Sociology of Religion, Basic Principles of Buddhism and Its Possible Action in Present World Crises

Yi-Fang Chang
Department of Physics, Yunnan University, Kunming, 650091, China
Email: yifangch@sina.com; yifangchang1030@hotmail.com

Article history: Received 1 June 2015, Received in revised form 20 July, 2015, Accepted 22 July 2015, Published 24 July 2015.

Abstract: First, we discuss relations between modern social sciences, sociology of religion and Buddhism. Next, we propose the basic principles of Buddhism, which are: (I) The essence of world principle is a world outlook. (II) The prajna (wisdom) principle is an epistemology and methodology. (III) The Dependant Origination (the law of causality) and the Emptiness of Nature principle is an outlook on life, and is also a rule on doing good works. These principles form a basic tree of Buddhism. Third, we search that Buddhism may exert more function in the present world crises.

Keywords: social science, sociology, Buddhism, principle, world crisis.

1. Introduction

Sociology of religion is the study of the beliefs, practices and organizational forms of religion using the tools and methods of the discipline of sociology. This objective investigation may include the use of both quantitative methods (surveys, polls, demographic and census analysis) and qualitative approaches such as participant observation, interviewing, and analysis of archival, historical and documentary materials (Weber 1990). Yinger (1957, 1970) studied religion, society, the individual and the scientific study of religion, and proposed the field theory of religion (Yinger 1965). N.Luhmann (1927-1998) discussed the function of religion.


Schipper (2012) searched Buddhist sociology and corresponding theories, methods, and possibilities, and explored potential links between Buddhism and sociology, highlighting the many commonalities between sociology and Buddhism, with an emphasis on ways that Buddhist thought and practice may contribute to the field of sociology. Buddhism can offer to our understanding of social institutions, social problems, and to the dynamics and possibilities for social change. The Four Noble Truths, central to Buddhist teachings, are explored in reference to their sociological theory applications. In this paper, we research modern social sciences, Buddhism and its basic principles, and possible action in the present world crises, etc.

2. Modern Social Sciences and Buddhism

Buddhism is rich and deep. In Buddhism Prajna means wisdom, and Maha Prajna is namely great wisdom. Philosophy is to love wisdom, which shows having or showing experience, knowledge, good judgement, prudence, etc. Therefore, Buddhism may is a type of philosophy. We discussed preliminarily consistency between Buddhism and the nonlinear whole sociology and cycle economics (Chang 2013b).

Sixth Patriarch in China is Hui Neng (638-713). His book *The Sutra of Hui Neng* explains everyone possesses Buddha-nature, and may reach Buddhahood directly. Descartes proposed: “Cogito, ergo sum.” When Bhikkhus viewed the wind or the pennant motion, Hui Neng said to them: “It was neither, and that what actually moved was their own mind.” This is that weltanschauung belongs to individual, and is human and mind philosophy. It has the advantage of harangue, and shows a relation of appearance and essence. This “all is mind, mind is all” is much visualized statement of Hume’s
perception. Then it aroused the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, and the Lu-Wang mind philosophy, etc. I think that Buddhism may be called the super-idealism. All is void, all is enlightenment, all is way, and all is the Essence of Mind (self-nature). Lao-tzu, Confucius and Hui Neng are three Chinese great saints. For philosophical meaning, the Hui Neng’s thought is more close to philosophy. He is a great philosopher of the most thoroughgoing subjective idealism, and is first comprehensive expression of the mind philosophy.

Philosophy of religion is the philosophical examination of the central themes and concepts involved in religious traditions. It includes B.P.Bowne (1847-1910), E.Mounier (1905-1950) and personalism; and neo-Thomism (Maritain 1952), and neo-orthodox theology (Tillich 1959), etc. Contemporary philosophy of religion involves all the main areas of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics and value theory, the philosophy of language, philosophy of science, law, sociology, politics, history, etc. Philosophy of religion also includes an investigation into the religious significance of historical events and general features of the cosmos. Neville (1995) discussed religions, philosophies, and philosophy of religion.

We extended the tree in the graph theory to a new tree-field representation (Chang 2012, 2013c, 2014c). It includes two parts: tree and field. A field is a set of legion small trees. Both can transform each other. This is a unification of simplicity (tree) and complexity (field), and may be applied to various complex systems on science, politics and economy, etc. In philosophy tree represents main research direction: human nature and whole order of cosmology (Wolff 2005), both corresponds to the mind philosophy and the Qi philosophy in Chinese traditional philosophy, their unification is namely Neo-Confucianism; field represents much other philosophical regions. In epistemology, tree is few realities, and field is multicoloured appearance (Wolff 2005). Field and tree as methodology correspond to that G.Deleuze (1925-1995) proposed “rhizome” or state thought, and “arborescent” or “nomadic thought”. Both may be connected with linear and nonlinear, revivification and chaos-whole thought, etc.

The relation between science and religion is searched (McGrath 1999; Harrison 2010). In fact, science and religion are not in the least complete opposite, and both possess inclusion and complementary. In particular, we discussed consistency of twenty aspects between Buddhism and modern science (Chang 2004). We think that philosophy is a method, which proves us to ponder on some big problems. But, it cannot be a way as guidance. A big funny mistake in scientific history is: After Uranus was observed, a well-known philosopher G.W.F.Hegel (1770-1831) satirized astronomers, who try to find eighth planet, and affirmed that if they advert to philosophy, only there are seven planets, their searches will be asinine daddle (Bell 1965).
We investigated possible unification of some ideal social sciences. The science of law should be based on ethics. Ethics is based on anthropology. Politics should be based on the science of law. The ideal sociology and economics should be based on ethics. Various ideal social sciences should be based on anthropology, in particular, social anthropology and culture anthropology (Chang 2014a). Of course, differences of various nations must exist for some specific rules in social sciences. Therefore, we should study simultaneously universality and speciality in social sciences. Religion is namely an important aspect in anthropology.

Sociology and philosophy of Buddhism includes “The Four Noble Truths”. It is came to the Buddha at the enlightenment, revolves around the logical process of seeing life, seeing all actions, not as we wish to see them, but as they really are. The first truth is that life always incorporates suffering. It can be the feeling you experience when you encounter pain, old age, sickness, loss, and can also represent a general unsatisfied feeling. The second noble truth is that suffering in its broad sense, comes from desire, and specifically, desire for meeting our expectations and for self fulfilment as we see it. By desiring for ourselves rather than the whole, we will always have suffering. The third noble truth tells us that if our attachment to desire ends, so too will the suffering. Specifically, if we change our perception and reduce our attachment to desire, suffering will also reduce. This is not intended to lead to a cancellation of the zest for life, but to an understanding of the nature of life and to controlling those desires which come from that lack of understanding. The fourth noble truth shows the way to of suffering. Buddha reached this middle way after himself living the extremes of life. The Noble Eightfold path leads to a way, which embraces life and is neither indulgent nor austere.


Buddhism and psychology are very consistency. Kalupahana (1987) discussed the principles of Buddhist psychology. Dockett, et al. (2002) edited psychology and Buddhism from individual to global community. Segall (2003) edited book Encountering Buddhism: Western Psychology and Buddhist Teachings. Mikulas (2007) searched fundamentals of integration on Buddhism and western psychology. He thought that essential Buddhism, the fundamental teachings of the historical Buddha and the core of all major branches of Buddhism, is psychology, not religion or philosophy. Essential Buddhism is described from a psychological perspective and interrelated with Western psychology in general, and cognitive science, behaviour modification, psychoanalysis, and transpersonal psychology, in specific. Integrating Buddhist psychology and Western psychology yields a more comprehensive psychology and more powerful therapies.
It is interesting that some conclusions of great king Marcus Aurelius (121-180)'s book *Meditations* are the same with Buddha's, and both are all very dignity.

### 3. Research on Basic Principles of Buddhism

Star and Bainbridge (1980, 1985) discussed a theory of religion as religious commitment, and the future of religion on secularization, revival and cult formation. They proposed a theory of religion, which includes seven axioms, 104 definitions and 344 propositions (Star et al. 1987).

Buddhism is quite simple, in essence. We research and propose the basic principles of Buddhism:

(I). The essence of world principle. From formation, dwelling, decay and emptiness of all bodies and phenomena, to birth, aging, sickness, and death of the mankind, or arising, abiding, changing and extinction of all existences, they are universal rule. This is the reality of life, and is also a fixed objective law of the universe and the essence of everything. It is a world outlook.

(II). The Prajna (wisdom) principle. It is the Four Noble Truths, i.e., suffering, accumulating, extinction and the way. Because all acts are transient, essential universal truths contain no ego-self, all desires are suffering, so nirvana is tranquility. Buddha says that nothing exists on its own, but always has come from earlier circumstances. It is an epistemology and methodology.

(III). The Dependant Origination (the law of causality) and the Emptiness of Nature principle. This is the most key principle. It is similar to cause and effect, and is the effect of karma power, but, it is not neither self causation nor external causation. It is an outlook on life, and is also a rule on doing good works. We should be enlightenment: all things in the universe are the Essence of Mind itself, for which neither created nor can it be annihilated. In essence, the Buddha did not see a separate and benevolent creator who could act on our behalf. He saw the interdependence of all life and the cause and effect of actions which create their own future. It is consistent with theorem of perfect correlation on humanity (Chang 2000, 2013a). Buddha said to have set in motion the Wheel of the Law. The world is woven of interconnected threads.

Based on (I), Buddhism leads us through (II) to reach (III). Further, from (III) we can enlighten (I) at a higher new level, and mind may reach peaceful and pleasure always. It forms the base and way of life on Buddhism. Other rules are supplement. For example, the Noble Eightfold path, and the commandments (the gauge rules) are supplements for (II). The Noble Eightfold path is Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. We may pass through commandment and meditation to reach wisdom. The Karmas of three lives are supplement for (III).
Buddha said that the way to suffering is to follow the middle way. This provides the guidelines for day to day living. These guidelines are covered in a different section. There is some analogy with the Ten Commandments in Christianity. Since the Dependant Origination in Buddhism is relative, so it obeys with the fair rule and has the human free rule, which is a selectable freedom. Right Effort shows just a type of the free rule. 2015 is anniversary centenary on general relativity, which shows that matter, mass and their movement determine the space-time of everyone. This is a universal physical representation of causality, and is also a great contribution of general relativity to modern social science (Chang 2014b). Everyone possesses fate and luck. Fate is various innate fields and surroundings. Luck is acquired activity and fortune, and they are changeable. Both aspects may be influence each other. “The times produce their heroes, and heroes produce their times.” This exhibits unification between inevitability and chanciness in history. The times are big surroundings and conditions of historical evolution, while chance and hero, etc., are various occasional factors of happened historical events.

For the same large surroundings of space-time, we depend on the Essence of Mind and thought self, and can grasp our destiny, and do good works. Buddhism possesses educational and moral meaning. Basis of Buddhism is that everyone has Buddha-nature. From the Emptiness of Nature and the same Essence of Nature, these derive necessarily the equality for every living being. Buddhism is the highest method of self-enlightenment and of mind-body pleasure, and is the only effective means which can be looked back after a long journey, and put down then obtain large comfortable (Shambhu) and large pleasure. Enlightenment has different levels, whose basis is looked back after a long journey (formation, dwelling, decay and emptiness of all bodies), put down, and follow karma (accept what comes according to circumstances), therefore, we will be happy everyday.

Based on the Emptiness of Nature we should enlighten that all living bodies are equality. Based on the Dependant Origination Buddhism can guide earthling to nobility. “Don't be evil, pursue the public good”. Tetra Pak affection, and compassion, then happy life. It is a value viewpoint. For different men Buddhism proposes different enlightenment methods. This is “Abundant method”. We should abandon desire, anger and ignorance, and practice the commandments, meditation and wisdom. These all are self-enlightenment.

According to the tree-field representation (Chang 2012), three principles form a tree of Buddhism. Other rules are various fields. Combining the three principles, we should be content with one’s lot, and be always pleasure.

4. Function of Buddhism in the Present World Crisis

Robertson (1987, 1992) investigated religion and its meaning in globalization. Religion can exert very important creativity effect. But, the secularization of religion as multidimensional
phenomenon shows also various pros and cons actions. Some scholars proposed universe of religion and universal religions.

Based on the social structure we introduced the social individual-wave duality, and researched the social topology and the social strain field. Further, the pattern dynamics and the damage mechanics in sociology are introduced. From this mechanism the crisis of society may be described mathematically by the qualitative analysis method. Moreover, we discuss some social phenomenon and war crisis (Chang 2015a). The laws of energy and entropy are two basic laws, both are also very important quantities necessarily considered in the development of economics and society. But, entropy is often misunderstood in some cases. We discussed the moderate degree of input negative entropy flow for open systems, and proposed possible entropy decrease due to internal interactions for isolated systems. From this we obtained a total formula of entropy change. Based on these basic social laws on energy and entropy, we discussed mainly some social sustainable developed patterns: 1) The nonlinear limit and cycle pattern of three elements; 2) the synergetic pattern on society-economy- environment developed together; 3) the promotion-restraint pattern on Five-Elements. Natural laws are unfeeling, but world is not pessimistic always (Chang 2015b).

Buddhism is more of a way of life than a religion, and its thought is happy everyday. Therefore, Maitreya is happy always, and world should be also harmonious and have true peace, and people will be full of happiness. Look round the present world, various crises have got entangled with our Earth Village (Chang 2013b). Faced on these crises we think that Buddhism may exert more function (Chang 2013d). Of course, Buddhism is also faced with much challenges and opportunities.

(1). For these crises, philosophers in 20 century proposed many correlated theories. For example, H.Marcuse (1898-1979) discussed leap of faith, E.Fromm (1900-1980) searched through self-love to realize heart health and social sanity. These are consistency with the sudden enlightenment on Chan, and with the basic thought of self-enlightenment and the Essence of Mind on The Sutra of Hui Neng.

Some philosopher, J.B.Rawls (1921-2002), C.M.Taylor (1931-), M.Walzer (1937-) and M.J.Sandel (1953-), et al., researched the social justice theories, which include various aspects (Rawls 1971; Rae 1981; Walzer 1983; Sandel 2010). For fifth Hwang Yan asked, Hui Neng replied: “Although there are northern men and southern men, north and south make no different to their Buddha-nature. A barbarian is different from Your Holiness physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha-nature.” This is the most thoroughgoing equality outlook for all flesh in Buddhism. The Sutra of Hui Neng said: “Realisation of the Essence of Mind is good deserts, and equality is good quality.” The equality is the basic precondition of the social harmony.
(2) At present the Chan-Ding tends already towards world. The Sutra of Hui Neng said: “What is Chan-Ding? Chan means to be free from attachment to all outer objects, and Ding means to attain inner peace.” It should further carry forward. This is the only way of advance taste and level for practice, and redounds to resolve human crises, and accelerates world peace. It is also the general Buddhism civilization bionomics (Chang 2006b).

A main function of Buddhism in psychology is to adjust self-mind. It is the same with new simple living (Luhrs 1997). Any succeed and fortune is only outer glory, but real happiness is origin of finding unique selfhood and keeping spirit serenity. Buddhism sparkplugs allowance and lifeway with mind serenity and few desires. It will be propitious to mind-body health and social progress. This is an important aspect that Buddhism may combines modern society (Chang 2006a).

(3) Life and death are a human eternal proposition, and are researched by religion and philosophy, in particular, existentialism.

Existentialism researches dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment, nothingness and so on, in particular, death, as true existence of life (Marcel 1968; Cooper 1999). The major philosophers include S.A.Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and F.W.Nietzsche (1844-1890) in the nineteenth century, and M.Heidegger (1889-1976), J-P.Sartre (1905-1980), K.Jaspers (1883-1969), G.Marcel (1889-1978), S.de Beauvoir (1908-1986), M. Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), and A. Gamus (1913-1960), et al (Heidegger 1962, 1985; Sartre 1968, 1992). Existentialism does not deny the validity of the basic categories of physics, biology, psychology, and the other sciences. But, it claims only that human beings cannot be fully understood in terms of them. Nor can such an understanding be gained by supplementing our scientific picture with a moral one. Moran (2001) emphasized the connection between self-avowal and the first-person perspective in a way that derives in part from Sartre; and Thomas Nagel has followed the existentialist line in connecting meaning to the consciousness of death. For anniversary centenary of Tolstoy’s die we discussed the relation between Tolstoy’s view on life and death and existentialism based on a story of life on Tolstoy and his deep description for death and realize for life, and searched generally an internal connection between his idea and Buddhism (Chang 2010).

The Dependent Origination and the Emptiness of Nature are the basic principles of Buddhism. The Dependent Origination explains that all things are origin of karma, and are dependence one another. Hui Neng said: “Maha prajnaparamita means great wisdom to reach the opposite shore (of the sea of existence)”, and said: “It is only natural that I should go, for death is the inevitable outcome of birth, and even the various Buddhas who appear in this world have to go through an earthly dearth before entering Parinirvana.” From this life and death may be surmounted. An ideal state of Buddhism
is without differences between life and death, and between me and world. A true man should surpass all funks, especial for death.

(4) The precondition of harmony is to accept differences, and assort with divarications. Any complete unification is not real, and is also impossible, because various differences exist necessarily for different nations, cultures and religions.

Simple living will decrease desires, and equality of all flesh will decrease dispute. Everyone is equal faced on death, which proves that fame and gain all are empty. We should consider self-death everyday, and transform those meaningless pursue and life style, and do necessary work, because life is briefness. Buddhism emphasizes “to refrain from all evil actions, and to practice whatever is good.” These are fundamental basis for social harmony and world peace.

5. Conclusions

In a word, life is very short, and is essentially simple. True is also essentially simple. We should enjoy life, and love truth, goodness and beauty. Modern society brings man to alienate, and mazes oneself, and lose the Essence of Mind. Based on the basic principles of Buddhism, it can exert positive role for mind-body culture, for self-enlightenment, for sustainable development on people-society-environment. Everyone can meditate self-questioning, and decrease desires and dispute. Buddhism may exert more function in the present world crises. This should also be a developed direction of society, and a pursued aim of modern men.

Human always pursue felicity. But, what is felicity? It is a find oneself. Dante’s The Divine Comedy describes visually different meanings and bourns of life. Philosophy and reason guide our through hell and purgatory, and belief guides into paradise. Three are unified. Reason and belief are duet of life. Hell, purgatory and paradise are trilogy of splendid life. These living movement and process are exceed epoch, and it is an eternal pursue. The Divine Comedy shows just this eternal truth of life. The highest paradise of felicity exists only in belief and religion. As long as belief is not fallacious, you with belief are namely happy. If you tasted happy, anyone cannot deprive your felicity.

References

Chang Yi-Fang. (2006a). Hong Kong Buddhism. No2:3; No3:5.


