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ENLIGHTENED VEGETARIAN RESTAURANTS IN MALAYSIA:
BUDDHIST ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY BUDDHISM

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Abstract: It is important to consider Buddhist Ethics of Ahimsa as a true practice to enhance compassion and understanding. The first precept of Buddhism stresses the importance of protecting life-beings and not exploiting other living beings. The Theravada and the Vajrayana schools are inclined to permit eating of meat whereas Mahayana practitioners advocate vegetarianism. The question that arises is whether running a vegetarian restaurant in Malaysia is identified as a way to practice Buddhist Ethics of Ahimsa. However, not much of Buddhist literature highlights the practices of Buddhist Ethics towards vegetarianism. This paper traces the link between the running of vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia and Buddhist ethics of Ahimsa and how this will decrease violence in one-self, in the family and in society. The authors' conclusion is that the running of vegetarian restaurants will bring about greater awareness about Buddhist ethics which will have an impact on practicing the Buddhist value.

Key words: Buddhist ethics, *Ahimsa*, Vegetarian restaurants, Buddhist value, Malaysia.

1. Overview

Vegetarianism is defined as the conviction and custom of eating solely plant-based food and refraining from eating any meat. Vegetarianism and non-violence become signifiers of purity in both Buddhism and Hinduism practices (Zimmermann 1999; Smith 1990, 177-205). In general, Buddhism is deemed as an animal-friendly religion, even though vegetarianism was not incorporated in the early part of Buddhist ritual. This is due to its practice of refraining from killing animals. Referencing Buddhist scriptures does not solve the matter of eating meat. The branches of Buddhism are categorized into Theravada, Vajrayana, and Mahayana. The former two schools (found in Southeast Asia, Ceylon, and Tibetan Bod) usually permit meat-consuming whereas the latter practitioners (found in East Asia Countries) promote vegetarianism. People in Tibetan Bod traditionally live as nomads and it is challenging to cultivate vegetables in high grounds, hence, following the vegetarian lifestyle can be hard. Therefore, the monastic way of life from both the Theravada and Tibetan customs is typically not vegetarian.

Most of the vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia practice the concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) to cater to the larger population of believers in Buddhism, Hinduism, Janism, Sikhism, and Taoism. The Buddha announced that eating meat to be considered as karmically neutral and monks adopt vegetarianism to express their superior spirituality. However, in the Jivaka Sutta (耆婆迦經) (MN 55), it is highlighted that the Buddha only permit eating meat if one did not:

1. “Witness the animal being slaughtered”;
2. “Hear the cry of the animal being slaughtered”;
3. “Suspect that the animal was slaughtered explicitly for the monk/nun.”

The Mahayanist Buddhism relates these three categories of “purified meat” (三淨肉) to compassion cultivation. The concept of compassion was continuously fostered in the Chinese Mahayanist custom when Buddhism was brought to China, and the Bodhisattva pledge of not eating meat was greatly emphasized. Hence, the Chinese Mahayanist monastic are vegetarian, and similarly, a large number of devotees have followed the Bodhisattva Precepts. Currently, there is an increase in number of Theravada and Tibetan monastic encouraging vegetarianism.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vegetarianism in Buddhist Ethics Consideration

The Buddha was not practicing the way of vegetarian. The Buddha had his meals either by travelling on almsgiving or by invitation. The

Buddha experimented with a variety of diets prior to his enlightenment, however, he finally deserted them as he deemed that it did not support his spiritual development. There were disputes on the Buddha's cause of death. "Buddhist Suttas and Sutras" for vegetarianism concluded that the Buddha passed away from consuming contaminated pork; while former Buddhist researchers debated that his death was due to the consumption of a poisonous mushroom (Kapleau 1981, 24; Page 1999, 121; Phelps 2004, 82). This argument is supported by other Sutras which did not support the conclusion of eating meat (Epstein 2006).

It was not practical to reject any food offering since the Buddhist monasticism in the Buddha's time depended upon the almsgiving of worshippers. If the animal was not particularly slaughtered for the layperson, it is permissible to receive the meat. Through the acceptance of food offerings, the monks could positively inspired them on how important vegetarian diet is (Kapleau 1981, 25). In reality, it was expected for contributors to check in with Ananda, who is the "beloved disciple" of the Buddha, in relation to the offerings of preferred food to the Buddha.

In 257 BC, King Asoka claimed that limited to the flesh of two peacocks and two deers were slaughtered to prepare food for daily consumption as compared to earlier days. From the 7th and 8th centuries, the Tantric texts cited both meat and alcohol consumption are deemed as suitable offerings to gods. This was most likely to include freedom to hold opinions from the usual practice of Tantra and an objection against Mahayanists who refrained from alcohol and meat consumption as a stand-in for genuine spiritual change.

However, Buddhist gradually became uncomfortable about meat eating. The Buddha said: "They [Bodhisattvas] should not be closely associated with people engaged in raising pigs, sheep, chickens, or dogs, or those engaged in hunting or fishing or other evil activities" in a Mahāyāna text (Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (涅槃經), 143). Sarao (2008, 91-98) doubted if the Buddha had permitted meat consumption before. He mentioned that it seems impossible that the Buddha condoned meat consumption since he did not support these acts, and that he even requested his monks' drinking water to be filtered to safeguard them from microorganisms. He hypothesized that meat may not be eaten in the Pali Canon were stated there long after the passing of the Buddha to excuse meat consumption by succeeding cultures (Stewart 2010, 99-140). However, he debated that the Buddha practiced vegetarian lifestyle but he probably supported meat consumption to prevent a division among a number of his monks.

In effect, there is a whole chapter in the *Lankavāṭara Sutra* (楞伽經, 8:246) where the Buddha expressed very fervently against meat consumption. The Buddha did not completely stopped his devotees or disciples to consume meat, but it was depend on themselves to make their own decision. This was the compassion shown by the Buddha, due to the

fact that some individuals resided in locations where it is challenging to refrain from meat consumption.

The Dhammapada denotes that a person is prohibited to “kill, nor cause to kill”. The first precept from the “Five Grave Precepts” (UKEssays 2018) too does not allow instigating others to kill. One would cause another individual to provoke suffering upon and sacrifice other beings by opting to consume meat, thus violating the First Precept. Dharmapala’s attitude towards meat eating and animal killing is clear. Extracted from “Daily Code for the Laity” (Gihi Vinaya) (1898), Dharmapala argued that an appropriate meaning of the Dharma demanded a strict vegetarianism to protect the animal rights. Dharmapala writes that, “The first principle of the Religion of the Buddha was prevention of cruelty to animals... Lay Buddhists should not ‘trade in flesh’ and the Buddha ‘prohibits the sale of... animals for slaughter.’”

2.2 The Concept of *Ahimsa* Towards Vegetarianism

Slaughtering animals for meat consumption not merely causes animal cruelty but also manipulates people, a notion which is opposing to the quality of *Ahimsa* (Schlosser 2001, 160; Eisnitz 2009, 39). *Ahimsa*, Understood as a doctrine of non-violence, close association of *Ahimsa* and vegetarianism turned into being associated with the creation of violence it is against.

During the independence movement, Hindus were already opposed to the consumption of cow flesh while British imperialists aggressively killed and consumed beef. This point of difference was exploited by Hindu independence leaders in order to raise passions amongst the general population. In addition, in the past ten years, the Gujarati government in India had prepared the doctrine of *Ahimsa* and its link with vegetarianism, using laws on cow protection (*gaaraksha*) as well as the control over slaughterhouse. One major Facebook group is the International Buddhist Council of Sri Lanka, which publishes numerous articles denouncing the consumption of beef, mistreatment of cattle, and a major proponent of *Halal* abolitionism. These objections echo earlier concerns where eating animal flesh can be detrimental to your health. Whether these concerns are grounded in reality or not is irrelevant as it is a propaganda for the cow protectionist movement and one that rings true for many Sinhalese who are generally quite health conscious.

With modern meat production, there is a negative ecological impact. Ecology and sustainability have gradually become a notable concern amongst a large number of Buddhist practitioners in the West (Kaza and Kraft 2000; Pathak 2004; Snyder 1996). With the increase in daily consumption of meat, many rain forests have been destroyed and soil erosion became an issue, leading to destruction of natural resources,

including air pollution. In addition, toxic waste from factory farms also led to contamination of food supply as well (Hill 1996).

The first precept *Ahimsa* emphasizes the consideration for life and times we live in. The death of countless living beings (farm animals) due to the mass production, unethical confinement and assembly-line profit-focusing processes should encourage us to adhere to a non-violent principle (Bodhipaksa 1999).

The recognition of animals as sentient beings should encourage Buddhists to see these living beings as equal to humans. Buddhists should not turn a blind eye in the killing of living beings for food. With meat consumption, one supports “the act of killing” (Sarao 2008, 91-98). Schmithausen (2002, 309-329) highlighted that consumers are responsible for the demand of meat supply. By not consuming animals, Buddhists are boycotting the act of sentient beings killing (Bodhipaksa 1999).

2.3 Vegetarianism in Klang Valley

A prior study reported that most of respondents who practiced vegetarianism were Buddhists (47%), Christians (23%) whereas Muslims and Hindus were the minorities. People tend to practice vegetarianism due to the influence from family and friends, environmental issues, health concerns, weight control, religious belief, and banned for animal cruelty, ranked by significance (Table 1). This is echoed by Rubin (2009) who stressed that peers has the most influence on an individual’s eating habits.

It was discovered that 31% of the young vegetarian participants highlighted environmental protection as a major reason. As water scarcity is limiting food production and shortages in food supply could compel population worldwide to turn to vegetarianism to cope with the overpopulation concern (Vidal 2012). “The Expat Online Magazine” (Melvin 2011) published that vegetarianism is gradually gaining attention amongst health-conscious and ethical individuals and resulting in a number of high-profile local celebrities endorsing their standpoint.

In Muslim-majority country such as Malaysia, meat consumption is common. Meat consumption is so deep-rooted in the Malaysian custom among the Malays (the largest race in Malaysia) that when meat-eaters come across vegetarians, countless questions arise regarding what vegetarians eat and how they obtain their proteins. Some Malaysians in the rural areas are ignorant of alternative ways of eating and are clueless of the ways animals are kept and raised for food. Since the teachers in schools are unlikely to address these concerns, it is challenging to remain informed.

Table 1. Higher density for being vegetarians with motives in Malaysia

Motives	The Number of Higher Density for being vegetarians in Malaysia			
	Long-Time practitioners	Vegan	Occasionally Vegan practitioners	Sum
Banned for Animal Cruelty	0		6	6
Save the Planet	5		47	52
Health Matter	3		17	20
Weight Management	0		20	20
Influenced by Friend	25		31	56
Religion Practice	2		11	13
Total	35		132	167

3. Research Methodology

Hardly any work has been done on such vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia that is related to the Buddhist ethics. It is unsurprising with the absence of substantial data in Buddhism research in Malaysia. This article provides case studies of vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia covering Tibetan, Indian, Chinese, and Malaysian’s vegetarian food culture in Klang Valley. These vegetarian restaurants are categorized based on ownership by monk/nun, Buddhist organization, and layperson. Relying on both archival sources and semi-structured interviews with key owners and managers, the report offers an astonishingly valuable set of historical and modern empirical evidence on Malaysia’s mindfulness of Buddhist ethics, *Ahimsa* among vegetarian restaurants in Klang Valley.

The difficulty in precisely describing mindfulness in vegetarian restaurants contributes to the reason of qualitative research being less executed (Yin, 2003). Complete data on vegetarian restaurants is not readily available due to the unique nature of majority business owners. Seeing as there is no standard definition of vegetarian restaurants, the considered criteria are outlined in Table 2. The research questions are:

1. How do Malaysia’s vegetarian restaurants retain the Buddhist ethics of *Ahimsa* to abstain from killing in their respective business?
2. Was the spread of Buddhist value and culture a crucial factor that sustained vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia?
3. How do monks/nuns and Buddhist organizations handle the challenges in running a vegetarian restaurant as compared to the ownership by layperson?

Following this line of reasoning, the research aims to:

1. Determine how the enforcement of Buddhist ethics of *Ahimsa* practiced by vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia allows them to stay unique in the marketplace.
2. Discover the importance of the spread of Buddhist values and culture in vegetarian restaurants in Malaysia.
3. Identify other factors besides Buddhist ethics of *Ahimsa* that have enabled Malaysian vegetarian restaurants to promote vegetarianism in Malaysia.

Table 2. Sampling Research Area and Reason for Choosing Vegetarian Restaurants

Vegetarian Restaurant	Reason to choose
1. Kechara Oasis, PJ and Klang Valley (Established since 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes innovative menu based on Tibetan cultural food. - Spread of Tibetan Buddhism to encourage more people to become vegetarian. - The company’s profit goes to the Kechara Foundation. - One of the best vegetarian restaurants that has gone through many innovation milestones.
2. Dharma Realm Guan Yin Sagely Monastery Canteen, Jalan Ampang (Established since 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes innovative Chinese vegetarian foods. - Spread of the value of vegetarianism particularly on the teaching of Bodhisattva. - One of the oldest Mahayanist Buddhist temples to cater devotees who used to believe in the teaching of Bodhisattva. The food court’s patrons come from different ethnics and religion practices.
3. Ahimsa Group of Companies and Vegetarian Restaurants Balakong (Established since 1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes innovative bean curd concepts of vegetarian restaurant, including oriental style, Malaysia delights, Nyonya food, and fast food restaurants. - Promote healthy vegetarian meals appealing and readily available to people. - Spread of the value of <i>Ahimsa</i>. - One of the most commonly-visited vegetarian restaurants among expatriates.

In this article, three vegetarian restaurants are examined in historical and comparative perspective. These three vegetarian restaurants focus on the central paradox of how *Ahimsa* of Buddhist ethics is closely associated with practices of vegetarianism. More specifically, it explores how the practicing of *Ahimsa* remind ourselves to show compassion. Despite facing obstacles in managing the vegetarian restaurant, these three case studies observed the first percepts to abstain from killing are successfully influencing more patrons to visit their vegetarian restaurants and canteen.

4. Results

4.1 Kechara Oasis

4.1.1 Enforcement of Buddhist ethics (*Ahimsa*)

The founder, His Eminence Tsem Tulku Rinpoche opened Kechara Oasis Vegetarian Restaurant as one of the thirteen departments of Kechara organization and managed by Irene Lim (Rinpoche's student) in 2009. The belief of *Ahimsa* perceived by Rinpoche and his devotees is that they should not recite holy mantra with the same mouth which consume animals slaughtered for consumption. Therefore, Kechara Oasis promotes vegetarian cuisine for all occasions, mostly Tibetan's food culture.

The operation manager explained that by promoting *Ahimsa* enforcement, this will benefit people who organize vegetarian banquet dinner: "See, today we have Indian couples celebrating their wedding event at Kechara Oasis. This Indian couple named Siva and his wife, both practice Hinduism and strictly vegetarian. They believed in offering vegetarian dinner will bring good karma and merits. This is due to the couples' fear that animal's meats, seafood, and fish contain too many antibiotics, hormones, and poisons. Siva's philosophy according to his view when booked for our vegetarian dinner earlier time believed save the life of all sentient beings will keep everybody happy."

4.1.2 The Spread of Buddhist values

As a young child, the founder was often hungry and faced physical and emotional abuse. This experience inspired Tsem Rinpoche to donate foods to the poor and encouraged others to do the same. Twice a week, Kechara Oasis cooperates with Kechara Soup Kitchen Society to serve vegetarian foods to the homeless people in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Johor Bharu. Kechara Oasis offers vegetarian meals in packaging with minimal charges for those patrons who are willing to help the homeless people. The profits of the Kechara Oasis as well as the sold Buddha's statues and offering or Puja items mainly go to the charitable funds.

To quote a Malay volunteer: "Kechara Oasis and Kechara Soup Kitchen are both non-profit oriented organization under Tsem Rinpoche Foundation. To perform generosity or charitable works to the people will bring good karma, right? It is the same as our Muslim community who believed in *Pahala* and *Dosa*. *Al-Quran* taught us that we need to perform good acts by helping others. In return, we will achieve something good and *Pahala* at the end of the day.... Kechara soup kitchen provides training to assist those homeless people to become employable. As one of the volunteers in Kechara, although I am Malay, I can see the connection between Kechara and the good values behind it that providing all people

deserve equally community services for better living. To me, Kechara group is awesome!”

4.2 Dharma Realm Guan Yin Sagely Monastery Canteen

4.2.1 Enforcement of Buddhist ethics (*Ahimsa*)

Constructed by early immigrant settlers from China in 1880, Kun Yam Thong temple was among the most outstanding Chinese-style structures in Malaysia. Served as a place for their devotees to pray, this temple upheld the belief of *Ahimsa* by offering vegetarian food during the first and the last lunar year of Chinese calendar to their devotees. Following an extensive renovation of the temple, the temple was renamed as Dharma Sagely Realm Monastery. Initially in 1994, the food court only operated during lunch hours but over time, Dharma Guan Yin slowly introduced 5-day vegetarian food court, serving noodles and Malaysian vegetarian specialties. Later, the food court was expanded, allowing it to accommodate up to 1,000 people. Besides providing vegetarian foods, this public canteen serves fresh fruits which are harvested from the monastery's own plantations.

As mentioned by the canteen keeper, Dharma Guan Yin public canteen encourages saving the earth by stopping animal killing and promoting healthy eating lifestyle: “Practice vegetarianism will lead to compassion and you might feel happy and lighter.... From chicken, pig, and cows later to the bird, squirrel, monkey and dog meats. Remember these animals are butchered, killed and suffered will lead those eaters also becoming the animals finally suffer in the three wretched realms... one day you will know the meaning of reborn and rebirth in the six realms. Chickens, ducks, fishes, and pig we cooked maybe our relatives from previous life... The turn is again and again.”

4.2.2 The Spread of Buddhist values

One of the beauties of Buddhism is to treat everybody equally regardless our religion or background. Therefore, running a vegetarian food court is the starting point to promote equality to promote *Ahimsa* towards mitigating greed and achieving world peace. Dharma Guan Yin public canteen strongly promotes vegetarianism of *Ahimsa*. International travelers from Trip Advisor praised the public canteen as “great value vegetarian food cooked with love in the center of Kuala Lumpur”.

From the generated profits, Dharma Guan Yin donated to the victims in the earthquake and tsunami in Sichuan and Burma. One of the Buddhist nuns shared her views about running a vegetarian canteen for the public: “The vegetarian public canteen is solely owned by Guan Yin’s monastery and the sales will become our funding and the monastery—usually run by the devotees and volunteers—will distribute the salary to the food court’s staffs and operator. Of course, we formed a community to run the

organization and the monastery will pay the workers with salary but not much. You may work as a volunteer here but at the same time, you can choose to contribute services such as food court's operator, cleaner, technician, accountant, driver, administrator, or publisher too since we used to publish quite a number of dharma books and sutra. The way we distribute the salary to the workers because we know some of them may want to work permanently in here. Therefore, they still need some money to pay for their daily necessities. The employed chefs usually have some experiences in cooking vegetarian dishes, noodles, and bakeries to the public. Those who work as volunteers need to be self-discipline to avoid any cheating, money stealing, fighting, or sabotage among each other in order to nurture right livelihood among the public."

4.3 Ahimsa Group of Companies

4.3.1 Enforcement of Buddhist ethics (Ahimsa)

In 1986, H. Y. Yeong, a successful seafood restaurant owner founded Chi Hong Group of restaurants. In managing the first restaurant, *The Cameleon*, the founder worked with 10 employees, only serving ala carte menu to their patrons. When the founder and his wife embraced Buddhism, they became vegetarians and gradually stop serving seafood in promoting *Ahimsa*. He fully converted his business into a purely vegetarian one and a wide range of vegetarian foods was introduced. Most of the veggie products are imported from overseas before the establishment of Ahimsa Vegan health food. Over time, Ahimsa group opened six vegetarian outlets with various concepts, namely Ala Carte's menu, fast veggie foods, and Malaysia Nyonya Veggie foods. The founder shifted their factory of Ahimsa to Beranang, Selangor to cater large export business by distributing Ahimsa Vegan products abroad.

He shared his opinion on vegetarian restaurants: "I can understand during 80s, not much of vegetarian restaurant in Malaysia. Unlikely now, I think almost 500 vegetarian restaurants which are located at Klang Valley including organic shops, veggie stall, and food courts. It is good news also to us since more and more people being so compassionate to the planet and stop killing animals by performing non-violence. I did suffer from gastric from the past but slowly recovered after embracing Buddhism and always practicing mindfulness. Running vegetarian restaurants of course can't accumulated large profits at the short time, but long time you will see the result. We have a lot of supporting patrons, mostly Chinese and Indians. Some of the Malay staffs even pay a visit to our branches and they love our healthy meals very much. We believed vegetarianism will shape the personality, mood, and mind. *Ahimsa* is the basic for spiritualism and purification to remind us we need to care about the living beings including human and animals."

4.3.2 The Spread of Buddhist values

The establishment of Ahimsa group is doing good deeds by offering strictly vegetarian dishes to those who are practising their religion and fulfilling ethical obligations. Ahimsa group also encourages vegetarianism since more people are abstaining from meat for health reasons these days. Besides, Ahimsa Group organizes yoga and meditation training. These activities attract certain patrons to join the mindfulness chanting by relaxing their mindset to reduce stress.

One of the managers of *The Cameleon* restaurant said her patrons appreciate the existence of the vegetarian restaurant since they are strictly vegetarian: “Some of my patrons who are Indians, Chinese, and Sikh community believed in the law of Karma. Animals have souls and killing animals have karmic repercussions that lead to reincarnation too. Even my kids are vegetarian who have been taught to be not exposed to non-vegetarian practices that harming a creature or human being. Most of the foreigners support vegetarian diets in promoting planetary health and its alignment with human health.”

5. Discussions

5.1 Ahimsa Specializes in Offering Unique Vegetarian Restaurants

A major precept of Buddhist of all denominations is to practice *Ahimsa*, meaning harmlessness in thought, word, or deed. Such an action should not be merely a theory, but a fact that should be practiced, a sacred pledge (*Samaya*) combined into every facet of life to move towards the path to enlightenment and liberation from the *Samsara*.

In the case of Kechara Oasis, although the cooking style is primarily Chinese and Tibetan, many non-Chinese couples from different religious backgrounds have opted to hold their wedding reception here because of the sumptuous vegetarian cuisine, top-notch service and pleasant environment to be selected as Malaysia Tatler Est Restaurants in 2017. Most couples believe vegetarian banquets for their special wedding day are considered as one of the Meritorious Deeds ('Dasa Punna-kiriya Vatthu') to practice harmlessness to the animals being killed just for the wedding dinner. One of Kechara Oasis' frequent patron mentioned that: “I used to visit Kechara Oasis because I used to eat their vegetarian foods during the forest retreat and the foods surprisingly are so fresh and delicious! I seldom eat mock meat as I prefer vegetables to be mindfully chewing and eat mindfully, taste mindfully and swallow mindfully. This would then help us eat without craving and strengthen our mindfulness. If you

wanted to be a vegetarian, bear in mind to keep balanced vegetarian diet. Don't over extreme! It is not advisable to think those vegetarian practices are higher ranking than those non-veggie practices."

Conversely, most Tibetan (Vajrayana) Buddhists consume meat on a regular basis. The devotees adopt "temporary" vegetarianism on pre-assigned dates as a rite of purification, which is known as the 1st (no moon) and 15th day (full moon) of every lunar month. Vegetarianism in Buddhist countries did not ascend exclusively from climatic or economic situations (Ruegg 1980, 234-241). Adopting vegetarianism seems to be more significant associated with two values: the "Mahayana Tathagatarha" doctrine and the principle of *Ahimsa* in Mahayana Buddhism. It is believed that all sentient beings have the prospect to turn into Arahant, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas (Kapleau 1981). Therefore, the establishment of Dharma Realm Guan Yin Sagely Monastery cite the principle of *Ahimsa* as the primary motivation for vegetarianism mainly targeted their devotees at first. Over time, the vegetarian food court that was finally open to the public and foreigners from different backgrounds highlights the ethical treatment of other sentient beings.

At the initial stage, the founder of *Ahimsa* group had invested modern machinery to produce daily improved of *Ahimsa* vegetarian products. The founder believes that if there is a demand for vegetarian foods in Malaysia, the supply of nutritional pulses, vegetables, nuts, and fruits will increase to cater the local and international market demand. Consequently, good quality products from agricultural farming will give more choices to vegetarians and non-vegetarians to consume daily. In return, it will lead to positive outcomes of good will, and compassion throughout society. Violent activities would cease to exist.

The patrons who visited *Ahimsa* group of vegetarian restaurants mentioned that *Ahimsa* inspired them to stop eating meat. The founder from *Ahimsa* group actively promotes vegetarianism and forest retreat since they recognized a connection between Buddhism, environment, and food choice. *Ahimsa* group published their own cookbooks and Malaysian authentic recipes to incorporate Buddhism, the environment, and food into the daily activities as avenues for engaged practice towards sustainability in their respective businesses. The founder of *Ahimsa* group highlighted that the *Ahimsa* practice towards animal would generate good deeds: "Humans knowing ones place as non-substantial (*Anatta*) and interconnected (*Paticassamuppada*). Understanding no-self (*Anatta*) and inter-being, dependent co-arising, and dependent origination (*Paticcasamuppada*) is skilful. Sometimes, we ignore the welfare of other beings and our interconnectedness. If we promote vegetarianism by establishing the vegetarian restaurants, surely good deeds are greater than bad deeds. Refer to the Buddhist cosmology, the good paths are devas, humans and asuras. The bad paths are animals, hungry spirits and purgatory beings. Therefore, humans were the ones who could experience *Nibbana* even

devas would have to be reborn as human first. Compared to the human rebirth realm, animal realm is depicted as unhappy.”

5.2 The spread of Buddhist values changes the society

The modern world is in dire need of exemplary Buddhists who practice what they preach and being true Bodhisattva saviors by educating and acting in ethical and compassionate ways. Kechara Oasis is a great example inspired by the founders who believe in Tibetan Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism. Enlightened to practice the Buddhist ethics to build a caring society, Kechara Oasis shows compassion to underprivileged people by offering vegetarian meals and help them in finding jobs or shelter. Since its inception, over 511,000 people have been fed in five states in Malaysia and in three countries. Over 350 people have been rehabilitated back into society with the association and support of over 100 private organizations. Furthermore, Kechara Oasis organized the program of vegetarianism and forest retreat, engaging vegetarianism in Lama Tsongkhapa Retreat by offering Puja and vegetarian buffet with refreshments.

Therefore, the establishment of Dharma Realm Guan Yin Sagely Monastery vegetarian canteen encourages the devotees and the public to have a far greater sophisticated aptitude for clear reasoning. The vegetarian foods with different varieties cater to the large groups of casual vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism in the Guan Yin's temple. The patrons from the Dharma Real Guan Yin Monastery agreed that one of the ethical considerations to the environment and society needs an extension of compassion and *Ahimsa* concerning the devotees or non-devotees food intake as well. From time to time, more and more patrons from different nationalities pay their visit to taste the tasty vegetarian foods. Most importantly, the culture of being vegetarianism can finally be accepted in the west. The west particularly America and some European countries agreed that animals are abused and only deemed as yet another consumable product. Thus, vegetarianism in the food court serves not only the religious purpose but also the spiritual development in the practice of the Buddha teachings. One Buddhist nuns in Dharma Real Guan Yin Monastery argues that: “Greedy and craving arise because of food. Not only that, greed and craving arise also because of money matter. Therefore, we encourage any of our volunteers or devotees when serving for the canteen have to be faithful to the Guan Yin's temple. The foods cooked have to be fresh and healthy (we try our best to provide healthier ingredients, for example to replace white raw sugar with brown sugar, no garlic or spring onions allowed, no eggs and dairy products. *Lankavatara Sutra* (Suzuki 1932) even stated those who kills the animals and devours the meat in order to strengthen his body. The energy thus will give rise to

ill-minded thoughts, evil minded. The unethical thoughts will give rise to greed and sensual desire.”

Each individual must find his or her own way through the simple precept to perform non-violence. The clear difference between vegetarian and non-vegetarian is minimalist and this may cause false pride. Persuasive gurus and authors stress a close heedfulness of his or her food intakes, the cause and effect and the nurturing of gratefulness for meal offering through improved eating behaviors and habits such as prayers, Gāthās and mindfulness food cravings (Snyder 1996). Lay Buddhists pay close attention to the details of the religious practices mandated by authorities at these locations and model these rituals accordingly in the context of their private affairs. The popularity of vegetarianism as a Buddhist diet may itself stem indirectly from these practices. If the Buddha should be given a vegetarian *pūja* then it implies that a vegetarian diet itself is holy and perhaps something a good Buddhist should himself adopt. If it is good for the Buddha then, in principle it is good for one and all.

There will always be a variety of food options when there are different cultures living in the same location. While we have no control over every food in different culture, the Ahimsa group of companies can choose the best elements from each of them. Ahimsa group strives to continuously improve their vegan food and products to better meet international standards. For the convenience of strict vegetarian in Malaysia, Ahimsa group adhere to their principles and declined to utilize particular ingredients that were in high demand but not completely vegetarian. Ahimsa group carries out research on the texture, recipe, and sanitation of vegan products and improve and test them vigorously to see how long they last so that their nutrients are still preserved when handed out. Therefore, the founder of Ahimsa group of companies came up with the idea of promoting Malaysian healthy vegan foods with the combination of the food culture among 3 races in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, and Indians).

6. Conclusion

The Buddhist ethics of *Ahimsa* motivated Kechara Oasis, Dharma Realm Guan Yin Sagely monastery canteen, and Ahimsa group who are run by the monks, Buddhist organizations, and laymen, respectively, to propose vegetarianism as a practice. These three vegetarian restaurants shared the common characteristics to view all creatures with equanimity and welcome the patrons from different backgrounds to dine in. The practice of equanimity is transformed into compassion by engaging the Buddhists values such as helping the poor with loving kindness, combating Avidyā (Ignorance). Avidyā, as asserted by the Buddha, is the cause of all sorrows. Even a meal Gāthās (the food comes from the efforts of all sentient beings) that is not completely vegetarian can be advan-

tageous to nurture an attitude of self-composure, equanimity and humane compassionate towards all living beings. Rinpoche (1994) stated that: “The beings with unfortunate karma that we are supposed to be protecting are instead being killed without the slightest compassion and their boiled flesh and blood are being presented to us and we-their protectors, the Bodhisattvas-then gobble it all up gleefully, smacking our lips. What could be worse than that?”

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