Two Stages of *Suñnatā* Meditation in the *Cūḷasunnātasutta*

—On the phrase ‘*imaṃ eva kāyaṃ paṭicca saḷāyatanikaṃ jīvītapaccayā ti*’—

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The *Cūḷasunnātasutta* (CS)¹⁾, which describes the basic idea of *suñnatā* thought in Pāli canon, is important for its distinctive feature in pointing out fundamental modes in which all phenomena present themselves through perception for reaching the state of ‘dwelling in emptiness’ (*suñnatavihāra*).²⁾ In this paper, an attempt is made to clarify the textual problem of the phrase ‘*imaṃ eva kāyaṃ paṭicca saḷāyatanikaṃ jīvītapaccayā ti*’ (these six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition).

After comparing the CS with the Chinese version (*Madhyamāgama*, no.190: T. vol. 26, pp. 736c-8ā) and the Tibetan version (*Mahāsūtra* 3: mdo 27, no. 24), Fujita in his ‘*Genshi bukkyō ni okeru kū*’ or ‘*Suñnatā Thought in Early Buddhism*’³⁾ pointed out that in the present Pāli edition of the CS, the phrase, which appears four times, the first two phrases (PTS ed. p. 107, l.34 f.; p.108, l. 4f.), being said to be wrong and both should be replaced with the phrase ‘*animittā cetosamādhim ekattaṃ ti*’ (singleness based on sign-less). In the Peter Skilling’s ‘*Mahāsūtra, Greater Discourse of the Buddha*’⁴⁾, we can also find the expression ‘*mtshan ma med pa*’ (*animittā*) is clearly mentioned in the text twice; so that we can confirm that the above replacement has a considerable basis. This textual remark of Fujita has made a valuable contribution to the study of *suñnatā* thought in Early Buddhism. However, based on the tradition of Pāli commentary, I have different opinion in reading this text.

In brief, the process of meditation on *suñnatā* mentioned in the CS is as follows: ‘the palace of Migara’s mother is empty of elephants, horses, mares etc.’ [*suñnatā* 1] → ‘empty of a village, forest etc.’ [*suñnatā* 2] → ‘empty of the perception of space’ (*ākāśānācāyatanasāṇṇaṃ*) [*suñnatā* 3] → ‘empty of the perception of the consciousness’ (*viññānācāyatanasāṇṇaṃ*) [*suñnatā* 4] → ‘empty of perception of theme-less’ (*akīñcāyatanasāṇṇaṃ*) [*suñnatā* 5] → ‘empty of perception of neither per-

ception nor non-perception` (*nevasaññanasaññāyatanasaññaṃ*) [*sunnatā* 6] → *‘imaṃ eva kāyaṃ paṭicca saḷāyatanikaṃ jīvitapaccayā ti’* → ‘the liberation from the worldly desires, becoming into existence and ignorance’ (*kāmāsavā pi bhāvāsavā pi avijjāsavā vimuccati*). Anyone that studies the CS may find the problem of the sequence of the meditation process from the state *sunnatā* 6 to the state *‘imaṃ eva kāyaṃ paṭicca saḷāyatanikaṃ jīvitapaccayā’*. By reading the commentary on the CS named *Cūḷasunnatasuttavaṇṇanā* (CSV)⁵⁾, I have come to the conclusion that the text should not be revised.

Although the commentary does not mention explicitly the two systems of meditation, it is obvious that the whole process of meditation on *sunnatā* in the CS and CSV can be divided into *samatha* (development of serenity), which leads to the development of concentration (*samādhībhāvanā*) and *vipassanā* (development of insight), which leads to wisdom (*paññābhāvanā*). The process of *samatha* meditation in both texts can be divided into two kinds, namely ‘meditation on objects with form’ (*rūpa-jhāna*) [*sunnatā* 1 – 2] and ‘meditation on formless objects’ (*arūpa-jhāna*) [*sunnatā* 3-6]. The practice of *vipassanā* is regarded as the essential key to liberation, the discovery of the Buddha.

My investigation on the text is that after the attainment of the *‘nevasaññanasaññāyatanam’* (the highest stage of *samatha* meditation/*arūpa-jhāna* 4), a meditator has to come back to his bodily existence by way of developing insight (*vipassanā*) in order to reach the final liberation. The highest truth of *sunnatā* cannot be attained by *samatha* meditation (in the above paragraph: *sunnatā* 1 – 6). The CSV explains that those six levels of the attainment of the meditation on *sunnatā* are called the attainment of *jhānas*, which have to be abandoned for attaining the state of arahantship.⁶⁾ The commentary also tells us that by developing insight meditation (*vipassanāya*), through ‘the right path’ (*maggā*), one gradually attains the final state of emptiness (*accantasunnatā*).⁷⁾ This attainment is explained as the state, which is ‘completely pure’ (*parisuddham*) and ‘supreme unsurpassable emptiness’ (*parāmāṇuttarasūñnatā*).

The CSV gives the explanation several ways of *vipassanā*, namely contemplation on the six bases (*saḷāyatana*), four fundamental existences (*catumahābhūta*), impermanency (*aniccā*), and one’s own defilement (*kāmāsava*). The CSV also mentions the way to attain the highest state of *sunnatā*, which is as follows: “Having abandoned

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the perception of a village through the perception of human beings, the perception of human beings through perception of forest, the perception of forest through the perception of earth, the perception of earth through the perception of space (*ākāsañāncāyatanāya*), the perception of space, through the perception of consciousness (*viññānañcāyatanāya*), the perception of consciousness through the perception of theme less (*akiñcāyatanāya*), the perception of theme less through the perception of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññanasaññāyatanāya*) the perception of neither consciousness nor non-consciousness (*suñnatā* 6) through insight (*vipassanāya*) and insight through the perception 'the way' (*maggā*), one gradually attains the final state of emptiness (*accantasunnatā*).⁸⁾

After the termination of the whole process of *suñnatā* meditation, the Pāli and both Tibetan and Chinese versions mention the bodily existence. This connotes that the meditator has to come back to his body after the completion of *suñnatā* meditation. Those who have attained this state and whose bodily existence still remains are called *saupadisesānibbāna*. This state corresponds to the third and fourth phrases (PTS ed. p. 108, l. 26f.; l. 30f).

From the above explanation, the conclusion can be drawn that the phrase '*imañ eva kāyañ paṭicca saḷāyatanikañ jīvitapaccayā*', which occurs four times in the CS, is not a repetition, and that the first two phrases do not necessarily to be replaced with the phrase '*animittañ cetosamādhim paṭicca ekattañ ti*'.

1) *Majjhima-Nikāya* Vol. III: 121, Text Series No. 62, edited by Robert Chalmers, Oxford: the Pali Text Society, 1994, pp.104-109.

2) *Ibid*, p. 104.

3) K. Fujita, *Bukkyo Shiso* 7 (Buddhist Thought), Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1982, p. 450.

4) *Mahāsūtras: Great Discourses of the Buddha*, Vol. I, edited by Peter Skilling, Oxford: the Pali Text Society, 1994: pp.147-181.

5) *Papañcasūdanī*, edited by I.B. Horner, London: the Pali Text Society, 1977, pp.149-154.

6) *Ibid*, p. 153.

7) *Ibid*, p. 152.

8) *Ibid*, p. 152.

〈Key Words〉 The phrase '*imañ eva kāyañ paṭicca saḷāyatanikañ jīvitapaccayā ti*'.

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