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REFUTATION OF UNIVERSALS IN BUDDHIST LOGIC AND ITS PRAXIS IN ZEN BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

This article posits that the Zen Buddhist approach to universals is fundamentally grounded in the theoretical framework established by early Buddhist philosophers, including the Buddha, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, and others. The study begins by elucidating the Buddhist critique of universals within the framework of the Nyaya-Buddhist debate. Furthermore, it illustrates how this theoretical dimension is intricately woven into the everyday practices of individuals, as demonstrated through Zen Buddhist texts.

KEYWORDS: Universal, thought-construction, Verbal proliferation, *apohavāda*, Zen Buddhism, Dignaga, Dogen

INTRODUCTION

Śri Śankara, the eminent architect of Advaita Vedanta, articulates that the nature of the world is neither entirely real nor entirely unreal, but rather an ever-evolving experiential phenomenon. In contrast, Buddhist philosophers tend to interpret the world as a construct of human cognition. The Buddha himself asserts that the world is influenced by the dynamics of the human mind, as encapsulated in the phrase: "*cittena niyati loko*." (*Samyukta Nikaya*, 1.39). The *Dhammapada*, a foundational Pali Buddhist scripture, commences with the assertion that our current experiences are shaped by our past thoughts:

"*Manopubbaṇgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā,*
manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā."

The Buddha emphasizes that if our actions are driven by malevolent thoughts, we will be perpetually tormented, akin to how the wheel of a cart follows the path of the ox. This illustrates that it is not external factors that generate our difficulties, but rather our own mental processes and thoughts. From the inception of the Abhidharma tradition within the Sautrantika school to the modern Mahayana sects, Buddhist philosophical inquiry has delved deeply into the complexities of the human mind. The Sautrantikas highlighted the subjective nature of experience, while the Vijnanavada school posited that the only reality is the continuous flow of consciousness known as the mind.

UNIVERSALS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Buddhist philosophers attribute significant importance to the human mind, raising questions about the philosophical implications of asserting that the mind governs the world. This assertion prompts inquiries regarding the denial of an external reality. To address such questions, it is essential to comprehend the concept of universals within Indian philosophy and the Buddhist perspective on this matter. A critical examination of the Nyaya-Buddhist debate concerning universals is necessary for this understanding. Indian philosophy can be broadly categorized into two camps: those that affirm the existence of universals and those that do not. The philosophical traditions that advocate for the objective reality of universals include Nyaya-Vaisesika, Vedanta, and Jainism, while Buddhist schools reject the notion of

universals as having objective status. The former group can be further divided: Jainism and Advaita Vedanta assert that universals exist within particulars, exemplified by the idea that 'cowness' is found solely in individual cows. In this view, universals and particulars are interconnected through identity, with the former being significant yet only manifesting in the latter. The Nyaya-Vaisesika school is particularly noted for its realistic approach, acknowledging the objective reality of both universals and particulars. Their interpretation of universals is closely linked to their theory of determinate perception, which is best understood in the context of the ongoing conflict between Nyaya-Vaisesika and Buddhist logicians.

Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophers assert that perception occurs in two distinct stages: indeterminate and determinate. In the indeterminate stage, known as *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*, the perceiver fails to recognize the relationship between the *viśeṣana* (the qualifier) and the *viśeṣya* (the qualified). Annam Bhatta, in his work *Tarkadīpika*, describes indeterminate perception as *viśeṣana - viśeṣya-sambandha-anavagāhi jñānam*. For instance, when one states, "This is a cow," there exists a connection between 'this' (the subject) and 'cow' (the predicate). However, in the indeterminate phase, the perceiver does not acknowledge this relationship, which is later recognized in the determinate stage, referred to as *savikalpaka pratyakṣa*. Proponents of Nyaya-Vaisesika contend that both perceptual states are legitimate, asserting that the reality presented through perceptual experience is not merely a mental construct but is objectively existent. Consequently, validating determinate perception is a fundamental aspect of Nyaya-Vaisesika realism. By affirming the legitimacy of determinate perception, Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophers establish the objective reality of *sāmānya* (universals) and counter the arguments posed by Buddhist logicians on this matter.

What is the stance of Buddhist logicians on perceptual experience? Dignaga's framework of Buddhist logic recognizes two categories of knowable entities, referred to as *prameyas*: *sva-lakṣaṇa* and *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*. The former pertains to the particular, while the latter pertains to the universal. Each of these categories corresponds to distinct means of cognition, or *pramanas*: *pratyakṣa* and anumāna. *Pratyakṣa* is exclusively concerned with the grasp of *sva-lakṣaṇa*, whereas *anumāna* is focused solely on *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*. Dignaga and his disciples contend that particulars, or *kṣaṇas*, possess genuine existence, while universals, or *sāmānya*, are constructs of thought (*kalpanapōdham*) rather than reflections of an external reality. In the context of determinate perception, there is invariably an unreal component—*sāmānya*—that does not constitute true perception. What is apprehended in perception is *sva-lakṣaṇa*, with *sāmānya- lakṣaṇa* being merely a product of thought. Consequently, indeterminate perception (*nirvikalpaka-pratyakṣa*) is deemed real, while determinate perception (*savikalpaka- pratyakṣam)* is classified as pseudo-perception.

Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophy posits that universals do not possess the same ontological status as substances, qualities, and actions, which are considered existents (*sat*). Instead, universals are classified as subsistents (*bhava*), existing outside the confines of space and time. They possess a form of being and subsist within substances, attributes, and actions (*dravyaguṇakarmavrtti*). According to Nyaya-Vaisesika, universals are not located in any specific place but are inherent to the world itself. B. K. Mattilal notes that particulars do not merely replicate universals; rather, they manifest them, providing a context for the universals to reside. When the particular is no longer present, the universal is described as 'homeless,' yet it is not annihilated in this process. It continues to exist in a 'homeless' or unmanifest state, remaining spatially locatable and observable as long as the corresponding particular is perceptible.

Dignaga's concept of *apohavāda* serves as a counterpart to the Nyaya-Vaisesika understanding of *sāmānya*, or universality. This doctrine posits that class designations are formed through a process of negation. For instance, a horse is identified not by a set of inherent characteristics that are exclusive to horses, but rather through its differentiation from other entities, such as cows, trees, and dogs. Similarly, a child lacks a name prior to the naming ceremony; once a name is bestowed, the child is distinguished from those who remain unnamed. This act of differentiation is, in essence, a construct, as the child exists as an individual even before the formal naming. Upon hearing a name from society, the child begins to experience a sense of identity, which persists throughout his life as a form of identification—essentially a construct. Buddhists do not argue that these constructs are superfluous; rather, they acknowledge their practical utility. Dignaga and his followers assert that truth does not reside within these constructs; instead, the goal is to transcend names and concepts. The pre-conceptual state, referred to as *sva-lakṣana*, represents the ultimate reality in Dignaga's philosophical framework.

THE *RAISON D'ETRE* OF BUDDHIST DENIAL OF UNIVERSALS

Human beings exist within a conceptual framework that can be likened to a prison. Concepts are fluid, shifting from one individual's mind to another. Ultimately, the trajectory of the world is shaped by the condition of human consciousness. This notion aligns with the Buddha's statement, '*cittena niyati lokah*.' Among the most valued concepts in human thought is objectivity. Naiyayika philosophers attribute an objective nature to mental constructs. The *Tarkasamgraha* articulates the idea of *sāmānya*, or universality, as '*nityamekamanekānugatam*,' suggesting that the universal is eternal, singular, and simultaneously present in multiple objects. They contend that recognizing the universal is essential for understanding the particular. For example, when we observe a cow, we identify it as such because we acknowledge the universal quality inherent in that creature. This universal quality must not only be present in numerous cows but also be accessible at the moment of each perceptual encounter.

Buddhist philosophers assert that universals lack any objective status, viewing them instead as constructs of the mind. While we utilize the concept of 'cowness' to identify a specific cow, this notion does not possess an objective reality, as it exists solely within human cognition. Buddhist logicians contend that the differentiation of a particular cow from others should occur through direct sensory experience, which reveals the essence of the object, or *sva-laksana*. The universal encompasses all that is not the essence itself, including names, genus, and associated concepts (*nāma-jātyādiyōjana kalpanā*). Dignaga characterizes pure perception, or *kalapanāpodham*, as devoid of conceptual frameworks. His disciple, Dharmakirti, expanded upon this definition by asserting that perception is also free from illusions, encapsulated in his assertion that *pratyaksam kalpanāpōdhamabrāntam* (*Nyayabindu* 1.4).

To elucidate the distinction between *sva-laksana* and *sāmānya-laksana*, Dharmakirti provides several criteria for understanding this differentiation: 1) *sva-laksana* possesses the capacity to effectuate outcomes, referred to as *artha-kriyāsakti*, whereas *sāmānya-laksana* lacks this capacity. 2) *Sva-laksana* is unique to a specific object, in contrast to *sāmānya-laksana*, which is applicable to multiple objects. 3)

Sva-laksana cannot be expressed through language, while *sāmānya-laksana* can be articulated using words. 4) *Sva-laksana* can be grasped without the need for linguistic frameworks, whereas *sāmānya-laksana* requires such frameworks for comprehension (*Pramanavartika*, III, 1-2).

Buddhists employ various methods to challenge the notion of universals in their pursuit of ultimate reality, which is understood as the unique particular or the object of sensation. In the fifth chapter of his seminal work, *Pramanasamuccaya*, Dignaga critiques the Naiyayika perspective on universals. He posits that claiming a universal can be perceived through external sense organs implies that it must occupy a specific location in space. Consequently, one must be able to identify where a universal exists. If it is entirely contained within a particular, it cannot simultaneously exist in multiple particulars. Conversely, if a universal is only partially present in a particular, it cannot be considered indivisible. Thus, a universal cannot be classified as an external object of perception. The only viable interpretation of a universal, therefore, is as a conceptual entity. These conceptual constructs (*kalpanā*) or universals are not, in fact, the subjects of perceptual experience (Hayes 2009: 108).

Buddhist logic posits that the existence of any entity is inherently linked to its causal efficacy. Dharmakirti, who formulated the theory known as *artha-kriyā-sāmarthya*, aimed to differentiate between genuinely existent objects and those that are merely illusory. A comprehensive grasp of this theory elucidates the rationale behind Dignaga's rejection of conceptualization in his logic of perception. It underscores the Buddhist tenet that a non-momentary object lacks functional capacity, whether in succession or simultaneity. ('*Arthakriyāsāmarthyalakṣanamathō vyāvartam*' – *Vadanyaya of Dharmakirti*, I.4).

The concept of *sva-laksana* pertains to momentary existence, confined to the eternal present, or the 'here and now.' Each pre-conceptual experience is transient, while concepts themselves are mental constructs, thus subject to the inherent fluctuations of the mind.

Early Buddhist texts, such as the *Nikāyās*, were crafted with a focus on the logical principles of non-contradiction and consistency. The *Majjhima Nikāya* serves as a notable example, wherein the Buddha counters his adversaries by highlighting their contradictory and inconsistent assertions. By revealing the inconsistencies in their positions, the Buddha often guided them toward a personal realization of the truth. Human beings find themselves ensnared by contradictions and inconsistencies due to their entrapment in conceptual frameworks. In the *Nikāyās*, the Buddha employs the term "seeing" to denote what we refer to as 'experience.' For the Buddha, this "seeing" equates to knowledge, as anything that is not seeing is merely conceptual and does not constitute true understanding. Consequently, "Knowing-seeing" represents direct perception or awareness. This epistemological perspective within Buddhism was further developed by Nagarjuna, who radically challenged *pramana* theories and conceptual thought. This line of thought was subsequently expanded upon by Dignaga and Dharmakirti in alignment with Yogacara philosophy.

ZEN BUDDHIST PRAXIS

The theoretical framework concerning the Buddhist rejection of universals has been articulated with greater clarity in Zen Buddhist literature. Zen Buddhism, as the Japanese manifestation of Mahayana Buddhist thought, draws upon the principles of the Buddha's Golden Silence, Nagarjuna's exposition of the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyata*), and the diverse interpretations offered by Bodhidharma and other eminent figures. The teachings of Zen are predominantly conveyed through narratives, poetry, anecdotes, and dialogues between masters and students. This discussion will explore how Zen masters effectively communicated their critique of universals through their distinctive approaches to dialogue and storytelling.

1. In a Zen monastery, a disciple began to frantically run about, shouting, "Fire, fire, fire," in the dead of night. The monks quickly evacuated the monastery. However, the Zen master remained undisturbed in his slumber. The disciple approached the master, urging, "Master, you must leave; the fire is getting closer." The master inquired, "Where is it?" Frustrated, the disciple replied, "It's everywhere! The entire kitchen is ablaze. You need to get out!" The master calmly responded, "Let it come here. Just do not interrupt my sleep," and promptly returned to his rest.
2. The Zen master Bokuju was approached by his disciple with a question: "Master, we must dress and eat each day. How can we escape these obligations?" Bokuju replied, "Simply dress and eat." The disciple responded, "Master, I do not understand." To which the master said, "If understanding eludes you, refrain from seeking it. Just put on your clothes and eat your food."
3. Suiryo inquired of Baso, "What does Bodhidharma signify by his arrival in this country from the West?" In this context, the West refers to India. From a Zen perspective, this inquiry can be rephrased as, "What constitutes the ultimate teaching of Buddhism?" Rather than providing a verbal response, Baso responded by delivering a kick to Suiryo's chest, causing him to fall to the ground. Upon rising, Suiryo erupted in laughter, exclaiming, "How remarkable! How peculiar! The infinite mysteries concealed within countless *samadhis* are now unveiled to me, down to their very essence, at the tip of a single hair." He then bowed to his master and took his leave. Subsequently, he shared with his fellow monks, "Since receiving the kick from my master, I find myself unable to stop laughing."

These Zen stories elucidate the Buddhist perspective on existence. Individuals inhabit a realm of conceptual frameworks, often evading the tangible reality of the present moment. Upon encountering specific terms, we instinctively respond as though they represent actual objects, akin to a table or a chair. The term 'fire' does not equate to fire itself; rather, it elicits an emotional resonance akin to that of genuine fire. A person who fully engages with the present moment remains untroubled by future uncertainties, as the existence of any individual in the next moment is inherently unpredictable. Zen embodies an immersion in the present, leading a Zen master to exhibit minimal concern regarding life's myriad challenges.

The subsequent story unveils the essence of boredom and its underlying causes. Individuals often engage in various activities primarily to alleviate the intolerable tedium they experience. Medical professionals frequently recommend diverse pursuits to their patients as a remedy for boredom. However, engaging in different activities generates distinct karmic impressions that subsequently shape the individual's future experiences. Thus, the path to overcoming the boredom encountered in life lies in acting without overthinking. This necessitates a non-dual experience of doing and being, rather than merely doing and contemplating.

In the third story, Zen master Baso emphasizes that the tenets of Buddhism are not encapsulated in language but are found in the lived experience of the present moment. To truly comprehend Buddhism on an experiential level, one must relinquish all accumulated conceptual knowledge and approach it devoid of any intellectual constructs. Zen advocates for a direct engagement with reality, akin to

grasping an object with bare hands, free from any barriers. This requires maintaining a profound awareness of the 'here and now,' referred to as *sva-laksana*, the ultimate reality. The immediacy of Baso's kick precluded Suiryo from any conceptual interpretation, as it embodied the essence of *sva-laksana*.

Buddhist epistemology and logic must be understood in the context of the philosophical implications of Zen stories. The Sanskrit term *prapañca* typically denotes the entirety of the universe. Various scholars have proposed different translations for *prapañca*, such as "verbal proliferation" (Matilal 1986: 10.1) and "thought distinct from reality" (Inada 1970: 135). The concept of verbal proliferation primarily pertains to the act of conceptualization. However, Kalupahana argues that Buddhism does not support the idea that reality is fundamentally unspeakable or indefinable. He suggests that Nagarjuna's reference to *prapañcātītam* in *Mūlamadhyamaka kārika* 22.15 indicates a release from attachments, interpreting *prapañca* as 'obsession' (Kalupahana 1996: 310)

The specific interpretation of this term should not be a source of dispute, as all interpretations shed light on a core principle of Buddhist philosophy: the notion that liberation from verbal proliferations and conceptualizations is synonymous with liberation from various forms of obsession—whether they be linguistic, ethical, social, political, or religious. When an individual surpasses linguistic constructs, they may find themselves unable to convey reality through language, as all linguistic expressions stem from particular conventions or obsessions. Viewed from this perspective, scholarly interpretations may seem inconsequential, and reality ultimately belongs to those who have had direct experiences of it. The degree to which academic misunderstandings and limitations have obscured the comprehension of reality is beyond expression.

Zen masters possess a profound experiential understanding that only tangible objects exert causal influence, while concepts merely represent fluctuations within the superficial layers of consciousness. Consequently, a fundamental aspect of training for a Zen novice is to attain liberation from the incessant distractions of the mind. Zen Buddhism posits the state of no-mind as the ultimate objective, wherein one is liberated from all forms of conceptual frameworks. Dignaga argues that any explanation relying on proper names, class names, quality names, action names, or substance names effectively transforms these concepts into perceived realities. This perspective illustrates the limitations of logical reasoning in capturing the essence of reality. The boundary between logic and metaphysics is delicate, a fact that the Buddha acknowledged through his silence centuries ago. Zen Buddhism emphasizes living in the present moment, rejecting all forms of conceptual constructs. As a result, Zen masters provide spontaneous answers to their disciples' inquiries, and Zen dialogues are inherently unstructured, as structure represents an attachment to names and classifications. Such spontaneous responses require a profound attunement to the present moment. In *Shobogenzo*, a classic work of Zen Buddhist literature, Master Dogen notably asserts that perception transcends the confines of the mind (Dogen 2007:246).

The apex of the Buddhist tradition is epitomized in Zen Buddhism, where it manifests as a practical, lived experience. Yaoshan, a prominent Zen master, frequently discouraged his students from engaging with written texts, asserting that enlightenment is attained through meditation rather than through reading. On one occasion, a disciple observed him engrossed in a Buddhist sutra and questioned, "Master, you have prohibited me from reading scriptures, yet you are reading yourself! What is the reason for this?" The master responded, "My eyes require rest." The disciple countered, "But my eyes could also benefit from such rest." The master replied quietly, "Indeed, but your eyes would pierce the entire page." (Reps 2000). Bodhidharma, recognized as the founding patriarch of Zen Buddhism, asserts that "Zen is a direct transmission independent of scriptures" (Dumoulin 2000: 67). Nevertheless, Zen does not dismiss the significance of scriptures as tools for accessing deeper truths. A Zen novice eventually comes to understand that scriptures serve merely as "fingers pointing to the reality."

CONCLUSION

We have thus established that Zen Buddhism embodies the practical application of Buddhist teachings found within Pali texts. To conclude our examination, we turn to the ten ox herding pictures created by Kakuan, a Zen master from 12th century Japan. Throughout these illustrations, the color of the ox transitions to white, culminating in the final image where the ox vanishes, leaving the shepherd appearing despondent amidst the bustling marketplace. This shift in color from black to white symbolizes the purification of mental impurities. The ultimate disappearance of the ox signifies the dissolution of the mind itself. The depiction of the shepherd, who merges with the chaos of the marketplace, implies his ability to engage in worldly matters with a serene demeanor. Kakuan's ox-herding pictures convey that the pursuit of truth leads to an understanding of life's reality when the mind is entirely transcended. In Buddhism, nirvana is understood as the process of shedding the layers of the mind. The gradual fading of the mind represents the realization of life from a Buddhist viewpoint.

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