

Order Number 9021821

Sthiramati's interpretation of Buddhology and soteriology

Nguyen, Cuong Tu, Ph.D.

Harvard University, 1990

Copyright ©1990 by Nguyen, Cuong Tu. All rights reserved.

U·M·I

300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

animate things like sentient beings also appear in space, it is said that [the activities of sentient and insentient beings] arise.

**21.2 similarly, the activities of Buddhas
arise and cease in the unaffected
realm.¹⁵⁷**

Similarly, Buddhas appear to rise and cease in the unaffected realm (*anāsrava-dhātu*). How so? Whenever there are sentient beings capable of being converted, the Emanation Body (*nirmāṇakāya*) shows perfect enlightenment and so forth: thus, [Buddhas] appear to arise. Whenever there are no more sentient beings capable of being converted, [Buddhas] enter nirvana: thus, [Buddhas] also appear to cease. This verse (21) explains that the activities of Buddhas appear uninterruptedly.

6. ON THE PROFUNDITY OF THE PURE REALM.

**Sixteen verses on the profundity of the Pure Realm
follow.¹⁵⁸**

This means that after explaining the activities of Buddhas as being spontaneous and uninterrupted, the author now explains in sixteen verses (22-37) the threefold profundity of the Pure Realm: (1) the profundity of the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa-gāmbhīrya*), (2) the profundity of ground (*sthāna-gāmbhīrya*), and (3) the profundity of activities (*karma-gāmbhīrya*).¹⁵⁹

(1) The profundity of characteristics is again fourfold: (1a) the characteristic of purity (*viśuddhi-lakṣaṇa*), (1b) the characteristic of

supreme self (*ātmāgratā-lakṣaṇa*), (1c) the characteristic of indeterminacy (*avyākṛta-vastu-lakṣaṇa*), and (1d) the characteristic of liberation (*vimukti-lakṣaṇa*).

22. Although not different before and after, it is unstained by all obstructions. Neither pure nor impure, Buddha[hood] is defined as Thusness.¹⁶⁰

This explains (1a) the characteristic of purity. Purity [is often thought to] mean that, having the nature of defilement beforehand, then afterward by cultivating the path, one becomes pure. [In other words,] before, one was a sentient being. Afterward, one becomes perfectly enlightened. [However,] the Truth Body (*Dharmakāya*) of Buddha is defined as Thusness (*tathatā*), namely, emptiness (*sūnyatā*). Emptiness means that even when one is at the level of ordinary sentient beings one has the nature of emptiness and luminescence (*prakṛtiprabhāsvara*).¹⁶¹ Afterward, when one becomes perfectly enlightened, one still has the nature of emptiness and luminescence. There is no difference in the pure nature. In this connection, because one does not become pure, [Buddhahood] does not become pure [from a former state of impurity]. Nevertheless, when perfect enlightenment is attained, on the strength of the cultivation of the path, one becomes free from the adventitious defilements (*āgantuka-kleśa*) of the afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Since one does become pure afterward, [Buddhahood] is not impure.

The second verse (23) shows that the Buddhas become the supreme self in the unaffected realm. Why do they become the supreme self? To answer this, the author says:

**23.1 Because they attain the [self of]
supreme selflessness,¹⁶²**

(1b) The [self of] supreme selflessness (*agranairātmyātma*) consists of the [the two kinds of] selflessness of persons and of phenomena. The Buddhas become the supreme self because they have these [two kinds of] supreme selflessness¹⁶³ as their self (*ātman*) and nature (*svabhāva*) in the unaffected realm (*anāsrava-dhātu*).

Regarding this: the word "self" (*ātman*), on some occasions means the imagined self of the non-Buddhists (*tīrthika*), as in "self (*ātman*), sentient beings (*sattva*), life (*jīva*) and so forth."¹⁶⁴ This word "self" on some occasions also means the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of things. To say that fire itself is hot means that it has heat as its nature. To say that earth itself is firm means that it has firmness as its nature. On this occasion the word "self" is being used in the sense of intrinsic nature. Because the Buddhas are of the nature of selflessness, it is said that they have attained the supreme self. In this context, what is the supreme selflessness? To answer this, the author says:

23.2 [in] pure emptiness,¹⁶⁵

The attainment of the supreme selflessness is the attainment of pure emptiness, namely, the emptiness of the [two kinds of] selflessness of persons and of phenomena, and the purification from the defilement of [the duality of] subject and object.

To explain the meaning, the author says:

**23.3 because they attain the pure self, the
Buddhas become the self called Great
Selfhood.¹⁶⁶**

In the unaffected realm, having attained pure emptiness, the Buddhas attain supreme selflessness. At that time, it is said that the Buddhas become the self which is called Great Selfhood. Thus, since they become the Great Selfhood of Self, [Buddhas] become the supreme self in the unaffected realm. This explains (1b) the characteristic of the supreme self.

Because it is the self of the supreme selflessness.¹⁶⁷

The [two kinds of] selflessness of persons and phenomena are called the supreme truth (*dharma*) of selflessness. Again, the purification from the defilement of [the duality of] subject and object is established as the supreme selflessness.

It is also the Buddhas' self in the sense of intrinsic nature.¹⁶⁸

The word **self** in the phrase **attaining the supreme self**, in this case, has the meaning of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), because the Buddhas become the nature of selflessness, that is what is meant by **attaining the supreme self**.

When this becomes pure, the Buddhas attain the pure self of the supreme selflessness.¹⁶⁹

In the unaffected realm, the Buddhas become the pure self of the [two kinds of] selflessness. It means that the Buddhas attain the ultimate, supreme self of selflessness.

Now to show that the question as to whether (1c) the Buddha exists after death or not is indeterminate (*avyākṛta*),¹⁷⁰ the author offers a verse (24) which begins:

24.1 Neither existent nor nonexistent,¹⁷¹

Here, in the unaffected realm, Buddha neither exists nor does not exist. Why so? Because Buddha is Truth Body (*Dharmakāya*), and because Truth Body is emptiness (*sūnyatā*). In emptiness there is neither imagined self nor imagined phenomena, [Buddha] is said to be nonexistent. [In other words, although] the absolute identity (*pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇa*) exists, imagined phenomena and self--like a hare's horn--do not exist, at that time, Buddha is defined as nonexistent. Furthermore, Buddha is not nonexistent. Because at that time Thusness (*tathatā*), which is of absolute identity, exists.¹⁷²

**24.2 that is why Buddha is [thus]
explained.¹⁷³**

That is why Buddha is explained above as neither existent nor nonexistent.

**24.3 Therefore, when such questions are
put about Buddha, no doctrine is
enunciated.¹⁷⁴**

Because Buddha is neither existent nor nonexistent, so when it is asked whether Buddha exists or not after death, it should be understood that no doctrine is to be enunciated. Why so? Buddha does not exist after death, because he does not exist as an imagined self or an imagined phenomenon; nor does Buddha not exist after