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Interrelational Existence

IT IS GENERALLY ADMITTED by scholars of the East-West "comparative" problem that the principles which underlie Eastern culture are "harmony," "concord," "unity," "integration," etc., and that the principles which underlie Western culture are "diremption," "differentiation," "analysis," etc. This dichotomy, which is almost taken for granted by many intellectuals, is over-simplified. As a clue to resolving the problem of comparative philosophy we would like to discuss the peculiar idea of "interrelational existence" which underlies various philosophical systems of the East.

The idea of "interrelational existence" is expressed by the term "*parasparāpekṣā*"¹ or "*parasparāśraya*" in Buddhist philosophy. The Buddhist term "dependent origination" (*paṭiccasamuppāda*; *pratīyasamutpāda*), whose meaning was highly controversial among the theologians of Abhidharma, was interpreted to mean precisely this "interrelational existence" by the Mādhyamikas. For Mahāyāna, the right knowledge of the truth of "dependent origination," as the doctrine was set forth in early Buddhism, led to a recognition of the interdependent relations of various aspects of human existence.

According to the doctrine of "dependent origination" in Mahāyāna, all existences and phenomena are interrelated. Even a flower is closely connected with the entire universe; a flower itself has no separate existence in the metaphysical sense. It cannot sever itself from the past. This is true of everything in the universe. The tiny violet droops its head just so much, and no more, because it is balanced by the universe. It is a violet, not an oak, because it is the outcome of the interrelational existence of certain members of a beginningless series.

The interconnection between one individual and the whole universe was especially stressed by the *Buddhāvataṃśakasūtra*, the Hua-yen sect in China, and the Kegon sect in Japan. The *Buddhāvataṃśakasūtra* says: "Within one pore of the body all living beings are accommodated."² Or, "All things appear

¹ "*parasparāpekṣikī siddhiḥ*." *Prasannapadā*, Louis de La Vallée Poussin, ed. (St. Pétersbourg: Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1913), p. 67, l. 11; p. 189, l. 9; p. 345, l. 2. *parasparāpekṣā*, *ibid.*, p. 200, l. 3; p. 202, l. 3.

² The *Hua-yen Sūtra*, Vol. 46 (*Taishō Tripiṭaka*, Vol. 10), p. 245b.

in one pore.”³ “The visible body of a Buddha teaches the ocean of merits of all Buddhas.”⁴

In the West, the idea of a unification with all creatures was expressed in early Christianity,⁵ but the idea of unification was limited to the members of the Church alone. The Eastern idea has a better counterpart in Plotinus. According to him, the eternal selves are here with a love-without-partition and together make an eternal company-without-partition. Each self penetrates into every other self “without ceasing to be what they are in themselves.” Plotinus also affirmed that each has all, and is all, and is with all in a world wherein “no individual is severed from the whole.”⁶

This theory of the interrelational existence of all beings was thus expressed in the Mahāyāna Sūtras, especially in the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*, in Hindu literature,⁷ and by Plotinus. It is noteworthy that the theory was first advocated in approximately the same period in both the East and the West.

The Hua-yen philosophy of China sets forth the theory from the spatial viewpoint in a fourfold manner:

- (1) One is in one.
- (2) One is in all.
- (3) All is in one.
- (4) All are in all.

From the viewpoint of time, the following formula is set forth:

- (1) When one is taken-in by all, one enters into all.
- (2) When all is taken-in by one, all enters into one.
- (3) When one is taken-in by one, one enters into one.
- (4) When all is taken-in by all, all enters into all.

All things in the universe are brought into existence according to the above-mentioned formulas at the same time.⁸

³ *Ibid.*, p. 403c.

⁴ “*sarvaromavivara-aśeṣabuddha-guṇasamudra-megha-nigarjana-varṇa*.” *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, D. T. Suzuki and H. Idzumi, eds., p. 347, l. 24. I translated the word in collation with the Tang version (*Taishō Tripitaka*, Vol. 10, p. 398b).

⁵ “He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.” The unification with all creatures as a member of the body of Christ is solemnly expressed in the Communion (*toū tà pánta ên pāsi plerouménou*). (*Ephesians*, I, 22-23.)

⁶ *The Enneads*, Stephen MacKenna, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., n.d.), III.2.1. All further references are to this edition.

⁷ Cf. *Mahābhārata* XII.298.17.

⁸ *Kegon Gokyō-shō*, etc.

In contrast to the Hua-yen theory, which is rather abstract and formal, Plotinus' description is highly poetic.

Who that truly perceives the harmony of the Intellectual Realm could fail, if he has any bent towards music, to answer to the harmony in sensible sounds? What geometrician or arithmetician could fail to take pleasure in the symmetries, correspondences and principles of order observed in visible things? Consider, even, the case of pictures: those seeing by the bodily sense the productions of the art of painting do not see the one thing in the one way only; they are deeply stirred by recognizing in the objects depicted to the eyes the presentation of what lies in the idea, and so are called to recollection of the truth—the very experience out of which Love arises. Now, if the sight of Beauty excellently reproduced upon a face hurries the mind to that other Sphere, surely no one seeing the loveliness lavish in the world of sense—this vast orderliness, the Form which the stars even in their remoteness display—no one could be so dull-witted, so immovable, as not to be carried by all this to recollection, and gripped by reverent awe in the thought of all this, so great, sprung from that greatness. Not to answer thus could only be to have neither fathomed this world nor had any vision of that other.⁹

After Plotinus, Proclus also said: "All things are in all things, but each according to its proper nature."¹⁰

This attitude of seeking to locate or recognize reality in phenomena is also found in the *Buddhāvataṃśakasūtra*: "If living beings are not suitable in terms of intelligence, they cannot see Buddhas. If they are willing, they can see them everywhere. In each land a Buddha appears respectively. Each Buddha in one of them displays immense miraculous powers."¹¹

Just as Plotinus recognized the basis for the rise of love in this knowledge, the Hua-yen philosophy recognized the universe to be motivated by the "Great Compassionate Heart." The idea of interrelational existence thus became the principle of altruistic deeds.

The theory of interrelational existence also applies to the relation between individual persons. Ryōnin (1072-1132), the founder of the Yūzū Nembutsu sect of Japan, is said to have seen Amida Buddha appear and to have presented a poem to him, saying, "One person is all persons; all persons are one person; one meritorious deed is all meritorious deeds; all meritorious deeds are one meritorious deed. This is called deliverance to the Pure Land by the grace of Amida." Dōgen (1200-1253), also advocated unification of the self with other selves, saying, "Oneself and others should be benefited at the same time."¹²

⁹ *The Enneads* II.9.16.

¹⁰ *Elements of Theology*, prop. 103.

¹¹ *The Hua-yen Sūtra*, Śikṣānanda, trans. (*Taishō Tripitaka*, Vol. 19), p. 53a.

¹² *Shōbō-Genzō*, *Bodaisatta Shishōbō* (Dōgen Zenji Zenshu, Doshu Okubo, ed., Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1930).

This idea was not lacking in the West either. In connection with the teaching in the Bible: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," Meister Eckhart speaks of the man who knows himself as "seeing thyself in everyone, and everyone in thee."¹³ Neo-Platonists and Christian mystics, however, held the notion of emanation or origination from the fundamental principle; the above-mentioned Buddhist schools lacked this concept.

To express the theory, mystics resorted to imaginary figures. Both Eastern and Western mystics used the metaphor of a mirror. The parable very often used in the Kego philosophy is as follows: Let there be set up ten mirrors at the eight points of the compass and at the zenith and the nadir. When you place a lamp at the center, you observe that each one of the ten mirrors reflects the light; now you pick up one of the ten and you see that it also reflects all the rest of the ten containing the light, together with the particular one you picked up. Each one of the nine is in the one and the one is in each one of the nine.¹⁴

Corresponding to the above, Eckhart said: "If I knew my Self as intimately as I ought, I should have perfect knowledge of all creatures," for, "the soul is capable of knowing all things in her highest power," viz., "as a clear mirror sees all things in one image," and so "not until she knows all that there is to be known does she [the soul] cross over to the Unknown Good."¹⁵ In later days, Nicolaus Cusanus thought: "A certain infinity belongs . . . to each individual thing, in the sense that in the characteristics of its essence it carries within itself also the characteristics of all other individuals. All is in all: *omnia ubique*. In this way every individual contains within itself the universe, though in a limited form peculiar to this individual alone and differing from all others. Each individual thing is, if rightly and fully known, *a mirror of the universe*. . . ."¹⁶ However, this concern with individuality, which was emphasized by Nicolaus Cusanus, is not clearly mentioned in the Kego texts. This seems to be an important point relevant to the differences in ways of thinking among different peoples.

According to the thought of early Buddhism, the way to deliverance from suffering taught by the Buddha is nothing other than the right knowledge of the truth of dependent origination. This truth is generally expressed by the formula, "When this exists, that exists; when this occurs, that occurs;

¹³ Meister Eckhart, C. de B. Evans, trans. (London: John M. Watkins, 1952), Vol. II, p. 132.

¹⁴ D. T. Suzuki, *The Essence of Buddhism* (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1948), p. 56.

¹⁵ Meister Eckhart, Evans trans., Vol. I., pp. 253, 324, 359, 385.

¹⁶ W. Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, James Tufts, trans. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 347.

when this does not exist, that does not exist; when this is destroyed, that is destroyed.”¹⁷ This truth is also seen through the twofold contemplation, which is: If nescience (*avijjā*), the first link, exists, other links exist, and finally suffering (e.g., decay and death) exists; if, on the other hand, nescience does not exist, being destroyed by enlightenment, then other links also do not exist, and finally suffering does not exist, having been destroyed. Such a two-fold contemplation should be practiced.

The right knowledge of the truth, as was set forth in Buddhism, must lead to a recognition of the interdependent relations of various aspects of actual human existence because, as expounded by Mahāyānists, the truth of interdependent relation lies in the principle of negation of the very existence of things that are transient and void by their nature—since they, being interdependent and interrelational, do not exist independently and separately. So far as the truth of interdependent relation has such a meaning, suffering is the necessary consequence of attachment to the existence of things and of claiming their unvarying eternity and identity in defiance of the truth. If, on the contrary, one realizes the truth as it is and knows the vanity of the existence of things, one will not be afflicted by suffering when experiencing decay, disease, and death. Śākyamuni is to be thought of as having freed himself from suffering by thoroughly realizing the truth of interdependent relation in this sense.

Plotinus expressed a similar thought. Loving one in all things and all things in one, none can find themselves excluded from the universal meeting. “Those drunken with this wine, filled with the nectar, all their soul penetrated by this beauty, cannot remain mere gazers; no longer is there a spectator outside gazing on an outside spectacle; the clear-eyed hold the vision within themselves. . . .”¹⁸

Another problem then arises. Why is it that all beings are interrelated at the bottom of their existence? The ways of explaining the theory of interrelational existence by mystics are too abstract and formal. They are not detailed enough to explain why each individual human being has been brought into existence with characteristics which cannot be replaced by other ones and which constitute the human being concerned as it is. To explain individuality, why one human being exists just as it is, we must suppose some causes which have formed it just as it exists now. These causes may be

¹⁷ “*Imasmim sati, idam hoti; imassupphādā idam uppajjati . . . / Imasmim asati, idam nahoti; imassa nirodhā, idam nirujjhati.*” / *Samyutta Nikāya*, 12, 19 (Pali Text Society Edition, Vol. 2, p. 78); 12, 50 (Vol. 2, p. 79); 12, 37 (Vol. 2, p. 65); 12, 21 (Vol. 2, p. 28); *Majjhima Nikāya* (PTS Edition), 38 (Vol. 1, p. 262 f.); 115 (Vol. 3, p. 63) etc.

¹⁸ *The Enneads* V.8.10.

infinitely multiple, and probably impossible to enumerate exhaustively. But we have to proceed to identify them by ratiocination. Here we find the theoretical limitations of the mystics in East and West, *although we do not* minimize the merit of the thinking of mystics in the past.

On the other hand, we should emphasize the significance of the theory of interrelational existence advocated by Eastern and Western mystics, especially considering the present-day situation of ideological and intellectual conflicts, which have something to do with the attitude of paying too much attention to the aspect of difference and to the confrontation between individual human beings. We are not separate beings who are absolutely irrelevant to each other, and have nothing to do with each other. In this respect this theory of the mystics of the past regains a present-day significance in the turbulent world of conflict and antipathy.