

Conflict and Integration of the Nation-state—Thai Muslim Conflict Functional Analysis

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Abstract. Research of issues related to religious conflicts in Southeast Asia at this stage, basically reflects the positive correlation between the factors of conflict and social disruption. Lacking of a comprehensive analysis of the function of the conflict limits the research results. This paper mainly focuses on the positive impact and deep role of religious conflicts on social structures to make all countries of the Southeast Asia have a new positive understanding towards religious conflicts by emphasizing the positive function of them. Based on the theoretical framework of social conflict theory, the analysis reveals that, conflict has become the conditioner of effective social operation. The paper examines the issue of the religious conflict from the aspect of social structures, explores specific social mechanisms behind the conflicts and provides analytic perspective of functionalism on discussion of religious conflicts. Through the interdisciplinary theoretical modeling, it aims to enrich the content of social conflict theory and elucidate new research ideas in the field of relevant research of Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

For a long time, the academic questions research of religious conflict in Southeast Asia mainly confined to artifacts level, but rarely involved discussions of the meaning of the whole society, such as social structure, social organization and hierarchy. In accordance with the study of L.Coser' s conflict theory, we found that conflict had developed into a positive social mechanism regulating social operation. This functionalism perspective provided me with a new theoretical framework and research ideas of religious conflict studies. When the theoretical model of conflict theory came into the reality of religious conflict in Thailand it could be founded that, religious conflict reflected its positive function in Thai society and the conflict theory had its feasibility in the study of religious conflict. The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to cause the sociological theory of social conflict to introduce the category of Southeast Asian Studies; (2) to provide new research model for Southeast Asian Studies. As such, the research questions guiding our research are as follows: (1) religious conflict supplies the government for institutional adjustment opportunities in policy development; (2) conflict has released the tensions between different hierarchy, thus playing a positive role in the stability and integration of social structure.

2. Literature review

Coser (1956) affirmed the conflict had positive significance that conflict played a positive role in the social structure. At a certain level, the conflict had a positive function in the role of promoting the establishment of unity within the community, maintaining the balance of the social structure, stabilizing and integrating the society against different groups, promoting the generation of new institutions and preventing social ossification.

Dahrendorf (1957) introduced the model of conflict into the framework of sociological analysis. He believed that the society was based on the mandatory aggregation of various social organizations integrated by different levels of power distribution. Imbalance of power structure associated quasi groups as the ruled into the group conflict in order to seek their own interests. Accordingly, the redistribution of power within the social organization is capable to achieve, and the society will enter

into a temporary stable state. However, it eternal covers the possibility of conflict under representation of peace, and the society is the result of cyclic process in interaction between the perpetual conflicts and transient harmony.

3. Conclusion and discussion

3.1 Conflict — actions of opposite groups. Generation of opposing relationship in two heterogeneous groups often due to the differences in their group structure and contradictory interests chase. This level of difference and contradiction makes the relationship between groups showing division disparity in hostility and conflict. "Legitimacy is a vital intermediary variable, without which, it can not be foreseen that whether the hostility caused by the privilege or unequal distribution of power will lead to actual conflict." [1] As the dominant group, the legitimacy of rule of the Government of Thailand has become a key factor in analyzing the south-Muslim conflict. Thai government govern through the theocratic way that religion as a mechanism for the maintenance of legitimacy. And the proof of the legitimacy of power lies in the spirit of sharing among the members of the group.

For those southern Muslim groups, as the spiritual framework for government to uphold its legitimacy, Buddhist is a great contradiction with its own belief system. "When social structure is no longer considered legitimate, a group with common interests and self-conscious will be formed by people who have the similar objective status through conflict." [2] Antagonistic relationship between the two groups formed an action of hostility - conflict.

3.2 Social roots of religious conflict in southern Thailand. Muslim conflict in southern Thailand Pattani region is not only due to differences in religious beliefs arising from differences and contradictions. "In the conflict among some religious groups, the only function of religion is as the symbol of the boundaries, in which divide 'we-group' from out-group, or the axis of social disruption in the same society only. The real point is in the conflict of secular political and economic interest, which lead to the use of violence. Religion can not restrict the use of violence, and the key reason is that religion is not the main driving force of action at this time but the indication of group identity." [3] Behind the conflict of two different religious denominations Buddhist and Muslim, there is a reflection from combined action of the economic, political, cultural and social aspects.

Because of the great disparity in north-south economic situation in Thailand, although the south has abundant natural resources, poor infrastructure and frequent natural disasters have made the economic development in difficulties. A majority of Muslim population in Pattani region still live in poverty. Due to the urgent requirements for improving the economic situation and lack of economic resources and social wealth itself, the Muslim community produce hostility on the Thai government.

Social conflict theory views that society continuance and operation have been always accompanied with the fight of power as the representative of society's scarce resources. Power becomes the core element of the social conflict . The imbalance of power in social structure, and the political power in the Muslim community have been weakened and been failed to meet their political demands therefore sparking conflict thoughts demand independence and changes in Muslim.

Early in Thailand cultural assimilation policy was implemented in an attempt to force Muslim members into the mainstream Thai culture system and eventually achieved a deeper effective control in southern Pattani region through the compulsive promotion of their culture. The short duration and the totality cultural deprivation behavior of Thai government are reflected in the intra-Muslim groups, which shows the chaos in individual order. Cultural content and spiritual beliefs of groups upon which the survival of the members were forced to pull away and were replaced by a new cultural pattern in the forced state. Losing the faith is very easily to lead to the identity crisis in the south of the Muslim community. In this state, in order to reshape the internal order and make sure that living together within the group is maintained, group members tend to show resistance to foreign cultures and establish their own cultural boundaries through the performance of hostile action.

In social aspects, "when discussing domestic reasons of Islam Movement in Southeast Asia, we must recognize that the struggle often hide the deep class distinction and social pressures." [4]

Solidification in social structure is a common problem that all Southeast Asian countries in social transition faced. The southern Muslim are always in the bottom of the social structure while the upper classes of society are basically occupied by the Thai people who own the possession of most of the social wealth. Class rigidity leads to a liquidity difficulty among the classes. In order to break through the rigid social structure of status and access to upward mobility, the underlying elite in the Muslim community would primarily establish an opposite relationship with the higher class members, in which the conflict is initiated with hostile groups to try to provide a new environment for the flow of the class so as to make it possible to flow.

3.3 Group structure determines the degree of conflict eruption. In examining the question of group structure and external conflict, we have to take three aspects of group structure into account: "(1) the relative size; (2) the degree of participation of the members; (3) situations: it' s the continual conflict, or incidental conflict. "[5]

Different from the small-scale conflicts in other parts, Muslim conflict movement in southern Thailand emerged into the organized, large-scale and systematic features.

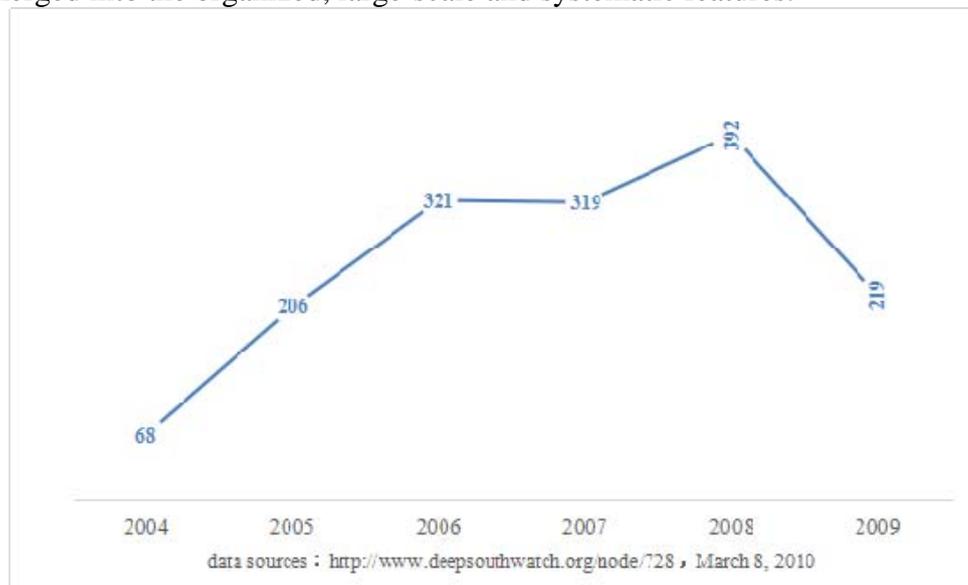


Fig.1 2004-2009 the number of bomb attacks across the south Thailand state

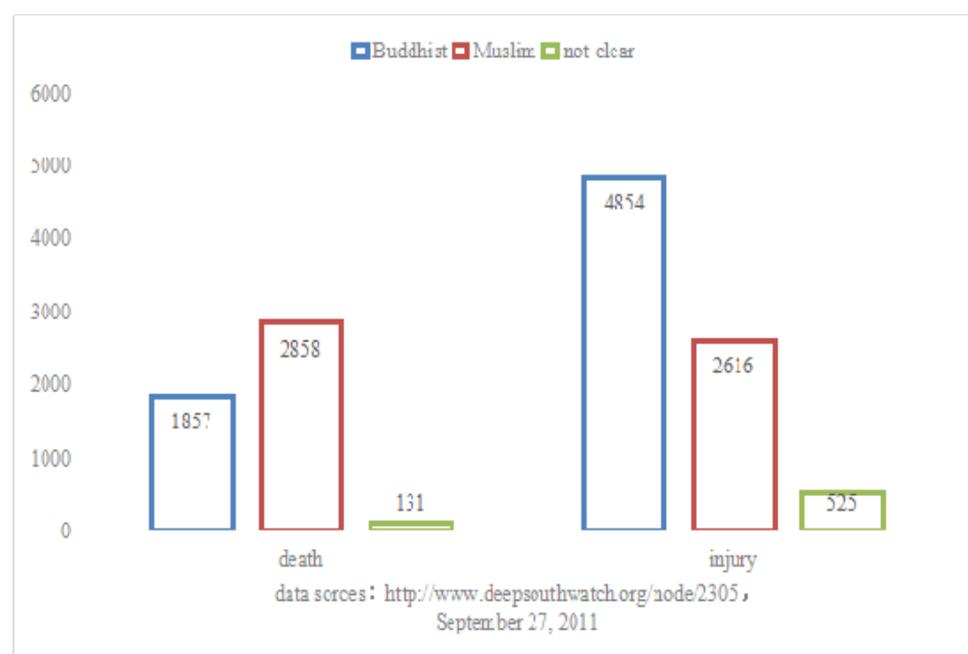


Fig.2 2004-2008 casualties in southern Muslim Conflict

Fusing the unrealistic factors and the emotional attitude into the realistic conflict in specific issues and the abstraction of the conflict conditional factors can give conflict for stronger power. Through conflict actions, the religion can be spread and promoted. Barbaric and cruel conflict is covered with a sacred religious redemption coat. Although basically the conflict can not become pure religious doctrine collision, the realistic competition for wealth and power is the real appeal behind it. Conflict even eventually becomes the conflict itself. But in the early stage of group participation mobilization, abstract conflicts are often able to mobilize members to participate in conflict actively.

Muslim conflict in southern Thailand regards sanctity of religion as a code of conduct within the constraints of each members of the group. When the members internalize this set of moral standards, the power of the individual begins to transfer to the overall goal so as to preserve its Muslim cultural identity. The competition for defending its social life power becomes an objective conflict beyond the individual personality. The conflict groups which combine the transferring power of all members within the organization and with the consistency of principle orientation, are usually more drastic and ruthless than individual conflict in the process of conflict.

From the perspective of the social situation, the Muslim conflict in southern Thailand manifests the process of an consistent struggle. The conflict must be based on some kind of competition for resources allocation or possession. Conflict is meaningless and can not be constructed if there is no pursuit of common interests between the two opposing groups. Thai Muslim conflict is a long-standing process that striving for social wealth, political power and cultural characteristics sustentation. Due to imbalance of political power, economic inequality and forcing assimilation in culture, the conflict is inevitable. Muslim community realized that only through violent forms of conflict and rebellion, can they make their own to obtain the corresponding status and power.

3.4 Religious conflict has a positive function on the social structure in Thailand. The conflict of Thai Muslims and Buddhists actually plays a role in the integration of the two different religious culture groups. Two groups plan to establish a social contact with conflict as an intermediary link. Conflict ensures the relationship between two groups be never too slack to a disruption of society, at the same time, "by allowing free expression of action, it prevents the accumulation of clogged hostile tendencies." [6]

Conflict actually looses the rigid social structure of Thailand and creates the flow channels for different classes. Society can maintain a more flexible operation on this level. Meanwhile, in order to maintain the stability of its social structure, the Thai government should also allow the existence of class antagonism appropriately, so that the tension between different classes can help consolidate and maintain the entire structure of the system.

"The opposition between a member and other is not a purely negative social factor, as long as this opposition is the only means of those who are actually unbearable to survive, then, is the case." [7] Muslims conflict in Southern Thailand to some extent is a way to express the maintenance of self-identity on internal Muslim community. Allowing for some form of conflict, in fact, is the affirmation for the meanings of existence of this Muslim group.

Conflict provides a sense of urgency in facing the threat at any time. In this state of tension, group stability and unity have been enhanced. "During the conflict, the new rules constantly have being created, the old rules continued to be improved. A new environment free from the plan and specification constraints partly or entirely are created by conflict. It also serves as a catalyst to promote the establishment of new rules and norms." [8] To alleviate the frequent religious conflict in southern Thailand Pattani region, the Thai government conducted a number of policy correction for the south.

Each conflict is a pursuit of individual rights in every members. During the continuous conflict, the individual consciousness is given self-awakening, and the notion of citizenship in the group begins to be produced. Thailand is in a stage of social transformation, and the improvement of demand for citizens in the participation of social life is contributed to government policy formulation and adjustment to a great extent. Completion of economic construction and development, health and social welfare system as well as social infrastructure construction will eventually contribute to the advance of national modernization.

3.5 Muslim conflict in the southern Philippines have the same practical significance. Philippines is a country mainly believing in Catholic faith, with a population of more than 80 percent Catholic. Government in dealing with the Muslim problem also took the overall "integration policy". Forced assimilation of such mainstream culture as well as comprehensive negation of the unique national identity of Muslims resulted the intense and serious religious conflict in the southern Philippines between Muslim and Catholic. To effectively solve the religious conflict in the Philippines, the ruling group in different periods have made many policy changes and initiatives for peace talks. After the continuous conflict and institutional reform, and ultimately, the Philippine government and the southern Philippines' Moro National liberation Front "signed a peace agreement, to achieve regional autonomy in the southern Philippines Muslim areas, to end the 23 years of religious conflict. The positive function of conflict in the whole social environment makes the government of the country continue to adjust its institutional policies against Muslims in the process. Social structure are eventually formed into a more optimized power integration and achieved the peaceful development of the country.

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