

A Contemporary Application of Buddhist Worldview for Understanding and Transforming Sentient Beings

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Abstract

Based on the Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa and the discourse on worldviews therein, this paper examines the migration among abiding-places and the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places from the viewpoint of cyclic rebirth (saṃsāra). Foregrounding worldviews as its discursive landscape and acknowledging the diversity thereof in this world, this paper further discusses the challenges posed by the experience of different, and sometimes antagonistic, worldviews from the perspective of co-arising and mutual accomplishment to exemplify the inclusive characteristic of the Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa.

The Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa breaks down sentient beings' repeated births and deaths into the realm of sentient beings, eka-dharma-dhātu, and tathāgata-garbha, all of which are not only rooted in dharma-kāya, but, in their relation to the realm of sentient beings, also point the way to life-practice. Through life-practice, the suffering of repeated births and deaths is clearly recognized, and hence one had better not cling to any worldly abiding-places. By examining into the facts connected with cyclic rebirth, one can cultivate remarkable ability to detach oneself from any investment in worldly abiding-places and thus become liberated and at ease.

In addition to an examination of the abiding-places, the issue of how various worldviews should be cognized will also be explored. From the vantage point of eka-dharma-dhātu, first, the Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa examines the variety of worldviews from the angle of conditioned co-arising. Second, it channels those who firmly hold their preconceptions to mutual growth through its inclusive characteristic.

Key words: Worldview, Abiding-place, Inclusivism,
Co-arising and Mutual Accomplishment, *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*

Introduction

Based on the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* (*Buzeng bujian jing* 不增不減經) and the discourse on worldviews therein, this paper examines the migration among abiding-places and the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places from the viewpoint of cyclic rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Foregrounding worldviews as its discursive landscape and acknowledging the diversity thereof in this world, this paper further discusses the challenges posed by the experience of different, and sometimes antagonistic, worldviews from the perspective of co-arising and mutual accomplishment to exemplify the inclusive characteristic of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*.

The main textual source is the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* with the only Chinese edition translated by Bodhiruci in 525, which can be found in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka* (T 16, 466a–468a). Preliminary study regarding the sūtra in question has been published elsewhere and will not be repeated in this paper (Tsai 2004, 89–155).

This paper is comprised of seven sections. Section one, the introduction, opens with the main thesis of this inquiry and outlines the paper's approach to worldviews, while section two explains, in a general manner, the labels, definitions, formats, and varying assessments associated with discussions of worldviews. Section three expounds the formats and contents of worldviews elucidated in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*. Section four discusses how cyclic rebirth bears on and impacts the idea of abiding-places. In particular, it shows how defilements (*kleśa*), wrong views, *eka-dharma-dhātu*, *tathāgata-garbha*, and life-practice can all be labeled as abiding-places, thus expanding the understanding of the notion of abiding-places. Section five further expands the scope of analysis and directs attention to cyclic rebirth as well as migration among abiding-places to contemplate the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places. Section six critically examines multiple worldviews and section seven succinctly provides a synthesis of arguments presented in this paper.

Labels, Definitions, Formats and Contents of Worldviews

A discussion of migration among abiding-places and the relationship between

sentient beings and worldly abiding-places can start from the perspective of cyclic rebirth, which necessitates establishing a communication platform with other scholastic endeavors. To this end, the paper will engage in philosophical discourse on worldview (*Weltanschauung*).¹ There are two strands to the concept of worldview, which I shall analyze in the present and following sections. The first explores the cognition of worldview at the ordinary level, examining the labels, definitions, formats, and contents of worldviews, while in the latter, the formats and contents of Buddhist worldviews according to the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* will be elucidated.

Labels of Worldviews

After being simplified and stylized, a worldview system is commonly regarded as an ideology, such as theism, atheism, materialism, idealism, humanism, theocentrism, determinism, naturalism, hedonism, etc.² However, it is not good enough to be simply called an ideology. At least in philosophy, development and implementation of a philosophical worldview still rely on rigorous investigation, deliberation, reasoning, scrutiny, and criticism (Kearney 1995, 10; Sweetman 2007, 3).

Definitions of Worldviews

Worldview and philosophy are two closely connected concepts. When taking life and world as the subjects of scrutiny, beyond the specialized discourse within linguistics or literature, then, in the broadest sense, philosophy can be virtually the same as worldview.³

The so-called “world” in the term “worldview” neither refers to “earth” nor “universe,” nor is it exactly the same as what can be observed in the universe. Rather, it can be roughly referred to as the overarching environment which encapsulates the process of arising, living, functioning, and decaying experiences. When the reference is to the environment in which sentient beings perform existential activities, it can be called the “living world.” When the reference is to the domain of the biological life process of sentient beings, it can be called the “life-and-world.”

Worldviews are presented as cognitive, belief, or discursive constructs, which build an all-encompassing image of how the world is formed and

operates through a series of connected concepts, which themselves are based on living experiences, interpretations, views, and beliefs. In short, a worldview functions as a unified foundation to cognize the world.

The four characteristics that define worldviews are as follows: (1) Prior to any conceptual notions, worldviews act as pre-conscious experiences (Note et al. 2009, 1). (2) As integrating conceptual frameworks, worldviews consolidate haphazard phenomena or fragmented knowledge into systems which help one to comprehend events, experiences, and reality, thus enabling the creation of meaning and value in the world. (3) Worldviews can act like maps which provide information regarding one's goals so that one can more effectively interact with the world (Bertrand 2007, 32–33; Vroom 2006, 10). (4) Worldviews can even function like manuals which shape one's problem-solving approach, helping one not only recognize the problems in the world, but also come up with possible solutions.

Formats of Worldviews

The so-called “formats of worldviews” are in fact worldview questions. In other words, these are the series of questions that emerge when making further inquiries and investigations into life-and-world. Most of the questions are non-scientific, yet, this does not necessarily mean that these questions are un-scientific; they are major questions on life-and-world in philosophy.

Worldviews seek to answer the following kinds of questions: What is the world? Where did the whole world originate? Where will the world go? Is it possible that the world will become drastically different from the current situation we are experiencing? Is it necessary to change the world? How shall the world be changed to the right path? Is the world real? What are the sentient beings in the world? What are the life and death of sentient beings? What are the positions in which sentient beings situate? What places do sentient beings abide in the world? What should sentient beings do in the world? Is the world itself fundamentally monistic, dualistic, or pluralistic? What is the purpose, meaning, or value of the life-and-world?

Contents of Worldviews

The so-called “contents of worldviews” pertain to views, assertions, or doctrines

acquired and the process of thinking and reasoning which unfolds from the kinds of questions a worldview seeks to answer.

However, how are worldviews constructed? They are based on six items in philosophical activities to assemble and build a series of process in philosophical worldviews. First is to propose questions concerning the world. Second is to establish a particular perspective on the world thus, simultaneously asserting its horizon. Third is to reflect on and configure a conceptual system for making sense of the world. Fourth is to analyze the meaning of key concepts. Fifth is to distinguish the internal links among key concepts. Then through specialized scrutiny or deliberation, a system that is theoretically robust and shows a general view of the world can be formed. Sixth is to inspect the reasonableness and accuracy in reasoning, to respond to possible questions, to evaluate how effectively this system explains the world, and to estimate the mechanism in problem-solving.⁴

Formats and Contents of Worldviews in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*

Professional philosophy or religion has been actively engaged in the formation of worldviews. Likewise, many variations of Buddhist worldviews can be sorted out from Buddhist texts or schools.⁵ When taking the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* as an exemplar to expound on Buddhist worldviews, two features must be considered: formats and contents.

Formats of Buddhist Worldviews in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*

The *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* pays close attention to the process of life generated by sentient beings and comprehensively contemplates the reality of the life-and-world. Indeed, this sūtra reveals a unique take on the idea of worldview, which can be reconstructed from the perspective of philosophy of life.

There are at least six questions discussed in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*: (1) What is the situation of the life-and-world? (2) What is the reality of the life-and-world? (3) Where did the whole world originate? (4) Where will the world go? (5) Is the world itself fundamentally monistic, dualistic, or pluralistic? (6) In what situation does the life-and-world abide?

Contents of the Buddhist Worldviews in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*

A reasoning process and systematic doctrines, taken together, make up the “content of worldviews.” This section deals with the six questions listed earlier and outlines arguments elucidated in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*.

(1) The life-and-world is the all-connected sphere of experience within which all sentient beings appear in the six life-paths and the three realms of *saṃsāra* over and over again, remaining trapped therein through four modes of birth: from eggs, from wombs, from moisture, and from spontaneous generation.⁶

(2) If the reality of the life-and-world has to be described by any term, then *eka-dharma-dhātu* will surely be adequate. The first word, *eka*, means “thorough” (*ekatva; ekatā; ekāntena*), or “one flavored” (*eka-rasa*). The second word, *dharma*, is “the intersection of two concepts which are interchangeable: the arising and passing away of causes and conditions, and emptiness.” The third word, *dhātu*, means “the realm, sphere, factor, or perceptual base.” Therefore, the term *eka-dharma-dhātu* roughly means the coherent and thorough arena that is based on the principle of emptiness and manifests as the emergence and dissipation of causes and conditions of all dharmas.⁷ Along this line, there are three major points to be made concerning the life-and-world. First, the life-and-world is entirely coherent and thorough. Second, all phenomena in the life-and-world are not only fundamentally empty of their own-being, they also arise and pass away due to causes and conditions. Third, as a result of the emerging and disappearing of the causes and conditions, the life-and-world is not only interrelated but also thoroughly coherent.

(3) The life-and-world does not come from anywhere else, nor does it come from any alleged divine being. In reality, it is founded on emptiness and is the outcome of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions. As the foundation of the life-and-world, emptiness, corresponding to various and numerous combinations (bodies), is also called *dharma-kāya*, or the “the zero-order body.” However, the principal causes and conditions that continue to bring about sentient beings are referred to as “defilements,” i.e., the disturbances, stains or taints of the emotions. In other words, the life-and-world emerges out of *dharma-kāya*, emptiness, due to the arising and passing away of causes and conditions.⁸

In this regard, all “places,” that is, the manifestations of phenomena or

events, are merely temporary appearances on a continuum made observable by the flow of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions. This outlook does not posit an origin of the life-and-world, and furthermore, any alleged divine being either manifests as a kind of sentient being in the life-and-world, or is part of the closely-knit relationship among other sentient beings in the life-and-world. Therefore, a divine being cannot be presumed to be the origin of the life-and-world either.

(4) The life-and-world neither rushes toward any imagined end, nor does it turn into nothingness. Even when looking toward the future, whatever may become of the life-and-world still rests on the principle of emptiness. The future moves toward possible opportunities in the stream of living activities accumulated from all the prior causes and conditions while still remaining open to limitless possibilities of ever-changing causes and conditions. Furthermore, *tathāgata-garbha* (*tathāgata* within; containing *tathāgata*) is the resultant concept which signifies that all sentient beings contain the *tathāgata*, or that within each sentient being there is the *tathāgata* (Zimmermann 2002, 39–50). Due to the foundational concept of emptiness, the *tathāgata* neither comes from anywhere, nor will it go anywhere. It can be said to be the endless life of the *asaṃskṛta-dharmatā* (uncompounded reality; unconditioned reality). As for the “within” denoted by *garbha*, on the one hand, it represents the data stream produced by the endless living activities as well as the endless ever-changing stream of causes and conditions in the future. On the other hand, it also encompasses the endless process of flow as such. In short, the compound *tathāgata-garbha* connotes emptiness, the endless life that does not have any origin or a final destination. Therefore, when looking to the future, one should first recognize the main axis, which is the double-layered *tathāgata-garbha*: the endless life of uncompounded reality, and the manifestations of the compounded factors (*saṃskṛtā dharmāḥ*) in the process of life. In other words, “The *tathāgata-garbha* is equal in all *dharmas* and eternal unto the endless future.”⁹

In this regard, the life-and-world does not rush toward any place elsewhere. Rather, it is rooted in endless life, that is to say, in the endless process of life. By the same token, the life-and-world will not turn into nothing abruptly. The reason is because the foundation of the life-and-world is not absolute nothingness, but emptiness. Based on the notion that emptiness and conditioned co-arising can be switched each other, as long as the causes and

conditions suffice, the process of life will keep manifesting ceaselessly in the future.¹⁰

(5) The life-and-world will neither turn into a situation of indefinite separation, nor will hell and heaven become two totally separate realms without any intersection whatsoever. On the contrary, the life-and-world goes on continuously, repeating the endless cycle of the birth and death of sentient beings. Therefore, when trying to determine whether the foundation or tendency of the life-and-world is monistic, dualistic, or pluralistic, it is necessary to take into consideration the life and death of all sentient beings so as to form a thorough comprehension and view of reality. Life and death of all sentient beings is based on emptiness, which does not exhibit any substantiality. Therefore, there is no such thing as a fixed and ever-lasting life-and-world. In other words, it cannot be monistic. Furthermore, the totality of all sentient beings' experiences of life and death, i.e., the *dharmadhātu*, is rooted in the emptiness of the *dharmakāya*. Thus, all life and death, or the "places" occupied in experience, can be penetrated with the axis of *tathāgata-garbha*. As a result, the life-and-world is neither dualistic nor pluralistic. In short, the life-and-world is entirely devoid of substantiality or dividedness. It is neither monistic, nor dualistic, nor pluralistic. Rather, based on emptiness, it manifests as the network of arising and passing away of causes and conditions.

(6) The life-and-world does not abide in a dualistic way between the living and the lived. The reality of the life-and-world, the *ekadharmadhātu*, manifests as the process of life and network of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions, and lacks any dividedness between subjects and objects. As a result of discriminating cognition and oppositional concepts, the subject projects an externalized entity, an object, which is cognized as occupying a separate place or location from the subject. However, eying on the whole life-and-world, in reality, all places in which commonly thought of as being lived are manifestations of the arising and passing away of the causes and conditions. All places can be unfolded to the process of life and network of the *ekadharmadhātu*. The notion that the subject and the object abide in opposing territories is totally irrelevant to a worldview as such. If one has to ask "What is the situation in which the life-and-world abides?" then a reply will be "The life-and-world is the *ekadharmadhātu*, which cannot be differentiated into the duality of the living and the lived. Therefore, the life-and-world abides in

the *eka-dharma-dhātu*, and yet at the same time, it does not abide in the *eka-dharma-dhātu*.”¹¹

The Impact of Cyclic Rebirth on the Idea of Abiding-Places

On the question of the life-and-world, as mentioned previously, the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* reflects upon key concepts such as sentient beings, cyclic rebirth, the realm of sentient beings, *eka-dharma-dhātu*, *dharma-kāya*, and *tathāgata-garbha*. In light of (*ati*)*gambhīrārtha* (very profound meaning) or *paramārtha-satya* (the truth of the utmost meaning), it propounds such axial ideas as emptiness, non-dualism and life-practice.¹²

The Buddhist worldview entailed in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* is illuminated through the understanding of the cyclic rebirth of all sentient beings as rooted in emptiness and *dharma-kāya*. The life-and-world is characterized by the arising and passing away of causes and conditions; such arising from conditions lies in defilements and wrong views. Furthermore, the life-and-world can be unfolded into a coherent and thorough domain as *eka-dharma-dhātu*; its overarching characteristic is *tathāgata-garbha*; and its network is not only devoid of any substantiality, dividedness, or border, but also immeasurably works in all directions. Therefore, through diligent practice, one can, on the one hand, scrutinize and cease various conditions for the cyclic rebirth, while on the other, develop the necessary vision, erudite knowledge, broad experience, great ability and skillful techniques to proceed on the journey in the life-and-world without hindrance.¹³

The above-discussed Buddhist worldview can greatly impact how we view abiding-places. First and foremost, the abiding-place loses its primary role and then may be at most secondary in importance. In addition, the mediocre notion of the single, fixed or permanent abiding-place is replaced by that of constant migration among abiding-places, which will be discussed further in the next section. This section summarizes three radically distinctive views of abiding-places. First, to label defilements or wrong views which most average sentient beings take for granted as abiding-places; second, to mark *eka-dharma-dhātu* or *tathāgata-garbha* as abiding-places; third, to label life-practice as an abiding-place.

In sum, defilements, wrong views, *eka-dharma-dhātu*, *tathāgata-garbha*, and

even life-practice can all be regarded as abiding-places in general. The Buddhist worldview as such can expand the concept of abiding-places to a multiple vista, broaden the notion of abiding-places, while also making abiding-places the entry point for entering life-and-world as a life-practitioner.

Pondering the Relationship between Sentient Beings and Worldly Abiding-Places from the Perspective of Migration among Abiding-Places

The Buddhist worldview expounded by the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* shows that the “world” is not simply an isolated place. When considering the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places, it is not necessarily the case that one will be locked into any specific abiding-place. Rather, a prior consideration on locating the “place of places” is in fact possible (Vaught 2004, 105). In other words, locating the place in question under the context of layers and layers of places to serve as the reference should be the first step in the whole process.

In moving from the foundational to the superficial, four different layers can be labeled when locating the place of places. The most foundational layer is based on *dharma-kāya*, which manifests as numerous processes of life. Second, the numerous processes of life generate the innumerable defilements or wrong views that serve as the key related conditions that facilitate ceaseless cyclic rebirth. Third, the flux of data created, accumulated, and left behind as a product of the process of life during cyclic rebirth, as well as the defilements and wrong views which have emerged as a result, are different in each individual and in each lifetime. Fourth, regardless of the destination or the location created, only after the “abiding” or “residing” discourse is focalized can the conception of “abiding-places” be formed.

In addition to locating “places” or “abiding-places,” the foregoing four layers can also be used to ponder the relationship between sentient beings and “worldly abiding-places.” Sentient beings move along the journey of the cyclic rebirth, while the “repeated births and deaths” function like major traffic routes. By the same token, all the assigned or designated “abiding-places” are not unlike stopover places along the traffic routes, such as airports, harbors, or train stations. Traveling from one stop to another is not unlike traveling from

one abiding-place to another. This is what is implied by the idea of migration among abiding-places.

When reflecting on worldly abiding-places, the migration among abiding-places during cyclic rebirth, and the relationship between sentient beings and abiding-places, three ideas related to worldviews become evident:

First, one is to cognize sentient beings and worldly abiding-places on a grand scale. Along the axis of time, “since time without a beginning” indicates there are periods of time other than this lifetime. Across the axis of space, “through the six states of existence in the three realms of *saṃsāra*” shows other states of existence such as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, Asuras, Devas, the realm of form and the formless realm, in addition to that of human beings in the realm of desire. Furthermore, one must consider “all sentient beings” “through the four modes of birth,” that is to say, all sentient beings entering life-and-world whether egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, or transformation-born.¹⁴

Second, one is to dynamically inspect the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places. Regardless of the scale, all that concerns sentient beings and worldly abiding-places is transitory and dependent on the causes and conditions that are in constant flux. Consequently, views that do not acknowledge such flux are most likely on shaky ground or even erroneous.

Third, one is to consider the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places along the axis of the cyclic rebirth. Just because sentient beings and worldly abiding-places are transitory does not mean that all that has occurred is haphazard, random, or chance happenings. The reason sentient beings and worldly abiding-places are transitory lies in the arising and passing away of causes and conditions. To assert the primordial origin and final destination of sentient beings without being cognizant of the axis of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions will entail a superficial and very limited grasp of reality.

There are at least three reasons why, instead of the abiding-places, cyclic rebirth of sentient beings must be the principal source of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions. First, all sentient beings “wander through the six states of existence in the three realms of *saṃsāra*.” All sentient beings keep looking for the direction or destination in all segments among cyclic rebirth in any state of existence or realm. Second, the process of cyclic rebirth, as opposed to any specific abiding-place, encapsulates the entirety of sentient beings’

activities, especially those of mental activities or accumulated effects that would strongly and deeply influence sentient beings' destinations in life. For instance, after a long period of incubation, defilements or wrong views produce further actions, that is to say, further causes and conditions. It is "due to these causes and conditions that sentient beings fall in this lifetime into the miserable states of existence."¹⁵ Third, whatever mentality had been projected onto the life-and-world or the effects accumulated by sentient beings, these will continue to have ramifications in the future. For example, if a person keeps behaving badly or keeps grasping wrong views, then the related conditions might very well drive that person into a place full of peril or suffering.¹⁶

From what has been established above, it may therefore be concluded that worldly abiding-places are merely "derivative products" of cyclic rebirth, or a temporary stopover. In fact, the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* frees up the mechanism of the cyclic rebirth of all sentient beings by elucidating concepts such as the realms of all sentient beings, *eka-dharma-dhātu*, and *tathāgata-garbha* and demonstrating that these concepts are in reality all rooted in *dharmakāya* and thus channel toward life-practice. After practicing and cultivating life, one will gain insight into the perplexity of the cyclic rebirth so as to avoid attaching to any abiding-places. As a result, when confronted by worldly abiding-places and cyclic rebirth, one can develop and cultivate the ability to reach and master all necessary skills and become free from all bondages.¹⁷

On Multiple Worldviews

After adopting the notion of worldview as the theme of this paper, and since the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* makes clear reference to other views, at least two questions arise. First, is there any contradiction between the *eka-dharma-dhātu* Buddhist worldview and the fact of multiple worldviews in this world? Second, how does the Buddhist worldview which proclaims *eka-dharma-dhātu* relate to other views so as not to efface or contradict each other?

Treating Multiple Worldviews from the Perspective of Conditioned Co-Arising

The basis for the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* to advocate *eka-dharma-dhātu* lies

in ideas such as emptiness and non-dualism. It is the view that the number of sentient beings in cyclic rebirth either increases or decreases that is considered to be a misconception. For this wrong view will generate other wrong views such as absolute annihilation, complete extinction in nirvāṇa, that there is a beginning of its arising in nirvāṇa, that things happen without any causes or conditions, etc.¹⁸ This prompts another question: How is the *eka-dharma-dhātu* advocated by the Buddhist worldview to be compared with other worldviews? This question can be approached from three different levels: “reality,” “convention,” and “the truth.”

The First Key Point Lies in Reality That Investigates the Being-ness of Worldviews

What is under scrutiny is the so-called “pluralism in worldview” that considers multiple worldviews with the same importance although they are not compatible with one another. On the other hand, the “monism in worldview” insists that there is only one worldview in the world. All the others are either devoid of their substantiality or fictitious.

However, according to the *Anūnatvāpūṃśatva-nirdeśa*, the following three arguments are worth noting. First, based on the coherent and thorough nature of emptiness and non-dualism, in reality, there is no fixed existence of living individuals, realm of sentient beings, worldview, nor is there dividedness among various items. Therefore, to apprehend the substantial existence of any worldview, or to adhere to either pluralism or monism concerning existence, would be a grave violation of the emptiness in reality. Second, as stated earlier, the *eka* (one) in *eka-dharma-dhātu* does not refer to anything quantifiable or fixed. Rather, it refers to the state of coherence, thoroughness, and sameness. Third, the proclamation of the *eka-dharma-dhātu* Buddhist worldview does not construct the *eka-dharma-dhātu* or worldview into a fixed substantial entity in the world. Instead, it provides a way to observe what arises or disappears as it really is so as to cognize the process of living experiences, to understand the reason why there is neither increase nor decrease in sentient beings, and to elicit discursive constructs.¹⁹ These three points could demonstrate that even if the Buddhist worldview of *eka-dharma-dhātu* is co-located with as many other worldviews, it would not one-sidedly fall into “pluralism,” nor would it incline to “monism.”

The Second Key Point Draws on Convention to Investigate the Mechanism Active in the Production of Worldviews

Even though in reality there are no fixed worldviews, this does not create obstacles for emergence of any worldview. Conventionally, depending on however many related conditions, there will be however many of whatever resultant worldviews.

The so-called “produced in accordance with the convergence of related conditions,” or “co-arising through causes and conditions,” i.e., *pratītyasamutpāda* (conditioned co-arising), is one of the important basic concepts in Buddhism.²⁰ The concept of *samutpāda* connotes combination, and emphasizes the state of being in production. Due to its focus on production, it cannot be identified with a static, fixed existence or entity. Rather, it is about the process of transformation during production. In highlighting “combination,” it does not identify any thing as a closed system. Along the line of transformation, depending on the combinations of the related conditions, things will keep unfolding.

Whether examining the Buddhist worldview of *eka-dharma-dhātu* or any other worldviews, it is possible to see that they are all the results of conditioned co-arising. In addition to viewing the diversity of worldviews from the perspective of conditioned co-arising, analysis of their formats and contents will help illuminate the process of their production, common ground among them in format, as well as the differences in contents. This makes it possible to discuss the presentation, similarities, and differences in worldviews according to the principle of conditioned co-arising, but also to discern a way for all sentient beings to live more harmoniously with each other. In the final analysis, all worldviews arise in accordance with the mechanism of conditioned co-arising, therefore, there is no substantial existence or dividedness, and, ultimately, no “pluralism of worldviews.”

The Third Key Point Focuses on the Idea “Truth” to Investigate the Correctness of Worldviews

One of the main missions in proposing worldviews is to elucidate the situation of sentient beings, solve problems, or direct the possible solutions in the life-and-world with ideas and doctrines. However, at least three existing common

practices have distorted this mission. First is the adherence to “monism,” which insists that there is only one truth. This entails the “exclusivism” which leads to identifying enemies, making derogatory remarks, attacking, and trampling upon others. The second, “pluralism” or “blind co-arising belief,” wrongly asserts that all worldviews are of their own-beings, that is to say, are fixed entities in the world, and are all equally effective.²¹ The third asserts that all worldviews, regardless of their particular attributes, are merely beliefs, ideologies, and subjective opinions which bear no correctness at all.

It will not only be unfair but also blind to consider all worldviews are as bad as the one that exhibits nothing else but dogmatic beliefs. Consequently, philosophical discernment is required to investigate their correctness, and to extract the “vector of truth” therein.

Co-arising through causes and conditions seems to be a useful method for uncovering the truth when investigating the correctness of worldviews. Observation of the world is the most crucial aspect of this approach. Nearly all human activities can be taken as opportunities for observing the phenomena of conditioned co-arising. This requires that one first establish the skill of perceiving and recognizing the process and network of conditioned co-arising as much as possible and draw a thorough reasoning, insight, and discourse. Second, one must reflect on, inspect, and critically review the discourse and argumentation particular to a worldview. These two skills make it possible that the life-and-world be cognized in a more correct manner by means of the worldview.²²

In sum, the perspective of conditioned co-arising works very well in discerning multiple worldviews. It can avoid being ensnared in the dichotomy of “monism” and “pluralism,” and can enable one to comprehend that there is no substantial existence or dividedness in the life-and-world or in worldviews themselves. In this manner, it provides a glimpse into the truth of discourse on the life-and-world.

Facing Those Insisting on Their Preconceived Views by way of Inclusivism and Working Toward Mutual Accomplishment

From the perspective of conditioned co-arising, it is clear that multiple worldviews are mutually connected and equal only because they are subject to its principle of interdependence. In other words, each worldview is completely

devoid of its own-being, and does not fixedly or permanently possess any place in the world.

Once the fact is recognized that a function of the worldview is to explain situations, solve problems or direct solutions in the world, it is less likely that the worldview will become something that sentient beings simply believe in or attached to blindly. Furthermore, it would be even less likely to become the excuse for creating hatred or eliminating “the others.” When a worldview is in oblivion regarding the thoroughly accessible network that it creates a large amount of absolute existence of individual beings, or considers relative concepts as substantially divided, then it will not only be alienated from the real situation of life-and-world, but also be inclined to linger around self-enclosed terms of judgment and discrimination. Without recognizing such absurdity, yet determined to believe in that kind of worldview, the worldview thus elicited is the so-called *icchāntika*.²³

A question can be raised: According to the Buddhist worldview of the *ekadharma-dhātu*, what kind of systematic policy can be employed when dealing with those who insist on their preconceived views? Below is a passage from the *Anūnatvāpūṇatva-nirdeśa*:

As for the view of increase and the view of decrease, Śāriputra, Buddha-Tathāgatas forever stay far away from these two wrong views. Both are denounced by Buddha-Tathāgatas. Śāriputra, if, among *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās*, there are those who hold either or both of these dualistic views, Buddha-Tathāgatas will not be their World-Honored Ones. They are not my disciples. Śāriputra, because of these dualistic views, these people will go from gloom into gloom, from dark into dark. I say that they are called *icchāntikas*. Therefore, Śāriputra, you all should learn this Dharma to convert sentient beings, enabling them to keep away from these dualistic views and to stay on the right path. Śāriputra, you should also learn this Dharma, to keep away from these dualistic views and to stay on the right path. (T 16, 467c)

How, then, can one approach various phenomena of worldviews, so as to avoid this unfortunate situation? A series of strategies are offered below.

(1) The most important item in a worldview lies in the truth vector. First of all, Buddhist practitioners should give all their might to observe the life-and-world and the process of life, comprehend the meaning of neither increase nor

decrease, so as not to fall into either side of any dichotomy, and thoroughly abide in the right path in life. Second, one should pursue the truth as such, and should not follow trends blindly. It is advised to stay away from dichotomous views, and from considering reality with dividedness. Otherwise, to hold such views is to be neither a true practitioner of Buddhism, nor a true disciple of the Buddha.

(2) No sentient beings are born evil nor remain evil eternally. First of all, the empty *dharmakāya* manifests as the limitless process of life through conditioned co-arising. Therefore, the resultant life-forms are strikingly diversified. Second, produced from various combinations, dichotomized views are not fixed in this world, nor are they fixed in any sentient being. Third, some sentient beings hold on to dualistic views, which lead to layers and layers of opposing concepts and obscure the reality of the life-and-world. Such sentient beings are eventually ensnared in the net woven with preconceived views of opposing concepts and are thus referred to as *icchāntikas* or “those who are attached to their own preconceived views.” All the links in this series emerge out of conditioned co-arising. In short, there does not exist anyone who is in his or her own-being locked in his or her preconceived views. The life-and-world, dichotomized views, and sentient beings all are the results of conditioned co-arising.

(3) It is important to treat those who hold strongly to their preconceived views with “inclusivism” in the quest for long-term cultivation with a view to mutual growth. Since one of the major reasons for becoming misguided sentient beings lies in the forming of and attaching to wrong views, one should not make derogatory remarks about others or decry them. One should instead focus on problem solving. Second, the key to planning and looking for the life journey ahead, in other words, to thoroughly comprehending ideas and escaping from the gloomy lives of misguided sentient beings, lies in putting the process of life and network of conditioned co-arising into good use. In other words, by practicing, one helps oneself. Then, when one helps others, then one makes a contribution to the world. Third, the Buddha asked that: “You all should learn this Dharma to convert sentient beings, enabling them to keep away from these dualistic views and to stay on the right path.” When encountering people who are attached to their own preconceived views, in addition to pointing out their mistakes therein, one should exemplify “inclusivism,”²⁴ to make proper use of the opportunity according to

conditioned co-arising, to re-direct them to focus on the arising and passing away of causes and conditions in the life-and-world and the process of life. As sentient beings learn to observe as such, and to contemplate according to the Dharma, none would find sustenance in various ideologies nor wish to keep on living without right views. After staying on the path to mutually developing life wisdom, the wrong worldviews dispel for lack of adequate causes or conditions, and stubborn ways are finally transformed.

Conclusion

A discussion of migration among abiding-places and the relationship between sentient beings and worldly abiding-places from the perspective of cyclic rebirth occasions the establishment of a discursive common ground from which to engage with other scholarly endeavors, particularly the philosophical understanding of the worldview.

“Worldviews” are based on living experiences, interpretations, views, and beliefs to construct a holistic imagery or vista as a unified foundation to cognize the world. The series of questions raised when investigating the life-and-world are the “formats of worldviews.” Accordingly, a series of thinking and reasoning are made, and the views, assertions, and doctrines elicited are the “contents of worldviews.”

By focusing on the process of life manifested by all sentient beings, and in order to position the experiences of sentient beings in the life-and-world within the most comprehensive cognition of reality, the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* presents us with an overarching worldview which encompasses many abiding-places, such as the realm of sentient beings, defilements, wrong views, *eka-dharma-dhātu*, *tathāgata-garbha*, and even life-practice.

The Buddhist worldview expounded by the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* can be summarized as follows:

1. The life-and-world is the all connected sphere of experience within which all sentient beings appear in the six life-paths and the three realms of *saṃsāra* over and over again through four modes of birth: from eggs, from wombs, from moisture, and from spontaneous generation.
2. The reality of the life-and-world can be expressed as *eka-dharma-dhātu*.

3. Based on emptiness, the life-and-world is the outcome of the arising and passing away of causes and conditions.
4. The compound *tathāgata-garbha* connotes emptiness, on the one hand, as the endless life of uncompounded reality, on the other hand, as the manifestations of the compounded factors in the process of life.
5. In reality, the life-and-world is entirely devoid of substantiality or dividedness. It is neither monistic, nor dualistic, nor pluralistic. Rather, based on emptiness, it manifests as the network of arising and passing away of causes and conditions.
6. The life-and-world abides in the *eka-dharma-dhātu*, and yet at the same time, it does not abide in the *eka-dharma-dhātu*.

The Buddhist worldview as such can expand the concept of abiding-places to a multiple vista, broaden the notion of abiding-places, while also making abiding-places the entry point for entering life-and-world as a life-practitioner. After practicing and cultivating life, one will gain insight into the perplexity of the cyclic rebirth so as to avoid attaching to any abiding-places. As a result, when confronted by worldly abiding-places and cyclic rebirth, one can develop and cultivate the ability to reach and master all necessary skills and become free from all bondages. Then, such a worldview proceeds on a path in the pursuit of mutual accomplishment even when challenged by those who insist on their own preconceived views.

Notes

- 1 The concept of worldview in the history of Western thought can be traced to Immanuel Kant. Other than being discussed in philosophy, the concept of worldview has been widely used in fields such as theology, anthropology, counseling, and education (Naugle 2002, especially 55–67).
- 2 For example, Naugle (2002, 331–339) points out that other than its beneficial side, the worldview pertains dangers in philosophy, theology, and spirituality.
- 3 On the relationship between worldview and religion, see Wolters (1989, 14–25).
- 4 See Creel (2001, 43–52: Chapter 6, “Methods for Doing Philosophy”); Martinich (2005, 49–64: Chapter 3, “The Structure of Philosophical Essay”).
- 5 On Buddhist worldviews, see Kakol (2002, 207–223); Goetghebeur (1999, 145–156); Wallace (2002, 34–50).
- 6 Since time without a beginning, sentient beings have been transmigrating, through the four modes of birth, to and fro along the six life-paths in the three realms of existence, suffering endlessly in life and death (T 16, 466a).
- 7 It is advised not to comprehend the first word, *eka*, as a substantial thing such as “the only one” or “absolute” so as not to contradict its fundamental meaning of arising and passing away due to causes and conditions, and emptiness (Shiu 2006, 90–91).
- 8 This very *dharmā-kāya* is called the realm of beings (*sattva-dhātu*) when it is concealed by a sheath of boundless afflictions, wandering repeatedly through births and deaths in beginningless *saṃsāra*, buffeted by the waves of *saṃsāra* (T 16, 467b).
- 9 “*Aparānta-koṭi-samas tathāgata-garbho dbruva-dbrmatā-saṃvidyamānatā.*” The *tathāgata-garbha*, in its existence as the *dharmatā*, is eternal (*dbruva*) and is equal (*sama*) through and through till the boundary of the future (*aparānta-koṭi*) (Shiu 2006, 147; 157–158; 279).
- 10 The *tathāgata-garbha* is equal in all *dharmas* and eternal unto the endless future. It is the root of all *dharmas*, complete and replete with all *dharmas*, and it is not apart or removed from the true reality of all worldly *dharmas*. It holds all *dharmas* and encompasses all *dharmas* (T 16, 467c).
- 11 Pertaining to this refuge of inconceivable pure *dharmā-dhātu*, which has neither birth nor death, always cool, never changing, I pronounce that it be called sentient beings. Why? Sentient beings are in effect the refuge which has neither birth nor death, permanent, eternal, cool, and changeless. They are a different name of the inconceivable pure *dharmā-dhātu*. According to this meaning, the pure *dharmā-dhātu* is called sentient beings (T 16, 467c).
- 12 *Paramārtha-satya* means unpacking the utmost meaning so as to reveal the correct reasoning. It is not confined in a brief, narrowed, superficial, opposing, or conventional scale or situation (Tsai 2011, 159–183).
- 13 Śāriputra, this very *dharmā-kāya* is called a bodhisattva when it is disillusioned with

the sufferings of the stream of *saṃsāra* and is detached from all the experiential objects of desire and engages in the practice aimed at enlightenment through the mass of eighty-four thousand doctrines (*dharmā*) which are subsumed by the ten perfections. Śāriputra, this very *dharmā-kāya* is called the *tathāgata*, *arhat*, *samyak-sambuddha* when it has become free from the sheath of all the afflictions, has passed beyond all sufferings, has eliminated the stains of all the subsidiary afflictions, purified, utterly purified, and, abiding in the other side of the supremely pure reality (*dharmatā*) and reaching the level which all beings wish for, has attained the peerless, heroic strength with regards all knowable things and has realized mastering power over all phenomena without any obscuration and any obstruction in nature (T 16, 467b).

- 14 Since time without a beginning, sentient beings have been transmigrating, through the four modes of birth, to and fro along the six states of existence in three realms, suffering endlessly in life and death (T 16, 466a).
- 15 Beings who embrace this [false] opinion are like the congenitally blind and cannot see the true nature of things. Hence they are involved in improper behavior for a very long time, following a false path. Due to these causes and conditions, sentient beings fall in this lifetime into the miserable states of existence (T 16, 466b).
- 16 Because of rigidly adhering to this perverse opinion, beings are involved in improper behavior for a very long time, following a false path. For this reason, they fall in future lifetimes into the miserable states of existence (T 16, 466b).
- 17 Śāriputra, this very *dharmā-kāya* is called a bodhisattva when it is disillusioned with the sufferings of the stream of *saṃsāra* (*saṃsāra-sroto-duḥkha-nirvīṇo*) and is detached from all the experiential objects of desire (*viraktaḥ sarva-kāma-viṣayebhyo*) and engages in the practice aimed at enlightenment through the mass of eighty-four thousand doctrines (*dharmā*) which are subsumed by the ten perfections (T 16, 467b).
- 18 Absolute annihilation takes things to come to an absolute annihilation after death while another misconception considers things to come to complete extinction after *nirvāṇa* (T 16, 466c).
- 19 “This profound meaning is in the realm of the *tathāgata*’s wisdom. It is also in the action field of the *tathāgata*’s mind” (T 16, 467a). It highlights the extremely profound meaning of *eka-dharma-dhātu* which does not rely on any existential thing or entity but in the exercise of mind that entails the observation, perception and recognition of the reality as such. “From this neither varying nor changing *dharmā* of true suchness, one never elicits the two extremely evil, unwholesome wrong views. Why? Because one sees in accord with true reality” (T 16, 467c). It stresses neither the increasing nor the decreasing views that fall into the wrong views of dichotomy, which are devoid of their own-being in this world. Therefore, as long as one constantly practices and sees the thorough reality as such, one would not elicit any dichotomized views.
- 20 *pratītya* (*prati-i-tya*): having moved toward; depending on *sam-ut-pāda*: co-arising; coming into existence together *pratītya-samutpāda*: an event or phenomenon as a whole

that has arisen depending on causes and conditions.

- 21 Therein lies a key difference between pluralism and inclusivism: an inclusivist privileges one tradition, keeping it primary, and absorbs something foreign into that tradition. Pluralism, in contrast, is more of a “separate but equal” or “different strokes for different folks” position. Pluralists with respect to salvation “think that all religions are equally effective in bringing salvation about” (Kiblinger 2005, 2).
- 22 On the truth vector of multiple religions, see Sweetman (2007, 141–156; 163–164: Chapter 8, “Religious Diversity: Is There a True Religion?”).
- 23 Derived from the root \sqrt{is} , this word has two main meanings: one is to recognize and insist; and the other is to desire and covet. In the context of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa*, the former definition is more suitable for this paper. The etymology of this word is still under debate. The two more popular explanations are as follows. (1) The present participle of \sqrt{is} becomes *icchant*, and then a suffix of *ika* is added. (2) The female noun expressing desire becomes *icbhā*, and a suffix of *anta* or *antika* is added. And then, the *ā* in the middle of the word is dropped into a normal *a*. See discussion in Karashima (2002, 148–151).
- 24 See Kiblinger (2005, 1–11: Chapter 1, “Why Buddhist Inclusivism?”).

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