

SungYong Lee - Nonviolent resistance of the Buddhist Sangha in Contemporary Cambodia

To promote and maintain nonviolent principles during war period is particularly challenging due to various restrictions set by, for example, the political authority, widespread war culture, acute social tensions, and extreme nationalism glorifying violence as a means to realise justice. Hence, pacifism tends to be least visible when it is most necessary. Moreover, the academic debates on this topic has not extensively conducted. Nevertheless, the Buddhist peace activism in Cambodia that has been revitalised since the early 2000s, presents an example of how pacifists can overcome such challenges.

Hence, this study examines how pacifism is materialised in conflict-driven and oppressive environment by considering the case studies of Buddhist Sangha civil resistance. The main question it attempt to answer is: How do religious leaders mobilise and expand their social resources to promote nonviolent resistance and maintain nonviolent principles?

The paper is consisted of four main sections. First, it will overview the new development of Buddhist nonviolent movements in Cambodia and key challenges they face. Then, it will analyse the unique features of Buddhist monks' strategies for mobilising civil resistance, by focusing on their utilisation of cultural traditions in Cambodia. Thirdly, it will present a few outstanding features of these Buddhist pacifists' movements, which may not well fit traditional pacifist philosophy. In the final section, this paper will discuss the theoretical significance of the Buddhist peace activism as a model of pacifist campaign developed in conflict-affected area.