

Chapter IV

The Development of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in Buddhism

4.1 The Development of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in Early Buddhism

Over the investigation into the thought of early Buddhism regarding Śūnyatā (emptiness), it is found the texts in early Buddhism that seem to offer the oldest formulation of the doctrine of emptiness which could be summarized in two categories as follows.

4.1.1 Emptiness from the Viewpoint of Anattā

Emptiness from the viewpoint of anattā appears to be a more direct, natural and discursive way of propounding emptiness through seeing anattā. It seems to display greater simplicity and precision and a refinement of thought that requires more time to develop.

The first set of texts to be examined are those that refer to the khandhas as being said by the Buddha :

What do you think of this, Soṇa, is material form
(or ‘body’ = rūpaṃ) permanent or impermanent?”

‘Impermanent, Lord.’

‘And what is impermanent is it painful or pleasant?’

‘Painful, Lord.’

‘And as regards what is impermanent, painful, mutable by nature, is it befitting to regard it as “That is mine, that I am, that is my self”?’

‘Not so, Lord.’

The same reasoning applies to feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), coefficients of consciousness or inner complexes (*saṅkhārā*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

Therefore, Sona, whatever material form is there, either past, future or present, either subjective or external, either gross or subtle, either mean or excellent, either near or remote, any kind of material form should be discerned by means of higher wisdom as it really is, as ‘That is not mine, that I am not, that is not my self.’¹

. The same is asserted of the other khandhas :

Thus discerning, Sona, the learned ariyan disciple feels disgust for material form... (the same applies to the other khandhas). Feeling disgust he is free from attachment. Through riddance from attachment he is liberated. At being liberated there is knowledge of being liberated. He knows, Destroyed is birth, lived is the brahma-life, done is what was to be done, there will be no more living in these conditions.²

Pondering over this text, we come to the following conclusions:

¹ Joaquín Pérez-remón, **Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism**, (New York : Mouton, 1980), p158-159. .

² Ibid.,159.

1) ‘This is not my self’ does not mean, ‘this is not my own self. It will not do to say that this attā is the ‘empirical self’, because it is being opposed to the khandhas which constitute the empirical self and are identified with the self by those immersed in the spirit of the sakkāyadiṭṭhi.

2) The reason why one should feel disgust for the khandhas is that they are impermanent, painful, changeable by nature and therefore cannot be mine, I cannot be the khandhas and the khandhas cannot be my self. The criterion used here for the utter rejection of the khandhas is in the last analysis that they are not my very self. This gives one the motive to feel repulsion at them and to discard them, and nevertheless one is told by the votaries of absolute anattā that the self in one is no reality. It is as if one was exhorted in the following way, ‘Feel disgust for the khandhas, get detached from them, disown them and get detached from them.

In the thought of early Buddhism, Another way of proposing the doctrine of the non-self is by asserting, “All samsaric factors are ‘void’ of the self or of what belongs to the self,”³ as being said by the Buddha :

The world is void, the world is void, thus, Lord, it is said. In what respect, Lord, is the world said to be void? In so far, Ānanda, as the world is void of the self or of what belongs to the self, in so far is the world said to be void. And what is it, Ānanda, that is void of the self or of what belongs to the self? The eye, Ānanda is void of the self or of what belongs to the self; visible forms...; sight-consciousness...;

³ suñṇarū attena vā attaniyena vā

the eye's sensorial contact...; and whatever feeling there arises dependent on the eye's sensorial contact, be it pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, that, too, is void of the self or of what belongs to the self. [The same is asserted of the other senses, mind included.]⁴

The text continues saying that there are six reasons more why one should consider the world as 'void', because the eye is void either of the self or of what belongs to the self, of what is permanent, perennial, immutable by nature.... The same is repeated of the other senses, their corresponding objects, their corresponding types of sense-consciousness, their corresponding types of sensorial contact, and the consequent types of feelings dependent on them. There are six other reasons why should the world be considered 'void'. First it is asserted of each of the khandhas that they ought to be considered empty, vain, void, non-self, essenceless, as destruction, as annihilation, as the root of suffering, as full of the āsavas, as something compound. Not the khandhas alone, but one should see in that light letting go all the feeling of self also.

Finally, the special relationship between suññatā and anattā is brought forward by saying : "Reflecting on non-self (anattato) the establishment of the void takes place."⁵ It is also found the equivalence between suññam and anattā in the following : Regard thoroughly with perfect wisdom what is impermanent as painful. [Regarding] the void (suññam) as non-self (anattā) people destroy grief....⁶

⁴ Ibid., 183-184.

⁵ suññatupatṭhānaṃ

⁶ Joaquín Pérez-remón, **Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism**, p.197.

4.1.2 Emptiness from the Viewpoint of Conditioned Genesis

Conditioned genesis is the first step to comprehend the profound dharmas of emptiness and nirvana. However, since there are various levels on which to understand the “emptiness” in early Buddhist texts. To observe the meaning of emptiness from the viewpoint of conditioned genesis, it is necessary to look at things as impermanence. In other words, conditioned genesis is connected with emptiness by virtue of “impermanence”.

The Buddha’s path to liberation (*vimutti*) begins with recognizing suffering in the nature of life. In terms of the “Four Noble Truths” (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*)⁶⁶ one must achieve full knowing of suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering (*dukkha-samudaya*)⁶⁸, the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*)⁶⁹ and the way leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāminī-paipadā*)⁷⁰. These four noble truths apply an easier way of comprehending the principle of conditioned genesis to show how suffering arises, and how it can be made to cease. Consequently, how to see and know compounded nature as suffering is a significant observation in Buddhist thinking. Conditioned genesis indicates that all compounded things are impermanent (*anicca*), and because they are impermanent they are also suffering. For example, following an explanation of conditioned genesis, the Buddha says:

And what, monks, is the dharma of “arisen by condition” (*paṭiccasamuppanna*)? Aging-and-death (and birth, becoming, attachment, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense-spheres, name-and-material form, consciousness, activities, ignorance) are

impermanent (aniccam), compounded things (or conditioned things, saṅkhataṃ), arisen by condition (paṭiccasamuppannaṃ), have perishable nature, (khaya-dhammaṃ), the nature of decay (vaya-dhammaṃ), fading way (virāga-dhammaṃ), cessation (nirodha-dhammaṃ).⁷

Hence, conditioned genesis indicates that compounded things “arisen by condition” are impermanent, and so have perishable nature, the nature of decay, fading away, and cessation. One must see that impermanence is suffering in the nature of life. In other words, to know suffering in the nature of life is also to know that the “five aggregates”,⁷⁷ “six sense-spheres”,⁷⁸ or “eighteen elements”⁷⁹ of conditioned genesis (compounded nature) are impermanent, and that is the suffering of aging, death, sorrow, distress, depression, and affliction. These are the reality of the body and mind of sentient beings. In early Buddhism, to see the nature of compounded things is to see “what is impermanent is suffering, and what is suffering is not-self.” “Impermanence, suffering, not-self” is the non-existence of self or Pudgala- Śūnyatā, the basic way, perhaps the only way, of insight leading to nirvana.

In conclusion, to realize “emptiness” in early Buddhism is to see Emptiness (Śūnyatā) from the Viewpoint of Anattā and from the viewpoint of Conditioned Genesis. This leads to aloofness from “suffering” by destruction of self-attachment and craving leading to the emptiness of self or Pudgala- Śūnyatā, and then to nirvana – the ending of suffering – by the ceasing of self-attachment.

⁷ SN 12. 20.

4.2 The Developmet of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in Sarvāstivāda

Legend has it that the Sarvāstivādins, under Kaniṣka's patronage, held a Fourth Council to resolve points of controversy within their lineage. As a result, they produced a massive commentary on the Jñānaprasthāna (Source of Knowledge) which is the principal Abhidharma text of this school and probably compiled as early as 200 B.C. The subsequent works of the school seem to have been a special exegesis on the subject-matter contained in it. This commentary, called the Mahāvibhāṣā, collated opinions on the controversial questions of the time, concluding with the orthodox Sarvāstivādin position on each. Other schools of thought continued to develop within the Sarvāstivādin lineage, but the monks who stuck by the Mahāvibhāṣā as authoritative were called Vaibhāṣikas.(S14)

The Vaibhāṣikas devote more attention to what it regards as the prime expression of ultimate truth: dependent co-arising. It delineates four ways of understanding the relationships among the factors in the causal chain: momentary, in which all twelve factors occur in a single moment of action; serial, in which the factors cause one another to arise in rapid succession as they themselves then pass away; static, in which the factors represent distinct stages in the relationships among the aggregates, which maintain continued existence before and after those relationships come and go; and prolonged, in which the whole sequence of causation occurs over three lifetimes. The Vaibhāṣikas maintain that only the static interpretation is valid, for unlike the first two it allows a mechanism for karmic consequences to last over time; unlike the last, it doesn't require that the ending of suffering take more than one lifetime.

The Theravādins and a dissident subschool of the Sarvāstivādins, however, adopted the serial interpretations of dependent co-arising, another subschool adopted the momentary interpretation, and the Theravādins held to the prolonged interpretation as well. All these groups rejected the static interpretation on the grounds it contradicts the canonical summary of dependent co-arising that portrays the factors in the causal sequence as actually coming in and going out of existence depending on the existence or nonexistence of their preconditioning factors. This controversy took the sort of hair-splitting technical turn for which the Abhidharmists are famous when the Vaibhāṣikas countered that the dharmas going in and out of existence are actually secondary dharmas—the stages of appearing, remaining, and passing away of each momentary relationship—but that the aggregates maintain their existence in all three time frames. Their opponent countered that admitting secondary dharmas would lead to an infinite regress: There would have to be the arising of the arising, the arising of the arising of the arising, and so forth. The Vaibhāṣikas admitted such dharmas up to a tertiary level, but denied any further regress, and the discussion reached an impasse.

One group of dissident Sarvāstivādins was to have a long-term influence in Buddhist philosophy. Called the Dārṣṭāntikas, the “Example Methodologists,” in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, their views were taken up by a group called the Sautrāntikas, “Those Who Follow the Sūtras” (as opposed to following the Abhidharma treatises as well). The relationship between the two groups is unclear. Perhaps their opponents called them by the first name, while they preferred the second; or perhaps the second group was simply influenced by the first. Although no Sautrāntika writings are extant, we know from later sources that although they

claimed to take the sūtras as their only guide, they addressed many of the questions formulated by the Abhidharmists, especially the question of how best to understand ultimate reality. As a result, they formulated an Abhidharma-like philosophy of their own. From the Sarvāstivādins they adopted the principle that present existence is an activity— ‘to be’ is to act—but they rejected the idea that past and future dharmas somehow exist. Existence, they said, is only momentary. In fact, the moment of a dharma’s existence is so short as to be indivisible, with no duration. The arising and passing away of a dharma happen simultaneously. Canonical references to duration between arising and passing away, they said, were simply a concession to unenlightened mentalities. To counter the objection that momentary existence would not allow a substratum for karmic consequences, they drew on the canonical image of karmic consequences as seeds. Each momentary dharma, they said, “perfumes” the series of momentary dharmas with a karmic seed, which will sprout later in the series. To allow for the possibility of awakening, they said that each dharmic series comes presented with the potential for awakening. Nirvāṇa, however, is not a dharma, but simply the cessation of all dharmas. The teachings on momentary existence, the perfuming action of karmic seeds, and the innate potential for awakening had a strong impact on later Buddhist philosophy, particularly among Mahayānists.

With reference to the points of controversy in early Buddhism regarding karma and rebirth of an individual, it was led to the arising of the theory of “Everything Existing”. A treatise in the Theravāda Abhidharma, the *Puggalapaññati* (Descriptions of Individuals) tabulates the Buddha’s many statements about the different types of individuals

existing in the world: “For example, there are individuals who are like a mark in water (their anger easily fades), those who are like a mark in the dirt, those who are like an inscription in stone (they bear long grudges); and so forth.”⁸ This tabulation is apparently what sparked the question: How does the concept of “individual” fit into the other taxonomies? Is it an ultimate truth like other topics? The Abhidharmists began to split between those who answered “Yes” to this question, and those who answered “No.”

The standard Theravādin position became “No.” and one of their treatises—the *Kathāvatthu*, or *Points of Controversy*—contains their arguments to support this negative position, as well as their record of their opponents’ arguments for the affirmative. Both sides manage to quote passages from the *Sūtras* to support their positions, but the Theravādin speakers generally avoid stating precisely how they regard the concept of the individual, and devote their efforts simply to attacking their opponents’ concept. To avoid the implication that their individual is simply a disguised assertion of “self,” the Pudgalavādins—“those who teach [the existence of] the individual”⁹—are forced into an awkward concept of person that is neither identical with nor separate from the five aggregates; neither fabricated nor unfabricated; and cannot be directly experienced, like the aggregates, but can only be inferred from them. This, for the Theravādin, shows that the concept of individual as an ultimate truth is self-contradictory, and thus untenable.

⁸ Richard H. Robinson & Willard L. Johnson, **Buddhist Religions : A Historical Introduction**, Fifth Edition, (California : Thomson Learning Inc.,2005), P.65.

⁹ Op. cit.

However there is one set of arguments concern the nature of karma and they focus on two questions that the Buddha as portrayed in the Sūtras refused to answer, on the grounds that they did not conduce to the ending of dukkha. The questions are these: Given that there are actions and their results, is there anyone who does the action? Is there anyone who experiences the result? The Pudgalavādins answer “Yes” to both questions, and then are charged with creating an infinite regress (having to further infer the doer of the doer, the experiencer of the experiencer, and so on). However, the Theravādins answer “No” to both questions, and although they do not portray themselves as encountering any difficulties, they have actually adopted a doctrine similar to an Ajīvaka position attacked in the Sūtras: that in the ultimate sense there are no agents and no one acted upon. In the succeeding centuries, most Buddhist schools adopted this position and were bedeviled by the natural follow-up questions: How can moral responsibility be more than a social convention if there are no agents? What does it matter if actions are skillful and unskillful if no one experiences their results?

The debates between the Pudgalavādins and their opponents reached an impasse that lasted for centuries, as each side developed increasingly sophisticated arguments to bolster its position. The Pudgalavādins formed their own lineage, which survived until Buddhism was wiped out of northern India in the beginning of the thirteenth century C.E. Their major offshoot, the Sāmmiītyas, flowered in the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., largely through the patronage of the great Buddhist king, Harṣavardhana, whose sister, Rājyaśrī, joined the school as a bhikṣuṇī.¹⁰ According to Chinese pilgrims at the time, it was the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.66.

dominant sect in the Ganges Valley. The school also had an outpost in what is now Vietnam. Only a few of its texts survive, however, mostly in Chinese translations.

The controversy with the Pudgalavādins raised further issues that we at present would classify under the headings of epistemology, cognitive psychology, and ontology: How are ultimate facts known? How is knowledge of anything formed? How do things exist in an ultimate sense? Full-fledged answers to these questions would not develop for centuries, until the arising of the theory of “Everything Existing”.

In the early period the theory of ‘Everything Existing’ has provided the foundation for a major school of Buddhist philosophy, the Sarvastivāda school. The name of the school means “those who teach that everything exists,” the “everything” here meaning things past, present, and future. The name Sarvāstivādin, meaning “those who explained that all exists,”¹¹ aptly expressed the “logic of dharma” of this school, on the basis of which they presented detailed proof of the truth of impermanence. The word dharma generally has the meaning of order, rule, or law; it may also mean justice, reality, virtue, custom, quality. In Buddhism, it can also mean “event,” “existent thing”—a usage probably based on the fact that all existent things follow laws and principles. As a Sarvāstivāda technical term, however dharma is meant :

It does not refer to a self-existent “thing” but to the “elements of existence” which coexist in composition. That all existents and phenomena in the experiential world are a flowing composition of countless dharmas, coming together and coming apart in complex

¹¹ Takeuchi Yoshinori ed., **Buddhist Spirituality : Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, and Early Chinese**, (New York : Crossroad, 1994, p.71.

cause—result relationships is the basic insight of the logic of dharma. In the perfected theory, these dharmas are of seventy-five kinds, falling into five categories : rūpa (the material elements), citta (the mind), caitasika (the various mental functions), citta-viprayukta-saṃskāra (what is neither material nor mental, and includes elements such a relation, potential, and condition), and asaṃskṛta.¹²

That “all exists” (sarvaṃ asti) is the central Sarvāstivāda tenet. The past dharma exists, the present dharma exists, and the future dharma also exists. But since conditioned dharmas also “instantaneously disappear,” they cannot be of a continuous nature in time. For example, we usually think that if the cup on the shelf remains unchanged from one hour ago, then it has existed continually. However, from the standpoint of the “logic of dharma” it is nothing more than an unbroken series of countless conditioned dharmas instantaneously arising and instantaneously disappearing. That in any one moment a cup exists is merely a coming together in that instant of the round, tall shape of the cup (this is one kind of dharma) and the touch of its hard, smooth surface (this is another kind of dharma) with countless other dharmas to form the phenomena known as the existence of the cup. In the next instant each of these dharmas disappears completely, and the cup continues to exist only because dharmas of the same kind have taken their place in the same spatial relationship, giving rise to the same phenomenon as that of the cup which existed in the preceding instant. In this process of arising and extinction of noncontinuous dharmas, the cup continues to exist as a stable, undisturbed phenomenon only as long as the succession of dharmas arising remains unchanged or unstopped.

¹² Op.cit.

Over the investigation into the theory of ‘Everything Existing’ of Sarvāstivādin school, the ‘everything’ here meaning things past, present, and future. The theory of ‘everything existing’ grew from discussions of how dharmas (facts) exist, how they can influence one another, and how they can be known. One of the peculiarities of the word dharma is that it can mean both teaching and phenomenon, in the same way that fact can mean a statement about a truth, as well as the truth itself. In the context of Abhidharma discussions, dharmas listed in the *mātrkā*s thus came to be seen both as classes of facts and as individual events. The question arose: How does an individual fact or event exist in the present? The general agreement was that mental facts had only a momentary existence, but were physical facts equally momentary? The Sarvāstivādin position began when someone said “Yes.” The seeming permanence of mountains, for instance, is simply an illusion caused by many similar physical form-events happening in rapid succession.

The difficulties entailed by this position are many. If everything is equally momentary, how can anything be present long enough to be known through the long cognitive process from sensory impression to concept? How can an action done at one time give results in another? The answer was that things exist through all time frames but act as events only in the present. The details of this position weren’t worked out until centuries later, but because those details have been very influential in the history of Buddhist thought, a brief summary might be useful here : Dharmas exist as real entities or substances (*dravya*) in all three time periods, each defined by an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) and marked by an intrinsic identifying characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*). Given appropriate conditions, they manifest a particular activity (*kāritra*), which makes them

present. But even when not acting in the present, they can serve as conditions for other dharmas to act. Thus it is the good or evil actions (karma) of the sattva's life that determine the various states of existence. Good karma, in the past necessarily earns one pleasant circumstances in the present, whereas evil karma necessarily earns one unfavourable circumstances filled with suffering. The cause-result relationships are strictly individual. One can neither obtain favorable fruits of one's own bad karma. This law is the basis of Buddhist morality. But however desirable it is to be reborn in heaven as the result of one's good karma, that is not the ultimate goal. Buddhism seeks instead the world of enlightenment, which transcends the world of saṃsāra and arises at the point where one is released from the shackles of karma.

According to the theory of 'Everything Existing' of Sarvāstivāda school, it is said :

The dharmas do not arise from nothingness, nor do they return to nothingness upon extinction. Arising means that a dharma comes from the future to appear in the present; extinction means that a dharma goes from the present into the past. Dharmas before arising in the present exist in the future. Dharmas after leaving the present exist in the past. In that one instant when dharmas have arisen from the future realm and are going into the past, they exist in the present. Whether past, present, or future, the dharma, keeping its unchanging self-nature (svabhāva) continues to exist. How then does a dharma appear from the future to arise in the present? The dharmas in the future realm are countless and without order. From out of that realm, a certain dharma will arise in a certain instant. It is a "cause" that decides which dharma will arise in which instant. Thus, the dharma

that a cause brings to arise in that instant is the result of that cause and hence is said to “arise in dependence.” If this is the case, what is this “cause” that brings about the arising of a dharma? The answer is : it is another dharma or other dharmas. The cause-result relationship is established between dharma and dharma. Each dharma has its cause in the countless other dharmas and arises as a result of them, and each is the cause of countless dharmas and works to bring about their arising as its results. This complex cause-result relation of countless intertwining dharmas constitutes our present world filled with suffering. On the one hand, there are the defilements (kleśa) that form the basis for wrong acts (karman) for which we sink deeper in suffering (duḥkha); on the other hand, there is the serene activity of wisdom (prajñā) which dispels the defilements one by one and turns us toward the way of enlightenment (bodhi). Kleśa and karman are the cause of which duḥkha is the result; prajñā is the cause of which bodhi is the result.¹³

Although the Sarvāstivāda was the central thesis, there were different theories on how ‘sarvam’ and even ‘asti’ were actually to be explained and understood among diverse sarvastivadins.

The doctrines of sarvastivada were not confined to ‘all exists’, but also include the theory of momentariness (ksanika), conjoining (samprayukta) and simultaneity (sahabhu), conditionality (hetu and pratyaya), the culmination of the spiritual path (marga), and others. These doctrines are all inter-connected and it is the principle of ‘all exists’ that is the axial doctrine holding the larger movement together when the precise details of other doctrines are at stake. The sarvastivada was also

¹³Ibid., pp,72-74.

known by other names, particularly *hetuvāda* and *yuktvāda*. *Hetuvāda* comes from *hetu* – ‘cause’, which indicates their emphasis on causation and conditionality. *Yuktvāda* comes from *yukti* – ‘reason’ or even ‘logic’, which shows their use of rational argument and syllogism. The doctrine of causation is particularly important in reference to later developments in subjective idealism and totalism.

Sarvāstivāda is in some ways a school of pluralistic realism or realistic phenomenalism. The term *Sarvāstivāda* shows it *sarva* = “all”; *asti* = “is” or “exists.” Verdu, Alfonso in his study on *Sarvāstivāda* said,

The dharmas are considered “ultimate and transcendental elements” (*dravya*) which have a latent or potential being of their own in the past and in the future, even if their actual manifestation (*dharma-lakṣaṇa*) takes place only in the momentary present. Thus the true nature of the dharmas (*dharma-svabhāva*) lies beyond the present “empirical manifestation,” and has to be inferred by philosophical thought. This conception, of course, leaves intact the illusory character of the ego (*anātman* doctrine), since the manifestation of the dharmas takes place only in “momentary” packages. A moment (*kṣaṇa*) is an indivisible quantum of time; it was even said that the snapping of two fingers would contain about seventeen moments. Important, however, is the *Sarvāstivāda* contention that the “past” and the “future” really exist in the potential status as *svabhāva-dharma* (abiding elements). The *Sarvāstivādins* insisted on this “real” nature of the “past” and the “future” in order to provide an ontological ground for the “reactivity” of individual karma or “maturation-causality” (*vipāka-hetu*). This inescapable postulation resulted in a minute “atomization” of reality. So, they claimed the existence of an

extra “non-manifested” rūpadharma (avijñapti) to be the carrier of material “karmic” impressions (verbal and physical); they also postulated numerous “forces” (saṃskāras) intervening in the immediate activation of the potential dharmas such as the forces of “acquisition” (prāpti) and “rejection” (aprāpti) of certain “dharmic” elements in accordance with the demands of the “karmic” accumulations (vāsanās), both material and mental, deposited in the avijñapti-rūpa and in the citta as explained above. Other forces included the force of “manifestation” (jāti), which would prompt a dharma-element to appear into the indivisible moment of the present, the force of “conservation” (sthiti) which would hold the dharma within this appearance-moment and the force of “extinction” (jara-anitya) in virtue of which the momentarily appearing dharma would be sunk back into its latent status.¹⁴

In the Kathāvatthu, the term ‘Sarvāstivāda’ is explained as follows : “The Sarvāstivādins maintain that everything exists everywhere, at all times and in every way. So, Sarvāstivāda is the school that – dogmatically – takes things to be existent in the three period of time, past, present and future.”¹⁵ Hence, the position adopted by the Sarvāstivādins is that, “as a unit (dravya) or as a self-nature (svabhāva), a factor always exists, but traverses the three periods of time.”¹⁶

The existence of the three periods of time is explained as follows in the Saṃyuktābhidharmahrdayaśāstra :

¹⁴ Verdu, Alfonso, **The Philosophy of Buddhism**, (Dordrecht Netherlands : Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, 1925), p. 96-7.

¹⁵ Charles Willemen, Bart Dessein & Collett Cox, **Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism**, (New York : Brill, 1977), pp.19-20.

¹⁶ Ibid., P.20.

If there were no past and future, then there would be no present period of time; if there were no present period of time, there would also be no conditioned factors (saṃskṛta dharma). That is why there are the three periods of time (trikāla). Do not state that there is a mistake. When stating that (the fact that) what is remote is past and that what will exist is future, does not exist, and that there only is the present, this is not right. Why? Because there is retribution (vipāka) of action. The World-honored One has been saying : “There is action and there is retribution.” It is not the case that this action and retribution are both present. When action is present, it should be known that retribution is future; when retribution is present, it should be known that action is already past. (...) As has been said : “If there are no such five faculties as faith, I say that this is the generation of worldlings.” When the seeker is the one who is bound by envelopers, such five faculties as faith are not present; because the path is not together with defilement. That is why it should be known that there is past and future. If it were different, noble persons (ārya-pudgala) would have to be worldlings.¹⁷

While a factor, as a self-nature, always exists, the factor itself is, in fact, momentary (kṣaṇika). According to Sarvāstivādins it lasts the time necessary for the four characteristic marks of the conditioned – birth (jāti). duration (sthiti), decay (jarā), and disappearance (anityatā) – to complete their activity. This period of time is so brief that no one is capable of understanding it.

¹⁷Ibid., p.21, For a complete translation of the “Saṃyuktābhīdharmahrdaya”, See Bart Dessein, **Saṃyuktābhīdharmahrdaya : Heart of Scholasticism with Miscellaneous Additions**, 3 Volumes, (India : Motilal Banarsidass, 1998).

The reason why factors proceed through the three periods of time, is the principle of causality. This theory of causality is the fundamental thesis of Buddhism. As the Sarvāstivādins assert that the past and the future are real, because the present has its root in the past and its consequence in the future, this implies that the three periods of time ought to exist separately, because the notions of past and future would not occur if they were no separate realities. The reality of the three periods of time, however, does not mean that the three periods themselves are eternally extant, nor does it mean that time is a real substance. It merely means that all things or elements are real in the past and in the future, as they are real in the present.

This creation continues in a time series of past, present and future, like in a chain. This chain is divided into twelve members, and is called 'the chain of dependent origination' (Pali : *paticcasamuppāda*, Sanskrit ; *pratityasa-mutpāda*). The Sarvāstivādins interpret these twelve members in terms of the three periods of time. These twelve members of the chain of dependent origination are further interested in terms of defilement, action and actual entities. The Vaibhāsikas accept only segmented dependent origination, in which each moment of the chain of dependent origination is a complex of the five aggregates. This type of dependent origination is most involved in the interplay between karmic cause and retribution; through the present fruition moments of dependent origination (consciousness, the psychophysical complex, six senses, contact, and feeling) one can know the past causes (ignorance and conditioning factors) that led to that fruition, and through the present causes (birth, and decay and dying). As Buddhism does not believe that all things came from one cause, but holds that everything is, inevitably,

created out of more than two causes, these causes became further differentiated.

Over the investigation into the emptiness of Sarvāstivāda, Vaibhāsika philosophers classified things into substantially existent and imputedly existent by describing as follows :

All things with discrete existence possessing general and specific characteristics (such as impermanence and audibility of sound) are substantial and real whereas things such as forest, stream, which are made up of basic dharmas and are thus not perceivable on their own only have a mentally constructed existence. However, the word ‘empty’ is rarely used and even the insubstantiality of the *prajñaptisat*, which from the Mahayana viewpoint can be understood to be *dharmanairātmya* and therefore emptiness, is not described as empty. The Sarvāstivādin did not seem to make any distinction of two truths but the Vaibhāsika delineated a theory of two truths in which only partless atoms and moments of consciousness and unconditioned things are ultimate entities and all the rest are relatively existent.¹⁸

In summary, the Sarvāstivāda school expounds the view that the substances and elements are real and absolute, and that emptiness in its philosophy only referred to the absence of an absolute self. The school, as its name implies, stood for the principle of “*sarvam asti*,” i.e., “All is” or “All exists,” its doctrine did not thereby profess merely the real existence of things, such as psycho-physical elements, but rather insisted quite vigorously the non-existence of the ego or the emptiness of *ātman* by denying individuality, thus referring to *Pudgala- Śūnyatā*.

¹⁸ Karma Phuntsho, **Mipham’s Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness : To be, not to be or neither**, (New York : Routledge Curzon, 2005), p.233.

4.3 The Developmet of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in Mādhyamika

Over the investigation into the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in early Mādhyamika, while the Sarvāstivāda logic of dharma attempts to explain logically the transiency of all things and Theravāda theory is an attempt to observe human psychology carefully. Sarvāstivāda speculation reflects interchange with non-Buddhist thought and other Buddhist schools, whereas Theravāda is based more on the Tipiṇṇaka. The Mādhyamika critique of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma and the reappropriation of Sarvāstivādin analysis in Yogācāra, provided Mahāyāna philosophy with its architecture. The Mādhyamika theories of emptiness (śūnyatā) and absence of self-nature (niḥsvabhāva) are clearly intended to refute or go beyond the Sarvāstivādin concept of dharma. The Yogācāra theory of store-consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) is intimately connected with the Theravāda concept of bhavāṅga. One may also note that the doctrine of tathāgatagarbha is not unrelated to the Mahāsaṃghika concept of the basic nature of mind, and that the Sautrāntika concepts of “seed” (bīja) and “impression in the mind” (vāsanā) were adopted in Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha doctrine. Thus some key concepts of Mahāyāna thought derive from or are intimately connected with abhidharmic Buddhism.

Abhidharma must also be credited with focusing the problem of the human condition and its solution with lucid fidelity to basic Buddhist insights. Furthermore, it inculcates awareness that the establishment of one’s true inner self cannot be achieved by self-assertion, but only by the regulation and control of one’s self through an absolute spiritual quiescence. It shows a radical lucidity, too, in its account of the moral

realm as conditioned and saṃsāric and in its aspiration to transcend this conditioned realm entirely in order to reach the absolute good—or, better, the quiescence and extinction—of nirvāṇa.

Over the investigation into the great importance of Nāgārjuna's writings in the realm of philosophy, It gives expression to Nāgārjuna's famous concept of the "Middle Way". The Middle Way begins with a verse of salutation which reads as follows:

The dependent origination
 that is not destroyed,
 does not come into being,
 is not cut off,
 is not everlasting,
 is not single,
 is not plural,
 does not come,
 does not depart—
 this is the highest goodness
 that transcends the emptiness of words:
 thus did the Buddha teach.
 I salute him,
 that transcends the emptiness of words:
 thus did the Buddha teach.
 I salute him,
 that most eminent
 of the expounders of the Way.¹⁹

¹⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, **Buddhism, the First Millennium**, tr.by Burton Watson, (Tokyo : Kodansha International Ltd., 1978), p.140.

Here we are at once presented with the so-called “Middle Path of the Eightfold Negation,” which is characterized by the eight negations of non-birth, non-extinction, non-cessation, non-permanence, non-uniformity, non-diversity, non-coming, and non-going.

The first thing to note about this eightfold negation, which sweeps us at once to the heart of Nāgārjuna’s thought, is that the word “eight” is not intended to be limiting. The meaning is not “eight negations, no more and no less,” but rather “numerous negations” or even “infinite negations.” It is through this process of negation of every possible concept that one arrives at an understanding of the śūnyatā or “emptiness” that is the core of Nāgārjuna’s philosophy of the Middle Doctrine.

It is very important to note, however, that the “emptiness,” which we arrive at through this process of negation, is not the same as mere “nothingness.” It is described as “empty” or “void” because we have negated all the possible characteristics or predicates that might ordinarily be used to describe it, but it is totally different in its essential nature from the kind of nothingness that is customarily associated with nihilistic thought, such a mere nothingness or non-being, which is the opposite of being, would of course in Nāgārjuna’s thought be negated along with all other concepts. The true “emptiness” of the Middle Doctrine is therefore a nothingness that transcends both non-being and being.

Nothing can be born out of mere nothingness. But from the “emptiness” of the Middle Doctrine, which is a kind of infinite potentiality, anything and everything may be born or produced, depending upon what causes happen to affect it. Various objects and

phenomena appear to the ordinary beholder to be arising out of nothing. But what precedes them is not in fact nothingness but the state of emptiness that Nāgārjuna has been describing.

The philosophical background for this concept of “emptiness” goes back to the so-called Twelffold Chain of Causation preached by Shakyamuni. According to that, no beings or events exist entirely separately in the world; all are linked to other beings and events through the chain of causation. Nāgārjuna demonstrates this aspect of interdependence in his “Middle Way” through the example of fire and firewood. It is a strikingly simple and homely analogy, and at the same time one which helps greatly to clarify the difficult and complex concept of “emptiness” as it functions in his doctrine of the Middle Path. Let us therefore see just how his analogy works.

According to the argument Nāgārjuna puts forth, fire cannot burn unless it has firewood to feed upon, and in this sense it must have the firewood in order to exist. Similarly, firewood cannot be called firewood unless fire exists—otherwise it can only be characterized as pieces of wood. In other words, neither fire nor firewood can be said to have any absolute existence independent from one another. And yet at the same time they cannot be said not to exist at all. They exist in the state of “emptiness” or potentiality, waiting for one another to be brought into actual existence.

All beings share this same dependent nature, coming into existence through causation, and it is this that is described by the concept of “emptiness.” It is neither being nor non-being but a state transcending both.

But although such concepts as causation and emptiness would appear to explain away the nature of all beings and the process by which they come into existence, one should beware of supposing that the situation is really that simple. Nāgārjuna says: “We speak of all things as ‘empty’ which are dependent in origination. But this ‘emptiness’ is no more than a relative hypothesis. This is the true Middle Path.”²⁰ That is, just as the concept of “emptiness” is arrived at by negating both being and non-being, so the concept of “emptiness” in turn must be negated. The true Middle Path, therefore, consists of this process of perpetual negation. It is an attempt to describe the interdependence of potentiality and place by continually postulating what it is not.

One reason for this emphasis upon negation in Nāgārjuna’s thought is to be found in the views prevailing in the world of Buddhist thought in his time. The second category of Nāgārjuna’s writings, while the Theravada or Sarvastivada school of Hinayana Buddhism still very powerful in Nāgārjuna’s time, insisted upon the ultimate reality of all phenomena, and Nāgārjuna attempted to expose the error of its assertions by expounding his own view of the “emptiness of all phenomena.” In addition, he attacked not only doctrinal errors within Buddhism itself, but also turned his attention to the theories of non-Buddhist schools of philosophy, doing his best to refute those who advocated nihilistic interpretations of the concept of emptiness.

Finally, as we have mentioned already, Nāgārjuna emphasized the necessity of moving beyond fixed concepts. In the Chū-ron he states: “The various Buddhas sometimes preached the existence of ego, sometimes preached the existence of non-ego, and sometimes preached

²⁰ Ibid.,p.142.

the existence of neither ego nor non-ego.” And in another passage he declares: “Those who cling to the view of ‘emptiness only’ are incurable!” That is, one must negate not only the concepts of being and non-being, but that of emptiness as well, for only by doing so one can understand the true absence of self-nature that is characteristic of all things, the true nature of “emptiness.”

The point of Nāgārjuna is making here is that one must not allow himself to become the prisoner of mere words such as “dependent causation” and “emptiness” and thereby to interpret the dharmas or phenomena of the world as possessing some fixed and irrevocable nature. To do so is automatically to lose sight of the true “emptiness” or absence of definable characteristics that is their essence. Nāgārjuna therefore would insist that one must not understand such concepts as the dependent causation taught by Shakyamuni, or the doctrine of the Middle Path which he himself put forward, in terms of mere words. Rather they are ideals to be realized and made concrete through the unceasing practice of the Way of the Buddha.

It is important to note that most of Nāgārjuna’s numerous writings were in fact the product of actual debates he held with his contemporaries rather than the fruits of solitary speculation. In addition, many of them are devoted to descriptions of the practices appropriate to a bodhisattva of the Mahayana faith.

Upon an analytical study above, the concept of Śūnyatā (emptiness) was that of the conditionality of all phenomena. From the conditionality of phenomena followed their egolessness: that which was dependent on other things for its existence could have no absolute own-being. Since the human personality could be analyzed into a number of

material and mental elements, all of which originated in dependence on causes, it followed that it was devoid of independent selfhood: it was ānattā (Skt. anātman). But in the centuries immediately following the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa there developed within a section of the Sangha a tendency to regard Wisdom as consisting exclusively in the minute analysis of phenomena into their constituent material and mental elements, or dharma, as well as in the classification of the dharma themselves in accordance with various elaborate schemes. Even this development, which found expressions in the Abhidharma literature of the Theravadins and Sarvastivādins, was by no means entirely reprehensible: it carried to its logical conclusion what was definitely one aspect of the Original Teaching. Difficulties arose only when the followers of these schools, forgetting that the doctrines of Buddhism were symbols and supports, began to insist that the dharma were real entities and that the Abhidharma description of their various permutations could be accepted as a fully adequate account of Reality. Thus the Abhidharma systems have often been accused of lacking all pertinence to the spiritual life. They seem to typify the attitude of the person struck by an arrow who is more concerned with discovering all about the arrow than with healing the wound. The wrong conception of substantiality was simply transferred from the whole to its parts. Thus the Abhidharma eventually came to stand for the very substantialism which the Buddha had so categorically rejected. Wisdom, understood literally, became a hindrance to Wisdom. In order to counteract this misunderstanding, it is obviously seen, "the Mādhyamika school taught not only the egolessness of the individual (Pudgala- Śūnyatā) but also the unsubstantiality and emptiness

of all phenomena (sarvadharmasūnyatā).²¹ The locus of this teaching is, of course, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, which for this reason have as their principal theme the doctrine of Śūnyatā.”

Upon the developmet of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in Mādhyamika, Nāgārjuna developed a Mahāyāna following, including a direct pupil—Āryadeva—and later commentators, such as Buddhapālita in the fifth century. In the fifth century, a commentary attributed to Nāgārjuna, was translated into Chinese, but most scholars doubt the attribution, as no Sanskrit or Tibetan reference to the work is known. However, not until Bhāvaviveka, in the sixth century, did a genuine school of thought develop around Nāgārjuna’s work. In fact, Bhāvaviveka (also called Bhavya) was largely responsible for creating the notion of “schools” of thought in Buddhist philosophy to begin with, defining his own school—the Madhyamaka, or Middle Way school—as well as competing schools in terms of their distinctive doctrines or approaches.

Bhāvaviveka advocated using Nāgārjuna’s method of deconstructive analysis as presented in the MMK. Thus, for him, the work of preparatory discernment was less meditative and more analytical : destroying all viewpoints by exploring the implications of the lack of own-nature of dharmas. This would lead to the second phase or nondual awareness which, following the Mahāyāna writings attributed to Nāgārjuna, Bhāvaviveka identified with the discernment of the nonarising of dharmas. In the subsequent phase, one’s discernment would embrace both levels of emptiness, so that one could continue the work of a bodhisattva.

²¹ Bhikkhu Sangharakshita (Maha Sthavira), **A Survey of Buddhism**, (Boulder : Shambhala,1980), pp.296-297.

From the different approach to the Mādhyamika doctrine of emptiness between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, it is found that the question of the relationship between the two truths, conventional and ultimate, is of utmost importance for understanding the debate between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika to approach Mādhyamika's emptiness. The debates between the two systems in particular are based on the realization of the two truths. To understand the reason of the two systems to approach the emptiness through the two truths, the key verses of Naagaarjuna underscore the vitality of the question as said in Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, XXIV, 9 :

Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding The significance of the ultimate,
Liberation is not achieved.²²

Also as said in Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, XXIV, 10 :
Those who do not understand
The distinction drawn between the two truths.
Do not understand
The Buddha's profound truth.²³

From the two verses above, it is apparently seen that the Prāsaṅgika school concentrates on the former, while the Svaantantrika school relies more heavily on the latter. For the Prāsaṅgika, ultimate truth is utterly beyond constructed thought; they "...stress the contradictions

²² Nāgārjuna, **Wisdom of the Middle Way : Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā**, tr. by Jay L. Garfield, p.298.

²³ Op.cit.

between absolute reality and the human attitude of understanding, which constitutes the ground of logic."²⁴ Prāsaṅgika content themselves with the negation of all views as their modality for the cognition of 'suunyataa'. But the Svaatantrikas want to demonstrate 'suunyataa' by positive argumentation. Thus Bhāvaviveka demonstrated the weakness of Prāsaṅgika methodology and replaced the Prāsaṅgika of Buddhapālita with fromal reasoning : 'From ultimate reality, perception is not self-born...'²⁵ Following closely on this verse, the Svaatantrikas, on the other hand, stated that ultimate truth cannot be expressed without conventional truth. Due to their understanding of the contiguity of the relationship between ultimate truth and conventional truth, the Svaatantrikas seek to establish ultimate truth not only by the negation of conventional truth, as do the Prāsaṅgikas, but also by positive argumentation of the syllogistic form. As Herbert V. Guenther observes: "What the Maadhyamika Svaatantrikas wanted to emphasize was that all human experience, inasmuch as it is experience and not mere propositions or the like, is an insight into reality, an awareness of coherence which is not its own authentication of reality, but reality itself."²⁶

Prāsaṅgikas are also called Non-Abiding Mādhyamikas, or Thoroughly Non-Abiding Mādhyamikas, because through refuting inherent existence they avoid the extreme of permanence and through asserting conventional existence they avoid the extreme of annihilation.

²⁴ Kajiyama, **Bhaavaviveka and the Prāsaṅgika School**, (Nava-Nalanda-Mahavihara Research Publication, vol. 1, n.d.), p.299.

²⁵ L.de la Vallee Poussin, **Bhaavaviveka**, (Brussels : Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, 1933). p.66.

²⁶ Herbert V. Guenther, **Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice**, (Baltimore, Md . Penguin Books, 1971), p.125.

They do not abide in any way, coarse or subtle, in either, but in the middle or center which denotes neither a mixture of existence and non-existence. The middle way philosophically is the way things are—not mistaking what exists for what does not exist and not mistaking what does not exist for what exists.

The Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas say that they avoid the extreme of permanence through asserting that objects do not exist from the viewpoint of an objective mode of subsistence which is not established through the object's appearing to a nondefective consciousness. For all objects attain their inherent existence through appearing to a non-defective consciousness. The Svātantrikas do not find it contradictory to assert that objects have no objective, inherent existence which is not established by the mind and to assert that objects do exist inherently. A beautiful woman created by a magician has no mode of being that is not posited by the mistaken minds of the audience who have come under the spell of the magician. However, this does not mean that the beautiful woman has no mode of being; she has one posited by a mistaken consciousness. Just so, though phenomena seem to have their own mode of being or own mode of subsistence free from any positing consciousness, they do not; however, they do have their own mode of subsistence within the scope of its being posited to them through their appearing to consciousness. In the case of the illusory woman, the positing consciousness is mistaken whereas in the case of phenomena the positing consciousness is correct or non-defective—free from error to spells, moving objects, disease, and so on. The Svātantrikas, therefore, say that they avoid the extreme of annihilation through asserting that conventionally objects exist inherently or exist in their own right. The

Prāsaṅgikas find such to be contradictory, and thus they say that they avoid the extreme of permanence through asserting that objects do not exist inherently. For them, existing ultimately and existing inherently are synonymous whereas for the Svātantrikas they are not.

Bhāvaviveka adopted Asaṅga's analysis of discernment into three phases, as well as the analogy of the magician to describe them, but he differed sharply with Asaṅga on the nature of the first phase. Simply put, he proposed a different way of using the doctrine of dependent co-arising as a means of arriving at non-dual discernment. Rejecting the concepts of storehouse consciousness and the three svabhāvas as counterproductive, he advocated using Nāgārjuna's method of deconstructive analysis as presented in the MMK. Thus, for him, the work of preparatory discernment was less meditative and more analytical :

Destroying all viewpoints by exploring the implications of the lack of own-nature of dharmas. This would lead to the second phase or nondual awareness which, following the Mahāyāna writings attributed to Nāgārjuna, Bhāvaviveka identified with the discernment of the non-arising of dharmas. In the subsequent phase, one's discernment would embrace both levels of emptiness, so that one could continue the work of a bodhisattva.²⁷

In order to make the method of analysis employed in the first phase more effective for his day and time—when the logical theories of Dignāga had been accepted—Bhāvaviveka emphasized the need to present Nāgārjuna's arguments in the newly accepted form. This required

²⁷ Richard H. Robindon & Willard L. Johnson, **Buddhist Religions : A Historical Introduction**, p. 122..

that each argument clearly state the logical assumptions on which it was based. Thus Bhāvaviveka wrote an extensive commentary on the MMK, explicitly stating the logical assumptions underlying each of Nāgārjuna's arguments.

In the seventh century, another Madhyamaka thinker, Chandrakīrti, rejected this approach, and his arguments highlight an interesting question in the issue of tactical skill. Bhāvaviveka believed that to be logically persuasive, Nāgārjuna's arguments had to be cast in the form acceptable to one's audience. Chandrakīrti, however, felt that this was a betrayal of the Madhyamaka approach. In casting Nāgārjuna's arguments in terms of their logical assumptions. Bhāvaviveka—in Chandrakīrti's eyes—was guilty of a two-fold error : (1) To assume that words have necessary implications is to endow them with an inherent nature; (2) to set out one's assumptions is to establish a philosophical system, which is precisely the sort of thing that the Madhyamaka approach is meant to deconstruct. To counter the first error, Chandrakīrti noted that, "Words are not like policemen on the prowl : We are not subject to their independent authority. . . They take their meaning from the intention of the person using them." In other words, they carry logical implications only if employed to construct a view about reality. If employed to destroy attachment to views, they carry no necessary meanings beyond their intended use. To counter the second error. Chandrakīrti identified the Madhyamaka with a particular style of argumentation, called *Prasaṅga*, in which one deconstructs one's opponent's statements simply by exposing their own logical inconsistencies, without proposing any independent views of one's own. Any other style of argumentation, he claimed, was not true to the

Madhyamaka and thus did not properly belong to the school. As far as he was concerned, Bhāvaviveka was not a true Mādhyamaka, but simply a logician dabbling in Madhyamaka ideas.

According to Chandrakīrti, the eighteen Emptinesses are : 1.Emptiness of the internal, 2. Emptiness of the external, 3. Emptiness of both external and internal, 4.Emptiness of Emptiness, 5. Emptiness of the great, 6.Emptiness of the ultimate, 7.Emptiness of the conditioned, 8.Emptiness of the unconditioned, 9.Emptiness of the limitless, 10.Emptiness of the beginningless and endless, 11.Emptiness of the indisposible, 12.Emptiness of ascity, 13.Emptiness of all phenomena, 14.Emptiness of individual characteristics, 15.Emptiness of the unapprehended and 16. Emptiness of the unsubstantial nature. Chandrakīrti summarizes them into four : 1.Emptiness of the substantial, 2. Emptiness of the unsubstantial, 3.Emptiness of the own being, Emptiness of other being. The last two added to the first enumeration of sixteen makes it eighteen or this category of four added to the previous category makes the list of twenty Emptiness.²⁸

Chandrakīrti's approach was fairly uninfluential in India, perhaps because it contradicted the MMK in two ways : (1) Nāgārjuna himself had not restricted himself to Prasaṅga arguments; and (2) Nāgārjuna had taught the necessity of views on the conventional level on the grounds that, if one did not have a view that encouraged the deconstruction of attachment to views, one would have no reason to accept the deconstructionist approach to begin with.

²⁸Karma Phuntsho, **Mipham's Dialectics and the Debate on Emptiness : To Be, not to Be or Neither**, p.229.

Later Indian Madhyamaka thinkers tended to follow Bhāvaviveka's example, expressing their arguments in the logical fashions of the times. In Tibet, however, Chandrakīrti became the more influential of the two thinkers. Tsongkhapa, the great fourteenth-century scholar, divided all Madhyamaka thought into two schools : the Independent Argument (Svātantrika) school, exemplified by Bhāvaviveka; and the Prasaṅga Adherent (Prāsaṅgika) school, exemplified by Chandrakīrti. Tsongkhapa championed Madhyamaka as the highest expression of Buddhist thought, and Chandrakīrti as the highest expression of the Madhyamaka method, and thus Chandrakīrti's teaching has dominated Tibetan philosophy to this day.

Chandrakīrti composed Clear Words (Prasannapada) as a commentary to Fundamental Wisdom based in part on Buddhapālita's treatise. In his work Chandrakīrti defends Buddhāpālita's position and refutes Bhāvaviveka's assertion of autonomous syllogisms. Since Bhāvaviveka was the first person to clearly distinguish the Svātantrika view from Prāsaṅgika view, he is regarded as the founder of the Svātantrika system. Similarly since Chandrakīrti was the first person to clearly distinguish Prāsaṅgika view from the Svātantrika, he is regarded by Tibetan scholars as the founder or path breaker of the Prāsaṅgika system. Tibetans recognize Chandrakīrti's explanations within the commentarial lineage of Buddhapālita, and for this reason some assert that Buddhapālita was the actual founder of Prāsaṅgika. However, though Nāgārjuna and Buddhapālita clearly taught the Prāsaṅgika view, in general neither are regarded as the founder or pathbreaker of the Prāsaṅgika system since they did not clearly set forth this view in contradistinction to the Svātantrika view.

For Chandrakīrti, the most troubling thing about Bhāvaviveka's logic is not that it attempts to uphold the way of emptiness of Nāgārjuna using a wide variety of methods. Rather, it is that, in attempting to help the counterpart of the Followers of the Middle Way understand emptiness by letting go of their misperceptions, Chandrakīrti felt that Bhāvaviveka had created a wholly new philosophy which attempted to make Nāgārjuna's system logically watertight, whereas the real import of Nāgārjuna's Middle Way approach is that it uses philosophy to overcome philosophy, logic to undermine logic. According to the vast majority of Tibetan interpreters, it was this insight of Chandrakīrti's that made him the preeminent heir of Nāgārjuna among Nāgārjuna's Indian commentators. When the above-mentioned masters' streams of explanation were passed down in Tibet, those who preferred Chandrakīrti's emphasis on absurd consequences came to be known as *Prāsaṅgikas* or "proponents of consequences," i.e. Consequentialists. Bhāvaviveka's followers were given the name *Svātantrikas* or "those who propound autonomous reasonings," i.e. Autonomists.

Upon the analytical study, both Bhāvaviveka and Chandrakīrti agree that the highest truth is beyond speech.²⁹ But Bhāvaviveka adds the most interesting category in his systematization (*vibhaaga*) of the two truths. Bhāvaviveka is merely trying to call to our attention the value of the teachings of Buddhism for our spiritual development, and is not formulating yet another doctrine. For Bhāvaviveka to use the logic of contradiction in the place where conventional truth and ultimate truth meet together is methodological completion of the absolute

²⁹ Nathan Katz, An appraisal of the Svātantrika-Prasāṅgika debates, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.26, No.3 (July 1976) : 257.

negation of the Maadhyamaka philosophy. Bhāvaviveka did not wildly fit in logical tendency of the age, but he did, observing the traditional method, the same exertion in the Maadhyamaka theory as Dignaaga did in the Vijnnaanavaada.³⁰ Even Murti, who exhibits a strong bias for the Prāsaṅgika as the only true representative of Naagaarjuna's teachings, agrees that “Bhāvaviveka was trying to rescue Buddha's words from the relentless negation of the Prāsaṅgikas.”³¹ This makes him out as a liberal-minded Maadhyamika unlike Chandrakīrti. According to Dzongka-ba, Chandrakīrti's interpretation of the object of negation in Madhyamika goes farther than does Bhāvaviveka's, refuting any sort of ultimate or inherent existence, even conventionally.³²

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika was brought to China by Kumārajīva who was regarded as the initial teacher of Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika in China. Kumārajīva came to China about 401 A.D. Mādhyamika, the ‘doctrine of the Middle Path,’ or Śūnyatāvāda, the ‘Theory of Negativity’ or ‘Relativity,’ this school is known in China and Japan by the appellation of San-lun or Sanron, the ‘Three Treatises.’ There are three fundamental texts which are devoted to the Doctrine of the Middle Path by seriously refuting the wrong views of Brahmanism, Hīnayāna, and Mahāyāna schools other than the Sanron School. Of these, the first text is the Mādhyamika Śāstra, by Nāgārjuna. Fortunately the Sanskrit text of it has been preserved. It was translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva (409 A.D.). Some of Kumārajīva's disciples, such as Hui-yüan (334-416).

³⁰ Kajiya, **Bhāvaviveka and the Prāsaṅgika School**, (Nava-Nalanda-Mahavihara Research Publication, vol. 1, n.d.), p. 300.

³¹ Murti, T.R.V., **The Central Philosophy of Buddhism**, (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), p.98.

³² Elizabeth Napper, **Dependent-Arising and Emptiness**, (Boston : Wisdom Publications, 1989), p.44.

Seng-jui (352-446) and Seng-chao (374-414), used Taoist and Confucian terms to expound Mādhyamika Buddhism so that Mādhyamika teaching could be understood by Chinese and consequently Mādhyamika thought flourished among Chinese intellectuals during six dynasties. However, the spread of the San-lun School in China after Kumārajīva was also due to the efforts of Seng-lang (494-512). Seng-chüan (d. 528), Fa-lang (507-581) and especially Chi-tsang (549-623). Perhaps Chi-tsang was the greatest San-lun master in the history of San-lun Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan.³³

San-lun Buddhism as a sectarian school began to decline after Chi-tsang died. And when the Yogācāra (Fa-hsiang School) was introduced to China by Hsüan-tsang (600-664), the Mādhyamika as a sectarian school began to disappear. Yet Sam-non-jong (the Korean pronunciation of Chinese San-lun Tsung) continued in Korea until the fifteenth century. This Buddhist school of thought is called the Sanron Shū (Three Treatise School) in Japan. From Prince Shōtoku's time (574-622) to the Nara period (708-781), it was one of the major Buddhist schools in Japan, yet never existed as an entirely independent sect or institution. However, it has been required as an academic discipline. Today most non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist colleges in Japan offer courses in the study of Mādhyamika Buddhism.

Upon the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in San-lun Mādhyamika, Chi-tsang the greatest San-lun master, has utilized Nāgārjuna's theory of the two truths for the realization of Śūnyatā (emptiness) as explained by Chi-tsang :

³³ Cheng, Hsueh-li, **Empty Logic : Madhyamika Buddhism from Chinese Sources**, (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), p.30.

Chi-tsang uses the term, “existence” (yu) and “emptiness” (k’ung) to explain the two truths. He says: “The worldly truth (shih-ti) is “an existent which is empty” (k’ung-yu) and the truth of supreme meaning (ti-i-i-ti) is “emptiness of an existent” (yu-k’ung).³⁴

In this regard, for the worldly truth, emptiness is the basis of existence. This implies that existence is characterized by emptiness. As for the truth of supreme meaning, existence is the basis of emptiness and this indicates that emptiness is dependent on existence. Hence, the relationship between emptiness and existence is “mutual dependence”.

Chi-tsang intuitively knows the rules of inferences, and his understanding of logic can be demonstrated in his explication of the concept of two truths :

Although all dharmas are empty of essence, they are said to be existent only according to mundane conventions which are characterized by a confusion. That which represents reality from the conventional perspective is worldly truth.

All dharmas are empty of an essence. All the sages truly know that mundane conventions are confused and that dharmas are empty of an essence. That which represents the reality from the sages’ perspective is the truth of supreme meaning.³⁵

In perspective, this definition of the concept of “worldly truth” is a pattern of reasoning which modern logicians now normally designate as “functional logic of disjunction.”³⁶

³⁴ Chang-qing Shih, **The Two Truth in Chinese Buddhism**, (Delhi : Private Limited,n.d.), p.111.

³⁵ Op.cit.

³⁶ Howson, Colin, , **Logic with Trees – An Introduction to Symbolic Logic**, (London and New York : Routledge,1997), pp.8-9.

On the issue of the supreme truth. Chi-tsang says:

All dharmas are empty of an essence.

All the sages truly know that mundane conventions are confused and that dharmas are empty of an essence.

That which represents the reality from the sages' perspective is the truth of supreme meaning.³⁷

To Chi-tsang, there is essentially one truth, which is not divided into two truths. In Erh-ti-i, Chi-tsang writes:

The two truths signify the theory of non-duality, just as the finger pointing to the moon; it points not at the finger but rather at the moon. [In this case.] the teaching of two truths is also like this. The two truths indicate non-duality and its aim is not duality.³⁸

Chi-tsang used the analogy of the finger and the moon to focus on the theory of non-duality. In this context, the finger is akin to the two truths and the moon akin to non-duality. The main aim of the division into two truths is not duality but being to obtain one truth. That is to say, the two truths are to show sentient beings the final goal of liberation, even though two truths themselves are not the final goal. Therefore, one should not attach to the two truths and ignore its real if hidden implication, the theory of non-duality.

According to Chi-tsang, sentient beings, skilful means and non-duality are the three elements that contribute to the division of two truths. For instance, Chi-tsang cites *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* which says: "Non-existence of the two truths. Wonderful by skilful means in accord with sentient

³⁷ Chang-qing Shih, **The Two Truth in Chinese Buddhism**, (Delhi : Private Limited,n.d.), P.112-113.

³⁸ Ibid. , p.137.

beings. Thus one teaches the existence of two truths.”³⁹ Upon reflection, this is a key quotation from which one can fully expand on the reason for the division of two truths. If we analyze the verse of Nirvāṇa Sūtra carefully, we notice that at the beginning of the verse, it stressed the actual true reality which is the non-duality of two truths, followed by skilful means and sentient beings. Finally, the last sentence states that the existence of the two truths is an expedient means for sentient beings to comprehend the non-duality of the two truths, thus explaining the arising of the division of the two truths.

Upon an analytical study, Chi-tsang, the great San-lun master, has applied the three elements, sentient beings, skilful means and non-duality in the establishment of the two truths. The three elements that contribute to the division of two truths become an expedient means for sentient beings to comprehend the non-duality.

4.4. Analysis of the Development

An overview of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in Early Buddhism. Emptiness is the principal topic of two Pāli texts, titled “Discourse on Small Emptiness” (Cūḷasuññata-sutta)⁴⁰ and “Discourse on Great Emptiness” (Mahāsuññata-sutta)⁴¹. These two texts, edited under the heading “emptiness”, are relevant to the texts in Saṃyutta-Nikāya⁴² and Majjhima-Nikāya⁴³ on the teaching of suññata-vihāra and appear to have

³⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁰ M. 121.

⁴¹ M. 122.

⁴² S. 236.

⁴³ M. 151.

been progressively edited by expanding on the practice of emptiness with concrete explanations. These two emptiness-sutras, which have greatly influenced the development of Buddhist thought, differ in content regarding the practice of insight into emptiness which manifests as follows.

First is the common meaning. This refers to the “empty place” (*suññāgāra*) in which the monk practises meditation to develop concentration (*jhāna*) and wisdom (*paññā*), and this leads to a symbolic use of “emptiness” to describe the resulting meditative state.

Second is the main meaning, which is “not-self” or *anattā*. The wisdom of not-self (i.e. the realization that the world is empty of self) is the basic insight (right view “*sammādiṭṭhi*”) that leads to the mind becoming empty of craving or desire-hatred-delusion. Here, the early Buddhist texts state that the object (the world) is empty of self; they do not state that the object itself is empty.

Third is the ultimate meaning as a type of awareness-release or full awareness. It is most fully discussed in *Majjhima Nikāya* which describes this state of awareness-release or full awareness as follows, “there is the case where a monk — having gone into the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or into an empty dwelling — considers this : This is empty of self or of anything pertaining to self. This is called the emptiness awareness-release or full awareness.”⁴⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* further adds, “if one frequently abides in the emptiness awareness-release, one may either attain the dimension of nothingness — one of the formless states — or be committed to the discernment that will lead to awakening.”⁴⁵ Upon an analytical study, the meaning of awakening in the supreme sense is

⁴⁴ M. 43.

⁴⁵ M.106.

supreme emptiness or nirvana. Nirvana is of uncompounded nature (*asaṃkhata*), that is completely empty of craving or desire-hatred-delusion; it is the ending of suffering. This realm is characterized neither as existence (arising) nor as non-existence (ceasing).

The early Buddhist texts prescribe the way to realize emptiness by seeing (insight) the nature of phenomena as *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* according to the doctrine of Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*), and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). This insight will lead to knowledge of the emptiness of non-self and to the attainment of nirvana, which is identified as “right view” following the Eight Noble Path.

The notion of emptiness in Early Buddhism is thus seeing (insight) emptiness of the world as empty of “self” or of anything belonging to “self”. Upon the analytical study of “the Discourse on Small Emptiness” and “the Discourse on Great Emptiness”, it becomes clear that “emptiness” or “empty” does not mean just denial, negation, devoidness, and voidness; it emphasizes the emptiness of the feeling of “I” and “mind” with no attachments. It also means aloofness from affliction (*āśava*), suffering, and distress in the realm of purification and peacefulness. Thus, the term “emptiness” or “empty” is seen to be an essential notion in all phases of Buddhism : early Buddhism, the early Buddhist schools, and Mahāyāna.

It has been demonstrated in this study that the notion of “emptiness” arises from the early Buddhist sūtras, though it is not initially a central theme of the teaching. The central teaching in early Buddhism is “Dependent Origination”, the Four Noble Truths, and non-self (*anattā*), however, one can hardly escape the conclusion that

“emptiness” is genuinely a teaching of the Buddha himself, and not simply a creation of the Mahāyāna. Despite the fact that the teaching of the Buddha is connected with the notion of emptiness, the term “empty” (suñña) or “emptiness” (suññatā) is not as significant in early Buddhist texts as the three terms, “impermanent” (anicca), “suffering” (dukkha), and “non-self” (anattā).

An attempt to find out the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in Sarvāstivāda is conducted by looking at the theory of “Everything Exists” of the school. Sarvāstivāda, also called Vaibhashika, is a school of early Buddhism. The Sarvāstivāda school is also known as the Vaibhashika because of the 2nd-century-ce commentary Mahavibhasha (“Great Elucidation”). This text itself was commented upon by the important 4th- or 5th-century Buddhist thinker Vasubandhu in his Abhidharmakosha, prior to his conversion to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. Thus, elements of the Sarvastivada school came to influence Mahayana thought.

A fundamental concept in Buddhist metaphysics is the assumption of the existence of dharmas, cosmic factors and events that combine momentarily under the influence of a person’s past deeds to form a person’s life flux, which he considers his personality and career. Differences arose among the various early Buddhist schools concerning the ontological reality of these dharmas. While, like all Buddhists, the Sarvastivadins consider everything empirical to be impermanent, they maintain that the dharma factors are eternally existing realities. The dharmas are thought to function momentarily, producing the empirical phenomena of the world, which is illusory, but to exist outside the empirical world. In contrast, the Sautrantikas (those for whom the sutras,

or the scriptures, are authoritative) maintained that the dharma factors are not eternal but momentary, and the only actually existing dharmas are the ones presently functioning.

The Sarvāstivāda school expounded the view that all substances and elements are real and absolute, and that emptiness in its philosophy only referred to the absence of an absolute self. The school, as its name implies, stood for the principle of “sarvam asti,” i.e., “All is” or “All exists,” its doctrine did not thereby profess merely the real existence of things, such as psycho-physical elements, but rather insisted quite vigorously the non-existence of the ego or the emptiness of ātman by denying individuality, thus referring to Pudgala- Śūnyatā.

An attempt to find out the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in Mādhyamika is conducted by looking at Nāgārjuna (2nd centry C.E.) and trying to understand the intent of his message. This will involve a critical overview of the development of the early tradition through Nāgārjuna, and beyond so as to see him within the context of what preceded and followed him.

In india Mādhyamika school was called the Mādhyamika-vāda, the school which advocates the “Teaching of the Middle” because it teaches the Middle Way which transcends the four types of logical statements, i.e., the postulates of (1) existence, (2) non-existence, (3) existence and non-existence, and (4) neither existence nor non-existence. The true truth or Nirvāna lies beyond these four formulations possible to the human mind; it exceeds all affirmation and negation; it is the true emptiness which has no form and cannot be grasped. Wince the concept of emptiness is most rigorously emphasized by the Mādhyamika school and pervades its dialectics, and since its whole doctrine is commonly

summarized by two words, *sarvaṃ śūnyam*, i.e., “All is empty,” this school is also called *Sūnyatā-vāda*,’ “the school that advocates the teaching of emptiness.”

This, however, should not be taken to mean that the Mādhyamika school invented the concept of emptiness or formulated it philosophically for the first time. This was done long before by Hīnayāna Buddhists, particularly with respect to the negation of the “self” or the “ego” (*ātman*). The main philosophical principle on which the Buddha of orthodox Hīnayāna, the so-called *Sthāviravādins* or School of the elders, insisted and tried repeatedly to impress upon his listeners, was that of “Non-self” or “Non-ego”; i.e., the principle of the non-existence of the ego, whereby the Buddha meant to say that an enduring personality or individual soul cannot be demonstrated to exist. He vested this idea in the formula of “the five *Skandhas* or *Aggregates* that do not constitute any ego.” This doctrine is the proper foundation upon which all Buddhism, Hīnayāna School, as well as *Mahāyāna*, rests and was the doctrine adopted by the representative Hīnayāna School, the *Sarvāstivāda* or *Kusha* School. If this school, as its name implies, stood for the principle of “*sarvaṃ asti*,” i.e., “All is” or “All exists,” its doctrine did not thereby profess merely the real existence of things, such as psycho-physical elements, but rather insisted quite vigorously the non-existence of the ego. But still greater emphasis was placed on the meaning of the two types of emptiness, namely, emptiness of *ātman* or self and emptiness of *dharma*s or things (psycho-physical elements). This twofold emptiness, however, is not that of nature itself, but is the emptiness of the two concepts (i.e., *ātman* and *dharma*). The twofold negation of *ātman* and of *dharma*s meant that both persons and things are without any ego or

permanent individuality. And the Sarvāstivāda school taught only one kind of emptiness, i.e., that of ātman.

As one of the early explorers of the conceptual frontier of emptiness, what Nāgārjuna had to deal with, therefore, was every way in which people tend to divide reality into concepts that separate subject and object in order to keep at least some piece of reality as permanent and unchanging, safe from their only known alternative, which is often “nothingness” as Nhat Hanh reports,

The fear of nothingness brought about by misunderstanding of the doctrine of not-self, gave rise to the need to confirm the existence of things.... In the Sarvāstivāda school, for example, it is taught that from the standpoint of the noumena, things exist in the past, present and future, but from the standpoint of phenomena, they exist only in the present moment.⁴⁶

This tendency to understand “no-self” as equivalent to “nothingness” was repeated in the history of the West’s early attempt to understand Buddhism. This misunderstanding by the West of the Eastern view of Sūnyatā as “nothingness” rather than “emptiness” was based on the Western philosophical frame of reference in which “nothingness” is the opposite of being.

In the East, Nāgārjuna was working from Shakyamuni’s proposal of “no-self” (anatman) to the Brahmic concept of “self” (atman); and anatman was applied to all things to mean Sūnyatā or “emptiness.” But in the West, the “no-self” was understood as not-existing, and Sūnyatā was understood as “nothingness” or nihil, as opposed to “being.”

⁴⁶ Gunn, Robert Jingen, **Journeys into Emptiness : Dōgen, Merton, Jung, and the quest for transformation**, (New Jersey : Paulist Press, 2000), p.23.

Thus, Buddhism was understood in the West as being nihilistic. This gross misunderstanding could only be corrected by a fuller understanding of *Sūnyatā* as emptiness, not by the simple substitution of one word for another. While this distinction may appear, the difference in ramifications for the Western reading of *Sūnyatā* as a negative realm of “nothingness” as opposed to Nāgārjuna’s construction of 5 as a positive and productive realm of “emptiness” was enormous. The dynamic concept of emptiness propounded by Nāgārjuna, far from being nihilistic, aimed at releasing human consciousness from its basic dualism-creating propensity. This is the liberation from suffering that is promised in the third Noble Truth.

Nāgārjuna might observe a tremendous regarding the misunderstanding of emptiness. While it was clear that experiences of emptiness on the psychological and everyday level were often triggers to the motivation for persistent engaging of a spiritual path, initial experiences of emptiness were, by definition, experiences of transience and loss that raised fundamental questions concerning the nature of life and death. Thus, lurking in the heart of the experience of emptiness was the terror of the possibility of our own not-being. This terror is preverbal, psychological and existential. This terror could be so great, that as Nāgārjuna discovered, one might subconsciously try to hold out something permanent in some conceptual form whenever faced with the threat of emptiness that would effectively facilitate a sidestep of the experience of emptiness.

With regards to Nāgārjuna’s thought, the question to be asked and answered is what Nāgārjuna is trying to say through a perplexingly redundant series of negative dialectical attacks on common sense assumptions as well as strictly Buddhist topics. On one level, the insistent

negative dialectic points to the artificial nature of the linguistic process : having a word for an object or activity makes it seem to be substantially existent. This fallacy of concreteness projected by the linguistic process is, of course, one aspect of what Nāgārjuna is trying to make us aware of. Beyond this linguistic emptiness, however, Nāgārjuna is attempting to tell us that there is a phenomenal emptiness or non-substantiality of reality because of the impermanent flow of events that denies any substantial, unchanging substratum of reality. Obviously this does not mean that things do not exist, but that things that do exist are empty, ever-changing entities. As has been repeatedly stated by commentators, Nāgārjuna is not a nihilist denying the existence of things. He is developing an ontology of emptiness, an ontology of non-substantial existence. The exposition of the impermanence of existence and the subsequent corollary of non-substantiality are at the core of the tradition's teachings. The normative view of Nāgārjuna is that he revived the tradition by extending the negative logic of no-self to the entities of existence (dharma) themselves. He thereby rejected the insistence on the substantive view of the entities of existence that was formalized in the Sarvāstivāda position, his main doctrinal opponent. In denying the substantiality of these entities of existence, Nāgārjuna tried to show that the tradition should develop toward a fully realized emphasis of impermanence and non-substantiality. This is the standard understanding of the polemic of Nāgārjuna directed against a position alien to what he saw as the genuine spirit of the original teachings. David Kalupahana⁴⁷ understood Nāgārjuna's polemic as misrepresenting the early tradition's

⁴⁷ David Kalupahana, **Causality : The Central Philosophy of Buddhism**, (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 1975), pp.49-86.

understanding of the entities of existence. His argument is that there was no progression from emptying the self to emptying the constitutive entities of the self. In short, the logic and insight of seeing the emptiness of the self naturally and inevitably led to a similar insight into the emptiness of the constitutive entities of existence that make up the self. Nāgārjuna's insight into the emptiness of all elements of existence was present in the early tradition. For Kalupahana, it was the Sarvāstivāda tradition that was the object of Nāgārjuna's polemic. Part of the first point, it was made, by relying on Kalupahana's insights into early Buddhism, to emphasize the early tradition's claim to the emptiness of all entities of existence. The second point was to look at Sarvāstivāda's claim of the substantive character of all constitutive entities of existence. This is admittedly a most problematic point, since it disregards the traditional, largely unquestioned understanding of the Sarvāstivāda view of the entities of existence. Here, Th. Stcherbatsky⁴⁸ and portions of the Chinese translation of the Abhidharmakośa were referred to. The assumption that Sarvāstivāda in fact advocated the view that the entities of existence are substantive, unchanging monads of existence. Reading Stcherbatsky carefully, he puzzles over how to understand and express what a dharma really is : he notes that it is the 'real essence of the element' but finally must opt for 'subtle force'. This struggle attempts to convey that while things are forever arising and passing away, there is an enduring quality of these entities of existence as they arise and instantaneously disappear. He uses the image of a motion picture with each frame coming to light and disappearing yet leaving a continuity of

⁴⁸ Th. Stcherbatsky, **The Central Philosophy of Buddhism and the Meaning of the World Dharma**, (Calcutta : Sasil Gupta Ltd., 1961), pp. 5, 22-24,31-36,86-70.

being. The ultimate and meaningless fading away of all things is compensated by an insistence that there is a continuity of existence as well. Change is never denied nor the reality of enduring, continuing reality. Moreover, Funahashi is emphatic about denying substantive existence to the elements of existence. He clearly states that the notion of dharma that Nāgārjuna negates has no relation to the dharma advocated by Sarvāstivāda. Finally, the *Abhidharmakośa* selections note the continuity inherent in a self that is no-self. The intuition of both change and continuity were evident in Early as well as Scholastic Buddhism. Thus, Buddhism is true to our basic intuitions into life : things change and endure. Again, what, then, is the message of Nāgārjuna. The third point and the point that has relationship to the present paper is what, indeed, was and is the point of Nāgārjuna's negative polemic against a substantive view of reality when the tradition more or less agreed with the insight into the impermanence and non-substantiality of the entities of existence. Looking at the development of the entire tradition, Nāgārjuna's role could be seen as part of an ongoing dialectic in the tradition that began with an emphasis on impermanence, a swing toward continuity, back to impermanence, a swing toward continuity, back to impermanence again and to continuity a second time. Thus the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) from early Buddhism (change) to Sarvāstivāda (continuity) and then to Mādhyamika (change) could be realized.

It is to tear away methodically all such hiding places that Nāgārjuna developed his dialectic of the "eight negations." The fundamental problem is the human tendency to confuse concepts with reality in order to achieve stability, but to do so in any form necessarily

entails developing a dualism. In Mādhyamika's philosophy, negation is a continuing process that is engaged in order to break down concepts to the point where the practitioner comes to rid himself of all discrimination and penetrates undiscriminated reality."

Even there is a split into two sects, the Prāsaṅgika led by Buddhapālita and the Svāntantrika led by Bhāvaviveka, sometime after the fifth century, the great thinker Chandrakīrti has clarified all the argument and Mādhyamika became a giant step forward. Until about 401 A.D. Mādhyamika was brought to China by Kumārajīva who was regarded as the initial teacher of Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika in China. Mādhyamika has well flourished in China as San-lun Mādhyamika and has been widespread to Japan, Korea later on. Chi-tsang, the greatest San-lun master, has utilized Nāgārjuna's theory of the two truths for the realization of Śūnyatā (emptiness). Chi-tsang used the analogy of the finger and the moon to focus on the theory of non-duality. In this context, the finger is akin to the two truths and the moon akin to non-duality. The main aim of the division into two truths is not duality but being to obtain one truth that is non-duality.

4.5 Conclusion

Upon investigation into the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in early Buddhism, it is found the texts in early Buddhism that seem to offer the oldest formulation of the doctrine of emptiness which could be summarized in two categories as follows.

Emptiness from the viewpoint of anattā appears to be a more direct, natural and discursive way of propounding the emptiness

(Śūnyatā) through seeing anattā. In the doctrine the statement regarding anattā is how to see the world as void by pointing to the insight into the three characteristics, thus the voidness of ‘self’ and things pertaining to ‘self’. The text continues saying that there are six reasons why one should consider the world as ‘void’, because the eye is void either of the self or of what belongs to the self, of what is permanent, perennial, immutable by nature.... The same is repeated of the other senses, their corresponding objects, their corresponding types of sense-consciousness, their corresponding types of sensorial contact, and the consequent types of feelings dependent on them.

Emptiness from the viewpoint of conditioned genesis appears to the first step to comprehend the profound dharmas of emptiness and nirvana. To observe the meaning of emptiness from the viewpoint of conditioned genesis, it is necessary to look at things as impermanence. In other words, conditioned genesis is connected with emptiness by virtue of “impermanence”. The Buddha’s path to liberation (vimutti) begins with recognizing suffering in the Four Noble Truths which apply an easier way of comprehending the principle of conditioned genesis to show how suffering arises, and how it can be made to cease. Conditioned genesis indicates that all compounded things are impermanent (anicca), and because they are impermanent they are also suffering. Hence, conditioned genesis indicates that compounded things “arisen by condition” are impermanent, and so have perishable nature, the nature of decay, fading away, and cessation.

Upon investigation into the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) in Sarvāstivāda, the Theravādins and a dissident subschool of the

Sarvāstivādins, however, adopted the serial interpretations of dependent co-arising, another subschool adopted the momentary interpretation, and the Theravādins held to the prolonged interpretation as well. All these groups rejected the static interpretation on the grounds it contradicts the canonical summary of dependent co-arising that portrays the factors in the causal sequence as actually coming in and going out of existence depending on the existence or nonexistence of their preconditioning factors. While the Vaibhāṣikas countered that the dharmas going in and out of existence are actually secondary dharmas—the stages of appearing, remaining, and passing away of each momentary relationship—but that the aggregates maintain their existence in all three time frames, thus the arising of the theory of Everything Existing. This theory has provided the foundation for a major school of Buddhist philosophy, the Sarvastivāda school. The name of the school means “those who teach that everything exists,” the “everything” here meaning things past, present, and future. The Sarvāstivāda school expounds the view that the substances and elements are real and absolute, and that emptiness in its philosophy only referred to the absence of an absolute self or the non-existence of the ego or ātman by denying individuality, thus referring to Pudgala- Śūnyatā.

Upon investigation into the development of Śūnyatā in Mādhyamika, while the Sarvāstivāda logic of dharma attempts to explain logically the transiency of all things, the Mādhyamika theories of emptiness (śūnyatā) and absence of self-nature (niḥsvabhāva) are clearly intended to refute or go beyond the Sarvāstivādin concept of dharma by applying the eight negations of non-birth, non-extinction, non-cessation, non-permanence, non-uniformity, non-diversity, non-coming, and non-going which sweeps us at once to the heart of Nāgārjuna’s thought, is that

the word “eight” is not intended to be limiting. The meaning is not “eight negations, no more and no less,” but rather “numerous negations” or even “infinite negations.” It is through this process of negation of every possible concept that one arrives at an understanding of the śūnyatā or “emptiness” that is the core of Mādhyamika philosophy of the Middle Doctrine. The philosophical background for this concept of “emptiness” goes back to the so-called Twelffold Chain of Causation preached by Shakyamuni. According to that, no beings or events exist entirely separately in the world; all are linked to other beings and events through the chain of causation. Nāgārjuna demonstrates this aspect of interdependence in his “Middle Way” where all beings share this same dependent nature, coming into existence through causation, and it is this that is described by the concept of “emptiness.” It is neither being nor non-being but a state transcending both. And it is obviously seen that the Mādhyamika school taught not only the egolessness of the individual (Pudgala- Śūnyatā) but also the unsubstantiality and emptiness of all phenomena (sarvadharmasūnyatā).

Until sometime after the fifth century, the school split into two sects the Prāsaṅgika led by Buddhapālita and the Svāntantrika led by Bhāvaviveka. Buddhapālita adopted an approach that did not add any logical methods that had not come directly from Nāgārjuna's philosophy. To Bhāvaviveka, a commentator's responsibility was to offer something more in a commentary than what was made literally available by a root text. To defend Nāgārjuna's statements concerning the nature of things, one must employ further logic, otherwise one's commentary does not truly become illuminating.

From the different approach to the Mādhyamika doctrine of emptiness between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika, the debates between the two systems in particular are based on the realization of the two truths. For the Prāsaṅgika, ultimate truth is utterly beyond constructed while the Svaatantrikas seek to establish ultimate truth not only by the negation of conventional truth, as do the Prāsaṅgikas, but also by positive argumentation of the syllogistic form. In the seventh century, another Madhyamaka thinker, Chandrakīrti, rejected Bhāvaviveka's approach that to be logically persuasive, Nāgārjuna's arguments had to be cast in the form acceptable to one's audience. Chandrakīrti, however, felt that this was a betrayal of the Madhyamaka approach. Chandrakīrti felt that Bhāvaviveka had created a wholly new philosophy which attempted to make Nāgārjuna's system logically watertight, whereas the real import of Nāgārjuna's Middle Way approach is that it uses philosophy to overcome philosophy, logic to undermine logic.

Upon the development of Śūnyatā (emptiness) as San-lun Mādhyamika in China, Chi-tsang, the greatest San-lun master, has utilized Nāgārjuna's theory of the two truths for the realization of Śūnyatā (emptiness). Chi-tsang used the analogy of the finger and the moon to focus on the theory of non-duality. In this context, the finger is akin to the two truths and the moon akin to non-duality. The main aim of the division into two truths is not duality but being to obtain one truth that is non-duality. Chi-tsang, the great San-lun master, has applied the three elements, sentient beings, skilful means and non-duality in the establishment of the two truths. The three elements that contribute to the division of two truths become an expedient means for sentient beings to comprehend the non-duality.