

Establishing a Model of the Harmony of Religious Diversity in 21st Century

Asst. Prof. Dr. Phramaha Somphong Khunakaro;¹ Ven. Dr. Neminda;² Ven. Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan;³ Prof. Dr. Frank Hoffman;⁴ Dr. Nadnapang Phophichit;⁵ Dr. Sakchai Sakabucha⁶

¹Somphong.uny@mcu.ac.th

²neminda@ibsc.mcu.ac.th

³nguyenanhtuan@ibsc.mcu.ac.th

⁴frankhoffman@hotmail.com

⁵Nadnapang@ibsc.mcu.ac.th

⁶sakchai9435@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research is qualitative research with three objectives: 1) To study a principle and a theory of establishment of the religious harmony; 2) to assess and analyze a way of establishment of the religious harmony from the religious leaders in Thailand, and 3) to propose a new model of establishment of the harmony of religious diversity in 21st century. Its methodology is to collect information of the concept and theory of religious harmony from the spiritual and religious leaders from various religions and books, journals, theses, etc. from the religious scholars. Besides, questionnaires for interviewing are given to the key informants, then, their information is systematically criticized, analyzed systematically.

The result of this research was found that:

The principle and the concept of establishment of the religious harmony emphasize on acceptance of the differences of the people in society, giving a respect to the others who belong to different religions and treating each other with ethical codes, equality, justice, and love with loving kindness. As assessed from the religious leaders in Thailand in term of the establishment of religious harmony, it indicates that many sectors of the society such as government, religion play a vital role for driving the process of establishment of the religious harmony thereby cooperating with each other to drive the religious harmony and using the religious attitude of religious pluralism – attending different functions together and joining the hands to organize various activities for establishing the religious harmony.

Having criticized and analyzed including synthesis of the information, it leads to establishment of a new model for the harmony of religious diversity in 21st century with three comprehensive approaches: Mutual understanding, cooperation, and contribution respectively.

Keywords: Establishment model, Harmony, Religious diversity, 21st century

1 Introduction

Among the present society throughout the global society, undeniably, it is diversity of society in which people live their life with others identified with various religious faiths, rituals, languages, etc. All of these are explicitly included in their cultures. In the term of “culture”, Hans Gullestrup explains that it is the philosophy of life, values, norms and rules, and actual behavior (Hand Gullestrup 2001). So, within each society where people living their life differently, it consists of three different dimensions: multicultural, cross cultural, and intercultural societies. Each of them is totally different from each other. The point is how to get happiness to life if they are to live with others who are exactly different in terms of religions, languages, rituals, etc. Among the differences, what they are to be concerned is conflict. It might be stirred by different ideas based on different backgrounds of people in society. Whenever it arises, severely, it can inevitably destroy friendship among them in their society resulting in living life with suffer and scare; not trust in each other. To prevent a conflict which might arise to society, harmony is an essential way for that purpose. In 21st century, undeniably, most of people belongs to different backgrounds such as religions; they apply a religious teaching to their life thereby practicing, participating, or organizing religious functions as their way of routine life. For the different ideas among them, there are various kinds of conflict; one of the conflicts caused by living life based on religious faiths, practices. So, Religions play essential roles as a center for encouraging and helping people to live their life amicably and happily. With this, religious leaders in each society should join a hand together to harmonize them to prevent a cause of conflict and solve a conflict arisen.

2. Objective of Research

- 2.1 To study a principle and a theory of establishment of the religious harmony,
- 2.2 To assess and analyze a way of establishment of the religious harmony from the religious leaders in Thailand,
- 2.3 To propose a new model of establishment of the harmony of religious diversity in 21st century,

3. Research Methodology

In conducting this research on “*Establishing a Model of the Harmony of Religious Diversity in 21st Century*”, as this is a qualitative and documentary research, the methodology of the research has been established thereby using documentary and qualitative research employing the research materials and instruments, the purposes of which are to find out the concept and information of harmony, religion, religious diversity, religious harmony and the topic related to title of research and establish a new model of the harmony of religious diversity in 21st Century, so, there are stages of the research process conducted altogether respectively. There are three steps for outlining a summary of steps in the whole research process. The first step is to design the process of research which is the initial process for creating the research tool thereby studying the material relevant to the objects of the research to get the initial knowledge of harmony of religious diversity. This process starts with convincing a team of the research for meeting to share a role for each, studying the materials, documents, and the researches relevant to the objects of research, synthesizing and summarizing the knowledge of harmony of religious diversity. The second step is the process of collecting the information of religious harmony from five religious groups as a key informant, Buddhists, Brahmins-Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs, thereby surveying the information from them and interviewing them. The process is done by collecting information thereby handing over questionnaires and interviewing them of religious harmony and studying, criticizing together with analyzing the collected information. The third step is a process of synthesizing of the collected information and integrating the information about establishing a new model of harmony of religious diversity in 21st century, and present the new model.

4. Related Theories and Concepts

Four theories or concepts are selected for this research which are: the theory of attitude of religions, concept of harmony, concepts of religious diversity and the concept of religious harmony. As for the theory of attitude of religion, it is generally defined in the broad ways. Concisely, it is the theory seeking to reflect the meaning of religions (Vigil Jose M. 2008, 57). Mostly, each religion has unique style of teaching, practice, tradition which makes each of them quite different that caused from the differentiated background of them.

Anyway, the difference as such can be concluded in three attitudes of the theory of religions; namely, religious exclusivism which has its standpoint that there are widely many religions with various truths but all are false because they cannot provide salvation, and only one true religion revealed by God is true religion -it is exclusive possessor of truth (Vigil Jose M. 2008, 57); religious inclusivism holds that one's own religion alone is true, but it does not hold that other religions are false, for they are all included in one's own religion (Swami Bhajanananda 2007, 15); religious pluralism holds that all world religions are true, revelations are many, and there are several paths to salvation / liberation (Swami Bhajanananda 2007, 16). There is other religious attitude that is religious universalism holding that universalism is the view that there exists a set of universally valid religious principles common to or unifying all religion (Swami Bhajanananda 2007, 27-28). Of these attitudes, each of them has their own attitude of faith.

As for the concept of harmony, it is derived from Latin *harmo(n)ia* (*harmonia*) which is from *ἁρμός* (*harmos*), the meaning of which is to "joint" or "means of joint. In this point of view, it signifies that the harmony is the coming-together of the different things (Li Chenyang, 2008). However, "Harmony" is used in different aspects in philosophical and religious contexts.

For religious diversity, it signifies that there are various kinds of religion in which people across the world belong to. Each of religion has their own teaching leading each of them be different in term of teaching disciples, the way of practice, the religious languages, etc. All of these result in religious diversity in society. So, religious diversity can be classified as three main theoretical approaches: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism respectively (George B. Connell 2016, 239). Each of these is designed to indicate the position of both truth and salvation in which they have different points of view.

For religious harmony, it means that the harmonious and common development within and between individual religions as well as between the religious community and the larger society which is realized through the dialogue-generated enhancement of mutual understanding and empathy and the sharing of the common responsibilities of peace and justice on the precondition of recognizing religious diversity and differences (Wan Zou'an 2013).

4. Result of Studies

4.1 Principle and Theory of Religious Harmony

With regard to the principle and theory of religious harmony, there are various sources given the principle and the theory of establishing the religious harmony. Regarding the attitude of theory of religions, it is separately classified into three attitudes: namely, religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism, religious pluralism; each of them is quite different in terms of attitude including the way to practice. Religious exclusivism accepts only one as a true religion, the other is not. Exactly, the attitude of exclusivism in this way cannot practically taken for harmonizing the religion as it cannot treat others equally as it accepts truth and salvation available in their own faith only. Similarly, the attitude of religious inclusivism cannot be practically taken for harmonizing the religions as it separates each other in the terms of truth or salvation thereby indicating that truth or salvation can be available in their own religion only, not for the others which they are regarded only as partial and preparatory for truth or salvation. In this regard, it is to accept their own religion as only the perfect one, other as merely preparatory and partial for salvific value.

Anyways, the religious attitude that can lead to establish for harmonizing the religions should be religious pluralism as it accepts equality of values of all religions thereby holding that all world religions are true, revelations are many, and there are several paths to salvation / liberation (Swami Bhajanananda 2008, 16). In this point, it indicates equal state of all religions which is quite different from both religious exclusivism and inclusivism as mentioned above. Moreover, religious pluralism can be taken as the principle for forging and harmonizing religions in diverse society when we consider its meaning and basic principles. Regarding the meaning, religious pluralism discloses four meanings: (1) empirical religious diversity, (2) normative ideas about the positive value of religious diversity, (3) the frameworks of public policy, law and social practices which, recognize, accommodate, regulate and facilitate religious diversity, 4) the social relational contexts of everyday interactions between individuals and groups in settings where religious differences are considered relevant (Giuseppe Giordan 2014, 21).

In addition to the attitude of religious pluralism suitable for harmonizing the religions, there is other attitude of the religious theory which can be suitably taken as the principle for the harmony that is religious universalism which is Swami Vivekananda's attitude of religions. According to the Swami, all religions are true which lead to the concept of religious universalism with three concepts:

1) One eternal religion which means the eternal religion does not belong to particular group, ethnic, it is only one, but exists in different places, races, ways.

2) The sum total of the existing world religions which means to coexistence of all religion as whole based on three principles: (1) It is to recognize and respect the unique features of each religion and its right to retain its individuality; (2) it is to recognize the fact that the religion of the world is not contradictory to each other, but complementary; and (3) it is something dynamic; it is to freely interact with one other for the common welfare of humanity (Giuseppe Giordan 2014, 42-44).

3) It is to emphasize on man's struggle to transcend his limitations, to find ultimate meaning in life and to attain total freedom and everlasting fulfilment.

Regarding the religious universalism, according to Swami Vivekananda, it is also suitable for creating religious harmony as it accepts the quality and the true available in all religion.

Also, for establishing the harmony, according to Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, the well-known monk in Thailand, forges idea of "No religion". With this, he classified people into three groups with two languages for communication. The first is the people who understand and speak only conventional language; they don't understand *dhamma* language, reality or the nature of things, whereas the second and the third are the people who understand and speak both conventional and *dhamma* languages. Because of their differences, they look and treat each other in society differently. As for their understanding in term of "religion", the first group looks at the religion as separated and differences that there are various religions, Christianity, 'Islam,' 'Buddhism,' 'Hinduism,' 'Sikhism,' and so on and speaks about the differences of them. With this, the first group cannot harmonize the religion as they look and treat each religion differently that can lead to be hostile among the religions. The second who understands *dhamma* or the reality or the nature of things looks at the religion different from the first group that all religion, Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, Islam, or whatever, are same; it is inwardly same (Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu 2020, 3). With this, the second group can create the harmony as they look at each religion equal. As for the third group, it is classified into those who understand *dhamma* but higher than the second group. It is those who have extremely penetrated the highest *dhamma* and feel in term of religion that it is only the name put to be easy to call; it is actually no religion, no Buddhism, no Christianity, no Islam, no Hinduism, no Sikhism, no Taoism; the religion doesn't exist absolutely. There is only *Dhamma*", "Truth", "God", "Tao" in which we can put, instead of putting the name Buddhism, Christianity, etc. (Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu 2020, 5). In this point, the third group can create the harmony as they look at the nature and reality of things rather than external phenomenon of things. Thus, it is to say that those who understand truth or *dhamma* and those who have penetrated the ultimate truth (*dhamma*) can create the harmony whereas those who are blind for the truth and seen only the external phenomenon cannot create the harmony, but conflict instead as consequence.

As for Sri Ramakrishna, one of famous Hindu monk of Indians, the concept of *Dharma-samanvaya* (Religious harmony) (Swami Bhajanananda 2008, 28) is used for harmonizing a diversity of religions. According to him, there is only one truth, but it is called in different names. In this point, it leads to the concept of *Dharma-samanvaya* (Religious harmony). As of this, the Swami reveals five ways for practice as:

1. Ultimate truth as available in each religion; it is the one, but appears in different name and forms; it likes water called in different names as being available in different sources, but it is same substances. To understand easily, Swami teaches by exemplifying the water in different traditional calls; the Hindu call *jal*, Mussalmans call it *pāni*, Christians call it water. All denote the same thing, but different in name only (Swami Bhajanananda 2008, 32-4).

2. Each religion has the purpose in their life that is realization of ultimate truth through direct transcendental experience.

3. There are several paths to realize the ultimate truth. Each religion has their own paths and each path in each religion can lead to realize the truth as Swami said *Yata mat tata path*, 'As many faiths, so many paths'. As paths lead to the same ultimate goal, all world religions are valid and true (Swami Bhajanananda 2008, 31).

4. As each religion has their own path that can lead to realize the truth, each follower of each religion should emphasize on their own path for practicing, not to try to several path.
5. The founder of each religion should be respected as each of them has special manifestation of God.

With these five ways for practicing, they can be clearly included into three ways for creating the harmony; that is, equality of each religion, self-respect, and respect the other of each religion.

In addition to these, for five religious groups, Buddhists, Brahmin-Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs, as interviewed them in term of discipline and theory of religious harmony, although, each of all these religions is quite different in term of background such as language, culture, language, etc. they have quite same principle and theory used for religious harmony. As seen, they all accept the differences, give respect to other, and treat other with ethical codes such as justice, love with loving kindness. Anyways, there is what to prevent also; that is, violence which can bring conflict to the society. More significantly, what the point they take for establishing religious harmony is to create the interconnect and relationship with people belonging to other religions.

4.2 The Way to Establish the Religious Harmony from Religious Leaders in Thailand

In Thailand, regarding the constitution on section 31, it said:

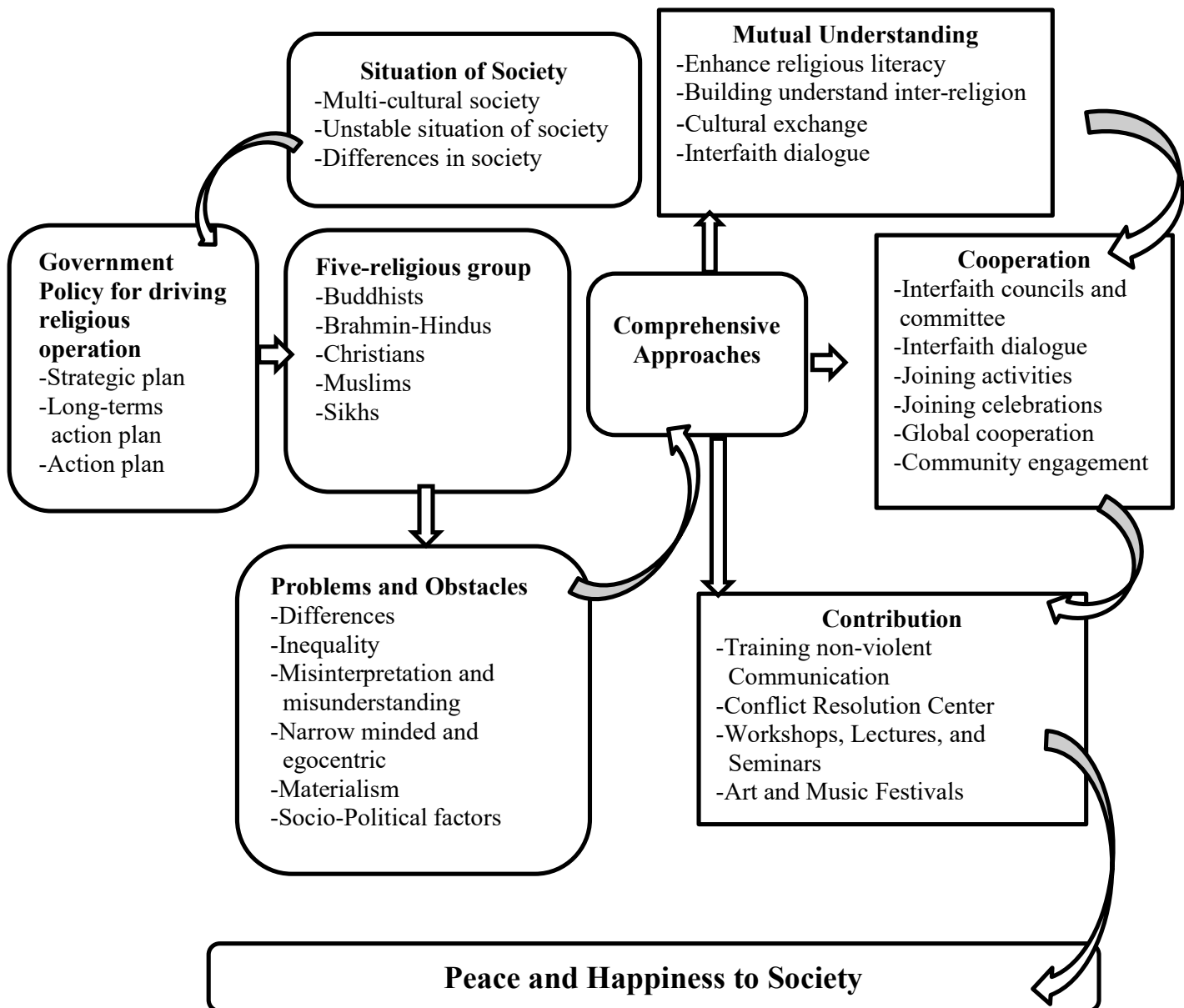
“A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, and shall enjoy the liberty to exercise or practice a form of worship in accordance with his or her religious principles, provided that it shall not be adverse to the duties of the Thai people, neither shall it endanger the safety of the State, nor shall it be contrary to public order or good morals” (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2560).

In this point of view regarding the Thai constitution, people have a freedom to believe and belong to any religion and also has a freedom to practice regarding their faith they belong to, but must not oppose to civil opportunity, peace or morality of the citizens there. To take action in accordance with the constitution, concerning the situation of society always changing because of planning for developing the country, long term-action plan is put as follows: 1) Supporting population to love, cherish, and respect the main institute of the country, 2) responding the religious ritual at royal ceremony, merit, and state ceremony, 3) supporting and cultivating people to apply religious teaching to daily life, 4) continuedly maintaining and inheriting religious ritual and culture, 5) supporting religious activities for creating understanding about coexistence in society, 6) developing mechanics and uplifting religious management (Long Term-Action Plan 2023-27). As assessed the way to establish the religious harmony from religious leaders in Thailand thereby interviewing each of them, it can clearly see that in past there were the problems risen by the different backgrounds of people in society such as religions, languages, rituals caused to misunderstanding among people based on their different backgrounds, ego of the religious people resulting in narrowed mind, etc., and also some caused by the political situation. All of these problems caused discrimination of people in society and lacked of mutual understanding including communication. With these problems, all sector of the society jointly handled them by jointly organizing the activity such as interfaith dialogue, etc. In presently, even though there is still the same problem sparking the society that is the problem from different backgrounds of the people in the society, but not much affect to the harmony as all sectors such as sectors of the government, society, and religion cooperate to organize various activities – more often than previous times – such as inter-religious dialogue, inter-religious relationship, etc. the purpose of which is to make all different religious people understanding the other and cooperating to organize the function to harmonize the people in the society. And also, they start to extend the function of the harmony to youth for getting them to realize significance of the religious harmony.

4.3 A New Model of Establishment of Harmony of Religious Diversity

in 21st Century

In 21st century, as it is said, the situation is quite different from previous times. Also, the way to harmonize the religion might be different or same. In this point, as criticized and analyzed including synthesis of the data, it can systematically establish a new model of the harmony of religious diversity in 21st Century as graphically presented:



As for the model for establishing the harmony of religious diversity in 21st century, it can explain each step which builds with 6 steps systematically as:

It starts with the step of Situation of Society: It realizes main situations, that is, multi-cultural society that affects to the way of life of people in 21st century, unstable situation of society and the differences in the society. By this, it leads to the second step that is Government Policy for Driving Religious Operation.

By the step of Government Policy for Driving Religious Operation, as concerned with situation of society which constantly changes and affects to the way of life of the people throughout the country, the Government needs to rely on religious dimension for helping the people thereby giving people liberty to profess religion and practice a form of worship regarding their faith stipulated in the constitution. Then, the government promulgates strategic plan including policy, long-term action plan and action plan to drive the process of country development on the part of religions, the propose of which is to harmonize people by using religious dimension. To drive this religious process, it leads to the step of Five-Religious Group.

With step of Five-Religious Group, as relied on religious dimensions to harmonize the people, the government is officially recognized five religious groups: Buddhists, Brahmin-Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs, to respond the policy of the government; all five religious groups can get protection and supporting from the government by getting developed knowledge, understanding and also creation harmony with people of other religion, etc. Then, it leads to the step of Problems and Obstacles.

By the step of Problems and Obstacles, for the process the harmony, the five- religious group observes situation of the society as it constantly changes and becomes multi-cultural society that affects the way of life of the people in the country and causes the problems and obstacles affecting to the process of the harmony. The problems and obstacles, as surveyed, are rooted in human factor itself and socio-political factors which mainly consist of: -Differences, Inequality, Misinterpretation and Misunderstanding, Narrow minded and Egocentric, Materialism, and Socio-Political factors.

Having found such these problems and obstacles, for solving such these and establishibg the harmony, it leads to the step of Comprehensive Approaches.

By the step of Comprehensive Approaches, it takes three approaches:

1. The Approach of Mutual Understanding

It is for those who misinterpret their own religious principle and misunderstand the other religious principles resulting in the problem of differences among them. To approach the reality of their own religious principle and understand the others, what they should be given are as: Enhance religious literacy, Building understand inter-religion, Culture exchange, and Interfaith dialogue.

2. The Approach of Cooperation

It is for the religious leaders who have to cooperate with each other with other religion for harmonizing the people in the society. Here are to do for the religious leaders for cooperating to establish the harmony: Interfaith councils and committee, Interfaith dialogue, Joining activities, Joining celebrations, Global cooperation, and Community engagement.

3. The Approach of Contribution

It is what the religious leaders should contribute to the society in the process of the harmony as: Training non-violent communication, Conflict Resolution Center, Workshop, Lectures and Seminar, and Art and Music Festivals.

With these approaches, it can say that it is the process of harmony by using the religious dimensions which consists of three approaches: 1) The Approach of Mutual Understanding, 2) The Approach of Cooperation, and 3) The Approach of Contribution respectively.

4.4 Factor of New Knowledge

The process of the religious harmony is initially started by the government and passed to the officially recognized-religious group. Then, the religious group joins the hands to drive the process of harmony by using religious disciplines for harmonizing the people in the society. So, a process of the religious harmony is driven by the religious group thereby starting with finding out and dealing with the problems and obstacles affected to the harmony and setting three comprehensive approaches, that is, mutual understanding approach, cooperative approach, and contributive approach respectively. Each of these approaches is continually connected; starting with the mutual understanding approach which is said to be the preparatory approach for people who need to get knowledge about their themselves and the others in terms of mutual understanding such as religious disciplines and cultures among the multi-cultural society. Then, it succeeds to the cooperative approach; it is for the religious leaders in which they join the activity together in order that they have a chance to learn from each other, the purpose of which it is to work together amicably and smoothly. After that, it succeeds to the next approach, that is, contributive approach. It is what the religious leaders do for the society in term of the harmony of religious diversity.

4.5 Conclusion

Regarding the principle and the theory of religious harmony, it can see that although they are different in

terms of language, disciplines, rituals, etc., they accept the differences and give respect to other religious people by concerning ethical codes and harmony of the people. Anyways, there are main problems for the religious harmony caused by the different backgrounds of people in society and exploitation of religion for some benefit. However. When surveyed the religious harmony from the religious leaders in Thailand, it has found that there are the problems and obstacles arisen from internal and external factors such as the different backgrounds of each religion in which people in the society belong to. Anyways, it does not affect much to the harmony as people in the society are quite generous and ready to learn to understand the differences. Moreover, all sector of the society support the process of harmony by relying on the religious dimensions and driving the religious actions in accordance with the policy and plan put as officially promulgated. In 21st century, the process of establishing the religious harmony can be done in accordance with the situation of society in 21st century. So, it can be proceeded with three comprehensive approaches: Mutual understanding approach, cooperative approach, and contributive approach respectively.

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