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Practical Relevance of Zen-Buddhism for modern philosophy and science

The article provides a theoretical introduction to the problem of the relevance of Zen Buddhism for modern Western philosophy and psychology. It shows how it is relevant separately for Western philosophy, separately for Western psychology by providing specific examples. The negative features of Zen Buddhism in relevance to philosophy and psychology are highlighted. It is demonstrated what exactly is a rudiment within the framework of Zen for modernity in the West in the above-mentioned sciences, what can no longer be used in the present. Throughout the article, a detailed analysis of Zen is carried out for its practical significance for a modern person. The conclusion is made about the relevance of Zen for modern science represented by philosophy and psychology. Zen is teaching applicable to modern Western civilization in the face of its sciences, philosophy and psychology in the 21st century. Even if it is important to use Zen tools wisely, it cannot be denied that science and Zen Buddhism are still in dialogue. The differences and possible uses of Zen in science still remain a topical issue for philosophy.

Keywords: modern Western culture, Eastern teaching, Eastern philosophy, Zen Buddhism, Zazen, Koan, mondo, psycho-practices, education, irrationalism.

Introduction

Zen-Buddhism is one of the most “atheistic” religions in the world of XXI century. Because Zen is not exactly a religion at its core but more of a certain way of life that promotes harmony of the person with themselves and the world around them. It helps to relieve anxiety and pain experienced in everyday life and gives a feeling of freedom and complete self-realization — at least by its practitioners’ interpretation. Originating in Japan of the XIIth century as a result of the development of Chinese Chan-Buddhism, Zen was the state religion of the country for several centuries but barely gained any distribution outside of Japan. In the West, Zen spread after World War II as a result of the search for teachings and spiritual practices to overcome the growing anxiety and neuroticism of society. There it mostly appears in the form of globalized Zen or Exo-Zen [1; 128]. However, authentic Zen is also present in the Western world, and in its original form with authentic Eastern content.

In a strictly practical sense, Zen as a name can be both attributed to the state of meditation and a system of meditation techniques. Therefore, Zen Buddhism as it were is a meditative form of Buddhism, or rather, Buddhism movement with a strong emphasis on its meditative part. Meditation is the Buddhist process of self-regulation and as such is considered as a reliable path to wholeness.

Meanwhile modern science has reached a high level of development in terms of the study of material world. These achievements can contradict more traditional worldview systems. So does Zen-Buddhism resonate with scientific discoveries of the last century? How does modern science understand reality? And what is the Zen’s view of reality?

There is a generally accepted view that religion and science act in completely different fields. The empirical realm of science is a set of theories and phenomenon that relate to the world, visible around, while religion operates with dogmas and focuses on moral values.

Despite the fact that there is a set of religious elements, such as temples, monks, rich ritualism, and prayers, inherited from the original Buddhism, it has a wide range of empirical methods for exploring the nature of the mind, putting forward various hypotheses and their evidence; Zen is able to build and justify theoretical systems that describe universe in concepts completely unrelated to religious field, and in that capacity (non-religious one) most interesting for our researching goals.

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The relevance of this article is justified by two points: 1) poor research of the relevance of Zen itself for the Western world in science, namely, philosophy and psychology; 2) not fully explored influence of Zen on Western philosophy and psychology.

The novelty of this article is contained in the following points: 1) isolation of a certain influence of the overviewed religion on Western philosophy and psychology; 2) a theoretical description of the practicality of Zen for modern Western society.

The purpose of this article is to figure out whether Zen is a relevant teaching for Western culture in the modern world. If so, where exactly this relevance is manifested.

Experimental

The proposed article uses philosophical analysis and the comparative method to understand and make sense of Zen Buddhism's relevance to contemporary philosophy and science. In our case, the comparative method is used to point out the similarities and differences between Zen and Western philosophical teachings, as well as their strong points, suitable for strengthening the Western approach in various fields, such as philosophy, psychology and education, and at the same time to warn against specific situations where Zen can be destructive to the subject who was supposed to benefit from the communication with Zen.

Results and Discussion

In the XX century, when Zen began to penetrate the West, it was compared with Western philosophical and psychological trends. If we look for analogues among Western philosophical movements, we can find certain similarities between original Buddhism and Epicureanism (Epicurus: "Gliding through life, do not lean on it", "By pleasure we mean not luxury and excess, but freedom from diseases of the body and suffering of the spirit"). Speaking specifically of Zen-Buddhism, the compared directions, first of all, were intuitionism mostly represented by Henri Bergson [2; 61], the philosophy of life of Friedrich Nietzsche [3; 211], and Martin Heidegger's philosophy [4; 109]. In psychology, such trends were psychoanalysis of the XIX and XX centuries [5; 300] and neo-Freudianism [6; 72].

Comparative studies have shown that Zen and Western teachings both in philosophy and psychology have much in common in details, but at the same time, they differ in essence — both in methods and results. Zen method uses various psycho-practices of religious origins while Western philosophy tends to use scientific or near-scientific methods; the result in Zen is liberation and peace, in Western philosophy — the search for truth.

Currently, in the XXI century, it is worth noting that Zen can help the various philosophical movements of the West, and these philosophical movements, in turn, provide material for the application of Zen. For example, in the philosophy of the subject, owing to Zen, it can be shown that where seemingly the subject and the object are equated, in fact, it is still possible to single out the subject — the subject as an addition to "the agent" of Vincent Descombes. It should be clarified that "an agent" is a semantic category indicating an active participant in a situation, performing an action, or exercising control over a situation [7]. In a sentence, agent is expressed by a verb. The agent's complement is a semantic subject with a passive form of the verb [8] — which is a noun. The agent's complement is usually associated with the possibility of active-passive transformation and with the active action of an animate actor [9]. For example, the sentence "Kodo Sawaki hugged Seungsahn" (both are famous Zen masters). This sentence must be put in a passive form — "Seungsahn was embraced by Kodo Sawaki". In this case, the agent is the verb itself (a specific action) — "was embraced", and the agent complement there is a noun in the form of a name "Kodo Sawaki".

Any enlightened person, in one way or another, uses language and, while describing a specific event, identifies a subject in the third person, which does not disappear anywhere, even if one does not use speech in this way (after all, the enlightened one performs an action). Thus, he shows the need for the concept of the subject as a complement of the agent with the help of language.

In addition, Zen Buddhism can serve well for such a branch of philosophy as hermeneutics. Zen koans (literally, riddles made for the Zen adept to experience satori — smaller personal enlightenment) and mondo (dialogues between the master and the student, leading to the latter's enlightenment) can serve as material for analysis and, thus, be reinterpreted using the techniques of this area. For example, mondo (a recorded collection of dialogues between a pupil and a teacher) can be seen not from the point of its sacred meaning, but from the point of the repetition of its parts in the Zen tradition, or from the point of view of the uniqueness of a particular incident, not necessarily even Zen one (e.g., Socrates' dialogues famously considered mondo).

Zen can also make a clear contribution to practical philosophy. Despite its contemplative orientation, it can still prepare the ground for action in objective reality owing to its psycho-practices, which, in this case, have propaedeutic traits, when the one who acts and the action itself become one.

Our reality has a dualistic nature. The substance that makes up objects and phenomena simultaneously exists in the non-material form of a wave and material particle shape. A particle in a waveform has no fixed position in space and time; it is simultaneously everywhere, distributed throughout the universe.

Everything we are is the end result of our thoughts. The Buddha said: “Mind is everything”. In Zen, the mind is the center of our reality. It serves not only as a simple part of said reality but also as its origin. The idea of the existence of the world outside the context of our consciousness, a world separated from the mind, is considered to be erroneous in Eastern philosophical tradition. Thus, it is considered that everything is the mind.

Einstein, who rejected quantum physics, co-authored a supplement to quantum theory in 1935 with scientists Boris Yakovlevich Podolsky and Nathan Rosen. Quantum entanglement is yet another weird quantum physics phenomenon that Einstein and his co-authors found. When two particles contact one another, they “become mixed up” and a unique state of connectivity develops between them. Now, regardless of whether they are at different locations inside the same room or the cosmos, when one of these particles is impacted, for example by measurement or observation, the second particle quickly and precisely imitates the behavior of the first one. In reality, “entangled” particles behave as if they were one thing rather than several objects, which might account for the odd interaction at a distance. Two particles are constantly linked, no matter where they are in time or space.

Only the force is the source of all matter (which causes vibrations of atomic particles and maintains the integrity of the microscopic solar system of the atom). The conscious mind, which is the foundation of all matter, holds this power. Werner Heisenberg, a well-known German scientist, postulated that just by looking at the atomic world, we have some impact on it. He concluded that it was impossible to know both the particle’s speed and its location in space at the same time. Even if an electron’s position is known with absolute certainty, its speed cannot be predicted. The basic uncertainty was what he named it. “Rather than observing nature as it is, we witness nature as it manifests itself to us via our method of questioning. The seen event is connected to conscious observation, which truly establishes where it belongs in the environment. The intellect that sees reality creates it.

It seems that Zen Buddhism works surprisingly well with modern physics achievements and theories.

In addition, existentialism as a philosophical trend can be enriched by Zen psycho practices (e.g., zazen, seated meditative practice) which help to live in this world of absurdity, contribute to the perception of the world as it is, not allowing to suffer from its alienation and meaninglessness. In some cases, the absurdity of this world can reach the so-called noogenic neurosis — a concept introduced by Viktor Frankl. Noogenic neuroses are the result of moral conflicts and spiritual problems [10; 242]. Beyond the mere coincidence of word resemblance, these Eastern ideologies and existentialism have many similarities. Ontology, the study of being, is something that both are interested in. Both look for a connection to reality that goes beyond the line between subject and object. Both would contend that man has become estranged from both nature and himself as a result of Western culture’s obsession with conquering and dominating the natural world. The fundamental reason for these parallels is that Eastern philosophy has never experienced the extreme separation of subject and object that has defined Western thought. Existentialism specifically aims to eliminate this duality.

For the various schools of thought, Zen can improve the following: antipsychiatry [11; 403], existential psychology [12; 157], and modern psychoanalysis [13; 33]. They can be enriched by Zen practices (koan, zazen) by introducing new methods of working with the patient’s mind, excluding their own theory, i.e., they will act as a support to existing psychotherapeutic practices.

However, besides the direct practices that will expand and deepen the psychological teachings under consideration, Zen in the theoretical part is weaker than them, and therefore it cannot improve them in any way. It can give a certain calming effect, because “One is All, and All is One”, which, to some extent, will help to work with anxiety, phobias and panic attacks due to disidentification with one’s own personality and identification with Other, but even in this case, complete healing without pharmacotherapy will be virtually impossible.

At the same time, it is worth noting that Zen Buddhism psycho practices in their essence can be used for various mental illnesses more acquired than hereditary in nature, for example, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), discrete increased levels of anxiety, etc. However, there is a number of psychiatric disorders for

which these practices not only will be ineffective, but outright harmful. These are disorders more hereditary than acquired — bipolar disorder, nuclear psychopathies of various types, schizophrenia, etc. In this case, it is better to use pharmacotherapy with traditional the West psychiatric methods — cognitive-behavioral therapy, reflexology etc, due to the fact that they cannot be completely cured, but only, at most can be stopped (at least, science has not yet proved that people suffering from hereditary mental illnesses have been cured with the help of Zen psycho-practitioners). In other words, professing the principle of “*primum non nocere*”, it is better not to use Zen Buddhism psycho-practices in the presence of psychotic symptoms (delusions, hallucinations), suicidal tendencies and manic states.

In psychology, it is considered positive that the teaching of Zen contributes to the development of mental flexibility. A person who decided to get acquainted with Zen Buddhism and delve into it to better cope with life's adversities will definitely go through the acceptance that they (the person) is not the center of the Universe if the anti-egocentric insight did not occur before meeting this teaching. Also, one of the integral parts of revelation in Zen is the fact that although a particular person is not the “center of the Universe”, at the same time they are so inseparable from the universe that they are technically completely one with it. Proceeding from these two realizations, the elaboration of subjective judgment, which cannot be truly true, is automatically attached, which means that the adherence to principles, which are so inherent in neurotized people suffering from their own principles, disappears. All of these things are definitely positive in terms of resilience to stress.

The practices of Zen Buddhism can be useful both for emotional stress and as a support for self-development. Serious stress or even panic attack can be eliminated, for example, by ending the internal dialogue [14; 280]. This skill is acquired through meditation aimed at working with it.

Zen Buddhism is such a teaching that can provide working systems of worldview and practices that qualitatively improve the psychological state of a person. A person who has decided to bring Zen Buddhism into their life is likely to lead a healthy lifestyle, which means that Zen affects a representative of modern Western culture in a complex and positive way from a psychological point of view.

Speaking about the disadvantages, it is worth noting mysticism, which can often be found among people who promote Zen Buddhism. An esoteric approach to Zen not only blinds a person who has embarked on the path of seeking spiritual harmony but also hypothetically can lead to a totalitarian sect, which today is common and dangerous for mental health. Also, the doctrine of karma and samsara may be destructive, because it creates unnecessary illusions and expectations, but at specific moments, in the context of psychological comfort, the idea of karmic retribution and reincarnation can be useful (albeit probably not true).

In addition, the rudiment part of Zen for modern Western people is its ritual component, which makes Zen appear as a religion (religious cult and religious organization), and not something else (for instance, philosophy). Another such rudiment can be a strictly defined formal hierarchy within the system of religious institutions, which greatly inhibits the development of Zen Buddhism itself in the forms of exo-Zen and Globo-Zen [1; 133] and even authentic Zen around the world. In addition, Zen Buddhism can be referred to be a religion, but only in the broadest, most ambiguous sense. Buddhism as a whole, whether it be Zen, more conventional Hinayana, or Mahayana, is not a set of beliefs and rules that we must accept and follow. Instead, it is a technique for altering our perceptions and transforming awareness. It is more empirical and experimental now. Zen Buddhism takes a step further by emphasizing direct, non-verbal experience as its fundamental tenant rather than a body of doctrines, theories, or moral precepts. Zen's actual focus is on fostering awareness growth through the Buddha's intellectual teachings and discourses. Only this, not a collection of ideas, should have an impact on how modern thought develops.

Conclusions

Through these various peregrinations, the discourse of Buddhism and Science has survived from the nineteenth, through the twentieth, and now into the twenty-first century. In the period after the Second World War, this science was displaced by Einstein's theories and “original Buddhism” was displaced by Zen, especially as set forth by D.T. Suzuki. The focus turned from cause and effect to relativity and from the law of karma to “interdependence” through creative readings of Nagarjuna's statements on *pratyasamutpada*, “dependent origination”. In more recent years, expositions of emptiness and quantum physics have continued (although now drawing on Tibetan interpretations of Indian Buddhist doctrine) with a new element added: the relation of Buddhism to cognitive science, especially through laboratory investigations of the effects of Buddhist meditation on the brain. Thus, in each of its periods of conjunction with science, a different form of Buddhism has been called upon to play its part.

However, Zen Buddhism and science are different. In the scientific method, at least in its idealized form, reality or truth has not yet been discovered; hypothesis and experiment are employed to arrive at a truth that is at the time unknown, or at least unverified. That truth can change and has changed many times over the history of science, with a new truth sometimes refining an old truth, sometimes completely replacing it. The image is one of augmentation and revision, moving toward an ever-receding horizon of omniscience. Then, Zen Buddhism is profoundly retrospective, looking to the past to understand the present, and thereby secure a haven safe from a hazardous future.

Thus, we conclude that Zen is a teaching relevant to modern Western culture represented by its sciences, philosophy and psychology in the XXI century. Although such a tool should be treated with caution, it cannot be denied that the dialogue between Zen Buddhism and science continues.

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Қазіргі философия мен ғылым үшін дзен-буддизмнің практикалық маңызы

Мақала заманауи батыс философиясы мен психологиясы үшін дзен-буддизмнің өзектілігі мәселесін қарастырған. Батыс философиясы мен психологиясы саласында дзен-буддизм тәжірибесін іс жүзінде қолданудың нақты мысалдары көрсетілген. Заманауи батыс философиясымен және психологиясымен әрекеттесу үшін теріс немесе рудиментті деп санауға болатын дзен-буддизмнің осындай ерекшеліктері бар. Жалпы, мақалада дзен-буддизм қазіргі заманғы адамға практикалық қолданылуын анықтау мақсатында талданған, оның негізінде батыс философиясы мен психологиясы ұсынатын философиялық бағыттың қазіргі заманғы ғылым үшін өзектілігі туралы қорытынды жасалған. Дзен —XXI ғасырдағы оның ғылымдары, философиясы мен психологиясы тұрғысынан қазіргі батыс өркениетіне қолданылатын ілім. Дзен құралдарын ақылмен пайдалану маңызды болса да, ғылым мен дзен буддизмі әлі де диалог жүргізіп жатқанын жоққа шығаруға болмайды. Дзенді қолдану әлі де философия үшін өзекті мәселе болып қала береді.

Кілт сөздер: қазіргі батыс мәдениеті, шығыс ілімі, шығыс философиясы, дзен-буддизм, зазен, мондо, коан, психопрактика, білім, иррационализм.

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Практическое значение дзен-буддизма для современной философии и науки

В статье рассмотрена проблема актуальности дзен-буддизма для современной западной философии и психологии. Продемонстрированы конкретные примеры практического применения практик дзен-буддизма в сфере западной философии и психологии. Отмечены такие черты дзен-буддизма, которые можно считать негативными или рудиментарными для взаимодействия с современной западной философией и психологией. В целом, в статье производится разбор дзен-буддизма с целью определения его практической применимости современным человеком, исходя из чего сделан вывод об актуальности философского течения для современной науки, представляемой западной философией и психологией. Дзен является учением, применимым к современной западной цивилизации в лице ее наук, философии и психологии в XXI в. Даже если важно использовать инструменты дзен с умом, нельзя отрицать, что наука и дзен-буддизм все еще ведут диалог. Различия в особенностях и возможное использование дзен в науке все так же остается актуальным вопросом для философии.

Ключевые слова: современная западная культура, восточное учение, восточная философия, дзен-буддизм, дза-дзен, мондо, коан, психопрактики, образование, иррационализм.

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