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Tathātā

Tathātā (Sanskrit: तथाता, romanized: *tathātā*; Pali: तथता, romanized: *tathatā*; Tibetan: དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་; Chinese: 真如) is variously translated as "thusness" or "suchness". It is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism^{[1][2]} having a particular significance in Chan Buddhism as well. The synonym **dharmatā** is also often used.

While alive the Buddha referred to himself as the Tathāgata, which can mean either "One who has thus come" or "One who has thus gone",^[3] and can also be interpreted as "One who has arrived at suchness".

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Mahayana Buddhism

Tathātā in the East Asian Mahayana tradition is seen as representing the base reality and can be used to terminate the use of words. A 5th-century Chinese Mahayana scripture entitled "*Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*" describes the concept more fully:

In its very origin suchness is of itself endowed with sublime attributes. It manifests the highest wisdom which shines throughout the world, it has true knowledge and a mind resting simply in its own being. It is eternal, blissful, its own self-being and the purest simplicity; it is invigorating, immutable, free... Because it possesses all these attributes and is

Tathātā	
Chinese name	
Chinese	真如
Transcriptions	
Standard Mandarin	
Hanyu Pinyin	Zhēnrú
Wade–Giles	Chen-ju
Yue: Cantonese	
Jyutping	Zan ¹ jyu ⁴
Middle Chinese	
Middle Chinese	Tsjen-ńjwo
Tibetan name	
Transcriptions	
Wylie	de bzhin nyid
Vietnamese name	
Vietnamese alphabet	<i>chân như</i>
Korean name	
Hangul	진여
Transcriptions	
McCune–Reischauer	Jinyeo
Japanese name	
Kanji	真如
Hiragana	しんによ
Transcriptions	
Romanization	Shin-nyo
Sanskrit name	
Sanskrit	तथाता

deprived of nothing, it is designated both as the Womb of Tathagata and the Dharma Body of Tathagata.^[4]

R. H. Robinson, echoing D. T. Suzuki, conveys how the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* perceives dharmata through the portal of śūnyatā: "The *Laṅkāvatāra* is always careful to balance Śūnyatā with Tathātā, or to insist that when the world is viewed as śūnya, empty, it is grasped in its suchness."^[5]

Chan Buddhism

In Chan stories, tathātā is often best revealed in the seemingly mundane or meaningless, such as noticing the way the wind blows through a field of grass, or watching someone's face light up as they smile. According to Chan hagiography, Gautama Buddha transmitted the awareness of tathātā directly to Mahākāśyapa in what has come to be rendered in English as the Flower Sermon. In another story, the Buddha asked his disciples, "How long is a human life?" As none of them could offer the correct answer he told them "Life is but a breath".^[6] Here we can see the Buddha expressing the impermanent nature of the world, where each individual moment is different from the last. Molloy states, "We know we are experiencing the 'thatness' of reality when we experience something and say to ourselves, 'Yes, that's it; that is the way things are.' In the moment, we recognize that reality is wondrously beautiful but also that its patterns are fragile and passing."^[7]

The Thiền master Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote, "People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child--our own two eyes. All is a miracle."^[8]

See also

- Dharmadhatu
- Ziran (Daoism)
- Tattva (Hinduism)
- Haecceity (from Latin, "this-ness")
- Quiddity (from Latin, "what-ness")

References

1. Goldwag, Arthur (2014). *'Isms & 'Ologies: All the movements, ideologies and doctrines that have shaped our world*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. p. 206. ISBN 9780804152631. "Most of its doctrines agree with Theravada Buddhism, but Mahayana does contain a transcendent element: tathata, or suchness; the truth that governs the universe"
2. Stevenson, Jay (2000). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Eastern Philosophy* (<https://books.google.fi/>)

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 4. Berry, Thomas (1996). *Religions of India: Hinduism, Yoga, Buddhism* (<https://archive.org/details/religionsofindia00berr>). Columbia University Press. p. 170 (<https://archive.org/details/religionsofindia00berr/page/170>). ISBN 978-0-231-10781-5.
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