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PROLOGUE

It is my great pleasure to launch this being Vol. 3 No. 1, the first edition of The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College of 2017.

The International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC) has developed this journal in accordance with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) requirement that all M.A. and Ph.D. students submit articles for publication in journals that are accepted into the TCI (Thai-Journal Citation Index Centre) before graduation.

IBSC, which began operations in July of 2014, offers Master of Art degrees as well as Doctor of Philosophy degrees in both Buddhist Studies and Peace Studies and carries an impressive international Buddhist community. We hold that this community is the future of Buddhism and we are very proud of their success, both in education and in the teaching of the Buddha.

The aim of this journal is to be a peer-reviewed source of Buddhist knowledge not only for the university and the Kingdom of Thailand, but for the whole world. Here, IBSC students and scholars can discuss various issues regarding Buddhist Studies in the English medium and in doing so, fulfill the requirements of the HEC. This journal hopes to continue the excellence of IBSC academics in a published forum that will uphold the high standards of an MCU education.

JIBSC will be a key supporter of the “Quality Development Policy of Higher Education” of the HEC through distinction in publication by offering articles that discuss intelligent and relevant issues facing Buddhism in this modern day and age. I want to thank all contributors, not only to this issue, but future ones. It is my hope that the journal will bring high quality articles to the world, but more importantly, spread the Dhamma through scholarly excellence.

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DHAMMACAKKHU IN THE DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA SUTTA: DOES IT COVER VIPASSANĀÑĀṆA AND THREE ÑĀṆ, AS IN THE COMMENTARIES?



Banjob Bannaraji

ABSTRACT

The dhammacakkhu appears at first in the Buddha's first sermon – the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta and then it is available in other suttas. Its meaning covers all stages of enlightenment – Sotapanna, Sakadagami, Anagami and Arahanta. However, it leaves behind doubt whether or not the meaning covers the vipassanāñāṇa and three ñāṇas known in the commentaries.

Keywords : Dhammacakkhu, Vipassanāñāṇa, Saccañāṇa, Kiccañāṇa, Katañāṇa

INTRODUCTION

The first sermon - The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,¹ known as the Sutta of Setting the Dhamma into Motion, contains a group of seven names of wisdom, by which it is called by the author as the 'group names'. They are cakkhu, ñāṇa, paññā, vijjā, āloka, ñāṇadassana, and dhammacakkhu. Of those, the first five names - cakkhu, ñāṇa, paññā, vijjā, āloka, are only for the wisdom of the Buddha, covering his stages of enlightenment, even the supreme enlightenment. The sixth one - ñāṇadassana, is for the wisdom of both the Buddha and his disciples, and the last one - dhammacakkhu, only for disciples headed by the venerable Aññakoṇḍañña and his colleagues, the very first ones who attained all stages of enlightenment through the Buddha's own guidance.

Interestingly, the *dhammacakkhu*, formerly known in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta as the first stage of enlightenment, is found in other suttas to cover all stages of enlightenment. Furthermore, the group names of wisdom in the sutta still gives birth to 73 more names of wisdom, detailed in the Paṭisambhidāmagga by the venerable Sāriputta, a foremost disciple of the Buddha; one of which has *vipassanāñāṇa* (insight) which has later become a collective name for gradually developed insight of different stages, with nine and ten in numbers, as seen in Aṭṭhakathās (commentaries) and Tīkā (sub-commentaries). More interesting is the dhammacakkhu and the *vipassanāñāṇa* are later replaced by the three *ñāṇas* in an Aṭṭhakathā that summarizes therein the enlightenment of different stages. The relations of these *ñāṇas* are worthy of study.

STUDY POINTS

The study points for the relations of the dhammacakkhu, the vipassanāñāṇa, and three *Ñāṇas* is as follows:

THE GROUP NAMES-THEIR FUNCTIONS

The group names of wisdom are here the first five names for the Buddha's wisdom: *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi* - eye in the unheard truths arose, knowledge...,wisdom...,breaking through..., light in the unheard truths arose.

¹ S I 367-370.

The Buddha himself gave no reason for the group names, but his disciples tried to reason them gaining answers as follows:

1.1 The venerable Sāriputta explained: cakkhu is seeing, ñāṇa is knowledge, paññā is wisdom, vijjā is breaking through, āloka is light.²

1.2 A later Indian commentator, called Buddhaghosa, living during 900-1000 B.E., studied in accordance with the venerable Sāriputta and concluded that they all were synonyms. He showed a relation among them, reasoning that ñāṇa itself is called ‘cakkhu’ because of seeing, ‘ñāṇa’ because of knowing, ‘paññā’ because of wisdom, ‘vijjā’ because of breaking through, ‘āloka’ because of light.³ His explanation helps us understand a role of the ñāṇa (knowledge) regarded as the center. Considering these explanations: the names are meaningfully integrated into the ñāṇa - the knowledge of the four noble truths. That is, ñāṇa is, according to the venerable Buddhaghosa, the main name with the rest as modifiers, the true meaning of which is the same knowledge of the four noble truths.

1.3 Over 40 years after that, the venerable Mahānāma, a Lankan commentator, agreed with the venerable Buddhaghosa and further added that the knowledge is endowed with five functions. Namely, ‘cakkhu’ because of the function of seeing the four noble truths as they are, ‘ñāṇa’ because of the function of knowing, ‘paññā’ because of the function of wisdom, ‘vijjā’ because of the function of breaking through, and ‘āloka’ because of the function of shining.⁴

In conclusion, the above mentioned explanations help integrate the group names into one - ñāṇa, or the knowledge. Moreover, what is worth consideration is why the Buddha put the names in the order initiated by cakkhu and then respectively followed by ñāṇa paññā vijjā and āloka.

From the study, it is found that cakkhu or eye naturally functions as seeing, the function of which helps make clear the meaning of enlightenment. Knowing is seeing, which maybe means that knowing with mind is so very clear that it is like seeing with eyes.

On this point, possibly putting the cakkhu first leads to create more words such as ñāṇadassana (knowing and seeing; clear sight resembles seeing with eyes) and dhammacakkhu (the dhamma eye, the vision of the truth) etc., to explain the touchable nature of enlightenment - cutting off mental defilements.

²K III 38.

³S II 25.

⁴A II 256.

As for the rest, ñāṇa → paññā → vijjā → āloka, are put in order in terms of interrelation. Ñāṇa relates to paññā in that both derive from the same root - ñā (to know), but paññā has a different prefix - pa, by which the root has a stronger meaning. Vijjā also relates to āloka in that vijjā functions as breaking through the darkness of delusion, āloka refers to the light of wisdom immediately breaking out.

In short, they are put in the order to make known the true nature of enlightenment simultaneously functioning in the so-called five aspects. It is necessary to mention them here to show that they are an origin of later related names.

DHAMMACAKKHU IN DIFFERENT STAGES

The name ‘dhammacakkhu’ in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, even though it not come directly out of the mouth of the Buddha, was initially used by the groups of the compilers of the Tipiṭaka for the first enlightenment of the venerable Koṇḍañña, his colleagues and later arahants. As far as the author knows, in the Tipiṭaka, the dhammacakkhu was used only for disciples not for the Buddha.

However, from the deep investigation based on the Papañcasūdanī⁵, the commentary of Majjhima Nikāya, the dhammacakkhu in other suttas is found to not only cover the first stage of enlightenment but gradual higher stages of enlightenment as well.

DIFFERENT USAGES

Before going to a conclusion, Let us study the following map describing the meanings of the dhammacakkhu as found in the suttas and the aṭṭhakathās.

⁵M II 250.

In the suttas

The dhammacakkhu is	In the suttas
Sotāpattimagga	Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Upālivāda Sutta, Dīghanakha Sutta, Sarada Sutta, Sīha Sutta
Three phalas sotāpattiphala, sakadāgāmiphala, anāgāmiphala	Brahmāyu Sutta
Four maggas + four phalas sotāpattimagga + sotāpattiphala sakadāgāmagga + sakadāgāmiphala anāgāmagga + anāgāmiphala arahattamagga + arahattaphala	Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta

In the map, the dhammacakkhu in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,⁶ the Upālivāda Sutta,⁷ the Dīghanakha Sutta⁸, the Sarada Sutta,⁹ and the Sīha Sutta¹⁰ only cover the first enlightenment or the sotāpattimagga (immediately accompanied by the sotāpattiphala). The Brahmāyu Sutta covers the first three stages as the fruits (phala) of gradual enlightenment - the sotāpattiphala (the fruit of the sotāpattimagga), the sakadāgāmiphala (the fruit of the sakadāgāmagga), and also the anāgāmiphala (the fruit of the anāgāmagga). The Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta¹¹ covers the four stages (comprising magga and phala) of enlightenment, which are here counted as ‘the four pairs’ - the sotāpattimagga and sotāpattiphala as the first pair, the sakadāgāmagga and sakadāgāmiphala as ‘the second pair’, the anāgāmagga and anāgāmiphala as ‘the third pair’, and the arahattamagga and arahattaphala as ‘the fourth pair’.

⁶V IV 98.

⁷M I 46.

⁸M II 182.

⁹A II 236.

¹⁰A I 155.

¹¹M I 359.

In the Aṭṭhakathās

The dhammacakkhu is	in the aṭṭhakathās
Three maggas sotāpattimagga, sakadāgāmicimaggā, anāgāmicimaggā	Samantapāsādikā Sumaṅgalavilāsini By the Venerable Buddhaghosa
Arahattamaggāñāṇa	Saddhammapakāsinī By the venerable Mahānāma

In this map, the commentators still followed the Piṭaka maintaining the meanings over all the stages of enlightenment.

It is worthy to note that the term ‘enlightenment’ in English used for the Buddhist term ‘bodhi’ by westerner scholars covers both magga and phala; magga or maggañāṇa (in full) at each stage of sotāpattimagga, sakadāgāmicimaggā, anāgāmicimaggā and arahattamaggā is the wisdom of cutting off defilements, but it is phala or phalañāṇa (in full) at each stage immediately arising after each magga is the cutting. Therefore, in any Buddhist scriptures, whenever any magga is mentioned, it relates to its phala, because phala is the immediate fruit of magga as well as whenever any phala is mentioned, it relates to its magga, because the magga is the direct forerunner (cause) of the phala. Immediate is the span between the magga and phala at each stage. Its length and rapidity are likened to that of lightning ; a flash is magga, an immediately following brilliant light is phala, which arises certainly and immediately without any hindrance.

CRITICAL STUDY

The suttas, in which the dhammacakkhu is interpreted as the sotāpattimagga, contain the same words : “...*virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi ‘yaṅkiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbantaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ* - the dhamma-eye, freed from dust (of defilements), freed from stain (of defilements), arose a compound thing naturally appears and then disappears.”¹²

¹²Generally found in the suttas.

Buddhist students who have read the Tipiṭaka get familiar with the words in the suttas and understand that such sayings are to reveal a true qualification of a person who won the first enlightenment and was called a sotāpanna (a stream winner).

Moreover, the Sarada Sutta (The Sutta on Summer) contains an important modifier context that describes the defilements uprooted by the sotāpanna, saying : “..because of the dhammacakkhu, uprooted were the first three saṃyojanas (bondages) - sakkāyadiṭṭhi (personality view), vicikicchā (doubt), and sīlabbataparāmāsa (adhererance to rules and rituals)...”. Its content seems not to let dhammacakkhu be interpreted in any other way than the sotāpattimagga.

The Brahmāyu Sutta¹³ (The Sutta on the Brahmin Brahmāyu), in which the dhammacakkhu is interpreted as the aforesaid first three stages of enlightenment, contains the Buddha’s words : “.. Monks ! because of the uprooting of five lower fetters (saṃyojanas), Brahmin Brahmāyu was, immediately after death, reborn in the Brahma world of the suddhāvāsa and is, with no return, sure to attain the final parinibbana there.” Its content shows a true qualification of the anāgami (non-returner) and leads to interpret the dhammacakkhu as the first three stages of enlightenment, because a Buddhist enlightenment of each stage is developed gradually and respectively until it is absolutely completed at the final stage.

However, the word ‘with no return - anavattidhammo’ keeps such an enlightenment within the limit of the anāgami, because it means ‘no return’ to take rebirth in the sensual pleasure worlds – including both human and devine worlds. Consequently, it is known as the realm of pure persons who attain the third stage of enlightenment in this (human) life and immediately after death take rebirth in the Brahma world.

The Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta¹⁴ (The Sutta on the suggestion for Rāhula), in which the dhammacakkhu is interpreted as the four stages of enlightenment, contains the words : “....over one thousand divine beings (devatā) attained the dhammacakkhu, freed from dust (of defilements), freed from stain (of defilements), realizing a compound thing naturally appears and then disappears.”

Besides the dhammacakkhu itself, the word ‘over one thousand divine beings’ is here another key word leading to the interpretation as seen in the Papañcasūdanī. The Papa

¹³ M I 378.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 359.

ñcasūdanī divided divine beings who attained the dhammacakkhu into ‘four groups’: the first group became the sotāpanna, the second, the sakadāgāmī, the third, the anāgāmī, and the fourth, the arahanta. Consequently, the dhammacakkhu is interpreted as the four stages of enlightenment.

Surely such an interpretation may be the cause of some confusion among Buddhist students who get familiar with the phrases ‘a compound thing naturally appears and then disappears’, used to describe the sotāpanna’s qualification. A way out for this is the dhammacakkhu or the dhamma eye, which has four levels that progress gradually deeper and deeper until it is completed at the stage of arahattamagga, which is the last. The four groups of divine beings had the same first stage of enlightenment and then some stayed at the stage, but the rest, there and then, gradually upgraded their dhammacakkhu, some to the second, some to the third, and some to the fourth. On this point, the dhammacakkhu herein covers all the stages of enlightenment.

VIPASSANĀÑĀṆA –THE COMMON NAME DEVELOPED INTO THE COLLECTIVE NAME

On the aforesaid study of the dhammacakkhu, no vipassanāñāṇa is mentioned in the suttas because it is just in a series of 73 ñāṇas listed in the Paṭisambhidāmagga by the venerable Sāriputta. According to the list, the vipassanāñāṇa appears as ‘vipassane ñāṇaṃ’¹⁵, it is the seventh in number and considered the ñāṇa of worldly (lokiya) level. However, it has practical and theoretical relations and leads to the maggañāṇa (the knowledge of cutting off mental defilements), and functions to relate the contents in the Tipiṭaka and the commentaries based on literal and natural meanings. Of those, the former is ‘seeing clearly’, which derives from prefix vi (clearly) + passannā (seeing),¹⁶ the latter is ‘seeing as it is’, both of which mean seeing the compound things’ three characteristics: impermanence, suffering, and selflessness. Moreover, the meanings still cover other related ñāṇas that are grouped in it and named after ‘vipassanāñāṇa’. Consequently, the vipassanāñāṇa has been developed into a collective noun used for related ñāṇas. Its development

¹⁵ the two words - vipassane and ñāṇaṃ can be combined in one word - vipassanāñāṇa, meaning-seeing as it is.

¹⁶ Krommaphra Chandaburinarunath, Pali-Thai-English-Sanskrit Dictionary, First Version. Bangkok : Mahamakutarajavidyalaya, 1970, p 710.

vividly results in giving births to eight vipassanāñāṇas (the vipassanāñāṇa with numbers in eight), nine vipassanāñāṇas (the vipassanāñāṇa with numbers in nine), and ten vipassanāñāṇas (the vipassanāñāṇa with numbers in ten).

The evidences can be found in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, in the Commentaries like the Visuddhimagga (the Path to Purification) and also in post-commentaries like the Abhidhammasaṅgaha Ṭīkā (the spost-commentary on the manual of Abhidhamma) and the Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī Ṭīkā (the post-commentary on true contents of Abhidhamma), in which nine vipassanāñāṇas and ten vipassanāñāṇas are presented.

To clearly understand the levels of the vipassanāñāṇa as seen in the Buddhist scriptures, let us see the following maps:

Map 1

Eight Vipassañāṇas ¹⁷	
1.	dhammaṭṭhiñāṇa - Knowledge of causes
2.	sammasanañāṇa - knowledge of comprehending mentality - materiality as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self
3.	udayabbayanupassanāñāṇa -knowledge of contemplation on rise and fall
4.	vipassanāñāṇa -Knowledge of seeing as it is
5.	ādinavañāṇa -knowledge of contemplation on disadvantages
6.	saṅkharañāṇa knowledge of compound things ; covers - muñcitukamyatāñāṇa knowledge of the desire for deliverance - paṭisaṅkhañāṇa knowledge of contemplation on reflective - santiṭṭhanañāṇa knowledge of equanimity regarding all formations (the conditioned things, compound things)

In this map, as the saṅkharañāṇa in number 6 is divided into 3, has resulted in the vipassanāñāṇa numbering eight.

¹⁷ Khud. I 31

Map 2

Ten Vipassanāñāṇas¹⁸	Nine Vipassanāñāṇas¹⁹
1. sammasanāñāṇa knowledge of comprehending mentality - materiality as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self	
2. udayabbayañāṇa	1. udayabbayanupassanāñāṇa knowledge of contemplation on rise and fall
3. bhaṅgañāṇa	2. bhanganupassanāñāṇa knowledge of contemplation on dissolution
4. bhayañāṇa	3. bhayatupaṭṭhanāñāṇa knowledge of the appearance as terror
5. ādinavañāṇa	4. ādinavanupassanāñāṇa knowledge of contemplation on disadvantages
6. nibbidañāṇa	5. nibbidānupassanāñāṇa knowledge of contemplation on dispassion
7. muñcitukamyatāñāṇa	6. muñcitukamyatānupassanāñāṇa knowledge of the desire for deliverance
8. paṭisaṅkhañāṇa	7. paṭisaṅkhanupassanāñāṇa knowledge of contemplation on reflective
9. sankhārupekkhāñāṇa	8. sankhārupekkhāñāṇa knowledge of equanimity regarding all formations (the conditioned things, compound things)
10. anulomañāṇa	9. anulomañāṇa knowledge of conformity with the truths

¹⁸ Found in the Visuddhimagga Part 3, the Abhidhammatṭhasaṅgaha Ṭīkā, and the Abhidhammatṭha-vibhavinī Ṭīkā.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

In this map, both are different in numbers, adding one more number in ten vipassanāñāṣas,. Numbers 2-10 in ten vipassanāñāṣas are of the same meaning as numbers 1-9 in nine vipassanāñāṣas, therefore translations are not needed.

AS THE WAY TO THE DHAMMACAKKHU

The vipassanāñāṣa²⁰ is in the worldly or mundane level, but it is conducive to the arising of the dhammacakkhu, which is only in the transcendental or supramundane level. This is possible because the occurrences and accumulations of the vipassanāñāṣa actually make wisdom mature, and the maturity has been accumulated more and more until the dhammacakkhu arises. The dhammacakkhu is the maggañāṣa or the knowledge of the Path functioning to cut off mental defilements, and the phalañāṣa or the knowledge of Fruition functioning as the fruit of the former. According to the Buddhist scriptures, the dhammacakkhu covers four stages of enlightenment.

To understand clearly the relation between the vipassanāñāṣa and the dhammacakkhu, let us study the state of respective sixteen ñāṣas²¹ as follows:

²⁰ Thai Buddhists have for a long time been familiar with the term ‘vipassanā’ and have habitually used the term for the Dhamma practice on occasions and at places. For example, whenever and wherever the Dhamma practice projects are held, a popular sentence ‘Please attend the vipassanā practice’ can be heard and seen on mass media. It suggests that all the Dhamma practices are included in the vipassanā practice, which urges us to think about the reasons.

In my opinion, there are three reasons. the first reason is based on the commentary like that of the Dhammapada , with a sentence : “a Buddhist monk has two kinds of duties - the duty of study (ganthadhura) and the duty of vipassanā practice (vipassanādhura).” The sentence, it is found, has been very powerful to convert Buddhists to consider the vipassana superior to all Dhamma practices, including the samatha - the tranquility, taught by the Buddha as the vipassanā’s base. The second is based on the significance of the vipassanā itself, functioning in line with their need ; namely ; directly leading to the destruction of ignorance (avijjā) . The third is based on misunderstanding the results of the samatha feared to keep them attached to endless rebirths.

²¹ Vis., p. 362.

Map 1

Ñāṇas	Meaning
1. nāmarūpaparicchedanañāṇa	Knowledge of the delimitation of mentality - materiality
2. paccayapariggahañāṇa	Knowledge of discerning the conditions of mentality - materiality
3. sammasanañāṇa	Knowledge of comprehending mentality - materiality as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self

Of three ñāṇas, the third number is counted as the first ten vipassannāñāṇas but is a preliminary ñāṇa conducive to the nine vipassannāñāṇas,.

Map 2

4. udayabbayanupassanāñāṇa	Knowledge of contemplation on rise and fall
5. bhaṅgānupassanāñāṇa	Knowledge of contemplation on dissolution
6. bhayatupatthanañāṇa	Knowledge of the appearance as terror
7. ādinavanupassanāñāṇa	Knowledge of disadvantages
8. nibbidānupassanāñāṇa	Knowledge of dispassion
9. muñcitukamyatāñāṇa	Knowledge of the desire for deliverance
10. paṭisankhanupassanāñāṇa	Knowledge of reflective contemplation
11. saṅkharupekkhāñāṇa	Knowledge of equanimity regarding all formations
12. saccanulomikañāṇa	Knowledge of conformity knowledge

All are known as true vipassanāñāṇas, which are mundane.

Map 3

13. gotrabhūñāṇa	Knowledge at the moment of ‘change - of - lineage’
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The gotrabhūñāṇa is between the tenth and ninth mundane vipassanāñāṇa and three following supramundane ñāṇas, so it neither mundane nor supramundane.

Map 4

14. maggañāṇa - sotāpattimaggañāṇa - sakadāgāmicamaggañāṇa - anāgāmicamaggañāṇa - arahattamaggañāṇa	Knowledge of the Path
15. phalañāṇa - sotāpattiphalañāṇa - sakadāgāmicaphalañāṇa - anāgāmicaphalañāṇa - arahattaphalañāṇa	Knowledge of Fruition
16. paccavekkhaṇañāṇa	Knowledge of reviewing

All are supramundane and have specific functions, namely, maggañāṇa with four stages to remove mental defilements which is immediately followed with phalañāṇa, its own fruit and paccavekkhaṇañāṇa, here reviewing defilements removed and left in each stage. Maggañāṇa and phalañāṇa are identical with the dhammacakkhu that are based on the vipassanāñāṇa.

THREE ÑĀNAS : SACCAÑĀṆA, KICCAÑĀṆA AND KATAÑĀṆA

The three ñānas were created by the commentators to explain ñānadassana endowed with three rounds (tiparivatta) and twelve actions (dvadasakāra) in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

Remarkably, the ñānadassana is used not only for the Buddha but also for disciples. It suggests that enlightenment of the Buddha and his disciple is principally the same, they possess this kind of the ñānadassana, but the Buddha's ñānadassana is deeper. However, let us study the meanings and functions of the three ñānas respectively.

Saccañāṇa is the knowledge of the respective four noble truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to the cessation of suffering ; namely; the knowledge of suffering as it is, the knowledge of the cause of suffering as it is, the knowledge of the cessation of suffering as it is, the knowledge of the way to the cessation of suffering as it is.

Kiccañāṇa is the knowledge of what to do with the respective four noble truths. Namely, the knowledge of suffering as it is to be known completely, the knowledge of the cause of suffering as it is to be removed, the knowledge of the cessation of suffering as it is to be realized, and the knowledge of the way to the cessation of suffering as it is to be developed.

Katañāṇa is the knowledge of what completely done with the respective four noble truths. Namely, the knowledge of suffering as it has been known completely, the knowledge of the cause of suffering as it has been removed, the knowledge of the cessation of suffering as it has been realized, and the knowledge of the way to the cessation of suffering as it has been developed. All the turned knowledges were counted as 'the three rounds';¹ the first round of the saccañāṇa, the second of the kiccañāṇa, and the third of katañāṇa. Other sources counted 'twelve actions' because a knowledge in each round has four actions as mentioned above.

Map 5

Saccañāṇa (round 1) →	kiccañāṇa (round 2) →	Katañāṇa (round 3)
The knowledge of suffering as it is	The knowledge of what to do with suffering	The knowledge of what completely done with suffering
The knowledge of the cause of suffering as it is	The knowledge of what to do with the cause of suffering	The knowledge of what completely done with the cause
The knowledge of the cessation of suffering as it is	The knowledge of what to do with the cessation of suffering	The knowledge of what completely done with the cessation of suffering
The knowledge of the way to the cessation of suffering as it is	The knowledge of what to do with the way to the cessation of suffering	The knowledge of what completely done with the way to the cessation of suffering
4 actions →	4 actions →	4 actions

An interesting question is how exactly are the three *nāṇas* created. This study may suggest that *saccañāṇa* comes from the first round of knowledge as they are of the four noble truths or *sacca* in Pāli. *Kiccañāṇa*, from the second round of knowledge of what to do. *Katañāṇa*, from the third round of knowledge of what is completely done (*kata* in Pāli) with the truths. Moreover, it is found that the root ‘kar’ (to do) plays an important role in creating the words *kicca* and *kata*, both of which were used together by the Buddha himself in the following passage : “...*khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ*...- birth has extinguished, the religious practice has been completed, what to do has been done...”

The sentence, ‘what to do has been done’ is a translation of *katam karanīyaṃ*. *Katam* was shortened as *kata* and *karanīyaṃ* was replaced by *kicca*, another form of *karanīyaṃ*,²² both with the same meaning and properly applicable in a Pāli sentence as a noun, a verb (main verb), and an adjective.

PRACTICAL RELATIONS

The *dharmacakkhu*, is interpretationed in the *Atthakathas* as having covered all *maggañāṇas* and *phalañāṇas*. The *vipassanāñāṇa* of all levels leads to the *dharmacakkhu*. The *dharmacakkhu* and the *vipassanā* are included by the commentator in the three *nanas* - *saccañāṇa*, *kiccañāṇa* and *katañāṇa*.

However, all are meaningfully developed from the wisdom in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* called and grouped by the Buddha ‘*Cakkhu, ñāṇa, paññā, vijjā, āloka*’ and ‘*ñāṇadassana*’, all of which are synonyms and cover all stages of the *dharmacakkhu* and those of later *vipassanāñāṇa*, *maggañāṇa* and *phalañāṇa*. The following map illustrates this:

Map 6

Vipassanāñāṇa of all stages is →	Saccañāṇa Kiccañāṇa (which are conducive to)	
	→ Dhammacakkhu of all stages, which is →	katañāṇa

²² In Thai language, in daily life, *kicca* and *karanīya* are combined as *karanīyakicca* and officially adopted as a polite word. Moreover, the word, combined with ‘*rājā*’ and appeared as *rājakaranīyakicca*, is adopted as a royal word and pronounced in Thai *phrarāṭchakaranīyakit*.

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CONFLICTING TRANSLATIONS OF RŪPA



Seth Evans

ABSTRACT

Rūpa is a well common concept within Buddhist literature found in teachings covering all aspects of the *Dhamma*. From meditation teachers to academics, it is one of the staples of how objects of consciousness are explained. What may be uncertain though is its intended meaning when in use over two millennia ago. While the accepted literal translation of the word is shape, or color, there are various interpretations of what that means, ranging from the ‘physical body’ to all that is ‘matter’. This disagreement may imply confusion from Buddhist scholars, as such, an attempt at a more unified and accepted meaning of *rūpa* should be considered. This article will look at the various translations of *rūpa* in the Pāli Canon made by Rhys Davids, Walshe, Bhikkhu Bodhi and others as well as post canonical texts, such as the *Vissudhimagga*, to show possible confusion concerning *rūpa* and the importance for a solution. It is suggested that *rūpa* is a most difficult concept to translate into contemporary English and that further usage should be done with great care and consideration. This paper aims to exhibit the possible confusion of the modern day understanding of *rūpa* and hopes to stress that while the use of the word is necessary, a consensus in its meaning is also important for the sake of understanding.

Keywords: *Rūpa*, Body, Matter, Form

INTRODUCTION

What did the Buddha mean when he said *rūpa*? The amount of varying definitions of this concept may suggest that we are not sure what he meant at all. It appears that the understanding of *rūpa* may not be as clear as one would like, this may be due to confusion about what was implied by the Buddha when he used it. This paper shows possible misunderstandings of the word by referring to the translations of Thomas William Rhys Davids, Maurice Walsh and Bhikkhu Bodhi in an effort to show the importance of a unified definition. By examining and comparing these translations, this article only wants to convey the state of confusion surrounding *rūpa* and in no way wish for the reader to think there is an endorsement of one translation over the other. The aim is to express the need for an accord in dealing with *rūpa* as a necessary and difficult concept that must be defined adequately. *Rūpa* itself is a subtle concept that helps express deeper ideas within the *Dhamma*, some ideas that require massive amounts of attention to detail and conceptualization. Having various translations of *rūpa*, such as ‘matter’ or ‘body’, may confuse broader ideas before any serious investigation is started. It is important that attention be brought back to *rūpa* as a concept in itself, a concept that supports the foundation of greater ideas such as dependent origination and the five aggregates, ideas that can never hoped to be fully understood unless their foundation is understood. When comparing these translations, as *rūpa* has such a broad meaning, only what scholars have translated *rūpa* as in the sense of *nāma-rūpa* will be shown, particularly in the dependent origination. The search has been narrowed to such a small topic in order to show confusion that may surround *rūpa*. In showing different translations of the same concept as it relates to the same idea, the hope is to show possible problems in how we understand it.

The intention of this paper is not to define *rūpa* so much as to help clarify the difficulties in understanding it, difficulties that might become worse if there is not a consensus on how to translate it. In fact, it may very well be that *rūpa* is impossible to translate correctly into English, as it is an ancient term that referred to objects of consciousness, modern day language may not be able to sufficiently account for all the nuances of the word. Although suggestions are offered as to how we should treat this fundamental concept, my main focus is only to clarify the possible confusion surrounding *rūpa* as it stands today.

This article will explore various possible conceptions of *rūpa*: 1) That *rūpa* is defined as the physical body; 2) That *rūpa* implies all that is matter; 3) That *rūpa* itself means materiality; 4) That *rūpa* can simply be defined as form. Not all scholars that use one or more of the above mentioned conceptions share the unease that is expressed, though many do. This paper attempts to show that the wide range of accepted meanings presented is grounds for concern.

The use of *rūpa* will be looked at from many different sources, but will primarily focus on Theravāda interpretations. As it has been used by many schools of thought it should be clarified that my comments are to be understood from a perspective of the Theravāda tradition only, as this is where my skills lie. Although it is exploring *rūpa* as it is used in the concept *nāma-rūpa*, it should be understood that this paper is not concerned with the definition of *nāma*, and accepts that the literal translation of *nāma* as ‘name’ and the understanding of that to mean consciousness, or the functions of consciousness, to be broadly correct. For the purpose of this paper there is no interest in the different connotations consciousness may entail as *nāma* is only discussed for the sake of *rūpa*, this paper assumes that mind, consciousness, name and cognition are interchangeable and does not wish for the reader to be distracted from the consideration of *rūpa*.

WHAT IS RŪPA?

Rūpa is a significant element in many of the Buddha’s teachings, from the *pañcakhanda* to the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as a description of the objects we experience. It seems clear that *rūpa*, at least in part, describes an entity involved in experiences, what is less clear is what that actual entity is. The Buddha talked about *rūpa* many times and described what *rūpa* is in experience, an important part of who we are as conscious beings.

The object of consciousness conditions what a being’s interpretation is, which then conditions its reaction; it is a vital element to the process of experience. Before discussing the consequences of explaining *rūpa* as an entity in-itself, one should first be clear as to what was meant by the Buddha when he discussed *rūpa*.

Bhikkhu Bodhi describes *rūpa* in his translation of the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* as follows:

There are twenty-eight types of material phenomena, which are briefly comprised in two general categories. The four great essentials (*mahābhūta*) are the primary material elements – earth, water, fire, and air. These are the fundamental constituents of matter which are inseparable and which, in their various combinations, enter into the composition of all material substances, from the most minute particle to the most massive mountain. The great essentials are called elements (*dhātu*) in the sense that they bear their own intrinsic natures (*attano sabhāvam dhārenti*).

Derived material phenomena (*upādāya rūpa*) are material phenomena derived from, or dependent upon, the four great essentials. These are twenty-four in number. The great essentials may be compared to the earth, the derivative phenomena to trees and shrubs that grow in dependence on the earth.¹

The Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha is describing *rūpa* by discussing its classification. It states that *rūpa* is of two categories, the *rūpa* that are great and the *rūpa* that are derived. These classifications deal with qualities of an object, the four *rūpa* that are great being inseparable to that object and the other 24 being derived from those four. The individual *rūpa* are not explaining an individual object here, but rather describing the characteristics of any given object.²

The Dhammasaṅganī describes *rūpa* as follows:

The results of good and bad states taking effect in the universe of sense, in that of form and as connected with the skandhas of feeling, perception, syntheses, and intellect.³

This explanation says that *rūpa* is something separate from consciousness, something outside, though still associated with it. The Dhammasaṅganī goes on to characterize *rūpa* as being involved in the process of how one experiences the results of good and bad states, in other words, *vipāka* of past *kamma*. This description describes *rūpa* as form; form that is not included with consciousness but still connected to experience. This experience includes feeling, perception, syntheses and intellect.

RŪPA IN PAṬCCASAMUPPĀDA

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* contains twelve factors and eleven rounds of conditioning where these twelve factors interact, within which *rūpa* always arises with *nāma*. Where *rūpa* is present, *nāma* is also present. They are conditioned together from the *viññāṇa* and

¹Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2012), p. 235.

²*ibid.*, p. 235.

³C. A. F. Rhys Davids (tr.), *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, (Bristol: PTS, 1900), p. 198

they condition the *saḷāyatana* together, existing as a single presence within the cycle of conditions.

The original Pāli will be shown following varying translations of the rounds of conditioning that deal with *rūpa*.

The standard formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is as follows:

*Tattha avijjāpaccā saṅkhārā, saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ, viññāṇa-paccayā namārupāṃ, namārupā-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ, saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso, phassa-paccayā vedenā, vedenā-paccayā taṇhā, taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ, upādāna-paccayā bhavo, bhava-paccayā jāti, jāti-paccayā jarā-marana-soka-parideva-dukkha-domanass' upāyāsā sambhavanti.*⁴

This paper will only focus on the rounds of conditioning that deal with *nāma-rūpa*.

Nāma-rūpa is included in the third and fourth rounds of conditioning in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*:

viññāṇa-paccayā namārupāṃ namārupā-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ

In the case of the *Mahānidānasutta* there is a variant formula of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *nāma-rūpa* is discussed in the first, second and third rounds, which is as follows:

*namārupā-paccayā viññāṇaṃ
viññāṇa -paccayā namārupāṃ,
namārupā-paccayā phasso*⁵

The paper focuses on only these particular rounds because they are the rounds that mention the concept in question, *rūpa*. The translations of *viññāṇa* and *saḷāyatana* (or *phasso*) should not distract the reader from the concept in question.

⁴Narada Maha Thera, **A Manual of Abhidharma**, (Colombo: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1979), p. 396.

⁵T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (tr.), **Dīghanikāya**, Vol 2, p. 56.

TRANSLATIONS OF RŪPA

As already clarified, when comparing these translations, I will only show what the scholars have translated *rūpa* as in the sense of *nāma-rūpa*, particularly as it is used in the considering the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

When considering the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the aim is to make it clear to the reader that this paper is only concerned with the translation of *rūpa*. Although the understanding of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is of the utmost importance, the meaning of this teaching as a whole is not discussed, nor is the translation of any other concepts that appear, even the ones that may be translated in context with *rūpa*.

MAHĀNIDĀNASUTTA

Rhys Davids and Walsh have produced translations of the Mahānidānasutta with varying renditions of *rūpa*:

Walsh:

mind-and-body conditions consciousness
and consciousness conditions mind-and-body,
mind-and-body conditions contact.⁶

Rhys David:

cognition, with name-and-form as its cause;
name-and-form, with cognition as its cause;
contact, with name-and-form as its cause.⁷

The two different translations of *rūpa* act in different ways within *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

⁶ Maurice Walsh (tr.), **Have I Heard: the Long Discourses of the Buddha**, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1987), p. 107.

⁷T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (tr.), **Dialogues of the Buddha**, Vol 2, (Bristol: PTS, 1899), p. 52.

BAHUDHĀTUKASUTTA

Horner and Bodhi's translations of the Bahudhātukasutta add yet two more interpretations of the same concept:

Horner:

Conditioned by consciousness is name shape; conditioned by name shape is the field of six senses.⁸

Bhikkhu Bodhi:

with consciousness as condition, mentality- materiality; with mentality- materiality as condition, the sixfold base.⁹

Varying translations do not necessarily mean confusion in understanding a particular concept. Translating *nāma*, for example, as consciousness or mind may not imply confusion on the part of the translators at all. However, the differences between 'form', 'body', 'name' and 'shape' seem to be too vast to assume the translators mean the same thing.

VISUDDHIMAGGA

The pinnacle of post canonical texts is the masterpiece of Buddhagosa, the Visuddhimagga, also known as the path to purification, it is the road map to enlightenment with detailed explanations for all the stops in between. The importance of this work is so great that it is sometimes considered alongside the Canon when discussing the necessary books of Theravāda. As such, it is essential that the translation of the Visuddhimagga be as exact as possible. The examples I provide are from *nāma-rūpa* as it appears in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* to keep the constancy of the paper.

⁸I.B. Horner (tr.), **The Book of Middle Length Sayings**, Vol 3, (Bristol: PTS, 1954), p. 107.

⁹Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya**, (Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 115.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli:

with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, the sixfold base.¹⁰

The Burmese scholar Pe Muang Tin's rendition of the Vissuddhimagga:

Conditioned by consciousness is Name-and-Form

Conditioned by Name-and-Form is Sense.¹¹

These two translations show possible disagreement between the writers as to what it actually means.

ABHIDHAMMATTHA-SAṄGAHA AND OTHER TEXTS

Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha is a work explaining consciousness, it is only natural that it spends a great deal of time with its objects. One of the objectives of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha is, in fact, to define and explore *rūpa*, but I believe this was done with the assumption that the student would already be comfortable with the concept. Keeping that in mind, the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha delves into subject matter that requires an understanding of the overall meaning of *rūpa* before any detailed investigation into the subject can be achieved. Again, we see discrepancies across translations, as *rūpa* is being communicated in different ways.

In Mehm Ti Mon's version of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha, *The Buddha Abhidhamma - Ultimate Science*, translates *rūpa* as follows:

Dependent on rebirth consciousness arise the mental and physical phenomena,
Dependent on the mental and physical phenomena arise the six (sense) bases.¹²

¹⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), **The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), p. 439.

¹¹ Pe Maung Tin, **The Path of Purification**, (Bristol: PTS, 1922), p. vi.

¹² Mehm Tin Mon, **Buddha Abhidhamma - Ultimate Science**, (Penang: Suki Hotu, 2002), p. 298.

Narada Maha Thera's translation in his version of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha:

Dependent on (Rebirth) Consciousness arise Mind and Matter.
Dependent on Mind and Matter arise the six (Sense) Bases.¹³

Nyanatiloka Maha Thera's Guide to the Abhidhamma:

thereon consciousness
thereon mentality and corporeality (*nāma-rūpa*);
thereon the 6 sense-bases.¹⁴

.Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha:

Dependent on consciousness arises mind-and-matter
Dependent on mind-and-matter arises the six sense bases¹⁵

It is interesting to note that Bhikkhu Bodhi himself decided on another translation for *rūpa* in the Majjhimanikāya when discussing *nāma-rūpa*, with a detailed explanation, "In this edition the compound has been changed back to the rendering used in his [Ñāṇamoli] translation of the Visuddhimagga, 'mentality-materiality', though with regret that this cumbersome Latinate expression lacks the concision and punch of 'name-and-form'.¹⁶ This shows Bhikkhu Bodhi in some ways prefers the translation of form, yet chooses a subtler translation to better express the nuances of the word, however, Bhikkhu Bodhi does not stick with the same translation, using materiality in one translation, and matter, or material phenomena, in another. This points to possible problems as one translation, which is preferred for its 'punch', is bypassed for what he believes is a clearer definition. It appears though that materiality may not have been clear enough. In a later translation of the Khandha-vagga in the Saṃyuttanikāya Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *Rūpa* as 'form' throughout, having apparently changed his mind again. It may also be noted that Bhikkhu Bodhi was Ñāṇamoli's protégé; in

¹³ Narada Maha Thera, *op.cit.*, p. 398.

¹⁴ Nyanatiloka Maha Thera, **Guide to the Abhidhamma**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publications, 1983), p. 34.

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2012), p. 294.

¹⁶ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 21.

fact, Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of Majjhimanikāya was a revision of Ñāṇamoli's version. This may explain why their translations are similar.

This article does not mean to nitpick when pointing out these different translations, as one could say that matter and corporeality are similar, or that materiality and form may be related, but why use the different terms if not to convey the different nuances of each? I do not see how it would be possible that all these different interpretations could be valid while being used to discuss the same topic.

IMPLICATIONS OF VARYING TRANSLATIONS

Translation	Translator
Body	Walsh
Matter	Bhikkhu Bodhi
Materiality	Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli
Corporeality	Nyanatiloka Maha Thera
Form	Rhys Davids
Shape	I.B. Horner
Physical Phenomenon	Mehm Ti Mon

Rūpa is used many times in the Pāli Canon by the Buddha and his close disciples as a fundamental concept within more detailed teachings. As *rūpa* was explained and investigated in the Suttas, in the Mahahattipadopamasutta for example, when Sariputta explains the four great *rūpas*¹⁷, it was likely more understood than it is today, allowing teachers, such as Sariputta, spend more time on the subtleties and nuances of *rūpa*. The Buddha and his disciples may have been able to spend very little time with the explanation of *rūpa* itself, as the Pāli Canon does not deal with *rūpa* with the same amount of precision and detail as *nāma*, and use it as a staple in very complex teachings where much more time and effort was applied. One does not have that luxury today, it is not an easy task to simply take *rūpa* for what it is. Put another way, one may not have a clear idea of what *rūpa* 'is'.

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 158.

Below is an examination of some possible implications regarding the varying translations of *rūpa* as well as an evaluation of how each translation of *rūpa* is interpreted as it arises with *nāma*; this arising being an intricate part of the concept within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* as discussed above. In doing this, the problems regarding how *rūpa* is conceptualized will be clear.

BODY

Walsh translates *rūpa* as body in the Mahānidānasutta.¹⁸ The single word ‘body’ is ambiguous, as it could mean for example ‘our physical presence in the world’ in a phenomenological sense, or the objective body in an anatomical sense. From a phenomenological perspective, body would be that which is experienced as the observer in the world, the physical quality of what a person is. Body would be experienced as an object as well as being the tool in which a person experiences. From an anatomical sense, body would seem to just mean the material construct of a being. Keeping this mind, body seems to point to three possible interpretations. The body of existence, being the body in which one lives as a being. The body as an object, being the body as we perceive it as a physical entity. The body of experience, being the body as it is used as a tool in order to experience.

The body of existence implies that the teaching is dealing with *nāma-rūpa* as it only applies to the body of a being. In this sense body would appear to be the mass that is our body that exists in the physical world, our material casing, whether it is involved in experience or not. It implies a being of matter that does not need to be part of a process of interpretation at all and exists in and of itself. This sense of body seems to assume that its primary quality of being *rūpa* is that it is a material extension of a conscious being. It does not account for the nuances that body plays in experience. This interpretation of body is not accounting for any objects of experience either; neither the body as an object of experience, such as a being seeing their own hand, or otherwise such as the sight of an apple or the smell of a flower.

The body as an object would be similar to the body of existence in that it is just dealing with the physical qualities of body, the material aspects. However, the body as an object is not the body as it exists alone, rather the body as it is experienced as an object. The body as a walking man is seen crossing the street. My body as the reflection in the mirror. The body as

¹⁸ Maurice Walsh (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 107.

an object is the body as it is perceived. Here *rūpa* would be the feel of the body, or the sight of my arm moving. Much like the body of existence, the body as an object doesn't seem to account for other objects of perception, e.g. flower or apple.

The body of experience is a more phenomenological explanation. it accounts for the physical body as well as the body's ability to sense objects, both itself and outside entities. Here *rūpa* would be a body that both physically exists and is experiencing its surrounding. However, this body, just like the body of existents and the body as an object, does not account for those outside objects the body may be experiencing. This interpretation of *rūpa* seems to only allow for the body to experience the body.

Within the explanation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* the body would come into existence with the mind, the mind and body would arise together in one step as they are conditioned from *viññāṇa*, mind and body arising together then conditions *saḷāyatana*. This seems to be a good explanation for birth, but again, it doesn't seem to account for the objects a being perceives outside of body.

MATTER

Narada Maha Thera translates *rūpa* as matter in in his rendition of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha.¹⁹ Matter can have many meanings. Not all of these meaning are wholly dependent on physicality either, for example: the matter of dispute, the matter at hand, what is the matter with someone? -etc. Matter can also be a more philosophical term, such as Socratic matter, that being demerge. This matter is what the transcendental forms take their physical appearance from. A common definition of matter is the physical element that an object is made from. This interpretation that it is the stuff that makes up an object is the one I will use as it seems to be the most relevant.

If matter is understood as the common interpretation of that which makes up physical entities in themselves, then *rūpa*, as understood as matter would be that which things in themselves are made of. Taking an apple for a physical object, the *rūpa* would be the matter that makes up the apple.

If *rūpa* understood as matter within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* then this may suggest that some entity that exists in-itself is playing a role in the process of *nāma- rūpa*, and that it may

¹⁹Narada Maha Thera, *op.cit.*, p. 324.

not be necessary to be aware of this entity. In this interpretation the matter which makes up an apple that exists on top of a table would be *rūpa* whether or not it is being experienced. It would be *rūpa* just for being the matter which makes up the apple in-itself. This matter which makes up the apple existing outside of experience would somehow arise with mind, as *rūpa* and mind arise together. The matter which makes up the apple, as it exists in itself, would be conditioned from *viññāṇa* as it arises with the mind and the matter which makes up the apple, as it exists in-itself, along with the mind, would condition the *saḷāyatana*.

MATERIALITY

Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli chooses to translate *rūpa* as materiality²⁰ in the Visuddhimagga; this may indicate that he wanted something that transcends matter in describing *rūpa*. Materiality is the quality of having matter, meaning that *rūpa* is in a state of being matter, but again, the meaning of materiality, much like matter, is ambiguous.

Materiality is another term that can mean many things. The physicality of an object, the quality of having material characteristic, the quality of having matter. taking this interpretation of materiality as a translation of *rūpa* allows for a more abstract description that is not as limiting as simply translating it as matter, yet it still describes it as being made of material. This may carry the same assumptions that matter does, placing *rūpa* in the world alone existing as an object in-itself. The materiality of the apple is an underlying part of the apple as it exists as an apple.

Taking a common definition of materiality, the quality of having matter, this being the quality of having that which makes up physical entities, *rūpa* is then an object having the state of being made from matter.

If *rūpa* is understood as materiality with the *paṭiccasamuppāda* then materiality arises with mind. *Rūpa* would be the quality of having the matter that makes up the apple and would come into existence with mind as it is conditioned from *viññāṇa*. Mind and the quality of matter that makes up the apple would then condition *saḷāyatana*. The quality of having the matter which makes up the apple would somehow be associated with the mind as a quality of being *rūpa*, even though its description appears to be that of a thing in-itself.

²⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 439.

CORPOREALITY

Nyanatiloka Maha Thera translates *rūpa* in Guide to the Abhidhamma as corporeality.²¹ This may be an attempt to reach for something beyond matter, perhaps even further than the use of materiality. In regards to *nāma-rūpa* corporality could be viewed in a couple of ways. Interpretations of corporeality could include the quality of being in regards to having matter or it could mean the quality of having a body.

Defining *rūpa* as the quality of being in regards to having matter, while having nuances that are different, carries the same implications of calling *rūpa* matter, an object existing as *rūpa* as it exists in-itself. *Rūpa* in this interpretation would be the quality of being that has the matter that makes up the apple.

This quality of being that has the matter that makes up the apple would arise with the mind within the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The quality of being that has the matter that makes up the apple and the mind would both be conditioned from the *viññāṇa* and the quality of being that has the matter that makes up the apple and the mind would both condition the *saḷāyatana*. This quality of being that has the matter that makes up the apple would have the quality of being connected to the mind as it is *rūpa*.

It should be noted that guessing at what Nyantiloka Maha Thera means by ‘corporeality’ may be no better than a distraction from the investigation into the meaning of *rūpa*, this concern would apply to the interpretations of many translators.

FORM

Rhys Davids translates *rūpa* as form in his translation of *rūpa* as form in Mahānidānasutta.²² This seems to simplify the translation to -being which has form-, and could imply the form that objects imprint upon us, or that which we interpret. The house one see is a form that imprints itself upon a being.

Form can also be understood from a Platonic or Aristotelian point of view. The transcendental form of Plato is something that is beyond this world, something that is not so much experienced as it is known already.

²¹ Nyanatiloka, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

²² T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 52.

The house, while existing as a house in our mundane world is a house because it shares in the otherworldly form of the perfect house. The Aristotelian form on the other hand is worldly, residing in the object itself. It is in fact that which we experience of an object. The material chunk of existence is interpreted as a house because that chunk of material exists as the form of a house. One may object to these comparisons to the Greek ontology of Plato and Aristotle, though if one were to take a closer look, these interpretations may be conceivable, esp. Aristotle.

It is also possible to interpret form as a characteristic of an entity in itself, separate from interpretation completely. The form of an apple can easily be thought to exist outside of perception. Its form being a characteristic of the apple itself.

If *rūpa* is understood as form, then within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* mind arises with the form of an apple. The form of an apple and the mind would be conditioned form *viññāṇa*, and the form of an apple and the mind would then condition *saḷāyatana*.

SHAPE

Horner decides to translate *rūpa* as shape in her version of the Bahudhātukasutta,²³ Shape is similar to form yet does not contain the broad qualities that the later possesses. Shape tends to deal with the immediate interpretation of an object, its physical characteristics. Where form could be a transcendental quality as mentioned above. Shape can be the shape of an apple as it is observed. The shape being how the apple is viewed in space. Though, much like form, shape can also suggest to a quality of a thing-in-itself. The shape of the apple being as it is, a quality of the apple as it exists as that apple.

Shape as a physical characteristic of an apple would have actual physical existence within space. Its shape is a part of it's being an apple. This interpretation of shape is not dependent on being perceived and is a quality of a thing in-itself. *Rūpa* in this sense would be how the apple exists in space, as the apple, how the apple is shaped as the apple.

Shape as a characteristic of perception would be dependent on being observed. The shape of the apple would be what the perception of the shape is. This shape is how the apple is seen in space.

²³ I.B. Horner (tr.) *op.cit.*, p. 107.

If *rūpa* is defined as shape, then shape arises with mind within *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The shape of the apple and mind are conditioned from *viññāṇa*. The shape of the apple and mind together condition *saḷāyatana*. The shape of the apple would always be associated with mind as it exists as *rūpa*.

PHENOMENON

Mehm Ti Mon translates *rūpa* as physical phenomenon in his version of the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha, The Buddha Abhidhamma -Ultimate Science.²⁴ Translating *rūpa* as physical phenomena, assuming the philosophical definition of phenomenon,²⁵ considers *rūpa* as something that is being observed as well. Physical phenomenon, while still having implications of being physical, is something described as an appearance in experience.

Defining *rūpa* as something experienced may represent the translators wish to take it out of the realm of an object that exists in-itself, even though it is still described as having matter. The physical phenomenon of the apple is a physical apple existing as it is being observed.

From the perspective of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the phenomenon of the apple would arise with the mind. The phenomenon of the apple and mind would arise together as they are conditioned from *viññāṇa*, the phenomenon of the apple and mind would then condition the *saḷāyatana*. The phenomenon of the apple would always arise with mind, would always be associated with mind, as *rūpa* is always associated with mind.

COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS

We are left with seven translations; Body, Matter, Materiality, Corporeality, Form, Shape, Phenomenon.

²⁴Mehm Tin Mon, *op.cit.*, p. 298.

²⁵*ibid.* p. 298.

Translations	Definitions
Body	The body of entities or The body of a being
Matter	The “stuff” that makes up entities
Materiality	The quality of having the “stuff: that makes up entities
Corporeality	The quality of being that has the “stuff” that makes up entities
Form	The entity as it exists
Shape	The shape of an entity
Physical Phenomenon	The appearance of an entity

It does not seem possible that all of these translations are consistent with each other. There appears to be 3 main themes within these conflicting translations: that *rūpa* means body; that *rūpa* means matter, wherein which it makes up objects; or that *rūpa* means objects.

As discussed earlier, body can mean several different things. Assuming that body within the *paṭiccasamuppāda* either means the body of existence, that being the anatomical body, or the body of experience, that being the body that facilitates the experience of objects in the world, *rūpa* may be implying a meaning that is a foundation from which consciousness occurs. This meaning does not appear to suggest an object of consciousness, nor the matter that makes up these objects that are experienced.

Presuming the correct translation is matter, and taking the more common interpretation of that word to mean that which makes up physicality, then it appears that *rūpa* is the foundation from which physical objects occur. This would not mean objects themselves, nor the body itself. Even accepting the modern explanation of the physical world, that all physical things are made up of matter, the things that are made up of matter should not be thought of as the matter. In other words, the body, and the objects in the world the body encounters, are that which matter makes up, not matter itself.

Assuming *rūpa* simply means object, and further assuming these objects are the objects that consciousness makes contact with, would mean that *rūpa* is that which consciousness is conscious of. This meaning emphasizes the direct object of consciousness rather than the body that facilitates consciousness, being the ability to make contact, or from where consciousness makes contact from. Object also means something other than matter, being the entity that is actualized from matter, what is experienced, not that which makes up the object.

It appears that these translations are incompatible. Of the seven translations discussed, *rūpa* may mean one of these, none of these, or some of these, but cannot mean all of these. It would seem incoherent to accept all of these translations as acceptable within the same teaching, that being *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which further suggests that it is impossible to accept all of them as acceptable.

The aim of this paper has been to shed light on the possible confusion that surrounds *rūpa* more than to try and clear that confusion up. That being said, the job of clearly defining the term is one that may be in desperate need of attention. The fact remains that *rūpa* may or may not be translatable in contemporary English, but this fact should only hasten the need for possible action. If such a concept, that is necessary to use, exists that cannot be fully understood, should we not then try to understand it as well as we can? Looking at the varied translations of *rūpa* and its impact on the correct conceptualization of the concept may be a place to start in order to do just that, understand it as well as we can.

CONCLUSION

Further questions require attention if we are to come to a consensus of what we mean when we say *rūpa*. How is it that the word for shape and color was used to represent the body? Why did the explanation of consciousness using *rūpa* to experience *rūpa*, such as the body sensing the world, make sense in the time of the Buddha? How can we deal with an ancient concept that was used to express objects of consciousness in this modern day and age of science and reason?

It is clear that *rūpa* does not have a concrete meaning in contemporary usage, as it was a word used 2500 years ago to help explain experience in a world that is much different from the one we now live in. In trying to translate it correctly, one should be cautious and attempt to convey the meaning meant by the Buddha. Having varied translations of this concept may be taking ideas down paths the Buddha and his disciples would not have approved of. Modern usage is very important in representing how well we may understand an ancient idea, as such, these contrasting translations of *rūpa* may point to possible problems. One must ask, do we understand *rūpa* as it was used by the Buddha, using the best of our abilities, in a precise and accurate way. The root problem may be that *rūpa* isn't understood in the way that the Buddha meant it in the first place, not that it's variously translated. The various translations of the word in the same context may be due to the lack of understanding and may perpetuate confusion, at least among non-Pāli readers. A closer examination of the different interpretations

of the concept of *rūpa*, in the context of the same teachings, is suggested to help clear up this possible lack of understanding.

Remarks: The ideas and opinions presented in this article are the researcher's alone and are not meant to imply the consensus or agreement of JIBSC editorial staff or other contributors to the journal.

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AN INFLUENCE OF CONCEIT (MĀNA) ON INDIVIDUALS AND THE WAY TO OVERCOME IT



Ven. Ariyavaṃsa

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the meaning of conceit (*māna*), how it can have influence on the normal and noble persons, and how to overcome conceit from the Theravāda Buddhist point of view. According to Theravāda Buddhism, man is composed of mind and matter (*nāma and rūpa*). In terms of mind (*nāma*), it has two parts: consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*). The characteristic of consciousness has only “knowing the objects” and it does not have any ability to create actions. However, when the mental factors arise with consciousness, they can make good or bad actions: bodily action, verbal action and mental action. Interestingly, conceit which is characterized as ‘haughtiness’, that being the quality that normal persons try to maintain, is the delicate Dhamma the noble persons try to give up.

Keywords: Conceit, māna, Individuals, Noble persons, ariya puggala.

INTRODUCTION

Conceit or *māna*, which plays very important role in Theravāda Buddhism, is referred to in a variety of different names. Such as, mental factor (*cetasika*), defilement (*kilesa*), fetter (*saṃyojana*), latent tendency (*anusaya*) and mental proliferation (*papañca*). However, the different names are not of importance in the Dhamma; all the teaching of the Buddha are focused on removing all mental defilements or hindrances. According to the Theravāda Buddhist perspective, all beings are composed of five aggregates: the aggregates of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental properties (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). These four mental states form the mind and the last aggregate, *rūpa* or matter forms the body. Man is, therefore, a combination of mind and matter. Mind in man is like a driver in a car, the car itself is like the matter.

The power of mind has no comparison with anything known by us, but we may compare it with colossal energy inherent in electricity, or perhaps, with atomic power. The electrical power could be utilized for different purposes, for good or bad or indifferent, and so does our mind. The atomic power now utilized for human destruction could be utilized for the alleviation of human suffering as well. Mind may be said to be like pure, transparent water which can be mixed with anything. When it is mixed with mud, it becomes thick and defiled and you cannot see through it.. In the same way, this supreme, incomparable energy known as mind, which is by nature clear, bright and transparent, becomes dirty, defiled and poisonous by ill use.¹ Here in, this paper would like to address the concept of the unwholesome mental factor of known as conceit (*māna*) in accordance with Theravāda Buddhism.

MĀNA

An etymological explanation finds that the term *māna* has two meanings: the first meaning signifies “highly thinking of oneself”. According to this, *māna* is derived from the root $\sqrt{\text{man}+a\eta a}$ (*māneti*). The second meaning refers to “measurement”, which stems from the root $\sqrt{\text{mi or mī}+ñā}$ (*mināti*).²

¹ Sayadaw U Thittila, **Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures**, (Yangon: Department of Religious Affairs, 2000), p. 255.

² Rhys Davids and W. Stede, **Pali-English Dictionary**, (London: PTS), p. 539.

In the *Vibhaṅga*, *māna* is defined as ‘conception’, ‘the state of conception’, ‘haughtiness’, ‘loftiness’, ‘mark’, ‘assumption’, or ‘the desire of prominence’.

There is conceit or pride when we consider ourselves important. Because of conceit we may compare ourselves with others. There can be conceit when we think ourselves better, equal or less than someone else. We may believe that there can be conceit only when we think ourselves better than someone else, but this is not so. There can be a kind of upholding of ourselves, of making ourselves important, while we compare ourselves with someone else, no matter in what way, and that is conceit.³

Besides, *māna* can be identified as:

One of the fourteen unwholesome mental factors in Theravada Abhidhamma teachings.

One of the ten fetters in the Theravada tradition.

One of the latent tendencies under the title of *anusaya*.

One of the proliferations under the name of *papañca*.⁴

There are three roots of the unwholesome: greed, hatred and delusion; and three roots of the wholesome mental states: non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. These two types of mental states which consist of three roots of unwholesome and wholesome volitional are acted through deeds, words or thoughts. The terms ‘wholesome’ and ‘unwholesome’ comprise all volitional actions that bind living beings to the round of rebirth and suffering.⁵ Therefore, all actions spring from these roots, which are called ‘*kusalakamma*’ (wholesome action) or ‘*akusalakamma*’ (unwholesome). The Pāli word ‘*hetu*’ ordinarily means ‘a condition’, ‘a reason’, or ‘a cause’. In Abhidhamma, ‘*hetu*’ has a more specific meaning. Here *hetu* refers to six types of leader *cetasikas* which are compared to a root. When having roots, a tree is firm stable, and strong. If a tree has no roots, it will be weak, unstable, and fall very easily.⁶ Similarly, when an action is formed through the wholesome mental roots, the results of such actions are good, while an action formed with the unwholesome mental factors, the results of such actions are bad. Good result or bad results of the actions are due to characteristics of these mental roots.

³ *ibid* p. 543.

⁴ *ibid* p. 355.

⁵ Gorkom, Nina van, *Cetasika*, (London: Zalog, 2010), p. 125.

⁶ I. B. Horner, O. B. E (tr.), *The Middle Length Sayings*, (London: PTS), p. 141.

Māna (conceit) can be found in the four types of consciousness dissociated with wrong view (*diṭṭhi*). The origination of *māna* is connected with each individual. It is rooted in consciousness associated with greed (*lobha*). *Māna* and *diṭṭhi* or conceit and wrong view never arise simultaneously in one particular consciousness. The commentaries have given an example of these two mental states by comparing them to two fearless lions that cannot live in one den.

In fact, there are three main types of conceit that we can find in the canonical texts. For instance, “I am superior (*seyya*),” “I am equal (*sadisa*),” and “I am inferior (*hīna*).” Three types of persons are ranked according to the social status: superior, equal, and inferior. These results are varied in nine possible arrangements and each type of person can potentially have all three types of conceit. The nine possible arrangements are as follows:

1. *Seyyassa seyyohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is better is called the conceit thus, “I am better”.
2. *Seyyassa sadisohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is better is called the conceit thus, “I am equal”.
3. *Seyyassa hīnohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is better is called the conceit thus, “I am inferior”.
4. *Sadisassa seyyohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is equal is called the conceit thus, “I am better”.
5. *Sadisassa sadisohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is equal is called the conceit thus, “I am equal”.
6. *Sadisassa hīnohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is equal is called the conceit thus, “I am inferior”.
7. *Hīnassa seyyohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is inferior is called the conceit thus, “I am better”.
8. *Hīnassa sadisohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is inferior is called the conceit thus, “I am equal”.
9. *Hīnassa hānohamasmīti māno* = This of one who is inferior is called the conceit thus, “I am inferior”.⁷

⁷Vibh. P. 363.

NOBLE PERSONS AND ORDINARY PERSONS

There are four pairs of stages that are enlightenment, or the stages of realizing *Nibbāna*. These consist of the four paths (*magga*) and the four fruits (*phala*):

The path and fruit of stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga* and *sotāpatti-phala*).

The path and fruit of once-returning (*sakadāgāmi-magga* and *sakadāgāmi-phala*).

The path and fruit of non-returning (*anāgāmi-magga* and *anāgāmi-phala*).

The path and fruit of arahantship (*arahatta-magga* and *arahatta-phala*).

An ordinary person who reaches one of these stages of enlightenments is called a real disciple of the Buddha, a so called *ariya puggala* or ‘noble persons.’

The first path of stream-entry is also known as ‘vision’ (*dassana*), because it refers to the first glimpse of *nibbāna*. The following three “path” of once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship are collectively known as ‘cultivation’ (*bhavanā*), since they involve a development in the truth (*dhamma*) initially realized at the moment of stream-entry.⁸

Ariya is generally translated as ‘cultivated’, ‘noble’, or ‘far from the foe or far from mental defilements’, while ‘*puggala*’ means ‘person’. The Buddha referred to people who are at one of these four stages as noble people (*ariya puggala*) and the community of such persons as the noble saṅgha (*ariya saṅgha*).

In contrast, an ordinary person is a general translation of the pāli word ‘*puthujana*’. In accordance with etymological explanation, *puthujana* means ‘one who can arise various or many defilements’. An ordinary person is trapped in an endless cycle of *samsāra*. An ordinary person born, lives and dies in this endless cycle of rebirth, either as a deity, human, animal, male, female, neuter, ghost, or various other kinds of different existences.

INFLUENCE OF CONCEIT (*MĀNA*) ON ORDINARY PERSON

We usually see people with pride as a having large egos. One who is proud and conceited is difficult to get along with and not easy to be associated with. Another apparent characteristic of conceited person is not being open-minded. They are not willing to learn from others, as they think they already know everything. Practically, one who is conceited

⁸Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (tr.) , **The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)**, (Kandy: BPS, 1956-2010), p. 697.

does not have many friends and nobody wants to be associated with him or her. Therefore, the impact of conceit on an ordinary person is being ‘lonely’.

On the other hand, if the person is conceited and arrogant, he or she sees himself or herself as being great. His or her heart’s eye will be too blind to see the faults and shortcomings. In this case, if that person wants to show someone their qualities, demonstrating a greatness of status, he or she will then be afflicted by the dangerous ailment of pride.

Nevertheless, some kinds of pride or conceit should be cultivated in order to lead a good life, but too much leads to suffering. For instance, when there is a competition in a classroom, one should develop some *māna* in order to get higher marks in the lecture. If not, they cannot get such high marks. When we see a person working steadily, we should have some *māna*, we can do our best and we can work steadily as well.

INFLUENCE OF CONCEIT (MĀNA) ON NOBLE PERSON

According to the Theravāda Buddhist perspectives, there are four pairs of noble persons, which are called *ariya puggala* in Pāli term. Of them, the Stream-enter eradicates only the first three fetters: (1) belief in self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), (2) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) and (3) attachment to mere rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*).

The once-returner (*sakadāgāmi-puggala*) develops some control over the 4th and 5th fetters: (4) sensuous craving (*kāma-rāga*), and (5) ill-will (*paṭigha*).

The non-returner becomes fully free from the above mentioned five lower fetters. Therefore, these three noble persons still have conceit in their latent tendency. However, these types of conceit found in the noble persons cannot lead to birth in the stage of lower state. The conceit in their heart can lead to the advanced the stage of an Arahantship.

The *arahanta* is one who is totally free from the five higher fetters, those being: (6) craving for fine material existence (*rūpa-rāga*), (7) craving for immaterial existence. (*arūpa-rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). The holiest person completely destroys conceit and all defilements just like a dirty white cloth become clean when washed in water. There is no impact of conceit in such a person.

Noble persons who are not yet Arahants can still have conceit, although they have no wrong view of self and may be inclined to compare themselves with others. When somebody thinks he is better than, equal to or less than someone else, it is conceit, even if it is true. In truth, there is no reason to compare ourselves with others.

THE WAY TO OVERCOME CONCEIT (*MĀNA*) IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

Out of the defilements, conceit (*māna*) is one of the *anusaya kilesa*, which lies dormant in the life-continuum as a latent tendency of mental defilements. The English saying, ‘Silence is Golden’ is not always right, but we can say that silence is less dangerous than a big noise. One who wants to uproot conceit (*māna*) must be practiced in insight meditation, or *vipassanā* meditation, because conceit lies down in the root of the mind. There are three levels of defilements; likewise, the abandoning of defilements has three stages. The Visuddhimagga states the differentiation of the three levels of abandoning of defilements as follows:

1. *tadaṅga-pahāna*: Overcoming by the opposite. Here, it refers to the overcoming of the wrong transgressions (*vītikkaṃma-kilesa*) by good morality. This removal or overcoming is only temporary, just by substitution. The defilements may take place after a while. That means one abandons the unwholesome mental states by substituting them with the wholesome mental states. When there is wholesome mental state, there cannot be any unwholesome mental state. That is called abandonment by substitution or momentary.

2. *vikkhambhana-pahāna*: Overcoming by repression. It refers to the subduing of the defilements (*variyuṭṭhāna-kilesa*) by suppression, by preventing by means of concentration of the degree of access concentration and attainment concentration (*jhāna*).

3. *samuccheda-pahāna*: Overcoming by destruction. It refers to the abandoning of all the defilements which originate in the core of someone’s minds and who develops the Path and which are completely eradicated by the four supra-mundane Paths so that they cannot arise anymore.⁹

By way of developing one’s insight and wisdom, one is able to dispel the first stage of defilements (*anusaya-kilesa*). It is like cutting a tree by the root so that it will never grow again. If defilements are cut by means of wisdom, such defilements will never rise again.

⁹Bhikkhu Ñāṇmoli (tr.), **The Path of Purification, (Visuddhimagga)**, (Kandy: BPS, 1991), p. 9.

This is called *samuccheda-pahāna*.¹⁰ In order to understand clearly, each factor within the three stages of trainings is explained. These three stages are interdependent and interrelated; *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* should be practiced at the same time and not separately.

MEDITATIONS SUBJECTS AND TEMPERAMENTS

Pertaining to Visuddhimagga, there are forty types of meditations. They can be listed into seven categories and run as follows:

- (i) Ten kinds of Device (*kasiṇa*)
- (ii) Ten kinds of Foulness (*asubha*)
- (iii) Ten kinds of Recollection (*anussati*)
- (iv) Four Divine Abidings (*brahmavihāra*)
- (v) Four Immaterial States (*arūpa-jhāna*)
- (vi) One Perception (*saññā*)
- (vii) One Defining: (*catudhātu-vavatthāna*).¹¹

Carita (temperament) signifies the intrinsic nature of a person which is revealed when one is in normal state without being preoccupied with anything. The temperaments of people differ owing to the diversity of their actions or *kamma*. Habitual actions tend to form particular temperaments.

In this connection, six temperaments have been mentioned in the Visuddhimagga: greed (*rāga*), hate (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), faith (*saddhā*), intelligence (*buddhī*), and speculation (*vitakka*).

The ten kind of foulness, and mindfulness of the body are intended to diminish sensual desire and are suitable for those of the temperament of greed.

Eight subjects—the four divine abiding and four colour *kasiṇas*—are appropriate for the temperament of hate.

¹⁰ Sayadaw, U. Thittila, **Essential Themes of Buddhist Lecture**, (Yangon, Myanmar: Department of Religious Affair), p. 169.

¹¹ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), **The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)**, (Kandy: BPS, 1987), p. 112.

Mindfulness of breathing is suitable for those of temperament of delusion and speculation.

The first six recollections are appropriate for the temperament of faith.

Four subjects—mindfulness of death, the recollection of peace, the defining of the four elements, and the perception of the repulsiveness in nutriment—are especially effective for the temperament of intelligence.

The remaining six *kaṣiṇas* and the immaterial states are suitable for all temperaments. However, the *kaṣiṇas* should be limited in size for one of speculative temperament and large in size for one of deluded temperament.¹²

THE WAY TO KNOW ONE'S OWN TEMPERAMENT

The specific temperament of an individual can be ascertained by the following five points which are described in the *Visuddhimagga*:

- (i) Posture (*iriyāyāpatha*).
- (ii) Action (*kiṇṇa*).
- (iii) Food (*bhojana*).
- (iv) Seeing, etc. (*dassanādito*).
- (v) Occurrence of mental states (*dhammappavatti*).
- (a) The greed temperament is frequently influenced by the following mental states: deceitfulness, fraud, pride, evil desires, ambition, discontent, self-aggrandizement, and vanity.
- (b) The hatred temperament is frequently influenced by the following mental states: anger, enmity, disparaging, domineering, envy and avarice.
- (c) The delusion temperament is frequently influenced by the following mental states: stiffness, torpor, agitation, worry, uncertainty, and holding fast to a certain view.
- (d) The faith temperament is frequently influenced by the following states: generosity, desire to see noble ones, desire to listen to religious discourses, joy, ingenuousness, honesty, and trust in things that inspire trust.

¹²Henepola Gunaratana, *The Path of Serenity and Insight: An Explanation of the Buddhist Jhānas*, (Kandy: BPS, 1988), p. 53

- (e) The intelligence temperament is frequented by the following states: readiness to be spoken to, possession of good friends, moderation in eating, mindfulness, full awareness, wakefulness, urge for religious life, and exertion.
- (f) The speculation temperament is frequented by the following states: talkativeness, sociability, not talking interest in good works, failure to finish undertakings, making plans at night and executing them at day time, and mentally roaming about.¹³

SUITABLE MEDITATION SUBJECT FOR REMOVING OF CONCEIT

Having investigated the forty meditation subjects and six basic types of temperament, one cannot find clear instruction for those who display the mental unwholesome quality of conceit. In this connection, conceit is most relevant to a greedy person, because it is attachment to one's own aggregates. It should be noted that those who are influenced by conceit should practice the ten kind of foulness and mindfulness of the body, such as the 32 parts of the body.

The Buddha taught venerable Meghiya to give special attention to the four conditions: in order to abandon lust he must dwell on the impurity of the body; in order to forsake malice he must dwell on kindness; with a view to the excision of evil thoughts he must practice meditation by counting inhalations and exhalations; and for the removal of pride which says 'I am', he must exercise himself in the consciousness of impermanency. In doing this, consciousness of non-egoity is established and he who is conscious of non-egoity succeeds in the removal of the notion 'I am' and in this very existence attains *nibbāna*.¹⁴

The essence of insight meditation is to see things as they really are and understand the three universal characteristics: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*). Among these three characteristics, focus on the perception of impermanence is very important for a meditator who wishes to dispel conceit.

¹³ U Dhammaratana, *Guide Through The Visuddhimagga*, (Kandy: BPS, 2011), p. 31

¹⁴ Ud.4.1; Major General B.C. D.M. Strong (tr.), *The Udāna: The Solemn Uttrances of the Buddha*, (London: Lzac publication, 1902), p. 51.

In the Saṃyuttanikāya, the Buddha explains how consistent and deep knowledge of impermanence (*anicca*) in insight meditation can lead all the way to Arahatsip:

“Bhikkhus, when the perception of impermanence is developed and cultivated, it eliminates all sensual lust, it eliminates all lust for existence, it eliminates all ignorance, it uproots all conceit ‘I am’.”¹⁵

Insight into impermanence leads to elimination of conceit (*māna*) because of the transience of everything we habitually cling to as “I” and “Me” is clearly and repeatedly understood, the non-existence of the supposed “Self” becomes perfectly apparent. That is why fully developed insight into impermanence brings the great benefit of understanding the essence of egolessness. Full comprehension of the nature of impermanence can eliminate conceit and bring liberation.

HOW TO DEFEAT CONCEIT IN OUR DAILY LIFE

Human beings are not able to live alone by their own nature. So, one should not be proud of himself for having good statuses of family, wealth, beauty, education, etc. We should bear in our mind that even if we are extremely beautiful, we cannot seduce death. Even if we are very powerful, we cannot hope to influence death. Even the incredible wealth cannot buy a few minutes more life. Death is as certain for us as for someone stabbed through their heart by a knife. Reflecting upon this is a good way to defeat conceit in our daily life.

The teachings of the Buddha are relevant to all circumstances. A good conduct was praised by the Buddha, not ignored by him. The opposite of *māna* in Buddhism is ‘respectful’ (*gārava*) and ‘humbleness’ (*nivāta*). Being respectful and humble are the enemies of conceit and pride. Thus, one should respect other beings and bear humbleness onto oneself. This is the best way to defeat conceit in our daily life.

Among the various meritorious actions, reverence (*apacāyana*) for elder and holy persons is the most suitable action to defeat conceit in our daily life. Beside, a Buddha-image should be treated respectfully and it is a good way of training oneself to treat the

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), **The Connected Discourse of the Buddha: Saṃyutta Nikāya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 961

Buddha-image as the one who were the Buddha himself. Reverence is a part of the Dhamma which should not be neglected for it helps in the overcoming of conceit. All Buddhist traditions have shrines with images, paintings, stūpas and so on, because reverence is an essential part of Buddhist training. By practicing reverence, one can possess humility in oneself and harmonious relationships with others. The Buddha taught us in the Dhammapada thus: “If a person is in the habit of constantly honoring and respecting those who are developed and mature, their lives improve in four ways. Their life span soon increases. Their complexion becomes clearer. Their good health and comfort will improve. Their vigour and stamina too will increase.” (*abhivādanasīlissa niccaṃ vaddhāpacāyino cattārodhammā vaḍḍhanti: āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ*).¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Conceit is related with self-attachment, which can be called in Pāli, “*lobha*”. Normally, we may think that conceit is related with anger, “*dosa*”, because we can see in our daily life that someone who has a conceited face is usually stiff and hard. In reality, conceit is similar to narcissism. The narcissistic person is proud of his own body and attempts to fix his identity by transient identifications such as social status, wealth, with fads and fashions, ideas and ideologies, and so on.

Similarly, according to the Theravāda Buddhist perspective, conceit has two functions: first of all, conceit comes from self-attachment; second, to compare oneself to others.

In conclusion, conceit can cause someone to lose great opportunities for his own life. Because of conceit, someone may destroy himself for the benefit of this present life. Conceit can influence both normal and noble persons, except those who achieved Arahantship. Conceit can bring a normal person into hell and can cause more rebirths within the endless cycle of death. However, for a noble person, it can help one achieve the higher stages of enlightenment.

¹⁶ Dhṛp. p. 109.

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VARIOUS INTERPETATIONS OF TATHĀGATAGARBHA IN MAHĀYĀNA MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA SŪTRA



Nguyen Tri Hoi

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the different concepts of tathāgatagarbha in the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra and to analyze the suitability of those concepts. Buddhadhātu is closely related in meaning to the term tathāgatagarbha in Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, which affirms that all sentient beings have *buddhadhātu* (buddha nature). Furthermore, the Buddha-Nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is the Self, but sentient beings cannot see it because it is covered by delusion. However, *buddhadhātu* is the embryo of a *tathāgata* as the potential to realize enlightenment which we all possess or as perfect enlightenment itself.

Keywords: tathāgatagarbha, Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, Buddhadhātu, Self

INTRODUCTION

Tathāgatagarbha is one of the most important theories of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which affirms that every sentient being has the potency for attaining the buddhahood¹ because each has the tathāgatagarbha. In Mahāyāna texts the term Tathāgatagarbha is known under so many different names as it is viewed in so many different aspects of its manifestation. Tathāgatagarbha is *bhutatathata* (Suchness) when it constitutes the reason of buddhahood or the essence of Buddha; tathāgatagarbha is *nirvāna*, when it brings eternal peace to a heart troubled with egoism and its vile passions; tathāgatagarbha is *dharmakāya*, when it is religiously considered as the fountainhead of love and wisdom; tathāgatagarbha is *bodhicitta*, when it is the awakener of religions consciousness; tathāgatagarbha is *prajña*; when it intelligently direct the course of nature; tathāgatagarbha is *bodhi* when it is the source of intelligence; tathāgatagarbha is *buddhadhātu*, when it is considered the possibility of the attainment of buddhahood. The appearance of different names of tathāgatagarbha is due to the different usages in the sūtras and the different interpretation of different Buddhist sects. Because of this problem, it leads to confusion about the meaning of tathāgatagarbha. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to look for the suitable interpretation of tathāgatagarbha for a better understanding.

There is a tendency among scholars to deem the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra as the center doctrine of tathāgatagarbha. Rather, the sūtra has typically been characterized as a text that presents a Buddha-Nature doctrine (*buddhadhātu*). Therefore, the text is, at the best, to propound the suitable interpretation of tathāgatagarbha.

THE FIRST CONCEPT OF TATHĀGATAGARBHA

The first concept of tathāgatagarbha can be found in the Pāli sūtras which attributed to the Buddha as the “Luminous Mind”.²The term tathāgatagarbha first appeared in the

¹Buddhahood: The state of awakening that a Buddha has attained. The word enlightenment is often used synonymously with Buddhahood. Buddhahood is regarded as a state of perfect freedom, in which one is awakened to the eternal and ultimate truth that is the reality of all things. This supreme state of life is characterized by boundless wisdom and infinite compassion. The Lotus Sutra reveals that Buddhahood is a potential in the lives of all beings. See also Daisaku Ikeda, **Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth & Death: . . . And Everything in Between, A Buddhist View Life**, (USA: Middle Press, 1988), p. 195.

²Shunko Katsumata, **Research into the Theories of Mind and Consciousness in Buddhism**, (Tokyo: SankiboBusshorin, 1988), p.465.

Mahāyāna texts composed in India between approximately 200 and 350 C.E.³ The concept of the luminous mind developed along within the Mahāsaṅghika and Sarvastivāda tradition.⁴ The term “tathāgatagarbha” did not appear in the early teachings of Buddha. The Buddha taught the luminous mind refers to the underlying radiant or luminous intrinsic nature of the mind, especially when it is free from the cover of defilement. The luminous mind is identified by the Buddha in the *Āṅguttaranikāya*, the Buddha states:

This mind, monks, is luminous, but it is defiled by taints that come from without. But this uneducated manyfolk understands not as it really is. Wherefore for the uneducated manyfolk there is no cultivation of the mind, I declare That mind, monks, is luminous, but it is cleansed of taints that come from without. This the educated Ariyan disciple understands as it really is. Wherefore for the educated Ariyan disciple there is cultivation of the mind, I declare.⁵

This discourse indicates that the nature of mind is itself radiant, although it is clouded by defilements it becomes clear through the practice of meditation.

In the following excerpt continues the idea of the purification of the mind in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*.

Whosoever have escaped, are escaping or will escape from the world, all of them, by abandoning the five hindrances, those defilements of the heart which cause the weakening of insight – all of them with thoughts well established in the four arising of mindfulness, by making to grow in very truth the seven limbs of wisdom – all of them have escaped, are escaping or will escape by so doing.⁶

The concept of luminous mind is expressed clearly through the best example of *Āṅgulimāla* who was an unwholesome person. However, he could be converted to a worthy one by the Buddha. The Buddha knew that *Āṅgulimāla* was born a virtuous, noble child

³Sallie, B. King, **Buddha Nature**, (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), p. 7.

⁴Bibhu Padhi Minakshi Padhi, **Indian Philosophy and Religion: A Reader's Guide** (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 2005), p. 32.

⁵Woodward, F. L. (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttaranikāya)**, vol 1, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 8.

⁶Woodward, F. L. (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Āṅguttaranikāya)**, vol 5, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 134.

and had the potential innate virtues (tathāgatagarbha) due to his past wholesome kamma to attain *nirvāṇa* in this life. He saw that Āṅgulimāla had sufficient innate virtues as well as the potential to enter the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and attain arhant hood or sainthood.⁷ The Āṅgulimāla Sūtra is the tathāgatagarbha class which teaches that the luminous mind (tathāgatagarbha, or the buddha nature) is real and immanent within all beings and all phenomena.

Therefore, in early teaching of the Buddha, the tathāgatagarbha is luminous mind and it is covered by the defilements. When practitioners know the nature of mind, they develop the mind to the stage of the primal mind; in doing this all defilements are destroyed. Therefore, its nature is pure. By developing the mindfulness or removing the hindrances, the nature of luminous mind will be manifested.

From the idea of the luminous mind emerged an idea that the awakened mind is a pure, undefiled mind. In the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras it is this pure consciousness that is regarded to be the seed from which buddhahood grows:

When this intrinsically pure consciousness came to be regarded as an element capable of growing into buddhahood, there was the “embryo (garbha) of the Tathāgata (=Buddha)” doctrine, whether or not this term is employed.⁸

According to Peter Gregory, the origin of tathāgatagarbha doctrine means the natural and true state of the mind:

The implication of this doctrine [...] is that enlightenment is the natural and true state of the mind.⁹

The concept of luminous mind is further developed and more popular in later Mahāyāna texts such as the Lotus Sūtra and the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. The tenth chapter of Lotus Sūtra teaches that everyone can be liberated. All living beings can become a *buddha*, not only monks and nuns, but also laypeople, *śrāvakas*, *bodhisattvas*, and non-human creatures;

⁷Horner I. B. (tr.), **The Collection of the Middle Length Saying (Majjhimanikāya)**, vol 2, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 284.

⁸Alex and Hideko Wayman, **The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990), p. 21.

⁹Peter Gregory N., **Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1991), pp. 288-289.

The twelfth chapter of Lotus Sūtra details that buddha nature is universal among all people, even the historical Devadatta who also had the potential to become a *buddha*. The story of Devadatta is followed by another story about a dragon princess who is both anāga and a female, whom the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī proclaims will reach enlightenment immediately, in her present form.¹⁰

According to Alex Wayman, the Avataṃsaka Sūtra was the next step in the development of the concept of tathāgatagarbha after the concept of the luminous mind:

Where it is taught that the Buddha's divine knowledge pervades sentient beings, and that its representation in an individual being is the substratum consciousness.¹¹

In addition, the Avataṃsaka Sūtra does not contain a singular discussion of the concept, but the idea of a universal penetration of sentient beings by the wisdom of the *buddha* was complementary to the concept of the *buddha* womb.

As mentioned above, the early teachings of the *buddha* does not mention anything about the tathāgatagarbha concept and only mention to the luminous mind. The statement that all sentient beings have the *buddha* element first appears in the Mahāyāna version of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra.

MEANINGS OF TATHĀGATAGARBHA

According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is believed that all human beings possess the buddha nature that is tathāgatagarbha: the embryo of the buddhahood in all beings. The idea that all living beings possess Buddha-Nature is mainly advocated by the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra and Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. In the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, the Buddha explains as follows:

¹⁰ Gene Reeves, *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2008), p.5.

¹¹ Alex and Hideko Wayman, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

All the living beings, though they are among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, have the Buddha's wisdom, Buddha's Eye, Buddha's Body sitting firmly in the form of meditation. – Thus, in spite of their being covered with defilements, transmigrating from one path . . . to another, they are possessed of the Matrix of the Tathāgata [tathāgatagarbha 'contain a Tathāgata'], endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence are not different from me. – Having thus observed, the Buddha preached the doctrine in order to remove the defilements and manifest the Buddha-nature (within the living beings).¹²

This teaching explains that all living beings have latent buddhahood and is different from the Buddha's tathāgatagarbha. It is the true nature of things and whether Buddhas appear or do not appear the tathāgatagarbha of beings are eternal and unchanging.

The idea that all human beings have latent buddhahood is mainly advocated by explaining that the human mind is essentially identical with the *tathāgata*. The essence of human mind is transparently luminous. The luminous mind is covered by defilement, when the defilement has been removed, the pure mind becomes apparent.

In the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the meaning of tathāgatagarbha is defined as the buddha nature and Self or True Self. The concept of *tathāgatagarbha* in this Sūtra has a different meaning from Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras. The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra states that all human beings have latent buddhahood, but it does not mean that all human beings have the potential of the Buddha-Nature giving them the possibility to become the Buddha in the future as Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra describes. All beings have the Buddha-Nature.¹³

In this sūtra, the Chapter on the Nature of Tathāgata explains tathāgatagarbha as Self:

“Self” means a Tathāgata embryo. All sentient beings have Buddha-nature. This means the self. This meaning of the self has been covered up by immeasurable delusion since the beginning. That is why sentient beings cannot see it.¹⁴

¹² Paul Williams, **Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations**, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 104.

¹³ Kosho Yamamoto (tr.), Tony Page Dr. (ed.), “Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra”, **Mahāyāna Sūtra Piṭaka (Taisho Tripiṭaka vol 12, no. 374)**, (USA: FLepine Publishing, 2008), p. 102.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 101.

The tathāgatagarbha's various interpretations have appeared in later ages. But its original meaning seems to be the embryo that conceived the *tathāgata*, nurtured it, and gave birth to it. To sum up, a sentient being (tathāgatagarbha) means one that possesses Buddha-Nature and is a member of the *buddha* family. This Buddha-Nature is passed from birth.¹⁵

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF TATHĀGATAGARBHA IN MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA SŪTRA.

The main theme of Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra is about the permanence and transcendence of the *buddha*. The key technical term in this portion of the text is the *buddhadhātu*. The *buddhadhātu* is described as a Self or True Self. These two concepts (*buddhadhātu* and *Self*) have a strongly association with the tathāgatagarbha concept.

This Sūtra is particularly noteworthy in our present context for two reasons. First, *buddhadhātu* is particularly fully developed in the forty volume versions of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra and the Sūtra contains the well-known phrase, "All sentient beings have Buddha-Nature."¹⁶

This means that everyone has the potential to achieve the Buddha-Nature (*buddhadhātu*) or full enlightenment. The *buddhadhātu* idea affirms that the goal of Buddhism is open to all, there is no one inherently incapable of achieving perfect wisdom and freedom.

Second, it is affirmed in a particularly direct way that the *buddhadhātu* (buddha essence or Buddha-Nature) is present in each and every sentient being, and it is nothing other than the Self. This is in contrast with some other Sūtras which are very careful to avoid the use of such a term as "Self" in connection with the tathāgatagarbha. According to the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Buddha stated that tathāgatagarbha is Self, it is the embryo of the Buddha. Buddha nature is the Self, but sentient beings cannot see it because it is covered by delusion.

¹⁵ Gadgin M. Nagao, *Madhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publication, 1992), p.117.

¹⁶ Kosho Yamamoto (tr.), Tony Page Dr. (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 102.

Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra:

“Self” means a Tathāgata embryo. All sentient beings have Buddha-nature. This means the self. This meaning of the self has been covered up by immeasurable delusion since the beginning. That is why sentient beings cannot see it.¹⁷

From this statement, it can be said that the *buddhadhātu* is identified with tathāgatagarbha. Tathāgatagarbha means either a womb of the *buddha* or embryonic *buddha*. In other words, it can be seen either as the potential to realize enlightenment which all beings possess, or as the perfect enlightenment itself. Moreover, it is said that tathāgatagarbha everyone possesses is covered up by defilements. The defilements hide the reality of tathāgatagarbha and conceal it. Thus, only once we know ourselves as the greedy, angry, ignorant, people we are, can we be liberated. However, these defilements, unlike the tathāgatagarbha, are not really real; ultimately, it is said, they do not exist. Buddha-Nature is identified with the tathāgatagarbha and thus represents our originally given, perfectly enlightened nature. In other words, the reality is that all human beings are all already enlightened, but they are under the illusion that they are unwise or ignorant. This delusion itself is what makes them ignorant. However, there is nothing essential about it. If they can just free themselves out of this delusion, they will realize that we are and always have been, in reality, enlightened. This is the basic idea of Buddha-Nature.

The early teachings of the Buddha is known for the “non-self” teaching. This teaching is central to both the doctrine and the practice from the beginning. However, the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra is one of the most famous texts devoting to the positive affirmation of the eternal Self or True Self as opposed to impermanent non-self. It is important to answer the question as to why does the Buddha teach this concept to his followers. According to the chapter three of the sūtra, “On Grief”, the Buddha clearly states that “all things have no Self and nothing belonging to Self”.¹⁸ It is different from the statement started in the chapter twelve that “Every being has the Buddha-Nature. This is Self”.¹⁹

Tony Page explains that in chapter three of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Buddha is confronted by a number of zealous Buddhist who are keen practitioners of what we might

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 101.

term as “absolutist non-self Buddhism”. This means the frequent meditative cultivation of the notion that everything is absolutely impermanent, suffering and non-self. The Buddha does not praise his enthusiastic followers for their non-selfism, but rather warns them of extremism. He even dismisses their mistaken and useless non-self meditation as pride and blames them for not understanding that meditation upon impermanent, suffering and non-self is highly risky and needs to be safeguarded from misapplication.²⁰

The Buddha understands that monks have grasped merely the outer letters, the externalities of his doctrine, but not the essential spirit or inner meaning. As such they are victim of extremism and invent a form of meditative practice in which they view the external as impermanent, the Self as non-self, blissful as suffering, pure as impure.

The Buddha:

Bhiksus, why is it said that one who has the idea of a Self is arrogant and haughty, traversing round saṃsāra? Bhiksus, although you might say, we also cultivate impermanence, suffering, and non-Self, these three kinds of cultivation have no real value/ meaning. I shall now explain the excellent three ways of cultivating dharma.

To think of suffering as Bliss and to think of Bliss as suffering, is perverse Dharma; to think of the impermanent as the Eternal and to think of the Eternal as impermanent is perverse dharma; to think of the non-Self [anatman] as the Self [atman] and to think of the Self [atman] as non-Self [anatman] is perverse dharma; to think of the impure as the Pure and to think of the Pure as impure is perverse dharma.²¹

However, they have failed to distinguish between what saṃsāra and nirvāna are. Saṃsāra is non-Self so the monks are right. But they have committed a serious metaphysical mistake. The Buddha points out that they are ascribing samsaric qualities and characteristics to the non-samsaric, to unconditioned nirvāna. For while everything samsaric is rightly labelled as “non-Self” that is not so for the unconditioned.

The Buddha reveals that there is Self, such as the Self of as the dharmakāya (body of Truth), which is nothing less than eternal Self (ātman):

²⁰ Tony Page Dr., **Affirmation of Eternal Self in the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra**, viewed 31 December 2015 <http://www.bu.ac.th/knowledgecenter/epaper/jan_june2010/pdf/Page_47.pdf>.

²¹ Kosho Yamamoto (tr.), Tony Page Dr. (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 29.

The Self' signifies the Buddha; 'eternal' signifies the dharmakāya [ultimate Body of Truth]; 'happiness' signifies nirvāṇa; and 'pure' is a synonym for the dharma.²²

The Buddha declares that truly there is a Self in all dharmas. Offering a rare characterization of what this Self is, the Buddha states that the Self is sovereign, self-governing or autonomous:

What is this Self? Any phenomenon [dharma] that is true [satya], real [tattva], eternal [nitya], sovereign/ autonomous/ self-governing [aisvarya], and whose ground/ foundation is unchanging [asraya-aviparinama], is termed 'the Self' [atman]. This is as in the case of the great Doctor who well understands the milk medicine. The same is the case with the tathāgata. For the sake of beings, he says "there is the Self in all things"²³

In chapter twelve of "On the Nature of Tathāgata" The Buddha states the equality between Self and tathāgatagarbha, as thus:

The Buddha said: "O good man!" "Self" means "tathāgatagarbha" [Buddha-Womb, Buddha-Embryo, and Buddha-Nature]. Every being has Buddha-Nature. This is the Self. Such Self has, from the very beginning, been under cover of innumerable defilements.²⁴

The idea of the Self being equated to the tathāgatagarbha is not only found in Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, but also in Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.²⁵ The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra clearly defines what belongs to the realm of selflessness and what possesses the True Self, as the sūtra stated:

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁵ Michael Zimmermann, **A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra: The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha Nature Teaching in India**, vol 6, (Tokyo: Soka University, 2002), p. 83.

“Non-Self is saṃsāra, the Self is the tathāgata; impermanence is the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the eternal is the tathāgata’s dharmakāya; suffering is all tirthikas, bliss is nirvāṇa; the impure is all compounded [saṃskṛta] dharmas, the Pure is the true dharma that the Buddha and Bodhisattvas have”²⁶

Of course, this statement leads to some confusions of the Buddha’s followers who were previously trained by the Buddha while they were practicing the contemplation on non-self. They further expressed their confusions and questioned the Buddha.

The answer which was given by the Blessed One is definitive:

Even though he has said that all phenomena [dharmas] are devoid of the Self, it is not that they are completely/truly devoid of the Self. What is this Self? Any phenomenon [dharma] that is true [satya], real [tattva], eternal [nitya], sovereign/autonomous/self-governing [aisvarya], and whose ground/foundation is unchanging [asraya-aviparinama], is termed ‘the Self’ [atman].²⁷

The answer seems to have no gap for any other interpretation but the literal interpretation. The Buddha alerts his followers not to fall into a one sided view of seeing only emptiness and suffering in all phenomenon.

The Blessed One has used an example of taking stones for gems to enhance his disciples understanding:

People go bathing in a big pond. They are enjoying themselves, sailing in a boat, when they drop a gem of beryl into the depths of the water, after which it can no longer be seen. Then they all get into the water and search for this gem. They competitively scoop up all such rubbish as tiles, stones, bits of wood, and gravel, and say that they have the beryl. They are glad and take the things out, and see that what they hold in their hands is not true. The gem is still in the water. By the power of the gem itself, the water becomes clear and transparent. As a result, the people see that the gem is still in the water, as clearly as when they look up and see the form of the moon in the sky. At that time, there is a wise man there who, working out a power, slowly gets into the water and gains the gem.²⁸

²⁶ Kosho Yamamoto (tr.), Tony Page Dr. (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 29.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 32

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 30.

Then the Buddha further instructs on the method of studying, acting, going and meditating on the Self, the external, the blissful and pure:

O you Bhiksus! Do not abide in the thought of the non-Eternal, Suffering, non-Self, and the not-Pure and be in the situation of those people who take stones, bits of wood, and gravel to be the true gem. You must study well the Way, how to act, wherever you go, and “meditate on the Self, the Eternal, Bliss, and the Pure”. Know that the outer forms of the four items which you have learnt up to now are inversions and that anyone who desires to practise the Way should act like the wise man who deftly gets hold of the gem. This refers to the so-called thought of Self, and that of the Eternal, Bliss, and Pure.”²⁹

In order to explain more about the meaning of this idea, the Buddha teaches the simile of the King and the Skillful Doctor. This simile talks about the skillfulness of a doctor who first prohibited the cure all sicknesses with medicine made of milk, because of the practice of an unskilled doctor before him. However, later on when the King himself got ill, the doctor prescribed him the milk medicine since he saw that it can help the King. In the same way, the Buddha first wanted to subdue those who hold the concept of non-self as the unskilled doctor.

The Blessed One says non-self to them.

There is no self, no man, no being, no life, no nurturing, no knowing, none that does, and none that receives.³⁰

A significant speech by the Buddha right after that is why the Buddha taught the doctrine of non-self:

O Bhiksus! Know that what the tirthikas say is like the case of a worm that eats upon [a piece of] wood, from which, by chance, there appears what looks like a letter. Because of this, the Tathāgata teaches and says no-self. This is to adjust beings and because he is aware of the occasion.³¹

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 32.

³¹ *ibid.*

Therefore, the Buddha teaches the idea of non-self just as skillful means to adjust to the level of understanding of his disciples. This is explained in the Chapter twelve “On the nature of *tathāgata*” as follows:

Engaging in the notion that there is no Self with regard to the mundane self, they do not understand the skillful words of implicational purport of the *tathāgata* ... They have the notion that there is no Self and are unable to know the True Self.³²

The Buddha continues to explain to his followers of the wrong view of practicing the characteristics of impermanent *Samṣāra* to the eternal part of the Buddha in chapter ten entitled “on the Four Truths”:

Any person who says that the Three Treasures are non-eternal and holds this view of life, and then this is a false way of practice and is not the noble truth of the Way.³³

In Yamamoto’s view a person annuls what is right and won’t allow it to live. On account of this is that the person does not know “*dharmatā*” (essence of Reality). Not knowing this, he repeats birth and death and suffers it greatly.³⁴

Based on what the research has discussed above, we can understand that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* has a most important part of the concept of Self.

To conclude this part, this article will use the statement of Paul Williams as follows:

“What exactly that Self is in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, however, is not determined beyond its being that within each sentient being which enables him or her to become a Buddha. One thing anyway is clear. The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* teaches a really existing, permanent element in sentient beings. It is this element which enables sentient beings to become Buddhas. It is beyond egoistic self-grasping – indeed the very opposite of self-grasping”.³⁵

³² Tony Page Dr., **Affirmation of Eternal Self in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra***, view 31 December 2015 < http://www.bu.ac.th/knowledgecenter/epaper/jan_june_2010/pdf/Page_4.pdf>.

³³ Kosho Yamamoto (tr.), Tony Page Dr. (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 98.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁵ Paul Williams, ***Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations***, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 108.

THE SUITABLE CONCEPT OF TATHĀGARBA

According to the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the term *buddhadhātu* is synonymous with tathāgatagarbha. It describes the inherent potential of all sentient beings to achieve buddhahood. The term is also widely used in Buddhist Sanskrit with the sense of *buddha* relic. The term *buddhadhātu* first appeared in the Mahāyāna recension of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, which states that all sentient beings have the *buddha* element.

According to Shimodo, that in the Mahāparinirvāṇa the *buddhadhātu* is called Buddha-Nature and it may be connected in an attempt to elaborate a substitute for *buddha* relics (likewise, *dhātu*). In other words, the statement encapsulated the term *buddhadhātu* and associated with doctrine of buddhahood which is present internally to the practitioner, in opposite to the idea that it is externally present in the relic of the *stūpa*.³⁶

Michael Radich has argued that the term tathāgatagarbha is used interchangeably with *buddhadhātu*. Thus, we should consider the possibility that, like the *dhātu*, the term *garbha* is connected to the cult of the relic and the *stūpa*. Some evidence for such a connection can be found in a passage in the Aṣṭa. The text extols the merit that will be generated by study, preaching, worship and other activities that take the text itself as an object saying that this merit will be far greater than that generated by worship of *stūpa*.

The *stūpa* is described as *tathāgatadhātugarbha*:

“Even if a gentleman or gentlewoman were to make from the seven precious substances *stūpas* containing the relic of the tathāgata (*tathāgatadhātugarbhān-stūpān*) by the myriad, for the purpose of worshipping the ArhatSamyaksambuddha Tathāgata who has entered *parinirvāṇa*, and then, so long as life should last, were to respect, honour...and reverence those [*stūpas*] with heavenly flowers, incense, perfumes... and rows of lamps all around...much greater would be the merit generated by a gentleman or gentlewoman who had faith in... listened to...preached...studied...and

³⁶ A *stūpa* is a structure, originally in the shape of a hemispherical mound, that contains the relics or possessions of the Buddha or a saint, often contained within a reliquary container. In the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Buddha says that after he had passed away, his relics should be enshrined in a *stūpa* erected at a crossroads, and that the *stūpa* should be honored with garlands, incense, and sandalwood paste. See also Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 2100.

promulgated this *prajñāpāramitā*, or put it in a book and kept it and stored it away, in order that the true dharma might last a long time”.³⁷

The characterization of the *stūpa* as having the relic in its *garbha* can be found in a number of other texts such as in the *Caityavandanāstotra*, the *Aśokāvadāna*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Kaṭhināvadāna*, the *Mahākarmavibhaṅga*, the *Manuśrīmūlakalpa*, the *Visuddhajanavilāsini* (*Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā*), the *Mahāvamsa*, and the *Paramatthajotikā I* (*Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā*).

The terms *garbha* and *dhātu* both are used in *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. Let’s look at the *garbha* first. The *garbha* in the compound *dhātugarbha* merely means inside. The most common expression in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is the doctrine that “there is a *tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings”. The *sūtra* seems to envisage *tathāgatagarbha* as a separate entity within the sentient being. However, the *garbha* can also mean chamber. This chamber or *garbha* is understood as a *stūpa*- that is the *dhātugarbha*. In other words, the *dhātugarbha* is analogous to a *stūpa* or a relic chamber where the relic or *dhātu* resides in. Thus, when the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* would like to state that a sentient being is like *stūpa*, this means that one has a *dhātu* of the *tathāgata* inside oneself, or one has a *garbha* or a chamber for a *tathāgata* inside.

In the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, it states that “these sentient beings always contain a *tathāgata*”. Where the *stūpa* is said to be *tathāgatagarbha*, it means a place to contain the relic of a *tathāgata*. In this sense, the sentient being simply contains a *tathāgata*. Therefore, when the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* says simply *tathāgatagarbha*, omitting the relic (*dhātu*) from that formula, the locus of the presence of buddhahood within the sentient being is assumed becomes of the *garbha* itself. But, if there is a *garbha* as a separate entity within a sentient being, it is most natural to think that a *garbha* is a womb. Hence, this explanation is rendered as a *garbha* that is a locus for future buddhahood.

For the term *dhātu*, in the context of the relic cult, *dhātu* means a vestige of buddhahood. However, it is better to understand that the relic is the presence of the Buddha or be treated as living; the basic understanding is the epicenter of the buddhahood instantiated by the relic laying in the past. According to Michael Radich, when *dhātu* is equated with *garbha* “the two are functionally equivalent, other resonances among the rich semantic resources of the term *dhātu* begin to resound: “raw material”, “component element”, “cause”. Thus, *dhātu* is

³⁷ Michael Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, (Germany: Hamburg University Press, 2015), p. 161.

transformed from a remnant of past buddhahood (the erstwhile existence of a single, exceptional and surpassingly rare being) into the promise of future buddhahood (in and for all)”.

This sūtra provides us the major meaning of the *buddhadhātu* concept, just as it does for tathāgatagarbha. The sūtra proposes that the object of highest religious value is not an external buddha relic, but an internal Buddha-Nature (*buddhadhātu*); this *dhātu* is within the *garbha* of the body of the sentient being which is like an element or raw material (*dhātu*) from which a new buddhahood can spring.

CONCLUSION

According to the above investigations, tathāgatagarbha originally means Luminous Mind in the early Buddha’s teaching. Later one, it is developed as a major concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Many different names of the term tathāgatagarbha have manifested, such as *nirvāṇa*, *dharmakāya*, *dharmadhatu*, *bhutatathata*, *Śūnyatā*, *tathāgatadhātu*, *buddhadhātu* etc. This is because the term tathāgatagarbha contains all aspects of these manifestations itself. They have less or more differences in the side of meaning, but they are the same in the side of becoming a Buddha. However, the term *buddhadhātu* is the closest meaning to the term tathāgatagarbha. Firstly, because *buddhadhātu* can bear the completed meaning of tathāgatagarbha since it describes the inherent potential of all sentient beings to achieve buddhahood. Secondly, both the term tathāgatagarbha and the term *buddhadhātu* have a connection to the cult of the relic and the *stūpa*. Due to these similarities, the term *buddhadhātu* is supposed to be a suitable conceptualization of tathāgatagarbha.

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THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING AS APPLIED BY TUE TRUNG THUONG SI AND HIS INFLUENCE ON VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM



Vo Thi Nga

ABSTRACT

Buddhism in Vietnam was directly brought from India by a monk named Su Phat Quang in 257 BCE.¹ Later Vietnamese Buddhism has developed into different sects, but Zen schools have been the most predominant. Especially prominent was a well-known Buddhist named Tue Trung Thuong Si whose lifestyle was seemingly similar to that of a Bodhisattva; he applied the Buddha’s teaching to the cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Also, he helped learners to comprehend the Buddha’s teachings. His point of view about the teaching “entered the world” is imbued with the personality of a Bodhisattva who embarks in a life to save all beings. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss how he applied the Buddha’s Teaching with this method of Zen and his influence on Vietnamese Buddhism. The great contribution of him was that people practiced his teachings and achieved final enlightenment and liberation.

Keywords: The Buddha, Tue Trung Thuong Si, Vietnamese Buddhism, Entered the World

¹Le Manh That, **History of Buddhism in Vietnam**, vol I, (HoChiMinh City: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, 2006), p. 24.

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism was established in Vietnam in the middle of the 3rd century BCE.² Since Buddhism was established and developed in Vietnam, there have been three Zen schools introduced from abroad, namely: the Ty Ni Da Luu Chi Zen Sect, the Vo Ngon Thong Zen Sect, and the Thao Duong Zen Sect. However, those three schools were not suitable for Vietnamese spiritual development at that time. Therefore, it was necessary for Buddhism to develop applicably to Vietnamese culture, tradition, and social life. Tue Trung Thuong Si adapted Buddhism towards these circumstances.

Tue Trung Thuong Si (1230-1291) was an influential lay Buddhist in the Tran dynasty in Vietnam. He played an important role in protecting the nation, shaping the social lifestyle and encouraging people to live ethically. He was a governor and a famous military general who led a resistance against three Mongolian invasions. His wisdom is profound like the ocean as is his capability of teaching the Dharma to the learners of three levels³. In other words, he was talented in teaching meditation through the three Vehicles⁴ and the three kinds of enlightenments.⁵

His most outstanding trait is the teaching of the Spirit of “Entered the world”, non-attachment, reaching the truth of emptiness and the way to reach enlightenment. This is the most striking aspect of his thoughts and his meditation technique.

In addition, Tue Trung Thuong Si made substantial contributions to the peace of the country and to Buddhism. Particularly, his meditation techniques have been the foundation of the advent of the Truc Lam Zen sect. He had worthy, profound influence on Vietnamese Buddhism, and on the building of the Vietnamese Buddhist literature to create a perennial power in the Nation’s history.

² *ibid.*, pp.19-26.

³ Three levels means: the upper, middle and lower is widely accepted.

⁴ Three Vehicles means: Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna.

⁵ Three kinds of enlightenments means: self-enlightenment, enlightening of others, and perfect enlightenment and achievement.

THE LIFE OF TUE TRUNG THUONG SI

Tue Trung Thuong Si was called “Tran Tung”. He was the eldest son of Kham Minh Tu Thien Dai Vuong (Tran Lieu), and the eldest brother of the Queen Nguyen Thanh Thien Cam (the wife of King Tran Thanh Tong).⁶ In addition, as a good dharma lay-devotee, he received a Dharma name known as “Tue Trung”, meaning The Wisdom Within. His title, given by King Tran Thanh Tong⁷, was Thuong Si, meaning The Superior Person.⁸ This name also means the Bodhisatta.⁹

Furthermore, he was a disciple of Zen Master Tieu Dao at the Phuoc Duong monastery where he learned the Dharma and comprehended the essential tenet. Everyday he took pleasure in Zen studies without carrying positions of fame. He returned to Tinh Bang Hamlet, the village where he lived his last life and was finally renamed ‘Van Nien’, Meditation for fun, where he dedicated his time to study the Dharma and cultivation of his mind.

To our contemporary society, he is widely respected as he was accepted by king Tran Thanh Tong. The king also sent his young prince, Tran Kham (later became King Tran Nhan Tong), to learn Dharma with him. Tue Trung Thuong Si was upheld in high reverence and considered a ‘master’ by the king Tran Nhan Tong. In 1291 he passed away at the age of 61.¹⁰

HIS APPLICATION OF THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING

There are several viewpoints of Tue Trung Thuong Si application of the Buddha’s Teachings such as that of the ‘Entered the World’, the ‘Freedom of Thinking and Non-attachment,’ and the ‘Turning the Spotlight to Ourselves’. However, his applications discussed here will be the most well-known ones.

⁶Ly Viet Dung (tr.), **Collection of Famous Saying by the Great Tue Trung**, (Ca Mau: Ca Mau Publishing House, 2008), p.506.

⁷King Tran Thanh Tong (1240-1290) was the second emperor of the Tran dynasty.

⁸Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, **The Wisdom Within: Teachings and Poetry of the Vietnamese Zen Master Tue Trung Thuong Si**, (California: Thien Tri Thuc Publications, 2010), p. 7

⁹Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁰Nguyen Lang, **Essays on the History of Vietnamese Buddhism**, (Ha Noi: Literature Publishing House, 2000), p. 258.

A Viewpoint on “Entered the World”

This teaching is given in two aspects: teaching of ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ and teaching of ‘Let all things take their Course.’

1) The Hoa Quang Dong Tran¹¹

The ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ is a term derived from Mahāyāna Buddhism used to describe the attitude and commitment of the Bodhisattva in life¹² who continues to work for the salvation of all beings. The King Tran Nhan Tong himself had summarized the teaching of the ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ of the Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si recorded in ‘The Superior Person’ with the following remarks:

The Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si who lived among of the secular life, mixed his truth life with the world. In every communication he never met in trouble cases because of his peaceful attitude. So he could succeed to the seeds of dharma, and helped the learners. Those who came to ask for his dharma advices were all shown the profound meanings, and given some useful ways to calm their mind. He was not bound by the form, when he disappeared or appeared, and he did not hold name and reality.¹³

The ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ is the core teaching of Tue Trung Thuong Si’s meditation, particularly the Vietnamese Zen in Ly–Tran dynasties. Contrary to the common people of the time, Tue Trung Thuong Si’s life, poetry, and collection of aphorisms are a clearly evident lifestyle of the ‘Hoa Quang Dong Tran’ that brought the light of wisdom to the world. In other words, he brought the light of truth in order to protect and rescue human life. However, the light of his wisdom couldn’t be contaminated by the secular world. A lay life is pollution and disturbance, but a Bodhisattva has transcendental wisdom and universal love. This is also a way of life, or the “in accordance with the situation” behavior that agrees with the concept of moral standards of the majority men. Nevertheless, to act in

¹¹ “Hoa Quang Dong Tran” is a Vietnamese Buddhist phrase, including two meanings: 1) Mingling with the world by hiding the light of his wisdom and virtue, and 2) The state of Buddhas and bodhisattvas concealing their glory and mingling among the living beings on earth for the purpose of saving the souls of the latter.

¹² ‘Mix Bodhisattva in life’ was the title coined by King Tran Thanh Tong to Tue Trung Thuong Si. This title means Bodhisattva who entered the world to teach and convert or transform men.

¹³ Nguyen Lang, *op.cit.*, p. 258.

accordance with the situation is not synonymous with a passive attitude that is swept along by the flowing secular life. The 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' is full of proactive posture of the one who embodies the truth when entering the world.

Tue Thuong Si applied the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' in his own life as a 'Dharma action', a way of life where the correct principle doctrine penetrated into his own life in great detail.

The unique features of the lifestyle of the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' in the Thuong Si's Zen poems is the posture known as 'venerably imposing'. This is a posture of an easy-going person who is imbued with the spirit of ego, and impermanence. One who enters the world very gently but confidently, "With the golden light shimmering on eyelashes, I stride into the dust realm".¹⁴

It is not necessary to mention the philosophy or doctrine Thuong Si¹⁵ took himself to 'set an example'. His actions themselves were a testimony to the lifestyle of one that enters the world for the sake of others. He showed us the real value of the Truth that is not separated from life, the Truth that created the spirits, the personalities, and the human lifestyle. Before becoming a man of the Truth, we must be human beings who have enough strength, courage, and intelligence to realize the truth of life and live rightly with 'worldly wisdom'. This is the 'Hoa Quang Dong Tran' teaching by which a Bodhisattva enters the world with altruism to teach and convert and transform men.

2) 'Let All Things Take Their Course'

The teaching of 'Let all things take their Course' highlights the importance of converting and transforming people according to their conditions and circumstances in general. Depending on the opportunity and the particular area, one should have a method which is suitable to different sentient beings, but one must always keep the True Dhamma goal, and never mislead. According to Thuong Si's Zen poems, 'Let all things take their course' brought extremely positive and vivid value. 'Let all things take their Course' is a way of the meditative life of an enlightened being. Living through 'Let all things take their Course' brings a free style of liberal and impartial behavior.

¹⁴ Nguyen Giac (tr.), and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁵ Thuong Si is another name of Tue Trung Thuong Si. There are some other names of him such as Tue Trung, or Tue Trung Thuong Si.

‘Let all things take their Course’ of Thuong Si is divided into two ways: \ ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘help life’ and ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘receive the Truth’.

The former means the lifestyle and behavior of Thuong Si towards the objective factors happening to him. According to Thuong Si, all things on earth have their own of function. Once there is ‘sufficient condition,’ they will be formed.

‘Let all things take their Course’ of the Zen master Tue Trung Thuong Si was not synonymous to a yielding and uninteresting attitude, or a person who was unable to change reality. Such a way is the lifestyle and behavior of an Enlightenment who has realized ‘the face of mother’ of all things.

‘The face of mother’ is referred to the Buddha nature that remains in all human beings. Anyone who becomes enlightened, the Buddha nature will be revealed, and he will see that the names of the heavens and beings are all false names.

If a Dharma practitioner wants to give his life for the people’s benefits, he must adapt himself to the opportunity and be consistent with the True Principle.

So the teaching of ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘help life’ is a way of life that is flexible and open-minded without expecting satisfying or perfect conditions. The standard is to recognize, assess, and put everything in its right places do to its inherent nature.

‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is a kind of poetry that contains the ideas which rise above the habitual view of the spiritual Enlightenment in the Zen tradition. His poetry also shows the readers the necessary rule of Truth.

Zen sects have their own view on preaching the Dharma and ‘Receiving the Truth’. However, his later concept gives optimism to the learners who believe in the ultimate destination that Zen sects aim towards, for example, the Zen emphasis on the ‘sudden Enlightened Zen’ rather than the ‘Gradual awakening Zen.

To prevent the Dharma learners from feeling inferior or discouraged, Thuong Si opened another broad-minded door for the Acarin, those that follow the religious life,: when the primary cause meets the environmental cause, one will achieve what one wants. Therefore, ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is a point of view that imbues the spirit of Thuong Si’s Meditation.

In addition, ‘Let all things take their Course’ to ‘Receive Truth’ is the behavior to penetrate human feelings. With a great superior character, the teaching is as a reminder of the nature of enlightenment. With someone who does not belief in the Triple Gem, it becomes a ‘pep talk,’ encouraging heartiness.

A View of ‘Freedom of Thinking and Non-attachment’

‘Non-attachment’ is one of the highlights of Tue Trung Thuong Si’s meditation thought. When beings understand ‘non-attachment’ thoroughly, they will achieve the state of ‘no-self’ in Buddhism.

A View of ‘Freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ appeared very early in the history of Buddhism including Vietnamese Buddhism. In the Diamond Sūtra says: “The Buddha spoke Dharma for forty-nine years and when the time of his Nirvāṇa arrived, he said that he had not spoken one word.”¹⁶ The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra teaches: “from the night of the Tathāgata’s Enlightenment till the night of his entrance into Nirvāṇa, he has not in the meantime uttered, nor ever will utter, one word”,¹⁷ and “for 49 years I have not added one to the Dharma which all the Buddhas of the past, present and future preach.”¹⁸

Thuong Si meant for his followers to recognize the essence of his teachings. They must practice the Dharma and not rely on the language he used.

A View of ‘Freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ had been taught not only by the Buddha Sakyamuni, but also by previous Buddhas. When Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, free thinking and non-attachment had already been received by the Vietnamese Zen masters. Inheriting it from his Zen predecessors, Thuong Si was especially interested in the thinking beyond doctrines which are considered as a mainstream technique to attain enlightenment. According to Thuong Si, when a practitioner has gained enlightenment, he needs to ‘break’ not only the chain of dualistic thinking, but all concepts. Hence, his methods help followers to liberate from attachment. These non-attachment methods have been applied thoroughly and comprehensively in all aspects of Zen practice for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Thuong Si’s freedom of thinking and non-attachment:

One day the Monk asked Thuong Si: The sūtra says: Emptiness is form; form is emptiness:

¹⁶ Dhyana Master Hsuan Hua (tr.), **The Diamond Sutra**, (San Francisco: The Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1974), p. 149.

¹⁷ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (tr.), **Lankavatara Sutra**, (London: London published, 1932), p. 125.

¹⁸ Steven Heine (ed.), **Dōgen Textual and Historical Studies**, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 178.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.

All Buddhas of the three times say that for convenience.

Originally, emptiness is not form; originally, form is not emptiness.

Shining bright, the nature neither gains nor loses.¹⁹

Thuong Si applied the emptiness idea to break wrong view of the Buddhist practitioners. He explained that form is emptiness, and *vice versa*. They are one, and both of them are empty by nature. Because sentient beings are ignorant, they still distinguish between form and emptiness, once enlightened, they will see everything is empty. Buddhas of the past, the present, and the future have and will consider the Dharma as the means in which to preach the Dharma. By nature, emptiness does not contain any form, and form does not contain any emptiness either. The True Nature is always shining bright, neither gained nor lost. Because Thuong Si was enlightened by the Truth, he knew all things do not begin nor end, his behavior was free and liberal.

He fought for the abolition of relying on the outside. Enlightenment must be attained by oneself: The hearers meditate; I don't. The bodhisattvas give dharma talks; I tell the truth.²⁰

Thuong Si's ideas are neither conceited nor immodest. To him, the Hearers (Śrāvaka)²¹ were Buddhist practitioners who were not enlightened; they needed to cultivate the mind by chanting, practicing meditation, and so on. Furthermore, the Hearers need to practice Buddhism further in order to attain Bodhisattvahood. Thuong Si thought that the Buddha is in our mind, inside of us, not outside. Both the unwise and the wise have the same Buddha Nature. Because of the distinction of mind, there are some differences between the ignorant and the enlightened, the unwise and the wise people. Thuong Si is different from a hearer. He became a wise man who had attained enlightenment. That is why he said he no longer needed sitting meditation, while the Hearers still needed that practice. As he wrote: "The Hearers meditate; I do not." He was enlightened, he is different from Bodhisattvas. He tells the truth while Bodhisattvas preach the Dharma for sentient beings. To him, "the truth" is the true nature of all phenomena, and the contemporary society of his time.

¹⁹ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-173.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 37.

²¹ The Hearers (Śrāvaka) means one of the Three Vehicles Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna. The Hearers being set on their own liberation, and cultivating detachment in order to attain liberation.

One day, the Queen Mother Thien Cam held a royal banquet, and showed a surprise when she saw Thuong Si eating meat:

“You practice meditation, and now you eat meat. How can you become Buddha?” asked the king’s mother.

“Buddha is Buddha,” replied Tue Trung. “And I am what I am. I don’t need to be Buddha. And Buddha doesn’t need to be me. You probably heard the words from old sages, “Manjusri is Manjusri; enlightenment is enlightenment.”²²

Here, Thuong Si taught the Queen Mother Thien Cam as well as future generations, a valuable lesson about ‘indiscriminate thoughts’. Buddhahood is the essential enlightenment nature of each sentient being. If one’s self-substance is covered by affliction, then the Buddhahood is covered. When the affliction is calmed down, the inherent knowledge can be revealing like a lighthouse to guide and illuminate mankind. Then, sentient beings will become Buddhas. As Thuong Si said, “I don’t need to be Buddha and Buddha doesn’t need to be me.”

According to Thuong Si’s idea, people are ignorant because they cling to the above concepts due to their ‘dualistic views’, and their dichotomous awareness of the real world. When attaining liberation, people often erect boundaries between ‘delusion’ and ‘bodhi,’ the holy and unholy, the enlightened and the stupid, the nirvāṇa and the saṃsāra, and so forth. So, they should tend to abandon their positions and move to the position of liberation, enlightenment, and nirvāṇa. Thuong Si criticized ‘dualistic views’, and broke the wall of *ignoramus* surroundings. Then he gave the ‘superior character or capacity’ (transcendental knowledge) giving opportunity to attain enlightenment quickly.

Being the Zen Master who is free, courageous, and free from self, Thuong Si wanted to make the practitioners feel the same spirit of ‘non-attachment’. However, Thuong Si’s ‘non-attachment’ attitude in this case is reserved only for those who study Buddhism and belong to the ‘superior character or capacity’ (transcendental knowledge) in the Zen world. Moreover, Thuong Si did not deny the role of doctrines, or the process of time for meditation, or the valuable realms of attainment. He just wanted everyone to not be attached to them; they are only a boat to cross the river, once ones pass the river, one should leave it.

²²Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 507.

A view of ‘freedom of thinking and non-attachment’ in Thuong Si’s meditation helped people to understand the value of meditation and right-livelihood. He delineated the Way to Buddhahood. Thus, people do not need to look beyond themselves but inside themselves. All living beings have the Buddha Nature, one must extinguish delusion, this is the purpose of his view of ‘freedom of thinking and non-attachment’.

‘Turning the Spotlight to Ourselves’

To ‘Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is the essential thought of the Zen master Thuong Si. He applies this idea to meditation every day, and teaches it to the potential learners.

‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ means that the person has to consider and reflect the body and mind from all gestures and actions and bring them back to the breath.

One day, being asked by King Tran Nhan Tong about the essence of Zen, Tue Trung replied, “Reflect inwardly to see the essence of you. Do not follow other ways.”²³

‘Reflect inwardly to see the essence of yourself’ means one should turn into oneself to revive the mind and to liberate the wisdom that is always available in your natural mind. His thought was similar to the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, when the Buddha was going to enter *Nirvāṇa*, he taught and summarized methods of practice to his disciples. Those were the messages and the great encouragement for his disciples who needed to cultivate themselves after the Buddha had passed away.

The Buddha to Ānanda:

Ānanda, dwell with yourselves as your own island, with yourselves as your own refuge, with no other refuge; dwell with the Dhamma as your island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.²⁴

Those viewpoints can be considered his principal teachings. Thus, the essence of the Zen sect originated by Thuong Si that the King Tran Nhan Tong had transmitted is very similar to the core of the Teaching of Buddha in the *Nikāya Sūtra* collections.

Based on those ideas, Thuong Si’s new idea thoroughly emphasized that one should not look beyond oneself, one should listen to the miracles of the Buddha Nature within oneself. Thuong Si said: “Eyebrows are horizontal, nose is vertical—no difference.

²³ Ly Viet Dung (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 505.

²⁴ S V 154.

Buddha and sentient beings have one same face.²⁵ There was no mind anciently; there is no Buddha now.”²⁶ Our mind is concealed by false thoughts and ignorance. Many people often go seeking an unreal silhouette, and forget themselves. Thuong Si emphasized that they need to turn to themselves. If they want to receive the Dharma Wisdom, they must use their vitality and cannot rely on others.

Thus, ‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is the core of cultivation and also the most original characteristic of Thuong S’s teaching. He emphasizes that all the disciples have to make their own effort to attain the pure mind, and then they could attain the perfect enlightenment. This thought is not for someone, but for everyone who wants to be on the path of enlightenment., ‘To Turn the Spotlight to Ourselves’ is a basic thought and a useful guideline for Buddhist practitioners.

THE INFLUENCE ON VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM

Since its establishment in Vietnam, Buddhism has gone through periods of prosperity and recession, however, it has survived. Although there the many changes in the country, the Teachings of the Buddha has never changed, but has been passed from generation to generation. Thuong Si, who brought the Buddha’s Teaching to the Vietnamese has a profound influence on the people wiyhin many fields of study.

King Tran Nhan Tong²⁷ was the founder the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect. It is the Zen school that has been developed from the first Patriarch of Zen.²⁸ He imbued Zen as a philosophy of identity for Vietnamese Buddhism. This Zen sect has continued to grow radiantly and illuminate the spiritual paths for many generations in Vietnam. Its influence ws handed-down to two Patriarchs: Phap Loa (1284-1330)²⁹ and Huyen Quang (1254-1334).³⁰

²⁵ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

²⁶ Institute of Literature, **Ly Tran Poetry and Literature**, Vol II, (Ha Noi: Society and Science Publishing House, 1988), p. 273.

²⁷ King Tran Nhan Tong (1258- 1308) was the eldest son of King Tran Thanh Tong (1240 – 1290) and the Queen Nguyen Thanh Thien Cam. Afterwards, he left his homelife to Hoa Yen temple on the Yen Tu mountain and later on, he founded the Zen school, namely, Truc Lam Đâu Đa, which is presently known as Truc Lam School, as well as the Zen sect the Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen sect.

²⁸ Nguyen Lang, *op.cit.*, pp. 279-280.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 331.

King Tran Nhan Tong learned the Dharma with Thuong Si when he was a child and was deeply impressed by his master's meditation. One day, the King asked his master about the essence of Zen, he really wanted to learn about the secret method of enlightenment that his master had attained by the guide of the Zen Master Tieu Dao so that he could gain some experience on the path of enlightenment. Thuong Si's reply made the King understand the essence of Zen, "Reflect inwardly to see the essence of yourself. Don't follow other ways."³¹

That view of Zen profoundly influenced the Truc Lam Zen sect. According to the Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, "Thuong Si has attained enlightenment" of Phat Hoang (the Zen master Tran Nhan Tong), "Mind-To-Mind Transmission."³²

This influence can be seen in the poem 'Cu Tran Lac Dao' of the Zen Master Tran Nhan Tong:

Living amid dust and enjoying the way, you should let all things take their course.

When hungry, just eat; when tired, just sleep.

The treasure is in your house; do not search any more.

Face the scenes, and have no thoughts; then you do not need to ask for Zen.³³

The spirit of the above verses is the principle of the first patriarch and the consistent thought of the Meditation School that has manifested through these four aspects:

- i) Harmonize the life without attachment.
- ii) Act according to conditions. It means to do what is needed, in the right time, and not against the natural law.
- iii) Be confident in oneself, returns to stimulate one's own potential and do not rely on others.

³¹ Nguyen Giac (tr.) and commented, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

³² Thich Thanh Tu, **Record of the Words of Tue Trung Thuong Si**, (HoChiMinh City: HoChiMinh Publishing House, 1997), p. 263.

³³ Nguyen Giac (ed.), **Tran Nhan Tong: The King Who Founded a Zen School**, (California: Thien Tri Thuc Publications, 2010), p. 55.

- iv) Do not be slaved to anything, neither to meditation nor the Buddha.³⁴

Master Tran Nhan Tong taught people how to practice the Dharma to create blessings, virtues, and wisdom for their own benefit as well as others. This teaching is greatly respected. However, those who lived their lives as a recluse in the forest without enlightenment do not save others, this is blameworthy behavior. Master Tran Nhan Tong was influenced by Thuong Si's behaviors: "I mix with the secular, harmonize with light, and never hurt or go against anything or anyone."³⁵ Thuong Si's opinion formed an idea in Master Tran Nhan Tong who 'entered the world' actively. This opinion is the fundamental guideline and activity of the Truc Lam Zen sect. The opinion touches people's hearts, and gives the 'belief shelter' to most Vietnamese people.

Those views are the decisive factors to the 'handed-down tradition' of the Truc Lam Zen School to advocate, engage actively, bring blessing and joy to people, and to achieve liberation (or to attain Buddhahood).

Vietnamese Buddhist Literature

Thuong Si is not only an enlightened Zen master but also a poet of genius. The majority of Thuong Si's Zen poems are concentrated in the 'Thuong Si Ngu Luc' book. This book mainly presents his meditation experience and his enlightenment. This is the way he wants his learners to understand. Thuong Si's original Zen poems discuss meditation, but he rarely uses the terminology of meditation rather lyrical and poetic prose. Thuong Si's Zen poems concern both beauty and the stages of attainment of Buddha-truth. This style brings freedom, and spontaneity to his poetry. However, his poetry is still solemn and deep as was his character in daily life. These are important factors that created the originality of his Zen poems.

Thuong Si creates a large volume of literature that contains Zen philosophy and poetry of nature. According to the Authors of Van Tho Ly Tran, the compositions and the translation work of the Thuong Si, which are collected in Thuong Si Ngu Luc book, are divided into three parts. Part one is the Collection of Aphorisms which consists of Zen Conversations and Koan Study. This part was recorded by the Zen Master Phap Loa and

³⁴ Academy of Social Sciences, **Tue Trung Thuong Si with Vietnamese Zen Buddhism**, (Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing House, 2011), p. 12.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 13.

revised by Tran Nhan Tong.³⁶ Part two consists of forty nine poems under a variety of topics and genres. Part three comprises one lesson, *The Superior Person*, written by the Zen Master Tran Nhan Tong, including eight lessons from eight Zen masters of the Truc Lam Zen school. The epilogue was composed by Do Khac Chung. The whole book was printed in 1863 by the Zen Master Tue Nguyen at the Long Dong temple on Yen Tu mountain, and reprinted in 1903 (by Master Thanh Cu of the Phap Vu temple) as well as in 1943 by the Tong Hoi Phat Giao Bac Ky.³⁷ At present, this publication is circulating around the country.

The Fatherland

When talking about the Vietnamese history three unforgettable wars against the Mongol (1257-58, 1285, 1287-88) must be mentioned. At that time, the Dai Viet or Vietnamese was one of the great powers in South East Asia. Thuong Si was an important part of the Mongol resistance. He was the most trustworthy aristocrat of the Tran dynasty during the three wars against the Mongol. He directly commanded the troops to attack the enemy. As a talented commander, he was devoted wholeheartedly to his homeland. These are some of the most glorious historical victories that have been handed down from generation to generation. According to the historian researcher Nguyen Khac Thuan, “A monumental success of all three wars for defending our country that affected profoundly powerful the thoughts and feelings of staff of writers, and the whole development of national literature in this period.”³⁸

CONCLUSION

Tue Trung Thuong Si was an outstanding Zen master in applying the Buddha’s teaching to the cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom. His lifestyle as a Bodhisattva who devoted his life to save all beings and his point of view of “entered the world” made substantial contributions to Buddhism and to Vietnamese Buddhist literature. He is known not only because of the advent of the Truc Lam Zen sect, a famous Zen school today but also because he helped create a perennial power in the history of the region.

³⁶ Institute of Literature, Vol II, *op.cit.*, p. 224.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

³⁸ Nguyen Khac Thuan, *The Dai Viet in the Tran Dynasty*, (Ha Noi: Thanh Nien Publishing House, 2002), p. 235.

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DIFFERENT IDEAS OF BODHISATTVA CHARACTERISTICS



Tran Thi Binh

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to make a fuller understanding of characteristics of bodhisattvahood that exist in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Different points of view concerning a Bodhisattva's characteristics in the Sutta Nikāya and the commentary of both schools present two different interpretations of characteristics between both schools. Theravāda Canonical texts hold an idea of a bodhisattva as a wise being who is concerned with awakening or obtaining the confirmation from the Buddha's mouth that he is an unenlightened bodhisattva. In contrast, Mahāyāna tradition explains the bodhisattva as a being with perfect knowledge and will be a future Buddha. He walks along the path of enlightenment by way of attaining Buddhahood through practicing the *pāramitās* (perfections), but he chooses to postpone his enlightenment and stay in this world to save all sentient beings. This represents the different ideas of a bodhisattva's characteristics between both schools. In fact, doctrine is the same since it is based on the Buddha's teaching but differences were created by the Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools. The way of a Bodhisattva attaining Buddhahood is to perfectly fulfill the *pāramitās* (perfections).

Keywords: Bodhisattva, characteristics, *pāramitās*, Theravāda, Mahāyāna

INTRODUCTION

The Bodhisattva¹ doctrine is the grounded doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. A bodhisattva practices the *pāramitās*² (perfections) as the way to attain Buddhahood by cultivating goodness to others without selfishness. The Bodhisattva idea is an ethical system that is the highest moral discipline and intellect in Buddhism which give the greatest happiness to all beings.

In Theravāda Buddhism, Bodhisattvas are presented in previous lives of the Gotama Buddha before attaining enlightenment. Meanwhile, Mahāyāna went on developing the Bodhisattva concept in such a way that Bodhisattva became a kind of object of devotion. Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages everyone to enter the Bodhisattva path because the belief that everyone has Buddha-nature and can become a Buddha.

This article aims to find the different ideas of the Bodhisattva's characteristics in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna tradition. Bodhisattva is an unenlightened being in Gotama Buddha's past life in the Theravāda tradition; meanwhile, Mahāyāna Buddhism says that the Bodhisattva is a celestial being or Bodhi-being. The characteristics of a Bodhisattva in both schools are obviously different. Emphasized here is an attempt to find the reason behind the different characteristics from both schools. In this sense, both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism seem to be addressing the same purpose but from different points of view.

THERAVĀDA BHODHISATTAVA CHARACTERISTICS

Investigating the bodhisattva's characteristics of the Theravāda tradition illuminates different types of Bodhisattva that are depicted in the Nikāyas. These can be broadly summarized into two usages: (a) one is the Bodhisattva referring to the state before the attainment of Enlightenment in the life of Gotama Buddha; (b) the other is the Bodhisattva used as a generic term referring to previous existences of any Buddha in the past.

¹Bodhisattva (Skt.) or bodhisatta (Pāli) consist of two words: *bodhi+satta/sattva*; *bodhi* means "awakening" or "enlightenment"; *satta/sattva* means "sentient being" or "attached to"; bodhisattva means being attached to awakening.

²Ten perfections of Theravāda tradition: generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness, equanimity.

Six perfections of Mahāyāna tradition: generosity, virtue, patience, energy, concentration, wisdom.

Bodhisattva in Canonical Literature

Bodhisattva in the Pāli Canon refers to Prince Siddhārtha prior to his enlightenment, in the period during which he was working towards his own liberation as well as his past lives. The Bodhisattva known as Siddhārtha left from Tusita heaven: “having deceased from the Tusita group, enter his mother’s womb.”³

Birth of Bodhisattva Gotama:

The moment, Ānanda, the bodhisattva has come to birth,... he takes seven strides, he scans all the world and utters as with the voice of a bull: “I am chief in the world, I am best in the world. This is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.”⁴

The next of story of the Bodhisattva Gotama discusses his renunciation up to the time of his Enlightenment:

Before awakenig, while I was still only the Bodhisattva, not fully awakened, being liable to birth because of self, sought what was like wise liable to birth, being liable to ageing because of self, ... disease ...to dying...to sorrow because of self.⁵

The Bodhisattva’s utterance that this is his last birth:

The uttemost security from the bonds-nibbāna-won the stainless. Knowledge and vision arose: unshakable is freedoom for us, this is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.⁶

The stories previous Buddhas of the past are recited continually from the Buddha throughout the Sutta Pitaka. Mahāpadāna Sutta refers to seven former Buddhas; there stories iare similar to that of Gautama Buddha.

³I.B. Horner (tr.), **The collection of the Middle Length Sayings** (Majjhimanikāya), vol III, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 165.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 160.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 207.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 217.

They were the Buddha Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and the Buddha Kassapa:

Monks, ninety-one aeons ago the Lord, the Arahant, the fully-enlightened Buddha Vipassī arose in the world. Thirty-one aeons ago the Buddha Sikhī arose; in the same thirty-first aeon before this Lord Buddha Vessabhū arose. And in this present fortunate aeon the Lords Buddhas Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa arose in the world. And, monks, in this present fortunate aeon I too have now arisen in the world as a fully-enlightened Buddha.⁷

Furthermore, In the Jātakas of the Khuddakanikāya show the stories of the previous births of Gotama Buddha and a fully elaborated doctrine of the Bodhisattva concept according to Theravāda tradition:

The Pāli work, contains 550 Jātaka or Birth-stories, which are arranged in 22 nipātas or books. Each story opens with a preface called the paccuppannavatthu or ‘story of the present’, which relates the particular circumstances in the Buddha’s life which lead him to tell the birth-story and thus reveal some event in the long stories of his previous existences as a bodhisattva or being destined to attain Buddha-ship.⁸

The Jātaka stories come under this category, though it may be later fabrication to connect them with the fulfillment of pāramī in varied forms of existences of the Bodhisattva.⁹

The best example of the Jātakas “gives the Buddha’s previous history both before his last birth, and also during his last existence until he attained the state of a Buddha”.¹⁰ These illustrate varied self-sacrificing acts performed by the Bodhisattva in his previous existences for the benefit of others.

⁷ Maurice Walshe (tr.), **The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012), p. 199.

⁸ Robert Chalmers and W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), **The Jātaka**, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. xxiii.

⁹ M. Winternitz, **History of India Literature**, vol II, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), p. 158.

¹⁰ Robert Chalmers and W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. xxv.

In brief, the Bodhisattva's characteristics, as discussed earlier, allow only two possible interpretations: the Bodhisattva as the former existences of Gotama Buddha and previous existences of all Buddhas in the past, present and future. An important point of the Bodhisattva characteristic in Theravāda Buddhism is a being who is unenlightened but intent on enlightenment.

Bodhisattva in the Commentarial Literature

This section details commentaries of the Pāli Cannon such as the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, and the *Milindapañhā* which discuss a Bodhisattva's characteristics.

The term Bodhisattva was only used to refer to the Buddha Gotama's life before his enlightenment and his previous lives and the six previous Buddhas.

The number of Buddhas increased in the commentaries to 24:

Every Buddha has been a Bodhisattva up to the time he wins complete Self-Awakening at the root of a Tree. Therefore, every Chronicle in *Buddhavaṃsa* gives some details of the life of its Buddha both before as well as after his Awakening.¹¹

Eight Buddhas (Dhammamadassin, Siddhattha, Phussa, Vipassin, Sikhin, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa) that they turned the Wheel in a *miḡadāya* (deer sanctuary) and only Gotama is recorded to have turned it in a *miḡadāya* in an *isipatana* (seers resort).¹²

Another commentary, the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, introduces for the first time in the Pāli tradition the ten *pāramitās* (perfections) that Gotama Bodhisattva was to fulfill for the attainment of Buddhahood:

Buddhavaṃsa and a number of Commentaries, including the *Jātakas* prose, are able to name the ten perfections are outstandingly important for the fulfillment of them all and further practice for fulfilling after he had heard the Buddha's declarations that he would be a Buddha at some future time.¹³

¹¹ I.B. Horner (tr.), *Buddhavaṃsa and Cariyāpiṭaka*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. xv.

¹² *ibid.*, p. xxii

¹³ I.B. Horner (tr.), *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon Part III: Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavaṃsa) and Basket of Conduct (Cariyāpiṭaka)*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. xiv.

These stories are divided into three vaggas or Divisions. The first the perfection of dāna; the second the perfection of sīla; and the third the perfection of nekkhama, the one following with the perfection of resolute, determination, adhiṭṭhāna, the next six with the perfection of truth, sacca, the next two with the perfection of loving kindness, mettā, and the final one with the perfection of equanimity, upekkhā.¹⁴

The Bodhisattva's characteristics found in the Buddhavaṃsa and the Cariyāpiṭaka developed the term in its usage of application. The next commentary is the Milindapañhā. Here, the word Bodhisattva is used mainly as a term denoting the former existences of Gotama Buddha. This is a book that describes a dialogue between King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena about the Buddha's teaching.

Milindapañhā, in its own way, contributes to the concept of Bodhisattva. Some important issues discussed in Milindapañhā, "Gotama Bodhisattva, when he was residing in the Tusita heaven, had eight investigations (vilokana) to determine the proper place and time of his descent therefrom."¹⁵ Gotama Bodhisattva had five teachers when he was trying to find nibbāna detail, "before the Awakening, and while he was not yet fully awakened the bodhisattva had these five teachers."¹⁶

The Bodhisattva concept from the Milindapañhā maintains the Canonical usage of the word to mean the previous existence either of Gotama Buddha or of Buddhas in general.

Milindapañhā, on the other hand, places emphasis, more than any other Canonical texts, on the generalization mainly of spiritual aspects of Bodhisattva-hood, at the same time, on differences among bodhisattvas, which are of physical and external nature.¹⁷

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.vi.

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Pesala, *The Debate of King Milinda: an Abridgement of the Milinda Pañha*, (Malaysia: Inward Path, 2001), p. 193.

¹⁶ I.B. Horner (tr.), *Milinda's Questions*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. 38.

¹⁷ Toshiiichi Endo, *Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism*, (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2002), p. 227.

After all, the term Bodhisattva had been used more in Pāli commentaries of Theravāda tradition. The Bodhisattva ideal illustrated is the Gotama Bodhisattva and other Buddhas on the way to finding enlightenment in the Theravāda tradition. Moreover, the Bodhisattva in Commentarial Literature showing a being finding the way to nibbāna seems to imply anyone can become a Bodhisattva though practicing the ten perfections.

MAHĀYĀNA BHODHISATTAVA CHARACTERISTICS

In this part the Bodhisattva's characteristics in Mahāyāna Buddhism will be shown through the examples of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, and Laity Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti. Following Mahāyāna tradition Bodhisattva are a celestial being, or Bodhi-being who strive for the salvation of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is a famous Bodhisattva image in some well-known Mahāyāna Suttas, 'karuṇā is said to be embodied in the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,'¹⁸ Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is also referred to as enlightened, 'the enlightening being Avalokiteśvara'.¹⁹ Avalokiteśvara is translated into Chinese as Kuan-yin, Kuan-shih-yin or Kuan-tzu-tzai.

The Universal Gate chapter of the Saddhammapundarika Sutta (Lotus Sutta)²⁰ says that at that time, the Bodhisattva, with inexhaustible intent, asked the Word Honored One, 'why is Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva called Perceiver of the World's sound?' The Buddha said to him that when any living being single-mindedly recites this Bodhisattva's name he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will gain deliverance from their suffering or trials. Moreover, his skill in resources is infinite through it he takes whatever form will help living beings. He manifests as a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, gods, a monk, a nun, a layperson, an asura, even a dragon and so on and speaks Dharma for individuals in

¹⁸Charles S. Prebish and Damien Keown, **Introducing Buddhism**, (New York: Routledge Published, 2010), p. 105.

¹⁹Thomas Cleary (tr.), **The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra**, (London: Shambhala Publications, 1993), p. 1275.

²⁰Paul Williams, **Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations**, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 234.

their particular needs. Therefore, he possesses all virtues and is especially rich in loving kindness and compassion.

In the Surangama Sutta,²¹ twenty-five Bodhisattvas explain their methods of cultivation by which they accomplished enlightenment. The Buddha praised Avalokiteśvara for having obtained very well the Dharma-door of perfect penetration through contemplation and listening to the sound of the world and said that this Dharma-door was appropriate to being in the Saha world.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva trained his sense of hearing and gained a perfect ability that surpasses all others:

Bodhisattva Who Hears the Cries of the World the practice of hearing and contemplating. Based on the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of contemplating, and the wisdom of practice, he was able to enter samādhi.²²

The Avatamsaka Sutta²³ says that the Bodhisattva has accomplished liberation and developed the great loving kindness and compassion of Dharma-door and ceaselessly teaches living beings to follow this path. He manifests himself everywhere and practice offering kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality, or contemplates sound to save living beings. He takes the vow to liberate living beings from fearfulness, and if anyone recites his name, they will be fearless.

The Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sutta (the Heart Sutta)²⁴ describes the experience of the liberation of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, as a result of insight gained while engaged in deep meditation that awakened the faculty of paññā (wisdom). The insight refers to apprehension of the fundamental emptiness of all phenomena. These phenomena are known as the five aggregates of human existence (*khandhas*): rūpa (material), vedanā (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *sankhārā* (coefficients of consciousness), and viññāna

²¹ Hsuan Hua (tr.), **The Shurangama Sutra - Commentary** (San Francisco: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1996), p. 341.

²² *ibid.*, p. 234.

²³ Thich Tri Tinh (tr.), **Kinh Hoa Nghiem** (The Flower Ornament Sutra), (Sai Gon: Quynh Hoa Printing House, 1965), pp. 445-450.

²⁴ Venerable Dharma Master Lok To (tr.), **The Prajna Paramita** (The Hear Sutra), (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998).

(consciousness). Seeing the emptiness of the five aggregates means seeing the absence of duality between material and mind as well as all other dualistic concepts.

The Middle Way according to this Sutta refers to direct knowledge of the nature of Dharma or existence. This nature does not have a permanent shape or image; it is not birth or death; not pure or dirty; and so on.

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī

Mañjuśrī is a Bodhisattva who is first referred to in early Mahāyāna texts to symbolize the embodiment of *paññā* (wisdom).

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara said to Sudhana:

Welcome you who have set out on the incomparable, lofty, inconceivable great vehicle,... you are filled with the energy of great compassion, determined to liberate all sentient beings,... born of the ocean of knowledge of Mañjuśrī.²⁵

The last chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sutta details the pilgrimage of the youth Sudhana taken on at the behest of the Bodhisattva . Sudhana would converse with fifty-two masters in his quest for enlightenment. The penultimate master that Sudhana visits is the Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “Mañjuśrī, who was together with a great host of transfigured enlightening beings, turned with the gaze of an elephant.”²⁶

In the Vimakakīrti Nirdeśa Sutta only Mañjuśrī, who holds the highest wisdom, can talk Dhamma with lay bodhisattva Vimalakīrti. When asked the how one entered the dhamma door of non-duality Mañjuśrī replied,:

“to know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing- that is the entrance into non-duality.”²⁷

With great wisdom, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī cut through all dualistic concepts in the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sutta (Diamond Sutta, named so because wisdom is like a sharp diamond blade that cuts away distracting and delusional thoughts that bind our minds).

²⁵ Thomas Cleary, *op.cit.*, p. 1276.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1171.

²⁷ Robert A.F. Thurman (tr.), **The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture**, (London and University Park: Penn State, 1976), p. 77.

Thus, with great wisdom, Bodhisattva, Mañjuśrī was ‘a very important and honored bodhisattva’²⁸ to appear in Mahāyāna Suttas, “Mañjuśrī’s name appears in the titles of many other sutta translated into Chinese by a variety of people.”²⁹ In some Asia countries, such as China, Tibet, Nepal and Japan, Mañjuśrī is depicted as a male Bodhisattva wielding a flaming sword in his right hand, representing the realization of transcendental wisdom which cuts down ignorance and duality.

Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti

A famous laity Buddhist named Vimalakīrti who, despite being engaged in worldly activities through his livelihood as a banker, manages to lead an exemplary life as a Bodhisattva:

There was a rich man name Vimakakirti. Already in the past he had offered alms to immeasurable number of Buddhas,... he observed all the rules of pure conduct laid down for monks, and though he live at home, he felt no attachment to the threefold world. He had wife and children, yet he was at still times chaste in action; he had kin and household attendants, yet he always delighted in withdrawing from them.³⁰

In the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sutta, the question of Vimalakīrti provides an important inquiry: “how does the Bodhisattva go about entering the gate of non-dualism?”³¹ Thirty-one replies follow, each somewhat more insightful and sophisticated than the preceding, but each lacking in complete understanding.

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī replied:

All dhamma are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of no-dualism.³²

²⁸Hrakawa Akira and Paul Groner (tr. and ed.), **A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), p. 291.

²⁹*ibid.*, p. 292.

³⁰Watson Burton (tr.), **The Vimalakīrti Sūtra**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008), pp. 32-33.

³¹*ibid.*, p. 104.

³²*ibid.*, p. 110.

Mañjuśrī then requests Vimalakīrti's answer his own question. At the time Vimalakīrti remained silent and did not speak a word. Mañjuśrī sighed and said: 'excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable- this is the true way to enter the gate of non-dualism!'³³ The conversation between Mañjuśrī and laity Buddhist Vimalakīrti was done with the highest of wisdom. This Sutta remain one of the most famous and influential works of the Mahāyāna texts, Paul Groner comments, 'the lay Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism played an influential role'.³⁴

To sum up the Bodhisattva's characters appear in famous Mahāyāna suttas as Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Maitreya and laities bodhisattvas; they are celestial beings or enlightenment beings, Bodhi-beings who bring happiness for sentient beings or choose to postpone release to show others attaining nibbāna.

DIFFERENT IDEAS OF BODHISATTVA CHARACTERISTICS

An investigation of Bodhisattva characteristics in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism shows the Bodhisattva in Pāli texts refers to former existences of Gotama Buddha before attaining enlightenment and other Buddhas' previous lives in the past. They are unenlightened people who attached to awakening. Meanwhile, Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and laity Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti in Mahāyāna Suttas.

Attaining Arahantship in Theravāda Tradition

In Theravāda Buddhism, the Buddha did not teach the Bodhisattva path:

I am perfected in the world,
A teacher supreme am I.³⁵
A Tathāgata, Arahant, fully enlightened one.³⁶

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

³⁴ Hirakawa Akira and Paul Groner (tr. and ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 310.

³⁵ M I 171; I.B. Horner (tr.), **The collection of the Middle Length Sayings** (Majjhimanikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 215.

³⁶ A I 21; F.L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings** (Anguttaranikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 14.

The Buddha was an Arahant, and encourage his disciples follow his path to also become Arahants. “The Buddha declares himself first of all to be an arahant. The defining mark of an arahant is the attainment of nibbāna in this present life.”³⁷ The Buddha in Pāli texts is described as a great Arahant who found the way of enlightenment and those who follow his path will get Arahantship. There is an absence of the Bodhisattva path or Bodhisattvahood in Theravāda Buddhism. However, the Bodhisattva concept is firmly rooted in Theravāda Buddhism as one who practices the *pāramitas* (perfections).

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva path is a higher state of Arahantship:

The Bodhisattva concept was broadened in Mahāyāna to include any being (*sattva*) aspiring to enlightenment (*bodhi*). A Bodhisattva is thus a Buddha-to-be, one who walks the path of enlightenment. Any being can become a Bodhisattva. The designation bodhisattva presupposes that one is seeking to bring all others, not just only oneself to enlightenment.³⁸

Anyone can become a Buddha-to-be. This means anyone is a Bodhisattva who cultivates welfare to others without selfness. It is a reason to make the Bodhisattva path the highest goal in Mahāyāna Buddhist.

The Development of Bodhisattva Doctrine

Theravāda Buddhism defines the concept of Bodhisattva as “one whose essence is Enlightenment” or “enlightened knowledge.”³⁹ Another accepted definition is “*one who is devoted or attached to bodhi*”.⁴⁰ *In the early Buddhism, one can not find the concept of Bodhisattva as a general concept. Nevertheless, the Pāli Canon gives the characteristics of Bodhisattva Gotama’s former lives as an unenlightened one aiming towards enlightenment. Later works like the Buddhavamsa, Cariyapitaka, and other Pāli commentaries recited his life and other Buddhas in the past practice fulfill perfections.*

³⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **Arahants, Buddha and Bodhisattva**, Bhikkhu Nyanatusita himi (ed.), **The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahāyāna**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), p. 5.

³⁸ Kogen Muzuno, **Essentials of Buddhism**, (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1996), p. 26.

³⁹ G.P Malalasekera, **Encyclopedia of Buddhism**, vol III, (Sri Lanka: the Government of Ceylon, 1971), p. 224.

⁴⁰ Har Dayal, **The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932), p. 7.

In the Mahāyāna Buddhist period, the concept of the Bodhisattva path was completed. Mahāyānists created great Bodhisattvas who chose to postpone release to work for the welfare of others like Avalokiteśvara, called Perceiver of the Word's sound, who listened to suffering from sentient beings.

Mahāyānists believe that “everyone has a Buddha mind or Buddha nature and can become a Buddha by following the Bodhisattva path.”⁴¹ The Lotus Sutta says to ‘Never Despise’ and to revere the Buddha-nature in others. Whenever the Buddhs saw someone else, he was in the habit of saying: “I do not despise you, for you will become a Buddha.”⁴² Depending on the Buddha-nature doctrine confirms anyone is a Bodhisattva and can become Buddha-to-be.

In brief, the Bodhisattva doctrine was originated in the Pāli Nikāyas and developed gradually. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that the concept of Bodhisattva was a sole creation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva path is motivated by the wish to attain full enlightenment for the sake of others; he makes vows and keeps them by practicing the perfections.

The Relation of Bodhisattva Path and Arahantship

In Theravāda tradition, the Arahant is considered as a person who acts not based on his individual needs but for the needs of others. An “Arahant has transcended individual constraints of the personality such as greed, hatred, and delusion; he clearly displays a radically different behavior from a mundane person.”⁴³

The Buddha emphasizes that each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own destiny, that no one can purify another or rescues\ another from the miseries of samsara. This includes an altruistic dimension that distinguishes Buddhism from most other religious systems. The Buddha encourages his disciples to go forth and preach the Dhamma out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human being. While the content of the Buddha enlightenment, according to the Nikāya Suttas, does not

⁴¹ Galmangoda Sumanapala, *Buddhist Social Philosophy and Ethics*, (Sri Lanka: Samadhi Buddhist Society, 2006), p. 84.

⁴² W.E. Soothill, *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, (United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 226.

⁴³ Raluwe Padmasiri, *Desire: Comparative Study in Lenivasian Concept of Desire and Buddhist Concept of Desire*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), p. ii.

qualitatively differ from that of other arahant, the Buddha did refer to himself as the “one person whose birth into the world is for the welfare of many folk, for the happiness of many folk: welfare and happiness of devas and mankind.”⁴⁴

Likewise Mahāyāna Buddhism says that a Bodhisattva’s every action is motivated by the wish to attaining fulfill enlightenment for the sake of others; to fulfill this wish he or she takes the Bodhisattva vow and keeps them by practicing the perfections. Both these images of human perfection present a message of Buddhism. With compassion, an Arahant or a Bodhisattva has a desire to help others. First, he strives for liberation, for nibbāna, and then helps others with his skills and his experiences. We never read of a distinction between monks following the path to arahantship and monks on the bodhisattva path. According to all Buddhist traditions, attaining the supreme enlightenment of a Buddha requires forming a deliberate resolution and the fulfillment of the spiritual perfections, *pāramitās*; it is the Bodhisattva who consummates the practice of these perfections.

Table of Different Ideas of the Bodhisattva’s Characters

Viewpoints	Theravāda Buddhism	Mahāyāna Buddhism
1. Attaining Arahantship	A highest goal	Selfishness
2. Development of Bodhisattva Doctrine	Noteless emphasizing	A highest stage and development
3. Relation of Bodhisattva path and Arahantship	Brings the welfare and goods for others	Cultives compassion and loving kindness

CONCLUSION

The sole objective of a Bodhisattva is to serve all beings. The virtues that one cultivates are aimed at doing good for others without selfishness. On this basis, we can evaluate the Bodhisattva ideas as well as the ethical system related to it as the highest

⁴⁴A I 21; F.L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings** (Anguttaranikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 15.

moral discipline in Buddhism which gives the greatest happiness to all beings in the world. The different ideas of the Bodhisattva as an unenlightened one, Gotama Bodhisattva in Theravāda tradition and Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism both state that the Bodhisattva is a celestial being or Bodhi-being. This article has explained the reasons behind the difference of Bodhisattva's characteristics between both schools. The path of enlightenment in Theravāda Buddhism towards Arahantship, which the Buddha required his disciples practice, is quite different from the Bodhisattva path or Bodhisattvahood. The Bodhisattva doctrine was originated and gradually developed in Theravāda period and completed in Mahāyāna period. All of these paths show the way of attaining enlightenment. Likewise, Arahant or Bodhisattva cultivates loving kindness and compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of all. It is the basis of the Buddha's teaching.

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AN EXPLANATION TO THE BUDDHA'S UNANSWERED QUESTIONS



Sadhana Ratna Chakma

ABSTRACT

According to Buddhism, unanswered questions are relevant to speculative views. The unanswered questions at the time of the Buddha were a big philosophical matter and subsequently, after the Buddha's passing away, were debated by the different schools of Buddhism. These debates have led to disputes in modern critical Buddhist thought. Such speculative views that the Buddha had been asked by his unenlightened disciples were current at the growth of speculative philosophers in the Upaniṣadic Period. Those unanswered questions which are found in the various discourses of the Buddha are similar views of those Upaniṣadic thinkers and philosophers of the time of the Buddha. The reason why the Buddha termed all those questions as speculative is because each and every unanswered question is based on the ground of *atmavāda* doctrinal principles of the Vedas.

Keywords: Unanswered questions, wrong views, qualified questions, Buddhism.

INTRODUCTION

There were ten questions which the Buddha did not answer. These ten unanswered questions are associated with the sixty-two wrong views of different religions that arose contemporaneous to the Buddha. They are as follows: that the world is eternal is associated with the eternalist's view; that a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death is associated with partial eternalism; the world is not eternal and that a Tathāgata does not exist after death are associated with the annihilationist view; that the world is finite and infinite associated with the extentionist view; the self is the same as the body; the self and the body are separate; a Tathāgata exists after death associated with immortality; a Tathāgata neither exists nor not exist after death is associated with endless hedging. These ten unanswered questions are termed as metaphysics. Numerically, the first four are cosmic metaphysics and the rest of metapsychology. The modern Buddhist argument is that the Buddha did not answer those metaphysical questions because the questions were wrongly put, or not constructive, otherwise, the Buddha would have answered them. The questions lacked the correct inquiry needed to get categorical explanations from the Buddha.

The inability to answer the question sare said to be due to either their indeterminable nature or that the questions were not constructive. The researcher is more inclined to say the questions were wrongly put than that they had an indeterminable nature. All these questions must have been answered by 'yes' or 'no'. The Buddha may not have been interested in these questions that can only be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. If the Blessed One had answered these by 'yes' or 'no', still the investigators would have remained confused. A question that begins with any auxiliary verb does not apply here. This means that to begin a question with any relative pronoun such as, how, why, what etc., is considered proper. From such question, answers cannot be given by 'yes' or 'no', instead they must be given a categorical explanation. This is the way to understand anything clearly from the Buddha's teachings. Again, the Buddha's teaching is through categorical explanation; the Buddha first provides categorical insight and then gives explanation. It is evidenced that the Buddha gives answer in straightforward manner, if the person asks by what, or by why, or by how, or by where etc. If the investigator still does not understand the straightforward answers given by the Buddha, he or she immediately prepares to ask for further explanation with examples. This is the finest opportunity for the Buddha to preach the Dhamma to help the investigators achieve liberation. Therefore, the ten unanswered questions should have been asked by what,

how, why etc. The Buddha would have definitely answered in a straightforward manner. In this connection, the Buddha also reveals four ways to answers the questions: (1) There is a question to be answered categorically (*ekamsa-vyākaraṇīya pañhā*); (2) there is a question to be answered after making a distinction (*vibhajja-vyākaraṇīya pañhā*); (3) there is a question to be answered with a counter-question (*paṭipucchā-vyākaraṇīya pañhā*); and (4) there is a question to be set aside (*thapaṇīya pañhā*).¹ In this case, the ten unanswered questions fall under the category of the system of answering question by keeping them aside, number (4). Leaving a question aside can also be considered a way of explanation that the Buddha uses to facilitate investigators to understand. In this regard, some related discourses will need to be examined.

DISQUALIFIED QUESTIONS IN BUDDHISM

Unanswered questions in Buddhist scripture are referred to as speculative views (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Here, the researcher will first give the list of the unanswered questions which are found in the Theravāda texts, then the unanswered questions will be explained as well as the impact of antecedent speculative views adopted by the dominant Indian religious and philosophical schools at the time of the Buddha. This also had a great impact to the Buddhist Saṅgha.

The list of ten unanswered questions are given in the following, and are divided into three things: the world, the self, and the Tathāgata:

- (1) Is the world eternal?
(*sassato loko ti*)?
- (2) Is the world not eternal?
(*asassato loko ti*)?
- (3) Is the world finite?
(*antavā loko ti*)?
- (4) Is the world infinite?
(*anantavā loko ti*)?
- (5) Is the soul the same as the body?
(*taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ ti*)?

¹ A II 46.

- (6) Is the soul different from the body?
(*aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṇ ti*)?
- (7) Does the *tathāgata* exist after death?
(*hoti tathāgato param maraṇā ti*)?
- (8) Does the *tathāgata* not exist after death?
(*na hoti tathāgato param maraṇā ti*)?
- (9) Does the *tathāgata* both exist and non-exist after death?
(*hoti ca na hoti ca tathāgato param maraṇā ti*)?
- (10) Does the *tathāgata* neither exist nor non-exist after death?
(*neva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param maraṇā ti*)?

The questions given below are asked by Vacchagotta to the Buddha. They are not qualified and are ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions. Because of this, Vaccha still does not understand the answers because the questions are not qualified:

“Now, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The world is eternal, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The world is eternal, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Then good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The world is not eternal, this is indeed truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The world is not eternal, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Now, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The world is an ending thing, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The world is an ending thing, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Then, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The world is not an ending thing, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The world is not an ending thing, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Now, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The life-principle and the body are the same, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The life-principle and the body are the same, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Then, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The life-principle is one thing, the body another, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The life-principle is one thing, the body another, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Now, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The Tathāgata is after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The Tathāgata is after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”

“Then, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The Tathāgata is not after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The Tathāgata is not after dying...falsehood’.”

“Now, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The Tathāgata both is and is not after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The Tathāgata both is and is not after dying...falsehood’.”

“Then, good Gotama, is the revered Gotama of this view: ‘The Tathāgata neither is nor is not after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’?”

“I, Vaccha, am not of this view: ‘The Tathāgata neither is nor is not after dying, this is indeed the truth, all else is falsehood’.”²

Vacchagotta continued to ask the Buddha the similar non-qualified questions, but in the name of a monk:

“But, good Gotama, where does a monk arise whose mind is freed thus?”

“ ‘Arise,’ Vaccha, does not apply.”

“ Well then, good Gotama, does he not arise?”

²I. B. Horner, (ed.), **The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhimanikāya)**, vol II, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. 162-163.

- “ ‘Does not arise,’ Vaccha, does not apply.”
- “ Well then, good Gotama, does he both arise and not arise?”
- “ ‘Both arises and does not arise,’ Vaccha, does not apply.”
- “ Well then, good Gotama, does he neither arise nor not arise?”
- “ ‘Neither arises nor does not arise,’ Vaccha, does not apply.”³

At this point, Vacchagotta becomes bewildered by the Buddha’s answers which are in the vein of “does not apply”. However, the Buddha rightly consoles him saying that it was right for him to have bewilderment since the Dhamma taught by the Buddha was not easy to understand and is difficult to see; but it was hard for him because he was of another view, another allegiance, another objective, of a different observance, and under a different teacher.

The ten unanswered questions can be found in the various discourses of the Buddha in the Pāli Canon, such as: Cūḷamālunkyaṭṭhasutta⁴, Aggivacchagottasutta⁵, Vacchagottasāmyutta⁶, Abyākatasāmyutta⁷, Nānātiṭṭhiyasutta⁸, Poṭṭhapādasutta⁹, and Pāsādikāsutta¹⁰; and the sixty-two wrong views are found in detailed explanation in the Brahmajālasutta¹¹. Furthermore, the ten unanswered questions are divided into three subjects: the world, the self, and the Tathāgata. These are shown in the below table:

No.	10 Unanswered Questions	No.	The 62 Wrong Views	Sources
1.	The world is eternal	1-4	Eternalism	(D I 13-17)
2.	The world is not eternal	51-57	Annihilationism	(D I 34-36)
3.	The world is finite	9	Extensionism	(D I 22-24)

³ibid., p. 165.

⁴M I 426-437.

⁵M I 483-489.

⁶S III 257-263.

⁷S IV 374-403.

⁸Ud 66-70.

⁹D I 187-190.

¹⁰D III 135-136.

¹¹D I 1.

No.	10 Unanswered Questions	No.	The 62 Wrong Views	Sources
4.	The world is infinite	10	Extensionism	(D I 22-24)
5.	The soul is the same as the body	19	Immortality	(D I 30-32)
6.	The soul is different of the body	20	Immortality	(D I 30-32)
7.	Tathāgata exists after death	19-50	Immortality	(D I 30-33)
8.	Tathāgata does not exist after death	51-57	Annihilationism	(D I 34-36)
9.	Tathāgata both exist and non-exist after death	5-8	Partial Eternalism	(D I 17-22)
10.	Tathāgata neither exists nor non-exists after death	13-16	Endless hedging	(D I 24-28)

The sixty-two wrong-views are signified by the Buddha in the *Brahmajāla* exposition (*dvāsaṭṭhi diṭṭhigatāni brahmajāle veyyākaraṇe vuttāni bhagavatā*). They are: four eternalistic theories, four partial eternalistic theories, four finite and infinite theories, four eel-wriggling theories, two theories (of occurrences) arising without a cause, sixteen theories of having apperception, eight theories of having non-apperception, eight theories of neither apperception nor non-apperception, seven annihilationist theories, and five theories on *nibbāna* in the present existence.¹²

QUALIFIED QUESTIONS IN BUDDHISM

The Buddha refused to directly answer non-qualified questions in order to avoid getting entangled into the debate. He, however, answered them by using a simile:

“What do you think about this: This fire that is blazing in front of you – what is the reason that this fire is blazing? what would you, Vaccha, reply when questioned thus?”

“If, good Gotama, someone were to question me thus: This fire that is blazing in front of you – what is the reason that this fire is blazing? – I, good

¹² Vibh 400; cattāro sassatavādā, cattāro ekaccasassatikā, cattāro antānantikā, cattāro amarā-vikkhepikā, dve adhiccasamuppannikā, soḷasa saññīvādā, aṭṭha asaññīvādā, aṭṭha nevasaññī-nāsaññīvādā, satta ucchedavādā, pañca diṭṭhadhammanibbānavādā.

Gotama, on being questioned thus would reply thus: This fire that is blazing in front of me – this fire is blazing because of a supply of grass and sticks.”

“If, that fire that was in front of you, Vaccha, were to be quenched, would you know: This fire that was in front of me has been quenched?”

“If, good Gotama, that fire that was in front of me were to be quenched, I would know: This fire that was in front of me has been quenched.”

“But if someone were to question you thus, Vaccha: That fire that was in front of you and that has been quenched – to which direction has that fire gone here, to the east or west or north or south? On being questioned thus, what would you, Vaccha, reply?”

“It does not apply, good Gotama. For, good Gotama, that fire blazed because of a supply of grass and sticks, yet from having totally consumed this and from the lack of other fuel, being without fuel it is reckoned to be quenched.¹³

When the questions were asked rightly, the Buddha immediately gave answer in categorical explanation. Questions rightly put means that a person should refrain from using any auxiliary verb, instead should make question begin with relative pronoun, such as: what, how, why, etc.

For example, in the *Vacchagottasamyutta*, the Buddha gives detailed explanation about the reason and causes of the arising of the speculative views concerning the ten unanswered points in the *Suttas*.

The Exalted One is once staying near *Sāvatthī* at the Jeta Grove in *Anāthapiṇḍika's* Park. Then the wanderer of the Vaccha clan comes to the Exalted One, exchanges friendly greetings with him and courteous compliments, and sits down at one side. Seated at one side, the wanderer Vacchagotta thus addresses the Exalted One:

“Pray, Master Gotama, what is the reason, what is the cause why these divers opinions arise in the world?¹⁴ Such as: ‘The world is eternal,’ or ‘the

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁴ These questions are constructive, as they begin with ‘what is the reason, what is the cause, why these diverse opinions arise in the world’. They demand either categorical explanation or just explanation. There is no way to give answers by ‘yes’ or ‘no’. From these questions, the Buddha gave categorical answers.

world is not eternal,’ or ‘the world is finite,’ or ‘the world is infinite,’ or ‘what is the life, that is the body,’ or ‘life is one thing, body is another,’ or ‘the Tathāgata exists after death,’ or ‘the Tathāgata exists not after death,’ or ‘the Tathāgata does and does not exist after death,’ or ‘the Tathāgata neither exists nor not exists after death’?”

The Buddha answers him the reasons and the causes of diverse opinions that are arising in this world are dependently originated, as follows:

Through ignorance of feeling, through ignorance of the arising of feeling, through ignorance of the ceasing of feeling, through ignorance of the way leading to the ceasing of feeling. Through ignorance of perception... Through ignorance of the activities... Through ignorance of consciousness... Through not seeing of body... Through not seeing of feeling... Through not seeing of perception... Through not seeing of the activities... Through not seeing of consciousness... Through not comprehending body... Through not comprehending feeling... Through not comprehending perception... Through not comprehending the activities... Through not comprehending consciousness... Through not understanding body... Through not understanding feeling... Through not understanding perception... Through not understanding the activities... Through not understanding consciousness... Through not penetrating body... Through not penetrating feeling... Through not penetrating perception... Through not penetrating the activities... Through not penetrating consciousness... Through not discerning body... Through not discerning feeling... Through not discerning perception... Through not discerning the activities... Through not discerning consciousness... Through not discriminating body... Through not discriminating feeling... Through not discriminating perception... Through not discriminating the activities... Through not discriminating consciousness... Through not differentiating body... Through not differentiating feeling... Through not differentiating perception... Through not differentiating the activities... Through not differentiating consciousness... Through not considering body... Through not considering feeling... Through not considering perception... Through not considering the activities... Through not considering consciousness... Through not looking into body... Through not looking into feeling... Through not looking into perception... Through not looking into the activities... Through not looking into consciousness... Through not making clear body... Through not making clear

feeling...Through not making clear perception...Through not making clear the activities...Through not making clear consciousness, through not making clear the arising of consciousness, through not making clear the ceasing of consciousness, through not making clear the way leading to the ceasing of consciousness.¹⁵

In the abyākatasamyutta, we also get similar explanation about reasons and causes by which the genesis of speculative views are taught.

WHY THEY WERE UNANSWERED

The Pāsādikāsutta tells us the reason why the Buddha is reluctant to give answer to the ten unanswered points:

‘If “the past” refers to what is not factual, to fables, to what is not of advantage, the Tathāgata makes no reply. If it refers to what is factual, not fabulous, but which is not of advantage, the Tathāgata makes no reply. But if “the past” refers to what is factual, not fabulous, and which is of advantage, then the Tathāgata knows the right time to reply.’¹⁶

However, the statements seem disputed by another Sutta when the Buddha said that he would not answer those questions because of “siding”.

As the Blessed One said to Venerable Ānanda:

‘If, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: “Is there a self?” I had replied to him: “There is a self,” then, Ānanda, that would be siding with the recluses and Brahmins who are eternalists.

But if, Ānanda, when asked: “Is there not a self?” I had replied that it does not exist, that, Ānanda, would be siding with those recluses and Brahmins who are annihilationists.’¹⁷

¹⁵ F. L. Woodward (tr.), **Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)**, vol III, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), pp. 202-204.

¹⁶ D III 134.

¹⁷ F. L. Woodward (tr.), **Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)**, vol IV, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 282.

The Khuddakavatthu of the Vibhaṅga gives the names and details of many wrong-views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). They are, namely: (1) the ‘becoming-view’ (*bhava-diṭṭhi*), which holds that the self and the world will exist again (*bhavissati attā ca loko cāti*); (2) the ‘non-becoming view’ (*vibhava-diṭṭhi*), which holds that the self and the world will not exist again (*na bhavissati attā ca loko cāti*); (3) the ‘eternalist-view’ (*sassata-diṭṭhi*), which holds that the self and the world are eternal (*sassato attā ca loko cāti*); (4) the ‘annihilationist-view’ (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*), which holds that the self and the world will cease (*ucchijjissati attā ca loko cāti*); (5) the ‘finite-view’ (*antavā-diṭṭhi*), which holds that the self and the world are finite (*antavā attā ca loko cāti*);¹⁸ (6) the ‘infinite-view’ (*anantavā-diṭṭhi*), which holds the opposite (*anantavā attā ca loko cāti*); (7) the ‘ultimate-beginning-view’ (*pubbantānudiṭṭhi*), concerning the ultimate beginning of beings; (8) the ‘ultimate-end-view’ (*aparantānudiṭṭhi*), concerning the ultimate end of beings (*aparantamārabha*); (9) the ‘identity-view’ (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*);¹⁹ (10) the ‘self-view’ (*attānudiṭṭhi*) which is the same view as *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*; and (11) the ‘gratification-view’ (*assāda-diṭṭhi*), which holds that there is no fault in sense pleasures (*natthi kāmesu doso*).²⁰

Throughout observations, many of the Buddha’s disciples, particularly unenlightened ones, may have been influenced by the Upaniṣadic philosophical thinkers of the time conditioning so called speculative thought. The ten questions imply two basic attitudes toward the world. The Buddha speaks of these two attitudes in his dialogue with Venerable Mahākassapa, when the Buddha says that there are two basic views, the view of existence and the view of nonexistence.²¹ He said that people are accustomed to think in these terms, and that as long as they remain entangled in these two views, they will not attain liberation.

¹⁸ Vibh 358.

¹⁹ Vibh 364.

²⁰ Vibh 368.

²¹ Mrs. Rhys Davids (tr.), Assisted by F. H. Woodward, **Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)**, vol II, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. 12-13: This world, Kaccāyana, usually bases on two things: on existence and on non-existence. Now he, who with right insight sees the uprising of the world as it really is, does not hold with the non-existence of the world. But he, who with right insight sees the passing away of the world as it really is, does not hold with existence of the world.

The propositions: that the world is eternal, that the world is infinite, that the Tathāgata exists after death, and that the self is independent of the body reflect the view of existence. The propositions: that the world is not eternal, that the world is finite, that the Tathāgata does not exist after death, and that the self is identical with the body reflect the view of nonexistence. These two views were professed by teachers of other schools during the time of the Buddha. The view of existence is generally the view of the Brāhmaṇical thinkers, while that of nonexistence is generally the view of the materialists and hedonists.

When the Buddha had refused to be drawn into the net of these dogmatic views of existence and nonexistence, he had two things in mind: the ethical consequences of these two views, and the fact that the views of absolute existence and nonexistence do not correspond to the way that things really are. The eternalists viewed the self as permanent and unchanging. When the body dies, this self will not die because the self is by nature unchanging. If this is the case, it does not matter what this body does since actions (of the body) will not affect the destiny of the self. This view is incompatible with moral responsibility; if the self is eternal and unchanging, it will not be affected by wholesome and unwholesome actions. Similarly, if the self were identical with the body, and when the self dies along with the body, then it does not matter what the body does. If a person believes that existence ends at death, there will be no necessary constraint upon action. But in a situation where things exist through interdependent origination, absolute existence and nonexistence are impossible.

Another example drawn from the ten unanswerable questions is that the propositions do not correspond to the way things really are. According to Buddhist teachings, the world does not exist absolutely. The world exists dependent on causes and conditions—ignorance, craving, and clinging. When ignorance, craving, and clinging are present, the world exists; when they are not present, the world ceases to exist. Hence, the question of the absolute existence or nonexistence of the world is unanswerable. Existence and nonexistence, taken as absolute ideas, do not apply to things as they really are. This is why the Buddha refuses to agree to absolute statements about the nature of things.

After his passing away, the Buddha's followers began to interpret the meaning of his silence on these questions. These speculations gave rise to different philosophical schools of Buddhism. In my view, the Buddha's main effort is to solve the fundamental problems of pain and misery in this very life, but his followers did not always adhere to his teachings. They tried to discuss these unanswerable questions, as all speculative philosophers did. But the Buddha himself always tried to make people aware of sorrow

inherent to the human condition so that they could understand its origin, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation.²²

In the Kathāvatthu, a debate on the unanswered questions was taken place among different Buddhist schools in the third century BCE. The schools that are mentioned in the Kathāvatthu are: Theravāda, Andhakas and Uttarāpathakas. Theravāda is the adherent and Andhakas and Uttarāpathakas are the opponents. They are opponents because those unanswered questions, in their opinions, were immoral, which Theravāda rejected.²³

Their debate about unanswered questions is excerpted from Kathāvatthu, as follows:

Theravāda: Then ones must be prepared to classify it as one of the immoral categories—result, inoperative consciousness, matter, *nibbāna*, organ and object of sense—which you may not do. Ones must also be prepared to admit that other mental factors, the conscious processes or acts accompanying erroneous opinion, are immoral. Else you have this anomaly: that all these together constitute a state of immoral consciousness, while the erroneous opinion alone is immoral.

Again, the unmoral has no moral fruit or result, while erroneous opinion is of the opposite nature. Nay, were not evil views ranked as paramount offences by the Exalted One? Did he not say:

‘Wrong views, Vaccha, are immoral, right views are moral’? And did he not say also: ‘For the holder of wrong views, Puṇṇa, I declare one of two destinies, either purgatory or the animal world?’

Andhakas and Uttarāpathakas: But did not the Exalted One say:

“This Vaccha, is unsolved (*avyākata*): that the world is eternal, or that it is not eternal. This, too, is unsolved (*avyākata*), that the world is finite, or that it is infinite. And so, too, are these: that the soul and the body are the same, or are different things;

²² Rajmani Tigunait, **Seven Systems of Indian Philosophy**, (Honesdale: Himalayan Institute Press, 1983), p. 40.

²³ Shwe Zan Aung, Mrs. Rhys Davids, **Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse (a translation of the Kathāvatthu from the Abhidhammapiṭaka)**, (London: The Pali Text Society, 1915), pp. 290-291.

that a Tathāgata comes to be after death, or not, or both comes to be and does not come to be, or that neither happens”? Surely then erroneous opinions are immoral.

Theravāda: But was it not said by the Exalted One:

‘Of a person holding wrong views, *bhikkhus*, whatever karma of deed, word and thought he completes and carries out in accordance with those views, be it volition, aspiration, adjustment of mind, or other activities, all those things conduce to the undesirable, to the unpleasant, to the disagreeable, to trouble, to ill’? Hence it is surely wrong to say that erroneous opinions are unmoral.

But mostly in the discourses of the *Suttanta Piṭaka*, the unanswered questions are seen as dialogue in a friendly environment rather than a debate. The Brāhmaṇical speculative thought at the Buddha’s time was very influential. The Buddha did not answer to such Brāhmaṇical speculative thoughts in Buddhist scriptures. Therefore, such speculative thoughts are termed as ‘unanswered questions’ (*avyākata pañhā*). The philosophers from all traditions are confused, this is the reason the Buddha did not answer them.

LOGICAL AND METAPHORICAL WAYS OF EXPLANATION

In the Cūḷamāluṅkyāputtasutta, Cūḷamāluṅkyāputta approach to the Buddha was aggressive in the way he put forward illogical circumstances and questions to the Buddha. These were not constructive and he did not receive an explanation from the Buddha.

However, the Buddha refuted Cūḷamāluṅkyāputta in a logical argument:

“Did I ever speak thus to you, Māluṅkyāputta: ‘Come you, Māluṅkyāputta, fare the Brahma-faring under me and I will explain to you either that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal...or that the Tathāgata neither is nor is not after dying?’” “No, revered sir.” “Or did you speak thus to me: ‘I, revered sir, will fare the Brahma-faring under the Lord if the Lord will explain to me either that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal...or that the Tathāgata neither is nor is not after dying?’” “No, revered sir.”²⁴

²⁴I. B. Horner (tr.), vol II, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99.

Then, the Buddha very correctly said, ‘I will not fare the Brahma-faring under the Lord until the Lord explains to me whether the world is eternal or whether the world is not eternal...or whether the Tathāgata neither is nor is not after dying’. In order to get clearer point of understanding, the Buddha had to give examples to Mālunkyāputta such as if a man were pierced by an arrow that was thickly smeared with poison and his friends and relations, his kith and kin, were to procure a physician and surgeon.

He might speak thus:

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the man who pierced me whether he is a noble or brahman or merchant or worker.’ He might speak thus: ‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who pierced me.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the man who pierced me whether he is tall or short or middling in height.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the man who pierced me whether he is black or deep brown or golden skinned.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the man who pierced me to what village or market town or town he belongs.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the bow from which I was pierced whether it was a spring bow or a cross-bow.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the bow-string from which I was pierced whether it was of swallow-wort or of reed or sinew or hemp or a tree.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the shaft by which I was pierced whether it was of reeds of this kind or that.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the shaft from which I was pierced what kind of feathers it had: whether those of a vulture or heron or hawk or peacock or some other bird.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the shaft from which I was pierced with what kind of sinews it was encased: whether those of a cow or buffalo or deer or monkey.’

‘I will not draw out this arrow until I know of the arrow by which I was pierced whether it was an ordinary arrow or some other kind of arrow.’²⁵

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

From this example, the question is what he should do. The answer is he should pull out the arrow immediately because otherwise he will die. In the *Simsapāsutta* the Exalted One was staying at Kosambī in *Simsapā* Grove.

Then the Exalted One, gathering up a few leaves in his hand, said to the monks²⁶:

‘What think ye monks? Which are the more numerous, just this mere handful of *Simsapā* leaves I have here, or those in the Grove overhead?’ ‘Very few in numbers, Lord, are the leaves in the handful gathered up by the Exalted One: much more in number are those in the Grove overhead.’ ‘Just so, monks, much more in number are those things I have found out, but not revealed; very few are the things I have revealed. And why, monks, have I not revealed them? Because they are not concerned with profit, they are not rudiments of the holy life, they conduce not to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full comprehension, to the perfect wisdom, to *nibbāna*. But what is it, monks, that I have revealed? Just that this is Ill. This is the arising of Ill. This is the ceasing of Ill. This is the practice that leads to the ceasing of Ill. Because, monks, this is concerned with profit. It is the rudiments of the holy life. It does conduce to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full comprehension, to the perfect wisdom, to *nibbāna*.²⁷

DISCUSSIONS

T. R. V. Murti, in his book *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, has brought an admirable discussion of the Upanishads and Buddhism in which he makes some judicious criticisms of Mrs. Rhys Davids for holding to the view that primitive Buddhism affirmed that the existence of a soul because the Buddha was silent when he was asked of the indeterminate points.²⁸

Noa Ronkin, in his “Early Buddhist Metaphysics:

²⁶ F. L. Woodward (tr.), *Kindred Sayings (Saṃyuttanikāya)*, vol V, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 370.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, (London: Routledge, 1955), pp. 10-28.

The Buddha, as he is portrayed in the *Nikāyas*, rejects purely theoretical questions known as the undeclared or indeterminate (*avyākata*) questions those that are to be set aside on the grounds that they are not conducive to *nibbāna*, and the Dhamma is accordingly presented as a therapeutic way of life rather than a system in the traditional sense. The Buddha's interest is in gaining insight into the conditions of sentient experience in *saṃsāra*, namely, in experience as lived, not in its foundation in reality, and he suspends all views regarding the nature of such reality, of the person and his or her relation to the environment, and of the ontological status of the encountered world. His teaching is therefore portrayed as pragmatic, empirically focused, concerning itself with the cessation of *dukkha* and to that end emphasizing issues of cognition, psychology, epistemology and soteriology.²⁹

Rajmani Tigunait has also discussed this issue in his "Seven Systems of Indian Philosophy":

The Buddha realized the Truth within and he understood the importance of ethical and moral teachings. He was primarily an ethical teacher and a social reformer rather than a metaphysician. His message addressed the problem of how to lead one's life in order to cross the ocean of suffering and misery. Whenever questions pertaining to the soul and its conditions after death were asked, Buddha always remained silent because he considered such speculation to be useless. For him, the most urgent imperative in life is to analyse the existence of suffering so as to put it to an end. He felt that a person who indulges in theoretical speculation while suffering with worldly problems is behaving nonsensically; such behaviour can be linked to that of a person shot by an arrow who, instead of trying to pull it out immediately, wastes his time on idle speculation regarding the origin, the maker, and the shooter of the arrow.³⁰

K. N. Jayatilleke, in his book, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, gave some important questions in relation to those unanswered questions. That is, on what grounds were those questions unanswered and have shown that those unanswered questions were

²⁹ Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The making of philosophical tradition*, (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), pp. 4-5.

³¹ Rajmani Tigunait, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

both answerable and unanswerable.³¹ He has observed that scholars in their endeavour have not been careful in distinguishing and explaining why the Buddha set aside those questions.

However, K. N. Jayatilleke would also seem to follow Arthur Keith's solution:

It is quite legitimate to hold that the Buddha was a genuine agnostic, that he had studied the various systems of ideas prevalent in his day without deriving any greater satisfaction from them than any of us today do from the study of modern systems, and that he had no reasoned or other conviction on the matter.³²

He is silent, not merely because knowledge of these matters does not tend to *Nirvāṇa*, but because men hold various opinions regarding them that is not true. The Buddha certainly says that men hold various views regarding these questions, which result in violent controversies, but he does not say that he left them unanswered. Keith bases this conclusion on the Canonical sources.

Apart from the foregoing discussions at the beginning, the researcher has pointed out that those unanswered questions were not qualified questions. Canonical references have justified that this may have led to those questions being unanswered by the Buddha. This shows that the Buddha enthusiastically sought the questions from which a categorical answer can be given from a qualified question. When the Buddha was been asked a qualified question, the Buddha showed no hesitation to answer or give explanation.

CONCLUSION

The discourses of the Buddha from the Pāli Canon show that the Buddha had been asked many non-constructive questions. In the Aggivacchagottasutta, along with other Suttas in the Pāli canon, Vacchagotta is told that the Buddha does not approach any of these views because they are speculative, which is accompanied by anguish, distress, misery and fever; they are not conducive nor to *nibbāna*. Categorical answers were given by the Buddha when Vaccha asked qualified questions.

³¹ K. N. Jayatilleke, **Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge**, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 472.

³² Arthur Berriedale Keith, **Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon**, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 63.

Many scholars are also of the view that those unanswered questions would be answerable but the questions must have been made into qualified ones. This paper has separately shown the data containing questions and answers of so-called unanswered questions into “disqualified” and “qualified” questions in order to understand why the Buddha did not answer the questions. The discourses of the Buddha also shows examples like that of Māluṅkyāputta and Vaccha were enlightened by the Buddha’s categorical answers and explanation since the questions asked were valid or qualified.

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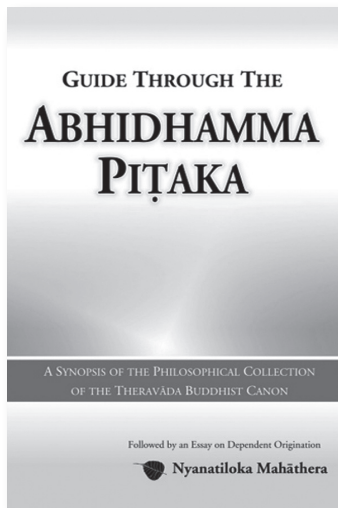
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GUIDE THROUGH THE ABHIDHAMMA PART II



Phra Abhijato



by

Nyanatiloka Mahāthera,
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This review of Nyanatiloka's essay on dependent origination is the second part of a larger review of his 'Guide Through The Abhidhamma' (the first part being found in JIBSC volume 1). This review will look at his essay on the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, found in the back of the guide to the Abhidhamma, but also the last chapter concerning the Paṭṭhāna. The chapter on the Paṭṭhāna is included because Nyanatiloka makes it a point to reiterate the 24 conditions found in the Paṭṭhāna and emphasize their importance in his explanation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

The seventh chapter of the guide to the Abhidhamma concerns the seventh book of the Abhidhamma, the Paṭṭhāna, a description of the 24 conditions that give rise to all conditioned phenomena that exist within reality. The Paṭṭhāna itself, the largest book of the Pāli Canon, is widely regarded as the most difficult teaching of the Buddha, for good reason. It is as complex as it is profound, an intricate presentation of all possible conditions that thrust existence itself into being. Nyanatiloka gives a good outline of the categories in the Paṭṭhāna in his guide, but he doesn't give the categorization process itself any attention. Nyanatiloka focuses on what the distinct categories are and highlights some of the specific topics found in each category. The vast majority of topics and concepts are not detailed in the guide, which is understandable as there are enumerable subjects within the Paṭṭhāna. This chapter serves more as an outline that demonstrates the basic structure. Perhaps that was his only intent, and he does it well, however, I wish he had spent more time explaining the structural process of categorization itself, instead of simply showing its outline. This process is notoriously complicated and goes through several permutations of comparison and contrast amongst several different concepts grouped in specific sections which are reflexively investigated and then in turn compared and contrasted with other groups. It is all but impossible to comprehend without a teacher to guide you through the steps. Though the chapter serves as a nice outline of the Paṭṭhāna, it would have been nice to have some explanation of the structure itself.

Nyanatiloka's essay on the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is one of my favorite summaries of this deep and penetrating teaching of the Buddha. I believe the best thing Nyanatiloka does in this essay is stress the connection between the 24 conditions of the Paṭṭhāna and the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, showing that the two teachings are descriptions of cause and effect and should be considered together. This is something not enough scholars do when describing the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, in fact, one of the most important things that Nyanatiloka does is to point out past scholars that have attempted to explain the *paṭiccasamuppāda* without understanding the context of the teaching, the language and basic Buddhist tenets. He clearly shows one popular explanation as being absurd, that all 12 steps in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* happen at once (page 156). He articulates a very concise and simple critique to that interpretation- the *paṭiccasamuppāda* circles upon itself through conditions and that by its very definition, it cannot all happen at once. He then goes on to clearly state what the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is: an account of all conditioned phenomena, both physical and mental; that rebirth and suffering are dependent on these conditions; and that to remove the phenomena that condition rebirth and suffering is to

escape rebirth and suffering. He then goes on to list the best examples of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the Pāli Canon and emphasizes the importance of the teachings found in the Visuddhimagga. This essay is a thorough investigation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* done with precision and care, one would be hard-pressed to find a better explanation in the English language.