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The Suññatā (Emptiness) Concept in Early Buddhism: A Study Based on Pāli Nikāyas and Early Mahāyāna Scriptures



Ven. Chan Fook Peng
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Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies
University of Peradeniya
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Abstract

The doctrine of *suññatā* is quite difficult to understand from its origin. Various definitions have been given from the nineteenth century up to today. On one hand, some ambiguous statements have attempted to lead the term into absolute nihilism or nothingness especially for the *Mādhyamika* School of Nāgārjuna. On the other hand, some say that the *śūnyatā* concept is non-nihilist, but an exposition of co-arising and relativity. In addition to that, some researchers argue that the concept of *śūnyatā* was first established by Nāgārjuna or *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

The present study rejects such doubtful and unclear statements. My hypothesis is that the theory of *suññatā* simply denotes the notion of no-self, impermanence, dependent origination and so forth. Thus, my central concern of the present research is aimed to reconstruct the *suññatā* concept in its historical sense to give it a proper place by bringing together the center of Buddhist study and practice. In this research not only the controversial issues of *suññatā* are clarified, but also readers are brought closer to the intrinsic meaning of the term emptiness both in the early canonical texts and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.