

УДК 316.74

Luong Thi Thu Huong, Ngo Thi Huong

Luong Thi Thu Huong

Philosophy PhD, Lecturer

Faculty of philosophy,

University of Transport and Communications,

Hanoi, Vietnam.

Ngo Thi Huong

Postgraduate,

Vietnam Buddhist University at Ho Chi Minh City,

Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam.

RASKOLNIKOV'S CONFESSION IN "CRIME AND PUNISHMENT": A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: Raskolnikov is portrayed as an intellectual, good-looking, well-educated, compassionate young man with a promising future in Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment", yet he commits murder. The primary purpose of this study is to re-examine Raskolnikov's mental state before and after the crime, in order to gauge the contrast between his seemingly happy life and his heinous crime. The second intention is to demonstrate that Sonya is Raskolnikov's karma, in her role as the prostitute who volunteered to follow him to prison to reach the core of his personality, as she represents an external projection of the murderer's karma to be conducted and punished. "Crime and Punishment" is one of the well-known works of the Russian writer Fyodor Mikhailovich

Dostoevsky (Dostoevsky). It was first published in 1866 in Russia and then has been translated and popularized worldwide. The Michael R. Katz's English translation as a pdf file with a total of 568 pages was utilized in this study.

Key words: Dostoevsky, Raskolnikov, crime, evil, punishment, confession, destiny, Buddhist kamma/karma, kamma/karma-results.

Introduction

Dostoevsky (1821-1881) was a celebrated Russian writer who penned many well-known works such as *The House of the Dead* (1860-1862), *Notes from the Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868-1869), *The Devils* (*The Possesses/The Demons*) (1871-1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). These works were written upon his return back to Saint Petersburg from a five-year prison labor camp and then a four-year exile as an army private in Siberia. After these tumultuous years, Dostoevsky had comprehended the deep understanding of the criminal mentality and the Russian souls due to directly communicating to prisoners and guards in Siberia.

“*Crime and Punishment*” reflects the unfortunate destinies of people, such as Raskolnikov, and Sonya, in the social instability of Saint Petersburg in the 1860s. Both Raskolnikov and Sonya, in their unfortunate youth, were found guilty of murder and prostitution. Raskolnikov's and Sonya's fates were examined from several angles in order to explore how they overcame adversity and arrived at a joyful ending, as revealed in the novel's epilogue. Their unusual relationship is the major subject of this study.

Results and Discussion

Through “*Crime and Punishment*”, Raskolnikov is most obviously the image of the karma. As soon as readers wonder why the main character did not follow a path to a happier and more successful life, Raskolnikov's karma appear gradually and precisely.

Raskolnikov's advantageous position allowed him to take several opportunities to achieve success. While he was a student at Law University, his knowledge, expertise, and determination could have helped him find a solid career after graduation. His self-learning ability was also well appreciated and admired by many people.

Raskolnikov was indeed his mother's source of optimism and pride, as she explained "because if you want to, you'll achieve anything you desire with your intellect and talent. It's just that in the meantime, you don't want to and you're busy with much more important matters" [2, p. 529]. His skills have further earned the high respect of his comrades [2, p. 64]. In particular, Raskolnikov was given great marks by two police officers, Porfiry and Porokh. According to Porfiry, Raskolnikov was truly a special individual, "God has prepared a life for you. Well then, so what if you have to join a different category of men? With your heart, will you long for comfort? What will it matter if perhaps no one sees you for a very long time? It's not time that matters, but you yourself. Become a sun and everyone will see you" [2, p. 475]. Similarly, Porokh expressed his praise for Raskolnikov in the following manner: "your career is a scholarly one, and you won't be dislodged by failures! To you all the beauties of life, one can say nihilist, you are an ascetic, a monk, a hermit! For you a book, a pen behind your ear, learned research - that's where your spirit soars" [2, p. 544].

In addition, Raskolnikov was able to secure a respectable job at a lawyer's office thanks to the efforts of his younger sister, Dunya. This young lady decided to marry Luzhin, a wealthy lawyer, in order to get out of her unfavorable situation and give Raskolnikov a great future. Raskolnikov certainly recognized how well his life and achievements were as a result of his family's sacrifice.

It's clear there's no one else involved except Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, standing front and center. Yes, indeed, we can arrange

for his happiness, support him at the university, make him a partner in the law office, guarantee his entire future; perhaps afterward he'll become wealthy, honored, and respected, maybe end up famous [2, p. 57].

However, Raskolnikov fearlessly sabotaged his fortunate situation to commit a murder without any real motives. In his confession to Sonya, Raskolnikov truthfully admitted that: "I didn't kill to help my mother - that's nonsense! I didn't kill to acquire the means and power to become a benefactor of humanity. That's nonsense! I didn't need the money when I killed; it wasn't the money" [2, p. 434].

Through each chapter, readers can recall that Raskolnikov was described as a student with a compassionate heart. He always expressed his natural kindness in the face of unfortunate cases. Voluntarily giving up the last of his coins, he supported his consumptive friend to overcome the poor. He also looked after his friend's father and later buried him once he passed away. In another situation, Raskolnikov jumped into the fire without hesitation to rescue the lives of two children in the apartment, burning himself in the process. His generosity was also demonstrated in the sense that he was willing to share some of his last money with Sonya's family to help fund her father's funeral. He also delivered the last kopecks to the policeman to call a cab to take the little child home after getting her away from the scoundrel.

It is a challenge to analyze the strange, unusual and confused performance of Raskolnikov, but his karma. Karma is a Sanskrit concept (Pāli: kamma) that refers to an individual's intentional actions, words, or thoughts. According to Buddhist teachings, the accumulation of positive and negative acts leads to an infinite chain of cause and effect that directly impact the karma creator. Once karma matures, it is impossible for one to understand how it works. As a result, one's karma returns to him quietly, unexpectedly, and unpredictably.

Raskolnikov's karma abruptly interrupted his education while he was earning money from the part-time job, as well as from his family's support. Raskolnikov's karma prohibited his younger sister's engagement and puts an end to his mother's and sister's dreams and aspirations, despite his constant desire to give them a comfortable existence. Due to his karma, Raskolnikov did not understand himself clearly and found it hard to explain about his behavior: "what am I doing now? why am I still in doubt? why have I been tormenting myself?" [2, p. 74] when he devised the plan to kill the lady.

It is clearer to understand Raskolnikov's karma, particularly in relation to his disgust at the first sight of the elderly woman, even though he knew nothing about her. Through the perspective of karma in Buddhism, there is an apparent connection between the previous lives of Raskolnikov and the lady. Because karma, always for a reason, lets individuals encounter each other in the next life and karma-results will play out as planned despite ones' best efforts. That's why it is vital to perceive the role of the person to others and vice versa. The sooner ones understand the truth of their karma, whether it's good or bad, the easier they would have settled it more effectively.

As another chance to a more comfortable life appeared, Raskolnikov adamantly denied the opportunity. Surely, readers will never forget Raskolnikov may spend his life in peace with his loving mother, his sacrificing younger sister, and Razumikhin - his one-of-a-kind friend at university, without having to struggle. They all held Raskolnikov in high respect and endeavored to provide him with the finest possible care. To begin with, both his mother and sister worked tirelessly to pay for his tuition. They unreservedly sent him all of their financial resources so that he could devote all of his time to learning. They silently borrowed money for him to keep learning, even while they were unemployed. They also did not require him to do anything in return, other than to study. Furthermore, his younger sister sacrificed her own happiness for his

benefit. She even agreed to a loveless marriage because of Raskolnikov's stable job after his graduation.

Furthermore, Raskolnikov was offered a part-time job as a book translator with a reasonable income by Razumikhin. Raskolnikov had been paid some of his remuneration before he started working, even though Razumikhin had no idea where he resided.

Raskolnikov, on the other hand, cruelly abandoned them all without any reasons. He even felt irritated with their presence whenever they came to visit him: "I can't stand it, I can't. Don't torment me! Enough! Go away" [2, p. 210]. Moreover, Raskolnikov straightly denied them when they wished to stay long with him:

I wanted to tell you, Mama and you, Dunya, that it would be better for us to separate for some time. I don't feel well; I'm not at peace. I'll come later, on my own, when it'll be possible. I remember you and love you. Let me be! Leave me alone! I decided this a while ago. I've decided this for certain. Whatever happens to me, whether I perish or not, I want to be alone. Forget all about me. It's better that way. Don't inquire about me. When necessary, I'll come myself or I'll summon you. Perhaps everything will resurrect! But now, while you love me, give me up. Or else, I feel that I'll get to hate you. Farewell!" [2, p. 327].

It is difficult to understand this sense with the knowledge that Raskolnikov loved his mother, and he wouldn't have allowed his sister to be insulted [2, p. 45]. The fact that the karma creator is an individual who reaps the karma-results when karma ripens. Raskolnikov renounced his family in order to suffer his punishment alone because they would be unable to sustain him once his karma has matured. His own karma-results also explained why he felt angry with Razumikhin while he himself was the one who came to Razumikhin's residence and brought discomfort to Razumikhin. He said:

I came to see you because besides you, I don't know anyone else who could help to start because you're kinder than all of them, that is, you're smarter, and you can judge. But now I see that I have no need, you hear, no need at all for anyone's favors or concern. I myself all alone. That's all! Leave me in peace!" [2, p. 127].

Indeed, Dostoevsky thoughtfully expressed in his diary that each person goes through and resolves his own unhappiness, which no one else can understand or share [3, p. 501]. That can be comprehended at the end of the novel when Raskolnikov's mother asked no further questions of him right after she had understood that something horrible was happening to him. She was also not surprised when Raskolnikov denied her proposal to accompany him, since she realized that some sort of dreadful moment was about to happen to her son.

Doubtlessly, as the karma-results, Raskolnikov himself had no permission to have a pleasant life with his family and his friend. He had to suffer alone for what he had caused in the previous lives. This impression is evident in the teachings of the Buddha: "neither mother, father, nor any other relative can do one greater good than one's own well-directed mind" [Dhammapada verse 43].

After his crime, Raskolnikov might enjoy the premium conditions of a new relaxing life in America, but he did not salvage the great opportunities to flee his evil with the following two main reasons.

On one hand, a prosperous life with the stolen fortunes of the murdered woman [2, p. 143-144] was ready for Raskolnikov in America. Beyond his imagination, the lady's properties were so plentiful that all his pockets were not enough to contain them. Having these worldly possessions allowed Raskolnikov to move to another nation, like America, in order to restart a life without fear of being prosecuted his crime. However, against his will, Raskolnikov hid all the robbed items under a stone without taking a glance because he was scared of being discovered [2, p. 428].

Raskolnikov, on the other hand, would be able to fly to America without risk thanks to Svidrigaylov's wise advice [2, p. 500-501]. Due to Raskolnikov's talent and intellect, Svidrigaylov willingly offered the way to liberate Raskolnikov's bondage state of mind, and believed that society would have changed better with Raskolnikov's contribution. On the contrary, Svidrigaylov was seen as a crude villain, voluptuous, debauched, and a scoundrel [2, p. 502] who caused sorrow and grief to others. If following Svidrigaylov's plan, Raskolnikov would have certainly generated new bad karma, and the positive life would have never returned to Raskolnikov. Therefore, Raskolnikov's affirmation "I'm not thinking about that at all" [2, p. 501] made complete sense.

According to Dostoevsky, punishment is inevitable whenever a crime is committed. The penalty can be corporal punishment, death punishment, or a strong sense of regret in the heart. Dostoevsky also asserted that an evildoer cannot live a peaceful life unless he has expressed a truthful apology for his mistake [3, p. 886]. The more evils he hides, the more pain his consciousness touches. That is why Porfiry, the examining magistrate, allowed Raskolnikov to spend some final free time in social life without fear of his fleeing, saying:

Why should you run away? What good would it do you? Running away is vile and difficult; most of all you need life, a defined position, and suitable air; well, what sort of air would you have? If you ran away, you'd return on your own. You can't get along without us. If I were to lock you up in a prison cell-well, and if you sat there a month or two, or three, you'd come forward on your own, perhaps not even expecting it yourself. I'm even sure that you'll decide to accept suffering [2, p. 476].

Porfiry's speech emphasized that while secular laws might be avoided, one's consciousness must never be at ease. In reality, no place, not even an independent country like America, can help an evildoer erase his mistake or

give him a sincere soul. Dostoevsky's point of view was absolutely outlined in the Buddha's teaching: "neither in the sky nor in mid-ocean, nor by entering into mountain clefts, nowhere in the world is there a place where one may escape from the results of evil deeds" [Dhammapada verse 127].

Undeniably, Raskolnikov's karma prevented him from suggestions to escape his crime, even though he was frightened of being caught [2, p. 427] and was condemned to a prison sentence [2, p. 436].

Raskolnikov's karma was more deeply expressed through sincerely selecting Sonya as the recipient of his confession due to only her personality being worth of much more than anything else in his world.

Initially, Sonya's good virtue is highly respected by Raskolnikov. From the beginning of the novel, Raskolnikov's exclamation "Sonechka, Sonechka Marmeladova, eternal Sonechka, as long as the world lasts" [2, p. 57] straight after hearing about Sonya's compassion and endurance from her father in the wine shop may sound some readers quite strange. It was until the conversation between Raskolnikov and Luzhin, the morality of Sonya became clearer when he said to Luzhin, a lawyer who was going to get married to his younger sister that: "It's my opinion that with all your merits, you aren't worth the little finger of that unfortunate young woman at whom you're casting stones" [2, p. 317]. For Raskolnikov, hidden under a pleasant appearance was Luzhin's vile, and infamous heart. Luzhin was nothing more than an opportunist who always aimed to gain his fame and fortune regardless of the honors and circumstances of others, including his future bride. Meanwhile, despite her base career as a prostitute, Sonya's soul was peaceful and calm. She selflessly sacrificed herself without hesitation. Luzhin's self-interest was, therefore, never worth Sonya's self-sacrifice.

On another occasion, Raskolnikov stressed his praise for Sonya's benevolence when comparing Sonya to his younger sister, Dunya. Although both of those two girls had volunteered to support their families, their

motivations were quite different. Dunya's decision was to get married to a wealthy man without love but for the sake of her whole family whereas Sonya's choice brought her nothing but shame and pity. While Dunya had spent her whole night to think and to pray before making a final decision [2, p. 50], Sonya had immediately chosen to work as a prostitute to support her father as well as stepmother and her own three children without considering or complaining as soon as she was required to save whole family's poverty. Doubtlessly, Sonya's loving-kindness and compassion won Raskolnikov's emotions despite the fact that she had never conveyed her condition or style of living to him.

Second, Sonya was the unique person who won over Raskolnikov's trust. Regardless of Sonya's youth, and her dishonorable employment, Raskolnikov came to her for his last refuge. Sonya's faith and honest demeanor made Raskolnikov admit his guilt even though he had enough excuses at first. Sonya was not only greedy for a single penny but helpful, even though she was growing up in extreme poverty. Sonya had a deep understanding and sympathy for people who had bad luck, such as her father, stepmother, and Raskolnikov, despite her lack of education. She was not only serene by Luzhin's malice, but she also quietly accepted her misfortune without seeking retribution. Sonya was not only terrified by Raskolnikov's crime, but also found out Raskolnikov's path of rebirth. Sonya put the Bible's teachings into her daily practice even though she did not attend church every day.

On the other hand, Sonya's reactions to Raskolnikov demonstrated that she profoundly understood what Raskolnikov's dilemma was as exact as Raskolnikov's. Not only did Sonya not criticize Raskolnikov but she also sympathized with his criminal motivation. Furthermore, Sonya gave Raskolnikov her hug and kiss without fear, saying "there's no one more miserable than you in the whole world!" [2, p. 427]. She even responded without hesitation: "I'll follow you. I'll follow you everywhere!" [2, p. 427] when Raskolnikov asked if she would leave him. Despite her deep love for

Raskolnikov, Sonya did not encourage him to flee; instead, she urged Raskolnikov to confess constantly to be given a new life. In fact, Sonya's performance indicated "as if she had foreseen exactly that" [2, p. 426]. Similarly, Raskolnikov's expressions seemed as if himself was pronouncing monologues that were, in fact, between goodness and badness to his own soul, rather appropriate than was speaking to Sonya, the human. First, his words "I'm so unhappy" [2, p. 427] showed his distress and suffering due to his bad karma. Second, his mutter "why didn't you come sooner?" [2, p. 427] made implied meaning stronger in relation to Sonya as his good karma. Raskolnikov wished if his good karma appeared and trained him to create more new good karma, such bad karma had not been conducted. In truth, it is impossible for any individual to be aware how karma works or to wish for karma to occur at a specific time. Therefore, Sonya's commitment to Raskolnikov "we'll go suffer together, we'll bear our crosses together" [2, p. 437] is fully evident that good karma and bad karma exit simultaneously in Raskolnikov. A wholly good person or totally perfect one is never possible in life. "Together" was quietly meaningful.

Through his works, readers can grasp the notion of Dostoevsky about evil "evil resides in the depths of human nature, in its irrational freedom, in its fall from a divine principle" [1, p. 91]. His thought was proved why Raskolnikov gave his kiss on Sonya's foot and declared that he couldn't live without her any longer [2, p. 345]. Dostoevsky's understanding was surprisingly reflected in the Buddhist law of karma: "mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow" (**Dhammapada verse 2**).

Furthermore, Raskolnikov's whisper "could her convictions really become my convictions? Her feelings, her sufferings, at least" [2, p. 564] made his karma at the end of the novel fully strong. To confront bad karma clearly gave Raskolnikov a great chance to improve himself. Incidentally, the Buddhist doctrine of karma and rebirth and Dostoevsky's opinion of accepting

punishment after a crime are herein met. “The gradual rejuvenation of a person, the gradual rebirth, and gradual movement from one universe to another” [2, p. 565] is completely amazing in Dostoevsky’s writings.

Conclusion

Regardless of the interpretation, karma is the most giving of all the benefactors. Karma is also a great instructor since it helps people learn from their mistakes. Because it returns to creators whatever they have sent forth as a thought, word, or deed, the law of karma is regarded as a punishment. Past-life karma is resoundingly present in this current life. Getting the courage to transform karmic appearances today is a wise decision that can improve the lifetimes to come.

References

1. Berdyaev N., “Dostoevsky”, (trans.) Donald Attwater, *Meridian Books*, New York.
2. Dostoevsky F. *Crime and Punishment*, (trans. by Michael R. Katz). New York: Liveright, 2017. Url: <https://vn1lib.org/book/3400502/1aecf3> (accessed May 1, 2021).
3. Dostoevsky F. *The Diary of a Writer*, (trans. by Boris Brasol). New York: George Braziller, 1954