



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

Interpretation of The Eight Precepts According to Postmodern Philosophy

Natsuda Chiaowet¹

Kirti Bunchua²

Kirti.bu@ssru.ac.th

Metha Harimtepathip³

Metha.ha@ssru.ac.th

^{1,2,3} Ph.D Program of Philosophy and Ethics, Graduate School, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat
University

Abstract

This is a philosophical research, having as its objective to answer the philosophical question whether it is possible to reinterpret the Eight Precepts by the Moderate-Postmodern Paradigm. The research found out that it had an important objection that it was impossible, because it had been prescribed in the ambiance of the medieval paradigm and had to be interpreted by the medieval paradigm, and such was supported by 2 important reasons: firstly the Eight Precepts belong to the doctrine of the Buddhist religion as guidelines for the observers of chastity who turned away from the worldly happiness and directed themselves to the level of the Buddhist Brahmins or upper in the Brahmin World; secondly the Eight Precepts absolutely direct to the Transcendental Life. But the research also found out that the above-mentioned arguments had weak points and could be objected that they were based on the narrow-mindedness that restricted the scope of the Buddhist Chastity within the sexuality only and so undermining value of the other related observances. In fact the Buddha' teaching has a wider ranges of the meaning of chastity, for examples: Dana, Viriya, Ariyamagga, Dhammadesana, which are morals needed for the development of quality of life according to the postmodern philosophy. Therefore the arguments proposed by the objectors were invalid. The research concluded that the Eight Precepts should not be interpreted only by the medieval paradigm, but should especially be interpreted by the moderate-postmodern paradigm.

Key Words: interpretation, Eight Precepts, Postmodern Philosophy

Preamble

The research started with a doubt in mind: "Is it possible to reinterpret the Eight Precepts by the moderate-postmodern philosophy?" The doubt came from the fact that many of the observers of the Eight Precepts, believed that the Eight Precepts direct to the



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

happiness of the next life in the the level of the Brahmins or upper, because the 3th article of the Eight Precepts states that abrahmacariya veramani sikha padang samadiyami (I intend of avoid all the offenses to the brahmin conducts), while the 3th article of the Five Precepts states that kamesumicchara veramani sikha padang samadiyami (I intend to avoid all the sexual conducts). So the people understand that the difference is only that the Eight Precepts includes the Five Precepts of the same quality plus 3 more article of the same level. They don't understand that the brahmins have the conducts of higher level than the Five Precepts level of the ordinary laymen. While they are living in this World, they are brahmin-like in human bodies, whose status is higher than the human status or even the Sixth Heaven' status itself. In fact, the Brahmin World is already on the Way to the Transcendent World: it is the place for the Pure Ones (Suddhavasa = the Habitation of the Pure) who are waiting only the Enlightenment.

Such misunderstanding of the people might come from the belief that the Pure One must have the intention to avoid only the kama (sexual pleasure), because it is the only cause of unending reincarnation. Who can avoid sexual pleasure partly becomes the arayapuggalas at different levels: Sotapannas, Sakadagami, Anagami and the totally Pure Arahanta. However there are Pure Ones who are waiting to become Arahanta by Enlightenment.

However the popular belief mentioned above has supporting reasons, partly from the Scriptures and partly from the traditions. Some Suttantapitaka passages suggest to the belief that the practice of the Eight Precepts does not lead to the happiness in this world, but directs to the purification with the hope for the happiness in the next world aiming motivatedly at the level of Brahmin World or upper to the Suddhavasa, which are the habitations of the Ariyapuggala, while the tradition may come from the hypothesis or the observation that the conducts of the Eight Precepts make difference from the other people: for example taking no more meal after noon time beside drink, avoiding the comfortable bedding, avoiding all kinds of sexual pleasure.

But the researcher found out that all the above interpretation came by the wong way of misunderstanding the word "brahmacariya or pure conduct of a brahmin". In contemporary Thai language, the word "brahmacariya" is taken to mean avoiding sexual accomplishment, but some go to the extreme to mean a whole life without any sexual accomplishment: a brahmacariya girl means a girl without any experience of sexual intercourse. The researcher sees that this word brahmacariya has been abused so much that it loses many original values to satisfy the want of the ordinary people. There remain only the narrow and superficial meaning within the scope of next world happiness. The Eight Precepts observers are then expected to reject all actual happiness, to show no interest at



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

all of the happiness of this life, to be indifferent to any attraction of this life, so that they may pay attention only to the happiness of the life beyond up to Nirvana: in sum, they can yearn only for the life of the Ariya up to Nirvana.

This is why the research has tried to analyze the scope of the original meaning of the brahmachariya in Buddhism to get the clear and distinct concept by the authentic interpretation of the Theravada Buddhism, so as to imply for the development of the quality of life as a postmodern people should do. In spite of objections, the researcher still has the effort to clear up all the possible objections and come to the confirmation that the Eight Precepts can be understood through “the interpretation of the Moderate Postmodern Philosophy” so that it may help develop the quality of life of the people at present, by following the philosophical research methodology as dialectic and discursive.

Objective

To answer the research question that the Eight Precepts can be interpreted by the Moderate Postmodern Paradigm.

Scope

The researcher limits the scope of this research only to the conceptual discussion by studying the writings concerning the interpretation of the Eight Precepts, the Five Philosophical Paradigms, the Hermeneutic of Interpretation, which are the content of chapter 2. The discussion of the objections is in chapter 3, while the defense of researcher’s standpoint in chapter 4. Chapter 5 brings the research to appreciation, application, conclusion and suggestions for further study.

Literature Revision

1. Precept (Sila) means rule directing the right conduct of body, words and mind (Somdej Phra Yanasangvara, 2010, p.1-2), so that the body and the words may stop persecuting oneself and others, be concentrated, and not violate (Ps. Pañisambhidāmagga 31/89/34): no violation by body, words and mind (Vbh. Vibhaṅga 33/604/283) of those who accepted the precepts (Buddhagosathera, 2003, p.10-11). It is the principle of action that controls the conducts in the right way of good relation with other people, with society and with the environment. That is why the Eight Precepts are the property that regulates the living of those who have to live with others. They are the social rules of conduct to guarantee the social order and peace. (Srisamdaeng 1991, p.114).



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

The Eight Precepts state as follow::

1. To abstain from taking life.
2. To abstain from taking what is not given.
3. To abstain from unchastity.
4. To abstain from false speech.
5. To abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness.
6. To abstain from untimely eating.
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows, from wearing garlands, smartening with scents, and embellishing with unguents.
8. To abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches. (Thevintho, 2003, p.120-135)

2. Bunchua, (2002, p.13) is implied to explicate the Five Paradigm Theory from his conclusion: “ The paradigm is the basic belief in the minds of all human beings, differentiated by sex, age,environment, education, and decision.” There are altogether 5 Paradigms (Bunchua, 2006, p.15-22) summarized as 1.Primitive Paradigm, 2.Ancient Paradigm, 3.Medieval Paradigm, 4. Modern Paradigm, 5.Postmodern Paradigm; and the Moderate Postmodern Philosophy is the Philosophy of those who believe that truth is multiple. There is not a truth of one man that covers the whole Reality. Each man has a partial truth. Hence the principle of the moderate postmodern philosophy is to emphasize the Distachment, that is to hold but not to attach to it, and the principle of “Reread all, Reject none.” (Harimthaphathip, 2015), to collect all that certainly can develop the quality of life, throw away all that certainly undermine the quality of life, and reserve all that are uncertain to develop the quality of life but certainly are not dangerous, so they are suspended waiting for the good chance in the future to be used fruitfully.

3. Hermeneutics corresponds to the Sanskrit word **artha** and to the Pali **attha**, meaning content combined with the Sanskrit word **parivrta** and Pali word **parivatta** meaning turning, changing and modifying, together to mean modifying from the literal meaning into the conventional meaning according to the need of the scholars. (Bunchua, 2006, p.1-3)

Research Methodology

This research uses the philosophical method of Dialectic and Discursive combined.

Dialectic means posing a question that has many answers.

Discursive means discussing with reason to find out the best reason.



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

Result

1. Learning the reason of the opposite opinion that interprets the Eight Precepts by the Medieval paradigm. Their main argument is that the Eight Precepts is a part of religious teaching and the rule of conduct for the chastity observants who turn away from all the worldly happiness hoping to reach the brahmin level or upper, of in the life to come.

2. But the researcher found out that the Medieval Paradigm has its weak point of narrow vision, especially in taking the narrow meaning of Brahmachariya in Buddhism into consideration, that is limiting its scope within the sexual pleasure only. By so doing it leaves out many values regrettably. Using the postmodern hermeneutic the researcher can extend the meaning of Brahmachariya to a larger meaning of the honourable conduct which includes many other values than sexual chastity, as the Five Precepts, Dana, Vaiyavacca, Appamanna, Methunviratti, Sadarsantosa, Virija, Uposatha, Ariyamagga, Sasana, Dammadesana, Ajjhasaya or Manoratha, Samanadamma.

Research Finding

1. By interpreting the word "brahmachariya" in the new philosophical context, the researcher can see the weak point in the argument of the opposites in proving the obligation of article 3 of the Eight Precepts by the narrow paradigm neglecting the valuable contexts of the word which in fact is liable to several meanings relating of each other compactly. Each context lies within the scope of brahmachariya, because brahmachariya means excellent conduct, though literally it means Brahmin Conduct, but it should be understood as Conduct of Brahmin in human body, that means taking the Brahmin Virtue as the leading factor, not the external feature of the God Brahman which is not a Buddhist attention, as the Buddha does not recommend the refuge to the gods and the spirits, but to their virtuous examples that elevate them to high positions of Ariya Puggala. In this new prospect, this excellent observance of brahmachariya is in fact the accumulation of virtues and parrnis for the observants to advance to excellent life actually in this life, while expecting the reward in the life to come. They cannot be the real excellent observance at all, because it is the object of desire or tanha, which is the cause of suffering or dukha. The desire to have a better or excellent happiness in the next world is called kamatanha, while the desire to become a Brahmin or even an Anagami is called bhavatanha. Therefore the reason supporting the medieval paradkgm of the opposits cannot be acceptable.

2. With the certainty that the medieval interpretation is not proper for the Eight Precepts as shown above, the research comes to the conclusion that we need a better interpretation and the research has found out that for the moment the interpretation of the Moderate Postmodern Philosophy is the most proper for the contemporary expectation,



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

which needs for the enhancing of quality of life, also Dana, Vaiyavacca, the Five Precepts, Appapanna, Methunviratti, Sadarsantosa, Virija, Uposatha, Ariyamagga, Sassana, Dhammadesana, Ajjhasaya or Manoratha, Samanadhamma, because all these qualities relating with brahmacariya are needed to supplement the development of quality of life. To reach this point we need first of all the interpretation through the critical methods of Analysis, Appreciation and Application.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Actions

The people of Thailand nowadays are alerting to develop the quality of life, but it is a pity that their scope is mostly limited to the requisites of living and comfort of the economic and social sectors, neglecting the importance of philosophy and ethics which remain only as policy without a serious implication. Statistics is the deciding factor in stead of philosophy, religion and morality, which are considered as transcendental far away from the real life of the people. However the grass-roots request so much for virtues, morality and good governance. This research would like to suggest as its conclusion that it is the proper time to apply this research to lay the national foundation of education for good character as a part of the policy of developing the quality of life including body, spirit, emotion and intellect. There should be regular courses of educating at least monthly in all the governmental offices, because virtues need repeating advices, because human spirit is easily flexible with stimulus of desire of the surplus, of power and of income which can be balanced only by regular education, if quality of life is taken seriously as the way to the authentic happiness.

2. Suggestions for Learning

The researcher does hope that the new interpretation which the researcher used in this study might be useful to understand the Buddhist Precepts in in general. Therefore the researcher wants to see the further researches emphasize on:

- The Hermeneutic on the Five Precepts by the Postmodern Paradigm.
- The Hermeneutic on the Ten Precepts by the Postmodern Paradigm.

Bibliography

- Religion Department (1982). Official Tipitaka. Bangkok: Religion Department. (in Thai).
- Bunchua, K. (2002). Philosophical Series, vol. 1. Bangkok: St. John's University. (in Thai).
- Bunchua, K. (2006). Hermeneutics and Postmodern Philosophy: Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University. (in Thai).



การประชุมวิชาการและนำเสนอผลงานวิจัยระดับชาติและนานาชาติ ครั้งที่ 10
"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

- Thevin Thevintho, Ven. (2003). Buddhist Ethics, Ethics, and Ethic. 2nd ed., Bangkok: Mahachulabannakharn, (in Thai).
- Buddhagosathera, Ven. (2003). Visuddhimagga, 1th ed. Bandkok: Prayuravongs Printing Co. (in Thai).
- Harimthaphathip, M. (2015). <https://thandimisukh.wordpress.com./2014/07/08/Moderate-Postmodernism>.
- Srisam Daeng, Sanit. (1991). Buddhism and Principle of Education: Theory of Knowledge. Bandkok: Nilnara Press.
- Somdejphrayanasangvara, Supreme Patriach. (2010). Sila in Buddhism, 4th ed. Bandkok: Mahamakul Press.