

THE INTERPRETATION OF RAINIS' (1865–1929) INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RECEPTION OF ASIA'S SPIRITUAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Along with the Baltic and European intellectual tradition, Asian spiritual teachings were also of great importance in the worldview of the notable Latvian poet and playwright Rainis, especially Buddhism, which he became acquainted with through European translations. It was the synthesis of these teachings with the knowledge of European philosophy that led to one of his most essential theories about the connection between man, society, universe and man's task in this context, which is reflected in his entire oeuvre. The task of this article is to show the importance of the reception of Asian spiritual heritage in Rainis' worldview, his dramaturgy and poetry – in order to obtain a more complete picture of him. This approach is extremely relevant in the process of humanitarian education in the conditions of globalization, while presenting him as an example of the reception of world cultural heritage in the works of national writers and outlining the mechanism of understanding the transcultural orientation of national authors. The reception of Asian spiritual heritage in Rainis' worldview and writings has, with rare exceptions, remained unexplored in literary studies and completely ignored in teaching materials. In order to understand Rainis' original message to humanity, it is necessary, in parallel with a new interpretation of the content of his work, to identify the sources Rainis used, delving into Buddhist, Hinduist and Daoist philosophies and Asian culture, without which Rainis' message is incomprehensible.

Keywords: *Asian spiritual teachings, Buddhism, Cross-Cultural studies, Daoism, Hinduism, Latvian literature, Rainis.*

Introduction

Analysis by literary scholars of the works of one of the most internationally prominent Latvian poets and playwrights Rainis (Jānis Pliekšāns (1865–1929)), and also the approach to teaching Rainis in schools and discussion of his works in the mass media, still have a narrow-minded view which has been evident for many years, where Rainis is perceived only as a socialist-symbolist, one who integrates folklore and historical material

into drama, a Latvian patriot and a universalist proponent of a just society in the future. This truly limits – even misinforms – pupils who are studying Latvian literature in a narrowly national, regional or social context, forgetting that from the very outset of his creative work, Rainis the philosopher and perceiver of various (also Asian) spiritual teachings, synthesised European and particularly Buddhist (as well as, in part, Hindu and Taoist) philosophical ideas. He developed his individual worldview, along with a peculiar synthetic philosophical doctrine, which included epistemology and ontology as well as social alternatives, ethics, aesthetics, exact sciences, criticism of religions and the problematics of immortality. Moreover, as his writings and essays show, he remained more or less faithful to this doctrine throughout his life, aligning his works and also his social and political activity with this philosophy. Without knowing the sources of Rainis' worldview and philosophy, it is also impossible to objectively understand the motivation behind his personal or public activities, as evidenced by the superficial, mostly politicised and stereotypical criticism of his activity in the contemporary press, on the internet or in monographs (Puče, 2022). There is some evidence of Rainis' interest in the literature of Asian peoples, which appears, for example, in an anthology of world folklore "A Restless Heart" and poetry published in 1921 (Rainis, 1980) or in Chinese lyrical poetry motifs that appear in his collection of poems "Mēness meitiņa" (Daughter of the Moon) (1925) (Rainis, 1978). Just as sources and literature were used to borrow themes from ancient Egypt and the Bible in the context of Rainis' famous play "Jāzeps un viņa brāļi" (Joseph and His Brothers) (1919) (Rainis, 1981), already evident in the commentary to the 11th volume of the most complete published works of Rainis (Rainis, 1981) and infrequently over the years an occasional phrase has been mentioned in passing about Rainis' reception of Eastern philosophy in his works, of the broad range of literature devoted to Rainis, only two works have actually looked further in outlining the role of Hinduism and Buddhism in Rainis' worldview. These are Saulcerite Viese's study "Jaunais Rainis" (Young Rainis) (Viese, 1982) and Arvids Ziedonis' monograph "Jāņa Raiņa reliģiskā filozofija" (The Religious Philosophy of Jānis Rainis) (Ziedonis, 1994). However in the latter work only a small part is devoted to this topic within the frame of other research, without delving into the nature of the sources used by Rainis himself or into the Asian spiritual heritage as such, which would allow us to understand both the commonalities and differences. Early scholars of Rainis sometimes noted that "... Rainis, as a man of ideas, was unfamiliar to Latvians" (Birkerts 1925, p. 29), continuing the outline of his life in the usual local – either national or regional context, sometimes referring to 19th and 20th century social ideas and European literary heritage, which is analysed more broadly nowadays, without including the spiritual heritage of Asia.

We cannot ignore Marxism, which was extremely relevant in the context of both philosophical and socio-economic ideas in the 19th and 20th centuries and has not lost its intellectual relevance today. Yet we cannot classify Rainis as a typical European social democrat of his time, or as a narrow-minded adherent of an authoritative 'communist' world-view, as was evident in publications of the USSR period and to some extent also later, simplifying the image of Rainis as a 'socialist' or 'politician', because Rainis found

it absolutely unacceptable to have an authoritative ‘morality’ using dictatorial methods that would force society to ‘integrate’ into it, even if it is only in the name of social justice. For Rainis, social or religious ideals were primarily theoretical constructions divorced from reality, a form of hypocrisy. The ideals of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, etc. interested him only insofar as he could use them within his own unique philosophical system, which included both epistemology and the social theory of society. Rainis was a unique individual, following his own path, transgressing the boundaries of all stereotypes and scientific disciplines or cultures. He was undoubtedly one of the most original European thinkers of his time, who, to this day, is still misunderstood among his compatriots and largely unknown in global intellectual circles. Rainis offered the world his own philosophy and social theory which was not Euro-centric or Western-centric, but based on intercultural studies, integrating Asian and Middle Eastern spiritual heritage into his philosophical-social doctrine. From this aspect, Rainis cannot be considered only as a “European thinker”. He was a global thinker, addressing all cultures, peoples, religions and socio-ethical doctrines, offering his teachings in both a universal and individual sense. The interpretation of Asian cultures is a long-standing tradition in European literature, art and science, and therefore teaching material in schools requires identifying it in the works of the authors to be covered, of which Rainis’ work can also be used as a case study in intercultural studies for senior pupils and university students. This paper uses comparative interpretive literary analysis and content analysis to identify the Asian sources and the ideas reflected in them that appear in Rainis’ works.

Critique of the Western Intellectual Tradition being a Contributor to Reception of the Asian Spiritual Heritage

In the context of the present study, it is important to first shed light on the Asian spiritual teachings which informed Rainis from very early on within the frame of the information available to him at that time. This is evident in his notes, written in 1896, shortly after meeting Aspazija (1865–1943) and before he started working as a lawyer in Panevėžys and his subsequent imprisonment, which are often identified as a turning point in Rainis’ genesis as a thinker and poet. Tracing Rainis’ notes in the section titled “Philosophy of Egoism – Reflections on Reading Philosophical Literature” (Rainis, 1986, p. 85), one can clearly and easily trace the path of Rainis’ insights from his critical analysis of the European intellectual tradition to the use of Hinduism and Buddhism to theoretically test his ideas in a future perspective. To understand Rainis’ path to the spiritual teachings of Asia, the course of his thought process must be traced, whereby he critically examined the Western intellectual heritage of his time. The term “writer’s quest”, a term often used in literary studies and media discussions, would be inappropriate here, because Rainis could rapidly absorb – concurrently – all the published scientific and fictional literature available at the time. He did not glorify or copy Western models; a trait that was characteristic of Latvian intellectuals of the time, rather he pragmatically assessed the feasibility of applying the ideas proposed by various authors to the needs

of the individual or society. From the outset, he was extremely sceptical in his evaluation of the European intellectual heritage, seeing philosophical, social, biological, etc. theories as a reflection of man's genetically determined programme. Rainis sees any religion or philosophy in part as a "doctrine of justification" for the basic "programme" of human existence: the selfish, relentless drive to reproduce, duplicate, replicate itself, which he proposes to develop in a positive-creative doctrine based on the promotion of mutual tolerance between the individual and society, the evolution of knowledge-based technologies and the achievement of common goals in society. The scientific paradigm of the late 19th century was based on Hegel's dialectic and the social theory of Marx or Darwin's evolutionary theory that developed from it – the interconnection between man, nature and society was seen as being in a constant state of flux, presented as "evolution" or "development". But Rainis is deeply aware of the limitations of every theory (even the most prominent and seemingly established theories of their time) in the context of a diverse, changing reality: "In every idea, even the greatest ones, there is something inanimate that must fall away. This inanimate part is often sought to be developed and ends up on false paths. But there is also something living in this idea, it just needs to be found" (Rainis, 1986, p. 87). Rainis was also critical of the popular philosophical or socio-economic theorists of his time, believing that a new theory can be built on several ideas of previous thinkers, rather than just one, by applying it in another field in a limited capacity. In Rainis' opinion, Nietzsche had done this by proposing Darwin's theory of evolution in ethics: "Is Nietzsche an independent thinker, does he have a new idea? I think he has just tried to apply evolutionary theory to moral issues" (Rainis, 1986, p. 86). There is evidence that over time Nietzsche himself became increasingly critical of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (Prayson, 2013), but Rainis is undoubtedly correct in his assessment that Nietzsche's preoccupation with evolutionary theory and its interpretation as an attempt to reform European ideas about ethics cannot be denied.

To better understand Rainis' openness to other cultures, it is important to understand that Rainis is generally an intercultural, and also an interdisciplinary thinker. Traditionally seen only as a writer: a poet and a playwright, we forget that Rainis is first and foremost a thinker, a scientist who is often more fascinated by the exact sciences than by poetry. Rainis' outlook on science in the late 19th century can be compared, for example, to the modern strategy on Artificial Intelligence: "Thinking must break away from a random, unsettled state, it must be regulated... Regulated and consciously guided thinking will solve unimaginable questions, ... We need to study thinking similar to the way we study chemistry, then it will help us to make bread from stones" (Rainis, 1986, p. 73). In this context, he already had an interest in the experience of Asian cultures in developing the human intellect through various teaching methods, such as the Confucian principle of the unity of heart and mind in the development of thought (cultivation of the heart-mind (心學)) (Wei & Li, 2011, pp. 753–765), reading aloud, etc.: "... in order to truly understand each thought, it must be visual. Confucius' visual teaching method, learning aloud, ..." (Rainis, 1986, p. 54). Rainis' broad, non-national, universal outlook, as well as his prioritisation of science and philosophy as spheres of human development

and knowledge, made him a very unique “poet” from the outset. He immediately showed an interest in the spiritual heritage of Asia: “Poetry is obsolete... The most powerful similes and images – and these pertain to poetry just as the lancet and the microscope pertain to natural science – can still be found in the Bible, the Vedas and other ancient ‘holy books’...” (Rainis, 1986, p. 69) – Rainis wrote this in his notes in 1896 and qualified it in his collected writings as “Notes on Morals and Art”. Interestingly, reference to an Asian spiritual tradition already appears here alongside the Bible. The Vedas are: the earliest Indian religious texts, including hymns to the gods, manuals of sacrificial ritual and the beginnings of Indian philosophy (Perrett, 2016, p. 27). At the same time, Rainis’ interest beyond the confines of Western civilisation was not merely the reception of Orientalism during the European Romantic era, as we see in the works of many of Rainis’ contemporaries, but a philosophical concept of the synergistic transformation of science, the individual and society. This led him to use the full arsenal of science and culture at his disposal to justify and realise this concept. It is therefore not surprising that long before the American historian and philosopher of science Thomas S. Kuhn’s famous work “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” (first published in 1962), Rainis had understood that a certain discovery within a particular civilisation can only become a “discovery” after the necessary preconditions have occurred for its perception (Kuhn, 2012). In 1896 Rainis wrote: “One often finds a premature truth which does not fit into the logistic sequence of ideas, which is then misunderstood and condemned to immortality” (Rainis, 1986, p. 92).

Rainis’ increasingly pronounced shift towards the philosophical-spiritual teachings of Asia is determined by his tendency to free himself completely from any slavish respect for the “values” of literature and poetry. Compared to the prospect of human revelation that has been uncovered by philosophy and science, Rainis sees these as meaningless in the traditional sense. Unless, being a pragmatist, he sees them as the transcendence of the insights of philosophy and science to the level of everyday consciousness in which most people live (Rainis, 1986, p. 57).

In the ethical sphere, for Rainis this also means getting rid of the religious-ethical ballast of Europe, perceiving it as an abstraction corresponding to the primitive human intellect, which hinders further intellectual development. His “doctrine of egosim” emerges within this context. It is extremely interesting to compare this particular philosophy of Rainis with the doctrine of Buddhism, which results from his reception of Buddhism, and postulates an alternate interpretation. Apparently opposed to Buddhism, this interpretation is, nevertheless, paradoxically related to Buddhism methodologically, just as Marx’s dialectic is the opposite of the Hegelian dialectic, yet makes use of Hegel’s methodology. To better understand East-West synthesis in the genesis of Rainis’ worldview requires also turning to his intellectual insights in the 1890s. Saulcerite Viese draws attention to Rainis’ letter to Aspazija, dated 19 September 1897, stating: “The books you brought are very interesting, at least Feuerbach and the Buddhist ones. So, looking a little bit into Feuerbach, I found a lot of my own thoughts, which have been unvoiced, without knowing that these ideas were already there” (Viese, 1982, p. 158). S. Viese suggests that Feuerbach may also have been one of the sources of Rainis’ reception of Eastern ideas:

“Feuerbach’s remarks about the close unity of Eastern philosophy with the universe, the perception of the world where ‘one does not forget nature for man’s sake, does not forget the course of the sun and stars in the course of everyday events’, are close to Rainis’ later observations of Eastern cultures” (Viese, 1982, p. 158). However, thinking specifically of Feuerbach, it is possible that this thinker was the primary influence on Rainis’ complete rejection of religion, or Rainis’ atheism, which was also far from primitive or vulgar (this will be discussed later). Feuerbach, who deeply understood the nature of Western logical reasoning, involving abstract thinking, also interprets religion, or the concept of God as an abstraction, a respectively highly synthetic degree of abstraction, where man combines various positive qualities observed in life into one abstract concept: in God, forming the quintessence of fantasy along with a fantastic doctrine detached from reality. In his famous work “The Essence of Religion”, Feuerbach, writing in very general terms in chapters 37 and 38 about the differences between the “Orientalist” and the “Occidentalist”, emphasises that the Orientalist (“Orientale”), unlike the Occidentalist (“Occidentale”), worships nature itself without elevating man above it; he relates the processes of nature and society to each other.

And only in the West, where the earth itself – nature is “purified of the divine” and “the Gods must move to heaven” (Feuerbach, 1849, p. 45). Here Feuerbach has very correctly detected the dominance of correlative thinking in the spiritual teachings of Asia. According to Hall, David L. and Ames, Roger T.: “Correlative thinking, as it is found both in classical Chinese ‘cosmologies’ (the Yijing (Book of Changes), Taoism, the Yin–Yang school) and, less importantly, among the classical Greeks involves the association of image or concept-clusters related by meaningful disposition rather than physical causation. Correlative thinking is a species of spontaneous thinking grounded in informal and ad hoc analogical procedures presupposing both association and differentiation. The regulative element in this modality of thinking is shared patterns of culture and tradition rather than common assumptions about causal necessity. The relative indifference of correlative thinking to logical analysis means that the ambiguity, vagueness and incoherence associable with images and metaphors are carried over into the more formal elements of thought. In fact, the chaotic factor in the underdetermined correlative order has a positive value as an opportunity for personalization and self-construal. In contradistinction to the rational mode of thinking which privileges univocity, correlative thinking involves the association of significances into clustered images which are treated as meaning complexes ultimately unanalyzable into any more basic components” (Hall & Roger, 1998).

Only Feuerbach did not idealise this thinking; it is with this thinking that he explains why “the Orient does not have such a living, progressive history as the Occident” (Feuerbach, 1849, p. 44). Rainis goes further; he tries to examine the spiritual teachings of Asia from the point of view of man’s scientific possibilities. Undoubtedly, understanding religion as an outdated theoretical construct that hinders man’s intellectual progress, Rainis was fascinated by the absence of the concept of God in Buddhism and by Hinduism’s unique approach to explaining the relationship between the universe and man through the tolerance of nature itself, not only man, in contrast to Western monotheism which

he saw as limited. For Rainis, however, discovering Hinduism and Buddhism does not imply the glorifying of these worldviews. Like Feuerbach, he is critical of them as hampering human evolution. For example, in Rainis' letter from Liepāja prison, published by S. Viese, he writes: "Why is India not first in terms of progress? It has a beautiful, free religion, or could this freedom not be felt? Should it have been chosen just like love for Christians? The nobility had power and freedom, but alongside it was slavery. Freedom cannot be unequal. But why does the lower class in the Vedas never reach out for freedom? Of course, Buddhism, like Christianity, is not restrictive, but even that is not enough. Can free religion not lead to action? Is Buddhism pessimism? [...] Studying Buddhism, Indian history" (Viese, 1982, p. 160). What exactly is Rainis studying? Saulcerite Viese provides some information on this in her monograph "Jaunais Rainis" (Viese, 1982, p. 160), which refers to letters to Aspazija from 1897, where "Hitopadesha" (Kaul, 2022), "Nala and Damayanti" (Neelakantan, 2023) are mentioned in the context of Indian culture, without explaining anything more about these works. It should first be clarified that "Hitopadesha" is the epitome of the "Pañcatantra" (Sanskrit: पञ्चतन्त्रम्) – the famous collection of animal fables and stories in Sanskrit which was translated into Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and almost into all the languages of modern Europe (Olivelle, 2002). Whereas "Nala and Damayanti", a story about lovers who overcame various difficulties is one of the episodes of the Hindu epic "Mahābhārata" (Sanskrit: महाभारत) (Menon, 2009). This story may have indirectly inspired Rainis' later major dramatic works "Indulis un Ārija", "Jāzeps un viņa brāļi" (Joseph and His Brothers) (in the context of the relationship between Jāzeps and Dina), etc. In Rainis' own notes we find an even more comprehensive list of the sources of Indian culture that he studied: "Schroeder, Leopold von 'Indiens Literatur und Cultur' (Schroeder, 1887), 'Mahābhārata', Bopp¹, Kellner², Geiger³ ed. (Book of basic texts.) 'Ramayana' (Menon, 2010), 'Nala and Damayanti', 'Indian tales', Adolf Holtzmann, Karlsruhe, 1845 (Holtzmann, 1845–1847)." Of course, a more complete picture of the literature read by Rainis can be found in the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House, at 30 Baznīcas Street, where Rainis and Aspazija lived in the late 1920s.

Reception of Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism in Rainis' worldview and works

However, stepping back a little from the superficial influences of Asian culture, it is worth returning to the essential questions of Asian spiritual traditions, which greatly influenced Rainis' worldview, even if he did not agree with their doctrines, even going so far as to develop his own as an antithesis to them. Without such contact, this would not have happened in such a radical and creative way. So, returning to Buddhism and Hinduism in a philosophical sense, S. Viese points out that while Rainis was in prison in Liepāja, he planned to write a drama about the Buddha. His letter to Aspazija, dated

¹ Franz Bopp (1791–1867).

² Carl Kellner (1851–1905).

³ Wilhelm Geiger (1856–1943).

29 August 1897, reads: “I am only impressed and pacified by the Buddha with his terrible consistency and pride” (Viese, 1982, p. 160). As for Rainis’ archive, S. Viese shows evidence of synopses of the poem “Buddhacharita” (Sanskrit: बुद्धचरतिम्) (Viese, 1982, p. 161). It is a poem in Sanskrit on the life of the Buddha written in two verse compositions (Olivelle, 2008). S. Viese is not correct in saying that the author of the whole composition was Āśvaghoṣa (born 80 CE?, Ayodhya, India-died 150?, Peshawar), a Buddhist philosopher and poet from India (Viese, 1982, p. 161). He is the author of the second version, which became popular across Asia (the first written by the monk Saṅgharakṣa (सङ्घरक्ष) (2nd century CE), the leader of the Yogācāra (Sanskrit: योगाचार) Buddhists and survives today only in the Chinese translation. Because of the early date of this poem, “... it is of great importance for ... the history of Indian Buddhism...” (Buswell & Lopez, 2013, p. 150). Āśvaghoṣa himself was originally an opponent of Buddhism, until he lost a debate with a member of the ancient Vaibhāṣika (वैभाषिकि) school of Buddhism. This school’s theory of cognition was controversial, according to this theory, reality was possible simply as a product of the human mind and – if this proved unsatisfactory – the existence of real objects and their cognizance should be acknowledged. In other words, unlike the school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, represented by the author of the first version of this poem: Yogācāra subjective idealism, Vaibhāṣika inclined towards direct realism which accepts that the objects of perception are real and exist independently of our minds (Chatterjee & Datta, 1948, p. 176). So, the intellectual roots of Rainis’ main source of Buddhist study, the Buddhacharita, were very diverse. In addition, Canto XII of this work provides an outline of another ancient Indian philosophical system: the Sāṃkhya (Sanskrit: सांख्य) (Buswell & Lopez, 2013, p. 151). Sāṃkhya is a philosophy of dualistic realism which admits two ultimate realities: Puruṣa (Sanskrit: पुरुष) (consciousness) and Prakṛti (Sanskrit: प्रकृति) (matter). Prakṛti is the ultimate cause of the world, it has three elements: “... sattva, rajas and tamas, which possess the natures of pleasure, pain and indifference, and cause manifestation, activity, and passivity. The evolution of the world starts “... in the association ... of the Puruṣa with Prakṛti, which disturbs the original equilibrium of the latter and moves it to action” (Chatterjee & Datta, 1948, p. 46). Puruṣa is consciousness which is essentially associated with nonrepresentational pure awareness (Perrett, 2016, p. 298). It cannot be bound and is essentially unaffected by the causal transformation of Prakṛti (Perrett, 2016, p. 271). The proximity of Puruṣa acts as a catalyst in releasing the causal transformation of primordial nature into the whole of the perceptible world (Perrett, 2016, p. 292). Emancipation follows from the correct understanding of the real nature of Puruṣa (Perrett, 2016, p. 292). All these insights and their interpretations can be seen in Rainis’ later works. In the drama “Uguns un nakts” (Fire and Night) (1905), if Puruṣa is undoubtedly reflected in the image of Spīdola, then Prakṛti is Lāčplēsis. In the unfinished play “Īliņš” (a large manuscript from 1908), which is very important in terms of the legacy of Rainis’ ideas, Puruṣa’s analogy is Īliņš, while Prakṛti is Ziedīte.

Before and alongside his Buddhist studies, Rainis was undoubtedly also deeply immersed in Hinduisim, or Vedic religion, as evidenced by his diary notes and notes made as explanations for his plays. For example, in the context of his unfinished play “Imanta”,

Rainis is very precise in his reference to the dominant role of rituals in Hinduism, which requires a person to fulfil his duty by making offerings to the gods, reading sacred scriptures, getting children to carry on the ceremony of making offerings (Rainis, 1981, p. 111). The sacrifices “... were supposed to possess a mysterious power capable of regulating ... the workings of the universe for the advantage of individuals...” (Dasgupta, 1927, p. 8) making the rituals even “... more powerful than the gods” (Dasgupta, 1927, p. 6).

But how reliable were the sources that Rainis used, and what did he really read, given that Rainis was not an Orientalist and did not know Asian languages to read the originals? Besides, at this time the genesis of Indian philosophy and Buddhism, like Sinology in Europe, had developed far below the level that it is today. Of course, Rainis learnt about Asian spiritual teachings, including Buddhism – which was so important to him – from translations. For example, with regard to sources from ancient India, there is evidence that even during his time spent in emigration in Switzerland, Rainis kept a German translation of the Rigveda (Sanskrit: ऋग्वेद), the oldest of the sacred books of Hinduism (Van Nooten & Holland, 1995), as one of the favourite books on his shelf (Cielēns, 1955, p. 33). In this regard S. Viese mentions the German translation of the Buddhacharita “Buddhas Leben und Wirken” (The Life and Works of the Buddha) (without mentioning the translator’s name), which is preserved in the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House (Viese, 1982, p. 161). The author of this translation is Theodor Schultze (1824–1898) and the full title of the book is “Buddhas Leben und Wirken nach der chinesischen Bearbeitung von Aṣvagoshas Buddha-Carita und deren Übersetzung in das Englische durch Samuel Beal in deutsche Verse übertragen von Th. Schultze” (Life and work of the Buddha according to the Chinese adaptation of Aṣvagosa’s Buddha-Carita and its translation into English by Samuel Beal, translated into German verses by Th. Schultze), published in Leipzig 1894. This German translation was, in turn, based on an English translation by British Orientalist Samuel Beal (1825–1889) who was the first Englishman who translated the early records of Buddhism directly from Chinese, thus also indirectly providing information on the spiritual culture of ancient India.

Before examining all the available information on the sources of Rainis’ influence and analysing the role of the Asian spiritual heritage in the origin of Rainis’ highly idiosyncratic, original philosophy, it is worth turning to Rainis’ own insights. The most striking evidence of the importance of Asian religions and philosophies according to Rainis are the conclusions he draws from his own notes, such as the insight he wrote down in 1896: “Why are atheistic religions (without pressure from above) only in Asia – for the Chinese and Indians? These two peoples are peaceful, at least compared to Europeans. The European, as a constant warrior, is used to discipline, power and coercion, and has arranged everything according to his warlike habits: his country, his economic life (plunder and exploitation), his morality (everything is based on the commandment “Thou shalt!”) and, finally, his god, the supreme warlord, who has also arranged the moral order militarily. The European is so enmeshed in military constraints that even the freest spirits cannot do without them. Even the socialists want morality with commandments – first of all with the commandment “Thou shalt sacrifice thyself to the populace i.e. to altruism.” ... If

morality cannot exist without constraints, then it is of no use at all” (Rainis, 1986, p. 94). Rainis expresses similar thoughts about regulated “state socialism” elsewhere, which forces us to abandon the stereotypical view that Rainis is simply classified as a socialist / social democrat, referring only to his ideal of social justice, which was reduced to banality already in the critiques before the founding of the Republic of Latvia (Jankavs, 1913), where, just like today, Rainis’ ideology was ‘compared’ with his true ‘egoism’ (Puče, 2022), without understanding anything about Rainis’ specific ‘philosophy of egoism’, which was truly an alternative philosophy at the time. Its ideal was precisely a society that was self-organising and mutually supportive: “The populace is also nothing other than many separate individuals and their principle, altruism is also nothing other than the sum of these separate principles, egoism. The individual and his principle, egoism, is the simple form, but generality and altruism are only its multiple form. So, we cannot speak of two principles, egoism and altruism, but only of one, egoism. Altruism is the multiplication, differentiation of egoism, while egoism is limiting. Yet the limitation does not come from others, but from the self – the individual’s adaptation to society. ... If a society is perceived as the advantage of a group of individuals, such as a class or a bureaucracy, or members of parliament, then the interests of the populace, or altruism, are simply a new tool for coercion, for exploitation. So, there must be no more coercion in socialism, otherwise it too will be class domination” (Rainis, 1986, p. 93). Rainis did not tolerate any abstract theories, unrelated to the real metamorphoses of nature and society, to which he also added altruism, structured religions such as Christianity, etc. In a way this brings him closer to Ludwig Feuerbach, but at the same time there is also a link with the reception of Buddhism. Rainis, of course, firstly perceived Buddhism in its classically simplified form, which is connected with the origin of this teaching – or in the context of the ‘Four Noble Truths’, the first of which teaches that all forms of existence are unsatisfactory and subject to suffering; the second, that all suffering and rebirth are caused by craving; the third – that the extinction of craving results in an extinction of rebirth and suffering, i.e. Nirvāna (Sanskrit: नरिवाण; pail: नरिबान, nibbāna); the fourth truth indicates the means by which this extinction is attained (Thera, 2011, p. 177). The original paths of Buddhism: Hīnayāna (हीनयान) and the closely related Theravāda school (inherited from Sanskrit स्थवरिवाद (sthaviravāda: doctrine of the elders), which follow the tradition of the senior monks of the first Buddhist sangha, or community, which envisages an individual path of salvation by ‘leaving the world’ within that community (Lysenko, Terent’yev & Shokhin, 1994, p. 178), was not acceptable to Rainis. In this context, the Samsāra (Sanskrit: संसार)⁴ concept of reincarnation or ‘endless cycles of rebirth’ (Thera, 2011, p. 187) is closely related to another concept: Karma (Sanskrit: कर्म) which due to the influence

⁴ It is noteworthy that in the deeper Buddhist understanding of Samsāra (Sanskrit: संसार) as a restless, unbroken combination-chain of ego entity illusions is part of a wider context, believing that the individual as an “independent” does not exist at all in the connected chain of natural processes. This is manifested in the unity of the various Dharma (Sanskrit: धर्म) (nature of a thing) (Thera, 2011, p. 55) streams and therefore has no fixed manifestation at all. It has no opposition between the “external” and the “internal” world, it cannot be opposed as “subject” to everything else as “object”.

of theosophie (Thera, 2011, p. 91) in the West in the time of Rainis and even today, was and is often misunderstood as the causal result of actions. This seems to be how Karma and Saṃsāra were originally understood by Rainis, as evidenced by his remarks, which S. Viese briefly refers to in her study. On the one hand, Rainis disagrees with this understanding of Buddhism, and at the time of writing these notes he apparently believed that this represents the essence of Buddhism. Rainis proposes his doctrine as the opposite of this form of Buddhism, looking at reincarnation as a rebirth in one's offspring who will be able to go further in their spiritual evolution (Viese, 1982, p. 162). He also treats the reincarnation of souls as the inheritance of ideas that can pass from person to person. In this context, even Rainis' poem "Samsara" has survived, where he states that he sees his spouse Aspazija as inheritor of his ideas if he were to perish (Viese, 1982, p. 163). A similar analogy is apparent in Rainis' play "Uguns un nakts" (1905) in the final dialogue between Spīdola and Lāčplēsis, where Lāčplēsis himself is aware of this possibility:

"You're my happiness, a gift from my past –
To you I leave my heart.
Spidola, protect her and lead the land –
To you I leave my soul and my spirit." (Transl.: Straumanis, 1986, p. 87;
original: Rainis, 1980, p. 312)⁵

However, one cannot deny a certain harmony of Rainis' ideas with Buddhism, however paradoxical such disagreement and harmony may seem. Given that suffering (Duḥkha, Sanskrit: दुःख) in Buddhist ethics, unlike in Christianity, for example, is neither the cause of original sin, nor can it be ended by a "higher power" (i.e. God) in the eschatological concept of salvation, but as an inherent manifestation of one's own unwholesome actions. Therefore, only man himself can avert this suffering. In Buddhist philosophy, this problem is approached from an epistemological point of view; as a consequence of narrow-minded thinking, which hinders the perception of the true limits of reality by making one cling to theoretical constructs. The text in Rainis' notes from 1896, for example, suggests an awareness of man's own role in determining his condition and the specific feelings that are associated with it: "Dhammapada. Self-abnegation at its most noble. Self-abnegation by doing good.

"One comes to this with earnestness.
Whether you are evil or not,
No one else can be your saviour." (Rainis, 1986, p. 95)

The Dhammapada referred to by Rainis is the best-known text in the Pali Tripitaka, the sacred scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism (Fronsdal, 2006).

Rainis' attitude towards the concept of nirvana in the Buddhist context is interesting. Rainis does not accept it as the goal of human life in the original (non-Buddhist philosophical) sense of the concept as "... the coming to rest, ... the 'no-more-continuing' of this physical-mental process of existence" which takes place with the death of arahat (Thera, 2011, p. 124).

⁵ Translation by Alfreds Straumanis.

This is very well illustrated in Rainis' diary of 1912: "Drama is the creator of life, is the work of man and the work of the gods, the creation of the world. Drama in its highest form is tragedy, just as life in its highest form is tragedy. There are two basic distinctions in philosophy: static – Vedanta, dynamic – the Buddha. But the Buddha takes evolution ultimately to immobility, to Vedanta, it is ultimately self-denying and consciously seeks nirvana, immobility, as salvation from life and movement. Christ is also a warrior, but still wants to bring everything to God and peace. I need a new philosophy which does not want movement for the sake of peace, life for the sake of death, but movement for the sake of movement, life for the sake of life; which does not want to be a weapon in the hand of its enemies, but wants to be itself and working for itself" (Rainis, 1986, p. 429).

In interpreting the Buddhist concept of nirvana, Rainis offers his own, which is evident in the depiction of death in the Island of Death scene in the drama "Uguns un nakts" where Spīdola announces to Lāčplēšis:

"A man achieves ultimate greatness
Being at peace with himself.
To your task you aspired
With fervor, but tired –
Only in my serenity
You'll find strength through eternity.
Bliss without end there lies,
Knot from knot unties;
On perpetuity's wings
You into future flings."

(Transl.: Straumanis, 1986, p. 60;
original: Rainis, 1980, p. 263)

Rainis later expressed similar thoughts in his poetry, for example, in the poem "Lielā vienaldzība" (The Great Indifference) published in the collection "Gals un sākums" (The End and the Beginning) (1912):

"Only calm indifference
Will bring peace into your heart,
Which had raced in intense passion.
There is still bitterness in your heart,
There is still harshness in your thought,
There is still fury in your voice,
Pain still brushes past your flesh,
The heart pities itself,
Your eyes, avert from the star.
Turn to the star, calm yourself:
The great indifference is drawing near,
Where the greater life begins."

(Rainis, 1977, p. 347)⁶

⁶ Translation by Daina Grosa.

Only here Rainis no longer associates nirvana with a state of “happiness”, but rather in a sense of Prajñāpāramitā (perfection of wisdom, Sanskrit: प्रज्ञापारमिति), as discussed in the Mādhyamika (Sanskrit: माध्यमिकि) school of Buddhism. Prajñāpāramitā was the insight or wisdom that constituted Omniscient cognition and was identified with the end itself, perfect awakening, beyond all thought constructions, absolutely pure, unattainable and beyond grasp (Leaman, 1999, pp. 235–236).

Was Rainis aware of any studies on Buddhism in the Russian Empire at that time? In the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House, we find evidence of this, including several Russian translations by Western European authors, such as the Russian translation in 1905 of “The History of Religion” (1895) by Allan Menzies (1845–1916), with its extensive and rather precise exposition of the ethical teachings of Buddhism (Menzies, 1905). Yet there is nothing on Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779–1847), who was a citizen of the Russian empire and due to the great influence of his theoretical works on Buddhism, served as one of the most important sources in Arthur Schopenhauer’s (1788–1860) interpretation of Buddhism. He translated into German one of the most important Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the Diamond Sūtra (Sanskrit: Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra). This work, published in 1840 in Saint Petersburg, is titled “Über das Mahāyāna und Pradschnā-Pāramita der Bauddhen” (On the Mahāyāna and Prajñāpāramitā of the Buddhists) (Schmidt, 1840). Interestingly, I. J. Schmidt was a friend of the Baltic German ethnographer, historian, linguist and clergyman Benjamin Fürchtegott Balthasar von Bergmann (1772–1856) from Latvia, who lived among Buddhist (Lamaist) Kalmyks – and is also known as a pioneer of Buddhist studies in Europe (Kļaviņš, 2023). But Rainis’ notes and the surviving sections of his library cannot serve as absolute evidence of what he did or did not read. We cannot exclude anything... For Rainis, Buddhism was not a whim, a search for the exotic inherent in European Orientalists, or a search for “Eastern analogies” for the purposes of literary experimentation which was typical of the Decadents. It is worth remembering that Buddhism was never aimed at fighting for man’s personal freedom, which is so important in the West. It has been much more consistent: liberation from the human condition as such, ending reincarnation (Lysenko, Terent’jev & Shokhin, 1994). For Rainis the thinker, Buddhism was one of the most important ethical-philosophical teachings, which had a decisive influence on the evolution of his worldview, even if he disagreed with it and he integrated it into his philosophy and theory of society. His remarks of 1897 are also a striking testimony to this: “I truly want to think hard about the Buddha’s teaching on the meaning of life. I must also attain this holy indifference. Yes, but is it closed to me, no point in striving? Or does it apply only to so-called earthly life? In any case, I must attain it. That is the meaning of life – to stand above life in order to understand it. To be within it, to feel it, is Faustian, but for me it must be to understand it, and then, as a further stage, to put into practice what was understood, not ordinary life as such” (Rainis, 1986, p. 142). In his study “The Religious Philosophy of Jānis Rainis”, Arvīds Ziedonis notes that in the drama “Uguns un nakts”, by depicting the scene on the Island of Death, Rainis gave an analogy of nirvana in Spīdola’s call to Lāčplēsis to go to Diamond Mountain (in the original – to split Diamond Mountain) (Ziedonis, 1994, p. 99):

“Through the night’s darkness,
 Through deepest shadows.
 Together we’ll climb the highest peak,
 Gleaming in its own light far away.
 As warm as sun, it warms itself
 And all hearts, imbuing joy.
 Its allure has a magic power;
 Who climbs it, lives in beauty forever.
 Earthly things – love and hatred,
 Vanity and vile – will fade away;
 The sun will adorn your flaxen hair
 And weave you a coat of her white beams.” (Transl.: Straumanis, 1986, p. 60;
 original: Rainis, 1980, pp. 266–267)⁷

And yet, the joy that Rainis sometimes describes as ‘happiness’ is for him not the passive result of achieving an unconscious state, which would also exclude any emotions born in an illusory context, but the space of this illusory context as the individual’s own creative fantasy and spiritual development. Happiness, then, is not just a by-product to be taken for granted but the result of one’s own intellectual work and training; it must be ‘created’. “Happiness is in activity” writes Rainis in his notes from Slobodsk, where he had been since 1899, when the court, continuing repressions for the “anti-government activity” he was accused of, sentenced him to exile to the town of Slobodsk, in the Vyatka Governorate (Rainis, 1981, p. 233).

Reading Rainis’ own writings and studying the literature he read, it becomes clear how careful we must be in our evaluations of Rainis, both in our scientific research and in our communication with school and university audiences. Therefore, it is not possible to fully agree with conclusions that simply mechanically apply Eastern spiritual teachings to Rainis’ works, without delving deeper into them. At the same time, of course, it is not easy to understand Rainis’ own level of awareness of these teachings. It is not quite correct to attribute to the influence of Chan (Zen) Buddhism Rainis’ thoughts that “Only in contemplation, by inner searching, can man find the answer to the mystery...”, to quote the following lines from the collection of poems “Gals un sākums” (1912) (Ziedonis, 1994, p. 204):

“May the end become the beginning,
 May the mystery awake,
 So that from your heels
 Night will finally retreat.” (Rainis, 1977, p. 407)⁸

Without delving into the Chinese school of Chan Buddhism (Seon or Sŏn in Korea, Zen in Japan) with its different strands advocating different approaches to liberation: gradual learning and meditation or sudden enlightenment (or both paths simultaneously,

⁷ Translation by Alfreds Straumanis.

⁸ Translated by Daina Grosa.

as proposed by the Korean Buddhist monk Jinul (1158–1210), one must generally agree with Oliver Leaman’s very precise definition of Chan (Zen) Buddhism: “The Chan path to cultivation involves the practice of non-cultivation. The best way to attain enlightenment is to carry out one’s ordinary tasks without making any deliberate effort. This means that one manages to live naturally and avoids setting out to attain complicated ends through one’s activity. If activity manages to have no further effects, then one’s accumulation of karma will become exhausted and liberation possible” (Leaman, 1999, p. 286). From this point of view, Rainis’ poem “Apaļš cilvēks” (Round Man) in the collection “Gals un sākums” would rather be a partial reflection of Chan (Zen) Buddhism:

“Filled with people’s emotions

Is the lap of my soul,

Nothing from my loved ones

Have I hidden.

I have loved more fiercely,

Though I have also scorned,

My fascination has always been

With the moment of greatness.”

(Rainis, 1977, p. 269)⁹

Only with the daily training of life, Rainis in his philosophy does not accept the destination as “peace.” Having been introduced to the ethical teachings and philosophy of Buddhism, Rainis develops his ideas further, his doctrine being rather a constant increase of entropy, to preserve and sustain life in the universe, while understanding that while “... humans might be able to contemplate infinity, we can only do so in a finite number of ways. The universe might be infinite, but we are not” (Seife, 2006, p. 262). Instead, we can pass on the information we have accumulated through our experiences to further evolution, through our companions, our children, members of society who are ready to take on our intellectual baggage. All this is vividly expressed in his poetry and dramas. Rainis deliberately treats this experience with all its fears, passions, will, hopes, in a way that is completely contrary to how it is interpreted in Hinduism and Buddhism, as a negative mental state (Kleśhas (Sanskrit: क्लेश)) that clouds the mind causing suffering and is considered as the roots of Saṃsāra. The rebirth itself is seen by Rainis not as a continuation of suffering but as a continuation of spiritual experience. He sees the Yogācāra concept of the tenet of ālaya-vijñāna (Sanskrit: आलयवज्ज्ञान), or “storehouse consciousness”, which should be freed of all unnecessary affects in order to connect with “ultimate reality” (Taivāne, 2005, p. 147) rather as the ultimate life energy itself, which should not be stopped but continued. For Rainis, stopping the emotional experience of life (with all its “mistakes”) is the death he fears most. This idea can best be substantiated by reading Rainis’ notes on the Buddhacharita: “... the journey of souls, not to other worlds, but rebirth here on earth, is but the birth of a son, the son is the continuation of the father, renewed, expanded by his mother’s karma; this rebirth is also advancement,

⁹ Translated by Daina Grosa.

not just one, but two karmas.¹⁰ The journey of souls is nothing but constant advancement ... Suffering in life is the same as happiness, it is hard to draw the line, ... Why attempt to voluntarily induce eternal peace which comes to every individual through death anyway. ... For the Buddha it is the passing on of the old, taking it over, and that is his mistake. Even without his voluntary death, his efforts, we arrive at nirvana, where the individual ceases to exist, no consciousness, nothingness, peace. The Buddha wants to escape the ghost, rebirth, which does not exist at all.” (Rainis, 1986, p. 146). Rainis understands Buddhism very accurately as a continuation of Hinduism, which developed in opposition to Hindusim, but analogous to the heritage of the Old Testament in Christianity, Buddhism carries forward some of the views of Hindusim: “The Buddha retains the old demonology, just as the New Testament retains the Old. The old gods remain, ... only a new path is shown, ... there it was altruism¹¹, here it is a higher philosophy, death.¹²” (Rainis, 1986, p. 146). Later, in 1908, while working on his drama “Īliņš”, which is full of various ideas but unfortunately unfinished, Rainis writes: “All the questions in philosophy and religion, which revolve so much around the question of life after death, would be settled, ... that death should not be regarded as something evil, ... So, a long life ending in a pleasant, conscious and desired death is the decider of all questions, ..., a long life is the immortality of the soul, is nirvana. ... all previous philosophies and religions wrongly make the question of death as the main issue. It should be about life. We are interested in life, not in death, ...” (Viese, 1982, pp. 267–268).

These insights are similar to the thoughts of Rainis’ great contemporary, the Riga-born Baltic German chemist and philosopher Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932), outlined in his book “Monistic Sunday sermons” (“Monistische Sonntagspredigten”) (1911) (Ostwald, 1911). In the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House at 30 Baznīcas Street, we see that he has carefully underlined in pencil all the places that are of interest to him in the available literature on the concepts and explanations of Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, the explanation of the concepts of karma and nirvana in the German translation of the Buddhacharita (Schultze, 1894, pp. 288–289), the text on the spiritual union with Brahman (Sanskrit: ब्रह्मन्)¹³ as a way of obtaining eternal peace in the German translation of 1907 of the “Bhagavad Gita”, etc. (Hartmann, 1907, p. 142). Rainis has also carefully studied the “Buddhist Catechism” (1881) by the famous American theosophist and revivalist of Buddhism in Sri Lanka – Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), translated by Augusts Deglavs and published in Riga in 1908 (Olkots, 1908). However, Rainis has subjected everything he has read to his own judgement on every issue. Rainis’ perception of the past is very philosophically sound, and it does not coincide with the approach in the Eastern European national myths of his time (Estonian, Latvian), which based everything on the demonisation of hundreds of years of past oppression, looking for

¹⁰ This quote is also mentioned by S. Viese. See: Viese, 1982, p. 162.

¹¹ Meant: in Hindusim.

¹² Meant: in Buddhism.

¹³ Cosmic consciousness, the ultimate goal of human life and spiritual thoughts, ultimate reality (an “absolute, and independent of any cause but itself”) (Paudyal, 2020, pp. 59–60).

a “golden age” before “the coming of the foreign invaders” and “the bright future”. Rainis believed that “... there is no real essence to the past except in our consciousness. The past is 0, just as this symbol it expresses only the non-existent. The past is only in our days, by itself it does not exist; it exists only insofar as it is still working, moving on within us, within the present, within the future. The past exists only insofar as it denies its own essence – peace, immutability, nothingness; it exists insofar as it denies itself, so there is no past: there is only movement and life” (Rainis, 1986, p. 429). In a unique way, this notion of Rainis is very similar to the theory of the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, which as a God-equivalent power recognised the One Common Mind as the absolutely good origin of all that exists (Torchinov, 2005, p. 175). In its original understanding of epistemology, this school, like solipsism in Western philosophy (a theory that our own existence is the only thing that is real or that can be known), held that the mind is in fact the only reality, consisting of a stream of different ideas, while our bodies and other objects only appear to be real, they are, in fact, just ideas of the mind (Chatterjee & Datta, 1948, p. 169). In the Russian translation of Allan Menzies’ “The History of Religion”, which can be found in the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House, we can read the following explanation of the Buddhist view of human thinking: “Who we are is only the result of our thinking; our whole being consists only of our thinking. If a person thinks or speaks with pure intention – he is always followed by happiness, which does not leave him” (Menzis, 1905, p. 281). Although one cannot fully agree with Rainis’ evaluation of Vedānta (Sanskrit: वेदान्त), if we look purely from a philosophical point of view, leaving aside immersion into the earliest sacred literature of ancient India, covering the Upanishads, the Vedānta Sūtras and the Bhagavad Gītā, there are paradoxically many similarities in Rainis’ views with those of Śaṅkara, the most prominent Vedānta philosopher (700?–750?), who believed that everything in this world is “... dependent on ... pure existence (brahman)... Brahman is the nondual ground underlying all objects, the single foundation ... on which the entire universe depends. All objects point back to this independent ground and possess no existence apart from it” (Dalal, 2021). One can fully agree with Neil Dalal, that “Śaṅkara argues that this foundational existence ... is self-established, irreducible, immutable, and free of space, time, and causation. ... His philosophical adversaries pejoratively labelled him as ... ‘one who argues the world is illusory (māyā)’. While this epithet is not exactly incorrect, it misrepresents his intention as centered on world negation, and ignores the fact that he infrequently uses the term “māyā” ... Śaṅkara places great emphasis on moral virtues and acting for the good of the world ... Furthermore, the world is a pedagogical necessity ... His goal is not to negate the axiological value of the world and intersubjective life ... Rather, his focus is simply brahman. The world is a dependent effect of brahman and therefore not other than brahman, and brahman is not a cosmogonic construction. This metaphysical view possesses epistemic value for liberation, along with its positive psychological byproducts such as cessation of suffering and the deepest happiness” (Dalal, 2021).

In a way the brahman is symbolised by Spīdola in the famous drama by Rainis – “Uguns un nakts”. Recalling her self-description, where Spīdola tries to open the simple,

narrow mind of Lāčplēsis to the diversity of the world, despite the single cause of this diversity:

“I am fleeting, I am like the sun,
My thousand colors undulate on earth.
Fulfilled within me, all things glow, take life –
Al that’s green on earth or shines in heaven
Or in dank wombs is still fermenting.
I am the cosmic source of beauty:
I give from and shape to everything.
Every being through my lens evolves
To realize itself, and in ornate scenes
I make the grass green, the flowers red,
And swarms of fireflies glow at night.
I make your eyes so blue
As two deep wells that reflect me
Wide in wonder.”

(Transl.: Straumanis, 1986, p. 49;
original: Rainis, 1980, p. 243)

Interestingly, Rainis uses the concept of non-existence to signify a reflection of everything, which uniquely reminds us of the already-mentioned concepts of emptiness and nothingness which are extremely important in Eastern as well as Western spiritual traditions. Emptiness as a doctrinal term is already evident in the Theravāda school of Buddhism (adj. *suñña*; noun *suññata*), exclusively to the doctrine of *anatta* (non-self, Pali: *अस्मिन्नि*), by which the unsubstantiality of all phenomena was understood; that is, visual objects, mind-objects, corporeality, consciousness, etc. are empty of self; void of permanency and of anything lasting, eternal or immutable (Thera, 2011, p. 205). However, the founder of the famous Mādhyamika school of Buddhism, Nāgārjuna (c. 150–c. 250 CE), developed the *Śūnyatā* (Sanskrit: शून्यता) concept of emptiness as a doctrine, called *Śūnyavāda* (Sanskrit: शून्यवाद), which has greatly influenced Buddhist philosophy and does not simply mean recognition of the “dependent arising” of all phenomena (Kalupahana, 1999, p. 86) – that all things are “empty” because they do not have their own independent identity. Nāgārjuna’s emptiness means something else, namely, that because nothing can exist without a true nature, and indeed nothing has a true nature, then that is exactly why things are empty – they do not exist at all (Shulman, 2009, pp. 150–151). And from this perspective, the world is conditioned by an act of our creative imagination (Shulman, 2009, p. 159). Rainis’ absolute conviction about the capacity of man – and moreover of humanity – to shape his own world through creative activity can be partly attributed to the influence of Nagarjuna’s theory. Rainis learnt about it indirectly by reading various kinds of literature explaining Buddhism. It is worth noting that “...the fact that Nāgārjuna understands reality to be conditioned by subjectivity demands a great degree of moral responsibility of people, since man naturally conditions and creates his own reality. According to this view, morality is not only validated but

enforced. The argument could be made that only in an empty world is morality understood to be not only a necessary, but even a constitutional force” (Shulman, 2009, p. 162). In any case, the interpretation of the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism had begun in Europe (recalling the works of I. J. Schmidt, see above). At the same time, the notion of non-existence in the image of Spīdola also suggests an interpretation of the notion of nothingness, so fundamental in Taoism, as the basis of all that exists, which manifests itself vividly in the work traditionally associated with Laozi (老子) (trad. 6th century BC – trad. 5th century BC), *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), recalling chapter 11:

“Thirty spokes converge in a nave; just because of its nothingness (void) the usefulness of the cart exists. Molded clay forms a vessel; just because of its nothingness (hollowness) the usefulness of the utensil exists. Doors and windows are cut in a house; just because of their nothingness (emptiness) the usefulness of the house exists. Therefore, profit from which exists and utilize that which is absent” (Lin, 1977, p. 19).

Rainis’ continued interest in the philosophy of ancient China is evidenced by the wide range of literature devoted to the subject in the library at The Rainis and Aspazija House at 30 Baznīcas Street, which is represented by various German-language publications from the 1920s, including the German edition of “Tao Te Ching”, published in 1922.¹⁴ But this collection of literature may be indirect evidence of Rainis’ continued interest in the subject, which certainly began much earlier. Over time, Rainis’ approach to Taoist philosophy increases in popularity, as evidenced by the introduction to the collection of poems “Mēness meitiņa” (1925), where he refers to a story which states that Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi (莊子) (4th century BC) once dreamed he was a butterfly, flitting and fluttering around, happy, and doing as he pleased. As a butterfly, he did not know he was Zhuang Zhou (Rainis, 1978, p. 389).

Conclusions

Contact with the heritage of Buddhist, Hindu and partly Taoist ideas undoubtedly played an extremely important role in Rainis’ worldview and oeuvre. But as a completely original thinker, Rainis integrated them into his own worldview and used them to interpret his own world outlook. He offers his own spiritual-philosophical-social doctrine, which can also be qualified as a new religion.

According to Rainis, as an active creative force of ideas – in his creative imagination – man can create, harmonize and sustain not only himself and society, but also the universe, evolving from a creature of the universe to a creator. Rainis sees nirvana in man’s own active agency, in the constant maintenance of a spiritual renaissance, not in a withdrawal from this reality as traditionally proposed by Buddhism (which in Rainis’ view is not possible at all), or in eliminating Saṃsāra. On the contrary, Rainis views the concept of Saṃsāra positively, believing that one should integrate oneself into the processes of nature, shaping them according to one’s own spiritual, and therefore

¹⁴ Tao Te King. Deutsch von F. Fiedler. Hrsg. von Gustav Wyneken. Hannover, Verlag: Steegemann, 1922.

social and material, desires. Not the escapism of Buddhism or the projection onto God, the transcendental, characteristic of Western Christianity, but the active renewal of consciousness and thereby the renewal of matter as a form of spiritual joy is Rainis' goal, using this constant renewal also to improve and develop the social needs of science and society, and accumulating certain knowledge as a result of which he also achieves biological immortality. The extreme importance of Buddhism in Rainis' worldview is due to its skeptical attitude towards all man-made theoretical constructions that interfere with the true understanding of reality that Rainis so aspired to. However, Rainis turns the goal proposed by Buddhism 180 degrees in the opposite direction: from "peace" to "unrest" being a constant sustainer of life in the individual, in society and in the universe. In the context of the Asian material, Rainis' ideas can be illuminated by interpreting them in parallel with the characteristics of the relevant sources, while delving deeper into the various concepts that had a direct influence on the evolution of his philosophical and social views. This would provide school and university students with both a deeper understanding of the worldview of this universal-minded Latvian thinker and with training in the methodology of intercultural studies.

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