

The conjunction of Rationality and Mysticism in the Heart Sutra: An Epistemological Exploration

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Abstract: This study delves into the philosophical and epistemological interpretation of the Heart Sutra, emphasizing the conjunction between rational and mystical thought processes. The paper illustrates how the Sutra promotes an intertwined understanding of reality through textual analysis and comparative discussion involving Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives. The exploration reveals that the Heart Sutra serves as a profound guide, advocating for a balanced comprehension that integrates empirical rationality and mystical insight. The findings suggest that the notion of 'Shunyata' or emptiness encapsulates a complex relational understanding of being, where rational knowledge and mystical experiences are not only coexistent but mutually inclusive. This conjunctive approach challenges the conventional boundaries of epistemic thought and offers a comprehensive framework for understanding reality's multifaceted nature. This research contributes to the broader discourse on integrating traditional philosophical insights with contemporary epistemological frameworks, enriching both academic and practical understanding of spiritual texts.

Keywords: Conjunction; epistemology; mysticism; rationality; *shunyata*.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi interpretasi filosofis dan epistemologis dari Sutra Hati, dengan penekanan pada konjungsi antara proses berpikir rasional dan mistis. Melalui analisis teks dan diskusi komparatif yang melibatkan perspektif filosofis Timur dan Barat, makalah ini menggambarkan bagaimana Sutra mempromosikan pemahaman realitas yang saling terkait. Eksplorasi ini mengungkapkan bahwa Sutra Hati berfungsi sebagai panduan mendalam, mengadvokasi pemahaman yang seimbang yang mengintegrasikan rasionalitas empiris dan wawasan mistis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konsep 'Shunyata' atau kekosongan mencakup pemahaman relasional kompleks tentang keberadaan, di mana pengetahuan rasional dan pengalaman mistis tidak hanya koeksisten tetapi saling inklusif. Pendekatan konjungtif ini menantang batasan pemikiran epistemik konvensional dan menawarkan kerangka kerja komprehensif untuk memahami sifat multifaset realitas. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskursus yang lebih luas tentang integrasi wawasan filosofis tradisional dengan kerangka kerja epistemologis kontemporer, sehingga memperkaya pemahaman akademik dan praktis terhadap teks-teks spiritual.

Kata Kunci: Konjungsi; epistemologi; mistisisme; rasionalitas; *Shunyata*.

1. Introduction

Some recent studies of the Heart Sutra explore how one can interpret the meaning of emptiness (Attwood, 2017; Leong, 2023). Alternatively, literature studies provide methods of exploration and a comparative approach to the text (Attwood, 2019, 2021, 2023; Hu, 2022). These explorations indirectly discuss a philosophical interpretation of rationality, which is implied by the text. These studies also enrich deep understanding concerning rationality not only to Eastern scholars (Leong, 2023; Sinha, 2017). Western scholars also enjoy intensive learning and diving into the text (Mattice, 2021). These explorations discover that scholars from both 'regions' could interact in an academic dialogue

concerning 'rationality', which the text implies (Islam, 2022; Panikkar, 1999; Zulkarnain & Samsuri, 2018).

The Western philosophy always implies a capacity for empirical, rational knowing and reasoning or disclosed, justifiable, and objective thinking (Budi, 2016; Pritchard, 2010). This capacity, epistemic thinking, is distinct from esoteric thought, which is irrational, closed, unjustifiable, and subjective. Meanwhile, the esoteric thought, *gnōsis*, or mystical, is exclusive to a particular, personal, individual mind (Awal, 2016; Ramdan, 1990; Stace, 1960). Therefore, *epistēmē* or knowledge represents the universal standard of human rationality (Djunatan, 2011). That is how of the Western philosophy classifies human rationality (Wera, 2021). As far as this classification of rationality is concerned, one necessarily excludes the realm of the esoteric/mystical mind. There is no active interaction between the rational and the mystical mind.

Meanwhile, one can initiate an epistemological analysis to the text from a perspective of an Eastern point of view to rationality. An epistemological analysis of the text indicates a comprehension of rationality from the perspective of an Eastern philosophical thinker. This exploration aims to argue for the idea of conjunction in human thinking. This means that human thinking encloses epistemic and mystical thinking. This implication is present when one explores *Hṛdaya (Sutra)* or the Heart Sutra (Mattice, 2021; Tanahashi, 2014). An epistemological approach to The Heart sutra conveys that human thinking is the intertwining between the epistemic or public, contested, verified, and the mystical or subjective, private mind.

To argue for this interaction, the heart sutra interpretation will apply a textual interpretation method. This method will start with an analysis of the text. This analysis will go through the text in order to dig the metaphor of 'shunyata' (in Sanskrit) or emptiness up from the text (Sinha, 2017; Tanahashi, 2014). This analysis refers to a contemporary translation and literary interpretation provided by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax. The latter interpretation focuses on analyzing the stanzas of the Heart Sutra line by line. This textual analysis aims to discover the implication of the metaphor of sunyata (emptiness). The implication of the metaphor indicates an experience of awareness of shunyata (emptiness). Such an experience emphasizes the rational capacity to comprehend of reality in itself (Kitaro, 1970).

The next section of the paper argues that the capacity of thinking necessarily conjoins both rational and irrational parts of the mind. That conjoin enables the epistemic part of thinking is to intertwine with the esoteric one (Ikbal, 2015). This intertwined mind is essential implication for comprehension to understand the idea of emptiness. This epistemological interpretation in the section then discusses the intertwined mind with a Japanese philosopher, Nishida Kitaro, and a Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh. I enclose this paper with an invitation to discuss the conjoin of rational knowledge and mysticism. Both are essential capacities of the mind in understanding and explaining reality. Both do not negate each other; each is the implication of the other.

2. Method

The paper chooses a method of textual interpretation to argue for the basic understanding of the conjoined capacities of the human mind. The method consists of two research stages (Moeloeng, 2012). First is an analysis of the heart sutra. This analysis takes into account a translation and interpretation of the text, which is conducted by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax. One will analyze each stanza in order to clarify some significant metaphors. The most significant metaphor implied by the stanzas is Sunyata (emptiness).

The next stage focuses on discussing the metaphor of Sunyata with the Japanese Philosopher Nishida Kitaro's argumentation of the process of thinking: knowing. The metaphor of Sunyata conveys the idea that process of thinking comprises of two directional ways, that is a movement from subject to object and vice versa. This kind of movement signifies an experience of knowing and understanding in which epistemic and esoteric thinkings conjoin. This second stage continues by elaborating Thich Nhat Hahn's idea of an awareness of interactive being. It means that the act of thinking (in knowing and

understanding) implies a sense of being on interactive sphere, in which sensical and intuitive capacities of thinking cohere interdependently.

3. Result and Discussion

An Analysis of the Text of Heart Sutra

There are two versions of the Heart Sutra. The short one was known as the Xuanzang version, a Chinese Monk in the 7th century (Attwood, 2021). The extended version was circulated in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia. The distribution of the short version occurred in areas which Chinese Ideographs, like China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam applied (Tanahashi, 2014). The spread of Buddhism throughout the world in modern times also made this short version spread to various corners of the world. Western academics also brought this short Heart Sutra to the West. In doing so, they also spread the text indirectly throughout the world.

Below is the short version of The Heart Sutra provided by two professional translators, Kazuaki Tanahashi and Joan Halifax (Tanahashi, 2014).

Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

The Sutra on the Heart of Realizing Wisdom Beyond Wisdom
 Avalokiteshvara, who helps all to awaken, moves in the deep course of
 realizing wisdom beyond wisdom, sees that all five streams of
 body, heart, and mind are without boundary, and frees all from anguish.
 O Shariputra [who listens to the teachings of the Buddha],
 form is not separate from boundlessness;
 boundlessness is not separate from form. Form is boundlessness; boundlessness is form.
 Feelings, perceptions, inclinations, and discernment are also like this.
 O Shariputra,
 Boundlessness is the nature of all things.
 It neither arises nor perishes,
 neither stains nor purifies,
 neither increases nor decreases.
 Boundlessness is not limited by form,
 nor by feelings, perceptions, inclinations, or discernment.
 It is free of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind;
 free of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and any object of mind;
 free of sensory realms, including the realm of the mind.
 It is free of ignorance and the end of ignorance.
 Boundlessness is free of old age and death,
 and free of the end of old age and death.
 It is free of suffering, arising, cessation, and path,
 and free of wisdom and attainment.
 Being free of attainment, those who help all to awaken
 abide in the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom
 and live with an unhindered mind.
 Without hindrance, the mind has no fear.
 Free from confusion, those who lead all to liberation
 embody profound serenity.
 All those in the past, present, and future,
 who realize wisdom beyond wisdom,
 manifest unsurpassable and thorough awakening.
 Know that realizing wisdom beyond wisdom is no other than this wondrous mantra, luminous,
 unequalled, and supreme.

It relieves all suffering.
 It is genuine, not illusory.
 So set forth this mantra of realizing wisdom beyond wisdom.
 Set forth this mantra that says:
 Gaté, gaté, paragaté, parasamgaté, bodhi! Svaha!

Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra is the complete title of this reciting prayer. *Prajna* in Sanskrit connotes transcendental wisdom, while *Paramita* is perfect (Tanahashi, 2014). The prayer consists of 4 (four) main stanzas. All stanzas contain the advice of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva to Shariputra (Angela, 2018; Tanahashi, 2014). When one studies these stanzas closely, one finds out the core of Dharma Buddha. The core itself presupposes a thinking paradigm in Buddhism (Hershock, 2006). The paradigm theorizes how the human mind governs one's life: freedom from suffering and attainment of happiness.

According to the second stanza, the human mind constitutes three parts: the sensible perception, the abstract conception of reality, and the ignorance of reality. The first represents an empirical model of knowledge, the second rational, and the last is the non-perceptible and non-conceivable layer of a thing or the thing in itself. This second stanza then continues that one should go through each 'virtual realm of thought': being free of the limitation of the empirical, rational, and the thing-in-itself. The condition of being free of that limitation of these three realms of thought is called 'boundlessness' or 'shunyata' of mind toward reality (Tanahashi, 2014).

In the third stanza, boundlessness here is a metaphor for the non-reducible capacity of the human mind. In this sense, every individual constitutes the complementary functions of one's mind: the sensible perception, the abstract conceptualization, and the esoteric understanding of reality. One should acknowledge these individual portions respectively and conjoin their complementarity to experience an intelligent life without 'a hindered mind'. One should not restrict the esoteric mind or the inner awareness (or, in common terminology of religiosity, the mystical realm).

As one continues to recite the prayer, one can indicate the phrase 'realization of wisdom beyond wisdom'. Buddhism does not associate this phrase with supernatural personification (Williams, 2012). When Buddhism provides symbolic presentations of deities, such deities are merely metaphors or symbolizations of human capacities to experience 'enlightenment'. Thus when the stanzas assert the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom, they convey a complete authorization of the human mind through practicing a long-life meditation and a thorough awakening of daily activities (Williams, 2012).

Going through an epistemic boundary

The Western philosophical account of knowledge implies the limits of empirical and rational knowledge and reasoning (Bagus, 2002). The empirical approach emphasizes the function of observation displayed by our senses to reason knowledge. Meanwhile, the rational one confirms that thinking moves from one premise to another by applying certain coherence methods. Moreover, the objectivity of knowledge obtained through testing and validation. Such tests and validations assure universal standard of knowledge. This universal standard also 'limits' what we can know.

What about the 'way of knowing reality' as stated in the text of the Heart Sutra? Regarding the human 'way' of recognizing reality, Buddhism proposes a process of knowing and reasoning similar to that of Western's epistemology (Ahimsa-Putra, 2019). However, in Buddhist philosophy (in general, it applies to both Hinayana and Mahayana schools), the subjective thinking and the objective knowledge are not two separated entities. The subjective thought and the objective knowledge are *simultaneously* distinct *and* the former correlates with the latter.

To explain this paradox of distinction and correlation, Nishida Kitaro explains that the subject's intention to an object presupposes a reciprocal interaction. The subject's intention leads to an experiential knowing with the object and vice versa (Kitaro, 1970). This reciprocal interaction also conveys the understanding that the subject is not the only determinant of knowledge about the object. In this two-way process, the known object influences the knowing subject, so the subject is aware of the presence of himself and experiences the thing in the knowing event. To explain this reciprocal

interaction of subject and object, Nishida uses the metaphor of interactivity between 'universal' or objective reality and 'particular' or I, the knowing subject. To understand this metaphor, we recognize phenomena or presentation of things' and noumena or something in itself.

According to Buddhist philosophy, Nishida states that the process of knowing includes complete negation. Firstly, subject must negate her perception of the senses, and her conception of the object. This complete negation gives way to the object to discover its noumena side. The thing is declaring itself to the subject in an experience of being together. The term 'declaring itself' explains that the subject experiences her presence with the object. The object is no longer something that the subject determines or conquers. The object actually 'exists' with the subject. In that experience of being, the subject is equal with and inseparable from the object. Nishida states that these two parties, the subject and the object can be said to be simultaneously equivalent (Kitaro, 1970).

In other words, this equivalence of subject and object in the event of understanding reality, according to Nishida, reveals the process of conjoining the rational and the mystical reason on a common sphere, that is, the absolute negation. Nishida argues that absolute negation is the process of mutual determination or the 'experience of coexistence.' This is 'the essence of the philosophy of nothingness (Kitaro, 1970).

In the experience of nothingness in the noumenal level, the subject experiences that everything changes (*anicca*) and everything has interdependent origins (*paticca-samuppada*). Therefore, Nishida emphasized that the self needs to 'absolutely' negate conceptions and perceptions that presuppose one is undivided. He must empty himself at the phenomenal level, as an atomic person (*anatta*), so that he understands that he exists in sustainable interactivities with others at the noumenal level (Kitaro, 1970; Koller, 1985).

In understanding the emptiness according to the Buddhist philosophy above (Sender, 2007), one can infer that our epistemic and esoteric minds can cross their respective boundaries. The epistemic mind goes through its objective limit into the esoteric area and vice versa. What can a person experience in this inner awareness? Nishida again stated that, "*We are always individual, and the absolutely irrational must exist in our very depths*" (Kitaro, 1970).

At the depth of existence, a person experiences the essence of life, which is esoteric. This depth of reality refers to the noumenal order, which according to Western philosophers, is 'untouched' by our understanding. In contrast to Western philosophers, Nishida argued that the understanding of the essence of everything that is subjective, or one can only experience the noumenal level of everything (Kitaro, 1970).

'Boundlessness' (or Emptiness) and 'Interbeing'

Exploring the reciprocal knowledge process, from subject to object and from object to subject, as experiences and events of 'becoming' is the foundation for understanding the text of the Heart Sutra. Buddha Gautama's teachings, the Heart Sutra, explain that the subject experiences self-unification with the object in the background by encountering rational understanding with inner awareness. Based on this thought, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh put two critical themes: emptiness or infinity (the translation from Sanskrit according to Kazuaki is 'boundlessness') and interbeing (Hanh, 1988).

'Shunyata' or boundlessness/Emptiness

In the context of Eastern Philosophy (India, China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia), emptiness/emptiness is, a terminology and metaphor to describe how humans understand and explain the reality called 'life.' To understand this, the Eastern sages often place the word 'empty' with its antonymic association. 'Empty' means 'there is something'; nothing is equivalent to being. I want to call this antonymic association the affirmative paradox.

Emptiness/nothing is water, while being is ripple. To understand this, Thich Nhat Hanh analogizes the affirmative paradox of emptiness and being with the pair of ripples (waves) and water (Hanh, 1988). The analogy says that ripples are an existential form of water. Meanwhile, water becomes the ripples'

core (which is the void). Therefore water is ripples. Ripples are also water. Likewise, if the text of the Heart Sutra mentions a couple as follows:

Form is not separate from boundlessness [emptiness];

boundlessness [emptiness] is not separate from form.

The form is boundlessness [emptiness]; boundlessness [emptiness] is form (Tanahashi, 2014).

The paradox pair above has an affirmative nuance. This Affirmative nuance conveys a complex appreciation of the reality of life. Life consists of two elements, one of which 'exists as an inherent part of' the other. These two elements, 'against-but-interdependent/confirm', differentiate emptiness from the form but simultaneously explain the equivalence relationship between emptiness and form. More than that, this affirmative paradox aims to demonstrate that basically the existence of reality is a network of its multiple elements. One entity, in reality, is intertwined with other entities. As water presupposes ripples and vice versa, form presupposes emptiness and vice versa.

This understanding is the logic of co-relative/equivalence thinking in the context of Buddhism (*paticca samuppada*) and Asian philosophy in general. The logic of the co-relativity says, "(1) If this is, that comes to be; (2) From the arising of this, that arises; (3) If this is not, that does not come to be; (4) From the stopping of this, that stops" (Koller, 1985).

The formulation of co-relative logic clarifies the understanding of reality. Reality always presupposes a complex nature because it presupposes a relationship between being and non-being. In this sense, each part correlates simultaneously as subject and object, as well as passive and active.

Absolute self-negation aims for the reciter of this prayer to understand a complex reality. The Heart Sutra mentions the negation of the 5 skandhas of human knowledge (Tanahashi, 2014), "boundlessness [emptiness] is not limited by form, nor by feelings, perceptions, inclinations, or discernment".

These five human faculties 'stop functioning' when a prayer recites this prayer. Thich Nhat Hanh argues that the absolute negation of our faculties (the 5 skandhas) as independent subject gives way to recognizing how rich and complex the presence of another self is. The self must leave/empty its 'independence' (or empty the self that thinks it is separate from others) to be able to cram in the presence of others (Hanh, 1988). Negating the five human faculties of knowing means giving way to the sense of cognizance to stop identifying with the other self in only one direction (Tanahashi, 2014).

It is free of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind;

free of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and any object of mind;

free of sensory realms, including the realm of the mind.

In other words, emptiness conveys the understanding that knowledge is an act of experiencing the complexity and richness of reality. Knowing is the act of sharing, according to Nishida Kitaro. Neither the emptiness is the absence of meaning in existence, nor is the void considered futility and irrationality. The more we understand emptiness both as the negation of one-way recognition and as an experience of intertwining elements in reality, the more we experience the complexity and dynamics of each component of that reality (Hanh, 1988).

That is also the reason emptiness can have a connotative meaning as 'boundlessness.' If a person recognizes something with or through his senses, isn't his knowledge only limited to his sensory abilities? For example, our sensory recognition of water only stops at the chemical formula H₂O. That chemical formulation reduces the complexity of the reality of water as fresh, cold, warm, and hot, its ability to live, its pleasure, and so on.

The experience of the boundlessness of water also makes us aware of the dynamics of the 'taste' of the water we drink. There is always an element of water that is 'indefinable by the senses and epistemic mind'. This element includes a subjective area that is still mystical, and we can only experience it. Such sensation is the subjective aspect that is 'conveyed' by the experience of boundlessness of water.

When our experience becomes boundless in the esoteric realm, we live out a mystical experience. In this mystical realization, we experience detachment from the 12 series of causation: knowledge, ignorance, forming power, unconsciousness, name-and-form, sense-cognition, emotion, desire,

sensation, becoming, birth-aging-death (Tanahashi, 2014). Concerning this mystical experience, The Heart Sutra mentions:

It is free of ignorance and the end of ignorance. Boundlessness is free of old age and death and free of the end of old age and death.

It is free of suffering, arising, cessation, and path and free of wisdom and attainment (Tanahashi, 2014).

Inter-being

Awareness of the emptiness of the permanent, unchangeable self leads us to a mystical experience of the presence of another person as a reality that is both unique and complex. Kazuaki refers to this experience of emptiness as the interconnection of non-duality. Such interconnection conveys an interpretation of the event of coexistence: one becomes an inherent part of the other. This 'experience of being together' is precisely what Thich Nhat Hanh calls 'inter-being' (Hanh, 1988).

The expression of inter-being marks the most profound form of enlightenment for everyone who seeks to understand the highest wisdom. The experience of inter-being liberates our understanding of identity as an independent-but-isolated person. Every human person is essentially 'being of and for other.' The awareness of inter-being appears in third stanza below (Tanahashi, 2014):

Being free of attainment, those who help all to awaken

abide in the realization of wisdom beyond wisdom

and live with an unhindered mind. Without hindrance, the mind has no fear.

Free from confusion, those who lead all to liberation

embody profound serenity.

All those in the past, present, and future, who realize wisdom beyond wisdom,

manifest unsurpassable and thorough awakening (Tanahashi, 2014).

Explaining the stanza above, Thich Nhat Hanh stated, "*Once we see with the eyes of interbeing, these obstacles are removed from our mind, and we overcome fear, liberating ourselves forever from illusion and realizing perfect Nirvana*" (Hanh, 1988).

Nirvana in the context above can mean 'liberation from the undivided and 'full' self. The concept of an 'indivisible and full self' is an illusion.

Finally, the Heart Sutra closes with an invitation to live up to the essence of Buddhism. The invitation is in the form of a spell. Mantra in Eastern thought has its roots in Sanskrit, namely the word 'man' or 'manas,' which means 'think,' 'imagine,' and 'respect.' While still rooted in Sanskrit, mantra also refers to the word 'mantr,' which means 'consider,' 'consult,' 'repeat' (consecrate). So a mantra is close to the Latin words 'mens' and 'mentio'; thought and memory/remembrance' (Tanahashi, 2014). Indeed, a mantra in Eastern thought is a recitation of words that are repeated in a ritual ceremony, whether worship or prayer. As such, mantras are not meaningless magical utterances. Mantra presupposes both rationality and spirituality. The mantra becomes a reminder for our minds when experiencing various dynamic events in life.

Know that realizing wisdom beyond wisdom is no other than this wondrous mantra, luminous, unequalled, and supreme.

It relieves all suffering.

It is genuine, not illusory.

So set forth this mantra of realizing wisdom beyond wisdom.

Set forth this mantra that says:"

Gaté, gaté, paragaté, parasamgaté, bodhi! Svaha! (Tanahashi, 2014).

The mantra '*Gaté, gaté*' contains connotative meanings that are paradoxical to each other: 'go,' 'life,' or 'come.' So, one can interpret it as 'go, live' or 'please come' (Tanahashi, 2014). The next word, '*paragaté, parasamgaté*', conveys the moment of going 'together to the opposite place or to 'the transcendent side.

If we observe the painting of the Tibetan Monks entitled 'The Wheel of Life' or 'Bhavacakra.' In this painting, Shakyamuni Buddha points to the moon. This Buddha's gesture exactly shows 'that place

over there.' That place over there was 'free from the clutches of Yama God's fangs. Lord Yama bites the circle of existence, which contains the 12 chains of causality, ignorance, and greed, which are the sources of suffering. This metaphor of pointing indicates an invitation so that people who recite this prayer do not focus on their understanding of the self. In that sense, Thich Nhat Hanh calls mantras having transformative power. It helps the individual experience changes in knowledge and inner awareness about himself in the background of being with others (Hanh, 1988).

In that transcendent place, one will experience liberation from one-sided and reductive knowledge of reality. Liberation is enlightenment or 'bodhi' and absolute joy or 'Shava' (Tanahashi, 2014). Enlightenment and real joy in this regard are the 'Heart' of the Buddha's teachings.

Conjoining knowledge and mystical experience

The Heart Sutra implies the ability of the human mind to naturally not stop at empirical and rational modes of knowledge. The mind's capacity has a reciprocal relationship with inner awareness in understanding and experiencing both the subjective side of the subject and the objective side of reality. Human rationality, in this case, is combined with mysticism. These two kinds of thinking, the rational and the mystical faculties, are a paradoxical affirmative pair. Between the two, there are boundaries as well as interconnections. In other words, knowledge and reason inherently presuppose mystical awareness. The limits of these two natural human abilities are both definitive and complimentary. Because of the nature of the ongoing interconnectivity between the two, one can experience coexistence' or emptiness.

The argument above elaborates that rational knowledge dialogues with inner awareness or mystical experience. In such a dialogue, mystical experience, combined with empirical and rational understanding, becomes a 'way of thinking' for someone to appreciate that reality is complex. In this complex reality, a person experiences the density of each element, whether the five senses can perceive it. Everything displays its sides which are natural or mysterious.

Everything that exists in itself and intertwines with other beings implies elements that shared knowledge and reasoning can explain. Mystical experience, in meditation and ascetic practice, pulls the rational faculties and reasoning out of their bounds. That is to say, the mystical experience of living reality with mysterious properties presupposes the role of sensory knowledge and reasoning to understand the complexity of the reality network. Without sensory expertise and logic, there is no possibility of inner awareness of the mysteries of life. Likewise, without inner awareness of the complex mysteries of reality, knowledge, and reasoning will only reduce reality to a 'real-and-measurable' or positive level. In contrast, the level of positive reality is only the outer layer of the richness and depth of life.

An essential note in The Heart Sutra is that this text concerns the mystical experience of the mysteries of reality. In this case, the experience of mystical awareness does not come from supernatural powers. This mystical experience departs from the subject's self-awareness, which always correlates with reality. In this case, one understands objective reality if and only if the subject experiences its subjectivity in interactivity with the objective reality. Negatively it can be formulated that way. It is impossible to experience the complexity of reality without experiencing the uniqueness of the self in the relationship between oneself and reality itself. The essence of spiritual or mystical awareness: the subject and reality are two mutually conjoined identities (Utami, 2019).

In closing, we can state that The Heart Sutra concludes that human rationality presupposes its irrational side. Instead of one negating the other, these two sides attract human appreciation of a complex and rich reality. In the name of rationality, a knowing subject cannot possibly reduce reality only on the empirical side or only on rational reasoning. Rationality in itself presupposes intertwining with irrationality the inner awareness of the mystery of the infinite existence (Anwar & Wurnayati, 2013). The fusion between sensory, reasonable perception with mystical experience does not occur in the past or the future in a sacred space. This mystical experience occurs here and now while reciting and listening carefully to the Heart Sutra.

4. Conclusion

The primary findings of this research illuminate the intricate interplay between rational and mystical thought as presented in the Heart Sutra. The study demonstrates that the concept of 'Shunyata' or emptiness is not merely a metaphysical abstraction but a practical epistemological tool that bridges the often perceived gap between rationality and mysticism. The sutra's text advocates for a non-dualistic approach to understanding reality, where empirical and mystical insights are seen as complementary rather than contradictory. This synthesis offers a more holistic view of human cognition and perception, suggesting that complete understanding necessitates embracing both the rational and the mystical.

This research contributes to the field by proposing a model of epistemological integration that challenges and expands the conventional boundaries of philosophical thought. By aligning Western epistemology with Eastern mystical traditions, the study offers a fresh perspective on old philosophical dilemmas about the nature of reality and knowledge. This approach not only enriches the philosophical discourse but also provides practical insights that could influence contemporary spiritual practices and theoretical applications in other fields, such as psychology and cognitive science.

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Heart Sutra within the scope of its chosen philosophical frameworks, it acknowledges certain limitations. The primary limitation is the interpretative nature of textual analysis, which may not capture all possible understandings of the sutra. Additionally, the comparison between Eastern and Western thought paradigms, while enriching, may oversimplify the nuances within each tradition. Future research could expand on this study by employing interdisciplinary approaches that include psychological experiments, cognitive science techniques, and even neuroscientific tools to explore how individuals actually experience and integrate the rational and mystical in real-time cognition. Further textual analysis from other Buddhist texts and comparison with mystical traditions from other cultures could also provide deeper insights into the universal aspects of the themes discussed. Moreover, empirical studies involving practitioners who embody these epistemological principles in their daily lives could offer additional layers of understanding and validation of the theoretical claims made in this study.

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