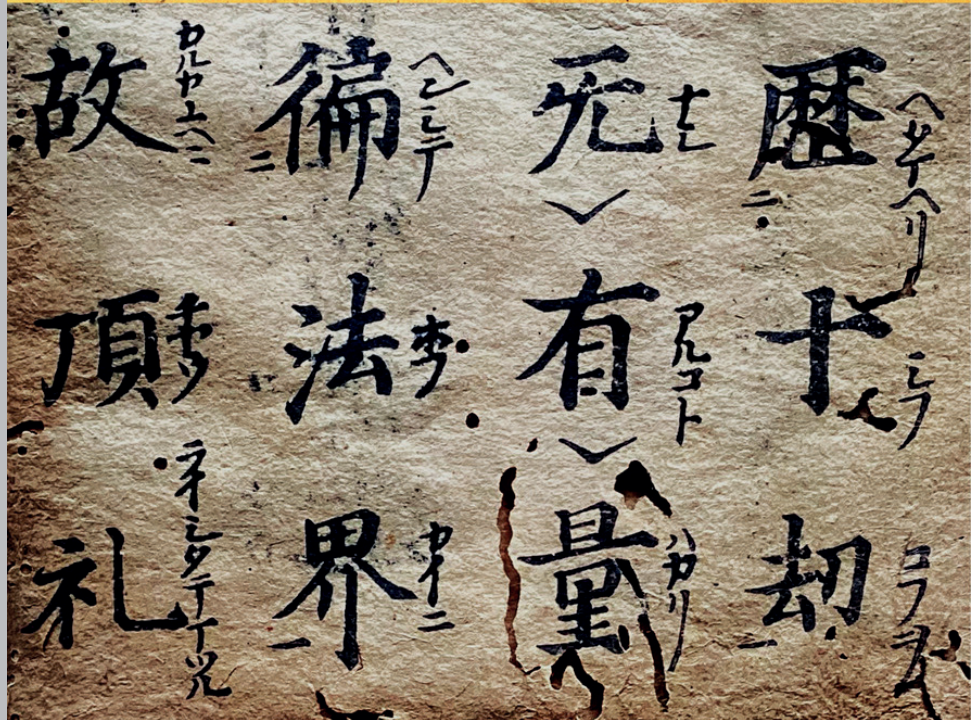
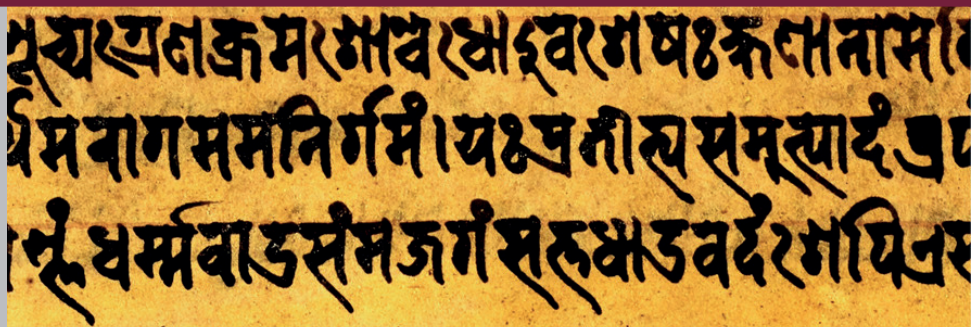




Fujii Jun (ed.)

The Dynamic Non-Duality of *Dharmadhātu*

Elucidations of Buddhist Truth Expressions



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in memoriam

Karashima Seishi (1957–2019)

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Foreword

While one and the same thing may be known by more than one name, the reverse is also true—one and the same term may hold divergent meanings and point to incongruous referents. This collection of essays attests to this latter phenomenon, and illustrates the fact with one of Buddhism's most controversial concepts, namely that of *dharmadhātu*.

Buddhist texts frequently feature many concepts the precise meaning of which is less than obvious, and many deploy standard concepts in a highly idiosyncratic fashion. *Dharmadhātu*, however, may be singular in the complexity of its conceptual history. Also due (at least partially) to the elasticity of the term's components, *dharma* and *dhātu*, its semantics boast a bewildering number of variations. Hence, the term is understood very differently in different contexts, is interpreted differently, and is located in different conceptual associations. That one and the same term may perform essential functions in systematic epistemological analyses (*dharmāyatana*, *dharmadhātu*, and *manovijñāna*), circumscribe the specific nature of the Buddha's omniscience and homiletic capabilities (*sarvajñatā* viz. *dharmadhātu*), and refer to the totality of all reality (*dharmadhātu* as *tathatā*), among others, is astonishing, to say the least. No wonder, then, that it has been translated variously into English ("realm of phenomena," "principle of the teachings," "space of the real," "element of truth," to give only a few) and that the assessment of its import and philosophical implications has given rise to extensive, ongoing, and at times heated debate.

It is this edited volume's singular merit to paint a lively picture of the biography of *dharmadhātu* as a concept, its continuous reincarnations and reimaginings, its migration through time and space as well as through linguistic systems, theoretical models and practical applications. It does so in a fashion both comprehensive and succinct, moving from early Mahāyānic scriptures through the entanglement of Buddhist traditions and non-Buddhist terminologies and ideas in East Asia up to *dharmadhātu*'s role in the reform movements of 20th-century Chinese Buddhism. The eight, meticulously researched contributions, along with the editor's introduction, break new ground, each in their own way. Their methods range from the philological analyses of canonical texts to historical linguistics to hermeneutic reconstruction and on to comparative philosophy, making this a multifaceted,

even kaleidoscopic look at a central—albeit problematic—concept in the history of Buddhist thought. The findings presented in the following pages truly are a treasure-trove for future continuations of inquiry into the dynamic nature of *dharmadhātu*.

Steffen Döll and Michael Zimmermann

Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of the project “Research on the Concept of the *dharmadhātu* (*fajie*): Focusing on an Analysis of the Early Mahayana Sutras and Their Older Chinese Translations” (KAKENHI 20H01185), sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The Outline of Research at the start of the project stated:

“What is truth?” This is a universal question for human beings, and therefore one that should be tackled sincerely by those involved in the Humanities. In this study, we will examine the concept of “*Dharmadhātu*,” an important Buddhist term for “truth,” with reference to Sanskrit and ancient Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures. The reason behind this is that in recent years, basic studies on ancient Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures have progressed and Sanskrit Buddhist text data has been made available, making comparative study easier than before. Through philological methods, the research will be carried out in international collaboration ...

After the passing of Karashima Seishi (1957–2019), a Japan-based scholar of international renown in Buddhist studies, this project was initially conceived as a platform to facilitate collaboration between young and mid-career Japanese researchers and their international counterparts, continuing some of Karashima’s contributions. The original plan was to participate in an international conference, the XIXth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies at Seoul National University in 2020, and compile the papers and discussions into an edited volume. However, restrictions due to the pandemic prevented international travel, and the IABS Congress was postponed until 2022. Despite these challenges, online academic exchanges served as a substitute for personal scholarly communication and facilitated more frequent global academic interactions. Leveraging our online exchanges, we seamlessly transitioned to a combination of online and face-to-face interactions from 2022 onward. Additionally, we flexibly allocated our budget to create comparative tables of Mahāyāna sutras, available at <https://mahayana-scriptures.com/>. With invaluable guidance from experienced researchers, we were able to collaborate with several young scholars, whose participation further enriched the project.

We extend our sincere gratitude to those who participated in our online conference. Special thanks go to Michael Zimmermann, Michael Radich,

Fan Muyou, and Li Zijie for their valuable contributions and insightful discussions. We also express our appreciation to the following young scholars who presented their projects online, offering fresh perspectives: Kasamatsu Sunao, Mibu Yasunori, Lee Youngjin, Lin Qian, and Naiki Satoshi. We deeply appreciate the organizers of and participants in the online study workshop, in particular Li Zijie, Lee Sangmin, Corin Golding, Lee Sangyop, Ernest Brewster, Aaron Proffitt, Paul Groner, Moro Shigeki, Maegawa Ken'ichi, Kujirai Kiyotaka, Murakami Akiya, Kim Taesoo, Kosaka Arihiro, Fabien Muller, and Jakub Zamorski. Additionally, we would like to thank those who provided valuable information via other venues: Tanaka Hironori, Watanabe Shōgo, Kyūma Taiken, Frédéric Girard, Paulus Kaufmann, Sotomura Ataru, Rafal Felbur, Park Boram, Katsura Shōryū, and Matsuda Kazunobu.

We are deeply appreciative of all those who contributed to this project, the structure of which rested upon two pillars. The first involved the compilation of contrast tables, slated for online publication, while the second comprised the publication of a collection of papers in English.

Under the guidance of Miyazaki Tenshō, the compilation endeavor was bolstered by the dedicated efforts of Fukuma Mika, Kondō Shiho, Yamana Jin, Watanabe Ryō, Ishimura Suguru, Matsumura Yukihiro, Doi Ryūsō, Arthur Defrance, and Lin Chiawei. We are also indebted to Fujita Kōtatsu (1928–2023) for graciously permitting the use of his translation. We received his warm encouragement over the phone.

In terms of publication, our deepest appreciation goes to all contributors. Their swift response and invaluable contributions following the approval of the grant have been instrumental in shaping this project. Our heartfelt gratitude is extended to the anonymous reviewers who have reviewed the chapters in this volume. Their invaluable comments and insights have significantly enhanced the quality of this work. Special thanks are due to Zhang Xin for her diligent efforts in collecting and organizing materials and to Takei Shingo for his assistance in standardizing the file format. We are also grateful to Yasukawa Mayu, Torisawa Hōshun, Torisawa Kōshō, and Hisamatsu Shōgen for their meticulous verification of sources. Ernest Brewster's enthusiastic support during the final stages of editing is truly appreciated. Our gratitude extends to Esther Sanders, whose exceptional proofreading and editing skills have significantly enhanced the quality of this volume. Her invaluable assistance ensured the smooth planning and execution of this collection of papers.

We would also like to thank Meguri Michiko and other Komazawa University staff for their administrative support. We are deeply grateful to the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg and to its co-directors, our colleagues Steffen Döll and Michael Zimmermann, for including this work in the Hamburg Buddhist Studies series.

Lastly, we would like to honor our mentor Karashima Seishi, whose guidance and wisdom were invaluable throughout this endeavor, both during his lifetime and even after his passing. Although he could not witness the project's progress and completion, we believe his spirit continues to inspire us—whether from the Pure Land or within this world.

Fujii Jun, Michael Conway, Ikuma Hiromitsu, Ishii Kōsei,
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Introduction

Fujii Jun

Greek

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.
οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν, ὃ γέγονεν.

Latin (Vulgate)

*In principio erat Verbum,
et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum.
Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.
Omnia per ipsum facta sunt:
et sine ipso factum est nihil, quod factum.*

German

*Im Anfang war das Wort,
und das Wort war bei Gott, und Gott war das Wort.
Dasselbe war im Anfang bei Gott.
Alle Dinge sind durch dasselbe gemacht,
und ohne dasselbe ist nichts gemacht, was gemacht ist.*

English (King James Version)

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him;
and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

The Evolution of *Logos*: Ancient Texts to Modern Interpretations

Before diving into a discussion of *dhātu*, it seems appropriate to begin with a journey through the evolution of the understanding of the Greek term *logos* in the renowned passage from the Gospel of John. This passage, quoted above, states the concept of primordial time and, in this sense, relates to a well-known Mahāyāna Buddhist verse, to be discussed later, containing the term *dhātu*.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, but it was the Latin bibles that dominated Western regions under Roman Catholic influence during the Middle Ages. The Latin bibles were primarily comprehended by intellectuals, notably the clergy, until approximately 1500 CE when translations into modern Western European languages commenced. Significantly, the Latin term *verbum* was employed to translate the Greek term *logos* at the beginning of the Gospel of John.

In Japan, Martin Luther (1483–1546) is widely credited with being the first to translate the Bible into German, one of the modern languages, although there were precedents of German translations before Luther's time.¹ In Germany, both pre-Lutheran and Lutheran bibles utilized the term *Wort* (word), which is cognate with the Latin *verbum*. Luther drew from a Greek bible edited by Desiderius Erasmus (1466?–1536) for his translation, but in this specific passage, Luther's rendition follows the Latin tradition.

Although Erasmus did not stand with the Reformers and remained a Roman Catholic, he caused more controversy than Luther over the interpretation of *logos* in the Gospel of John. Initially, in 1516, he released the Greek New Testament alongside its Latin counterpart under the title *Novum Instrumentum Omne* (All New Instrument), which Luther utilized for his translation. Subsequently, in 1519, Erasmus revised and reissued it as *Novum Testamentum Omne* (All New Testament). In his updated Latin translation, he opted to render *logos* as *sermo* ("sermon" or "profit") instead of *verbum*, which he had used in the first edition. This alteration sparked considerable debate. When a certain Carmelite in Brussels accused Erasmus of trying to alter the Gospel of John, Erasmus found himself compelled to

¹ I first learned about pre-Lutheran German bibles during my visit to the Bible Museum in Münster on December 29, 2019. This visit was encouraged by Miyagawa Sō 宮川 創, who was residing in Göttingen at the time. I would like to extend my gratitude to him for his recommendation and for confirming the four languages of the Gospel of John.

justify his choice.² It is unclear whether Erasmus's "reformatory" rendering influenced later generations, but the term subsequently developed particular dynamics in Germany.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) penned the tragedy *Faust* based on a German legend. In Goethe's *Faust*, the protagonist Doktor Johann Faust, intrigued by sorcery, makes a pact with the devil Mephistopheles to pursue earthly pleasures. In one notable scene, Faust is not satisfied with the translation *Wort* for *logos* in the outset of the Gospel of John and attempts to translate the term more accurately. The terms he employs for translation are *Sinn* (mind), *Kraft* (power), and *Tat* (deed).³ While these terms do not precisely align with the original Greek term, they serve as literary expressions through which Faust defies Christian authority and showcases his erudition. His translation attempts reflect the prevailing emphasis on human agency and volition during that era.

Following the unification of Germany in 1862, science and technology rapidly developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the emergence of many prominent scientists. One such figure was Walther Hermann Nernst (1864–1941), a Nobel laureate in chemistry in 1920. In his letter addressed to Max Theodor Felix von Laue (1879–1960), a Nobel laureate in physics in 1914, Nernst discusses the translation of *logos* as found in *Faust*, expressing a preference for *Naturgesetz* (natural law) as a suitable rendering of the term.⁴ This suggestion aligns with the scientific endeavor to uncover the underlying laws governing natural phenomena, reflecting early twentieth-century confidence in the natural sciences.⁵

The engagement with the translation issues surrounding *logos* among Germany's leading intellectuals of their respective times, from clergy to

² For Erasmus's apology, titled *Apologia de "In principio erat sermo,"* see Jarrott, 1964, and Drysdall, 2015. Such accusations and apologetics remind me of the case of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 sect in Japanese Buddhism. There is a widespread belief that Zenran 善鸞 (1217–86), one of Shinran's sons, was isolated because he altered Shinran's teachings. I have argued that his isolation is not a historical fact because all documentations are dubious and likely forged by Shinran's disciples; see Fujii, 2013.

³ Goethe's *Faust: Der Tragödie erster Teil*, verses 1219–37.

⁴ Letter dated February 13, 1938. See Hermann, 1976: 116, text and n241.

⁵ Werner Heisenberg (1901–76), in his renowned book *Der Teil und das Ganze* (Physics and Beyond) mentions the term *Teilchen* (particle) as a potential translation for *logos* in the Gospel of John in the context of the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus. Additionally, he notes terms corresponding to the English "mathematics," "symmetry," and "natural law" as potential translations for *logos*. Heisenberg, 1969: 185.

literary and cultural heroes to natural scientists, is noteworthy as it reflects evolving perspectives across different epochs.

Table 1: Translations for *logos* in Germany⁶

	Texts	German (Greek/Latin)	English equivalent
(1)	Greek bibles	<i>logos</i> (Greek)	word
(2)	Latin bibles	<i>verbum</i> (Latin) ⁷	word
(3)	German bibles prior to Luther	<i>Wort</i>	word
(4)	Erasmus's translation, 1519	<i>sermo</i> (Latin)	sermon or profit
(5)	Luther's bible, 1522	<i>Wort</i>	word
(6)	Goethe's <i>Faust</i> , 1806	<i>Sinn, Kraft, Tat</i>	mind, power, deed
(7)	Nernst's letter, 1938	<i>Naturgesetz</i>	natural law
(8)	Heisenberg's <i>Physics and Beyond</i> , 1969	<i>Teilchen, Naturgesetz, Mathematik, Symmetrie</i>	particle, natural law, mathematics, symmetry

The Buddhist Concept of *Dhātu*: Evolution and Interpretations

The evolution of the understanding of *logos* through time leads us to the following Buddhist verse, which includes the term *dhātu*.

The beginningless natural law is the ground of all things.
Because it exists, every state [of transmigration] exists, and also the
acquisition of *nirvāṇa* exists.⁸

⁶ I presented items (1), (2), (5), (6), and (7) at the poster session organized by the Humboldt Foundation at Leipzig University on April 4, 2019. Although some of these sources were cited in a note by Herbert Pietschmann and in a lecture at Herbstschule Maria Laach, both of which appeared to have been published online in 2013, I had independently collected these materials as part of my own research projects.

⁷ There exist diverse categories of Latin bibles, spanning from ancient fragments to the Vulgate Bible, yet the consistent term employed across these variations is *verbum*.

⁸ Hermann Georg Jacobi (1850–1937) and Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935) published German and French translations, respectively, of the *Triṃśikā-vijñaptimātratā* (Thirty Verses on Manifestation Only) and its commentary in 1932. “Eine Realität (dhātu) ohne zeitlichen Anfang ist die Kollektion aller dharmas; wenn jene ist, dann gibts Geburt in allen Wesensklassen oder auch Erlangung des Nirvāṇa” (Jakobi, 1932: 50); “Il y a un Plan qui n’a pas commencé dans le Temps, qui est le Réceptacle commun de toutes les Essences, et du fait qu’il est, il y a toutes les Destinations ou bien aussi l’accès du Nirvāṇa” (Lévi 1932: 110). Prior to these, Louis de La Vallée Poussin

*anādikāliko dhātuḥ sarvadharmasamāśrayaḥ /
tasmin sati gatiḥ sarvā nirvāṇādhigamo 'pi ca //*⁹

While I will not offer a cursory comparison here, it must be noted that this content bears a remarkable resemblance to the opening of the Gospel of John, although the texts employ terms representative of their respective Christian and Buddhist traditions. The verse above is attributed to the *Mahāyāna-abhidharma-sūtra*. Its precise provenance, however, is not well understood, and it is shared also by the Yogacāra tradition and *tathāgatagarbha* thought. In Buddhism, primordial time is described as “beginningless,” expressed in the negative form.¹⁰ The term I have translated as “natural law,” following Nernst, is *dhātu*. This translation is not definitive, and how to interpret *dhātu* in this verse is a major question that has occupied not only contemporary scholars of Buddhist studies but also Buddhists since as early as the sixth century.¹¹

Another influential phrase that contains the term *dhātu* is found in the following passage in the *Samyuttanikāya* in Pāli.¹²

Uppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ, ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyaṃatā idappaccayatā. Taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. (Samyuttanikāya 12.20, PTS II 25.18–20)

The translation by Caroline Rhys Davids (1857–1942) renders it as:

Whether, [brethren,] there be an arising of Tathāgatas, or whether there be no such arising, in each this nature of things just stands, this causal status, this causal orderliness, the relatedness of this to that. Concerning that the Tathāgata is fully enlightened, that he fully understands.¹³

translated this verse in his 1928 rendering of the *Cheng Weishi Lun* 成唯識論. However, he did not translate the term *dhātu* and only referenced its meaning as *hetu* (cause) based on the commentary.

⁹ *Triṃśikā* 37.12–13; RGV 72.13–14. For purposes of brevity, those references which are also given in my chapter in this volume are omitted from the bibliography at the end of this introduction.

¹⁰ See p. 319n278 in my chapter in this volume.

¹¹ This verse is also addressed in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (Paramārtha: T1593:31.114a1–2; Xuanzang T1594:31.133b15–16; D 4048 [sems tsam, ri] 3a6) and the *Cheng Weishi Lun* (T1585:31.14a13–14). In these texts, *dhātu* is interpreted as *hetu* (cause) or *bīja* (seed). See Lamotte, 1973: 12–13 (TOME II) and La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 169–71.

¹² This passage is discussed by Christopher Jones in his chapter in this volume. See page 7.

¹³ Rhys Davids, 1922: 21. These examples present some of the early translations of Buddhist texts into Western languages. It is commonly presumed that as time passes,

In this context, the term *dhātu* is translated as “the nature of things”¹⁴ and used interchangeably with *idappaccayatā*, which later denotes *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) in Sanskrit. This phrase, in almost the same form, is also found in Sarvāstivāda literature, which is the mainstream tradition in Sanskritic Buddhism. It is noteworthy that, in comparison, Mahāyāna Buddhist literature often substitutes other terms for *dhātu* within this stock formula, likely due to the demands of the era.¹⁵

One of the earlier Mahāyāna sutras, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, first replaces *dhātu* with *lakṣaṇāni* (marks or characteristics). Following this replacement, the larger *Prajñāpāramitā*s, roughly two hundred years later, substitute terms such as *dharmatā*, *dharmadhātu*, *tathatā*, and *bhūtaakoṭi* for *dhātu*.¹⁶ These terms are widely utilized in Mahāyāna Buddhism to convey the highest expression of truth or ultimate reality. Furthermore, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* notably employs *paurāṇasthitidharmatā* (the nature of *dharma* that has abided since the beginning), while the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* uses *tathāgatagarbha* (womb of Tathāgata), also referenced in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. These sources have long been acknowledged in the academic community.

Moreover, within Buddhist literature, one can observe a variation found in an esoteric sutra, the *Mahavairocana-sūtra*, although it is less widely recognized. The text substitutes the term **(guhya)mantra* for *dhātu*.¹⁷ This less familiar instance offers an invaluable opportunity to examine the concept of *dhātu* from a fresh perspective. These terminological replacements may seem disjointed, but I believe they conceptually relate to the idea of *dhātu*.

scholarly understanding deepens and translations become more accurate. This is a preconception in Buddhist studies based on the comparison of the intractable translations of the Han dynasty with those of later periods. It is generally assumed that Han translations were based on an inadequate understanding of the texts and that later translations were more appropriate and hence became widely known. As Eric Greene’s chapter in this volume thoroughly demonstrates, this is not the case.

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi’s choice of rendering *dhātu* as “element” in the same passage (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000: 551) appears to align with contemporary interpretations of the term, although I harbor reservations regarding such interpretations. As Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000: 741n51, points out, Buddhaghosa (fl. fifth century) glosses *dhātu* as “the intrinsic nature of the conditions (*paccayasvabhāva*)” in his *Sāratthappakāsinī* (PTS II 40.19).

¹⁵ Lamotte I 157 n1 lists the relevant sutras with this stock formula.

¹⁶ See La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 743–61, for earlier detailed references to these terms.

¹⁷ During my research on Kūkai 空海 (774–835), I observed his citation of this variation, a pivotal passage concerning his comprehension of truth. See Fujii, 2008: 503–504.

Table 2: Substitutions for *dhātu* in the stock formula

Text	Translator/translation	Source/original terms
<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> 12.20 <i>Paccayasutta</i>	Rhys Davids 1922: 21 nature	PTS II 25.19, 34 <i>dhātu</i>
<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā- prajñāpāramitā</i>	Conze 1958: 99 those <u>marks</u> stand out just as such. Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022: 256 ces caractères	ASP 135.27 <i>lakṣaṇāni sthitāni</i>
Larger <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i> s: <i>Aṣṭaśasāhasrikā- prajñāpāramitā</i> <i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā- prajñāpāramitā</i> (3c)	Conze 1962: 266 Suchness of dharmas Dharmahood Dharma-element of dharmas established order of Dharma reality-limit Cf. Lamotte V 2191 la nature de dharma la stabilité des dharma la manière d’être	Conze 1962: 67.20–22 <i>dharmāṇām tathatā dharmatā dharmāṇām dharmadhātu dharmasthititā bhūtakoṭi</i> PSP I–2: 63 <i>dharmatā dharmasthititā tathatā</i>
<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> (5c)	Suzuki 1932: 124 an eternally abiding reality	<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> 143.9 <i>paurāṇasthitidharmatā</i>
<i>Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra</i>	Takasaki 1966a: 294–95 Matrix of Tathāgata	<i>Ratnagotravibhāga</i> 73.12 <i>tathāgatagarbha</i> ¹⁸
<i>Mahāvairocana-sūtra</i> (7c)	Hodge 2003: 131 Intrinsic nature of the mantras of <i>mantrins</i> Giebel 2005: 49 mantras	* <i>guhyamantra</i> <i>gsang sngags rnams kyi gsang sngags kyi chos nyid</i> ¹⁹ 諸真言。真言法爾 (T848:18.10a13)

The review above has indicated well-known instances in Buddhist literature, which use *dhātu* or its substitutions in isolation rather than as part of a compound word or phrase. Let us now consider the compound case of *dharmadhātu*, the subject of this volume. As Jakub Zamorski notes in his contribution, the exploration of the concept of *dharmadhātu* continues to present significant philological and philosophical challenges. Paul Demiéville (1894–1979), in his translation of the *Linji lu* 臨濟錄, emphasizes

¹⁸ See also Zimmermann, 2002: 106, 106–107n71.

¹⁹ Derge Tohoku 494 [*rgyud 'bum, tha*] 170b2. *gsang sngags rnams kyi gsang sngags kyi chos nyid*. The conclusion of Ikuma Hiromitsu's chapter suggests that *tathāgataguhya* and *tathāgatagarbha* are sometimes rendered by the same term, *mimi* 祕密, in Chinese translations. The occurrence of the word **guhya* in the formula within the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, as evidenced in the Tibetan translation, may indicate a semantic connection between the terms used interchangeably in this formula.

the complexity of the term as “one of the most untranslatable terms in the Buddhist vocabulary.”²⁰

To what degree has the Buddhist tradition confronted the complexity of concepts such as *dhātu* or *dharmadhātu*? While modern scholarship may not agree with its interpretations or may even find its notions abstruse, it is conceivable that the tradition comprehended these terms with relative ease.

Our investigation commences with an examination of a substantial corpus of instances featuring the usage of *dharmadhātu* and *dhātu*, aimed at identifying underlying simplicities. After all, multiple meanings frequently develop from a single core concept. While some of these derived meanings may diverge from the original conception, they typically preserve some kind of association with the semantic origin. To discern such commonalities amid the multitude of meanings and phenomena has long been considered a hallmark of human wisdom. A philological exploration of the meaning of *dhātu* will reveal that the term *dhātu* itself was used in such intellectual activity.

The complexity of the term *dhātu* and its associates results from the fact that while its meaning is generally outlined in the Indian classics, its actual usage in Buddhist literature does not seem to correspond to those definitions. This observation is, I believe, widely shared among scholars of Buddhism. My argument, however, is that the interpretation of *dhātu* in Buddhist literature does not deviate in any significant manner from its classic usage in Indian literature. Moreover, I posit that *dhātu* holds a fundamentally simple meaning. This interpretation aligns with the views of Chinese Buddhist scholars of the Sui dynasty, as well as that of Eugène Burnouf (1801–52).

Forgotten Precedents: *Dhātu* in Huiyuan and Zhiyi

First, let us focus on how Jingyingsi Huiyuan 淨影寺慧遠 (523–592) elucidates the translation of *dhātu* as *jie* 界 and *xing* 性. As a scholar-monk within a lineage of *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* scholars, Huiyuan compiled the monumental *Dasheng yi zhang* 大乘義章, in which he meticulously examines 222 topics. We shall address two of those specifically: the “concept of eighteen entities” (*shibajie yi* 十八界義)²¹ and the “concept of Buddha-

²⁰ Demiéville, 1972: 76. He conceptualizes *dharmadhātu* as the universe (or the element) of cognizable things (*les choses connaisables*). This information was kindly provided by Frédéric Girard. See also Girard, 2019: 63. A similar assertion is made by Jacques May (1927–2018). See note 43 of my chapter in this volume for more details.

²¹ I intentionally do not use the common translation “realm” for *jie* (except in quotes).

hood” (*foxing yi* 佛性義).²² The passage from the description of eighteen entities is as follows:

此之十八，經名為界，亦名為性。界別名界，性別名性。諸法性別故名為界 (T1851:44.633a16–17)

The sutras designate these eighteen [entities comprising the six sense organs, their respective objects, and the corresponding consciousnesses] as *jie* 界 or *xing* 性. The *jie* are so called [because] *jie* are distinct [from other *jie*], and [likewise] the *xing* are so called [because] *xing* are distinct [from other *xing*]. We designate *jie* [as such] because the *xing* [i.e., natures] of all *dharma*s are distinct.²³

A notable aspect of Huiyuan’s interpretation lies in his characterization of *dhātu* as embodying both nature in the sense of essence and the function of differentiation. Furthermore, Huiyuan discusses the significance of the character *xing* 性 in the term “Buddhahood” (*foxing* 佛性), emphasizing its immutable nature and its role in categorization. These two viewpoints resonate closely with the interpretation of his contemporary, Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597).²⁴

Building on the insights of Huiyuan and Zhiyi, we may distill a concise understanding of *dhātu* as signifying an “unchanging nature,” facilitating categorical differentiation by virtue of its inherent distinctiveness. Despite alleged occasional divergences in Buddhist usage, as evidenced by variants with spatial semantics such as *lokadhātu*, *traidhātuka*, and *dharmadhātu*, I argue against ascribing a uniquely Buddhist significance to the term *dhātu*.

For instance, the term *lokadhātu*,²⁵ usually translated as “world,” invokes the concept of space. However, the image of space should be attributed to the

²² This information was kindly provided by Ishii Kōsei 石井公成 on July 11, 2022.

²³ Cf. *Mohe shiguan* 摩訶止觀, fasc. 5.1: “The [eighteen] realms [that is, the six sense organs, their six objects, and their six consciousnesses] are so called [because they are each] distinct realms. They are also called ‘the individual nature’” 界名界別，亦名性分 (T1911:46.51c24). See also Swanson, 2018: 786.

²⁴ *Dasheng yi zhang* (T1851:44.472a8–b16); *Mohe Zhiguan* (T1911:46.53a21–25).

²⁵ Harrison, 2006: 136–38, examines how the term *lokadhātu* in §13c of the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā* has been understood in previous translations. He proposes a *bahuvrīhi* interpretation of the word, which appears more coherent than the earlier *karmadhāraya* interpretation suggesting a “mystical subversion of language.” In this passage, Harrison refers to *lokadhātu* as a “world-system (or world-realm, world-sphere, world-element, etc.),” indicating that he interprets *dhātu* as “realm” or “sphere.” However, as I discuss in my chapter, *dhātu* does not inherently mean “realm” or “sphere.” Given the context of §13c, it is more appropriate to interpret it as “unchanging nature.”

first element, *loka*. The usage of *dhātu* within the term *lokadhātu* is indicative of the peculiar principle asserting the exclusive presence of only one Buddha within a particular world, thereby distinguishing it from other worlds. While the cumulative effect of *lokadhātu* may indeed evoke the image of space, *dhātu* itself does not carry such connotations.²⁶

Additionally, in contexts where *dhātu* signifies relics, its unchanging nature underscores their designation as relics, particularly prevalent in regions like India where cremation is customary and bones persist post-cremation.

The scholarly background of Huiyuan and Zhiyi reflects a significant influence from Kumārajīva (fl. 344–413), familiarizing them with the translation of *xīng* as *dhātu*. Moreover, their understanding of *jie* stems from the engagement with Abhidharma literature and Paramārtha's (499–569) translation of *Madhyāntavibhāga*. While the extent of their comprehension regarding the specific Sanskrit term denoting Buddhahood (*buddhadhātu*) in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* remains uncertain, they unequivocally link their understanding of *xīng* to their conceptualization of *foxing*.

In premodern East Asia, the writings of Huiyuan and Zhiyi held prominence, with Buddhist scholars recognizing *jie* as a translated symbol, fully grasping its implications within their scholarly discourse.

Burnouf's Comprehension of *Dhātu*²⁷

As an Indologist and orientalist of the nineteenth century, Burnouf conducted a meticulous examination of *dhātu* terminology, offering valuable insights that challenge contemporary interpretations and prompt scholars to reevaluate their understanding of the concept. While Burnouf extensively covered *dhātu*-related idioms during the early days of Buddhist Studies in the West, recent articles curiously overlook his findings. Due to limitations of space, I will only briefly mention three points that force us to reflect on our current understanding of *dhātu*:

²⁶ See also the next section about Burnouf on *traidhātuka* and my chapter in this volume.

²⁷ Before Burnouf, there were earlier scholars who engaged in the translation of Sanskrit and Tibetan literature containing the term *dhātu*, as noted by Burnouf himself. Among these scholars, Burnouf cites Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779–1847), Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), and Horace Hayman Wilson (1786–1860). Their contributions are intriguing in the context of modern Buddhist studies' archaeological excavation, and I intend to address those in future investigations. For the present discussion, I will limit my focus to Burnouf's references.

- (1) The basic function of *dhātu* is classification.
- (2) There are cases in which the meaning of terms ending with *-dhātu* remains unchanged even when this ending is omitted.
- (3) *Dhātu* can be translated as domain, or region, in context but even then, Burnouf is cautious because of the importance of classification.

(1) overlaps with Huiyuan's understanding. (2) is related to Kūkai's usage, as we shall see later. As for (3), it is important to reconsider the modern understanding.

Burnouf mentions the six entities of earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness in the section discussing Abhidharma in his milestone work, *Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien* (Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism; 1844). He mentions *nirvāṇadhātu* and *sattvadhātu* in appendix I, and further discusses the term *sahalokadhātu* in appendix II.

In his translation of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Le Lotus de la bonne loi*; 1852), which was the first from Sanskrit into any Western language, Burnouf gives a detailed commentary on the term *traidhātuke* (in three kinds [of regions]). In the fourth appendix, *dhātu* is given a separate entry; here, he discusses in detail the cases in which *dhātu* is listed in terms of endings in addition to the eighteen entities. In appendix XI, he also mentions the *dhātu* found among the Tathāgata's ten powers, which expresses inclination. Thus, Burnouf discusses terms that include the major usages of the ending *-dhātu*, as well as those that are often overlooked.

Table 3: *Dhātu* in the *Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien*.

Location	Title	Usage of <i>dhātu</i> , page nos.	Cited texts
Section IV	Abhidharma ou Métaphysique	six éléments (<i>dhātu</i>); 496–97	<i>Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā</i> 57.29–58.2 <i>Garbhāvākraṇṭi</i>
Appendice N° I	Du mot Nirvāṇa	<i>nirvāṇadhātu</i> <i>nirupadhiśeṣe nirvāṇa-dhātāu</i> ²⁸ ; 590–91, 593	<i>Avadānaśataka</i> 227.8 <i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā</i> §3 §17a ²⁹

²⁸ This phrase is found in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (*Dīghanikāya* 16; PTS II 108.33–109.1, 136.5) and the *Udāna* (PTS 55.32, 85.9) as *anupādisesāya nibbānadhātuyā*. See page 71 of Eric Greene's chapter in this volume for the term also found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* in Sanskrit.

²⁹ Harrison, 2006: 142, 152. "In the realm of extinction without substrate remaining."

		<i>sattvadhātu</i> ; 593	<i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā</i> §17a
Appendice N° II	De l'expression Sahalokadhātu	<i>Sahalokadhātu</i> ; 594ff <i>Sukhavatīlokadhātu</i> ; 596	<i>Commentary of Jina-alāṅkāra</i> , <i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> 191.9–11

Table 4: *Dhātu* in Burnouf's translation *Le Lotus de la bonne loi*.

Chapter	Verse	Sanskrit <i>Saddharmapūṇḍarīka</i> , page nos.	French translation, page nos.
I	16	<i>traidhātuke</i> 11.1	Dans l'enceinte des trois mondes, 7
III	66	<i>anupadhiṣeṣe nirvāṇadhātāu lokadhātuṣu</i> 24.6	l'élément du Nirvāṇa, 14
VII		<i>dharmadhātu</i> 60.8	dans les univers, 16
XI	22	<i>sattvadhātuṃ</i> 187.1 <i>ākāśadhātuṃ</i> 253.13	le domaine des lois, 39 la réunion des êtres, 114 l'élément de l'espace, 154
Appendix	Title	Compounds (omitting <i>dhatu</i>)	Sources
N° IV	Sur le mot <i>dhātu</i>	eighteen entities <i>chakkhu</i> , <i>rūpa</i> , <i>chakkhu viññāṇa</i> ; <i>sota</i> , <i>sadda</i> , <i>sota viññāṇa</i> ; <i>ghāṇa</i> , <i>gandha</i> , <i>ghāṇa viññāṇa</i> ; <i>djīhvā</i> , <i>rasa</i> , <i>djīhvā viññāṇa</i> ; <i>kāya</i> , <i>poṭṭhabba</i> , <i>kāya viññāṇa</i> ; <i>mano</i> , <i>dhamma</i> , <i>mano viññāṇa</i> .	<i>Jinālaṅkāra</i> (probably its commentary) <i>Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā</i> 38.33–39.29
N° IV	Sur le mot <i>dhātu</i>	<i>pathavī</i> , <i>āpo</i> , <i>tejo</i> , <i>vāyo</i> , <i>ākāsa</i> , <i>vinnāṇa</i> 514; <i>kāma</i> , <i>vyāpāda</i> , <i>hiṃsā</i> , <i>nekkamma</i> , <i>avyāpāda</i> , <i>avihiṃsā</i> 516; <i>dukkha</i> , <i>domanassa</i> , <i>avijjā</i> , <i>sukka</i> , <i>somanassa</i> , <i>upekkhā</i> 516; <i>kāma</i> , <i>rūpa</i> , <i>arūpa</i> 516; <i>nirodha</i> , <i>saṃkhāra</i> , <i>nibbāna</i> 516	<i>Jinālaṅkāra</i> (probably its commentary)
N° XI	Sur les dix forces d'un Buddha	<i>anekadhātānānādhātunānam</i> 785 <i>nānādhātudjñānabalam</i> 785	

Burnouf's comprehension of *dhātu* relied mainly on two pivotal sources: Yaśomitra's (fl. late sixth century) commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* and the southern Buddhist work of literature *Jinālaṅkāra*'s commentary.³⁰ Yaśomitra's work provided insights into the concept of classification, while the *Jinālaṅkāra* offered an extensive inventory of compounds containing *dhātu*. These texts provided the basis for Burnouf's understanding of *dhātu*. Additionally, Burnouf's engagement with Sanskrit scriptures such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā*, *Avadānaśataka*, and *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* enriched his comprehension. Many of the manuscripts consulted by Burnouf likely originated from Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800–94). Thus, Burnouf not only acquainted himself with a plethora of words ending with *-dhātu*, but also adeptly incorporated them into his principal works. That this significant body of references should have been overlooked until now is indeed curious,³¹ and their findings align closely with the conceptual framework of *dhātu* that I previously envisaged.³²

Burnouf's theory, previously undisclosed, holds significant relevance for the contemporary examination of research findings on *dhātu*. Next, I present five excerpts from Burnouf's two writings.

- (1) I regard *dhātu* as one of those category names that abound in the style of Buddhists, and which are part of the classifying system of their doctrine. The element of Nirvana [*nirvāṇadhātu*] is certainly nothing more than the element called Nirvana, or in other words, than Nirvana. (Burnouf 1844: 590; see Buffetrille and Lopez Jr. 2010: 536)
- (2) The last word, *dhātu*, which means element, is hardly more than an expletive, and adds nothing to the meaning of the word *loka*. (Burnouf 1844: 594; see Buffetrille and Lopez Jr. 2010: 541)

As noted above, Burnouf understands *dhātu* as an expletive (*explétif*) or redundancy that holds no significance to the concepts of *nirvāṇadhātu* and

³⁰ Burnouf often mentions only the title of the *Jinālaṅkāra*, a psalm dedicated to the praise of the Buddha. However, it is notable that the examples of *dhātu* mentioned by Burnouf are not found in the *Jinālaṅkāra* itself. Burnouf, 1844: 594, utilizes a manuscript that he describes as *Jinālaṅkāra*'s commentary. Although Burnouf's reference to the *Jinālaṅkāra* may potentially allude to its commentary, I refrain from delving into this relationship in greater detail within this introduction.

³¹ I confess that the discovery of their relevance evoked in me a sense of scholarly exhilaration akin, I imagine, to that of an archaeologist uncovering hidden treasures.

³² To be frank, there are elements in Burnouf's wording that at first glance do not align easily with my perspective. Consequently, one may potentially identify aspects within Burnouf's exposition that challenge my hypothesis. For now, I shall neither address nor attempt to reconcile such discrepancies.

lokadhātu. This is an important aspect for any scholar who is trying to demonstrate diligence by giving some translation of the source term. The above adopts the understanding of “classification” from the *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*. It can also be seen in the following sentences:

- (3) It [i.e., *dhātu*] will undoubtedly be translated in various ways, depending on the nature of the objects to which it is attached, sometimes as element, sometimes as region, sometimes as class. But among all these meanings, the most general will be the best; it will be the one that adds least to the particular meaning of the terms modified by *dhātu*, since we could enumerate these terms without mentioning *dhātu*, without altering the meaning in any way. This is exactly what the authors of the *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā* mean when they want us to take *dhātu* as a synonym for class. (Burnouf 1852: 516–17)

The preceding passage elucidates that the term *dhātu* may encompass diverse translations such as “element,” “region,” or “class” contingent upon contextual nuances, yet its fundamental connotation leans toward an interpretation as “class.” In the following statement, it is suggested that the *dhātu* in *sattvadhātu* (i.e., the *dhātu* of sentient beings) holds relatively minor significance, although there remains a potential for its translation as “domain” rather than “element.”

- (4) It is clear that *sattvadhātu* cannot mean the element of beings or matter, as Schmidt proposes, but that it is one of those expressions familiar to Buddhist Sanskrit, where *dhātu* has no great value, and where it should at most be translated as “the domain of beings,” that is to say “among beings.” (Burnouf 1844: 593; see Buffetrille and Lopez Jr. 2010: 540)

However, while the passage below suggests an understanding of the term *dhātu* in relation to the concept of “domain” or “region,” enabling an interpretation of the term *traidhātuka* as “three regions,” it still implies an understanding of *dhātu* primarily in terms of “class,” as evidenced by the enumeration of *dhātu* preceding the following quote.³³

- (5) It is quite clear that if the word *dhātu* [within *traidhātuka*] is to be given a meaning here, it’s that of region, rather than that of element; but at the same time, the general meaning of class, of genus, claimed by the author of the *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*, is no less appropriate for this category than for the preceding ones. (Burnouf 1852: 517)

³³ See table 4, N° IV, for its enumeration of *dhātu*-ending terms.

This understanding is significant, as many interpretations immediately tend to understand *dhātu* within *traidhātuka* as a spatial entity. However, upon encountering the examples provided by Burnouf, the possibility that even in the case of *traidhātuka* (“three kinds of [regions]”) *dhātu* may denote classification has to be taken into account.

In this context, it must be pointed out that *dhātu* is frequently translated into Chinese using the term *jie* 界, which has a definite spatial connotation. Since *traidhātuka* had been rendered as *sanjie* 三界, it seems all but inevitable that it should be uncritically interpreted in spatial terms by Japanese scholars. As noted in (4) and (5), *dhātu* can indeed be translated as “region” or “domain,” given that these may be more appropriate than “element” to certain contexts. Nevertheless, this does not imply that *dhātu* itself inherently means “region.” As Burnouf cautions, one should not confuse the meaning of a word with its translatability in context.

The possibility of translating *dhātu* as “domain” or “region,” with spatial connotations, may be explained in the following manner: When the term *dhātu* conveys the notion of a boundary or partition, which holds the function of classification, its occurrence within a term evokes the imagery of a distinct region delineated by such a boundary. Likewise, when *dhātu* appears in an expression indicating a multitude of entities, it evokes the notion of a domain. Consequently, a *dhātu*-ending signifies, or evokes, a specific domain within human cognition.

Even within the cases of *traidhātuka* and *lokadhātu*, I believe that *dhātu* itself does not inherently signify “domain.” Rather, it denotes an immutable essence that distinguishes it from others. I accordingly argue that my current comprehension of *dhātu* aligns with Burnouf’s perspective.

Based on the “forgotten” studies of Huiyuan and Burnouf as well as the common image derived from substituted terms for *dhātu* within the stock formula, I propose four images representing the concept of *dhātu*, as follows:³⁴

- (1) having the quality of changelessness
- (2) existing deep inside
- (3) having potential power
- (4) being totally different from other components

³⁴ I presented these findings in the panel discussion “Expressions of the Concept of Truth in Buddhist Literature: With a Focus on *Dharmadhātu*,” convened by Miyazaki Tenshō and myself at the IABS Conference at Seoul National University on August 18, 2022.

I entertain the belief that illustrating the concept *dhātu* through imagery enables a more profound understanding than a mere semantic discussion. The four images unify the representation of the concept more plausibly than separate definitions. They indicate key aspects of the concept of *dhātu*. The term *dhātu* often appears in constructs like X-*dhātu*, Y-*dhātu*, and Z-*dhātu*, denoting the essence of X, Y, and Z. It is noteworthy that X is distinguished from other entities (Y and Z) by its inherent essence (*dhātu*).³⁵ I shall illustrate this with simple examples in the next section.

Lastly, I would like to briefly touch upon Burnouf's—admittedly limited—exploration of *dharmadhātu*. The term appears once in the *Lotus Sutra*.³⁶ Burnouf translates it as “into the domain of laws” (*dans le domaine des lois*):

By introducing us into the domain of laws similar [to ourselves], the Bhagavat [i.e. the Buddha] has extricated us with the help of a paltry vehicle. (Burnouf 1852: 39)

tulye nāma dharmadhātupraveśe vyaṃ bhagavatā hīnena yānena niryātītāḥ (*Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* ch. 3, 60.8–9).

While Burnouf mentions *dharmadhātu* in the *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, along with *dharmakāya* and other truth expressions, he does not provide a detailed explanation of this term.³⁷ Despite not publishing a translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* containing the term *dharmadhātu* during his lifetime, he did leave a manuscript of his translation where he renders the term as “the element of the law” (*l'élément de la loi*).³⁸

Exploring *Dhātu*: Japanese- and English-Language Interpretations

Buddhist doctrine employs three methods of preaching (Ch. *sanzhou shuofa*, Jp. *sanshū seppō* 三周說法): direct teachings, parables, and concrete narratives. Based on these principles, I aim to elucidate the concept of *dhātu* using contemporary Japanese and English examples.

³⁵ This image aligns with the observations made by Christopher Jones. See Jones, 2021: 123. He states that the **dhātu* has x quality, where x is permanence, changelessness, etc.

³⁶ This passage is discussed in Jones's chapter in this volume. See page 16.

³⁷ See Burnouf, 1844: 531; Buffetrille and Lopez Jr. 2010: 438; *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* ch. 2 verse 28, 18.8.

³⁸ Recently, Burnouf's manuscript was published in transcription. See Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022.

I contend that even in modern times, the character 性 (Ch. *xìng*, Jp. *sei*), which Kumārajīva tended to use as a translation of *dhātu*, serves as an apt analogy for understanding *dhātu*. In modern Japanese, *sei* 性 means “nature” or “sex.” Consider the compound *dansei* 男性 for “male”: it means either a male individual or a male group. The same applies to the term *otoko* 男, which omits *sei* 性 from *dansei*.³⁹ Hence, the main meaning remains consistent, irrespective of *sei* being present or not. Analogously, the Sanskrit term *lokadhātu* can denote a particular “*sahā* world” or encompass the entirety of the “three thousand great thousand worlds” as a comprehensive collection.

Amid the pandemic in Japan, daily news broadcasts frequently reported on the “number of positive cases.” The idiomatic expressions for the state of being infected or not, “positive” (*yōsei* 陽性) and “negative” (*insei* 陰性), respectively, have emerged as prevalent terms containing the character *sei* 性 in Japanese discourse. Notably, the term “negative” delineates the group of individuals with negative results in testing, effectively excluding those testing positive (and vice versa). In this case, too, the kanji for *sei* serves exactly the same function as *dhātu*.

Buddhist contexts often translate *dhātu* as “element,” especially when referring to the eighteen *dhātus* or six *dhātus*. In such cases, *dhātu* functions as a linguistic tool for categorizing wholes into distinct parts. A comparable function can be observed in the English term “party.” For example, political factions in the United States include the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, while in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party are among major factions. Occasionally, these designations are abbreviated in news reports, conveying the same concept without explicitly using the term “party.” Thus, *dhātu* serves a similar role to “party” in this context. This insight supports Burnouf’s suggestion that the essence of words containing *dhātu* remains unchanged even when the term itself is omitted. Additionally, Huiyuan and Zhiyi provide succinct annotations for the term *jie* 界, interpreting it as both “nature” *xìng* 性 and “division” or “classification” *fen* 分.

³⁹ Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) offers a similar, though not identical, interpretation of *dharmadhātu*, examining the relationship between the individual (*geren* 個人) and humanity (*renlei* 人類). For a comprehensive analysis of Taixu’s explanation, see Zamorski’s chapter in this volume (page 89).

Kūkai's Understanding of *Dhātu*

To consider the matter of omission of *dhātu*, I delve more into the remarkable figure of Kūkai 空海 (774–835). Among Japanese scholar-monks, Kūkai stands out not only for his profound philosophical insights but also for his exceptional literary talent. He left all his writings in Chinese, which, during his time, was akin to Latin in the Western world. One of his most renowned passages, familiar to modern Japanese audiences, reads as follows:

When voidness is exhausted, when *nirvāṇa* is exhausted, when sentient beings are exhausted, then my aspiration will also be exhausted.⁴⁰

In these words, Kūkai articulates his unwavering commitment to an endless journey of ascetic practice until all sentient beings attain liberation. It is worth noting that Kūkai's audience extended beyond Buddhist monks, encompassing a broader spectrum of individuals.

His statement alludes to a passage in the *Daśabhūmika* (ch. 2, §24), where Sanskrit terms such as *ākāśadhātu* (*dhātu* of void), *nirvāṇadhātu*, and *sattvadhātu* (*dhātu* of sentient beings) are deployed. While later Chinese translations of the sutra, which were seen by Kūkai, include the character *jie* 界 as part of translated terms, Kūkai omitted the character in his above passage.⁴¹ This omission appears consistent with Burnouf's insight that *dhātu* carries no significant meaning. While it is possible that Kūkai omitted the character for simpler reasons, his choice makes the passage more accessible even to modern Japanese readers unfamiliar with Chinese characters, conveying Kūkai's profound dedication to the liberation of all beings.

Classical scholars often adhere rigidly to word-for-word translations to avoid any doubts regarding how they are to be comprehended. However, Kūkai's omission of the character *jie* 界 manifests a deeper understanding of the essence of *dhātu*.

⁴⁰ *Kōyasan mantō-e gammon* 高野山萬燈會願文, in *Shōryōshū* 性靈集, vol. VIII (832 [Tenchō 天長 9].8.22). Quoted according to *Teihon Kōbō daishi zenshū* 定本弘法大師全集, 8:158.7. I omit commentary on the compilation of the *Shōryōshū* and the authenticity of this passage.

⁴¹ For the KAKENHI project, Miyazaki Tenshō has compiled a comparative table of several Mahāyāna sutras, including the *Daśabhūmika*, where this passage can be found. See <https://mahayana-scriptures.com/ct/dbh/details/58>. In fact, Kumārajīva's translation and another one influenced by him do not include the term *jie*. While it may appear that Kūkai merely followed this precedent, I believe he was acquainted with both types of translations and chose the one that was more natural.

Title and Chapter Summaries

The title of this volume, *The Dynamic Non-Duality of Dharmadhātu*, was chosen to reflect the straightforward and direct approach taken by the book's contributors. It symbolizes the overarching theme of Mahāyāna Buddhism—overcoming the dichotomy between conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas* or between transmigration and *nirvāṇa*, even if individual chapters do not directly address the concept of *dharmadhātu*. The term “non-duality” emphasizes this theme, with its roots found in sources like the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and Sthiramati's (fl. sixth century) commentary on the *Madhyāntavibhāga* as *advayadharmadhātu* (“non-duality of *dharmadhātu*”).⁴² Although the Sanskrit term was found later in the research process, it aligns well with the established hypothesis.

“Dynamic” signifies the approach taken in our research, which aims to explore the dynamic nature of Mahāyāna Buddhism's resolution of dichotomies. While Chinese Huayan 華嚴 thought defines suchness (*zhenru* 真如, Skt. *tathatā*), an expression of Buddhist truth, in static (*ningran* 凝然) and dynamic (*suiyuan* 隨緣) terms, the contributions to this volume do not adhere to such categorizations, as Mahāyāna Buddhism presents its resolution dynamically through various means. Hence, we believe the title of this book aptly encapsulates our research's multiple foci and approaches.

While only three of the eight chapters in the collection directly address *dharmadhātu*, each contribution provides vital perspectives on understanding this concept. For instance, Michael Conway's and Keng Ching's examinations of *dharmakāya* resonate deeply with *dharmadhātu*, underscoring its interconnectedness. Keng's chapter explores *dharmakāya* and *manomayakāya*, offering insights into conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas* related to the nature of *dharmadhātu*.

Conway's and Ernest Brewster's examinations of the Two Truths in Buddhism illuminate the relationship between transmigration and *nirvāṇa* and, by the same token, *dharmadhātu*. Eric Greene's study on early Chinese translations sheds light on the intellectual foundations preceding Buddhist dissemination. His endeavor enriches our understanding of Han dynasty translations and their relevance to contemporary discourse.

I would like to briefly acknowledge the work of the late Karashima Seishi, to whose memory this volume is dedicated. In our contributions, Christopher

⁴² GV(V) 284.3. GV(S) 365.1. *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* 253.16: *advayasya dharmadhātoḥ sarvatragatva prativedhaḥ*.

Jones, Greene, and I have extensively drawn upon Karashima's work. This volume is grounded in Karashima's devoted efforts and stands as a testament to his hard work.

Ikuma Hiromitsu explores the Buddhist articulation of truth through the lens of negation, particularly focusing on the concepts of secret (*guhya*) and inconceivability (*acintya*). He traces the evolution of these concepts from their roots in early Buddhism to its development in Mahāyāna Buddhism. A pertinent passage in one of his cited texts holds significant importance in elucidating the concept of *dharmadhātu*.

Zamorski's analysis of the modern Chinese understanding of *dharmadhātu* further underscores its historical continuity. While this volume does not encompass the understanding of *dharmadhātu* in premodern China, it aims to elucidate the origins of this understanding in modern China.

Jones utilizes the *Lotus Sutra* as a foundational text for Mahāyāna literature, subsequently exploring the treatment of *dharmadhātu* in various sutras that are significant in *tathāgatagarbha* thought. He offers a comprehensive analysis, focusing particularly on the previously unexplored relationship between *dharmadhātu* and a single vehicle (*ekayāna*), as well as Buddhist soteriology.

Despite unexpected shifts in the direction of our research project, which resulted from the discovery of new information only after the IABS presentation, Fujii's paper aims to align with overarching themes. As a debut English paper, it pays meticulous attention to conveying pertinent information on *dharmadhātu*, albeit with potential linguistic idiosyncrasies.

While acknowledging the collection's inability to comprehensively elucidate the *dharmadhātu* concept, we assert that significant insights have been gained and that these contribute to its clearer understanding. Our research may contribute to the future discourse of Buddhist studies, which will undoubtedly address crucial contemporary concerns of declining interest in the humanities by way of engaging with fundamental inquiries into reality and truth. Summaries of the individual chapters are provided below.

Dharmadhātu in India

In his contribution, Christopher V. Jones investigates the early usage of the expression *dharmadhātu* in both "mainstream" and Mahāyāna Buddhist sources and how its role as a designator for the ultimate nature of phenomena was expanded to refer also to the underlying nature of sentient beings

(*sattvadhātu*). Attending to Pāli, Sanskrit, and Chinese witnesses to Indian Buddhist thought, Jones observes how from an early stage the term *dharmadhātu* was employed in the context of affirming that there is ultimately only a singular character of what we experience, without differentiation and apart from the ebb and flow of phenomena as these are known to ordinary, transmigrating sentient beings. He then traces a trend in Mahāyāna thought that keeps in view the singularity of the *dharmadhātu* and relates this to the affirmation that there can in the final analysis be only one kind of liberation: the fully awakened status of a buddha, available to (and, perhaps, already inherent in) all sentient beings. Privileging sutra texts of the early Common Era, some of which appear to have left little mark on later Indian Buddhist commentaries, Jones's study leads us through the history of the term *dharmadhātu* in relation to teachings about a single vehicle of Buddhist instruction (*ekayāna*) and ideas about the latent "buddha-nature" (*buddhadhātu*; *tathāgatagarbha*) inherent in all sentient beings. We see how in some Mahāyāna works, typified by the *Anūratvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* (*Buzeng bujian jing* 不增不減經), *dharmadhātu* came to be used as a designator not simply for what one might know but also for how audiences of Mahāyāna teachings might think of themselves—as expressions of a singular reality, in essence no different from the Buddha himself and distinguishable from him only insofar as they have yet to fully actualize this basic identity.

Fujii Jun explores the concepts of *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight within Mahāyāna Buddhism from early sutras to the Yogācāra school. He analyzes several underexplored topics, providing a structured understanding of important Buddhist expressions of truth, particularly *dharmadhātu*, in Mahāyāna Buddhism. *Dharmadhātu* means (1) *sarvadharma* (all *dharmas*) and (2) the essence of all *dharmas*. While previous studies have suggested this, modern interpretations often describe *dharmadhātu* as "realm of truth," words that do not fully capture its meaning. Fujii argues that *dharmadhātu* expresses the monistic nature of all *dharmas*, consistent with early Mahāyāna sutras using monistic expressions like non-duality (*advaya*), one characteristic (*ekalakṣaṇa*), one taste (*ekarasa*), and equality (*saṃatā*). The concept of instantaneous insight has received little attention in Mahāyāna studies. Fujii's analysis reveals its broad applicability, showing it is intimately related to all *dharmas*. This concept is shared by Mahāsāṃghika and Mahāyāna traditions as a description of the Buddha's awakening. The inherent purity of mind, also shared by both traditions, is closely related to instantaneous insight, suggesting a shared doctrinal foundation. In addition,

examining the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* and various Mahāyāna sutras, he shows that both traditions emphasize a shared monistic understanding. Fujii discusses the connection between the inherent purity of mind and *dharmadhātu*, which have been treated as separate concepts in previous studies. He postulates that the inherent purity of mind, mediated by the idea of instantaneous insight and the “inherent purity of all *dharma*s,” connects with the purity of *dharmadhātu*, as later explicitly seen in the Yogācāra school. Fujii argues that Mahāyāna sutras often challenge the categorical understanding of *dharma*s. Similarly, he suggests that *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight, intertwined within a monistic doctrinal framework, also challenge Sarvāstivādin’s dichotomous categorizations. The term *dharmadhātu*, expressing the essence of all *dharma*s, proves more effective than the term “all *dharma*s.” In sum, Fujii presents a comprehensive examination of *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight, identifying their monistic understanding from early Mahāyāna sutras to the Yogācāra school.

Dhātu and Dharmadhātu in China

Eric M. Greene examines how the earliest translators of the Chinese Buddhist texts, during the Han and Three Kingdoms periods, deployed the important Chinese philosophical concepts of “inborn nature” (*xing* 性) and “instinctive emotion” (*qing* 情) to translate technical concepts from Indian Buddhist thought. Starting with *xing*, Greene shows that from as early as the late Eastern Han dynasty this word was used to translate *skandha* in the context of the five *skandhas*, while in the Three Kingdoms period it was used to translate *svabhāva*. As Greene then elaborates, within the late-Han Chinese philosophical context, discussions of “human nature” involved not only the idea of *xing* but the equally important concept “instinctive emotion” (*qing*). The word *qing*, as Greene shows, was also used productively in Buddhist translations during the early period of Chinese Buddhism, both as a translation of Indian terms for mental defilements such as *kleśa* or *trṣṇā* and also for the words *dhātu* and *āyatana* in the context of Abhidharmic analysis of the constituent parts of a sentient being. These translations match well with the pre-Buddhist Chinese analysis of *qing* as the natural but problematic desires that prevent human beings from becoming sages. This study concludes that the later use of *xing* to render the important concept “Buddha-nature” (*foxing*) was based on this longer, earlier history of translators aligning important pre-Buddhist concepts concerning human nature with

similar concepts from Indian Buddhism. Moreover, the earliest examples of this alignment were sophisticated and demonstrate that even though these examples of early Chinese Buddhist translation vocabulary were later abandoned, they were the product of careful and deliberative thinking about the relationship between Chinese and Indic Buddhist thought.

Jakub Zamorski's chapter examines the modern development of the Chinese Buddhist scholastic discourse on *dharmadhātu*. Observing that this concept gained fairly wide currency in the vocabulary of Chinese Buddhists in the Republican (1911–49) era, Zamorski focuses on the monk Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947)—an influential author known for his ambitions of reforming, or modernizing, Chinese Buddhism and also for his voluminous writings that attempted to systematize and explain traditional doctrines. The chapter argues that Taixu's understanding of *dharmadhātu* was deeply influenced by the heritage of premodern Chinese Buddhist scholasticism. This influence extends to Taixu's interpretation of the etymology of the compound *fajie* 法界 (one of the common Chinese translations for *dharmadhātu*) as well as to his philosophical musings on the meaning of this term, in which he creatively synthesizes several motifs characteristic of traditional Sinitic Buddhist thought. In his most representative writings Taixu defines *dharmadhātu* as the totality of things—the Buddhist counterpart of the “universe”—as well as the supreme truth of the universe that underlies all elements of this totality. Zamorski argues that Taixu understood Buddhism as a system of knowledge that is ultimately based on the complete cognition of the *dharma*-realm and that, because of this, is vastly superior to the partial “visions of the universe” proffered by religions, philosophies, and scientific theories. He was also sensitive to the social and political implications of his notion of *dharmadhātu*: in some of his writings it morphs into a vision of “world” or “society” in which actions of single individuals influence the entire collective. Taixu's example suggests that in the first half of the twentieth century the ancient and venerable concept of the *dharma*-realm emerged as one of the doctrinal keywords that helped Chinese Buddhists to negotiate the place of their tradition within the modern “epistemic space” and the modern political environment.

Dharmakāya

Keng Ching's paper explores the Truth expression of the Dharma-body in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*. It begins with a puzzle: Why did Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀

羅 (394–468), the earliest Chinese translator of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, interpolate the notion of Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) into a list of synonyms for *tathāgatagarbha*—a list that also included unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) and permanent (*nitya*) *dharmas* such as Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Thusness (*tathatā*), Dharma-nature (*dharmatā*), neither-arising-nor-ceasing (*anirōdhānutpāda*), and *nirvāṇa*? Keng then investigates whether this interpolation accords well with the general doctrinal framework of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*. He first shows that the sutra includes the Dharma-body under the mind-made body (*manomaya-kāya*), and he then pinpoints the reflexive noble *jñāna* (*pratyātmāryajñāna*) as the core of the last among the three kinds of mind-made body. Next he observes how the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* reasons that the reflexive noble *jñāna* must be permanent since its sole cognitive object, Thusness, is permanent. Based on the above observations, Keng argues that the Dharma-body—whose core is reflexive noble *jñāna*—must also be permanent and hence Guṇabhadra’s interpolation is justified. Finally, Keng shows that since the Dharma-body, i.e., the reflexive noble *jñāna*, is permanent, it is pervasive and innate in all sentient beings. In this manner, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* justifies the central claim of the Tathāgatagarbha tradition that all sentient beings are *tathāgatagarbhas* or, in other words, that the body of each, and every, sentient being contains the Tathāgata (i.e., the Dharma-body).

Michael Conway analyzes the way in which Daochuo 道綽 (562–645) incorporates the concept of the two truths (*erdi* 二諦) in his discussion of birth in the Pure Land in the *Anleji* 安樂集. By reviewing key passages in that discussion, as well as their sources in the works of Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?), Conway shows that Daochuo held birth in the Pure Land to be the most efficient way to conform to both of the two truths and thereby realize the bodhisattva ideal of perfecting both wisdom and compassion. Daochuo’s primary source for this argument is Tanluan’s discussion of the relationship between the ornaments of the Pure Land and the ultimate truth of Buddhism in the *Jingtu lunzhu* 淨土論註, where Tanluan posits a two-fold Dharma-body: the *faxing fashen* 法性法身, the ultimate truth that lies beyond human conception and serves as the foundation for the ornaments of the Pure Land, and the *fangbian fashen* 方便法身, those ornaments as a comprehensible expression of that ultimate truth. As shown by his creative quotation of this passage and his discussion of the issue in other parts of the *Anleji*, Daochuo held that through birth in the Pure Land, one attains insight into both truths, which affords one the linguistic capacity to effectively liberate other sentient

beings from suffering and lead them to enlightenment. Through these considerations, this chapter shows that Daochuo saw the Pure Land as an essential expedient to both gain awareness of the ultimate truth of emptiness and also engage in compassionate action within the world of suffering—and not simply as a convenient shortcut to enlightenment for deluded beings born in an unfortunate time and incapable of proper Buddhist practice, as has generally been assumed in much modern scholarship about him.

Related Truth Expressions

On the basis of the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra*, Ikuma Hiromitsu studies negative expressions of truth. The adjectives of four cognitive distortions—*caturviparītadṛṣṭi* 四顛倒 (everlasting, pleasant, self, pure)—and the three adjectives *nitya* (everlasting), *dhruva* (firm), and *śāśvata* (constant) were considered to have negative connotations in the *Āgamas* and *Nikāyas*, while in middle-period Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* they were construed as positive terms referencing Buddhahood and *nirvāṇa*. Ikuma examines the influence of the four inconceivable topics in the *Āgamas* and *Nikāyas* on the notion of Buddhahood in the early Mahāyāna scriptures. Among the four inconceivable topics presented negatively in the **Ekottarika-āgama* as those that one avoids fixating on, Ikuma contends, the inconceivability of Buddha/Tathāgata was presented positively in some early Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Tathāgatotpattisambhava* and *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, as the highest teaching. The inconceivability of the Buddha is the doctrine disclosing aspects of the Tathāgata; it was also called *tathāgataguhya* 如來祕密, or “the secret of the Tathāgata.” Ikuma argues that the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* described themselves (or their teachings) as *tathāgataguhya-dharmamukha* (“the gate of Dharmas of the secret of the Buddha”) or **tathāgataguhya-nāma-mahāsūtra* (“the great sutra entitled the secret of the Buddha”). Furthermore, the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra*, after citing all the four inconceivable topics in the **Ekottarika-āgama*, designates the inconceivability of the Buddha and Tathāgata as the highest of the four topics and takes the activities (“secrets”) of the Buddha’s body, voice, and mind as its subject. Subsequently, in middle-period Mahāyāna scriptures the word *tathāgataguhya* is associated with *tathāgatagarbha* teaching, especially as exemplified in the Chinese translations of these sutras.

Ernest B. Brewster examines the argumentation advanced by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), the Sui dynasty, Sino-Parthian Madhyamaka Buddhist scholar-monk, to establish the doctrine of two kinds of truth—conventional and ultimate truth—for Sinitic Madhyamaka Buddhism. Throughout his corpus Jizang argues that two kinds of truth jointly provide an exhaustive account of the nature of all *dharmas*, the fundamental constituents making up the entirety of reality. To Jizang, conventional truth describes the *dharmas* as possessing intrinsic natures (*svabhāva*; *zixing* 自性) that distinguish each *dharma* as a discrete existent; ultimate truth designates each *dharma* as ultimately empty (*sūnya*; *kong* 空) of any intrinsic nature that is not borrowed from a myriad of other *dharmas*. In a rigorous defense of the Mādhyamika doctrine of two kinds of truth, Jizang endeavors to dispel the Tiantai doctrine of three kinds of truth, as postulated by his rival and patriarch of the Tiantai tradition, Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597). Zhiyi contends that the nature of the *dharmas* is explicated in terms of conventional truth, ultimate truth, and a third truth (*disan di* 第三諦), the “supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way” (*Zhongdao diyi di* 中道第一義諦). Zhiyi argues that reality as it really is, is fully illuminated only through the realization of the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way. For Zhiyi, the Middle Way is made evident through a logical operation wherein the disjunction between conventional and ultimate truth is negated, while the conjunction between the two is simultaneously affirmed. Jizang argues that the Middle Way is not analytically distinct, eclipsing or transcending the two kinds of truth, thereby establishing two kinds of truth as a sufficient account of reality as it really is.

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The Nature of Things and the Nature of Beings

Dharmadhātu in Relation to Universal Buddhahood in Mahāyāna Sutra Literature

Christopher V. Jones

1 Introduction

The expression *dharmadhātu* is one among several that Indian Buddhist authors used to refer to the true nature of things.¹ In a Mahāyāna context, in which it is generally taught that all phenomena are in some fashion illusory and can be likened to events in dreams, this underlying nature is identified with the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of experience—to the point where one is led to reflect on to what extent anything ultimately exists at all. This chapter explores how the expression *dharmadhātu* is used in a range of Mahāyāna

¹ Lengthy lists of relevant terminology are provided in La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 748–50, and repeated in Lamotte, 1944: 39n1; from among other examples that these authors cite, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* provides a list from perhaps the fourth century: *anīrodha*, *anutpāda*, *śūnyatā*, *tathatā*, *satyatā*, *bhūtātā*, *bhūtaḥ*, *dharmadhātu*, *nirvāṇa*, *nitya*, *amatā*, *advaya* (Nanjio, 1923: 192–93). For the most part I leave the expression *dhātu* untranslated, although in the context of *dharmadhātu* especially I am drawn to Étienne Lamotte’s choice of the French *fondement* (Lamotte, 1980: 2183; brought to my attention by Zhao, 2018: 147), corresponding to English “foundation(s).” Pace Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda systematics, for example what is found in the *Madhyānta-vibhāgaśāstra* (commentary on verse 1.15; Nagao, 1964: 23.23–24.1; see also Schmithausen, 1969: 145–48, with ample further reflections on the history of this expression), I am not persuaded that in many cases (*dharmadhātu*) is best understood as the “cause (*dhātu* = *hetu*) of *dharmas*,” at least with respect to Mahāyāna sutra literature. Furthermore, with reference to many of the sources discussed below, it is undoubtedly better to foreground *dhātu* in terms of a foundational “nature” rather than focus on its denotation of a “realm” (the latter communicated by the common translation of *dhātu* into Chinese with *jie* 界 over, for example, *xing* 性; so too the often mechanical rendering with *dbyings* or *kham* into Tibetan). For an erudite discussion of these matters that instead privileges *dhātu* in the sense of “realm” over “nature,” see Silk, 2015: 14–39.

Buddhist discourses (*sūtras*), which present a wide range of teachings attributed to the Buddha as he instructed bodhisattvas on the path to becoming buddhas themselves. In particular, we will address how Mahāyāna authors employed the term *dharmadhātu* to refer not only to the true nature of things experienced by sentient beings, but also where this trips over into explanations of what sentient beings themselves, as audiences of a text, must necessarily be also.² At their most elaborate, we find some discourses employing the sense of a single, indivisible nature of all things to buttress soteriological assertions about the singular trajectory of Buddhist practice—a position adopted by only some expressions of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India—and the claim that each and every sentient being is necessarily capable of attaining not simply liberation but the still higher goal of perfect buddhahood.

Given that it is hard to know where to begin in an examination of the term *dharmadhātu*, we may as well start with the *Dharmadhātuprakṛtyasambhedanirdeśa* (“Explanation of the Indivisibility of the Nature of the *Dharmadhātu*”), one of the many Mahāyāna discourses produced in the first half of the first millennium (and difficult to date with much more precision), and one that devotes considerable attention to the topic at hand.³ At the outset of this text, the Buddha requests that the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī deliver to a pious deity a teaching about the *dharmadhātu*. Mañjuśrī remarks that this means he is to speak about all phenomena, so he asks the Buddha for guidance with respect to how he should begin. The Buddha says that if persons who are greatly conceited (*jiaoman* 憍慢; *ābhimānika*) hear Mañjuśrī’s teaching on the matter, they might become afraid.⁴ Mañjuśrī’s

² A far greater enterprise is the examination of these themes in commentarial sources, as found in learned and wide-ranging studies by David Seyfort Ruegg (e.g., Seyfort Ruegg, 1968; 1969; 1977). As we will see below (albeit in brief), many of these works shift attention to the matter of “lineage(s)” (*gotra*), whereas in the more heterogeneous world of Mahāyāna sūtra literature we find relatively more investment in the *dharmadhātu* as a signifier for what is fundamental to the existence of both sentient beings and buddhas.

³ This particular text was brought to my attention by the publication of an English translation of its Tibetan version by the 84000 project (Dharmacakra Translation Committee, 2018: <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh52.html>, accessed January 10, 2023). Although never the last word on the study of any Buddhist text, these translations serve as useful points of entry to all manner of works that remain relatively little studied.

⁴ The Chinese reads *jingguai* 驚怪, which more accurately is “shock” or “alarm” rather than “fear”; however, corresponding content in the surviving Tibetan translation reads *skrag pa* (Derge no. 52 [*dkon brtsegs, kha*] 141a), which is stronger, and I find 驚怪

response is that those who would be afraid have themselves, as their own nature, the *dharmadhātu*, and the *dharmadhātu* can exhibit no fear. The Buddha's disciple Śāriputra asks how any state of affliction, such as fear, can come about in the *dharmadhātu*, or for that matter any removal of affliction also. Mañjuśrī explains that it is our false sense of selfhood that leads to this kind of erroneous thinking and the transmigration that results; what is really the case, through and through, is simply the *dharmadhātu*, which is purified as soon as one realizes that there is no essential affliction in the first place.⁵

On the surface the *Dharmadhātuprakṛtyasambhedanirdeśa* appears to negate the need for anything to be done: the real nature of things is as it always has been and always will be, characterized by neither the arising of phenomena nor their disappearance, and liberation is the realization of this.⁶ The text is interesting for its clear assertion that one has nothing to fear about what it teaches because the *dharmadhātu* describes not only what we experience but also, if we know our experience to be the sum total of what we are, our own character erroneously thinking of "itself" in terms of personhood, or "the self and what is of the self" (*ātmātmīya*). The sense that this kind of wrong-minded thinking, characterized by duality and differentiation, is the root cause of our predicament in transmigration is a prominent aspect of Mahāyāna teaching in India and beyond. In just some instances this takes on at least the appearance of something ostensibly monistic, insofar as a notion of a pervasive, underlying nature of things is used to reinforce the sense that liberation is something imminently available to any and all sentient beings, if they can only come to comprehend it (and so "themselves") correctly.⁷ In the pages that follow we will investigate some

to correspond to both *skrag pa* and moreover the Sanskrit *saṃtrāsa* in versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*. At any rate, the Sanskrit underlying this Chinese text intended that some persons would be actively perturbed by teachings about the *dharmadhātu*.

⁵ T310–8:11.143a22–b9; compare Derge no. 52 (*dkon brtsegs, kha*) 141a2–b4 (see note 3, above, regarding an English translation of this Tibetan material).

⁶ Appropriately, an audience of monks in the text begin to storm off, believing that Mañjuśrī's teaching amounts to the fact that there is no point in practicing as Buddhist renunciates. Mañjuśrī promptly intervenes to reassure them that the aim of their practice is to properly realize the state of things, which does not happen by simply walking away from the profound truths expounded in the Dharma. See T310–8: 11.143c7–144a22. Regarding the broader theme of non-arising in Mahāyāna discourses, see Skilling, 2018: 45–51.

⁷ I tread carefully around the language of monism, although one cannot help but notice how some strains of Mahāyānist thought appear conceptually similar to the tradition of Advaita Vedānta that eventually came to be so dominant in Brahmanical/Hindu

Mahāyāna discourses that draw attention to how the singularity of the *dharmadhātu*, as a means of referring to the fundamental nature of all elements of experience, underpins a basic sameness across sentient beings also. We will see how this particular means of referring to “how things (really) are” was put to use in Buddhist teaching about how audiences should think of themselves, both alone and in relation to other sentient beings, as well as, more distantly, in relation to perfectly awakened buddhas: those who have realized a mode of being coterminous with the *dharmadhātu*, called sometimes the *dharmakāya*.⁸

What I take to be perhaps the latest discourse that will concern us here is the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*, one of the most influential works behind the compendious, commentarial *Ratnagotravibhāga*, which was likely produced in the late fourth or early fifth century.⁹ The *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* is available in just a single Chinese translation (T668, *Buzeng bujian jing* 不增不減經), produced in 520 CE by Bodhiruci 菩提流支, although quotation of it in the extant Sanskrit of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* informs us about the specific Indic terminology that its authors used. As remarked by Jonathan Silk in his edition and translation of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*, this discourse promotes something conspicuously like a monistic vision of reality based on “an essential unity to all (sentient) existence.”¹⁰ A key passage from the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* declares that

philosophy—a similarity, we should remember, that was the cause of early Advaitins such as Śaṅkara being castigated by their Brahmanical peers as nothing less than “crypto-Buddhists” (*pracchannabauddha*). See Nakamura, 1983: 119–22; see also note 96 below.

⁸ The meaning(s) and development of the expression *dharmakāya* far exceed what can be explored here; for classic discussions of this expression, see (for example) Harrison, 1992a; Radich, 2007.

⁹ That the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* is unlikely to be a particularly early discourse is hard to deny. It is a work that seems to build upon doctrine of the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādanirdeśa* (after Silk, 2015: 11–13), itself very probably indebted to content of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, which explicitly names (among other works) the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* itself is not “early” insofar as it seems to build upon awareness of the Mahāyāna (or *bodhisattvayāna*) being a well-established part of the Indian religious landscape. For a discussion of the relative dates of these texts in particular, with cautious suggestions about their absolute dating, see Jones, 2021: 238–39.

¹⁰ Silk, 2015: 33–38, in which he makes an important distinction between the brand of monism found here and the use of this term by earlier Western scholars concerned with it, primarily Obermiller, 1931.

because all foolish, ignorant beings do not correctly know the single *dharmadhātu* (yifajie 一法界: **ekadharmadhātu*), and because they do not correctly see the single *dharmadhātu*, they produce mistaken views: namely, that the nature [otherwise “realm/domain”] of sentient beings increases and decreases.¹¹

The *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* expounds how there is only a single underlying basis (*dhātu*) for both transmigratory and liberated existence, the *dharmadhātu*, which is in this text identified both with the underlying nature of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*) and the true mode of a Buddha’s existence, the *dharmakāya*. By virtue of the consistency of this basis, there can be no new sentient beings that come into existence (no “increase” of them; *apūrṇatva*), nor does the gradual process of these beings attaining liberation result in any decrease (*anūnatva*) in the totality of sentient existence. Although all of this is properly knowable only to a fully awakened mind, the audience learns that sentient beings and liberated buddhas sit at opposite ends of a spectrum, separated only by the degree to which the *dharmadhātu*, identifiable with the *dharmakāya*, is tarnished with mental afflictions. Only insofar as this basis to both transmigration and liberation from it is so tarnished can there be said to be sentient beings as we conventionally think of them.¹²

One aim of the present study is to trace how Buddhist authors might have arrived at this picture, with special attention to the expression *dharmadhātu* as a central concept upon which the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* grounds its unifying account of what exists and what distinguishes bound sentient beings from liberated buddhas.¹³ To do this, it is first worth examining the earlier life of the expression *dharmadhātu* in Indian Buddhist literary compositions, and in particular where *dharmadhātu* stands for that which is singular and

¹¹ T668:16.466b8–10: 一切愚癡凡夫不如實知一法界故，不如實見一法界故，起邪見心謂眾生界增眾生界減。See also Silk, 2015: 65–68 (§4i).

¹² T668:16.467b6–8; see also Silk, 2015: 103–105 (§14i). Note that the Chinese text says only “referred to as sentient beings” (名為眾生). This could reflect a decision of the translator *metri causa* to keep a consistent four-character pattern in the Chinese. We have surviving Sanskrit of this passage, quoted in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Johnston [1991] 1950: 40.16–18), in which we read *sattvadhātur ity ucyate*.

¹³ Silk’s thorough study of the text (especially Silk, 2015: 14–39) goes a long way toward situating the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* in relation to both buddha-nature teaching and the matter of “neither decrease nor increase” as explored in other, likely earlier, Buddhist discourses. Our primary interest in this chapter is the role played by the category *dharmadhātu* in this picture, informed by an understanding of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* in relation to early buddha-nature teaching in India. See also Jones, 2016; 2021: 139–42.

unifying in a world that seems to sentient beings, in our ignorance, to be characterized by plurality and difference.

2 Early References to the *Dharmadhātu*

We encounter references to the *dharmadhātu* already in some Pāli discourses, and there more in agreement with what we find in the Mahāyāna tradition than what we find in various abhidharmic systems.¹⁴ In the *Abhayarājakumārasutta* (MN 58), the Buddha states that answers to questions occur to him promptly because of his having fully comprehended the *dharmadhātu* (*dharmadhātuyā suppaṭividdhattā*).¹⁵ The same phrasing occurs in the *Mahāpadānasutta* (DN 14), when the Buddha answers specifically how he knows so much about the lives and deeds of previous buddhas, long departed.¹⁶ This second example corresponds to our first occurrence of *dharmadhātu* in the ordering of materials in the Chinese canon, in this instance translated with *faxing* 法性 (“nature of *dharmas*”), preserved in the *Dīrghāgama* (T1 *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經).¹⁷ A perhaps significant nuance, or possible ambiguity, should be noted with respect to this particular usage of the term *dharmadhātu*, preserved in both Pāli and Chinese. The point in this passage is that the Buddha knows the history of his predecessors—that is, the history of the Dharma having been realized and made known in the world. Hence, we could here understand the expression *dharmadhātu* to refer to what is basic or fundamental to “the Dharma” in the sense of Buddhist teaching, rather than phenomena (that is, “*dharmas*”), the

¹⁴ For example, one could consider the first chapter of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, which is devoted to exposition of the *dhātus* (*dhātunirdeśo nāma*), here meaning fundamental elements in cognition; see Pradhan, 1967: 1–37. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* postdates most of the literature considered in this paper, although one assertion points in the direction taken by Mahāyāna literature insofar as it associates the *dharmadhātu* with what is ultimate and of supreme interest for the Buddhist practitioner. Verse 1.38a of the *Abhidharmakośa* states that “a single [type of *dhātu*] has substance (*dravyavat*)”; the commentary states that “what is unconditioned, because of its fixedness, is substantial, and that exists within the *dharmadhātu*, hence the *dharmadhātu* is the one *dhātu* characterized by substance.” (Pradhan, 1967: 26.5–6: *dravyavān ekaḥ / asaṃskṛtaḥ hi sāravād dravyam / tac ca dharmadhātāv asty ato dharmadhātūr eko dravyayuktaḥ*).

¹⁵ MN I 396; translation Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 498–501.

¹⁶ DN II 8–10 (*dharmadhātuyā suppaṭividdhattā*); translation Walshe, 1987: 202; also 220, in which he translates *dharmadhātu* as “fundamentals of the Dharma.”

¹⁷ E.g., T1:1.1b21, 1c1.

former being tied inextricably to the emergence and influence in the world of awakened teachers. As such, and as far back as we can trace the term *dharmadhātu*, we must be alert to the fact that the term *dharma* can always refer to not only the content of lived experience, but also (or instead?) the revelatory teachings of buddhas that *explain* how things are, which are eternally true and conducive to liberation.¹⁸

Staying with Pāli materials, a very influential line in the *Samyuttanikāya*, concerned with teaching about conditioned arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*), anticipates Mahāyāna Buddhist statements about *dharmadhātu* and to what it refers:

Whether or not there appear *tathāgatas*, there remains this principle (*dhātu*)—the regularity of phenomena, the necessity of phenomena, their conditionality upon that [which conditions them].¹⁹

Here *dhātu* means something like the “rule” of *dharmas*: their dependence upon other phenomena for their origination. As we turn to look at Mahāyāna literature, emphasis upon the conditioned character of phenomena gives way to teachings about their emptiness, or their absence of intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*): no event in our experience is anything more than its causal dependency upon others, in spite of our mental habit of reifying things beyond this process.²⁰ We then find the above formula reimagined in versions of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* as follows:

Whether or not there appear *tathāgatas*, there remains the character of *dharmas* (*dharmatā*), the continuity of the nature of *dharmas* (*dharmadhātu*).²¹

¹⁸ For further references to *dharmadhātu* in Pāli sources, see Cone, 2010: 472b. For an excellent overview of dimensions and uses of the term *dharma* in Buddhist literature, see Gethin, 2004.

¹⁹ SN II 25: *uppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā tathāgatānaṃ ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idapaccayatā*. For further references, see Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 330–31n4.

²⁰ This gloss on emptiness is very much based on the assertion in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, perhaps our oldest exegesis of Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching about emptiness, that what the author understands by emptiness is nothing other than dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*: La Vallée Poussin, 1903–13: 503.10–11 [v.24.18]). Note that the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* makes no mention of the expression *dharmadhātu* and that other interpretations of emptiness abound in wider Mahāyāna literature.

²¹ This translates our surviving Sanskrit, in the edition of Kondō, 1936: 136.8–9: *utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā sthitaivaśā dharmatā dharmadhātusthitiḥ* [then, exclusive to the Sanskrit] *yadidaṃ sarvadharmasūnyatā sarvadharmānupa-*

Although absent from our earliest translations of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, our surviving Sanskrit text adds at the end that this indeed means the emptiness of all phenomena, and also their quality of being unobtainable (*anupalabdhi*)—another means of referring to the ethereal, and not just ephemeral, character of all aspects of our experience, as might be considered a hallmark of specifically Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching.²²

We might next ascertain how some particularly early works in the Mahāyāna tradition use the expression *dharmadhātu*, and how far these prefigure the term used in consideration of the nature of not just phenomena but also the agents who experience them. For our earliest surviving complete versions of Mahāyāna discourses we look to works translated by Lokakṣema 支婁迦讖 in the latter half of the second century.²³ To begin with some particularly influential discourses, the equivalence between sentient beings and the nature of phenomena is present in at least some formative works in the Perfection of Insight literature. The Sanskrit *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, for example, refers to all sentient beings as “equivalent to space, equivalent to the nature of phenomena (*dharmadhātusama*).”²⁴ However, the term *dharmadhātu* is essentially lacking from both Lokakṣema’s translation of a *Prajñāpāramitā* text (T224, *Daoxing banre jing* 道行般若經) and the rest of our early translations of the so-called smaller *Prajñāpāramitā* into Chinese.²⁵ Available evidence suggests, therefore, that

labdhiḥ; translation Honda, 1968: 220–21. A form of the formula is preserved in Dharmarakṣa’s third-century translation of the *Daśabhūmika* (T285:10.482c13–15), in which what is established is very specifically also the *dharmadhātu* (住在法界). A surely earlier form of this refrain is in versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, but this refers instead to the perpetuity of the “characteristics of reality” (*tathaivaitāni lakṣaṇāni*) without any mention of the term *dharmadhātu*.

²² Regarding *anupalabdhi* and what is at stake in how this is understood, see Steinkellner, 1992.

²³ From what I can find there are currently no known usages of the term *dharmadhātu* in any Indic fragments, in particular in Gāndhārī manuscript remains, that can be taken to predate the attested dates of Lokakṣema and his translations. Regarding the relative authenticity of different works attributed to Lokakṣema, see Nattier, 2008: 73–89.

²⁴ For the Sanskrit, see Wogihara, 1932–35: 428.20–26; for the Tibetan, see (for example) Derge no. 12 [*brgyad stong, ka*] 110b4–5; see also Lancaster, 1968: 183–87. Agreement between the Sanskrit and a Chinese source can be seen in the C10–11th translation by Shihu 施護/*Dānapāla: T228:8.617c29–618a1 (法界平等眾生平等).

²⁵ Note that Michael Radich (Radich, 2007: 754–55) spots that the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Palace editions of the Chinese canon preserve in Lokakṣema’s translation one occurrence of *jingjie* 經界 (T244:8.473c22; Taishō variant *jingguo* 經果; present also in Zhiqian’s translation of the *Smaller Prajñāpāramitā*: T225:8.505b29–c1), which,

the early *Prajñāpāramitā* literary tradition did not privilege this expression, instead using other terminology (*śūnyatā*, *dharmatā*, *tathatā*), arguably less “substantive” in nuance, to refer to how things really are. We nonetheless find the expression *dharmadhātu* represented in our earliest witness to the “larger” *Prajñāpāramitā*, in Dharmarakṣa’s 竺法護 *Guangzan jing* 光讚經 (T222, dated to 286 CE), and more frequently in other, further expanded texts in this family of discourses.²⁶

Although the term *dharmadhātu* is virtually absent from Lokakṣema’s *Prajñāpāramitā* it was no doubt an expression that he encountered with some frequency when producing other translations. As recognized already by Paul Harrison, a curious feature of some works attributed to Lokakṣema, specifically his translations of the *Drumakinnararājaparipṛcchā* (T624, *Dun zhentuoluo suowen rulai sanmei jing* 陀真陀羅所問如來三昧經; henceforth simply *Drumakinnararāja*) and the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā* (*sūtra*) (T626, *Azheshi wang jing* 阿闍世王經), is that he demonstrably employed the expression *fashen* 法身, which would later become a commonplace translation of the expression *dharmakāya*, to render what was almost certainly *dharmadhātu*.²⁷ In Lokakṣema’s version of the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā*, we read that the *dharmadhātu* is all *dharmas*; they are equal to it and conform with it.²⁸ But in his translation of the *Drumakinnararāja* we find clearer traces of the idea that concerns us in the present investigation, for example where we encounter the notion that all buddhas can be said to be in reality one because of their common comprehension of (or “entry into”) the

given Lokakṣema’s habit of rendering *dharma* in terms of *jing*[fa] 經[法] (see below), may suggest a single occurrence of *dharmadhātu* after all.

- ²⁶ For example, the *Guangzan jing* 光讚經 uses *dharmadhātu* (here *fajie* 法界) to refer to the emptiness of phenomena as well as “the limit of reality” (*benji* 本際; *bhūtakoti*) that is realized through the perfection of insight (T222:8.154c19–27; Zacchetti, 2005: §3.52); it is also something that the bodhisattva should not take to be distinct from phenomena (T222:8.155b6–22; Zacchetti, 2005: §3.65–69). Space does not permit the present enquiry to consider material in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T1509, *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論), our earliest commentarial work on the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition, which undoubtedly preserves further interesting perspectives on the *dharmadhātu*, including the notion of a bodhisattva having a body born from it (*faxing sheng shen* 法性生身: **dharmadhātujakāya*); see Zacchetti, 2021: 107–108, and works cited therein.
- ²⁷ See Harrison, 1992a: 61–65; regarding the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā*, with the benefit of extant Sanskrit fragments, see also Harrison and Hartmann, 2000: 168n4.
- ²⁸ T626:15.401b9–12; compare, in Dharmarakṣa’s third-century version: T627:15.422b 3–7; also Derge no. 216 (*mdo sde, tsha*) 252a1–4, which states that all *dharmas* “follow” the *dharmadhātu* ([*chos kyi dbyings kyi*] *rjes su* ‘brang: *anu-* √ *gam*?) and informs my reading of content in T626 ([諸法等]法身所入).

dharmadhātu.²⁹ In one of its more protracted discussions of this topic, the *Drumakinnararāja* states that a bodhisattva knows that all sentient beings are inseparable from the *dharmadhātu* because they know the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of sentient beings, of phenomena in general, and of *nirvāṇa*; to know one of these is to know the others.³⁰ At least as early as the middle of the second century, Buddhist authors were not only dwelling upon the nature of phenomena but were presenting this as relevant also to how one should think about the sentient beings who aspire to know it.

Still further reference to the *dharmadhātu* in Lokakṣema's corpus presents us with a different approach to the translation of this term. Sequentially late verses in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Lokānuvartanā* (*sūtra*) (T807, *Foshuo neizang baibao jing* 佛說內藏百寶經) exhibit the expressions *jingfa benjie* 經法本界 and *jingfa ben* 經法本, and corresponding material in our ninth-century Tibetan version of this discourse has as its operative term *dharmadhātu* (*chos kyi dbyings*). In this translation and elsewhere, Lokakṣema used the expression *jingfa* 經法 to render *dharmas*, including in contexts where this may have had less to do with teachings preserved in literature (i.e., what one might expect from use of the character 經).³¹ With respect to the *dharmadhātu*, we find the following:

The *dharmadhātu* (經法本界) cannot be surpassed, because the past, present, and future are all empty. The Buddha displays to people his veneration for the Dharma; it is in conformity with what is worldly that he makes such a display.³²

²⁹ T624:15.358b5–6: 一切佛為一佛耳。何以故？法身所入不可計故；compare Kumārajīva's translation T625:15.377b18–19 and the Tibetan version in the edition of Harrison, 1992b: 137.5–6 (§7K).

³⁰ T624:15.350c14–18; compare the slightly different version by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, T625:15.369c7–10; also Harrison, 1992b: 35.2–9 (§2M). The Tibetan text suggests *svabhāva* (*rang bzhin*); Lokakṣema employs *ziran* 自然, regarding which see Karashima, 2010: 667–68; Kumārajīva uses *xing* 性. Elsewhere, our Tibetan version of the text goes on to state clearly that “all phenomena reside in the *dharmadhātu*, as do all sentient beings” (Harrison, 1992b: 71.7–8 [§3L]: *ji ltar chos kyi dbyings la gnas pa de ltar sems can thams cad gnas te*).

³¹ E.g., T807:17.751b29–c1. The same feature is found throughout Lokakṣema's version of the *Smaller Prajñāpāramitā* (T224) and is carried into the third-century translation of Zhi Qian 支謙 (T225) as well as the *Mohebanre chaojing* 摩訶般若鈔經 (T226) ascribed to Zhu Fonian 竺佛念. See Lancaster, 1968: 155–70. For a more thorough examination of 經法 in early Chinese translations, see Vetter and Zacchetti, 2004.

³² T807:17.753b15–17: 經法本界無有能過者，過去當來今現在皆空故。佛現人尊經法。隨世間習俗而入示現如是。 Compare in Tibetan (for example) Derge no. 200 (*mdo sde, tsa*) 307b1–2. For a further, similar example, see Harrison, 1982: 226.

What we might take from this is that Lokakṣema understood *dharma*s, plausibly still in the sense of “phenomena,” to be those things that exist as revealed by the Buddha—in other words, *dharma*s both in the sense of “things experienced” and also, with the Buddha as absolute authority on such matters, “things taught.” Another of Lokakṣema’s translations of *dharmadhātu* in the same text, all but confirmed by the corresponding Tibetan, is *jingben duanjie* 經本端界, perhaps “the initial realm of the *dharma*s” (*dhātu* rendered with *jie* 界, and *dharma*s with simply *jing* 經):

One who wishes to know the Buddha and his Dharma, by complete understanding of the *dharmadhātu* (*jingben duanjie* 經本端界, Tib. *chos dbyings*), knows the Buddha.³³

One could read this as follows: by knowing what is *foundational* to the Buddha’s teaching (*jing* 經) one comes to know both the Buddha and his Dharma; otherwise, by a different reading, it is knowledge of the nature of all phenomena that achieves this.³⁴ We cannot rule out the possibility that Lokakṣema’s choice of characters to render *dharma* was significant and that he took *dharmadhātu* in the sense of what underpins Buddhist *instruction*, and perhaps not so directly the world of phenomena explained by it.

A further and valuable reference to the *dharmadhātu* is somewhat clearer and survives not only in Tibetan translation but also in a Prakritic form: specifically, two verses quoted in Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā*, identified by J. W. de Jong (de Jong, 1978) and subsequently discussed by Paul Harrison (Harrison, 1982):

Not destroyed nor produced, the world is the same as the *dharmadhātu*, yet [the Buddha] taught the *sattvadhātu*, this being in conformity to the world.

He does not apprehend any nature (*prakṛti*) of sentient beings in the three times, yet [he] taught the *sattvadhātu*, this being in conformity to the world.³⁵

³³ T807:17.753a28–29: 中有欲知佛及了佛法者，經本端界悉入，是人為曉了佛。 Compare Derge no. 200 (*mdo sde, tsa*) 307a3–4: *sangs rgyas chos nyid gang yin dang // sangs rgyas rig par su 'dod pa // de ni chos dbyings zhus shig pa*. For another translation of the Chinese, see Guang 2006: 324.

³⁴ Regarding another of these verses that involves a slightly perplexing use of *dharmadhātu*, see Radich, 2015: 117n292 (noting, in passing, the inclusion of this verse in the surviving Tibetan of Candrakīrti’s *Śūnyatāsaptatvṛtti*: see Harrison, 1982: 227).

³⁵ English modified slightly after that in Harrison 1982: 225 (after La Vallée Poussin 1912 and de Jong 1978), translating: *ṇa viṇaṣṭa na uppaṇṇa dharmmadhāusamaṇ jagam / sattvadhāuṇ ca daṇṣesi eṣā loānuvattaṇā // tīsu adhvāsu sattāṇaṇ pakatī nopalambhatī / sattvadhāuṇ ca daṇṣesi eṣā loānuvattanety ādi //* Candrakīrti’s source

Our surviving Tibetan of the *Lokānuvartanā* also suggests the presence of both the terms *prakṛti* (*rang bzhin*) and *sattvadhātu* (*sems can khams*), and while Lokakṣema's Chinese still has a trace of the term *dharmadhātu* (here *jingbenjie* 經本界), he refers not directly to the *sattvadhātu* but rather, less succinctly, to the Buddha having displayed the existence of “sentient beings in the five destinations of transmigration” (死生五道中人).³⁶ The message across all versions of the verse is nonetheless the same: there is an implied contrast between the *dharmadhātu*, certainly here meaning the underlying “nature of things,” and the reification of sentient beings, which the Buddha accepts and uses in his teaching to conform to what is seen in the world. The true nature of beings is identifiable with the nature of things in general; as we read also in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*, talk of discrete sentient beings is useful only when discussing the experience of transmigration. What there is fundamentally, known to a buddha, is simply the *dharmadhātu*.

A full survey of what further Mahāyāna discourses have to say about the *dharmadhātu* is beyond the scope of this chapter, although it is worth attending to some additional sources that preempt what we find presented in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*. The *Brahmaviśeṣacintipariṣcchā*, for example, is among works translated by Dharmarakṣa, in 286 CE. His translation and other extant versions of this discourse reflect upon how even if one were to act for trillions of ages there would not be the slightest change in the *dharmadhātu*—specifically, that it would exhibit neither any increase nor any decrease in its extent.³⁷ Meanwhile, the **Aniṣabodhisattva-parivarta* makes a clear identification between the *dharmadhātu* and *sattvadhātu*; the bodhisattva should perceive that there is no difference between the two and that, with respect to both, nothing is ever produced nor destroyed.³⁸ Material in the vast and compendious *Buddhāvataṃsaka*,

for these verses seems to be the *Pūrvaśailanikāyānuvarttanāgāthā*. La Vallée Poussin found these verses used by Candrakīrti again in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* (La Vallée Poussin, 1912: 134–35).

³⁶ T807:17.753b18–19; 752c13–14.

³⁷ T585:15.10c1–3: 假使遵行億百千姦諸劫之數[<三> <宮> 數 = Taishō 教]，不知法性之所增減：以是之故一切所行為無所行。Compare Kumārajīva's T586:15.42b22–24: 若人千萬億劫行道。於法性不增不減。是故言一切行非行。A still earlier statement of this kind is in Lokakṣema's version of the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā* (T626:15.390b1), although in the translation of Dharmarakṣa (T627:15.408a11–12) this refers more simply to just *dharmas*.

³⁸ T397–7:13.43c19–23. Translated by Silk, 2015: 29; also Shiu, 2006: 107. So too in the *Trāyastriṃśatparivarta*, also cited in Silk, 2015: 30, Derge no. 223 (*mdo sde, dza*) 146a1: a study to which the present paragraph is certainly indebted.

versions of which make frequent use of the expression *dharmadhātu*, strikes a similar tone by identifying this with the *sattvadhātu* and declaring that the domain of a buddha is knowledge of every kind of nature (*dhātu*).³⁹ Although exhibiting some differences across its two Chinese versions and a Tibetan translation, the *Ratnacūḍaparipṛcchā* also affirms the identity of the *dharmadhātu* and *sattvadhātu* and compares them to the basic nature of space (*ākāśadhātu*), stating that a bodhisattva aims to comprehend that there is but a single nature of things (*dbying gcig*; *yijie* 一界; *ekadhātu*).⁴⁰

In many places Mahāyāna discourses do not so explicitly relate the *dharmadhātu* to what is fundamental to sentient beings, but there is nonetheless a commitment to the idea that the *dharmadhātu* is of one kind—that beneath the tumult of ever-changing phenomena there is a single, uniform character to all things. Several versions of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* refer in passing to the *dharmadhātu* as that which is of a single character (*ekavyūha*), while the Dharma, in the sense of the Buddha’s teaching, is that which is taught in innumerable ways (*anantākāravayūha*).⁴¹ Another interesting excursus on the uniformity of the *dharmadhātu* is found in the *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā*, our earliest version of which is a mid-sixth-century translation by Gautama Prajñāruci 瞿曇般若流支 (T339, *Dewugou nü jing* 得無垢女經).⁴² The text features a formulaic set of questions and answers between some of the Buddha’s most venerable disciples and the child-bodhisattva Vimaladattā. Interrupting this pattern, in which the bodhisattva

³⁹ Especially clear in the Tibetan: Derge no. 44 (*phal chen, ka*) 209b5–6: *chos kyi dbyings ni tha mi dad // sems can khams rnam rtoḡs par mkhyen // dbyings rnam thams cad rab tu brnyes // de ni sangs rgyas yul yin no //*. Compare T279:10. 69a21–22. This after Silk, 2015: 30, which cites another relevant passage at Derge no. 44 (*phal chen, ka*) 320a2ff (corresponding to T278:9.470b15ff). Much more could be said with respect to how the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* collection, extensive as it is, understands the category *dharmadhātu*; for insights into how still more complicated this matter is with respect to its final portion, the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, see Gómez, 1977; Katsura, 2022.

⁴⁰ Derge no. 91 (*dkon brtsegs, cha*) 230a1–3; T397–11:13.178a18–23; T310–47: 11.663c16–20. For full editions and further discussion, again see Silk, 2015: 31.

⁴¹ Taisho Group, 2006: 45.8–9 (27a3). Note that this detail is present also in the corresponding Tibetan (e.g., Derge no. 176 [*mdo sde, ma*] 198a3–4) as well as in Xuanzang’s Chinese (T476:14.567c1–3) but absent from the earlier Chinese translations of Zhiqian (T474) and Kumārajīva (T475).

⁴² Despite the relatively late date of this Chinese translation, and while it would be hasty to consider it an especially “early” Mahāyānist text, I find no features that suggest composition of the *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā* later than other discourses discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

successively reduces each of the Buddha's disciples to silence, Vimaladattā asks the following, rhetorical, question:

Is there any distinction between the *dharmadhātu* of the *tathāgata*(s) and the *dharmadhātu* of the disciples? If there are different *dharmadhātus*, then there are separate *dharmadhātus*. If the *dharmadhātu* were divisible, the *dharmadhātu* would be twofold [which is not the case]. The *dharmadhātu* is non-dual, and said to be reality (*tathatā*).⁴³

This presumes and reaffirms that although there are many things known and accomplished by buddhas and not by mere arhats, the perceptual domain of the Buddha and of his liberated disciples is one; how things really are is how things really are. And yet if this is indeed the case, one might wish for more clarity with respect to how precisely there can be said to be anything serving to discriminate the insight of lesser liberated beings, such as Śāriputra and the rest of the Buddha's disciples, from that of bodhisattvas who are on course to realize the supreme knowledge of a buddha.

3 A Single Nature and a Single Goal

The matter of how a uniform nature of things relates to a hierarchy of Buddhist adepts invites a question near the beginning of a Mahāyāna discourse that otherwise is little concerned with the category *dharmadhātu* and that has as its focus not the nature of phenomena but the character of the Buddha, his Dharma, and their relationship to the world. This is the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, or commonly the *Lotus Sutra*, which we know to have existed in some form by, at latest, the middle of the third century, given that it was translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 286 CE. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is best known for its two great revelations: first, in the domain of Buddhist soteriology, that all Buddhist teachings belong to a single vehicle

⁴³ T339:12.101a15–17: 如來法界聲聞法界有別異耶？若異法界則壞法界。若法界壞法界則二。法界不二得言真如。It is clear from the context that what is translated by *huai* 壞, commonly “destroyed,” “collapsed,” or “broken,” must have had the sense of “splitting”; plausibly it may have been the Sanskrit **(vi)bhinna*. Compare the slightly different version of this material in our Tibetan translation of the *Vimaladattā-paripṛcchā* (Derge no. 77 [dkon brtsegs, ca] 248a4–6), in which the non-dual character of the *dharmadhātu* explains reality (*de bzhin nyid: tathatā*) to be without differentiation. Our later Chinese translation refers more simply to lack of differentiation in the Dharma (*fā* 法) and states that this cannot be the case as this would mean differentiation in what is unconditioned (*wuwei* 無為): unconditioned *dharmas* do not arise and as such cannot exhibit duality (T310–33:11.558c9–12).

(*ekayāna*) of instruction, such that *all* followers of the Dharma are on course to attain perfect buddhahood (*samyaksambodhi*). Second, with respect to the nature of buddhahood, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* declares that Śākyamuni did not realize awakening at Bodhgayā but in fact attained this status many aeons ago and has since occupied a transcendent position above, yet influential in, both our world and others besides. It is very plausible that the first of these “revelations” was initially made known to Indian audiences by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*; the second is at least heavily implied throughout the *Lokānuvartanā*, known already to Lokakṣema in the second century, which is focused throughout on how the Buddha visible in the world is not the Buddha as he truly is.⁴⁴

Given all of the remarkable things that transpire in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, one could easily miss a single but crucial reference to the *dharmadhātu* at an important, early juncture in its narrative.⁴⁵ At the beginning of its third chapter, the disciple Śāriputra rejoices that the Buddha has unexpectedly just revealed that he and other arhats are not incapable of attaining the exalted status of a buddha, in spite of what they had understood from earlier teachings. The Buddha explains how the vehicle of disciples (*śrāvakayāna*), ostensibly an inferior vehicle (*hīnayāna*), is only a provisional expression of teachings that will, in time, lead to perfect awakening (the *buddhayāna*, or the *ekayāna*). The upshot of this is that the goal of arhatship, considered a deficient alternative to buddhahood, is nothing of the sort; it is in fact no final liberation at all, such that Śāriputra and the rest of the Buddha’s disciples can continue in their progress and eventually reach the same end that is sought by bodhisattvas.⁴⁶ As he rejoices, Śāriputra voices

⁴⁴ For more, see Harrison, 1982.

⁴⁵ Some further interest in the *dharmadhātu* is unique to the Tibetan version of this work. In the eleventh chapter, the great stupa of the buddha Prabhūtaratna appears in the sky and emits a voice; in the Tibetan *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* alone the voice goes into great detail about the accomplishments of the buddhas and states that a buddha is reality (*de bzhin nyid: tathatā*), that this is the limit of reality (*yang dag pa’i mtha’*; *bhūtakoti*), and that this limit of reality is the essence of phenomena (*chos kyi dbyings*; *dharmadhātu*): Derge no. 113 [*mdo sde, ja*] 89b1. This triad of terms occurs once more in the Tibetan version alone, in the chapter concerned with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Derge no. 113 [*mdo sde, ja*] 175b4–5). Ikuma Hiromitsu (Ikuma, 2017) argues that content unique to this version of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is drawn from the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* specifically.

⁴⁶ This is what has been called by Jan Nattier “bodhisattva universalism,” which in what she calls its “strong form” is the position that “the bodhisattva path is appropriate for all, and that all Buddhists either are, or should be, on that path” (Nattier, 2003: 174–76). It is far more common for Mahāyāna texts to espouse that bodhisattvas are bound

how he had repeatedly thought about the Dharma, in moments of sorrowful weakness, before this point:

Whereas comprehension of the *dharmadhātu* has been said to be the same, the Exalted One presented us [his disciples] with an inferior vehicle.⁴⁷

The surviving Tibetan of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is essentially identical, albeit perhaps understanding that the Buddha has already “liberated” (*nges par bton pa*) his great disciples by means of the inferior vehicle.⁴⁸ Slightly different is Kumārajīva’s 鳩摩羅什 celebrated Chinese version (T262), which reflects a woeful interrogative: “We equally comprehend (/ enter into) the *dharmadhātu*; why does the Tathāgata show liberation by means of teachings of an inferior vehicle?”⁴⁹ Our older Chinese translation, that by Dharmarakṣa in the late third century (T263), is alone in not clearly mentioning the *dharmadhātu* but instead simply the Dharma: it reports that Śāriputra, presented with various “entrances” to it, was resolved to that which is inferior (i.e., “*hīnayāna*” teachings).⁵⁰

With similarities to the passage from the *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā* discussed above, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* presents the *dharmadhātu* to be a singular truth to which all those who attain liberation, be they arhats or buddhas, are witness. But there is again some ambiguity with respect to whether we best understand this as a statement about how the liberated mind knows phenomena (“*dharmas*”) or about how it knows Buddhist teaching (“the Dharma”). It is fair to say that the former interpretation seems to be more common across Mahāyānist discourses produced in the broad period in which we place the composition of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*; but then again, this is a text decidedly interested in the matter of the Dharma qua instruction,

for a different goal than are disciples (*śrāvakas*)—arhats being those who have heard teachings from a buddha and attained liberation after it, without taking up the far harder task of working to become buddhas themselves.

⁴⁷ Kern and Nanjio, 1908–12: 60.8–9: *tulye nāma dharmadhātupraveśe vayaṃ bhagavatā hīnena yānena niryātītāḥ*. Regarding the Sanskrit presented here and in other manuscripts (in which the variant *tulya* is found) see also Kern, 1884: 60n2; regarding *niryātīta*, see Edgerton, 1953: 303–304. I discover only late in the production of this study a relevant precursor to this line of thinking in the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, which contrasts the plurality of Buddhist vehicles (*yānas*) that are taught and the non-differentiated of the *dharmadhātu*: see Braarvig, 1993 (translation) I 441–42; (edition) II 115.1–5.

⁴⁸ Derge no.113 (*mdo sde, ja*) 25a2–3. Although uncertain, this could still plausibly reflect a reading of the Sanskrit *niryātītāḥ*, regarding which see the previous note.

⁴⁹ T262:9.10c5–7: 我等同入法性，云何如來以小乘法而見濟度？

⁵⁰ T263:9.73b13–14: 深自惟言法號等入，世尊為我現若干教，而志小乘。

and we have seen already how there is possibility elsewhere, in likely early Buddhist compositions, to understand *dharmadhātu* in the sense of what underlies the Buddha's teachings. The primary content of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, at least in its early chapters, is the revelation that all of the Buddha's activity conducive to liberation (that is, the Dharma) intends a single course for his audience/s: what elsewhere is understood to be divisible into three "vehicles" of instruction (*yānatraya*) in fact constitutes the trajectory of a single vehicle (*ekayāna*) that aims at complete buddhahood. Hence, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* introduces a different soteriological paradigm to that which is presumed and promoted in earlier Buddhist teaching, based on the premise that the Dharma, or perhaps what is fundamental to it (*dhātu*), is ultimately of a single kind. In similar language, and explaining one of the celebrated similes of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the Buddha compares his activities to that of a raincloud that nourishes all things equally:

I also pour rain, that is, the rain of the Dharma that sates the whole world; each person, according to their ability, accepts this Dharma that has [in spite of its apparent diversity] a single essence (*ekarāsa*).⁵¹

According to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, all Buddhist instruction aims at producing buddhas, even if another discourse by the Buddha gives the impression that its aim is to lead an audience to an inferior kind of liberation, that of the arhat or the *pratyekabuddha*. The *dharmadhātu*, understood in the sense of what is fundamental to all of the Buddha's teachings, is one.

Relative to its tremendous success in East Asia, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* does not appear to have successfully overturned how the wider Indian Mahāyāna understood the Buddha's teaching, at least if we measure its success by how far commentators cite it, or whether these or other works adopted the single-vehicle paradigm that is its doctrinal crux.⁵² What is revealing is that among the few other Indian Buddhist discourses that clearly advance the single-vehicle paradigm we find several that relate its egalitarian model of liberation to the category *dharmadhātu*, stressing the singularity of what this refers to. One such work is the *Satyakaparivarta* (called otherwise, more protractedly, the *Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvaṇanirdeśa*), in which the Buddha teaches alongside the seemingly non-Buddhist ascetic

⁵¹ Kern and Nanjio, 1908–12: 130.9–10: *mamāpi co varṣatu dharmavarṣaṃ loko hy ayaṃ tarpitu bhoti sarvaḥ / yathābalaṃ cānuvicintayanti subhāṣitaṃ subhāṣitaṃ ekarasaṃ pi dharmam //*

⁵² See Silk, 2001.

Satyaka, who is revealed late in the text to be a bodhisattva.⁵³ Throughout the *Satyakaparivarta*, which we have preserved in two Chinese translations as well as a Tibetan version, we find several mentions of the *dharmadhātu*. The very beginning of the *Satyakaparivarta* includes an echo of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: we read that the Buddha’s audience of arhats had all “entered into the single *dharmadhātu*”; according to the corresponding Tibetan they all “dwelled in the domain of the singular character of the *dharmadhātu*.”⁵⁴ Whether we take this to refer to their knowledge of reality or of the Buddha’s teachings (given the context, I suspect the former), the *singular* nature of the *dharmadhātu* is undeniable. What then distinguishes the *Satyakaparivarta* from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is that it goes on to buttress the position that there is only a single vehicle by declaring that “there is no distinction between vehicles, because there is no distinction in the *dharmadhātu*.”⁵⁵ What is only implied by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Satyakaparivarta* makes explicit: the fact that all phenomena have the same underlying character means that it does not make sense that there are in the end three kinds of liberated status (those of the arhat, the *pratyekabuddha*, and the perfect buddha [*samyaksambuddha*]), with distinct routes to each.

Still, however, a question mark hangs over quite what *dharmadhātu* means: Is there no distinction between vehicles because the true character of things, including that of sentient beings aspiring to be liberated, is of one kind? Or is it because the foundation of the Buddha’s teaching, which we are here told aims at just one kind of liberation (perfect buddhahood), is of one kind? Perhaps both meanings are intended, although like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* the *Satyakaparivarta* is a text that seems more invested in lauding a particular model of Buddhist instruction—the Mahāyāna, presented as the complete picture of all the Buddha’s teachings and activities in the world—rather than exploring a model of reality taught by it.

⁵³ For a translation of the Tibetan text into English, see Jamspal, 2010; regarding the *Satyakaparivarta*’s use of non-Buddhist figures to elevate the single-vehicle paradigm, see Jones, 2022: 100–107.

⁵⁴ T271:9.300b29: 一切入一法界處行; compare Derge no. 146 (*mdo sde, pa*) 82b4: *thams cad kyang chos kyi dbyings tshul gcig pa’i spyod yul la gnas pa*. Our other Chinese translation differs only slightly: they had “all cultivated the conditioned phenomena that are the domain of the *dharmadhātu* that is(?) reality (**yathābhūta*)” (T272:9.317b6: 一切皆修如實法界境界諸行).

⁵⁵ Very clearly in T271:9.305a26: 是乘無差法界無別故; compare T272:9.326a3–4 (which is similar, but only slightly more verbose); also Derge no. 146 (*mdo sde, pa*) 95a5: *chos kyi dbyings la tha dad pa med pa’i phyir ‘di la theg pa tha dad par ‘gyur ba gang yang med do*.

The above statement by the *Satyakaparivarta* is found in another source also plausibly produced in the first few centuries of the Common Era, but notably not what is best classified as a Buddhist “discourse” (*sūtra*)—that is, not a work that is framed as a teaching by the Buddha. Instead, this is a devotional composition, and one attributed traditionally to the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, Nāgārjuna (ca. second century). This is the *Niraupamyastava*, one of four short panegyrics (sometimes called the *Catuḥstava*) attributed to Nāgārjuna by a number of Mādhyamika authors of later centuries.⁵⁶ The passage in question survives in Sanskrit:

Because there is no differentiation in the *dharmadhātu*, there can be no differentiation among vehicles; [the Buddha] teaches the three vehicles for the sake of entry [into the Dharma] for sentient beings.⁵⁷

It is not impossible that in its first two metrical quarters (*padas*) this verse includes some of the precise wording that was found in Indic versions of the *Satyakaparivarta* (for which we have only a few fragments of Sanskrit). Ambiguity with respect to whether *dharmadhātu* refers to the foundational nature of phenomena or the Buddha’s teaching/s remains, but what is clear is that Buddhist instruction, however and to whomever it is delivered, is of a single kind, all for the sake of leading every sentient being to the exalted status of a buddha.

It is worth pausing to consider some continuities. The *Lokānuvartanā*, a text that exalts the properly transcendent character of the Buddha and his docetic projections in the world, was plausibly known to the author of the *Niraupamyastava*.⁵⁸ That the *Lokānuvartanā* is an early source for the Buddhological picture promoted in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is clear enough. We have then a set of related ideas across these texts, as well as the *Satyakaparivarta*, which is a discourse produced in the wake of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: the *dharmadhātu* is singular, by virtue of which there should be nothing to differentiate ostensibly different soteriological pathways—nor, therefore, different soteriological goals—taught by the

⁵⁶ Regarding citations of this work, and the matter of its attribution to Nāgārjuna, see Tsuda, 2016: 170–71.

⁵⁷ *Niraupamyastava* v.21 (Tucci, 1932: 320–21): *dharmadhātōr asambhedād yāna-bhedo ’sti na prabho / yānatritayamākhyātām tvayā sattvāvatārataḥ* // Compare the Tibetan text (published alongside the Sanskrit), which essentially agrees with the surviving Sanskrit: *chos kyi dbyings la dbyer med phyir / gtso bo theg dbye ma mchis kyang / khyed kyis theg gsum bstan pa / sems can gzhus pa’i ched du lags* //

⁵⁸ See Mitrikeski, 2009: 152–57, which cites Harrison, 1982.

Buddha. Across these sources it is also possible to interpret the *dharmadhātu* not exclusively in terms of what is fundamental to phenomena, but rather what is the underlying truth of the Dharma wherever and however it is expressed. For the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, at least, this is the truth that all Buddhist instruction aims at the realization of perfectly awakened buddhas, who are more than whatever they appear to be in the world.

Before turning to a further development in this trajectory, we might note in passing how these ideas were understood in some early commentarial sources. The verses of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, plausibly composed around the fourth century, introduce the *dharmadhātu* as that which the basis (*ādhāra*) for attainment has as its nature.⁵⁹ The only further mention of the *dharmadhātu* in this text is where it refutes that there are discrete lineages or potentials (*gotras*) among sentient beings that would determine their soteriological prospects, stating that “there can be no division of lineage, because of the lack of division in the *dharmadhātu*; and yet there is said to be division of that because of the division of imputed phenomena.”⁶⁰ Suspending what subsequent commentators make of these lines, these admittedly very terse verses stress the uniformity of the *dharmadhātu* over any difference between sentient beings and their respective soteriological potentials or pedigrees (that is, their respective *gotras*).⁶¹ Another source from the same period, which focuses still more attentively on the idea of “lineages” that distinguish sentient beings and their prospects, is the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, the verses of which make reference to a familiar kind of argument when exploring how there are said to be separate vehicles of Buddhist instruction.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 1.5c-d (Pensa, 1967: 13; Lee, 2017: 3.15): *ādhāraḥ pratipatteś ca dharmadhātusvabhāvakaḥ*.

⁶⁰ *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 1.39 (Pensa, 1967: 77; Lee, 2017: 93.15; 94.4): *dharmadhātor asambhedād gotrabhedo na yujyate / ādheyadharmabhedāt tu tadbhedāḥ parigīyate //*

⁶¹ For a thorough consideration of this passage in light of our earliest extant commentaries, namely, those of Ārya-Vimuktisena and Bhadanta-Vimuktisena, both Mādhyamikas of (perhaps) the sixth century, see Seyfort Ruegg, 1968, in which it is demonstrated that these authors relate a single *gotra* of sentient beings to the *dharmadhātu*. It is noteworthy, however, that these authors use the language of “lineage” throughout, without explicitly relating this to the matter of vehicles, which is the more prominent interest in sutra literature.

⁶² That both of these works are more invested in the question of lineage (*gotras*) than they are in vehicles (*yānas*) is characteristic of commentarial literature, building upon what we find in Mahāyānist discourses.

Because of sameness with respect to phenomena, absence of self, and liberation; because of difference with respect to lineages; because of the attainment of two kinds of aspiration; and because of things emanated, there is [taught] a single vehicle.

To attract some and to retain others, the buddhas taught the single vehicle to those not determined [in their trajectory].⁶³

Similar can be found in verses of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, this being a position that becomes standard in commentaries of a Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda orientation.⁶⁴ Our earliest commentary on the above verses of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* states that because there is a commonality to all phenomena (*dharmatulyatva*), and because disciples and others do not have any distinction with respect to the *dharmadhātu*, the Buddha has taught about a single vehicle. However, the commentary goes on to make clear that the idea of a single vehicle was taught only with a special intention in mind (*abhiprāya*) and so, disagreeing with the doctrinal line of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, this teaching did *not* intend that there are not definitively three vehicles of Buddhist instruction, and so three different kinds of liberation.⁶⁵ Even where early commentarial sources seem to oppose the single-vehicle paradigm, or at least present it as only a provisional teaching, it was perceived to be aligned with the idea of the singularity or uniformity of the *dharmadhātu*.

4 The *Dharmadhātu* and Buddha-Nature

Returning to sutra literature, we are closing in on the model of sentient beings and their relation to the *dharmadhātu* promoted in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*. What is missing from the picture is an account of buddha-nature, commonly taught using the expression *tathāgatagarbha*, which is one of the defining features of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* and a feature of Mahāyāna teaching that built upon what was revealed in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.⁶⁶ In

⁶³ *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* 11.53–54 (Lévi, 1907: 68–69): *dharmānairātmyamuktīnāṃ tulyatvāt gotrabhedataḥ / dvyāśayāpteś ca nirmāṇāt paryantād ekayānatā // ākarṣanārtham ekeṣam anyasaṃdhāraṇāya ca / deśitānīyatānāṃ hi saṃbuddhair ekayānatā //*

⁶⁴ See, for example, T1593:31.132a7–10 (Paramārtha's translation); T1594: 31.151b17–20 (Xuanzang's translation; see also Lamotte, 1973: 326–28). Regarding Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda interpretation of *dharmadhātu*, see Schmithausen, 1969, 145–48.

⁶⁵ Lévi, 1907: 69.

⁶⁶ Regarding influence on the buddha-nature tradition by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, see Jones, 2021: 203–14, as well as scholarship cited therein.

the same vein as the commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, the majority of extant Mahāyāna literature from India suggests that most Buddhist authors down the centuries retained the sense that fundamentally there are three vehicles of Buddhist instruction: most sentient beings can, at best, hope to attain the status of arhat after having studied as “disciples” (*śrāvakas*) of the Buddha, or perhaps are capable of becoming isolated awakened beings (*pratyekabuddhas*) in many lifetimes hence, while the status of a buddha is reserved only for those who can successfully navigate the long and arduous path of a bodhisattva. Exceptional are texts that espouse forms of teaching about what in English has been called “buddha-nature,” which serves well as a translation for the Sanskrit *buddhadhātu* (and Chinese *foxing* 佛性). This expression is closely tied to the history of the more slippery term *tathāgatagarbha*, which we can understand here to refer to the hidden “womb” or “chamber” (*-garbha*; Chinese *zang* 藏) for a buddha that sentient beings have at their core. Many of our earliest Indian discourses concerned with the category *tathāgatagarbha* appear to have used this term interchangeably with *buddhadhātu*, which denotes what is essential to a buddha present to, but entirely hidden within, the constitution of every sentient being.⁶⁷ That early buddha-nature teaching builds upon another sense of the Indic term *dhātu* allowed authors to develop further the thread that this chapter is following: the notion of a nature common to phenomena in general, the *dharmadhātu*, invites also a sense of commonality with respect to all sentient beings; having the same fundamental character, they must share the same soteriological potential, in every case. Sentient beings are of one kind, and in some fundamental sense not truly different from the buddhas that they can all, in theory, become.

Some scholars have considered our earliest surviving text concerned with buddha-nature to be the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, versions of which exhibit a wide range of ideas and imagery to communicate what it is that sentient beings possess such that they can each be said to “contain a *tathāgata*” (*tathāgatagarbha*).⁶⁸ Interesting however is that in spite of this very broad range of ideas—among which sentient beings are said to host the nature of a buddha (*tathāgatadhātu*), their buddhahood (*buddhatva*), the knowledge of

⁶⁷ Both *tathāgatagarbha* and *buddhadhātu* are much discussed; see, for just a few recent examples, Radich, 2015: 159–69; Habata, 2015; Zimmermann, 2020; Jones, 2021: 14–21.

⁶⁸ Regarding use of the compound *tathāgatagarbha* in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, see Zimmermann, 2002: 39–50.

a buddha (*tathāgatajñāna*), or indeed the nature of *dharma*s (*dharmatā*)—there is no instance in which what beings host is called the *dharmadhātu*.⁶⁹ In fact, the only likely mention of *dharmadhātu* at all features in Amoghavajra’s 不空金剛 eighth-century Chinese translation of this sutra (T667), in which a version of the formula about whether or not a buddha appears in the world (drawn ultimately from the *Samyuttanikāya*, discussed above) states that whether or not there is a buddha in the world, “the nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*)—the *dharmadhātu*, the pure *tathāgatagarbha* of all sentient beings—is enduring and changeless.”⁷⁰ Other versions of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, including what looks to be a quotation of the above passage in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, lack the expression *dharmadhātu*.⁷¹ Although there is an undeniable semantic proximity between terms like *dharmatā* and *dharmadhātu*, there is no sense that authors of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* took the latter to be a significant term in their doctrine.

The other source that scholars have located at the start of what we can know about buddha-nature teaching is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (henceforth simply *Mahāparinirvāṇa*), which is known for employing the term *tathāgatagarbha* to refer to the concealed presence of the nature of a buddha (*buddhadhātu*).⁷² We have extant three complete witnesses to versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* from India, but once again across these there is noticeably very little interest in the term *dharmadhātu* specifically. Where it does feature, it once again appears in relation to the Buddha’s true body or mode of being (*dharmakāya*), which has the same character as it. In a passage that ponders what happens if someone were to do physical harm to the Buddha, we are asked rhetorically, “If the body of the Tathāgata is not

⁶⁹ See Zimmermann, 2020: 51–53. Notably, a version of one of the similes, which compares buddha-nature to a sprout that can emerge from a seed, is reproduced in verses of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (1.116; Johnston [1991] 1950: 64.3–6) in a form that states that the *dharmadhātu* can be found “in” sentient beings. However, these verses in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* exhibit language not found in any version of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* itself; see Jones, 2021: 166.

⁷⁰ T667:16.461c19–21: 善男子，如來出世若不出世，法性、法界、一切有情如來藏常恒不變。This is notably ambiguous with respect to how *tathāgatagarbha* (*rulaizang* 如來藏) relates to sentient beings (*youqing* 有情): whether Amoghavajra intends to reflect the sense that beings are “containers for a buddha” (i.e., *sarvasattvās tathāgatagarbhāḥ*), or whether we should understand *tathāgatagarbha* as something belonging to or “within” them.

⁷¹ Johnston, [1991] 1950: 73.11–12: *eṣā kulaputra dharmāṇām dharmatā / utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā sadaivaite sattvās tathāgatagarbhā iti //*

⁷² For further discussion of *dhātu* in this context, see Jones, 2021: 14–21, as well as scholarship cited therein.

connected with the accumulated elements [that constitute a physical body] (*bsags pa'i kham*s; **ācayadhātu*s), but is instead the *dharmadhātu*, how can someone kill him?"⁷³ Faxian's 法顯 Chinese translation (T376), from the early fifth century, exhibits no trace of the term *dharmadhātu*; Dharmakṣema's 曇無讖 (T374), from essentially the same time, seems to tell us that the *dhātu* of the Buddha's body is indestructible (如來身界不可壞; here, *jie* 界 for **dhātu*); his body is not made of assembled elements but rather "has only the nature of *dharmas* (/ Dharma?)" (唯有法性) such that it cannot be destroyed.⁷⁴

In the above passage we see the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*'s creativity with respect to the category *dhātu*, which contrasts physical elements (another common sense of the term *dhātu*) with the *dharmadhātu* that constitutes the Buddha's true body. We have seen above traces of the idea that the *dharmadhātu* relates to how a buddha really is, or his *dharmakāya* (*fashen* 法身), as far back as Lokakṣema's translations of the *Drumakinnarārāja* and *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā*. But sources that develop forms of buddha-nature teaching go further, and reflect upon how the expression *dharmadhātu* can relate to both the liberated character of a buddha and the present but as-yet-unmanifested buddhahood of sentient beings. This idea we find developed in particularly creative ways in the *Aṅgulimālīyasūtra*, which survives in a fifth-century Chinese translation by Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (T120) and in a ninth-century Tibetan translation. The *Aṅgulimālīya* is noteworthy not only because it picks up from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* a preoccupation with the category *dhātu*—in terms of the *buddhadhātu* that is here also "one's own (enduring) nature" (*woxing* 我性; **ātmadhātu*), even as one still transmigrates—but also because it promotes the single-vehicle paradigm espoused by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. In the marriage of these two ideas, the *Aṅgulimālīya* employs the term *dharmadhātu* in what is undoubtedly a metaphysical sense, with reference to what makes sentient beings, buddhas, and phenomena in general, at the fundamental level, indistinguishable.

⁷³ Habata, 2013: §289: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku la ni bsags pa'i kham*s kyi bag kyang *ma mchis te / chos kyi kham*s lags na ji ltar dgrongs su rung. A couple of extracts from this material are preserved in a Sanskrit fragment of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* (no. 15.8): see Habata, 2019: 130. Habata reconstructs (*tathāgatas*)ya kāye ā{r}cā[y](a), without any *aḥśaras* of -*dhātu* preserved.

⁷⁴ For Faxian's translation: T376:12.875b28–c4; for Dharmakṣema's translation: T374:12.396b15–18. It is worth noting that many lines in Dharmakṣema's Chinese depart from what we find in all other witnesses to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*: see Jones, 2023.

Two appearances of the expression *dharmadhātu* in the *Aṅgulimālīya* are worthy of consideration. In the midst of the Buddha explaining how the attainment of awakening is no easy thing, in spite of all sentient beings already having buddha-nature, our Chinese version tells us that due to their negligence (*fangyi* 放逸; *pramāda*) many beings may not ever “have their buddha-nature liberated”; the corresponding Tibetan, however, states that “due to negligence, many are not liberated by the *dharmadhātu*.”⁷⁵ Still more indicative of the link between buddha-nature and the nature of phenomena is a later passage in which the *Aṅgulimālīya* espouses vegetarianism—another feature of this text that seems to have been developed from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* and then, more famously, adopted by the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.⁷⁶ Whereas both of these other discourses prohibit meat because of its impurity, the *Aṅgulimālīya* associates the essential nature of oneself (*wojie* 我界; **ātmadhātu*) with the nature of all sentient beings (*yiqie zhongsheng jie* 一切眾生界; *sarvasattvadhātu*) and declares these to be in fact “a single nature” (*yijie* 一界; *ekadhātu*), going so far as to say there is a “single flesh” (*yirou* 一肉; *ekamāṃsa*) of all sentient beings.⁷⁷ The corresponding material in our Tibetan version of the text replaces **ātmadhātu* with *dharmadhātu*, and so we read that “the nature of all sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*) is the *dharmadhātu*.”⁷⁸ That the *Aṅgulimālīya* is not otherwise very concerned with the expression *dharmadhātu* makes this portion of the text a little conspicuous: it is possible that the mention of *dharmadhātu* over **ātmadhātu* in our Tibetan version may reflect a redaction that served to bring this content into alignment with more widely used Buddhist terminology. But there is nonetheless the clear sense that sentient beings can all be thought of as being of one kind: the *dharmadhātu*, clearly in the sense of a commonality to all things, serves as a basis for the ethical pronouncement that all living things must be treated with due compassion.

The relationship between buddha-nature teaching and the category *dharmadhātu* develops further, again in a fleeting but important mention, in

⁷⁵ T120:2.539b9–11 佛性不度; Derge no. 213 (*mdo sde, tsha*) 193a3–4: *de nyid bag med pa mang ba dag bag med pa'i phyir chos kyi dbyings kyis mi sgrol lo* // For more, see Jones, 2021: 83–87.

⁷⁶ A thorough discussion of this material and its place in early Buddhist espousal of vegetarianism is found in Schmithausen, 2020: I.229–38.

⁷⁷ T120:2.540c26–27. See also Jones, 2021: 87–91.

⁷⁸ Derge no. 213 (*mdo sde, tsha*) 197a5–6: *sems can thams cad kyi dbyings ni chos kyi dbyings te / dbyings gcig tu gyur pa'i sha za bar 'gyur bas / sangs rgyas rnam sha mi gsol lo* //

the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādanirdeśa* (henceforth simply *Śrīmālādevī*).⁷⁹ The *Śrīmālādevī* exhibits awareness of other works concerned with buddha-nature but (perhaps very deliberately) dispenses with the category *buddha-dhātu* and focuses instead on the expression *tathāgatagarbha*, which it relates to the idea of an intrinsically pure nature of the mind and takes to be something like a foundation for both transmigratory and liberated existence.⁸⁰ It also features a very telling reference to the *dharmadhātu* specifically:

Exalted One, the *tathāgatagarbha* is the *dharmadhātugarbha*, is the *dharmakāyagarbha*, is the *garbha* of what is supremely supermundane (**lokottaradharmagarbha*), the *garbha* of what is intrinsically pure (**prakṛtipariśuddhadharmagarbha*).⁸¹

I have here left the term *-garbha* untranslated. I have argued elsewhere that this passage of the *Śrīmālādevī* evinces well how the text understands this term to mean something like the “locus” at which something can be found (in the manner of a “chamber,” hence Chinese *zang* 藏); the *tathāgatagarbha*, equated in the *Śrīmālādevī* with the mind, is where there is located, although unknowable to anyone less than a buddha, a *tathāgata*, or otherwise what characterizes one. This, as we see above, can also be thought of as the fundamental nature of things in general (*dharmadhātu*).⁸² Given that the *tathāgatagarbha* is characteristic of all sentient beings, the implication is that all beings are themselves the site at which one can discover the *dharmadhātu*; they are each the source from which a fully awakened being can emerge. What is more, and although the relevant expression does not appear in this passage, it is significant that the *Śrīmālādevī* is otherwise one of our most emphatic voices concerning teaching about a single vehicle. Arguably it is in this discourse that the soteriological innovation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*

⁷⁹ Regarding the title of this discourse, see Matsuda, 2000: 74.

⁸⁰ For a more thorough consideration of the *Śrīmālādevī*’s use of the term *tathāgatagarbha*, see Jones, 2021: 122–29.

⁸¹ T353:12.222b22–23: 世尊，如來藏者，是法界藏、法身藏、出世間上上藏、自性清淨藏。 The Sanskrit reconstructions in my translation follow terminology preserved in the commentarial prose of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Johnston, [1991] 1950: 76.16–77.1), which relies heavily on the ideas and terminology of a version of the *Śrīmālādevī*. For more on this passage, including in other versions of the *Śrīmālādevī*, see Jones, 2021: 123–24.

⁸² See again Jones, 2021: 122–29.

is most consistently woven together with buddha-nature teaching, taught consistently using the expression *tathāgatagarbha*.⁸³

The interrelation of the expression *dharmadhātu* with the no-less-slippery term *tathāgatagarbha* leads us finally to the picture of reality espoused by the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*, outlined near the start of this study. The *Śrīmālādevī* and *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* are then the two most cited works in the commentarial stratum of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, in which we find quoted several passages concerned with the *dharmadhātu* that are cited above. With reference to a passage of the *Śrīmālādevī*, for example, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* declares that the *dharmadhātu* explains how, from the perspective of an awakened being, transmigration is precisely liberation; the goal of a bodhisattva is the non-abiding liberation (*apraṭīṣṭhitanirvāṇa*) that understands there to be no difference between the two.⁸⁴ Elsewhere, the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is perhaps a little more creative in citing other texts. For example, it quotes as follows from the *Jñānālokālaṃkāra*:

once the Tathāgata has awakened to all phenomena of such a form, and observed the *dharmadhātu* of sentient beings to be impure, unclean, blemished, there is set in motion the great compassion for sentient beings called “mastery” (*vikrīḍita*).⁸⁵

This is certainly a quotation of the *Jñānālokālaṃkāra*; however, no witness to a version of this text itself, including a Sanskrit manuscript, refers to the *dharmadhātu*, and instead we read “observed the nature of sentient beings (*satvānām . . . dhātum*) to be impure.”⁸⁶ What is possibly a redaction on the part of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is all the more conspicuous given that this mention of *dharmadhātu* is then glossed by it to mean “the *tathāgatagarbha* that is not separate from the intrinsic nature of its own character.”⁸⁷ One

⁸³ See (for example) T353:12.219b4–221a18. For more, see Jones, 2021: 132–36; 204–205.

⁸⁴ Johnston, [1991] 1950: 34.20–35.4, quoting (for example) T353:12.222a12–14; see also Takasaki, 1966: 219. Given the recurring presence of Nāgārjuna in this article, one could also note the conceptual overlaps here with verses of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, for example v.16.10; v.25.19–20; see La Vallée Poussin, 1903–13: 299.2–3; 535.2–3; 535.9–10.

⁸⁵ Johnston, [1991] 1950: 9.17–10.1: *tathāgatasyaivaṃrūpān sarvadharmān abhisambudhya satvānām ca dharmadhātum vyavalokyāśuddham avimalaṃ sāṅgaṃ vikrīḍitā nāma sattveṣu mahākaruṇā pravartata*.

⁸⁶ Taisho Group, 2004: 132–33.

⁸⁷ Johnston, [1991] 1950: 10.4: *dharmadhātum iti svadharmatāprakṛtīnirviśiṣṭatathāgatagarbham*. I am not sure how best to understand the first half of this compound regarding the grammatical relationship of *svadharmatā* to *prakṛti*.

could hypothesize that the author of this material in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* has altered a passage concerned with (*sattva*)*dhātu* to be explicitly one concerned with the *dharmadhātu*—a step very much aligned with what is taught by the *Śrīmālādevī* and *Anūnatvāpūrnātvanirdeśa*. This is perhaps not a tremendous leap, but would be a good example of a commentarial work making slight adjustments to reconcile source materials with its particular terminological and doctrinal leanings.⁸⁸

It is not the objective of this study to go beyond discourses that feed into the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. However, another interesting summation in the commentarial stratum of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* helps to introduce one final source that is worthy of note. The verse below underlines the sense that the *dharmadhātu* and a buddha in his true mode of being are identical:

The *dharmakāya* should be known in two ways: as the *dharmadhātu* that is perfectly unblemished, and what flows from it, which are teachings that are profound and variegated in type.⁸⁹

This idea is the crux of another devotional work, like the *Niraupamyastava* both in form and due to its having been associated with the figure of Nāgārjuna—namely, the *Dharmadhātustava*.⁹⁰ Whereas the *Niraupamyastava* is a paean to the transcendence and excellence of the Buddha, the *Dharmadhātustava*, as its title suggests, is at least in its early verses a homily to the *dharmadhātu* specifically. Here the term *dharmadhātu* is introduced as “that nature which in transmigration is being purified, and when pure in *nirvāṇa* is indeed the *dharmakāya*.”⁹¹ Throughout the rest of its verses the *Dharmadhātustava* repeats similes and imagery found otherwise in

⁸⁸ Other usages of *dharmadhātu* cited by the *Ratnagotravibhāga* include mention in the simile of the “cosmic cloth” drawn from the *Tathāgatotpattisambhava*, a text included in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*; see Takasaki, 1966: 189–92 (corresponding Sanskrit: Johnston, [1991] 1950: 22.10–24.8). Regarding the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* collection, see note 39 above.

⁸⁹ Johnston, [1991] 1950: 70.3–4: *dharmakāyo dvidhā jñeyo dharmadhātuḥ sunirmalaḥ / tanniṣyandaś ca gāmbhīryavaicitryanayadeśanā* // A further string of verses concerned with the *dharmadhātu* as “the pure nature of the buddhas” (*tathāgatānām amalāḥ sa dhātuḥ*) runs across Johnston, [1991] 1950: 85.12–86.10; see also Takasaki, 1966: 325–26. These verses, unlikely to be particularly early content in the composition of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, align with what is taught in the *Dharmadhātustava*, discussed below.

⁹⁰ See Seyfort Ruegg, 1971: 453–54; Lindtner, 1982: 17; other relevant scholarship is cited in Liu, 2015: ix–x.

⁹¹ Liu, 2015: 8: *ya eva dhātuḥ saṃsāre śodhyamānaḥ sa eva tu / śuddhaḥ sa eva nirvāṇe dharmakāyaḥ sa eva hi* //

discourses concerned with the *tathāgatagarbha*; the *dharmadhātu* is stainless without arising or cessation, essentially pure but obscured by afflictions.⁹² Perhaps at the center of its account of the *dharmadhātu*, again clearly in alignment with buddha-nature teaching, is this passage:

Awakening is not distant, nor proximate; it has not gone, nor arrived—it is either not seen, or it is seen, here in a cage of afflictions. It is said in the sutras that one who abides thinking upon the(ir) self, by abiding with the lamp of insight, has arrived at supreme peace.⁹³

In other words, the *dharmadhātu* is apprehended within oneself.⁹⁴ The nature of things that is the object of an awakened mind is precisely one's own character, or rather the character of one's own mind, that would be immediate to the practitioner were it not for the afflictions that obscure it.

5 Findings and Reflections

Over the preceding pages this study has sought to trace a development in Indian Buddhist thought from (1) early teachings preserved in the Pāli *Nikāyas* into (2) some of our earlier witnesses to Mahāyāna literature from India, (3) what is arguably a reinvention of Buddhist soteriology promoted by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and works that are indebted to it, and (4) a variety of sources concerned with buddha-nature thinking, up to the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* and its role in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Once again, it goes beyond the scope of this study to examine further the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and, for that matter, the works of commentators in the second half of the first millennium who wrestled with both this incredibly rich treatise and others like it.⁹⁵ It is enough to reflect on how the *dharmadhātu*, which

⁹² Liu, 2015: 9: *dharmadhātur na cotpanno na niruddhaḥ kadācana / sarvakālam asaṅkīṣṭa ādimadhyāntanirmalaḥ* // For more on the ties between this and discourses concerned with buddha-nature, see Jones, 2021: 140–141n6.

⁹³ Liu, 2015: 18–19: *bodhir na dūre nāsanne na gatā nāpi vāgatā na dṛśyate dṛśyate caiva atraiva kleśapañjare* // *uktaṃ ca sūtravargeṣu viharaty ātmacintakaḥ / prajñāḍīpavihāreṇa paramām śāntim āgataḥ* //

⁹⁴ The sense that some discourses have required the practitioner to “think upon the(ir) self” brings to mind specifically those works in the buddha-nature tradition that opt to articulate buddha-nature in terms of a Buddhist account of what warrants the designation *ātman*, regarding which see part 1 of Jones, 2021. See also earlier content of the *Dharmadhātustava*, specifically Sanskrit verses 35–37, in Liu, 2015: 15–16.

⁹⁵ For the history of interpretation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* in India, see Kanō, 2016. Another text that uses the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*, and that warrants further

we can take to be something fundamental (*dhātu*) and about which buddhas have privileged knowledge, relates to the gradually developing sense in Mahāyāna literature that liberation can mean only the status of a buddha, understood to be an expression of a single reality that comes to awareness, one sentient being at a time, of its own nature.⁹⁶

Indian Buddhism is emphatic that the *dharmadhātu* is of one kind, and so the nature of things known to an arhat and known to a buddha should be the same. Early in Mahāyānist literature, indeed among our earliest surviving sources for it, we find the sense that because all things known to a Buddha are of one kind this must extend also to sentient beings themselves. This being the case, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there can be no distinction between what different sentient beings can achieve—or, in terms more familiar in commentarial literature, between “lineages” (*gotras*) that might distinguish those who can be buddhas from those who can be merely arhats or *pratyekabuddhas*. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is perhaps our earliest known text that promotes an overhaul of divisions between types of attainment, essentially by denying that the arhat and *pratyekabuddha* have finished their progress. However, it only begins with an assertion about the uniformity of the nature of things and does not explicitly relate this to its revelation about the single trajectory undertaken by all students of the Dharma. This connection is then made in two works seemingly indebted to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*: the *Satyakaparivarta* and the homiletic *Nirauṇāmyastava*. This invites how the *dharmadhātu* is treated in works concerned with buddha-nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, which explore both the Buddha’s identity with the *dharmadhātu* and the notion that all sentient beings have this same nature as their true character. This leaves no room for distinction between sentient beings, and by the time of the *Anūnatvāpūṇatvanirdeśa* the notion of a single *dharmadhātu* is fully formed to explain the commonality

scholarly attention, is the **Mahāyānadharmadhātunirviśeṣa*—a work extant in two Chinese translations and doctrinally related to, but distinct from, the *Ratnagotravibhāga*: see Silk, 2015: 9–10.

⁹⁶ I hazard this phrasing deliberately to reintroduce a comparison between what we find here and in expressions of Advaita Vedānta philosophy—a comparison that is at least as old as Takasaki’s study of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Takasaki, 1966: 20n31, 28, 61). Suspending all works concerned with buddha-nature prior to the *Anūnatvāpūṇatvanirdeśa*, one can at least safely acknowledge that the *dharmakāya* of this sutra—which is the fundamental nature (*dhātu*) of sentient beings, even as they transmigrate—has at least a superficial similarity to how reality is ultimately reducible to the absolute *brahman* in Advaita philosophy. For further thoughts in this vein, see Jones, 2021: 227n90, 252n60; see also note 7, above.

between transmigrating sentient beings and liberated, transcendent buddhas. These ideas, systematized in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, have since been grist to the mill of Indo-Tibetan commentators for the better part of a millennium.

A slippery feature of some of the sources discussed above, and one that was not evident at the outset of this research, is the ambiguity of the first half of the expression *dharmadhātu*: what to make, in this context, of the endlessly nuanced term *dharma*.⁹⁷ At least as far back as the *Lokānuvartanā* (perhaps also the *Mahāpadānasutta*) we can detect that *dharmadhātu* may at least sometimes have been understood in the sense of “what is fundamental to the Buddha’s teaching/s”: the Dharma may take many forms, but the *basis* for all of these teachings, in other words the truth to which they all gesture, is singular. Nonetheless, the majority of passages that we have examined seem to use *dharmadhātu* in the more widely accepted sense of what is fundamental to phenomena: it is, as such, something of a metaphysical category that refers to reality as understood by an awakened being. In the line of thinking that we have followed, the understanding that the *dharmadhātu* is necessarily of one kind supported developments in Buddhist soteriology that broke down distinctions between different kinds of sentient being, who elsewhere in Buddhist teaching were held to be capable of distinguishable kinds of liberation.

Sources produced in the wake of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, and especially those that pursue forms of buddha-nature teaching, commit to the principle that there is no truly liberated status beneath that of a buddha, who is certainly more than a physical entity encountered in the world. Being liberated is awakening to the fact that all phenomena are characterized by the same emptiness, the same absence of real arising or cessation, that accounts not just for all moments in transmigration but also for all of those who *themselves* transmigrate. The single-vehicle paradigm and buddha-nature teachings, which we can safely say are at least complementary developments in Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching, are both logical developments of the earlier idea that all things in our experience have the same fundamental character; the universal nature of all phenomena cannot but suggest that there is nothing to distinguish sentient beings in terms of what they are and, moreover, can become. What results, and is the legacy of this kind of Mahāyāna teaching, is a kind of soteriological egalitarianism in which the Dharma, wherever it is encountered, aims at the knowledge that all beings are expressions of the

⁹⁷ See Gethin, 2004.

same impersonal reality—a reality gradually coming to awareness of its own non-duality and absence of individual personhood.

Abbreviations

DN	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32. https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/ . Accessed 10 January 2023.

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Inborn Nature (*Xing*) and Instinctive Emotion (*Qing*) in the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Texts

Eric M. Greene

1 Introduction

Forced to choose a single term to encapsulate the distinctive doctrinal attributes of East Asian Buddhism, one could not do much better than “Buddha-nature” (*foxing* 佛性). In contrast to India, where it was but one among many currents of Mahāyāna thought, in East Asia the concept of Buddha-nature—and, above all, the doctrine that it is something universally possessed by all living beings—eventually became central to almost all Buddhist traditions.¹ So important is its specifically East Asian history that even when discussing this idea in the context of Indian Buddhism modern scholars often speak of Buddha-nature, despite this term’s status as a calque of the Chinese *foxing* rather than a direct translation of any of the relevant Indic terms such as *buddhadhātu*, *tathāgatagarbha*, or *buddhagotra*.²

The overwhelming success of the Buddha-nature doctrine in East Asia must be understood in light of the specifically Chinese intellectual context, where these ideas were, evidently, received with special favor. Some scholars have proposed an even stronger thesis: that the understanding of Buddha-nature that developed in China, in traditions such as Huayan 華嚴, Tiantai 天台, and Chan 禪, was not the mere continuation of a preexisting Indian Buddhist doctrine, but a synthesis, for better or worse, of Indian and pre-Buddhist Chinese thought.³

In this telling, one key element of the preexisting Chinese intellectual context is what Whalen Lai, discussing this issue, has called the “Mencian

¹ See for example Liao, 2008.

² See for example Jones, 2021: 1. On “Buddha-nature” as a term of “Buddhist hybrid English,” see Radich, 2015: 24n18.

³ Often, the claim is that the Chinese projected onto Indian Buddhism an inappropriate “ontological” focus, as was argued by the early twentieth-century Chinese scholar Lü Cheng 呂澂; on this, see Lin, 2014.

problematic”: the various positions that classical Chinese thinkers took with regard to the question of human nature (*renxing* 人性) and whether it is good (*shan* 善), as argued by Mencius 孟子, or bad (*e* 惡), as proposed by Xunzi 荀子.⁴ The very notion of Buddha-nature, a term first used systematically by translators in the early fifth century,⁵ indeed suggests a desire to propose that Buddhism had something to contribute to these debates.

Previous scholarship has explored the development of Chinese theories about Buddha-nature and has traced the history of the earlier ideas, in both India and China, that may have contributed to the eventually standard form of the Buddha-nature doctrine in East Asia.⁶ In this essay, in contrast, I direct my attention to the slightly different question of how, in the era before the formal introduction of Buddha-nature texts, the key Chinese vocabulary associated with the Mencian problematic—including not only “inborn nature” (as I will translate *xing* 性) but also “instinctive emotion” (*qing* 情), a term that eventually figures prominently in these discussions—was used in the translation of Buddhist technical terminology.

At the most basic level my aim here is to explore a number of heretofore overlooked technical translations from the earliest Chinese Buddhist literature. Additionally, I contend that these previously overlooked examples give us reason to conclude that the eventual adoption in fifth-century China of the weighty concept “inborn nature,” in the context of Buddha-nature, was not an unprecedented event. Even in the very earliest Chinese Buddhist texts, translators and commentators were reaching for terminology from the pre-Buddhist Chinese discourse on human nature as a way of understanding core Buddhist doctrinal concepts. They were doing this, moreover, in a relatively sophisticated way. The presence in Chinese Buddhist texts of this freighted Chinese philosophical vocabulary was not a mere projection, based on incomplete understanding, of “Chinese” ideas—as the very earliest moments of the Sino-Buddhist encounter have sometimes been depicted. Rather, translators and commentators had implicitly identified a number of actual parallels between certain foundational Buddhist concepts and the dynamics

⁴ Lai, 1983. On the debates about human nature in pre-Buddhist (and in some cases later but non-Buddhist) Chinese thought, see Mori, 1971; Xu, 1963; and Jiang, 1997.

⁵ On the earliest uses of the word *foxing*, see Li, 2022.

⁶ Radich, 2014, 2016a, 2016b. See also Lai, 1986; Lee, 2021; Felbur, 2018. By “standard form” I mean the “original awakening” (*benjue* 本覺) model, in which Buddha-nature is an ontologically monistic ground; this model is most closely associated with the *Da sheng qi xin lun* 大乘起信論.

of human nature as it had previously come to be discussed by Chinese thinkers.

2 “Inborn Nature” in Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms Translations

It is fitting to begin our inquiry with the concept of inborn nature itself. How was the term *xing* used by the earliest translators of Chinese Buddhist texts, by which I mean translators working during the Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220) and Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–280) periods?⁷

2.1 *Xing* in Eastern Han Translations

In the earliest Chinese Buddhist translations, those dating to the Eastern Han dynasty, the word *xing* is rare.⁸ And when it does appear, it is usually not a technical term; that is, it does not usually translate any notable Indic Buddhist doctrinal category. In most examples, it seems to be a relatively generic word to describe someone’s personality or temperament. We see this, to take but one representative example, in the *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經 (T196),⁹ a biography of the Buddha, where an unruly *nāga* is described as “of an impetuous nature, jealous and angry” (性急妬惡).¹⁰

⁷ Unless stated otherwise, I follow Nattier, 2008, concerning which surviving Buddhist texts can be reliably dated to this era.

⁸ I am unaware of studies that examine this word in Eastern Han or Three Kingdoms translations specifically. Within Chinese Buddhist literature as a whole, *xing* is widely used in various ways. Hirakawa, 1998: no. 1171—without citing sources, however—gives over thirty distinct Sanskrit equivalents and also notes the word’s use in translating abstract suffixes such as *-tā* and *-tva*. Nakamura, 2001: 826 gives a much shorter list of possible equivalents: *prakṛti*, *svabhāva* (and *bhāva*), *dhātu*, *gotra*, *ātmaka*, and *ākāra*.

⁹ Nattier, 2008: 109, dates T196 to the Han but notes some uncertainty about whether it was revised in later eras.

¹⁰ T196:4.150b2–3 (see, similarly, 148c22, 152b4, 160b25, 160c27, and 161a29). Other examples from texts that Nattier, 2008, assigns to Eastern Han–dynasty translators are *Qichu sanguan jing* 七處三觀經, T150A:2.879b28; *Fajing jing* 法鏡經, T322:12.17a2, 17c16, and 22b16; and *Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 (unrevised portions), T418:13.904c3. In all of these cases *xing* is used after an adjective and may well have translated abstract suffixes such as *-tā* or *tva*. A final—albeit difficult-to-understand—example is found at *Daodi jing* 道地經, T607:15.231c12.

Because examples such as this cannot, as far as I can determine, be compared to parallel Indic texts or fixed canonical formulas, we cannot rule out the possibility that the underlying Indic words were sometimes terms with a formal role in Buddhist doctrine. Still, what we can say confidently is that in most such passages the translators were not using *xing* in a technical sense intended to recall Chinese debates about human nature, nor were they attempting to align this word, in anything more than a passing and incidental way, with Buddhist concepts of any particular doctrinal importance.

However, there is one example suggesting that during the Han dynasty these kinds of connections were occasionally being made. In the *Liaoben shengsi jing* 了本生死經 (T708; *Śālistamba-sūtra*), a text likely from the late Eastern Han and one much cited by Chinese authors during the Three Kingdoms period,¹¹ *xing* features in the concluding line of the canonical *pratītyasamutpāda* formula, the primary topic of this text:

如是是但大苦性具成有。(T708:16.815c5)

evam [如是] asya [是] kevalasya [但] mahato [大] duḥkha [苦]
skandhasya [性] samudayo [具成] bhavati [有]¹²

Thus does this entire great mass of suffering's arising come to be.

It is clear upon comparison that this Chinese passage, which is hardly comprehensible on its own, is a syntactically unmodified, word-for-word rendering of this canonical Indic stock expression.¹³ Although taken as a whole the result can hardly be called a true “translation” (what a Chinese reader who did not already know the meaning of the expression would have made of this passage is quite unclear), at the level of individual semantic units it seems that *xing* here translates *skandha*.

Skandha is of course a technical concept of great importance in the context of the five *skandhas*, which, according to foundational Buddhist

¹¹ On the reasons for thinking that T708 is a Han-dynasty text, see Zacchetti, 2004: 210–11; see also Nattier, 2008: 109. It is cited four times in *Yin chi ru jing zhu* 陰持入經註 (T1694:33.10b25, 13c13, 14c29, 21a22) and once in the commentary to *Da mingdu jing* 大明了經 (T225:8.480a27), an indication of its relative importance among authors of the Wu 吳 kingdom.

¹² The Sanskrit here is from the citation of the *Śālistamba-sūtra* preserved in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra-pañjikā* (Schoening, 1995: 2.701).

¹³ My intentionally stilted English translation (based, of necessity, on the Indic) roughly attempts to mimic this style, though the grammatical features of English in fact make the final product much more understandable than An Shigao's 安世高 (fl. 148–170) Chinese. On this curious translation style in An Shigao's texts, see Zacchetti, 2007.

doctrine, are the totality of elements that compose a sentient being. In the above stock formula, however, the meaning of the word is usually understood more generically, as the “totality” or “mass” (as I have translated) of suffering that characterizes *samsāra*. Yet later in T708 *xing* also translates *skandha* in the context of the five *skandhas*. The first such passage concerns the definitions of *viññāna* (consciousness) and *nāmarūpa* (mentality-and-materiality):

知物故為識。五性故為名色。(T708:16.816a12–13)

Because it knows objects, it is consciousness. Because the five inborn natures [are present], it is mentality-and-materiality.

Here there is no doubt: *wuxing* 五性 (five inborn natures) denotes the five *skandhas*, and this is confirmed by the Sanskrit parallel, which, even though somewhat different in this line, also defines *nāmarūpa* as the five *skandhas*.¹⁴ “Five inborn natures” is also used to explain the eleventh link, “birth” (*sheng* 生; Skt. *jāti*):

愛彌廣故為受。受當復有行故為有。五性具成故為生。
(T708:16.816a15–16)

The full expansion of craving is grasping. When, after there is grasping, there is again action, this is becoming. When the five inborn natures are fully formed, this is birth.

Here, the Sanskrit parallel, “birth is the manifestation of the *skandhas*” (*skandhaprādurbhāvo jātiḥ*),¹⁵ is very close, making it clear that “five inborn natures” refers to the five *skandhas*.¹⁶

It is notable that both of the above passages, if we follow the typical “three lifetimes” interpretation of *pratītyasamutpāda*, concern the moment of rebirth, either from a past life to the present (*viññāna* to *nāmarūpa*) or from the present life to a future life (*bhava* to *jāti*). To invoke the five *skandhas* here is perfectly orthodox from the perspective of Indian Buddhism, where a

¹⁴ Schoening, 1995: 1.714.

¹⁵ Schoening, 1995: 1.715.

¹⁶ The expression “five inborn natures” occurs in two additional passages, in each case aligning with *skandha* in the meaning of the five *skandhas*: T708:16.816a25, corresponding to *skandhaprādurbhāvārthena jātiḥ* (Schoening, 1995: 1.717n9, following *Bodhicaryāvatāra-pañjikā*) and T708:16.816b5–7, corresponding to *skandhānām upacayaparipākād vīnaśo . . . jarāmarāṇam ucyate* (Schoening, 1995: 1.722).

living being, and hence the formal beginning of one's next life, is often defined as the presence of all five *skandhas* as a coherent bundle.

But it also fits quite well with the Chinese idea of *xing*, which in the pre-Buddhist context is typically defined as that which humans possess from birth and that whose presence defines human life as such. The most frequent single-word glosses of *xing* in early pre-Buddhist Chinese literature are thus *sheng* 生 (life) and *ming* 命 (endowment).¹⁷ Pre-Qin philosophical texts similarly explain that “that which is so from birth is what we call ‘inborn nature’” (生之所以然者謂之性), as Xunzi puts it.¹⁸

The similarity between the Buddhist *skandhas* and the Chinese *xing* arguably becomes even more pronounced if we examine Han-dynasty sources, where *xing* is sometimes explained as that which one “receives” (*shou* 受) at birth. Commenting on the famous *Lunyu* 論語 passage where it is said that Confucius's disciples did not hear his words about “inborn nature and the Dao of Heaven” (性與天道), the *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 (compiled by He Yan 何晏 [ca. 190–249] and others) thus says: “Inborn nature is that which human beings receive so as to be born” (性者人之所受以生也).¹⁹ A preserved citation of Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200) commentary to this same line is even more explicit: “Inborn nature refers to the blood and *qi* that human beings receive so as to be born” (性謂人受血氣以生).²⁰ Here, then, we might say that *xing*, or inborn nature, consists of the material and nonmaterial components that human beings receive at birth, from some prior source, and that determine their character and disposition.²¹

At a broad level of generality, then, the Chinese notion of inborn nature as it had come to be understood by the late Han dynasty indeed seems to have much in common with the Buddhist notion of the five *skandhas*; despite their differences, the two concepts perform similar work within their respective traditions. From this perspective, this attempted introduction of the weighty Chinese concept of *xing* into the technical idiom of Chinese Buddhism as a translation of *skandha* should not be seen as a mere haphazard selection, let alone a choice that blatantly mischaracterizes its sources. Rather, it bears the

¹⁷ *Gu xun hui zuan* 故訓匯纂: 781–82.

¹⁸ *Xunzi ji jie* 荀子集解: 22.412.

¹⁹ *Lun yu ji shi* 論語集釋: 1.320.

²⁰ *Hou han shu*: 28.960 (commentary by Li Xian 李賢 [655–94] and others).

²¹ Strictly speaking, *qi* 氣 is not “nonmaterial.” But what is pointed to here comes relatively close to denoting those things that the Indian Buddhist tradition (and we ourselves) would classify this way.

marks of a studied effort, if still a halting and not yet widely adopted one, to use the resources of Chinese thought to draw reasonably accurate connections between Buddhist doctrine and widely discussed Chinese concepts about life, death, and human nature.

2.2 *Xing* in Three Kingdoms Buddhist Sources

Turning to the Three Kingdoms period, we find that *xing* continued to be used regularly in nontechnical contexts.²² But just as in Han-era texts, we also occasionally find it as a technical term of Buddhist doctrine. On the one hand, this occurs in one of the same contexts discussed above: as a translation of *skandha* in the concluding phrase of the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula, a usage that might have been merely a frozen form borrowed by later translators familiar with the *Liaoben shengsi jing* 了本生死經.²³ Much more significant is a seemingly new context for the term in scroll 1 of the *Damingdu jing* 大明度經 (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*), where *benxing* 本性 (original inborn nature) translates the crucial term *svabhāva* at the moment of its first occurrence. The line in question is one whose centrality to the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature as a whole needs no introduction: “material form [*rūpa*] is without the original inborn nature [*svabhāva*] of material form” (色休色本性),²⁴ and so on for the remaining *skandhas*.

Remarkably, when these comments are immediately repeated, now spoken by Subhūti rather than Śāriputra, *svabhāva* is translated by a different but equally freighted Chinese term: *ziran* 自然 (self-so).²⁵ The word *svabhāva* occurs once more in the remaining portions of scroll 1 of T225,

²² I will not tabulate here all of the examples, which proportionally are slightly more frequent than in Han translations.

²³ *Bannihuan jing* 般泥洹經 (probably translated by Zhi Qian; Nattier, 2008: 126–28), T6:1.178c7 and 178c13 (致是具足苦性習). T5, the other probable Three Kingdoms translation of a *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* whose relationship to T6 is quite complicated, gives *kuyin* 苦陰 for *duḥkha-skandha* in the corresponding passage (*Fo bannihuan jing* 佛般泥洹經, T5:1.163b15), using the standard early translation *yin* 陰 (dark element) for *skandha*.

²⁴ T225:8.479b26, corresponding to *rūpaṃ eva* (色) *virahitaṃ* (休) *rūpasvabhāvena* (色本性) in the Sanskrit (cited from Karashima, 2011: 10n69); T224 reads 色離本色 (T224:8.426b25). This passage, as well as the other translations of *svabhāva* within T225, have been discussed by Kawano Satoshi 河野訓 (Kawano, 2008: 152–54).

²⁵ T225:8.479c1. For a study of the use of *ziran* as a translation of *svabhāva* (and also, interestingly, *asvabhāva*) in early Chinese translations of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, see Sucki, 1982: 234–41.

where it is again translated as *ziran*,²⁶ which is the usual translation of *svabhāva* in T224, Lokakṣema's earlier version of this same text.²⁷

It would seem, then, that the translators of T225's scroll 1 were experimenting. In the first instance they chose for *svabhāva* a new term, *benxing*, but then they quickly reverted to the older, more established translation *ziran* that is used throughout T224.²⁸ A similar if arguably even more developed kind of experimentation is seen in scrolls 2–6 of T225, which constitute a revision by Zhi Qian 支謙 (d. ca. 252) of T224 and which have a different origin than scroll 1 (Nattier, 2009). In this case, all of the instances of *ziran* from T224 are replaced by various other translations.²⁹ Clearly, then, during the Three Kingdoms period translators were not at all settled on how to render *svabhāva* in Chinese. It was within this general state of experimentation that *benxing* was chosen, in one instance at least. Although from the perspective of surviving Han and Three Kingdoms sources this choice was anomalous—it is not repeated elsewhere, as far as I can determine—it was prescient. Over the course of the fourth century, *xing* would become part of the eventually standard translation of *svabhāva* as *zixing* 自性 (self-nature), a word that, we can now see, splits the difference between *ziran* (自然; self-so) and *benxing* (本性; original inborn nature).³⁰

Indeed, despite appearing in this usage only once within any surviving Han or Three Kingdoms translation (again, as far as I can determine), this terminology associated with “nature” (性) was becoming, during this era, well known to Chinese Buddhists. This is shown by the interlinear commentary to T225's scroll 1, which is generally accepted as dating from

²⁶ “[Just as] the self-so-ness of sentient beings, so is the self-so-ness of thoughts” 眾生自然，念亦自然 (T225:8.482a21), corresponding to *sattvāsvabhāvatayā āyusman śāriputra manasikārāsvabhāvatā veditavyā* (Vaidya, 1960: 16).

²⁷ Karashima, 2010: 667, gives many instances.

²⁸ Alternatively, it is also possible that this singular example of *benxing* was a modification made by a later editor who did not continue marking the subsequent occurrences. Kawano, 2008: 154, interprets the change from *benxing* to *ziran* as an indication of the translator(s) wishing to emphasize that *ziran* was a more appropriate translation.

²⁹ See Karashima, 2010: 667–68, which lists the many different terms used in T225 in the places where T224 uses *ziran* to translate *svabhāva*.

³⁰ The text that seems to coin *zixing* as a translation of *svabhāva* is the *Fanguang jing* 放光經 (T221), a Western Jin 西晉 translation of the larger *Prajñāpāramitā*, where the word is used frequently. *Zixing* is never used in Eastern Han or Three Kingdoms translations. It was eventually adopted for *svabhāva* by Kumārajīva in his translations of *Prajñāpāramitā* and Madhyamaka texts and thereafter remained the standard rendering.

the time of the Wu 吳 kingdom (222–80). Commenting on a later passage in which the sutra had discussed each of the five *skandhas* as being “boundless,” the interlinear commentary reads:

色所以無邊無極者，色之性本空故。(T225:8.481b3)

The reason that form [and the other *skandhas*] are boundless and limitless is that the inborn nature of form is originally empty.

The commentator, we may notice, has evidently taken the idea of “inborn nature” being “empty” as a kind of higher-level truth that explains one or more typically gnomic *Prajñāpāramitā*-style statements concerning the ultimate nature of the elements that, conventionally speaking, comprise a human being or self.³¹ Even at this early date of the mid-200s, despite not yet appearing in translated literature to the degree that would soon become normal, *xing* had evidently already come to serve as part of the technical vocabulary of Chinese Buddhism.

3 Chinese Theories of Human Nature From the Han Through Three Kingdoms Periods

As we have seen, although the idea of “inborn nature” (*xing*) was used only occasionally during the Han and Three Kingdoms periods as a translation of technical Buddhist terminology, the few examples that do exist show a relatively sophisticated engagement with the broader Chinese philosophical discourse on this topic. This suggests that we need to look more closely at that discourse if we want to fully track the degree to which the first Chinese Buddhist translators and authors may have been drawing from this area of pre-Buddhist Chinese thought.

In particular, we need to consider how human nature was discussed by Chinese thinkers during the Han and early Three Kingdoms period. As we will see, what distinguishes the debates in this period compared with the more frequently examined pre-Qin discussions is that they no longer centered on the concept of *xing* alone but had come to include, at least as importantly if not more so, a second component of human nature: *qing* 情 (instinctive

³¹ The phrase “original empty” (*ben kong* 本空) is already used occasionally in T224 (*Dao xing bore jing*, T224:8.456c20, 467c13). The T225 commentary is unprecedented, however, in linking this idea of being “originally empty” to the “inborn nature” of things. This move foreshadows language that in the fourth century would become pervasive.

emotion). Significantly, this term was also widely used in early Buddhist translations and, to an even greater extent, in the earliest Chinese-authored Buddhist commentaries.

3.1 “Instinctive Emotion” (*Qing*)

The word *qing* has long generated controversy among sinologists because it seems to carry two contradictory meanings: “reality” or “fact” on the one hand and “emotion,” “desire,” or “subjective response” on the other. Scholars have long debated how the same word could denote these apparently opposed ideas, how these two broad meanings are related, whether this relationship changed over time, and what all this tells us about early Chinese understanding of the emotions and the practices of ethical cultivation that focused on them.³² Although no single English word is wholly adequate, I here translate *qing* as “instinctive emotion” with the aim of capturing the way that this word refers to what are claimed to be our pre-given, unreflective emotional responses to things but without prejudging whether these responses are good or bad, or inevitable or eliminable, since these questions were, precisely, part of the debate.³³

In pre-Qin sources *qing* was often contrasted with *xing* in terms of an active-passive dichotomy. In this presentation, instinctive emotions (*qing*) are a human being’s natural response to a given situation in the world, in contrast to one’s inborn nature (*xing*), meaning one’s underlying latent state or disposition.³⁴ These natural responses were often described by way of a

³² There is a vast literature here. For representative studies, see Graham, 1990: 59–66 (first published in 1967); Hansen, 1995; Harbsmeier, 2004; Cheng, 1999; Tang, 2003; Attilio, 2006; Brindley, 2006; Middendorf, 2008; and Plaks, 2019. None of these scholars examines any Buddhist sources.

³³ As Michael Puett suggests, *qing* denotes “how one would respond naturally to a situation” (Puett, 2004: 46). As a translation, “instinct” is suggested by Maurizio Scarpari (Scarpari, 2003). Another important connotation of *qing* is that it is usually something about a person’s predisposition that is hidden from observers who lack extremely refined discernment (Schaberg, 2016: 46). Emphasizing this side of things one might translate *qing* as “true feelings.”

³⁴ An active-latent duality seems to inform Paul Kroll’s recent definitions of *xing* and *qing* as “predisposition” and “disposition,” respectively (Kroll, 2015: 510, 370).

sixfold typology: liking, disliking, being happy about,³⁵ being angry about, grieving over, and taking joy in (好惡喜怒哀樂).³⁶

At the same time, the *qing* were also described as being, most basically, appetitive. As Xunzi puts it: “the instinctive emotions of human beings are such that the eye desires superlative forms, the ears superlative sounds, and the mouth superlative flavors.”³⁷ For Xunzi, that instinctive emotions involve wanting (or rejecting) things is what makes them dangerous. Notably, Xunzi here classifies these appetites in terms of desire for the different kinds of attractive sensory objects. Although this was not the most common classification of the *qing*, we do find it occurring occasionally in later, Han-dynasty sources. The *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (ca. 150 BCE), for example, speaks of the “six instinctive emotions” (六情) as the six natural human desires for six kinds of sensory stimulation:

人有六情。目欲視好色，耳欲聽宮商，鼻欲嗅芬香，口欲嗜甘旨，其身體四肢欲安而不作，衣欲被文繡而輕暖。(Han shi wai zhuan ji shi 韓詩外傳集釋: 16.184)³⁸

Human beings have six instinctive emotions. Namely, the eyes desire to look at beautiful forms; the ears desire to hear the *gong* and *shang* notes; the nose desires to smell pleasing and delightful fragrances; the mouth desires to taste sweet and savory things; the body and four limbs desire

³⁵ In my English translations of the third through sixth terms I add prepositions (“about” and so on) to emphasize that, similar to “liking” (好) and “disliking” (惡), all these terms are best understood as transitive verbs: they are responses directed *toward* some given thing, not mere free-floating mental states. This is one reason that translating *qing* as “emotion,” an English word that in ordinary (and even technical, psychological) parlance is not usually transitive in this sense, is actually somewhat problematic.

³⁶ *Xunzi ji jie* 荀子集解: 22.412. This list of six *qing* is far and away the most common typology. The *Liji* 禮記, as one example of a variation on this typology, defines *qing* as “that for which one has the ability even without having to learn it” (弗學而能) and, adding “desire” (欲), lists seven such things (*Li ji zheng yi* 禮記正義: 22.194c). As discussed below, in Han sources desire was usually presented as the overarching nature of the *qing*, rather than one among many.

³⁷ 夫人之情，目欲綦色，耳欲綦聲，口欲綦味 (*Xunzi ji jie* 荀子集解: 11.211). The character 綦 is interpreted by commentators as equivalent to 極, of which it was probably a phonetic variant (Wang, 2000: 926).

³⁸ When directly citing the titles of Chinese in published books, I follow the American Library Association and Library of Congress guidelines, which call for placing a space between the pinyin of each Chinese character, except for proper names (*Han shi wai zhuan*). When merely mentioning the name of the text as a generic entity, I group the pinyin syllables into words as seems most appropriate (*Hanshi waizhuan*).

relaxation and not having to work; and for clothing, one desires to wear beautiful embroideries that are light and cool.

The six senses referred to here are somewhat similar to the usual six senses of Buddhist doctrine (though notably the *Hanshi waizhuan* does not make “mind” the sixth). This precedent for using *qing* in the context of a typology of five or six senses should be remembered when we consider, below, the way that *qing* was taken up in early Buddhist texts in reference to the Buddhist scheme of the six sense faculties (*indriya* or *āyatana*).

3.2 *Qing* During the Han Period

During the Han dynasty, the Xunzian emphasis on the problematic nature of the instinctive emotions was eventually merged with the Mencian notion that humans possess an inherent goodness. The result was a model in which human nature was characterized as a combination of two contrasting poles: “instinctive emotion” (*qing*) and “inborn nature” (*xing*), the latter being *good* (the latent state) and the former *evil* (appetitive emotional responses).³⁹ This duality was further aligned with the meta-duality of “light” (*yang* 陽) versus “dark” (*yin* 陰). Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) attributes this view to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–104 BCE), characterizing it as a compromise between the positions of Mencius and Xunzi:

董仲舒覽孫、孟之書，作情性之說曰。「天之大經，一陰一陽。人之大經，一情一性。性生於陽，情生於陰。陰氣鄙，陽氣仁。曰性善者，是見其陽也。謂惡者，是見其陰者也。」(*Lun heng jiao shi* 論衡校釋: 3.139–140)

Dong Zhongshu examined the writings of Sun [i.e., Xunzi] and Meng and crafted his explanation of inborn nature and instinctive emotion, which states: “The great constancy of Heaven is the pair dark (*yin*) and light (*yang*). The great constancy of human beings is [likewise] the pair instinctive emotion and inborn nature. Inborn nature comes from the light, while instinctive emotion comes from the dark. The energy (*qi*) of darkness is base, while the energy of light is benevolent (*ren*). When [Mencius] says that ‘human nature is good,’ this is in consideration of its light aspect. When [Xunzi] calls [human nature] ‘evil,’ this is in consideration of its dark aspect.”

³⁹ For a helpful summary of these broad changes, see Tang, 2003, who sees an alternation between (and then synthesis of) the active-latent duality and the good-evil duality as the main driver of changes in the discourse surrounding *qing* from the pre-Qin to the Han and then the early post-Han periods.

Whether or not it really originated with Dong Zhongshu⁴⁰ and whether or not anyone apart from Wang Chong thought of it as a synthesis of Mencius and Xunzi, this basic picture was common among Eastern Han intellectuals. It is this model that is explained by the court-sponsored *Baihu tong* 白虎通 (ca. 79 CE) in its chapter “On Inborn Nature and Instinctive Emotion” (*Xingqing* 性情):

性情者，何謂也。性者，陽之施。情者，陰之化也。人稟陰陽氣而生，故內懷五性六情... 陽氣者仁，陰氣者貪，故情有利慾，性有仁也。(Bai hu tong shu zheng 白虎通疏證: 8.381)

What are inborn nature and instinctive emotion? Inborn nature is what is bestowed on humans by the principle of light; instinctive emotion is the operation of the principle of dark. Human beings are born through the endowment of both light and dark energies (*qi*), and for this reason they harbor within themselves the five inborn natures and six instinctive emotions. . . . The energy of light is benevolence (*ren*);⁴¹ the energy of dark is greed (*tan*). Therefore it is in instinctive emotion that lies profit-seeking and desire; it is in inborn nature that lies benevolence.

The ensuing passage goes on to explain that the “five inborn natures” are the so-called five virtues of benevolence (*ren* 仁), integrity (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and trustworthiness (*xin* 信), while the “six instinctive emotions” are the standard list, presented above, of “liking, disliking, being happy about, being angry about, grieving over, and taking joy in.”

To judge from the *Shuowen jiezi*’s 說文解字 (ca. 100 CE) definitions of the two terms *xing* and *qing*, which are listed sequentially and clearly intended to form a pair, by the turn of the first century it had become the standard understanding that humans are by birth endowed with a good, *yang* “inborn nature” and with bad, *yin* “instinctive emotions” characterized above all by craving:

⁴⁰ Similar ideas can be found in the “Deeply Investigating Names” (*Shen cha ming hao* 深察名號) chapter of the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Chun qiu fan lu yi zheng* 春秋繁露義證: 293–99), but given the many controversies surrounding the true authorship or dating of any part of this text, their origin remains uncertain. The *Hanshu* biography of Dong Zhongshu, it should be noted, presents ideas about this same topic in a somewhat different manner, describing “inborn nature” merely as the “raw substance” (*zhipu* 質樸) of humans and “instinctive emotion” as “human desires” (*renyu* 人欲), without linking these to *yin* and *yang* (*Han shu* 漢書: 26.2515).

⁴¹ This section is introduced as a citation from the *Gou ming jue* 鉤命決, a so-called weft (*wei* 緯) text.

情，人之陰氣，有欲者... 性，人之陽氣，性善者也。(Shuo wen jie zi zhu 說文解字注, 10 下 24.ab, 506–507)

Instinctive emotion comprises the dark (*yin*) energies of a human being; it is the part that has desire. . . . Inborn nature comprises the light (*yang*) energies of a human being; inborn nature is the good part.

This model, moreover, was not found only in elite, court-sponsored texts. We find, for example, a similar presentation in the *Taiping jing* 太平經, a document that has a complicated textual history but whose core sections are associated with one of the nascent “Daoist” religious groups that arose during the late Han dynasty:

天道為法，以是分別人優劣... 故含五性多者象陽而仁，含六情多者象陰而貪。受陽施多者為男，受陰施多者為女。受王相氣多者為尊貴則壽，受休廢囚氣多者數病而早死又貧極也。⁴²

The laws of the Way of Heaven in this way differentiate human beings in terms of superior and inferior. . . . Thus it is that those in whom the five inborn natures are predominant resemble the *yang* and are benevolent; those in whom the six instinctive emotions are predominant resemble the *yin* and have cravings. [At birth,] those who receive the greater endowment of the *yang* become boys, while those with the greater endowment of the *yin* become girls. Those who receive a greater share of kingly energy (*qi*) will be noble and long lived, while those who receive a greater share of decrepit energy will have many illnesses, will die young, and will also be extremely poor.

Here, human beings are said to exist on a spectrum, ranging from more animal-like to more noble, and this distinction is explained in terms of differing endowments of inborn nature and instinctive emotion—said to consist of five and six elements, respectively⁴³—which are then aligned with good *yang* and bad *yin* as well as other dualities such as long life versus sickness and death.

⁴² *Tai ping jing he jiao* 太平經合校: 96.424. This passage comes from what Hendrischke classifies as the “A” (earlier) stratum of the surviving text (Hendrischke, 2006: 358).

⁴³ The *Taiping jing* does not tell us what the five and six elements are, however. The rubric of the “five inborn natures and six instinctive emotions” was reasonably widespread. It is mentioned in the memorial of Gaotang Long 高堂隆 discussed below and also in the Heshang Gong 河上公 commentary to *Laozi* 老子 section 6 (*Laozi Dao de jing Heshangong zhang ju* 老子道德經河上公章句: 21), where the five inborn natures come from Heaven (天) and are five aspects of what we might loosely call the “mind,” while the six instinctive emotions come from Earth (地) and are six parts of the body.

3.3 Sages and Emotion

A notable element in the *Taiping jing* passage above is the claim that inborn nature (*xing*) and instinctive emotion (*qing*) are not always present to the same degree: more fortunate or virtuous people have more “inborn nature” and less “instinctive emotion.” Although the *Taiping jing* does not raise the question directly, this implies that a fully perfect person would have little or no instinctive emotion at all. This stance, in the early Three Kingdoms period, was encapsulated by the famous slogan, “The sage has no instinctive emotion” (聖人無情).

Prefigured by a passage in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子,⁴⁴ as an explicit proposition “the sage has no instinctive emotion” is attributed to He Yan, one of the founding fathers of so-called Dark Learning (*xuanxue* 玄學).⁴⁵ However the idea that perfect human beings are devoid of *qing* derives directly from Eastern Han ideas about human nature.⁴⁶ Wang Chong, for example, after presenting the view of Dong Zhongshu discussed above (in which inborn nature and instinctive emotion are the good and bad aspects of all people), goes on to propose a cognate theory according to which Mencius’s claim that human nature is “good” refers to superior people, while Xunzi’s thesis that it is “bad” refers to lesser people.⁴⁷ Here too, then, inborn nature and instinctive emotion are not possessed by all people equally. To this extent, “the sage has no instinctive emotion” can be seen as a reformulation of a more widely shared Eastern Han perspective: that what makes perfect humans perfect is that, by dint of either birth or training, they are free of the negative aspects of human nature, namely, the instinctive emotions that are at root characterized by desire (*yu* 欲) or craving (*tan* 貪).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “[The sage] has human form but lacks human *qing*” (有人之形，無人之情; *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋: 217).

⁴⁵ Concerning the claim “the sage has no *qing*” among Wei-era writers, see Middendorf, 2010; Chan, 2008.

⁴⁶ As pointed out by Tang, 1957 [2001]: 101–102.

⁴⁷ *Lun heng jiao shi* 論衡校釋: 13.142.

⁴⁸ This perspective was widely shared but not universal. One late Han author who expressed a quite different view was Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209), who criticizes the view that inborn nature is good and instinctive emotion is evil, arguing that instinctive emotion is, rather, the external manifestation of inborn nature and that liking and disliking are not themselves evil but can be put to either good or evil purposes (*Shen jian zhu jiao bu* 申鑒注校補: 5.202). This hearkens back to a more typically pre-Qin way of discussing these ideas. However, that Xun Yue argues *against* the view that

The path to human perfection, in the late Han and early post-Han context, was therefore often described as one of eliminating, or severely curtailing, the instinctive emotions. Those who “embody the Dao” (體道者) are able to “seal off the instinctive emotions” (閉情), as Gao You 高誘 (ca. 168–212) says in his commentary to the *Huainanzi* 淮南子.⁴⁹ Though few can really do it, “to seal off instinctive emotion and be without desire” (閉情無欲者) is best, according to Huan Fan 桓範 (d. 249).⁵⁰ Although its dating is controversial, also worth noting is the Heshang Gong 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi*, which repeatedly presents the instinctive emotions as the desire-filled energies that chase away the good bodily spirits and lead to death.⁵¹ The famous Laozi dictum that “by doing nothing, nothing is undone” (無為而無不為) is here interpreted to mean the state when “the desires and instinctive emotions have been severed” (情欲斷絕).⁵² Similarly, the commentary explains Laozi’s statement that “the sage acts for the belly” (聖人為腹) to mean that “[he] preserves the five inborn natures but eliminates the six instinctive emotions” (守五性去六情).⁵³

That one should eliminate instinctive emotion was also a prescription for how rulers should govern others. In response to a period of heightened punishment by “laws” (*fa* 法) carried out by Cao Rui 曹睿 during the Qinglong 青龍 era (233–237), Gaotang Long 高堂隆 submitted to the throne

“inborn nature is good, instinctive emotion is bad” shows that it was indeed a typical claim at the time.

⁴⁹ *Huai nan zi ji shi* 淮南子集釋: 7.523. This, the oldest commentary to the text, is in fact probably a combination of the commentaries of Gao You and Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149); see LeBlanc, 1993: 190–91.

⁵⁰ *Quan shang gu san dai qin han san guo liu chao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文: 1261 (全三國文 37.7), from the “Regulating Desire” (*jieyu* 節欲) chapter of his *Shi yao lun* 世要論 (preserved in the Tang collectanea *Qun shu zhi yao* 羣書治要).

⁵¹ For example, “[In the line ‘exiting is life, entering is death’ 出生入死], ‘exiting is life’ means that when the instinctive emotions and desires exit from the five internal [organs], the *hun*-soul is stable and the *po*-soul is calm, therefore one lives. ‘Entering is death’ means that when the instinctive emotions and desires enter one’s heart, the refined spirits become worn out and confused, and therefore one dies” 出生謂情欲出五內。魂定魄靜。故生也。入死謂情欲入於胸臆。精神勞惑。故死。(Laozi *Dao de jing* Heshanggong zhang ju 老子道德經河上公章句: 191 [commentary to section 50]). The Heshang Gong commentary may date to around 300 CE, but some scholars maintain that it was not written until the fifth century. On these questions, see Boltz, 1993: 273–76.

⁵² *Laozi Dao de jing* Heshanggong zhang ju 老子道德經河上公章句: 186 (commentary to section 48).

⁵³ *Laozi Dao de jing* Heshanggong zhang ju 老子道德經河上公章句: 46 (commentary to section 12). Similar ideas are found throughout the Heshang Gong commentary.

a long memorial, part of which proposes that a better approach would be to govern by “ritual” (*li* 禮):

夫六情五性，同在於人，嗜慾廉貞，各居其一。及其動也，交爭於心．．．夫情之所在，非好則美，而美好之集，非人力不成，非穀帛不立。情苟無極，則人不堪其勞，物不充其求。勞求並至，將起禍亂。故不割情，無以相供．．．由此觀之，禮義之制，非苟拘分，將以遠害而興治也。(San guo zhi 三國志: 25.713–14)

All human beings have the six instinctive emotions and five inborn natures, the former being characterized by appetites and cravings and the latter by modesty and probity. When [people] are stirred [by outside circumstances], these two aspects compete within one’s mind. . . . As a general rule, wherever there is instinctive emotion there is [desire for] tasty [food] and beautiful [clothes].⁵⁴ But assembling the tasty and the beautiful cannot be accomplished without people and labor and cannot be actualized without grains [to eat] and silk [to wear]. Hence if instinctive emotions [remain] unlimited, the people will be mightily burdened and there will not be enough goods to fulfill their wants. When both their burdens and wants reach this point, [political] disorder will result.

Therefore if one does not sever the instinctive emotions [of the people], there will be no way to supply them [with enough material resources to avoid their eventual dissatisfaction and hence rebellion]. . . . Looking at things this way, the [ruler’s proper] institution of ritual and propriety is not just so [that all people] maintain [their proper societal] position, but rather it is a means of preventing danger [to the state] and causing the overall governance [of you, the ruler], to flourish.

Here, that one should “sever the instinctive emotions” (割情) expresses the traditional Xunzian idea that ritual is necessary to regulate the people’s natural but harmful desires, with, however, the additional nuance that these desires should not just be regulated but *eliminated* because they are characterized by the kind of mere acquisitiveness for fine material goods that the state would do best to stamp out.

Although by the end of the Eastern Han it was, thus, a widely shared understanding that “instinctive emotions” consist above all in craving and that the best human beings manage to eliminate them entirely, in subsequent years there arose a lively debate among intellectuals about this point. According to the oft-cited story, not long after He Yan had become famous for his proposal that “the sage does not get happy about, angry about, grieve

⁵⁴ The earlier and subsequent contexts of the essay make clear that *hao* 好 (tasty) and *mei* 美 (beautiful)—which in this line could also be read as verbs—are invoked specifically in reference to food and clothing, respectively.

over, or take joy in anything” (聖人無喜怒哀樂)—which is to say that the sage lacks *qing*—Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) proposed that the sage *does* have instinctive emotion, that “what the sage shares with ordinary people is the five instinctive emotions” (同於人者五情也). It is, Wang Bi said, merely that “[the sage] is of such instinctive emotion that he responds to things without being tied up by things” (聖人之情，應物而無累於物者也).⁵⁵ The sage, in short, still has the same instinctive emotions as the rest of us even though his somehow do not cause problematic entanglements. This framing, as Tang Yijie 湯一介 notes, hearkens back to the more typical pre-Qin understanding in which *qing* contrasts with *xing* not as evil versus good, but as activity versus quiescence.⁵⁶ Wang Bi thus evidently thought that to have no instinctive emotion would mean being unable to act at all, and he therefore proposed that the goal of self-cultivation is not to eliminate the *qing* but to “make *qing* more like *xing*” (性其情)—that is, to make one’s emotional and appetitive responses to the world conform to the goodness of one’s inborn nature.⁵⁷

Similar sentiments were expressed by others in this era. Ji Kang 嵇康 (224–263), for example, writes in his *Shi si lun* 釋私論 (Dispelling Self-Interest) that for a cultivated person “instinctive emotions are not bound by desires” (情不繫於所欲).⁵⁸ Here, Ji Kang more or less agrees with Wang Bi that the instinctive emotions are something that can be purified of their problematic qualities without themselves being eliminated. However it was evidently at least somewhat difficult to explain just what the difference was between this proposal and the elimination of the instinctive emotions altogether. Thus, in his *Yang sheng lun* 養生論 (Treatise on Nourishing Life) Ji Kang says that one should ensure that “fondness and hatred do not lodge within one’s instinctive emotions” (愛憎不棲於情), thereby again making a distinction between the problematic things that should be eliminated (fondness and hatred) and the instinctive emotions themselves.⁵⁹ Yet in his rejoinder to this essay, Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 223–ca. 275) accuses Ji Kang of,

⁵⁵ This summary of He Yan’s proposal and Wang Bi’s reply to He Yan is presented in He Shao’s 何邵 biography of Wang Bi, cited in the commentary to the *San guo zhi* 三國志 (28.795).

⁵⁶ Tang, 2003: 279.

⁵⁷ See Wang Bi’s commentary to *Lunyu* 17.2; Wang Bi *ji jiao shi* 王弼集校釋: 631–32.

⁵⁸ *Jikang ji jiao zhu* 嵇康集校注: 402.

⁵⁹ *Jikang ji jiao zhu*: 252.

precisely, proposing that one eliminate the instinctive emotions altogether, something that Xiang Xiu thinks is neither wise nor possible.⁶⁰

Perhaps for such reasons, in the end Wang Bi's claim that perfection could be achieved while still retaining instinctive emotion seems not to have carried the day. Commenting on the *Lunyu* passage in which Confucius was said to have wailed bitterly at the death of his disciple Yan Yuan 顏淵, Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312), in a formulation that would remain influential, thus observes:

人哭亦哭。人慟亦慟。蓋無情者與物化也。⁶¹

When people cry, [the sage] cries too. When people are sad, he is sad too. This must be because the one who is without instinctive emotion is able to transform together with things.

For Guo Xiang, then, Wang Bi is exactly wrong to claim that because sages respond to the world they must have instinctive emotion just like the rest of us. Rather, it is because the sage does *not* have *qing* that he can harmonize with the world by responding appropriately, including by appearing sad if that is what is called for.

4 *Qing* in Early Buddhist Translations

The above survey of Chinese discussions of human nature during the period circa 0–300 CE has been cursory and selective; I have aimed not to give a complete intellectual history of this topic but merely to highlight certain aspects of it that, I will now argue, are relevant to understanding the emerging Buddhist literature of the era. In particular, what I wish to note from the above discussion is that in the late Han and immediately post-Han periods, the key term of debate was no longer *xing* (inborn nature)—the essential goodness of which everyone seemed to accept—but *qing* (instinctive emotion), which was generally interpreted to mean the problematic parts of human nature associated with appetitive desires. For those who saw the instinctive

⁶⁰ “When there is life, then there are the instinctive emotions, and to accord with one's instinctive emotions is therefore something that happens of itself. If one were to cut them off and cast them away, then one would be the same as a nonliving thing” (有生則有情，稱情則自然得，若絕而外之，則與無生同; *Jikang ji jiao zhu*: 284).

⁶¹ *Lun yu yi shu* 論語義疏: 272 (commentary to *Lunyu* 11.10).

emotions as necessarily (rather than just potentially) evil, human perfection, reached by sages, was a state where all instinctive emotion was eliminated.

This general background becomes important for our understanding of how, during this time, Buddhist thought was or was not brought to bear on the so-called Mencian problematic, because *qing* was, as it turns out, a significant technical concept within the earliest Chinese Buddhist literature. That translators and commentators took up this concept as equivalent to various key Buddhist doctrinal terms amounts to a claim that Buddhist teachings had something significant to say with regard to long-standing Chinese questions about human perfection and how it might be achieved.

Before returning to the Han and Three Kingdoms periods, my primary focus, let us first note that by the middle of the fourth century the concept “instinctive emotion” had enabled an often seamless convergence between Buddhist and Chinese models of human perfection. According to the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, an early fifth-century compendium of anecdotes concerning famous third- and fourth-century literati, when Gu He 顧和 (288–351) took his two precocious grandchildren, Zhang Xuan 張玄 and Gu Fu 顧敷, to a Buddhist temple, he tested their relative wisdom by asking them to explain the meaning of an element within an artistic depiction of the Buddha’s death:

見佛般泥洹像，弟子有泣者，有不泣者。和以問二孫。玄謂：被親故泣，不被親故不泣。敷曰：不然，當由忘情故不泣，不能忘情故泣。(Shi shuo xin yu jiao jian 世說新語校箋: 91 [2.51])

They saw an image of the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, in which some of the Buddha’s disciples were crying and others were not. Gu He asked his two grandchildren about this. Zhang Xuan said: “Those who cry do so because they were loved by [the Buddha] as kin; those who were not loved as kin do not cry.” But Gu Fu said: “That’s not right. It must be that some of them have been able to forget their instinctive emotions and so do not cry, while others have not been able to forget their instinctive emotions and so do cry.

Here, the traditional story according to which the arhats did not cry at the Buddha’s funeral—which is indeed a prominent theme in artistic depictions of the *parinirvāṇa*—has been interpreted in light of the long-standing Chinese question concerning whether or not perfect humans have instinctive emotions, a question that in the Chinese context too was often connected to the problem of crying at funerals (as in the passage from Guo Xiang cited above).

This anecdote concerning Gu He and his grandchildren is, obviously, not a translation of an Indian Buddhist text. Nevertheless, it does show how key ideas of Indian Buddhist doctrine had, by this time, come to be translated into

Chinese. In particular, from this anecdote we see that the mental defilements (*kleśa*) or cravings (*tṛṣṇā*) whose elimination leads to enlightenment, according to normal Buddhist understanding, were sometimes being made equivalent to the “instinctive emotions” that had long been at the center of Chinese philosophical debates about the nature of the sage. This same equivalence is found in other Eastern Jin writings on Buddhism and was evidently, by this time, a common way of discussing the nature of the Buddhist path.⁶²

4.1 *Qing* as the Defilements

Given how clearly the word *qing* was sometimes aligned with central Buddhist concepts such as *kleśa* or *tṛṣṇā* (in cases such as the above anecdote), it is notable that modern dictionaries of Chinese Buddhist terminology do not record such meanings for this word.⁶³ In early (Han and

⁶² In his famous treatise *Shamen bubai wang lun* 沙門不拜王論, Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) contrasts religious and secular life as the distinction between those who lack *qing* and those who have not yet gotten rid of *qing*. He then further argues that, for monks and nuns, it is precisely because “they do not allow their lives to be tied up by instinctive emotion that for them life [i.e., rebirth] can be extinguished [and *nirvāṇa* obtained]” (不以情累其生, 則生可滅; see *Hongming ji* 弘明集, T2012:52.30b25–c17). Notice how relative to Ji Kang’s essay *Shi si lun* (cited above), Huiyuan inverts the relationship between *qing* and the rest of life. For Ji Kang, the goal was not to let the *qing* be “tied up” by desires. But for Huiyuan, it is the *qing* that “tie up” one’s life. *Qing* is also a key concept in Huiyuan’s treatise on karmic retribution, the *Ming baoying lun* 明報應論. Here, the imagined interlocutor proposes that karmic retribution does not make sense because (among other reasons) if “with *qing* as the cause there is retribution” (因情致報) then it would be impossible to accord with the “way of spontaneity” (自然之道; *Hongming ji*, T2012:52.33b17). Huiyuan’s response is long and detailed, but in one place he summarizes his position by stating that “the activation of one’s *qing*” (情感) causes “the [karmic] response to occur of itself” (應自來), an understanding that Huiyuan contrasts with the idea that karmic retribution might be caused by “underworld authorities” (幽司), a possibility that the interlocutor had raised (*Hongming ji*, T2012:52.33c20–22). Here again, for Huiyuan instinctive emotion is that which in human beings perpetuates rebirth, and the word is therefore functionally a translation of a concept like *kleśa* or *tṛṣṇā*.

⁶³ Nakamura, 2001: 831b, gives only two possible Indic equivalents for *qing*: *sattva* and *indriya*; other definitions, not said to correspond to Indic technical terms, are also listed, such as *shiqing* 事情 (thing) and *ganqing* 感情 (feelings). Hirakawa, 1998: no. 1216, without listing sources, gives an only slightly expanded list of possible equivalents: *manas*, *sattva*, *indriya*, *caṅsus*, and *ruci*; this last, though capturing the sense of “desire,” is hardly a central doctrinal term. Hirakawa also gives, for *liu qing* 六情 (p. 167), *ṣaḍ-ādhyātmikāyatana* (the six internal *āyatana*). Both dictionaries also

Three Kingdoms) translations, however, we can find cases where *qing* demonstrably translates not only these and similar words, but also a variety of other important technical terms that modern reference works have similarly not noticed. These uses, in the context of translation, were not terribly numerous and in many cases did not last beyond the Three Kingdoms period. Nevertheless their presence, however infrequent or short lived, shows us that, in some circles at least, the Chinese philosophical discourse concerning human nature was indeed being actively used by translators and interpreters to make sense of foundational Buddhist ideas about the constitution of human beings and the path to human perfection.

As was the case with *xing*, *qing* most often appears in Han and Three Kingdoms translations in nontechnical contexts. The word, in these instances, conveys the general idea of feelings or emotions without being aligned with any obvious Buddhist doctrinal concepts.⁶⁴ Sometimes, however, *qing* conveys specifically a sense of desire, which one is advised to abandon or hold in check.⁶⁵ Notably, *qing* is in such cases often linked to the words *yu* (desire) or *tan* (craving), both of which, as we saw above, were used in Chinese writings from the Eastern Han to characterize the general character of the instinctive emotions.

In a few of these examples where *qing* means “desire,” we can consult a parallel Indic text. Through such comparisons, we discover that this semantic unit, in the compound *qingyu* 情欲 at least, was often used as a translation of important Indic doctrinal terminology. In a passage from T350, Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, *qingyu* translates either *rāgaṭṛṣṇā* or

record *qingyu* 情欲 as a translation of the Sanskrit *sneha*; this word, though within the semantic orbit of “desire,” is certainly not a central Buddhist technical term.

⁶⁴ This usage and the word itself are most common in narrative texts. See for example *Liudu jijing* 六度集經, T152:3.2a24, 10b5, 11a2, 13a9l, 20a6–8; 33b1; *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經, T185:3.475a12–13, 478c2; *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經 (a text that uses the word relatively frequently), T196:4.149a4, 159b8–10, 154a13, 154a29, 156a25, 157a30, 157c14, 158a13, 159c4, 160a5, 160b10–15, 160c28, 161c12, 162b17, 162c25.

⁶⁵ *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經, T196:4.161b25–27; *Fo bannihuan jing* 佛般泥洹經, T5:1.161a16; *Liudu jijing* 六度集經, T152:3.34b8, 44a1, 49c28–29. It should be noted that *qing* and *qingyu* 情欲 [var. 情慾] appear frequently in the *Sishier zhang jing* 四十二章經 to mean the desire or craving that Buddhist practice aims to eliminate—though one must also note that this text is of uncertain date and is probably not a direct translation of an Indic source; see T784:17.723a22, 723b14–15, 723b25–28, 724a14–15.

kleśatṛṣṇā.⁶⁶ In another example from the first Chinese translation of the *Dharmapada*, the *Fa ju jing* 法句經 (T210), this same word seems also to translate *tṛṣṇā*.⁶⁷

But even in the more frequent cases where we cannot align the Chinese texts with Indic parallels, *qing* is often implicitly equated with central terms of Indian Buddhist doctrine inasmuch as abandoning the *qing* is presented as the means by which perfected beings, such as buddhas or arhats, achieve their status. In the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經, a biography of the Buddha translated during the Wu kingdom period, immediately after his enlightenment the Buddha teaches the god Brahmā the path to the extinction of suffering, by way of the *pratīyasamutpāda* formula. Having first presented the “positive” version (the generation of suffering), the Buddha then introduces the negative version (the cessation of suffering) as follows:

欲得道者，當斷貪愛滅除情欲，無為無起。然則癡滅，癡滅則行滅... (T185:3.480b18–20)

Therefore those who wish to attain the Way must cut off craving and eliminate the desires of instinctive emotion (*qingyu*), being without action and without production [of desire]. Then, ignorance will be extinguished. With the extinction of ignorance, volitional formations will be extinguished[, et cetera].⁶⁸

⁶⁶ “In this same way, *śramaṇas* who can chant many scriptures and are very learned but who do not eliminate desire will die of thirst-desire in the midst of desire” (沙門如是，多諷經高才，不去情欲，於情欲中渴欲死； T350:12.193a7–11), corresponding to *ekatye śramaṇabrāhmaṇo bahūn dharmān paryāpnuvanti, na rāgaṭṛṣṇān vinodayanti, na dveṣaṭṛṣṇā na mohaṭṛṣṇā vinodayituṃ, te mahatā dharmārṇavenohyamānāḥ kleśaṭṛṣṇayā kālagatā . . . bhavanti* (von Staël-Holstein, 1926: 183). Here *qingyu* may translate *rāgaṭṛṣṇā*, or else serve loosely to convey the idea of all three defilements and hence be functionally a translation of *kleśaṭṛṣṇā* (the version seen by Lokakṣema might have listed only *kleśaṭṛṣṇā* in the first instance).

⁶⁷ *Faju jing* 法句經, T210:4.570c22 (不能捨情欲), corresponding to *Udānavarga* 3.9 (*tṛṣṇām loke sudustyajām*); see also *Dhammapada* 335 (*taṇhā loke visattikā*) and *Paṭina Dharmapada* 138 (*taṇhā loke duraccayā*). In the other parts of this chapter, *tṛṣṇā* is sometimes translated as *aiyu* 愛欲. In another passage from T210, *qingyu* translates *kāma* (T210:4.564a23; 抑制情欲, corresponding to *hitvā kāmān* [*Udānavarga* 16.14] / *hitvā kāmā* [*Dhammapada* 88]). *Qingyu* as a translation of *kāma* (sensual desire) also occurs in the *Liudu jijing* 六度集經 (T152:3.39a23–28), here in a rendering of the line “separated from desirable sense objects” (*vivekakāma*), from the canonical *dhyāna* formula.

⁶⁸ A very similar passage occurs in *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (T184:3.470c4–5), another early biography of the Buddha that shares a great deal with T185 but whose relationship to it is uncertain (see Nattier, 2008: 108–109).

In the full presentations of the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula that precede and follow this line, *tṛṣṇā* is translated as *ai* 愛, which shows up in the passage cited here as part of the word *tan'ai* 貪愛 (craving). In the context of *pratītyasamutpāda*, this passage therefore makes the noteworthy doctrinal point that the elimination of ignorance (*avidyā*), and in turn the elimination of suffering, depends on the elimination of craving (*tṛṣṇā*). At the same time, the passage pairs this injunction to eliminate craving with a second recommendation: to “eliminate the desires of instinctive emotion (*qingyu*).” The translator has thus presented the “desires of instinctive emotion” as a synonym for “craving” and, in this way, proposed an equivalence between *qing* and *tṛṣṇā*, the fundamental cause of suffering in the Buddhist context.

A passage from Zhi Qian’s translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* similarly presents the elimination of the instinctive emotions as something done by the Buddha’s most advanced disciples:

天下人民，聞佛道奧深妙法言，解本生死緣之事，斷情絕欲，皆得出要。第一精進得應真道，第二精進得不還道，第三精進得頻來道，第四精進得溝洫道。(Bannihuan jing 般泥洹經, T.6:1.179c14–18)

Those among the people of the world who hear the most profound teachings of the Buddha’s path come to understand the origin of birth and death, and by *cutting off instinctive emotion and severing desire* they all obtain release [from rebirth]: the first [class] by making pure progress attains the path of the arhat; the second that of the non-returner; the third that of the once-returner; and the fourth that of the stream-enterer.

Although here we cannot be sure of the specific Indic terminology, it is nonetheless clear that, once again, the Chinese notion of the instinctive emotions has been used to describe the fundamental defilements whose elimination is characteristic of enlightened beings.

4.2 *Qing* as the Sense Faculties

Alongside these examples where *qing* is aligned with important doctrinal terms that indicate the fundamental cause of suffering (such as *tṛṣṇā* or *kleśa*) are other textual examples presenting a category that would in the long run become of great importance: *liuqing* 六情 (the six instinctive emotions). In later Chinese Buddhist literature, this term typically refers either to the six sense faculties (*indriyas*) or the six faculty-object fields (*āyatana*s). By the

middle of the fourth century, this usage had become well established.⁶⁹ In the Han and Three Kingdoms periods, however, it was still rare.

Among Han-dynasty translations, I find only one case where *liuqing* has a definite connection to the sense organs:

目受色為衰，六情所受為衰。衰不止便苦生。(Zhong benqi jing 中本起經, T196:4.152a8–9)

When the eye receives visible forms, this becomes a source of decay; [in general], what is received by the six *qing* becomes a source of decay. When this source of decay is not ended, then suffering arises.

Shuai 衰 (source of decay) was a frequent translation of *āyatana* in Han-dynasty texts.⁷⁰ This would then seem to make “six *qing*” a designation of the six sense organs (either as the internal *āyatanas* or the *indriyas*), something that recalls the *Hanshi waizhuan* passage cited above in which the “six instinctive emotions” were aligned with a (slightly different) sixfold typology of the senses. The now specifically Buddhist usage of “six *qing*” to mean the six sense organs was, therefore, not entirely without precedent in Chinese literature.

In Three Kingdoms sources, there is one instance where a parallel Indic text confirms that *liuqing* translated *indriya*.⁷¹ And in other cases we can occasionally infer from the context that the intended referent was the six sense organs.⁷² But in many cases it is difficult to be certain because, as discussed above, the term *liuqing* is also known from pre-Buddhist Chinese literature in a meaning that is not directly connected to the sense faculties, namely, as a set of six emotions most typically given as liking, disliking, being happy about, being angry about, grieving over, and taking joy in. For this reason when we read in a Buddhist text that one “should not give free reign to the six *qing*” (不馳六情)⁷³ or that we should “close off the six *qing*”

⁶⁹ Xi Chao’s 郗超 *Feng fa yao* 奉法要 includes the term *liuqing*, in the meaning of the six *āyatanas*, as a key technical term (*Hongming ji* 弘明集, T2012:52.87a9–10).

⁷⁰ The other typical translation of *āyatana* in Han-dynasty translations was *ru* 入 (entrance). On *shuai* as a translation of *āyatana*, see Greene, 2016: 253.

⁷¹ See *Da mingdu jing* 大明度經, T225:8.495b23: 六情完(←雅)具 (The six *qing* are complete), corresponding to *paripūrṇāindriyaś ca bhavati nāparipūrṇendriyaḥ* (Vaidya, 1960: 166); here, 雅 must be an error for 完, perhaps based on a written form such as 牙. T224 reads 身體完具無瘡癰 (body complete and unimpaired); *Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經, T224:8.455b29–c1.

⁷² *Liudu jijing* 六度集經, T152:3.43a20–22.

⁷³ *Bannihuan jing* 般泥洹經, T6:1.177a8; I can find no parallel to this passage in other versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.

(閉六情),⁷⁴ there is no obvious way of determining if the translator or author intended this to refer to the Buddhist concept of the six sense organs (restraint of which is certainly a common injunction in Buddhist texts) or if, rather, “six *qing*” was a loose translation of a broad category such as *tr̥ṣṇā* or even some other, less technical expression referring to emotions such as happiness or anger.

In the long run *qing* did become a regular translation of *āyatana* in particular. This usage appears to have become solidified not in translated texts, but in Chinese-authored Buddhist texts from the Wu-kingdom period. In his preface to An Shigao’s 安世高 (fl. 148–170) *Anban shouyi jing* 安般守意經, Kang Senghui 康僧會 (d. 280) writes:

情有內外。眼耳鼻口身心，謂之內矣。色聲香味細滑邪念，謂之外也。經曰：諸海十二事。謂內外六情之受邪行，猶海受流。(Chusanzang jiji 出三藏記集, T2145:55.43a2–5)

The instinctive emotions (*qing*) have internal and external aspects. Eye, ear, nose, mouth, body, and mind are called the internal ones. Visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and perverse thoughts are called the external ones. A sutra says: “the twelve things of the oceans.” What this means is that the manner in which the internal and external instinctive emotions grasp perverted activity is similar to how the ocean receives the rivers [without ever reaching a limit].

Numbering the instinctive emotions as twelve and dividing them into internal and external categories associated with the six senses and their objects, Kang Senghui, there can be no doubt, here uses *qing* to denote *āyatana*.

This is notable because the word *qing* never appears as a translation of *āyatana* in the *Anban shouyi jing* itself, nor, in fact, in any of An Shigao’s known translations.⁷⁵ That *qing* was used to refer to *āyatana* primarily within texts authored in China (rather than in translations per se) can further be seen from the text that uses the word *qing* more than any other Han- or Three Kingdoms-period work: the *Yin chi ru jing zhu* 陰持入經註, a line-by-line commentary to An Shigao’s *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 (Scripture on the

⁷⁴ *Hongming ji* 弘明集, T2102:52.4c4 (*Mouzi li huo lun* 牟子理惑論).

⁷⁵ I refer here to the Kongōji 金剛寺 version of the *Anban shouyi jing* (Ochiai, 2004: 186–94), which is the original version, as Zacchetti, 2008, has demonstrated. The received *Anban shouyi jing*, which is largely an early commentary to the Kongōji version, in one instance uses “the six *qing*” to mean the *āyatanas* (T602:15.167c10–13).

Skandhas, *Dhātus*, and *Āyatanas*).⁷⁶ An Shigao's translation itself usually renders *āyatana* as *ru* 入 (entrance)—as seen in the title—but also sometimes uses *shuai* 衰 when speaking of the sense objects in particular. The commentary, however, systematically speaks of the “six *qing*”—the six “sensory-emotive faculties,” as we might translate—whenever the topic is the internal *āyatanas*, the sense organs. Remarking on a passage that defines *āyatana* (translated *ru* here in the root text) as “arriving from this” (從所致), the commentator thus notes that this explanation

譬六情從意所念致六欲也。入者，邪入于六情矣。
(T1694:33.11a16–17)

is an analogy for the way that the six sensory-emotive faculties (*liuqing*), following from what the will thinks upon,⁷⁷ arrive at the six desirable things [i.e., the six sense objects]. [We use the word] *entrances* because they concern the matter of defiled things *entering into* the six sensory-emotive faculties.

Or, later, when remarking on the *pratīyasamutpāda* formula, the commentator explains the root text line “from name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*) there is caused to be the six entrances (*ṣaḍ-āyatana*)” (從名字令有六入)⁷⁸ as follows:

由五陰受身，令六情生，而有六邪入。(T1694:33.13c10)

Following after one receives a body [upon rebirth and thereby acquires the totality of] the five dark elements (*skandhas*), there are caused to arise the six sensory-emotive faculties, and [there then also] come into being the six defiled things [the six sense objects], which enter [them].

Despite a few examples in translated texts, in Three Kingdoms sources the use of *qing* as a technical term meaning the Buddhist sense organs (in reference to either the six internal *āyatanas* or the six *indriyas*) was largely confined to Chinese-authored Buddhist commentaries. The *Yin chi ru jing*

⁷⁶ The *Yin chi ru jing zhu* is attributed only to a certain “Mr. Chen” (陳氏), about whom little is known, but the dating of the commentary to the time of the Wu kingdom is secure. See Zacchetti, 2010.

⁷⁷ Here 從意所念 (following from what the will thinks upon) seems to be a rephrasing of the 從所意念 (following what the mind thinks upon) from the immediately preceding phrase in the root text. The commentator's claim seems to be that sense perception somehow *follows* upon thinking (i.e., consciousness), which is quite interesting.

⁷⁸ Note here the unusual translation of *nāmarūpa* as *mingzi* 名字, rather than the more typical *mingse* 名色.

zhu commentary stands out as far and away the text in which this occurs most often. Yet by the end of the third century, this equivalence was established to the degree that it was used regularly in translations as well. In the *Fangguang jing* 放光經, translated in the year 291 (where we find, as I noted above, the earliest example of *zixing* as a translation of *svabhāva*), *qing* is the usual translation of *āyatana* and is paired with *yin* for *skandha* and *xing* for *dhātu*.⁷⁹

As concerns the broader questions raised in this essay, this growing use of *qing* to translate (or gloss other translations of) the word *āyatana* is significant because within formal Buddhist doctrine the *āyatanas* are a complete description of all of the components of a human being.⁸⁰ In other words, just as was the case when *xing* translated *skandha* in the context of the five *skandhas*, the translation of *āyatana* as *qing* is another example in which a central concept from the pre-Buddhist Chinese discourse on human nature—the “instinctive emotions”—was taken up by early Chinese translators and commentators as a way to make sense of a category from Buddhist thought that also purported to be a typology of all of the essential elements of a human being.

4.3 *Qing* as *Dhātu*

In addition to the five *skandhas* and six (or twelve) *āyatanas*, Buddhist doctrine typically proposes a third category that encompasses the totality of human existence: the eighteen *dhātus*. Notably, though again seemingly unnoticed by modern reference works, *qing* is also attested as a translation of *dhātu* in this context.

The earliest example of this occurs in the *Fajing jing* 法鏡經 (*Ugraparipṛcchā-sūtra*), translated in the late second century.⁸¹ Although this portion of the sutra is not preserved in Sanskrit, from the context and the later Chinese and Tibetan translations we can be certain of the underlying terminology:

復有四淨戒事。何謂四。一曰已可諸陰為幻法。二曰以可諸情為法情。三曰以可諸人為虛聚。四曰不隨方俗之儀式。(T322:12.22a1–3)

⁷⁹ See for example *Fangguang bore jing* 放光般若經, T221:8.17c12.

⁸⁰ In mature Abhidharma works, categories such as the *āyatanas*, *skandhas*, and *dhātus* are also claimed to encompass *all* phenomena, not just human beings.

⁸¹ Nattier, 2008: 90–92. I find no examples of *qing* used in this meaning in any text translated by An Shigao or Lokakṣema.

Further, there are four matters associated with purity of the precepts. What are the four? First, being able to take all dark elements (*skandha*) as illusory things. Second, taking all *qing* (*dhātu*) as the *dharmā-qing* (*dharmadhātu*). Third, taking all the entrances (*āyatana*) as an empty village.⁸² Fourth, not following along with worldly customs.⁸³

Among other things, this passage presents the classic triad *skandha*, *dhātu*, and *āyatana*, with *qing* evidently the translation of *dhātu*. Also notable here is the curious expression *faqing* 法情, which appears to be one of the earliest attested Chinese translations of the word *dharmadhātu*.⁸⁴

Because one of the basic meanings of *dhātu* is “element,” we might well suspect that the motivation for translating *dhātu* as *qing* was the latter word’s meaning of “fact” or “reality” more so than its meaning of “instinctive emotion.” While this may be true to some extent, we cannot ignore that the framework of the eighteen *dhātus*—which is at issue when the *dhātus* are discussed together with the *skandhas* and *āyatanas*—is one in which the “elements” of a human being are discussed specifically in terms of the components of sense perception.⁸⁵ The use of *qing* to translate *dhātu* is, from this perspective, quite similar to its use, discussed above, as a translation of *āyatana*. In both cases, at least a large part of what inspired the translation must have been the connection between *qing* and the idea of the instinctive emotions understood as the fundamental or instinctive human responses to the different modalities of sense perception.

The rendering of *dhātu* as *qing* was taken up by translators during the Three Kingdoms period.⁸⁶ In the *Faju jing* 法句經 (T210), this can be confirmed in one passage by comparison with the parallel verse preserved in

⁸² That the six internal *āyatanas* are to be likened to an “empty village” (P. *suñño gāmo*) is an old canonical simile conveying the idea of non-self; see *Saṃyutta-nikāya*: 4.174–75.

⁸³ For the parallel passages, see Nattier, 2003: 311. A similar passage occurs earlier in the text at T322:12.21a19–21 (Nattier, 2003: 303).

⁸⁴ Paul Harrison has also noted a few places in the translations of Lokakṣema where *dharmadhātu* may appear as *fashen* 法身 “dharma body” (Harrison, 1992: 64–65). I wish to thank Fujii Jun 藤井 淳 for this reference.

⁸⁵ The eighteen *dhātus* are the six sense organs, the six sense objects, and the six kinds of associated consciousness (*viññāna*).

⁸⁶ In addition to the two passages discussed in detail here, note also *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (T185:3.478c2), where the word *qingtai* 情態 seems to be used to translate *dhātu* within the context of the expression *nānā-dhātu-jñāna-bala* in a list of the Buddha’s ten powers (*bala*). I thank Fujii Jun for bringing this passage to my attention.

the *Udānavarga*.⁸⁷ Even more interesting, however, is a further passage in this text with no Indic parallels but where, again, the context is enough for us to be certain that the word *qing* here translates *dhātu*:

是身為死物，精神無形法，假令死復生，罪福不敗亡。終始非一世，從癡愛久長。自此受苦樂，身死神不喪。身四大為色，識四陰曰名。其情十八種，所緣起十二。(T210:4.574a12–17)

This body is a dying thing; / the subtle spirit is a nonmaterial entity. / When it dies, one is then reborn / but sin and merit are not lost. / Birth and death are not matters of [only] one lifetime; / owing to ignorance and craving [one is reborn] for a long time.

From these one experiences suffering and joy [in rebirth]; / upon the death of the body the spirit does not die. / The body, comprised of the four great elements, is called “form”; / consciousness, comprised of the four dark elements [i.e., the four non-material *skandhas*], is called “name.” / Its *qing* has eighteen elements; / its dependent arisings are twelvefold.

Much about this passage is a bit uncertain. But even so it is clear that in the final stanzas we have an explanation of several key doctrinal categories: the five *skandhas*, divided in the usual manner into the two broad categories of material (“form”) and immaterial (“name”); the eighteen “elements,” which can only refer to the eighteen *dhātus* and for which *qing* is seemingly the collective name; and then a category of twelve, which is most likely the twelve links (*aṅga*) of *pratītyasamutpāda*.⁸⁸

In addition to being another example where *qing* translated *dhātu* in the context of the eighteen *dhātus*, this passage is also worthy of attention for its broader context. The first stanzas cited here speak of the “spirit” (*shen* 神), which, it is said, transmigrates beyond a single lifetime such that “the spirit does not die” (*shen bu sang* 神不喪). This is one of the earliest examples in Chinese Buddhist literature of a famous slogan that is more often given in the

⁸⁷ See 非一情以解 (T210:4.569b26–27), corresponding to *Udānavarga* 12.14, *anekadhātupratisamvidhāya* = *an* (非) *eka* (一) *dhātu* (情) *prati* (以) *samvidhāya* (解). Here and below, for identifying parallel versions I have relied on the tables in Mizuno, 1981.

⁸⁸ Although given how often they occur in sequence we might expect the three named categories to be *skandha*, *dhātu*, and *āyatana*, it is difficult to make the phrase *suo yuan qi* 所緣起 mean *āyatana*. Interestingly, in the commentary to scroll 1 of the *Da mingdu jing* 大度經, there is a passage that groups together, as a unit, the categories *skandha*, *āyatana*, and *pratītyasamutpāda* (於佛經法，不見五陰、六衰、十二緣起有，菩薩也; *Da ming du jing* 大度經, T225:8.478c12). Although here the middle category is *āyatana* rather than *dhātu*, this is a vaguely similar (and unusual) typology.

nearly identical form *shen bu mie* 神不滅 (“the spirit does not perish”). This saying, in the early medieval period, was often held up as an expression of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. Many modern scholars, however, have seen it as evidence that the earliest Chinese Buddhists misunderstood the idea of rebirth as implying the existence of a “soul” that transmigrates.⁸⁹ Although we cannot draw any concrete connections between this passage and those later debates, it is nevertheless interesting that *qing* was here used as a translation of the important category of the eighteen *dhātus* at the same moment when the translator was formulating, or at least invoking, a way of discussing rebirth and transmigration that many scholars have seen as a distant precursor to the monistic, consciousness-centered Chinese ideas about Buddha-nature that later became typical.⁹⁰

There is one final context in Three Kingdoms sources where *qing* can be shown to have translated *dhātu*: the well-known canonical formula concerning the “element of *nirvāṇa*” (*nirvāṇa-dhātu*). Several examples of this are seen in Zhi Qian’s *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*:

佛言。阿難，有二因緣佛色發明。何等二。謂初夜得佛無上正真之道妙正覺時，及至終夜棄所受餘無為之情取滅度時。(Bannihuan *jing* 般泥洹經, T6:1.184a21–26)

The Buddha said: “Ānanda, there are two situations in which the Buddha’s face glows. What are the two? At the time when, on the first night, he obtains Buddhahood, the unsurpassed true path of sublime correct awakening, and also at the time when, on the last night, he abandons the excess he has received and, through the *qing* of non-doing, takes hold of extinction.”

The last line here is difficult to understand until we realize that it is a calque of a stock phrase: *anupadhiṣeṣe* (棄所受餘)⁹¹ *nirvāṇa-dhātau* (無為之情) *parinirvāsyate* (取滅度), that is, “attained *nirvāṇa* in the element of *nirvāṇa* without remainder.”⁹² Leaving aside how this curious phrase would have

⁸⁹ See for example Park, 2008.

⁹⁰ See in particular Radich, 2014 and 2016b.

⁹¹ *Qi* 棄 (abandons) to translate the negative prefix *an-* suggests that the translator has taken *anupadhiṣeṣe* to mean not just “without remainder,” but “in which what remains has been eliminated.” This is quite curious. Speculatively, I wonder if this was part of an attempt by the translator to interpret this expression as a so-called non-implicative negation (*prasajya-pratiṣedha*), that is to say a negation that does not affirm anything positive about the negative state, rather than a so-called implicative negation (*paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*), which would.

⁹² The cited passage corresponds to the Indic texts in Waldschmidt, 1950–51, sections 28.56–59. This expression occurs throughout the Sanskrit text (the form of the final

been understood by a Chinese reader, we can note that “the element of *nirvāṇa*” (*nirvāṇa-dhātu*) has been translated, quite pleasingly it seems to me, as *wu wei zhi qing* 無為之情 (the *qing* of non-action), an expression that would readily have conveyed the idea of a perfected human being by linking the well-worn Chinese idea of “non-action” to the concept of “instinctive emotion” that was of such importance in late Han debates about human nature.

5 Conclusion

As we have seen, during the Han and Three Kingdoms periods, and particularly the latter, key vocabulary associated with long-standing Chinese philosophical debates about human nature—specifically the terms *xing* and *qing*—were taken up by Buddhist translators and commentators as Chinese equivalents to various fundamental Buddhist doctrinal categories. Prominent among these were the terms *skandha*, *dhātu*, and *āyatana*, each of which, in Buddhist thought, also provides a complete description of the elements that fully comprise a human being. The term *qing* was furthermore used, in both translations and native Chinese writings, as an equivalent for important terms such as *trṣṇā* or *kleśa* characterizing the problematic aspects of human existence that those seeking perfection must eliminate, chiefly “desire” in a broad sense.

At the most basic level, this shows us that engagement with at least some aspects of the indigenous Chinese philosophical debates about human nature began in the very earliest moments of Chinese Buddhism. The making of these kinds of connections was, in those early days, still only occasional. And in the long run, it came to be best represented not by any of these early examples, but by the famous notion of the “Buddha-nature” (*foxing*), introduced in the early fifth century. Nevertheless, it is now evident that long before this at least some translators had been attempting to forge connections

verb differs), though it is rarely complete and often must be reconstructed from parallel passages; see for example Waldschmidt’s sections 16.11–12, 17.20–22, 23.2, and 28.58. In T6, see also 184b6, 188b1, and 188c5. This formula is found throughout the Pāli canon in reference to the *parinirvāṇa* of both the Buddha and also arhats. An earlier translation of the same stock phrase can be found in T224 (*Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經), where *nirvāṇa-dhātu* is translated as 泥洹界. Interestingly, in T225 (*Da mingdu jing*), Zhi Qian’s revision of T224, 泥洹界 is rewritten as 滅度處 (486a24), quite different from the 無為之情 seen in T6.

between this domain of Chinese thought and the conceptual world of Indian Buddhist doctrine.

What seems most significant about this from a broader perspective is that even in these very early attempts we see a relatively sophisticated engagement with the Chinese philosophical and intellectual tradition as well as with Buddhist doctrine. The use of *qing* to translate terms such as *āyatana* and *dhātu*, for example, was quite ingenious. Although this was not a strictly literal translation and arguably imposed onto these two terms the idea of “emotion,” as a matter of interpretation and commentary—as we might think of it—this rendering was intellectually coherent. It organically connected the question of problematic desire to the question of sensory perception in a way that is consonant with basic Buddhist thought (in which, for example, desire is frequently classified in terms of the desires for each of the sense objects, or where, as in the *pratīyasamutpāda* formula, the arising of *trṣṇā* proceeds from the immediately prior arising of sensation associated with sense contact). It then allowed, moreover, easy parallels to be drawn by any Chinese reader to the then-contemporary Chinese discourse on human perfection and sagehood, in which many voices argued that the ideal human being was one who lacked all “instinctive emotion,” a term whose basic meaning (as in the *Shuowen jiezi*, discussed above) was, similarly, “craving” (*tan*).⁹³

Modern scholars have often painted the earliest era of Chinese Buddhist translation (the Han and Three Kingdoms periods) as one in which translators produced works that were either excessively foreign and hence largely incomprehensible or, alternatively, plagued by hastily drawn and misleading equivalences between Buddhist concepts and native Chinese thought (so-called *geyi* 格義, or matching meanings). The early Chinese Buddhist use of the vocabulary *xing* and *qing*, however, suggests that in many cases even the very first translators were working in a more sophisticated, subtle, and intellectually productive fashion. Though the traces of this work are often difficult to find, only through this kind of careful study can we hope to illuminate the full scope of the earliest history of the Chinese Buddhist translation project.

⁹³ Surprisingly, and quite wrongly I think, some modern scholars have proposed that the Buddhist emphasis on eliminating desire would have been seen as something utterly novel by the earliest Chinese audience. Kenneth Ch'en for instance writes, “As for the cultivation of the way, the Han Buddhists emphasized the suppression of the passions. . . . This Buddhist teaching of suppressing the passions was something new to the Chinese and not found in Taoist practice” (Ch'en, 1964: 47).

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Dharma-Realm as a Modern Concept: The Case of Taixu¹

Jakub Zamorski

1 Introduction

As discussed elsewhere in this volume, the concept “*dharma-realm*” (*dharmadhātu*; *fajie* 法界) has a rather complex history of interpretations that involves some of the knottiest issues of Buddhist philosophy and philology. This history begins with the early discussions of *dharmadhātu* in the ancient Indian texts that were subsequently translated into Chinese. It was carried forward by the Chinese scholiasts who developed a new “Sinified” doctrinal discourse about *fajie*. The most recent, and perhaps the least understood, stage of this process began in the Republican period (1911–49), which is routinely described as the “modern” phase in the history of Chinese Buddhism. On the pages of *Haichaoyin* 海潮音, one of the most innovative and influential Buddhist periodicals of those decades, one can see numerous references to the activities of the “*Dharma-Realm Seminary*” (*Fajie xueyuan* 法界學院), the “*Dharma-Realm New Lotus Society*” (*Fajie xin lianshe* 法界新蓮社), and other such organizations. These examples suggest that the idea of *dharma-realm* resonated even beyond narrowly understood doctrinal and textual studies. At the same time, we also find in *Haichaoyin* appearances of the concept in the context of elaborate theoretical discussions.

This modern phase in the history of interpreting *dharma-realm* in China provokes its own set of questions and problems. The *Haichaoyin* authors are routinely portrayed as Buddhist modernists who were engaged in reviving, reforming, or even revolutionizing their tradition by adapting Buddhist doctrines to suit increasingly large, diverse, and westernized lay audiences. Why ancient and notoriously intricate concepts such as *dharma-realm* attracted the attention of such people is a topic that merits closer investigation. Were the Chinese authors writing about *dharma-realm(s)* in the 1920–30s simply elaborating de rigueur on a topic that they had inherited from the

¹ The author would like to thank Ishii Kōsei 石井公成, Robert F. Rhodes, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

scholiasts of late imperial China? Or did they find this concept relevant in the context of their modernist agendas? How did they resolve the numerous ambiguities inherent in the concept of *dharmadhātu* (and its Sinitic counterpart *fajie*), including those discussed in the present volume? Were they merely navigating between its traditional understandings, or did they come up with some new interpretations? In what sense, if at all, were those new interpretations “modern”?

This chapter does not purport to answer all of these questions in detail. Its aim is to provide a starting point for such discussions by examining how contemporary discourse on the *dharm*-realm unfolded in the writings of Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), who was the chief editor of *Haichaoyin* and who has been considered the intellectual leader of many Chinese Buddhist reformists. By bringing this Chinese monk under discussion, I aim here to make a twofold contribution to the present volume. First, as will be shown below, Taixu’s discussions of the *dharm*-realm recapitulated, quite systematically, the various understandings of this concept that had been proposed by premodern authors. For this reason they demonstrate clearly how the philosophical and philological issues taken up elsewhere were approached from a more confessional perspective by doctrinally educated Chinese Buddhists. Second, in Taixu’s writings one can see how traditional Sinitic notions of *dharm*-realm became creatively grafted onto a new “epistemic space” (Hammerstrom, 2016) defined by concepts that in his time had been introduced to Chinese vocabulary only recently—concepts such as “religion,” “philosophy,” and “science.” By calling attention to this phenomenon, this case study of Taixu may inspire a reconsideration of the idea of *dharm*-realm, not only as a perennial problem of Sinitic Buddhist scholastics but also as an important but overlooked term in the intellectual history of modern China.

2 Who Was Taixu—and Why Taixu Again?

By focusing on Taixu as a representative Buddhist thinker of the Republican period, the present study continues a long-standing, yet somewhat problematic, scholarly tradition. While the abundance of contemporary scholarship on Taixu makes him appear as a truly towering figure in the

history of modern Chinese Buddhism,² this impression does not necessarily reflect the widespread view of his contemporaries. In his own day Taixu became known—but not universally appreciated—as an activist monk who argued for a sweeping reformation, or “revolution,” of traditional Chinese Buddhism. This revolution was conceived as a form of shock therapy aimed at saving Buddhism from its own alleged vices. It was supposed to bridge the gap that divided monastic institutions from the rapidly modernizing Chinese society, to revamp the popular image of Chinese Buddhism, and to remake this allegedly moribund tradition—supposedly threatened with extinction together with China’s imperial past—into a living social and intellectual force indispensable to the new Republican China. To be sure, Taixu’s project had a practical and activist dimension; it involved a (never-realized) proposal to reform monastic structures as well as the founding of (usually short-lived) organizations and educational institutions. At the same time, his reformist postulates were developed against the background of his constantly evolving interpretations of canonical Buddhist doctrines, which he presented in numerous lectures and essays—many of them published in his own *Haichaoyin* journal.³

Taixu’s writings reveal a considerable breadth of interests and an eclectic erudition that mirrors his complex intellectual biography.⁴ Chief among their subject matter are the traditional Sinitic Buddhist doctrines, which he began to study as a young monk and on which he based his own exposition of Buddhism aimed at modern audiences. These (often scholastically complex) discussions of Buddhist teachings are interspersed with fairly bold detours into a range of other subjects, including wholly contemporary philosophical, scientific, and political ideas that Taixu acquired through his voracious reading as a self-taught intellectual. Taixu’s preeminence in the present-day academic discourse on Republican Chinese Buddhism does not, however, reflect the reputation generally accorded him as a thinker during his lifetime, which was limited mostly to his own circle of followers.⁵ It owes more to the

² For introductory studies on Taixu’s life and career, see for example Welch, 1968: 51–71; Pittman, 2001; and Hong, 1999. For a general study of Taixu’s thought, see Guo, 1996 and 1997.

³ On Taixu and *Haichaoyin*, see Hou, 2018: 49–73.

⁴ On Taixu’s educational background and his manifold intellectual inspirations, see his autobiography (Taixu, 1986) and Jiang, 1993. See also Hong, 1999: 21–93.

⁵ This reputation was more universally acknowledged during Taixu’s trip to Europe and the United States in 1927–28, when he was asked to deliver (to a mixed reception)

positive reception that *some* of his ideas had among the more contemporary Buddhist modernists. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, Taixu's efforts to redirect Chinese Buddhism toward human life (*rensheng* 人生) and the human world (*renjian* 人間) proved particularly inspiring for the authors and movements that advocated more socially oriented interpretations of traditional doctrines.⁶ Yet another factor that contributed to raising Taixu's profile among academics is the prevalent scholarly narrative that portrays the modern history of Chinese Buddhism as a story of response to the West and/or modernity.⁷ From such a perspective, Taixu obviously stands out as both the most systematic and the most influential Republican-period author to have applied a Buddhist mindset to quintessentially modern topics—the relationship between religion and science, the premises underlying social activism, the notions of evolution and progress, the politics of a modern nation-state, and so on.

In some of the more recent studies, this “Taixu paradigm” (Travagnin, 2017a: 226) has been challenged on two major accounts. On the one hand, new scholarship has tended to undermine the “Taixu-centric” vision of Republican-period Buddhism by revealing the contested position of Taixu and highlighting previously overlooked alternative networks and actors (Gong and Lai, 2014). On the other hand, this scholarship complicates Taixu's stereotypical image as a modernizer and reformist. Successive studies on Taixu's Buddhist thought have revealed a fairly complex mix of modern and traditional inspirations in which the modern factor did not necessarily gain the upper hand.⁸ It has also been noted that Taixu rejected

public lectures on issues such as relations between Buddhism and science (Welch, 1968: 59–62).

⁶ The best-known example of Taixu's impact on contemporary Sinophone Buddhism is the movement known as *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教, or Humanistic Buddhism (Li, 2000; Yang, 2006: 67–148; Travagnin, 2017b). Also influential has been the notion of “Pure Land in the Human Realm” (Jones, 2021). While these currents are now associated mostly with Taiwanese Buddhism, Taixu's authority has also been invoked by the theorists of “life Chan” (*shenghuo Chan* 生活禪) in China (Huang, 2016: 601–602) and “engaged Buddhism” in Vietnam (De Vido 2009), among others.

⁷ As noted by Scott Pacey (Pacey, 2014: 150), Taixu effectively equated the idea of modernity with developments in the contemporary Western world. At the same time, as a Buddhist apologist he also “responded” to Christian theology (Pittman, 1993; Long, 2000; Yao and Gombrich, 2019) and to ancient philosophy (Guo, 1997: 426–36). Additionally, he was involved in the study of classical Chinese thought and Neo-Confucianism (Guo, 1997: 359–98; Ding, 2021: 377–425).

⁸ For discussions of traditional and modern elements in Taixu's thought, see for example Jiang, 1993: 51–52; Hong, 1999; Yang, 2006: 68–76; and Ritzinger, 2017.

critical historical methodologies for studying Buddhist texts that had been developed by Western and Japanese scholars and continued to approach the canonical scriptures in a mostly confessional and traditional way (Chen and Gong, 2019: 66–70). In contrast to certain other famous Buddhist modernists, he was not willing to scrutinize the developments that Indian doctrines had undergone in China and staunchly defended the doctrinal legacy of Sinitic Buddhism—such as the apocryphal treatise the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*—against its modern detractors (Ding, 2021: 252–335; Jorgensen, 2021).

As a case study centered on the issue of *dharma*-realm, this chapter may contribute some further insights to an increasingly nuanced picture of Taixu’s response to modernity. The study approaches Taixu in his most traditional role—namely, that of a learned monk who interpreted the meaning of canonical texts for both lay and monastic audiences. It goes without saying that Taixu performed this traditional role of an exegete in a vastly changed intellectual landscape; his reading of traditional texts reflects the appearance of new concepts and a new system of values, some of which he personally shared. However, as will be argued below, he was greatly concerned with *reproducing* the authority of canonical texts and traditional patterns of understanding. In fact, he relied on those very patterns in formulating his own highly assertive response to modernity, which involved understanding science and philosophy in Buddhist terms. It is only in those cases where traditional readings resisted such an understanding that Taixu’s modern fascinations impacted his interpretation of traditional concepts rather than the other way round.

3 Taixu’s Understanding of *Dharma*-Realm: Preliminary Considerations

In the vast corpus of Taixu’s published works the word *fajie* appears in a number of different meanings and contexts. Generally speaking, these differences reflect the multiple meanings that the concept “*dharma*-realm” already had in the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts and in premodern Sinitic Buddhist literature. For example, Taixu occasionally mentions *dharma*-realm as an item on the fivefold list of realms of Tathāgata from the

Samdhinirmocanasūtra.⁹ In other, much more numerous, cases he discusses *dharma*-realm as an independent category, following the usage entrenched in Sinitic Buddhist scholasticism. Most importantly, he adduces the Huayan concept of the four *dharma*-realms, which comprise the *dharma*-realms of phenomena (*shi* 事), principle (*li* 理), the non-obstruction between phenomena and principle (*lishi wu'ai* 理事無礙), and the non-obstruction between phenomena (*shishi wu'ai* 事事無礙). From the Tiantai tradition he adduces the idea of the ten *dharma*-realms, which correspond to the six paths of transmigration and the four stages of attainment on the Buddhist path.¹⁰ These uses need to be distinguished from those instances where the term *fajie* can be construed as a singular noun referring to the *dharma*-realm—in some cases, qualified as the “One True *dharma*-realm” (*yi zhen fajie* 一真法界) or “the *dharma*-realm of Suchness” (*zhenru fajie* 真如法界).

Much of the theorizing by Taixu on *dharma*-realms that will be discussed below revolves around the ambiguity of the whole concept. In some cases Taixu assumes the attitude of an analytical scholiast who enumerates the multiple understandings of the Chinese term *fajie* and explains their etymologies, typically by providing glosses on the term “realm” (*jie*). However, the approach that appears overall more characteristic of Taixu is that of a synthetic philosopher. In this capacity, he is looking for a common denominator among the seemingly disparate definitions of *dharma*-realm and trying to work out the definitive understanding of this concept. In this synthesis the pivotal role is assigned to the concept of the singular *dharma*-realm, which encompasses the totality of objects covered by all Buddhist doctrines. Whereas the four *dharma*-realms of Huayan and the ten *dharma*-realms of Tiantai continue to appear in Taixu’s writings, his interpretation of these categories appears to be ultimately derived from his more general understanding of the idea of *dharma*-realm as such.

Even though Taixu clearly sought to integrate the divergent interpretations of the *dharma*-realm into a larger theory, his exposition of the concept itself was never truly systematic. Where the word in question

⁹ In this interpretation, *dharma*-realm refers to “*skandhas* and other *dharma*s that provide support for the realms of sentient beings and container-worlds” (蘊等法為有情器界所依; *Jieshenmijing rulai chengsuozuoshi pin jianglu* 解深密經如來成所作事品講錄 [1937], TDQS 14: 26). In the quotes throughout this chapter from the *Taixu dashi quanshu* (TDQS) compilation, the first number refers to the volume (*ce* 冊) and the second number to the page.

¹⁰ These are also divided into “phenomenal” and “principle” realms, the latter term referring to the perfected realm of the buddhas. See also Yang, 2006: 91.

appears in his writings in quotes or paraphrases from canonical texts, it is sometimes left unexplained—its understanding on the part of the reader seemingly assumed. When the explanation is provided, it often comes in the form of short glosses, or succinct elaborations, that allude to other works of Taixu or the Buddhist canon. The official corpus of Taixu’s published works contains only two brief essays that are devoted primarily to explicating the notion of *dharma*-realm: *Fajie lun* 法界論 (On *Dharma*-Realms, Taixu 1920; TDQS 30: 2718–25) and *San chong fajie guan* 三重法界觀 (The Threefold Contemplation of *Dharma*-Realms; Taixu 1922, TDQS 18: 1385–95). Both of these texts represent a relatively early phase of Taixu’s thought and are not counted among his most influential works. In fact, some of the points they raise appear to have been sidelined, if not abandoned, in his later writings. On the other hand, these two texts introduce several important motifs that appear crucial for understanding Taixu’s mature discourse on the notion of *dharma*-realm. For this reason, they deserve to be given more extensive treatment.

4 Taixu’s Definitions of *Dharma*-Realm

4.1 On *Dharma*-Realms (*Fajie lun*)

Fajie lun was written in 1916 on the holy island of Putuoshan—the place where Taixu underwent his three-year monastic confinement (*biguan* 閉關) devoted to practice and also to reading (Taixu, 1986: 44–54); the essay appeared in *Haichaoyin* in December 1920. This terse text is written in an authoritative and somewhat abstruse style that (as in the case of many other publications by Taixu) resembles lecture notes. It presents statements rather than arguments and makes heavy use of scholastic vocabulary that is unaccompanied by layman-friendly glosses or explanations. This dense rhetoric is already apparent in the first section—“Shiming” 釋名 (Explanation of the Name)—where Taixu analyzes the meaning of the two parts of the Chinese compound *fajie* and their mutual relation. With regard to the component *fa* (*dharma*), he adopts the definition found in the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論, the Sinitic compendium of Consciousness-only (Yogācāra) thought. This text explicates *dharma* with the help of two Chinese words that may be tentatively translated as “pattern” and

“support.”¹¹ Taixu unpacks his cryptic definition with some formulas that are also adapted from Tang-period Sinitic scholastics. Namely, he defines *dharma* as a pattern that regulates, or produces,¹² an understanding (*guifan wujie* 軌範物解) of something and as a support for an entity’s nature and characteristics (*renchi xingxiang* 任持性相)—in other words, as a factor that makes it possible to continuously discern one entity from another. Furthermore, Taixu relates *dharma* in the sense of “pattern” to *dharma* in the sense of “teachings” (*fajiao* 法教), and he relates *dharma* in the sense of “support” to *dharma* in the sense of “principles” (*fali* 法理). He also mentions the “*dharma* in itself” (*fa zixing* 法自性), defined as the never-changing “*dharma*-seal of the *dharma*-realm,” which encompasses both senses of the term. As Taixu makes clear, this threefold classification is inspired by his reading of a fragment from an apocryphal text called *Dazong dixuan wenben lun* 大宗地玄文本論.¹³ In addition to these three specific meanings of *dharma*, Taixu also recognizes the more general understanding of this concept as referring to all entities of various ontological status:

In sum, the Sanskrit word *da'ermo* is a comprehensive appellation for the attributes of things, for concrete phenomena, for principles. Just say the word *dharma*, and everything is included.

要之、梵語之達爾摩，乃是物德事理都名，但舉曰法，攝一切盡。
(TDQS 30: 2718)

The word *dharma* having such a broad meaning, the precise understanding of the compound “*dharma*-realm” hinges on the interpretation of its second member—the term “realm.” This term is glossed by Taixu in a fourfold way: as a causal seed (*yin zhong* 因種), as an affiliation (*zulei* 族類),¹⁴ as a differentiating principle (*fenli* 分理), and as the Ultimate (*benji* 本際):

¹¹ 法者軌持 (TDQS 30: 2718; for the original quote, cf. T1585:31.1a24). All quotes from the Taishō canon refer to the electronic version published by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA), 2022 Q.4, and found at <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/>.

¹² The more typical formula used in traditional scholarship and Taixu’s own writings is *guisheng wujie* 軌生物解.

¹³ TDQS 30: 2718. For the original text of *Dazong dixuan wenben lun*, see T1669:32.669b9–13. The influence of this text on Taixu’s mentor Yang Renshan 楊仁山 (Yang Wenhui 楊文會; 1837–1911) and on Taixu himself is discussed by Ishii Kōsei (Ishii, 2020).

¹⁴ A historical precedent for these definitions can be seen for example in *Dabore boluomiduo jing bore liqufen shuzan* 大般若波羅蜜多經般若理趣分述讚, by Xuanzang’s disciple Kuiji 窺基 (632–682); see T1695:33.42b15.

With regard to causal seeds, one can speak of a realm that is pure or defiled; with regard to affiliations, one can speak of the realm of holy persons or ordinary worldlings; with regard to differentiating principles, one speaks of the four *dharma*-realms (of Huayan); with regard to the Ultimate, one speaks of the true *dharma*-realm.

依因種故，說染淨界；依族類故，說聖凡界；依分理故，說四法界；依本際故，說真法界。(TDQS 30: 2718)

With regard to the mutual relation between the two parts of the compound *fajie*, Taixu has the following to say:

When these two words are taken together [as a compound], a *dharma* is an individual characteristic, such as individual man; a realm is a common characteristic, such as mankind. The connection of *dharma* and realm resembles how an individual man is an individual that belongs to mankind and mankind is a kind to which an individual man belongs. . . . “The realm of a *dharma*” is a “master-dependent” compound (*tat-puruṣa*); “a *dharma* is the realm” is an “activity-bearing” compound (*karma-dhāraya*); “a *dharma* that has realm” is a “property-possessing” compound (*bahuvrīhi*); “a realm that has *dharma*” is also a property-possessing compound.¹⁵ The term “*dharma*-realm” covers all these three interpretations [with respect to the compound structure].

合而論之，法者自相，比若個人；界者共相，比若人類。法界一致，猶個人是人類之個人，人類是個人之類也 (...) 是法之界，依主釋也。法即是界，持業釋也。有界之法，有財釋也，有法之界，亦有財釋。法界一言，通此三釋。(TDQS 30: 2719)

While Taixu’s etymological musings are only moderately helpful in understanding the Indian origins of the concept, they are nonetheless quite revealing in terms of his approach to the philology of Buddhist texts. His definitions draw profusely on the legacy of Abhidharma- and Yogācāra-laden scholasticism of the Tang dynasty, which enjoyed high prestige among the educated laypeople and progressive monks of the Republican period. His understanding of these categories may, arguably, reflect some more contemporary Western inspirations.¹⁶ These are also visible in his modernized transcription of the Sanskrit word *dharma* as *da’ermo* 達爾摩,

¹⁵ Translations of the Chinese terms follow Teng, 2014: 178–80.

¹⁶ The word *wude* 物德, translated above as “attributes of things,” appears in Taixu’s writings as a technical term used by John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Cf. *Lun Yan yi* 論嚴譯 (1915), TDQS 50: 205.

which he elsewhere assumes to reflect its English pronunciation.¹⁷ At the same time, Taixu explicates the meaning of this Sanskrit word largely on the basis of a premodern Chinese apocryphal text, while his analysis of Sanskrit compounds follows the traditional Sinitic classification of “six compounds” (*liu he shi* 六合釋; Teng, 2014)¹⁸ rather than the philological methods of modern Buddhologists. In this sense, Taixu’s approach to *dharma*-realm as a *term* appears thoroughly traditional, not only with respect to textual sources and inspirations but also with respect to vocabulary and methods of interpretation.

Following a concise explanation of the term *dharmadhātu*, in the second and more elaborate section of the essay Taixu attempts a fuller exegesis of its meaning (*chu yi* 出義). This section does not explicitly quote any canonical sources and may perhaps be construed as an outline of Taixu’s own understanding of the doctrinal import of the notion of *dharma*-realm. This understanding is fleshed out in terms of the following *dharma*-realms, which he organizes in pairs:

- (1) Posited vs. unposited
- (2) Endowed with vs. not endowed with self-nature(s)
- (3) Dependently originated vs. non-dependently originated
- (4) Retributive vs. non-retributive
- (5) Defiled vs. undefiled
- (6) Having form vs. formless
- (7) Karmically propelling vs. karmically non-propelling
- (8) Affording pristine recompense vs. affording non-pristine recompense
- (9) Wholesome vs. unwholesome
- (10) Transient vs. intransient
- (11) Endowed with qualities vs. not endowed with qualities
- (12) Ultimate vs. not ultimate¹⁹

¹⁷ In contrast to the traditional transcription *damo* 達摩. Cf. *Fofaseng yi guang lun* 佛法僧義廣論 (1936), TDQS 1: 295–96.

¹⁸ For Taixu’s own explanations of these, see *Liulihe cili shiyi* 六離合辭例釋義 (1918), TDQS 45: 1489–96.

¹⁹ 一、安立諦非安立諦，二、自性性無自性性，三、緣起非緣起，四、業報非業報，五、漏無漏，六、色無色，七、動業不動業，八、純報不純報，九、善趣

The “posited” *dharma*-realm is defined as being expressible in words and cognizable, either by means of direct cognition or by intellectual analysis. The unposited *dharma*-realm, on the other hand, is not even explicitly defined. It is only symbolically expressed as a series of five circles resembling a Chinese ellipsis—most likely an indication of its fundamental ineffability (TDQS 30: 2725; Guo, 1997: 178–79). The “affirmative” (not negated) halves of the remaining eleven pairs are all subdivisions of the posited *dharma*-realm. More precisely, each subsequent positive *dharma*-realm is a subdivision of the one from the preceding level. For example, the posited *dharma*-realm is analyzed into *dharma*-realms that are endowed with and not endowed with self-nature(s). And in turn, the self-natured *dharma*-realm encompasses the subsequent ten *dharma*-realms, while the non-self-natured *dharma*-realm is not divided further.

The twelve *dharma*-realms can perhaps be described as the various aspects of the universe as perceived through the lens of Buddhist canonical doctrines. The various subdivisions of the dependently originated *dharma*-realm include sansaric worlds that are created by the karman of sentient beings, the pure lands emanated by the buddhas for the benefit of others, and the objects of meditative visions. The non-dependently originated *dharma*-realm, while classified as “posited,” is nonetheless described as completely ineffable and defying conceptual understanding. It is equated with “the *dharma*-nature body” (*faxing shen* 法性身) of all buddhas and the original nature (*benxing* 本性) of sentient beings. The *dharma*-realm without self-nature(s) is in turn described as a reality in which all *dharma*s are ultimately equal (*pingdeng* 平等) and interfused (*yuanrong* 圓融) and where every single *dharma* includes—and is included in—all others. Taixu relates a perception of such a *dharma*-realm to “the Perfect Middle view of the three truths” of the Tiantai tradition.²⁰ He also notes that its “resultant merits” (*guode* 果德) can be illuminated through the “wisdom of the One True *dharma*-realm with no obstructions” taught by the tradition of Huayan²¹ and

不善趣，十、變易無變易，十一、具德不具德，十二、究竟非究竟 (TDQS 30: 2719).

²⁰ This phrase is not repeated in any other works by Taixu, although he does take up the ideas of both Perfect Middle (*yuanzhong* 圓中) and three truths (*sandi* 三諦) in his discussions of Tiantai doctrines.

²¹ The reference to “One True *dharma*-realm” in the context of Huayan may suggest the impact of Chengguan (澄觀; 738–839). Remarkably, Taixu mentions *Huayan xuantan* 華嚴玄談 and [Huayan jing] *shuchao* 疏鈔—texts by Chengguan—among the texts

the “immaculate *dharma*-realm of the Four Wisdoms” from the *Fodijing* 佛地經²² (TDQS 30: 2723–25).

On Dharma-Realms is probably best construed as an essay on Buddhist cosmology, or the metaphysical makeup of the world. However, as is the case with Buddhist cosmology in general, Taixu’s account also leans toward matters of ethics and soteriology. It presents a universe that is created by the consequences of individual actions and thoughts and that is categorized and structured into different realms on this basis. At the same time, Taixu strongly emphasizes that a complete understanding of this universe requires a special kind of cognition that transcends all conceptual distinctions and perceives various aspects of reality as mutually complementary and harmoniously integrated. This more advanced vision represents Taixu’s own understanding of the goal of Buddhist practice. It is, most likely, based on the ostensibly Tiantai-centered, yet doctrinally eclectic, presentation of Buddhist philosophy that he encountered in his early monastic education.²³

4.2 The *Threefold Contemplation of Dharma-Realms* (*San chong fajie guan*)

The brief essay *San chong fajie guan*, written and published in *Haichaoyin* in 1922 (Yinshun, 2000: 135), illustrates the evolution of Taixu’s views on both metaphysical and soteriological aspects of the idea of *dharma*-realm. The threefold scheme presented here is meant to supplement the well-known Huayan teachings about the four *dharma*-realms, which according to Taixu “do not exactly match the perception of objects in their nature (*xingjing* 性境; TDQS 18: 1385). The three *dharma*-realms are enumerated as follows:

- (1) The *Dharma*-realm of Things and Self (*wu wo fajie* 物我法界)
- (2) The *Dharma*-realm of the Mind and Objects (*xin yuan fajie* 心緣法界)

that he studied during his period of monastic confinement (Taixu, 1986: 51). On Taixu and Chengguan, see Guo, 1997: 184.

²² Probably a reference to the *Fodijinglun* 佛地經論 (T1530:26.302a2–11 and elsewhere).

²³ As mentioned by Taixu himself (Taixu, 1986: 19, 22), his early master Daojie 道階 specialized in Tiantai teachings but expounded them in reference to Huayan texts (especially *Xianshou wujiaoyi* 賢首五教儀, by Xufa 續法[1641–1728]), Consciousness-only literature studied in the late Ming period (such as *Xiangzong bayao* 相宗八要 and Ouyi Zhixu’s [薄益智旭; 1599–1655] *Weishi xinyao* 唯識心要), and the practice of Chan.

(3) The *Dharma*-realm of Nature and Thusness (*xing ru fajie* 性如法界)

The first of these three *dharma*-realms encompasses, on the one hand, the “substances and characteristics” (*tixiang* 體相) of things (i.e., particular entities) that are perceived and, on the other hand, their individual perceptions (*zhuyi* 主意). Taixu claims that this basic dichotomy can be contemplated by those who are at the relatively less advanced stages on the path toward liberation—the ignorant commoners, but also practitioners of lesser vehicles, who are only capable of perceiving the Buddha in his material form. The “*Dharma*-realm of the Mind and Objects” corresponds to the more subtle perception of reality as a realm of objects that are generated by consciousness. Here the mind corresponds to the activity of cognizing and intuiting (*lüzhi lingjue* 慮知靈覺), and the perceived objects are merely “supports” for phenomena that are transformed by the mind (*zhuanbian yichi* 轉變依持). This second *dharma*-realm is perceived in the more advanced mental states of concentration, for example in the states attained by the bodhisattvas who meditate on the marks of the buddha-bodies. Finally, the “*Dharma*-realm of Nature and Thusness” represents awareness of the ultimate aspect of reality. This ultimate aspect is fundamentally inexpressible but can be tentatively described, in positive terms, as that which is “universally pervasive and real” and, in negative terms, as that which is not “transient and illusory” (TDQS 18: 1385–87).

The remaining portion of the essay relates the three *dharma*-realms to other, mostly threefold, classifications known from Sinitic Mahāyāna scholasticism: discipline, meditation, and wisdom; sentient beings, the mind, and buddhahood; the three natures of Yogācāra; the empty, provisional, and middle truth of Tiantai; and the four *dharma*-realms of the Huayan tradition. These connections are illustrated with diagrams, some of which are followed by brief explanations. In each case, the relations between the three *dharma*-realms and the corresponding categories are explained on three levels: the relatively straightforward “single view” (*danguan* 單觀), where each *dharma*-realm corresponds to a single item from the other list; the complex view (*fuguan* 複觀), which posits some less intuitive connections between these categories; and the most profound perfect view (*yuanguan* 圓觀—in some cases, “perfect perfect” view: *yuanyuanguan* 圓圓觀), in which all *dharma*-realms and their corresponding categories are shown to be interrelated through a dense network of mutual connections (TDQS 18: 1387–95).

Taixu's explanations and diagrams contained in the latter part of the essay appear conceptually complex and abstract, partly due to their brevity. However, the basic threefold scheme of the three *dharma*-realms may be understood as simpler and more intuitive than his earlier theory of twelve realms. The three *dharma*-realms represent the three perspectives on reality that can be related to an ascending hierarchy of achievement on the Buddhist path and to the three kinds of buddha-bodies, as explicated in the Mahāyāna teachings. While the pride of place in this hierarchy clearly belongs to the *dharma*-realm of Nature and Thusness, its true apex is, in fact, the integrated perception of all three *dharma*-realms as mutually interconnected and interfused with all aspects of reality. Taixu relates "perfect views" of *dharma*-realm to the "perfect interfusion of the three truths" espoused by the Tiantai tradition as well as to the ideas of Huayan: the "*dharma*-realm of non-obstruction between phenomena" and the "One True *dharma*-realm" (TDQS 18: 1393–94).

As Taixu states at the outset, in his discussion of threefold *dharma*-realms he purports to expand on the classical Huayan theory of the four *dharma*-realms and explore the relations between the perceiving mind and its objects. At the same time, the ensuing discussion makes it very clear that an understanding of how the mind perceives and creates its objects (i.e., the major tenet of "Consciousness-only" doctrine) does not, in itself, constitute the supreme understanding of *dharma*-realms. This supreme understanding has to be sought in an insight that penetrates to the immutable true Nature of all phenomena and reveals the relations of mutual "non-obstruction" and interpenetration that occur between Nature and phenomena, on the one hand, and between the phenomena themselves, on the other. Seen in this light, the *Threefold Contemplation of Dharma-realms* appears to reaffirm the traditional pattern of classifying Buddhist doctrines (*panjiao* 判教) that is characteristic of the Huayan school (Liu, 1981).²⁴ As will be shown below, this doctrinal direction is even more consistently explored in Taixu's later works.

²⁴ The Huayan credentials of this text are discussed in detail by Qiu Gaoxing 邱高興 and Han Chaozhong 韓朝忠 (Qiu and Han, 2017: 8–13), who consider it as an example of a creative (not necessarily in a flattering sense) theoretical development of traditional Huayan thought. See also Yinshun, 2000: 135–36.

4.3 Later Developments

The two aforementioned essays were not followed by any extensive article that centered on the concept of *dharma*-realm as such. In order to trace the further development of the ideas espoused by Taixu that are discussed above, one needs to collect some scattered pieces of evidence—usually brief passages in texts devoted to other topics. Yet this does not mean that the concept itself ceased to be important in Taixu's thought. Quite to the contrary, in his later writings it becomes more organically integrated into his interpretation of fundamental Buddhist doctrines and routinely mentioned in his introductory and general discussions of Buddhism. These introductions are not primers in the modern academic sense. They are rather conceived as doctrinal treatises that elucidate the core principles of Buddhism—here understood not as a particular historical religion, but rather as a comprehensive and definite explanation of the universe that is derived from the infallible insight of the Buddha. As will be shown below, such an understanding of Buddhism is directly related to Taixu's interpretation of the idea of *dharma*-realm.

In terms of etymology, later sources do not contradict, but also do not significantly expand on, the basic information provided in *On Dharma-Realms*. In a few texts Taixu repeats the scholastic definition of *dharma* as a “pattern” and “support,” albeit couching his explanations in more accessible language. He also reiterates the understanding of *dharma* as a universal appellation for all things.²⁵ Drawing on this latter understanding, he consistently introduces *dharma*-realm as a concept that pertains to the totality of the universe, rather than to any particular thing.²⁶ At the same time, he still distinguishes between the various understandings of *dharma*-realm that connote different ways in which this totality can be approached. The following two fragments, taken from Taixu's essays written down in 1930 and 1937, respectively, may be considered as representative in this regard:

²⁵ See for example the relatively lucid explanation of the idea of *dharma* contained in the *Fofa jiushi zhuyi* 佛法救世主義 (1927), TDQS 46: 112.

²⁶ Taixu notes, for example, that “*dharma*-realm” (unlike “Suchness”) is not a specific term (*techeng* 特稱)—which here perhaps means a term that has a particular referent. Furthermore, *dharma*-realm has no conceptual opposite (*duicheng* 對稱). Cf. *Zongyi lun* 宗依論, the first part of a treatise by Taixu called *Zhen xianshi lun* 真現實論 (On the True Reality), which appeared in 1927. *Zhen xianshi lun. Zongyi lun* 真現實論 宗依論 (1927), TDQS 36: 2.

Dharma-realm is another term for Suchness—the Suchness that corresponds to non-discriminating wisdom.

Besides, just as the colloquial word “universe” does not only designate space and time but in fact includes within itself all things, the term *dharma*-realm also summarily refers to all *dharma*s. Every single *dharma* among all *dharma*s represents the general characteristic of all *dharma*s, because every one of them can contain all *dharma*s. This general characteristic is nothing other than the *dharma*-realm; therefore, it is said that “every [random] *dharma* you pick is the *dharma*-realm.”²⁷ A pencil can comprise all *dharma*s, as it is produced in dependence on various [causes and] conditions, and various conditions of those conditions follow with no end. Hence, one contains all and one enters into all. This is the meaning of the *dharma*-realm.

Moreover, the “realm” has the meaning of “cause,” and the *dharma*-realm means “the cause(s) of all *dharma*s.” Even though all *dharma*s mutually enter into one another, they do not lose their individual characteristics; this is because every *dharma* has different seeds acting as its cause and the respective causal seeds do not mix with one another. Hence, their respective actual manifestations are also distinct. On the other hand, although causal seeds are distinct from one another, they mutually permeate one another. Thus, every causal seed universally permeates everywhere, as the potentialities within the store-consciousness are unlimited and pervasive. The respective seed-causes of all *dharma*s are elucidated by being called “*dharma*-realms.”

法界即真如別名，即無分別智相應之真如。又如世言宇宙，非但指空間時間，實包一切物而言。此法界者亦復如是，乃總括此諸法而言也。諸法中無論任何一法，皆諸法之總相，以皆能攝一切法故。此總相即為法界，故曰「隨舉一法皆為法界」。如鉛筆可統一切法，以依眾緣成故，眾緣之眾緣展轉無盡故，故一攝一切，一入一切，此法界義也。又界者因義，法界者、即諸法之因。法法雖互入，然不失其自相，此不失自相者，以一一法有不同種子為之因，此因種各各不相雜亂，故現行亦各各差別。然此因種雖各各差別而又交互相遍，故一一因種，一遍一切，以阿賴耶識中之能力，無方所邊際故，明此諸法各別種因，謂之法界。²⁸

There are three meanings of “*dharma*-realm.” First, “realm” has the meaning of “nature.” The nature of all *dharma*s is ultimately empty, and this emptiness of the *dharma*s is nothing other than the *dharma*-realm. Second, “realm” has the meaning of “cause.” The nature of the *dharma*s

²⁷ This phrase “every [random] *dharma* you pick” (隨舉[or 拈]一法) is one of Taixu’s favorites in the context of his discussions of *dharma*-realm. It is probably indebted to the writings of Ouyi Zhixu.

²⁸ *Foxue gailun* 佛學概論 (1930), TDQS 1: 60–61.

is originally empty; they do not arise and do not become extinct. The distinctions between all the manifold *dharma*s always arise due to causes and conditions; [as for] the causes of the dependent origination of the innumerable *dharma*s in the universe, these causes are seeds and the totality of seeds is nothing other than the *dharma*-realm. Third, *dharma*-realm represents the summary characteristics of all *dharma*s. All *dharma*s are summarized and united within one *dharma*, yet there is no separate *dharma* that summarizes and unites [all the other *dharma*s]; rather, every single *dharma* is a *dharma* that summarizes and unites [all others], being neither the same nor apart, neither the same nor different from them. The “realm” has the meaning of limit, and *dharma*s cannot go beyond the limit of each particular *dharma*-realm.

法界有三種義：一、界即性義，一切法性畢竟空，此法空性即法界；二、界即因義，法性本空不生不滅，而此萬有諸法差別皆因緣生，宇宙無量諸法緣起之因，因即種子，一切種子即法界；三、法界即一切法總和相，以一法而總一切法統一切法，又非另有一法為統為總，即每一法皆總統一法，不即不離，不一不異，界即界限之義，諸法皆不能越出每一法界限之外。²⁹

These definitions may be summarized as follows: First, *dharma*-realm connotes the universal nature of things—their immutable and original aspect, which is normally obscured by ignorance and revealed through the salvific knowledge gained and taught by the Buddha. Taixu identifies this nature with emptiness, but also with Suchness—a term having more positive connotations and one evincing an ultimate reality that remains unconditioned, yet inseparable from the perceived world of illusion and ignorance. Second, there is the *dharma*-realm as the sum total of all things, all of which are generated according to their specific and distinctive causes. Third, the *dharma*-realm comprises the “general characteristics” of all *dharma*s, which inhere in every single *dharma*. The *dharma*s endowed with these general characteristics mutually contain and pervade one another, thus forming a universe where “one” and “all” are seamlessly integrated.

As has already been noted, Taixu is concerned not only with enumerating these different aspects, but also with organizing them into a systematic theory. In his later works the underlying nature of things, on the one hand, and the multitude of phenomena, on the other, are often contrasted in terms of *dharma*-nature (*faxing* 法性) and *dharma*-characteristics (*faxiang* 法相).³⁰ The opposition between these two concepts is further related to the

²⁹ *Dacheng jia yeshanding jing jiangji* 大乘伽耶山頂經講記 (1937), TDQS 7: 130.

³⁰ Alternatively, *Dharma*-abode (*fazhu* 法住), TDQS 10: 842.

opposition between the two kinds of wisdom—the non-conceptual and ineffable fundamental wisdom (*genbenzhi* 根本智) and the more world-oriented subsequently acquired wisdom (*houdezhi* 後得智). In this light, the notion of *dharma*-realm in the strict sense refers to a reality that encompasses *both* these aspects. The perception of *dharma*-realm is simultaneously a perception of phenomena as infinitely manifold manifestations of particular “seeds” and a non-conceptual realization of their universal nature. Moreover, it is a perception of a universe where every single phenomenon contains within itself the universal nature of all things, and thus every single phenomenon effectively represents the interrelated totality of the universe.

Remarkably, Taixu maintains that a truly simultaneous cognition of *dharma*-nature and *dharma*-characteristics cannot be attained even by a bodhisattva, much less an ordinary practitioner. Such a completely integrated perception is the domain of the buddhas and constitutes the object of their ultimate perfect awakening (*yuanjue* 圓覺). In Taixu’s own classification of Māhāyana teachings, which begins to form in the mid-1920s, the “Standpoint of the Perfect Awakening to the *Dharma*-realm” (*fajie yuanjue zong* 法界圓覺宗) is pronounced as the most comprehensive Buddhist teaching and in this respect it is ranked higher than both the “Standpoint of the Emptiness-Wisdom of the *Dharma*-Nature” and the “Standpoint of the Consciousness-only *Dharma*-characteristics,” which roughly correspond to Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, respectively (Yang, 2006: 93–96).³¹

It goes without saying that this third, most profound, standpoint according to Taixu’s classification summarizes doctrinal formulations that are most characteristic of the Sinitic Buddhist literature. In his summaries of this standpoint, Taixu explicitly invokes the scholastic traditions of Tiantai and Huayan,³² although he maintains that the same perception of *dharma*-realm animates the practice of Esoteric Buddhism, Pure Land, and, of course, Chan.³³ He even relates the supreme vision of *dharma*-realm to the message

³¹ *Fofa daxi* 佛法大系 (1926[1925]), TDQS 2: 339–40; *Zai lun dacheng sanzong* 再論大乘三宗 (1928), TDQS 10: 841–43; *Wo zenyang panshe yiqie fofa* 我怎樣判攝一切佛法 (1940), TDQS 2: 524; and others.

³² Including for example *Wo zenyang panshe yiqie fofa*, TDQS 2: 524–25. Generally speaking, in his discussions of the *dharma*-realm Taixu adduces the concepts associated with the Huayan tradition somewhat more often in comparison to other “schools.” See for example *Zhen xianshi lun*, *Zongyi lun*, TDQS 36:2; *Foxue gailun*, TDQS 1: 60–61; and *Fa yu ren zhi yanjiu*, 法與人之研究 (1931), TDQS 18: 1315–16.

³³ *Fofa daxi*, TDQS 2: 340–41.

of pre-Buddhist Chinese philosophy—for example, the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes)—which explains the universe in terms of dynamics between *yin* and *yang* and the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極) that is present in all permutations of these forces.³⁴ Remarkably, for the explanation of the latter concept Taixu refers the reader to the wisdom of the “Huayan school,” particularly its teachings about the ten profundities (*shi xuan* 十玄), the six marks (*liu xiang* 六相), and the dependent origination of the *dharma*-realm (*fajie yuanqi* 法界緣起).³⁵

Generally speaking, Taixu’s account of the *dharma*-realm firmly locates the ultimate truth of Buddhism within a specifically Chinese tradition of exegesis and thought. This tradition draws crucial inspirations from the apocryphal Sinitic sutras and treatises; it follows hermeneutics of Buddhist texts that began to form in the late Tang and revolve around the notions of (eclectically interpreted) Huayan and Tiantai doctrines, understood in the light of Chan experience, and it remains open to doctrinal harmonization of the “three teachings” of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. This “essentially conservative” (Pacey, 2014: 150), or “neo-traditionalist” (Ding, 2009: 246, 257), doctrinal background distinguishes Taixu from the more iconoclastic Buddhist modernists, such as Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943) or Yinshun 印順 (1906–2005).³⁶ And yet Taixu’s stance cannot be simply equated with that of a generic “traditional” preacher. This is because, as will be discussed below, Taixu took great pains to underline certain fundamentally modern implications of the traditional Chinese Buddhist understanding of *dharma*-realm.

5 Taixu’s Modern Glosses on *Dharma*-Realm

5.1 The Universe

As discussed above, the concept of *dharma*-realm plays an important role in Taixu’s systematized exposition of traditional Buddhist doctrine. At the same time, *fajie* remains a key term of Taixu’s in those writings where he appears

³⁴ *Weiwu, weixin, weisheng zhexue yu foxue* 唯物唯心唯生哲學與佛學 (1939), TDQS 42: 639–42.

³⁵ *Weiwu, weixin, weisheng zhexue yu foxue*, TDQS 42: 642.

³⁶ For more detailed comparisons, see for example Yang, 2006: 103–107; Ding, 2009: 250–65; and Ding, 2021.

to go beyond the letter of canonical texts and where he develops his own interpretation of Buddhism as “true realism” (*zhen xianshi zhuyi* 真現實主義).³⁷ Conceptual foundations for this idea are explained in *Zongyi lun* 宗依論, the first part of a treatise by Taixu called *Zhen xianshi lun* 真現實論 (On the True Reality), which appeared in 1927 and introduces the notion of reality (*xianshi* 現實) as the *summum bonum* of Buddhism. This introduction proceeds in four paragraphs under the following headings:

- (1) “Reality Equals the Universe” 現實即宇宙
- (2) “Reality Equals the *Dharma*-Realm” 現實即法界
- (3) “Reality Equals Reality” 現實即現實
- (4) “Realism Is ‘Buddha-ism’ without the ‘-isms’” 現實主義乃佛陀無主義之主義³⁸

In the second paragraph, Taixu explains that while “*dharma*-realm” is essentially synonymous with “reality,” he prefers the latter concept because it is clearer and includes important additional nuances.³⁹ This remark signals that for all his penchant to discuss Buddhist doctrines in scholastic technical terms, Taixu was aware that such language might be insufficient to communicate these doctrines to contemporary audiences. It also suggests that he considered the notion of *dharma*-realm per se as expendable for these very reasons and might have intended to replace it altogether with his own preferred term. Yet a closer examination of his writings suggests that his attitude in this regard was never consistent. In fact, it is “the universe” (*yuzhou* 宇宙), rather than “Reality,” that appears to be Taixu’s preference when he wants to explain *dharma*-realm in more accessible language. He juxtaposes the ideas of universe and *dharma*-realm quite frequently, providing a distinctively modern take on the *dharma*-realm that adds a new meaning to the old concept.

Granted, the word *yuzhou*—translated here as “universe”—has a long history of usage in premodern Sinitic (not necessarily Buddhist) thought. Taixu’s own definition of the word in the aforementioned treatise expands on the traditional understanding of Chinese scholiasts, who analyzed *yuzhou* as a coordinative compound in the sense of “space and time.”⁴⁰ However,

³⁷ On this concept, see Li, 2003; Hong, 1999: 166–71; and Guo, 2019.

³⁸ *Zhen xianshi lun. Zongyi lun*, TDQS 36:1–3.

³⁹ *Zhen xianshi lun. Zongyi lun*, TDQS 36:2.

⁴⁰ *Zhen xianshi lun. Zongyi lun*, TDQS 36:1–2.

like many other Sinitic terms with a classical pedigree, the term in question acquired a new meaning in the process of importing new systems of knowledge to China—a process that was heavily influenced by the influx of Japanese neologisms coined in the Meiji period (1868–1912), as discussed by Kaneki Toshinori 金木利憲 (Kaneki, 2012). In its new, modern meaning the Chinese understanding of the notion of universe came to denote not only the outer space investigated by astronomers, but also the cosmos—understood as an object of rational inquiry by philosophers, scientists, and theologians. This latter connotation appears to have been shared by Taixu, who discusses philosophy, religion, and science as different cosmologies—literally, “visions (or views) of the universe” (*yuzhou guan* 宇宙觀).⁴¹ By this he appears to mean a systematic explanation of the origin, structure, and purpose of the cosmos, understood as the realm inhabited and perceived by human beings. While this definition does not exhaust Taixu’s idea of what Buddhism entails, it is certainly relevant to his understanding of Buddhism—especially those aspects of Buddhist teachings that were explored in his aforementioned essays about *dharma*-realm. In order to see how Taixu related those traditional Buddhist motifs to modern views of the universe, it is instructive to consider the following passage from his 1931 lecture published under the title “Study of *Dharmas* and Humankind” (*Fa yu ren zhi yanjiu* 法與人之研究):

Dharma-realm is not some mystical formula; this very world is the *dharma*-realm, equally extending to the bodies of sentient beings and the insentient things. There is no single mind, principle, or phenomenon that is not *dharma*-realm. . . . Every single *dharma* manifests the nature of the *dharma*-realm, [every] one *dharma* encompasses all *dharmas* and all *dharmas* universally permeate [every] single *dharma*. . . . The ultimate vision of the *dharma*-realm is that each and every single [*dharma*] is the *dharma*-realm. By penetrating the *dharma*-realm in which nature and characteristics are not two, [one attains] the perfect vision of the *dharma*-realm. This is the vision of the universe held by Buddhist Learning!

法界非虛玄之稱謂，乃即世間是法界，等而至於有情身、無情物乃至一心一理一事無非法界 [...] 是故一一法皆現法界性，一法統攝一切法，一切法普遍一法 [...] 一一皆法界，是為究竟法界觀。窮了性相不二之法界，亦即圓滿的法界觀，是為佛學的宇宙觀！⁴²

⁴¹ Taixu’s understanding of this term in the context of philosophy is discussed by Guo, 1997: 426–29.

⁴² *Fa yu ren zhi yanjiu*, TDQS 18: 1315.

What Taixu considers “the perfect vision of the *dharma*-realm” is the liberating insight of a buddha that reveals a universe in which “nature and characteristics are not two” and each and every *dharma* permeates all others. These statements are consistent with his understanding of the idea of *dharma*-realm as derived from his reading of the canonical texts. At the same time, Taixu summarizes this understanding in fairly modern language as the cosmology, or the “vision of the universe,” held by “Buddhist Learning.” This modern phrasing is not merely a matter of a more popular, or more accessible, exposition of the teachings. As demonstrated by the very neologism “Buddhist Learning” (*foxue* 佛學),⁴³ Taixu reconsiders his ideas in a new historical context, one in which canonical texts are no longer the only point of reference for explaining Buddhist concepts. In this context Buddhism becomes redefined as a knowledge-based system of beliefs with modern credentials, and as such it is compared with other systems of belief that are characteristic of modernity. In the negative sense, Buddhism is disassociated from superstitious cults (*mixin* 迷信) and religions (*zongjiao* 宗教). In the positive sense, it is compared (favorably) with philosophy (*zhexue* 哲學) and science (*kexue* 科學)—two relatively prestigious categories in the modern taxonomy of knowledge (Hammerstrom, 2016: 94–104). In either sense, the case for Buddhist exceptionalism is bolstered by the exceptional features of the Buddhist “vision of the universe,” which is equated with the “perfect vision of the *dharma*-realm.” Consider, for example, Taixu’s following remarks about the proper understanding of buddhahood as opposed to religious faith in God or gods:

[The phrase] “All *dharms* of the *dharma*-realm” mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures refers to all the multiple things that exist in the universe. The Buddha has attained the ultimate self-awakening with regard to all *dharms* that make up all the multiple things in the universe. Hence, he is called the one who is universally and correctly awakened. He is also the one who instructs all sentient beings and lets them attain the universal and correct awakening. In the universe there is no celestial god who created all things and is ruling over them, as is preached by the monotheistic religions. Likewise, one cannot regard the Buddha as one deity among the numerous deities that exist within the universe—as is preached by the polytheists. When ordinary people develop in their hearts a superstitious belief that equates buddhas and bodhisattvas with God, or with the multiple gods, they commit a grave error.

⁴³ On this term, see for example Welch, 1968: 64, 204; Miyagawa, 1998.

佛典上之法界諸法，即宇宙萬有。佛於宇宙萬有諸法自覺究竟，故稱遍正覺者；亦為教化一切有情令得遍正覺者。宇宙本無創造萬物與自在主宰的天神，如一神教之所說；也不可如多神教所說，以佛為宇宙許多神中的一個神。平常人心理上迷信一神或多神和佛菩薩一樣，那實在是大錯特錯。⁴⁴

Taixu's condemnation of theism provides an interesting contrast with his rather liberal endorsement of some seemingly mythological aspects of Buddhist cosmology, such as faith in the pure lands or in buddhas' and bodhisattvas' supernatural powers (Ritzinger, 2017). Taixu disassociates Buddhism from religious faith on the grounds of its superior cosmology and on the idea of the Buddha as the supreme "knower" and as the teacher who reveals the ultimate truth about the universe. This ultimately knowledge-based "vision of the universe" is absent in the case of theistic religions; their gods and spirits are merely particular elements of the universe whose true nature is not properly recognized by their believers. What is important to note here, however, is that the inherent superiority of the Buddhist worldview, as defined by Taixu, cannot be ascribed merely to its more "rational" or "philosophical" character. This becomes clear from the contrast Taixu draws in his 1923 essay *Fofa yu zhexue* 佛法與哲學 (Buddhism and Philosophy):

The Buddha is the one who has attained the unsurpassable correct and universal awakening. This means that he became universally awakened with regard to the true nature and characteristics of all the multiple entities in this universe. Whatever it is that philosophy cannot explain, or whatever it is that philosophers cast away because it was beyond their reach—all of this has been personally verified by the Buddha.

The philosophers of old were prone to holding one particular view and stifling competing views, thus leading to a proliferation of disputes. The [philosophers] of today have discarded those subjects and no longer discuss them, or they have chosen to explore some altogether new paths. To wit, they have not accomplished much as yet. Philosophy's point of departure is its desire to know the original essence and the true aspect of the universe. In this respect, it is not unlike the Buddhist Learning, which seeks after the correct awakening to the *dharma*-realm. Yet, the philosophers remain incapable of knowing the universe's true aspect and its original nature. They will instead preach about monism, dualism, nihilism, and the like and continue with their reasoning, becoming more and more stubborn about their conjectures.

⁴⁴ *Fofaseng yi guanglun* 佛法僧義廣論, TDQS 1: 295.

佛、無上正遍覺者，即遍覺此宇宙萬有之真實性相之謂也。在哲學所不能明，及求之不得而捨棄者，皆佛之親切證明者也。蓋昔哲執一概餘，迭興諍辯，今者或撥置不談，或另闢新路，要未能有何成就也。在哲學上，要知宇宙真相本體之出發點，與佛學之求正覺法界不無相同；但哲學家卒難確知宇宙之真相本體，或計之為一元、多元、無元等，思維籌度，遽執為當！⁴⁵

In his discussions of religion, Taixu contrasts the knowledge-based (Buddhist) and the “superstitious” (religious) approaches toward the universe; in the case of philosophy, however, he repudiates the quality of knowledge on which the philosophical “vision of the universe” rests. Whereas Taixu clearly regards philosophical insights as more sophisticated than those of theology and religious mythology, he dismisses them as partial, contested, and inconclusive. Adopting the tone of a Buddhist preacher, he explains that philosophical thought remains entangled in the egoistic attachments and distortions typical of an ordinary, unawakened mind and as such is inherently incapable of grasping what is original and real about the universe—namely, the truth about the *dharma*-realm.⁴⁶ A similar rhetoric underlies the main arguments of Taixu’s essay comparing Buddhism and science and, in fact, most of his opinions on science that are scattered throughout other essays. Taixu touts the “Buddhist Learning” as “a science in the broader sense” (*guangyi de kexue* 廣義的科學)⁴⁷ that is more profound than secular science in its understanding of the universe and vastly superior in its practical implications. It is only Buddhism, and not science as such, that penetrates “the true nature and characteristics of all the multiple things in the universe” (*yuzhou wanyou zhenshi xingxiang* 宇宙萬有真實性相); it is Buddhist practice, and not scientific technology, that can successfully remove the “attachments to self and *dharma*s” (*wo fa er zhi* 我、法二執) and lead the way from ordinary human society into the Pure Land.⁴⁸

5.2 The World and Society

In addition to *yuzhou* (universe), another modern-sounding term that is sometimes used by Taixu to gloss the concept of *dharma*-realm is *shijie* 世

⁴⁵ *Fofa yu zhaxue* 佛法與哲學 (1923), TDQS 42: 553.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Fofa yu zhaxue*. For Taixu’s views on philosophy, see also Guo, 1997: 426 ff., esp. 440–42; Chen and Gong, 2019: 290–92.

⁴⁷ *Renshengguan de kexue* 人生觀的科學 (1924), TDQS 46: 5.

⁴⁸ *Fofa yu kexue* 佛法與科學 (1923), TDQS 43: 809, 811–12. For Taixu’s views on science, see also Pacey, 2014; Hammerstrom, 2016; Chen and Gong, 2019: 285–89.

界 (world). This word appears in his writings in at least two different senses. In the first sense, it is close to the metaphysical notion of the universe, understood as the totality of things.⁴⁹ In the second sense, it refers to humanity or the totality of people who inhabit the earth.⁵⁰ While the world in the former meaning remains the subject matter of the “vision of the universe,” in the latter meaning it concerns what Taixu calls a “vision of life” (*rensheng guan* 人生觀)—a system of values that inspires systematic action and practice.⁵¹ As mentioned above, Taixu maintained that the Buddhist emphasis on ethics and religious practice renders it inherently superior to both philosophy and science, which provide no real basis for spiritual progress. At the same time, much of the driving force behind Taixu’s attempts at “revolutionizing” contemporary Buddhist preaching was his dissatisfaction with the “vision of life” that was shared by most contemporary Chinese Buddhists. What he found lacking there was an idea of practice and spiritual progress that would benefit not only an individual or his family, but also society as a whole. As pointed out in previous studies, Taixu’s points of reference in this regard were mostly his non-Buddhist competitors and anti-Buddhist polemicists—the “new Confucian” scholars and the Christian missionaries who derided Buddhism as socially “passive,” impractical, and parasitic—as well as the modern Chinese intellectuals who were fascinated by the Western-inspired notions of “reformist evolutionary cosmology” (Furth, 2002: 14) and the general vision of modernization and progress.⁵²

All of these polemical and apologetic considerations underlie Taixu’s “modernist” interpretations of the concept of *dharma*-realm. These include his new assessment of the Tiantai doctrine of the ten *dharma*-realms. Among these, Taixu attaches the pivotal role to the *dharma*-realm of humankind (*ren fajie* 人法界), which includes within itself the remaining nine realms—both the “profane” (*fan* 凡) realms, such as those of hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, and animals, and the “holy” (*sheng* 聖) realms, including the realm of the buddhas (Guo, 1996: 276–77). As has been argued in previous studies,

⁴⁹ However, Taixu sometimes distinguished the “universe” and the “world,” considering the latter to have a more narrow meaning. Cf. for example *Zhen xianshi lun. Zongyi lun*, TDQS 36: 1.

⁵⁰ For Taixu’s more practical ideas and initiatives regarding the “world” and his global perspective on Buddhist activities, see for example Hou, 2018: 471–79; Chen and Gong, 2019: 273–99.

⁵¹ See also Guo, 1997: 275–311, 433–35.

⁵² For more comprehensive discussions on this topic, see for example Hong, 1999: 142–50; Yang, 2006: 68–76.

this old notion of inclusion, which had long been emphasized by Tiantai scholiasts, might have emboldened Taixu to connect Buddhism with new ideas of evolutionary progress (Yang, 2006: 90–92) and introduce “human realm” and “human life” as new Buddhist keywords (Zhou, 2018: 175–76). Yet another noteworthy innovation of Taixu’s is his rather curious rephrasing of the (singular) *dharma*-realm in terms of a “worldly” social philosophy:

“May all under heaven belong to all” and “may the world become the Great Unity” [both signify] the common direction that has been chosen independently by peoples of all ages, whether in China or in the West. [They signify] also the goal of [Sun Yat-sen’s] Three Principles of the People. The formation of a global society of the Great Unity occurs through the accumulation of smaller units, i.e., individuals. Therefore, the actions of an individual, be they lofty or base, can all influence the whole world. Such is exactly the vision of the universe that the Buddhist Learning teaches about: “one is all and all is one; any *dharma* you pick at random is the *dharma*-realm.”⁵³

天下為公，世界大同，為古今中外人民不約而同的公共趨向，亦即三民主義之目的。全世界大同社會之組成，由於各人為單位積集而成的，故一人之行動若優若劣、均能影響全世界，正為佛學上所謂「一即一切一切即一，隨拈一法皆為法界」的宇宙觀。⁵⁴

Within the society of the Great Unity individual persons are the simple elements that make up the world and the world is a collective, which is directly formed by individuals.⁵⁵ Buddhist Learning teaches that one is all and all is one, within the dependent origination of the *dharma*-realm, [from which it follows that] the good and evil of an individual person can influence the whole universe. This is the vision of the universe that applies to the society of the Great Unity.

大同社會，以個人為世界單純之分子。以世界為個人直接的團體，佛學之一即一切、一切即一之法界緣起，一人之善惡能影響於全宇宙，這就是大同社會的宇宙觀。⁵⁶

The unabashedly direct references here to slogans associated with the Guomindang Republican government underscore a political dimension of Taixu’s thought, which has come under much scrutiny in more recent studies (Gong and Lai, 2014; Hou, 2018). At the same time, the passages quoted

⁵³ Cf. footnote 27.

⁵⁴ *Shenme shi foxue* 甚麼是佛學 (1929), TDQS 1: 263.

⁵⁵ In this translation I have not followed the punctuation of the original Chinese text, which in my opinion may be erroneous.

⁵⁶ *Foxue gailun*, TDQS 1: 68–69.

above indicate a certain pervasive theoretical challenge that Taixu had to face as a modern apologist of traditional Chinese Buddhism. In order to assert Chinese Buddhism as a truly authoritative modern system of knowledge, it was not enough for him to redefine it as a superior *representation* of the universe or as a system of metaphysics. Rather, Taixu's ultimate objective was to represent Buddhism as a knowledge-based *program of action* that would bring practical benefit to the world and society at large; such a program would have to accommodate a distinctively modern vision of progress (Koselleck, 2002: 218–35) but also retain impeccably Buddhist canonical credentials. As the aforementioned passages suggest, Taixu approached this conundrum by reinterpreting the idea of *dharma*-realm in the spirit of social philosophy and by relating it to the contemporaneous ideal of “Great Unity” (*Datong* 大同).⁵⁷ More specifically, he rewrote the metaphysical vision of the mutual interpenetration between the whole and its parts as a vision of society in which every individual is capable of making ethical choices that influence the whole world.⁵⁸ Seen in this light, Taixu's idea of *dharma*-realm appears to constitute a missing link between the values and expectations of modernity and the authority of the Chinese Buddhist canon.

6 Concluding Reflections

One of the most striking aspects of Taixu's understanding of *dharma*-realm is how deeply it is rooted in the Sinitic Buddhist tradition. As discussed above, Taixu approaches the concept of *dharma*-realm in terms of its Chinese rendering, *fajie*. He mostly considers the etymology and meaning of the two parts of this Sinitic compound and appears only marginally interested in the Indian pedigree of the original concept and its historical evolution; the rather scant information he provides on this subject is filtered through the limited understanding of ancient Chinese scholiasts. Taixu is mostly interested in

⁵⁷ On the premodern roots of this ideal and the modern reformulation of it by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), which impacted Republican-period Chinese thought, see Furth, 2002: 20, 31–38; Takeuchi, 2008. On Taixu's appropriation of the term, see for example Li, 2000: 119–22.

⁵⁸ Remarkably, a similar motif appears in the writings of Taixu's lay associate Tang Dayuan 唐大圓 (1885–1941) in the context of the founding of the “*Dharma*-realm New Lotus Society” and the proposal to construct a “New Pure Land” in the 1920s (Zamorski, 2019).

reconstructing the doctrinal significance of the concept of *dharma*-realm as it appears in the Chinese Buddhist canon. While the exact textual details concerning the sources of his inspiration require more thorough research, it is apparent that his reconstruction is based mostly on (Chan-laden) Huayan and Tiantai thought, with occasional references to other doctrinal strands of Sinitic Buddhism. From within this framework, Taixu defines *dharma*-realm as an object of the Buddha's liberating insight that pertains to the universe in its totality. This totality encompasses the multiple singular *dharma*s, or things, that the universe consists of and the *dharma*s' true nature, which inheres in every particular entity. The idea of the *dharma*-realm implies the seamless unity of these two aspects, a unity that is intuited through the buddhas' perfect awakening.

As argued above, in his discussions of the *dharma*-realm Taixu repeats doctrinal insights that date back to at least as early as the Tang dynasty while also formulating a distinctly Chinese Buddhist response to modern thought. Taixu's exegetical perspective allows him to reassert the notion of *dharma*-realm—the world as perceived and explained in terms of Buddhist doctrine—against the new “realms” that were described with the use of modern concepts: namely, the “universe” (i.e., the realm of rational inquiry) and “society” (i.e., the realm shaped by human action). Remarkably, in spite of the ostensibly traditional way in which Taixu explicates the idea of *dharma*-realm, he effectively portrays Buddhism as a system that both encompasses and supersedes its modern competitors. He pronounces the Buddhist view of the universe, which is based on a perfect view of the *dharma*-realm, as inherently more universal and more profound than any insight provided by Western theology, philosophy, or science. He also deems it a basis for a new view of life that is capable of stimulating ethical and political progress for the Chinese nation and for the whole of humankind. A Chinese Buddhism that is presented in this fashion is clearly not a tradition in need of any substantial “modernization.” In its doctrinal essence, at least, it is already replete with everything that Western modernity has to offer—and additionally with superior values of its own that the modern West has not even begun to realize.

At the same time, the case of *dharma*-realm exposes certain limitations of and contradictions within Taixu's assertive approach toward Western modernity. His apologetic writings on the traditional Buddhist vision of the universe hinge on the idea of perfect knowledge, which is construed as direct, total, and indisputable. Such perfect gnosis is fundamentally ahistorical and

concerned with timeless truths and fundamental meanings—not with historical evolution and social or cultural contexts. In this respect, Taixu's interpretation of the Chinese Buddhist idea of knowledge sets it on a collision course with modern (not to mention postmodern) epistemologies, in particular with methods employed by contemporary academics. At the same time, for all his confidence in the Buddhist vision of the universe, Taixu appears to be making some rather sweeping concessions to the secular world when he equates this vision with the ideal of the Great Unity and when he rewrites the metaphysical notion of *dharma*-realm as an essentially political ideal of an organic society (an ideal that is somewhat notorious for its totalitarian and utopian implications).⁵⁹

While these problematic implications may not be directly addressed in Taixu's writings, they nonetheless point to real challenges that have unfolded in the history of Chinese Buddhist modernism. How, and to what extent, these tensions were resolved is a question that may guide future studies on other modern Chinese Buddhist authors, many of whom were Taixu's associates, polemicists, or successors.

Abbreviations

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32. CBETA 2022 Q.4 (<https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw>).
- TDQS *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書. 65 vols. Ed. Taixu Dashi Quanshu Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 太虛大師全書編纂委員會 (1950–59). Taipei: Shandaosi Fojing Liutongchu.

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⁵⁹ For a critique of Buddhist-inspired (Huayan-inspired) philosophy of social unity from this point of view, see Matsumoto, 1997: 362.

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Dharma-Body (*Dharmakāya*) in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*

Keng Ching

1 Introduction

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (LAS, Sutra on the Entry into Laṅkā) is arguably one of the most mysterious Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. It represents an idiosyncratic synthesis between the Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha traditions. On the one hand, it presents detailed discussions of the major doctrines of Yogācāra, including the eight kinds of consciousness, the five *dharmas*, the three natures (*svabhāva*), and the two types of no-self (*nairātmya*). On the other hand, it also extensively discusses the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* and claims that pure *tathāgatagarbha* is innate in all sentient beings.¹

This study seeks to contribute to resolving some of the mysteries surrounding the LAS by focusing on its notion of Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*). I have previously suggested (Keng, 2023: 177–90) that a key feature of Tathāgatagarbha thought is the identification of the Dharma-body with unconditioned *dharmas* such as Thusness (*tathatā*), Dharma-realm (*dharmadhātu*), and so on. More specifically, I noted that given the pervasiveness (*spharaṇa*) of Thusness, if the Dharma-body is identical with Thusness, then all sentient beings equally share the Dharma-body; herein, I argued, lies the justification for the Tathāgatagarbha claim that all sentient beings are *tathāgatagarbhas* (literally, “containing the Tathāgata”).² The current study builds on that prior work, exploring the relationship between the Dharma-body and Thusness in the LAS in the hope of shedding light on how the LAS justifies the Tathāgatagarbha claim.

¹ See, for example, the following passages from the Chinese translation of the sutra by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652–710): T672:16.599b8–13.

² For the pervasiveness of Thusness and its relation to the Tathāgatagarbha claim that all sentient beings are *tathāgatagarbhas*, see chapter I verse 28 of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Johnston, 1950: 26) and Keng, 2023: 186–90.

2 The Interpolation of “Dharma-Body” into the LAS

To investigate the notion of Dharma-body in the LAS, I begin with a puzzle: Why did Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394–468), translator of the earliest Chinese rendering of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, interpolate the notion “Dharma-body” (*fashen* 法身) into a list of synonyms for *tathāgatagarbha*—a list that included unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) and permanent (*nitya*) *dharma*s such as Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Thusness (*tathatā*), Dharma-nature (*dharmatā*), neither-arising-nor-ceasing (*anirōdhānūtpāda*), and *nirvāṇa*? Let us examine the following passage from Guṇabhadra’s translation of the *sūtra*—a text henceforth referred to as LAS (G):

Passage 1:

The World-honored One told Mahāmāti: My teaching about *tathāgatagarbha* is not the same as the claim for the Self (*ātmavāda*) by non-Buddhists. Mahāmāti, sometimes I refer to [*tathāgatagarbha*] by such terms (*padārtha*) as Emptiness, Lack of Marks (*animitta*), Lack of Wish (*apraṇidhāna*), Thusness, Apex of Reality (*bhūtakoti*), Dharma-nature, Dharma-body, *nirvāṇa*, absence of Self-nature (*asvabhāva*), neither-arising-nor-ceasing, original tranquility (*ādiprasānti*), innate *nirvāṇa* (*prakṛtinirvāṇa*), and so on. Having taught *tathāgatagarbha* in this way, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Perfectly Enlightened One teaches the aspect of *tathāgatagarbha* (*rulaizang men* 如來藏門; *tathāgatagarbha-mukha*) that is devoid of illusions and in which there is no cognitive object (*li wangxiang wusuoyou jingjie* 離妄想無所有境界; *nirvikalpa-nirābhāsa-gocara*), in order to cut off fools’ fear about the phrase (*pada*) of “no self.”³

This passage presents a puzzle because of Guṇabhadra’s striking interpolation of “Dharma-body,” which is not found in the two later Chinese translations of LAS, i.e., those by Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (?–527)—henceforth referred to as LAS (B)—and Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652–710)—henceforth referred to as LAS (Ś). The notion “Dharma-body” does not appear in the extant Sanskrit manuscripts, either.⁴ It does not seem to be an interpolation made by later Chinese editors, however, because it is cited by scholars as early as Jizang 吉藏 (549–623).⁵

³ LAS (G), T670:16.489b3–9. Cf. LAS (B), T671:16.529b26–c3; LAS (Ś), T672:16.599b15–19; Nanjō, 1923: 78; Vaidya, 1963: 33; Suzuki, 1932: 69.

⁴ For LAS (B), see T671:16.529b27–29; for LAS (Ś), see T672:16.599b15–18. See also Nanjō, 1923: 78; Vaidya, 1963: 33.

⁵ Jizang (T1824:42.160a14–15) refers to Guṇabhadra and attributes to him the enumeration of five names for the Dharma-body—specifically, “Thusness” (*zhenru*

Regarding the interpolation of *fashen* in the corresponding Tibetan translations, the same interpolation also appears in Derge No. 108 (*mdo sde, ca*, 216b3), which is generally agreed to be a translation by Chos Grub 法成 from Guṇabhadra's Chinese translation. In contrast, the Tibetan equivalent of *fashen* does not appear in Derge No. 107 (*mdo sde, ca*, 86a5), which, according to the Tohoku catalogue, was also translated by Chos Grub from the Chinese translation (if so, presumably it was rendered either from LAS [B] or LAS [Ś]).⁶ Likewise, the Tibetan equivalent of *fashen* appears in Peking No. 776 (*mdo sna tshogs, ngu*, 235a5–6), which is generally agreed to be identical with Derge No. 108⁷ but does not appear in Peking No. 775 (*mdo sna tshogs, ngu*, 94b3–4), which agrees quite closely with Derge No. 107. Whether the source text behind Derge No. 107 and Peking No. 775 is LAS (B), LAS (Ś), or a Sanskrit text akin to the edition by Nanjō Bun'yū 南條文雄 (Nanjō, 1923) is a question awaiting further investigation.⁸ Hence, two versions of one Tibetan translation (Derge No. 108 and Peking No. 776) also confirm the interpolation of *fashen* in Guṇabhadra's translation. Due to the limitation of space and the limited proficiency in Tibetan of this author, the current chapter only consults the Chinese and the Sanskrit texts in the discussion that follows.

An important implication of Guṇabhadra's interpolation is that he identifies the Dharma-body with *tathāgatagarbha*, Thusness, and *nirvāṇa*. Since Thusness and *nirvāṇa* belong to unconditioned *dharma*s, we can infer that Guṇabhadra regarded the Dharma-body as being unconditioned and permanent. Intriguingly, an analogous situation is seen in Paramārtha's 真

真如), "Dharma-nature" (*faxing* 法性), "Apex of Reality" (*shiji* 實際), "Dharma-realm" (*fajie* 法界), and "Dharma-body" (*fashen* 法身). Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that the interpolation was made by somebody after Guṇabhadra and before Jizang. But since the main purpose of this chapter is to suggest that the interpolation of *fashen* in Guṇabhadra's translation as we currently have it agrees with the general intent of the LAS, I ignore the issue of whether it was Guṇabhadra himself who made the interpolation.

⁶ See Ui Hakuju et al., 1934: 25. Tulku Tarthang indicates that there is doubt about whether Chos Grub was the translator and gives some comments on this point. See Tarthang, 1981: 279–84. Hadano Hakuyū 羽田野伯猷 adamantly denies that Derge No. 107 could have been a retranslation from Chinese. See Hadano, 1975: 93–94.

⁷ For example, see Tarthang, 1981: 283.

⁸ See Ōtani Daigaku Toshokan (1930–32): 277–79. Tarthang considers Peking No. 775 to be identical with Derge no. 107; see Tarthang, 1981: 279. Many thanks to the reviewer for urging me to explore the Tibetan translations of the LAS and to my colleague Shenghai Li 李勝海 for providing the information about the Tibetan catalogues and searching for the corresponding passages.

諦 (499–569) translation of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, where he interpolates the notion “Dharma-body” (*fashen* 法身) into a list of synonyms for Emptiness, including unconditioned *dharma*s such as Thusness and Dharma-realm. In my earlier work, I suggested that this choice by Paramārtha signifies that he identified the Dharma-body with Thusness while the original text of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* did not.⁹

In the current study, I pose two questions: Does Guṇabhadra’s interpolation agree with the notion of Dharma-body as generally understood in the LAS? And is the Dharma-body considered permanent by the LAS? In the sections below I argue that the answer to both questions is yes. Before I proceed, however, two notes are in order.

First, a note about the term “permanent” (*nitya*): It has been suggested by Habata Hiromi 幅田裕美 (Habata, 2021: 1–2) that in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, *nitya* does not mean “eternal” in the temporal sense but rather “present here” in the spatial sense. While not disputing her thesis, I would like to point out that *nitya* means “permanent” in the temporal sense in the context of the LAS, which follows a precedent for this meaning that was already well-established in the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*.¹⁰ I discuss this point in detail below.

Second, a note about citations from the various versions of the LAS: There are three Chinese translations, two Tibetan translations, and two Sanskrit editions, and these do not always agree with each other.¹¹ Since the aim of

⁹ Cf. T1599:31.452b23–c6. Also cf. Keng, 2023: 194–95.

¹⁰ A notable occurrence is the following passage from the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*, which is quoted by the *Ratnagotravibhāga*: “It is said [in the scripture, i.e., the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*]: ‘Lord, something is dead, something is born’; such sayings are merely a worldly usage (*lokavyavahāra*). The saying ‘something is dead,’ Lord, this means the destruction of sense organs. ‘Something is born’ means, Lord, origination of new sense organs. However, Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is never born, never decays, never deceases, never passes away or arises [again]. For what reasons? Because, O Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha*, being beyond the sphere characterized as being caused and conditioned (*samskṛtalakṣaṇaviśayavyatīrṭta*), is eternal (*nitya*), constant (*dhruva*), quiescent (*śiva*), and everlasting (*śāśvata*)”; this English rendering is a modification of Takasaki, 1966: 242–43. For the Sanskrit text, see Johnston, 1950: 45–46; for the Chinese translation of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, see T1611:31.833b19–24; for the corresponding passage in the Chinese translation of the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*, see T310:11.677c7–14, T353:12.222b5–11 and Derge No. 92 (*dkon brtsegs, cha*, 274a6–b3).

¹¹ For a list of various Sanskrit texts and translations of the LAS, together with a list of some recent studies, see Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 25–34; notable here is Takasaki’s observation that Vaidya’s edition simply corrects some typos found in

this study is to investigate whether Guṇabhadra's interpolation agrees with the general intent of the LAS, I by and large avoid citing his Chinese translation in order not to beg the question. Instead I cite mainly from Śikṣānanda, for two reasons. First, his rendering accords quite well with the Sanskrit text edited by Nanjō (Nanjō, 1923). Second, D. T. Suzuki's English translation of the LAS (Suzuki, 1932) is the most widely circulated, and it basically follows Śikṣānanda. For the Sanskrit text, I mainly follow Nanjō, and I have incorporated his Sanskrit terms into my English translation when necessary.

3 Dharma-Body Is Permanent: Mind-Made Body

The notion of Dharma-body in the LAS remains underexplored. For example, concerning the interpolation of the notion in Guṇabhadra's translation of the sutra, a work by Takasaki Jikidō 高崎直道 and Horiuchi Toshio 堀内俊郎 simply mentions that "Dharma-body" is interpolated into a list of terms where no corresponding Sanskrit is attested, without making any further comments (Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 142n20). Elsewhere, Takasaki (Takasaki, 1980: 319) notes that the LAS identifies Dharma-body with *tathāgatagarbha* and Dharma-nature, Dharma-realm, Thusness, and Apex of Reality, but here, too, no further comments are offered. In an effort to restore the "original" Sanskrit text, Tokiwa Gishin 常盤義伸 (Tokiwa, 2018: 42, line 10) simply includes the term *dharmakāya* in his restored Sanskrit text, apparently without realizing that Guṇabhadra may have made an interpolation based on his own interpretation and instead presuming that there must have been an older, "original" Sanskrit text upon which Guṇabhadra's rendering was based.

To explore the notion of Dharma-body in the LAS, I begin with the sutra's statement that neither-arising-nor-ceasing (*busheng bumie* 不生不滅; *anirōdhānūtpāda*) is a synonym (*paryāya*) for the Tathāgata. To clarify why this is the case, the LAS states that neither-arising-nor-ceasing does not imply nothingness as is usually assumed. Rather, non-arising is a synonym for the mind-made Dharma-body (*yisheng fashen* 意生法身; *manomaya-dharmakāya*):

Nanjō's edition but does not do any further editorial work based on a consultation of other extant manuscripts. Also cf. Tokiwa, 2018: i-ii.

Passage 2:

O world-honored One! Please explain this to me. If there is anything that is neither-arising-nor-ceasing (*anirōdhānutpāda*), it should be non-existence (*abhāva*). How then can you teach that to be a synonym (*pariyāya*) for the Tathāgata? ... The Buddha says, “Listen! I shall explain this to you. O Mahāmāti, I claim that the Tathāgata is neither non-existent nor [just] a word (*grahaṇa*) for neither-arising-nor-ceasing [of all *dharma*s]. It is not dependent upon conditions nor is nothing. I explain neither-arising[*-nor-ceasing*] to be a synonym for the mind-made Dharma-body (*yisheng fashen* 意生法身; *manomaya-dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgata.”¹²

Here the Tathāgata is identified as the mind-made Dharma-body. In that it appears only once in the LAS, “mind-made Dharma-body” (*yisheng fashen*) is somewhat mysterious. I suggest that the term betrays a close connection between the Dharma-body and the mind-made body (*manomayakāya*).

My suggestion finds support in the immediately following passage, which begins, “Those who know the Tathāgata...” and continues with several statements of the same type: “Those who know X...” This formulaic presentation indicates that the various substantives I here designate as “X” should be considered synonyms for the Tathāgata. These substantives include Thusness, Apex of Reality, Dharma-realm, *nirvāṇa*, and, finally, the mind-made body.¹³ Note that right after this long list, the LAS repeats that neither-arising-nor-ceasing is a synonym for the Tathāgata,¹⁴ which echoes passage 2 quoted above. Two other verses of the LAS also identify the mind-made body with Thusness, the Apex of Emptiness, *nirvāṇa*, and the Dharma-realm, all of which are permanent.¹⁵

¹² See LAS (Ś), T672:16.615b12–19. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.506a18–29; LAS (B), T671:16.550c22–551a8; Nanjō, 1923: 191–92; Vaidya, 1963: 77–78; Suzuki, 1932: 164–65.

¹³ LAS (Ś), T672:16.615b24–c10. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.506b7–18; LAS (B), T671:16.551a16–b2; Nanjō, 1923: 192–93; Vaidya, 1963: 78; Suzuki, 1932: 165–66. Note that the Sanskrit text has simply *manomaya* (“mind-made”), but I believe this refers to *manomayakāya* (“mind-made body”). Both Śikṣānanda and Bodhiruci have supplemented “body” in this connection.

¹⁴ See, for example, LAS (Ś), T672:16.615c12–16.

¹⁵ For the first verse (LAS chapter III verse 31), see LAS (Ś), T672:16.610a1–3. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.500b16–17; LAS (B), T671:16.543c4–6; Nanjō, 1923: 154; Vaidya, 1963: 63; Suzuki, 1932: 133. For the second verse (LAS chapter X verse 192), see LAS (Ś), T672:16.628a25–26; LAS (B), T671:16.569c22–23; Nanjō, 1923: 290; Vaidya, 1963: 120; Suzuki, 1932: 241.

To summarize, the LAS states that the Tathāgata is non-arising and is identified with permanent *dharma*s such as Thusness and the Dharma-realm. This strongly suggests that the Dharma-body is permanent, as suggested by passage 1. The Tathāgata is further identified with the mind-made body. However, it is with this notion that complication arises, a matter to which we now turn.

4 Mind-Made Body

The notion “mind-made body” is rendered in several ways in the various translations of the LAS, as *yisheng shen* 意生身 (Guṇabhadra, Bodhiruci, Śikṣānanda), as *ruyi yishen* 如意意身 (Bodhiruci), and as *yicheng shen* 意成身 (Śikṣānanda). It is an old notion from the earliest phase of Buddhism. According to an ancient idea, when a practitioner advances to a high level of meditation, a mind-made body is produced that can travel across physical boundaries and across various realms (the realm of desire [*kāmadhātu*], the realm of matter [*rūpadhātu*], and the realm of non-matter [*ārūpyadhātu*]).¹⁶ This idea is closely connected to the notion of supernatural power (Pāli: *iddhi*; Skt.: *ṛddhi*). In keeping with this ancient tradition, the LAS characterizes the mind-made body as follows:

Passage 3:

What is called “mind-made body” is [a body] that travels quickly and without obstruction, like the mind, and hence is named “mind-made body.”¹⁷

Among the Mahāyāna scriptures, the most famous occurrence of this notion appears in the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*, but no extensive explanation is offered there.¹⁸ According to Takasaki, the notion of “mind-made body” in the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra* refers to a body as one wishes, i.e., the kind of body that represents an intermediate state before an advanced bodhisattva

¹⁶ Cf. *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. *yisheng shen* 意生身, by Sumi Lee, entry updated November 21, 2014, <http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb>; Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 343–44. In brief, the notion appears to be crucial for the Tathāgatagarbha tradition, as it also appears in the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra* and in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Cf. note 18 below.

¹⁷ LAS (Ś), T672:16.599c22–23. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.489c19–20; LAS (B), T671:16.530a15–17; Nanjō, 1923: 81; Vaidya, 1963: 34; Suzuki, 1932: 72.

¹⁸ See T353:12.219c20–220a25 and T353:12.221c3–6, to which the *Ratnagotravibhāga* refers (see, for example, T1611:31.830b7–c1; Johnston, 1950: 32–34).

attains *nirvāṇa*.¹⁹ In the case of advanced bodhisattvas, Takasaki suggests, the emphasis is on the idea of “as one wishes” (*ruyi* 如意), just as the Tathāgata has a body that he wishes.²⁰

Given the vagueness of the notion of mind-made body, in my discussion below I simply follow the text of the LAS. To begin with, the LAS distinguishes three kinds of mind-made body. The first is attained during the third through fifth bodhisattva stages; the second is attained at the eighth bodhisattva stage; and the third is attained at the stage of Buddhahood, as stated below:

Passage 4:

O Mahāmati! There are three kinds of mind-made body. What are the three? [First,] the mind-made body that has entered the bliss of concentration (*ru sanmei le* 入三昧樂; *samādhisukhasamāpatti*); [second,] the mind-made body that understands the self-nature of *dharma*s (*juefa zixing* 覺法自性; *dharma*svabhāvāboddha); [third,] the mind-made body that does not do [intentional] actions [but follows] what is born together with the genus [of the buddhas] (*zhonglei jusheng wuzuoxing* 種類俱生無作行; *nikāyasahajasaṃskārakriyā*).²¹ The practitioners realize (*parijñāna*) [these three kinds of mind-made body] after they have entered the first bodhisattva stages.

O Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body that has entered the bliss of concentration? This refers to the body [attained] when the practitioner enters into concentration at the third, fourth, and fifth bodhisattva stages. [That is,] when the practitioner is devoid of various kinds of mind (*li zhongzhong xin* 離種種心),²² remains calm, and does not move; when

¹⁹ Sumi Lee (Lee, 2014) gives a detailed study of the mind-made body in the *Śrīmālādevīsīmaṇāda-sūtra*, the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and the *Foxing lun* 佛性論. Her article is quite informative and helpful but is not directly relevant here because she focuses more on the kinds of mind-made body that are associated with the stages when one has not yet attained Buddhahood. The current study focuses, as discussed below, on the mind-made body that is identified with the Dharma-body, namely, when one has attained Buddhahood.

²⁰ Takasaki, 1975: 387n64. Also cf. Kubota, 1996: 193; this PhD dissertation is available in digital form at National Diet Library Digital Collections, DOI 10.11501/3120738.

²¹ The Sanskrit text here does not contain negation, but all three Chinese translations do. Following Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 362–63, I think this means that the mind-made body does not do anything intentionally but simply follows whatever co-arises with the genus of the buddhas. I arrive at this reading taking into consideration that the passage at this point refers to the mind-made body above the eighth through tenth bodhisattva stages, when one has almost attained Buddhahood, as stated in passage 4.

²² The Sanskrit text here has *svacittavivḍhāvivekavīhāra*, literally, “dwelling in various kinds of conceptualizations (*viveka*) of one’s own mind.”

there are no waves of evolving consciousness (*zhuanishi* 轉識; *pravṛtti-vijñāna*) [arising] from his ocean of mind (*xinhai* 心海; *cittodadhi*); when the practitioner realizes (*liao* 了; *parijñāna*) that cognitive objects are merely [those that are] seen due to one's own mind (*xinxian* 心現; *svacittadṛśya*) and hence do not [really] exist. This is named “the mind-made body that has entered the bliss of concentration.”

O Mahāmati! What is the mind-made body that understands the self-nature of *dharma*s? This refers to the body [attained] when the practitioner at the eighth bodhisattva stage understands (*avabodha*) and observes (*pravicaya*) that *dharma*s have no [real] manifestation (*wuyou xiang* 無有相; *nirābhāsa*) like illusion (*māyā*); when the practitioner's basis (*suoyi* 所依; *āśraya*) of the mind is transformed (*cittāśrayaparāvṛtta*); when the practitioner stays in the concentration of “illusion-like” (*māyopama-samādhi*) and other types (*mukha*) of concentration; when the practitioner manifests countless kinds of supranormal knowledge (*abhijñā*) like a flower that [blossoms] as one wishes and as swift as a thought (*nengxian wuliang zizai shentong ruhua kaifu suji ruyi* 能現無量自在神通如花開敷速疾如意; *anekalakṣaṇavaśitābhijñākusumitam manojavasadr̥ṣam*),²³ [his manifestation of supernatural power is] like illusion, like dream, like the moon (*bimba*) [in water], like appearance (*prakhya*) [in the mirror], [like something that is] not made from the four great elements but looks like them [and what are made from them] (*fei sida zao yu zao xiangsi* 非四大造與造相似; *abhautikaṃ bhūtabhautika-sadr̥ṣam*), possessed of (*samudita*) all visible and beautiful forms (*yiqie sexiang juzu zhuangyan* 一切色相具足莊嚴; *sarvarūpavicitrāṅga-samudita*); when [the practitioner] has gone into the assemblies (*parśan-maṇḍala*) in all buddhas' fields and has understood the self-nature of *dharma*s—such a mind is named “the mind-made body that understands the self-nature of all *dharma*s.”

O Mahāmati, what is the mind-made body that does not do [intentional] actions [but follows] what is born together with the genus [of the buddhas]? This refers to [the body] that understands (*liaoda* 了達; *avabodha*) the marks of *dharma*s (*faxiang* 法相; *dharma*) that are known reflexively (*zizheng* 自證; *pratyātmādhigama*) by all buddhas.²⁴ It is named “the mind-made body that does not do [intentional] actions [but follows] what is born together with the genus [of the buddhas].” O

²³ This is somewhat strange. I think the Japanese translation by Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 200, follows LAS (G) but does not seem to make sense.

²⁴ The Sanskrit and the other Chinese translations also have “understands the marks of bliss” (*sukhalakṣaṇāavabodha*). Guṇabhadra has *yuan zide lexiang* 緣自得樂相 (T670:16.498a6); Bodhiruci has *rushi lexiang faxiang le* 如實樂相法相樂 (T671:16.540c7–8).

Mahāmāti, you should make efforts to observe and understand the marks of the three bodies.²⁵

This passage is quite complicated, and the details of the three kinds of bodies are not easy to lay out. I don't pretend to have fully understood the passage in all its particulars, but the following is still clear: There are three kinds of mind-made body. The first kind is attained during the third through fifth bodhisattva stages as a result of an advanced level of concentration (*samādhi*); the second is attained at the eighth bodhisattva stage as a result of the understanding that all *dharma*s are, like illusion, not real; the third is attained at the stage of Buddhahood because the practitioner has attained the reflexive knowledge that is equal to the knowledge of all buddhas.²⁶

Now the difficulty is this: If the mind-made body is of three kinds, each being attained at different bodhisattva stages, then the mind-made body should not be considered permanent—or at least we can say that not all its individual types are permanent. This is because whatever is permanent should be single and unitary, like Thusness and space (*ākāśa*).

In contrast to Takasaki, who did not discuss extensively the notion of “mind-made body” as understood in the LAS, Kubota Chikara 久保田力 (Kubota, 1996) investigates every occurrence of the notion in this sutra. Probably influenced by the idea that the LAS represents a synthesis between Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha, Kubota thinks Takasaki's reading of the mind-made body must be supplemented by the interpretation from the Yogācāra tradition.

In particular, Kubota (Kubota, 1996: 195) points to a passage from the *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 (CWSL; T1585), a text compiled by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). After quoting the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*, the passage claims that the three kinds of mind-made body mentioned in this sutra are also named the transformation-bodies (*bianhua shen* 變化身; *nirmāṇakāya*) of the buddhas because they “are different from [their] original [bodies] given that they are transformed from the undefiled power of concentration (*wulou ding li* 無漏定力), like the transformation[-bodies] of the buddhas.”²⁷

²⁵ LAS (Ś), T672:16.607b25–c10. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.497c19–498a7; LAS (B), T671:16.540b19–c9; Nanjō, 1923: 136–37; Vaidya, 1963: 56; Suzuki, 1932: 118–19.

²⁶ There is another passage that suggests the mind-made body is attained at the eighth bodhisattva stage. See LAS (G), T670:16.496a10–14; LAS (B), T671:16.538 b17–21; LAS (Ś), T672:16.605c20–24.

²⁷ See T1585:31.45a24–25. Kubota also refers to the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* chapter XI verse 54–59, where it also states that one among the Hearers' vehicle (*Śrāvakayāna*) can receive a transformation-body after abandoning the body through meditation. The

The crucial point to note concerning the CWSL's definition of mind-made body as the transformation-body is as follows: The mind-made body is conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) because the transformation-body is conditioned. It is conditioned for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, it is an effect of a cause (i.e., the undefiled power of concentration). Second, the transformation-body is conditioned because it has to change itself in accordance with the audience it aims to teach.²⁸

Hence, we face a tension concerning the notion of "mind-made body": Some passages of the LAS suggest mind-made body is not permanent because there are multiple types. On the other hand, given the identification of the Dharma-body with the mind-made body discussed above, the latter should be permanent because the former is permanent. I shall come back to this tension toward the end of this study.

5 The Mind-Made Body and *Pratyātmāryajñāna*

Before we can resolve the issue set out above, we need to further explore the notion of mind-made body. A key clue lies in noting that common to the three kinds of mind-made body outlined above is the general idea of *jñāna* (knowledge). To sum up the explanations presented earlier, the features of the three are, respectively:

- (1) "realizes the existence and non-existence of the cognitive objects that are seen by one's own mind"
- (2) "understands the self-nature of all *dharmas*"
- (3) "understands the marks of *dharmas* that are known reflexively by all buddhas"

These descriptions make clear that all three kinds of mind-made body concern *jñāna* in the broad sense, which includes realization (*parijñāna*), understanding (*gata*), and comprehension (*avabodha*). In order to accommodate all of the different levels of cognizance, I have chosen in the current study to use the term *jñāna* without translating it. The relation

latter seems to accord better with the ancient notion of mind-made body. The discussion of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* is not clearly connected with my discussion here, and hence I will leave it for now.

²⁸ See, for example, the definition of the transformation-body offered by CWSL, T1585:31.58a2–6.

between the mind-made body and *jñāna* can further be confirmed by the compound *kāyaṃ ca jñānāmanomayaṃ*, whose Chinese translations are *shen zhi yisheng* 身智意生 (LAS [G]), *yisheng shen zhi shen* 意生身智身 (LAS [B]), and *yisheng zhi shen* 意生智身 (LAS [Ś]).²⁹ I translate it as “the mind-made body that is *jñāna*.”³⁰ This notion refers, again, to the body attained by advanced bodhisattvas above the eighth bodhisattva stage.³¹ It will soon become clear that this “mind-made body that is *jñāna*” should be considered identical with the last among the three kinds of mind-made body, with the emphasis on this body having *jñāna*—which should be understood as its characteristic feature.³²

To be even more precise, the mind-made body is closely related to the notion of “reflexive noble *jñāna*” (*pratyātmāyajñāna*), as indicated by the following passage:³³

Passage 5:

Further, O Mahāmati, having stayed in the mark of mind, consciousness, and wisdom (*zhu zhihuixin suozhu xiang* 住智慧心所住相; *citta-vijñāna-prajñālakṣaṇa-vyavasthā*), afterwards, efforts should be made regarding the three marks of the noble *jñāna*. What are the three? They are: [first,] the mark of no manifestation (*wuyingxiang xiang* 無影像相; *nirābhāsa-lakṣaṇa*), [second,] the mark of holding and abiding by all buddhas’ own vows (*yiqie zhufu yuanchi xiang* 一切諸佛願持相;

²⁹ LAS (G), T670:16.510b25; LAS (B), T671:16.556c25; LAS (Ś), T672:16.619c22; Nanjō, 1923: 222; Vaidya, 1963: 90; Suzuki, 1932: 192. Suzuki translates it as “knowledge-body created by the will.”

³⁰ The reviewer suggests that *kāyaṃ ca jñānāmanomayaṃ* should be translated as “the body made of *jñāna* and *manas*” or “the body made of *manas* as *jñāna*.” I agree that these are more literally correct translations. But since *manomaya* is a fixed phrase in the LAS, I tend to read *mano* and *maya* together, meaning “mind-made,” and hence translate, or, better, paraphrase it as “the mind-made body that is *jñāna*.” I believe that ultimately both approaches lead to exactly the same meaning.

³¹ Namely, at the bodhisattva stage known as immovable (*budong di* 不動地; *acala-bhūmi*). See the text immediately preceding the passage cited in note 29, i.e., LAS (G), T670:16.510b21; LAS (B), T671:16.556c20; LAS (Ś), T672:16.619c18–19; Nanjō, 1923: 221; Vaidya, 1963: 90; Suzuki, 1932: 192.

³² There is a passage in the first chapter of the LAS claiming that the Tathāgatas have *jñāna* as their substance and their body (*rulai yi zhi wei ti zhi wei shen* 如來以智為體智為身; *jñānātmakās tathāgatā jñānaśarīrā[s]*). See LAS (Ś), T672:16.590b2–10; LAS (B), T671:16.518c16; Nanjō, 1923: 20; Vaidya, 1963: 8; Suzuki, 1932: 20. This passage is missing from LAS (G).

³³ Suganuma, 1966, does not provide any details about the notion *pratyātmāyajñāna* itself, nor does it pay any attention to the link between *pratyātmāyajñāna* and the mind-made body.

sarvabuddhasvapranidhānādhiṣṭhāna-lakṣaṇa); [third,] the mark of the knowledge (*gati*) [attained] by the reflexive noble *jñāna* (*zizheng shengzhi suoqu xiang* 自證聖智所趣相; *pratyātmāryajñānagati-lakṣaṇa*). When all practitioners attain these three marks, they abandon the mark of mind and wisdom, which is like that of a lame ass (*khañjagardabha*), enter the eighth bodhisattva stage, and make endless practices to [further polish] these three marks.

O Mahāmati, among these, the mark of no manifestation arises (*pravartate*) due to the frequent practice (*paricaya*) with the marks of the Śrāvaka, the Pratyekabuddha, and the non-Buddhists. The mark of holding and abiding by all buddhas' own vows arises due to the holding and abiding by the own vows of all previous buddhas. The mark of the knowledge by the reflexive noble *jñāna* arises due to the non-adherence to the marks of all *dharma*s (*buqu yiqie faxiang* 不取一切法相; *sarvadharmalakṣaṇānabhīniveśa*), the attainment of various bodies of concentration that is illusion-like (*chengjiu ruhuan zhu sanmei shen* 成就幻諸三昧身; *māyopamasamādhikāyapratilambha*), and the accumulation (*pracāra*) of the going (*gamana*) into the knowledge (*gati*) at the buddha stage (*qu fodi zhi* 趣佛地智; *buddhabhūmigatigamana-pracāra*). O Mahāmati, such are the three marks of the noble *jñāna*. By following these three, the nobles (*ārya*) approach the cognitive objects of the knowledge (*gati-gocara*) by the reflexive noble *jñāna* (*zizheng shengzhi suoxing* 自證聖智所行; *svapratyātmāryajñānagatigocara*). Hence efforts should be made with respect to these three marks of noble *jñāna*.³⁴

In this passage, advanced bodhisattvas above the eighth bodhisattva stage practice these three marks in order to attain the “reflexive noble *jñāna*” (*pratyātmāryajñāna*), which is the knowledge reached at the stage of Buddhahood. Recalling from passage 4 that the last among the three kinds of mind-made body is characterized by the feature “understands the marks of *dharma*s that are known reflexively by all buddhas,” we can now establish a close connection between the last kind of mind-made body and the reflexive noble *jñāna*, which has three characteristics.³⁵

³⁴ LAS (Ś), T672:16.595b15–27. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.485a14–26; LAS (B), T671:16.524a21–b4; Nanjō, 1923: 49–50; Vaidya, 1963: 22–23; Suzuki, 1932: 44–45.

³⁵ For another passage that also indicates the close relation between the mind-made body and the reflexive noble *jñāna*, see LAS (G), T670:16.489c27–29 (cf. Suzuki, 1932: 72; note that there is no correspondence in LAS (B), LAS (Ś), and Sanskrit). This passage discusses the four *dharma*s that make a bodhisattva a yogin with great practices (*caturbhir mahāmate dharmaiḥ samanvāgatā bodhisattvā mahāyogayogino*). There are problems with the order of texts, but the translation by Guṇabhadra most clearly connects the mind-made body with the reflexive noble *jñāna*. Kamiya

The first characteristic of the reflexive noble *jñāna* is its having as its sole objects *nirvāṇa*, Emptiness, and Thusness. The LAS states that the perfected nature (*pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva*) includes both the right *jñāna* (*samyag-jñāna*) and Thusness.³⁶ And the following passage further indicates that the reflexive noble *jñāna* has Thusness as its object:

Passage 6:

What is the perfected nature? It is Thusness (*tathatā*), which is devoid of conceptualization such as the characteristic of appearance, the characteristic of names and the characteristic of things (*li mingxiang shixiang yiqie fenbie* 離名相事相一切分別; *nimittanāmavastulakṣaṇa-vikalpavirahita*), which is the understanding of where the noble *jñāna* leads (*āryajñānagatigamana*), which is the cognitive object (*gocara*) of the knowledge (*gati*) of the reflexive noble *jñāna* (*pratyātmāryajñānagatigocara*). This, O Mahāmati, is the perfected nature, the heart of *tathāgatagarbha* (*rulaizang xin* 如來藏心; *tathāgatagarbhahṛdaya*).³⁷

This passage suggests that the perfected nature includes both the noble *jñāna* and its cognitive object (i.e., Thusness). In another passage, the LAS states that the ultimate reality (*diyi yi* 第一義; *paramārtha*) is the object of reflexive noble *jñāna*.³⁸

The second characteristic of the reflexive noble *jñāna* is that it constitutes the core of the Dharma-body: As mentioned above in passage 2, the mind-

Masatoshi 神谷麻俊 (Kamiya, 1973) also identifies the reflexive noble *jñāna* as a characteristic feature of the Tathāgata and one that corresponds to *nirvāṇa*. Kuo Chiung-yao 郭瓊瑤 (Kuo, 2013) explores the various usages of the term *pratyātmagati*- (*zineizheng zhi* 自內證智) in the LAS but does not pay particular attention to the close connection between the *pratyātmāryajñāna* and the mind-made body.

³⁶ LAS (Ś), T672:16.620b29–c1. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.511b6–7; LAS (B), T671:16.557c29–558a1; Nanjō, 1923: 227; Vaidya, 1963: 92; Suzuki, 1932: 197.

³⁷ LAS (Ś), T672:16.598a3–5. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.487c13–15; LAS (B), T671:16.527c12–15; Nanjō, 1923: 67–68; Vaidya, 1963: 29; Suzuki, 1932: 60. Concerning the long compound in the Sanskrit text *āryajñānagatigamana-pratyātmāryajñānagatigocara*, LAS (Ś) simply renders it as *zizheng shengzhi suoxing* 自證聖智所行, but LAS (G)'s rendering (*shengzhi suode ji zijue shengzhi qusuoqing jingjie* 聖智所得及自覺聖智趣所行境界) attests the Sanskrit. In this passage the perfected nature is also named *rulaizang xin* 如來藏心 (*tathāgatagarbhahṛdaya*). It is not easy to tell exactly what the LAS means by the term “heart” (Skt. *hṛdaya*), but I agree with Takasaki and Horiuchi, 2015: 338, that it means something along the lines of “essential part.”

³⁸ LAS (Ś), T672:16.596c26–28; Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.486c2–4; LAS (B), T671:16.526a18–20; Nanjō, 1923: 60; Vaidya, 1963: 26; Suzuki, 1932: 54.

made body is also named the mind-made Dharma-body. As also indicated above, the core of the last among the three kinds of mind-made body is the reflexive noble *jñāna*. Hence, the reflexive noble *jñāna* constitutes the core of the Dharma-body.

Third, the reflexive *jñāna* is non-conceptual.³⁹ For this reason, the last kind of mind-made body (having *jñāna* as its core) should belong to the Dharma-body rather than to the transformation-body, which employs the right *jñāna* and languages to teach sentient beings.⁴⁰ This constitutes a reason to reject Kubota's suggestion that all three mind-made bodies of the LAS correspond to the transformation-body.

6 Elimination of Mind, Mentation, and Consciousnesses

So far, we have established a connection linking the last kind of mind-made body, the Dharma-body, and the reflexive noble *jñāna*. We now turn back to the issue of whether the last kind of mind-made body is permanent. A clue can be found in the following passage, where the LAS states that the mind-made body (here referring to the last among the three kinds) is attained at the eighth bodhisattva stage after the transformation (*parāvṛtti*) of mind, mentation, and mental consciousness:

Passage 7:

O Mahāmati, how can one become devoid of views that [hold external objects to be] arising, staying, and ceasing? One should observe that all *dharma*s arise like illusions and dream... If one observes in this manner, i.e., all *dharma*s, either internal or external, cannot be grasped, one knows that [*dharma*s] have no real substance and hence stays away from views that [*dharma*s] arise, and realizes that [*dharma*s] are illusion-like. At that time, one immediately attains the patient acceptance of no-arising (*wu sheng fa ren* 無生法忍; *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti*) and stays at the eighth bodhisattva stage. [Thereafter,] by [undergoing] the transformation (*parāvṛtti*) of mind, mentation, and mental consciousness (*xin yi yishi* 心意意識) and by understanding the objects [as they are], including mind, mentation, mental consciousness, the five *dharma*s, the self-nature [i.e.,

³⁹ See LAS (Ś), T672:16.600c12–14 and T672:16.608b20–22.

⁴⁰ The LAS claims that the transformation-bodies of the buddhas teach sentient beings (LAS [Ś], T672:16.601b15–18; T672:16.596b25–27); also cf. LAS chapter X verse 143—LAS (Ś), T672:16.627b8–9; LAS (B), T671:16.568c7–8; Nanjō, 1923: 283; Vaidya, 1963: 116; Suzuki, 1932: 237—in terms of the right *jñāna* (LAS [Ś], T672:16.620c12–15). This claim is missing from LAS (G).

the three self-natures], and the two kinds of no-self (*liao xin yi yishi wufa zixing erwuwo jing* 了心意意識五法自性二無我境; *cittamanomanovijñānapañcadharmasvabhāvanairātmyadvayagatiparāvṛttyadhigamāt*), one attains the mind-made body.⁴¹

Here the long compound *cittamanomanovijñāna-pañcadharma-svabhāvanairātmya-dvayagatiparāvṛttyadhigamāt* is very difficult to unpack. Partly inspired by Bodhiruci's translation,⁴² I suggest it can be divided into two groups:

- (1) the transformation (*parāvṛtti*) of mind, mentation, and mental consciousness (*cittamanomanovijñāna-parāvṛtti*)
- (2) the understanding (*adhigama*) of the knowledge (*gati*) about the five kinds of *dharma*, the [three kinds of] natures, and the two kinds of no-self (*pañcadharma-svabhāva-nairātmyadvaya-gati-adhigama*)

Now concerning the term *parāvṛtti* (transformation) in this long compound, there are two possible interpretations, as reflected in the two different Chinese renderings. Both LAS (G) and LAS (B) adopt the term *li* 離, meaning “devoid of, eliminate” in the sense of the Sanskrit *rahita*, or *virahita*. But LAS (Ś) uses the term *zhuan* 轉, meaning “turning, revolving,” which accords better with the current Sanskrit *parāvṛtti*.

Here I believe the sense “elimination” should be preferred because we have several similar passages where the LAS indicates that advanced bodhisattvas eliminate mind, mentation, and mental consciousness before attaining *nirvāṇa*. For example:

Passage 8:

O Mahāmati, the bodhisattvas, the Śrāvakas, and the Pratyekabuddhas⁴³ at the eighth bodhisattva stage have seen the no-evolving of discrimination (*fenbie xiang mie* 分別想滅; *vikalpasyāpravṛttim*) of mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness. Beginning with the first till the sixth bodhisattva stage, they observe that all the three realms arise merely due to one's own discriminations of mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness, become devoid of self and mine, and do not see [i.e., grasp] various marks of [what appear to be] external *dharma*s. Ordinary people and fools do not understand this, and, due to the permeation of begin-

⁴¹ LAS (Ś), T672:16.599c13–21. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.489c9–18; LAS (B), T671:16.530a6–14; Nanjō, 1923: 80–81; Vaidya, 1963: 34; Suzuki, 1932: 71.

⁴² In LAS (B) we find: “To be devoid of (*luanli* 遠離) the substances and characteristics of mind, mentation, mental consciousness, and the five kinds of *dharma*s; and to attain (*de* 得) the mind-made body that is fulfilling one's wish and is characterized by two kinds of no-self” (T671:16.530a12–13).

⁴³ The current Sanskrit text here does not have “the Śrāvakas, ... the Pratyekabuddhas.”

ningless mistakes and faults, are attached to the marks of a grasper and what is grasped (*nengsuoqu* 能所取; *grāhyagrāhaka*) that are transformed (*bianzuo* 變作; *pariṇāma*) from their own minds... O Mahāmati, the bodhisattvas, the Mahāsattvas are also like this. Beginning with the first and till the seventh, and advancing to the eighth bodhisattva stages, they attain non-discrimination and see every *dharma* as being like illusions and dreams, devoid of a grasper and what is grasped, see the huge utilities (*guangda liyong* 廣大力用) of mind and mental concomitants,⁴⁴ cultivate diligently the Buddha-*dharma*s and cause those who have not realized [Buddha-*dharma*s] to realize, become devoid of the illusory ideation due to the discriminations of mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness (*li xin yi yishi wangfenbie xiang* 離心意意識妄分想; *citta-mano-manovijñāna-vikalpa-saṃjñā-vigama*), attain the patient acceptance of no-arising. Such is the *nirvāṇa* that is attained by the bodhisattvas, which does not mean cessation (*miehuai* 滅壞; *vināśa*).⁴⁵

This passage states that the advanced bodhisattvas become devoid of the illusory ideation (*saṃjñā*) that is the function of mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness in order to attain *nirvāṇa*. Further, the LAS also states that the bodhisattvas attain the Tathāgata-body after they have eliminated mind, mentation, and mental consciousness and their bases (*anuśraya*) are transformed.⁴⁶ Two verses from the last chapter of the LAS also indicate that one attains the state of Tathāgata, the lineage (*gotra*), after one has eliminated mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness, together with the [five] kinds of *dharma* and the [three kinds] of nature.⁴⁷

One question that arises from the above passages is, When the LAS discusses the elimination of mind, mentation, and mental consciousness, does this include the first five sensory consciousnesses or not? The answer is yes, as the LAS states:

Passage 9:

O Mahāmati, [among these five *dharma*s] “appearance” (*xiang* 相; *nimitta*) refers to matter that is seen by the visual consciousness and to sound, smell,

⁴⁴ The Sanskrit text here has “the flow of the discrimination of mind and mental concomitants” (*cittacaitasikavikalpaprasara*) instead.

⁴⁵ LAS (Ś), T672:16.618b21–619a2. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.509c3–8; LAS (B), T671:16.555b11–18; Nanjō, 1923: 212–15; Vaidya, 1963: 86–87; Suzuki, 1932: 183–86.

⁴⁶ LAS (Ś), T672:16.594a21–22. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.483c26–27; LAS (B), T671:16.522c24–25; Nanjō, 1923: 42–43; Vaidya, 1963: 19–20; Suzuki, 1932: 38–39.

⁴⁷ LAS chapter X verses 417–18: LAS (Ś), T672:16.632a4–7; LAS (B), T671:16.575a27–b2; Nanjō, 1923: 318; Vaidya, 1963: 134–35; Suzuki, 1932: 258. Both of these verses are missing from LAS (G).

taste, touch, and ideas that are cognized by the auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses. I teach these to be “appearance.” ... The Buddha says, “O Mahāmati! All these—the three self-natures, the eight consciousnesses, and the two kinds of no-self—are included in the five *dharmas*. Among them, names and appearances map onto the imagined self-nature (*wangji xing* 妄計性; *parikalpita-svabhāva*).⁴⁸

This passage clearly maps the function of the five sensory consciousnesses onto the imagined self-nature, which by definition is not ultimately real. For this reason, we should also consider sensory consciousnesses to be illusory, and hence they are to be eliminated before one attains Buddhahood. In another passage, the LAS compares mind, mentation, and the six consciousnesses to a magician, which suggests that the function of all eight kinds of consciousness is illusory as well.⁴⁹ As shall be briefly discussed below in the conclusion, there are confusions in the LAS regarding whether the mind that is to be eliminated refers to the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) or not.⁵⁰

Hence the excerpt from the LAS quoted earlier as passage 7 suggests that when advanced bodhisattvas have eliminated their mind, mentation, and the first six kinds of consciousness, they attain the mind-made body. Because passage 8 identifies the elimination of mind, mentation, and the first six kinds of consciousness as the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, the mind-made body here must be understood to refer to the last of the three kinds of mind-made body. This may sound quite surprising, because it seems to suggest that advanced bodhisattvas after such elimination would have no mind at all. In what follows, I explore if there is anything left from the elimination of the function of mind, mentation, and the six consciousnesses.

⁴⁸ LAS (Ś), T672:16.620b6–28. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.511a12–b4; LAS (B), T671:16.557b25–c26; Nanjō, 1923: 225–27; Vaidya, 1963: 92; Suzuki, 1932: 195–97. See also the following two additional passages: T672:16.598a11–13; T672:16.622c4–5.

⁴⁹ LAS chapter VI verse 4: LAS (G), T670:16.510c19–20; LAS (B), T671:16.557a22–24; LAS (Ś), T672:16.620a17–18; Nanjō, 1923: 224; Vaidya 1963: 91; Suzuki, 1932: 193.

⁵⁰ Another issue here is at which stage precisely such elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses takes place. Some passages suggest that this takes place at the eighth bodhisattva stage, but others seem to suggest that it takes place when one attains Buddhahood or *nirvāṇa*. I must confess that I need to engage in further study before I can arrive at my own firm conclusion regarding this issue.

7 What Remains After the Elimination of Mind, Mentation, and Consciousnesses?

After the elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses, does anything remain? According to the LAS, at this point there remains a cognitive state having at least two aspects. First, there is the objective aspect, namely, *nirvāṇa* or Thusness; second, there is the reflexive noble *jñāna* having Thusness as its object.

Regarding the first aspect, the LAS states:

Passage 10:

The Buddha told Mahāmati: After the transformation of the permeation of the self-nature of all consciousnesses and of the views and permeations of the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), mentation, and the mental consciousness (*yiqie shi zixing xiqi ji zangshi yi yishi jian xi zhuan* 一切識自性習氣及藏識意識見習轉; *sarvavijñāna-svabhāva-vāsanālaya-mano-manovijñāna-dṛṣṭi-vāsanā-parāvṛtti*), [what is left is the state] that I and all buddhas call *nirvāṇa*, which is the state of the emptiness of the self-nature of *dharma*s.⁵¹ Further, O Mahāmati, *nirvāṇa* is the cognitive object (*gocara*) for the knowledge (*gati*) of the reflexive noble *jñāna* (*zizheng shengzhi suoxing jingjie* 自證聖智所行境界; *āryajñāna-pratyātmagatigocara*) and is devoid of eternalism, nihilism, and of existence and non-existence. Why is it named “not eternal” (*na śāśvata*)? Because it is devoid of such conceptualizations as [being] a particular or a universal characteristic (*svasāmānyalakṣaṇavikalpaprahīṇa*). Why is it named “not annihilated” (*na uccheda*)? Because it is the cognitive object of the reflexive (*pratyātma*) *jñāna* of all past, future, and present noble ones.⁵²

This means that after the elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses, the phenomenal world that is mistaken for the external world disappears,⁵³ and only *nirvāṇa* remains. This passage also states that since *nirvāṇa* is the object for the reflexive noble *jñāna* of all past, present, and future noble ones, the reflexive noble *jñāna* would have nothing to cognize if *nirvāṇa* did not always exist.

⁵¹ The Sanskrit and the other two Chinese translations have a long compound instead: *nirvāṇagatisvabhāvaśūnyatāvastugocaram*.

⁵² LAS (Ś), T672:16.602b6–12. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.492b7–12; LAS (B), T671:16.533b2–11; Nanjō, 1923: 98–99; Vaidya, 1963: 41; Suzuki, 1932: 86–87.

⁵³ LAS (G), T670:16.486c28–487a7; LAS (B) T671:16.526b26–c7; LAS (Ś), T672:16.597a21–28; Nanjō, 1923: 62–63; Vaidya, 1963: 27; Suzuki, 1932: 55–56.

Regarding the second aspect, the LAS states that the reflexive noble *jñāna* subsists after the elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses:

Passage 11:

O Mahāmati, after transforming (i.e., eliminating; *zhuan* 轉; *parāvṛtti*) mind, mentation, and the mental consciousness, the practitioners are devoid of a grasper and what is grasped. They dwell in the state of Tathāgata and [are endowed with] the reflexive noble *dharma*s—i.e., the reflexive noble *jñāna*—(*zhu rulai di zizheng shengfa* 住如來地自證聖法; *tathāgatabhūmipratyātmāyājñānagata*).⁵⁴ They have no concepts such as existence and non-existence.⁵⁵

Here the LAS says that one attains the reflexive noble *jñāna* at the stage of Tathāgata. This indicates clearly that the reflexive noble *jñāna* is what the buddhas possess.⁵⁶ Another verse also confirms that after the elimination of the mind, mentation, and various types of consciousness, what remains is the mind-made body. This obviously refers to the last kind of mind-made body, which has the reflexive noble *jñāna* as its core.⁵⁷

Thus, both *nirvāṇa* (as the objective aspect) and reflexive noble *jñāna* (as the subjective aspect) remain after the elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses. The relation between the two is that between what is cognized and what cognizes because, as mentioned above, the reflexive noble *jñāna* has *nirvāṇa*/Thusness as its sole object.

With regard to this retention in Buddhahood of a cognitive state having both objective and subjective aspects, the following passage unequivocally claims that the subjective aspect (reflexive noble *jñāna*, mind-made body, or simply the Tathāgata) is permanent given that the objective aspect (*nirvāṇa*, Thusness) is permanent:

⁵⁴ Except for LAS (Ś), both Sanskrit texts and the other two Chinese translations all have *pratyātmāyājñāna*. LAS (G) renders this *zijue shengzhi* 自覺聖智; LAS (B) renders it *zheng shengzhi* 證聖智.

⁵⁵ LAS (Ś), T672:16.601b12–14. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.491b13–15; LAS (B), T671:16.532a15–19; Nanjō, 1923: 93; Vaidya, 1963: 39; Suzuki, 1932: 81.

⁵⁶ There is another passage saying that one attains the reflexive noble *jñāna* after the eighth bodhisattva stage. I take this to mean that the reflexive noble *jñāna* continues to exist in Buddhahood. LAS (Ś), T672:16.619c17–22; Suzuki, 1932: 191–92.

⁵⁷ LAS chapter X verse 226: LAS (Ś), T672:16.628c13–14; LAS (B), T671:16.570c9–10; Nanjō, 1923: 294–95; Vaidya, 1963: 122; Suzuki, 1932: 244.

Passage 12:

Further, O Mahāmati, in a different sense (*bieyi* 別義; *paryāya*) [the Tathāgata] can be said to be permanent (*nitya*). Why? Because [the Tathāgata's] direct observing *jñāna* realizes the permanent *dharmā* (*xianzhi zheng changfa* 現智證常法; *abhisamayādhigamajñānanityatva*), the direct observing *jñāna* is permanent, and hence the Tathāgata is also permanent. O Mahāmati! The Dharma-nature (*faxing* 法性; *dharmatā*), the stableness of the Dharma (*fazhu* 法住; *dharmasthititā*), the fixed course of the Dharma (*fawei* 法位; *dharmaniyāmatā*) remains (*sthitā*) no matter whether the Tathāgatas arise or do not arise [in the worlds]. [The Dharma-nature and the like] are not non-existence among the *dharma*s that are attained by all the two [lesser] vehicles and non-Buddhists, but ordinary people and fools [like them] do not know about this. O Mahāmati! Tathāgatas are characterized (*deqiming* 得其名; *prabhāvita*) by their pure *jñāna*, which realizes reflexively the Dharma-nature (*qingjing hui neizheng faxing* 清淨慧內證法性; *adhigamajñāna prajñajñāna-prabhāvita*),⁵⁸ but not by the illusory permeation of mind, mentation, the mental consciousness, and *dharma*s, i.e., *skandhas*, realms, and sense spheres. All the three realms arise from illusory discriminations (*xuwang fenbie* 虛妄分別; *abhūta-vikalpa*), but the Tathāgatas do not arise from illusory discriminations.⁵⁹

Here the reasoning is as follows: since the cognitive object of the reflexive *jñāna* remains the same, that is, it remains Dharma-nature (*dharmatā*) or Thusness, the reflexive *jñāna* must also be permanent.

To summarize, the LAS claims that both the objective aspect (*nirvāṇa*, Thusness, Dharma-nature) and the subjective aspect (reflexive noble *jñāna*, the last kind of mind-made body) remain after the elimination of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses. Given that the objective aspect is permanent, the subjective aspect is also permanent.

An important point to draw from the permanence of the reflexive *jñāna* is this: Since it is permanent, it pervades all sentient beings just like Thusness pervades all sentient beings. To put it differently, just like Thusness is innate in all sentient beings, the reflexive *jñāna* is also innate in all sentient beings. This means that when bodhisattvas have eliminated mind, mentation, and consciousnesses, their innate reflexive noble *jñāna* is disclosed but not newly

⁵⁸ The Sanskrit text says something different: “The *jñāna* that enters [the Dharma-nature] (*adhigamajñāna*) of Tathāgata is characterized (*prabhāvita*) by the *jñāna* that is wisdom (*prajñajñāna*).” LAS (G) also mentions 如來所得智是般若所熏 (T670:16.510a15–16).

⁵⁹ LAS (Ś), T672:16.619b6–14. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.510a11–18; LAS (B), T671:16.556a18–29; Nanjō, 1923: 218; Vaidya, 1963: 88; Suzuki, 1932: 188.

produced. And this, further, reveals the close connection between the subjective aspect of the cognitive state retained in Buddhahood and the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*, to which we now turn.

8 Reflexive Noble *Jñāna* as *Tathāgatagarbha*

Our discussion above indicates that in Buddhahood there remains a cognitive state having both objective and subjective aspects. The objective aspect refers to *nirvāṇa*, Thusness, Dharma-realm; the subjective aspect refers to Dharma-body, to the last kind of mind-made body, to reflexive noble *jñāna*. Both aspects are permanent. For this reason, both aspects should be regarded as being innate to all sentient beings.

This conclusion points to the close connection between the Dharma-body and *tathāgatagarbha*. Note that the LAS introduces the notion of “the mind-made body that is *jñāna*” (*yisheng zhishen* 意生智身; *kāyaṃ ca jñānāmanomayaṃ*) in its discussion of the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*. Here I quote this discussion in abridged form:

Passage 13:

[*Tathāgatagarbha*] is like a great ocean in which the waves roll on constantly but its body (*ti* 體; *śarīra*) remains uninterruptedly (*buduan* 不斷; *avyucchinna*). Its nature is extremely pure (*benxing qingjing* 本性清淨; *atyantaprakṛtipariśuddha*). It is devoid of the fault of being impermanent (*wuchang* 無常; *anīya*) and devoid of any claim for the Self (*wolun* 我論; *ātmavāda*).⁶⁰ ... This *tathāgatagarbha*, the storehouse consciousness, has a nature that is extremely pure (*benxing qingjing* 本性清淨; *prakṛtipariśuddha*), [but] it [appears to be] (*iva*) impure (*bujing* 不淨; *aśuddha*) because it is defiled by adventitious afflictions (*kechen suoran* 客塵所染; *āgantukleśopakliṣṭa*). This cannot be directly perceived by all [sentient beings] of the two lesser vehicles and non-Buddhists, who can merely have [rough] views (*jian* 見; *darśana*) about this by rough investigation (*yidu* 臆度; *vitarka*). The *Tathāgatas* can directly perceive this as clearly as when they see a *myrobalan* lying in the hand.⁶¹

⁶⁰ At this point in the passage, the LAS states that one attains the mind-made body that is *jñāna* (*yisheng zhishen* 意生智身; *kāyaṃ ca jñānāmanomayaṃ*) at the eighth bodhisattva stage.

⁶¹ LAS (Ś), T672:16.619c5–620a1. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.510b8–c4; LAS (B), T671:16.556c1–557a6; Nanjō, 1923: 220–22; Vaidya, 1963: 90–91; Suzuki, 1932:

At this point we can see the full picture concerning what remains in Buddhahood: *Tathāgatagarbha* in the LAS refers to the subjective aspect of the cognitive state that remains in Buddhahood—i.e., the Dharma-body, the last kind of mind-made body or the reflexive noble *jñāna*, which has Thusness as its sole object and hence is permanent because Thusness is permanent. Although the reflexive noble *jñāna* is permanent and innate, it becomes defiled by adventitious afflictions in the form of the function of mind, mentation, and the six kinds of consciousness, and hence it is not disclosed. When one eliminates mind, mentation, and consciousnesses by cultivating concentration (*samādhi*) stage by stage, one gradually develops a mind that functions in accordance with one's originally endowed reflexive noble *jñāna*. This happens initially at the third through fifth bodhisattva stages (the first kind of mind-made body) and next at the eighth stage (the second kind of mind-made body). And finally, at the stage of the buddha, the self-reflexive *jñāna* (the third and last kind of mind-made body) becomes fully disclosed. The transformation-body begins to teach sentient beings in terms of the right *jñāna* after the reflexive noble *jñāna* becomes fully disclosed.⁶² Since the Dharma-body is permanent and innate, it is identical with *tathāgatagarbha*: When the Dharma-body is hidden by ignorance and defilements, it is named *tathāgatagarbha*, but when it is disclosed, it is named the Dharma-body.

Hence the LAS is contrasting two modes of cognition: The Dharma-body, i.e., *tathāgatagarbha* and the last kind of mind-made body, refers to the pure mode of reflexive noble *jñāna* because it does not point to any external objects but has Thusness as its sole object. In contrast, the function of mind, mentation, and consciousnesses refers to the impure mode of ordinary cognition (or illusory discrimination [*abhūta-parikalpa*]), which mistakes mental representations for external objects.⁶³

190–92. Many thanks to the reviewer for suggesting *myrobalan* for the Sanskrit term *āmalaka*.

⁶² An unresolved issue in need of further study is whether one needs to develop a conditioned mental function that operates in accordance with the reflexive noble *jñāna*. The LAS simply contrasts the reflexive noble *jñāna* with the right *jñāna* but does not present a sufficiently clear discussion.

⁶³ This contrast is shown in the juxtaposition of “the distinct mark, i.e., where the reflexive noble *jñāna* leads” (*zizheng shengzhi sheng jingjie xiang* 自證聖智勝境界相; *pratyātmāryagatīviśeṣalakṣaṇa*) with “the marks that are seen by one's own mind” (*zixin suoxian fenbie jian xiang* 自心所現分別見相; *svacittalakṣaṇadr̥śya*). I think the Sanskrit for the latter should be *svacittadr̥śyalakṣaṇa* instead of *svacittalakṣaṇadr̥śya*. See LAS (Ś), T672:16.596c1–2; LAS (G), T670:16.486b4–5;

9 Mind-Made Body: Conditioned or Unconditioned?

Now let us turn back to the issue of mind-made body. Above, we have seen that the LAS is ambiguous with respect to whether the mind-made body is conditioned. The close connection between the reflexive *jñāna* and the third kind of mind-made body, together with such notions as *kāyaṃ ca jñānāmanomayaṃ* (*yisheng zhizhen* 意生智身) and “mind-made Dharma-body” (*yisheng fashen* 意生法身; *manomayadharmakāya*), strongly suggests that at least the last among the three kinds of mind-made body is unconditioned. On the other hand, the differentiation of the mind-made body into three kinds strongly suggests that it is conditioned.

I suggest that the best way to make sense of this ambiguity is to take the notion of mind-made body as being both unconditioned and conditioned. That is, the first two kinds are conditioned, but the third is unconditioned. Recalling that the core of all three is *jñāna*, we may say that the first two kinds map to conditioned *jñāna*, while the last kind maps to reflexive noble *jñāna*, which is unconditioned.

This distinction among the three kinds of mind-made body also parallels the distinction among the three kinds of buddha-bodies. We have seen that the third kind of mind-made body maps to the reflexive *jñāna*, which is non-conceptual and unconditioned. For this reason, the last kind of mind-made body maps to the Dharma-body, which is unconditioned. In contrast, the LAS indicates that the transformation-body employs the right *jñāna*, or *jñāna* arising from concentration (see passage 4), to teach sentient beings.⁶⁴ These conclusions are encapsulated in table 1:

Table 1. Connections between *jñāna* and the mind-made body.

Reflexive noble <i>jñāna</i>	<i>Jñāna</i> arising from concentration
The third kind of mind-made body	The first two kinds of mind-made body
Dharma-body (and the enjoyment-body?) ⁶⁵	Transformation-body
Non-conceptualized	Conceptualized
Unconditioned	Conditioned

LAS (B), T671:16.525c9–11; Nanjō, 1923: 57–58; Vaidya, 1963: 25; Suzuki, 1932: 52.

⁶⁴ See note 40 above.

⁶⁵ As far as I can trace, the LAS does not explicitly discuss the connection between the enjoyment-body and *jñāna*.

In sum, the LAS seems to have expanded the notion of mind-made body from the understanding found in earlier Buddhist tradition by infusing into it the unconditioned *jñāna* (i.e., the reflexive noble *jñāna*). According to this expanded framework, the first and the second kind of mind-made body are conditioned and correspond to the transformation-body of the Buddha, whereas the third kind of mind-made body is unconditioned and corresponds to the Dharma-body of the Buddha. This conclusion disagrees in part with the claim made by the CWSL, as discussed above with reference to Kubota.⁶⁶ But it again confirms that the Dharma-body is unconditioned according to the LAS and hence justifies the interpolation by Guṇabhadra discussed at the beginning of this study.

10 Dharma-Body: Permanent or Not?

In this final section before the conclusion, I wish to address a potential challenge to my findings posed by the LAS itself. In the above discussion, I have argued that the Dharma-body should be considered permanent because of its identification with the reflexive noble *jñāna* and with the last kind of mind-made body and, further, that to this extent it is properly understood as *tathāgatagarbha*. But the LAS also states unequivocally that the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent:

Passage 14:

At that time, the Bodhisattva Mahāmati further said this to the Blessed One: Is the Tathāgata, the Arhat and the Fully Enlightened One, permanent or impermanent?

Said the Blessed One: O Mahāmati! The Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One is neither permanent nor impermanent. Why? Because either way has a fault connected with it. Mahāmati, what fault is connected with either assertion? If the Tathāgata is permanent, [there is the fault that] he will be connected with the creator (*nengzuo* 能作; *kāraṇa*). For, Mahāmati, according to all non-Buddhists the creator is permanent.

If he is impermanent, he will be connected with [the fault that he is] something created (*suozuo* 所作; *kṛtaka*). For the *skandhas*, which are predicable as qualified and qualifying (*xiang suoxiang* 相所相 ;

⁶⁶ Kubota emphasizes that the notion of mind-made body is embedded in the context of *gotra* theory (Kubota, 1996: 195, 199–202). A remaining issue for future exploration is how mind-made body is understood in the LAS, since the sutra mentions both *tathāgatagarbha* and various *gotras*.

lakṣyalaṣaṇa), are nonexistent because they eventually are annihilated (*duanmie* 斷滅; Skt. *uccheda*), and yet the Tathāgata is in reality not annihilated.

O Mahāmati! All that is created, a jug, cloth, and so on, is impermanent, and [if you take the Tathāgata to be created, then you] commit the fault of treating the Tathāgata as being impermanent. [Moreover, if you commit this fault, then you also commit the fault of] taking all merits and *jñāna* that one cultivates as being empty and useless (*sambhāra-vaiyarthya*). Further, [if you commit this fault, then you also commit the fault of] treating all created things as being the Tathāgata because they share the same causes (*wu yiyin* 無異因; *viśeṣahetvabhāva*). Therefore, the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent.

Further, Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is not permanent for the reason that [if he were] he would be like space (*ākāśa*), which is not established in dependence upon a cause. O Mahāmati! [I use] space as an example because it is neither permanent nor impermanent. Why? Because it is devoid of all faults such as being taken as permanent or impermanent, unitary or different from others, being together or not being together (*ekatvānyatvobhayatvānubhayatvanityānityatva*), and so on. Further, O Mahāmati, the Tathāgata is not permanent. If he were, then he would be non-arising (*busheng* 不生; *anutpāda*) like the horns on a rabbit, a horse, a fish, a snake.⁶⁷

I contend that this passage does not in fact represent a challenge to my above claim, for a number of reasons. First, the passage appears right before passage 12 quoted above, where the LAS claims that “in a different sense (*bieyi* 別義; *pariyāya*) [the Tathāgata] can be said to be permanent (*nitya*).” So passage 14 must not be taken literally. Second, I suggest that passage 14 should be interpreted in the narrow sense to mean, specifically, that the Tathāgata must not be considered impermanent like the aggregates (*skandhas*) or a jug—nor permanent like the creators and the horns on a rabbit. Third, we have seen that the right *jñāna*, by which the Tathāgata teaches sentient beings, maps to the transformation-body, and that the reflexive noble *jñāna*, which is non-conceptual and unconditioned, maps to the Dharma-body. To the extent that the Tathāgata includes both the Dharma-body and the transformation-body, it makes sense for the LAS to claim that the Tathāgata is neither (merely) permanent nor (merely) impermanent.

⁶⁷ LAS (Ś), T672:16.619a20–b5. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.509c25–510a11; LAS (B), T671:16.555c21–556a18; Nanjō, 1923: 217–18; Vaidya, 1963: 88; Suzuki, 1932: 187–88.

Based on the above logic, we can say that the LAS holds the Dharma-body to be unconditioned and permanent despite its claim that the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent. If correct, this finding would justify Guṇabhadra's interpolation of Dharma-body into a list of synonyms for unconditioned *dharmas*.

11 Conclusion

This chapter began with the puzzle of why the earliest Chinese translation of the LAS, that by Guṇabhadra, interpolates “Dharma-body” into a list of permanent *dharmas* that includes Thusness and *nirvāṇa*—an interpolation that is not attested in the other two Chinese translations, nor in the extant Sanskrit editions. I identified the Dharma-body as the last of three kinds of mind-made body and as having as its core the reflexive noble *jñāna*. I next discussed the LAS's reasoning that because the reflexive *jñāna* has permanent *dharma* (Thusness, etc.) as its sole cognitive object, this *jñāna* is also permanent. Hence, I argued, Guṇabhadra's interpolation of the Dharma-body is justified.⁶⁸

There is yet a further implication: If the Dharma-body is permanent, like Thusness, then it pervades everywhere—including all sentient beings, just like Thusness does. To this extent, the claim that all sentient beings are *tathāgatagarbha* (i.e., contain the Tathāgata) is justified. Hence the LAS justifies the Tathāgatagarbha claim by suggesting that the Dharma-body refers to the permanent *jñāna* of Thusness. This is different from the claim made in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra*, which states that the Dharma-body consists of both Thusness and the *jñāna* about Thusness.⁶⁹

There is at least one further issue that remains to be investigated. There seems to be confusion about whether the storehouse consciousness is pure or not. On the one hand, the LAS claims that “*tathāgatagarbha* is named

⁶⁸ Concerning the reason why “Dharma-body” is missing from the original list in the LAS, my guess is that the list came from an earlier stratum of the sutra. A similar situation also occurs with Paramārtha's Chinese translation of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, as indicated above in note 9. But this is an issue that cannot be adequately dealt with here.

⁶⁹ T664:16.363a6. Also cf. Paramārtha's Chinese translation of the *Mahāyāna-saṃgrahabhāṣya*, T1595:31.249c18–28. For my discussion about this notion, see Keng, 2023: 113–14.

ālayavijñāna” (*tathāgatagarbha ālayavijñāna-saṃśabdita*),⁷⁰ which strongly suggests that the *ālayavijñāna* is something pure and innate. In some passages the LAS claims that phenomenal objects appear because of the function of the seven consciousnesses, which suggests that the *ālayavijñāna* is not to be eliminated.⁷¹ But on the other hand, the LAS also calls to eliminate mind, mentation, and consciousnesses, where mind often maps to the eighth consciousness, i.e., the *ālayavijñāna*. Another passage suggests that there are eight types of discrimination (*bazhong fenbie* 八種分別; *vikalpa aṣṭadhā*).⁷² This suggests that the storehouse consciousness is not pure and is to be eliminated. I suspect that the LAS itself is not consistent and hence this remains an issue for the Dilun tradition in China.⁷³ I hope to take up this issue in a future study.

Abbreviations

CWSL	<i>Cheng weishi lun</i>
LAS	<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i>
LAS (B)	<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> (Bodhiruci)
LAS (G)	<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> (Guṇabhadra)
LAS (Ś)	<i>Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra</i> (Śikṣānanda)
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i>

⁷⁰ LAS (Ś), T672:16.619b29–620a9; LAS (G), T670:16.510b4–c11; LAS (B), T671:16.556b22–557a14; Nanjō, 1923: 220–23; Vaidya, 1963: 90–91; Suzuki, 1932: 190–93.

⁷¹ LAS (Ś), T672:16.619b29–620a9.

⁷² LAS (Ś), T672:16.620c1–4. Cf. LAS (G), T670:16.511b7–10; LAS (B), T671:16.558a1–3; Nanjō, 1923: 227–28; Vaidya, 1963: 93; Suzuki, 1932: 197.

⁷³ The dispute in the Dilun tradition about whether it is Thusness or the storehouse consciousness that serves as the basis (*yichi* 依持; *āśraya*) for the phenomenal world is closely related to the issue of whether the storehouse consciousness itself is pure or not. The famous scheme of “One Mind in Two Aspects” (*yixin ermen* 一心二門) of the *Awakening of Faith* (*Dasheng qixinlun* 大乘起信論) can also be considered as meaning to reconcile the tension embedded in the LAS. For a brief discussion of this dispute in the Dilun tradition, see Keng, 2023: 148–49. On whether the elimination of the mental consciousness implies the elimination of the storehouse consciousness, see Zeng, 2017.

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The Role of the Two Truths in Daochuo's Understanding of the Pure Land

Michael Conway

1 Introduction

Daochuo 道綽 (562–645) is famous as the Pure Land patriarch who advocated the simple practice of reciting the name of Amitābha in order to be born in his Pure Land as the only option for eventual enlightenment available to the deluded beings in a degenerate age far removed from the time of Śākyamuni. Daochuo's *Anleji* 安樂集 (T1958)¹ does indeed make reference to the theories about the degeneration of the Dharma that were prevalent in his time, but a careful reading of that text shows that he had other reasons for encouraging people to have faith in Amitābha and to seek birth in his land. Rather than simple resignation regarding the possibility of attaining enlightenment due to a poor karmic lot in this life, Daochuo saw birth in the Pure Land as the only way for sentient beings to genuinely fulfill the bodhisattva ideal of perfecting both wisdom and compassion. That is to say, Daochuo's choice of Pure Land devotion and his arguments for that devotion to be understood as the centerpiece of all of Buddhism were not meant to serve as a mere lamentation over one's having been born with

¹ The provenance of the *Anleji* (perhaps best translated as “A Collection of Passages on [the Land of] Peace and Contentment”) has been much discussed. It is generally considered to be the lecture notes that Daochuo prepared for his lectures on the *Guan wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 (T365), but it may be better understood to be partial transcripts of those lectures prepared by his disciples and circulated posthumously. See Yamamoto, 1959: 205–12, esp. 208–209, for a discussion of the former position. The text was lost in China some time prior to the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) but preserved in a variety of scripture collections in Japan. The oldest extant manuscript is currently held at the Nomura Art Museum in Kyoto and was previously held at Kōzanji 高山寺 (Akao, 2014). This chapter uses the texts in the Taishō canon and the *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書, which both take Edo-period woodblock print editions as their base texts but include annotations regarding the oldest manuscript because they use a faithful Edo-period copy of that manuscript in their critical editions (see Ochiai, 2010).

inferior capacities in a degenerate world and as expressions of hope for a better, postmortem future. Instead, Daochuo held that in order to benefit both oneself and others through the perfection of wisdom and compassion, one needed to seek birth in the Pure Land and to attain a wisdom recognizing the mutually inclusive nature of ultimate truth and the scriptural descriptions of the ornaments (*zhuangyan* 莊嚴) of the Pure Land.

The concept of the two truths (*erdi* 二諦) plays a very prominent role in Daochuo's arguments for the centrality of the Pure Land teachings in the Buddhist tradition. Needless to say, at the time that he was active Pure Land devotion was understood by a large number of Buddhist exegetes to be an inferior expedient for beings with inferior capacities and had been criticized as going against several of the fundamental tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism; thus in the *Anleji* Daochuo is at pains to prove his point that Pure Land Buddhism is the centerpiece of all of Śākyamuni's teachings. In the course of those arguments, as Daochuo addresses one criticism of Pure Land devotion after another he repeatedly refers to the two truths to show that Pure Land Buddhism is indeed in accord with the fundamental teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism and further to show that only through seeking birth in the Pure Land is it possible to actually fulfill the bodhisattva ideal.

The concept of the two truths has its scriptural roots in the *Prajñā pāramitā* sutras,² and references to the idea can be found in many other major Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* (T374, T375)³ and the *Flower Garland Sutra* (T278, T279).⁴ Nāgārjuna (ca. first to second centuries) famously employed the concept in the development of his philosophy of emptiness in the *Zhonglun* 中論 (T1564)⁵ and in his *Shiermenlun* 十二門論 (T1568).⁶ The concept was also a standard part of Chinese Buddhist exegeses from the time of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–409/413) forward, and a wide variety of interpretations were offered by a great many Chinese Buddhist commentators.⁷

² See, for instance, T223:8.378c9–18 and 8.405a15–17 for references in the translation of the *Mahā Prajñā Pāramitā Sutra [in Twenty-five Thousand Verses]* by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–409/413).

³ There are too many instances to list fully, but the concept is discussed in detail in the “Fanxingpin” 梵行品 chapter. See T374:12.463b–472c and T375:12.706a–715b.

⁴ See, for instance, T278:9.446a27–28 and 9.555c23–29.

⁵ See, for instance, T1564:30.32c16–33a7.

⁶ See T1568:30.165a16–b24.

⁷ In his explanation of the understanding of the concept presented by Jingyingsi Huiyuan 淨影寺慧遠 (523–592), Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄 states, “Looking at the

Generally speaking, the first of the two truths—referred to variously as the “true truth” (*zhendi* 真諦, *paramārtha-satya*), the “truth of excellent significance” (*shengyidi* 勝義諦), or the “truth of primary significance” (*diyiyidi* 第一義諦)—is the ultimate truth of Buddhism that is inexpressible in words and beyond any and all human ideation. The second truth is the “worldly truth” (*shidi* 世諦, *samvṛtti-satya*), or “secular truth” (*sudi* 俗諦), and refers to the mundane truth expressed in ordinary discursive thinking and language. The basic stance in the scriptural tradition is that there are two different levels of truth, one entirely beyond human conception and one that can become the object of human thought and language. The vast majority of the exegetical discussions about this distinction in both the Indian and Chinese settings revolved around the question of the interrelationship between the two. Was the worldly truth nothing more than human delusion, or was it in some way actually expressive of the ultimate truth? Different commentators took very different stances on the issue, so it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations, but David Chappell (1940–2004) argues that many of Daochuo's Chinese predecessors and contemporaries took the stance that the two truths were fundamentally in “harmony” with each other (Chappell, 1977: 32), such that the worldly or conventional truth did in fact express the more fundamental principle of the ultimate truth of emptiness.⁸

As we will see below (P.1, 14–17), in the *Anleji* Daochuo took this broadly held agreement about the relationship between the two truths and combined it with the stance of Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?) on the relationship between ultimate truth and the ornaments of the Pure Land in order to argue that the Pure Land teachings provided the perfect vehicle to fully conform to both truths and thereby fulfill the bodhisattva ideal of perfecting both wisdom and compassion. From Daochuo's perspective, because the ornaments of the Pure Land express and clarify the ultimate truth of Buddhism, seeking birth in the Pure Land will give the practitioner not only profound insight into that

fact that the *Guanghongmingji* 廣弘明集 includes the views of twenty-three different thinkers regarding the two truths, we can see that it was a significant issue in the Buddhism of the Northern and Southern Dynasties in China” (Kamata, 1968: 316). Kamata is referring to the positions recorded by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) at T2103:52.246c25–250b25.

⁸ Needless to say, this question is directly related to the overall theme of this volume: How is truth expressed in the Buddhist tradition? As we will see in the following, Daochuo holds that the ornaments of the Pure Land, as perfect descriptions of ultimate truth, are the best and most efficient expression for those who aspire to fulfill the bodhisattva ideal.

ultimate truth but also the oratorical skills to effectively guide suffering sentient beings who are mired in delusion. For Daochuo, accomplished practitioners who can attain the wisdom that understands the unborn nature of birth in the Pure Land will be endowed with great rhetorical skills that will allow them to guide deluded beings toward enlightenment and function as bodhisattvas liberating other beings.

Also based on Tanluan's thought, Daochuo held that the only way to genuinely conform to the two truths was through taking refuge in the Pure Land and aspiring to be born there. In the first section of chapter 4 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo praises six of his immediate predecessors in China who were essential for setting him on the path of Pure Land devotion. After praising each one individually,⁹ Daochuo presents the following summation of their virtues:

Passage 1: *Anleji* chapter 4 §1

In this way, the previous six people possessed of great virtues are all awesome mirrors of the two truths (*erdi shenjing* 二諦神鏡). They are the foundation of the Buddha Dharma. Their aspiration and practice are unlike others, and they are truly rare in past and present. They all together carefully investigated the Mahāyāna and praised reliance on the Pure Land, for it is the unsurpassed, essential gate (*wushang yaomen* 無上要門). (SSZ1.413; T1958:47.14b18–21; see also Inagaki, 2014: 84)

Here, Daochuo not only praises his predecessors as “awesome mirrors of the two truths” who show clearly what it means to accord with both, he also says that their careful investigation of the corpus of the Mahāyāna teachings led them to the conclusion that “reliance on the Pure Land” is the “unsurpassed, essential gate” to realizing those teachings. That is to say, their study of the whole of the Buddhist tradition led them to decide that Pure Land devotion was not just the best path to fulfilling the bodhisattva ideal, it was the only path for doing so.

Readers accustomed to seeing Daochuo characterized as a thinker who advocated Pure Land devotion as a last resort for incompetent people in an unfortunate age might be surprised to find in the *Anleji* such a resounding endorsement of Pure Land devotion as the natural conclusion to sustained engagement with the Buddhist scriptural tradition. This is not the only passage in that work, however, where Daochuo argues that Pure Land devotion is essential to Buddhist attainment in all times and for all

⁹ See Conway, 2014a: 120–24, and Sharf, 2002: 288–89, for brief discussions of these six figures.

practitioners.¹⁰ As in this instance, in those other arguments as well the concept of the two truths plays a significant role, because Daochuo holds that it is only the Pure Land teachings that give practitioners the capacity to conform to both truths and thereby fulfill not only their own wisdom but also compassionate action in the world.

Given the prominent place of the concept of the two truths in the *Anleji* (the term appears twelve times),¹¹ previous scholars have discussed its role in some detail, although none has pointed out—as I will in this chapter—the close interplay between the concept of the two truths and the way in which Pure Land devotion allows the wise practitioner to fulfill the bodhisattva ideal. Chappell describes the role that the two truths play in Daochuo's understanding of the Pure Land both in his dissertation (Chappell, 1976) and in a short article based on it (Chappell, 1977). He rightly points out that the doctrine of the two truths allows Daochuo to argue that even practitioners who do not attain insight into the unborn nature of birth in the Pure Land will still ultimately be born there and conform to that truth, but when it comes to Daochuo's understanding of the “higher grade of birth,” he says:

Because of the times and the low capacities of men, Tao-ch'o advocated rebirth in the Pure Land above all else. Even wise persons who understand the Two Truths also need to be reinforced in their understanding through rebirth in the Pure Land. (Chappell, 1977: 48)

This position of Chappell's appears to be based on the rather facile assumption that any and all references that Daochuo makes to birth in the Pure Land mean a postmortem rebirth in a heaven-like realm. As I have shown elsewhere, such a view is oversimplistic and misunderstands the content of what Tanluan and Daochuo describe as “unborn birth” (*wusheng zhi sheng* 無生之生).¹² In what follows, I will show that for Daochuo, the wise persons who could understand the nature of the ornaments of the Pure Land as expressive of ultimate truth and as showing “the form of actual form”

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of how the idea of the degeneration of the Dharma is positioned in Daochuo's thought and an analysis of some of his more forceful arguments for the centrality of Pure Land devotion to the Buddhist tradition, see Conway, 2014b.

¹¹ SSZ1.387, 390, 392 (3 times), 393, 394, 402, 413, 425, 428, 431; T1958:47.7a23–24, 7c25, 8b13, 8b15, 8b21, 8c14, 9a7, 11b10, 14b19, 17c2, 18c4, 19b19.

¹² For Tanluan's usage, see SSZ1.327; T1819:40.838c20. For Daochuo's, see SSZ1.393, 394, 403; T1958:47.8c23, 9a8, 11c12. For a discussion of the plurality of meanings Daochuo associates with the term “birth in the Pure Land,” see Conway, 2019.

(*shixiangxiang* 實相相)¹³—that is, the form of reality as it actually is—would thereby become able to conform to both of the two truths and fulfill the bodhisattva ideal.

A recent article by Satomi Keishū 里見奎周 intimates that such a reading is possible, focusing on “the bodhisattva who has attained birth in the Pure Land” (Satomi, 2020: 123). Satomi notes that Daochuo correlates Tanluan’s discussion of the two types of dharma bodies with the concept of the two truths. His article, however, does not consider the implications of that correlation very carefully, instead shifting to an inquiry about the stage of attainment of such a bodhisattva according to the system of bodhisattva stages found in the *Shidejinglun* 十地經論 (T1522) and suggesting a source for Daochuo’s stance in the *Jiujing yicheng baoxing lun* 究竟一乘寶性論 (T1611).

Two other recent Japanese-language articles are noteworthy in considering the significance of the two truths in Daochuo’s thought. Both Sugiyama Hirotoishi 杉山裕俊 (Sugiyama, 2014) and Wang Zhenxian 王振賢 (Wang, 2022) carefully consider each of the twelve references that Daochuo makes to the two truths. Their analyses both focus primarily on the way in which Daochuo uses the two truths to respond to challenges against Pure Land Buddhism from the perspective that it does not accord with the Mahāyāna teaching that ultimate truth is without set form (*wuxiang* 無相). These considerations do reveal one important aspect of Daochuo’s use of the concept of the two truths, but in this chapter, I intend to introduce the more affirmative element in Daochuo’s stance: that wise practitioners of the “higher grade of birth” are endowed with the capacity to liberate sentient beings because their reliance upon and understanding of the Pure Land teachings give them the ability to accurately appreciate the nature of the delusion of sentient beings and effectively preach to them in order to lead them away from it.

Below, following this introduction, I will first consider the way in which Tanluan’s *Jingtu lunzhu* 淨土論註 (T1819)¹⁴ serves as a background for

¹³ SSZ1.429; T1958:47.18c17.

¹⁴ This text, formally entitled *Wuliangshoujing youpotishe yuanshengjie zhu* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註 (A Commentary on the Verses in Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land, an *Upadeśa* on the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life*), is a word-by-word commentary on the *Wuliangshoujing youpotishe yuanshengjie* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈 (T1524), or *Jingtulun* 淨土論 (Treatise on the Pure Land), attributed to Vasubandhu. Tanluan became a Pure Land devotee based on his encounter with the translator of the latter text and likely made his commentary in the latter half of the

Daochuo's stance. I will then introduce the portion of the eighth section of chapter 1 of the *Anleji* where Daochuo correlates an understanding of the interrelationship of the ornaments of the Pure Land and the ultimate truth of Buddhism with the two truths. There, Daochuo states that an insight into the truth expressed in the ornaments is available to "clerics and laypeople" and qualifies them to a "higher grade of birth," along with the realization of self-benefiting and benefiting others through the establishment of both "true wisdom" and "true compassion." This portion of the *Anleji* forms the crux of Daochuo's argument about how Pure Land devotion allows the adept to function as a bodhisattva. In section 4 below, I will introduce other passages in the *Anleji* where Daochuo develops that argument, showing that he saw the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land, in light of the knowledge of its identity with ultimate truth, as an effective way to establish healthy wisdom and healthy compassion that conform to both of the two truths and avoid two major pitfalls on the bodhisattva path: attachment to the concept of emptiness and covetous attachment to the sentient beings that one is trying to liberate. I then conclude in section 5 with a brief introduction to Daochuo's views on the "unhindered eloquence" granted to those aspiring to be born in the Pure Land.

2 Roots in Tanluan's Thought

Daochuo is said to have become a follower of the Pure Land teachings when he encountered a stele that related information about Tanluan and the miraculous events recorded by his followers at the time of his passing.¹⁵

530s, soon after the translation was completed. As with the *Anleji*, the *Jingtu lunzhu* (Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land) did not survive in China after the persecution of Buddhism toward the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907) but was preserved in scripture collections in Japan. One of the oldest complete manuscripts of this text is the woodblock print edition, held at Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 in Kyoto, that Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) annotated with Japanese grammatical markings in 1256. That manuscript serves as the base text for the editions in both the *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* and the Taishō canon, which I use in this chapter. An older handwritten manuscript of just the second fascicle that was copied in 1138 is housed at Kongōji 金剛寺 in Kawachi Nagano, Osaka Prefecture. See Miyake, 2008, for a critical edition and discussion of the unique characteristics of that latter manuscript.

¹⁵ This story is related in the *Jingtu wangsheng zhuan* 淨土往生傳 by Jiezhū 戒珠 (982–1074). See T2071:51.118a19–23. The gap of over four hundred years between Daochuo's passing and the appearance of this story in the historical record has led several contemporary scholars to question its veracity (see Suwa, 1967; Satō, 1985:

Tanluan's influence on Daochuo can be seen in the many references to the elder cleric's works in the *Anleji*: Daochuo not only directly quotes from *Zan Amitufo jie* 讚阿彌陀佛偈 (T1978),¹⁶ he also quotes extensively from *Jingtu lunzhu*, though he attributes the passages to either Vasubandhu (ca. 400–480) or Nāgārjuna. Further, there are several passages in the *Anleji* that are clearly based on passages in Tanluan's works, despite being presented by Daochuo as his own words. In particular, most of the third section of chapter 2 of the *Anleji* is made up of Daochuo's reworking of questions and answers that Tanluan presents in the *Jingtu lunzhu* and the *Lüelun anle jingtu yi* 略論安樂淨土義 (T1957).¹⁷ Daochuo's discussion of the two truths also has its roots in Tanluan's thought. Although Tanluan only makes passing reference to the two truths in the *Jingtu lunzhu*, Daochuo associates the concept with an important passage where Tanluan expounds on the relationship between the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land in Vasubandhu's *Jingtulun* 淨土論 (T1524)¹⁸ and the ultimate truth of Buddhism, which

293–306; Conway, 2008a), but the *Jingtulun* 淨土論 by Jiakai 迦才 (n.d.), a contemporary of Daochuo's who likely studied under him at Xuanzhongsi 玄中寺, clearly states that Daochuo's appreciation for Tanluan was the decisive factor in his conversion to Pure Land devotion (T1963:47.98b6–12). On the relationship between Daochuo and Jiakai, see Naruse, 1984.

¹⁶ This text is a set of verses that Tanluan wrote based on the content of the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (T360, *Sutra on Immeasurable Life*), likely to have been used for liturgical purposes. See Miyai, 1991, for a more detailed discussion.

¹⁷ See Conway, 2008b: 92–108, for a chart that compares Daochuo's references with Tanluan's originals for all of these direct, indirect, and unattributed quotations. The *Lüelun anle jingtu yi* is made up of several questions and answers about the nature and content of birth in the Pure Land as described in the scriptural tradition. Although the *Zan Amitufo jie* and the *Lüelun anle jingtu yi* have long been treated as independent texts, several old manuscripts present them together as a single work. See Kaku, 2012: 22–39, for a discussion of those manuscripts.

¹⁸ As indicated in note 14 above, this work is a commentary on the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. The first part consists of verses where the author expresses his desire to be born in the Pure Land of Amituo 阿彌陀 (Skt. Amitābha) and praises the different virtues of that land and its inhabitants. The second part is a prose commentary on the verses by the author which describes a system of practice based on the verses that will lead one to quickly accomplish both self-benefit and other benefiting, thereby attaining supreme, perfect enlightenment. No Indic equivalent for the text survives, so the authenticity of the attribution to Vasubandhu has been called into question by recent scholars. Neither Daochuo nor Tanluan (who wrote his commentary on the text less than a half century after Vasubandhu is thought to have passed away and was converted to Pure Land Buddhism by a second-generation disciple of Vasubandhu's), however, doubted the attribution at all, so for the purposes of this chapter, I will treat the text as Vasubandhu's work. The Chinese translation has been preserved in the major Chinese scripture collections from the Song dynasty forward. The edition in the

Vasubandhu refers to using the phrase “the term single dharma” (*yifaju* 一法句). Daochuo crafts a selective, interpretive quotation of this passage in the eighth section of chapter 1 of the *Anleji*, which we will consider in the following section. Prior to that, however, I will introduce Tanluan's passage in detail so that we will be able to better understand Daochuo's point of emphasis in his summation of Tanluan's position.

Tanluan began his career as a Buddhist exegete with extensive study of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka thought as it had been introduced into China in the translations of Kumārajīva and passed down by his disciples. Tanluan was also said to have been conversant in theories related to buddha nature (*foxing* 佛性), which likely means that he had engaged in study of the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, since that is one of the sutra's primary themes. After a foray into Daoist practice, Tanluan was converted to Pure Land devotion in an encounter with Bodhiruci (fl. 520–540), an Indian monk who translated several works that had a major influence on the development of East Asian Buddhism, including the *Jingtulun*.¹⁹ Tanluan's commentary on this work clearly shows the strong influence of Nāgārjuna's thought, especially in the passages where Tanluan discusses the nature and meaning of birth in the Pure Land.²⁰

Taishō canon, which I use in this chapter, is based on the version in the Goryeo canon and compared with the other major collections from the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. The text was translated sometime around 530, but the oldest extant specimen (of the verse portion only), dated ca. 620, is carved on a wall at the Leiyingdong 雷音洞 on Fangshan 房山. See Tsujimoto, 2006, for a discussion of these various editions.

¹⁹ See Nogami, 1970: 11–68, and Tōdō, 1995: 4–34, for a detailed discussion of Tanluan's life. Most of their considerations are based on the biography of Tanluan presented in Daoxuan's *Xugaosengzhuan* 續高僧傳 (T2060:50.470a13–c15).

²⁰ For instance, see Tanluan's discussion of the significance of Vasubandhu's aspiration for birth in the Pure Land, where Tanluan makes explicit reference to the *Zhonglun* in arguing that the birth that Vasubandhu speaks of is fundamentally different from the “actual birth” that deluded beings imagine to exist (SSZ1.283–84; T1819:40.827b16–c2). A variety of commentators on the *Jingtu lunzhu* have pointed out this relationship. Kōgatsu-in Jinrei 香月院深勵 (1749–1817; Kōgatsu-in Jinrei, 1973: 144–54) provides a comprehensive discussion on the sources of Tanluan's argument in this portion of the *Jingtu lunzhu*. Tōdō Kyōshun 藤堂恭俊 (1918–2000) has also made a careful consideration of Tanluan's exposition and its roots in the *Zhonglun* (Tōdō, 1952: 348–56, esp. 352–53). Tōdō criticizes Tanluan's position as a misunderstanding of Nāgārjuna's view of the relationship between the two truths; he attributes this to Tanluan's failure to take into account a part of Nāgārjuna's *Mahāyāna-vimśika*. Tōdō nevertheless very clearly describes the influence of passages in the *Zhonglun* on Tanluan's discussion of the nature of birth in the Pure Land. His criticisms seem guilty of placing considerably anachronistic expectations on Tanluan: the text Tōdō refers to

Although Tanluan only makes one direct reference to the two truths in the *Jingtu lunzhu*, the strong influence exerted on his view of the Pure Land by Nāgārjuna's thought—and its profoundly strict denial of the capacity of human discursive thinking to grasp the ultimate truth of emptiness—led him to take an interpretive stance predicated on the distinction of two levels of truth embedded in the concept of the two truths (an inexpressible one and one that can become the subject of human speech and cognition). That is to say, even though the concept is only referred to directly once in the *Jingtu lunzhu*, it can be said to form one important element of the conceptual apparatus that Tanluan uses to interpret Vasubandhu's treatise.²¹

The one reference to the concept that Tanluan does make is of particular relevance to our discussion here because it names conformation to the two truths as an essential element for effectively realizing both wisdom and compassion. This understanding was clearly inherited by Daochuo, so before turning to the abovementioned passage where Tanluan takes up Vasubandhu's description of the ornaments of the Pure land, I would like to first introduce the passage where Tanluan refers to the "two truths." It appears in his comment on the second verse in the *Jingtulun*, where Vasubandhu states that he has composed the verses based on the form of true virtues as it is described in the Mahāyāna sutras, particularly in the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (T360, hereafter, *Sutra on Immeasurable Life*). In his definition of "the form of true virtue," Tanluan states:

Passage 2: *Jingtulun*, related to P.14

Regarding "the form of true virtue": There are two types of virtue. The first arises from a defiled mind and does not accord with dharma nature (*faxing* 法性). The so-called myriad goods of ordinary beings, humans and devas, the recompense of humans and devas, be they cause or effect, are all inverted and all vainly false. Therefore, they are referred to as "unreal virtue." The second occurs through the wisdom and pure karma of the bodhisattva and ornaments the Buddha's work. Based on dharma nature, it enters into the form of purity. This dharma is neither inverted nor vainly false. It is referred to as "true and real virtue" (*zhenshi gongde* 真實功德). Why is it not inverted? Because it is based on dharma nature

was not translated into Chinese until over four hundred years after Tanluan had passed away (see *Dacheng ershi songlun* 大乘二十頌論 [T1576]).

²¹ Sugiyama seems to miss this point and makes the overexuberant statement that Daochuo was the first person in the history of Pure Land Buddhism to employ the concept of the two truths in any substantial way (Sugiyama, 2014: 169); this clearly fails to take account of the manner in which the concept formed an important part of the backdrop to Tanluan's thought.

and accords with the two truths. Why is it not vainly false? Because it encompasses sentient beings and brings them to ultimate purity. (SSZ1:284–85, T1819:40.827c17–24; see Inagaki, 1998: 135, and Tokunaga, 2018: 15–16, for alternative translations)

Here, Tanluan makes a distinction between “true and real virtue” and “unreal virtue.” He holds that the source of true virtue is “the wisdom and pure karma of the bodhisattva,” that is, a being who has had an insight into the ultimate truth of Buddhism and understands “dharma nature.” Such wisdom allows bodhisattvas to avoid the “inverted” views of deluded beings who mistakenly interpret permanence, contentment, self, and purity; bodhisattvas are thus able to act in accord with the world as it actually is, rather than seeking to realize their “vainly false” hopes to attain unrealistic, imagined goals. Tanluan explains that the capacity of the bodhisattvas to overcome such inverted views is based on the fact that they conform to the two truths and act in accord with dharma nature. That is to say, bodhisattvas who are able to realize true and real virtue conform to the ultimate truth of dharma nature, on the one hand, and the worldly truth of human linguistic production, on the other. Tanluan says that one who is endowed with such true and real virtues is capable of leading sentient beings to ultimate purity. Thus, in this passage, Tanluan can be said to understand conformity to the two truths as an essential element in the bodhisattva's realization of true wisdom and compassion, or the genuine fulfillment of benefiting both self and others. As I will show below, it is clear that Daochuo inherited this fundamental interpretive stance of Tanluan's.

In the eighth section of the first chapter of the *Anleji*, Daochuo selectively quotes from part of the second fascicle of Tanluan's *Jingtu lunzhu*. Daochuo picks up several sentences from Tanluan's comments on Vasubandhu's discussion in the *Jingtulun* of the ornaments of the Pure Land and the bodhisattva's realization of expedient means and merit transference. The passage in the *Jingtulun* that Tanluan comments upon reads as follows:

Passage 3: *Jingtulun*, related to P.5, 6, 7, 11, 12

Further, I have previously described contemplating the fulfillment of the virtues of the ornaments of the Buddha land, the fulfillment of the virtues of the ornaments of the Buddha, and the fulfillment of the virtues of the ornaments of the bodhisattvas. One should recognize that these three types of fulfillment all ornament the mind of the aspiration, because, explained briefly, they are included in the term single dharma. The term single dharma is called the pure phrase, because the pure phrase is true and real wisdom and the unconditioned dharma body (*wuwei fashen* 無為法身).

One should recognize that there are two types of purity. What are these two? First is the purity of the environment. Second is the purity of sentient beings. The purity of the environment refers to the fulfillment of the virtues of the ornaments of the Buddha land, such as the seventeen explained above. This is referred to as the purity of the environment. The purity of sentient beings refers to things such as the fulfillment of the eight virtues of the ornaments of the Buddha and the four virtues of the ornaments of the bodhisattvas described above. One should recognize that in this way, the two types of purity are included in the term single dharma.

In this way, the bodhisattva cultivates *śamatha* [i.e., focusing] and *vipaśyanā* [i.e., contemplation] both extensively and in brief, thereby realizing an agile mind (*rouruanxin* 柔軟心) and understanding these brief and extensive dharmas in accord with reality. In this way, [the bodhisattva] realizes effective expedient means (*qiao fangbian* 巧方便) and merit transference. What is the bodhisattva's effective expedient means and merit transference? The bodhisattva's effective expedient means refers to taking all the virtues and roots of goodness accumulated through the five types of cultivation, such as making reverences, described above, not seeking after the maintenance of one's individual contentment, encompassing all sentient beings and aspiring to be born together with them in the same way in the country of peace and contentment, because one wishes to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings. This is referred to as the fulfillment of the bodhisattva's effective expedient means and merit transference. (SSZ1.275–276; T1524:26.232b22–c9; see Matsumoto, 2015: 37–38; Tokunaga, 2012: 61–63)

In the first paragraph of this passage, Vasubandhu states that the twenty-nine ornaments of the Pure Land that he describes in detail in both the verse portion of the *Jingtulun* and in the prose commentary that precedes this passage can all be explained briefly with the term single dharma. This term refers to the ultimate truth of Buddhism, or the singularity of existence that is described with terms such as “oneness” or what Vasubandhu refers to as “the unconditioned dharma body.”²² Clearly, in this first paragraph,

²² This phrase, “the term single dharma” (*yifaju* 一法句), is one of the key terms used to express the content of ultimate truth in the *Jingtulun*. In spite of the importance that Vasubandhu accords to it in this work, the expression is not used much at all in the rest of the Buddhist scriptural tradition, so his choice (or his translator's choice) here to use this unusual phrase deserves careful consideration. In the preceding sections of the *Jingtulun*, Vasubandhu uses the same character *ju* 句 when discussing the ornaments of the Pure Land, its buddha and bodhisattvas, for instance, writing about the eight ornaments of the buddha that, “One should recognize that in briefly expounding these eight terms (*baaju* 八句), it clearly shows the order of how the ornaments of the virtues of the Tathāgata's self-benefit and other benefiting are realized” (SSZ1.274; T1524:26.232b3; see also Matsumoto, 2015: 36; Tokunaga,

Vasubandhu is stating that this ultimate truth is expressed in more detail (or more “extensively”) in his descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land in the preceding portions of the treatise.

In the second paragraph, Vasubandhu goes on to say that through the cultivation of meditative concentration and careful consideration of the significance of both the ultimate truth expressed in the term single dharma and its extensive expression in his description of the twenty-nine ornaments of the Pure Land, bodhisattvas realize an “agile mind” that will allow them to effectively implement expedients and employ the virtues that they have cultivated for the liberation of suffering sentient beings. In this way, Vasubandhu clearly sets forth the path by which a bodhisattva can realize effective expedient means and thereby genuinely act compassionately: the cultivation of wisdom through an understanding of the significance of the truth expressed in his explanation of the ornaments of the Pure Land. This basic stance is inherited in the works of both Tanluan and Daochuo.

Tanluan's word-by-word commentary on the above passage by Vasubandhu spans over almost a full page in the Taishō canon. Daochuo's selective quotation merely picks up parts of Tanluan's comment on two sentences in the first half of the first paragraph and on two sentences near the beginning of the second paragraph; here I will only introduce these pertinent passages.

Tanluan comments on Vasubandhu's statement that “explained briefly, they [i.e., the fulfillment of the twenty-nine virtues of the ornaments of the Pure Land] are included in the term single dharma,” saying:

2012: 59). It seems that the translator chose to use the same character in this phrase that expresses ultimate truth in order to highlight the correlation between the singular, ultimate truth central to Buddhist enlightenment and the varied expressions of that truth described with the terms used in Vasubandhu's verses. In that sense, it seems appropriate to understand this phrase to mean “the expression single dharma” in contrast to the twenty-nine different “expressions” Vasubandhu uses in the verses to describe Amituo and his Pure Land, so I have chosen to translate this phrase as “the term single dharma.” Although both Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益 (1895–1976; Yamaguchi, 1960) and Matsuda Kazunobu 松田和信 (Matsuda, 1999) have argued that *ju* should be understood to mean “state” or “way of being,” by positing that the original Sanskrit was *pada* and showing that that term has been translated as *ju* in certain instances, the translation of the text they use to make that correlation (*Dacheng zhuangyan jinglun* 大乘莊嚴經論 [T1604]) was not rendered by Bodhiruci, so their arguments are tenuous at best. Rather than try to understand this character based on texts that were translated into Chinese over a hundred years later, it seems far more natural to read it as having essentially the same meaning that it has when used a few lines earlier in the same text.

Passage 4: Tanluan's commentary, related to P.11

The preceding seventeen statements about the land's ornaments, eight statements about the Tathagata's ornaments, and four statements about the bodhisattvas' ornaments are termed "the extensive." That they are included in the term single dharma is referred to as "the brief." Why is it explained that the extensive and the brief are included within each other? The myriad buddhas and bodhisattvas have two types of dharma bodies. First, a dharma body of dharma nature (*faxing fashen* 法性法身). Second, a dharma body of expedient means (*fangbian fashen* 方便法身). The dharma body of expedient means arises based on the dharma body of dharma nature, and the dharma body of dharma nature is shown by the dharma body of expedient means. These two types of dharma body are different but cannot be separated. [They are] one but should not [be considered to be] the same. Thus, the extensive and the brief are included within each other, and all are referred to with the word "dharma." If bodhisattvas do not realize that the extensive and the brief are included within each other, they are incapable of both self-benefit and benefiting others. (SSZ1.336–337; T1819:40.841b10–17; see Inagaki, 1998: 264–65; Tokunaga, 2018: 134–35)

Tanluan sets forth the concept of two dharma bodies in order to explain Vasubandhu's position that the ornaments of the Pure Land are expressive of ultimate truth. Tanluan holds that these two dharma bodies function together to make the ultimately inexpressible truth of Buddhism accessible to human cognition and linguistic expression. He goes on to say that it is essential for bodhisattvas to recognize this interrelationship between ultimate truth and its expression in the dharma body of expedient means (or the descriptions of the twenty-nine virtues of the ornaments of the Pure Land) if they hope to fulfill "both self-benefit and benefiting others," which is the goal of the bodhisattva path. In other words, here Tanluan identifies insight into the fact that the teachings about the Pure Land are expedients designed to lead one to realize the ultimate truth of Buddhism as an essential prerequisite to fulfilling the bodhisattva ideal.

Tanluan then comments on the next sentence in Vasubandhu's treatise. There, Vasubandhu says, "The term single dharma is called the pure phrase, because the pure phrase is true and real wisdom and the unconditioned dharma body." Vasubandhu is here associating the singularity of existence expressed in the term "single dharma" with the "purity" referred to in descriptions of the Pure Land, as well as the unconditioned nature of the ultimate truth in Buddhism. He is taking "pure," "unconditioned," and "singular" all as synonyms expressive of the content and nature of that

ultimate truth. Tanluan discusses the significance of that correlation in his word-by-word commentary as follows:

Passage 5: Tanluan's commentary, related to P.12

These three terms [i.e., “pure,” “true and real wisdom,” and “the unconditioned dharma body”] each in turn are included within each other. In what sense are these referred to with the term “dharma”? Because they are all pure. In what sense are they said to be “pure”? Because they are true and real wisdom and the unconditioned dharma body. True and real wisdom is the wisdom that knows actual form. Since actual form is without set form, true wisdom has no set knowledge. “The unconditioned dharma body” is the body of dharma nature. Because dharma nature is quiescence, the dharma body is without set form. Since it is without set form, there is no form it cannot take. Therefore, the fine [physical] features [of the Buddha] and the ornaments are the dharma body. Because it has no set knowledge, there is nothing it cannot know. For this reason, the wisdom that understands all categories (*yiquiezhongzhi* 一切種智) is itself true and real wisdom. The fact that wisdom is described as true and real clarifies that wisdom is neither intentional nor unintentional. The fact that the dharma body is described as unconditioned clarifies that the dharma body is neither form nor without form. Without negation, how can successive negation possibly lead to affirmation? Only when there is no negation can that be called affirmation. When affirmation is taken alone, without any relation to anything else, it is not true affirmation. It is neither affirmation nor negation. It cannot be described even with one hundred negations. This is what is expressed in the phrase “purity.” The term “purity” refers to true and real wisdom and the unconditioned dharma body. (SSZ1.337; T1819:40.841b18–c2; see Inagaki, 1998: 265–66; Tokunaga, 2018: 134–35)

Tanluan carefully discusses the significance of each element in Vasubandhu's terse explanation of the term “single dharma” in order to show that “the fine [physical] features [of the Buddha] and the ornaments are the dharma body.” That is, the inexpressible ultimate truth of Buddhism (described here with terms such as “dharma nature” and “dharma body”) is said to be expressed in the form of the ornaments of the Pure Land and the descriptions of the virtues of Amituo 阿彌陀 (Skt. Amitābha).

Tanluan further confirms that the “purity” referred to in descriptions of the Pure Land is identical with the wisdom that knows the actual form of things or sees reality as it truly is. True and real wisdom understands the singularity of existence and therefore also understands the fundamental purity of all existents, since no individual existent can be abstracted from another and designated as “impure.” This total affirmation, where each

existent is affirmed as “pure” in its relation to all of the individual elements making up the singular totality, is fundamentally different from relative or partial affirmation, where some existents are affirmed as pure and others negated as impure. Therefore, this absolute, total affirmation is said to be “neither affirmation nor negation.” Further, this pure, actual form that is understood by true and real wisdom is entirely beyond the grasp of any form of discursive thought and is therefore said to be indescribable “even with one hundred negations.” In this way, Tanluan confirms that the ornaments of the Pure Land and the descriptions of Amituo are effective expedients that will guide one to gain the true and real wisdom of a buddha that is one of the two primary goals of the bodhisattva. Without these expedients, this goal would be unattainable, since such an insight is entirely beyond ordinary human discursive thinking.

The source for the latter half of Daochuo’s interpretive quotation is Tanluan’s commentary on two sentences from the second paragraph in the passage from the *Jingtulun* quoted above (P.3). In his description of how a bodhisattva attains effective expedients, Vasubandhu writes,

Passage 6: *Jingtulun*, part of P.3

In this way, the bodhisattva cultivates *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* both extensively and in brief, thereby realizing an agile mind and understanding these brief and extensive dharmas in accord with reality. In this way, [the bodhisattva] realizes effective expedient means and merit transference. (SSZ1.275; T1524:26:232c3–5; see Matsumoto, 2015: 37; Tokunaga, 2012: 62)

Tanluan comments on the phrase “understanding these brief and extensive dharmas [i.e., the single dharma and the ornaments of the Pure Land] in accord with reality,” saying:

Passage 7: Tanluan’s commentary, comment on P.6

To “understand in accord with reality” means to understand in accord with actual form. [As to] the twenty-nine statements in the extensive and the one term in the brief, there is none that is not actual form. (SSZ1.339; T1819:40.842a4–5; see Inagaki, 1998: 269–70; Tokunaga 2018, 138)

Here as well, Tanluan associates the form of the ornaments of the Pure Land with “actual form” or the ultimate truth that a buddha sees when wisdom is fully realized. He explicitly states that these descriptions are all expressive of that actual form or that ultimate truth. In this sense, the ornaments are again confirmed to be excellent expedients for the fulfillment of wisdom.

He goes on to comment on the next sentence in this quote from Vasubandhu's treatise, stating:

Passage 8: Tanluan's commentary, following P.7; comment on P.6

"In this way" means in the way that the extensive and brief here are all actual form. Because one understands actual form, one then understands the false, deluded form of sentient beings of the three kinds of realms. One understands sentient beings' falseness and delusion and thus gives rise to true and real compassion (*zhenshi cibe* 真實慈悲). Because one knows the true and real dharma body, one gives rise to true and real reliance (*shenshi guiyi* 真實歸依). The effective expedient means of compassion and reliance are discussed below. (SSZ1.339; T1819:40.842a6–10; see Inagaki, 1998: 270; Tokunaga, 2018: 138)

Here, Tanluan reiterates that the extensive descriptions of the Pure Land and the brief expression of ultimate truth in the term single dharma are expressions of the actual form of the world that is seen through vision endowed with genuine wisdom. He then says that this insight into actual form leads the bodhisattva to give rise to both "true and real compassion" and "true and real reliance." Wisdom endowed by an understanding of the significance of the descriptions of the virtues of the Pure Land allows one to properly understand the plight of suffering sentient beings and what it means to act toward them with true compassion. For Tanluan, without that understanding engendered by engagement with the teachings about Amituo and the Pure Land, genuine compassion is impossible. Further, that insight into the true nature of wisdom and compassion is said to lead the bodhisattva to the conclusion that reliance on Amituo and the working of the original vow in the world is the only path to genuinely realizing that true and real compassion.

We should remember here that Daochuo praised Tanluan and his successors as having "carefully investigated the Mahāyāna and praised reliance on the Pure Land, for it is the unsurpassed, essential gate."²³ This discussion of Tanluan's in his commentary on the *Jingtulun* clearly shows that he took reliance on the Pure Land as the "essential gate" to genuinely realizing the goal, set forth in Mahāyāna Buddhism, of attaining both true wisdom and compassion. This stance is very different from the received caricature of the Pure Land tradition as a last resort for people with a bad karmic lot in life. Tanluan is clearly not encouraging Pure Land devotion "because of the times and the inferior capacities of men,"²⁴ or because

²³ SSZ1.413; T1958:47.14b20–21; see Inagaki, 2014: 84.

²⁴ Chappell, 1977: 48.

“man’s capacities in this age are so low and conditions so bad that his only hope is to seek rebirth in the Pure Land as an intermediate stage on the way to enlightenment.”²⁵ Rather, Tanluan sees such reliance as the only effective means to genuinely fulfilling the bodhisattva ideal. Daochuo’s interpretive quotation of these passages in the *Jingtu lunzhu* clearly shows that he has inherited his fundamental stance about the importance of Pure Land devotion from Tanluan and holds that the wisdom engendered by the teachings about the ornaments of the Pure Land—as well as a recognition that those teachings accord with the actual form of the world that the wisdom of a buddha sees—is essential to realizing compassionate action in the world. In the next section, we will consider Daochuo’s stance in more detail.

In his discussion of the two dharma bodies, Tanluan does not make any direct reference to the two truths or to the relationship between the ornaments of the Pure Land and ultimate truth as described by Vasubandhu. Nevertheless, it is not at all a logical leap to associate, on the one hand, the “single dharma” and the “dharma body of dharma nature” with the true truth and, on the other hand, the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land and the “dharma body of expedient means” with the mundane truth. Daochuo refers to the two truths directly after he introduces these passages of Tanluan’s, so it is likely that he did make those sorts of associations. Let us now turn to an analysis of that portion of the *Anleji*.

²⁵ Chappell, 1977: 45. To be fair to Chappell, it is of course important to point out that the vast majority of Japanese-language scholarship on Daochuo presents his thought in this way, because Daochuo’s primary contribution to the history of the development of Pure Land Buddhism is understood to be a doctrinal classification system wherein he divides all of the Buddhist teachings into the “path of sages” and those that preach “birth in the Pure Land” and concludes, “The present time is the Latter Dharma and is currently an evil world filled with the five defilements, so the only path that it is possible to enter and complete is the single gate of the Pure Land” (SSZ1.410; T1958:47.13c10–11; see Inagaki, 2014, 78). In his presentation of that system, Daochuo argues that the “path of sages,” or the bodhisattva path as it was understood in China at the time—as a system of practice where one passes through a variety of stages by perfecting a variety of different types of practice—is impassable because of the limitations of the time and the capacities of sentient beings. Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) quotes this passage at the beginning of his *Senjaku hongan nenbutsushū* 選択本願念仏集 (SSZ1.929–30; T2608:83.1b7–26), which set the tone for the subsequent understanding of Daochuo in Japan that persists to this day, but a careful reading of the *Anleji* reveals that this is just one prong in Daochuo’s arguments about the necessity of relying on the Pure Land teachings to attain Buddhahood and, moreover, not necessarily the most central one. For a detailed discussion of this issue and Daochuo’s more robust criticisms of the problems with the path of sages, see Conway, 2014b.

3 The Two Truths and the Ornaments of the Pure Land in the *Anleji*

In the *Anleji*, Daochuo repeatedly addresses the various criticisms of Pure Land Buddhism that held aspiration for birth in the Pure Land to go against several of the basic tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Most of these criticisms maintained that the teachings about Amituo and the Pure Land in the scriptural tradition were simply expedients for people who lacked the capacity to realize authentic wisdom through the practice of the six *pāramitās* and other practices encouraged as part of the bodhisattva path. These criticisms are presented from a variety of angles, and Daochuo's responses to them constitute several of the salient themes that are taken up repeatedly in the *Anleji*. Daochuo's references to the two truths serve as one important prong in his arguments responding to these varied criticisms.

Broadly speaking, the criticisms can be grouped into four types. The first holds that the teachings about the Pure Land do not accord with the ultimate truth taught in Mahāyāna Buddhism, because they advocate seeking to be born in a realm with form. That is to say, the Pure Land teachings are criticized as not according with genuine wisdom. The second holds that aspiration for birth in the Pure Land does not accord with genuine compassion, because it entails abandoning suffering beings in the *sahā* world. The third holds that Amituo and his Pure Land are expedients designed to respond to the needs and expectations of deluded beings with inferior capacities and are not genuinely expressive of ultimate truth. The fourth holds that the teachings about the capacity for the *nianfo* 念佛 (recalling the Buddha) to bring about birth in the Pure Land and enlightenment are nothing more than expedients, so although such practices might be useful as a start on the Buddhist path, they are far removed from genuine realization of Buddhahood.

Daochuo's discussion in the eighth section of chapter 1—where he quotes the passages from the *Jingtu lunzhu* introduced above (P.4, 5, 7, 8)—is one part of his response to these various criticisms. In order to understand the context for that quotation, let me take some time to explain the content of the text leading up to it. In the seventh section of chapter 1, Daochuo argues that Amituo is a fulfilled body (*baoshen* 報身, *saṃbhogakāya*) and his Pure Land is a fulfilled land (*baotu* 報土).²⁶ Previous Chinese commentators on the Pure

²⁶ Although other terms, such as “recompense,” “reward,” and “compensation,” have been used to translate the character *bao* 報 in this phrase, I have chosen to follow the

Land had designated Amituo as a transformed body (*huashen* 化身) or a response body (*yingshen* 應身, *nirmāṇakāya*).²⁷ This stance falls into the third category of criticism described above. Having established that Amituo and his land are genuine expressions of truth and not warped to meet the needs of sentient beings, in the eighth section of chapter 1 Daochuo argues that both those who have had an insight into that truth (*shengzhe* 聖者) and those who have not (*fanfu* 凡夫) can indeed be born in that fulfilled land. Daochuo argues that because birth in the Pure Land is brought about through the working of Amituo's vows, all who aspire to birth in the Pure Land will be born there, regardless of their attainment of wisdom or insight into the truth that is expressed in the teachings about the Pure Land.

In the course of that discussion, he distinguishes different grades of birth in the Pure Land for people of varying capacities: Those who do not attain insight into the ultimate truth of Buddhism are described as receiving lower and middling grades of birth in the Pure Land and are said to only conform to that ultimate truth after having been reborn in a variety of postmortem Pure Lands. Those who understand that the birth in the Pure Land spoken of in the scriptures is an unborn birth and who thereby conform to the two truths attain birth of a higher grade, which allows them to realize genuine wisdom and compassion. In his discussion of the former, Daochuo writes:

Passage 9: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8

Ordinary people with shallow wisdom, most of whom seek relying on form, definitely attain birth in the Pure Land. However, because the power of good with form is faint, [such people] are only born in a land of form and just see a transformed fulfilled buddha. (SSZ1.386; T1958:47.6c3–5; see Inagaki, 2014: 26)

Daochuo says that those who have not had an insight into the ultimate truth of Buddhism, which lacks any set form and is beyond any sort of human

translation choice made in the *Collected Works of Shinran* and other translations produced by the translation committee for the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha 浄土真宗本願寺派 (see, for instance, Hirota et al., 1997: 1.177). This translation relays the sense that Amituo has become a Buddha through the fulfillment of his vows in practice. While the other translations also relay the sense of “the results of one's practice,” it seems that the term “fulfilled” sets the focus on the importance of Amituo's vows, which form the backdrop of that practice and are so very central to Pure Land soteriology.

²⁷ See T1745:37.91c28–92a7 and T1749:37.173c21–29 for the stance of Jingyingsi Huiyuan. Also see T1752:37.233c29–234c2, 235a16–c23, 243c21–244b3, for the stance of Jizang 吉藏. Both of them designate Amituo as primarily a response body.

cognition, can indeed be born in the Pure Land, which is an expression of that ultimate truth. He further holds, however, that this land is an intermediate stage, a “land of form,” and that the Buddha encountered there is not a genuine fulfilled buddha, but one that has taken on a different form for the sake of edifying such a deluded being. Daochuo then quotes a long passage from the *Guanfosanmeijing* 觀佛三昧經 that describes how a certain practitioner who simply encountered a Buddha as a child and made reverences to him was after that continually reborn in Pure Lands, where he encountered countless buddhas, eventually becoming a bodhisattva of high attainment who understands that the ultimate truth of Buddhism is without any set form.²⁸ This practitioner can be understood as one who attained a lower or middling grade of birth in the Pure Land, but eventually was able to make significant progress on the bodhisattva path through successive rebirths in different Pure Lands.

Just after his long quotation from the *Guanfosanmeijing*, Daochuo shifts the topic of discussion from the lesser grades to the higher grade, saying:

Passage 10: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8

This passage [from the *Guanfosanmeijing*] serves as evidence. Therefore, we know that the Pure Land equally includes the land of form. Birth is unmistakable. Those who know that the substance [of the Pure Land] is without form and divorced from conceptual thought, but still seek birth as an object of cognition (*yuan zhong qui wang* 緣中求往), should mostly attain a higher grade of birth. (SSZ1.387; T1958:47.7a4–6; see Inagaki, 2014: 28–29)

Here, Daochuo restates his position that those who lack wisdom will unmistakably be born in the Pure Land but then goes on to say that those who understand the essence of the Pure Land as being in accord with the ultimate, ineffable truth that lacks set form will “attain a higher grade of birth” (*shangbeisheng* 上輩生).²⁹

²⁸ See SSZ1.386; T1958:47.6c5–7a4; Inagaki, 2014: 26–28.

²⁹ This “higher grade of birth” is likely a reference to the higher grade of birth described in the second fascicle of the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life*, which states that such people directly encounter Amituo at the end of their lives and are then welcomed directly into his Pure Land (see SSZ1.24; T360:12.272b16–21). However, while that passage in the sutra describes those of this higher grade as monastics, Daochuo closes this section clearly stating that both monks and laypeople can attain “a birth of the upper rank” (SSZ1.387–88; T1958:47.7a22–24; see Inagaki, 2014: 30). This statement clearly indicates that Daochuo believed laypeople could also be included in this higher grade. Thus it appears that his point of emphasis is the attainment of wisdom, so on the whole

It is in this context that Daochuo presents the selective, interpretive quotation from the passages by Tanluan that were introduced earlier. He quotes these passages as part of his description of the higher grade of birth, offering them in order to explain why those who understand that the substance of the Pure Land is without form nevertheless seek birth in the Pure Land as an object of cognition. The quotation is quite long, so I will break it into three parts that roughly correspond to the three portions of Tanluan's work that I quoted above (P.4, 5, 7, 8).

First, Daochuo quotes Tanluan's discussion of the two dharma bodies, writing:

Passage 11: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8, follows P.10 and related to P.4

Therefore, Vasubandhu Bodhisattva's treatise states, "If one can contemplate the twenty-nine types of ornamental purity, then [they] are included in brief form in the term single dharma. The term single dharma is called the pure phrase, because the pure phrase is the wisdom of the unconditioned dharma body. Why must the extensive and the brief be included within each other? The myriad buddhas and bodhisattvas just have two types of dharma bodies. First, a dharma body of dharma nature. Second, a dharma body of expedient means. Because [it] relies on the dharma body of dharma nature, the dharma body of expedient means arises. Because [it] relies on the dharma body of expedient means, the dharma body of dharma nature appears clearly. These two types of dharma bodies are different but cannot be separated. [They are] one but should not [be considered to be] the same. Thus, the extensive and the brief are included within each other. If bodhisattvas do not realize that the extensive and the brief are included within each other, they are incapable of both self-benefit and benefiting others." (SSZ1.387; T1958:47.7a6–15; see Inagaki, 2014: 29)

Of course, the most important point in this passage for our purposes is Daochuo's clear reiteration of Tanluan's stance that understanding the relationship between the scriptural descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land and the ultimate truth of dharma nature is absolutely critical for the fulfillment of the bodhisattva ideal. From Daochuo's perspective, those who attain this higher grade of birth clearly understand that "the extensive and the brief are included within each other" and it is this understanding that will allow them to realize "self-benefit and benefiting others."

the concept "higher grade of birth" as he uses it seems to differ from the usage in the *Sutra on Immeasurable Life*.

On the whole, the passage very closely echoes Tanluan's discussion, but there are a few important differences that deserve attention. Despite weaving together parts of Tanluan's commentary with parts of Vasubandhu's *Jingtulun*, slightly adjusting both the order of appearance and the phrasing, Daochuo attributes the whole passage to Vasubandhu. The changes that Daochuo introduces to the order are primarily necessary to make the passage sensible outside the context of Tanluan's word-by-word commentary on the *Jingtulun*. Daochuo's changes of phrasing in the first three sentences clarify the stance taken by both Vasubandhu and Tanluan—that the ultimate truth is contained within and expressed by the ornaments of the Pure Land. In the first sentence, he explicitly states that one's contemplation of those ornaments leads one to recognize that they can be summarized with the expression “single dharma.” That is to say, the ornaments of the Pure Land lead a person to an insight into the ultimate truth of oneness. While Tanluan's passage explains Vasubandhu's statements and the reasons behind them, Daochuo's passage is more direct in its prose, clarifying that the crux of the discussion lies in an understanding of the interrelationship between the ultimate truth and the description of the ornaments of the Pure Land.

Daochuo continues this quotation, in which he takes parts of Tanluan's comment on Vasubandhu's discussion of the “pure phrase,” as follows:

Passage 12: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8, follows P.11 and related to P.5

“The unconditioned dharma body is the body of the dharma nature. Because dharma nature is quiescence, the dharma body is without set form. Because the dharma body is without set form, it can take any form. Therefore, the fine [physical] features [of the Buddha] and the ornaments are the dharma body. Because the dharma body is without set knowledge, it can know anything. For this reason, the wisdom that understands all categories is the true and real wisdom.” (SSZ1.387; T1958:47.7a15–19; see Inagaki, 2014: 29–30)

Daochuo considerably simplifies Tanluan's discussion here, focusing specifically on the point that “the fine [physical] features [of the Buddha] and the ornaments are the dharma body” and describing how understanding that dharma body is “true and real wisdom.” The understanding of the dharma body that is brought about through an understanding of the twenty-nine ornaments of the Pure Land described by Vasubandhu is here styled to be the “true and real wisdom” attained by a buddha. As such, Daochuo's selective quotation highlights why it is important to recognize that the ultimate truth is included within the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land by

showing that this recognition is a critical element in the attainment of “true and real wisdom.” Needless to say, this wisdom is essential for the bodhisattva to realize “self-benefit.”

The next portion of Daochuo’s long, interpretive quotation describes how this understanding is essential for the realization of “benefiting others” and the fulfillment of the bodhisattva ideal of compassionate action. Daochuo writes:

Passage 13: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8, follows P.12 and related to P.7, 8

“Although one knows the contemplation of the two phrases, the comprehensive and the specific, in accord with the object of cognition, there is nothing that is not actual form. Because one knows actual form, one knows the empty and delusional form of the sentient beings of the three kinds of realms. Because one knows the empty and delusional aspect of the sentient beings of the three kinds of realms, one gives rise to true and real compassion. Because one knows true and real compassion, one gives rise to true and real reliance.” (SSZ1.387; T1958:47.7a19–22; see Inagaki, 2014: 30)

As with Tanluan’s passage, most important here for our purposes is Daochuo’s statement that insight into the interrelationship of the ultimate truth and the ornaments of the Pure Land endows one with a wisdom that makes compassion possible and also leads one to reliance on Amituo and the teachings about the Pure Land. And as I argued in the previous section, this passage shows that Daochuo was not interested in the Pure Land teachings simply as a last resort, but instead saw them as the “essential gate” to fulfilling the bodhisattva path.

The first sentence in the portion of the quote introduced directly above is considerably different from Tanluan’s original. Daochuo has elided approximately one register of text in the Taishō canon between the closing sentence of the previous portion, with its reference to “true and real wisdom,” and this opening sentence about “the comprehensive and the specific.” In Tanluan’s original, the terms “extensive” and “brief” from the *Jingtulun* are used, but Daochuo rephrases that language to “the comprehensive and the specific,” inverting the order and indicating that the ultimate truth of oneness represented in terms such as “the unconditioned dharma body” and “single dharma” is expressed in specific terms in the ornaments of the Pure Land. Although this stance does not differ in any fundamental way from Tanluan’s position that the ornaments of the Pure Land are expressions of “actual form,” or reality as it is seen by a buddha, Daochuo’s choice of terminology further clarifies the commonality between the two: the twenty-nine descriptions of

the ornaments of the Pure Land are called “specific” expressions of the truth, while the term “single dharma” is said to be a “comprehensive” expression of it.

Daochuo summarizes the point of this long quotation and closes the exposition in this section in the following way:

Passage 14: *Anleji* chapter 1 §8, follows P.13

[If] contemporary practitioners, without question whether [they are] clerics or laypeople, can just know birth and non-birth and not differ from the two truths, many [of them] shall end up in a birth of the upper rank. (SSZ1.387–88; T1958:47.7a22–24; see Inagaki, 2014: 30)

This passage shows a great deal of optimism on Daochuo's part about the capacity for a wide range of people in his time to attain wisdom and act in accord with both the ultimate and the mundane truth that Buddhism preaches. His reference to “knowing birth and non-birth and not differing from the two truths” is clearly made in light of the long, interpretive quotation that precedes this statement. The wisdom described there as knowing that “the fine [physical] features [of the Buddha] and the ornaments are the dharma body” and that the dharma body of dharma nature and the dharma body of expedient means “are different but cannot be separated, . . . one but should not [be considered to be] the same” is here described as “knowing birth and non-birth.” That is to say, “knowing birth and non-birth” means recognizing that the ornaments of the Pure Land express nothing other than “actual form” and that what is spoken of as birth there is not a birth in the ordinary sense of the term, but instead a profound recognition of the ultimate truth contained in the descriptions of the Pure Land in the scriptural tradition. Such an insight will allow practitioners to accord with both of the two truths and, as we have seen, thereby realize both true wisdom and true compassion.

In Daochuo's formulation, the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land (the “extensive” or “specific” expressions of “actual form” in human language that can become the object of human cognition) are a part of the mundane truth, but they function to lead one to a direct insight into the ultimate truth. For him, understanding and acting in accord with both of the two truths is essential to realizing the bodhisattva ideal. The above considerations clearly show the way in which Daochuo inherited Tanluan's basic stance about the important role that Pure Land devotion plays in the fulfillment of the bodhisattva path. In the following section, I will consider how Daochuo develops this stance in the *Anleji* in order to argue that the understanding of the two truths made possible by Pure Land devotion allows

the practitioner to overcome two severe impediments to wisdom and compassion on that path.

4 Both Truths for the Fulfillment of Wisdom and Compassion

The Mahāyāna tradition teaches that the bodhisattva path is fraught with obstacles.³⁰ Not only is ultimate truth ineffable and beyond ordinary human cognition, human attachment is said to run so deep that insight into that truth can be counterproductive, leading one to mistaken attachment to emptiness as an idea and complete incognizance of its reality. That attachment not only obstructs the genuine realization of wisdom, it is said to also obstruct the realization of true compassion. Bodhisattvas are constantly subject to the danger of becoming attached to the sentient beings they are trying to save, as well as to their ideas about the content and nature of that salvation.³¹ In the *Anleji*, Daochuo makes repeated reference to how conformity to the two truths, engendered by insight into the fundamental reality (actual form) that is expressed by the scriptural descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land, allows the practitioner to avoid these obstacles and genuinely fulfill the bodhisattva ideal.

A variety of passages in the *Anleji* make this point,³² but due to space considerations I can only introduce two. Both appear in the second section of chapter 2, which is devoted to Daochuo's responses to nine different criticisms of Pure Land Buddhism. The passages that we will consider here are the first two responses that Daochuo presents in his argument that Pure Land Buddhism is indeed in accord with the fundamental teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The first is his response to the criticism that the Pure

³⁰ For just one of countless examples, see, for instance, the story of Śāriputra's retrogression after sixty *kalpas* of strenuous effort on the bodhisattva path when met by an ungrateful recipient of his *dāna* relayed in the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (T1509:25.145a18–29).

³¹ This issue is addressed in a wide variety of Mahāyāna scriptures. See, for instance, the passage (chapter IV §15) in the *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 (hereafter, *Vimalakīrti Sutra*) at T475:14.545a27–b3. (Although it is quite likely that Daochuo referred primarily to the translation of this sutra by Kumārajīva, see Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Bongo Butten Kenkyūkai, 2004: 202–203, for a comparison with the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and other Chinese-language versions.) Another important statement about this problem can be found in the *Da zhidu lun* at T1509:25.210b4–14.

³² See, for instance, SSZ1.390–91; T1958:47.7c11–8a21; Inagaki, 2014: 35–37; SSZ1.393–94; T1958:47.8c20–9a7; Inagaki, 2014: 42–44; SSZ1.394; T1958:47.9a7–17; Inagaki, 2014: 44–45.

Land teachings do not lead to wisdom, but instead serve to further delude deluded people. The second is his response to the criticism that encouraging the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land is a form of deluded attachment to other sentient beings that will not liberate them, but only lead to more suffering. In both instances, Daochuo makes reference to the two truths and argues that Pure Land devotion is the only way to conform to the principle of both truths.

Daochuo begins as follows to address the challenge that the Pure Land teachings, in positing the form of the Pure Land's various ornaments and encouraging people to aspire to be born there, go against the basic Mahāyāna stance that ultimate truth is without set form:

Passage 15: *Anleji* chapter 2 §2.1

First, to refute the mistaken interpretation of the Mahāyāna [teaching of] no-set-form:

Question: For instance, there is a person who says, “The Mahāyāna has no set form (*wuxiang* 無相). One must not focus one's mind on this or that. If one aspires for birth in the Pure Land, then this is focusing on a set form. [This] will increase bonds and defilement all the more. Why would one seek after this?”

Answer: This sort of interpretation is surely mistaken. Why? Because the sermons of all the myriad buddhas necessarily have two elements. First, they are based on the real principle of dharma nature. Second, they must conform with those two truths. That critic's interpretation of the Mahāyāna as being void of thought relies solely on dharma nature, but slanders and discounts seeking after an object. That is, [that position] does not conform to the teaching of the two truths. This sort of view falls under the purview of the nihilistic [understanding] of emptiness. (SSZ1.392; T1958:47.8b9–15; see Inagaki, 2014: 39–40)

The questioner argues that the form of the Pure Land is a set form that will end up further deluding the beings who take it as an object of cognition and aspiration. As we saw in the previous section, Daochuo holds that the form described in the ornaments of the Pure Land expresses “actual form” and that those descriptions are in accord with both the ultimate and the mundane truths in the two truth formula. Therefore, in answer to the challenge, he says that the critic of Pure Land Buddhism fails to recognize the importance of having an object of cognition that expresses ultimate truth and thereby ends up falling into the first pitfall on the bodhisattva path: “the nihilistic [understanding] of emptiness.” From Daochuo's perspective, Pure Land devotion and the insights afforded by taking the descriptions of the ornaments

of the Pure Land as an object of cognition keep the practitioner from falling into a mistaken attachment to the teaching of emptiness and the idea that since all is empty, there is nothing to be done and nothing to seek after. This devotion affords the practitioner a balanced, healthy wisdom that conforms to both levels of truth expressed in the Buddhist scriptures. His challenger's position is ultimately unbalanced and fails to account for the importance of truth expressed on the level of human language and cognition.

Daochuo follows this rebuttal with scriptural evidence showing that attachment to the teaching of emptiness is not appropriate. He quotes a passage from the *Wushangyijing* 無上依經 where Śākyamuni says, "If [someone] gives rise to a view of emptiness, [even as little] as a mustard seed, I will not forgive this."³³ Daochuo then reiterates his stance, saying:

Passage 16: *Anleji* chapter 2 §2.1

Now, I encourage the practitioners: Although in principle [birth in the Pure Land] is non-birth, when it comes to the principle of the two truths, it is not that one never seeks after an object. All attain birth in the Pure Land. (SSZ1.392; T1958:47.8b20–22; see Inagaki, 2014: 40)

Here again, Daochuo holds that to accord with the principle of the two truths, it is necessary to take the ornaments of the Pure Land as an object of cognition while maintaining the understanding that ultimately those ornaments express a higher, ineffable state that is actually "non-birth." That is to say, the "higher grade of birth" discussed in the previous section, which understands the unborn nature of birth in the Pure Land, is essential to realizing genuine wisdom that avoids attachment to the teaching of emptiness and conforms to both of the two truths.

Daochuo argues as follows that Pure Land devotion is essential to the realization of genuine compassion because it allows one to conform to both of the two truths:

Passage 17: *Anleji* chapter 2 §2.2

Second, to reconcile the issue of the bodhisattva's great compassion based on an attached perspective (*aijian dabe* 愛見大悲):

³³ SSZ1.392; T1958:47.8b18–19; see Inagaki, 2014: 40. The source for this quotation can be found at T669:16.471b9–10, although that text does not refer to a mustard seed but instead says, "If a person of exceeding arrogance were to become attached to a view of emptiness even as small as one-sixteenth of a piece of hair, I will not forgive this."

Question: Relying on the sacred teachings of the Mahāyāna, [it is said that] if a bodhisattva gives rise to great compassion based on an attached perspective regarding myriad sentient beings, then that should be discarded. Here, you encourage sentient beings to [aspire to] be born together in the Pure Land. How could this be anything other than focusing on a set form stained with attachment? How could one avoid this compounding of defilement?

Answer: There are two types of excellent functions in a bodhisattva's practice. What are these two? First, [the bodhisattva] realizes *prajñā*, the wisdom of emptiness. Second, [the bodhisattva] is endowed with great compassion. First, because of the capacity gained in cultivating *prajñā*, the wisdom of emptiness, even though [bodhisattvas] enter into the six ways in birth-and-death, they are not caught up in defilement. Second, because [bodhisattvas] consider sentient beings with great compassion, they do not dwell in *nirvāṇa*. Bodhisattvas, while remaining within the two truths, are always wondrously able to discard both being and nothingness and attain the middle in both adoption and abandonment, without conflicting with the great principle. (SSZ1.393; T1958:47.8c7–15; see Inagaki, 2014: 41–42)

In this way, Daochuo responds to the challenge that encouraging birth in the Pure Land is a form of attached, deluded compassion that will only compound the suffering of sentient beings: he states that bodhisattvas are only able to realize both wisdom and compassion by “remaining within the two truths,” while also recognizing the ineffable nature of the ultimate truth. As we saw above, for Daochuo, the fact that the ultimate truth is expressed in the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land makes these descriptions the most effective expedient for conforming to the two truths and realizing genuine great compassion. In that sense, the Pure Land teachings are not an obstacle to the realization of compassion, but instead the only vehicle by which to fully conform to both of the two truths and put into practice the bodhisattva path.

Daochuo next quotes from the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* to prove his point that Pure Land devotion is essential to genuinely realizing the bodhisattva's goal of great compassion. He writes:

Passage 18: *Anleji* chapter 2 §2.2, follows P.17

For this reason, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* states: “For example, it is as though there were a person who wished to build a dwelling on vacant land. [They are able to do so] just as they wish, without any obstruction. If [they try to do so] in the sky, ultimately they will be unable to complete it. Bodhisattvas are also this way. Because they wish to fulfill sentient beings, they aspire to take on a buddha country. Aspiring to take on a buddha

country is not [like trying to build] in the sky.”³⁴ (SSZ1.393; T1958:47.8c15–19; see Inagaki, 2014: 42)

As we have seen, from Daochuo’s perspective since Pure Land devotion gives the practitioner access to a discursive and conceptual apparatus that accords to both the ultimate truth and the mundane truth, serving to clarify the ultimate truth for those who are only capable of understanding the mundane truth, it allows that practitioner to function as a bodhisattva and genuinely liberate sentient beings “without any obstruction.” Lack of access to those expressions and singular reliance on the inexpressible, ultimate truth of emptiness, however, leave the bodhisattva trying to do something as impossible as building a house in midair. Deluded beings are reliant on language, discursive thinking, and form; in order to draw them out of their delusion and effectively liberate them, it is necessary to use the expressions in the scriptural tradition that accord to both truths.

It is quite likely that Daochuo not only viewed the Pure Land teachings as the perfect expedient enabling a bodhisattva to effectively teach sentient beings in accord with both truths but also saw reliance on the Pure Land teachings as a way to avoid mistaken attachment to the sentient beings the bodhisattva was trying to liberate. We should remember that for both Tanluan and Daochuo, the conclusion drawn from the arising of “true and real compassion” was “true and real reliance.” The Pure Land teachings afford the practitioner an insight into the “actual form” of the world as it is and the nature of human delusion, as well as what is necessary to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings. Viewing the world from the perspective afforded by the Pure Land teachings allows the practitioner to see “true and real compassion,” which can only be realized through reliance on the greater working of other power, not the individual machinations of individual beings, which are always necessarily subject to the danger of becoming attached to the sentient beings one is trying to liberate and one’s ideas about the nature of that liberation. Pure Land devotion saves the bodhisattva from the danger of attached compassionate action by shifting the primary locus of that action from the individual to the broader working of Amituo’s vows in the world.³⁵

³⁴ See T475:14.538a25–29 for the original passage (chapter I §12). See also Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Bongo Butten Kenkyūkai, 2004: 30–31.

³⁵ Although Daochuo does not explicitly state this in chapter 2 of the *Anleji*, his reference to the “power of the vows of Dharmākara” at the end of the section where he discusses the significance of merit transference intimates that he held this stance. SSZ1.435–36; T1958:47.20c2–19; see Inagaki 2014, 124–26.

That shift from self-reliance to reliance on the working of the vows is referred to as “true and real reliance” and liberates one from the self-centered perspective that would necessarily color conscious attempts to liberate others, thereby making such attempts “great compassion based on an attached perspective.”

This short section fails to fully describe the way in which Daochuo employs the concept of the two truths to show that the Pure Land teachings are the “essential gate” to fulfilling the bodhisattva ideal of self-benefiting and benefiting others. The two examples taken up here, however, provide ample evidence that Daochuo was not interested in the Pure Land teachings simply as a last resort in an unfortunate age. They show that he was instead primarily concerned with how one could complete the path of the bodhisattva laid out in the Mahāyāna scriptures. He saw the Pure Land teachings—and especially the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land—as expedients that endowed the practitioner with the capacity to both understand and achieve true wisdom and compassion. That outcome was not necessarily realized in a postmortem rebirth, but instead as an “unborn birth,” or “birth of non-birth,” wherein the practitioner attained a profound insight into the interrelationship between ultimate truth and the teachings about the ornaments of the Pure Land and was thus enabled to realize the bodhisattva ideal of perfecting genuine wisdom and compassion.

5 Conclusion: Achieving “Unhindered Eloquence”

As we have seen, Daochuo did not turn to the Pure Land tradition simply out of despair regarding his capacity to attain Buddhahood in any other way. Instead, he considered Pure Land devotion to be the “unsurpassed, essential gate” to fulfilling the bodhisattva ideal. He repeatedly makes reference to the concept of the two truths in the *Anleji* because he viewed Pure Land devotion as the key to genuinely conforming to both of those truths and, further, viewed conforming to them as critical for realizing the wisdom and compassion that Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages people to attain.

In the previous section, I discussed how Daochuo takes this position because he recognizes the profound difficulties presented by that path and sees the Pure Land teachings as the only expedient available to allow the practitioner to genuinely overcome these difficulties and actually fulfill the ideal that the Mahāyāna scriptures set forth. The fact that the Pure Land teachings allow the practitioner to conform perfectly with both of the two

truths is, in Daochuo's understanding, critical. Both practitioners and those they aim to liberate require the discursive thought and linguistic expression of the mundane truth in order to gain insight into the ultimate truth. Vasubandhu states that the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land are the perfect expedients for expressing that ultimate truth, a stance that Tanluan and Daochuo readily adopt and develop to show that Pure Land devotion is indeed the “unsurpassed, essential gate” of all Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Daochuo seems to have held that the sophisticated conceptual and linguistic apparatus afforded to the practitioner by the Pure Land scriptural tradition—where the scriptural descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land directly express the “actual form” of the world as perceived by the Buddha's wisdom—granted access to an insight into the truth of both truths and what he calls “unhindered eloquence” (*wuai biancai* 無碍辯才). Limitations of space do not allow a thorough discussion of all the instances where the term *wuai biancai* occurs in the *Anleji*,³⁶ but in closing I would like to introduce one short passage where Daochuo says that those who aspire to and attain birth in the Pure Land are endowed with these unhindered linguistic abilities.

In the third section of chapter 8 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo clearly states that the reason one should aspire to be born in the Pure Land is “simply because one wishes to quickly complete self-benefiting and benefiting of others, such that one can benefit beings broadly and profoundly.”³⁷ After describing in detail how this aspiration for birth is intended to fulfill every element along the bodhisattva path, he asks:

Passage 19: *Anleji* chapter 8 §3

Question: If it is really the case that those who aspire for birth in the Pure Land focus on the desire to benefit beings, the sentient beings that need to be relieved are now, at present, here in this world, so when one has already been able to give rise to this mind, then one should simply remain here and relieve the suffering of sentient beings. Why is it that having already attained this intention, one first aspires to be born in the Pure Land? It seems like that is abandoning sentient beings to seek after the pleasure of

³⁶ The term *biancai* 辯才 appears in the *Anleji* at SSZ1.394, 432 (twice), 436; T1958:47.9a2, 19c3, 19c4, 20c15; Inagaki, 2014: 43, 117 (twice), 125. The first three instances refer to the eloquence of those who either aspire to birth in the Pure Land or have been born there.

³⁷ SSZ1.431; T1958:47.19b17–18; see Inagaki, 2014: 116.

enlightenment for oneself. (SSZ1.431, T1958:47.19b22–26; see Inagaki 2014, 116)

Daochuo here again raises a question concerning the need for Pure Land devotion, echoing contemporary criticisms that aspiring to birth in the Pure Land was tantamount to abandoning suffering sentient beings and the most fundamental desire of the bodhisattva for the sake of individual peace and contentment.³⁸ In response to this question, he makes repeated reference to the “unhindered eloquence” attained by those who aspire to be born in the Pure Land. The first instance appears in the following creative quotation from the *Da zhidu lun*:³⁹

Passage 20: *Anleji* chapter 8 §3, follows P.19

For example, it is as though there were two people who together saw their parents and relatives drowning in deep water. One of them goes directly and exhausts his strength trying to save them but is unable to do so and ends up sinking together with them. The other one runs far off and approaches riding on a boat. He pulls them out of the water so that they are all able to get out of the difficulty. Bodhisattvas are also this way. When they have not yet given rise to the mind [that seeks enlightenment], their transmigration in birth and death is no different from other sentient beings. Just when they have already given rise to the mind that seeks *bodhi*, first they aspire to be born in the Pure Land, get the boat of great compassion, ride on unhindered eloquence, enter into the ocean of birth and death, and deliver sentient beings. (SSZ1.431–32; T1958:47.19b26–c3; see Inagaki, 2014: 117)

Here and elsewhere in the *Anleji*, Daochuo says that those who aspire to be born in the Pure Land are endowed with eloquence that gives them the capacity to deliver sentient beings from suffering. This eloquence is available to them because the descriptions of the ornaments of the Pure Land are directly expressive of ultimate truth. Those who have attained “a higher grade of birth,” and thus understand this interrelationship between ultimate truth and the scriptural language describing the ornaments of the Pure Land, are endowed with an “agile mind” that allows them to freely and unobstructedly

³⁸ One representative of that position is described as rebuking Daochuo when the latter encouraged him to aspire to birth in the Pure Land. See the biography of Tanxuan 曇選 (542–607) in the *Xugaosengzhuàn* 續高僧傳 (T2060:50.641c6–10).

³⁹ The quotation seems to be Daochuo's creative expansion on the sense of a short passage from the *Da zhidu lun* (T1509:25.607a5–6) that makes passing reference to drowning when one tries to save another being but does not appear to contain, as this quotation does, a description of two people trying to save their family from drowning. For more about Daochuo's creative quotation practices, see Conway, 2021.

preach to sentient beings employing “effective expedient means” and quickly realizing “self-benefiting and benefiting others.” It is this promise of the ability to fulfill the bodhisattva ideal—and not despair over the degenerate nature of his age and his contemporaries—that was Daochuo’s primary reason for arguing that Pure Land Buddhism should be viewed as the centerpiece of all of Śākyamuni’s teachings and the “unsurpassed, essential gate” of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Abbreviations

- SSZ *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書. 5 vols. Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.

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On the Four Inconceivable Topics in the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* and Their Influence on Early Mahāyāna Notions of Buddhahood¹

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1 Introduction

In the *Āgama* and *Nikāya* texts, adjectives signifying the four cognitive distortions (*caturviparītadṛṣṭi* 四顛倒; everlasting, pleasant, self, and pure) and the three adjectives *nitya* (everlasting), *dhruva* (firm), and *śāśvata* (constant) were laden with negative connotations. However, in middle-period Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādanirdeśa* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* these adjectives were viewed positively, referencing the Buddha and *nirvāṇa*.²

The concept of the four inconceivable topics (*cattār' acintyāni* 四種不可思議) is also found in the *Āgama* and *Nikāya* texts, where these topics are associated with negative connotations. The **Ekottarika-Āgama* (EA) 增一阿含經 and the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* (AN) mention these four inconceivable topics, including the Buddha's perceptual domain. They teach that contemplating these topics can contribute to mental disturbances.

A footnote in Lamotte, 1970: 1639, provides relevant references regarding the five inconceivable topics delineated in the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (T1509:25.248c3–4), citing sources such as the EA and the AN, among others. Recent studies have expanded upon these references, and my own research has uncovered further instances.

In this chapter, I will explore the four inconceivable topics as explicated in the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, a subject heretofore overlooked in secondary

¹ I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Michael Radich, Vincent Tournier, Rafal Felbur, Jens-Uwe Hartmann, and the anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on the research underlying this study.

² For *caturviparītadṛṣṭi*, see Shimoda, 1993: 179n52. One origin of the concept can be found in *Thera-gāthā* 594 (PTS edition). For *nitya*, *dhruva*, and *śāśvata*, see *Majjima-Nikāya* 146, PTS III 273.18–24; Shimoda, 1997: 243.

scholarship. I will discuss the sutra's treatment of these topics and clarify the relationship between the early Mahāyāna sutras³ and the *Āgama* texts. Specifically, I will examine the connection between the term *tathāgata-guhyā* ("secret of the Tathāgata"; Ch. 如來祕密; Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang*) and the four inconceivable topics in early Mahāyāna scriptures. Additionally, I will explore the concept of the "discourse of Dharmas of the secret of Tathāgata" (*tathāgataguhya-dharmaparyāya* 如來祕密法門) as presented in the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra* and its parallels in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*.⁴

2 The Four Inconceivable Topics in the **Ekottarika-Āgama* and in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*

The **Ekottarika-Āgama* corresponds to the Pāli *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*. Various sources confirm that all major schools of Buddhism include in their textual canons four *Āgamas* 四阿含, among which is the *Ekottarika-Āgama*.⁵

The four inconceivable topics as presented in the **Ekottarika-Āgama* are **loka* 世界 (the world), **sattva* 眾生 (sentient beings), **nāga* 龍 (dragons/dragon kingdoms), and **buddhaviṣaya* 佛境界 (the Buddha's perceptual domain). In the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, on the other hand, the four topics are enumerated as the Buddha's domain, the perceptual domain of meditation adepts, the different maturity of the *karma* of individual sentient beings, and the world. In both texts, the four inconceivable topics are described as inducing mental disturbance in the practitioner who contemplates them.

The formulation of the four inconceivable topics found in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* can be seen in the following passage:

Monks, there are these four inconceivable topics (*cattārimāni acinteyyāni*), which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration. What are the four? Monks, the Buddha-domain of Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ buddhaviṣaya*) is inconceivable,

³ My definition of "early Mahāyāna" here would be later than the definition in recent Western studies. In this chapter, I have described early Mahāyāna and mid-Mahāyāna as such based on the Japanese understanding of the *Shoki daijō* 初期大乘 and *Chūki daijō* 中期大乘, respectively.

⁴ I refer to Gómez and Harrison, 2022, for the translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and rely on Habata, 2013, for the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*.

⁵ The affiliation of the extant Chinese translation of EA has been a topic of considerable discussion, but I will refrain from delving into it here. For its translator, refer to Radich 2017.

which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, the domain of absorption of one who is meditating (*jhāyissa jhānavisaya*) is inconceivable, which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, the maturing of *karma* (*kammavipāka*) is inconceivable, which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, thoughts about the world (*lokacintā*) are inconceivable, which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, these are the four inconceivables, which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration.⁶ (AN 4.8.77)

In the **Ekottarika-Āgama*, the four inconceivable topics are mentioned in two specific passages, EA 26.9 and EA 29.6. The latter, EA 29.6, corresponds to AN 4.8.77.

Furthermore, within the **Ekottarika-Āgama*, the inconceivable of the Buddha's domain is divided into subcategories. They include the inconceivables of the Buddha's lifespan, body, brahma sound, wisdom, and so on. Below are translations of EA 26.9 and EA 29.6, with the underlined parts highlighting descriptions of the inconceivable of the Buddha's domain:

Sāriputta, you should know that there are four inconceivable aspects of the Tathāgata that the Hīnayānists are unable to understand. What are the four? The world is inconceivable, sentient beings are inconceivable, *nāgas* are inconceivable, and the domain and perceptual field of a Buddha is inconceivable. Sāriputta, these are reckoned to be the four inconceivables.⁷ (EA 26.9, T125:2.640a4–9)

Then the World Honored One told the Bhikṣus. There are four topics that cannot be comprehended. What are the four? Sentient beings are inconceivable. The world is inconceivable. The kingdom of *nāga* is inconceivable. The realm of the Buddha is inconceivable . . . What is the inconceivability of Buddha's domain and perceptual field (*fo guo jing jie* 佛國境界)? Is the body of Tathāgata generated by the parents? This is also inconceivable. Because the body of Tathāgata is pure and free from contamination and partakes of heavenly matter (*qi* 氣). Is it made by humans? This is also inconceivable. Because it is beyond human activity. The body of Tathāgata is the great body. This is also inconceivable. Because the body of Tathāgata is not created by a heavenly deity. Is the lifespan of the Tathāgata short? This is also inconceivable. Because Tathāgata has four supernatural powers. Is the lifespan of a Tathāgata long (*chang shou* 長壽)? This is also inconceivable. Because the Tathāgata cycles throughout the world, in accordance with skillful means. The body of Tathāgata is not measurable. It cannot be called "long" or "short." The

⁶ AN II PTS 80.14–26. The translation here makes reference to that of Bhikkhu Anālayo (Anālayo, 2016: 463–64).

⁷ See Anālayo, 2016: 460.

voice of Tathāgata is not subject to any set norms. His brahma sound (*fan yin* 梵音) and the wisdom and eloquence of Tathāgata are inconceivable. They are beyond the reach of the people of this world. In this manner, the domain of the Buddha [lands, in light of earlier phrasing] (*fo jing jie* 佛境界) is inconceivable. Bhikṣus, there are these four inconceivable topics. They cannot be conceived by ordinary people. But these four inconceivable topics are devoid of “wholesome roots.” Nor do they lead to the practice of Brahmācāryā (*fan xing* 梵行). Not to the place of rest. Even to the place of *nirvāṇa*. But they cause confusion and disturbance in the mind and lead to doubts and bonds. (EA 29.6, T125:2.657a19–c2)

3 The Four Inconceivable Topics in the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* and Its Intentions⁸

The *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* is an early Mahāyāna scripture that is concerned with the three secrets of the Tathāgata *mulai sanmi* (如來三密: body, voice, and mind). It contains a parallel discourse to one found in the **Ekottarika-Āgama*, 37.2.⁹ The sutra was first translated into Chinese in 288 by *Dharmarakṣa 竺法護¹⁰; this translation is known by the title *Guhyakādhipati-nirdeśa* 密迹金剛力士經 and constitutes the third chapter of the **Mahāratnakūṭa* 大寶積經, a collection later compiled by *Bodhiruci 菩提流志.¹¹

In the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra*, the four inconceivable topics are **karman* 業, **nāga* 龍, **dhyāna* 定, and **Buddha* 佛, which are explained at the

⁸ I am currently working on a critical Sanskrit edition of the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra*, which will be published soon. I have already published editions and transliterations of several chapters in Ikuma 2014; 2015a; 2019. Banārasī Lāla has published an edition of the entire sutra (Lāla, 2018–20), and Péter-Dániel Szántó has published a transliteration of the entire manuscript (Szántó, 2021). Both, however, show textual alterations without notes. Lāla, Szántó, and I have all based our work on manuscript no. 18 (The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, G10765), which is mentioned in Śāstri, 1917: 17–21.

⁹ Akanuma, 1929: 142, proposes a correlation between the two texts concerning Maudgalyāyana’s supernormal power.

¹⁰ *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, T2145:55.7b18.

¹¹ The title *Guhyakādhipati-nirdeśa* is found in the *Mahāyānasūtra-ālaṃkāra-bhāṣya*. In the history of the Mahāyāna scriptures, it has been pointed out that the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* has an influence on the concept of not saying a single word (一字不說) in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* 入楞伽經 (Takasaki, 1980: 364). The *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* has also been identified as the main compilation material of the **Devarājaprabhara-prajñāpāramitā* 勝天王般若波羅蜜經 (T231). The **Devarājaprabhara-prajñāpāramitā* is also translated as the sixth chapter of the *Da banruo boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (T220). See Ikuma, 2015b: 36.

beginning of the sutra. In this text, the inconceivability of the Buddha (佛不可思議) is foremost among the four and is identical with the **tathāgataguhyā* 如來祕要, the subject of the scripture. The relevant passage of the sutra is as follows:

Then, Bodhisattva Śāntamati said to all the assembly:

Honorable ones, these four inconceivable topics were taught by the Buddha. What are the four? They are the inconceivability of *karman*, the inconceivability of *nāga*, the inconceivability of meditation, and the inconceivability of the Buddha. And since, honorable ones, it is only after one has attained the supreme, righteous, and perfect awakening that these four inconceivable topics are accomplished, he said that of these four inconceivable topics, the inconceivable of Tathāgata is the highest. Honorable ones, then, after you have heard the inconceivable of the Bodhisattva and the inconceivable of the Buddha, you should not be surprised, you should not be afraid, you should not fall into fear. After you have heard, you should give rise to an immense joy, a faith, and a supreme delight in great measure. (P 760[3] *tshi*, 118b4–119a1; D 47 *ka* 101a2–7)¹²

In chapter 5 of the *Vyākhyāyukti*, Vasubandhu notes that of the sixty speeches of the Buddha in the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, there are two that correctly teach the inconceivable dharma (*acintyadharmasamyaḡdeśikatvāt*). These are the twenty-seventh, the voice that should make known (*ājñāpanīyā*), and the twenty-eighth, the voice that should identify (*vijñāpanīyā*).¹³

From the above, we can make the following observations: First, the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* couches the four inconceivable topics in positive terms, in contrast with their negative treatment in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* and in the **Ekottarika-Āgama*. Second, the inconceivable of Buddha/Tathāgata is one of the main subjects of the sutra. This latter point is also mentioned in the *Da zhidu lun*, Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti*, and so on.

Numerous variations of the four, five, and six inconceivable topics have been identified in scholarship on sutra literature. In this connection, the abovementioned *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* and the following four texts are mentioned in Lamotte, 1970: 1639.

The *Da shenbian hui* 大神變會 in the *Mahāratnakūṭa* collection (T310: 493c16–19).

¹² This part of the Sanskrit manuscript is missing. Chapter 1. T310:11.43c12–22 and T312:11.706b1–9. See also 84000: 1.23. Chapter numbers follow Fa hu's 法護 translation (T312).

¹³ The *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭīkā*, P 5570 i 172b3–6. See Ueno and Horiuchi, 2018: 39.

The **Mahāvibhāṣā* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 (T1545:27.586b24–25).

The *Apitan piposha lun* 阿毘曇毘婆沙論 (T1546:28.163a8–9).

The **Śāsanashūrti* 顯揚聖教論 (T1602:31.510c2–6).¹⁴

Recent studies have mentioned the following references related to the inconceivable topics.

The *Śrāvakabhūmi* 聲聞地: 234.8–12.¹⁵

The *Fenbie gongden lun* 分別功德論 (The Commentary of the **Ekottarika-Āgama*) (T1507:25.30c28–31b14).¹⁶

The *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* (P 5595 *tu* 114b2).¹⁷

The *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭīkā* (P 5570 *i* 172a8–173a3 and 89a1).¹⁸

I myself have identified several others, as follows:

The *Zun poxumi pusa suoji lun* 尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論 (T1549:28.785a5–12).

The *Sanḅhabhedavastu*: 25.6–8.¹⁹

The *Sarvapuṇyasamuccayasamādhī* 集一切福德三昧經 (T382:12.1002c 16–20).²⁰

The *Ru dasheng lun* 入大乘論 (T1634:32.47b8–14).²¹

The **Tattvasiddhi; Cheng shi lun* 成實論 (T1646:32.291a3–4 and 332a29–b1).²²

¹⁴ Although the *Yogācārabhūmi* contains relevant references, Lamotte, 1970, does not mention them. Cf. the *Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論, T1579:30.655a7–b5.

¹⁵ See Horiuchi, 2016: 134n891.

¹⁶ See Palumbo, 2013: 328.

¹⁷ See Anālayo, 2016: 464 and his note 73, and Horiuchi, 2016: 134n891.

¹⁸ See Ueno and Horiuchi, 2018: 64.

¹⁹ *catvāri sthānāny acintanīyāni / ātmacintā lokacintā satvānām karmavipākacintā buddhānām ca buddhaviśayacintā iti / Genben shuo yiqieyou bu pinaiye posing shi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶破僧事, T1450:24.103a22–26. Cf. *Genben shuo yiqieyou bu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶, T1442:23.679c15–18.

²⁰ Dharmarakṣa: *Deng ji zhong de san mei jing* 等集眾德三昧經, T381:12.978a22–27. P 802 *du* 122a1–4; D 134 *na* 116a6–b1; 84000: 2.192. The *Sarvapuṇyasamuccaya-samādhī* adds *pusa sheng qi zhu qingjing hang bu ke siyi* (the inconceivable of arising and pure conducts of the Bodhisattva) 菩薩生起諸清淨行不可思議, T382:12.1002c19.

²¹ See section 4.6 of this chapter.

²² The **Tattvasiddhi* states that in the **Ekottarika-Āgama* there are the five kinds of unexplainable wonders[, including Buddha's inconceivable topics]. 如增一阿含中說有五事不可思議.

Lamotte, 1970: 1639, points out the five inconceivable topics referenced in the *Jingtu lun zhu* 淨土論註 (T1819:836b7–10), attributed to Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542). The following examples are indicated in the annotations of the *Jingtu lun zhu* written by Jōdoshū and Jōdoshinshū scholars.²³

The *Lushena fo pin* 盧舍那佛品 (the first chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* of sixty volumes) (T278:9.409b23).

The *Xianshou pusa pin* 賢首菩薩品 (the eighth chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* of sixty volumes) (T278:9.437a27–28)

The *Shidi pin* 十定品 (the twenty first chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* of eighty volumes) (T279:10.226a8–9).

The *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*: 72.26–74.3.²⁴

4 The *Tathāgataguhyā-dharmaparyāya* 如來祕密法門 and the Four Inconceivable Topics

In the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, one finds the term *tathāgataguhyāṃ nāma dharmamukhapraveśaṃ* (accessing the gate of Dharmas entitled “The Secret of Tathāgata”).²⁵ There are several theories concerning whether or not this term is synonymous with the term *tathāgataguhyāṃ dharmaparyāyaṃ* in the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, and no consensus has been reached.²⁶ In addition, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* refers to “the great sutra named Tathāgata’s secret” (**tathāgataguhyā-nāma-mahāsūtra*; translated by Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 as *shenshen mizang* 甚深密藏).²⁷ Michael Radich points out that there is no compelling reason to regard this as a reference to the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* and that the relationship between the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* and the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* is a subject needing further study.²⁸

²³ This information was provided by Fujii Jun 藤井淳. He further asserts the existence of numerous other potential sources. For other sources, refer to Hartmann, 2024, and Skilling, 2005: 102–105.

²⁴ *Dacheng apidamo ji lun* 大乘阿毘達磨集論, T1605:31.681b1–15; *Dacheng apidamo za ji lun* 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論, T1606:31.732b20–733a6. The term “one taste of dharmadhātu” (*dharmadhātvekarasatā, yiwei fajie* 一味法界) appears in this passage.

²⁵ VKN chapter VI §13. Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什: 諸佛祕要法藏; Xuanzang 玄奘: 一切如來祕要法門. See VKN 2004: 286–87; VKN 2006: 72.12; Gómez and Harrison 2022: 77.

²⁶ See Takahashi, 2018: 263. *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* MS 30b1–2.

²⁷ See footnote 37 for the source.

²⁸ See Radich, 2015: 47.

In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between the four inconceivable topics and two sutras, namely, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, along with their predecessor sutras. This relationship has not been thoroughly examined in previous studies.

4.1 The *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* 首楞嚴三昧經²⁹

My investigation did not reveal any explicit references to the four inconceivable topics in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. However, in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, which presumably precedes the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, the word **tathāgataguhyapraviṣṭa* (“entering the secret of the Tathāgata”; Tib. *de bzhiṅ gshegs pa'i gsang ba la 'jug pa*)³⁰ is encountered. The use of this term in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* bears similarity to that in both the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra*.³¹

The following passage from the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* (§21) contains the word **tathāgataguhyapraviṣṭa*:

Entering the realm of all buddhas, revealing the observation of the Buddha's wisdom, entering the secret of the Tathāgata (The *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, P 800 *thu*, 286a1; D 132 *da* 262a2)³²

Apart from that, the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* includes the phrases **buddhānām bhagavatām buddhasthānam acintyaṃ* (“the inconceivability of Buddha's state of Buddhas”; Tib. *sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnam kyī sangs rgyas kyī gnas pa yang bsam gyis mi khyab pa*; Ch. *zhufo shenli bu ke siyi* 諸佛神力不可思議)³³ and **sattvānām acintyaḥ karmavipākāḥ* (“the

²⁹ Section numbers and most of the reconstructions of Sanskrit terms follow Lamotte, 1998.

³⁰ This Tibetan term is also found in the *Daśabhūmika*. The corresponding Sanskrit term is *tathāgatānām bhagavatām guhyānupraveśā*. Only in Dharmarakṣa's translation does the meaning “secret” (祕藏; T285:10.491c7) appear. See chapter 11 § 22 at the following site: <https://mahayana-scriptures.com/ct/dbh/details/358>.

³¹ VKN Chapter IV §1 *sarvabodhisattvaśarvabuddhaguhyasthāneṣu*. See VKN 2004: 182–83; VKN 2006: 45.7; Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 49. *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra*, *sarvatathāgataguhyasthāneṣu* MS 12a5. See Takahashi, 2018: 9.

³² Kumārajīva: 能入諸佛祕密法藏 (T642:15.631c12–13). See Tanji, 1974: 207.

³³ In Kumārajīva's translation, we find the word *shen li* 神力 (supernormal power; T642:15.640c17), the same as in the *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭīkā* (P 5570 i 172b6). This suggests that the Tibetan translation and Kumārajīva's translation convey different lineages in this section.

inconceivability of maturing of *karman* of sentient beings”; Ch. *zhongsheng bu ke siyi ye* 眾生不可思議業).³⁴ Here is the first phrase (§126):

Then the Buddha [Śākyamuni] said to Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta: Now listen carefully and engrave it well in your mind (*tena hi śrnu sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca manasikuru*), but you must not fear or tremble or take fright, or hesitate or doubt (*nottrasitavyaṃ na samtrasitavyaṃ na samtrāsam āpattavyaṃ na vimativicikitsā utpādayitavyāḥ*). Why? The supernormal power (*rddhibala*) of the Buddhas is inconceivable (*acintya*) and the excellence (*āṛsabha*) of the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi* is also inconceivable. (Kumārajīva, T642:15.640c15–18; Lamotte, 1998: 199)

The state of the Buddha of the holy Buddhas is inconceivable and the supremacy of the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi* is also inconceivable. (P 800 *thu*, 322b2–3; D 132 *da* 296b1–2)³⁵

Next, let us look at examples for the inconceivability of *sattva* and *loka* in the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi* (§164). There we find the term **sattvakarmavipākācintyaṃ* (Tib. *sems can rnam kyi las kyi rnam par smin pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa*)³⁶; Ch. *zhongsheng bu ke siyi ye yinyuan* 眾生不可思議業因緣), which corresponds to one of the four inconceivable topics:

Then the Venerable Māhākāśyapa said to Mañjuśrī: Friend, you have accomplished a most difficult thing (*atiduṣkara*) by thus making yourself manifest to sentient beings.

Mañjuśrī replied: Kāśyapa, what do you think of this (*tat kiṃ manyase*): Who produced this Grdhrakūṭapārvata and from what does this universe (*lokadhātu*) derive?

Kāśyapa answered: Mañjuśrī, all universes are produced like foam and they derive from the inconceivable maturing of *karma* of sentient beings (*sattvakarmavipākācintyaṃ*).

Mañjuśrī said: All *dharma*s also derive from the inconceivable maturing of *karma*. In this sphere, I do not have to make any effort (*abhisamkāra*). Why? All *dharma*s depend on causes and conditions (*hetupratyayādhīna*); not being independent (*asvāmika*) they are produced at will (*yathākāma viṭhapita*). Nothing is difficult (*duṣkara*) for him who has understood this. O Kāśyapa, for a man who has not seen the four Noble Truths (*na drṣṭasatya*) to hear these things and believe them, that is what is difficult. But for a man who has seen the four Truths (*drṣṭasatya*) and obtained the supernormal powers (*abhijñāprāpta*) to hear this and believe it, that is not difficult. (Kumārajīva, T642:15.644a24–b6; Lamotte, 1998: 232)

³⁴ T642:15.644a29.

³⁵ See Tanji, 1974: 313.

³⁶ The *Śūraṃgamasamādhi*, P 800 *thu*, 334a1–2. D 132 *da* 307a6. Tanji, 1974: 343–44.

Although the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* does not associate Tathāgata's secret with inconceivability, it is noteworthy as an early example of both appearing.

4.2 The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* 大乘涅槃經

In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, the term **tathāgataguhyā-nāma-mahāsūtra* (*shenshen mizang* 甚深密藏) is mentioned.³⁷ Additionally, expressions such as *rulai jingjie bu ke siyi* 如來境界不可思議 (“the inconceivable of Tathāgata's domain”) and *suoyou zhuding bu ke siyi* 所有諸定不可思議 (“the inconceivable of all *samādhis*”) are found.³⁸ In the same sutra, we also find the notion that “Tathāgata is inconceivable, everlasting, firm, and constant.”

The following passage is intriguing because it presents a reversal in the evaluation of two doctrines derived from the *Āgamas*: “the inconceivable of the Buddha” and “everlasting, firm, and constant”:

bhagavān acintyas tathā[g]a(to nityo dhruvaḥ śāśvataḥ)* (Habata, 2019: 115)

如來亦爾不可思議，故知如來常住不壞無有變異 (Dharmakṣema, T374:12.384c20–21)³⁹

The term **tathāgataguhyā* (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba*) appears five times in the Tibetan translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*. The corresponding Tibetan passage where the term *shenshen mizang*, as translated by Dharmakṣema, appears a second time is as follows:

What is called the suchness of the secret of Tathāgata is called permanent (**nitya*). Given that it is permanent, conceiving of Tathāgata's impermanence is impossible.⁴⁰

³⁷ Dharmakṣema, T374:12.380b3–4. Faxian 法顯: 甚深經義 (T376:12.863c26). Habata 2013: 94–95 §118. Radich, 2015: 177 (appendix 1, 3). See Shimoda, 1993: 196 [5F].

³⁸ Dharmakṣema, T374:12.379a19–20. Faxian: 諸佛所說不可思議。諸佛所行不可思議 (T376:12.863a22–23). Habata, 2013: 88 §109. See Shimoda, 1993: 160 [4AJ].

³⁹ Faxian: 如來法王不可思議，如來常住非變易法 (T376:12.867c7–8). Habata, 2013: 124–25 §160. See Shimoda, 1993: 252–53 [6Z].

⁴⁰ *de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba'i de kho na nyid shes pa dang / rtag pa yin par shes pa gang yin pa de dag ni de bzhin gshegs pa mi rtag go zhes sems skyed kyang mi srid de* / Habata 2013: 241–42 §332. Faxian: 善解如來方便密教，知諸如來是常住法非變易法非磨滅法 (T376:12.879c7–9); Dharmakṣema: 若有人能了知如來甚深密藏，及知如來常住不變 (T374:12.401c10–11).

Thus, the main doctrine of this sūtra, “Tathāgata’s permanence,” is expounded in connection with the key words “inconceivable” and “Tathāgata’s secret.”

4.3 The *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava* 如來性起品

In the *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava*, an early Mahāyāna scripture on the subject of the aspects of Tathāgata, there is a similar phrase, **tathāgatasarvaguhya-praviṣṭaṃ* (“entering all the secrets of Tathāgata”; Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba’i gnas su chud pa*),⁴¹ which is similar to the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, and the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi*. The following passage containing the word is found at the beginning of the *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava*:

O son of the conqueror, you, too, serving hundreds of thousands of aeons (**koṭi-nayuta*), having attained the highest ultimate point of all bodhisattva practices, and freely operating with all methods of mental unification and concentration, have become well versed in (everything) and have entered the secret state of all the *tathāgatas*. (P 761[43] *śī* 79a2–3; D 44 *kha* 78b5–6)⁴²

In addition to the above passage indicating the subject of the scripture, later in the *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava* we find synonyms for one of the four inconceivable topics: **samyaksambuddhānāṃ buddhaviṣayaṃ* (the realm of Buddhas, that of Buddhas; Tib. *sangs rgyas rnam kyi sangs rgyas kyi yul*). The following is the passage that contains the term:

How should a Bodhisattva-mahāsattva understand the realm of Buddhas, that of Buddhas who have rightly attained perfect awakening and are worthy of the world’s respect? (P 761(43) *śī* 120a1; D 44 *kha* 119b1–2)⁴³

This term is related a little later with **acintya* (inconceivable; Tib. *bsam gyis mi khyab*).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Dharmarakṣa: 皆入如來祕密之藏 (T291:10.594a8); Buddhahadra 佛馱跋陀羅: 深入一切如來祕密 (T278:9.612a9); Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀: 入一切佛祕密之處 (T279:10.262c18). This Tibetan term is also found in the *Satyakapārivarta*. Cf. D 146 *pa* 84a2; T271:9.301a12; T272:9.318a4–5.

⁴² See Takasaki, 1975: 137. Chapter 2 (5). Chapter and section numbers follow Takasaki, 1975.

⁴³ Dharmarakṣa: 如來之境界 (T291:10.608a14); Buddhahadra: 如來應供等正覺境界 (T278:9.625a14–15); Śikṣānanda: 如來應正等覺境界 (T279:10.273c6–7). See Takasaki, 1975: 231. Chapter 7 (57).

⁴⁴ D 44 *pa* 120a3, 6. See Takasaki, 1975: 232–33. Chapter 7 (58)(59).

The *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava* also mentions, as one of the sutra's titles, first of all, the secret state of the Tathāgata, **tathāgataguhyā-sthāna* (Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba'i gnas*).⁴⁵ This term is similar to that found in the aforementioned two sutras—namely, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*. The following is the passage that contains the term:

O son of the conqueror, the various gates of teaching of the kind I have described above are named “the secret state of the Tathāgata.” They are also called “incomprehensible (**durvijñeya*, Tib. *shes par dka' ba*) to all worldly beings.” The sutra is also called “holding the seal of Tathāgata.” Also called “the perfection of the great power of wisdom.” Also called “the exposition of the lineage of the Tathāgata.” It is also called “the perfection of all Bodhisattvas. Not to be destroyed by all worldly things.” Always following the sphere of activity of the Tathāgata. It is also called “purifying all remaining sentient beings.” It is also called, “reaching the ultimate point of perfection of all the wholesome roots taught by all the Tathāgatas.” O son of the conqueror, this is not the kind of gate of teaching that Tathāgata taught, except for those who abide in the Mahāyāna and the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas who abide in the vehicle of the inconceivable vehicle (**acintyayāna*; Tib. *bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i theg*). (P 761 [43] *śī* 136b8–137a4; D 44 *kha* 136b4–137a1)

Furthermore, a different translation (version) of the *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava* is the *Da fangguang rulai xingqi weimi zang zing* 大方廣如來性起微密藏經, a manuscript of which has recently been found at the Nanatsudera temple 七寺 in Nagoya.⁴⁶ The word **guhya* (*wei mi* 微密) is also found in the Chinese name of this sutra.

The following table summarizes the appearance of the four inconceivable topics in various texts:

Table: The four inconceivable topics in various texts

Text/section in this chapter	Inconceivability of <i>karman</i>	Inconceivability of <i>nāga</i>	Inconceivability of meditation	Inconceivability of Buddha
<i>Āṅguttara-Nikāya</i> § 2	<i>kamma-vipāko acinteyyo</i>		<i>jhāyissa jhānavisaṃyo acinteyyo</i>	<i>buddhānaṃ buddhaviśaya acinteyyo</i>
<i>Śrāvaka-bhūmi</i> 聲聞地	<i>sattvānāṃ karmaṇavipāka-cintāṃ</i>		<i>dhyāyināṃ dhyāyi-viśayaṃ</i>	<i>buddhānāṃ buddhaviśayaṃ</i>
<i>Śūraṅgama-</i>	<i>sems can rnam</i>			<i>sangs rgyas bcom</i>

⁴⁵ Dharmarakṣa: 如來祕奧之藏 (T291:10.613a15–16); Buddhābhadrā 一切諸佛微密法藏 (T278:9.629c22); Śikṣānanda: 如來祕密之處 (T279:10.277b24). See Takasaki, 1975: 271 and 405n91. Chapter 12 (88).

⁴⁶ See Kimura, 1994.

<i>samādhi</i> 首楞嚴三昧 經 § 4.1	<i>kyi las kyi rnam par smin pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i> (*sattvānām karmavipākācin tyam) (§164)			<i>ldan 'das rnam kyi sangs rgyas kyi gnas pa yang bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i> (*buddhānām bhagavatām buddhasthānām acintyam) (§126)
<i>Tathāgata- guhya-sūtra</i> 如來祕密經 § 3	<i>las bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i>	<i>klu bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i>	<i>bsam gtan pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i>	<i>sangs rgyas bsam gyis mi khyab pa</i>
<i>Mahāparinir- vāṇamahā- sūtra</i> 大般涅槃 經 § 4.2				<i>acintyas tathā[g]a(to nityo dhruvaḥ śāsvataḥ)</i>

4.4 The Inconceivability of Tathāgata as Subject Matter in the Early Mahāyāna Scriptures

In the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* and the *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava*, which explain the secret of the Buddha, we can identify parallel expressions of the four inconceivable topics. The *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava* (§5) discusses the Tathāgata from the ten aspects, including the domain of the Buddha's perception and cognition, which is akin to the concept of the "inconceivability of Buddha."⁴⁷ Similarly, the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* (§165) is concerned with *samādhi* for the sake of seeing the Tathāgata(s) while also elucidating the supernormal power of Tathāgata.⁴⁸ Hence, it seems that these early Mahāyāna scriptures, much like the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, center their teachings on the doctrine of the Buddha, particularly emphasizing the inconceivability of the Buddha among the four inconceivable topics. As noted earlier, especially in the *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava* and the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*, the subject is articulated as the secret of the Buddha.

⁴⁷ The *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava*, P 761(43) *shi* 79a6–b1; D 44 *kha* 79a2–4. See Takasaki, 1975: 137–38. Chapter 2 (5).

⁴⁸ The *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, P 800 *thu*, 334b4–8; D 132 *da* 307b2–5, and so on. See Tanji, 1974: 345.

4.5 The Subject Matter of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* and of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the Secret of Tathāgata

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* focuses on the doctrine of “Tathāgata’s permanence” as its primary theme. As mentioned in section 4.2, this doctrine is associated with the secret and inconceivable nature of the Tathāgata. Similarly, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* explores the theme of inconceivability. Its fifth chapter is titled *acintyavimokṣa* (Inconceivable Liberation), and the alternate name for this scripture, *acintyadharmavimokṣaparivartam* (The Chapter of the Inconceivable Dharma of Liberation), appears at the end of the scripture.⁴⁹ The term *dharmamukhapraveśa* (accessing the gate of Dharmas), which is linked to the term *tathāgataguhyā*, is mentioned five times in this scripture. Of the five instances, four are associated with the term *advaya* (non-duality), serving as a central theme of the sutra.⁵⁰ Hence, the term *tathāgataguhyā* holds considerable significance in this scripture. These teachings can be considered as addressing the inconceivable nature of the Buddha, a theme explored in preceding sutras.

4.6 The Secret of Tathāgata in the History of Indian Buddhism

Let us compare the inconceivability of the Buddha’s perceptual domain 佛境界不可思議 in the **Ekottarika-Āgama* with the subjects of the Mahāyāna sutras. The lifespan of the Tathāgata is mentioned in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*⁵¹ and in the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* (§171). In addition, Tathāgata’s (1) body, (2) brahma sound (voice), and (3) wisdom (mind) (*shen kou yi* 身口意) are described in the *Tathāgatotpattisambhava*,⁵² the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*,⁵³ the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*,⁵⁴ and the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*.⁵⁵ In these

⁴⁹ Chapter XII §23. See VKN 2004: 508–09; VKN 2006: 125.14–15; Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 138.

⁵⁰ Chapter VIII §§1 and 33. See VKN 2004: 324–25 and 350–51; VKN 2006: 84.3 and elsewhere; Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 93 and 99.

⁵¹ Chapter 5 of 13 total. Chapter numbers are according to Faxian’s translation. The chapter is named the “Longevity” (Ch. *chang shou* 長壽). In this chapter, the term **tathāgataguhyā-nāma-mahāsūtra* appears.

⁵² Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of 13 total.

⁵³ Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of 25 total.

⁵⁴ (1) Body: chapter I §10 verse 9, chapter III §§43–48, chapter XI §1; (2) voice: chapter I §10 verse 10–11, chapter IX §15; (3) mind: chapter I §10 verse 14–15.

⁵⁵ In this sutra, only Tathāgata’s body is mentioned, in §§11–20.

Mahāyāna sutras, the concept of the secret of Tathāgata appears. In sum, we can see that the Buddha's inconceivable realm of perception was developed in the Mahāyāna sutras through the conceptual model of the secret of Tathāgata.

The *Ru dasheng lun* 入大乘論 (Treatise to Enter Mahāyāna) points out that there is a connection between the *dharmakāya* and the four inconceivable topics.⁵⁶ In the same text, inconceivability is regarded as “extremely profound and secret.” The *Ru dasheng lun* cites the *Tathāgatoḡpattisaḡbhava*, which presents a synonym for one of the four inconceivable topics (the realm of Buddhas, that of Buddhas) as testimony to the *dharmakāya*. The following is a passage from the *Ru dasheng lun*:

The treatise-masters of all the schools claim that all buddhas emerge from the Jambū continent and, moreover, that Śākyamuni Buddha is born in the Lumbinī Garden and in the city of Gayā sits in the seat of awakening (**bodhimāḡḡa*) to attain perfect awakening, gives his first sermon at Vārāḡasī, and attains perfect *nirvāḡa* in the city of Kuśīnagara. Therefore, what you say is not correct.

Answer: This is not the case. Why is that? My intention is not to have it that the *tathāgatas* emerge here (on the Jambū continent), but attain awakening in the Śuddhāvāsa Heaven. For if they had attained perfect awakening in the Śuddhāvāsa Heaven, they would not have been born in the royal palace, nor would they have gone forth [into ascetic practice], nor would they have awakened. Why is that? If this were so, then the *tathāgatas* would have no kin, no birthplace, and would not enter into extinction. As is explained in detail in the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Jñānālokāḡmkāra* (*Zhizhao jing* 智照經), and the *Tathāgatoḡpattisaḡbhava* (*Rulai chusheng jing* 如來出生經): the Tathāgata neither arises nor ceases. Kāśyapa himself said, “I was ordained by relying on complete cognition of all forms (**sarvākārajñāna*).” You should know what this means. That is to say, this shows that the Tathāgata does not arise in the golden coffin and put forth his feet [so that] Kāśyapa [can] pay homage. Accordingly, it is clear that the Tathāgata [also] never enters into extinction. For this very reason, it should be known that the Dharma-body of the Tathāgata (*Rulai fashen* 如來法身) neither arises nor perishes.

Question: Does the Tathāgata neither arise nor perish in the slightest?

Answer: I now explain directly, relying on reasoning, that the Tathāgata indeed neither arises nor ceases and is not an illusory construct. The Tathāgata merely displays himself as arising and ceasing through skillful means. All this is inconceivable (*bu ke siyi* 不可思議). It is for the sake of instructing sentient beings. As the Buddha says in the **Sūrata-*

⁵⁶ Though the origins of the *Ru dasheng lun* remain unidentified and only its Chinese translation has survived, it warrants examination as a document translated during the first half of the fifth century.

pariprcchā (*Xiulai jing* 修賴經/*Xulai jing* 須賴經), in the *Sahā* world, if I appeared in [my] real body, there would be no single person who would receive my teaching.⁵⁷ Therefore, this point is extremely profound and secret (*zui wei shenshen yi shi mimi* 最為甚深亦是祕密). I also designate it to be the manifestation [of the Buddha's body]. It is all for the sake of sentient beings of lesser capacity, whose wisdom is shallow and [who therefore] cannot comprehend the profound Dharma. For this reason, I display these things through skillful means . . .

This doctrine is profound, and difficult to explain, and should not be preached to people all over the place.

Question: even if it is not to be expounded everywhere, it should be preached to those who can understand it. If someone conceives of the great ambition to increase his wisdom, you should expound it in full for that person, as it is expounded above. I answer, there are four types of inconceivability (*si bu siyi* 四不思議), namely: the inconceivability of the Buddha, the inconceivability of **dhyāna* and **samādhi*, the inconceivability of the *nāgas*, and the inconceivability of *karmic* recompense for actions. As for the *dharma*s that are to be made manifest by the inconceivability of the Buddha, only sentient beings with superior abilities can experience all the *dharma*s that have been taught since the time of Vairocana Buddha (*lushena fo* 盧舍那佛). (T1634:32.47a2–b14)

Thus, the *Ru dasheng lun* relates inconceivability to the secret with reference to earlier Mahāyāna sutras.

5 The Secret of Tathāgata and the Inconceivability of Buddha

The *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra* does not clearly explain the relationship between the secret of Tathāgata and the inconceivability of Buddha. However, the Tibetan translation of the sutra has the title '*Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo* (**Āryatathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśa-nāma-mahāyānasūtra*), and the Chinese translation—from the Song period—has the title *Rulai bu siyi mimi dasheng jing* 如來不思議祕密大乘經. Both of these renderings of the sutra's title contain words meaning "secret" (**guhya*; Ch. *mimi* 祕密) and "inconceivable" (**acintya*; Ch. *bu siyi* 不思議).

In the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka-sūtra* 大菩薩藏經, which is based on the *Tathāgataguhyā-sūtra*,⁵⁸ the three secrets of the body, voice, and mind of

⁵⁷ The *Xulai jing* 須賴經, T328:12.57a1–4. This phrase from the *Xulai jing* differs from the extant original text and appears to have been adapted by the *Ru dasheng lun*.

⁵⁸ I presented this point at the conference "Esoteric Buddhism and East Asian Society," held at the University of British Columbia on March 7–8, 2020.

Tathāgata described in the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra* are presented as the inconceivable of Tathāgata's body, voice, and mind, respectively. The following is a passage from Xuanzang's 玄奘 translation of the *Bodhisattva-piṭaka-sūtra*:

What are the names of the ten inconceivable *dharma*s of Tathāgata? The first is belief in the inconceivable body of Tathāgata. The second is belief in the inconceivable voice of Tathāgata (*yinsheng* 音聲). The third is belief in the inconceivable wisdom (*zhi* 智) of Tathāgata. The fourth is belief in the inconceivable light of Tathāgata. The fifth is belief in the inconceivable discipline and meditation of Tathāgata. The sixth is belief in the supernormal power of Tathāgata. The seventh is belief in the inconceivable power of Tathāgata. The eighth is belief in the inconceivable fearlessness of Tathāgata. The ninth is belief in the inconceivable great compassion of Tathāgata. The tenth is belief in the inconceivable Dharma of Tathāgata. (T310:11.208b16–24)⁵⁹

From the above we can confirm that, at least in the history of the Mahāyāna sutras, the secret of Tathāgata as expressed in the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra* was also considered to be the inconceivable of Tathāgata.

6 Conclusion: Motifs From the *Āgamas* in the Early Mahāyāna Sūtras

From the foregoing presentation, we can draw several conclusions. To begin with, some early Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Tathāgatotpattisaṃbhava* and *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, used phrases frequently found in the *Āgamas*—an example being the adjective *caturviparītadṛṣṭi*—reversed their values, and made these phrases a subject of their own texts. That is, among the four inconceivable topics couched in negative terms in the **Ekottarika-Āgama* as those that one should not contemplate, the inconceivability of Buddha/Tathāgata was taught positively in these sutras as the highest teaching. The inconceivability of Buddha/Tathāgata is the doctrine concerning aspects of Tathāgata; it was also called “the secret of the Tathāgata” (*tathāgataguhya* 如來祕密).

In accordance with the above, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* called themselves (or their teachings)

⁵⁹ MS 20a7–b2. I express my profound gratitude to Fredrik Liland, Jens E. Braarvig, Kazunobu Matsuda, and Jens W. Borgland for providing the source of the Sanskrit manuscript. The *Da cheng pu sa zang zheng fa jing* 大乘菩薩藏正法經 T316:11.795a11–28. P 760(12) *dsi* 314b4–315a3; D 56 *kha* 288a4–b1. 84000: 4.1.

tathāgataguhya-dharmamukha (“the gate of Dharmas of the Secret of Tathāgata”) and **tathāgataguhya-nāma-mahāsūtra* (“the great sutra entitled the Secret of Tathāgata”), respectively. Furthermore, the *Tathāgataguhya-sūtra*, after quoting all the four inconceivable topics in the **Ekottarika-Āgama*, describes the inconceivable of Buddha/Tathāgata as the highest of the four and the acts (secrets) of the Buddha’s body, voice, and mind as its subject; note, too, the use of the word *tathāgataguhya* (the secret of Tathāgata) in the sutra’s title.

In the history of Indian Buddhism, the relationship between the early Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava*, and the four inconceivable topics is pointed out in the treatise the *Ru dasheng lun*. Later, in the middle-period Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* and the *Tathāgatararbha-sūtra*, the word *tathāgataguhya* is associated with *tathāgatararbha* doctrine, especially in their Chinese translations.⁶⁰

Abbreviations

84000 “84000 Translating the Words of the Buddha” (<https://84000.co/>)

AN *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*

D Derge (sDe dge) edition.

EA **Ekottarika-Āgama* 增一阿含經.

PTS Pāli Text Society.

P *The Tibetan Tripitaka: Peking Edition* 影印北京版西藏大藏經. 168 vols. Ed. Daisetz T. Suzuki. Reprinted under the supervision of Otani University, Kyoto; Tokyo: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955–61.

T *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo, Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.

VKN *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*

⁶⁰ See Radich, 2015, appendixes 1 and 2. Note 275 of Fujii Jun’s chapter in this volume indicates that the names *tathāgataguhyakośa*, **tathāgatararbha*, and “the storehouse of the secret of the Tathāgata” (*ru lai mimi zang* 如來祕密藏) are variously used to refer to a specific scripture (T821) in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese, respectively.

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Miji jingang lishi hui 密迹金剛力士會, T310.

Rulai busiyi mimi dasheng jing 如來不思議祕密大乘經, T312.

'Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo (*Āryatathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśa-nāma-mahāyānasūtra*), Tohoku no. 47; Otani no.760 (3).

Saṅghabhedavastu: See Gnoli (1977).

Śrāvakabhūmi: See Śrāvakabhūmi Study Group (1998).

VKN 2004: See Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Bongo Butten Kenkyūkai (2004).

VKN 2006: See Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature (2006).

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The Essence of the Two Truths Is the Middle Way: Jizang's Arguments Against the Tiantai Doctrine of the Three Truths¹

Ernest B. Brewster

1 Introduction

Jizang 吉藏 (549–623 CE), the Sino-Parthian scholar-monk of the Sui 隋 Dynasty, is known for developing within Sinitic Madhyamaka Buddhism the doctrine of the two truths (*satyadvaya*; *erdi* 二諦), which explains the essential natures (*tixing* 體性)² of the *dharma*s (*fa* 法)—the impartite entities that compose the entirety of the universe—in terms of conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*; *shisu di* 世俗諦) and ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*; *zhendi*

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Sangyop Lee for numerous comments and suggestions, as well as corrections on the translations. The anonymous reviewer for Hamburg University Press also provided invaluable feedback, which I have tried to incorporate wherever possible. Any mistakes and idiosyncrasies that remain in the translations are my own.

² In his *Weimojiejing shu* 維摩經義疏 (Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*), Jizang deploys the term *tixing* (essential nature of *dharma*s) as a synonym for terms signifying omnipresent *dharma*-nature (*dharmatā*; *faxing* 法性) and thusness (*tathatā*; *ru* 如)—the latter being a designation for reality as it really is (*rushi* 如實): “Omnipresent *dharma*-nature, thusness, the apex of reality—these three items are all different names for the true characteristics of reality as it really is. Reality, just as it is (*rushi* 如是), is immutable and is therefore termed ‘thusness.’ This is the essential nature of *dharma*s, and hence it is called ‘omnipresent *dharma*-nature.’ By exhausting the limits of reality, it comes to be termed the ‘apex of reality.’ Initially viewing the reality of the *dharma*s, just as it is, can be likened to seeing a tree from a distance—one discerns it to be a tree. That is seeing things ‘thusly.’ One sees that the functioning of *dharma*s is profound. When approaching the forest and seeing a tree, one knows what [type of] wood it is. That is called ‘[knowing] omnipresent *dharma*-nature.’ Fathoming and exhaustively knowing the tree’s constituents being the roots, stalks, branches, and leaves is called ‘[knowing] the apex of reality.’ Each of these three [ways of knowing] involves the entire tree; the difference between them simply resides in seeing [the selfsame tree] in different ways.” 法性。如。實際。此三皆是實相異名。如實不變名如。是諸體性，故名法性。窮其際畔，稱實際也。始見法實，如遠見樹，知定是樹，名為如。見法轉深。如近見樹，知是何木，名為法性。窮盡知樹根莖枝葉之數，名為實際。此三未始非樹，因見為異耳 (T1781: 38.938a19–24).

真諦). Throughout his voluminous body of commentarial work and original doctrinal treatises, Jizang advances the argument that these two truths, when taken together, provide for a comprehensive explanation of the essential nature of the *dharma*s. Conventional truth describes the *dharma*s as existing (*sat*; 有) with intrinsic natures (*svabhāva*; *zìxìng* 自性) that distinguish them as real entities undergoing successive stages of alteration while retaining their essential, and selfsame, identities. Ultimate truth designates the *dharma*s as non-existing (*asat*; *wú* 無), in that the intrinsic nature of each, and every, *dharma* is empty (*śūnya*; *kōng* 空) of an essential core, or any aspect, that is not the direct product of the collective causal power of other *dharma*s. According to Jizang, conventional truth establishes the existence of all *dharma*s as based upon the force of mental construction, which imputes existence to the *dharma*s as real entities with intrinsic natures. Ultimate truth, for its part, does not recognize for any of the *dharma*s an existence that is separate and independent from the myriad of other *dharma*s that comprise the totality of reality.

To establish the doctrine of the two truths, Jizang conducts an extensive exegesis of the Indic Madhyamaka and Tiantai sources on the essential nature of the *dharma*s. He centers his examinations of Madhyamaka teaching on the writings of the Indic philosopher Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 CE), focusing his analyses of Tiantai doctrine on the treatises and sutra commentaries of his slightly older contemporary Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597 CE), who is remembered as the de facto founder of the Sinitic tradition of Tiantai Buddhism. Jinhua Chen has undertaken thoroughgoing research (Chen, 1998; Chen, 1999) on the accounts of Jizang’s purported discipleship under both Zhiyi and Guanding 灌頂 (561–632 CE), one of Zhiyi’s most prominent disciples and the posthumous editor of many of his teacher’s works—writings that are presented in the *Tiantai Guoqing lu* 天台國清錄 (Tiantai Records of Guoqing), an important early Tiantai ‘sectarian historiography’ compiled by Guanding, while the story of Jizang’s discipleship under Guanding is found in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Further Biographies of Eminent Monks), compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667 CE). Chen concludes that “none of the documents or passages in Records from Guoqing . . . that establish or support Jizang’s [institutional] connections to Tiantai appeared in the original versions, but were added later” (Chen, 1998: 56). While there are putative formal-institutional connections between Jizang and prominent Tiantai scholar-monks and scholiasts made in the historical record, even a cursory investigation of the portions of Jizang’s extant corpus dealing with the

Tiantai doctrine of the three truths is sufficient to demonstrate two things: First, it shows that Jizang had a deep familiarity with available Tiantai exegetic sources. Second, it shows that he frequently cites the very same sources Zhiyi uses to articulate this paradigmatically Tiantai stance embracing a third truth of the Middle Way. However, he does so in order to take issue with Zhiyi's appropriation—in service of the doctrinal postulate of a third truth—of this (largely indigenous Sinitic) sutra material, including, but not limited to, *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 (Sutra of the Diadem of the Primary Activities of the Bodhisattvas) and *Renwang bore boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經 (Sutra for Humane Kings).³

In his close reading of *Zhonglun* 中論 (Middle Treatise), composed by Nāgārjuna and rendered in Chinese in the early fifth century by Kumārajīva, Jizang appraises the inherited Madhyamaka explanations regarding the relationship between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth and regarding the relationships between the two truths and the Middle Way (*Madhyamapratipad*; *Zhongdao* 中道). Following Nāgārjuna, Jizang examines the “middle” between the conventional existence and the non-existence of *dharmas* with intrinsic natures. He takes on a philosophical question: How can the *dharmas* be defined, conventionally, on the basis of their existing with intrinsic natures yet with respect to ultimate truth be considered devoid of any intrinsic reality?

In his examination of the extensive corpus of Zhiyi, Jizang directs his attention to the Tiantai doctrine that provides an account of the essential natures of the *dharmas* in terms of three truths (*sandi* 三諦): the truth of provisional existence (*jiadi* 假諦), which designates the temporary being of individual *dharmas* having intrinsic natures and composites made up of multiple *dharmas* as equally derived from a multitude of internal and external causes and conditions; the truth of emptiness (*kongdi* 空諦), which indicates the non-existence of the intrinsic natures of the *dharmas*; and the third truth (*disan di* 第三諦), also described as the Middle truth (*Zhongdi* 中諦) of the Middle Way, which specifies the center between the two extremes (*erbian* 二邊) of conventional existence and fundamental emptiness.

Jizang closely examines the round, or perfect, teaching (*yuanjiao* 圓教) of Tiantai Buddhism developed by Zhiyi throughout his work, wherein the third truth is characterized as encompassing the truths of the conventional

³ For an in-depth investigation of Zhiyi's appropriation of these Sinitic apocryphal sutras in his formulation of the Tiantai doctrine of the three truths, see Swanson, 1989: 50–56.

existence and the pervasive emptiness of the *dharmas*, and integrating them into a round, or perfect, (*yuan* 圓) whole. Zhiyi characterizes the third truth as the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way (*Zhongdao diyiyi di* 中道第一義諦) and envisions the Middle Way as laying bare a deep reality that is not evidenced—in its complete fullness—by either conventional truth or the truth of emptiness, or by a combination of both.⁴ To Zhiyi, the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way supersedes (*jue* 絕)⁵ the two truths by departing from (*li* 離) the two extremes, or two prior levels (*jieji* 階級),⁶ of

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- ⁴ Brook Ziporyn observes that the truth of the Middle Way, as characterized by Zhiyi, remains distinct from both emptiness and conventional existence in its paradoxical negation and affirmation of both emptiness and conventional existence—a stance that, at the same time as uniting both emptiness and non-emptiness into one overarching truth, denies that either emptiness or non-emptiness are mutually exclusive and separate aspects of one reality: “The aspect of emptiness itself is empty, non-empty, and Center, and considered purely on its own terms is not only the negation of all things but also, when fully thought through, the positing of all things (non-empty) and the identity of positing and negation (Center)” (Ziporyn, 2021). In this formal analogy, he likens the truth of emptiness and the truth of conventional existence within the Perfect Teaching to two sides of the same coin while also likening the truth of the Middle Way to the whole true essence of the coin, which is inherent in both sides but not confined to either: “the whole true essence of the whole is found in any of the three aspects, and any of the aspects is the whole true essence” (Ziporyn, 2021).
- ⁵ Hans-Rudolf Kantor (Kantor, 2020: 894) renders *jue* in the Tiantai context of the doctrine of the three truths as “to suspend,” as in this characterization of the third truth of the Middle Way: “. . . which must be revealed through the ‘suspension of correlative dependency’ (*juedai* 絕待)—the evading sense of the subtle (*miao* 妙) is suspension (*jue* 絕) realizing emptiness.” In his *Miaofa lianhua jing xuan yi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (Profound Meaning of the *Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma*), Zhiyi envisions the truth of the Middle Way as uniquely evading determination in terms of either existence or non-existence, as its real nature (*shixing* 實性) effaces these two antinomic descriptions, which are correlatively dependent upon one another such that the presence of one necessarily implies the absence of the other. It is the aspect of the Middle Way that supersedes this relationship of correlative dependence that is identified by Zhiyi as subtle: “The third truth is without correlative dependency; it is precisely for this reason that it is characterized as ‘the subtlety of superseding correlative dependency’ (*juedai miao* 絕待妙).” 三諦無所可待，是為絕待妙也 (T1716:33.705a14).
- ⁶ In his *Sanguan yi* 三觀義 (On the Meaning of Threefold Contemplation), Zhiyi aligns the doctrine of the three truths with the Tiantai Buddhist practice of Threefold Contemplation (*sanguan* 三觀), the series of realizations (*zheng* 證) that take place on the path to awakening (*jue* 覺): “The principle (*li* 理) of [*dharmas*] produced by causes and conditions includes gradations in terms of its differentiated aspects; the three types of cognitive disturbances [i.e., (1) cognitive disturbances derived from erroneous discernment, (2) cognitive disturbances brought about by the immense variety of details requiring attention in the task of liberating other sentient beings, and (3) cognitive disturbances derived from primal nescience] have differing levels in

provisional existence and emptiness. The third truth illuminates an essential nature of the *dharmas* that is not fully captured by either conventional or ultimate truth. Within the Tiantai paradigm, the third truth of the Middle Way is regarded as distinct from conventional truth, from the truth of emptiness, and from a synthesis or integration (*tong* 統) of both conventional and ultimate truth. Within the Tiantai paradigm, the third truth of the Middle Way is realized by the simultaneous negation and affirmation of conventional existence and emptiness. In probing the potential weaknesses in the Tiantai doctrinal model as formulated by Zhiyi, Jizang poses another question: How can the *dharmas* of the Middle Way be, in any respect, separate and/or analytically distinct from either the existing *dharmas* as seen in light of conventional truth and/or the intrinsically empty *dharmas* as seen in light of ultimate truth?

Throughout his body of work, Jizang takes great pains to debunk the Tiantai formulation of the Middle Way as a sublation of conventional and ultimate truth that is said to in some way reach beyond the two truths of conventional truth and the truth of emptiness. He contends that by dividing conventional truth, the truth of emptiness, and the Middle Way into three progressive and analytically distinct truths, the Middle Way is reified as having an intrinsic reality apart from conventional existence and the fundamental emptiness of all *dharmas*. To Jizang, this is grievously erroneous in that it violates the fundamental Mahāyāna Buddhist tenet of emptiness as the only intrinsic reality of the *dharmas* and, furthermore, in that the negation of the intrinsic reality of the *dharmas* as they are commonly considered in terms of conventional truth does not posit some further layer or aspect of reality corresponding to ultimate truth. To Jizang, the Middle Way is always, and is already, subsumed within conventional truth and ultimate truth⁷; the expression “Middle Way” does not correspond to

terms of their grossness or subtlety. In contemplating principle (*li*) and banishing mental disturbance, there are differences in terms of the application of accurate cognition. It is for this reason that it is called the “Threefold Contemplation with Differentiated Aspects.” 因緣所生三諦之理，相別不同。三番惑障麤細階級。觀理破惑，用智不同。故名別相三觀也 X909:55.670a19–20. Paul Swanson gives a detailed account of Zhiyi’s model of the Threefold Contemplation, characterized as a progressive (*cidi* 次第) course of practice wherein each level of contemplation reveals a specific insight into the nature of reality that leads to full awakening. See Swanson, 1989: 116–23.

⁷ Yasuo Deguchi (Deguchi et. al, 2021: 79) concludes that Jizang, in the final analysis, advocates for a realist position concerning the nature and existence of ultimate reality wherein ultimate truth corresponds to an ultimate reality that really exists, independent

anything other than a correct ascertainment of what is both essential and common to the two truths when the two are discerned as mutually compatible truths about one and the same reality. Therefore, Jizang is at pains to make the case that the Middle Way is inseparable from either a conventional truth accounting for the reality composed of continuously arising, abiding, decaying, and ceasing conditioned *dharma*s (*youwei fa* 有為法) or an ultimate truth that discloses the pervasive emptiness and inherently quiescent (*jimie* 寂滅) nature of the selfsame *dharma*s.

Throughout his writings on Madhyamaka doctrine, Jizang argues that by positioning the Middle Way as a third truth that is inclusive of, yet distinct from, the ultimate truth of the *dharma*s as devoid of intrinsic natures, the Tiantai doctrine contravenes a certain Madhyamaka tenet about fundamental emptiness. The tenet at issue holds that fundamental emptiness is the only real nature of reality and that ultimate reality—the nature of which is approximated by the metaphor of “emptiness”—cannot in any meaningful way be distinguished from the conventional reality constituted at its most basic level by a manifold of discrete *dharma*s, each of which comes to be due to the collective causal power of a myriad of other *dharma*s.⁸ In this specific respect, the reading of Jizang’s exegesis on two truths doctrine presented in this chapter is consistent with a Sideritsian anti-realist or “semantic non-dualist” reading of the relationship between the two truths as originally envisioned by Nāgārjuna, according to which, in the final analysis, the only ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth—that is, ultimate truth does not

of the minds of sentient beings, and is not simply the mistaken hypostatization of elements of conventional reality made up of *dharma*s, as a separate level or aspect of reality, beyond conditioned reality: “Unlike Jizang, Zhiyi doesn’t subscribe to the idea that there are different aspects or levels of reality.” In contrast, Sangyop Lee (Lee, 2023) upholds a Sideritsian semantic non-dualist or anti-realist reading of Jizang’s understanding of the doctrine of the two truths, according to which Jizang should be taken to repudiate “the validity of the very notion of mind-independent reality” and to further deny “the possibility of there being ultimately true statements about reality,” which entails a wholesale rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, based on which true statements are to be considered valid if and only if they correspond to mind-independent states of affairs.

⁸ In *Erdi yi* 二諦義 (On the Doctrine of the Two Truths), Jizang appeals to the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* as scriptural support for his stance that, in the final analysis, only ultimate truth is ultimately real (*shi* 實): “The *Nirvāṇa Sutra* correctly explicates the meaning of ‘truth’ (*satya*) in clarifying that only the ultimate is ultimately real. Only the ultimate is the [real] truth. The conventional, precisely in that it is illusory conceptualization, is not ultimately real. Therefore, it is precisely in this respect that the conventional is not the [real] truth.” 《涅槃》正釋諦義，明唯真是實故。唯真是諦。俗即虛妄非實。故俗即非諦 (T1854:45.104c28–29).

correspond to anything beyond conventional reality. It is also consistent with Jan Westerhoff's (Westerhoff, 2018) corollary to Siderits's anti-realist non-dualist reading of Madhyamaka philosophy, which maintains that the *only* ultimate reality is the conventional reality.⁹ From Jizang's standpoint, Nāgārjuna's thoroughgoing dispelling of reifications from the domain of Buddhist teaching can only obtain its full meaning when it is properly understood not only to deny that mere conventionalisms, such as composites, as well as individual *dharma*s defined by ultimately real intrinsic natures, are inherently real things, but also to deny that emptiness itself is ultimately something real. For Jizang, emptiness is a mere conceptual fiction—that is, it does not reference anything with intrinsic reality apart from the manifold of conditioned *dharma*s that instantiates it.

In developing his counterarguments to the Tiantai doctrine of the three truths, Jizang returns to the account of the relationship between the two truths presented in the *Middle Treatise*: conventional truth, in extremis, leads to a reification of the existence of the *dharma*s with intrinsic natures as ultimately real, and ultimate truth, in extremis, leads to a nihilistic denial of the conventionally real existence of the *dharma*s. Following Nāgārjuna, Jizang steers away from either extreme, proposing that, taken together, the two truths of conventional and ultimate truth capture the essential natures and existence of the *dharma*s that comprise the entirety of the universe. To Jizang, without a conventional truth conceptualizing the existence of *dharma*s as based on the real force of mental construction, the phenomenal world is illusory and false. Without an ultimate truth that determines that the conditioned *dharma*s and the unconditioned *dharma*s (*wuwei fa* 無為法)—for example, the unconditioned *dharma* of spatiality (*ākāśa*; *xukong* 虛空)—are universally devoid of intrinsic natures, emptiness is not omnipresent and not real. Jizang reasons that without both truths in combination, the Mahāyāna teaching regarding the coextensiveness of conventional existence and the pervasive emptiness of both conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s is violated.¹⁰ By framing the two truths as non-exclusive, Jizang avers that

⁹ As Westerhoff describes it (Westerhoff, 2018: 211–12), a corollary to the “semantic non-dualist” Madhyamaka doctrinal stance, on which “the only ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth,” is the position that “there is no ultimate reality, no way things are ‘no matter what.’”

¹⁰ In the third chapter of his *Shier men lunshu* 十二門論疏 (Commentary on the *Treatise on the Twelve Aspects*), T1825:42.199a10–13, Jizang points to the root treatise, *Shier men lun* 十二門論 (Treatise on the Twelve Aspects), T1568:30.163b24–28, as contending that in the absence of characteristic marks of conditioning activity

conventional truth and ultimate truth jointly explain one and the same reality. For Jizang, the two truths of the conventional and the ultimate natures of the *dharmas* together provide a comprehensive account of the mundane reality of transmigration (*saṃsāra*) and the ultimate reality of *nirvāṇa*; moreover, the two truths encompass the fundamental inseparability and the coextension of transmigration and *nirvāṇa*.

Ultimately, Jizang comes to determine that “two truths—in conjunction—make evident the Middle Way” (*erdi heming Zhongdao* 二諦合明中道). He construes the Middle Way as the common essence of the two truths—as a place where the truth of provisional existence and the truth of emptiness are fully illuminated. Here, Jizang uses the word “essence” (*ti* 體) to denote the non-dual (*bu'er* 不二) essential, or fundamental, nature of the multitude of *dharmas* making up reality; he sees this essence, or nature, as the common feature linking the two truths.¹¹ He uses the word “function” (*yong* 用) to indicate the distinctive expression of either of the two truths—that is, as differentiated from one another, or as dual (*er* 二) in character.¹²

(*saṃskṛtalakṣaṇāṇi*)—namely, the marks of arising, abiding, and ceasing—the unconditioned *dharmas*, insofar as they are considered to exist, lack any discernible features differentiating them from the conditioned reality made up of constantly fluctuating conditioned *dharmas*: “Again, non-arising, non-abiding, and non-ceasing are called ‘the characteristic marks of the unconditioned.’ Non-arising, non-abiding, and non-ceasing are thus non-*dharmas*. Non-*dharmas* would not present any characteristic marks.” 復次，無生、無住、無滅，名無為相；無生、住、滅則無法，無法不應作相。In his exegesis on the above statement, Jizang reasons that if unconditioned *dharmas* are to be considered real entities whose existence can be discriminated from that of conditioned *dharmas*, then they should—just like conditioned *dharmas*—evinced characteristic marks of conditioning activity that would distinguish them as discrete *dharmas* with specific characteristics. Hence, based upon the observation that in the absence of any distinctive features, unconditioned *dharmas* cannot be determined to really exist, Jizang concludes that unconditioned reality, denoted by emptiness and *nirvāṇa* (i.e., the cessation of conditioned *dharmas* producing mental affliction) has no intrinsic reality apart from conditioned reality made up of impermanent *dharmas*: “Precisely because conditioned *dharmas* are empty, unconditioned *dharmas* are also empty. ‘Unconditioned *nirvāṇa*’ means bringing conditioning activity to a halt, therefore *nirvāṇa* is also empty.” 有為法空故，無為法亦空。何以故？滅有為名無為涅槃，是故涅槃亦空。

¹¹ In *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang characterizes the two truths as having an essence (*ti*) in common. He writes: “Two truths mutually comprise an essence, while ultimate and conventional [truths] mutually comprise [distinct] functions.” 二諦互為體。真俗互為用也 (T1854:45.107c27–28).

¹² In his investigation of the development of the *ti/yong* model during the Six Dynasties period, Funayama Tōru 船山徹 (Funayama, 2019: 45) concludes: “In short, because *Ti/yong* is a basic idea that is related to the foundation of ontology, if we look for a counterpart in India, we may be able to find one. However, given that it is not possible

Jizang predicates his argument in support of the doctrine of the two truths as inclusive of one Middle Way upon two propositions: First, that conventional and ultimate truth have a mutual identity (*xiangji* 相即) in that they have in common an essence (*ti*) that comprises the Middle Way.¹³ Second, that the Middle Way, as the common essence of the two truths, makes evident that the *dharma*s are ultimately neither conventional constructions of physical and mental phenomena nor annihilated and empty. Rather, both are conventionally existent and fundamentally empty.¹⁴ Jizang concludes that conventional truth and ultimate truth together explain how the commonplace perception of ordinary reality is compatible with the fundamental emptiness of all *dharma*s. Because the Middle Way is simply the essence of the two truths subsuming all *dharma*s (*shefa* 攝法), a third

to completely ignore the history of the formation of Chinese thought and explain the *Ti/yong* [model] solely from the perspective of Indic Buddhism, the possibility that it derives from translations based upon Chinese renderings of Buddhist works should be extremely low.” 要するに、体用は存在論の根本に関わる基本的な考え方であるから、インドに対応を探せば見つけられるかも知れないが、中国的な思想形成史をまったく度外視してインド仏教のみから説明することはできないため、体用が漢訳仏典に基づいた訳語に基づく可能性は極めて低いべきである。

¹³ Jizang avers that while the different functions (*yong*) of the two truths comprise a duality, they are identical (*ji* 即) with one another in having a common essence. This essence is non-dual in nature. He defines it in negative terms to consist in “separation from the tetralemma” (*li siju* 離四句) and therefore a departure from the one-sided views of undifferentiated unity and of radical separation between the two truths; see *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths* (T1854:45.112a24–26) for Jizang’s stipulation of this particular sense of “identity.” For Jizang, the non-dual essence of the Middle Way integrating the two truths preserves the functional distinction between them. In his determination, the Middle Way is a non-dual essence established through the simultaneous negation of both the “identity of being inseparable” (*bu xiangli ji* 不相離即)—likened to the two horns of an ox, which invariably co-occur yet remain distinct—and the “identity of being completely unified” (*jishi ji* 即是即). For an analysis of Jizang’s understanding of the theory of mutual identity as it pertains to explicating the relationship between the two truths, see Yang, 1989: 156–60; Hirai, 1969: 50–55.

¹⁴ Jizang does occasionally speak of the Way as “non-empty,” or as having a “non-empty” aspect, although, as Chien-hsing Ho points out, “one of his purposes is to highlight that the Way cannot be determined as empty.” That is, emptiness should not be mistaken as a definite description for a metaphysical reality separate from conditioned *dharma*s. Ho adds that another purpose in speaking of the Way as “non-empty” is “to indicate that the Way cannot be reduced to emptiness; after all, it contains within itself all things in their undifferentiated and quiescent state.” He thus concludes that “Jizang does not clearly posit any non-empty metaphysical reality or principle.” Ho, 2014: 415.

truth is not necessary to explain the nature of the *dharmas* that comprise the entirety of reality.

This study presents the reasoning whereby Jizang comes to determine that conventional and ultimate truth together provide a comprehensive account of the nature of the *dharmas*. The second section, following this introduction, examines the argumentation employed by Jizang to combat the Tiantai doctrine of the three truths as formulated by Zhiyi. Here, Jizang debunks two propositions that undergird the doctrine: First, that the third truth of the Middle Way is analytically distinct from both the truth of provisional being and the truth of emptiness. Second, that the third truth of the Middle Way ultimately supersedes both the truth of provisional existence and the truth of emptiness. The third section focuses on the argumentation put forth by Jizang in determining that the Middle Way is an integration of the two truths and nothing more. Here, Jizang defends his position with two propositions: First, that the two truths exhibit mutual identity. Second, that the Middle Way is fully realized through the simultaneous negation of both exclusive existence and exclusive non-existence and that therefore it can be characterized as neither existence nor non-existence (*feiyou feiwu* 非有非無). For Jizang, the Middle Way is confined to neither existence nor non-existence. It is inherent in both and is fully instantiated in the harmonious integration of the two. Throughout his body of exegetical work and doctrinal treatises, Jizang counters the Tiantai position by insisting that the instantiation of the Middle Way as a third truth erroneously eclipses the prior two truths and contravenes the fundamental Madhyamaka teaching that conventional truth and ultimate truth, taken together, provide an exhaustive account of the reality of all *dharmas*.

2 Jizang's Arguments Against the Identification of the Middle Way as a Third Truth

To banish the Tiantai doctrinal view that posits the third truth of the Middle Way as distinct from the two truths properly considered in combination, Jizang conducts meticulous exegeses of sutra commentaries as well as doctrinal treatises by Zhiyi. Works taken up by Jizang include the *Miaofa lianhuajing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (Profound Doctrine of the *Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma*), the *Miaofa lianhuajing wenju* 妙法蓮華經文句 (Words and Phrases of the *Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma*), the *Weimojing wenshu* 維摩經文疏 (Commentary on

Passages of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*), the *Weimojing xuan shu* 維摩經玄疏 (Exegesis on the Profound Meaning of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*), and the *Sijiao yi* 四教義 (On the Doctrine of the Four Teachings). In these exegetical works, Zhiyi structures the logic of his argument—that the essential nature of the *dharmas* is explained according to three truths—using two propositions: First, he orients the third truth of the Middle Way as analytically distinct from the conventional truth and the truth of emptiness. Second, he establishes the third truth of the Middle Way through the paradoxical negation (*zhe* 遮) and affirmation (*zhao* 照) of the emptiness and conventional existence of all *dharmas*.

2.1 Zhiyi: The Middle Truth Is Analytically Distinct From Conventional and Ultimate Truth

Zhiyi contends that the third truth of the Middle Way integrates the truth of the emptiness of the *dharmas* and the truth of the provisional existence of the *dharmas* into a singular whole that illuminates a reality superseding both. To Zhiyi, the Middle Way is instantiated in the individual *dharmas* that conventionally exist as discrete entities that possess definite natures yet are empty in the sense of lacking a solid core or an invariant essence. He argues that the essential nature of the *dharmas* consists in “the overcoming of the oppositeness, per se, of all oppositions.”¹⁵ In his formulation, the Middle Way subsumes the opposite truths of the provisional existence and the ultimate emptiness of the *dharmas* into a singular whole that is distinct from either. The perfectly whole Middle Way illuminates the “non-duality” (*bu'er* 不二) of the existence and the emptiness—an aspect of the *dharmas* that to Zhiyi is not fully clarified by either conventional or ultimate truth.

In formulating his postulate of the three truths of the nature of the *dharmas*, Zhiyi draws from the writings of Nāgārjuna and two indigenous Sinitic apocrypha believed to have been composed in Chinese. Zhiyi notes that the three truths, as delineated in the *Sutra of the Diadem of the Primary Activities of the Bodhisattvas* and the *Sutra for Humane Kings*, include the truth of conventional existence (*you di* 有諦), the truth of ultimate non-existence (*wu di* 無諦), and the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way (*Zhongdao diyi di* 中道第一義諦).¹⁶ In the treatment of the three truths found in these

¹⁵ Ziporyn, 2013: 210.

¹⁶ See *Renwang bore boluomi jing* (T245:8.829b24–27), traditionally attributed to Kumārajīva as translator.

two sutras,¹⁷ the truth of conventional existence is delineated as follows: (a) the affirmation of the conditioned reality made up of individual *dharma*s; (b) the truth of non-existence presumed to be the denial of the intrinsic reality of individual *dharma*s; and (c) the supreme-meaning truth described as reaching beyond the dichotomy between affirmation and negation to reveal a deeper reality that is not made fully evident by truths of conventional reality, by the truth of ultimate reality, or by their conjunction.¹⁸

To fortify his argument that the third truth of the Middle Way harmonizes the two truths of emptiness and provisional designation¹⁹—while remaining analytically distinct from both—Zhiyi draws heavily from the eighteenth stanza of the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna. In this stanza,²⁰ Nāgārjuna explains that the individual *dharma*s, and the composite entities that are made up of individual *dharma*s, simultaneously exemplify three distinguishing characteristics: “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*) or “non-existence” (*wu* 無); “provisional designation” (*prajñapti*; *Jiaming* 假名) or “conventional existence” (*shisu you* 世俗有); and the Middle Way, the non-duality between non-existence and existence. As translated by Kumārajīva, Nāgārjuna states:

The myriad of causally produced *dharma*s, I say, are non-existent,²¹ are but provisional designations, and are also the Middle Way.

¹⁷ See in particular T1485:24.1015a17–18.

¹⁸ As described by Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez (Buswell and Lopez, 2014, s.v. “three truths”), within Zhiyi’s envisioning—in its coming to eclipse both the truth of conventional existence and the truth of emptiness—the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way may be considered, for all intents and purposes, an ultimate truth: “The supreme-meaning truth transcends all dichotomies, including affirmation and negation, to provide an all-embracing perspective and corresponds to ultimate truth (*Paramārthasatya*).”

¹⁹ In his *Commentary on Passages of the Vimalakīrti Sutra*, Zhiyi parses the four hemistichs of this stanza: “Where the stanza from the *Middle Treatise* reads, ‘I say that causally produced *dharma*s are “empty,”’ this precisely is to explain the ultimate truth. It is also named ‘provisional designation,’ to explain the conventional truth, and further named ‘the meaning of the Middle Way,’ which is to explain the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way. This stanza thus propounds the Mahāyāna principle of three truths.” 《中論》偈云：因緣所生法，我說即是空。此即詮真諦。亦名為假名，即詮俗諦也。亦名中道義，即詮中道第一義諦也。此偈即是申摩訶衍詮三諦理。(T1777:38.535a11–14).

²⁰ T1564:30.33b11–12.

²¹ The Chinese character *wu* 無 is the rendering of the Sanskrit terminology *śūnyatā*, meaning “empty,” deployed by Kumārajīva in the second hemistich of the eighteenth stanza of the twenty-fourth chapter of his translation of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

眾因緣生法，我說即是無，
亦為是假名，亦是中道義。

In his exegesis of this root stanza, Zhiyi claims that Nāgārjuna makes two pronouncements: First, that the Middle Way evidences the non-duality between conventional existence and emptiness as coextensive aspects of reality. Second, that the Middle Way contains the valid and separate truths of emptiness and conventional existence.²² Drawing from his exegesis of Nāgārjuna's stanza, Zhiyi characterizes the third truth of the Middle Way as an exemplification of the "non-dual principle" (*bu'er zhi li* 不二之理)²³ in that it indicates how the fixed opposition between the two extremes (*erbian* 二邊) of the variegated existence and the uniform emptiness of the *dharma*s is overcome. In the hands of Zhiyi, the non-dual principle hews to the middle ground between the conventional existence of the *dharma*s and the fundamental emptiness of the *dharma*s. Zhiyi envisions the Middle Way as simultaneously identified with conventional existence and with emptiness, and as equally present, equally exemplified, and equally distributed within both conventional existence and emptiness.²⁴

Within Zhiyi's formulation, the Middle Way is not reducible either to conventional existence or to the ultimate emptiness of the *dharma*s; it is present in both. At the same time, for Zhiyi, as described by Brook Ziporyn (Ziporyn, 2013), the Middle Way "remains itself in spite of instantiation in difference" and is analytically distinct from the truth of conventional

²² Supreme-meaning truth (*dīyīyī di* 第一義諦) is considered to refer to the truth of the Middle Way in Tiantai teaching and is thus regarded as analytically separate from ultimate truth (*zhēndī* 真諦). In translations of Indic works, both terms are used to refer to *paramārthasatya*, the ultimate truth of pervasive emptiness. This uniquely Sinitic doctrinal distinction derives from the *Sutra for Humane Kings*; see *Renwang bore boluomi jing*, T245:8.829b24–27 (attributed to Kumārajīva).

²³ Ziporyn, 2013: 210–11, describes how Zhiyi identifies the Central or Middle truth with *li*, or "principle." This *li* is not reducible to either conventional existence or emptiness, while it is present in both: "The center means what is tipped neither towards one extreme nor the other, which is equally present in the two opposite extremes, remains unchanged in and as either." Ziporyn writes that for Zhiyi, *li* is beyond "simple location in one place opposed to its other" and is, thus, omnipresent.

²⁴ Zhiyi writes in his commentary on the *Sutra for Humane Kings*, edited by Guanding, that the "supreme-meaning truth" designates the non-duality realized in the identification of emptiness and conventional existence: "Duality is conventional truth. Not seeing oneness or duality is ultimate truth. The identity with conventional existence and with emptiness designated by 'non-duality' is the supreme-meaning truth." 二是俗諦，不見一二是真諦。即俗即空，故言不二，是第一義諦 (T1705:33.279c14–15).

existence and the truth of emptiness.²⁵ The truth of the Middle Way is tiered separately for two reasons. First, it is limited to neither provisional existence nor ultimate emptiness. Second, it affirms both provisional existence and ultimate emptiness as mutually compatible accounts of the nature of the *dharmas*. The Middle Way is therefore *neither* conventionally real nor ultimately non-existent because it is neither fixed in dwelling (*zhu* 住) in provisional existence *nor* mired in fundamental emptiness. It is *both* because it reveals that provisional existence and fundamental emptiness are not mutually conflicting realities but are, in fact, mutually complementary.

In *On the Doctrine of the Four Teachings*, Zhiyi clearly identifies the Middle Way with the non-dual principle:

The supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way negates the two extremes. Hence, it is termed “the Middle Way.” That is, “negates two extremes” refers to negating the extreme of the attachment to and view of existence in ordinary deluded humans and negating the view of non-existence found within the Two Vehicles (i.e., the vehicles of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*), which is termed “the extreme of featureless emptiness.” In negating the two extremes of conventional truth and ultimate truth, of mundane truth and supreme-meaning truth, and so forth, it is therefore termed “non-dual.” The non-dual principle is named the “Middle.” This principle is vacuous and penetrating, being unimpeded. It is termed “the Way.”

中道第一義諦者，遮二邊故說名中道。言遮二邊者，遮凡夫愛見有邊。遮二乘所見無，名無相空邊。遮俗諦真諦之二邊。遮世諦第一義諦之二邊。遮如此等之二邊，名為不二。不二之理目之為中。此理虛通無擁。名之為道。²⁶

Here Zhiyi claims that because the Middle Way effaces polarities—including the two extremes between conventional and ultimate truth—it dwells (*zhu* 住) neither in existence nor in non-existence. As described by Ziporyn (Ziporyn, 2013: 216), Zhiyi regards the Middle Way as non-dwelling (*wuzhu* 無住) in that it does not reside on either side of the polarity between conventional existence and ultimate emptiness. In the same passage, Ziporyn further states that the Middle Way is “not confined to either provisional positing or emptiness, being or non-being, this or that.” To Zhiyi, the Middle Way is not limited

²⁵ Ziporyn, 2013: 203, describes Zhiyi’s view of *li* as “not confined to either of the two extremes,” while existing in both at the same time. Ziporyn writes that it is in this sense similar to “the idea of universals or forms, which can be in more than one place at a time.”

²⁶ T1929:46.727c12–17.

to either an account of the conventional existence of the impartite *dharmas* with intrinsic natures and the composites based upon impartite *dharmas* or to a designation of the ultimate non-existence of composites and *dharmas* without intrinsic natures. As an explanation of the real nature (*shixing* 實性) of the *dharmas*, the Middle Way is unbound from confining dualities.²⁷

2.2 Zhiyi: The Truth of the Middle Way Is Realized Through the Simultaneous Negation and Affirmation of Emptiness and Conventional Existence

Zhiyi postulates the Middle Way as being a third level of truth that remains analytically distinct and irreducible to either the truth of conventional reality or the truth of emptiness. He bolsters his position regarding the distinctiveness of the third truth by arguing that the Middle Way is realized by the synchronous negation and affirmation of the existence and non-existence of the *dharmas*. To Zhiyi, the Middle Way is realized through a simultaneous double negation (*shuangfei* 雙非)²⁸ that denies either the existence or the non-existence (*ruo you ruo wu* 若有若無) of the *dharmas* and double affirmation (*shuangzhao* 雙照) that confirms both the existence and the non-existence (*yi you yi wu* 亦有亦無)²⁹ of the *dharmas*. Thus for

²⁷ In his *On the Doctrine of the Four Teachings*, Zhiyi adduces a passage from *Dharmakṣema's rendering of the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* (T375:12.651c3–4) in order to explicate the “real nature of the *dharmas*” as essentially non-dual: “The nature of non-duality is precisely the real nature [of the *dharmas*].” 無二之性即是實性也 (T1929:46.728c29).

²⁸ Zhiyi writes in his *Profound Meaning of the Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Sublime Dharma* that the realization of the Middle Way involves dispensing with the view of disjunction between emptiness and existence, according to which the two are considered to be mutually exclusive presences that cannot coincide: “Again, [the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*] states: ‘Buddha-nature both exists and does not exist. How is it said to ‘exist’? It is because all sentient beings possess it. How is it said to ‘not exist’? It is because it is only seen [to exist] due to skillful expedient means.’ Again, that there both exists and does not exist an enzymatic nature within milk is precisely the teaching of both existence and non-existence. If one explains that Buddha-nature is identical to the Middle Way, then one doubly negates and dispels both [existence and non-existence]. Again, that there neither exists, nor does not exist, an enzymatic nature within milk is precisely the teaching of neither emptiness nor existence.” 又云：佛性亦有亦無。云何為有？一切眾生悉皆有故。云何為無？從善方便而得見故。又譬乳中亦有酪性，亦無酪性，即是亦有亦無門也。若明佛性即是中道，雙非兩遣。又譬乳中非有酪性，非無酪性，即是非空非有門 (T1716:33.785a25–29).

²⁹ In his *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (Great Calming and Insight), Zhiyi specifies that the Middle Way is realized through the simultaneous negation and affirmation of both

Zhiyi, a comprehensive understanding of the *dharma*s can only be obtained by (a) denying that the truth of emptiness and the truth of provisional designation provide for complete accounts of the nature of the *dharma*s, (b) then by affirming that the truth of emptiness and the truth of provisional designation provide for complete accounts of the nature of the *dharma*s, and (c) then by assimilating the denial and the affirmation into a whole truth. In this paradigm, only the paradoxical simultaneous denial and affirmation of the two prior levels of truth provide for a complete explanation of what either truth cannot fully capture on its own.³⁰

In his *Commentary on Passages of the Vimalakīrti Sutra*,³¹ Zhiyi cites the commentary on the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* 24.15—which survives only in Chinese—by the early Indic exegete Piṅgala (known in Chinese as *Qingmu* 青目, or “Blue Eyes”). Zhiyi relates that according to Piṅgala, Nāgārjuna illustrates how the truth of the Middle Way simultaneously negates and affirms ultimate truth and the truth of provisional existence:

Thus, Piṅgala’s commentary reads:

It is termed the “Middle Way” as it negates the two extremes. This is precisely to negate the two extremes of the emptiness of conditioned reality (*yinyuan*) and of the provisional [existence]. The negation of these two extremes is termed “one real truth,” which is neither ultimate nor conventional truth.

故青目釋云：遮二邊故名為中道。³²

existence and non-existence: “Why do you say that it [i.e., the mind] both exists and does not exist. If it is not determinately present, it is absent of existence; if it is not determinately absent, it is absent of non-existence. The absence of existence is non-arising. The absence of non-existence is non-ceasing. What departs from the [two] sides of existence and non-existence is termed the ‘Middle Way.’” 云何乃謂亦有亦無？若不定有，則非有。若不定無，則非無。非有者，非生也。非無者，非滅也。出於有無之表是名中道 (T1911:46.66b7–9).

³⁰ Swanson (Swanson, 1989: 6) describes Zhiyi’s Middle Way as “a simultaneous affirmation of both emptiness and conventional existence as aspects of a single integrated reality.” While the unity realized in the integration of the two prior levels of truth is one of its aspects, its other aspect is the exclusion of either of the two prior levels of truth as partial explanations of the reality made up of manifold *dharma*s.

³¹ This passage is also found in the *Sijiao yi* 四教儀 (On the Doctrine of the Four Teachings) at T1929:46.728c25–27.

³² This is a paraphrase of a statement found in Piṅgala’s prose commentary to verses of the *Middle Treatise*, which reads: “Because it departs from the two extremes of existence and non-existence, it is thus termed the ‘Middle Way.’” 離有無二邊，故名為中道 (T1564:30.33b18).

即是遮因緣空邊假邊。非此二邊，則非真俗二諦，名一實諦也³³

Hearkening to Nāgārjuna and Piṅgala, Zhiyi proposes the following: it is not that the *dharmas* ultimately do not exist, or that the *dharmas* ultimately exist, but that individual *dharmas* do not exist as entities with intrinsic natures that distinguish them as separate from the myriad of other arising, abiding, and ceasing *dharmas*. This line of reasoning allows Zhiyi to adhere to the ultimate truth of the pervasive emptiness of the *dharmas* without negating the conventional truth of their provisional existence as the sequentially reproducing constituents of composites that continue over time.

With his formulation of the three truths of the *dharmas* for Tiantai Buddhism, Zhiyi designates the essence of all *dharmas* as neither conventionally real nor ultimately unreal, and he establishes the Middle Way as the simultaneous affirmation of the ultimate emptiness and the provisional existence of all *dharmas*.

Defining the Middle Way as the integration of conventional existence and emptiness, which at the same time reaches beyond both, Zhiyi aims to harmonize the two truths by negating their opposition and affirming their inseparability and their oneness. For Zhiyi, the central principle of the Middle Way is instantiated in the individual *dharmas* that are at once conventionally existent as discrete entities possessing definite natures and fundamentally hollow of any inherent existence. Zhiyi therefore contends that the Middle Way designates the essence of the *dharmas* as neither existent nor non-existent and as both existent and non-existent. According to Zhiyi, the truth of the Middle Way indicates the natures of individual *dharmas* as simultaneously different (*yi* 異) and one (*yi* 一). For Zhiyi, while the essential oneness and fundamental inseparability of all *dharmas* is an aspect of the truth of emptiness, the specific differences between—and the manifold diversity of—the *dharmas* is the distinctive feature of conventional truth. Therefore, in Zhiyi's formulation, the Middle Way—as the integration of the truths of emptiness and of conventional existence—discloses the true characteristics of the *dharmas* (*zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相) that are neither one nor different (*fei yi fei yi* 非一非異).³⁴

³³ T1777:38.535c12–14.

³⁴ In his *Commentary on Passages of the Vimalakīrti Sutra*, Zhiyi asserts that the *dharmas* are “not one” in that their manifold diversity and separate existence are captured within conventional truth. However, the *dharmas* are “not different” in that their lack of independent existence and their fundamental inseparability from one another are attributes that follow from ultimate truth: “Oneness is the defining characteristic of the ultimate truth. Difference is the distinctive attribute of the

Ultimately, Zhiyi subsumes both the negation of conventional existence and of emptiness, on the one hand, and their mutual affirmation, on the other hand, under one Middle Way. The negation and affirmation of the conventional existence and emptiness of all *dharma*s are therefore not characterized as mutually exclusive, but as mutually compatible functions (*yong* 用), or aspects, of one Middle Way, under which (a) the two functions of negation and affirmation are enacted simultaneously; (b) the conventional existence of causally produced and causally productive *dharma*s that possess intrinsic natures and characteristic functions is simultaneously validated and negated; and (c) the ultimate non-existence of the *dharma*s as fundamentally real, and not conceptually constructed, is at once affirmed and denied.

2.3 Jizang: The Truth of the Middle Way Is *Not* Analytically Distinct from Conventional and Ultimate Truth

Like Zhiyi, Jizang envisions the Middle Way as the non-dual principle that dwells neither in the constant flux of conventional existence nor in the static inertia of fundamental emptiness.³⁵ The Middle Way, as operationalized by both Zhiyi and Jizang, negates the extremes of conventional existence and ultimate non-existence, reasserts their fundamental inseparability, and renders their differences as non-contradictory. Jizang, however, firmly rejects the postulate of the Middle Way as a third truth that can be regarded as distinct, in any manner, from the two truths of conventional existence and fundamental emptiness. He thus takes issue with any designation of an ultimately real nature of the *dharma*s that is not circumscribed purely in terms of a distinction (*fenbie* 分別)³⁶ between conventional and ultimate truth.

conventional truth. Now, the true characteristics are neither ultimate nor conventional, therefore they are neither one nor different.” 一相是真諦之相。異相是俗諦之差別。今實相非真非俗，故非一非異 (X338:18.694c17–19).

³⁵ In his *Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義 (On the Profound Doctrine of the Three Treatises), Jizang highly appraises the notion of “Middle Way” operationalized by exegetes of the **Mahāyānasamgraha* (Summary of Mahāyāna) attributed to the Yogācāra thinker Asaṅga. Jizang cites the gloss offered by these exegetes as follows: “In clarifying the Middle, followers of Mahāyāna, for example the masters of the *Summary of Mahāyāna*, explain: In the absence of defining truth, there is no adhesion to transmigration, while no dwelling in *nirvāṇa*. This is what is styled the ‘Middle.’” 大乘人明中者，如《攝大乘論》師明：非安立諦不著生死；不住涅槃，名之為中也 (T1852:45.14c23–24).

³⁶ The ninth stanza of the twenty-fourth chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* states that ascertaining the distinction between the two truths is necessary for accurate

Jizang diverges from Zhiyi's understanding of the three aspects of all *dharmas*—emptiness, provisional existence, and the Middle Way—as first articulated by Nāgārjuna in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and redefines the nature of the *dharmas* in terms of two aspects: emptiness and provisional existence. By combining conventional and ultimate truth into one non-dual essence, Jizang eliminates the necessity of instantiating the Middle Way as the third truth.³⁷ The Middle Way is therefore not reducible to either emptiness or conventional existence; rather, it is the integration of emptiness and conventional existence. In a theoretical sleight of hand, Jizang reduces the three truths of Tiantai Buddhism to the two truths of Indic Madhyamaka Buddhism: the truth of fundamental emptiness and the truth of conventional existence.

2.4 Jizang: The Truth of the Middle Way *Does Not* Supersede the Two Truths

Jizang advances his position that the Middle Way is a harmonization of the two truths by mounting a withering critique of Zhiyi's superfluous positing of the Middle truth as possessing an intrinsic reality that is somehow apart

knowledge of reality. Or, as rendered in Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of this stanza (T1564:30.32c19–c20): “Who do not know the distinction between the two truths, they do not understand reality in accordance with the profound teachings of Buddha.” 若人不能知，分別於二諦，則於深佛法，不知真實義 (T1564:30.32c19–20).

³⁷ In his *Zhongguan lunshu* 中觀論疏 (Exegesis on the *Middle Treatise*), Jizang identifies the third truth of the Middle Way mentioned in some Mahāyāna sutras as the non-dual essence of the two truths, which is instantiated in the “dual” functions of conventional and ultimate truth: “There are two explanations for the Middle Way of the two truths clarified in combination: First, we discuss the two truths in combination in order to explicate the Middle Way; second, we efface duality in reverting to non-duality in discerning the essential middle. There are three explanations for how clarifying the two truths in combination forms the Middle Way: First, we seek to explicate the sutras and treatises (*sāstras*) that only offer clarifications in terms of the doctrine of two truths and take the two truths to subsume the *dharmas* exhaustively, without recourse to clarification based upon three truths; second, to simply clarify the two truths is to simply clarify the functional middle, and in clarifying the two truths in combination we discern their functional middle; third, in clarifying that the essential middle is neither ultimate nor conventional we explicate the doctrine of three truths found in the sutras.” 合明二諦中道有二義：一者合論二諦以釋中道；二者泯「二」歸乎「不二」辨於體中。就合明二諦為「中」復有三義：一者欲釋經論但明二諦義，即二諦攝法義周，不須明於三諦；二者單明二諦，此是單明用中，合明二諦合辨用中；第三明非真非俗方是體中，此釋經中三諦義也 (T1824:42.26a23–29).

from the two truths of conventional existence and fundamental emptiness. Drawing from Nāgārjuna's teaching of the coextension of transmigration and *nirvāṇa*, Jizang contends that conventional truth and ultimate truth are coextensive in that they share an essence (*ti* 體) that denotes the non-dual nature (*bu'er zhi xing* 不二之性) and the one principle (*yi li* 一理)³⁸ common to both truths and exclusive to neither. Jizang insists that the Middle Way cannot be characterized as exclusively conventional or existent, or as exclusively empty or non-existent. For Jizang, the Middle Way is nothing but the common essence of conventional truth and ultimate truth. In the *Er di yi* 二諦義 (On the Doctrine of the Two Truths), Jizang unequivocally states that the two truths unilaterally cohere around a singular principle:

Again, all the Buddhas have but one Way. For this reason, the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Buddhāvataṃsaka*)³⁹ reads: "The *Dharma* of Mañjuśrī is permanent within it. The King of the *Dharma* has but one *Dharma*. All undaunted ones follow one Way to escape from transmigration."

又諸佛唯有一道。故《華嚴》云。「文殊法常爾。法王唯一法。一切無畏人。一道出生死。」

Since there is only one Way and not two ways, there is only one principle and not two principles.

既唯有一道，無有二道。唯有一理，無有二理也。⁴⁰

Jizang envisions the Middle Way as essentially non-dual, as ultimately real (*zhenshi* 真實), and as comprised of nothing more than the two truths. In bolstering this doctrinal position, Jizang maintains that although ultimate and conventional truths can, and should, be analytically distinguished from one another, they together elucidate one and the same reality—not two separate realities, nor two separate aspects of one reality, nor two progressive stages of realization of one reality.

In conclusion, Jizang states that two truths in conjunction make evident the Middle Way (*er di heming Zhongdao* 二諦合明中道). He establishes the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way as inherent within, and common to, the conventional truth of conditioned reality and the ultimate truth of the fundamental emptiness of the *dharma*s. Jizang's teaching highlights the irony that while the Middle Way is equally present in both truths, it is exclusive to

³⁸ See analysis of this passage by Itō Takatoshi (Itō, 1990: 70).

³⁹ This is a verbatim quotation of a stanza found within Buddhahadbra's Chinese rendering of the *Flower Garland Sutra* (T278:9.429b18–19).

⁴⁰ *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, T1854:45.108c15–18.

neither, and thus it evades characterization as exclusively existent or exclusively non-existent.

The *Dasheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論 (Treatise on the Profundity of the Mahāyāna Teaching), traditionally ascribed to Jizang,⁴¹ paraphrases a statement from the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* (*Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*) wherein the conjunction of conventional and ultimate truths with neither existence nor non-existence⁴² is denoted as the Middle Way:

⁴¹ Although the lengthy five-fascicle work cribs heavily from other treatises and commentaries more reliably attributed to Jizang himself (as opposed to posthumous compilations put together by his disciples), the inauthenticity of the attribution of the entire text as a genuine composition of Jizang's has long been suspected in East Asian bibliographical studies (see the *Daijō gen mondō* 大乘玄問答 by Chinkai 珍海 [1092–1152 CE], T2303:70.572c28–a3). In more recent years studies such as Cho, 2014; Itō, 1971 and 1972; and Okuno, 2012, have isolated distortions of Jizang's original arguments as they are represented in the *Dasheng xuanlun* based on salient discrepancies from, and distortions of, arguments found within works more reliably ascribed to Jizang himself, such as *Erdi yi*. In his meticulous study of such discrepancies with Jizang's authentic works, focused on the section on "One Vehicle Doctrine" (*yisheng yi* 一乘義), Okuno Mitsuyoshi 奥野光賢 (Okuno, 2012: 54–55) recognizes other scholars' doubts regarding the attribution of *Dasheng xuanlun* to Jizang himself: "Since it is recognized that there are almost verbatim accounts located in *Silun xuanyi* 四論玄義 (On the Profound Doctrines of the Four Treatises), by Jizang's classmate [under the teacher Falang 法朗] Huijun/Hyegyūn 慧均 (d.u.), the current Japanese academic world is rather apprehensive about identifying this book as a genuine composition by Jizang himself." 吉藏と同門である慧均（生没年不詳）の『四論玄義』にほとんど類似した記述が認められたため、現在の日本の学界では本書を吉藏の真撰に帰することについては慎重になりつつあるというのが実情である。However, Okuno expresses some concern about other scholars' attempts to override the received attribution of *Dasheng xuanlun* simply based on the fact that there exist duplicate accounts in contemporaneous works by other authors.

⁴² A paraphrase of the passage from the southern recension of the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* containing the Buddha's statement on the Buddha-nature to his disciples. This statement describes the Middle Way as integrating the conventional existence of *dharma*s with intrinsic natures and their ultimate non-existence as entities with intrinsic natures: "The Buddha-nature is neither existence nor non-existence; at the same time it is precisely existence and non-existence. What is denoted as 'existence'? All existence is neither discontinuous nor ceasing in sentient beings. We liken it to the flame of a lamp—everything up to and including *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* (perfect awakening) is called 'existence.' What is denoted by 'non-existence'? All sentient beings at the present moment that do not possess all the qualities of a Buddha—eternality, bliss, selfhood, and purity—this is denoted as 'non-existence.' The unification of existence and non-existence is, precisely, the Middle Way." 佛性非有、非無、亦有、亦無。云何名有？一切悉有，是諸眾生不斷、不滅，猶如燈焰，乃至得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，是故名有。云何名無？一切眾生現在未有一切佛法——常、樂、我、淨——是故名無。有、無合故，即是中道 (T375:12.819b20–25).

Therefore, the words of the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* read: “Existence and non-existence are identical with neither existence nor non-existence.”

《涅槃經》文：有無即是非有非無。(T1853:45.19c6)

With this concise lemma, Jizang asserts the position that because the two truths of conventional existence and fundamental emptiness comprise two aspects of one Middle Way, the two cannot ever be extricated from one another. Thus, the two truths coincide, and coincide perfectly. Jizang postulates that, joined together, the two truths provide an exhaustive explanation regarding the essential natures of the *dharma*s that make up the entire Buddhist universe. In the hands of Jizang, the third truth of the Middle Way—a truth that is somehow distinct from the two truths—is akin to an appendix in the body, and it is not necessary to provide a full account of the nature of all *dharma*s. Therefore, Jizang’s argumentation—in support of the two truths as mutually compatible, as invariably concomitant, and as jointly exhaustive aspects of one and the same reality—succeeds in neither reifying the *dharma*s as fundamentally existing things with static intrinsic natures nor nullifying them as eternally non-existent entities lacking in any reality.

3 “Two Truths in Conjunction Make Evident the Middle Way”

In a succinct six-character phrase—“two truths in conjunction make evident the Middle Way” (*erdi heming Zhongdao* 二諦合明中道)—Jizang encapsulates his position that the Middle Way, while neither exclusively conventional nor exclusively ultimate, consists in the mutual identity of conventional and ultimate truth. Additionally, this statement summarizes Jizang’s argument that the Middle Way is the integration of the existent and the non-existent natures of conventional truth and ultimate truth—and nothing more. Jizang’s summation of the doctrine of the two truths as evidencing the Middle Way is predicated upon two propositions: First, that conventional truth and ultimate truth are characterized as having a common essence. Second, that the Middle Way is characterized as neither existent nor non-existent in that it simultaneously negates two perspectives: (a) the one-sided view that conventional existence is characterized by *dharma*s that are discrete entities in possession of invariant intrinsic natures with characteristic functions and (b) the one-sided view that the ultimate non-existence of all *dharma*s is characterized by discrete entities with unchanging natures.

3.1 The Two Truths Have a Mutual Identity in *Ti*

In *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang stipulates that conventional truth and ultimate truth have a mutual identity in that they share a common essence, *ti* 體, that is integral to both and exclusive to neither. The doctrine of mutual identity, or *xiangji*, as developed by Jizang provides the logical linchpin for the proposition that the two truths, taken together, describe the nature of all *dharma*s. Jizang contends that the conventional existence of *dharma*s distinguished by intrinsic natures, as designated by conventional truth, does not obstruct or conflict with their fundamental emptiness of intrinsic natures, as designated by ultimate truth. To support his argument that the two truths are mutually identical, Jizang takes pains to stipulate what mutual identity is and what it is not. He argues that mutual identity of the truths does take the form of either an equivalence or a mere concurrence between a conventional and an ultimate reality. By dispelling the view that conventional truth and ultimate truth reference separate realities, or two distinct levels of reality, Jizang upholds the Madhyamaka Buddhist tenet—as set forth by Nāgārjuna—that the conditioned reality of transmigration cannot be distinguished in any way whatsoever from the unconditioned reality of *nirvāṇa*.⁴³

Jizang argues that because conventional truth and ultimate truth share a common essence, they are mutually identical and do not conflict with or exclude one another. The mutual identity of the two truths, as specified by Jizang, describes the logical relationship of mutual compatibility and harmony between conventional and ultimate truth. Mutual identity, for Jizang, does not imply equivalence, nor does it entail an elision of the distinction between the two truths. Rather, in postulating that conventional truth and ultimate truth share a mutual identity, Jizang is affirming that the two truths do not describe separate realities or distinct tiers of reality but instead provide, together, mutually validating accounts of one and the same reality.

⁴³ In the nineteenth stanza of the twenty-fifth chapter of his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna reasons that “there is no distinction whatsoever between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.” Since “there is not even the finest gap to be found between the two,” transmigration and *nirvāṇa* are considered to be perfectly coextensive—that is, the unconditioned reality of *nirvāṇa* exists anywhere and everywhere across the conditioned reality of transmigration; to experience *nirvāṇa* is merely to penetratingly and transparently see the nature of conditioned reality, just as it is. Quoting from the translation by Mark Siderits and Shoryu Katsura (Siderits and Katsura, 2013: 302).

The Middle Way, according to Jizang, makes evident the essence of a *dharma* when the two truths are integrated through an accurate discernment of their conjunction and inseparability. In his detailed specification of the logical relationship of mutual identity shared by the two truths, Jizang determines that a proper understanding of mutual identity eclipses the view that the two truths are definitively one in essence (*yiti* 一體) as well as the view that they are determinately different in essence (*yiti* 異體). By abjuring these two antipodal views, which predicate the mutual identity of the two truths upon either oneness or difference in terms of their essence, Jizang maintains that the important distinctions between the two truths, as well as their fundamental inseparability, must be recognized in order to correctly ascertain the true nature of their mutual identity. He affirms, in no uncertain terms, that the Middle Way does not go beyond (*bu chu* 不出) the two truths in any respect. Rather, it simply consists in a non-dual (*bu'er* 不二) essence of both truths, which becomes expressed in terms of a duality (*er* 二)—that is, as either conventional or ultimate truth.⁴⁴ According to Jizang, while the two truths are integrated within one Middle Way, they also provide characteristic functions as analytically distinct truths.

⁴⁴ *On the Profound Doctrine of the Three Treatises* characterizes the essence of the two truths as being neither ultimate nor conventional and designates their distinct functions as being either ultimate or conventional: “The *Flower Garland Sutra* (T278:9.429b18–19) reads: ‘The *Dharma* of Mañjuśrī is permanent within it. The King of *Dharma* has but one *Dharma*. All unhindered ones follow one Way to escape from transmigration.’ It is simply that in seeking to liberate sentient beings [from transmigration], [the Buddha] was compelled to use linguistic terms in verbalizing the nameless *Dharma*, so that followers would be induced to realize awakening based upon it. For this reason, two types of correctness are disclosed: firstly, essential correctness and secondly, functional correctness. Being neither ultimate nor conventional is termed ‘essential correctness.’ The [two] aspects of ultimate and conventional are termed ‘functional correctness.’ The reason is this: the true characteristics of the *dharmas* efface language and exhaust ordinary cognition. What is called ‘essential’ is precisely what has never been [exclusively] ultimate nor conventional. Precisely that correctness which is deemed to dispose of the various biased and pernicious views is termed ‘essential correctness.’ What is denoted as ‘functional correctness’ supersedes names and words, [therefore,] sentient beings have no clue how to become awakened. Although it is neither existence nor non-existence, one is compelled to speak of it in terms of ‘ultimate’ and ‘conventional.’ For this reason, it is termed ‘functional.’” 《華嚴》云：文殊法常爾，法王唯一法，一切無畏人，一道出生死。但欲出處眾生，於無名相法，強名相說，令稟學之徒，因而得悟，故開二正：一者、體正；二者、用正；非真非俗名為體正。真之與俗目為用正。所以然者，諸法實相言亡慮絕，未曾真俗，故名之為體。絕諸偏邪，目之為正。故言體正。所言用正者，體絕名言，物無由悟。雖非有無，強說真俗。故名為用 (T1852:45.7b7–14).

Jizang reasons that because the essence of a *dharma* cannot be exhaustively described as either conventionally real (and ultimately unreal) or as conventionally unreal (and ultimately real), only the mutual integration of the two truths can fully explain the essence of a *dharma*. He therefore avers that the two truths subsume all *dharmas* (*shefa* 攝法); that is, the two truths in combination supply an exhaustive account of the reality of all *dharmas*. In elucidating the Middle Way as the common essence of the two truths, Jizang relies upon an understanding of the relationship of mutual identity between the two truths that does not simply equate the two or dissolve one truth into the other but endeavors to preserve a clear analytical distinction between them.⁴⁵ By postulating that the mutual identity shared by the two truths boils down to a non-reductive logical relationship of “neither oneness nor difference” (*fei yi fei yi* 非一非異), Jizang preserves the basic harmony and compatibility between the two truths without relegating either one to the status of a mere appendage or a mere reiteration of the other.

In *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang describes the relationship between the two truths as one of mutual compatibility while carefully specifying that the mutual identity of the two truths does not imply that they are an amalgam of one and the same truth. Jizang drives home the point that the mutual identity of the two truths does not result in a hypostatization of two tiers of reality wherein ultimate truth is demoted to the lower register of conventional truth or conventional truth is elevated to the higher register of ultimate truth.

The extensive discussions in the second fascicle of *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths* shore up the doctrine of mutual identity between the two truths by isolating the defects in two theories of identity (*ji* 即). In the first of these theories, *bu xiangli ji* 不相離即 (“the identity of inseparability”),⁴⁶ the two

⁴⁵ As Shih Chang-qing and Heng Guoqing point out (Shih and Heng, 2006: 167), according to Jizang’s understanding of the postulate of “mutual identity,” conventional truth can be identified with ultimate truth, but the converse is not the case—that is, ultimate truth cannot be identified with conventional truth. As it is envisioned by Jizang, the identity of conventional truth with ultimate truth is asymmetric in nature: although conventional truth can be identified with ultimate truth, ultimate truth cannot be identified with conventional truth in that ultimate truth does not have all of the same properties as conventional truth.

⁴⁶ Jizang’s *Exegesis on the Middle Treatise* associates the theory of *bu xiangli ji* with Master Longguang 龍光, who views the identity of mutual inseparability as describing a logical relationship wherein two entities are invariably concomitant yet possess separate essences, such that “the two sides of the boundary [between them] perpetually remain distinct” 兩際常別 (T1824:42.158c28). The *Dasheng xuanlun* notes that the apparent upshot of this theory of mutual identity, as applied to the explication of the

truths are characterized as having different essences while being invariably concurrent; in the second, *jishi ji* 即是即 (“the identity of being completely unified”),⁴⁷ the two truths coalesce into one indivisible unity. Jizang takes issue with both theories, claiming that they fail to account for the actual nature of the mutual identity between the physical stuff made of physical *dharma*s and the inherent emptiness of the physical stuff made of physical *dharma*s. In an extensive rejoinder, Jizang demonstrates that both theories are predicated upon a defective understanding of essence, or *ti*, contending that the theory concerning the identity of inseparability fails to recognize that physical stuff and emptiness share a common *ti* and refer to one and the same reality encompassing a myriad of physical *dharma*s. He further argues that the theory concerning the identity of being completely unified fails to acknowledge the meaningful distinction between the two truths by erasing the apparent phenomenal distinction between physical stuff and emptiness:

[The second counterargument states:] When you identify physical form with emptiness, is there then a gap between emptiness and physical form? Or is there no gap between them? If there is no gap between them, then the two meld into one. If emptiness and physical form are one, then they are both permanent and both impermanent. Ultimate and conventional truth being one, asserting that conventional truth is impermanent and ultimate truth is permanent is just an instance of the [same] difficulty in [completely] unifying ultimate and conventional truth, granted that [as such] ultimate is impermanent and conventional truth is permanent. If

relationship between the two truths, is that it secures the mutual compatibility of conventional and ultimate truth while at the same time preserving their distinctiveness: “Longguang explains that each of the two truths has its own essence. He applies [the explanation of] identity as inseparability.” 龍光明：二諦各體，用不相離即 (T1853:45.21c12). On the question of who Master Longguang was, see Yang, 1989: 70n48.

⁴⁷ According to the *Treatise on the Profundity of the Mahāyāna Teaching*, the theory of *jishi ji* is most closely associated with the Liang Dynasty Buddhist master Kaishan Zhizang 開善智藏 (467–527 CE) and entails the identity of the two truths in the sense that both share “one essence”: “Kaishan [Zhizang] explained that the two truths are of one essence and applied the identity of being completely unified.” 開善明：二諦一體。用即是即 (T1854:45.110b27–28). In his *Silun xuanyi*, the sixth-century Sanlun scholiast Huijun/Hyegyūn offers the following explanation of Zhizang’s application of this theory to the understanding of the relationship between the two truths: “Therefore Kaishan [Zhizang] states: ‘the provisional, in and of itself, lacks any intrinsic reality. It arises but does not [ultimately] exist. The conventional is thus identical with the ultimate. Precisely because it [i.e., the conventional] lacks any intrinsic reality, it is logically appropriate to consider it to be ‘provisional.’ The ultimate is therefore identical with the conventional.’” 故開善云：假自無體，生而非有。俗即真，無體故可假。真即是俗也 (X784:46.581c18–19).

there is a gap [between emptiness and physical form], then emptiness and physical form may differ [in their respective properties]. Although identified, in the final analysis they are then divided by a gap, and thus [in actuality] they are different.

汝色即空時，為空色分際？為不分際？若不分際，則混成一。若空色一，皆常皆無常。真俗一，言俗無常真常者，即例難真俗一，真無常俗常也。若分際，則空色異。雖即，終分際終異。⁴⁸

In the third fascicle of *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang initially attacks the position encapsulated in *bu xiangli ji*—namely, that the two truths are basically distinct in that they possess different essences (*yiti* 異體). He begins by constructing the conditional: If the two truths have different essences, then conventional existence and fundamental emptiness must form two distinct realities. He continues by arguing that this position erroneously implies that conventional truth and ultimate truth correspond to separate and distinct realities—namely, conventional reality and ultimate reality. The theory of identity as mere inseparability injects an unwarranted gap between conventional truth and ultimate truth such that the conventional and ultimate reality no longer coincide (*bing* 並), or are no longer coextensive with one another.⁴⁹ This theory is unable to provide an explanation for the perfect coextension of physical stuff and emptiness.⁵⁰ The notion of mutual

⁴⁸ *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, T1854:45.105c8–12.

⁴⁹ Liao Minghuo (Liao, 2006: 225) expresses this thought in writing: “Undoubtedly, things conjoined share a certain ‘identity’ with one another, but in terms of their actual respective referents, these distinct things [though conjoined] differ in their substance; hence, they are not [in actuality] ‘mutually identical.’” 無疑，不同層面的東西在事實上可以是連合在一起，有某一義的相即；但在義理上它們究竟是性質兩樣的東西，乃是非相即。

⁵⁰ *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths* poses the following challenge to this theory of mutual identity as inseparability: “Question: According to the opponent’s theory, the two truths, being of one essence, cannot possibly ‘coincide.’ Now, if one illuminates existence, one precisely illuminates non-existence, [as these] are also one in essence, so how could they possibly coincide?” 問：他二諦一體不得並。汝今照有即照無，亦是一體。云何得並耶？It then answers the challenge as follows: “Our explanation runs: The explanation of the opponent has a defect—in identifying existence with emptiness, they lose track of existence, and in identifying emptiness with existence they lose track of emptiness. Therefore, [on their theory] the two cannot possibly coincide. Now, it is only insofar as emptiness is precisely existence and existence is precisely emptiness that in identifying existence with emptiness, emptiness does not obliterate existence and that in identifying emptiness with existence, existence does not modify emptiness. Therefore, the two are perfectly coincident.” 解云。他義有礙。有即空即失有。空即有即失空。故不得並。今只有即是空。空

exclusiveness of physical stuff and emptiness flies in the face of the conventional reality experienced by sentient beings.

Jizang then proceeds to repudiate the theory of *jishi ji* as an ultimately spurious formation of mutual identity. He constructs his refutation based upon the conditional: If the two truths share one essence, then there is no phenomenal distinction between physical stuff and emptiness. He argues that this theory lacks analytical rigor in that it dissolves the distinctions between conventional truth and ultimate truth. Jizang contends that the theory does not account for the coextensiveness of physical stuff and emptiness in any meaningful way. In this paradigm, conventional existence and pervasive emptiness are utterly indistinguishable from one another. Again, this flies in the face of the conventional reality experienced by ordinary sentient beings in which objects are phenomenally distinct. Thus, Jizang regards the second theory as fallacious in that it obliterates the mutual identity between the two truths and melds them together into an undifferentiated oneness.

Throughout *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang refuses to define the mutual identity shared by the two truths in terms of either a muddled concurrency of oneness or a false equivalency of sameness. Jizang concludes that the integration of conventional truth and ultimate truth into one Middle Way provides for an explanation of the complete essence of individual *dharma*s. He thereby succeeds in neither reifying the *dharma*s as fundamentally existing things with static intrinsic natures nor nullifying them as intrinsically unreal entities that lack even conventional existence.

3.2 Jizang: The Middle Way Is Neither Exclusively Existent Nor Exclusively Non-Existent

Jizang avers that the Middle Way—as the essential commonality joining the two truths—makes evident that the nature of an individual *dharma*, and the nature of a composite entity comprised of multiple *dharma*s, cannot be circumscribed in terms of a duality between existence and non-existence. He reasons that because conditioned *dharma*s constantly arise, abide, and cease to exist, they cannot be determined as existent or non-existent. Because each, and every, conditioned *dharma* undergoes continual flux—decaying and ceasing immediately upon engendering a conditioned *dharma* of a similar nature—all conditioned *dharma*s are neither eternal (*chang* 常) nor

即是有。有即空。空不壞有。空即有。有不動空。故得並也 (T1854:45. 110b28–c1).

annihilated (*duan* 斷).⁵¹ Jizang further argues that because each, and every, composite entity is constituted by a continual series of conditioned *dharmas* that are devoid of intrinsic natures, all composites are fundamentally empty. Therefore, the individual *dharmas*, and the composite entities that comprise conventional reality, are neither existent nor non-existent; the individual *dharmas*, as well as the composite entities that comprise conventional reality, are ultimately empty of unmodifiable or unconditioned intrinsic natures.⁵²

Jizang builds, in the following way, upon the doctrine of the mutual identity shared by the two truths: he maintains that the commonplace perception (in ordinary reality) of the existence of (a) *dharmas* with definite natures and (b) entities composed of multiple *dharmas* does not conflict with the notion of the fundamental emptiness of the *dharmas* that comprise the entirety of the universe. Jizang's teaching thus highlights the irony that

⁵¹ As Jizang posits in his commentary on the seventh chapter of the *Bailun* 百論 (Hundred Verse Treatise), entitled *Po yin zhong you guo pin* 破因中有果品 (Refutation of the Existence of the Effect as Inherent within the Cause): "Question: Now, [the treatise states:] 'in continuing as a series, [the *dharmas*] are not terminated. In decaying, they are not permanent.' How is it said that they are neither existent nor non-existent? Answer: [that statement that] 'in continuing as a series, [the *dharmas*] are not terminated' refutes the non-existence [of the effect] within the cause. [The statement that] 'in decaying, [the *dharmas*] are not permanent' refutes the existence [of the effect] within the cause. Adherents of Sāṅkhya posit that [the effect] exists inherently within the cause. This is based upon the reason that the cause is not lost and does not decay." 問：今續故不斷，壞故不常。云何是非有非無？答：續故不斷破因中無。壞故不常破因中有。僧佉執因中有。因不失壞故也 (T1827:42.290b17–20).

⁵² Jizang writes in his *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sutra* that the Middle Way is realized through a negation of both the intrinsic reality of composites and the intrinsic reality of their ultimate constituents, the individual *dharmas*: "Some others say: In not being ultimately real, it is not ultimate truth; in not being conventional existence, it is not conventional truth; this is precisely the direct contemplation of the Middle Way. Again, in not being ultimately real, it is not ultimately real; thus, it is unreal in its nature. Not being existent, it is not the conventional existence of conditioned reality. For this reason, the double negation of [ultimately real] intrinsic natures and their conventional [existence] is to become aware of the emptiness of the sickness [of Vimalakīrti]. It is the way by which one is able to know the emptiness of the sickness. If the sickness were really existent, then the sicknesses of oneself and others could not be expiated. It is precisely because these [sicknesses of oneself and others] do not ultimately exist that they can be expiated. Since these [sicknesses] can be expiated, once the mind of compassion arises, the great vow is produced; therefore there exists the Way of liberating oneself and others." 有人言：非真即非真諦。非有即非俗諦，即中道正觀也。又言非真者，非是真實，即非性實也。非有者，亦非因緣假有。故雙非性假，悟病空也。所以了病空者。若病是實有者，則自他病不可除。以其非真有故，可得除之。以其可除故，悲心即生，弘誓便起，故有兼濟之道也 (T1781:38.959c7–12).

although the Middle Way integrates the two truths into a complete explanation of reality as it really is, as such the Middle Way cannot be qualified in terms of either existence or non-existence.⁵³

Through a comprehensive examination of the key passages from the sutras and doctrinal treatises—including the *Sutra for Humane Kings*⁵⁴ and the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*—Jizang arrives at the conclusion that the ultimate truth, which denotes the non-existence of all *dharmas* as devoid of intrinsic natures, and the conventional truth, which denotes the existence of all *dharmas* as possessing intrinsic natures, share a common essence in the Middle Way:

Question: Where in the words of the sutras does it say that the Middle Way comprises the essence of the two truths?

問：何處經文中道為二諦體也？

Answer: The *Middle Treatise* states: “The myriad of causally produced *dharmas*, I say, are empty, are but provisional designations, and are also the Middle Way.” “The myriad of causally produced *dharmas*” is conventional truth, “are empty” is ultimate truth, and “are also the Middle Way” is essence (*ti*).

答：《中論》云：「因緣所生法，我說即是空，亦為是假名，亦是中道義。」因緣生法是俗諦，即是空是真諦，亦是中道義是體。

⁵³ *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths* relates a few different ways of denoting the third truth of the Middle Way in relation to the two truths: “Sometimes, three truths are expanded upon: namely, the truth of existence, the truth of non-existence, and the truth of the Middle Way as the supreme-meaning truth of neither existence nor non-existence. Sometimes, the three truths are subsumed under two truths, with existence and non-existence coinciding under conventional truth; neither existence nor non-existence is regarded as supreme-meaning truth. In addition, conventional truth is sometimes considered to be ‘dual yet non-dual,’ while supreme-meaning truth is considered to be ‘neither dual nor non-dual.’ Discussed in this way, [the third truth] does not go beyond two truths.” 時開則有三諦：有諦、無諦、非有非無中道第一義諦。有時攝三諦為二諦，有無並世諦。非有非無為第一義諦，乃至二不二為世諦。非二非不二為第一義諦。就此而論，則無出二諦 (T1854:45.114a22–a26).

⁵⁴ *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths* paraphrases the *Sutra for Humane Kings* on the third truth of the Middle Way as follows: “Again, the *Sutra for Humane Kings* states that the third truth is the non-duality [between the two truths] when considered as an ‘essence’ (*ti*). The truth of existence and the truth of non-existence are identical to [the two truths *qua*] teaching, and the supreme-meaning truth of the Middle Way is identical to the [two truths as non-dual] principle (*li*).” 又《仁王經》云：三諦，亦是二不二為體。有諦無諦，即是教；非有非無中道第一義諦，即是理也 (T1854:45.109a6–a8).

The *Flower Garland Sutra* states that “all existent and non-existent *dharma*s are understood as being neither existent nor non-existent.”⁵⁵ Therefore, either existence or non-existence stands for the two truths, and neither existence nor non-existence stands for the essence.

《華嚴》云。一切有無法。了達非有非無。故有無為二諦。非有非無為體。(T1853:45.19b17–22)

In *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang elaborates how the Middle Way is realized by effacing the duality arising when existence and non-existence are viewed as distinct and separate entities corresponding to numerically different essences:

Question: Since you posit three truths, there should be three essences. In our teaching, the two truths have two essences.

問：汝既有三諦，應有三體；我有二諦有二體。

Explanation: If you actually grasped the import of the teaching of this tradition (i.e., Sanlun), then you wouldn’t make such an argument.

解云：若得一家意致，不應作此難。

The preceding stated: The conventional truth consists in provisional existence, and the ultimate truth consists in provisional non-existence. Provisional existence is the existence of absence, and provisional non-existence is the presence of non-existence. The existence of absence exists without possessing any presence [such as the presence of non-existence]. The presence of non-existence lacks any existence as the absence of what it negates.⁵⁶ So where do there exist three [distinct] essences [corresponding to three distinct truths]?

前云：假有為世諦，假無為真諦，假有不有有，假無不無無。不有有，有無所有。不無無，無無所無。那忽有三體耶？(T1854:45.109a23–27)

For Jizang, the Middle Way is realized by the simultaneous non-implicative negation of both existence (X) and non-existence (-X). As described in the above passage from *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, this form of negation

⁵⁵ A prose paraphrase of a line of verse from the Chinese translation of the *Flower Garland Sutra* attributed to Buddhahadra (T278:9.426c9).

⁵⁶ Here Jizang stipulates that as the result of a non-implicative negation of a particular presence, the absolute non-existence of a presence does not exist as a real entity. Therefore, in defining the non-existence of presence—absolute non-existence—as the negation of any presence, Jizang does not seek to also, in so doing, indirectly affirm the existence of the absence of the *negatum*—i.e., the existence of an absence (*buyou you* 不有有)—as a real entity.

does not imply the presence of “the existence of absence” (*buyou you* 不有有), nor “the presence of non-existence” (*buwu wu* 不無無). This conceptual pair appears in the rudimentary credo (*chuzhang* 初章) of Jizang’s Sanlun tradition itself, wherein it is stated that non-existence, the *negatum* of existence, is a contingent form of being—that is, it depends upon the presence of existence to be realized. Jizang avers that absolute non-existence is realized only through the non-implicative negation of existence, therefore necessarily excluding the reification of “non-existence” as a real form of “presence.”⁵⁷ In his specification of the logical operation by which the Middle Way is realized, Jizang insists that the two *negata* resulting from the non-implicative negation of existence and non-existence, respectively, are both pseudo-entities lacking any intrinsic reality; thus, one should avoid reifying them in one’s characterization of the Middle Way as “neither existence nor non-existence”:

Again, what kind of an entity is the negation of existence and non-existence? The negation of existence reverts to non-existence, while the negation of non-existence reverts to existence. But in reverting to existence or non-existence, annihilation, or permanence, how can one then speak of it as the Middle Way? Now we explain simply in this way: The

⁵⁷ In his *Exegesis on the Middle Treatise*, in an explanation of the rudimentary credo (*chuzhang* 初章) of the Sanlun tradition, Jizang attributes to rival traditions the postulate of “the presence of non-existence,” regarded to be a form of negative entity with ontological status in its own right. For Jizang, this view flows from reifying the *negatum* resulting from the implicative negation of “non-existence” as a form of real “presence”: “Other traditions [establish] existence, but not as a result of non-existence (i.e., not as the *negatum* of the non-implicative negation of non-existence), since [they consider] existence to be a presence in and of itself. They [establish] non-existence, but not as a result of (the non-implicative negation of) existence, since [they consider] non-existence to be an absence in and of itself. Now [our tradition establishes] existence as a result of (the non-implicative negation of) non-existence, since [we consider] existence to not be a presence in and of itself. Insofar as non-existence results from there being existence [to negate], non-existence is not a presence in and of itself. The other tradition [establishes] existence to be a presence in and of itself, such that they designate ‘existence’ as coming to be due to [the presence of] existence itself. They [establish] non-existence to be an absence in and of itself, such that they designate ‘non-existence’ as coming to be due to [the absence of] existence itself. Now [for our tradition] existence is not a presence in and of itself, which would be called ‘the existence of absence’; nor [for our tradition] is non-existence an absence in and of itself, which would be called ‘the presence of non-existence.’” 他不由無故有，有是有。不由有故無；無是自無。今由無故有，有不自有。由有故無，無不自無。他有是有，名有故有。無是自無，名無故無。今有不自有，名不有有。無不自無，名不無無。(T1824:42.28a16–20).

two truths are aspects of the Buddha's explained teachings. Non-duality is the Middle Way.

又且汝非有非無是何物耶？非有還是無。非無還是有。還是有無斷常。何說中道耶？為是故今明：二諦是教門。不二是中道也。

Again, in the other tradition absence and the presence of existence and non-existence are [both] lacking. Now [in our tradition], the absence of existence lacks the non-existence of absence. This is exactly contrary [to the other tradition]. The other tradition only has existence and non-existence as two [separate] principles, and they lack the non-dual Way. Now [in our tradition] there is only the non-dual Way, and there is no [duality between] existence and non-existence.

又他無不有，無有有無。今有不有無無有無。反之也。他唯有有無二理。無不二之道。今即唯有不二之道，無有無也 (T1854:45.88c14–19).

In *On the Doctrine of the Two Truths*, Jizang drives home three points regarding the logical operation by which the Middle Way is realized. First, the non-implicative negation of the extreme views of existence and non-existence of the *dharma*s does not indirectly affirm either the existence of absence or the non-existence of presence. Second, the non-existence of presence arises when one reifies the absence or privation of “existence” and “non-existence.” Third, the existence of real entities results from the logical operation of double negation.⁵⁸ For Jizang, only this particular form of non-implicative negation, directed at the logical disjunction “either existence or non-existence,” is both necessary and sufficient to establish the Middle Way.

4 Conclusion

Jizang founds his doctrine of the Middle Way upon the postulate of mutual identity between the two truths. In the hands of Jizang, mutual identity does not imply that the two truths are directly equated, or that they are sublated and amalgamated such that they lose their distinctive identities. Instead, the doctrine of mutual identity characterizes a relationship of neither oneness nor difference, wherein the distinction between the two truths is preserved and neither truth is reduced to, or fully explicated in terms of, the other truth.

In his argumentation to establish the doctrine of the two truths for the Sinitic Madhyamaka tradition, Jizang disassembles the Tiantai doctrine of

⁵⁸ T1824:42.28a18–21.

the Middle Way as a supreme-meaning truth, as put forth by Zhiyi, wherein the Middle Way effaces the two extremes of sheer existence and sheer non-existence to reveal a third, analytically distinct layer of truth. Zhiyi construes the Middle Way as realized through a logical operation involving both, on the one hand, negating the dichotomy between conventional existence and fundamental emptiness as mutually exclusive truths and, on the other hand, integrating the two together into a harmonious unity wherein neither is denied. By contrast to Zhiyi, who paradoxically reaffirms both the conditioned reality as defined by the existence of *dharma*s with intrinsic natures and the ultimate reality of the way the *dharma*s really are—fundamentally empty of intrinsic natures—as two aspects of one Middle Way that is not restricted to either, Jizang considers the Middle Way to only be fully instantiated through the thoroughgoing negation of anything, including emptiness, as ultimately real. By refuting the innovative idea of a third truth as formulated by Zhiyi, Jizang safeguards a doctrinal understanding that takes Nāgārjuna to deny that nothing exists beyond the conditioned reality. In other words, for Jizang, nothing exists more than conventionally. Thus, Jizang’s perspective on the two truths aligns closely with the modern interpretation of Nāgārjuna advanced by Siderits, according to which the ultimate truth is that there are no ultimate realities.

In contrast to Zhiyi, who deploys both apophatic and kataphatic language in his articulation of the Middle Way, Jizang heavily prioritizes apophatic language in characterizing the Middle Way when viewed in the light of ultimate truth as neither existence nor non-existence. Ultimately, for Jizang, the Middle Way cannot be circumscribed in terms of the duality between existence and non-existence; it is comprised of the common essence of the two truths that does not, in any way, eclipse, supersede, or transcend their combination. Jizang concludes that the Middle Way does not supersede the two truths to reveal a deeper reality; rather, the Middle Way is simply what is formed by interfusing the two truths and distilling their combination down to an irreducible essence.

Abbreviations / Primary Sources

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al. 1924–32. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai (CBETA version). Citations are indicated by

the text number, followed by volume, page, register (a, b, or c), and line number(s).

- X *Manji Shinsan Dainihon zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. 1975–89. Printed by Kokusho Kankōkai 國書刊行會. Originally compiled by Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧, 1905–12. Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin (CBETA version). Citations are indicated by the text number, followed by volume, page, register (a, b, or c), and line number(s).

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Monistic Descriptions of *Dharmadhātu* and Instantaneous Insight in Mahāyāna Sūtras¹

Fujii Jun

1 Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of *dharmadhātu* and its precise relationship to “instantaneous insight” (insight associated with a single moment of thought, *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā*, *yinian xiangying hui* — 念相應慧) in early Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. These two concepts are extremely complex and cannot be understood in isolation from the vast network of other related concepts that inform the discourse of early Mahāyāna texts.² For this reason, the following investigation is not confined to an analysis of these concepts alone but rather first explores a number of

¹ In preparing this chapter, I received valuable comments from many people. I cannot name them all, but I would like to thank in particular Shōno Masanori 生野昌範, Paulus Kaufmann, and Watanabe Shōgo 渡辺章悟 as well as members of the KAKENHI group, including especially Miyazaki Tenshō 宮崎展昌, Ikuma Hiromitsu 伊久間博光, and Robert Rhodes. In the final stages of my writing process, I received extensive feedback from Steffen Döll and Christopher V. Jones. While I could not incorporate all of their comments, I am appreciative of their assistance in clarifying several crucial points. Any remaining errors are entirely my responsibility. Throughout the chapter I make frequent use of existing translations; as indicated in their accompanying footnote citations, in most cases my renderings are modified versions of these translations, which I have adapted as appropriate to fit the current context without enumerating the individual modifications.

² Because of the controversy over whether or not “Mahāyāna Buddhism” was established in the second century, there is some debate over whether second-century sūtras can accurately be characterized as “early Mahāyāna sūtras,” but I do not deal with this vexing issue in this chapter. Skilling, 2018: 53, in consideration of recent findings in manuscript discoveries, also casts doubt on categorizations such as “early” and “middle” Mahāyāna Buddhism. For the purposes of this chapter, I use the various translations of Lokakṣema as one criterion in delimiting the body of the early Mahāyāna sūtras. These divisions of mine may seem somewhat archaic in light of the fact that some manuscripts dating back to earlier periods than Lokakṣema’s translations have been discovered in recent years. Nevertheless, Lokakṣema’s translations can still be used as a basis for analysis because they can be accurately dated.

relevant concepts in order to show how they fit together in a comprehensive religious discourse. It is hoped that this approach, circuitous as it may be, will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight. In simple terms, instantaneous insight is understood as the perceiver in the process of awakening, while *dharmadhātu* is regarded as the object of perception. Bhāviveka (fl. 490–570), a prominent figure in the Madhyamaka school, does however challenge this subject-object dichotomy.

To clarify the meaning of *dharmadhātu*, I explicate concepts related to “all *dharma*s/phenomena/teachings” (*sarvadharmā*)³ and *dharmadhātu*, as found in the Mahāyāna sutras, from three perspectives: (1) monistic expression, (2) inherent purity of mind, and (3) instantaneous insight. These three perspectives are interrelated.

The term “monism” is the subject of various interpretations. In this chapter, I employ it for convenience to denote the idea that all *dharma*s possess a singular nature. I contend that non-duality (*advaya*), a single characteristic (*ekalakṣaṇa*), one taste (*ekarasa*), and equality (*samatā*) are considered monistic terms from this standpoint. While Western academia may resist categorizing the latter three terms as such, they are commonly viewed as monistic in Japanese academic discourse due to their indication of a single underlying nature shared by all *dharma*s. In deploying the term my aim is not to offer a philosophical definition of monism; rather, I utilize the term to contextualize historical perspectives. Within narratives of the Buddha’s life, tathāgatas or bodhisattvas are portrayed as ascertaining all *dharma*s (*sarvadharmā*). I argue that the concept of instantaneously perceiving diverse beings has fostered the notion of perceiving them as possessing identical properties or natures—a perspective I label as a “monistic understanding.” Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasized this monistic teaching to critique Abhidharma, which tended to rigidly separate all *dharma*s into multiple distinct categories.⁴

³ In Buddhism, the term *dharma* encompasses a range of meanings. The emphasis placed on either the existential aspect or the teachings of the Buddha can vary significantly depending on the context, often making it difficult to specify. However, this chapter does not delve into this particular distinction. Therefore, the term is left untranslated. For a similar approach, refer to Harrison, 2006: 136.

⁴ Here I offer a concise list of studies that reference monism within this context. First, the Japanese term meaning monism (*ichigenron* 一元論) is used for *dharmadhātu* by Takasaki Jikidō 高崎直道 (1926–2013) and Suguro Shinjō 勝呂信靜 (1925–2012). See Takasaki, 1974: 760, 762, and Suguro, 1989: 373, 376. David Seyfort Ruegg (1931–2021) and Étienne Lamotte (1903–83) are examples of scholars who exercise caution

In the pages that follow, (1) I introduce the related ideas of “all *dharma*s” and *dharmadhātu* in Mahāyāna sūtras. (2) I then relate the monistic expressions relevant to all *dharma*s to the inherent purity of the mind, which holds that the essence of the mind is pure. This idea is inextricably linked to the fact that the essence of all *dharma*s (i.e., *dharmadhātu* as the essence of all *dharma*s) is pure in a monistic sense. (3) Based on the above, I examine the concept of instantaneous insight, which recognizes all *dharma*s (i.e., *dharmadhātu* as a collective noun). Instantaneous insight features in the scene of the Buddha’s awakening within the Mahāsāṃghika lineage. The content of the Buddha’s awakening, or instantaneous insight, encompasses all *dharma*s. The reason why the concept “all *dharma*s” is depicted monistically in Mahāyāna sūtras is that the individual objects making up the cognitive content of instantaneous insight are not divided into multiple categories but rather cognized totally in a collective fashion. Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching treats “all *dharma*s” ontologically and epistemologically based upon a monistic framework through the concept of “instantaneous insight.”⁵ This doctrinal understanding contrasts with the Sarvāstivādin stance, which categorizes all *dharma*s based upon a dualistic model, in terms of the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s.

The term “instantaneous insight” is widely used in Mahāyāna sūtras following the translations of Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護, 239–316). In

when applying the term “monism” to Buddhism. Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 3–4, states that Vedānta’s *advaita* can be called monism, but he does not call Buddhism that uses the word *advaya*, which also means non-duality, monism. Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 3n4, states: “As Lamotte himself writes [Lamotte, 1962: 214–15n144], the affirmation of an *ekānaya* in no way implies a monistic view of things, and in no way constitutes a metaphysical entity.” On the other hand, scholars including Fyodor Shcherbatskoy (1866–1942) and Eugène Obermiller (1901–35) use the term monism for Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in reference to *tathāgatagarbha* thought; see Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 3n1, n2, n4, for relevant sources. I too do not intend to use the expression “monism” simply as a general characterization of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrinal models. However, I do find it useful to apply the term to the textual sources examined here for analytical purposes.

- ⁵ Caution should be exercised when employing the terms “ontology” and “epistemology” within the realm of Buddhist studies. In the context of this chapter, these terms are specifically confined to the examination of how Buddhist practitioners perceive all *dharma*s. It is prudent to recognize the diversity of viewpoints among various Buddhist schools, with some emphasizing ontological perspectives and others focusing on epistemological considerations. An illustrative example of these usages can be found in the well-known book, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, by Tiruppattur R. Venkatachala Murti (1902–86). Murti, 1955: 217–18, distinguishes between the ontological approach of Vedānta’s *advaita* and the epistemological approach of Mādhyamika’s *advaya*.

the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, which makes extensive use of the word *dharmadhātu*, instantaneous insight is intimately associated with *dharmadhātu*. In other words, throughout the doctrinal development of the concept of instantaneous insight, instantaneous insight is closely aligned with the idea of *dharmadhātu* via the medium of all *dharma*s, which has the same meaning as *dharmadhātu*. I thus argue that the narrative concerning the Buddha's instantaneous realization of all *dharma*s has contributed to the development of the doctrine within Mahāyāna Buddhism that identifies the *dharmadhātu* as all *dharma*s, or their fundamental essence, and affirms its inherent purity.

Section 2 looks at the Buddha's unique ability to realize all *dharma*s in order to shed light on the meaning of *dharmadhātu* in the sense in which I am using it in this chapter.

Section 3 outlines my reading of *dharmadhātu*. Within the current academic discourse, *dharmadhātu* in Mahāyāna Buddhism is frequently translated as the "realm/domain of truth." I argue that this translation offers a somewhat vague and insufficient comprehension of *dharmadhātu*. I contend that the term becomes more comprehensible when we grasp its two basic senses: (1) as a synonym for the concept "all *dharma*s," which constitutes the object of the Buddha's awakened cognition, and (2) as an expression denoting the essence or nature inherent in all *dharma*s.

Section 4 takes up the monistic description of all *dharma*s in early Mahāyāna sutras and the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. The idea of "one taste, one and the same characteristic, and non-duality" is found in early Mahāyāna sutras (§4.1, §4.2). As demonstrated in section 5, sutras that use the concept of "one taste" in many cases also contain the inherent purity of the mind. Because the two have the same philosophical structure, I review the monistic expressions first in section 4. Here I also lay the groundwork for my examination in section 6 of the conceptual relationship between the idea of a single characteristic (*ekalakṣaṇa*) and of a single moment (*ekakṣaṇa*) by confirming that all *dharma*s are characterized as *ekalakṣaṇa* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (§4.3). This monistic line of thinking is also implicated in the doctrinal position of the Mahāsāṃghika school (§4.4).⁶

⁶ There is limited space within this chapter to delve into Maeda Eun's 前田慧雲 (1855–1930) idea (Maeda, 1903) proposing the origin of Mahāyāna within the Mahāsāṃghika school, along with Hirakawa Akira's 平川彰 (1915–2002) critique of that idea (Hirakawa, 1968: 13–58). Although recent years have witnessed the discovery of numerous new Sanskrit manuscripts, these manuscripts do not provide a comprehensive depiction of the state of mainstream Buddhism and Mahāyāna in the years just before and after the beginning of the Common Era. In this context, the

Section 5 begins with an exploration of the inherent purity of the mind found in the Mahāsāṃghika (§5.1). The concept of the inherent purity of the mind can be found in early Mahāyāna sūtras. It should be noted in addition that these sūtras also often include the teaching that all *dharma*s have an inherently pure essence; philosophically, the two teachings are inextricably linked (§5.2). In the section on purity in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* (Eight Thousand Verse Prajñāpāramitā; hereafter ASP), we will see that the concept of inherent purity is based on the monistic notion that the essence of all *dharma*s is one and not two (§5.3).

Section 6 takes up the idea of instantaneous insight. I have devoted a lengthy section to this topic because the core idea, though found in the Mahāsāṃghika lineage, has not previously been addressed comprehensively in relation to the Mahāyāna. The instantaneous insight that cognizes all *dharma*s is related to the concept of *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (§6.8). In this section, I take up the literature in which instantaneous insight and the concept of inherent purity are closely related (§6.9). The monistic doctrinal stance that all *dharma*s are inherently pure is intricately connected to the concept of instantaneous insight as a doctrinal model. This section concludes with a detailed explanation (§6.10) of a table provided to systematically depict the relationship between instantaneous insight, monistic expressions, and inherent purity in Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises. For convenience, the table has been placed at the very end of the chapter.

Section 7 reviews the relationship between all *dharma*s and *dharmadhātu* from the perspective of the Yogācāra treatises. The concept that the essence of the mind is pure is closely related to the notion that the essence of all *dharma*s is pure (§7.1). The assertion that all *dharma*s are inherently pure in the monistic sense seems to have been related to the intention of overcoming the dichotomy, put forward in the Sarvāstivādin teachings, between the conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s (§7.2). Furthermore, Yogācāra literature states that *dharmadhātu* is inherently pure. The Yogācāra school inherited the doctrinal model of instantaneous insight and monistic thought from the Mahāyāna sūtras. This may be because it was considered more appropriate to state that *dharmadhātu*, which can refer to all *dharma*s or

precise nature of the relationship of influence between Mahāsāṃghika and Mahāyāna during those years remains indeterminate. Nonetheless, within the scope of this chapter we will once again draw a comparison between the two and scrutinize the respective structures of thought within each tradition, noting that the concept of instantaneous insight is prevalent across an extensive array of Mahāyāna sūtras and bears relevance to the Mahāsāṃghika as well.

furthermore to the essence of all *dharmas*, is inherently pure, rather than to directly state that all *dharmas* are pure.

I have been as careful as possible in selecting the texts necessary for the discussion in this chapter. Needless to say, however, any work of scholarship is subject to the limitations of the author's point of view, and I acknowledge that some readers may question whether my selection of texts may have been somewhat limited or haphazard in a presentation that, though lengthy, is unavoidably truncated.

Readers might also question my treatment of the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (Wheel of the Formations of Divisions of the Doctrine; *Yibu zonglun lun* 異部宗輪論 T2031) as faithfully representing the doctrine of the Mahāsāṃghika lineage. This text records the agenda-laden Sarvāstivāda account of the development of the various schools that arose in the mainstream Buddhist community in the time following the Buddha's final *nirvāṇa*.⁷ As we will see in this chapter, the Mahāsāṃghika theories attested in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* are more closely connected to the content and philosophical structure of the Mahāyāna sutras than previously thought. One might think it preferable to take up the doctrine of the Mahāsāṃghika before that of the Mahāyāna sutras and to view the discourse of the Mahāyāna sutras along a time axis. At the time of writing, however, I have chosen to treat the theories found in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* separately because some researchers are uncomfortable with positing a unidirectional influence by the Mahāsāṃghika lineage on the Mahāyāna sutras, particularly when relying upon Chinese and Tibetan sources that date from after the fourth century, in the analysis of early Mahāyāna sutras. The discussion in this chapter will demonstrate that monistic descriptions are closely related to the Mahāsāṃghika lineage and Mahāyāna sutras as doctrinal models, and it will point to a necessity to reconsider the value of these sources.

Another possible question pertains to my extensive utilization in what follows of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, which is not definitively classified as an early Mahāyāna sutra. This sutra has had a significant impact on the modern understanding of *dharmadhātu* as construed in spatial terms. For this reason, I provide the background to such an understanding of *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*; I then show, thereby, how *dharmadhātu* in this sutra as well can be better understood in accordance with the two basic senses laid out in this chapter.

⁷ See Buswell and Lopez, 2014, s.v. *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*.

2 Buddha and Omniscience (*Sarvajñā*)⁸

In this chapter, I focus on the term *dharmadhātu* in its meaning of “all *dharma*s.” This sense of the term has been pointed out in prior scholarship but to date has not been sufficiently shared in academic circles.⁹ To understand *dharmadhātu* in this sense, let us look at the Buddha’s special ability to realize all *dharma*s. In several schools of mainstream Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is said that the Buddha knows everything. In the earliest accounts of the Buddha’s life, the *Mahāvagga* book of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the Buddha meets an ascetic practitioner called Upaka shortly after his awakening. On that occasion, the Buddha says: “I am the all-knowing (*sabbavidū*).”¹⁰ The “all” in “all-knowing” can also be understood as “all *dharma*s” in the technical sense of that phrase. “All *dharma*s” corresponds to *sabbe dhammā* in Pāli and to *sarvadharmā* in Sanskrit. The statement that the Buddha knows all *dharma*s is also found in Mahāyāna sūtras. One Mahāyāna sūtra, the **Dhāraṇīśvararājaparipṛcchā* (Questions of the Lord of *Dhāraṇī*; hereafter, *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*),¹¹ which takes place at the site of

⁸ This topic is also addressed in Anālayo, 2006, though from a perspective that differs from my interests and employs different sources.

⁹ Takasaki Jikidō points to “all things” as the first meaning of *dharmadhātu* and also presents as a second meaning “root,” or “essence”; Takasaki, 1966b: 86. He further clarifies (Takasaki 1974: 95n35) that “[Franklin] Edgerton [1885–1963] does not address the same sense of ‘essence’ as *dharmatā*.” This is similar to the idea expressed by Christopher Jones in his chapter in the current volume, where he draws attention to the French word *fondement* in this context. See also Suguro, 1989: 374. The information about Suguro’s study was provided to me by Miyazaki Tenshō on July 6, 2023. Harrison, 1992b, primarily focuses on elucidating the concept of *dharmakāya*, which is often overlooked in studies of *dharmadhātu* (in fact, I noticed its importance during the final stages of writing this chapter). In its analysis of early Mahāyāna sūtras, Harrison, 1992b: 67, correctly identifies the understanding of *dharmadhātu* as the “totality of *dharma*s.”

¹⁰ *sabbābhibhū sabbavidū 'ham asmi / sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto / sabbañjaho taṇhakkhaye vimutto / sayam abhiññāya kam uddiseyyam. Mahāvagga i.6.8 PTS I 8.17–20; Dhammapada verse 353 PTS 99. References to PTS editions of canonical texts cite volume, page, and line numbers. Lamotte, 1980: 131, suggests that the term *sarvajñā* is used in corresponding scenes in several Sanskrit texts. *Catusparīṣad* 10.6, 51(112.3), 128.14, and 443.23; Mvu 3.326.7. Jones, 1949–56: III 317. Cf. *Śaṅghabhedavastu* 132:14. See Hazuka, 2006: 25n21.*

¹¹ Other names for this sūtra are *Dhāraṇīśvararājaparipṛcchāsūtra* and *Dhāraṇīśvararājasūtra*. *Da ai jing* 大哀經 (T398), translated by Dharmarakṣa; *Tuoluoni zizai wang pusa pin* 陀羅尼自在王菩薩品 (T397[2]), translated by Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385–433); D 147 **Tathāgatamahākaraṇīrdeśa* (Teaching on the Great Compassion of the Tathāgata). Throughout the current study, my citations to chapters

the Buddha's awakening, says: "The Lord has perfectly realized the equality of all *dharma*s."¹² This passage is cited in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.¹³ The *Ratnagotravibhāga* relates this description to the eighth of the ten stages of ascetic practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹⁴

The following passage describes the first of the ten special powers of a Tathāgata (*daśa-balāni*, *shili* 十力) as found in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* within the *Yogācārabhūmi*, a representative treatise of early Yogācāra literature. The object of the Buddha's observation here is *dharmadhātu*.

pūrvam tāvat tathāgato 'bhisambuddha-mātra eva sthānāsthānājñāna-balena prāṭīyasamutpannam dharmadhātuṃ vicārayati. tataḥ karmasvakajñānabalena yeṣu prāṭītyasamutpanneṣu dharmeṣu sattvasaṃjñātāṃ sattvadhātuṃ vicārayati /¹⁵

Earlier, by the power of knowledge of right and wrong (*sthānāsthāna*) the newly awakened Tathāgata first observed the totality of *dharma*s

and sections from this sutra are those used in Takasaki, 1974: 646–49. Tibetan literature is based on the Derge (sDe dge) editions and textual revisions, cited using Roman numerals following the Tohoku numbering system. The name of the deduced Sanskrit document is marked with an asterisk (*). Translations of titles are sourced from 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha (<https://84000.co>). The same approach has been adopted for other texts in subsequent sections. Given that my research primarily relies on the Chinese translations, which are typically older than the Tibetan, I predominantly cite the original Chinese translations; because of space constraints I have omitted numerous Tibetan sources and only provided references to their locations.

¹² Takasaki, 1989: 7n1, 218, notes that this statement is found in the introductory chapter (Nidānaparivarta) of the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*. Takasaki, 1974: 641–50, points out that the passage here corresponds to one found in the *Yingluo pin* 瓔珞品 (Chapter on Necklace of Precious Stones), part of the Chinese translation of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sutras collection. The exact same expression is also found in the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa* and in the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā*, which are contained in the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sutras collection as well. See also note 230.

¹³ *bhagavān sarvadharmaśamatābhisambuddhaḥ* RGV 3.18. 婆伽婆平等證一切法 in the *Jiujing yicheng baoxing lun* 究竟一乘寶性論 (T1611:31.821b20), translated by Ratnamati (Lenamoti 勒那摩提) in 511. See Silk, 2015: 2n5, on the name of this text. When the year of the scripture's translation is indicated but the translator's dates of birth and death are not clear, I do not provide those dates.

¹⁴ RGV 4.1–2. The eighth stage is regarded as an extremely high state, on almost the same level as awakening. The peculiarity of the eighth stage is dealt with in §6.6.

¹⁵ BBh 399.17–21. This is the sixth of the six examples of *dharmadhātu* in the *Yogācārabhūmi* mentioned in Suguro, 1989: 376–77. The corresponding Chinese translations of the sixth example are as follows: *Yuqie shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論 (T1579:30.572c18); *Pusa dichi jing* 菩薩地持經 (T1581:30.958a18–23). This expression can be traced to the prominent expression of dependent origination in the *Samyutta-nikāya* (12.20). *paṭiccasamuppannā dhammā* PTS II 26.7. See also Takasaki, 1966b: 80.

(*dharmadhātu*) generated from causes and conditions. Then, by the power of his own knowledge based on *karma*, among the various dharmas arising from various causes and conditions, he observed the conceptual designation of sentient beings that is the totality of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*, *youqing jie* 有情界 or *zhongsheng jie* 眾生界).¹⁶

In the passage above, the term *dharmadhātu* is glossed using the words “various dharmas arising from various causes and conditions” (*pratītyasamutpanneṣu dharmeṣu*). This rendering indicates that *dharmadhātu* here can be said to signify plural *dharmas*, i.e., *sarvadharmas*.

“The knower of everything” (*sarvajña*, *yiqie zhi* 一切智) is often employed as an epithet for the Buddha. It is found in the *Dīpavaṃsa* chronicle of the Pāli, in the opening reverential verses of several mainstream Buddhist works, and at the beginning of the *Ratnāvalī* by Nāgārjuna (fl. second and third centuries).¹⁷ The word *sarvajña* is found in Lokakṣema’s 支婁迦讖 (fl. 147–189) translations as *sayunruo* 薩芸若 as early as the second half of the second century.¹⁸ In the larger *Prajñāpāramitās*, which are some two hundred to three hundred years more recent than the smaller

¹⁶ My rendering here is based on the Japanese translation in Goshima, 2015: 18, which translates *dharmadhātu* as “domain of *dharma(s)*” (*hō no ryōiki* 法の領域) in keeping with the common understanding of the term. I think that such a Japanese translation, while not incorrect, could introduce ambiguity in grasping the concept. The reason why *dharmadhātu* has a spatial connotation will be discussed later (§3.3), but it is imperative not to interpret *dharmadhātu* merely as a literal space.

¹⁷ In the *Dīpavaṃsa* (ch. 1, verse 13), established around the fourth century, it is said that “the great sage has awakened to the height of knowledge regarding all *dharmas*” (*sabbaññutañāṇavaram abhisambuddho mahāmuni* PTS 14.17). All of the following sentences mean “take refuge in [the Buddha with] knowledge of everything”: *li yiqie zhi zun* 禮一切智尊 (T1656:32.493b8; *Baoxing wang zheng lun* 寶行王正論, *Ratnāvalī*); *gui ming yiqie zhi* 歸命一切智 (T1649:32.462a6; a Sammitīya school text **Sammitīyanikāyaśāstra*, *Sanmīdi bu lun* 三彌底部論); *jing li yiqie zhi* 敬禮一切智 (T1554:28.980b26, a Sarvāstivādin text; **Abhidharmāvatāra*, *Ru apidamo lun* 入阿毘達磨論). Note also Nāgārjuna’s *Ratnāvalī*, verse 1cd: *praṇamya sarvajñam ahaṃ sarvasattvāikabāndhavam* (I bow in reverence to the Omniscient One, / The true good friend of all sentient beings). *Ratnāvalī*: 2.3–6. See Dharmamitra, 2009: 31. In the earliest Buddhist texts, the term *tevijja* (three insight) was used and the term *sabbaññu* (knower of everything) was avoided to distinguish from the omnipresence of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta. However, the term *sabbaññu* has been in use since the old layer of the *Milindapañha* (Questions of Milinda). For the development of the term *sabbaññu*, see Hazuka, 2006. Cf. Jayatilleke, 1963: 380–81, 468. Mano, 1972: 85n96, lists examples of *yiqie zhi* 一切智 in early Buddhist literature translated into Chinese.

¹⁸ Miyazaki, 2012: 167 (34). A parenthetical number following the page number, such as “(34)” here, indicates the section or other relevant information. Some translations are also numbered using parentheses for the sake of clarity and ease of identification.

Prajñāpāramitās, “all-knowing” (*sarvajñatā*) expanded to the three kinds of knowledge.¹⁹ The three kinds of knowledge are (1) the knowledge of comprehending the characteristics of all *dharma*s (*sarvākārajñatā*, *yiqie xiang zhi* 一切相智), (2) the knowledge of the path (*mārgajñatā*, *dao zhi* 道智), and (3) all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*, *yiqie zhi* 一切智). They are explained with regard to, respectively, (1) buddhas (tathāgata, arhat, saṃyaksambuddha), (2) bodhisattvas, and (3) śrāvakas/arhats and *pratyekabuddhas*. The first kind of knowledge is considered the highest. The three kinds of knowledge in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* (hereafter, PSP) are examined in §6.4, which discusses instantaneous insight in that text.

3 What Is *Dharmadhātu*?

3.1 The Meaning of *Dharmadhātu*

We have seen the example of equivalence between “all *dharma*s” and *dharmadhātu* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. On this basis, I would like to consider the following four senses of *dharmadhātu*; the first two and the second two are overlapping pairs: (1) all *dharma*s, (2) the essence of *dharma*(s), (3) *svalakṣaṇa* (unique characteristic), and (4) *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (common characteristic).

Of these, (1) and (2) are noted in Takasaki, 1966b: 86–87, and I have simplified them.²⁰ That *sarvadharmā* and *dharmadhātu* share the same meaning is confirmed by the fact that the term *dhātu* appears at the end of a given word, as in *X-dhātu*, to indicate the “nature in the sense of essence” of *X*.²¹ Thus, “that which has the nature of *dharma*” signifies none other than

¹⁹ Mano, 1972: 66–72; Watanabe, 2019a: 148–56.

²⁰ The two meanings that Takasaki, 1966b, gives are generally followed in this chapter. However, I disagree with the following point stated in Takasaki, 1966b: 83: “In this sense, ‘*dhātu*’ may be translated into ‘sphere’ or ‘region’, of which similar uses are found in such terms as *lokadhātu*, *trāidhātuka*, etc.” I think the *dhātu* in *lokadhātu* and *trāidhātuka* represents a constituent or classification, not a “sphere” or “region.” See also the introduction to this volume.

²¹ The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* list *prakṛti* and *dhātu* as synonyms of *gotra*. See note 75. Based on these synonyms, *dhātu* can be taken in the sense of essence. The term *dhamma-dhātu* is found in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* within the *Dīgha-nikāya* (no. 14) of the Pāli canon (PTS II 10.16). In the commentary to this sutra, the *Līnatthapakāsinī*, the term is interpreted as *dhammānaṃ sabhāva* (PTS II 22.12), which can also be understood as “the essence of various (i.e., all) *dharma*s.”

the *dharma*s themselves. “All *dharma*s” (*sarvadharmā*) denotes the aggregation of all *dharma*s.²² As a result, the primary meaning of “*dharmadhātu*” is “all *dharma*s” or “totality of *dharma*s.”²³

In relation to (2), Schmithausen, 1969: 147, lists *dharma*-nature (*dharmatā*) as a synonym for *dharmadhātu* and renders *dharmadhātu* as “*dharma*-nature” (*Natur der dharmāḥ*). “*Dharma*-nature” (*dharmadhātu*) signifies (3) the unique nature (*svabhāva*)²⁴ of an individual *dharma* or (4) the nature common to several (i.e., all) *dharma*s (*dharmatā*).²⁵ Meanings (3) and (4) correspond to *svalakṣaṇa* (unique characteristic) and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (common characteristic), respectively. The definition of (4) is clearly found in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.²⁶ The term *dharmadhātu* holds numerous

²² Takasaki, 1966b: 83, explains that “*dharmadhātu* signifies the whole phenomenal world or the universe, i.e., *sarvadharmāḥ* [all *dharma*s].” *Dharmadhātu* functions as an alternative to the collective noun usage of “all *dharma*s,” just as *sattvadhātu* means “an accumulation of sentient beings,” an assembly of sentient beings (*sattvarāṣi*), or all sentient beings (*sarvasattva*). Suguro, 1989: 378 (3), also describes *dharmadhātu* as a collective noun, citing the example of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T1579:30.548a21–23; BBh 294.23, 295.6–7).

²³ Harrison, 1992b: 67, examines the concept of *dharmakāya* as a compound term. This analysis holds true when we substitute the term “body” (*kāya*) with either “constituent” or “essence” (*dhātu*).

²⁴ Although *svabhāva* and *svalakṣaṇa* are not entirely synonymous, their distinction necessitates careful consideration. Exploring the nuances between these terms remains a potential avenue for future research.

²⁵ There is a passage in a commentary on chapter 11, verse 14, of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* in which *dharmadhātu* and *dharmatā* are said to be almost synonymous: *na khalu tasmād evaṃ lakṣaṇād dharmadhātōḥ kimcit anyal loke vidyate dharmatāyā dharmasyābhinnatvāt* / (In truth, there is nothing in the world other than *dharmadhātu* (nature of *dharma*s) with this kind of characteristic, since *dharma* cannot be separated from *dharmatā* [nature of *dharma*s]). AMsa 59.1–2. Thurman, 2004: 122, and Lévi, 1911: 108. My renderings of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* are based on the English translation in Thurman, 2004, and the French translation in Lévi, 1911. It is plausible that in Chinese Huayan doctrine, (3) and (4) correspond, respectively, to *dharmadhātu* as “each thing” (*shì fājiè* 事法界) and to *dharmadhātu* as “principle of all *dharma*s” (*lǐ fājiè* 理法界). I posit that the classification of *fājiè* in Chinese Huayan doctrine may be rooted in the analysis of the Sanskrit term *dharmadhātu* and remains useful to analyze the idea of *dharmadhātu* even in modern times. This topic will be explored in the future.

²⁶ This source is also discussed in §7.3. *Madhyāntavibhāga*, ch. 5, verse 19: *dharmadhātuvinirmukto yasmād dharmo na vidyate / sāmānyalakṣaṇam tasmāt sa ca tatrāvīparyayaḥ* // (Since *dharma* cannot exist independently of *dharma*-nature [*dharmadhātu*], *dharmadhātu* serves as the common characteristic [*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*] of *dharma*s. This implies that there is no inversion in relation to it). MAV 67.8–9. D’Amato, 2012: 181. The *Madhyāntavibhāga* consists of verses traditionally attributed to Maitreya, accompanied by its commentary, the *Madhyāntavibhāga-*

connotations and is often deemed difficult to grasp in its intricacy. However, I contend that these four significations, when regarded as foundational aspects, render the term more accessible.²⁷

According to Sarvāstivādin doctrine, the term *abhidharma* is defined as a comprehensive analysis of all *dharmas*, and a distinction is made between (1) their unique characteristics (*zixiang* 自相/*biexiang* 別相) and (2) their common characteristics (*gongxiang* 共相/*zongxiang* 總相) in the *Da piposuo lun* 大毘婆娑論 (hereafter, **Mahāvibhāṣā*).²⁸ The *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論, which critically examines this view, integrates these two aspects in a monistic manner under the concept of *dharmadhātu*.²⁹ It is my contention that Mahāyāna Buddhism criticizes the Sarvāstivādin perspective on the complex classification of all *dharmas* through its use of the term *dharmadhātu* and seeks to account for all *dharmas* throughout both time and space in a monistic manner.

bhāṣya, composed by Vasubandhu (fl. fourth century). In this chapter, we will collectively refer to these two texts as the *Madhyāntavibhāga* for brevity. My rendering of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* is based on the translation in D'Amato, 2012.

²⁷ One of the reasons why the meaning of *dharmadhātu* in Mahāyāna Buddhism has been so difficult to understand is that *dharmadhātu* used in its sense as one of the eighteen realms or, more appropriately, elements, seems to be far different from Mahāyāna Buddhist usage of the term. However, as the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* defines *dharmadhātu* as “all *dharmas*” (AKBh 12.8), my understanding is consistent. I believe that the difficulty has arisen because previous studies did not fully consider why *dharmadhātu* has a spatial connotation.

²⁸ “[The significance of] Abhidharma lies in the analysis of the unique (*svalakṣaṇa* 自相) and common (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa* 共相) characteristics of all *dharmas*” (*fenbie zhufa zixiang gongxiang shi apidamo* 分別諸法自相共相是阿毘達磨; T1545:27[I].1c28–29). In the corresponding passage in another version of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Apitan piposha lun* 阿毘曇毘婆娑論), translated by Buddhavarman 浮陀跋摩 and Daotai 道泰 and others during the Northern Liang Dynasty (397–429), *zixiang* 自相 and *gongxiang* 共相 are rendered, respectively, as *biexiang* 別相 and *zongxiang* 總相 (T1546:28.2a19). It can be affirmed that the *biexiang* and *zongxiang* in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Da zhidu lun* correspond to *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* and *svalakṣaṇa*, respectively. These two terms, first used in Abhidharma, have different meanings when used in later Buddhist logic. Even in later generations, the Chinese translation of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* 佛地經論 uses these two terms in the same sense as in Abhidharma rather than in the same sense as Buddhist logic (T1530:26.318b4–15). Keenan, 2002: 151–52. For the corresponding part of the Tibetan translation of the text, see D 3997 [*mdo* 'grel, *chī*] 265b2–5. Nishio, 1940a: 106; Nishio, 1940b: 250 VI. 4 (10). For the *Da ban niepan jing* (T374), the *Da zhidu lun* (T1509), and the *Da piposuo lun* (T1545), volume numbers are presented in Roman numerals within square brackets.

²⁹ This passage will be discussed in §4.1.

3.2 *Dharmadhātu* in the Sense of “All *Dharmas*” in Mahāyāna Sūtras

Earlier we saw the word *dharmadhātu* used in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* in a sense very similar to “all *dharma*s.” The same is true of the term’s use in Lokakṣema’s translation of the early Mahāyāna sūtra *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanāsūtra* (hereafter, *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*).³⁰ The Tibetan version of this sūtra was translated from Sanskrit around the ninth century;³¹ a Sanskrit manuscript as well as a comparison between Lokakṣema’s translation and the Tibetan translation (X 9) confirm that the term *dharmadhātu* was already being used in this sense as early as the second century.³² Lokakṣema’s translation for the Tibetan equivalent, **dharmadhātu*, here is *fashen* 法身 (Dharma-body),³³ while his translation for **sarvadharmā* is *zhufa* 諸法 (all *dharma*s):

法身無所不入諸法，亦不見法身有所入。何以故。諸法是法身。如諸法等故，法身亦等，故曰法身所入 (T626:15.401b10–12)

The body of *dharma*s (法身)³⁴ enters into all *dharma*s, but it cannot be seen where the body of *dharma*s enters. For what reasons? All *dharma*s are the body of *dharma*s. Just as all *dharma*s are equal, the body of

³⁰ *Asheshi wang jing* 阿闍世王經 (T626), translated by Lokakṣema; *Wenshuzhili pu chao sanmei jing* 文殊支利普超三昧經 (T627), translated by Dharmarakṣa. See Miyazaki, 2012: 1–22, and 2023: 3–19, for other relevant materials. I indicate the chapter numbers (using roman numerals) and sections given in Miyazaki, 2023.

³¹ D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*]. **Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodana* (Eliminating Ajātaśatru’s Remorse). See Miyazaki, 2023: 4.

³² The term *dharmadhātu* appears in the Sanskrit manuscript of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*: *dharmadh*(tu)ḥ a(...)* *sarvadharmāḥ* (*Ajātaśatru-sūtra* 197, folio 538v2–3); in the Chinese translations: *fashen* 法身 (Lokakṣema) and *fajie* 法界 (Dharmarakṣa).

³³ Harrison, 1992b: 61–63, points out that *fashen* in Lokakṣema’s translations of the **Drumakinnararājapariprcchā* corresponds to the Tibetan *chos kyi dbyings* (**dharmadhātu*). For *chos kyi dbyings* (**dharmadhātu*) in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*, refer to D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 6b5 and 10b4. Harrison, 1978: 14.11, 25.6, and Harrison, 1990: 19 [1S] (93), 29 [2J] (134). This is confirmed by a Sanskrit fragment of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*. See note 32. The character *shen* 身 within *fashen* originally denoted the torso, encompassing the area between the shoulders and the groin while excluding the limbs. Lokakṣema chose to translate the Sanskrit term *dhātu* using the Chinese character *shen*, most likely to convey the idea of the main body or essence. It is crucial to differentiate Lokakṣema’s translation of *fashen* from the later use of *fashen* translated from *dharmakāya* (Dharma-body) within the theory of the Buddha’s body, even though the terms used are the same. See also the chapter by C. Jones, p. 9.

³⁴ Shingan, 2022:92, translates *fashen* 法身 as Dharma-body, which I consider to correspond to **dharmadhātu*. In this context, I employ the term “body” to convey the idea of the primary, central, or principal component. It closely resembles the concept of “essence.”

dharmas is also equal; thus, all *dharmas* are said to enter the body of *dharmas*.³⁵

de bas na chos thams cad chos kyi dbyings kyi rjes su 'brang ba zhes bya mod kyi / chos nyid la ni chos gang yang rjes su 'brang ba med do // de ci'i phyir zhe na / chos thams cad nyid chos kyi dbyings yin te / chos kyi dbyings gang dang mnyam pa chos thams cad kyang de dang mnyam mo //

It is said that all *dharmas* are in conformity with **dharmadhātu*, but in the *dharma*-nature, no *dharma* is in accord with **dharmadhātu*.³⁶ The reason for this is that all *dharmas* means the **dharmadhātu*. In other words, all *dharmas* are also equal to that which is equal to **dharmadhātu*.³⁷

In this passage, *dharmadhātu* and all *dharmas* are used with the same meaning. Thus, the two are used to refer to the same concept in the second half of the second century.

The *Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā* (*Shan yongmeng bore jing* 善勇猛般若經) was composed later than the earlier *Prajñāpāramitās*. It is cited in the *Prajñāpradīpa* written by Bhāviveka, so we know that it existed in the late fifth or early sixth century. The first chapter of this text (*Nidānaparivarta*) contains a passage in which *dharmadhātu* is taken to refer to “all *dharmas*.”

*sarvadharmā iti dharmadhātor etad adhivacanam*³⁸

“All *dharmas*” is a term that describes *dharmadhātu*.

From the definition provided here, it can be inferred that there was a subtle difference in nuance between all *dharmas* and *dharmadhātu* during that time, with the latter bearing a more abstract meaning. Nonetheless, it is possible to verify that the two words are treated as having the same meaning.

We thus come to see that the fact that they are treated as approximate equivalents is confirmed by literature ranging from the *Lokakṣema*

³⁵ Shingan, 2022: 92. My renderings of this sutra are based on the translation in Shingan, 2022, from the Chinese and on the Japanese translation in Miyazaki, 2023, from the Tibetan. This passage is revisited below, in §6.7, focusing on the connection between an individual *dharma* and the concept of *dharmadhātu*.

³⁶ Miyazaki, 2023: 268n44, observes that the Tibetan translation in question presents challenges in comprehension and notes contradictions between the sentences before and after. Additionally, he highlights the presence of both *dharmatā* and *dharmadhātu* in the Tibetan translation.

³⁷ D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 252a2–4. Harrison, 1992b: 64, observes that in the passage found in T626:15.401b9–12, the term *fashen* corresponds to the Tibetan *chos kyi dbyings* (**dharmadhātu*). Miyazaki, 2023: 244; 84000: 1.282.

³⁸ *Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā* 15.19.

translation in the second century to the *Suvikrāntavikrāmiparipṛcchā* in the fifth century.³⁹

The intriguing example of the **Drumakinnararājaparipṛcchā* is discussed in Harrison, 1992: 62.⁴⁰ It pertains to a particular sūtra that has been preserved in two Chinese versions, one by Lokakṣema and the other by Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什; fl. 344–413), with a Tibetan translation also available.

Lokakṣema: 菩薩者自己界於法身而甚淨。其知是者後乃受決 (T624:15.363a11–12)

The bodhisattva's own essence (*ziji jie* 自己界) is within the body of dharmas (*fashen* 法身, **dharmadhātu*) and is extremely pure; knowing this, he then receives assurance [of future awakening].

Kumārajīva: 若如是者佛授記，今我性等一切法，已性無我等空性，菩提之性猶虛空 (T625:15.383a25–26)

If one is like this, the Buddha gives an assurance [of future awakening.] Now the essence of *ātman* is equal to all dharmas. One's own nature, which is the absence of self, is the same as the nature of emptiness; the nature of awakening is like space.

*chos rnam kun dang bdag tu rang bzhin mnyam //
bdag ni bdag med stong pa'i rang bzhin te //*⁴¹

³⁹ In the following passages from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 3 §6), *dharmadhātu* and *sarvadharmā* are not treated as strict synonyms, but it is assumed that they share a close meaning: *dharmadhātuṣamavasaraṇaḥ sarvadharmāsamāhitaḥ* (It leads to the attainment of the totality of dharmas (*dharmadhātu*), it is that in which all dharmas are coalesced). Vkn 21.23–22.1/82–83. Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 25. Gómez and Harrison's translation "totality of *dharmas*" is based on the analysis in Harrison, 1992b. According to Sakaino Kōyō 境野黄洋 (1871–1933) (Sakaino, 1935: 147–48), and He, 2019: 16, the earliest extant translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* was carried out by Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 222–253) and revised by Dharmarakṣa. In Zhi Qian's translation (ch. 3 §6, §52; ch. 4 §20), *dharmadhātu* is translated as *faqing* 法情 (emotion of *dharma*). Cf. *fo yi faqing zhu pu ru zai* 佛以法情住普入哉 (ch. 3 §52; T474:14.524a10–11). See the chapter by Eric M. Greene for background on the translation of *dhātu* as *qing* 情 in Chinese translations in the later Han dynasty. My rendering of the sūtra is based on the translation, from the Sanskrit, found in Gómez and Harrison, 2022. Section numbers are based on Lamotte, 1962. The numbers after Vkn are the page and line numbers of the two texts published in 2006 and 2004, as given in the reference *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*.

⁴⁰ *Dun zhen tuo luo suowen rulai sanmei jing* 仵真陀羅所問如來三昧經 (T624), translated by Lokakṣema; *Da shu jinmaluo wang suowen jing* 大樹緊那羅王所問經 (T625), translated by Kumārajīva; D 157 **Drumakinnararājaparipṛcchā* (Questions of the Kinnara King Druma; hereafter, *Drumakinnararāja*).

⁴¹ D 157 [*mdo sde, pha*] 301b1. Harrison, 1992a: 223 [10H][28], and 84000: 1.361. This section is also discussed in note 166.

All *dharmas* are the same as one's own nature.
One's nature is emptiness, absence of self.

In this verse, Lokakṣema's translation employs the term *fashen* 法身, suggesting the original term **dharmadhātu*. In contrast, Kumārajīva uses *yiqie fa* 一切法 (**sarvadharmā*), aligning with the Tibetan translation, *chos rnams kun* (**sarvadharmā*). The reason behind this variation remains unclear, but it serves as an example of the overlapping nature of the two concepts, "all *dharmas*" and *dharmadhātu*.⁴²

3.3 Why *Dharmadhātu* Has a Spatial Meaning

It is important to note the tendency to translate *dharmadhātu* using terms having a spatial connotation, such as "*dharma*-realm," "universe," "domain of *dharmas*" (*hō no ryōiki* 法の領域), and "world of awakening (or truth)" (*satori [shinri] no sekai* 悟り[真理]の世界).⁴³ Silk, 2015: 28, explores the concept of *dhātu*, attributing to it the significance of "realm." However, the present inquiry centers on the underlying reason for ascribing the connotation of "space" to the term *dharmadhātu*.⁴⁴

⁴² Lokakṣema's translation employs the term *ziji jie* 自己界, hinting at the original term **ātmadhātu*. The Tibetan translation, on the other hand, uses *bdag tu rang bzhin*, suggesting the possible usage of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*. Kumārajīva often translates *dhātu* as *xing* 性 rather than *jie* 界. He also translates *svabhāva* as *xing*. Therefore, Kumārajīva's use of the term *woxing* 我性 does not definitively indicate whether the original term was *dhātu* or not. While Lokakṣema's translation suggests *dhātu*, the Tibetan version suggests *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*. This further illustrates the commonality between these concepts. See also note 75. In later periods, the term *ātmadhātu* is used synonymously with *dharmadhātu* in some texts like the *Gaganagañjaparīṣcchā*. Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774): T404:13.621a1–2; D 148 [*mdo sde, pa*] 263b5–6; Han, 2020: 267, IV §34. In the text, the interconnectedness of all *dharmas* and of *dharmadhātu* becomes an important theme, providing another indication of the overlap between these two concepts. See also §6.10 and note 264.

⁴³ Takasaki, 1975: 375n14. See also note 309. May, 1971: 287 (in French) says of *dharmadhātu* that it is a "term difficult to interpret that can be translated as the "domain of the Law" as well as the "foundation of phenomena." Cf. Schmithausen, 1969: 147, where we find "*Bereich der Lehre*" (domain of teaching), "*der [gesamte] Bereich der Gegebenheiten*" (the [entire] domain of the entities), and "*das Universum*" (the universe). See also notes 16 and 20 for examples of *dhātu* being understood as a "space," "domain," "sphere," or "region." Again, as mentioned there, I do not agree with these interpretations.

⁴⁴ This idea of mine is led by the hitherto overlooked understanding of *dhātu* by Eugène Burnouf (1801–52) (Burnouf, 1844; Burnouf, 1852) and the understanding of *jie* 界 and of *xing* 性 as translations of *dhātu* by Jingying si Huiyuan 淨影寺慧遠 (523–592) in the *Dasheng yi zhang* 大乘義章 (T1851:44.633a16–17). I touch on this in my

The association of *dharmadhātu* with the conception of space can be accounted for based upon two reasons: (1) its juxtaposition in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* with *ākāśadhātu* (space, void)⁴⁵ and (2) its association in that sūtra with the verb $\sqrt{sphar}$, which means “to expand/pervade/spread (to an entire space).”⁴⁶ This association is also observed in the overall context of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, as evidenced by its Chinese translations.⁴⁷ In early Buddhist literature, the Pāli verb $\sqrt{sphur}$ (also $\sqrt{sphar}$) was employed to convey the idea of spreading throughout space without using the word *dharmadhātu*. For example, in the *Tevijjasuttam* (*Dīgha-nikāya* no. 13), this verb refers to “spreading the mind (*cetas*) in the ten (i.e., all) directions” during meditation on the four immeasurables (Pāli *appamaññā*, Skt. *apramāṇya*, *si wuliang xin* 四無量心).⁴⁸ The terms $\sqrt{sphar}$ and *vipula* (vast)

introduction to the current volume, but in this chapter I merely wish to indicate that *dharmadhātu* should be held as “all *dharmas*” or “totality of *dharmas*.”

⁴⁵ I believe that the term *ākāśadhātu*, which contains the ending term *dhātu*, can be understood as “the collective void” or “all voidness” in a manner analogous to the case of *sattvadhātu*, as shown in note 22. According to a search conducted on the website Dharmadhātu Research Project (<https://mahayana-scriptures.com/en>), the term *ākāśadhātu* in the *Daśabhūmika* is consistently associated with *dharmadhātuvipulam* (vast *dharmadhātu*) in eleven instances (ch. 1 §16; ch. 2 §§14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23), and with *dharmadhātuparama* (supreme *dharmadhātu*) in three instances (ch. 2 §3; ch. 4 §16; ch. 11 §10).

⁴⁶ According to a search conducted on Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* the term *dharmadhātusphar* appears 28 times and *dharmadhātum sphar* appears 48 times. These are just a few instances demonstrating the relationship between these terms. In the *Daśabhūmika*, the term *dharmadhātu* appears 30 times and the verb $\sqrt{sphar}$ is found 20 times. In the sūtra, the word $\sqrt{sphar}$ is frequently associated with *lokadhātu*, while *dharmadhātu* and $\sqrt{sphar}$ are connected only once, in the eleventh chapter in §1, verse 5: *dharmadhātuvipulān spharītva* (pervading the vast totality of *dharmas*). See Honda, 1968: 257. My rendering of the *Daśabhūmika* is based on the translation in Honda, 1968.

⁴⁷ The Chinese translations that correspond to the verb $\sqrt{sphar}$ include *bianman* 遍滿, *zhoubian* 周遍, *pubian* 普遍, and *chongman* 充滿. However, it is worth noting that these translations do not have a one-to-one correspondence with the verb $\sqrt{sphar}$. For instance, *zhou bian* is also used to translate *samavasaraṇa*, a concept associated with *dharmadhātu* in sūtras such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 3 §6) and the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā* (IV §34). I plan to delve deeper into these Chinese terms in future discussions.

⁴⁸ PTS I 250.32–251.4. In the Pāli canon, it appears in the form *pharitvā*. Cf. Tödō, 1977: 150–51. This meditation practice is also crucial for considering the origins of the term non-duality (*advaya*) in Buddhist literature. For the four immeasurables, see Maithrimurthi, 1999. Another important usage of $\sqrt{sphur}$ and $\sqrt{sphar}$ is the expression *kāyaṃ parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena pharitvā*, which means “filling the body with the pure mind.” *Dīgha-nikāya* nos. 2, 10; *Majjhima-nikāya* nos. 39, 77,

used in this meditation practice on the four immeasurables are closely related to *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Daśabhūmika*, respectively, although I do not discuss them extensively in this chapter.⁴⁹ In other words, during the early stages of Buddhism, these terms invoked associations with the concept of space. The usage of the verb *√sphar* in conjunction with *dharmadhātu* in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* evokes the spatial imagery associated with the word *dharmadhātu*.

While the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* may evoke an image of space through the term *dharmadhātu*, it is more appropriate to conceive of *dharmadhātu* as “all *dharma*s” or as “the essence of *dharma*(s).”

4 Monistic Description in the Mahāyāna Sūtras

4.1 All *Dharmas* as “One Taste” in Early Mahāyāna Sūtras

Before delving into the inherent purity of the mind in Mahāyāna sūtras in section 5, it is important to note that the monistic description of all *dharma*s as having “one taste” (*ekarasa*, *yīwei* 一味), “one and the same characteristic” (*ekalakṣaṇa*, *yixiang* 一相), and indivisibility or “non-duality” (*advaya*, *bu er* 不二) is indeed present in the Mahāyāna sūtras. Instances where the term *dharmadhātu* is linked with *ekarasa* or *advaya* can also be observed in Sanskrit.

The early instances of these monistic portrayals in the Mahāyāna sūtras can be found in Lokakṣema’s translations. The term “one taste” (*yīwei* 一味), signifying the unity rather than diversity of *dharma*s,⁵⁰ is found in numerous Mahāyāna sūtras. Its roots can be found in the parable of the great ocean in the *Udāna* of the Pāli canon, one of the earlier Buddhist scriptures. This content is shared with the *Cūḷavagga*, in the Pāli Vinaya, and the *Pahārādasutta* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and elsewhere.⁵¹ In this parable, the ocean is described as

119; *Aṅguttara-nikāya* V 28 (PTS III 27.2–3). This is also related to the pure mind as discussed in this chapter, though I do not examine it fully.

⁴⁹ Some believe that the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Daśabhūmika* were composed in India independently of the rest of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, unlike its compilation in China. I consider both works to be closely related in content to the other chapters in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*.

⁵⁰ I will not address the question of whether *dharma*s are teachings or phenomena/things within the context where the term *ekarasa* is employed in this chapter. See note 3.

⁵¹ For the sake of convenience, I refer readers to the parallels presented on the website SuttaCentral rather than detailing them here. <https://suttacentral.net>.

having eight marvels, which are then shown to have parallels in Buddhist teachings. In the second of these eight parallels, for example, the establishment of the Dharma (teaching) (*thitadhammo*) is asserted; in the fifth, it is asserted that there is no increase or decrease in the quantity of the teachings. These parallels hold great significance as a backdrop for a monistic interpretation of one taste in Mahāyāna sūtras.⁵² The fifth parallel in particular is the basis for the claim of non-increase/decrease of *dharmadhātu* in some Mahāyāna sūtras, like the *Brahmapariṣṭchā*⁵³ and the **Tathāgatotpattisambhavanirdeśa* (Teaching on the Emergence of the Tathāgata).⁵⁴ It later contributed to the conception of non-increase/decrease found in the **Anūnatvāpūṇatvanirdeśa-parivarta*.⁵⁵ The last two are related to *tathāgatagarbha* thought as cited in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

The sixth of the eight marvels employs the analogy that the sea tastes the same everywhere to illustrate that *dhamma* and *vinaya* are of the same nature everywhere in the *Pahārādasuttaṃ* within the *Āṅuttara-nikāya*.

Just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt; even so the teachings (*dhamma*) and regulations (*vinaya*) are of one taste, the taste of release. ... This is the sixth marvel.⁵⁶

⁵² In the portion of the *Mahāyāna Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (D 120 [*mdo sde, tha*] **Mahāpari-nirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*) that exists only in Chinese translation, the parable of the great ocean is quoted verbatim from early Buddhist scriptures (T374:12[XXXII].558c23–559b17). Based on this passage, a famous Japanese monk, Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), wrote: “In the seawater of the name of marvel, the corpses of the slanderers do not stay, and when the ten thousand rivers of many evils return, they are all of one taste in the ocean of merit” (名号不思議の海水は 逆謗の死骸もとどまらず 衆悪の万川帰しぬれば 功德のうしほに一味なり). *Kōsō wasan* 高僧和讃. Hirota et al., 1997: 371.41; “They are like waters that, on entering the ocean, become one in taste with it” (凡聖逆謗齊回入, 如眾水入海一味). *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信證. Hirota et al., 1997: 70.

⁵³ *Chi xin fantian suowen jing* 持心梵天所問經 (T586), translated by Dharmarakṣa; *Si yi fantian suowen jing* 思益梵天所問經 (T586), translated by Kumārajīva; D 160 **Brahmaviśeṣacintipariṣṭchā* (Questions of Brahmaviśeṣacintin). See Goshima, 1988: 49–53, for other relevant materials. D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 90b2–3, 92b1. Goshima, 2017: 98, 102 (2) XXXV-1, 2; 84000: 1.669, 679.

⁵⁴ This sūtra is a part of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* series and is commonly referred to as the *Rulai xing qi jing* 如來性起經. The earliest Chinese translation of this sūtra is Dharmarakṣa’s *Rulai xing xian jing* 如來興顯經 (T291). See also note 64.

⁵⁵ *Bu zeng bu jian jing* 不增不減經. See Silk, 2015: 22.

⁵⁶ *Pahārādasuttaṃ* (Āṅuttara-nikāya VIII 19). See Hare, 1935: 139. This translation represents an abbreviated version of the original text. *Seyyathā pi, pahārāda, mahāsamuddo ekaraso* loṇaraso; *evam eva kho, pahārāda, ayaṃ dhamma-*

E. M. Hare notes the similarity between the parables of one taste found in the *Pahārādasutta* and in the Upaniṣads.⁵⁷ Many researchers, especially those in Japanese academia, would be tempted to reject the similarity between Upanishadic monism and the Buddhist monistic description. However, it must first be acknowledged that the use of the parable of the great ocean having one taste makes the two monistic frameworks very similar, at least externally.⁵⁸ This parable is utilized in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*, as we will examine soon. It is later used in the *Brahmapariṣcchā*⁵⁹ and in the **Tathāgatopattisambhavanirdeśa*⁶⁰ as well.

Now, let us examine the concept of “one taste” in Lokakṣema's translations of Mahāyāna sutras. The following passage is from the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (I §21),⁶¹ where various bodhisattvas elucidate the means to attain ultimate knowledge (*wuji hui* 無極慧, *wuji zhizhi* 無極智慧, and *sayunruo* 薩芸若), which corresponds to all-knowing (**sarvajña*[tā]).

海意菩薩言，其心當如海所受，慧而無極。譬如海受於眾流，合為一味，菩薩以諸所有合為一法。所以者何。用微妙故。不與十二因緣有所變。念法身亦不增亦不減，為一切作功德 (T626:15.390a26–b1)

Sāgaramati said: One's mind should be like the sea that accepts [all *dharmas*], and one's knowledge should be limitless. Just as the sea receives all rivers, which combine to become of one taste, a bodhisattva unites all beings to become a single *dharma*. Why? Because [this single *dharma*] is very subtle; it is not transformed by the twelve links of dependent origination. Contemplating the body of *dharmas* (*fashen* 法身 **dharmadhātu*), which neither increases nor decreases, one will cultivate merit for all beings.⁶²

vinayo ekaraso, vimuttiraso. Aṅguttara-nikāya VIII 19, PTS IV 203.6–9. Cf. *Udāna* V.5 PTS 54.4–7, 56.1–5. *Cūlavagga* 9.1.3 PTS II 238.6–9, 239.30–35.

⁵⁷ Hare, 1935: 139n5, points out the sentences from the *Maitrāyaṇa-Brahmaṇa-Upaniṣad* 6.35 (Müller, 1884: 336) and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 2.4.12 (Müller, 1884: 111). For the relationship between the early Buddhist scriptures and the Upaniṣads, see the references provided in Jones, 2021: 8n21.

⁵⁸ Cf. the chapter by Christopher Jones, pp. 3n7 and 30n96.

⁵⁹ D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 90b3–4, 92b1. Goshima, 2017: 98, 102 (5) XXXV–1,2; 84000: 1.669, 679.

⁶⁰ Dharmarakṣa: T291:10.609a10; Buddhahadra: T278:9.626a9; Śikṣānanda: T279:10.274b14; D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 123b2–3. Takasaki, 1975: 240.

⁶¹ D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 215b7–216a1. Miyazaki, 2023: 45; 84000: 1.20.

⁶² Shingan, 2022: 21. See also Harrison, 1992b: 63, for this passage.

In this context, the bodhisattva *Sāgaramati (*Haiyi* 海意, meaning “awareness like the sea”) employs the analogy of the sea,⁶³ emphasizing that all *dharma*s share the same taste. Notably, as the term *fashen* 法身 often corresponds to *dharmadhātu* in Lokakṣema’s translations, it is worth highlighting the statement in the above quote that the “**dharmadhātu*... neither increases nor decreases.”⁶⁴

Furthermore, in the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 5), all *dharma*s are mentioned elsewhere as having “one taste,” as illustrated by the following statement. A translation of the ninth-century Tibetan version is also provided below, as relevant comparisons can be drawn.

Lokakṣema: 諸法一味，調脫故 (T626:15.400c24)

All *dharma*s are of one taste, namely [the taste of] liberation.⁶⁵

rgyal po chen po chos thams cad ni rnam par grol ba'i rjes su 'jug pas ro gcig pa'o //

O Great King, since all dharmas accord with liberation, they have one taste (**ekarasa*).⁶⁶

Next, let us explore the concept of “one taste” as found in the *Kāśyapa-parivarta* (§40),⁶⁷ commonly understood to be a relatively early Mahāyāna

⁶³ Within the contextual framework of the preceding and subsequent bodhisattvas, there often exists a correlation between their appellations and the doctrines they expound. Regarding this particular bodhisattva, both the nomenclature and the teachings are intertwined through the common theme of the sea.

⁶⁴ However, it should also be noted that in the Tibetan translation, the term used is not **dharmadhātu*, but rather the negative form of *gang yang* (anything). See also Harrison, 1992b: 63. The statement “**dharmadhātu* neither increases nor decreases” appears in the **Tathāgatotpattisambhavanirdeśa* (Chinese and Tibetan translations) and the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra* (Chinese and Tibetan translations). The **Tathāgatotpattisambhavanirdeśa* as translated by Buddhahadra (*fo tuo batuoluo* 佛陀跋陀羅, 359–429) contains the following: 清淨法界無增無減 (T278:9.622b21) (pure *dharmadhātu* neither increases nor decreases); Dharmarakṣa: T291:10.605a28–29; Śikṣānanda: T279:10.271a29–b1, 273a13; D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 110b7–111a1. Takasaki, 1975: 211, 227. The *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra*: 而淨法界無增無減 (T680:16.721a20); D 275 [*mdo sde, ya*] 37b5–7. Nishio, 1940a: 5.18–6.5; Nishio, 1940b: 168 II (5).

⁶⁵ Shingan, 2022: 90.

⁶⁶ D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 250b5. Miyazaki, 2023: 240; 84000: 1.275.

⁶⁷ Miyazaki, 2023: 65, highlights a correlation between a passage in the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (I 21) and another in the *Kāśyapa-parivarta* (§40). Additionally, Goshima, 2017: 98n48, draws attention to a connection between this passage and a simile in the *Brahmapariṣecchā* (XXXV-1) and also notes that when the term *rasa* is employed as a metaphor for concepts like *śūnyatā* (emptiness) or liberation, it carries connotations of elixir, quintessence, and substance. Although Takasaki, 1974: 450–52, briefly

sutra. Lokakṣema's translation of this scripture,⁶⁸ as I demonstrate below, also alludes to the inherent purity of intrinsic nature.

譬如萬川四流皆歸於海，合為一味，菩薩如是。持若干種行，合會功德。持用成願一味，入薩芸若中 (T350:12.190b28-c1)

Just as the currents of the ten thousand [smaller] rivers and four [great] rivers all return to the sea and unite to have one taste, so it is with the bodhisattva. No matter how many practices he adheres to, they unite to be meritorious. His adherence, his application, and the fulfillment of his vow are of one taste, and [this is how] he enters the all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*).⁶⁹

In the Sanskrit text §40,⁷⁰ there is no corresponding Sanskrit word for “all-knowing” (**sarvajña*[*tā*], *sayunruo* 薩芸若). However, in the subsequent verse §41⁷¹ the term *sarvajña(tā)* is present in the Sanskrit text, and Lokakṣema's translation also uses the word *sayunruo* (T350:12.190c2). This suggests that the idea “that which is realized is the one taste” is associated with the term *sarvajña(tā)*. Hence, it can be inferred that the term *ekarasa* was connected to the notion of knowledge encompassing all *dharma*s. Next, let us look at a description in which nature in the sense of essence is depicted as having one taste in §103.

mentions the term *ekarasa* in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* in relation to *tathāgatagarbha* thought, the focus of my examination in the current chapter diverges toward the term's association with *sarvajña(tā)* and monistic thought. We will revisit this section of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* in §7.2.

⁶⁸ I follow the section numbers provided in von Staël-Holstein, 1926, which compares the *Kāśyapaparivarta*'s Sanskrit text with the Tibetan and various Chinese translations; note that it differs from the section of the Chinese translation used by Weller, 1987. Both von Staël-Holstein, 1926, and Pāsādika, 2015, serve as sources for the Sanskrit text.

⁶⁹ See Weller, 1987: 1198 §32. My rendering is based on the German translation from the Chinese found in Weller, 1987.

⁷⁰ *tad yathāpi nāma kāśyapa nānādigvidikṣu mahānādiṣv āpskandho mahāsamudre praviṣṭaḥ sarvaṃ ekaraso bhavati yad uta lavaṇarasah evaṃ eva kāśyapa nānāmukhopacitaṃ kuśalamūlaṃ bodhisattvasya bodhāya pariṇāmitaṃ sarvaṃ ekarasaṃ bhavati yad ida vimuktirasam tatredam ucyate* (O Kāśyapa, also, for example, the large quantities of water from various places, when they enter the ocean, all have one taste, the taste of salt. In the same way, O Kāśyapa, the wholesome roots of the bodhisattvas, which have been accumulated through various kinds of good actions, acquire one taste, that is, the same taste of liberation, when they are turned towards [sentient beings] for the attainment of Buddhahood). KP 69 and Pāsādika, 2015: 38, 127. The rendering of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* is based on the translation in Pāsādika, 2015.

⁷¹ KP 70 and Pāsādika, 2015: 38, 127.

羅漢臧⁷²亦無身行無口行無心行，是臧無有異也。何以故。諸經一味故 (T350:12.192b8–10)

The excellence of the arhats is also without physical acts, without vocal acts, without mental acts. The excellence is without distinction. For what reason? Because all *dharma*s (*zhujing* 諸經) are of one taste.⁷³

The Chinese *zang* 臧 corresponds to the Sanskrit *gotra*, and in this context *zang* is translated as “excellence.”⁷⁴ I utilize this term in the sense of “inborn nature” or “nature in the sense of essence.” While “lineage” and “nature” typically seem to denote distinct concepts in English, there are contexts where they may be linked, particularly when discussing the inherent qualities or characteristics of a specific family or group in Sanskrit. In this correlation, I employ the term “inborn nature” as a translation of *gotra*.⁷⁵ In §103, *zhujing*

⁷² This particular character is rendered as *mie* 滅 (to extinguish) in the Taishō edition, but I have opted to utilize *zang* 臧 (excellence), as found in alternative editions. Following Miyazaki Tenshō’s guidance (in an email message dated May 10, 2023), I note that only the *Kaibao zang* 開寶藏 lineage employs the term *mie* 滅, whereas the original form can be understood as *zang* 臧 or *zang* 藏. It is highly likely that *mie* 滅 is a copying error for *zang* 臧, given their similar glyphs. Takasaki, 1974: 469, raises awareness of the manuscript variations and suggests the term *zang* 藏 (臧). While Weller, 1987: 1161, acknowledges the issue of manuscript discrepancies and offers an extensive discussion, this becomes unnecessary in light of Miyazaki’s proposed resolution. Henceforth, as in this passage, the different readings of Chinese texts are indicated by dotted underlines. These differences are examined in detail only insofar as they are relevant to the discussion in this chapter.

⁷³ Weller, 1987: 1216 §85. The Sanskrit reads: *tatra na karmo na karmābhisamkāro nāpi tatra gotre kāyena karma kṛyate na vācā na manasā... nirviṣeṣaṃ tad gotraṃ sarvadharmāikarasaṭayā* (In its inborn nature, no bodily acts are performed, no acts of speech, no acts of thought. ... Its inborn nature is without differentiation, by virtue of which all *dharma*s are [ultimately] equal in their taste). KP 151; Pāsādika, 2015: 65, 157. Nagao and Sakurabe, 1974: 77–79, renders *gotra* in the passage as *umaretsuki ni yoru honshō* 生まれつきによる本性 (inborn nature) and Pāsādika, 2015: 157, renders it as lineage.

⁷⁴ Initially, I utilized the term *zang* 藏 instead of *zang* 臧. However, following a suggestion from Christopher Jones on February 20, 2024, I have adopted the term *zang* 臧. I maintain the view that Lokakṣema employed this term in the translation of *gotra* or *gautra*. This assertion is likely supported by the usage of *zang* 臧 in contemporary Chinese literature, *Zhugongshu shiyi* 朱公叔謚議, written by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192), to denote innate human dispositions. While *gotra* is primarily understood in terms of family lineage, I contend that it also connotes a distinct “nature” from other clans. Nonetheless, this aspect requires further careful examination.

⁷⁵ Synonyms for *gotra* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* include *bīja*, *dhātu*, and *prakṛti*: *tat punar gotraṃ (bījam ity apy) ucyate dhātuḥ prakṛtir ity api*. BBh 3.6–8. Okada, 2014: 23, notes that *prakṛti* (ch. 8, verse 5, 6; ch. 17, verse 34; ch. 18, verse 19) and *dhātu*

諸經⁷⁶ corresponds to “all *dharma*s,” which have “a single taste.” The Sanskrit formulation *nirviśeṣaṃ tad gotraṃ sarvadharmāikarasatayā* (Its inborn nature is without differentiation, by virtue of which all *dharma*s are of one taste) can be regarded as already existing in Lokakṣema’s time. Here it is said that the essence or inborn nature of arhats is the absence of unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind. Although there are no words that directly imply purity of mind (**citta*) in the surrounding passages, together with §§104 and 125, which we will look at later (in §5.2), it can be said that inborn nature (*gotra*) without distinction (*nirviśeṣaṃ*, *wu you yi* 無有異) is linked to the inherent purity of all *dharma*s. Moreover, it can be inferred that this purity extends to the mind.

When examining the term *ekarasa* in §§40 and 103 of the *Kāśyapa-parivarta*, we observe that it is connected to the terms *sarvajña(tā)* and “all *dharma*s.” These three terms were interrelated in the text translated by Lokakṣema. Thus far, we have examined all five instances of the use of *yiwei* found in Lokakṣema’s translations.

Now, let us turn our attention to the passage in the *Da zhidu lun* where *faxing* 法性 (**dharmadhātu*) is connected to *yiwei*. It is worth noting that Kumārajīva often translates *dharmadhātu* as *faxing* 法性 instead of *fajie* 法界.⁷⁷ In this context, it is stated that the criteria of unique characteristics

(ch. 11, verse 8) are regarded as synonyms of *gotra* in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*’s commentary by Vasubandhu.

⁷⁶ The general Sanskrit equivalent of the Chinese *jīng* 經 is *sūtra*, but according to Karashima, 2010: 262–64, Lokakṣema’s translation of the ASP often uses *jīng* to correspond to the Sanskrit term *dharma*.

⁷⁷ This has already been noted by Louis de La Vallée-Poussin (1869–1938) (La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 753) and Schmithausen, 1969: 147. Before Kumārajīva, *Mokṣala (Wuchaluo 無叉羅) utilized the translation *faxing* for *dharmadhātu* in his rendition of the PSP known as the *Fangguang bore jīng* 放光般若經 (T221) translated in 291. Dharmarakṣa also employs *faxing* for *dharmadhātu* in the following sections of the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (T585.15.11a6–19). Kumārajīva’s rendering of *dharmadhātu* as *faxing* can be seen, for example, in his translation of the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (as well as the same sutra cited in the *Da zhidu lun*), where the Tibetan translation corresponding to *fashen* is **dharmadhātu* (*chos kyi dbyings*). The *Da zhidu lun*: 普華言。一切法定在法性中。有聞者說者不 (T1509:25[XXVIII].267b10–11). Lamotte IV 1849; Roman numerals for this source identify the volume number. Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Brahmapariṣcchā* is as follows: 普華言。一切法皆入法性 (T586:15.43a4). D 160 [*ndo sde, ba*] 49b4–5. “He (*Samantakusuma) said: Venerable Śāriputra, how should one deliver or listen to all *dharma*s, although ‘all *dharma*s’ is decided as unchangeable (**avikāra*, *avipariṇāma*) *dharmadhātu*?” Goshima, 2011: 199 XI–1; 84000: 1.243. Kumārajīva also sometimes uses the word *fajie* for *dharmadhātu*, and Dharmakṣema uses *fajie* as well as *fashen* in some cases.

(**svalakṣaṇa*) and common characteristics (**sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), which the Sarvāstivādins employ to comprehend all *dharma*s, are all assimilated to *faxing* 法性 (**dharmadhātu*).⁷⁸

復次如水性下流故，會歸於海，合為一味。諸法亦如是。一切總相別相皆歸法性，同為一相，是名法性 (T1509:25[XXXII].298b26–28)

Moreover, it is similar to water, which by nature flows downward and for this reason all returns to the sea and combines to become of one taste (**ekarasa*). The same is true of all *dharma*s. All of them having common characteristics (**sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) and unique characteristics (**svalakṣaṇa*), all attributed to the nature of *dharma*s (法性 **dharmadhātu*) and united by having one and the same characteristics (**ekalakṣaṇa*), this is called the nature of *dharma*s.⁷⁹

This passage is part of a commentary on the concepts of *ru* 如 (*tathatā*), *faxing* 法性 (*dharmadhātu*), and *shi ji* 實際 (*bhūtaśi*) as found in the PSP (T223:8.219c14–15).⁸⁰ These three expressions are often listed together as expressions for what is “absolute truth” in Mahāyāna Buddhism⁸¹ and frequently appear in the PSP and its commentary, the *Da zhidu lun*. The text quoted above is part of a commentary on *faxing*. In this context, the monistic

It should be noted that the term *faxing* in Kumārajīva’s translation does not always correlate to *dharmadhātu*. See note 329.

⁷⁸ The usage of the terms *zongxiang* 總相 and *biexiang* 別相 in the *Da zhidu lun* indicates a probable reference to Sarvāstivādin teachings. Interestingly, while these terms are frequently encountered in the *Da zhidu lun*, they are entirely absent in Kumārajīva’s translation of the PSP, which is an object of the commentary of the *Da zhidu lun*. While they are found in Buddhahadra’s translation of the *Daśabhūmika* (ch. 2 §17), they are not found in the translation of this work by Kumārajīva. This represents an exception to the general pattern, as most of Buddhahadra’s translation choices are typically thought to emulate Kumārajīva’s. This particular passage had a significant impact on the formulation of the “six characteristics” (*liu xiang* 六相) in the Huayan doctrine. However, it is worth noting that the original Sanskrit words used in this context are *salakṣaṇa* and *vilakṣaṇa*, rather than *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* and *svalakṣaṇa*. The terms *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* are found in the *Daśabhūmika* ch. 6 §4: *svasāmānyalakṣaṇānubodhāl lakṣaṇasatyam prajānāti* (He knows the truth of characteristics because he understands unique and common characteristics). Honda, 1968: 176. Kumārajīva translates this as *fenbie zhufa zixiang gu* 分別諸法自相故 (to distinguish between their own characteristics of all *dharma*s; T286:10. 511c29–512a1). Refer to J. Zamorski’s chapter (p. 96) for Taixu’s 太虛 (1890–1947) assertion that *fajie* (**dharmadhātu*) is nothing other than *zongxiang* (common characteristics), a perspective articulated by this prominent modern Chinese Buddhist reformer.

⁷⁹ Lamotte V 2197. My rendering is based on Lamotte’s French translation from the Chinese.

⁸⁰ The corresponding Sanskrit is found in PSP I–1:33.25–29.

⁸¹ We observe that this trio is employed in the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* in §6.10.

terms “one taste” and “one and the same characteristic” are mentioned. All *dharmas* are described as possessing the quality of “one taste” (*ekarasa*), while their common and unique characteristics are ultimately assimilated into the concept of *dharmadhātu*.⁸² This is a natural alignment, considering that *dharmadhātu* carries the meanings of both common and unique characteristics. The *Madhyāntavibhāga* (ch. 5, verse 19) defines *dharmadhātu* as **sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (common characteristic). Without mentioning *dharmadhātu*, but instead *sarvadharmā*, the text, in the immediately preceding verse (ch. 5, verse 18), also defines *svalakṣaṇa* (unique characteristic). Although the specific term *dharmadhātu* is not mentioned in this passage, the nature of *dharma(s)* (*dharmadhātu*) can also represent the essence of an individual *dharma* of all *dharmas* as *svalakṣaṇa*. Because the dual meanings, common and unique characteristics, are finally summarized to *dharmadhātu*, it is taught in this section of the *Da zhidu lun* that *dharmadhātu* is considered as “one and the same in character (**ekalakṣaṇa*).” The intention behind this passage may be to critically transcend the Sarvāstivādin’s emphasis on the distinction between common and unique characteristics, thereby offering a new doctrinal perspective.⁸³

4.2 *Advaya* and *Ekalakṣaṇa* in Early Mahāyāna Sūtras

Continuing on from the concept of *ekarasa*, we will now examine other expressions suggesting a monistic conception, such as *advaya* and *ekalakṣaṇa*, which describe “all *dharmas*” and *dharmadhātu*.⁸⁴ It is

⁸² It is difficult to say whether this passage actually existed in Sanskrit, just as there are questions related to the authorship and translation of the *Da zhidu lun*. However, this passage can at least be said to represent the understanding held by Kumārajīva of the synthesis of two types of characteristics with *faxing* 法性 (**dharmadhātu*).

⁸³ Nishi Giyū 西義雄 (Nishi, 1978: 3b, 4b) contends that subsequent to the incorporation of the inherent purity of the mind by the compilers of the early *Prajñāpāramitās* in South India, a critical assimilation with Sarvāstivādin doctrine occurred in North India, with a concurrent adoption of the Sarvāstivādin perspective on bodhisattvas. Though Nishi’s argument might appear a bit presumptuous in a contemporary context, it merits attention owing to his comprehensive engagement with both Abhidharma and the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

⁸⁴ There are other monistic expressions worth considering, such as *ekanaya* and *samatā*, but such an investigation lies outside the scope of this chapter. On *ekanaya*, see Lamotte, 1962: 214–15n144; Lamotte and Boin, 1976: 109–10n144; and Goshima, 2011: 215 (25). Matsumoto, 1989: 243–47, associates the term *samatā* with the monistic perspective of *tathāgatagarbha* thought. Lokakṣema’s translation of *samatā* as one (*yi* 一) and *prakṛti* as purity (*jing* 淨) is discussed in this section and §5.3.

important to note that these expressions appear extensively throughout the Mahāyāna sūtras, and the passages presented here are only a selection from early examples from Mahāyāna literature.

A comparison of several versions of the ASP reveals that the term *advaya*, frequently encountered in Sanskrit texts, is seldom found in Lokakṣema's translation of the ASP, suggesting that most of these instances might have been interpolated at a later stage,⁸⁵ and the same observation applies to the term *dharmadhātu* in the ASP.⁸⁶ This is a matter of significance in connection with the development of the ASP but will not be addressed within the scope of this chapter.

Let us now examine the occurrence of the term *advaya* (indivisible, non-dual) in relation to “all *dharma*s” in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 5).

諸法無有雙者，謂無有侶。諸法無有侶，謂一心故。諸法一心，謂脫故 (T626:15.400c14–15)

That all *dharma*s are without counterparts expresses that they have no partners. All *dharma*s have no partners because there is said to be one mind. All *dharma*s are one mind because it [combines with] liberation.⁸⁷

rgyal po chen po chos thams cad ni gnyis su med pa'i phyir gnyen po med pa'o // rgyal po chen po chos thams cad ni mtha' spangs pa'i phyir gnyis su med pa'o //

O Great King, since all *dharma*s are indivisible (**advaya*), they have nothing to compare with each other. O Great King, since all *dharma*s avoid limitation, they are also indivisible (**advaya*).⁸⁸

In Lokakṣema's translation, the term *yixin* 一心 does not have a single corresponding word in the Tibetan text; it is often, but not always, a translation of the word *dhyāna* (concentration of mind, contemplation) within

⁸⁵ According to a search on GRETIL based on Vaidya's Sanskrit text, the term *advaya* is found in thirty-six instances. Among these, the phrase *advayam etad advaidhikāram* ([They are] non-dual and not to be divided) occurs in nineteen instances. See also Matsumoto, 1989: 248, 295n42. This specific expression is not mirrored in Lokakṣema's rendering of the ASP. Nevertheless, in §5.3 we will observe that even in Lokakṣema's translation the concept of “non-duality” emerges in conjunction with the inherent purity of the mind.

⁸⁶ As Takeda, 2003: 56–57n23, has highlighted, instances of the word *dharmadhātu* in the ASP may be later additions. While the current searchable data allows for more precision, the general conclusion remains consistent with Takeda's observation.

⁸⁷ Shingan, 2022: 90.

⁸⁸ D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 250a6–7. Miyazaki, 2023: 240; 84000: 1.274.

the six perfections.⁸⁹ The terms *shuang* 雙 (counterpart) and *lǚ* 侶 (partner) seem to correspond to the concept of two (**dvaya*). The word for “one mind,” which appears twice here, might correspond to *advaya*. In the *Sarvadharmāpravṛttinirdeśa*,⁹⁰ there is an example where *advaya* is translated as *yī* — (oneness).⁹¹ In any case the concept of non-duality or indivisibility (**advaya*) can be said to have already existed in Lokakṣema’s translation. We shall see later (§5.2) that immediately preceding this sentence it is stated that “all *dharma*s are pure.”

It is worth noting that monistic descriptions for all *dharma*s can also be found in the **Pratyutpannabuddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhisūtra* (*Bozhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 T418),⁹² a sutra on the subject of meditation that was translated by Lokakṣema. The chapter of this sutra on ascetic practice adduces a list of 153 definitions of the contemplation (*samādhi*), which is also the name of the sutra and is called “Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present.”⁹³ Let us next examine some of the notable expressions of this sutra in Lokakṣema’s translation and in the Tibetan translation:⁹⁴

(129) Lokakṣema: regarding all *dharma*s as one
Tibetan: Sameness of [attitude toward] all *dharma*s⁹⁵

(134) Lokakṣema: plunging into the *dharma*s
Tibetan: Entrance to the *dharma*-nature (**dharmadhātu*)⁹⁶

(139) Lokakṣema: the realization that everything is non-dual
Tibetan: [Realization of the] non-duality of all *dharma*s⁹⁷

⁸⁹ Karashima, 2010: 565–66.

⁹⁰ *Zhufa wu xing jing* 諸法無行經 (T650), translated by Kumārajīva. See Braarvig, 2000: xxii, for other relevant materials.

⁹¹ See note 122.

⁹² D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] **Pratyutpannabuddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhisūtra* (Sūtra on the Samādhi in which the Buddhas of the Present All Stand Before One). Hereafter *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*. See Sueki, 1989: 314–16, and Harrison, 1990: xv–xvii, for other relevant materials.

⁹³ This chapter is considered the oldest part in the sutra. See Sueki, 1989: 321–23.

⁹⁴ T418:13.904c26–27. Harrison, 1998: 20. D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 10b4–6. Harrison, 1978: 24.29–25.13, and Harrison, 1990: 29–30 [2I] [2J]. The material in square brackets and the numbers in parentheses refer to Paul Harrison’s translation based on the Tibetan text. My rendering of Lokakṣema’s translation is based on the translation in Harrison, 1998; my rendering of the Tibetan is based on the translation in Harrison, 1990.

⁹⁵ *yiqie yi ji* 一切一計; *chos thams cad la mnyam pa*.

⁹⁶ *zhong fa zhong de xia* 中法中得下; *chos kyi dbyings la ’jug pa*.

⁹⁷ *yiqie bu er jue* 一切不二覺; *chos thams cad la gnyis su med pa*.

(141) Lokakṣema: [missing or integrated into 142]

Tibetan: Focusing of the mind (Skt. **cetasa ekotībhāva*?)⁹⁸

(142) Lokakṣema: all the buddhas are subsumed within a single thought

Tibetan: Entrance into unobstructed cognition with [?] all the Buddhas⁹⁹

Given the occurrence of the term **dharmadhātu* in expression 134, let us temporarily set aside the monistic description and concentrate on the words that conclude with *dhātu* in expressions 134–37. In the Tibetan translation, the term **dharmadhātu* appears first. Subsequent to this, the words **ākāśadhātu*, **sattvadhātu*, and **nirvāṇadhātu* emerge in the sequence shown below. Although specific examples are not given in this chapter due to limitations of space, it becomes evident from Dharmarakṣa onward that terms ending with *dhātu* are sometimes treated as “synonyms.” We find here an early example of the practice of enumeration (even though a direct Chinese equivalent for *dhātu* is not apparent in the following), since establishing the terms as synonymous requires that they be explicitly enumerated.

(134) *zhong fa zhong de xia* 中法中得下 [134] plunging into the Dharma

(135) *yi liao kong yi* 以了空意 [135] by understanding emptiness

(136) *yi ji ren yi bu you yi bu mie* 意計人亦不有亦不滅 [136] thinking of people as neither existing nor perishing

(137) *zi zheng wuwei* 自證無為 [137] realizing nonaction for oneself (T418:13.904c25–26)¹⁰⁰

	Lokakṣema's translation	Sanskrit deduced from Chinese translation	Tibetan translation ¹⁰¹	Sanskrit deduced from Tibetan translation
(134)	<i>fa</i> 法	<i>*dharma</i>	<i>chos kyi dbyings</i>	<i>*dharmadhātu</i>
(135)	<i>kong</i> 空	<i>*ākāśa</i>	<i>nam mkha'i kham</i>	<i>*ākāśadhātu</i>
(136)	<i>ren</i> 人	<i>*sattva</i>	<i>sems can gyi kham</i>	<i>*sattvadhātu</i>
(137)	<i>wuwei</i> 無為	<i>*nirvāṇa</i>	<i>mya ngan las das pa'i dbyings</i>	<i>*nirvāṇadhātu</i>

⁹⁸ *sems kyi rgyud gcig tu gyur pa*.

⁹⁹ *yi qie fo wei yinian ru* 一切佛為一念入; *sangs rgyas thams cad dang thogs pa med pa'i ye shes la 'jug pa*.

¹⁰⁰ Harrison, 1998: 21, translated from the Chinese; I have added the numbers in square brackets for clarity based on a comparison with the Tibetan translation.

¹⁰¹ D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 10b4–5. Harrison, 1978: 25.6–9, and Harrison, 1990: 29 [2J].

In Lokakṣema's translation, it appears that the Chinese terms *kong* 空 (space), *ren* 人 (sentient beings), and *wuwei* 無為 (non-action or *nirvāṇa*) correspond, in sequence, to the Sanskrit terms **ākāśadhātu*, **sattvadhātu*, and **nirvāṇadhātu*. When considering the Tibetan translation, there is a reasonable likelihood that Lokakṣema's translation aligns with these Sanskrit terms. I thus contend that Lokakṣema's translation of the *Dou sha jing* 兜沙經 (T280), which is a part of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, also shows such a correspondence.¹⁰²

The sequential recurrence of these terms with the addition of the ending term *dhātu* is notably evident in a passage within the *Daśabhūmika* (ch. 2 §24). In that section, ten words ending with *dhātu* are listed, and these ten items are assumed to be numerous. The bodhisattva then issues a vow: "When all of them are completely exhausted, my vows will also come to an end (will be exhausted)."¹⁰³ Among these, the first five are the most common: (1) *sattvadhātu*, (2) *lokadhātu*, (3) *ākāśadhātu*, (4) *dharmadhātu*, (5) *nirvāṇadhātu*. In this section, the term *dhātu* does not denote space; rather, it signifies the totality of the preceding word.¹⁰⁴

Now let us examine the monistic references. The expressions 141 and 142 are intriguing as they appear to be connected to a monistic interpretation,

¹⁰² The possible deduced Sanskrit words from the *Dou sha jing* are as follows: *Renmin* 人民 **sattvadhātu*; *zhu cha tu* 諸刹土 **lokadhātu*; *fachu* 法處 **dharmadhātu*; *nihuan hui* 泥洹慧 **nirvāṇadhātu*. These terms appear consecutively in a brief passage of the sutra (T280:10.445a15–17). Because of space constraints, I will not present detailed comparisons. Compare especially with **dhātu*, *jie* 界 (T279:10.57c29) in the corresponding passage in Śikṣānanda's translation. See the chapter by Eric Greene (p. 72n92) for Zhi Qian's rendering *dhātu* in **nirvāṇadhātu* as *chu* 處 (T225:8.486a25).

¹⁰³ *yā niṣṭhā yāvaj jñānavartanīdhātuniṣṭhāyāḥ sā me niṣṭhaiṣāṃ mahāprañidhānānām bhavatu* / (My fundamental term of these great vows should be the end (*niṣṭhā*) of a series of [ten] ending with the totality of the cycle of knowledge). See Honda, 1968: 134. See also the introduction of this volume for the relationship between this passage and Kūkai 空海 (774–835).

¹⁰⁴ Given the limited scope of this chapter, I briefly mention the issues regarding their synonymic use in the footnotes. As previously discussed in §3.3, *dharmadhātu* is frequently employed in the *Daśabhūmika* with *ākāśadhātu*. The identification of *dharmadhātu* and *sattvadhātu* in this sense can also be found in the *Drumakinnararāja*. Lokakṣema: T624:15.349c28; Kumārajīva: T625:15.368c17–18; D 157 [*mdo sde, pha*] 257b6. Harrison 1992b: 20 [2D]; 84000: 1.27. The equivalence with *ātmadhātu* (*wo jie* 我界; "self-*dhātu*"), which later gains prominence in the *Aṅgulimālīya Sutra* (See Jones, 2021: 74, 84, 85, 89), appears in the PSP from the earliest Chinese translation. Mokṣala: T221:8.112b10–11; Kumārajīva: T223:8.373b3–4; *subhūtir āha: katham bhagavan tathatā bhūtakotīdharmadhātur ātmadhātuḥ sattvadhātur jīvadhātur jantudhātuḥ pośadhātuḥ puruṣadhātuḥ pudgaladhātuḥ*. PSP 5:112:14–16.

although they are not explicitly monistic. And 141 can be considered an expression of the meditative practice settling one's mind on a single object. I should caution that this would not simply be a monistic expression. If the phrase *cetasa ekotībhāva*¹⁰⁵ might be present in the original Sanskrit text, it would signify an expression related to meditative practice. In 142, the term *yi nian* 一念 is used, which, in subsequent periods, came into use as a translation of *ekacitta* (one mind) or *ekakṣana* (one moment).¹⁰⁶ However, no such examples can be found in any of Lokakṣema's other translations. In the Tibetan translation, the expression is divided into two parts, 141 and 142, but in Lokakṣema's translation, it appears that either one of the parts does not correspond or the two parts are translated together: "all the buddhas are subsumed within a single thought." It is worth noting that both sections 141 and 142 include the term *eka*, but one should exercise caution in assuming that a monistic understanding or instantaneous insight can be inferred from them due to a dearth of further information.

In 129 and 139, we encounter explicit monistic descriptions such as the sameness and non-duality of all *dharma*s. In 129, it can be inferred from the Tibetan translation that the term **samatā* (*mnyam pa*, "equality") was present.¹⁰⁷ The term *yi ji* 一計 (one measure) is found in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Drumakinnararāja*.¹⁰⁸ The corresponding translations into Chinese by Kumārajīva and into Tibetan both employ the negative form to convey that if a bodhisattva achieves acceptance based on awareness of the non-arising of all *dharma*s, he will not contravene all *dharma*s.¹⁰⁹ Both translations are intertwined, to say the least, with the concept of "all *dharma*s." In Lokakṣema's translation, the visibility of the concept "all *dharma*s" is not explicit, making it challenging to discern how he interpreted "one" in the term *yi ji*. However, it is evident that he utilized the term *yi* (one) to signify

¹⁰⁵ See Lévi, 1911: 164n14, and 1912: 502, for the term *ekotī*.

¹⁰⁶ The connection of these terms with instantaneous insight will become evident in section 6.

¹⁰⁷ D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 10b4. Harrison, 1978:24.29. As a brief aside, *samatā* is also a monistic expression. See note 84.

¹⁰⁸ *bu yi you wu, chi yi ji er jin zhi yi qie ren* 不疑有無，持一計而盡知一切人 (T624:15.352c16–17) (He does not doubt that [every person] does not actually exist, but he understands that they have one and the same characteristics, so he can fully comprehend every person).

¹⁰⁹ Kumārajīva's translation: *bu wei yi qie fa, bu ni yi qie fa* 不違一切法，不逆一切法 (It does not contradict all *dharma*s, and it does not oppose all *dharma*s; T625:15.372a24–25); D 157 [*mdo sde, pha*] 268b4. Harrison, 1992a: 71 [3L] 2–3; 84000: 1.103.

a monistic interpretation. In 139, we can deduce from the Tibetan translation that the term **advaya* was employed,¹¹⁰ which aligns well with the concept “non-duality” (*bu er* 不二) that is conveyed in Lokakṣema’s translation. Additionally, Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Drumakinnararāja* features the term *yixiang* 一相 (*ekalakṣaṇa*), which is validated by its correspondence in the Tibetan translation.¹¹¹

As observed in the passage employing terms equivalent to “one taste,” “non-duality,” “one and the same characteristic,” and “equality” in Lokakṣema’s renderings, it can be confirmed that certain monistic descriptions are present in those translations.

Following Lokakṣema’s translations, there was a noticeable increase in monistic expressions in Dharmarakṣa’s translations. The sheer quantity of these expressions has rendered it impractical to encompass all of them within this study. Instead, my examination centers on the monistic depictions of “all *dharma*s” and *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, a text of significance due to its utilization of the concept of *dharmadhātu*.

This is pivotal because against the backdrop of the monistic notion, the seemingly opposing values of transmigration (*saṃsāra*) and *nirvāṇa* are regarded as identical within Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹¹² This idea is intrinsically linked to the inherent purity of the mind, which will be examined in section 5, where I also delve into how the monistic concept aligns theoretically with the Mahāśāṃghika school of mainstream Buddhism.

4.3 *Advaya* and *Ekalakṣaṇa* in Later Mahāyāna Sutras

As is well known, the term *dharmadhātu* is used frequently in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.¹¹³ In this sutra there is a passage that explicitly states, “all *dharma*s have a single character (*ekalakṣaṇa*).” The passage appears in the fifth among the eight chapters of the sutra featuring the successive appearances of goddesses. Compared to the other chapters where characters

¹¹⁰ D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 10b5. Harrison 1978: 25.10.

¹¹¹ This term emerges within the context of three kinds of *saṃādhis*, namely, the *saṃādhi* of emptiness, the *saṃādhi* of no-marks, and the *saṃādhi* of non-contrivance. T624.15.360b15–17; Kumārajīva: T625:15.379b29–c3; D 157 [*mdo sde, pha*] 289b4–5. Harrison, 1992a: 166–67 [8c] [47] [48]; 84000: 1.221, 222.

¹¹² See the reference to Nāgārjuna and Jizang’s 吉藏 (549–623) position on these values in the chapter by Ernest B. Brewster.

¹¹³ According to a search on GRETEL, the term *dharmadhātu* occurs 364 times in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. For the related term *sarvadharmadhātu*, see also note 241.

are portrayed as non-divine human beings, the chapters featuring goddesses primarily address doctrinal matters.

dharmasvabhāvalakṣaṇaparijñeyāḥ sarvadharmāḥ ekalakṣaṇās, traya-dhva-paṭhāvatārāḥ punar anantamadhyanirdeśāḥ sarvadharmāḥ / ¹¹⁴

All *dharma*s, the nature (*svabhāva*) and characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of *dharma*s¹¹⁵ being known, have a single character; moreover, all *dharma*s appear on the path in the three temporal dimensions and are explained as having neither an end nor a middle.¹¹⁶

This particular passage can be considered the sole instance in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* that provides a definition of what all *dharma*s are. Although Buddhābhaddra's translation does not fit the Sanskrit perfectly, this part affirms that all *dharma*s possess only one and the same characteristic. The mention of *svabhāva* and *lakṣaṇa* in this context can be interpreted as a critique of Abhidharma schools, especially the Sarvāstivādins, who extensively analyze and classify all *dharma*s on the basis of these concepts.

Additionally, there is a section in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, noted in Gómez, 1977: 227–28, where *dharmadhātu* is delineated from ten different perspectives.¹¹⁷ Below is an excerpt from this section,¹¹⁸ which is found in the sixth chapter dedicated to the goddesses.

(6) *ekotībhāvagataṃ dharmadhātum avatārāmi...*

I enter the *dharmadhātu*, which is the state of being one.

(7) *svabhāvavimalaṃ dharmadhātum avatārāmi...*

I enter the *dharmadhātu*, which is untainted by nature.

¹¹⁴ Gv(V) 224.28–29; Gv(S) 294.2–4. Both Suzuki and Idzumi, 1934–36 and Vaidya, 1960, serve as sources for the Sanskrit text.

¹¹⁵ One must be wary of making assumptions about Sanskrit equivalents based on their Chinese translations, but Buddhābhaddra's translation suggests **dharmadhātu-svabhāva* (法界性, T278:9.735c4), while Śikṣānanda's translation indicates **dharmadhātulakṣaṇa* (法界相, T279:10.385b26). Buddhābhaddra: 分別了知法界性故, 解三世法悉一性故 (T278:9.735c4–5); Śikṣānanda: 以能了知法界相故, 知一切法唯一相故。能平等入三世道故。能說一切無邊法故 (T279:10.385b25–27).

¹¹⁶ Kajiyama et al., 2021b: 268. My rendering is based on the Japanese translation, from the Sanskrit, found in Kajiyama et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c.

¹¹⁷ Gómez, 1977: 234, also draws attention to the term *dharmadhātutalabheda*, which signifies the diversity of *dharmadhātu*. For the purpose of this chapter, suffice it to say that I interpret *dharmadhātutalabheda* as representing each and every *dharma* in terms of the one characteristic of all *dharma*s.

¹¹⁸ Gv(V) 234.14–17; Gv(S) 305.7–12; T278:9.738b16–19; T279:10.388b26–29. Kajiyama et al., 2021b: 289.

(9) *ekālaṃkāraṃ sarvadharmadhātum avatārāmi*

I enter the entire *dharmadhātu* or the *dhātu* of all *dharma*s, which is adorned in one and the same way.¹¹⁹

Buddhabhadra: (6) 法界一 (7) 法界自然清淨 (9) 法界一切莊嚴¹²⁰

Śikṣānanda: (6) 法界一性 (7) 法界性淨 (9) 法界一莊嚴

Two of these ten definitions, (6) and (9), roughly state that “*dharmadhātu* is oneness.” It would be unwarranted to read *dharmadhātu* in this context simply as physical space, as this would imply that “space is oneness.” Therefore, it is more appropriate to understand *dharmadhātu* as all *dharma*s and to consider all *dharma*s (or their essence) as oneness. Regarding the term *ekotībhāva* in passage (6), its connection to meditative practice can be observed in comparison with the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*, which I examined earlier in §4.2. Although the contexts of these references are each distinct, there exists a potential linkage between the concept *dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the notion of “all *dharma*s” in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*, facilitated by the shared presence of the term *ekotībhāva*.

Furthermore, definition (7) characterizes *dharmadhātu* as “*dharmadhātu*, which is untainted by nature (*svabhāvavimala*).” This terminology aligns with the inherent purity of the mind and the purity of all *dharma*s. Both Chinese translations render the Sanskrit word *vimala* (“without dirt”) as “pure” (*jing* 淨). It is my belief that the notion of “the essence of all *dharma*s or *dharmadhātu* being pure” and the inherent purity of the mind mutually reinforce one another.

Having examined the monistic portrayal of both *dharmadhātu* and “all *dharma*s” within the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, let us now delve into the doctrinal model of passages deemed emblematic of Mahāyāna Buddhism, wherein contrasting values are presented as identical.

¹¹⁹ Among the ten definitions, only the ninth definition and the one that summarizes all ten definitions include the term *sarva* before *dharmadhātu*. Currently, I believe that in the context of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the term *sarva* is employed for emphasis and that the meaning remains nearly identical whether or not the word *sarva* is used. On this point, see §6.8.

¹²⁰ “(9) The *dharmadhātu* [contains] all kinds of adornment.” It is important to highlight that Buddhabhadra’s translation may not fully correspond to the Sanskrit text and is often considered less faithful than Śikṣānanda’s rendition. For the purposes of this chapter, I adhere to the interpretation based on the Sanskrit text. It is crucial to emphasize that this discrepancy does not affect the content of this chapter.

The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 8 §13) declares transmigration and *nirvāṇa* to be non-dual (*advaya*).¹²¹ Similarly, the *Sarvadharmāpravṛttinirdeśa* states that knowledge (*vidyā*, *míng* 明) and ignorance (*avidyā*, *wu míng* 無明), sentient beings [in delusion] (*sattva*) and awakening (*bodhi*) are *advaya* and *ekalakṣaṇa*.¹²² This scripture states that “greed, anger, and delusion are also equal to *nirvāṇa*.”¹²³ By asserting the identity of these seemingly opposing elements, it suggests that all *dharma*s share the same essential nature. A theoretical explanation of this scripture can be found in the following passage from the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (XXII-2):

’khor ba’i rang bzhin gang yin pa de mya ngan las ’das pa’i rang bzhin yin no // mya ngan las ’das pa’i rang bzhin gang yin pa de chos thams cad kyi rang bzhin yin te/ de’i phyir sems rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal ba zhes bya’o //

The essence (**prakṛti*) of transmigration is the essence of *nirvāṇa*. The essence of *nirvāṇa* is the essence of all *dharma*s. Therefore, the mind is said to be luminous (**prabhāsvara*) by nature.¹²⁴

The Sanskrit term translated as “luminous” in this context is *prabhāsvara*, which can alternatively be understood as “pure.” In the context of the inherent purity of the mind, the two Sanskrit terms *prabhāsvara* and *pariśuddhi* (or *viśuddhi*) are employed, and they carry essentially the same meaning.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Kumārajīva: 生死涅槃為二。若見生死性則無生死。無縛無解不生不滅。如是解者，是為入不二法門 (T475:14.551a7–9); Xuanzang: 生死涅槃分別為二。若諸菩薩了知生死其性本空。無有流轉亦無寂滅，是為悟入不二法門 (T476:14.577c4–6). This passage has no corresponding passage in the oldest translation, that by Zhi Qian.

¹²² For the Sanskrit text, see Iwamatsu, 2004: 135, and Braarvig, 2000: 109. For Kumārajīva’s rendering, see T650:15.751a27–29. This part of Kumārajīva’s translation varies in different editions; the word *advaya* is rendered *yi* (oneness) in the Taishō edition but *bu er* 不二 (non-duality) in many other editions. A similar statement is found in Vkn ch. 8 §16. Vkn 86.5–7/334–35.

¹²³ Kumārajīva: T650:15.759c13; D 180 [*mdo sde, ma*] 292b5. 84000: 1.291.

¹²⁴ D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 75a7–b1. Goshima, 2013: 90; 84000: 1.495. Kumārajīva’s translation: 知生死性即是涅槃(性)。涅槃性即是一切法性。是故說心性常清淨 (T586:15.51b18–19).

¹²⁵ See Matsumoto, 1989: 272, and Silk, 2015: 39, for the use of these two words in the same sense. While Fujita, 1988: 34b–35a, discusses the differences between the two terms and how they were confused, I follow Matsumoto’s and Silk’s opinion. In the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (XXII-2), which is discussed in §7.1, these terms are used consecutively.

4.4 Monistic Description in the Mahāsāṃghika Tradition

This monistic understanding is also shared by the Ekavyāvahārika viewpoint within various mainstream Buddhist schools. Ekavyāvahārika is said to be either a branch of the Mahāsāṃghika tradition or an alias of the Mahāsāṃghika itself.¹²⁶ Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) describes the characteristics of the Ekavyāvahārika school in his *Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義 as follows:¹²⁷

一說部。此部執生死涅槃皆是假名，故云一說 (T1852:45.8c25–27)

The Ekavyāvahārika (“Adherents of a Single Discourse [or Enunciation]”):

This school held that [the cycle of] birth and death (transmigration) and *nirvāṇa* are both conventional designations; hence the name “Single Discourse [or Enunciation].”¹²⁸

According to Jizang, the school known as Ekavyāvahārika derives its name from the concept that “all existences are merely conventional designations.” The connection between the notion of conventional designations and the name signifying “Single Discourse (or Enunciation)” is not straightforward. While the interpretation of this name remains open, it becomes possible to bridge the potential relationship between a single discourse and conventional designations by supplementing our understanding with the idea that opposing concepts such as transmigration and *nirvāṇa* can be said to have one and the same characteristic as conventional entities. The viewpoint of this school can be delineated as monistic thinking, given its attribution of identical properties to significantly disparate entities.

Among the various mainstream Buddhist schools, the Ekavyāvahārika was recognized in the seventh and eighth centuries in China and Japan as

¹²⁶ According to Tāranātha (1575–1634), Ekavyāvahārika is another name for Mahāsāṃghika. See Schiefner, 1869: 273; Teramoto, 1928: 371; Bareau 1955: 78.

¹²⁷ Jizang’s knowledge concerning various mainstream Buddhist schools relies primarily on Paramārtha’s (Zhendi 真諦, 499–569) translation of the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (*Bu zhi yi lun* 部執異論 T2033) and on Paramārtha’s commentary (*Bu zhi yi lun shu* 部執異論疏). Paramārtha’s commentary on the Ekavyāvahārika school is recorded in the *Sanron gengi ken’yū shū* 三論玄義檢幽集 (T2300:70.463b 20–22) by Chōzen 澄禪 (1227–1307). 真諦云，此部執世出世法悉是假名，故言一切法無有實體。同是一名，名即是說，故言一說部 (T2300:70.459b29–c1). For a French translation, see Demiéville 1932: 45.

¹²⁸ My rendering is based on the French translation, from the Chinese, that is found in Ducor and Isler, 2022: 187. The almost identical statement is found in Jizang’s commentary to the *Zhong lun* 中論 (*Zhong guan lun shu* 中觀論疏; T1824:42. 103b29–c1, 127a22).

having a stronger association with Mahāyāna Buddhism than other schools. Bhāviveka articulates that the doctrine of the Ekavyāvahārika school posits that all *dharma*s are thoroughly known by insight associated with a single moment of thought.¹²⁹ The monistic thought of the Ekavyāvahārika seems to be shared with Mahāyāna sūtras and Yogācāra literature. I believe that the monistic understanding of “all *dharma*s” serves as the underlying foundation for the inherent purity of the mind, for Expounding the Dharma in a Single Voice (*yiyin shuofa* 一音說法), and for the concept of instantaneous insight, which are distinct characteristics of the Mahāsāṃghika school.

5 The Inherent Purity of the Mind and Monistic Thought

5.1 The Mahāsāṃghika Tradition and the Inherent Purity of the Mind

When focusing on the concept “instantaneous insight,” we find that terms signifying this concept are widely present in the *Mahāvastu*, a Vinaya work of the Mahāsāṃghika tradition, and in various Mahāyāna sūtras. The description of the Buddha’s awakening holds immense significance for the Mahāsāṃghika tradition. According to the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra*,¹³⁰ “instantaneous insight” was considered a characteristic of the Mahāsāṃghika school and its branches but was not recognized by the Sarvāstivādin school. The sixth section of the current chapter will center on the concept of

¹²⁹ *Dasheng baifa ming men lun jie* 大乘百法明門論解, by Ji 基 (632–682): 此二通於大小乘 (These two [Lokottaravāda and Ekottaravārika schools] are common to both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna; T1836:44.46c26); *Huayan wujiao zhang* 華嚴五教章, by Fazang 法藏 (643–712): 此通初教之始 (This [school] is an introduction to the first teachings [of Mahāyāna Buddhism]; T1866:45.482a3); Chikō’s 智光 (fl. 709–780) *Jyutsu gi* 述義, quoted in Anchō’s 安澄 (763–814) *Chūron soki* 中論疏記: 彼宗所言似於大乘 (What that school says is similar to Mahāyāna; T2255:65.18c23). Bhāviveka’s explanation is presented within the broader context of explicating the doctrines of the eighteen mainstream schools. **Tarkajvālā* (D 3856 [dbu ma, dsa] 148b3); **Nikāyabhedavibhaṅgavyākhyāna* (D 4139 [’dul ba, su] 147b2–3) Cf. Eckel, 2008: 113, 309, and Teramoto and Hiramatsu: 1935, 4, respectively.

¹³⁰ There are three Chinese translations of this treatise, the *Shiba bu lun* 十八部論 (Treatise about Eighteen Schools; T2032); the *Bu zhi yi lun* 部執異論 (T2033); and the *Yibu zonglun lun* 異部宗輪論 (T 2031), translated by Xuanzang, as well as a Tibetan translation. The first translation is traditionally attributed to Kumārajīva; however, its authenticity has been a subject of debate. See Sakaino, 1935: 722. Teramoto and Hiramatsu, 1935, provides a comparison of the three Chinese versions and a Japanese translation from Tibetan.

instantaneous insight and its connection with the inherent purity of the mind. The rationale for this focus lies in the existence of a sutra that explicitly establishes a relationship between instantaneous insight and the inherent purity of the mind, as will be explored below in §6.9.

The Mahāsāṃghika scholars' insistence on the inherent purity of the mind is found in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra*.¹³¹ I posit that the inherent purity of the mind is rooted in the shared concept of “insight associated with a single moment [of thought],” which regards the perceived objects of awakening in a monistic way. The earliest surviving version of the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* is preserved in a Chinese translation from the fourth century, traditionally attributed to Kumārajīva as the translator. However, the contents of this text can be traced back to no earlier than the third century. Thus, it is crucial to note, descriptions in the treatise do not allow us to assume a one-way influence from the Mahāsāṃghika school to early Mahāyāna sutras. Despite the difficulty of establishing a definitive influence between the two, one should acknowledge their doctrinal proximity. Let us examine section I 42 of this treatise, where the inherent purity of the mind is expounded.

心性本淨，客塵¹³²隨煩惱之所雜染，說為不淨 (T2031:49.15c27–28)

The nature of the mind is inherently pure; stained by adventitious afflictions (*kechen* 客塵), it is said to be impure.¹³³

When asserting the inherent purity of the mind, a challenge arises due to the presence of afflictions, which are evidently real. However, according to this school, the essence of the mind remains pure, while afflictions are regarded as adventitious taints.

¹³¹ Hirakawa, 1968: 210–11, argues that the inherent purity of the mind is not limited to the Mahāsāṃghika school, whereas Fujita, 1986: 169, contends that it is a characteristic feature of that school.

¹³² My rendering of *kechen* 客塵 follows the Song, Yuan, and Ming editions rather than the Taishō edition. This passage is dealt with in Takasaki, 1974: 659–60, but Takasaki does not associate it with instantaneous insight.

¹³³ Kumārajīva(?) (T2032:49.18c5); Paramārtha (T2033:49.21a1); D 4138 [*'dul ba, su*] 143b1. Masuda, 1925: 30; Teramoto and Hiramatsu, 1935: 34; Bareau, 1955: 67–68 (cf. 147, 175, 194); Tsukamoto, 2004: 100. My rendering is based on the translation in Matsuda, 1925, and my citations follow the chapter numbers (Roman numerals) and sections given there. In addition, I list the corresponding parts of Teramoto and Hiramatsu, 1935 (translation); Bareau, 1955 (French study); and Tsukamoto, 2004 (translation). For the inherent purity of the mind, see also Lamotte, 1962: 53; Lamotte and Boin, 1976: LXXIV–LXXV.

5.2 The Inherent Purity of the Mind and “All *Dharmas*” in Early Mahāyāna Sūtras

One of the reasons behind the emphasis on the inherent purity of the mind in both the Mahāyāna and the Mahāsāṃghika traditions may be their common intention to counter the views of the Sarvāstivādins. The Sarvāstivādins categorize all *dharmas* as either conditioned (*saṃskṛta*, *youwei* 有為) or unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*, *wuwei* 無為) and either contaminants (*sāsrava*, *youlou* 有漏) or what is uncontaminated (*anāsrava*, *wulou* 無漏). As we will explore in §7.2, Mahāyāna sūtras often challenge the significance of such categories, asserting that they are ultimately meaningless; this stands in direct opposition to the theories of the Sarvāstivādins.¹³⁴ The early Mahāyāna sūtras already express a monistic understanding of the inherent purity of the mind and all *dharmas*. To investigate the presence of the inherent purity of the mind in those sūtras, let us examine certain translations by Lokakṣema. In later texts such as the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, there remain expressions of monistic thought that are closely associated with the inherent purity of the mind.

A Sanskrit manuscript for a part of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (XI 5) has been discovered containing a passage that relates to the inherent purity of the mind.

cittaṃ (hi *bhoḥ* *puruṣa prakṛti viśuddham na saṃ*) *kliśyati na viśudhyati*

Mind, sir, being essentially pure, is neither defiled nor purified.¹³⁵

The corresponding translations by Lokakṣema and Dharmarakṣa state, respectively, “The mind is inherently pure” (*xin zhe benjing* 心者本淨)¹³⁶ and “The mind is pure” (*xin zhe qingjing* 心者清淨). Both the Chinese translations and the Sanskrit text employ expressions denying the opposing concepts, i.e., denying both defilement and purity, in a manner typical of the *Prajñāpāramitās*. Thus, this particular statement may not straightforwardly represent the inherent purity of the mind. However, the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 11) contains explicit passages affirming that Mañjuśrī and the Buddha taught the inherent purity of the mind:

¹³⁴ The Sarvāstivādin is not the exclusive proponent of the categorization of all *dharmas* into conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas*; see Skilling, 1981, and Skilling, 1981–82, for these categories in mainstream Buddhism. Nevertheless, I contend that Mahāyāna sūtras like the *Prajñāpāramitās*, as delineated in Nishi, 1978: 4b–7b, are fundamentally constructed upon a strong critique of and some integration with Sarvāstivādin views.

¹³⁵ *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* 195, 196, folio 538r2–3; Miyazaki, 2023: 286.

¹³⁶ 心者本淨故，亦無有沾污，亦無有而淨者 (T626:15.403b3). Shingan, 2022: 107.

Lokakṣema: 其心本以清淨 (T626:15.401a27)

The mind is inherently pure.¹³⁷

In explaining why “King Ajātaśatru, who committed the gravest of offenses by killing his father, will never reincarnate into the unfortunate world,” the Buddha affirms as follows:

Lokakṣema: 是人以供養五百佛盡索。從一一佛聞心法本淨 (T626:15.404a4–5)

This person made offerings to five hundred [past] buddhas. From each buddha, he heard that the *dharma*s of the mind are inherently pure.¹³⁸

In these two instances, we can affirm that the character *ben* 本 corresponds to the concept of **prakṛti* (Tib. *rang bzhin*, nature as essence). This observation reinforces the notion that the inherent purity of the mind is indeed expounded in the Lokakṣema translation of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*.¹³⁹

Furthermore, in another section, X 5, the sutra also imparts the idea of the inherent purity of all *dharma*s.

Lokakṣema: 諸法無所著，謂清淨故。諸法悉清淨，謂本中外悉淨 (T626:15.400c12–14)¹⁴⁰

All *dharma*s are without attachment, because of their purity. All *dharma*s are entirely pure, because they are inherently pure both inside and outside.¹⁴¹

The order and content of the Lokakṣema and Tibetan translations often do not correspond. The Tibetan, which precedes and follows this passage, often refers to all *dharma*s as pure.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Shingan, 2022: 92. D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 252a6–7. Miyazaki, 2023: 244–45; 84000: 1.285.

¹³⁸ *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* XI 10. Shingan, 2022: 109. D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 260a5. Miyazaki 2023: 290; 84000: 1.345.

¹³⁹ In Hirakawa Akira, 1968: 211–217, Hirakawa posits that the inherent purity of the mind is not the primary focus and does not specifically mention Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*. However, in Hirakawa, 1970: 149–50, he asserts that the concept of the inherent purity of the mind is addressed throughout the entirety of the sutra.

¹⁴⁰ I have removed the word “*deng*” 等 immediately preceding this sentence as pointed out by Eric Greene (on February 19, 2024).

¹⁴¹ Shingan, 2022: 90.

¹⁴² *chos thams cad ni dag pa’i phyir rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal ba’o* / (Since all *dharma*s are pure, they are luminous by nature). D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 250a5–6. Miyazaki, 2023: 239, 264n25; 84000: 1.274.

Unfortunately, these parts are lost at the end of the Sanskrit text fragment. Lokakṣema's translation clearly mentions the purity of all *dharma*s (zhufa 諸法). Dharmarakṣa's translation affirms, "Since the essence (*ziran* 自然) of all *dharma*s is pure, the essence (*shen* 性) of the mind is also pure."¹⁴³ In older Chinese translations, the term *ziran* often serves as a translation for *svabhāva* or *prakṛti* (nature as essence).¹⁴⁴ While it is uncertain whether *ben zhong wai* 本中外 (the expression used by Lokakṣema in rendering the notion "inherently [pure] both inside and outside") corresponds directly to "the intrinsic nature [of all *dharma*s]," it is crucial to acknowledge the connection between "purity" and "all *dharma*s."

Next, let us look at inherent purity in the *Kāśyapaparivarta*.¹⁴⁵ In passages §§103–104, the term *gotra* is employed in a manner akin to the concept of "nature as essence" (*prakṛti*), which we previously encountered in §4.1. With this understanding, we can proceed to discuss the purity of *gotra*. In the subsequent section (§104), the Chinese translation includes the term *benjing* 本淨 (inherent purity).

Lokakṣema: 是臧本淨，無愛欲之瑕 (T350:12.192b12)

The excellence (臧 **gotra*) is inherently pure, without the defects of craving and desires.¹⁴⁶

There are three possible Sanskrit passages corresponding to the above Chinese passage in §104:

vimalaṃ tad gautraṃ sarvakleśamalavigataḥ,

One who has [some] *gotra* (inborn nature) is undefiled because it is devoid of the stain of all afflictions (*kleśa*).

śubhaṃ tad gautraṃ sarvākāramalavigataṃ,

One who has [some] *gotra* is beautiful (*śubha*) because it is devoid of any kind of stain.

viśuddhaṃ tad gautraṃ atyaṃtaviśuddhatayā.

One who has [some] *gotra* is pure as it is absolutely pure.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ 諸法自然淨故，心性淨哉 (T627:15.421b13–14).

¹⁴⁴ Sueki, 1996: 128–74.

¹⁴⁵ These sections are also addressed within Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 110, which touches upon the concept of the "unconditioned" within *gotra*. The meaning of *gotra* in the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, within its historical context, is a subject for future study.

¹⁴⁶ Weller, 1987: 1217 §86.

¹⁴⁷ KP 152 and Pāsādika, 2015: 66, 157–58.

In general, the Sanskrit version contains more text than Lokakṣema's translation. Although there are three possible interpretations of this quoted Chinese passage indicated by the corresponding Sanskrit text, a consideration of the term *aiyu* 愛欲, which in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§§48 and 49)¹⁴⁸ corresponds to *kleśa* (mental affliction), suggests that the quoted Chinese passage in §104 corresponds to the first of the above three Sanskrit passages. In any case, it can be seen as representing the concept of inherent purity.

The following passage (§125) is also an example of the inherent purity of all *dharma*s.¹⁴⁹

atyantapariśuddhāś ca prakṛtyā sarvadharmā asaṅkliṣṭān paśyati /

He realizes that all *dharma*s are absolutely pure and undefiled by nature.¹⁵⁰

Lokakṣema: 悉見諸法淨潔本無瑕穢 (T350:12.192c29)

He sees all *dharma*s as completely pure by nature without defect or dirt.¹⁵¹

The character for *ben* 本 (inherently, fundamentally) in Lokakṣema's translations leads to the inference that it corresponds to *prakṛti*.

Furthermore, the concept can be found in the following verse of the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* (8K). The term **prakṛtiprabhāśvara*, which I take up shortly below, will play a crucial role in the discussion that follows in §6.9, where I examine the instantenous insight within the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*.¹⁵²

諸佛從心解得道，心者清淨明無垢，

五道鮮潔不受色，有解是者成大道 (T418:13.909a7–8)

All buddhas realized the way (i.e., awakening) through mind.

The mind is pure, bright, and unsullied;

Pristine in the five destinies, it does not suffer the limitations of form;

Anyone who understands this perfects the great way (i.e., awakening).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ §48 *bodhisatvasya kleśaviṣaṃ* 菩薩雖在愛欲中 (Even if the bodhisattvas are staying in mental affliction; T350:12.190c11–12); §49 *bodhisatvasya kleśaḥ* 菩薩雖在愛欲中 (Even if the bodhisattvas are staying in a state of mental affliction; T350:12.190c13). See Weller, 1987: 1199–20 §§39 and 40. KP 78–80 and Pāsādika, 2015: 41, 130.

¹⁴⁹ Takasaki, 1974: 475.

¹⁵⁰ KP 177 and Pāsādika, 2015: 75, 168.

¹⁵¹ Weller, 1987: 1222–23 §104.

¹⁵² For the term *prakṛtiprabhāśvara*, see Shinoda, 1964; Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 409–30; May, 1971: 270n9.

¹⁵³ Harrison, 1998: 41.

*sangs rgyas byang chub sems kyis brtags pa yin // sems kyang rnam dag
rang bzhin 'od gsal zhing // rnyog med 'gro ba kun dang ma 'dres par //
gang gis shes pa byang chub mchog 'tshang rgya //*

The awakening of a Buddha is discerned by mind,
And mind is pure and luminous by nature,
Unpolluted and unsullied by all destinies.
Those who know that will awaken to the supreme awakening.¹⁵⁴

The significance of the term *prabhāsvara* in teaching about the inherent purity of the mind is often a subject of debate. Let us look at its earlier occurrence in the Mahāyāna sūtras, examining the verse through the lens of the Tibetan translation, which can be easily traced back to the original Sanskrit source. In so doing, the following terms can be identified: (1) **citta* (Tib. *sems*, mind), (2) **viśuddhi* (Tib. *rnam dag*, pure), and (3) **prakṛtiprabhāsvara* (Tib. *rang bzhin 'od gsal*, luminous by nature). They correspond, respectively, to these Chinese terms: (1) *xin* 心 (mind), (2) *qingjing* 清淨 (purity), and (3) *ming* 明 (luminous). Additionally, the term *wugou* 無垢, which translates to “unsullied,” aligns with the Tibetan term *rnyog med* in the subsequent verse.

The aforementioned verse of the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* exhibits a general correspondence. Notably, the Chinese term *ming* 明 and the Tibetan term *'od gsal* appear to align with each other and likely represent a translation of *prabhāsvara*. While it is accurate to say that the corresponding term for **prakṛti* is not explicitly present in Lokakṣema's translation, considering a parallel with another Chinese translation¹⁵⁵ and the challenge of altering the verse due to restrictions posed by the rhyme scheme, it becomes highly plausible that the term **prakṛtiprabhāsvara* did indeed exist in the original Sanskrit text on which Lokakṣema's translation is based.

In addition, let us look at the adventitious afflictions in Lokakṣema's translations. The term “adventitious afflictions” (*āgantuker upakleśa*, *kechen fannao* 客塵煩惱) is of substantial importance to the inherent purity of the mind. We have seen the connection in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* in §5.1. This idea can also be found in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§99).¹⁵⁶ Four distinct Chinese translations are provided here for our consideration.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ D 133 [*mdo sde, na*] 27b5–6. Harrison, 1978: 78.5–8, and Harrison, 1990: 75 [8K][7].

¹⁵⁵ 其心本來自明淨 (T416:13.882b1) in the *Da fangdeng da ji jing xianhu fen* 大方等大集經賢護分 trans. Jñānagupta (*Shenajueduo* 闍那崛多, 523–600) in the Sui dynasty.

¹⁵⁶ KP 145–46 and Pāśādika, 2015: 64, 155.

¹⁵⁷ See KP VIII–X for information on three translations other than Lokakṣema's.

cittaṃ hi kāśyapa ākāśasadr̥śam āgantuker upakleṣe saṃkliśyate /

The mind, Kāśyapa, is like space, [pure, yet] defiled by adventitious afflictions.

Lokakṣema: 愛欲亦如是卒來無期 (T350:12.192a17–18)

Attachments and desires also like this, coming suddenly without expectation [of them].¹⁵⁸

Qin 秦: 心如虛空，客塵污故 (T310[43]:11.635b16–17)

This mind is like space, because it is blemished [only] by adventitious stains.

Jin 晉: 是心如霧，外事穢故 (T351.12:197c21)

This mind is like a cloud, because it is defiled [only] by outer defilements.

Song 宋: 心如虛空，得虛妄煩惱 (T352:12.211b10)

This mind is like space, experiencing [only] empty afflictions.

Among these translations, Lokakṣema's rendition does not align perfectly with the others. Nevertheless, his rendering may have relevance when viewed in conjunction with other corresponding translations. In Lokakṣema's translation, as in other translations, this back-and-forth discussion concerns the mind (*xin* 心). Takasaki, 1974: 475, after contrasting Chinese translations, concludes that the term “adventitious afflictions,” is missing in Lokakṣema's translation. I appreciate Takasaki's prudent perspective, but I contend that the concept of adventitious afflictions can already be discerned as *aiyu* 愛欲 in Lokakṣema's translation.¹⁵⁹

5.3 Monism and Purity in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*

The inherent purity of the mind is also evident in Lokakṣema's translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*:

心極清淨，悉受得之，...是心甚清潔，清潔過於阿羅漢，辟支佛道上 (T224:8.454c10–14)

¹⁵⁸ See Weller, 1987: 1214 §81.

¹⁵⁹ The *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 4) expounds on the impossibility of contaminating space and underscores the inherent purity of all *dharmas*. D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 249b6. Miyazaki, 2023: 238–39; 84000: 272. While Lokakṣema's translation (T626:15.400b27–c1) may not explicitly emphasize the inherent purity of all *dharmas* as clearly as the Tibetan translation does, the contextual evidence leaves little room for doubt.

The mind is absolutely pure and enjoys all these [merits]. ... This mind is extremely pure and is purer than that of arhats and *pratyekabuddhas*.¹⁶⁰

Fujita, 1989: 145, and Matsumoto, 1989: 229, 272, 277n65, emphasize the fact that the inherent purity of the mind is not evident in the first chapter, which they regard as the oldest portion of the ASP in Lokakṣema's translation.¹⁶¹ However, if we set aside the details of the way these two scholars define "oldest portion," it becomes clear that the inherent purity of the mind is also presented in the twelfth chapter of the ASP, a point acknowledged in Fujita. On this basis, Nishi, 1978: 2b, maintains that the inherent purity of the mind is clearly in evidence in Lokakṣema's translation of the ASP. I will not delve further into this matter, but I underscore the inevitability of the idea being augmented by subsequent generations rather than continuing to conform to the oldest portion in which it is attested.

Next, we will explore the concepts of "purity of all *dharma*s" and monistic thought as reflected in the ASP. The understanding that "all *dharma*s are not dual, but one, because they are pure in essence" is found in the eighth chapter on purity (*viśuddhi*) within the translation of Lokakṣema:

心者本清淨。能可有所作 (T224:8.442c5)

The mind is inherently pure. How could [merit] be transferred into something else?¹⁶²

佛語須菩提。無有兩法。用之本淨故曰為一。其淨者於一切無有作者乃至無淨 (T224.8.442c19–21)¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Chapter 15 on Nonregression (*avaivartika*, *aweiyuezhī* 阿惟越致). My rendering is based on the translation provided in the footnotes in Karashima, 2011. Cf. Karashima, 2011: 306n40. *kāyapariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhñāte, vākpariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhñāte, cittapariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhñāte* / ASP 162.30–31. See Conze, 1958:122; Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022: 310. Sanada, 1992: 239 (table 4). Sanada, 1992, has compiled tables that compare different Chinese translations of passages concerning purity with their corresponding Sanskrit counterparts in the ASP.

¹⁶¹ My understanding differs somewhat.

¹⁶² Karashima Seishi's translation of *zuo* 作 as "converted" is likely influenced by the context in which the topic of *pariṇāmanā* (transferring the merit) is introduced around this part in the text. I agree with Karashima's translation in the interrogative form. See Karashima, 2011: 181n458; Sanada, 1992: 230 (table 2.4), 235 (Table 3.2). Cf. Nishi, 1978: 2b.

¹⁶³ Sanada, 1992: 230–31 (Table 2.5). Cf. Matsumoto, 1989: 273. *na hi subhūte dve dharmaprakṛtiḥ / ekaiva hi subhūte sarvadharmāṇāṃ prakṛtiḥ / yā ca subhūte sarvadharmāṇāṃ prakṛtiḥ, sā aprakṛtiḥ, yā ca aprakṛtiḥ, sā prakṛtiḥ* / ASP 96.9–11 (For there are no two natures of *dharma*, Subhūti, but just a single one is the nature of all *dharma*s. And the nature of all *dharma*s is no nature, and their no-nature is their

The Buddha told Subhūti: “There are no dual types for [any] *dharmas*. Because they are inherently pure and, therefore, they are said to be one. Purity does not act on anything. This is also the case with non-purity.”¹⁶⁴

As is generally the case, there is no one-to-one correspondence between Lokakṣema’s translation and the extant Sanskrit text in the ASP. It is important to note that this chapter presents a theoretical elucidation of the notion of purity. Karashima, 2011: 184n489, observes that “here, Lokakṣema... translated *prakṛti* (‘essence’) as *jing* 淨 (‘pure or purity’).”¹⁶⁵ It would not be wrong if Lokakṣema translated *prakṛti* (nature as essence) as “pure, purity” at a time when translations were not as standardized as they became in later times. In fact, it can be inferred that he grasped (or misconstrued) the intrinsic connection between these two terms within their historical context.¹⁶⁶ If the essence of *dharma*(s) is “not two,” it is perfectly logical to assert that “the mind ascertaining all *dharmas* in a monistic manner is pure.”

As observed earlier, Lokakṣema’s translations clearly exhibit the inherent purity of the mind. It is my contention that this understanding of the mind aligned with the model of thought presented in the framework of the Mahāyāna sutras, which incorporated the preexisting idea with the intention to ascertain all *dharmas* in a monistic manner and thus serve as a critique of the complex understanding of all *dharmas* presented by the Sarvāstivādins, which stood in stark contrast to the Mahāsāṃghika.

nature). See Conze, 1958: 65; Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022: 181. The Sanskrit word corresponding to “no doer” (*wu you zuo zhe* 無有作者) may have been the word *akṛti* (no action), which is close to *prakṛti* only in form, or Lokakṣema may have (mis)understood it that way. The phrase *sarvadharmāṇām prakṛtiḥ* and the term *dharmaprakṛti* that appear in this passage can be said to be the same as *dharmadhātu* in the sense of the nature of all *dharmas*.

¹⁶⁴ Karashima, 2011: 184, 184n491.

¹⁶⁵ See also Karashima, 2010: 275. Cf. Karashima, 2016: 616–17, for Zhi Qian’s translation of the terms *jing* 淨 or *qing* 清 for *vyūha* (arrangement) in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*.

¹⁶⁶ In the *Drumakinnararāja*, previously discussed in §3.2, Lokakṣema’s term *shen jing* 甚淨 (extremely pure) corresponds to *deng* 等 (equal) in Kumārajīva’s rendition and to *mnyam* (same) in the Tibetan translation. Both of these translations imply the presence of the Sanskrit word *sama*(*tā*) (same or equal). This term is often employed to signify a monistic depiction of all *dharmas*. While a meticulous comparison of the various translations is essential, it is possible that Lokakṣema held the sameness and oneness of all *dharmas* as pure. The notion of *dharmadhātu* being inherently pure gains confirmation in texts post-Dharmarakṣa’s time. Lokakṣema’s interpretation, despite being a Chinese translation, can be seen as foreshadowing this perspective.

We have now examined the monistic expressions and the inherent purity of the mind that have been present in the development of Buddhist thought since the early Mahāyāna sūtras. In section 6, we will explore their connection to the conception of instantaneous insight.

6 Instantaneous Insight

6.1 Monistic Understanding of All *Dharmas*

We have explored the inherent purity of the mind and the purity of all *dharmas* in early Mahāyāna sūtras. The next aspect to be examined is the relationship between (1) the monistic understanding of all *dharmas*, represented by the terms *ekarasa*, *advaya*, and *ekalakṣaṇa*, and (2) the purity of all *dharmas* or the purity of the mind. These can be described as “monistic ontology.” Scholars have long noted the connection between the inherent purity of the mind, which is a paradigmatic doctrine of the Mahāsāṃghika school, and *tathāgatagarbha* thought.¹⁶⁷ Both the inherent purity of the mind and *tathāgatagarbha* thought share a monistic perspective.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, it can be argued that this monistic understanding is closely linked to the Mahāsāṃghika’s distinctive notion of “Buddha’s insight recognizing all *dharmas* in a moment,” referred to as “instantaneous insight”¹⁶⁹ in this chapter. This notion can be called “monistic epistemology.” My proposition originates from the observation of the manuscript’s alternation between “*ekalakṣaṇa*,” as discussed earlier, and “*ekakṣaṇa*,” denoting instantaneous insight. I posit that while the former represents an ontologically monistic concept, the latter delineates an epistemologically monistic notion due to its association with the Buddha’s insight. Below, I make the argument that monistic ontology and epistemology are closely related to each other.

¹⁶⁷ See Fujita Masahiro’s 藤田正浩 list of major studies in Japanese on the inherent purity of the mind (Fujita, 1986: 169–70n1).

¹⁶⁸ May, 1971: 283, observes that (paraphrasing from the original French) Sāramati (the purported author of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*) professes a monism tinged with idealism, in which immaculate and luminous thought (*amalam prabhāsvarām cittam*) appears as a supreme entity, affected by an accentuated positive character that brings it closer to the universal soul of the Vedānta.

¹⁶⁹ The corresponding Sanskrit words are as follows: *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā* (by the insight associated with a single moment of thought).

In the discussion that follows I begin with the fact that the conception of an “instantaneous insight” that recognizes all *dharma*s is found in numerous Mahāyāna sutras, and then I proceed to point out the connection between the mind, all *dharma*s, and *dharmadhātu*, which are considered to be inherently pure.

The idea of “knowing all *dharma*s by instantaneous insight” is a common concept found in the Mahāsāṃghika lineage, as described in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra*. Below are three Chinese translations and the corresponding English translation based on Xuanzang’s (玄奘 602–664) rendering. Of the forty-eight distinctive doctrines of the Mahāsāṃghika lineage, the thirteenth and fourteenth are related to “instantaneous insight.”

Kumārajīva(?): 如來一心知一切法 (T2032:49.18b16–17)

Paramārtha: 如來一心能通一切境界 (T2033:49.20c4–5)

Xuanzang: 一剎那心了一切法 (T2031:49.15c4–5)

Single moment of [the Buddha’s] thought (*ekakaṣanacitta*) apprehends all *dharma*s.

Kumārajīva(?): 一念相應慧覺一切法 (T2032:49.18b17)

Paramārtha: 如來一剎那相應般若能解一切法 (T2033:49.20c5–6)

Xuanzang: 一剎那心相應般若知一切法 (T2031:49.15c5)

[His] insight (*prajñā*), which arises in correspondence with one moment of mind, perceives all *dharma*s.¹⁷⁰

The Mahāsāṃghika insists that the insight associated with a single moment of cognition perceives all *dharma*s, though the Sarvāstivādins do not accept this idea. From the viewpoint of Sarvāstivādins, a detailed discussion of this disagreement can be found in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*. A related discussion is also found in the last chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.¹⁷¹ The Sarvāsti-

¹⁷⁰ Masuda, 1925: 20–21; Teramoto and Hiramatsu, 1935: 24; Bareau, 1955: 60; Tsukamoto, 2004: 97–98. D 4138 [’*dul ba, su*] 142b4–5. The following articles reference the passage in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra*: Masuda, 1925: 20n6; Sakamoto, 1935: 161–62; Nishi, 1960: 394, 397; Kajiyama, 1966: 701–02; Seyfort Rugg, 1989: 179; Kawasaki, 1992: 91–92; Watanabe, 2009: 124; Ölzijargal, 2015: 53–54n30. The commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* by Buddhaghosa (fl. fifth century), *Paṭuppannañāṇakathā*, states that the Andhaka school claimed to possess such knowledge. *Kathāvatthu* V.9 PTS 314.13–315.18. *Kathāvatthu aṭṭakathā* PTS 86.11–15. Cf. Sakamoto, 1935: 159–60, 162; Lamotte, 1977: 294. See also note 275.

¹⁷¹ See note 174.

vādins disagree that a certain insight recognizes itself.¹⁷² Consequently, they argue that (1) a certain insight, which knows all *dharma*s, and (2) a knowledge that recognizes this insight must be separate.¹⁷³ According to their perspective, it takes two moments to ascertain all *dharma*s. Kawasaki, 1992: 94–95, provides a summary of this argument as follows:

The crux of this debate lies in whether the insight capable of knowing “all *dharma*s,” including knowledge of itself, exists in one moment or two. The Mahāsāṃghikas, who assert the unreality of the past and future, find it challenging to accept an insight that spans two moments and consequently insist on knowing all *dharma*s in a single moment. On the other hand, the Sarvāstivādin doctrine, which posits that knowledge extends over two moments to recognize all *dharma*s, aligns with their belief in the real existence of the past, present, and future.

The Sarvāstivādin stance on this matter is in conflict with several other mainstream Buddhist schools, particularly the Mahāsāṃghikas.¹⁷⁴ The Chinese translation of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* (*Fodi jing lun* 佛地經論), part of the corpus of Yogācāra literature, says of the opponent understanding that “this is just falsehood,”¹⁷⁵ quoting the verse on which the Sarvāstivādin (or Sautrāntika) school bases its idea.¹⁷⁶ Later in the current

¹⁷² Kajiyama, 1966: 687–89.

¹⁷³ In the *Jñānaprasthāna*, *Apidamo fa zhi lun* 阿毘達磨發智論 (T1544:26.919b9–13), the question is raised regarding whether one knowledge can comprehend all *dharma*s. The **Mahāvibhāṣā*, a commentary on the *Jñānāvibhāṣa* (T1545:27[IX].42c9–45c15), provides an elaborate discussion on this matter. Sakamoto, 1935: 163, points out a similar argument found in the *Zun poxumi pusa suoji lun* 尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論 (T1549:28.727a27–b7), which is believed to date back to the first century BCE.

¹⁷⁴ Certainly the Mahāsāṃghika lineage is not the only opponent of Sarvāstivādin. The **Mahāvibhāṣā* presents arguments from the Vātsīputrīya, Mahīśāsaka, and Dharmaguptaka schools regarding this debate. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, specifically in the last chapter discussing the denial of self (AKBh 467.14–468.1; T1558:29.155a1–17), an argument is put forth with the Vātsīputrīya school in mind. For details, see Kawasaki, 1992: 96n4. Nevertheless, it was the Mahāsāṃghika lineage that sharply opposed Sarvāstivādin.

¹⁷⁵ *ci dan xuyan* 此但虛言 (T1530:26.309c9). In Śīlabhadra’s (529–645) Tibetan commentary, a distinct interpretation of the same verse is presented. D 3997 [*mdo ’grel, chi*] 257a3–4. Nishio, 1940a: 83; Nishio, 1940b: 229 III 6.2.1.

¹⁷⁶ The verse is quoted in the ninth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*: *saṃtānena samarthatvād yathāgñiḥ sarvabhūmataḥ tathā sarvavideṣṭavyo na sakṛt sarvasya vedanā* (... Because [the Buddha] does not know all *dharma*s at once). AKBh 467.20–21. Here, I do not adhere to the editing by P. Pradhan; instead, I adopt the reading *na sakṛt* from the manuscript witness as indicated in a footnote. Xuanzang: 由相續有能，如火食一切，如是一切智，非由頓遍知 (T1558:29.155a10–11). This ninth chapter is unique within the work, as Vasubandhu emphasizes his position as a Sautrāntika

chapter, in §6.10, it will be demonstrated that the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* explicates *dharmadhātu* as purity based on a monistic understanding of all *dharmas*, as it accepts the concept of “instantaneous insight.”

6.2 Single Moment of Insight in the *Mahāvastu* and Mahāyāna Sūtras

Accounts of the Buddha’s life describe three stages that occurred during the night prior to his awakening, by which he attained distinct forms of insight known as the threefold knowledges (*trividyā*, *sanming* 三明). The understanding of the content of his awakening varies across different periods and the different mainstream Buddhist schools, with notable distinctions arising in the interpretation of the third stage. The following passage from the *Mahāvastu*, a text associated with the Lokottaravāda school (*Shuo chushi bu* 説出世部), elucidates the third stage. According to the **Samayabhedo-paracanacakra*, Lokottaravāda is said to be one of the three factions that emerged from the Mahāsāṃghika school.¹⁷⁷

*smṛtimena dhṛtimena matimena sarvaśo sarvatratāye jñātavyaṃ
prāptavyaṃ boddhavyaṃ abhiśamboddhavyaṃ sarvantam ekacittakṣaṇa-
samāyuktayā prajñayā anuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhiśambuddho //*¹⁷⁸

The mindful, the steadfast, and the intelligent man (i.e., the Buddha) has at all times and everywhere to know, attain, become aware of and become fully aware of; he awakened to the supreme correct awakening by the insight associated with a single moment of thought.¹⁷⁹

In this passage, we encounter the terms *sarvaśo* (wholly), *sarvatratāye* (in every way), and *sarvantam* (everywhere), all of which contain the element *sarva* (all). The presence of multiple words signifying “all” is consistent with

more strongly than in other chapters. However, since the official position is that of the Sarvāstivādins, I have indicated “Sautrāntika” in parentheses. This verse is also mentioned in **Asvabhāva’s* (d.u.) commentary on the *Mahāyānasamgraha* as being contrary to the concept of instantaneous insight (D 4051 [*sems tsam, ri*] 199b3–4). Cf. Yamaguchi, 1964: 569–70. Xuanzang’s translation of the same text is less clear, but essentially conveys the same verse (T1598:31.385c8–9). This verse is also cited by Wōnch’ūk 圓測 (613–696) in his commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*. See note 183. Cf. Nagao, 1982: 117. Kawasaki, 1992: 96n4, suggests that this verse is related to verses 243, 255, and 256 of Kamalaśīla’s (fl. 740–795) *Tattvasamgraha*.

¹⁷⁷ For recent scholarship on Lokottaravāda, see Tournier 2017: 29–37.

¹⁷⁸ Mvu 1.229.9–11. The same expressions are found in other sections of the *Mahāvastu* as well, including Mvu 2.133.11, 285.2–3, and 416.3.

¹⁷⁹ Jones, 1949–56: I 185. For other sections, see also Jones, 1949–56: II 128, 267, and 368.

the general Buddhist notion that “the Buddha knows all *dharma*s” and is not exclusive to the *Mahāvastu*.

When translated into English, *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā* means “by the insight associated with a single moment of thought.”¹⁸⁰ The components of the term *ekacittakṣaṇa* denote the smallest unit of time in Buddhism. *Eka*, *citta*, and *kṣaṇa* mean one, mind, and moment, respectively. The term *samāyukta* can be understood to mean “conjoined” or (in this case) “associated.”

Notably, the term of interest here, *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā*,¹⁸¹ is also found in the *Lalitavistara*.¹⁸² The term is not only found in the *Mahāvastu* and the *Lalitavistara* but also extensively in Mahāyāna sūtras. In a dialogue with Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334–416), Kumārajīva mentions the

¹⁸⁰ Jones, 1949–56: I 185, translates this phrase as “insight gained in a momentary flash of thought.”

¹⁸¹ While it is uncertain whether the Sarvāstivādins were aware of the presence of this term in the *Mahāvastu*, in the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (T1545:27[IX].43b16–19), Vasumitra (Shiyou 世友, or Poxumiduo 婆須蜜多, d.u.), a Sarvāstivādin scholar, criticizes the Mahāsāṃghika’s understanding of the second of the threefold knowledges, stating, “If one follows the doctrine of the Mahāsāṃghika, the second of the threefold knowledges, the abode-supporting knowledge (*su zhu sui nian zhi* 宿住隨念智), which originally knows things of the past, now knows the present mind, which is the fault of the Mahāsāṃghika.” This statement indicates that the Sarvāstivādins did not recognize self-knowledge, and it is possible that the threefold knowledges based on accounts of the Buddha’s life were discussed in various debates on the subject, although no discussion about instantaneous insight of the third knowledge exists in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*. For more details, see Sakamoto, 1935: 167–70.

¹⁸² *Lalitavistara*, ch. 22, 350.8–14. The corresponding term is found in a Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara*, titled *Fangguang da zhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經, translated by Divākara (Dipoheluo 地婆訶羅, 613–688) in 683, as shown here with underlining: 彼一切一念相應慧證阿耨多羅三藐三菩提成正覺具足三明 (T187:3.595c27–29). Although the passage should be included in a part of the nineteenth chapter of the *Puyao jing* 普曜經 (T186:3.522b11–15), translated by Dharmarakṣa in 308, which is the oldest surviving Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara*, we do not find it there. While the term, insight (*zhizhi* 智慧), appears in this context, there is no evident correspondence to the specific passage under discussion. It is worth noting a related phrase in this text, *kuo ran da wu* 廓然大悟 (T186:3.522b13). In the Mahāsāṃghika’s Vinaya literature, known as the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, there exists a passage depicting the Buddha’s awakening. The passage reads, 世尊在菩提樹下。最後心廓然大悟。自覺妙證 (T1425:22.412b27–28) (The Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree. At the last moment he became totally awakened. He attained the subtle awakening for himself). Interestingly, the phrase *kuo ran da wu* appears in both the *Puyao jing* and the *Mohe sengzhi lü*. While the former might merely echo the earlier two Chinese accounts of Buddha’s life, the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (T184) and the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (T185), I will not delve into a detailed analysis in this chapter.

following concerning teachings in the Mahāyāna sutras related to “a single thought-moment of insight” (*yinian hui* 一念慧) and its ability to eradicate all afflictions:

Jiumoluoshi (Kumārajīva) *fashi dayi* 鳩摩羅什法師大義

諸摩訶衍經說，佛以一念慧斷一切煩惱習 (T1856:45.131a26–27)

Various Mahāyāna sutras teach that the Buddha extinguishes all habituated tendencies of afflictions by a single thought-moment of insight.

Kumārajīva usually renders *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā* as *yinian xiangying hui* 一念相應慧, while Xuanzang uses *yì chana xiangying miaohui / bore* 一剎那相應妙慧/ 般若. Words that serve a similar function, such as *ekacitta* and *ekakṣaṇa*, are also employed in prominent Mahāyāna sutras within the same context as “insight associated with a single moment [of thought],” as we will explore in §6.6.

6.3 Previous Studies on Instantaneous Insight

Although, to date, a few researchers have paid attention to *ekacittakṣaṇa-samāyuktā prajñā*, currently its importance does not seem to be widely recognized in the broader academic community. It can be argued that Kumārajīva was cognizant of the widespread use of the term, while modern Buddhist studies scholars have tended to overlook its importance. Let us briefly review the existing scholarship.

Long before modern scholarship, it was Wōnch'ūk 圓測 (613–696) from Silla who related the instantaneous insight of the Mahāsāṃghika lineage, recorded in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (abbreviated as SBUC in this section), to that of Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹⁸³ Masuda Jiryō 増田慈良 (1887–1930), who rendered the Chinese translation of the SBUC into English (Masuda, 1925: 20–21n6) based on the work of Koyama Ken'ei 小山憲榮 (1828–1903) (Koyama, 1891), annotates the discussion of instantaneous insight of the Mahāsāṃghika in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*. The significance of this concept to the Mahāsāṃghika has been taken up extensively by Sakamoto Yukio 坂本幸男 (1899–1973) (Sakamoto, 1935) and Nishi Giyū (1897–

¹⁸³ Wōnch'ūk mentions this concept in his commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* (vol. 10), citing the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* and **Asvabhāva's* commentary on the *Mahāyānasamgraha*. This volume is lost in extant Chinese and was translated into Tibetan, which was then restored into Chinese by Inaba Shōju 稲葉正就 (1915–90). Cf. Inaba, 1972: 35–36. D 4016 [*mdo 'grel, di*] 144a3–b3.

1993) (Nishi, 1960 and 1968), who base their discussions on the SBUC and the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. In a footnote to the term *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā* in his Sanskrit edition of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Cecil Bendall (1856–1906) (Bendall, 1902: 278n3) observes that the term is encountered in both the *Mahāvastu* and the *Lalitavistara*.

Discussions related to the concept are found in several mainstream Buddhist sources. Notably, the *Kathāvatthu* (PTS 212–20) and chapter 6 of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh 351.8–352.7) address the debate on whether the concept of *abhisamaya* (direct realization) consists of a single moment or more, specifically, sixteen moments to realize the four noble truths (Bareau, 1955: 270). Additionally, chapter 7 of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, titled *Ekakṣaṇa-abhisamaya* (One Moment of Realization), is also related to this subject. Lamotte, 1977: 294 and 1980: 124, 128–29; Seyfort Ruegg, 1989: 178–81; and Galloway, 1981, 1985, 1988 also reference the term “instantaneous insight” in various texts such as the *Mahāvastu*, *Lalitavistara*, and *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. These scholars’ interest seems to be connected with the controversy between sudden and gradual awakening in Tibet in the late eighth century (Lamotte, 1959: 685–86 and Seyfort Ruegg, 1989: 150–54).

Mainstream Buddhist schools’ two perspectives on the duration of *abhisamaya*—either a single moment or sixteen moments of thought—were well recognized among Indian Buddhist masters such as Bhāviveka and Chandrakīrti (fl. 600–650). In addition, the term “a single moment of awareness” (*ekakṣaṇajñāna*) frequently appears in Bhāviveka’s *Tarkajvālā*. For this reason, scholars of the Madhyamaka school sometimes refer to the sources and secondary studies mentioned above in their notes (Scherrer-Schaub, 1991: 176n246; Heitmann, 1995: 404–406 and 412n58; Eckel, 1992: 224n14 and 2008: 287–88n115), but they do not mention the extensive occurrence of the term “instantaneous insight” in the Mahāyāna sūtras. Yonezawa, 2018, referring to Watanabe, 2009, notes that the phrase within the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* is cited in the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* by Chandrakīrti.

Statements that diverge from the above trends are described below. The term in the *Lalitavistara* has been noted by D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) (Suzuki, 1963: 85). Honda Megumu 本多恵 (1930–2019) (Honda, 1968: 222n48) refers to a phrase containing the term in the SBUC in his note to the translation of the *Daśabhūmika*, citing Masuda, 1925, and Bareau, 1955. In addition, he notes that the related term *ekakṣaṇa* is also found in the chapter on *śūnyatā* (emptiness) of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* (Golden Light Sūtra). Honda, however, does not mention its usage in the *Mahāvastu* or the *Lalitavistara*.

Watanabe Shōgo 渡辺章悟 gives examples of the word *ekacitta-(la)kṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā* found six times in the PSP (Watanabe 1991, 2009), and elsewhere (Watanabe, 2019b: 24n23) he notes that the word occurs twice in the *Samādhirājasūtra*. The Chinese translation for *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā*, *yinian xiangying hui* 一念相應慧, appears in the *Dacheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna; T1666:32.581b14), a text thought to have originally been compiled in China, according to a meticulous study by Ōtake Susumu 大竹晋. This study references the *Da zhidu lun* (T1509:25[LXXI].653a20–21) and the PSP (PSP 5.137.23–24) as the sources for the term (Ōtake, 2017: 273–74).

Vincent Tournier refers to the term in the *Mahāvastu* and mentions its presence in the *Lalitavistara*, although he does not make reference to the SBUC or Mahāyāna sutras (Tournier, 2017: 35–36). Stefano Zacchetti (1968–2020) briefly cites this mention by Tournier in relation to the PSP but does not provide further elaboration (Zacchetti, 2021: 57n116). Watanabe, 2019b: 11, points to the inheritance by the PSP of the formulaic expression of instantaneous insight from the *Mahāvastu* through an analysis of the term *satpuruṣa* (good man). Ölzijjargal Kh. (Ölzijjargal, 2015: 52–53) associates the term *ekakṣaṇa* in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* with the PSP and the SBUC, citing Watanabe, 2009: 127. In a different passage in the same study, however, he seems unaware of other earlier research, concluding that no previous investigations on “insight associated with a single moment of thought” exist (Ölzijjargal, 2015: 39).

Taking together the body of recent scholarship as summarized above, we may state that there is currently a lacuna of comprehensive research addressing this topic.

6.4 “Insight Associated With a Single Moment” in the *Prajñāpāramitās*

Watanabe, 2009, identifies six occurrences of the term *ekacitta-(la)kṣaṇa-samāyuktayā prajñayā* in the PSP.¹⁸⁴ Although it is important to note that

¹⁸⁴ Watanabe notes that while the term *ekacittakṣaṇa-samāyuktā* appears in the Sanskrit text of the ASP, it is not connected to insight in the same way as in the PSP. Here I will mention only one example of the term in the ASP. In the corresponding translation by Lokakṣema, the passage reads, “while one mind revolves” (*yi yizhuan qing* 意一轉頃; *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktā hy eṣā apūrvā koṭir yad uta akoṭiḥ* / ASP 180.10–11). See Conze, 1958:140; Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022: 343. For further details, see Karashima, 2011: 338–39. Nishi, 1978: 5b, traces a link between the inherent purity of the mind and this passage, which, it asserts, correlates with the well-established

ekalakṣaṇa and *ekakṣaṇa* are distinct words, they are closely related with respect to a monistic viewpoint. The six occurrences are as follows:¹⁸⁵

	Ch.	- <i>samāyuktayā</i>	PSP	Conze, 1962 and 1974	Note
1	1	<i>ekacittakṣaṇa-</i>	1-1:97.26		Dutt, 1934: 82.8
2	5	<i>ekalakṣaṇa-</i>	5:137.23	Ch. 64 <u>164.16</u> V 8.2. 359	
3	5	<i>ekalakṣaṇa-</i>	5:153.22	Ch. 69 <u>182.9–10</u> V 8.11. 375	
4	5	<i>ekalakṣaṇa-</i>	5:169.4	Ch. 70 <u>199.18</u> 389	
5	8	<i>ekacittakṣaṇa-</i>	8:124.22–23	Ch. 77 102.15 VIII 5,14. 215	一相 ¹⁸⁶ 之智
6	8	<i>ekakṣaṇa-</i>	8:141.3–4	Ch. 79 116.20 VIII 5,20. 227	<i>ekalakṣaṇa</i> ¹⁸⁷

In the PSP, “instantaneous insight” is associated with the highest form of knowledge, namely, the knowledge that ascertains the characteristics of all *dharma*s (*sarvākārajñatā*). It becomes evident that in certain Mahāyāna sūtras, “instantaneous insight” assumes the utmost significance.

The second and fifth of those instances are shown below as representative examples. In the case of the second instance, the term *ekalakṣaṇa* is used in place of the standard term *ekakṣaṇa*:

*ekalakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā sarvākārajñatām anuprāpsyati, tasya tatrāvasthāyām sarvavāsanānusamdhiklēśāḥ prahāsyante, anutpattika-prahāṇāḥ.*¹⁸⁸

[The bodhisattva] will attain the knowledge of all *dharma*s by the insight associated with a single characteristic (*ekalakṣaṇa*). In that state, he will

concept in the Huayan doctrine known as “One thing, just as it is, is all” (*yi ji yiqie* 一即一切). On the translation of the related term *ekacittopāda* (*xin yi fan* 心一反 and *yi fan nian* 一反念) in the ASP, see Karashima, 2010: 543, 564.

¹⁸⁵ Note the difference in order from Watanabe 2009: 125–31. I list them in order of their appearance in the PSP. Edward Conze’s (1904–79) work (texts and translations) on the *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* (Eighteen Thousand Verse Prajñāpāramitā), published in 1962 and 1974, is cited here for reference. The underlined parts in Conze, 1962, are deductions from Tibetan.

¹⁸⁶ The term *yixiang* 一相 appears in the *Fangguang bore jing* translated by Mokṣala (T221:8.136a10). The original Sanskrit corresponding to this word is assumed to be **ekalakṣaṇa*. See Watanabe, 2009: 130.

¹⁸⁷ Watanabe states, “Kimura does not note it, but this is *ekalakṣaṇa* in the Todai manuscript T2; No. 235.” See Watanabe, 2009: 135n32. Conze’s edition also uses *ekalakṣaṇa*. Conze, 1974: 227, in a footnote, mentions that the Tibetan word corresponds to “moment” and opts for *ekalakṣaṇa*, translating it as “a wisdom which is conjoined with one single mark.”

¹⁸⁸ PSP 5:137.21–25.

abandon all afflictions combined with all habitual actions. These are the meditations of “non-arising.”¹⁸⁹

In Sarvāstivādin doctrine, the final moment of abandonment of afflictions just before reaching the pinnacle of arhatship is referred to as the “adamantine meditation” (*vajropamasamādhi*, *jingang yu ding* 金剛喻定). The fifth instance of the PSP explains this meditation in relation to “instantaneous insight” as follows:

*vajropame samādhau sthitvaikacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayānuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambudhyate tadā tathāgata iti nirdiśyate. sarvadarśim-sarvadharmavaśavartī.*¹⁹⁰

[The bodhisattva, fully equipped with the various virtues], abiding in the adamantine meditation, realizes supreme correct awakening by the insight associated with a single moment of thought. Then [he] is regarded as a Tathāgata. He is the one who sees all [*dharma*s] and masters all *dharma*s.¹⁹¹

This correlation between the “adamantine meditation” and “instantaneous insight”¹⁹² is also present in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* (§6.7) and in the commentary on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* by Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622) (see note 215 below).

In the passages just quoted, the terms *ekalakṣaṇa* (one and the same characteristic) and *ekacittakṣaṇa* (one mind-moment) are employed interchangeably. Watanabe, 1991: 6n7, briefly mentions this alternation in the PSP.¹⁹³ As noted at the outset of this section, there exists a distinction between *ekakṣaṇa* and *ekalakṣaṇa*. While the latter may potentially be attributed to a mere error in transcription of the former, I posit that they are interconnected concepts within the realm of monistic thought. Notably, when

¹⁸⁹ See Watanabe, 2009: 130. I refer to Watanabe’s Japanese translation.

¹⁹⁰ PSP 8:124.15–25 and Conze, 1974: 102.15–18.

¹⁹¹ See Watanabe, 2009: 130, and Conze, 1974: 215–16.

¹⁹² The link between these two appears in the first example of the table and is pointed out by Seyfort Ruegg, 1989: 167 and note 336. The link was continued in subsequent generations in East Asia. Through Shandao’s 善導 (613–681) verse in the *Guan wuliang shou fo jing shu* 觀無量壽佛經疏 (T1753:37.245c23–24), this link was later transmitted to Shinran. 行者正受金剛心，慶喜一念相應後，與韋提等獲三忍，即證法性之常樂 (Practitioners receive the adamantine mind / And accord [with the Vow] in one thought-moment of joy; whereupon, / Equally with Vaidehī, they acquire the threefold insight (**kṣānti* 忍) / And are immediately brought to attain the eternal bliss of *dharma*-nature). *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Hirota et al., 1997: 73.

¹⁹³ He notes that “*Ekakṣaṇa* and *ekacittakṣaṇa* are similarly used interchangeably in the PV [=PSP], while the manuscripts often confuse *lakṣaṇa* and *kṣaṇa*. This is probably the reason for the confusion to be observed in the text.”

considering the connection between these terms on the one hand and between *dharmadhātu* and all *dharma*s on the other, both pairs of terms are deployed to convey a monistic concept. *Ekalakṣaṇa* embodies an ontologically monistic concept, whereas *ekakṣaṇa* delineates an epistemologically monistic notion by virtue of its association with the Buddha's insight. We will return to this point in the next section.

6.5 Instantaneous Insight in Sanskrit and *Ekalakṣaṇa* in Various Manuscripts

The term “insight associated with a single moment of thought” (*ekacitta-kṣaṇasamāyuktā prajñā*) can be found in various Mahāyāna sūtras preserved in Sanskrit, Tibetan translations, and Chinese translations. To date, I have identified this term in the following texts in Sanskrit: (1) the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* quoted in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, (2) the **Samvṛtiparamārthasatyānirdeśa* (Teaching the Relative and Ultimate Truths) quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*,¹⁹⁴ (3) the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa* quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*,¹⁹⁵ (4) the *Samādhirājasūtra*,¹⁹⁶ (5) the *Bodhisattvapīṭaka*,¹⁹⁷ and (6) the *Tathāgata-*

¹⁹⁴ *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 17.19–18.7. Bendall and Rouse, 1922: 19–20. The specific name of this scripture is not mentioned in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. However, it is referred to as ‘*dul ba yongs su dag pa'i mdo* (sutra of pure discipline) in the Tibetan translation (D3940 [*dbu ma, khi*] 13a6) and as *Wenshu qingjing lü* 文殊清淨律 (Mañjuśrī Pure Discipline) in the Chinese translation (T1636:32.79b12). On this point, see Suzuki, 2016: 135, 137n17. Yoshimura Shūki 芳村修基 (1908–71) suggests that the *Satyadvayavibhāga* (199.19–200.1) and *Satyadvayanirdeśa* (212.10; 215.2, 8; 218.19) cited in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama* correspond to this sūtra (Yoshimura, 1974: 333n45, 356n84 and n89, 357n93). In chapter 18 of the *Prasannapadā* (374.5–375.6), this scripture is cited as the *Satyadvayavibhāgāvatārasūtra*, wherein the term *dharmadhātu* is equated with *tathatā* and the five heinous sins. T460:14.449a28–29; T1489:24.1076c11–12; T1490:24.1082a29–b1; D 179 [*mdo sde, ma*] 248a6–249a4. 84000: 1.25–30. See note 200 for information on these Chinese texts. For another instance of *dharmadhātu* in the *Prasannapadā*, refer to the chapter by Christopher Jones, p. 11.

¹⁹⁵ *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā anuttarā samyaksambodhir abhisamboddhavyā iti* (So I..., by the insight associated with a single moment of thought, must develop the supreme correct awakening). *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 278.12–13. Bendall and Rouse, 1922: 255.

¹⁹⁶ The Chinese version is the *Yuedeng sanmei jing* 月燈三昧經 (T639), translated by *Narendrayasas (Nāliantiyeshe 那連提耶舍) in 554. The sources of this phrase, which appears twice in the text, are as follows: (1) SRS 288.15; T639:15.614a27–28, (2) SRS 289.9; T639:15.614b22. See Watanabe, 2019b: 24n23.

¹⁹⁷ The phrase appears three times in the *Bodhisattvapīṭaka*. The sources of the Sanskrit manuscript were kindly furnished by Matsuda Kazunobu 松田和信 (via email on August 28, 2023); publication of the manuscript by the University of Oslo is anticipated. (1) *ekakṣaṇacittayogena sarvajñatājñānābhisambodhanatā* (MS 123r7);

guhyaśūtra.¹⁹⁸ Among these, further below we will explore the *Dhāraṇī-śvararāja* in connection with the inherent purity of the mind in §6.9. First, however, let us look at the **Samvṛtiparamārthasatyānirdeśa* in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, where we find typical terms relating to “instantaneous insight.” For the sake of the discussion that follows, I also present a Chinese translation, a passage from the *Dasheng ji pusa xue lun* 大乘集菩薩學論, which corresponds to the following passage in Sanskrit:

*ekakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā sarvadharmān avabhotsya ity evaṃ cittam utpādya nāntarā tiṣṭhati, na viṣṭhīvati aprāptāyāṃ sarvajñatāyām.*¹⁹⁹

Having resolved to ascertain all *dharma*s by the insight associated with a single moment [of thought], he does not dwell nor take rest as long as all-knowing has not been attained.²⁰⁰

於諸法智和合一相。如是發心中無所住。由無所住於一切智悉無所得 (T1636:32.79b19–21)

Knowledge blends together with all *dharma*s and becomes one and the same characteristic (**ekakṣaṇa*). Thus the mind arises, but it does not dwell in it. By not dwelling in it, there is nothing to be attained in all-knowing.

Here we find the phrase *sarvadharmān avabhotsya* (to recognize all *dharma*s [by instantaneous insight]). The term *sarvajñatā*, denoting all-knowing, is also present here. While Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the **Samvṛti-paramārthasatyānirdeśa* does not include a word or phrase directly

(2) *ekacittalakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñāyām* (MS 128r5); (3) *ekakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñāyānuttarā* (MS 131v5).

¹⁹⁸ *anunayapratīghaviḡatena kulaputra bodhisatvena ikacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā yat kiñcit jñātavyam draṣṭavyaṃ prāptavyam* / (O good men, by a bodhisattva who is free from greed and enmity, by the insight associated with a single moment of thought, something should be known, seen, and obtained). MS 17b7–8. This Sanskrit text and a tentative Japanese translation were kindly provided by Ikuma Hiromitsu; my English rendering here is based on that Japanese version. Ikuma will publish a critical edition of the Sanskrit manuscript of the text. Although the context is not identical, the sequence of verbs that appear with instantaneous insight is similar to those in Chandrakīrti’s commentary on the *Catuhśataka* (Four Hundred Verse Treatise) (ch. 8, verse 15) by Āryadeva (fl. third century). D 3865 [*dbu ma, ya*] 139a5.

¹⁹⁹ *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 18.5–6.

²⁰⁰ Bendall and Rouse, 1922: 20. *Wenshushili jinglü jing* 文殊師利淨律經, translated by Dharmarakṣa in 289 (T460:14.452a24–27); *Qingjing pini fangguang jing* 清淨毘尼方廣經, translated by Kumārajīva (T1489:24.1079a27–29); *Ji diao yin suowen jing* 寂調音所問經, translated by Fahai 法海 (fl. fifth century) (T1490:24.1084c24–27); D 179 [*mdo sde, ma*] 256a7. 84000: 1.98.

corresponding to the notion of “instantaneous insight,”²⁰¹ Kumārajīva’s translation clearly includes it, with the rendering *yinian xiangying hui* 一念相應慧 (**eka(citta)kṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā*).

Let us now discuss the phenomenon of alternation between *ekalakṣaṇa* and *ekakṣaṇa* in Sanskrit manuscripts. Working backward from Tibetan and Chinese translations, we can assume that in almost all instances the notion of “instantaneous (insight)” appears in the Sanskrit texts as *eka(citta)kṣaṇa*. However, as pointed out in Watanabe, 1991 and 2009, the word *ekalakṣaṇa* appears three times in the extant PSP edition and once in a Tōdai manuscript of the PSP. This is also the case in the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* as cited in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, shown in §6.9. Furthermore, in the second of the three examples from the manuscripts of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*, the word is *ekacittalakṣaṇa*.

There is also a Chinese translation, *yixiang* 一相 (one and the same characteristic), that allows one to assume that the original Sanskrit text had **ekalakṣaṇa*. The Chinese translation of the PSP in 291 has the word *yixiang*, corresponding to “instantaneous insight.”²⁰²

於金剛三昧，一相之智，逮得阿耨多羅三耶三菩 (T221:8.136a9–10)

In the adamant meditation, by the insight of one and the same characteristic (*yixiang* 一相), [the practitioner] attains **anuttarasamyak-saṃbodhi* (supreme correct awakening).

In the Chinese recension of the **Samvṛtiparamārthasatyānirdeśa* cited in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, translated in the Northern Song dynasty, the corresponding term is *yixiang* 一相, equally suggesting **ekalakṣaṇa* for the Sanskrit. The phenomenon of alternation between *kṣaṇa* (moment) and *lakṣaṇa* (character) can also be observed in these two Chinese translations.

Given the frequency of these instances, it appears challenging to attribute them all solely to transcription errors or misunderstandings of the original Sanskrit manuscripts. I do not intend to imply the occurrence of a Homeric nod. Nevertheless, I posit that the recurrence of these terms suggests a deeper connection rooted in monistic thought. A scribal (mis)writing of *ekalakṣaṇa* seems distinct from a mere miswriting of an unrelated word. It is not implausible to suppose that the monistic term *ekalakṣaṇa* might have been

²⁰¹ The phrase *fayi zhi qing* 發意之頃 (T460:14.452a25) might correspond to instantaneous insight. According to Hirakawa, 1968: 215, the inherent purity of the mind is exclusively found in Dharmarakṣa’s translation of this text and not in other translations.

²⁰² See the fifth row in the table in §6.4.

employed in this particular context of Buddha's awakening; thus it is advisable to entertain the possibility that instantaneous insight is inherently intertwined with the monistic comprehension of all *dharma*s.

6.6 *Ekacitta* and *Ekakṣaṇa* as Instantaneous Insight

We will now explore how the words *ekacitta* and *ekakṣaṇa* in several important Mahāyāna sutras share the meaning “insight associated with a single moment [of thought].” Individually these words simply denote, respectively, “one mind” and “one moment.” Examining them in isolation allows us to grasp only their literal meaning, while comparing them with examples from other literature enables us to comprehend their intended significance. These words frequently appear in the context of the Buddha's awakening in numerous Mahāyāna sutras. Hence, it is evident that they carry the same meaning as “insight associated with a single moment [of thought],” or “instantaneous insight.” The *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, *Daśabhūmika*, and *Gaṇḍavyūha* will be examined in this section.²⁰³

The *Daśabhūmika* is said to be influenced by the *Mahāvastu*, as the former inherited from the latter the conception of the ten stages of ascetic practice.²⁰⁴ Just as there is a significant shift between the seventh and lower stages and the eighth and higher stages in the *Mahāvastu*,²⁰⁵ a similar

²⁰³ Instances of these terms in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* and the *Daśabhūmika* have already been noted in Honda, 1968: 222n48.

²⁰⁴ Takahara, 1955: 131a, states, “The ten stages of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* lineage bear similarities to the ten stages of the *Mahāvastu*, suggesting a possible influence. However, the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* lineage appears to have extended this concept by introducing additional names for the stages to emphasize its distinctive characteristics. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the ten stages of the *Mahāvastu* preceded the ten stages of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* lineage.”

²⁰⁵ *aṣṭamīprabhṛtiṃ bhūmim gatāte anivartiyā* / (Having reached the eighth stage or above, they do not regress). Mvu 1.102.6. Jones, 1949–56: I 80. An explanation of this phrase is seen in Takahara, 1955: 130b. The transition from the seventh to the eighth stage becomes possible with the presence of the “mind characterized by great compassion” (*mahākaruṇāsaṃprayuktaṃ cittam*) at the end of the seventh stage (Mvu 1.136.4–5; Jones, 1949–56: I 108). It is worth noting that in the seventh stage of the *Mahāvastu*, the term *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion) is coupled with the word *saṃprayukta*, which bears a striking resemblance to *saṃyukta* (associated with). In addition, *mahākaruṇā* holds significance as a key term in the *Daśabhūmika* and assumes an integral role in bodhisattva practice from the eighth stage onward. Hence, it can be argued that in the *Mahāvastu*, *mahākaruṇā* serves as the guiding force for transitioning from the seventh to the eighth stage, while in the *Daśabhūmika* it is characterized by the presence of “instantaneous insight.” Sueki, 1996: 87, 95n17,

transition exists in the *Daśabhūmika*, where the eighth-stage bodhisattvas are portrayed as being on par with those who have achieved awakening in several ways. One feature of the eighth stage is that the activities of the bodhisattva become effortless (*anābhoga*, *wu gongyong* 無功用).²⁰⁶ The following passage of the eighth stage in ch. 9 §14²⁰⁷ elucidates another distinction, in which the word *ekakṣaṇa*, which relates to “instantaneous insight,” appears.

*tena khalu punar buddhā bhagavantas tasya bodhisattvasya tāvad apra-
māṇaṃ jñānābhīnīrharākarmopasaṃharanti yasyaikakṣaṇābhīnīrḥṭasya
jñānābhīnīrharākarmaṇaḥ sa pūrvakaḥ prathamacittotpādam upādāya
yāvat saptamīm bhūmipratīṣṭhām upāgata ārambhaḥ śatataīm api
kalāṃ nopeti, sahasratamīm api, ..., koṭīniyutaśatasahasratamīm api*

Therefore, again the venerable buddhas at first provide the bodhisattva with the immeasurable act which produces knowledge. Of this knowledge-producing act, accomplished in one moment, the exertion produced from the first resolution of mind up to the dwelling in the seventh stage cannot reach even a part of one hundredth, of one thousandth, ... of one hundred thousand millions.²⁰⁸

The bodhisattva at the eighth stage, having attained instantaneous insight, is depicted as occupying a significantly higher level compared to the earlier stages “in one moment.”

Moving on, let us consider a passage from the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*. Originating in northwest India during the Gupta dynasty and potentially dated to the early fifth century, the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* is clearly not an early Mahāyāna scripture. The term *ekakṣaṇa* is deployed in the final verse of the fifth chapter, titled *sūnyatā* (Emptiness), in a description related to awakening.²⁰⁹ It is noteworthy that terms associated with instantaneous

observes that the term *yinian* 一念 (**ekacitta*, one mind) in the Chinese translation of the *Daśabhūmika* occurs more frequently above the seventh stage.

²⁰⁶ The distinction lies between *sābhoga* (with effort or exertion) and *anābhoga* (without effort or exertion). See also Seyfort Ruegg, 1969: 112, for the special location of the eighth stage.

²⁰⁷ Note that the numbering of the stages and chapters is shifted by one in the version in Tatsuyama, 1938, where the introduction is designated as chapter 1 and the epilogue as chapter 12. For a Sanskrit source and a table comparing the Chinese translations, see the following page on the website of the Dharmadhātu Research Project: <https://mahayana-scriptures.com/ct/dbh/all>. The 1926 edition of *Daśabhūmika* edited by Johannes Rahder serves as a source for the Sanskrit text on the site.

²⁰⁸ Honda, 1968: 222.

²⁰⁹ For the correspondence between the Tibetan and Chinese translations of this chapter, see Ölzjargal, 2015: 16.

insight are mostly oriented in the conclusion to the treatment of a particular topic, thus serving as the focal point of utmost importance.

ekakṣaṇapravṛttaṃ tu yaj jñānaṃ ca mahāmuneḥ /

anekakalpakoṭīṣu na śakyam gaṇayitum kvacit // verse 33²¹⁰

The great sage's [i.e., the Buddha] knowledge that occurred in a single moment cannot at all be counted up in numerous millions of aeons.²¹¹

This term appears in the concluding verse of the chapter on *sūnyatā* and carries overwhelming significance. This pattern remains consistent in other literature as well.

The significance of the appearance of the terms in the denouement of the chapter becomes clear when examining the *Vimalakīrtinīrdeśa* (ch. 3 §59). The following excerpt encapsulates the gist of the concluding section of their dialogue:

*sarvasatvamaṇḍa eṣa satvāsvabhāvatayā, sarvadharmamaṇḍa eṣa sūnyatābhisaṃbodhanatayā, ... traividyaṇḍamaṇḍa eṣa niravaśeṣatvāt kleśānām, ekacittaniravaśeṣasarvadharmānubodhamāṇḍa eṣa sarvajñajñānasamudāgamatvāt /*²¹²

It is the seat of all sentient beings, because sentient beings are without essence. It is the seat of all *dharma*s, because it awakens fully to emptiness.... It is the seat of the knowledge that derives from the threefold knowledges, through not having even a residue of the afflictions. It is the seat of the ascertainment of all *dharma*s without remainder (*niravaśeṣa*)²¹³ in a single [moment] of thought (ekacitta), through the attainment of the knowledge of all-knowing one.²¹⁴

The term *ekacitta* here specifically pertains to the depiction of the Buddha's awakening. Both Kumārajīva's and Xuanzang's translations unequivocally render it as "instantaneous insight."²¹⁵ Furthermore, *sarvadharma* (all

²¹⁰ *Suvarṇabhāṣasūtra* 63.15–16.

²¹¹ Emmerick, 1996: 24.

²¹² Vkn 38.1–7/152–53.

²¹³ The term *niravaśeṣa*, which describes *sarvadharma* in the passage quoted above, is intriguing as it pertains to the definition of *sarva* (all). Cf. §6.8.

²¹⁴ Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 40.

²¹⁵ The Chinese translations for *ekacittaniravaśeṣasarvadharmānubodhamāṇḍa eṣa sarvajñajñānasamudāgamatvāt* in the passage quoted above are as follows: Zhi Qian, 一意覺場是一切智普具故 (T474:14.524b15); Kumārajīva, 一念知一切法是道場成就一切智故 (T475:14.543a4–5); Xuanzang, 一剎那心覺一切法究竟無餘是妙菩提。一切智智圓滿證故 (T476:14.565c12–13). Prince Shōtoku annotates the relevant part of Kumārajīva's translation as *jīngang xīn* 金剛心 (adamantine mind) in

dharmas) and *sarvajñajñāna* also appear in conjunction. Interestingly, the phrase “awakening, the nature of which is pure” (ch. 3 §52), which surfaces shortly before this passage, relates to the inherent purity of the mind.²¹⁶

Now let us examine a passage from the Samantabhadra chapter of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* is a lengthy composition, and while many of the chapters predominantly employ elaborate literary language, making it arduous to pinpoint the core doctrine, some do contain doctrinally significant concepts. Among the fifty-three chapters, the last, on the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, contains many passages pertaining to important doctrines, including the following:

*ekakṣaṇasamantabhadrabodhisattvacaryāpratyakṣajñānapāramitāvihār
aṃ pratyālabhata* /²¹⁷

He has attained the perfection (*pāramitā*) of knowledge, which in one moment realizes the deeds of the universal and wise (*samantabhadra*) bodhisattva.²¹⁸

the *Yuimagyō gisho* 維摩經義疏 (T2186:56.44b10). The translation by Zhi Qian contains the term *yi* 一意, which is believed to correspond to **ekacitta*. The phrase *ru yi* 如一意轉頃 (like while one mind revolves) is found in Zhi Qian’s translation of the *Da ming du jing* 大明度經 (T225:8.497a18) for the ASP 180.10–11. See also note 184.

²¹⁶ *anākulā bodhiḥ prakṛtipariśuddhā, prakāśā bodhiḥ svabhāvapariśuddhā* (Awakening is not turbid, being pure by nature. Awakening is radiant, being pure in essence). Vkn 36.10–11/144–45; Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 38. Zhi Qian, 順哉佛本性已清。明哉佛自然已淨 (T474:14.524a16–17); Kumārajīva, 無亂是菩提常自靜故。善寂是菩提性清淨故 (T475:14.542c5–6); Xuanzang, 無亂是菩提常自靜故。善寂是菩提本性淨故 (T476:14.565a24–25). This passage indicates a close connection between the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the inherent purity of the mind. In another well-known teaching directed at Upāli (Vkn ch. 3 §34), we can find a famous phrase related to the inherent purity of the mind. Hirakawa, 1968: 212, explains, “This is not the inherent purity of the mind, but it is a thought that leads to it.” *uktam hi bhagavatā cittasaṃkleśāt satvāḥ saṃkliṣyante cittavyavadānād viśudhyante* / (The Buddha stated, “Sentient beings become defiled when their minds are defiled; they become purified when their minds are purified”). Vkn 30.9–10/118–19; Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 32. Kumārajīva: 如佛所說。心垢故眾生垢。心淨故眾生淨 (T475.14.541b18–19); Xuanzang: 如佛所說。心雜染故有情雜染。心清淨故有情清淨 (T476:14.563b 27–28). The *Ratnagotravibhāga* (RGV 67.1–2) quotes this passage. Cf. Takasaki, 1966a: 277n77. We can trace back its origin as far as the Pāli *Nikāyas* (e.g., *Samyutta-nikāya* 22.100; PTS III 151.32, 152.8–9). For related sources see La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 214, 421; Lamotte, 1962, 51–53; Lamotte and Boin, 1976: LXXIV.

²¹⁷ Gv(V) 425.7; Gv(S) 537.21–22; T278:9.785a13–14; T279:10.441a26–27.

²¹⁸ Kajiyama et al., 2021c: 334.

This particular sentence is preceded by a description of attaining “the ten knowledge *pāramitās*” (*daśa jñānapāramitā*). Note that here the reference is to *jñāna*, not *prajñā*. In the *Daśabhūmika* (ch. 11 §40), the “perfection of knowledge” (*jñānapāramitā*) is regarded as the highest among the ten perfections.²¹⁹ Expanding upon the concept of “one moment of knowledge,” the *Gaṇḍavyūha* seeks to attribute original significance to the phrase *samantabhadrabodhisattvacaryā* (the practice of a universal and wise bodhisattva) in this passage.²²⁰ The phrase appears thirty-seven times in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and plays a crucial role in this text. The association of this phrase with the conception of a single moment of knowledge is significant and should not be overlooked.

Furthermore, the corresponding term for “[knowledge of] one [thought-] moment” (*eka[citta]kṣaṇa*) appears twice in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, denoting the knowledge that ascertains the three temporal dimensions of past, present, and future.²²¹ Similar expressions are found twice in the *Daśabhūmika*, conveying a nearly identical meaning.²²² Thus, *eka(citta)kṣaṇa(jñāna)* seems to function in the same way as all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*). In the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Daśabhūmika*, the concept of perceiving the three temporal dimensions through the “knowledge of one [thought-]moment” should, in accordance with the Abhidharma’s definition, imply the perception of all *dharma*s. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh 296.4), it is stated that the

²¹⁹ *tasya daśabhyah pāramitābhyo jñānapāramitātiriktatamā bhavati...* (For him the perfection of knowledge is the most excellent among ten perfections...). Honda, 1968: 276.

²²⁰ Katsura, 1995: 20, observes that the term *samantabhadrabodhisattva* used here is not a specific name of a well-known bodhisattva, but rather an expression denoting a “bodhisattva who is universal and wise.”

²²¹ The two appearances are in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* as follows: (97) *ekacittakṣaṇatryadhva-jñānaśarvalokābhijñānānām* (By the knowledge of the three temporal dimensions (tryadhva) in one mind-moment, one becomes acquainted with all the people of the world). Gv(V) 31.21–22; Gv(S) 41.22; T278:9.685b27–28; T279:10.329a22–23. Kajiyama et al., 2021a: 104; *tryadhvaikakṣaṇajñānapratilabdhanām* (Bodhisattvas have attained the knowledge to know the three temporal dimensions in one moment). Gv(V) 158.15; Gv(S) 208.1–2; T278:9.712c22–23; T279:10.366b26; T294:10.859c1–2. Kajiyama et al., 2021b: 111.

²²² Ch. 2 §2 *tryadhvaikakṣaṇavibodhāya* ((9) He acknowledges the three temporal dimensions in one moment); Honda, 1968: 127. Ch. 8 §2 *ekakṣaṇatryadhvānubodhaṃ ca buddhānām bhāgavatām avataraṭi* / ((10) He comprehends that the venerable buddhas understand the three temporal dimensions in one moment); Honda, 1968: 201. In the *Daśabhūmika*, both passages are depicted in scenes of awakening based on accounts of the Buddha’s life.

name “Sarvāstivāda” is used because the proponents of this school argue for the existence of *dharmas* throughout the past, present, and future. Therefore, the three temporal dimensions can be understood as the existence of all *dharmas*.²²³ In other words, the sections of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Daśabhūmika* that refer to “perceiving the three temporal dimensions in one moment” are equivalent to “perceiving all *dharmas* in one moment.”

As demonstrated earlier, the notion of instantaneous insight is not only evident in the *Daśabhūmika* and the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* but also prominently featured in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. It can be argued that this concept is also discernible within the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. The utilization of this term holds significance in better understanding the monistic framework of thought that underlies these entire sūtras.

6.7 Instantaneous Insight in Chinese (and Tibetan) Translations

The concept “instantaneous insight” is also present in the Chinese (and Tibetan) translations of the *Lokottaraparivarta*, a chapter of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* and of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa(mahā)sūtra*. As the Tibetan translations came later, in the ninth century, in this section I focus on the two Chinese translations that date to the third and fifth centuries, respectively.

I begin with the *Dushi pin jing* 度世品經, Dharmarakṣa’s third-century translation of the *Lokottaraparivarta* (Chapter on the Transcendence of the World), later also rendered into Chinese by Buddhabhadra in the early fifth century and by Śikṣānanda (Shicha nantuo 實叉難陀, 652–710) in 699 as the *Li shijian pin* 離世間品. The *Lokottaraparivarta* expounds the idea of “adventitious afflictions” (*āgantuker upakleśa*, *kechen fannao* 客塵煩惱) and asserts that the true nature of all *dharmas* is purity. It also elucidates the concept of the three kinds of categories of being as nothing but mind (*sanjie weixin* 三界唯心).²²⁴ Within this scripture, there exist two specific passages

²²³ Paramārtha’s commentary on the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (T2300:70.463b20–22) is helpful in understanding “three temporal dimensions” as “all *dharmas*.” It records that “all *dharmas* are of six kinds.” Three of the six kinds are unconditioned *dharmas* and three are conditioned *dharmas*. Of these, the general definition of unconditioned is found in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. The three conditioned kinds are said to be the three temporal dimensions. This is also recorded in the *Abhidharmadīpa* 257.4, a Sarvāstivādin treatise written as a response to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, which was written by Vasubandhu.

²²⁴ I am providing the translation “categories of being” here, which does not correspond to *dhātu*. I believe that *traidhātu* simply refers to “three kinds.” See for instance the following passage quoted in the *Bhāvanākrama*: *uktam cāryalokottaraparivarte*

that serve as instances of instantaneous insight. The concept “instantaneous insight” shares a profound connection with the concepts “all *dharma*s” and “purity of the mind,” as will be explored in §7.1. Each section of the *Lokottaraparivarta* is divided into ten subsections, with the most significant teachings often placed in the final section. The following passage is from the *Dushi pin jing*:

一心念頃，應時平等，逮成智慧，為最正覺 (T292:10.644c6–7)

In a single mind-moment, [the bodhisattva awakens] to the equality [of all *dharma*s] according to the moment in time, attains insight, and attains the supreme correct awakening.

The preceding excerpt is found within a passage delineating the insight of the Tathāgata’s yawning (**viṣṭambhaṇa*, Tib. *bsgyings pa, fenxun* 奮迅), and it is positioned at the end of the section explaining the ten types of yawning. Immediately preceding this passage, the Buddha is portrayed as having repelled the demons, and here he is depicted as having attained supreme correct awakening. Thus, in the *Dushi pin jing*, following accounts of the Buddha’s life, the term associated with “in a single mind-moment” (*yixin nian qing* 一心念頃) appears at the point when he attains awakening after successfully dispelling Māra and his demons. In Buddhahadra’s translation, in what corresponds to Dharmarakṣa’s rendering of *yixin nian qing*, there is a clear, literal Chinese translation that corresponds to **eka(citta)kṣaṇa-samāyuktayā prajñayā*.²²⁵ The following passage is also from the *Dushi pin jing*:

一心念頃，解諸法等，慧如金剛 (T292.10.645c11)²²⁶

In a single mind-moment, he realizes that all *dharma*s are equal. His insight becomes adamant.

This section on pure insight (**prajñāviśuddhi*; Tib. *shes rab yongs su dag pa*) serves as the concluding segment following the teachings of five out of

“*punar aparam, bho jinaputra, cittamātram traidhātukaṃ avatarati, tac ca cittam anantamādhyatayavatarati*” iti / (In the holy *Lokottaraparivarta*, it is stated, ‘Oh, son of the victor! Moreover, [the bodhisattva] understands that the three kinds [of categories of being] are only the mind, and that the mind is without extremes and without middle.’) *Bhāvanākrama* 217.9–11. Dharmarakṣa: T292:10.628c26–28; Buddhahadra: T278:9.642a14–16; Śikṣānanda: T279:10.288c5–6.

²²⁵ Buddhahadra: 一念相應慧 (T278.9.659c1); Śikṣānanda: 一念相應慧 (T279:10.304b18); D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 234b6.

²²⁶ Buddhahadra: *ynian xiangying jingang zhi* 一念相應金剛智 (T278.9.660c17–18), Śikṣānanda: 一念相應金剛智 (T279:10.305c5–6); D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 238b7–239a1.

the six pure *pāramitās*.²²⁷ It represents the tenth and final subsection dedicated to elucidating pure insight. The orientation of “instantaneous insight” at the end of the description of awakening is akin to the case of the ten *pāramitās* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the verse in the chapter on *śūnyatā* of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra*, introduced earlier.

Additionally, the phrase “his insight becomes adamant” bears resemblance to the presence of the adamant (*vajropama*) meditation in the fifth example of “instantaneous insight” in the PSP (§6.4).

If the abbreviated form *ekacitta* (*yixin* 一心, *ynian* 一念, Tib. *sems gcig*) has the same meaning as “instantaneous insight,” then in all likelihood *yixin* in the following passage from the eleventh chapter on the four noble truths of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa(mahā)sūtra*, *Da ban niḥuan jing* 大般泥洹經, translated by Faxian 法顯 (337–422), is also being used in this sense.

起於一心，便得妙果，常樂自在，名法自在王 (T376:12.883a6–7)

If [his insight] arises in one mind[-moment], he attains the subtle result and is able to enjoy mastery (**aiśvarya*) at all times and is called a king who attains mastery over all *dharma*s.

The corresponding translations of *yixin* 一心 in Dharmakṣema’s rendering and in Tibetan are, respectively, *ynian* 一念 and *sems gcig*.²²⁸ It can be inferred that the original Sanskrit term for all three translations was **ekacitta*. Considering that the terms for “[enjoying] mastery” (**aiśvarya*, Tib. *dbang phyug*, *zizai* 自在) are associated with the description of supreme correct awakening,²²⁹ it can also be inferred—against the background of §6.4 above—

²²⁷ After this, the text continues with ten sections on each of the four immeasurables: loving-kindness or benevolence (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*). In §7.1, we will look at the section on compassion within them.

²²⁸ *Da ban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, translated by Dharmakṣema: 若發此心，一念因緣，於諸法中而得自在 (T374:12[VII].406c13; Then upon bringing forth this mind, by the conditions wrought by this single mind[-moment], one can attain freedom in all *dharma*s). My rendering here is based on the translation in Blum, 2013: 222–23. D 120 [*mdo sde, tha*] **Mahāparinirvāṇamahāyānasūtra* 101b5; *gang gi tshes sems gcig bskyed pa’i las kyi ’bras bus bdag gis chos kyi dbang phyug rtag pa dang bde ba ’thob bo snyam*. Habata, 2013: §368.9–11. Cf. Habata 2013: §369.10–11.

²²⁹ It is worth noting that in scenes depicting awakening, expressions denoting “to enjoy mastery over all *dharma*s,” *yiqie fa zizai* 一切法自在, appear frequently. The Chinese *zizai* 自在 often translates the Sanskrit *vaśitā* or *aiśvarya*. In Tibetan, the Sanskrit *vaśitā* and *aiśvarya* are rendered as *dbang pa* and *dbang phyug*, respectively. Both sets of terms mean supernatural power or mastery. See Silk, 2015: 71 i) and a reference therein for *dharmavaśitā*. For examples of *dharmavaśitā*, see the following passage: *buddhadharmavaśitā prāpuṇesi* (attaining mastery over the Buddha’s teachings) Mvu

that this passage conveys the same meaning as the passage on “insight associated with a single moment [of thought].”

Similar examples of words corresponding to “equality” and “[enjoying] mastery” in the *Dushi pin jing* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa(mahā)sūtra* can be found in the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā* (Questions of Gaganagañja) and the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa* (Teaching of Akṣayamati), where they describe scenes of awakening, such as “having attained mastery over all *dharma*s” (**sarva-dharmavaśitāprāptaḥ*) and “realizing that all *dharma*s are equal” (**sarva-dharmasamatābhisambuddhaḥ*).²³⁰ Thus, upon awakening, all *dharma*s appear as the object to be cognized.

Utilizing the search function on Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae (TLB), a University of Oslo website dedicated to the presentation of Buddhist literature,²³¹ we can confirm that the term *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā* is found in the Tibetan translations of the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*²³² and the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā*.²³³ These texts are categorized alongside the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*, as we will see below, within the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sutras.²³⁴

In several sources examined in this section, we observe the assertion that “all *dharma*s are equal” represents the Buddha’s awakening. Some *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sutras state that “all *dharma*s are equal” signifies what the

2.415.16. Jones, 1949–56: II 368; *eṣā hi prajñāpāramitā sarvadharmavaśitām anuprāpayati* (This perfection of insight attains mastery over all *dharma*s) PSP 5.64.18; cf. *Daśabhūmika* ch. 9 §22.

²³⁰ Takasaki, 1974: 674, 733n7, points out the commonality in the format of the preface of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* sutras.

²³¹ <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=library&bid=2>, hereafter, “Oslo.”

²³² According to search results on Oslo, the term **eka(citta)kṣaṇasamāyuktayā* appears in this text three times, as documented in Braarvig, 1993.

²³³ According to search results on Oslo, the term *eka(citta)kṣaṇasamāyukta* appears in this text three times. The fact that these passages appear at the end of their respective sections implies a connection with the Buddha’s supreme correct awakening. While the corresponding Chinese word for *ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktayā* is found in Amoghavajra’s translation for these instances, it is not present in the *Xukong zang pusa pin* 虛空藏菩薩品 T397[8]. Matsumoto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎 (1869–1944), based on the *Chu sanzangji ji* 出三藏記集 (T2145:55.13c15–17), attributes the translation of this sutra to Shengjian 聖堅 (d.u.) (Matsumoto, 1927: 133–42).

²³⁴ It is conceivable that there might exist other Mahāyāna sutras that expound on the concept of instantaneous insight. Examples can be found by searching for (*sems kyi*) *skad cig gcig dang ldan pa’i shes* (**eka(citta)kṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā*) in Tibetan literature.

Buddha realized at the beginning of the sūtras, and this phrase is also referenced in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.²³⁵

In the second example from the *Lokottaraparivarta* mentioned earlier, the mention of “all *dharma*s are equal” is also consistently found across all the translations.²³⁶

Now, let us also examine references to “all *dharma*s are equal” within early Mahāyāna literature and Yogācāra literature. In the *Drumakinnararāja* (31; first verse), Lokakṣema’s and the Tibetan translation explicitly convey the message that “all *dharma*s are equal.”²³⁷ In the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra*, as discussed in §3.1, the Tibetan translation may be somewhat challenging to comprehend due to the presence of relative pronouns. However, in Lokakṣema’s translation, it unequivocally states that “all *dharma*s are equal” and “*fashen* 法身 (**dharmadhātu*) are equal.”²³⁸ In turning the eye to Yogācāra literature, in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (ch. 14, verse 30), it may be observed that the verse pertaining to “the equality of *dharmadhātu*” is elucidated as “the equality of *dharma*(s)” in the commentary.²³⁹

In this section, we have observed from the sūtras that the object of instantaneous insight is all *dharma*s, and that they are depicted as equal. Consequently, the monistic concept that “all *dharma*s are equal” is intimately connected to the depiction of the Buddha’s awakening in certain Mahāyāna texts, with some texts also referencing the equality of *dharmadhātu*.

²³⁵ *bhagavān sarvadharmasamatābhisambuddhaḥ*. RGV 3.18.

²³⁶ Buddhābhadrā: 覺一切法平等淨慧 (T278:9.660c18); Śikṣānanda: 了一切法平等清淨慧 (T279:10.305c06); D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 238b7–239a1. *chos thams cad mnyam pa nyid du rtogs pa'i ye shes*.

²³⁷ 諸法等而悉脫 (T624:15.352a8–9); D 157 [*mdo sde, pha*] 266b4. Harrison, 1992a, 60; 84000: 1.75. Cf. 14C 於諸法等無有異 (366a11–12); D 157 314a5. Harrison, 1992a, 278; 84000: 1.466.

²³⁸ See §3.2. Cf. II 5 諸法等而無差特 (T626:15.392a11); D 216 [*mdo sde, tsha*] 221b1. Miyazaki, 2023: 74; 84000: 1.51.

²³⁹ *dharmadhātoś ca samatām pratīvidhya punas tadā / sarvasatveṣu labhate sadātmasamacittatām* / (Then, when he fully realizes the equality of the totality of *dharma*s, he attains the constant awareness of the sameness of himself and all beings). AMSa 94.8–9. *dharmānairātmyena ca dharmasamatām pratīvidhya sarvasatveṣu sadā ātmasamacittatām pratilabhate* / (Having realized the equality of [all] *dharma*s through the objective selflessness, he obtains the constant awareness of the sameness of himself and all beings.) AMSa 94.12–13. Thurman, 2004: 182, and Lévi, 1911: 168.

6.8 Instantaneous Insight and *Dharmadhātu* in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*

In the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, there are recurrent references to the notion that the bodhisattva pervades the whole space (*dharmadhātu*)²⁴⁰ in a single moment. I believe that these are closely connected to the concept of instantaneous insight. It should be noted that in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the term *dharmadhātu* is frequently preceded by the word *sarva* (all).²⁴¹ *Sarvadharmadhātu* and *dharmadhātu* are employed in almost identical senses in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.

It is important to consider the following: While the word *sarva* simply means “all,” some mainstream Buddhist schools have proposed that it may not merely denote “all” in the literal sense. The **Mahāvibhāṣā* and the **Tattvasiddhi* (*Cheng shi lun* 成實論) dispute whether *sarva* signifies “all” in an absolute sense or instead conveys the notion of “not truly all, but many.”²⁴² Considering this unresolved discussion, it is plausible that in *sarvadharmadhātu*, the term *sarva* may be employed to emphasize *dharmadhātu*. The adjectives *aśeṣa*, *niḥśeṣa*, *anavaśeṣa*, and *niravaśeṣa*, all meaning “without remainder,” are employed in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* to emphasize *sarva*. For example, the phrase *niravaśeṣasarvadharmadhātu* is found in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.²⁴³ In this phrase, I interpret the term *niravaśeṣa* to mean “without reminder” and *sarva* as “all” in a literal sense, with both terms emphasizing the term *dharmadhātu*. Although this interpretation of mine is not conclusive, instead of interpreting (*sarva*) *dharmadhātu* in the

²⁴⁰ My use here of the term “whole space” to denote *dharmadhātu* is tentative, and the connection between the word *dharmadhātu* and the idea of space was discussed earlier in §3.3.

²⁴¹ According to a search on GRETIL, there are 122 instances of the term *sarvadharmadhāt(u)* and 364 instances of the term *dharmadhāt(u)*. The former number is included in the latter.

²⁴² Xuanzang’s translation of the **Mahāvibhāṣā*: 一切有二種。謂一切一切，少分一切 (There are two ways to refer to “all”: literally “all” and “all” even in part. T1545:27[IX].45a16–17). This debate is seen in the **Tattvasiddhi* (T1646:32.364c29–365a24). Cf. AKBh 329.21–23; Paramārtha (T1559:29.267a8–10); Xuanzang (T1558:29.114c5–7). I was alerted to this reference within the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Tanaka Hironori 田中裕成 (email dated September 5, 2023).

²⁴³ Gv(V) 29.31; GV(S) 39.6; T278:9.684c20–21; T279:10.328b16. Kajiyama et al., 2021a: 99–100 (77). A related term can be found in the opening invocative verse of reverence of the Tibetan translation of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna*. *gang dag chos dbyings ma lus thugs su chud gyur la* // ([I show homage] to the [Buddha who] realised *dharmadhātu* without reminder [**aśeṣadharmadhātu*]). D 3997 [mdo ’grel, chi] 234b1. Nishio, 1940a: 25; Nishio, 1940b: 179 l 1.1.

Gaṇḍavyūha solely as a spatial concept, we should understand this term as signifying either “all *dharma*s” in a literal sense or “totality of *dharma*s” in a more abstract sense.

It can be asserted that such an abstraction contributed to the emergence of the term *dharmadhātuviśuddhi* (purity of the *dharmadhātu*) within later Mahāyāna sūtras and Yogācāra literature, representing the purity of all *dharma*s. This aspect will be explored in §7.3.

The following are passages where *cittakṣaṇa*, *sarvadharmadhātu*, and the verb *√sphar* occur in close proximity to each other.

*pūrvasabhāgacaritavikurvitaṃ ca samanūsmananti / cittakṣaṇe cittakṣaṇe sarvadharmadhātuspharaṇenāvātāreṇa*²⁴⁴

[These Bodhisattvas] also recalled supranormal transformations of the same deeds in past lives by entering into the all-pervading perfection of the totality of *dharma*s (*dharmadhātu*) in successive moments of mind.²⁴⁵

Such expressions are found several times in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*.²⁴⁶ The notion of pervading the totality of *dharma*s, moment by moment, is characterized as monistic due to the homogeneous character of all *dharma*s.²⁴⁷

The potential connection between the mind (*citta*) and *dharmadhātu* as all *dharma*s might underlie the fact that the purity of mind, the purity of all *dharma*s, and the purity of *dharmadhātu* share a common structure, as we will see in section 7.

Let us look at another passage in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. Here we find the words *dharmadhātu* and all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*).²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Gv(V) 30.18; Gv(S) 40.2; T278:9.685a9; T279:10.328c7.

²⁴⁵ Kajiyama et al., 2021a: 101.

²⁴⁶ GV(V) 68, 70, 73, 74. Cf. *praticittakṣaṇaṃ sarvadharmadhātuṃ spharāmi* (I am pervading the whole space [*dharmadhātu*] with every moment of the mind). GV(V) 153, 235, 345. Only the page numbers in Vaidya’s edition are shown here.

²⁴⁷ The term *ekacitta(kṣaṇa)* also holds significance. In Buddhism, the smallest unit of time is often expressed using the term *citta* (the mind), and *ekacitta* alone would convey the same meaning. The importance of *ekacitta* within *ekacittakṣaṇa* should not be overlooked. The discourse suggesting that in each moment of the mind bodhisattva extends to the totality of *dharma*s (*dharmadhātu*) could imply an equation between the mind and *dharmadhātu* as all *dharma*s. The notion that the totality of *dharma*s consisting of the three kinds of categories of being is nothing but mind, prominent in Yogācāra literature, is also worth reconsidering (though it falls outside the purview of this study).

²⁴⁸ According to Watanabe, 2003: 52, among occurrences in the ASP of words related to “all-knowing,” *sarvajñatā* accounts for the overwhelming majority; this comparison includes the following comparable terms: *sarvajña*, *sarvajñajñāna*, and *sarvajñatva*.

bhagavato vairocanasya kāyaṃ vyavalokayamānā... dharmam deśayamānān drṣṭvā udārān dharmadhātuvipulāṃś cittakṣane cittakṣane sarvajñatāśahagatān mahāprītegasamudrān pratilabhe //²⁴⁹

World-honored One, when I look at the body of Vairocana... [while he is] preaching, I am like the vastness, which is like the totality of dharmas (*dharmadhātu*), and the vast ocean of the great joyous impulse that accompanies all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*) in each moment of mind.²⁵⁰

In this passage, the all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*) occurs moment by moment, and it is accompanied by the vast *dharmadhātu*. The presence of (*eka*)*cittakṣaṇa*, *sarvajñatā*, and *dharmadhātu* in this section is noteworthy, as these terms are believed to have originated from the Mahāsāṃghika conception of the “insight of knowing all *dharmas* in a single moment.” Since the author(s) of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* would have been aware of this concept, this passage would indicate a new development in which the insight realized in ascetic practice gradually expands moment by moment to pervade *dharmadhātu* (totality of *dharmas*) and does not appear only once at the moment of awakening, but instead successively.

6.9 The Connection Between “Instantaneous Insight” and the Inherent Purity of the Mind as Seen in the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*

As mentioned previously (§6.5), the concept “insight associated with a single moment” is present in the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*. The *Ratnagotravibhāga* cites this sutra in relation to the inherent purity of the mind.²⁵¹ The transcriptions follow Johnston, 1950, and I have retained the use of round parentheses and strikethrough for the forthcoming explanation.

yat āha / prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam / tat tathaiva jñānam / tata ucyate /
eka(la)kṣaṇalakṣaṇasamāyuktayā prajñayā samyaksambodhir abhisam-
*buddheti /*²⁵²

My own search reveals that in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the word *sarvajñatā* occurs 348 times, with its occurrence relative to comparable words similar to that found in the ASP.

²⁴⁹ Gv(V) 224.21–25; Gv(S) 293.20–25; T278:9.735b27–c2; T279:10.385b22.

²⁵⁰ Kajiyama et al., 2021b: 268.

²⁵¹ I became acquainted with the following passage through its citation in Sueki Fumihiko’s 末本文美士 examination of the genesis of *ichinen* 一念 (**ekacitta*), a significant notion in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism (Sueki, 1996: 85).

²⁵² RGV 22.6–7. In the *Ratnagotravibhāga* manuscript, the term used is *ekalakṣaṇa*; however, Johnston, 1950: 22, appears to misinterpret it based on the Chinese translation, rendering it as *ekakṣaṇalakṣaṇasamāyuktayā*. Takasaki, 1966a: 189n24,

The mind is luminous by nature. This is real knowledge, just as it is. Therefore it is said: [the Tathāgata] perfectly realized the supreme perfect awakening by the insight associated with a single characteristic [or moment].²⁵³

The term *prakṛtiprabhāsvara* is characteristic of the inherent purity of the mind. Therefore, it is clear that the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* presents the concept of instantaneous insight in association with this concept. Among the numerous Mahāyāna sūtras featuring the concept of instantaneous insight, this particular text stands out as one where these two aspects are clearly interconnected.

I posit that this association stems from a monistic interpretation. In Dharmakṣema's translation of the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* (§12 1), we find this monistically oriented passage: "The Buddha has observed that *dharmadhātu* is of one taste."²⁵⁴ This passage appears almost verbatim in both Dharmarakṣa's rendering and in the Tibetan translation.²⁵⁵ It is evident that the passage adopts a monistic position.²⁵⁶

argues that it should be *ekakṣaṇa*, excluding *lakṣaṇa*, based on Tibetan and Chinese translations. As we have already seen with instances in the PSP and the *Bodhisattvapīṭaka*, Sanskrit texts sometimes render *ekalakṣaṇa* where the word for instantaneous insight, *ekakṣaṇa*, should be; thus, there is no need to correct the Sanskrit manuscript as suggested by Takasaki. I am grateful to Kanō Kazuo 加納和雄 for providing the manuscript. Ye, 2021, reports the detection of extant Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*. Unfortunately, according to his comparison table the extant manuscripts do not contain this passage. Below are the corresponding Chinese translations of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and two Chinese translations of the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*; *Jiujing yicheng baoxing lun*: 是故經言心自性清淨。自性清淨心本來清淨。如彼心本體。如來如是知。是故經言。如來一念心相應慧。得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提故 (T1611:31.827a23–26); *Da ai jing*: 心所依倚心本清淨而悉了之。故曰發心之頃成無上正真道 (T398:13.437b4–5); *Tuoluoni zizai wang pusa pin*: 知心性淨。是故唱言如來一念得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提 (T397[2]:13.20b25–27); D 147 [*mdo sde, pa*] 210b6–7, 84000: 2.473 (26). Takasaki, 1974: 648 §11(C)12. This passage is quoted after ch. 6, verse 213, of Chandrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*. D 3862 [*dbu ma, 'a*] 322a7–323b1. See Yonezawa, 2018: 142–43.

²⁵³ Takasaki, 1966a: 188–89.

²⁵⁴ Dharmakṣema: 佛觀法界皆一味已 (T397[2]:13.21c9).

²⁵⁵ Dharmarakṣa: 有諸法界為一種味 (T398:13.439b18); D 147 [*mdo sde, pa*] 215a7, 84000: 2.503. Takasaki, 1974: 648 §12 1.

²⁵⁶ The expression "dharmadhātvekarasa" is found in the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* by Sthiramati (fl. sixth century). *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* 74.1–2, 123.22; Xuanzang T1606.31.733a4, 757b27–28. The first instance appears within Buddha's inconceivability, a topic addressed in the chapter by Ikuma Hiromitsu (p. 189).

6.10 The Relationship Between “Instantaneous Insight,” “Purity of Mind,” and “One Taste”

I have prepared a table, located at the conclusion of this chapter, that summarizes the findings discussed so far, illustrating the concurrence of certain terms in scriptures where one finds the appearance of “instantaneous insight” (row A; the first concept listed in the column at the far left).²⁵⁷ The purpose of this table is to present evidence that demonstrates the relationship between the purity of all *dharmas* and the purity of *dharmadhātu* in Yogācāra literature. To accomplish this, in the discussion that follows I offer a comprehensive and crucial explanation of the symbol Δ, which appears in several places in the row devoted to instantaneous insight.

The remaining concepts listed in the column to the far left are as follows:

(B) “One taste”: This concept is closely related to the monistic understanding. “One taste” is frequently used in conjunction with the metaphor of the great ocean. The phrase “one taste” appears in several contexts, and I have marked it with the symbol © only when it signifies “one taste” in relation to the great ocean.

(C) (the inherent) purity of the mind: This concept is prevalent in most of the texts in the table and is often accompanied by the term (D) “adventitious defilements.” The idea of (E) the “purity of all *dharmas*” also occurs frequently in most of these texts. Since “all *dharmas*” can carry the same meaning as *dharmadhātu* in specific contexts, I posit that this expression served as a conduit through which (F) the “purity of *dharmadhātu*” was derived. The focus on these two concepts—(A) and (C)—is based on the **Dhāraṇīśvararāja* (column 10), which is dealt with in §6.9 above.²⁵⁸

The *Daśabhūmika*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* (*mahā*)*sūtra* (columns 3, 4, and 9, respectively) utilize a simplified form of the term *ekacitta* or *ekakṣaṇa* to denote the concept of instantaneous insight. In the **Samvṛtiparamārthasatyānirdeśa* (column 5), the mark ● indicates the term’s absence in certain versions. Notably, the concept of the inherent purity of the mind is exclusively found in the first Chinese translation by Dharmarakṣa,²⁵⁹ whereas the term “one taste” is absent in Dharmarakṣa’s

²⁵⁷ The terms shown in the table are not found in close proximity in the respective scriptures.

²⁵⁸ As observed in the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*, “purity of mind” and “instantaneous insight” are closely related in terms of their structural affinity. Both of these concepts are indicative of the Mahāsāṃghika tradition, as mentioned in the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* I 12,13 and 42 (§5.1 and §6.1).

²⁵⁹ T460:14.452b3–9.

translation. In the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā* (column 11), the symbol Δ indicates that the term “instantaneous insight” is not present in the first translation by Shengjian 聖堅 (d.u.) but found in Amoghavajra’s (Bukong 不空, 705–774) translation and in the Tibetan translation.

The phrase “purity of *dharmadhātu*” is relatively rare and infrequently encountered in any of the Mahāyāna sūtras listed here. In exceptional cases,²⁶⁰ it appears in the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā* (11), the **Ratnakāraṇḍasūtra* (13),²⁶¹ and the *Satyakaparivarta* (14).²⁶² Especially in the *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā*, the purity of all *dharma*s is closely associated with the concept of the purity of *dharmadhātu*.

*de bas na chos thams cad chos kyi dbyings su yang dag par 'du'o zhes bya ste / chos kyi dbyings ni gar yang 'gro ba'ang med / mi 'gro ba'ang med do // ... de ci'i phyir zhe na / bdag rnam par dag pas chos kyi dbyings kyang rnam par dag do // de bzhin du chos thams cad kyang rnam par dag pa ste / gang rnam par dag pa de rab tu snang ba'o //*²⁶³

For that reason, since all *dharma*s are said to be gathered up in *dharmadhātu* (**dharmadhātusamavasaraṇa*), there is no going and no not-going in *dharmadhātu*... Why is that? Because the self is pure (**ātmaviśuddhi*), the *dharmadhātu* is also pure (**dharmadhātuviśuddhi*). In that way all *dharma*s are pure, and this purity is illumination.²⁶⁴

Let us examine the earliest Sanskrit example in the Mahāyāna sūtras where the phrase “the purity of *dharmadhātu*” appears as *dharmadhātupariśuddhi*,

²⁶⁰ At the last stage of preparation, Watanabe Shōgo pointed out that the two texts ultimately included in the table as texts (13) and (14) incorporate the concept of instantaneous insight. I was aware of the existence of these texts but had originally not included them because I considered them to be minor. My reconsideration was prompted by Watanabe’s suggestion.

²⁶¹ T461 *Wenshushili xian baozang jing* 文殊師利現寶藏經, translated by Dharmarakṣa; T462 *Da fangguang baojie jing* 大方廣寶篋經, translated by Guṇabhadra (Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅, 394–468); D 117 [*mdo sde, ja*] **Ratnakāraṇḍasūtra* (Basket of the [Three] Jewels).

²⁶² T271 *Pusa xing fangbian jingjie shentong bianhua jing* 菩薩行方便境界神通變化經, translated by Guṇabhadra; T272 *Da sa zhe niqianzi suoshuo jing* 大薩遮尼乾子所說經, translated by Bodhiruci (Putiliuzhi 菩提留支, ?–535); D 146 [*mdo sde, pa*] **Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvitanirdeśasūtra* (Sūtra Teaching the Miracles in the Domain of Skillful Means that the Bodhisattvas Have at Their Disposal).

²⁶³ This quoted Tibetan passage does not correspond to the first translation but is clearly found in Amoghavajra’s translation. Amoghavajra: 是故法界與一切法互相涉入。法界即法，法即法界，無所不遍...所以者何我清淨故法界清淨。如是一切法清淨故 (T404:13.620c29–621a3).

²⁶⁴ D 148 [*mdo sde, pa*] 263b5–7. Han, 2020: 267, IV §34.

which can be found in the *Tathāgataḡhyasūtra*. Although this sūtra is not included in the table, we have already seen in §6.5 that the concept of instantaneous insight is present in this sūtra.

Dharmarakṣa: 復有三事，得入清淨業。何調為三。一曰自然清淨。二曰本無清淨。三曰本際清淨。是為三 (T310[3]:11.79a15–17)

Fahu: 又有三種通達清淨。何等為三。一者法界清淨。二者真如清淨。三者實際清淨 (T312:11.749a10–12)

*tisraḡ pariśuddhayo 'nugatā bhavanti / dharmadhātupariśuddhis tatathāpariśuddhiḡ bhūtakotiḡparipariśuddhiḡ / MS 34a3–4*²⁶⁵

There are three kinds of purity. They are the purity of *dharmadhātu*, the purity of suchness (*tatathā*), and the pure apex of reality (*bhūtakotiḡ*).²⁶⁶

Dharmadhātu is mentioned in conjunction with *tathatā* and *bhūtakotiḡ* as the “absolute truth” or “ultimate reality” in the PSP and other texts. In the Sanskrit text of the *Tathāgataḡhyasūtra*, where the term *dharmadhātu-pariśuddhi* (the purity of *dharmadhātu*) appears, Dharmarakṣa’s translation renders it as “pure by nature” (*ziran qingjing* 自然清淨). It is highly likely that Dharmarakṣa chose to translate *dharmadhātu* as *ziran* 自然. In this context, it is plausible that Dharmarakṣa perceived (*dharmad*)*dhātu* as a concept akin to *svabhāva* or *prakṛti*.

This study focuses on three specific Yogācāra texts (columns 15, 16, and 17). While it is important to carefully acknowledge the differences in the thought presented within these texts, I have chosen them because they provide clear definitions of the term *dharmadhātu* and because they encompass all the concepts associated with the inherent purity of the mind.²⁶⁷

First, let us examine how the concept of instantaneous insight is addressed in Yogācāra literature. The concept of instantaneous insight is employed in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (17), following the description found in the *Daśabhūmika*. In the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (ch. 20–21, verse 15cd and its

²⁶⁵ This part was kindly provided by Ikuma Hiromitsu.

²⁶⁶ Although the translations provided for these terms may not be entirely satisfactory, they are used here provisionally following scholarly practice. D 47 [*dkon brtsegs, ka*] 198b7. 84000: 24.31.

²⁶⁷ The term “one taste” is not found in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (15). However, another monistic term *advaya* appears with *dharmadhātu* in its commentary by Sthiramati; *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* 253.16. *advayasya dharmadhātōḡ* (indivisibility of the totality of *dharmas*).

commentary), “instantaneous insight” appears in a context related to the seventh stage of ascetic practices.²⁶⁸

*saṃtānaśaṃkleśaviśuddhibhede nirmāṇa ekakṣaṇalabdhābuddhiḥ //*²⁶⁹

The absence of conceit with regard to the distinction between affliction and purity in the continuity and the cognition (*buddhi*) gained in a single moment [is what makes a bodhisattva].

*saptamyām ekakṣaṇalabdhābuddhir nirmittavihārasāmarthyāt pratipakṣaṇaṃ saptatrimśad bodhipakṣabhāvanātaḥ //*²⁷⁰

In the seventh stage, the cognition gained in a single moment can be stabilized in a state of no characteristics (*nirmitta*), and at each moment the thirty-seven factors of awakening can be practiced.²⁷¹

Although the precise relationship between the seventh and eighth stages requires further investigation, it is noteworthy that instantaneous insight here is framed in a context in which one overcomes the duality between affliction and purity in the seventh stage.

Next, let us focus on the symbol Δ in the other two Yogācāra texts, (15) and (16). It can be asserted that the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* (16) embraces the concept of instantaneous insight, critiquing the Sarvāstivādin (or Sautrāntika) interpretation,²⁷² though this text does not utilize the term “instantaneous insight” per se. I have also applied the symbol Δ to the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (15) and the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (1) as an indication of their possible relation to the concept of instantaneous insight. While the *Madhyāntavibhāga* does not explicitly employ this term, it is worth noting the following connection: the text extensively cites parts of a series of passages from the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§§52–71).²⁷³ The cited passages are located in the commentary section of verses 23–26 in the fifth chapter of the

²⁶⁸ This information was provided by Watanabe Shōgo in an e-mail message dated August 26, 2023. Yamaguchi, 1964: 568, points out that other parts of the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* (ch. 9, verses 31 and 33) make reference to instantaneous insight in the Yogācāra school. AMsa 39.9–16. Thurman, 2004: 84, and Lévi, 1911: 77.

²⁶⁹ AMsa 178.9.

²⁷⁰ AMsa 178.19–20.

²⁷¹ Thurman, 2004: 324, and Lévi, 1911: 291.

²⁷² This is elaborated upon in §6.1. See note 176.

²⁷³ The *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* quotes relevant passages from the *Kāśyapaparivarta*. Additionally, Chandrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā* in the seventh chapter quotes the verse of §71. For §71, see *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* 250.12–23. Cf. *Prasannapadā* 156.1–157.4.

Madhyāntavibhāga.²⁷⁴ In the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, although there is no appearance of a term directly corresponding to the concept of instantaneous insight, there is a noteworthy passage in §71 that appears to relate to the concept.

This part of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* elucidates the notion of afflictions and their cessation through an analogy involving the sudden banishing of prolonged darkness upon lighting a lamp.²⁷⁵ There is a commentary on this sutra that has been preserved in both Chinese and Tibetan translations.²⁷⁶ The Tibetan translation of the commentary employs the term “moment” and “the light of insight,” as follows:

²⁷⁴ MAV 69.19–73.14. D’Amato 2012: 183–88.

²⁷⁵ KP 106–108 and Pāsādika 2015: 49–51, 140–41. A very similar analogy can be found in several Mahāyāna sutras. (1) *Gaṇḍavyūha*: GV(V) 402.8–12; GV(S) 502.18–23; T278:9.778b23–26; T279:10.432c4–7. Kajiyama et al., 2021c: 275 (46). (2) *Dhāraṇī-śvararāja*: Dharmarakṣa (T398:13.414a27–b1); Dharmakṣema (T397[1]:13.4c20–22); D 147 [mdo sde, pa] 155a1–2. 84000: 1.114. Takasaki, 1974: 643 A§4. (3) *Da fangguang rulai mimi zang jing* 大方廣如來祕密藏經 (T821:17.844c29–845a10). Although only a Chinese translation of this sutra has survived, a portion of it is quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* as the *Tathāgatakoṣa-sūtra*. In this text, the teaching on the purity of all dharmas by nature is expounded. *prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām sarva-dharmāṇām* (All dharmas are luminous by nature); *ādisuddhān sarvadharmān* (All dharmas are originally pure). *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 172.7–8. Bendall and Rouse, 1922:168. T821:17.844c24, T1636:32.109b11–12. Bendall, 1902: 171, 407, indicates that it can also be found in the *Subhāṣitasamgraha* as the *Tathāgataguhyakoṣa-sūtra* (Bendall, 1904: 45.7=69.7[part II]; Ff.99), as well as in the Tibetan translation referred to as the **Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*. The phenomenon of alternation between *guhya* (secret), *garbha* (womb), and *mimi zong* 祕密藏 (secret storehouse) is evident in the title of this sutra. This phenomenon is briefly mentioned in Ikuma’s chapter in this volume. See the chapter by Ikuma Hiromitsu, p. 200. The parable of the lamp is employed in the *Jietuo dao lun* 解脫道論 (T1648:32.457b6–8), authored by Upatissa 優波底沙, who was apparently affiliated with the Abhayagirika school in the first half of the second century, as a metaphor for the realization of the four noble truths in a single moment. This parable is also present in Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (XXII 92; PTS 690.1–5), dating from the fifth century. Additionally, Bapat, 1937:119n1, suggests its occurrence in chapter 6 of the *Peṭakopadesa* (PTS 134.28–135.2) and the *Abhidhammavāṭāra* (Buddhadatta, 1915[PTS]: 132–33). See also note 170. Steffano Zacchetti has suggested that the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 (T603), translated by An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148), corresponds to chapter 6 of the *Peṭakopadesa*. For the text, see Zacchetti, 2002: 87; T603:15.179b20–26. In his study of the *Peṭakopadesa*, Mizuno Kōgen 水野弘元 (1901–2006) suggests that this parable is found in the *Sidi lun* 四諦論 (T1647:32.377c26–28), translated by Paramārtha (Mizuno, 1959: 65n19).

²⁷⁶ There is some debate regarding the authorship of this text. For further details, refer to Ōtake, 2008: 24–35. Ōtake suggests that the author is affiliated with the Yogācāra school.

*de la spong bas yongs su bstan pa 'di ni ye shes kyi snang ba skyes pa'i skad cig des thog ma med pa'i dus nas zhugs pa'i las dang nyon mongs pa spong ba ste /*²⁷⁷

In what is above, the teaching on extinguishing [darkness, as told in §71] is that by that moment when the light of insight arises, actions (*karma*) and afflictions that have been active since beginningless time have been eliminated.²⁷⁸

The Chinese translation of the commentary, the *Da baoji jing lun* 大寶積經論 translated by Bodhiruci, annotates this section as follows:

尋即所生智慧光明能滅無始以來諸業煩惱 (T1523:26.219c12–13)

The light of insight that arises immediately (*xun ji* 尋即) can extinguish the actions and afflictions that have existed since beginningless time.

The term *xun ji* is prominently featured in Dharmarakṣa's translations, where it conveys the sense of “immediately,” and it is commonly encountered throughout Buddhist scriptures.²⁷⁹

While the *Kāśyapaparivarta* itself does not explicitly mention instantaneous insight in §71, it is reasonable to understand both the Chinese and Tibetan translations of the commentary as elucidating this concept. Right after the above-quoted passage, the terms *myur du* (Skt. **kṣipram* or **na cirāt*) and *su* 速 are employed in the Tibetan and Chinese versions, respectively, to describe the extinguishing of afflictions. Both of these terms convey the idea of quickness and appear to be connected to the concept of instantaneous insight.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that §71 serves as the concluding section in the explanation of ascetic practices within the *Kāśyapaparivarta*. This

²⁷⁷ D 4009 [*mdo 'grel, ji*] 235a4. von Staël-Holstein, 1933: 152. Cf. Ōtake, 2008: 232n6, 404.

²⁷⁸ Both the Tibetan *thog ma med pa'i dus* and the Chinese *wushi yilai* 無始以來 correspond to the Sanskrit word **anādikāla*, which means “from beginningless time.” See the introduction to this volume for the concept found in the famous verse of the *Mahāyāna-abhidharmasūtra*, which contains the term *dhātu*.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Karashima, 1998: 519. It is important to note that the term has a distinct meaning from the usual interpretation. Ōtake's translation study on this text is groundbreaking as a foundational investigation. However, he interprets this word as “asking, then” (*tazunureba sunawachi* 尋ぬれば、即ち), which appears to be a misinterpretation of its intended meaning (Ōtake, 2008: 232). In the *Zhuji bianlue* 助字辨略 by Liu Qi 劉淇 (fl. early eighteenth century), the character *xun* is interpreted to convey a meaning akin to *xuan* 旋 and *sui* 隨, both signifying “immediately.”

mirrors the common occurrence of instantaneous insight appearing toward the end of lists in various other texts.

An intriguing thought to ponder is the possibility that Lokakṣema, the first translator of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, might have misinterpreted the Sanskrit text in §71 and that consequently this translation has become linked with the concept of instantaneous insight.

karmakleśa ekena yoniśomanasikāraprajñāpratyavekṣaṇena vigacchati tailapadyota iti kāśyapa āryasyaitat prajñendriyasyādhivacanam tamondhakāra iti kāśyapa karmakleśasyādhivacanam

[One's] actions and affliction[s], [in spite of their prevalence for an incredibly long time,] will disappear by [the lamp of] a single observation characterised by correct thinking and insight. The oil-lamp, Kāśyapa, stands for the faculty of insight [pertaining to a] Noble [One], and complete darkness for [one's worldly] actions and affliction[s].²⁸⁰

Lokakṣema: 聞佛經一反念善，罪即消盡。燈炷明者，於佛法中智點明是也。冥愛欲即為消盡 (T350:12.191b3–5)

When one hears the Buddha's sutras and contemplates good things just one time, one's demerits are immediately eliminated. The brightness of the lamp is the brightness of the wise insight pertaining to the Buddha Dharma. Craving and desire, which are darkness, will disappear immediately.²⁸¹

The Sanskrit text contains the term *pratyavekṣaṇa*, which is derived from the verb *√īkṣ* and means here “observation,” “attention,” or “contemplation.” Although *pratyavekṣaṇa* ends with *kṣaṇa*, the ending word here is completely unrelated to the homographic *kṣaṇa* denoting “a moment.” The phrase *yi fan* (*nian*) 一反(念) corresponds to *ekacitta* or *eka(citta)kṣaṇa* in Lokakṣema's translation of the ASP.²⁸² It is possible that Lokakṣema translated the term *yi fan* as “just one time” in this context due to the presence in this passage of two terms, *ekena*²⁸³ as an instrumental case of *eka* and *kṣaṇa* within *pratyavekṣaṇa*.

²⁸⁰ KP 106 and Pāsādika, 2015: 50, 140.

²⁸¹ See Weller, 1987: 1205 §56. Here “*nian*” 念 (to contemplate) is a verb with the following word “*shan*” 善 (good) as its object. Unlike the ASP's *yi fan nian* 一反念 in Lokakṣema's translation, it is considered that *yi fan* 一反 corresponds to **ekakṣaṇa* or **ekacitta*.

²⁸² See note 184.

²⁸³ Pāsādika renders it as “once.”

We have explored the possible presence of the concept of instantaneous insight in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* despite the absence of its explicit articulation within the scripture. The concept of instantaneous insight is thought to have been further developed later and subsequently inherited by the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* and other works of Yogācāra literature.

The first unequivocal occurrence of the term “instantaneous insight” in Mahāyāna sūtras can be traced to Zhi Qian’s 支謙 (fl. 222–253) translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 3 §59), which may have undergone revision by Dharmarakṣa (§6.6 and note 215). Numerous concrete examples of this term are found in Dharmarakṣa’s translations. Although not addressed in this chapter, instantaneous insight is presumed in other chapters of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* and is even referenced in a biography of the Japanese priest Genshin 源信 (942–1017). Historically, it was a concept regarded as a given in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In the foregoing section of the current study, we have delved into instantaneous insight as a foundational concept for investigating the relationship between *dharmadhātu* and all *dharmas*, which will be explored further in the next section. Instantaneous insight is intricately connected to the inherent purity of the mind, and this correlation ultimately leads to the purity of the *dharmadhātu* through the purity of all *dharmas*.

7 *Sarvadharmā* and *Dharmadhātu*

7.1 The Notion “All *Dharmas* are Pure (by Nature)” in Mahāyāna Sūtras

In the academic world, the notion of the inherent purity of all *dharmas* as presented in Mahāyāna sūtras has received considerably less attention than the notion of the purity of the mind.²⁸⁴ However, a significant and interconnected relationship exists between these two ideas that should not be overlooked. In this section, I will concentrate on the purity of all *dharmas* in order to shed greater light on its connection with the inherent purity of the mind and *dharmadhātu*.

²⁸⁴ Regarding the inherent purity of the mind, Hirakawa Akira 平川彰 briefly touches upon the idea that “all *dharmas* are not separate from the mind.” However, this concept is not widely prevalent in general discourse. Hirakawa, 1974: 382; in English, see Hirakawa and Groner, 1990: 298.

In §7.3, I delve into Yogācāra literature concerning the purity of *dharmadhātu*, but before entering into that discussion it is crucially important to consider the various instances of the notion that “all *dharmas* are pure by nature” as elucidated in the Mahāyāna sutras examined so far. Early Mahāyāna sutras such as the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§125; discussed below in §5.2) and the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 5, 11) contain the monistic assertion that “all *dharmas* are pure.” The notion of the purity of all *dharmas* also appears in ASP,²⁸⁵ the *Daśabhūmika*,²⁸⁶ and the PSP.²⁸⁷ Here we see an example from the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (XXII-2):

*'di ni dus gsum yongs su dag pa zhes bya'o / ... yongs su dag pa gang gis
rang bzhin gyis yongs su dag pa 'di ni shin tu yongs su dag pa ste / de'i
phyir chos thams cad rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba zhes bya'o /*

These [all *dharmas*] are said to be pure throughout the three temporal dimensions (*tryadhva). ... That which is pure by its own nature is said to be ultimately pure (*atyantapariśuddha). This is why all *dharmas* are said to be luminous by nature (*prakṛtiprabhāsvara).²⁸⁸

Soon following the above excerpt the *Brahmapariṣcchā* states, “the mind is pure by its own nature.”²⁸⁹ These passages explicate that both the inherent nature of all *dharmas* and the inherent nature of the mind are pure.

In the *Lokottaraparivarta*, the concept of instantaneous insight and the purity of mind are expounded, although they do not appear successively. A passage from the “Pure Compassion” section of this text affirms that “all *dharmas* are pure by their own nature and remain untainted by adventitious

²⁸⁵ *yadā bhagavan sarvadharmā evaṃ prakṛtipariśuddhāḥ*, (World-honored one, when all *dharmas* are pure by nature...). ASP 211:25. See Karashima, 2011: 409; Conze, 1958:173; Burnouf and Ducoeur, 2022: 402. Lokakṣema: 佛所有諸法本皆淨 (T224:8.465a12). Cf. Hirakawa, 1974: 382; Hirakawa and Groner, 1990: 298.

²⁸⁶ Ch. 7.2 *sarvadharmādiviśuddhisamatayā* ((6) equality because all *dharmas* are pure from the beginning). Honda, 1968:186. Dharmarakṣa: 為甚清淨，調定真正 (T285:10.475c26); Kumārajīva: 五以本来清淨故。一切法平等 (T286:10.514b17–18).

²⁸⁷ PSP ch. 63 *bhagavān āha: evaṃ etat subhūte evaṃ etat, yathā vadasi sarvadharmāḥ subhūte prakṛtipariśuddhāḥ* (Buddha said, “Subhūti, you are right.” As you have said, Subhūti, all *dharmas* are pure by nature). PSP 5.31.10–11. Kumārajīva: 佛告須菩提。如是如是。一切諸法本性清淨 (T223:8.357b24–25).

²⁸⁸ D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 75a4–5. Goshima, 2013: 90; 84000: 1.494. Dharmarakṣa: 諸法亦悉清淨 (T585:15.20c15); 其本清淨則一切法 (20c18–19). Kumārajīva: 是三世畢竟淨，無能令不淨。性常淨故。是以說一切諸法性常清淨 (T586:15.51b12–14).

²⁸⁹ Dharmarakṣa: 心本清淨。心為顯明 (T585:15.20c29); Kumārajīva: 是故說心性常清淨 (T586:15.51b19); D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 75a7–b1. Goshima, 2013: 90; 84000: 1.495.

afflictions.” As the translations of the *Lokottaraparivarta* by Dharmarakṣa and Buddhahadra contain essentially the same content, I provide here the following sentence from Buddhahadra’s translation:

自心清淨故，除滅一切眾生倒惑淨悲。說實法故，知一切法自清淨空無所有客塵所染 (T278:9.661a11–13)²⁹⁰

Because one’s own mind is pure, the removal of the mental disturbances of all sentient beings is pure compassion. Because [the bodhisattva] teaches the truth, he knows that the true nature of all *dharma*s is pure and empty (*sūnya*) and that nothing is defiled by adventitious defilements.

While Dharmarakṣa’s translation may be more challenging to understand than Buddhahadra’s, both versions clearly express these concepts. Throughout the *Lokottaraparivarta*, it is continuously taught that the mind, and all *dharma*s, are inherently pure.²⁹¹

Reviewing from this perspective early Mahāyāna sūtras translated by Lokakṣema, such as the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§§104 and 125) and the *Ajātaśatru-sūtra* (X 11; discussed earlier, in §5.2), we find that both sūtras address the purity of all *dharma*s and the purity of the nature of the mind.²⁹² Thus, since the earliest iterations of the Mahāyāna literature that is extant today, these two concepts have been closely interconnected.

Let us also consider Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the *Mo ni jing* 魔逆經 (Demonic Reversal Sutra), which has survived in Chinese and Tibetan translations and contains the description quoted below.²⁹³ This sūtra prominently features both Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and Māra Pāpīya, a malignant celestial king, and presents the paradoxical idea that the actions of bodhisattvas, normally considered virtuous, are inversely regarded as the actions of demons. In essence, it suggests that the underlying essence of what is commonly perceived as good or bad remains identical. I believe that this

²⁹⁰ Dharmarakṣa: 己心愍淨，憐念諸倒，住世無智，使遠依倚。應時說法。一切諸法，本淨自然，悉虛無實。為諸客塵之所沾污 (T292:10.645c28–646a1); Śikṣānanda (T279.10.306c25–a1); D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 239b6.

²⁹¹ Hirakawa, 1968: 213, when elucidating the inherent purity of the mind in Mahāyāna sūtras, references passages from the *Dhāraṇīśvararāja* (§11(A) 4) (T397[2]:13.15c6) and the **Ratnadārikāsūtra* (T397[3]:13.38b17) that expound the idea of the purity of all *dharma*s.

²⁹² Thorough consideration is required regarding whether the purity of the nature of the mind can be located in Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§99), as it is not expressed in a clear form (§5.2).

²⁹³ The name of the corresponding Tibetan translation is **Mañjuśrīvikurvāṇaparivarta* (Chapter on Mañjuśrī’s Magical Display).

paradoxical idea stems from the inherent purity of the mind, which is evident not only in the following passage but also in other parts of the sutra.

心者自然則為清淨。諸法亦然自然清淨。法界清淨得不動轉
(T589:15.115b26–28)

The mind is pure by nature. All *dharma*s are also pure by nature. The essence of the totality of *dharma*s (**dharmadhātu* 法界) is pure and immutable.

The sutra describes the purity by nature of the mind and of all *dharma*s, followed by the portrayal of *dharmadhātu* as pure. In older Chinese translations, the term *ziran* 自然 often serves as a translation for *svabhāva* or *prakṛti*.²⁹⁴ This successive mention about purity is explicit only in the Chinese translation and not in the Tibetan; nevertheless, it serves as evidence of the close connection between these three concepts. In the corresponding Tibetan text,²⁹⁵ the term *sarvadharma* does not appear between “mind” and **dharmadhātu* in the Tibetan translation, but immediately afterward the text addresses the issue of the purity of the *dharma*s and the inherent purity of sentient beings.²⁹⁶ Despite these differences in expression between the Tibetan and Chinese versions, it is clear that the discussion in both texts concerns the concepts of the purity of mind, of all *dharma*s, and of *dharmadhātu*.

As we will see below (§7.3), *dharmadhātu* is described as pure in Yogācāra literature as well. This may be attributable to the ease with which the essence of all *dharma*s can be presented as inherently pure without contradicting the definition of contaminated elements.

7.2 Discussions that Aim to Overcome the Dichotomy Between Conditioned and Unconditioned *Dharma*s

Discussions aimed at overcoming the dichotomy between conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s can be found in numerous Mahāyāna sutras. I believe that these discussions share a similar structure with the concept of the inherent purity of all *dharma*s. Such references appear in the *Kāśyapapari-*

²⁹⁴ See note 144.

²⁹⁵ D 97 [*mdo sde, kha*] 250b2–3. 84000: 1.64.

²⁹⁶ D 97 [*mdo sde, kha*] 250b7. 84000: 1.65.

varta §59,²⁹⁷ the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 8 §10),²⁹⁸ the *Brahmapariṣcchā* (XXV and XXVI-2),²⁹⁹ the *Lokottaraparivarta*,³⁰⁰ the *Gaṇḍavyūha*,³⁰¹ and the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (ch. I.1).³⁰² These discussions may be understood as an expression of monistic thought with regard to the nature of all *dharma*s. Its crucial aspect lies in nullifying the negative aspects of the conditioned or of the contaminants (*sāsrava*) and in effacing the dichotomy between conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s or between contaminants and what is uncontaminated (*anāsrava*).

Abhidharma classifies all *dharma*s in several categories.³⁰³ In the *Da zhidu lun*, the way of thinking that divides all *dharma*s into two or more categories is characterized as the knowledge of a disciple (*śrāvaka*), which is inferior to that of a bodhisattva.³⁰⁴ The aforementioned Mahāyāna sūtras criticize such categorization and insist on expunging dichotomous thinking.

As a corrective aiming to dispel such dichotomous thinking, the parable of the one taste of the ocean in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§40; discussed above in §4.1) is quoted in the *San juzu jing youbotische* 三具足經憂波提舍,

²⁹⁷ While the terms “conditioned” and “unconditioned” are not explicitly evident in this section in Lokakṣema’s translation, it is apparent that the text of §§56, 57, 58, 59, and 60 is engaging in a critique of dichotomous thinking.

²⁹⁸ *siṃhamatir bodhisatva āha: idaṃ sāsravam idaṃ anāsravam iti dvayam etat* / (The Bodhisattva Siṃhamatī said, “When we say this is subject to the contaminants and that is not, we have duality”). Vkn 85.7–10/330–31. Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 94.

²⁹⁹ D 160 [*mdo sde, ba*] 77b3–5. Goshima, 2013: 95, XXV; 84000: 1.514–15. D 160 78b3–5. Goshima, 2013: 97, XXVI–2–7; 84000: 1.528.

³⁰⁰ Dharmarakṣa (T292:10.649a22–24); Buddhābhadrā (T278:9.664c12–14); Śikṣānanda (T279:10.309a27–29); D 44 [*phal chen, ga*] 251a1–5.

³⁰¹ GV(V) 400.26–29; GV(S) 500.12–16; T278:9.778a5–9; T279:10.432a7–12. Kajiyama et al., 2021c: 271 (31).

³⁰² Xuanzang: 一切法無二 (T676:16.688c20–21); D 106 [*mdo sde, ca*] 3a4. Lamotte, 1935: 34, 169, Introduction 4; 84000: 1.1. Cf. 於彼聲聞乘中宣說種種諸法自性。... 於大乘中即說彼法。同一法界同一理趣故 (T676:16.708a15–18); D 106 [*mdo sde, ca*] 48a7–b2. Lamotte, 1935: 147, 255–56, ch. IX.32; 84000: 9.32. Cf. Suguro, 1989: 375. Chapter and section numbers are based on Lamotte, 1935.

³⁰³ Such categorization is called *zhumen fenbie* 諸門分別 (classification of several gates) in East Asia. While the corresponding Sanskrit term is not clear, it may be found in the beginning of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as follows: *dharmāṇāṃ pravacayam* (distinction of all *dharma*s). AKBh 2.19–22. Paramārtha: *jianze fa* 簡擇法 (T1559:29.162a18); Xuanzang: *ze fa* 擇法 (T1558:29.1b19). I became aware of the term *zhumen fenbie* through a presentation by Torisawa Hōshun 鳥澤芳峻, a graduate student at Komazawa University, on November 6, 2023.

³⁰⁴ 分別二門諸法，名為聲聞智慧 (T1509:25[XXVIII].266b20) (Categorizing all *dharma*s into two groups. It is called the *śrāvaka*’s knowledge). Lamotte IV 1839–40.

translated by *Vimokṣaprajñārṣi (Pimuzhixian 毘目智仙) and *Gotama Prajñāruci (Qutan Boreliuzhi 瞿曇般若流支) in 541. This treatise is exclusively available in a Chinese translation and serves as a commentary on the three types of accumulations (**saṃbhāra*, *juzu* 具足) enumerated in the **Sarvaṇyāsamuccayasamādhi Sūtra*:³⁰⁵ *dāna-saṃbhāra* (accumulation from donation), *śīla-saṃbhāra* (accumulation from precepts), and *śravaṇa-saṃbhāra* (accumulation from hearing). Among these three, the first two are categorized as contaminants, while the last one is considered to be what is uncontaminated. This treatise asks the question of how practitioners can realize the all-knowing, which falls under what is uncontaminated when these two different classifications are in play.³⁰⁶ Then, in a later passage, it answers this question as follows:

譬如蜂王種種異物皆作一味，菩薩亦爾。漏與不漏二種具足，以智慧力皆為一味。又願方便令漏不漏二種具足得一切智。不漏之法如寶積經 (T1534:26.364b5–8)

Just as the king of bees creates one taste from many different sources, so does the bodhisattva. [The bodhisattva] has two kinds of accumulation, contaminants and what is uncontaminated, but through the power of insight he forms everything into one taste. Moreover, [the bodhisattva], through his skillful means, wishes to attain the all-knowing while possessing the two types of contaminants and what is uncontaminated. [The *Kāśyapaparivarta* within] the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra* describes uncontaminated *dharmas*.³⁰⁷

Bodhisattvas possess not only what is uncontaminated, which is related to awakening, but also the contaminants, which is related to afflictions, because they remain in this world of transmigration in order to save sentient beings.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ *Deng ji zhongde sanmei jing* 等集眾德三昧經 (T381:12.976b5–7), translated by Dharmarakṣa; *Ji yiqie fude sanmei jing* 集一切福德三昧經 (T382:12.993a9–13), translated by Kumārajīva; **Sarvaṇyāsamuccayasamādhi* (Absorption That Encapsulates All Merit). D 134 [mṃdo sde, na] 83a7–b1; 84000: 2.12.

³⁰⁶ 施戒二具足漏，聞具足者則是不漏。以何因緣。以漏不漏二種具足，得一切智不漏之法 (T1534:26.359b23–26) (The two accumulations from donation and precepts are considered contaminants, whereas the accumulation from hearing is regarded as what is uncontaminated. [The question arises:] How is it possible to attain all-knowing, which is uncontaminated *dharma*, with these two types, the contaminated and what is uncontaminated?). Ōtake, 2013: 225.

³⁰⁷ Ōtake, 2013: 269.

³⁰⁸ The topic in question is addressed in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§72). “Just as all [kinds of] seed, Kāśyapa, do not sprout in the sky, so it is absolutely impossible, Kāśyapa, for the qualities of a Buddha [which] a bodhisattva [aspires after] to ‘sprout’ in attachment from the unconditioned.” KP 108 and Pāsādika 2015: 51, 141. In this

This text goes on to quote the *Kāśyapaparivarta*'s analogy of one taste of the great ocean in order to describe the way in which bodhisattvas can attain knowledge regarding all *dharma*s, which is inherently uncontaminated. Thus, the parable of taste is used to unify all *dharma*s into what is uncontaminated.

This parable of one taste effectively dissolves the diverse divisions and functions, unifying all *dharma*s into a monistic perspective whereby all *dharma*s ultimately lead to awakening. I posit that the term *dharmadhātu* operates in a similar manner.

In the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* and in Yogācāra literature, the term *dharmadhātu* is employed in a sense that does not entail afflictions and is almost synonymous with awakening or *nirvāṇa*.³⁰⁹ This usage likely arises from the abolishing of the duality between conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s when viewed from the perspective of their ultimate nature and tries to subsume all *dharma*s under the unconditioned *dharmadhātu*, which is uncontaminated. In essence, this discourse comprehends all *dharma*s as the unconditioned or pure by nature.³¹⁰

context, the term “sky” corresponds to *ākāśa* in Sanskrit, which is employed in Buddhist discourse as a metaphor for the unconditioned *dharma*s. Lokakṣema's translation uses the term *nihuan* 泥洹 (*nirvāṇa*), although it does not explicitly mention the word unconditioned. It is worth noting that *nirvāṇa* is a typical synonym for what is unconditioned. Furthermore, the commentary on the *Kāśyapaparivarta* elaborates on not only the conception of the unconditioned *dharma*s but also how the bodhisattva, amidst the domain of contaminated and conditioned *dharma*s, enhances the unsurpassed teaching of the Buddha. A similar analogy with the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§72) is employed in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (ch. 7 §3), where it also illustrates the abolishing of the formal definitions of unconditioned and conditioned *dharma*s as separate and distinct. Vkn 78.8–25/306–307. Gómez and Harrison, 2022: 83–84.

³⁰⁹ Many Japanese researchers describe *dharmadhātu* as “the world of awakening” (*satori no sekai* 悟りの世界). Cf. Takasaki, 1974: 760, and Suguro, 1989: 373–74. However, I am cautious about endorsing this expression, as there can be ambiguity with regard to specific understandings of the Japanese contemporary word for “world” (*sekai* 世界). Nevertheless, it is clear that *dharmadhātu* is regularly depicted in the texts as signifying complete freedom from delusion or ignorance in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*.

³¹⁰ Almost the same perspective for *dharmakāya* is discussed in Keng Ching's chapter in this volume. Additionally, Michael Conway's chapter (p. 155) discusses a passage found in Vasubandhu's *Jingtulun* 淨土論 (Treatise on the Pure Land): 一法句者，謂清淨句。清淨句者，謂真實智慧、無為法身故 (T1524:26.232b24–25) (One *dharma* phrase is the pure phrase. The pure phrase is the true insight and unconditioned Dharma-body). This concise passage encompasses all the elements addressed in this chapter: a single phrase in a monistic way, purity, true insight, and the quality of being unconditioned.

7.3 The Purity of *Dharmadhātu* in Yogācāra Literature

By focusing on the relationship between *dharmadhātu* and all *dharma*s in terms of their inherent purity, it is possible to establish a clearer understanding of their interconnection in the body of Yogācāra literature that emerged after the early Mahāyāna sutras.³¹¹

Katsumata Shunkyō 勝又俊教 (1909–94) (Katsumata, 1961: 491–94), highlights the discussion of the inherent purity of the mind in Yogācāra literature, such as the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. He explains that in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (ch. 5, verse 21), the term *śūnyatā*, or the true nature of the mind, is replaced by *dharmadhātu*, though the underlying idea remains the same. However, Katsumata’s analysis does not explore the contexts in which *dharmadhātu* and all *dharma*s are used interchangeably, as previously described by Takasaki and Suguro. This is an example of how the concept of *dharmadhātu* has not received sufficient attention in existing scholarship, often being treated merely as an idiom without a thorough examination of its significance. Scholars tend to treat *dharmadhātu* in Yogācāra literature as a technical term without considering the connection with early Mahāyāna sutras.

The following turns to the early Yogācāra literature. It will focus on three Yogācāra texts (numbers in parentheses follow the table at the end of this chapter): the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (15), the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (17), and the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* (16). The rationale behind this selection of source materials stems from the fact that the first and second of these texts, as well as the second and third of these texts, share similar verses that define *dharmadhātu* in the same way.

In these three texts it is asserted that “*dharmadhātu* is pure by nature.” It is more appropriate to understand *dharmadhātu* in Yogācāra literature as basically equivalent to “the totality of *dharma*s” or “all *dharma*s,” at least in certain contexts.

Let us begin by examining the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna*, a commentary on the *Buddhabhūmi Sutra*. The sutra and the treatise are interconnected, and based on the existence of translations by Xuanzang, both are believed to have been composed during the second half of the sixth century. Both Chinese and

³¹¹ In this section, I frequently opt to quote only half of verses or part of texts. This decision serves to economize paper usage and enhance the clarity of the discussion. The omitted portion of the verses may present viewpoints that contradict my arguments. However, I deem it appropriate to leave the matter of addressing such contradictions to a future occasion.

Tibetan translations of the commentaries are extant. It will be reported soon that a part of the Sanskrit text of Śīlabhadra's commentary is quoted in the *Munimatālaṃkāra*.³¹²

The *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra* often deploys the analogy of a single taste of an ocean,³¹³ and there are instances where the pure *dharmadhātu* is likened to an oceanic body of water.³¹⁴ As evident from the table, the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra* and its commentary, the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna*, encompass almost all the ideas related to a monistic perspective that are commonly found in Mahāyāna sūtras. As will be seen below, the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* emphasizes that pure *dharmadhātu* remains free from adventitious defilements and that all conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s are devoid of error by nature. The following represents the initial two out of sixteen definitions of the pure *dharmadhātu*:

清淨法界者，謂離一切煩惱所知客塵障垢。一切有為無為等法無倒實性 (T1530:26.302a3–4)

The pure *dharmadhātu* is said to be divorced from all afflictions and adventitious defilements hindering what is knowable. It is the faultless, true nature of all *dharma*s, both conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s.³¹⁵

In this context, pure *dharmadhātu* is depicted as the immutable nature of all *dharma*s that unifies conditioned and unconditioned *dharma*s, without exclusion.

Four verses about *dharmadhātu* found in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* in the ninth chapter on “awakening” (*bodhi*)³¹⁶ are shared with the *Buddha*-

³¹² The two versions of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* differ in their lineage of thought. These Chinese and Tibetan commentaries are authored, respectively, by Qinguang 親光 (d.u.) and Śīlabhadra. Cf. Nishio, 1940b: 147–48. Kanō Kazuo will give a presentation on the Sanskrit text at the 75th Conference of the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies on September 8, 2024.

³¹³ T680:16.721a5, 7, 722a5, 6, 723a1, 2–3, 4–5, 8, 18, 21, b1.

³¹⁴ T680:16.723a26, 28–29; D 275 [*mdo sde, ya*] 44a1–2, 3. Nishio, 1940a: 22.5–7, 10–11; Nishio, 1940b: 177 (5).

³¹⁵ Keenan, 2002: 68. Cf. D 3997 [*mdo 'grel, chi*] 247b4–5. Nishio, 1940a: 60.9–13; Nishio, 1940b: 211 III 5.2(1) and 212n6.

³¹⁶ The word *anāsravadhātu* (uncontaminated nature) is employed in this chapter in verses 20, 21, and 31, and it occurs frequently in the commentary. It can be considered equivalent to pure *dharmadhātu*. Cf. La Vallée Poussin, 1928–29: 694–702, and Thurman, 2004: 81n32.

bhūmi Sutra.³¹⁷ Below are the first and last passages of this set of four verses (56–59), which discuss pure *dharmadhātu*. As Hakamaya, 1976: 3–4, points out, the initial passage presents a narrow definition of pure *dharmadhātu*, while the concluding passage offers a broader understanding.³¹⁸

sarvadharmadvayāvārata tathatāśuddhilakṣaṇaḥ / (AMsa ch. 9, verse 56ab)³¹⁹

[The *dharmadhātu*] is characterised by the purity of suchness with respect to the two hindrances [the afflictive hindrances and the cognitive hindrances] of all dharmas.³²⁰

dharmadhātur viśuddho 'yaṃ buddhānāṃ samudāhṛtaḥ // (AMsa ch. 9, verse 59cd)³²¹

Declared is this pure dharmadhātu of the buddhas.³²²

Here again, *dharmadhātu* is related to the inherent purity of all *dharmas*; the term was likely employed to convey the idea that all *dharmas* are inherently pure by nature. This choice of terminology might have stemmed from a deliberate effort to avoid direct conflict with the critical stance of the Sarvāstivādins, who were influential as antagonists of the Mahāyāna.³²³

³¹⁷ T680:16.723b3–10; D 275 [*mdo sde, ya*] 44a5–7. Nishio, 1940a: 22–23; Nishio, 1940b: 177–178 8(1)–(4).

³¹⁸ Numerous prior studies have delved into these four verses. However, due to limitations of space I cannot provide an exhaustive examination of these studies in this chapter. While I acknowledge the importance of presenting my interpretation of *tathatā* and *lakṣaṇa*, for the purposes of this chapter, it suffices to affirm that these renowned four verses underscore the interconnectedness of *dharmadhātu* with all *dharmas*.

³¹⁹ AMsa 44.8. Cf. *vastujñānatadāmbavaśitākṣayalakṣaṇaḥ* (56cd). AMsa 44.9.

³²⁰ Thurman, 2004: 93, and Lévi, 1911: 85.

³²¹ AMsa 44.23. Cf. *svabhāvadharmasambhoganirmāṇair bhinnavṛttikaḥ* (59ab). AMsa 44.22.

³²² Thurman, 2004: 95, and Lévi, 1911: 86.

³²³ A notable feature of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* (Śīlabhadra's commentary on the *Buddhabhūmi Sutra*) is that pure *dharmadhātu* is considered a transformation after the Buddha's adamant meditation. "Pure *dharmadhātu* can be considered as a transformation of all *dharmas*. [With regard to all *dharmas*,] it [i.e., suchness of all *dharmas*] also becomes pure *dharmadhātu* ["all *dharmas*" or "nature of all *dharmas*"] if one leaves the seed of the two hindrances completely behind by attaining the pure path (**suviśuddhamārga*) of "supramundane knowledge" (**lokottara-jñāna*). It is said to be the suchness of transformation of the true Buddha after the adamantine meditation." D 3997 [*mdo 'grel, chī*] 270b3–5. Nishio, 1940a: 119.12–25; Nishio, 1940b: 262 III 8.1. The adamant meditation is related to the awakening of all *dharmas* in the Buddhist tradition. In various texts, typically those of the PSP family,

When certain conditions are fulfilled, the Suchness (*tathatā*) of all *dharma*s undergoes a transformation into pure *dharmadhātu*.³²⁴ This suggests that all *dharma*s and *dharmadhātu* are nearly synonymous, with a subtle qualitative distinction. The utilization of *dhātu* with the meaning of essence may imply “the essence of all *dharma*s,” positioning it as pure from a monistic perspective.³²⁵

Both the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga* contain identical phrases, expressing this idea:

dharmadhātuvinirmukto yasmād dharmo na vidyate /³²⁶

Apart from *dharmadhātu* there is no *dharmo*.³²⁷

Let us start with the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. This verse is quoted twice in the thirteenth chapter on “ascetic practice” (*pratipattyadhipikara*).³²⁸ The commentary of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* for verse 11ab states that greed, anger, and delusion are not separate from *dharmadhātu*.³²⁹

the concept of “adamantine meditation” (*vajropama*) is used in conjunction with “instantaneous insight” to convey the concept of awakening, as discussed in §6.4.

³²⁴ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into an examination of the concept of suchness. Suchness is considered here as reality as it really is.

³²⁵ The preceding passage, verse 55, falls under a different category when compared to verses 56–59. Nevertheless, the analogy in verse 55 drawn between the non-increase and non-decrease of the great ocean and the concept of the *dharmadhātu* is noteworthy. As we have seen in §4.1, the notion of the ocean’s non-increase and non-decrease is one of the eight ocean-related parables, along with the parable of one taste, in early Buddhism.

³²⁶ MAV ch. 5, verse 19ab. This verse of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* is also quoted in note 26. AMsa ch. 13, verse 11ab, verse 12ab. Cf. *tasmād rāgādayas teṣāṃ buddhair niḥsaraṇaṃ matāḥ* 11cd; *tasmāt saṃkleśanirdeśe sa saṃvid dhūmatāṃ mataḥ* (12cd). AMsa 87.3, 9.

³²⁷ Thurman, 2004: 169–70, and Lévi, 1911: 156. D’Amato, 2012: 181.

³²⁸ Due to space constraints, I will list here only some sources of the literature I am aware of regarding related concepts. **Ratnakāraṇḍasūtra*: 若離法界有餘法者，可知法界 (T462:14.469b18–19) (If there are other *dharma*s apart from *dharmadhātu*, then you can understand *dharmadhātu*). Related concepts are also seen in some verses, for example in verse 54 of the *Triṣatikāyāḥ Prajñāpāramitāyāḥ Kārikāsaptatiḥ*, the commentary on the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā*, written by Asaṅga (fl. fourth century). Tucci, 1956: 80, 117–18.

³²⁹ In the *Sarvadharmāpravṛtīnirdeśa* (Teaching How All Phenomena Are without Origin), there is a similar passage where Bodhisattva Xigen 喜根 (*rab tu dga’ ba’i dbang po*) explains in the Tibetan translation that nature as essence (**svabhāva*, Tib. *ngo bo nyid*) of greed, anger, and delusion is synonymous with all *dharma*s. Braarvig, 2000: 157.18–159.20; Kumārajīva: T650:15.759a26–28; D 180 [*mdo sde, ma*] 291b4. 84000: 1.281. In Kumārajīva’s translation, this passage starts with his renowned phrase *zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相 (the true characteristic of all *dharma*s), which

Katsumata, 1961: 491–92, asserts that the thirteenth chapter in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* is founded upon the concept of the inherent purity of the mind.³³⁰ Vasubandhu’s commentary for verse 12ab states that “ignorance and bodhi are identical.”³³¹

*yad uktam / avidyā ca bodhiś caikam iti / tatrāpi sakleśanirdeśe sa
evābhisamdhīḥ / avidyā bodhidharmatā syāt tad upacārāt /*

如經中說，無明與菩提同一，此謂無明法性施設菩提名。此義是經旨趣 (T1604:31.622b14–15)

It is said: “Ignorance and awakening are the same,” and such is the indication in the instructions concerning that which has afflictions. Ignorance is (called) the reality of awakening through metaphoric designation. [Translation from Sanskrit]

Additionally, in the second chapter on “going for refuge (*śaraṇagamana*),” it is mentioned that “transmigration and *nirvāṇa* are of the same taste.”³³² A similar, though not identical, passage is found in the *Sarvadharmāpravṛtti-nirdeśa*, as we have already seen in §4.3.

diverges from the Tibetan version. Furthermore, Kumārajīva’s rendering employs the terms *yiqie faxing* 一切法性 (nature of all *dharma*s) and *zhu faxing* 諸法性 (nature of various *dharma*s); here the character *xing* 性 denotes “nature,” which does not align with the Tibetan translation. Nevertheless, when this passage is juxtaposed with another passage in the same sutra (Braarvig, 2000: 135.11–37; T650:15.754a17–19; D 180 277a1–2. 84000: 1.111), where the “nature as essence (Tib. *kham*s, **dhātu*) of greed, anger, and delusion” is equated with “nature as essence (Tib. *dbyings*, **dhātu*) of *nirvāṇa*,” Kumārajīva’s inclusion of the character *xing* 性 becomes comprehensible. The reason is that the corresponding phrase “nature as essence (Tib. *rang bzhin*, **prakṛti* or **svabhāva*) of all *dharma*s” (*yiqie faxing* 一切法性) is found in both Kumārajīva’s translation and in the Tibetan translation of this passage. While I have previously noted that Kumārajīva associates *dharmadhātu* with *faxing* 法性 (see note 77), in this context the Chinese term *xing* (nature) of *yiqie faxing* 一切法性 does not align with the **dhātu* of the Tibetan; instead, it corresponds to **svabhāva*. Consequently, in Kumārajīva’s translations the word *faxing* does not consistently correlate with *dharmadhātu*. Rather, Kumārajīva employed the term *faxing* for the term *dharmadhātu* because he perceived an overlap between the essence of all *dharma*s and the concept of *dharmadhātu*.

³³⁰ See verses 18 and 19 and their commentary. Thurman, 2004: 171–72, and Lévi, 1911: 157–58. Cf. ch. 13, verse 19a, *cittam prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ* AMSa 88.9.

³³¹ This phrase appears after AMSa, ch. 13, verse 12. AMSa 87.5. Thurman, 2004: 170, and Lévi, 1911: 156. Sthiramati, the commentator on the text, attributes this to a phrase in the *Prajñāpāramitā* in *One Hundred Thousand Verses*. See Thurman, 2004: 170n17.

³³² AMSa, ch. 2, verse 3, *yo nirvāṇe saṃsarane ’py ekaraso*. AMSa 9.13. Thurman, 2004: 17–18, and Lévi, 1911: 19; 生死涅槃體是一味 (T1604:31.593a27).

The notion of the true nature being metaphoric (*upacāra*, *shishe* 施設) closely resembles the Ekavyāvahārika's assertion concerning conventional designations (*jiaming* 假名, **prajñapti*, **vyavahāra*).³³³ It can be argued that one distinctive feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which postulates the identity between awakening and delusion, flows from a monistic doctrinal perspective.

The *Madhyāntavibhāga* (ch. 5, verse 19cd) also employs the same verse with the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* as a basis for stating that *dharmadhātu* is the common characteristic (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) of all *dharmas*.³³⁴ From the perspective of my investigation in this chapter, the common characteristic can be said to be the essence of all *dharmas*.

In the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, the concepts of “purity of mind” and “adventitious afflictions” are also visible in the first chapter on “characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*).”

prabhāsvaratvāc cittasya / kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ // verse 22cd³³⁵

Because the mind is luminous. Because afflictions are adventitious.³³⁶

³³³ We have seen this assertion recorded by Jizang in §4.4. In the *Viper Sutra* transmitted by the Sarvāstivādins, the terms *upacāra* and *vyavahāra* (*jiaming* 假名) are used in the sense of provisional designations for *ātman* and *puruṣa*, respectively. The revised texts and Japanese translations of this sūtra are provided in Matsuda et al., 2022: 65, 66 [69r3].

³³⁴ MAV 67.9. See also §3.1 and note 26. A similar explanation is found in the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* III 6.1.1. *chos kyi dbyings ni de bzhin gshegs pa nyid yin te / de ni chos thams cad kyi spyi'i mshan nyid yin la /* (*Dharmadhātu* is suchness [*tathatā*]). It (*dharmadhātu* or suchness) is the common characteristic of all *dharmas*. D 3997 [*mdo 'grel, chī*] 248a5–6. Nishio, 1940a: 61.20–24; Nishio, 1940b: 213. T1530:26.304b29–c3; Keenan, 2002: 85.

³³⁵ MAV 27.7, 9. Cf. *na kliṣṭā nāpi vākliṣṭā śuddhāśuddhā na caiva sā* (22ab). There is a slight problem with this verse: Sthiramati's commentary does not mention the latter half of this verse as a verse in either Sanskrit or Tibetan; see Yamaguchi, 1935:16–17. In the commentary to verse 22, “adventitious affliction” is mentioned as a quotation from a sacred text (*Āgama*). *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* 61.5–7. Regarding the understanding of instantaneous insight and the purification of the mind, the Mādhyamika school offers a critique of the Yogācāra school. While I will not delve into the details of this critique here, it is pertinent to note that the term *dharmadhātu* (*chos kyi dbyings*), as employed by Bhāviveka in the *Tarkajvālā* (D 3856 [*dbu ma, dsa*] 222a7–223a6), is synonymous with *sarvadharmā*. For further reference, see Yamaguchi, 1964: 557–74, and Eckel, 2008: 284–87, 434–36, although Eckel consistently translates *dharmadhātu* as “Dharma essence.” Additionally, Haribhadra, a prominent Mādhyamika scholar from the eighth century, similarly paraphrases *sarvadharmā* as *dharmadhātu* in his critique of the Yogācāra school within the *Abhisamayālaṃkārikāloka* (79.9–14). Cf. Obermiller, 1933: 98–99, and Mano, 1972: 55.

³³⁶ *Paramārtha*: 心本清淨故，煩惱客塵故 (T1599:31.453a29); Xuanzang: 心性本淨故，由客塵所染 (T1600:31.466b17). D'Amato, 2012: 130.

In addition, the idea that all *dharmas* are inherently pure or luminous is assumed in this treatise.³³⁷ These examinations of purity of mind and all *dharmas* inevitably lead to the purity of *dharmadhātu*. *Dharmadhātu* is said to be pure in the fifth chapter on “the supreme vehicle” (*yānānuttarya*). In the passage below, the word *prakṛtyā* (by nature as essence) is explicitly used.

dharmadhātor viśuddhatvāt prakṛtyā vyomavat punaḥ / verse 21ab³³⁸

Because of its intrinsic purity, the *dharmadhātu* is also comparable to the sky.³³⁹

In this case, too, *dharmadhātu* can be explained as “all *dharmas*,” or as “the essence of all *dharmas*,” or as encompassing both of these, emphasizing their purity by nature.

It is important to note that *dharmadhātu* as explicated in Mahāyāna sutras may not be exactly the same as that elucidated in Yogācāra treatises, and differences in doctrinal orientation might be observed between the two. However, for the purpose of this chapter, with its focus on the concept of “instantaneous insight,” we can identify a common usage of terms related to a current of monistic thought running through both doctrinal contexts.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the concepts of *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight within the framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism, from early Mahāyāna sutras such as Lokakṣema’s translations to the Yogācāra literature. Focusing on topics that have received little attention, my analysis has presented several significant differences from previous studies and has provided a structured picture of the understanding of an important expression of Buddhist truth, *dharmadhātu*, in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

³³⁷ This discourse is expressed in the form of a hypothetical question with critical overtones, but the assumption is consequently that all *dharmas* are inherently pure. *atha saṃvidyante dharmānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā* (And if they do exist, [it would be unreasonable to posit] that all *dharmas* are luminous by nature). MAV 68.22. *yadi prakṛtiprabhāsvaratā dharmānām* (If all *dharmas* are luminous by nature...). MAV 69.2. D’Amato, 2012: 182. The Sanskrit does not have *sarva* (all), but the Chinese translation adds a term corresponding to “all” (*yiqie* 一切).

³³⁸ MAV 67.18.

³³⁹ *Paramārtha*: 法界性淨故，譬之如虛空 (T1599:31.462b1); Xuanzang: 知法界本性，清淨如虛空 (T1600:31.475b23). D’Amato, 2012: 181.

Dharmadhātu, by definition, simply means (1) all *dharmas* (*sarvadharma*) and (2) the essence (nature as essence) of all *dharmas*.³⁴⁰ This has been suggested in previous studies, but in modern times *dharmadhātu* has been interpreted in various ways, often as “realm of truth” or “absolute truth.”³⁴¹ These interpretations, while easy to understand at first glance, do not fully capture the concept. Our discussion suggests a perspective in which *dharmadhātu* expresses the monistic “pure” nature of all *dharmas*. This interpretation is consistent with early Mahāyāna sūtras describing all *dharmas* as *advaya* (non-duality), *ekalakṣaṇa* (one characteristic), *ekarasa* (one taste), and *samatā* (equality), terms that emphasize the monistic nature of all *dharmas*.

The concept of instantaneous insight has received little attention in Mahāyāna studies. My analysis reveals the broad applicability of instantaneous insight in Mahāyāna Buddhism. I demonstrate that instantaneous insight is not merely the sudden awakening of truth but is intimately related to the essence of all *dharmas*. This concept is shared by the Mahāsāṃghika and Mahāyāna traditions as a description of the Buddha’s awakening, an idea not accepted by the Sarvāstivādin school, which understands all *dharmas* as divided into many categories. Furthermore, the concept of inherent purity of mind shared by both traditions is closely related to the view of instantaneous insight, suggesting a shared doctrinal foundation.

Another difference from previous research is the connection between the inherent purity of the mind and *dharmadhātu*. Previous studies have often treated the inherent purity of the mind and *dharmadhātu* as stand-alone concepts. In contrast, my analysis directly links this purity of mind to the monistic nature of *dharmadhātu*. I postulate that the inherent purity of the mind, mediated by the idea of instantaneous insight and the “inherent purity of all *dharmas*,” came to be expressed over time as the purity of *dharmadhātu*, as seen in texts such as the *Madhyāntavibhāga* in the Yogācāra school.

³⁴⁰ Depending on the context, these two meanings can either be distinguishable or indistinguishable from each other. At times, the distinction between the two may elude us in the present day, while in other instances the two meanings are interwoven. I would contend that the Huayan doctrine evinces sensitivity to this overlapping case. Proponents of the doctrine likely expressed it as the unobstructed *dharmadhātu* between *li* (principle) and *shi* (phenomena) (*lishi wu'ai fajie* 理事無碍法界), an issue that merits further investigation in future research.

³⁴¹ Furthermore, this chapter confirms that *dharmadhātu* is generally understood as a spatial concept, not because the term *dhātu* means space but because it is used with the verb *√sphar* (to expand) and the term *ākāśadhātu*, and that *dharmadhātu* basically means all *dharmas*. See §3.3.

This study contrasts with previous studies by emphasizing the doctrinal implications of these concepts. In conventional interpretations, *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight are treated as isolated doctrinal constructs. I argue that these concepts are deeply intertwined within a broader monistic framework that challenges dichotomous categorizations and emphasizes the monistic pure nature of all *dharma*s. The frequent expressions in Mahāyāna sutras that challenge dichotomous categorization can be understood as a critique of the Sarvāstivādin's understanding of all *dharma*s in terms of their various categories. The term *dharmadhātu*, which expressed the monistic pure nature of all *dharma*s as Mahāyāna Buddhism developed, was more effective than the term "all *dharma*s."

My analysis reveals a doctrinal proximity between the Mahāyāna and Mahāsāṃghika traditions, showing that the view that these sects developed independently does not hold. By examining the **Samayabhedoparacanacakra* and various Mahāyāna sutras, we see that both traditions exhibit a shared monistic understanding, providing a more nuanced perspective on their doctrinal evolution.

In conclusion, this chapter presents a comprehensive examination of *dharmadhātu* and instantaneous insight, identifying their monistic understanding and relevance to each other from the earliest Mahāyāna sutras to the Yogācāra school. Although it requires further elaboration in the future, this chapter offers a fresh perspective on the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism with an emphasis on the purity of all *dharma*s (i.e., *dharmadhātu*) and instantaneous insight. This examination deepens our understanding of other Mahāyāna expressions of truth and encourages further exploration of their doctrinal and practical implications.

Abbreviations

84000	84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha (https://84000.co)
AKBh	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i>
AMsa	Asaṅga's <i>Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra</i>
ASP	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā</i>
BBh	<i>Bodhisattvabhūmi</i>
D	Derge (sDe dge) edition
Gv (V)	<i>Gaṇḍavyūha</i> , Vaidya edition
Gv (S)	<i>Gaṇḍavyūha</i> , Suzuki and Izumi edition

IBK	<i>Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū</i> 印度學佛教學研究 (<i>Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies</i>)
ITK	<i>Indogaku chibettogaku kenkyū</i> インド学チベット学研究 (<i>Journal of Indian and Tibetan Studies</i>)
IsMEO	Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente
JIABS	<i>The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>
KP	<i>Kāśyapaparivarta</i>
MAV	<i>Madhyāntavibhāga</i>
Mvu	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
Oslo	Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae on the website of Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo (https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=library&bid=2)
PSP	<i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā</i>
PTS	The Pāli Text Society
RGV	<i>Ratnagotravibhāga</i>
SRS	<i>Samādhirājasūtra</i>
T	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–32.
Tohoku	<i>A Complete Catalogue of The Tibetan Buddhist Canons (Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur)</i> 西藏大藏經總目錄. Ed. Hakuju Ui, Munetada Suzuki, Yenshō Kanakura, Tōkan Tada 東北帝国大学法文学部編. Sendai: Tohoku Imperial University. 1934.
Vkn	<i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśa</i>

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See Harrison and Hartman (2000).

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See Vaidya (1960) and Suzuki and Idzumi (1934–36).

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See von Staël-Holstein (1926) and Pāsādika (2015).

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See Kimura (1992)=5; (2006)=6–8; (2007)=I–1. Cf. Dutt (1934), Conze (1962) (1974).
- Prasannapadā*
See La Vallée Poussin (1903–13).
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See Johnston (1950).
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	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
translator	LK	LK	DR	Zhi Qian	DR	DR	DR	DR
year	2nd c.	2nd c.	297	193–252	289	286	286	291
text	Skt. T310 (43) T350 T351 T352	D 216 T626 T627 T628 T629	Skt. T278 T279 T285 T286 T287	Skt. T474 T475 T476	D 179 T460 T1489 T1490	D 160 T585 T586 T587	Skt. T220 T221 T222 T223	D 44 T278 T279 T292
(A) instantaneous insight	△ §71 6.1	×	○ IX 14 6.6	○ III 59 6.6	◎ Skt. in ŚS 6.5	×	◎ 6.4	◎ 6.7
(B) one taste	◎ §40 4.1	◎ I §21 4.1	◎ XII 5	○ VI 2*a	●	◎ XXXV -1, -2	◎ PSP 5: 52, 64	◎
(C) purity of mind	△ (§104) §99 5.2	◎ X 11 4.2	○ V 17, 20 X 5	○ III 34	●	◎ XXII -2 7.1	○ PSP 1-1: 153/4	○
(D) <i>āgantuka-kleśa</i>	○ §99 5.2	○ X 4	×	○ IV 15	—	△ XXII -2 *b	○ PSP 1-1: 146/7	○ 6.7
(E) <i>sarva-dharma</i>	◎ §125 5.2	◎ X 5, 11 5.2	◎ V 2 7.1 n286	○ IV 20 VI 2	—	◎ XXII -2 7.1	◎ 7.1 n287	◎ 7.1
(F) <i>dharmadhātu</i>	—	—	×	—	—	—	—	—

LK Lokakṣema

DR Dharmarakṣa

ŚS *Śikṣhāsamuccaya*(1) *Kāśyapaparivarta*(2) **Ājātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodana*(3) *Daśabhūmika*(4) *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*(5) **Samvṛtiparamārthasatyānirdeśa*
(Mañjuśrī Pure Discipline)(6) *Brahmaparipṛcchā*(7) *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*(8) *Lokottaraparivarta*

(E) and (F) are related to purity. For (5), see notes 194 and 200.

*a *samarasa*, not *ekarasa**b The term **āgantuka-kleśa* is not found, but a parable of the void and smoke, very similar to KP (1) §99, is present.

(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
Faxian	DR	Sheng-jian	DR	DR	GB	Para-mārtha	Xuan-zang	PK
417–418	291	420–422	308	270	394–468	499–569	650	630–633
D 120	D 147	D 148	D 175	D 117	D 146	Skt.	D 3997	Skt.
T374 T376	T397(2) T398	T397(8) T404	T397(12) T403	T461 T462	T271 T272	T1599 T1600 T1601	T1530	T1604
○ §368 6.7	◎ Skt. in ŚS §11C12 6.9	△ n233 6.7	◎ n232 6.7	◎ VIII -4(32)	◎	△ V.22–26 co. cf. KP 7.1	△ III.6.2 (1)	◎ XX– XXI.15
○ §256 §402	○ §12 1 n254	◎ VI 68	○	◎ II 4	◎	×	◎ III.7.4	○ cf. II.3 IX.83
— *c	○ §10.2.4	◎ Skt. in RGV VI 78	○ VI 14	◎ VI-6	○	◎ I.22c	◎ III.6.1 (2)	◎ XIII.19 XVIII. 40 co.
○ §297	○ §11A4	◎ Skt. in RGV VI 78	—	◎ VI-6	○	◎ I.22d V.21	◎ III.6.1 (2)	◎ XIII.19 XI.13 co.
—	○ §11A4 7.1 n291	◎ VI 63	—	○ VI-6	—	○ V.22 co. n337	◎ III.8.1	◎ IX. 56ab
—	○	◎ IV 26	◎ VII 16	◎ IV	○ Only T272	◎ V.21	◎ III.6.1 (1)–(8)	◎ IX.55, 57 co.

GB Guṇabhadra

PK Prabhākaramitra (波羅頗迦羅蜜多羅)

co. Commentary

(9) **Mahāparinirvāṇamahāyānasūtra*

(10) **Dhāraṇīśvararājaparipṛcchā*

(11) *Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā*

(12) *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*

(13) **Ratnakāraṇḍasūtra*

(14) *Satyakaparivarta*

(15) *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*

(16) **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna*

(17) *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*

The sections listed in (13) are based on translations by Goshima Kiyotaka from 2013 to 2019. They are not listed in the references but are found under “寶篋經” at <https://www.inbuds.net/>. *c Tathāgata’s body or Tathāgata is described as pure. Cf. §112 (*shin tu dag pa*) §257 (*rang bzhin dag par*).

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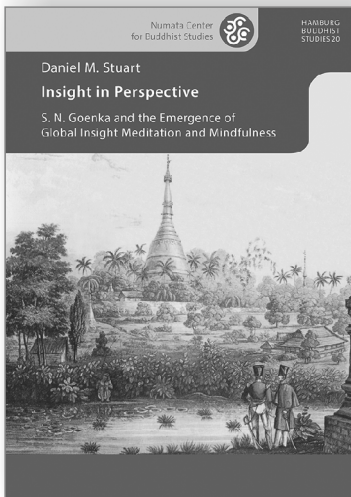
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Daniel M. Stuart

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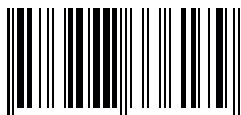
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This monograph interrogates a dominant teleological narrative about the history of modern global insight meditation and mindfulness: namely, that modern mass meditation movements were the inevitable result of the work of a handful of modern reformers

who were in large part responding to colonial forces in Asia. Focusing on the figure of S. N. Goenka (1924–2013) and his Burmese lineage, the book redescribes the development of twentieth-century lay-focused insight meditation and mindfulness emergent from Burma (Myanmar). By recovering the historical background, lineage relationships, and practice contexts of Goenka's teacher, the Burmese lay meditation master Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899–1971), the book elucidates the historical dynamics that gave rise to one of the most influential global meditation institutions of the twentieth century. Daniel M. Stuart shows that an appreciation of the cosmological, political, and personal motivations of the meditation teachers in S. N. Goenka's lineage brings to light occluded aspects of the history of modern global insight meditation.

This volume, with contributions from eight scholars, examines the centrality of *dharmadhātu* and related expressions of ultimate truth within Mahāyāna Buddhism, analyzing them as distinct yet interconnected concepts. Through historical and philosophical inquiry, it explores their roles in addressing conceptual dichotomies such as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas*, and traces the development of these ideas across Indian and Chinese Buddhist traditions. Engaging with key sutras and commentarial texts, the study examines *dharmadhātu* and other truth expressions separately, while highlighting the shared threads that connect them. The analysis reveals the doctrinal implications of these concepts and their relevance within broader Buddhist frameworks. Concise and accessible, this work offers a fresh perspective on the complexity of Buddhist thought, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of these foundational concepts and their historical trajectories.

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