



Samsara, Karma, and Self-Enlightenment: A Buddhist Perspective on Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*

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Abstract

Buddhism may best be defined as a path of practice and spiritual improvement leading to insight into the true nature of reality. Buddhist beliefs and practices intend to change individuals so as to develop the qualities of consciousness, benevolence, and wisdom. The experience developed within the Buddhist tradition over thousands of years has made a unique asset for each one of human beings who wish to pursue a path—a path which ultimately culminates in Enlightenment. The theory of *Karma* is the central tenet of that ethical path in Buddhism. According to this theory, actions good or bad which drives samsara (cycle of existence) for creatures, produce their consequences in the life of the individuals. The present study undertakes to examine the theory of *karma* in Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. It likewise demonstrates that human beings can liberate themselves from samsara by following the Buddhist path which helps them to attain salvation and self-enlightenment that are considered to be the ultimate goal in an individual's life.

Key words: Buddhism; Samsara; Karma; *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*; Mo Yan

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INTRODUCTION

Mo Yan (1955-), one of the most significant contemporary writers in China is an institution in himself. Born and brought up in a traditional family in north-eastern China, Mo Yan is a true Chinese both in spirit and thought. Much has been said about Mo Yan as an outstanding and unassailable story-teller. Numerous studies and investigations have been published on his eye-catching narrative style and his art of characterization. He has always been asserted as a novelist par excellence in matters of social criticism of China. But little has been written on how Mo Yan incorporates the profoundest Chinese thoughts, philosophies and spiritualism in his novels. His knowledge of Chinese classical literature, philosophy, religion and ethics permeates his writing. He does not utilize the genre of novel as a vehicle for propaganda for any social or political cause, nor does he pour too much philosophy and theory in his writing like his peers.

In 2012, he was honored the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work as “an author who with hallucinatory realism fuses folk tales, history and the contemporary” (qtd. in “The Nobel Prize in Literature 2012”). For Mo Yan's works (Chan, 2000, p.496), “blurring the boundary between the past and present, dead and evil” as well as good and bad is a common feature. He regularly shows up as a character of his books himself, being a semi-autobiographical hero, who retells the stories and changes the narration of the storyteller. His works, which are also called —the blast of life energies, acclaim the primordial virtues, which, as the writer's opinion, were stifled by the Confucian civilization for just about two thousand years. His work is alluded to postmodern literature not only because of the tangible frames but also because of their spirit.

In his narration Mo Yan utilizes figurative and colorful language. The author examines humanity mercilessness,

governmental corruption and heroism in his works. He assimilates not with any missionary generosity or passion but with the understanding and wisdom of an artist who acknowledges various compulsions, complexities of life behind his metafictional, chimeric and hallucinatory narrative modes. Therefore, his comic mode and his use of black humor yield his philosophy. Behind the narrative façade of his novels, Mo Yan attempts at a vision of life—a life of contrasting dualities, of appearance and reality, beliefs and betrayals. Undesirable catastrophes befall the hero as ensuing unexpected good fortune. His characters welcome their fates with serenity that suggests the faith that things will somehow turn out happily, whatever their own motivations or actions.

Mo Yan's fiction likewise embodies the psychological and ethical implications of some Buddhist concepts as abstinent purification, abandonment, non-attachment, and the cyclic progressions of life and death. Significantly, Mo Yan projects the great Buddhism theory of *Karma* and he minutely represents various paths of achieving self-realization in his work. His fiction incorporates different facets of life and experience. Yan illustrates the characters passing through a period of struggle and transition but towards the end they achieve a new vitality which provides them with a new interpretation of ordinary situations.

Yan has likewise presented the philosophy of order and disorder in his novels. One finds the "order-disorder" pattern on a large scale in Mo Yan's novels. In his presentation of human relationship between two human beings, there is order in the beginning, but this order is not lasting. It gets disordered when undesirable disasters and conflicts befall his characters. Their relationships do not achieve any proper dimension because their motives confront with each other and their outlooks and attitudes differ from each other. Since they understand the worldliness of human relationship which is centered on greed and negative intentions, then their relationship gets disordered. But in the end they reach the life full of spiritual and mental peace as they realize that human and the social values preached by the Buddhist philosophy are compulsory for any human being to achieve salvation and self-realization. Therefore, Yan's fiction echoes the doctrine of *Karma* in the Buddhist philosophical system. The capacity of its renewal and the intrinsic trust in life is the central principle of his fiction. The karma philosophy appreciates this life which operates in a cyclical order subjected to different ups and downs as medium of true self-awareness.

Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is a 2006 novel inspired by the occasions of the Chinese civil war at the end of 1940s and has been taken as a warning against the dangers of a totalitarian state. The story takes place during Chinese land reform movement in which a generous landlord is executed and then reincarnated as

different animals. The landlord observes and satirizes Communist society, for example, when he (as a donkey) constrains two mules to impart sustenance to him. It parodies official accounts of the historical backdrop of "the People's Republic of China from 1950 to 2000 through the metaphorical framework of the Buddhist thought of the six paths of reincarnation" (Huang, 2009, p.33). Thus, it is the aim of this study to investigate Buddhist philosophy of karma in Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. It also explores how karma leads human beings to infinite bliss state in which there is no pain, suffering, or happiness; the soul has ultimate peace.

1. MAN REAPS WHAT HE SOWS: KARMA, REINCARNATION, AND MOKSHA IN BUDDHISM

The selfish, doing harm, do not know what is in store for them.
They are burned as if by fire by the results of their own deeds.
(Easwaran, 2007, p.144)

Death is the most certain thing for any living entity and also the mysterious riddle that we know so little about it. It is the inevitable happening which may come early or later in life. We assume that we are immortal and death does not enter into our life, yet we carry out our actions. However, if we realize death then we will really comprehend life and this will help us to live profitably. Since ancient times the spiritual writings in almost every society are about the art of living which gets people prepared for death. Hence, they contain complicated details of heaven and hell. In addition, some religions illustrate the hell terrifying so individuals will change their behavior to avoid it. Majority of those writings are about how to live appropriately so one can get away from the cycle of birth and death. However, the underlying philosophy of them is the continuity of soul. For instance, Egyptians believed that resurrection will finally take place and so the dead body was treated with mummification ritual. Similar has been the case in other religions.

Buddhism is considered as one of the most virtuous and idealistic religions directed by the Buddha towards all creatures in the universe. It covers a vast scope of phenomena and principles that is much more extensive than what is currently studied. As to time, it includes the past, present and future and with respect to space, it incorporates everything from our daily lives to the infinite universe. In fact, Buddhism may best be described as the instruction of the knowledge and realization of life and the universe and is not a religion. *Karma* is a core Buddhist concept and also the foundation of the Buddhist ethics. Karma is hard to understand and that "even the intelligent are bewildered" in determining what karma is (Mascaró, 1962, p.23). The beginning stage for understanding the theory of karma is to perceive that it has a primary and a secondary function.

The primary and more general function is to clarify why there is such disparity of poverty and wealth in the world as well as why apparently good and/or innocent people seem to suffer unreasonably, while bad, and probably guilty, people remain unpunished or even gain rewards. What is the reason for the injustice that exists among human beings? Either this injustice of mankind has a reason, or it is basically unintended. No sensible individual would consider ascribing this unevenness, this imbalance, and this differing qualities to visually impaired chance or unadulterated mischance. The secondary and more personal function of karma is to convince individuals that, in spite of the evident imbalance and injustice in the world, bad deeds are finally punished and good deeds are rewarded in the course of time, if not in this life then in a future life. This secondary function is clearly in the administration of the primary function. It claims that one's present day rebirth into an unsatisfactory state is usually a punishment for past unskillful or unmeritorious actions, while one's rebirth into a desirable state is usually a reward for past skillful or commendable deeds. In other words, these two related functions of karma demonstrate that there is a logical, non-arbitrary reason for human suffering and pains and subsequently it intimates that the world is ultimately a just place.

The word *Karma* is derived from the Sanskrit *Kri*, to do; then karma literally means action, work or deed. Any sort of purposeful activity whether mental, verbal, or physical, is viewed as Karma. It covers all that is incorporated in the phrase "thought, word and deed." Metaphorically speaking, it implies all ethical and indecent volition. Unintentional or oblivious activities, however in fact deeds, do not constitute Karma, on the grounds that volition, the most critical variable in deciding Karma, is missing. The Buddha says: "It is volition, bhikkhus, that I call *kamma* [Skt: karma]; for having willed, one acts by body, speech, or mind" (Bodhi, 2012, p.33).

However, Karma does not only mean past activities. It covers different times of deeds. It can be construed as the accumulated result of all acts during one's life (Chadha, 1998, p.43). Consequently in one sense, we are the consequence of what we were; we will be the aftereffect of what we are. In the other sense, it ought to be included, we are not absolutely the consequence of what we were; we won't totally be the aftereffect of what we are. The present is undoubtedly the posterity of the past and is the present of the future, yet the present is not generally a genuine record of either the past or the future; so unpredictable is the working of Karma (Kim & Freeman, 1981, p.14).

In addition, karma is considered to be the law of moral retribution where every cause has an effect, and everyone who puts the cause in action suffers the effect. Radhakrishnan (1996, p.245) calls it "the law of the conversation of moral energy." It is well-described in the

eighth book of the *Light of Asia*, one stanza of which must here suffice.

That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields!
The sesamum was sesamum, the corn
Was corn. The Silence and the Darkness knew!
So is a man's fate born. (Arnold, 1885, p.180)

The central tenet of the theory of karma is that the universe is morally just and that good actions are gifted and bad actions are punished. Good deeds are those which are performed in accordance with *Dharma* (McClelland, 2010, p.137). In Buddhism dharma means cosmic law and order, but is also applied to the teachings of the Buddha (Bowker, 1997, p.274). In Buddhist philosophy, dharma is also the term for "phenomena" (Kalupahana, 1986, p.15). The prominent translator Étienne Lamotte (1988, p.15) states: "The teaching of karma, or action, forms the cornerstone of the whole Buddhist doctrine: Action is the ultimate explanation of human existence and of the physical world, and it is in terms of karma that the Buddhist masters have constructed their philosophy."

The social system and one's place in that system can be described by karma and dharma. The secondary refers to where one is in life at a particular moment and the duties that belong to that position. The primary refers to the journey of the self through time and gives the individual a sense of place (Creel, 1972, p.161). Potter (1991, p.8) describes dharma as "the attitude of concern towards others as a fundamental extension of the self." It is this state of mind that is instrumental to achieve *Moksha*, to attain enlightenment. It is a state of moral and intellectual perfection. Karma is the reason for rebirth and moksha is the liberation from the continual wheel of life and birth which is called *Samsara*. Dalai Lama explains how individuals can liberate themselves from samsara in saying:

To attain liberation from samsara one must perfect the three higher trainings: self-discipline, meditative concentration, and the wisdom of emptiness. However, in order for the training in wisdom to mature and become strong, one must first develop meditative concentration; and in order to develop and support concentration one should cultivate the training in self-discipline, which calms the mind and provides an atmosphere conducive to meditation. When one practices all three of these higher trainings and takes them to perfection, liberation from samsara is definite. (1982, pp.363-366)

In Buddhism, flourishing a genuine, experiential understanding of karmic action and result—how all of one's actions will have a corresponding result—is a fundamental part of the Buddhist path to moksha or liberation. Karmic actions are thought to be the core and somehow engine which drives the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth (samsara) for creatures. As Kragh (2006, p.11) asserts: "The Buddhist theory of action and result (*karmaphala*) is fundamental to much of Buddhist doctrine, because it provides a coherent model of the functioning of the world and its beings, which in turn

forms the doctrinal basis for the Buddhist explanations of the path of liberation from the world and its result, *nirvāṇa*.” Thus, liberation will be achieved when individuals obtain a complete understanding of karmic action and result which makes them free from samsara. Tibetan Buddhist teacher Je Tsongkhapa (2000, p.211) pinpoints the importance of understanding karma is to follow the Buddhist path: “Attaining certain knowledge of the definiteness, or non-deceptiveness, of karma and its effects is called the correct viewpoint of all Buddhists and is praised as the foundation of all virtue.”

In the Buddhist perspective, the result of a single action depends upon a nearly infinite number of ancillary causes and conditions; correspondingly, the ability to absolutely predict the results for any single action is considered to be beyond the understanding of ordinary beings. According to the Buddhist tradition, it is claimed that only one who has achieved the mental range of the Buddha (referred to as *omniscience*) would have the capacity to exactly foresee the outcome of specific actions. Indeed, the Buddha implies that worrying over the exact consequences of particular actions is a counterproductive practice that will only double one's suffering or anxiety. Sogyal Rinpoche (2009, p.97) explains: “The kind of birth we will have in the next life is determined, then, by the nature of our actions in this one. And it is important never to forget that the effect of our actions depends entirely upon the intention or motivation behind them, and not upon their scale.”

In the Buddhist view, as a result, our actions or karma of our previous life determine the type of birth we have in this life; and the results of our future rebirth are determined by our actions in this life. This perspective does not intimate any accuse or judgment of creatures who are naturally born into troublesome circumstances or into the lower realms. In Buddhist philosophy, all creatures have been circling in samsara from beginning less time, and all beings have experienced every type of misfortune and good fortune in their previous lifetimes, they often experience the upper realms of samsara and often the lower realms. Therefore, being aware of the rules of samsara will make one have sensitivity for all creatures, including ourselves, who are caught in this cycle of birth and death.

However, Buddhists hold this view that human beings have the capability to free from suffering by practicing meditation and cultivating a lifestyle prescribed by the Buddha. The wheel plays a significant role in Buddhism because it depicts the cycle of life and death. This endless wheel of rebirth, called *Reincarnation*, implies the impermanent nature of human existence. Reincarnation means “the repeated incarnation, or embodiment in flesh, of the soul or immaterial part of man's nature” (Atkinson, 1936, p.7). Buddhists believe that after beings die, they are reborn or reincarnated into a new form. This new form could be different creatures ranging from a deity

and human being to the different animals and hungry phantoms. Therefore, all of good deeds and actions result in good karma and cause individuals reborn in a higher form, while the outcomes of one's negative deeds, bad karma, may cause in rebirth in a lower form.

2. SELF-ENLIGHTENMENT: THE ULTIMATE GOAL IN A MAN'S LIFE

To discover one's true nature is self-realization and this is equivalent to true freedom. The process of self-realization entails mastery over one's 'lower' nature. (Roy, 1984, p.190)

The focus in this section is mainly on Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* with a view to discuss the theory of *Karma* and Yan's cyclic vision of life. The doctrine of Karma and the cyclic process of human life are embodied in this novel. He depicts the Chinese history of the last sixty years through an animal reincarnation cascade. Mo Yan's fiction reiterates the doctrine of karma in the Buddhist philosophical systems. This intrinsic trust in life and the capacity of its renewal in the face of a threat to its existence is the central principle of his fiction. Then this philosophy regards life which functions in a cyclic order subjected to various ups and downs as means of realizing the true self.

The doctrine of karma or action gets out the faith in the ethics of the universe. The universe is not a blind unconscious power, nor is it a chance world, but it is a theater of ethics for the art of soul making. In Buddhist view, the law is pre-established by the Lord but it does not predestine man's fate, for each individual has a free will. No external fate or force determines his fate. Man is the architect of his own fortune. Man reaps what he sows. Yan (2008, p.V) begins the novel with an epigraph from Buddha which comes from the second awakening of the eight great awakenings in *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*:

Transmigration wearies owing to mundane desires
Few desires and inaction bring peace to the mind

The epigraph launches the novel's cultural philosophy situated in the basic doctrine of incarnation in Buddhism. The protagonist of the novel, Ximen Nao who is executed during Mao Zedong's land reform movement in 1948, is subjected to reincarnations as a donkey, an ox, a pig, a dog, and a monkey, until finally being born again as a human. The novel is about desires, ambitions, and the agony they cause. If the reader wants to flourish a Buddhist theory of what caused the tragedy of the past fifty years of Chinese history, it would be grounded in the emotional lives of people, their desires and wishes. Mo Yan provides us an insight into these desires and wishes by illustrating a family's fate over this time period. Jinllong's expectations for status help him down the path of extreme brutality and corruption. The heroes of

the novel unquestionably suffer because of their desires for independence, yet it would be conceivable to regard Lan Lian's attempts to preserve his commitment to independent farming and Lan Jiefang's quest for love as efforts to minimize their desires and expectations. Thus, Ximen Nao's case might be seen as the most obvious and fascinating case regarding comprehension of the problems of desire and the suffering it causes. This is well-illustrated by the beginning of the novel:

My story begins on January 1, 1950. In the two years prior to that, I suffered cruel torture such as no man can imagine in the bowels of hell. Every time I was brought before the court, I proclaimed my innocence in solemn and moving, sad and miserable tones that penetrated every crevice of Lord Yama's Audience Hall and rebounded in layered echoes. . . . Unanticipated joy fell on me like a millstone, seemingly shattering my body into shards. Lord Yama threw down his triangular vermilion symbol of office and, with what sounded like impatience, commanded: "Ox Head and Horse Face, send him back!"... "Why are you standing around?" Symbol of Authority said. "Go gets some donkey blood!" (Mo, 2008, pp.3-5)

After his execution, Ximen Nao finds himself in the underworld, where Lord Yama, king of the underworld, tortures him by devils attempting to obtain an admission of guilt from him. Nao maintains that he is innocent, but as punishment, Lord Yama sends him back to the world where he is reborn as a donkey in his village on January 1, 1950. Upon his death, Nao enters the samsara which means to rebirth in the six realms of existence. The nature of one's existence is determined by karma. The six realms which are illustrated by Wheel of Life are an allegorical description of samsara, into which beings are reborn. These six realms are normally classified into three higher realms and three lower realms: the three higher realms are the realms of the gods, demi-gods, and humans; the three lower realms are the realms of the animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. Figure 1 (Rinchen, 2006, p.8) illustrates the Wheel of Life as it is conceptualized by Buddhists:



Figure 1
The Wheel of Existence

It is argued that incarnation in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* does not adhere strictly to Buddhist doctrine (Duran & Huang, 2014, p.141). Although Mo Yan has not mentioned explicitly the six realms of samsara in his novel, he implicitly utilized it. Ximen Nao is reincarnated into different level of existence by reborn into six creatures. The most crucial point here is that Yan began to turn the wheel for Ximen Nao from donkey to the most intelligent and rational creature, human being. It implies that Yan was aware of the higher and the lower realms of samsara, but he just depicted it in a completely novel form. Mo Yan says: "A writer should express criticism and indignation at the dark side of society and the ugliness of human nature, but we should not use the one uniform expression" (qtd. in "Mo Yan"). Then this does not mean that the philosophy of karma is not demonstrated in this novel.

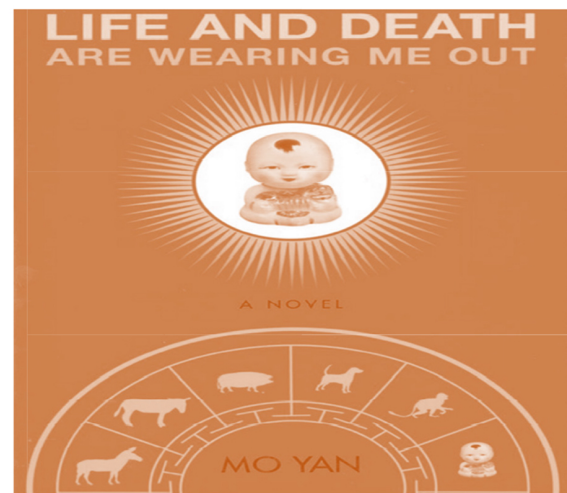


Figure 2
The Wheel of Existence in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*

Figure 2 shows the Wheel of Existence in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. The figure is structurally similar to the previously illustrated model of Wheel of Life. Thus, it shows Mo Yan's outstanding writing ability to adopt the profoundest philosophies and theories into the best approaches. After Nao is reborn as a donkey, he is sold to his adopted son, Lan Lian:

Much as I hated being an animal, I was stuck with a donkey's body. Ximen Nao's aggrieved soul was like hot lava running wild in a donkey shell. There was no subduing the flourishing of a donkey's habits and preferences, so I vacillated between the human and donkey realms. The awareness of a donkey and the memory of a human were jumbled together, and though I often strove to cleave them apart, such intentions invariably ended in an even tighter meshing. I had just suffered over my human memory and now delighted in my donkey life. (Yan, 2008, p.20)

Although Nao was first unsatisfied of his reborn as a donkey but he confesses that he is delighted in his donkey life, but the only thing that suffers him is the memory of the past. Yet Nao's human memory

accompanies him. He is delighted since he is becoming aware of his surrounding situation and also understands his family members better than his previous life. Ximen Donkey shows liveliness, boldness, humiliation to the people who were not loyal to him, and loyalty to those who were loyal to him. All that had happened over the ten years since he'd been reborn on this spot on earth flashed before him. He suffered miserably from the memory of the past and died being sent back again to live the life of an Ox:

Life as an ox had been a tragic existence. . . . Why can you not put those sad recollections out of your mind and seek happiness instead?" I knelt on the cold marble floor of Lord Yama's Hall. "Great Lord," I said, a note of agony creeping into my voice, "I want more than anything to do that, but I cannot. Those painful memories are like parasites that cling stubbornly to me. When I was reborn as a donkey, I was reminded of Ximen Nao's grievances, and when I was reborn as an ox, I was reminded of the injustice he suffered. These old memories torment me relentlessly, Great Lord. (Mo, 2008, pp.219-220)

The same sequence happens in his Ox life with perhaps an even deeper loyalty met with an even more terrible and heroic end. He just suffers from actions and deeds of his past life. He expected Lord Yama to send him back as Ximen human but Lord Yama says that Nao must forget those sad memories and recollections and seek happiness. It is the law of karma. The wheel of life turns for Ximen Nao, so he must find the true ethical path to liberate from samsara and attain salvation. He is not enlightened since he neither know himself nor is aware of his surroundings. He thinks that Lord Yama fools him:

I blinked to clear the mucus out of my eyes. I didn't need to look at myself to know that I'd come back as a pig this time, and that all those squirming, squealing lumps of flesh were my brothers and sisters. I knew what I must look like, and I was furious over how back-stabbing Lord Yama had fooled me again. How I loathed pigs, those filthy beasts. I'd have been fine with coming back as another donkey or an ox, but not a pig, condemned to roll around in the muck and mud. I'll starve myself, that's what I'll do, so I can get back down to the underworld and settle accounts with that damned Lord Yama. (Mo, 2008, p.221)

Ximen Nao is once reincarnated but this time as a pig under the responsibility of his son, Jinlong, who ruthlessly killed him as an ox. His pig life is perhaps the most political life he lives. Ximen pig is king of the pigs, establishes his dominance and "thinking about a kingdom in which some pretty little pigs keep it company and supply the future king of pigs with a harem" (Akhavan & Zohdi, 2015, p.84). He runs away saving himself from a plague, oversees the growth of their power and then steps down from power. He is not aware of submitting his life to the upcoming pig/human war. Then this perspective shows humanely ambitions and also the greedy faces of human beings. His last action as pig is to rescue some rural children from drowning in a small lake that is considered to be a good karma. Although he thinks that he

did good deeds, his high ambitions and desires do not let him to free from samsara and achieve self-realization and self-enlightenment.

Ximen Nao is then reincarnated as a dog, who faithfully takes care of his grandson's child, while his grandson, Lan Jiefang, leaves his family for the love of his life. He observes the pain and enduring the matters happens for his grandson's wife and his great grandson, and he does not think a great deal of Lan Jiefang's awakening to life. He dies in his adopted son Lan Lian's farm, and he understands the secret of why Lord Yama has not incarnated him as a human being. Since there was too much hate in Ximen Nao's heart, Lord Yama justifies why he did not receive a human incarnation. He discloses:

"There are too many, far too many, people in the world in whose hearts hatred resides," Lord Yama said sorrowfully. "We are unwilling to allow spirits who harbor hatred to be reborn as humans. Unavoidably, some do slip through the net." "My hatred is all gone, Great Lord!" "No, I can see in your eyes that traces of it remain," Lord Yama said, "so I will send you back once more as a member of the animal kingdom. This time, however, you will be reborn as a higher species, one closer to man, a monkey, if you must know, and only for a short time — two years. I hope that during those two years you will be able to purge your heart of hatred. When you do that, you will have earned the right to return to the realm of humans." (Mo, 2008, p.510)

The reasons for injustice are revealed as well as the ethical core of transmigration. Hatred is to be purged. Transmigration seems helpful means that Lord Yama is helping to weaken the chains of karma that blame human beings to endure The Buddhist thought and practices contradicts human political values that may revel in anger and revenge. Then he goes through life as a monkey — an animal that is so close to human beings. As time flows on, Ximen Nao ascends to the higher realms of the samsara:

No, I can see in your eyes that traces of it remain," Lord Yama said, "so I will send you back once more as a member of the animal kingdom. This time, however, you will be reborn as a higher species, one closer to man, a monkey, if you must know, and only for a short time — two years. I hope that during those two years you will be able to purge your heart of hatred. When you do that, you will have earned the right to return to the realm of humans. (Mo, 2008, p.510)

Finally, Kaifang ran downstairs of the hotel and crashed through the door. Fenghuang was in bed waiting for him. Ximen monkey attacked him, but he drew his pistol and shot the monkey dead, bringing an end to the reincarnation cycle for a soul that had spun on the wheel of life for half a century:

He differed from other children right from birth. Small in body, he had a remarkably big head, in which nearly total recall and an extraordinary gift for language existed. Although his grandparents could not help thinking about his unusual entrance into the world, after talking it over, they decided he deserved to be given the family name Lan. On the day of his fifth birthday, he summoned my friend, his grandfather, spread his arms like a

storyteller, and embarked upon the narration of a long tale: "My story begins on January 1, 1950. ..." (Mo, 2008, p.540)

Birth, life and death make an inevitable cycle in this world from which no creature escapes. However, salvation achieved through commitment and faith in the Lord gets man the spiritual bliss and peace. Mo Yan allots sufficient time to the protagonist to acknowledge and trace his frailties and eccentricities. His protagonist goes from one phase of life to the next where he achieves liberation. According to Buddhism, there are three stages of life through which a seeker attains *Moksha* or liberation. These stages are committing sin, atoning and requesting forgiveness, and attaining self-realization and self-enlightenment. Ximen Nao, the protagonist of the novel, passes from these three stages in order to achieve liberation from the world.

Thus, Ximen Nao undergoes an internal spiritual transformation. He learns the theory of *Karma* and drifts towards the spiritual world of self-realization towards the end of the novel. The novel is a layover into the theme of man's quest for self-realization and self-enlightenment. The protagonist, Ximen Nao, explores the meaning, and mystery of the life cycle through Buddhist philosophy in the novel. The chain of events in his life in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* depicts a cyclic order. The novel explores the theory of *Karma* in a truly Buddhist sense. It is a classic exposition of the Buddhist philosophy of composure where man survives the outer stuns of misfortune positively and peacefully. Therefore, the struggle of Mo Yan's characters between temporal and eternal, between fascinating but illusory material world and blissful spiritual world enlightens the most profound philosophy of *Karma* in the novel.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mo Yan, one of the most revered and applauded writers among the Chinese writers deeply rooted in Chinese culture, tradition and philosophy, reflects the Buddhist spirit and thought in his works. His fiction assimilates the essence of Buddhist philosophy of *Karma* in particular. However, Mo Yan, an unassuming and unpretentious writer, does not burden his fiction with pedantic philosophical discourses. Despite all philosophical undercurrents in his works, Yan treats his novel as a means of social, political or religious propaganda. The mundane commonalities of Ximen Nao's life depicted by Yan and the simplicity of thematic concerns give a non-serious tone of his fiction. Thus, Mo Yan is first and foremost a writer and not a philosopher. Nevertheless, Mo Yan's novel has a foregrounding in Buddhist philosophy that could be partly ascribed to his traditional background. But his philosophical vision is purely indigenous that bears the imprint of his knowledge of ancient Chinese tradition, culture

and philosophy. It becomes therefore imperative to briefly survey the Buddhist philosophical systems so as to correlate Mo Yan's novel of *Karma* philosophy with a view to envisage the philosophical vision of the writer.

Buddhism regards desires and wishes as the source of agony. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, film director, lays out the philosophy and doctrine of Buddhism in saying: "In order to be a Buddhist, you must accept compounded phenomena are impermanent, all emotions are pain, all things have no inherent existence, and Nirvana [enlightenment] is beyond concepts" (Khyentse, 2008, p.3). Mo Yan's fiction heads the pursuers to the acknowledgment of this truth. Everybody achieves liberation and salvation in his novel as Ximen Nao does. Hatred, greediness, and high ambitions and desires are invaded, which makes Mo Yan as a loyal follower of Buddhism. The philosophy of *karma* is the Buddhist philosophical effort to comprehend the incredible question of the cause of miseries and inequalities among human beings. Man's bliss, enduring, abilities, excellences, his birth in the given family with its social status —are all traced to his actions in the previous life. The theory of *karma* takes it further and asserts that a man's deeds in his past life determine not only his present condition, but also his future life.

In Buddhist perspective, *Karma* is defined as causal law, working on the moral and spiritual planes. Just as every effect is said to have a cause in the physical world so is the case in the spiritual and moral world. The law of *Karma* is the law of cause and effect, the sequence in which each effect has its own cause, the consequence of an action is hidden in its performance. Furthermore, the fruits of all actions may not be enjoyed or suffered in one's life but punishment or reward for the action is the eternal truth which makes the world moral or ethical (Pandey, 2011, p.39).

Mo Yan has conceptualized the theory of *Karma* as depicted in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, which presents unambiguously a comprehensive ideal of true religion and in its conceptualization of ultimate reality and the ideal of morality. The thematic concerns in Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* extensively explore the *Karma* philosophy of self-realization or self-enlightenment which is considered to be the ultimate goal in an individual's life. The final goal of life for an individual is the attainment of release from the recurrent cycle of birth and death. Yan is, thus, deeply entrenched in the Buddhist philosophical system which is rendered clearer once one witnesses the originality of the text, the motives of characters, the ideals of the protagonist or the reactions of the Ximen Nao in a particular situation or a context. Therefore, an analysis of Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* unleashes the spontaneous flow of philosophy of *Karma*.

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