Comparative Studies of Bruno Petzold and Hanjirō Tominaga on Buddhism and Goethe

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We cite, first of all, the comparison of Zen with Tendai in the English essay, "Buddhist Meditation" of Bruno Petzold:

Therefore the fundamental rule of Tendai practice is that whoever gives himself up to meditation must direct his regard into his own ordinary mind, as it is nearest and most certain to us. This practice, however, as our earlier statements have made clear, is very different from the introspection into our own heart that is practiced by the Zen School and could be summarized by the following verse from Goethe's Faust, Part II, Act III:

Lass der Sonne verschwinden, Let the sun's brilliance disappear
Wenn es in der Seele tagt, Provided the day is dawning in the soul,
Wir im eignen Herzen finden, We find in our own heart
Was die ganze Welt versagt. What the whole world refuses to us.

The originality of the Tendai meditation, distinguishing it from Zen meditation, consists consequently in a twofold of reaching knowledge. Discursive thought, or the seizing and perception of fundamental truth by the intellect, here is joined organically with intuition, and intuition with discursive thought. In both, logic is active, but in different ways. In considering Tendai meditation, we are confronted with neither a logic void of intuition nor an alogical intuition, we face a vehicle that advances on the two wheels of conceptual thought and pure both kept in smooth motion by logic that overcomes all friction.

Before this passage there are 20 articles of the comparative study on Zen and Tendai. We extract three noticeable ones from them:

1. Zen is mere vitalism, based on the urge of life and on our immediate inner experience. Tendai combines with the urge of life and our immediate inner experience. The idea of life considers that all depends not only on life but also on our thought on life.
2. Zen takes its stand only on the irrational, rejecting the rational. Tendai says that the rational is the irrational, the irrational the rational, both coinciding in the end. That whereby we picture to ourselves the world is itself the substance of the world.

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17. Zen sees everywhere only the continuous, eternally gushing, flowing and shoreless stream of life and maintains an antitheoretical, systemless attitude towards the world. Its experience is mere ecstasy, mere vanishing of one’s individuality into a boundless existence. Tendai demonstrates the will to establish a system and represents a theoretical world view. Its experience is intellectual intuition.

In the first half of the Shōwa period, or during and after the Wartime more than hundreds and scores of disciples devoted themselves to the lectures of Hanjirō Tominaga (豊永半次郎), chic and sincere private scholar. In the earliest numbers of the monthly transcript of lectures, “Ichi,” about which I reported in this Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies last year, he referred to the rise of Zen in relation to Tendai. We summarize these circumstances. The method which the so-called Zen-sect elected was that of avoiding or disinliking our intellectual posture, such as is symbolized by ‘no expression with letter.’ And there were reasonable historical causes. In short, when we come intellectually to a deadlock, there are possibilities of breaking the deadlock as a product of our efforts, as a German proverb “distress breaks iron” shows. Since the six dynasties of China various kinds of Indian Buddhism entered disorderly into China. In course of time they had to put them in order since the first half of the six dynasties, while the interpretations of sutras became active, they resulted finally in an evil influence of scholastics....

Shichirō Chidani (千谷七郎) (1912–1992), a psychiatrist and one of the chief disciples of Tominaga delivered his second lecture in Marbach a. N. on "Der Buddhismus im Lichte der Philosophie von Klages—ein Versuch, die ursprüngliche Lehre des Buddha herauszuschälen—. (The Buddhism viewed from the philosophy of Ludwig Klages, an essay, to sift out the core of primordial doctrines of Buddha). The main themes are as follows: 1. Problems of Nirvana-Buddhism 2. Schism’s history of Buddhist sangha (orders) and clues to the primordial Buddha’s doctrines 3. The significance of King Aśoka’s Edicts the history of Buddhism 4. The significance “Lotus-Sutra Proper” in the history of Buddhism 5. The origin of Nirvana-thought, which Klages criticized severely. 6. Śramaṇa Gautama 7. His Enlightenment under the Bo-tree 8. The meaning of His obtaining the state of deathlessness or immortality 9. The origin of the contemplation of five skandha 10. The meaning of pañca khandā aniccā and anatta 11. The death of Buddha 12. Buddha and Nature. Chidani concluded: Klages criticized Buddhism very severely and incisively stating that it was nothing but Nirvana-thought itself. In section 1., he interpreted, following his Master Tominaga’s view, reinterpreted Tendai and Zen, as follows:
Following his Master Tominaga’s views, Prof. Chidani interpreted Tendai and Zen in another passage of this essay: Though the Mahayana Buddhism regarded, except *Lotus-Sutra proper*, took all things for empty as well as for existent (the idea of both ‘existence and empty’) 亦有亦空), or ‘neither existence nor emptiness’ (dual negation) 非有非空, it named its own perfection in wisdom (prajñāpāramitā), strangely enough, “the last or highest Nirvana.” One could think that Mahayana Buddhism is nothing but a rebirth of the ancient *Upanishad* philosophy. Finally Mahayana Buddhism reached the highest scholastic climax in the doctrine of the mutual correlation of the emptiness 空, the temporality 仮 and the middle (中) of Tendai-Daishi, the greatest scholar of Chinese Buddhist scholars. I should like to conceive the prosperity of the Zen-sect to be a contemporary reaction of the Chinese predominantly practical disposition against the then strongly scholasticized textualism of the Mahayana Buddhism, so that the Zen-sect came to hold an extraordinary strong antipathy for all the written faith (不立文字).

The lecturer arranged almost all the contents of this lecture, mainly the two sittings out of the cores of Buddha’s doctrines and of the *Lotus (Saddharma-puṇḍarīka) Sutra Proper*, which owes to the accomplishments of his teacher, Tominaga, to make them more comprehensible for the audience of Klages-Gesellschaft (society).

Goethe’s articles of No.160 of Pläne und Entwürfe zum *Faust* (plans and projects for *Faust*) were replanned, especially from post that of Leiche (corpse), so that articles from *Da capo*, Himmel (sky) till Gericht über (judgement on) Faust are annexed, Seeing this, we can understand that the poet laid chiefly emphasis on the scenes after the hero’s death and that this sixth scene is the “Abschluß (closing) of the whole volume of *Faust*. What was promised in the beginning Prologue in Heaven, was a bet between the Lord and Mephistopheles on the soul after the death of the hero. Its decision was expected to be both ‘Zweck’ (aim) and ‘Motive’ (motif).

The most indispensable was this very scene, which had the sixth scene, *Da capo* Himmel as its closing point. One should call, so to say, a finishing point, completing the eyes of a painted dragon. It is eliminated completely in the renewed *Faust*. This is no trivial matter, and a marvellous accident. The author himself calls it, however, a great success of the *Faust*-creation. So that one can do nothing but to regard the poet as a madman. If one cannot treat such an excellent man as Goethe as an insane, one must come precisely into question to this point, which one should call an excessive solicitude of Goethe. That is ‘das
Neuere’ (the newer) written in his last letter to W.v.Humboldt (17,3,1832). And its concrete, point-blank expression is the following trenchant passage, showing his wonderful dexterity,

Mephistopheles

Und hat mit diesem kindisch-tollen Ding, If to this childish-fatuous spree
Der Kluger sich beschäftigt, One so experienced could descend,
So ist führwahr die Torheit nicht gering, Then no mean folly it must be
Die seiner sich am Schluss bemächtigt. That seized upon him in the end.

(11840–11843) (trans. W. Arndt)

This very four-line verse is an explication beyond explication, a reason beyond reason. (By the way) this change, though it was drastic, was not concrete, but incorporeal or rather a subconscious one, that is to say, as a human mental action of “Vernunft” (reason) and “Verstand” (understanding). To put it now briefly, one could nearly rewrite that the disposition of self-adherence disappeared. Such a phenomenon is so rare in mankind, that an even extremely unusual experienced man expresses so, by means of his experiences with the background of the day, because of its unprecedentedness, for convenience’s sake, in most cases figuratively. Of all few examples, one of the most critical changes is Goethe’s Verstand-like in His last days, seems to correspond (psychologically) to one of the two main sermonic words of Śākya-Buddha in his last days: “āyu-saṃkhāro oṣsaṭṭho.”

Bruno Petzold: On Buddhist Meditation (The Transaction of the Asiatic Society of Japan; 3rd series V. 1. 1948).

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