

**How Is “Real Abiding” Possibly
Founded on Non-abiding?
A Philosophical Inquiry Mainly
Based on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa***

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Theme of Research

- This paper explicates the doctrine of “abiding” in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, mainly in terms of how “real abiding” can emerge from the non-abiding issue. It will focus on the double-aspect of the practices of Bodhisattvas: the teaching and practicing of “abiding” on the one hand, and “non-abiding” on the other hand, and, furthermore, the Bodhisattvas’ idea of “non-abiding nor non-abiding.”

Textual Sources

- In order to remain focused on the discourse, relevant concepts and thoughts, this paper chooses the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* as the main textual source.
- Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Bongo Butten Kenkyūkai (ed.), *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa: A Sanskrit Edition based upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace, Tōkyō*: Taishō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2006
- Of the eight known records of Chinese translated editions of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, only three have survived. Arranged in chronological order, they are Chih-ch'ien (tr. ca. 223-228), *Fo shuo wei mo chieh ching*, T. 474, vol. 14, pp. 519a-536c; Kumārajīva (tr., dated 406), *Wei mo chieh so shuo*, T. 475, vol. 14, pp. 537a-557b, and Hsüan-tsang (tr., dated 650), *Shuo wu kou ch'eng*, T. 476, vol. 14, pp. 557c-588a.

“Abiding” as a Key Concept in Philosophy of Life

- To focus on life is to look at all sentient beings with their long-lasting life experiences who roam in the vast world of life. Daily greetings such as “Where do you live?” “How do you live?” and conventional common phrases like “to live in peace and work with contentment” and “rest peacefully when buried” all show that people highly value the state of “peaceful living, i.e. abiding” (or abide, live, gain a foothold) in daily activities. Therefore, the philosophy of life that focuses on life will extend its focus to the important daily concern of the state of “abiding.”

“Abiding” as a Key Concept in Philosophy of Life

- There are many terms in Sanskrit that are relevant to “abiding” in Chinese Buddhist texts. Just to name a few, there are $\sqrt{sthā}$ (to stand/ to stay/ to abide), $prati-ṣṭhāpayati$ (to place on/ to establish), \sqrt{vas} (to dwell/ to abide), $vi-\sqrt{hr}$ (to sojourn/ to reside temporarily), $vi-ny-\sqrt{as}$ (to put into a certain place/ to lay down), $adhy-\sqrt{ās}$ (to occupy as one’s seat/ to settle on), and $sam-ā-\sqrt{śri}$ (to depend on/ to rest on). Taking a philosophical perspective, the more interesting question does not lie in comparing these relevant terms. What interests a philosopher more is what it reveals now that “abiding” is perceived as a key concept in philosophy of life.

“Abiding” as a Key Concept in Philosophy of Life

- A meaningful differentiation between “deluded abiding” and “real abiding” is then possible.
- The so-called “deluded abiding” in this paper has a strong metaphysical overtone which, when scrutinized in depth, on a larger scale, or over a longer time period, reveals what is conventionally considered as the conception of abiding or assertion of abiding to be the results of concealed or misled beliefs, projections, or labels of transitory, confined, or superficial situations. Those commonly mistaken conceptions or associations are in fact different from the reality which is unfounded in reality.
- The so-called “real abiding/abiding as it really is” in this paper also has a strong overtone in metaphysics. It is not formed by cognitive projection, labels of identification, usage of language, or signification in semantics. It does not appear to be temporary or superficial abiding only under certain conditions. The “real abiding/abiding as it really is” in the life-world or life experience exhibits a state of abiding under all circumstances such as time and space. In addition, all constituents of the situation and all aspects of its status are completely, really and thoroughly abiding.

The Reasoning, Discourse, and Practice of “Non-abiding”

- There are nine aspects that can be induced from the spectacularly all-encompassing reasoning, discourse and practice in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*.
- The nine interwoven aspects evolving around the main structure of non-abiding are as follows: (1) all dharmas are non-abiding; (2) non-abiding is the foundation that sustains all dharmas; (3) the venerable and paradigmatic Buddhas and Tathāgatas are non-abiding and non-relied; (4) the Unsurpassed Enlightenment that serves as the goal on the Path to Enlightenment is also non-abiding; (5) one should not pursue abiding in practice, nor should one pursue abiding-place in practice; (6) not only does non-abiding not cause the slightest agony, it may also entail pleasure and joy; (7) after recognizing mental factors do not abide in any segment or abidance in time or space, thoughts can then be pacified; (8) while perceiving, one does not abide in the dichotomy of the subject and the object of perception, while meditating, one does not abide in the dichotomy of contemplating nor not contemplating; (9) Bodhisattvas do not abide in the dichotomy of conditioned cyclic rebirth and the non-conditioned Nirvāṇa.

All dharmas are non-abiding

- The first scriptural passage runs as follows:
- “*utpanna-bhagnân-avasthitā bhadantôpāle sarva-dharmā māyā-megha-vidyut-sadrśāḥ*” (Vkn 2006, p. 30) Cf. T. 474, p. 523a; T. 475, p. 541b; T. 476, p. 563c; Lamotte 1976, p. 73.
- “*Honorable Upāli, all dharmas are not abiding in arisen or broken, like illusions, clouds, or lightning bolts.*”
- The second scriptural passage reads as follows:
- “*na kva-cid gamanâgamano 'n-avasthitatvāt*” (Vkn 2006, p. 22) Cf. T. 474, p. 521c; T. 475, p. 540a; T. 476, p. 561c; Lamotte 1976, p. 48.
- “*It [the Dharma] is going nowhere or coming nowhere because it is non-abiding.*”
- The third scriptural passage reads as follows:
- “*tatra yâtītā jātiḥ, sâ kṣīṇā. yâpy anāgatā, sâpy a-saṃprāptā. pratyutpannāyāḥ sthitir nâsti jāteḥ.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 35) Cf. T. 474, p. 523c; T. 475, p. 542b; T. 476, p. 564c; Lamotte 1976, p. 88.
- “*If it is a past birth, it is already exhausted. If it is a future birth, it has not arrived. If it is a present birth, it does not abide.*”

All dharmas are non-abiding

- The fourth scriptural passage reads as follows:
- “*dharmo ’saṃvāsaḥ*” (Vkn 2006, p. 57) Cf. T. 474, p. 527a; T. 475, p. 546a; T. 476, p. 570b; Lamotte 1976, pp. 137-138.
- “*The Dharma is not co-habitation.*”
- The fifth scriptural passage reads as follows:
- “*nir-apekṣāḥ sarva-dharmāḥ kṣaṇam api nâvatiṣṭhante*” (Vkn 2006, p. 30) Cf. T. 474, p. 523a; T. 475, p. 541b; T. 476, p. 563c; Lamotte 1976, p. 73.
- “*Not being dependent on each other, all dharmas do not abide even for a single instant.*”

Non-abiding is the foundation that sustains all dharmas

- The section focusing on “the *mūla* (root) of a certain factor” in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* expounds the phenomenon that all things can be traced down to a lower level of foundation. This back-and-forth discussion that evolves around the axis of “non-abiding,” could serve as a response to the two questions raised above. The text points out that *kuśala-akuśala* (wholesome and unwholesome) takes root in *sat-kāya* (body/ the existing assemblage), which takes root in *icchā-lobha* (desire-greed), which takes root in *a-bhūta-parikalpa* (unreal projection of distinction), which takes root in *viparyastā samjñā* (inverted conception), which takes root in *a-pratiṣṭha* (non-abiding). At the end of this section, “[*Vimalakīrti*] answered: “*The non-abiding is the root of inverted conception.*” [*Mañjuśrī*] asked: “*What is the root of non-abiding?*” [*Vimalakīrti*] answered: “*Mañjuśrī, if it is non-abiding, how will it have any root? That is why all dharmas abide in the root which is non-abiding.*”
- “*āha: viparyastāyāḥ samjñāyā a-pratiṣṭhā mūlam. āha: a-pratiṣṭhāyāḥ kiṃ mūlam. āha: yan mañjuśrīḥ a-pratiṣṭhānaṃ tasya kiṃ mūlaṃ bhaviṣyati. iti hy a-pratiṣṭhāna-mūla-pratiṣṭhitāḥ sarva-dharmāḥ.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 68) Cf. T. 474, p. 528b; T. 475, p. 547c; T. 476, p. 573b; Lamotte 1976, p. 160.

The venerable and paradigmatic Buddhas and Tathāgatas are non-abiding and non-relied

- The first scriptural passage reads as follows:
- “*vandāmi saṃsāra-gatāv a-niśritam.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 7) Cf. T. 474, p. 520a; T. 475, p. 538a; T. 476, p. 558c; Lamotte 1976, p. 14.
- “*We bow our heads to you who are not leaned (or relied) on the pathways of cyclic rebirth.*”
- The second:
- “*vande ’ham ākāśa-samaṃ a-niśritam.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 8) Cf. T. 474, p. 520a; T. 475, p. 538a; T. 476, p. 559a; Lamotte 1976, p. 14.
- “*I bow my head to you who are leaned (or relied) on nothing, as space.*”

The venerable and paradigmatic Buddhas and Tathāgatas are non-abiding and non-relied

- In addition to receiving homages, all Buddhas and Tathāgatas are the paragons for practitioners. One of the major tasks in following Buddhas' footsteps is to observe and comprehend what the reality is, how Buddhas and Tathāgatas do not rely on any path in the cyclic rebirth. *“I see [the Tathāgata] as not born from the past, not passing on to the future, and not abiding in the present time.”*
- *“pūrvāntato ’jātam, aparāntato ’saṃkrāntaṃ, pratyutpanne ’dhvany a-saṃsthitam paśyāmi.”* (Vkn 2006, p. 109) Cf. T. 474, p. 534b; T. 475, p. 555a; T. 476, p. 584 ; Lamotte 1976, p. 238.

The *anuttarā samyak-saṃbodhiḥ* that serves as the goal on the Path to Enlightenment is also non-abiding

- “*a-sthāna-sthitaiva hi bodhiḥ.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 74) Cf. T. 474, p. 529b; T. 475, p. 548c; T. 476, p. 574c; Lamotte 1976, p. 171.
- “*Indeed Enlightenment is without any locus of abiding.*”
- “*tathatâ-pratiṣṭhitā bodhiḥ sarvato ’dṛśyā.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 36) Cf. T. 474, p. 524a; T. 475, p. 542c; T. 476, p. 565a; Lamotte 1976, p. 92.
- “*Enlightenment, not to be seen anywhere, does not abide in Suchness.*”

One should not pursue abiding in practice, nor should one pursue abiding-places in practice

- “*ye ke-cid dharmeṇa sārdham saṃ-vasanti, na te dharmārthikāḥ, saṃ-vāsārthikās te.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 57) Cf. T. 474, p. 527a; T. 475, p. 546a; T. 476, p. 570b; Lamotte 1976, p. 138.
- “*Those who abide with the Dharma are not pursuing the Dharma but are pursuing abode.*”
- In sum, the outlook for the process of cultivating Buddhist teachings according to the doctrine of non-abiding entails the following two aspects. On the one hand, one should not consider the dharmas, the factors that are to be learned, as objects to be dwelt upon, or to be accompanied. On the other hand, one should abide in the dharmas that keep on accomplishing factors to be learned on the path of cultivation.

Not only does non-abiding not cause any slightest agony, it may also entail pleasure and joy

- “*dharmârāma-ratiḥ ... viṣayeṣv a-niśrita-ratiḥ.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 40) Cf. T. 474, p. 524c; T. 475, p. 543a-b; T. 476, p. 566a; Lamotte 1976, p. 138.
- “*Joy in the garden of the Dharma ... is the joy which consists in not leaning (or relying) on objects.*”
- In sum, after the non-abiding meaning is comprehended, the ability to be independent of any sensory object is cultivated with a positive, healthy, happy attitude, then it is possible to proceed persistently on the path of cultivation.

After recognizing mental factors do not abide in any segment or abidance in time or space, thoughts can then be pacified

- “*cittaṃ ca bhadantôpāle nādhyātma-pratiṣṭhitaṃ na bahirdhā nōbhayaṃ antareṇôpalabhyate.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 30) Cf. T. 474, p. 523a; T. 475, p. 541b; T. 476, p. 563b; Lamotte 1976, pp. 71-72.
- “*Honorable Upāli, the mind neither abides within nor without, nor is it to be apprehended between the two (or in the middle).*”
- “*tathā pratisamlīyaś ca yathā te na cādhyātmaṃ cittaṃ avasthitaṃ bhaven na bahirdhōpavicaret.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 20) Cf. T. 474, p. 521c; T. 475, p. 539c; T. 476, p. 561b; Lamotte 1976, p. 44.
- “*To have your mind neither abide internally nor inspect externally—this is sitting in repose.*”

While perceiving, one does not abide in the dichotomy of the subject and the object of perception, while meditating, one does not abide in the dichotomy of contemplating or not contemplating

- *“cakṣū rūpaṃ ca dvayam etat. yat punaś cakṣuḥ-parijñātāvī, rūpeṣu na rajyati, na duṣyati, na muhyati, sa ucyate śānta iti. ... evaṃ śānta-sthitasyâ-dvaya-praveśaḥ.”* Cf. T. 474, p. 526c; T. 475, p. 545b; T. 476, p. 569b; Lamotte 1976, p. 128.
- *“He should abide neither in pacified contemplation, nor in the unpacified mind.”*
- *“cakṣū rūpaṃ ca dvayam etat. yat punaś cakṣuḥ-parijñātāvī, rūpeṣu na rajyati, na duṣyati, na muhyati, sa ucyate śānta iti. ... evaṃ śānta-sthitasyâ-dvaya-praveśaḥ.”* (Vkn 2006, p. 86) Cf. T. 474, p. 531b; T. 475, p. 551a-b; T. 476, p. 578a; Lamotte 1976, pp. 196-197.
- *“Regarding eye and form, it is two (or a duality). Moreover, if one, completely understanding the eye, does not have craving, aversion, or delusion with regard to forms, this is called “serene (or calm).” ... To abide serenely (or calmly) in this way is to enter into non-duality.”*

Bodhisattvas do not abide in the dichotomy of conditioned cyclic rebirth and the non-conditioned Nirvāṇa

- “*na saṃsāra-sthito na nirvāṇa-sthitaḥ, pari-bhuñjīta.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 23) Cf. T. 474, p. 522a; T. 475, p. 540b; T. 476, p. 562a; Lamotte 1976, p. 53.
- “*Neither abiding in cyclic rebirth nor abiding in Nirvāṇa—only then should one eat.*”
- “*tad bodhisatvena saṃskṛtaṃ ca na kṣapayitavyam, a-saṃskṛte ca na pratiṣṭhātavyam.*” (Vkn 2006, p. 104) Cf. T. 474, p. 533c; T. 475, p. 554b; T. 476, p. 582c; Lamotte 1976, p. 229.
- “*The Bodhisattva should neither exhaust the conditioned (or compounded) nor abide in the unconditioned (or un compounded).*”

“Real Abiding” Transformed from and Based upon Pertinent “Non-abiding”

- The previous section cited scriptural passages from the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* to illustrate the reasoning, discourse and practice of the main theme of “non-abiding.” This section will focus on how to transform “non-abiding” into “real abiding” in the following five segments of philosophical reflection and deliberation: (1) To recognize non-abiding in the life-world prior to discussing abiding; (2) On non-abiding which serves as a guideline; (3) In terms of wisdom, one should abide in dharma-abiding; (4) To abide in the mind-set in the never-ending forward thrust on the path of cultivation; (5) To abide in the process of helping/saving/transforming sentient beings.

To recognize non-abiding in the life-world prior to discussing abiding

- In addition to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, many Buddhist scriptures show the same insight and consistent and systematic rectification of names. For example, the commonly asserted self will be termed *an-ātman/ nair-ātmya* (not-self), or *ātma-śūnyatā* (emptiness of the self); the often asserted individual is termed *pudgala-nairātmya* (not-self of the person/ the person is not the substantial self), or *pudgala-śūnyatā* (emptiness of the person); while the usually asserted as a constituent factor is termed *dharma-nairātmya* (not-self of the dharma/ the dharma is not the substantial self), or *dharma-śūnyatā* (emptiness of the dharma).

On non-abiding as a guideline

- After gaining the insight that the reality of the life-world is different from that of commonly asserted abiding, non-abiding is not only not difficult to understand, but also serves as a beacon that lights up the direction for practitioners in the life-world.
- All dharmas in the world are non-abiding. By focusing on the inquiry into reality, we can identify that there are at least three that are higher in priority than pursuing specific abiding: (1) one will be aware and recognize that the life-world is non-abiding; (2) when one looks at the life-world, one would immediately perceive the non-abiding, alternation, process or path, and that one would prioritize scrutinizing the process of mind, process of life, or path of life; and (3) for the sake of proceeding on the process of mind and process of life, one would clear the path of life, rather than to shroud, barricade, hinder, or agitate the life-world with abiding or abiding-places.
- The conventional pursuit of certain abiding can be transformed into advancing on the path of cultivation through shifting the focus on the foundations and aspects. However, this important guideline in strategy will not suffice to break the myth of deluded abiding and achieve real abiding. Nevertheless, this does not mean that real abiding is not possible, either. In fact, the following three modes of practices entail real abiding: (a) through wisdom, one abides in dharma-abiding; (b) to abide in the mind-set in the never-ending forward thrust on the path of cultivation; (c) to abide in the process of helping/saving/transforming sentient beings.

Through wisdom, one abides in dharma-abiding

- This kind of “abiding of dharma” does not dwell on superficial factors such as individual, self, country, and incidents, nor does it link itself from the beginning to banal notions of abiding and specific terminology. Instead, one recognizes all sentient beings that have entered into the life-world, reveals all dharmas which are the constituent factors, relevant conditions, or operational factors, and realizes the non-abidence of all dharmas. The key to such awareness does not lie in the predominant way most people follow, grasping and isolating unilateral non-abidance, labeling it with language, then proceeding to differentiate things according to the labels. Instead, one should proceed along the main axis of non-abiding, observe the process of non-abiding in a thorough manner, and comprehend the context, mechanism and meaning of non-abiding. As a result, regardless of the upheaval and drifting appearance of not being in one specific place, the underlying unobstructed awareness abides in non-abiding and proceeds to comprehend the insight into the mechanism and meaning of non-abiding. If the unobstructed awareness and insightful comprehension can be recognized as wisdom, the way dharmas abide in non-abiding can be referred to as the abiding of dharma, then this way of cultivation can be described as through wisdom abiding in dharma-abiding.

To abide in the mind-set in the never-ending forward thrust on the path of cultivation

- At the very least, one has to avoid being short-visioned, narrow-minded, slack, passive, or complacent as well as not falling to either side of the duality, or even the possibility of falling off the path. On the more advanced level, one has to be constantly aware of the ultimate mission of cultivation which is led by an unobstructed cognition and is sustained with ceaseless momentum of practice. In short, one has to be able to take unsurpassed enlightenment as the ultimate goal, consider all Buddhas and Tathāgatas as the exemplars in practice, realize all dharmas in the world being non-abiding as the foundation idea, perceive the doctrine of emptiness as the shining beacon, employ non-duality so as not to fall to either side of the path, operate from a strategy of non-attachment and realize that nothing can be attained, and keep on cultivating ceaselessly so as to penetrate layers and layers of delusion and phantasmagoria to reach real abiding

To abide in the process of helping/saving/transforming sentient beings

- First of all, the main backbone of the Path to Enlightenment is wisdom, which “specializes” in gaining the insight of emptiness and non-duality. Emptiness helps untie the knots that bundle dharmas in existence. Non-duality eliminates the segmentation or peripheralization possibly derived from *vi-jñāna* (differentiating/ distinctive perception; consciousness) or from divided concepts. Therefore, if one gains insight through emptiness and non-duality in dharmas, one’s worldview will be open, vast, without boundary, and unobstructed. Secondly, there are many subjects or courses of practices to be learned thoroughly, such as to understand fully and solve problems caused by the accumulated data from various activities of previous lives, to perceive and handle properly daily routines on multiple aspects of the life-world, to develop and cultivate a benevolent quality or a superb ability in life, and to accumulate and facilitate ideas, mental states, good roots, abilities, and means to keep advancing cultivation lifetime after lifetime. Therefore, through practice on the Path to Enlightenment as such, the scope and cultivation are suitable for a long-term, wide, and superb operation. Thirdly, on the Path to Enlightenment, Bodhisattvas not only pick unsurpassed wisdom as the ultimate mission, but also engage in helping/saving/transforming sentient beings and embellishing this world. As a result, during the process of helping sentient beings and dignifying the world, the actions then further unfold the world without boundary. In short, there is no need for later remedy, as long as Bodhisattvas recognize the worldviews, scale, and missions on the Path to Enlightenment and keep on practicing. Not only real-abiding will occur without apparent effort, but also Bodhisattvas will abide in helping/saving/transforming sentient beings.

Conclusion

- The doctrine of abiding in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* not only recognizes the fact that all things in the world are impermanent and non-abiding, but also responds with the teaching and implementation of abiding in practices of Bodhisattvas, which is not only sustainable but also entails easy access to anywhere in the world.
- In conclusion, before inquiring on abiding, non-abiding in the world should be recognized beforehand. After proper comprehension of non-abiding, and employing non-abiding as a guideline for strategy, the following three practices can all lead to real abiding: (1) through wisdom, one abides in dharma-abiding; (2) to abide in the mind-set in the never-ending forward thrust on the path of cultivation; (3) to abide in the process of helping/saving/transforming sentient beings.

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