

The International Journal for Field-Being

De-Substantializing Buddha-Nature in the Tathagatagarbha Tradition

by **Youru Wang**

Rowan University
Glassboro, NJ, USA

IJFB, Vol. 1(1), Part 2, Article No. 10, 2001.

Citation URL: <http://www.iifb.org/ijfb/YWang-2-10>

- ¶1. The rise of the *tathagatagarbha* thought of Mahayana Buddhism met the need to complement the emptiness teaching of the Madhyamika school. This need involves two interrelated areas: the practical and the theoretical. First, practically, Buddhist thinkers, especially those of *tathagatagarbha* thought and the Yogacara school, believe that the relentless denial and negation of Nagarjuna in destroying all wrong views is effective but not sufficient in conveying the positive value of Buddhist practice. In other words, although the teaching of emptiness is not negative or nihilistic, its apophatic language and its strategic avoidance of any constructive view have their limits in affirming soteriological purposes or benefits. It does not provide direct answers or solutions to some crucial questions of soteriological practice. For example, one of the questions *tathagatagarbha* thought tries to answer is how it is possible to find the link between sentient beings, who are actually wandering in *samsara*, and their practical goal—the attainment of *nirvana*. [1] Apparently, this is not the central concern of Madhyamika philosophy. But it is of soteriological importance to many practitioners and has a great bearing on the thrust of their practice. This example points to the theoretical aspect as well. Theoretically, it is far from the case that Madhyamika has accomplished so much that other Buddhists have nothing more to say. The teaching of emptiness lays foundational work for Mahayana discourse in correcting wrong views, and is open to the affirmation of authentic existence and the world as such. But it focuses on demolishing all metaphysical views and leaves the latter somewhat unfulfilled or insufficiently explained. [2]

- ¶2. These issues can also be viewed from the angle of language use. Mahayana Buddhists, after Madhyamika, face the question of "Is apophatic language the only language we can use?" This question, put another way, is whether there is any possibility of using other language. Madhyamika philosophy claims that negative terms such as emptiness are only useful conventional designations for soteriological purposes. [3] Mahayana Buddhism, including Madhyamika, regards the use of all terms or concepts as *upaya*. This implies that neither apophatic nor kataphatic language should be privileged ultimately. Negative language, therefore, has no absolute priority over positive language. Understood in this way, the possibility of using positive language is unhesitatingly explored by the expounders of *tathagatagarbha* thought and the Yogacara school in echoing the call of their practices. Another point of this issue is that negative terms, like all other terms, can be reified or substantialized. This is precisely the reason the Madhyamika thinkers constantly invoke the strategy of self-deconstructing in emptying emptiness. It proves from the other side that negative language has no ultimate superiority over positive language. The point, then, is not what kind of language can be appropriately used but how to avoid reification or substantialization. Are there any possibilities of using positive language while avoiding reification by imposing restrictions on it? The Buddhists of *tathagatagarbha* thought and the Yogacara school think there are. Although Madhyamika deconstruction has made constructive discourse more difficult—quite similar to what Derrida has done to Western philosophy—the Buddhist thinkers nonetheless try the latter with intellectual courage and subtlety.
- ¶3. This is the general background of the venture of *tathagatagarbha* thought. The fundamental concern of *tathagatagarbha* thought is to assert the possibility or potentiality of attaining *nirvana* or liberation for all human beings. This concern is represented by the common teaching of this tradition that all sentient beings have the *tathagatagarbha* within themselves which enables them to be eventually enlightened. *tathagatagarbha* literally means the embryo or matrix of the Tathagata, the Buddha. The Chinese translation of this word is *rulaizang*, the embryo-container of Buddha, or foetus, Buddha nature. Takasaki Jikido has observed that the meaning of the word *tathagatagarbha* in the use of this tradition is closely related to other words such as *tathagatagotra*, *buddhadhatu*, and *dharmadhatu*. From this observation he suggests that what is called Buddha nature involves the nature (*dhatu/svabhava*) of the Buddha and the cause (*hetu*) of the Buddha as these Sanskrit words signify. [4] Since *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha nature appears to involve something like the "essence" of Buddha, it entails the question of whether it is a substantialist concept. Also since *tathagatagarbha* thought reintroduces the notion of self, along with other kataphatic terms, into Buddhist discourse, from the very beginning it runs the risk of being reappropriated by the Brahmanical metaphysical notion of Self (*atman*).

- ¶4. However, things are not as simple as they appear. Madhyamika claims that all things are devoid of self-existence, and refuses to take a view concerning the existence of things. Historically, scholars have argued: is it not itself a view concerning the nature of things to claim that all things are devoid of self-existence? Is emptiness not itself an interpretation of the nature of things? [5] Although Madhyamika claims that to avoid substantialization, emptiness is only a conventional designation, and as designation it is dependent co-arising, it cannot be denied that this claim addresses, after all, the issue of the nature of things. If Madhyamika nonetheless refers to the nature of the existence of things in a certain way, why cannot the *tathagatagarbha* tradition try another way? The point again is not that some words cannot be used but how to use them. The exponents of *tathagatagarbha* thought are fully aware of their risk and understand that they must use positive language differently. They make various efforts to impose restrictions on their use of kataphatic terms. Although in a few cases *tathagatagarbha* is equated to Self without clarification [6], in most cases the imposition of restriction is apparent. Of course, we must examine carefully whether their efforts have succeeded or not.
- ¶5. The main clarifications made by the exponents of *tathagatagarbha* thought can be divided into two interrelated kinds. One I like to call strategic, as far as the content of this clarification is concerned. Another kind is theoretical, namely, of restrictions more substantially imposed upon the explanation of *tathagatagarbha* thought. Both are crucial to a non-substantialized *tathagatagarbha* thought. The examination of all these efforts will provide inspirations for our contemporary endeavor to construct a non-substantialistic philosophy.
- ¶6. First, some *tathagatagarbha* texts clarify that the teaching of *tathagatagarbha* is nothing but a temporary expedient (*fangbian*) and a practical/soteriological strategy. For instance, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* mentions that ordinary people do not understand the Buddha's teaching of no-self and ask if there is no self, who keeps the rules of discipline, and who transgresses those rules. To those who have a deep attachment to the sense of self and worry about the loss of self, the Buddha says: "I have not preached that all sentient beings are without self. [On the other hand,] I always proclaim that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature. What else can the Buddha-nature be if not the self?" [7] But next the Buddha explains: "The Buddha-nature is in fact not the self. For the sake of [guiding] sentient beings, I describe it as the self." [8] The text also shows how effective this strategy is in attracting non-Buddhists to Buddhist practice. This point is supported by other *tathagatagarbha* texts. The *Ratnagotravibhaga* points out that the teaching of *tathagatagarbha* is to win sentient beings over to abandoning "affection for one's self"—one of five defects caused by non-Buddhist teachings. [9] The *Lankavatara Sutra*, though syncretic between *tathagatagarbha* thought and the Yogacara school, regards the teaching of *tathagatagarbha* as one of skillful means (*upaya*), just as the teaching of no-self is. However, the purpose of *tathagatagarbha* teaching "is to make the ignorant cast aside their fear when they listen to the teaching of egolessness," and "to awaken the

philosophers from their clinging" to the Self. [10] Finally, the text emphasizes that *tathagatagarbha* thought should not be identical with the metaphysical Self. Rather it should be identical with the teaching of no-self. [11] These clarifications show us that the context of *tathagatagarbha* thought is pragmatic and soteriological. The purpose of this teaching is not to re-introduce the metaphysical Self into Buddhism, or to smuggle the Brahmanical Self in by the back door through an investigation of the ontological structure of self. Rather it is to lead more people to the Buddhist path and to the teaching of no-self more effectively through something that looks like a notion of self, namely, appears to presuppose something within each self.

- ¶7. Noticing this context is important. It will help to avoid jumping to the conclusion that *tathagatagarbha* thought is simply another case of metaphysical imagination. However, a soteriological theory can also be based on a metaphysical notion or seek support from a metaphysical notion, just as the metaphysical theory of Brahmanism can also entail its own soteriology. Merely giving strategic reasons is not sufficient in defining a teaching of *tathagatagarbha* that is clearly distinguishable from any metaphysical notion of self or from any theory of essence. Thus, the thinkers of the *tathagatagarbha* thought must provide more substantial reasons for the non-substantialized explanation of this teaching.
- ¶8. One of the further clarifications of *tathagatagarbha* thought made by some texts is the emphasis on the meaning of *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha nature as cause or causal element. The *Ratnagotravibhaga* plainly states that the *tathagatadhatu*, the synonym for *tathagatagarbha* in the text, is the cause for the acquisition of Buddhahood. The Sanskrit word *dhatu* here, it underscores, "is especially used in the sense of '*hetu*,' a cause." [12] Thus the *tathagatagarbha*, or Buddha nature, is at the same time called "the cause of Buddha nature (*rulaixingyin* or *foxingyin* in Chinese)." [13] The *Ratnagotravibhaga* also quotes a passage from another *tathagatagarbha* text, the *Srimaladevisimhanada* (hereafter *Srimala*) *Sutra*, to explain the notion of the Buddha nature as cause: "[I]f there were no [*tathagatagarbha*], there would be neither aversion towards suffering nor longing, eagerness, and aspiration towards [nirvana]." [14] According to this sutra, although the *tathagatagarbha* is obscured by defilements in unenlightened beings, this *tathagatagarbha* nonetheless determines their possibility or potentiality of attaining Buddhahood. In this connection, the notion of *tathagatagarbha* is nothing but a soteriological notion of the inner cause or thrust for liberation within all sentient beings. It serves the soteriological purpose of affirming the possibility and potentiality of attaining enlightenment within sentient beings and encouraging them to move forward on the Buddhist path. This accent on the soteriological-causal dimension of the *tathagatagarbha* thought is undeniable. However, the problem with these two texts is that they declare a *tathagatagarbha* not only responsible for the final liberation but also for samsaric life. [15] Soteriologically, this view explains that when defiled or covered by defilement, the *tathagatagarbha* entails *samsara* as well. What is underlined is thus a turn from defilements to the original purity. In this aspect it reflects an early attempt of the

tradition to stress the importance of existential transformation for every human being through soteriological practice. But the texts themselves do not warrant this soteriological understanding. They open to ontological or even cosmological interpretation due to their implications of the *tathagatagarbha* as the only basis of the world. The problem indicates that if a causal theory is to be non-substantialist, it must clarify itself in such a way as to avoid lending itself to any interpretation of a metaphysical essence or cosmological origin.

- ¶9. A better clarification of the Buddha nature as non-substantialized causal element or relation comes in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*. This scripture considers the Buddha nature identical with the twelfth chain of interdependent arising (*dvadasanga pratityasamutpada*). "This twelfth chain of interdependent arising is called Buddha nature." [16] "Because there is cause, or cause vis-a-vis cause, . . . it is called Buddha nature." [17] "All sentient beings must have such a twelfth chain of interdependent arising; therefore it is said that all sentient beings have Buddha nature." [18] Since the saying that all sentient beings have Buddha nature may leave the impression that it presupposes something permanent, the scripture explains that it is said thus because the chain of interdependent arising is permanent. [19] This amounts to saying that change and causal relation are permanent. It does not affirm any entity as permanent. The Buddha nature is thus none other than a web of causal relations and the realization of this. Once the Buddha nature is regarded as cause and causal relation, the scripture continues to propose two types of cause—the Buddha nature as direct cause and the Buddha nature as auxiliary cause. The *tathagatagarbha* is direct cause (*zhengyin*), and the practice of the six paramitas is auxiliary cause (*yuanyin*). [20] The causal analysis of this kind makes the theory of Buddha nature more tenable and distinguishable from a metaphysical theory of essence or origin. However, in the *tathagatagarbha* tradition the Buddha nature is described not only as a cause, but also as an effect or fruit. In describing this fruit or the reality of Buddhahood, *tathagatadhatu* or *buddhadhatu* is used also in the sense of nature or *svabhava*. To avoid substantializing Buddha nature, something more must be done to clarify the special meaning of this "nature." This leads to another effort at de-substantialization.
- ¶10. The effort is to identify the Buddha nature with emptiness. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* maintains: "What is empty is Buddha nature." [21]
- ¶11. When you see the Buddha nature, you see no more the inherent nature of all dharmas. . . . Because you do not see the inherent nature of all dharmas, you see the Buddha nature. . . . If you still see this inherent nature, you do not see the Buddha nature. . . . *Prajnaparamitais* empty, . . . *tathatais* empty, *nirvanais* empty, . . . all dharmas are empty. [22]

- ¶12. This is a good example of integrating *tathagatagarbha* thought with the teaching of the *Prajnaparamita* and Madhyamika. Emptiness is maintained in the original sense of being without self-existence or inherent nature. The Buddha nature is empty, just as other Buddhist soteriological terms—*prajnaparamita*, *tathata*, *nirvana*—are. The Buddha nature is also beyond the dichotomy of existence and non-existence. "For the sake of accommodating the conventional world, it is said that *nirvana* exists." [23] So is the Buddha nature. The Buddha nature abides nowhere. Because it is good for being a temporary expedient, it is said that the Buddha nature can be seen in sentient beings." [24] These statements make *tathagatagarbha* thought resistant to any understanding of the Buddha nature as substance or essence.
- ¶13. Another forceful clarification is the identification between the Buddha nature and the Middle Way. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* declares: "The Middle Way is called Buddha nature. . . . You do not follow the Middle Way, therefore, you do not realize the Buddha nature." [25] "The Buddha nature is the ultimate meaning of emptiness and this ultimate meaning of emptiness is called Middle Way." [26] Here we see a perfect accord with Nagarjuna's *Karika* 24:18, the identification among emptiness, interdependent arising, and the Middle Way. The scripture just extends this identical relation to the Buddha nature. In explaining this identical relation among emptiness, the Middle Way and the Buddha nature, the scripture emphasizes something typical of *tathagatagarbha* thought. It asserts that the Buddha nature and the ultimate meaning of emptiness must go beyond both "empty (*sunya*)" and "nonempty (*asunya*)." The Middle Way has neither fixation on "empty" nor on "nonempty." As a dialectic result of freeing oneself from the attachment to any one-sided views, it enables the wise to attain the skillful or situational use of either term. In other words, the supreme wisdom transcends conventional binary distinctions, but nonetheless makes use of them strategically in the world of conventions. This point obviously has its support from Nagarjuna's famous statement about the relation of *paramartha* and *samvrti*. [27] Nagarjuna's thought also implies that as conventional designation, emptiness, just like non-emptiness, cannot be privileged ultimately.
- ¶14. Derived from, and complementing the thought of Madhyamika, the following notion is expressed by the scripture: "Only seeing that all are empty without seeing the nonempty side—this cannot be called Middle Way. Only seeing that all have no self without also seeing the self—this cannot be called Middle Way." [28] This is to say that empty and nonempty, self and nonself, are equally partial in terms of the Middle Way. From the transcendent perspective of the Middle Way, one should not fix on one side while ignoring the other. Thus the scripture provides legitimation for, and also restriction on, the use of terms, such as nonemptiness, self, permanence, purity, existence, in *tathagatagarbha* thought. The restriction is that although the use of them is inevitable, these terms must be used in a relational perspective. They must be de-sedimented and regarded as expedient only. In this way the *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha nature eschews reification. However, in the texts of the *Ratnagotravibhaga* and the *Srimala Sutra*, it is said that the *tathagatagarbha* or Buddha nature is only

empty of adventitious defilements that cover it, but not empty of its own innate purity. [29] It is appropriate, and even necessary, to talk about the existence, or nonemptiness, of purity, permanence, joy, and so on, as practical virtue from a soteriological perspective. [30] However, without insisting at the same time its strategic nature or the ultimate transcendence of both *asunya* and *sunya* in the sense of the Middle Way, the texts lose the capacity of resisting reification.

- ¶15. One *tathagatagarbha* text of extreme importance for East Asian Buddhism worth mentioning here is the *Dacheng Qixin Lun (The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana)*. This text is of a blending of Indian Mahayana Buddhist thought and indigenous Chinese mind-nature theory. [31] Some scholars have suggested that this text contributes to the further substantialization of *tathagatagarbha* thought. [32] This is not true. At least two crucial points made by the text contribute to the de-substantialization of the Buddha nature. First, although the text, following its Indian precursor, describes the *tathagatagarbha* or the mind of suchness as both "truly empty" and "truly nonempty," it places both of these terms strictly in the sphere of conventional conceptualization and binary distinction. The higher meaning of suchness, however, is beyond both sides.
- ¶16. All words and speeches are dependent designations without [corresponding] reality. . . . What is termed suchness is without any form of existence as well. Suchness is, so to speak, the limit of conceptualization wherein the word is used to put an end to other words. But the whole [or the body] of suchness has no existence to be put an end to, for all things truly exist as they are; nor is there anything to be established particularly, for all things are equally in the state of suchness. [33]
- ¶17. This paragraph clearly shows that it is not legitimate to regard the *tathagatagarbha* or the mind of suchness as entity, substance or essence. The Buddha nature itself is not an entity over and above the true existence of all things, namely, over and above the interdependent arising of all things. The Buddha nature merely denies or empties the self-existence of all things, but at the same time affirms the interrelated, non-self-identical existence of all things through this denial or emptying. This "double character" is also made clear by the discussion of "truly empty" and "truly nonempty" as a provisional distinction. The so-called "empty" side is not a form of existence, nor is a form of nonexistence. Because the minds of all unenlightened beings are deluded by binary conceptualization, emptiness is taught. "Once they are free from their deluded minds, they will find that there is nothing to be emptied." [34] The so-called "nonempty" side manifests the dharma body empty of delusion, but nonetheless "has no form of existence to be grasped." [35] Thus "empty" and "nonempty" intrinsically involve each other. The double character is not "hardly conceivable" in this text, as Gadjin Nagao claims, [36] but more skillfully maintained than in the *Srimala Sutra*

and the *Ratnagotravibhaga*.

- ¶18. Second, the text identifies the one mind of suchness with "the mind of the sentient being." [37] This one mind thus has two aspects: the mind of suchness and the mind of the circle of life and death, namely, the enlightened mind and the deluded mind. The enlightened mind and the deluded mind are the same mind. They are nondualistic. Since this one mind has these two aspects, the text stresses: "What is called enlightenment means that the whole of the mind frees from [deluded] thoughts. The characteristic of that which is free from thoughts is equal to the sphere of emptiness." [38] "One instant of thought corresponds to suchness. . . . Because it is far away even from subtle [deluded] thoughts, the insight into the nature of the mind [the suchness] is gained." [39] Notice the clarification made here on the whole of the mind—it is equal to emptiness. [40] But more importantly, these statements suggest a way of existentializing the issue of Buddha nature. As a Chinese commentator later elucidates,
- ¶19. This one mind is none other than the presently deluded mind of the sentient being. . . . When it is deluded, the circle of life and death starts and the whole of the mind of suchness is in the state of life and death; when it is enlightened, the circle ends and this mind of life and death itself is the whole of [the mind of] suchness. [41]
- ¶20. The central concern of the notion of one mind, according to this understanding, is the existential-practical transformation of the human mind from the deluded to the enlightened. In other words, it is the transformation of human subjectivity from the inauthentic, illusory self-existence to the authentic, relational existence. The notion of one mind is just a provisional means to encourage this existential transformation. All the uses of other similar terms are basically related to this existential-soteriological dimension, and this dimension is underscored and supported by the notion of one mind. [42] Since the Buddha nature is nondualistic from "the presently deluded mind of the sentient being," it is not regarded as substance or essence *behind the existential function of ordinary minds*. In this aspect the notion noticeably bridges the gap between *tathagatagarbha* thought and Chan Buddhist ideology.

- ¶21. This survey of *tathagatagarbha* thought shows that it is premature to see the whole *tathagatagarbha* tradition as the metaphysical reappropriation of Buddhist thought. Rather, the articulation and evolution of *tathagatagarbha* thought involves the very effort to resist any metaphysical appropriation. In this aspect, it can even be said that *tathagatagarbha* thought involves the use of certain deconstructive, or even self-deconstructive, strategies. However, this struggle within *tathagatagarbha* thought becomes or provides the context for further struggles between metaphysical appropriation and deconstruction. [43] In other words, *tathagatagarbha* thought, on one hand, meets the need of Buddhist soteriological practice, and on the other, calls for the further deconstruction of itself. We may cautiously define this call or necessity for deconstruction as follows in terms of the above survey of *tathagatagarbha* thought.
- ¶22. First, any attempt to equate *tathagatagarbha* thought with the metaphysical Self without any clarification amounts to a metaphysical appropriation; it inevitably calls for a deconstructive effort.
- ¶23. Second, the terms of *tathagatagarbha* thought, such as Buddha nature, self, nonempty, permanence, purity, heavily rely on the restriction or clarification of their soteriological context and dimension. They must be regarded as temporary expedients. Apart from this context and dimension, or without being treated as temporary expedient, they would lead to a kind of reification or sedimentation that calls for deconstruction.
- ¶24. Third, theoretically, *tathagatagarbha* thought needs a series of careful clarifications or modifications to resist any metaphysical appropriation. Due to the insufficient clarification or explanation of non-substantialist *tathagatagarbha* thought present in some texts, an ensuing deconstructive operation may be necessary.
- ¶25. Fourth, even when its soteriological context is clear, the emphasis on its strategic use is present, and the theoretical explanation is sufficient, there are always possibilities of misunderstanding or misinterpreting it as something quasi-reifying or quasi-metaphysical. The deconstruction of these understandings or interpretations is always required.
- ¶26. Fifth, as we have indicated, the advent of *tathagatagarbha* thought meets the need of Buddhist soteriological practice. When practice moves forward, it may change the need, and theories may always fall behind practice. The call for the deconstruction of Buddha nature may be rooted in the development of Buddhist soteriological practice itself that is, in turn, determined by various social-cultural and historical factors.

- ¶27. All these necessities are generally of two kinds. One is internal to *tathagatagarbha* thought; another is external. They are interrelated. For those internal elements or external appropriations that become the target of deconstruction, we may define them as quasi-reifying or quasi-metaphysical, since the context determines that they are nonetheless different from a metaphysical notion in the Western sense. What we have surveyed thus becomes the overall background and context for the Chinese, especially Chan Buddhist, deconstruction of Buddha nature. Chan Buddhism cannot fall from the sky without inherited intellectual or spiritual resources. The tradition of Buddha-nature thought is part of that heritage. Thus Chan Buddhism almost from the beginning is involved in the struggle between the substantialization of the Buddha nature and the deconstruction of it. But I will leave this further investigation to another paper.

END NOTES

1. For this question, see Takasaki Jikido, [Dharmata, Dharmadhatu, Dharmakaya and Buddhadhatu--Structure of the Ultimate Value in Mahayana Buddhism](#), *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu*, 14(2) 1966, , 90.
2. These are actually criticisms from the expounders of *tathagatagarbha* thought and the Yogacara school. For criticisms and a different view of emptiness from the Yogacara school, see Gadjin M. Nagao, [What Remains in Sunyata: A Yogacara Interpretation of Emptiness](#) in L. S. Kawamura (Ed.), *Madhyamika and Yogacara* Albany: State University of New York Press (1991). For criticisms from the thinkers of *tathagatagarbha* thought, see Takasaki Jikido, [A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga \(Uttaratantra\): Being a Treatise on the tathagatagarbha Theory of Mahayana Buddhism](#), *Serie Orientale Roma No. 33*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (1966) 54-57. For criticisms from a combined perspective of both *tathagatagarbha* and Yogacara, see Sallie B. King, [Buddha Nature](#) , Albany: State University of New York Press (1991), 6-19.
3. See, for instance, Nagarjuna *Mulamadhyamakakarika* 24:18, the English translation in Nagarjuna, [Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapada of Candrakirti \(Mulamadhyamakakarika\)](#), translated by Mervyn Sprung, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1979), 238.
4. Takasaki Jikido, [Dharmata, Dharmadhatu, Dharmakaya and Buddhadhatu--Structure of the Ultimate Value in Mahayana Buddhism](#), *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu*, 14(2) 1966, , 91. Also see his Takasaki Jikido, [Nyoraizo shiso](#), Kyoto: Hozokan (1988) Vol. 1, 43.

5. Cf. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* , London: Routledge (1989), 63.
6. For instance, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, on one occasion, simply declares that Self (*atman*) is the meaning of *tathagatagarbha*, although on other occasions it distinguishes between them. See *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 407b. Also cf. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 98.
7. *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 525a. For the English translation see Ming-Wood Liu, *The Doctrine of the Buddha-Nature in the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-Sutra*, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 5(2) 1982, , 88.
8. *ibid.*, 88.
9. Takasaki Jikido, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the tathagatagarbha Theory of Mahayana Buddhism, Serie Orientale Roma No. 33*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (1966), 305-6.
10. *The Lankavatara Sutra*, translated by D.T Suzuki, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1932), 69.
11. *ibid.*, 70.
12. Takasaki Jikido, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the tathagatagarbha Theory of Mahayana Buddhism, Serie Orientale Roma No. 33*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (1966), 290.
13. *Taisho*, vol. 31, 1611, 839a.
14. Takasaki Jikido, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the tathagatagarbha Theory of Mahayana Buddhism, Serie Orientale Roma No. 33*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (1966), 293. The English translation here is from *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala; a Buddhist scripture on the Tathagatagarbha theory*, translated by Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, New York: Columbia University Press (1974), 105.

- [15.](#) *ibid.*, 291, 105.
- [16.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 524a.
- [17.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 524a.
- [18.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 557a.
- [19.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 533b.
- [20.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 530c. Cf. Ming-Wood Liu, [The Doctrine of the Buddha-Nature in the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-Sutra*](#), *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 5(2) 1982, , 74.
- [21.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 445c.
- [22.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 521b.
- [23.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 375, 747b.
- [24.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 519b.
- [25.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 523b.
- [26.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 524b.
- [27.](#) Nagarjuna, [Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the *Prasannapada of Candrakirti \(Mulamadhyamakakarika\)*](#), translated by Mervyn Sprung, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1979), Karika 24: 10, 232.
- [28.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 12, 374, 523b.

- [29.](#) See Takasaki Jikido, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the tathagatagarbha Theory of Mahayana Buddhism, Serie Orientale Roma No. 33*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (1966), 301; *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala; a Buddhist scripture on the Tathagatagarbha theory*, translated by Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, New York: Columbia University Press (1974), 99. Cf. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, London: Routledge (1989), 101, 105; Justus . Buchler, [Reply to Anton: Against 'Proper' Ontology](#), *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 14(1) 1976, 85-90, 57-60.
- [30.](#) Cf. Sallie B. King's explanation of the use of these terms in relation to another *tathagatagarbha*-Yogacara text *Foxing Lun*: These terms are "just talking about what a Buddha is like and extolling the virtues of such a being." See her Sallie B. King, [The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature Is Impeccably Buddhist](#) in J. Hubbard and P.L. Swanson (Eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (1997), 181.
- [31.](#) I take a position similar to Peter Gregory's in defining the nature of this complicated text. Gregory once wrote, "[W]hatever else the text may or may not be, it is surely a hybrid." (See Peter Gregory, [The Problem of Theodicy in the Awakening of Faith](#), *Religious Studies*, 22(1) 1986, , 64). However, by the term "hybrid" or "blending," I mean the combination of not only different Indian Mahayana schools but also of Indian and Chinese thought regardless of its author of either Indian or Chinese origin. Although this position is highly hermeneutic rather than exegetical, it can be supported by the careful examination of the use of terms in the text. For the limited space, however, I cannot pursue or show this kind of investigation here any further.
- [32.](#) For instance, Paul Williams has thought that the Buddha nature doctrine in the *Awakening of Faith* becomes a cosmological theory that combines an all-pervading Buddha-essence with the aversity to all forms of dualistic discrimination, namely, a metaphysical monism. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, London: Routledge (1989), 112.
- [33.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 32, 1666, 576a. Cf. *The Awakening of Faith*, translated by Yoshito Hakeda, New York: Columbia University Press (1967), 33.
- [34.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 32, 1666, 576b. Cf. *ibid.*, 35.

- [35.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 32, 1666, 576b. Cf. *ibid.*, 35.
- [36.](#) Gadjin M. Nagao, [What Remains in *Sunyata*: A Yogacara Interpretation of Emptiness](#) in L. S. Kawamura (Ed.), *Madhyamika and Yogacara* Albany: State University of New York Press (1991), 60.
- [37.](#) [The Awakening of Faith](#) , translated by Yoshito Hakeda, New York: Columbia University Press (1967), 28.
- [38.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 32, 1666, 576b; cf. *ibid.*, 37.
- [39.](#) *Taisho*, vol. 32, 1666, 576b; cf. *ibid.*, 39.
- [40.](#) The reader may notice that I translate the Chinese word *xinti* as "the whole of the mind" and avoid translating it as the substance or essence of the mind. To my knowledge, the Chinese word *ti* originally involves the meaning of body and the organic whole. *Xinti* designates the non-objective dimension of the organic whole of a concrete world, a holistic dimension that the human mind may attain or experience. Since it is non-substantialist, it may be even distinguished from the English word subjectivity which involves the meaning of substance in Modern Western philosophy. However, *ti* in Chinese philosophy reflects the relatively static side of the whole and is distinguished from the dynamic side of *yong*, the functioning of the whole. In the use of these words in the text we are discussing now, the word *ti* is related to other words such as *xiang* and *yong*. Scholars have argued whether the use of these categories is the indication of a Chinese author. If it is, the text must be considered the product of Chinese thought instead of Indian thought. Here I do not intend for a philological investigation and a simple solution to this problem. The text itself is, I would argue, more complicated than anything we can simply attribute to an Indian author or a Chinese one. When *ti* is related to *xiang*, these two words suggest an Indian way of thinking and involve the meanings of essence and attribute (or virtue), even though these meanings are restricted by the soteriological dimension of the text. The usage of *xiang* obviously does not come from original Chinese thought. When *ti* is related to *yong*, they do appear closer to the Chinese way of thinking, although one may not have sufficient reasons to consider them utterly belonging to the terminology of Chinese philosophy and involving exactly the meaning of the dynamic and static sides of the whole. William Grosnick has pointed out the similarities or channels between some Sanskrit words and the Chinese *yong* (see his William Grosnick, [The Categories of *T'i*, *Hsiang*, and *Yung*: Evidence that Paramartha Composed the Awakening of Faith](#), *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 12(1) 1989, ?? - IS "1" THE ISSUE

NUMBER OR IS IT THE FIRST PAGE NUMBER?? PLEASE CLARIFY AND LET ME KNOW WHAT THE FULL PAGE RANGE OF THIS ARTICLE IS--Curt). His argument is forceful in opposing jumping into the conclusion of simply seeing the text as a Chinese product. What Grosnick does not take into consideration is the possibility of mutual influences and the blending of Indian and Chinese understanding embodied in this historical text, irrespective whether it is attributable to an Indian or Chinese author. Since this text uses *ti*, *xiang* and *yong* together, at least in the extant form it is a mixture of Indian and Chinese usages. This mixture facilitates, if not misleads, the later Chinese use of the text. The extant form of the text may also indicate a turn from the Indian usage to the Chinese usage when it emphasizes the realization of Buddha nature as the existential transformation of the mind and employs other Chinese terms such as *xinxing* (mind-nature). I thus think that it is tenable to render *xinti* as the whole of mind in accordance to the Chinese usage and to the historical tradition of the East Asian understanding of the text.

41. Zhixu, *Liewang Shu. Taisho*, vol. 44, 1850, 428c-429a.
42. For a recent discussion of the existentializing point implied by the text with respect to the realization of Buddha nature, see Charles W. Fu, [A New Inquiry into the Meanings of the Awakening of Faith](#) in C. W. Fu (Ed.), *Cong Chuangzaode Quanshixue Dao Dacheng Foxue* Taipei: Dongda Book Company (1990).
43. Deconstruction here is regarded as a contextual strategy or a situational operation of overturning oppositional hierarchies with the characteristic of self-subverting. Its main target is reification or substantialization. Obviously, this broad meaning of deconstruction is not limited to Derridean deconstruction.

ISSN 1548-6001

Professor Lik Kuen Tong, Ph.D., Editor
Professor Curtis R. Naser, Ph.D., Co-Editor
Professor Theresa Dykeman, Ph.D., Managing Editor

IIFB - Fairfield University - Fairfield, CT - 06430
Tel: (203) 254-4000 Ext. 2857, 2851 Fax: (203) 254-4074
likong@iifb.org -- cnaser@iifb.org -- mailto:cnaser@iifb.org

Site Design by [Commonwealth WebWorks](#)
Database to Web Programming by [Eidos Virtual Web](#)
Powered by *ColdFusion*