

The Three Maxims in the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to construct Myanmar thought based on Myanmar Myth, such as the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing. As Philosophy is the replacement of category habits by category disciplines, we can find out the three Maxims in the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing. They can be regarded as category habits and they can be replaced and constructed by category disciplines of Buddhist Philosophy such as action (*kamma*), knowledge (*ñāna*) and effort (*virīya*). So this paper is a study of the relationship between philosophy and the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing.

Keywords: Category habits, Category disciplines, Myth

Introduction

Every race in the world has the own myths and legends. They are passed down from the spirituality of ancient ancestors to their descendants. Accordingly, myths and legends are valued, everywhere in the world, as the most important cultural heritage of people. Myths are generally narratives about divine or heroic beings, arranged coherent system, passed down traditionally and linked to the spiritual or religious life of a community. Some myths descended originally as part of an oral tradition and were only later written down and many of them exist in multiple versions. The word “mythology” literally means the oral retelling of myth. Myths are often intended to explain the universal and local beginning natural phenomena, inexplicable cultural convention and anything else for which no simple explanation is present. Myanmar myths can be regarded as intellectual and cultural resources of Myanmar people. So we can say that culture and myths are very closely related.

The Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing is well known in our Myanmar society. There are three maxims in this myth. These maxims are category habits in our daily life. Category habit is a kind of habit based on habitual actions of man in his daily life. Category discipline is a kind of concepts based on some systems of philosophical theories. For this reason, the category habits in the myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing can be replaced and constructed by category disciplines of some ethical concepts of Buddhist Philosophy such as Action (*kamma*), Knowledge (*ñāna*) and an Effort (*virīya*). This is a study of relationship between Myth and contemporary ways of life in Myanmar Theravāda Buddhist society.

The Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing

In Myanmar culture, there have been myths and legends since ancient times. One of the most famous myths was “Maung Pauk Kyaing”. There is a person named Maung Pauk Kyaing, in the age of Tagaung. Maung Pauk Kyaing was a student at a university for three years. At the end of the course of three years, professor gave him the following three maxims of wisdom. These are as follows,

- (1) If you walk on and on, you get to your destination.
- (2) If you question much, you get your information.
- (3) If you do not sleep and idle, you preserve your life.

So Maung Pauk Kyaing left the University for his home. Before returning to his village, he decided to go and see the wonderful city of Dagaung. Dagaung was many miles away, so he traveled on foot. At last he reached Dagaung and he realized how true and valuable the first principle or maxim that “If you walk on and on, you get to your destination”. We infer that this maxim becomes the concept of Action.

At Dagaung, he obtained the interesting information that the kingdom was ruled by a queen and not by a king. After repeated questioning, he discovered that the queen had been married to several kings in turn, but each king had mysteriously died in bed on the wedding night. Nobody wanted to marry the queen. Maung Pauk Kyaing was glad to get this information, and he realized, with gratitude, the second maxim that “If you question much, you get your information”.

Maung Pauk Kyaing reached the palace where he informed the ministers that he was willing to marry the queen. He was duly wedded to her, and declared to be king. When he went to the royal bed-chamber at night, he took the stem of a banana plant which was his height, and hid it under the bed. He then got into bed and, pretending to be asleep, waited for the queen, who came in soon after and fell asleep by his place on the bed and, covering it with the blankets, he made it look as if it was a man who was sleeping. Then he hid himself behind a pillar and waited events. Some hours later, he saw a dragon which appeared from behind the rafters, and slid down the pillar nearest the royal bed. Dragon was killed with one stroke of his sword. So he realized the third maxim or principle that “If you do not sleep and idle, you preserve your life”. We also think that the last maxim comes out as the concept of Effort.

The Philosophical Point of View

(1) The Concept of Action

The first maxim is that “If you walk on and on, you get to your destination”. This means that to do something, otherwise we travel for the goal or end. Everybody should have aims. A man does not possess the success in life without practical efforts. We need to have right means and right ends. In Buddhism, most of Myanmar people believe in the law of *Kamma*. *Kamma* means action; our actions determine our life. If we do the bad, we will be bad in life, and if we do the good, we will be good in life. So, *Kamma* means law of cause and effect. We should do very careful good deeds. The more we understand the law of *kamma*, the more careful we are of our acts, words and thoughts and how responsible our fellow beings. Our actions govern our future life. To be a good life, we must be had good conducts. So man is also a performer.

(2) The Concept of Knowledge

The second maxim is that “If you question much, you get your information” meaning that we ask the questions in order to get the information or knowledge. Curiosity or inquisitiveness is a distinctive feature of human beings. When we want to know about the world where we live and what we wondered and doubted we asked questions. In the Western philosophy, it is said that philosophy begins with the question such as, “what is the start of the universe?” So, the question is more important than the answer in philosophy. In the study of philosophy, epistemology is one of the branches of philosophy. The philosopher who is engaged in epistemology concerned with the question about the nature of knowledge and criteria for knowledge. Man’s action has a definite aim and that aim leads to all bodily verbal and mental actions. Among them, verbal action is concerned with the question that is important in Buddhism; a right view is one of the eightfold noble path. The right view is defined as the

correct knowledge about the four noble truths. In our daily life, we need to have the right view. If we have the right view then we will get right knowledge.

According to Socrates, we need to have asked, examined and evaluated about life as a worthy living person. Because, Socrates said that “the unexamined life is not worth living”. The task of philosophy is to find out the question or problem we have faced. To ask the question is to get the knowledge.

(3) The Concept of Effort

The third maxim is that “If you do not sleep and idle, you preserve your life”. It is meant that everybody has to act with right effort to achieve good life and aim. The word “effort” means to endeavor with awareness to do something. We need to make an effort in order to overcome sufferings of our life. A person who either accepts the right view or eliminates evil or wrong views to improve his morality, everywhere, must have right effort. In Buddhism there is eightfold noble path, right effort is important for our good life. Thus the concept of effort is very closely related and interrelated to the former concepts, “Action” and “knowledge”. To get knowledge we need effort. Only if we can apply this knowledge with effort then we will lead to good actions and good aims. We need to apply both theory and practice. There is a motto, “Theory is the light that illuminates the practical life and life is the touch-stone or yardstick of the truth”. Practice without theory is blind and theory without practice is useless. We can test the validity of theory by applying it to the practical life. So, effort is a very important factor for the achievement of our goal.

Conclusion

The unity of actions, knowledge and efforts are the essence of Myth of the Maung Pauk Kyaing. We can extract as three principles with three concepts from Buddhist Philosophy. In Buddhism, There is Eightfold Noble Path. They are: (1) Right View, (2) Right Resolve, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Conduct, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness and (8) Right Concentration.

The concept of knowledge is concerned with right view and right resolve. The concept of morality is concerned with right speech, right conduct and right livelihood. The concept of concentration is concerned with right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Moreover, the first maxim refers to right action, the second maxim refers to right view, and the third maxim refers to right effort. In studying the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing, the three maxims or principles can be regarded as category habits and these are replaced by category disciplines as the concept of ‘Action’, ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Effort’. They are based on Buddhism. Three maxims can be constructed as Myanmar contemporary ways of thinking.

Based on these three principles we can extract moral criteria from the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing. They are self-reliance, self- control and self- confidence. We should have these powers for our achievement of life and obligation. Moreover, we can find the three concepts in Myanmar way of thinking based on the Myth of Maung Pauk Kyaing. These are as follows;

- (1)The Concept of Action (*kamma*)
- (2)The Concept of Knowledge (*ñāna*)
- (3)The Concept of Effort (*virīya*)

The unity of three maxims is a basic principle of Myanmar philosophy based on Theravāda Buddhism. When we review the Myanmar way of life, it can be said that knowledge without action is nothing and action without effort is also inadequate for life. Therefore we can conclude that the unity of these three concepts can be regarded as virtue in Myanmar way of thinking.

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