



Organ Donation after Death in Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspective

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Abstract

Nowadays lots of countries are encouraging organ donation after death. With the global organ shortage, and the increasingly sophisticated organ-transplantation techniques, this practice is becoming popular. In Buddhist circles, especially in today's Buddhist circles in Taiwan, there have been some Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī who have been sparing no effort to advocate organ donation after death. Meanwhile, there are also some Buddhist masters who disagree or even oppose organ donation after death. Generally speaking, those who advocate organ donation after death are keeping pace with the times by answering the government's call and are occupying the moral high ground. However, most of the Chinese mainland Buddhist masters are still rather conservative about organ donation after death. Actually, both the pros and cons of organ donation after death can find their theoretical basis recorded in the texts. This article is a research on organ donation after death in Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective. There are three objectives of this article: (a) to study the belief of organ donation (dāna) in Mahāyāna Buddhism; (b) to study the pros of organ donation after death in Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective; and (c) to study the cons of organ donation after death in Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective. This research examines two primary cruxes: (a) the first crux of organ donation after death involves the problematic criteria for death¹; (b) the second crux of organ donation after death involves different understanding of death and how to take care of dying people.

Keywords: organ donation, death, Mahāyāna.

¹E.g. cessation of brain waves, cessation of heart beat and cessation of respiration.

Introduction

Nowadays lots of countries are encouraging organ donation after death¹. With the global organ shortage, and the increasingly sophisticated organ-transplantation techniques, this practice is becoming popular. In Buddhist circles, especially in today's Buddhist circles in Taiwan, out of the faith of sacrifice, devotion and benevolence, some of the most Buddhist reverends also keep pace with the times and have been sparing no effort to help promote organ donation after death. Among them, Bhikkhunī Cheng Yen² and Venerable Hsing Yun³ are the most representative Buddhist masters.

Bhikkhunī Cheng Yen from Taiwan, who is well-known for her charity promotion, is the founder of Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. Dukkha includes birth, aging, illness and death. Master Cheng Yen believes that the dukkha of illness is what we should pay the most attention to. On the basis of this belief, she has founded many Tzu Chi hospitals, including the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital, Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, Douliou Tzu Chi Outpatient Department, Suzhou Tzu Chi Outpatient Department, etc. As a renowned philanthropic Buddhist master, Master Cheng Yen has been promoting organ donation after death vigorously for years by propagating her eleemosynary idea of “body donating & waste recycling & medicine promoting” and up until today she has achieved much success. When she was asked about how to take care of the recently deceased people, Master Cheng Yen remarked that we better should not move the recently deceased people's

¹There are mainly two types of organ donation after death: “Donation after cardiac death (Donation after circulatory

determination of death—DCDD); Donation after brain death (Donation after neurological determination of death—DNDD)” James F. Childress & Catharyn T. Liverman, **Organ Donation: Opportunities for Action**, (Washington: National Academies Press, 2006), p. 4.

²Taiwanese Buddhist nun. She is noted as the founder of the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi

Foundation (commonly known as Tzu Chi). “On April 14, 1966, Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Merit Society in Hualien with the support of thirty housewives...” **Tzu Chi USA Journal** #44, (Han Huang, 2015): 75.

³The First Patriarch of Fo Guang Shan Order and a famous proponent of Humanistic Buddhism. “Humanistic Buddhism as conceived and interpreted by Grand Master Hsing Yun, attempts to reconnect us with the original spirit and essence of truth that Sakyamuni Buddha brought into this world over 2500 years ago.” Richard L. Kimball, *Humanistic Buddhism as Conceived and Interpreted by Grand Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan*, **Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism** Vol.1, (Los Angeles: Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism, 2000): 45.

bodies within 24 hours in case extra physical sufferings were inflicted to the recently deceased people⁴. Possibly based on her belief that the dukkha of illness is what we should pay the most attention to, while involving with the problem of organ donation after death, Master Cheng Yen claims that only the Seventh Consciousness⁵ and the Eighth Consciousness exist for the recently deceased people and thus there won't be any physical pains arising in the recently deceased people's bodies. That's because the preceding Six Consciousnesses have ceased working at the time when the recently deceased people are having the operation of organ-harvesting.

Venerable Hsing Yun is the patriarch of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. On one hand he advocates hospice care and admits Pure Land Belief is our final sanctuary. On the other hand he dodges the most fundamental and very well-known theory of "the dead people can only get dressed, bathed or moved by others at least three or eight hours after their death", which is believed as one of the most prominent features of Pure Land Belief. Venerable Hsing Yun said: "You would bring light to the others when you donate your cornea, you would bring the power of life to the others when you donate your heart, you would transfer your vitality of life to the other people's life when you donate your marrow."⁶ and thus organ donation after death is preached as a supposed highly noble virtue of human beings by him.

There are also some other Buddhist masters who disagree or even oppose organ donation after death. Generally speaking, most of the Chinese mainland Buddhist Masters are rather conservative about organ donation after death. Their opinions can be summarized as follows:

Our consciousnesses are still with us after recent death and it can not be taken as true death then. We are not really dead until our consciousnesses leave our bodies completely. Because the consciousnesses won't leave instantly after recent death and by when the

⁴Bhikkuni Cheng Yen, **Pure Wisdom**, (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Press, 2009), p. 54.

⁵"Manas-vijñāna is the Seventh Consciousness. It serves as the ground for ego-attachment. Ālayavijñāna is the Eighth Consciousness. It stores dharma seeds and serves as the genesis for all dharma." "Eye Consciousness, Ear Consciousness, Nose Consciousness, Tongue Consciousness and Body Consciousness are five kinds of sense consciousnesses, collectively they are called as the Five Sense-consciousnesses." "Mano-vijñāna is the Sixth Consciousness. It's centre for mental phenomena and activities." Lingbo Yu, **Analects for Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses**, (Buddha's Education Foundation, 2009), p. 21.

⁶Ven. Hsing Yun, **Buddhist Perspective for Euthanasia—Master Hsing Yun's Dharma Talk in Singapore**, (Taiwan: Pu Men Xue Bao, 2003), p. 7.

bodies still can feel, if at that time the recently deceased people undergo the surgery of organ-harvesting, there would be huge pains arisen and in return intense hatred would be generated among the dead people's last-moment-thought and finally this would lead to the recently deceased people's degeneration. The process of death is suffering itself and both the dying people and the recently deceased people need to be taken good care of, rather than to be bothered or hurt. The last-moment thought is highly crucial for the dying people and it would determine where the dying people are going to be reborn in their afterlife. We need to chant the name of Amitāyus Buddha⁷ for the dying people and the recently deceased people for a few hours or even days to help the dead human get far away from duggati (realms of miserable existence) and to be reborn in heaven or the Buddha's realms.

Mysterious death

In ancient China, people would tell life from death by touching pulses or feeling nose breath. Nowadays most of the countries are taking heartbeat-stopping or lung-respiration-stopping or brain death as the criteria for death. However, if we take heartbeat-stopping or lung-respiration-stopping as criteria of death, the problem is both the stopped heartbeat and the stopped respiration would sometimes restart. Some people may believe the brain death is irreversible and take brain death as the criteria for death. If we take brain death as the criteria of death, the problem is: is brain death the real death?⁸

In Buddhism, it was considered that one would not pass to another rebirth realm in an instant. It is a process.⁹ Firstly you lose your respiration (wind), then you start to lose your temperature (heat). The temperature is lost inch by inch, and it may take hours until the

⁷“The Buddha then said to Elder Śāriputra: “If you travel westward from here, passing a hundred thousand koṭis of Buddha lands, you will come to the land called Utmost Bliss, where there is a Buddha named Amitāyus. He is living there now, teaching the Dharma...” Hisao Inagaki & Harold Stewart translated, **The Three Pure Land Sutras**, (Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003), p. 91.

⁸“In most human deaths, the loss of these neurological functions is accompanied by the traditional, familiar markers of death: the patient stops breathing, his or her heart stops beating, and the body starts to decay. In relatively rare cases, however, the irreversible loss of brain-dependent functions occurs while the body, with technological assistance, continues to circulate blood and to show other signs of life. In such cases, there is controversy and confusion about whether death has actually occurred.” **Controversies in the Determination of Death**, (A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008), p. 1.

⁹Master Yin Guang, **Master Yin Guang Wen Chao Jing Hua Lu**, (Beijing: Religion Press, 2006), p. 61-66.

temperature is gone completely. While the heat is dispersing, the consciousness is also ceasing to work little by little. Finally the body gets totally cold and that means our consciousness has already gone entirely. It's until then when a person can be regarded as truly dead. In the history of China, there are many ancient notable Buddhist masters who were very careful and prudent about death. Some of them even instructed their disciples to keep their bodies unmoved or enshrined for at least three or seven days after their deaths just in case they would get interrupted.

The primary dispute on organ donation after death is mainly involved with the problematic criteria for death and how to differentiate life from death. It is well-known that there are lots of different interpretations of death. Death is really mysterious and is a forever tricky problem. For millennia the human beings have kept on studying death and the religion believers have never stopped debating it. Nevertheless, up until today there is still much controversy about either the precise definition of death or the concrete process of death, let alone the world after death. Death is such an obscure and profound issue that it's just like what is described by the great Chinese educationalist Confucius¹⁰ in his work *The Analects* (*Lun Yu*)¹¹: 'If we don't know life, how can we know death?'¹²

The Belief of Organ Donation in Mahāyāna Buddhism

The *Essay on the Meaning of Mahayana* defines donation as follows¹³: "Speaking of donation, it means to give away one's own property and belongings to the other people with the intended purpose of sacrificing oneself and benefiting the others." Briefly speaking, donation connotes both the relinquishing of stinginess and the cultivating of generosity by a kind of benevolent giving of alms which aims at helping the receivers while expect nothing in return. Categorized by different groups of practitioners, *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*¹⁴ enumerates nine types of Donation and they are Truth Donation and Alms Donation suitable

¹⁰551 BC—479 BC. "Confucius is the earliest and the most influential thinker and educationalist in China. He has been regarded as a sage by Chinese people for over 2000 years." Confucius, *The Analects*, (Foreign Language Teaching and Studying, 1997), p. 3.

¹¹"The Analects is a book recording conversations between Confucius and his disciples." Ibid. p. 5.

¹²"Tzu-lu asked how one should serve ghosts and spirits. The Master said, Till you have learnt to serve men, how can you serve ghosts? Tzu-lu then ventured upon a question about the dead. The Master said, Till you know about the living, how are you to know about the dead?" Ibid. p. 133.

¹³ *Essay on the Meaning of Mahayana*. (CBETA, T44, no. 1851, p0694b08-p0694b12)

¹⁴CBETA, T11, no. 0310, p0515c02-p0515c08.

for the Lay Bodhisattvas; Pens Donation, Ink Donation, Scriptures Donation and Dharma Donation suitable for the Ordained Bodhisattvas; Thrones Donation, Wives Donation and Organ Donation suitable for the Anutpattikadharmaksanti¹⁵ Bodhisattvas.

As to organ donation, it can be recognized as one piece of Mahāyāna precepts. In the second volume of Brahmajāla-sūtra¹⁶, organ donation is specified as the Sixteenth-minor-precept as follows: Buddhist Bodhisattvas should enlighten themselves by studying and contemplating Mahāyāna Tipiṭaka. If there are any novice Bodhisattvas come to learn from them, the Buddhist Bodhisattvas should honestly teach those novice Bodhisattvas about all ascetic cultivations such as burning bodies, burning arms and burning fingers. The Bodhisattvas can not be named as Monastic Bodhisattvas without making offerings to Buddhas by burning off their bodies, arms or fingers. In addition, the Bodhisattvas should also make offerings to hungry tigers, wolves, lions and all hungry ghosts by renouncing their flesh and limbs. The Buddhist Bodhisattvas should systematically preach Dharma to novice Bodhisattvas and make them enlightened. If the Buddhist Bodhisattvas can not accordingly preach Dharma honestly and systematically by reason of their self-interests, they would commit a minor transgression.

In the sixth volume of Śūraṅgama-sūtra¹⁷, the Buddha states the benefits of organ donation as follows: After I pass away, if there are any Bhikkhus who would resolve to practice samādhi can burn one body-lamp or one finger-joint in front of the Buddha Figure, those Bhikkhus would collect boundless merit. Their unlimited sins would be eliminated and their innumerable ignorance would be exterminated. They have validated their commitments on Dharma. If it's not on account of their practicing of organ donation, those Bhikkhus would have to atone for akusala kamma (demeritorious action) of their previous incarnations, just as how the Buddha ingested horse fodder.

In Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, the rationale of organ donation lies in the well-known story which talks about how the Bhaiṣajya-rāja Bodhisattva¹⁸ (Medicine King Bodhisattva)

¹⁵“...to be enlightened with the truth that nothing really arises or perishes”, **Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra**, (CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p0676a11-p0676a15)

¹⁶CBETA, T24, no. 1484, p1006a16-p1006a25

¹⁷CBETA, T19, no. 0945, p0132b14-p0132b20

¹⁸(Skt.), aka Bodhisattva Medicine King. “to cure two kinds of diseases: firstly Disorder of the Four Elements, secondly Ignorance and Malice. is named Bodhisattva Medicine King according to his practice.” **Visualization of the Two Bodhisattvas, the King of Medicine and the Superior Physician**, (T20, no. 1161, p0880c06-p0666a22)

burnt his own body off as an offering to the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon and to the Dharma Flower Sutra twice. This story is recorded in the 23rd chapter of Saddharma Puṇḍārīka Sūtra¹⁹. According to the Saddharma Puṇḍārīka Sūtra, if there is a one who has made his firm resolve to obtain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi²⁰ and that one would like to burn off a finger or even a toe of his body as an offering to a Buddha stupa, thus the virtue and merit of this person's offering would surpass the virtue and merit of all the other kinds of offerings. For example, the virtue and merit of the offerings of kingdoms, cities, wives, children, the Three-thousand-great-thousand realms, mountains, forests, rivers, ponds, and all kinds of treasures and jewels.

According to Saddharma Puṇḍārīka Sūtra, the virtue and merit of organ donation is so outstanding and amazing that lots of subsequent Chinese Mahāyāna monks tried similar organ donation practice and burnt themselves off to pay homage to the Buddha or Dharma. Here is a brief study of those monks who are categorized by the periods in which they lived.

(1) Biography of Eminent Monks²¹

Biography of Eminent Monks records the biographies of ancient Chinese eminent monks from Eastern Han Dynasty to Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Because the book's author Hui Jiao is from Liang Dynasty and so sometimes the book is also called as the Biography of Eminent Monks in Liang Dynasty. There is a Death Episode in the twelfth volume of this book and it records altogether eleven monks who perished out of the reason of organ donation.

(2) A Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks²²

A Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks records the biographies of ancient Chinese eminent monks from the beginning of Liang Dynasty to the middle of Tang Dynasty. Because the book's author Dao Xuan is from Tang Dynasty and so sometimes the book is also called as the Biography of Eminent Monks in Tang Dynasty. There's a Death Episode in the twenty-seventh volume of this book and it records altogether twelve monks who practiced organ donation.

¹⁹CBETA, T09, no. 0262, p0054a12-p0054a16

²⁰Supreme perfect enlightenment. "Only the Buddha's wisdom can be called as Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi." **Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra**, (CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p0656b05-p0656b13)

²¹CBETA, T50, no. 2059, p0404a02-p0405c22

²²CBETA, T50, no. 2060, p0678a15-p0684b03

(3) Biography of Eminent Monks in Song Dynasty²³

Biography of Eminent Monks in Song Dynasty records the biographies of ancient Chinese eminent monks from the middle of Tang Dynasty to Song Dynasty. Because the book's author Zan Ning is from Song Dynasty and so this book is called the Biography of Eminent Monks in Song Dynasty. There's a Death Episode in the twenty-third volume of the this book and it records altogether seventeen monks who had ever practiced organ donation.

(4) An Additional Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks²⁴

An Additional Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks records the biographies of ancient Chinese eminent monks from Tang Dynasty to the end of Wanli reign in Ming Dynasty. The book's author Ming He is from Ming Dynasty. There's a Death Episode in the twentieth volume of this book and it records altogether five monks who had practiced organ donation.

(5) A New Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks²⁵

A New Sequel to Biography of Eminent Monks records the biographies of ancient Chinese eminent monks from Northern Song Dynasty to the beginning of Republic Era. The book's author Yu Qian is from Republic Era. There's a Death Episode in the thirty-ninth volume of this book and it records seven monks who perished out of the reason of organ donation.

The Pros of Organ Donation After Death

Generally speaking, there are four aspects of organ donation after death as follows:

(1) According to Mahāyāna Bodhisattva precept

According to the second volume of Brahmajāla-sūtra, organ donation is specified as the Sixteenth-minor-precept. Since organ donation is an essential cultivation for Mahāyāna Bodhisattva practitioners, let alone the organ donation after death.

²³CBETA, T50, no. 2061, p0855a27-p0861c27

²⁴CBETA, X77, no. 1524, p0506b19-p0509b08

²⁵CBETA, B27, no. 0151, p0301b14-p0306b25

(2) According to Mahāyāna Yogācāra theory

According to Mahāyāna Yogācāra, there is a theory on Eight Consciousnesses. They are the Eye-Consciousness for seeing, the Ear-Consciousness for hearing, the Nose-Consciousness for smelling, the Tongue-Consciousness for tasting, the Body-Consciousness for touching, the Mind-Consciousness for perception, the Manas Consciousness for self-grasping, and the Storehouse Consciousness for storing. Although the eight consciousnesses have different appellations, however they're actually of one same entity. Their relationship is just as the water and waves which are neither identical nor different. They are named respectively according to different functions. Among them, Ālaya Vijñāna (the Storehouse Consciousness), acts as the receptacle for storing Bīja and it's called mind. Manas Vijñāna (the Manas Consciousness) is arising from the Storehouse Consciousness, it acts as the self-grasping consciousness and always revolves around and embraces the Storehouse Consciousness as its object, so the Manas Consciousness is called Thought. The preceding six consciousnesses are able to discriminate various objects and act as the discriminating consciousness, so they are called consciousness.

The preceding six consciousnesses might be intermittent sometimes. However, the eighth Storehouse Consciousness and the seventh Manas Consciousness would always keep being incessant as long as the human being is alive. According to The Rules of the Eighth Kinds of Consciousness written by Xuan Zang, the Storehouse Consciousness would always be both the very first and the very last host throughout a human being's life. When a human being is going to die, the human being's lifespan, warmth and consciousness would extinguish simultaneously. The human being's lifespan, warmth and consciousness are just like three sticks of reeds²⁶. The three sticks of reeds lean on each other and support each other. Once one stick of reed fall down, the three sticks of reeds would consequently fall apart simultaneously. Likewise, a human being's lifespan, warmth and consciousness support each other and sustain the human being's life together. Once one of them stops to function, the other two would collapse simultaneously and consequently the human being's life would be extinct instantly. When a human being is going to die, he would have to abandon his mortal body. The dead mortal corpse lying in the ground would become as inanimate as wood or stone.²⁷

²⁶Samyuttāgama, (CBETA, T02, no. 0099, p0081b03–p0081b08)

²⁷Ibid. p0150a17–p0150b13

(3) According to Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra²⁸

In the eleventh volume of Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Buddha clarifies that if there are Virtuous men and women who are able to refrain from evil physical, verbal and mental karma, when they are going to die, if their families would deal with their corpses by burning off, or by plunging the corpses into the water, or by casting the corpses into the graveyard, the corpses would then be devoured by foxes, jackals and beasts. However, those virtuous men and women's minds, thoughts and consciousnesses would go to good paths. Nonetheless, the minds dharma is indeed neither whence nor whither. The state of consciousness is a continuous and uninterrupted consciousness flow. It's composed of continuous and uninterrupted successions of numerous momentary states of consciousnesses. The previous consciousness and its next consciousness are not intermittent and they're similar and continuous.

(4) According to Bie Yi Za A Han Jing

In the eighth volume of Bie Yi Za A Han Jing²⁹, the 155th text records as follows:

... Śākya Mahānāma Kulika went to visit the Buddha. After paying homage to the Buddha's feet, he sat sideways and asked the Buddha: "Bhagavato, the people of Kapilavastu are prospering and at ease. I live with them together and sometimes this strange idea would occur to me: if there were mad elephant or rushing cart or uncontrollable horse or insane man who run into me, at that time perhaps I could not keep myself mindful of the Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha. At that time I might think to myself—if the Bhikkhu could not keep himself mindful of the Triple Gems, when he was demised, where would he go, which gatiyo was he advancing, what kind of phala would he bear?" The Buddha answered his questions thus: "At that circumstance, you do not fear, then upon your death you would go to good places, and you wouldn't degrade into the duggati. You wouldn't suffer from akusala kamma. That's just like a big tree. When the tree is young, it always grows to the east. If you cut it off when it's big, to what direction would it fall down? You need to know the tree would definitely fall down to the east. You are just like the tree. You have accumulated lots of merit from practicing for a long time, if you degenerate into duggati and suffer from akusala kamma, that would never happen."

²⁸ Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra , (CBETA, T12, no. 0374, p0431b07–p0431b12)

²⁹ Bie Yi Za A Han Jing , (CBETA, T02, no. 0100, p0432b14–p0432b27)

The Cons of Organ Donation After Death

The cons of organ donation after death can be categorized from four aspects as follows:

(1) According to Nan Hai Ji Gui Nei Fa Zhuan³⁰

According to ‘Immolation Improper’ and ‘Imitating Offense’ from the fourth volume of Nan Hai Ji Gui Nei Fa Zhuan written by Master Yi Jing from Tang dynasty, lay people can burn their fingers off as an offering to the Buddha or Dharma. However the monks can not burn off their fingers as an offering because it is in contradiction with the precepts.

(2) According to Maraṇa-dukkha

In Buddhist Tipiṭaka, Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra³¹ called death as Marana-dukkha. Maraṇadukkha refers to the suffering of death. Maraṇa means death, dukkha means suffering. According to the sixty-seventh volume of Saddharmasmṛty-upasthāna sūtra, there are four types of death at the end of human beings life. They are earth disorder, water disorder, fire disorder and air disorder. At the end of human beings’ life, the Four Elements would disintegrate and collapse and huge agony would occur correspondingly. In the tenth volume of Abhidharma-kośa³², Maraṇa-dukkha is called as Marman-dukkha and it describes the process of death as Marman-destruction-suffering³³. Marman is a Sanskrit term which means death-point of the body. It’s extremely tiny and would induce agony and death under the slightest stimuli. The Four Elements, i.e. the earth, water, fire and air would increasingly get proliferated and degenerated while the human is dying. Under the stimulation of the disintegrating Four Elements, there would appear Marman Destruction during the process of dying. According to Abhidharma-kośa, during the process of death, the water, the wind and the heat in our body starts to decompose. Either of the water decomposition, the wind decomposition and the heat decomposition would stimulate and destruct Marmans in the body and acute prick

³⁰CBETA, T54, no. 2125, p0231a29–p0231c17

³¹Voluminous work of Yogācāra School. It’s a definitive encyclopedia on yogic practice. **Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra**,

(CBETA, T30, no. 1579, p0279a08–p0882a14)

³²Verses on the Treasury of Abhidharma. A key work on Sarvāstivādin tenets written by Vasubandhu from Gandhāra in the 4th or 5th century. **Abhidharmakosa-sastra**, (CBETA, T29, no. 1558, p0001a10–p0159a14)

³³“Marmans are acupuncture points in our body which would lead to death by the slightest touch.” It’s said there are hundreds of Marmans in our body. Ibid.

pains would be stirred up to the human in the destruction process of Marmans. Finally the Marman-destruction³⁴ would lead to human's death. According to Abhidharma-kośa, there are two different ways to end the human beings' life at the end of their life. One way is named instant dead and the other way is named gradual dead. For those human beings who would suffer gradual dead would probably also have to suffer from Marman-dukkha.

(3) According to Last-moment Degradation

In the sutra *Zhong jing zhuan za pi yu*³⁵, there is a tale about King Agnidatta who degraded into a serpent after death despite originally King Agnidatta should have been born into the celestial heaven on the facts of immeasurable virtue and merit he made by making offerings and erecting pagodas and temples when he was alive. What led to his degeneration as to be born as a serpent? In the sutra *Zhong jing zhuan za pi yu*, King Agnidatta explained the reason as follows: "While my life was going to end, the fanning servant dropped the fan on my face by accident and hatred was stirred up in my mind. That's why now I degraded into this serpent body." According to King Agnidatta's degrading tale, we can see the importance of taking good care of the dying people's mind.

The crucial significance of the last-moment thought of the dying people has also been recorded in *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*³⁶. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* quoted some text from the *Fen Bie Ye Jing* and clarified why the last-moment thought of the dying people is able to decide the final direction of our afterlife as follows:

Venerable Ānanda asked the Buddha why at the end of people's life the power of a modicum of last-moment thought would surpass the power of their whole life's practice. The Buddha told Venerable Ānanda that although the dying people's last-moment thought is no more than a single and momentary thought, it's sharp and of unmitigated power. Just as the fire or the poison, which with limited quantity can create much effect, the dying people's last-moment thought is able to finally decide the dying people's afterlife. At the end of their life, the dying people would have to relinquish their mortal bodies and all the other possessions all of a sudden,

³⁴“ Either of the water decomposition, wind decomposition and heat decomposition would stimulate Marmans like a sharp edge and hence acute sufferings would be arisen...It's called Marman-destruction because death would come on the heels of that.” Ibid.

³⁵*Zhong jing zhuan za pi yu*, (CBETA, T04, no. 0208, p0535b05–p0535b16)

³⁶CBETA, T25, no.1509, p0238b15–p0238b27

it's just like the soldiers on the battlefield who would fight hard even at the cost of their lives. The last-moment thought is fearless and full of power, it would surpass the power of one-hundred-year's practice and can be called as Great Mind.

(4) According to Last-moment hospice

Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism regards the human beings' last-moment thought as the crucial and determinate factor which would determine the outcome of dying people's afterlife. Master Yin Guang stresses the importance of the last stage of life and narrates in detail about how to take care of the dying people at their last stages of life in the article "Dharma Talk on End-of-Life" from his work "Yin Guang Da Shi Wen Chao Jing Hua lu"³⁷. In this book, Master Yin Guang relates the last stage of life as of most importance and maintains we should by no means touch or move the dying people's body in case extreme sufferings and hatred arisen to the dying people which would inevitably lead to their degradation. For the practitioners who chant the Amitābha Buddha and originally would aspire to transmigrate to the Amitābha Buddha's Western Pure Land, if they have families who would just cry and weep sorrowfully at the end of their life, those practitioners would get their right mind harmed and fail to attain their next births in the Amitābha Buddha's Western Pure Land.

Conclusion

In a word, as a part of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva precepts, organ donation is an essential cultivation for Mahāyāna Bodhisattva practitioners. Based on this reason, some people would believe organ donation after death is a meaningful and supposed cultivation for Mahāyāna Bodhisattva practitioners as well. Generally speaking, in today's Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist world, organ donation after death is occupying the moral high ground and being advocated and propagated by some Buddhist masters in the light of some theoretical basis recorded in the texts. In the meantime, some Buddhist masters oppose it in the light of some theoretical basis recorded in the texts as well.

³⁷Master Yin Guang, Dharma Talk on End-of-Life, *Yin Guang Da Shi Wen Chao Jing Hua lu*, Religion Press, 2006), p. 61-66.

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