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Is Tri – Kāya Concept a pure Mahāyāna Buddhist Teaching: An Analytical & Comparative Study Based on Teachings In Contemporary Religions including Theravāda & Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Mahayana Buddhism views that the Buddha manifests in three different bodies *Dharma-kaya* (truth body) *Sambhoga-kaya* (bliss body) *Nirmana-kaya* (emanation body). This *Tri-kaya* concept was developed with the demise of the historical *Shakyamuni* Buddha until about the 4th century CE. The main aim of the paper was to study whether this “*Tri-kaya*” concept in Mahayana Buddhism was a pure Mahayana Buddhist teaching or not. Here, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist texts were used as primary research sources with research findings of other Buddhist scholars who conducted research on Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Research findings of this paper were discussed through critical, analytical and comparative perspectives using descriptive and explanatory methods. According to research findings, it can be argued that teachings of Mahayana Buddhism on three bodies (*Tri-kaya*) are not pure Mahayana Buddhist doctrine. Mahayana Buddhism has developed this concept with some ideas borrowed from contemporary religious tradition: Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism Jainism and Christianity. Especially, antecedents of the Mahayana *Trikaya* doctrine appear in the early Buddhist scriptures known as the *Plai Canon*. These teachings in *Sutta pitaka* have influenced Mahayana Buddhism for formation of “*Tri-kaya*” concept towards vital and wider concept. Moreover, Mahayana Buddhists have interpreted teachings in Theravada Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism and Christianity under two stages in keeping with Mahayana tradition. First, they had only *Dharma-kaya* and *Nirmana-kaya*. Later, with the development of this concept under various Mahayana traditions they had a third called “*Sambhoga-kaya*”. Therefore, it is shown that *Tri-kaya* doctrine in Mahayana Buddhism was not a pure teaching specific to Mahayana Buddhism but, it is a teaching mixed with other contemporary religious traditions. Finally, it can be argued that this kind of research can provide insights into comparative religious studies to direct them towards meaningful research approach.

Keywords: Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, Tri-Kaya doctrine, contemporary religious tradition