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Abstract

   This paper examines the connection between Buddhist essential teachings and human communication in the East Asian context. The essential Buddhist essential teachings, including the perception of reality, living the present moment and mindfulness, compassion, the four noble truths, and the six paramitas are first delineated. The paper then analyzes how these Buddhist teachings influence East Asian communication behaviors from five perspectives: ontological assumptions, communication ethics, communication behaviors, relationship development, and rhetorical communication. It is concluded that although Buddhist teachings show great impact on the life of East Asians, the influence of other religions and thoughts should not be ignored.

   Recent research on Asian communication has provided insights into the concepts of *yuan*, dependent origination, (Chang & Holt, 1991a, 2002; Ishii, 1998), *guanxi,* relationship and networking, (Chang & Holt, 1991b; Chen, 2001) and facework (e.g., Hwang, 1997; Jia, 2001). Taoist perspectives, such as acceptance and *wu-wei* (non-action) on conflict and persuasion, as well have drawn communication scholars' attention (Chen & Holt, 2002; Crawford, 1996, 1997, 2002). In addition, in studying Taoist and Buddhist perspectives on conflict and emotional adversities, Chuang (2002) unveils the spiritual and philosophical roots of Asian values through Buddhist teachings. This paper extends Chuang's study by further examining the connection between Buddhist essential teachings and human communication in the East Asian context.

Essential Teachings of Buddhism

Reality, Delusion and *Sunyata* (Emptiness)

   What is Buddhism? What is the essence of Buddhism? What are the most fundamental teachings of Buddhism? In short, Buddhism is about reality and delusion.

   What then is reality? Reality is to see things as they are. It is the state of *Samyaksambodhi* (unexcelled complete enlightenment) in which duality is transcended and reality is manifested. The reality is therefore not constrained by dichotomy and *Madhyamaka* (the middle way) reveals the way to transcend all

duality of two extreme opposites to reach the reality. Thus, the reality is neither different nor the same; neither eternal nor nihilistic; neither subjective nor objective (Chang, 2002).

For example, the dichotomous notion of good versus bad and fortune versus misfortune may not capture the whole essence of the phenomenal world. To gain something may result in a bigger loss, whereas to lose something may lead to a huge gain. However, in the reality it is not rising nor diminishing, and it is not permanent nor transitory. Because of its complexity of reality lies in its non-duality, The notion of *sunyata* (emptiness, void) becomes pivotal to Buddhism. *Sunyata*, as Aik (1999) noted, is the doctrine "which asserts the transcendental nature of Ultimate Reality" (p. 111). It "declares the phenomenal world to be void of all limitations of particularization" and eliminates "all concepts of dualism" (pp. 111-112). Nhat Hanh (1998) cautions that the concept of "emptiness" does not mean nonexistence, but rather it denotes "interdependent co-arising, impermanence, and non-self" (p. 146).

The following passage from the *Heart Sutra* reveals the interconnection between reality, delusion and *sunyata*:

Form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness (trans, Conze, 1958, p. 81).

The excerpt indicates that our emotions, feelings, sensory, perceptions and myriad phenomena are a mere illusion and nothing stays forever (Chuang, 2002). Our emotional ups and downs, happiness and sadness, and existence are like a bubble and lightening thunderbolt, as indicated also in the *Diamond Sutra*, "wheresoever are material characteristics there is delusion; but whose perceives that all characteristics are in fact no-characteristics, perceives the *Tathagata*" (trans. Price & Wong, 1990, p. 21).

Therefore, if we can transcend all the material phenomena such as wealth, fame, reputation, and success, we'll reach the state of *Tathagata* (Buddha). If we can see through the delusion that our material realm presents to us and free ourselves from all kinds of attachments, be they strong emotions or material gains, we reach enlightenment. By detaching us from emotional clinginess and material possession, we learn to accept the major setbacks in our lives more easily and reduce our own sufferings.

Living the Present Moment and Mindfulness

The *Diamond Sutra* notes that our mind/heart is unreachable and ungraspable because "it is impossible to retain past mind, impossible to hold on to present mind, and impossible to grasp future mind" (trans., Price & Wong, 1990, p. 39). Our past, present and future cannot be held on to nor reached. Our

mind should not dwell on the past and we should let our heart go of what had happened, no matter how painful or how joyful it was. We should not fear what the future will bring nor should we allow our heart to be hindered by the unknown future. Because the universe is constantly changing therefore we cannot control our present moment, what we can do though, is to enjoy the present moment.

The heart of Zen Buddhism is to live at the present moment and not to let our wandering thoughts be bothered by the past or future. Zen Buddhism teaches us to be mindful of our mundane actions such as walking, living, sitting, and lying down. One can be happy and content just by being mindful of what is present in front of us.

As Hui-Neng, the sixth patriarch of Chinese *Dhyana* (zen) sect, states that *dhyana* means to be "free from attachment to all outer objects, and *samadhi* means to attain inner peace" (trans. Price & Wong, 1990, p. 99). Hui-Neng clearly illustrates the importance of non-attachment, non-duality, reality and delusion as some of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. He indicates, "If we are attached to our outer objects, our inner mind will be perturbed. When we are free from attachment to all outer objects, the mind will be in peace" (p. 99). He further differentiates the difference between *dhyana* and *samadhi*: "to be free from attachment to all outer objects is *dhyana*, and to attain inner peace is *samadhi*. When we are in a position to deal with *dhyana* and to keep our inner mind in *samadhi*, then we are said to have attained *dhyana* and *samadhi*" (p. 99).

The Buddhist concept of "nirvana" is not a state of enlightenment which can be obtained by a few high monks when they passed on. But rather, nirvana can be reached in our heart at the present moment. Hui-Neng sought to teach us that enlightenment is within us and we do not seek it from the outer world or other people. Our mind is intrinsically pure, it is just that along the way we were afflicted by external influences. Buddha is in our heart, which is like a clear mirror supposed to reflect everything but not to be attached by it. As Hui-Neng further explains, "our essence of mind is intrinsically pure," and "Let us realize this for ourselves at all times, Let us train ourselves, practice it by ourselves, and attain buddhahood by our own effort" (trans., Price & Wong, 1990, p. 99). Thus, being mindful is to be aware of the change and not to be disturbed by it, and Zen Buddhism teaches us to be observant of our surroundings and to keep an open-mind.

Compassion

Brahma (divine) *Vihara* (state of mind) can be reached through compassion (*karuna*), which includes components of loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. To Buddhism, compassion is "the wish to remedy all forms of suffering, and especially to tackle its causes – ignorance, hatred, desire, and so

on" (Revel & Ricard, 1998, p. 166). The Dalai Lama (2001) contends that to be compassionate toward all beings, we must eliminate any preference and partiality from our attitude toward them. To our loved ones such as lovers, friends, and children we feel a sense of closeness, whereas to strangers we may not be as inclined to show our empathy. Our compassion is filtered through our "discriminating emotions" (p. 109).

The dichotomous distinction of friends vs. enemies and loved ones vs. strangers limits our compassion toward others. The Dalai Lama advocates a non-prejudicial and unconditional compassion. As he states, "we must cultivate equanimity in order to transcend any feelings of discrimination and partiality" (p. 110). We can cultivate equanimity by contemplating the impermanence of affection and dislike. Our aversion toward someone may not last forever, and conversely no close friends may stay friends forever. Our friends may leave us after they find a new job or a new relational partner. Conversely, our so-called enemies may be the one who brings us different perspectives, which broaden our horizon.

Four Noble Truths

In addition to concepts previously mentioned, the most fundamental teachings of Buddhism are the Four Noble Truths that were upheld both by *Mahayana* and *Hinayana* Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths include afflictions, accumulation of sufferings, ways to alleviate the sufferings, and the right paths. From the perspective of a psychotherapist perspective the Four Noble Truths are symptom (nature of suffering), diagnosis (source of suffering), cure (cessation of suffering) and treatment (path to nirvana).

<u>Affliction (*Dukkha*)</u>

One of the paramount concepts of Buddha's teaching is the inevitability of sufferings and adversity. Birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression, and agitation are *dukkha* (Brazier, 1998). This First Noble Truth represents Buddha's view of ordinary life which may be filled with suffering, sorrow, and pain. However, it also connotes deeper philosophical meanings. It includes concepts such as emptiness, impermanence, imperfection, insubstantiality and sub-consciousness (Rahula, 1974).

However, in the quest for perfection, there are emotional highs and social recognition which we inevitably encounter *dukkha*. According to Buddhist teachings the eight sufferings or distresses are: birth, age, sickness, death, "separation from beloved ones," "yearning for some thing" or someone but failing to obtain it, being in the company of those whom we loathe, and five aggregates (Aik, 1999, p. 33*; A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms, 1962*). The five aggregates in which the Buddha has summed up all the physical and

mental phenomena of existence, and which appears to an ignorant person's ego are form, feeling, thinking, volitional activities and consciousness. These aggregates (*skandas*) cause mental and physical sufferings.

To be free from our suffering or *dukkha* we must start from mind training. As our sufferings are originated from our consciousness, especially *alaya-vijnana*, which is the "store" house of our consciousness, the mind is believed to be the same for *alaya-vijnana*, because "both store and give rises to all seeds of phenomena and knowledge" (*A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 1962, p. 292). Therefore, human sufferings and emancipation from them originated from our mind and *alaya-vijnana*. To live a peaceful life and to maintain harmonious relationship with our surroundings, we must start from our mind. Conversely, from our mind and *alaya-vijnana*, we also encounter human sufferings due to our attachments and ignorance which is caused by our inability to see reality as it is.

The Source of Suffering (*Samudaya*)

The ultimate source of suffering is ignorance. The second Noble Truth explains the origin and the arising of *dukkha*. It is this thirst for existence and becoming, and thirst for non-existence (e.g., self-annihilation) which creates suffering. Our greed, fixation, desire, greed, and craving manifest themselves in various ways and give rise to all forms of sorrows (Rahula, 1974). Our sufferings needs to be fully realized and understood (Nhat Hanh, 1998). We need to embrace rather than try to run away from our fear, hatred, anguish, loneliness and sadness.

Our mind is powerful, because we perceive what we want to perceive. Thus, it is important to cultivate a right mind and *alaya-vijnana*. As one of the famous Buddhist sayings unveils, "mind is the center of all." When practicing we will find all kinds of things arise in our heart. If we perceive the loss of a relationship as blessing in disguise, then we will embrace our lost with an open heart. However, if our heart does not allow us to accept the loss of a relationship or a person, then we are battered by sadness, depression and misery. Our mind is so infinite that one single thought can be transformed into a great chilocosm (three thousand things).

Our suffering is deeply affected by dependent originations (*yuan*). Buddhism specifies Twelve Dependent Originations (*Nidanas*), the chain of phenomenal cause and effect by which birth and rebirth occur, that include ignorance, volitional activities, karma formations, previous impressions, consciousness (in the present life), name and form, six senses, touch, feeling, craving and desire, attachment, existence, birth and rebirth, and finally old age and decay.

These twelve dependent originations are interconnected. From ignorance

volition arises; from consciousness there is cognition; from cognition is the six-fold sensory (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and will); from the six sensory faculty there is contact; from contact there is feeling; from feeling there is craving; from craving suffering arises; craving and thirst lead to grasping and attachment; grasping leads to possession; possession results in the wish for long life; and finally, from life there is inevitable aging, sickness death, and other unsatisfactory consequences such as worry, depression, sadness, pains, and sufferings (Chang, 2002).

Though Buddhists understand the law of karma as manifested in the twelve dependent originations, they are not to be mistaken for fatalists nor pessimists (Chuang, 2002). Rather, they believe in cosmic energy and the rhythm of nature.

Cessation of Suffering and Paths to Nirvana

The last two noble truths provide specific suggestions for alleviating of human sufferings. The Eight Paths offer treatment for diminishing adversities and as a result nirvana and the exalted state of enlightenment can be obtained. First of all, we must start with a right view. Wrong views such as the illusion of being self, extreme view, perverse view, stubborn view, perverted view and rigid views (Aik, 1999) should all be eradicated. These five wrong views hinder our clear mind and impair our ability to see reality through filtered lenses. The other seven paths include right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Together, the eight paths can be used to prevent sufferings from happening.

The Eight Paths can be further integrated into three major clusters: wisdom, precepts, and meditation. The wisdom paths include right view and right thought. They seek to be free from ignorance through using correct view and wholesome thought (no craving, fixation, anger or ill-will). Precepts include wholesome speech, which includes no lies, harsh words, or backbiting, and wholesome actions or deeds. These right actions are conducted through adhering to *sila* (precept, morality). Finally, meditation covers areas such as correct endeavor, mindfulness and concentration (*samadhi*).

The Six *Paramitas*

The Mahayana Buddhist teachings of six *paramita* (perfection) as well offer valuable advice to improve oneself and reach the "shore of freedom, harmony, and good relationship" (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 192). They include charity, precept, patience and forbearance, energy, meditation, and wisdom.

The first *paramita* is the perfection of giving, charity, offering and generosity (*dana*). By being generous and charitable, we do not reduce our happiness but rather we gain something more intangible and valuable in return. It is important to note that giving has to be related to non-attachment, that is, to

give freely and do not to expect anything in return.

The second *paramita* is precepts or morality (*sila*). The five basic moral precepts are: to abstain from taking life, to abstain from taking what is not freely given, to abstain from misuse of the senses, to abstain from speaking falsely, and to abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind (Thompson, 2000). According to Nhat Hanh (1998), these precepts provide mindful trainings which help protect our body, mind, soul, friends, loved ones, and society in general; and when we adhere to this fivefold mindfulness training, we are practicing "deep listening" and "loving speech."

The third *paramita* is inclusiveness, forbearance, and the capacity to receive and bear insults and sufferings (*virya*). The practice of for-bearance requires a deep understanding of other people's perspectives and motives even though they inflict pain on one. As Nhat Hanh states, "if you nourish your hatred and your anger, you burn yourself. Understanding is the only way out" (p. 204). Moreover, inclusiveness teaches us to be compassionate, as "deep looking leads to understanding, and understanding always leads to love and acceptance" (p. 205).

The fourth *paramita* is diligence or patience (*kshanti*). The storehouse of our consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*) is filled with both positive and negative thoughts. They can be seeds of anger, hatred, delusion, and fear, but we also have seeds of compassion, deep understanding and forgiveness. The practice is to foster positive thoughts and actions through continuous effort and diligence. To cultivate our positive being and reach inner peace, it requires constant effort and practice.

The fifth *paramita* is related to meditation and concentration (*samahdi*). To meditate helps us look deeper within ourselves and to be more in touch with the core of our inner beings. Meditation calms us down and help us see things more clearly. It also helps us relax and not to get into the constant fight or flight mode, when we are in a conflictual situation with others. As the Six Patriarch Hui-Neng mentioned, meditation helps us reach the state of *dhyana* (to be free from external objects) and *samahdi* (a clear mind not being disturbed by the external world).

The last *paramita* is profound wisdom and perfection of understanding (*prajna*). There is an interconnectedness among these six *paramitas*. The combination of the first five *paramitas* help individuals reach the state of profound wisdom. As the highest form of understanding, the profound wisdom is free from all knowledge, preconceived notions, habitual patterns, ideas and perspectives. It helps us reach the shore of freedom, enlightenment and emancipation. In other words, *prajna paramita* is "the wisdom of nondiscrimination" (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 210).

The Influence of Buddhism on Human Communication

The pervasiveness of Buddhist teachings in East Asian societies reflects its profound impact on people's daily life. Based on the previous discussion, this section delineates how the essential teachings of Buddhism dictate human interaction in East Asia. Aspects of human communication discussed in this section include ontological assumptions, communication ethics, communication behaviors, relationship development, and rhetorical communication.

Ontological Assumptions

Three ontological assumptions of Buddhist teachings are related to human communication. First, the non-duality feature of reality reveals a holistic nature of human communication in which opposites are transcended over time and space. Second, *yuan* (dependent originations) dictates that all elements in the communication process are interrelated. Third, the concept of *samsara* (Wheel of Life) indicates that human communication is an endless cycle with no real beginning or ending.

The holistic view of human communication based on Buddhist teachings demands the interconnectedness between interactants in a constantly transforming temporal and spatial environment. In Zen Buddhist views, when two beings encounter each other due to the formation of *yuan*, they begin to establish the experience of non-separateness (Nordstrom, 1979). This mutual dependence or dependent origination, in accord with non-duality or non-dichotomy, discloses the themes of relationality and circularity (Miike, 2002).

Relationality indicates that the meaningful existence of human beings is embedded in an interdependent and interrelated network. Circularity infers that the transcendence of time and space "provides a sense of relatedness of the present to the past and the future, and a sense of relatedness of the life world to the whole of nature" (Miike, 2002, p. 6). In a nutshell, human communication becomes meaningful only in relation to others in a harmonious way.

Finally, the mutually dependent interconnectedness beyond the temporal and spatial limitation penetrates the boundaries of different worlds of existence. Based on this, Ishii (2001) develops a model of triworld communication which shows the grand interfusion and interpenetration among human beings' world, natural beings' world, and supernatural beings' world.

Ethics of Human Communication

Buddhist teachings offer abundant guidelines for how people should communicate, or what standards and rules should guide peoples' conduct. According to Konsky, Kapoor, Blue, and Kapoor (2000), Buddhism strongly upholds "ethical concepts of tolerance, non-violence, respect for the individual,

love of animals and nature and a belief in the fundamental spiritual equality of all human beings" (p. 244). The ethical sources of Buddhism are mainly grounded on the principle of Eight Paths that specify what is right or wrong in dealing with another person. Among them, the third, fourth, and fifth paths, including right speech, right action, and right livelihood, are especially related to communication ethics.

Kirkwood (1997) suggests five ethical guidelines for speech from the Buddhist perspective:

1. One should restrain the impulse for internal or overt speech and master the practice of silence.

2. One should avoid language which fosters ego-identificatin in oneself or others and select language which promotes accurate knowledge of the empirical ego.

3. One should restrain from speech which arouses strong desires or aversions in oneself or others and practice speech which promotes attitudes of desirelessness.

4. One should restrain from speech which is not consistent with one's thoughts or actions and practice truthfulness.

5. One should restrain from speech which denigrates others or oneself and practice speech which honors others and oneself. (pp. 223-225)

The Buddhist ethics of speech are quite consistent with the prominent universal principle of ethical communication that is comprised of four elements: mutuality, open-mindedness, honesty, and respect (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

Communication Behaviors

On the behavioral level, the Buddhist emphasis on harmony, mutual dependence, selflessness, compassion, and ethics that aim to reach enlightenment directly shows its impact on East Asians' communication behaviors. The influence leads to five characteristics of East Asian communication: intuition, emphasis of silence, empathic, emotional control, and avoidance of being aggressive.

The intuitive style of communication influenced by Buddhism rejects the Western linear or abstract thinking pattern, as well the Confucian preoccupation of conventional knowledge. Instead, it is greatly identified with Chinese Taoism emphasizing the inner liberation through a direct understanding of life or an original spontaneity to catch every instant moment of life (Watts, 1957). In other words, the intuitive communication style is "to feel" rather than "to analyze" or "think about" the situation in the process of interaction. Abstraction and conceptualization are denied (Suzuki, 1959).

Silence as a form of speech in East Asian cultures is greatly influenced by both the Buddhist and Taoist emphasis of integrating creative intuition and

ontological experience based on tranquillity. It is the mind sounding insider, rather than the mouth talking outside. To Buddhism, the internal mind working for a spiritual breakthrough in the quest of enlightenment represents a non-mechanical process to reach internal and external confirmation without relying on verbal expressions. Silence then becomes an effective nonverbal expression for mutual understanding (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994). In contrast, North Americans tend to interpret silence as critique, embarrassment, obligation, regret, and sorrow (Wayne, 1974).

Wisdom and compassion as the two qualities characterizing the Buddhist path accentuate the importance of empathic communication. As Suzuki (1980) indicates, from the perspective of Zen Buddhism human beings should have the third eye that goes beyond the first eye's I am I and the second eye's You and You to reach the transcendental level of I am You and You are I. It refers to the ability of accepting things and is the affective detachment from the self which is based on the wisdom that recognizes all things change and everything is interconnected, and based on compassion that emits a natural acceptance of others' existence. This great empathy formulates the ideal of fellow-feeling by expanding the self consciousness to the consciousness of one's fellow persons. It, with sensitivity and creativity as its two main elements, in turn leads people to show deep concern for others' feelings and reactions and to demonstrate reciprocity of affective displays to establish an interactional rapport (Chen & Starosta, 2002).

Finally, a core meaning embedded in Buddhist teachings, especially the Eight Paths, is the concept of *Madhyamaka*, the "middle way," which refers to "a way of life that was mid-way between those two extremes" (Thompson, 2000, p. 48). The practice of the "middle way" in daily life is manifested in two features of East Asian communication: emotional control and avoidance of aggressive behaviors. Through self-discipline and self-restraint emotional control is considered the responsibility of cultivated persons, Showing raw emotion threatens the principle of the "middle way." In addition, the emphasis on self-discipline and self-restraint leads to the avoidance of showing aggressive behaviors in the process of interaction. Showing aggressive behaviors immediately violates the principle of compassion and harmony.

Relationship Development

The Buddhist concept of *yuan* (dependent origination, secondary causation, predestined relation, or connection) plays a critical role in the initiation, maintenance, and termination of human relationships in East Asian cultures. The formation of connection or network between two people is only possible through the function of *yuan* (Chang & Holt, 1991a; Ishii, 1998). According to Chang and Holt (2002), *yuan* has become a key metaphor Chinese people use to

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conceptualize and interpret interpersonal encounters, and with its multiple linguistic expressions, *yuan's* contents and meanings continue to be expanded and reinterpreted in modern life.

Yang (1988) points out that, in addition to contributing to the formation of an interpersonal bond, the basic function of *yuan* is to effectively keep a harmonious relationship. He further identifies four characteristics of *yuan* in Chinese society that can be summarized as follows:

First, *yuan* not only functions after two people have encountered each other. It happens long before the formation of the connection, no matter whether the relationship is expected or just transient.

Second, *yuan* serves as a catalyst in the initial stage of relationship development. If a positive first impression is made, attraction will be followed, because both parties "*you yuan*" (having a predestined relation). Conversely, they are "*wu yuan*" (without a predestined relation). Thus, the development of interpersonal relationship is the cumulation of *yuan*, which represents a sudden up and down process rather than a continuous process characterizing the relationship development in Western world.

Third, *yuan* becomes a self and social defense mechanism if the relationship never emerges or after the relationship is established or terminated. Because it is *yuan* which decides the success or failure of relationship, when the relationship is in jeopardy or deteriorating, it is common for people to attribute the cause to *yuan* (i.e, *wu yuan*). This practice avoids falling into the trap of internal attribution, for example, by blaming one's negative personality, that tends to have one lose one's face and self-esteem. As a result, it greatly benefits the stability of role relationship and social structure.

Finally, *yuan* brings about the effect of self-fulfilling prophecy in the process of interpersonal interaction. If one feels *yuan* there, a positive feeling tends to develop and leads to more frequent interaction and friendly responses, and vice versa. The pervasive influence of *yuan* is not only limited to the Chinese society, but also extended to Japanese and Korean cultures (Kotajima, 1990; Ueno, 1987).

Rhetorical Communication

Ishii (1992) argues that Buddhist preaching is the main undercurrent of Japanese rhetorical and oral communication practices which shows similarities and differences with the Western-centered attitude towards rhetoric. Ishii indicates that the differences regarding the rhetorical aspects of Buddhist and Christian preaching are threefold: (1) The truth of subject is not solely based on the Bible for Christianity, but from various sutras in different sects for Buddhism; (2) While Christian preaching focuses on the discovery of the truth revealed by God, Buddhist preaching stresses the meaning of delineation of the

sutras; and (3) Unlike Buddhism, Christianity denounces the possibility for followers to become God or Buddha and the practice of idol worship.

The Buddhist preaching helps to build the traditional Japanese rhetorical arts and to develop into "different forms of public chanting, recitation, and speaking" (Ishii, 1992, p. 394). Compared to the five canons of Western rhetoric, Sekiyama (1978) finds that the Japanese Agui School also develops a five-step organization in terms of preaching: theme glorification, tenet explanation, allegory demonstra-tion, karma evidence, and concluding persuasion (also in Ishii, 1992).

From another perspective, the Zen Buddhist emphasis on intuitive observation, meditation, mindfulness, sudden enlightenment (*satori*), and the use of koans to achieve a direct perception of the nature of reality leads the Chinese intellectuals to develop a special type of rhetoric which emphasizes naturalness, brevity, and subtlety (Ge, 1991).

These elements were developed due to the distrust of human language. Zen Buddhists believe that language is completely incompetent in describing the reality and logic should be discarded, because language and logical reasoning segment the holistic nature of the reality. However, in order to convey one's thought and emotion to reach understanding or intentionally or unintentionally persuade the listener, verbal expression is inevitable. Thus, naturalness, subtlety, and brevity become a way to reach the rhetorical goal by reducing the number of verbal expressions or words. The character is also displayed in East Asian painting and poetry (Suzuki, 1959; Sze, 1956).

Naturalness refers to the expression which is not subject to artificiality or external rules of interaction. Being free from artificiality not only reflects one's "pure objective reality," but also reflects spontaneously one's inner feeling without "distortion and limitations from the ego-consciousness" (Chang, 1963, p. 177). Zen Buddhist naturalness corresponds with the Taoist view of *wu wei*, meaning to let one's mind work by itself without action, doing, making, or striving (Watts, 1959).

This no-mind, non-attachment, or non-graspingness makes one's mind like a mirror which functions to blend the internal and external of the message sender and receiver into unity or the state of mutual understanding. As demonstrated in Zen's art of archery, the great strength generated from the effortlessness of a performance makes "the technical and artistic, the material and the spiritual, and the project and object, flow together without a break" (Herrigel, 1971, p. 66).

Brevity is mainly originated from the principle of Zen Buddhist communication, i.e., "less is better." Minimizing the occurrence of verbal messages and words creates a greater space for imagination and creativity from the message receiver's perspective. In other words, detailed explanations block

the channel for imagination to freely associate with all possible creative thoughts. An example of brevity is that it is not uncommon for Buddhists to use silence, humor, eye contact, laughter, yearning, coughing to answer a question (Ge, 1986).

However, while the brevity of expression brings about a space for interactants to create an imaginative association and achieve the resonance of meanings between the two parties, it also forges ambiguity which leads to the difficulty of an accurate interpretation of the meaning. The Japanese *enryo-sasshi* interaction style is also closely related to this Zen Buddhist tradition (Ishii, 1984; Miike, 2003).

Finally, subtlety is associated with brevity of the expression. The ambivalence of renouncing the function of verbal expression in reaching understanding on the one hand, and inevitably relying on it for the communication purposes on the other hand forces Zen Buddhists to adopt the way of brevity and subtlety for verbal expression. Subtlety especially relies on the use of paradox. The famous saying "Analogy blurs the real face of reality" reflects the Zen Buddhist preference of indirect expression.

According to Grigg (1994), the use of paradox is "to create an insight that cannot be explained by any system of understanding" and by deliberately cultivating confusion or ambiguity through paradox "is intended to generate an awareness that is neither logical nor linear" (p. 267). Grigg also points out that paradox produces a state of waiting, an effortless or "purposeless tension" out of which "the release, the resolution, and the leap of action or insight" (p. 271) in the process of communication are naturally induced in a way of "peaceful and spontaneous appropriateness" (p. 276).

Conclusion

Buddhism in East Asian societies is not only a religion, but also a way of living. Its pervasiveness is reflected in the thinking pattern and communication style of East Asians, and helps to form the foundation of East Asian cultural context. Aiming to examine the influence of Buddhism on human communication, this paper first delineates the essential Buddhist essential teachings, including the perception of reality, living the present moment and mindfulness, compassion, the four noble truths, and the six paramitas. The paper then analyzes how these Buddhist teachings influence East Asian communication behaviors from five perspectives: ontological assumptions, communica-tion ethics, communication behaviors, relationship development, and rhetorical communication.

While the great influence of Buddhist teachings on the life of East Asians is irrefutable, it is important to understand that Buddhism is not the only belief

that dominates the way of living in East Asia. Confucianism and Taoism are two other schools of thought that are deeply rooted especially in China and spread over Japan and Korea, and the impact of Shintoism on the Japanese life is also enormous. The interaction and integration of these groups of belief from a communication perspective deserves a further exploration in future research. For example, without Taoism the traditional Buddhism would be impossible to be transformed into Zen Buddhism in China and continue to blossom in Japan. How to sort out the similarities and differences through comparison and contrast among these schools of thought, and more clearly examine their impact on the way East Asians communicate and behave remains a great task for scholars in different disciplines to achieve.

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