

The Reconstruction of the Ontological Thought of Madhyamika and Prajna School by the Theory of Vijnaptimatra

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Abstract

In the system of Mahayana Buddhism, the theory of Vijnaptimatra (Consciousness-Only) is the representative thought of Existence School. The theory of Vijnaptimatra further developed Mahayana Buddhism on the basis of Madhyamika and prajna school. So, the question is concerned that the theory of Vijnaptimatra how to construct and transform the Madhyamika and prajna school's thought. In order to avoid the emptiness of the article due to range of proposition, this article will focus on Ontology, deeply study the reconstruction of the Ontological Thought of Madhyamika and prajna school by the Theory of Vijnaptimatra.

Keywords

Ontological Thought; Mahayana Buddhism; The Theory of Vijnaptimatra; Madhyamika and prajna school.

1. Introduction

Mahayana Buddhism, as a whole can be divided into Emptiness School and Existence School. The thought of Emptiness school is represented by the theory of Madhyamika and prajna. Existence School takes the theory of Vijnaptimatra (Consciousness-Only) as the core. The theory of Consciousness-Only forms later from Madhyamika and prajna school, which is the further development of Mahayana Buddhism on the basis of Madhyamika and prajna school. The theory of Vijnaptimatra claims that they founded the ideological system of Consciousness-Only, holding inner consciousness real exist, which is in order to save the malpractice of the last stream of Emptiness School of "Durgrhita sunyata (be confined to stubborn emptiness)".

As for the "reality" of existence, the Theory of Madhyamika and prajna talks about it through existence's essence is empty, but there is not nothing", which is called the "Middle way" of "being and non-being". However, the Theory of Vijnaptimatra expounds it through "the external objects is non-existent, but the inner consciousness is existent", which is also called "Middle way" of "being and non-being". That is to say, from the perspective of ontology that the both are all discussing the "Middle way" of "being and non-being". But respectively as the representative thought of Emptiness School and Existence School, where are the theoretical differences between them? In other words, how does the theory of Consciousness-Only reconstruct the ontological thought of Madhyamika and prajna in its own theoretical system? That's what this article is about.

2. The Ontological Thought of Madhyamika And Prajna

The theory of Madhyamika and prajna divides all existence into two levels, one is called "Samskrta dharma" and the other is named "Asamskrta dharma". The "Samskrta dharma" is the phenomenon that is functioning and changing, and the "Asamskrta dharma" is the real essence of phenomenon. In the view of Madhyamika and prajna school, all existence in the phenomenal world has no eternal and unchanging essence. Because the "Samskrta dharma" is only born and

died with the confluence and spread of karma. All "Samskrta dharma" changes from moment to moment, and there is no constant, invariable essence. Because of this, the Madhyamika and prajna school holds that the phenomenal world as we see is a false existence. Although in the phenomenal world, there are birth and death, light and darkness, rivers, mountains, the sun, the moon and stars, these are all false existence. Because they do not have an eternal, unchanging essence, they are unreal. That is to say, according to the theory of Madhyamika and prajna, there is no absolute, unchanging existence in this world. In other words, there is no real existence. For the "real" in their eyes must be constant, absolute, otherwise it is false. Therefore, the "Diamond Sutra" says, "All the Samskrta dharmas are like a dream, a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightning. That is how to meditate on them, that is how to observe them". [1] That is, everything is changing all the time and will not stay for a moment. They have no real essence, such as dreams, such as shadows, are false.

Some people may have a question here. Since all existence in the phenomenal world are false and has no real essence, why is it said that "Asamskrta dharma" is the essence of "Samskrta dharma"? The reason is as follows: just because all "Samskrta dharma" have no constant and invariable essence, the characteristic of "having no constant and invariable essence" can be said to be the essence of "Samskrta dharma", which is called "Sunyatas (void)" by the Madhyamika and prajna school, or named "Asamskrta dharma". In other words, the concept of "Asamskrta dharma" is put forward to dispel the erroneous view that "Samskrta dharma" has constant and unchanging essence. It can be seen that in the system of Madhyamika and prajna, "Asamskrta dharma" is only a concept and category targeted at "Samskrta dharma". For this reason, the "Sunyatas" and the "Asamskrta dharma" are false in the theory of Madhyamika and prajna, just like the "Samskrta dharma". Because the "Sunyatas" and the "Asamskrta dharma" only are the concepts based on "Samskrta dharma", they are just pseudonyms, not there is a constant and invariable "Asamskrta dharma". Just as Nagarjuna said: "All the Samskrta dharmas died out at every moment, and the Asamskrta dharma just is a pseudonyms or notion". [2] The meaning of this sentence is that all the "Samskrta dharma" are constantly changing, and there is no real existence without the change of birth and death, and there is no real "Asamskrta dharma"; Because the "Asamskrta dharma" is only a concept, or a pseudonym; Therefore, although it is said in language that the "Asamskrta dharma" is the real essence of "Samskrta dharma", in fact there is no eternal, unchanging "Asamskrta dharma". Once we admit that the "Asamskrta dharma" is a constant reality, we will deviate from the original intention of Madhyamika and prajna school.

On the one hand, the theory of Madhyamika and prajna holds that the essence of all dhammas is "Sunyatas", thus all Dhammas are "non-being"; Because all dharmas have no real essence, their essence is "Sunyatas". On the other hand, all laws dharmas are false existence, thus all dharmas are "being". Although existence is false, it is not completely absent. For example, the mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars and dust that we see are not real existence, but they can still be seen by people.

3. The Ontological Thought of Law - Dependent Knowledge

The basic system of Consciousness-Only is the theory of consciousness with "Alaya" as the core. From the perspective of contemporary philosophy, this theory of consciousness is a very systematic epistemological system. Therefore, in the whole Mahayana Buddhism, the noteworthy feature that distinguishes the ontological thought of Consciousness-Only from that of Madhyamika and prajna is the bright presentation of the mutual of cognition and existence. The theory of Vijnaptimatra divides cognition into two types, one is "Cognition with Sasrava" and the other is "Cognition with Anasrava". In other words, the difference between these two kinds of cognition lies in the difference between the two categories of "S-asrava" and "An-

asrava". The meaning of "asrava" is vexation. Therefore, "S-asrava" means vexations endless flow, and "An-asrava", that is, have got rid of vexations. The important treatise of Consciousness-Only school - "Vijnaptimatratasiddhi Satra", in the first half of Volume I clearly states that the treatise is intend to illustrate "the two Sunyatas or voids"(the two Sunyatas are: pudgalasunyata, voidness of Atman or ego, and dharma-sunyata, voidness of all dharmas or external things) [3], and renounce the two heavy avaranas or barriers"(the two heavy Avaranas are: klesavarana, the barrier of vexing passions which obstructs one's way to Nirvana or true deliverance, and jneyavarana, which impedes Manabodhi or supreme Enlightenment) [3], it says "Vasubandhu wrote the Trimsika for those who misunderstood or made nothing of the Doctrine of the two Sunyatas or Voids, in order that the might acquire a correct understanding of it. A correct understanding of this doctrine is essential if one is to cut off the two heavy avaranas or barriers". [4] "Vijnaptimatratasiddhi Satra" also says that "Both these avaranas are due to a belief in the subjective existence of Atman or ego and to a belief in the objective existence of Dharmas or external things". [4] From this, we can infer that, both the "Klesavarana" and the "Jneyavarana" are derive from "the wrong belief that there are the real ego and the external things"."Commentary of Vijnaptimatratasiddhi Satra" supplementary explains that "The wrong belief is the root of all vexations,there is no vexation does not arise from it ". [5] That is to say, "The wrong belief that there are real ego and external things" is the root of all troubles, including the Klesavarana and the Jneyavarana".

To sum up, the fundamental meaning of "Sasrava" is "the wrong belief that there are the real ego and the external things". All sentient beings hold that there are real ego and external things because they have ignorance since the beginning. The fundamental meaning of "Anasrava" is that have removed "the wrong belief" and have acquired bodhi wisdom. From this, we can see "Cognition with Sasrava" is the false cognition that believe in the real Altman and Dharma. In the "Cognition with Anasrava", we can realize the real Altman and Dharma are void, which just like that the vain moon people saw while they have sick eyes. Only by constantly learning the doctrine of Consciousness-Only and practicing the Buddha Dharma can we get rid of "the wrong perception that there are real Atlman and Dhama" and get the "Cognition with Anasrava". From then on, we can correctly understand everything in the world.

But what is the certain cognition about all existence in the world? The Theory of Vijnaptimatratra (Consciousness-Only) holds that the real ego and real things are actually based on the Evolution and Transformation Consciousness. The real Atlman and Dharma are the result of the evolution and manifestation of consciousness (vijnanaparinama), as such they are subjective and conventional elaborations. What is meant by "the evolution of consciousness"? "evolution" indicates that what essentially constitutes consciousness (that is to say, its substance), when it is born, manifests itself under two seeming aspects or divisions (bhagas), namely, the image-aspect and the perception-aspect, or the object perceived and the perceiving faculty (nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga). All existence of the phenomenal world is nothing but infinite the object perceived and the perceiving faculty, or endless nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga. That is due to we are ignorant and unenlightened since the beginning, and we mistakenly believe there are real Atlman and Dhama. Only by getting rid of "the wrong belief " can we understand the nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga manifested by the consciousness (vijnanaparinama).

From this, we can infer that the real ego and real things we know in the "Cognition with Sasrava" are all "non-beings ", because they all come from people's wrong understanding. The nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga that the Buddha saw in his "Cognition with Anasrava" are "being" , because they all are correct understanding .To sum up, in the system of Consciousness-Only school, the real Altman and Dhama are "non-being", that is, external object is "non-being"; All nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga are "being", namely, the inner

consciousness is "being". "Being and non-being", this is the "Middle way" of Consciousness-Only school.

4. Consciousness-Only School Reconstructed the Ontological Thought of M-Adhyamika and Prajna

4.1. Transform the Hierarchy of Existence

As mentioned above, the noteworthy feature of the ontological thought of the Consciousness-Only school is that it clearly shows the intercommunication between cognition and existence. Therefore, on the problem of the division of the hierarchy of existence, its the greatest development is combined the "Sasrava" and "An-asrava" of cognition's characteristic with the "Samskrta" and the "Asamskrta" of existence's feature. the Theory of Madhyamika and prajna divides all existence into two levels, one is "Samskrta dharma" and the other is "Asamskrta dharma". On the basis of this, the Consciousness-Only school divides all existence into: "Samskrta dharma of Sasrava", "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava", and "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava". Master Taixu said that "Asamskrta dharma only belong to Anasrava", and Samskrta dharma belong to Anasrava and Sasrava." [6] It is to say that the "Asamskrta dharma" only has "Anasrava", and "Samskrta dharma" has "Anasrava", and "Sasrava".

The "Samskrta dharma" is the functioning and changing phenomenon, and the "Samskrta dharma of Sasrava" is the wrong understanding and imagination of "Samskrta dharma" under the "Cognition with Sasrava". In other words, the real Atman and Dharma that we hold, such as the sun, the moon, mountains and rivers, sentient beings, plants and trees, are generally believed to be false imagination on our wrong cognition, and all belong to "Samskrta dharma of Sasrava". "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava" is the evolution and manifestation of consciousness (vijñānaparināma), that is to say, they are the inner consciousness itself, or they are the object perceived and the perceiving faculty, only under the "Cognition with Anasrava" can we really know.

"Asamskrta dharma" is the essence of phenomenon, "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava" is the real experience of Asamskrta dharma under "Cognition with Anasrava". However, the difference between "Samskrta dharma of Sasrava", "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava", and "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava" is that the first two cannot be recognized by common people. Only by practicing the Dharma and realizing the truth of the world and life can we acquire "Cognition with Anasrava" and truly know and understand them.

4.2. Transform the Definition of "Reality"

The "Middle way" of Madhyamika and prajna holds that the "Samskrta dharma" is "non-existing", and has no eternal and invariable essence. Samskrta dharma also is "existing", and there is not nothing here. As the Samskrta dharma's essence of "non-essence", "Asamskrta dharma" is also "existing and non-existing", which is not eternal and invariable existence. On the other hand, the "Middle way" of Consciousness-Only school holds that "Samskrta dharma of Sasrava" is "non-being", because it comes from wrong understanding. The "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava", and "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava" is "being" because they come from correct understanding. In other words, Consciousness-Only school holds that as the essence of "Samskrta dharma", "Asamskrta dharma" is a real existence. But this "real" is separated from the eternity, the "reality" that cannot be described in words, and the "reality" that common people cannot recognize.

That is to say, the theory of Vijñaptimātra is the same as the Madhyamika and prajna school in that they both oppose the eternal and unchanging existence. However, the definition of "reality" in Madhyamika and prajna school also is eternal and constant, so in its ideological system, "Asamskrta dharma" is not a "real" existence. The definition of "reality" in the theory of

Vijnaptimatra is divorced from eternity and transcended language. Therefore, in the ideological system of Consciousness-Only school, "Asamskrta dharma" is a "real" existence.

From the above, we can infer that on the basis of the transformation of the definition of "reality", Consciousness-Only school recognizes the authenticity of "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava", and "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava". Therefore, the inner Consciousness is "real", and The essence of Samskrta dharma, Asamskrta dharma is also "real". This is why the theory of Madhyamika and prajna is the representative of the Emptiness School, while the thought of Vijnaptimatra is the representative of the Existence School. Although they both point to the rejection of real and unchanging existence, the former focuses on "Emptiness" while the latter focuses on "Existence".

4.3. Systematically Discuss the Origin of Existence

On the basis of the transformation of the category of "reality", the Theory of Vijnaptimatra focuses on "Existence", both "Samskrta dharma of Anasrava" and "Asamskrta dharma of Anasrava" are real existences. And just because the Consciousness-Only school admits that the both are really being and that the phenomenal world is essentially being, it have to explain how all existence in the phenomenal world unfolds. This explanation is the theory of "the origin of existence", or "the origin of Alaya".

As for the origin of existence, the Madhyamika and prajna school holds that all existence haven't a center of origin, but only emphasizes the interrelation of all existence in the phenomenal world. However, the theory of Vijnaptimatra holds that all existence in the phenomenal world is the self-presentation of "inner consciousness", exactly speaking, it is the self-presentation of the eighth consciousness. All existence in the phenomenal world is the self-manifestation of "Alaya", which is called "the origin of Alaya". The theory of Vijnaptimatra divides people's consciousness into eight parts, all of them have the capable of unfolding or manifest themselves. In other words, The eight consciousness all can manifest itself under the object perceived and the perceiving faculty. These eight consciousness are not separated from each other, but form a complete system centering on the eighth consciousness, "Alaya".

To understand this system, we have to refer to one of the most important concepts in the Consciousness-Only school - "Bija or seed". The Bija is hidden in "Alaya" and can give birth to all dhamma. On the one hand, the first seven consciousness are derived from their respective Bija; On the other hand, the first seven consciousness have a constant influence and form their new Bijas; thus forming a continuous interaction between the first seven consciousness and the "Alaya".

It can be seen from the above: first of all, in the theoretical system of Vijnaptimatra, the real state of all existence is the infinite nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga, or the inner consciousness. Secondly, the eight consciousness which can manifest themselves are all centered on the eighth consciousness, "Alaya". That is, all the existence of the phenomenal world is due to the self-presentation of "inner consciousness", and in particular to the self-manifestation of "Alaya". All the existence of the phenomenal world is the infinite object perceived and the perceiving faculty. It is only because of the sentient being's ignorance that they believe there are real Atman and dharma on the basis of nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga.

5. Conclusion

the Theory of Vijnaptimatra constructed the Ontological Thought of Madhyamika and prajna school. Specifically, the first point is that the Consciousness-Only school concretized the hierarchy of existence, clearly presenting the interoperability of cognition and existence. Secondly, the theory of Vijnaptimatra transformed the definition of "reality". Thirdly, it systematically expounded the origin of existence with Alaya as the core.

Acknowledgments

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