A Comparative Study of the Concept of Dharmakṣṭya Buddha: Vairocana in Hua-yen and Mahāvairocana in Shingon Buddhism

Kwang-soo Park

The concept of Dharmakṣṭya is the central theme in both the Hua-yen and Shingon Buddhist literatures. Hua-yen Buddhism adopts Dharmakṣṭya Vairocana Buddha as the main Buddha. Shingon Buddhism, on the other hand, claims that their secret doctrine is the direct teaching of Dharmakṣṭya Mahāvairocana Buddha. Even though these two schools are based on the same idea of Dharmakṣṭya Buddha, the concepts of Vairocana in Hua-yen and Mahāvairocana in Shingon are different in their doctrinal formulation. Hua-yen Buddhist literature elaborates the function of Dharmakṣṭya Vairocana in the context of the three Buddha-body theory; the Shingon Buddhist literature elaborates Dharmakṣṭya Mahāvairocana in the context of the five Buddha Body theory. Shingon literature emphasizes the direct communication between Dharmakṣṭya Mahāvairocana and sentient beings, and expands his direct salvation of sentient beings in saṃsāra. This process of salvation by Mahāvairocana is based on compassion which is a fundamental merit of Mahāvairocana. Compassion is the basic element of enlightening and saving sentient beings.

Kwang-soo Park is a Professor of Buddhist Studies at Wonkwang University

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I. Preface

The concept of Dharmakīya is the central theme in both the Hua-yen and Shingon Buddhist literatures. Hua-yen (J. Kegon; K. Hwa&m) Buddhism adopts Dharmakīya Vairocana Buddha as the main Buddha. Shingon Buddhism, on the other hand, claims that their secret doctrine is the direct teaching of Dharmakīya Mahāvairocana Buddha.

Even though these two schools are based on the same idea of Dharmakīya Buddha, the concepts of Vairocana in Hua-yen and Mahāvairocana in Shingon are different in their doctrinal formulation. The ideas of Dharmakīya in Hua-yen and Shingon Buddhism have been developed in connection with the concepts of two, three, or multiple Buddha-bodies. Hua-yen Buddhist literature elaborates the function of Dharmakīya Vairocana in the context of the three Buddha-body theory; the Shingon Buddhist literature elaborates Dharmakīya Mahāvairocana in the context of the five Buddha Body theory. Also, compassion is essential to the descending process of both Vairocana and Mahāvairocana whereby sentient beings are saved. Although their function for salvation is elaborated somewhat differently, the process of salvation is basically shared among their traditions.

Hua-yen Buddhism in particular developed the idea of dharma-dhātu in connection with the idea of pratītyasamutpāda. Dharmadātu-pratītyasamutpāda (C. Fa-chiai-yün-ch'i: 'interdependent

1 The term "Shingon" is a Japanese term derived from the Chinese Chen-yen (mantra, literally means the 'true word'). The term "Mikkyō" means literally 'secret teaching,' and it is used in contradiction to "Kegyō," which literally means 'revealed teaching.'
2 The names Vairocana and Mahāvairocana Buddha appear in various Buddhist scriptures. The terms 'Vairocana' and 'Mahāvairocana' are associated with Light, or Sun, and they are derived from the same root vīra in Sanskrit and vēro in Pāli, which literally means 'shining upon, brightening, illuminating.' Gautama Vajracharya, a Sanskrit scholar, makes a distinction between vairocana and vīrocaṇa: the term vairocana means "associated with light" and it refers to 'sun, fire'; on the other hand, the term vīrocaṇa literally means 'one who has the light' and it is also used to mean the name of 'transcendent' Buddha. The term vairocana, rather than vīrocaṇa, is used continuously in the Sanskrit Ga'davya²ha, the last chapter of the Avata8saka-vy^ha. For reference, see, Franklin Edgerton, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1953), 498a, 512a.