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A Study of Knowledge, Belief and Practice in Religious Teachings for Living together with Peace at Individual and Communal Level of New Generations Venerating Buddhism, Islam and Christianity

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to study knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace at individual and communal level of new generations venerating Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Multi-stage random sampling was applied in this study. The samples were selected from Bangkok and suburban areas (Bangkok and Nakorn Pathom Province), Northern region (Chiangmai and Lampang Province), Northeastern region (Ubolratchathani and Mahasarakham Province), and central region (Ayutthaya and Chanthaburi Province). The samples in each province were stratified into group of occupations: agriculturist, employer committees using workforce, staff and employees of private business companies, employees of government agencies and enterprises, male and female merchants, and students, with total amount of 1,212 subjects. The research questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the data. Statistics used in this study consisted of percentage, mean and standard deviation, independent t -test, and one-way ANOVA. The research findings showed that, in total, the factors influencing peace of individual and community were at high level (\bar{X} = 5.35, S.D = 0.88). In particular, the factors influencing peace of Christianity and Islam were at high level (= 5.51, S.D = 0.76) and (= 5.50, S.D = 0.85) respectively, whereas factors of Buddhism were at almost high level (= 5.22, S.D = 0.90). The peace of people at individual and communal level was at high level (= 5.32, S.D = 0.98), which individual level was at high (= 5.43, S.D = 1.04), and communal level was at almost high (= 5.22, S.D = 1.04).

Keywords— Peaceful Co-existence Doctrine, New Generation Society, Knowledge Belief and Practice

Introduction

People in Thai society, especially those living in large cities such as Bangkok and suburban areas have a lot of progress and advancement in terms of business, science and technology. These include modern and borderless communication devices, which can provide them with sufficient facilitations for living in the current world. Most of people want to have modern facilitations in order to increase self-esteem and well acceptance in the society. This trend leads to the society of materialism and consumerism, which people have to struggle to obtain materials and resources to pamper their lives. As such, it causes a lot of stress. Sometimes, struggling to obtain such facilities has been processed in the wrong way, causing conflict and stress in daily life. The way of living according materialism had led generations to neglect the substantial teachings of their religion. They adhere to religion just as to perform a ceremony at the surface without paying attention to the real teachings of religion and practicing in the right way.

Thai society in the past was full of real peace with people having generosity, loving kindness and

compassion towards relatives, friends and unknown persons. The factors that led to such good merit were religious morality, ethics and virtues. Moreover, the economic condition of Thai people in the past was not highly competitive and people did not have much pressure on such economic condition. Religion became the main principle of direction and led the ways of life of people at that time. Currently, even the Thai society seems to have peace in some regions, but in many other regions there still have conflict and violence at individual and communal level. These problems may be caused from less natural resource, unfairness in allocation of resources, and unequal treatment. In addition, most family members have to work hard in order to earn money for spending in the high cost of living. Therefore, they may not have even time to learn and practice according to religious teachings from religious and educational institution. Thus, they are not cultivated in virtues and ethics of their own religions. Most importantly, when people do not practice in their religious teachings, they are dominated by materialism. This is relevant to the report of the Office of National Economic and Social Development Committee which found that "Changing situations and contexts had an effect on development of desirable Thai people. The diminution of morality, virtue and ethics of Thai people still becomes the main factor life quality development of Thai society. Thai people are now influenced by the world cultural currency, and do not give much importance to Thai identity. Family system is vulnerable, and cannot take responsibility in cultivating family members to be good human capital with virtues and ethics, and to work for the benefits of society at large. This leads to many other social problems such as divorcement, abandoned and deserted children from family, addiction problem in childhood and adulthood which is increasing rapidly. At the same time, media also has great influence on children as it becomes an arousing factor towards their ideas and behavior. This leads to risky behavior in children, for example, sexual problem, and high number of pregnancy in teenagers. On the other, there is an indicator that the expansion of online network can also lead to create conscience in public mind and cultivate civilian culture to new generations sustainably. Moreover, social capital in Thai society plays a key role in strengthening Thai society for a long time. If each family has been strengthened at a bottom line, it will become the important crucible in developing children and juveniles to be the social capital with quality."

[1]

Public and private sector, and society have been trying to solve such problems, but problems still exist, and in some regions and some periods they expand and become more serious. This reflects that the resolution to those problems is not appropriate, and strategy in coping with those problems is not practical.

Religion is necessary for human beings. Human body needs the four necessities for life: clothing, food, lodging, and medicine to live a healthy and happy life. At the same time, human mind needs religious teachings to be a direction in developing mental quality. If the mind is directed by morality and virtue of the religion, it is stable and steady. It is full of loving kindness and compassion towards human beings. In the past, religion became the main direction for people in the society, human society was full of peace and happiness, but at present time, people neglect the substance of their religious teachings and prioritize materials more than mental quality, causing many social problems which are hard to be solved. For Thai society, religion becomes the main factor in creating art and culture, ways of life, and attitude towards environments. Religion is a tool to create friendliness and brotherhood among people in the society. Even though each religion may have different origin and belief, but the main purpose of each religion is the same that is to increase happiness and relieve suffering of human beings. Moreover, religion is the art and science for living a good life and solving human problems. Loving kindness, compassion, generosity and being sympathy to other people, forgiveness, unity and harmony are what regions teach. If believers practice in the real teachings of their religion, the world will be full of peace, happiness, and people will be able to live with their own identity with good understanding and accepting other religions as having the same purpose.

In Buddhism, the Buddha taught his disciples to practice in four sublime states of mind (Brahmavihara), which consist of the following: 1. Metta: loving kindness, goodwill in helping other people; 2. Karuna:

compassion, being sympathetic to other people and help them to escape from difficulties and sufferings; 3. Mudita: altruistic joy, being joyful when seeing other people are happy and receive good fortune; 4. Upekkha: impartiality, neutrality, and having fairness in mind without any prejudices. The Buddha taught people to avoid from the four prejudices which can create unfairness and injustice in the mind of human beings, consisting of: (1) Prejudice caused by love or desire; people who are dominated by this prejudice will lose impartiality. They will make a judgment or decision for the benefits of the persons that they are acquainted with or have much favor. (2) Prejudice caused by hatred or enmity; people who are dominated by this prejudice will not be able to treat people equally. They are narrow-minded persons, treat the opposed parties as inferiors to the others, and act intentionally for the disadvantage and calamity of those people. (3) Prejudice caused by fear; people who are dominated by this prejudice will lose fairness and will not treat people equally. They are afraid of power and influence of some influential people. When some powerful people commit a crime or mistake, they dare not punish them. They try to help them for the sake of their own safety. (4) Prejudice caused by delusion or stupidity; people who are dominated by this prejudice are full of ignorance. They have no wisdom or reason to make a judgment on what is right and wrong. [2]

Moreover, in order to live together with peace, people have to follow the six virtues for conciliation, or virtues for fraternal living: (1) to be amiable in conduct; (2) to be amiable in word; (3) to be amiable in thought; (4) to share any lawful gains with virtuous fellows; (5) to be well-behaved; and (6) to be endowed with right views.

In Islam, the Koran said that "He who has no mercy will receive no mercy from God." This teaching can be evidenced by the generosity which appears in the form of Zakat, giving a fixed proportion to charity. Muslims are required to give away a percentage of their earnings to those less fortunate, regardless of their religion.

Moreover, Islam taught Muslims to practice fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar year. On each of the twenty – nine or thirty days of month, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sex from dawn to sunset. Muslims call Ramadan the blessed month, a month of mercy and compassion. The purpose of fasting is to create patience and tolerance.

In Christianity, Jesus said that love each other in the same way as I love all of you. If you love each other, you will know that you are my disciples. Jesus taught people to love each other such as love neighbors as you love yourself, and to have good conscience. Jesus also taught people to avoid evil deed and anger, to respect to the right of other people, to treat people with fairness, and to avoid discrimination based on ethnics, language and religion. [3]

This research is part of roles and responsibilities in managing educational institution to be more perfect by applying wisdom developed through religious teachings, which consists of virtue and ethics into practice. We strongly believe that religion can provide useful suggestions and directions for new generations to live their lives with good understanding among different religious believers, and to practice the right teachings of their own religions for the sake of peace and happiness of people in the society. Moreover, this research can help solve social problems caused by misunderstanding among people who have different belief, and provide directions for juveniles and youths to help create peace in the society as the proverb "Good youths lead to good future of society." In addition, the research will provide directions and ways to live together with sustainable peace.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

A. The concept of living together with peace: Peace is happiness that occurs from calmness, or tranquility. It is a state of mind that is free from worry and anxiety. Peace also means harmony and unity with surrounding environments, a state of life and society that is free from conflict, violence and crime. In Buddhism, the origin of peace comes from the mind; the Buddha said that "All the phenomena of existence have mind as their precursor, mind as their supreme leader, and of mind are they made. With an impure

mind if one speaks or acts, suffering follows him in the same way as the wheel follows the foot of the chariot. With pure mind if one speaks or acts, happiness follows him like his shadow that never leaves him."

B: Buddhist teachings with regard to living together with peace: 1) the four sublime states of mind (Brahmavihara). These virtues should be practiced and maintained in order to purify the mind and increase loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity for the benefits of all human beings.

2) The six virtues for conciliation, virtues for fraternal living: (1) to be amiable in conduct; (2) to be amiable in word; (3) to be amiable in thought; (4) to share any lawful gains with virtuous fellows; (5) to be well-behaved; and (6) to be endowed with right views.

3) The Eight Fold-Path, the source of peace. Right understanding and right thought are grouped into "wisdom." Right speech, right conduct and right livelihood are grouped into "morality." Right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration are grouped into "meditation." Everyone can remove physical and mental suffering through practicing in the principles of wisdom, morality and meditation.

4) The principle of patience. Patience or tolerance can be classified into two categories: (1) Physical patience means being tolerant with difficulties caused by nature, and environmental problems in living, including illness, sickness and death. (2) Mental patience means being tolerant with unsatisfactory emotion and feeling, including being tolerant with the power of evil roots such as greed, hatred and delusion.

In order to live together with peace, we must follow the principle of mercy, which is the virtue for helping and supporting each other in society. This principle can create harmony, and unity of people in the society.

C: Teachings in Islam with regard to living together with peace: The purposes of provision in Koran were to cultivate faith and to follow that faith which can be classified into theory and practice.

1) Theory in Islam consists of the six main beliefs: (1) Belief in Allah as the one and only God; (2) Belief in angels; (3) Belief in the holy books; (4) Belief in the Prophets (special messengers). e.g. Adam, Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus); (5) Belief in the day of judgment; and (6) Belief in predestination of God.

2) Practice in Islam consists of 5 principles: (1) The testimony; (2) Prayer (Lamad); (3) Fasting; (4) Zakat (charity); and (5) Perform Hajj.

D: Teachings in Christianity with regard to living together with peace: Christianity has its definition as a religion of love of God; a religion of human love propagated by Jesus. Christianity has the principle of Trinity which is consisted of (1) God, the Father; (2) Jesus, son of God; and (3) Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. This trinity can be easily called "Father, Son and Spirit." Even though this trinity has different status, but it has a unified power which is connected to each other, and it is unified as three in one or one as three, thus it is called "Trinity."

II. OBJECTIVES & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research Objectives:

To study knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace at individual and communal level of new generations venerating Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.

Conceptual Framework:

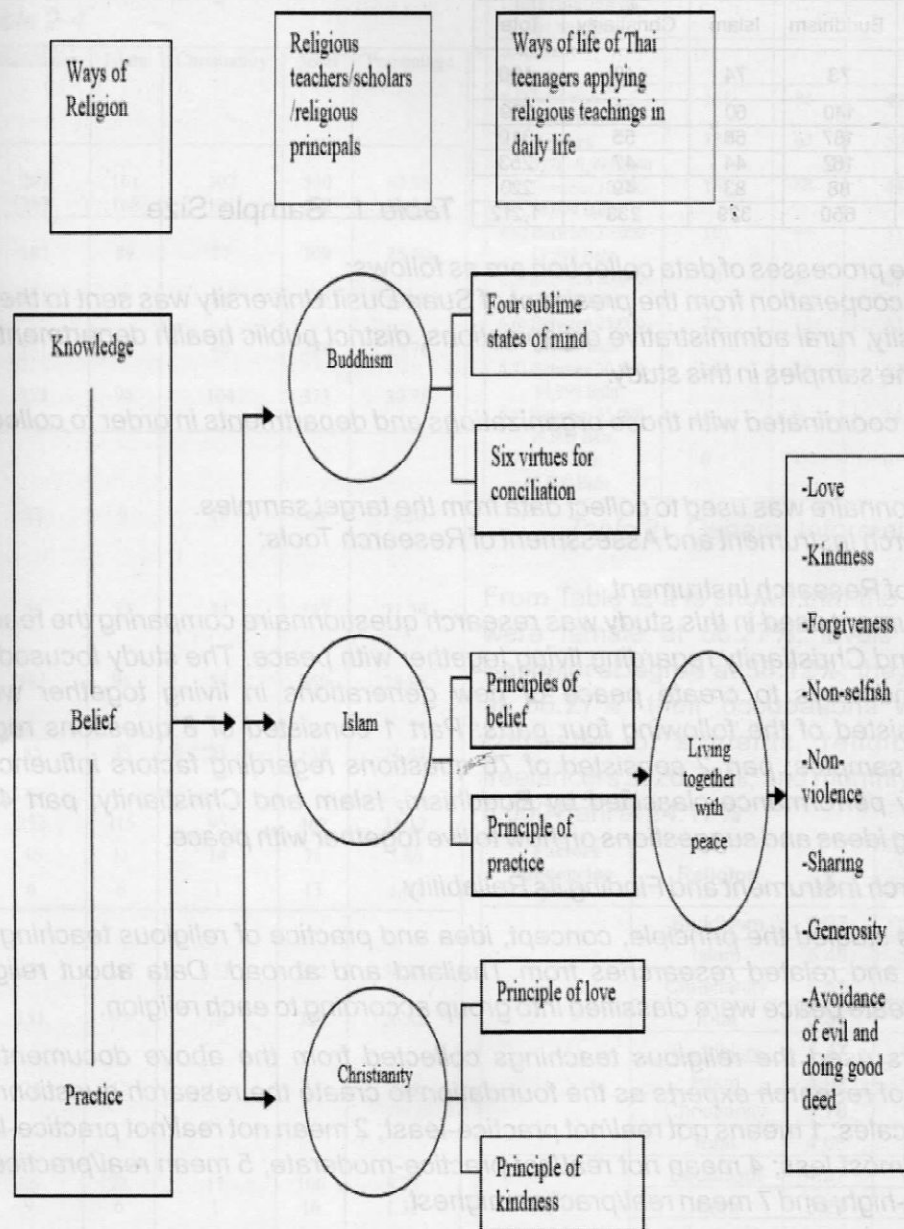


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the research

METHODOLOGY

Sampling: Multi-stage random sampling was applied in this study. The samples were selected from Bangkok and suburban areas (Bangkok and Nakorn Pathom Province), Northern region (Chianmai and Lampang Province), Northeastern region (Ubolratchathan and Mahasarakham Province), and central region (Ayutthaya and Chanthaburi Province). The samples in each province were stratified into group of occupations: agriculturist, employer committee using workforce, staff and employees of private business companies, employees of government agencies and enterprises, male and female merchants, and students, with total amount of 1,212 subjects.

Sample Size:

	Religion Region	Buddhism	Islam	Christianity	Total
1.	Bangkok and Suburban areas	73	74	43	190
2.	Northern region	140	60	39	239
3.	Northeastern region	187	68	55	310
4.	Central region	162	44	47	253
5.	Southern region	88	83	49	220
	Total	650	329	233	1,212

Table 1: Sample Size

Data Collection: The processes of data collection are as follows:

1) Letter asking for cooperation from the president of Suan Dusit University was sent to the sub-campus of Suan Dusit University, rural administrative organizations, district public health departments, and religious leaders who were the samples in this study.

2) The researchers coordinated with those organizations and departments in order to collect data and plan for data collection.

3) Research questionnaire was used to collect data from the target samples.

Formulating Research Instrument and Assessment of Research Tools:

1. Characteristics of Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was research questionnaire comparing the teachings between Buddhism, Islam and Christianity regarding living together with peace. The study focused on knowledge, belief, practice, and ways to create peace of new generations in living together with peace. The questionnaire consisted of the following four parts: Part 1 consisted of 8 questions regarding general information of the samples; part 2 consisted of 76 questions regarding factors influencing peace, and religious ceremony performance classified by Buddhism, Islam and Christianity; part 4 consisted of 5 questions regarding ideas and suggestions on how to live together with peace.

2. Creating Research Instrument and Finding its Reliability

1) The researchers studied the principle, concept, idea and practice of religious teachings from religious texts, documents, and related researches from Thailand and abroad. Data about religious teachings regarding how to create peace were classified into group according to each religion.

2) The researchers used the religious teachings collected from the above documents together with recommendations of research experts as the foundation to create the research questionnaire. There are seven evaluation scales: 1 means not real/not practice-least; 2 mean not real/not practice-less; 3 mean not real/not practice-almost less; 4 mean not real/not practice-moderate; 5 mean real/practice-almost high; 6 mean real/practice-high; and 7 mean real/practice-highest.

3) The research questionnaire which was developed by the researchers was sent to five research experts in order to investigate content validity by considering the value of the Index of Item Objective Congruency (IOC).

4) The research questionnaire was used to try out with the testing samples of 30 subjects at the first time and another 30 subjects at the second time in order to find its reliability with Cronbach Coefficient, and the Cronbach coefficient at the first time test was 0.991, and the second time was 0.968.

Data Analysis: The researchers used SPSS version 23 (IBM Corp., 2015) in analyzing data. Statistics used in this research consisted of frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation, Independent t -test, one-way ANOVA.

V. RESULT

The results of a study on knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace at individual and

communal level of new generations venerating Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity can be presented in Table 2-4

Religion General information of the samples	Buddhism	Islam	Christianity	Total	Percentage
1. Gender					
1.1) Male	267	161	102	530	43.73
1.2) Female	383	168	131	682	56.27
2. Age					
2.1) 17 – 21 years old	183	89	37	309	25.50
2.2) 22 – 26 years old	121	77	44	242	19.97
2.3) 27 – 31 years old	171	69	48	288	23.76
2.4) 32 – 35 years old	175	94	104	373	30.78
3. Educational level					
3.1) Primary school or lower	12	9	19	40	3.30
3.2) Junior high school					
3.3) Senior high school	56	57	24	137	11.30
3.4) Associate degree					
3.5) Bachelor's degree	193	98	59	350	28.88
3.6) Higher than Bachelor's degree	85	33	21	139	11.47
3.7) Others	252	115	95	462	38.12
	46	11	14	71	5.86
	6	6	1	13	1.07
4. Marital status					
4.1) Single					
4.2) Married and live together	374	187	121	682	56.27
4.3) Married but not live together	151	95	79	325	26.82
4.4) Live together without marriage	24	12	11	47	3.88
4.5) Widowed	66	23	17	106	8.75
4.6) Divorced	9	6	1	16	1.32
	26	6	4	36	2.97
5. Occupation					
5.1) Government officials/enterprise employees	141	17	24	182	15.02
5.2) Private business employees	120	30	46	196	16.17
5.3) Self-employed	56	98	44	198	16.34
5.4) Workers	74	32	34	140	11.55
5.5) Agriculturalist	46	19	2	67	5.53
5.6) Freelancers	44	35	26	105	8.66
5.7) Others	169	98	57	324	26.73

Religion General information of the samples	Buddhism	Islam	Christianity	Total	Percentage
6. Monthly income					
6.1) Less than 5,000 Baht	158	86	49	293	24.17
6.2) Between 5,000-9,999 Baht	137	63	50	250	20.62
6.3) Between 10,000 - 14,999 Baht	161	68	44	273	22.52
6.4) Between 15,000 - 19,999 Baht	101	44	31	176	14.52
6.5) Between 20,000 - 24,999 Baht	50	25	21	96	7.92
6.6) Between 25,000 - 29,999 Baht	22	13	12	47	3.87
6.7) Between 30,000 - 34,999 Baht	20	23	12	55	4.53
6.8) Between 35,000 - 39,999 Baht	1	6	14	21	1.73
6.9) More than 40,000 Baht	0	1	0	1	0.08

Table 2: General Information of the Samples

From Table 2, it is shown that the majority of samples were female at 56.27%; levels of education were Bachelor's Degree at 38.12%; they held marital status at 56.27%; their occupations were others which consisted of students, religious teachers and freelancers at 26.73%; and monthly income is less than 5,000 Baht at 24.17%

Factors influencing peace	Religion	X	S.D	Interpretation
	Buddhism	5.27	1.08	Almost High
	Islam	5.45	1.10	High
	Christianity	5.51	1.04	High
	Total	5.36	1.08	High
	Buddhism	4.47	1.14	Almost High
	Islam	4.92	1.16	Almost High
	Christianity	4.78	1.21	Almost High
	Total	4.65	1.18	Almost High
	Buddhism	4.97	1.08	Almost High
	Islam	5.29	1.07	Almost High
	Christianity	5.27	1.01	Almost High
	Total	5.12	1.08	Almost High
	Buddhism	5.46	1.14	High
	Islam	5.67	1.02	High
	Christianity	5.62	1.20	High
	Total	5.55	1.13	Almost High
	Buddhism	4.97	1.08	Almost High
	Islam	5.35	0.96	High
	Christianity	5.31	0.97	High
	Total	5.14	1.04	Almost High
	Buddhism	5.17	1.03	Almost High
	Islam	5.47	0.98	High
	Christianity	5.37	1.06	High
	Total	5.29	1.03	Almost High

	Buddhism	5.42	1.08	High
	Islam	5.65	0.99	High
	Christianity	5.82	0.93	High
	Total	5.56	1.04	High
	Buddhism	5.17	1.11	Almost High
	Islam	5.43	1.01	High
	Christianity	5.61	0.98	High
	Total	5.32	1.07	High
	Buddhism	5.51	1.09	High
	Islam	5.71	1.02	High
	Christianity	5.84	1.01	High
	Total	5.63	1.06	High
	Buddhism	5.44	1.11	High
	Islam	5.65	1.03	High
	Christianity	5.91	1.00	High
	Total	5.59	1.08	High
	Buddhism	5.46	1.06	High
	Islam	5.74	1.00	High
	Christianity	5.67	0.89	High
	Total	5.58	1.02	High
of evil, and religious teaching preference	Buddhism	5.22	0.90	High
	Islam	5.50	0.85	High
	Christianity	5.51	0.76	High
	Total	5.35	0.88	High

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Factors Influencing Peace of Individual and Community

From Table 3, it is shown that the overall factors influencing peace of individual and community were at high level ($\bar{X} = 5.35$, S.D = 0.88), with Christianity and Islam at highest level (= 5.51, S.D = 0.76) and (= 5.50, S.D = 0.85), and Buddhism at almost high level (= 5.22, S.D = 0.90).

Religion	Peace	\bar{X}	S.D	Interpretation
	Individual level	5.22	1.04	Almost High
	Communal level	5.04	1.03	Almost High
	Total	5.12	0.98	Almost High
	Individual level	5.55	1.05	High
	Communal level	5.40	1.00	High
	Total	5.47	0.97	High
	Individual level	5.88	0.83	High
	Communal level	5.49	0.98	High
	Total	5.67	0.84	High
	Individual level	5.43	1.04	High
	Communal level	5.22	1.04	Almost High
	Total	5.32	0.98	High

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Peace at Individual and Communal Level

From Table 4, it is shown that the overall mean of peace at individual and communal level was at high level ($\bar{X} = 5.32$, S.D = 0.98), with individual at high level (= 5.43, S.D = 1.04) and communal at almost high level (= 5.22, S.D = 1.04)

VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of a study on knowledge, belief and practice according to religious teachings for living together with peace of people holding Buddhism, Islam and Christianity in Thai society, in total, were at high level. The results of the study are relevant to the four sublime states of mind (Brahmavihara) in Buddhism, the six principles of belief in Islam, and the Trinity in Christianity, which focus on love and compassion towards human beings. In particular, peace at individual level was at high level, and at communal level was at almost high level. Comparing peace among each religion, peace of the samples of Christianity and Islam was at high level, whereas Buddhism was at almost high level. The results of this study are relevant to the research of Techapanit [4] which found that Christians are satisfied to dedicate themselves for the benefits of the public more than Buddhists which prefer to live with their own contentment. The overall factors influencing peace were at high level. Comparing factors influencing peace among each religion, factors of Christianity and Islam were at high level, whereas factors of Buddhism were at almost high level. The factors which influence peace at individual and communal level can be ranked in order from higher to lower as follows: honesty is the first factor, followed by loving kindness and compassion, respecting each other, and avoiding from blasphemy respectively. With regard to the ways of living together with peace of new generations venerating Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, the results showed that family institutions, educational institutions, religious institutions, mass communication and online communication, public and private sector and communal and social environments are also the important factors for living together with peace.

These are relevant to the study of On-khom [5] which studied about religion and information technology and found that a majority of monks in Buddhism and priests in Christianity accept and support the using of information technology in teaching, learning and propagating religious teachings. Using information technology or other electronic devices for teaching, learning and propagating religious teachings is not against and is in compliance with religious provision because religion itself has to apply new technologies for the benefits of learning and propagating its teachings and principles.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

1. Suggestions for Implementation

1.1 The practical ways of three religions in terms of knowledge, belief and practice with regard to living together with peace should be implemented by educational institutions and other related agencies in order to create peace in each society.

1.2 Thai youths should be encouraged to participate in the practical ways of three religions in terms of knowledge, belief and practice with regard to living together with peace; they should be supported to find the ways to live together with sustainable peace and happiness.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

2.1 This research focuses on a study of knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace, there should be a study on the aspect of using new technology to support knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace in Thai society.

2.2 There should be a study on activity and environmental design to support knowledge, belief and practice for living together with peace in Thai society.

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From Table 3, it is shown that the overall factors influencing peace of individual and community were at high level ($X = 5.35$, $S.D = 0.88$), with Christianity and Islam at highest level ($= 5.51$, $S.D = 0.76$) and ($= 5.50$, $S.D = 0.85$), and Buddhism at almost high level ($= 5.22$, $S.D = 0.90$).



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