

# On the Middle Way in Yogācāra Buddhism

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It is an unchangeable truth that the Middle way is a basic tenet in Buddhist thoughts. In primitive Buddhism, or in Buddha's own teaching, the Middle way (*majjhimapatipadā*) was represented as the Eight-Noble-Truth, and in Mahāyāna, especially in Nāgārjuna's system it is expressed as follows: one who realizes the *pratityasamutpāda* (緣起) is a true practiser of the Middle way.

In Yogācāra Buddhism, which represents the most complete result of philosophical development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, also the Middle way has an important role in its system. It is named as "the Middle way of Yogācāra" or "the Middle way of *Vijñapti-mātra*" (唯識中道) by the Buddhist historians. I wish to discuss here, the meaning of the Middle way in Mahāyāna-yogācāra Buddhism.

In Yogācāra Buddhism, it is "the three natures of the beings" or *tri-svabhāvatā* and "the three nature of non-nature of the beings" or *tri-niḥsvabhāvatā* that support the Middle-way-thought. In order to understand completely these thoughts, we have to trace the path of its historical development.

At first let us take up the *tri-svabhāva* and *niḥsvabhāva* theory in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (解深密經), which represents the first *yogācāraic* work. In the fourth chapter of this *sūtra*, named "All aspects of beings" (一切法相), we see the first description of it as follows: "There are three aspects (*lakṣaṇa*) of things (*bhāva*) ; 1) an aspect of sole imagination (*parikalpita-lakṣaṇa* 遍計所執相), 2) an aspect of dependent origination (*paratantra-lakṣaṇa* 依他起相), and 3) a complete and perfect real aspect (*pariṇiṣpanna-lakṣaṇa* 圓成實相<sup>(1)</sup>).

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(1) Taishō-shinshū-Daizōkyō, Vol. XVI, p. 693. a.

According to the explanation in this sūtra, the first aspect, parikalpitalakṣaṇa, is the imaginary and delusive aspect which clings to hold the realistic self in the dependent-originating-beings; the second aspect, paratantralakṣaṇa, is that all beings (sarvadharmas) in this triple world have originated depending upon each other, and the last one, pariniṣpannalakṣaṇa is the complete and perfect aspect of beings that appear as soon as all obstacles of man are taken away.

In the fifth chapter, named "The aspect of non-nature of beings" (無自性相品) in the same sūtra, tri-niḥsvabhāvatā is described as follows: "I preach to you, Paramārthotpatti, that all beings (sarvadharmas) do not have their own realistic natures by depending upon tri-niḥsvabhāvatā..... "the nature of non-nature of aspect" or lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā, "the nature of non-nature of origination" or utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā, and "the nature of non-existence in the highest sense" or paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā<sup>(2)</sup>".

The first one, lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā is told as concerning the parikalpitalakṣaṇa. As parikalpitalakṣaṇa is manifested only through the imaginary of false sense, the things have no such aspect in reality. The utpattiniḥsvabhāva is told as concerning paratantralakṣaṇa, and the last is said as concerning pariniṣpannalakṣaṇa.

Thus the thought of the three natures and non-natures of beings in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra consists of an explanation of all beings that have originated depending upon certain cause or "hetu (因)" and condition or "pratyaya (緣)" but it seems that it does not have direct connection with vijñāna-system.

Secondly, I would like to discuss the thought in the Yogācārabhūmi (瑜伽師地論) which is an encyclopaedia of yogācāraic Buddhism in India. According to the Yogācārabhūmi, parikalpitasvabhāva is divided into five kinds<sup>(3)</sup>, but its contents almost coincide with the description the former sūtra. The explanation of paratantra and pariniṣpanna in this śāstra also almost resembles that in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra. So we understand that tri-svabhāva and niḥsvabhāva thoughts in the Yogācārabhūmi have not been accom-

(2) Taishō, Vol. XVI. p. 694, a.

plished yet, as a complete system, although it develops the contents in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra.

Next we have to consider the Mahāyānasamgraha (攝大乘論) written by Asaṅga (無著) to understand the next step of the tri-svabhāva and niḥsvabhāva-thought. In the third chapter named "The nature of the cognizable" (所知相品) in the Mahāyānasamgraha, the author Asaṅga says as follows: "What is the parikalpitasvabhāva? ..... It is the consciousness or vijñāna, of which its seed (bīja 種子) is ālayavijñāna, and which is caused by false-thought-construction of abhūta-parikalpa<sup>(4)</sup>. We find the tri-svabhāva-thought connecting with the ālayavijñāna-thought in this work. That is, according to this, parikalpitasvabhāva is the vijñāna, whose seed is ālayavijñāna and which is caused by a false-thought-construction.

In concrete, they are the consciousness of body (身識), the consciousness of an enjoyer (受者識), the consciousness of an enjoyable (所受識) and the rest. These vijñānas are impressed in the ālayavijñāna by the three impressional forces or vāsanā (熏習), abhilāpavāsanā (名言熏習), ātmaḍṛṣṭivāsanā (我見熏習) and bhavāṅgavāsanā (有支熏習), which manifest the false-thought-construction. Thus all vijñānas do not have their own selves but abhūta-parikalpa (虛妄分別). Therefore it is named paratantrasvabhāva.

The paratantra, which was treated from the view of pratītyasamutpāda-theory in the Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra and the Yogācārabhūmi, is treated here only through its connection with the ālayavijñāna-thought. It is as said in this śāstra: "What is the paratantrasvabhāva? ..... It is one which appears resembling the objects that do not exist really but vijñāna"<sup>(5)</sup>.

The last nature is one which manifests depending upon paratantra, and when parikalpita is taken away by paratantra, it appears. Therefore these three natures are neither different nor non-different from each other.

Lastly I shall deal with the three natures and non-natures theory in the Triṃśikā (唯識三十頌) which was written by Vasubandhu (世親 310-400), and represented the most systematical thought of Yogācāra Buddhism

(3) Taishō, Vol. XXX, p. 703, b—c.

(4) Ed. by G. Sasaki, p. 29.

in India. The Triṃśikā says about parikalpita as follows: “All things which are falsely discriminated by false-<sup>(6)</sup>imagination, are the nature of the sole imagination, and this does not exist.

According to the commentary on it by Sthiramati (安慧), all the eight vijñānas which belong to the saṃskṛta (有爲), are the active discrimination (能遍計). But Dharma-pāla (護法), who also make his commentary on it, says that the sixth and the seventh vijñānas which cling to self or ātman (我) and Elements or dharma (法) are the active discriminations.

Further the paratantra and pariniṣpanna are mentioned in the Triṃśikā as follows: “The false discrimination is paratantra. The one which transcends from the former is the perfect and complete nature<sup>(7)</sup>”.

In these two, paratantra is the citta (心) and caittasika (心所) which are given rise to by hetupratyaya (因緣), samanantarapratyaya (等無間緣), ālambanapratyaya (所緣緣) and adhipateyapratyaya (增上緣). The part of the cognizer (見分) and the part of the cognized (相分) which have risen from these two belong to paratantra.<sup>(8)</sup>

The pariniṣpanna is explained in the same verse. It is perfection and completion of all beings which manifest themselves through realizing “both śūnyatā of man or pudgala and existence or dharma (人法二空)”. It is the true nature of all beings or dharmatā, accomplishment or siddhānta. Two śūnyatās are realized for us only when we can transcend our false imagination to the realistic self. When we attain to the asaṃskṛta (無爲), separating from the saṃskṛta, there manifests the absolute truth or tathalā (眞如) which is not subjected to growth, destruction, increase or decrease. That is, it is the pariniṣpanna which is manifested by two śūnyatās of man and existence. It is said in the Triṃśikā: “Therefore it is neither completely different from paratantra, nor non-different from it<sup>(9)</sup>”.

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(5) *ibid.*

(6) Triṃśikā, K. 20.

(7) Triṃśikā, K. 21.

(8) Taishō, Vol. XXXI, p. 46, b.

(9) Triṃśikā, K. 22.

Next we have to consider the *niḥsvabhāva*-theory in the same work. It is said in the 23rd verse as follows: “Basing on the three *niḥsvabhāvatās* of the three *svabhāvatās*, Bhagavat has preached the *niḥsvabhāvatā* of all <sup>(10)</sup>dharmas”.

The first *svabhāva* is the *niḥsvabhāva*, because its natures do not exist. For the second, it is another *niḥsvabhāvatā*, because it does not rise by itself. <sup>(11)</sup>It is the *paramārtha* of Dharmas; it is the *tathatā*, because it is immovable; it is the *Vijñapti-mātratā* <sup>(12)</sup>(唯識性).

The three *niḥsvabhāvatās* are *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā*, *utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā* and *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*. In these, the *parikalpita* is *niḥsvabhāvatā*, because, like a flower of the sky, it has no substance and no essence. Therefore *lakṣaṇa* means *parikalpita*, and on account of that, non-existence of *parikalpita* is *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā* (相無自性性).

The *paratantrasvabhāva* is the *utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā* (生無自性性), because, like an imagination, it arises always with the reason of causes. So it does not exist by itself or *asvayambhāva*.

The *pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva* is *paramārthaniḥsvabhāva* (勝義無自性性), because this *niḥsvabhāvatā* is obtained by transcending the falsely-imagined *ātman* and *dharma*, and there is no realistic thing at all. Consequently the *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* is the synonym of the *tathatā* (眞如), *dharma-dhātu* (法界) and *bhūtaakoṭi* (實際). This is named “*Vijñapti-mātratā*”.

Thus from the above discussion of the three natures and non-natures-theory in the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, the *Yogācarabhūmi*, the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the *Triṃśikā* along with the commentaries by *Sthiramati* and *Dharmapāla*. In conclusion, we can understand what forms the Middle way in *Yogācāra Buddhism*.

The *trisvabhāva* and the *trimiḥsvabhāva* are not different from each other, but it is found that all things have the three *svabhāvas* and *niḥsvabhāvas*. Consequently all things are neither named “decidedly exististing” (決定有)

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(10) *ibid.* K. 23.

(11) *ibid.* K. 24.

(12) *ibid.* K. 25.

nor “decidedly non-existing” (決定無). This is the Middle way which is neither sat nor asat.

It is the meaning of the three svabhāvas-niḥsvabhāvas-thought in Yogācāra that makes us realise “the truth that the absolute śūnyatā is the ultimate reality” (真空妙有<sup>(13)</sup>). In other words, vijñāna-thought has been accomplished by transcending śūnyatā itself, but of course basing on the firm ground of śūnyatā.

According to the explanation in the Jōyūishiki-ron (成唯識論), the accomplishment of vijñapti is suitable for the Middle way, because it separates from “the attribute of imagination” or samāropa (增益) and “the false refutation” or apavāda (損減). When we separate from these two extreme views, getting rid of our false-thought-construction, realizing the perfect and complete real aspects of beings, then we can get the Middle way, and at the same time there is accomplished Vijñaptimātratā.

That is to say, the realization of the Middle way in Yogācāra is not only our separation from sat-asat (有無), but also our realization of active accomplishment of Vijñapti-mātratā. Thus here it is proved that the Middle way thought in Yogācāra was completed basing on the three svabhāvas and niḥsvabhāvas.

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(13) Dr. Shōson Miyamoto, Konponchū to Kū, p. 112.