

The Process of Building a Sustainable Culture of Peace According to Theravāda Buddhism



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ABSTRACT

Although the United Nations was formed after the World War II in 1945 aiming to advancing security arrangements and post-war assurances of a peaceful international community¹, both international and intra-state conflicts and violence still continue unceasingly worldwide. Fostering ‘Culture of Peace’ in any possible means is one of promising ways to globally transform culture of war and violence to culture of peace and non-violence. However, if individual’s mind has not been developed to acquire more virtuous habits, the vicious cycle of humanity still surely to be existing. While the UN peace building system is built base on equality and human right principle, Theravāda Buddhism offers a holistic approach on constructing peace and peace culture. This documentary research aims to examine the process of building a sustainable culture of peace according to Theravāda Buddhism.

Keywords: Peace, Culture of Peace, Theravāda Buddhism

¹(A.B. Fetherston, 1994) p. 2.

Introduction

In the past decades, our world has witnessed a growing number of mass destruction and violence-imposed phenomena on a scale never seen before in history. After the 9/11 attacks of 2001 in New York City, the safety of people in the world can no longer be assured. Today, terrorism and social unrests have become more rampant and widespread than ever. Crime, public aggression and domestic violence are now common news. Mass killings of innocent people are becoming more frequent. There are so many disturbing events around the world that remind us how unsafe our world is today.

Globally, deaths by terrorism rose from 11,000 in 2007 to more than 29,000 in 2015, with the number of deaths peaking in 2014 at 32,765. Total number of terrorist incidents increased 326% over the same period, jumping from approximately 2,800 in 2007 to more than 12,000 in 2015.² In addition, World Bank's research estimates that, if this trend remains unchecked, by 2030 more than half of the world's poor will be located in countries that suffer high levels of violence.³

The concept of the culture of peace was first mentioned in July 1989 during the UNESCO International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men held in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. The declaration highlights to help construct a new vision of peace by developing a peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights, and equality between men and women.⁴

The process of building a culture of peace encompasses the various aspects of life in the society. This is indeed a long-term arduous procedure, and to be successful, culture of peace must be adapted into 'a way of life' of individuals. The Buddha's teachings have long been a way of life for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists for over twenty-five centuries. Practicing nonviolence and the Middle Way concept in daily life is the key principle in achieving a peaceful life.

Ordination into monkhood is one of the most intensive self-development processes and training, utilizing *Tisikkha* as a framework to achieve a peaceful way of living. Entering Buddhist monasticism by becoming a monk is not only an effective means to attain true

²(Institute for Economic and Peace, 2017) p. 31.

³(World Bank, 2018) p. xvii.

⁴(UNESCO)

peace, it also expedites and shortens the arduous self-development journey toward the ultimate life goal-*Nibbana*.⁵ A monk, or *bhikkhu* who has fully committed himself to the monastic training for a certain period of time will gradually cultivate a peaceful character encompassing humility, simplicity, self-control, patience, compassion, caring and harmlessness. Since human development is a key ingredient to all successes, it is essential to educate and transform an individual before attempting to transform the world. People who have undergone the proper systems of education and moral training will have a better chance of developing the culture of peace and be able to solve problems and avoid suffering more effectively, and to achieve lasting happiness.

Although the UN concept of building peace culture among humankind has been proposed, knowledge in Buddhism which is a great source of wisdom for promoting and cultivating sustainable peace has not yet been fully utilized. Since the implementation of peacebuilding is quite complicated and there is no single universal peace principle or methodology that can be applied for all conflicts; thus, there are plenty of rooms for researches and studies for the improvement of building a culture of peace.

Background of Culture of Peace

Peace and the culture of peace is not born with humans genetically. It is a new concept to humanity.⁶ Throughout the history of human civilization, man has exerted his dominance over others through the use of force and violence. This has often led to wars and destruction. Violence seems to be a common phenomena than peace. Based on the surviving written records out of the past three and a half thousand years – only two hundred and fifty years were peaceful in nature.⁷ It is estimated that throughout all of human history, the total number of people killed in wars ranges from 150 million to 1 billion. According to New York Times, 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century.⁸

⁵(Narada, 1988) p. 516.

⁶(Rensch, 1972) p. 113.

⁷(Agius and Ambrosewicz, 2013) p. 4.

⁸(Hedge, 2003)

The history of human civilization is full of wars and violence. History has proven that peace and harmony is more beneficial to mankind than wars and violence. It is thus imperative for humankind to make positive transitions from a culture of war and violence to a culture of peace and harmony. For this to happen, the concept and culture of peace must be ingrained in the mind of every person in society. This can be achieved through the process of mental cultivation and spiritual development that will lead to the improvement of personal moral and spiritual values. It is only through the culture of peace that the destruction of future civilizations can be prevented and sustainable peace can be attained.

As a global citizen, everyone, both present and future, has the right to live in peace. We have the moral obligation to pass on a culture of peace to our future generations. Article 9 of the UNESCO Declaration on the Responsibilities of Present Generations towards Future Generations states that “the present generation should ensure that both the present and future generations learn to live together in peace, security, respect for internal law, human rights and fundamental freedoms”.⁹ The article also states that “the present generation should spare future generations the scourge of war. To that end, they should avoid exposing future generations to the harmful consequences of armed conflicts as well as all other forms of aggression and use of weapons, contrary to humanitarian principles.” Building a culture of Peace requires both critical and visionary perspectives. Ultimately, the culture of peace is about human evolution.¹⁰ It is possible to make a cultural shift from domination to partnership, from violence and exploitation to compassion and collaboration if we begin to realize the importance of building a culture of peace. Therefore, establishing a culture of peace is the heart of UNESCO’s mandate to develop a long-lasting peace.

Since cultures are human creations, they can and have been changed. However, fundamental changes will not happen overnight. There will continue to be resistance. Shifting to partnership cultures requires creativity, courage, and persistence. But by working together, humankind can create cultures that support rather than inhibit the realization of mankind’s highest potentials for caring, empathy, and creativity.¹¹

⁹(UNESCO, 1997)

¹⁰(Adelson, 2000)

¹¹(Eisler, 2004) p. 36.

Define Culture of Peace

A culture is a way of life of a group of people, while, a society is the structured collective of individuals who follow a given way of life. Society is composed of people, while the way they act, speak, think, behave and live signifies the expression of their culture. In order to understand any given culture, it is essential to study the mentality of its people. Man is the only creature that has developed culture and seeks to enjoys his accumulated values of life. He is the sole culture-building animal. Culture is what make human distinctively from all other animals.¹²The essence of culture is comprised of a shared ideal, value and purpose of life. The concept of culture points to the qualities and attributes inspired by these values and ideals of a particular society.¹³

Edward Burnett Tylor, English anthropologist, the founder of cultural anthropology, defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”¹⁴. It is a human revolution which has been developed overtime. Building culture is a long path and it takes time to develop in any individual or society. In other words, it must be incorporated into human habit and attitude, so that sustainable culture can exist for current and future generations.

A ‘culture’ can also be defined as networks of knowledge, consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other people. It could also be seen as a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world.¹⁵ A ‘peace culture’, however, is interpreted as a cluster of attributes that enable peaceable behavior in a society. This cluster can be thought of as mosaic of identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, and institutional patterns that lead people to live harmoniously with one another and the world itself. This mosaic does not rely on the aid of structured power differentials, of its people and properly shares its resources.¹⁶

¹²(Butr Indr, 1995) p. 21.

¹³(Butr Indr, 1995) p. 22.

¹⁴(Tylor, 1958) p. 1.

¹⁵(Hong, 2009) p. 4.

¹⁶(Oxford, 2014) p. 23.

Culture of peace is new concept in UN peace building system. The concept of culture of peace has been developing over the past 10 years at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) since it was first described at Yamoussoukro in 1989.¹⁷ According to the UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/53/243, “a culture of peace has been defined as a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life...” However, is there a set of values , attitudes, modes of behavior, and ways of life for building cultures of peace that have cross-cultural validity?

The researcher is convinced that, stopping violence, reducing social gap and inequality, fostering new understanding of peace can be used as the essential generic framework for building culture of peace as illustrated in Figure 1.

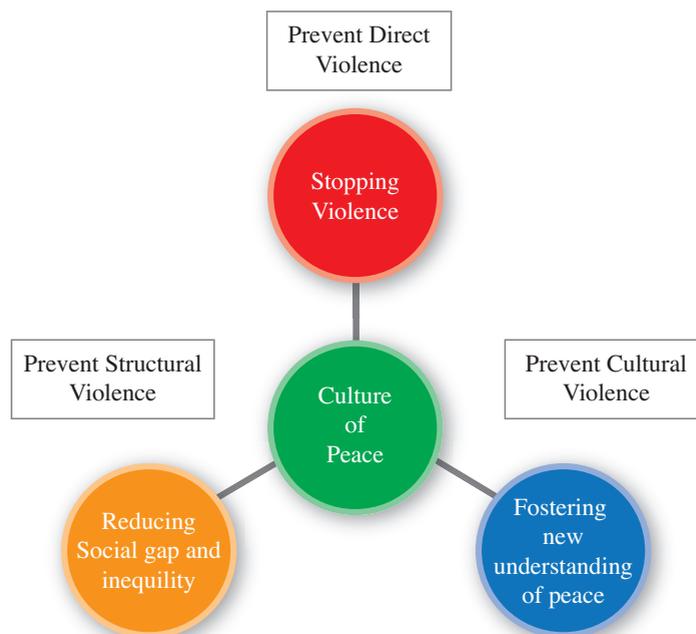


Figure 1 Culture of Peace building framework

Designed by Thanajayo (2019)

¹⁷(UNESCO, 1989)

Culture of Peace in Theravāda Buddhism

In Pali, the term which may serve to convey the meaning of culture in its spiritual and moral sense is derived from the root ‘bhav-; *bhāvanā*, *bhāvitā*, *bhāvetabba*’ rendered as ‘cultivation, acquirement, acquisition, and development.’¹⁸ From Aṅguttara Nikāya, Woodward conveys his opinion that the word ‘bhavana’ answers to ‘culture’. This is exemplified by his translation from the scriptures:

For one who has right view...wrong view is worn out...and those divers evil, unprofitable states which come into being because of wrong view, those are also worn out in him...which those divers good, profitable states, due to the right view, reach fulness of culture.¹⁹

The *Sangiti Sutta* mentions three branches of culture, namely, bodily culture (*Kaya Bhavana*), mind culture (*Citta Bhavana*), and the culture of insight (*Paññā Bhavana*). These three branches point to the threefold training course (*Tisikkha*) of higher morality (*Adhisīla Sikkha*), of higher mental training (*Adhicitta Sikkha*), and of higher insight or wisdom (*Adhipaññā Sikkha*).²⁰ The entirety of the Buddhist culture is comprised of this threefold foundation of enculturation: the first implies the observance of moral principles; the second the practice of concentration; and the highest scheme represents wisdom. These three elements of culture have a large impact on Buddhist societies. In *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha preaches being well cultivated on the basis of upright conduct, earnest contemplation is of great fruit and advantage; being well cultivated on the basis of earnest contemplation, intelligence is of great fruit and advantage; being well cultivated on the basis of intelligence, the mind is set quite free from the mental intoxicants.²¹

Good Buddhist practitioners are all expected to acquire, cultivate, develop and train themselves under the three cultures as a way of life to be followed.

¹⁸ Davids, T.W. Rhys and Stede, W., **Pali English Dictionary**, p. 503.

¹⁹ A.V 214; F.L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of The Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara Nikāya)**, Vol. V, (Oxford: PTS., 2003), p. 151.

²⁰ D.III. 220; T.W. Rhys Davids (tr.), **Dialogues of the Buddha**, Vol. III, (Oxford: PTS., 2002), p. 213.

²¹ D.II. 84; T.W. Rhys Davids (tr.), **Dialogues of the Buddha**, Vol. II, (Oxford: PTS., 2002), p. 89.

The principle of righteousness appears in many places in the Buddhist Scripture. For example: the root cause of wholesome or righteous actions (*Kusalakamma*) and unwholesome or unrighteous actions (*Akusalakamma*) point to greed (*Lobha*), hatred (*Dosa*) and delusion (*Māna*). Unwholesome actions are categorized as follows: a) unwholesome bodily action: destroying life, stealing and sexual misconduct; b) unwholesome verbal actions: false speech, slandering, harsh words, and idle chatter; c) unwholesome mental actions: covetousness, ill-will, and the wrong view.²²

Many verses in the Dhammapada oppose violence and fortify peace and harmony. Some examples are as follows: “For not by hatred are hatreds ever quenched here but they are quenched by non-hatred.”²³ “One should conquer anger by non-anger, bad be good, miserliness by giving, and speaking falsehood by truth.”²⁴ “If a man were to conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, but conquer one, himself, he indeed is the best conqueror in battle.”²⁵ “Whoever injures with violence creatures desiring happiness, seeking his own happiness he does not gain happiness when he has passed away, while whoever does not injure with violence creatures desiring happiness seeking his own happiness, he gains happiness when he has passed away.”²⁶ “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Compared with oneself, one should not kill or cause to kill.”²⁷ “In Jivaka Sutta, for the Buddha’s disciple, torturing or killing any living being is not allowable and it creates much demerit.”²⁸

According to the Buddha’s principles, it is clear that there is no room for any kind of violence. Rather, it stands for a strategy of mutual understanding, goodwill and harmony for the promotion of peace. It opposes violence of all forms, and immoral acts of every type. It also points out the harmfulness of warfare and contrasts the use of forceful measure with an emphasis on a standard of righteousness and the cultivation of social solidarity.

²²M. 9; Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), **The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikāya)**, (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2015), pp. 132-133.

²³Dh. 5; K.R. Norman (tr.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, p. 20.

²⁴Dh. 223; K.R. Norman (tr.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, p. 34.

²⁵Dh. 103; K.R. Norman (tr.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, p. 34.

²⁶Dh. 131-132; K.R. Norman (tr.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, p. 20.

²⁷Dh. 129; K.R. Norman (tr.), **The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)**, p. 20.

²⁸M.II. 371; I.B. Horner (tr.), **The Middle Length Saying (Majjhima Nikāya)**, Vol. II, (London: PTS., 1975), p.35.

Having realized the important of the Middle Way, throughout his forty-five year, the Buddha relentlessly teaches it to the monks, the nuns, and the lay followers, so that this noble life would become known and widespread to many. The essence of this the Middle Way refers to a righteous course of training which can be applied for both life of monks and that of laity.

Process of Building a Culture of Peace according to Theravāda Buddhism

The peace and culture of peace building strategy framed by the Buddha is simple, yet powerful and timeless. It has been used for over 2,500 years and still applicable to train both monks and laity to cultivate a culture of peace. He suggests three main steps to be observed, “A wise man, established well in virtue, develops consciousness and understanding, then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious, he succeeds in disentangling this tangle.”²⁹ (‘Tangle’ is a term for the network of craving or desires as explained by Buddhaghosa in *Visuddhimagga*.)³⁰

Elaborately, the process of cultivating a culture of peace should start with 1) avoid doing all evils through the developing of higher virtues, 2) practice higher consciousness through meditation, and 3) develop right understanding or wisdom through the practice of the Middle Way.

The Buddha introduces a holistic form of practice called Four-fold Development or (*Bhāvanā* Four)³¹ as a framework for life development (Figure 2). This Four-fold training consist of: 1) physical development, 2) moral development, 3) mental development and 4) wisdom development. One who has completed all four areas of development perfectly will attain the status of an *Arahant*.³² Here is the explanation of the Four-fold Development:³³

²⁹Ibid., p. 20.

³⁰Buddhaghosa, **The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)**, Tr. by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, p. 5.

³¹A.III. 106; E.M. Hare (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara Nikāya)**, Vol. III, (Oxford: PTS., 2008), p. 84.

³²(P.A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), 2017)p. 525.

³³(P.A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), 2017) p. 520.

Physical Development (*Kāya - Bhāvanā*): to develop one's relationship to external surroundings or to one's own physical body, especially, to be mindful of the five faculties when exposing to the world by relating to them in a way that is beneficial, does not cause harm, increases wholesome qualities, and dispels unwholesome qualities.

Moral Development (*Sīla - Bhāvanā*): development of virtuous conduct; to develop one's behavior and social relationships by keeping to moral codes, by not abusing or injuring others or causing conflicts, and by living in harmony with others and supporting one another.

Mental Development (*Citta - Bhāvanā*): development of the mind; to strengthen and stabilize it; to cultivate wholesome qualities such as loving-kindness, compassion, enthusiasm, diligence, and patience; to make the mind happy, concentrated, bright, and clear.

Wisdom Development (*Paññā - Bhāvanā*): develop and increase wisdom until one realizes a comprehensive understanding of truth; by knowing things as they really are, and by gaining a clear insight into the true nature of the world. At this stage, one is able to free the mind, purify oneself from mental defilements, and liberate oneself from suffering. One lives, acts, and solves problems with penetrative awareness.

A human being is composed of three factors of conduct including: the external world (*Sīla*), internal world or mental activities (*Citta*) and comprehension (*Paññā*). These three factors act in unison and are interdependent in bringing about holistic life development,³⁴ so *Bhāvanā* Four can be utilized in aiding this developmental process. It can also be seen as the process of building a culture of peace as suggested by the Buddha. Once a man fully trains himself according to Buddhist principles, he will become a peaceful person and can contribute peace towards world around him.

³⁴(P.A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), 2017) p. 521.

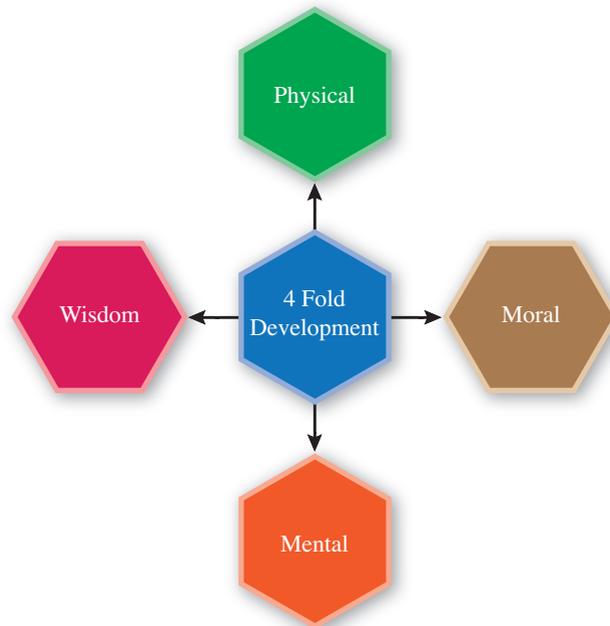


Figure 2 The Four-fold Development
Designed by Thanajayo (2019)

Building a culture of peace is a similar task to cultivating peace habits which is essential in Buddhist educational system. The Buddha advises monks and lay followers to cultivate a culture of peace by developing virtuous habits in body, speech and mind and abandon vicious habits of these three factors.³⁵

However, according to a 2009 study published in the European Journal of Social Psychology, it takes 18 to 254 days for a person to form a new habit.³⁶ To develop peace or moral habits and a culture of peace, one must fully commit oneself to the practice of Four-fold development.

³⁵S.V 74; F. L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Samyutta Nikāya)** Vol. V, (London: PTS., 1979), p. 62.

³⁶(Lally, Cornelia, and Jaarsveld, 2010)

Conclusion

Urgently building an outer peace by alleviating immediate needs of people in society such as to end poverty and protect the planet is indeed vital, but it doesn't guarantee that peace and culture of peace can be sustain after all the 'needs' have been met. This paper argued if human attitude and behaviors have not changed, nothing changes. Simply because the human mind naturally encompasses both moral and immoral susceptibilities and human actions are the manifestation originated from those two factors.

The UN peace building system is designed to tackle today's world challenges focusing on strengthening "physical peace". Since peace and happiness of the individual are inextricably linked to peace and happiness of society and the world, the new perception of peace must be cultivated and transmit to modern society based on the educational framework of the Four-fold Development. Therefore, to be success in the process of building sustainable peace and culture of peace for any given society, both physical and spiritual (or outer and inner) components must be parallel developed.

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