

## **Humanism Ideology in Buddhist Philosophy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article is partial fulfilment of Doctor of Philosophy's dissertation entitled as "Existentialism in Theravada Buddhist Philosophy the author composed and renamed as "Humanism Conceptual Framework in Buddhist Philosophy for further implementation on academic research with 2 objectives; namely, 1) to study Humanism ideology in Buddhist Philosophy, 2) to distribute academic research to public. Humanism is an idea to understand, empathize in human beings with differences to live together in the society peacefully. Humanism in Buddhist Philosophy has the theory stating about the theory stating about human being and practice path to explicitly peaceful objectives. Moreover, it is a principle emphasizing on human's practice for truly peaceful development by themselves.

**Key Words:** Ideology, Human, Humanism, Buddhist Philosophy, Peace

### **1. Introduction**

Since middle age, human's concept was mostly focused on beliefs and living relying on Theism, so they might sometimes be credulous and become pessimistic leading to cause of violence among human beings. The latter human's beliefs were changed and approached to Renaissance. There were new idea of thought, point of view, and human's beliefs from pessimistic to optimistic. Humans were likely to be more empathy to each other, and trusted that we have capability, self-worth as a consequence of

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Humanism. Scholars had turned to focus more on Buddhist Philosophy on account of initially emphasizing on human.

## **2. Contents**

Humanism is a school of thought that trusts in human's capability; therefore, this concept strives to encourage people to trust in their own potentials and capability. It is believed that people are intelligible to appreciate knowledge and truth. As long as people believe in the human being's significance, they will look for the chance to search for noble truths and virtues according to their ability. Moreover, Buddhist Philosophy emphasizes on self-awareness of human for each action, so people can control their destiny by themselves. Nonetheless, they do not believe that there was anyone or any power over the others in any actions. Action becomes the power that people can control by themselves. It is an individual responsibility where people must accept its result. As Buddhist Philosophy's principle stated that "you are your own refuge". As a result, this school of thought is a motivation for human's trust called "Humanism".

Buddhist Philosophy focuses on actions of human on account of the volition (cetanā), thus individual action results in the people and surroundings involved. Whenever we think and determine to do anything and such action leading to result, there will always be impact. That's why we must be careful before doing, and the action will not be mistaken. Jean Paul Sartre (trans, 1998) said that "people define themselves on what they and others are at the same time" I am obliged to will the liberty of others at the same time as my own. Besides, Buddhist Philosophy is also empathy on surrounding people as Buddha's quote "Treat others in the way you want to be treated" that means to be empathy on each other, and the action must be to support each other; for example, how we love happiness but hate suffering, others also love happiness but hate suffering. When we realize this way, any decision on any action will be for self and others. Buddhist Philosophy provides

chance for this kind of human beings equally to adjust and improve oneself for higher goal.

Buddhist Philosophy emphasizes on being human with ability to strive by the own effort until success without waiting for and entreaty from any to bestow so it is actually considered as the Humanism as it focuses on individual action by oneself instead of appealing from others.

Buddhist Philosophy presents the concept that “human being is more important than race”. The priority is that human being comes before kingship or Kshatriyas rulers, administrators, and warriors, Brahmin or priestly people, Vaishyas artisans, merchants, tradesmen, and farmers, and Shudras or laboring castes. All castes were later defined by human as well as the way they treat to each other; namely, norms, customs, or rules. These would be defined whether valuable or not depending on human who selects and valuate whether to accept or deny it, because it is not objective nor existent, but it depends on free circumstance which people can choose. One of Greek Philosopher said that “man is measure of all things”. While the scholar in existentialism expressed that actual philosophy must be an idea that helps people able to learn and solve the problems by themselves freely without following the order to do or not to do.

This conceptual framework definitely supports the noble truths principles called Ariyasacca 4 in Buddhism because the noble truths are in everybody. They are the process of problem solving; for everybody must start to do by themselves and it will generate the result. It is the individual learning about problem and its cause, then perform the solution by one’s self as stated that “Buddhist Philosophy is a model of Humanism” so called Buddhist Humanism which focused on human beings emphasizing understanding one’s self, relying on one’s self, and solving the problems by one’s self instead of waiting for the destiny or relying on external factors according to Determinism.

For self reliance, the researcher is to illustrate the example of the persons who controlled his own destiny by selecting and deciding on what others do not, and striving by his own effort swimming in the ocean until going over and becoming survival without waiting for any destiny or any help from deity. Eventually he was rescued by the deity and attained the intention.

### **2.1 Concept of Human and Nature of Theist Humanism**

The concept of "Humanism" and "Norms" of Western Theism religious philosophy that is Kant's philosophical system and religious belief seemed like the same rule of Eastern Theist religious philosophy as they believed that "there were creator and creature" in both schools of thought. For Oriental religious philosophy, especially Indian schools of thought, they believed that Brahman created human from his different parts of the body, so people were classified differently and become the system of castes in Indian Society. Moreover, the doctrine still emphasizes the belief that *"any caste they were born was due to the past life's action and it would conduct the role, status, and duty which were not changeable."* The law of Karma in Theism was seemed like a curse Adam and Eva received or the definite order which is inarguable or unchangeable instead of being surrendered to the fate all whole life.

That's why Theist human nature cannot adjust or change anything. They believe not only in figure but including their mind and all human behaviors. So, anything cannot be altered to others inspite of determination; for example, when they believe someone who was born in upper class even how bad he commit, he is still in upper class (warrior and Brahman) because the status defined his/her nobleness and it has been regulated that way, thus it is unable to change. On the other hand, the person who was born in lower class family such as Shudra or Chandala (untouchables); nevertheless, how good he/she do, he/she is also defined as lower status for he/she has been definitely designed and it is unchangeable as well. Similarly, western Theists also believe in

original sin that human's ancestors were sinful, so we were born sinfully and it has been a dilemma in Ethics.

The conceptual framework of Plato "form" or Kantian and Cartesian Rationalism have the same foundation idea that is belief in human's nature. How human tends to do can be inferred to the nature of human, so they were likely to forecast human behavior rigidly as if freesize dress cut; as a result, practice course is the same for everyone that the existentialists stated it cannot be detached from Theist idea.

Let's try considering this text;

"He steals because he is a robber", and "He is robber as he steals."

Which sentence is Theist idea, and which one is Atheist? And what is Buddhist Philosophical point of view toward these sentences?

If comparing with the idea that believes human was born from sin.

Mr. A is a man, so Mr. A is sinful.

This can be inferred as same as the sentence "He steals because he is a robber" because it focuses on "being", while another sentence "He is robber as he steals" focuses on "action".

According to this term of logics, if the warrant is true, everybody cannot be avoided being sinner that means "every man is robber, Mr. A is human, so Mr. A is a robber." And "every robber steals, Mr. A is a robber, so Mr. A must steal." This is because of his previous life's action that led him to be a robber, and being a robber forced him to always steal unchangeably. There is only one way to avoid him from stealing that is to murder him legally.

This way of thought is related to many points and dimensions in the world, even in the point of view they have with other people. If we think this way, we will see human

different from another. We will discriminate others by complexion, race etc. as black, white, Jewish, Chinese, Thai, Laotian, Khmer, or Burmese. People may label others on how they feel with others, because they believe others will be actually as they think unchangeably. This is the concept of Theism.

Frequently, we can see the black being abused by the white, lower class people being beaten by the upper class, the civilized race looking down on the people from underdeveloped country, and so on. On account of this cause, the war among Theists severally occurred for many centuries.

Buddhist philosophy does not accept these paradigms; accordingly, we object class system; for example, Brahmins considered themselves as an upper-class background and Buddha argued that name and family background was only illusion existed due to consecutive perception. The entitled name and family has long been embedded for those who didn't realize the truth. When being unknown, they claimed that Brahmin were born natively.

## 2.2 Humanism and Nature of Buddhist Humanism

Humanism in Buddhism focuses on five groups of existences such as corporeality, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. But the nature of human in Buddhist Philosophy does not mean as being stated; nevertheless, we believe that human has its own nature but not the rigidly based nature; namely, rationality, irrationality, love, anger, hate, jealousy, disappointment, delightfulness, pleasure etc. These are nature of human while these are not lasting and clinged to the human in born. These are temporarily mental defilements not the authentic nature of human. If the stated nature were true, so the term that Mr. A is bad because he is mad, Mr. A would always be bad due to his anger. But in fact, Mr. A is not always mad to any one, so the anger will be temporarily happened, and Mr. A might not be considered

as bad person. Instead, it must be said anger made Mr. A bad because no one loves anger. It ruins happiness of both himself and people surrounded, so it is called “bad”.

Buddhist Philosophy does not accept the rigid nature of human, thus human can improve him/herself to reach the highest goal as his/her capability. If we are to claim the Buddhist Philosophical definition, it is a doctrine emphasizing humanity that can understand the natural law not the law regulated by people from their own thoughts but the law according to natural truth as called “enlightenment” which is from human’s wisdom, by human, for human. Human’s wisdom reveals secret existing natural truth by itself, but it had been concealed by Theism for very long time. Buddhist Philosophy can be described as if a lighted lamp among the dark, or to open the long-closed object, or the shining sun that makes the people with visible eyes can see things by themselves.

*“The Dharma has been clarified by Master Gotama in many ways, as though he was lighting what was overthrown revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes can see forms.”*

Buddhist philosophy is Actionism which insists humankind by his/her own action not the creature nor a curse. The individuals can define themselves by their action whether they are farmer, artisan, merchant, servant, soldier, priest, king, or even robber due to their actions. The seer with visible eyes can see cause and effects (Dependent Origination or Paṭiccasamuppāda) with wisdom to understand action and its result, so that he/she can see the Kamma according to the actual actions “every creature is relied on its action or what goes around, comes around”

Buddhist Humanism paradigm is based on individual experience emphasizing on realization rather than acceptance by clinging to the scripture (*mā piṭaka sampadānena*); for instance, the consecutive belief stated in Hinduism’s Veda “*Buddhist Philosophy objects to the old religious belief, or the traditional customs or norms that was*

*disheveled.*” This point can be analyzed that Buddhist school of thought revolted the Hinduism society people used to rely on the supreme power and turned to focus on their own actions rather than to surrender for the power beyond human. But it focuses on human’s own inner power individually to encourage the confidence in his/ her own action by doing.

Buddhist Philosophy attracted people in that time to consider their own mind as existing laymen called by the existentialists as “Existence of Humankind”. We more focused on humanity than the external factors beyond human; in other words, we focused on the human being existing with flesh and blood without anything but the existence of human being.

There were questions why Buddhist Humanism emphasizing on humanity or why being human was prioritized. One of the reasons was that it is difficult to be born as human, even when we were born as human the way we lived with righteousness or survived was also difficult. Moreover, it is more difficult for the people who strive to attain the goal of human being.

As a result, there were precepts in Buddhist philosophy for Bhiksu (monks) about significance of being human not to kill people. Whoever commits murder is the highest penalty. Actually, not only the human’s life, but also any creature in the world are deserved to save by growing love on all beings in people’s mind more (cultivation of kindness, *mettābhāvanā*). Some religion was contemporarily established as Buddhism emphasizing on creature even tiny lives or microorganism but considered as living things worth to be conserved as in Jainism.

### **2.3 Humanism and the Buddhist Goal**

Regarding to humanity, Buddhist Philosophy has a goal that people can solve the suffering by themselves. Suffering is a big deal of humankind as Venerable Bhikkhuni Vajira said *“only suffering emerged, exists, and varied, except suffering no any*



*other things emerged and perished”* in accordance with the ideal of Buddhist Philosophy *“I teach only suffering and the way to end the suffering.”* Due to the quoted Buddha’s teaching, we can infer to the original source of Buddhism’s emergence that it was from suffering and there is the supreme goal to eliminate all sufferings.

### **3. Conclusion of Humanism in Buddhist Philosophy**

1. Buddhist Philosophy accepted the humanity as there were 2 parts of the body; namely, body and mind or tangible object and intangible things called as 5 groups of existences such as corporeality (Rūpa), sensation (Vedanā), perception (Saññā), mental formations (Saṃkhāra), and consciousness (Viññāṇa).
2. In human being, Buddhist Philosophy objects to self or Attā as the universal spirit which is origin of all entity or permanent entity existing background of humankind in Upanishad philosophy. Buddhist humanity consisted of 5 components is emptiness from perpetual beings, so Buddhist Philosophy objects to the supreme spirit dominating human being or controlling the human’s destiny.
3. Buddhist Philosophy does not emphasize metaphysically universal quest because the Buddhist point of view is that human’s problem or suffering appears before us that needs to suddenly solve; otherwise, it may long until we die without chance as we cannot last much longer than 100 years old. If we always search for universal truth far away from us, it may not be found and understood in present life.
4. Buddhist Philosophy rejects Theist school of thought that we do not cling into entity beyond human’s subjectivity, because it is far away from life and truth. That’s why Buddhist Philosophy encourages people to turn to be confident on their own ability and to focus on volitional action “cetanāhaṃ

bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi” by teaching to trust in what we do with intention significantly.

5. The Buddhist Philosophy’s point of view is human beings were not created rigidly although it is believed that human has his/her own previous bad volition. On the other hands, it doesn’t mean the previous volition has absolute power to control or destine all the human’s fate, human can change their behavior and improve better things, and human can develop his/herself by the action with good or bad volition.
6. Origin of Buddhist Philosophy was not only from the analysis by critical thinking, but it is from the explicitly awared experience of existence.
7. Buddhist Philosophy’s point of view is “everything must be changed, no matter object or mind”.
8. Buddhist Philosophy’s theory to practice for the life goal explicitly is three folds training or noble eightfold path. If people abide by this path, they will really attain the supreme goal because it had been proved before then the options were suggested to people.
9. The supreme objective of Buddhist Philosophy is to eliminate sufferings by human’s ability.
10. Buddhist Philosophy emphasizes on human’s perseverance to attain the objectives because suffering or problem can be overcome through human’s effort.

Humanity in Buddhist Philosophy is explicit idea and there are 3 levels of living attainments; as followings,

1. Basic Objectives are (a) to maintain existence of the social rules; for example, there are the precepts observing as well as the doctrine of good or bad action, (b) to maintain the good relationship among people; for instance, there are monks with good conduct, as well as the virtues of parents, teachers, friends, and the respectation and homage to each other still have its good result.
2. The middle objectives are to encourage self perseverance for further higher objectives. Humanity is not only a part of material but human has the wisdom substance or mind to improve farther than material, so people have the hope, future, the result of effort to do good or bad things existed.
3. The supreme objectives in Buddhist philosophy are to create the virtue for the path to attainment where people can achieve by themselves while they are still human beings with flesh and blood existed in this world, especially they can eliminate the sufferings. In fact, the sufferings or problems are not extinct but attachment (Upādāna) or clinging on something is destroyed. When we understand the process of cause and effect explicitly, we will realize that nothing can be grasped any more, and there is not the existence nor inexistence. This is the supreme objective beyond the world.

The author strongly hopes this article will present the ideas, points of view, and inspire the objectives for peace building among the society to live together peacefully with empathy to each other; inspite of difference of race, birth, habitat, culture, or value.

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