

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW ON THE CORRELATION BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

Over the course of the past century, there have been significant connections established between Buddhist principles and practices and the field of modern psychology. Various aspects of Buddhism, such as its understanding of the mind, insights into the causes of suffering, methods for cultivating mindfulness and managing negative emotions, as well as its concept of a self without ego, have had an impact on and been incorporated by different branches of Western psychology. The focus in this paper is on areas where Buddhist thought has intersected with clinical psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and humanistic psychology. Specifically explored are topics like mindfulness-based interventions, meditation practices applied in therapy settings, emotions from a Buddhist perspective psychotherapy technique inspired by Buddhist philosophy. The first section provides an outline of how Buddhism views the nature of consciousness or subjective experience. It then goes on to discuss how mindfulness practices derived from Buddhism have rapidly gained popularity within clinical psychology and psychotherapy fields. Subsequent sections examine how ideas from Buddhism regarding the origins harmful emotions destructive feelings illusions about one's sense self-have influenced new approaches in psychological research. Finally discussed is effectiveness or efficacy therapeutic techniques drawn from Buddhism as well as mindful-based interventions used in clinical practice. Overall, this review highlights how concepts derived from Buddhist teachings have shaped modern Western psychological theory intervention strategies. By incorporating these principles into their work many psychologists are finding new ways to approach mental health treatment promote overall well-being.

Keywords Buddhism, psychology, mindfulness, meditation, emotions, psychotherapy

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism and Western psychology are two distinct traditions that aim to alleviate human suffering and promote well-being. They have different worldviews and methodologies (De Silva, 2005). Buddhism, an ancient Asian philosophical tradition, focuses on studying the mind through first-person introspective practices in order to gain insight into subjective experiences (Dreyfus, 2011). On the other hand,

modern psychology predominantly relies on external third-person research and theoretical modeling to understand mental functions and behavior (Kirmayer, 2015). Despite their differences, both Buddhism and Western psychology share a common goal of transforming human experience to reduce suffering. As a result of this shared objective, the two traditions have intersected in interesting ways over the past century

and a half (Kumar, 2002). Principles and techniques from Buddhist psychology have been integrated into clinical interventions as well as various branches of Western psychology. This cross-pollination has resulted in valuable new therapies and perspectives (Shonin et al., 2014).

This examination provides an overview of the significant connections between Buddhist and Western psychological knowledge that have emerged from their encounter. Initially, it discusses Buddhism's perspective on the mind and personal experiences, highlighting how it differs from psychology's more externalized approaches. Furthermore, it explores how mindfulness-based clinical interventions rooted in Buddhism have become increasingly integrated into Western psychotherapy, underscoring the expanding influence of Buddhism in this field. Moreover, this paper delves into how Buddhist concepts surrounding destructive emotions and the illusory self have shaped modern psychology. It analyzes the impact of these ideas on psychotherapy techniques influenced by Buddhist principles such as mindfulness. Ultimately, this review evaluates the effectiveness of incorporating Buddhist-inspired practices into psychotherapy and examines their potential in reducing mental suffering. It concludes by exploring future prospects for collaboration between the contemplative tradition of Buddhism and Western psychology. The goal is to avoid reductionism while leveraging their respective methodologies and epistemologies to gain deeper insights into the mind. In summary, this analysis sheds light on various aspects of this fruitful encounter that hold promise for advancing our understanding of the mind and providing new tools for alleviating mental distress.

BUDDHISM'S VIEW OF THE MIND

Buddhist psychological thought places great emphasis on the thorough examination of the mind and mental events from a first-person perspective. This exploration is rooted in cultivated introspective awareness (Dreyfus, 2011). Over centuries of phenomenological inquiry, dialogues with teachers, and empirical observation during practices such as meditation,

Buddhist practitioners and scholars have developed sophisticated theories about subjective experience and consciousness.

According to recorded teachings of the Buddha, understanding reality and attaining freedom from suffering can be achieved by gaining knowledge of the mind (Olendzki, 2016). Through their analyses, Buddhists have identified important aspects of mental phenomena - feelings (vedana), perceptions (samjna), thoughts (sankhara), and sensory consciousness (vijnana) - along with their interplay in shaping subjective experience from moment to moment (Ganeri, 2019). These investigations have resulted in a detailed phenomenological model that illustrates the various components and processes at work within the mind.

The Abhidharma tradition in Buddhism presents a comprehensive system for categorizing mental factors, such as contact, attention, volition, and equanimity. These factors occur alongside states of consciousness and were developed centuries ago through introspective empirical observation and rigorous analytic meditation practices (Ganeri, 2019). This demonstrates an intricate understanding of the mind.

In Buddhist philosophy, a key principle is that true insight into the nature of self and reality can be attained by training the mind to cultivate deep awareness (Ricard et al., 2016). By engaging in meditative practices, individuals can improve their ability to concentrate while developing ethical qualities. They also sharpen their attentional skills and introspective abilities. As a result of these efforts, they become capable of breaking down conceptual projections and cognitive-emotional patterns that typically dominate conscious experience. This process also unlocks the potential inherent in conscious awareness. Through its classification system for mental factors along with its emphasis on cultivating penetrating awareness through meditation practices, Buddhism provides valuable tools for individuals seeking to understand themselves more deeply while expanding their perception of reality.

By practicing mindfulness meditation, individuals

can engage in a careful and detailed observation of how sensory perceptions, thoughts, and emotions emerge and fade away from one moment to the next (Van Gordon et al., 2015). Maintaining focused attention allows for the recognition of the transient and dependent nature of mental phenomena. Rather than attaching oneself to any specific sensation, thought, or emotion as fixed entities or inherent aspects of one's identity, this practice reveals their empty and interconnected existence.

Through Buddhist introspective inquiry, valuable insights are gained into the constructed and conditioned nature of subjective experience as well as the illusion of an inherent self-identity (Ganeri, 2019). This first-person approach stands in stark contrast to psychology's reliance on external observations aimed at establishing generalizable theoretical models. Nonetheless, Buddhism's empirical investigation into mental dynamics through contemplative practices can complement and enhance psychology's exploration into consciousness and subjective experience.

MAINSTREAMING OF MINDFULNESS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Over the past five decades, there has been a significant connection between Buddhist philosophy and Western psychology through the incorporation of secular mindfulness meditation-based interventions in clinical practice and psychotherapy contexts (Van Gordon et al., 2017). The integration of mindfulness into mainstream therapy signifies an important milestone in Buddhism's influence on psychology.

In the 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn played a crucial role in popularizing mindfulness practices within clinical settings (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). Combining his background as a molecular biologist with his experience as a Zen meditation practitioner, he recognized how Buddhist-inspired mindfulness techniques could alleviate suffering caused by chronic health conditions. Kabat-Zinn established the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, introducing secularized mindfulness training to address chronic pain and

anxiety disorders. The integration of these practices marks an important point where Eastern philosophy intersects with Western therapeutic approaches. By embracing elements derived from Buddhism, clinicians have expanded their treatment options to include techniques that promote self-awareness and stress reduction. This collaboration not only enhances patient care but also showcases Buddhism's potential contribution to contemporary psychological well-being.

MBSR comprises of 8-week programs that teach intensive mindfulness meditation techniques based on Buddhist vipassana practices, excluding any religious teachings. Participants are guided through practicing mindfulness of the breath, bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions with the goal of cultivating nonjudgmental awareness of present experiences. In clinical trials, MBSR training has demonstrated efficacy in reducing pain, psychological distress, and medical symptoms (Grossman et al., 2004).

The emergence of MBSR has paved the way for the proliferation of mindfulness-based interventions across various clinical domains. Therapies incorporating mindfulness have been developed for a wide range of conditions including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, addiction issues, eating disorders and more (Gallegos et al., 2017). An example is Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which combines mindfulness training with elements from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and is recommended as treatment for recurrent depression in mental health guidelines (Lo & Chan, 2021).

Numerous clinical trials have verified that interventions based on mindfulness can alleviate symptoms of mental health and enhance overall well-being in various situations (Lu et al., 2022). A pair of recent meta-analyses, which included more than 200 randomized controlled trials, discovered that therapies grounded in mindfulness notably decreased symptoms related to depression, anxiety, stress, and pain when compared to control groups (Gotink et al., 2015; Goyal et al., 2014). The widespread adoption of mindfulness techniques highlights the significant

influence Buddhism has had on mainstream Western psychology and psychotherapy.

BUDDHIST IDEAS ON EMOTIONS AND SUFFERING

Buddhist psychology places great importance on understanding how afflictive emotions contribute to psychological distress and maladaptive behaviors (Ekman et al., 2005). The Four Noble Truths, as highlighted by the Buddha, emphasize the universal existence of suffering, its origins, cessation, and the path to liberation. In Buddhism, destructive emotions like anger, fear, envy, and craving are considered to be the primary causes of suffering or dukkha (Ricard, 2013). These troubling emotions are believed to arise primarily from a lack of awareness and misunderstanding about the transient nature of people and phenomena (Ganeri 2017). We react with aversion or attachment towards fleeting experiences due to incorrect perceptions and beliefs. For example, "anger may surface when we fail to obtain something we desire", while fear can stem from exaggerating potential threats that challenge our sense of self-identity.

The teachings in Buddhist psychology encourage individuals to cultivate insight into their own minds through practices such as mindfulness meditation. By developing a deeper understanding of these afflictive emotions and their underlying causes rooted in ignorance and delusion, "one can gradually overcome them "and attain freedom from psychological suffering. It is evident that Buddhist psychology offers valuable insights into recognizing the detrimental impact of afflictive emotions on human well-being. Through dedicated practice based on wisdom and compassion, "individuals have the potential" to transform their inner world leading towards greater peace and harmony.

Mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and various techniques are employed by Buddhist practitioners to gain transformative insight into destructive emotions and liberate themselves from their oppressive grip (Grabovac et al., 2011). By non-judgmentally observing the emergence of anger or craving and recognizing their impermanent nature, individuals can avoid

impulsive reactions and cultivate wiser responses. Furthermore, Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of positive emotional qualities such as compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity through practices like metta meditation (loving-kindness).

The influence of these Buddhist principles has extended to clinical approaches aimed at enhancing emotional regulation. Therapies such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy incorporate Buddhist concepts regarding the origins of emotions as well as mindfulness practices to assist clients in relating adaptively to their feelings (Kraxner et al., 2021). Research has substantiated that training in secular mindfulness practices based on Buddhism significantly improves individuals' capacity to manage challenging emotions like anxiety or anger (Desrosiers et al., 2013).

NOTIONS OF SELF IN BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

The concept of anatta, or non-self, is a fundamental principle in Buddhist philosophy (Ganeri, 2017). According to this belief system, the idea of a fixed and singular ego is nothing more than an illusion. When individuals mistakenly view their experiences through the lens of a separate and permanent self, they tend to develop attachment, cravings, and psychological distress. Buddhism promotes the practice of non-judgmental meditation as a means to directly experience the emptiness of ego and cultivate a sense of interconnectedness with all phenomena (Olendzki, 2016).

These Buddhist teachings on an egoless and impermanent self have had significant influence on Western psychotherapy and psychology in recent decades (Epstein, 2007). Traditionally focused on strengthening the ego by resolving inner conflicts within oneself, psychoanalysis perpetuated the notion of having a coherent and unified self (Epstein, 2007). In contrast to this perspective, some modern approaches in psychotherapy now emphasize cultivating mindful acceptance without attachment towards various aspects of one's experience (Germer et

al., 2013).

Both Buddhist philosophy and contemporary psychology recognize the advantages of letting go of rigid attachment to egoic identities and conceptual projections in order to improve well-being and self-realization. Therapeutic approaches that incorporate Buddhist principles, such as vipassana mindfulness meditation, are useful in helping individuals detach from their mental narratives, observe thoughts and emotions with compassionate objectivity, and connect with the present moment (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015). Research has shown that practicing mindfulness leads to reduced identification with an imagined, unchanging self and promotes overall well-being (Hölzel et al., 2011). This alignment highlights Buddhism's influence on modern psychological understandings of selfhood.

BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Over the past few decades, Buddhist philosophical and contemplative traditions have served as a source of inspiration for the development of new psychotherapeutic methods in Western societies (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015). The fundamental insights derived from Buddhist psychology pertaining to the concept of self, impermanence, relinquishing cravings, and nurturing compassion have been integrated into various psychotherapy approaches and interventions (Epstein, 2007).

An increasing number of psychotherapists now incorporate Buddhist mindfulness meditation practices and perspectives into existing evidence-based treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (Didonna, 2009). Clients are guided through mindfulness exercises and meditation techniques that aim to cultivate a non-judgmental awareness, detachment from thoughts, and connection with the present moment. These practices provide support for crucial therapeutic processes including emotional regulation, restructuring cognitive patterns, and clarifying personal values.

One example of a relapse prevention method for depression is Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which combines CBT and

mindfulness training (Segal et al., 2012). Randomized trials have shown that MBCT effectively reduces the recurrence of depression compared to maintenance antidepressants. Similarly, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) draws on Buddhist principles such as selflessness and letting go of attachment to promote psychological flexibility and enhance overall well-being (Gotink et al., 2015).

Overall, Scientific research indicates that psychotherapy approaches influenced by Buddhism, which encourage non-attached awareness, skillful response to emotions, and prosocial virtues, can lead to symptom reduction and improved well-being in various conditions ranging from anxiety disorders to addiction (Shonin et al., 2014). A thorough evaluation conducted by Gotink and colleagues (2015) revealed that incorporating Buddhist mindfulness practices into traditional psychotherapy programs significantly enhances outcomes. This highlights the valuable contributions that Buddhism has made to modern techniques and interventions in psychotherapy.

DISCUSSION

This review has provided a comprehensive summary of the significant aspects of the cross-cultural exchange between Buddhist and Western psychological knowledge that has been unfolding for the past century and a half. As pointed out by De Silva (2005), Buddhism has long been engaged in the development of a pragmatic first-person empirical science aimed at understanding and transforming the mind. This ancient tradition offers valuable models that can greatly enhance the third-person investigation of mental functioning conducted by modern psychology. The interfaces highlighted in this analysis, which showcase the convergence of Buddhist and Western psychological perspectives, are just the beginning of what promises to be an ongoing and fruitful dialogue between these two rich traditions. It is through this ongoing exchange that both disciplines can continue to learn from each other and deepen their understanding of the complexities of the human mind.

Several key themes emerge from examining these

interactions. Firstly, it is important to note that there is strong evidence supporting the idea that Buddhist perspectives and practices, such as mindfulness, have the potential to greatly enhance psychological research and clinical interventions (Van Gordon et al., 2015). This suggests that incorporating concepts like egolessness and mindfulness meditation into the field of psychology can open up fresh angles of understanding and provide effective tools for addressing mental afflictions and promoting overall well-being. By embracing the teachings of Buddhism, psychologists can tap into a rich tradition that offers profound insights into the human mind and behavior. The integration of Buddhist perspectives and practices into psychology highlights the value of cross-cultural learning. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and appreciating different belief systems and approaches to mental health. Through this integration, psychologists can expand their understanding beyond the confines of Western psychology and explore alternative ways of conceptualizing and addressing psychological issues. Furthermore, the potential benefits that can arise from integrating different perspectives and practices are significant. By incorporating Buddhist principles into psychological research and clinical interventions, psychologists can gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. This holistic approach can lead to more comprehensive and effective treatments that address the root causes of mental afflictions, rather than merely alleviating symptoms. Moreover, the integration of Buddhist perspectives and practices can also contribute to the promotion of overall well-being. Mindfulness meditation, for example, has been shown to reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance overall mental health. By incorporating these practices into psychological interventions, psychologists can provide their clients with valuable tools for self-care and self-awareness.

Secondly, Buddhism's unique first-person phenomenological methodology for investigating subjective experience offers a valuable complement and extension to psychology's third-

person studies (Lutz et al., 2007). While psychology traditionally relies on objective observations and measurements, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of introspective mindfulness-based empirical observation of mental dynamics. By combining this introspective approach with neuroscientific evidence and quantitative data, it is possible to develop more comprehensive models of consciousness and gain a deeper understanding of the human mind. In summary, the examination of the interactions between Buddhist perspectives and practices with psychological research and clinical interventions reveals several important themes. The incorporation of mindfulness and other Buddhist concepts into psychology can enhance the field's ability to address mental afflictions and promote well-being. Additionally, Buddhism's first-person phenomenological methodology offers a valuable complement to psychology's third-person studies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of consciousness. By embracing cross-cultural learning and integrating different perspectives, the field of psychology can continue to evolve and develop more effective approaches to mental health and well-being.

Respecting the distinctions between two knowledge systems is vital for successful collaboration (Kirmayer, 2015). It is important to recognize that psychology and Buddhism have different goals and approaches. Psychology seeks to develop universal theoretical models of human functioning in order to guide interventions, while Buddhism's focus is more practical, aiming to alleviate suffering through honing attention and fostering wisdom, ethics, and mental equilibrium through personal experiences. However, there have been instances where psychological practices have detached Buddhist principles such as mindfulness from their philosophical and ethical roots (Van Gordon et al., 2019). This detachment can lead to an oversimplification of Buddhist teachings and practices, which is not conducive to a genuine integration between psychology and Buddhism. To truly integrate these two knowledge systems, it is essential to avoid oversimplification and to understand the

philosophical and ethical foundations of Buddhist principles. Mindfulness, for example, is not just about being present in the moment; it is deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy and ethics. By understanding and respecting these roots, psychologists can ensure that their use of mindfulness is in line with the true essence of Buddhism. Moreover, a genuine integration between psychology and Buddhism requires a mutual respect for each system's unique contributions. Psychology can benefit from the practical wisdom and techniques that Buddhism offers, while Buddhism can benefit from the scientific rigor and empirical evidence that psychology brings. By recognizing and valuing the strengths of both systems, collaboration can be truly successful. In conclusion, the importance of respecting the distinctions between psychology and Buddhism cannot be overstated. A genuine integration between these two knowledge systems requires an understanding of their respective goals, approaches, and philosophical foundations. By avoiding oversimplification and valuing the unique contributions of each system, collaboration can thrive and lead to a more comprehensive understanding of human functioning and well-being.

This review acknowledges certain limitations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, due to the need for brevity, some nuances surrounding the combination of Buddhist contemplative practice with clinical psychology were omitted. While the main ideas were presented, it is important to recognize that there is much more depth and complexity to explore in this area. Secondly, the focus of this review was primarily on the intersection of Buddhist and Western psychology, with less attention given to the social, organizational, and humanistic subfields. These subfields play a significant role in shaping the broader context of psychological practice and should not be overlooked. Additionally, it is worth noting that indigenous Asian psychological perspectives were underrepresented in this review. These perspectives offer unique insights and approaches that could greatly contribute to the understanding and application of psychology. Therefore, it is crucial for future research to

address these gaps and delve deeper into these areas.

In brief, the interface between Buddhist and Western psychology presents a fertile ground for collaborative learning and exploration. As highlighted by Kirmayer (2020), there is great potential in leveraging the complementarity of their first-person experiential and third-person empirical approaches. By doing so, valuable integrative frameworks and practices can be developed to alleviate mental suffering and cultivate human potential. However, it is important to emphasize that this collaboration requires skillful cross-cultural dialogue and ethical integration of their respective epistemologies and methodologies. Only through such efforts can the inner sciences be advanced and humanity as a whole benefit from the synergistic insights and practices that emerge from this intersection.

CONCLUSION

This article examines the various ways in which Buddhist principles and contemplative practices have had an impact on different branches of modern psychology over the past century. Buddhism's understanding of subjective experience, techniques such as mindfulness meditation to train the mind, concepts about self and emotions, and therapeutic approaches have all been adapted for the benefit of clinical psychology and psychotherapy in Western societies. Research has shown that interventions influenced by Buddhism, which focus on cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and detachment from harmful desires and ego-attachment, can be effective in alleviating mental suffering and promoting overall well-being. Continued collaboration between Buddhist contemplative science of the mind and Western psychology can lead to valuable insights that advance both fields. It is crucial to maintain open-minded dialogue that respects the context of Buddhist knowledge while making use of the complementary nature of their first-person experiential approach with third-person empirical methods.

Further research in areas such as social

psychology, humanistic psychology, and organizational psychology has the potential to uncover additional applications of Buddhism's time-tested framework for studying and transforming the mind for human benefit. By delving deeper into these fields, researchers may discover new insights and perspectives that can contribute to the advancement of the modern psychological sciences. The rich history and teachings of Buddhism offer a wealth of knowledge and wisdom that can be applied to various aspects of human behavior and well-being. Exploring the intersections between Buddhism and psychology can lead to a deeper understanding of the human mind and provide valuable tools for personal growth and development. Additionally, studying the principles and practices of Buddhism within the context of psychology can shed light on the effectiveness of mindfulness techniques, compassion training, and other mindfulness-based interventions. By expanding our exploration of Buddhism's contributions to psychology, we can tap into a vast reservoir of knowledge that has the potential to enhance our understanding of the human experience and improve the well-being of individuals and communities alike.

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