

Analyzing the Errors in the “Dhātu-vāda” of the “Critical Buddhism”

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Abstract

This article summarizes the essence of “Critical Buddhism” in four characteristics: “one target, two origins, alienation and generalization of vision angle, and lack of correct Buddhist knowledge”; the last one runs through the first three.

Shiro Matsumoto equated the meaning of “Realm” in the sutras with the “Dhātu,” filled the “Dhātu-vāda” with the thought of Brahma-Atma-Aikya theory, and then used this “Dhātu-vāda” as the base to presume the thoughts of Vijnana-Only and Tathagatagarbha of Mahayana Buddhism to be the thought of Brahma-Atma-Aikya theory. Starting from that point, he brought up a campaign to eliminate the influence of Chinese Traditional Buddhism on Japanese Buddhism, and to completely veto the legal position of the Chan School, Huayan (Kegon) School, etc. in Chinese Traditional Buddhism.

In disagreement with Matsumoto’s concept of “Dhātu” (with quotation marks), this article builds the concept of Dhātu (without quotation marks) to help convey the following meanings: First, to understand and recognize the expedient expression of the “real entity” in the sutras, second, to set up the term Dhātu and then to give it up, expressing the incapability of language and manifesting the limitation of “the *prajna* of words,” third, to identify the reason why various viewpoints are unable to refute Matsumoto’s concept is that they dare not recognize the real nature of Dhātu of “the nirvana being tranquil,” with the implication that what is admitted will become “Dhātu” or even the “Brahma-Atma-Aikya” theory; a well-established concept of Dhātu will help to explain the reason why Matsumoto’s errors can actively exist for so many years.

The essence or kernel thinking logic of Shiro Matsumoto’s errors is in fact using the first two “dharma-seals” (after transforming them into the “Theory of Dependent Arising” and the “Theory of No-Self” respectively) of Buddhist “Three Dharma-Seals” to oppose the third “dharma-seal,” “the nirvana being tranquil”; based on this fundamental concept, he built his “Dhātu-vāda” to criticize the meaning of “Realm.”

From his thinking logic and context, Matsumoto thought, when Vijnana-Only theory regards the eighth *vijnana*, seeds of flawless dharmas, and Tathagatagarbha as “existing just the way they are” and being perfect and complete inherently, it is exactly the real nature of the Brahma or Self theory; Matsumoto completely ignored various differences, which are mentioned in the sutras of the three rounds of Buddha Sakyamuni’s dharma transmission, between the eighth *vijnana* Tathagatagarbha and Mahabrahma or the self of eternalism.

From *Upanishad* and *Brahma Sutra*, which are the typical non-Buddhist sutras of Brahma-Atma-Aikya theory, and their authoritative interpretations, we can make a comparison and identify its difference from the correct meanings of Tathagatagarbha.

Matsumoto highly praised the theory of twelve links of dependent arising and thought that “Dhātu-vāda” conflicts with that theory; if Matsumoto’s “Theory of Dependent Arising” can include the Alaya dependent arising and dharma-realm dependent arising, it will not violate the third dharma-seal, “the nirvana being tranquil.” The “twelve links of dependent arising” possesses the meaning of “Realm.”

Matsumoto explained the meaning of the “perfect harmony of dharma-realm” with a shallow understanding, which shows that he was unfamiliar with Buddhist knowledge; the supporters of “Critical Buddhism” thought that “Dhātu” is the general origin of the social inequality in Japan; this is because they did not clearly understand the essence of Buddhism when it was founded.

Any intention to depict or restrain the doctrines of Buddhism with philosophical models will be proved foolish; it is because the superficial similarities between Buddhism and some philosophical thoughts or models cannot reflect the true essence of the Buddhist system.

Matsumoto and many scholars who support the “Critical Buddhism” mostly use the knowledge and thinking logic of document study and linguistics to start many trivial, miscellaneous textual researches and discourses, but they lack the systematic Buddhist knowledge. They have two general faults in their research method.

Keywords: Critical Buddhism, Shiro Matsumoto, Dhātu, Vijnana-Only, Tathagatagarbha, Brahma-Atma-Aikya, Three Dharma-Seals, twelve links of dependent arising