

Preface

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People say the world has entered into a borderless age. To be sure, information gets around across the borders of countries and any country's economy moves on an international scale. No country can expect to have a viable economy unless it follows the policy of interdependence. It is under these circumstances that the idea that the world is one seems to be gaining wide acceptance and it seems certain that this oneness will gain further ground in the future. Does "the world is one" mean that the world is homogeneous? One might get a clear idea if one thinks about this in terms of the language one speaks. There is little doubt that the English language is going to stay as the world's common language. This is quite significant because by using a common language we will be well able to communicate with one another and to share our knowledge. The world seems to be moving in that direction. However, does that mean that it would be wonderful if there is only one common language to the detriment and extinction of all other languages? Language is tightly interwoven with country and culture. For example, there is this Japanese word "shibui". When we in Japan praise a stage actor for his excellent performance, we say "Her/his performance is shibui" (sober, quiet, and refined). Originally shibui means a bitter taste (so bitter that it numbs the mouth). This is the experience when eating an astringent Japanese persimmon. We use such an expression for a quiet, refined, and skillful performance, and not for a showy or flashy one. There does not seem to be an English equivalent for this word. Loosing various languages through the adoption of a single language could mean the loss of the unique cultural spirit of each country's. In bygone history many forms of spiritual culture may have disappeared like that.

Just like diversification contributed to the advancement of forms of life, spiritual richness could be attained through diversification, not unification. The disappearance of borders between countries in the world might mean the invigoration of mutual interchange and the creation of new cultures of diversification. In other words, this does not necessarily mean that one single culture will take control over other cultures and create a unified and monotone culture. That would result in digression and the destruction of cultures. Cultural diversity ideally nurture respect for difference rather than overemphasizing disparity and discontinuing interchange. The interchange of different cultures will bring in different cultures and enrichment of one's own culture. Furthermore, it will breed new cultures and create further diversification. This is a process with an underlying commonness and it seems utmost important and worthwhile to seek and find this commonness. Without some joy of finding commonness, there can be no interchange. Such commonness is not simply a cultural similarity (analogy) but a cultural homogeneity (homology) somewhere deep down under the surface. Conceptually, commonness is situated on an ultra high level of abstraction as a part of a meta-theory. Any other kind of theory

would be monotonous and destructive for diversity. If we then would, for instance, discover the simple fact that we are all human beings, the meaning of “transcultural” would gain tremendous impact.

Different things have already been pointed out with respect to the differences between western and eastern culture. Here I would like to address a couple of issues regarding meditation by taking up the example of Buddhist meditation, particularly meditation as practiced in the Zen denomination. The essential aspect of Zen meditation is the requirement for strict control of body posture. Particularly one is required to sit with the back straight without using any physical strength. “Why is that?” you may ask. The results of our somatic-psychological studies showed that if you hunch up your back and stoop, you will end up in a depressive mood or worsen it and that if you straighten your back, you will invite a positive mood. Such was also pointed out earlier by William James. Evidently, physical responses are closely related to mood. For this reason it is important to keep the back straight. Furthermore, breathing is emphasized as an important point in Zen practice because breathing, needless to say, is essential to life. At the same time it is assumed that the breath is deeply related to one’s mind. Zen is based on this assumption because, according to eastern thought, “body-mind” are inseparable and interrelated to each other; besides, all living human beings function on the basis of breathing. The mind is necessarily related to the body and the body is necessarily related to the mind. In western spirituality one is not required to be aware of one’s posture or way of breathing. This is just one example how western and eastern thinking differ. With all respect to this difference, what could be the commonness lurking behind this difference? Again, a meta-theoretical purview would be helpful for an in-depth understanding of meditation.

Then, there is the issue of the self often pointed out as a big difference between western and Buddhist culture. While westerners contend that the self is hard to crack and persists to exist, Buddhists maintain that self does not exist and that, for instance, Zen aims at attaining a state of not-self. Discussing the difference between the two approaches using body and mind as an example, I could feel a pain in my body after being hit. The pain is mine and no one else’s. This is a secure sign that my body exists. But, where does my body come from? I did not create it and neither did it engender itself. My body was conceived by my parents and further sustained by the intake of nutrients like milk, meat, and vegetables, etc. I did not create my own body. Through drinking milk, the life of cows is transferred into my body, by eating meat, poultry is part of my body; and by eating vegetables, plants are incorporated in my body. This is why I cannot claim any part of my body as purely “mine”. There is a distinctive difference between a self existing as something like a “god-given” element which is hard to crack and as “self-existing” like an indivisible atom. As one’s sense of self may differ from anyone else’s, the difference discussed here refers to the “cause” of self’s existence. Cultural differences originating in this difference of self conceptualization may be deeply rooted and the very cause of cultural diversity. Tracing commonness to the abstruse meta-theory is also important to see the Buddhist self. Imagine the self as a swirl formed in a river. Standing on a bank and watching the surface of a river, one can clearly tell the difference between a big and a small swirl and between a strong and a weak swirl. Different selves as swirls exist. However, what is the true nature of a swirl? A swirl comes about by the dynamic force of a river, thus its nature is none other than the flow of a river. A swirl cannot be detached from the flow of the river flow. The self exists and its true nature is being inseparable from the world’s dynamics. A self separated from the communal world only exists artificially. Swirls disappear and re-appear along with the flow.

It would be wonderful if viewers of different cultural backgrounds could sit together and enjoy watching a performance called “Clinical Meditation” by stage performers in different national costumes on the stage called *New Horizons in Buddhist Psychology* and discover that they have something in common and share the joy of such a discovery.