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USING ELEMENTS OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN ACCOUNTING ETHICAL EDUCATION

Thesis is devoted to the presentation of the core assumptions of Buddhist ethical education in the context of their usefulness for teaching ethics in accounting. It fills the cognitive gap regarding the Buddhist model of teaching ethics in accounting, which is a potential supplement to the theory and educational techniques in this field.

Keywords: *Buddhism, ethics, education, accounting.*

The need for better education in accounting ethics is well documented by both individual researchers and professional organizations [1; 2]. Buddhism has a long tradition of emphasizing ethical behavior in its practice (characteristic of Eastern philosophical teachings) and at the same time significant educational achievements, so the concepts of Buddhist teaching deserve more structured analysis and study by accounting educators. The moral sensitivity is influenced not only by ethical knowledge, but also by the whole insight of mankind into the interdependence of the world. This is fully in line with Buddhist philosophy. Ethical education should be a form of character development, i.e. a multidimensional education of the whole person. It would therefore be necessary to find an educational approach that would effectively develop strong ethical values and a sense of moral duty. One of the potential factors of influence here could therefore be religion or philosophy. If we accept the argument that educational negligence in the field of ethics results in a lack of knowledge about the strength and depth of the relationships between business, society, nature and the world, which in turn leads to the fact that corporations are managed by people who are not ethically sophisticated, without a sufficient sense of responsibility, and accounting education is too narrow, focused on technical aspects, not very effective in demanding environment, it should be noted here that it is in Buddhist education that ethics and wisdom have never been separated. The knowledge of nature and human society imparted in Buddhist teachings does not inhibit the ethical development of believers; rather, it reinforces their ethical behavior.

Compared to the mainstream Western model of education, the framework of Buddhist ethical education tends to be comprehensive and systematic. The systematic nature of Buddhist ethical teaching is manifested in the linear formulation of the necessary steps leading to the ultimate achievement of moral behavior. In summary, the Buddhism educational framework provides professionals with practical guidance on what they need to work on (sequentially or synchronously) in their moral development process, while current Western accounting education is still primarily focused on its technical principles based on transaction values for owners individual enterprises [3, p. 4]. This kind of accounting ethics education is doomed to failure for several reasons. First,

adherence to agency theory, based on oversimplified economic theories, leads the Western system of accounting education to unconsciously acceptance of selfish behavior of businessmen and accountants. Second, the perceived contradictions in ethics and economic theory have led to considerable debate about whether the term „business ethics” is actually an oxymoron [3, p. 4]. Third, teaching accounting ethics is too trivial to have any deterrent effect compared to technical accounting knowledge. The results of surveys conducted among managers reveal disturbing attitudes of people involved in business activities. At the same time, accounting professionals communicate that ethical education in this field is very important.

The empirical evidence collected at Western universities indicates that students of economics tend to show less interest in the public good than students in other disciplines, or than they did before they started studying economics [4; 5]. The same time the Buddhist ethical framework emphasizes the importance of communication (right speech) and social responsibility (right livelihood) in moral behavior. Both are particularly relevant to the work of an accounting professional. The emphasis on communication is important because one of the main goals of accounting is to faithfully represent the financial position of an enterprise. The emphasis on proper livelihood is very strong in Buddhist ethics and reflects the belief that individual ethics should include the social responsibility that comes with doing business. Right conduct requires that one's behavior does not cause harm to others. In modern society, the no-harm principle can be interpreted as „fair” trade or an arm's length transaction between the two interested parties involved. While some of these principles are more about personal conduct, several of them (no lying or defrauding) are directly related to the core values of the Accountants' Code of Professional Conduct. The importance of „right view” (understanding the Buddha's Four Noble Truths) is the basis of ethical motivation and behavior. It is especially important to understand the law of cause and effect – if the interconnectedness of human behavior is well understood, it automatically becomes clear that many of the negative consequences of unethical behavior will eventually „return to the perpetrator” (karmic principle). This is crucial in the correct analysis of the effects of human activity [3, p. 18] and at the same time it is the best approach to developing practical wisdom and virtues. Most people see interconnectedness only in the short term, which also has negative consequences for business. Ignoring the risk that entails a conflict of interest, focusing on quick profit, enterprises often disregard the interconnectedness with those who may be harmed by their actions, and the negative effects that do not necessarily involve legal consequences, in the form of, for example, loss of reputation, customer trust and cooperators. Also, many accounting scandals are the result of failing to recognize the long-term implications and personal consequences inherent in providing financial services to clients. The best approach to cultivating „right view” in Buddhist doctrine is the proper practice of meditation („mindfulness”). Modern neurologists have verified its effectiveness in the mental, emotional and physiological development of the brain of business practitioners. In „compassionate” meditation, the practitioner must reflect on the interconnected relationships of living beings and develop compassion for the suffering of others and joy for the happiness of others. In „cause and effect” meditation, practitioners are required to critically examine and analyze complex scenarios of their existence and identify the correct causes and determinants of their life situation in order to develop appropriate

moral responses to their dilemmas. In „identity analysis” meditation, the practitioner must reflect on the ever-changing state of human consciousness and recognize the transient and elusive nature of what constitutes identity. The proper meditation requires considerable self-control and a higher level of reflective thinking. It is now recognized as an advanced learning strategy. Conducted research on the role of „mindfulness” in the ethics of the organization lead to the conclusion that the processes that build the ethical corporate context seem to be conceptually similar to „collective mindfulness” occurring at the organizational level. Such companies are highly aware of stakeholder interests, as well as the fact that an ethical approach is essential to developing long-term positive relationships with stakeholder groups. These relationships suggest that ethical context is positively related to employee mindfulness, and that both factors contribute to a better understanding and evaluation of the business environment. Cultivating virtue and moral behavior is a never-ending endeavor in life, requiring constant improvement and constant reinforcement. Therefore, the ethics of Buddhism emphasizes the importance of right effort in every aspect and phase of the moral development process. The Buddhist ethical framework offers then four important methodological elements in the development of virtues: right view, right meditation, right concentration, and right effort. Each plays a key role in developing moral sentiments, practical wisdom, transitory virtues, and self-control to guide moral judgment for moral behavior.

Reasuming, the advantage of ethical education offered by Buddhism lies in its comprehensiveness. Professionals educated in this way are not conditioned to think in the short term – they see more than just the immediate benefits of unethical behavior. Educated in a discipline that is part of business education, they have many opportunities to make business decisions, and they are encouraged to assess the long-term and wider effects of these decisions, in accordance with the doctrine of Buddhist philosophy. They are also not limited by specialization and move freely outside the narrow area of the learned discipline [3, p. 19]. They are also more aware of the need to develop the habit of lifelong learning, in accordance with the Buddhist concept of self-improvement. The advantage of such a system of education is then to increase the chances of consolidating learned content (also non-ethical) in long-term memory, thank to emphasising reflection in the teaching process.

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