

Buddhist Philosophy Is of “To Be” Philosophy

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Based on the two roots of “to be” in Indo-European languages, this paper proposes that Brahman, Buddha, and bhutatathata all come from the second root, of “bhu (to be)”, because “bhu” belongs to the same root as the Greek root “phy”, physis from “phy”, is naturalism. Therefore, Brahma, Buddha, and bhutatathata are all knowledge related to natural science. The first root of “as (to be)” has led to the debate in buddhist philosophy about the asmiti and anasmiti. The spread of Buddhist philosophy in China is due to the lack of “as/bhu (to be)”, vocabulary and grammar in Chinese; as a result, the Buddhist verses translated in ancient China became a philosophy without “as/bhu (to be)”. At the same time, some Buddhist words have lost their connection with the root and the grammatical features of “as/bhu (to be)”, resulting in the spread of Buddhist philosophy in China having been into a language game. We should put Buddhist philosophy back into the Indo-European language family; it transforms the Buddhist philosophy of speaking ancient Chinese into the Buddhist modern philosophical language, and makes Buddhist philosophy develop into a set of understandable and logical normative philosophy.

Keywords: to be, Buddhist philosophy, the west philosophy, Indo-European civilization

In Indo-European languages, “to be” has two main roots: as and bhu. These two roots perform a variety of functions that are very different from those of most languages. From Parmenides to the existentialists, the metaphysical problems caused by it have always been of great importance. As we all know, Greek philosophy is on the “to be” philosophy. But why isn’t Buddhist philosophy on the “to be” philosophy, because both Greek philosophy and Buddhist philosophy belong to the Indo-European philosophy. Did the Indo-European civilization consist of two completely different cultural types? In other words, Indo-European civilization can be divided into the two different philosophy—“to be” philosophy and “not to be” philosophy. In fact, the ancient Indian Upanishads and Buddhist philosophy have also questioned the two roots of “as/bhu (to be)”. In fact, the ancient Sanskrit grammar classic—*Panini Sutra*—also includes the two “to be” roots “as” and “bhu”, and lists “as” and “bhu” as mutually explanatory relationships. It means that there is “to be” in the ancient Sanskrit, and may have the same function as “to be”. In other words, both Greek philosophy and Hindu philosophy belong to the “to be” philosophy.

Discuss on “Bhu”

As we all know, the ancient Indian Upanishads put forward Brahman. On etymologically, Brahman is a word from the “bhu” of the second “to be (is)” root, which means that Upanishadic philosophy regards absolute existence as “to be”. We can also see that the many words related to “bhu” are used to express as the philosophical concepts in the Upanishads. For example, the word “bhava” is used to express things, which is a word formed by

adding a suffix to “bhu”, and it should be the meaning of “the being”. In the Maitrā Upanisad 2.6 (Xu, 1984), the “bhūta” is also the meaning of “the being (things)”. In the Muṇḍaka Upanisad, the being is also expressed as bhutanti, that is, the “One”. In Western philosophy, it is also often called the things to the being by “to be” adding suffix “ing”. It can be seen that the Upanishads and western philosophy use the same word formation to express absolute existence and things.

Buddhist philosophy was born out of ancient Indian philosophy, which is also the “to be” philosophy. However, because the Buddha was born in the dialect area of the eastern India, and the Upanishads came from the Sanskrit area of the central India, due to the different linguistic environment, some linguistic changes took place when Sanskrit spread to the eastern dialect area. For example, the Brahman from the second “to be” root “bhu” was transformed into “brh” when it spread to the eastern dialect area. In this way, Brahman was to be Buddha, because Buddha came from the “brh”, which is equivalent to Brahman’s root “bhu”. By the time of Mahayana Buddhism, which advocated the writing of Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit, “brh” was returned to “bhu”, also. At this time, the Buddha from “brh” is turned to the bhutatathata from “bhu”. According to this, Brahman, Buddha, and the bhutatathata all come from “bhu”. Since “bhu” is equivalent to the “phy” of Greek “to be” root, both express the being of nature, that is, the nature of nature. And physis from “phy” belongs to natural science. Then, Brahman, Buddha, and the bhutatathata could also belong to natural science.

Discuss on “As”

Around 1500 BC or earlier (Sheng-Yen, 1931-2009), Vedic philosophers created two important philosophical concepts: sat—asat (= to be, not to be) from the first Indo-European “to be (as)” root. The famous and the oldest philosophical Poem 129 of the Rigvedas is the Song of Nothingness: “nasad asin no sad asti tadanim”, which is explained as: “At that time (Taichu) there was neither sat nor asat”. Again, we are familiar with a sentence: Asat is neither something nor something (sat). Among them, asat is referred to the being (things) of the phenomenal world, and sat is referred to the noumenon of the transcendental world. If we associate the western philosophy “to be” with the three meanings of is, there is, and the being to understand and translate this ancient Sanskrit sentence, and the “asat” should be translated into “not to be” or non-being, then this scripture can be translated as: “that which is does not exist, that which exists is not”. This is the main argument of Parmenides’ philosophy.

Starting doing, a series of asti (the past tense of as) are used to discuss the origin of the universe, indicating that “as” has been asked as a special what at this time. It is worth noting that in the Upanishads: “At the beginning of the creation of heaven and earth, there was only an Atman as human except himself in this world. He said: ‘aham asmi (I am/have me)’, that is, ‘I am’”. The “asmi” comes from “as”. Because this word is the same as “I am who I am”, the self-definition of Jehovah in the Bible, this verse can be seen as the self-definition of God in the Upanishads. The Hebrew pronunciation of Jehovah is Yahweb, which means YHWH, which means “I am”. Jehovah says: “I am who I am”. Accordingly, the God of the Upanishads and the God of the Bible are both “I am”, and the Atman as human in the Upanishads is equivalent to Jehovah. In other words, the God of the Upanishads and the Bible should be the same God, the God of metaphysics as the self-cause and the supreme being.

In the history of Buddhism, the debate about the atman and anatman is probably concerned with the logical subject of “aham asmi”. One school holds that the logical subject “aham” should be translated into “aham asmi”, that is, the Vedanta school of atman; the other school holds that the logical subject “aham” cannot be translated, but can only be translated into “asmiti”, that is, the Buddhism of the anatman. In the western philosophy history, when Greek philosophy spread to Latin areas, there was also a dispute over the logical subject. One school

believes into I am, and the other school believes that it can only be translated into am. This is equivalent to the debate between atman and anatman in the Buddhism.

In the past, we thought that the Buddha was not interested in ontological problems, and that 14 without records means that Buddha did not distinguish between the 14 metaphysical problems. This is the biggest misunderstanding we have about Buddha. In the Buddhist philosophy, the Eighteen Emotional Behaviors (Yang, 1980) discuss *asmiti* and *siyan ti* from as that are questioned as “a what”. In the Eighteen Emotional Behaviors, “*asmiti*” and “*siyan ti*” are treated directly as subjects, which is inconsistent with the grammatical requirements of Indo-European languages, because according to the grammatical characteristics of Indo-European languages, when a verb is used as a subject, it must be changed into a noun word or phrase. This grammatical feature, in fact, is the same as the Greek language of the impersonal use of copula without expressing the subject and the impersonal use of existence without expressing the subject (Yang, 1980), which grammar at that time was not yet perfect when the verbs and nouns were mixed. That is to say, the verbs are only transformed into the nouns in part of speech, but are used directly as nouns before they are transformed into nouns in form. After a certain stage of grammatical development, it is realized that verbs cannot be directly used as subjects, but must be transformed into gerunds, participles, or infinitive phrases. For example, by the study of ancient Greek grammar of Heidegger (Miao, 1989), it was found that there was a stage in which verbs were used directly as nouns, and then gerunds appeared.

Moreover, “*asmiti*” is the active form of the first person singular present tense, which is equivalent to “am” in English. And “*siyan ti*” is the first person singular imperative, which is equivalent to “shall be” in English. Among them, “*ti*” plays the role of intensifier to attract attention, referring to someone’s distinctive mind/state of mind/opinion/speech. The author has noticed that “*ti*” is the same as the Greek grammar which expresses the present direct form. For example, Socrates and Aristotle were asked the question to be asked “*ti* to on”, that is, “*ti*” expresses the essence of things that philosophy asks. Therefore, “*ti*” may only be to play the role of intensifier, but also to ask the essence of things.

Since Buddhist philosophy is asking “*asmiti*”, how does Buddhist philosophy interpret this “*asmiti*”? In my opinion, we can use Moniz’s interpretation of “-*estin*-” (Yang, 1980) to interpret “-*asmi*-”. Moniz believes that only the word “*estin*” is used in the second fragment of Parmenides, which constitutes a one-word sentence. Or, to be more precise, it forms a sentence frame. Therefore, “*estin*” is interpreted as a sentence frame of “-*estin*-”, which expresses the complete idea of the whole sentence, including three usages of copula, existence, and truth. Accordingly, Moniz interprets Parmenides’ philosophy of “-*estin*-” as: (1) the sentence “-*is*-” is true, (2) it is the case (the fact is) “-*is*-”, and (3) the state of things embodied in “-*is*-” remains and persists. If we also interpret “*asmiti*” as a sentence frame “-*asmi*-”, then we can also conclude that the sentence frame “-*asmi*-” expresses “-*is*-” or there is a thing “-*is*-”, that is, there is a fact. In Buddhist philosophy, the meaning of *bhutatathata*: “is true”, “being like this”, and “existing” should be the conclusion of this framework. The meaning of truth is to determine whether the framework is true or false. From this, we can see that the three meanings of “-*estin*-” interpreted by Moniz are exactly the same as the three meanings of the *bhutatathata*. The *bhutatathata*, then, is based on the reading of “-*asmi*-”, and the meaning of *bhutatathata* depends on the exact meaning of “-*asmi*-”.

The copula “*hoti*” in the Eighteen Emotional Behaviors is also a word worthy of attention, because it is the same word as the Greek “*hoti*”. The Greek “*hoti*” is generally considered to be a specific statement of the actual situation, the “how-so” situation of the being, the original meaning of the Latin “*existenti*”. This is the metaphysical subject field that has theological orientation as metaphysics of theology.

The 14 Emotional Behaviors among the Eighteen Emotional Behaviors deal with whether the universe is constant or non-constant, whether there are edges or non-edges, whether life exists or not after death, and whether life and the body are one or different, which are precisely answers to the 14 metaphysical questions. In the form of existential sentences, it holds that the world is undifferentiated and self-identical, and there is no boundless problem. It illustrates the diversity of asmiti philosophy, which, although elusive, provides a starting point for Buddhist philosophy. This means that Buddhist philosophy is the philosophy of “amsi”.

Among the Eighteen Emotional Behaviors, the two lines that deserve our most attention are “asasmiti hoti” and “sat-asmiti hoti”. Both the verses have “asmiti” as the subject, and “asasmiti” is the negative form of “asmiti” with the negative prefix “as-”. Although these two verses do not discuss any specific issues, they use “asmiti” as the subject, essentially asking “is” as what. “Hoti” from bhu is the third person declarative active present tense. It is equivalent to “become” in English that it has the meaning of generation, transformation, and becoming. It plays the role of predicate and expresses “asmiti” is present. The judgment by the copula (hoti) expresses whether “asmiti” is functioning (asmiti hoti) or not (asasmiti hoti), which reveals the existence usage of “asmiti”. Therefore, these two verses express whether there is such a thing as X.

The author notes that these two verses have the same grammatical structure as the second fragment of Parmenides (Miao, 1989): “estin einai, ouk estin me einai”, which are translated: “that it is and cannot not—be, that it is not and that needs must not be”, or “that ‘that which is’ is, and it is impossible for it not to be, that it is not, and must needs not be”. Therefore, the philosophical meaning of these two verses can be read by comparing them with the second fragment of Parmenides. The western philosophy has developed into the rich philosophical theories based on the questioning of this Parmenides’ two fragments. But Buddhist philosophy has not noticed the philosophical meaning of these two verses in history. Therefore, the rich Buddhist philosophical theory has not been putted on, nor has the Buddhist philosophical system been constructed through these two verses.

Buddhist Philosophy “As/Bhu (To Be)” in Chinese

There are many words in Buddhist verses that are related to the root of “as/bhu (to be)” such as Sat, stha, vas, vid, vrt, etc. When these words are translated into Chinese words, they lose their root connection of “as/bhu (to be)”. It is worth noting that the world, the nature, the tathagata garbha, and the Alaya consciousness all come from the same Sanskrit word “dhatu”, which in turn comes from “bhu”—the second “to be” root of the Sanskrit word “bhu”. From this point of view, the world, nature, the tathagata garbha, and Alaya consciousness should all be knowledge related with “bhu (to be)”. But when they were translated into Chinese, they had lost to be related with “bhu (to be)”. This means that there is not the word related with “to be (bhu)” in Chinese. Again, verbs in Sanskrit have grammatical forms such as person, tense, and so on, but ancient Chinese has not paid attention to the grammatical phenomena. Therefore, when the verbs of Buddhist scriptures translated in ancient Chinese, Sanskrit “kaya” is translated as body, which loses the grammatical form of Sanskrit suffix. In ancient Chinese, Zuo (作) is used to translate the process of an action, and the continuous tense is lost. You (有) is used to translate the completion of an action, and the perfect tense is lost.

Heidegger (1999) once lamented that the Greeks’ analytical level of “to be” was incomparable; they expected people to understand the expressions in their works were simple and unheard of, and but our power was essentially weak, lacking not only vocabulary, but also grammar, so that philosophy for more than two thousand years had been into a language game. The spread of Buddhist philosophy in China is due to the lack of “as/bhu (to be)”, vocabulary and grammar in Chinese; as a result, the Buddhist verses translated in ancient China became

a philosophy without “as/bhu (to be)”. At the same time, some Buddhist words have lost their connection with the root and the grammatical features of “as/bhu (to be)”, resulting in the spread of Buddhist philosophy in China having been into a language game.

Summary

Based on the above understanding, the author (Lin, 2008) put that “bhu and as (to be)” is the most important and fundamental meaning in Buddhist philosophy. It has many functions, such as copula, existence, trueness, etc. It also has the form of noun and participle of “to be” and many words related with the root of “to be”. Moreover, Buddhist philosophy has the same philosophical problems as western philosophy in its development and evolution, such as the questioning method of philosophy, the degeneration and end of philosophy, the pragmatic turn, the subjective turn, the epistemological turn, and the axiological turn, etc. That is to say, Buddhist philosophy, like western philosophy, is about the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of “to be”. In view of the above, we can get a new understanding of “what is the Dharma”, which is an eternal doubt in Buddhist philosophy, from the perspective of “to be”. We can answer that the Dharma is about “to be” and all the metaphysical problems caused by it.

As a result, the author proposes that we should put Buddhist philosophy back into the Indo-European language family, with the help of western philosophical language, using the analysis method of philosophy and etymology in western philosophy to interpret Buddhist philosophy from the perspective of “to be”, so as to reconstruct Buddhist philosophy and restore a “to be” ideological system of Buddhist philosophy. At the same time, it transforms the Buddhist philosophy of speaking ancient Chinese into the Buddhist philosophy of speaking modern philosophical language, and makes Buddhist philosophy develop into a set of understandable and logical normative philosophy.

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