

Guest Lecture at Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka

Self-cultivation and the Performer: does Buddhism oppose to performing arts?

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Honorable reverends, distinguished guests, scholars and graduate students. I am very much honored to be here today to deliver a speech on performing arts and its relationship to Buddhist philosophy and theory of attunement. My colleague, reverend Omalpe Somanada thero invited me to do this lecture as a part of their ongoing seminar series. I believe, organizing such diverse, discussion would definitely be benefited for future research and innovations.

Today, I am going to talk about a bit controversial topic. The topic that may appear as opposed to the teaching and ethos of Buddhist value system and teaching. When someone sees the title of this topic, he or she may definitely think that either this topic is a misinterpretation of theorization of classical Buddhist texts or either this speaker is not in a good sense of mind. However, I want to say that, yes, I have chosen this topic with a clear purpose in my mind. In this speech, I want to argue that there is no distinction between the artistry and Buddhist teaching and there is no negation in the classical Buddhist cannon that artistic endeavor is a barrier to the supreme attain of *nibbhana* or enlightenment. In this argument, I will make use of certain philosophical readings, particularly Japanese contemporary philosophy and also some phenomenological philosophy to discuss against this notion that artistic practices are opposed to the Buddhist teaching. Further I want to show how classical Buddhist teaching is in line with the artistry and psychophysical training that is aligned with the Buddhist practices of Samadhi meditation and mindfulness. In so doing, I am intending to introduce some of the Asian body/mind theories developed by various Japanese philosophers.

Introduction

In this talk, I would like to provide an Asian phenomenological approach to body-mind problem by introducing recent development of body-mind theories introduced by a leading Japanese philosopher, Yuasa Yasuo. Yuasa in particular and Japanese phenomenological tradition in general have thoroughly influenced by the European phenomenological tradition. Apart from their counterparts in Western phenomenology, these Asian theorists have been continually influenced by Buddhist theories of body-mind and meditation. In this paper, I am particularly interested in Yuasa's philosophy towards body-mind theories and his sophisticated, metaphysics to come up with Asian way of interpreting human perception and bodily relationship with the word.

As we proceed with Yuasa's study of Eastern body-mind theory and his integration of Western phenomenology, it is clear that Yuasa thoroughly embraces phenomenology as well as Eastern Buddhist theories alike. Thomas P Kasulis also insists that the importance of Yuasa's philosophy is the way he accepts and admires Western and Eastern philosophy as the basis of his analysis. He further argues that "Yuasa has shown that there is at least one point of contact between the world of the Zen Buddhist and the physiologist, the world of the No actor, and the psychoanalyst, the world of the acupuncturist and the phenomenologist. In short Yuasa has given us a starting place for an East-West dialogue and the promise of finding further connections in the future" (Kusalis edit. 1987, p.12). Therefore I also believe that Yuasa's discussion on self-cultivation brings a meeting point for my concern of Western Phenomenology, Eastern Buddhist phenomenology and the actor's craft together.

Asian theory of self-cultivation

As I have mentioned, contemporary Japanese philosophers including Ichikawa and Yuasa are highly influenced and are in constant dialogue with their counter parts, existential phenomenologists in the West. Among them Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger are prominent. Different theoretical stances and philosophical assumptions have influenced them to develop their own versions of body philosophies. My concern here is Yuasa Yasuo's theories related to "self-cultivation" and his analysis of the lived body in relation to Merleau-Ponty's theory of body-subject and how Yuasa has culminated this idea of "lived subject" and introduce a new approach to understand human body's existence related to Asian body mind theories.

Before we embark into Yuasa's philosophical terrain, we first need to understand how Yuasa's philosophical interests toward Asian cultivation theory has been influenced and nourished by Buddhist philosophy and Asian artistry including ikebana, Waka poetry and most importantly Zeami Motokio's teaching of actor training. Basic assumption seems to be that Eastern theory of body-mind is based upon the notion that body-mind is not separated. This inter-relatedness is reflected through a Japanese phrase: "The oneness of body-mind" (Shinjin ichinyo) (Yuasa, 1987). This phrase is used to express the inner tranquility achieved through various corporeal practices such as Zen meditation, Japanese martial arts and or Noh theatre practice. Further, the notion of "body-mind oneness" is also an ultimate goal of most of the different Buddhist practices scattered in the Asian continent, including *Mahayana (Greater Vehicle)* *Heenaya (lesser vehicle)* and *Vajrayana* schools. As these Buddhist schools believe, "*anattha*" or No-mind (emptiness) is the ultimate goal of a practitioner who follows Buddha's teaching towards *Nirwana (attunement of enlightenment)*. If I put it simply, if someone follows, a certain corporeal practice

repeatedly, as training moral habits, he/she will be able to achieve the inseparability of body and mind by experiencing the phenomenological “nothingness”. This nothingness in religious perspective is known in different terms such as *nirvana*, tao or satori. In order to achieve this satori or emptiness (body mind oneness), is received as a kind of “habit formation.” It is the habit that one accumulates and sediments by leaving the “habit of mindlessness” and achieving the habit of “mindfulness.” The most important factor of this transformation of the habit body to self-cultivation is that this cultivation process is completely achieved through corporeal means; it is the “wholeness” we achieve through our body. Nagatomo insists that we should understand this type of habituation as “somatic in character: it is the somatic transformation that enables a person to transform herself/himself from a provisional dualistic stance to a non-dualistic stance.” (Nagatomo, 1992, p. 182). He further asserts that this kind of bodily achievement needs to be regarded as a higher form of psycho physical being than the one we are having as everyday mode of being.

Yuasa further contends that the notion of “cultivation” is simply presupposed the theoretical and philosophical tradition pertaining to Asia. In this Asian philosophy based on Buddhist philosophy assumes that the “true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through bodily recognition or realization (*tainin* or *taikoku*) that is, through the utilization of one’s total mind and body.” (Yuasa, 1987, p. 25). Buddha himself has also clearly stated about this bodily recognition of knowing and its impact on experiencing the “wholeness” of the body. Commenting on developing the mindful awareness of the body and how to maintain a proper bodily comportment, Buddha “provides a set of guide lines for *Sariputra* (a Buddhist monk) regarding what should and should not be done with the body, which is divided into what should be cultivated and what should not be cultivated (Powers, 2009, pp. 120.121). These disciplinary guidelines are based on Buddhist meditational practice known as Samadhi. Derived from 5th century B.C. Buddhist text “*Visuddhimagga*” or “Path to Purification” by Buddhaghosa Thero. These Samadhi meditational practices are divided into two categories. One method is meditation of motionlessness and other one is meditation in motion. These bodily comportments and disciplinary bodies are both applicable to monks and laymen who follow the Buddha’s path. Accordingly one method is that meditator sits under a tree folding legs and meditates through breathing. In this type of meditation the body does not move while focusing on breathing and attuning the awareness of the whole body. The body’s stillness is the key factor of this mediation. The other option that Buddha provides is the “mindfulness of moving body”. In this meditational practice moving body including every subtle

movement and postures should be brought onto the attention of the meditator and cultivate the mindfulness.

Another example can be given to prove that Asian self-cultivation or mindfulness is not just an intellectual attainment but a bodily being that should be achieved through corporeal understanding and training. This example I take from Mahayana Buddhist tradition and a book called *Śikṣāsamuccaya* or a *compendium of training* written in Sanskrit by a Buddhist scholar Sāntideva (7th-8th Century B.C.). *Compendium of training* explores the training (*Sikṣā*) and disciplining *Bodhisattvas* who are seeking to liberate from the *Sansaric* cycle of life. This implies to the monastic monks or laymen who seek to stop rebirth by doing good karmas and try to emancipate from the continual life circle. This text thus provide for both, laymen and monastic monks of training methods to discipline bodies to become *Bodhisattvas*. These training includes: study of scriptures, confession liturgies (*pāpadeśanā*), forms of meditations, code of ethical conduct etcetera (Mrozi, 2007, p.p.4-5). As we can see, compendium of training basically assumes the need of corporeal discipline and training to become a *Bodhisattva* to see the *Nibhana* (enlightenment) and help other laymen to attain the same status.

The rejection of intellectual realization and promoting the visarel actualizing of the knowing, clearly mark the epistemological contrast between Cartesian epistemological approach to the knowledge seeking in Western model and Asian way of actualizing the true knowledge through bodily disciplining and attuning bodymind. This connection between bodily recognition of knowing and the disciplining body mind through cultivation, I shall elaborate Yuasa's compelling analysis of his own interpretation of it. As the Buddhist religion and philosophy have been divided in to different schools and practices, as well as because these different traditions have spread among the Asian region, the "notion of cultivation" seems to be practicing and theorizing according to different cultural orientations. Yuasa points out the "personal cultivation" has been a major practice not only in Buddhism but in Hinduism in India as well. Among these different traditions of self-cultivation methods, Zen meditation, Indian yoga or Taoism is prominent. These culturally varied self-cultivation practices are still found and functioned within corporeal practices backed by Asian intellectual tradition.

The notion of "self-cultivation" is primarily a Buddhist concept. It is a pathway to attain enlightenment through "cultivating embodied mind." The ultimate goal of the Buddhist practitioner is to experience the "no-mind" conditioned developed through constant practice of a particular meditation derived from "Buddhist discourse of mindfulness of the body." The important of Yuasa's research work towards Buddhist self-cultivation theory is that he has been able to unveil not only the Buddhist way of

cultivating body mind for laymen but how the theory of self-cultivation has been an integral part of Asian / Japanese artistry, particularly in Japanese No drama. I hope to introduce how Yuasa's explanation of the self-cultivation in Noh theatre because this incorporates Zeami Motokio's analysis of *Hana*- the concept of "Flower" in relation to Buddhist theory of self-cultivation. This idea of self-cultivation and *Hana* in No theatre developed by Zeami provides a pathway to understand how this **attunement of bodymind** can be adapted and understood within Sri Lankan actor's milieu and how important this theory of cultivation is to realize actor's task that is viewed as a unified integration of bodymind.

Zeami and *Fushikaden*

Zeami Motokio, Noh theatre master (1363-1443) is regarded as the key theorist who developed Noh theatre and its theoretical basis. Zeami's concept of "flower" (*Fushikaden*) presents the bodily training of the actor who develops bodily skills through the time as the flower matures. In his book "*Fushikaden*" (*Transmission of stylish form and flower*) Zeami explores how a Young Noh actor starts with "timely flower" and goes through the temporary flower and matures his skills and achieves the "true flower". The key argument Zeami provides here is that "true art cannot be mastered merely through the conceptual understanding" (Yuasa, 1987, p. 104). This artistic skills should be achieved and realized through long term corporeal practices and embodiment of skills. Zeami writes:

The timely flower, the flower of voice, and the flower of yugen [the body's beauty] – all these are apparent to be the eye, but since they blossom from out of the performer's technique [waza]. (Cited in Yuasa, 1987, p. 105).

As Zeami argues, acquiring of skills of the actor in different stages of his life is bodily visible and apparent to the outside eye. This corporeal achievement through practice of techniques is visible to the viewer and presented on the actor's flesh. It is not a conscious Judgment that achieves the performer but a corporeally visible achievement, or a transformation of one's daily bodily skills into an engagement with the actor's skilled body.

In Zeami's *Hanakagami* (Flower Mirror), he presents two distinctive variations of performer's art: one is called the 'easy rank' (mind at ease) and the second stage is the 'mature rank' that is known as 'no-mind'. The performer who is in the easy rank could utilize the techniques of performing and mind's interference of achieving the technique is predominant. At this stage, performer's techniques are highly visible and that visibility proves the fact that this performer has not achieved the 'mature rank' level of the performance. In this level, as Zeami explains, the performer employs only seventy percent of her body and "full operation of her mind" (Yuasa, 1987, p. 107). Unlike 'easy rank', matured rank depicts the full

utilization of the actor's art by penetrating the 'easy rank'. This penetration of easy rank or "performing with mind", the performer acquires the full control of her body-mind faculties and the final result is the experience of "*Sunyata*" or the 'no-mind'. If I further clarify with Yuasa's taxonomy, easy rank, the form is emptiness; and in the mature or no-mind level, the "emptiness is the form" (Ibid, 108).

The level of No-mind simply refers the concept developed in Buddhist teaching and widely known as *anatta/or anathman*. Zeami's here tries to combine the performer's state of no-mind with Buddhist notion of "anatta" or "Sunyata" which is the "emptiness." This "emptiness" is the ultimate goal that a master actor experiences while performing. This phenomenological existence of the body is experienced by the matured, well trained performer. This nature of emptiness or no-mind situation is not confined to performing arts but in other forms of practices such as dance, athletics and sports performers. As Yuasa asserts, a master performer who possesses the level of no-mind could use techniques wrong, this may also appear as right in the matured level. Csepregi illustrates this nature of bodily existence as "physical body change into an autonomously functioning living body. "The intentional act of the athlete changes into the unintentional swing of his living body.[.....] the body seems to step beyond the limits and orientation imposed by the previous training and displays an unexpected virtuosity" (2006, p.56). This unexpected virtuosity is one way of explaining Zeami's notion of no-mind where the performer could experience the *Sunyata* and apparently "observe" his own performance as detached from his body. This notion of "seeing from outside" or "alienated self" can be achieved by the master actor and the actor is capable of being alienated from her own body and interlace with the audience. On the other hand this expression implies that the actor who experiences the minimal friction between body and mind and could experience the "mindfulness and be able to alienate from her own body and observe as a spectator. This detachment seems similar to what Bertolt Brecht's coined as *Verfremdungseffekt (V-effect)* or as popularly known as 'alienation effect'. Yuasa argues that this "state of being" of the actor depicts the fact that this notion does not imply any distinction between self and other or actor and audience. This development of integration of the self and the other also resonates phenomenological notion of intersubjectivity. Borrowing from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty further developed this idea of Intersubjectivity by stating body's ontological existence as bodily-being-in-the world. The body therefore is not only encroached upon the world but the world is also embraced and encroached upon the body. Finally the performer's experience of "mindfulness" seems blended into a single unity with the self and the world; that bypasses dichotomies of mind and body.

Nagatomo Shigenori argues that the body's connection to its living ambience is connected through specific engagement between the body and the living ambience. This bilaterality is fundamental to bodily nature of its "intentionality" or its connectedness with other bodies. I here use the term "intentionality" to relate to Nagatomo's term with Edmund Husserl's concept of "Intentionality." These two terms correlatively express similar process. In phenomenology, the human body is always "intending" to connect; the body is always "conscious of" something. This intentionality is the basis of bodily motility and perception. Without bodily intentionality there is no motility and perception (knowing). Nagatomo also introduces the term "engagement" to depict bodily primordial nature of motility or its relationship with the world. This term "engagement" creates the bridge between the body, thoughts and the world. Nagatomo names this as the "fundamental modality" of the human body. Nagatomo makes a strong point to present the nature of this engagement:

When I am standing, I am standing *before* I "see" reflectively my self-making a contact with the Ground. That the personal body invariably makes contact with the ambience means, generally speaking, then, that it is *engaged* in the ambience. Engagement is a manner through which the living personal body relates itself to the ambience through its activities or just being in the ambience (ibid, p.188).

This "engagement" is also applicable to the fact when the body is engaged with other people. This engagement is phenomenologically known as inter-subjectivity or inter-corporeality. As Husserl also saw it, this engagement allows body to be empathized with other's bodies and thoughts. This "empathic impersonation" has been elaborated into a "being empathized with the audience" by No Master, Zeami Zenchuki. Therefore this bodily engagement with its living ambience is not just a relationship but an ongoing "attuned engagement." Nagatomo's conclusion is that engagement is primordially attuned. There is no attunement without engagement; and there is no engagement without attunement. It is mutually interdependent.

Along with Nagatomo and philosopher Gilles Deleuze I take the activity of "learning to swim" to illustrate this point. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's argument of "learning" is integrated in this discussion as he also takes the same example of "swimming" in relation to Nagatomo's idea of "attuned engagement." Nagatomo, in his book *Attuned through the Body* (1992) argues that we are only able to say "attuned" to a person who practices soma aesthetic, once he/she corporeally engages with that particular corporeal art. For instance Nagatomo takes the act of swimming for his explanation. He asserts that it is incorrect to state that a person is attuned to swimming if that person does not "engage" with the body of swimming. The same metaphor seems useful for Deleuze to interpret his version of learning/somatic learning.

According to him, swimming involves basically three types of bodies: The body of the swimmer, the body of water and the body of knowledge. These three bodies are always needed to be intertwined to generate the process of learning. Deleuze also states that learning of a particular somatic activity is not based on learning of passive knowledge from an expert (Guillaume, 2011) of the subject but bodily recognition and actualization through intermingled with bodies involved.

[w]e do not learn consciously since learning must go beyond our conscious faculties (*If I knew how to swim, I'd do it*). Instead, we have to experiment in ways that connect to the unconscious process that relate us to water in any other thing that we must enter into a new relation to" (2003:137 cited in Guillaume, 2011, p. 56).

As this passage shows, somatic learning is occurred below the conscious body and that learning process is linked with the unconscious body that is inaccessible to our conscious knowing. When we discussed about Yuasa's "dark conscious," we clearly see how our pre-conscious level functions beneath the layer of the conscious body. However, after being apprenticed with the new bodily knowledge, and once the conscious mind is interlaced with the body, the learning process will be fulfilled. The performer experiences the wholeness of the 'bodymind', once his unconscious body fits with the conscious body. This is the **non-dualistic position of Samadhi awareness** that Asian Buddhist phenomenology explores through the human body and its engagement with different somatic practices. This achievement is possible and can be achieved through the bodily engagement. It is the body that "attunes and engages" with the "living ambience" (own bodily experience and living with the environment). This pre-reflective knowledge thus turns into a conscious body of knowledge after being practiced for a long period of time. This body is then known as a "conscious body of knowledge." (Guillaume, pp.55-56).

Attunement

In Nagatomo's theory of attunement, the "engagement" or bodily intentionality plays a vital role in the process of learning. Nagatomo emphasises this bodily existence as "being -in-the-ambience." This integration with ambience is an experiential moment of "coming-together" (Nagatomo 1992, p.223). As Nagatomo meticulously explores, this "coming-together" ness of the human body and its living ambience, occurs through another three modes of ways. These three modes of "engagements" are as follows: a.) Tentionality, b.) de-tentionality, and c.) non-tentionality. These three phases of body's passages indicates the bodily "transformation" from everyday existence of the body to the more transcendental nature of "Samadhi awareness" that experiences through assiduous somatic practice and meditation. In other words, the "tentional" relation of the body marks the daily tentional correlation between mind and body and our dichotomous aspect of body mind experience. This is the "provisional nature" of body-mind split

in our daily life. In this nature of existence, the ego consciousness (ego cogito) is predominant. The final phase marks the transitional pathway of departing from “provisional body-mind split’ towards a more cohesive integration of bodymind through meditative and artistic practices of bodily training. (Nagatomo, p. 224)

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sketched out two different epistemological pathways of knowing and learning in relation to the human body. In predominant Western somatic culture exemplified and theorized by Descartes’s idealism argues that the knowledge is possible through the mind that is central to the thinking of the body. Bodily nature of perception and knowing have been subjugated throughout the history of Western epistemology. Merleau-Ponty for the first time opposed to the Cartesian split of body and mind and proposed the idea of body-subject which favours bodily orientation of perception and knowing. Merleau-Ponty’s ground breaking idea, “body-subject” marks the cease of dichotomous thinking of the Western philosophy and promotes the body as a “lived entity” that is “epistemologically” and “actionably” intertwined with the world. However this idea challenges the Cartesian split and views the body as the subject that is lived and animated as a living being.

Along with Yuasa Yasuo’s seminal philosophical investigation into Buddhist cultivation, and Shigenori Nagatomo’s theory of “attunement” provides an alternative paradigm of embodied mind. Nagatomo’s theorization has profound effect on the contemporary development of the understanding of the human body as “psychophysical” continuum. Nagatomo’s analysis of “attunement” of the body explained through the connection of the body to the “living ambience”. This engagement of the personal body with the living ambience is considered in this modality as the inherent nature of the body as “engaging phenomena” and this “connectedness” is defined as a transformation from body’s daily correlation of body-mind split to the more profound experience of body-mind oneness that is exemplified by Buddhist meditation of Samadhi. This body-mind oneness as the “experience of wholeness” that is achieved through *Samadhi* awareness of the body. This approach surely establishes the actor’s body as an epistemic gateway and celebrates the bodily inherent nature of knowing and learning in contrast to the domination of mental cognition.

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