
Śūnyatā in Chinese Hua-yan Thought

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the concept of śūnyatā in the Hua-yan teachings. In contrast to the viewpoint that things originate interdependently, is the position that things are not fixed, that which is fixed is self-nature, that which negates this is śūnyatā or non-self nature. This is the underlying basis of Buddhist thought and practice. However, there is another viewpoint which arose because of the śūnyatā thought in the Hua-yan Doctrines which has a simple but complicated point of view that the original destination of śūnyatā is emptiness and this should be pursued in a transcending manner.

Fa-zang endeavored to see the original aspect of things from a position transcending both existence and non-existence, although the primary meaning of emptiness lies in negation. In other words, he recognized things in front of the eyes as concrete ones, but he did not fix them and accepted them without obstruction. Thus, things do not disappear by force and are seen more clearly as what inherently does not exist.

Thus is maybe understood that, if the śūnyatā in the Wu-jiao zhang means non-self-nature, that in the Zong-zhi-yi-ji means boundlessness. According to the Hua-yan interpretation, 'perfect and interfused emptiness and existence[Zhen-kong-miao-you] become one and, there is no obstruction between them. This is because the basis of 'non-obstruction between phenomena[shi-shi-wu-ai] is 'non-obstruction between principles and phenomena[Li-shi-wu-ai], which is supported by non-obstruction between emptiness and existence.

In this context, śūnyatā in Hua-yan thought cannot be pursued without yuan-jiao because endlessly repeated dependent origination, affirming the reality itself, is śūnyatā.

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I. Introduction

It is widely accepted that the foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhism is śūnyatāda. However, Mahāyāna Buddhism is not the only religion that propagates emptiness (śūnyatāda). Since the establishment of early Buddhism, the teachings of śūnyatā have been consistently pursued. After studying the thought of śūnyatā expressed in the sūtras of early Buddhism, some scholars insisted that the basic ideas of the *Prajñā-pāramitā* Sūtra were included in such early sūtras. There is even an opinion (Benkyoo Suio, 1932:475 and Yukio Sakamoto, 1956:27) that Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Buddhism do not need to be seen as divided on the basis of śūnyatā because the latter also explains dharma- śūnyatā.

In this context, śūnyatā is truly an introduction to Buddhism as well as the basic idea serving as a foundation of the entire Buddhist teachings. The Hua-yan doctrines, thus, cannot be fully understood without an understanding of śūnyatā.

Considering the academic trend in Buddhism, it is easily perceptible that the śūnyatā of the Madhyamika School in Indian Buddhism is quite different from that explicated by Chinese Buddhism, especially in the Hua-yan School. This is because śūnyatā is the backbone of Buddhist teachings from early Buddhism to Mahāyāna Buddhism. However the understanding of the doctrine of śūnyatā is different according to each school.

In this paper, the concept of aśūnyatā, the opposite of śūnyatā will first be discussed, and then the positions of both the first Hua-yan patriarch Du-shun and the second Zhi-yan will be reviewed with reference to their writings. Also, the śūnyatā thought of Fa-zang based on non-obstruction between emptiness and existence will be discussed in a detailed manner. The objective of this paper is to correctly understand how the śūnyatā of Hua-yan School has influenced the entire philosophy of Chinese Buddhism.

II. Śūnyatā and Aśūnyatā

It is generally believed that the word śūnyatā was first used in the *Prajñā -pāramitā* Sūtra, but that is not true. The word 'śūnya' was used before the *Prajñā paramita* appeared. According to the Madhyamika School, śūnyatā means 'arising interdependently'. (pratītya-samutpāda) Therefore, aśūnyatā means 'not arising interdependently'. Despite the fact that the primary meaning of śūnyatā lies in non-existence, śūnyatā inevitably

becomes *aśūnyatā* due to actual experience. *Śūnyatā* is, of course, opposite to *aśūnyatā*, so there is no reason the former becomes the latter. However, *śūnyatā* cannot remain as itself because it becomes truth itself through practice as exemplified in the Awakening of Faith in Mahāyana which explains *śūnyatā* and *aśūnyatā* as Suchness. Once *śūnyatā* becomes suchness, it is not *śūnyatā* any more, but *aśūnyatā*. Thus, it can be said that the true meaning of *śūnyatā* is understood more clearly through its practice.

In India, *aśūnyatā* means not arising interdependently; that is, having self-nature. Thus, as the opposite concept to *śūnyatā*, that is *pratītya-samutpāda*, *aśūnyatā* should be negated by the manifesting of *pratītya-samutpāda* and *śūnyatā*.

However, in Chinese understanding of *śūnyatā*, *aśūnyatā* is granted an active value by indicating the concept of mysterious existence, expressed as 'truly non-existent, but mysteriously existent' (Shunei Hirai, 1970:500)¹. In other words, *aśūnyatā* is considered a natural consequence and value that can be found through the process of absolute affirmation achieved by absolute negation, or in the ultimate state where *śūnyatā* is eliminated endlessly by dialectically understanding 'Kong-yi-fu-kong'.

So how and when did the concept of *aśūnyatā* which had not existed in India become established in China? The word *aśūnyatā* can be traced back to the *Fang-guang-pan-ruo-jing*, translated by Wu-luo-cha in West Jin dynasty, as follows;

Also, *aśūnyatā* is not *aśūnyatā* itself, either. [T 8: 36a]

The Guang-zan-pan-ruo-jing translated by Zhu-fa-hu explains about 20 kinds of *śūnyatā* but makes no mention of *aśūnyatā*. Yet, the sūtra interpreted by Wu-luo-cha talks about *aśūnyatā* having self-nature as being the opposite concept of *śūnyatā*. In the *Prajña-pāramitā Sūtra* translated into Chinese, *aśūnyatā* is understood with this original meaning without exceptions. (Shunei Hirai, 1970:501)

It is very difficult to find the Chinese-style explanation of *aśūnyatā* in other writings except the 21st, Quan Cheng-huai-pin' in *Mula-m ādhyamaka-*

¹ Considering the usage of 'truly non-existent, but mysteriously existent', among the writings of Fa-zang, we find this term was mentioned in those that raise issues including 『Wang-chin-huan-yuan-kuan』 (T 45 : 638a) and 『Yu-hsin-fa-chieh-chi』 (T45: 649c-650a). As for Cheng-guan's works, this term was used several times in 『Fa-chieh-hsuan-ching』 (T 45 : 680a) and 『Yen-i-ch'ao』 .

śāstra as follows;

Aśūnyatā is a fixed existence and does not have construction and deconstruction (Cheng-huai). [T 30: 28a]

Aśūnyatā is here used only to mean the nature of a real existence that does not arise interdependently. In China, the opinion prevailed that śūnyatā was one of the extremes, and such a trend had already been expressed in the 13th, Quan-xing-pin in Mula-mādhyamaka-śāstra translated by Kumarajiva him as follows;

If there is Aśūnya -dharma, śūnya-dharma should exist. If there is no Aśūnya -dharma, how could śūnya-dharma exist? [T 30: 18c]

Likewise, he tried to remove the attachment to śūnya-dharma, but aśūnyatā was still used here as 'meaning having self-nature' and as the opposite concept of śūnyatā. This trend is reflected throughout the Hua-yan doctrines.

III. Śūnyatā Thought of Hua-yan Patriarchs

1. Du-shun's Śūnyatā Thought Expressed in the *Fa-jie-guan-men*

In *Fa-jie-guan-men*(Ae-soon, Chang, 1996:68~90) written by Du-shun (557-640), the name of *Da-fang-guang-fo hua-yan fa-jie-guan-men*(*Fa-jie-xuan-ching* [T 45, 672a] appears), so it is obvious that the first patriarch of the Hua-yan School organized this *guan-men* so that the truth spoken of in the Hua-yan Sūtra could be put into practice. According to one opinion, (Shigeo Gamada, 1982:424) the *Fa-jie-guan-men* became a driving force in establishing the Hua-yan School by not following the trend of commentaries.

As is widely known, the three views explained in the *Fa-jie-guan-men* consist of Zhen-kong-guan, Li-shi-wu-ai-guan and Zhou-bian-han-rong-guan. Further to this, Zhen-kong-guan [T 45: 673a] is divided into four categories among which the fourth Min-jue-wu-ji-guan attracts most attention.

For Du-shun, real śūnyatā is not based on form and, at the same time, is based on form. This is also true of śūnyatā. In short, they are understood as transcendental and absolute śūnyatā in a position of analytical meditation

with 'non-obstruction between form and emptiness'.

Li-shi-wu-ai-guan, that is, the view of non-obstruction between tathatā and phenomena is explained by using the Ten Doors.

Explicated as Li-shi-wu-ai-fa-jie, it manifests the width and depth of dharma-dhātu through zhen-kong-guan. The relation between tathatā and phenomena is also explained by using the Ten Doors: this is later interpreted by Ching-guan (*Fa-jie-xuan-kung*[T 45: 676b]) as related to Wu-dui.

Finally, zhou-bian-han-rong-guan was considered as the world in which phenomena influence one another without hinderance. It expresses the ultimate of Hua-yan-guan-men, reflecting traditional opinions²; this is also applied to the interpretation of dharma-dhātu. The explanation also adopts the Ten Doors.[T 45: 672c] In particular, Chengguan said, "The shi-xuan, that is, ten characteristics of the world in which phenomena are interdependent, came from the Ten Doors".

The position of Cheng-guan as adoption of Fa-zang's Shi-xuan-shuo was centered on *Fa-jie-guan-men* and, later, his founding of Si-zhong-fa-jie-shuo-stemed from various reasons. Above all, it seems that the Zen School greatly affected his position.

Thus, it can be said that, until the time of Cheng-guan, no new evaluation had been given to the weight of Du-shun's *Fa-jie-guan-men* on the Hua-yan doctrines.

2. Zhiyan's Consciousness-only Śūnyatā Thought

When considering the characteristics of his doctrines, it can be seen that Zhi-yan (602-668), (Shigeo Gamada , 1963:29) is more influenced by the view of Consciousness-only than the thought of śūnya. In the *Wu-shi-yao-wen-da*, the relation between the views of Consciousness-only and śūnya is explicated in a relatively minor manner. [T 45: 532a]

According to this text, the practice of śūnya should be undertaken in accordance with the Ten Dharmas including san-ye which is explained in the Hua-yan sutra. In other words, Zhi-yan argued that one should contemplate whether pure practices are based on the body or the precepts.

² Both Chengguan and Zongmi arranged the Three Views, following the order of the dharma-realm of principles, the dharma-realm of non-obstruction between principles and phenomena, and the dharma-realm of non-obstruction between phenomena. 『*Fa-jie-xuan-ching*』 (T 45: 672c) 『*Zhou-Fa-jie-guan-men*』 (T 45: 684c)

As for Shi-jing, he defined all phenomena as arising from one object according to the thought of śūnya because all objects are non-existent and thus are śūnyatā itself.

Later, he discussed the difference between the views of Consciousness-only and śūnyatā. In other words, he raised a question about how different the two are in meditative concentration if a person can enter into correct meditative concentration with the view of either Consciousness-only or śūnya. It is said that they are similar at the stage of completing zhiguan or śamatha and vipazyanā but employ different methods. Because such views are the essence of Zhiguan, one can keep these views in mind in daily life. By this process, earthly desires and lusts are removed from the mind, and the views of both Consciousness-only and śūnya contribute to the practice of awakening.

However, Zhi-yan said in the *Kong-mu zhang*[T 45: 542b] that one should not attach to earthly desires or bodhi because they are beings. That is, anitya is what removes all form and, thus, śūnya. In particular, Zhi-yan viewed śūnyatā as the opposite concept of aśūnyatā as follows in *Sou-xuan-ji*;

Also, this should be true to artificiality and unartificiality because of Yi-sheng-gong-jiao. The artificiality in the single vehicle is śūnyatā and the unartificiality in the single vehicle is aśūnyatā. [T 35: 26b]

Śūnyatā is understood to have a relatively shallow and intimate meaning and aśūnyatā to have a profound meaning.³

3. Fa-zang's Perfect and Interfused Śūnyatā Thought

A. Śūnyatā Thought of Non-obstruction between Emptiness and Existence

The śūnya thought of Fa-zang is reviewed with reference to his various writings, especially the *Shi-er-men-lun zong-zhi-yi-ji*, (Ae-soon, chang, 1989:238-240) also called the *Xin-san-lun*.

According to Fa-zang, among the writings of the Mādahyamika School, *Shi-er-men-lun* is the most representative, whose verse and commentary were

³ T 35: 44c. The record of 'kong-bu-kong-men', also, exists in Fa-zang's writings, for instance, 『*Hua-yan-san-bao-zhang*』 (T 45: 623a) and 『*Yu-hsim-fa-chieh-chii*』 (T 45: 647a).

written by Nāgārjuna. After Fa-zang heard about the discussion on kong-you from Ri-zhao-san-cang, he wrote this *Zong-zhi-yi-ji* to clearly express his interpretation on śūnya. What he heard from Ri-zhao-san-cang was shown in the *Tan-xuan-ji* and the *Qi-xin-lun-yi-ji*, but it is well known that these came later. (Yoshiide Yoshitsu, 1979:163)

His understanding of śūnya in the *Zong-zhi-yi-ji* appears to be a little different from that in the *Wu-jiao zhang*. This is because the latter was written in the position of Xing-xiang-rong-hui and the former in the position of śūnya. (Junshoo Tanaka, 1962:70)

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that *Zong-zhi-yi-ji* appeared when Fa-zang was the most spiritually mature.

The Yi-ta-yi [T 42: 215b] in the *Zong-zhi-yi-ji* spoke of the san-xing's interpretation on śūnyatā thought. Because Fei-you and Fei-bu-you themselves are perfect śūnyatā although they are in Huan-you, they are called non-possession. Real śūnyatā, also, has the two aspects of Fei-kong and Fei-bu-kong, but should transcend the realms of existence and non-existence.

The following sentence indicates that existence and emptiness are basically the same, clearly showing Fa-zang's thought about the union of existence and emptiness.

Emptiness not different from existence is real emptiness, and existence not different from emptiness is huan-you. Therefore, these two are the same because they are not two. [T 42: 215c]

In the above-mentioned sentence, the logic of 'emptiness not different from existence' and 'existence not different from emptiness' is one aspect relating to existence as the highest truth, rather than an explanation of the nature of interdependently arising existence: This clearly reveals Fa-zang's position because the perfectly accomplished nature of reality is suchness in the sense of completing the practice, and Yi-ta is interfused with the perfectly accomplished nature of reality in the dharma-realm of suchness. It does not need to be said that the teachings of Fa-zang are based on the Hua-yan Sūtra. Even in his commentarial work on this Sūtra, the *Tan-xuan-ji*, [T 35: 119a] non-self-nature is viewed as suchness. Thus, it is fully understandable that his śūnya thought sees Kong-yi from the perspective of Yuan-cheng-zhen-ru. In short, Fa-zang addressed the contradiction imbedded in Pan-ruo-kong unavoidably adopted by the early teaching of the Great Vehicle and in Zhong-guan-kong only stressing the inevitability of

transforming negation into affirmation, accepted the reality itself as true thusness, and, further, affirmed all things through suchness.

B. Śūnyatā Thought as Yuan-qi-guan

A phenomenon that at first glance appears to be trivial is not existent by itself, but it exists in the interrelation with limitless and countless others. The basis of this logic naturally lies in Yuan-qi-guan, which is Fa-jie-yuan-qi, one of the characteristics of the Hua-yan School.

Fa-jie-yuan-qi views interdependent origination from the dharma-realm's perspective and the prerequisite of interdependent origination is non-self-nature. These relations are clearly explicated in the *Zong-zhi-yi-ji* as follows.

There is no dharma that is not based on dependent origination when occurring.

It follows Yuan-you and, thus, inevitably does not have self-nature. And it follows causes due to non-self-nature. However, Yuan-you and Xing-wu are not two separate dharmas. The difference arises only from yuan-you.

The worldly truth comes from the yuan-you's position, and the absolute truth from the Wu-xing-iwei's position. In one, dependent origination, yuan-you and Xing-wu co-exist with each other and lead to the two truths. Dependent origination is not two and transcends the two extreme views toward the middle way. This is the summary. [T 42: 215b]

This is mentioned in the Third Door, *Zong-shu-zong-yi*, among the Four Doors describing the Zong-qu of *Shi-er-men-lun*. Among parts explaining right principles, this is one especially explicating the Erh-di-zhong-dao of the nature of interdependently arising existence. As long as a thing arises interdependently, it cannot have an original nature; this itself is the true aspect of the thing.

Thus, huan-you cannot be defined as materialized existence of things. Fa-zang said that this could exist only as real śūnya.

However, careful attention should be given to the logic that what arises interdependently is no self-nature. The Madhyamika School used the terms of provisional existence and illusory existence, but never adopted the terminology of seemingly existence. If we understand that what arises interdependently is indicated as having no self-nature because it is a provisional existence like an illusion, the terms of provisional existence and non-self-nature are clearly understood. (Kyookee Kaginusi, 1988:746)

However, if what arises interdependently is seemingly existent as well as non-self-nature, the explanation of Yuan-qi-wu-xing should not be

conducted according to the original position, but according to a new view. That is, if what arises interdependently is considered as not only seemingly existence but also non-self-nature, such non-self-nature should be explicated in places where seemingly existence appears like existence. Because the nature of interdependent existence arises from causes, seemingly existence is non-self-nature and these two meanings become one.

IV . Conclusion

This paper has considered the concept of śūnyatā in Hua-yan teachings. In contrast to the viewpoint that things originate interdependently, is the position that things are not fixed, that which is fixed is self nature, that which negates this is śūnyatā or non-self nature. This is the underlying basis of Buddhist thought and practice.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

* Notes: S = Sanskrit. K = Korean. J = Japanese. E=English

Ae-soon Chang(K) 張愛順
Anitya (S) 無常
Cheng-guan 澄觀
Cheng-huai-pin 成壞品
Cheng-huai 成壞
Da-fang-guan-gfo- hua-yan- fa-jie-guan-men 大方廣佛華嚴法界觀門
Du-shun 杜順
Erh-di-zhong-dao 二諦中道
Fa-chieh-hsuan-ching 法界玄鏡
Fa-jie-guan-men 法界觀門
Fa-jie-yuan-qi 法界緣起
Fa-zang 法藏
Fang-guang-pan-ruo-jing 放光般若經
Fei-bu-you 非不有 有
Fei-bu-kong 非不空
Fei-kong 非空
Fei-you 非有 無
Guan-g-zan-pan-ruo-jing 光讚般若經
Hua-yan 後漢
Hua-yan-guan-men 華嚴觀門

Huan-you 幻有
Ki-sil-lon 起論
Kon-g-yi-fu-kong 空亦復空
Kong-bu-kong- men 空不 空門
Kong-mu-zhang 孔目章
Kong-yi 空義
Kong-you 空有
Ku-ma-ra-jiva (S) 鳩摩羅什
Li-shi-wu-ai-fa-jie 理事無碍法界
Li-shi-wu-ai-guan 理事無碍觀
Madhyamika School(E) 中觀派
Miao-you 妙有
Min-jue-wu-ji-guan 泯絕無奇觀
Mula-malhyamaka- Śāstra(S) Zhong-lun 中論
Pan-ruo-kong 般若 空
Pratītya-samutpāda (S) 緣起
Qi-xin-lun-yi-ji 起論義記
Quan-xing-pin 觀行品
Ri-zhao-san-cang 日照三藏
San-xing 三性
San-ye 三業
Shi-er-men-lun 十二門論
Shi-er-men-lun-zong-zhi-yi-ji 十二門論宗致義記
Shi-jing 十境
Shi-shi-wu-ai-fa-jie 事事無碍法界
Shi-xuan 十玄
Shi-xuan-shuo 十玄說
Siz-hong-fa-jies-huo 四種法界說
Sou-xuan-ji 搜玄記
Śūnyatā(S) 空性
Tan-xuan-ji 探玄記
wu-zuo 無作
Wang-chin-huan-yuan-kuan 妄盡闡厥觀
West -Jin 西晉
Wu-dui 五對
Wu-jiao zhang 五教章
Wu-luo-cha 無羅叉
Wu-shi-yao-wen-da 五十要問答
Wu-xing-I-wei 無性一味
You-zuo 有作
Yuan-qi-wu-xing 緣起無性

Yuan-jiao 圓教
Xin-san-lun 新三論
Xing-wu 性無
Xing-xiang-rong-hui 性相融會
Yen-i-chao 演義少
Yi-sheng-gong-jiao 一乘共教
Yi-ta 依他
Yi-ta-yi 依他義
Yuan-cheng-zhen-ru 圓成真如
Yuan-qi-guan 緣起觀
Yuan-jiao 圓教
Yuan-you 緣有
Yu-hsin-fa-chieh-chi 遊心法界記
Zhen-kong-guan 真空觀
Zhen-kong-miao-you 真空妙有
Zhi-guan 止觀
Zhi-yan 智儼
Zhong-guan-kong 中觀空
Zhou-bian-han-rong-guan 周遍含容觀
Zhu-fahu 竺法護
Zong-shu-zong-yi 總述宗意
Zong-zhi-yi-ji 宗致義記
Zong-qu 宗趣

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