

The New Contemporary Cross-Cultural Buddhist Woman and Her Attitude and Perception toward Motherhood

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Abstract : Among the relatively large volume of literature, the role and perception of women in Buddhism have been examined from various perspectives such as theology, history, anthropology, and feminism. When Buddhism spread to the West, women had a major role in its adaption and development. The meeting of different cultures and social structures had the fruit of a necessity to change. As Buddhism gained attention in the West, it produced a Buddhist feminist identity across national and ethnic boundaries. So globalization produced a contemporary cross-cultural Buddhist Women. The aim of the research is to find out the new role of such a Buddhist woman in aging societies. More precisely to understand what effect this contemporary Buddhist religion may have, direct or indirect, on fertility. Our worldwide aging society, especially in developed countries, including members of EU, raise sophisticated sociological and economic issues and challenges to be met. As declining fertility has outstanding influence underlying this trend, numerous studies have attempted to identify, describe, measure and interpret contributing factors of the fertility rate, out of which relatively few revealed the impact of religion. Among many religious guidelines, we can separate two major categories: direct and indirect. The aim of this research was to understand what are the most crucial identified (family values, gender related behaviors, religious sentiments) and not yet identified most influential contributing contemporary Buddhist religious factors. Above identifying these direct or indirect factors, it is also important to understand to what extent and how do they influence fertility, which requires a wider (inter-discipline) perspective. As proved by previous studies religion has also an influential role in health, mental state, well-being, working activity and many other components that are also related to fertility rates. All these components are inter-related, hence direct and indirect religious effects can only be well understood, if we figure out all necessary fields and their interaction. With the help of semi-structured opened interviews taking place in different countries, it was showed that indeed Buddhism has significant direct and indirect effect on fertility, hence the initial hypothesis was proved. However, the interviews showed an overall positive effect, the results could only serve for a general understanding about how Buddhism affects fertility. Evolution of Buddhism's direct and indirect influence may vary in different nations and circumstances according to their specific environmental attributes. According to the local patterns, with special regard to women's position and role in the society, outstandingly indirect influences could show diversifications. So it is advisory to investigate more for a deeper and clearer understanding of how Buddhism function in different socioeconomic circumstances. For example, in Hungary after the period of secularization more and more people tended to be attracted toward some transcendent values which could be an explanation for the rising number of Buddhists in the country. The present research could serve as a general starting point or a common basis for further specific national investigations how contemporary Buddhism affects fertility.

Keywords : contemporary Buddhism, cross-cultural woman, fertility, gender roles, religion

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