Time in Buddhism

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1. Structural Model of Time

1.1 Image of Time Structure

The proof of life lies in acts (karma). As long as we live, we keep engaging in acts. Having rest is also a kind of act. It requires an elapse of time to get acts established. However simple an act is, unless there is a certain length of time or continuity of time, none can be realized. In other words, in so far as the proof of life lies in acts, we are to exist within the scope of time.

People use certain measures to quantify time such as hour, day or year. In this case, time is considered to be a homogeneous entity like a belt of a specific length, which can be quantified in terms of numerical units such as one metre or two metres, as is in the case of cutting pieces out of 90 cm-wide fabric. Definitely, it is an important aspect of time, and such a spatial representation of time is convenient in daily life. However, it is not all that we find as attributes of time.

In order to better understand the nature of time, I would like to propose a structural model of time. A model might be the image of a pleated curtain swaying in the wind. As is well symbolized by the curtain, time has variable concentrations in it, which are translated into coarse sections and fine sections of time. There is another model to represent time, which has a spherical structure rather than a two-dimensional one. The rationale of this model is that within the scope of time co-exist vectors with different orientations (quantities of energy which possess orientation). The co-existence of vectors signifies that both the vector AB, the orientation of which is from the centre of a sphere towards its surface, and the vector BA, the orientation of which is from the surface towards the centre, concurrently exist in time. (cf. Figure 1)

Another possibility is that time is an entity which does not allow any spatial representation. If so, time might be something which should be defined as a rhythm. The problem is that those images which I have described so far can only marginally help us construct the structural model of time, and that it is not verified at all that there would be only a single model which would fit to the purpose of elucidating the structure of time. At any rate, the reason why we bother so much about those images of time is that they could, in one way or another, represent the
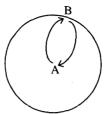
Figure 1

structure of people's acts. As I said before, all acts are committed within the scope of time, and time is a medium by which one can understand the structure of acts.

Here I would like to briefly touch upon what has been conventionally called eternity. So-called eternity is defined as something that transcends time, infinitely elongated time or super-time which exists within time. Those definitions can be categorized into two groups, according to their characteristics. One is the concept that eternity is something that transcends time. The other is that eternity is contained within time, but that it is an infinitely protracted time. Probably the former is more universally accepted.

When we talk about an entity which transcends time, however, what does the term transcend mean? Does it mean that it has nothing to do with time? If so, this entity could not undergo any change at all, because changes can take place only within the scope of time. I used the phrase "this entity," to refer to what transcends time. It is true that time is always self-emancipating, because, by denying the current time, new time —— or something new inside new time —— is to be generated. Having said so, however, it should be noted that time cannot transcend itself. The reason is that, if time could be transcended, it would require a context where there is something that transcends time, the case of which would require the existence of something. Now, if time were to transcend itself, the something in the context above would be time. This notion contradicts to the concept of time which we are dealing with. In other words, the time as a something is quite different from what we are to address in this paper based on the perception of transcendence of time.

Let us discuss the situation where an entity (x) transcends time. As was discussed before, x cannot experience any change. It is said that Hindu deities are not to be born, not to die, nor to undergo any change but to stay the same (*Bhagavadgītā*). A Hindu deity Vishnu, which corresponds to x, never changes at all. In Hindu myths, however, Vishnu is realized in the form of various creatures, thus behaving like a human being, eventually to die. On the other hand, from the Hindu point of view, the transformation of Vishnu takes place for the purpose of saving mankind, whereas the essential being of Vishnu remains immortal and immutable. Although similar concepts are maintained by Buddhists as well, they are not explicitly established in the religious faith except for the fact that there is

some reference to this effect in a few Buddhist scriptures. There is an infinitely small gap between time and the x which transcends time. Buddha also exists within the scope of time.

1.2   Basic Structure of Religious Acts

There are always three elements in acts. That is to say, (1) the recognition of the current status or world where those who commit to an act are situated (the world view), (2) the objective and purpose of an act and (3) the means and processes through which the above-mentioned objective and purpose can be achieved. Based on (1), namely, the recognition of current situation or the world view, the objective and purpose are selected. In many cases, within the world view, the objective and purpose are already set forth. It is because, on many occasions, the global view is constructed on a basis of the reflection of previous history. On the other hand, the objective and purpose have already been accomplished in the previous history by way of certain acts, which in turn are to be experienced from now on. In this context, methods have already been experimented, thus their effectiveness having also been verified in previous experiences. When the purpose and methods are already built-in within the world view, people's acts — or ideological systems which unfold around the world view — are defined according to the view.

Here we focus on the issue of concept of time in the sphere of religions, especially in Buddhism. The core of religion is an act. What is worth noting is that all religious acts uphold a specific purpose. Religious acts are the ones in which the second element, namely, the objective and purpose, are vigorously pursued. At the same time, however, it seems that religious acts often require a certain structural image in place in order to pretend that they do not carry any specific objective or purpose. In many religions, it is considered to be the ultimate goal for people to relinquish their desires and self-interests in pursuit of an ideal model. Self-sacrifice and self-denial are often chosen as a means to achieve the goal. It should be noted, however, that hidden behind the concept of desisting from self-interest or self-denial exist tremendous desires in people's mind. Since the value of accomplishment is such that people even dare to give up self-interest in secular dimensions or to dedicate their life in its pursuit. This valuable accomplishment is already incorporated in religious acts in the form of objective and purpose.

I define a religion as a goal-oriented act done with the consciousness of a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane. Although I learned the concepts of the sacred and the profane from Mircea Eliade, I do not necessarily follow his theory about how to apply these concepts to religious study. In my paper, "the sacred" refers to the sacred power which is given to materials, goods, dates and so forth, as well as the materials, goods, dates and others which have gained the sacred power. While "the profane" can mean things of worldly interest with purely secular dimensions or vulgarity, it can also mean routine, everyday affairs and

situations in daily life.

Religious acts can be grouped into two major categories. One is of individual nature and the other is of collective nature. In the former are included yoga, Zen (Historically, Zen was developed as part of yoga), *Nenbutsu* (recitation of Amitābha's name), the visualization of deities (sādhana) (religious asceticism through which one seeks to be united with gods and Buddha) and so on. The latter includes festivals, funerals, homa (a fire ritual, the act of burning firewood, grain, etc., as an offering to deities in Tantric Buddhism) ritual as a line extension of the ancient Vedic ritual and others. The problem is that these two are not always distinguishable. Furthermore, in later centuries, when tantrism prevailed in India, it was attempted to unify these two types of acts. For instance, Buddhist tantrism incorporated the ancient tradition of homa rituals into its system, as a result of which *goma* is exercised in the present day. Especially, *ge-goma* (external homa) is a linear extension of homa ritual as a collective act in which a group of followers throw offerings into a fire. At the same time, inside the mind of each individual follower (ascetic), spiritual fire burns and destroys his worldly and secular or profane desires. This internal (spiritual) and individual act has been named *nai-goma* (internal homa).

Whether individual or collective, as long as religious acts are defined as acts, they are never able to overcome the irreversibility of time. Is time dropped from the future onto the present, falling further down to the past? Or does time flow from the past to the present, and further into the future? I do not bother this question right now. As is expounded by the school of Sarvāstivāda of Abhidharma Buddhism, it might be true that there exist three times such as the past, the present and the future and that time slides along from the future into the past. It is similar to a situation where, while watching a film at a cinema, we could imagine that the present phase is being shown on screen through the light emitted from the projector, only when a series of exposures corresponding to the three different times are placed in the present phase. Although, we generally consider that time flows from the past toward the future, it is not yet known whether or not time is an entity which flows or falls in the environment.

At any rate, what is certain is that acts are conducted in the stream of time and that the stream is irreversible. Even though we could go to a past world in a time-machine, what we would discover over there would be that the acts which we materialized in the past were proceeding at different points of time in an irreversible manner. Although we could see our past acts moving into a certain direction and confirm the fact, we could not reverse the direction of movement. In the world of science fictions, it is often suggested that it could be possible to change that direction of movement, but it is not a very precise way to put it. Probably, a better way to express the phenomenon would be that it is possible for us to contemplate about changing the way in which acts are proceeding. It is virtually impossible for us to think about inverting the movement itself. In fact, this very fact is a good proof that time is irreversible.

Interestingly enough, however, in the sphere of religions, especially in Buddhism, there seems to have been an attempt to challenge this notion of the irreversibility of time. In the end, it is an attempt to destroy the structure of acts itself. It seems that Buddhism, under the slogan of "achieving enlightenment (bodhi)," has been challenging this fundamental nature of time, and therefore challenging the destiny of human life, although it is not so likely that the effort will be rewarded.

I have already discussed that to live means to stay within a scope of time, and that to stay within time means to act. As motion can be specified in terms of time and distance, an act can be defined in terms of time and the energy of act. The energy of act selects a means to accomplish its objective, thereby releasing itself into a circuit of time. On the contrary, it seems that Buddhism aims to destroy this basic structure. Could we interpret that emptiness (sūnyatā), which is the most fundamental philosophy of Buddhism, aspires the rebellion against the irreversibility of time? At the same time, we also note that this rebellion does not aim to throw the process of human life into an nihilistic end of nothingness, but to restore and regenerate human acts by way of closely watching the depth of the temporal structure of acts.

1.3 Emptiness and Time

We understand that the fundamental philosophy in Buddhism, emptiness, negates daily acts of human beings in order to seek something hidden behind them. On the other hand, in daily life, we are used to the idea that people's acts can be manifested as a stream, thus each individual act also being defined within the stream. There is no problem in thinking that the worldly usefulness and effectiveness of acts can be thus established. The point is that the philosophy of emptiness does accept this general manifestation of acts as a secular on profane point of view. There are several religious sects which advocate the philosophy of emptiness. Although each sect upholds different points of view on secular or profane matters, there is a common feature prevailing in them that secular acts can be established with certain meanings or within a certain dimension. The philosophy of emptiness does not simply maintain that everything is empty. Rather, it tries to dialectically verify that acts could be established without the mediation of a real existence, which is eternal and immutable. The generalized temporal structure of acts, including religious acts, can be represented by three different times, that is to say, (a) the time before an act fulfills its purpose, (b) the time when the purpose is fulfilled, and (3) the time afterward.

For example, we can identify a typical example of these three times in a case of a Zen monk, who has spent many years in extremely demanding ascetic practices before reaching a status of enlightenment. The time (a) is the one before he fulfills his purpose in the ascetic practices. The time (b) is when he has finally reached the enlightenment. The time (c) is the one when, after experiencing the enlightenment,

he comes to live in a new world (in other words, he experiences the time following (c)). A similar temporal structure can be found in another situation where one leaves home to go to a shrine for religious worships, reaching the temple and dedicating worships before coming back home.

Mahāyāna was enhanced by Nāgārjuna, who provided it with a theoretical model. In the most prominent book written by Nāgārjuna, namely, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Middle Stanzas), he maintained that, after going through the process of negation and denial (phase of practices) of the world of the profane (causal phase) which contains afflictions, evil passions, worldly desires (kleśa) and karma, one can accomplish the emptiness (phase of result (phala)). Shortly afterward, a hypothesis (a temporary verbal definition of the existence of things) appears as the second phase of the result (phala). If we interpret his teaching in this way, then it would be right to say that religious acts which are depicted in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* also possess the above-mentioned temporal structures of three different times.

The way in which the three times exist as elucidated in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* can be expressed as the following, if we adopt the concepts of the sacred and the profane. At Time (a), the profane is denied and the realization of the sacred comes closer. At Time (b), the emptiness as the sacred functions as wisdom. At Time (c), the profane gets sanctified by the power of the sacred.

These three times are not homogeneous. Time (a) is continuous, and the acts conducted at (a) are iterative and planned. Time (b) is instantaneous. Normally, it is believed that human intuition of mystic nature can be completed within an extremely brief time or even momentarily. The author of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* himself did not leave any particular explanation on the mental-physiological conditions which are associated with the experience of emptiness. However, we can conjecture, based on the reading of scriptures written by his contemporaries as well as literature in later days, that Time (b) could not last for a long time. According to Zen monks, the time of so called enlightenment is also momentary. Furthermore, it is said in Buddhism that the first stage of enlightenment in the process of ascetic practices, which is called the path of insight (darśana-mārga), comes momentarily. It is not the case that, when travelling from (b) to (c), people spend the same amount of time as (a), that is to say, a period of time which has elapsed before the arrival at (b). Time (c) is materialized almost simultaneously with the realization of (b). Unlike (b), however, (c) is not ended instantaneously, but lasts for a long time after the establishment. In some cases, what has been experienced at the moment of (b) could completely transform one's life. A very good example is found in the experience of a Japanese Buddhist monk Hounen, the founder of the Jodo (Pure Land) sect, who underwent momentary enlightenment at the Kurodani Valley in Mt. Hiei of Kyoto, which determined the rest of his life.

The question is how one can achieve Time (b). Even though it is supposed to be gained as a consequence of extreme perseverance and asceticism, there is no

guarantee that one can reach (b) after a certain period of ascetic practices. Times (a) and (b) are heterogeneous. Unless the energy of acts at Time (a) undergoes a quantum leap in quality, one could never reach (b).

Probably, it is not a correct expression that Time (a) is led to Time (c). It is because a status at a certain point of time would not shift or change to another status. In relation to acts, however, we represent them as a change in a person or entity or as the one in the circumstances in which the person or entity is situated. For instance, let us imagine that an ascetic who has never experienced enlightenment suddenly comes to achieve it, which fundamentally changes his way of life afterwards. In such a context, the phrase of "getting rid of delusions to reach enlightenment" does not sound contradictory at all as a linguistic expression.

Having said so, however, as I have already suggested, it seems that such a leap would require a wild break up, through some drastic measures, of normal circumstances. By "normal," I mean a kind of environment, which is pertinent to the above-mentioned ordinary linguistic expression. Then, one could desist from the time of delusions (Time (a)) before arriving at enlightenment (Time (b)). As a matter of fact, Buddhism has proposed various theories and implementation methods through its history for its followers to leave Time (a) and reach the moment of (b). Obviously, those theories and implementation methods are based on the global view in Buddhism, which is the first element of acts.

1.4   World Sturucture and Causality in Buddhism

Indian philosophy can be divided into two major groups according to the view on the world structure. We can name one of them Indian realism, and the other Indian nominalism. In the former, it is considered that both substance and quality are independent existence and that the substance, which is a basic being, contains quality, universality and motion in it. In contrast, in the latter, it is not accepted that the substance and quality are independent and discrete existence. Nor does it admit that the substance, which is a basic being, contains quality in it. The former group includes the Nyāya school, which is an orthodox sect in Brahmanism, together with Vaiśeṣika. The dogma in both schools is based on reasoning and logic. The latter group includes Vedānta, which is generally regarded as the most representative sect in orthodox Brahmanic faith, and also Buddhism, the most representative ideology which stands against Brahmanism.

There are ontological relations between the substance and quality. The temporal aspect of world structure can be better depicted by introducing a causal relationship. As far as the view on causality is concerned, there is striking difference between realism and nominalism. As there is distinctive difference between these two groups concerning substance and quality, so is there difference in approach with regard to the view on causality. According to Indian realism, a reason (cause) needs to precede a consequence (effect). There is a clear distinction between a cause and an effect. On the other hand, according to Indian

nominalism, there is no clear distinction between the reason (cause) and consequence (effect). The distance between the two can be kept minimum. Furthermore, in Indian realism, the relations between reason (cause) and consequence (effect) are sometimes considered to be identical to the ones between substance and quality. For example, according to the school of Vaiśeṣika, the ground or earth is a substance, whereas scent is a quality belonging to the former. In this case, the ground or earth is the reason (cause), whereas scent is the result.

The school of Vaiśeṣika defines time as one of the substances. This substance triggers the recognition of temporal perspective and helps people to understand that this thing happened long time ago or that this thing has happened very recently. What is important is that categories such as substance, quality, motion and others are determined regardless of time. The motion is divided into five subgroups such as ascent, descent, flex, extension and others. These five subgroups are not defined in terms of time, either. On the other hand, it should be noted that there is a major gap between what we call time today and the time which was taken as a substance by those Indian philosophers in the past. It is a distinctive fact that the school of Vaiśeṣika did not have any comprehensive perception, by which people in the modern age address time.

The situation of Indian nominalism is somewhat complicated. Whereas the school of Vedānta and Buddhism are both defined as part of nominalism, there is significant difference between the two. In the former, they recognize the real existence of fundamental cause of the world (Brahman), believing that world phenomena are the culmination of this fundamental cause (Brahman) or its tentative manifestation. They maintain that the substance as reason (cause) and the world of phenomena as its result are homogeneous. According to them, many items and matters in the world of phenomena are to be eventually assimilated into the Brahman, which is the fundamental cause of the world. They identify the essential homogeneity in substance and quality. The former is a basic being (focus), whereas the latter is an attribute of the former.

On the other hand, unlike Vedānta, Buddhism does not expound that the world of phenomena derives from the fundamental cause (Brahman). Instead, followers of this faith, despite some differences among sects, believe, by and large, that the world is based on the reasoning of Dependent Co-arising (pratītya-samutpāda). This reasoning is an approach in which the world structure is elucidated by the notion that y is generated by x. It is the most fundamental philosophy of Buddhism. In this approach, x and y correspond to the reason (cause) and result, respectively. In particular, in Mahayana Buddhism, the distance between these two terms, x and y, is made as short as possible. Eventually, this notion leads to the denial of these two terms. A fundamental principle in Buddhism is that whatever exists in the world, apart from a few exceptions, is to exist momentarily, only to go extinct after a second. Should x exist in affiliation with not less than two moments (kṣaṇa), it would mean that x was allowed to get involved with not less than three moments. In the end, x would have to be

something permanent. This very reasoning contradicts with the fundamental principle of Buddhism, which I have described. In order to resolve this contradiction, or at least to avoid a drastic infringement of principle, those who had faith in Buddhism, especially in the theory of emptiness of Mahāyāna Buddhism, had to find a solution, whereby reiterating that everything in the world, under the control of causality, was transient and mutable (anitya), and therefore momentary. They reached a conclusion that the causal relationship itself — although there was a limitation that it was applicable only at the time of one's intuitive attainment of emptiness — should be denied. Thus the philosophy of emptiness, which was originated as a landmark theory of Indian nominalism, expounded that, when the emptiness was intuitively attained, x and y were not heterogeneous, and that neither of them did exist in reality. In this way, the distance between x and y was negated.

It is important to note, however, that not all Buddhist sects negated the existence of x and y, which existed on the reasoning of Dependent Co-arising. For example, there was a sect which accepted, although purely as an abstract concept, the existence of x and y, in compensation of which it contended that the reason (cause) and result existed concurrently. For example, The school of Vijñānavāda, part of Mahāyāna holds such a view.

1.5   Language and Time in Nāgārjuna

Here let us go back to the previous subject of acts which aim to attain emptiness. We have been focusing on the issue of how those who had faith in Buddhism, including Nāgārjuna, explored methods by which they could start from Time (a) and reach the moment of (b). The method proposed by Nāgārjuna was nothing but a manifestation of nominalism itself.

In his perspective, the world of phenomena was language itself. He did not believe that what was referred to by language existed externally, thus opposing advocates of realism. As far as Nāgārjuna's thought was concerned, if something was under causality, it meant that it was linguistically expressed. The very core of his methodology, as was delineated in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, lay in his attempt to vindicate that the world as language or as proposition was essentially empty (sūnya), and therefore that the substance (sva-bhāva) did not exist.

Nāgārjuna named actions which utilize language prapañca. He applied the same name to the object of language. "Prapañca" means language proliferation. "Proliferation" referred to a crevice or distinction which is manifested between A and non-A, subjective and objective, cause and effect or active and passive. In the dimension of language or proposition, this proliferation is manifested in juxtapositions such as subject and predicate, noun phrase and verb phrase, or as a supplementary distribution of regions which are expressed by nouns (For instance, in the second chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, roads are differentiated between those which have already been traversed and those which have not. The proliferation delineates the world structure. It is precisely by way of these

distinctions that we can use language. As a result, acts are given a meaning. He contended that the basic structure of acts could be represented by expressions such as "somebody conducts some action," but that there was no distinction between somebody and action or between somebody and what he does in the dimension of emptiness. This notion is almost the same as claiming that there is no basic structure of acts at all. Nāgārjuna was very decisive in his argument that, in the sphere of emptiness, none of the proliferation did exist. If so, we are led into thinking that, at the time of emptiness, namely, (b), there is another time, the quality of which is different from what we know in our daily life. The problem here is that probably the nature of such time would not accommodate expressions such as "there is such and such..." or "such and such is...."

Language was what Nāgārjuna focused on in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as a copy of world or as the world itself. Language took the form of proposition. From his point of view, he had to vindicate that proposition was essentially impossible, because, by doing so, he could place himself in a position to deny the profane, thereby waiting for the manifestation of the sacred. This process of waiting takes place at Time (a). The time for manifestation of the sacred is the same as moment (b), when language and the world are utterly extinct. In addition, almost simultaneously with the advent of moment (b), the profane, which has already undergone death, is resurrected. Time (c) is the time when what has been resurrected continues to exist.

Man is a being which acts according to his volition. As far as human beings are concerned, language is indispensable for them to complete their acts. However, Buddhism, and the philosophy of emptiness in particular, orders man to desist from both his volition for acting and the consequence of his act. It mandates people to give them up at least once, if not permanently. Nāgārjuna, who systematically philosophized and advanced the idea of emptiness, declared that, as long as man used language, he could never reach enlightenment in its genuine sense. To relinquish acts and language means to stay outside the sphere of time. Clearly, on this particular point, his theory is exposed to a critical problem. The problem is that, as I have mentioned several times, Buddhism would never accept the real existence of something x that is to transcend time. If so, how on earth could it be possible that one gives up acts to seek one's purpose as well as language, while concurrently trying not to depend on something x which transcends time? Obviously, the answer to this question is, as was proposed by Nāgārjuna, that man's effort to desist from a pursuit of purpose, thus associating himself with a world in which language has ceased to exist, would resuscitate man's language and acts by the power of the sacred. Thus he would be able to be reborn as the sanctified.

We could conjecture that emptiness ought to be either wisdom of instantaneous and intuitive nature or what could be directly corroborated by wisdom. Under these circumstances, it would not matter whether it was wisdom as emptiness or emptiness as an object of wisdom. Only when such moment of

emptiness is achieved, it could extend its message to human mind, without the need to transcend time, in a dimension where acts and language have been deceased forever.

2.   Volition and Time in Religious Decision

I have already discussed that the generally accepted temporal structure of acts including religious acts has three different times, that is to say, (a) the time before the fulfillment of purpose of an act, (b) the time of the fulfillment and (c) the time afterward.   Furthermore, I have also explained that this structure coincides with that proposed in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, which contains three different times, namely, (a) the time before the understanding of emptiness, (b) the very moment when emptiness is realized and (c) the time afterward.

I published this specific chapter titled the "Volition and Time in Religious Decision" in *The Journal of the Nippon Buddhist Research Association No. 4, Feb. 1976*.   I wrote it based on my own experience in spring 1959.   When I wrote this particular section, I had not yet realized the three elements associated with acts, nor the 3 times of (a), (b) and (c).   However, when I read it again today, I can sense that I had already envisaged, in those days, the structure of time which I am trying to depict in this paper.   Three decades have passed since, and I would like to incorporate this report on my own experience and ideas in here, so that I can examine it as if it were a case study of somebody else.   I will deal with it with an objective perspective of a third party.   When it comes to the question of whether or not the approaches proposed here would represent Buddhist philosophy, I would leave the judgment with readers.   At least, what is certain is that it was definitely Buddhism, especially the tradition of Pure Land sect, if anything at all, that inspired me to formulate these ideas.   I can say so without doubt, judging by the circumstances where I was in those days.

2.1   About Questioning the Affiliation with Amitābha Buddha

Let us start with the fact that we are already affiliated with Amitābha Buddha. (In the following part of this paper Amitābha Buddha is abbriviated as Buddha.) In this paper, we do not bother the question of what essential reason would be needed for us to be led to the affiliation with Buddha.   It is because we start to contemplate ourselves only after we have got affiliated with Buddha.   In other words, as a natural choice for human beings, people contemplate themselves who are affiliated with Buddha, rather than Buddha himself or its essential nature.   Our major interest lies not in the question of "what Buddha is," but in the issue of "what on earth we, who are concerned so much about 'what Buddha is', are," or "what on earth we, who are involved with a being called Buddha, are."   I believe that the essential being of Buddha should be elucidated by careful examination of ourselves in a context in which we are already affiliated with Buddha.

Whatever affiliation it is, I live a life associated with Buddha. When saying so, I do not mean that I have already attained ultimate enlightenment or salvation. It is far from what I really am. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that I am affiliated with Buddha and that Buddha has been associated with me in a way or another. It is beyond doubt that there is such exchange between me and Buddha.

I name the effort for people to question about themselves. The process of examining ourselves to discover how we are affiliated with Buddha is a very critical part of cross-question.

2.2   Universality of Questioning about the Affiliation with Buddha

Most of philosophical observations on religious practices are founded on personal experiences, and so are people's perception about those religious practices. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to translate these observations into a discipline of universal nature. Having said so, however, it is exactly what I am planning to do in this paper. I am to address this metaphysical subject in here, based on my personal conviction, which is again an extremely difficult phenomenon to be reviewed as a universal matter. At the same time, we are aware of many situations in which experiences of personal dimensions have been successfully communicated with and appreciated by others. More importantly, religious philosophy ought to be established on the basis that those experiences are understandable by others. If we employ the assumption that faith in religions is constructed with a more universal structure than has conventionally been believed, then it would not be too extraordinary a thing for me to expect that my personal experiences could be somehow assimilated with the universal structure.

Even though somebody has shared a recognition similar to what I am dealing with in this paper, he might grasp it in a different approach. Moreover, some might not accept the necessity of religious acts at all, rejecting so called religious approaches from start. Although I envisage that my proposal could be exposed to such criticism, I believe that it is a mandatory task for me to present my experience to the public and universal domain. More correctly put, I am willing to do so for the purpose of provoking potential criticism, so that fruitful dialogues can be developed among people.

2.3   Structure of Time in Religious Practices

The affiliation with Buddha can be materialized in innumerable situations. One important scene is the one in which one keeps faith in Buddha. The problem of this particular scenario is that nothing could have a structure as complicated as the act of faith. It is because that nobody could ever present an ultimate proof for faith. At the same time, we know that no one would be able to talk about the structure of religious belief, when ignoring the act of faith. In order to resolve this problem, I would like to apply the method of cross-questioning to the scenes of

faith as well as its time structure.

Aa   *The World as an Arena for Involving Oneself with Others & Having Others Involved with Oneself*

In this world are we involved with others, whereas others are involved with us. It is in this world where one acts. What is important is that the subject for acts is not only so called self. It is both self and others, meaning many individual entities, who acts in the world.

Ab   *Involvement of One with Oneself*

The involvement of one with others is reflected on in one's mind. This particular scene should be appreciated as the internal world of someone who acts in the situation Aa, namely, the world. It should not be alienated from the scene Aa. On the other hand, Aa and the situation of involvement of one with oneself are heterogeneous. The latter contains its own structure, which is worth analyzing.

Ab1   *Situation where Limitation and Deception of Self Are Recognized*

We all know that we are to die in the end. However, while comforting ourselves in the complacency that death is not imminent, we are usually inclined to lead an idle life. On the contrary, it sometimes happens that we are suddenly exposed to the absolute truth that we are all to die in the end. It is revealed to us that the time available for each life is finite, as a result of which tension is evoked in our time. Death, that is to say, the end point of time allowed for each living organism, exposes a fact to us that the allowed time is not infinite, but finite. It triggers us to question about the meaning of time which is given to us. It is the start of process which is called cross-questioning.

The point is that the limitation of time, which is revealed to us by death, is not all limitation that we face. It is already a limitation that we exist in a secular world. Whatever effort we make, we are finite beings as long as we live in profane or secular dimensions. Our way of being is fraught with limitation.

All our behaviour and all that exists in our daily life are to be denied through cross-questioning. However useful and effective our acts look in secular terms, once they are subjected to cross-questioning, they reveal inherent deceptiveness and uncertainty. However convincing our experiences are, once scrutinized in cross-questioning, those attributes surface. Some acts were conducted in a belief that they were purely for the benefit of others, whereas it often turns out, when examined in retrospect, that they were done in our own interest.

Moreover, the effort to correct such deception and selfishness almost always fails. Those who used to patiently endeavour to rectify deception

eventually exhaust themselves in the process of iterative self-denial. Given that the limitation of their being has been disclosed, the effort to overcome the limit exposes its finiteness all the more evidently. When one admits that none of the effort is fruitful, one would have to acknowledge failure.

Ab2   *Situation where Effort is Made to Have Faith in Buddha*

When I realized that the time allowed for me was finite, and that my being in a profane world should be denied, Buddha manifested himself as an entity to guide me. The Buddha became a collaborator for me to deny my being in secular dimensions. I use the word "collaborator." The reason is that, although I recognized Buddha as an existence to guide me, basically I was still concerned with myself at that stage. Of course, Buddha should not end up with a mere projection in me as collaborator, but, in those days, he was still manifested as a supremely noble existence which was projected in me. At any rate, I tried to have faith in Buddha, and experienced a brief moment when I was convinced that I had faith in Buddha.

Ab3   *Situation where I Discovered Myself Merely Fabricating the Faith in Buddha*

The moment when I was convinced of my faith in Buddha was surprisingly brief. Shortly after the happy moment, a cross-question surfaced in mind, pressing me to wonder if I was merely fabricating faith in Buddha. My conviction in Buddha was not permanent. The conviction was challenged by doubt right away, which voiced the suspicion that I might not have had faith. In the following stage, however, that suspicion was contradicted by resurfacing conviction, which said, "I must have had faith in Buddha." Then, shortly after, the conviction was negated again. Thus belief and disbelief repeated cyclically. As far as my perception is concerned, however, I am confident that this cyclic change in mind was, in fact, a manifestation of a series of acts, which pursued the true faith in Buddha. At the same time, I should not forget that, at that stage, as I mentioned before, I was still mainly concerned about myself, although not entirely, while maintaining the disguise of assimilation with Buddha.

Ab4   *Situation where I Put Myself at Stake for the Faith in Buddha*

Following that stage, I was guided to endeavour to overcome the crevice between belief and disbelief, putting my own being at stake. "Putting myself at stake" means that I had to decide. "Decision" means to choose one out of multiple alternatives which were offered to me. Each alternative carried different, and sometimes contradictory, potential. To choose one means to nullify the others. Decision making effort was mandatory for coming up with one conclusion. At this stage, my volition was not concerned about what those alternatives were. Instead, its main concern was about the selection process itself. When I identified the power of

volition, the very essential nature of which lay in choosing, I became fully convinced that I had faith in Buddha.

Ab5   *Situation where I Discovered Myself Merely Cherishing the Illusion that I had Put My Own Being at Stake for the 'Faith in Buddha'*

Following a fairly short time after I was convinced of my faith in Buddha (Ab2), I discovered that I had merely deluded myself into belief that I did so (Aa3). By the same token, Ab4 was finally turned to Ab5. The volition to believe in Ab2 corresponds to the one which puts my own being at stake in Ab4. Both types of volition are to have a choice out of 2 alternatives, namely, belief and disbelief. What is particularly important is that, as soon as question surfaces in mind about what those alternatives are, enticing us to wonder whether everything is only arbitrary, and not founded, the volition loses its power, falling useless.

At the beginning, the four situations from Ab2 through Ab5 occurred in sequence, whereas after certain time, they were iterated without particular regularity. For example, I sometimes underwent the processes, apparently without any particular order, from 2 to 3, and at other times, from 4 to 5, repeatedly.

This sequence of denial, in which I persistently moved from one extreme to the other, seems to be an extremely demanding task of self-denial. In reality, however, it tends to entice people to release themselves from a sincere and conscientious commitment into slackened mediocrity of ordinary life. People could escape from this task, using convenient excuses, saying "I am exercising continuous asceses through cross-questioning," or "I am conscientiously dialoguing with myself." It was true of my case. On the other hand, it is also true, that, once people have been urged to make an ultimate decision between belief and disbelief, they are reminded in later processes that what they have chosen entails in life, despite seductive power that tries to cajole people into slackened mediocrity.

B   *Situation where One Relinquishes the Involvement with Oneself, Intuitively Recognizing the Power of Buddha*

Would it be possible for one to continue cross-questioning about oneself forever? At the end of the day, would one not fall in a masochistic trap of desperation and self-abandonment, if one pursues questions about oneself to the very extreme? Probably, what we really should be can be discovered outside the scope of cyclic movement from Ab2 through Ab5.

The volition which aspires to believe is valuable. Without it, we would be unable to proceed in a profane world. During this process, decision making based on our volition is required for moving forward from one situation to another. Decisions make possible a quantum leap of quality. The decisions are a manifestation of power which we possess. In this

context, I put aside certain issues, such as "in what way we possess the power," or "how it has happened that it is owned by us." Decisions were made in the situations from Ab2 through Ab5, while my being was concerned mainly about myself. On the contrary, the shifts at Ab'1 through Ab'5 and the one from Ab5 to B are heterogeneous.

While I was still bothering about processes from Ab2 to Ab5, I came to sense certain power arising somewhere in a direction, which was totally different from where my cross-questioning exercise was oriented. All the process I had undergone to reach the point was instantaneously ceased by an entity that I did not know. I felt that my effort was reoriented into a different direction by its power. At the same time, I was comforted by sensing that all of my being, which had continued the self-denial process all the time, was forgiven. In other words, I was assured that the continuous self-denial before reaching that point had possessed a positive meaning.

I would not feel comfortable if I tried to claim that that particular experience was a representation of time when I heard Buddha's voice. Nor would I allege that I had been saved. I intend not to pay so much attention to what on earth the power was, even if the power, which I intuited after a protracted process of self-denial, was in fact that of Buddha.

Ab'5 *Situation where My Being was Asserted Notwithstanding the Fact that I Only Cherished the Illusion that 'I had Put My Being at Stake for the Faith in Buddha'*

The difficulty is that we can not stay in the scene (B), where we intuited the power of some unknown entity, for ever. Once we are embraced by the sacred power, the environment, which we finally reached after the endless perseverance of cross-questioning, mercilessly pushes us back to the profane world. It is as if a summit of mountain, which we reached after so much suffering of long expedition, had turned out to be too steep, rugged and narrow for us to place our foot. The reason is that ultimate reality (paramārthasat) does not possess its own structure outside the profane. Only by means of manifesting itself in the profane, ultimate reality is able to show its existence. Therefore, it needs to emerge in profane dimensions.

In Ab'5, no sooner were religious practices brought into contact with the power of ultimate reality than I was pushed back to the world of profane dimension. It was exactly like rays of light being reflected on the surface of a mirror, going back to the original source. Upon arriving at Ab'5, the former iteration and cycle of self-denial is accommodated right away, which in turn is nullified within a second. Whereas the shift from the profane to ultimate reality is gradual, the one from ultimate reality to profane dimensions is instantaneous.

Not only Ab5 but also all the stages of cross-questioning in the profane, including Ab4, Ab3 and Ab2, are affirmed as soon as they come into contact

with ultimate reality. In other words, the practices of cross-questioning are restricted by time, the orientation of which is completely opposite to that in the previous situations. If I am allowed to use a metaphorical expression here, it is that the time oriented toward ultimate reality starting from the profane, is upward, whereas the time the other way round is downward. Or, if I may use something in traditional terminology, it could be defined as drop out or fall out from ultimate reality.

At Ab'5, a new meaning was discovered in my being. At a former stage, I had fabricated that I put my being at stake for the 'faith in Buddha'. At Ab5, my being was exposed to continuous denial and negation, whereas, when reaching Ab'5, my acts were affirmed. It would be fair to say that Ab'5 is a reversion of the time of Ab5. However, disappointment in myself, which was triggered by the discovery that I had deluded myself about the faith, did not disappear. Rather, I trust that this disappointment was essential for supporting the reversion of Ab5 into Ab'5.

Ab'4 *Situation where Putting My Being at Stake for the Faith in Buddha was Affirmed*

The decision, which I made at Ab4, to put my being at stake should have been rejected. Nevertheless, after going through the situation (B), it was appreciated as a positive act. This situation can be named Ab'4.

Ab'3 *Situation where My Being, which Cherished the Illusion of the Faith in Buddha, was Affirmed*

Likewise, my being, which cherished the illusion that I believed in Buddha, was also forgiven instantaneously. Importantly enough, however, although the repetitive act of cross-questioning was forgiven, it does not mean that I could firmly justify this act. Instead, the forgiveness meant that I was provided with strength to continue cross-questions. Since I was permitted to continue, I was encouraged to commit more to the act.

This forgiving was not really my own act for myself. My act of cross-questioning was accommodated by an unknown entity. It was a result of an act which was committed by that entity. In the situations of Ab', I was assured that an unknown entity supported me, which induced me to go back to the situations Ab, where I resumed the act of cross-questions.

Having said so, however, I would like to emphasize that we should not allow ourselves to be in complacency that we are forgiven. We should not celebrate the forgiveness. Instead, we should regret it. The reason is that Buddha is not a mere forgiver, nor saviour. Although he encourages human beings positively, he also demands that we recognize the finiteness of our being, thus forcing us to make effort for innovation. Buddha urges us to strive and endeavour all the way to our goal.

Ab'2 *Situation where My Being which Pursues the Faith in Buddha is Asserted*

Upon the arrival at Ab'4 and Ab'3, we come back to square one of the whole process of cross-questions. The world is always polarized between opposite attributes, such as just and unjust, rich and poor or beautiful and ugly. The process of cross-question does not remove such contradiction in reality. Nevertheless, we should not acquiesce in an environment where cross-questioning, which is aimed to overcome the crevice of contradiction between opposite values such as belief and disbelief, is confined only in the spiritual world of individual people, without extending its impact to reality at all. We should never give up our effort toward reality, nor forget discrimination and contradiction which exist in the world. When we embarked on a stride toward infinite cross-questions, we knew about fissures stretching between trust and distrust or faith and lack of faith. That recognition was valuable, since it shed light to discrimination, contradiction and other problems in reality. In order for us to overcome the cleft between faith and lack of faith, we need to strive toward our goal. By the same token, a commitment is required in our involvement with reality as well.

Ab'1 *Situation where I Intuited the Power of Buddha, whereby Recognizing the Limitation & Deception of My Being*

At Ab1, I discovered the limitation of my being, a being which was totally alienated from others. Then I had to make effort to deny — at least in my perception — the secular existence in myself. At that point, I was standing in front of an entity, the time of which was structured according to a completely different calibration from my time. Facing that truth, I became conscious of the finiteness of time available for me. Only when we come across the entity which transcends our time scale, we are able to achieve the intuition that our time could be ceased any time in the imminent future. More importantly, it was in this situation where it was revealed to me that the unknown entity had already been exercising its power on me, and that, thanks to the power, I could start my effort towards the sacred after giving up secularity namely, the state of being the profane. I had been utterly wrong in believing that it was me, with my own will, who had initiated the process of negation. At Ab1, while I closely reviewed myself, I was daunted and felt diffident in the face of the power of this unknown entity. Under these circumstances, I disclosed everything in me to this entity. When doing so, I was fully conscious that all my being would have to be denied for start.

It should be noted here that, in the situation Ab'1 as well as Ab1, the dimensions have to be denied, and not affirmed. The profane approaches, which were rejected in Ab, are not restored with affirmation in this step. Instead, we are encouraged to continue the acts of self-denial. Given the

circumstances, our own being, which is committed to negation, is forgiven. It is not that the profane dimensions are forgiven.

Aa'   *Situation where One Acts in the World while Intuitively Recognizing the Power of Buddha*

The situations of Aa and Ab are not unrelated. Likewise, those in Aa' and Ab' are not unrelated, either. As a matter of fact, Ab' takes place in Aa'. It is in agreement with the fact that the Ab situations are part of the content of Aa. The reason why Ab' and Aa' are dealt with separately is that religious practices in Ab' are not buried in the world, but are exposed to it, whereby sometimes inducing changes in the world.

The (a) in Aa represents the moment of the world, which is independent of the being or acts of being. (b) in Ab represents human acts. (A) symbolizes profane dimensions, whereas (B) signifies ultimate reality. The right-angled triangle in Fig. 2 represents the cycle from Aa, Ab, B, Ab through Aa, which I have discussed. The diagonal line shows the progress of cross-questioning. The vertical line indicates the situations where cross-questioning is promoted. The horizontal line symbolizes the world together with time. The horizontal line protruding in the far right represents the world where people stay after coming into contact with the drop out time from the sacred. The orientation of the oblique line toward top right implies that time is continuity, whereas the vertical line depicts that time is momentary.

It is not that the drop out from B onto Aa' occurs only once. The acts of cross-questioning, namely, religious acts in the Ab situations, are supposed to last until the termination of an individual being, which is death. We also speculate that the reversal of time from Ab to Ab', ought to happen several times in a life span, although with different magnitude of scale. More importantly, whether we are aware or not, in principle, the reverse of time occurs every single moment in today's world. Therefore, whenever we experience such a reversal, we should be reminded of the following truth; Now I have felt the power of Buddha. Actually, this now existed in the past,
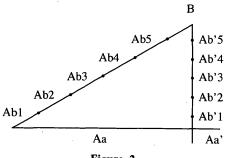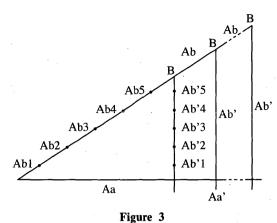

Figure 2

Figure 3

too.   Even while I was in a continuous process of cross-questioning, this drop out of time must have been happening all the time.   I have just experienced a reversal.   However, I might have undergone the same process before without recognizing it.

Given all these thoughts, we can easily understand that Figure 2 should be redesigned into Figure 3.

In this paper, I have elucidated an approach to religious practices from a perspective of time.   In this perspective, we are not allowed to dismantle the polarization in religions, thus inadvertently unifying the sacred with the profane without proper mediation in between.   At the same time, we are not advised to bury the religious practices, confining them within the internal and spiritual sphere of an individual being, either.