

THE DIALECTICAL UNIFICATION OF CHRISTIANITY, MARXISM AND JAPANESE BUDDHISM: ON THE BASIS OF TANABE'S PHILOSOPHY OF NOTHINGNESS

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ABSTRACT. *Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962) was the successor of the philosophy of Kitarō Nishida and established various academic studies in Japan. Sometimes it is said that as the characteristic of the philosophy of Nishida is intuition of pure experience, it is Platonic. On the other hand, as the characteristic of the philosophy of Tanabe is dialectic, it is Aristotelian. A symbol of Tanabe is mutual negative mediation. The first result is the establishment of Logic of Species in terms of which he always thought dialectically of individual, species of race or the state and universality of humankind. That is his original theory of the state. The second result was to open the road of philosophy of science in Japan. His main contribution is to propose the integration of the theory of relativity and the quantum theory. The third result was the dialectical unification of religions and sciences. Especially, 'Christianity, Marxism and Japanese Buddhism – Anticipation of the Second Religious Reformation' is a very unique attempt. For a long time, it has not been received in the spot light, but now it is discussed by the international contributions of Emeritus Prof. Makoto Ozaki at Sanyo Gakuen University, Japan. From the view point of my original philosophy, 'A philosophical synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam' which was published by several international journals in various countries, I want to propose the difference between the philosophy of Tanabe and my philosophy. Through our confrontation, I wish to find a new road and thought. It is the opening of a new dimension by mutual negative mediation between the philosophy of Tanabe and my own.*

KEYWORDS: *Hajime Tanabe, Dialectic of Aristotle, Unification, Christianity, Marxism, Japanese Buddhism, Anticipation of The Second Religious Reformation, Makoto Ozaki, Mutual Negative Mediation*

Contents

Introduction

1. Characteristics of the Philosophy of Tanabe
2. Christianity, Marxism and Japanese Buddhism by the Philosophy of Tanabe
3. Christianity and Marxism
4. On Japanese Buddhism – Zen and Nianfo Buddhism
5. World Religions
6. A philosophical Synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam by Nakatomi

Conclusion

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Introduction

The relation between Nishida and Tanabe could be compared with the relation between Plato and Aristotle. That is adequate to both the philosophical contents and personal relationships. A famous *cliché*, “I respect Aristotle, but I love truth more than him.” Tanabe respects Nishida, but loves truth more than him. Although Tanabe succeeded in using the notion of nothingness of the philosophy of Nishida, nevertheless, he did not inherit the notion of pure experience. According to Prof. Makoto Ozaki, Tanabe hardly used the word experience. Far from that, it is very difficult to find the word in his numerous works [Makoto Ozaki, *Individuum, Society, Humankind: The Triadic Logic of Species according to Hajime Tanabe*, Brill, 2001, p.107]. Tanabe does not think in terms of experience but think in terms of logic. This is a profound difference between them [ibid. p.107]. The difference between them became clear as soon as Nishida retired as professor of Kyoto University. The successor, Prof. Tanabe, began to criticize strongly the theory of Nishida as the philosophy of Nishida was static and far from real society. For instance, Tanabe said to Nishida, “Master, therefore you cannot understand dialectic!” in a meeting with some disciples [Hisashi Ueda, *Continued Grand Father Kitarō Nishida*, Nansōsha, Tokyo, 1983, p.157]. That is similar to the situation between Aristotle and Plato. In a sense, it seems that the Japanese Philosophy is a model of the Greek Philosophy. But, this is not the case. This is the destiny of the development of philosophy. Affirmative and negative exist together. Our thought depends upon nothingness as negative word. For instance, we suppose that there is a dog. In this judgment, nothingness as negative word functions. This is not a cat. On the basis of the judgment, nothingness as negative word works. When the degree of opposition increases, affirmation and negation are emphasized. Then, ‘These’ and ‘Antithese’ appear and these are synthesized. This is the process of dialectic. This process is the principle of our thought. Tanabe’s criticism of Nishida and Aristotle’s of Plato occurred inevitably by the principle of thought. Only through the criticisms that are called as negative mediation by Tanabe, sciences can develop. The following is the dialectical development of Tanabe.

1. Characteristics of the Philosophy of Tanabe

As the sentences of Tanabe are long and classic, they are difficult to read. And because the philosophy of Tanabe is based on the philosophy of Nishida, only researchers who grasp the whole of philosophy of Nishida can undertake the study of the philosophy of Tanabe. Further the philosophy of Nishida is inspired by the European philosophy and Nishida’s style is complex. Therefore, the difficulty is triple and the researchers of the philosophy of Tanabe are few. The study of Tanabe was not widely spread. In recent years, Prof. Makoto Ozaki obtained Ph.D. from Leiden University, the Netherlands, and published two books² on Tanabe in Europe.

² Makoto Ozaki:

-Introduction to the Philosophy of Tanabe: According to the English Translation of the Seventh Chapter of the Demonstratio of Christianity, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich. Netherlands, 1990;

Sometimes he participated in international congresses and was engaged in research at Cambridge University, Munich University and Harvard University, and so on. The results of Prof. Ozaki and of Tanabe have been hardly spread in the world. This paper is inspired by his achievements³. If our research goes ahead, the true appreciation of Prof. Makoto Ozaki may arise.

On the study of Tanabe, I selected only some papers of Tanabe, for instance, ‘A proposal for a new methodology in theoretical physics’⁴, ‘My Philosophical view of Shōbōgenzō’ and ‘The Dialectical Unification of Christianity, Marxism and Japanese Buddhism’. Though my research is limited, I wish to expose my personal view.

The logic of Tanabe is both intuitive and dialectical in methodology. For the intuitive method, he succeeded to further develop the logic of nothingness of Nishida. On the other hand, as Nishida studied the dialectical method through Aristotle and Hegel, Tanabe also accepted and developed the dialectical method thoroughly. In a dialogue, dialectic reaches to new dimensions through the movement of negation (nothingness of the negative word) in the way of thesis (These) → antithesis (Antithese) → synthesis (Synthese). In this, nothingness functions as negation. In the first place, nothingness as a form of negation works in our thought and nothingness constitutes our thought. In the judgment, “There is a dog”, there are uncountable things that are not a dog. Through the continuity of uncountable negations, the recognition of a dog is constituted. In the dialectic, nothingness functions. If the function of nothingness works strongly, the thing is abstracted and treated by thought. That is, thesis is at first set up, then antithesis appears and lastly synthesis is brought about. This is the movement of thought by the function of nothingness as the negative word. Tanabe used dialectic thoroughly and established the original expression of ‘mutual negative mediation’. Still more, though Tanabe unified Idealist dialectic and Materialist dialectic, as he insisted on Absolute dialectic. This is the main difference between the Absolute Dialectic of Tanabe and the dialectics of Aristotle and Hegel.

2. Christianity, Marxism and Japanese Buddhism as proposed by the Philosophy of Tanabe

Tanabe described that ‘Dialectical Unification of Christianity, Marxism and Japanese Buddhism’⁵ was absurd from the view point of the same quality logic. Christianity and Japanese Buddhism are religions.

On the other hand, the quality of Marxism is economics and sociology.

- *Individuum, Society, Humankind – The Triadic Logic of Species according to Hajime Tanabe*, Brill Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2001.

³ Makoto Ozaki, ‘Tanabe’s Idea of World Religion in Relation to Whitehead’, *Biocosmology – Neo Aristotelism*, 2016, Autumn

⁴ Prof. Makoto Ozaki treated this paper in his ‘Scientific thought as culture – Toward a unification of the theory of relativity and quantum theory’, *Diverse aspects of culture*, 1997, University education publication, Okayama, Japan. Prof. Ozaki’s paper inspired my paper ‘On the synthesis of the theory of relativity and quantum theory’, *New Horizon of Sciences by the Principle of Nothingness and Love*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2012

⁵ Hajime Tanabe, *Philosophy of Mediate Independence Introduction of the philosophy of Tanabe*, Shoshi-Shinsui Company, Tokyo, 2013 pp. 159-217

Especially, Marx denied religion as the “opium for the masses”.

From the view of Materialism, religion is excluded. How can one unify Marxism and religion? At a glance, we cannot find the fusion point. To do so, there may be a key, i.e., the idealist dialectic.

On the other hand, there is the problem of the fusion of Christianity and Japanese Buddhism. How can man connect Christianity and Buddhism? How can man fuse the different religions? Christianity is the doctrine of Yahweh, Jesus and the Spirit, the Trinity. On the other hand, Buddhism is the teaching of Buddha. It attains to Satori, Enlightenment. At a glance, we cannot find the fusion point there, too.

Here, Tanabe found another key. That is the ‘sole existence’ (single person, individual) of Kierkegaard. The existence is a human who is troubled and suffering from difficulties. To escape from the difficulties, man believes in Buddhism. By this existence, Christianity and Buddhism are connected. Kierkegaard preached three stages of life. The first is the esthetic stage where man seeks the pleasures of life. As the desire of man is infinite, man seeks the pleasures of infinite life. Infinite desire reaches to nothingness and despair. The second stage is the ethical existence where man seeks morality and justice. But as man is imperfect, he would despair of his imperfection. Finally, the third stage is the religious existence. He only believes in God and faces the judgment of God. This is the existential dialectic.

In the previous part, I showed that Marxism embraces materialist dialectic. This dialectic is common. The religions of Christianity and Buddhism are different from Marxism. But by the dialectic, religions and Marxism are integrated. This is the logic of Tanabe. The keyword is ‘mutual negative mediation’.

3. Christianity and Marxism

We cannot go ahead at a stretch. There is no bridge from Marxism to Christianity. From Christianity, the bridge is made by Karl Barth (1886-1968). He was inclined to socialism. But he faced the limitation of socialism and abandoned it. He became a Protestant theologian and the philosophy of Kierkegaard was his base. Tanabe became cool to Catholicism as Catholicism led to a fixed and feudal society. Barth thought a great deal of individual faith as the sole existence before God. Jesus carried the original sin of all humans and was crucified by the Romans and the Jews for the atonement. He died and became nothingness. This was the realization of God’s love.

Tanabe called it ‘the logic of instant nothingness as love’⁶ and further believed in the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was real and ideal type, Messiah of Humankind. As he could forsake his life for humankind, he was free perfectly. Though he had perfect deprivation, he was free perfectly. He proved that perfect deprivation was perfect freedom. This is the self-identity of absolute contradictories. Tanabe described that “Existence is constituted by the principle of nothingness and existence can realize freedom in love.”⁷

Here, he drew such opposite schema as God-Man, Spirit-Flesh and Faith-World.

⁶ Japanese ‘mu souk ai’ 無即愛 *ibid.* p.180.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 175-176.

Humans cannot live only by faith. They must live with their body, flesh. Now society appears and the confrontations of individual and society occur. In modern age, Protestantism produced Capitalism and preached the significance of work and recommended saving. By these thoughts the capitalist society developed. On the other hand, the confrontation between the class of capitalists and the class of workers occurred. The class of workers was oppressed by the class of capitalists and was the object of exploitation by the upper class. Marxism aimed to solve the confrontation. Marx denied religions and established the ideal that workers be free from labor. But it was not enough as a human theory to be free from labor. The state in which one satisfies his economic desires is the same as the esthetic stage of Kierkegaard. After a while, the laborer falls into fatigue and despair. Tanabe insisted that man should not persist in wealth (prosperity and status) but should aim to establish the communities and societies with *philia* through self-negation and self-sacrifice⁸. This is the realization of neighborly love and gratitude in Buddhism. For Tanabe, Marxism and Socialism are completed by the acceptance and awareness of the principle of love. About Socialism, it seemed that Socialism lost significance with the collapse of the Soviet Union. But after that, capitalists declared the victory of Capitalism and preached the logic that profit is the best. It was called greed Capitalism. It gave birth to the great depression of the Lehman Shock. Though Socialism collapsed once, there is an increasing review of Socialism since Capitalism is increasing the economic disparities and vigorous confrontation of the rich class and the pauper class. The notion of equality is still necessary.

4. On Japanese Buddhism – Zen and Nianfo Buddhism

Tanabe regarded Zen⁹ and Nianfo Buddhism¹⁰ as the main types of Japanese Buddhism. Zen had the transcendent quality of nothingness and recognized the bottom of existence. Tanabe appreciated the philosophy of Dōgen. The title of the paper is ‘My Philosophical view of Dōgen’ From the view point of Zen, all theories of philosophy are abandoned. The essence of Zen is beyond the words and theories. The basic thought is ‘*furyumonji*’ (不立文字). Therefore, most Japanese philosophers did not refer to the philosophical significance of Zen. But Tanabe elaborated the signification of Sōto Zen by ‘My Philosophical view of Shōbōgenzō’. That is the first-class essay about Shōbōgenzō, Dōgen. As the attitude of ‘mind and body fall off’¹¹ man overcomes life and death, this leads to the concept of ‘anticipatory

⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

⁹ Zen Buddhism consists of two sects: One is Sōto Zen and another is Rinzai Zen. As Sōto Zen is near the thought of love for people of Land Pure Buddhism, Tanabe expects the activity of Sōto Zen (ibid. p.190). The founder of Sōto Zen was Dōgen (1200-1253).

¹⁰ Nianfo is Nembutsu, a chanting practice, *Namu Amida butsu* (南無阿弥陀仏). According to Shinran, one can only be saved by chanting practices all day. It means that one takes refuge in Amitab Buddha or one believes in Amita Buddha. Amita is the meaning of “Infinite Light”. Amita Buddha expresses immeasurable Life and Light. Therefore, the color of Buddha statues is gold.

¹¹ *Shinshin toturaku* (心身脱落). It means “nothing but precisely sitting”. The essence of his thought is ‘oneness of practice – enlightenment’. There is no gap between practice and

resoluteness (vorlaufende Entschlossenheit) of Heidegger. The philosophy of opening of reality and nothingness in the later Heidegger has an affinity with the Zazen experience. This is the technique in which nothingness as reality occurs. Generally, one says that Martin Heidegger was influenced by the thought of Japanese Zen [cf. Kiyokazu Nakatomi, *Philosophy of Nothingness and Love*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2016, chapter 1]. But Zen had no character of mercy due to its self-liberation and lacked a dialogue between 'I' and 'You' owing to its self-practice. The practice of Zen of 'mind and body fall off' aims to unite the transcendental being of all things. It was passive religion as Zen was mysterious intuition. In Zen one practices as one forgets oneself. Zen inclined to appear as self-persistence to aim to forget oneself. There, it is impossible to be selfless. Zen is a practice of one person, and hence needs mutual negative mediation between self-liberation and other-liberation.

However, there is no mythos in Zen, and therefore Zen is compatible with science¹². Tanabe had a hope in the doctrine of Shinran (1173-1263) that aimed to save the people rather than Zen of self-liberation. The most important thing is to recite Nianfo. Tanabe wanted to connect Nianfo Buddhism and Zen Buddhism. It is to practice Zen through reciting Nianfo. It means to recite with cast off and mind and to practice with Nianfo. Tanabe found the essence of Japanese Buddhism in the unity of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. He proposed Nianfo Zen. But though religious communities of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism were the largest in Japan, they were mere façades and lost their religious power. What is the true and world signification of Japanese Buddhism? The thought of nothingness is effective in the future. Since Buddhism does not have mythical eschatology, Buddhism can purify Christianity. Tanabe identified the entry to the God Land, Buddha land and Pure Land with 'the entry to universal human society of existence in cooperation' and 'the belonging to the church of Christianity'¹³. It can be said that identifying Buddha land with the Church is inclined to Christianity.

5. World Religions

I argued for Buddhism and Marxism. As a matter of fact, what is the true religion for Tanabe? From the context, it is Christianity. He recognized Jesus as the Messiah for Humankind and accepted the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus practiced the love of God. On this point, there is the clear historical reality. After the resurrection, the disciples undertook a world mission. Then we recognized the working and real power of the Holy Spirit. The sole problem is its mythical eschatology. But it would be purified by the introduction of Buddhism. Further Marxism would be effective for the gap and confrontation between the rich class and the pauper class. Zen as a thought can teach the logic of nothingness and Pure Land

enlightenment or Zazen and daily life. From the view point of Tanabe, if one practices Zazen and Nembutsu chanting practices in daily life, Nembutsuzen will be new and true Buddhism.

¹² Hajime Tanabe, *Philosophy of Mediate Independence Introduction of the philosophy of Tanabe*, p.195, p.197.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.195

Buddhism can preach the teaching of love of Christianity with logics. Both Zen and Pure Land Buddhism will live and become a power motor of history in Christianity. Japanese Buddhism, Christianity, and Marxism will be unified dialectically through mutual negative mediations. This is the second religious reformation. That is the 'tri-mono unity, 'triadic unity', like the trinity in Christianity and the realization of absolute religion as hold by Hegel.

In this line of thought Tanabe stated that the concrete movement of nations did depend on the cooperation among the USA, the Soviet Union and Japan¹⁴.

6. A Philosophical Synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam by Nakatomi

Now I want to argue for the difference between the theory of Tanabe and my thoughts expressed in my publication 'A Philosophical Synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam'¹⁵. The first point of the divergence is the opportunity. The most important reason of this paper was to suggest a solution to the suicide bombings acts in the Middle East and elsewhere and the conflicts between developed nations and the Muslim World. These suicide bombings and terror acts occurred also in Europe, Asia and the USA often. There we can witness to the problem of the difference of religions. Islam is now in the spot light. At one time, President George Bush even said, "Christian countries are good, but Islamic countries are bad." Then he ordered to attack Iraq and overcame the government of President Saddam Hussein. But after the attack, the Middle East became unstable. Instead of Saddam Hussein, the Islamic State controlled large parts of Iraq and Syria. Now, terror occurs daily. It is impossible to solve this terror by political and military powers. We must establish dialogues. To achieve these dialogues there is a need for common notions and religious words. In this situation, such assertions as 'Jesus is good', 'Allah is good' and 'The teaching of Buddha is good' could not help to build a meaningful dialogue. At least, man should not use the name of God. Instead of God, man uses the transcendent being. First, I mentioned the life of religious founders and their existences. Then I built upon the essence and common concepts of religions. In Christianity, I gave the spot light of the existence of Jesus in Gethsemane. He wanted and prayed to escape the cross twice. But he was crucified for atonement and resurrected. In the part about Buddhism, I treated of the existence of Buddha who was tested by the sexual temptations of young women. Through the victory over the temptations, he attained to Satori, enlightenment. In the part about Islam, I argued for the life of Muhammad and the revelation that is the dialogue between Allah and him.

Through the process, the synthesis was constituted. In this paper, I did not treat of the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. In Buddhism, I did not treat of the Japanese Buddhism, Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. Marxism is more concerned with the problem of economics and sociology. In other papers, 'Bushido of the Enterprise', 'A Theory of Justice by Confucius', 'Theory of Peace of Confucius'

¹⁴ Ibid., p.212.

¹⁵ Kiyokazu Nakatomi, 'A Philosophical Synthesis of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam', *New Horizon of Sciences by the Principle of Nothingness and Love*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2012. This paper was published by universities and academies cited in references.

and ‘Social Freedom and Deprivation’, I also argued for economics and sociology. These papers are cited in references.

Conclusion

Did Tanabe succeed in the theory of unification? I wish to point out three problems. The first problem is the unification of Christianity and Buddhism. The difference of the two religions is important. But through their differences, Tanabe proposed the higher level of synthesis of two religions. He attempts at a unification of two religions in the dialectical way. This is his achievement. But there is no confrontations and dialogues for Jesus and Buddha. It is the lack of existential confrontation. Tanabe treated of the life of Jesus and the Cross. But he did not treat of the life and distress of Buddha. And he did not describe the scene of struggle of temptation and suffering. Instead of the life of Buddha, Tanabe wrote about the characteristics and development of Zen and Shinran. Why did he treat only of Zen and Shinran, Pure Land Buddhism? There are various forms of Buddhism, for instance, to mention a few, Chinese Buddhism, Thai Burma Buddhism, Korean Buddhism and in Japan Shingon, Tendai, and Nichiren Buddhism. His focus of Buddhism is very limited. It means that the theme of Buddhism of Tanabe is not international. This is one problem.

The second problem is the unification of religions and Marxism. He indicated the method to unify the different qualities by the dialectic. In a sense, he could unify water and oil. The formal method is successful. But is the condition that mixes water and oil in a cup true unification? It is the problem of quality which requires economic and sociological theories. From the view point of Marxism, the most important problem is the economic difference between the wealthy class and the pauper class. Here we need the theory of distribution that is based on modern economics and macro-economic theories. But it is not sufficient for the principle of love and relief of Christianity.

The third problem is the mediation between Buddhism and Marxism. Zen and Pure Land Buddhism are unified by formal dialectic. But there is no mediation between Buddhism and Marxism. For instance, Karl Barth advocated a mediation between Christianity and Marxism, socialism. Tanabe’s theory lacks the thought of a key person. Tanabe’s theory needs a concrete economic impulse, for instance, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh offering loans without interest which adheres to the principle of charity of Islam. This is the bank where women invest small amounts of money and which lends small amounts to them to start businesses. This is an innovative banking system for the weak and poor people. The bank and people believe in Allah and work together to save the poor people. The founder is Dr. Muhammad Yunus. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. He is working and acting between economics and religion. Tanabe’s theory lacks concrete method and idea. The idea of Tanabe, even now, remains unfinished. The success of the unification proposed by Tanabe and its development depends on our attitude, efforts and discussions with the guide of Prof. Makoto Ozaki.

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