

The Happy Way of Life of Retired Civil Servants According to the Integrative Buddhist Principles

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Abstract

The objective of the research is to study the way of life of retired civil servants, to study Buddhist principles suitable to the happy way of life of retired civil servants, to integrate the suitable Buddhist principles to the happy way of life of retired civil servants, and to synthesize a body of knowledge on “a model of integration of suitable Buddhist principles into the happy way of life of retired civil servants”. The study is mainly qualitative. The study finds that there are three main problems in living a life of retired civil servants, including physical health, economic situations, and social and psychological conditions. The Buddhist principles suitable to solving the health problem and raising health satisfaction are: the Three Common Characteristics, the Four Noble Truths, and the Four Principles Bhāvanā. The Buddhist principles suitable to solving economic problems and raising economic satisfaction are Dīṭṭhadhammikattha Four and Santuṭṭhi Three. The Buddhist principles suitable to solving social and psychological problems and raising satisfaction in such regards are the Three Items of Meritorious Action. The integration of the Buddhist principles in terms of health include understanding the fact of life, following moral principles, moderation in the consumption of food, having a proper residence, performing physical exercises properly and regularly, and caring for oneself in cases of illness. In dealing with the economic situation, the integration of the Buddhist principles suggests one should become satisfied with what he has and avoid the causes of ruin. In social and psychological conditions, the Buddhist principles may be integrated such that one shall remain unaffected by worldly conditions, have good friendship, regularly make merits and offerings, keep working, not worry in advance, not worry about the past, keep calm by concentration meditation and insight meditation, and welcome inevitable situations with peace. The body of knowledge obtained from this study is the BMS model, in which the way of life of retired civil servants is filled with happiness, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Keywords: Happy Way of Life, Retired Civil Servants, Integrative Buddhist Principles

Introduction

Retirement is a process, where important changes in life take place, such as the changes in personal life and social life, because retirement requires a person who is originally employed to leave the job when he reaches the retirement age. Retirement is, therefore, a social withdrawal, particularly from the professional circle. For Thailand, the retirement age for civil servants is 60, whereby they have to leave the government job at the end of the corresponding budget year (Salyacheewin, 1983). In some cases, however, civil servants continue to be hired for a certain period of time following the retirement, such as the case of university employees where they may continue to be hired until the age of 65 or the case of public prosecutors or judges who may continue to work until the age of 70. Regardless of how many years they continue to be hired, these civil servants eventually have to quit the professional life and experience a change in life situations from working to being free from duties

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(Jenobrom, 1991), particularly as the retirement system currently adopted by the Thai government involves a mandatory retirement at the age of 60.

Therefore, retirement from a government job is a crucial change in life. Not only do the retired withdraw themselves from professional roles, but retirement also represents aging and life expectancy of each person because retirement from the government job coincides with the age when each person enters senior citizenship. Having to stop working often affects the elderly who are subject to a concrete timeframe of when they have to stop working more than the elderly who work in professions that have no certain retirement timeframe, such as farmers and businesspeople. In the latter group, the changes in their professional life are gradual depending on their physical conditions and their personal desires. This group of people may choose to work full-time whenever they want to, which differs from the retirement from government jobs and the withdrawal from professional life that abruptly happen at the age of 60, except that the cabinet approves a year-by-year extension of retirement timeframe until the age of 65 (Kaewsri and Dusitsuttirat, 1983).

By adopting and applying the Buddhist principles, retired civil servants will have an anchor in life and be able to find lasting happiness, which the author believes is the best and most suitable solution in this day and age. For instance, faced with illness or physical changes, the retired shall adopt the Three Common Characteristics, because it is the natural principle found by the Buddha and taught to the humanity so that the humanity is aware of the truth that every matter, even one's own life, eventually does not last, does suffer from distress, and has no physical substance. As such, the Buddha said in Ghanakhasutta that

“Aggivessana the bodily substance is born from Mahābhutarupa, has mother and father as a place of birth, grows from cooked rice and yogurt desserts, does not last, gets touched and massaged, and becomes broken and scattered by nature. All of you shall consider such non-permanence and suffering, like diseases or abscesses or arrows. It is distress and exploitation. It is like a separate person. It is something that must break. It is empty. It is Anattā. When you consider this body as non-permanent, as suffering, as diseases, as abscesses, as arrows, as distress, as a separate person, as something to break, as empty, as Anattā, you may disregard the satisfaction in the body, the connection to the body, and the obedience to the body...” (Majjhimanikaya Majjhimapannasaka, 13/275/242)

The Four principles of Bhāvanā is another principle that the retired should bring to practice for self-development in areas of health, morality such as self-discipline, caring for own mental health such as avoid getting worried easily, and acquisition of intellect and understanding of the fact of life. As for the reduction in income, the author believes that Diṭṭhadhammikattha Four, especially about being sufficient and living a moderate life for a retired person, will help mitigate problems with the cost of and the expenditures of living. As for the social role, where the retired may feel lonely and depressed, the author believes that regularly practicing the three items of meritorious action, including offering and sharing, being moral and composed, and training mind to remain calm, to develop intellect, and to think only good deeds, will certainly help reduce depression and loneliness.

In this connection, the author chooses to study the happy way of life for retired civil servants according to integrative Buddhist principles as the doctoral dissertation, with an aim to propose a new model and collect a body of knowledge with respect to the integration of appropriate Buddhist principles for happiness in life of retired civil servants.

Objectives

1. To study the way of life of retired civil servants
2. To examine the Buddhist principles suitable for retired civil servants to achieve happiness in their way of life.
3. To integrate appropriate Buddhist principles for retired civil servants to attain happiness in their way of life
4. To synthesize a body of knowledge about the integration of appropriate Buddhist principles for retired civil servants to attain happiness in living their way of life.

Research Methodology

Scope of the research

In this study, the author examines the problems in lives of retired civil servants, with a specific focus on those having previously been employed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand.

Sample

1. Thirty retired civil servants who had been employed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand participate in a group discussion.
2. Five experts on Buddhism participate in in-depth interviews.

Research tools

1. Questionnaire is used to survey data, including backgrounds of interviewees, details about how interviewees adopt the Buddhist principles after their retirement, and problems experienced by the retired civil servants following their retirement.
2. In-depth interview specifies issues to be addressed in the interview, such as the Buddhist principles suitable for being integrated into the problem-solving process of the retired civil servants, so that they can retire happily.

Data analysis

The analysis is done qualitatively, by transcribing the group discussion and the in-depth interviews, sorting the information, and analyzing the information to find relations and connections between various sources of information. Summary of information is based upon primary and secondary information, from documents, group discussion, and interviews. From such information, an integrative model of Buddhist principles and happiness in the way of life lived by retired civil servants is constructed.

Research Results

The Buddhist principles suitable for solving problems and generating satisfaction with personal health include the Three Common Characteristics, the Four Noble Truths, and the Four Principles Bhāvanā.

The Buddhist principles suitable for solving problems and generating satisfaction with one's own economic conditions include Diṭṭhadhammikattha Four and Santuṭṭhi Three.

The Buddhist principles suitable for solving problems and generating satisfaction in one's social life and psychological health include the three items of meritorious action, namely, offering and sharing, being moral and composed, and training one's mind to only consider good deeds.

After incorporating all the Buddhist principles suitable to generate happiness in the way of life led by retired civil servants within this research framework, it is found that the Buddhist principles can be applied to the way of life following the retirement, so that life can be lived in happiness physically and mentally.

1. For retired civil servants to live a happy life in term of personal health, with the Buddhist principles incorporated, the author proposes a model for them to practice as follows. The retired civil servants should 1) understand the fact of life, 2) have morality, 3) consume food in moderation, 4) have proper accommodation, 5) perform physical exercises properly and regularly, and 6) take care of themselves in times of illness.

2. For retired civil servants to live a happy life in term of their economic condition, with the Buddhist principles incorporated, the author proposes a model for them to practice, which is to abstain from the six causes of ruin, including 1) addiction to alcohol and intoxicants, 2) roaming the streets at unseemly hours, 3) frequenting shows, 4) addiction to gambling, 5) association with bad companions, and 6) lazing at work.

3. For retired civil servants to live a happy life in terms of their social life as well as their psychological health, with the Buddhist principles incorporated, the author proposes a model for them to practice, including 1) to remain unaffected by worldly conditions, 2) to be open-minded and forgiving, 3) to associate themselves with good companions, 4) to make merits and offerings regularly, 5) to keep working, 6) to not worry in advance, 7) to not worry about the past, 8) to keep calm by concentration meditation and insight meditation, and 9) to welcome inevitable situations with peace.

In summary, faced with life problems, retired civil servants can incorporate and apply appropriate Buddhist principles to the solutions, so they could lead a happy life, solve the problems, including health, economic, as well as social and psychological problems, with intellect. This mechanism differs from the regular problem-solving process, which does not address root causes of the problems. While the regular problem-solving process may be able to partially solve the problems, they often fail to fully solve them. Moreover, problems typically faced by retired civil servants are of moral or spiritual issues, thereby the solutions must start from changing the moral and the spiritual behaviors for the better in a way that suits the context of each particular problem. This is to reduce problems retired civil servants face in living their lives, for them to lead their lives towards happiness and towards personal as well as social well-being, and eventually to lay foundation for the ultimate goal of living their lives based on the Buddhist principles.

Discussion of Results

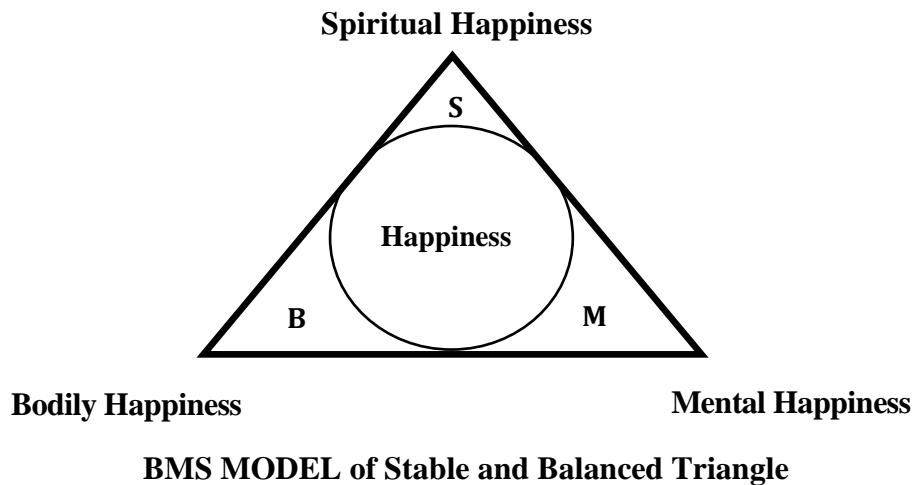
In the synthesis of knowledge bases with regards to Buddhist principles suitable for leading the lives of retired civil servants, the integration of the Buddhist principles into the way of life of retired civil servants only produce good outcomes. First, it produces **bodily happiness**, which is the happiness resulting from physical comfort and an ability to reduce physical suffering. Such means moderate, timely, and beneficial food consumption, where the food shall be easy to digest and produce no harm, and having an environment that is conducive to strong physical health, such as living in a proper accommodation.

Another good outcome of the integration of the Buddhist principles into the way of life of retired civil servants is mental happiness, which is rooted in happiness from within. It can be practiced by letting go of stinginess and instead offering to or sharing with other human-beings and animals. Such would lead to kindness and compassion. Giving away non-material items, such as forgiveness, and relieving oneself from anger and malice, would also lead the mind of retired civil servants to remain relaxed and calm. Forgiving petty issues, not taking small matters too seriously, relying on understandings, and having an optimistic view

of the world are foundations of forgiveness, cordiality, and amity, which make living together in the society happy for one another. Retired civil servants, who are patient and do not get easily angry, would be in good mood as well as filled with good hearts and joys, thereby creating mental happiness both for themselves and those surrounding them. Besides, having a good friendship would make the elderlies lead their lives happily, because good friends tend to give good and useful advice as well as remind each other of yonisomanasikāra, a practice to consider matters carefully and intellectually. Finally, mental happiness can be achieved by working honestly without encroachment on oneself or others, by staying lively and by letting go of grief and boredom at work, by making oneself useful personally or socially, physically or mentally, and by maintaining morality and ethics, all of which would lead one to mental happiness and far away from harm.

Spiritual happiness is the kind of happiness that results from not holding on to matters that may lead to suffering. When the mind does not hold on to matters, it is free of worries. No less important than physical work is the spiritual work that frees oneself from worries. The spiritual work is such as practicing mettā bhāvanā to all animals or meditating to keep the mind calm, and freeing oneself from matters of the future or suffering from the past. Holding on to suffering in advance leads to a waste of time, a damage at work, and a loss of psychological health without any gain. Retired civil servants should, therefore, remain focused on the present work and pay attention to only what they are doing. When the mind stays with the present desire, one will see values and benefits of the present work, and emotions of the future can be eliminated from the mind.

Putting together bodily happiness, mental happiness, spiritual happiness into a model integrating appropriate Buddhist principles with the happy way of life of retired civil servants results in the BMS Model, which can be illustrated in the diagram.



BMS MODEL of Stable and Balanced Triangle

In conclusion, the integration of appropriate Buddhist principles into the way of life is essential for retired civil servants to live a happy life, because the problems experienced in their lives all seem to disrupt their bodily happiness, mental happiness, and spiritual happiness. The proposed BMS Model is a model arising from the integration of Buddhist principles that is consistent with the way of life of retired civil servants. Specifically, the problems faced by retired civil servants are taken into account and analyzed in order to arrive at the reasons behind these problems. Then, assessment is done with regards to harms caused by such problems and benefits gained from effectively and directly solving the problems. Therefore, if retired civil servants adopt the BMS model as proposed, it is believed that their life problems will be effectively addressed, and their well-being improved, in a stable, balanced, and sustainable manner.

The BMS Model is another creative strategy that retired civil servants should realize and apply to their daily life, so that their happiness in life consistently continues and that they can pass along this happiness to the coming generations of retired civil servants.

Recommendations

Policy recommendations

Thailand is moving into the stage of an aging society. It is forecast that in the year 2025 Thailand will have become an aged society. At present, the population of Thailand is 64.5 million people, of which 9.4 million people are 60 years of age or older, which accounts for 14.5 percent of the total population. The number of elderlies of 60 years of age or older increases approximately 500,000 a year, which means that in the year 2024 - 2025, when Thailand becomes an aged society, they will make up of approximately 20 percent of the total population. In other words, there will be one elderly person for every five people.

In this respect, Thailand should accordingly prepare the personnel and the system related to the elderlies, such as upgrading and keeping updated the database of the elderlies, putting in place health insurance, health security, and healthcare systems, promoting long-term care for the elderlies, addressing the shortage of caretakers, establishing an income guarantee scheme, promoting savings among the retired, encouraging the elderlies to continue working, extending the retirement age, and strengthening the institutions of family and community.

Recommendations for further studies

The author suggests that those interested in the integration of Buddhist principles towards the way of life of other retirees, such as the integration of Buddhist principles towards the way of life of actors, of businesspeople, of artists, of signers, and of farmers, respectively.

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