

109-1 佛家哲學研究 week 12

實相、語言、不可說

授課教師：蔡耀明

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本週閱讀材料

1. Yao-ming Tsai, “Language as an Instrument of Soteriological Transformation from the Madhyamaka Perspective,” *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 24/4 (November 2014): 330-345.
2. Yao-ming Tsai, “The Ineffable Reality of the World and the Turning of the Dharma Wheel: An Exploration of Pedagogical Strategies in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*,” *Critical Review for Buddhist Studies* 27 (April 2020): 39-60.

Abstract

Buddhist teachings and practices can be viewed as a journey of soteriological transformation, where language, as a tool for the analysis of views, occupies a place of special significance and importance. This article examines how the concept of non-duality, from the Madhyamaka perspective, has served as a powerful rhetorical device with the explicit aim of fostering soteriological transformation. Among the various expressions representative of the Madhyamaka perspective, two are particularly explored in this article for their facilitation of soteriological transformation: the expression of ‘neither a dharma nor a not-dharma’ and the teaching that ‘one should let go even of dharmas, still more so not-dharmas’. I argue that the Madhyamaka expression of ‘neither A nor not-A’ is hardly ever just about conforming to any linguistic conventions. It is about gaining liberation from linguistic conventions and unexamined remarks.

Introduction

- In both the Path to Liberation and the Path to Perfect Enlightenment, one moves toward liberation from impoverished conceptualizations and views. In light of this, such concepts as ‘**not-self**’ and ‘**emptiness**’ are crucial for gaining insight into the limitations of concepts in the everyday use of language. However, expressions of the Madhyamaka perspective such as ‘neither arisen nor ceased’, ‘neither existent nor not-existent’ and ‘neither a dharma nor a not-dharma’ are notoriously difficult to understand and are riddled with interpretive ambiguities. Moreover, the fact that the Madhyamaka perspective most frequently employs double negative conjunction words (i.e., **neither ... nor**) may increasingly challenge conventional understanding and usage of language. This article focuses on the rhetorical construction of non-dualistic terminology and the way linguistic strategies are used in directing non-dualistic terminology for the purpose of soteriological transformation.

What Is the Madhyamaka Perspective?

- The Sanskrit word ‘madhyama’ or ‘madhyamaka’ means ‘middle’ or ‘middlemost’. If ‘madhyama’ is joined by ‘pratipad’ (way or path), the phrase ‘madhyamā pratipad’ figuratively means ‘middle way’. This should **not** be regarded as a position in the sense of a third position lying at a middle point between the two extremes. Neither does this mean a logocentric middle.
- It means a way or path that repudiates any set of extremes on both sides so as to allow the turning of related factors (dharmas) to proceed. In other words, **related factors operate along a way or path leaving various sets of extremes behind. Such a way or path can therefore be called ‘middle’.**

What Is the Madhyamaka Perspective?

- To have a perspective means to think about things or to look at whatever is perceivable—such as life, sentient beings, events, the world and so on—in a particular way.
- However, one can hardly become liberated with the same perspective that has gotten one caught up in polarized controversies and trapped in the flow of life.
- For Buddhism, a perspective tune up—seeing from the angles of **not-self** (anātman), **emptiness** (śūnyatā), **madhyamaka**, to name just a few—plays a crucial role in gaining insight into how the sentient world works, traveling on the Path to Liberation, or setting out on the Path to Perfect Enlightenment.

What Is the Madhyamaka Perspective?

- Thus construed, madhyamaka is more accurately understood as a **specific perspective** rather than as a certain school or sect such as the Mādhyamika school. It is worth noting that madhyamaka as a perspective is **never exclusive to the Mādhyamika school**. Indeed, Madhyamaka perspective can be found in most of the Buddhist sūtras.
- Although ‘madhyamaka’ literally means ‘middle’, Madhyamaka perspective should **not** be taken at face value to mean that **there is something out there called ‘the middle’ ready to be seen or apprehended**.

What Is the Madhyamaka Perspective?

- At least three steps are required to properly unpack and look into the Buddhist claim of the middle:
 1. non-dualistic cognition (a-dvaya-jñāna);
 2. process skills;
 3. thoroughly realizing both conditioned co-arising (or dependent co-arising) (pratītya-samutpāda) and cessation (nirodha) of related factors.

Language Scrutinized from the Madhyamaka Perspective

- The Madhyamaka perspective sees language not as about linguistic ability or linguistic intelligence that reinforces linguistically related stereotypes. Rather, it is about gaining a more thorough awareness of reality, the limitations of language in expressing this thorough reality, and how to overcome the limitations of language.
- If we believe we can fully express what we want to express, we will not realize that, on the one hand, sensual immediacy and critical thinking are severely limited by the languages available to us and, on the other hand, that thorough comprehension of reality may be distorted or hindered by the lens offered by established languages.

Language Scrutinized from the Madhyamaka Perspective

- at least the following three points may be offered as a useful guide to avoid the mistakes often made in understanding the nature of language.
 1. developing a critical understanding that thorough reality is altogether beyond the reach of language, designation or differentiating thinking, or dissociated from it.
 2. developing a critical understanding that what language brings about is at most a reduced, simplified, fabricated and even a distorted representation resulting from the mechanism of cognition.
 3. developing a critical understanding that, without proper observation and rigorous examination, language is neither a suitable window on the world, nor a reliable window on the mind.

Language as a Soteriological Instrument

- In the academic field of Buddhist studies, soteriology, the study of the doctrine of salvation, can be understood as a key theme in helping sentient beings rightly understand how the sentient world works and how to maintain or improve well-being in the ongoing life-process.
- In order for soteriology to be functional and effective, Buddhism has recourse to multiple paths of cultivation and various tools of soteriology, which are appropriate to the heterogeneous faculties and sentiments of sentient beings and are therefore conducive to the autonomous practices of prospective sentient beings.
- language can be an equally valid tool in Buddhist soteriological application.

Soteriological Transformation and Linguistic Transformation

- Buddhism shows at least two levels of linguistic adjustment in presenting its soteriological transformation to sentient beings:
 1. a non-authoritarian position on words and views;
 2. linguistic transformation.

A Transformative Approach to the Madhyamaka Expression of 'Neither a Dharma Nor a Not-Dharma'

1. Remarks on 'Neither a Dharma Nor a Not-Dharma'
2. Reasoning of 'Neither a Dharma Nor a Not-Dharma'
3. Creating a Soteriological Link with the Raft Simile
4. Facilitating an Overall Soteriological Transformation

Conclusion

Instead of considering the works of Nāgārjuna or other Mādhyamika thinkers, as most contemporary scholars tend to do, this article looks to language as an instrument of soteriological transformation from the Madhyamaka perspective mainly by drawing on such Buddhist scriptures as the Āgama/Nikāya collections, Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras, Lankāvatāra-sūtra and Mahā-parinirvāna-sūtra. In the philosophical discourses of Buddhist teachings, the major function of language is to serve as a guiding tool oriented toward soteriological goals.

Conclusion

As soteriology entails transformation, so too soteriological tools embody transformation. In the same manner, language undergoes transformation when used in a soteriological context. In brief, this article has demonstrated that, through a shift to a transformative approach, one can at least, to some extent, properly understand the innovative wisdom and soteriological strategies characteristic of such Madhyamaka expressions as ‘neither a dharma nor a not-dharma’ without casually labelling it as ‘a charter for paradox and irrationality’.

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.

Introduction

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.

Introduction

- 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.

Introduction

- 4. Ineffability:** Ineffability normally means incapability of being expressed 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.”**

The Reality of the World in the Context of Buddhist Teachings

- 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.
- Then, what is it that the Tathāgata has proclaimed as the reality of the world? ...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.

The Reality of the World in the Context of Buddhist Teachings

- 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.

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. 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.

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

- **The first strategy:** The operational framework of the two truths (satya-dvaya) incorporates both the reality of the world and linguistic convention.
 1. The first step is to cognize and understand linguistic convention (saṃvṛti- jñāna) instead of simply taking linguistic convention for granted.
 2. The second step is to understand that linguistic convention and the utmost meaning are not separated from each other.
 3. The third step is to understand the respective roles of linguistic convention and the utmost meaning.

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

- **The second strategy:** Verbal instruction relies mostly on linguistic convention rather than on the utmost meaning.
- **The third strategy:** The reality of the world remains ineffable.

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 śūraṅgama-samādhi – and insightful wisdom can take over to fill up.

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