

A STUDY ON THE CONCEPT OF FOUR NIRVĀNAS OF YOGĀCĀRA SECT, WITH A COMPARISON TO THERAVADA TEACHING AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE BODHISATTVA PATH



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ABSTRACT

The highest goal of Buddhist practice is to strive for Nibbāna (Nirvāna in Sanskrit) but the way to do this has various kinds of interpretation among different schools in history. Within them, the teachings of the Yogācāra Sect are the most differentiated one due to their enlargement the original two types of Nibbāna into Four Nirvānas. This study explains the enlargement was actually developed from the doctrine of *Bhūtatathatā*. This viewpoint towards Nibbāna seems to be different from Theravada doctrine. However, the major characteristics of both do not show great dissimilarity. Rather, there were transformations in the Yogācāra Sect which helped in explaining the need for the Bodhisattva Path. By elucidating on this aspect, scriptural studies could benefit from understanding that the two different schools may seem different on the surface but were both attempting to teach the same Dhamma. Also, practitioners could also benefit from knowing different paths that are explained in the scriptures so that different steps and targets would not be confused as wrong teachings.

Keywords: Nibbāna, Nirvānas, Yogācāra, *Bhūtatathatā*, Bodhisattva Path

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, Nibbāna (Nirvāṇa in Sanskrit) is a universally accepted concept in Buddhism as the highest goal for all practitioners. In the scriptures of Theravada tradition, two kinds of Nibbāna could be identified: (i) Nibbāna with a Remainder (*Sopadhi-Śesa-Nibbāna* in Pāli or 有餘依涅槃 in Chinese) and (ii) Nibbāna without Remainder (*Nirupadhi-Śesa-Nibbāna* in Pāli or 無餘依涅槃 in Chinese). However, in Mahāyāna, when it came to the time when Yogācāra Sect led the religion, two more kinds of Nirvāṇa were added to the list: (iii) Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification (*Ādi-Prakṛti-Pariśuddha-Nirvāṇa* in Sanskrit or 本來自性清淨涅槃 in Chinese) and (iv) Nirvāṇa without Abiding (*Apratiṣṭhita-Nirvāṇa* in Sanskrit or 無住處涅槃 in Chinese). Together with the former two kinds, the Yogācāra Sect has a total of Four Nirvāṇas.¹ Why were these two new concepts added? Do they violate the original teaching of the Buddha? Are they really new ideas or just the new interpretation to the old thoughts? On what reasons the Yogācāra Sect had to propose them? Was there any relationship to the Bodhisattva Path which they concerned a lot? What effects did they reflect on the scriptures? Should scholars be required to aware these effects? How much should practitioners pay consideration on this concept? These are all the questions that might need to be answered.

THE FOUR NIRVĀÑAS: THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND RELATIONSHIP

In the Pāli Canon, it is easy to discover the explanation of Nibbāna from either the Sūtta Nikāya or the commentaries. For example, in the Majjhima-nikāya, this is written:

He turns his mind away from those states and directs it towards the deathless element thus: ‘This is the peaceful, this is the sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.’ Standing upon that, he attains the destruction of the taints.²

¹ **Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra** 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, p. 55: ‘The significances of Nirvāṇas could be divided roughly in 4 kinds..... Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification; Nibbāna with a Remainder; Nibbāna without a Remainder; and Nirvāṇa without Abiding (涅槃義別略有四種.....本來自性清淨涅槃、.....有餘依涅槃、.....無住處涅槃).

² I.B. Horner (tr.), **Middle Length Sayings** Vol. II, no. 30, (Oxford: PTS, 1997), p. 106.

Several key points should be highlighted and explained: ‘deathless’ which would mean no born or death; ‘stilling of all formations’ would mean all aspects of the Five Aggregates stopped functioning; ‘destruction of craving’ would mean no attachment to the Three-Worlds; and ‘cessation’ would mean no arising of the Three-Poisons.

Modern scholars Collins (1998) has the following viewpoint towards Nibbāna: ‘The literal meaning is “blowing out” or “quenching.”’³ Here, ‘blowing out’ would have the same meaning with ‘cessation’ in the Majjhima-nikāya and therefore meaning no arising of the Three-Poisons.

Another scholar, Gombrich (2006) also suggested: ‘Within the Buddhist tradition, this term has commonly been interpreted as the extinction of the “three fires”, or “three poisons”’⁴ Here, he directly pin-pointed to the cessation of the Three-Poisons.

Therefore, to conclude from the above, the definition of Nibbāna or Nirvāṇa could be analyzed as:

- i. Stilling of all formations or Five Aggregates stopped functioning;
- ii. Cessation of Craving or no attachment to the Three-Worlds; and
- iii. Extinguishment or cessation of the Three-Poisons.

According to the scriptures of Theravada tradition, the Buddha explained very detail in the Itivuttaka Sūtra. Several lines within are listed below:

For this one the five faculties still persist, as a result of whose non-disappearance he receives that which is charming and otherwise, experiences pleasure and pain. On this one’s part, it is the destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion, monks, that is spoken of as that nibbāna-element that is with substrate-remnant.⁵

Within the above, two points were mentioned: first, the “five faculties still persist” would mean not everything stopped, the Five Aggregates are still in function; second, the

³ Steven Collins: **Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities**, Cambridge University Press, London, UK., 1998, p. 191.

⁴ Richard F. Gombrich: **How Buddhism Began. The conditioned genesis of the early teachings**, Second edition, Routledge, London, UK., 2006, p. 66.

⁵ Peter Masefield (tr.), **Ittivuttaka**, (Oxford: PTS, 2011), p. 35.

cessation of the Three-Poisons. In this case, the Nibbāna with a Remainder could be viewed as the temporary stage of a complete Nibbāna, i.e. the Nibbāna without a Remainder, with the Five Aggregates still remained in the Three-Worlds. Only at the end of this life, the sage who attained this Nibbāna would enter the complete stage and not return again to the phenomenon world.

Therefore, the definition of this Nibbāna with a Remainder could be concluded as:

- i. cessation of Craving;
- ii. extinguishment of the Three Poisons;
- iii. but with the Five Aggregates still persist.

One point has to clarify is, according to Theravada commentary, although the Five Aggregates, resulted from past clinging, still persist in such Nibbāna, the defilements that can lead to future existence have become still and extinguished. This is why it is named Nibbāna.⁶ As the result, the Five Aggregates resulted from past clinging actually create even no hindrance to the attainment of the stage of Nibbāna.

In additional to the Theravada's descriptions, we could also find in the Yogācāra tradition the following commentary:

This is corresponding to *Bhūtatathatā* and getting rid of afflictive hindrances (*kleśa-āvaraṇa*). Although tiny suffering arises from remainders leftovers, afflictive hindrances comes still forever, thus is named Nirvāṇa.⁷

Here, the term *Bhūtatathatā* (True Suchness) is mentioned which will be further discussed afterwards. Meanwhile, it is obviously that the Yogācāra teaching direct all things to correspond with *Bhūtatathatā* in order to be said as attaining enlightenment or Nirvāṇa. Afflictive hindrances are also mentioned here which are fetters that interfere one

⁶Bhadantácariya Buddhaghosa, Bhikkhu Náóamoli (tr.), **The Path of Purification (Visudhimagga)**: 'The Buddhas' goal is one and has no plurality. But this [single goal, Nibbāna,] is firstly called with result of past clinging left since it is made known together with the [aggregates resulting from past] clinging still remaining [during the Arahan's life], being thus made known in terms of the stilling of defilement and the remaining [result of past] clinging that are present in one who has reached it by means of development.' Fourth edition, (Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), pp. 522-523.

⁷**Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra** 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 55 (original Chinese scriptural record): '有餘依涅槃，謂即真如出煩惱障，雖有微苦所依未滅，而障永寂故名涅槃'.

from getting rid of the mundane world and attain Nirvāṇa.⁸ The most important here is the mentioning of “remainders leftovers” which is the same meaning of “Five Aggregates still persist” in the Theravada explanation. As the result, besides the corresponding of *Bhūtatathatā*, the description of the Yogācāra commentary is actually the same as the Theravada’s.

The *Itivuttaka Sutta* discussed Nibbāna without a Remainder (*Nirupadhi-Śeṣa-Nibbāna*):

In this case, monks, a monk is an arahant, one in whom the āsavas have been destroyed, one who has stayed the course, one who has done what was to be done, one who has laid down the burden, one who has reached his own goal, one for whom becoming’s fetters have been totally destroyed, one who, upon knowing (things) properly, has become liberated. On this one’s part, monks, all that sensed right here, being not rejoiced in, will become cold; it is this, monks, that is spoken of as that nibbāna-element without substrate-remnant.⁹

Within these, several points are worth to be explained regarding the Nibbāna without a Remainder: first, the sage attained this stage is an arahant who achieved the exhaustion of the stream of transmigration (āsavas have been destroyed); second, this is the (final) goal and has nothing re-exist after this life; third, it is the stage of total liberation which means no craving thereafter; forth, all senses that should arise from Five Aggregates have become cold and therefore stopped. As the result, it could be seen that this Nibbāna is the final stage of an arahant upon the end of his life who had already attained the Nibbāna with a Remainder as the temporary stage before.

To conclude, this Nibbāna carries the following characteristics:

- i. this is the final goal and will have nothing more to become;
- ii. cessation of Craving;
- iii. extinguishment of the Three Poisons;
- iv. and the Five Aggregates do not persist or re-exist in the future

The Yogācāra Sect had also commented on this Nirvāṇa:

⁸*Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra* 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 48: ‘These are obstacles that hinder sentient beings from attaining Nirvāṇa. (此皆擾惱有情身心能障涅槃名煩惱障).

⁹Peter Masefield (tr.), **Ittivuttaka**, (Oxford: PTS, 2011), p. 35.

That is corresponding to *Bhūtatathatā* and exit the suffering of birth and death. Afflictions ended and all remainders extinguished. All sufferings came still, thus is named Nirvāṇa.¹⁰

Just identical to the Nibbāna with a Remainder, corresponding to *Bhūtatathatā* is also precisely considered here. Now, no suffering from birth and death completely since all afflictions ended and all remainders extinguished. This is definitely pointing the total cessation of the Five Aggregates which is absolutely the same as the Theravada's description while disregarding the *Bhūtatathatā* corresponding issue.

Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification (*Ādi-Prakṛti-Pariśuddha-Nirvāṇa*) is one of the two newly established Nirvāṇas proposed by the Yogācāra Sect. In their commentary, it was written:

That is all dharma's fundamental substance of *Bhūtatathatā*, although with the outside infections, the nature is still pure. It consists immeasurable subtle merit; unborn and undead just like void. All sentient beings carry it equally. It is not the same and not different with all dharma; apart with all characteristics and all differentiations. No way to think of nor define with. Only real sages can recognize it from within. Its nature is originally stillness, so it is named Nirvāṇa.¹¹

In these lines, it is seen that: first, the term *Bhūtatathatā* (True Suchness) was mentioned which, according to the theory of the Yogācāra Sect, is the highest truth of all dharmas.¹² Since this Nirvāṇa is said to be the same as all dharma's fundamental substance of *Bhūtatathatā*, this is meant that it is the highest or peerless unconditioned supra-mundane existence or truth; second, it is still pure would mean it has no Three-Poisons at all from the very beginning; third, it is unborn or undead would mean it belongs to supra-mundane world but not the Three-Worlds; forth, only real sages can recognize it would mean that

¹⁰ *Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra* 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 55 (original Chinese scriptural record): '無餘依涅槃，謂即真如出生死苦，煩惱既盡餘依亦滅，眾苦永寂故名涅槃'.

¹¹ *Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra* 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 55 (original Chinese scriptural record): '謂一切法相真如理，雖有客染而本性淨，具無數量微妙功德，無生無滅湛若虛空，一切有情平等共有，與一切法不一不異，離一切相一切分別，尋思路絕名言道斷，唯真聖者自內所證，其性本寂，故名涅槃'.

¹² *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra* 《瑜伽師地論》, T30, no. 1579, pp. 698: 'Bhūtatathatā is peerless, as the unconditioned purities corresponding as the object. (真如無上，無為清淨所緣義故)'.

no craving to any mundane substance could happen finally; fifth, it carries an original stillness nature would mean it is stilling of all formations from the very beginning.

As a conclusion, this third Nirvāṇa has the following definitions:

- i. it is the synonyms of Bhūtatathatā, the Highest Truth;
- ii. it carries no Three Poisons;
- iii. it belongs to the supra-mundane world;
- iv. sages correspond to it have no-craving;
- v. original stillness nature where the Five Aggregates cannot be said existing at all.

Nirvāṇa without Abiding (*Apratiṣṭhita-Nirvāṇa*) is the second established Nirvāṇas proposed by the Yogācāra Sect. In their very same commentary, it was recorded:

Corresponding with *Bhūtatathatā* and getting rid of cognitive hindrances (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), and with the constant support of the Great Compassion and *Prajñā* (*paññā*) like the two wings, neither born and dead nor Nirvāṇa are abided. For using this to help sentient beings till the end of future with permanent stillness, it is named Nirvāṇa.¹³

Several points have value for consideration: first, this Nirvāṇa corresponds with *Bhūtatathatā*, which is the third Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification; second, born and dead, the phenomenon of transmigrations (*samsāra*), are not abided; third, Nirvāṇa, the highest goal, is not abided also; forth, helping others subtly with permanent stillness at the same time.

To conclude, this Nirvāṇa could be defined as follow:

- i. it is Nirvāṇa due to it can correspond to the highest truth;
- ii. not abiding to the mundane Three-Worlds, meaning no craving;
- iii. not abiding to the supra-mundane world either, meaning mundane mind and body still function but without attachment due to point ii above;
- iv. permanent stillness with phenomenal actions,
- v. meaning no Three-Poisons arisen.

¹³ **Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra** 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 55 (original Chinese scriptural record): ‘無住處涅槃，謂即真如出所知障，大悲般若常所輔翼，由斯不住生死、涅槃，利樂有情，窮未來際，用而常寂，故名涅槃。’

From all the above, it could be seen faintly that the Yogācāra Sect describes the status of the Four Nirvāṇas somewhat having nearly the similar notions of the Theravada's explanation. In the next sections, the characteristics of Nirvāṇa will be compared with each of the Four Nirvāṇas to further examine the similarities and differences between them.

DOCTRINAL COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE FOUR NIRVĀNAS

The characteristics of Nibbāna or Nirvāṇa were identified as:

- i. Stilling of all formations or Five Aggregates stopped functioning;
- ii. Cessation of Craving or no attachment to the Three-Worlds; and
- iii. Extinguishment or cessation of the Three-Poisons.

Next, these characteristics are used as the base to compare the fulfillment of each of the Four Nirvāṇas so that the similarities and differences of them could be observed even more clearly.

The characteristic of stilling of all formations or Five Aggregates stopped functioning

- (i) Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification: for it has the original stillness nature, this Nirvāṇa satisfies the requirement in this category.
- (ii) Nibbāna with a Remainder: since it has the characteristic of Five Aggregates remain persist, this Nibbāna does not fulfill the requirement.
- (iii) Nibbāna without a Remainder: as the Five Aggregates do not persist or re-exist in the future, therefore, this Nibbāna fulfills the requirement.
- (iv) Nirvāṇa without Abiding: although with permanent stillness and without attachment, its characteristic of not abiding to the supra-mundane world makes the phenomenal mind and body still active. This made it not fulfilling the requirement of this category.

Cessation of Craving or no attachment to the Three-Worlds:

- (i) Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification: As only sages can recognize this Nirvāṇa which means no-craving arisen, therefore, it fulfills the requirement.
- (ii) Nibbāna with a Remainder: it carries no craving and definitely fulfilling the requirement.

- (iii) Nibbāna without a Remainder: since it also has no craving and therefore fulfilling.
- (iv) Nirvāṇa without Abiding: this does not abide to the born and dead of the mundane world, so it fulfills.

Extinguishment or cessation of the Three-Poisons:

- (i) Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification: it has the permanent pure nature and without Three Poisons, therefore, it satisfies the requirement.
- (ii) Nibbāna with a Remainder: it fulfills the requirement as the Three Poisons have been extinguished, although it remains the Five Aggregates in function temporary.
- (iii) Nibbāna without a Remainder: with the Three Poisons and Five Aggregates totally extinguished, it fulfills.
- (iv) Nirvāṇa without Abiding: this, of course, fulfills as it has permanent stillness and non-abiding to the mundane world.

From the above examinations, a table could be drawn as follows to summarize the comparison:

| Characteristics of Nirvāṇas | Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification | Nibbāna with a Remainder | Nibbāna without Remainder | Nirvāṇa without Abiding |
|--|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Stilling of all Formations or Five Aggregates stopped functioning | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| 2. Cessation of Craving or no attachment to the Three-Worlds | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3. Extinguishment of the Three Poisons | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

The X-axis shows the Four Nirvāṇas in the topic; whereas, the Y-axis shows the three characteristics of the general definition of Nirvāṇa. A ✓ means fulfilling the characteristic and an ✗ means not satisfying.

As that could be seen, the first one, the Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification, has exactly the same specifications of the third one, the Nibbāna without a Remainder. Also, the second one, the Nibbāna with a Remainder, coincidentally, having the same conditions of the forth, the Nirvāṇa without Abiding. In the table, these two pairs of similar Nirvāṇas are highlighted in different background colors.

To recapitulate, all Four Nirvāṇas have the same positive characteristics fulfilling the general definition of Nirvāṇa except one: the existence of the Five Aggregates which indicating there are still a body and mind staying in the Three Worlds, either temporary or in the long run! Therefore, it could be said that, together with the doctrine of *Bhūtatathatā* correspondence, and the ways of how different sects viewing the existence of the Five Aggregates, these two are the major differentiations between the descriptions about Nirvāṇa of Theravada and Yogācāra. And in the next section, these two factors would be discussed using the basic thoughts of the Yogācāra Sect in order to discover the reasons behind the story.

THE TWO NEW NIRVĀÑAS, THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE

Among the so many concepts and ideas of the Yogācāra Sect, there are two significant thoughts which have great contribution to the development of the concept of the Four Nirvāṇas. They are:

- i. *Bhūtatathatā* (True Suchness): the core Unconditioned Dharma, which closely related to the setup of the Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification. Also, the nature of the other three Nirvāṇas were highly affected by this thought; and
- ii. Nirvāṇa of Buddha, which expounded the point of views of the Sect towards the nature of the Buddha's life, and at the end, contributed to the development of the Nirvāṇa without Abiding.

In below, these two thoughts will be examined regarding how they ended up to the unique characteristics of the Four Nirvāṇas in the Yogācāra explanation.

As it has been mentioned in section 2 already, the Yogācāra Sect has developed the thought of *Bhūtatathatā* as the peerless unconditioned truth, natural existence, and almost all of the other unconditioned dharmas have to correspond to it.¹⁴ This idea, as it can be found from the *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra* 《瑜伽師地論》, should had been established in a very early stage in the development history of the Yogācāra Sect, as it was believed that the founder of the Sect: Asaṅga, had participated as the core person in the recording of this commentary.¹⁵

This thought has some evidences showing even the Theravada scriptures also agreed the existence of the Nibbāna as the ultimate unconditioned truth and natural existence. For examples, in *Udāna Sūtta*:

Yet since there exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there is therefore made known the escape from that which is born, from which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned.¹⁶

It is said that out of the conditioned dhammas, there should be an unconditioned one exists for sages escaping to. The meaning of this unconditioned one that exists is undoubtedly directing to Nibbāna. Also in *Visuddhimagga*, this is quoted:

...it should not be said that Nibbāna does not exist. Why not? Because it then follows that the way would be futile.¹⁷

Although this quotation has a prerequisite, it clearly determined the Nibbāna should not be said as non-existing.

These believes of the Theravada have the similar viewpoints to the thought of *Bhūtatathatā* of the Yogācāra Sect which is highly contradicting to that of the Mādhyamika who treats even the unconditioned dharmas as empty and could not be separated from the

¹⁴ *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra* 《瑜伽師地論》, T30, no. 1579, pp. 698: ‘*Bhūtatathatā* is peerless, as the unconditioned purities corresponding as the object. (真如無上，無為清淨所緣義故。)

¹⁵ **Great Tang Records on the Western Regions** 《大唐西域記》, T51, no. 2087, pp. 896: ‘Bodhisattva Asaṅga raised to the palace of the devas and from Bodhisattva Maitreya, learnt the *Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra*. (無著菩薩夜昇天宮，於慈氏菩薩所受《瑜伽師地論》。

¹⁶ Peter Masefield (tr.), **Udāna**, (Oxford: PTS, 1997), p. 166.

¹⁷ Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, Náóamoli (tr.), **Visuddhimagga**, (2010), pp. 521.

conditioned dharmas.¹⁸ The former two sects might even have the same root which is not to be discussed within the scope here. But what was important is, the Yogācāra Sect chose to use the concept of *Bhūtatathatā* as the permanent nature of everything, so that different levels of sages can find their suitable ways in corresponding to this ultimate peerless truth and get enlightenment and liberations. As this had become the goal of all sages, it should also have the characteristics of the Nirvāṇa same as that before in order for people to aim at. For the reason of this, the term Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification was established which is said to be the “all dharma’s fundamental substance of *Bhūtatathatā*”. In another word, this Nirvāṇa is just the synonyms of *Bhūtatathatā*.

Now, the *Bhūtatathatā* had used the identity of Nirvāṇa and become the top of everything. So, what is the relationship of it with the other Nirvāṇas?

From another commentary written by Asaṅga, it was said:

For continuously concentrating on purity as the object, which has its substance and characteristic same as the purity of the Suchness, thus established the *Bhūtatathatā*. From the four kinds of detachments, the other four unconditional dharmas are established... (which are) the Non-Analytical Cessation (*Apratisamkyā-Nirodha*) ... (and also) Analytical Cessation (*Pratisamkhya-Nirodha*).¹⁹

As all the other Nirvāṇas are attained by cessation of craving through some kinds of analytical wisdom, therefore, Asaṅga just followed this basic teaching and allocated the other Nirvāṇas all in the category of Analytical Cessation and explained that once the wisdom is strong enough in corresponding to the *Bhūtatathatā*, which is also the same as corresponding to the Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification, this will create an Analytical Cessation which is a kind of unconditioned dharma and therefore Nirvāṇa.

However, being one of the member of the Mahāyāna family, escaping from the conditioned is not good enough. More important to this is to explain how the value

¹⁸ **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra** 《大智度論》, T25, no. 1509, pp. 424: ‘Apart from the conditioned, the unconditioned could not be held. The true substance of the conditioned is unconditioned. (離有為, 無為法不可得, 有為法實相即是無為.)

¹⁹ **Āryavācāprakaraṇa-śāstra** 《顯揚聖教論》, T31, no. 1602, pp. 572 (original Chinese scriptural record): ‘由清淨所緣故, 建立真如, 由此真如如清淨時所緣體相, 常如是住故, 由四種離繫故, 建立餘四無為, 謂非擇滅等四種。...謂緣差脫畢竟離繫(即「非擇滅無為」)、簡擇煩惱究竟離繫(即「擇滅無為」).

of Bodhisattva is vital apart from the Two-Vehicles, i.e. the *Sāvaka* and *Pacceka-Buddha* who mainly aim at getting rid from *samsāra* without coming back.

It has been a long tradition in some *Mahāyāna* scriptures, the life of the Buddha had been viewed as infinitive.²⁰ Based on this viewpoint, the *Yogācāra* Sect extended it to the discussion about the nature of *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, which is, whether it was the final one just like Arahants did, or it is just a showing only but actually He did not enter the final *Nirvāṇa*. In the commentary, the following is recorded to represent their idea:

With there immeasurable Buddhas had shown *parinirvāṇa*, not the final extinguishment.²¹

This is obviously the conclusion closely related to the idea of immeasurable long life of the Buddha in the *Mahāyāna* tradition. This is recorded in the *Mahaparinirvāṇa Sutra*:

For the reason to help sentient beings, all Buddhas, adapt as needed, expounded the three-vehicles, with immeasurable long life that cannot be estimated. The *Tathāgata* is the same, that is why the Buddha is named *Tathāgata*.²²

The long life of the Buddha is only because He needs to help sentient beings which is also the major requirement of a Bodhisattva. This is the core of the *Mahāyāna* teachings.

As the result, the *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha should be somewhat different from the two *Nibbānas*, with a Remainder and without a Remainder, that the Theravada describes. It should have the characteristics similar to the *Nibbāna* with a Remainder as the Five Aggregates should remain in full function; but it should also be superior than the final *Nirvāṇa* without Abiding, that is, it must be subtle enough to have the Five Aggregates

²⁰ **Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka Sūtra** 《妙法蓮華經》, T09, no. 262, pp. 42: ‘It has been a far great long time since I had attained the Buddhahood; with the life of immeasurable great *asamkhyeya*, always exists without cessation. (我成佛已來，甚大久遠，壽命無量阿僧祇劫，常住不滅。)

²¹ **Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra** 《瑜伽師地論》, T30, no. 1579, pp. 707: ‘從此無間諸佛世尊現般涅槃，非畢竟滅。’

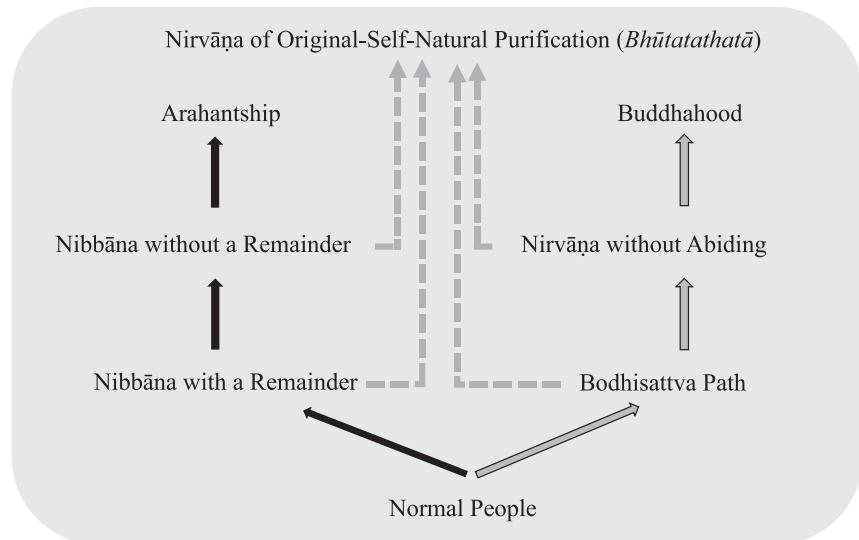
²² **Mahaparinirvāṇa Sūtra** 《大般涅槃經》, T12, no. 374, pp. 468 (original Chinese scriptural record): ‘諸佛世尊為眾生故，隨宜方便開示三乘，壽命無量不可稱計，如來亦爾，是故號佛為如來也。’

still working but with no suffering at all. Therefore, a new concept came into the line: Nirvāṇa without Abiding, meaning by the permanent stillness without abiding to either the mundane worlds or to the supra-mundane Nirvāṇa; abiding to nowhere is the ultimate status of the Buddha.

In order to give prominence to this supreme status, the commentary of the Sect recorded:

The Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification...All sentient beings carry it equally...The two-vehicles (*Sāvaka* and *Pacceka-Buddha*) carry the first three (Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification, with a Remainder, and without a Remainder). Only our Lord Buddha can be said to carry all four of them (first three together with the Nirvāṇa without Abiding).²³

This doctrine of Yogācāra made the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha fundamentally differentiated from the *Sāvaka* and *Pacceka-Buddha*. And by the Nirvāṇa without Abiding, the mind and body of the Buddha can always be in function so as to help sentient beings in the mundane worlds without an end. Bodhisattvas who have vowed to take this path to become a Buddha in the future, in this sense, should aim at this Nirvāṇa without Abiding instead of the two Nibbānas the *Sāvaka* and *Pacceka-Buddha* intended for.



²³ **Vidya-matrāśiddhi śāstra** 《成唯識論》, T31, no. 1585, pp. 55 (original Chinese scriptural record): '本來自性清淨涅槃...一切有情平等共有...二乘無學容有前三：唯我世尊可言具四'.

In the diagram, if a normal person at the bottom wants to get rid of suffering in the mundane worlds, he can choose either one of the two ways in practicing Buddhist trainings. On the left-hand side is the Theravada way which is first aiming at attaining the Nibbāna with a Remainder, and then the Nibbāna without a Remainder. This is the path towards Arahantship and the result is escaping from the Three-Worlds forever with mind and body completely extinguished.

On the right-hand side is the second route which is called the Bodhisattva Path. In this route, the aim is to attain the Buddhahood with the training of both getting rid of sufferings personally as well as helping other sentient beings apart from sufferings. The target is to attain the Nirvāṇa without Abiding just like the Buddha does by maintaining subtle actions in the mundane worlds without abiding to them and simultaneously with a permanent pure and stillness status.

In the theory of Yogācāra Sect, no matter which kind of these three Nirvāṇas one would attain, together with the Bodhisattva training of the Pāramitās, they should all correspond to the highest truth, the Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification, that is, the *Bhūtatathatā* in order to say the one is liberated from sufferings.

As it can be seen, the two new Nirvāṇas solely recognized by the Yogācāra Sect, the Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification and Nirvāṇa without Abiding, were mainly established for the purpose of building up the supremacy of the Bodhisattva Path against the Two-Vehicles. It is therefore not difficult to draw a conclusion that they were highly correlated to the fundamental thoughts of the Sect and were developed mainly for a concordance in the explanation of the Bodhisattva Path.

TEXTUAL EFFECTS ON SCRIPTURES AND THE CONCERNS TO SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS

The study of the Four Nirvāṇas does not just relate to scriptural clarification and understanding. Actually, it has certain important meanings in the areas of scriptures textual comparison as well as practical guidance where users like scholars and practitioners should not be overlooked. In the following, these issues are going to be discussed.

1. Textual effects on scriptures

Let's see an example from a Mahāyāna important scripture, the Diamond Sūtra. This Sūtra has a total of 6 translation versions in Chinese and many commentaries. Since

the western scholars started studying Buddhism in the near centuries, many Sanskrit fragments of this Sūtra has been found. Some scholars translated these Sanskrit texts into English claiming that they are the original version, and, questioned the correctness of the Chinese translations in the old day as inaccurate. The one mostly in query is the version rendered by Kumārajīva who translated the texts in 403 CE. The table below shows one of the lines from several translations:

| Translator's Version & Year | Chinese scriptures with references | English translations by the researcher |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什) 403 CE | 如來者，即諸法如義。 (T8, no.0235, pp.751) | <i>Tathāgata</i> , that means all dharmas as suchness. |
| Bodhiruci (菩提流支) 509 CE | 言如來者，即實真如。 (T8, no.0236, pp.755) | <i>Tathāgata</i> , that is the real <i>Bhūtatathatā</i> . |
| Paramārtha (真諦) 562CE | 如來者，真如別名。※ (T8, no.0237, pp.765) | <i>Tathāgata</i> , is another name of <i>Bhūtatathatā</i> . |
| Dharma Gupta (達磨笈多) 590 CE | 如來者..... 真如故此即是；如來者..... 不生法故此即是；世尊者.....道斷此即是；如來者..... 畢竟不生故此即是。彼何所因？如是，彼實不生，若最勝義。 (T8, no.0238, pp.770) | <i>Tathāgata</i> <i>Bhūtatathatā</i> thus is it; <i>Tathāgata</i>unborn thus is it; the World honoured One..... destructed all path thus is he; <i>Tathāgata</i>at the end unborn thus is it. Why? Suchness, in real, those are unborn, just like the highest meaning. |
| Xuan Zang (玄奘) 648 CE | 言如來者，即是真實真如增語；言如來者，即是無生法性增語；言如來者，即是永斷道路增語；言如來者，即是畢竟不生增語。何以故？..... 若實無生即最勝義。 (T7, no.0220h, pp.984) | <i>Tathāgata</i> , is real <i>Bhūtatathatā</i> corresponded words... <i>Tathāgata</i> , is unborn nature of the dharma corresponded words ... is destructed all roads corresponded words. <i>Tathāgata</i> , is at the end unborn corresponded words. Why? When in real, unborn, it is the highest meaning. |
| Yi Jing (義淨) 703 CE | 言如來者，即是實性真如之異名也。 (T8, no.0239, pp.774) | So called <i>Tathāgata</i> , that is another name of the real nature <i>Bhūtatathatā</i> . |

As that can be seen, the translations between different versions is quite unalike. First of all, explained in the pure *Prajña-Mādhyamika* concept is Kumārajīva's version only. In the text, there is not even a tiny notion of real, fixed and unchanging. All dharmas are as they are. This corresponds to the concept of *Śūnyatā* as well as impermanence. Therefore, *Tathāgata* is only the status that completely and perfectly correspond to the most basic nature of dharma. No word can actually express that, and, 'Suchness' is the best suitable words that was chosen to the description of it in order for sentient beings to catch the meaning in an abstract way.

Starting from Bodhiruci, obviously, the concept of *Bhūtatathatā* was put into the text and was positioned identical to *Tathāgata*. Especially, the word 'True' was put in before the term '*Bhūtatathatā*' which means *Bhūtatathatā* is something subject to no change at all. Since *Tathāgata* is the highest level no matter in the fundamental or the Mādhyamika Buddhism, the indistinguishing between the two would definitely bring the concept of *Bhūtatathatā* to the top status in Buddhist understanding.

From there onwards, it could be seen there were at least 2 types of further handling methods that had been utilized. First kind was shown in Paramārtha's and Yi Jing's which used the words 'Another name' to explain the situation. So, *Tathāgata* and *Bhūtatathatā* are completely the same thing but only synonyms to each other.

The second method was shown in Dharma Gupta's and Xuan Zang's which made an in-depth elaboration or explanation of how *Tathāgata* is identical to *Bhūtatathatā*, and with a final conclusion of they both carries the same nature of real, unborn and is the highest meaning. In this way, the highest identity of *Bhūtatathatā* is affirmed.

However, these two translation are very interesting to the topic of this paper. Using Xuan Zang's as an example, '*Tathāgata*, is real *Bhūtatathatā* corresponded words', this is just the same meaning of Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification! '*Tathāgata*, is unborn nature of the dharma corresponded words', this is just the meaning of attaining the unborn nature but still has the Five Aggregates persist, i.e. the Nibbāna with a Remainder! It 'is destructed all roads corresponded words', which means all aspects, mind and body, ceased forever, i.e. the Nibbāna without a Remainder! And finally, '*Tathāgata*, is at the end unborn corresponded words', which means ultimately nothing is born (nor dead), even the Nirvāṇa; so, where should one abide to? Therefore, it is another description of Nirvāṇa without abiding!

From this example, it is noticed that the concept of Four Nirvāṇas completely altered the scriptural texts and replaced with the doctrines of the Yogācāra Sect! It is unwise

to think that it was just the Chinese translator's alternation. For the modern translation that was claimed to be more precise with the Sanskrit, the same meaning of Xuan Zang's could be clearly identified. For example, Müller (1894), has his translation as follow:

.....the name of *Tathāgata*? It expresses true suchness.....It expresses that he had no origin.....It expresses the destruction of all qualities.....It expresses one who had no origin whatever. And why this? Because.....no-origin is the highest goal.²⁴

It could be clearly seen that this is exactly from the same origin of Xuan Zang's! For this reason, it could be assumed that the Sanskrit fragments discovered by these scholars are just the altered versions by the Yogācāra Sect and cannot be used as relevant tools to directly compare with the older Chinese translations, especially the Kumārajīva's which is believed to be the one solely reflecting the ideas and concept of the *Prajñā-Mādhyamika* thoughts.

2. Practical guidance

Technical terms being used in Buddhism practicing is huge. There are so many that sometime confused practitioners. Especially the topic related issue which requires great caution.

To make it brief, in the ancient time India, there was already happened once with an argument between Mādhyamika Sect and Yogācāra Sect, which was called 'the Debate of Unreality and Reality'. This was mainly due to the difference of explanation to the nature of the ultimate goal of practicing Buddhism, the Nibbāna.

In practice, treating this goal as empty or truly exist should have a lot of differences in field meditation or conceptual observation, thus, influencing the techniques being used in both Samantha and Vipassanā. If practitioners do not classify the concepts clear enough and even mix up the two, there would be a possibility of false training and would never reach the required goal. This is very important to the user.

²⁴ Friedrich Max Müller: **The Sacred Books of the East**, Volume XLIX: Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts, Part II, (Oxford University Press, London, UK, 1894), p.133.

CONCLUSION

From the above, The Four Nirvāṇas have been observed. They have the similar characteristics in (i) Cessation of Craving and (ii) Extinguishment of the Three Poisons. But in (iii) Stilling of all Formations, they are different. Although Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification and Nirvāṇa without Abiding were developed from the thoughts of Yogācāra sect, they do not violate the main and basic characteristics of Nirvāṇa which the other 2 Nirvāṇas carries. Nirvāṇa of Original-Self-Natural Purification was established as the universal truth that all sages have to correspond to. Nirvāṇa without Abiding which only the Buddha carries, could be seen as the endless continuation of the Nibbāna with a Remainder without a stop in the Nibbāna without Remainder.

These 2 new Nirvāṇas of the Yogācāra Sect are important to the Bodhisattva Path which clearly identified the differences of this Path with the *Sāvaka's* and *Pacceka-buddha's*. This study is important in the aspect of textual comparison between Sanskrit and Chinese texts, since scholars might overlooked the possibility of alternation to the Sanskrit scriptures. Also, practitioners should also aware the different of thoughts and concepts hidden inside the scriptures so as to maintain an accurate training path.

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