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A Study on the Relationship Between Greed and Disease: A Case Study of Gluttony

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I. Introduction

Greed, a fundamental human problem, significantly impacts individuals' physical and mental health. Excessive pursuit of greed often leads people to neglect their physical and mental well-being, resulting in various diseases. This study focuses on "gluttony" and explores the relationship between gluttony and diseases from a medical perspective. By employing a literature review method, including medical literature and classical texts, and using illustrative arguments, this study aims to demonstrate that gluttony itself is a disease and can also lead to complications.

This paper will be organized and written according to the following structure:

First, the definitions of "gluttony" and diseases will be explored from both medical and Buddhist perspectives, with a particular focus on related definitions in the medical field.

Second, from a medical standpoint, the relationship between "gluttony" and diseases will be explored, analyzing the connections between "gluttony" and various diseases such as binge eating disorder (complications, dementia). The causes of these diseases will be investigated, and how "gluttony" leads to the occurrence of these diseases will be analyzed.

Finally, in the conclusion, it will be concluded that "gluttony" itself can be considered a disease and can also lead to complications and other diseases. It is hoped that this research can provide a new perspective on understanding diseases caused by "gluttony", helping people to better understand the interaction between diet and health, as well as the prevention and treatment of related diseases.

II. Definitions of Greed and Disease

Firstly, it is essential to clarify the definition of "disease". In Paper No.

14, "On the Relationship Between Doubt and Disease", disease has been defined as a painful condition that causes harm and impairment to both the body and mind. This definition will not be reiterated here. Next, we turn to the definition of "greed". In Buddhism, greed is considered a type of "afflictive illness" or "poison of greed". Combining the descriptions of "greed" in the *Treasure Rain Sutra*¹ and the *Mahāsaṃghika Vinaya*², greed can be defined as an attachment to the five desires, an inability to let go, an insatiable desire to obtain them. Finally, we define "gluttony". In the medical field, "gluttony" is considered an excessive desire and pursuit of food, exceeding normal physiological needs. This behavior is often accompanied by a weakened ability to control eating behavior and a disregard for the negative consequences of eating. Gluttony can not only lead to physical health problems but also have a negative impact on mental health.

III. A Medical Exploration into the Relationship between Greed and Disease

A substantial body of existing medical research has demonstrated a strong correlation between "greed" and various diseases. In particular, binge eating disorder serves as a prime example of "greed" manifested as a disease. Individuals suffering from binge eating disorder often struggle to control their eating behavior, exhibiting an excessive pursuit of food and disregarding the negative consequences of overeating. A domestic documentary titled "China's First Original Documentary on Eating Disorders (Anorexia/Bulimia/Binge Eating Disorder)" provides a real-life account of the symptoms of binge eating. For instance, the documentary

1 Dharmarakṣa, *The Sutra of the Precious Rain*, Vol. 2: "What is superior greed? It means that this greed fills the body and mind, follows the inferior, the mind is always stained and attached, and there is no shame or regret at all times. ... All the means of livelihood, if the mind is attached to it, is generally called greed." *Taishō Tripitaka*, Vol. 16, p. 290.

2 Buddhahadra and Dharmakshema, *Mahāsaṃghika Vinaya*, Vol. 1: "At that time, there was a light and frivolous greedy being who tasted this flavor and felt its fragrance and sweetness. Gradually taking food, he immediately developed an attachment." *Taishō Tripitaka*, Vol. 22, p. 229.

features a girl named Zhang who engages in uncontrollable binge eating and exhibits self-harm behaviors during her hospital stay.³ The *A+ Medical Encyclopedia* further characterizes binge eating disorder as follows:

Binge eating disorder is an eating disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of uncontrollable overeating. During binge eating episodes, the amount of food consumed is astounding and the speed at which it is consumed is incredible. Typical patients resemble starving refugees, their eyes fixed solely on food, oblivious to their surroundings. They devour entire meals in a matter of minutes, as if swept away by a whirlwind. These binge eating episodes can occur repeatedly. The marked anxiety, depression, and irresistible cravings for food cause significant distress.⁴

The characteristics of binge eating disorder, as depicted in the documentary and research, strongly support the assertion that "gluttony" itself constitutes a disease. Binge eating disorder is characterized by recurrent episodes of uncontrollable overeating, often followed by compensatory behaviors such as purging (including self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives and diuretics, excessive exercise, or fasting). However, long-term abuse of ipecac syrup for inducing vomiting can lead to cardiomyopathy, and self-induced vomiting can erode tooth enamel and cause esophagitis. Severe fluid loss and electrolyte imbalances, particularly hypokalemia, can also occur. In extreme cases, binge eating can result in gastric or esophageal rupture, leading to life-threatening complications. Additionally, depression, anxiety (such as about weight and social situations), and anxiety disorders are commonly observed in individuals with binge eating

3 "Domestically Produced Original Documentary on Eating Disorders (Anorexia/Bulimia/Binge Eating Disorder)", Bilibili

website, URL: [【国内首部原创进食障碍纪录片（厌食/暴食/贪食症）】获 70 万关注-全 B 站独家授权_哔哩哔哩_bilibili](#), accessed on January 30, 2024.

4 "Binge Eating Disorder," A+ Medical Encyclopedia, URL: <http://cht.a-hospital.com/w/%E7%A5%9E%E7%BB%8F%E6%80%A7%E8%B4%AA%E9%A3%9F%E7%97%87>, accessed January 30, 2024.

disorder.⁵

Furthermore, "gluttony" can lead to other complications. For instance, once individuals become greedy, they tend to pick and choose their favorite foods, inevitably leading to picky eating, nutritional imbalances, and consequently physical and mental health problems. For example, a preference for spicy foods can lead to excessive secretion of gastric acid due to the capsaicin content in chili peppers, resulting in gastrointestinal inflammation and even inflammation and diseases of the liver and gallbladder, causing significant discomfort.⁶ Moreover, "gluttony" has been linked to other diseases.

For instance, regular eating can ensure stable blood glucose levels. However, once individuals engage in "gluttony" and eat impulsively, irregular eating patterns can lead to significant fluctuations in blood glucose levels, resulting in fatigue, irritability, and emotional disturbances, including depression and anxiety.⁷

Furthermore, many processed foods and beverages contain added sugars, fats, salt, and refined flour, all of which have detrimental effects on health. These products have been linked to poor mental health, obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other illnesses. Numerous studies have shown that sugar can adversely affect certain regions of the hippocampus, leading to behavioral and cognitive problems.⁸ Moreover, sugar creates an acidic environment in the body, causing long-term damage to internal organs, including the five viscera and six bowels. Consequently, it can gradually deteriorate the entire body, damaging organs such as the skin, muscles, and

5 "Binge Eating Disorder", Merck Manual, Professional Version, URL: [神经性贪食症 - 精神疾病 - MSD 诊疗手册专业版 \(msdmanuals.cn\)](#), accessed on January 30, 2024.

6 "Capsaicin—the pungent component of chili peppers: A review of gastrointestinal effects and mechanisms," X-MOL, URL: <https://www.xmol.com/paper/1432845804477595648/t?recommendPaper=1386865594339450880>, accessed January 30, 2024.

7 "Diet and Health: How Your Diet Affects Your Mental Health," BBC News Chinese, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/science-53642105>, accessed January 30, 2024.

⁸ Same as footnote 5.

bones, and eventually leading to the failure of individual or multiple organs, ultimately resulting in death. Individuals suffering from these conditions experience significant pain and discomfort.⁹ Notably, "gluttony" inevitably leads to excessive sugar consumption, triggering the aforementioned health issues.

In general, excessive eating negatively impacts the body's metabolism and immune system, increasing the risk of various diseases. A comprehensive analysis reveals the following: excessive eating can lead to excessive calorie intake and obesity, which in turn can contribute to a host of other diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Heart disease, a potential consequence of obesity, can further lead to heart failure, myocardial infarction, and other cardiovascular complications. Moreover, excessive eating can induce stress and anxiety, triggering mental health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders. It can also promote unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as sedentary behavior, which can contribute to a wide range of health problems.¹⁰ These health issues can, in turn, lead to more severe conditions, such as dementia. The "Summary of the 2017-2025 World Health Organization Global Dementia Action Plan" describes the characteristics of dementia as follows:

Dementia is a general term for several progressive diseases that primarily affect a person's memory, thinking, and behavior, significantly impairing daily life. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, accounting for approximately 60-70% of all cases. Some studies have shown that cognitive impairment shares common lifestyle risk factors with other non-communicable diseases. These risk factors include physical inactivity, obesity,

9 "What are the effects of sugar on the human body?", China Science and Technology Information Institute, URL: <http://www.kepu.gov.cn/www/article/Ofac13a58c3642c9b68729469f68ff08> ' accessed January 30, 2024.

10 "Health: The principles behind the interaction and impact of physical and mental health," BBC News Chinese, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/science-57739492>, accessed January 30, 2024.

unhealthy diet, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, diabetes, and high blood pressure in midlife.¹¹

It is evident that many of the lifestyle risk factors for dementia are closely linked to "gluttony." For instance, obesity and an unbalanced diet are often triggered by excessive pursuit of food, with "gluttony" at its root. Moreover, numerous health websites have published similar viewpoints. For example, an article titled "Obesity Accelerates Cognitive Aging" directly states: "Obesity accelerates brain aging and increases the risk of dementia."¹² Another authoritative website published an article titled "Obesity harms not only the body but also the intellect," stating: "Researchers have found a link between overweight and impaired memory function, as well as higher levels of inflammatory proteins. Although not a direct correlation, the results suggest that brain inflammation caused by weight differences affects the cognitive function of older adults."¹³ Additionally, an article titled "9 Risk Factors Triggering Dementia Crisis" mentions: "Other risk factors include late-life depression, midlife hypertension, midlife obesity, diabetes, physical inactivity, and social isolation."¹⁴ These risk factors for dementia are either directly or indirectly related to "gluttony." Furthermore, an article titled "Find the Signs, Get Checked: 3 Effective Ways to Prevent Dementia!" suggests reducing sugar and salt intake as a preventive measure for dementia.¹⁵ Excessive eating inevitably leads to increased consumption of sugar and salt, thereby increasing the risk of dementia. It is evident that "gluttony" can lead to complications such as dementia.

11 URL: [2017-2025 世界衛生組織全球失智症行動計畫 摘要](#) , accessed January 30, 2024.

12 "Obesity Accelerates Cognitive Aging," National Health Research Institutes Newsletter, URL: [肥胖會加速大腦認知老化 - 國衛院電子報 \(nhri.edu.tw\)](#) , accessed January 30, 2024.

13 "Obesity harms not only the body but also the intellect," BBC News Chinese, URL: [肥胖症不仅有害身体，更伤害智力 - BBC 英伦网](#) , accessed January 30, 2024.

14 "9 Risk Factors Triggering Dementia Crisis," Health 2.0, URL: [9 個危險因子 引爆失智症危機|研究|大腦|教育程度|健康 2.0 \(tvbs.com.tw\)](#) , accessed January 30, 2024.

15 "Find the Signs, Get Checked: 3 Effective Ways to Prevent Dementia!", Hello Doctor, URL: [找徵兆、做檢查，3 招有效預防失智症！ - Hello 醫師 \(helloyishi.com.tw\)](#) , accessed January 30, 2024.

Similarly, Buddhist scriptures contain numerous records of diseases caused by "gluttony." For example, the *Sūtra on the Differences of Karmic Retribution for Suka, the Elder* states, "Tenth, if one does not digest the previous meal and continues to eat, one will receive the retribution of many diseases."¹⁶ In other words, failing to digest food before consuming more leads to various illnesses. Furthermore, *The Great Nirvana Sutra* states, "All diseases are caused by excessive eating."¹⁷ This sutra directly links excessive consumption to various ailments. Additionally, the *Sutra of the Great Vows of Kṣitigarbha* states, "If one encounters those who eat immoderately, one should explain that they will receive the retribution of hunger, thirst, and throat diseases."¹⁸ This passage highlights the connection between "gluttony" and diseases related to hunger and thirst.

In conclusion, both contemporary medical research and Buddhist scriptures establish a strong correlation between "gluttony" and various diseases. "Gluttony" itself can be viewed as a pathological condition and may lead to a multitude of complications, including but not limited to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, depression, anxiety, and dementia.

IV. Conclusion

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate whether "gluttony" can be classified as a disease and whether it can lead to other complications. By examining the perspectives of both medicine and Buddhism, this paper concludes that "gluttony" itself is a disease and can indeed cause various complications. Through an exploration of medical concepts such as binge eating disorder, complications, and dementia, this study demonstrates how "gluttony" can be considered a disease and how it

¹⁶ Fazhi, trans., *Sūtra on the Differences of Karmic Retribution for Suka, the Elder*, *Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 1, p. 892.

¹⁷ Dharmagupta, trans., *The Great Nirvana Sutra*, vol. 10, *Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 12, p. 427.

¹⁸ Śikṣānanda, trans., *Sutra of the Great Vows of Kṣitigarbha*, vol. 1, *Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 13, p. 781.

can lead to other health problems. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between human behavior and health.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that numerous factors contribute to the development of diseases. Due to limitations in medical knowledge and writing skills, this paper does not delve into these factors in great detail. The author hopes to be able to write a more comprehensive and persuasive paper on the relationship between "gluttony" and disease in the future.

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