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English Review of Dissertation

Introduction

'A good memory is not better than a pen.' I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to write this reflective account, as it allows me to revisit my past experiences. Although yesterday cannot be changed and today will soon become history, it is precisely by looking back that we gain insights to shape the future. The title of my dissertation is *The Philosophy of Non-Attached Giving in the Diamond Sutra: A Study on Mitigating Educational Anxiety Among Chinese Parents*. In this review, I discuss my writing journey in five aspects: How I chose the direction of my dissertation? How I refined my dissertation topic? How I combined Buddhist thought with parental education? The difficulties I encountered in my research and areas for future improvement. What I have learned from this dissertation in my daily life?

1. Why Choose *the Diamond Sutra* and the Concept of 'Non-attachment Giving' as a Starting Point?

During my participation learning *the Diamond Sutra* program, I was deeply moved and gained numerous insights. The Venerable Master Chin Kung 淨空法師 often emphasized that “Buddhism is not separate from the law of the world” This prompted me to explore how the wisdom of *the Diamond Sutra* might be applied to address modern challenges: What are the most pressing issues today? Which problems are particularly difficult to resolve, and which might have viable solutions?

The Master also stressed that, “Education is the foundation of a nation, its leadership, and its people.” Similarly, Master Yinguang 印光大師 once said, “Teaching children is the root of governing a nation and bringing peace to the world.” Thus, education is not merely an individual concern but a matter of national significance. At its core, family education forms the foundation of all learning, shaping a person's entire life.

A 2024 survey in *the Blue Book of Family Education in China*, based on responses from 450,000 individuals, revealed that Chinese parents experience significantly higher anxiety about their children's education compared to their

Western counterparts. A staggering 68% of parents expressed concerns over their children's academic future and life uncertainties. Even more troubling, in the past decade, depression among young people has emerged at an increasingly early age, with suicide rates rising sharply. Alarming, those under 24 years old now account for 65.5% of all reported cases of depression in the country. This 'pathologization' of education has led to a generation of children struggling with severe psychological distress, which not only harms them but also deeply affects their families.

The Diamond Sutra teaches the importance of 'detachment from appearances' (离相), revealing that the root of human suffering lies in clinging to illusory and impermanent forms. Giving (布施) is a powerful practice to gradually loosen attachment. However, while Buddhist literature extensively explores the theoretical aspects of giving, discussions on its practical application—especially in family education—remain limited. Motivated by this gap, I sought to explore how the principle of non-attachment giving (离相布施) could help parents navigate educational challenges and foster a harmonious family environment.

2. Refining the Title and Scope of This Study

When discussing my research topic with Venerable Shengmiao, I initially proposed the title 'A Study on the Application of Non-Attachment Giving in Modern Chinese Family Education.' However, as I delved deeper into the writing process, I realized that the scope was too broad and lacked practical grounding. At my teacher's suggestion, I refined my focus, shifting from an 'application study' to an 'applicable study.' This adjustment allowed me to move beyond abstract discussions and integrate real-world educational contexts into my analysis. By the third section of my paper, which specifically addresses family education, I had further narrowed my focus, ensuring that my research would not only remain theoretically sound but also offer meaningful insights for parents navigating the challenges of modern child-rearing. I will revise the title again to narrow it down to the issue of parental anxiety.

3. Exploring the Implementation of 'Non-attachment Giving' in Family Education

Applying Buddhist wisdom to modern education must go beyond superficial integration. If we simply frame scientific educational methods within a Buddhist

narrative, it risks being a mere veneer—an attempt to reconcile two paradigms without true understanding. Yet, the Dharma is not an external doctrine; it is profound and boundless wisdom. Thus, grasping its essence is crucial when considering its application to family education.

While there has been extensive research on family education, most studies focus on external factors—such as societal structures and parental expectations—which are ever-changing. For example, in 2021, China introduced the Double Reduction Policy (双减政策) to alleviate students' academic burden. However, rather than reducing anxiety, many parents simply shifted their competitive mindset to new metrics—comparing educational backgrounds of other parents or adopting alternative pressure-driven methods.

Despite ongoing scholarly research, many parents continue to struggle with ineffective parenting strategies. This led me to question: What are the key variables that influence educational outcomes? A particularly striking case was the Zhang Yide Incident, a controversial example that sparked nationwide debate. Zhang Yide's father meticulously designed his son's education, adhering to rigorous academic planning with the hope of securing a successful future for him. Zhang excelled, achieving near-perfect TOEFL scores and gaining admission to a prestigious U.S. university while still in high school. Yet, just months later, he took his own life.

This tragedy underscores a painful reality: behind every suffering child often lies an unhealthy family dynamic. A child's decision to end their life is never spontaneous—it is the culmination of prolonged distress. This case prompted widespread reflection: If the same 'scientific' parenting methods yield vastly different results, does a universal formula for education truly exist? How can parents identify the most suitable approach for their children, given each child's unique temperament and needs?

To address these fundamental questions, we must look beyond surface-level strategies and seek a guiding principle that applies universally. Through studying Vajra Sutra commentaries and engaging in deep reflection, I realized that the core of Buddhism lies in the transformation of the mind. Parents' words and actions differ because of their internal mental states, which ultimately shape their children's development. True Non-attachment Giving requires parents to first release their attachment to external appearances—whether it be their child's grades, achievements,

or future prospects. Only by letting go of their own anxieties and desires can they return to the true essence of education: nurturing their children with wisdom and compassion.

4. Challenges in the research process

In the course of my research, I have encountered a number of challenges, which have not only affected the progress of the thesis, but also made me reflect more deeply on my own viewpoints.

(1) Misunderstanding and Blurring the boundaries of 'Non-attachment Giving'

The concept of 'Non-attachment Giving' can easily be misunderstood as not taking care of things, not taking responsibility, or even equivalent to 'permissive education'. Some parents may misinterpret it to mean, 'Since we have to let go of our obsession, does it not matter what the child's academic performance is? However, if you do not care about your child's learning at all, you are going to the other extreme.

Therefore, I was very careful with the words I used in my writing for fear that people would misunderstand that 'leaving the phase' means letting go of the child. I want to make it clear that 'letting go of attachment' is not the same as 'letting go of responsibility', and that true 'detachment' means that parents are responsible for their children's growth, but without being overly anxious and obsessed with superficial results and worldly standards. It is the balance between these two points that is most worthy of investigation.

2) The gap between theory and practice

In the course of my research, I have tried to translate some of the more abstract concepts of Buddhist philosophy (such as the 'Four Phases' or 'Undivided Mind') into concrete methods of homeschooling, but there is still a big gap when it comes to actual practice. After all, the concepts are beautiful, but the reality is often less than ideal.

I often wonder: in such a highly competitive social environment, can parents really 'let go of their obsession'? This is not just a theoretical question, but also involves the social structure, cultural environment, and even the psychological state of the parents themselves. Sometimes I worry that I, as a learner of Buddhist thought, may have unknowingly 'over-idealized' this method. Will my faith in Buddhism overestimate its positive impact on family education and underestimate the difficulty

of practicing it? All these questions need to be supplemented by more in-depth empirical studies, not just theoretical deductions. Therefore, future researches should be more objective in presenting the strengths and limitations of the 'Non-attachment Giving', rather than just emphasizing its ideal effects.

(3) Limitations of Data Sources

Due to the limitation of time and conditions, my study mainly relied on literature analysis and existing data (e.g. The Blue Book of Home Education), but lacked first-hand interviews with parents or field observations. This is actually a great pity because education is a very life-oriented and personalized issue, and it is not enough to just look at the data.

If I have the opportunity to conduct further research in the future, I would like to combine qualitative and quantitative methods, such as in-depth interviews to understand parents' true feelings, or using anxiety scales to measure the impact of 'Non-attachment Giving' on parents' psychological state. In this way, the study will be more convincing and will be able to help parents find practical solutions.

4) Difficulties with Case Studies

Every family is unique, and although from a Buddhist perspective, there are always the same principles, the real challenge lies in how to apply these theories to different families. Originally, I had hoped to use more case studies to analyze the application of the 'Non-attachment Giving' in family education, but most of the information that I could find so far was only academic conclusions and lacked concrete details of the cases.

In addition, the selection of cases is also very difficult. As far as I can observe, parents of each generation have different educational thinking, for example, parents of the 'post-70s', 'post-80s', 'post-90s', and 'post-00s' in China have very different educational philosophies. If the study is to be more relevant to the reality, it should be designed according to the specific situation of modern parents and children, and adjusted to meet the contemporary needs. However, due to space and time constraints, this part of the study can only be further supplemented in future studies.

5. Harvest of Writing

I have done some research on the 'four phases' of *the Diamond Sutra* for this thesis, and I have found that the four phases are really the root cause of contemporary

people's anxieties and troubles. The four phases are the I phase, which is the obsession with the self; the Human phase, which refers to human beings and is the beginning of opposition; and the Sangha phase, which refers to beings who are not limited to any appearance, which can be crystallized into the voices and values of social groups in terms of humanity. The life-existence phase is the belief that life is limited and the anxiety about time constraints. It is precisely because we hold on to these things that we get into a lot of trouble. Two incidents have inspired me to reflect on this:

One day when I was writing a paper, I encountered a scholar's article that left me confused, so I went to consult my thesis advisor Venerable Shengmiao. My thesis advisor answered my question very seriously, based on what Mr. Jiang and the Venerable Master Chin Kung had said, and after listening to them, I felt that I had already understood, so I immediately tried to prove to my thesis advisor that the scholar's statement was wrong. However, my thesis advisor said that just because the other side said something different from what Mr. Jiang had said did not prove that the other side was wrong, and that it was necessary to look at the context of the person's words in relation to their own context. I suddenly realized that I was inadvertently caught up in the situation, because I was too familiar with the 'man, self, right and wrong' dichotomy, so I started to 'take sides' without even thinking about it, thinking that what Mr. Jiang and the old masters had said must be right, and that comments different from those of the masters were wrong, but my thesis advisor immediately brought me back to reality with calmness, generosity, rationality, and respect. My thesis advisor do not assume that other people's comments are wrong just because he is Master's disciple. However, I am a person who likes to take sides without thinking, as long as I like what I say, what is wrong is right. In fact, this kind of obsession is an obsession with my own appearance and the appearance of others. Because I believe that I am on the same side as the Venerable Master Chin Kung, anyone who attacks the Venerable Master is attacking me, and anyone who doesn't agree with the Venerable Master is in another side.

Another example that illustrates my attachment to these phases involves a seemingly mundane situation—my kitchen. I recall thinking, “The kitchen is dirty—who made this mess? It's such a nuisance! I haven't finished my thesis, so I can't afford the time to clean it.” In the past, I would force myself to rationalize that “I made the mess; therefore, it's my responsibility.” However, the essence of Buddhist

practice is to let go of selfish thoughts and self-interest. Through a deeper understanding of the Four Phases, I realized that my annoyance stemmed from perceiving the mess as someone else's fault, thereby placing myself in opposition to others. My fixation on my own time and thesis led me to view cleaning as detrimental to my interests.

How, then, could I release these attachments? Observing that my mentor—despite his busy schedule—remained untroubled by such matters, I sought his advice. He suggested that I adopt a more empathetic perspective, considering the situation from multiple angles rather than solely from my own viewpoint. He also reminded me that change does not occur overnight, even when one is in a position to guide others, as the human heart is very sensitive and must be treated with care.

Reflecting on our morning mantra—“Always think of others and always greet them with a smile”—I realized it was not just a slogan but a principle to live by. I began to see that the kitchen had transformed from a battleground into a peaceful space once I considered that the mess might simply be due to someone being preoccupied. Even though I had not finished my thesis, I recognized that I could spare a few minutes to tidy up—not only to avoid inconveniencing others but also to clear my own mind of obsessive thoughts.

Ultimately, I learned to be cautious about becoming overly attached to outcomes—whether by seeking validation from others or expecting immediate change. This awareness made it clear that it is not external circumstances that hinder us, but our internal attitudes. As my father once said, “Buddhism is a method of reduction.” I now understand that by reducing our attachment to the Four Phases, we can achieve true happiness. Examining the behaviors and reactions of modern parents through this lens also helped me recognize similar attachments within myself. My greatest takeaway is that the Four Phases not only address parental anxiety but also offer solutions to broader human challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of starting from within—aligning education with each child's unique needs and nurturing their inherent personality and interests. Family education is not a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach but a dynamic, evolving process. Although this study lays a theoretical

foundation for transcending superficial characteristics in giving, its practical application must navigate cultural, structural, and cognitive challenges.

Through this research, I have come to realize that academic inquiry is more than the mere pursuit of knowledge—it is a continuous journey of self-awareness and personal growth. True understanding is achieved not only by studying theories but also by applying them in real life. I firmly believe that when parents are willing to shift their mindset, they will naturally discover the most suitable approach for their families. At the same time, I recognize that I must first embody these principles myself. Only by beginning with my own transformation can I hope to become a competent and compassionate mother in the future. With an open and discerning mind, I aspire to contribute meaningful solutions to the challenges of modern family education.