

A Philosophical Study of Nonmetaphysical Approach towards “Human Existence”

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to prove why the meaning of human existence can be realized nonmetaphysical approach. It is because human existence can be realized by the practical philosophy of Buddhism. This paper contributes to understanding the practical approach toward human existence.

Key words: Existence, Aidagara, *Kū*

Introduction

In this paper, philosophy of Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960) is analysed. He is a Japanese philosopher who wishes to unify Western and Eastern philosophical and religious ideas. Philosophies of Heidegger and Buddhism influence on his thought. Watsuji went to Germany in 1927, when Heidegger's *Sein Und Zeit* (Beings and Time) was published. While in Berlin, he had read it and he thought that Heidegger under-emphasizes spatiality and over-emphasizes temporality. Under influence of Heidegger, he wrote *Fudo*, in which the spatial being is suggested as basic concept of human existence, is direct response to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Watsuji wrote *The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism*. It is one of the classical texts for the study of Buddhism in Japan. In this book the notion of *ku*, one of the central symbols in the teachings of primitive Buddhism, is described. This notion indicates the ontological foundation, on which every dynamic human activity exists. To understand the meaning of *ku*, Watsuji first inquires into the meaning of the silence of Buddha.

Buddha was asked some metaphysical questions concerning human reality: Are self and world unchanging or transient? Are self and world limited or unlimited? Are body and soul unified or different entities? To these questions, Buddha remained silent. Watsuji wonders why Buddha did not answer these questions. Historically, people simply explained the reason of the silence in terms of an expression, "no-necessity of *gedatsu*." But this explanation, Watsuji argues, cannot provide a satisfactory understanding of Buddha's attitude toward human existence and the world. Hence, with a critical eye to the historical answer for the silence of Buddha, he studied several sutras concerning the story of the silence of Buddha from a hermeneutical approach, and concluded that this silence indicates a revolutionary approach toward human existence and reality in the history of Eastern thought.

The meaning of silence can be understood if we study two influential systems of thought contemporary to that of Buddha, the orthodox *Braahmana* and *Rokushigedo*. The orthodox *Braahmana* establishes the spiritual principle in the center of the notion of *ga*, self. On the other hand, *Rokushigedo* emphasizes the material principle of sensory materialism. It is obvious that these two schools are different in terms of their principles. However, if we examine their philosophies carefully, behind the difference lies a common metaphysical attitude toward reality. The common element is an attempt to substantiate the ideal with which to objectify the outside world. By taking either Self or World they unconsciously affirm the opposition between subject and object. In short, they substantiate the knowledge

gained by ordinary experience in a metaphysical way. It is metaphysical because they ignore the existential situation of man and his World. It is in contrast to the metaphysical framework of these two schools of thought that we are able to understand the meaning of Buddha's silence.

Nonmetaphysical Approach to Human Existence

It is clear that the silence of Buddha indicates a way of thinking which shows that one must adopt a nonmetaphysical approach toward human existence. Then what is the "nonmetaphysical approach" which discloses the real meaning of the silence? To this question, Watsuji introduces the notion of *muga*, no-self, in contrast to *keiga*, self. As the expression indicates, the no-self or *muga* is a denial of *keiga*, a denial of the split between subject and object, and instead discloses the everyday experience of human existence as the relational existence prior to the split. In the Aagama Sutras we find a teaching about human existence in terms of *mujo* (transience), *Ku* (suffering), and *muga*. The teaching clearly implies the connection between *muga* and the everyday experience of human existence. Human existence is revealed in that the process of becoming through *mujo*, *ku*, and *muga* is held together. If one understands this togetherness of existence, there is no way for a self or a material entity to claim the principle of understanding this living process of our life. It is this *muga* which can reveal the meaning of the silence of Buddha in such a way that he would inevitably show the totality of the everyday life of human existence as it is in a nonverbal way. Here we learn that we cannot presuppose any principle with which to understand the meaning of human existence. But how is it possible for *muga* to grasp and show the real situation of human existence? According to Watsuji, a teaching of early Buddhism, *goun*, is able to answer this question. The early Buddhist used *goun* to express the dynamic life of human existence symbolically.

Realization of Human Existence

Historically, both *muga* and *goun* are called *dharma*. Watsuji, however, understands two different modes of *dharma* in *muga* and *goun*. *Goun* is the *dharma* for living existence, while *muga* is a higher mode of *dharma* to unify various modes of existence. In other words, the *dharma* of *goun* expresses various modes of existence of the human world, while that of *muga* is the unifying activity which discloses existence as a whole. The idea of *goun* is to express existence as such. However, every existence exists temporally. Hence, *goun* also expresses the temporal character of existence. The best evidence that the early Buddhists knew of this temporality can be found in the well-known expression about *goun*: *goun* is transient; *goun* is suffering; *goun* is *muga*. The transience of *goun* means the changing character of every existence. However, these *dharms* of *goun* are not themselves changing because *goun* is not an entity but is, instead, *dharma*, the expression of the law of the temporal character of existence. *Muga* means this law which unifies that temporal character. Zen Buddhism teaches us the meaning of *muga* in teaching the elimination of self: in order to see real human existence, we first have to get rid of our ego, our self. This elimination is an attempt by man to unify himself with his world so that everyday experience discloses itself as it really is.

In general, whenever experience is discussed, modern man always understands it in such a way that an objective entity first exists, and then the subject becomes conscious of it. This is the approach which *keiga* always takes. *Muga*, on the other hand, is the unifying activity which lets real existence reveal itself as existence. Yet the very fact that one already thinks and describes experience reveals self-conscious activity. There is no way for man to avoid this metaphysical approach except to negate various descriptions of experience. Therefore, the way toward the true recognition of our experience and existence is to negate

the metaphysical approach, that is, to negate self-conscious activity. *Muga* is the movement to go forward, the negation of every attempt to affirm the separation between subject and object. This negation is the way to reach *nehan*, *nirvaana*. In this silence, there is no distinction between subject and object, theory and practice. Hence, Watsuji contends that this silence is the fundamental characteristic of early Buddhism, and at the same time the full realization of human existence.

Watsuji understands early Buddhism as a movement for overcoming the problem of *keiga*. This self is the transsensory and transcendental subject which is able to know the outside world as opposed to the subject. In this respect, it is interesting to acknowledge that the Eastern tradition also acknowledges something like the Cartesian ego. Like the Cartesian ego this self clearly shows the metaphysical character of separating subject from object. Hence, it is not existential but abstract. Early Buddhism, on the other hand, does not take this metaphysical approach, but affirms the law of *dharmā* as the way of realizing the true nature of human existence. It furthermore claims that there is no transcendental subject in the cognition of the World. One question remains. We understand the meaning of the silence of Buddha in relation to the notion of *muga* and *goun*. But in what sense can we understand the relationship between *Kū* and the silence of Buddha? Or, rather, in what sense does *Kū* reveal itself in the notion of *muga*? To this question an understanding of Naagaarjuna becomes of decisive importance because it is he who deeply influences the thought of Watsuji concerning the notion of *Kū*.

Relationship between *Kū* and the Silence of Buddha

Watsuji understands *Kū* as the foundation of the interplay (interdependence) of subject and object in which *muga* resides. And the silence of Buddha symbolically expresses the dynamic interplay between subject and object. However, the designation of that as *Kū* originally derives from the philosophy of Naagaarjuna. The notion of *Kū* means emptiness and negation in a literal sense. It is through this notion that Naagaarjuna understands the interdependence of human existence. This interdependence is not static since human existence also means living. "Living" means "changing." In life, man always regenerates himself. This regeneration is a key to understanding the notion of emptiness. To regenerate means to move from one mode to another. To move from one mode, there has to be an empty spot into which we are able to move. Life always reveals emptiness in that it is possible for it to change itself. If there is no emptiness in the essence of life, there is no way to live and to change. Mind is the stream of consciousness which is changing. This mind sometimes discloses itself as a mode of affection. It sometimes changes its mode into the mode of anger. To change its mode, the mode of affection has to disappear from the mind. This disappearance clearly indicates emptiness. This emptiness is *Kū*. *Kū* is the foundation for establishing a thing by means of changing. *Kū*, therefore, is the foundation of existence. Hence, man cannot possess *ku* but resides in it. Thus the notion of *ku* signifies the meaning of emptiness in human existence.

Kū also reveals the negating activity in itself. In the moment we describe the totality of human existence, that description becomes the affirmation of *keiga* (self-consciousness). Hence, Naagaarjuna describes *Kū* in terms of "how various forms are not able to show the experience" rather than "how they are able to show it." That is why Naagaarjuna's well-known doctrine of interdependent causation indicates total negation. This total negation is symbolized by *Kū*, which is the fundamental foundation for existence. Watsuji shares Naagaarjuna's concern in this respect and stresses the absolute negation of the subject in the symbolism of *Kū*.

By the very reason to negate the totality, the individual is essentially the totality. This negation is the self-consciousness of the totality. Accordingly, as soon as the individual realizes itself in negation, a way is opened to realize the totality through its negation of the individual.... That man's existence is essentially the movement of negation means the origin of man's existence as the negation itself, that is, as absolute negativity. Both the individual and the totality in truth are *Kū* which is the absolute totality.

As his quotation indicates: “ *Kū* is the essence for the existence of individuality as well as totality” . The notion of *Kū* shares this characteristic with Being: Being is the total horizon for existence as well as the basis for individual entities. Yet, unlike Being, *Kū* signifies the negating power to express that existence. If we understand this movement, we cannot affirm or negate things, because truth resides only in absolute interdependent causation. Since things exist interdependently and relatively to each other, the notion of the appearance of a thing-in-itself is denied. Since there is no such thing as the appearance of a thing-in-itself, a thing does not exist. Through this negating process the absolute interdependent causation, *Kū*, reveals itself.

If the totality, as aforementioned, is the negation of differentiation, the absolute totality, which is beyond the limited-relative totality, is the negation of the absolute differentiation. Because of absoluteness, the absolute totality is the non-differentiation which negates even the difference between the differentiation and the non-differentiation. Accordingly, the absolute totality is the absolute negation and the absolute-ku. The absolute-ku is the infinitude that has originated in the ground of the totality of every finitude.

Two Characteristics of *Kū*

The mode of existence is always changing. Hence if someone takes *keiga* to affirm a static mode of existence, that mode conceals the changing mode of existence. In fact, he who takes this mode will never reside in *Kū*. Accordingly, he has to let himself negate his attachment to things and his world so that the negation makes him open himself to entering into the horizon of *Kū*. This negation of *keiga* is *muga*, no-self. Since *keiga* is the affirmation of man's egoistic desire, the realization of *Kū* is at the same time the negation of the egoistic desire. In this respect, as Mizuno points out, *Kū* is *muga*. In fact there are two important characteristics of *Kū*: emptiness and negation. Because of these two, Watsuji always refers to one expression: "*Kū go Kū zuru*" which means "*Kū* (the Emptiness) is *Kū*-izing' (negating itself)" To be sure, this negation and emptiness should not be understood in distinction from affirmation and Being. As has already been explained, emptiness, *Kū* realizes itself only when some things, being, or man exist. This means that the emptiness of *Kū* is at the same time the affirmation of beings. *Kū* actualizes itself when it negates [*Kūzuru*] the attitude that one represents *Kū* as a thing. This process means the self-realization of *Kū* with Being, or of the identity between *Kū* and Being, rather than the idea that *Kū* exists outside of Being or *Kū* is different from Being. This complete identification is a unique philosophy which the Western tradition, perhaps, has never experienced. It is true that Hegel, in a sense, understands the identification of "non-Being" and "Being" dialectically in the moment of an historical event. But that identification is the manifestation of the absolute Geist which is Being or affirmation. That is to say, that any negation and non-Being always has been understood within the revelation of the affirmative Being. Nishitani symbolizes this complete identification in terms of *so*, place, in which both non-Being and Being, *Kū* and *aidagara* are completely one. It is in this complete identification that Watsuji understands two opposite movements in *Kū*. On the one hand, *Kū* reveals itself in the phenomenal world, that is, as the *aidagara* relation. This *aidagara* refers, as already pointed out, to the relational structure of human existence. Yet, in describing modes of *aidagara*, we represent our consciousness of

those modes as entities or objects. Rather, without the chasm between subject and object, we cannot represent modes of human existence, because representation means that it represents itself with others and returns the other to itself. We face a paradoxical situation: while the *aidagara* relation cannot be treated as an object, our understanding of it as representation already presupposes something as an object through which its relationality emerges. The dynamic force of this paradoxical movement is *Kū* because the movement is due to the emptiness of *Kū*. *Kū*, on the other hand, realizes itself through the perennial negation of itself (emptiness). In pointing this out, *Kū* becomes an idea which covers up the emptiness of *Kū*. *Kū* again has to negate the idea of what *Kū* tries to realize. In this way, *Kū* has to express itself only through the absolute negating process. It is in this absolute negating process that we are able to understand the following assertion about *Kū*: "the absolute totality is the non-differentiation which negates even the difference between the differentiation and the non-differentiation." Hardly anyone can understand the meaning of negating "the difference between the differentiation and non-differentiation" unless we grasp this perennial negating process in *Kū*.

Watsuji explains the meaning of human existence within the absolute negating process of *Kū*. He understands this absolute negating process as the fundamental character of primitive Buddhism. Indeed, this absolute negation is the fundamental principle of human existence as exemplified in the silence of Buddha. With this negating process Watsuji explains social organizations. A specific mode of human existence arises only when human existence negates itself. That is to say, various modes of human existence appear in such social institutions as family, relatives, community, economic organizations, and nation in a dialectically negating moment. Hence, every social institution has a self-negating moment in itself. A formation of relatives can realize in a self-negation of family. In this way this negating process reaches its apex at the moment of the formation of a nation. Watsuji believes that the formation of a nation can be achieved at the moment when every self-identity of social organizations has been absolutely negated (or sublimated.) In this respect, for Watsuji, the nation is organically the most obvious locus where the authenticity of human existence can be realized, for the nation is the culmination of the self-negating process of *ku*. It is within this understanding of nation that Watsuji appreciates the meaning of the Imperial House as a symbolic form of authentic human existence.

Conclusion

Watsuji was influenced by western philosophy especially Heidegger's view on "man" and "existence". According to Heidegger, the human being is mainly based on time from the emotional sense of an individual's past, present and future. In his philosophies of man, "Time" is emphasized more than "Space".

Watsuji tried to express the human existence by using the concept "*muga*"(no-self). So it is clear that the concept itself denies the self (ego). In this way of conceiving about "Man" and "Human existence", Watsuji deviated of the Heidegger's metaphysical concept, "Time" and ground on the "Space". He took the practical approach toward "Human existence".

Watsuji uses "*Kū*" as an ontological concept. But the meaning of "emptiness" in philosophy of "*Kū*" is different from the concept of "emptiness" in western philosophy of being. The concept of "emptiness" in western philosophy is only a relative concept of being. Watsuji's "social relationism" and ethics were based too heavily on the influence of "*fudo*" on man's existence. This notion lacked interiority and a scheme of values which could transcend the social aspects of society. Changing social relationship cannot be a solid bade for valid ethical principles, which Watsuji tried to establish. He seems to justify the primitive custom of giving the wife to guest as being a sign of communitarian spirit.

This means that “Human existence” cannot be realized by metaphysical approach. In reality; “Human existence” can be realized only by practical approach. In this way Watsuji tried to expose “the meaning of man” and “the existence of man” under the shadow of practical philosophy of Buddhism

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