

The Synaesthetic and Metaphorical Uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in Chinese Buddhist Texts

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Abstract

This paper investigates the non-gustatory uses of the gustatory word 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in Chinese Buddhist texts, in particular, in the *Āgamas*. The non-gustatory uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ basically fall into two categories: the synaesthetic category and the metaphorical category. The former features the use of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ as an umbrella sensory term which can collocate with all the other sensory words, whereas the latter shows that 味 *wei* ‘taste’ can modify abstract and sublime Buddhist terms, such as 法 *fa* ‘dharma’ and 解脫 *jietuo* ‘enlightenment’, for the sake of concretization. These two categories of uses have one sense in common: the sense of “pleasure and joy”, which can be interpreted in both mundane and supra-mundane levels, depending on the context. Moreover, we find that the versatile uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ are most likely to be influenced by its equivalent in the *Pāli* Buddhist texts. This finding sheds light on the history of Chinese language development, specifically, how Chinese language has been influenced by Buddhist text translation.

1 The gustatory word 味 ‘taste’

In the Chinese Buddhist texts, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ is basically used as a gustatory word, referring to ‘taste’, as shown in (1).

(1) 我眼見色，我耳聞聲，我鼻嗅香，我舌嘗味，我身覺觸，我意識法。【雜阿含經】

Wo	yan	jian	se,	wo	er	wen
I	eye	see	form	I	ear	hear
sheng,	wo	bi	xiu	xiang,	wo	she
sound	I	nose	smell	smell	I	tongue
chang	wei ,	wo	shen	jue	chu,	
taste	taste	I	body	feel	tangible	
wo	yi	shi	fa.	(Saṃyutta	Nikāya)	
I	mind	perceive	object			

‘My eyes see the forms, my ears hear the sounds, my nose smells the smells, my tongue tastes the taste, my body feels tangible things and my mind perceives objects.’

In the Chinese Buddhist texts, the gustatory and olfactory words are clearly distinguished, as represented by 味 *wei* ‘taste’ and 香 *xiang* ‘smell’, respectively. Devoid of the convergence between gustatory and olfactory expressions, which is now shown in Modern Chinese, Chinese Buddhist texts feature some other special uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, as follows:

First, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ is attested to be able to collocate

with all the sensory words, i.e. 色 *se* ‘form’, 聲 *sheng* ‘sound’, 香 *xiang* ‘smell’, 味 *wei* ‘taste’, 觸 *chu* ‘touch’, to give rise to the Buddhist expressions such as 色味 *sewei* ‘form-taste’, 聲味 *shengwei* ‘sound-taste’, 香味 *xiangwei* ‘smell-taste’, 味味 *weiwei* ‘taste-taste’, 觸味 *chuwei* ‘touch-taste’; Second, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ can follow some abstract, as well as philosophically important, terms to concretize their philosophical meanings, such as 義味 *yawei* ‘meaning-taste’, 法味 *fawei* ‘Dhamma-taste’ and 解脫味 *jietuowei* ‘emancipation-taste’. In Section 2, we present the synaesthetic uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’. The origin of the synaesthetic uses is reported in Section 3. Subsequently in Section 4, we examine the implicit synaesthetic uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in collocation with *Five Aggregates*, which are apparently non-sensory but essentially sensory. Next, the metaphorical uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ are presented and analyzed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes this paper.

2 Synaesthetic Uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’

In this section, we analyze the uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ which transcend the gustatory sense *per se* but extend to other non-gustatory sensory meanings. The data are grouped into two types, viz. nominal and verbal types, along the grammatical line.

2.1 The nominal use of synaesthetic 味 *wei* ‘taste’

We go through the uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in *Āgamas* (CBETA 2015) and find out that 味 *wei* ‘taste’ is not limited to the TASTE use. Apart from being a gustatory word, it serves as an umbrella sensory word to collocate with all the sensory words. This is illustrated in (2). In this dialogue, a visiting Brahmin used the expression “tasteless” to refer to the Buddha’s lack of conventional hospitality. The Buddha, in reply, uttered a statement, which is an apparent consent to the Brahmin’s comment but a *de facto* refutation.

(2) 梵志復白：「瞿曇無味。」(*Madhyama Āgama* 157)

Fanzhi fu bai: qutan wu wei.
Brahmin reply say Gotama NEG taste
‘Master Gotama lacks taste.’

世尊告曰：「梵志！有事令我無味，然不如汝言。若有色味、聲味、香味、觸味者，彼如來

斷智絕滅拔根終不復生，是謂有事令我無味，然不如汝言。」

Shizun gao yue: fanzhi! You shi
Buddha reply say Brahmin have thing
ling wo wu wei, ran
make me NEG taste however
bu ru ru yan. Ruo you
NEG like you say if have
se-wei, sheng-wei, xiang-wei,
form-taste sound-taste smell-taste
chu-wei zhe, bi rulai duanzhi
touch-taste etc. that Tathagata break
juemie bagen zhong bu fu
destroy disroot finally NEG again
sheng, shi wei you shi ling wo
grow be call have thing make me
wu wei, ran bu ru ru yan.
NEG taste but NEG like you say

‘The Buddha said: ‘Brahmin! There are indeed things that make me tasteless. Suppose that there are form-taste, sound-taste, smell-taste and touch-taste, the Tathagata destroys them and makes them cease to be. Thus we say that there are things, different from what you said, that make me tasteless.’

According to the Brahmin, the Buddha’s lack of taste is due to his observation that the Buddha does not follow the cultural convention to salute visitors. The Buddha, in order to eschew confrontation with the Brahmin, literally admits to the comment but reinterpretes it in a different way, i.e., the Buddha lacks taste with regard to forms, sounds, smells and tangibles, indicating the Buddha’s disenchantment with sensory gratification. Crucially, in this passage, the gustatory word 味 *wei* ‘taste’ is applied to all the other sensory words, transcends the gustatory sense and refers to sensory gratification. With regard to this use of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, it functions as a noun.

2.2 The verbal use of synaesthetic 味 *wei* ‘taste’

The example in (2) is not the single case of the non-gustatory use of 味 *wei* ‘taste’. In the *Samyuttāgama*, 味 *wei* ‘taste’, together with 著 *zhuo* ‘attach’, is attested to function as a verb, meaning “attach to; attract”, as exemplified in (3). The verb 味著 *weizhuo* ‘attach to; attract’ connects the six internal organs, viz. 眼 *yan* ‘eye’, 耳 *er* ‘ear’, 鼻 *bi* ‘nose’, 舌 *she* ‘tongue’, 身 *shen* ‘body’ and 意 *yi* ‘mind’, and the six external objects, viz. 色 *se* ‘form’, 聲 *sheng* ‘sound’,

香 *xiang* ‘smell’, 味 *wei* ‘taste’, 觸 *chu* ‘tangible’ and 法 *fa* ‘(mind)-object’. This connection is enforced by means of “attaching to” or “attracting” each other. According to the Buddha, the action instantiated by 味著 *weizhuo* ‘attach to; attract’ leads to bondage. As a result, the actor gets stuck by a magic hook.

- (3) 爾時，世尊告諸比丘：「有六魔鈎。云何為六？眼味著色，是則魔鈎，耳味著聲，是則魔鈎，鼻味著香，是則魔鈎，舌味著味，是則魔鈎，身味著觸，是則魔鈎，意味著法，是則魔鈎。若沙門、婆羅門眼味著色者，當知是沙門、婆羅門魔鈎鈎其咽，於魔不得自在。」 (Saṃyuttāgama 244)

Ershi, shizun gao zhu biqu: you liu
then Buddha speak_to PL monk have six
mogou. Yunhe wei liu? Yan
mara_hook why be six eye
weizhuo se, shi ze mogou,
attach_to form be then mara_hook
er **weizhuo** sheng, shi ze mogou,
ear attach_to sound be then mara_hook
bi **weizhuo** xiang, shi ze mogou,
nose attach_to smell be then mara_hook
she **weizhuo** wei, shi ze mogou,
tongue attach_to taste be then mara_hook
shen **weizhuo** chu, shi ze mogou,
tongue attach_to tangible be then mara_hook
yi **weizhuo** fa, shi ze mogou.
mind attach_to thing be then mara_hook
Ruo shamen, poluomen yan weizhuose se
if ascetic Brahmin eye attach_to form
zhe, dang zhi shi shamen, poluomen
person should know this ascetic Brahmin
mougou gou qi yan, yu
mara_hook catch its pharynx at
mo bu de zizai.
Mara NEG get freedom

‘At that time, the Buddha told the monks: “There are six types of additive hooks. What are the six? The eye-taste, due to its attraction to forms, is reckoned as an additive hook; the ear-taste, due to its attraction to sounds, is reckoned as an additive hook; the nose-taste, due to its attraction to smell, is reckoned as an additive hook; the tongue-taste, due to its attraction to taste, is reckoned as an additive hook; the body-taste, due to its attraction to tangibles, is reckoned as an additive hook; the mind-taste, due to its attraction to objects, is reckoned as an additive hook. As for an ascetic or a Brahmin, if their eye is attached to forms, gets stuck by the additive hook, and then they cannot be away from freedom.’

The examples of (2) and (3) converge to a focal point regarding the non-gustatory use of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, be it a noun or a verb. Crucially, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ transcends the gustatory sense but retains its sensual meaning. Specifically, it refers to “sensual gratification” or “get sensually gratified”, depending on its part of speech.

3 The synaesthetic uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’: inherent or induced?

味 *wei* ‘taste’, according to its uses in the *Āgamas*, can be semantically bleached, in the sense that the gustatory meaning recedes to give way to the general sensual meaning. Going beyond the gustatory meaning, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ can thus collocate with all the sensory words. The question that naturally ensues is why 味 *wei* ‘taste’, out of the inventory of sensory words, is selected as an umbrella term to signify “sensual gratification” or “get sensually gratified”. Considering the fact that Chinese Buddhist scriptures were translated from South Asian languages, e.g., Sanskrit or Pāli, we need to figure out whether the choice of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ as an umbrella sensory term happened in the original South Asian languages or in Chinese language during the process of translating. To answer this question, we checked the uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in Chinese *Nikayas* (CBETA 2015), which were translated from Pāli to Chinese via Japanese. Importantly, the original Pāli scriptures were translated independently to English in Modern time by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. The availability of two versions from the same source enables us to compare the Chinese and the English versions to determine whether the use of TASTE for SENSUAL PLEASURE is induced by translation or inherent in Chinese language.

The example shown in (4) is extracted from *Anguttara Nikaya* (CBETA 2015) and the free translation is cited from the English translation provided by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012). It is interesting to note that, in both Chinese and English versions, the gustatory word TASTE is used in this context.

- (4) 「尊瞿曇乃無色味。」 *Anguttara Nikaya* (2012: 1125)

Zun qutan nai wu se wei.
Venerable Gotama indeed NEG form taste
‘Master Gotama lacks taste.’

「婆羅門！有事由，依此事由之故，正說者謂

我：『沙門瞿曇乃無色味。』婆羅門！色味、聲味、香味、味味、觸味者，此如來已斷其根本，如無根多羅樹令歸滅於無，而為未來不生之法。婆羅門！有此事由，依此事由之故，正說者謂我：『沙門瞿曇者乃無色味。』』

Poluomen! You shiyou, yi ci shiyou
Brahmin have way by_means_of this way
zhi gu, zheng shuo zhe wei wo
DE reason rightly speak person say me
'Shamen qutan nai wu se wei.
ascetic Gotama indeed NEG form taste
Poluomen! Se-wei, sheng-wei, xiang-wei,
Brahmin form-taste sound-taste smell-taste
wei-wei, chu-wei zhe, ci rulai
taste-taste touch-taste these this Tathagata
yi duan qi genben, ru wugen
already abandon their basis like root-less
duoluoshu ling guimie yu wu,
palm_stump make annihilate at nothingness
er wei weilai bu sheng zhi fa.
then for future NEG arise DE Dhamma
Poluomen! You ci shiyou, yi ci
Brahmin have this way by_means_of this
shiyou zhi gu, zheng shuo zhe
way DE reason Rightly speak person
wei wo: shamen qutan zhe nai wu
say me ascetic Gotama person indeed NE
se-wei. *Anguttara Nikaya* (2012: 1125)
form-taste

'There is, brahmin, a way in which one could rightly say of me: 'The ascetic Gotama lacks **taste**.' The Tathagata has abandoned his **taste** for forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, obliterated it so that it is no more subject to future arising. It is in this way that one could rightly say of me: 'The ascetic Gotama lacks **taste**.'

Since the Chinese version and the English version are not supposed to be influenced by each other, we come to a conjecture that the use of TASTE as "sensual gratification" derives from the Pāli source. In order to corroborate this conjecture, we checked the original Pāli scripture for the corresponding expressions, as shown in (5). This conjecture is borne out, as the Pāli word *rasā* 'taste' is proven to collocate with other sensory words, as illustrated by *rūparasā* 'taste of forms', *saddharasā* 'taste of sounds', *gandharasā* 'taste of smells' and *phoṭṭhabbarasā* 'taste of tangibles'.

(5)

English	Pāli
taste	<i>rasā</i>
taste of forms	<i>rūparasā</i>
taste of sounds	<i>saddharasā</i>
taste of smells	<i>gandharasā</i>
taste of tangibles	<i>phoṭṭhabbarasā</i>

So far, we have established the fact that the gustatory TASTE in Pāli is versatile and capable of collocating with all the other sensory words. This feature, through the process of translation of Buddhist scriptures, has been adopted in Chinese language.

4. More on 味 *wei* 'taste': synaesthetically-motivated uses of 味 *wei* 'taste' on *Five Aggregates*

To strengthen our understanding of 味 *wei* 'taste' in the *Āgamas*, we take a close look at the data and figure out an extended context in which 味 *wei* 'taste' occurs. Other than the sensory words, e.g., 色 *se* 'form', 聲 *sheng* 'sound', 香 *xiang* 'smell', 味 *wei* 'taste', 觸 *chu* 'tangibles', the words for "five aggregates", viz. 色 *se* 'form', 受 *shou* 'feeling', 想 *xiang* 'perception', 行 *xing* 'preparation', 識 *shi* 'consciousness', can collocate with 味 *wei* 'taste', when the five aggregates are understood in terms of the five sense faculties. As shown in (6), our understanding of the five aggregates relies on the six sense faculties, viz., 眼 *yan* 'eye', 耳 *er* 'ear', 鼻 *bi* 'nose', 舌 *she* 'tongue', 身 *shen* 'body' and 意 *yi* 'mind'. Dependent on our knowledge of the five aggregates gleaned from the sensory data, there arise pleasures, which are termed as the **taste** of the five aggregates.

(6) 爾時，世尊告諸比丘：我昔於色味有求有行，若於色味隨順覺，則於色味以智慧如實見。如是於受、想、行、識味有求有行，若於受、想、行、識味隨順覺，則於識味以智慧如實見。...云何色味如實知？謂色因緣生喜樂，是名色味，如是色味如實知。

Ershi, shizun gao zhu biqu: wo
then Buddha speak_to PL monk I
xi yu se-wei youqiu
in_the_past at form-taste have_expectation
youxing, ruo yu se-wei
have_preparation if at form-taste
suishunjue ze yu se-wei yi zhihu
follow_naturally then at form-taste by wisdom
rushi jian. Rushi yu shou, xiang,

thus see thus at feeling perception
xing, **shi-wei** youqiu
 preparations consciousness-taste have expectation
 youxing, ruo yu shou xiang,
 have preparations if at feeling perception
 xing, **shi-wei** suishunjue,
 preparations consciousness-taste follow naturally
 ze yu **shi-wei** yi zhihui rushi
 then at consciousness-taste by wisdom as such
 jian. Yunhe **se-wei** rushi zhi? Wei
 see why form-taste as such understand such
 se yinyuan er sheng xiyue, shi ming
 form reason then arise pleasure thus call
se-wei, rushi **se-wei** rushi zhi.
 form-taste thus form-taste thus understand
 ‘At that time, the Buddha spoke to the monks: I used
 to have expectations and preparations with regard to
 the taste of forms; if I were in tune with the taste of
 forms without expectations, I see the taste of forms as
 it is with the help of wisdom. Likewise, with regard
 to feeling, perception, preparations, and
 consciousness, I used to have expectations and
 preparations; if I were in tune with the tastes of
 feeling, perception, preparations, and consciousness
 without expectations, I were in tune with the tastes of
 feeling, perception, preparations and consciousness
 as they are, I see the taste of consciousness as it is
 with the help of wisdom... Why do we see the taste of
 form as it is? Dependent on forms, there arise
 pleasures. This is called the taste of forms. It is in this
 sense that we see the taste of forms as it is.’

云何受味如實知？緣六受生喜樂，是名受味，如是受味如實知。

Yunhe **shou-wei** rushi zhi?
 why feeling-taste as such understand
 Yuan liu shou sheng
 dependent on six feeling arise
 xiyue, shi ming shou-wei,
 pleasure be called feeling-taste
 rushi **shou-wei** rushi zhi.
 as such feeling-taste as such understands
 ‘Why do we understand the taste of feelings as it is?
 Dependent on the six feelings, there arise pleasures.
 This is called the taste of feelings. It is in this sense
 that we see the taste of feelings as it is.’

謂眼觸生想，耳、鼻、舌、身、意觸生想，是名
 想，如是想如實知。云何想集如實知？...云何想
 味如實知？想因緣生喜樂，是名想味，如是想味
 如實知。

Wei yan chu sheng xiang, er,
 call eye touch arise perception ear

bi, she, shen, yi chu sheng
 nose tongue body mind touch arise
 xiang, shi ming xiang, rushi
 perception be call perception as such
 xiang rushi zhi. Yunhe
 perception as such understand why
 xiang-wei rushi zhi? Xiang
 perception-taste as such understand perception
 yinyuan sheng xiyue, shi ming
 reason arise pleasure be call
 xiang-wei, rushi xiangwei-wei
 feeling-taste as such perception-taste
 rushi zhi.
 as such understands
 ‘Dependent on eye-touch, there arise perceptions.
 Dependent on ear-, nose-, tongue-, body- and
 mind-touch, there arise perceptions. They are
 called perceptions. It is in this sense that we
 understand perceptions as they are... Why do we
 understand the taste of perceptions as it is?
 Dependent on perceptions, there arise pleasures.
 This is called the taste of perceptions. It is in this
 sense that we see the taste of perceptions as it
 is.’
 云何行如實知？...眼觸生思，耳、鼻、舌、
 身、意觸生思，是名為行，如是行如實
 知。...謂行因緣生喜樂，是名行味，如是行
 味如實知。
 Yunhe xing rushi zhi?
 Why preparations as such understand
 Yan-chu sheng si, er,
 eye-touch arise mental formation ear
 bi, she, shen, yi-chu sheng
 nose tongue body mind-touch arise
 si, shi mingwei
 mental formation be call
 xing, rushi xing rushi
 preparations thus preparations as such
 zhi... wei xing yinyuan
 understand call preparation reason
 sheng xiyue, shi ming
 arise pleasure be call
 xing-wei, rushi **xing-wei**
 preparation-taste thus preparation-taste
 rushi zhi.
 as such understand
 ‘Why do we understand preparations as they are?
 Dependent on eye-touch, there arises mental
 formation. Likewise, mental formation can be
 derived by ear-touch, nose-touch, tongue-touch,
 body-touch and mind-touch. This mental
 formation is called preparation. It is in this sense
 that we understand preparation as it is.’

Dependent on preparation, there arise pleasures. This is called preparation-taste. It is in this sense that we understand preparation-taste as it is.’

云何識如實知？謂六識身——眼識身，耳、鼻、舌、身、意識身，是名為識身，如是識身如實知...云何識味如實知？識因緣生喜樂，是名識味，如是識味如實知。(雜含經卷第一)

Yunhe shi rushi zhi?
why consciousness as_such understand
Wei liu shi shen,
call six consciousness substance
yan-shi shen, er, bi,
eye-consciousness substance ear nose
she shen yishi-shen
tongue body consciousness-substance
shi mingwei shi-shen, rushi
be call consciousness substance as_such
shi-shen rushi zhi...
consciousness substance as_such understand
Yunhe **shi-wei** rushi zhi?
why consciousness-taste as_such understand
Shi yinyuan sheng xiyue, shi
consciousness reason arise pleasure be
ming shi-wei rushi
call consciousness-taste thus
shi-wei rushi zhi.

consciousness-taste as_such understand
‘Why do we understand consciousness as it is? It is called the substance of the six consciousnesses. The substance of eye consciousness, that of the ear consciousness, that of the nose consciousness, that of the tongue consciousness, that of the body consciousness, and that of the mind consciousness, are collectively called the substance of consciousnesses. It is in this way that we understand consciousness as it is. Why do we understand the taste of consciousness as it is? Dependent on consciousness, there arise pleasures. This is called the taste of consciousness. It is in this way that we understand the taste of consciousness as it is.’

In addition to the nominal use of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in collocation with the five aggregates, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ can be used as a verb, meaning “be gratified by sensual pleasures”. This can be exemplified in (7) below.

- (7) 爾時，世尊告諸比丘：若眾生於色不味者，則不染於色；以眾生於色味故，則有染著。

如是眾生於受、想、行、識不味者，彼眾生則不染於識；以眾生味受、想、行、識故，彼眾生染著於識。

Ershi, shizun gao zhu
at that_time Buddha speak_to PL
biqiu: ruo zhongsheng yu se bu
monk if beings at form NEG
wei zhe, ze bu ran yu se;
taste person then NEG delude at form
yi zhongsheng yu se **wei** gu,
by beings at form taste reason
ze you ranzhuo. Rushi zhongsheng
then have delusion thus beings
yu shou, xiang, xing, shi
at feeling perception preparation consciousness
bu **wei** zhe, bi zhongsheng
NEG be_gratified person those beings
ze bu ran yu shi,
then NEG delude at consciousness
yi zhongsheng **wei** shou,
because beings taste feeling
xiang, xing, shi
perception preparation consciousness
gu, bi zhongsheng ranzhuo
reason those beings delude
yu shi.

at consciousness
‘At that time, the Buddha told the monks: “if beings are not gratified with regard to forms, they don’t get deluded by forms; if beings are gratified with regard to forms, they are deluded by forms. With regard to feeling, perception, preparation and consciousness, if beings are not gratified, they don’t get deluded by them. It is because beings are gratified with regard to feeling, perception, preparation and consciousness, they are deluded by them.”’

The discussion above points to the fact that the Chinese word 味 *wei* ‘taste’ can transcend the gustatory meaning to refer to “sensual gratification” as a noun or “be gratified by sensual input” as a verb. Despite of this grammatical difference, these two uses have one feature in common: they are related to sensory meaning. Crucially, we find that these two uses in Chinese are derived from Pāli language, by which the original texts were composed.

5. The Metaphorical Uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’

Apart from the sensory uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, we identify another usage of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, which collocate with words of abstract meanings, such as 法

fa ‘dhamma’, 意 *yi* ‘meaning’ and 解脫 *jietuo* ‘liberation’. Since these words are devoid of sensory meanings, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ in this use is said to be further semantically bleached.

- (8) 如我今日說法，上中下言，皆悉真正，**義味**具足，梵行清淨。(長阿含經 佛說長阿含 第二分轉輪聖王修行經第二)

Ru wo jinri shuofa, shang zhong
like I today preach dhamma up middle
xia yan, jiexi zhenzheng, **yi-wei**
down speech all authentic meaning-taste
juzu, fanxing qingjing.
endowed holy practice clean
‘As I am preaching Dhamma for now, the beginning, the middle and the end of the Dhamma is authentic and meaningful. And the holy practice is clean.’

- (9) 比丘！行此十念者，便獲大果報，得甘露**法味**。(增壹阿含經卷第三十四七日品第四十一 (五))

Biqiu! Xing ci shi nian zhe,
monk practice this ten thinking person
bian huo da guobao, de ganlu
then gain big benefit gain nectar
fa-wei.
dhamma-taste
‘Monks! If you practice the ten thinking patterns, you will reap great benefits and gain the nectar taste of Dhamma.’

- (10) 行法得樂果，**解脫味**中上，智慧除老死，是為壽中勝。(雜阿含經卷第五十)

Xing fa de le guo,
practice dhamma gain happiness fruit
jietuo-wei zhong shang, zhihui
liberation-taste in up wisdom
chu lao si, shi wei
rid aging death be as
shou zhong sheng.
life in superb
‘The fruit of happiness gained by one’s Dhamma practice is the upmost one in the taste of liberation; the elimination of aging and death by means of wisdom is the superb one in one’s life.’

- (11) 正如此，能得義味、法味、解脫味之有情少；相反者，不能得義味、法味、解脫味之有情更多。諸比丘！是故，今汝等應如是學，謂：我等欲得**義味、法味、解脫味**。諸

比丘！汝等應如是學。(增支部；第十九不放逸品)

Zheng ruci, neng de **yi-wei**,
right as_such can obtain meaning-taste
fa-wei, **jietuo-wei** zhi youqing
dhamma-taste liberation-taste DE being
shao; xiangfan zhe, bu neng de
few opposite case NEG can obtain
yi-wei **fa-wei** **jietuo-wei**
meaning-taste dhamma-taste liberation-taste
zhi youqing gengduo. Zhu biqiu
DE being more PL monk
shi gu jin ru deng ying rushi
thus reason now you PL should thus
xue, wei: wo deng yu de
learn call I PL want obtain
yi-wei, **fa-wei**, **jietuo-wei**.
meaning-taste dhammat-taste liberation-taste
zhu biqiu! Ru deng ying rushi
PL monk you PL should as_such
xue.
learn

‘... So too those beings are few who obtain the taste of the meaning, the taste of the Dhamma and the taste of liberation; more numerous are those who do not obtain the taste of the meaning, the taste of the Dhamma, the taste of liberation. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: ‘we will obtain the taste of the meaning, the taste of the Dhamma, the taste of liberation.’ It is in such a way that you should train yourselves.’

The above examples show that 味 *wei* ‘taste’ could fully transcend the sensory meaning. Moreover, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ of this use, unlike that in the sensory context, carries commendatory sense. As shown in (8)-(11), 義味 *yiwei* ‘meaning-taste’, 法味 *fawei* ‘dhamma-taste’, 解脫味 *jietuowei* ‘liberation-taste’ are positive qualities that Buddhist practitioners are encouraged to procure through diligent practice. Though “pleasure and joy” component of meaning is retained, this “pleasure and joy” are not derived from sensory input. As is well-known, sensual pleasures are something unwholesome in Buddhist teachings, 味 *wei* ‘taste’ derived out of sensory data is naturally negative in the sense that practitioners should forgo this kind of sensory taste. By contrast, “pleasure and joy” gained through one’s knowledge of dhamma or one’s experience of liberation, at the supra-mundane level, is something wholesome and thus commendatory.

This polarity value can be well captured by two types of emotional evaluation: the spontaneous emotion and the evaluative emotion (Xiong and Huang 2015). The synaesthetic uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’ are usually associated with spontaneous or embodied emotion, as they are sense-related, whereas the metaphorical ones can be evaluative, as they are more abstract and less embodied.

6. Concluding Remarks:

This paper investigates the non-gustatory uses of 味 *wei* ‘taste’, which can be generally classified into two types: one is the synaesthetic usage and the other is the metaphorical usage. The former one features its collocation with all the other sensory words, directly or indirectly. The latter one is not sense-related but it inherits the “joy and pleasure” meaning, which is interpreted in the supra-mundane level and thus commendatory.

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