

THE ACTIVE SELF:
A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF THE BUDDHA NATURE TREATISE
AND OTHER CHINESE BUDDHIST TEXTS

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Dedicated
in gratitude
to
Thomas Dean

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BNT: Buddha Nature Treatise
IBK: Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū
NINDS: No Increase, No Decrease Sūtra
PEW: Philosophy East and West
Ratna.: Ratnagotravibhāga
SBS: Supreme Basis Sūtra
T.: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Buddha nature is the Thusness revealed by the twin emptiness of man and things. . . . If one does not speak of Buddha nature, one does not understand emptiness.¹

The Buddhist notion of anātman, no self, has been a source of fascination and bewilderment to Western thinkers ever since the introduction of Buddhism to the West. Yet once we accept this notion and its centrality in Buddhist thought and practice, our bewilderment is redoubled when we learn that certain texts of the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature lineage speak in the most positive language of such things as a Buddha nature, a pure mind and even the perfection of selfhood. How can such language be used within a tradition which places so much importance on the anātman teaching? Similarly, we are at first puzzled by the Mādhyamika teaching that everything is empty (śūnya) and that the supreme truth is emptiness. This language is the product of a man, Nāgārjuna, who is regarded as second only to the Buddha by Mahāyāna Buddhists and whose thinking forms

¹Fo Hsing Lun (佛性論 Buddha Nature Treatise, BNT), attributed to Vasubandhu, translated into Chinese by Paramārtha. T. 31, #1610, p. 787b.

the core of Mahāyāna philosophy. How, then, do the Buddha nature theorists intend their remarks that the Buddha nature is revealed by emptiness and that the perfections of purity, self, bliss and eternity characteristic of the dharmakāya, with which the Buddha nature is identified, are not empty (aśūnya)? Such doctrines are astonishing in the context of Mādhyamika emptiness teachings.

This study addresses these philosophical issues. What is Buddha nature? What is its ontological status? Why do certain texts speak of a Buddha nature? What is the place of the Buddha nature concept in the context of the history of Buddhist thought? In particular, can it be reconciled with the central teachings of anātman and śūnyatā? If so, how? In short, what does the term "Buddha nature" represent and how does it function?

I shall approach these issues through an examination of the Buddha nature concept within the context of Chinese Buddhism. The Buddha nature idea achieved a popularity and an importance in China which greatly exceeded its importance in India. China was the site of the heated and sustained "Buddha nature controversy" which revolved around the issue of whether or not all beings possess a Buddha nature. Virtually all important Buddhist schools and thinkers were obliged to commit themselves to positions on this crucial issue of the time and these positions became one of the primary criteria by which they judged each other. As a result of its being made an object of such scrutiny, the

importance of the Buddha nature concept for subsequent developments of Chinese Buddhism was assured. I shall therefore be concerned toward the end of the study to consider the influence the Buddha nature concept may have had on some of these subsequent developments.

Since I am concerned to understand what "Buddha nature" means in the Chinese context, I will look to Chinese texts for source materials. By "Chinese" here, I do not mean a text written by a Chinese--it is often difficult in Buddhism to determine who has written a text, and the texts with which we are concerned in this study are no exception in this regard. Rather, we need a text or texts in the Chinese language and extant in the Chinese collection of scripture, for it is obviously in this form that the concept made its impact on the Chinese culture. We also need a text or texts which made a significant impression on the Chinese thinkers of the time. I am not interested in a text written from a Chinese sectarian point of view, but one which preceded or was contemporaneous with but outside of the development of the Chinese schools and which may therefore have contributed to the ideas characteristic of those schools.

The following three texts, representative of Buddha nature thought and extant only in Chinese, will form the focus of the present study. They are: the Buddha Nature Treatise (佛性論, BNT), attributed to Vasubandhu (though this attribution is doubted) and translated by Paramārtha; the

Supreme Basis Sūtra (無上依經, SBS), also translated by Paramārtha; and the No Increase, No Decrease Sūtra (不增不減經, NINDS), translated by Bodhiruci. These texts were chosen for several reasons.

The Buddha Nature Treatise is the focal text of this study. It was chosen primarily because it fulfills the conditions listed above. It is, to my knowledge, the only extant treatise not of a Chinese or Japanese sectarian nature entirely devoted to the detailed exposition of the Buddha nature concept. The position of this text is philosophically sophisticated and well articulated. The text was well known, esteemed by Chinese thinkers and frequently cited in the Buddha nature controversy.

The other two texts were chosen primarily for their textual and philosophical relationships to the BNT. Thus, they are studied in comparison to the BNT, in the expectation that they may help to clarify the message of the latter. The relationship of the NINDS to the BNT is not completely obvious, though it is quoted in the latter several times. This textual relationship is perhaps one of the factors behind the strong philosophical resemblance of the two texts, both stressing the nonduality of the ordinary person and the Buddha in such a way as to highlight the positive qualities perceived in humanity. Thus, in the case of the NINDS, its relationship with the BNT is primarily philosophical and secondarily textual.

The case of the SBS is just the reverse: its textual relationship with the BNT is extremely close, while its philosophical stance is virtually the opposite of the latter. While the BNT focuses on the ordinary person, the SBS focuses on the Buddha, and the resulting difference in tenor of the two texts is roughly of the same degree (though not of precisely the same nature) as the difference between a humanistic and a theistic philosophy. Thus, it is clear that a strong textual bond does not guarantee similarity of doctrinal contents. Yet it is valuable for present purposes to study the teachings of the SBS as indicative of a second major doctrinal perspective (after that of the NINDS and the BNT) within tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought as well as to clarify by contrast certain features of the BNT.

A different kind of reason motivating the selection of these texts is their relative unfamiliarity in the Western world and the lack of research on them in contemporary scholarly circles. Chinese sources are for the most part among the more neglected of Buddhist works reaching Western audiences. This generalization certainly applies to the texts of the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature group. Ruegg, for example, in his La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra¹ focuses exclusively on Sanskrit and Tibetan texts. This is,

¹David Seyfort Ruegg, La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra (Paris: École Française d'extrême orient, 1969).

though, an excellent study, with considerable philosophical content. Takasaki, in his Nyoraizō Shisō no Keisei¹ (Formation of the Tathāgatagarbha Theory) does of course include Chinese texts in his study, but limits himself to texts pre-dating the Ratnagotravibhāga (Ratna.). Of the present three texts, the only one which forms a part of his study is the NINDS. Moreover, his study is primarily textual-historical and does not deal with the kinds of philosophical issues to be concentrated upon here.

One other text extant only in Chinese which might logically have seemed to belong in the present study is the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, again a translation of Paramārtha. However, this text is one of the better known of the tathāgatagarbha group in the West and has been translated into English by Yoshito Hakeda.² Moreover, there is a recent textual and doctrinal study of this text, also in English.³ Thus, it was not felt that this text needed to be included in the present study, in the company of three relatively unknown texts, none of which have been translated into a Western language.

As for non-Western studies of these texts, the text which has received the most attention is the NINDS. As an

¹Takasaki Jikidō, Nyoraizō Shisō no Keisei (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1974).

²Yoshito S. Hakeda, The Awakening of Faith (New York: Columbia, 1967).

³Whalen Wai-lun Lai, "The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana (T ch'eng ch'i hsin lun): A Study of the Unfolding of Sinitic Mahayana Motifs" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Univ., 1975).

early and formative text in the tathāgatagarbha tradition, its influence is felt to have been considerable.¹ It is included in the present study despite the attention it has received in the East because it is not well known in the West and because of the similarity in general outlook between it and the BNT.

The BNT is virtually ignored in the West and has received only a small amount of attention in non-Western scholarly circles. The one book length study of it with which I am familiar is a recent Japanese study by Takemura Shōhō.² This study is primarily textual, including a partial modern Japanese translation and a very useful outline, in conjunction with which parallel passages and quotations from tathāgatagarbha texts and other sources are listed. Some doctrinal issues are discussed, but the study is not philosophical as such. In addition to the Takemura work, there are brief remarks in, for example, Ui's work on the Ratna.³ and in Takasaki's study of the Ratna.⁴

It is a bit of a puzzle why the BNT has not received more attention than it has. Part of the reason may be that it has been eclipsed by the Ratna., with which it has much in common, and which has received a considerable amount of

¹See Takasaki, Keisei; and Takasaki Jikidō, "Fuzōfugengyō no nyoraizōsetsu," Komazawadaigaku Bukkyōgakubu Kenkyūkiyō 23 (1965): 88-107.

²Takemura Shōhō, Busshōron Kenkyū (Tokyo: Hyakkaengan, 1978).

³Ui Hakuju, Hōshōron Kenkyū (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 1960).

⁴Takasaki Jikidō, A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra) (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966).

attention. The Ratna. is considered a summary statement of the early period of tathāgatagarbha thought and as such is a convenient focus for contemporary studies of the latter. It figured prominently in Ruegg's work and has been especially emphasized by Takasaki. The latter has gone so far as to virtually equate the BNT with the Ratna.¹ Anyone who accepts this evaluation will, of course, thereby be stopped from studying the BNT, given the amount of attention that the Ratna. has already received.

It is certainly true that there are extensive parallels in both form and content between the BNT and the Ratna. It is nonetheless equally true that there is a considerable amount of the BNT which is not paralleled in the Ratna. and which therefore merits consideration in its own right. These passages unique to the BNT are, moreover, of keen interest philosophically precisely for their contribution to the Buddha nature concept. The Ratna. is a tathāgatagarbha text and quite straightforwardly so. The BNT elucidates Buddha nature. For an introduction to a comparison of the two concepts, the BNT is an important text. It also elucidates a concept of the Buddha nature which is quite dynamically expressed, incorporating Mādhyamika, Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha thought, as well as the general perspective centering on the notion of Thusness. It has for all

¹Takasaki Jikidō, "Busshōron," in Buttenkaidaijiten, 2nd ed., pp. 145-6. Edited by Mizuno et. al. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1977).

these reasons seemed to me to be important to stress the differences between the BNT and the Ratna. and to emphasize the passages of the former which have no parallel in the latter. It is my contention that this procedure will show that the BNT expresses a doctrine which is distinct from that of the Ratna. and of considerable philosophical import in its own right.

It should be clear that a study of the philosophical significance of the Buddha nature concept based on Chinese sources is an open field. The problem addressed in the present study is to understand and assess the philosophical significance of the teachings of these three texts concerning Buddha nature. It is thus primarily a study of philosophical concepts in purpose, though secondly it is a textual study by necessity. A third area of concern is to judge in what way the appearance of the Buddha nature concept within the anātman-sūnyatā tradition opened new possibilities for religious thought and practice in China.

The progression between these three areas is natural. In order to determine what "Buddha nature" means, we must first examine the textual sources. However, the understanding of a concept involves more than the reading and relating of the sources. One must also interpret what one reads in the light of certain concerns, from a particular (or several particular) point(s) of view and using a certain methodology. Only thus may one assess a significance, draw a conclusion, or make a judgment. This involves an assessment of the

philosophical import of the texts. Once, however, one has understood the meaning of "Buddha nature" in the context of the Chinese sources, the third stage of inquiry is implicit. If one understands what Buddha nature represents or means, it is a short step to considering what it implies or suggests. This is especially true inasmuch as we have the historical record of the actual Chinese Buddhist developments on which to base such hindsight.

The study is divided into three parts on the basis of this triple concern. I begin with a textual section, taking the BNT as the primary text, in comparison with which the NINDS and the SBS are subsequently discussed. In this section, I summarize and interpret what I consider to be the most important portions of each text for our present philosophical concerns. The summaries of the texts include paraphrase and translation. All translations are my own. This is not, however, a neutral presentation of textual materials. I have selected and arranged these materials in the light of my philosophical concerns. I also comment in this section on conceptual issues and themes as they begin to emerge. Such remarks, however, are restricted to the textual contexts on which they are based. Thus, the interpretive work begins in this section, but is limited to comments on particular textual references.

The second section comprises the developed analysis of the philosophical concepts. Here we bring together the conceptual themes which emerged in the textual section to resolve

the major problems of the study: what the Buddha nature is, its ontological status, its congruence or disaccord with earlier Buddhist thought and its significance in the present texts. These issues will be treated in three chapters. A chapter on ontology largely indicates what the Buddha nature is not, while clarifying its position in relation to other Buddhist thought. Chapters on action and practice more positively discuss what Buddha nature is and explain its function in the texts.

The third part of the study consists of one chapter on the influence of Buddha nature thought on subsequent developments in Chinese Buddhism. Here some of the potential of the Buddha nature concept is explored. This is not a historical study as such, but a comparison of certain doctrinal and practical features of Buddha nature thought with similar features in sectarian Chinese Buddhist thought. Thus is clarified another level of meaning of the Buddha nature concept, this time an implicit level. We also indicate that Buddha nature thought is an important key in understanding Chinese Buddhist thought.

These are the three major components of the study. Two additional segments may be mentioned here: the appendix and the glossary. The appendix consists of a reflection on the nature of mysticism in the light of the findings derived from the three texts and presented in the study. This reflection takes the form of a dialogue between two levels of question: "Are these texts mystical?" and "What is

mysticism?" To answer the first question is simply to add another dimension to our understanding of the Buddha nature concept and its significance. The first question, however, cannot be answered without answering the second. Hence the necessity of reflecting on the nature of mysticism itself. It will be shown that our understanding of the present texts does shed light on this issue.

A glossary of technical terms is found at the end of the study. This is conceived as an aid to two types of reader. The reader familiar with Chinese will find there the characters for the terms discussed in the text. The general reader will find explanations of technical terms as used in the text, whether in English, Sanskrit or Chinese. The glossary should particularly assist in the reading of the textual analysis section.

A final word on methodology is appropriate here. Though textual and historical concerns are evident in this study and philological techniques are conspicuous throughout, the primary concerns of this study are conceptual, and analysis of philosophical concepts vies with the textual analysis for importance. There are two general approaches to conceptual interpretation employed in this study. The first is derived from linguistic philosophy. This technique will be evident in my speaking of the term "Buddha nature" and its functions, in addition to my concern with what Buddha nature "is." The use of this technique was actually suggested to me by the author of the BNT, who makes use of it himself!

He very often speaks of the word "Buddha nature" and what can be "said" about it, as opposed to what "it is." In general, he exhibits a great deal of sensitivity to the form of expression and the important role of language in conveying ideas.

The second methodological "technique" is actually nothing more than a philosophical perspective from which to ask questions. I refer to the "action theory"¹ of human personhood which suggests that it may be more productive to think in terms of a person's acts, rather than in terms of mind and/or body, in attempting to understand the phenomenon of personhood. I have used this idea in studying the textual accounts of Buddha nature and have indeed found it to be productive. The term "active self"² used with respect to the Buddha nature derives from this approach.

¹I have made use of the works of such thinkers as James, Ryle, Strawson and Wittgenstein. See the Bibliography, section on Secondary Works on Western and Comparative Philosophy.

²The term "active self" is my own and does not derive from any traditional Buddhist term. It is thus used for interpretive, rather than reportive, purposes and is intended to convey the active character of Buddha nature.

PART ONE

THE TEXTS

In this part of the dissertation I present the three texts which form the basis of the study. In this Part, I summarize and interpret what I judge to be the most important themes, ideas and arguments of each text. In the cases of the NINDS and SBS this is a relatively straightforward matter, since both texts are relatively short and clearly structured by their authors. In the case of the BNT, however, the size, complexity and sometimes incoherent arrangement of the text compel me to impose more of my own order on the text.

The BNT, as the main focus of the study, is presented first. Chapter by chapter, I select the main themes of the text, presenting them in the forms of summary, paraphrase and translation. The themes are arranged according to the concerns of this study, namely, in such a way as to clarify the Buddha nature concept, its ontological status and its philosophical import in the context of Buddhist thought. I not only indicate what the author says, but attempt to interpret as well the significance of what he says for these philosophical concerns. This section lays the conceptual foundation for the rest of the study.

The NINDS is presented second. It is an early text in the tathāgatagarbha tradition from which the BNT drew and exhibits important philosophical similarities with the latter. Its usefulness is found in its clarifying the general ontological framework of the BNT, i.e., the concept of non-duality. This framework is held in common by both texts,

but is more fully articulated in the NINDS. The NINDS also holds a remarkable position on the man-Buddha relationship, which, again, is similar to and clarifies that of the BNT.

Third to be discussed is the SBS. This text is very close to the BNT in a textual sense but very different philosophically. As the NINDS helps to clarify the BNT on the basis of its similarity with the latter, so the SBS clarifies the BNT by virtue of its differences. The teachings concerning the man-Buddha relationship here are very different from those of the BNT with the consequence that the practices recommended for the attainment of liberation are quite divergent in the two. Given the textual proximity of the two and their sharing of a common literary background, the important differences which they exhibit are all the more striking.

Clearly this part of the study is not just textual--the conceptual analysis also begins here. It is in this discussion of the texts that the philosophical themes emerge. These themes, though, only emerge here and the discussion of them is limited to the immediate context in which they arise. It will be reserved for a later task, that of the section on the basic philosophical concepts, to lift these themes from the contexts in which they are here presented and to discuss them in greater depth with the aim of formulating a unified and systematic account of the Buddha nature concept.

Before proceeding with the presentation of the texts, two more preliminary explanations are necessary, concerning

the translation of Buddhist terms into Chinese and concerning the terms tathāgatagarbha and "Buddha nature." First, regarding the translation of Buddhist terms into Chinese, it should be remarked that the transmission of Buddhism to China is a classic instance of the convergence of two highly sophisticated and literate cultures. The well-developed languages and philosophical presuppositions of the two were very different and the problems of translation were thus exacerbated. Much has been made in scholarly works of the Chinese practice of ko-i, "matching concepts," in which Indian Buddhist terms were rendered in Chinese by the Taoist terms which they were judged to "match." While it is true that this practice did importantly influence the translation of texts for a brief period of time, its final significance may be better located in its position as a single manifestation of the profound and mutual influence of Taoism and Buddhism. Its significance in the limited context of translation is more confined. Zürcher judges that

the importance of Taoist terminology has generally been overestimated: terms of undoubtedly Taoist provenance actually constitute a very small percentage of the Chinese archaic Buddhist vocabulary, the bulk of which consists of terms which cannot be traced to any Chinese source and which probably have been improvised by the earliest translators.¹

In other words, for the greatest part of its history, and with the exception of the archaic ko-i practice later

¹E. Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China (Leiden: Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 33-4. Italics mine.

discredited by the translators, the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese is characterized by the transliteration, rather than the translation, of technical terms. Thus, with the exception of a few terms importantly affected by Taoist influence,¹ for most Chinese Buddhist terms there is no etymological history of any significance. The procedure of transliteration used is as follows.

In order to avoid the danger of confusion and misunderstanding . . . the transcribers appear to have used a limited set of signs conventionally employed in phonetic renderings. For obvious reasons preference was given to those characters which seldom occurred in normal written Chinese. . . . But on the other hand, quite common signs . . . are frequently found in Buddhist transcriptions.²

In this practice, a Sanskrit word is broken into syllables, with each syllable represented by a Chinese character. Thus, prajñāpāramitā, for example, becomes 般若波羅蜜多 pronounced pan-jo-po-lo-mi-to, but quite meaningless if one attempts to combine the individual meanings of the constituent terms as translations.

Other terms which were translated, rather than transliterated, are still lacking in Chinese etymological history. The term advaya (nondual), for example, was translated into Chinese as 不二, which literally means "not two." However, this form entered Chinese with the Buddhist texts and is only

¹The concepts of being and non-being, and their relationship to "emptiness," were influenced in this way. This will be discussed at length below.

²Zürcher, p. 39.

rarely found in use outside the Buddhist context. The one extra-Buddhist usage recorded in the classical Chinese dictionaries is in a compound with the word for "price." The compound means "uniform (not two) prices" and is obviously not of philosophical import. The philosophical concept of nondualism, therefore, entered China with Buddhism and, though translated, was rendered in a neutral form. Given these features of the translation of Buddhist terms into Chinese, in the following presentation of the texts, I shall limit my comments on the etymology of technical terms to the few cases where there are philosophically significant etymological considerations.

Second, a brief discussion of the Sanskrit etymologies and Chinese translations of the terms tathāgatagarbha and "Buddha nature" will provide essential background information for our study of the Buddha nature concept. The term tathāgatagarbha is relatively straightforward, when compared to the term "Buddha nature," though it does permit more than one interpretation. It is a compound of the term tathāgata (tathā + āgata, "thus come," or tathā + gata, "thus gone"), an epithet for the Buddha, who is "thus gone" in realization from samsāra to nirvāna, and "thus come" from nirvāna to samsāra to work for the salvation of all. The term garbha has two basic meanings: embryo and womb. Thus, the term tathāgatagarbha may mean either "embryo of the Tathāgata," i.e., incipient Buddha, or "womb of the Tathāgata," i.e., that from which the Tathāgata emerges. The first meaning is

often discussed as the "cause" of the Tathāgata and the latter meaning as the "fruit" of the Tathāgata. As "fruit," it indicates the fulfillment of the Buddha Path, the dharmakāya, nirvāna, perfect wisdom or realization. The Chinese seem to have generally decided to understand the term tathāgatagarbha in the latter sense as womb of the Tathāgata. This is demonstrated in their choice of terms for rendering tathāgatagarbha, namely, 如來藏 (ju-lai-tsang, Japanese nyoraizō). The term ju-lai exactly renders tathāgata as "thus come," and tsang renders "storehouse." Thus the Chinese translation shows a preference for conceiving the tathāgatagarbha as the container of the Tathāgata (i.e., the womb), rather than that which is contained (the embryo).

Nevertheless, in a text such as the BNT, an author is likely to indicate various meanings of the term ju-lai-tsang. For example, the BNT indicates that two of the meanings of tathāgatagarbha are (1) that which is held within the storehouse (所攝藏) and (2) the storehouse as container (能攝藏). The first meaning indicates the understanding of garbha as embryo, i.e., that which is contained, and in the BNT it is specifically indicated that what is contained, the embryo, is ordinary sentient beings. The second meaning indicates garbha understood as container, and in the BNT this container or storehouse is said to be filled with the Buddha's merits, likened to jewels. Thus, the "cause" and "effect" senses of the two meanings remain clear. However, it is specifically as two meanings of the single

term tathāgatagarbha that these are analyzed. Thus for the author of the BNT, the single term tathāgatagarbha embraces both senses of container and contained, or cause and effect. Hence, what is a difficult etymological problem for the scholar, namely, whether tathāgatagarbha really means embryo of the Tathāgata or womb of the Tathāgata, is no problem at all for the Buddhist author of the BNT, who simply allows tathāgatagarbha to encompass both meanings.

An additional difficulty which is not found in a discussion of tathāgatagarbha attends any discussion of the term "Buddha nature." The term "Buddha nature" is a Chinese term for which the Sanskrit equivalent is not readily apparent. This missing Sanskrit equivalent has become the topic of some discussion among Buddhist scholars, Formerly it was assumed that the equivalent must be buddhatā, or buddhatva, i.e., "Buddhahood" or "Buddha-ness." However, upon comparison of the Chinese versions of texts containing the term "Buddha nature" with their Sanskrit and Tibetan equivalents, it became apparent that the fo hsing did not correspond to Sanskrit buddhatā, buddhatva, or their Tibetan equivalents. Rather, what emerged was somewhat more complex. Ogawa¹ and Shinoda,² for example, compare the Chinese text of the Ratna.

¹Ogawa Ichijō, "'Busshō' to buddhatva," IBK 11 (March 1963): 544-545.

²Shinoda Masashige, "Busshō to sono gengo," IBK 11 (1963): 223-226.

with its Sanskrit counterpart and find that "Buddha nature" is used to translate compounds of the term dhātu, (nature, element, realm, principle; e.g., Buddha-dhātu, Tathāgata-dhātu, etc.), gotra (family, lineage), or garbha. Ogawa sees these three as of equal status and synonymous meaning and so feels one can safely take "Buddha nature" to have one meaning, rather than several, namely, the term tathāgatagarbha and its equivalents. Shinoda, on the other hand, sees the dhātu and gotra groups as the standard bases for the "Buddha nature" translation, with garbha and the remaining terms as exceptions to these standards. Moreover, he sees the basic meaning of both dhātu and gotra as cause, as in "the dhātu is the cause of the arising of the three jewels--Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" (from the Ratna.) and "all merits are born of this gotra." However, "Buddha nature" means not only the cause of the Buddha, but also the "essential nature" of the Buddha, enlightenment, and this the term gotra cannot convey. Shinoda concludes that dhātu, as equivalent to dharmakāya, dharmatā and tathatā (Thusness), includes the "fruition" sense of the Buddha, as well as the "causal" sense, and can be taken as the most appropriate equivalent for Buddha nature. Thus, "Buddha nature" would most exactly translate buddhadhātu.¹

Takasaki² indirectly confirms Shinoda's thesis and clari-

¹Ibid.

²Takasaki Jikidō, "Dharmatā, Dharmadhātu, Dharmakāya

fies its meaning. He explains dhātu as meaning originally "that which places or sustains something," and hence, like dharma, it can stand for rule, principle or truth.¹ In the Abhidharma it was taken to mean element, essence, or essential nature. Subsequently, the term dharmadhātu came to be interpreted as (1) the nature (dhātu) of things (dharma), or the truth concerning things, and (2) the totality of phenomena or things.² It is also given as meaning the origin or cause of the Buddha's teachings, the Dharma. Thus, he finds the term dhātu to have the bivalence attributed to it by Shinoda. In line with the latter he sees buddhadhātu as signifying (1) the nature (dhātu = dharmatā) of the Buddha, thus equivalent to the term dharmakāya, and (2) the cause (dhātu = hetu) of the Buddha. Moreover, "the link between the cause and the result is the nature (dhātu) common to both, which is nothing but the dharmadhātu."³ Thus the connection between the Chinese fo hsing and the Sanskrit buddhadhātu seems fairly well established, though the other Sanskrit terms found by comparing Chinese and Sanskrit texts are to be remembered. This is the present state of our knowledge of the genealogy of the term "Buddha nature." The meaning of "Buddha nature" in particular textual contexts is the subject of the present study.

and Buddhadhātu--Structure of the Ultimate Value in Mahāyāna Buddhism," IBK 14 (March 1966): 78-94.

¹Ibid., p. 81. ²Ibid., p. 83. ³Ibid., pp. 91-2.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BUDDHA NATURE TREATISE

The BNT¹ holds a position of considerable importance

¹The BNT is attributed to Vasubandhu (4th century) and translated into Chinese by Paramārtha (6th century). Only the Chinese translation is extant; neither a Tibetan translation nor a Sanskrit original survive. It is not suspected that the text might be a purely Chinese original, as it contains an extensive refutation of several non-Buddhist Indian philosophical schools, which would probably not be expected in a Chinese original. There is, however, a considerable degree of doubt as to whether Vasubandhu actually wrote the text. Takasaki and Hattori, for example, are convinced that the text was not translated, but actually written, by Paramārtha, on the basis of his knowledge of the Ratna. (Takasaki Jikidō, "Structure of the Anuttarāśrayasūtra [Wu Shang I Ching]," IBK 8 [March 1960]: 35. His citation of Hattori.) It is difficult not to be somewhat suspicious of Paramārtha since he is given as the translator of both the BNT and the SBS, neither of which are extant in other than their Chinese (Paramārtha) versions, and since both contain extensive similarities with the Ratna. The issue is not yet resolved, but a certain amount of healthy skepticism would seem to be in order.

However, this is not the only difficulty concerning the text of the BNT. The circumstances of the text's composition, translation (assuming it was translated) and transmission are all very little known. Ui puts the translation of the text between 557 and 569. (Ui, p. 366.) Takemura puts it at approximately 558. (Takemura, p. 6.) There is no record of the date and place of translation on the manuscript.

One particularly troublesome aspect of the text is the existence of certain passages preceded by the term, "comment:" (釋日). It is not known what person or persons may have added these comments, though some suspect that fragments of Paramārtha's lost commentary on the BNT may have been preserved here. (See Takasaki, Buttenkaidaijiten, p. 144 and Takemura, pp. 6ff.) According to the classical authority on the text, Fa-tsang, some commentary-like

in the body of tathāgatagarbha texts transmitted to China. In Sino-Japanese Buddhism there was a significant and sustained controversy concerning the "existence" of Buddha nature, i.e., whether all beings or only some possess the Buddha nature and are thereby assured of the attainment of Buddhahood. The BNT "received serious consideration in China and Japan as a representative text arguing for the existence in all beings of Buddha nature and against the consciousness-only view recognizing no Buddha nature."¹

material did get mixed with the text during the process of transmission. (Takemura, p. 37.) Takemura makes a bold attempt to determine whether Vasubandhu, Paramārtha, or someone else may have added these commentary-like passages. He feels each case has to be treated individually and that it is very difficult to be sure in one's judgment. He doubts, however, that Paramārtha would have been rash enough to insert his views this way and feels that the text Paramārtha received must have contained them and that Paramārtha "obediently" translated them. (Ibid., pp. 6 - 37).

One further textual consideration to be mentioned is the large degree of similarity between the BNT and the Ratna. Takemura (Ibid., p. 26) and Takasaki (Buttenkaidaijiten, p. 144) indicate that the former may have been based on the latter, but Takemura goes on to point out that the relationship between these two texts may be considerably more complex, with the BNT possibly serving as an intermediary between the Chinese and Sanskrit texts of the Ratna. in some cases. (Takemura, p. 30ff.) In any event, the two texts are quite similar and do share much common material.

¹Translated from Takasaki, Buttenkaidaijiten, p. 144.

Ling-jun, for example, who was one of the early advocates of the universal Buddha nature theory, quoted the BNT (as well as the SBS and other tathāgatagarbha texts) in his attempt to refute the view that some do not possess the Buddha nature.¹ Many commentaries, both Chinese and Japanese, were written on the BNT, though only one Japanese commentary survives.²

As Takemura points out, however, the very existence of such a "Buddha nature controversy" is based upon an understanding of the Buddha nature concept which is quite antithetical to that concept as presented in the BNT.³ The controversy, that is, is formulated on an understanding of the Buddha nature as some kind of original principle or metaphysical entity which can either exist or not exist. The essential theme which we shall see in the BNT, however, is that the Buddha nature is not a metaphysical thing of any kind, but simply an individual's potential to achieve Buddhahood. It is thus, strictly speaking, improper to say either that it exists or that it doesn't exist. Nonetheless, the author of the BNT does say, for certain soteriological

¹William Henry Grosnick, "Dōgen's View of the Buddha-Nature" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979), p. 120.

²Takasaki, Buttenkaidaijiten, p. 144. Extant is
佛性論節義 by 賢洲

³Takemura, p. 3.

reasons, that the Buddha nature can be said to exist in a sense which he specifies.

It is on this theme of the BNT that the present study will focus. We shall study what is meant by "Buddha nature" in the text and the nature and significance of the functions attributed to the Buddha nature. Substantial textual material will be examined to clarify the author's ideas and arguments in this regard. The author's soteriological and linguistic maneuvers and concerns will be considered insofar as they mold the Buddha nature teachings of this text.

My concern throughout the present study is to clarify the nature of selfhood implicit in the present texts. In the case of the BNT this teaching is at once simple and complex. It is simple in that a single view of selfhood pervades the text. It is complex in that this theme is illustrated and explained in terms of dozens of Buddhist technical terms and concepts. In the latter regard, the text presents an impressive synthesis of the Mahāyāna teachings which were to be held in common by the indigenous Chinese Buddhist schools. Thus, in addition to its importance in the "Buddha nature controversy," we may also see the text as a sort of primer of basic Chinese Buddhist thought. Given that Buddhist philosophy largely revolves around its view of the person, it is not surprising that a single text may be outstanding both in its careful and detailed discussion of the selfhood issue (in this case, in the particular language of Buddha nature thought) and as a study

in Buddhist philosophy on the general level. Thus, the text, and the present study, is focussed on the selfhood issue, but within the context of, and in dialogue with, general Mahāyāna thought.

Given the length of the BNT,¹ our study must be divided into sections. These will be as follows: A. Introduction and Refutation of Other Views (comprising chapters 1 and 2 of the BNT), B. The Essence of Buddha Nature (corresponding to chapter 3 of the BNT), C.. Characteristics of Buddha Nature, I: Action and Non-Substantiality (chapter 4 of the BNT, sections 1 - 5) and D. Characteristics of Buddha Nature, II: Soteriology (chapter 4 of the BNT, sections 6 - 10).

In the first section, after introducing his topic, the author considers several challenges to his understanding of Buddha nature and refutes each in turn. In so doing, he shows us what his view is not, distinguishing what he does want to say about Buddha nature from various possible misunderstandings of his view. We have here a negative introduction to his views. The second section introduces us in a positive way to his view of Buddha nature, giving us the essence of the idea in a relatively simple form. Here his concept of Buddha nature is presented as a synthesis of three important Mahāyāna notions: bodhicitta, true nature and tathāgatagarbha.

¹Four chüan or rolls.

The final two sections as presented in this study represent a considerable re-structuring of the material given in the text. In the interest of comprehensibility, the material there given has been organized for the present study around two themes. The section on action and non-substantiality presents the basic textual evidence for the claim that the Buddha nature as portrayed in this text should be conceived as being of an active character rather than as an entity or thing of any sort. The final section clarifies what sort of action forms the essence of the Buddha nature. By showing that the Buddha nature essentially functions in a soteriological manner, we confirm the claim that the essence of the Buddha nature is action.

A. INTRODUCTION AND REFUTATION OF OTHER VIEWS

1. Introduction

The author begins in a manner very suggestive of his understanding of Buddha nature. He does not respond, as we might expect, to the question "What is Buddha nature?" This kind of question, we may surmise, would be question-begging in a way quite destructive to the view that the author wishes to present. It would presuppose a Buddha nature which "is" "something." The nature of being and the substantiality of the Buddha nature are the two single issues which the BNT's author seems to feel are most misunderstood by others and which he thus focuses on from the beginning of the text.

Instead, then, of the question, "What is Buddha nature," the BNT opens with the question, "Why did the Buddha speak of Buddha nature?"¹ Note that no ontological or metaphysical questions are begged here. The answer is that the Buddha spoke of Buddha nature in order to help people overcome five shortcomings (inferior mind, arrogance, delusion, slandering the truth, and attachment to self) and to produce in them five virtues (diligent mind, reverence, wisdom [prajñā], knowledge [jñāna] and compassion). Thus, the Buddha taught that all sentient beings have Buddha nature in order to undo the effects of ignorance and to prod all beings toward enlightenment.

¹BNT, p. 787a.

Right from the beginning, then, a certain theme is announced--the teaching of Buddha nature does not essentially indicate the existence of and describe the nature of "something" that "is," but rather serves the very practical purpose that all the Buddha's teachings are purposed to serve, namely, aiding sentient beings in their quest for enlightenment. Buddha nature, as a part of the corpus of the Buddha's teachings, is upāya, a means directed toward the salvation of mankind. This is one important clue for our understanding of Buddha nature and a fitting introduction to our subject. Since "Buddha nature" cannot be spoken of as "something" that "is," it must be a term that functions in another way. We begin to get a sense of what Buddha nature is not. The rest of this section expands this incipient understanding of what Buddha nature is not.

2. Refutation of Other Views

The author of the BNT next clarifies the Buddha nature notion as he understands it by contrasting it with the teachings of Hīnayāna schools,¹ non-Buddhist Indian philosophical schools and Mahāyāna schools. In what follows we

¹Please note that in my use of this term I do not wish to convey any of the original pejorative sense of the term. It is to be hoped that through widespread use this term no longer carries the negative connotation it once had, but has become neutral in connotation, much as the term "Quaker," though originally a pejorative, is now commonly taken as a neutral and acceptable term to refer to the Society of Friends. "Theravāda," of course, cannot substitute for "Hīnayāna," as it is only one of many schools constituting the latter.

shall be concerned to note how he further develops the notion of the existence or non-existence of the Buddha nature and the sort of logic he uses to refute others. The latter of course also negatively indicates the position he will take: by negating other positions he will show what position remains for himself.

a. Refuting Hīnayāna Views: Buddha Nature Neither Exists Nor Does Not Exist

The question which begins the section on the Hīnayāna is as follows: the Buddha "said that there are some persons who do not 'dwell' in the Buddha nature [i.e., who lack Buddha nature] and who will never attain nirvāna. This produces doubts and is destructive of faith."¹ The directly implied question is: why did he say this? Note that, as in the first passage examined, this question stands in place of another. Instead of this question, we might have expected, "in certain texts the Buddha says there is no Buddha nature. Does the Buddha nature exist or doesn't it?" This question, again, would present the issue in a question-begging manner. For the BNT's author, to speak of the existence or non-existence of the Buddha nature is misleading. Yet in this section he does want to address the fact that certain texts seem to indicate that there is no Buddha nature, in the sense that there are some who will never attain

¹BNT, p. 787c.

nirvāna. That is, he wants to consider the view that there is no Buddha nature without formulating the issue in terms of its existence or non-existence. Hence the present form of the question.

The answer he gives to this question, in typical Mahāyāna revisionist fashion, is that the Buddha wanted to have people stop hating or rejecting the Mahāyāna, since this act of rejection is the true cause of the icchantika's condition, i.e., his eternal non-attainment of nirvāna. Thus the icchantika teaching is upāya, a means used to lead the so-called non-attainer to attainment.

The main thrust of this section¹ is to refute both the

¹My discussion focuses here on what I perceive as the overall emphasis of this section. It should be noted, however, that the author (rather, the author of the comment passage [釋日]) in which this is found) specifically mentions two Hīnayāna schools as targets of his criticism. He has the Vibhajyavādins, or "those who make distinctions" (分別部), represent the view that there is a Buddha nature. They are portrayed as holding that "all sentient beings, whether ordinary persons or saints, have emptiness as their source. Therefore, all sentient beings, both ordinary persons and saints, emerge from emptiness. Thus, emptiness is Buddha nature and Buddha nature is nirvāna." (BNT, p. 787c.) He represents the Sarvāstivāda as saying that "in no sentient being is there an innate Buddha nature; there is only acquired Buddha nature." (Ibid.) Thus, they represent the position that there is no Buddha nature as such.

Though there is not much known concerning the Vibhajyavādins, it is most doubtful that they could have held the kind of view attributed to them here. The Japanese commentator on the BNT attempts to interpret the passage attributed to the Vibhajyavādins by saying that "emptiness" stands for simple "absence of person" (人空) or anātman. (Takemura, p. 190.) However, as Takemura says (p. 191), if this were so, then Buddha nature would be identical to anātman and there would be no "Buddha nature controversy." Moreover, on the mere face of it, there are Mahāyāna notions

view that the Buddha nature exists and the view that it doesn't exist. The way in which this is done is typical of the logic of the BNT. With respect to Buddha nature, says the author, if you say either that it exists (有) or that it doesn't exist (無)¹ you go astray. Neither view can

attributed to a Hīnayāna school here, which is clearly unacceptable. The same comment applies to the passage portrayed as Sarvāstivādin. Apart from whether or not the Sarvāstivāda did or did not assert the existence of a universal, innate Buddha nature, to ascribe a discussion of Buddha nature as such to them is anachronistic at best.

In sum, Takemura's judgment on this passage is apt. (Ibid., p. 192.) The inappropriateness of the remarks made with respect to the two schools only demonstrates that their author was not very scrupulous in his discussions of other views. Since these remarks are found in one of the "comments" incorporated into the text, we are therefore justified in passing over them somewhat lightly. However, it is pertinent to note that even though the attribution of these views is not appropriate to the schools concerned, these attributions function to establish foils against which the views asserted in the BNT may be measured. Thus, the Vibhajyavādins are made to represent the view that Buddha nature exists, while the Sarvāstivādins represent the view that it doesn't exist. In this manner the author may proceed with his theme, the criticism of the two views that Buddha nature either exists or does not exist, and the establishment of his view that instead it "aboriginally exists."

¹Yu (有) and wu (無) are two of the most thoroughly studied words in the classical Chinese language, especially in their philosophical meanings. Basically, yu means "have" or "there is." Wu is the opposite, meaning "lack" or "there is not" (evidently the oldest form of this character pictured a forest from which the trees had been cleared by men; see L. Wieger, Chinese Characters, 2nd edition [New York: Dover, 1965]). Thus, anciently, the terms indicated the presence or absence of a thing or things. Though yu translates the existential sense of English "is" (in the phrase "there is"), it is the object of yu that corresponds to the subject of "is." As Graham says, "in Indo-European languages a thing simply is, without implying anything outside it. . . . In Chinese . . . one approaches the thing from outside, from the world which 'has' it, in which 'there is' it." (A.C. Graham,

"'Being' in Western Philosophy Compared with Shih/Fei and Yu/Wu in Chinese Philosophy," Asia Major 7 [December 1959]: 98.)

Philosophically, yu and wu early took on the extended, abstract senses of existence and non-existence, something and nothing. These are used, for example, in the Taoist philosophy of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. However, yu is used primarily with regard to concrete things; the Tao, li (principle) and other such abstractions are only occasionally covered by yu, but are usually wu or neither yu nor wu. (Ibid., p. 99.) "The English word 'Nothing' implies the absence of any 'entity,' the Chinese wu only the absence of concrete things. . . . But if the Tao is Nothing, then Nothing is a positive complement of Something, not its mere absence." Yu, unlike other verbs and adjectives, is not negated by the term pu (不), "not," but forms a pair with its contrary, wu, "similar to such pairs as long and short, left and right, Yin and Yang." (Ibid., p. 100.) Thus wu may have a positive, constructive content, unlike the English "nothing" or "non-existence." That this is so is illustrated by the Taoist teaching that it is in being a combination of something (yu) and nothing (wu) that such things as doors and windows are useful. (Ibid., pp. 100-1.) In fact, wu has such a positive nature that in Taoism it is considered the source or pen (本) of all manifested things.

Thus, by the time Buddhism entered China, the terms yu and wu already had well-developed philosophical meanings within the Taoist vocabulary. When the Buddhist teachings arrived, however, they were perceived as being one of a kind with the Taoist teachings. This was so much the case that a practice known as ko-i, or "matching meanings," developed in which Buddhist technical terms were directly translated by the Taoist terms which they "matched." Śūnya-vāda and Neo-Taoism were felt to be particularly close. Thus matched were yoga and tao, bodhi and tao, tathatā and pen wu (original non-being), bhāva and yu, abhāva and wu, śūnyatā and wu or pen wu. It is particularly revealing that both abhāva and śūnyatā were rendered with wu; the meaning of śūnyatā was clearly not well understood by these so-called Buddho-Taoists. In time, however, with the arrival of more texts and better translations, the differences between Buddhist and Taoist ideas came to be understood and such overt mingling of concepts ceased.

The Buddho-Taoist practices occurred approximately 200 years before the time of Paramārtha. When he uses the terms yu and wu, the Taoist connotations are no longer intended. Nonetheless, it is obvious that a certain residue of the terms' connotations in their extra-Buddhist usage must inevitably remain. We will return to this point. In the present context, any non-Buddhist connotation is minimal, inasmuch as the terms are being used in the non-philosophical sense of "there is" and "there is not" (Buddha nature). In

account for the fullness of reality, namely that some here and now are realizing their Buddha nature and some are not. The author here is concerned to allow for practice (therefore criticizing the view that there is no Buddha nature, which naturally leads one to cease trying to attain the unattainable) and for change (therefore criticizing the view that all "have" Buddha nature in a substantialist sense). The idea is that if one says there is no Buddha nature, then one will never be able to attain Buddhahood, there being an unbridgeable gulf between the ordinary being and Buddha, each being frozen into its own nature. The corollary to this is that if one says there is Buddha nature, then the idea of the change or transformation inherent in practice will be lost. Why practice the Buddha Way if one already is Buddha? Thus, both the ideas of there being or not being a Buddha nature are rejected, since either would equally freeze reality into a static state of being.

The two ideas of being and non-being, wherever they are applied, are taken as logical absolutes in Buddhist thought, and such absolutes are not acceptable. Why? Because they do not logically allow for the self transformation which constitutes the Buddha Way; neither existence (有) nor non-

the subsequent paragraph the terms will be used in their abstract, philosophical sense. I will render yu with both "existence" and "being" and wu with "non-existence" and "non-being."

existence (無) can be "transformed."¹ This is an eternalistic sense of substantiality: "What is, cannot be destroyed, what is not, cannot be produced."² This, of course, applies to Buddha nature as well. Thus, the author says, this nature is nothing "fixed" (定). Over and over again it is emphasized that reality, or that which constitutes reality, is of a dynamic, ever-changing nature. To think of it as "fixed"--whether as being or as non-being--is a basic mistake. This of necessity applies to Buddha nature as well. In a sense, ontology takes second place to practical necessity. The primary importance is perceived to be soteriological, the self-transformation of liberation. Ontological notions must fall in line with this matter of superior importance and provide a theoretical explanation as to how self-transformation or change is possible. The groundwork of this explanation is laid with the rejection of the static notions of being and non-being.

So far this type of logic sounds like basic Middle Path logic--the two extremes of being and non-being, eternalism and annihilationism being denied. However, whereas in śūnyavāda thought, the mean between the two extremes is obliquely indicated with the term śūnya, or "empty," here in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought the case is somewhat different. First, after rejecting the extremes of

¹不可轉 BNT, p. 788c.

²有不可滅 無不可生 Ibid.

being and non-being (both in general and with respect to Buddha nature) the author goes on to criticize the Hīnayāna views, saying that it is because of these mistakes of thinking in terms of beings and non-being that the Hīnayānists adhere to false doctrines.¹

Yet we still have not arrived at the radically new movement characteristic of tathāgatagarbha thought. The section refuting Hīnayānist views concludes as follows:

In accordance with principle, all sentient beings universally and aboriginally possess the pure Buddha nature. If there were one who eternally failed to obtain nirvāṇa, then this would not be the case. This is why Buddha nature most assuredly aboriginally exists (**本有**); the reason being, that is, that it has nothing to do with either being or non-being.²

Several points are to be noted in this passage. First, the author begins by appealing to "principle."³ Thus, though what follows is, as the author notes, a reference to scripture,⁴ the author also wants to ground his teachings in what he feels simply is true, the way things are, whether or not a Buddha had come into the world to point it out to us. This is typical of tathāgatagarbha

¹Ibid., p. 788c. ²Ibid.

³(**道理**) Literally, "Way-principle," the basic reality pervading all things unobstructedly. Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, compiled by Ting Fu-pao (Taipei, 1946), p. 2367.

⁴Tathāgatagarbhasūtra.

literature.¹

The author also wants to indicate that what he is about to say is an actively affirmative truth, i.e., a positive quality of reality, which may be spoken of in affirmative language, however, obliquely. He is saying, in effect, this is how things are: the world is not chaotic, we need not be lost in it. There is a principle, discoverable by humans, manifesting the order of the universe. By realizing this principle (or, following the Chinese more closely, by bringing ourselves into accord with this principle) we may discover this truth of the universe, which is also the truth of our own nature. This is a reason for rejoicing, and the authors of tathāgatagarbha literature felt it imperative that this be made clear.

It is said that Buddha nature "most assuredly aboriginally exists." The aboriginal existence (本有)² spoken of here is an altogether different thing from ordinary existence. The former is contrasted with both existence, or being (有), and non-existence, or non-being (無), and plays the same role in tathāgatagarbha thought which śūnyatā

¹The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra, for example, states whether or not a Buddha comes into the world, all beings dwell in the tathāgatagarbha. Ta Fang Teng Ru Lai Tsang Ching, T. 16 #666, p. 457c.

²Literally, "root, source, origin" + "existence, being." The term contrasts with terms representing a finite sense of existence, i.e., a sense of something coming into being and perishing in time. My translation is intended to emphasize the sense of an ageless origin and thereby enhance the contrast with ordinary existence. Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, pp. 844-845.

plays in śūnya thought.¹ In both cases, the two extremes of being and non-being are rejected, and we are left with a term which functions to indicate the conceptual insufficiency of those extremes. Yet how different are the "flavors" of the two terms! We begin to get here a sense that perhaps the term "emptiness" is not as purely empty as it is said to be, or at the very least, that the Buddhists of the time were incapable of perceiving it as purely empty, i.e., lacking in all qualities. For if it were so utterly empty, it could not stand in contrast to the present "aboriginal existence." Yet it does, and, as we have seen, the authors of the

¹Taoist thinkers distinguished two senses of the term wu (無): (1) "that primal undifferentiated state which preceded the later state of manifested things (yu)" and (2) "the perpetual alternation of the absence of something (wu) as contrasted to the presence of something (yu)." In the former, "both existence and nonexistence lay fused and undifferentiated. This unitive state was not, however, a mere 'nothing' for it contained all future possibilities for world manifestation." (Arthur E. Link, "The Taoist Antecedents of Tao-an's Prajñā Ontology," History of Religions 9 [1969-70]: 187-8.) The former sense of wu was called 本無 pen wu, "original or root non-existence" to distinguish it from the second sense of merely contingent non-existence.

One might speculate that the term 本有 pen yu as used here may have been influenced by the Taoist pen wu. In both, the term pen, "source, root, origin" is attached to the verb to distinguish the existence or non-existence in question from the merely contingent variety. Both pen yu and pen wu stand opposed to the existence/non-existence pair. Pen yu, however, does not carry two of the connotations carried by pen wu, namely, (1) the sense of being that out of which all else emerged in a temporal sense and (2) the sense of blending existence and non-existence. The former connotation is ambiguous in the Taoist tradition in any event.

tathāgatagarbha literature were intent on putting into some kind of positive language what they felt to be the ultimate truths of Buddhism. They evidently felt that the śūnya language was somewhat negative, or that it was inescapably to be perceived as such. Thus, we have two paths, both of which proceed through negation of conceptual extremes, but one of which ends with the term śūnya and the other with a "Buddha nature" which "aboriginally exists."

This is where the BNT's author enunciates, if not a new truth, then the same truth in a new way. However, by virtue of their partial harmony with śūnya thought, the ideas expressed in the section refuting Hīnayāna views are definitely of the Mahāyāna family. That is, the way in which the Hīnayāna is refuted in this section is in general keeping with Mahāyāna tenets.

To sum up the central point of this section from a different perspective: both the view that Buddha nature exists and the view that it doesn't exist are to be rejected since both imply that Buddha nature is something which is capable of existing as other things exist. To borrow Gilbert Ryle's terminology,¹ to so conceive Buddha nature is to make a category mistake, i.e., to conjoin the kind of existence proper to things such as trees and stones with the very different kind of existence pertaining to Buddha nature.

¹Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), pp. 22-3.

One thereby confuses the ontological status of Buddha nature with that of trees and stones. Buddha nature, unlike the latter, is not a thing in the world. Rather, as a term, it serves to affirm the potential of all sentient beings to realize Buddhahood. Thus to say "Buddha nature exists" is very unlike saying "stones exist." To indicate this difference between the two uses of the term "exist," the author refers to that of Buddha nature as aboriginal existence, emphasizing that it has no relation to the ordinary concept of existence or its negation.

b. Refuting Non-Buddhist Philosophies: Buddha Nature
Is Not an Own-Nature

In the preceding section, the author argued that it is incorrect to say either that Buddha nature exists or that it doesn't exist. The framework for this argument was a criticism of Hīnayāna views, but the author's carelessness in stating the Hīnayāna positions revealed that his concern was not with the refutation of Hīnayāna views per se. Rather, he simply used the alleged Hīnayāna views as foils in order to establish his own perspective.

A similar approach is evident in the present section, ostensibly devoted to a refutation of non-Buddhist (tīr-thika) philosophies. On the face of it, the author engages in a criticism of what he calls the own-nature (svabhāva

自性)¹ views of the Vaiśeṣika and Sāṅkhya schools, thereby establishing that own-nature is empty. As in the case of the Hīnayāna schools, however, his presentation of the views of these schools is deficient and his primary concern appears to lie elsewhere. In fact, though he at length refutes the "own-nature views" of these two schools and argues for the emptiness of own-nature, his direct aim is to differentiate his view that Buddha nature "aboriginally exists" from their alleged views that own-nature exists.² Thus, in effect, he is concerned to establish that Buddha nature is not an own-nature.

First to be considered is the Vaiśeṣika school. The Vaiśeṣika position is represented³ as holding that in order for us to take seriously the differences between things, we must acknowledge that everything has an own-nature. Without each thing possessing its respective own-nature, we could not differentiate water and fire, matter (rūpa, 色) and mind (manas, 心), nirvāṇa and samsāra. Thus, each thing must have its own nature and is not empty.⁴

¹This term is taken directly from the Sanskrit; the Chinese literally means "self" + "nature" and is the standard translation.

²Takemura, p. 193.

³The following is summarized from BNT, pp. 788c-789a.

⁴This argument represents Vaiśeṣika thought only insofar as it reflects their concern for the systematic differentiation of phenomena. "The word 'Vaiśeṣika' is derived from viśeṣa, which means 'difference,' and the doctrine is so

To this the author replies, first, if an own-nature existed, we should be able to have some empirical evidence for it ("see" it). However, like the rabbit's horns and the snake's ears, we find no evidence of it, and therefore, like them, an own-nature does not exist. Own-nature, therefore, is empty.

Furthermore, says the BNT's author, suppose you want to establish the own-nature of a jug in order to distinguish it from cloth.¹ It can't be done. Why? Take the jug and, for

designated because, according to it, diversity and not unity is at the root of the universe." (M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932], p. 225.) According to this philosophy, water, fire and mind each belongs to the category "substance" (dravya) and thus each is classified as an ultimate element, without overt reference to an own-nature concept as such. In place of an own-nature theory there is an atomistic theory, according to which earth, water, fire (and air) refer to "not the compound transient objects made out of them, but the ultimate elements, the suprasensible eternal partless unique atoms which are individual and infinitesimal." (Chandradhar Sharma, A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy [London: Rider, 1960], p. 177.) Mind also is an eternal atom but does not form compounds. By "own-nature" the BNT's author may mean to refer to these eternal atoms, but if so, his expression is rather misleading. It should also be mentioned that to my knowledge, nirvāṇa and samsāra are not mentioned in the classificatory scheme of the Vaiśeṣika. Rūpa, as matter, is not a substance; rather, the specific elements (bhūta)--earth, water, fire, air and ether (ākāśa)--are considered individually.

¹For the most part, this statement seems inapplicable to Vaiśeṣika teachings. The latter differentiate such compound particular things as a jug and a bit of cloth by the differences of their parts. No reference to the own-nature of a jug or cloth is necessary in the Vaiśeṣika scheme to differentiate them. The only possible justification I can imagine for this notion is if the BNT's author is thinking of the Vaiśeṣika category of "universal" (sāmānya). Thus, by the "own-nature of a jug" he might mean to refer to the universal, "jug-ness," which is distinguishable from the

example, the form (rūpa, 色) of the jug--do they share one own-nature, or are the own-natures of the jug and its form different? If you say they're the same, then there shouldn't be such a thing as eight jugs, since (the constituent part) "number" would be different from the jug (i.e., the jug would be solely and fully constituted by its form and have no other parts). If you say they're different, then even if you had the form of the jug, you still wouldn't have the jug. Thus, you cannot say either that the own-nature of the jug and that of its form are the same or that they're different. Therefore, there is no own-nature to be found with respect to the jug.

From this argument we may conclude, though this is not explicitly stated, that any attempt to take any given part of some compound thing and declare that part to be the own-nature of the whole would encounter the same difficulties encountered in the above attempt to declare the form of the jug to be the own-nature of the jug itself. Thus, no own-nature can be found in any compound thing. I surmise

universal, "cloth-ness." Such universals, according to the Vaiśeṣika, are eternal, objective realities. Unfortunately for this attempted justification, the argument which follows the opening statement has nothing to do with universals. It seems at first that it might concern the Vaiśeṣika study of the relation between the whole and the part (subsumed under the category "inherence," samavāya), but it would be very labored to construe this notion as having anything to do with an own-nature concept. One can only conclude that the BNT's author was not much concerned to accurately portray the Vaiśeṣika teachings.

that the author wishes to imply here that in the same way one also cannot find an own-nature in the compound thing, "person." Therefore, when he affirms the Buddha nature of a person, he is not affirming an own-nature. His challenges to Vaiśeṣika thought appear designed to free himself of such a charge.

In the context of a rebuttal of Sāṅkhya philosophy, the author continues to argue against own-nature as follows.¹

In the case of a seed,

what formerly (前) is a seed, subsequently (後) produces a corn plant. The 'former' and 'subsequent' stages of this corn are neither one nor two, neither exist nor do not exist. If they were one [i.e., the same], then there would be no 'former' and 'subsequent.' If they were different, then what was formerly corn could subsequently be a bean. Therefore, they are neither the same nor different. Due to [the confluence of] the destruction of the cause and the production of the effect, own-nature neither exists nor doesn't exist. [That is,] since the cause perishes, own-nature doesn't exist, but since the effect is produced, it doesn't not exist. Since at the time of the cause there is not yet an effect, you cannot say own-nature exists. Since the production of the effect is certainly due to the cause, you can't say it doesn't exist. In this sense, cause and effect, reflection and understanding reach completion together, and therefore we say there is no own-nature.²

¹Once again the author does not betray great concern for an accurate portrayal, in this case, of Sāṅkhya philosophy. Here he evidently uses the Sāṅkhya acceptance of the satkāryavāda view as a pretext for discussing the quite separate issue of own-nature. Satkāryavādins, including the Sāṅkhya, "believe that the effect is not a new creation, but only an explicit manifestation of that which was implicitly contained in its material cause." (Sharma, p. 151.)

²BNT, p. 793a.

Here the idea of own-nature is refuted because, in the author's view, it does not allow for the process of change as seen in the growth of a plant or in any process having a former and a subsequent stage. He evidently conceives of an own-nature as being eternal precisely in the sense of unchanging. Therefore any phenomenon or event which is in any way dynamic or in process is judged to be empty of an own-nature. Please note that this judgement is made in the context of Buddhist philosophy, i.e., a philosophy well-known for its conceptualization of life and the living as dynamic rather than static.¹ Thus the implication is that since all is in flux, nowhere will one find an own-nature.

In this section refuting non-Buddhist philosophies, we see no new ideas or perspectives offered by the author. What he gives us is straight Middle Path logic emphasizing the process of flux and the interdependence of cause and effect, of former and subsequent stages. He concludes the section by affirming in the most orthodox manner, "know, therefore, that all things (dharma, 法) are Thus truly without own-nature. Only true emptiness is their essential nature."² In this way he affirms that his forthcoming teachings concerning the Buddha nature do not trespass on

¹As evidenced in the early teaching that everything is anitya, impermanent, as well as the view of life in terms of the twelve links of the chain of conditioned origination.

²BNT, p. 793c.

the inviolable teaching that there is no own-nature. He seems to anticipate that his teachings may in the eyes of some resemble an own-nature view. Hence, early in the treatise he discredits this view, in order that such a misunderstanding may not develop. This section of the text, therefore, serves the purely precautionary aim of thoroughly separating his view from the own-nature view.

c. Clarification of Mahāyāna Views: The True Meaning of the Two Truths Doctrine¹

Thus far, the author has argued that one cannot say either that Buddha nature exists or that it doesn't exist but that it is correct to say that it aboriginally exists and that this Buddha nature which aboriginally exists is not a form of own-nature. He now wishes to prepare the reader to understand the status of his Buddha nature teachings in the context of the Mahāyāna emptiness doctrine, specifically, the emptiness doctrine of the Mādhyamika two truths (satyadvaya)² theory. To do so, he must first dis-

¹As in the cases of Hīnayāna and non-Buddhist philosophy, the text here reads "refutation." I choose instead to title this section "clarification" since it is only a misunderstanding of Mahāyāna doctrine that is addressed here.

²The Mādhyamika two truths theory teaches that all of reality is encompassed by two levels: the relative or worldly (saṃvṛti) and the ultimate or supreme (paramārtha). Though ordinarily translated as "truth," the satya of satyadvaya "ranges in meaning from 'reality' to the 'truth' about reality." (Mervyn Sprung, "The Mādhyamika Doctrine of the Two Realities as a Metaphysic," in The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta, ed. Mervyn Sprung

credit a certain misunderstanding of the two truths doctrine and then offer his own interpretation of that doctrine. His interpretation is presented in the form of a synthesis of Mādhyamika two truths theory and Yogācāra three natures (tri-svabhāva)¹ theory. The interpretation he offers is intended to prove to the reader that his Buddha nature teachings do not violate the Mahāyāna emptiness doctrine. This is his final preparatory statement before taking up the exposition of Buddha nature itself.

[Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1973], p. 40.) Thus this is both an epistemological and an ontological doctrine. Samvṛti-satya is said to be: whatever is enveloped and obscured; ignorance; existence, understood in terms of the kleśa-- desire, hatred and delusion; conditioned co-origination (pratītyasamutpāda); the realm of what is empty (śūnya). Paramārthasatya is said to be: the cessation of the modes of "I" and "mine" and of belief in person; tranquillity, understood as the cessation of the personal world; what does not arise or cease and is not dependent; known by wise saints in and through itself; the reality of samvṛti as its emptiness; the Middle Path; liberation. (Selected and condensed from Mervyn Sprung's list of meanings in *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.)

¹The three natures theory of the Yogācāra, in a manner somewhat parallel to the Mādhyamika two truths theory, "teaches that all data of experience can be considered from three points of views, (1) as 'imagined' (parikalpita, or 'contrived'), (2) as 'interdependent' (paratantra), and (3) as 'absolute' (pariniṣpanna, lit. 'perfected')." (Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought in India [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967], p. 258.) The parikalpita nature corresponds to the common-sensical view of the world which, since it interprets experience in terms of subject and object, is wholly imaginary and fabricated. The paratantra nature recognizes the fact of pratītyasamutpāda, the mutual conditioning and interdependence of all things. This is the level of relative truth. Finally, the pariniṣpanna nature cognizes Thusness and therefore is perfect and absolutely true. The three natures theory will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter of the BNT.

The author begins by announcing that he wishes to "refute the biased views of beginners on the Mahāyāna path."¹ Thus, although the title of this section seems to indicate that he will refute Mahāyāna views, he in fact only wishes to correct certain misunderstandings of true Mahāyāna teachings by those who, while calling themselves Mahāyānists, may actually misrepresent the Mahāyāna. The misunderstanding at issue is the view that "according to worldly truth all things exist (有); according to supreme truth all things do not exist (無)."² It is particularly the misunderstanding of supreme truth, or emptiness, in a nihilistic manner that is troublesome here. Is the highest truth to be understood as nihilism?

This first level of misunderstanding is rejected in favor of the following suggested correct understanding of the two truths. "That all dharmas lack own-nature is supreme truth. To speak of the existence of own-nature within [the actuality of] the absence of own-nature is called worldly truth."³ The difference between the two truths, then, is not a difference between things existing or not existing, nor is it simply the difference between the existence or non-existence of an own-nature. Rather, it is

¹BNT, p. 793c.

²Ibid. A concern over an identical incorrect view is found in Yogācārabhūmi (T. 30, p. 713b). There too the holder of this incorrect view is identified only as the beginner on the Mahāyāna path. (Takemura, p. 212.) Thus, one should not expect to find a written record of this view.

³Ibid., p. 793c.

emphasized that worldly truth is found in the position of falsely speaking of existence in the midst of nonexistence.¹

No sooner is this second-level understanding of the two truths proffered, however, than it too is called into question, especially the understanding of supreme truth given therein. Is it sufficient, the author asks, to speak thus of supreme truth as no more than the absence of own-nature? It is not, for this view concerning the absence of own-nature is "made on the basis of the language of worldly truth; it is to be regarded as just words." Moreover, "if this view is just words, then nothing has been explained, because the language of worldly truth is [inherently] deficient."² In recognizing supreme truth as the absence of own-nature, we are still speaking and thinking on the level of worldly truth, on the level of the duality of presence and absence of things, including own-nature. Given that the language and concepts of worldly truth are inherently deficient, they must represent a deficient perspective from which to speak of supreme truth. Therefore, this second-level understanding of the two truths must also be transcended.

We are thus brought to the third and final position, representing the author's own understanding of the two

¹Takemura, p. 213.

²BNT, p. 793c. "Deficient" could also be rendered "incomplete, imperfect."

truths. Especially important is his understanding of supreme truth. In expressing this understanding he rejects the dualistic language of being and non-being characteristic of the position of worldly truth in favor of his own characteristic formulation: neither being nor non-being is the case.

The two truths theory cannot speak of being (有), nor can it speak of non-being (無), because neither being nor non-being is the case (非有非無). The reason why the supreme truth can speak of neither being nor non-being is that since it negates (無) both person and thing it cannot speak of being, and since it reveals the two forms of emptiness [of man and thing] it cannot speak of non-being [since emptiness is not the same as non-being]. The same is true of worldly truth. Because of the discriminating nature [*parikalpita*] it cannot speak of being, and because of the relative nature [*paratantra*] it cannot speak of non-being. Furthermore, supreme truth establishes neither being nor non-being with respect to man and things. [Being and non-being] are neither one nor two [i.e., neither the same nor different].¹ Emptiness [both] is and is not. The same is true of worldly truth. One cannot establish non-being [simply] on the basis of the discriminating nature. Nor can one establish being [simply] on the basis of the relative nature.²

¹I have chosen to translate the variant reading, as it seemed to fit better in the context. The other reading of the sentence is, "It is not the case that [being and non-being] are not nondual," i.e., they are nondual. The variant reading is also to be preferred since the primary version requires one to read 無二 as nondual, whereas the standard form is 不二.

²BNT, pp. 793c - 794a. The closing statements concerning the relationships between the two worldly natures and being/non-being are exactly the opposite, in the Chinese, of the earlier statements. I have therefore added the term "simply," which I believe is implied, in order to preserve consistency.

The most important point here is that the wu (無) or negation intrinsic to the previous two attempts at discussing supreme truth is now eschewed in favor of an approach which rejects the dualistic being vs. non-being approach.

To establish this point, the author combines the three natures and the two truths theories, as shown in the following:

<u>Three Natures</u>	<u>Two Truths</u>
discriminating (<u>parikalpita</u>)	} = worldly (<u>saṃvṛti</u>)
relative (<u>paratantra</u>)	
[true (<u>pariniṣpanna</u>)--not named]	= supreme (<u>paramārtha</u>)

However, rather than, as is usually the case, demonstrating the superiority of supreme truth (and, by implication, the pariniṣpanna nature) over worldly truth, he places both truths at the same level: neither truth "can speak of" either being or non-being. In the case of worldly truth, this is because the affirmation of the discriminating nature implies an affirmation of non-being (since the discriminating nature is totally false), while the affirmation of the relative nature implies an at least partial affirmation, in the view of the BNT's author, of being (since the relative nature is partially true: things are interdependent.)¹

¹Here the author draws on standard Yogācāra doctrine, which is then inserted into his own framework of the being and non-being concepts. The Yogācāra teaches that the discriminating nature is utterly a product of our imaginations, completely false; in the BNT's terms, it is completely non-being (無). As Conze notes, however, "the 'interdependent [relative] own-being' is, unlike the 'imaginary [discrimina-

Thus, since both being and non-being are affirmed in worldly truth, the two negate each other, and neither can stand.

In the case of supreme truth, being cannot stand, since man and things are negated (無); that is, neither is said to be ultimately real. Yet non-being also cannot stand, since the dual emptiness of man and thing is, after all, revealed (顯). This indicates for the BNT's author (as will be evident again and again) that not only is emptiness or the supreme truth not a matter of pure negation or nihilism, but to the contrary, it can, and for religious purposes even should, be described in the most positive, affirmative terms possible. He would emphasize that supreme truth is not just a negation of worldly truth (the ideas of person and thing). It also functions positively to reveal something and the author would emphasize the positive quality of this function.

The author concludes his explanation by stating that from the perspective of supreme truth, not only do being and non-being not apply to the phenomena of experience, they are also neither the same nor different, that is, they are nondual. This may be explained as follows. Since being and non-being are denied on the grounds of their being both affirmed and denied (e.g., in the case of supreme truth,

ting] own-being,' not entirely non-existent." (Conze, p. 259.) That is, it is not entirely non-being (無) or, is in some sense being (有).

non-being is affirmed with respect to people and things, but denied with respect to emptiness), clearly their identities, which should be based on mutual exclusion, are jeopardized, and it is no longer possible to see one as the negation of the other. That is, in affirming non-being, ordinarily one is negating being, but here one simultaneously affirms non-being (thereby implicitly negating being) and denies non-being (thereby implicitly affirming being). Hence, from the perspective of supreme truth, non-being (for example) is at once both affirmed and denied, thus it is at once both being and non-being.

Moreover, says the author, emptiness "both is and is not" (空有不有). This is the final salvo against any who might mistake emptiness for non-being. The author's treatment of emptiness both makes this particular mistake impossible and opens the way for a discussion of emptiness in positive terms. For the BNT's author, emptiness, or supreme truth, has a positive, "being-ful" quality to it. It is not just the negation of worldly truth. As we recall, it also functions positively to "reveal" something.

This, in sum, is the author's point in this section. Emptiness, or supreme truth, (1) is certainly not equivalent to non-being. Nor is it (2) merely the negation of worldly truth. Rather, (3) its full implications are understood only when one realizes that supreme truth has a positive quality, that it reveals something, that it is meaningful in a constructive as well as a destructive way. It is impor-

tant for the author to establish this, since he will want to show that it is precisely Buddha nature which is the positive content of this revelation. Thus, Buddha nature must be shown to be the fulfillment of the supreme truth, emptiness; it must not be suspected of conflicting with it. The purpose of the present section has been to provide a proper understanding of emptiness toward this end.

3. Evaluation

In this section the author has established three points. (1) it is incorrect to say either that Buddha nature exists or doesn't exist, though it is correct to say Buddha nature aboriginally exists, as long as this is understood as an affirmation of each person's potential to realize Buddhahood and not as a kind of existence which can stand in contrast to non-existence. (2) Buddha nature is not an own-nature. An own-nature is incompatible with the constitution of a compound thing, such as a person, nor can it be found where a phenomenon, such as a person, is in process. The idea of an own-nature is therefore to be discredited and thoroughly distinguished from the notion of Buddha nature. (3) Emptiness is not merely a matter of negation; supreme truth does not merely negate worldly truth. The contents of emptiness or supreme truth cannot be so limited as to be exhausted by functioning in a destructive manner; there must also be a positive revelation in emptiness. Therefore, since emptiness is not exclusively negative, it need not conflict with a Buddha nature which, though not an own-

nature, is affirmed as existing aboriginally.

The import of these three points is that though Buddha nature cannot be said to exist or not to exist, it is in accordance with principle to realize that all possess it and hence to affirm it. Note here the key role played by the author's understanding and manipulation of language. The sections on the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna were particularly sensitive to the role played by language. In both cases the author showed that when the two extremes of existence and non-existence (or being and non-being) are negated, and as a result the principles of identity (A is A), non-contradiction (nothing can be both A and not-A) and excluded middle (everything is either A or not-A)¹ are no longer to be relied upon, the laws of language based on those principles are likewise no longer to be assumed. At such a point, we are wide open to a new use of language. Nāgārjuna stepped into this language void and filled it with śūnya language. The authors of the tathāgatagarbha literature stepped into the same void and filled it with a very different kind of language, a language that could speak positively of such things as Buddha nature and tathāgatagarbha. Yet the foundations of both usages of language are remarkably similar.

The author makes his point crystal clear in this key

¹John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 209.

passage:

Attachments are not real, therefore they are called vacuous. If one gives rise to these attachments, true wisdom will not arise. When one does away with these attachments, then we speak of Buddha nature. Buddha nature is the Thusness (真如) ¹ revealed (顯) by the twin emptiness of man and things. . . . If one does not speak of Buddha nature, then one does not understand emptiness.²

The author is uncompromising on this point. Emptiness is not limited to a negative function. It clears the way only so that something positive, Buddha nature, may be revealed. One who does not affirm Buddha nature has simply not sufficiently penetrated emptiness. We now proceed to discover what this Buddha nature revealed by emptiness is.

¹真 (chen) means "true, real, genuine." 如 (ju) means "like, as." "Ju, 'like, as much as,' comparing qualities and actions rather than things, is related to jan, 'thus' (like this, as much as this). As a noun, one may take ju as 'being as (not "what") it is.' . . ." (Graham, p. 102.) The Buddhist "Thusness," then, speaks of an adjectival quality of things rather than a nominative thingness as such. It is not a matter of what a thing is, but of how it is. The 如 form alone is often used for Thusness; the 真如 form simply means "truly Thus."

²BNT, p. 787b.

B. THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHA NATURE¹: BODHICITTA, TRUE
NATURE AND TATHĀGATAGARBHA

1. Introduction

Having cleared the path, the author now moves on to state the essential or fundamental points concerning Buddha nature. These essentials comprise three categories: the three causes (因) of Buddha nature, the three natures (性) and tathāgatagarbha. We shall look at each of these categories in turn. In the first we shall see that the cause of Buddha nature is bodhicitta, understood in an active sense. The second section is a discussion of Buddha nature in terms of Yogācāra three natures (tri-svabhāva) theory. Here the crucial point will be to understand what a "nature" is for the light it may shed on our comprehension of the Buddha nature. We will see that the subject-object relationship is central to this understanding. Finally, tathāgatagarbha itself is etymologically analyzed. Here again the analysis of the subject-object relationship is crucial, though related issues useful in clarifying Buddha nature are discussed as well.

Having considered each category in turn, we shall proceed in the evaluation section to bring the separate strands together in an effort to determine their joint import for

¹"Essence" translates 體, meaning, in this context, essential or fundamental nature. It is not related to the own-nature concept.

our understanding of the Buddha nature.

2. Analysis

a. The Three Causes

In the discussion of the three causes, the central movement appears to be what is called the second cause, namely, bodhicitta (菩提心,).¹ This is the real "cause" of realizing Buddha nature. The other two movements in this triple cause are: (1) the anticipation of bodhicitta, i.e., it is said that in accordance with the "Thusness manifested by the twin emptiness" (二空所現真如) one "should obtain" (應得) bodhicitta; and (2) the fulfillment (圓滿) of the bodhicitta potential.² Bodhicitta itself is called prayoga, which Soothill defines as "added progress, intensified effort, earnest endeavour."³ It is indicated here by hsing-chia, i.e., hsing (行), the active practice or cultivation of the Buddha Way, which is chia (加), progressive. It is noteworthy that the term hsing is used to signify bodhicitta, as one of its most fundamental meanings is "to do" or "to act." Thus, the active quality of Buddha nature is anticipated in its cause,

¹This term is comprised of a transliteration of bodhi plus the standard term for translating citta, namely, the Chinese word for heart or mind.

²BNT, p. 794a.

³William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Co., 1970), p. 167b.

the essential nature of which is fundamentally active. The inherence of the active nature in bodhicitta is further emphasized in the description of the third "cause" (which actually is both cause and effect), namely, the "fulfillment" of bodhicitta, for it is plainly stated that "the fulfillment cause is the prayoga [or bodhicitta]." ¹

Here there are two points to note. First, this would seem to anticipate Hua-yen thought, which emphasizes the non-serial nature of stages in the realization of Buddhahood, stressing that the final stage of realization is already contained within the first stage of awakening the desire for Buddhahood. Second, and this is the point to be stressed in the present context, if the fulfillment of the cause of Buddha nature (i.e., Buddha nature itself) and the prayoga or bodhicitta are the same, then the hsing or activity which characterizes the latter must also characterize the former. Thus, Buddha nature must be essentially constituted by activity.

b. The Three Natures

The next section, on the three natures (性), deals with the two natures we have already seen--the discriminating (parikalpita, 分別) and the relative (paratantra, 依他) natures--plus the remaining nature of the three natures

¹BNT, p. 794a.

theory, the true nature (parinispāna, 眞實). This section is thus a discussion of Buddha nature in terms of the three natures theory. Incidentally, we see here evidence that the author of the BNT, whether or not he considered himself a Yogācārin, certainly drew on that doctrine rather heavily in the exposition of his own thought.

The essential meaning of each nature is described as follows:

The discriminating nature is established on the basis of the use of the words and terms of delusory speech. If there were no such terms, then the discriminating nature would not come into being. Therefore you should know that this nature is merely a matter of verbal expression,¹ in reality it has no essence and no properties. . . . The relative nature is that which is manifested by the principle (道理) of the twelve-fold chain of cause and condition. . . . The true nature is the Thusness (眞如) of all things.²

Furthermore, the latter is comprised of all virtues, and of the three natures is the only one which may be characterized as ju-ju (如如). This is a term which we must consider in detail.

The Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien cites the Lankāvatārasūtra, a text containing considerable tathāgatagarbha material, as containing the following in explanation of ju-ju (如如):

¹I.e., a linguistic convention.

²BNT, p. 794b.

The principle (理體) of dharmatā (法性) is nondual and equal, therefore we say it is 如 ("thus," "so"). This and that, all things are 如 (thus, or like that), therefore we say they are 如如 ("thusly thus," or thus--like that thus). This is the principle which is in accordance with the true wisdom.¹

In other words, the principle of Thusness or Suchness which characterizes reality is called ju, 如. The concordance of all things with this principle is called ju-ju, 如如. Obviously, this is somewhat redundant as the 如如 form simply says that all things are like the principle which manifests the nature of things (i.e., what things are like). The advantage of the 如如 form, however, is that it clarifies that Thusness (如) is not a transcendental principle distinct from the things of the world, but is the nature of those things themselves.²

The true (parinispāna) nature, as mentioned, is the only one of the three natures the realization of which is characterized as ju-ju. It is also, and for the very reason that it is characterized as ju-ju, the only one which is described as asamskrta, unconditioned, i.e., beyond the duality of conditioned and unconditioned. In this regard, the author once again brings out his "neither being nor non-being" analysis, applying it to the true nature in the following manner. The discriminating nature is characterized

¹Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, p. 1085.

²It also indicates the dynamic nature of Thusness. For simplicity's sake, I shall translate both 真如 and 如如 as "Thusness."

as virtually completely non-existent, with only the proviso that the words which constitute its nature are "not inappropriate" (無倒).¹ The relative nature is characterized as existent when compared to the discriminating nature, but "not really existent" (非實有) in comparison with the true nature. With respect to the true nature itself it is said that, "because neither being nor non-being is the case, both being and non-being are of the nature of true Thusness (真如如)." ²

This final quotation must be understood in the context of the earlier statement that being and non-being are neither one nor two, neither the same nor different. Logically, in negating or denying being one affirms non-being; in negating both being and non-being, one here affirms both. Thus, in transcending both being and non-being, Thusness is able to embrace both. This appears to be the sense of this passage. It would seem that even though the true nature cannot be characterized by such a dualistic category as existence, one is still left with a rather positive sense of its presence or reality as compared to the other two natures. As noted

¹Literally, not "upside-down," i.e., not erroneous. I have chosen the present translation since the subject is language and its relation to the world.

²BNT, p. 794c. This is close to standard Yogācāra thought which states, "the 'interdependent own-being' [relative nature] is, unlike the 'imaginary own-being' [discriminating nature], not entirely non-existent. . . . [On the level of the true nature] one can either say that nothing exists or that that which exists is free from either existence or non-existence." Conze, pp. 259-260.

earlier, ordinary language fails when both being and non-being are simultaneously affirmed or negated, but the author wants to fill this language void with positive language--here the "true" (i.e., real) nature.

Finally in this discussion of the true nature, the question is raised, "what would be lacking if there were no true nature?" The answer is, "if there were no true nature (性), then all the various kinds of pure realms (境) would not be attained (得成)." ¹ In other words, it is the true nature which makes realization possible. This is a crucial characteristic.

One thing which characterizes the three natures theory as a whole is its import for the understanding of the subject-object relationship. This, of course, is standard Buddhist material, but it may be fairly said that the three natures theory manifests the Buddhist position on this issue rather clearly. For what exactly is a nature (性), and in what way can there be said to be three of them which somehow constitute reality? Do these natures constitute persons or things? This may be clarified by a look at the passage last quoted above. This is a difficult passage to render in English, inasmuch as it is not clear whether it refers to subjective or objective qualities; in fact, it appears to refer to both at once. There are three main elements in this sentence: the true nature, which is the element

¹BNT, p. 795b.

currently under question, the pure realms, and the attaining. Ordinarily, one might assume that the nature in question is constitutive of personhood (subjectivity) inasmuch as we know it is fundamentally linked with Buddha nature. If this were assumed, then we would tend to think that the "realms" were something like subjective states of being, attainable only because of the potential represented by the true nature. However, the term used for "realms," ching (境) ordinarily means the objective realm, one's environment, the objects of one's senses and cognition, precisely in contrast to the subjective realm, which is rendered with the term for knowledge or wisdom, chih (智). Therefore, the simple attribution of subjective qualities to the true nature becomes somewhat problematic. One starts to wonder, then, if this true nature is not some kind of quality in the world, objective to persons, which one may or may not discover. The terms for "attaining" also contribute to one's indecision, as they literally mean "obtain" plus "complete, fulfill." Thus one wonders whether the sentence means:

(1) if there were no (subjective) true nature, one would never experience certain states of purity; or (2) if there were no (objective) true nature, the "pure" quality of the world would not exist. In fact, the translator must walk a thin line between these two versions, or actually try to render both simultaneously.

This is an excellent example of what might be called the phenomenological quality of Buddhist thought. In this

passage neither objective reality nor pure subjective states are being referred to. Rather, the subject of the sentence seems to cut across this distinction because it concerns lived reality, or experience, and experience is always "experience of" something. In this passage, the author is indicating a certain quality which life may have. It is able to have this quality both because the world (objective reality) is the way it is (i.e., "thus" 如) and because we are the way we are. If either of these elements were missing, life would not have this quality. Whereas this may sound to the reader like a complex way of talking about the same subjective states that were earlier rejected, closer examination shows this not to be the case, for this would be to render the sentence according to (1) and to ignore (2). This would do justice neither to the inescapably objective quality of ching (境) nor to the importance of the Thusness of all things, the ju-ju (如如) discussed above, which expresses the way all things (法) are. Thus, what the passage is intended to express is the immediately given, lived reality, which includes both objective and subjective elements. This is clearly not to say that the author has "resolved" the issue of subject-object dualism, but neither, it seems to me, would it be fair to accuse him of sidestepping the issue. Rather, his is simply a perspective in which the two are immediately and inseparably present (though the two may be distinguished, as will be shown later).

The crucial point in the present context is that all of this applies to the "nature" (性) concept as well. All three natures indicate ways in which (a) reality presents itself to persons, and (b) persons experience reality. The two elements are inherent in each nature. Thus, each has both subjective and objective qualities. The discriminating nature indicates both a deluded person and a fragmented reality. The relative nature indicates a person with partial understanding of the way things are and a reality in which all things are interdependent and relative. The true nature, as we begin to see it unfolding, indicates both the way things are (thus!, 如) and the undeluded beholding of the way things are.¹ The author of the BNT, I submit, describes each of these natures as something "primitive," in the sense that each is given to human experience as a whole, as a unity, and only later do we realize that what is given as a primitive whole may be described with both subjective and objective terms.²

C. Tathāgatagarbha

The final section of this chapter elucidating the essentials of Buddha nature concerns the notion of tathāgata-

¹Compare this to the understanding of Mādhyamika "two truths" as representing both reality and truth about reality.

²This analysis was suggested by that of P.F. Strawson, Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 101ff., where he describes "person" as a "primitive concept" to which both states of consciousness and bodily characteristics are ascribed.

garbha. The latter is explained in terms of three meanings: the contained (所攝藏), hiddenness (隱覆藏), and the container (能攝藏).¹ The bulk of the discussion is devoted to the first of these, a description of that which is contained, or literally "held within" the "storehouse" (tsang, 藏). This is basically an etymological analysis.

Concerning this first meaning, the text reads as follows:

Regarding the term 藏 tsang [in the sense of] that which is contained (所攝), the Buddha says that it is in accordance with the own nature abiding (住自性)² Thusness (如如, ju-ju) that all sentient beings are (是) the tathāgata-garbha (如來藏). In speaking of 'thus' (如在如來藏), there are two meanings. The first is the Thusness wisdom (如如智) and the second the Thusness realm (如如境). Since both are apt (不倒), we speak of Thusness (如如). In speaking of 'come' (來 in 如來藏), the "come" of "thus come," Tathāgata), it is in accordance with coming from the own nature that in coming there is arriving, and in arriving there is attaining (來至至得). This is what is called 'thus come' (如來). Hence, although the 'thus come' nature (如來性) is a causal name, it should [also] have a name of fruition, since the natures of arriving and attaining are not two.³

This passage is full of elements that merit discussion.

Most important for present purposes is the discussion herein

¹The first and third meanings are the active and passive terms of the same attribute. This section of the three meanings of tathāgata-garbha is one of the most widely discussed sections of the text.

²That is, abiding in own nature, i.e., Buddha nature.

³BNT, p. 795c.

of the term ju-ju (如如). Its use is apparently interwoven with the use of the single 如 of 如來藏, tathāgatagarbha, as follows. It is a manifestation of the principle of ju-ju (如如) (all things according with Thusness) that all sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha. The Thusness (如) inherent in tathāgatagarbha (如來藏) is, of course, the same Thusness spoken of with the term ju-ju (如如). Therefore, it is of the nature of the tathāgatagarbha to accord with all things. In this way, by virtue of the Thusness comprising them both, all sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha.

In addition to the above-discussed link between 如 and 如如, an even more powerful linkage follows, where the "thus" (如 of 如來藏, tathāgatagarbha) is discussed explicitly in terms of 如如. "Thus" or 如 has two components, and it would seem to be the sum (or perhaps the gestalt, the whole being greater than the parts) of these two components. One component is subjective (智, chih) and the other objective (境, ching). It should be noted that these are standard terms, when used together, for distinguishing the subjective and objective realms.¹ Thus, ordinarily, the chih is the cognizer and the ching the cognized. In the case of 如如智 and 如如境, the former is the knowledge which accords with the 如如 principle, and the latter is the object

¹Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, p. 2490.

of that knowledge.¹ The author then goes on to say that since both are "apt" (literally, "not inverted," i.e., not contrary to the nature of things), the term 如如 is coined to embrace them both. However, all of this--the 如如 with both its subjective and objective constituent --is given in explanation of the "thus" (如) of tathāgata-garbha (如來藏). This corroborates the findings discussed above--one term here, "thus" (如), clearly comprises both subjective and objective elements. In other words, the single ju (如) "thus" is equivalent to the double ju-ju (如如), and whereas the latter spells out the joint objective-subjective nature of Thusness, the former may be taken as expressing the same thing in shorthand.

The rest of the quoted passage, dealing with the "come" of "thus come" (Tathāgata), picks up the thread of standard tathāgatagarbha thought, where it is often said (following Sanskrit etymology) that the garbha of tathāgatagarbha can mean on the one hand, seed or embryo (i.e., cause) or, on the other hand, womb or matrix (containing the various Buddha virtues, i.e., effect). The Chinese choice of a term to render garbha, tsang (藏), basically means "storehouse." Thus it is unable to render the former of the two senses of garbha, and this section, which in Sanskrit would play on the bivalence of garbha, must be treated rather differently. Hence in Chinese we have a discussion of the logical inter-

¹Ibid., p. 1085.

connectedness of coming and arriving (i.e., the inter-connectedness of cause or seed and effect or fruit) together with the implication that since it is the ju-lai or tathāgata nature that is coming, and since this nature "never leaves home," but always "abides" (住) in itself (自性), "coming" does not imply leaving anything. Therefore, the tathāgata's nature (如來性), which is where one arrives, or in other words, what one attains, is not something from which there is any departing. Thus, while it is the cause (that which comes), it is also the effect, and the two are not separate.

The discussion of the third meaning of tathāgatagarbha, that which is contained, concludes with an analysis of the term tsang (藏) per se.

Since all sentient beings universally exist (在) within (內) the Tathāgata's wisdom (如來智), the term tsang (藏) [storehouse] is used. And since the Thusness wisdom (如如智) is in accord with the Thusness realm (如如境), there is certainly no sentient being who is excluded (出). The Thusness realm constitutes that which is embraced¹ by the Tathāgata, and therefore it is called 'the contained' (所藏). Sentient beings are (為) the tathāgatagarbha.

Furthermore, tsang has three meanings. The first shows the incomparability of the true realm (正境), since from this Thusness realm (如如境), there is not a single realm which is omitted. The second shows the incomparability of the true practice (正行), since there is no other superior wisdom which may surpass this wisdom (智). The third makes manifest the incomparability of the true fruit [of practice], since there is no fruit which surpasses this one. This is why we speak of incomparability. Since this fruit encompasses (能攝藏) all sentient beings, we say that sentient beings are (為) the tathāgatagarbha.²

¹Or be-held or com-prehended, 所攝持. ²BNT, p. 796a.

Beginning with the last part of the passage first, we can see that the term tsang or storehouse indicates three major groups of things which are said to be contained within the storehouse. This is to be taken in the sense that the things stored within the storehouse constitute the nature of the storehouse itself. If this were not so, it would not be said that the term tsang or storehouse itself was being clarified by a listing of what was within the storehouse. It is not to be thought that the storehouse is a kind of shell within which various items accumulate. Rather, the character and quality of the items "within" the storehouse constitute the character and quality of the storehouse itself. The storehouse is simply the accumulation of all those things which it "holds."

What are these things held by, and constitutive of, the storehouse? First is the true realm of Thusness, another way of speaking of all realms apprehended properly. Second is the true practice or wisdom (the Thusness wisdom), i.e., the proper apprehension of all realms or things. It is important to note here that hsing (行), practice (of the Buddha Way) and chih (智), wisdom, are used interchangeably, and that the terms ching (境), objective realm, and chih (智), mentation or "subjective realm," are again placed in tandem. Thus the meaning of the term chih may be clarified: while its opposition to the term ching indicates that its nature has to do with subjectivity, its interchangeability with hsing indicates

that it cannot be interpreted as any kind of static or substantial basis of subjectivity (such as an agent or self), but must be taken as subjectivity in action. It is translated as "wisdom" when used in relation to practice, since the particular kind of subjectivity in action cultivated in Buddhism is, of course, wisdom. In other words, practice is a kind of doing, and wisdom is a particular practice--acting or doing wisely. Finally, the third item constitutive of the storehouse's "store" is the fruit of practice, namely, realization of Buddhahood or the Buddha nature. This fruit of the realization of Buddhahood encompasses all sentient beings, that is, it pertains to all of them since they all have the potential for this realization. Thus, all sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha in that they are all beings which may realize Buddhahood.

The first part of the quoted passage is interesting in that it emphasizes very heavily the "storehouse" meaning of the term tsang, even to the extent of playing on the spatial metaphor by saying that all sentient beings are within (內) the storehouse. The same sentence, however, also indicates that the tsang is to be identified with the Tathāgata's wisdom, and thus it is clear that the spatial sense is no more than metaphor. The following sentence in that passage confirms this reading, by elaborating that the tsang (Tathāgata's wisdom, Thusness wisdom) is in accordance with the realm of sentient beings (Thusness realm), and therefore no sentient being can be excepted from the all-

embracing mutual coherence of wisdom and the realm of wisdom.

This part of the passage concludes with the indication that it is in this sense that all sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha. Since sentient beings are taken up or held by the Tathāgata, one can say either (1) that which is "within" the storehouse constitutes the storehouse, as discussed above, or (2) there is ultimately no distinction to be made between Thusness wisdom and the Thusness realm, and hence by constituting the latter, sentient beings automatically constitute the former as well. It seems to me that the first reading is more directly suggested in this passage, though this first meaning clearly implies the latter once the storehouse is understood as the Thusness wisdom. In this way one can see that the Thusness realm constitutes the Thusness wisdom, their union or mutual coherence being that which is primitively given. Moreover, that the "contents" of the tathāgatagarbha constitute the nature of the garbha itself is confirmed by noting that the fruit of the realization of Buddhahood is first listed as one of the three items "contained" within the garbha, and that later the garbha itself is identified with the Tathāgata wisdom (which is the same as Buddhahood). Thus, the "contents" are here explicitly identified with the "container," and the distinction between the two collapses. Finally, it should be noted that the first sense in which sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha (in that they all may

realize Buddhahood) is not in any conflict with the second sense (in which sentient beings actually constitute the Thusness wisdom or Tathāgata's wisdom) since, as noted above, in tathāgatagarbha thought, the cause of practice and realization (garbha in the sense of seed or germ) is not held to be ultimately distinct from the result of practice, i.e., realization (garbha as the womb or storehouse of Buddha virtues).

The final two meanings of the tathāgatagarbha dealt with in this section of the text may be discussed more summarily.¹ The second meaning of the term is hiddenness. Here the author plays on another of the meanings of the term tsang, as this term also means "to hide, to conceal." The idea is the standard notion in tathāgatagarbha thought that the tathāgatagarbha, in itself attuned with the way things are (不顛倒, not upside-down) and eternally maintaining its own nature without change or differentiation, is covered up and concealed from the view of sentient beings (and hence its existence is unknown) by the kleśa or defilements (delusion, anger, greed, etc.) produced by human ignorance. The third meaning of tathāgatagarbha is "the container." This is the fulfillment of the Tathāgata nature, the realization of Buddhahood with its infinite Buddha virtues. This realization of the Buddha nature is said to have no beginning (非始得) as it is aboriginally existent (本有).

¹The following is summarized from BNT, p. 796a.

3. Evaluation

We may now turn to an overview of the three sections on the three causes, the three natures, and tathāgatagarbha. The first point to be noticed is that these three sections are all offered as elucidations of the essentials of Buddha nature. Thus these three must to some extent make Buddha nature what it is.

As shown above, the three "causes" of Buddha nature may be reduced to one, bodhicitta. The nature of bodhicitta, it will be recalled, is basically active cultivation of the Buddha Way, the making of effort and of progressing in that Way. Thus, it is not a cause in the sense of a thing which a person may have or may lack. Rather, it is simply the requirement that a person must make some effort in order to fulfill the Way, and the truism that progress in that Way is progress toward realization. Moreover, it was stated that the third movement within bodhicitta, i.e., the fulfillment of bodhicitta, is equivalent to (即是) bodhicitta itself. Since bodhicitta is the "cause" of which realization of Buddha nature or Buddhahood is the effect, this makes it clear that bodhicitta itself directly contributes to the constitution of Buddha nature. Thus, everything said about bodhicitta--in particular, its active nature--applies to Buddha nature as well. This parallels what we have seen concerning the inherence of cause in effect in the tathāgatagarbha section.

In the discussion of the three natures, it was no doubt

clear that if any of the three natures were to be conceived as identical with Buddha nature, it would have to be the third, the true (pariniṣpanna) nature. This identity is attested by a comparison of the two following quotations, which were previously noted: (1) "Buddha nature is the Thusness (眞如) revealed by the twin emptiness of man and things."¹ (2) "The true nature is the Thusness of all things."² Since it is a given in Mahāyāna thought that all things are empty, the two statements can be seen as virtually identical. Hence, in the case of the three natures, we may say that any attributes of the true nature may be directly applied to an understanding of the Buddha nature. Moreover, in the statement, "if there were no true nature, then all the various kinds of pure realm would not be attained,"³ we can see the continuity between the bodhi-citta and true nature concepts, inasmuch as the true nature here appears to be that which makes realization possible. It should be noted as well that it is said of the true nature, just as it is said of the third meaning of tathāgatagarbha, that it is comprised of all virtues (Buddha-dharma).

It is a point of some discussion whether the concepts of tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature are identical. Clearly they overlap considerably, though the genesis of the two terms may be discussed at length. In one place, Takasaki goes so far as to equate them without further ado, intro-

¹BNT, p. 787b. ²Ibid., p. 794b. ³Ibid., p. 795b.

ducing his summary of the BNT with the phrase, "Buddha nature, i.e., tathāgatagarbha" ¹ In general, I would agree that the two terms amount to virtually the same thing, though there is a characteristic flavor to tathāgatagarbha thought, due to its stress on the inherent purity of the tathāgatagarbha itself and the adventitious character of the defiling kleśa. These elements seem to characterize tathāgatagarbha thought. It would seem, however, that the present text develops the Buddha nature concept out of a combination of the bodhicitta, three natures and tathāgatagarbha concepts.

One point which might tentatively be offered as an illustration of how this difference between tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature might be manifested is the fact that in this section all sentient beings are said to "be" (是 or 為) rather than to "have" (有) the tathāgatagarbha. ² While it is dangerous to place too much emphasis on this distinction, since it may be due purely to the translator's choice of words, we might nevertheless hypothesize as follows. If Buddha nature can, as indicated above be equated with the true (parinirvāṇa) nature, it would be natural in that case to speak of the relationship between

¹Takasaki, Buttenkaidaijiten, p. 143 ("i.e.," translates "sunawachi").

²Strictly speaking, when the word yu (有) is used, the well-known phrase should be rendered "all sentient beings have the tathāgatagarbha" or "in all sentient beings there is the tathāgatagarbha."

human nature and Buddha nature with a copula. If one were to extend the true nature-Buddha nature identity to include tathāgatagarbha, as is done in this text, the use of the copula might likewise be extended and come to supplant in this text the more traditional verb of possession. The latter is natural to the tathāgatagarbha tradition, which conceives the tathāgatagarbha as a germ, seed, embryo or potential which people have. It seems to me, however, to be more characteristic of this text to follow the tone set by the emphasis on Thusness and speak of the way things immediately "are": thus. This is not to say that the tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature concepts conflict in any way, for they do not, and certainly the Ratna, for example, speaks a great deal of Thusness. The much smaller point I am making is that in this text on Buddha nature, the tathāgatagarbha concept is only one of several concepts constitutive of the Buddha nature concept. This seems to me to be supported by the arrangement of the text, in which the three causes, three natures, and tathāgatagarbha are presented as equally illuminative of the essentials of Buddha nature.

Within the text itself there are passages supportive of this reading. Thus it is said to be in accordance with Thusness (如如) that all beings are tathāgatagarbha; the latter is subsumed by the former. Moreover, and this is the basic point, the tathāgatagarbha concept is fully harmonized with the bodhicitta and true nature concepts, and all three are mutually coherent with the Buddha nature

concept. Thus the "contents" of the garbha are said to include the true realm of Thusness (which also characterizes the true nature), and true practice or wisdom (i.e., bodhicitta). The third item in the list of garbha "contents," the fruit of practice, is Buddha nature itself. Finally, the third meaning of tathāgatagarbha, "the container," is clearly equivalent to the true nature (and hence Buddha nature) since it is none other than realization of Buddhahood, and has the same accompanying Buddha virtues mentioned as characterizing the true nature. Thus, the Buddha nature concept as developed in this text appears logically to be an amalgam of the bodhicitta, true (parinirvāṇa) nature and tathāgatagarbha concepts, but also to be separably identifiable with any one of the three.

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHA NATURE, I: ACTION AND
NON-SUBSTANTIALITY

1. Introduction

Chapter Four of the BNT, "An Explanation of the Characteristics of Buddha Nature," is very long and complex. Since the chapter is so long and since the topics it covers¹ are not arranged in a manner harmonious with the goals of the present study, I have divided the exposition of the text into two parts and arranged the contents according to the concerns of this study, emphasizing in my presentation the topics most stressed in the original.²

¹The chapter is divided into ten sections: (1) own-nature, (2) causes, (3) fruits (of practice), (4) functions, (5) union, or all-embracing character, (6) differentiation (of types of practitioners), (7) stages (of realization), (8) all-pervadingness, (9) unchangeability and (10) indivisibility. Each section represents one characteristic or lakṣaṇa of Buddha nature. These ten characteristics of Buddha nature exactly match the ten characteristics of tathāgata-garbha discussed in the Ratna., and as Takasaki says, the "explanations under each 'lakṣaṇa' are in most cases quite equivalent to those in the Ratna. even in their wording, but sometimes doctrines based upon the Vijñānavāda are interwoven among passages. . . ." (Takasaki, Ratna., p. 47. See also Takemura, p. 123.) This is a fair assessment, echoing the findings above of the BNT's author's attempt to bring together tathāgatagarbha and Vijñānavāda (Yogācāra)-- notably three natures--theories in his presentation of the Buddha nature. I will stress in my exposition portions of the BNT not paralleled in the Ratna.

²My sub-chapter C corresponds to sections 1 - 5 of the BNT's chapter 4, with section 5 on "union" emphasized. Sub-chapter D corresponds to sections 6 - 10 of that chapter, with section 9 on "unchangeability" emphasized.

In the present sub-chapter, I focus on three points: (a) transformation of the basis, (b) dharmakāya and nirvāna and (c) the non-substantiality of self and mind. In the section on the transformation of the basis we are provided with our first detailed understanding of the Buddha nature as being of an active, as opposed to substantial, character. Thus this section introduces the textual basis for the claim of this study that the Buddha nature is an "active" self. As for the second section, the term dharmakāya is introduced in the text as the culmination of the "transformation of the basis" process. Thus the discussion of dharmakāya completes our understanding of the transformation of the basis. In this connection, we discover the dharmakāya also to be of an active nature. As the culmination of the Buddhist path, the dharmakāya is equated with nirvāna. Here we see a supremely positive value ascribed to dharmakāya or nirvāna, which functions to justify Buddhist practice. It also accounts for the positive language used with respect to the Buddha nature. Finally, in the third section, we take up terms of selfhood and mind used in association with the Buddha nature and investigate whether there is any sense of substantiality to be derived from these terms. This will involve investigation of the notions of perfection of self and pure mind, among others.

This sub-chapter, then, will provide the textual basis for our understanding of the Buddha nature as active, rather than substantial. The positive value associated with the

Buddha nature will be seen to be associated with this active character inasmuch as it is the self-transformative process which is thus highly valued and it is as such that the Buddha nature is spoken of in supremely positive language.

2. Analysis

a. Transformation of the Basis

We may begin by looking at three "causes" of Buddha nature and three "fruits" of Buddha nature, both of which are said to be in "union" with the Buddha nature itself and serve to introduce the notion of the transformation of the basis. The three causes of Buddha nature are given as three kinds of practice, namely: (1) the purity of the dharmakāya, (2) the engendering of the Buddha wisdom, and (3) the Buddha's compassion. As practices, the first is manifested in cultivation of faith in the Mahāyāna, the second in cultivation of prajñā meditative practices, and the third in cultivation of compassion. Concerning these, the author says, "These three [practices] of the causal stage are [both] the dependent and the basis on which the dependent relies (所依能依). That is why we speak of 'union.'"¹ As the "basis," these three practices are the causes of Buddha nature; as the "dependent," they are that which relies on the cause, i.e., the result of the cause, viz., Buddha nature. The "union" or non-differentiation of the two indicates that the three "causes" manifest the Buddha nature itself.

¹BNT, p. 801a.

The three causes are all of an active, rather than a substantial, nature since they are nothing but Buddhist practice. Thus we see the active character of Buddha nature beginning to appear.

The three fruits of Buddha nature are directly identified with three characteristics of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya. Thus Buddha nature is identified with the dharmakāya. The three fruits are: (1) the five super powers able to banish the darkness of ignorance, (2) the unborn wisdom able to burn up and destroy karma and the defilements (kleśa), and (3) the extinguished and unborn¹ realm, i.e., the highest purity, also called the parāvṛtti-āśraya or "transformation of the basis" (轉依).² Please note that the first two

¹不生, the standard Chinese translation of anutpāda. The term denies the Hīnayāna assertion that all dharmas are characterized by arising and extinction at each moment. This denial is formulated in the context of Mahāyāna emptiness teachings.

²BNT, p. 801a-b. The third fruit here listed is notable for several reasons. (a) The Ratna lists this third fruit as simply āśravakṣaya (漏盡), "the end of the passions, or the exhaustion of the stream of transmigration." (Soothill and Hodous, p. 425a.) Here we have nirvāṇa as discussed in, e.g., the Pali texts of the Theravāda school. This sense of the "transformation of the basis" is found in the BNT passage represented by the term "extinguished" (盡), but it is not developed. (b) This first sense appears in the BNT immediately and without further ado wedded to the later Mahāyāna expression for nirvāṇa, "unborn." This conveys the sense of the eternity of nirvāṇa, its non-production or not beginning at the time when a person "realizes it." In other words, in the Mahāyāna sense, nirvāṇa logically (thought not metaphysically) transcends persons and their activities; in the Theravāda sense, there is no discussion of a transcendent nirvāṇa. This sense of the third fruit is not found in the Ratna passage.

(c) In the BNT, the third fruit is introduced with the positive-sounding phrase, "manifestation of purity"

"fruits" are clearly of an active nature. We will now turn to a study of the third.

The author discusses at length the notion of transformation of the basis, relating it to the notions of dharmakāya and nirvāṇa. These are ostensibly "fruits" of Buddha nature, but as in the case of the causes, the fruits are "in union" with Buddha nature itself, and thus in elucidating transformation of the basis, dharmakāya and nirvāṇa, he is further elucidating the notion of Buddha nature as well.¹

(顯淨), whereas in the Ratna. the somewhat negative-sounding term āsravakṣaya is used, and the former term is not found. This may be evidence of the further "sinicization" (see Lai) of the BNT, beyond even the Chinese translation of the Ratna. That is, the "manifestation of purity" term points more directly to the Buddha nature than does the āsravakṣaya term, thus making more explicit the Buddha nature itself.

(d) Finally, the BNT directly identifies the third fruit with the "transformation of the basis" (轉依), and then, after completing the portion of the text paralleling the Ratna., goes on immediately to discuss this term in great detail. The Ratna. says in passing only that the āsravakṣaya is the "transformation of the basis" (轉身) and then does not refer to the term again. It is interesting to note quickly the the alternative form in which the term parāvṛtti-āśraya is rendered by the translator of the Ratna., Ratnamati. He uses 身 (Sanskrit kāya, Chinese shen, "body") where the standard term became 依 (i, "to depend on," and by extension, "that on which something depends"). The use of 身 perhaps gives the term a more individualistic appearance, and may indicate the transformation of the person (身 can render "person") in realizing nirvāṇa.

²The discussion of these three notions is further evidence of the author's attempt to go beyond pure tathāgata-garbha theory, synthesizing other notions from Mahāyāna and especially Yogācāra thought, in developing the idea of Buddha nature.

The term "transformation of the basis" (轉依 , Sanskrit parāvṛtti-āśraya, Chinese chuan-i) is properly a Yogācāra term. In a purely Yogācāra context its meaning is compounded as follows.¹ "Transformation" (轉 , also "turning," "revolution") has two meanings: "transforming" in the sense of getting rid of something, and "transformation" in the sense of attaining something. "Basis" (依) refers to the 8th consciousness in the Yogācāra theory, the ālayavijñāna. The latter is the "storehouse" (藏 tsang) consciousness which stores the karmic seeds produced by past actions, which in turn determine the future dispositions of individuals. In the "transformation" of the ālayavijñāna, or basis, the seeds of defilements (kleśa) and discriminatory knowledge are what is discarded, while the two "fruits" of bodhi (wisdom) and nirvāṇa are what is attained. Thus for the Yogācārin, the "storehouse" or ālayavijñāna itself is transformed.

As seen above, the author of the BNT incorporates the term parāvṛtti-āśraya into his discussion of the third fruit of Buddha nature, "manifesting purity." Thus the parāvṛtti-āśraya, as that third fruit, is the supreme purity revealed when all barriers and impurities have been extinguished; it is the "purity of the original nature" (本性).² Here begins the incorporation of this Yogācāra term into the

¹The following is condensed from Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, pp. 2818-2819.

²BNT, p. 801b.

scope of the Buddha nature notion.

The author of the BNT builds on this beginning to produce a complex account of the parāvṛtti-āśraya notion within the dynamics of Buddha nature thought. He begins by analyzing the term into four constituent meanings.

(1) The productive basis (生依). The non-discriminative way of the Buddha is interconnected with and dependent upon this basis. If there were not the conditioning of this basis, the non-discriminative way would not be produced. Since the way is dependent on this condition, we name this aspect the basis which produces the Way (道生依).

(2) The destructive basis (滅依). All delusions and habits are ultimately destroyed and not born because there is no basis for them to rely upon [i.e., they are not real, have no basis in reality]. If, since they are not based on the parāvṛtti-āśraya, delusions are ultimately extinguished, then the extinguishings of delusion by śrāvakas, by pratyekabuddhas and by Buddhas are not different, yet they are not the same. Therefore know this aspect as the basis which ultimately destroys delusions.

(3) The fruit of well-matured reason. Penetrating what is good and right, showing reverence over a long period of time, uninterruptedly and to the utmost extent cultivating the knowledge of Thusness--this is the fruit of parāvṛtti-āśraya. If one is on the Way, the parāvṛtti-āśraya is the cause. If one has completed the Way, it is called the 'fruit.' If the parāvṛtti-āśraya did not constitute this fruit of well-matured reason, then it would be the own-nature of all Buddhas which should constitute the matured reason, the destruction [of delusions] and purity. Since this isn't so [as there is no such thing as own-being] we know that the parāvṛtti-āśraya is the fruit of well-matured reason.

(4) The dharmadhātu's characteristic of purity. All false thoughts are utterly extinguished [here]. As this dharmadhātu surpasses that which can be expressed in reasoning or in speech, we take purity to be a characteristic of the dharmadhātu. Thus the activities of the mind are extinguished and the way of speech is cut off. It is ineffable, the attaining of the not-to-be-attained principle of Thusness (真如理).¹

¹BNT, p. 801b.

The first meaning illustrates that parāvṛtti-āśraya is the basis on which the Buddha Way is founded. As such, it is equivalent to the supreme truth, to the dharmadhātu. The second meaning parallels the standard tathāgata-garbha teaching that all defilements, such as ignorance, are basically unreal, having no basis in reality--i.e., they are simply an absence of truth or reality, rather than the real presence of defilement--and hence are inherently extinct. Thus, the paths variously tread by śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas and Buddhas are neither differentiable (since none of them really eliminate any existent defilements) nor identical (since their practices are different).

With the third meaning we are told that parāvṛtti-āśraya is a fruit of practice. The question arises: to whom or to what does this fruit pertain? It cannot be a quality which adheres to an individual (a Buddha), as there is no such individual (in terms of having an "own-being" which identifies him). Therefore, it must just be one aspect of the universal nature of things manifested as parāvṛtti-āśraya. This is an interesting point, as it represents a resurgence of śūnyavāda-like views within tathāgata-garbha/Buddha nature thought. Tathāgata-garbha thought in particular is well known to be associated with the tendency to make the Buddha into a figure that can be worshipped.¹

¹The Śrīmālādevīsūtra, for example, stresses the knowledge which only a Buddha can have. The Ratna elevates the Buddha above the other two jewels (of Dharma and Śaṅgha) as the "supreme refuge."

However, here we see the author of the BNT turning his back on one opportunity to thus elevate the figure of the Buddha. Thus, in this section at least, the author seems to be stressing a cosmic, universal perspective on reality, as opposed to the glorification of the Buddha per se. This is confirmed in the fourth meaning, where parāvṛtti-āśraya is identified with the ineffable dharmadhātu and with Thusness, which, as seen in the first meaning, is logically prior to the Buddha Way.

As the productive basis, then, parāvṛtti-āśraya is the basis of the Buddha Way or Buddhist practice. It is not a substantive basis, but a basis or foundation of a particular form of action, Buddhist practice. As the destructive basis, parāvṛtti-āśraya represents the link between the standard tathāgatagarbha notion of the inherent unreality of defilements and, again, Buddhist practice. It functions as the basis of practice on all Buddhist paths, representing the continuity between them. The active nature of this basis is once more evident. In its third meaning, parāvṛtti-āśraya is the fruit of practice and by virtue of its very nonsubstantiality shows how it is that there can be fruition of practice when there is no one to whom this fruition could belong. The parāvṛtti-āśraya is identified with the fruition of practice and the latter is exhausted in its active character. There is no substantiality connected with either the fruition or the āśraya; they are both of an utterly active nature. Finally,

the parāvṛtti-āśraya represents the very end of Buddhist practice, the realization of Thusness.

In this way, in all its four meanings, parāvṛtti-āśraya represents Buddhist practice from its beginnings to its culmination. As such, it is consistently portrayed as being of an active character. Since parāvṛtti-āśraya is a "fruit" of Buddha nature which is in "union" with Buddha nature, what we learn of the āśraya fully pertains to Buddha nature as well.

Elsewhere,¹ parāvṛtti-āśraya is ascribed two meanings. It stands for separation from desire and the cause of separation from desire. Here separation from desire is equivalent to the Third Noble Truth, Cessation (of suffering), and cause of separation from desire is equivalent to the Fourth Noble Truth, Path. The identity of parāvṛtti-āśraya and Buddhist practice could not be made more clear. Again the active nature is emphasized.

In another passage, the term parāvṛtti-āśraya is discussed in conjunction with the term dharmakāya. The passage in question is constituted by a discussion of seven "names" of the parāvṛtti-āśraya dharmakāya, i.e., the dharmakāya of parāvṛtti-āśraya nature. The term dharmakāya is a significant one for this text and should itself be understood before we discuss its use in the present, rather unique context. "Dharma" (法), of course, is the ubiquitous Buddhist term, meaning the Buddha's teaching,

¹BNT, p. 801b.

truth, law and principle (in addition to other senses not presently relevant). Kāya (身) is the term for body and in addition stands for "person." It also means, by extension toward the sense of "embodiment," that which constitutes the givenness or the reality of something. Of course, the term dharmakāya is much more complex than this, and different schools assigned it different particular meanings (its specific meaning in this text will be discussed below), but suffice it to say here that, as one of the trikāya (three bodies) of Buddha, dharmakāya is the body in which Buddha and Dharma (ultimate truth) are identified; thus it is the embodiment of ultimate truth.

In the present text, the terms dharmakāya and parāvṛtti-āśraya are joined and assigned seven names, which are then discussed. These seven are as follows. (1) The undoing (沈没) of the skandha-grasping-skandha cycle. The five skandhas give rise to grasping and grasping gives rise to new skandhas (i.e., rebirth); this is a cycle that can continue indefinitely. However, "within the dharmakāya, neither cause nor effect exists; therefore we speak of 'undoing' (沈). The grasping is opposed and cured and thus we speak of 'causing to perish.' As for the skandhas, the fruit of retribution is exhausted and so we say they 'are not' (没)." ¹

¹BNT, p. 802b-c.

(2) The stillness (寂靜) of all acts.

All sāṃskṛta dharmas (conditioned things) are called 'acts' (行), since they are conjoined with four characteristics. These four are birth, differentiation, abiding and destruction. All sāṃskṛta dharmas being bound by the past, are conjoined with birth, being bound by the future, are conjoined with destruction, and being bound by the present, are conjoined with differentiation and abiding. Actions have an active nature; they don't rest--that's why they are called 'acts.' The Tathāgata's dharmakāya, though, is not like this. In the past it is not born, in the future it isn't destroyed. In the present there is no illness and old age. It eternally abides, profoundly. Unborn, it is called 'still' (寂); undestroyed, it is called 'quiet' (靜).¹

(3) Discarding (棄捨) remnants. The śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha have several remnants: kleśa (defilements), ignorance and karma. The Tathāgata's parāvṛtti-āśraya dharmakāya has already "crossed over" the four kinds of rebirth² (i.e., discarded karma) and utterly extinguished all kleśa and delusion (i.e., ignorance). All paths of spiritual cultivation have been tread. Thus with samsāra cast aside (棄) and putting aside (捨) the Path (in the sense of a raft being put aside once one has crossed the stream and its usefulness is past), "the dharmakāya alone abides in the fulfillment of the four per-

¹Ibid., p. 802c.

²The four are: "from obscurity and poverty to be reborn in the same condition; from obscurity and poverty to be reborn in light and honor; from light and honor to be reborn in obscurity and poverty; from light and honor to be reborn in the heavens." Soothill and Hodous, p. 179b.

fections" (bliss, self, purity, eternity).¹

(4) Going beyond (過度) the two kinds of suffering. Since in the dharmakāya there is no gross suffering as of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha, we use the term "surpassing" (過). Since there is none of the subtle suffering of the bodhisattva (i.e., the four kinds of rebirth mentioned above), we use the term "crossing over" (度). Thus the dharmakāya goes beyond these two kinds of suffering.²

(5) Doing away (拔除) with the ālayavijñāna.³

The meaning of ālaya is [found in the combination of the terms] 'base' and 'hidden.' It is the source (本) of samsāra since it produces the four kinds of splotch (末). The four splotches are two kinds of kleśa, karma and retribution. The first of the two kinds of kleśa is all views. Its origin is in ignorance, and the path of the characterless liberation gate is its cure. The second is all kleśa other than views. It is originated from desire and cured via the path of the wishless liberation. The source of karma is the nature of ordinary man (凡夫性). This is because the nature of ordinary man is equivalent to holding views of self (身見). The source of recompense is one: all of samsāra is recompense. Relying on the ālayavijñāna, samsāra has its source; by not separating from it, recompense is not severed. In the dharmakāya [however] the two worlds⁴ are

¹BNT, p. 802c - 803a. ²Ibid., p. 803a.

³In Yogācāra thought, the ālayavijñāna is the eighth or "storehouse" consciousness which holds the "seeds" produced by past acts and productive of future states of being and act.

⁴This life and the hereafter. Soothill and Hodous, p. 20b.

extinguished by means of two paths, and therefore we speak of 'doing away.' The two paths are: (1) Non-discriminating wisdom--this does away with present delusions and purifies the dharmakāya; it is called the wisdom which depletes (盡智). (2) Subsequent non-discriminating wisdom--this prevents any future delusions from ever arising and fulfills the dharmakāya; it is the unborn wisdom. 'Plucking out' (拔) is the purifying, the extinguishing of present delusions. 'Removing' (除) is the fulfillment, the severing of future delusion. Hence, the name 'doing away.'¹

(6) Relieving the five fears. The five are: (a) self-blame, as when a man does something evil and is filled with dread day and night; (b) fear of the blame of others, as when a man has done something wrong and fears that other persons or gods saw it; (c) fear of punishment; (d) fear of being born into an evil birth, since one is evil now; (e) multitudinous fears--one's three kinds of karma² are impure and one's discernment is not deep; one's fears of virtue are legion. However, "if a person has realized the dharmakāya, then he removes himself from the five fears; thus we say the dharmakāya is the relieving of the five fears."³

¹BNT, p. 803a.

²Variously rendered as (1) deeds, words and thoughts; (2) the consequences of present deeds in this life, the next life and subsequent lives, etc. Cf. Soothill and Hodous, p. 606. In the present context, the term simply means the totality of one's karma.

³BNT, p. 803a-b.

(7) Severing the retribution of the six paths (道).¹

The term 'path' has many meanings; we will briefly speak of two. . . . (1) The place where sentient beings transmigrate; (2) the place where karma acts. With these two meanings the term 'path' is established. The Tathāgata's dharmakāya does not return to this path . . . therefore we speak of cutting off the six paths. We speak of the Tathāgata's dharmakāya when there is this condition.²

It is clear from the above that the parāvṛtti-āśraya dharmakāya is basically a term expressive of Buddhist practice, i.e., the transformation inherent in realizing one's Buddha nature. As such, all of the above seven names express the Noble Truth of Cessation by virtue of which the life of bondage and suffering is brought to an end: (1) the skandha-grasping-skandha cycle, (2) the change inherent in the passage of time, (3) karma, kleśa and ignorance, (4) suffering, (5) the ālayavijñāna, i.e., the source of transmigration in samsāra, (6) fear, and (7) transmigration among the six paths--all are severed, undone, extinguished, overcome. It is the parāvṛtti-āśraya that expresses this severing, undoing, extinguishing, and hence its active nature is clear.

The dharmakāya, on the other hand, represents the state of being in which these seven categories of fear and suffer-

¹Gati, viz., hell, hungry ghosts, animals, asura (demons), humans and deva (heavenly spirits).

²BNT, p. 803b.

ing are undone, i.e., in which they are absent or lacking. For how is the dharmakāya described herein? (1) Within the dharmakāya neither cause nor effect exists; (2) in the past it is not born and in the future it is not destroyed; (3) it has crossed over the four kinds of rebirth and extinguished all kleśa and delusion; (4) it goes beyond the two kinds of suffering; (5) the doing away with all present delusion purifies it, and the prevention of all future delusions from arising fulfills it; (6) it relieves the five fears; and (7) it is cut off from returning to transmigration. Thus the meaning of dharmakāya as evidenced here, though of positive value, is negatively expressed. However, there is a hint of a more positively expressed account to come in such passages as (3) the dharmakāya alone abides in the fulfillment of the four perfections; and (2) it eternally abides, profoundly.

In the BNT, parāvṛtti-āśraya is given as manifesting the character of Buddha nature. We have seen that it basically represents Buddhist practice. "Buddhist practice" here does not mean any set rituals, meditations or ethical observances, but rather the process of self-transformation of the individual progressing from a self-centered and ignorant mode of being to the selfless, awakened and compassionate mode of a Buddha. This process of self-transformation is the parāvṛtti (transformation) of the āśraya (here, the person). By virtue of its identification with Buddha nature, parāvṛtti-āśraya demonstrates that the affirmation of the Buddha nature is an affirmation of every person's potential to

transform him/herself in this way. This is the active character of Buddha nature and the very heart of its meaning.

b. Dharmakāya and Nirvāṇa

In conjunction with the exposition of parāvṛtti-āśraya we have seen the term dharmakāya come into prominence. In the above passage, the dharmakāya represents the culmination of Buddhist practice or parāvṛtti-āśraya, namely, the realization of Buddhahood. This too is obviously a constituent of the meaning of Buddha nature: to affirm that every person has the potential to be radically transformed is to affirm that everyone is a potential Buddha. The discussion of dharmakāya, which quickly merges with a discussion of nirvāṇa, plays the important role of affirming the capability of the self-transformation process to reach a culmination. Here, dharmakāya and nirvāṇa become virtually interchangeable terms; each affirms the reality and the desirability of the Buddhist goal. As such, they represent the terminus of the parāvṛtti-āśraya process. As we shall see, however, the dharmakāya also stands for "the purity of the original nature" and thus represents the aboriginal existence of the Buddha nature. It manifests the eternally true nature of things and is not just the end of a process. As shall become evident below, dharmakāya and nirvāṇa manifest the superbly positive value associated with the Buddha nature. Thus, they justify the process of self-transformation itself.

First, let us demonstrate that the dharmakāya does represent the culmination of Buddhist practice rather than

a metaphysical entity. The outstanding characteristic of the dharmakāya is said to be "all suffering being at rest."¹ Its "flavor" is constituted by non-backsliding and serene joy. It is clear from the text that these are qualities that apply to persons, not to any transcendental absolute. "If there is someone who trains in the proper practice and seeks to perceive this truth (法), when he realizes it, he obtains non-backsliding and serene joy. . . ." ² The dharmakāya is also characterized by two functions--the elimination of the skandha and the negation of prapañca (technically "sophistry," but used for any kind of false argument). Thus, it represents the fulfillment of the goal for which Buddhist practice is designed: liberation from samsāra and from ignorance. Here we see the dharmakāya as part of the active process of self-transformation.

The BNT's author takes up the issue of the reality of the dharmakāya. The objection is raised:

How do you establish these characteristics and meanings concerning the dharmakāya? If it is as you say, the dharmakāya must be nonexistent (無, wu), since it cannot be apprehended. If a thing is not perceived by the six consciousnesses³ then surely it is non-existent (無) --like a rabbit's horns. A rabbit's horns are not perceived by the six consciousnesses and thus they certainly don't exist. The dharmakāya is also thus, and this is

¹Ibid., p. 803b. ²Ibid.

³Each of the five senses has its own consciousness, plus one for the consciousness with thoughts as its objects.

why the dharmakāya definitely does not exist.
How then do you [establish] all your ideas?¹

This question erroneously assumes that the dharmakāya is a thing which should be empirically perceptible. In order to defend its reality, therefore, the author must interpret the question of the "existence" of the dharmakāya as a question concerning the possibility of achieving the Buddhist goal of nirvāna. This he does by identifying the dharmakāya with the "fruit" of nirvāna.

You say that the dharmakāya doesn't exist because it is not perceived by the six senses. This idea is contrary to the truth. Why? Because one can realize nirvāna by means of upāya.² Reflection, invocation [of the Buddha's name], and correct practice are called upāya. Because of this upāya, the dharmakāya can be known and can be perceived.³

Thus, through proper practices, one can realize nirvāna, i.e., the dharmakāya, and thereby know its reality. This is the first reply, and a perfectly pragmatic one: you shall know the dharmakāya by its fruit, nirvāna.

If the dharmakāya were nothing (無), then all correct practices should be lost in emptiness. Taking right views as the foremost practice, and including in addition such good things as morality, concentration and wisdom, the correct practices which one cultivates are not empty (不空), and do not lack fruit. Because these correct practices do yield fruit, we know that the dharmakāya is not nothing.³

¹BNT, p. 803c.

²Skillful means, here, correct practice.

³BNT, p. 803c. ⁴Ibid., p. 804a.

The response then turns more logical. The question becomes focused: perhaps the idea that the dharmakāya is nothing originates from the knowledge that it is constituted by the cessation or absence of such things as the five skandhas, the kleśa, etc. The misconception that the absence of skandhas, etc., constitutes the fullness or the totality of nirvāṇa is dispatched.

If the absence (~~無~~) of the skandhas, etc. were nirvāṇa, then the skandhas of previous and subsequent lives, also nonexistent, should be nirvāṇa. Yet since the nonexistence of the skandhas, etc. of these two times are not nirvāṇa, we know not to seize the nonexistence of skandhas and call it nirvāṇa.¹

That is, the author wants there to be no doubt in anyone's mind regarding the concern raised for some by Nāgārjuna's dialectics: nirvāṇa is definitely not pure cessation and nothing but; it is certainly not pure non-being.

Moreover, according to another argument advanced by the author, to hold that nirvāṇa is the same as cessation or extinction, is to make the particular error of identifying the non-conditioned nirvāṇa with conditioned phenomena,

because cessation has, the same [as conditioned phenomena], the two characteristics of motion and suffering. That is, conditioned phenomena are burned by the fires of delusions such as desire and thus always scatter and move about, not abiding. Furthermore, being injured by birth, age, death, etc., they are constantly in suffering. . . . This death is identical to extinction, and extinction is [a matter of being] conditioned. . . . You theorize that what is most

¹Ibid.

still is moving, and what is most blissful is suffering. This is why it is contrary [to the truth].¹

In other words, nirvāṇa cannot be simply extinction, since extinction is only one factor in the whole cyclical "movement" of birth-age-death which constitutes the nature of all conditioned things. As such, it implies inherent suffering. However, the nature of nirvāṇa (and here the author begins to tell us something of it) is just the opposite of what the theory would indicate: it is the most still, rather than "moving" (i.e., rather than changing through time); it is the most blissful, rather than suffering.

After more of this kind of reasoning, the questioner is made to show some signs of impatience, asking, "if we cannot take the 'unborn' as nirvāṇa, why did the Buddha say that the 'unborn,' the 'extinct' is nirvāṇa?"² The reply is that that sort of teaching was a matter of speaking of the "fruit" or effect (nirvāṇa) from within the purview of the cause, cessation. "Why then does the fruit bear the name of the cause, instead of directly grasping the essence of the fruit itself and thus naming it?"³ Here is a question that all teachers of religion have heard. The author of the present text answers in the time-honored fashion: because conceptually it is so subtle. And how is this known?

Because the great sages do not enjoy expounding the Dharma; because it is the knowledge of noble, indiscriminating wisdom; because the great teachers,

¹Ibid., p. 804c. ²Ibid., p. 805a. ³Ibid., p. 805a-b.

seeing the extreme subtlety of nirvāṇa, and seeing the basic nature of sentient beings, [realized] the one was not compatible with the other. This is why the Buddha's mind (佛心) turned toward stillness, toward entering nirvāṇa. He did not want to preach the Dharma.¹

Again, the teaching here is that nirvāṇa is more than cessation. We find here, in effect, an explanation for the use of phrases making nirvāṇa appear to be cessation or extinction. Here is the rationale behind the use of what is essentially a via negativa approach. The nature of the Dharma, of nirvāṇa itself, is difficult to speak of because it is known by non-dualistic wisdom. People's aptitudes, moreover, are not particularly sharp. The prospect does not entice the would-be teacher--even the Buddha.²

After being told that nirvāṇa is not just cessation, we are gradually led to a discussion of nirvāṇa in quite positive terms.

Because it abides eternally, apart from nirvāṇa there is nothing. By virtue of the really existent (實有) and eternally abiding nirvāṇa, one attains liberation by relying on upāya, and thus training in the Way is not an empty error. Therefore, there being no time before there is nirvāṇa, we know that it abides eternally, surpassing such marks as form, etc. and consequently we say it is not form. Because it is not separate from the purity, etc. of the

¹Ibid., p. 805b.

²It is valuable to note in passing one of the rare uses of the term hsin ("mind") in this text. In its present context, it is clear that it carries no substantial, static, or dualistic overtones. In fact, the term "mind" could be dropped from the sentence entirely without any change in the meaning of the sentence; that is, the phrase could be rendered, "this is why the Buddha turned toward stillness. . . ." Thus, the term "mind" here carries no meaning.

form mark,¹ we say it is not non-form. It is the great functioning (大功用) obtained by non-discriminative wisdom. Therefore, we say it truly exists (真有), and its cause transcends the world (出世). It is the Way, taken to its culmination by unremitting zeal. Since it is what the Buddha attained, we know it really exists (實有). As the sūtra says, 'Bhikṣus, this Dharma really exists. It is unborn and does not arise. It is not made and is unconditioned (無為). Therefore know that nirvāna really and eternally abides.'² 'This Dharma' is the Tathāgata's transformation of the basis. This is why, finally, it is named 'all-embracing'; it is also called 'union.'³

The most immediately obvious feature of this passage is its portrayal of nirvāna (and therefore of dharmakāya and parāvṛtti-āśraya) in strongly positive terms. Its eternity and reality, moreover, validate the practice of the Buddha Way. It is noteworthy that these positive qualities are attested of the practice and realization of the Way rather than attributed to the Buddha. What this text doesn't do in its discussion of the dharmakāya, that is, and what one might have expected on the basis of the Ratna, and the Śrīmālādevī, for example, is glorify the Buddha. There is no mention here of the identification of the Buddha with the Dharma, which ordinarily constitutes the basis meaning of the term dharmakāya. Rather, it is as if the Buddha is dropped, and we have a discussion purely of the Dharma, the Truth. However, since this entire discussion

¹Lakṣaṇa--a distinctive property.

²I have not been able to locate the source of this quotation.

³BNT, p. 805c.

takes place within the context of Buddha nature, "Truth" is linked with the realization of Truth. We know it exists, since it is a fact that people do attain liberation. Thus the positive qualities of nirvāna are both justified by and justification of Buddhist practice.

There follows a rather śūnyavāda-like passage where it is stated that nirvāna is neither form nor non-form, but this is done with a twist peculiar to tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature thought. That it is not form is clear enough, but that it is not non-form is due to its identity with purity and the like qualities of form. Where in śūnyavāda thought would one find a reference to the purity of form? Yet this is characteristic of tathāgatagarbha thought with its doctrine of the unreality, i.e., the real nonexistence, of all defilements, of anything which might besmirch the purity of what is. Since all impurities, all defilements are unreal, what is, form, is simply thus, with nothing to mar its Thusness; hence, its unity with nirvāna. The important point in the present context is that the positive language associated with nirvāna is extended here to cover ordinary reality as well. It is not that nirvāna is emptiness and hence so is ordinary reality. Rather, nirvāna is purity and hence so is ordinary reality. The affirmative stance of the Buddha nature position is all-embracing.

A most revealing passage follows, in which nirvāna is identified with the "great functioning" obtained by nondiscriminative wisdom. This "functioning" is literally yung

(用), acting or doing, i.e., functioning, plus kung (功), achieving. Because this is identified with nirvāna, it is evident that what is achieved is nirvāna, or better, that nirvāna is the achieving itself. Thus, the active nature of nirvāna is revealed. This stands to reason, since nirvāna is but the final movement in the active parāvṛtti-āśraya process. Thus this passage manifests not only the positive qualities associated with Buddha nature via nirvāna, but its active nature as well.

A third ubiquitous theme in Buddha nature thought, subject-object nondualism, is also apparent in this passage. It is said that the cause of nirvāna transcends the world, but this is in the sense that its cause is nondiscriminative wisdom.¹ Here is a glimpse of the nondualism of this text: this world (世) is identified with discriminative thought. That is, "world" is not purely objective and "wisdom" purely subjective. Rather, the two are identified in that "this world" may be taken to be the lived world, i.e., the world as we live in it, the world as we make it with our discriminating thought. Thus, nondiscriminative wisdom "transcends" the world inasmuch as it transcends discriminative thought. The latter transcendence is a judgment

¹As for the statements that nirvāna is unborn, abides eternally, and especially the statement that apart from nirvāna there could not be a single thing, these are not to be taken as implying any substantial, metaphysical ground of being which could be identified with nirvāna. Rather, they simply indicate the noncontingent nature of nirvāna and its identity with Thusness.

based on experience; the former transcendence simply re-states this.

Again, nirvāṇa is identified with the Way, with the Buddha Way fulfilled. This reinforces the above understanding of the "transcendent" cause of nirvāṇa, since the fulfillment of the Buddha Way is surely that which is attained by non-discriminative wisdom. It also confirms in a most direct manner our view of nirvāṇa as the culminating movement in the self-transformative process (parāvṛtti-āśraya) of Buddhist practice and confirms it in such a way as to make clear that nirvāṇa is still part of that Buddha Way.

At the end of the passage, the author identifies nirvāṇa with the "Tathāgata's transformation of the basis." Thus he states in yet another way that nirvāṇa is but the culmination of Buddhist practice, the transformed "basis." And what is this basis? As shown above, its basic Yogācāra meaning is the ālayavijñāna, but for the author of the BNT, it means, of course, the person.

As noted earlier, it is the transformation of the basis, this act, which is the "purity of the original [Buddha] nature."¹ Thus, the transformation of the basis, nirvāṇa, the dharmakāya, all are finally related back to the Buddha nature. The concept of the Buddha nature is, on the basis of the information supplied by these various descriptive elements, finally a metaphor for the validity of the Buddha

¹Ibid., p. 801b.

Way, a justification for Buddhist practice. It functions to thus validate Buddhist practice not by serving as a substantial, metaphysical ground for the mechanics of release, nor by glorifying the figure of the Buddha per se (as does much of tathāgatagarbha literature) and thus enticing those attracted to practices of worship. Rather, Buddhist practice is validated by attesting to the desirability of the goal (this is the role of the dharmakāya part of the Buddha nature concept) and the capability of each person to reach that goal (this is the role of the Buddha nature concept as such). Notice, though, that in all respects the Buddha nature concept revolves around Buddhist practice. The latter is the final raison d'être of the Buddha nature concept. The fundamental message of Buddha nature thought is: practice, self-transformation, realization. Hence the conclusion that Buddha nature is of an utterly active, rather than a substantial character.

c. Non-Substantiality of Self and Mind

In arguing for an understanding of Buddha nature as active, part of our task must be to demonstrate that it does not represent a substantive self or mind of any kind. There are many passages in the BNT that demonstrate this. The first example is found in the BNT's treatment of what it calls the "own-nature" of Buddha nature. This is an obvious place to suspect the presence of a substantive self or mind. However, in the BNT the own-nature of Buddha nature is characterized by (a) resemblance to a wish-fulfilling

jewel (in that realization fulfills one's true desire), (b) non-differentiation (in that ordinary persons, saints and Buddhas are basically alike), and (c) the "moist" quality of compassion for all.¹ Here there is clearly no substantive self or mind. Rather, the first and third characteristics manifest the active or dynamic character of the Buddha nature, while the second simply attests to its universality.

Our second case concerns the notion of ātman pāramitā, or perfection of self. This is discussed in this text in the following manner. The author lists four kinds of person with four kinds of wrong views (or barriers to the realization of the truth). These four kinds of wrong views may be cured, respectively, by four practices. These corrective practices or cures, in turn, are considered "causes" of four "fruits." These four fruits are the four pāramitā or perfections, also given as the four Buddha virtues, which constitute the Buddha's dharmakāya (法身), or body of Dharma. The relationship of the four pāramitā to the persons, obstacles and "causes" or cures mentioned above may be presented in the form of a table.

¹Ibid., p. 796b.

<u>Person Type</u>	<u>Obstacle</u>	<u>Cure/Cause</u>	<u>Fruit</u> (<u>Pāramitā</u>)
1. <u>Icchantika</u>	disregard and hate of Mahāyāna	belief and pleasure in Mahāyāna	purity (śubha 淨)
2. Heterodox	adherence to self view	<u>prajñā</u>	self (ātman 我)
3. <u>Śrāvaka</u>	fear of <u>samsāra</u>	the <u>samādhi</u> which overcomes false emptiness	bliss (sukha 樂)
4. <u>Pratyekabuddha</u>	disregard for welfare of others	compassion (<u>karunā</u>)	eternity (nitya 常)

Of course, the elevation of the characteristics of purity, self, bliss and eternity to the level of the highest truth by the authors of the tathāgatagarbha literature was a radical departure--at least in terms of the language used--from the Buddhist tradition beginning with Śākyamuni and continuing through śūnyavāda. The tathāgatagarbha theorists' aim was, as ever, to reveal the positive qualities emergent from the practice of the Buddha Way.

The item of present concern is the perfection of self or ātman pāramitā. As there could hardly be a doctrine more central to the Buddha's teaching than anātman, absence of self, this new revelation of a perfection of self at the end of the Buddhist path, characteristic of the Buddha's dharmakāya itself, was, at the least, shocking to the contemporary Buddhist community. What was intended by it? Here is how the BNT explains this.

All heretics, in their various ways, conceive and grasp a self¹ in those things which lack self, namely the five skandhas,² e.g., form, etc. Yet these things such as form, etc. differ from what one grasps as the mark of self; therefore, they are eternally lacking in self. [However,] with the wisdom of Thusness (真如智), all Buddhas and bodhisattvas realize (至得) the perfection of not-self (anātman pāramitā) of all things. Since this perfection of not-self and that which is seen as the mark of not-self are not different, the Tathāgata says that this mark of the eternal not-self is the true, essential nature (真體性) of all things. Therefore it is said that the perfection of not-self is self. As the sūtra verse says,³

Already the twin emptiness is pure;
[In this] is realized the not-self,
the supreme self.

Since the Buddha realizes the pure
nature (性)

Not-self turns on itself (轉) and
becomes self.⁴

¹wo (我); used in the extra-Buddhist context for "I," "me," "my"; in the Buddhist context it renders ātman.

²The five are: rūpa - form, vedanā - sensation, samjñā - perception, saṃskāra - impulses (e.g., volition, dispositions, etc.) and vijñāna - consciousness.

³This verse actually closely parallels a verse in the Chinese version of the Ratna. and to my knowledge is not taken from any sūtra.

⁴It is interesting to compare this verse with the parallel verse in the Chinese translation of the Ratna. The latter reads as follows (as translated from Chiu Ching I Sheng Pao Hsing Lun [究竟一乘賢性論] T. 31, #1611, p. 829c):

Like the pure, true emptiness*
He realizes the supreme not-self (無我)
The realization by all Buddhas of
the pure nature (體)
Is called realization of the Great Self
(大身).

(*A variant reading gives "knowing the pure, true emptiness.")

The similarity of the two verses is obvious. What is of particular interest here is the term, "Great (or "Uncon-

All the heterodox perceive and grasp a self within the five skandhas. Overturning that attachment to self as vacuous and cultivating prajñāpāramitā, one realizes the supreme not-self which is identical to the self pāramitā. This is the fruit [of the practice of prajñāpāramitā] which you should know.¹

Clearly, the explanation is that the new teaching of self pāramitā is not in conflict with the old anātman teaching, but on the contrary is the fulfillment of it. The very anātman itself, when taken to its extreme, i.e., when perfected, is the self pāramitā. The teaching is logically parallel to the śūnyavāda teaching that emptiness or śūnya is the characteristic or the own-being (svabhāva) of all things. In śūnya dialectics this is a way of stating the apparent paradox that the own-being of all things is to lack own-being. In tathāgatagarbha literature this same

ditioned") Self" (大身). This is a somewhat unusual term, meaning literally "great body." In the present context it is evidently parallel to the supreme not-self, for which the ordinary term 無 "not" + 我 "I, ego," is used. Thus, we have a clear example of the confluence of the terms for "body" (身) and "I" or "ego" (我), here both referring to selfhood, in the loose sense of self as identity, the quality or qualities which makes a thing be what it is. That is, whereas in the BNT we have the not-self (無我) identified with the self (我), here in the Chinese translation of the Ratna. we have the not-self (無我) identified with the Great Self (大身) rendered with the term for "body."

¹BNT, p. 798c.

apparent paradox is taken as revelatory of the way things are, i.e., "thus." Hence this characteristic of not-self, when seen as revelatory of Thusness, turns on itself, or perhaps better, turns full circle (轉, to turn around, to revolve) and as characteristic of the way things are is indicated with the positive term "self," which may be taken as meaning "own-being," that is, the "own-being of Thusness."

This is simply a particular consequence of the dictum enunciated above, "Buddha nature is the Thusness revealed by the twin emptiness of man and things. . . . If one does not speak of Buddha nature, then one does not understand emptiness." Inasmuch as one is speaking of a nature (性), it adds nothing new to refer to that nature as "self," for this "self" must be understood in a very particular way. The heterodox are as wrong as ever in seeing a self in the changing phenomena of worldly flux. Yet the Buddhist who stops with characterizing this flux as empty doesn't really understand emptiness, unless he realizes that this emptiness is a characteristic of reality, and as such, possesses a positive nature. The perfection of the realization of emptiness, or the lack of self in things, is to realize to the fullest extent the qualities of this positive nature. Thus, though anātman and ātman pāramitā are logical equivalents, what is implied by the tathāgatagarbha authors is the inferiority of the former as a term indicative of the vitalizing potential of spiritual realization. That is, there is a soteriological difference, but no logical

difference, between the two terms. Thus ātman pāramitā is no more a substantive entity than is anātman, and the dharmakāya (or Buddha nature) represented by ātman pāramitā is consequently free of substantiality.

Our third case concerns the notion of pure mind and its substantiality or lack thereof. In this case, however, we must first attend to a discussion of two practices concerned with penetrating Thusness which forms the context for the statements on mind. Here we will see the interrelatedness of the teachings concerning Thusness, Buddhist practice, the true understanding of mind and the positive value readily ascribed to reality.

In reponse to the question, "What are seeing and knowing?" the following account is initiated. Seeing and knowing are not perceiving a thinker (想) and not perceiving objects of thought (境), but perceiving both as empty. In this way, the Tathāgata knows all things as equal, and hence knows all. This knowledge is realized by means of two practices, the practice of the Thusness Principle and the practice of the Thusness Limit. These are described as follows:

In the world there are only two things to be known, people and things. If one is able to penetrate these two [kinds of] emptiness, then this is to eternally realize the Thus, the True. For this reason, it is called the Thusness Principle. . . . Exhausting [the contents of] the source (源) and penetrating the nature (性), examining the source of the dharmadhātu--this is what is called the [Thusness] Limit.

The exposition continues:

In this way, people and things are, from the beginning, characterized by the utmost wondrousness (妙極), and by tranquillity. Since they are the nature [i.e., the Buddha nature], they neither increase nor decrease in number; they have nothing to do with either being or non-being. The quality of tranquillity indicates that the own-nature is pure, all delusions being, from the beginning, non-originated. Seeing the twin emptiness [of people and things] is what is called the quality of tranquillity. The own-nature, pure mind is called the Noble Truth of Path. The non-grasping of the pure mind in which delusion never is born is called the Noble Truth of Cessation.¹

This passage is begun with a nod toward śūnyavāda thought with the statement that both the subject and object of perception are empty. Then, in line with the "Thusness is what is revealed by emptiness" theme of this text, the author goes on to indicate something of the character of this knowledge which emerges from the knowledge of emptiness. Practicing the Principle of Thusness, one realizes the Thusness of all things. In the practice of the Thusness Limit, one exhausts this realization, plumbing it to its extreme limits. This latter practice includes a complete penetration of the "source" (a rather Chinese, specifically, Taoistic term), the Buddha nature, and the dharmadhātu (one speaks of the "source" of the dharmadhātu in the sense of its boundaries or "limits").

One also realizes that people and things are identical with the Buddha nature, i.e., that they are Thus. This quality of Thusness may be seen from two perspectives:

(1) from the ultimate standpoint, it is simply the utmost

¹Ibid., p. 802.

wondrousness, and (2) from the mundane standpoint, in which thoughts of delusion and non-delusion arise, one describes it as tranquil, i.e., pure, all delusions which might sully the purity being not real. These qualities are ascribed to persons and things as they are here and now, not as they might be. It is not that these things have to be "purified." Rather, if one sees correctly, one will realize that all things already are not only "tranquil" (this is a śūnyavāda-like insight), but also the utmost in wondrousness, marvelousness, excellence (all these qualities being conveyed by the term 妙). The latter insight is the kind of insight purely characteristic of Buddha nature thought.¹

¹ Ordinarily in tathāgatagarbha thought (for example, in the Ratna. and in the Śrīmālādevīsūtra) this kind of quality of wondrousness and the like is ascribed to the Buddha, the dharmakāya, etc. Of course, in those cases it is indirectly linked with sentient beings, since they "have" the tathāgatagarbha. However, here we see these qualities ascribed directly, and not only to persons, but also to things (法). One might hypothesize that here again we have an indication of Buddha nature thought going one slight step beyond tathāgatagarbha thought. We might recall in this connection the indication previously noted of the possible progression of Buddha nature beyond tathāgatagarbha thought, namely, the statement that all sentient beings "are" (rather than "have") the tathāgatagarbha. In the present passage we see that all sentient beings and all things, "are" the Buddha nature. The immediate identification of all things in the world with Buddha nature and with the associated qualities of wondrousness, marvelousness and excellence certainly might be taken as preparatory for the perspective expressed by certain indigenous Chinese schools wherein worldly phenomena in their immediate givenness are attributed ultimate status.

We now come to the crucial point of the passage for our present concern. This is found in the final two sentences: "The own-nature, pure mind is called the Noble Truth of Path. The non-grasping of the pure mind in which delusion never is born is called the Noble Truth of Cessation." Here we see one of the rare references in this text to something called "mind" (心, hsin). However, this "mind" is immediately identified, in the first sentence, with the fourth Noble Truth, Path. It may be recalled that this Truth of Path is equated with the "cause of separation from desire," i.e., the cause of realization. Since this cause of realization is linked, by the author, with the fourth Noble Truth, we may know that this "mind," as cause, is cause in the same way that bodhicitta was said to be cause, by representing effort, or the treading of the Path itself. Thus, this "mind," as cause, is the activity involved in realization. From the Buddha's day on, the Path is not a thing to be tread, but a way to behave, a compendium of attitudes, endeavors and behaviors. Hence the "mind" of this context is clearly not a substance in any sense, but a way of being, i.e., the way a person "is" who is on the Path.

This reading is confirmed by the second sentence, where the third Noble Truth, Cessation (earlier identified with "separation from desire") is identified, not with "mind" this time, but with what is equivalent, a certain action or disposition of the mind, negatively stated as "non-grasping." Thus, "cessation" is realized by the cessation

of a certain behavior, grasping. Again, the analysis centers on ways of being or acting, and this is characteristic. Furthermore, the terms "Thusness Principle" and "Thusness Limit" practice (修) are used interchangeably in this section with the terms "Thusness Principle" and "Thusness Limit" wisdom (智). Hence, the active nature of the former fully pertains to the latter. Therefore, the term "mind" (心), as a static base of subjectivity, is not characteristic of the perspective of this text, while the terms "practice" and "wisdom," with their active, non-substantial senses of ways of being and doing, are characteristic. Where "mind" does appear, it is to be interpreted in the latter sense, rather than as a substantive entity.

Finally, we may consider a passage in which the author discusses nine instances of prapañca, or false theorising, concerning the self (我, wo). These are all negated by the functioning of the dharmakāya. Thus the latter, rather than being a self, serves to deliver us from views of self and represents the absence of such views. The nine false theories concerning the self are as follows.

(1) The theory that a self pervades all five skandhas, indivisible and indistinguishable (不能分別) from those skandhas. (2) From among the five skandhas, grasping one skandha and taking it for the self. (3) Any theory that a self should exist, whether astika (eternalist) or nastika (nihilist). (4) The theory that the self will not be reborn. (5) The theory that in the realms of desire and form the self

is matter (रूप, rūpa). (6) The theory that in the formless realm the self is non-material, i.e., that which is mental. (7) The view that in all three realms (desire, form and the formless), with the exception of the heavens of no thought, all thought is the self. (8) The view that non-thought is self, i.e., the heaven of no thought, the grasses and trees, etc. are self. (9) The theory that the self is neither thought nor non-thought, but the extreme top of the head.

[A person who holds this ninth view] believes that thoughts are binding cords and nirvāṇa is a pit. If he doesn't rid himself of thought, liberation will not follow, because of the binding cords. But if he gets rid of all his thoughts, then he fears he will lose the self, as it will fall into the pit of nirvāṇa. Why? Because thoughts and self are mutually distinct. He manages neither to abandon thought nor not to abandon it. Since thoughts are binding cords, he desires to rid himself of them and therefore he considers [the self] not to be thought. But since he fears losing the self, he doesn't dare get rid of all his thoughts, hence [the self] is not non-thought.

The section soberly concludes:

Because [persons] with these variously deluded minds will not attain nirvāṇa, these [views] are called prapañca. When one gains insight into and realizes the dharmakāya, no further prapañca arises.¹

The last of the nine deluded views is quoted here at length as it well captures the pathos of the person suffering from the views he holds. Trapped by his notions of selfhood, he is unable to do this, unable to do that, unable to proceed at all and yet well aware that his present condition is intolerable. In each of the nine cases cited,

¹BNT, p. 803b-c.

the theory (or thought) is that which binds. The dharmakāya, once again, is the Noble Truth of Cessation with respect to any and all forms of prapañca. It severs present prapañca and prevents future prapañca from arising. Thus here, as in the earliest form of Buddhism, it is theories of self and attachment to self which bind us. Buddha nature thought too aims to release us from this bondage. The dharmakāya (or Buddha nature), as the Truth of Cessation, represents the active releasing from bondage which constitutes the Buddha Way. Here, then, we see as clearly as anywhere that the Buddha nature is not a substantive entity, not a self, but the realization of cessation of self. As such, it is of an active character.

3. Evaluation

In this sub-chapter we have presented the textual evidence for the non-substantial and active character of the Buddha nature. The explanation of the Buddha nature in terms of the transformation of the basis is the firmest textual ground for this interpretation. Buddha nature in this light is seen as representing Buddhist practice, understood as the transformation of the "basis," or person. Moreover, all terms of selfhood or mind which seem to indicate the presence of a substantial "basis" associated with Buddha nature are found on the contrary to represent an overcoming of views of self and the release from the bondage such views bring about. Dharmakāya or nirvāṇa stand for both the overcoming of these views of self and the culmination

of the self-transformative process (these being but two ways of speaking of the same thing). The positive language associated with these terms colors the entire presentation of Buddha nature thought in a similarly affirmative manner.

A simplified version of these teachings could be put as follows: "Both the problem and the solution are right in your own nature. You are deluded; you do not see reality aright, hence you suffer. However, that very reality which you constitute with your delusion and on which you blame your suffering, is not really in itself such that it renders suffering inevitable. In fact, it is wonderful, glorious. Furthermore, you have the ability to perceive it thus glorious, the way it is. What you have to do is to train yourself so that you no longer render this glorious realm into hell. Thus, yours is a wonderful nature, able to put an end to suffering and thereby reveal the excellence of what is."

This, our texts suggest, is the heart of the Buddha nature message. With its emphasis on practice, on the transformation of the "basis" (i.e., self transformation), and with its use of positive-sounding language (speaking of eternity, bliss, purity) in its description of ultimate reality--i.e., dharmakāya or nirvāna--its basic aim is to render a positive account of Buddhist practice, emphasizing its feasibility (the solution is in your own nature) and its desirability (true reality is glorious). As such, Buddha nature represents each person's potential by undertaking Buddhist practice to realize the goal of Buddhism. This is the active character of Buddha nature.

D. CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHA NATURE, II: SOTERIOLOGY

1. Introduction

In this sub-chapter, we will discuss three topics: (a) the man-Buddha relationship as explained in terms of Thusness and Buddha nature, (b) the Middle Path and (c) the trikāya. These separate topics all represent different facets of the soteriological import of Buddha nature. By "soteriology" I mean those teachings and practices relevant to ultimate liberation or realization. As the transformation of the basis, the Buddha nature represents ultimate liberation. The present three topics further clarify the nature of its soteriological functioning. The man-Buddha relationship as portrayed in the BNT defines the parameters of liberation in the sense that the Buddha is shown here as the supremely liberated man. The Middle Path displays something of the technique and practice of liberation as release from the extremes of thought and emotion that bind us. The trikāya, or three Buddha bodies, stand for two aspects of liberation, with the dharmakāya representing liberation as such and the sambhoga- and nirmāṇakāya the manifestation of liberation. The three sorts of soteriological dynamics discussed in this sub-chapter are all presented as characterizing Buddha nature.

2. Analysis

a. The Man-Buddha Relationship

A Buddhist text's depiction of the man-Buddha relationship offers significant insight into the soteriology of that text. The BNT is no exception in this regard. In the pre-

sent case, the portrayal of this relationship also clarifies the Buddha nature concept itself, since the latter is, to a large extent, a metaphor for this relationship. Here we are concerned with both of these functions.

The BNT typically distinguishes three categories of sentient beings: ordinary persons, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. One of the issues discussed in the text with respect to these three classes of beings is the manner in which Buddha nature can be said to pervade and/or be differentiated among them. First, the author discusses the "pervasive" (通) characteristic of Buddha nature.

The author says that all things are Thus (如如) and pure, and therefore Buddha nature pervades all things. There are specific meanings given for these characteristics. Thusness here incorporates a sense of nondualism: "The worldly Thusness (俗如) is the true Thusness (真如); the true Thusness is the worldly Thusness. The two Thusnesses, true and worldly, are not distinguished as different." There are two aspects of the meaning of "purity" as follows:

- (1) Thusness (如如) within the cause-- because the Thusness which has not yet attained the unblemished fruition stage is not itself blemished; and (2) the identity of the purity of cause and fruit--because within the cause there is unblemished purity and arriving at fruition there is unblemished purity.¹

¹BNT, p. 805c.

This is the meaning of the "pervasive characteristic of Buddha nature."

What we see, then, in both the Thusness and the purity characteristics is a basic non-differentiation between ordinary or "worldly" reality (also equivalent to the "causal stage) and "true" reality (also equivalent to the "purity" stage). In other words, there is but one Thusness and it pervades all things. In fact, Thusness pervading all things is the "pervasive" characteristic of Buddha nature. Hence, Thusness pervading is Buddha nature pervading.

Having established this unity, the author goes on to discuss the differentiation of Buddha nature among the three classes of sentient beings.

Within this Buddha nature three kinds of sentient beings are differentiated: (1) those who do not perceive and realize the Buddha nature--these are called ordinary persons; (2) those who do perceive and realize the Buddha nature--these are called wise men (聖人); (3) those whose realization reaches the ultimate purity of this principle--these are called the Thus Come (Tathāgata).¹

Clearly this differentiation of Buddha nature is not a gotra-type theory in which some persons are innately capable of realization and others are not. It was established in the discussion of the pervasiveness of Buddha nature that Buddha nature is omnipresent; all share in it and all share equally in Thusness. The present differentiation of Buddha nature among classes simply recognizes the reality of different stages of awareness among mankind and explains it

¹Ibid., pp. 805c - 806a.

straightforwardly in terms of the degree to which one has realized one's own Buddha nature.

Elsewhere, the text speaks of three "stages" rather than three classes of sentient beings, namely, (1) the impure, i.e., sentient beings, (2) the pure, i.e., bodhisattvas, and (3) the supremely pure, Buddhas. To clarify this, and to show that this does not conflict with the articulation of the universal permeation of Buddha nature, there follows a quotation¹ indicating that all three "stages" or realms are constituted by the dharmadhātu (the realm of Truth, equivalent to Thusness).² The realm of sentient beings, it states, is this dharmadhātu when covered by defilements and suffering transmigration. The realm of bodhisattvas is this same realm of sentient beings when they have become averse to the sufferings of samsāra and practice the bodhisattva path in reliance on the 84,000 doctrines of the Buddha and all pāramitā. Finally, the third stage (that of the Buddhas) is described as follows:

This realm of sentient beings, having cast off all kleśa coverings, gone beyond all suffering and rejected all defilements, being naturally and to the utmost degree cleansed and purified, being seen in accordance with the desires of all beings, having entered and dwelled in the place of supreme wondrousness, the place of all-

¹Attributed here to the SBS but in fact closely paralleling a statement in the NINDS. (Takemura, p. 149.)

²The Ratna. has dharmakāya where the BNT has dharmadhātu, perhaps indicating the interchangeability of the two.

knowledge, and the place of universal non-obstruction [or harmony], having arrived at incomparable ability, and having attained the great, spontaneous power of the Dharma King-- I call [beings who achieve this] 'Thus Come' (Tathāgata).¹

It is noteworthy, in comparing the texts, that the Ratna. three times evokes the dharmakāya when introducing each of the three stages, while the BNT refers only once to the dharmadhātu, namely, upon introducing the stage of sentient beings. Thereafter, the remaining two stages are introduced as variations of the sentient being "realm," rather than as manifestations of the Dharma "realm." In this way, it is made much more clear in the BNT than in the Ratna. that a Buddha is a sentient being. There are two main consequences of this maintenance of a continuity between ordinary beings and Buddha: (1) We see a rejection of the tendency found in much tathāgatagarbha literature to make the Buddha (and hence the Buddha's nature) qualitatively transcend ordinary beings, rendering him an appropriate object of worship. (2) It is made all the more clear that the Buddha's nature is the same as the nature of the ordinary person, in that the reverse is plainly stated--the Buddha is a kind of sentient being. The latter is an inspiration to practice for the ordinary person who is told that he too can become Buddha. The two points are clearly two sides of the same coin, the coin being the identity

¹BNT, p. 806b.

between the essential nature of Buddha and ordinary person (the difference being a matter of practice and its fruit of realization).¹

Thus we have learned that the Buddha nature pervades all sentient beings, that it is able to do so because of its identity with Thusness and that sentient beings are also essentially Thusness. Thusness, moreover, is the key to the nondual relationship of the ordinary world and "true reality." There is a parallel structure in the man-Buddha and ordinary reality - "true reality" relationships, with Thusness as the key to both. Therefore, although the Buddha nature concept might be taken at first to be of purely soteriological import, it is evident that ontology is also involved here. This is because Thusness is both ontological and soteriological and as such is the key to the soteriological dynamics involved in the Buddha nature concept.

b. The Middle Path

Buddha nature is, as we have seen, identified with the dharmakāya. This identification, as shown above, indicates that one of the ways in which the soteriological function of the Buddha nature may be understood is as "separation from extremes." The extremes in question are extremes of thought, emotion and practice. Buddha nature, or dharmakāya, repre-

¹Thus again we see a difference in tenor between the tathāgatagarbha literature and this text espousing a doctrine based on the Buddha nature concept.

sents the liberated position of freedom from these extremes. Here we see the Buddha nature teaching at work; we see how it should function when put into practice with the aim of overcoming the delusions ("extremes") of the practitioner. Here, then, is Buddha nature theory's soteriology.

This soteriological functioning is explicitly related to the doctrine of the Middle Path and the section is introduced with the remark, "as there are six sorts of Middle Path, [the dharmakāya] removes itself from six pairs of extremes."¹ In other words, the dharmakāya, or Buddha nature, represents the Middle Path. As the Middle Path did classically, so now it represents the cure for humanity's suffering. There are six examples which demonstrate this soteriological functioning.

The first example illustrating separation from the two extremes is concerned with destructibility and absolute destruction.

There are those who say all things are ultimately destructible (可滅); this is one extreme. Calling absolute destruction (滅盡) 'emptiness' is the other extreme. Grasping onto these two extremes creates fear. Therefore, in order to break the attachment to these two extremes, Buddha taught that since all things do not exist (不有), it is not the case that they are destructible. Since they are not non-existent (不無), it is not the case that they are indestructible. Being neither destructible nor indestructible is called the Middle Path.²

¹Ibid., p. 809a. ²Ibid.

The section continues with the author saying that it is in order to rid us of these fears that the Buddha, through his skillful means (upāya), refers to all things as "empty." To illustrate this point, there is added a quotation from a sūtra,¹ the end of which, and then the BNT's author's comment on which, read:

'All things are by upāya spoken of as empty. If you fear this emptiness, then why don't you fear all things? If you love (惜) all things, then why don't you love this emptiness?' [Comment] Question: What meaning does this sūtra express? Answer: It shows that the reason why things are said to be empty is because the original nature of all things is not 'being' (有). It is not the case that it is in connection with the destruction of things that emptiness comes to be obtained. Therefore, there is nothing to fear in the nature of emptiness. This is what is called 'separation from destructibility and absolute destruction.' These extremes reveal that the Middle Path has nothing to do with either the destroyer (能滅) or the destroyed (所滅).²

In this first example, the dharmakāya (or Buddha nature) is indicated to be emptiness properly understood as negating the two extremes of being and non-being. Moreover, the practical implications of the emptiness teaching are emphasized. Emptiness is upāya, taught because of the Buddha's compassion in order to relieve people's fears of the inevitable destruction of all phenomena. Yet it is recognized that the emptiness teaching itself, though the only cure for this

¹ Referred to as 寶頂經 but apparently meaning 寶積經. (Takemura, p. 157.)

² BNT, p. 809a-b.

fear, may engender fear in those who fail to rightly comprehend it. Thus, the two extremes--the disease and the cure, the resisting of the nature of life and the right diagnosis of the nature of life--may each engender fear when seen through deluded eyes. The dharmakāya, as the right understanding manifested in the emptiness teaching, overcomes these fears.

The second example, concerning fear and the fearsome, echoes several of these themes.

Believing that the six sense-objects such as form, etc. which arise from the discriminating nature really are suffering is one extreme that creates a fearful mind. The other extreme which produces fear is to believe that it is in the grasping of the discriminating nature by the relative nature that there is real suffering. In order to do away with these two extreme views, and desiring to manifest the Middle Path, the Buddha created the parable of the artist:¹ 'Kāśyapa, suppose there is an artist who draws a picture of a demon (a rākṣasa), and, since the picture is very frightening, he himself becomes frightened upon looking at it and turns his face. He does not dare to look at it and is stupid and confounded. Just so, Kasyapa, is the ordinary person who, because of the sense-objects of form, etc. which he himself creates, revolves in samsāra and in this way is unable to penetrate the Thusness-Reality Principle (如實道理).'² [Comment] What does this parable reveal? It shows that the sense-objects of form, etc. are not truly existent (實有) but are only made by false discrimination. These people are like the artist who himself discriminated and made the frightening picture of the demon, and yet seeing it was still afraid. They themselves are within emptiness (於空中), yet they still give rise to fear.²

¹See note 1, p. 129.

²BNT, p. 809b.

There is a comment on this passage in the text which clarifies this example: "If you don't understand the two natures--the discriminating and the relative--but grasp on to them as really existing, then you suffer pollution."¹ While the first example addressed itself to misunderstandings held by Hīnayānists, this example is addressed to the Mahāyāna, or to those who might misunderstand this particular Yogācāra teaching. Clearly, neither of the two natures is "real," i.e., in any substantial or inevitable sense. These natures, and the suffering associated with them, are of our own making and, the clear implication is, of our own unmaking. The idea here is to emphasize that the Yogācāra teachings only explain the functioning of delusion and suffering, they do not by any means say "this is reality." In inferring from the teachings that suffering "is reality," one needlessly frightens oneself. The dharmakāya, as manifested in this example, would be the right understanding of these teachings concerning the two natures and the undoing of the fear produced by wrong understanding. This is its soteriological function; it also indicates the non-duality of the feared object and the fearing subject.

The third example concerns the object which is grasped and the mind which grasps, that is, "discriminating the graspable [i.e., the grasped] and the grasper and considering them to really exist."

¹Ibid.

In a sūtra, the Buddha uses a magician as an illustration to draw us away from these two extremes.¹ 'Kāśyapa, it is like a magician who conjures magical images. The tigers, etc. which he makes, turn around and devour the magician. Kāśyapa, the bhikṣu's contemplative practice is like this. In accordance with it, he contemplates an object as only a manifestation of emptiness, [thinking] in reality there is nothing which exists; it is false and nothing real.' [Comment] How can one escape the extremes [of grasped and grasper]? By relying on the manovijñāna² to create consciousness-only wisdom. Consciousness-only wisdom (唯識智) is the wisdom [constituted by the understanding that] all sense data [gūṇa] lack own-nature. When this consciousness-only wisdom is perfected, it turns around and extinguishes its own root, viz., manovijñāna. How is this? Since the sense data lack own-being, manovijñāna is not produced. With the manovijñāna destroyed, consciousness-only wisdom is like the magical tiger. . . . As Āryadeva says in verse, Throughout the three realms,³ the origin of manovijñāna Is always to be found in sense data. When one perceives that sense data have no own-being Existing seeds are naturally extinguished.⁴

In this example, we see plainly manifest the joining of Yogācāra doctrine with tathāgatagarbha thought character-

¹See note 1, p. 129.

²In Yogācāra thought, the sixth consciousness, that which collects the sense data and brings them to the level of conceptualization.

³E.g., the realms of desire, form and non-form. There are several definitions. Soothill and Hodous, p. 68a.

⁴BNT, p. 809b-c.

istic of the BNT's author. The point of the example is to demonstrate the nonduality of the grasped "object" and the grasping "mind," and the argument closely adheres to Yogācāra doctrine. In this example, unlike the previous one, the parable illustrates correct practice. In Yogācāra terms, one should practice so as to realize that all sense data are inherently unreal, i.e., lacking in any nature of their own, since they are produced by the mind. However, the mind likewise is produced by the sense data. If there were no sense data "objects," there would be no cognizing of sense data and hence, immediately, no cognizer.

It is clear that with sense data as its cause, the manovijñāna consists totally in cognizing activity. That is: no sense data, no cognizing; no cognizing, no cognizer. Hence, the manovijñāna-sense data relationship is mutually causative; eliminate one and the other disappears. The name "consciousness-only" as applied to such a theory is somewhat misleading. Though it is appropriate inasmuch as the sense data "objects" lack own-being and hence are unreal, or do not exist, the basic teaching is that the cognizer and the cognized are interrelated even to the extent of being mutually dependent. They arise and disappear together. Hence, "consciousness-only" does not mean simply "consciousness--yes, objects--no" (and certainly not "mind--yes, matter--no") but rather, it implies "cognition only" or "cognizing only," with both "consciousness" qua mind and sense data or objects of consciousness negated.

This is basic Yogācāra doctrine. In its present context, and as an illustration of dharmakāya, it indicates several things. (1) It manifests the nonduality of cognizer and cognized, or grasper and grasped. (2) It shows the basically active nature of dharmakāya; i.e., there is no "mind" here, but certain kinds of cognitions and wisdom. In this context, "consciousness-only wisdom" may in particular be seen as an illustration of dharmakāya, in that this wisdom is a special kind of act, a realization of the nature of things, which in turn has certain practical consequences. (3) The practical consequences of "consciousness-only wisdom" seem to constitute a kind of "transformation of the basis" (parāvṛtti-āśraya), the "basis" here being manovijñāna, and the "transformation" being the elimination of the basis. To the extent that manovijñāna is the consciousness in which conceptualization appears, its elimination means the elimination of delusion. Thus, as an illustration of dharmakāya, and hence of Buddha nature, we see again in this example an emphasis on the teaching that Buddha nature means the practice (or engagement in the activity) of becoming Buddha. This is the soteriological functioning here.

With the fourth example, we move into a discussion of pairs of opposites as illustrations of the separation from extremes. In this case, the opposites discussed are the false (邪) and the correct (正), and these are taken to be two equally erroneous, one-sided extremes.

The 'correct' is distinguished as the true contemplative practice of the Stage of Perception.¹ Not yet to have thus perceived is the 'false.' To escape these extremes, take the parable of wood starting a fire. As it says in the Sūtra,² 'Kāśyapa, it is like two pieces of wood being rubbed together and starting a fire. When the fire is produced, it turns around and consumes the wood. In this way, the "correct" aspect of the true contemplative practice plus the curing of the "false" aspect produce the root of noble wisdom. When the root of wisdom is perfected, it turns around and does away with the discriminated pair, "false" and "correct.'" [Comment] In this simile, the fire, being produced, turns around and consumes the two pieces of wood. When the two pieces of wood are consumed, the fire also has no basis. 'False' and 'correct' are not two, and therefore we speak of the Middle Path.³

The parable would seem to have been extended beyond its limits in the author's final remarks. Does he mean to say that, like the fire, wisdom "goes out" or "is extinguished" when the two extremes of "false" and "correct" are consumed? Apparently not; I judge that his intention was only to conjure up certain images, viz.: (1) wisdom, like nirvāna, may perhaps be referred to as "blown out" (as nirvāna is compared to a flame which is extinguished), with the question of its nature after being "blown out" remaining unanswered; (2) wisdom is often referred to as the stage in which the "fires of passion" have been extinguished; (3) wisdom, as unconditioned, would be said to have no basis (無依).

¹The Stage of Perception (通達位) is the first of five stages according to the Fa-hsiang (Chinese Yogācāra) school. The Wei Shih Lun says this is the "stage in which all bodhisattvas dwell in perceiving the Way." Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, p. 1950.

²See note 1, p. 129. ³BNT, p. 809c.

Beyond this, the main point of this example would seem to be the soteriological implications of the nonduality of "false" and "correct" as realized in the wisdom of the Middle Path. It is not that in this case wisdom is the mean between the "false" and the "correct." Rather, the point seems to be, in line with the Buddha nature concept informing this text, that the "false" is not radically distinct from the "correct," but is the same "correctness" not yet completely "cured." Thus, the "correct" is identified with a certain stage of practice, and the "false" is simply the stage of practice, if you will, preparatory to this "correct" stage. It is to be noted, though, that this "correct" stage is still an early one in the bodhisattva's career. Thus, might it not be said that this "correct" stage is itself not yet fully cured? It is evidently the author's contention that the "correct" and the "false" are in this way of one nature, and that wisdom itself shares this nature inasmuch as its roots are implanted in both. Hence, there is no firm line to be drawn, either between the "correct" and the "false," or between the "correct-false" and "wisdom." Note also that there is no mention here of any kleśa or defilements to be sloughed off the tathāgata-garbha. Nothing is to be subtracted from the final sum here; the "false" is as integral a part of the picture as anything. Perhaps here is another small indication of the difference between tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature thought.

The fifth example is entitled, "the extremes of 'producing' (有作) and 'not producing' (無作)" and is directly linked with matters of practicing the Buddha Way.

Producing: someone gets a notion and says, 'I wish to cultivate wisdom (智慧). Certainly I must first produce (作) a thought, and later the matter will be completed.' Not producing: someone gets a notion and says, 'wisdom is not an activity (事) and not an ability (能). Why? Because discernment (解) and delusion are contradictories; that is, when discernment arises, delusion naturally disappears. It is not the case that discernment actively removes [defilement]. Therefore, I say wisdom is neither an activity nor an ability.' In order to avoid these extremes there is established the parable of the oil lamp. As it says in the Sūtra,¹ 'Kāśyapa, it is like a burning lamp: the lamp-light having arisen, darkness is extinguished. And yet although that lamplight did not produce (作) the thought, "I am able to extinguish the darkness; the darkness is extinguished because of me," it is certainly because the light arose that the darkness was extinguished. Therefore, although the lamplight does not produce a thought, it is not true that there is no activity or ability. Wisdom is also thus. It does not produce the thought, "I am able to extinguish delusion," and yet it is also true that it is because wisdom arises that delusion is extinguished. Therefore, know that it is not true that wisdom is neither activity nor ability.' [Comment] If one says he produces the thought, "I am able to extinguish delusions," this is called "increasing,"² and is the extreme of "producing" (有作). If one says, "when wisdom arises, ignorance self-destructs--and not because of wisdom," this is called "decreasing,"² and is the extreme of not producing (無作). In order to avoid these extremes, we say that the arising of wisdom does not produce thought. As for [wisdom] producing

¹See note 1, p. 129.

²Compare this to the title and theme of the No Increase, No Decrease Sūtra.

or not producing, it is not the case that it produces [thought]; therefore there is no increase. Neither is it the case that it doesn't produce [change]; therefore there is no decrease. This is called the Middle Path.¹

This is an interesting section, directly manifesting the soteriological function of the Buddha nature and confirming the thesis that Buddha nature essentially has to do with the practice of the Buddha Way and with action. It should first be noted that the terms yu tso (有作) and wu tso (無作), translated as "producing" and "not producing," respectively, have other meanings pertinent to the present context. Thus yu tso means, "functioning, effective; phenomenal, the processes resulting from the law of karma," and wu tso, "not creating; uncreated; not doing; inactive, physically or mentally. . . ." ²

The author's intent with this example appears to be to establish that the dharmakāya (or Buddha nature) is active and does play a part in effecting change (in not being wu tso) but that its activity does not take place within the scope of karmic laws of cause and effect (in not being yu tso). Thus, in addition to reading yu tso as "producing," it can also be read "produced," and in negating this extreme, the author is indicating that wisdom is non-phenomenal, i.e., non-samsaric, since it is that which cuts through the karmic linkage of cause and effect, rather than being

¹BNT, p. 809c.

²Soothill and Hodous, p. 213a and p. 377b.

subsumed by it.

Yet it is equally important, one is tempted to say more important given the present text, for the author to establish that wisdom is an activity or functioning (事), i.e., a doing, and that it does have the ability or power (能) to effect change. It is not fortuitous that wisdom arising, defilements are extinguished; it is definitely because of wisdom's presence that defilements are undone. Yet the author hesitates to speak of this in a directly causal fashion, as causation is the law of samsāra and karma, while wisdom is precisely the breaking of this bondage. Thus the author states directly (though in negative language) that wisdom is an activity and an ability; that is, it is an activity or a doing that is effective. This certainly demonstrates that the dharmakāya, and hence Buddha nature, is by its very nature an activity. And of course this activity is the particular kind of activity appropriate to the realization or practicing of the Buddha Way, eliminating defilements (so that what is may be seen as it is).

The author's mention of the terms "increasing" and "decreasing" is interesting in its evoking the No Increase, No Decrease Sūtra. In the latter, as we shall see, the issue of increasing and decreasing has to do with the status of individuals transmigrating and attaining nirvāṇa, which is clearly not the case here. Rather, the point which the BNT's author seems to be making is that to think in terms of "increasing" or "producing" is to think in karmic or

samsaric terms which do not apply to wisdom, and to think in terms of "not producing" is a "decreasing" or nihilistic kind of thought, inasmuch as the efficacy of the Buddha Way is denied--and this too clearly is inappropriate in the context of understanding the nature of wisdom or the functioning of Buddha nature. The effective and active functioning of the Buddha Way within, though not subject to, samsāra is the "Middle Path" with which the author leaves us. His insistence on the soteriologically active nature of dharmakāya or Buddha nature is to be well noted.

The sixth and final example likewise is addressed to certain views which threaten the validity of Buddhist practice. The topic is a refutation of the two extreme views that (1) the path "does not come to be born" (不生), i.e., the path, or liberation, will never be attained, and (2) the path and delusions have always co-existed (同生), with the consequence that the path is unable to vanquish delusion.

(1) First is the view that [the path] is not born. That is, an ordinary person is in the midst of the interconnections of cause and effect; defilements eternally arise, and the path of liberation is not yet born. Because of the hindrance of delusion, the future will also be thus. Therefore we know there is no liberation. This is the first extreme.

(2) Second is the view [that path and delusion] are produced together. That is, all delusion aboriginally exists from the beginningless past. If the path which opposes and cures delusion arose simultaneously with delusion, it should be able to destroy delusion. If the path were born first, the power of this path must be weak, as it cannot destroy delusion. Therefore, we know that for eternity there is no liberation. In order to avoid these

two extremes, the Buddha spoke the second parable of the lamp.¹ 'Kāśyapa, it is like a cave in a dark, narrow mountain pass within which one comes to a hut, within which is a shrine room which for countless thousands of years has been filled with darkness, there never having been someone with a burning lamp illuminating it. Suppose someone burns a lamp within it. Can this be done?' 'It can.' 'Kāśyapa, does the darkness inside think to itself, "I have been here a long time; I will not now take leave of this darkness." Can it think this?' 'It cannot, World Honored One. Why? The lamplight is already there, it is impossible for the darkness not to go.' 'Kāśyapa, defilements and karma are also thus. For innumerable aeons they have been intertwined with sentient beings. But if one is able to produce one thought of true reflection, then the defilements which have endured for aeons will all be self-extinguished. Kāśyapa, the lamplight stands for noble, indiscriminative wisdom. The darkness stands for sentient beings' defilements and karma.' [Comment] The view that the path does not obtain birth is refuted with this parable. Why? Since the path depends on causes and conditions in order to be born, if the causes and conditions have not yet come together, the path won't obtain birth. But if the causes and conditions are present, then the path will be born. The illustration of the darkness being extinguished refutes the view that defilements and the path arise together, since it is only after the burning lamp is present that the darkness is extinguished. Since the darkness is the weak factor it can be extinguished.²

This final example once again appears to be intended to validate Buddhist practice. Two threats to this validity are considered: (1) the view that one is so enmeshed in karma and defilements that the future effects of one's past and present actions must inexorably continue to bear fruit, thus leaving one eternally ensnared by the succession of cause and effect according to karmic law; and (2) the view

¹See note 1, p. 129.

²BNT, p. 809c-810a.

that defilements and the path to liberation (or the potential for liberation) have co-existed throughout eternity, and if the path were able to free one from delusion, it would have happened immediately (or at least already), but since this has not occurred, there must in fact be no efficacy in this so-called path.

The refutation of the first argument is in fact somewhat feeble, stating simply that when the proper conditions are present for the karmic chains to be broken, they will be broken. This argument, though feeble, is nothing if not an indication of the central importance of practice. The refutation of the second argument restates an argument presented above to the effect that the darkness (or defilement) does not simply disappear fortuitously, but only under certain specific conditions, here the presence of light (or the practice of the path). This clearly parallels the reply given to the first objection. In both cases, the author is stating in a rather indirect, yet uncompromising, manner: practice the Buddha Way and your objections will resolve themselves; in the absence of practice, the questions are insoluble. This again is the soteriology of the Buddha nature.

It should be noted that the response given in this final case, though clearly somewhat weak philosophically (in that it does not directly appeal to reason), is typical of the kind of response made in tathāgatagarbha literature whenever the question arises of how there can be such a thing as defilement. Given the teachings in the tathāgata-

garbha thought that the mind is basically pure, that defilements are not intrinsic to the nature of mind but adventitious and that they are unable really to sully the purity of the mind itself, it is somewhat difficult to respond philosophically to the demand to explain further how this defilement comes to be, what its nature is, and how exactly it relates to the "pure" mind. When these questions arise, for example, in the Śrīmālādevīsūtra, the response is blunt: only a Buddha can understand these things.¹ The implication there, as here, is straightforward: become a Buddha yourself (by practicing the Buddha Way) and you will find out. However, since in the present text the dharmakāya or Buddha nature is seen to stand for practice of the Buddha Way, it may not be inappropriate for the author to have made this response here.

It should be noted, though, that the objections raised by the "extreme" views to which the author responds in this section hover around this group of issues concerning, in effect, the problem of evil. Philosophically, here, as elsewhere in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature literature, the questions are evaded. However, perhaps the response made here is entirely in line with the approach taken by the

¹For example, see Diana Mary Paul, "A Prologomena to the Śrīmālādevī-Sūtra and the Tathāgatagarbha Theory: The Role of Women in Buddhism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974), pp. 263-4.

Buddha when he refused to answer a question, citing its lack of soteriological value or its unavoidably misleading nature. Certainly if this is the case, the most compassionate response, and most effective soteriologically, is directly to prod the questioner toward further practice.

c. The Trikāya

We have already seen the dharmakāya identified with the Buddha nature and discussed at length in several passages of the text. We now turn to look at the trikāya, the three Buddha bodies, in order to determine the soteriological function of all three. It is not only dharmakāya which is identified with the Buddha nature, all three kāya are so identified. The manner in which this identification is presented is instructive for our understanding of the soteriological meaning of the three kāya.

First, Buddha nature is divided into two "natures": the Buddha nature which dwells in the own nature (住自性性) and the emergent Buddha nature (引出性). It is said that the three Buddha bodies, dharmakāya, sambhogakāya (應身) and nirmānakāya (化身), "all become complete because of these two natures."¹ Thus, the trikāya, including the dharmakāya, are all logically subsumed under the Buddha nature. To be more specific, the dharmakāya is identified

¹BNT, p. 808b; cf. Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, pp. 302-3. The sambhogakāya is the "enjoyment" or "communal" body manifest in the pure Buddha lands and visible to advanced bodhisattvas. The sambhogakāya preaches most of the Mahāyāna sūtras. This body is a sort of intermediary between the dharmakāya and nirmānakāya. The latter is the "transformation" body in which the Buddha appears among ordinary persons.

with the Buddha nature which dwells in the own-nature, while the sambhoga- and nirmānakāya are identified with the emergent Buddha nature. Thus the dharmakāya represents what the Buddha nature is in itself, while the other two kāya represent what it is with respect to others, i.e., how it functions with respect to others.

On this basis, one might erroneously be led to expect that only the sambhoga- and nirmānakāya are significant soteriologically. This, however, is not the case. In fact, we have already seen something of the dharmakāya's soteriological functioning in the above section on the Middle Path, where the dharmakāya was presented as representing the Middle Path, the cure for humanity's suffering. This Middle Path nature, or "avoidance of extremes" is one of five characteristics ascribed the dharmakāya. The remaining four characteristics complete our understanding of the dharmakāya's soteriological functioning.

The first of these four characteristics is the characteristic of being unconditioned (無為相). This is due to its having nothing to do with the four marks of conditioned phenomena: birth, change, duration and destruction.¹ That is, it is empty of these marks. As we shall see in the following characteristic, this is because it is Thus, not because it is of a transcendent nature. Although this characteristic does not explicitly manifest any soteriologi-

¹BNT, p. 809a.

cal functioning, the unconditioned nature of dharmakāya does make possible such functioning as shown in its other characteristics.

The second characteristic of the dharmakāya is its being "neither the same nor different." This is explained in terms of people's theories concerning whether supreme and worldly truth are the same or different.

If the supreme and worldly truths are the same, then ordinary persons, upon perceiving worldly truth, should penetrate the supreme truth. But if they penetrated the supreme truth, they should be wise men [instead of ordinary men]. Therefore they don't perceive the supreme truth, and therefore the two truths are not one. If you say the two truths are different, then wise men, perceiving worldly truth, shouldn't penetrate supreme truth. But if they didn't penetrate supreme truth, they would be ordinary men. Therefore, wise men's perceiving [worldly truth] is not different [from their penetrating supreme truth]. Therefore, we know [the two truths] are neither the same nor different.¹

This second characteristic manifests the logic of the dharmakāya in a rather śūnyavāda-like manner. With respect to the variety of things, "when you consider the penetration of Thusness you can't say they're different, but because of worldly distinctions, you can't say they are the same."² Hence, the theme of this second characteristic is the ultimate harmony between Thusness and phenomenal reality. Since they are not different, they are ultimately

¹Ibid., p. 809a.

²Ibid. The word for "Thusness" here (眞) is the same term used to indicate "supreme truth" in the example.

interchangeable. Just as "form is emptiness and emptiness is form," so "Thusness is phenomena and phenomena are Thusness." However, since they are not the same, one is not reduced to the other, and each maintains its own reality, its own identity.

The example of the two truths broaches the implications of this logic for practice of the Buddha Way. The two truths (or, seeing things aright and seeing things through delusion) can't be simply identified--or why would there be any need of practice? Yet they also cannot ultimately be kept distinct, for the bodhisattva must act in and through the worldly reality of delusion. The dharmakāya, then, here manifests that worldly truth and supreme truth, phenomena and Thusness are interconnected in such a way that they logically cannot be said to be either the same or different. Practically, the consequence is that liberation is possible. This is the soteriological functioning of dharmakāya.

The third characteristic of dharmakāya is "separation from barriers."

There are three kinds of barrier: (1) the kleśa (defilement) barrier--the arhat who obtains the wisdom of liberation overcomes this barrier; (2) the dhyāna (meditation) barrier--in overcoming this barrier, arhats and pratyekabuddhas obtain complete liberation; (3) the all-wisdom barrier--this is what the bodhisattva path breaks through. By overcoming this barrier, they realize sambodhi (the Buddha's wisdom). In these three stages, the Tathāgata's dharmakāya

only possesses the three obstacles; it is not itself corrupted.¹

Here we again see the dharmakāya discussed in terms of practice and, especially, realization. The dharmakāya is constituted in the overcoming of various barriers or milestones of progress in the Buddha Way. At the first stage, the dharmakāya is constituted in overcoming defilement. At the second stage, we see a shift in the logic of the very concept of "barrier." As the second barrier is constituted by dhyāna, it is clear that this is not something undesirable or polluting (as kleśa), but the opposite. Hence "separating" from this barrier must be accomplished by fulfilling it. That is, it is on completing the dhyāna practice that one overcomes the dhyāna "barrier." Thus, it is not so much a barrier as a milestone. The same may be said of the third "barrier," all-wisdom. The "breaking through" of this barrier is equal to the fulfillment of the Buddha path, the realization of the Buddha wisdom. Thus, in all instances, the dharmakāya is constituted by the realization inherent in progressing on the Buddha Way. Furthermore, realization is only a matter of progressing in practice and nothing more. As the dharmakāya or Buddha nature is not corrupted in any of these stages of practice, neither is it purified in any essential way by realization. There is no change in nature on the Buddha path, only various stages of progress in coming to know one's nature. Again, this is the dharmakāya's

¹Ibid., p. 810a.

soteriological character.

The fourth and final characteristic of dharmakāya cited by the author is "the purity of the dharmakāyadhātu" (the dharma-body-realm).¹ What is this "purity" attributed here to the dharmakāyadhātu and invoked so often in this text in speaking of Buddha nature, dharmakāya, and the like? The author here fills out the meaning of this term figuratively, using four images--gold, water, space and bodhi (enlightenment), each of which is interpreted in four different ways. The explanation of the dharmakāyadhātu's purity, then, is as follows.

(1) The first four meanings are: (a) the dharmakāya is unchangeable like gold; (b) Thusness is pure like water; (c) supreme truth is attributeless like space, and (d) mahāparinirvāṇa manifests clarity like bodhi. The second four meanings are: (a) the supernatural powers are transformative like gold, (b) compassion is moist like water;² (c) own-nature [Buddha nature], like space, does not reject sentient beings; and (d) prajñā releases purity like bodhi. The third four meanings are: (a) the original purity is unpolluted like gold; (b) the superior path is cleansing like water; (c) liberation is non-binding like space; and (d) the fruit-essence is manifested like bodhi. The fourth

¹Note here the interchangeability of the terms for "body" and "realm." Up until now the characteristics under discussion have all been attributed to the dharmakāya (dharma-body). Now the term "realm" (dhātu) is appended to this, and without any apparent change in meaning.

²Though this may sound strange to some, moistness is commonly attributed to compassion in Buddhist texts. In addition to moisture, the term connotes fertility, enrichment, etc.

set of four meanings is: (a) the enjoyment nature is beneficial like gold; (b) the pure nature clarifies like water; (c) the eternal virtues are non-harmful like space; and (d) the meaning of 'self' (我) is 'non-attachment,' as in bodhi.¹

First notice the string of terms subsumed within the dharmakāyadhātu notion: dharmakāya, Thusness, supreme truth, mahāparinirvāna, supernatural powers, compassion, own-nature (or Buddha nature), prajñā, original purity, the superior path, liberation, the fruit-essence, the enjoyment nature, the pure nature, the eternal virtues, and the (true) meaning of "self." What is found here is a list of the various superlatives found in Buddhism or, otherwise put, a list of the fruits of realization, the rewards of the soteriological path. The "purity" in question would seem to consist in the absence of defilements in these fruits. Hence, there is no change (a source of suffering), no attributes (manifestations of ignorance), no binding or attachment. Rather, there is transformative power (the ability to act on behalf of others), the moistness of compassion, non-rejection of the plight of sentient beings in samsāra, etc. Thus, the two main characteristics of purity would seem to be the absence in oneself of any defilements and action on behalf of the liberation and welfare of others. This is none other than the realization and practice of the bodhisattva path, as manifest in prajñā and karuṇā (compassion). This is Buddhist soteriology par excellence.

Particularly noteworthy in the present instance is the statement, "the meaning of 'self' is 'non-attachment,' as

in bodhi." Here we see the transformed self of tathāgata-garbha/Buddha nature thought, the self at the end of the Buddhist path. Earlier in the BNT, "self" is listed as one of the four pāramitā,¹ and its meaning is given as "the perfection of not-self." In the present instance, the same kind of thinking is present. Why were all theories concerning the self rejected early in Buddhist thought? Because all the theories were considered wrong; people grasped something that was not self and called it "self." Subsequently there developed a "doctrine of not-self" out of what was originally purely a rejection of the various theories of self available at the time.² However, to transform this practice of rejection into a doctrine or theory concerning the non-existence of a self is to construct a philosophical theory just as graspable, when misunderstood, as any theory concerning what the self is.

For this reason, tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thinkers "suntatize" or negate the theory of not-self as well. What they end up with is an equation of the meaning of "self" and the practice or act of not grasping or non-attachment. Thus, the "perfection of self" consists in the act of non-

¹See p.

²Katsuro Nobushizu, "Yuishiki Shisō yorimitaru Garon." In Jiga to Muga, ed. Nakamura Hajime (Kyoto: Heirakujishoten, 1963), p. 553.

attachment.¹ In ontological language, this is expressed as "the perfection of not-self is self," epistemologically, as "the meaning of 'self' is 'non-attachment.'" As always in Buddhist thought, however, the ontological and epistemological categories overlap, and all are joined within the network of practice for soteriological purposes. Thus it is to be recalled that the apparently "ontological" expression is found within the context of a discussion of practice, and in fact the "perfection of self" is given as one of the fruits of practice. Hence, the perfection of not-self which is self is the self which is transformed by virtue of Buddhist practice culminating in realization, which latter element is inherently epistemological. It is by virtue of this epistemological power that the transformation of self occurs. Thus the self is the transformed person who no longer acts in a grasping or "attaching" manner. The self is also epistemologically empty, in that it is constituted by that which cannot be grasped in a conceptual sense. In terms of practice, the self is the "perfection of not-self," i.e., acting in a way so as not to grasp, not to be attached. This "practical self" subsumes or includes the transformative and epistemological senses of self. Hence, "the meaning of 'self,'" both epistemologically and in terms of self-transformation, "is non-attachment." Thus dharma-

¹Technically speaking, this is perhaps better expressed as the non-committal of certain acts (as of grasping). Yet it is still comprised of the propensity to behave in a non-attached manner.

kāya functions soteriologically as both the transformative power inherent in Buddhist practice and as the "perfection of not-self" to which this power belongs.

Upon completion of the discussion of the dharmakāya, the other two kāya are taken up. Given their identity with the "emergent nature" of Buddha nature, there can be no question of their soteriological status: the entire raison d'être of both sambhoga- and nirmāṇakāya is nothing but liberation, the liberation of others.

The sambhogakāya is treated first.

Because of the breadth and greatness of its influence and activities, this kāya has three basic virtues: great wisdom (prajñā), great meditation (samādhi) and great compassion (karuṇā).¹ The essential characteristic of great wisdom is non-discriminative knowledge (jñāna). The essential characteristic of great meditation is uncreated mentation (意), i.e., mentation which has left behind [the duality of] leaving [the world, i.e., saving oneself] and entering [the world, i.e., saving others].² The essential characteristic of great compassion is the ability to pluck [sentient beings] out [of suffering] and save them. If the mentation of sentient beings is to be caused to attain perfect fulfillment, three things are necessary: pleasure in the Dharma, the six super powers (abhijñā),³ and the giving of aid by plucking [sentient beings out of their suffering]. Thus great compassion plucks

¹Or unconditioned wisdom, meditation and compassion.

²These additions are tentative.

³The abilities to: see everything, hear everything, know the thoughts of others, know the previous lives of self and others, perform various wonders and know that the defilements are extinct. See Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932), pp. 106ff.

[sentient beings] out of the three evil paths of suffering¹ and causes men and devas to be established in great peace. Great concentration brings about the arising of faith and joy by the manifestation of the six super powers. Because it takes pleasure in the Dharma, wisdom realizes liberation. This is what is called the sambhogakāya.²

This is the entirety of the discussion of the sambhogakāya in the text. It is clearly discussed in terms of its soteriological functioning or activities. Thus, though it is characterized by three "qualities," these three qualities are introduced in terms of the great influence and activities of the sambhogakāya, i.e., in terms of their transformational efficacy. Thus, compassion is constituted in salvific activities, meditation in paranormal activities, and wisdom in the act of taking pleasure in the Dharma. So we see that sambhogakāya, like dharmakāya, reveals an essentially active nature, the acts naturally centering on salvation of self and others.

Next is the nirmānakāya.

Great compassion is its root, meditation is its transformation form, and wisdom gives it five kinds of ability: (1) it causes the arising of repugnance [concerning samsāra], (2) it causes one to enter the Noble Path, (3) it causes one to discard old attachments, (4) it brings about faith and joy in the great Dharma, and (5) it causes one to receive the mark of great bodhi. In the causal stage, these three great factors influence ["perfume"] Thusness in such a way that the great vow [to be a bodhisattva] is calmly established. Because of this vow, one will at

¹The hells, hungry ghosts and animals. Soothill and Hodous, p. 65.

²BNT, p. 810c.

a later time complete the path. Accordingly, the three bodies (kāya) perform acts (事) for the benefit of sentient beings.¹

Here we see a great similarity with the sambhogakāya. The same three basic qualities are listed (compassion, meditation and wisdom) and the soteriological functions or active nature of the kāya is clearly pronounced. There are fourteen acts performed for the benefit of sentient beings which are specifically mentioned, and these trace the most significant events in the life of the Buddha. Thus, the Buddha's life itself was a compassionate act, and it is in this historical person that the nirmānakāya is manifested.

We now come to a passage in which the eternity of the three kāya is treated. Here we see that this eternity is based upon the same soteriological functioning of the tri-kāya that we have noted above.

Furthermore, since these three bodies always perform acts of profit to the world, it is said that they abide eternally. This eternal abiding rests on ten kinds of cause and condition. . . . (1) They are eternal because of the boundlessness of causes and conditions. Having for innumerable aeons cast away body, life and property, they embrace the true Dharma. The true Dharma is boundless, inexhaustible, inextinguishable. In turn, this inexhaustible cause molds the inexhaustible fruit. The fruit is these same three bodies, and therefore we know they are eternal. (2) They are eternal because of the boundlessness of sentient beings. At the time [a bodhisattva] first gives rise to the thought of enlightenment, he takes the four great vows,² and gives rise to

¹Ibid., p. 810c.

²To save all innumerable sentient beings, to eradicate all delusions and passions, to penetrate the infinite Dharma or doctrine and to fulfill the Buddha Way.

the ten inexhaustible vows,¹ [saying] 'If sentient beings are inexhaustible, my vow [to save them] is inexhaustible; if sentient beings are exhausted [i.e., all saved] then my vow is exhausted.' Since sentient beings are inexhaustible, the nirmāṇakāya is eternally within the world, teaching sentient beings inexhaustibly. (3) They are eternal because of the boundlessness of great compassion (mahākaruṇā). Since all bodhi-sattvas have great compassion, they eternally act to save sentient beings. In their hearts there is no limit to giving aid. Long they abide in samsāra, not entering nirvāṇa. How much more is the Tathāgata with all his merits consummated eternally present in great compassion! Saving [all beings] with perpetual kindness--how could there be a limit to it? This is why we speak of eternity. (4) They are eternal because the four bases of super powers (ṛddhi-pāda)² are boundless. Those within the world who obtain the four bases of super powers are able to live long lives of forty lesser aeons. How much more can the master of great super powers, the Tathāgata, not abide then for a million aeons, freely living such a long life and widely delivering sentient beings. This is why we speak of eternity. (5) They are eternal because of the boundlessness of indiscriminative wisdom. Far beyond grasping samsāra

¹As spoken by Samantabhadra in the Hua-yen Sūtra, they are: (1) to worship all Buddhas, (2) to praise the Tathāgatas, (3) to perform pūja worship, (4) to repent and remove karmic hindrances, (5) to make all one's talents accord with the joyful and meritorious, (6) to turn the wheel of the Dharma (i.e., to preach the Dharma), (7) to purify all Buddha lands, (8) to always follow Buddhism, (9) to always make sentient beings prosper, and (10) to return one's merits for the good of all. Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, p. 2091. There are other versions. See Dayal, p. 66.

²These are four bases of super powers, developed by uniting intense concentration and effort with (1) desire, (2) energy, (3) thought, and (4) investigation. Soothill and Hodous, pp. 173b-174a. See Dayal, pp. 104ff.

and nirvāṇa as two, they are always united in the supreme truth. They are both unmoving [a characteristic of nirvāṇa] and not departing [from saṃsāra] and thus we know they are eternal. (6) They are eternal because they are always in samādhi. In the world there are those who, obtaining samādhi, are impervious to water, fire, embers, drowning, knives and arrows. How much more will the Tathāgata, constantly in samādhi, be incapable of suffering harm! This is why we speak of eternity. (7) They are eternal because they are serene and pure. Serenity is the Diamond Mind, able to do away with the dwelling place of ignorance, with the final thought [upon entering nirvāṇa], with impermanence and with suffering. Since there is no suffering, it is called 'serene.' As the Buddha fruit is completely manifested, it is called 'pure.' Since this is the path of liberation, it is called 'eternal.' (8) They are eternal because while acting within the world, the eight essential things¹ are not sullied. Although the Buddha body returns to [the realm of those who have] not yet completed the path and is joined with saṃsāra, he is not sullied by defilements nor influenced by false thought. This is why we say he dwells eternally. (9) They are eternal because they are the sweet dew of immortality (amṛta); they are still, and are far distant from Yama.² The sweet dew causes men to grow into immortals and not die. The Diamond Mind discards ignorance, the final thought [before nirvāṇa], and delusion, and thus obtains the Buddha fruit of eternal joy. Since there is eternal joy, there is stillness, and since there is stillness, they are far distant from Yama. To be far distant from Yama is to abide eternally. (10) They are eternal because they are not of the nature of production and destruction. It is not the case that the dharmakāya originally did not exist but now exists [i.e., is produced], nor did it originally exist but now does not exist [i.e., is destroyed]. Although it acts (行)

¹Namely, "instruction, doctrine, knowledge or wisdom attained, cutting away of delusion, practice of the religious life, progressive status [and] producing the fruit of saintliness." Soothill and Hodcus, p. 38a.

²The Lord of Death.

within the three periods¹ it is not of the three periods (非三世法). Why? The dharmakāya aboriginally exists; it is not the case that it begins now to exist. It transcends the three periods and so we call it 'eternal.'²

In the above ten "causes and conditions" of the eternity of the three Buddha bodies, a certain emphasis on practice and action is to be noted. Not that all ten emphasize these active qualities. The first, for example, names the eternity of the Dharma as the cause of the eternity of the Buddha bodies, which are the fruit of this cause.³ While we know that here the eternity of the Dharma is the basis of the eternity of the Buddha bodies, it is worth pondering what "the Dharma" is. Remembering the ubiquity of this term, and the overlapping nature of superlative terms in Buddhist thought, it is to be noted that "the Dharma" is not simply the Truth, but also the way things are (empty--Thus) and the Path of realization. Thus there are present in the one term epistemological, ontological and practical, soteriological aspects, and all of these constitute the basis for the eternity attributed to the Buddha bodies.

Of the rest of these "causes and conditions" of the eternity of the trikāya, there are two others which do not

¹Past, present and future.

²BNT, p. 811a-b.

³Thus, incidentally, for the author of the BNT, the Dharma is logically prior to the Buddha. This is in contradistinction to the view of the author of the Ratna., who holds that of the three jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Śaṅgha), the Buddha is the supreme "refuge." (See Takasaki, Ratna., p. 180ff.) The two authors here diverge most strikingly.

seem to speak essentially in terms of soteriological practice and action. These are the fifth, which speaks of nonduality, and the tenth, which is concerned with non-temporality. The nonduality of samsāra and nirvāna, of which the fifth example speaks, is partly ontological, in that it refers to what is, yet it is mostly epistemological, a metaphor for one's understanding (manifested in this non-discriminative wisdom) of what is. Beyond even this, it indicates the response of the total person to what is: does one see the world as suffering and hence make his lived world, his life, the abode of suffering, or does one understand, perceive and live nirvāna? Thus even here, in this apparently purely ontological example, ontology is joined with epistemology via realization, a special vehicle for the engagement of a person in the world, i.e., for soteriological action. The tenth example, concerning temporality, is much like the fifth. Its key phrase is the statement that although the dharmakāya "acts" within the three time periods, it is not of them, i.e., not of a temporal nature. The soteriological functioning of the kāya is presented as the heart of the matter here.

The remaining examples of "causes and conditions" all have to do, in one way or another, directly with practice and action. The second and third examples go hand in hand by having the eternity of the Buddha bodies rest on the eternity of salvific acts performed by the Buddhas: these acts being endless, so are those Buddha bodies. The fourth

and sixth examples are alike in invoking the performance of marvels constituting transcendence of physical bonds as proof of eternity. The seventh and ninth examples together refer to the act of realization as being the source of the eternity of the Buddha bodies. The seventh example, that is, states plainly that with the act of realization, ignorance, impermanence and suffering are vanquished. The ninth example repeats this, adding the metaphorical element of the "sweet dew" of immortality and the mythological figure of Yama, the Lord of Death.¹ Finally, the eighth example, like the second and third, refers to the Buddha's compassionate acts for the welfare of sentient beings, but links this with the basic tathāgatagarbha doctrine of the essential purity of the tathāgatagarbha (here the Buddha body), unsullied by its contact with defilements (here its engagement in life). Thus, the eighth example most directly reveals the action in the world of the Buddha bodies as the source of their eternity: the Buddha (or Buddha bodies) is

¹It is to be noted in passing that in these examples we find reference to something called a "Diamond Mind." This is evidently no "Mind" such as is construed in an idealistic monism, but on the basis of the textual evidence appears to represent the person of realization, i.e., the person fulfilling the Buddha Path. This "mind"--or person--is shown solely in the acts of dispelling ignorance and suffering, and enjoying the fruits of serenity and joy which result. Thus we are not presented here with a monistic Mind of idealist metaphysics, nor with a dualistic mind opposed to a body. What is portrayed is an acting person. Though my judgment here is based on an argument from the negative, the conclusion certainly fits with what is taught throughout the text concerning "mind."

essentially pure (or fully itself) in the midst of soteriological action.

3. Evaluation

At the end of this section, the author adds a list of five meanings of Buddha nature. These may serve to tie together the threads of our discussion and to connect the recently developed points with the larger picture of Buddha nature. Three of the meanings given here are just stated without comment, but the last two are accompanied by the interpretation of the unidentified commentator (釋) of the BNT. The five meanings assigned the Buddha nature are:

(1) It really exists (眞實有). (2) It can be perceived through upāya. (3) Having been perceived, its merits are inexhaustible. (4) It is [concealed by] the beginningless shell with which it is [both] disunited and united. The commentator says, 'beginningless' means that defilements, karma and retribution are all without a start and therefore we say they are 'beginningless.' As for 'disunited,' since these three forsake the dharmakāya, we say they are 'disunited.' We say they are 'united' since these three arise in dependence on the dharmakāya. As for 'shell,' these three conceal (藏) the dharmakāya and therefore are called 'shell.' (5) The beginningless, united, excellent nature is the Dharma. The commentator says, it is called 'beginningless' because the dharmakāya's prajñā, great¹ compassion and samādhi, which are obtained by the [Buddha] nature, all aboriginally exist. The essence and the functions have never been separate and therefore we say they are 'united.' This is what is called beginningless.² As for, 'the united, excellent nature

¹Or unconditioned.

²The text shows evidence of tampering here, with the terminal phrase, "therefore it is called 'beginningless'" given twice, with two explanations of the term "united" given.

is the Dharma,' [it is explained thus]. By virtue of prajñā, the own-nature of the dharmakāya does not change; by virtue of samādhi, the nature possesses awesome merits; and by virtue of great compassion, the nature benefits [others]. Therefore we praise this excellent nature, calling it the 'Dharma.'¹

These five meanings more or less sum up the author's discussion of Buddha nature in this section. First, he begins with the straightforward statement: the Buddha nature really, truly exists. Here he does not choose to say "it both exists and doesn't exist," or "it neither exists nor does not exist." It really, truly exists. This, of course, is still in contrast to the status of ordinary phenomena: he would certainly not state plainly that they "really exist." The Buddha nature is different: it is reality, pure reality and nothing but, whereas all worldly phenomena partake of the unreality of delusion, defilement, etc. Thus, even in plainly stating "Buddha nature exists" this is not to say that it exists in any way like ordinary things exist. This was stressed above in the statements indicating that the Buddha nature is unborn, indestructible, etc. Yet to say plainly that the Buddha nature "really exists" is a good example of the use of language in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought. The attempt to speak positively, if not rapturously, of that which fulfillment of the Buddhist path reveals is certainly characteristic of this kind of thought, and is one of the main elements of distinc-

¹BNT, p. 811b-c.

tion between it and śūnyavāda thought. Thus, the Buddha nature "really exists": it may function as a peg upon which to hang the often humdrum reality of daily Buddhist practice; it offers hope and the assurance that the effort of practice is not being made for "nothing." It attests to the reality of Buddhism's soteriological promise.

(2) Buddha nature can be perceived through upāya.

Upāya includes all the Buddha's teachings as well as the Buddha's life itself. It has also been mentioned above in this text that upāya includes the various practices one undertakes on the Buddhist path in one's attempt to gain realization. In fact, upāya seems to include everything but realization itself. Thus it is anything one encounters in "Buddhism" except self-realization. In this way, the Buddha's teachings are pointers of the way and the Buddha's life is a model, both of these being means initiated by another to help one, while the practices of restraint, the dhyānas, etc. are means employed by oneself. All are means toward the end of self-realization, which is not a means, of course, but truth and reality itself. Thus, in saying that the Buddha nature may be perceived through upāya, the author is saying both (a) through the example of the Buddha's life, the sūtras, the dhyānas, etc. one gets some preliminary inkling of what realization, or Buddha nature, is, and, more importantly, (b) through all these means, which constitute the Buddha Way, one will come to self-realization. Self-realization or liberation is the Buddha nature.

(3) Having been perceived, the merits of the Buddha nature are inexhaustible. This statement, like the first, is a positive declaration of the intrinsic value of the "Buddha fruit," the fulfillment of Buddhism's soteriological promise. In line with the second meaning, it indicates both (a) one may see the merits of the Buddha nature, e.g., manifested in the life of the Buddha, and, again more importantly, (b) having realized the Buddha nature, or Buddhahood, one will know oneself as possessing these merits.

(4) It is concealed by the beginningless shell with which it is both disunited and united. This meaning simply summarizes the strong element of pure tathāgatagarbha thought in this text, here identifying the "concealed" Buddha nature as dharmakāya.

(5) The beginningless, united, excellent nature is the Dharma. Here we find once again very positive language used in discussing the Buddha nature. The "essence" referred to is the own-nature--the dharmakāya--Buddha nature. The "functions" are prajñā, great compassion and samādhi. In saying that these two categories are inseparable or united, he means that they are identical or interchangeable. (This is typical of the author's use of the concept of "separation" to indicate dissimilarity throughout this entire section.) Being identical, we find that the "essence" of Buddha nature is its functions; i.e., the actions constitutive of compassion, samādhi and prajñā (perceiving rightly) are the "essence" of the Buddha nature. Here it is the aboriginal

existence of these functions which is made to account for the aboriginal existence of the dharmakāya or Buddha nature. The functions are logically primary and the "basis" of the latter. These functions represent both sides of the soteriological coin: liberation of self (as manifest in prajñā and samādhi) and liberation of others (through compassion). Action, then, (or "functions") is the essence of Buddha nature, while the particular character of this action is soteriological.

E. CONCLUSION

The author gives us a summary of his teachings in the form of four meanings of Buddha nature, four names for Buddha nature and the progressive realization of Buddha nature by four classes of persons.

The first meaning of the Buddha nature is its "inseparability from all Buddha dharmas both before and after [realization]."¹ The Buddha dharmas are the meritorious qualities of the Buddha nature or dharmakāya, e.g., purity, bliss, etc. Thus it is stated that because of the Buddha dharmas, the tathāgatagarbha is "not empty," (不空) and being "not empty" indicates the inherent presence of the Buddha dharmas. The second meaning of Buddha nature is, "this nature, under all conditions, is Thus."² This is "because all phenomena lack own-nature." That is, the emptiness of all things is their Thusness, and vice versa. Buddha nature is found in this condition, which is universal. Third, Buddha nature "has nothing to do with false thoughts or inverted teachings," and fourth, "the original nature [Buddha nature] is still."³ "Still" here means free of suffering.

¹BNT, p. 811c.

²Ibid., p. 812a. It also could be read, "in all places this nature is Thus."

³Ibid.

On the basis of these meanings, or qualities, are established four names for the Buddha nature.

- (1) By virtue of its inseparability from the Buddha dharmas, it is called the dharmakāya.
 (2) Since under all conditions the nature is Thus, it is called Tathāgata (Thus Come). (3) It is called the supreme truth since it is neither false nor inverted. (4) since it is aboriginally still, it is called nirvāṇa.¹

These are four names for one thing, Buddha nature. Buddha nature is, then, the supreme truth, the nature of things (Thus), the realization of the truth of the way things are (nirvāṇa), and the embodiment of all the excellent qualities attendant on realization (dharmakāya).

Next is taken up the progressive realization of the Buddha nature by four classes of persons. First, the dharmakāya (法身) name of Buddha nature is explained by the author to be the correction for ordinary persons' views of self (身見). Ordinarily the term shen (身) means "body," and in this sense is used to render the kāya of dharmakāya (Dharma + body). However, it can also mean "person" or "self," and in this sense is used by Chinese Buddhists to render "concepts, theories, or views" concerning "self,"² This first conjunction of a type of person

¹Ibid.

²It is highly noteworthy that in Chinese a term which basically means "body," is also used for "self" and for "person." This manifests in a very concrete manner that the Chinese tradition, and hence Chinese Buddhists, did not conceive mind-body dualism as a part of the issue concerning the nature of the self. In particular, "mind" was not selected as the essential locus of the self. To the contrary, the term "body" was used to render "self."

(the ordinary person) with a name of the Buddha nature (dharmakāya) is a restatement of a point that has been made above. The author says that if people can rid themselves of their perverted views of the "me" and the "mine," they will penetrate the realm of Dharma (dharmadhātu). Upon perceiving this realm they will have found something indestructible. Being eternal, it deserves the name "true self" (眞身) or, equivalently, dharmakāya (法身). Thus, what ordinary people grasp as self is not real (since it is not eternal), and as a corrective the term dharmakāya (which is eternal) is used.¹

The second name, "Tathāgata," is a corrective to the inverted views of the Hīnayāna. The Hīnayāna, says the author, do not recognize that the Tathāgata is eternal, blissful, self and pure. They think only of the negation of these qualities on the phenomenal level. Hence their views and practice are inverted and they do not attain the fruit of the Tathāgata path. They think only in terms of the causal stage, in which the wrong views of ordinary persons (seeing self where there is no self, etc.) have to be corrected. However, the bodhisattva knows that this causal stage is not to be separated from the fruition stage, in which the virtues of self, eternity, etc. are realized. Hence, the Hīnayāna think only of leaving this world, i.e., leaving

¹This and the following sections on classes of persons are summarized from BNT, p. 812a-c.

(去) and not returning (來). The bodhisattva, on the other hand, knows that leaving and returning are inseparable. Thus he speaks of the Thus Gone (如去 tathā + gata, i.e., Tathāgata), and the Thus Come (如來 tathā + āgata, i.e., Tathāgata), but the term "Thus Come" stands especially as corrective to the Hīnayāna.

The "supreme truth" is the corrective name for those with "scattered and turbulent minds," i.e., the bodhisattva at the early stages of his practice. There are two types of confusion exhibited by these fledgling bodhisattvas. One thinks that emptiness is nothingness (wu 無), that things only exist by virtue of discrimination, and that when the latter ceases, all things will be "empty," i.e., nonexistent. The other thinks that emptiness is something that really exists which he should cultivate and attain. As a corrective to these views, the supreme truth is enunciated. This truth is here given in succinct verse:¹

There is not a single thing to be removed
 And not a single thing to be added.
 What is should be perceived as it is;
 Perceiving thus, liberation is attained.

The Dharma realm has no connection with defilements,
 It is altogether empty of them.
 But of the supreme qualities it is not empty;
 From them the Dharma realm is inseparable.

Thus the Buddha nature, or Dharma realm, is empty of defilements but not empty of the supreme qualities (of eternity,

¹These verses are found in many Mahāyāna texts. See Takasaki, Ratna., p. 300.

etc.): "since there is not one thing which can be removed, it is empty, and since there is not one thing which can be added, it is not empty." Thus this emptiness is a fullness and this is what the bodhisattva must learn.

Nirvāna is the name directed to bodhisattvas in the tenth or final stage of their training. That is, by definition, only a Buddha attains nirvāna. Thus, this is the one name, or level of realization, that stands beyond the reach of the advanced bodhisattva. Nirvāna is spoken of here in distinctly positive terms as possessing all merit, infinite merit, inconceivable merit, and ultimate, pure merit. It is not simply cessation of suffering.

In this summary statement by the BNT's author we see his characteristic emphasis on the positive aspects of Buddha nature and the path to realization which it represents. It is specifically pointed out that the dharmakāya is full of the Buddha merits and that it is eternal. The Tathāgata is not only "Thus Gone" from suffering to realization but also "Thus Come" from realization to teach and relieve the suffering of others. The supreme truth teaches that there is not a single supreme quality which can be added to the Dharma realm since it already possesses them all. Finally, even nirvāna, which, as is well known, is most frequently described in the language of the via negativa, is here said to possess everykind of supreme merit.

If Buddha nature is dharmakāya, Tathāgata, supreme truth and nirvāna, this is in the senses of these terms we have

discussed above. Buddha nature is dharmakāya and therefore is the transformation of the basis, i.e., the self-transformation of the person from a life of suffering and ignorance to a life of wisdom and bliss via the dynamics of the Middle Path, abandoning all extremes of thought, emotion and practice. Buddha nature is supreme truth and nirvāṇa is the fullness, the positive content found at the end of the path. It is Tathāgata as sambhoga- and nirmāṇa-kāya, manifesting the culmination of the path of transformation in acting for the benefit of others out of perfect wisdom and compassion. Even though they are referred to in positive language, none of these terms stand for substantive entities. All represent different aspects of the path to realization: the transformation inherent to the path, the positive values of the path and the manifestation of the path. Buddha nature is that which encompasses these various aspects of the soteriological path.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO OTHER TEXTS

As an adjunct to the study of the BNT we will now consider two other texts: the No Increase, No Decrease Sūtra and the Supreme Basis Sūtra. These will be examined for the insight they may give into the BNT. Both have textual ties with our main text. While such ties between the BNT and the SBS are extensive, we will find that the teachings of the two are quite different. In contrast, the philosophical position of the NINDS is much closer to that of the BNT, though the textual ties are fewer. The study of both texts, however, does improve our understanding of the BNT. In the case of the NINDS this is by virtue of the similarity of the two texts, while in the case of the SBS, it is a result of the contrast between the two.

A. THE NO INCREASE, NO DECREASE SŪTRA

1. Introduction

Judging from its citation in the Ratna., the NINDS¹

¹The NINDS is extant only in the 6th century translation of Bodhiruci (Fo Shuo Pu Tseng Pu Chien Ching 佛說不增不減經 T. 16 #668, pp. 466-468.) Neither a Sanskrit nor a Tibetan text survives. However, fragments of the text in Sanskrit do survive as quotations in the Ratna. and other texts (see Takasaki, "Fuzōfugengyō," p. 88) so it is generally assumed that the text did formerly exist in Sanskrit but was

appears to be an early text in the tathāgatagarbha tradition and as such played a formative role in the development of that thought. Its historical importance within the tradition is based on its statements concerning the human condition: these form the theme of the text. This factor also establishes its importance in the present inquiry.

The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, which is generally acknowledged to be the earliest text of the tradition, states that all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha. This tathāgatagarbha is portrayed symbolically with such images as a treasure buried in the earth, a precious statue concealed with tattered rags and a cakravartin (world-ruler) child in the womb of a poor and lowly woman. The exposition of tathāgatagarbha theory remains close to the metaphorical form of expression throughout the sūtra.

The advance of the NINDS consists in its replacing the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra's symbolic tathāgatagarbha with its own abstract and theoretical expression, sattvadhātu.¹ A sattva is a sentient being. Dhātu, as used here, has basically two meanings: (1) the sphere, realm, domain or totality of the group of sattvas; (2) the hetu or cause, origin or basic nature of sattvas.² Takasaki speculates³ that both

subsequently lost. The reconstructed Sanskrit title of the text is Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa. It is a brief text and not divided into chapters.

¹Takasaki, "Fuzōfugengyō," p. 98b.

²Takasaki, Keisei, p. 87.

³Takasaki, "Fuzōfugengyō," p. 98b.

senses are implied in the term sattvadhātu and hence the latter refers to the basic or essential nature of the group of sentient beings as such. The sattvadhātu is the main subject of the NINDS and thus this text is able to speak in a direct and philosophical manner on the nature of sentient life. Moreover, in terms of the historical development of tathāgatagarbha thought, Takasaki sees the innovative use to which the sattvadhātu concept is put herein as a possible prelude to the Nirvāna Sūtra's development of the tathāgatadhātu and buddhadhātu concepts.¹ In this respect, the importance of the NINDS for the BNT becomes apparent inasmuch as the terms tathāgata- and buddhadhātu were two of the terms most commonly rendered with "Buddha nature" (佛性) in Chinese. Thus the NINDS' sattvadhātu teachings may have prepared the way in some fashion for the BNT's Buddha nature concept. We shall see in what way this may be so.

The issue which is raised in the NINDS is the nature of sentient being. Is human life what it appears to be to the common-sensical realist, or is there perhaps a more true way of apprehending what our life is all about? As the main speaker, the Buddha disavows the common-sensical view and explains sentient life in terms of tathāgatagarbha theory. I will focus in my comments primarily on three of the views espoused herein: (1) the nature of sentient life, (2) non-

¹Takasaki, Keisei, p. 89.

dualism and (3) the man-Buddha relationship and its significance for the Buddha nature concept of the BNT. In what follows, I will first briefly summarize the important points of the text and then go on to discuss and evaluate the text in terms of the themes mentioned above.

2. Analytic Summary

The text opens¹ with Śāriputra² asking the Buddha whether the "ocean" of sentient beings, in all the coming and going of its transmigration in the triple world, ever increases or decreases. The title of the text indicates the tenor of the Buddha's reply. He replies that it is a grave error to think in these kinds of terms at all, and that it is in fact

¹The very first line, actually, is the traditional "Thus have I heard." This formula announces the claim of the present text to represent the historical word of the Buddha as heard and remembered by his disciple, Ānanda. As in the case of other Mahāyāna sūtras generally, however, this claim is not accepted by modern scholars.

²As the Buddha's interlocutor in this sūtra, Śāriputra is of course a very different figure than the Śāriputra of the Pali texts. In the latter tradition Śāriputra was reputed to be the foremost in wisdom of all the monks. Wishing to establish the Mahāyāna wisdom as superior to that of the Hīnayāna, the author of the present text simply has the incarnation of Hīnayāna wisdom, Śāriputra, placed in a supplicatory, wisdom-seeking position herein. When the Buddha in this text denounces the presuppositions of Śāriputra's question, he in effect denounces the Hīnayāna perspective, as portrayed by the Mahāyāna, that is. It is typical of Mahāyāna texts to thus assert their superiority in a theatrical, as well as a philosophical, manner.

because of the kind of misconception displayed in this question that sentient beings must suffer through transmigration. The remedy for this suffering is to cut it off at its source, namely, ignorance, by coming to know the "single dharmadhātu" (一法界) or, an equivalent term, the single dhātu (ekadhātu 一界). It is because of ignorance of this dhātu that people develop such mistaken views as that expressed by Śāriputra.

The views that sentient beings increase or decrease are discussed by the Buddha at some length.¹ These views are said to arise, generally, from reliance on the Buddha's "incomplete" (不了義) teachings² and from ignorance of śūnyatā. More specifically, they arise from ignorance (and, it is implied, lack of experience) of the various stages of the Buddhist path from the first awakening of bodhicitta through the realization of nirvāṇa.³

The Buddha goes on to interpret the view that sentient beings decrease as nihilistic. In the various forms which it can take, this view is said to express a negative view of nirvāṇa. If sentient beings decrease, then either there is no nirvāṇa or else nirvāṇa is a matter of the absolute

¹NINDS, p. 466b-c.

²This again is an instance of the Mahāyāna anti-Hīnayāna polemic. The target of this attack is left vague enough to indicate that all Hīnayāna schools are intended.

³Takasaki, "Fuzōfugengyō," p. 89a.

extinction of a person and no more. Seen from this perspective, one might speculate that the NINDS' author fears the Buddhist goal is perceived either as a non-existent fiction or, if real, as perhaps not ultimately desirable.

On the other hand, the view that sentient beings increase is linked by the Buddha with the two views that nirvāna has a beginning in time or that it unexpectedly, without cause or condition, just comes into being. While the logic of the connection of these views with the view that sentient beings increase is not totally clear, an increase in sentient beings and a nirvāna that comes into being appear to be viewed here as cases of something emerging from nothing. It is clear in any case that these "increase" views are contrary to the pratītyasamutpāda doctrine¹ which teaches that all things' existence is dependent upon the causes and conditions with which they are associated.² The Buddha specifically states, moreover, that the problem with these views is that they cause a person to not desire to escape samsāra and to make no effort to do the same, regardless of the propitious circumstances in which he might find himself.

In short, these two views and all their variants are manifestations of the denial of the reality and desirability

¹Takasaki, Keisei, p. 73.

²Clearly the Hīnayāna schools could only with great injustice be accused of this wrong. The unmentioned target of the criticism must be the "heterodox" schools, again in the vaguest sense.

of the goal of nirvāṇa, on the one hand, and the denial of the pratītyasamutpāda doctrine, on which the logic and efficacy of practice is based, on the other. As such, they are the source of all wrong views, hence all ignorance and all suffering. In order to see the way out of this syndrome, it is important to remember that these two views, in turn, are most deeply based on ignorance of the single dharmadhātu. Knowledge of the single dharmadhātu, then, appears to be the key to the elimination of ignorance, and hence suffering. It is said to be known only to a Buddha.

What is this single dharmadhātu? It is identified as being equivalent to the supreme truth, the realm of sentient beings, the tathāgatagarbha and the dharmakāya. The latter is here explained as the Buddha dharmas, the Tathāgata's merits and wisdom. The discourse proceeds with a recounting of the characteristics of the dharmakāya: it is non-temporal (having to do with neither past nor future, but being constant and eternal), pure (i.e., nondual) and unchanging. This dharmakāya, when bound by defilements, "drifting on the waves of samsāra," is called "sentient beings." This same dharmakāya, when filled with repugnance for the suffering of samsāra, in putting aside all desires, practicing the ten pāramitā, embracing the 84,000 Dharma gates¹ and cultivating bodhisattva practices, is called bodhisattvas. Again, this very same dharmakāya, when free from all defile-

¹Teachings, doctrines and methods of the Buddha path.

ments and utterly pure, in arriving at the place which everyone wants to reach, overcoming all barriers and obstacles and obtaining spontaneous power, is called "Tathāgata." Thus, the dharmakāya is the realm of sentient beings and the realm of sentient beings is the dharmakāya. These are two names with one meaning.

Furthermore, what is called "the realm of sentient beings" embraces three conditions, all of which are "Thus," and hence ultimately not to be differentiated. (1) The first is the tathāgatagarbha as it is aboriginally, i.e., pure and in union with the Dharma nature. It is described as pure wisdom, the dharmadhātu of Thusness. The Buddha says to Śāriputra, "for the sake of sentient beings, and on the basis (依) of this pure dharmadhātu of Thusness, I speak of the inconceivable, the own-nature, the pure mind."¹ This is the first condition or aspect of the nature of sentient beings.

(2) The second manner in which sentient beings are described is the tathāgatagarbha as it also is aboriginally, i.e., bound by the impure defilements with which it is not in essence related. Only a Tathāgata's bodhi wisdom can sever these bonds. The Buddha says, "for the sake of sentient beings, and on the basis of this inconceivable dharmadhātu which is bound by defilements but not essentially united with them, I speak of the inconceivable, the own-nature,

¹NINDS, p. 467b.

the pure mind tainted by adventitious defilement."¹ This describes the second aspect of sentient beings' condition.

(3) The final meaning is the tathāgatagarbha as it exists in the future, universal, constant and existent (有法).² This is the "root" of all things, the perfection of all things. It upholds all things and embraces all things. Regarding this sense of tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha says,

On the basis of this unborn, indestructible, eternal, constant and unchanging refuge, the inconceivable and pure dharmadhātu, I apply the name 'sentient beings.' What does this mean? This means that sentient beings are (即是)² this unborn, indestructible, eternal, constant, pure and unchanging refuge, the inconceivable and pure dharmadhātu; they³ are the same as this, but have a different name.

Here we have the climax of the text.

This understanding of the three inseparable conditions of sentient beings expresses the true understanding of the nature of sentient beings. If one understands this correctly, one will not develop the false views of an increase or decrease in the number of existent sentient beings. One who does hold such views is no disciple of the Buddha's, but one who "passes from darkness into darkness."⁴ Thus

¹The opposite of 無法 or non-existent, as in the turtle's hair or the rabbit's horn. These things do not exist; what is 有法 does exist. Fo Hsüeh Ta Tz'u Tien, p. 1010.

²These characters function as an equals sign and indicate identity.

³NINDS, p. 467c. ⁴Ibid.

Śāriputra should convert sentient beings to this teaching, causing them to forego the above two fallacious views and dwell in the Right Path. Śāriputra should likewise correct his own views. Thus speaking, the Buddha ends his discourse, which is received with great joy, faith and reverence.

3. Evaluation

It is evident that the dharmadhātu is identical with the sattvadhātu, the essential nature of the realm of sentient beings. The concept of identity here refers to an ontological identity of the same nature as the identity of nirvāna and samsāra: one reality with two names. Given this identity, the two constitute the single (dharma)dhātu.¹ This is the dhātu, knowledge of which is the key to the elimination of all ignorance and suffering. This dhātu, however, has no transcendent nature, but is immediately identical with sentient beings. Thus, as a sattva, what one must learn in life in order to put an end to suffering is no transcendent truth, but rather what a human being is. It is to this that the Buddha directs his discourse. Śāriputra represents the common-sensical or naive view of the nature of humanity and it is this view which is seen as the root of ignorance. Thus the correct view, while not in any way indicative of any transcendental truths, is also not simply naive realism. One must reappraise one's under-

¹Takasaki, Keisei, p. 87.

standing of the nature of humanity. When one sees persons apparently being born and dying in suffering and in ignorance, one sees the unreal (i.e., ultimately non-existent) defilements which conceal the reality of the dhātu, the true nature, of the sattva, the person. The true qualities of the latter are those of the pure mind and the dharmadhātu of Thusness. This is standard tathāgatagarbha doctrine.

The NINDS, however, goes one step beyond the tathāgatagarbha doctrine taught in such texts as the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra by making explicit the nondualistic implications inherent in tathāgatagarbha theory. By nondualism, I refer to a philosophical perspective which unifies all of reality without reducing the individuality of particular members of that totality. The latter element distinguishes this type of perspective from monism. In the NINDS, the unification of all reality is obvious. It is clearly declared with the "one dhātu" concept--i.e., the identity of sentient beings and the dharmadhātu--knowledge of which is the key to liberation. Moreover, the basic tathāgatagarbha doctrine of cittaprakṛti, the innately pure mind, is an obvious basis for the identity of persons and the Buddha. It is the second element, however--the non-reduction of individuality--which I wish to emphasize here. The NINDS avoids monism by expressing all its truths in terms of the sattvadhātu, the realm of sentient beings, and by not indicating the existence of any contrasting, transcendent truths. The dharmakāya, for example, on the very heels of its descrip-

tion as pure and unchanging, is identified in turn with sentient beings, then with bodhisattvas and then with Buddhas. It is not left transcending human reality, but is identified in terms of the latter. There can be no transcendence where there is no difference. Note also that the Buddha is clearly shown as the culmination of a process beginning with the sentient being and passing through the bodhisattva. The differences between the three are no more than the differences in the utterly human element of degrees of practice.

This sūtra, then, by virtue of its detailed explication of the human condition, its immediate identification of man and Buddha, and its avoidance of the common tendency to glorify the Buddha, to raise him qualitatively above the status of mankind, succinctly states the supreme truth directly in terms of human reality. Passages which may seem to imply otherwise, e.g., which state that "only a Buddha can know this," lose their power to distance the Buddha from mankind in such a context and instead indicate only the extreme desirability of one's realizing one's own Buddhahood. Thus the central message of the text appears to be that sentient beings are the Buddha. In a sense, it is sentient beings who are glorified here, being elevated to such a level. One has no sense that the Buddha is "brought down" to the mundane level. It is mundane reality which finally is elevated to the status of ultimate, supreme reality. Uttering the phrase "sentient beings," one immediately

indicates the highest truth, the most pure being.

It should be noted that all tathāgatagarbha thought assumes the notion of Thusness, tathatā. Given this perspective, all tathāgatagarbha thought will perhaps tend towards nondualism since Thusness is a nondualistic teaching (that is, all things, as they are--i.e., without reduction--are "Thus"). Moreover, the very statement that "all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha" brings ultimate reality within the sphere of the ordinary sentient being. It remains for the NINDS, however, to take this statement of the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra and transform it into a vehicle for radical nondualism by bluntly equating the sattvadhātu with the dharmadhātu. Given the bivalence of the term sattvadhātu, the dharmadhātu is equated, then, not only with the basic or essential nature of the sentient being (which might be understood as an abstract equivalent of the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra's symbolic tathāgatagarbha--the embryo of the Tathāgata), but also with the sphere of sentient beings, that is, the total group of all sentient beings in their multiplicity. Given that these two meanings are interchangeable, we find that ultimate reality is not only identical with an essential nature well-hidden by the more gross reality of human ignorance with which we who cannot penetrate to this concealed treasure are more familiar; it is also identified with the group of sentient beings as such, that is, ordinary, mundane human reality. Granted, it is perhaps by a certain terminological slight-of-hand

that this effect is achieved. Regardless of the manner of its achievement, however, the result is a thoroughly non-dualistic perspective: ultimate reality is identical with ordinary reality; ordinary sentient beings, without reduction, are the dharmadhātu.

In this connection, it may also be noted that the theme of this sūtra is very much in harmony with the tenor of the BNT. Both emphasize the all-sufficiency of sentient beings (seen in the light of their tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature) and downplay the transcendence of the Buddha, resisting the urge to glorify him. Both affirm ordinary reality as immediately ultimate. As we have seen, it is again and again emphasized throughout the BNT that the Buddha nature is identical with the nature of the ordinary person. This is very similar to the teaching of the NINDS. Thus, we may see the NINDS as a philosophical progenitor of the BNT.

In a tangible sense there is an indirect link between the two texts via the intermediary position of the Ratna., on which the BNT relied and which in turn drew from this sūtra. There is also a direct link as evidenced by the quotations in the BNT drawn from this sūtra.¹ However, with this corroborating evidence, what is most interesting is the overall sympathy of the standpoints of the two texts. Whereas the Ratna.,² for example, with which the

¹See Takemura, pp. 125, 128 and 150.

²And the SBS, as we shall see.

BNT also has close ties, follows the general pattern of elevating the Buddha to a qualitative transcendence over ordinary persons, the BNT and the NINDS, by contrast, turn in a similar way from that perspective towards a more humanistic one. Thus, though the BNT is unquestionably most intimately related in a textual sense to the Ratna., it is more closely linked in terms of its broadest philosophical implications to the NINDS.

Moreover, it is in the NINDS that we see "the realm of sattvas" immediately identified with (即是) the tathāgatagarbha. In this sūtra ordinary beings are the tathāgatagarbha.¹ This is expressed with the strictest verb of identity available in Chinese. The realm of sattvas is also immediately identified with the dharmakāya.² Thus, we can see here a precursor of the BNT's doctrine that ordinary beings "are" (rather than "possess") the Buddha nature.³ Moreover, it seems to be more than a coincidence that these two texts which say that sentient beings "are" tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature are the very same two which do not glorify the Buddha, but instead find ultimate value in ordinary beings. It appears, then, to be a key element in analyzing the philosophical proximity of these two texts to understand the implications of ordinary persons "being" rather than "possessing" the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature.

¹NINDS, p. 467b. ²Ibid.

³This idea was inspired by Takasaki, "Fuzōfugengyō," p. 92.

This immediate kind of identification leaves no room for a qualitative gap between ordinary persons and the Buddha and hence necessitates the discovery of positive value in the lived world of those ordinary persons.

In conclusion, it seems the NINDS has a rather unusual and, from the common-sensical point of view, perhaps extreme vision of the nature of the human condition. Ultimately, it says, each and every one of us is eternal, pure, unchanging and indestructible. By virtue of our identity with the dharmadhātu, we take on the attributes of the latter. Despite its startling qualities, though, this teaching does no more than draw out the implications of standard tathāgatagarbha thought. Given that the adventitious defilements which mar our common-sensical image of humanity are ultimately unreal and non-existent, a strict identification of humanity and ultimate reality becomes philosophically possible. The NINDS actualizes this possibility. The result philosophically is thorough nondualism.

The religious or soteriological import of this teaching is suggested in the objections raised against the so-called "decrease" and "increase" views. As shown in that section, the author of the text clearly wants to demonstrate that the Buddhist goal of nirvāṇa is desirable, that one should keenly yearn for this release and practice toward this end. It may be that the teachings concerning human nature are related to this soteriological end. What, we may speculate, would be the reaction of one hearing or reading this sūtra?

One hears that one is pure, eternal, identical with the dharmakāya and indestructible. This certainly seems contrary to experience; one definitely doesn't feel that way or think of oneself in that way. Startling; intriguing; appealing. How does one look into this, find out more about it? Through practice. As in the case of the BNT, the combination of the startling effect and the positive language used may be upāya functioning, as ever, to lead persons to liberation.

The NINDS shares with the BNT a nondualistic philosophy and an emphasis on ordinary human reality as the locus of supreme value. These two elements are interrelated: the denial of ontological transcendence in the former must result in a religious context in a denial of axiological transcendence. This is summed up in both texts with an affirmation of strict identity between the ordinary sentient being, on the one hand, and the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature, on the other.

B. THE SUPREME BASIS SŪTRA¹1. Introduction

The present text is regarded by Takasaki as perhaps "the most developed expression of the tathāgatagarbha theory in its full and pure aspect."² He makes this judgment in the light of his belief that "the core of the tathāgatagarbha theory is in . . . the 'pure' faith in the Buddha." Thus, the concurrence in this text of tathāgatagarbha theory with laudation of the Buddha and recommendation of stūpa worship "shows the existence of an essential interrelation among them" and reflects early Mahāyānist faith and practice.³ It may be that the historical importance of this text lies in the light it sheds on these practices.

On the basis of the preceding studies of the BNT and NINDS, however, it will be clear to the reader that the present writer is not convinced of any essential relationship between tathāgatagarbha theory and the practice of glorifying the Buddha. It is doubtless true that Takasaki has located a major tendency in tathāgatagarbha thought. The BNT and NINDS, however, represent another tendency within the same tradition.

¹This sūtra, translated by Paramārtha, was, according to Ui, rendered into Chinese in 557. (Ui, p. 534.) Only this Chinese version is extant. Like the NINDS, this text claims to be the word of the Buddha. The comments made regarding the historicity of the NINDS apply here as well, with the addition that this text may have been originally written in Chinese.

²Takasaki, "Anuttarāśrayasūtra," p. 34. ³Ibid.

The interest of the SBS for the present study, then, rests on other grounds, textual and philosophical. The SBS is of interest and was selected for inclusion in this study largely because of its very close textual relationship with the BNT. As in the case of the BNT, it is suspected by Takasaki that Paramārtha may have been responsible for more than just the translation of this text; it seems that he, or someone in his circle, may have written it as well.¹ There are several reasons for suspecting this. First, the structure of the sūtra is very similar to that of the Ratna., with the contents of these two and the BNT overlapping considerably. Secondly, the Ratna. never cites the SBS as an authority. To the contrary, the latter is quoted only in the BNT and in Paramārtha's translation of Vasubandhu's Mahāyānasamgraha-vyākhyā. As for the latter text, "the quotation [from the SBS] is not found either in the Tibetan version or in Hsüan-chuang's translation of the same text. It is probably an insertion made by Paramārtha himself."² In other words, it would appear that Paramārtha may have been the only one who knew of the existence of the SBS. Thus, the suspicion that Paramārtha was the author of this sūtra appears rather well-founded. The BNT and the SBS may share an author. Moreover, the amount of material common to the two texts is considerable and extends well beyond the

¹Takasaki, Ratna., p. 52.

²Takasaki, "Anuttarāśrayasūtra," p. 33.

BNT's quotations from the SBS. This textual concordance notwithstanding, the overall tenors of the two texts bear marked differences, particularly with regard to their respective understandings of the man-Buddha relationship. We will consider whether their difference in this respect signifies a difference between the two in their general concepts of selfhood.

The philosophical interest of the text in the present context lies in those of its teachings which relate to our general subject of human selfhood. The following discussion, then, will focus on those sections dealing with the above-mentioned man-Buddha relationship, the concept of personhood and the interrelated topics of ontology and action. In the latter category we will consider the meaning of the term "basis," found in the title as well as throughout the text, and its significance for a substantive or active model of personhood. In connection with our examination of these concepts, we shall consider the notions of the transformation of the basis and of bodhi for their clarification of the nature of action concerned. Finally, we shall look at the particular examples of the acts or functions discussed as such in the text for insight into this text's view of practice.

The following does not represent an exhaustive summary of the contents of the SBS. Rather, it is comprised solely of a presentation and examination of those passages relating

to the above-mentioned theme.¹

2. Analysis

In reading the SBS, one notices immediately a considerable difference in the tenors of the SBS and the BNT. While the latter stresses the importance of practice and the primacy of the Dharma, the SBS, true to what Takasaki considers the more usual style of tathāgatagarbha texts, extolls the supremacy of the Buddha and emphasizes the incomprehensibility of the tathāgatagarbha teachings. For example, the Buddha says, "Ānanda, why is the tathāgatadhātu"²

¹The SBS consists of eight chapters. The first, an introductory chapter, "Appraising the Merits," is found by Takasaki ("Anuttarāśrayasūtra," p. 34) to be derived from the Adbhūtasūtra (T. #688, #689), a text which is mainly concerned with stūpa worship and its value. Chapter 2, Tathāgatadhātu (nature of the Tathāgata), Chapter 3, Bodhi (Wisdom), Chapter 4, "Tathāgata Merits," and Chapter 5, "Tathāgata Acts" comprise the body of the text. These three chapter headings parallel the divisions of the Ratna. and a considerable amount of the material of the two texts overlaps. Two exceptions to this uniformity are the SBS' discussion of the transformation of the basis found in the chapter on bodhi and chapter 5 on the Tathāgata's acts. (Takasaki, "Anuttarāśrayasūtra, p. 32.) These are unique to the SBS. Chapter 6, "Praises" consists of a laudation of the Buddha in verse form. Finally, Chapter 7, "Entrusting," concludes with the formal titling of the sūtra, its entrustment to Ānanda, and an emphasis on the importance of its transmission.

I will concentrate in this study on the portions of chapters 2 - 5 of the SBS which are not also found in the BNT. Thus, there will be no repetition of material discussed elsewhere in this study. I will omit treatment of chapters 1, 6 and 7, as their subject matter is not relevant to the topic of this study.

²Nature of the Tathāgata or Buddha. 如來界 tathāgata-dhātu is used synonymously in this text with 如來性 tathāgata-nature.

incomprehensible? Ānanda, the tathāgatadhātu is in the midst of impurity; it is simultaneously both pure and impure. This condition cannot be comprehended."¹ Given this incomprehensibility, only one remedy is possible: "All bodhisattvas, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas through faith in the Buddha's word can understand this teaching." Faith--hardly mentioned more than in passing in the BNT--is the sole path to salvation in the SBS.

Here we have a gulf established between the ordinary person and the Buddha. The Buddha's is an epistemological, not an ontological, transcendence, based on the incomprehensibility of the Buddha's nature for the ordinary person. Only the Buddha's wisdom or bodhi does not suffer this deficiency and thus merits the qualifier "singular" (不共). This term also indicates a distancing from man. Let us examine it in context.

Again, the Buddha speaks.

Ānanda, what is the singularity of the supreme bodhi? There are two kinds of singularity. The first is unknowability: no ordinary persons, śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas can penetrate it [the supreme bodhi]; it is not [within] their realm. The second is unattainability: with the exception of the Buddha, no one attains it. This singularity has five characteristics: (1) the extreme profundity of the Thusness Principle (如如理) [which it comprehends]; (2) its freedom and unshakability; (3) its being maintained in the pure realm of no outflow;² (4) its

¹Fo Shuo Wu Shang I Ching 佛說無上依經 (SBS), T. 16, #669, p. 470c.

²I.e., the condition of no karmic retribution determining future transmigration.

non-obstruction [or embracing] of everything that is known; and (5) its fulfilling all acts profitable to sentient beings. This is what is called bodhi's characteristic of singularity.¹

The term which I have rendered as "singularity" literally means "not public." It seems from the above description to embrace two related meanings, privacy or seclusion, and uniqueness. My "singularity" is intended to convey both. The first meaning, privacy or seclusion, is displayed in the two senses of unknowability and unattainability. Here bodhi is described as an elusive and distant goal, attainable only by a Buddha.²

The second meaning, uniqueness, is conveyed in the five characteristics attributed to the singularity of bodhi. These five serve to indicate five ways in which the Buddha's bodhi is radically unlike the mental condition of ordinary persons. Thus, some details of the epistemological gulf between man and Buddha are indicated. The Buddha, unlike the ordinary man, comprehends Thusness in all its profundity. His mental condition, unlike ours, is stable and free, free (自在) in the sense of being independent, self-reliant and not subject to manipulation or coercion by external forces and conditions. The Buddha does not suffer karmic retribution as we do for our thoughts, and his knowledge, unlike ours, is all-embracing. Finally, he, unlike

¹SBS, p. 473a-b.

²The author seems to differentiate between knowing bodhi in a limited sense, which a bodhisattva can do, and fully realizing bodhi, which only a Buddha can do.

us, is moved to act for the benefit of others. In all these ways we differ.

The singularities of the Buddha, or in other words, the differences between us and the Buddha, are not based exclusively on the Buddha's bodhi, however. The text lists 180 "singular" qualities¹ attributable to the Buddha and the Buddha alone. These include the 32 marks and the 80 signs, plus a list of 64 miscellaneous qualities, including the ten powers of a Buddha, the four ways in which a Buddha is fearless, and a long list of single attributes, all preceded by the phrase, "the Buddha alone attains . . . [this quality]." ² Once again, the difference between the Buddha and the ordinary person is emphasized.

Whereas the author of the BNT made a constant effort to emphasize the unity of the Buddha and ordinary beings, of delusions and bodhi, no such emphasis is noticeable in the SBS. Rather, in the SBS we have a separate characteristic of singularity, intended to emphasize the qualitative transcendence of bodhi and the one who attains it. We see no emphasis whatsoever on the immanence of bodhi or the non-differentiation of the Buddha and the ordinary person, such as was repeatedly stressed in the BNT. In the latter, instead of a section on the singularity of bodhi (or Buddha nature), we find in contrast a section, the entire point of which is to stress the equality of ordinary persons,

¹ Āvenikadharmā. ² SBS, pp. 473c - 475a.

bodhisattvas and Buddhas.¹ It is in this respect, more than any other, that the tenors of the two texts differ.

What is the significance of this contrast between the two texts? There are three points to be made here. First, the difference in perspective is reflected in a parallel contrast in notions of practice. Given the epistemological transcendence of supreme bodhi according to the SBS, the inevitable result will be that faith, reliance on the Buddha's word and compassionate acts, will be the necessary approach for the person desiring to rise from his condition. Likewise, given the Buddha's aesthetic, moral, physical and psychic superiority, faith will be the natural response. By contrast, the immanence of bodhi in the ordinary human condition from the perspective of the BNT makes meditative practice the natural religious act.

Second, and somewhat closer to our central concern, how does the SBS' view of the man-Buddha relationship affect its concept of personhood as such? While it is anticipating a study of the remaining sections of the text to answer this now, it can be said that the SBS, being of the tathāgatagarbha group, basically shares a common ontological perspective with the BNT. The second chapter of the SBS, Tathāgatadhātu,² is largely devoted to an exposition of the

¹See BNT, Chapter 4, "Characteristics of Buddha Nature," Section 8, "All-Pervadingness."

²Nature of the Tathāgata.

basics of tathāgatagarbha thought: the union of the tathāgatadhātu (or Buddha) with the sattvadhātu (or ordinary beings) and the purity of the Tathāgata while in the realm of impurity, samsāra. Thus the immanence of the Buddha nature in mundane reality is maintained, even in this text with its emphasis on the Buddha's epistemological transcendence. Therefore, ontologically there is no transcendence of the Buddha; this is basic to tathāgatagarbha thought. In this way, there need not necessarily be a difference between the SBS and the BNT in their concepts of the ontological dimension of personhood. The exact nature of the SBS' perspective on the latter must await further discussion below.

Third, by means of the device of emphasizing epistemological transcendence while denying ontological transcendence, the SBS manages to imply how it is that we need practice (inasmuch as we differ from the Buddha epistemologically) and yet are also capable of practice (inasmuch as we share the Tathāgata nature). We thereby avoid the problem raised by the NINDS of straining our credulity to believe we are actually identical with the Buddha in every way. While, as we saw, there may be a certain method (upāya) to the madness of the NINDS, madness it unavoidably is from the common-sensical perspective.

Let us move now from our discussion of the man-Buddha relationship in the SBS to a consideration of its concept of person as such. We shall be interested to see if the

SBS seems to indicate a concept of the self as substantive or whether the self is shown to be of an active and non-substantive nature. There are two passages in this text containing expressions incorporating the term shen 身, "body" or "person." In the first of these, the Buddha explains the meaning of the Tathāgata nature.

Ānanda, I will now speak of the Tathāgata nature (如來性). Numberless as the sands of the Ganges, all Tathāgatas are uniquely real. What is called the tathāgatadhātu emerges from this [nature] and becomes manifest. . . . All noble and virtuous persons, embodying (身) morality, concentration and wisdom, subsequently attain perfection, and thus this Dharma [the Tathāgata nature] is called dharmakāya (法身).¹

Here we see first that the Tathāgata (or Buddha) nature as manifest in the world is called tathāgatadhātu. That is, the Buddha nature as found in ordinary persons is called tathāgatadhātu. This same dhātu, when perfected through the practices of the Buddha path, is called dharmakāya. The play on the word shen (身, kāya) is significant, as it indicates the bivalence of the term as "body" and "person" (or "self"), and the inherence of the sense of body in the concept of personhood. Thus, we see here that one can equally say either the "persons" or the "bodies" of the noble and virtuous exhibit morality, concentration and wisdom. Ordinarily, one would say "person" in such a case, as these are all qualities which are certainly more than

¹SBS, p. 470b.

purely physical, yet the parallel with the term dharmakāya or dharma-body is clearly intended by the author. Just as dharmakāya indicates the Buddha as embodiment of Dharma, so in the preceding sentence, the term shen indicates the noble and virtuous as embodiments of morality, concentration and wisdom. What the author intends in drawing the parallel between the two kinds of "body" seems to be to indicate the fundamental connectedness between ordinary person and Buddha, the two being separated only by degrees of practice.¹

The second passage incorporating the term shen occurs in the context of a discussion of the bodhisattva's path to realization. In the text, the bodhisattva has perceived the merits of the tathāgatadhātu, when,

relying (依) on unobstructed wisdom, . . . he gains insight into the tathāgatadhātu, a joyful, extraordinary thought. He cries out, 'Sentient beings! The Tathāgata is present within the persons of sentient beings! (在衆生身內)'²

Here the term shen can be taken either as "body" or "person," without much change in the meaning. What is notable about the language of this passage is that it seems at first glance to parallel to a certain extent the kind of idea found in Western mysticism of a "divine spark" within the human soul. The metaphysics of Western mysticism is quite

¹A similar use of the word (身) was noted in the BNT.

²SBS, p. 470a.

different from that of tathāgatagarbha thought, though. Is there a way, then, to understand this passage without producing misleading ontological implications?

A passage with some similarity to the present one was noted in the BNT. "Since all sentient beings universally exist within the Tathāgata's wisdom, the term 'storehouse' (tsang) is used."¹ This sentence was easier to interpret, as it was clear that it exhibited only a metaphorical use of the spatiality of the term "within." It was, in fact, a complex way of saying that sentient beings possess and manifest the Tathāgata's wisdom. The difference between this passage and that from the SBS, of course, is that whereas in the BNT, sentient beings are said to be within the Tathāgata, in the present passage from the SBS, the Tathāgata is said to be within sentient beings. Nonetheless, the latter passage may be taken as metaphorical also.

The context of the quotation from the SBS is a discussion of the tathāgatadhātu. It is when the bodhisattva gains insight into this dhātu that he utters the cry that the Tathāgata is present within sentient beings. Thus, it would seem that with his cry he intends to convey the immanence of the tathāgatadhātu in the sattvadhātu. He is saying no more than that all sentient beings "possess" the tathāgatagarbha, or "are" the Buddha nature. Thus, whether

¹BNT, p. 796a.

the Tathāgata is said to be within sentient beings or vice versa, the meaning is virtually the same. The difference in expression may be seen to parallel the bivalence of the term garbha: as womb or storehouse it is the all-embracing Tathāgata, within which sentient beings are encompassed, but as seed or embryo it is the Tathāgata to come, which is "embraced" by the sattvadhātu, inasmuch as the latter are all potential Buddhas. Thus, basic tathāgata-garbha theory is simply expressed in this passage in an unusual, metaphorical manner.

We find in the above passages no indication of a substantive self concept. Rather, the concept of selfhood here seems to follow the general tathāgatagarbha thought pattern we have so far noted. We see a basically active model of selfhood in which the salient feature is the person's degree of activation of his or her potential Buddhahood. Even where the text speaks of the Tathāgata "within" the person, we find this does not indicate the presence of any "thing" present there, but instead indicates the presence of the unrealized ability, potential or disposition to behave as a Buddha.

In this connection we should observe what the SES has to say about the perfection of self, or self pāramitā. In other tathāgatagarbha texts,¹ this is one of the four

¹The BNT, the Ratna.

fruits¹ or perfections (purity, self, bliss and eternity) associated with the dharmakāya, while in the SBS these are called four fruits of the supreme bodhi. In our discussion of the BNT we learned that the self pāramitā is not an ātman and does not represent any substantial thing. Here in the SBS it is once again plainly demonstrated that this "perfection of self" has nothing to do with any concept of an ātman. The text reads:

The great self (大我) pāramitā has two aspects which should be known. It is separate from the false attachments of all heterodox schools, transcending the falseness of views of self. It is [also] separate from the theorizing and false attachments of the Hīnayāna, transcending the falseness of the 'not-self' [view].²

Thus "perfection of self" is claimed to be neither ātman nor anātman, but something superior to both. As in the case of the BNT, the Middle Path between absolute affirmation or denial of the self is taken. We shall have to look elsewhere in the text, though, for some idea of what one finds on this Middle Path.

One term in the SBS with important ontological implications on both the individual and the universal level is the term 依 (i). I render this term, found in the title and throughout the text, as "basis."³ Though this is one

¹In the sense of earlier potentials brought to fruition.

²SBS, p. 472b. The eternity perfection likewise transcends the dualism of eternalism and nihilism. (SBS, p. 472c.)

³Though 依 means "to depend," its use here as a trans-

of the terms used in tathāgatagarbha thought¹ which gives rise to suspicions of substantialism, it will be shown that in the present context this term does not carry such a connotation.

For example, one of the uses of "basis" is in explaining the status of kleśa or defilements. Why is it that the tathāgatadhātu remains unpolluted, though it is found in the midst of polluting defilements? The answer is that "these kleśa defilements have no power and no potency. . . . They lack any real basis (依)." ² They have no basis in reality as they are purely the products of ignorance. Their lack of basis accounts for their inefficacy. Furthermore, it is through realizing that they have no basis that one sees that the defilements never really arise. This understanding, in turn, is the basis of causing them to not seem to arise and is thus the key to liberation.

This leads to the second point concerning the term "basis." It is also used to indicate the basis of liberation. The Buddha says,

In this way, Ānanda, in the causal stage, on the basis (依) of the knowledge of Thusness (如實智) and on the basis of the cultivation of the Thusness Limit, the Tathāgata penetrates the

lation of āśraya seems to indicate that it is an abbreviation for 所依, "that on which something depends." Takasaki also translates 依 as "basis" ("Anuttarāśraya-sūtra, p. 34.)

¹In the Śrīmālādevīsūtra. ²SBS, p. 469c.

tathāgatadhātu, . . . dwells in the no-dwelling place, i.e., the stillness of nirvāṇa, and quickly obtains unexcelled, complete enlightenment (anuttara samyaksambodhi).¹

The "bases" here mentioned are not of a substantial nature, indeed of no ontological nature at all, but are elements of the Buddhist path to realization: a special kind of knowledge and practice. These acts of knowing and practicing form the substance, if you will, of the Buddhist path, and in this way are the bases of realization. Thus, the basis discussed in this text appears to be of an active, rather than a substantive nature.

Finally, a third sense of "basis" to be considered concerns the use of the term in the sūtra's title. What is the "supreme basis" to which there is made reference? Takasaki says in one place² that this basis is the Tathāgata, whose four aspects of dhātu (nature), bodhi, merits and acts are discussed in the sūtra. In another place,³ he identifies the supreme basis with the single aspect of bodhi, which he feels of the four aspects is given the greatest emphasis in the sūtra. But whether Tathāgata (Buddha) or bodhi, we must ask what this basis is the basis of. In light of the above discussion, the answer must be that it is the basis of the liberation of mankind, in the

¹SBS, p. 469c.

²Takasaki, "Anuttarāśrayasūtra," p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 34.

sense that it makes this liberation possible. Thus, both answers offered by Takasaki would seem apt. The Buddha is the supreme basis for one or both of two reasons. (1) He may be the supreme basis inasmuch as he is the embodiment of the dhātu, or Buddha nature common to all, of bodhi, merits (the manifestations of the fruit of realization), and acts of compassion (further manifestations of the fruit of realization in their exhibition of selflessness and upāya). (2) He may also be the supreme basis in that faith in him and reliance on his compassion effects salvation. On the other hand, it is also appropriate that the bodhi aspect is stressed as the basis in this sūtra, inasmuch as knowledge has always been the key to liberation since the very beginnings of Buddhism.¹

These three uses of the term "basis" when taken together harmonize quite well. They indicate that the life of ignorance or defilement is without basis and hence without reality. What is real, by contrast, is the Tathāgata--as a manifestation of realization--and practice on the path to realization. Thus, realization--an act, not an ontological substance--is the basis.

Another aspect of the "basis" concept of the SBS is

¹Yet it should be remembered that the chapter on the Tathāgata's acts is the one section for which the author of this sūtra felt compelled to add substantially to the texts of his sources, the Ratna. and the Adbhūtasūtra. In this he displays a concern to maintain in tandem the centrality of the pair prajñā and karuṇā.

found in the compound term parāvṛtti-āśraya, transformation of the basis. As we saw, this was a significant term in the BNT as well and a key there to the clarification of the active self concept. The term is similarly useful in the present text.

One notable passage in the SBS explains the "own-nature" (svabhāva) of bodhi virtually exclusively in terms of parāvṛtti-āśraya.

What is that which is called the own-nature of bodhi? It is the ten [bodhisattva] stages and the ten pāramitā; it is the cultivation of the Thusness Principle and the Thusness Limit, the Path which separates [one from delusion]. The transformation of the basis which is attained [by these practices] is tranquil and clear. This is not the world of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha! This is what is called the own-nature of bodhi. Ananda, when this realm [of bodhi] has not yet cast off its covering of defilements, I call it tathāgatagarbha. When it has reached the utmost purity, it is called 'transformation of the basis.'¹

In the SBS, bodhi and the "transformation of the basis" seem to be virtually identified, as the other things mentioned in this quotation--the ten stages, the pāramitā, the cultivations of the Thusness Principle and of the Thusness Limit and the Path--are all practices engaged in by the bodhisattva in his effort to refine his bodhi, that is, to purify, to transform, the basis. Thus, here the "basis" would seem to be bodhi. In this passage, moreover, there are two movements of bodhi: when covered by defile-

¹SBS, p. 470c.

ments, it is called tathāgatagarbha; when completely purified, it is called the "transformation of the basis." This understanding certainly parallels the views of the BNT, where it was the Buddha nature, when covered with defilements, that was called tathāgatagarbha. When this nature is purified, it is called in the BNT, dharmakāya, one "fruit" of which is called the "transformation of the basis." In the BNT as well, the transformation of the basis is described as supreme purity, the "purification of the original nature" revealed when all barriers and impurities have been extinguished. Thus far, then, the use of the term in the two texts seems comparable.

The similarities between the two texts extend further. In both, the term "transformation of the basis" is assigned four meanings. In the BNT, these are: the productive basis, the destructive basis, the fruit of well-matured reason, and the dharmadhātu's characteristic of purity.¹ Let us examine the four meanings given in the SBS and then discuss to what extent the two sets are comparable.

In the SBS, the four characteristics of the transformation of the basis are as follows. (1) "The condition of production" (生起緣) -- "The condition of the production of the path of bodhi is the Tathāgata's entering all worlds and joining himself to them." (2) "The condition of destruction" (滅盡緣) -- "Given the [proper] cause, the various

¹See p. 88.

defilement-roots in three grades¹ are eternally destroyed."

(3) "The Dharma-fruit known by the rightly matured thought-limit"--"It [the transformation of the basis] is called the 'Dharma-fruit' because one has rightly penetrated and known Thusness and realized the fruit." (4) "The purest essence of the dharmadhātu"--"It is called the 'essence of the dharmadhātu' because all appearances and bondage are extinguished and the pure dharmadhātu is manifested."²

Clearly, the names and the basic ideas of these four characteristics of the transformation of the basis are quite similar in the BNT and the SBS, though the specific explanations given in the two texts differ. In the SBS, it is shown that the transformation of the basis incorporates the "causal" element of the Buddha's entering the world and engendering the path of realization, which is capable of eliminating the root of all defilement, as well as the "fruition" element of the dharmadhātu emptied of all defilements and the realization by the practitioner of this dhātu. Hence, it would seem the term parāvṛtti-āśraya should be understood as the "transformed basis" as well as the "transformation of the basis"; both senses are implied. Both are movements within an active process.

It is this active process itself which is the transformation of the basis, bodhi, and it functions on both

¹Superior, medium and inferior. Soothill and Hodous, p. 62a.

²SBS, pp. 470c - 471a.

the individual and the universal levels. As the SBS says,¹ the own-nature of bodhi is neither the same as nor different from the five skandhas (or "heaps" which constitute the human being),² the four elements (making up the universe),³ the six āyatana (or "openings" of human perception),⁴ and existent and non-existent things (again, on the universal level). Thus we know that the non-substantive, active nature of bodhi pertains to the constitution of the person.

It seems, then, that where we look for ontological substantives (in the "basis"), we find actions or functions (bodhi). What does this text say about the actions it discusses as such? There are two sections of the SBS specifically concerned with acts. First, we are told the two functions of bodhi (or wisdom), namely, "non-discriminative wisdom" and "subsequent non-discriminative wisdom."⁵ The first is the perfection of self-benefit, and the second the perfection of benefitting others. The first consists in liberation, as manifested in the dharmakāya, the second in manifesting the nirmāna- and sambhogakāya to preach the

¹SBS, p. 473b.

²Form, sensation, perception, impulses and consciousness.

³Earth, water, fire and wind.

⁴The five senses plus thought.

⁵This parallels what is said of the two acts of bodhi in the Ratna. See Takasaki, Ratna, pp. 318-322.

Dharma for the liberation of others.¹

Note that the trikāya, or three "bodies," are nothing but the embodiment, in a figurative sense, of wisdom and the blossoming of that wisdom in compassion. This is another instance of a substantive-seeming term representing activity. Note also that we have here a quite even-handed treatment of prajñā and karuṇā, the inseparable pair of supreme virtues according to the Mahāyāna. In the SBS, the acts of bodhi are equally divided between self-benefit and other-benefit.

The second section devoted to acts is that which discusses the acts of the Tathāgata.² The eighteen acts listed show the Buddha as teacher, presenting the Dharma on the basis of his own realization and refuting any with contrary teachings. When he manifests his super powers, it is for the instruction of others. He is equally compassionate to each and every person and causes each to produce a reverential and worshipful heart/mind. Everything he does is of benefit to humankind.

In this section the compassion of the Buddha is very much emphasized. Since this list of eighteen acts constitutes the entirety of the chapter on the Tathāgata's acts, it is clear that compassion is the very epitome of a Buddha's

¹SBS, p. 472c.

²This material constitutes the chapter which is unique to the SBS. Ibid., p. 476a-b.

acts in this text. This, then, is the nature of practice at the end of the Buddha Way. One interesting remark that follows the exposition of the eighteen acts states that "the Tathāgata dwells (住) in these acts."¹ This would seem to imply that the Buddha is constituted by these acts, i.e., that there is no distinction drawn between the doer of the act and the acting itself. This, however, is an isolated remark, though it does fit with what we have learned of the active nature of the self.

All in all, the SBS offers a more balanced presentation of prajñā and karuṇā than is found in the BNT. It would seem that the author of the latter was primarily concerned with the acquiring of wisdom and self-realization. In other words, he speaks from the point of view of the person striving for enlightenment. In contrast, the author of the SBS (even if he is the same person, though writing at a different time or with different concerns perhaps) was for the most part interested in maintaining the traditional ideal balance between wisdom and compassion, self-benefit and other-benefit, as manifested in the Buddha. Nonetheless, as in the case of the BNT, the SBS exhibits an image of a person--in this case, the ideal person, Buddha--in action. Even as the ontology of the text teaches us to understand the notion of personhood in terms of action rather than

¹Ibid., p. 476b.

substance, so in a parallel but more dramatic and perhaps direct fashion we are shown how the ideal person acts. It is these acts that inform us who and what this person is.

3. Concluding Evaluation

Throughout the above examination of the SBS, it was noted many times that there are considerable differences in the approaches and perspectives of the SBS and the BNT. These differences, of course, occur within the framework of a larger agreement--the presupposition of the general tathāgatagarbha framework, with its doctrines of a certain commonality between man and Buddha, the inherent purity of the nature of man, and the concealment of this purity by non-essential ignorance and other defilements. The two are also closely related textually.

There are, however, substantial differences. Notable among these is the tendency of the SBS to glorify the Buddha and to emphasize the incomprehensibility of the tathāgatagarbha doctrine, which, it should be remembered, constitutes salvific knowledge. An obvious corollary of such a perspective is the emphasis on faith as the supremely efficacious religious exercise. We can thus see the appropriateness of sandwiching the central teachings of the text between the chapters promulgating the practice of stūpa veneration and extolling the virtues of the Buddha.

This perspective contrasts markedly with the emphasis in the BNT on the development of bodhicitta and the all-

importance of self-realization of the ultimate truth. In the BNT, when the supreme truth is described as "inconceivable," what is implied is that it is inaccessible to rational thought. If it is said that only a Buddha penetrates the supreme truth, this is just the truism that when one becomes a Buddha one will realize the fruits of the Buddha Path. The constant emphasis on self-realization leaves no doubt here.

The two texts could not differ more with respect to their views on the man-Buddha relationship. We can almost see in this the first stirrings of the "other-power"/"self-power" antithesis which becomes such an essential concept later in the history of Buddhism. This is not to say that the two texts do not exhibit great similarities in philosophical content, since they do. The general impacts of the two, however, differ markedly.

In sum, then, though the SBS and the BNT are quite closely related in a textual sense, and may even share the same author, in a doctrinal sense there are several points of significant difference. Thus, while the SBS emphasizes the Buddha, the BNT emphasizes the Dharma and ordinary beings; while the SBS stresses the importance of faith, the BNT stresses self-realization. It must also be said that the SBS, like the BNT, emphasizes the importance of practice and action. However, whereas in the BNT it was the ordinary person's practices and acts which were seen to be crucial, in the SBS it is the Buddha's practice

and acts which are really salient. Thus, it is not that one text emphasizes action more than the other; rather, the SBS emphasizes the ordinary person's acts of self-realization. In both cases, the focal person--whether Buddha or sattva--is defined in terms of action.

Finally, and most significantly, we find that despite the broad differences in perspective of the two texts, their teachings on selfhood do not differ in any important way.¹ In the SBS, as in the BNT, we find presented an active model of selfhood. The term most conspicuously used to demonstrate this model is the transformation of the basis, the basis being bodhi (an act in itself) always either in the process of realization or in the act of manifestation. Thus, we have here a basically dynamic model of selfhood as act, in contrast to a static model of self as substance or thing.

¹On the basis of this study, it is my view--in contrast to Takasaki--that there is no essential relationship between tathāgatagarbha theory or associated models of selfhood, on the one hand, and attitudes toward the Buddha or beliefs concerning appropriate practice, on the other.

PART TWO

THE PHILOSOPHY

What "is" a Buddha nature? The BNT's author will not respond to this question. Rather, he leads us into consideration of the term "Buddha nature," how it is used and what it stands for. Is this a 6th century example of the "semantic ascent,"¹ or does the author intend by this maneuver to indicate something important concerning the ontological status of the Buddha nature? Perhaps both.

It is made clear in the BNT that the categories of being and non-being are inapplicable to the Buddha nature. This signals us that the ontological status of the Buddha nature requires careful consideration. If the Buddha nature, as reported, cannot be said either to exist or not to exist, yet can be said to "aboriginally exist," what manner of entity is it? Perhaps it is no manner of entity at all, but possesses a radically different manner of "being" which for some reason cannot be spoken of as a manner of being. This is the ontological issue.

Furthermore, in taking the "semantic ascent" and directing us to consider the way in which the term "Buddha nature" is used, we are signalled to be alert for non-referential uses of language in the BNT. Why do we want to speak of Buddha nature, if we can't say what it is? How, then, does the term function? As we saw in the conclusion to the BNT, the author was motivated to write the

¹The shift from talk of things to talk of words, recognized as freeing a discussion from certain ontological presuppositions. See Willard Van Orman Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960), pp. 270ff.

text in order to encourage Buddhist practice. Likewise, he says in his introduction to the text that the Buddha spoke of Buddha nature also to encourage practice. Evidently, if the term "Buddha nature" is not to be taken referentially, its function must have to do with practice or soteriology.

In fact, the two issues of the ontologically problematic nature of the Buddha nature and its soteriological import are interrelated. As I shall show below, the resolution of the ontological issue is predicated upon an understanding of the term's soteriological import. An appreciation of the significance of the latter, in turn, depends upon the clarification of the ontological issue. Thus we shall come to understand what the Buddha nature "is" in the light of the soteriological import of the term "Buddha nature."

The discussion of these issues will be divided into three chapters. The ontological issue will be considered first. The chapter on ontology is in fact largely a defense of the negative thesis that Buddha nature is not an entity. The full and constructive implications of the ontological issue become more expressly apparent in the following chapter on action. The action under consideration is, not surprisingly, of a soteriological character. Details of the latter are provided in the chapter on practice.

In the above study of the texts there has already been considerable philosophical work done. The major terms and

themes have all been introduced in their contextual setting. It remains in this section to construct a systematic account of the philosophical and religious significance of the Buddha nature. We will also judge how this thought relates to our contemporary categories of metaphysics and theories of personhood, as a clarification of this point.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONTOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION

In his section refuting non-Buddhist views, the author of the BNT argues that the Buddha nature is not a form of own-nature (svabhāva). Nevertheless, he says that it "aboriginally exists" and that it is characterized by purity, self, bliss and eternity. It is my intention in this chapter to bring together the scattered remarks in the BNT (and to a lesser extent in the SBS and NINDS) pertaining to the ontological status of the Buddha nature in order to construct a unified and systematic account of what the Buddha nature "is." This concern with the ontological status of the Buddha nature is particularly pertinent given traditional Buddhist views on self. One may wonder if the Buddha nature teachings can possibly be considered a continuation of a tradition teaching anātman and śūnyatā, or if instead they must be regarded as thoroughly anomalous. We must consider, then, whether despite the BNT's author's disclaimer, the Buddha nature is a form of self possessing independent existence. If this were shown to be true, the Buddha nature teachings would have to be considered heretical.

I aim to show in the following that the Buddha nature teachings need not be so considered, that all passages which seem to indicate that the Buddha nature is an independently existing, substantial entity (in the sense that it possesses its own essence, or innate qualities and generally a "thing" like nature) must on the basis of textual evidence be otherwise understood. The discussion of this issue in the contemporary scholarly literature takes the form of debate on the question whether the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature teaching is a form of monism. The present discussion shall also be so structured. The variety of monism under consideration in this context, though not always so specified, is the Brahmanical version. Gadjin Nagao, for example, states "the tathāgatagarbha seems to me to occupy a supreme position--a position akin to that of Brahman or Ātman, or other 'Absolute Being,' in Brahmanical philosophy."¹ Without explicitly comparing the two sets of teachings, I shall contend against this interpretation that the Buddha nature or tathāgatagarbha cannot be so conceived. The reason why it cannot be so conceived, I will show, is that the Buddha nature is not an entity of any sort--in particular, it is not a "mind"--and therefore it cannot serve as the basis of a monistic view--in particular, an idealist monism.

¹Gadjin M. Nagao, "'What Remains' in Śūnyatā," in Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice, ed. Minoru Kiyota (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), p. 81.

The first and main portion of this chapter, then, consists of a refutation of the view that Buddha nature thought is a form of monism and that the Buddha nature is a substantial entity. After introducing the topic, I will structure my argument around a consideration of six themes found in our three texts which seem to indicate that the Buddha nature is a substantial entity. Each passage will be shown not to have this meaning, but one of three others. The ontology of Buddha nature thought, moreover, will be shown to be nondualistic rather than monistic. After completing the analysis of the six themes, I will briefly consider Gadjin Nagao's contrary view that the tathāgata-garbha is a form of "Absolute Being" and that tathāgatagarbha thought is monistic.

The second part of this chapter is conceived as the completion of the first. As mentioned, one of the three points used to counter the view that Buddha nature thought is monistic is the understanding of Buddha nature ontology as nondualistic. In the context of the first part of the chapter, only that portion of the nondualism concept pertinent to the monism argument can be considered. In the second part, other aspects of nondualism as evidenced in the three texts will be studied, with the intention of completing our understanding of the ontology of Buddha nature.

B. CONTRA MONISM

The question is often raised in contemporary scholarly literature as to whether or not tathāgatagarbha (and by extension, Buddha nature) thought is a Buddhist form of monism. Obermiller, for example, states that the Ratna is an "exposition of the most developed monistic and pantheistic teachings of the later Buddhists."¹ Ogawa² and Yamaguchi,³ on the other hand, feel that tathāgatagarbha thought is an extension of the line of thought leading from the concept of pratītyasamutpāda to śūnya thought. Thus, they do not see it as monism. The issue is a complex and sensitive one, as some seem to feel it would amount to virtual heresy against the Buddha's teachings, not to mention crypto-Vedāntism, if the charge of monism were proven true.

First, it is necessary to specify the meaning of the term "monism" as it will be used here. Generally speaking, there seem to be two basic meanings to the term, a stronger one and a weaker one.⁴ According to the stronger meaning, all of reality can be reduced to one basic substance. This

¹Yevgenii Y. Obermiller, The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation, Being a Manual of Buddhist Monism (Shanghai, 1940), p. 82.

²Ogawa Ichijō, Nyoraizō Busshō no Kenkyū (Kyoto: Nakayamashobō, 1976), pp. 3-41, passim.

³Yamaguchi Susumu, Hannya Shisōshi (Tokyo: Hōzōkan, 1951), Chapter 6.

⁴The following is derived from Roland Hall, "Monism and Pluralism," in Paul Edwards, ed., The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 5, pp. 363-5.

form of monism includes both materialism and idealism.¹ The weaker thesis holds only that all of reality can be explained in terms of a single principle or that one can make statements about reality as a whole. There is obviously a great deal of difference between these two meanings, and in fact very many varieties of philosophical and religious thought would have to be considered monistic according to the second definition. Even Mādhyamika (śūnya) thought itself would have to be considered monistic in terms of the weaker definition, inasmuch as it speaks of all of reality in terms of the single principle, śūnyatā.

Interestingly, when Obermiller describes tathāgatagarbha thought as monistic, he is in fact linking it with Mādhyamika thought, which he explicitly labels "monistic."² Thus he is discussing both tathāgatagarbha and śūnya thought in terms of the weaker sense of monism. As noted above, however, Ogawa and Yamaguchi avoid characterizing tathāgatagarbha thought as monistic precisely by elucidating tathāgatagarbha thought in terms of pratītyasamutpāda-śūnya thought.

Now if one wanted to deny that tathāgatagarbha thought is monism in the sense that Obermiller meant it (i.e., the weaker sense), one could not do so by means of comparing it or linking it to śūnya thought. Nor could one do so in terms

¹"Substance" is not used here for the physical or material quality, but for anything with independent existence or a nature of its own.

²Obermiller, p. 81.

of pratītyasamutpāda, since this too in an attempt at explaining all of reality by means of a single principle. I take it, then, that the weaker sense of monism is not at issue here, and that the stronger sense is what we are concerned with. This is the form of the issue to which Ogawa and Yamaguchi (as well as Ruegg¹ and Nagao²) were addressing themselves. How shall we respond?

There are passages to be found throughout tathāgata-garbha and Buddha nature literature, including those upon which the present study is focused, that do, on first reading, seem to indicate something of a monistic (in the sense of a substantial monism) quality about the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature. These need to be looked at rather closely before the attribution of monism is too quickly affirmed, however. We will be particularly concerned to note and analyze any sense of substantiality which seems to belong to the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature. I will state right from the beginning that I do not believe the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is monistic in the substantial sense. The following analysis is intended to defend that thesis.

Some of the apparently monistic concepts and themes in the texts are the following:

- (1) the very common statement, essential to all

¹Ruegg, Théorie, pp. 291, 361 and passim.

²Gadgin M. Nagao, "Amarerumono," IBK 41 (1968): 23-27.

tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, that sentient beings "possess" or "are" the tathāgatagarbha/ Buddha nature.

(2) statements¹ that the tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha nature or the dharmadhātu is the "base" (依) or "support" (持) of all else--all statements that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is a "basis" are open to the suspicion of imputing substantialist monism;

(3) the concept of the Buddha virtues or pāramitā, viz., purity, self, bliss and eternity, attributed to the dharmakāya; in particular, the notion of "self" could be suspected as carrying a substantialistic connotation;

(4) the concept of the pure nature, and its lack of essential relationship with the agantukakleśa, or adventitious defilements; the latter are said to be śūnya (empty) in the sense of "unreal," while the former is said to be, of all things, aśūnya (non-empty) in the sense of "real"; this would appear to be a very straightforward attribution of substantiality;

(5) statements (related to the above) that the tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature, dharmakāya, or dharmadhātu is "existent" (有法) or "aboriginally exists" (本有);

(6) statements that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is beyond cause and conditions, and is eternal, quiescent, unborn, unchanging, etc.; these qualities make the

¹E.g., in the SBS, p. 470b.

tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature appear to be a solid "something" able to transcend the laws of change ordinarily considered all-embracing in Buddhism.

The above indicate the locus of the issue; all are notions to be found within the three texts covered in this study. While they do initially seem to indicate that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature (or their equivalent, dharmakāya, dharmadhātu, etc.) is something substantial, I will argue against this interpretation. How then are these passages correctly to be interpreted? In my view, they are to be read in three ways: (1) some will appear to be fundamentally soteriological in intent, and thus have nothing to do with either monism or non-monism--some passages may not carry ontological import at all, but may be of an entirely different order; (2) other passages which do have ontological import may be understood as non-dualistic,¹ rather than monistic; these are two considerably different concepts of ontology; and (3) some passages may be seen as manifesting action, rather than a substance, and thus, again, are not of ontological import other than negatively. Various combinations of these three themes will be found in the six types of passage discussed below.

It will be useful to remember from the beginning a passage from the BNT, quoted above more than once: "Buddha

¹In this I agree with Ruegg, whose work definitely contributed to my view.

nature is the Thusness revealed by the twin emptiness of man and things." This passage indicates not only the difference between śūnya thought and tathāgatagarbha thought, but is also central to an understanding of tathāgatagarbha thought as nondualistic rather than monistic. The equivalence of the tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature, dharmadhātu, etc. with Thusness is key since Thusness is clearly not a monistic concept. Although it does have an ontological quality to it, all it means is that things are "as they are." In a sense it is pure tautology, a simple "thus" attributed to all things. As The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna says,¹ the word "Thusness" is not a term which has the qualities or attributes of being "this" or "that"; it is a word by which words are undone, a word which points at our language and indicates that it won't do. Yet the term "Thusness" does not have the negative connotations of śūnya, a term which functions in a similar way to "undo" language. Hence, to equate the Buddha nature with Thusness is to indicate that there is something positive about it--one wants to say, it is "real," it "exists"--but the use of the term "Thusness" serves to remind us that the direction in which our minds begin to move upon hearing these terms "real" and "exists" will not be a totally appropriate one. The term "Thusness," in fact, is really the epitome of tathāgatagarbha

¹Ta Sheng Ch'i Shin Lun 大乘起信論 T. 32 #1666, p. 576a. Cf. Hakeda, p. 33.

/Buddha nature thought: it is intended to show that the goal of the religious life is actively desirable, it is good; yet if one becomes attached too soon to any specific notions of what that goal is like (other than its goodness) this will prove a hindrance to attaining the goal.

Let us now take up the apparently monistic themes enumerated above and see what can be made of them. First, it is important to discover what is intended by the repeated contention that sentient beings "possess" or "are" the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature. It was shown above several times that this does not indicate that persons possess "something," and by virtue of that "something" are able to complete the Buddha Way. The NINDS, for example, indicates that the three conditions of sentient beings spoke of as three conditions of tathāgatagarbha are all equivalent to Thusness (眞實如) ¹--all are essentially the pure dharmadhātu. We saw in the discussion of that text that the term dharmadhātu indicates both the identity of man and Buddha in Thusness and the knowledge of that identity. As such, to say that sentient beings "are" the tathāgatagarbha (as does the NINDS) is to say that they are "Thus" (which is ontological, but not substantial) ² and that they "have" the potential to know that they are "Thus," and may in the

¹NINDS, p. 467b.

²Since as the etymology of the term shows, "Thusness" refers to how something is, rather than what it is.

future engage in the act of knowing their Thusness. There is nothing substantial here; on the contrary, the interconnected nature of ontology and epistemology in the dharmadhātu of Thusness ensures that we take this attribution of tathāgatagarbha as indicative of persons being capable of a certain kind of acting, inasmuch as the "being" is dependent upon the knowing.

The above understanding is confirmed in the BNT in several passages. First, in the section refuting non-Buddhist philosophies, the author makes clear that the Buddha nature is not an ātman, not something to which one can straightforwardly attribute existence, not something which simply "is." This is one way of indicating its non-substantiality. Furthermore, on the positive side, it is shown that the Buddha nature concept is an amalgam of three other concepts: bodhicitta, the true nature and tathāgatagarbha. Bodhicitta is progressive practice, or progress on the Buddha Way. The true nature is the Thusness of all things, incorporating both the way reality presents itself to persons and the way persons experience reality. The term tathāgatagarbha was subjected to a complex analysis through which two particularly salient points became apparent: (1) the statement that sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbha is based on Thusness; (2) the storehouse (the garbha of tathāgatagarbha) is constituted solely by that which it contains, namely, the true realm of Thusness,

true practice or wisdom, and realization of Buddhahood. In sum, the Buddha nature, as an amalgam of these three constituents is shown to be: (1) identifiable with Thusness, thus ontologically nonsubstantial, and (2) the active practice and realization of Buddhahood. These two points are interrelated inasmuch as Thusness subsumes the realization of Buddhahood (which is also identifiable as the realization of Thusness). Buddha nature, therefore, is essentially constituted by action and hence is a kind of "doing" rather than a substantial thing; as Thusness, it is the inseparable conjunction of reality presenting itself to persons "Thus" and persons experiencing reality "Thus." There is no place for substantiality here.

Remember also that the statement, "all beings possess/are the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature" is interchangeable with the statement, "all beings are capable of realizing Buddhahood." As the BNT says, "In accordance with the principle of the Way, all sentient beings universally and aboriginally possess the pure Buddha nature. If there were one who eternally failed to obtain nirvāṇa, then this would not be the case."¹ "Buddha nature" means "potential Buddha" --not as a type of being, but as practice, i.e., realization, which is an action or series of actions. It is in accordance with the principle of the Way--Thusness--that this be

¹BNT, p. 788c.

so. Thusness is all-embracing, it excludes no one. All are capable of performing this act. Hence, the statement, "all beings possess/are the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature," indicates that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is essentially both Thusness and a particular kind of action, realization. These two terms, Thusness and the action of realization, are overlapping in meaning. In this way, the first instance of apparent monism is dissolved: this is not monism, but Thusness and action, both of which are nonsubstantial.

The second issue has to do with statements indicating that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is a "basis" or "support." The term "i" (依, "basis," "to depend on," "to trust to") is one which crops up frequently in tathāgatagarbha literature. In the SBS, for example, the term, "i" or "basis" figures prominently, not only in the title, but also throughout the chapter on the tathāgatadhātu. There it was seen that the "basis" being spoken of was either the Buddha or bodhi. The Buddha could serve as the basis either inasmuch as he is the embodiment, the manifestation, of realization, or in that faith in him and reliance (依) on him will lead to one's own realization. Bodhi may be the basis inasmuch as it represents reality, or the correct perception of reality, which amounts to the same thing. In either case, the "basis" here serves to indicate what realization--or, to say the same thing in another way,

reality--is dependent (依) upon. If it is dependent upon faith in the Buddha, i.e., the Buddha as "refuge" (also rendered with 依), or if it is dependent upon Buddha as teacher, the revealer of the Way, then we say the Buddha is the basis. If we say it is dependent upon bodhi, we are in fact uttering a tautology: realization (or bodhi) is dependent upon bodhi (or realization). This tautology would be no problem in tathāgatagarbha thought, wherein the cause and the effect of realization are interchangeable. What is noteworthy is that in none of these cases is the "basis" anything substantial; always it is some form of practice, or realization, or manifestation of practice. Moreover, whenever it appears that the tathāgatagarbha or dharmadhātu is being described as the "basis" of reality per se (as in the SBS: it is the basis--依--, the support--持-- of that which is disunited from wisdom and realization--i.e., samsāra),¹ this is only true inasmuch as reality and the perception or experience of reality are not distinct or separate things. Thus, the Tathāgata nature here is the basis of samsāra and nirvāna, not in an ontologically substantial sense, but insofar as both samsāra and nirvāna are modes in which are conjoined the givenness of reality presenting itself and the experiencing of that which is presented. As stated above, realization (and non-realization)

¹SBS, p. 470b.

are the same as reality (and non-reality). "Realization" means "reality." All of this is part of the dynamics of Thusness. The SBS follows up its statement that the Tathāgata nature is the basis of (what amounts to) nirvāna and samsāra with: "it is the storehouse [or garbha] of all dharmas, it is unchanging and non-differentiating; that is why it is called 'Thusness.'"¹ Here the garbha is directly identified with Thusness and shown to be all-embracing. It is in the all-embracing, or universal, character of Thusness that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature can be the "basis" of nirvāna and samsāra, realization and ignorance. Hence, though it may act as a "basis," this is only in the sense that each individual person is a world-creator, creating his/her own samsāra or nirvāna. This is the result of human acts and is not a matter of substantiality.

What shall be made of the third item on our list, the Buddha virtues or pāramitā? These are presented in the BNT as the end-product of a soteriological process. They are the "inversions" (顛倒) of the four errors to which they correspond, and the "projections"² of the four practices used to correct the errors. Thus, for example, purity pāramitā is not a quality which the dharmakāya possesses per se. Rather, it is the result of having faith in the Mahāyāna, and the inversion of being satisfied with samsaric

¹SBS, p. 470b. ²Ruegg, Théorie, p. 364.

existence and disparaging the Mahāyāna. This is its meaning; thoroughly soteriological, it is defined entirely in terms of practice.

As for the self pāramitā, the same principle holds. It is simply the result of the cultivation of prajñāpāramitā and the inversion of seeing a self where there is none, namely, in the elements of phenomenal life. This is illustrated most straightforwardly in the BNT with the example of the three stages of practice. The erroneous stage is that in which one sees a self in phenomenal existence. This is overcome in the second stage in which one realizes that there is no self to be found in phenomenal existence. The third stage is the perfection, or the logical extreme one might say, of the second: now one sees that this characteristic of not-self is the true, essential nature of all phenomena (this is still in accord with śūnya thought) and as such may justifiably be called "self."¹ Thus, this third stage discussion of a "self" really is no more than an extension to the logical extreme of the perspective of the second stage. As such, it is seen as the culmination of prajñāpāramitā practice. Moreover, while the term "self" may seem to echo the perspective of the first, erroneous stage, the content of the third stage is undeniably the opposite (or the inversion) of that of the first.

Another point to note concerning the use of the term "self" as a pāramitā, (as well as the use of the terms,

"purity," "bliss," and "eternity") is its usefulness--soteriologically--for shock value. These terms seem to be used in precisely the same way as the Heart Sūtra, for example, earlier negated such things as the Four Noble Truths, wisdom, nirvāṇa, etc. In the case of both śūnya and tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, the language is being used to "sunyatize." Both take the terms that are used in the Buddhist community of the time (for the śūnya-vādins this was the Four Noble Truths, etc., whereas for the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists, it was precisely the terms used by the śūnyavādins themselves.) The purpose in both cases is to shock the Buddhist community. For the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists the idea was to shake anyone who had a too-secure or too-simplistic understanding of śūnyatā, i.e., anyone who "grasped" śūnyatā as the "Truth." Yet anyone who really understood śūnya thought would not be shocked or dismayed by this move, since all the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists are doing is further applying the identical principle of śūnyatā.

One might ask of the attributes themselves whether there isn't a sort of astika ("being-ful") quality about them. But one would be no more justified in thinking this than in attributing a nastika ("unbeing-ful") quality to śūnya terms. Both are equally mistaken on a purely philosophical level, though if the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists are right, there is something to these attributions on the emotional level, this being an effect of the kinds of

language used by the two.

Furthermore, it is evident that, in addition to representing the end-product of a soteriological process and being a peculiar use of language, the pāramitā are ontologically nondual. Let us take the self pāramitā again as an illustration. Note that it is the not-self which is equated with the self: "this characteristic of the not-self is the true, essential nature of all things. Therefore it is said that the perfection of not-self is self."¹

The language is paradoxical: not-self is self. This indicates that nondualism is at work here. The perfection of self is found in overcoming the dualism of self (stage 1) and not-self. The self pāramitā is the true and essential nature of all things (sounds like a self) at the same time that it is the utmost negation of self, anātman pāramitā: the perfection of not-self. This, it seems to me, is a pure example of the perspective of Thusness, the Thusness revealed by emptiness. Self is utterly negated, it is completely empty, and yet this is how things "are"--one ends on this positive, astika-sounding note. This is the truth of things, the essence of things; yes, they are "Thus." Yet Thusness always proceeds by way of emptiness. One must first negate the common-sensical realist perspective, emptying this perspective of its view of things as discrete entities, but then realize that not only is form emptiness (as śūnyavāda

¹BNT, p. 798c.

might be accused of emphasizing), but that emptiness is also form, and is not apart from it. One returns very solidly to form, remembering its emptiness, but recognizing it as the totality or fullness of what is. Just as the duality of self and not-self is transcended with the nondualistic term, "perfection of self," so the duality of form and emptiness is transcended with the nondualistic term, "Thusness." Tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought is grounded in the perspective and language of Thusness: a nondualistic ontology expressed in positive-sounding language. For once nondualism is realized, it might as well be expressed in positive-sounding language as in negative-sounding language, inasmuch as the former is a superior encouragement to practice, giving the impression that there is something "good" at the end of the path.

What seems to be insufficiently understood in the debate as to whether tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought is a form of monism is the difference between monism and nondualism. In monism, all phenomena in their manifold plurality are reduced to the transcendent One. In nondualism, phenomena are not thus reduced: their plurality remains real. Such is the case in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought. There is no One to which phenomena could be reduced. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form; there is nothing else apart from the plurality of phenomena. They are empty, but they are "Thus." The perspective of

Thusness is the very opposite of monism insofar as the immediate givenness of the plentitude of phenomena is the locus of Thusness.

Our fourth problem area concerns the pair of terms, śūnya (empty, and in this context, "unreal") and aśūnya (non-empty, and here, "real"). The latter property is attributed in our texts to the tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha nature and the dharmakāya, which are said to be innately "pure." In addition, in order to explain the condition of ordinary persons who are ignorant, confused and greedy, the concept of the agantukakleśa, or foreign, adventitious defilements is used.¹ Although both the tathāgatagarbha (Buddha nature, dharmakāya) and the agantukakleśa have existed eternally in conjunction, they have no essential relationship with each other. Persons' delusions and hatred are said to have no basis in reality, but to be the unreal products of ignorance. Thus, a person is "really" the pure tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature, but falsely ("unreally") thinks of himself otherwise because of the activities of the unreal kleśa. The exact nature of the relationship between the two is said to be inconceivable, and in fact, no attempt is made to explain it. This is given as one point which only a Buddha can understand.

As seen above in the discussion of the first issue, the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature does not indicate anything

¹See the discussion of the NINDS for a presentation of this theory in brief form.

substantial, but rather indicates each person's potential to achieve Buddhahood (this being a matter of activity) and identifies each person as Thusness (hence, as being ontologically nonsubstantial and nondual). Moreover, while it is said in our texts that the dharmakāya and its pāramitā (purity, self, bliss and eternity) are aśūnya, this does not mean that they are real or exist in any substantial sense. Rather, the attribution of the aśūnya qualifier can be seen as part of the inversion process exemplified by the pāramitā themselves. Thus, just as purity is the inversion of the impurity perceived in phenomena by the śūnyavādin, so the aśūnya nature of this purity is the inversion of the śūnya nature of the impurity. In fact, it would have been inconsistent for the tathāgatagarbha theorists not to ascribe aśūnyatā to the dharmakāya and pāramitā: as we saw in the case of the self pāramitā, not-self is the property which "really" (in an aśūnya manner) describes phenomena, and it is because of the reality of this property that one may speak of the self pāramitā. In this sense, the śūnya - aśūnya concept presents nothing new in this philosophy that was not already present in the notion of the pāramitā. While the pāramitā are expressions of the culmination of practice, the aśūnya notion is perhaps a linguistic ploy used to further emphasize the reality of the fruits of that practice. As for the relationship between the "pure" nature and the unreal,

adventitious defilements, while this is undeniably a weak point philosophically in tathāgatagarbha theory per se,¹ the idea of this relationship is not part of a monistic theory, inasmuch as the nature in question is activity (which is non-substantial) and Thusness (which is non-substantial and nondual).

Another way to understand the term aśūnya is to realize that the logic of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought follows the pattern of śūnya thought, but adds a characteristic twist of its own. According to śūnya thought, śūnya

¹The tathāgatagarbha texts explain this relationship only by saying that this relationship is inconceivable. Although the relationship between the "pure" nature and the adventitious defilements is a philosophically weak point in this thought, the matter need not necessarily rest there. If this doctrine is looked upon as a statement of an existential, rather than a purely notional, truth, it might appear to be more acceptable. This doctrine may be an attempt to express what is experienced in practice. A possible interpretation is as follows. Defilements and ignorance are infinite; if one tries to "cure" them on their own level, as it were, attempting one by one to eliminate the various manifestations of this pervasive set of dispositions (a selfish act here, a hostile act there), one will never succeed in bringing the matter to an end. Rather, one must pluck out this set of dispositions by its roots, "overturning" the whole person who so behaves. Thus, the gulf represented in tathāgatagarbha theory between the "pure" nature and the adventitious defilements may represent the hiatus found in a person's own practice of self-transformation between his acting in a deluded manner, on the one hand, and without delusion, on the other: two sets of experienced reality in a single person which are so opposite in nature that the ordinary person may be unable to understand the relationship between the two. This is one interpretation which might add respectability to what appears as a philosophically weak doctrine.

is empty of any own-mark, i.e., śūnya is empty of the mark of śūnya and therefore is not graspable as such.¹ Tathāgata-garbha/Buddha nature theorists say that since śūnya is empty of the mark of śūnya, it must be said of śūnya that its emptiness is real. This strikes one as exceedingly strange logic at first. We are accustomed to the Mādhyamika "sunyatizing" of śūnya, but this seems to be something else altogether. Yet the move made by the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists is really not so different from that of the Mādhyamika: in both, śūnya is "sunyatized." For tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, though, when one "sunyatizes" śūnya, one inevitably ends up with aśūnya. The logic is inexorable: to "sunyatize" śūnya is to introduce aśūnya.

In other words, it is by virtue of the very unreality of all things that one must say that their unreality is real. From this point, we can in no way distinguish the tathāgatagarbha which is identical with the "pure" dharmakāya from the tathāgatagarbha which is covered by defilements: because the defilements are unreal, they cancel out. By virtue of their canceling out, their unreality is equivalent to the reality of the dharmakāya. Thus, the two are two sides of one coin. It is by virtue of the dynamics of emptiness that we must speak of the non-empty. Each

¹Cf. Ruegg, Théorie, p. 379f. Ruegg's analysis contributed to my understanding here.

immediately necessitates the other. In my view, there is no distinguishing this kind of dynamic from the Mādhyamika dynamic which equates nirvāṇa and samsāra. There too it is not a matter of substantialist monism, because emptiness is and must be form, every bit as much as the reverse is true. It is not a matter of one being reduced to the other, but of each indicating the necessity of the other. The dynamics of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought are virtually the same as in śūnya thought, though the particular forms these take appear at first to be diametrically opposed.

Our fifth point is related to the fourth. There are passages in our texts which describe the tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature or dharmakāya as existent (有法) or aboriginally existent (本有). Again, do these indicate that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is something substantial which "exists"? The answer to this question is similar to the one indicated in the aśūnya issue. Partially, again, it is a matter of language: to say that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature "exists" is to say that there is truth to the claim that all can attain Buddhahood. Partially it is a matter of the Thusness perspective: if the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature, as Thusness, transcends the two poles of being and non-being (i.e., if it is nondual), one may as well say that it is real, it exists, as say that it doesn't exist, especially when cognizant of the encouraging

nature of the former statement.

This position is well illustrated in the BNT, which says that the Buddha nature "aboriginally exists" (本有). In the section refuting Hīnayānist views, the author first refutes both the view that the Buddha nature exists (有)--since that might lead some to immediately identify themselves with the Buddha, without going through the effort of practicing the Buddha Way and actually becoming a Buddha--and the view that the Buddha nature doesn't exist (無)--since this might lead others to expect that no matter how much they practiced, they never could become a Buddha. He concludes with the following: "In accordance with the principle of the Way, all sentient beings universally and aboriginally possess the pure Buddha nature. If there were one who eternally failed to obtain nirvāna, then this would not be the case. This is why Buddha nature most assuredly aboriginally exists; the reason being, that is, that it has nothing to do with either being or non-being."¹

The decision to say that the Buddha nature exists aboriginally appears to be basically a pragmatic one: this is the statement that will most encourage practice. Yet it is also quite clear that this does not mean that the Buddha nature "exists" in the normal sense; aboriginal existence has nothing to do with either being or non-being.

¹BNT, p. 788c.

Why? Because it has to do with persons' actions or practice of the Buddha Way, which is not essentially something ontological, and because it has to do with change or transformation, with what appears "Thus," which is never thing-like, but always a flux. The ontology of flux is essentially related to the soteriology of practice. Hence, to say that the Buddha nature (aboriginally) "exists" is the very opposite of giving it a substantial, or thing-like character. Rather it is to encourage practice, to indicate the primacy of practice, and simultaneously to deny of reality that it can accurately be described with the terms and concepts of being and non-being. As with persons, so with things. The "twin emptiness" of persons and things reveals what might be called the "twin Thusness" of persons and things. This very revelation of the Thusness (of both) is the Buddha nature which "aboriginally exists." Reality and persons are not ultimately separable in this kind of thought;¹ both are part of the vision of Thusness which is always expressed in positive terms: hence the language of existence, which nonetheless is said to transcend the (ordinary) concept of existence.

The final expression apparently indicating that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature involves a substantialist monistic theory is found in those passages stating that the

¹See the discussion of the three natures in the BNT, p. 62ff.

tathāgatagarbha, dharmakāya or Buddha nature is beyond cause and conditions, is unborn, quiescent, eternal or unchanging. The NINDS, for example, says that the tathāgatagarbha-dharmadhātu is the "unborn, indestructible, eternal, constant and unchanging refuge."¹ Does this not indicate that we have here a monistic substance, capable of transcending the law of conditioned co-origination (pratītyasamutpāda)? This seems to be a negation not only of śūnya thought, but of early Buddhist thought as well.

However, this is not really a negation of such basic Buddhist thought; on the contrary, it is the logical extension of it. The prajñāpāramitā literature, for example, says that all dharmas, or things, are "unborn." This is the same term that is found in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature texts. In prajñā thought, all things are unborn because there is no own-nature (svabhāva) there to be born, or to die, etc. It is by virtue of the dynamics of śūnya (based on the principle of pratītyasamutpāda) that this qualifier "unborn" is logically necessitated. Oddly enough, this would seem to be equivalent to saying that all things are outside the realm of cause and condition (pratītyasamutpāda). The theory of pratītyasamutpāda indicates that all things come into existence (are "born") due to causes and conditions, and yet it is by virtue of that very principle that everything is said to be empty (i.e., of own-nature), hence unreal

¹NINDS, p. 467c.

(not truly existent), hence incapable of birth and death, or for that matter, of not being born and not dying. Thus, the real meaning of "unborn" is outside the dualism of birth and no-birth; it is necessitated by every step of pratītyasamutpāda-śūnya thought.

The exact same process is at work in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, for what is the difference in the purely conceptual content of the terms "unborn" and "eternal"? None whatsoever: both mean "outside the realm of cause and condition"; both are based on and necessitated by pratītyasamutpāda-śūnya thought. If one were to call the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature theorists' "eternal" attribute astika (being-ful), one would also have to call the prajñāpāramitā's "unborn" attribute nastika (nihilistic). Both labels would be inappropriate, as both the "eternal" and the "unborn" attributes are intended to manifest nonduality. The difference between them is that the prajñāpāramitā does so in apparently "negative" language, while tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought employs apparently "positive" language.

In this manner, the six problematic areas are resolved. Ontologically, they indicate nondualism rather than monism. They are marked by an inclination toward action rather than substance, and by frequent use of "positive" sounding language. Often they are soteriological, rather than strictly philosophical, in intent.

One recent challenge to the above understanding of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought as non-monistic should be noted. Gadjin Nagao, in his study, "What Remains,"¹ labels the tathāgatagarbha as a monistic pure being. He proceeds by comparing several texts on the subject of emptiness and non-emptiness. Of these texts, one is from the Nikāya, three are from the Vijñānavāda school (and are written by Vasubandhu and Asaṅga), and the fifth is the Ratna. He concludes that the Ratna's concept is different from that of the other texts. It is valuable to study his remarks, since the references he makes to the Ratna. are all to themes shared by the BNT. Though a detailed commentary on his study would take us beyond the bounds of the present work, the following remarks are pertinent.

In the former four texts, says Nagao, "what remains" in emptiness and hindrances to realization (such as the body, discrimination, etc.), whereas "what remains" in the Ratna. are the "pure" Buddha qualities (dharma). In the Ratna., he says, it is a matter of "arithmetic subtraction"; once you have "destroyed" the kleśa (defilements), all that remains is "pure being."² Thus, he sees the tathāgatagarbha as a monistic pure being, which remains when the defilements have been "subtracted." Furthermore, he states that

¹Nagao, "Amarerumono." ²Ibid., p. 26b.

this position of the Ratna. is "fatal," since it would seem to lay the foundation for the notion that kleśa and bodhi are identical.¹ The implication is that this notion threatens the continuation of practice of the Buddha Way.

I feel that this understanding is not accurate. Nagao speaks of "destroying" the hindrances, but in the Ratna. and the BNT the hindrances are unreal, they do not exist--how could they be destroyed? Moreover, he speaks of the Buddha dharma as "transparent" pure being. Thus, he interprets the aśūnya notion as meaning that the Buddha dharma are utterly distinct and separate from śūnya. Yet we have seen that the term aśūnya is used in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought to indicate the nonduality which goes beyond both śūnya and aśūnya in a positive manner. The tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is neither being nor non-being, but Thusness. Nor can the notion of "arithmetic subtraction" stand scrutiny. One cannot subtract "nothing" (i.e., the non-existent defilements) from "neither nothing nor something" (i.e., Thusness). The logic of the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is based on the nonduality of Thusness and is clearly not a matter of eliminating an undesirable element and ending with an astika (being-ful) "something."

Finally, Nagao's fear that the tathāgatagarbha theory will lead to the identification of kleśa and bodhi (delusion

¹Ibid., p. 27b.

and wisdom) and thereby eliminate the theoretical justification of practice is forestalled in the BNT. Of course, Nagao is right, in a sense, insofar as he has put his finger on the weakest point of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought: the relationship between the "pure" tathāgatagarbha and the defilements which cover it (or in other words, the relationship between wisdom and delusion). However, the author of the BNT, for one, is at pains to demonstrate why the Buddha nature doctrine not only is no threat to practice, but actively justifies and encourages it. In the section refuting Hīnayānist views, as mentioned above, it is demonstrated that one cannot say either that the Buddha nature exists or that it doesn't exist. The reasons given for this are not so much philosophical as practical: it is precisely the author's concern to prescribe the necessity of practice and to emphasize its desirability. This, as we saw, stood out as the formative motive behind the writing of the BNT. The Buddha nature, again and again, was seen as the potential for Buddhahood, realizable through the self-transformation of practice. Nagao's fear, while on a purely philosophical level perhaps understandable, is not borne out in the context of the BNT. He would also seem to be disproved by the example of Ch'an (Zen), surely one of the most practice-oriented schools of Buddhism, yet given to such declarations as "this ordinary mind is Buddha mind."

Thus is laid to rest the notion that tathāgatagarbha/ Buddha nature thought is monistic. There are, however, some further remarks to be made on the subject of nondualism as presented in these texts. In the above, we have only considered that portion of the nondualism concept which counters the view of Buddha nature thought as monistic. There are other aspects of nondualism which have not yet been studied. These will be the topic of discussion in the remainder of this chapter.

C. NONDUALISM - OTHER ASPECTS

There are many kinds of nondualism mentioned in the BNT alone: the nonduality of the Buddha and the ordinary person, of being and non-being, of subject and object, of thinking and being, of mind and body, and of person and world. Most of these were initially discussed in the course of the analysis of the BNT. The first two have been sufficiently covered in the section on monism; the rest deserve a few more words.

The nonduality of subject and object is interrelated with those of thinking and being, and of person and world. The position on these topics espoused in the BNT is most clearly stated in the section on the three natures¹ and in the concept of Thusness (the "thusly thus," 如如).² The three natures were seen to represent both a person's

¹See p. 62ff.

²See p. 69ff.

nature and reality's nature, these two being an inseparable or primitive unit, in the sense that they are bound together in what is phenomenologically given. Certainly the two can be distinguished for purposes of analysis, and Buddhists analyze in this manner as much as anyone. However, they see the union of the two in experience as prior to the separation of the two in analysis. Hence, there results a "primitive" concept like a "nature" which simultaneously and immediately indicates both a person and a world, or a subject and an object. Our world is the way it is because of the way we are; we are the way we are because of the way our world is (the tathāgatagarbha is "hidden"). The two arise together and are mutually creative. However, it is stressed that this interplay may be broken by transforming oneself and the way one perceives the world, something over which one has total control and for which one's responsibility is also total. Thus, by changing the way one thinks/perceives/experiences, one simultaneously transforms not only the way one is (one's "being," in an active sense), but the way the world is as well (the way it presents itself to one). There is no sense that the world is "out there," objective to and separate from me. I create it, and it conditions me: the interplay creates a complex mesh which is not to be broken.

This might be called a matter of perspective rather than philosophy. From our point of view, the Buddhists seem to

intercept the subject-object, mind-world continuum precisely at the point where the two "poles" meet, and to emphasize this meeting place over the independent status of the two poles involved. However, their motivation for doing so is plainly evident: soteriology. By stressing the interconnection of person and world, it becomes possible for a person to be given full responsibility for his destiny. There is no external factor impinging on one over which one has no control. One's karma certainly influences one's future possibilities, but this is entirely self-created, and one is always in possession of the freedom (and the responsibility) to respond to one's karma as one will, to make of it what one will. Likewise one's world is a matter of one's creation: life and death, suffering and joy, they are all a matter of how one perceives what is purely "Thus." One may change one's world by changing oneself, inasmuch as one is change and one does create oneself from moment to moment. At each instant, who one is is a matter of choice; to continue in the same pattern one has maintained for some time, or to move in a radically different direction, are equally matters of choice. The world is not so much our stage as it is the manifestation of our working out of our destinies: our grasping or our evading of our freedom and our responsibility.

This point is made in another way with the concept of the "thusly thus" (如如). The latter is another term for

the more familiar "Thusness" (眞如) and is said to amplify the meaning of the latter. It embraces in a "primitive" fashion the Thusness of wisdom and the Thusness of the object of wisdom. As such, these subjective and objective elements are embraced in the singular Thusness. The latter being what is given in experience, it indicates the nonduality of the subjective and objective poles; they do not constitute it, it constitutes them.

The nonduality of mind and body and of person and world are best illustrated through an examination of certain important terms used in the BNT. It was pointed out several times in the discussion on the BNT that the term 身 (shen), which basically means "body," is normally used to represent "person." On the other hand, 心 (hsin), "mind," is only rarely found in the text, and where it is found it indicates either what we would call "mental" acts and dispositions, or, occasionally, it means "person." Thus both the term for "body" and the term for "mind" are used to render "person." A notable example of the first is the Ratna's speaking together of the not-self (無我, not-ego, not-I) and the supreme self (大身, literally great self or great body). Moreover, the standard term used to express "views of self," "theories of selfhood," etc. is 身見 shen-chien, literally "seeing" + "body," or "viewing the body," "views on the body or person or 'self.'"

It is clear that mind-body dualism was not a part of the problematic of selfhood which was undertaken to be resolved. If anything, there seems to be a tendency for the person to be identified with the body more than with the mind--at least as far as the terms go. Of course, functionally, what is salient for the person is his/her degree of wisdom or delusion, so there is no possibility of the person being identified with physical to the exclusion of mental attributes. It is notable, though, how rarely the term for mind is used, whereas the various so-called "mental" acts or dispositions such as wisdom, compassion, and delusion are constantly under discussion. There is really very little in the way of a place to look for a substantial sense of "mind." Where the term hsin is used in the BNT it was seen to mean: the activity involved in realization; person; the dharmakāya (i.e., Dharma-body); and heart/mind, as the metaphorical locus in the person of compassion. It is interesting that the "mind" could be immediately identified with a certain "body" with no further ado.

This particular "body," though, the dharmakāya, is of course no ordinary body, but indicates the Buddha as the "embodiment" of the Dharma. As such it is the "embodiment" of the ultimate truth, of wisdom and of realization. It is also, in this text, identified with the "true" nature, or Buddha nature, of all persons. It is the Buddha "fruit"

and thus immediately identifiable with the Buddha's realization or wisdom (which are the same). Thus, we have a term which basically means "body" being used to indicate the Buddhist "mental" activity par excellence, wisdom. The Buddha nature, troublesome in the eyes of some for its connection with cittaprakṛti, the pure mind, is identified in the BNT more often with the dharmakāya than with any other term. Thus, the Buddha nature is not a "mind" at all. As the BNT says, the dharmakāya is the inversion of ordinary persons' false views of self (身見) and as such merits the name "true self" (眞身).¹

In sum, the mind-body nondualism of the BNT is exemplified by the notion of "person," a term usually rendered with the word for "body," but functionally described mostly in terms of "mental" acts and dispositions. This is generalized with the term dharmakāya, a synonym in this text for Buddha nature, whose salient characteristic is realization or wisdom. Mind-body dualism, therefore, is simply not part of the problematic of this thought. One might hypothesize that the term shen is used to indicate "person" since it is the body which "defines" a person, setting him/her off from the not-self in a physical or public way. However, "mental" acts or dispositions usually form the content of discussions of persons' natures, and this is probably because these are the most important for Buddhist soteriology. One

¹See p. 168.

cannot assume, that is, that we have here an attempt at a full account of personhood; rather, those features are stressed that are most important to the Buddhists--those relating to liberation or realization.

The nondualism of person and world has been discussed above in connection with the nondualism of subject and object. What seem to be two distinct factors to us are, in the Buddhist view, given in immediate union in Thusness. An illustration of this using the term dharmadhātu (Dharma-realm) will be useful. The term dhātu is one of the more ambiguous in the Buddhist lexicon; depending on the context, it can mean cause, nature, element, principle, realm and more. It is found in the compound buddhadhātu and as such is considered the original of the term rendered in Chinese as 佛性, or Buddha nature. In the compound dharmadhātu, it means both the nature of things, or Thusness, and the totality of things, or world.¹ One can already see that, very much like the term "nature," this term can represent the nonduality of person and world, inasmuch as "Thusness" alone can represent both of these meanings, while the second meaning perhaps brings it home to any who are not convinced that the "world," concrete reality, is included in this.

By way of illustration, the BNT shows the dharmadhātu as identified with the three stages of person: ordinary

¹See Takasaki, "Dharmatā," p. 81ff.

person, bodhisattva and Buddha.¹ Elsewhere, it states that it is by penetrating the dharmadhātu that one may discover the true self, or dharmakāya. Hence, the dharmadhātu is all persons, individually and collectively, as well as the truth of what is, or reality. Just as in the case of the concept of "nature," the concept of world, or "reality" comprehends both the world as it presents itself to persons, and persons' perceiving of the world. In general, the term dharmadhātu tends to have a more "objective" flavor than other terms, since one of its meanings is "world" or "realm." Yet it is clearly identified with persons, and even with the "true self" in this text.

Interesting in this regard is the term dharmakāyadhātu, presented as one of the characteristics of the dharmakāya. This dharmakāyadhātu, in turn, is described by the terms (among others) dharmakāya, Thusness, supreme truth, wisdom and compassion. Hence it seems plain that dharmakāyadhātu and dharmakāya are interchangeable terms, with the dhātu portion adding little. In this way it is once again demonstrated that kāya (person) and dhātu (world) are nondual, the meaning of each being implicit in the other. The string of meanings for the term dharmakāyadhātu is comprised of both primarily personal (wisdom, compassion) and primarily "worldly" (Thusness, supreme truth) attributes, though these two categories cannot be kept completely distinct.

¹See p. 122ff.

Another very clear illustration of the nonduality of person and world is found in the SBS, where it says, "the mark of the Tathāgata-kāya does not forsake the emptiness nature; all Buddha lands manifest this kāya."¹ That is, the Tathāgata-kāya (or Buddha) does not have any identifying mark of its own; it is empty of marks. However, you may find the Buddha manifested in the world. In other words, the Buddha and the world are not separate. This is a fine example of person-world nonduality.

D. CONCLUSION

We have seen that tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought is not characterised by monism, inasmuch as it is based on a nondualistic ontology. In particular, it is not idealistic monism, since there is no substantial "mind" evidenced in these texts. Many passages which appear to be concerned with ontology are in fact concerned instead with soteriology or with action. Thus it is a category mistake, for example, to compare the self pāramitā of Buddha nature thought with the ātman of Brahmanical philosophy, inasmuch as the manner of existence or "being" attributable to the former is strictly limited to the context of fruits of practice. Certainly, the BNT may encourage such a category mistake by its manner of expression, but careful study does show it to be an error to conceive the self pāramitā in the same

¹SBS, p. 476b.

context (or category) in which we normally conceive selfhood. We find the BNT's author to be justified in his contention that the Buddha nature is not a form of own-nature, since it is not an entity of any kind. Nor is Buddha nature thought anomalous in the historical development of Buddhism; it is a logical consequence and extension of śūnya thought, though again its form of expression is quite different from the norm and virtually the opposite of that of śūnya thought.

As nondualism, the ontology of the BNT is manifested in the Thusness concept. The latter, exactly as Buddha nature, transcends the duality of being and non-being. Just as śūnyatā negates these two extremes, so does Thusness. Thusness, moreover, is revealed by emptiness. Thus, emptiness does the work of negation, on the other side of which or from out of which Thusness appears. Thusness is the fulfillment of emptiness. One is tempted to say that Thusness represents the ontological nature of Buddha nature, but in fact, Thusness (which is fully identifiable with Buddha nature) reveals the inseparability of ontology and soteriology here. Emptiness' "work of negation," referred to above, is in fact the work of a Buddhist practitioner. Emptiness is, ontologically, the negation of being and non-being, but it is so only insofar as the practitioner effects this negation. Thusness, likewise, is both the final ontological position reached on the far side of the negation and

the culminating stage of a person's practice. In both respects, it is the "aboriginally existent" Buddha nature.

Buddha nature is not a "mind." It embraces both mind and body, person and world, subject and object. Soteriologically, it is to be understood as the convergence of person and Buddhahood in all the moments of this convergence: the potential to realize Buddhahood, the practice toward realizing Buddhahood, the realization itself, and the fruits of that realization. Thus, Buddha nature is a notion fundamentally based on the action-process of realization, rather than on substantiality, and as such, practice of the Buddha Way plays a critical role in Buddha nature thought. These features, action and practice, will be the subjects of the remainder of this analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

ACTION

A. INTRODUCTION

One of our reasons for arguing above that tathāgata-garbha/Buddha nature thought is not a form of monism in the substantialist sense was our understanding that the tathāgata-garbha or Buddha nature represents activity rather than substantiality. In the present chapter we shall more closely examine the concept of action outside the context of the monism issue and consider its place in the overall philosophy of the texts. The place it occupies is of central philosophical significance.

I claim with the title of this study that the Buddha nature is an "active self." By this I do not mean that the Buddha nature is a busy or effective agent. Rather, I intend removing the Buddha nature concept from the category of "self" understood in the sense of an entity or subsistent thing and placing it within the context of action theory. According to the latter, we may most usefully proceed toward an understanding of human personhood if we make the acts of the person (as opposed to notions of body or mind) the primary focus of our attention. The concept of

the act is seen in this philosophy as a kind of primitive concept (in Strawson's sense), prior to those of distinct "mental" and "physical" functions. Adherents of this philosophy hope that such an approach may result in the overcoming of the difficulties traditionally associated with the Cartesian dualistic model.

I place the Buddha nature concept in this general category since it is expressly portrayed in terms of activities and functions and not in the terms of a substantive entity or thing (whether mind or body). The present chapter is intended to offer evidence for this understanding based on the teachings found in the SBS and, primarily, the BNT. This evidence will be presented in two sections. To establish our thesis, we will first look at passages in which the Buddha nature or its equivalent is spoken of and identified in terms of its functions. Secondly, we will examine three categories of terms which appear to impute a form of substantiality or "thing"-likeness to the Buddha nature: own-nature, mind and the "consciousness-only" notion. We will attempt to determine whether these terms in fact impute substantiality or whether they may represent actions.

B. ACTION

1. THE SUPREME BASIS SŪTRA

In the SBS, actions of the Tathāgata are twice made headings for discussion. First, bodhi or wisdom is described by ten characteristics, one of which is the functioning or

acts (事) of bodhi. The two acts here ascribed to bodhi are called "non-discriminative wisdom" and "subsequent non-discriminative wisdom."¹ It is noteworthy both that the author of the SBS considers these to be acts, and that he so clearly labels them as such, so that there can be no doubt in this matter. Hence, it is evident that wisdom is here understood as an act, not as a quality which a "mind" "has." Wisdom is a way of behaving. "Non-discriminative wisdom" consists in the act of liberating oneself, and "subsequent non-discriminative wisdom" in the act of liberating others. There is apparently no "thing" called wisdom, and consequently no need of a substantial "mind" to serve as the focus for it.

The other place in the SBS which bears the heading, "acts," is the chapter on the "Tathāgata's acts." This is a list of actions performed by the Buddha in the course of his own realization and in teaching others. It is once again made evident that the author of this text considered such "mental" functions as knowledge, memory, dhyāna (meditation), vigilance and even attitudes (having an "unpolluted mind" concerning all classes of practitioners and non-practitioners) to be acts. Thus, an "act" here is any kind of human functioning with or without apparent physical movements. Significantly, the Buddha is expressly defined in terms of two of these not obviously physical

¹See p. 209.

acts: bodhi and compassion. One with perfect bodhi and compassion is a Buddha, and vice versa. In this sense, the statement in the SBS that "the Tathāgata dwells in these acts,"¹ may be seen as quite in keeping with the gist of the text. Buddhahood is constituted in the acts of bodhi and compassion.

2. THE BUDDHA NATURE TREATISE

Whereas the SBS identifies the Buddha in terms of action, the BNT does the same for the ordinary person, the person who "is" or "possesses" the Buddha nature. One clear example of the Buddha nature's "active" identity is that one of its constituent parts is bodhicitta. Despite its name (bodhi = wisdom, + citta = mind), bodhicitta does not indicate any kind of substantive "mind," but on the contrary, is glossed by prayoga, which indicates the activity of engaging in and making progress in the Buddha Way. Thus its meaning is essentially active, and as a constituent of Buddha nature, it renders this active as well. The other two constituents, in addition to signifying nonduality, also exhibit an active nature. In the case of the true (pari-nispanna) nature, the act of correctly perceiving reality is indicated. In the case of the tathāgatagarbha, it is both the potential act of realizing Buddhahood (of which all beings are capable) and the actualization of that potential which are expressed. Moreover, it is clear in the text

¹SBS, p. 476b.

that the tathāgatagarbha "storehouse" is not a thing which contains various elements, but rather is constituted by those elements which it is metaphorically said to "embrace." The items which are "contained" within the storehouse all exhibit active natures: Thusness (which includes the sense of correct perception of reality), true practice or wisdom, and the fruits of that practice, namely realization of Buddhahood. Hence, it is clear that all three constituents of the Buddha nature contribute to the active nature of the latter. In particular, it is noteworthy that wisdom, virtually the sine qua non of a Buddha, is treated here as interchangeable with "true practice." Thus wisdom, attributed to a person, would seem to indicate correct practice (a kind of act) rather than a static or substantial quality which a person could "have."

In listing characteristics of the Buddha nature, the BNT, like the SBS, includes "functions" on its list. The functions of the Buddha nature here are two: stirring up feelings of repugnance for samsāra, on the one hand, and feelings of desire and joy for nirvāna, on the other. Both of these are part of the all-embracing act of progressing towards realization of Buddhahood. In acting in the manner described by these two functions, a person manifests his/her Buddha nature. Elsewhere in the text, nirvāna, one of the aspects or "names" of the dharmakāya or Buddha nature, is described as "the great functioning obtained by nondiscrim-

inactive wisdom."¹ This is by way of demonstrating that nirvāna is not the purely negative cessation of suffering, but has a positive aspect as well. When it comes to actually naming this positive aspect, though, we find a certain functioning or activity referred to, rather than any substantive quality.

One very direct illustration of the active nature under discussion is found in the assertion that the wisdom which characterizes the dharmakāya is an activity and an ability.² It is affirmed that it is because of the active nature and ability of wisdom that ignorance is undone. Thus, the wisdom of the dharmakāya is directly shown to be an activity and to have the ability to effect change. This particular activity, though, is manifested in breaking through the law of karma (and karma literally means "act") so that the act of wisdom is unlike samsaric acts, acts which are produced within the realm of karma. In this sense, wisdom is an act which functions to undo acts (and their retribution). Thus, while it is clearly active rather than substantial, the particular kind of change which it effects renders it a "non-act" from the point of view of liberation, though it is an act from our philosophical perspective.

This notion is further confirmed in the passage which states that the correct meaning of "self" is non-attachment.³

¹See p. 104. ²See p. 137. ³See p. 150.

Here, "self" is explicitly defined as a particular act, or non-act, namely, non-attachment. This too is an act which undoes other acts inasmuch as any act performed with non-attachment is an act whose basic nature is so transformed that it can no longer bear karmic fruit. Thus, in the karmic sense, the act is rendered a non-act. It is by virtue of the efficacy of the non-act of non-attachment that the efficacy (in the karmic sense) of all other acts is undone. This is the functioning of the "self" which is equated with the dharmakāya.

The dharmakāya (which, it is to be remembered, is all along equated with Buddha nature) has two emanations, both of which represent different aspects of its nature, the sambhogakāya and nirmānakāya. These two are alike said to possess three virtues which illustrate their basic character: wisdom, compassion, and meditation (samādhi). Note that these three all represent acts. These three chief act-attributes are then elucidated in terms of more specific acts which they encompass, such as saving sentient beings, entering the Noble Path, taking pleasure in the Dharma, etc. In fact, these two kāya are described exclusively in terms of their functions, or the acts they manifest. There is not the slightest hint of anything substantial in their natures.

The three kāya, moreover, are all said to be "eternal" precisely because they endlessly perform acts of benefit to

others. Thus, it is not the case that a transcendent substance endures. They are eternal because the Dharma (whose raison d'être is solely realization) is eternal, because there are endless sentient beings for them to save and their compassion for these beings is endless, because they manifest super powers and wisdom, etc.¹ Action is implicit in all these points. Most notably, they are eternal because they act within the world and yet are not "sullied" by their immersion in the mundane sphere. While performing acts, they are untouched by the binding potential of those acts because of the wisdom of non-attachment.

The text of the BNT closes with a list of five "meanings," or characteristics, of the Buddha nature. The fifth meaning is especially noteworthy in the present context, and deserves to be quoted here.

The beginningless, united, excellent nature is the Dharma. The commentator says, it is called the 'beginningless' because the dharmakāya's prajñā, great compassion, and samādhi, which are obtained by the Buddha nature, all aboriginally exist. The essence and the functions have never been separate and therefore we say they are 'united.'²

Here, although we see mention of something called the "essence" of Buddha nature, this is not an essence in the sense in which the term is ordinarily taken. That this is true can be seen in the immediate identification of the "essence" with the functions of prajñā, compassion, and

¹See p. 155ff. ²BNT, p. 811b-c.

samādhi (the same triad as mentioned before). To say that the functions and the essence are "united," is, in the usage of the author of the BNT, to say that they are the same, or that the one is constituted by the other. Throughout the text he has repeated that, for example, the tathāgatagarbha is united with the Buddha dharmas, but separate from the adventitious defilements. Thus, it appears that the "essence" of the Buddha nature is constituted by its functions. One might in particular understand these functions as standing in place of a "Mind," thus eliminating the necessity of speaking of the latter. Instead of a substantial "mind," then, we have three functions--what we would call "mental" functions, though such a term does not appear in the text--wisdom, compassion, and meditation. These functions, in their verbal or active sense, constitute the identity or so-called "essence" of Buddha nature. Thus, the anātman doctrine is unthreatened by the presence of a lurking, metaphysical mind, and yet the author of the BNT is still able to speak positively of a Buddha nature which "really exists." The key which makes possible this affirmative speech in the midst of the formidable anātman tradition of Buddhism lies in the identification of the Buddha nature with its functions. There is nothing substantial being assumed, and yet the efficacy of Buddhist practice can be affirmed without restraint, inasmuch as the latter is constituted by action. Thus, in the Buddha

nature concept we have the attempted resolution of a sticky dilemma in Buddhist thought: how to affirm the efficacy and desirability of the Buddhist path without creating an astika (beingful, and thus affirmative) "something" to which people would tend to become attached, thus hindering their liberation. The Buddha nature would seem to escape from this bind principally by virtue of its identification with the path; the Buddha nature represents the affirmation of everyone's ability to tread the path to the end, the manifestation of practice on the path and the fruits of that practice (the functions of prajñā, etc.). Thus, by virtue of its active nature, the Buddha nature can be absolutely affirmative without providing a basis for attachment.

C. NON-SUBSTANTIALITY

1. Own-nature

If the active nature of the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is so critical, what then, it must be asked, should be made of the discussions of the "own-nature" of Buddha nature in the BNT and the "own-nature" of the Tathāgata bodhi in the SBS? Does not this notion of "own-nature" indicate some kind of substantial quality attributable to these? In order to defend the thesis that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is essentially active in nature, we must also show that there is no substantiality inherent in its character. It would seem that the very notion

of an own-nature would indicate the presence of substantiality. Is this borne out in context?

In the SBS, there is clearly no substantiality inherent in the own-nature concept. The relevant section reads,

What is the own-nature of bodhi? It is the ten [bodhisattva] stages and the ten pāramitā; it is the cultivation of the Thusness Principle and the Thusness Limit, the Path which separates [one from delusion]. The transformation of the basis which is attained [by these practices] is tranquil and clear. . . . This is what is called the own-nature of bodhi.¹

The own-nature of bodhi, then, seems to be completely constituted by various practices and activities. Among these, the above-mentioned "stages" are stages of realization and the pāramitā are the practices which the bodhisattva is said to perfect. As for the "transformation of the basis," though this has a substantial-sounding name, its meaning is purely active. It is to be recalled that in the SBS the "basis" in general seemed to refer to either the Buddha--a person--or bodhi--an action. In the specific context of the own-nature of bodhi, the transformation of the basis is further explained as both the cause and the fruit, that is, the entirety, of the path of realization. It is the extinction of defilements and the penetration of Thusness. Hence, the transformation involved is that inherent in the path of liberation, while the basis would seem to be that which is transformed, the person (epitomized

¹SBS, p. 470c.

by the figure of the Buddha) or the person's bodhi, with the latter understood as the totality of the person's mentating processes or activities as they are transformed through Buddhist practice. In sum, there is nothing substantialistic in the notion of the own-nature of bodhi as discussed in the SBS. Rather, it indicates the self-transformation of the person who engages in Buddhist practice. The present notion of own-nature, then, parallels the above-mentioned assertion that the essence (of the Buddha nature) is its functions. Thus, both "essence" and "own-nature" simply mean "identity," and the identity is found in the functions.

In the BNT, the own-nature of the Buddha nature is described as being characterized by three attributes.¹

(1) It is said to resemble a wish-fulfilling jewel, inasmuch as it is realization which fulfills one's most true desire. (2) It is characterized by non-differentiation, in that ordinary persons, saints and Buddhas are all basically alike. (3) Finally, it is characterized by compassion for all. Certainly none of these indicate the presence of any substantiality. On the contrary, the first shows that the Buddha nature has to do with realization, the second that all beings equally share the potential for Buddhahood, and the third, that it is manifested in acts of compassion.

¹See p. 108ff.

Hence, the own-nature of Buddha nature as described here is concerned purely with realization, its potential, and its fruits. Moreover, these three characteristics are said to indicate, respectively, (1) the inconceivability of the Buddha nature (or realization); (2) that one should realize it; and (3) the infinity of its virtues.¹ Thus, the three attributes do not indicate substantial qualities which the Buddha nature as such possesses. Rather, looking from the perspective of ordinary persons toward the Buddha nature, one understands that one cannot comprehend it, and yet that it is desirable that one realize it, inasmuch as to do so will make one an infinitely virtuous, i.e., compassionate, person. In the BNT, as in the SBS, then, there is nothing substantial to the own-nature concept. However, in the BNT this nonsubstantiality is directly expressed as a function of understanding Buddha nature as a path which a person may choose to follow. The Buddha nature concept serves both to entice people to engage in Buddhist practice, and to represent the potential, activity and fruition of that practice itself. The "own-being" of Buddha nature is perhaps best understood as the distillation of that practice; in representing the essence of Buddha nature, it manifests the essentials of Buddhist practice. Just as the latter convey no substantiality, neither does the former. Since

¹BNT, p. 797a.

there is no Buddhist practice apart from persons practicing Buddhism, persons in the act of practicing are all there is to be found here as a foundation or "basis" for the edifice of Buddhism.

2. Mind

Before concluding our case for the nonsubstantiality of the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature, we must take a look at two related terms to determine their status regarding substantiality. The first of these is the term hsin (心) meaning "mind." As noted above, our texts do not often use the term for "mind," and where they do, they often could substitute a term for "person" without any appreciable change in meaning.

One instance in which the term "mind" cannot be quite so easily treated is contained in the following passage from the BNT. "The own-nature, pure mind is called the Noble Truth of Path. The non-grasping of the pure mind in which delusion never is born is called the Noble Truth of Cessation."¹ In this case, though something called a "pure mind" is mentioned, it is immediately identified with two of the Noble Truths, already indicating that it cannot be taken as a substantial thing. Rather, by virtue of the two Truths which it represents, it is an expression for the act of engaging in practice of the Buddha Way, and

¹BNT, p. 802a. See p. 115.

for the "non-act" of non-grasping. The identification of pure mind with non-grasping is an echo of the equation of true self and non-grasping which was noted above. In both cases, a substantial-sounding term, "mind" or "self," is rendered nonsubstantial by its identification with certain behaviors and actions.

The single instance of use of the term "mind" which is the most difficult to explain as nonsubstantial is found in a passage of the BNT borrowed from the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, giving nine similes for the condition of the tathāgatagarbha in the midst of defilement. The fourth of these similes likens the "mind" covered by defilement to the condition of pure gold fallen into filth.¹ This simile, taken from what is considered the earliest text of tathāgatagarbha thought, reflects the lack of sophistication of that text, the similes it employs being somewhat clumsy attempts at expressing an "inconceivable" doctrine: the relationship of wisdom to ignorance. As a simile, the "pure mind" does seem to bear substantial qualities, especially in its comparability to pure gold. By borrowing this simile, the BNT inherits this apparent substantiality made unavoidable by the comparison. However, immediately following the statement of the simile, a few remarks are added which make it clear that there should be no substantiality assumed here. After rendering the simile of the pure gold fallen

¹Ibid., p. 807c.

into filth, the text continues, "The man free of passion is also like this, because the defilements on the surface of (上) the mind rebel against the intentions. That is why this simile is related."¹ In characteristic fashion, the author of the BNT relates the simile of the gold to the condition of the ordinary person, explaining the former as a metaphor for the latter. He evidently wishes to use the simile to illustrate that a person (like gold) is inherently pure, i.e., free of passions, and yet "on top" of this pure nature are the defilements which lead one away from one's real nature.² This, of course, is standard tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, but the point here is that it is the teaching about the human condition which is being promoted, while the simile with its apparent metaphysical implications is not to be taken as any more than an attempt to clarify the former. Where it misleads (and it does mislead to the extent that it implies substantiality) it is not to be adhered to. As a carryover from the clumsy mode of expression of the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra it is incorporated into the BNT. However, the author of the BNT attempts to bring the simile into line with his effort to clarify the human condition and the path to Buddhahood. Thus, the example of pure gold in filth

¹Ibid.

²This appears in certain respects to be the inversion of the Freudian model.

likened to the "mind" amidst defilements in an apt simile insofar as it sheds light on the human existential condition. However, like all similes, its fit is not perfect, and we should not permit the simile to extend so far as to indicate any substantiality to a human "mind," a notion which runs counter to the fundamental teaching and perspective of the BNT.

3. Consciousness-Only

The other term to be investigated with respect to the substantiality issue is the term "consciousness-only wisdom," used in the BNT. The concept of "consciousness-only," originated in the Yogācāra, is often the basis for understanding the latter school as idealistic. While I do not wish to broach that particular issue, I do wish to show that its incorporation into the BNT does not render the latter idealistic.

The passage in question reads as follows.

How can one escape the extremes [of grasped and grasper]? By relying on the manovijñāna to create consciousness-only wisdom. Consciousness-only wisdom is the wisdom [constituted by the understanding that] all sense data lack own-nature. When this consciousness-only wisdom is perfected, it turns around and extinguishes its own root, viz., manovijñāna. How is this? Since the sense data lack own-being, manovijñāna is not produced. With the manovijñāna destroyed, consciousness-only [wisdom] destroys itself.¹

The pertinent issue here is whether this represents an idealistic theory, in the sense that consciousness or mind

¹BNT, p. 809b. See p. 132.

is "real," while the objects of that consciousness lack reality. My interpretation is that this is not the case, inasmuch as (1) the mind or consciousness is nothing substantial and (2) the mind or consciousness does not partake of any reality which its objects lack. As the above passage indicates, it is true that the sense data, or objects of consciousness, are unreal by virtue of their lack of own-nature. However, consciousness and its objects are shown to be interrelated even to the extent of mutual dependence (as would be expected according to the law of pratītyasamutpāda). Hence, it is not the case that consciousness is real while its objects are unreal; on the contrary, being mutually dependent, they share the same degree of reality or unreality. Therefore, this theory accords mundane reality to the meeting of consciousness and objects, i.e., the act of cognizing, while denying the reality of both consciousness (as thing or "mind") and objects per se. Thus, "consciousness-only" should be understood as indicating the act of "cognizing" only. In fact, this is hinted in the compound term, "consciousness-only wisdom," inasmuch as wisdom is portrayed again and again in this text as an act. Hence, "consciousness-only wisdom," which is in this context given as an illustration of the dharmakāya (which, in turn, is synonymous with Buddha nature) is not an indication of idealism nor of a substantial mind or consciousness, but is an illustration

of the importance of the notion of action as constitutive of Buddha nature.

D. CONCLUSION

The functions or acts of the Buddha nature are its "essence." It is not a mind, except insofar as the latter is a metaphor for certain attitudes and dispositions of the person, nor is it a form of own-nature, unless the latter is understood as practice or realization. Whenever apparently substantial terms are used with respect to the Buddha nature, we find that they really stand for acts. Even the wisdom pre-eminently characteristic of the Buddha nature is expressly identified as an act, rather than a quality which a "mind" could "possess."

Since the acts of wisdom, non-attachment, compassion and the like are called the "essence" of Buddha nature, it is clear that it is in terms of these functions that the Buddha is identified. The functions therefore constitute the identity of the Buddha nature. As such, if selfhood is understood in terms of identity, we may justifiably call the Buddha nature an "active self." Thus, in calling the Buddha nature an "active self," I mean that it is identified exclusively in terms of particular acts. We have seen in this chapter something of the nature of the acts constitutive of the Buddha nature's identity. In the following chapter we will complete this understanding with additional details on the nature of these constitutive acts.

CHAPTER SIX

PRACTICE

A. INTRODUCTION

In the course of the discussion of the BNT, it was again and again evident that one of the author's main motivations in writing the text must have been to encourage Buddhist practice. The same motivation stands behind his concept of the Buddha nature itself, and in fact the latter incorporates concern for Buddhist practice to the extent that it can be said to be a metaphor for it. The concept of practice as a constituent of the Buddha nature notion is of course closely related to that of action as such a constituent. However, whereas our interest in the latter focused on its implication for ontology (i.e., nonsubstantiality), our interest in practice is more related to an interest in Buddhism as a living religion. In the concept of Buddha nature as constituted by action and practice is established a meeting ground for the philosophy and the living religion of Buddhism.

In this chapter we will examine the forms of practice advocated by and exemplified in the BNT and the SBS. The NINDS is omitted as it has virtually nothing to say on the

subject of practice. In the BNT and SBS we find two texts closely related in the literary tradition which nonetheless present notions of practice that are almost diametrically opposed. We shall consider the forms of practice advocated in each, with the aim of understanding the place of practice in the overall teachings of each text. Once we understand the role of practice in each, we will have a more concrete idea of the concept of Buddha nature of each, since the "essence" of the latter is its functions relating to realization, or in other words, practice.

B. ANALYSIS

1. The Buddha Nature Treatise

The theme of the centrality of practice is announced early in the BNT. The opening chapter declares, for example, that the Buddha taught the Buddha nature concept in order to aid people to undo their ignorance and move toward enlightenment.¹ In other words, as far as the BNT's author is concerned, the Buddha nature teaching is a matter of upāya, the rationale for it being that it will promote realization. Hence, the issue of the truth or falsity of the teaching is not even broached, unless truth is defined pragmatically. Similarly, the question of what the Buddha nature "is" is either a misguided question or not important.

This initial clue is followed up in a more detailed discussion, the gist of which is that one can say neither

¹BNT, p. 787a.

that the Buddha nature exists nor that it doesn't exist. The reason for this refusal to permit ontological labeling of the Buddha nature is not philosophical per se, though the discussion is filled with philosophical terms, but is once again practical. "Buddha nature" represents change, the self-transformation inherent in realizing Buddhahood, which can be fulfilled only by practice. One will not practice if he feels there "is" or "is not" a Buddha nature, inasmuch as both formulations call up an image of an unchanging reality, whereas the heart of practice is change. Thus, both these terms must be denied. Yet, given that the author's goal is to encourage practice, he finishes by stating that the Buddha nature "aboriginally exists," insisting that this term has nothing to do with either of the changeless states of being and non-being, while determining to express himself in positive, practice-encouraging terms. Thus, what the "Buddha nature" concept seems to represent is the knowledge that one can attain Buddhahood, but that this attainment requires the cultivation of Buddhist practice.

In the discussion of the parāvṛtti-āśraya ("transformation of the basis") dharmakāya,¹ a notion constitutive of the Buddha nature concept, we find a concept whose meaning is entirely grounded in practice. As the "transformation of the basis" it is able to convey the transformation or

¹See p. 84ff.

change inherent in practice. What is changed, of course, is the practitioner moving from the stage of ordinary person through bodhisattva to Buddha. That there is continuity between these is conveyed with the term "Buddha nature" as applied to ordinary persons. That there is radical change is conveyed by the "transformation of the basis." The metaphor of transformation simply indicates one's acts of ridding oneself of the non-existent defilements, delusion, etc.-- in other words, engaging in Buddhist practice. Thus, to speak of Buddha nature at all is, in effect, to draw a comparison between the ordinary person and the Buddha and to say, 'here is Buddha nature concealed by delusion' and 'there is Buddha nature in its original purity.' Yes, the two are linked, but that very linkage draws attention to the disparity between the two and the consequent necessity of practice. The term "Buddha nature" itself justifies Buddhist practice by virtue of its ability to represent both the conjunction of and the disparity between the ordinary person and the Buddha. As such, it is a metaphor for the validity of the Buddha Way, i.e., the path of realization.

At the same time, by virtue of its synonymity with such terms as dharmakāya and "Thusness," the term, "Buddha nature" is always encouraging as to the value and desirability of the goal of Buddhist practice, as well as to its feasibility. Hence, reality seen aright is now described as "Thus" (as opposed to "empty"), pure, eternal and

wondrous. Moreover, by incorporating the dharmakāya with its "perfections" of purity, self, bliss and eternity, the Buddha nature concept certainly induces practice in those who perceive themselves and their world as impurity, not-self, suffering and transience.

It is constantly reiterated in the BNT that one's goal must be realization or wisdom. The practices to this end which are discussed in most detail in the text are the practice of the Thusness Principle and the practice of the Thusness Limit.¹ These practices begin with the realization of the emptiness of persons and things and culminate in fully exhausting the contents of Thusness. These two practices are also called the Thusness Principle and the Thusness Limit wisdom. Hence, wisdom is seen as both practice and goal, and even as "goal" attained, it is still an on-going active practice, rather than an "end state." In this way, the Buddha nature is constituted by these two practices or "wisdoms," both as a causative or change-inducing factor, and as the manifestation of the process of purification: that which purifies is that which is purified. Buddha nature is both. In this we see most clearly that Buddha nature is "essentially" practice.

This is further confirmed by another statement in the same passage. "The own-nature, pure mind is called the Noble Truth of Path. The non-grasping of the pure

¹See p. 114ff.

mind in which delusion never is born is called the Noble Truth of Cessation."¹ Here equivalents of Buddha nature are identified with the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, Cessation and Path. Both Cessation and Path are essentially practice, Path obviously so, and Cessation in that it is here given as meaning "non-grasping." Thus, Buddha nature is the treading of the Path to liberation; evidence of that engagement in Path activities is found in the ceasing of delusion as manifest in non-grasping. As noted above, the "pure mind" mentioned here is no substantial mind; rather, by virtue of its identification with the Third and Fourth Noble Truths it represents the activity and motivation, effort and actual practices of the person who "is" on the Path.

Lest all this talk of self-realization be misleading, it should be noted that the author of the BNT does not concentrate on prajñā and self-benefit to the exclusion of karunā and other-benefit. It is true, though, that there is more attention devoted to the former than to the latter in this text. The reason for this, it seems to me, is that the BNT focuses almost entirely on the position and condition of the ordinary person and what s/he needs to do to remedy his/her situation of entrapment in delusion. Thus, the author concentrates on painting as vivid a picture as possible of what the human condition is, both "really" and

¹See p. 115.

phenomenally, but focusing somewhat more, perhaps, on the "real," though non-apparent, condition in order to help people to recognize and realize it. It is secondary to this author's concern to speak very much of the Buddha, except insofar as he stresses the identification of the Buddha with the ordinary person, which is mentioned many times. It is apparently not the conviction of the author, however, that salvation is to be realized by faith. This is a conclusion which is inescapable in a study of the BNT, which constantly urges practice to end ignorance and realize wisdom, while making only the most cursory remarks concerning faith. If it is thus assumed that faith is not especially efficacious, then the corollary is that the Buddha's compassion toward humankind will also be a less than central point in the text. In other words, what the author seems to feel is needful is for people to engage in practices that will end their delusion. The text appears to be written, then, from the point of view of the ordinary person struggling to progress on the Buddhist path. Anything which is not of immediate and direct relevance to this central concern, is of secondary importance in the text.

That is not to say that compassion is ignored in this text, as it is not. It is simply not emphasized. However, it is mentioned in passing in various places throughout the text. One of the attributes mentioned of the dharmakāya is

compassion,¹ and in the discussion of the sambhogakāya and nirmānakāya, which are said to emerge from the dharmakāya, compassion is one of the three features or "virtues" which is stressed.² This accords with the above understanding, in that the sambhoga- and nirmānakāya represent the Buddha as teacher, thus manifesting the act which is the epitome of compassion in Buddhism, whereas the dharmakāya is the body of the Buddha with which ordinary beings are identified in this text. The dharmakāya, then, while nominally manifesting compassion, does not represent it in its essence to the extent the other two bodies do. Thus, the BNT seems to assume³ that the cultivation of wisdom and self-benefit come first on the path, and that once these are completed, they are then manifested in acts of compassion for the benefit of others. The assumption seems to be that the former practices must precede the latter, the latter being impossible without the foundation of the other.

In the case of the sambhoga- and nirmānakāya, compassion looms as a central element. The former exhibits compassion in leaving behind the duality of saving oneself and saving others, in removing sentient beings from conditions of distress and in inspiring in them feelings of faith and joy

¹See p. 156. ²See p. 153ff.

³This is directly expressed in the SBS; see p. 209.

which will aid them in their efforts to achieve liberation. The nirmānakāya represents the historical Buddha, whose entire life was an act of compassion performed as upāya for the good of humankind. Moreover, all three Buddha bodies are said to be eternal precisely because "they always perform acts of profit to the world." It is because they eternally manifest compassion for the endless mass of humanity that their own eternity is affirmed.

Thus, there is no structural shortage of compassion in the BNT; it is just located rather specifically in figures somewhat peripheral to the author's central concern. To the extent that it is central to the condition of humanity that they be shown the way out of their plight, the Buddha's compassionate acts are directly of importance to the author's theme. Beyond this, though, it would seem that he felt the ordinary person to be too immature to exhibit any acts of true compassion. As such, perhaps the truly compassionate act for such a one is to "mature his roots," i.e., to continue to cultivate his own insight and mature his comprehension of the Dharma. While thus benefitting himself directly, he may be doing the only thing he can at this stage of his development which may eventually lead to his ability to benefit others. It is by engaging in such practices that one manifests one's Buddha nature, according to the BNT.

2. The Supreme Basis Sūtra

The picture presented by the SBS is in certain respects diametrically opposed to that of the BNT. While the latter stresses the cultivation of wisdom towards realization of liberation on the part of the ordinary person, the former emphasizes acts of compassion on the part of the Buddha and faith in the Buddha on the part of the ordinary person. Thus, the SBS states over and over again, at virtually every opportunity, that the tathāgatagarbha theory is incomprehensible to anyone but a Buddha and that the only recourse for others is to have faith in the Buddha's word. Faith is quite apparently the sole efficacious means to liberation in the view of the SBS' author.

The emphasis on faith is in a sense an abdication of action on the part of ordinary beings and a pointer towards the acts of another, the compassionate acts of the Buddha. Of course, faith is still an act of a sort, but of a peculiar kind; it is an act which does not carry its own efficacy, but on the contrary manifests inefficacy, a void of ability which is filled by the effective acts of the Buddha. Thus, what is really salient in the SBS is the corpus of compassionate acts performed by the Buddha. There is in this regard an entire chapter of the SBS devoted to the topic of "Tathāgata Acts." The acts which are listed here emphasize the Buddha's teaching and the aid which he compassionately provides for mankind. The teaching

of course is based on his knowledge and would not be possible without it, and yet the impression one gets is that what is really important here is that the Buddha does in fact teach. The position of the author seems to be that the essence of a Buddha is compassionate acts; it is these acts that make a Buddha "be" a Buddha--they are the defining element. This is made clear by the discussion of the two functions of bodhi: non-discriminative wisdom and subsequent non-discriminative wisdom, the latter of which is equivalent to compassion. Compassion, in its "subsequent" position, clearly intersects with the ultimate or Buddha "stage." Thus, as the culmination of Buddhist practice, compassion provides the identity of the Buddha.

With the dual emphasis in the SBS on faith and the compassion of the Buddha, it is pointless to speculate to which of these two elements the author is primarily committed. The commitment to faith as the essential religious practice requires an emphasis on the compassionate acts of the Buddha, and vice versa. Neither of these factors could be changed without a corresponding change in the other.

C. CONCLUSION

"Buddha nature" in the BNT represents practices towards the attainment of realization, while in the SBS, the Buddha's nature is manifested as the culmination of practice, acts of compassion towards humankind. In both cases, the active nature, and in particular the practice of the Buddha Way, be it manifested in the search for wisdom or acts of compassion,

is at the heart of the message. The focal "person" of each text is defined in terms of action and practice: in the BNT, the ordinary person is defined in terms of realization and the path of acts leading towards that goal, while in the SBS, the Buddha is defined in terms of his compassionate acts which are based on realization.

Hence, in spite of the manifest disparity in the approaches of the two texts, we find that each shows in its own manner that the persons of the Buddha Way, be they ordinary persons or Buddhas, are understood as persons engaged in actions. The BNT shows this most clearly and in most detail, filling out the picture with a denial of the mind-body, person-world dualisms. Nonetheless, what is shown there is certainly complemented by the understanding of the Buddha presented in the SBS.

* * *

What "is" Buddha nature? It is an "active self," a non-entity whose identity is constituted solely by the acts which characterize it. How does the term "Buddha nature" function? It represents the path of realization, constituted by the acts of the Buddhist practitioner. The acts in question are of course the same in both instances, and these two levels of meaning finally merge. Ontology and soteriology are once again shown to be inseparable and mutually constitutive categories in this philosophy. All statements concerning what "is" take place within the over-

riding concern with soteriology. If a statement is not in some way an encouragement to or an aid in practice, it has no place here. This is a natural corollary to the position made manifest in the BNT, that all of "Buddhism," save for realization, is upāya, and upāya is that which conduces towards realization.

We have thus far been concerned to determine the meaning of the Buddha nature concept as presented in our three texts and have interpreted the place occupied by this thought with the help of our contemporary categories of metaphysics (it is nondualism, not monism) and theories of personhood (it seems harmonious with action theory). We have assessed the significance of Buddha nature thought with respect to earlier forms of Buddhism and especially orthodox śūnyavāda thought. We now turn to a consideration of the significance of Buddha nature thought for the subsequent development of the indigenous Chinese Buddhist schools.

PART THREE

THE INFLUENCE

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHA NATURE THOUGHT ON CHINESE BUDDHISM

A. INTRODUCTION

It is interesting in studying Buddha nature thought to consider the influence the latter may have had in the development of indigenous schools of Chinese Buddhism. While I will not in this section attempt to draw any conclusions concerning historical developments, I do want to indicate certain doctrinal features of Buddha nature thought which seem to lay the conceptual foundations for various elements of Chinese Buddhist thought. This sketch should not by any means be taken as an exhaustive statement of the relationship between the two: neither all schools of Chinese Buddhism nor all features of Buddha nature thought which may have influenced Chinese Buddhist thought will be examined. However, enough of both will be considered to establish my thesis that tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought would prove a most fruitful area of study for clarifying the process of the transmission of Buddhism from India to China.

The exact status of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought in India has never been established. There is no

evidence, for example, that it was a "school" on the level of the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. The author of the BNT, for one, drew heavily from both Mahāyāna sources, though his position does not exactly coincide with either.

Whatever the status of this thought in India, the concepts inherent in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought in time took on remarkable importance in China. One could say they even became characteristic of Chinese Buddhist thought. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the fundamental declaration that all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha or the Buddha nature. This teaching fits in perfectly with the ekayāna teaching of one path for all to tread to reach Buddhahood, a teaching which became extremely popular in China. For given that all persons equally have what it takes to achieve liberation, there is no reason for there to exist a variety of spiritual paths leading to a variety of spiritual goals. Rather, since all share the same nature or possess the same potential, all should eventually realize the same goals.

This notion became a critical point in Chinese thought, and the various schools' positions on this issue became one of the criteria by which they judged each other. Certain individual Chinese Buddhists and schools, notably the T'ien-t'ai and the Hua-yen, practiced a form of criticism called p'an-chiao. A p'an-chiao criticism consisted in a hierarchical ranking of the various divisions of Buddhist

thought known to a given school or an individual by means of whatever criteria that school or individual chose.

P'an-chiao was one of the primary means by which Chinese Buddhists attempted to make sense of the variety and internal contradictions of the plethora of Buddhist ideas that had entered China haphazardly, with no relationship to their historical development in India. The p'an-chiao method assumed that the Buddha taught different things at various times to groups of listeners with vastly different capacities; hence, some teachings were complete and some partial, some elementary and some advanced.

The relevance of this to our present concern is found in the Hua-yen p'an-chiao system, according to which the Fa-hsiang (Chinese Yogācāra) school was relegated to the second lowest place in the hierarchy, superior only to the Hīnayāna teachings, precisely because they did not recognize a universal Buddha nature. Instead, they taught the doctrine that different persons possess innately different spiritual capacities, there being five of these different gotras or lineages: icchantika (those destined never to attain liberation), śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, bodhisattva and Buddha. These were regarded as five distinct paths and goals. It is precisely in contrast to this teaching that the ekayāna (or "one path") teaching seems to have been promulgated. This declared that there really is no icchantika, and that what seem to be a variety of other

paths are in fact all the single Buddha path. By virtue of its ignorance of this teaching and its advocacy of the five gotra theory, the Fa-hsiang was labeled only "quasi-Mahāyāna." Though a major school in Indian Buddhism, this school did not survive long in China. By contrast, the major indigenous schools of China--T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, Ch'an and Pure Land--were all ekayāna, and all but Pure Land emphasized the doctrine of universal Buddha nature. (Pure Land did not of course give much credence to the idea of universal Buddha nature as taught, for example, in the BNT, but as we shall see shortly, it did benefit from certain other aspects of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought.)

It is interesting to consider just what it is that made the concept of Buddha nature so important to the Chinese that it came to characterize three out of four indigenous schools, though they of course differed on what they made of this teaching. Whalen Lai, for example, finds certain affinities between the Buddha nature concept and the thought of Mencius and Chuang-tzu.¹ It is reasonable to expect that there be something in pre-Buddhist Chinese thought preparing the ground for the universal Buddha nature concept, in order to account for the importance this notion acquired in China, when it was simply one among many other doctrines in Indian Buddhism. In fact, as seen in the chapter on the

¹Lai, p. 103ff.

genealogy of the terms, there is no real Sanskrit equivalent of the Chinese fo hsing, Buddha nature. Thus, we must wonder not only what it is that made this concept so important in China, but also in what way the apparent Chinese propensity to actually coin the term fo hsing from its various Sanskrit forbears came to be. This issue is beyond the scope of the present study. It is to be noted in this regard, however, that although the BNT is occasionally written off as a second version of the Ratna., the BNT is surely a more "Sinicized" text than the Ratna. by virtue of its use of the term fo hsing. The origins and use of the term in the text are of course not clear, given the suspicions over the origins and authorship of the text itself, but simply by its prominent use of the term, the BNT presents a much more Sinic appearance than other tathāgatagarbha texts, notably the Ratna.

There will be three divisions to our discussion in this chapter. First, we will look at the Ch'an school where we will find that many of that school's enigmatic sayings concerning "mind" and true self are greatly clarified when they are examined in the light of Buddha nature thought. Second, we will consider the Pure Land school. The positive language used in Buddha nature thought and the attitude toward the Buddha expressed in the SBS will be considered in relation to the devotionism and "other-power" doctrines of Pure Land. Finally, we will discuss

and compare the positive valuation accorded phenomenal reality in the Ch'an and Hua-yen schools and in the BNT and NINDS. I take these three themes--the doctrine of true self, the practice of devotionism and the positive valuation of ordinary reality--as three outstanding characteristics of Chinese Buddhism. It is my thesis that all three are anticipated in Buddha nature thought as exemplified by the BNT, NINDS and SBS.

B. CH'AN

Perhaps the best place to look for an illustration of the importance of the Buddha nature concept in indigenous Chinese Buddhist thought is the Ch'an school. A key element in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought is that the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature is real (aśūnya, not empty), while the defilements which encase it are not only adventitious, but unreal (śūnya, empty). (Remember that this theory does not intend to set up a new śūnya-aśūnya dualism, in that the aśūnya category is in a sense the fulfillment of śūnya.) Since, then, the defilements are unreal, there is no question of having to overcome or destroy the defilements. The understanding of practice is formulated accordingly. Since the defilements don't really exist, the only thing necessary is to become aware of one's own true and pure nature which is concealed by the unreal defilements.

This attitude is also evident in Ch'an and is well expressed in the pair of poems reputedly written by Shen-hsiu

and Hui-neng immediately preceding the latter's investiture as patriarch. The poems read as follows.

Shen-hsiu: The body is the Bodhi tree,
The mind is like a clear mirror.
At all times we must strive to polish it,
And must not let the dust collect.

Hui-neng: Bodhi originally has no tree,
The mirror also has no stand.
Buddha nature is always clean and pure;
Where is there room for dust?¹

Hui-neng's poem was considered the superior one.

Shen-hsiu's poem shows that he is still working on his practice; he views things through the eyes of duality and still believes there is some reality to the dust or defilements which obscure the purity of his mind. Hui-neng, on the other hand, expresses an understanding which shows that he has realized the Buddha nature; he no longer accords any reality to the dust or defilements and will speak positively only of the "clean and pure" Buddha nature. What we see expressed in Hui-neng's poem is virtually identical to tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought. It is certainly remarkable that these ideas are presented in the poem which is taken as proof of Hui-neng's enlightenment.

Moreover, as implied in the above, the Ch'an emphasis on realizing one's true nature is also quite reminiscent of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought. For this is appar-

¹Philip Yampolsky, The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 130 and p. 132. There are two versions of Hui-neng's poem.

ently the same as the goal indicated in the BNT: you already possess the Buddha nature, but you must realize it. Again, the Ch'an saying that everyday mind is Buddha mind certainly seems to fit the tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature pattern. For example, Ma-tsu says, "All of you should realize that your own mind is Buddha, that is, this mind is Buddha's Mind."¹ As in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, since defilements are not real, there is nothing to inhibit the identification of the individual's present, deluded mind with the perfect mind of Buddha. That this identification did not lead to the abandonment or discrediting of practice was due in the case of Ch'an to the strongly practice-oriented nature of the school (in which such a misunderstanding would never have the necessary context for growth) and in the case of the BNT, by the entire tenor of the text which links the Buddha nature with practice via such concepts as the transformation of the basis, the denial that there "is" such a thing as Buddha nature, etc. Thus, in Ch'an as in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, the present mind or nature is already enlightened, though most people have deluded themselves into not knowing this.

Thus, an understanding of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, with its concepts of śūnya and aśūnya, of the pure tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature and the adventitious

¹Chang Chung-yuan, Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 149.

defilements, may be a useful tool for clarifying the sometimes enigmatic Ch'an statements concerning Buddha mind, everyday mind and even "no mind." For as the BNT says, perfection of self is not-self. Thus we may understand the passage from Hakuin's famous "Song of Meditation":

. . . he who turns within
 And confirms directly his true nature,
 That his own nature is no-nature--
 Such has transcended vain words.¹

As in the BNT, perfection of self (or nature) is emptiness of self (or nature). Yet why, in Ch'an, is there this constant insistence on the true mind, true self or true nature? All things being equal (and because everything lacks own-being or svabhāva, everything is equal), whence this priority accorded to the mind/self/nature? This difficulty is eased, it seems to me, if one reads Ch'an with an eye to tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, in which the tathāgatagarbha, Buddha nature, or dharmakāya alone is said to be aśūnya or real, as well as pure. As the BNT says, there is no such thing as a Buddha nature; the perfection of self is the not-self. Yet it is in the very reality of emptiness that we find the key to the perfection of self, or realization. The not-self is real: it must be realized. Hence the crucial role of practice in both the BNT and Ch'an. If there were mere emptiness, in a negative sense, realization would not matter. But the emptiness is real, hence it should

¹"Hakuin's 'Song of Meditation' A Commentary" by Amakuki Sessan, in A First Zen Reader, ed. Trevor Leggett (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1960), p. 67.

be realized. This subtle, final step in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature logic is the heart of the proof of the importance of practice, so central in both the BNT and Ch'an. It is in the active (and in this sense positive) realizing of the emptiness of self that is found the perfection of self or Buddha nature. The act of realization is the critical step which accords the BNT its positive tone and affirms the value of the Buddha Way. There is this realization; that is why we may speak of a Buddha nature. In the context of the BNT we read these declarations in the light of their intended contrasts with the negative language of the śūnya-vāda. When we come to Ch'an, the roots of such declarations about the "true nature" are not always clear, though they are always tied to realization. Yet in seeing the commonality between Ch'an and tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, we can perhaps see a possible theoretical explanation in such ideas as are expressed in the BNT for the Ch'an linking of "true nature" and practice. As shown in the BNT, the Buddha nature is realization, the cause, path and fruit of practice.

C. PURE LAND

A second aspect of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought which may have significantly contributed to the development of indigenous Chinese Buddhist thought is the positive language it uses in describing such things as the non-empty pāramitā which characterize the dharmakāya and in glorifying the Buddha. This group of characteristics, best exemplified

from among the present three texts by the SBS, may have contributed to the scriptural basis of the devotionalism which became so important in China, notably of course in the Pure Land school. It is much easier to defend devotional practices on the basis of the Thusness language used in tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought than on the basis of śūnya language. Even if these two types of language both finally denote nonduality, the emotional connotations of the two are certainly quite different. Śūnya language "sounds" nastika (nihilistic) with its strings of negations, while Thusness language "sounds" astika (beingful) with its attributions of such qualities as eternity and purity to the Buddha. Given the emotional element in devotional practice as well as the necessity of feeling that the object of one's devotions is both real and worthy of devotion, Thusness language seems much more naturally suited to devotionalism than śūnya language could ever be.

This quality is shown in the SBS in its embracing of stūpa veneration as a valuable religious exercise, its glorification of the Buddha, and its emphasis on the incomprehensibility of the teaching and the consequent necessity of faith. Along with the emphasis on the compassionate acts of the Buddha, his talents as a teacher, and the uniqueness of his knowledge of the Truth, there is here an implicit anticipation of the "other-power" doctrine of the Pure Land. For it is evidently the view of the author of this text that

liberation is the result of faith in the Buddha and the compassion of the Buddha; meditative exercises and study are patently useless in the context of a teaching which is comprehensible only to a Buddha. Thus, self-power, though of course not mentioned here as such, is virtually ignored, while one's vision is instead ever more focused on the Buddha, who manifests not only qualitative transcendence over ordinary persons, but also the key--the only key--to liberation.

The attitude under consideration here is well displayed in the SBS' discussion of the notion of singularity, a notion not singled out for emphasis in either the Ratna. or the BNT. "Singularity" conveys both the unknowability and unattainability of the Buddha's wisdom and its uniqueness. As depicted here, the Buddha's wisdom is put beyond the reach of the ordinary person. Since that wisdom is equivalent to the Buddha's realization, the implication is that the Buddha's realization is also beyond ordinary persons. It is from out of that realization, in turn, that the Buddha's compassion reaches out to aid ordinary beings. Thus, the entire process by which they are liberated is pictured as beyond the ken of ordinary persons. The "otherness" by which their liberation is effected is clearly implied.

D. THE POSITIVE VALUATION OF PHENOMENAL REALITY

The above are the two clearest examples of rapport and possible convergence of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought

with indigenous developments in Chinese Buddhism. There is one further example of such conceptual concurrence which is more subtle, but worth noting. Certain Chinese schools, particularly Hua-yen and Ch'an, are remarkable for the positive valuation they seem to accord ordinary, phenomenal reality. Since this tendency is more fully developed in these schools than in the Buddha nature texts, we will begin by demonstrating this theme as it is expressed in Ch'an and Hua-yen and then look for similar themes in the NINDS and BNT.

Ch'an exhibits this vision in the many tales in which everyday things are used to express ultimate values and truths. In this vein, there is the exchange, "What is the Buddha?--Three pounds of flax." Or again, we find the "story of the man who complained that he served the master for three years without receiving any spiritual instruction. The master responds in surprise, 'How can you say that you received no spiritual instruction? When you brought me tea, did I not take it? When you bowed, did I not bow?'"¹ Perhaps the epitome of this vision is found in the famous saying, attributed to the daughter of the Layman P'ang, "When I am hungry I eat,/ When I am tired I rest,"² as an expression of her insight. In all these instances, what is noteworthy is the way in which everyday things and activities

¹As cited by Maurice Friedman in "Martin Buber and Asia," PEW 26 (October, 1976): 421.

²Chang, p. 145.

are used as expressions for the highest truth. There is no hint of a sacred/profane dichotomy here.

The same phenomenon is evident in Hua-yen philosophy. Although the expressions of this vision are less metaphorically and more analytically presented, the same point may be made: here we see a positive valuation given to ordinary phenomena. In Hua-yen thought, this is expressed in the formula, shih-shih-wu-ai (事無礙), which means "non-obstruction between phenomena." In order to explain this concept, some background information must be given.

It is a general characteristic of the Mahāyāna to refute all dichotomies, including the sacred/profane dichotomy. Thus, samsāra is identified with nirvāṇa, form with emptiness, and vice versa. The latter identification is especially significant for Hua-yen thought. As all things are empty, and emptiness characterizes all things, emptiness becomes, in effect, a universal principle. Hua-yen, in fact, takes emptiness as such a principle; its important term, li (理) or "principle," means emptiness. This concept is employed in the phrase, li-shih-wu-ai (理事無礙), "the non-obstruction of principle and phenomena." "Non-obstruction" means here no barrier, no limitation, no hindrance, no confining. Since li means emptiness and shih means phenomena, the idea of li-shih-wu-ai is basically the same as that of the paired sayings, "form is emptiness" and "emptiness is form." Particular forms, or phenomena,

are empty, that is, their own-nature is emptiness; it is impossible for there to be any obstruction between the principle of emptiness and that which is empty. The characteristic Hua-yen formulation of this is that the principle and the phenomena (the li and the shih) are neither the same nor different. Hence, li is able to fully and unimpededly be li with no limitation placed on it by the various shih. Likewise, the shih are free of any limitation imposed by li. The two interpenetrate; each can act as the other without obstructing the other. Because of this interpenetration, each individual phenomenon includes the totality of the principle. This being the case, since the principle also embraces all phenomena (all being empty), Hua-yen teaches that each phenomenon embraces or includes not only the totality of the principle, but also every other phenomenon. Each phenomenon contains all phenomena, and those phenomena, which from one perspective are contained within the first phenomenon, in turn each embrace all other phenomena. Thus each, individually, contains all. Yet in this infinite interpenetration or mutual containment, no phenomenon is obstructed by any of the others. This is the meaning of shih-shih-wu-ai, as taught in Tu Shun's Meditation on the Dharma-Realm.¹ The notion of shih-shih-wu-ai is the

¹Translated by Garma C. C. Chang in his The Buddhist Teaching of Totality (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), pp. 207-223. Translated with the commentary of Tsung-mi in Sallie King, "Commentary to

culmination of this philosophy and completely eclipses li-shih-wu-ai once it is established. Thus, a universe entirely composed of phenomena is the final vision; li or principle is forgotten. In this way, phenomena perforce embody ultimate value in this philosophy; there is no transcendent or sacred absolute in comparison with which they could lose value. Hence, in Hua-yen thought, ordinary, "worldly" phenomena are given a completely positive value.

I have taken this characteristic of Ch'an and Hua-yen thought, their positive valuing of everyday phenomena, as a characteristic of indigenous Chinese Buddhist thought in which some convergence with tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought is apparent. This characteristic is manifested in the latter in the notion of nonduality held by the NINDS and the BNT. In the NINDS this is primarily shown in the nonduality of ordinary persons and the Buddha, one of the main themes of that text. While this particular form of nonduality may seem implicit in the very concept of the tathāgatagarbha, in fact we do not see the radical nonduality of ordinary persons and the Buddha in such an early text as the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra or in such a late text as the SBS, as we see it developed in the NINDS. But while this radical nonduality is just one possibility in the development of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought, it

is one which seems to have been readily assimilable by the Chinese. We see the NINDS saying that "sentient beings are this unborn, indestructible, eternal, constant, pure and unchanging refuge, the inconceivable and pure dharmadhātu."¹ Thus, ultimate value is manifested on the level of everyday, ordinary reality, in this case, ordinary persons. It is most decidedly not the case that ordinary persons are portrayed as inferior to the Buddha. It is in this text that it is said that ordinary persons "are" the tathāgatagarbha, rather than "possess" it. This identification contrasts with the relationship of possession in that it makes the two identified persons interchangeable. This is made especially clear with the term used to express the identity, chi-shih (即是), which functions like an "equals" sign. Thus, in this vision, ordinary beings partake of all the qualities of a Buddha and in their mundane, quotidian lives manifest ultimate value.

It should be noted, however, that this positive valuation of everyday phenomena is not as radical in the NINDS as in the Ch'an and Hua-yen schools. In the NINDS it is still necessary to display the positive value of ordinary beings by equating them with the dharmadhātu or the tathāgatagarbha, whereas in Ch'an and Hua-yen there is no longer any need to speak of such things as the Buddha or the

¹See p. 180.

principle of emptiness; there remains just "when I am hungry, I eat," and "the non-obstruction between phenomena." Thus, we see the kind of thought displayed in the NINDS as a conceptual precursor of Ch'an and Hua-yen, though not an equivalent.

The BNT likewise seems to anticipate Ch'an and Hua-yen in this respect. One specific feature of Hua-yen thought which it anticipates is the notion of the interpenetration of the stages of realization on the way to Buddhahood. In Hua-yen philosophy, the stage of faith, which is the first stage of the path, is seen as identical with Buddhahood. This is true even though the fifty-two stages of the path still remain individual. The reasoning behind this has to do with the identity of cause and effect. The cause (the stage of faith) and the effect (the realization of Buddhahood) are shown to be two mutually conditioning elements in a non-linear totality. There is no progression from cause to effect; rather, all elements are both cause and effect simultaneously. Buddhahood is the result of faith, yet "without the result stage of Buddhahood, the causal stage of faith is not a cause at all, because a cause is a cause only with regard to a definite result."¹ So Buddhahood is a conditioning factor which determines what

¹Francis H. Cook, "Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines: an Annotated Translation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970), pp. 188-9.

faith is; in short, it is a cause of faith. Yet it is also the result of faith. This interpenetration of cause and effect is characteristic of Hua-yen thought. It manifests their positive valuation of mundane reality by demonstrating the identity of the beginner in Buddhist practice and the Buddha. As the beginner at the first "stage" (of faith) is the cause of the final "stage" (Buddhahood), so the Buddha as "cause" of the stage of faith, also occupies the position of the beginner. The two are ultimately mutually substitutable. Thus, whatever value is associated with the Buddha is associated with the beginner, the person still ensnared by delusion, as well.

To similar effect, though using somewhat different logic, the BNT likewise displays an interpenetration of the cause and the effect of realizing Buddhahood. In discussing bodhicitta, for example, it is shown that one of the causes of realizing Buddhahood is the "fulfillment cause," also known as bodhicitta;¹ that is, the fulfillment of the cause of Buddha nature (viz., the result, Buddha nature) and the cause of Buddha nature (bodhicitta) are the same. Moreover, it is shown elsewhere² that three practices which are "causes" of the Buddha nature (viz., cultivation of faith, meditation and practicing compassion) are called both the "dependent" and "the basis on which the dependent relies." As the latter, they are causes of Buddha nature;

¹See p. 60. ²See p. 84.

as the former, they are that which relies on those causes, or is caused by them, Buddha nature. Thus, these two examples are specific instances in which the cause and the effect of Buddha nature are portrayed in the BNT as interpenetrating.

As mentioned, however, the logic of these statements differs from that of the Hua-yen. In the present case, the interpenetration of cause and effect is evidently derived from the nonduality of the ordinary person and the Buddha implicit in the very concepts of tathāgatagarbha and Buddha nature themselves. The garbha, it will be recalled, can be either the embryo (cause) or the womb (result) of the Tathāgata. In the NINDS it is clearly shown to be both the present condition of the ordinary person and the future condition of fulfilled Buddhahood. The above statements from the BNT are simply extrapolations from this kind of nonduality. Thus, while both assert the interdependence of cause and effect, the BNT does so on the basis of the nonduality inherent to the Buddha nature concept, while Hua-yen thought seems to do so on the basis of the logical relatedness and mutual dependence inherent to the nature of cause and effect themselves, i.e., on the basis of pratītyasamutpāda-śūnya dynamics. Of course, the latter results in nonduality, so the logic of Hua-yen thought is in this way related to that of the BNT. In both cases, moreover, the nonduality of cause and effect is applied to practice. One might hypothesize that the Hua-yen

thinkers might have been more reluctant to apply their logic in this particular way had it not been for their acceptance of the universal Buddha nature teaching.

One area in which the teachings of the BNT and those of Hua-yen thought seem to be even more compatible is in their positive valuation of things, in addition to persons. This, of course, is a central characteristic of Hua-yen thought with its teaching of the non-obstruction between phenomena. In the case of the BNT, we can see an anticipation of this attitude, though not a full development of it. The relevant portion of the BNT reads, ". . . people and things are, from the beginning, characterized by the utmost wondrousness (妙極), and by tranquillity."¹ This statement is based on the doctrine that emptiness reveals Thusness: as all things are empty, they are Thus, and what is Thus is wonderful, marvelous, excellent. It is normal in tathāgatagarbha thought to see these qualities ascribed to the Buddha and the Buddha lands, but to see them attributed to ordinary, mundane phenomena--as they are here and now, not in some "purified" form--is rather more notable. This attitude is certainly inherent in the most fundamental position of the BNT: its doctrine that emptiness reveals Thusness. It is also rooted to some extent in its assent to the non-duality of person and world. Although most emphasis in the

¹See p. 115.

BNT is given to the teaching concerning Buddha nature, it is not the case that the latter is exclusively personal, omitting "wordly" elements. Therefore, the exalted status of the Buddha nature, which is universal, must apply to the world as well. However, despite the fundamental level at which the teaching of the "wondrous" nature of the world logically belongs in the BNT, few explicit references are made to it. Thus, this doctrine in the BNT only anticipates the more developed form it acquires in the Hua-yen, in which the exalted status of worldly things or phenomena is made quite explicit and becomes one of the most striking characteristics of that philosophy.

Two notable instances of the positive valuation accorded phenomena in the BNT are as follows. In one passage,¹ nirvāna is not held distinct from phenomena because it does not differ from the "purity, etc." of form. "Purity" in this text refers to the absence of defilements. Knowing that all defilements are inherently unreal (as all tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought teaches) there is no impurity to be ascribed phenomena. Hence, there is no real difference between ordinary phenomena and Thusness, or nirvāna. The positive valuation accorded phenomena rests on the most thorough-going nonduality of samsāra and nirvāna and the unreal status of all defilements.

¹See p. 103f.

A very nice indication of the status of phenomena in the BNT is provided in the passage¹ which states that because phenomena are all penetrated by Thusness, you cannot say that the various phenomena differ from one another; yet because of the worldly distinctions which do obtain between phenomena (and which thus possess mundane reality), you cannot say they are all the same. Thusness and phenomena ultimately interpenetrate, and yet the author refuses to reduce all phenomena to pure Thusness, negating those differences which constitute their very phenomenality. By declining to say either that Thusness and phenomena are identical or that they are different, he is attempting to have it both ways: to unite all phenomena in the ultimate value of Thusness, and yet to maintain phenomena in that differentiated condition which constitutes their value as phenomena. Thus, phenomena lose none of their purely mundane or phenomenal value, while at the same time they take on the values of Thusness, nirvāṇa, etc. It is not unusual to see form and emptiness or samsāra and nirvāṇa identified. However, to maintain, in tandem with the assertion of this identity, the very differentiation and phenomenality of things is to bring the position of the BNT into a special proximity with the Hua-yen emphasis on the ultimate status of the phenomenality of things.

¹See p. 146.

Again, the attitude of the BNT is only an anticipation of the developed teaching of the Hua-yen and Ch'an in which emptiness or Thusness is finally forgotten and only phenomena remain. Yet the positive valuation of phenomena, in their phenomenality, evidenced in the BNT, does seem to lead in that direction which the Hua-yen and Ch'an further develop.

E. CONCLUSION

In declaring the immanence and absolute purity of "Buddha nature," Buddha nature theorists open the door to a world of new thought, discourse and practice in the Mahāyāna. By stressing the fruition aspect of Buddha nature (realization, liberation, the tathāgatagarbha as womb) one may speak positively of the Buddha, his merits of purity, self, bliss and eternity, and his Buddha lands. No paradox or negative form of expression is needed: one may directly praise the Buddha in the most exalted language. By stressing the causal aspect of Buddha nature (practice, the tathāgatagarbha as embryo) one may embrace the "purity" or inherent value of this world and its inhabitants. The Ch'an emphasis on realizing one's "true nature" comes to mind in this connection and seems particularly close to the idea of the Buddha nature as portrayed in the BNT. The affirmation represented by Buddha nature, though, fully applies to all aspects of existence. The Chinese tendency to locate supreme truth and value in ordinary phenomena seems to be of a similar nature.

The schools of Chinese Buddhism exhibit in more developed forms various features apparent in the Buddha nature concept. Often the Chinese forms and developments are more readily comprehensible when studied in the light of Buddha nature thought. In this respect, a student of Chinese Buddhist thought would be well-advised to begin by thoroughly familiarizing him or herself with Buddha nature thought.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHA NATURE THOUGHT

Buddha nature is the Thusness revealed by the twin emptiness of man and things. . . . If one does not speak of Buddha nature, then one does not understand emptiness.¹

There is an insistent quality about this quotation from the BNT. Using the concept of the speech act,² we may interpret its significance in the following way. The author betrays by his insistence that he is arguing with someone. With whom is he arguing? Evidently with persons possessing an understanding of emptiness which does not embrace the use of the term "Buddha nature." He is arguing, then, for no less than a reinterpretation of the crucial term "emptiness" and its relative significance in the Buddhist path. As he showed in his arguments refuting the errors of "beginners" on the Mahāyāna path, he believes it to be a mistake to embrace emptiness as the supreme truth, the end of the path. How could it be, he insists, that the absence of own-nature, the cessation of wrong views, could constitute the fullness

¹BNT, p. 787b.

²According to this concept a verbal expression, oral or written, is meaningful only within the context of its utterance. Thus, to better understand a verbal expression, one should consider who is speaking, to whom, for what purpose, why, etc. See John R. Searle, Speech Acts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

of supreme truth? He rejects the understanding of supreme truth as functioning in an exclusively negative or destructive manner and replaces it with the insight that the supreme truth is positive inasmuch as it constructively reveals the reality of things, namely, their emptiness. Logically, this new account of supreme truth is not greatly different from the other. Logic, however, is not the point.

Recall the author's words at the close of the BNT as he reveals his motives for writing. He says that he attempted to do three things in writing the treatise:

(1) to manifest the aboriginally existent, inconceivable realm; (2) to show what can be attained via cultivation and practice of the Way; and (3) to reveal that the attainment of this Way results in the ultimate perfection of infinite merits.¹

His concluding remarks show that throughout the texts he has attempted to manifest the Buddhist path, the Buddhist goal, the Buddhist life as something which anyone would desire to embrace. He evidently feels that the negative language used in discussing the path--"it puts an end to suffering"--is not enough. An attractively articulated, positively rendered statement is needed; hence, the talk of an "aboriginally existent" realm and the "ultimate perfection of merits."

The same spirit motivates his argument for a new understanding of "emptiness." In both cases, his concern is that practice of the Way be made attractive. The supreme truth

¹BNT, pp. 812c - 813a.

must not be explained solely as the "cessation" of wrong views; talk of this destructive function must be supplemented by language indicating the culmination to be the constructive revelation of the reality of things.

Note that in arguing for this reinterpretation of emptiness, the author does not offer an exclusively pragmatic argument. It is not just that those who speak only of cessation don't know how to attract converts, they also misunderstand the true nature of emptiness. This is very carefully and precisely put: the author doesn't want to replace "emptiness," he sees nothing wrong with "it." It is just that some "misunderstand" it. By putting his argument in this form he avoids presenting his teachings as if they are in conflict with the emptiness teachings. Instead, his teachings are the "correct" understanding of the orthodox emptiness teachings.

This "correct" understanding, as we have seen, takes the form of converting the orthodox teachings into positive language. In addition to his belief that such a form will better attract people to practice of the Way, the author also believes that this positive language is more in accord with the true nature of things than the negative language of śūnyavāda. For, he argues, it is "in accordance with principle" to realize that everyone has the potential to attain Buddhahood. In other words, this is the true nature of things: practice is a reality, realization is a reality;

reality therefore possesses these positive attributes. It is characteristic of this text that the same positive attributes pertain to both person and "world." The two are not separate: reality is such that it may be truly perceived, persons are such that they can truly perceive. This is one function which goes by the names of "Thusness" and "Buddha nature."

Given that the author's goal is to speak in positive language about this positive quality or function, his chief problem is to avoid the semblance of an astika ("being-ful") position while using this positive language. He must speak positively of reality without cutting himself off entirely from the Buddhist tradition which has largely tended toward the via negativa. An astika position, in the Buddhist view, is one which veers toward the "extreme" of "being" (as dualistically opposed to non-being) and tends to result in a "grasping" attitude toward whatever is said to "be." Thus, Buddhism has historically preferred to speak in negative language (a notable example of which is the anātman doctrine) as an aid in deconditioning our innate disposition to "grasp." While the author may not wish to present his views as opposed to the orthodox emptiness teaching as such, he does not avoid taking up a non-orthodox position on the use of language. Given the doctrinally loaded reasons for the orthodox position on language, this difference in form is perhaps as significant and laden with

implications as any substantive challenge. Indeed, the two are not unrelated.

Still, while using highly unorthodox language, the author wishes to remain within the orthodox fold. He requires, therefore, a way of saying things positively without indicating the existence of any astika things, things which exist in a way dualistically opposed to non-existence, things which one can "grasp." His tool for thus expressing himself both positively and in a manner acceptable to the orthodoxy is the term "Buddha nature."

As explained in the BNT, "Buddha nature" is an amalgam of three concepts: bodhicitta, the true (parinispāna) nature and tathāgatagarbha. As bodhicitta, it is shown to be the active pursuit of the path to realization. Its identity or nature is constituted by this activity itself, not by any entity or thing. As the true nature, Buddha nature is identical with Thusness, that is, reality as truly perceived and persons as truly perceiving reality. Though a single principle, this is a dynamic function of the nature of things. Again, no entity or thing is in sight. Finally, the constitutive element tathāgatagarbha, as Thusness and as the Tathāgata's wisdom, is identified with all sentient beings; by virtue of the tathāgatagarbha, all can attain enlightenment. This enlightenment or wisdom nature is something that is present in everyone at all times, but it is directly explained as a form of action and therefore should not be conceived as possessing a thing-like nature.

The fundamental affirmation of tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature thought--that all persons "possess" the tathāgatagarbha or "are" the Buddha nature--does not indicate anything substantial which pertains to individual persons, but instead their potential to realize liberation; thus, it indicates the potential to act in a certain way.

In all three constituents of the Buddha nature concept, then, there is no indication of any substantive, thing-like or astika nature. Instead, the three represent three perspectives on the single truth that all sentient beings are capable of realizing enlightenment or attaining Buddhahood. All represent active or dynamic functions: practice and wisdom. It is in this way that the author manages with the term "Buddha nature" to speak positively and constructively of the Buddhist path, life and truths, without stepping beyond the permissible: Buddha nature represents actions, rather than a thing. It is this identification of the Buddha nature with its functions (or its description in terms of actions) which makes possible the affirmation of such a thing as a Buddha nature despite the emphasis on anātman in the history of Buddhism. The Buddha nature stands as a metaphor for the efficacy and desirability of the Buddha path without creating a substantial "thing" to which persons could become attached.

This understanding is confirmed throughout the text of the BNT. The term "Buddha nature" is used interchange-

ably with quite a few others, and these give more information as to its character. It is identified, for example, with: the transformation of the basis, dharmakāya and nirvāna. The "transformation of the basis" stands for all the phases of Buddhist practice from inception to fulfillment, as well as for practice as such. In the latter sense it represents the self-transformation of the person who, by virtue of his or her engagement in practice, moves from ignorance and folly to the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. Thus, the "basis" is a person and the "transformation" represents the essentially active character of that person's engagement in practice.

Dharmakāya is the culminating moment of the process called "transformation of the basis." It represents the fulfillment of Buddhist practice. As such, its significance is threefold: (1) it affirms the basic identity of the person and the Buddha, since it shows Buddhahood as the culminating stage of the practice in which ordinary persons are engaged; (2) it consequently confirms the reality of the promise of practice and shows it to be, positively, Buddhahood (as opposed to pure cessation); and (3) it shows that the dharmakāya is not a substantial thing, but the final stage of a process which maintains, in this culminating "moment," its active character by manifesting the "acts" of wisdom, meditation and compassion. Dharma-
kāya and nirvāna are mutually identified as the "fruit" of

practice and together represent the supremely positive value of Buddha nature. Thus they justify the process of self-transformation itself.

This accomplishes the author's goal of showing the desirability of practicing the Buddha Way without creating the impression of a substantial entity or thing either within the person or as the goal at the end of the path. The person can successfully tread the path "because of" Buddha nature. But this "Buddha nature" is not a thing the person possesses; it is simply a metaphor for the affirmation that everyone can, by practicing the Buddha Way, attain enlightenment. Similarly, there is a "real" goal and one full of all supreme merits at the end of the path. But dharmakāya and nirvāṇa, again, though spoken of in glowing language, are not substantial things, but metaphorical affirmations of the value of practice and of the attainment of wisdom and compassion. They are, moreover, identical with the Buddha nature in its "original purity."

Though the text is full of apparently substantial terms used in conjunction with "Buddha nature"--"basis," "pure mind," "perfection of self" and even "Buddha nature" itself, careful examination shows that none of these represent a substantial thing or entity of any kind. Buddha nature thought therefore does not represent a substantive monistic theory, idealism included. Though it does explain all of reality with a single principle, Thusness or Buddha

nature, the Buddha nature is not an entity and therefore cannot serve as the basis for a substantive monism. This is not to say that this teaching is devoid of an ontological element. The ontological position represented here is non-dualism rather than monism. There is no transcendent One of which all things are manifestations. The only reality is ordinary, phenomenal reality. Individual things therefore cannot lose their discreet particularity by being reduced to a transcendent monistic reality. Ordinary persons are identical with the Buddha in the sense that he is a former ordinary person and they are future Buddhas. They are not all "one."

The unity of the Buddha nature among all sentient beings consists in the fact that it is a truth which pertains to all. It is not an entity which all possess. The nature of this truth is represented with the word "Thusness," a term which bridges the categories of ontology and soteriology. Thusness, as we recall, is said to be revealed by emptiness. As such, it is the fulfillment of emptiness. Ontologically, emptiness is the negation of both being and non-being. But it is always a person who, in practice, effects this negation. This is the soteriological factor. In fact, the two are inseparable. The same is true of Thusness. Ontologically, it is the reality which becomes apparent when the dualism of being and non-being has been removed. Soteriologically, it is one's vision of this reality after one has removed this dualism. Again, the

two are inseparable, two perspectives on a single truth. Inasmuch as Thusness is Buddha nature, we see here the inseparability of the ontological and soteriological aspects of Buddha nature. It is in this way that what Buddha nature "is"--its ontological status--is a product of its functioning. When "concealed by defilements," it is a "false reality" and a deluded apprehension of reality; when these defilements are extinguished by practice of the Buddha Way, it is true reality and the correct apprehension of that reality. Practice makes the Buddha nature what it "is."

We have seen that "Buddha nature" stands for the acts of practice on the Buddha Way, liberation itself and the manifestation of that liberation. This is its active, soteriological nature. It is in this sense that I interpret it as an "active self." Buddha nature is expressly identified with such acts as wisdom, non-attachment and compassion. It is never represented as possessing a substantive, thing-like character or attribute. It is specifically said that the "functions" of Buddha nature are its "essence." Thus the identity of Buddha nature is constituted by nothing but its actions. Thus it is an "active self"--not an entity, but an identity comprised of certain acts. The acts which comprise this identity are acts of the person appropriate to his or her stage of progress on the Buddha path. For the ordinary person, practicing to attain realization is

indicated; for the Buddha, manifestation of that realization. In both cases, it is these acts which constitute the essence and the identity of the person. Hence, the term "active self" is appropriate.

With this understanding of Buddha nature, we may proceed to consider the similarity of these ideas to developments in later Chinese Buddhist thought which may have been influenced by them. Three points of similarity may be noted. First, the positive and often exultant language characteristic of Buddha nature texts may have helped prepare the way for Pure Land glorification of the Buddha; certainly the language and attitude of the emptiness teachings could not serve this purpose. Second, the positive attitude toward ordinary phenomena characteristic of Ch'an and Hua-yen seems similar to, though more highly developed than, the nondualistic position of the BNT and NINDS which emphasize that all merit and value pertain to the mundane world inasmuch as there is no other. Finally, the affirmation of Buddha nature with its associated imperative to realize enlightenment (or the "original purity" of one's Buddha nature) is strongly anticipatory of the Ch'an insistence upon realizing one's true nature. In all three of these cases, note that it is different aspects of the affirmative character and message of the Buddha nature teachings that constitute their similarity to the Chinese Buddhist teachings.

The author of the BNT was concerned to speak in positive language and did so. At the time this was a conscious rebellion against the orthodox mode of expression. Because of the manner in which it was articulated, the Buddha nature appeared to be something of an anomaly in the context of the anātman teachings. This anomalous appearance was not borne out, however, since as we have seen, the Buddha nature is an "active self" rather than an entity. It represents practice of the Buddha Way and its identity is constituted exclusively by the acts of wisdom and compassion which characterize it.

The judgment of the authors of the early Buddha nature literature was, in a sense, confirmed by history. The affirmative character of the Buddha nature and the language in which it was articulated would in China become anything but anomalous. Whether manifested in laudation of the Buddha, in an embracing of mundane reality as the locus of supreme value, or in the injunction to realize one's true nature, the affirmative stance of Buddha nature thought would be fully in harmony with the new, Chinese orthodoxy.

APPENDIX

BUDDHA NATURE THOUGHT AND MYSTICISM

Implicit in the position of anyone who studies and/or teaches in an institution called a "department of religion" is the task of relating his/her special area of interest to the concerns of the larger field of religion. In particular, one may seek to learn about the phenomenon of "religion" by studying and interpreting given concrete and historical instances of this phenomenon. It is impossible to understand anything unless it is studied in an appropriate context. In order to understand what "Buddha nature" "means," it was necessary in this dissertation to study it in particular textual contexts, with reference to śūnyavāda thought, in the light of contemporary Western philosophical terms and categories, and in relation to the subsequent Chinese Buddhist schools. Each contextual level gives additional depth to our understanding of the concept's "meaning." There is no meaning apart from these contexts. Given that contexts are infinitely multiple, there is never an absolute or final level of "meaning" or understanding attained. We may, however, reach a level of greatest practicable generality, when the particular phenomenon under study is contemplated

within the context of that same phenomenon on an abstract and cross-cultural scale. My concern in this appendix is to relate the material contained in the BNT, NINDS and SBS to contemporary scholarly discussions of cross-cultural mysticism. In fact, though we shall seek to supplement our understanding of the Buddha nature concept by examining it within the context of cross-cultural mysticism, we shall find that our understanding of the latter perhaps benefits the most from this examination.

Just as there is no "religion" apart from "religions," so there is no "mysticism" apart from "mysticisms." Thus in studying the concrete instances of such abstract notions, our ideas concerning the latter must always be open to change or adjustment. In order to better understand our particular texts, I ask three questions: (1) Are they mystical? (2) If so, what kind of mysticism do they represent? (3) How does the mystical path of the BNT function? In attempting to answer (and even ask) such questions, however, I find myself unavoidably faced with the necessity of considering the following questions on the general, abstract level:

(1) What is mysticism? (2) What elements are necessary to it? (3) What is mystical knowledge?

In the following I will attempt to answer these questions. The discussion will necessarily take the form of a dialogue between the two levels of question. We may expect firm answers to the first set of questions but only tentative

and incomplete answers to the latter. This is as it must be. Nevertheless, since the only light that can be shed on the abstract issues comes from the study of the particular phenomena, the dialogue between the two levels is a necessary one.

Before we begin, there is an initial difficulty with which we must be concerned. In order to decide whether something is a form of mysticism, we must first know what "mysticism" is, and unfortunately there is no generally agreed-upon definition for this term. In fact, it is even questioned by some whether it is useful to speak of such a thing as "mysticism," especially in the light of recent studies underscoring the variety within the corpus of phenomena generally known as mysticism and the consequent lack of assurance that there is any single essence pervading the various phenomena and furnishing the necessary unifying element.¹

For my part, I would prefer for at least the time being to take Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances," applied elsewhere to the problem of a definition of "religion,"² and apply it to the effort to define "mysticism." The basic idea is that some words, such as "religion," are

¹See Steven T. Katz, ed., Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), passim.

²Rem Edwards, Reason and Religion: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972), pp. 14ff. I have taken from Edwards the information on Wittgenstein's idea as applied to the definition of "religion."

instanced by members which share no common essence, but instead share a whole set of characteristics, no one of which need necessarily be possessed by any individual in order for it to be a member of the class. The set of characteristics is shared by the group of members in such a way that a whole list of characteristics might overlap among the group in endlessly varying ways. By applying this sort of understanding to "mysticism," we are enabled to speak sensibly about it without forcing ourselves to search for some common "essence" or necessary characteristic which would determine an individual's membership in the group.

I am not concerned to present here a list of the characteristics of mysticism; such a list could be composed by a perusal of some of the literature of the various mystical traditions. I do want to point out, however, that the "family resemblance" model should not obscure the experiential character of mysticism; this is one factor which must be present inasmuch as "mysticism" refers to that group of phenomena comprised of mystical experience, practices and lifestyles conducive to mystical experience, speeches and writing composed on the basis of mystical experience, etc. The experiential element is not to be eliminated since it is the basis of all the related factors. Ninian Smart uses "mysticism" in reference to "the contem-

plative life and experience,"¹ and this is the crux of the matter: "mysticism" does have to do primarily with a life and an experience, and only secondarily with a body of literature, or a philosophy based on the experience. Of course, the scholar's primary access to mystical phenomena is through the literature of mysticism. The point is, however, that it is not useful, and in fact seriously obscures the matter, to forget that there are experiences and lives on which that literature is based.

The case of the SBS is the most straightforward and will therefore be discussed first. It seems to me that this is not, in a significant way, a mystical text. I base this judgment primarily on the attitude of the author of that text, who emphasizes again and again that the liberating wisdom represented by the tathāgatagarbha theory is unattainable by the ordinary person and is realized by Buddhas alone. The corollary of this is that one is not urged to cultivate certain practices in order to attain a certain mystical goal, but is instead urged to have faith in the Buddha word and in the compassion of the Buddha in order that one's salvation be effected. In short, this is devotionalism rather than mysticism.

While it might be replied that this could be a numinous or theistic type of mysticism, it seems to me that

¹Ninian Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," Religious Studies 1: 76.

this would be inaccurate. One scholar, in broaching the subject of the nature of mysticism, offers the following: "Seen very broadly, mysticism is a name for our infinite appetites. Less broadly it is the assurance that these appetites can be satisfied."¹ While it is not the case that any person on a mystical path dares feel assured that his "infinite appetites" will be satisfied, I feel it is true that any aspiring mystic must feel those appetites can possibly be satisfied. Except in cases of spontaneous mystical experience, in which no anticipation is present one way or the other, it seems fair to say that the very existence of a mystical path presupposes that that path may possibly be successfully trod. This element is most conspicuously absent in the SBS, which offers no path to the seeker, but instead virtually urges the reader to forbear from seeking or from trying to understand the Truth, since one cannot possibly succeed. Instead, a very passive sort of faith is encouraged. Even in the theistic type of mysticism, where it is taught as part of the doctrine that it is a matter of God's grace for a person to be brought into communion with God, one is urged to do what one can to prepare oneself for God's grace, or to make oneself more acceptable to God, through emptying one's mind of all "creaturely" things, practicing charitable acts, etc.

¹Geoffrey Parrinder, Mysticism in the World's Religions (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 7 supplies this quotation, but does not reveal its source.

This is what constitutes the initial stages of the mystic path in these traditions. In the present case, however, there is no path, and it is this more than anything else which renders this text non-mystical. For this reason, the faith of this text is a devotional, rather than a mystical, faith. Moreover, although according to this text one is dependent upon the Buddha in order that one's salvation be effected, it is certainly not as if salvation here consisted in attaining union or loving communion with the Buddha. Liberation, as ever, consists in bodhi or wisdom (knowledge of the Dharma, not of the Buddha)-- it is just that one is unable to develop that wisdom by one's own efforts. Thus, the teachings of this text unquestionably have nothing whatsoever to do with a theistic type of mysticism. They also are not instances of any other kind of mysticism, inasmuch as the personal experience or knowledge which is needed for liberation is not presented as attainable.

My judgment that the SBS does not represent a form of mysticism seems to fly in the face of the "mystical" philosophy or ontology which it, in common with the BNT and the NINDS, espouses. These three texts share the basic teaching that all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha, which is inherently pure, and that this tathāgatagarbha is covered by an adventitious and fundamentally unreal shell of defilement. It is not that there is "that of the Tathāgata" in

all persons, but that there is an important similarity between the nature of the Buddha and that of ordinary persons. This fundamental similarity, in the BNT and the NINDS, is the ground for the assurance that ordinary persons can realize Buddhahood. It is curious that the SBS does not similarly strike this note, despite the shared doctrinal basis for it. However, this is nonetheless an excellent illustration of the point that an apparently mystical philosophy or ontology is insufficient to constitute the phenomenon of mysticism as such. The experiential or "life" quality must be present as well. Hence, in my view, the tathāgatagarbha philosophy per se does not constitute mysticism; what a given text or person does with that philosophy in applying it to practice is a decisive factor.

The BNT, in contrast to the SBS, does seem to be a somewhat mystical text. The NINDS is as well, though perhaps to a slightly lesser degree than the BNT. Both take seriously the implications of the tathāgatagarbha doctrine that all sentient beings may attain Buddhahood; both stress the nonduality of the ordinary person and the Buddha; and both speak of the mystical goal and reality in both philosophical and personal terms, though the BNT develops more fully than the NINDS the centrality and the nature of the path to realization.

Both the BNT and the NINDS strongly emphasize that one can and should realize the truth of one's nature and of what

is (these not being separate) and that the possession or lack of this knowledge is the single most essential factor in determining the quality of one's life. This already places them in the mystical company by virtue of their assurance that our "infinite appetites," here our desire for ultimate knowledge and wisdom, can be satisfied. This perspective of the two texts is found in their emphasis on the universality of the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha nature with its immediate corollary that all can and will attain Buddhahood, and in (the same thing stated in another way) their central theme of the nonduality of the ordinary person and the Buddha. Note that the latter doctrine, which seems on the surface to parallel certain mystical teachings of a "divine spark" within man, implies no such metaphysical postulates. To assert the nonduality of man and the Buddha is to assert a functional, rather than a substantial, truth, namely man's potential to realize Buddhahood.¹

¹This teaching of Buddhist mystical texts suggests the possibility of reading the "divine sparks" and so forth of other mystical texts in a similarly non-substantive or functional way. Is it necessary, for example, to take these "sparks" as metaphysical entities (a position which may be difficult to defend) in order to take seriously the functions which these "sparks" represent: our ability to perceive the presence of "God" (another metaphysical entity which one might consider in functional terms), or to become selfless in our concerns, etc.? This in a sense would be to operate phenomenologically: just as we recognize "consciousness" as a function rather than a thing (and can think of "mind" in the same way) we might likewise consider the "sparks," etc. of mysticism.

The philosophies of the NINDS and the BNT, as discussed in the study, are quite close: both stress nonduality and Thusness. This is ostensibly the same basic philosophy as that of the SBS, since all the texts are based on tathāgatagarbha thought. However, the SBS, with its theme of glorification of the Buddha, does not develop the notion of nonduality implicit in a limited way in the tathāgatagarbha concept itself and, more broadly, in the dynamics of Thusness, to anything like the degree to which the BNT and the NINDS take it. In the latter texts we see quite thorough-going nonduality with the result that the sacred/profane (or, perhaps better here: pure/impure), real/unreal division is undone, and this in two ways. First, according to the nondualistic philosophy of the two texts, there is no "real" impurity, as this is a logical impossibility: a real unreality. Second, by engaging in the practice advocated therein, one's impression (which, according to this philosophy, is itself unreal) that there exist these real/unreal divisions, etc. is undone. Thus, in these two ways, philosophical and practical, the realm of purity or true reality is shown to be immanently accessible to or conjoined with the realm of man.

This conjunction, it seems to me, is the heart of mysticism. Its philosophical or doctrinal facet teaches that true reality, the Absolute, God, however we name or conceive the nature of our "infinite appetite," is knowable,

attainable or immediately accessible in its fullness. The unreality which we perceive in ourselves or in our lives is not absolute, it is not the full story. The practical element of mysticism (which may well in many cases precede the philosophical or theoretical element) actualizes or makes real what the philosophical element de- or prescribes. It constitutes the mystical path and the practice of that path.

The important point here is the primacy of the latter, or practical, element in constituting an instance of mysticism. For as shown in the case of the SBS, one can have an apparently mystical theory (the tathāgatagarbha doctrine) without having a mystical text (since it is denied that one can realize the liberating knowledge). However, given the practical element of mystical experience, the philosophical or theoretical element will ordinarily follow as soon as one starts to speak of, or out of, the experience, or even as soon as one attempts to understand for oneself what has happened in the "mystical experience." If there is neither any awareness that one is transformed nor any sense of a profoundly meaningful element in the experience, then there is no need to speak of mysticism.

This practical element is described more fully in the BNT than in the NINDS. The BNT seems about equally divided between describing practice in terms of bodhi--i.e., a particular kind of wisdom which one may attain by exhaustively

assimilating the principle of Thusness--and in terms of transformation or "purification" of one's nature. The first seems to indicate a primarily noetic path, one in which knowledge and meaning would be the essential factors. The second indicates a path in which knowledge or understanding is not expressly regarded as the centrally constitutive element; rather, it is a path in which one becomes a radically new person. Of course, in Buddhism in general, and this text in particular, what one is and what one knows are mutually dependent and formative elements, and in this sense, the impression we are given here of practice is strictly in accord with theory. Moreover, the knowledge which is transformative is, in the BNT, knowledge of Thusness and the Buddha nature, and in the NINDS, knowledge of the "one dharmadhātu" (which amounts to the same thing). As both of these clarify what one's nature is, as well as the nature of the world (with which one's own nature is inter-related), it is no surprise that they are capable of transforming that nature. The transformation which is spoken of is simply the cessation of delusion and the emergence of clarity, which is the functional meaning of the transformation from the "stage" of an ordinary person to Buddhahood. Thus, the acquiring of knowledge and the transformation of a person's nature seem to go hand in hand, in practice as well as in theory.

The notion of knowledge in this context is worthy of some consideration. While in some Buddhist contexts

(Mādhyamika, Ch'an) it is not always said that one acquires new knowledge on the Buddhist path (despite the refutation--logical or practical--of certain kinds of old knowledge), in the present texts, knowledge (chin, 知) and wisdom (chih, 智) are directly named as the desiderata. In the BNT, "Thusness Wisdom" is often referred to as the goal. In the SBS, the ordinary person's inability to understand the tathāgatagarbha teaching is given as the reason he must rely on the Buddha and cannot progress on the path by his own efforts. This knowledge is, of course, non-discursive, and appears to be gained by meditative practice. It is also closely related to insight into emptiness, whose status as "knowledge" is of course highly problematic. In fact, the dictum of the BNT that Thusness is based on, but goes beyond, emptiness may indicate that the latter is a purely negative undoing of delusion, and that Thusness is that which either emerges or remains when the delusion is eliminated. In this way, Thusness can be seen in close relationship to the "non-knowledge" of emptiness, without itself taking on this "non-knowledge" character. All the same, the non-discursive nature of the knowledge of Thusness makes it somewhat difficult for us to speak directly of the nature of its meaningfulness. Perhaps, however, the conceptual difficulty here may be overcome by thinking of this meaningfulness in conjunction with the transformation of one's nature with which it is paired. Merleau-Ponty

speaks of man as "incarnate meaning":¹ in the act of living itself, we create meaning, and our lives express that meaning which we make and which we are. According to this understanding, the transformation of which the BNT speaks and the acquiring of the knowledge of Thusness with which it is conjoined, are automatically productive of a new meaning which the practitioner is and lives. It may be non-discursive without its noetic contents being in the least reduced thereby. It is in this sense that we should perhaps understand the nature of the meaningfulness of the knowledge of Thusness.

I would like to conclude by considering the BNT in the light of our present scholarly understanding of mysticism. It seems to me that Buddhist cases are often neglected in the cross-cultural study of mysticism and that our judgements on mysticism are frequently made without sufficient appreciation of them. Buddhist philosophical language is somewhat peculiar in the company of the world's religions (no God, no Being, no self) and this may account for the difficulty we have in typing it alongside the others. However, if we were to pay more attention to the functions of the language, we might encounter less difficulty. This might even be an instructive method for use in the study

¹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 166. The exact phrase used in the translation is "incarnate significance."

of other mysticisms, allowing us to avoid assuming that what is spoken of must necessarily be reified, and letting us investigate instead how the terms function to describe the activities of the mystical path.

Taking the BNT as our case, if we agree that it represents a form of mysticism, what form of mysticism would this be? Clearly not a theistic type (although it could be argued that there is a numinous quality to Thusness), since there is no room for Otherness here. Yet it also cannot satisfactorily be classified as a unitive type, provided the assessment of Thusness as nondual rather than monistic pure Being is correct. There is no One with which to be united here. Nor, finally, will the "nature mysticism" type do, inasmuch as the BNT is clearly speaking of a knowledge of Thusness which embraces both the individual and the world, with the nonduality of the latter two strictly insisted upon. It is impossible to contrast the "interior" and the nature types of experience in this context;¹ wisdom here definitely encompasses both. I cannot help but conclude that the type of mysticism represented in the BNT (and I feel a very similar type is evident in Ch'an) must constitute a separate category, one amenable to the non-

¹As Smart implies should be done: "The sense of rapport with nature often comes to people in a striking and intimate way; but it is to be contrasted with the interior experience in which, as it were, a man plumbs the depths of his own soul." (Smart, p. 76.)

dualistic philosophy represented by the term "Thusness."¹ The salient point in this philosophy is the ability of Thusness to encompass all phenomena without the latter being reduced to the former or in any way losing their particularity. In the most developed forms of this thought (Ch'an, Hua-yen), phenomena also possess the very highest value. In this type of mysticism, furthermore, one comes to this sort of knowledge both with respect to himself (hence the centrality of the Buddha nature) and all things, inasmuch as these two are mutually formative and dependent. Such a mysticism is neither "interior" nor of "nature," neither unitive nor grounded in a sense of otherness. Yet its mystical character is clear from the ultimacy of the knowledge or wisdom it possesses and the radically transformative power it represents in the life of the individual.

It should also be noted that we have in the BNT a form of mysticism which does not appear to be based upon a doctrine of a substantial self or mind. It is not a union of the Self and the One, nor a communion of the self and God. Though mental activities are (inevitably, in any form of mysticism) absolutely central in this discourse, a

¹Smart offers the following judgment: "It is probable that Zen satori is to be equated with panenhenic [nature mysticism] experience, though Zen also makes use of the general pattern of Buddhist yoga which elsewhere culminates in an interior rather than a panenhenic type of experience." (Ibid.) Smart also seems to find Zen demolishing the categories, but responds by simply letting it overlap the two.

self or mind to which they pertain yet from which they may be distinguished is not evident. Thus, the view that such a doctrine of a substantial self is necessary to mysticism is defeated by the example of the BNT.

In sum, a study of the SBS, NINDS and BNT demonstrates that the philosophical outlook of a text does not in itself determine whether that text is mystical. Taking mysticism as centering on a mystical path,¹ we can see that what is crucial in a text is the attitude toward practice and the kind of practice prescribed. Again, if we take the path as central, it seems useful to try interpreting the terms and concepts found in mystical texts in the light of the functions they might play in de- or prescribing a mystical path, instead of assuming that the words must function referentially. The latter approach leads for the most part to a philosophical dead-end anyway, with the presumed metaphysical objects (God, divine spark) to which the words refer largely unverifiable outside the mystical experience. An acceptance of the centrality of path even clarifies the nature of mystical knowledge. If our concept of human nature embraces the notion of a person as essentially a "meaning maker," the self-transformation constitute of progress on a mystical path automatically ensures that new

¹We may even speak of a "path" in some cases of spontaneous mysticism. There are many cases of persons unconsciously driven to mystical experience through their attempts to resolve spiritual crises. The pattern of such a struggle could represent a path.

meaning is being created, or knowledge "acquired."
Our ideas concerning the verification of mystical
knowledge would accordingly, and radically, be
altered.

GLOSSARY

aboriginal existence (pen yu 本有): Buddha nature "aboriginally exists" since everyone has the potential to realize Buddhahood. This term indicates the negation of the existence/non-existence dualism. For a detailed discussion see p. 39.

āgantukakleśa (客塵): Literally "foreign defilement," it is portrayed as being (1) extrinsic to the tathāgata-garbha, (2) a purely contingent or adventitious covering of the tathāgata-garbha and (3) utterly unreal and non-existent. In its second function it conceals the tathāgata-garbha and thus is the cause of our ignorance and suffering.

ālayavijñāna (阿梨耶識): In Yogācāra thought, the eighth or "storehouse consciousness" which holds the "seeds" produced by past acts and productive of future states of being and act. The Chinese is a transliteration of ālaya plus a translation of "consciousness."

anātman (無我): The doctrine of the non-existence of an abiding self in the human being.

arhat (阿羅漢): The Hīnayāna saint or enlightened man, worthy of reverence. He will not be reborn and enters nirvāṇa at death. The Chinese is a transliteration.

basis (依, ālaya): Literally "to rely," it also means that which is relied upon. In Yogācāra thought, it is the ālayavijñāna. In the SBS it is the Buddha and the Buddha's bodhi. In the BNT it is the practicing individual.

being: See "existence."

bhikṣu (比丘): A mendicant monk. The Chinese is a transliteration.

bodhi (菩提): Enlightenment, with the positive connotation of illumination. The Chinese is a transliteration.

bodhicitta (菩提心): The Chinese for this term is a transliteration of the Sanskrit for bodhi plus a translation of citta using the standard Chinese term for "mind." It is the "mind of enlightenment," traditionally representing aspiration to enlightenment or the beginning of the Buddhist path. In the ENT it is glossed by prayoga (加行) which shows the element of effort or endeavor involved.

bodhisattva (菩薩): (1) One on the way to becoming a Buddha. (2) A Mahāyāna practitioner; contrasted with the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha. The Chinese is a transliteration.

Buddha (佛): An enlightened one. May be used without qualification to refer to Śākyamuni. In Mahāyāna there is an infinite number of Buddhas as expressed in the trikāya doctrine.

Buddha dharma (佛法): Qualities or attributes of a Buddha; the teachings of the Buddha.

Buddha nature (佛性): The potential of all sentient beings to realize Buddhahood; practice toward realization; realization itself. For an etymological discussion see p. 21.

consciousness-only wisdom (唯識智): As described in the BNT, the realization of the nonduality of the grasped "object" and the grasping "mind," the mutually dependent nature of "subject" and "object." It does not mean that only a substantive "mind" exists, but that there exist only acts of cognition.

Dharma, dharma (法): The capitalized form represents the Truth, the true nature of reality and the Buddha's teachings. The lower case form means in early Buddhism an element of existence, later simply a phenomenon or phenomena.

dharmadhātu (法界): (1) The universe; (2) the realm or sphere of Dharma--Truth and Reality.

dharmakāya (法身): One of the three Buddha bodies (trikāya), the dharmakāya is the Buddha as embodiment of the Dharma. In the BNT it: (1) is an equivalent of Buddha nature, (2) especially represents the latter as enlightenment or liberation, and (3) is manifested in the four perfections of purity, self, bliss and eternity. It is portrayed as the basic Buddha body of which the other two are manifestations.

dhātu (界): (1) A region or realm, (2) a species, class or group, (3) the nature of something.

dhyāna (禪定): General term for meditation.

discriminating nature (分別性, parikalpita-svabhāva): One of the three natures according to Yogacara thought. The discriminating nature corresponds to the common-sensical view of the world which, since it interprets experience in terms of subject and object, is wholly fabricated.

ekadhātu (一界): The "one dhātu," i.e., the dharmadhātu or the identity of the sattvadhātu and the dharmadhātu, according to the NINDS.

empty (空, śūnya): The absence of own-nature in all phenomena and characterizing reality as a whole. An extension of the doctrine that all things exist in dependence on other things.

existence (being, yu 有): The Chinese term means "to have" or "there is" and by extension "existence." See p. 34f. for a detailed discussion.

Hīnayāna (小乘): The "Lesser Vehicle," so-called by the Mahāyāna. They accept as canonical fewer sūtras than the Mahāyāna and embrace the paths of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha.

icchantika (一闍提): One forever incapable of realizing Buddhahood. The tathāgatagarbha/Buddha nature texts deny that there is such a being. The Chinese is a transliteration.

karma (業): The term basically means deeds, acts or work, but in Buddhism this idea is always tied to that of the retribution one suffers for one's deeds. Karma represents both the cause or "seed" and the effect or "fruit" aspects of the single "acts and retribution" process. As such, it is the condition of transmigration in samsāra. As the BNT indicates, however, acts performed in non-attachment do not result in samsaric retribution.

karuṇā (悲): Compassion, especially mahākaruṇā, great or unconditioned compassion representing a Buddha's attitude toward the suffering of sentient beings.

kāya (身): Body.

kleśa (煩惱): Affliction, suffering or distress, and their causes, namely delusion, desire and hatred. (There are various lists, but all point to ignorance and the ignorant emotions.)

Mahāyāna (大乘): The self-styled "Great Vehicle" of bodhisattva practice. They accept as canonical many sūtras not acceptable to the Hīnayāna.

manovijñāna (意識): In Yogācāra thought, the sixth consciousness, that which collects the sense data and brings them to the level of conceptualization.

nirmāṇakāya (化身): One of the three Buddha bodies, it is the "transformation" body, the body in which the Buddha appears among ordinary persons to preach the Dharma. In the BNT it represents compassion.

nirvāṇa (涅槃): The Buddhist goal expressed as the cessation of suffering and release from the bonds of transmigration. The Chinese is a transliteration.

non-being: See "non-existence."

nondual (不二, advaya): Used in the BNT to represent an ontological position which is neither pluralism nor monism. Nondually related things are not "the same," since they function differently, but neither are they "different," since they are all alike in their emptiness.

non-empty (不空): In challenge to the doctrine of universal emptiness, the BNT teaches that the dharmakāya is "not empty" of infinite virtues and merits.

non-existence (non-being, wu 無): The Chinese term means "to lack" or "there is not" and by extension "non-existence." See p. 34f. for a detailed discussion.

original nature (本性): An equivalent for Buddha nature, it indicates that the latter is not "produced" by practice, but is as it is eternally, though usually concealed by ignorance.

own-nature (自性, svabhāva): Independently existing, having an unchanging character or immutable essence.

pāramitā: See "perfection."

parāvṛtti-āśraya: See "transformation of the basis."

perfection (波羅蜜 , pāramitā): The original sense is of crossing to the other shore of nirvāṇa, or going beyond samsāra. Thus it represents a quality not found in the world of suffering. The Mahāyāna generally speaks of six perfections, the cultivation of which constitutes practice, namely: giving, morality, patience, vigor, concentration and wisdom. The BNT speaks of four guṇapāramitā, namely, purity, self, bliss and eternity. These represent the dharmakāya, as the culmination of practice. The Chinese is a transliteration.

prajñā (般若): Wisdom, especially the perfection of wisdom, prajñāpāramitā; it is associated with insight into emptiness. The Chinese is a transliteration.

prapañca (戲論): The Chinese literally reads "frivolous discourse." It stands for sophistry, any talk not conducive to enlightenment and by extension any deluded talk or views.

pratītyasamutpāda (緣起): Conditioned co-origination. The basic Buddhist teaching that all things come into being through causes and conditions; thus all things exist in mutual dependence. The Chinese literally means "conditioned arising."

pratyekabuddha (緣覺 or 獨覺): A solitary Buddha (rendered by the second Chinese form), one who achieves enlightenment through his own efforts and then maintains a reclusive existence. Also, one who achieves enlightenment through penetrating the truth of the twelve-fold wheel of causation. (This is rendered by the first Chinese form.)

relative nature (依他性 , paratantra-svabhāva): One of the three natures according to Yogācāra thought. The relative nature recognizes the fact of conditioned co-origination, the mutual conditioning and interdependence of all things.

samādhi (定): Perfect concentration of the mind in meditation.

sambhogakāya (應身): One of the three Buddha bodies; it is the "enjoyment" or "communal" body manifest in the pure Buddha lands and visible to advanced bodhi-sattvas. In the BNT it represents compassion.

samsāra (生死): The endless round of transmigration. The Chinese literally reads "birth and death."

sattva (衆生): Sentient beings(s). The Chinese literally means the group or entirety of living beings.

sattvadhātu (衆生界): A sattva is a sentient being. Sattvadhātu can refer to either the characteristic nature of the sattva or the total group of all sattvas.

self (我 , ātman): The Chinese term is the standard one for "I, myself." The BNT describes the adherence to views of self as a fundamental error which may be overcome by the cultivation of wisdom. As a result of the latter, one realizes the "perfection of self," which is equivalent to not-self.

shen (身): In non-Buddhist Chinese it can mean "body" or "person." In Buddhist Chinese it also renders the Sanskrit kāya or "body."

singularity (不共): Not public, in the sense of private and unique. An adjective applicable to the Buddha's bodhi, merits and acts.

skandha (陰): According to early Buddhism, five skandhas or "heaps" constitute the person: form, sensation, perception, impulses and consciousness. In none of these individually nor in their combination is there said to be a self.

śrāvaka (聲聞): A "hearer" of the Buddha; A Hīnayāna practitioner whose practice is based on realizing the Four Noble Truths.

śūnya: See "empty."

supreme truth (真諦 , paramārthasatya): One of two levels of truth or reality according to the Mādhyamika two truths doctrine. This level represents the cessation of delusion and liberation. For a detailed discussion, see p. 48.

sūtra (經): A discourse of a Buddha.

Tathāgata (如來): An epithet for the Buddha. The Sanskrit can mean "thus gone" (tathā + gata) to nirvāṇa or "thus come" (tathā + āgata) to samsāra, but the Chinese consistently render the term "thus come." The BNT explains that though the two aspects are inseparable, the "thus come" form is stressed in order to emphasize the compassion of the Buddha returning to samsāra in order to teach and save humanity.

tathāgatadhātu (如來界): Nature of the Tathāgata or Buddha. Used interchangeably in the SBS with 如來性, Tathāgata nature.

tathāgatagarbha (如來藏): The womb or embryo of the Tathāgata or Buddha. For a detailed discussion, see p. 19.

three natures (三性, tri-svabhāva): The Yogācāra doctrine which holds that all experience and all of reality may be considered in three categories: the discriminating, relative and true natures. For a detailed discussion, see p. 49 and p. 62ff.

Thusness (眞如 or 如如, tathatā): Reality; the way things truly are. This term, like śūnya, is an attempt to put an end to words, yet "Thusness" is perceived as being of a more positive tenor than the latter. In the 如如 form it is emphasized that Thusness is not a transcendental principle, but the true character of phenomenal reality.

transformation of the basis (轉依, parāvṛtti-āśraya): Originally a Yogācāra term, as used in the BNT, it is a synonym for Buddha nature. As such, it represents the self-transformation of the person through engagement in Buddhist practice. It stands for both the acts of practice which undo ignorance and the liberation produced by practice. It is thus both the cause of enlightenment and the effect, enlightenment itself.

trikāya (三身): The three bodies of the Buddha: dharmakāya, sambhogakāya and nirmānakāya. This is a concept used throughout Mahāyāna thought.

true nature (眞實性, pariniṣpanna-svabhāva): One of the three natures according to Yogācāra thought. The true nature cognizes Thusness, is perfect and absolutely true. It is one of the three terms used to represent the "essence" of Buddha nature.

two truths (二言帝, satyadvaya): The Mādhyamika doctrine which holds that all of reality is encompassed by two levels: the worldly truth or reality and the supreme truth or reality. For a detailed discussion, see p. 48.

unborn (無生, anutpāda): Since all things are empty of own-nature (svabhāva) there is no real essence or entity which comes into existence. Used with respect to the dharmakāya and nirvāṇa it indicates their freedom of samsāra (which is rendered in Chinese as "birth and death") or unconditioned nature.

upāya (方便): Skillful means used to bring about the enlightenment of humanity. All aspects of the Buddha Way except enlightenment itself are included, according to the BNT.

worldly truth (俗諦, samvṛtīsatya): One of the two levels of truth or reality according to the Mādhyamika two truths doctrine. This level represents whatever is enveloped or obscured, ignorance and phenomenal existence. For a detailed discussion, see p. 48.

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