

## A Critical Literature Review in Conceptualizing a Structural Framework to Position Buddhist Inquiry Paradigms

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### Abstract

Literature presenting the Buddhist inquiry paradigms has vastly lacking the Western versions, prompting an urgent need to perform a critical literature review in order to fill the gap. This research effort culminated in suggesting a structural framework to organize the inquiry paradigms of the Buddhist teachings while also describe the nature of each paradigm from the ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects. This conceptual paper thus provides a critical contribution to the literature of Buddhist studies and their applications in the field of social sciences and management studies.

### Introduction

In Buddhism, getting to know the reality of phenomenon is of utmost importance as it is acknowledged that a mind knowing the reality is released from the burden or stress of the delusion. In other words, a tranquilized mind is one who knows the ontological nature of reality. How this theory of knowledge or knowing of the reality is developed must thus be made clear. Essentially this is an epistemological question that an observer must address and its outcome is that such an epistemological stance may influence the methodological

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preference in the Dharma research process. The utility in aiming to understand the reality is peaceful mind and the development of Dharma in the mind as the guiding art of daily living and business operations.

In brief, the Buddhist methodological approach to engage in a research activity must simultaneously embrace an effort to address three inquiry paradigmatic questions, namely the ontological question, the epistemological question and the methodological question. The Buddhists know these three questions as the wisdom aspect, the precept dimension and the mindfulness practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Having realized the vitality of these inquiry paradigm positions, the following research questions are raised in which this research article attempts to address based on a critical literature review approach:

What is the structure and nature of the Buddhist inquiry paradigms and how they show the similarity or dissimilarity to the Western versions?

As such a theoretical framework of the Buddhist inquiry paradigm structure would be proposed.

## **Literature Review**

A paradigm represents a worldview that “defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to the world and its parts” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). The term “inquiry paradigm” is used quite loosely in academic research and can mean different things to different people, and to resolve this uncertainty Morgan (1979) suggests that the term be interpreted at three levels (Hussey and Hussey, 1997, p. 47):

- At the philosophical level – the ontological question which is raised to seek to understand the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 99), i.e. how things really are and how things really work.
- At the social level – the epistemological question which clarifies the relationship between the inquirer and the known (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 99) in response to the ontological nature. In the Buddhist Canons, the common relationship to be maintained between the researcher and the researched is considered to take root in an ethical foundation, i.e., by being honest and maintaining in integrity, and having a compassionate or balanced state of mind when seeking to understand the researched. In other words, in an objective worldview perspective, the Buddhist practitioners (as researchers) should remain ethically objective and foster a detached, which is a so-called “distance” attitude towards the researched. Similarly, for a phenomenological position, ethical and detached state of mind and approach still remain as the common guideposts. The only difference now is that the Buddhist practitioner now remains being absorbed within the context of the phenomenon, as having a closer relationship to the researched but still holding tight to a detached state of mind, in the view to enable the researcher to be able to speak from the perspective or meanings of the researched. Thus, while many philosophical or tactical approaches to implement this epistemological question are similar between the academicians and the Buddhist practitioners,

the major difference being that the Buddhist practitioners complement the relationship with Buddhist ethicality and detached state of mind.

- At the technical level – The methodological question addresses how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). In this case, the Buddhist practitioners fundamentally use the five senses and the mind (its consciousness) for the investigation, which can skillfully exploit the commonly known means of research instruments to address the methodological questions. The methodological means can, for instance, be in experimental, dialogic or dialectical, or hermeneutical nature. The Buddhist practitioners complement these techniques with mindfulness training in response to the researched, the procedure and the knowledge. Thus while focusing on the outside, i.e., a phenomenon, is important, the methodological question addresses as well the inside – the mind, consciousness, the state of verbal, bodily and thought actions and reactions. Ultimately, the mind in dealing with the researched phenomenon should be remained at detached level and tranquility level. It is only at this level that the interpretation is not tainted with the thoughts and idea of the self, which is influenced by the experiences, education, the environment, the needs, wants and desires of the researchers and as such, the research can truthfully reflect the reality as it is. In other words, when human researcher is

involved in the observation, it is important the interpretation which relies heavily on the interpretations of the observer is not invalidly and unreliably influenced by the observer (Sheth and Malhotra, 2011). This methodological approach is highlighted in the Diamond Sutra (a part of the Buddhist Canons) which stated: "... the minds ... should be purified of all such concepts as relate to seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and discriminating. They should use the mental faculties spontaneously and naturally, but unconstrained by any preconceptions arising from the senses." (Goddard, 1938, p. 94).

It is by now clear that answering these three paradigmatic questions manifests the epistemological commitments. According to Johnson and Duberley (2000), epistemological commitments are a key feature of our pre-understandings which influence how we make things intelligible and the students pursuing social science and management studies are increasingly expected to demonstrate a reflexive understanding of their own epistemological commitments. The reason why epistemological commitment is important because we are all epistemologists or, according to Johnson and Duberley (2000, p. 2), "at least we routinely take certain epistemological conventions to be so self-evident that we rarely feel the need consciously to express, discuss or question them."

What follows are the paradigm of choices in informing and guiding inquiry into the nature of reality or an observed phenomenon, namely transcendentalism, pragmatism, empiricism, rationalism, positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, phenomenology and constructivism.

### Transcendentalism

From the Buddhist perspective, transcendentalism is an unconditioned state of mind that is transcending the influences of the entire spectrum or continuum of the worldviews, morality, the relationship between the mind and the phenomena, and the wide variation of any available methodological approaches. To be exact, an unconditioned state of mind is void of ignorance about the phenomenon (i.e., the mind), greed, hatred and delusion (Kalupahana, 1992), or in short, is transcending the conditioned worlds of phenomena, or Hui neng (638-713), a central figure of Zen Buddhist tradition was quoted as saying, “True seeing is called transcendence; false seeing is worldliness” (Cleary, 2005, p. 25). The danger of false seeing is, for instance, understood by the Dharma practitioners as such:

“With ignorance as condition, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness ... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.” (Bodhi, 2000, p. 563)

When one is trapped within the phenomenal world, the state of the mind and its capability of understanding the reality is prevented from being perfect – a theme advocated by critical realism or post-positivism. In the phenomenal world, there are three worlds of desire, form and mind. All created things or beings, both noble and ignoble, both cause and effect, are within the phenomenal world. In one of the later Chinese Buddhist Canons, The Surangama Sutra, it stated that “all conditioned things are as empty as space. Existing as they do under conditions, they are false and fantastic,” (Goddard,

1938, p. 215). Thus, Transcendentalism is beyond the world of both the material and the mind, in reaching the state of emptiness that the mind is purified to a state of complete detachment from the influences of both the material phenomena and the mind states. In this worldview, reality is known as it is, and the mind will never be influenced by it and corrupts the understanding of it. In the language of phenomenology, transcendentalism is the purest awareness or consciousness of the phenomenon possible – in a way the “self” that is conscious of the phenomenon is also diminished and the state of mind is one that is resulted, for instance, from “the purification of the evil out-flowing of the mind which come from clinging to the notions of an objective world” (Lankavatara Scripture; see Goddard, 1938, p. 325).

### Pragmatism

The most famous Zen grand master in China, Hui Neng (638-713), once told, “If there were no people in the world, myriad teachings would not originally exist of themselves” (Cleary, 2005, p. 23), “People may be of these two kinds [of better faculties and of lesser faculties], but the truth is not” (ibid, p. 29). Thus venerable Hui Neng was well-known by the Chinese communities as in making popular the compassionate pragmatism concept in the Buddhist Dharma teaching – which is also alternatively known as the expediency philosophy of teaching, practice and learning. This concept shares the same theme of the western counterparts, William James back in 1898 (cf. James, 1977) and Charles Sanders Peirce in his essay “How to make our ideas clear” (1878, cited in Peirce, 1992, p. 131) – that is, “What is tangible and practical unites pragmatists.” (Dewey, 1969-1990). Pragmatism is useful to reduce the

fixation and constraints of sticking to one worldview which is considered by the Dharma practitioners as harmful – which narrows the state of mind and produces egoistic predisposition and unwholesome state of mind i.e., conceit (Tan, 2010).

### Empiricism

While, epistemologically, the rationalist gives credentials to rationality and the contemplative mind as the reliable foundations for knowledge, the empiricists claim that reliable and valid knowledge can only be established by studying the phenomenon through the five senses empirically (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). Most of the Theravada school of Buddhism, one that most prevails and is popular in Thailand, would argue that empiricism is the only reliable epistemological approach to Buddhist meditations, which reinforces the key emphasis on taking awareness through the six sense channels, like the eye, ear, nose, mouth, body and mind (or, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mind). Because of this strong epistemological preference by the Theravada school, the methodology which follows has skewed towards direct awareness of the reality without much of purposeful cognition. As such, rationality is often ignored or considered by the empiricists as the unnecessary and the wrong epistemological approach. The author would argue that this epistemological reinforcement is a trap which is a direct result of biased or partial understanding on the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Rationality and empiricism are in fact inseparable, and one without the other could further delay the time needed for emancipation. When sole rationalism is the epistemological theme, it is highly likely that delusion is spirally multiplied and eventually gone

out of control. When sole empiricism is reinforced biasedly, the speed of progress is slowed down because one has to, dogmatically, wait for spontaneous or random occurrence of direct knowledge or wisdom to occur in order to summarize the experienced. Thus, biased reinforcement using the empiricism approach to study and understand phenomenon, although necessary, could actually slow down the entire emancipation process. Nevertheless the balanced use of both rationalism and empiricism could assist Buddhist practitioners to organize their understanding of the empirical senses. In short, empiricism and rationalism resemble the inseparable process of induction and deduction, and their objectives are to establish an organized understanding of a phenomenon. Thus both empiricism and rationalism pervade the entire paradigmatic spectrum, and they represent an approach-oriented aspect of the epistemological philosophy.

### Rationalism

As asserted in Johnson and Duberley (2000), rationalists give priority to thinking as the primary source for comprehending reality, such as through a systematic rational justification to what is skeptical in the first place, as also advocated by Decartes (1968). However, rationalistic approach as the Buddhist way has to be much cautioned because, by rationality, it often means mind-or-brain dominated, which is often skewed away from the direct first-hand experience needed to develop real wisdom. In a way, rationalism is necessary but it has to be cautioned, and it has to work in parallel with the direct understanding or wisdom development process. This cautionary position is also asserted in Kalupahana (1992) when he illustrated that the four noble truths of

what the Buddha taught are often superficially understood. The four noble truths, which reveal the cause-and-effect principle of our mental and physical experiences, demonstrate the important theme on rationality, stating that mental suffering, for instance, is caused by our delusion or wrong views on the subject of the current experience, which is what it is meant by the epistemological trap. However, rationalism itself is insufficient as it only works at the brain level, and thus, empiricism at the mind-or-consciousness level must be reinforced simultaneously. This point is emphasized by the Buddhist practitioners in general in their practices toward emancipation. Most of the Buddhist Schools consider purposeful rationality as a major source of delusion which brings about all the mental suffering. The reason is that, when the study to understand the phenomenon is undertaken strictly in rationalism, the result is often interpreted subjectively or biasedly in accordance with each of the perceived or rationalized view – a theme often asserted by the academicians and researchers in general (see Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Nevertheless, as Buddhist practitioners aim to establish balanced mode of approach in order to arrive at a balanced and tranquilized state of mind, rationalism should actually not be neglected, as rational thinking is useful to establish points for contemplation at the meditative level.

## Positivism

Auguste Comte (1853) coined the word 'positivism', which was aimed to rid science of the dogmatic influences of religious beliefs. To Comte, the empirical world is a domain of objective facts and is cognitively accessible (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). As such, four interrelated webs of

epistemological commitments are reinforced by the positivists, namely, (1) the observation of the empirical world through our senses provides the only foundation for knowledge (ibid, p. 23), not the idealistic thoughts or ideas, and (2) anything non-observable is rejected and its discussion is considered as metaphysical speculation (ibid, p. 24), (3) the natural sciences provide the model for all the sciences including the social sciences (ibid, p. 26), and (4) the task of positivists is to predict and control social and natural events (ibid, p. 26).

As argued in Jackson (2000, p. 217), “It often has been argued that, of the world’s religious traditions, Buddhism is uniquely exempt from the challenges of modernity and post-modernity, because of the uncanny match between philosophical perspectives at the heart of its wisdom literature and outlooks developed in the west in the twentieth century... Buddhism was prospectively modernist because of its focus on an impersonal, dynamic, causal, and broadly ecological explanation for the operations of the cosmos, such that the more recent scientific explanation simply have filled out, rather than, conflicted with, Buddhist accounts. ”

The four epistemological commitments as asserted by Comte (1853) on positivism can be argued as follows on Buddhism. Principle 1 is supported because as stated in the empirical epistemology, direct observation based on our available six sense channels is required as our mentality is affected, on palpable basis, by these six sense channels. By direct observation, the Buddhists are recommended to be cautioned about the unnecessary wrong influences by our memory-based or creation-induced inferences and deduction, which could be correct or wrong (Hanh, 2006).

The principle 2 of the positivism is rejected by the Buddhist practitioners, as what is non-observable could be a result of the ability of the researchers or the observers lacking the capacities and capabilities in undertaking empirical observation. At certain point in time, one variable is unobservable and thus, any intellectual discussion over this variable is interpreted as metaphysical at best. However, when, for instance, certain technology is developed, or when the definition of the variable is made clearer or, a suitable methodology is being identified, or when one's wisdom has improved, then, all of a sudden, what is unobservable becomes observable. Thus, positivism should be approached by not rejecting the view that the mental or religiously tainted issues are often un-measurable (Clinton, 1988). In short, both the materialistic phenomenon and the states of mind are observable from the Buddhist practitioners' point of view.

Principle 3 is highly applicable. The Buddhist practitioners often approach this through analogies and usage of metaphors – that is to observe, study and understand the nature as it is and then transfer the model of nature to help understand the state of mind and how the mind is stressed by the misunderstanding, or not understanding of it, and essentially to transcend and achieve emancipation.

As such, the four phenomena as depicted by the Four Noble Truths of the Buddhist teaching i.e., the nature of reality, the causes and the dynamics of the phenomena, the complete understanding of the nature of reality and thus the emancipatory state of mind, could be objectively observed and comprehended, both through physical means such as research instruments, measurement devices and even the mind. Having equipped the capability to

do so and actually deliver the result, one gains a better understanding of the nature and his or state of mind, and thus one is in a better position to predict and control the nature through wisdom and wholesomeness in natural manner – albeit the nature exhibits a flux of ceaseless change. To the Buddhist practitioners, to predict and control is to use the knowledge gained about the nature and thus can lend compassionate hands to help, for instance, regenerate the nature, essentially a theme of environmental sustainability (Belal, 2008) and social responsibility (Duckworth and Moore, 2010), or concept of Cradle-to-Cradle dark green strategy (Tan, 2013).

### **Post-Positivism**

According to Healy and Perry (2000) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), critical realism of post-positivism holds an epistemological position that reality is “real” but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible. Realism is used interchangeably with the term “critical realism” or “post-positivism.” The state of imperfect comprehension of a “real” reality is caused by the flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 100). The “critical” aspect of realism could be understood as the degree of efforts that need to be made in order to seek an understanding of the phenomenon towards perfection. In other words, “critical” realists claim that reality must be “subjected to the widest possible critical examination to facilitate apprehending reality as closely as possible” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The Buddhist practitioners underpin realism or critical realism or post-positivism as an epistemological process of learning, realizing that perfection towards a valid understanding of phenomena and thus

its concomitant emancipatory state of mind is a gradual process. The more one engages mindfully on the observation or research process in examining and studying the phenomenon which the mind engages with, or even a phenomenon of the mind state and the consciousness, the closer the “real” real is made possible. This is however feasible only when both the epistemological (i.e. the nature of relationship between the dharma practitioner and the researched must be conducted in ethical manner, which maintains at as neutral position as possible) maturity is reached while the methodological competency, reflected by the state of the mind i.e. in terms of tranquility, concentration and mindful observation, is improved to the state of perfection. Thus, realism, or its critical degree of it, is well supported by the Buddhist practitioners.

### Critical Theory

Critical theory underpins an epistemological effort which aims to achieve emancipation through self-conscious critique and critical epistemology that rejects the self-evident nature of reality so as to prevent from clinging dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions (Carr, 2000). In other words, the aim of critical theory is to produce a particular form of knowledge ‘that seeks to realize an emancipatory interest, specifically through a critique of consciousness and ideology” (Carr, 2000, p. 208).

There are many ways for self-conscious critique such as by revealing the ideological, historical and interest influence. Dialectic logic is popularly used by the Frankfurt School (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). For instance, Marcuse (1993) demonstrates that a distanced or detached relationship between the subject and the object of the positivistic epistemology in the study

of a social world does not valid, as the subject and object are so joined that truth can be determined only within the subject-object totality. As such, the object (i.e. the social phenomenon) itself contain subjectivity in their very structure, and thus, the so-called knowledge that is found is very much mediated through the society itself (Adorno, cited in Spinner, 1975). To free oneself from socially tainted delusion, Marcuse (1964) thus suggested to strike to define the irrational character of the established rationality and to define the tendencies which cause this rationality to generate its own transformation. In other words, critical theory as the epistemological position would fit well in a cultural study as it helps to expose the inherent power disequilibrium and other variables involved that could possibly prevent one from having a valid understanding towards the research topics or the phenomenon under investigation by the Buddhist practitioners.

By carefully reviewing the Buddhist Canons (cf. Bodhi, 2000) it is easily noted that the Buddha often advised his disciples to not simply accept his words literally but to make an effort to examine his words and the implications. Analogically, this critically self-examination effort is like a goldsmith would test the quality of the gold (Tsiring, 2006). As such, critical analysis and reasoning, which is rooted in a mixture of empiricism and rationalism, are the two popular means in the study of the mind and its function. Another set of the Buddhist Cannons, Abhidharma Pitaka, which was written down around three hundred years after the Buddha's passing away (Tsiring, 2006), provide a compendium of Buddhist psychological theories and illustration which serve to guide the dharma practitioners to critically examine the state of mind and its quality. However, the conscious approach undertaken by the Buddhists has no

room for critique, and many of the dialectic-logico methods popularly used by the critical theorists could lead to unwholesome state of mind which in turn produces undesirable consequences. Thus critical theory is a well-accepted epistemological position of the Buddhist practitioners but the methodological ideology has to be implemented according to the Middle Path (cf. Bodhi, 2000) by remaining in a balanced state of mind.

However, critical theory as a suitable epistemology from the Buddhist perspective should be used cautiously, although ontologically it agrees that critical examination is needed for emancipation. Nevertheless, critical theory could be used as a first-tier approach in examining the state of lived experience in a society or an organization, and as a second-tier approach targeting at the individual level as the unit of analysis by focusing on the mentality structure and behavior.

In conclusion, critical theory is supported with caution, only as a way of understanding the phenomenological world.

## Phenomenology

As illustrated in Hussey and Hussey (1997, p. 52), phenomenology is the science of phenomena, and quoted Allen (1990, p. 893) in describing a phenomenon as “a fact occurrence that appears or is perceived.” To this end phenomenology involves being conscious of one’s state of mind as a preface in understanding the lived experiences of oneself, the community, a group, an organization involving with phenomena of interest. Thus to be able to generate valid research effort, the phenomenological procedure must involve studying the phenomenon through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop

patterns and relationships of meaning about the associated phenomenon as perceived or understood by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). To do that, as suggested by Niewswiadomy (1993), the researchers must be fully aware of their historical background and experience and ensure these do not interfere with the interpretation of the meanings and understanding of the phenomenon of the participants. In the social field, it can be stated that any research methodology that is directed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning, and structure of everyday experience, could thus be captured by the phenomenological epistemology that describes how one orients to lived experience (Gibson, 2003). Phenomenological approach is crucial as humans seek meaning from their experiences and from the experiences of others. In order to arrive at a deeper, inter-subjective understanding of the phenomenon, one would have to understand the reality from within a socially and historically bounded context and not by observation of behaviors and actions alone (Gibson, 2003). Phenomenology holds on to an ontological and epistemological view that reality can be understood by direct investigation and description of the phenomena as consciously experienced without theories and presuppositions. This can be further expanded by borrowing the definitions by a number of researchers in the field. Patton (1990) defines a phenomenological study as one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. Creswell (1998, p. 52) asserts that "researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience (hermeneutics) and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward

appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning.”

From the above discussion, Buddhist approach to knowledge generation also fits relatively well to the theme of phenomenological epistemology. The first Noble Truth of the Buddhist teaching delivers a clear acknowledgement that there is suffering and it needs to be understood accurately, in valid and reliable manner. And how do we get to understand how we experience what we experience? From the Buddhist perspective, being mindful of the phenomenon in detached manner, and by knowing its conditioned state and nature, and our emotional reaction to it through the manifestations in feeling, perception, mental activities and consciousness, we can finally have a clear understanding of the essence and nature of the phenomenon, including the meaning and the structure of mechanisms that lead to that phenomenon and our understanding of it. Thus, phenomenology is an applicable epistemology which is equally suited to meditation practices.

In conclusion, phenomenology is supported for the fact that Buddhist approach to learning in understanding reality (i.e. through insight meditation) is very much a direct investigation and description of the phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories and presuppositions, such as in seeing things (i.e. consciousness) themselves. In simple terms, according to Patton (1990), a phenomenological study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. The meditative experience often reflects the definition of a phenomenological study as given by Patton (1990) (cf. Tan, 2009a; Tan, 2009b). Without the a priori support of any necessary theories, the meditators

rely on balanced mindfulness to observe the phenomena (data) through the six channels of senses, which is a methodological approach that shares the similar themes of grounded theory. To be specific, grounded theory is a longitudinal research methodology (Leonard and McAdam, 2001) that examines the processual pattern of change (Wolfgramm et al. 1998) at the state of mind, the consciousness and the nature of understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The theory of a phenomenon or the knowledge of both the materiality and corporeality is developed through grounding the data up (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### Constructivism

Constructivism as a feasible epistemology has gained its momentum due to the influence of cognitivism as a paradigm within psychology (Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, 2007) and also by the emergence of post-positivism, contextualism and postmodernism in response to the critique and weaknesses embedded in positivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism is distinguished by its focus on how the individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowledge which is heavily influenced by the historical and cultural contexts (Young and Collin, 2004). In a way, constructivism stresses on a paradigmatic view which holds that the so-called perceived or understood reality is mentally constructed through cognitive processes, and as such, it has great emphasis on the epistemological aspect of our reality – that is, how we relate to the reality, how we know and develop meaning to our perceived or understood reality. As individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, in varied and multiple facets, and to prevent researched rushing

to channel the interpretation of the researched in biased manner, Creswell (2009) recommend researchers to ask questions in their methodological approach that are broad and general so that the participants can construct meaning of a situation in their own space.

While the key focal to constructivism is the individualistically mentally construction of reality, there are various different degrees of individualistic focus, from the so-called radical constructivism to social constructivism. As argued in Young and Collin (2004), radical constructivists interpret that it is the individual mind that constructs reality, whereas social constructivists recognize the influence of social relationships in the individually constructed reality, or as Thorne (2008) puts it, the world is understood by the way we engage in the world. The qualifier that is extended to radical constructivism emerges out of the critique on its sole reliance on an individually sovereign process of cognitive construction in explaining the reality (Martin and Sugarman, 1999).

If the unit of analysis is individual, and from the Buddhist perspective whose ultimate aim is to achieve enlightenment, then radical constructivism is a highly applicable epistemology. What it implies to the use of constructivism is that the world of reality is constructed through the mind, which is why the Buddhist teaching acknowledges that we are living in a deluded world often corrupted or influenced by our own paradigmatic worldview. Thus the deluded or phenomenological reality is constructed, and the path that leads to complete emancipation or enlightenment is accomplished by acquiring a practicing or training process that transcends worldviews or mental formation. In this way the Buddhist practitioners undertake constructivism with the ultimate purpose of de-constructing the originally constructed perception or understanding of the

phenomena. In other words, it is through examining the constructed reality that the nature of that interpretation can be de-constructed towards a state of mind where it can be released of stresses and suffering.

As stated in Tserling (2006), only with thorough understanding of the mind and its function can we hope to transcend disturbing thoughts and emotions that plague us. The two Mahayana Buddhist schools, namely, Vijnanavada and Yogachara, would fit into this epistemology, and they are more commonly referred to as the “Mind Only” or “Consciousness Only” school (Hanh, 2006). In reality, all schools of Buddhism recognize a basic consciousness from which mental formation arise, and acknowledges therefore a core theme in Buddhist teaching, that is, in order to transform woeful reality into nirvana (which is characterized as peaceful, stable, cessation of suffering and the cessation of all the afflictions like greed, hatred and delusion mental states), we need to learn to look deeply and see clearly that both are manifestations of our own consciousness. In other words, the mind is a field in which every kind of mental quality seed is sown, and thus, reality is accordingly constructed. To transcend, we must de-construct what we have constructed.

Thus, radical or social constructivism is supported in the sense that our phenomenological world in which we live in is seen and interpreted from our own mental construction. As a result, cognitive and experiential process, unconscious or unconscious, strengthens our habitual patterns (i.e. through assimilation, acculturation, accommodation, routine experience) and thus, the type of our mental concomitants along with our consciousness. Constructivism can be illustrated in a Buddhist philosophy as quoted by Kalupahana (1992, p. 32):

Depending upon the visual organ and the visible object, O monks, arises visual consciousness; the meeting together of these three is contact; conditioned by contact arises feeling. What one feels, one perceives; what one perceives, one reflects about; what one reflects about, one is obsessed with. What one is obsessed with, due to that, concepts characterized by such obsessed perceptions assail him in regard to visible objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, the future, and the present.

From these statements, it can be inferred that all philosophical theories about the world are dependent on contact (i.e. with the topics of interest, the research phenomenon). Contact thus expresses the idea of familiarity (i.e. our behavior, our persistent support for that particular paradigm), and familiarity further breeds contempt, admiration, or indifference (such as to others' research works). That is a part of the rationale Immanuel Kant distancing himself from the naïve empiricist epistemology by "arguing that our minds are not passive receivers of sense data. Rather we automatically select, limit, organize and interpret our experience of external reality. We endow the world with meaning... shaped or mediated by our mental structures" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000, p. 65).

## Conceptual Framework

A critical literature review is like analyzing and synthesizing an interview script, in which themes are formed i.e. the paradigm position and its epistemological arguments, and the structure that embrace the themes and the relationship of the themes in various dimensions i.e. ontological, epistemological, and methodological, are subsequently taken shape. Based on this concept, the following conceptual framework is derived which is indicated in Figure 1.

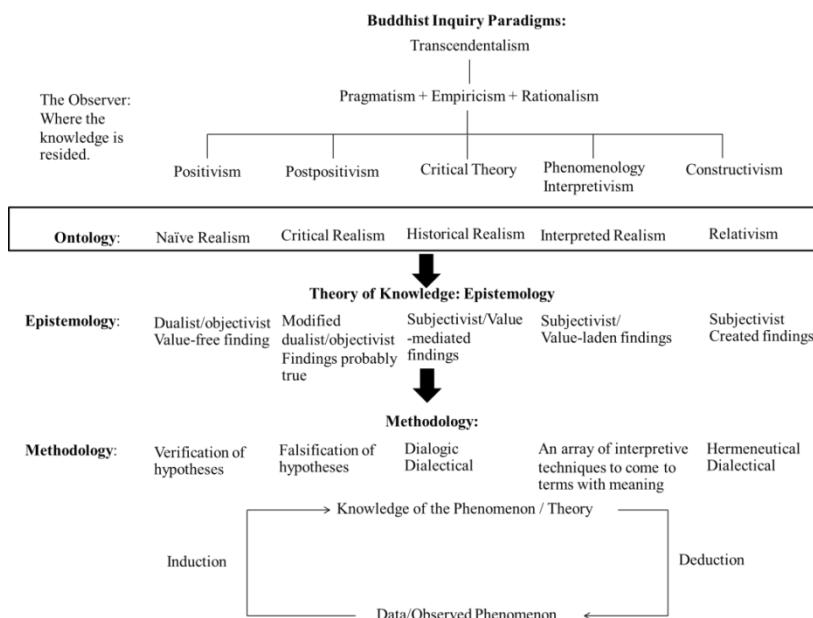


Figure 1 The structure of Buddhist Inquiry Paradigm

Specifically Figure 1 presents that Transcendentalism is the ultimate paradigm position that is aimed and truly valued by the Buddhists. However,

using this paradigm as a platform to study Dharma phenomena is not easy and as such, pragmatism, empiricism and rationalism are recommended as the effective epistemological guides. While empiricism and rationalism capture the needs for induction and deduction, pragmatism provides a skillful convenience to educate awareness to the right perception of truth. In other words, these three guiding epistemological stance pervade in numerous inquiry paradigms ranging from the naïve realism to relativism scale as shown in Figure 1. Relativism connotes that philosophical conception that human personality is of infinite variations, contributable to an interwoven process of form-process, sensation-process, perceptual process, volitional process and consciousness process (Johansson, 1979).

Figure 1 also states the sequential influence of ontological position, epistemological stance and methodological practices, although on practical basis, the reversible sequence or other alternatives are possible. These three inquiry paradigmatic elements also are captured by the Noble Eightfold Path as described with abundant real cases in the Buddhist Canons – that is, right view of the ontological nature of reality would eventually lead to right thought and behavior, and the relationship with the surroundings (epistemological questions), as well as mindfulness based methodology as a part of the state of mind and qualia of consciousness maturity.

## Conclusion

The structure and the nature of the Buddhist inquiry paradigms were discussed, and the similarities or dissimilarities to the Western research paradigm were also illuminated. In particular the critical literature review has

been exhaustive which covers the Buddhist Canons as well as the Western literature on research paradigm. A critical revelation is that while the Western paradigmatic positions are linear in nature, spanned across a wide spectrum of realist position (i.e. naïve realism, critical realism, historical realism) to relativist, the structure of the Buddhist inquiry paradigms have in addition to the horizontal a vertical nature. Vertically, the Dharma research paradigm is embraced by Transcendentalism, but on the practical treatment to the nature of reality and its relationship between the observer and the observed, three epistemological guiding positions (namely pragmatism, empiricism and rationalism) are commonly mentioned in the Buddhist Canons. These three epistemological guiding positions provide the fundamental philosophical treatments to the key paradigm choices namely positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, phenomenology and constructivism. While the former four paradigm positions exhibit different degrees of realism (i.e. naïve realism, critical realism, historical realism and interpreted realism), the last version is relativism in philosophy.

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