On Fundamental Values of Buddhism
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Abstract. This paper explains three fundamental concepts of equality, life and charity, aiming to discuss the reason that Buddhism was prosperous perennially and its influence on modern society. It is a gradual and continual fusion of Indian Buddhism and Chinese native culture and the former greatly influenced on values of the later during about 2000 years since Buddhism was introduced to China. What Buddhism advocates, such as ideology of equality, respect for lives and bearing with charity, is still useful for us. It is crucial and necessary to give a clear explanation on above concepts so as to study Chinese traditional values.

Equality

In Liang Qichao’s The Relationship between Buddhism and the Group, he presented that Buddhism aims at equalizing ordinary persons to Buddha. Huayan Sutra from the 60-volume version of Jin dynasty comes up with the same statements which says all creatures can become Buddha who focuses on the mind, so the mind, Buddha and all creatures are the same. Indiscrimination refers to equality which means all beings are equal to Buddha. In Fayan Sutra, Zu Daosheng said directly none beings are different from Buddha. In Tan Sutra, Huineng also said all beings are endowed by prajna as Buddha…… the nature of beings is the same for the fool as well as the wise. If Buddha represents the sound perfection and the supreme goodness, it means affirming the inner goodness and perfection of all beings because they are equal to Buddha. In practical life, it is possible for all beings with different faculty and status to return its self by striving constantly. Buddhism also advocates that all beings can become Buddha. The fifth volume of a version of zaAhan Sutra emphasizes the crucial way to becoming Buddha is to experience and practice by returning to the self-mind. “It should be shown what did he do Instead of Where was he born; it is possible for the humble to be moralist and for the twig to make a fire.”

From the view of equality between Buddha and all beings, it contains the implication of equality between all beings. Chang Ahan Sutra defines all creatures which are equal without differences whatever a woman or a man, the humble or the honorable, the senior or the junior. The definition implies that all beings have the shared appellation and are equal to each other, ignoring all differences on sexes and statuses. Buddhism demonstrates the value of equality of all beings not only on the theoretic level, but also on the practical level. Chang ahan sutra states that Buddha warns his believers that all castes of India are equal in Buddhism faith. “My followers who were born of different castes believe what buddha preaches. They should remember they should reply they are Buddhist if someone questions their castes”. chang a han sutra records many stories about buddha’s begging with Buddhists and all creatures. It demonstrates the value of Buddhism is to build up equal personal relationship. In Chinese Buddhism it is a famous legacy written in tan sutra that Hongren, the fifth founder of the Chan sect, passes his legacy to Huineng, born of humble family in Lingnan.

Except above all, a variate of equality told in Buddhism sutras reflects that Buddhism highlights the value of equality. In Xin huayan sutra it is told ten equalities endowed by Buddha: the equality of all creatures, the equality of all laws, the equality of all moments, the equality of all heart, the
equality of all goodness, the equality of all Bodhidharma, the equality of all wishes, the equality of all paramita, the equality of all behaviors and the equality of all Buddhas. While Bodhidharma abides on the law, he will obtain the supreme wit of all Buddhas. Ten equality including the equality of karma and the equality of retribution and so on is also written in the sutra. The equality of all creatures, the equality of laws, the equality of peace, the equality of donation, the equality of discipline, the equality of tolerance, the equality of diligence, the equality of meditation, the equality of wisdom and the equality of highest law. All sorts of equality demonstrate Buddhism aims at realizing all equality on different level including beings, laws, countries, practice and Buddhas. The master Qingyuan of Song Dynasty said it is not so far like Buddhism to value equality best of all.

Life Respect

Buddhism admires human beings and believes that life is the most important and valuable. In Buddhism belief, it is said that the whole life is bitter and there are a span from three kinds to hundred kinds of bitter. During the whole life, there are eight fundamental bitters: living, oldness, sickness, death, love and leaving, resentment and hatred, seeking and losing and five skandhas. Nevertheless, it is not the best method by giving up the life or to die directly to get over the sufferings and bitter. Buddha warns it is a crime for Buddhist monks to suicide and fast. On the contrary, Buddhism believes it is a significant value for a life to face its death bravely. Dazhidulun of lunshu tells a story on a merchant who enlightens the essence of the life when his ship sinks.

A merchant set off the sea to look for treasure. While it was not far that the ship left off the bank, it broke and all treasures lost.

“I almost lost my treasure “Joyfully he raised his hand and said.

Others asked with puzzle: “you escaped from the disaster with losing all treasures just soon and why did you say so joyfully”

“Among all treasures life is the most valuable. One lives for the life by treasures instead of for the treasures by the life” the merchant answered.

The celebration of the merchant on his survived life affirms the value of the life in Buddhism.

Buddhism emphasizes not only the value of the life, but also respect to all creatures. One should regard all creatures as his own life equally. Anybody is as same as others with different names and in essence they are born out of same caste with different appearance. Buddhism advocates that the life should be treated and respected equality as well as parents that is endowed in human relations. Fanwang sutra says: “all creatures from six realms are my parents because all men are my fathers, all women my mothers and I subject to them. It means killing my own parents or my own body out of them if I murder one of them.” It takes for granted to respect parents because they are the persons who hatch their life. The primary principle to treat the life is to respect their lives as well as parents.

Buddhism bases on respect to all lives as its principle on which the creed is drawn up to constrain beings’ behavior. Buddha forbids prominently killing lives by values the lives of all creatures. Buddha tells us not to murder others’ lives because all creatures are worth to cherish. In ahan sutra lists no killing on the top of ten correct paths. Dazhidu sutra says murdering is the most serious crime of all crimes; no murdering is the loftiest of all virtues. Except above all, Buddha warns firmly that beings, all living things, even all causes, reasons, laws, karma should not be killed or wiped out deliberately the way of suicides, murdering, criticizing or cursing. The quotations by Buddha are regard as Buddhist creeds and principles which reflect its goal to respect and cherish lives.

Charity

Buddhism advocates that one should bear with charity and do the good. Zengyi a han records Buddhist Jiaye asking Anan on the essence of Buddhism. Anan sums up the fundamental creeds of Buddhism: the goal of Buddhism is to do good things and to avoid bad things, and then the person who is aware of it will be a Buddha. Anan explains specifically that avoiding bad things is to
control self-behavior; lofty virtue is to do good things; the peaceful mind is to enlighten the goal of Buddhism; eliminating evil and disaster is to getting rid of foolish and puzzled thoughts. The former two factors build up the merciful practice of the moral subject on moral principle and value orientation. The latter two factors emphasize self-establishment and self-realization from the inner quality. Basing on them, it is obvious that Buddhism claims its fundamental creeds are merciful mind and practice. The creeds reflect the fundamental value defined as charity. Charity is the essence of Buddhism… the greatest of all laws.

Charity is to show kindness. Buddha said “what is kindness? It is to practice merciful action.” That is to say the behavior of practicing the law of Buddhism is kindness, in reverse, the kindness is explicitly shown during practicing. Charity, according to Sanzang rules by Mingyiru, contains two concepts: one is love; the other is compassion. Love is an affection which refers to joyful or delightful feeling caused by inner happiness and shared with others. Compassion is a pity which refers to sympathetic feeling caused by other’s bitter and avoiding it. Charity is shown the way of sharing love and avoiding bitter. Both love and compassion are kindness. Daboro sutra records 22 kindness including two factors which are manifested by merciful action. All laws are based on the mind which determines all results according to the rule of cause and effect. Apitan mind sutra says that kindness is the result transferred by enlightening the mind. Buddha teaches all creatures and practice his love and compassion to all creatures, basing on his kindness. Chang ahan sutra says Buddha teaches four truths of life, bearing with charity. Fajiyaosong sutra says Buddha as a teacher with charity for the wise preaches the truth of the world to us.

Buddhism believes that the kind mind leads good behaviors because the mind determines behaviors. The essence of Buddhism is the merciful mind with which one bears will do correct action. Wuliangshou sutra says charity is born from Buddha and demonstrated to all creatures. The mind of Buddha is Charity with which Buddha appeals to all followers equally. The image of bodhisattvas is created to represent kindness in Buddhism. According to putixingjing bodhisattvas do good things and don’t care for wealth and frame. Miaofalianhuajing advocates their kindness of salvation. Fayuanzhulin written by the master Shidaoshi in Tang Dynasty says relief of bodhisattvas on the surface bases on their kindness inside so as to help the poor and sick. Putizilianglun points out the moral realm of bodhisattvas is to seek after the natural law and lofty virtues so as to get rid of bitter of all creatures instead of to request self-happiness, careless of wealth and frame.

The above Buddhist values show an angle of iceberg of its ideology which is up for sorting and studying systematically. Among them, there are many subjects such as conflicts between values of Buddhism and Confucianism, the modern value of Buddhism etc. worth researching for their historical and practical value.

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References