

A Comparative Study of the Concept of Papañca/ Prapañca between Early Buddhism and Mahayana

Ven. Hai Hui

Visiting Lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages,
Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka

The purpose of this study is to investigate into the relevant literature based on the concept of *papañca* /*prapañca* in early Buddhism and Mahayana. This concept which is closely related to Nirvana is a significant term in Buddhist doctrine, which reveals the difference between ordinary people and the Buddha. It consists of important philosophical nuances like epistemology, metaphysics, and language philosophy. However, its meaning has been an argumentative topic for years. There are four specific kinds of meanings of *prapañca* found in Mahayana. They are defilements, the essential nature conceptualized by verbal designation (*prajñapti-vāda-svabhāva*), discrimination (*vikalpa*), and wrong views including misunderstanding Dharma, grasping views, and metaphysical speculation. Although these four kinds of meanings of *prapañca* can be found in sutras of early Buddhism, they are potential. Regarding the four kinds of meanings of *papañca/prapañca*, Mahayana and early Buddhism have given different emphasis. Theravada tradition interprets *papañca* as defilements; Vasubandhu sees the undeclared points as *prapañca*, which are metaphysical speculations; Mādhyamika and Yogācāra emphasize on the meanings of *prapañca* as the essential nature conceptualized by verbal designation (*prajñapti-vāda-svabhāva*) and discrimination (*vikalpa*). This difference between early Buddhism and Mahayana exists because the goals of early Buddhism and Mahayana are different. The goal of early Buddhism is eradicating self-attachment (*atma-graha*), so early Buddhism emphasizes eradicating self-attachment (*atma-graha*). Likewise Theravadins see defilements as *papañca*, the radical of which is self-attachment (*atma-graha*); metaphysical speculations seen as *prapañca* by Vasubandhu are irrelevant to eradicate self-attachment (*atma-graha*). The goal of Mahayana is not only to eradicate self-attachment (*atma-graha*), but also to eradicate dharma-attachment (*dharmagraha*), so Mahayana emphasizes eradicating dharma-attachment (*dharmagraha*). Discrimination (*vikalpa*) seen as *prapañca* leads to dharma-attachment (*dharmagraha*). The manifestation of Dharma-attachment (*dharmagraha*) is the essential nature conceptualized by verbal designation (*prajñapti-vāda-svabhāva*).

Key words: *Papañca, Prapañca, Vikalpa, Early Buddhism, Mahayana,*