

Buddhist Approach to Suicide and Solutions of Worldly Problems: Mainly Based on *Adbhuta-dharmaparyāya*

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Abstract

(1) Research Topic

There are many discourses on the issue of suicide from philosophical inquiry. However, for the sake of in-depth discussion, this paper will confine the scope within the issue of ethics only. In other words, the questions to be raised include: is it appropriate to suicide? Should one suicide? Is suicide good or bad? And then, I will further narrow down the discussion to whether suicide can solve problems in life, and the appropriate solution to problems in life proposed by Buddhism. Most people decided to commit suicide because they had difficulty handling the trauma encountered in their lives. Out of despair, terminating their lives seemed to be the only way they stopped facing the problems, which is the assertion this paper will scrutinize.

The suicide rate has been on the rise for the past fifty years. Suicide has been one of the top ten causes of death in Taiwan during 1997 and 2009. Furthermore, suicide ranks second highest cause of death among young adults in Taiwan.¹ This striking number reveals a large amount of people who struggle to survive their agonizing, void, lonely, confounding, oblivious, and repressed lives.

Philosophy developed out of human's inquisition toward and confounds from life. Philosophers tried to investigate issues such as how the world comes to be, how life is as such, what the meaning and value of life are, and which direction in life is, and so on. In addition, the inquiry will be conducted as all-encompassing, long term, and in-depth as possible. Furthermore, Buddhism strives to alleviate sentient beings from the worldly suffering by investigating the ultimate realities in all possible ways and providing all plausible alternatives in life for those who felt trapped. As a result, a thorough scrutiny and retrospection on life as such with the help of Buddhism and philosophy is the perfect antidote to suicide.

¹ According to the official data released by the Department of Health, Executive Yuan, see http://www.doh.gov.tw/CHT2006/index_populace.aspx

(2) Textual Source

The main text employed in this paper is the *Adbhuta-dharma-paryāya* (A Discourse of Marvelous Happenings 《佛說未曾有因緣經》) translated by T'an-Ching (曇景) during A.D. 479-502. Other than being relatively short and easy to follow, there is a discourse on a lady wishing to burn herself to death in hope to eradicate her past bad karmas and hindrances. The passages on suicide and further elaboration and theory are very pertinent to this research.

(3) Research Method

Due to the fact that this Buddhist text was recorded millennia ago, many of the issues being discussed nowadays did not exist then, especially those issues in applied ethics that are pertaining to behaviors or law. As a result, topics such as applied ethics rarely appear in Buddhist texts. Nevertheless, this does not mean that modern issues cannot be discussed from the perspective of Buddhism.

Buddhism brings about the reality in the world through practice and realization while issues in bioethics base on life and sentient world. Sentient beings can develop such mental abilities as penetrating wisdom through Buddhist practices and utilize these cultivated mental abilities to get a bigger picture of the sentient world, especially concerning how the sentient world and the flow of life really work. If we have a bigger picture of the sentient world, we can better deal with the flow of life. Therefore, even though the issues regarding ethics may not have been recorded in Buddhist texts, it is possible to reveal ways to deal with those issues in question after unfolding comprehensive relationships among life and sentient world. In addition, this way of thinking is in fact more long-term and thorough than the conventional way.

(4) Structure of Paper

Section one states the main theme of this paper while section two sums up a rough literature review on the issue of suicide in different domains. Section three explains Buddhist point of view on the reason why suicide does not solve any problem. After investigating the reality of sentient world and looking at the problem at its source, one will realize destroying one's physical body does not make any contribution to the situation at all. On the other hand, Buddhism offers pertinent solutions to the problems in life. Section four concludes the paper.