

The Ineffable Reality of the World and the Turning of the Dharma Wheel: An Exploration of Pedagogical Strategies in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras**

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국문 초록

본 논문에서는 주로 세계의 실재성에 대한 문제와 세계의 실재성에 대한 설명 방식을 집중적으로 다루고자 한다. 언어의 사용은 결코 일상 생활 또는 현상 세계의 영역에만 한정되지 않는다. 불교의 가르침들, 특히 『반야바라밀다경』은 세계의 언표불가능한 실재를 보이고 설명하기 위해 어떤 언어든지 사용하고 있다. 예컨대 공간은 예외 없이 공하다고 선언하며, ‘불생(不生, an-utpāda)’, ‘불멸(不滅, a-nirodha)’과 같은 부정적 접두사를 가진 기술적(技術的) 용어들은 공간의 의미를 표현하기 위해 채택되고 있다. 그러한 실재를 지칭하기 위해 어떤 용어든지 사용될 수 있지만, 실재는 관습적 구성물과 동일시될 수도 그 안에 포함될 수도 없다. 실재의 언표불가능성에 의해 드러난 간극, 곧 담론의 불충분성과 부적합성으로 인해 남겨진 것을 메우는 작업은 명상 수행과 통찰적 지혜(반야)가 떼말게 되었을 것이다.

주제어: 언표불가능성, 언어철학, 공간, 공, 이제, 실재, 『반야바라밀다경』

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I. Introduction

The world in which sentient beings live has been one of the main focuses and characteristic features of philosophical inquiry. Buddhist scriptures contain various teachings and discussions on critical and significant questions that philosophers have raised about the roots, arising, trends, mechanism, and reality of the world. Aiming at constructing a Buddhist philosophy of space-time, this paper mainly focuses on the issue of the reality of the world and the way in which the reality of the world is demonstrated.

The following four key concepts need to be defined and clarified in order to better understand and communicate the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

- (1) World: A world is an entire existing sphere with temporal process and spatial extension of related factors and activities, rather than merely the material cosmos or physical universe.
- (2) Space: Just as the temporal world literally means the world pertaining to or concerned with time, so the spatial world means the spatial aspect of the world. However, whether space is simply material is an issue to be further studied and is not to be taken for granted. Although the world can be studied from the aspects of space, time, or space-time, this paper will be mostly limited to the spatial aspect in weighing the relationship of such an aspect to meditative practices and philosophical insights.
- (3) Reality: On the one hand, reality is the state/nature of related factors and activities as they really are, as opposed to conceptual construction or emotional grasp of them; on the other hand, reality is the totality of related factors and activities, including whatever happens, has happened, and will happen, as opposed to spatially and temporally limited phenomena.¹⁾
- (4) Ineffability: Ineffability normally means incapability of being expressed

1) See e.g., Campagna 2018, 103-105; Thagard 2010, 8, 72-76.

or described in words. However, this definition needs to be made more precise. Philosophically speaking, it is neither that a particular object is too sacred or too complicated to be expressed in words, nor that the experience cannot be conveyed, nor that the meaning cannot be explained. It is ineffable in the sense that there is a tremendous gap between “the expressing action” and “to be expressed in reality.”²⁾

After defining and clarifying key concepts such as world, space, reality, and ineffability, this paper moves to explore the reality of the world in the context of Buddhist teachings.

II. The Reality of the World in the Context of Buddhist Teachings

The reality of the world is one of the main focuses of Buddhist teachings as attested in the *Āgama/Nikāya* collections and the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*.³⁾ According to Buddhist scriptures, it is pointless to claim to have developed wisdom without inquiring into the reality of the world. Along the same line, becoming thoroughly liberated from the world of pain and suffering without correct understanding of the reality of the world does not make much sense. The “not-self” (Skt. *anātman*, *nairātmya*; Pāli, *anatta*) doctrine, for example, in the *Āgama/Nikāya* collections on the one hand does not succumb to any psychological ego, theological self, or philosophical views of the self, and on the other hand claims that whatever should be and can be examined is in reality not the self. It is through such an investigation into the reality of the world that wisdom can be acquired and suffering can be brought to cessation.⁴⁾ In short, Buddhist wisdom goes hand in hand with the understanding of the reality of the

2) See e.g., Knepper 2017, 1-8; Kukla 2005, 1-51.

3) See e.g., Brainard 2000, 69-126; Coseru 2012; Tilakaratne 1993.

4) See e.g., *Samyuktāgama* nos. 1, 33, 34, T. 2, 1a, 7b-8a; Bodhi 2000, 869, 909.

world, which is crucial for attaining liberation from the world.

The *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, being the pioneer and foundation of almost all of the Mahāyāna scriptures, are rich in philosophical insights in a number of important aspects including those of space, time and world.⁵⁾ In order to narrow down the textual evidence, this paper draws mainly on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-Paripṛcchā* among various assemblies of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*.⁶⁾

Although the ideas of emptiness and non-duality also play a significant role in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, the essential dharma is the *prajñāpāramitā* (perfection of wisdom), the meaning of which can be sought from the following passage:

After that was said, the Venerable Subhūti asked the Bhagavān: “Concerning the *prajñāpāramitā*, Bhagavan, it is called the ‘*prajñāpāramitā*.’ In what meaning does one speak of the ‘*prajñāpāramitā*’?”

The Bhagavān replied: “Subhūti, it has reached the utmost perfection of all dharmas-in that meaning one speaks of the ‘*prajñāpāramitā*’ Furthermore, Subhūti, it is through this *prajñāpāramitā* that all Disciples, Pratyekabuddhas, Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas, and Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksambuddhas have gone beyond-in that meaning one speaks of the ‘*prajñāpāramitā*.’ Furthermore, Subhūti, in the utmost meaning the meaning of all dharmas is not broken apart, and thus in this *prajñāpāramitā* this beyond in all dharmas is not apprehended by these Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksambuddhas-in that meaning one speaks of the ‘*prajñāpāramitā*.’” [translation my own]⁷⁾

5) See e.g., Brunnhölzl 2010, 23-46; Khenchen 2004, 155-159.

6) For a textual classification of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, see Conze 1978.

7) “*evam ukte, āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat: prajñāpāramitā prajñāpāramitēti bhagavann ucyate. kenārthena prajñāpāramitēty ucyate? bhagavān āha: parama-pāramitaiṣā subhūte sarva-dharmāṇām agamanārthena prajñāpāramitēty ucyate. api tu khalu punaḥ subhūte etayā prajñāpāramitayā sarva-śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhā bodhisattvāś ca mahāsattvās tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ pārāṅ-gatās, tenārthena prajñāpāramitēty ucyate. api tu khalu punaḥ subhūte paramārthena yo ’rthaḥ sarva-dharmāṇām abhinnaḥ, sa iha prajñāpāramitāyām tais tathāgatair arhadbhiḥ samyaksambuddhaiḥ sarva-dharmeṣu pāro nōpalabdhas,*

In short, the *prajñāpāramitā* is a compound word consisting of *prajñā* (wisdom) and *pāramitā* (perfection), and means bringing wisdom to perfection. Ordinary discerning cognition is not good enough; insightful wisdom or penetrating wisdom is required to push the limits and accomplish the impossible. This *prajñāpāramitā* not only lies at the heart of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* but is also called the mother of Buddha-Tathāgatas, since Buddha-Tathāgatas are born from the practice of the *prajñāpāramitā*.

The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* devotes numerous passages and even entire chapter to elucidate that the *prajñāpāramitā* functions as the genetrix of the Tathāgata (*tathāgatasya janayitrī*) by contributing the indispensable qualities and powers to the achievement of the Tathāgata's enlightenment, and also as the instructress of this world (*asya ca lokasya darśayitrī*) by instructing or demonstrating (*darśayati*) what this world really is. The following passage is an example of such a function of the *prajñāpāramitā*:

Then the Bhagavān said to the Venerable Subhūti: "The perfection of wisdom, Subhūti, functions as the genetrix of the Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksaṃbuddha, and also as the instructress of this world. For this reason, the Tathāgata dwells taking recourse to this dharma of the perfection of wisdom." [translation my own]⁸⁾

The elucidation of this theme has received little scholarly attention in spite that it is the cornerstone of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and a large number of the Mahāyāna scriptures as well. According to this particular elucidation, the reality of the world is the focus of what constitutes the *prajñāpāramitā*. However, what does the term the "world" refer to? The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*

tenārthenōcyate prajñāpāramitā." Kimura 1992, 127. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 338b; Conze 1975, 520. See also, Lamotte 2001, 819.

8) "atha khalu bhagavān āyusmantam subhūtim āmantrayāmāsa: prajñāpāramitā subhūte tathāgatasyārhatasamyaksaṃbuddhasya yenaiva janayitrī asya ca lokasya darśayitrī. tena kāraṇena tathāgata imaṃ prajñāpāramitā-dharmam upaniśritya viharati." For the textual source of this section, see Kimura 1990, 70-73. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 232b-234b; Conze 1975, 353-355. See also, Lamotte 2001, 234-235.

Prajñāpāramitā, being in the same manner as the *Āgama/Nikāya* collections,⁹⁾ approaches the “world” in terms of the five aggregates (*pañca skandhāḥ*), twelve perceptual gates (*dvādaśāyatanāni*), eighteen perceptual elements (*aṣṭādaśa dhātavaḥ*), and so on.¹⁰⁾ In other words, how the world works has everything to do with dharmas, i.e., the bodily and mental factors that take part in sentient beings’ activities, integration and disintegration.¹¹⁾

Then, what is it that the Tathāgata has proclaimed as the reality of the world? Above all, the *prajñāpāramitā* shows up to the Tathāgata that the world is empty (*prajñāpāramitā tathāgatasya lokāḥ śūnya iti jñāpayati*), and the Tathāgata proclaims (*tathāgatenākhyāta*) accordingly. Moreover, the *prajñāpāramitā* shows up to the Tathāgata that the world is ineffable (*acintya*), detached (*vivikta*), ultimately empty (or empty of what has surpassed boundaries; *atyanta-śūnya*), empty of own-being (or empty of inherent existence; *svabhāva-śūnya*), serene (*śānta*), exactly emptiness (*śūnyataiva*), and so on.¹²⁾

It is worth noting that the sequential steps in this particular elucidation are (i) the *prajñāpāramitā* as the realization of the reality of the world, (ii) the revelation of the reality of the world to the Tathāgata through the *prajñāpāramitā*, (iii) the Tathāgata’s proclamation of the reality of the world as ineffable along with such extraordinary utterances as empty and even ultimately empty. This sequence does not start from conceptualization or discourse and there is an advantage of not falling prey to linguistic barriers to reality.

9) See e.g., *Samyuktāgama* nos. 38, 233, T. 2, 8c, 56c; Bodhi 2000, 581-582, 1185.

10) For example: “*subhūtir āha: katamaḥ punar bhagavaṃs tathāgatena loka ity ākhyātaḥ? bhagavān āha: pañca subhūte skandhās tathāgatena loka ākhyātaḥ.*” [Subhūti asked: “Moreover, Bhagavan, what is it that the Tathāgata has proclaimed as ‘the world’?” The Bhagavān answered: “The world,’ Subhūti, has been proclaimed as the five aggregates.”] [translation my own] Kimura 1990, 58. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 225b; Conze 1975, 346.

11) See e.g., Buescher 2005, 55-56; Subbarayappa 2004, 28.

12) “*punar aparaṃ subhūte prajñāpāramitā tathāgatasya lokāḥ śūnya iti darśayati.*” “*punar aparaṃ subhūte prajñāpāramitā tathāgatasya loko ’cintya iti darśayati. ... evaṃ vivikta iti, atyanta-śūnya iti, svabhāvaśūnya iti darśayati.*” “*punar aparaṃ subhūte prajñāpāramitā tathāgatasya lokāḥ śānta iti darśayati.*” “*punar aparaṃ subhūte prajñāpāramitā tathāgatasya lokāḥ śūnyataivēti darśayati.*” Kimura 1990, 73. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 234b-235a; Conze 1975, 355-356.

III. The Ineffability of the Reality

The *Āgama/Nikāya* collections for the most part just point out that the five aggregates are, individually and collectively, not the self. However, little has been said about the “not-self” itself.¹³⁾ The lack of conceptual-related positive identity applies not only to other reference words pointing to the reality of the world, e.g., emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*/ Pāli, *suññatā*), illusion (*māyā*), non-duality (*a-dvaya*), but also to those words indicating ultimate state of soteriological release, e.g., cessation (*nirodha*), liberation (Skt. *mokṣa*/ Pāli, *mokkha*), blown out (Skt. *nirvāṇa*/ Pāli, *nibbāna*). Most, if not all, of those words are explained in terms of what an object is not, rather than what an object is. Otherwise speaking, those words convey meaning through excluding (*apoha*) the identity between words and objects and not through any ontological relation to their referents.¹⁴⁾

While demonstrating the reality of the world, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* acknowledge not only the unfixed and indivisible nature of the reality but also the inadequacy of conventional expressions in corresponding to the reality. Seen in this light, the idea of the ineffability (*a-cintyatā*; *a-vyapadeśyatā*) is brought out for rigorous deliberation and is emphasized as one of the essential characteristics of the reality. In other words, such tools as conceptualization, discerning cognition, thinking, inference, and discourses are at most related to some phenomenal aspects of the world, but as far as the reality is concerned, these ordinary tools are clearly unqualified to capture the reality. For example:

The Bhagavān said: “In that manner, Subhūti, all dharmas are ineffable, incomparable, immeasurable, innumerable, and equal to the unequalled. These Tathāgata-dharmas of the Tathāgata are ineffable, incomparable, immeasurable, innumerable, and equal to the unequalled because thinking, comparing, measuring,

13) See e.g., Bodhi 2000, 869, 901-903. See also, Barash 2013, 38.

14) See e.g., Schliff 2013, 638-646.

counting, equality and inequality have ceased. In that manner, Subhūti, all dharmas are ineffable, incomparable, immeasurable, innumerable, and equal to the unequalled. These Tathāgata-dharmas of the Tathāgata are ineffable, incomparable, immeasurable, innumerable, and equal to the unequalled because thinking, comparing, measuring, counting, equality and inequality have been transcended.” [translation my own]¹⁵⁾

Besides, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* frequently include the ineffability among a set of reference words characterizing the fundamental dimensions pertaining to the reality, which is regularly enumerated as thusness (or suchness; *tathatā*), without deviation from suchness (or unmistaken suchness; *a-vi-tathatā*), not different from suchness (or non-extraneous suchness; *an-anya-tathatā*), the state/nature of dharma (*dharmatā*), the realm of dharma (*dharmadhātu*), the state/nature of the abiding of dharma (*dharmasthititā*), certainty of dharma (*dharmaniyāmatā*), the furthest limit of existence (or limit of reality; *bhūta-koṭi*), and ineffable realm (or inconceivable element; *acintya-dhātu*).¹⁶⁾ Such a set of reference words is not only helpful in understanding why the reality is ineffable but also in providing multiple approaches to the reality for Bodhisattvas dedicated to cultivating the *prajñāpāramitā*. In a nutshell, the reality is not something confined to differentiative physical world or phenomenal entities, and therefore cannot be grasped (*a-grāhya*; *an-upalabhya*) by ordinary tools.¹⁷⁾

15) “*bhagavān āha: anena subhūte paryāyeṇa sarva-dharmā acintyā atulyā aprameyā asaṃkhyeyā asamasamāḥ. ime te subhūte tathāgatasya tathāgata-dharmā acintyās cintanōparatavād, atulyās tulanōparatavād, aprameyāḥ pramāṇōparatavād, asaṃkhyeyā gaṇanōparatavād, asamasamāḥ sama-viṣamōparatavāt. anena subhūte paryāyeṇa sarva-dharmā acintyā atulyā aprameyā asaṃkhyeyā asamasamāḥ. ime te subhūte tathāgatasya tathāgata-dharmā acintyās cintā-samatikrāntāḥ, atulyās tulanā-samatikrāntāḥ, aprameyāḥ pramāṇa-samatikrāntāḥ, asaṃkhyeyā gaṇanā-samatikrāntāḥ, asamasamāḥ sama-viṣama-samatikrāntāḥ.*” Kimura 1990, 76. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 236c; Conze 1975, 357.

16) See e.g., Kimura 1986, 70-71; T. 7, no. 220 (2), 156a-b; Conze 1975, 237.

17) For example: “*prajñāpāramitā kauśika agrāhyā anidarśanā apratighā eka-lakṣaṇā yad utālakṣaṇā.*” [“The perfection of wisdom, Kauśika, cannot be grasped, cannot be pointed out, cannot be opposed, and has one characteristic, i.e., no characteristic.”] [translation my own] Kimura 1986, 88. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 161c; Conze 1975, 249.

IV. Buddhist Strategies to Deal with the Ineffability of the Reality While Turning the Dharma Wheel

In a broad sense, almost all the Buddhist scriptures can be regarded as the outcome of the turning of the Dharma wheel (*dharma-cakra-pravartana*; *dharma-cakram pravartayati*), which is one of the eight characteristic deeds of a Buddha (*buddha-kārya*).¹⁸⁾ The *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana-sutta* regards related dharmas as wheels of a vehicle and elucidating related dharmas as turning the Dharma wheel on the path to liberation.¹⁹⁾ However, Buddhas are not the only ones who can turn the Dharma wheel. After training in the Dharma and gaining some degree of mastery, qualified Buddhist Disciples and Bodhisattvas, in turn, may follow the steps of the Buddha and turn the Dharma wheel accordingly (*dharma-cakram anu-vartayati*).²⁰⁾

Here comes a challenging question. On the one hand, the *prajñāpāramitā* consists in instructing or demonstrating the reality of the world, on the other hand, the reality of the world is ineffable. The “ineffability of the reality” conveys a meaning that the reality to be expressed is out of reach, provided that the expressing action is infused with grasp (or apprehension; *graha*), distinction (*vi-kalpa*), and discourse (*nāma*).²¹⁾ In other words, what is involved in the process of expression actually expresses some feelings, conceptualizations, thoughts, and so on about some events or issues at the cost of hindering from realizing the reality of the world.

18) Cf. *Fo Ben Xing Ji Jing (Abhiniṣkramaṇa-sūtra)*, T. 3, 655a-932a; *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, T. 10, 309b-313c.

19) Cf. *Samyuktāgama* no. 379, T. 2, 103c-104a; Bodhi 2000, 1843-1847.

20) For the case of Buddhist Disciples, see e.g., *Samyuktāgama* no. 1212, T. 2, 323b; *An Alternative Translation of the Samyuktāgama* no. 228, T. 2, 457b-c; *Madhyamāgama* no. 121, T. 1, 610b; *Ekottarāgama* no. 325, T. 2, 677b-c; Bodhi 2000, 287. For the case of Bodhisattvas, see e.g., *Shuo Wugoucheng Jing (Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa)*, T. 14, 587a; *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa: A Sanskrit Edition Based upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace*, 2006, 121.

21) This theme is emphasized not only throughout the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* but also in numerous Mahāyāna scriptures, especially the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.

Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, frequently point out that although ordinary cognition and communication typically contain grasp, distinction, duality, expression, and limitation, the reality of the world is ungraspable, non-distinguishable, non-dualistic, inexpressible (*nir-abhilāpya*), and infinite.²²⁾ Such a twofold situation does not necessarily lead to a passive nihilism or an attachment to the notion of ineffability as one might imagine. For pedagogical purposes, strategies, rather than some sort of interpretive statements, can function as high level plans of action to achieve overall aim. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, the following three pedagogical strategies can be implemented to address the seeming difficulties of the above-stated situation.

The first strategy: The operational framework of the two truths (*satya-dvaya*) incorporates both the reality of the world and linguistic convention.²³⁾ The concept of “reality” concerns what really is, and is therefore mainly about the state/nature of the real world or related factors. Except for mathematical truth or logical truth, the concept of “truth” poses a concern regarding the pertinence of assertions or statements to actualities or reality, and is therefore mainly about the correctness of assertions, understanding, and realization. The Buddhist doctrine of the two truths differentiates between two levels of truth: “the truth (manifested) in linguistic convention” (or conventional truth; *saṃvṛti-satya*) and “the truth (manifested) in the utmost meaning” (*paramārtha-satya*).²⁴⁾ This avoids confusion between practical statements about the sensible aspect of the world necessary for verbal instruction and the reality of the world, the meaning (*artha*) of which in its utmost extent (*parama*) is beyond any linguistic reference or

22) For example, a discussion of *sarva-dharma-nirābhilāpya-śūnyatā* (the emptiness of all related factors in the sense that they are inexpressible), see Vaidya 1963, 32; Suzuki 1932, 66.

23) The Buddhist doctrine of the two truths has a very long history behind it, and has been a focus in academic publishing drawn particularly from the the Mādhyamika school. See e.g., Thakchoe 2007; The Cowherds 2011. However, little attention has been paid to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*.

24) Linguistic convention (*saṃvṛti*) appears to be largely interchangeable with worldly conventional expression (*loka-vyavahāra*). See Kimura 2009, 166; T. 7, no. 220 (2), 129b; Conze 1975, 197. Concerning *saṃvṛti*, *loka-vyavahāra* and related terms, see Newland and Tillemans 2011, 12-14.

differentiation. In other words, there is no contradiction between “what is said” and “what is ineffable” since these two labels do not exist at the same level or in the same way, but indicate different levels of connotations. This is not an issue of logical contradiction but an opportunity to unravel reality from conventional confinement. How is the first strategy possible? The following three steps can be taken into account.

The first step is to cognize and understand linguistic convention (*saṃvṛti-jñāna*) instead of simply taking linguistic convention for granted. Most people probably tend to make use of linguistic inventions to understand and fabricate the world in which they live.²⁵⁾ The world is thus seen, experienced, and (re-)constructed mainly through the lens of linguistic relativity.²⁶⁾ But, philosophically speaking, what is perhaps more important and more difficult is to reflect on how we build, follow, and share linguistic convention at both societal and individual levels.²⁷⁾ For example:

Therein, what is the cognition conforming to linguistic convention? That is the cognition, by way of the very mind, of the mind of other sentient beings and individuals. [translation my own]²⁸⁾

The second step is to understand that linguistic convention and the utmost meaning are not separated from each other. It’s a pretty common mistake to think that two concepts necessarily stand for two divided entities. First of all, the concept of the utmost meaning (*paramārtha*) suggests that what matters most is a consistent unravelling and understanding of the meaning (*artha*) to the utmost extent possible (*parama*), rather than grasping the object as an entity.²⁹⁾

25) Cf. Ferrari 2014, 171-174; Watrous 2015, 144.

26) See e.g., Everett 2013, 9-22; Gumperz and Levinson 1996, 1-18.

27) Cf. Carston 2016, 612-624; Waxman 2019, 33-145.

28) “*iatra katamat saṃvṛti-jñānam? yat para-sattvānām para-pudgalānām cetasaiva cetaso jñānam.*” Kimura 2009, 82. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 80b; Conze 1975, 156.

29) Concerning the utmost meaning as emptiness, see *Samyuktāgama* no. 335, T. 2, 92c; *Ekottarāgama* no. 37.7, T. 2, 713c-714b; Lamotte 1993, 1-23; Choong 1999, 89-98.

Secondly, the dimension of Suchness (*tathatā*) can be manifested by unravelling the meaning of related factors, and this dimension of Suchness applies equally to linguistic convention.³⁰⁾ And finally, both linguistic convention and the utmost meaning are not separated from each other in terms of the dimension of Suchness. For example:

Subhūti asked: “Is again, Bhagavan, worldly linguistic convention one thing, and the utmost meaning another?”

The Bhagavān replied: “Worldly linguistic convention, Subhūti, is not one thing and the utmost meaning another. What is the Suchness of worldly linguistic convention, that is the Suchness of the utmost meaning. It is because those sentient beings neither know nor see this Suchness, that, for the sake of those sentient beings, the so-called ‘existence’ or ‘non-existence’ is indicated by way of worldly linguistic convention. ... It is thus that the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva should course in the perfection of wisdom.” [translation my own]³¹⁾

The third step is to understand the respective roles of linguistic convention and the utmost meaning. Various distinctions, such as the distinction between existence and non-existence, associated with the whole multiplicity of the phenomenal world can be indicated by means of discerning cognition and linguistic convention. However, the reality as emptiness, non-duality, or non-dividedness, indicated as the utmost meaning, is beyond the reach of discerning cognition or linguistic convention, and is to be realized by the cultivation of the perfection of wisdom. In short, linguistic convention has to do with various

30) For a more detailed explanation of the dimension of Suchness, see a chapter on “Suchness” in Kimura 1990, 114-141; T. 7, no. 220 (2), 251c-260b; Conze 1975, 376-387.

31) “*subhūtir āha: kiṃ punar bhagavann anyā loka-saṃvṛtir, anyañ paramārthaḥ? bhagavān āha: na subhūte ’nyā loka-saṃvṛtir, anyañ paramārthaḥ. yaiva loka-saṃvṛtes tathatā, saiva paramārthasya tathatā. tān te sattvā evañ-tathatān na jānanti na paśyanti, teṣāṃ arthāya, loka-saṃvṛtyā nirdiśyate bhāva iti vābhāva iti vā. ... evañ khalu subhūte bodhisattvena mahāsattvena prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caritavyam.*” Kimura 1992, 138-139. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 343b; Conze 1975, 529.

distinctions; the utmost meaning manifests non-dividedness. For example:

Then the Venerable Subhūti asked the Bhagavān: “If, Bhagavan, the Path is non-existent, and Nirvāṇa is non-existent, how, Bhagavan, can the following statements - ‘this is a Stream-enterer.’ ‘this is a Once-returner.’ ‘this is a Non-returner.’ ‘this is an Arhat.’ ‘this is a Pratyekabuddha.’ ‘this is a Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksambuddha.’ - be indicated?”

The Bhagavān replied: “Subhūti, it is not the Unconditioned that causes to become [the distinction between Stream-enterer, Once-returner, etc.] However, taking worldly conventional expression as a standard, it [i.e., the distinction between Stream-enterer, Once-returner, etc.] can be demonstrated. But in the utmost meaning no such distinction can be caused to occur. And why is it so? Because the path of speech derived from cognitive designation does not exist therein [i.e., in the Unconditioned].” [translation my own]³²⁾

The second strategy: Verbal instruction relies mostly on linguistic convention rather than on the utmost meaning. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* consistently emphasizes that what has just been remarked and discussed about reality is dependent on conventional usage of specific times and places although explicit intents are usually directed toward the utmost meaning. This leads to a recurrent statement: “*tathāgatena loka-saṃketena vyavahriyate, na punaḥ paramārthena.*” (It is stated by the Tathāgata by way of worldly convention, but, again, not by way of the utmost meaning.)³³⁾ Such a strategy serves as a bridge between discourses and reality. Although most of the remarks and discussions

32) “*atha khalv āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat: yadi bhagavann abhāvo mārgaḥ, abhāvo nirvāṇaḥ, tat kutaḥ punar bhagavan nirdeśyate - ayam srotaāpanno, ’yaṃ sakṛdāgāmy, ayam anāgāmy, ayam arhann, ayam pratyekabuddho, ’yaṃ tathāgato ’rhan samyaksambuddhaḥ? bhagavān āha: na khalu subhūte asaṃskṛtaḥ bhāvayati. api tu loka-vyavahāraṃ pramāṇī-kṛtyōcyate. na punaḥ paramārthena śakyā prabhāvanā. tat kasya hetoḥ? na hi tatrāsti vāk-patha-prajñāptir.*” Kimura 1992, 126. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 338a; Conze 1975, 519-520.

33) See e.g., Kimura 1990, 68. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (2), 230b; Conze 1975, 352. See also, Arnold 2014, 145; Eckel 2016, 75-76.

seem to be about correct assertions in the utmost meaning, such discourses are, nevertheless, engaged in linguistic convention. In short, discourses about reality are not the same as reality, but rather are “conventional ways of cutting up the flow of cyclic existence into conceptually convenient bits.”³⁴⁾

The third strategy: The reality of the world remains ineffable. The *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-Paripṛcchā* frequently and decisively points out that the reality of what has just been remarked and discussed is not the same as thus said (*na punar yathōcyate*).³⁵⁾ In other words, the reality cannot be contained in speech by verbal expressions (*na śakyā vācā vaktum*).³⁶⁾ Such a strategy does not mean to set a great wall between discourses and reality. Rather, it honestly faces the insufficiency and inadequacy of discourses in corresponding to the reality. The gap can be fulfilled by the realization resulting from meditative practices – such as the concentrated insight called “the non-appropriation of all dharmas” (*sarva-dharmāparigrhīto nāma samādhiḥ*), the concentrated insight called “not grasping at any dharma” (*sarva-dharmānupādāno nāma samādhiḥ*), or the concentrated insight of the heroic progression (*śūraṃgama-samādhi*) - and insightful wisdom.³⁷⁾

Let us take Buddhist teachings on space-time as an example. In the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, space is generally used as a simile not only for Mahāyāna (*ākāśa-samaṃ tad yānam*) but also for all the related factors in deliberation. There is a long list of characteristics pertaining to the reality of space-time, which includes the following three utterances: (i) The ten directions, being the same as space, are beyond cognizance (*yathākāśasya na pūrvā dik prajñāyate, na dakṣiṇā, na paścimā, nōttarā, na vidiśo, nādho, nōrdhvā dik prajñāyate*). (ii) Space is neither the past, nor the future, nor the present (*ākāśaṃ nātītaṃ, nānāgataṃ, na pratyutpannaṃ*).³⁸⁾ (iii) Ineffability is neither the past, nor

34) Westerhoff 2009, 151.

35) See Vaidya 1961, 4-8, 10-11, 36-37, 43.

36) Hikata 1983, 7; Vaidya 1961, 3. Cf. T. 7, no. 220 (16), 1067c; Conze 1993, 4.

37) See Vaidya 1960, 5, 7; Wogihara 1932, 49-50, 60; T. 220 (4), vol. 7, 764b, 765b; Conze 1975, 85, 87.

38) See Kimura 2009, 122-129; T. 7, no. 220 (2), 97b-102c; Conze 1975, 183-185.

the future, nor the present (*na hy acintyātātītā vānāgatā vā pratyutpannā vā*).³⁹⁾ Throughout this long list, whatever words in conventional sense may be used to describe space-time are literally negated, or erased from ordinary usage, to demonstrate the insubstantiality, indivisibility, infinity, and ineffability of the reality.

V. Conclusion

The usage of languages is never confined within the sphere of everyday life or phenomenal world. Buddhist teachings, especially the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, use whatever language to demonstrate and elucidate the ineffable reality of the world. This explains why space is declared as empty, and such technical terms with negative prefixes as not-arising (*an-utpāda*) and not-ceasing (*a-nirodha*) are adopted. Whatever terminology may be used to point to the reality, but the reality cannot be identified as or contained in conventional construction. Concerning the gap revealed by the ineffability of the reality, i.e., what is left by the insufficiency and inadequacy of discourses, meditative practices – such as *śūramgama-samādhi* – and insightful wisdom can take over to fill up.

³⁹⁾ Masuda 1930, 235; Vaidya 1961, 350. Cf. T. 220 (7), vol. 7, 968b; Conze 1993, 91.

Abbreviation

T. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.

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The Ineffable Reality of the World and the Turning of the Dharma Wheel: An Exploration of Pedagogical Strategies in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*

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This paper mainly focuses on the issue of the reality of the world and the way in which the reality of the world is demonstrated. The usage of languages is never confined within the sphere of everyday life or phenomenal world. Buddhist teachings, especially the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, use whatever language to demonstrate and elucidate the ineffable reality of the world. For example, space is invariably declared as empty and such technical terms with negative prefixes as not-arising (*an-utpāda*) and not-ceasing (*a-nirodha*) are adopted to express the meaning of space. Whatever terminology may be used to point to the reality, but the reality cannot be identified as or contained in conventional construction. Concerning the gap revealed by the ineffability of the reality, i.e., what is left by the insufficiency and inadequacy of discourses, meditative practices and insightful wisdom may take over to fill up.

Keywords: ineffability, philosophy of language, space, emptiness, two truths, reality, *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*.

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