

A Comparative Study on the Concept of Papañca of Pāli Āgama and the Concept of Prapañca of Chinese Āgama

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the relevant literature based on the concept of papañca in Pāli Āgama and the concept of prapañca in Chinese Āgama. This concept which is closely related to nirvāna is a significant term in Buddhist doctrine, which reveals the difference between ordinary people and the Buddha. It consists of important philosophical nuances like epistemology, metaphysics, and language philosophy. However, its meaning has been an argumentative topic for years. The interpretation of papañca as defilement (kilesa) is a traditional one in Theravada Buddhism. In modern times, different English translations of the Pali term papañca are found such as proliferation, mental proliferation, diversification, diffuseness, obsession, difficulty (obstruction), obstacles, worldliness, and objectification. Differing to the traditional interpretation of Theravada Buddhism, ‘prapañca’, in Chinese texts of Agama, is cited as ‘gaming view (xilun 戏论)’, ‘thinking (si 思)’, ‘distinction (fenbie 分别)’, ‘the idea of thinking-attachment (xiangzhu zhinian 想著之念)’, ‘fictions (xuwei 虚伪)’, ‘dalliance (tiaoxi 调戏)’, ‘untruth (xuwang 虚妄)’, ‘fictitious language (xuyan 虚言)’, and ‘game (xi 戏)’. Therefore, in this study an attempt will be made to compare the relevant literature found in Pali and Chinese Agama to clarify the perfect meaning behind this concept because it has become a controversial topic right from the very beginning.

Both in Pali and Chinese Agama the connotation of papañca (prapañca) is shown as follows: papañca (prapañca) as a stage of the perceptual process, papañca (prapañca) as metaphysical speculation, self is the root of papañca (prapañca). The definition of ‘prapañca’ as the origin of

meaningless thinking and distinguishing is found in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, yet this aspect is neglected by scholars. This definition and the discussion of ‘prapañca’ of the *Abhidharmakosabhasyam* prove the reasonability of Chinese interpretations of ‘prapañca’ as ‘thinking (si 思)’, ‘xilun (戏论)’, and ‘fictitious language (xuyan 虚言)’. The Chinese interpretations of ‘prapañca’ involve the problems of metaphysics and language philosophy, in which the traditional commentaries of Theravāda Buddhism are not involved. Certainly, in Chinese Āgama the interpretation of ‘prapañca’ which is similar to the interpretation of ‘papañca’ as defilement (kilesa) that is found in Pali Agama is also found as ‘desire (yu 欲)’, which belongs to defilement (kilesa) in Chinese Agama. Finally, it can be said that the interpretation of ‘prapañca’ as ‘gaming view (xilun 戏论)’ in Chinese Agama gives better insights into the term when compared to the term ‘papañca’ interpreted as defilement (kilesa) in Pali Agama, because the interpretation of ‘prapañca’ as ‘gaming view (xilun 戏论)’ in Chinese Agama matches the relevant suttas. ‘Papañca’ need not have its particular connotations if ‘papañca’ is explained as defilement (kilesa) by commentators of Theravada Buddhism, since the word ‘kilesa’ is sufficient.

Key words: papañca, prapañca, papañcasaññāsankhā, Chinese āgama

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