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LAKSAWAT PALARATANA : IS THERAVADA BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGY AN

EMPIRICIST THEORY?. THESIS ADVISOR : ASSO. PROF. SUNTHORN

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Due to the fact that there are conflicting views on Buddhist theory of knowledge and many scholars hold that it has empirical characteristics, this research aims to assess whether Buddhist thinkers fall into the class of Empiricists.

The result of this research shows that, in spite of the differences of the meaning of "senses", "experience" and "perception", the similarities which we find between Western Empiricism and Buddhist philosophy are remarkable. It can be said that the concepts of perception, verification and reasoning (yonisomanasikara) which are of fundamental importance to knowledge are all based on experience. Buddhist theory of knowledge has an empirical approach since it sees experience as the main source of knowledge. All of these characters give Buddhism a look of Empiricism.

In considering the question "Is Theravada Buddhist Epistemology an Empiricist Theory?" we cannot overlook the fact that there are various meanings of "experience" and different degrees of "empiricism". There is therefore no hard and fast answer to this problem as its answer entirely depends on its context. In order to get the correct and complete answer we need to assess it case by case, and the analytical and many-sided method (Vibhajjavada) should be used instead of the one-sided method (Ekansavada).

Thus, the answer to this problem is that in the case that "empiricism" is used in the weak sense to mean the doctrine which holds that experience is the most important source of knowledge, Buddhist epistemology can be classified as an empiricist theory. But in the case that "empiricism" is used in the strong sense to mean the doctrine which holds that experience is the sole source of knowledge, it cannot be classified as such.