

**"Middle Path and Moderation in Buddhism and
Eco-Civilization"**

Speech by

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Forum

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed my greatest pleasure to be invited to deliver a short address to the Fanjing Mountain Ecological Civilization and Buddhist Culture Forum in this beautiful city of Tongren today. I would like to commend the Chinese leadership on having such a far-sighted vision in seriously addressing the global issue of environment and the Chinese concern on sustainable development by calling for the new era of eco-civilization. The success of this endeavour will not only have such a resounding repercussion to China's development and sustainability but definitely to the world at large. I wish also to commend the organizer of this forum in Tongren for so rightly and appropriately linking the Buddhist culture to the future and the implementation of ecological civilization. Yesterday, in my 3 speeches at the Eco Forum in Guiyang, I share with the participants my belief that joining hands to bring forth eco-civilization must be done both physically and mindfully. Rebalancing the economic growth toward green and sustainable development cannot be succeeded merely through law, regulations, administrative and bureaucratic measures. The joining of hands will be meaningful only if the hearts and minds mean it as well.

But as long as, in our mind, the brain still does not operate spontaneously and correspondingly to what we advocate in eco-civilization, we will face difficult time on our paths towards green development. We cannot merely rely on law enforcement since it, more

often than not, deals with what we do, not what the mind thinks. Therefore, I wish to reiterate that in our oriental way, our oriental wisdom and buddhist principles can guide our mind to help better achieve the desired eco- civilization.

In the East, our oriental wisdom can be found in many religions and ways of life. Mahatma Gandhi once said that "The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed". Confucius wrote : "He who will not economize will have to agonize". In Buddhism, the middle path, moderation, and to know one's own proper consumption are found amongst some of the basic guiding principles.

In short, it is the wisdom of training the heart and mind of ourselves to be mindful of what we are doing at all time, especially to ensure that the way of living will not create man-made problems to ourselves and to the society we live in.

Since Buddhism is the theme of this forum, allow me to explore more into some of the Buddhist philosophy.

Buddhism as a philosophy stresses “middle path” or “moderation” as a discipline of life, a discipline of how to live in a society and make it a peaceful one. Its achievement depends on the condition of the mind. That is why Buddhism believes that men must be all the time mindful of what they do. Mindfulness is the key of successfully practicing Buddhism and the key to achieve the middle path and moderation. Only the trained mind could tame human greed.

“Middle path”, consists of 8 factors, namely, righteousness in perception, thought, speech, action, work, diligence or perseverance, mindfulness and concentration. These factors are keys to the practice of middle path or moderation. Middle path is not against development, nor is it against profit making or modernization. On the contrary “middle path” is a way to approach economic development not to destroy the environment in such a way that barely anything is left to the next generation. The Buddhist approach of “middle path” is also reflected in His Majesty the King of Thailand’s philosophy to guide economic development.

H.M. the King of Thailand, over 60 years of his reign, has worked hard on the ground and through his experiences. He has stressed the importance of “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy”. There are three major principles involved, moderation, reasonableness and immunity to protect oneself from possible negative consequences. The three principles must be accorded with knowledge and good morality. One must have the knowledge of how to do things in a moderate and reasonable way, to do it with morally responsible way which will create immunity to protect oneself from negative consequences.

His Majesty's work and philosophy have been recognized by the United Nations which presented to His Majesty the first Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award.

In the economic world, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy,

therefore, teaches us not to over-spend, nor-under spend, not to over invest nor under-invest, but spend and invest moderately, with reasons, in the way that will not hurt us in the future. For example, if one has US\$ 100,000 as savings but decides to buy a house which costs US\$ 2 million, even with a bank financing, that is not the middle path, not moderate, not reasonable, and leaving no immunity in case of any unexpected mishaps. But if one has US\$ 10 million and decides to buy US\$ 2 million house, then it's reasonable, and still have immunity against negative consequences in the future. The same logic goes to investment in stocks, bonds, buying luxury goods or industrialization without concern on damages on the environment and so forth.

However, middle path or moderation does not mean no progress, closing door to modernization. Rather it means doing things with reasons. In economic terms, like I said, moderation means not to over spend, not to under spend, not to over invest nor to under invest. One should not make decision to do thing that is far beyond one can afford or far beyond the society can afford, thus damaging one's financial security, damaging resources and the environment for the next generation. Therefore, moderation could be anti-economic cycle because one should invest reasonably during crisis and not over-invest during boom time. Moderation provides immunity against financial mishaps. Moderation guarantees sustainability.

The choice of spending we make in this free market economy is wrong not because it is illegal but rather it is wrong because it involves too much or too little. It involves too much economic development and too little concern on environment condition. It involves greed. The choice is, therefore, made without due regard to moderation. Global financial crisis is the product of “financial extremists”. Climate change crisis is the product of economic advancement extremists. They take place because one ignores the value of oriental wisdom, of Buddhist philosophy of middle path and mindfulness in everything one does, and the value of Sufficiency Economy, moderation and reasonableness. These values are overlooked and overtaken by the idea of extreme economic advancement and profit maximization. It occurs without any due regard to the possible negative consequences to us and to our society.

Indeed, profit maximization driven by greed is not sustainable. We have tried to invent new laws and regulations to curb human behaviour. However, law and regulations alone cannot control greed. Greed always finds loophole in law and its application. We need to control greed from within, from our heart and mind, to learn to be moderate, sufficient, reasonable and create immunity to ourselves and society. We need to constantly teach our hearts and train our minds to be moderate, reasonable, and be cognizant of what we do at all time. We need to chart a common cause, walk on a common path, create a

coalition of economic moderation today. For tomorrow, it may be too late.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have no doubt that the values of Buddhist culture as described shall be found pertinent in building the new era of ecological civilization. I have no doubt in my mind that the Buddhist “middle path” or “moderation” principles shall play such an important role in building our new era of eco-civilization. I have no doubt in my mind that the economic and the green development and sustainability can go hand in hand if sufficiency economy of His Majesty the King of Thailand is appropriately applied to different societies. I have no doubt in my mind that the Buddhist principle of mindfulness will keep all of us well in tune with making the building of eco-civilization a success.

If we are to pass on to our children and their children a greener earth and the new era of eco-civilization, it is entrusted upon us to make sure that the new era of eco-civilization shall have no room for excessive greed, reckless lack of mindfulness, absence of moderation and absence of the middle path.

Let us be united in keeping our hearts and minds towards that goal. Let us, for whatever faith and belief, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, be determined that the future generations will inherit the civilization that is

less harmful, less damaging and less destructive to the environment and everything around us. Let us make sure that the dawn of such ecological civilization is already on the horizon. Let us firmly join hands to make it real. On that note, may I wish this Forum every success.

Thank you for your attention.