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Meaningful Contexts of Interpretation of Transpersonal Experience by Representatives of the Eastern Spiritual Practices in Ukraine



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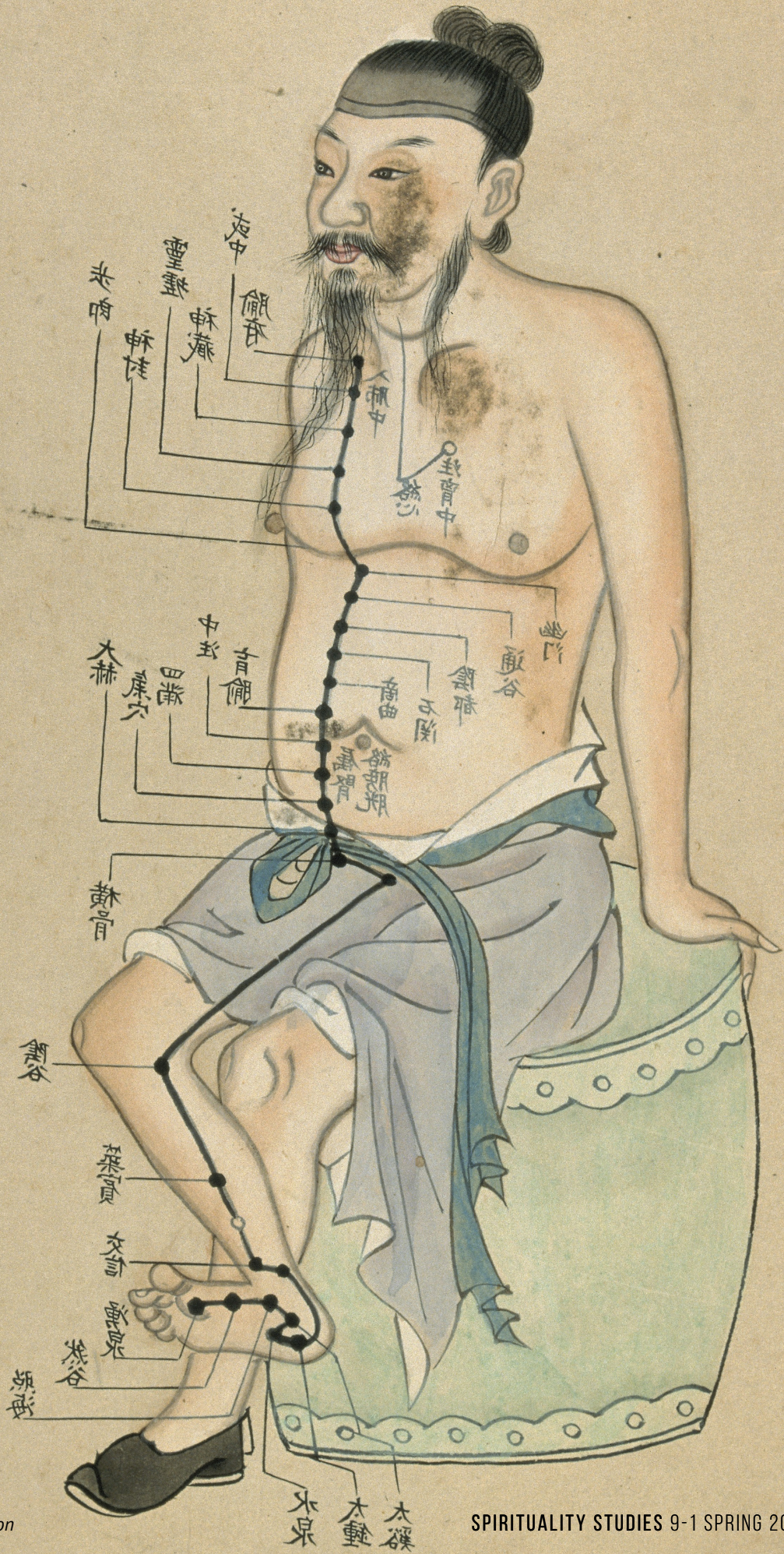
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The article explores the lives of individuals who practice Eastern spiritual practices in modern society, such as yoga, qigong, reiki, and others. The subject of this article is the problem of interpreting transpersonal experiences by those who practice Eastern spiritual practices in Ukraine. Based on a qualitative sociological study using the tactics of life history and the method of narrative interviews (29 interviews), the author proposes a classification of meaningful contexts for interpreting transpersonal experiences. The author identifies several meaningful contexts, including the reasoning meaningful context, adventure meaningful context, cognitive meaningful context, eudaimonic meaningful context, the meaningful context of the impossibility of articulation, epiphenomenal meaningful context, the meaningful context of reward, and the compensatory meaningful context of the interpretation of transpersonal experiences. This typology provides a deeper understanding of the lives of individuals who practice Eastern spiritual practices and may help formulate hypotheses regarding their increasing popularity.

以少氣習經 式五十四穴



↑ Qigong exercise to treat involuntary seminal emission

1 Introduction

In modern individualistic societies, people are increasingly concerned with whom they want to become, what they aspire to achieve, and which meanings and ideas they want to implement. Religious and ideal pluralism has weakened the dependence of religious affiliation on objective structures of society. As a result, individuals face the choice of their life path regarding culture, ideals, and faith, choosing traditional and non-traditional ways of generating meaning. According to Ipsos' survey in 2010, 13% of French practice relaxing exercises such as yoga, meditation, or sophrology [1]. In a research conducted by the Department of Sociology of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University in 2009 involving students, 48% of the students gave a positive answer to the question, *Do you follow any religion?* Out of the respondents, 35% responded negatively, and 17% answered, *No, but I do spiritual practices.* According to the data from the research performed in 2015, 18,7% of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University students practice Eastern spiritual practices [2].

It is undeniable that the spiritual situation, redefining the meaning of "choice," which turns from possibility to necessity (Berger 1979, 11), actualizes the study of Eastern spiritual practices (e.g., yoga, qigong, reiki) that generate transpersonal experiences. Why have Eastern spiritual practices gained popularity in modern society? What do they have that traditional ecclesiastic religiosity lacks? And finally, how has the life of those who turned to them changed? In our previous works, we have studied certain aspects of including Eastern spiritual practices in an individual's life (Zubariev 2018, 141–193). However, the answer to these questions would be incomplete without addressing the problem of transpersonal experiences. Due to Eastern spiritual practices being accessible to the large public translator of forms of culture of psychical activity (Abaev 1983), they often aim to achieve a transpersonal experience.

2 Theoretical Basis

It should be noted that Eastern religions and psycho-techniques are not the only sources of transpersonal experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James expresses an opinion that there is some kind of sense of reality in human consciousness, which is "more deep and more general than any of the special and particular" (James 1917, 46), which is a prerequisite of mystical experience. This primary sense of reality is evidenced by hallucinations, for example, when a person suddenly feels someone's presence around them, which any of the organs of senses cannot perceive. William James tries to demonstrate his thesis wide by giving examples of no relation to the sphere of religiosity. If we talk about religious feelings, many people possess the objects of their belief "in the form of quasi-sensible realities directly apprehended" (James 1917, 51).

James emphasises mysticism and argues that the origin of all religions must be sought in mystical states of consciousness. Although James admits that the constitution of his soul precludes the possibility of experiencing mystical states, their reality is confirmed by the testimony of many other people. There are four criteria for mystical experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. Ineffability is one of the most precise criteria, as it is difficult to describe their feelings in words that fully convey their experience. They are convinced that only someone who has had a similar experience can understand them. The noetic quality means that mystical states of consciousness are a special form of cognition with enormous significance for human life; it is a revelation that one cannot forget for the rest of their day. Mystical states of consciousness typically last from half an hour to two hours and then give way to everyday consciousness. When experiencing a mystical state, a person usually cannot make voluntary decisions and appears to be under the influence of a higher power. The first two criteria are the most important, and James provides examples of mystical experiences in yoga, Buddhism, and Sufism (James 1917, 286–325).

There is no doubt that James's work is of enormous importance in studying mystical states of consciousness, as he conceptualized them as a distinctly human phenomenon. However, James did not focus on Western religions and spiritual practices as cultural forms that directly translate knowledge of psycho-techniques – various ways to achieve transpersonal experiences (Torchinov 1998).

A classic work on the psychology of Eastern religions and philosophies is the book *Yoga and the West* by the Swiss psy-

choanalyst Carl Gustav Jung. Jung points out that in the West, the spiritual situation is characterized by a strict distinction between science and faith, while yoga differs significantly from what it is in the East. What makes yoga attractive to Europeans? According to C. G. Jung, there are several reasons: yoga appears as a method that unites scientific and religious approaches; the depth of Indian philosophy and the possibility of obtaining controlled experience that is in line with “scientificity” for a European; and the great possibilities that yoga is believed to offer. However, yoga is a method of mental hygiene that can only be effective with the philosophy that is seamlessly bound to it. A westerner tends to differentiate between body and soul, science and faith, while they make a harmonious unity for an Indian (Jung 1994, 38–39). This is why Jung takes a critical approach to the possibilities of yoga used by Europeans.

Jung conducted an in-depth study of the place of transpersonal experience in Eastern religiosity in his writing *On the Psychology of Eastern Meditation*. Reflecting on the specific character of Indian thinking, he writes that this way of thinking and its images are embodied in the sensory world but cannot be deduced from it. These images are supersensible and refer to another world, a potential reality that can change its ontological status at any moment, and therefore, the ontological status of the sensory world. In fact, the goal of yoga is to master the powers that bind a person to this world (Jung 1994, 8–10). Jung studied the peculiarities of the mental processes of yoga based on fragments from the *Amitāyur Buddha Dhyāna Sūtra*, illustrating the process of achieving transpersonal experience, which is fundamentally different from, say, night dreams. In a dream, a person does not act according to an aim or project, while meditation contemplates that a new reality is created by the psyche actively and consciously. Jung’s analysis of the treatise is based on the assumption of the existence of the collective unconscious (Jung 1994, 11–32).

The American psychologist and psychiatrist Stanislav Grof’s studies are dedicated to altered states of consciousness, which lie beyond the realms of psychology, religion, and orientalism. Grof’s research specifically focuses on altered states of consciousness resulting from psychedelics, particularly LSD. In his work, *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research*, Grof identifies four basic levels of LSD-induced experiences, each representing a realm of the human unconscious: abstract and aesthetic experiences, psychodynamic experiences, perinatal experiences, and transpersonal experiences (Grof 1976, 25–34).

Transpersonal experiences, according to Grof, are “*experiences involving an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and beyond the limitations of time and/or space*” (Grof 1998, 155). Stanislav Grof further distinguishes two categories of transpersonal experiences: experiential extension within the framework of “objective reality” and experiential extension beyond the framework of “objective reality”. The former encompasses experiences such as the temporal and spatial extension of consciousness, including experiences of the embryo and fetus, ancestors, collective and race experiences, phylogenic experiences, and more. The latter encompasses experiences such as communication with superhuman spiritual creatures, experiences in other worlds and communication with their inhabitants, archetypal experiences and complex mythological episodes, communication with various deities, intuitive understanding of universal symbols, activation of chakras, and spiritualistic and mediumistic experiences (Grof 1998, 158–204).

Grof’s classification represents a mapping of the unconscious human experience as he moves from observing individual phenomena during LSD sessions to constructing a theoretical model that encompasses each phenomenon. However, it should be noted that these studies are not exhaustive. Grof fails to acknowledge that internal experience only becomes accessible and understandable through symbolic articulation, that is, through discourse. LSD therapy is one of many discourses in which such articulation is possible.

Evgeny Torchinov’s writing, *Religii mira: opyt zapredelnogo* (En. *World Religions: Experience of the Transcendent*), represents a unique synthesis of research in religious studies and transpersonal psychology. Torchinov agrees with William James that religious experience is a prerequisite for any religion but presents a counter-thesis of the uniformity of religious experience. Evgeny Torchinov claims that religious experiences expressed in various traditions can be attributed to a certain level of the unconscious at which they were experienced (Torchinov 1998).

In sociological discourse, the phenomena of the supernatural and the holy are predominantly studied within the framework of the sociology of religion. According to Peter Berger in his work *The Heretical Imperative*, a crucial aspect of the supernatural, as against other finite provinces of meaning, is its radical quality (Berger 1979, 41). The world of the supernatural can turn from an enclave within the framework of the routine world into the reality par excellence, compared to which all the concerns of everyday life lose their meaning. As a religious experience of experiencing the supernatural threatens the stability of everyday life, a religious tradition

emerges to “tame” this experience and protect everyday reality from the uncontrolled ingress of the supernatural. Berger points out the reduction of authority of religious tradition in modern society and the increasing significance of religious experience unmediated by tradition (Berger 1979, 41–65).

Peter Berger was the first sociologist to address the issue of transpersonal experience and attempted to understand this phenomenon from a sociological perspective. Later, several authors discussed perspectives and directions of sociological research on transpersonal experience. Ken Wilber attempted to offer a holistic, complex methodological approach to spiritual phenomena, within which the transpersonal sociology of religion is justified (Wilber 2005, 57). Ralph Walsh and Frances Vaughan defined the subject of *transpersonal sociology* as the social dimensions, implications, expressions, and applications of transpersonal phenomena (Walsh and Vaughan 1993, 203). Robert Rominger and Howard Friedman (2013, 17) analyzed in detail the origin, development, and theories of transpersonal sociology.

Susan Greenwood (1990, 1995) played a special role in the institutionalization of transpersonal sociology. Comparing the concept of the *collective consciousness* by Émile Durkheim and the concept of the *collective unconscious* by Carl Gustav Jung, she concluded that these authors conceptualized the structures through which religion manifests itself. However, Durkheim focused on the external manifestations of religion and Jung on the internal. Greenwood proposed the concept of transpersonal sociology of religion, which has synthetic potential (Rominger and Friedman 2013, 20). The founding of the *Transpersonal Sociology Newsletter* is associated with Greenwood’s name. The last issue of this journal, dated back to 1997, contains the definition of transpersonal sociology as a discipline concerned with the study of the social dimensions of those human experiences traditionally called spiritual or religious. This includes the evolution of a sense of self, the evolution of society, and the understanding of consciousness as extending beyond traditional human knowledge (Rominger and Friedman 2013, 20–22).

Our understanding of this discipline is closer to the point of view of Roger Atchley (2009), who provides a comprehensive definition of transpersonal sociology as the study of groups and communities of people who share transpersonal states of consciousness and live in accord with such understandings (Rominger and Friedman 2013, 19).

Multiple modern authors have touched upon the problems of meditative experience in the context of spreading Eastern religions and spiritual practices in the West. Véronique Altglas

(2011), Silvia Ceccomori (2001), Elizabeth de Michelis (2004), Bernard de Backer (2002), David N. Kay (2004), Frédéric Lenoir (1999a, 1999b), Paul Magnin (2003), Thierry Mathé (2003), Éveline Micollier (1999, 2004), and David Palmer (2003) have studied yoga, Hindu traditions, the adaptation and transformation of Buddhism, and the transnationalization of qigong in European countries. However, despite the abundance of research in this field, researchers typically focus on various aspects of implementing Eastern religions and spiritual practices in the West, characterized by developed psycho-techniques and experience orientation.

This short review demonstrates that researchers use different concepts to refer to an individual’s special spiritual experience. William James uses the concept of *mystical states of consciousness*, which refers to mystical experiences characterized by four features: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. However, *mystical states of consciousness* is a term that is more appropriate for the European-Christian religious experience. The definition of William James emphasizes the experience of revelation or enlightenment, which is of paramount importance to a person. Nevertheless, people who practice Eastern spiritual practices, such as yoga or qigong, may perceive and evaluate their experiences somewhat differently. Peter Berger uses the term *supernatural* to refer to the *experience of the supernatural*, which is outside the logic and laws of this world. However, this view of the world is meaningless for Taoism, which does not recognize a division into *natural* and *supernatural*. Therefore, in this study, we use the concept of *transpersonal experiences* concept introduced by Stanislav Grof. These are experiences in which a person exits the usual boundaries of the ego, such as activation of chakras, identification with fauna and flora, and journeys among worlds.

Undoubtedly, sociology is interested in something other than transpersonal experiences as a phenomenon of the psyche, their essence, causes, or forms. These are the subject of other disciplines. Instead, it is important for sociology to examine how transpersonal experiences are part of individuals’ lives and are meaningful experiences. When an individual describes their transpersonal experience, the narrative almost always includes a description of the event itself and a certain interpretation that answers the question, *What does this experience mean to me in the context of my life?* Therefore, this study focuses on the meaningful contexts of interpreting transpersonal experiences by representatives of Eastern spiritual practices. The term *meaningful context* is used by the German sociologist Alfred Schütz. According to Schütz (2004, 774), meaningful experiences are included in a single meaningful context if they are constituted within polytheistically

structured acts into a synthesis of a higher order and can be embraced with one monothetic glance as a constituted unity [3].

By identifying the main meaningful contexts of the interpretation of transpersonal experiences, we can say much more about the reasons for the popularity of Eastern spiritual practices in modern society.

The concept of cultural form helps to define Eastern spiritual practices as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Iuliia Soroka (2010, 116) provides the following definition of the cultural form: *“It is the culture of group life, a set of historically changing rules of perception, judgment, and behavior of a specific social community (social-ethnic, social-political, social-territorial, social-class, etc.). In the structure of the cultural form, the external (presentational) side (clothes, rituals) and the internal side or doctrinal core are distinguished. It is also characterized by a specific moral and emotional mood, everyday clothing codes and symbols, a linguistic concept (jargon), and a special set of ‘mise-en-scene’ that outlines the cultural context of group life. The basis of a cultural form in the process of its formation is the social interest of the community of its bearers (social group, stratum, etc.)”*

According to our understanding, Eastern spiritual practices are cultural forms that have explicit sources from another culture to a greater or lesser degree, i.e., connections (in the form of borrowings, imitation, etc.) with one or a few religious and philosophical systems of the East – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism (in the terminology of Evgeny Torchinov, *religions of pure experience*) – which are significantly distanced from them (geographically, historically, and culturally) and widely spread in the West (Zubariev 2018, 125–126). As cultural forms, they are realized in the space of an individual.

Therefore, this article aims to build ideal-typical models of meaningful contexts in which individuals who practice Eastern spiritual practices understand their transpersonal experiences.

3 Method and Methodology

The tactic of sociological study implemented in this work is the life history. This qualitative sociological study involves obtaining as much information as possible about a person's life path and their subjective perception of their own life, allowing us to explore world manifestations and, therefore, to get closer to understanding how the world is experienced by those who practice Eastern spiritual practices.

The method used to gather sociological information is a narrative interview. It is believed that during an arbitrary story about one's life or its separate aspect, a person reveals the world's significance to them. The narrative acts as an objectification of this world in the text. In the narratology of the modern German researcher Fritz Schütze (1983, 283–293), this phenomenon is fixed in the principle of homology of life experience and narrative.

Interview procedure. At the outset of the interview, the participant is informed about the interview's purpose, including the principles of anonymity, the possibility of audio recording, and the limits of its further use. These details are dependent on the interviewee's motivation, the interview's duration, and its location. Following this, the interviewer presents the narrative impulse, which initiates the conversation. The narrative impulse is structured as follows: *We are interested in the life stories of people who practice Eastern spiritual practices. Please share the story of your life, including how and why you came to practice Eastern spiritual practices and everything that happened subsequently. We suggest beginning from the point where this topic became relevant for you (e.g., during childhood) and continuing to the present time. You can talk about anything that seems important to you, as everything is of interest to us.* Once the informant has completed their story, additional questions are asked. These are non-directive and are intended to clarify specific aspects of the story, as well as directive questions that seek to obtain specific factual information of interest to the research. These questions include a mandatory block and questions that arise from the informant's story. Among the mandatory questions, we ask, *Have you had any experiences with the transpersonal? If so, please tell us about them.* In some cases, we conduct a follow-up interview to obtain additional clarification.

Criteria for selecting interviewees. Concerning the selection criteria for our interviewees, there are several points to consider. Firstly, a crucial selection criterion for the interview was an individual's experience in oriental meditation. We sought representatives of Eastern spiritual practices who had been actively practicing for at least two years at the time of the interview. Notably, the presence of transpersonal experience was not a determinant for selecting informants; we needed to gain prior knowledge of the informants' transpersonal experiences. However, during the interviews, it became apparent that most of the informants had transpersonal experiences and could discuss them. Secondly, since we defined Eastern spiritual practices concerning their cultural connection to the religions of pure experience, it was important to have both those who practice Eastern spiritual practices rooted in Hinduism (such as the various types of yoga) and

those who practice Eastern spiritual practices with perceptible cultural connections to Buddhism (such as Zen-Buddhism) and Taoism (such as qigong) among the interviewees.

Formation of a sampling frame. The sampling frame was formed using the snowball sampling method, where one informant shares the contacts of acquaintances who practice Eastern spiritual practices, and they, in turn, share their contacts and so on.

To determine the number of interviews we used the information saturation threshold criterion to determine the number of interviews. The number of interviews is sufficient when each subsequent interview fails to provide new knowledge on the study topic. We also considered recommendations from researchers who reconstructed the sample size in a phenomenological study. John Ward Creswell recommends five to twenty-five interviews, while Janice M. Morse suggests six interviews (Zubariev 2018, 147).

Thus, we conducted twenty-nine narrative interviews (each lasting at least one hour) with individuals practicing Eastern spiritual practices in Kharkiv from 2012 to 2015, which was sufficient for building an empirical typology. Participants included representatives from organizations such as the Kharkiv Center of Indian School of Reiki, Maharaja Yoga Center, Kharkiv Organization Zhong Yuan Qigong, Qigong School of Mantak Chia, Patanjali International Yoga Foundation (Vajra Yoga Studio), Shantaram Yoga Studio, Shanti Yoga Studio, Vostok Studio, Kharkiv Society of Sahaja-Yoga, Kharkiv Diamond Way Buddhist Center within the Karma Kagyu lineage, Roman Dolya Center of Self-Cognition, Wuwei School of Psychology, Yoga School House of Sun, School of Kundalini Yoga (SOLAR Center), and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Data analysis. The data analysis involved two qualitatively different stages of working with the text material. Firstly, we performed primary text reading, where we singled out sequences according to the topical principle, applied the procedures of “thick description” (Denzin 1989, 83), and performed primary coding and classification (Wolcott 1994, 23–29). At this stage, we read transcripts of twenty-nine interviews and singled out text fragments in which informants described their transpersonal experiences. Another primary coding was applied to these fragments, and each fragment received one or several codes that disclosed the meaning assigned by the informants to their transpersonal experiences. Examples of codes included “self-understanding”, “feeling of happiness”, “euphoric state”, “confirmation of existence of energy”, “support in difficult moments”, “experience of another reality”,

and so on. We then classified fragments that received similar codes accordingly, grouping them into categories such as “transpersonal experience and perception”. As a result of this stage, we identified and classified fragments of narrative interviews in which informants talked about their transpersonal experiences. In the second stage, we focused on defining the meanings that informants assigned to their transpersonal experiences. We asked ourselves what these experiences meant to the informants in the context of their lives. At this stage, we formulated a typology of meaningful contexts for interpreting transpersonal experiences by the representatives of Eastern spiritual practices.

The study limitations. The study was carried out using qualitative methods of sociological research, namely the life history tactics. Unlike quantitative methods, which involve the generalization of data obtained by studying the common characteristics of the sample population, qualitative methods are aimed at studying the unique life experience. Thus, the analysis of twenty-nine narrative interviews with representatives of Eastern spiritual practices of the city of Kharkiv allowed to outline an empirical typology that is not universally significant and has cultural, social, religious and geographical limitations. We acknowledge that there are probably other meaningful contexts of interpretation of transpersonal experiences that have not been identified within this study. For example, one can assume that there are individuals who had transpersonal experiences with negative effects (despair, sadness, fear), and eventually abandoned spirituality.

It should also be noted that we do not question the veracity of the interviewees’ accounts of transpersonal experiences and do not set out to prove or disprove the existence of the respondents’ experiences. Using the methodological technique of phenomenological reduction, we take this issue “out of the brackets” for this study.

4 Interpretation of Research Findings and Discussion

We have identified the first ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience, which includes meaningful contexts in which transpersonal experiences are interpreted by informants as arguments corroborating certain phenomena, processes, and reality. Several subcategories within the framework of this ideal-typical model can be identified, as transpersonal experience can be interpreted as: a) corroboration of the health-improving effect of “energy” on the physical body; b) evidence of the fact that psychological problems,

“clamps”, “blocks”, etc., are being worked on; c) corroboration of the reality of the supernatural, such as “energy”, “chakras”, “other worlds”; d) corroboration of the reality of contactless diagnostics, the possibility to feel human “energy” and “biofield” from a distance; e) corroboration of achieving a certain level in “spiritual practice” and “spiritual development” [4].

Here is how one of our informants describes her transpersonal experiences, which became proof of the existence of “energy” and one of the reasons for her to turn to Eastern spiritual practices:

For the first time in my life I felt these energies, that our Universe consist of a certain type of substance. Transcendent energy, energy of light, energy of fog can be used to influence the [note: body] [5]. The essence of this practice was to imagine a shining ball in the area of the head over the third eye and to pull this ball of energy inside... This is the most harmless practice proposed by Mantak Chia... I felt energy, I realized that it exists. And the energy passed through the head, filled the head, the state was very good... I feel the heart filling to the fullest, and I say 'I have enough'. I understand that I cannot stop this flow. I fainted, fell, hit with my head against door handle heavily. Afterwards I laid a while, a few moments later I got up, I was so happy that my family did not notice this incident because they were watching TV. I closed the book and said: 'I realized that this exists and I am waiting for the teacher.'
– Mariia, 50 years old, Kharkiv Organization Zhong Yuan Qigong [6].

Several issues attract attention in this passage. Firstly, the informant tells us about her transpersonal experience, which she received at the beginning of her turning to Eastern spiritual practices. She uses the concept of the worldview, which she internalized significantly later. Mantak Chia has not disclosed the idea of three types of “energy” noted in the narrative; this is an element of the doctrinal nucleus of the cultural form of Zhong Yuan Qigong, an Eastern spiritual practice that the informant has been practicing when we took the interview. Therefore, we have reinterpreted previous experience given the probability structure, which is significant at present [7]. Secondly, transpersonal experiences are described as experiences at the border of the everyday life-world and its structures. The informant recalls that when she was practicing, her family watched TV, representing the fragment’s routine and cognitive style. Thirdly, the informant highlights several times that the experience made her understand that *these energies exist*. Here, transpersonal experiences act as symptoms of another reality. Suppose we understand the symptoms as the object or a situation, which

presence points at the presence of other objects and situations. In contrast, assurance in the existence of the former is understood as a reason for the latter’s existence (Schütz 2004, 829). In that case, transpersonal experiences can be considered symptoms of another reality.

Therefore, all the fragments of narrative within interviews in which the informants understand transpersonal experiences as reasons for assurance in something else usually in the presence of some “other reality,” (whatever it may be and howsoever it should be represented) are attributed to the first ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience – the reasoning meaningful context.

The second ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience unifies narrative fragments in which this experience is described as an adventure. Within the framework of this model, we have identified the following subcategories: a) vision of other worlds; b) meetings with teachers; c) meetings with supernatural creatures. According to Peter Berger, the world that opens in the supernatural experience is often an inhabited world, and meeting its “inhabitants” becomes an essential aspect of this experience (Berger 1979, 218). The differentiated subcategories seem to be a good example of this. According to Stanislav Grof, such experiences can be classified as a widening of experiences beyond “objective reality”. One of our informants describes such an experience:

On day three to four, we started practicing silence, we didn't talk to each other. It was a bit difficult on the first day, but on day two and three we entered this silence, that we could understand what we want from each other at first sight. We sit and eat nuts. Suddenly, I see a small leshy looking at us. Then we resumed talking, it was at the end of our visit. I tell T., 'Can you see it?', she answers, 'I can't see anything'. In a couple of minutes, I can see that that small creature brings another one. They stood a while looking at us and left. It brought the whole family: grandmother, grandfather etc. I could see it. All were standing and looking. I told 'T., we should have come to an agreement with the forest dwellers. I don't know how to come to agreement.' It was so that I watched their reaction and T. was coming to agreement with them. In the end, we arranged that we don't make a fire and sit in silence.

– Bohdan, 40 years old, Kharkiv Center of Indian School of Reiki, Zhong Yuan Qigong.

This is a narrative within a narrative, where the protagonist narrates about life and its characters while an eventful and complete story about the world of Eastern spiritual practice

unfolds. The story features a hero, other characters, a certain plotline with an introduction, climax, and conclusion, as well as a description of the setting and nature [8]. The hero is the author-informant himself, and the other characters are his colleague and leshys, who the narrator places on the same plane of existence. Unlike the world of night dreams, fantasy, and imagination analyzed by Alfred Schütz, the world of Eastern spiritual practice involves meaningful plans and aims, resulting in certain projects and work in both everyday life and the finite province of meaning. A phase character and limited freedom characterize activity in this world.

The events related by the informant can be defined as an adventure due to their special relation to the entirety of life. According to Georg Simmel, an adventure is a self-contained, whole, and self-absorbed fragment taken out of the context of life, with a definite beginning and end, defined by its internal form (Simmel 1996, 565). The meeting with leshys, as reflected in the informant's narration, fits this definition.

We assigned all narrative fragments in which informants interpret transpersonal experiences as an adventure in the meaningful context of interpretation of transpersonal experiences.

The third model of interpreting transpersonal experiences encompasses narrative fragments in which informants understand these experiences in the context of cognition. This includes the cognition of a) a new spiritual reality, divine, Good; b) oneself, one's soul, and body; c) other people and the world. Some informants focused on the positive aspects of the possibilities of cognition offered by Eastern spiritual practices, while others saw both positive and negative aspects. The following is an example of an informant's interpretation of their transpersonal experience from the perspective of the cognition of other people and the world:

I completed four stages and only at the fourth we were told that all the elements have spirits: water, fire, and so on... At the beginning, it is of course scary, but then you get used to it... You have different feelings when you enter the forest, look at water. Energies can be various, not only positive, spirits can be various... We are told that yes, there is that. Some people can see it. We were told how we could view at least some energies. Then I understood that I can see it, a bit. When you start talking to a person and you see a clumps of unpleasant color tearing from them, this is some kind... I realized that I'd better not do it, because

the life makes sick then. If you open these possibilities in a person, they are opened, but if it is difficult, they won't open.

– Maryna, 25 years old, Wuwei School of Psychology.

The cognitive meaningful context is not explicitly described in this passage, but it is crucial to the informant's interpretation of their transpersonal experience. All the experiences described involve cognition of the world, new feelings from observing natural phenomena, and other people from the point of view of their "energetics," a slang term common in most Eastern spiritual practices as part of the esoteric subculture. Evidently, the informant's narrative also has a subjective meaning of self-cognition. The cultural form of this trend provides its disciples with the necessary resources to understand and control new experiences, i.e., conceptual conditions of secondary socialization and alternation.

The fourth ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience encompasses narrations in which informants describe transpersonal experiences in the context of joyful, positive feelings and/or a feeling of happiness. Informants interpret their experiences in various ways, such as a) a state of absolute happiness, which is the aim of yoga; b) very pleasant feelings, "nirvana"; c) a state of constant happiness, equilibrium, the Creator, Brahma, Absolute; d) a feeling of light euphoria; e) "mental orgasm"; f) "big and all-embracing bliss, which is difficult to describe with words"; g) something that completely changes the state of consciousness, resulting in euphoria, bliss, or a feeling of intoxication and joy in living.

After meditation comes the state of intoxication, joy in living. I would call it nirvana as judged from what I've read of nirvana. But for sure, when you meditate, some kind of chemical processes occur in the body, hormones, endorphins etc. are produced. You feel how you love this world. I had pretty lot of such experiences in my life. Plus, I have also practiced lucid dreaming. But I can't say to what extent this is the experience of irrational or just interesting cartoons I am watching, when I order them. As a whole, I like this topic and rudely speaking I enjoy it. I start understanding that everything is not that easy in this world, as our science knows... Or just a lot of things depend on our psychics. If our psychics is happy, then the body feels joy in living and everything goes right. To tell the truth, I don't care what the catch is, it is important that it works. The same is with lucid dreaming. What can I say? I just like it. They gave me additional evidence of that, yes, it's cool that I do that, I'm not going to give it up.

– Yaroslava, 30 years old, Wuwei School of Psychology.

Informants describe transpersonal experiences as moments of pleasure, joy, and delight, which make it worthwhile to continue practicing. This point of view is typical of the eudaimonic meaningful context in which informants understand transpersonal experiences. The psychological and biological topics are more prominent in narratives where the eudaimonic meaningful context prevails, except for interviews with representatives of Eastern spiritual practices belonging to new religious organizations, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and Sahaja Yoga.

The fifth ideal-typical model for interpreting transpersonal experiences combines fragments of interviews where informants acknowledge the impossibility of expressing their experience. We identified the following subcategories: a) deeply personal experiences that are difficult to articulate, b) feelings that cannot be communicated to someone who has never experienced them, and c) states that cannot be described.

An example of a meaningful context in which transpersonal experiences are understood as inexpressible is when an informant acknowledges that their narration lacks a description of their experience. However, they still confess to the impossibility of articulating it.

There are different respiratory practices. There is such practice as Sukshma-Vyayama. These feelings are difficult, and impossible to describe, they can only be discussed with a person, who has also experienced them.

– Verinika, 20 years old, Pantajali International Yoga Foundation, Vajra Yoga Studio.

Some states that I experienced in practice, yes, they were, but I can't describe them. You follow your body, you cross the borders, you see the world absolutely differently without opening the eyes. It is entirely different.

– Leonid, 32 years old, Pantajali International Yoga Foundation, Vajra Yoga Studio.

If an informant uses a meaningful context of the impossibility of articulation, the narration lacks a description of transpersonal experiences. However, such experiences can be present, but in one way or another, the informant confesses the impossibility of expressing their experience.

The sixth ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience unites fragments of narrations in which it is acknowledged that the experience is not the main thing. Here is what one of our informants, who practices yoga, said:

In its essence yoga nidra is a technique of deep sleep and lucid dreaming. During sleep out subtle body in our physical body, but it cannot be separated. During the sleep we can leave our body and travel in our subtle body. I have friends who have achieved that. During deep sleep sometimes I could get up from the bed, but this is difficult, because you either wake up, or feel that it is difficult to move. This is not that easy, you need practicing all the time... But this is not the final aim, the final aim is to achieve maximum concentration, control of your mind, body, soul. Traveling in subtle body, tantric sex are the secondary aims, they are not the main in Hatha Yoga.

– Vadym, 25 years old, Maharaja Yoga Center.

The above passage uses the epiphenomenal context of understanding transpersonal experience. Using this context, informants, as a rule, talk about their transpersonal experiences, which can be very different, but they point out that all these experiences and feelings are not the main thing, “kind of side effect.” It should be noted that to ascribe a narrative fragment to this ideal-typical model, it is not important what kind of transpersonal experiences the informant had. The connotation allowing the ascription of these experiences to epiphenomenal meaningful context is important.

The seventh ideal-typical model of the interpretation of transpersonal experiences unites cases in which informants perceive transpersonal experience as a reward or gift. It could be assumed that this model is more characteristic of the bearers of religious tradition, but we have also found it during our research:

Once I had a dream... I realize that I am in a totally different world, I have a feeling that here, in this world, I think more clearly, the colors, sounds are more distinct, the impressions are more vivid. This is a kind of world with other colors, and I clearly understand that I am in this world. It's not the one I used to. There were some figures in that dream. I thought, 'what is that?' Was it something supernatural that contacted me, noticed me? I could not explain it, until I found [note: descriptions] some kind of impressions of lucid dreaming and I realized, this is it, lucid dreaming! Or, once during body practices I had an experience, I felt I was like a tiger... These are two most vivid examples that present. Time passes, something happens, but they stay in the memory. They all are very pleasant; this is a kind of reward for something. And as an extension of own understanding of myself. Now, it is difficult to say, if it had an effect, then what it was? As if I can't find words.

– Mykyta, 48 years old, Qigong School of Mantak Chia.

The above passage contains not one, but several meaningful contexts, allowing the informant to interpret his experience. Here we see the cognitive meaningful context and the context of impossibility to articulate, which we have analyzed and illustrated above with respective fragments from interviews. A new type of meaningful context is the meaningful context of reward, and this is the only interview in which transpersonal experience is analyzed with the use of this meaningful context.

It should be noted that the first experience described by the informant according to Stanislav Grof's classification is the extension of consciousness within the borders of objective reality, while the second one is the extension of consciousness beyond the borders of objective reality. They belong to totally different groups, but that does not prevent the informant from using them to interpret one and the same meaningful context, particularly the meaningful context of reward. This reward can hardly be understood as a gift in the meaning ascribed to this phenomenon by Marcel Mauss, as the anthropological interpretation of the gift foresees that the gift must not only be taken but must be obligatorily returned (Mauss 1923–1924, 41–60). The gift obtained by our informant should hardly be returned.

The eighth ideal-typical model of understanding transpersonal experience was named the compensatory meaningful context. Within the framework of this model, the fragments of narrations were united in which transpersonal experience was interpreted from the point of view of existential problems. We have singled out two subcategories of interpretation of transpersonal experiences within the framework of this ideal-typical model: 1) something that gave support in difficult times; 2) the answer to the question related to some problem. The cases when the transpersonal experience of an informant acquires compensatory meaning for another person, who was told of this experience, should be viewed separately [9]. One of our informants, who practices qigong, interprets her transpersonal experience in the compensatory meaningful context:

It was so hard, my mother in March, my father in August [note: died]. Next year on 1th April B. came. My mother died in March and he came in April. If he hadn't come... But he came and gave the task: until one o'clock in the night sit in a convenient position, put pillows round yourself, from 11 to 1 a.m. I will be sending you images. If you fall asleep during this time, and wake up again, keep sitting. I thought, well, Master, I should do that for sure. I put pillows around myself, sit and feel that I fell asleep. I wake up, few minutes past twelve, but he said 'until one

a.m.' I keep sitting and see on my palm – darkness, it is still dark, no light, no glares, I have a luminous sphere on my palm, so bright green, some kind of leaves, and there is a bird on a bush or on a tree. It is bluish-yellow, so beautiful. All the colors so bright, and the only part that is on my palm is glowing. And complete darkness around. Wow, what a flight of imagination! Then it disappeared, that was short. We came to the class and then B. asks who saw what... Mostly everyone saw B. I felt ashamed to talk. [note: but B. told] 'I was sending pictures of nature!' – Oleksandra, 44 years old, direction encoded.

It should be noted that the informant's narration contains many transpersonal experiences, most of which are interpreted in a compensatory meaningful context. In other words, they have psychotherapeutic meaning for the informant. The transpersonal experience explained in the above narration fragment is not directly linked to the previous tragic events in the life of the informant – the death of their mother and father – but is only perceived in connection with this event. The essence of transpersonal experiences seems open to interpretation, but their compensatory role as positive, light, and harmonious experiences is evident.

5 Conclusion

Let us summarize the results of the study. From the point of view of Schütz's phenomenology, transpersonal experiences of our informants are not routine experiences obtained in the world of Eastern spiritual practices, which is a finite province of meaning with a specific cognitive style. However, we found that transpersonal experiences become a part of the everyday lives of individuals who practice Eastern spiritual practices. It is not surprising as Bernhard Waldenfels correctly noted that routine is formed as a consequence of the process of "routinization", which is in turn constituted by an opposite process of "overcoming routine". Therefore, the borders between routine and non-routine remain mobile and depend on place, time, and culture (Waldenfels 1991, 40). It could be assumed that the experience of the world of Eastern spiritual practice, however unusual it may be, is also subject to the process of "routinization" and is integrated into everyday life as its enclave through telling of this experience.

We identified eight ideal-typical models of meaningful contexts of interpretation of transpersonal experience by individuals practicing Eastern spiritual practices: reasoning, adventure, cognitive, eudaimonic, a meaningful context of the impossibility of articulation, epiphenomenal, a meaningful context of a reward, and compensatory meaningful context.

As a whole, this typology is not an absolute surprise. Most meaningful contexts of interpretation seem to be general for understanding transpersonal experience within the framework of religion and Eastern spiritual practices, e.g., reasoning, cognitive, compensatory meaningful contexts, a meaningful context of the impossibility of articulation, a meaningful context of a reward. In contrast, such meaningful contexts as adventure, eudaimonic, and epiphenomenal are more likely to express the specificity of Eastern spiritual practices.

The variety of transpersonal experiences of informants does not lead to radical relativization and depreciation of the relevance of their routine lives. We did not find features of “radicality” in these experiences in the meaning ascribed to this notion by Peter Berger; we did not find a meaningful context that would be unambiguously connected with alternation, i.e., cardinal rethinking of life, a change in life trajectory, and division of life into “before” and “after” the experience, plenty of which examples could be found in the Christian religious tradition. Probably, it is connected with the fact that the transpersonal experience of people practicing Eastern spiritual practices is not sufficiently “radical.” However, we are inclined to think that the matter is rather in totally different modus of its perception and experience.

In his idea, Peter Berger argues that modern humans tend to trust their personal experience and tradition when it comes to an understanding of the existence of other realities, with the experience of the supernatural serving as the final argument (Berger 1979, 32–60). However, we encounter a different understanding of transpersonal experience when it comes to Eastern spiritual practices. It is acknowledged to exist but is constantly subjected to doubt and is continually redefined in the context of an individual’s life. Furthermore, it is expected that this experience will be followed by another, shedding light on something and allowing for further interpretation. As a result, Eastern spiritual practices offer unique conceptual and social conditions for legitimizing transpersonal experience that significantly differs from traditional church religiosity. However, these assumptions can only be verified or refuted through comparative studies of individuals practicing Eastern spiritual practices and those holding traditional church religiosity.

Therefore, in the context of socio-cultural changes, Eastern spiritual practices serve as a source of transpersonal experience in an individual’s life world that is not mediated by religious tradition. Additionally, different symbolic systems are utilized to interpret these experiences, making them accessi-

ble and variable, which is one of the reasons for the popularity of Eastern spiritual practices in the modern world.

Notes

- [1] The survey was conducted for Agence Thomas Mar-ko & Associés and Bion 3 from May 21 to May 27, 2010. The sample consisted of 105 individuals and is representative of the French population aged 15 years and older. ipsos.com.
- [2] The study was conducted by V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University and it involved 621 3rd and 4th year students of the institution.
- [3] Due to the article’s limited volume, we cannot delve deeply into Schützian explication of the notions of “essence” and “meaningful context” that were crystallized in polemics with Max Weber’s ideas.
- [4] We have enclosed in quotes the expressions that are elements of linguistic concepts of cultural forms of Eastern spiritual practices.
- [5] Qualitative methods allow the use of extensive interview fragments in academic text, but we have shortened them where possible without compromising meaning.
- [6] We have used pseudonyms in place of the informants’ names.
- [7] According to Alfred Schütz (2004, 698), “*the problem of meaning is the problem of time*”.
- [8] This perspective is possible when viewing narration as a world of aesthetic vision (Bakhtin 1990, 4–256).
- [9] A complete interview with Oleksandra is available in Zubarev 2018, 276–297.

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