

EUROPEAN AND BUDDHIST ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF “OPEN SOCIETY” CONCEPT

¹Lepekhov S.Y., ²Lepekhova E.S.

¹*Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude, e-mail: lepekhov@yandex.ru;*

²*Institute for Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude*

In this paper are analyzed the relationship of the degree of “openness” of society, its level of “democracy” and the rationalism of the various spheres of public life in Popper’s conception of “open society”. While analyzing the contemporary society, the mainstream criticism of world capitalism system by G. Soros was taken into account. The comparative analysis of “Western” values, based on the ideal of rationality and articulated by K. Popper, along with corresponding values of the Eastern civilizations (notably the Buddhist civilization) was taken. Estimated contribution to Buddhist logicians in the formation of the “East” of the ideal of rationality. Particularly, the economic dimension of the Buddhist way of life and ideological component of geopolitical potential of Buddhist civilization, its positions in intercultural and inter-civilization dialogue were examined. The article concludes that the corresponding values and ideals of rationality, in both Western and Eastern civilizations could co-exist together.

Keywords: the concept of “open society”, ideal of rationality by K. Popper, values of the Buddhist civilization dialogue of civilizations

The main object of study in this paper is the conception of “open society concept” and its correlation with ethics in European and Buddhist philosophy. First, let’s view what is the problem of an “open society”. A. Bergson was the first one to formulate the problem of “open” and “closed” societies. According to the French philosopher society’s openness is the result of creative evolution of the personality aimed to merge with the object of cognition on the intuitive basis. The intuitive vital urge guides the cultural innovations which break the shell of “close societies”. The “close society’s” mind devoid of critical reflection considers senseless any innovation affecting its foundation. Thus the problem of “opening” society comes to “introducing” the rationalistic ideals into its values. It was exactly this problem that was realized by K. Popper who understood the transition to open society as the intellect acquiring the ultimate role in the life of human societies. He believed this role was in criticizing and renovation of all the phenomena of social life. According to K. Popper, the member of “open society” counts only on the judgment of intellect.

Open society is regarded by K. Popper and his supporters as an ideal model of social life, its best possible design that should be the goal of all people who believe in a possibility of rational decisions based on scientific knowledge. According to Popper, democracy, and the one of the western type at that, is the best form of the state system which makes open society possible.

Open society is devoid of hierarchy and authority set once and for all, these is flexible and interchangeable since everyone in principle is able to occupy any social position. It makes

archaic clans and communities monopolizing whole branches of administration and professional activity impossible. It is devoid of a taboo system and scrupulous code of conduct. When comparing open society with the close one Karl Popper notes that the latter is much dependant on personal relations among people since the social function there is as a rule inseparable from a concrete person beginning from a monarch or dictator elected by no one. According to Popper open society’s design is more abstract, that is impersonal. K. Popper identified the threat to open society in totalitarian ideology under the disguise of revolutionary striving for the future and traditionalistic return to the past. Analyzing the views of Heraclitus, Plato, Hegel, and Marx Popper revealed their effective role in fighting the openness of the social system in order to preserve the interests of a definite party or a clan of oligarchs.

The “entry” into “open society” and struggle for its principles – territorial openness, democracy, individualization, which started in the 5th century B.C. and resulted in the conflict between Athens and Sparta, are still important nowadays under the conditions of existing various political traditions and various degrees of political systems’ openness. There is a stable correlation historically formed in the western political and social thought between the degree of society’s openness and its degree of democratization which is carried out alongside with rationalization of the majority of the political life spheres. But can such correlation be universal for all other societies challenging the world’s openness in the social spheres of information, economics, culture and others? The principle of openness has become universal. But its correlation with democracy turned out

extremely complex, both in the developed and developing societies. It seems that the transition of society from one level of openness (for instance associated with the recognition of the market's role only) to another level (assuming for example a search for some equilibrium among the interests of society, business and the state) is up to society itself. The principle of openness may destroy or erode the social system or on the contrary give it a new impetus boosting the spiritual and intellectual potential in order to let the system reach a new level of development.

The historical events of the ancient epoch, we are going to dwell on, symbolize the "beginning" of a new social reality with consideration to man's needs and assumption of his critical reflection of the surrounding world, society and state. We will note once more that the first historical "entry" into open society associated with classical antiquity and the times of rule by strategist Pericles may be regarded as a hypothesis or a "clarifying myth" like those proposed as the ground for the "agreement" theories of the state's origin. Some agreement once taking place marked the birth of the state as a "mortal deity" created by man. Certain mythifying and idealizing of democracy and openness of Pericles time's society marks only the first impetus towards that new state of openness which may be associated with the new form of ruling – democracy and the new strategy of governing the social world. There is no surprise that the focus of the analysis of open society, in a sense still remaining an ideal model, shifts. And such historical shifting more and more clearly marks a desertion from the local historical confrontation "Sparta – Athens" and transition to a more global and multifold confrontation of various traditions, opinions, discourses and social practices.

J. Soros, a well-known financier and student of Karl Popper, continuing the tradition of the "open society" research anxiously states new dangers to "open society" mostly coming from the "dynamic misbalance" caused rather by the informational war and postindustrial expansion than totalitarian ideology. A society that proved unable to accept the challenge of openness becomes unstable and dangerous. Soros interprets "dynamic misbalance" as a clear disparity between the dynamics of social changes and man's ability to adequately comprehend and react to them. Instability and chaos, as Soros sees it, come from the "market fundamentalism" which cannot yet be restricted the world political system. Numerous unpredictable results to open society may be expected from the societies that having made first steps towards democracy have not yet developed adequate ways of comprehending and controlling social dynamics.

At the same time democratic traditions and institutions have been forming not only in the West but also in the East. The same can be said of science and rationalistic philosophy playing a decisive role in Popper's concept. A number of crucial principles of Buddhist civilization forming throughout the millennium appear to be quite corresponding to the model of open society. The principles of universal humanism and compassion as the staple of the world; the principle of universal responsibility for forming social institutes and organizations aimed to solve problems common to all people; the principle of tolerance and common ethical direction of all world religions can be attributed to such principles.

Buddhism represents a system of spiritual-ecological values alternative to the ideology of the modern consumer society. Instead of the idea of man's rule over nature and paradigm of man's exceptionality, Buddhism brings forward the idea of the absence of personal "Self", inner self-sufficiency of every living being, instead of the necessity to conquer nature – the "ahimsa" principle – that is abstaining from doing harm to all living things; instead of the ideology of political violence – the concept of a natural non-violent way of development; instead of alienated values – genuine happiness (nirvana).

The social ideal of Buddhism is a harmonious society with spiritual and ecological priorities established. The humanistic ideal of Buddhism is a person satisfied with life in society and living in harmony with nature. Buddhism encourages self-restriction and social solidarity, justice and equality, pure thoughts and deeds. This is a powerful spiritual tool liberating us from human egoism and consumer ideology.

The economic ideal of Buddhism is small energy (and material consumption) with results satisfying man. The Buddhist lifestyle would seem incredible to an economist due to its unbelievable rationality. Relations among people in Buddhist civilization controlled mostly by Buddhist values and ideals cause a specific, as a western researcher may see it, economic activity within which there takes place distribution of religious merits involving not people only but all living beings as well. As M. Spiro has noted, the mechanism of such distribution involving both spiritual and material values (from 30 to 40 percent of the whole gross product) becomes an integrating factor of social life. This fact has also attracted attention of Trevor Ling who considers negative assessment of Buddhism by Max Weber wrong since the Buddhist economic model cannot be judged from the viewpoint of protestant individualism and Buddhism cannot describe as a "religion

of individual salvation". The implementation of an optimum consumption model is the main condition for sustainable development of man.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, economic development should promote the development of human qualities rather than material wealth. Today it is absolutely clear that economic growth by itself will not lead to sustainable development of the world. There is a need in global changes based on a new spiritual paradigm. According to Buddhism spiritual evolution of the individual is a basis of society's sustainable development. When we have a spiritual harmony within us we can live in piece with society. Moreover, the spiritual influence can involve the whole environment. In a word, the world originates within each of us.

Buddhist civilization emerged as an alloy of the elements of numerous preceding cultures and civilizations, experience of many generations of various ethnoses. The peculiarity of Buddhist civilization's development lies in the fact that to a considerable extent such experience was selected quite purposefully, and the further development was greatly influenced by philosophic reflection. Even in those cases when logic was deliberately limited or even denied, the integrity of Buddhist culture, Buddhist knowledge, deliberate and responsible attitude to reality was not broken. Buddhist civilization lies "in between" since in most cases it acts a close-to-perfect mediator among other cultures and civilizations, various ethnic groups and peoples.

The historical experience of Buddhist civilization is of interest as the mankind tries to understand its problems and find an optimal way of development. At present the major part of the civilized mankind finds itself approaching a crisis. If the present-day trends of the mankind's development remain for this quarter of the century, a sharp economic decline, depletion of natural resources, overpopulation and a global ecological catastrophe are predicted. Besides, there is a prediction of intensified struggle between the world's leading ideologies, aggravation of religious and ethnic conflicts and a clash of civilizations in perspective. Many consider this to be the result of those regularities that make the basis of the very phenomenon of civilization. Twenty five centuries of Buddhist civilization's existence vividly prove that it is possible to live in equilibrium with the natural environment, in piece with the surrounding cultures, scientific progress, to remain stable moral values and norms, maintain high educational standards. Buddhism's tolerance to the cultural and religious values of the others, its readiness to assimilate the best from the world culture let it gain the status of a global universalistic civilization spreading

beyond the state, national and confessional borders. Buddhism lies beyond the presupposed struggle between the other major civilizations since it does not strive to control the shrinking natural resources or to politically or ideologically rule the world. If the directions and ideals of the mankind's development model for the twenty first century, recommended by the present-day global problems experts are compared to the basic economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual parameters of Buddhist civilization, then it will appear that many of these ideals have already been put into practice by many generations of Indians, the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Tibetans, Mongols, Buryats, Kalmyks, Vietnamese, Khmers, Thais, Singhalese, Burmese, etc. Buddhism does not claim to be exceptional and is wide open to philosophic dialog, and this makes it still more appealing to intellectual elite as a neutral ideological field opening possibilities for various contacts at all levels. Fairly strict moral norms of Buddhism presume a possibility and necessity to carry out that what is called inalienable rights of the individual and responsible social conduct. To some extent they correspond to the ideals of the western democracy but unlike the latter they remain the collectivist ideological trends and condemn individualism.

As an example of the typical Buddhist civilization could be examined early medieval and medieval Japan. It is remarkable that the first constitution of Japan ("Constitution of 17 articles"), compiled in 604, based mostly on the principles of Buddhist ethics. Originally it's compilation was attributed to Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku-taishi).

The Prince Regent Shōtoku (Shōtoku-Taishi) (574–621) is as inseparably linked with Buddhism, as the Indian emperor Ashoka or the Tibetan king Songtsän Gampo. He also was considered as an author of the first code of laws, and the patron of the Buddhist Sangha, who led the construction of temples. In addition, first treatises on Buddhist philosophy in Japan (Sangyo Gishō) were also attributed to Prince Shōtoku. It is necessary to pay attention on one important ethical category, which is constantly present in the writings of Prince Shōtoku. This is the concept of "virtue" (*zen* 善). Analyzing this concept, it is noticeable that for Shōtoku-Taishi the constant practice of virtue is more important than good karma and even prosperity. Prosperity for him serve only as an opportunity to carry out good deeds for the common weal of all sentient beings. The ultimate goal of this practice is the obtaining of the Buddha's state. The concept of "virtue" as the foundation of a harmonious society also presents in the "Constitution of 17 articles". For example in the article II is said: "Sincerely revere

to the Three Treasures (*sanbō* 三宝). The Three Treasures are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Among the people are less notorious scoundrels. But even those worship the teachings of Buddha. The Buddha's teaching is a noble law, which avoids evil and seeks good, the highest object of worship in all countries". This passage shows the desire of the author to regulate the behavior of people with virtue. The "Three Treasures" could not only save the misguided people, but also make their daily lives full of meaning. In article X is written: "It is necessary to avoid anger in your heart and thoughts. There are times when there is a reason to be angry at the other, but not always the accusing person is right and not always on the accused one lies fault. Mostly guilty are both persons. Actually, all people are the same and it is impossible to find out the cause of fault. If another person is angry, it would be better to admit that he is wright".

It is evident that prince Shōtoku's philosophical views were innovative for that time. Their uniqueness lies in the fact that the man who was considered to be the founder of the Japanese state system, in fact was Buddhist devotee and considered Dharma as a moral and ethical code. One of the contribution of Prince Shōtoku in Japanese Buddhism consists of that he was founder of the concept of Buddhist ethics in early Japanese Buddhism. This concept later was developed by Doshō (629-700), the founder of East Asian Yogācāra school, and Saichō the founder of Tendai school already in the Heian period. Due to this concept in the early Japanese Buddhism formed the ideological currents, focused mostly on the moral image and ethics behavior of followers of Buddhism. The Buddhist ethics of Shōtoku-taishi, combined with original Shinto ideas, also stimulated the development of traditional Japanese culture, acknowledged as one of the most significant phenomenon in the world cultural inheritance. It could also be one of the reason

how the Japanese preserved their traditional culture till nowadays in the transforming world of modern globalization.

By the dialog between civilizations we imply such interaction of various social-cultural worlds when each of them understands the need to reconsider its basis and prospects for the future in the presence of the other world and to treat the latter as a further extension of its own practice. The dialog of civilizations implies equality of peoples and their positive cooperation. The dialog is only possible when each of its participants respects the others and treats them as equal. The definite forms of globalization during future evolution depend on the degree of development of the strategic partnership among various countries, social powers and local civilizations. Here various interests and values are compared. And they can be united by an idea common to all of the mankind. Such an idea, as we see it, can be the one of sustainable and balanced development, that is an idea of long-term (eternal in perspective) existence of the human civilization in harmony with nature, the natural environment and cosmos.

References

1. Influence of the Religious Factor on the International Relations in Conditions of Globalization // International Relations Among Developing Countries. – Dongying Shandong, China, 2008, p. 58–65.
2. Buddhism in Buryat Mongolian Cultural Tradition // The Journal of Oriental Studies. – 2008. – Vol. 47. – № 2. (Japan). – P. 109–126.
3. Buddhism in Russia; Buddhism in Mongolia // 2600 Years of Sambuddhatva: Global Journey of Awakening. Asanga Tilakaratne (ed.). – Colombo: The Ministry of Buddhasasana and Religious Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka, 2012. – P. 356–372; P. 373–378.
4. The Religious Policy of the Russian Government towards Buddhism at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Centuries // International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture. (Korea). – February 2013. – Vol. 20. – P. 145–161.
5. The Problem of Text and "Personality Context": Inter-cultural Approach (Oriental Dimension) // Philosophy Study. – (USA) March 2014. – Vol. 4. – № 3. – P. 224–231.