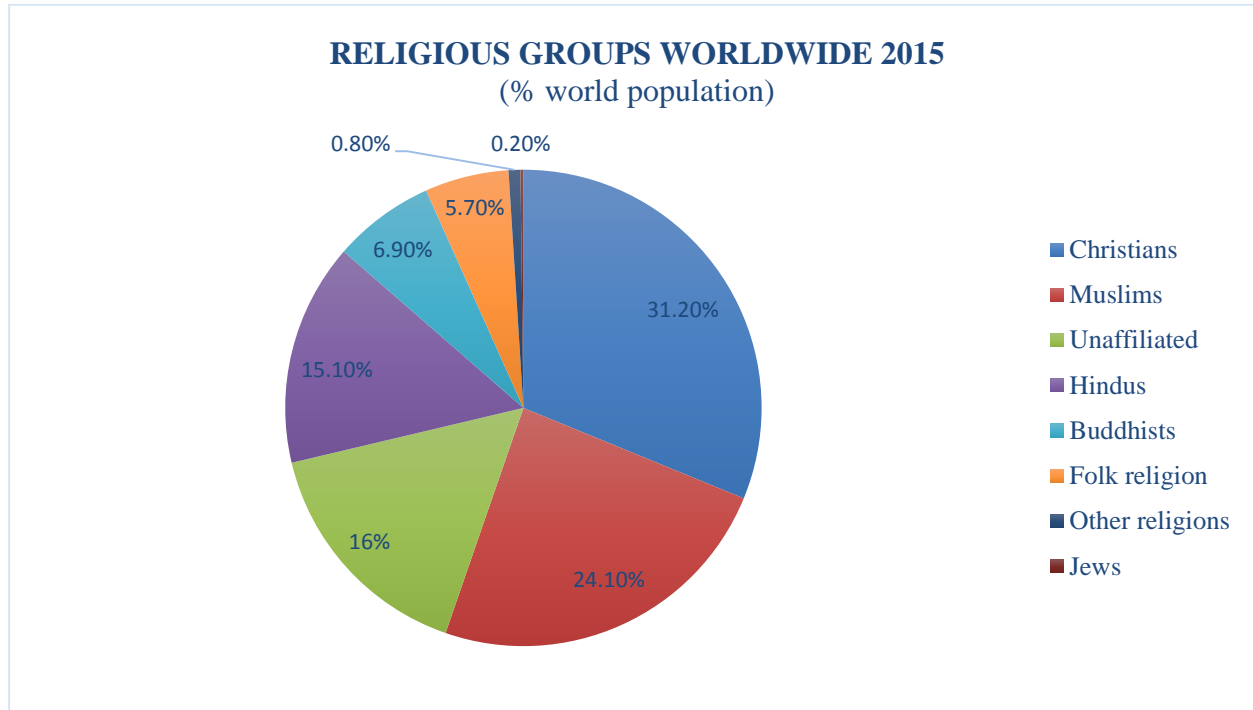


Figure 2: Religious groups worldwide 2015

(Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections)

3.2.1 Principle of equality between religions

Buddhism always affirms everyone is equal regardless of their social positions or origins. In resolving the issue of religious conflicts, it is assumed that all believers of different religions have the right to be treated equally and be respected. Broadly speaking, all religions are equal whether they are considered as orthodox or unorthodox, minority or majority thoughts in society. In other words, in social relations as well as in international relations, no religion has the right to oppress other one. In a multi-religion society, this right should be institutionalized into legal documents and be implemented in practice.

For believers who make mistakes, they should be treated equally as other believers. Because it is the fact that ignorance usually drives people into the vicious circle of Three poisons including Desire, Anger and Stupidity that is inevitable to offend in life. From the Buddhist perspective of the spirit of tolerance, they are not the sinners, they are just losing their right mind and wandering



in the realm of ignorance. In fact, they are still on the path of practice to attain Nirvana - real liberation. Therefore, helping them to return the right way is the most necessary responsibility with the spirit of tolerance and generosity.

This principle should also be applied not only within Buddhism, but also used as the principle of action for each individual and for the whole society. In this way, the message which modern society often refers that “no one is left behind” has practical meaning. This open-minded approach is actually similar to the modern conception today.

3.2.2 Principle of respect for differences between religions

As analyzed above, in the spirit of tolerance, Buddhism does not absolutize its belief that only its view and approach is true, nor does it disregard the existence of other religions. Especially in the pluralistic society, along with the development of society are the emergence of new born religious movements in recent years. These new religions may have been created by indigenous people, or by absorbing the exogenous ideology from legal immigrants. Modern world is characterized by globalization in many aspects. If a new religion appears in this region, sooner or later it will broaden its influence to other regions. Therefore, respecting the differences between religions have become the basic behavioral principle at both micro and macro levels.

True tolerance in religion involves the capacity to admit differences as real and fundamental, yet at the same time to respect the rights of those who follow a religion different from one's own (or no religion at all) to continue to do so without resentment, disadvantage or hindrance. In extended meaning, everyone is free in thought, in religious belief or non-belief. Respecting freedom of religion is also respecting human rights. All acts of prohibiting, preventing anyone following religions, changing religion, giving up religion or threatening, forcing him to follow a religion are seriously violating their freedom of thought as well as human right.

3.2.3 Principle of ensuring common values for people

Buddhism promotes peaceful coexistence among religions. The background for this coexistence is the great humannistic values which any religion has to aim at as Ho Chi Minh pointed out that "Jesus taught Ethics is charity, Buddha said Ethics is compassion, Confucius showed Ethics is benevolence" (as cited in Huy Thong, 2004, p.198). “They all want to pursue the happiness for everyone, the welfare for the community. If they were still alive today, if they reunite, I am certain that they would become close friends ”(as cited in Huy Thong, 2004, p.326). Therefore, it is the



duty of all religious followers to unite, co-operate in order to make people understand the value of human life, values of the dedication and the basic moral principles for common values such as the truth, the goodness, the beauty, justice, wholeheartedness, kindness and goodwill, etc. Every dispute, every religious conflict should keep these common values as a common goal from which to choose appropriate concrete measures in order to resolve conflicts.

3.2.4 Distinguishing clearly between ideological and political aspects in religious matters

It is the fact that there are so many complicated changes in religion and nation among countries worldwide in the 21st century. In many cases, religious issues normally attached to national issues, regarding of not only human rights, but also the reasons of armed conflicts in modern society. Religious issues in the context of globalization and technology revolution easily go beyond the national boundary and become international issues. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the religious ideological and political aspects in religious phenomena. On the one hand, the ideological aspect represents the religious beliefs of followers. On the other hand, religion is a form of social consciousness, religious organizations are also social institutions, hence, in the development process, religion has close ties with government, even in many countries it is part of the political system.

Therefore, if the relationship among religions is not properly dealt with harmony and tolerant spirit, it is easy to provoke divisions and hatred among religions, as well as to be exploited and used as a channel for political purposes under the guise of religion. The bad and extreme forces will continue use religion to divide the solidarity in each community and among the nations against the progressive development of humankind.

Buddhism with the spirit of religious tolerance has adapted to the cultures and beliefs in the countries where it had been introduced. Buddhist monks also follow the spirit of Buddhist tolerance and contributed to the development of these countries. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the cooperation among religions, especially among religious leaders to ensure this principle as well as direct the followers because they are also citizens in modern society besides being believers of a religion.

4. CONCLUSION

A pluralistic society is a diverse one where has the existence of different types of people, who have different beliefs and opinions, within the same society. With the spirit of tolerance from perspective of Buddhism, people respect all kinds of different things and tolerate each other's



beliefs even when they do not match their own. Then due to religious tolerance, community's solidarity, and solidarity among different religions, as well as among believers in the same religion appear. Solidarity among religions creates a peaceful coexistence between religions, and human is the significant key to create social harmony in the pluralistic society now.

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