

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF PAPAÑCA/PRAPAÑCA AND THE ANTINOMIES OF KANT

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### Introduction

This research attempts to discuss the Buddhist concept of *papañca* /*prapañca* from philosophical perspectives and then compare it with Kantian philosophy of antinomies.

”*Prapañca*” is a Sanskrit term, which corresponds to the Pali term ”*papañca*”. Nirvana is closely related to *prapañca*; the concept of *prapañca* reveals the difference of Buddha, Arahant and Sentient beings. As a very significant concept in Buddhism, it does not get the attention it deserves. Some researchers have been aware of the relationship between the concept of *prapañca* and the antinomies of Kant. However, no systematic research has been dedicated to it.

This study is conducted through a mixed methodology in which different research methods are incorporated, such as the philosophical method and the critical method.

### Perception and Inference

Buddhists and Kantians all hold the view that there are two methods or sources of cognition. They are perception and inference from the phenomenal point of view by man. Buddhists and Kantians also accept the empirical reality of things, including objects and the knowing subject. But, a deeper understanding into perception and inference can be seen in early Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism of thought.

In early Buddhism, ”*papañca* / *prapañca*” applies to the whole perceptual process including perception and inference, which causes attachment and proliferation at any stage of the perceptual process. That might be why empirical knowledge of man is not real ultimately.

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In the Prajñāpāramitā system, the whole of Dharma is only a *prajñāpti* (false name) without self-nature. If we have the idea that perception and inference exist, which is proliferation (*prapañca*), which reveals that the perception and the inference that the seeing and understanding of ordinary people are, in fact, “the perception and the inference conceptualized by verbal designation”.

The Yogācāra school emphasizes that, according to the Tattvārtha chapter of Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, the perception and the inference that are considered as real by ordinary people, in fact, are illusory, since they are conceptualized by verbal designation. They can be seen as *prapañca*, and are absolutely nothingness. Though the empirical knowledge that the seeing and understanding of ordinary people has been considered as empirical, it is actually conceptualized by verbal designation which is illusory. Moreover, according to Dharmapala, there are two methods of cognition, namely perception and inference, but the two methods have the fetters of the image-aspect (*nimitta-bandhana*), which can restrict and obstruct the perception-aspect, and makes it not bright, clear, and unable to realize the true nature and character of objects.

In Yogācāra, discrimination (*vikalpa*) is a variant name for *prapañca*, because that contaminated mind has the mark of distinction, which is found in Kuiji’s commentary. Bandhuprabha also says that because apart from discrimination (*vikalpa*), it is named non *prapañca*. *Prapañca* means discrimination (*vikalpa*), which is the broad sense of *prapañca*. In this sense, according to Dharmapala, it is said that perception and inference have the fetters of the image-aspect. In other words, the two methods of cognition are illusory, which is different from Kantian.

Different to Dharmapala, as recorded in the *Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*, Sthiramati considers that the subject of perception and the object of perception do not exist in reason, which also reveals that perception is illusory, which is discussed under the broad sense of *prapañca*—discrimination (*vikalpa*), and which is different from Kantian.

Through the concept of *prapañca*, the Mahāyāna tradition critiques the empirical knowledge conceptualized by verbal designation, and suggests that the empirical knowledge is illusory, whereas in Kantian thought it is not so. Obviously, the Buddhist range of criticism is wider than Kantian.

### **The Intellectual Intuition, the Thing-in-itself, and Prajñā, Reality**

There is apparently coincidence between the Kant's intellectual intuition and Buddhist *prajñā* (Wisdom). They both are intuitive; they are not the cognitions of ordinary people; they both can intuit the reality (the thing-in-itself or the inexpressible character (*nirabhilapya-svabhavata*)).

Kant believes that the intellectual intuition is only possible for necessary being, but Buddhism ascribes human beings equal capability of *prajñā*(Wisdom). The notion of *prajñā* (Wisdom) as it is put forward by the Buddha in Buddhism has an important philosophical significance.

The thing-in-itself of Kant would correspond to the reality of Buddhism, such as the inexpressible character in Yogacara. Firstly, Kant believes that the thing-in-itself is the source of sensible data, while Yogacara considers that the inexpressible character is the support of sensibility or the source of sensible data of ordinary people that conceptualized by verbal designation. Secondly, the thing-in-itself is the boundary of cognition, which cannot be exceeded by cognition; the inexpressible character is also the boundary of cognition, which cannot be observed by the cognition of ordinary people. The difference is that Kant believes that only the necessary being has the intellectual intuition, which can intuit thing-in-itself, but Buddhism ascribes human beings equal capability of *prajñā* which can observe the reality like the inexpressible character.

According to Buddhist teachings, the view points of intellectual intuition and thing-in-itself are attachments and nothingnesses.

### Arrogation of Pure Reason and Apramāṇa

The common goal of *prapañca* and antinomies is to critique metaphysics. Kant claims that the doctrines of traditional metaphysics are illusions arising from the deceptive extension of the concepts of pure understanding beyond the limits of experience or appearance to things-in-themselves. Kant considers antinomies, which are contradictions, only arise when reason illegitimately transgresses its own limits and seeks to grasp the infinite. The God is called the Ideal of Pure Reason. Philosophers who had believed that they could prove the existence of God had transgressed the limits of human reason. According to Buddhism, for instance, Nāgārjuna once said those who hold emptiness as a view they have pronounced incurable. It shows us that the view of emptiness is illusion that comes from mental fabrication called *prapañca*, which belongs to *apramāṇa* (non-cognition).

The truth, which has self-nature (*svabhāva*), is accepted in the Tathāgatagarbha system and the Vijñapti-mātra system, which can be seen as an idea of metaphysics. Unlike Kantian, Buddhism accepts experiential metaphysics, though both Kantian and Buddhism reject speculative metaphysics.

### Dialectic and Prasaṅga

Nāgārjuna's *sprasaṅga* (a method of logical inquiry of reductio ad absurdum) is similar to Kant's dialectic. According to Nāgārjuna, *prasaṅga* is a method to generate paradoxes including metaphysical speculations, which is called *prapañca*. According to Kant, dialectic is a method to generate paradoxes of metaphysics called antinomies. But Nāgārjuna's *sprasaṅga* is essentially different to Hegelian dialectic.

**Keywords:** *papañca*, *prapañca*, Nāgārjuna, Yogacara, Kant, antinomies

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