

# An Analysis of the Buddha's Paradoxical Silence: Neither the Positive nor Nihilistic View

*Kwangsoo Park*

*The ineffable realm is one of the most widely debated topics in the distinctive religious traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Muslim Mysticism, and other religious traditions. All words, metaphors, and symbols in Buddhist literature as well as in other religious literature are the symbolic and metaphoric illustrations that point to what the ineffable reality is.*

*The Buddha kept silent when asked some metaphysical questions. The Buddha's silence becomes the fundamental tradition of Buddhism, and it is a hot issue in Buddhist Studies. The Buddha's silence would be a way to avoid either the positive or nihilistic approaches. The Buddha's silent approach influenced Mādhyamika, Yogācāra and in particular, Ch'an Buddhism.*

*The paradoxical expression ignores the principle of non-contradiction. It remains as a paradox illustrating the ineffable reality. The paradoxical view follows some logical procedure: (1) either A or B; (2) neither A nor B; (3)*

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Kwangsoo Park is a Professor of Department of Won-Buddhism at Wonkwang University, Korea. This paper was supported by Wonkwang University in 2006.

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not neither A nor B. In the positive way, the paradoxical view admits some validity of the words and metaphors to illustrate the ineffable reality. In contrast, the paradoxical view admits that words, metaphors, and symbols are not the perfect tools for illustrating the ineffable realm. Finally, it rejects the previous formulas and uses the paradoxical logic: not neither A nor B. In this sense, the paradoxical view is neither the positive view nor the nihilistic view. It uses some progressive negations of the preceding syllogism in different perspectives. The Buddha's silence is an example of the paradoxical expression of the Buddha without relying on words to avoid either Nihilism or Eternalism.

Key Words: Buddha's silence, Ineffable realm, Paradoxical logic, Ch'an Buddhism, Nihilism.

## I. Preface

The ineffable realm is one of the most widely debated topics in the distinctive religious traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Muslim Mysticism, and other religious traditions. In the Vedic literature, *Brahman* is described in many different ways.<sup>1</sup> The qualities of *Brahman* is illustrated with the terms *nirguna* and *saguna* in the *bhakti* worship. *Nirguna* worship to the Hindu deity ascribes no form or attributes. On the other hand, *saguna* worship ascribes qualities to the Hindu deity (Embree, 1988:371). *Nirguna* implies the invaluable qualities of *Brahman* beyond conceptualization. The state of non-duality, in the *Upanishads*, is the ineffable aspect of the ultimate reality (*Brahman* or *ātman*) which is expressed with a short passage 'neti neti' or 'not this, not that'. In the *Upanishads*, *mokṣa* is the state of infinity that is attained when one comes to know the identity of *ātman* and *Brahman* and the state of the elimination of all duality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Brahman* is illustrated in many ways in the early Hindu literatures as God, Creator, Universal Being, or Universal Principle: (1) 'The Lord of Creation' in the *Prasna Upanishad*; (2) the source of all creation without having any human form (Mascaró, 75); (3) In the *Katha Upanishads*, the Creator of the Universe, Pure Spirit, and the Truth itself (Mascaró, 65).

In Christianity, God is beyond any finite reality including time and space, verbal expressions, and any logical reasoning. According to Paul Tillich, “God” in Christianity is revealed through religious symbols. For this reason, Paul Tillich says “The object of theology is found in the symbols of religious experience. ... Theology, then, is the conceptual interpretation, explanation, and criticism of the symbols in which a special encounter between man and God has found expression” (Tillich, 1951:132-33, 196-97, 265ff., 1955:108).

All words, metaphors, and symbols in Buddhist literature as well as in other religious literature are the symbolic and metaphoric illustrations that point to what the ineffable reality is. When we follow the Nihilistic view, there is no other way to illustrate the essential reality beyond the dichotomic concepts or logical reasoning. Then, consequently, one should keep silent because neither words nor reasoning could be applied to illustrate the ineffable realm.

The Buddha kept silent when asked some metaphysical questions. There are some famous stories about the silence of the Buddha. The Buddha's silence becomes the fundamental tradition of Buddhism, and it is a hot issue in Buddhist Studies. T. W. Organ in his “The Silence of the Buddha” diminishes the Buddha's philosophical capabilities in light of his silence (Organ, 1954:125-140; Nagao, 1991:38). On the other hand, T. Watsuji defends the Buddha's silence as a means of not denying the validity of philosophical or systematic thinking. Watsuji considers that “such an attitude (of silence) constitutes the essential characteristic of a philosophy” (Watsuji, 1927:133-4). Yoshinori insists that the silence is pragmatic and contemplative (*dhyāna*; *samādhi*) (Yoshinori, 1991:3-12).<sup>2</sup> Yadav interprets Buddha's silence to signify two things: a refusal to commit metaphysical non-sense and a proposal to diagnose the human existence whose form is expressed in metaphysics (Yadav, 1977:465).

Further, Nagao discusses the validity of words in contrast to silence in his essay “The Silence of the Buddha and its *Mādhyamic*

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2 Yoshinori claimed that the pragmatic standpoint fails to provide us with any help “when religion runs counter to philosophy and metaphysics precisely because metaphysical transcendence substitutes a conceptual abstraction for authentic transcendence.” However, from another point of view, he considers that the pragmatic or positivistic explanation is not without its basis.

Interpretation” (Nagao, 1991:35-49). He cites three meanings of the Buddha's silence: first, silence on metaphysical topics (*catvāri avyākrtavastūni*: things undetermined, or unelucidated, or unanswered); second, silence as a sign of approval of a disciple's exposition of a certain truth, or of acknowledgment for his supplication; and third, silence as a disagreement with an opponent's questions and arguments (Organ, 1954:129; Nagao, 1991:36).

The Buddha's silence is different from the silence of the Nihilistic view. It is to avoid either Eternalism or Nihilism for the metaphysical questions. The Buddha's silence would be a way to avoid either the positive or nihilistic approaches. The Buddha's silent approach influenced *Mādhyamika*, *Yogācāra*, and in particular, *Ch'an* Buddhism. *Ch'an* masters applied negative expression as the best way to disclose the ultimate reality which is paradoxically ineffable. Let me examine three different views in defining the ineffable realm such as the Nihilistic view, the view of metaphoric resemblance, and the Buddha's paradoxical silence.

## II. The Nihilistic View: Keeping Silence

The Nihilistic view rejects any validity of the words to illustrate the ultimate reality. The main premise of the nihilistic view is that the transcendental reality is beyond any finite reality. However, words, symbols, and metaphors are the finite reality.

In Christian theology, human beings are also living in the finite reality bounded by time and space. Also, the knowledge of human beings is limited. In other words, human beings as a finite reality could never fully understand the transcendental reality, namely God. Knowledge about God is only possible through His divine revelation. Divine revelation appears through symbols, people, events, and nature. However, God remains a mystery. In this case, there is no way for the finite reality to access the transcendental reality which is beyond any conventional reality. Based on this reasoning, the people who follow the Nihilistic view generate the unpretentious conclusion that words cannot

illustrate the ineffable reality.

W. T. Stace, in the *Mysticism and Philosophy* called this nihilistic view the Dionysian theory which is “the view that no words apply to the mystical, or to God” (Stace, 1960:288). According to Stace, the Dionysian theory advocates “nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it” (Stace, 1960:289). The theory of Dionysus makes the transcendental reality of God absolutely ineffable.

Steven T. Katz also discusses Christian mysticism and divides it into two types: the non-absorptive type and the absorptive (or unitive) type. The non-absorptive type, according to Katz, is reminiscent of Jewish mysticism:

Jewish mystics envisioned the ultimate goal of mystical relation, *devekuth*, not as absorption into God, or as unity with the divine but rather as a loving intimacy, a ‘clinging to’ God, a relation which all the time is aware of the duality of God and systic (Katz, 1978:35-36).

Katz interprets the Jewish mystical experience as the experience of God in ‘Totally Other’ rather than in ‘Self.’ In the Jewish mystical experience, *Devekuth* is the experience of absolute dependence on God. God is omniscient and omnipresent, while human beings are dependent upon the graceful power of God. The experience of one’s absolute dependence is the main goal in Jewish mysticism.

The Christian mysticism of Rudolf Otto would be categorized in the non-absorptive type. Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy* illustrates the mystical religious experience with the term ‘numinous’ which is beyond conceptualization. Rudolf Otto has analyzed the phenomenon of awe and warns that the Holy can by no means be fully understood in rational terms. According to Otto, “through the experience of awe, we behold mystery, fear, and fascination” (Meitzen, 1993:11-12). According to Otto, one of the most distinctive mystical experiences is ‘creature-feeling.’ Creature-feeling is the Christian mystical experience of one who encounters the transcendental, realizing that one has been created. In this non-absorptive type, Jewish mysticism and Rudolf Otto

emphasize the ineffability of the transcendental reality of God.

The absorptive (or unitive) type is the mystical experience of the union between self and God. The absorptive type indicates that one as a little part will be absorbed into the transcendental realm of God as a whole. This is an all-embracing unity between an individual and God. The most significant person in Christian mysticism may be Meister Eckhart, a Western Christian theologian in mystics. Eckhart insists that "If I am to know God directly, I must become completely he and he I: so that this he and this I become and are one I" (Katz, 1978:41). It is a unitive and absorptive mysticism of the divine.

The absorptive type does not provide any validity of words to explain the mystical experience of the union with God. Meister Eckhart stands for the Nihilistic view of the words and states that the tongues of the prophets who have had mystical experience will be tied for three reasons:

First, because the good they knew by sight in God was too immense and too mysterious to take definite shape in the understanding.

Another reason was that what they had gotten in God rivalled God's very self in its immensity and sublimity and yielded no idea nor any form for them to express.

Third, they were dumb because the hidden truth they saw in God, the mystery they found there, was ineffable (Stace, 1960:287).

Based on these three reasons, Eckhart postulates that God's very self could not be expressed with any visual forms or words.

However, as Katz has cautioned, we should not distinguish the Christian mystical experience of union with God from the Hindu mystical experience of union with *Brahman*. Katz considers that the Hindu experience of *Brahman* and the Christian experience of God are not the same, saying "'God' can be 'God', '*Brahman*' can be '*Brahman*' and *nirvāṇa* can be *nirvāṇa* without any reductionist attempt to equate the concept of 'God' with that of '*Brahman*', or '*Brahman*' with *nirvāṇa*" (Katz, 1978:66).

I agree with Katz's approach to distinguish any mystical experience in the religious, cultural, and historical context. There are many cases where the contents are different, although they use the same terms to explain their mystical experience. However, when we discuss the style and the absorptive type of mystical experience, it is somewhat similar to the style of the *Upanishadic* mysticism of union between self (*ātman*) and *Brahman*. In the *Upanishads*, an individual being and *Brahman* are metaphorically illustrated as a grain of salt in the ocean. Individual beings are melted away and absorbed in the ocean-like *Brahman*.

The state of non-duality, in the *Upanishads*, is the ineffable aspect of the ultimate reality (*Brahman* or *ātman*) which is expressed with a short passage 'neti neti' or 'not this, not that.' The *Upanishads* represent the final stage in the development of Vedic religious thought. In other words, The *Upanishads* has its antecedent in earlier Vedic texts (Embree, 1988:29). In the *Mundaka Upanishad*, two main states of Knowledge are mentioned, namely, knowledge in duality and knowledge in non-duality. The lower wisdom is to know the four sacred *Vedas*, definition and grammar, pronunciation and poetry, ritual and the signs of heaven. The higher wisdom is the knowledge of non-duality between *ātman* and *Brahman*.<sup>3</sup>

The *Tao-te Ching* (道德經), one of the most important literary sources in Taoism, also follows this nihilistic view and amplifies the uselessness of words to describe the Tao or Way. In the first chapter of the *Tao-te Ching*, the term Tao refers to the ineffable realm: "The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; The Named is the mother of all things" (Chan, 1963:139).

To Lao-tzu, the Tao which is illustrated is not the eternal Tao. For this reason, the *Tao-te Ching* says that "the sage manages affairs without action (*wu-wei*). And spreads doctrines without words" (Chan, 1963:139). The *Tao-te Ching* minimizes the value of the words and appraises silence: "He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know. Close the mouth" (Chan, 1963:166). The best way of the

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3 Juan Mascaró, *The Upanishads*, 75.

sages is to shut their mouths and keep silent. The *Tao-te Ching* is seeking other means of making people understand without relying on words. However, the other means are not elaborated on in the *Tao-te Ching*.

### III. The View of Metaphoric Resemblance.

In this view of metaphoric resemblance, metaphors and symbols are used as the main tools in pointing to the essential reality of non-duality. Metaphors and symbols are not the same as the transcendental reality which they point to. However, as Stace insists, a metaphor implies a resemblance (Stace, 1960:293). Stace distinguishes the Dionysian theory and the metaphor theory as follows:

According to Dionysus the word X if used of God means that God is the cause of X. According to the metaphor theory if the word X is used of God, it means that X is a metaphor for something in the actual nature of God himself or in the mystical experience. ... Another way of expressing the difference between them is to say that in the Dionysian theory the relation between symbolizandum and symbol is causal, whereas the metaphor theory implies a relation of resemblance (Stace, 1960:291-292).

In this passage, Stace insists that a particular metaphor is used for one of the actual natures of God. Although a metaphor is not the same as the actual quality of God, it has a certain resemblance with one of the qualities of God.

Rudolf Otto holds that the 'numinous' is ineffable and human conceptions are inadequate to illustrate what God is. However, he used many metaphors to illustrate the characteristics of the mystical experience of God. For example, Otto has used the term 'awe' for the mystical experience and illustrated the experience of awe as 'mystery,' 'fear,' and 'fascination'. 'Awe' implies the mystical experience of ineffable reality. Although God reveals Himself to human beings, He remains as an incomprehensible mystery. The term 'fear' has three elements such

as awfulness, overpoweringness, and energy.<sup>4</sup> Moses's mystical experience at Mt. Sinai showed his fear of God. Moses was overwhelmed by the power of God and trembled at the awfulness of God. Moses also showed his fascination to the "Totally Other." Stace asserts that a concept is possible wherever there is a resemblance.<sup>5</sup> The metaphors used by Otto, as Stace insists, imply resemblances of the characteristics of God. In other words, though the metaphors are not the same as the reality which they illustrate, these metaphors show some resemblances to the characteristics of God.

It seems that *Ch'an* masters have used symbols as the means or vehicles to attain enlightenment; the truth per se. For example, *Ch'an* masters sometimes burned the wooden Buddha statue and the *maṇḍala* because they believed the symbol (i.e., the wooden Buddha statue) was an expedient means to show the limitless qualities of the Buddha. This fact does not necessarily mean that *Ch'an* masters ignored the Buddha statue, but they might have thought that the symbols remained as symbols pointing to the Buddha. In another *Ch'an* metaphor, the finger pointing to the moon in the sky is not considered the moon, but as a means of pointing to the reality of the true moon. In this sense, the wooden Buddha statue would remain as the sign pointing to the qualities of the Buddha. It is not the Buddha himself. The approach of *Tantric* Buddhism is different from the *Ch'an* tradition. The symbols (i.e., *mudrā*, *maṇḍala*, and *mantra*) represented the secret or sacred power of *Mahavairocana* Buddha in Japanese *Shingon* Buddhism.

Stace insists that "metaphorical language is only meaningful and justifiable if it is at least theoretically translatable into literal language" (Stace, 1960:293). Stace points out one possibility of 'meaningless metaphor' in the metaphor theory, saying: "If A is used as a metaphor

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4 Three elements in the fear: (a) awfulness: there is an element of horror at beholding the totally other; (b) overpoweringness: It leaves us stripped of any pretense of power; (c) energy: The Holy is the source of all energy. Those who encounter God perceive that they are in the presence of vast energy (Meitzen, 1993:11-12).

5 Stace illustrates this as follows: "X can only be a metaphor for Y if X resembles Y in some way. But any two resemblant things can be placed in a class because of the resemblance. Therefore to say that X is a metaphor for something in the essence of God is to say that the something can be conceptualized" (Stace, 1960:293).

for B, both A and B must be before the mind and also the resemblance between them which is the foundation of the metaphor. If this is not the case, we have what is usually called 'meaningless metaphor'" (Stace, 1960:293). If one could not use the literal language descriptively to illustrate the ineffable reality, he or she could not avoid the ambiguity in using words. For example, the words such as 'void', 'darkness', 'undifferentiated unity', and 'joyfulness' are used metaphorically to describe the ineffable reality. But, these literal words, metaphors, or symbols are not identified with the ineffable realm of the reality.

One could explain for the blind what the sun looks like by giving some metaphoric examples, i.e., round like a gong, blazing like a candle flame, and others. Although the sun possesses the same characteristics of the roundness of a gong and the brightness of a candlelight, the sun is not the gong and the candlelight in reality. The finger pointing to the moon in the sky should not be identified with the moon itself. For this reason, all words, symbols, and metaphors used by the mystics are not descriptive but remain metaphorical and symbolical. In other words, the view of metaphoric resemblance holds that the ineffable reality still remains beyond conceptualization.

#### IV. Paradoxical Silence: Neither the Positive nor Nihilistic View

Teaching without relying on words is also emphasized in the Buddhist tradition. In the early Buddhist scriptures, the meaningful silence of the Buddha is described. For example, *Ch'an* or *Sōn* Buddhism asserts the transmission of the Buddha *dharma* without relying on the words. The main theme of the *Ch'an* literatures is found in its emphasis on the mind as the key in the transmission of Buddha *dharma*. What is the function of the Buddha's silence in Buddhist tradition?

It is clear that the Buddha did not answer questions relating to metaphysical topics such as: "Is the universe infinite?", "Are the soul and the body identical?", or "the effect of *karman*", or "existence after death", and so forth (Thomas, 1935:25). It is not clear whether the

Buddha, as T. Watsuji claims, did not consider these metaphysical questions as real philosophical questions. However, the Buddha explained his reasons for not answering the metaphysical questions by using a metaphor of a wounded person who was shot by a poisoned arrow. What was urgent for the wounded person was to pull out that arrow to save his life, but it would not be urgent for him to ask where the arrow came from or who shot it.

Another story gives the Buddha's viewpoint for not answering the question about the existence of *anātman*. Vacchagotta, a monk, asked the Buddha whether *ātman* existed. The Buddha did not answer but explained his reasons to Ānanda: the answer of whether “*ātman* exists” or “*ātman* does not exist” will be either on the side of Eternalism (*sāsvata-vāda*) or of Nihilism (*uccheda-vāda*) (S.N. IV:400ff; Organ, 1954:129). The silence of the Buddha gives his clear viewpoint to be neither Eternalistic nor Nihilistic because both sides mislead or do not elaborate the true nature of *ātman*.

According to the bibliographies of both the *Mahāyāna* and *Hīnayāna* traditions, we can also find the reluctance of the Buddha to answer some questions after his enlightenment at the foot of the *Bodhi* tree at Gāya.

But if I were to teach the Doctrine, and others did not understand it, it would be a weariness to me, a vexation. ...

Through painful striving have I gained it,  
 Away with now proclaiming it;  
 By those beset with lust and hate  
 Not easily in this Doctrine learnt.  
 This Doctrine, fine, against the stream,  
 Subtle, profound, and hard to see,  
 They will not see it, lust-inflamed,  
 Beneath the mass of darkness veiled.  
 (Thomas, 1935:23; Nagao, 1991:36-7)

The Buddha mentioned not only the subtle and profound truth but also the difficulty of understanding it. It is not clear whether he denied the validity of words to explain the *Dharma* completely.

The Buddhist schools such as *Mādhyamika*, *Yogācāra*, and *Ch'an* schools interpreted the Buddha's silence in different ways. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśanā-sūtra* also states that the Ultimate Truth is beyond verbal expression: "It is in all beings wordless, speechless, shows no signs, is not possible of cognizance, and is above all questioning and answering" (T.14.551c; Organ, 1954:137-8). It is clear that the Buddhist scriptures, in one aspect, generally claim the invalidity of words and logical reasoning in describing the ineffable realm. However, we might consider that the Buddha's silence would be one way to show the ineffable reality. In other words, silence is not a simple rejection of the validity of the words, but a skillful means to guide people to understand the ultimate reality which is ineffable.

Peter Moore insists that "What mystics are trying to describe cannot be described without their falling into contradiction, even though one might envision other language systems in which the experience could be described without such contradiction" (Moore, 1978:106). This contradiction is expressed in the *Isa Upanishad*:

That One, though never stirring, is swifter than thought ...  
 Though standing still, it overtakes those who are running ...  
 It stirs and it stirs not.  
 It is far, and likewise near.  
 It is inside all this, and it is outside all this.

It is a paradoxical and contradictory statement. Nāgārjuna applied the eightfold negations to approach the ultimate truth by refuting his non-proposition.

Not arising, not passing away;  
 Not eternal, not terminable;  
 Not one, not many;  
 Not coming, not going;  
 I pay homage to the Buddha,  
 The foremost among teachers,  
 Who has taught this dependent co-arising  
 In order to graciously to uproot all fabrication.  
 (Nagao, 1989:10)

Kalupahana refers to this approach as the ‘dialectical negative approach’ in the Buddhist Philosophy. In the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, Nāgārjuna formulated the central teaching of the Buddha as follows:

*saroṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyaṃ eva ca,  
naivātathyaṃ naiva tathyaṃ etat duddhānuṣṇaṃ.*

“Everything is such, not such, both such and not such, and neither such and not such: this is the Buddha’s admonition” (Kalupahana, 1986:269).

Frits Staal formulates this short passage (*catuskoṭi*) in the following form: “(1) x exists, (2) x does not exist, (3) x exists and does not exist, (4) x neither exists nor does not exist” (Staal, 1975:36). If we follow this formula, we have to accept that “x exists and does not exist” at the same time. As Staal and Murti have mentioned, these four formulas would violate ‘the principle of noncontradiction’ which prevents us from rejecting and accepting the same statement at the same time (Staal, 1975:37; Murti, 1955:146-148).

Richard Robinson has interpreted Nāgārjuna’s formula in alternative ways as follows: (1) All x is A, (2) No x is A, (3) Some x is A, and some x is not A, (4) No x is A, and no x is not A (Robinson, 1978:57). Staal insists that Robinson and other scholars’ logical attempts to interpret this formula is unsatisfactory by their failure between “the principle of noncontradiction (‘not both A and not-A’) on the one hand, and the two principles of the excluded middle (‘either A or not-A’) on the other (the two latter principles are equivalent)” (Staal, 1975:38).

Staal considers that the *catuskoṭi* shows Nāgārjuna’s adherence to an ancient Indian tradition which rejects the validity of the words. In the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (18.7), Nāgārjuna advocated the limitation of the words as follows:

*Nivrttam abhidhātavyam nivrtte citta-gocare,  
anuppannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇam iva dharmatā.*

“When the sphere of thought has ceased, that which is to be designated also has ceased. Like freedom, the nature of things

is non-arisen and non-ceased” (Kalupahana, 1986:268).

Staal translates the first line of this *sloka* as “What words can express comes to a stop when the domain of the mind comes to a stop.” He interprets Nāgārjuna's thought as to “express the view that one knows that certain things cannot be expressed and cannot be known” (Staal, 1975:45). This is paradoxical in at least one sense. The *Mādhyamikans* felt such difficulties and interpreted their doctrine in different ways. In this particular *sloka*, Staal seems to interpret Nāgārjuna's view as negative.

Nāgārjuna's view of words should be distinguished from the Nihilistic view which rejects any validity of words. Although Nāgārjuna admitted the limits of words, he utilized the sequential negations of words as his logic of paradox without propounding any propositions (*pratijñā*) (Staal, 1975:44). Nāgārjuna said, “I have no proposition (*nāsti mama pratijñā*)” (Bhattacharya, 1971:237). Although Nāgārjuna insisted his non-proposition, paradoxically, non-proposition is another type of proposition. Continuous negations of negations is the way to avoid any misconceptualization in the definitions of words.

It seems that Nāgārjuna kept his own proposition without standing to either side of the secular propositions, such as Nihilism or Positivism, as the reasons for the Buddha's silence are examined.<sup>6</sup> However, there is no other means to explain ultimate or conventional truths without using words with logical reasoning, or other symbolic expressions; otherwise, one should keep silent. Therefore, Nagao agreed to the position of the Prasaṅghika who “speak by using conventional language and reason with the logic of the mundane world for the simple reason that there is no other means by which the Great Compassion can manifest itself” (Nagao, 1991:47).

Although the Buddhist scriptures describe the aspects of the limitation of words or misleading aspects, it seems that they do not negate the valuable aspect of words and logical reasoning. In the doctrinal system of the twofold truth of the Buddhist literature, the

<sup>6</sup> Kalupahana asserts that Nāgārjuna's emphasis of “emptiness” was to eliminate any dogmatism or obsession (*adhilaya*) and any erroneous views (*dosa-prasanga*, XXIV.13) (Kalupahana, 1986:86).

True or Ultimate Reality is beyond words, while, on the other hand, the functional aspect of the True Reality is expressible. Within *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the system of the two truths has been employed to that end to resolve the essential aspect and functional aspect of the Ultimate Reality. The two truths are *paramārtha* (ultimate or superworldly) and *saṃvṛti* (conventional or worldly).

Nāgārjuna divides Buddhist doctrines into the two truths: the worldly conventional truth and the ultimate truth (Kalupahana, 1986:331-333). Concerning the two truths, in the *Mādhyamika* tradition, Nāgārjuna elaborates the two truths in his Treatise on the Middle Way (*Mādhyamaka-sāstra*): 1) the nature of the two truths; 2) that if one does not know the truths, one does not know the essence of Buddha's scriptures; 3) the purpose of teaching the two truths; 4) the faults of misconceiving the two truths; and, 5) that because the two truths are difficult to realize, Buddha did not teach them in the beginning.

Truths are objects that exist the way they appear. Thus, according to the Geshe Lhundup and Jeffrey Hopkins, conventional objects are truths only in the sense that they seem to exist the way they appear because of an ignorant consciousness, a concealer (*saṃvṛti*) of suchness (*tathatā*) through conceiving phenomena which exists inherently (Sopa, 1989). Hence, all objects except emptiness are conventional truths or truths-for-a-concealer. On the other hand, the Geshe Lhundup and Jeffrey Hopkins elaborates that emptiness is an ultimate truth because it exists as empty of inherent existence in direct perception. It is an ultimate truth, because among phenomena it is supreme, since through meditating on it, obstructions are removed and it is the object of the highest wisdom.

Nāgārjuna's rejection of the *Abhidharma* system<sup>7</sup> was based on his tenet that “all *dharmas* do change continuously and they all have no

<sup>7</sup> One of main themes of *Abhidharma* theory is the ‘Absence of Essence (or *ātman*) and permanence of *dharmas*’. *Vaiśiṣṭika* accepted the authority of *Abhidharma* and asserted that all existences are substantially established as having their own autonomous entity that is not dependent on conceptuality. In the *Abhidharma* system, *dharmas* do not change but exist permanently. The *Hīnayānas* cultivate the view of selflessness merely through brief reasoning. In dependence on this, they finally remove the conception of true existence, together with its seeds, through the *vajra*-like meditative stabilization of the *Hīnayāna* path of meditation and simultaneously actualize the *Hīnayāna* enlightenment. It is denied by the *Mādhyamika* school.

own-being (*svabhāva*).”<sup>8</sup> It seems that Nāgārjuna followed the Buddha's theory of codependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) faithfully<sup>9</sup> and he elaborated further on the theory of codependent arising in relation to emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Nāgārjuna defined both *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* as the ‘middle path’ (*pratipat saiva madhyamā*) (Kalupahana, 1986:334-339). Even though Nāgārjuna divides the two truths to explain the doctrine which is taught by the Buddha, the two truths are not separable: “Without relying upon convention, the ultimate fruit is not taught. Without understanding the ultimate fruit, freedom is not attained” (Kalupahana, 1986:333-335). Therefore, the two truths are not different entities but one entity within a nominal difference. The truths are not one, but are nominally different, for they appear differently in thought. The *Mādhyamika* school refutes true existence with respect to all phenomena even down to particles. This means that through reasoning, this school shows that things are not established as their own mode of subsistence or are not their own reality. For example, the final mode of a table is not the table but its emptiness is its own reality (Sopa, 1989:279-280).

*Yogācāra*, on the other hand, developed a conception of the ‘three natures’ (*trisvabhāva*), which is used to explain the three different aspects of consciousness. According to the *Yogācāra* school, a conventional truth is an object which can be distinguished conventionally by a correct consciousness. Falsity, conventional truth, and nominal truth (*vyavahārasatya*) are mutually inclusive. An ultimate truth is an object which can be realized by a primary cognition. *Śūnyatā* (Emptiness), elements of [a Superior's] qualities (*dharmadhātu*), thoroughly established [nature] (*pariniṣpanna*), ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*), the limit of reality (*bhūtakoti*), and thusness (*tathatā*) are asserted to be mutually inclusive (Kalupahana, 1986:264-265).

8 (T.30.18b). Nāgārjuna criticized the *Abhidharma* tenet, saying “*Tathagato yat svabhavas tat svabhavam idam jagat, tathagato nihsvabhavo nihsvabhavam idam jagat* (Whatever is the self-nature of the *tathagata*, that is also the self-nature of the universe. The *tathagata* is devoid of self-nature. This universe is also devoid of self nature)” (Kalupahana, 1986:310).

9 Kalupahana considered that the Buddha claimed to know the theory of co-dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) rather than to accept any notion of “ultimate reality” (*paramārthasatya*) (Kalupahana, 1986:331).

*Yogācāra* criticized *Mādhyamika* because the *Mādhyamika* school over-emphasized *sūnyatā*. The *Mādhyamikan's* identification of *sūnyatā* and *prāṭītyasamutpāda* does not provide any logical reasoning of 'how' and 'why'. According to *Yogācāra*, *Mādhyamikan's* emphasis on *sūnyatā* caused some people to cling to one-side of *sūnyatā*. The *Yogācāra* school insisted on *citta-mātra* or consciousness-only that all phenomena and events are of the mind and from the mind. The *Yogācāra* school described *citta-mātra* through the *trivabhāva* theory. The transformation of consciousness makes it possible for sentient beings to become as enlightened as the Buddha or the *bodhisattvas*. It seems that Asanga emphasized the central position of *paratantra*, which is transformable to *parikalpita* or to *pariniṣpanna*.

Nāgārjuna's dialectical negative approach is believed to lead to the understanding of the ultimate reality (*paramārtha*) which is the ineffable realm. Nāgārjuna's method of the consequent negations is different from the nihilistic view in refuting the ineffable reality of *sūnyatā* through the negative dialectic method by utilizing the conventional means such as words.

In Chinese *Ch'an* Buddhism, *Ch'an* Buddhist leaders applied negative expression as the best way to disclose the ultimate reality which is paradoxically ineffable. Bodhidharma (460?-534?) came to China from India and introduced *Ch'an* Buddhism between 520 and 526. Bodhidharma transmitted the esoteric teaching to Hui-k'o (486-593). Under the teaching of Hung-yen (605-675), the fifth patriarch, Shen-hsiu (?605- 706) and Hui-neng (638-713) were the prominent disciples. Later, *Ch'an* Buddhism was developed into two different schools in the early eighth century: Northern School by Shen-hsiu and Southern School by Hui-neng.

Shen-hsiu of Northern School was highly respected and was regarded as 'the Lord of the Law' in Chinese Buddhism. The Empress Wu (r.684-705) invited him to her palace in 700 when he was 90 years old. Shen-hsiu left his famous poem based on the *Yogācāra* tradition of *Ch'an* Buddhism.

The body is like unto the *Bodhi*-tree,  
 And the mind to a mirror bright;  
 Carefully we cleanse them hour by hour  
 Lest dust should fall upon them (Fung, 1959:256).

Shen-hsiu emphasized the Universal Mind or Buddha Nature spoken by Tao-sheng and constant practice for the gradual enlightenment by following the main ideas in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Hui-neng utilized negative expression to explain the Buddha-nature paradoxically. Hui-neng was originally an illiterate fuel-wood peddler, and his basic teachings are recorded in the Liu-tsu t'an-ching (Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch). According to the Liu-tsu t'an-ching, Hui-neng composed his poem against Shen-hsiu's affirmative illustration of Buddha Mind.

Originally there was no *Bodhi*-tree,  
 Nor was there any mirror;  
 Since originally there was nothing,  
 Whereon can the dust fall? (Fung, 1959:256)

In his poem, Hui-neng emphasized the *Wu* (無; Non-being) of Seng-chao and refuted the gradual enlightenment by emphasizing the Sudden enlightenment. Fung Yu-Lan notices that Shen-hsiu expressed the idea that "The very mind is Buddha"; but Hui-neng expressed "not-mind, and not-Buddha" (Fung, 1959:257). As Fung points out, the first principle of *Ch'an* Buddhism is "inexpressible" by emphasizing the term *Wu* (nothingness or non-being).

## V. Conclusion

Symbolic and metaphoric illustration accepts some validity of words or symbolic drawings to explain a certain reality, i.e., Truth, sacredness, and others. Buddhist and Hinduist *mantras* are considered as

10 The full name of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (Skt.) is called *Saddharma-Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (Lancaster, 1979:69-70). Hodgson discovered the Sanskrit *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* manuscript in Nepal (Bunyu, 1923; Suzuki, 1932:1956).

some ways to express the ultimate reality. Also, various *maṇḍalas* are considered to visualize the ineffable reality. On the other hand, the negative approach rejects any validity of words or visualizations because of its limited function to elaborate or express the ineffable reality. The Nihilistic view shows that there is no other way to illustrate the essential reality beyond the dichotomic concepts or logical reasoning. The only way is to keep silent.

I interpreted the Buddha's silence in response to some of his followers' metaphysical questions as paradoxical. The paradoxical expression ignores the principle of non-contradiction. It remains as a paradox illustrating the ineffable reality. The paradoxical view follows some logical procedure: (1) either A or B; (2) neither A nor B; (3) not neither A nor B. In the positive way, the paradoxical view admits some validity of the words and metaphors to illustrate the ineffable reality.

In contrast, the paradoxical view, same as the Nihilistic view, admits that words, metaphors, and symbols are not the perfect tools for illustrating the ineffable realm. In the other perspective, similar to the metaphoric view, the paradoxical view also admits the limited validities of these means to be applicable in illustrating the ineffable reality and making people understand its non-duality. Although words, metaphors, symbols, and even silence are not the absolute or perfect means, these are satisfactory instruments that point to or illustrate the ultimate reality.

Finally, it rejects the previous formulas and uses the paradoxical logic: not neither A nor B. In this sense, the paradoxical view is neither the positive view nor the nihilistic view. It uses some progressive negations of the preceding syllogism in different perspectives. The Buddha's silence is an example of the paradoxical expression of the Buddha without relying on words to avoid either Nihilism or Eternalism.

## **Glossary of Chinese Terms**

(K=Korean, C=Chinese, J=Japanese, S=Sanskrit, P=Pali)

Bodhidharma (S) 菩提達摩  
 Ch'an (C), Seon (K) 禪  
 Hui-k'o (C) 惠可  
 Hui-neng (C) 慧能  
 Hung-yen (C) 弘忍  
 Shen-hsiu (C) 神樹  
 Tao-sheng (C) 道生  
 The Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra (S) 楞伽經  
 The Liu-tsu t'an-ching (C) 六祖壇經  
 The Tao-te Ching (C) 道德經  
 The Vimalakīrtinirdeśanā-sūtra (C) 維摩詰所說經  
 Wu (C) 無  
 Wu-wei (C) 無爲

## Abbreviations

S.N. *Samyutta-Nikāya*

T *Taishyō-shinsy-daizōkyō* (大正新修大藏經; Japanese Edition of Chinese *Tripitaka*). Tokyo: Taishō-Issaikyō-Kankōkai.

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