

# SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF THE ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS: THE UNITY OF VERITY, BEAUTY AND DIVINITY IN BUDDHA AND RŪMÎ\*

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## ABSTRACT

What makes so many diverse Asian peoples and countries sympathize with the notion of the Asian Community? In spite of the apparent difference of religion, culture, language, race, etc, we can feel that something spiritual emanating from the bottom of our Being leads us to share the open mind of the true community. If our academic efforts succeed to find the self-identity of the Asian Community in this dimension of the Being, the plurality and diversity will have the celebrating meaning of creativity and richness of Life. Naturally, this awakening will imply the alliance of civilizations for the World community. This work of defining the self-identity of the Asian Community is closely related to the historical and archaeological excavations of the hidden links between the Asian civilizations. The spiritual link has the significance of giving the meaning and direction of the community to these various social and cultural links. Our study on the common spiritual foundation of the Asian civilizations will make it clear that Asia is the morning land illuminating the verity.

**Keywords:** Mawlânâ Jalâl al-Dîn al-Rûmî, Buddha, the unity of verity, archeology of religion, Samâ', Alaya Consciousness

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## I. ARCHAEOLOGY OF RELIGION AND ART

If the teleological interpretation for the history of philosophy is to be introduced, we can say that human self-consciousness has long time pursued an aim to attain the true Being. Religion and art, together with philosophy, show that, in this ultimate dimension, verity, beauty, and divinity are unified in oneness. As the origin of values, telling the essence, meaning, and purpose of life, it sends us messages. Already, from the primitive ages, men have heard the messages. That is why we begin with the ancient shamanism.

It is well known that the origin of art is found in the religious cult of the primitive times. The archaeology shows that paintings, poetry, music, and dance began naturally with the shamanic rituals of the cavemen. In the origin, they formed an inseparably integrated whole. At night, in front of the pictures, reliefs, or statues of worship, dancing together around the fire with incantations to appease the souls of mountains, seas, animals, trees, etc, slowly they fell in the state of ecstasy. In this mystic state, it seemed that they met the souls of nature, and they felt to be one with them. A fact no less important in this primitive cult is that, through it, the cavemen could feel one between them also, and it played a role of strong community bond. As it was most important for maintaining the group identity, the shamanic cult became the essential part in the social life of the primitive men. Through long ages, it has been accumulated in the subconscious basis of folkloric culture. That is why we necessarily come to meet the religious meanings in studying the folkloric music, dancing, paintings, statues, etc. Originally art and religion were unified in an ensemble.

The study of the various forms of shamanism of the world shows that their ultimate goal is to reach a climax of the ecstasy. In this mystic state, one can experience the highest beauty and the divinity at the same time. Exactly speaking, the highest beauty is the divinity itself. This primitive experience of the world of divinity was already sufficient for the shamanism to take the attitude of coexistence and harmony toward the nature. Even if the shamanism became fossilized and degenerated, this essential merit passed down to the later religions.

If we look our self closely, we can perceive that, under the deep feeling of beauty, there exists an emotion of divinity. When we are deeply moved by music, paintings, or literature, the infinite world into which we are immersed is that of divinity. In ordinary life, our personal love is particular, because we are attracted by the beautiful charm of a person. But we should not fail to see that already the particular love tells us the universal love, the divinity.

In modern times, with the division of art and religion, the essential unity of beauty and

divinity has been forgotten, and it is worried that, even if art is becoming more and more refined in its techniques, its spiritual origin of Being is alienated from us almost completely. We have lost sight of the fact that the ultimate meaning of beauty is divinity. That is why Mawlânâ Jalâl al-Dîn al-Rûmî's thoughts and works of art have the more importance for the contemporary civilization. Through his poems and Samâ', we are naturally led into the world of divinity.

We will try to understand this religious ecstasy<sup>1</sup> through Buddhism. Concerning the unhappy modern separation of verity, beauty, and divinity, it is very significant to see that the fundamental transformation of Western metaphysics and epistemology, achieved by H. Bergson, was deeply influenced by Buddhist philosophy of Being.

### 1. Awakening of the Being

It is well known that, by practicing a long meditation, descending into the remotest area of our unconsciousness, we can finally coincide with our true self. All values coming from this original self, it is acting somewhere, even if faintly, in everyday life. So, if we truly try to see, we can see it. Moved deeply by the works of music, literature, or art delivering the messages of the great souls, anyone can have an experience of meeting an infinite divine world. Is this experience different fundamentally from that of mysticism in which man meet God? Never different, because these experiences are the lights emitted from the same deepest world of our Being, teaching us together by strong emotion about what we are, what the meaning of life is, and what to do.

The original spirit of open religion is closely related to these experiences. Here, what is the most important is the vivid religious experience and inspiration. The absolute systematization of theology has nothing to do with this original spirit of religion, as it supports the political powers which exclude others for their own interests. That is why, in Buddhism and Taoism, the ultimate metaphysical questions are left in the margin unwritten.

The way of seeking after truth begins by concentrating on our self to descend gradually into the profundity of unconsciousness. Through longtime effort, passing one by one the gates of the unconscious world, our consciousness approaches our true self. All our past, instead of disappearing to nothingness, is preserved in our unconsciousness. Among the past memories, only those small parts that can give aid to the present situation float to the conscious level. The other greater parts remain submerged in unconsciousness.

<sup>1</sup> In Chinese character, this religious ecstasy is 法悦.

According to Buddhism, our happiness or unhappiness is due, not only to our own actions after birth, but to our own past doings traced back to a proximate or remote past births. Buddhism calls these actions and doings “Karma”. Under our consciousness, there is a storehouse of unconsciousness named “Alaya Consciousness” where all Karma is accumulated. The Alaya Consciousness preserves all past memories, desires, psychic impetus, and vital energy, melted and spread in our body.<sup>2</sup>

We are apt to think that this Alaya Consciousness which is bound to our finite body is our true self. Buddhism teaches us to free ourselves from this illusion. It preaches us to go much further, crossing the thick strata of Alaya Consciousness, to attain the ultimate verity of our true self, ‘眞如佛性’ (*the truth is the same with the Buddha’s nature*).

Our ordinary intellectual activities relying on the routine conceptions and languages cannot make us transcend the Alaya Consciousness latent in subconsciousness from time immemorial. As long as we wander in the confusion and illusion of the Alaya Consciousness, we will remain harassed by anguish and anxiety resulting from our vain desires.

Buddhism encourages us to overcome ourselves. The verity of Being, though neither visible nor audible because of the many folded thick strata of confusions and desires, can be felt anyway, even if faintly, in our heart, through its vibration from the deepest part of ourselves. Even in our ordinary life, there are some special occasions to contact directly the world of Being. When we are deeply moved by human relations, music, literature, arts, or religion, we are actually at the entrance of the world of Being. Though we do not know the fact, we are, for a short period, in a state of Buddhahood. Such occasions can be the starting point of our seeking after truth.

Here, we should be awakened to the true meaning of love. When we love someone truly, we do not hesitate to give her or him anything we have, even if it demands our sacrifice. We can understand why the Saints of Divine Love have gone the way of maximum self-sacrifice, mortification. To embrace all existences, to save them, the Saints decided to give all things they have, even their lives. Naturally, that way meant the death of ego, desertion of all desires. Their souls wore the minimum cloth of matter for the existence on earth. Like the candle which illuminates the world by firing its body, they practiced the Divine Love.

After a long period of mortification, when the Great Awakening came to them with

religious ecstasy, they found themselves in the inexplicable ultimate dimension of the unity of verity, beauty, and divinity. In this mystic dimension of infinity, they found themselves to be in oneness of the Being. The expressions like the union of Heaven, Earth, and Man, union of Atman and Brahman, and union with God refer to this same ultimate dimension. It teaches us the way of universal love, i.e. Divine Love.

Buddhism tells us that, when we attain to the ultimate awakening, our true self and the universe are unified as one verity. The ordinary conceptual thinking which opposes me against others, subject against object will be replaced by the direct intuition of the oneness of universe. The nature of the universe being that of my mind, all of the universe is unified in the ultimate verity of ‘眞如佛性’ (*the truth is the same with Buddha’s nature*). This awakening naturally makes us go forward to practice the universal charity and love.

## 2. Mawlânâ Rûmî and Divine Love

Mawlânâ Rûmî guides us to the Divine Love embracing all creatures of the world. If Buddha had met Rûmî, he would certainly have recognized Rûmî as another Buddha. Between them, the outward difference in theology would not have mattered at all.

We accept the difference and variety of the living beings as natural. They adapt to their environment in their own ways according to their shapes. Each form being the expression of life, their variety means the richness of life. Likewise, different cultures and religions should be understood as the various expression of human life. But, unlike that of bodily shapes, the difference of culture and religion has caused problems and conflicts until today. We should listen to the teaching of Buddha and Rûmî. Why we cannot be tolerant to the difference of cultures and religions!

If we attain the true meaning of our life, we will awaken to the verity that the ultimate nature of the Being is the Divine Love itself. It is the highest dimension of verity, beauty, and divinity, kept in the heart of our soul as the essence of our existence. As the origin of all values, it tells us what the true meaning of beauty is. So we are to be sensible enough to hear the subtle voice coming from the deepest part of our self.

By spiritual resonance reaching into our heart, Mawlânâ Rûmî’s poems guide us to the Divine Love. He teaches us what the true meaning of love is. The true love is the love of God embracing all existences. Our personal love will not have its true meaning until it is awakened to the Divine Love latent in it. “The lovers of the whole are not those who love the part: he that

<sup>2</sup> This Buddhist theory of Alaya Consciousness is so similar to Bergsonian theory of memory that we can see how deeply Bergson was influenced by Buddhism. Based on this theory of memory, Bergson developed his philosophy of evolution creatively.

longed for the part failed to attain unto the whole.”<sup>3</sup> Those whose love is limited only to worldly things are alienated souls. “Those love which are for the sake of a color (outward beauty) are not love: in the end they are a disgrace.”<sup>4</sup> At the beginning, our love may be attracted by the beauty and charm of a particular individual. But, as it becomes deep and true, this love will no longer make us remain in the particular dimension. It will open for us the gate of the universal divine love which has been ready to receive us from the beginning. The essential spirit of Islam is well summarized in Mawlânâ’s words. “Our Prophet’s way is Love. We are the sons of Love; our mother is Love.”

Thus, our true love reaches the entire world, embracing all the existences of the universe. Through the intermediary of a particular love, we are led into the universal love. No matter what it may be called, the transcendental God, or inner Awakening, this universal love is the essence, meaning, and purpose of Being and Life. This ultimate verity comes to us as the mystic experience of the infinite world of divinity. It is this spirituality that flows commonly in the heart of Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, and Christian Mysticism.

The Samâ’ represents the spirit of Mawlânâ Rûmî with all these merits of mysticism. The clothes of the whirling dervishes symbolize the death of ego, mortification. In their posture, we can read the ideal of the union of Heaven, Earth, and Man. They whirl together towards the religious ecstasy of the union with God. Through this most beautiful dance, they send us the message of God, the Divine Love.

Religion, art, and philosophy coincide in the ultimate dimension of the Being. Their aim and duty is to share the light and voice of this dimension with the people. They have the mission to lead the people to the Elysium of World Community. We know that the Asian cultures have grown on the basis of this spirituality. Our Asian Community has the mission for the World Community.

For the cultural basis of Asian Community, we need to trace the origin of this spirituality and its historical development in Asian cultures. Through this, we will see how the Asian spiritual tradition of coexistence and harmony has been formed, and why this spirit has the more importance in the contemporary techno-scientific civilization menaced by “*Seinsvergessenheit*”. As the etymology of the word reveals, Asia is the “Land of the Morning Light”.

<sup>3</sup> Mathnawî, 1/2903.

<sup>4</sup> Mathnawî, 1/214. In Asia, traditionally the word color (色) has been commonly used to mean material thing, body, outward beauty, or sex.

## II. THE HOLISTIC INSIGHTS OF ASIAN CULTURES

About the attitude toward the world, it has been well indicated that the Asian cultural tradition differs fundamentally from that of the West. In Asia, under the ideals of coexistence and harmony, a way of living together with nature has been generally taught. We do not see, in the history of Asia, such hateful oppressions against heterogeneous others as in the West. Accepting the existence of others as being natural, the inclusion and tolerance of them were regarded as the virtue of a great man. In Asian tradition, a true leader is a man who can make more people live together peacefully encouraging others.

On the contrary, the Western civilization has treated the nature as the object of conquest and exploitation, which resulted in the danger of total collapse of mankind. It also perceived the world as an arena of rivalry and fight, obeying the rule of power and hegemony. These dominant trends made the Western civilization exclude and destroy other civilizations.

In contrast to this, the myth of a shaman-king descending from heaven to promote the welfare of mankind characterizes the Han-Tengri civilization. From where originates the Asian spirit of tolerance and inclusion characterizing Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism? What kind of intuition and awakening to the essence of Being have created this great attitude toward the world?

It is proven that the experiences and awakenings of mysticism which have generated the open religions are similar. In the form of ecstasy, there emerged the following awakenings that between the universe and me there is an inseparable connection, that my existence is possible only with the participation of the universe, that all things of the universe interpenetrate one another, that all living beings, in spite of their different forms, have the same value, and that the ultimate nature of the Being is charity and love. If it is true that all things arise by universal interaction, the essence of our life is derived from that of the universe, and the religious ecstasy will mean the ultimate dimension of the oneness with universe. The phrases like the union of Heaven, Earth, and Man, or the union with God have been used to express this dimension.

Whether this meeting with the Divinity would be expressed in terms of the theology of absolute transcendental God, or explained as the coincidence with the ultimate true self unified with the universe in oneness, can vary, depending on the historical conditions and situations of the time when the religion came into being. And, sometimes, it happens that, after several hundred years from birth, a religion takes a theological system totally different from the ideas of the founder. So, here, we are to indicate the fact that, what matters most is

the spiritual message toward life that the vivid mystic awakening delivered, not the exterior theological system.

It is an important part of our work to find out from where and when the Asian ideal of harmony and mutual encouragement of life began, because it will provide us with the cultural, historical, and religious links needed for the formation of Asian Community. In doing this, the obstacles which have blocked the way to Asian Community by deforming, concealing, and forging historical facts will be eliminated.

Up to now, the fact has not been well known that the Asian world view of harmony and mutual encouragement of life originated from the ancient Siberian shamanism of Würm glacial stage (BC 53000~BC 10000). In spite of its decisive influence on Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Japanese Shintoism, and American Indian Shamanism, the Siberian shamanism has been far from academic illumination.

The vestige of the ancient shamanic ecstasy remains in the Altaic-Tungus hieroglyph “𐰉”<sup>5</sup> symbolizing the unification of heaven, earth, and man.<sup>6</sup> This Altaic-Tungus letter “𐰉” itself implies the philosophy harmony and mutual encouragement of life. Entering into China with the Altaic-Tungus conquerors, this letter has become Chinese. Lack of thorough archaeological and historical knowledge has made this hieroglyph “𐰉” known as a Chinese letter.

Here, we should make clear the fact that the *inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces* known as the beginning of Chinese characters originated in the civilization of the *Liao-ho River* (遼河) in Manchuria.<sup>7</sup> This civilization is at least 2000 years older than that of the *Yellow River* in China. Today, the following fact is admitted even by the academic world of China that a branch of the *Dong-Yi* (東夷) people who were the masters of the civilization of the *Liao-ho River* migrated from North to south into the central China to establish the *Shang Dynasty* famous for the *inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces*. The *Dong-Yi* people, pertaining to the Altaic linguistic group, originally had lived, during the glacial stage, isolated by the glacier, around the *Han-Tengri*, *Altai*, and *Baikal*. With the end of the glacial stage, they moved gradually south to Manchuria, China, Korea, and Japan.

5 It is useful for us to quote the following sentences of M.A. Czaplicka. “According to Banzaroff, the word shaman originated in northern Asia: *saman* is a Manchu word, meaning ‘one who is excited, moved, raised’; *samman* (pronounced shaman) and *hamman* in Tungus, have the same meaning.” M. A. Czaplicka, *Shamanism in Siberia*, 1914, republished 2007 by Forgotten Books, 42.

6 So, the traditional Altaic-Tungus cultures have given special religious importance to the numbers 3 and 9.

7 The inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces originated from the cult of divination of burning bones. The crack lines left on the burnt bones were regarded as showing the will of gods, either good or bad.

The aborigines of Siberia during the Würm glacial stage (BC 53000-BC 10000), exposed to the extremely cold climate below minus 50°C, developed a special technique of warming the body by regulating the breath. Practicing this technique, they came to experience a state of ecstasy in which man and nature are unified in oneness. The experience of communicating with the souls of nature in ecstasy made the shamans open their eyes to the true value and meaning of life.

The shaman in ancient times was a man or women who ruled the earth by the will of the heaven that he communicate to earth. In accordance with his cosmic principle of unification, the shaman had the wisdom and capacity of harmonizing nature with man, man with man. The shaman was an almighty leader, being at the same time priest, prophet, magician, medicine-man, artist, politician, etc. Today, in most regions of Asia, shamanism has degenerated into a superstition or incantation, being confined to the outdated frame of fossilized customs and rituals. But its essential spirit of pursuing universal harmony and respecting lives penetrated deep into other religions, influencing their basic attitude toward the world. The vestige of this influence upon Buddhism remains in the Pali word “*samana*” which means a religious mendicant seeking after spiritual awakening. In ancient India, a man or women who practiced asceticism like Buddha, renouncing the world, was called “*samana*”. This word, later introduced into China, was translated “沙門”.

The fact that the Siberian shamanism entered into China with the Altaic *Dong-Yi* (東夷) Conquest and developed into Taoism is well recorded with concrete names in ancient archives. It is generally admitted that the writing of the book *Yin Fu Jing* (陰符經) by the *Yellow Emperor Xuan Yuan* (黃帝軒轅) marks the beginning of the Chinese Taoism. Actually, the *Yin Fu Jing* (陰符經) is known as an interpretation of the book *Sam Huang Nae Moon Gyeong* (三皇內文經) of the great *Dong-Yi* (東夷) master *Ja Bu Sun Yin* (紫府仙人) from whom the *Yellow Emperor* learned the shamanistic philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the traditional religion of the American Indians is a kind of Siberian shamanism makes us rethink our understanding of world history. It is the Siberians of the Würm glacial stage who had crossed the frozen Bering Sea, following the reindeers that became the ancestors of the American Indians. Naturally, the American Indians and Siberians share many old customs. Adapting themselves to nature, they lived as a part of nature. Totemism was essential to their social life, because they formed their social identity and kinship through the worship of the same totem. Hunting in excess, over necessity, was prohibited by the custom,

8 In the Korean history book “*Handangogi* (桓檀古記)”, this ancient story is well narrated.

and they performed a ritual for the repose of the animals which were sacrificed in order to provide them with food and clothing.

Entering into Japanese islands through the Korean peninsula, the Siberian shamanism has been transformed into Shintoism. When the royal family of Japan performs the Shintoist ritual, today's Japanese people do not understand the meaning of the song invoking the spirit of the dead, because the song is written in a Korean dialect of the South-East region. As a native religion settled in Korea and Japan for a long time, the shamanism has maintained the time-honored tradition of harmonizing well with other religions introduced later.

### III. MESSAGE FOR THE COTEMPORARY TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION

Our considerations on mysticism will make us sympathize with life in general, and, if we continue this way, it will be possible for us to attain the essence, meaning, and purpose of life. Philosophy, music, arts, and religion coincide in guiding this way. Step by step, they are able to dig into the profundity of Being and Life, revealing to us that the world of Being is charity and love. Here, knowledge tells the practice of love already.

The great Asian spirit of Buddha and Rûmî will save the Cotemporary Techno-Scientific Civilization from the pitfall of "Seinsvergessenheit" caused by the fundamental illusions<sup>9</sup> concerning the Being. Their messages will make us overcome the unhappy rupture caused by the Western rationalism between reason and emotion, object and subject, concept and intuition, knowledge and practice, and between science and religion. Certainly they will make us advance even further to overcome the rupture between religions. Philosophy should grasp the reality in its concrete totality. Our discussion implies naturally the urgent need to change the stereotype positivistic level of education modeled on the fossilized modern reason.

The self-disruption deluded the Western reason into believing that only science treats the objective reality, while art and religion pertain to the realm of subjective emotion. The Western reason was too superficial to realize into what profound world of reality art and religion guide us. We should completely read again the contents and meaning of experience as

9 At the apex of the Western philosophical development is the metaphysics of Henry Bergson. He demands that the Western philosophy should return to its origin in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and recommence after correcting its fundamental illusions hidden in its root. His metaphysical notions like *durée pure*, *intuition philosophique*, *élan d'amour*, etc. show the deep influence of Buddhism on him. M. Heidegger follows H. Bergson.

the origin of science and religion. Preoccupied with the superficial dualism of objectivity and subjectivity, the immature *raison moderne* made confrontation and conflict between science and religion. In this level of mind, science is not a true science, religion not a true religion. In this respect, the Islam tradition in which there is no trouble between science and religion is a good example of the great spirit of integration to the whole.

Here, the old Asian cultural tradition that gives warning to the technique solely for technique, science for science, should be estimated. Losing the inner connection with the essence of Being, such technique and science fall into a one-dimensional level where nothing counts but efficiency and money. When science forgets its original meaning, it is degenerated into a simple instrument. That is why, in Asian tradition, humane education was emphasized before entering into scientific or technical training. A simple technique or knowledge, not accompanied by mental maturity, was regarded as most dangerous.

We should note that, under the Asian traditions, there move calmly the great teachings coming from the awakening of Being attained through the long ascetic mortification. The stray techno-scientific civilization, wandering in the level of simple instrumentality and superficial sensualism, should be saved by the light coming from Asia. This transformation of civilization will mean at the same time the historical end of hegemony and rivalry in world politics. The fundamental transformation of Western metaphysics, influenced by Buddhism, shows the future way of the alliance of civilizations. The great road to the World Community will begin with the spirit of the Asian Community.

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