
Research Article

The Buddha at Eranos

Oliver Knox

University College London

The Eranos conferences between 1933 and 1939 brought together psychologists and scholars of Eastern religions to take part in annual meetings that aspired to provide a “meeting place between East and West” (Hakl 2013: 25). At these meetings a group of international European scholars developed a shared understanding of Buddhist doctrine and meditation that has become widespread, namely, the notion that Buddhism is, first and foremost, a noetic science the principal concern of which is the transformation of human psychology. Their interpretations were the catalyst for the uptake of Buddhism in the American counterculture of the 1950s and 60s that, in turn, spawned a host of psychotherapies seeking to integrate these so-called “Buddhist” practices into their therapeutic systems.

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Buddhism as Psychology: Some Preliminary Remarks

In December of 2019, Erik Sand published *Imagining the East*, in which he outlined how two Buddhas emerged in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One was the Buddha of the Theosophists, a teacher of esoteric spiritualism and occultism, a “Mahatma”—Madame Blavatsky’s term for a “great teacher”—who materialized esoteric texts at will to his initiates. The other Buddha belonged to the Orientalists: a rationalist, atheist, philosopher who promoted secular ethics and scientific method. Needless to say, these two Buddhas were at odds, and, retrospectively, seem to reflect internal debates within nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western society more than the religion they purportedly represented.¹

¹ The dichotomy implied by Sand and others acts as a helpful explanatory tool. It should be noted that certain important contemporary thinkers, like Schopenhauer, while belonging to neither school of thought, were significant to the history of both. A more detailed study of Schopenhauer’s work can be found in Peter Abelsen’s *Schopenhauer and Buddhism* (1993). Schopenhauer was particularly significant for the Heinrich Zimmer, whose contribution is discussed in this paper. Details on this can be found in Matthew Kapstein’s *Schopenhauer’s Shakti* (1994).

Enlightening though this twin reception was, it ignores the major reconstruction of Buddhism in the West today. Both Theosophy and Orientalism have certainly left their mark on modern conceptions of Buddhism but there has emerged, over the past century, another more dominant image, namely the image of Buddhism as psychology, in particular “depth-psychology”. This approach usually construes Buddhism’s soteriological goal positively, as psychological health, well-being or “wholeness”, and often assumes that the unconscious was, in effect, a feature of Buddhist meditation and philosophy (Waldron 2003; Moacanin 2003; Epstein 1995; Preece 2012). A recent exponent of this kind of interpretation is the lay Buddhist and psychotherapist Mark Epstein, who writes in his influential work, *Thoughts Without a Thinker*, which contains a foreword by the fourteenth Dalai Lama,² as follows:

I begin with a discussion of what has always impressed me the most about Buddhist psychology: its comprehensive view of the human psyche. For Buddhism, like the Western traditions that followed many centuries later, is, in its psychological form, a depth psychology . . . the Buddha may well have been the original psychoanalyst, or, at least, the first to use the mode of analytic inquiry that Freud was later to codify and develop. (Epstein 1995: 9)

Epstein offers no discussion of the history of the association between Buddhism and depth psychology. Such a history, in fact, would compromise the authenticity of the so-called Buddhism he describes. Rather than being an accurate representation of Buddhism as practiced in South-East Asia, Epstein’s “Buddhism” is largely a product of attempts of early twentieth-century American and European intellectuals to formulate an original psychology of religious experience based on developments in western psychology and psychotherapy.³

The Buddhism described by Epstein and others, as my comments below suggest, is a product of a relatively new movement in the philosophy of religion, which can be broadly characterised as “spiritual but not religious”—a philosophy that originated in Europe in the early twentieth century and embedded itself within the counterculture of the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

C. G. Jung

Interest in Buddhism began to flourish during the years in which psychology was attempting to establish itself as part of western science.⁴ As such, Buddhism became moulded around the requirements and metaphysical assumptions of various schools of western psychology. The first and

² The Dalai Lama himself has become involved in the interchange between psychotherapy and Buddhism. See, for example, his *Transforming the Mind: Teachings on Generating Compassion*.

³ Another example is Wendy Haylett’s bestseller, *Everyday Buddhism*, which opens with the claim:

“The first thing you should know about Buddhism is that it is—above all—practical. For those of us in the West, it can be considered more a blend of philosophy and psychology than a religion—and it can be practiced despite your religious affiliations. The laboratory for the study of the philosophy/psychology is 100% accessible and portable because it is essentially a study of the nature of our own minds, with the practical goal of living a life that allows the mind to be peaceful and healthy.” (Haylett 2019: 16)

⁴ For more information on the history of early psychodynamic schools, see Shamdasani 2003.

most significant psychologist to engage in a serious study of Eastern religion in the twentieth century was the psychiatrist C. G. Jung (1875–1961). He understood Buddhism and Yoga as cross-cultural parallels to his analytical psychology, whose central principle was what he termed the “process of individuation” (Jung 1940: 275–354). Individuation consists in the synthesis of a new centre of the personality, which Jung called the “self” (1940: 278), by means of a harmonisation of conscious mind and the unconscious. The process begins with the recognition of the existence of the impersonal nature of the collective unconscious and culminates with the realisation that the self, that is, the totality of conscious and unconscious, not the Freudian ego, constitutes the true centre of the psyche. Buddhists, Jung supposed, having understood the architectonics of the individuation process, had long ago devised meditation techniques designed to induce it and so guide the practitioner through its various stages. He imagined Buddhism, therefore, as a sophisticated psychology of the unconscious that anticipated the core principles of depth psychology recently rediscovered in the West. Furthermore, Jung believed that his hypotheses of the archetypes, the collective unconscious and active imagination provided an explanation of the universal psychological principles at work in Buddhist meditation, ones that the psychological theories of his contemporaries, notably Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, could not account for. Jung’s psychological interpretation formed the theoretical basis upon which many popular twentieth-century authors, among them Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), Alan Watts (1915–1973) and Friedrich Spiegelberg (1897–1994), constructed their notions of Buddhism. (Tucci 1961: 5; Watts 1972: 313; Spiegelberg 1948: 33)

Standard presentations of Jung’s study of Eastern religion tend to fall into one of two categories. Sympathetic readings present Jung as a champion of an original interpretation of Eastern religion, while critical readings present his interpretations as idiosyncratic and unduly coloured by his own intellectual interests. An illustration of the former view is the historian Sulagna Sengupta, who, for example, writes, “the parallels that [Jung] found between his psychological concepts and the religious principles of the East came from his own meticulous investigations and were pioneered by him alone” (Sengupta 2013: 27). An illustration of the latter is Luis Gomez in his study, *Jung and the Indian East* (1995), who represents Jung’s treatment of Buddhism as a singlehanded search for self-confirmation. What seems to have eluded scholars, as I hope to show in this article, is the extent to which Jung’s interpretation resulted from his collaboration with some of the leading Buddhologists of his day. His seemingly “spasmodic” account, as one commentator described it (Clarke 1992: 87), can leave readers, oblivious of the historical precedents for his interpretations, bewildered as to why he saw such deep congruity between Buddhist soteriology and his own psychology. His interpretation of Buddhism, however, becomes intelligible and, to a degree, coherent, once we take into account the historical context from which his views emerged.

It reflects, in other words, the conclusions of a largely unknown branch of European orientalism responsible for the “psychologised” Buddhism familiar today.

Eranos

Jung’s major period of engagement with Eastern religion was between 1933 and 1939. During this period, Jung published forewords to Evans-Wentz’s translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1935)

and D.T. Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1939), as well as an essay on *Yoga and the West* (1936). He travelled to India in 1937, publishing two articles based on his travels in 1939, entitled *The Dreamlike World of India* and *What India Can Teach Us*. His interest in Buddhism culminated in his 1938-39 ETH Lecture series, which were later abridged and published as *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation* (1947).⁵

Jung's interest in Eastern religion was inspired by his participation at yearly conferences which took place in Ascona, a small town at the northern end of Lago Maggiore, at the foot of the Swiss Alps. Here, at the home of Frau Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn,⁶ a group consisting of some of the world's most renowned scholars, including scholars of religion, historians, anthropologists, scientists and psychologists, met annually to participate in conferences, the goal of which was to provide a new way to integrate what they understood as the esoteric teachings of the East into Western psychology. The name given to these conferences, which started in 1933, was "Eranos", taken from the Ancient Greek meaning, "a banquet to which one brings contributions of food." Lectures focused on a central theme, decided in advance, which speakers were expected to address by drawing on research in their own specialism. The theme of the first conference, for example, was "Yoga and Meditation in East and West".

Between 1933 and 1953, Eranos was the locus, in Fröbe-Kapteyn's words, of "a providential coming together of scholars who were intuitively moving in the same direction and open to the same ideas" (Fröbe 1954: 5), including many of world's leading Buddhologists, Sanskritists, Indologists and Sinologists. Lecturers included Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys-Davids (1857-1942), Jean Przyluski (1885-1944), Daisetz Teitaro T. Suzuki (1870-1966), Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984), Jakob Hauer (1881-1962), Erwin Rousselle (1890-1949), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and Heinrich Zimmer (1890-1943), to mention only a few. The expectation at Eranos was that lecturers should be experts in their fields, but also that they should contribute to the communal spirit of the meetings, passing beyond the purely scholarly. "In many cases", wrote Fröbe, "[the Eranos lectures] carry us to the bounds of scholarly investigation and discovery, and point beyond" (Fröbe 1954, 8). In 1939, she summarised the project at Eranos as follows:

The Eranos conferences deal with the experiences of the soul of all ages and among all people, both in the Orient and the Occident. Its goal, by means of comparative study, is to shed light, in a psychological sense, on parallels and differences between the two parts of the world. The confines of Eranos is therefore like a circle, with various doors which

⁵ Jung retained a keen interest in Buddhism after 1939. On May 16th 1958, Jung held a conversation with Zen Master Hisamatsu, a transcript of which can be found in Young-Eisendrath and Muramoto's *Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy* (2002). In 1955, Jung also published a commentary to Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*.

⁶ Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's vision directed the atmosphere at Ascona. During the seven years preceding the first conference, Olga Fröbe lived an extremely reclusive life, having contact only with her domestic servant. She later called these years a period of "concentration discipline", during which she studied Vedanta and other Indian spiritual paths. She later established contact with the Theosophist Alice Bailey. According to Alfons Rosenberg, Fröbe turned away from Theosophy just before the foundation of Eranos at the behest of Jung. (Hakl 2003: 31).

lead to different spheres of knowledge. In the middle of the circle we have psychological research, which represents a unifying and creative analytic function. (Fröbe 1939: 3)

The “psychological research” alluded to by Fröbe refers to Jung’s analytical psychology. Jung was involved in the organization of the conferences and Hakl reports that it was probably his idea to dedicate Eranos to the meeting of East and West (Hakl 2013: 25). All participants shared an interest and sympathy for Jungian psychology and, although Jung himself never lectured on Buddhism, preferring to use the occasions to learn from specialist colleagues, his psychology acted as the underlying conceptual framework around which Eranos lecturers constructed their expositions of Buddhism. “We are greatly indebted to C. G. Jung”, wrote Fröbe, “whose rediscovery of the archetypal world and its value for us today has from the beginning provided us with a background for the work done here in the last twenty-three years” (Fröbe 1955: xvi).

The relationship between Jung and other participants at Eranos was symbiotic. On the one hand, Jung’s psychology provided participants with, in Mircea Eliade’s words, a “new language” (Campbell 1960: 1) that could express universal, psychological motifs contained within Eastern religion and mythology. On the other hand, Jung was able to expand his knowledge of Buddhism by engaging with lecturers and conversing with internationally renowned specialists. In a letter to Fröbe, he expressed his gratitude for the “abundant stimuli for the mind; the exchange of thoughts with people of similar interests as well as the resonance from an educated audience” (Hakl 2013: 191). Moreover, as we shall see, many of Jung’s fundamental insights derived from the work of scholars at Eranos.

Jung was aware of his hagiographical status at Eranos and of the possibility that his psychology might overtake the intellectual climate there. He wrote, in a letter to Fröbe in 1934:

In general, I would like to give precedence to sinologists and indologists and to keep psychology in the background, as a difficult and insipid area for Asia’s enthusiasts, and of which no one cares if they must not [. . .]. At your conference, therefore, I would basically like to act as a sympathetic listener. (Jung 1934: 174)

Despite his intentions, Jung was, for his Indologist and Sinologist colleagues, much more than a sympathetic listener. As Mircea Eliade remarked, Jung was the *spiritus rector* and his complex psychology became the cultural language of Eranos, “capable of expressing human realities and spiritual values”, in contrast to the “empirical and utilitarian language of contemporary scholarship” (Eliade 1989: xiii). Eranos adopted Jung’s analytical psychology as the middle path between Theosophy and Orientalism, capable of assimilating the esoteric message of the East into its proper context in Western culture, by avoiding what the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer called the “willed blindness of Theosophy on the one hand, and the sterilizing anatomy and dehydration of the merely intellectual approach of the sheer scientist-philologists on the other hand” (Zimmer 1984: 249). The Indologist and pioneer of comparative philosophy, Paul Masson-Oursel, expressed a similar sentiment, opening his 1936 lecture with the following remark:

Outside the Eranos circle, the nature of the underlying concept which gives these meetings their meaning is perhaps not fully realised. The wish to understand the Orient and an interest in psychology are uniquely combined in the personality and work of Professor Jung. Each one of us, however, must seek to clarify what analytical psychology and the age-old experience of the Orient have in common. (Campbell 1955: 3)

Despite Eranos' importance, first in the history of Buddhism's reception in the West, and second in shaping Jung's interpretation of Buddhism, there are no studies on the primary texts produced by Eranos during the period 1933–39, namely the German transcripts of the lectures recorded by Fröbe in the *Eranos Jahrbucher*. These texts, together with several lectures translated into English by Joseph Campbell in his *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (1954–1964), are the main material for my conclusions in what follows. Hakl's *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* and Bernardini's *Jung a Eranos* provide the first detailed histories of Eranos. Neither scholar, however, addresses the question of how Buddhism was conceived there.

The Eranos Lectures (1933-39)

Two concepts stand out in Eranos' reconstruction of Buddhism. First, the soteriological goal of Buddhism was understood to be the realisation of the Self, understood in Jung's terms as a psychological experience of "wholeness" (Jung 1969: 303) latent within the human psyche. Second, Buddhist meditation was taken to be a cross-cultural parallel to Jung's depth-psychology. Meditation was imagined as a technique, in Jung's words, to "plumb the depths of the unconscious" (Jung 1976: 465). Both notions are, from a traditional Buddhist perspective, problematic, if not inaccurate. *Anatman*, no-self, is a hallmark of Buddhist doctrine, and there is no agreement among scholars for any concepts in Buddhist literature corresponding to 'the unconscious' or related psychoanalytic notions such as "projection" and "transference". Yet the leitmotifs constructed at Eranos have prevailed to this day, with varying degrees of subtlety, in popular conceptions of Buddhism (Waldron 2003; Haylett 2019; Moacanin 2003; Epstein 1995; Preece 2012). To understand the historical genesis of these ideas, and the scholarly justifications given for them, we must examine how Buddhism was viewed at Eranos.

a) Self/no-self

Eranos's construction of Buddhism was indebted to the work of C. A. F. Rhys Davids, President of the Pali Text Society between 1923 and 1942. Though best known as an author and translator of Buddhist texts, Rhys Davids' early interest was not in Buddhism, but in psychology and philosophy, which she studied at University College London until 1889. Her psychology tutor put her in touch with her future husband, T. W. Rhys Davids, the most respected contemporary Pali scholar of his day, to further her interest in Indian philosophy. What particularly interested her about Buddhism was "this psychologizing without a psyche . . . that seemed to bring the work, for all its remoteness in other respects, nearer to our own experimental school (Rhys Davids 1900: 76)." Until 1922, Rhys Davids followed the hypothesis espoused by her husband that, although Buddhism was a religion, its primary

concerns were ethical and philosophical, and its methods rational and scientific. Furthermore, like her husband, she was convinced that the teaching of no-self (*anatman*) was the cornerstone of Buddhist psychology.

The death of her son Arthur, however, in the First World War (1917), followed by the death of her husband five years later (1922), marked a turning point in her life and career. Perhaps seeking solace from her sorrow, she became interested in spiritualism, which she integrated into her extensive knowledge of the Pali Canon. Around the same time, Rhys Davids seems to have become associated with Theosophical circles. The historian James Santucci claims that shortly after her husband's death, she spent time at Christmas Humphreys' Buddhist Lodge (of the Theosophical Society) read Theosophical publications attentively (Santucci 2020: 88). She also began taking a keen interest in Jung's publications, particularly his work on Eastern religion, citing his treatment of the *Upanishads* in his *Psychological Types* (1921) as the only accurate portrayal of early Indian psychology (Rhys Davids, 1936).

The archival documents pertaining to Rhys Davids held in the Senate House Library, London University, consist of volumes of automatic writings, notes on the afterlife, and channelled messages from spirits. Among her communications are messages from Lao-Tze, Confucius, Heraclitus, Plato, Parmenides and Plotinus. Some messages are revelations of esoteric doctrines on the nature of the self.⁷ Others outline spiritual practices intended to facilitate communication on the astral plane, often with the intention of enabling communication with her deceased son.⁸ The spirits revealed to her Gotama's original, positive doctrine of the self, re-orienting her understanding of Buddhist soteriology. She henceforth dedicated her lectures and publications to defending her views with reference to certain passages of the Pali Canon.

At Eranos, Rhys Davids found a sympathetic community that shared her conclusion on the nature and function of the self in Buddhist soteriology. In her 1933 address, *Religious Exercises and the Religious Man in India*, delivered over three separate lectures, she attempted to disprove contemporary interpretations of Buddhist soteriology. Addressing standard interpretations of *anatman*, she remarked,

That this negation of self or soul should have been one of the main principles of Buddhism from the earliest years seems to me a serious and terrible mistake. From the moment I gained clarity on this point, I have taken every effort to bring this knowledge to the public. (Rhys Davids 1933: 43)

⁷ A message from a "follower of Socrates" reads: "He [Socrates] bade men to know the self. By this he means a soul, a psyche, which was then not a well known idea, but a new notion. We know that something does leave the body after death. . . . This is a new doctrine to the world. *We are your helpers in this . . .*" (Senate House Library Archives, GB 96 MS 1082, 1918-1940).

⁸ "We use other faculties, often we are thus said to be clairvoyants. . . We are now using other faculties. We are not hearing with our native ears, or seeing with our native eyes. We can use other faculties for three worlds . . . when you are in the astral, you can use other faculties, so can he (Arthur)" (Senate House Library Archives, GB 96 MS 1082, 1918-1940).

Rhys Davids lectured four times at Eranos, between 1933 and 1936, each year developing this central theme. She argued that Gotama's so-called "original" doctrine of inner progress, the soteriological goal of which was, as she remarked in her 1936 lecture, the fulfilment of "the most (*artha*), the necessary, the sought" (Rhys Davids 1936: 150), had been corrupted by what she called the "world-denying attitude" (Rhys Davids 1933: 33) of Buddhist monks in the centuries following Gotama's death. The *artha*, not *nirvana*, she argued, was the original goal of the Buddhist *dhamma*. Her search for Gotama's original teaching and her disdain for Buddhist monasticism were standard orientalist ploys in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lopez, 2013). In her 1935 Eranos lecture, *Man, the Search and Nirvana*, she argued as follows:

Only one thing is clear: the word *nirvana* had appeared at some point and then stuck; the word *attha*, on the other hand, which had been there before, fell increasingly out of use. And it is significant that the gradual disappearance of this word, for the purpose of a religious end goal or religious search, is preceded by an ominous exhaustion and devaluation of the terms "man" and "the self" (*atta*), which are left out . . . through this process . . . the divinity of the concept of self was gradually destroyed; this decline and slow decay took centuries to complete. (Rhys Davids 1935: 228)

Rhys Davids reconstruction of "original" Buddhism was supported, among others, by the German Indologist and Yoga expert, Jakob Hauer, who lectured at Eranos in 1934. Hauer's scholarship was a primary source for Jung's psychological analysis of Yoga and the two held a week-long seminar on Yoga together in 1932 at the Zurich Psychology Club. In his 1934 Eranos lecture, *Symbol and Experience of the Self in Indo-Aryan Mysticism*, Hauer argued that the Buddha's seemingly reductive exposition of the self was a pedagogical technique intended to break through "the conceptual systematics which try to cover up the reality of the self" (Hauer 1934: 54). The emphasis on the self in ancient India, he argued, had rendered positive expositions of it cliché. The doctrine of *anatman*, he therefore argued, was an attempt to "snatch the last positive out of a frozen speculation and make it accessible to a living experience again" (1934: 56). He remarked:

The Buddha's teaching of no-self has been understood as a denial of the self. This interpretation is a gross misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching. I feel quite at one with Seidenstucker and Mrs Rhys Davids, who have repeatedly emphasized the positive in Buddha's teaching . . . behind these negations of the not-self there is surely entrenched the affirmation of a final positive reality, that "unshakeable" that he calls the unborn, the un-created, the un-formed. (1934: 56)

Hauer's motivations for subscribing to Rhys Davids argument were connected to his theory of ancient history which was, in turn, colored by his political ideology. At the time of his Eranos lecture, Hauer had just founded the German Faith Movement, which, he hoped, would become the state religion of the Third Reich. He subscribed to a particular version of the so-called "Aryan invasion theory", popular among some contemporary German orientalists, according to which the Buddha was the archetypal embodiment of an advanced Indo-Germanic spirituality in the "primitive" climate

of ancient India. Hauer's own philosophy, however, was based on the notion that the self was "the central concept, its experience the decisive event for the Indo-Aryans on the road to ultimate reality" (1934: 1). It followed, or so Hauer concluded, that if the Buddha was indeed the archetypal manifestation of the Indo-Aryan spirit, he could not at the same time have denied the existence of the self. Rhys Davids' reconstruction of Buddhism, therefore, was welcome to Hauer, and both scholars found in each other corroboration for their notion that the Buddha maintained "behind the negations of the not-self . . . a final positive reality" (1934: 56). Jung later fell out with Hauer on account of his political views and, by 1938, they had ceased corresponding. Hauer was no longer invited to Eranos. Nevertheless, at the time of Hauer's lecture, Jung found his expositions singularly instructive.⁹

Another scholar who merits consideration is the Buddhologist and expert on South-East Asian languages, Jean Przyluski. Przyluski lectured twice at Eranos, in 1937 and 1938. Of Polish descent, Przyluski was a highly respected scholar of South-East Asian languages, and Professor of Vietnamese at the *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris, where he organised instruction in the comparative grammar of Indo-Chinese languages. Przyluski introduced the study of Buddhist sects and their expansion out of Northwest India into mainstream Buddhist Studies and his analyses of the traditions associated with *parinirvana*, the funeral of the Buddha, the first Buddhist Council and the legend of King Asoka, remain seminal contributions to the history of Buddhism. In his late career, Przyluski felt the limitations of specialisation, realising that "in order to understand, it is not enough to describe, analyse and reconstitute: one must situate, integrate a datum into a whole" (Przyluski 1932: 198). His works from 1936 onwards shifted away from philology and towards the question of how religious practices could inform the understanding of human evolution and psychology. Works such as *Participation* (1940), *L'Évolution humaine* (1943), and *Créer* (1943) aimed to trace humanity's development through economic, social and spiritual stages.

Przyluski's Eranos lectures in 1937 and 1938 outlined this evolutionary pattern. The Buddha was, he remarked, an archetype of redemption, comparable to Christ in the Christian tradition.¹⁰ Buddhism, he argued, embodied a transformation in the collective consciousness of ancient India insofar as liberation, which had previously been always sought externally, was now sought within. The original teaching of the Buddha, he argued, turned the "gross magic" of the Vedas "into exercises that prepare the blossoming of the purest yoga" (1937: 199). The Buddha was, according to his evolutionary theory, the natural development of earlier Vedic philosophy, embodying the goal that the Vedas could only approximate, namely the experiential realisation of the self. In his 1937 Eranos

⁹ In his *Zarathustra Seminars* (1935), Jung implored his audience to read Hauer's lecture in the *Eranos Jahrbuch*. "If you want to go a bit deeper into the definition of the self you must look up the literature; I should advise you, for instance, to read the Eranos of 1934 where Prof. Hauer has a very interesting article about the symbols of the self in the Upanishads and the Tantric philosophy." (Jung, 1989: 906)

¹⁰ In his 1937 lecture Przyluski argued, "to many theorists who do not go back to the origins, Buddhism seems like an abnormality among human religions. In their opinion, it would be a religion without God . . . We can see a certain common ground in the three major world religions. In Islam, Allah is God and Mohammed is his prophet. In Christianity there is only one God and Jesus is the Incarnated Son of God. In original Buddhism, Sakyamuni, the human Buddha, brings man the truth revealed by the god Brahma". (Przyluski 1937: 136)

lecture, *Redemption after Death in the Upanishads and Original Buddhism*, he argued that “Brahmins, whatever they may say, were unable to achieve union with *Brahma*. Only the Buddhists were able to achieve it” (1937: 199).

Rhys Davids, Przyluski and Hauer were among the world’s leading authorities on Buddhism and Yoga. Their participation at Eranos not only served to corroborate each others’ views but also helped to disseminate their interpretations among a group of like-minded and receptive scholars. Looking back to Jung’s interpretation of the Buddha as an archetypal symbol of the Self, we can see that his view was a synthesis of the voices of his colleagues at Eranos:

I grasped the life of the Buddha as the reality of the Self which had broken through and laid claim to a personal life. For Buddha, the Self stands above all gods, a *unus mundus* which represents the essence of human existence and of the world as a whole. The Self embodies both the aspect of intrinsic being and the aspect of its being known, without which no world exists . . . Christ-like Buddha—is an embodiment of the Self, but in an altogether different sense. Both stood for an overcoming of the world: Buddha out of rational insight; Christ as a foredoomed sacrifice. (Jung, 1962: 272)

b) *Buddhism: A Psychology of the Unconscious*

While Rhys Davids, Przyluski and Hauer concentrated on reconstructing Gotama’s so-called “original” teaching, other scholars at Eranos focused their lectures on Mahayana Buddhism. Among them was the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer, Jung’s friend and colleague. Zimmer was Professor of Indian Philology at Heidelberg University between 1924 and 1938. In 1938 he was forced to emigrate to England by the Nazis before moving to New York in 1940 to continue his career as a lecturer at Columbia University. Though highly admired at Eranos, Zimmer was, according to his biographer Margaret Case, never fully accepted in contemporary academic community “because of his exuberant personality . . . and because his career was interrupted for four years by military service in WW1” (Case 1994: 2). Moreover, Zimmer felt that he had to distinguish his own approach from those of contemporary Indologists, whom, he felt were caught in the “spell of the logic of positivistic sciences,” and therefore “ultimately remained unrelated to the content of the material they handled all their lives” (Zimmer 1984: 256). Sadly, however, Zimmer died unexpectedly in 1943 without publishing much of the work that he had been preparing during the course of his intellectual career.

Zimmer left behind volumes of notes and manuscripts which were posthumously compiled and edited by his student, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987). Campbell’s later reconstructions of Zimmer’s work, such as *The Philosophies of India*, bear more resemblance to his own work than Zimmer’s. Yet today they are far more widely read than Zimmer’s original writings, and scholars have paid little attention to Zimmer’s *magnum opus*, *Artistic Form and Yoga*. “It is perhaps only now”, wrote the Tibetologist Matthew Kapstein in 1994, “given the recent interest among students of India in interpretation theory and Tantrism, that an appropriate readership for Zimmer’s (early) masterwork, *Kunstform und Yoga*, has been created” (Case 1994: 44). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Zimmer

appreciated the value of Mahayana and Tantric literature, realizing that they embodied a system that resolved many conflicts in earlier Indian philosophy.

Before meeting Jung, Zimmer had been impressed by Jung's mythological studies in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (1912). He felt, while studying this text, that "Dr. Jung, in his solitary way, knew more about mythology than most of us" (Zimmer 1942: 7). Several years later, however, while reading Jung's commentary to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the Taoist text, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, a topic closer to his own specialism, Zimmer became infuriated with Jung's lack of historical and philological emphasis, and threw the book against a wall (Case, 1994: 7). At the time, he had been working on volumes of translations of Sanskrit Mahayana sutras, which he approached in the style of his Sanskrit teacher, Heinrich Lueders (1869–1943), whom he called "an arch-craftsman in philology . . . one of the past masters of philological craft in the field of Indic studies" (Zimmer: 1984: 247). Zimmer remained fascinated by Indian philosophy and mythology, but despite his technical training, "could not", at the time, "have expressed what they meant" to him (1984: 257). His book, *Kunstform und Yoga* (1926), being the "first study on mandalas and kindred diagrams" (1984: 225), drew Jung's attention. "I had read his fascinating book", Jung remarked, "and long wished to meet him in person. I found him to be a man of lively temperament, a man of genius" (Jung 1962: 259).

Their first encounter took place at Jung's Kundalini Seminars in 1932, whereupon Zimmer told Jung about his reaction to *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. "I was not surprised", Jung remembered, "for it was typical of others who had read the book—or so I heard indirectly. Like many others, he reacted to the word "psychological" like a bull to the red flag. Surely, so went his thoughts, "psyche" is out of place in a text that is only of historical interest. The whole notion is simply a flight of fancy, not the least bit scholarly" (Jung 1962: 385). After conversing with Jung, Zimmer revisited the text, "asking himself whether psychology might not have something of importance to contribute to a book like this after all. . . . Outstanding connoisseur of Indian literature that he was, he could not fail to see a whole host of interesting parallels, and here his artistic powers of vision and his rare intuitive sense stood him in good stead" (1962: 259). Zimmer remembered this moment as follows, "What struck me then, was the sudden realisation that my Sanskrit texts were not simply a collection of grammatical and syntactical problems, but that they actually contained a substantial body of meaning" (1962: 259).

From this moment on, Zimmer strove to understand both Eastern and Western ideas from universal psychological conceptions lying at the heart of all religions and philosophies. Analytical psychology became for him a "master-key" (Zimmer 1942: 44) to the treasure of myths and symbols. He represented Jung as "a Zen master . . . the kind of whom I have never encountered before in the flesh, and never expected to meet in a time like ours, but which is very familiar to me from Hindu tales and dialogues of sages, yogins, wizards and gurus" (1942: 47). Depth-psychology was, he came to realize, a science of the soul, a Western parallel to the techniques of spiritual development described in his Sanskrit texts:

We are thus given a new outlook over our present-day psychological situation, and we begin to see a great many possibilities and tasks in which Western psychotherapy will

engage itself in the future and which may have a very far-reaching effect. Perhaps one of these paths into the future will lead to the development of the soul; and from the analysis and observation and collection of psychological facts we may evolve a method somewhat similar to the Indian one, which would grow up from our own Western soil and material into a kind of synthetic dietetics of the psyche. (Zimmer 1936: 189)

In Zimmer, then, Jung came to find a scholar enthusiastic to interpret Indological texts through the conceptual framework of analytical psychology. Jung's psychology, as Zimmer argued at Eranos, "puts us into relation with the very same reality which speaks through the fading hieroglyphic systems of other ages" (Zimmer 1933: 28). In turn, Zimmer's encyclopaedic knowledge of India contributed to the formation of Jung's lectures and publications on Eastern religion. The two maintained a lively correspondence, and Zimmer frequently sent Jung samples of Indian art and mystical diagrams, along with his own commentaries on them. Zimmer was one of the few commentators on Jung's work who recognised his reliance on contemporary scholarship. On one occasion, he compared Jung's approach to comparative religion to that of a bear: "this huge and strong animal, nimbly and quietly rambling through the wild forest, hankering after the sweet honey which the diligent bees have stored in the hollows of trees. He takes it out of their hives, as if it were meant for him, swallows it, relishes it, and walks on" (Zimmer 1942: 44).

Zimmer lectured at Eranos four times, in 1933, 1934, 1938 and 1939. The topics of his lectures varied from expositions of Mahayana texts to psychological analyses of Indian mythology, lore and ritual. Unifying all aspects of his work is the conceptual framework of analytical psychology. For Zimmer, Mahayana Buddhism represented a sophisticated understanding of the inner workings of what he called the "deep unconscious" (Zimmer 1933: 25). In his 1933 Eranos lecture, *On the Meaning of Indian Tantric Yoga*, Zimmer argued that the goal of Tantric Buddhism was for the devotee "to renounce the conscious ego and give himself piously to the unconscious in himself" (Zimmer, 1933: 18). He proceeded to an analysis of the Tibetan text, the *Bardo Thodol*, better known to the English-speaking world as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Zimmer described the *Bardo Thodol* as having a dual function in Tibetan Buddhism. It described a ritual for the instruction and guidance of the dead that simultaneously served as an exposition of Mahayana's sophisticated understanding of the unconscious. It demonstrated a detailed knowledge, for example, of the inner mechanics of the archetypes,¹¹ projection,¹² and active imagination.¹³ Its goal was to teach the adept to "come to terms with the projections of his own inwardness and learn to recognize them without fear when he encounters them in the intermediate realm" (1933: 33). The *Bardo Thodol* was, in Zimmer's view, proof

¹¹ The psychoanalytic notion of projection is defined, in Jung's words, as "the expulsion of a subjective content into an object . . . a process of dissimilation, by which a subjective content becomes alienated from the subject and is, so to speak, embodied in the object" (Jung 1971: 457).

¹² Jung defined an archetype as "a primordial image [that] can be conceived as a mnemonic deposit, an imprint or *engram*, which has arisen through the condensation of countless processes of a similar kind. In this respect it is a precipitate and, therefore, a typical basic form, of certain ever-recurring psychic experiences" (Jung 1971: 444).

¹³ Active imagination denotes "a vision perceived by intense concentration on the background of consciousness, a technique that is perfected only after long practice" (Jung 1966: 222).

of how Mahayana Buddhists had centuries ago realised the goal of religious life as “directed towards man’s own unconscious, the divine that is in us, which it conjures, awakens, and ritually worships” (1933: 31). He called this the “open secret of Buddhism in its developed form, the ‘Great Vehicle’” (1933: 28).¹⁴ Two years after Zimmer’s lecture, Jung contributed a “psychological commentary” to Evans-Wentz’s third edition of the *Bardo Thodol*, echoing Zimmer’s insights, without crediting him directly (Jung 1935).

What separated Mahayana Buddhism from other world religions, was, in Zimmer’s view, its self-reflective, psychological understanding of its own symbolic and mythological material. In his 1939 Eranos lecture, *Death and Rebirth in the Light of India*, for example, he described the story of a soul’s journey through the cosmic spheres as recounted in the Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana, remarking:

The Indians, more than two thousand years ago, recognised such cosmologies and journeys of rebirth through the cosmic spheres to be the projections of the psyche upon cosmic space, and at an early date gave this knowledge a clear formulation in Mahayana Buddhism . . . Yoga, a system with pre-Aryan roots, recognised all gnostic doctrines of the cosmos to be symbols of psychic reality. (Zimmer 1939: 351)

Zimmer’s reframing of Mahayana Buddhism within the conceptual framework of depth-psychology was developed by Erwin Rousselle, Director of the China Institute at Frankfurt-an-Mein and a lecturer in Chinese and Buddhology at the University of Frankfurt. Rousselle lectured for three consecutive years at Eranos, starting in 1933 and was considered the expert on Buddhist and Taoist meditation, having spent several years in China, where he practiced meditation, principally in the Taoist tradition. In his 1933 Eranos lecture, Rousselle described the three-stage psychology of meditation, beginning with “the circulation of the light”, which he described as a realization of the “existence in the unconscious of an opposite centre” (Rousselle 1933: 84). The second stage was characterised by allegories and symbols pertaining to transformation, “the death of the ordinary man”. The third stage of meditation involved the “growth of the new, immortal man”, resulting in the final stage, the production of images which suggest the “perfect state . . . [in which] an inner unity, a true individual arises, out of the union of polarities” (1933: 86). Without stating his conclusion explicitly, Rousselle’s account of meditation paralleled the re-centring process involved in Jung’s individuation process, which similarly begins with the realization of the unconscious as an opposite centre, and ends in the experiential realization of the Self, rather than the ego, as the centre of the total personality.

Rousselle’s reconstruction of meditation within the language of analytical psychology is particularly clear in the summary of his 1933 Eranos lecture:

¹⁴ From the perspective of modern scholarship, Zimmer’s interpretation is problematic. According to Donald Lopez, the *Bardo Thodol* is not primarily concerned with the recognition of psychic projections at the moment of death. Rather, its concern is, in Lopez’s words, the process of “rebirth and the resurrection of texts”. (Lopez 2011: 11)

Meditation systematically unfolds the entire psyche, creates communication between consciousness and unconscious, raises the contents of the unconscious to the light of consciousness, and forms a new whole personality, the personality of a man integrated with everything in himself, in his fellow men and in the cosmos. . . . [T]he unconscious must be accepted and used for the building of the new man. (1933: 67)

At Eranos, therefore, meditation was understood, in Rousselle's words, as a "descent into the unconscious", the goal of which was the transformation of the personality. The Jungian psychologist, G. R. Heyer (1890-1967), expressed this notion, which nowadays is mainstream, almost a century ago in his 1933 Eranos lecture: "So unknown to us Westerners . . . these paths [to the depths of our inner world] have been taken in the Orient for thousands of years, since they have been researched and worked out in almost scientifically exact systems." (Heyer 1933: 223)

The Legacy of Eranos

In the decades following the "first phase" of Eranos (1933-39), depth psychology and Buddhism became increasingly entwined. From this marriage, which was particularly widespread in the American counterculture of the 1950s and 60s, there grew a number of psychotherapies that attempted to integrate Buddhist meditation practice into therapeutic systems. One of the principal institutions connected with the American counterculture was the Esalen Institute at Big Sur California, founded by Michael Murphy in 1962. Kripal's *Esalen* (2007) gives a detailed account of the cultural significance of the Institute. Suffice it to say here that Esalen was one of the centres of the American counterculture and a cradle of the Human Potential and Transpersonal Psychology movements of the 1960s and 70s, helping to evoke what Hakl called a "consciousness shift" in a largely puritanical America (Hakl 2013: 286). The cross-fertilisation of Buddhism and Buddhist meditative practices with developing psychologies was one of Esalen's characteristic features.

The extent to which Esalen inherited its preconceptions and ideas about Buddhism from Eranos has not been fully recognised. The historian Hans Hakl reports that Michael Murphy, Esalen's founder, stated that Eranos was a model for the development of Esalen (Hakl 2013: 106). Murphy himself had remarked:

Eranos and Esalen belong to the same universe of discourse, one which aims at the healing of the separation between East and West, religion and science, and body and soul. This constellation of people, ideas and practices represents a dynamic coalescence of fundamental possibilities for human transformation and advance. (Dunbar 2004: 31)

The significance of Eranos to the development of the various innovations in psychological research that originated at Esalen is but one example of its continued legacy in modern conceptions of Buddhism. In popular imagination nowadays, Buddhism has become synonymous with meditation and the image of the Buddha has become the symbol *par excellence* of the healthy self. Numerous books, therapies, scientific articles and instructional courses promote the "Buddhist-derived practice of mindfulness" (Griffiths, 2014) as a psychotherapeutic technique compatible with the latest

scientific advances in psychology.¹⁵ Proponents of these views unwittingly carry over into the twenty-first century leitmotifs first constructed by European intellectuals at Eranos almost a century ago. Notably, the widespread assumption that Buddhism parallels the central concerns of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis reflects the prejudices of the lecturers and participants at Ascona in the 1930s.

Corresponding author:

Oliver Knox
University College London
ok62923@gmail.com

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¹⁵ For example, Germer writes, "Therapists are exploring meditation both for personal well-being as well as for cultivating beneficial therapeutic qualities and patients are seeking therapists who meditate and have a compatible approach to emotional healing. Psychotherapists are likely to find early Buddhist psychology compatible with their interests because it shares the goal of alleviating suffering and the value of empirical inquiry" (2013: 13).

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