

# The Deconstructionist Interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti*\*

Shi, Ruyuan (Chien-Yuan Hsu)

PhD candidate, the Dep. of Religious Studies, the University of  
Calgary, Canada

Sessional instructor, Mount Royal University, Canada

## Abstract

*Catuṣkoti* is one of the popular topics that many scholars like to investigate in regard to Nāgārjuna's philosophy. Some Buddhist scholar such as T. R.V. Murti, Richard H. Robinson and Kajiyama Yuichi have adopted Hegel's Dialectic towards the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* after discovering that it is impossible to apply the formulas of ordinary logic to explain the theory. Under the paradigm of the dialectic, the four propositions of *Catuṣkoti* are interpreted hierarchically and hence, can be considered as a structural interpretation. However, their dialectic constructional interpretation is very controversial. On the basis of *Zhon Lun Shi* (中論釋), *Prajñāpradīpa* and *Prasannapadā* as primary sources, this paper adopts Derrida's deconstructionist concept to provide another

possible interpretation to *Catuṣkoti*. That is, according to those commentaries of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the propositions of *Catuṣkoti* are to interpret the same object from four different perspectives, and thus, they are equally true. Therefore, *Catuṣkoti* neither contradicts the ordinary logic nor has a hierarchical structure, and owing to the absence of hierarchies, the constructional interpretation of *Catuṣkoti* is deconstructed.

Keyword: *Catuṣkoti*, Structuralism, Deconstructionism, Dialectic

---

\* 2010/6/11 收稿，2010/7/19 通過審查

# 龍樹四句的解構詮釋

釋如源

加拿大卡加利大學博士候選人

加拿大皇家山大學約聘講師

## 摘要

龍樹的「四句解讀」一直是其哲學中很受歡迎的研究主題。有關四句的解讀，由於其內在邏輯的矛盾性，早期一些知名的學者諸如 Murti、Robinson 和梶山雄一等人，為消弭此矛盾性，皆採取黑格爾辯證法的角度加以詮釋。在辯證邏輯的規範之下，四句被階層性地解讀，而此種階層性的解讀可被當成一種建構式的詮釋。然而，這種階層性的建構詮釋法其實是相當具爭議性的。本論文以《中論釋》、《般若燈論》及《明句論》等《中論》之注釋書為基本資料，並取用 Derrida 的解構思考作為研究方法，嘗試提供一個不同於建構主義的解讀。根據上列三種《中論》注釋書的詮釋，龍樹「四句」實際上是從四種不同的角度來描述同一件事物，因此四句本身並無內在邏輯的矛盾性，也無高低權實的區別，而皆具同一的真實性。在此階層結構的破除之後，此四句的建構解讀法自然而被解構了。<sup>1</sup>

關鍵字：四句，結構主義，解構主義，辯證法

<sup>1</sup> 本文已根據兩位審查人的寶貴意見加以修改和增補，並謹此致上謝忱。

The most popular topic in the contemporary dialogue regarding modern criticisms about Buddhism is the relationship between Nāgārjuna's philosophies and deconstruction. Perhaps the earliest attempt at relating Derrida to Nāgārjuna is found in Part Three of Robert Magliola's *Derrida on the Mend*.<sup>2</sup> David Loy also penned an article entitled "The Cloture of Deconstruction: A Mahayana Critique of Derrida" arguing that Derrida's deconstruction did not go as far as what Nāgārjuna aimed to obtain.<sup>3</sup> Another figure in the contemporary dialogue, Harold Coward, also tries to compare the goal of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* with Derrida's deconstructionism.<sup>4</sup>

*Catuṣkoti* is a theory of the nature of reality by categorizing it into four propositions. They are: that something is, is not, both is and is not, and neither is nor is not.<sup>5</sup> The term *Catuṣkoti* is translated into English as "tetra-lemma" or "four-pronged propositions."<sup>6</sup> These

<sup>2</sup> Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1984), 87~129.

<sup>3</sup> David Loy, "The Cloture of Deconstruction: A Mahayana Critique of Derrida" *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no.1 (March 1987): 59~80.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Coward, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 125~146.

<sup>5</sup> E. Franklin, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), 223.

<sup>6</sup> T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Mādhyamika System* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), 45. R.H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 56. 'Some Logical Aspects

four alternative propositions exhaust all possible situations of existence.<sup>7</sup> Modern Buddhist scholars such as T. R. V. Murti, Richard H. Robinson and Kajiyama Yuichi have adopted Hegel's Dialectic towards the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* upon discovering that it is impossible to apply the formulas of ordinary logic to explain the theory.<sup>8</sup> Such an interpretation is structural because Hegel's Dialectic involves a hierarchical dualism. Due to errors in the analysis of the traditional commentaries of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (hereafter *MMK*) by the scholars, especially Piṅgala's commentary, misunderstandings have occurred in the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti*. The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct, according to traditional commentaries of *MMK*, the structural interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* by claiming that

---

of Nagarjuna's System'. *Philosophy East & West*. Volume 6, no. 4 (October 1957), 302-303.

<sup>7</sup> For some Indian philosophers, non-existence is a type of existences (bhāva). For example, vātsyāyana, a scholar of Nyaya school, thinks that non-existence is an existence which can be perceived by a perceiver (Stcherbatsky 387). In addition, other schools such as Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā also have the similar idea (Chatterjee 240-243, 388-389).

<sup>8</sup> T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Mādhyamika System* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977), 45. R.H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 56. Kajiyama Yuichi, *Mādhyamika Philosophy of Buddhism*. Chinese trans. Ru Jun Wu (Kaoshiung: Fo Guang, 1978), 36.

*Catuṣkoti* is neither a violation to the logical form nor Hegel's Dialectic.<sup>9</sup>

As briefly explained above, *Catuṣkoti* is a set of four alternative propositions: that something is, is not, both is and is not, and neither is nor is not. However, in the *MMK* there are three distinct variations of *Catuṣkoti* and among them, two of the variations categorize the human experience differently from the propositions discussed above. The first variation is known as the four-pronged negation in which any existence of something is rejected. For example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> verse of the *MMK XXV* it states: "It is not assumed that *Bagavān* exists after death. Neither is it assumed that he does not exist, or both, or neither."<sup>10</sup> In other words, whether the historical Buddha existed or did not exist after death remains a question among the so-called fourteen unanswerable questions of the Early Buddhism.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Since this paper merely focuses on deconstructing the structural interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti*, some other related issues such as how Robert Magliola and Harold Coward interpreted Derrida, the challenge of Derrida's deconstruction and so on, due to the limitation of this research, will be considered to be dealt with in the future researches.

<sup>10</sup> D. J. Kalupahana, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: the Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Delhi: motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996), 365.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase fourteen unanswerable questions in Buddhism refers to fourteen common philosophical questions that Buddha refused to answer. The fourteen questions are: Questions concerning the existence of the world in time, 1) is the world eternal? 2) or not? 3) or both? 4) or neither? Questions referring to the world:

The second type of *Catuṣkoti* is named the four-pronged affirmation. This form of *Catuṣkoti* is an inverse of the first type and asserts that any experience of something can be qualified. The best example is found in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *MMK*: “Everything is such, not such, both such and not such and neither such and not such: this is the Buddha’s admonition.”<sup>12</sup>

The third type is called ‘similarity of *Catuṣkoti*.’ Alternately, this set of propositions do not possess the form of something that is, is not, both is and is not, and neither is nor is not. The famous verses of the four-pronged negation of arising are a good example of the similarity of *Catuṣkoti* whereby it is stated: “No existents whatsoever are evident anywhere that are arisen from themselves, from another, from both, or from a non-cause.”<sup>13</sup> In this form of *Catuṣkoti*, no two experiences are identical. Therefore, experience cannot be categorized neatly into four defined propositions. Because this type of *Catuṣkoti* is so remarkably different from the other two types, due

---

concerning the existence of the world in space, 5) is the world finite? 6) or not? 7) or both? 8) or neither? Questions referring to what is beyond the world, 9) does the Tathagata exist after death? 10) or not? 11) or both? 12) or neither? Questions referring to personal experience, 13) is the self identical with the body? 14) or is it different from the body? See Tsaahan (雜阿含). TSD. vol 2. ed. Takakusu Junjiro et al. Tokyo: Daizo Shuppansha, 1924, 109b and 245b (Hereafter T2, 109b & 245b).

<sup>12</sup> D. J. Kalupahana, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 105.

to its inability to follow a formulaic structure, it is known as similarity of *Catuṣkoti*.

The variations between the three types of *Catuṣkoti* are more identifiable when the four propositions of each type are translated into a logical format. The following formulas emerge from the three systems:

X = something

P = existence

A = arising from self

B = arising from another

C = arising from both

D = arising from non-cause

1) Four-pronged Negation:

$X \neq p$

$X \neq -p$

$X \neq p \ \& \ -p$

$X \neq -p \ \& \ -(p)$

2) Four-pronged Affirmation:

$X = P$

$X = -P$

$X = P \ \& \ -P$

$X = -P \ \& \ -(P)$

3) Similarity of *Catuṣkoti*:

$X \neq A$

$X \neq B$

$X \neq C$

$X \neq D$

Upon converting the systems into logical formulas, it can be seen that the first two types of *Catuṣkoti* are more similar to each other while the third form is most distinct from the rest. This is the reason for which it is necessary to clarify the different types of *Catuṣkoti* before proceeding with further discussion.

Among the three types of *Catuṣkoti*, modern scholars have compared the second type, the four-pronged affirmations, to Hegel's Dialectics. The 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the *MMK XVIII* is an especially popular verse, which forms the focus of their assertion. Consequently, the discussion in this paper will focus on this verse to shed light on the problems of interpretation:<sup>14</sup>

*Sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyam eva ca,  
navivātathyaṃ naiva tathyam etad buddhānuśāsanam*  
(*MMK XVIII*)

Everything is real, not real, both real and not real, and neither real nor unreal. This is the Buddha's admonition<sup>15</sup>

In his work *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, T. R. V. Murti asserts that Nāgārjuna adopted a dialectic method in the *MMK*.<sup>16</sup> However, Murti does not provide a

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>15</sup> R.H. Robinson, 93. “一切實非實，亦實亦非實，非實非非實，是名諸佛法” (T30, 23c)

<sup>16</sup> Murti, 145.

definition of his view of dialectics and only claims that dialectics refers to a series of *prasaṅgapādānam* which is the indication of an opponents' paradox.<sup>17</sup>

Dialectics is a philosophical term bearing different meanings and usages from ancient Greek times. After the emergence of G. W. F. Hegel, dialectics became associated with a certain definition. Although the term 'dialectics' originated from Plato, its methodology can be traced back to Socrates' techniques in midwifery.<sup>18</sup> According to Hegel's definition, dialectics refers to the logical development of thought or reality through a process of dialect with opposing propositions, each of which ends in a paradox. Through the process of negation, a certain higher level of truth is attained as a result. The pair of opposite propositions, which are negated, are referred to as the thesis and antithesis. The higher-level truth is known as the synthesis and it transcends both the thesis and antithesis. However, the synthesis becomes the thesis at the next higher level of truth. Due to the fact that there must be an opposite existence to the thesis, the next higher level of truth thus contains a thesis and antithesis again. In a continuous cycle, the synthesis appears again. In his form of dialectics, Hegel sought to move through the countless series of

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> P. Edward, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol.1- 2 (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967), 385~386.

thesis, antithesis and synthesis to obtain the absolute reality.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the feature of hierarchical realities is prominent in Hegel's Dialectics.

According to *Piṅgala's* commentary, another scholar, Richard H. Robinson followed in Murti's footsteps by analyzing the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the *MMK XVIII*. Robinson claimed that Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* followed Hegel's Dialectic due to the presence of hierarchical categorizations in which the later proposition refuted the previous proposition.<sup>20</sup> Robinson indicated that the first proposition of *Catuṣkoti*, also referred to as "P" in its logical form, is considered the thesis while the second proposition or "-P" is the antithesis. Both "P" and "-P" are the opposite of the other. By the union of "P" and "-P" a higher-level truth, also referred to as the synthesis, is attained which can be expressed as "P & -P." At this level of truth, "P & -P" then becomes the thesis, and the fourth proposition "-P & -(P)" become the antithesis. Following Hegel's Dialectic, Robinson proposed that the purpose of Nāgārjuna's *Catuṣkoti* was to similarly move through the thesis, antithesis and synthesis to attain a higher truth.

Although Robinson tried to establish a logical form for *Catuṣkoti*, he encountered certain difficulties. He claims:

If we assume that the four lemmas are modes of one proposition, then the tetralemma is to be interpreted: "Either

---

<sup>19</sup> P. Moran, *Hegel and the Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner Publishing Co., 1988), 40-44.

<sup>20</sup> R. H. Robinson, 56.

P, or not-P, or P-and-not-P, or not-P-and-not-not-P." In this case, "P-and-not-P" would be absurd, by the rule of contradiction, and "not-P-and-not-not-P" is identical with "P-and-not-P" if we assume that "not-not-P" equals "P." Thus the third and fourth lemmas would be senseless.<sup>21</sup>

According to the law in which the middle is excluded from ordinary logical form, nothing can both be "is" and "is not." Therefore, the third and fourth propositions are senseless. As well, the first and second propositions cannot both be true. In another manner of speaking, the four-pronged affirmation is a senseless assertion in ordinary logical form.<sup>22</sup> A serious problem is raised in this controversy because the four-pronged affirmation is the admonition of the Buddha according to Nāgārjuna. If such is the case, how is it possible for the Buddha's admonition to be senseless?

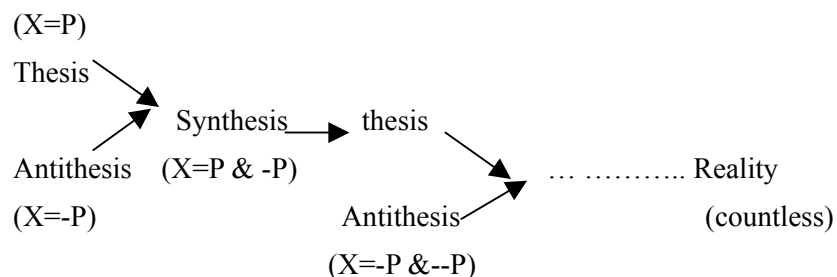
On the basis of Robinson's logical analysis, a famous Japanese scholar named Kajiyama Yuichi suggested that since the four-pronged affirmation cannot all be true at the same time according to logical form, every later proposition is higher than the previous one and also negates the previous one. Thus, there are different levels of truths in the four-pronged affirmation and every proposition that follows is higher than its previous proposition. Hence, Kajiyama further states that the fourth proposition "X= -P & -

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

(-P)” is the highest proposition which reveals the truth that the Mādhyamika school intended to demonstrate. From his argument, it can be known that Kajiyama concluded that *Catuṣkoti* possessed the feature of Hegel’s Dialectics.<sup>23</sup> Based on Robinson and Kajiyama’s assertion, it can be presupposed that they believed there had to be higher levels of truth when *Catuṣkoti* could not fit into logical form.



In regards to the relation between modern criticisms and Buddhism, deconstructionists such as Derrida as well as Robert Magliola and David Loy considered *Catuṣkoti* to be a linguistic means to describe any conventional phenomena.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of deconstructionist perspective, this paper supposes that the above interpretation by T. R.V. Murti, Richard H. Robinson and Kajiyama

<sup>23</sup> K. Yuichi, *Mādhyamika Philosophy of Buddhism*. Chinese trans. Ru- Jun Wu. (Kaoshiung: Fo Guang, 1978), 84~86.

<sup>24</sup> H. Coward, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 144~146.

Yuichi could be qualified as modernism (structural interpretation). One of the important aspects of modernism is hierarchical dualism. It divides the world according to entities and their opposites, which are always hierarchical.<sup>25</sup> For example, bad versus good, devil versus angel, and male versus female. Within these dualisms, one is always evaluated as higher than the other. For example, good is higher than bad. In this paper, hierarchical dualism is used to refer to this kind of principle.

When Hegel’s dialectics is applied to the interpretation of *Catuṣkoti*, this method is considered to be a modernist principle. That is, the four-pronged propositions of *Catuṣkoti* are hierarchically arranged into a dualism if *Catuṣkoti* was to be interpreted based on this principle. Hierarchical dualism occurs in the first level of *Catuṣkoti* whereby Nāgārjuna’s first proposition is considered to be a thesis and the second proposition is an antithesis. Within the dualistic arrangement, the antithesis is more supreme or real than the thesis. The third proposition is interpreted as a synthesis which transcends both the thesis and antithesis. In the second higher level, dualism occurs again and the synthesis becomes a thesis to the fourth proposition. Then the fourth proposition is the antithesis to the third proposition. The antithesis is always considered to be more supreme than the thesis. As a result, the four-pronged propositions are divided

<sup>25</sup> S. Hekman, “feminism” in *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*. Ed. by Malpas, Simon & Wake, Paul (New York: Routledge, 2006),98.

into two separate levels with the existence of hierarchical dualisms at each level.

By arguing against the modernist approach of understanding *Catuṣkoti*, this paper provides a different perspective of interpreting Nāgārjuna's theory. In fact, Piṅgala's commentaries of the *MMK* have already provided reasonable explanations of *Catuṣkoti*.<sup>26</sup> Through a careful analysis of the commentary, the problems which arise from the interpretations and inferences of the modern scholars become apparent. In the following section, there are four quotes regarding Piṅgala's commentary on the four-pronged affirmation:

First, Piṅgala explains the purpose of *Catuṣkoti*:

In order to save sentient beings, the Buddha by means of countless skillful means, with regard to the sign-less characteristic of all dharma, preached that everything is real or unreal or both-real-and-unreal or neither-real-nor-unreal.

The interpretation of the first proposition (X=P):

---

<sup>26</sup> Piṅgala's commentary exists only in Chinese version. It is said to be one of the earliest commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. However, the question about who Piṅgala is remains unsolved (R. H. Robinson 29~30). Besides, Piṅgala's commentary has been translated into English at least twice. See Miyamoto Shōson, Translation of the Chung-Lun, Piṅgala's commentary on the *madhyamakakārikā* (Oxford University, 1928.) Brian Bocking, *Nāgārjuna in China: A Translation of the Middle Treatise* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.)

[The teaching] that everything is real means that when the real-nature of all dharmas is investigated, they all enter the absolute reality, are equal, and of one mark— in short, are mark-less. It is just as the different colors and different tastes of all the streams which become one color and one taste when they enter the great ocean.

The interpretation of the second proposition (X= -P):

As for “everything is unreal,” when the dharmas have not entered the real mark, they are contemplated analytically one by one, and they are all [seen to] have nothing real in them. They only exist because of the combination of many conditions.

The interpretation of the third proposition (X= P & -P):

As for “everything is both real and unreal,” there are three classes of living beings—superior, medium, and inferior. The superior contemplate the marks of the dharmas as “not real and not unreal.” The medium contemplate the marks of the dharmas as “all both real and unreal.” The inferior, because their powers of knowledge are shallow, looks on the marks of the dharmas as “partly real and partly unreal.” Because



*nirvāṇa*, and the [other] unconditioned dharmas are imperishable, they look on them as real. Because *saṃsāra* and the conditioned dharmas are counterfeit, they look on them as unreal.

The interpretation of the fourth proposition (X= -P & -(-P)):

As for “[everything] is not real and not unreal,” [the Buddhas] declared “not real and not unreal” in order to refute “both real and unreal”.<sup>27</sup>

In his commentary, *Piṅgala* provides readers with significant clues by which to interpret the four-pronged affirmation. The clues are found in the two quotes, “the absence of definite feature of all dharmas,” and “Buddhas’ countless skillful means.” The first quote, which is widely overlooked by modern scholars, refers to the teaching that all dharmas do not have an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).

<sup>27</sup> R. H. Robinson, 56. All of the original Chinese is: “諸佛無量方便力，諸法無決定相，為度眾生或說一切實，或說一切不實，或說一切實不實，或說一切非實非不實。一切實者：推求諸法實性，皆入第一義平等一相，所謂無相。如諸流異色異味入於大海則一色一味。一切不實者：諸法未入實相時，各各分別觀皆無有實，但眾緣合故有。一切實不實者：眾生有三品有上中下。上者觀諸法相非實非不實，中者觀諸法相一切實一切不實，下者智力淺故觀諸法相少實少不實。觀涅槃無為法不壞故實，觀生死有為法虛偽故不實。非實非不實者：為破實不實故。說非實非不實。” (T30, 25a)

Such a teaching is the central principle of Nāgārjuna's philosophy. For this reason, it is imperative to interpret the four-pronged affirmation from the perspective of the absence of intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*.)

Due to the absence of the intrinsic nature of all dharmas, everything can be interpreted from different perspectives according to *Piṅgala*. In another manner of speaking, four-pronged affirmations view the same things from four different perspectives. Hence, there are more ways than one to interpret existence. In fact, interpretation changes according to different people with varying knowledge and backgrounds. Thus, it should not be the case that the same thing is interpreted in the same manner amongst all people. Furthermore, there is almost no way to judge which interpretation is more accurate than the others.

Figure 1 (see the final page below) provides an example of the various contrasting perspectives.<sup>28</sup> Is the figure in the picture a rabbit or a duck? From the perspective of angle A, the viewer may see a rabbit. From the perspective of angle B, however, the viewer may see a duck and not a rabbit. Moreover, some may answer that the image

<sup>28</sup> In his article, 'Joseph Jastrow and His Duck- Or Is It a Rabbit?', John F. Kihlstrom points out that the original author of this picture is Joseph Jastrow, an American psychologist, who proposed this picture in *TICS* (1899) 32. The copy of this figure and the information are taken from (<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/JastrowDuck.htm>).

is both a rabbit and not a rabbit at the same time. Further yet, some may report seeing neither a rabbit nor not a rabbit since there is not an exact way of determining what the image is. In this respect, there is no way to judge which interpretation is more accurate among the four answers above.

Piṅgala held the idea that the Buddha interpreted the same thing from four perspectives in order to adjust to different people. In the four-pronged affirmations, the first proposition adopts the view of ultimate reality to look at the dharmas (existences).<sup>29</sup> In the ultimate reality, all dharmas share the same features and reality. Within this proposition, the word “real” means an ultimate truth. The second proposition adopts the perspective of interdependent co-arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) to examine dharmas. In this view, all dharmas are considered unreal because they do not have an intrinsic nature. The third proposition embraces the view that all dharmas come from both perspectives of ultimate reality and interdependent co-arising. In this view, all dharmas are both real and unreal because all dharmas have the same feature and do not have an intrinsic nature. According to *Piṅgala*, the fourth proposition refutes the third proposition. Because the fourth proposition refutes the third proposition, the first

---

<sup>29</sup> The term “Dharma” possesses many different meanings in Buddhism. One of the most common meanings is “existence.” See Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and Meaning of the Term “Dharma”* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1923), 2.

and second proposition is also refuted due to the fact that the third proposition encompasses both the first and second one. However, this does not mean that the fourth proposition is the most real. It simply serves as a reminder to Buddhists that one should not become attached to any propositions because they only represent an interpretation of the same thing from a variety of different perspectives. If someone considered the fourth proposition as the most real, then that opinion is also biased and needs to be refuted.

As it can be known from the above analysis, there is no hierarchy among the four-pronged affirmations because the four propositions are equally real and unreal. Since different levels of reality do not exist in the four-pronged affirmation, they cannot be Hegel's dialectic.

It is also important to note that the terms “dharmas” or “everything,” according to Piṅgala's commentary, does not share the same definition for each of the four-pronged affirmations because there is a different predicate which defines what the “dharmas” are in every proposition. In other words, although the subjects in the four propositions use the same referent, every proposition adopts a different perspective to view it. Hence, the propositions actually possess different subjects. If one wishes to translate the four-pronged affirmations into logical form, one should not follow Robinson's construction as shown earlier in this paper. Because the definitions of the subjects change with every proposition, the differences should be indicated in each case to conform to a more accurate logical form.

Suppose that if X represents the subject “dharmas,” then X1 and X2 represent the different perspectives of X. The logical form of the four-pronged affirmation would then be shown in the following form (P = “real”):

The 1<sup>st</sup> proposition:  $X1 = P$

The 2<sup>nd</sup> proposition:  $X2 = -P$

The 3<sup>rd</sup> proposition:  $X1 = P \ \& \ X2 = -P$

The 4<sup>th</sup> proposition:  $X = -P \ \& \ -(-P)$

When the propositions are shown in logical form, the differences among the subjects are more apparent. One can also see that the four-pronged affirmations can be translated into a logical form without any contradiction, and no problems are caused by the assertion that the four propositions are all real at the same time.

This method of interpretation does not only appear in Piṅgala's commentary. The same principle of interpretation also appears in two other famous commentaries, *Bhāvaviveka's Prajñāpradīpa* and Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, although the details in them are different. Regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of the *MMK XVIII*, Bhāvaviveka's explains:

In addition, in regard to those inner sources and outer objects such as form and so on, from the concept of conventional reality, all are real. From the perspective of ultimate reality, those inner sources and outer sources arise in terms of interdependent arising. They are like an illusion and cannot be perceived because they are not like what is to be seen.

Hence, all are unreal. From the perspective of the relative relation between the two realities, all are both real and unreal. When a practitioner attains enlightenment, because one has gained the reality of all dharmas and does not calculate, he/she does not see the real and the unreal. Hence, [Buddhas proclaimed that] all are neither real nor unreal.<sup>30</sup>

According to Robinson's translation, Candrakīrti offers an explanation of the same verse:

First, the Buddha speaks of phenomena as if they were real, in order to lead beings to venerate his omniscience. Next, he teaches that phenomena are unreal, because they undergo modifications, and what is real does not undergo modifications. Thirdly, he teaches some hearers that phenomena are both real and unreal — real from the point of view of worldlings, but unreal from the viewpoint of the saints. To those who are practically free from passions and wrong views, he declares that phenomena are neither real nor unreal, in the same way that one denies that the son of a barren woman is white or that he is black.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> R.H. Robinson, 56. The original Chinese is “復次內外諸入色等境界，依世諦法說不顛倒，一切皆實。第一義中內外入等，從緣而起，如幻所作體不可得，不如其所見故，一切不實。二諦相待故，亦實亦不實。修行者證果時，於一切法得真實無分別故，不見實與不實，是故說非實非不實。” (T30, no.1566,108a)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Based on the quotations above, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti held the same position as Piṅgala that the four propositions portray the same object from different perspectives. Through the analysis of the two commentaries, four perspectives regarding the interpretation of the same thing arise. The first perspective refers to the view from the conventional reality or common people. In contrast, the second perspective refers to the view from the ultimate reality or an awakened one. The third perspective is the view of both conventional and ultimate reality. The final perspective is the inner state of an awakened person.

In conclusion, the evidence to support the analysis that the four-pronged affirmations interpret the same object from four different perspectives can be obtained from the traditional commentaries of the *MMK* such as *Zhon Lun Shi* (中論釋), *Prajñāpradīpa* and *Prasannapadā*. Their conclusions support the opinion that the four propositions or four-pronged affirmations can all be true at the same time without violating ordinary logic and also deny the existence of a hierarchy of truths, a feature of Hegel's Dialectics. Owing to the absence of hierarchies and dualisms and the fact that neither of the four-pronged propositions is superior to the other, the modernist principle or hierarchical dualism also cannot be accurately applied to the interpretation of the four propositions. In this way, the deconstruction of interpretation regarding *Catuṣkoti* is achieved.

**Fig.1****Angel B****Angel A**

The copy of this figure are taken from

<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/JastrowDuck.htm>.**Bibliography**

- Bhāvaviveka. *Bo Ro Deng Lun Shi* (The commentary of the Light of Wisdom). Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo. vol 30. ed. Takakusu Junjiro et al. Tokyo: Daizo Shuppansha, 1924.
- Coward, Harold. *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Edward, P. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol.1- 2. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967.

- Kalupahana, D. J. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*. Delhi: motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.
- Loy, David. "The Cloture of Deconstruction: A Mahayana Critique of Derrida" *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no.1 (March 1987): 59~80.
- Magliola, Robert. *Derrida on the Mend*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1984.
- Malpas, Simon & Wake, Paul, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Moran, Philip. *Hegel and the Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*. Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner Publishing Co., 1988.
- Murti, T. R. V. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Mādhyamika System*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1977.
- Piṅgala. *Zhonglunshi* (the Interpretation of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*). Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo. vol 30. ed. Takakusu Junjiro et al. Tokyo: Daizo Shuppansha, 1924.
- Robinson, R.H. *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Some Logical Aspects of Nagarjuna's System'. *Philosophy East & West*. Volume 6, no. 4 (October 1957): 302-303.
- Stcherbatsky, Th. *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana. Second Revised and English Edition*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and Meaning of the Term "Dharma."* London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1923.

- Wan, Jin-chuan. *The Interpretation of the Thought of Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Jayi: Xiangguangshuxiang, 1998.
- Yuichi, Kajiyama. *Mādhyamika Philosophy of Buddhism*. Chinese trans. Ru Jun Wu. Kaoshiung: Fo Guang, 1978.