

BUDDHIST ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION 4.0

by Do Thu Ha*

ABSTRACT

Technology Revolution 4.0 is the great innovation of the world, of mankind, which brings great achievements to the development of human production and life, however, it also puts human beings in the midst of many challenges and new risks. The paper chooses several points that, according to the author, are positively related to the sustainable values of Buddhism, suggesting the possibility of promoting such sustainable values to limit the negative impacts of the new industrial revolution, to increase factors of humanity, to continue developing human and human values in the new age.

The paper mentions 03 main issues involved in the fourth industrial technology revolution such as (i). Point raising, (ii). Revisiting Buddhist philosophy via Technology Revolution 4.0; (iii). Connecting Buddhism with technology, connecting with the human spirit and social responsibility and (iv). Social networking, cyber society, cultivated netizens and Buddhism.

1. POINT RAISING

We are living in the 21st century when mankind has so far gone through tremendous development. The hands and the mind of man have created miraculous values: artificial intelligence,

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Department of Indian Studies VNU, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam.

advanced technology, large databases, global connectivity, smart cities, manufacturing and intelligent services are constantly being deployed. However, humanity is also facing the challenges, the unprecedented risks in history. Climate change and environmental pollution, depleted resources, ethnic conflicts, ideological, cultural and economic conflicts, poverty and terrorism, transnational diseases, the problem of autism and suicide on a large scale ... The suffering still clings to humanity on the whole mankind. Greed, ignorance and desire are still lulled. Individuals are still putting up a lot of risk.

Currently, in the year 2018, human beings were saying much about, cheering, implementing the 4th industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0. This new revolution is evaluated: "... completely different in stature, scale and complexity from in any other previous revolution. Featuring a new set of technologies that blends the physical world, the digital world, and the biological world, the evolution of the fourth industrial revolution is affecting every rule, every economy, every industry and government, even challenging the connotation of "human" concept¹.

This is a huge technological, economic, cultural and social movement from east to west. This technological revolution implements the global digitization, bigdata building, maximizes artificial intelligence, internet of things, performing all activities with the attendance and support of information technology. This is an individualized movement for serving objects and consumer demand, relation innovation, production and service. "Innovation" and "Connection" are two particularly important keywords. This new industrial revolution creates new production capacities that better meet human needs, expand human limitations. Individualistic human beings are also emphasized and satisfied at higher levels of utility than any other revolutions. One can predict the material effects, the natural environment, and the advantages of the revolution on human life, but its effects on social life and human life are still showing up gradually. People just feel, just see some

1. Klaus Schwab. 2018. Forewords, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. National Political Publishing House. Hanoi.

of its aspects on both positive and negative sides. Social activists, social science researchers and humanists are having a lot of work ahead. The paper tries to raise some points of the possibilities that can bring into play the advantages of Buddhism in supporting and complementing the human beings and humanistic aspects of the new industrial revolution, in the direction of increasing positive values, minimizing the negative effects of this new revolution.

2. REVISITING BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY VIA TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION 4.0

The new industrial revolution better meets the needs, in the direction of individualizing and providing services to every individual and intelligent services. This also means to stimulate and promote human desire and ambition. Whether the great religions and the humanistic doctrines want or not, they have discussed, analyzed, and given their notions of human desire and ambition, which mostly expresses their concerns for human sufferings caused by their own lust and ambition. So how are all of these modern phenomena related to the philosophy of Buddhist ethics and philosophy?

Buddhist ethics are traditionally based on what Buddhists view as the enlightened perspective of the Buddha, or other enlightened beings such as Bodhisattvas. The Indian term for ethics or morality used in Buddhism is *Śīla* (Sanskrit: शील) or *sīla* (Pali). *Śīla* in Buddhism is one of three sections of the Noble Eightfold Path, and is a code of conduct that embraces a commitment to harmony and self-restraint with the principal motivation being nonviolence, or freedom from causing harm. It has been variously described as virtue², right conduct³, morality⁴, moral discipline⁵ and precept.

2. Harvey, Peter (2000), *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (PDF), Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-511-07584-1, p.199.

3. Edelglass, William (2013), "Buddhist Ethics and Western Moral Philosophy" (PDF), in Emmanuel, Steven M., *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (1st ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 476–90, ISBN 978-0-470-65877-2, p.242.

4. Gombrich (2002), p. 89; Nyanatiloka (1988), entry for "sīla"; Archived June 13, 2016, at the Wayback Machine and Saddhatissa (1987), pp. 54, 56.

5. Peter Harvey *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* Cambridge University Press 2000, page 195.

Sīla is an internal, aware, and intentional ethical behavior, according to one's commitment to the path of liberation. It is an ethical compass within self and relationships, rather than what is associated with the English word «morality» (i.e., obedience, a sense of obligation, and external constraint).

Sīla is one of the three practices foundational to Buddhism and the non-sectarian Vipassana movement — *sīla*, *samadhi*, and *panna* as well as the Theravadin foundations of *sīla*, Dana, and Bhavana. It is also the second paramita⁶. *Sīla* is also wholehearted commitment to what is wholesome. Two aspects of *sīla* are essential to the training: right “performance” (*caritta*), and right “avoidance” (*varitta*). Honoring the precepts of *sīla* is considered a «great gift» (*mahadana*) to others, because it creates an atmosphere of trust, respect, and security. It means the practitioner poses no threat to another person's life, property, family, rights, or well-being⁷.

Moral instructions are included in Buddhist scriptures or handed down through tradition. Most scholars of Buddhist ethics thus rely on the examination of Buddhist scriptures and the use of anthropological evidence from traditional Buddhist societies, to justify claims about the nature of Buddhist ethics⁸.

All phenomena, the Buddha once said, are rooted in desire. Everything we think, say, or do - every experience - comes from desire. Even we come from desire. We were reborn into this life because of our desire to be. Consciously or not, our desires keep redefining our sense of who we are. Desire is how we take our place in the causal matrix of space and time. The only thing not rooted in desire is nirvana, for it's the end of all phenomena and lies even beyond the Buddha's use of the word “all.” But the path that takes you to nirvana is rooted in desire — in skillful desires.

6. Horner, I.B. (trans.) (1975; reprinted 2000). *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon* (Part III): ‘Chronicle of Buddhas’ (*Buddhavamsa*) and ‘Basket of Conduct’ (*Cariyapitaka*). Oxford: Pali Text Society. ISBN 0-86013-072-X.

7. Mirka Knaster, *Living This Life Fully: Teachings of Anagarika Munindra*, Shambhala Publications, USA, 2010. Pg. 67.

8. Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* Macmillan 1992; Peter Harvey *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* Cambridge University Press 2000.

The path to liberation pushes the limits of skillful desires to see how far they can go.

That's why it is necessary to set policies, methods and points of view to protect humanity and human conscience by self-cultivation. The Buddhist methods of self-cultivation such as sutra-reading, ritual worship, abundant offering and charitable practices, strict observance of the Canons of Discipline, Name-reciting, Ch'an Meditation, taking a journey to visit venerable monks living in secluded places, and so forth are numerous and diversified.

The Avatamaska Sutra says: If one does not understand one's own mind, how can he know the Right Way? It is because of the perverted mind that he only increases his evil deeds.

The Sandinirmocana Sutra also says: If one does not understand the Dharma of Formlessness, he can hardly wipe out contaminations.

According to the Vairocana Sutra: Bodhi means understanding the reality of self-mind...

From this, it may be clearly seen that to practise Buddhism, we should cultivate self-awareness; by developing awareness, we can also develop concentration and wisdom to understand the mind and the self-nature, so that we may wipe out our various habits and realize the Truth of Life by self-experiencing; so that we may turn subjective thinking into objective awareness and look deeply into things before us from their phenomena to their substance, liberate ourselves from the suffering of birth and death in this world and then attain the supreme and perfect Enlightenment - this is practically the gist of Buddhism, and mind you, it is also the fundamental objective of Buddhism!

It can be said that Buddhism is very experienced in persuading people to cultivate, train to master human lust, to regulate human desire and ambition, to set free the spirit so that man can reach rational behavior, harmony among individuals and between individuals and the community. The self-cultivation, self-control, self-monitoring of traditional Buddhism, if promoted, will benefit individuals to regulate their desire and ambition in the context of new production and service backgrounds that can surely promote lust.

3. CONNECTING BUDDHISM WITH TECHNOLOGY, CONNECTING WITH THE HUMAN SPIRIT AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The new industrial revolution advocates connecting man to man, social networking is a tool that turns society into a real network. There are two issues here, the issue of social networking on the internet and the socialization of the social network, which is connected by social networks to many layers of small groups, big groups and extremely big groups to the biggest group of the whole mankind.

Buddhism has advocated building a social order, in which the links create order, individuals and elements of society have the best spiritual and personal life, but the personality and the human values of individuals are determined in relation to the community and they are only formed and confirmed in relation to the community (with others). So it included a maximum connection. It is not just connected in form or bound by social responsibility (as child, husband, student or teacher ... in family and society), the connection is also made self-discipline depth from inner feelings, from human personality. Relationships and connections are self-made in the sense of humanity and the human ideal.

In the Eightfold Path the Buddha talks about Right Thought or Right Aspiration, which has three aspects. *The first* is cultivating thoughts that are free from desire, discarding transitory experience, and developing a sense of inner contentment. *The second* is cultivating thoughts free from ill will and resentment; this means cultivating thoughts of compassion and gentleness. *The third* is cultivating thoughts free from cruelty; this means nourishing the forces of kindness and active love within us. With a sense of Right Aspirations we can use all the different situations we face as stepping stones, this is the thread that unites all the moments of our lives. Each moment becomes an opportunity.

Does the world need more medicine and energy and buildings and food? Not really. There are enough resources for all of us. There is starvation and poverty and disease because of ignorance, prejudice, and fear, because we board materials and create wars over imaginary geographic boundaries and act as if one group of people is truly different from another group somewhere else on the planet.

What the world needs is not more oil, but more love and generosity, more kindness and understanding. The most fundamental thing we can do to help this war-torn and suffering world is to genuinely free ourselves from the greed and fear and divisive views in our own minds, and then help others to do the same. Thus, a spiritual life is not a privilege; it is a basic social responsibility. From the *Dhammapada*, Verse 270, the Buddha says: “One is not called noble who harms living beings. By not harming living beings one is called noble.” Or “When watching after yourself, you watch after others. When watching after others, you watch after yourself”, as the Buddha says in the *Samyutta Nikaya*.

This kind of connection is the spirit of selflessness, the spirit of compassion. It is also the most durable and deepest connection. The connection is based on the transformation of human desire and ambition, from the desire for the individual to the desire for others. That makes the practice goodness for others become stronger, livelier, a permanent demand. It is very simple, normal but very powerful as well.

Buddhism since the early stage has especially emphasized the connection, the linkage of people. The difference is that modern human connectivity is based on technology and information connectivity. Buddhism attaches great importance to the human spirit and sentiments. Buddhism regards this connection as a part of the very activity of cultivation, activity of personality. This kind of mental connection can bring about better effects on human relations in the new age of technology, increasing the sense of social responsibility and empathy of human beings in the activities of technology connection.

The new industrial age with the support of technology, of artificial intelligence, of the internet of things not only connects man to man but also man to things, and everything with each other. The connection of the whole world realized by digital technology is likely to be better if one emphasizes on incorporating a familiar Philosophy of Heaven - Earth – Humanity in Unity model of Buddhism.

That connection extends the limits for man, making the spiritual life vast and enriched, so that the cultivation of human beings is not

limited in the ordinary life, but great and eternal. That connection is based on self-confidence, self-awareness, self-contentment of man. This connection is in a self-conscious and lively manner.

4. SOCIAL NETWORKING, CYBER SOCIETY, CULTIVATED NETIZENS AND BUDDHISM

New technological life creates the maximum connection of man and things, things with each other and with man. As mentioned above, that connection is the achievement of technology, the universal digitization, the bigdata, of the artificial intelligence and the internet. The connection of new technology needs to pay attention to the human factor and put human beings in the ultimate position, otherwise internet of things will become meaningless, or the dangerous technology game and goes against the human tradition that has been built in the East and the West for thousands of years.

Self-cultivation, self-monitoring and self-control are the basic methods of Buddhist cultivation of personality. In today's virtual world, people can hide their faces, can put their nicknames, can express their views without being responsible for their speech or directly bearing the consequences. In this case, the personality training in the way of Buddhist cultivation can be effective. The Five Precepts are the basis of Buddhist morality. They are not all of it. We start by recognizing our bad behavior and striving to stop doing it. That is what the Five Precepts are for. After we have stopped doing bad, we then commence to do good. Take for example, speech. The Buddha says we should start by refraining from telling lies. After that, we should speak the truth, speak gently and politely and speak at the right time. Buddha says: "Giving up false speech he becomes a speaker of truth, reliable, trustworthy, dependable, he does not deceive the world. Giving up malicious speech he does not repeat there what he has heard here nor does he repeat here what he has heard there in order to cause variance between people. He reconciles those who are divided and brings closer together those who are already friends. Harmony is his joy, harmony is his delight, harmony is his love; it is the motive of his speech. Giving up harsh speech his speech is blameless, pleasing to the ear, agreeable, going to the heart, urbane, liked by most. Giving up idle chatter he speaks

at the right time, what is correct, to the point, about Dhamma and about discipline. He speaks words worth being treasured up, seasonable, reasonable, well defined and to the point.”

So, before “throwing stones” to others or another virtual character (behind that is a real person), please think, we can hide our face but God knows, heaven knows, earth knows. When we act with hidden face, please take it into consideration that there are hundreds or thousands of eyes watching our behavior. If you think like that, people will act cautiously, will “throw stones” in a more responsible way.

5. CONCLUSION

It has been internationally accepted that the trend of this global village has become the Fourth Industrial Revolution or 4IR that has been built by integrating technologies on electronics and information of the third revolution. While technologies have been affecting humankind, the borderlines between physical, mental and digital are hardly defined among humans. Though technologies have been focused by all sectors, the world will always need human brilliance, human ingenuity and human skills. Power of data needs to be utilized by power of people. It has been argued that emerging new technologies have been socially and economically widening the gap between the north and the south, the rich and the poor and the ignorant and the educated. In addition, the inexorable integration of technology could diminish some of humans’ quintessential capacities, specially compassion and cooperation. In this scenario, to care and share or having compassion and cooperation among humankind is, thus, a crucial element that people can use their potentialities to utilize these technologies not only for their own wealth but for the well-being of all members in society. And Buddhism can bring us that wonderful power.

Reference

- Edelglass, William (2013), “*Buddhist Ethics and Western Moral Philosophy*” (PDF), in Emmanuel, Steven M., *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (1st ed.), Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 476–90, ISBN 978-0-470-65877-2
- Gwynne, Paul (2017), *World Religions in Practice: A Comparative Introduction*, John Wiley & Sons, ISBN 978-1-118-97227-4
- Harvey, Peter (2000), *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (PDF), Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-511-07584-1
- Keown, Damien (2003), *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-157917-2
- Keown, Damien (2012), “*Are There Human Rights in Buddhism?*”, in Husted, Wayne R.; Keown, Damien; Prebish, Charles S., *Buddhism and Human Rights*, Routledge, pp. 15–42, ISBN 978-1-136-60310-5
- Keown, Damien (2016b), *Buddhism and Bioethics*, Springer Nature, ISBN 978-1-349-23981-8
- Ratanakul, P. (2007), “*The Dynamics of Tradition and Change in Theravada Buddhism*”, *The Journal of Religion and Culture*, 1 (1): 233–57, CiteSeerX 10.1.1.505.2366, ISSN 1905-8144
- Seeger, M. (2010), “*Theravāda Buddhism and Human Rights. Perspectives from Thai Buddhism*” (PDF), in Meinert, Carmen; Zöllner, Hans-Bernd, *Buddhist Approaches to Human Rights: Dissonances and Resonances*, Transcript Verlag, pp. 63–92, ISBN 978-3-8376-1263-9
- Terwiel, Barend Jan (2012), *Monks and Magic: Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand* (PDF), Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, ISBN 9788776941017.
- Vanphanom, Sychareun; Phengsavanh, Alongkon; Hansana, Visanou; Menorath, Sing; Tomson, Tanja (2009), “*Smoking Prevalence, Determinants, Knowledge, Attitudes*

and Habits among Buddhist Monks in Lao PDR”, BMC Research Notes, 2 (100): 100, doi:10.1186/1756-0500-2-100, PMC 2704224, PMID 19505329

Wijayaratna, Mohan (1990), *Buddhist monastic life: According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition* (PDF), Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-521-36428-7.

