

The Meaning of Skillful Means and the Conventional Truth in Buddhist Education

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《Abstract》

The present essay is concerned with the nature of the Tathāgata's methods of preaching as skillful means (*upāya*) and the meaning of the Conventional truth (*samvṛti-satya*). The main focus will be given on: (a) the necessity of therapeutic speech in Buddhist education, (b) Tathāgata and the samsaric world (c) the conventional truth as educational device, and (d) educational meaning of the Tathāgata's return to people's language. We place the scriptural word in its soteriological perspective, stressing the therapeutic concerns of the Tathāgata's teaching. The necessity of the scripture as therapeutic speech is presented examining the meaning of the Two truth as teaching device. And the educational significance of the truth of *samvṛti* in Buddhist educational system is explored.

Buddhist scriptures are comprised of emancipatory words. Of necessity they are spoken to others, their aim being removal of human suffering. Not only does the Buddha arrive at emancipatory experience, he also formulates the experience in everyday language. This language is the very essence of the Bodhisattva praxis in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The scriptural texts are the Buddha's methods to convey his experience to the public. According to the listener's degree of capacity or receptivity, the methods are varied, and teachings are flexible. In this sense, we may confirm that 'method will control the theme, form and content'. The Buddha followed public modes of thinking through categorical convention. For the Buddha, a central concern as a preacher was how to speak. The scriptures have an emancipatory mission; they told towards the listeners. The thematic equality in the scriptures lies in such a missionary function, that is, the scriptural texts are the body of emancipatory meaning and the Buddhas are no more than what people hear.

Key Words: Tathāgata, Buddhist education, conventional truth, educational device, skillful means, people's language

I. Introduction

The present essay is concerned with the nature of the Tathāgata's methods of preaching as skilful means (*upāya*) and the educational meaning of the conventional truth(*saṃvṛti-satya*). The main focus will be given on: (a) the necessity of therapeutic speech in Buddhist education (b) Tathāgata and the samsaric world (c) the conventional truth as educational device, and (d) educational meaning of the Tathāgata's return to people's language. We will place the scriptural word in its soteriological perspective, stressing the therapeutic concerns of the Tathāgata's teaching. Second, the necessity of the scripture as therapeutic speech will be presented examining the meaning of the Two truth as teaching methods. Third, the educational significance of the truth of *saṃvṛti* in the Buddhist system will be explored.

II. Skillful Means as Therapeutic Teaching

Buddhist scriptures are comprised of emancipatory words. Of necessity they are spoken to others, their aim being removal of human suffering. Not only does the Buddha arrive at emancipatory experience, he also formulates the experience in everyday language. This language is the very essence of the Bodhisattva praxis in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, the authority of the Mahayana scriptures lies in its function, *i.e.*, communicative efficacy. The scriptural texts are characterized according to their capacity to lead to ultimate enlightenment. It means that the scriptural words of the Buddha have no relationship to the concept of truth and falsity. They are merely

functional in nature.

Shakyamuni formulated his egalitarian faith in every day language. And he extended a sociality test to his own truth-claim. He insisted that no claim be true unless it is demonstrated to be true; that there are rules of demonstration; and that truth is objective and public. Truth seeks to liberate itself from linguistic exclusivity and metaphysical transcendence.¹⁾

The scriptural texts are the Buddha's methods to convey his experience to the public. According to the listener's degree of capacity or receptivity, the methods are varied, and teachings are flexible. In this sense, we may confirm that 'method will control the theme, form and content'. The Buddha followed public modes of thinking through categorical convention. For the Buddha, a central concern as a preacher was how to speak. The scriptures have an emancipatory mission; they told towards the listeners. The thematic equality in the scriptures lies in such a missionary function, that is, the scriptural texts are the body of emancipatory meaning and the Buddhas are no more than what people hear. There is a singularity of voice in the words of the Buddha, but the listeners interpreted the words differently according to their capacities. It is said that there are the eighty four thousand Dharma-gates preached in proportion to the eighty four thousand illusions. Either a body of the scripture is oriented toward the audience or the readers are bound to have discrepancies that lead to doctrinal exclusivity. Thus, *upāya* is one of the main functional powers of wisdom (*prajñā*). However, practice of *upāya* is more difficult than that of *prajñā*.

With regard to the functions of *upāya*, the Chi-tsang (549-623 C.E.) interprets them in three ways; (a) the expedient skill of penetrating the object of cognition, (b) non-substantiation of emptiness(*śūnyatā*), (c) the function of generating practice.²⁾ *Upāya* as practice of *śūnyatā* does not substantiate *śūnyatā* as the ultimate meaning and moves through the worldly convention without grasping. The relationship of *prajñā* and *upāya*, thus, is

1) Bhibuti S. Yadav, "Adhasa and History," unpublished article (1988), pp. 47-48.

2) Chi-tsang, *Ta-ch'eng-hsuan-lun* (TCHL), T.45, p. 54b.

complementary as *prajñā* is foundation and *upāya* is function. *Upāya* appears from the experience of the ultimate *śūnyatā* and is also guided by *prajñā*.³⁾ It means that *upāya* is an application of *prajñā* to the conventional world. *Upāya* is Bodhisattva's dynamic movements through existence. The *Saddharmapundarika sutra* describes the Tathāgata's supreme competence of preaching Dharma:

The wisdom of the Tathāgata is broad and great, profound and far-reaching; His mind is infinite, His expositions are unimpeded, His powers, fearlessness, meditations, emancipations, contemplations, have enabled Him to enter into the boundless and to accomplish all the unprecedented Dharma.⁴⁾

'The infinite mind' of the Tathāgata refers to benevolence, compassion, joy and indifference. The word 'unimpeded' indicates the Tathāgata's four unlimited forms of wisdom in preaching Dharma, i.e., unlimited knowledge of Dharma (*Dharma-pratisamvids*), the meaning (*artha-pratisamvids*), the terms or arguments (*nirukti-pratisamvids*), and pleasant discourses (*pratibhāna-pratisamvids*). It is also said that the Tathāgata has the four kinds of fearlessness, i.e., fearlessness in proclaiming all truth, the truth of perception or freedom from faults, in exposing obstacles to the truth, and the way to end all suffering. The powers means the ten powers of the Tathāgata's expedient means in teachings which can tame sentient beings with the utmost strength and excellent ability.⁵⁾ The Tathāgata comprehends:

3) TCHL, p. 54b.

4) The *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra* chapter 2, tr. by Bunno Kato, *The Sutra of the Lotus Flower the of Wonderful Law* (Tokyo: Rissho Kosei-kai, 1971), p. 33. Bunno kato's translated from a Chinese version *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*, translated by Kumarajiva in 406. For the English translation from Sanskrit version, see H. kern tr, *Lotus of the Good Law*, SBE 21 (Oxford, 1884), and L. Hurvitz tr, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York, 1976). Chinese tr. T. 262-265, K. 115-118.

5) The ten powers are one of the eighteen special characteristics of the Tathāgata. Special Dharmas (*Astadasa Aventikadharma*) means different characteristics of the Buddha compared with the other enlightened ones such as *Arhats* or

- (a) as they really are caused occasion in every condition;
- (b) as it really is the result of causal occasion, of the cause of taking on of Karma, past, present and future;
- (c) as it really is the cause leading to all birth;
- (d) as it really is the world with its manifold elements, its various elements;
- (e) as they really are the various inclinations of beings;
- (f) as it really is the state of the faculties (cardinal virtues, of faith and so) of others;
- (g) as it really the defilement of the purification of the emergence from the attainments of the *jhanas*, the deliverance, the concentrations;
- (h) Tathāgata remembers a variety of former habitations in all their mode and detail;
- (i) Tathāgata with his purified deva-like vision surpassing that of men sees beings as they are deceasing and uprising, and comprehends beings' futures according to the consequence of Karmas;
- (j) Tathāgata by the extinction of the outflows, having realized here and now the freedom of mind and freedom through wisdom that have no outflows, entering thereon abides therein.⁶⁾

The *Abhidarmama-vibhasa* comments that wisdom is an essence of the Ten powers. In the other word, will power of the Buddha composes wisdom. All powers include wisdom. This power is immovable, unconquerable, indestructible, non-harming, unchangeable, enduring with all encompassing insight, strong, possible, and excellent.⁷⁾ The Ten Powers are the power of

Pratyekabuddhas. The eighteen special dharms are; (a) the Ten Powers, (b) the Four Confidences, (c) the Three kinds of Equanimity, (d) the Great Compassion. The eighteen special dharms are generally accepted by all Buddhist as an example of the Buddha's superior personality.

6) *Majima Nikaya* vol. 1, pp. 83-85. Also see The *Mahasihanada-sutta* (Great Discourse on the Loins Roar), pp. 93-110

7) The *Abhidharma-vibhasa-sastra*, T. 1546, p. 156, tr. by Hsüan-tsang.

the Buddha's wisdom which can tame other beings skillfully. As a teacher the Buddha has to know actual conditions of every individual in past, present, and future. By comprehending all modes (*prakara*) of existence and the rule of demonstration, the Buddha can teach his students with confidence. Thus, for the Buddha, supreme wisdom (*prajñā*) and skillful means (*upāya*) work together in teachings.

The wisdom of Buddhas is very profound and infinite. It is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Ever since I became Buddha, with various reasoning and various parable I have wildly discoursed and taught, and, by countless tactful methods, have led living beings, causing them to leave all attachments. Wherefore? Because the Tathāgata is altogether perfect in His *upāya* and *prajñā paramita*. The Tathāgata is able to discriminate everything, preach the Dharma skillfully, use gentle words, and cheer up the hearts of all.⁸⁾

Candrakīrti (600–650, C.E.) observes the nature of teaching of the Tathāgata:

All the teachings of the illustrious Buddhas, who are possessed of universal compassion, ultimate insight and practical wisdom, are intended to be a means of penetrating (*avatara*) to the eternal way of things (*tattvamṛta*). The perfectly realized ones have not uttered one word which was not in fact a means of penetrating to the eternal way of things. They administer medicine suited to the illness. They have the urge to those who need guidance and they teach the truth accordingly. To quote from the Four Hundred Verse: 'Things are real, things are not real, things are both real and not real: all this is said variously. Indeed all cures as such are cures for a specific desire.'⁹⁾

8) Tr. by Bunno Kato, *The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law* (Tokyo: Rissho Kosei-kai, 1971), pp. 32–33.

9) Candrakīrti, *Prasannapada*, trans. by Mervyn Sprung, as *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), [abbreviated as PSP], p. 182.

The scriptural texts of Buddhism represent the Buddha's methods of teaching, but they do not represent the truth itself. The truth seeks to free itself from the limit of the scriptural languages, as a raft has to be abandoned at its last journey. Referring to the analogy of raft in the *Vajraccedika prajñāparamita Sutra*,¹⁰⁾ the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* interprets that the Buddha has taught that one has to abandon one's clinging even the teaching of the Buddha:

The intention of the Buddha is this: My disciples must be free from passion for Dharma, free from attachment to Dharma, free from partisanship. What they seek is only the freedom from suffering; they do not quarrel about the diverse nature of things.¹¹⁾

The Buddha does not encourage people to seek any notion of the truth even in regard to the *prajñā* and *śūnyatā*. The truth is beyond all notions of the true and the false, for the Dharma that the Buddha realized transcends such discursive thoughts. The Scriptural words are only the linguistically conditioned context of the truth. Freedom from attachment to the Truth means that all ideas of the truth are wrong. The scriptural words have nothing to do with the concept of the truth. The scriptural words exist with one's linguistically constructed thought. They are only rafts which function to cross over the river of samsaric thought. The scriptural texts as a raft are not no longer useful when one reaches the paramita, ceasing of thought construction. However, what is to be useless is not scriptural language

10) The *Vajraccedika prajñāparamita Sutra*, Chapter 6. Chinese translations: T. 220, K. 1. T. 235, K. 13. T. 236, K. 14. T. 237, K. 15. and T. 238, K. 17. English translation: A. F. Price, *The Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom* (1947); repr. as *The Diamond Sutra* (1955). E. Conze, *Vajracchedika- prajñāparamita* (Rome: 1957), pp. 65-92. Max Muller, *Buddhist Mahayana Sutras*. SBE 49 (Oxford: PTS, 1894).

11) The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* T. 25, p.63. [abbreviated TCTL]. TCTL is a comprehensive encyclopedic work on the *prajñāparamita* literatures. Kumarajiva translated it into Chinese between 402 and 405, CE, contained in T. 25, no. 1509, pp. 57-756, and in K. 549.

itself, but one's attachment to it. The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* observes that the Buddha taught the one Dharma in many ways with skillfulness according to the needs of people:

The dharma of the Buddhas is limitless like the great ocean. In accordance with the diverse mental capacities and aptitudes of the people they teach the Dharma in a variety of way. Sometimes the Dharma is taught through existence, permanence, pain, and self. And some other times it is taught through non-existence, impermanence, pleasure, and non-self. Sometimes it is taught that one should exert oneself in cultivating the three kinds of deeds and should collect all elements of merit, while some other times it is taught that all things are devoid of construction. In this way, the Dharma has taught in several ways.¹²⁾

III. Tathāgata and the Samsaric World

Tathāgata as a Bodhisattva returns to this world to complete his *pāramitā* practices, because this practice in the mundane world is itself the way of *nirvāṇa*. For the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva, *nirvana* is not a permanently fixed stage, but it is non-abiding (*apratisthita*). Bodhisattva will not dwell in static nirvāṇa until all sentient beings are saved. The term '*Tathāgata*' itself signifies Bodhisattva ideal. Traditionally, the Buddha is called by various names, such as *Tathāgata*, *Arhat*, *samyakambuddha*, *Vidyacaranasampanna*, *Sugata*, *Lokavid*, *Anuttara*, *Purusadamyasarathi*, '*Sastadevamanusyanam*, *Bhagavat*, etc.¹³⁾ These names are found in both

12) The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* T. 25.p. 192a. Also see, Nāgārjuna, *Mula-madhyamka-karika* [hereafter abbreviated as MMK], 28:6. For Sanskrit text and English translations of the MMK see K. K. Inada, *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mulamadhyamaka Karika with an Introductory Essay* (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1970), and David J. Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of Middle Way* (Abany: SUNY Press, 1986). Chinese translations: T. 30, no. 1564; K. 549.

13) According to the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (TCTL), these ten names of the Buddha

Pāli and *Mahāyāna* scriptures, and are generally accepted by all Buddhist traditions. The word 'Tathāgata' is one of the most popular names of the Buddha, meaning one who has come from suchness and gone to suchness.

Etymologically the Sanskrit term '*tathāgata*' can be read in two ways; (a) as '*tatha-gata*' meaning 'thus gone,' and (b) as '*tatha-agata*' meaning 'thus come.' The term 'thus' traditionally refers to the way that previous Buddhas have departed from and returned to the world. It also is connoted means, the way; the way of suchness. From the two meanings of the term, it can be understood that the Tathāgata is; (a) one who has realized the Dharma, (b) one who knows how he has realized the Dharma, and (c) one who returned to the world to speak about how he has realized the Dharma.

The point to note is that 'Tathāgata' connotes methodic function. It means the demonstration in deed and in words of emancipatory experience. The emphasis on function is an argument against the notion that Tathāgata is a thing-in-itself, an ontological entity. The Tathāgata, if taken as a transcendent one, is said to be like a dream.

Buddha himself is like *maya* or a dream,
and the essential qualities of Buddhas are like *maya*
and a dream.
The truth and enlightenment, properly understood,
are devoid of an existence of their own-natures.¹⁴⁾

The point of the statements is not to deny the existence of the Tathāgata. But what is denied is the attribution of a metaphysical essence to the Buddha, the belief that the Buddha is an entity. Concerning this dynamic nature of the Tathāgata, it is said that the Tathāgata is like the universe (*jati*) where the dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) functions. Nāgārjuna observes that the Tathāgata is without a self-existent nature as

signify the virtue and personality of the Buddha. For detail see TCTL, pp. 70b-73c. For a valuable analysis on the meaning of the ten names of the Buddha, see Sun-young Park, *Bulkyu ui gyuyuk sasang* (*The Buddhistic Philosophy of Education*) (Seoul: Dongwha-chulpan-gongsa, 1981), pp. 187-238.

14) PSP, p. 200.

the cosmos also is without a self-existent nature.¹⁵⁾

The Tathāgata is ever independent of the elements of existence;
all elements of existence are akin to the Tathāgata;
those of puerile intellect are subject to the notion of
cause and err
about in the world among putative elements of existence,
which are unreal.
The Tathāgata is of the nature of a perfection;
he is of pure elements which cause no harm;
here there is no perfection and no perfectly realized one;
he is beheld in all the world as a reflection.¹⁶⁾

The Tathāgata cannot be said to exist, for the Tathāgata is equated with *śūnyatā*. Nāgārjuna characterizes the Tathāgata as one who is beheld in the world as a reflection. The Tathāgata is beyond named things, and is ontologically non-existent. The *Vajracchedikā-sūtra*, also dismisses the ontological sense of Tathāgata. The etymological sense of the Tathāgata is also denied as the Buddha says:

Whosoever says that the Tathāgata goes or comes, stands, sits or lies down, he does not understand the meaning of my teaching. And why? 'Tathāgata' is called one who has not gone anywhere, nor come from anywhere. Therefore is called 'the Tathāgata, the Arhat, and the fully enlightened one.'¹⁷⁾

At this point, there seems to be a contradiction between the de-ontological nature of the Tathāgata and the soteriological senses of the Tathāgata. However, this dilemma is solved when the Tathāgata is willing to speak the Dharma without self-existence, dwelling yet not dwelling. As the term 'tathāgata' means, the Tathāgata has gone (*gata*) and come the way of

15) MMK 22:16.

16) PSP on MMK 22:16, p. 205.

17) The *Vajracchedikā-sūtra* (VCPS) 29. Edward Conze's tr. *The Vajracchedikā-Prajñā-Pāramitai* (Rome, 1957) p. 64.

suchness (*tatha*), the Tathāgata signifies not staying at all. The Tathāgata is in a dynamic of endless process which is the way of Bodhisattva. The truth is that the Buddha was always walking from the beginning to end of his life. It is no small irony that he was born on the road as well as died on the road. Staying (*sthita*) is against the meaning and mission of the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata's aspiration lies in endless return to the samsaric world to remove the sufferings of sentient beings.

Bodhisattva will stay in this world, rather than go to *nirvāṇa*. There is no *nirvāṇa* apart from *saṃsāra*. *Prajñā* as ultimate freedom will also be achieved only within *saṃsāra*. This very essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism is expounded by Nāgārjuna (150–250 C.E) in the *Mūla-madhyama-kārika* as the ultimate identity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* :

There is no specifiable difference
whatever between nirvana and the everyday world;
there is no special difference
whatever between the everyday world and nirvana.
The ontic range of nirvana is the ontic range of
the everyday world.
There is not even the subtlest difference
between the two.¹⁸⁾

This statement has a crucial point for the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva. The assertion of the ultimate identity of nirvana and *saṃsāra* is based on reflection of the same nature of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* , i.e., they are devoid of substantial existence. This identity is different from metaphysical identity or mystical identity. In this statement Nāgārjuna is not

18) Nāgārjuna, the *Mūla-madhyama-kārika* (abbreviated as MMK) 25:19–20, Mervyn Sprung's tr. in *The Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti* (abbreviated as PSP), p. 259. Kenneth K. Inada translated the verses as: "saṃsāra (i.e., the empirical life-death cycle) is nothing essentially different from nirvana. Nirvana is nothing essentially different from saṃsāra. The limits (i.e., realm) of nirvana are the limits of saṃsāra. Between the two, also there is not the slightest difference whatsoever," *Nāgārjuna: Mūla-madhyama-kārika* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1970), p. 158.

saying *samsāra* is a provisional convention for *nirvāṇa*, but the ultimate oneness of the two. According to Candrakīrti, the indistinguishability of *samsāra* from *nirvāṇa* preempts the possibility of metaphysical polarity between them. Bodhisattva praxis is more important than being or non-being of *nirvāṇa* beyond the world.¹⁹⁾

IV. The Conventional Truth as Educational Device

The scriptures give privilege to the aspiration by rejecting metaphysical polarity of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says, "the conventional (worldly) truth is identical with the ultimate truth (*paramārtha*)."²⁰⁾ The *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* also teaches, "form is empty by nature. It is not empty by the destruction of form."²¹⁾ Also the Heart *sūtra* (*Mahā-pajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*) states: "Form (*rupam*) is emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from, form does not differ from emptiness; Whatever is form that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form."²²⁾ All forms are identical with non-emptiness (*aśūnya*). All *dharma*s are seen as non-substance. *Śūnyata* is forms in the sense that one does not substantiate *śūnyatā*, and moves through phenomenal forms without grasping. This moving through existence is called *upāya*.²³⁾ This relationship is described as from "still mirroring" to "a return to dynamic movement."²⁴⁾ Bodhisattva's return to the world, thus, has profound meaning as practice of *śūnyatā* and movement through existence. The central point here is the practice of emptiness in everyday life and language. While *prajñā* enters *śūnyatā* and does not grasp existence, *upāya* moves through existence.²⁵⁾ Thus, *upāya* appears from the deep

19) PSP on MMK 25: 20-21, p. 260.

20) The *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, T. 12, p. 443a.

21) The *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, T. 14, p.551a.

22) Edward Conze, ed. and tr., *The Heart Sutra* in *Buddhist Wisdom Book* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 81.

23) Chi-tsang, the *Ta-ch'eng-hsuan-lun* (TCHL), T.45, p. 50b.

24) TCHL, T. 45, p. 50a.

25) TCHL, T. 45, p. 55c.

insight of *śūnyatā*. Candrakīrti paid special attention to the recovery of the worldly convention, offering new definitions of *saṃvṛti*. He presents three meanings of *saṃvṛti*:

Everyday (*saṃvṛti*) means being covered by ignorance. Again, ignorance arising from the utter obscuring of the true nature of things is called the everyday. Again, to be reciprocally dependent in existence, that is, for things to be based on each other in utter reciprocity, is to be everyday. Again, the everyday means social convention, that is, the world of ordinary language and of transactions between individuals which is characterized by the distinction between knowing and the thing known, naming and the thing named, and so on.²⁶⁾

It is said that Sanskrit texts have two spellings for worldly convention; '*saṃvṛti*' and '*saṃvṛtti*.' The term '*saṃvṛti*' derives from the root '*vr*' meaning 'to conceal, cover, hide, obstruct.' This means *Samvṛtisatya* is covered truth or hidden truth. On the other hand, '*saṃvṛtti*' derives from the root '*vrt*' meaning 'to become, originate, exist, arise, come about, activate,' to move toward.' This suggests that *saṃvṛtti satya* is truth that exists within the everyday world.²⁷⁾

Candrakīrti's first definition, i.e., *saṃvṛtti* covers up completely the real nature of objects (*saṃvṛtīḥ*), seems to follow the root '*vr*,' meaning to conceal the truth. Candrakīrti associates the concealment with delusion in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*:

Delusion is a screen (*saṃvṛti*) precisely because it obstructs awareness of the intrinsic nature of all things, and on its account, what is merely fabricated appears to be real. The sage declared that this is the truth of the screen, and that entity which is pure fabrication is a mere screen. If everyday experiences were authoritative, then common people would perceive

26) PSP on MMK 24: 8, p. 230.

27) See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1116, and Gadgin Nagao, *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 39. According to Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 541, the Sanskrit term '*saṃvṛti*' has its true etymology in Pali term '*sammuti*' (root *man*) meaning convention, general (popular) acceptance or belief, common sense conditioned, exoteric, dependent, limited truth or knowledge.

the reality expressed in the truth of the highest meaning. What necessity would there be for those others, the saint? And what would be accomplished by following their path? It is unreasonable for such foolishness to be accepted as entirely authoritative.²⁸⁾

In this respect, *saṃvṛti* is synonymous with *viparyāsa*, meaning delusive experience and associated activities. *saṃvṛti* means deceptive truths.

The Buddhist poet Santideva, in the early eighth century C.E., characterizes *saṃvṛti-satya* as deceptive truths because they are established from the point of view of deceived minds that obscure the reality.²⁹⁾ *Saṃvṛti* is also understood as discursive knowledge, for it is incapable of knowing the true nature of things while the *paramārtha-satya* is regarded as the truth comprehended by a superior's wisdom in which there is no presence of deceptive truth. For 'Santideva, *paramārtha* is beyond the range of understanding, so rational understanding is called *saṃvṛti*.

In Candrakīrti's second definition, he equates *saṃvṛti-satya* with the notion of mutual dependency (*paraspara-apekṣa*). *Saṃvṛti* means relative truth, the truth of dependent origination. However, it is not considered the ultimate truth, because "in contrast to what is empty, non-existent, and undifferentiated, the worldly and conventional always exist in mutual dependence within a world of manifold being. This multiplicity and differentiation is nothing other than the discrimination of self from others, of subject from object, whence 'name' are engendered and language developed."³⁰⁾ In this respect, *saṃvṛti* is conditioned by other objects for things have no self-nature.

28) Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6: 28, tr. C. W. Huntington, Jr. with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989) [Abbreviated as MV], p. 160.

29) 'Santideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9: 2. 'Santideva, in the early eighth century A.D., belongs to the Prasāṅgika Mādhyamika school. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the 'Sikṣa-samuccaya represent his Mādhyamika thought. On the life of Santideva, see Bu-ston, *History of Buddhism* II, p. 161. For Korean Translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* from Chinese Version, see Korean Tipitaka No. 251 (New Edition), pp.359-482 translated by Yong-pyo Kim.

30) Gadja Nagao, *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p.40.

Candrakīrti's third definition associates *samvṛti* with sociality of language, including the network of categories and concept rooted in an intellectual tradition. It signifies symbolic and social discourse (*samketo lokavyavahara*) through language and conceptions. *Samvṛti* as a social discourse is effective in a particular social context. But this sort of *samvṛti* has no absolute validity. It is valid only within a particular history and culture in the everyday world. *Samvṛti-satya* as a social convention is conditioned by the historical context of language and thought. In this respect, Candrakīrti says that the objects encountered in everyday experience, and any attempt to negate them may be effectively countered by relying on the testimony of just that everyday experience.³¹⁾

Samvṛti-satya is divided into the real empirical truth (*loka-samvṛti*) which is characterized as common sense and judgment based on conceptual distinction, and unreal empirical truth (*aloka-samvṛti*) which is experienced due to defects and illness of sense organs. What is true in and for the worldly convention is individual everyday truth (*lakasamvṛti-satya*) which is not valid in the ultimate sense (*paramārthatah*).

V. Conclusion

Then, what is the educational role of *samvṛti*? What is the educational meaning of the Tathāgata's return to people's language? Buddhism never deny the importance of *samvṛti*. On the contrary, *Samvṛti* is effective because "unless the everyday world of verbalized transaction (*laukivyavahara*), i.e., the realm of naming and the thing named, knowing and the thing known, has been accepted as a base (*abhyupagamyā*). It is impossible to point out, or to teach (*desayitum*) the surpassing sense."³²⁾ *Samvṛti* is a necessary means to attain *Nirvana*. That is way Candrakīrti compares *samvṛti* with a container for someone who wants water.³³⁾ Linguistic

31) Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6: 31, tr. C. W. Huntington, Jr. with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989) [Abbreviated as MV], p.161.

32) PSP, pp. 231-232

conventions are useful methodologically as well as soteriologically. The ultimate meaning will be expressed in everyday language.

The Tathāgata's use of ordinary language signifies acceptance of established categories and concepts as means to a higher truth. That is why the Tathāgata used Magadhi in preaching. In the Theravāda tradition, Pāli is regarded as the language that the Tathāgata spoke. Although modern studies indicate that Magadhi and Pāli are different languages, they are both people's language, not special cast's language like Sanskrit. That the Tathāgata's refused to use Sanskrit is significant in the sense that he wanted to reach all classes equally. In the time of the Tathāgata, only upper classes could read and transmit the scriptures of the Vedas which are written in Sanskrit. Sanskrit was, and still is regarded as the educated class's language. But the Tathāgata chose the language of ordinary people so that all kinds of people could understand the Dharma.

Thus, the identity of *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha* is understood in upāyic stance. The worldliness of language is the only tool that the Bodhisattvas have, and they conform to the rules of that very language. This sense of *saṃvṛti* is essentially different from *saṃvṛti* as delusion, for it is the means through which the Bodhisattvas convey the meaning of emancipatory experience to the world.

The rationale for this conformation of *saṃvṛti* is observed by Hajime, "The correct discernment of the twofold truth proves to be the most important key point. This discernment has originally resulted from the discontinuity between the two spheres of *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha*; and it is reasoned by means of the Mādhyamika's own precise logic. This reasoning is like this; the negation of *śūnyatā* is the negation of thing in itself (*svabhāva*), but not the negation of things as *saṃvṛti* or life itself on earth; *saṃvṛti* is, on the contrary, reality established and bestowed with life solely through this negation."³⁴⁾ This recovered life and positive affirmation of the everyday world is called 'merely being concealed (*saṃvṛti-mātra*)'.³⁵⁾ It is not that the conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) is ignorance, but recovery of

33) PSP, p. 232.

34) Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Hirakata: Kufs Publication, 1980), p. 251.

35) *loc. cit.*

the conventional world. The worldly truth contains innumerable meanings. With in the worldly, Bodhisattva can reach the ultimate without hindrance. In that sense, *samvṛti* is at the heart of Buddhism. The enlightened experience can be understood only in the language of the world. "Cognizing truth in the flower represents the intuition of enlightenment but beyond this is the further ability to once again return to the discriminated multitude of dharmas or the conventional world and perceive in the flower the brilliance of the heavens, warmth of the sun, rich smell of the earth."³⁶ This interpretation signifies the importance of returning the world to the Bodhisattva's way of life.

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36) Daiga Matsunaga, et al., "Sanron: Philosophy of Ultimate Reality," *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Buddhist Book International, 1974), p. 75.

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