Heretical Views in the *Pañcattayasutta*¹

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(0) Heretical views depicted in the early Buddhist scriptures can be roughly divided into two types: the sixty-two views and the teachings of six heretics. The *Brahmajālasutta* and the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* are famous as the suttas in which these views are transmitted. The *Pañcattayasutta* (MN cii)² is the scripture mainly describing the views about the future within the sixty-two views. The purpose of this paper is to consider these views by analyzing this *sutta*.

(1) Before considering each view, two features of this *sutta* should be mentioned. (i) The title of the *sutta* means the classification of the views about the future. Namely, the five views (*saññivāda*, *asaññivāda*, *nevasaññināsaññivāda*, *ucchedavāda*, and *diṭṭhadhammanibbānavāda*) can be categorized into three by lumping the *saññivāda*, *asaññivāda*, and *nevasaññināsaññivāda* together. And the commentary and the Abhidharma-texts in latertime explain these lumped as eternalism³). So the five views about the future are classified into eternalism, annihilationism, and *diṭṭhadhammanibbānavāda*. (ii) In mentioning the five views about the future, the respective view is introduced at first and the *tathāgata*’s comment on them is expressed next. After that, the following stereotyped expression is put in the end.

This is rough and what has been constructed. By the way, there is the stopping of those which have been constructed. The *tathāgata*, knowing that there is [the stopping] and seeing it going off, transcends that. (MN II, p. 230)

From this, we can affirm that the core of the *tathāgata*’s comment is not the criticism against the views, but the presentation of his transcendence over them.

(2.1 *saññivāda*) Eight kinds of *saññivādas* are introduced at first, and the *viññānakasiṇa* and the *ākiñcaññāyatana* are mentioned as higher states transcending *saññivāda*. Instead of directly insisting “The *tathāgata* transcends *saññivādins*”, by introducing the higher states, which are lower than the *tathāgata*’s state, his
transcendence over sannivāda is shown.

(2.2 asaṃnivāda) The tathāgata criticizes it as follows.

Monks, a certain recluse or brāhmaṇa insists [“Without material, feeling, perception, and constructing functions, I will assert the coming, going, passing away, uprising⁴, growth, enlargement, and increase of consciousness⁵.” But the reason of their assertion is not found.] (p. 230f.)

This account in [ ] is also found in SN 22.54.12 in the context of the existence of vinnāṇatthiti. Considering the contexts, we can infer: (i) SN’s context must be original; (ii) Because it includes the contents that “It is illogical that the coming, etc. of consciousness exist without perception”, it was applied to Pancaṭṭayaṣutta, which needed the evidence pointing out that “It is illogical that ātman has no perception after death”, for consciousness was supposed to be the substitute for ātman.

(2.3 nevasaṃnīnaṃsaṃnivāda) The tathāgata’s criticism is as follows.

Monks, some recluses and brāhmaṇas explain the achievement of this state only through constructing what should be recognized by what is seen, heard, and thought. But, monks, it is said that this (which they express) is a blunder for the achievement of this state. Because, monks, this state is said not to be reached by spiritual attainment which has constructions, but to be reached by that which has the remainder of constructions. (p. 231f.)

The account in boldface, in which the core of criticism exists, is premised on a description like the following.

Monk, this nevasaṃnīnaṃsaṃnī-state should be reached by spiritual attainment which has the remainder of constructions. (SN II, p. 151)

This premising would show that toward the opponents who assert nevasaṃnīnaṃsaṃnī of ātman after death, the tathāgata takes out a system of meditation found in his own sutta and points out the contradiction of the opponents’ assertion.

(3 ucchedavāda) After describing an ucchedavāda’s refutation against the preceding three views, the tathāgata criticizes ucchedavāda.

Metaphorically speaking, when a dog is tied by a strap to a strong pillar or a stake, the dog runs and revolves around it. So these recluses and brāhmaṇas, fearing and detesting sakkāya, run and revolve around sakkāya. (p. 232)

In this metaphor, ucchedavādins are compared to a dog which is tied and not freed⁶. So it is the tathāgata’s intention that although ucchedavādins insist on uccheda and criticize sannivāda, etc., they are not actually set free, either. Namely,
implying “they insist on uccheda, i.e. cutting off, but they are not cut off”, the tathāgata catches them in their own words and ridicules them.

(4 ditthadhammanibbānavāda) Next, four views of some recluses and brāhmaṇas come. Considering the situation where they are introduced\(^7\), it is appropriate to interpret them as ditthadhammanibbānavādas, although they are not called so. The outline of the four is as follows.

(i) Entering the pleasure of solitude, they think “This state is calmed and excellent.”
(ii) Entering the non-material pleasure, they think “-----.”
(iii) Entering the feeling which is neither painful nor pleasant, they think “-----.”
(iv) They think “I have attained nibbāna, I have no grasping.”

Each one is raised as more excellent than the previous. And according to the commentary, the first three correspond to the four jhānas. Here, let’s see the tathāgata’s criticism against the fourth, i.e. the highest one.

Certainly, this venerable insists on the way which is suitable for nibbāna. But this recluse or brāhmaṇa is grasping the view about the past or the future ... grasping the feeling which is neither painful nor pleasant. And his thinking “I have attained nibbāna ...” is also said to be grasping for this recluse or brāhmaṇa. (p. 237)

Because this person is beyond four jhānas, he must have reached a quite high state. In spite of that, why does grasping exist even in this person? This question is solved by comparing it with the following sentences.

Now, monks, this best and calmest state is awakened to by the tathāgata. That is, having known the uprising, vanishing, tasting, disaster, and separation of these six organs of contact, [the person] is freed without grasping. (p. 237)

In short, in order to be freed without grasping, it is necessary to understand the uprising, etc. of the six organs of contact vividly, and the transcendence over the four jhānas is insufficient for the freedom.

(5) The purpose of the Pancattayasutta is basically same as that of the Brahmajālasutta, which exalts the tathāgata’s transcendence over heretical views. And in the process of the exaltation in the Pancattayasutta, the contradiction of the views about the future is pointed out by quoting or being premised on the descriptions of other suttas. This method corroborates the intention of making firm the tathāgata’s transcendence. But such a ‘scriptural armament’ remains a comment of
the contradiction and does not refer to the state of ātman, which is the main point of the opponents’ insistences. Moreover, the way of comment, using own scriptures for the comment of the opponents’ contradiction, gives us an impression of dodging. Namely, the tathāgata does not argue at the viewpoint equal to the opponents’, but shows own transcendence in his own territory. And in the process of the exaltation, the ‘Middle way’, that is, the Buddhist viewpoint belonging to neither eternalism nor annihilationism could be confirmed. But the contents which this sutta tells aren’t only the ‘Middle way’, for ditthadhammanibbānavāda which does not belong to either is also criticized. Taking it into the consideration that this sutta consistently explains the tathāgata’s transcendence, I think the viewpoint of Buddhism to the heretical views was on a different level, which did not belong to the extremes such as eternalism and annihilationism, nor to any standpoints outside both extremes.

1) I would like to thank Ms. M. Tomita for correcting my English. Abbreviations follow the Epilegomena of CPD except SHT: Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden; T: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō. All references are to the PTS edition. But partly I took the readings of the Burmese edition (Chattha Sangayana).


3) Tīkā (Burmese edition), p. 220; Hsuan-tsang (tr.), Mahāvībhāṣā, T. 27, p. 996b (including the citation of this sūtra.); Yogācārabhūmi Vastusamgrahani, Otani 5540, Ḍi 177b; Tohoku 4039, Zi 156a.

4) PTS: uppatti; I selected the reading ‘upapatti’ of the Burmese edition.

5) PTS: aṇṇatra viṇṇāṇassa; I selected the reading ‘viṇṇāṇassa’ of the Burmese edition.

6) In SN 22.99, this metaphor refers to an ordinary man who sticks to sakkāya. Perhaps this SN’s context is original.

7) (i) Ditthadhammanibbāna is mentioned at the beginning of this sutta. (ii) The contents of the views are similar to ditthadhammanibbānavāda found in Brahmajālasutta. (iii) In the Tibetan version of this sutta, they are affirmed as *dṛṣṭadharmanirvāṇavāda. (§§ 8.0, 9) Cf. SHT [IV] Kat.-Nr. 33.7v5.

〈key words〉 Pañcattayasutta, heretics, views