

A Study of Eastern Culture from the Philosophical Perspective

San San Aye, * Wah Wah Nwe Oo, ** Thwe Thwe Oo, *** Shwe Kyay Mone****

Abstract

In the world philosophies the Eastern has investigated everything in their aesthetic component on the other hand the Western has investigated these things in their theoretic component. The main objective of this paper is intended to study on Eastern culture from the philosophical Perspective. Most of the Easterners emphasized on man than on his natural world and one of the characteristics of Eastern culture is fundamentally religious in character. The research problem of this paper is “why the Easterners’ ways of thinking seems to emphasize on the human concern in aesthetic component?” The solution of this paper is that Easterner’s ways of thinking generally based on emotional sense than rational sense. Hence they place emphasis on knowledge by intuition and on contemplation of everything in their aesthetic immediacy. This research paper will contribute to promote understanding that people can put into practice reconciliation of the philosophical perspective of the East and the West in order to achieve a comprehensive integration. As a consequence we enable to establish mutual understanding and good communication among different cultures.

Keywords: culture, philosophy of culture, ways of thinking, the aesthetic component.

Introduction

Human has two essential abilities-rationality and emotionality. For human, nature is his primary environment and culture is his secondary environment. Humans are dependent on the primary environment (the natural environment) for all fundamental needs-food, clothing, shelter. Besides these fundamental needs humans also want to satisfy both biological and mental needs and to protect from many dangers they encounter. Therefore humans came to invent a cultural environment is called his secondary environment. This cultural environment as a complex phenomenon consists of artifacts, organization of cooperative groups and various kinds of norms and values, including moral norms and aesthetic values, through the use of his two abilities.

Culture is different from nature in the sense that it is the creation of man. The anthropologists say that mankind is one but cultures are many. Culture has been defined in many ways by variety of people from diverse backgrounds. Culture focuses on social behavior and the transmission of knowledge. According to Webster dictionary, “Culture is development, improvement, or refinement of the intellect, emotions, interests, manners and taste.” Thus, the cultural diversity emerges according to the diverse mentality and behavior of the people in the respective cultures. Culture interacts to shape people’s ways of thinking, their attitude and belief. Hence one of the main tasks of cultural philosophy is to suggest the possible existence of a psyche that is present in all cultures in the world.

There are different levels of culture; while a society has its distinct way of life, distinct customs, beliefs and languages it is still a part of the entire human race. Culture has to develop at different levels, in a family and community on the one hand, and as a part of wider human

*Dr., Professor and Head of Department, Department of Philosophy, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

** Dr., Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

*** Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

**** Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

society on the other. A man of culture identifies himself with the interest and values of the whole humanity and behaves as a guardian of values.

The **main objective** of this paper is intended to the Eastern culture from the philosophical Perspective. Yet, the ways of thinking of the east and the west distinguish each other a lot. The ways of thinking of Easterners has investigated everything in their aesthetic component on the other hand the ways of thinking of Westerners has investigated these things in the theoretic component. Most of the Easterners emphasized on man than on his natural world and one of the characteristics of Eastern culture is fundamentally religious in character. This research paper will contribute to promote understanding that people can put into practice reconciliation of the philosophical perspective of the East and the West in order to achieve a comprehensive integration. As a consequence we enable to establish mutual understanding and good communication among different cultures.

If most of people who live in any culture are blockaded to the interaction with others, they have to live in “close society.” The world philosophies can be affluent by even the only all. It rather has to seek for orchestrated harmony by means of active reconciliation, compromise and overall understanding.

Material and Method

Many material used in this research paper were collected from the philosophical works and some were studied and collected from website resources. In this research descriptive method will be used to make a literary review from the philosophical books. Moreover the evaluative method will be used to discuss the Eastern culture from the philosophical Perspective and the principle of reciprocity is used as a research principle.

Discussion

1. Culture as a universal category of Mankind

Human creates a convenient society and he believes to be a beautiful life by his wisdom. From the Western point of view, philosophy is defined as love of wisdom and wisdom is the kernel of philosophy in this sense. Philosophy, in fact, aims to shape not only one’s ways of thinking but also one’s way of life. Therefore, philosophy is essential in the shaping of a life of beauty. Moreover, as philosophy presents in every culture, whether primitive or advanced, philosophy may be considered as a universal category of culture.

For human, nature is his primary environment and culture is his secondary environment. The word “**Culture**”, the Latin word “*cultus*”, is very well known to all of us which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Here capabilities imply language, techniques for making and using various tools and capability of thinking.

In the Renaissance, the term culture was commonly associated with the cultivation of literature, philosophy, eloquence, law, arts, and sciences, whose fruits were the human virtues necessary for civil society. In the nineteenth century, the most important inter-disciplinary connection of cultural history was the new field of anthropology. Edward Tylor (1832–1917), one of the modern anthropologists says that “Culture or Civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

(https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/culture_1.htm) So, culture is man's way of living consisting of the things he produces and the ideas he express.

According to Plato (B.C. 427-347), a classical philosopher, philosophy aims at the knowledge of the eternal and the essential nature of things. Philosophy is concerned with the study of the entire reality including social phenomena. Therefore, philosophy is the common link between all branches of knowledge. Philosophy of culture or cultural philosophy is one of the newly developing branches of philosophy like philosophy of education, philosophy of economics, environmental philosophy, philosophy of language, and so on. The discipline cultural philosophy is a systematic study of man's life from the philosophical point of view. Culture is a raw material for philosophical activity. Philosophy of culture provides the professional philosophers the data based on which to transcend into pure, critical philosophy. It has the two senses of philosophy; philosophy in the strict sense and in the loose sense is thereby clarified, linked and joined in a mutual relationship of bedrock provision.

Human is inconceivable without culture. These two terms correlated and these have become increasingly clear, although it may not yet have been stated in a sufficiently distinct and definite form. Culture is not only an expression and production of man in the form of objective culture and the medium or environment he creates around himself and inside which alone he can lead a human life. It is also the condition something essential of things human, the external and, as it were, objectified aspect of man's being. For that reason, culture is an essential part of man.

According to the diversity of mentality and behavioral of the people in their respective cultures the cultural diversity is emerged. Thus, Franz Boas (1858–1942) who is a German-American anthropologist and one of the most influential social scientists says that cultures are many but mankind is one. There is the cultural universal or universal phenomenon of each and every culture. "Cultural Universal" means phenomenon or universal element that is commonly accepted by the people in each and every culture. It can become a common ground on which all societies in the world can stand together as cultural equals. Every culture is built up of behavioral norms or customs. There are many cultural elements or phenomena which may be regarded as cultural universal, such as, folklore, religions, faith, mythological thought, implicit philosophical thinking, etc. In other words these are cultural products of human beings and intangible manifestations in every society whether it is primitive or advanced.

2. Main Difference between Eastern Culture and Western Culture

American philosopher F. S. C. Northrop (1893- 1992) was also an influential expert in science, anthropology and law. He studied the ways of acquiring human knowledge which differ according to the culture of Western man and Eastern man. He states that generally speaking there are two trends in search for human knowledge. According to Northrop,

"A culture rooted in such a philosophy can build with confidence since the aesthetic component is immediately apprehensible and the theoretic component is scientifically verifiable." (F. S. C. Northrop, 1952, *The Meeting of East and West*, The Macmillan Company, New York, U.S.A, p-163)

Northrop mentions that the Western type of knowledge tends to be formally and doctrinally expressed in logically developed, scientific and philosophical treatises. He believes philosophical, scientific, and religious knowledge of Western culture always asserts more than immediately apprehended factors on the other hand, the Eastern culture concentrated only upon a portion of the nature of thing which can be known only by their perceptive experience.

According to Northrop, in Western scientific philosophy, the nature of things is composed of two factors or components: the one gives immediately and purely empirically with certainty and the other having existence known with equal certainty, but known as to its specific formed as well as empirical content only hypothetically and postulationaly. The second factor is not immediately observed, but is instead theoretically postulated a priori; and is only indirectly verified through its deductive consequences. Thus, one is led to conceive of the nature of things as composed of two ultimate and irreducible components. The one purely empirical and directly inspectable in its character, the other unobservable and designated only by theory proposed a priori. The later given the status of existing when this proposed, a priori theory is verified empirically and indirectly through its deductive consequences.

Western knowledge in any field is based on the purely empirical component in it, it is final and not subject to change with time except as the empirical data alter and it is based upon the theoretic component, it is not absolutely certain and with the advent of new evidence, incompatible with the traditional formulation, is subject to change with time. Northrop mentions that,

“It is because the idea of the good in the Western world has been identified almost exclusively, as the previous discussion has shown, with the theoretic component, proposed a priori, that Western theories of value in politics, economics, religion and the arts, and the cultures based upon them, have undergone so many diversifications and reconstruction during the history of the Western world.”(F. S. C. Northrop, 1952, *The Meeting of East and West*, The Macmillan Company, New York, U.S.A, p-302)

The type of knowledge held by Easterners is based on the ground of immediately apprehended experience. It is knowledge that can be acquired through the aesthetic components which comprise concepts by intuition. The knowledge of Eastern people, according to Northrop, is *‘knowledge of the aesthetic component’* that is pure fact by direct inspection alone; it is a purely empirical, positivistic, immediately apprehended a posteriori factor. Easterners place emphasis on intuition and contemplation of everything in their aesthetic immediacy or aesthetic component.

The purely empirical, positivistic component must be considered with respect to its characteristics and nature. When the immediately experienced items are conveyed as they are by the artist under certain circumstances in and for themselves, there is art for its own sake. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this purely empirical, positivistic, immediately apprehended a posteriori factor in human knowledge, *the aesthetic component* in the nature of things. It is not to be concluded from this usage that all art is to be understood solely in terms of this aesthetic component.

The other component in things is not immediately experienced or felt, but is known only by means of theory proposed a priori and confirmed only indirectly through its deductive consequences, it is equally appropriate to term it *the theoretic component*. It is not to be concluded from this usage that the theoretic component is a mere idea or subjective construct.

The point to be aware that is not that art of this traditional Western type and theoretical knowledge of this Western kind are not the most excellent of art and knowledge of that kind, but merely that they are one type of art and one type of knowledge. According to Northrop, a theory of any kind, whether scientific or philosophic, is a body of propositions and it is a set of concepts. Concepts fall into different types according to the different sources of their meaning. He divides all concepts into two kinds: concept by intuition and concept by postulation.

Northrop points out that,

“The Orient, for the most part, has investigated things in their aesthetic component; the Occident has investigated these things in their theoretic component.” (F. S. C. Northrop, 1952, *The Meeting of East and West*, The Macmillan Company, New York, U.S.A., p-375)

In the above mention, the Western type of knowledge tends to be the theoretic component which consists of concept by postulation. Continuously, Northrop says that the Eastern type of knowledge tends to be the aesthetic component which comprise concept by intuition. Both the aesthetic component and the theoretical component are as indispensable and essential in the search for human knowledge. These components have their own functions and their particular aims and purposes. Thus, both functions respectively play significant roles in the creativity of art like both components play important roles in human knowledge.

3. The Aesthetic Component as significant Role in Eastern Ways of Thinking

The Eastern civilization has concentrated its attention upon the nature of all things in their emotional and aesthetic, purely empirical and positivistic immediacy. Whereas the traditional West began with this continuum and still returns to local portions of it to confirm its syntactically formulated, postulationally prescribed theories of structures and objects, of which the items of the complex aesthetic continuum are mere correlates or signs. The East tends to concentrate its attention upon this differentiated aesthetic continuum in and for itself for its own sake. Professor Northrop philosophized that Eastern culture has investigated things in their aesthetic component. Furthermore, the trend of Eastern culture based upon the stark realism and thorough positivism.

In most of Eastern countries, the people emphasized the aesthetic component in the creation of art and its value judgments. For Easterners the aesthetic component is important not only in their day life but also in philosophical thinking. Eastern thinkers intend to search the truth that can guide man to attain liberation whereas Western philosophers attempt to know the reality of the universe. For Easterners the aim of liberation is not to escape from the world of space and time but to be enlightened, wherever they may be.

Eastern philosophers, especially of ancient periods, attempt to search in several ways to attain liberation. In Eastern culture, philosophy is named “*darsana*” that means “vision of truth”. Spiritual philosophies, based on religious thought, determine their ways of living, give values to their lives and set goals for them. Generally speaking these philosophies are the foundations of Eastern culture. The religious thinking of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism, which guide the way of living in Eastern Culture, share a basic unity by emphasizing the aesthetic component in search of their knowledge and the truth of reality.

Because of the significant role of the aesthetic component in Eastern philosophical fields, namely epistemology and metaphysics, we may regard it as one of the indispensable characteristic of Eastern philosophy. In connection with the Buddhist culture of the Orient, human spiritual freedom in part is located in the aesthetic component of human nature. As Northrop has insisted, man is in part free because in his essential nature he is in part indeterminate. As a matter of fact, the aesthetic component is an irreducible and fundamental component in man’s nature. Since the Eastern peoples are those who concentrate on the spiritual freedom of man, it is reasonable to claim that the aesthetic component plays a significant role in Eastern Culture.

Eastern culture has an enormous and fruitful tradition. Most of the eastern cultures are derived from two main cultures: Indian and Chinese cultures. In this research, the term

‘traditional Eastern Aesthetics’ created in the ancient period which Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Myanmar. Most of Eastern aesthetics share a common religious character. Eastern culture is rich in religious, notably that of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in India; Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese; Zen Buddhism in Japanese and Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar.

3.1 The Aesthetic Component in Indian ways of thinking

Eastern creation and appreciation of aesthetics is linked with Eastern way of thinking. In the Eastern way of thinking, the religious and moral character is given more emphasis than the view of the universe. Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was famous for his work on comparative religion, comparative Eastern and Western philosophy. In his work “Religion and Culture” he stated that:

“In spite of varying developments, the different people of Asia possess a number of features in common, which will justify our speaking of an Asian view of man. The view is essentially a religious one” (S. Radhakrishnan, 1968, Religion and Culture, Hind Pocket Book Ltd, India. p- 109)

One of the doctrines by which Indian culture is best known to the other cultures is that of *tat tvam asi* that means the eternal is one’s self. It is one of the great statements of Upanishads. Indian thinkers believe that the human soul has the potential divinity and that the soul is not to be confused with the body which can be destroyed. In the Indian way of thinking,

“The Real which is the innermost of all things is the essence of one’s own soul. The sage whose passions are at rest sees within himself the majesty of the great Real.” (Ibid.p-110)

Indian traditional painting has its own technique and style. The technique of Indian traditional painting is different from that of Western style. There are many particular outstanding works of traditional India paintings. One of the classical paintings of India, named “Krishna in the Upanishads” although created nearly about 18th century, which states that Ghora Angirasa taught the sacrificial nature of human life to Krishna, the son of Devaki, whereby he became free from all desires.

Illustration- 1



This above illustration-1 states that Angirasa taught Krishna about that life was a sacrifice because it was not meant to be lived for oneself but for the sake of God to perform his duties. In that sacrifice one became both the sacrificer and the sacrificed. We get a brief idea of the nature of his teaching in which the daily sacrifices were compared to the phases in human life.

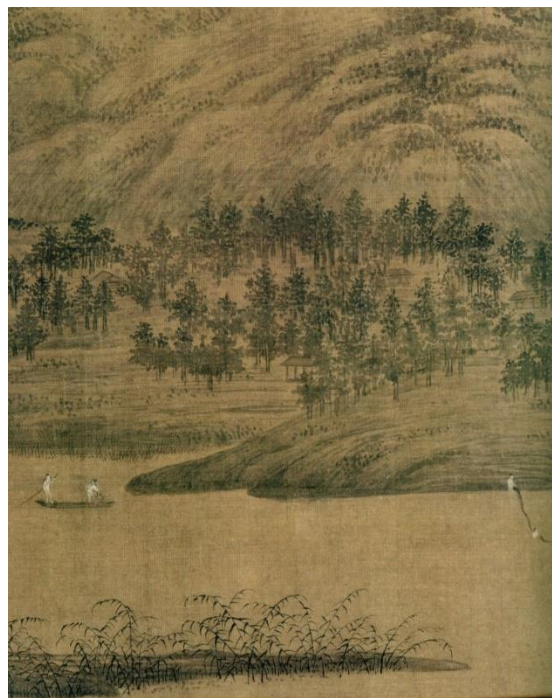
3.2 The Aesthetic Component in Chinese ways of thinking

The Chinese artists are fond of the charms of nature, of human life and of objects. Thus they select the charm of nature for the content of a work of art. The ancient Chinese accepted the conception of painting as the Cultivation of Tao. The art of Ancient Chinese culture is an activity which can bring an artist into unity with and makes manifest the cosmic principle of Tao that may be regarded as the root of the Chinese ways of thinking. According to Lin Yutang (1895-1976) who was a Chinese philosopher and historian,

“Charm in nature relates to the spirit; charm in human refers to life; charm in objects relates to forms and shapes”
(Lin Yutang, 1969, *The Chinese Theory of Art*, Panrher Books, England. p- 127)

Chinese artists are interested in the charms of nature and attempt to create natural objects as they see and feel them. “Palace Museum” by Chinese painter, Tung Yuan (B.C 934-962), that is often considered to be one of his greatest masterpieces, and it “illustrates the revolutionary impressionism” he had achieved by “means of broken ink washes and the elimination of the outline.”

Illustration- 2



The illustration- 2 “Palace Museum” is described the charm in nature.

3.3 The Aesthetic Component in Japanese ways of thinking

All area of Japanese aesthetics is permeated with the explosive virility and disciplined containment of the “Zen way”. The meaning of “Zen” is emphasized that religious knowledge is achieved through emptying the mind of thoughts and giving attention to only one thing,

rather than by reading religious writings: “In Japanese culture painting and poetry are often related to each other. Zen Buddhism may be regarded not only as a religion but also as a way of living and ways of thinking in Japanese culture both traditional and contemporary. So, Japanese artists create work of art including painting, sculpture, poetry and architecture, using Zen Buddhism as subject matter or content.

The theme and content of the works of art, and the traditional Japanese aesthetics are fundamentally concerned with Zen’s way of thinking. Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) who was one of the greatest Japanese poets uplifted haiku to the level of serious poetry and many of his poems are reproduced on monuments and traditional sites. “The old Pond” one of the famous poem of Matsuo Basho is influence of Zen’s way of thinking.

The old Pond

“The old pond-

a frog jumps in,

sound of water.”

Written by Japanese poet Basho

Translated by Robert Hass (<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-old-pond/>)

3.4 The Aesthetic Component in Myanmar ways of thinking

In Myanmar, one of an Eastern county, traditional art and poetry can be found rich in aesthetic values. Art is an integral part of culture and plays a significant role in Myanmar culture. In the traditional Myanmar ways of thinking aesthetic value is standardized by means of ‘*rasa*’, a *pali* word that means flavor or relish. ‘*Rasa*’ means the object of aesthetic relish. It is not to be found in the creation of nature. The English term for ‘*rasa*’ is aesthetic emotion that is said to be the result in the audience who has an aesthetic. According to Let Wei Min Nyo, a Myanmar author and aesthetician defined art as an object which appeals to man’s visual, audio or mental senses and has perfect harmony with its environmental surroundings.

One of the famous Myanmar poems, Emerald Lake written by Myanmar Anonymous Poet in the Bagan period is expressed the emotion of pleasant.

“Emerald Lake”

“Emerald Lake fed by a mountain stream,

The waters enters running,

And circle cool and clear,

Within unbreachable banks,

Water lilies are fragrant

And all types of birds abound.

This is so like Nanda that is in the Heavens,

is this perhaps the self-same Nanda Lake?”

Written by Myanmar Anonymous Poet

Translated by U Win Pe (Mya Zin) Translated by U Win Pe (Mya Zin)

(“မြကန်သာ” မြကန်သာ၊ တောင်ကျချောင်းတေး၊ ရေဝင်ပြေးလှည့်၊ ရေအေးကြည်စွာ၊ ကန်ပိုင်မာလျက်၊ ကြာပေါင်းထုံထုံ၊ ငှက်မျိုးစုံသည်၊ ဘုံဝတီသာ၊ နန္ဒာပေလော၊ ဘူစုဟုတ္တာ။

<https://myanmarpoetry.wordpress.com/2015/04/02>

This poem was about a natural lake known as “Mya Kan” (Emerald Lake) which lies at the foot of a range of hills called Tu-yin Taung Tan about seven miles south of Bagan. It is now silting and due to deforestation it is drying up. But it must have been a very pleasant lake with a lush vegetation and wildlife in the glory days of *Bagan*.

Thus, the ancient Eastern trend of artistic creation and artistic appreciation are different from that of the ancient Western because of their differences between their way of living and ways of thinking. According to Northrop,

“In Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, the facts in direct experience open to everyone’s inspection and quite independent of a prophet, a tribe, or a divine revelation come first, and the teacher comes afterward, if at all” (F. S. C. Northrop, 1952, *The Meeting of East and West*, The Macmillan Company, New York, U.S.A, p-405)

Most Eastern traditional artists use the aesthetic materials in and for their own sake. The above illustrations and poems are the exemplification of them, which depict the aesthetic component as the differentiated aesthetic continuum; and the work uses the materials of this aesthetic continuum to convey those materials and that continuum in and for themselves for their own sake. They may be considered as the aesthetic component which plays a significant role in traditional Eastern ways of thinking.

Conclusion

Every culture in the world has its distinct characteristics and culture and people’s ways of thinking interact to shape each other. In any particular society, there is a philosophy which is transmitted from one generation to the next, just as a certain types of family, cooperative patterns and technological skills are parts of the culture of any society.

Nowadays we live in an age of science and technology with the globalization. In this age of science is progressing very rapidly and with this progress of science man’s way of living and his environment has undergone a series of dramatic changes. Thus we cannot be called upon to accept dogmatic thinking and though we may call these changes progress of mankind we should preserve our cultural values and our traditional ways of thinking. Eastern ways of thinking based on the aesthetic component which consists of concept by intuition. The aesthetic component is the vital role of Eastern culture in which its people convey from one generation to the next as a cultural pattern. A philosophy which is the unification of the aesthetic component and the theoretical component can provide the physical and mental development for human being. Thus, Easterners should be act “*Think global, act local*” that is a fashionable slogan.

In short, it can be concluded that we must encourage reconciliation of Western postulation and Eastern intuition. If the cultural perspective of East and the West can be combined, both Eastern and Western philosophy are more orchestrated unity and harmony. Moreover eastern ways of thinking is mainly based on emotional sense than rational sense. Hence they place emphasis on knowledge by intuition and on contemplation of everything in their aesthetic component. Reconciliation of eastern and western ways of thinking can contribute to establish mutual understanding and good communication among different cultures. Both the aesthetic component and the theoretical component are essential in search for human knowledge. Theoretic component leads to the improvement of science and technology. So in order to develop our Myanmar culture, we should not only preserve our ways of thinking based on aesthetic component but also adapt to Western ways of thinking based on theoretic component as a cultural pattern.

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