

Musashi Tachikawa, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*. (translated by Rolf W. Giebel) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, iv + 213 pp. Bibliography, Index. Rs. 200.

I. Introduction

The *Middle Stanzas* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) of Nāgārjuna (A.D. 150-250 or 100-200) undoubtedly gives readers the impression that it represents a logic transcending logic, or that Nāgārjuna set a positive value in the argument on logical contradiction and paradox. A reader encountering the following passages will have the same impression:

“Things are born neither from self, nor from another, nor from both, nor without cause”. (p. 134, *Middle Stanzas*, I.1)

“That which has been traversed is not being traversed, nor is that which has not been traversed being traversed; That which is being traversed, such as is other than that which has been traversed and that which has not been traversed, is not being traversed or is not known”. (p. 54, *Middle Stanzas*, II.1)

It has often been said, on the contrary, that Nāgārjuna bestowed logic upon the world of emptiness espoused in the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures. These two aspects (logic and something transcending logic) of the *Middle Stanzas* have long troubled readers who want to understand the *Middle Stanzas* in a consistent way. For this reason, although Nāgārjuna is said to have exerted a great influence on later Buddhism, the structure of his philosophy and the characteristics of his logical operations are not necessarily made clear in the *Middle Stanzas*. The present book is an attempt to achieve “as accurate as possible an understanding of Nāgārjuna’s intention” (p. iii) and to interpret his text consistently.

This book is an English translation of a revised version of the Japanese book entitled *Kū no kōzō* (The Structure of Emptiness, Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1986). The main body of the tenth chapter of the present book comes from *Genshō sekai no seika — Churon ni okeru engi* (“Sanctification of the Phenomenal World: on *pratyasamutpāda* in the *Mādhyamakakārikās*, Chapter 26”, *Buddhist Seminar* 35, 1982, pp.73-88). The author, Musashi Tachikawa, adds a final chapter which is also an English translation of his Japanese article entitled *Kibyūronshōha* (“The Prāsaṅgika School”, *Mahāyāna Buddhism* vol. 7: Mādhyamika, Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1982, pp. 117-145).

The author’s method in interpreting the *Middle Stanzas* is to introduce the two ‘poles’ of the sacred and the profane and to conduct a logical analysis of Nāgārjuna’s argument. The sacred and the profane are scholarly concepts that have been proposed by Otto, Eliade, Caillois, Mauss, etc., to facilitate an understanding of religion (pp. 6-8). Tachikawa has claimed that after the vectors between the sacred and the profane are taken into account, the contradiction between negative expressions such as “things do not arise” and affirmative expressions such as “things arise by dependent co-arising” in the *Middle Stanzas* ceases. In other words, Nāgārjuna’s negative statements indicate the vector pointing

from the profane to the sacred, while his affirmative ones indicate the vector pointing from the profane to the sacred.

II. Content of the present book

The thirteen chapters of the present book can be divided into five parts: (1) chapters one to three concerning the sacred and the profane, (2) chapters four to eight concerning a logical analysis of 'negative' statements in the *Middle Stanzas*, (3) chapters nine and ten relating 'negative' and 'affirmative' statements to the sacred and the profane, (4) chapters eleven and twelve concerning the tetralemmas in the *Middle Stanzas*, and (5) chapter thirteen dealing with the history of the Mādhyamika school with particular reference to Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti from the viewpoint of the increasing significance of the profane.

The following are the titles and contents of the thirteen chapters taken up in the above parts. (1) Chapter one, "The Historical Position of Nāgārjuna's Thought", describes the relation between his thought and the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures. Chapter two, "The Religious Position of the *Middle Stanzas* (*Mūlamādhyamakārikā*)", introduces the poles of the sacred and the profane and applies these poles in the analysis of religions in general and Indian religions in particular. Chapter three, "The Conventional and Ultimate Truths in Nāgārjuna's Thought", applies the two poles in the analysis of the *Middle Stanzas*. Tachikawa has maintained that the profane is the phenomenal world, whereas the sacred, i.e., ultimate truth, is not explicitly described. Hence, he has assumed that the sacred indwells in the profane in the case of the *Middle Stanzas*. These three chapters reveal Tachikawa's deep understanding of the structure of the *Middle Stanzas* and his position in considering this text as a religious work. This does not mean, however, that we can neglect the importance of the logical operations implemented in the *Middle Stanzas*.

(2) Tachikawa begins with a logical analysis of Nāgārjuna's argument in chapter four entitled "Statements to Be Treated in the *Middle Stanzas*: the Structure of the Profane." He has claimed that Nāgārjuna's logical operations are directed to the purpose of negating the reality of the phenomenal world, the profane. This chapter presents a list of all the sets of two factors which are described as interdependently related in the propositions in the *Middle Stanzas* (pp. 37-45). It is an excellent view that "When two — and sometimes three or more — terms are incorporated in a single proposition by means of a syntactical connection, these two or more factors become in the *Middle Stanzas* a subject of examination as entities standing in a relationship of dependent co-arising to one another" (p. 52). Chapter five, "A Survey of Nāgārjuna's Arguments: An Examination of Chapter II of the *Middle Stanzas*," demonstrates a typical method of argument to implement the negation of the profane. Tachikawa points out that there are three patterns of negation in Chapter II of the *Middle Stanzas* and that the first is the most common: the procedure of "Distributing one of two intrinsically interrelated entities so as to cover all possible instances, expressing the relationship between the two in the form of a proposition, and concluding all such propositions with a negation" (pp. 56-57). Chapter six, "Complementary Relationship in the *Middle*

Stanzas: The Negation of the Profane (1),” elucidates this first pattern. That is to say, “After having given expression in the form of a single proposition to two factors standing in an interdependent relationship, Nāgārjuna distributes either or both of the two factors, or the relationship itself, into two complementary parts such that the sum of both parts is equivalent to the whole. Either or both of the two factors, or the relationship between them, is established as the fixed locus of the discussion, and this locus is in turn distributed in such a manner that there remains no sphere that is left untouched by Nāgārjuna’s argument” (p. 61). This chapter classifies cases of complementary distribution into five types and provides a complete list of the passages related to each type (p. 64).

Chapter seven, “Syntactical Relationship in the *Middle Stanzas: The Negation of the Profane (2),*” discusses the syntactical characteristics of the propositions describing factors which have been subjected to complementary distribution. The author also provides a list of all the instances of these factors in the *Middle Stanzas* (pp. 76-87). Chapter eight, “The Negation of a Term and the Negation of a Proposition: The Negation of the Profane (3),” explains two types of negation with the help of transformational grammar and tree diagrams: implicative negation (*pariyudāsa*) and absolute negation (*prasajya-pratiśedha*). Tachikawa has clarified that the complementary distribution concerns the former negation, while the question of the truth of a proposition concerns the latter, and that Nāgārjuna was fully conscious of the distinction between them. It is of interest that Tachikawa has connected the meaning of *prapañca* (a phenomenal world, the literal meanings of which is extension or dichotomy), ultimately to be negated, with the characteristics of a proposition: “a division into two factors, into two cases, and into a noun phrase and a verb phrase” (p. 104).

(3) Chapter nine, “‘Own-Being’ in the *Middle Stanzas: From the Profane to the Sacred,*” shows that Nāgārjuna uses the term ‘own-being’ (*svabhāva*) in two senses: something eternal and immutable, and everything existent, and points out that Nāgārjuna says that change (or birth-and-death) in the phenomenal world is negated regardless of the existence or non-existence of own-being and on the other hand that there is change. This ‘contradiction’ leads Tachikawa to consider that Nāgārjuna has a change in perspective: the vector from the profane to the sacred and the vector from the sacred to the profane. Chapter ten, “The Affirmation of the Phenomenal World: From the Sacred to the Profane,” evaluates two points regarding Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of dependent co-arising: “In the first place, he extended the sphere of the members interrelated through dependent co-arising, and secondly he linked dependent co-arising and emptiness” (p. 116). In the *Middle Stanzas*, dependent co-arising described in negative terms indicates the vector from the profane to the sacred, while dependent co-arising described in affirmative terms indicates the vector from the sacred to the profane.

(4) Chapter eleven, “Tetralemmas in the *Middle Stanzas,*” represents a new interpretation of the tetralemmas. To surmount the defects of the previous symbolic representation of each case of the tetralemmas, Tachikawa has interpreted each case as indicating a division of the universe of discourse, a sum of divisions, or no universe of discourse. To support his interpretation, he gives a list of the

types of tetralemmas (p. 136) and classifies all the tetralemmas by the criteria of affirmative or negative, and conjunctive or disjunctive (p. 137). He proves in this chapter that the tetralemmas in the *Middle Stanzas* observes the laws of contradiction and the excluded middle. Chapter twelve, “Nāgārjuna’s Tetralenna in Comparison with that of the Hua-yen School in China,” points out a difference between tetralemmas used in the *Middle Stanzas* and in the *Hua-yen wu-chiao chang* (華嚴五教章), and concludes that the latter, unlike the former, does not include radical negation of the profane. Tachikawa’s statement on the negation implemented in these two texts is very interesting: “The emptiness of the *Middle Stanzas* represents ‘rebirth’ that follows on from total negation. In the *Wu-chiao chang*, etc., on the other hand, the ‘remnants’ of the profane negatee form the world of provisional designation. This way of thinking, which was absent in Early Buddhism and the early Mādhyamika school, was later to gradually develop in the Yogācāra school, Tathāgatagarbha thought, Tantrism and the Hua-yen and Tien-t’ai school in China” (p. 167).

(5) Chapter thirteen, “Later Interpretations of ‘Dependent Co-arising’: The Significance of the Profane,” tries to reinterpret the difference between the standpoints of Bhāvaviveka making much of Dignāga’s logical system and of Candrakīrti attaching much significance to *reductio ad absurdum* in the framework of the sacred and the profane.

III. Comments

The most important aspect of this book is that the author has constantly succeeded in interpreting Nāgārjuna’s thought represented in the *Middle Stanzas* from the perspective of the sacred and the profane. The use of these scholarly concepts may cause some readers to think that the author’s analysis of the text is rough and inaccurate. However, the logical analysis presented in chapters four to eight of the present book eliminates all such doubt. Moreover, Tachikawa has stated that Nāgārjuna’s logical operations aim to negate the reality of the profane and as a result manifest the sacred. He has shed light upon Nāgārjuna’s most common method of argument as quoted (pp. 56-57, 61) in the previous section of the present review. His logical analysis confirms our belief in the validity of using those concepts. His interpretation of the tetralemmas in the *Middle Stanzas* is also logical and effectively removes the ambiguity concerning the interrelation of their cases in past research. The four tables inserted in the present book (pp. 37-45, 64, 76-87, 136-137) cover all the cases and support the validity of his analysis. The fact that he has proved that Nāgārjuna observes basic rules of logic such as the laws of contradiction and the excluded middle is also an important achievement.

Tachikawa’s use of the concepts of the sacred and the profane has paved the way for a connection of Nāgārjuna’s perspective in the *Middle Stanzas* to religion. He seems to claim that this text is an object not only of Buddhist studies but also of religious studies. If Tachikawa had aimed simply at understanding Nāgārjuna’s religious perspective, Nāgārjuna’s own terms ‘ultimate truth’ and ‘conventional truth’ would have been sufficient to bring about that purpose. By applying these

two scholarly concepts, Tachikawa has claimed that we can interpret Nāgārjuna's perspective in the framework of religion. Chapter two of his book, in particular, reveals his view about the nature of religion. This book will undoubtedly attract the attention of persons interested in religious studies.

It is noteworthy that Tachikawa has demonstrated the interpretation of the tetrallemmas made by the Hua-yen school, its difference from Nāgārjuna's intention, and the influence of this difference on the Yogācāra school, Tantrism, etc. In this sense, the present book will certainly be of value not only to those interested in the Mādhyamika school, but also to those interested in Buddhism in general.

Nāgārjuna examines propositions describing the relationship among philosophical concepts such as action, its agent, and a locus where the action takes place, cause and effect, and so forth, and eventually proves that these propositions are false. The method of his criticism is *reductio ad absurdum*. Tachikawa's logical analysis of Nāgārjuna's argument will undoubtedly interest readers of philosophy in general.

I would like to pose a few questions here. (1) When he inquires into the meaning of 'own-being', Tachikawa claims that "As in the case of the 'similar effect' and 'dissimilar effect' in IV.6, 'effects that are really existent by their own-being' and 'effects that are not really existent by their own-being' do not signify two spheres that together constitute the entire realm of all 'effects'; instead they actually refer merely to two types of effects far removed from one another, one effects that are eternal and immutable entities and the other effects that are without any shadow of existence and are equivalent to nothing" (p. 109). He continues that "In the case of the former, 'own-being' (*svabhāva*) refers to something eternal and immutable, whereas in the case of the latter it signifies not only something eternal and immutable, but everything existent, including that which is subject to change." However, it is not clear why 'own-being' signifies everything existent when effects that are without any shadow of existence are referred to in verse 21ab, XX: Would a cause produce an effect that is not really existent by its own-being? (*phalaṃ svabhāvāsadbhūtaṃ kiṃ hetur janayisyati*). In this verse also, 'own-being' seems to mean something eternal and immutable. Tachikawa's claim may be correct, but he should have elucidated the case in more detail.

(2) It is understandable that the two poles of the sacred and the profane are an effective means to interpret the *Middle Stanzas*, but I wonder how much they facilitate our understanding of other religions and what the connection with other scholarly concepts such as impurity is. This issue, of course, is beyond Tachikawa's scope, and hence he did not need to address it in his book. However, since he explains religious activities from the perspective of the two poles in the second chapter, my question seems natural. I look forward to reading his answer elsewhere.

These questions do not impinge upon the main theme of the present book. To my knowledge, Tachikawa has provided the first consistent interpretation of the whole *Middle Stanzas* with a logical analysis of Nāgārjuna's arguments. The original version of the present book was published in 1986, but most of the

material had come out much earlier. The author has published English papers on the *Middle Stanzas* but they did not all appear in readily obtainable journals. In addition, these papers do not necessarily lead non-Japanese readers to an understanding of his framework in consistently interpreting Nāgārjuna's text, and consequently Tachikawa's approach to Nāgārjuna's thought has unfortunately not been widely introduced outside Japan. The present book makes up for this drawback. It is not an exaggeration to say that the reading of the present book will lead to many further studies on the *Middle Stanzas*.

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