

Michael Radich

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* and the Emergence of  
*Tathāgatagarbha* Doctrine

Hamburg Buddhist Studies 5  
Series editor: Michael Zimmermann



Numata Center  
for Buddhist Studies

Michael Radich

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Hamburg University Press

Publishing house of the Hamburg State and University Library

Carl von Ossietzky

## Imprint

Bibliographic information published by the *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* (German National Library).

The *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* lists this publication in the *Deutsche Nationalbibliografie*; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <https://portal.dnb.de>.

The online version is available online for free on the website of Hamburg University Press (open access). The *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* stores this online publication on its Archive Server. The Archive Server is part of the deposit system for long-term preservation and availability of digital publications.

Available open access on the Internet at:

Hamburg University Press – <http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de>

Persistent URL: [http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/purl/HamburgUP\\_HBS05\\_Radich](http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/purl/HamburgUP_HBS05_Radich)

Archive Server of the *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* – <https://portal.dnb.de>

ISBN 978-3-943423-20-4 (printed version)

ISSN 2190-6769 (printed version)

© 2015 Hamburg University Press, Publishing house of the Hamburg State and University Library Carl von Ossietzky, Germany

Printing house: Elbe-Werkstätten GmbH, Hamburg, Germany

<http://www.elbe-werkstaetten.de/>

Cover design: Julia Wrage, Hamburg

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## Foreword

### About *Hamburg Buddhist Studies*

Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religious ideas at the University of Hamburg for almost 100 years, ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany. We are proud that our program is housed in one of the pioneering academic institutions in Europe at which the study of Buddhism has become a core subject for students focusing on the religious dimensions of South and Central Asia.

With this publication series, the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg aims to honor this long-standing commitment to research and share the results of this tradition with the academic community and the wider public. Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline makes use of a broad variety of approaches and methods. The field covers contemporary issues as much as it delves into the historic aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. Understanding present-day Buddhist phenomena, and how such phenomena are rooted in a distant past, is not a matter of indulgence. Rather, it has become clear that fostering such an understanding is one of the many crucial obligations of modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Buddhism is one of the great human traditions of religious and philosophical thought. The *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series aims to discuss aspects of the wide variety of Buddhist traditions that will be of interest to scholars and specialists of Buddhism, but it also wants to confront Buddhism's rich heritage with questions whose answers might not be easily deduced by the exclusive use of philological research methods. Such questions require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a variety of disciplines building upon and yet going beyond the solid study of textual materials. We are convinced that the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series will contribute to opening up Buddhist Studies to those who are not necessarily trained in the classical languages of the

Buddhist traditions but want to approach the field with their own disciplinary interests in mind. We very much hope that this series will encourage a wider audience to take interest in the academic study of the Buddhist traditions.

### About this publication

It is my great pleasure to introduce the fifth volume in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series. In this book, Michael Radich argues against the understanding of previous scholarship that the eponymous *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* was the earliest text to articulate *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. He suggests that in fact, we are best to regard the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* as most likely to be earlier. Radich then investigates the *tathāgatagarbha*/“Buddha nature” doctrine of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, and its connection to other ideas in that context, for clues to the motive of the original authors of the doctrine. He argues that in this context, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is best understood as a part of a much wider pattern of docetic Buddhology – the understanding that Buddhas are not really as they appear – including positive corollaries of negative statements of that docetism, that is, positive claims about what in fact is true of Buddhas, in contrast to those deceptive appearances. Radich suggests that within this frame, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine was articulated as just such a soteriologically-oriented positive substitute for one particularly troubling dimension of the Buddha’s ordinary human embodiment: the fact that he had a flesh-and-blood human mother, with all the distressing impurity and degradation which that fact implied. In effect, on Radich’s reading, it is as if the subtext of the earliest *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is this: Buddhas are not conceived and gestated in putrid, painful human wombs; rather, buddhahood springs from a “womb” (*garbha*), inherent in all sentient beings, in which glimmers the transcendent promise of final liberation from flesh altogether.

Michael Zimmermann

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Luis Gómez for his kind invitation to participate in a panel entitled “Early Expressions of the *Tathagarbha* Doctrine in India” at the XVIth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, June 25, 2011. This invitation gave me the initial impetus to think about the ideas that eventuated in this book. A very early version of some of the ideas presented here was first aired in a talk for the Religious Studies Programme of Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand, in August 2010. I thank Doug Osto, my host at that time, for that invitation. I am also grateful to Erica Baffelli and Scott Pacey for their hospitality when I presented a late version of this work at Manchester in January 2013.

I am most grateful to Michael Zimmermann for doing me the honour of accepting this work into the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series, and to Isabella Meinecke of Hamburg University Press for her editorial guidance. I am also deeply indebted to Paul Harrison and an anonymous reviewer for many suggestions that improved the final form of the book. Work on the final stages of the book was undertaken while I had the privilege of serving as the Numata Visiting Professor in Buddhist Studies at the Hamburg University Center for Buddhist Studies in Winter 2013-2014, and I am very grateful to both the Center and the Numata Foundation for that invaluable opportunity and support.

I also thank Jan Nattier and the late John McRae for encouraging me to embark on this work in the first place; Stephen Hodge, for access to digitised texts of the MPNMS; Doug Osto, for references to relevant literature; Ben Schonthal for help with Sinhalese dictionaries; Jonathan Silk, Shimoda Masahiro 下田正弘, Paul Harrison, Antonello Palumbo, Stephen Hodge, Doug Osto, and Habata Hiromi 幅田裕美 for allowing me to see and cite unpublished work; Jonathan Silk, Kanō Kazuo 加納和雄, Ching Keng 耿晴, and Eyal Aviv for helpful comments on draft; Michael

Zimmermann, Alan Wagner, and Sungdoo Ahn for useful questions and feedback that helped me think through my argument and presentation better; Funayama Tōru 船山徹 for his unstinting guidance on all matters Buddhological; Nathan Hill for help with knotty Tibetan passages; and Jens-Uwe Hartmann for rigorous and generous challenges to some of my arguments. I am especially grateful to Habata Hiromi for a very informative discussion in Munich in December 2013, and for very generous written advice at a time when she was under great pressure because of other projects. Her careful corrections saved me from a number of errors.

I must also express my gratitude to several cohorts of Honours students at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), who studied the MPN-MS closely with me, and often helped push my thinking further. In particular, Ali Tilley and Hadleigh Tiddy drew my attention to passages I might otherwise have overlooked. As always, I am very grateful to my colleagues in Religious Studies at VUW, Paul Morris, Rick Weiss, Joe Bulbulia, Chris Marshall, Art Buehler, Geoff Troughton, and Alik Kalliabetos, for constituting a supportive and collegial working environment that makes my research possible. I would also like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of VUW for funding to assist the research leading to this book; the fabulous Interloans Service at VUW for truly world-class assistance in obtaining many rare and obscure items in various languages; and Atsushi Iseki for his meticulous, untiring research assistance throughout the duration of this project.

I set this book in Victor Gaultney's Gentium font, and I thank Gaultney for creating it and making it freely available.

Finally, I thank my wife, Amanda; my mother, Kay; and my daughters, Lauren and Kelsey. From their love all else grows.

## Introduction

In this study, I argue that we are best to regard the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (“MPNMS”)<sup>1</sup> as our earliest extant text propounding *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. On that basis, I suggest that this makes MPNMS an important arena for examination of the motives for the elaboration of that doctrine. I argue further that the elaboration of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in MPNMS is part of a much wider pattern of docetic Buddhism and its corollaries. In particular, the claim that all sentient beings have a *garbha* (“womb” or “embryo”) of the Tathāgata within them, I suggest, was elaborated as a type of soteriologically-oriented, positive substitute for the idea that Buddhas could have their genesis in an ordinary, fleshly human womb, which was unacceptable to docetic thinking.

## Outline

In Part I, I present my arguments relating to dating. I aim to reconsider external and internal evidence for both the absolute date of (pertinent portions of) the MPNMS, and also its date relative to other *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures. My argument will be probabilistic. Available evidence may ultimately be inconclusive, but in the balance, makes it most *likely* that MPNMS is our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mahāyāna text of this name is to be distinguished from the almost identically entitled “Mainstream” *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (Skt; Pali: *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*), an early canonical text that exists in numerous versions in various languages, and which has been the subject of much seminal modern scholarship. The Mahāyāna text in question is often referred to in scholarship as the “Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*” (and also, occasionally, the “*Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*”, as if “Mahāyāna” was a part of the title). However, study of the surviving Skt fragments shows that the title there is *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (or simply *Mahāparinirvāṇa*); Habata (2007): xliii-xliv, referring to SF 12.9, 24.15 (and 12.5). In this study, I will therefore refer to the text by the attested title *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*.

One obstacle to consideration of MPNMS as the earliest *tathāgataḡarbha* text is the understanding, common in scholarship to date, that it is not a typical *tathāgataḡarbha* text at all, but rather, represents a kind of side-line or offshoot, against a supposed “mainstream” of standard *tathāgataḡarbha* discourse. To stave off this misunderstanding, in Chapter 1, I present evidence that MPNMS is indeed a veritable *tathāgataḡarbha* text – at least as much so as the *Tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra* (TGS), which has previously been regarded as the earliest text to propound *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine.

In Chapter 2, I discuss internal evidence for the dating of MPNMS and TGS relative to one another. Prior studies have taken two main pieces of internal evidence to indicate that TGS is earlier than MPNMS: MPNMS is supposed to refer to TGS by its title, and MPNMS is supposed to have borrowed one key simile from TGS. However, on the basis of various types of evidence, I argue that when MPNMS speaks of a “*tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra*”, it is almost certainly referring to itself. I argue further that there is no reason to be sure that the shared simile was borrowed from TGS by MPNMS, rather than the other way around.

In Chapter 3, I discuss internal and external evidence for the absolute date of MPNMS and other *tathāgataḡarbha* texts, again focusing on TGS for the latter point of comparison. MPNMS shares a complex of prophecy narratives with the *Mahāmegha-sūtra*, the *Mahābherihāraka-sūtra*, and the Mahāyāna *Āṅgulimāliya-sūtra*. This prophecy complex is unusually rich in details that hint at real-world historical contexts. On its basis, I argue that the composition of MPNMS (in stages) was most likely associated with the Southern India of the Śātavāhana kings, and the domain of the Kuṣāṇas around the time of Kaniṣka. This would place the portions of MPNMS propounding *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine around the second century. We have no evidence for such an early absolute date for TGS, or other *tathāgataḡarbha* scriptures.

The conclusion of Part I is therefore that MPNMS is most likely our earliest extant *tathāgataḡarbha* text. In Part II, I therefore take the text as the object of a heuristic exercise in the interpretation of Buddhist doctrinal history, in the hope of gaining new insights into the reasons for the emergence of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine, and its doctrinal and historical significance.

Chapter 4 presents the heart of my argument. I propose that the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS is best understood as a part of a far-reaching pattern of docetic Buddhology. I use “docetism” as a convenient catch-all label for all doctrines that state or imply that Buddhas are not as they appear in the world. Docetism, I argue, is centrally concerned with the corporeal dimensions of the Buddha’s fleshly, human existence, and this includes, centrally for MPNMS, his death; his conception, gestation and birth; and the fact that he had a mother.

The docetic attitude is most readily recognisable when it is framed in negative terms – that in truth, Buddhas are *not* this, *not* that. However, I argue that the broader docetic pattern properly includes a range of corollary doctrines, which tell us in positive terms what Buddhas *are* like instead. I propose that Buddhist texts include two main sets of such substitutes for the conception, gestation, and birth of the Buddha. On the one hand, many texts describe miraculous, special processes and events that substitute for the mess and pain of ordinary human biology: Māyā is miraculously impregnated by a white, six-tusked elephant; the *bodhisatva* dwells in a marvellous jewelled palace inside his mother’s body; he is born painlessly through her right side in the *sāla* grove. On the other hand, other texts propose that the Buddhas’ true corporeality is found in a range of soteriologically-oriented, *dharmic* substitutes, radically different from visible, material realities. *Dharmakāya* doctrine is one such “transcendent” corollary to docetic denial of the Buddhas’ ordinary human embodiment. I argue that *tathāgatagarbha* originates, in the context of MPNMS, as another such positive corollary to negatively framed docetic Buddhology. Buddhas are not engendered by painful processes, from impure human mothers, touched by filthy physical organs; Buddhas properly have their genesis in a soteriologically loaded “womb” (*garbha*) found within all sentient beings.

This pattern of positive corollaries to negatively framed docetic Buddhology, I claim, can be traced still further. In closing Chapter 4, I very briefly sketch connections to other claims about the Buddhas’ “mothers”, of various types; and about other branches of the Buddhas’ “kin”.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the same viewpoint helps us make equal sense of the alternate term *\*buddhadhātu* (“Buddha nature”), which MPNMS also uses to articulate roughly the same concept as *tathāgatagarbha*.

Following Shimoda Masahiro, I interpret *\*buddhadhātu* doctrine as a similar positive corollary to docetic Buddhology – in this case, as a response to and modification of the relic cult. I also argue that this viewpoint clarifies the connection between the term *\*buddhadhātu* and the term *tathāgatarbha*, and thereby enables us better to understand the connections between different compositional strata of MPNMS.

Several Appendices consider subsidiary or ancillary problems in more detail. Appendix 1 presents in tabular form a comparison of terms related to *tathāgatarbha*/*\*buddhadhātu* in the four main extant witnesses to MPNMS. Appendix 2 considers the theme of “secret” (or implicit, or hidden) teachings in the text, and its relation to the possibly puzzling choice of *zang* 藏 as the Chinese translation of *-garbha*. Appendix 3 presents some additional detail from the prophecy complex discussed in Chapter 3. Appendix 4 lays out the simple stratification assumed for MPNMS in this study, and my reasons for adopting it. Appendix 5 presents a concept of “kataphatic gnostic docetism” as one way to characterise the fit between *tathāgatarbha* doctrine, as I interpret it in this study, and certain broader concerns in the history of Buddhist doctrine and practice.

## Contributions of this study

This is the first monograph in English on the history or doctrinal content of MPNMS, and indeed, the first study of the text of this scope and type in any Western language.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, even scholars in East Asia have to date only produced a handful of studies of the text on a similar scale.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly, MPNMS has been the object of a host of shorter modern studies in Japanese. This is not the place to enter into a full review of those studies, which would be a mammoth task for a braver spirit than mine. Confining our attention, then, to European languages, the text has been the subject of surprisingly few studies, considering its significance

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<sup>2</sup> I am excepting the text-critical studies of Habata (2007, 2013), Matsuda (1988), Bongard-Levin (1986) and Yuyama (1981), and Blum’s recent translation of the first quarter of the text (2014), not out of any disrespect to those studies, but only because they represent a fundamentally different type of scholarship to the present work.

<sup>3</sup> Primarily Shimoda (1993, 1997) and Mochizuki (1988); cf. also Qu (1994).



and impact. Such studies as do exist have tended overwhelmingly to concentrate on a few problems, such as its central doctrines of “Buddha nature”, *tathāgatagarbha*, *ātman*, and *icchantika*;<sup>4</sup> and the impact of the text in China.<sup>5</sup> Only a few recent studies have broached elements of the text beyond these timeworn themes.<sup>6</sup>

Against the backdrop of such a dearth in Western-language scholarship on such an important text, readers might naturally have certain expectations of a first monograph in English. They might expect such things as a balanced overview of the content of the text; a survey of the history of the text’s formation and subsequent impact; and an attempt to situate the text and its significance in large currents of Buddhist history. As the above summary will indicate, this is not that book, though its argument does incidentally offer glimpses into facets of these problems.

Rather, the sole central aim of this book is to mount a single argument: that MPNMS is best regarded as our earliest extant *tathāgatagarbha* text; and that in the context of MPNMS, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine can be interpreted as motivated, in part, by the same concerns that animate larger patterns of docetic Buddhology and Buddha-body discourse. I hope, therefore, that the book contributes primarily to the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, as part of the larger history of Mahāyāna thought. I hope also to demonstrate, more generally, that MPNMS and related texts were quite probably not, as prior scholars (most influentially Takasaki) have thought, an aberrant side-line in the development of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, but rather, the forgotten scene of its original elaboration. I hope that this dimension of my argument might stimulate further work to revise the larger lineaments of that same history, beyond what I myself can undertake, to correct possible biases that may have been condi-

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<sup>4</sup> Fujii (1993); Karashima (2007); Liu (1982, 1984); Takasaki (1971).

<sup>5</sup> Barbieri-Kontier (1993); Lai (1982a, 1982b); Mather (1981).

<sup>6</sup> Principally Hodge (2006, 2010/2012, unpublished); Radich (2011), Chapters Three and Four, Appendix 4; Radich (2011[2012]); see also Granoff (2012). Shimoda has published a small portion of his research findings in English (1994), as has Suzuki (2001). Sasaki (1999) presents a review article that brings some of the findings of Shimoda (1997) to an English-language readership, and situates Shimoda’s contribution in the field of studies of early Mahāyāna.

tioned by looking back through the possibly anachronistic lens of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.

I also hope that this book also contributes to the study of some other important problems. In light of the relation I draw between *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and ideas about various “mothers of the Buddhas”, I believe my argument contributes to our understanding of ideas and attitudes about women and gender in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Building on the work of Shimoda Masahiro, I aim to add to our understanding of Mahāyāna attitudes and responses to the cult of the worship of the Buddha’s relics, and their ramifications. I also hope to have demonstrated that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, through its connection to docetic Buddhology, is itself a part of far-reaching patterns of ideas about the Buddha’s embodiment. I thus hope also to have further extended scholarly consideration of the problem of Buddha-bodies *per se*.<sup>7</sup> Finally, I expect that my argument adds to scholarship on the motif of the power of seeing the Buddha, in various ways, and I believe that the present work is one of the most sustained considerations to date of the range and entailments of docetic Buddhology. In all these respects, I hope to have substantiated my conviction that there are often closer connections than we realise between apparently distinct domains in Buddhism, such as thought, text and practice; genres like *sūtra*, *śāstra* and narrative literature; cult and “high” doctrine; social attitudes and soteriological models; and “Mahāyāna” and “non-Mahāyāna” ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Radich (2007a).

# I Is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* “Our Earliest” *Tathāgataḡarbha* Text?

## Introduction

The usual view in scholarship to date is that the earliest text preaching *tathāgataḡarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine is the eponymous *Tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra* (“TGS”). In Part I of this study, I will argue, rather, that the portion of MPNMS expounding *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine is *most probably* “our earliest” *tathāgataḡarbha* text.

In calling MPNMS “our earliest” such text, not “the earliest”, I mean two things. First, I mean to admit the possibility that our record is incomplete. MPNMS thus may not be *the* earliest *tathāgataḡarbha* scripture that ever existed, but I suggest that it is probably the earliest such text that *we now have*.

Second, I also mean to acknowledge that our evidence is uneven, and sometimes difficult of interpretation. As I will discuss in detail below, we happen to have much richer evidence suggesting a concrete date for MPNMS than for other early *tathāgataḡarbha* scriptures. Thus, I contend that *on the strength of the evidence available*, it is most reasonable *for us* to treat MPNMS as the earliest such scripture. At the same time, I also acknowledge that even considering extant texts alone, our evidence is woefully incomplete. Thus, to say that MPNMS is “our earliest” *tathāgataḡarbha* text is to say that among *tathāgataḡarbha* texts now extant, MPNMS is the text that *we have the best reasons to regard* as early.

Thus, it seems to me a false hope that at the present state of our knowledge, we are likely to arrive at anything approaching certainty about which *tathāgataḡarbha* text was in fact the first, and I hope to firmly shift the discussion to weighing up relative probabilities. In this light, it might fairly be asked why we should not just admit our ignorance about which text came first, remain neutral, and not treat any text as

“earliest”. Such scruples have obvious merits. However, I do not propose to undertake the lengthy task of evaluating the evidence presented below merely with the aim of assessing these probabilities for their own sake. Rather, that exercise will only bear fruit as the basis for a further exercise in turn.

I propose that ultimately, in combination with evidence for dating, we should regard MPNMS as “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text for methodological reasons, i.e. as a heuristic device. Doing so allows us to consider MPNMS (instead of TGS) as our most proximate evidence of the “scene of origin” of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and thereby form or test new hypotheses about the possible background for its emergence. This second exercise is the focus of Part II of this study.

Part I will be divided into two parts. In Chapter 1, I will discuss reasons for considering relevant portions of MPNMS as “a *tathāgatagarbha* text”. It may seem strange to argue this point, but I believe that emphasis on so-called “Buddha nature”, as a supposedly different concept from *tathāgatagarbha*, has obscured the degree to which MPNMS is centrally concerned with *tathāgatagarbha per se*. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will give evidence that no other significant *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures are necessarily earlier than relevant parts of MPNMS.

### *The portion of MPNMS under consideration (“MPNMS-tg”)*

MPNMS is extant in four main independent witnesses:<sup>8</sup>

- 1) “FX”: *Dabannihuan jing* 大般泥洹經 T376, translated ca. 416-418 by Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅 (fl. ca. 406-421) and Faxian 法顯 (320?-420?);<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I exclude two remaining versions, which derive from DhKṣ and are therefore of little independent text-historical value:

- 5) the so-called “Southern Version” 南本 of the text, *Dabanniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 T375, a revision of T374 produced under the Liu Song 劉宋 (in the 430s) by Huiyan 慧嚴, Huiguan 慧觀, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 et al.; and
- 6) a second Tibetan translation (from DhKṣ) by Wang phab zhun, dGe ba'i blos-gros, and rGya mtsho'i sde, D119/Q787.

- 2) “DhKṣ”: *Dabanniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 T374, translated ca. 421-432 by \*Dharmakṣema 曇無讖<sup>10</sup> (385-433);
- 3) “Tib”: *Yongs su mya ngan las ’das pa chen po’i theg pa chen po’i mdo*, translated in the 9th century by Jinamitra, Jñānagarbha, and Devacandra, D120/Q788;
- 4) “SF”: 34 identified Central Asian Skt fragments from 23 leaves, probably stemming from a total of 3 manuscripts from the vicinity of Khādalik; plus one fragment at Kōyasan (SF 13).<sup>11</sup>

Tib and FX contain approximately the same body of material, which is also coterminous with the range spanned by SF, and matched by approximately the first quarter of DhKṣ. I will refer to text common to all four of these versions (with due allowance for lacunae in the fragmentary Skt) as “MPNMS-common”. This study only discusses MPNMS-common; in other words, I largely disregard the massive unique portion of DhKṣ.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of doctrinal content (and other features), MPNMS-common is clearly divided into two large parts.<sup>13</sup> The first part culminates in the chapter on the adamantite *dharm*-body (the title of this chapter is

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<sup>9</sup> Hodge discusses possible reasons to doubt the traditional ascription of this text to Faxian, and consider rather that the main translator may have been Buddhahadra; Hodge (2010/2012): 8-9. Pending further investigation of this possibility, in this work, I identify the text by its traditional ascription for convenience.

<sup>10</sup> There may be problems in the identification of the Skt equivalent of the name 曇無讖, but pending further investigation, I use this usual reconstruction.

<sup>11</sup> The abbreviation “SF” is for “Skt fragment”. Numbering of the fragments, e.g. “SF 5”, follows Habata (2007). On the extant fragments, see Habata (2007): xxvi, xxxi. One further fragment was added to this list in Habata (2009). Since then, further fragments have been found and identified, but not yet published; the total number of Central Asian fragments currently known is 40, from 28 leaves, yielding, in addition to the Kōyasan fragment, 41 fragments from 29 leaves (Habata Hiromi, personal communication, January 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Material unique to DhKṣ alone is in total perhaps three times as voluminous as all of MPNMS-common. Where necessary, I will refer to this material as “DhKṣ-unique” (however, it will only be of marginal significance for the present study).

<sup>13</sup> See below p. 59, and Appendix 4.

known in Skt: *Vajrābhedakāya*, SF 5).<sup>14</sup> The only material following in this part is a brief chapter on the “virtues of the name” (of the *sūtra*), which is a common closing device in Mahāyāna scriptures. This study will not usually focus on this first portion of the text, but where relevant, I will refer to it as “MPNMS-dhk”, after the centrality of *dharmakāya* (= dhk) doctrine to it.

The second part, comprising the remainder of MPNMS-common, is the only part (excluding DhKṣ-unique) in which terms related to *tathāgatagarbha* are discussed, and the exposition of *tathāgatagarbha* (and related doctrines) is arguably the main doctrinal focus of that portion of the text.<sup>15</sup> I will thus call this portion of MPNMS-common “MPNMS-tg”, referring to the centrality of *tathāgatagarbha* (= tg); and it will constitute the main focus of the present study.

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<sup>14</sup> This portion spans roughly FX 853a3-868a17; DhKṣ 365a2-385b5; Tib H §1-168. See Appendix 3. (For abbreviations and conventions for citation from MPNMS, see Abbreviations, “MPNMS”.) On aspects of the content of the *Vajrābhedakāya* chapter, see Radich (2011[2012]).

<sup>15</sup> This portion spans roughly FX 868a24-899c23; DhKṣ 385b12-428b12; Tib H §169-588. See Appendix 4. The only (very minor) occasions on which terms related to *tathāgatagarbha* appear in MPNMS-dhk are MPNMS 1-3 (numbering of MPNMS *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature passages follows Appendix 1 below).

## 1 MPNMS-tg as a “*Tathāgataḡarbha* Text”

In this chapter, I will argue that we are justified in considering MPNMS (-tg) as a true *tathāgataḡarbha* text, just as much as TGS. The following chapters will consider reasons that MPNMS is likely to be earlier than TGS. In combination, these considerations warrant us regarding MPNMS as “our earliest *tathāgataḡarbha* text”. I will begin by trying to show that MPNMS-tg has a stronger claim to the title of “*tathāgataḡarbha* text” than is usually thought. I will then try to show, conversely, that the claim of TGS to that same title is in fact weaker than scholars usually assume.

### 1.1 MPNMS-tg as a veritable “*tathāgataḡarbha* text”

There has been a tendency among scholars to regard MPNMS as slightly removed from the centre of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine proper. Rather, MPNMS has typically been characterised as a text that presents a “Buddha nature” doctrine, or discussed primarily in terms of a supposed (related) doctrine of *\*buddhadhātu*. Either way, the text is supposed at best to propound its own special sub-species of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine. Correspondingly, scholarship to date has underestimated the extent to which MPNMS-tg discourses directly and centrally on *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine proper.

This misunderstanding seems natural enough. On the one hand, both Chinese translations of MPNMS frequently feature terms like *foxing* 佛性 and *rulaixing* 如來性. These terms may not obviously look like translations or equivalents for *tathāgataḡarbha*, especially when we have been conditioned by the later Chinese tradition to think that the standard Chinese term for *tathāgataḡarbha* is *rulaizang* 如來藏. On the other hand, comparison shows that in some instances, where Chinese has *foxing* or *rulaixing*, Tibetan has terms like *de bzhin gshegs pa'i kham*s, *sangs rgyas kyi kham*s etc. Scholars have tended to assume that these Chinese terms

therefore uniformly correspond to a speculative Skt *\*tathāgatadhātu*, *\*buddhadhātu* throughout MPNMS.<sup>16</sup>

Next, scholars have also usually assumed that MPNMS is later than some other, supposedly more “basic” *tathāgatagarbha* texts. This has led to the impression that MPNMS is espousing an innovative twist on an already pre-existing *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine.<sup>17</sup> Translating into English on the basis of Chinese, and arguably on the basis of an over-reading of the syllable *xing* 性, scholars have most often called this concept “Buddha nature”.<sup>18</sup>

However, careful examination of all the passages and terminology expounding *tathāgatagarbha* in MPNMS-tg shows that it is somewhat inac-

<sup>16</sup> For example, Takasaki (working without our present advantage of fuller Skt fragments) suggested *\*asti buddhadhātuḥ sarvasattveṣu* for *sems can thams cad la sangs rgyas kyi khams yod do*; and speaks of *buddhadhātu* (without the asterisk denoting reconstruction) as if it is unproblematically “the” term at issue; Takasaki (1965): 1022 and throughout. Cf. also Takasaki (1975): 127. This issue is further complicated by the fact that in other *tathāgatagarbha* texts, *foxing* does correspond to *\*buddhadhātu*, *sang rgyas khams* etc. For instance, Ichikawa notes that this correspondence is frequent in RGV and AñgM; Ichikawa (1960): 184. However, in discussing MPNMS, it is obviously dangerous to generalise from these other (possibly later) texts, often translated by different translators. I have therefore confined myself here to examining the term in the various versions of MPNMS alone. For another instance of the assertion of an oversimplified one-to-one correspondence between *foxing* and *buddhadhātu*, see Grosnick (1977): 30.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most powerful statement of this version of the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is that of Takasaki. See e.g. Takasaki (1975): 768: “The notion of *foxing*...is not employed at all in the *main current* that leads through Anūn to Śrīm (<仏性>という概念は...『不増不減経』から『勝鬘経』にいたる主流の中ではついに用いられてない, my emphasis);” Takasaki’s accompanying chart showing conceptual lineages clearly shows MPNMS out on a side-line, 769; see also 127. Takasaki also argues that we can tell that the texts in the MPNMS group comprise a collateral line or offshoot because RGV quotes none of them apart from MPNMS. However, this assumes that the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage as a whole would have continued to remember its actual historical roots – and, moreover, would have wanted to avow them. Even if it is true that the MPNMS group and its ideas were *eventually* side-lined, this does not demonstrate that they could not have come first chronologically.

<sup>18</sup> This “Buddhist Hybrid English” term is now so firmly entrenched in the English Buddhist lexicon that it is probably better to use it, rather than try to replace it. On “Buddhist Hybrid English”, see Griffiths (1981).



curate to think that MPNMS-tg is more concerned with expounding *\*buddhadhātu* or “Buddha nature” than *tathāgatagarbha*, or that the text treats these two terms very differently.<sup>19</sup> In Appendix 1, I provide a full table of key terms in all three main versions of the text (four, where we have Skt). On the basis of this table, I want to highlight two main observations. First, MPNMS probably talks of *tathāgatagarbha* much more than it talks of *\*buddhadhātu*. Second, even where it does talk of *\*buddhadhātu*, that term is probably to a significant extent interchangeable with *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>20</sup> I will discuss each of these points in turn.

The first evidence for the predominance of *tathāgatagarbha* is the Skt fragments, which preserve six instances of the term *tathāgatagarbha* (MPNMS 22, 33, 98, 104 [3x]).<sup>21</sup> We can therefore be certain that at least one Indic version of the text used this term.

In MPNMS 33, moreover, we get a tantalising glimpse of the key central formulation of the *sūtra*: X *tathāgatagarbho ’sti*, “there is *tathāgatagarbha* [in X]”:

[An analogy: A child is ill. A physician prescribes medicine, but it is necessary that the child abstain from breast milk for as long as it takes

<sup>19</sup> I have been very deliberate about my use of the asterisk denoting reconstruction here. To my knowledge, the term *\*buddhadhātu* is not attested in any Skt fragment of MPNMS (see below). Thus, in the context of MPNMS-tg, it is *always* a speculative reconstruction. *Tathāgatagarbha*, by contrast, *is* attested (see below). Thus, there are some contexts in which the asterisk is not needed for *tathāgatagarbha*, and in some instances where we speak generally of the doctrine of the text overall, it is also unnecessary. In other contexts, however, we cannot be sure whether the original Indic text had *\*tathāgatagarbha* in a particular passage, and in that case, the asterisk is required.

<sup>20</sup> Habata has also recognised the interchangeability of *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu*; Habata (unpublished): 2, 12-18, 19-22. She suggests that on occasion, variability in Chinese might have been *metri causa* (“conditioned by the Chinese style which determined how many characters were needed”, 19-20).

<sup>21</sup> In this study, reference to MPNMS followed by a simple number (e.g. “MPNMS 22”) refers to a “passage” in the text as numbered in the Table in Appendix 1. (On the arbitrariness of my use of the term “passage” in this manner, see the preamble to Appendix 1.) In the passages listed here, the term *tathāgatagarbha* corresponds, in Tib, to *de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po*, and in Ch, to 如來性 (FX); and 佛性, 如來藏, 如來祕密藏, 如來密藏, 如來微密藏 and 如來祕藏 (DhKs). We will return to the volatility of DhKs, and its emphasis on the secret and the hidden, below; cf. Appendix 2.

for him to digest the medicine. The mother smears a bitter substance on her breasts and tells the child that it is poison to discourage the child from suckling; when the medicine is digested, the mother washes her breasts and allows the child to breastfeed again.] In the same way, I [the Buddha], too, having taught that “There is no self (\*ātman)” in order to turn [you] away from worldly teachings, now teach that “There is tathāgatagarbha;” and [I] now teach that just like that child, O Monks, you should not be afraid; just as the child, having considered the matter, suckles at his mother’s breast, so should you too, O Monks, think, “There is tathāgatagarbha in us,” and make effort to practice [accordingly].<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the fragmentary Skt corresponding to this passage still does not tell us all we would like to know.<sup>23</sup>

- 1) This passage speaks of *tathāgatagarbha* existing, not in “[all] sentient beings”, but in “us”.
- 2) The nearest thing in the passage corresponding to the locative corresponding to “in X” (Tib X *la*) is the somewhat surprising *asmākam upari*, “on [top of] us”.
- 3) As this suggests, and as parallels in Tib and DhKṣ indicate, this particular passage, MPNMS 33, is not cast in the most typical form in which MPNMS-tg teaches its *tathāgatagarbha* / “Buddha

<sup>22</sup> Tib: 1. ...de bzhin du | ngas kyang 'jig rten pa'i chos las bsgyur ba'i phyir de skad ces bstan te | bdag med do zhes byas nas da ni nga de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do zhes ston gyis dge slong dag byis pa bzhin du ma skrag par ji ltar byis pa des brtags nas phyir yang ma'i nu ma nu bar byed pa de bzhin du dge slong dag khyed kyis kyang bdag cag la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do snyam du brtags nas sgom pa la brtson par gyis shig dang da bstan to, H §378.14-20. This passage discussed in Habata (2014): 158-159. Note the resonance here of the complex of ideas about gender considered in Ch. 4 below; cf. also Jay, as discussed below n. 367.

<sup>23</sup> Skt (corresponding to underlined portions of Tib): 1. [t](a)thāgatagarbho (')stīti de(śa)-[yā]mi mā bhikṣavo bhaiṣṭa bālavat ya...; 2....asmākam u[p]ari [t]athāgatagarbho (')stīti vimṛś-ya bhāva[n]āyā...; I am grateful to Habata Hiromi for allowing me to see and cite her updated, unpublished work on this Skt fragment. Corresponding phrases and key terms in DhKṣ: 1. 我今亦爾說如來藏; 2. 比丘亦爾、應自分別如來祕藏不得有; missing from FX.

nature” doctrine: “All sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha* [in their bodies],” Tib: *sems can thams cad [gyi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do*; Ch: 一切眾生[身中]悉有佛性.<sup>24</sup> Thus, even if we did have the full Skt, it would not show us exactly how that key formula was phrased.

However, this passage does still show us two important points. First, *tathāgatagarbha* is in the singular, not the plural (as would be the case if *tathāgatagarbha* was being used as a *bahuvrīhi*: \**tathāgatagarbhāḥ sarvasattvāḥ*). Second, the formula also contains the verb *asti* (also in singular). In combination with the locative formulation frequently attested in Tib (MPNMS 25, 28, 31, 56, 57, 78, 96, 101), this makes it most likely that the “classic” formula of the text is \**sarvasattveṣu tathāgatagarbho 'sti*. It is therefore unlikely that *tathāgatagarbha* is here being used as a *bahuvrīhi*.<sup>25</sup> This confirms that the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the text is different from that of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, where the most typical formulation is *sadaivaite sattvās tathāgatagarbhāḥ*.<sup>26</sup> The MPNMS-tg formula most likely indicates, as Zimmermann has suggested, that *tathāgatagarbha* is understood as a “separate entity” within the sentient being.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, Skt fragments do not preserve any instance of \**buddhadhātu* or \**tathāgatadhātu*. Of course, this is most likely only a product of the chances that preserved some parts of the text and destroyed others. I do not mean to claim that the original text did not feature those terms at all. However, it does mean that for MPNMS-tg, the terms \**buddhadhātu* and \**tathāgatadhātu* are speculative reconstructions, where *tathāgatagarbha* is not (not always).

Next, it is also important to observe that where we do not have corresponding Skt fragments, it is often difficult to be sure of the language

<sup>24</sup> Rather, the passage depicts the Buddha explaining why he previously did not teach *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, but now does. Tib says only: *da ni nga de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod ces ston gyis [var. kyis]... H §378.15-16; DhKṣ 我今亦爾說如來藏, 407c16-17.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Habata (2014): 158-159.

<sup>26</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 39, 106-107 and n. 71, Skt preserved in RGV 73.11-12.

<sup>27</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 20. But cf. TGS Verse 1.1, discussed by Zimmermann (2002): 47-48, which, exceptionally for TGS, seems also to present an understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* as a separate entity.

of the underlying Indic text, because terminology corresponds only inexactly between the three main versions (Tib, FX, DhKṣ). Certainly, there is no one-to-one correspondence between *-xing* and *khams*, or between *-zang* and *snying po*.<sup>28</sup>

- 1) Both FX and DhKṣ frequently have *foxing*, etc., where Tib has *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* = *\*tathāgatagarbha*.
- 2) Conversely, though much less often, *-zang* sometimes corresponds to *khams*.<sup>29</sup>
- 3) In DhKṣ, terms featuring *-zang* often also correspond to a set of formulae about the “secret [hidden, implied etc.] teaching of the Buddha”.<sup>30</sup>
- 4) Sometimes, Ch *-xing* or *-zang* corresponds in Tib to references to *sūtras* (MPNMS 28, 76, 100).

Thus, our best method for estimating the language of the underlying text is to triangulate between all three versions, rather than using any one

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. also Habata (unpublished): 12-18. Stephen Hodge has also recently noted that comparison of “the variant readings found in the three extant versions [of MPNMS]...[shows] that the use and distribution of the terms ‘*buddha-dhātu*’, ‘*tathāgata-dhātu*’ and ‘*tathāgata-garbha*’ are quite erratic and puzzling.” Hodge advances the important hypothesis that the bewildering pattern of correlation (or lack thereof) between terms in the three versions is a tell-tale giveaway of an important aspect of the history of the text and its doctrines, namely, that uses of the term *\*ātman*, proper to earlier layers of the text, were subject to an “imperfect process of annotation, substitution and over-writing”; Hodge (2010/2012): 42-43, 53-54 and n. 91. Interested scholars will eagerly await future publications in which Hodge lays out in full the evidence supporting this provocative and promising line of thought. If Hodge is right, we must reckon with the momentous possibility that the very earliest core of MPNMS preached *ātman* rather than *tathāgatagarbha*/*\*buddhadhātu*, but that the latter replaced the former in the course of the redactional history of the text; Hodge (2010/2012): 42-43, 53-54, 82-84. However, evaluation of this theory and its consequences must await Hodge’s future publications.

<sup>29</sup> DhKṣ MPNMS 27, FX MPNMS 49, FX MPNMS 78.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 2: key terms are *gsang ba*, *dgongs pa'i tshigs* etc.; cf. MPNMS 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 23, 46, 51, 52, 60, 77, 101, 102, 109.

version as an arbitrary yardstick. By that standard, as I will now try to demonstrate, *tathāgatagarbha* predominates over *\*buddhadhātu*.

First, we will examine instances that conform with common stereotypes about the text.

*khams (\*dhātu) = xing*

*khams (\*dhātu)* is paralleled by *xing* in roughly 44 instances in 23 “passages”.<sup>31</sup> In these passages, the text speaks variously of *\*buddhadhātu*; *\*tathāgataadhātu* (MPNMS 35); *\*dhātu* only; and of a few oddities like *\*dhātu bodhisattvānām*, *\*dehasya dhātuḥ* (MPNMS 80), *\*maddhātu* (MPNMS 49, 61), *\*sattvadhātu* (MPNMS 37) etc. This pattern conforms with the usual understanding that *foxing* = *\*buddhadhātu*.

*snying po (\*garbha) = zang*

*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (\*tathāgatagarbha)* coincides with *-zang* (in one or both Chinese translations) in approximately 32 instances in nineteen “passages”.<sup>32</sup> These passages also conform with the usual understanding that *rulaizang* = *\*tathāgatagarbha*.

However, these instances conforming with common understandings of MPNMS are far outweighed by the following instances.

*snying po (\*garbha) = xing*

*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (\*tathāgatagarbha)* coincides with Ch *foxing* 佛性, *rulai(zhi)xing* 如來(之)性, etc. in approximately 70 instances.<sup>33</sup> In

<sup>31</sup> MPNMS 17, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 44, 48, 49, 55, 57, 61, 66, 67, 68, 78, 80, 108, 110.

<sup>32</sup> MPNMS 16, 25, 29, 31, 33, 42, 43, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 76, 78, 98, 99, 104, 108, 111. FX has particularly few instances of *rulaizang* etc. corresponding to *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*: only about ten, in about seven “passages” (MPNMS 16, 25, 55, 57, 58, 76, 78; four instances are concentrated in MPNMS 55; and we find one converse instance of *zang* = *khams*, MPNMS 49). This means that in Ch versions of MPNMS, *-zang* is predominantly an idiosyncrasy of DhKṣ (see once more Appendix 2). We should therefore not let the fact that *rulaizang* became the standard Ch translation of *tathāgatagarbha* lead us to assume too easily that *zang* (and only *zang*) reflects *\*garbha* in MPNMS itself.

<sup>33</sup> MPNMS 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 42, 43, 45, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 68?, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 78, 80?, 82, 84, 89, 90, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 103, 104, 111. The situation is ambiguous in MPNMS 68 and 80, because a single term featuring *-xing* in Ch corresponds to a phrase in Tib featuring both *khams* and *snying po*: *rang gi lus la sangs rgyas kyi khams yod bzhin du bdag gi lus la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do snyam du...mthong*;

other words, *foxing* etc. = *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* (\**tathāgatagarbha*) nearly twice as often as *foxing* = *sangs rgyas gyi khams* etc. (\**buddhadhātu*).

When we add these passages to those in which *zang* also probably stands for \**tathāgatagarbha*, \**tathāgatagarbha* is mentioned more than 100 times, whereas \**buddhadhātu* is mentioned only approx. 44 times. Considered independently of the Ch translations, it is also about twice as common for Tib to speak of *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* (\**tathāgatagarbha*) than *sangs rgyas gyi khams* (\**buddhadhātu*).

We should note that *foxing*, etc., is no less comprehensible, as a translation for *tathāgatagarbha*, than *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*. Both *xing* and *snying po* mean approximately the “essence” of a thing. Thus, there seems to have been a common understanding, among both Ch and Tib translators, that the *-garbha* of *tathāgatagarbha* meant “essence” – however perplexing that gloss may be to us on the basis of our usual lexicographic and etymological bases for understanding of the term.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, *zang* has also puzzled scholars as a translation for *garbha* (I will return to this point in Appendix 1).

Thus, all indications are that MPNMS-tg speaks of *tathāgatagarbha* far more often than of \**buddhadhātu*. I now turn to my second observation, that even where the text speaks of \**buddhadhātu*, it seems to do so in a manner that is roughly interchangeable with *tathāgatagarbha*, not distinct from it.

First, both \**tathāgatagarbha* and \**buddhadhātu* are often used interchangeably in the course of a single organic explanation of one idea, even within a single given version of the text. We see this pattern in quite a large number of “passages”.<sup>35</sup>

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*bzhin gshegs pa'i snying pos khyab pa'i khams*. This situation is found more often in FX than in DhKs, which may have to do with other connotations of *zang* in DhKs; we will return to this point below.

<sup>34</sup> See Zimmermann [2002]: 41 and n. 58 for brief discussion of evidence from modern Indian languages that also supports this reading.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. MPNMS 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 43, 55, 57, 61, 63, 68, 78, 80, 108. Shimoda has also discussed *tathāgatagarbha* and \**buddhadhātu* in MPNMS-tg as interchangeable: “*tathāgatagarbha*, *buddhadhātu* がもともと「共通な意味を持った名詞」として使用されている;” Shimoda (1991): 122. Such creative terminological variety should not surprise us.

In addition, as we have seen above, the correspondence between terms in different versions of the text is quite variable. We find instances of *xing* = *kham*s, *xing* = *snying po*, *zang* = *kham*s, and *zang* = *snying po*. We also find numerous instances in which FX *xing* = DhKṣ *zang*, and a smaller number of instances in which FX *zang* = DhKṣ *xing*. This could indicate that translators also did not distinguish carefully between the terms *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu*, but rather, used them somewhat interchangeably. Alternatively, it could indicate that there originally existed more than one Indic version of the text, and that the term used in a given passage differed between those versions.

These patterns of alternation between *\*tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu* in a single passage, and between *\*tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu* between multiple versions of the same passage, suggest that the two terms are somewhat interchangeable in MPNMS. This suggestion that *\*tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu* are more or less fungible terms in MPNMS-tg would be strengthened, of course, if we could find an interpretation of the terms, the concept they label, and the place of that concept in the overall system of the text, on which such an equivalence made sense. I will attempt to provide the beginnings of such an explanation below (Part II).

For the present, the main points that I wish to draw from the above discussion are simple. MPNMS has a reputation as a text that provided a new “spin” on a supposedly pre-existing *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. It is supposed to have achieved this by introducing a new doctrine of “Buddha nature” (*foxing*), which latterly has been connected by Shimoda, and scholars following him, to the cult of the relics (*\*buddhadhātu*). However, this understanding of MPNMS may exaggerate the extent to which “Buddha nature” is a different doctrine from *tathāgatagarbha*. This section has attempted to show that the term *tathāgatagarbha* dominates over *\*buddhadhātu* in MPNMS, and that the text uses these two terms largely interchangeably, so that the concept under discussion may be approximately the same by either name.

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In a sense, Zimmermann has shown that TGS itself has even greater terminological variety. Zimmermann (2002): 51-52; also Takasaki (1975): 48-53.

On the basis of these arguments, I contend that MPNMS-tg has just as much claim to the title of “a *tathāgataḡarbha sūtra*” as any other text usually considered under that head. I will now briefly examine the strength of the claim of TGS to that same title.

## 1.2 The *Tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra* as a “*tathāgataḡarbha* text”

As we will see below, the eponymous *Tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra* (“TGS”) is usually regarded as the first *tathāgataḡarbha* text. It may therefore seem odd even to question that TGS should be regarded as “a *tathāgataḡarbha* text”. Certainly, I agree that the content of the text clearly bears an intimate thematic relation to *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine, and that the text is intimately bound up with the history of the doctrine. However, one feature of the text is very peculiar, if it is to be regarded as the headspring of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine *per se*. The term *tathāgataḡarbha* only appears in one of the nine similes given for *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine in the text (the first).<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, throughout the text, we witness an almost riotous profusion of alternative terms for roughly the same idea.<sup>37</sup> Thus, somewhat surprisingly, TGS is a “*tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra*” only in a relatively limited sense – in terms of terminology, the label holds only for a small part of the text.

In fact, Zimmermann has argued that the term *tathāgataḡarbha*, and the section of the text containing it, is probably a latecomer in the doc-

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<sup>36</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 12. The title of the *sūtra* is thus derived from this one simile alone; Zimmermann 28. The term does appear in the MPNMS-tg simile that most scholars regard as derived from TGS (MPNMS 31-32; both *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* and *sangs rgyas kyi khams*). Tib contains an instance of the term *\*tathāgataḡarbha* in the fifth simile as well, but Zimmermann shows that it is highly unlikely that the original Indic text read *\*tathāgataḡarbha* here, 284-285, 284 n. 25, and 121 n. 140; as was already recognised by Takasaki (1975): 53.

<sup>37</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 48-53, esp. 50-52. Most prominent among these alternate terms are *\*tathāgatatva*, *\*buddhatva*, *\*tathāgatakāya* (and other terms denoting special Buddha bodies), and terms denoting types of *jñāna*.



trinal development of TGS, only being introduced at the third phase of its compositional history.<sup>38</sup> He also argues:

The insertion of 1A [in which a person with divine vision removes the disgusting petals of rotting lotuses and cleans the *Tathāgatas* sitting within] could have been caused by the advent of the term *tathāgatagarbha*...The main reason...was probably the compiler’s wish to introduce the term *tathāgatagarbha*. We cannot be sure what exactly led to the eminence of the term. *As long as we have no other early text which could have coined the term*, we should assume that it developed in fact from the lotus image in the first stage of the TGS (my emphasis).<sup>39</sup>

However, as I hope the argument of this study shows, we do have a text which could well be earlier than TGS (or even a group of texts, if we include the *Mahāmegha* and perhaps other members of the “MPNMS group”, for which see §3.5). Thus, the compilers of TGS might well have been introducing the term *tathāgatagarbha* into the text from the outside, and the lotus image in the first simile could have developed from the term, rather than *vice versa*.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, on doctrinal grounds, TGS reveals relatively little about possible reasons that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine might have been elaborated, and the term “*tathāgatagarbha*” coined for it. By contrast, as I will argue below, MPNMS-tg presents us with a context rich in possible reasons for both the doctrine and the term are.

An additional consideration is the manner in which the term *tathāgatagarbha* is expounded and defended in each text. In TGS, *tathāgatagarbha* is mentioned almost in passing, as if it is a known quantity; and it is men-

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<sup>38</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 12, 28-31. Cf., however, TGS 1.1, discussed by Zimmermann (2002): 47-48, which seems to treat *tathāgatagarbha* as a “separate entity” within the sentient being, thus constituting an exception to the usual pattern in TGS, but conforming to the usual pattern in MPNMS. We might therefore consider the possibility that the verse preserves a trace of the term as it was introduced from outside TGS, and that the *bahuvrīhi* interpretation of the compound *tathāgatagarbha*, centring on §1A, is a creative reinterpretation of the term.

<sup>39</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 32.

<sup>40</sup> Compare the reverse scenario, as imagined by Shimoda: that the term *tathāgatagarbha* was introduced *into* MPNMS *from* TGS, at the point in its compositional history when MPNMS-tg was added to the text; see Shimoda passages cited in n. 46 below.

tioned with a placid assurance of its legitimacy as a concept, in a manner that suggests it is already established and accepted. In fact, the same is also generally true of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* and the *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda-sūtra*, and thus in all the key early *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures outside what I will call the “MPNMS group”. In MPNMS and other texts in its group, by contrast, the teaching is expounded at length, and audiences are often portrayed as greeting it with bafflement and doubt; detractors claim that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is a pernicious invention of Māra; that the Vinaya provisions of MPNMS are extracanonial (i.e. spurious) and the work of Māra;<sup>41</sup> that its exponents make false claims to arhatship, and could be accused of a *pārājika* offence (and possibly, disciplined as a result by secular authority).<sup>42</sup> Although such evidence is circumstantial, in light of this contrast, it looks likely that MPNMS is closer than TGS to the point of origin of these controversial new ideas.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, although TGS features *tathāgatagarbha* imagery throughout, it only uses the terminology of *tathāgatagarbha* in a very limited part of the text, which may have been added last; and it does not develop the doctrine in any very great degree. By contrast, MPNMS-tg elaborates on *tathāgatagarbha*, in those terms, at great length, and *tathāgatagarbha* is arguably the central theme of the entire text. The claim of MPNMS-tg to the title of “*tathāgatagarbha* text” is thus as strong as that of TGS, and in some ways, stronger, despite the strange twist that has made *tathāgatagarbha* the eponymous doctrine of the latter. Thus, it is meaningful to ask whether MPNMS-tg is “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text. It is to this question of relative chronology that I now turn.

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<sup>41</sup> Tib H §347-348, DhKṣ 404a1-23, FX 881a9-29.

<sup>42</sup> Tib H §350-352, DhKṣ 404b8-c21, FX 881b11-c11.

<sup>43</sup> See also n. 202 below.

## 2 The Date of MPNMS-tg, Relative to Other *Tathāgataḡarbhā* Texts

In this chapter, I will survey text-historical evidence to support the suggestion that MPNMS-tg may be “our earliest” *tathāgataḡarbhā* text, in the sense discussed above. For the most part, I will consider from various angles the likely chronological relationship between MPNMS-tg and TGS. I will begin with internal evidence, within the two texts, for the chronological relation between them, focusing on the apparent reference to the title of TGS in MPNMS-tg, and on a simile that is common to both. I will then consider independent evidence for the absolute date of each text in turn. Finally, I will also briefly consider possible chronological relations between MPNMS-tg and two other *tathāgataḡarbhā* texts regarded as early: the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* and the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda-sūtra*; and between MPNMS and other texts in the “MPNMS group”: the *Mahāmeḡha-sūtra*, the *\*Mahābherihāraka-sūtra*, and the *Āṅgulimāliya-sūtra*. I will conclude that we have better reason to regard MPNMS-tg as earlier than TGS than the other way around; and that we also have no strong reasons to regard any other *tathāgataḡarbhā* texts as earlier than MPNMS-tg.

### 2.1 Does MPNMS-tg refer to (our present) TGS by title?

TGS is often taken as the earliest *tathāgataḡarbhā* text.<sup>44</sup> MPNMS is naturally, therefore, often taken as later than TGS.<sup>45</sup> Specific reasons for this

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<sup>44</sup> See e.g. Takasaki (1965): 92; Takasaki (1966): 40 n. 68; Takasaki (1975): 46, 48, 178; Nakamura (1980): 229-230; Zimmermann (1998); Zimmermann (2002), as is shown by his very title (*The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-nature Teaching in India*); Kanō (2014): 206.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Takasaki (1975): 166-167; Shimoda (1991): 122; Suzuki (2014): 179.

relative dating are that MPNMS appears to cite TGS;<sup>46</sup> or that one simile in MPNMS-tg is thought to be derived from TGS;<sup>47</sup> or occasionally, other reasons.<sup>48</sup>

However, there is in fact no reason to be sure that MPNMS-tg (or even MPNMS-common as a whole)<sup>49</sup> knows TGS, and independent evidence

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<sup>46</sup> Takasaki (1966): 40 n. 68; Takasaki (1975): 41; Zimmermann (2002): 88 n. 190 (discussing MPNMS 25); Shimoda (1991): 122; Shimoda (1997): 262-263; 271-272, 278, 282, 285, 287-290 (following Takasaki 1974), 301-302, 304; Suzuki (2002): 1015, following Shimoda; Suzuki (2001): 1007-1006[L]; Habata (1992): 160. Recently, however, Shimoda has expressed agreement with the arguments I present here in favour of a revised chronology (based upon an earlier draft of the present work); Shimoda (2014): 71-72.

<sup>47</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 37. I discuss this simile below, §2.2. Cf. also, for the assumption that MPNMS is later, Zimmermann 45. Zimmermann has recently revised his earlier views to agree that MPNMS is probably older, on the basis of Hodge (2010/2012) and an earlier draft of the arguments I present here; Zimmermann (2014): 98, 111-114. Zimmermann also revises his earlier understanding of the composition of TGS to incorporate the idea that the term *tathāgatagarbha* is introduced from MPNMS into the first simile, the only simile in TGS to use the term; 111-114.

Zimmermann also points out that the understanding and use of the term *tathāgatagarbha* in MPNMS and TGS are quite different, and would seem to indicate that the authors of TGS did not necessarily know MPNMS very well, or differed from MPNMS in their interpretation of the term, and may have been operating in quite a different context. He further notes that on the basis of relations between usages of the term *tathāgatagarbha* in the two texts, we cannot exclude the possibility that the core of TGS (the other eight similes, which his stratigraphic analysis regards as older) might be as old as MPNMS. Naturally, I agree. The arguments I advance in the present work about relative chronological relations between TGS and MPNMS can only be valid for the relevant parts of each text, i.e. MPNMS-tg and the first simile (§1A) of TGS.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Takasaki considers the following points as ancillary evidence that TGS is earlier than Anūn: TGS is metaphorical in its expressions, whereas Anūn is logical or theoretical, Takasaki (1975): 85; treatment of TGS in RGV, 48; the variety of terms under which TGS discusses *tathāgatagarbha*, 53. Scholars also sometimes argue that MPNMS-tg could not be the first *tathāgatagarbha* text because of the manner in which it expounds *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. See also §3.4 below for detailed discussion of Takasaki's theories about the date of MPNMS relative to TGS, Anūn and Śrīm. Habata argues that the first few MPNMS-tg passages expounding *tathāgatagarbha* (MPNMS 16, 17, 22) seem to show that its authors already presume the meaning of the doctrine is known, and therefore, that the idea is introduced into the text from a pre-existing outside source; Habata (1992): 155-159; cf. Habata (2014): 156.

shows that MPNMS-tg is more likely to be early than TGS. This section will survey the evidence for these claims. First, I will consider apparent MPNMS-tg references to TGS by its title. I will show that MPNMS-tg seems to refer to itself by a number of nonce titles; that it rarely refers to actual Mahāyāna texts by title in a manner that clearly refers to the content of our extant texts of the same name; and that where it does sometimes show relations to other Mahāyāna texts, it does not necessarily mention the title by which we now know them. Thus, I will argue that in its supposed reference to TGS, it is more likely that MPNMS-tg is referring to itself. I will also examine a single partly shared simile in MPNMS-tg that is sometimes regarded as borrowed from TGS. Finally, I will examine independent evidence for the date of MPNMS-tg and TGS respectively (independent of evidence of their relation), which shows that we have much stronger grounds for an early date for MPNMS-tg than we do for TGS.

### 2.1.1 References to a/the (this?) Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra within MPNMS-tg

MPNMS-tg appears to refer to “TGS” by name. Comparison between all four versions (including Skt) actually shows that such references are slightly more numerous than prior scholars have usually noted. Such reference is clear in the following four passages:

- 1) MPNMS 25: FX 如來藏經; Tib refers to a \**Tathāgatagarbha-mahā-sūtra*; in DhKṣ the fact that the reference is to a *sūtra* title is unclear.<sup>50</sup>
- 2) MPNMS 98: Skt *Mahāmegha-tathāgatagarbha-mahāsūtra*.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> All the material discussed below pertains specifically to MPNMS-tg, except where otherwise noted. MPNMS-dhk very rarely says anything relevant to the problem of whether MPNMS-common knows TGS.

<sup>50</sup> *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo sde chen po*, where *-mahāsūtra* parallels the true Skt title of MPNMS itself, now known from SF 12, SF 24.

<sup>51</sup> Tib: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo sde chen po sprin chen po*, or \**tathāgatagarbha-sūtraṃ mahāmegham(?)*; DhKṣ: 如來祕藏無量法雨.

- 3) MPNMS 99: Tib *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i rgyud phyi ma*, \**Tathāgatarbha-uttaratantra*; where FX reads \**Mahāyāna-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*; and DhKṣ “the secret store of the Tathāgata”.<sup>52</sup>
- 4) MPNMS 108: Tib only, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo sde chen po*, \**Tathāgatarbha-mahāsūtra*; where, as in MPNMS 99, FX reads \**Mahāyāna-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*, and DhKṣ “the secret store of the Tathāgata”.

Reference to a so-called “TGS” is possibly also seen in the following three passages:

- 5) MPNMS 28: DhKṣ only.<sup>53</sup>
- 6) MPNMS 60: DhKṣ only.<sup>54</sup>
- 7) A colophon found at the end of Tib only, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ston pa'i mdo*, \**Tathāgatarbha-nirdeśa-sūtra(?)*<sup>55</sup> (H §588.3-4); where, however, it could also be a description (“the *sūtra* that teaches the *tathāgatarbha*”) modifying *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (*yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo chen po*) in the previous line.

However, there is nothing about the content of these references that allows us to determine that the authors of MPNMS-tg had the present TGS in mind. We should therefore also consider the alternate possibility that it is referring to some other text. The most significant possibility, in this

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<sup>52</sup> FX: 摩訶衍般泥洹經; DhKṣ 如來密藏 (on the ambiguity of this phrase in DhKṣ, see Appendix 2). On other instances of \**Uttaratantra*, see also below.

<sup>53</sup> DhKṣ 有經名曰如來祕藏; Tib *shin tu rgyas pa'i mdo sde rnams*, \**vaiṇyāsūtrāṇi*; FX 方等般泥洹經.

<sup>54</sup> DhKṣ 『大涅槃』、名為『如來祕密之藏』; Tib *mdo sde 'di*.

<sup>55</sup> Takasaki suggests a similar reconstruction; Takasaki (1965): 1022. Note that the combination of both *nirdeśa* and *sūtra* seems pleonastic, and by the tentative Skt equivalent here, I intend only to show what the Tib seems to reflect, not to suggest that such a phrase was certainly in Skt.

regard, is that the text is actually referring to itself (or some part of “itself”, if “itself” refers to the present, quite extensive text).<sup>56</sup>

This possibility is supported by similar instances in other texts of the “MPNMS group” (for which see below p. 62). The *Āṅgulimāliya* (ĀṅM) once mentions the phrase “*tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*”, in a context expounding a doctrine that all sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha*, and that “Buddha nature” can be “attained” by the gradual elimination of defilements.<sup>57</sup> Scholars have taken this passage as a mention of “the” TGS.<sup>58</sup> However, the phrase the text uses is actually “this *tathāgatagarbha sūtra*”.<sup>59</sup> It is therefore more natural to read it as ĀṅM referring to itself as “a” *tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, meaning merely a text that teaches *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>60</sup> There is nothing else about the passage that gives us particular license to think it points to the TGS we now know.

The \**Mahābherihāraka* also mentions the phrase “*tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*” twice.<sup>61</sup> Once more, however, there is no reason to take these passages as referring to our present TGS. In the first instance, the text speaks of *bodhisatvas*<sup>62</sup> “taking up” (‘*dzin*, \**ud√grah?*) all *tathāgatagarbha*

<sup>56</sup> In a paper that appeared only just before this present study was completed, Stephen Hodge has also suggested that MPNMS, or part thereof, refers to itself by the title *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, and further, that “this should...dispel the common, but mistaken, notion that the MPNMS refers to the short ‘*Tathāgata-garbha-sūtra*’, the composition of which must actually postdate [MPNMS];” Hodge (2010/2012): 36 and n. 66. Hodge suggests, in fact, that MPNMS originally comprised two somehow distinct works, which were known as the \**Tathāgatānitya-sūtra* and the \**Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* respectively; 36, 48-49, 56-58, 60. See also n. 93 and 472 below.

<sup>57</sup> 一切眾生皆有如來藏。我次第斷諸煩惱得佛性, T120:2.539c7-8, Ogawa (2001): 151; 如是遇(var. 值遇 [Song, Yuan, Ming], 過 [Shōgozō])如來應供等正覺如來藏經, 539 c14-15, Lh ma 296a4-296b4, Ogawa (2001): 152.

<sup>58</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 90 n. 199.

<sup>59</sup> *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po mdo sde 'di'i don med par ma byed cig...*

<sup>60</sup> In this, the phraseology in this passage is similar to that in other passages, like that cited below n. 165.

<sup>61</sup> Zimmermann only noticed one of these passages, (2002): 90 and n. 200; and takes this, too, as a reference to “the” TGS by title.

<sup>62</sup> On the spelling of this term, see Bhattacharya (2010). Bhattacharya’s reference to the etymological discussion in von Hinüber (2007): 387-390 (see esp. n. 11) strikes me as potentially misleading, since the thrust of those remarks is that the spelling *bodhisatva*

*sūtras*, in a manner that suggests that such texts are plural; and, moreover, it does so in a context that reminds us more of the teachings of MPNMS-tg than of TGS.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the second locus seems to be speaking of a class of *sūtras*: its phrasing actually reads “*sūtras* of the eternity of the Buddha and the fact that *tathāgatagarbha* exists”.<sup>64</sup>

The *Śrīmālādevī* is another *tathāgatagarbha* text that gives \**Tathāgatagarbha-nirdeśa* (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po bstan pa*) as one of its own alternate titles (one of about fifteen such titles).<sup>65</sup> These examples suggest that it would not be unusual for MPNMS-tg to refer to itself as a/the “*Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*”.

### 2.1.2 Reference to other titles and texts in MPNMS

In addition, in support of the possibility that MPNMS-tg refers to itself as “a/the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*”, we can also note that MPNMS-common (like many Mahāyāna *sūtras*) seems habitually to refer to itself by a variety of titles (sometimes perhaps somewhat fanciful ones). In addition to most regularly bestowing upon itself the title of *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (sometimes just \**Mahāparinirvāṇa*, “this *mahāsūtra*”, etc.), the text also may refer to itself by at least the following titles in the following passages. I have arranged the passages in rough order from those in which

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is justified not by etymology, but only by usage in manuscripts. Nonetheless, I am content to join von Hinüber himself, and such scholars as Dieter Schlingloff and Monika Zin, in following the manuscript orthography.

<sup>63</sup> *thams cad kyang de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo sde 'dzin pa*, Lh tsa 149a1-4; 菩薩...受持一切如來藏經 T270:9.291b15-19; the context includes the eternity of the Buddha, secret doctrines, and definitive teachings.

<sup>64</sup> *de bzhin gshegs pa rtag pa nyid dang / de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod pa nyid kyi mdo sde snying po can kyi le'u 'di*, Lh tsa 169a1-2; Ch even says “*sūtras*...like this one”, 如是如來常住及有如來藏經, T270:9.295a10. Examples can be found in MBhH of the text seemingly referring to itself (and like texts) loosely or creatively, as I have argued is the case with MPNMS-tg; cf. n. 194 below. Suzuki has discussed this instance, in connection with other oddities of the title of MBhH (mainly the fact that the text is sometimes referred to as a “chapter”, as here); Suzuki (1996a): 13-14.

<sup>65</sup> 說如來藏, T353:12.223b3; Takasaki (1975): 98, 110. Unfortunately the Skt ms. has a folio missing at this point; Matsuda (2000): 72-73.



self-reference to MPNMS-common is most likely, to those in which it is least. All instances are found in MPNMS-tg,<sup>66</sup> except *\*Tathāgataguhyā* in MPNMS 3.

- 1) *\*Aksayabodhi-mahāsūtra(?)*.<sup>67</sup> Tib reads: “Thus, this *\*Aksayabodhi-mahāsūtra* (*byang chub zad mi shes pa'i mdo sde chen po*) is a great heap of all merits (*\*sarvapuṇyaraśi?*), and therefore it is called ‘great’ (*\*mahā-*).”<sup>68</sup> DhKṣ also clearly understands the text to be giving another of its own titles;<sup>69</sup> FX is ambiguous.<sup>70</sup> See also discussion of the title *\*Sarvapuṇyasamuccaya-sūtra* immediately below.

<sup>66</sup> Habata has already observed that MPNMS-common refers to titles mainly in the second half, with the partial exception of the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* (for which see below n. 116); Habata (1992): 159.

<sup>67</sup> This title, of course, reminds us of the *Akṣayamati-nirdeśa* (AkṣM). However, there is little reason to think that AkṣM is the text at issue here. The Tib title of AkṣM, and the name of its protagonist *bodhisatva*, is *Blo gros mi zad pa*; the *bodhisatva* appears in MPNMS Tib with the same translation (SF1, Tib H §5.5, FX 853b28, DhKṣ 366b3), which differs from the title here. Moreover, in content, AkṣM is related to MPNMS-common only relatively remotely. Common features are: the central notion of “imperishability” in AkṣM (*akṣaya*) resonates with MPNMS’s eternity of the Buddha and his *\*vajrābhedakāya* (cf. Braarvig 2:lx). AkṣM might also be “a peripheral product of a *lokānuvartanā* tradition” (Braarvig 2:xlx), insofar as verses on *vināśa*, ascribed to the Pūrvaśaila sect and quoted by Candrakīrti in the *Prasannapadā*, may stand at the head of Harrison’s “*lokānuvartanā* tradition”, and Braarvig proposes that the thought of those verses “may at least be said to be an ideological prototype” of AkṣM (Braarvig 2:xlvi n. 1 and n. 3, lxiii and n. 3, citing Harrison [1982]: 225-227; and discussion in Paramārtha’s commentary on the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*, T2300:70.459c19-26, Demiéville [1931-1932]: 42-43). However, AkṣM only explicitly mentions the concept of *lokānuvartanā* once (Braarvig 2:xlx n. 3), and in broad terms, these themes (imperishability, and the possibility nonetheless of action in the world for the sake of suffering sentient beings) are the common property of many Mahāyāna texts. Braarvig concludes after long discussion that AkṣM most probably reached its present form sometime during the first two centuries C.E. (Braarvig [1993]: 2:xlx), which might make it slightly older than MPNMS-tg (see below), but we cannot be sure.

<sup>68</sup> *de ltar na byang chub zad mi shes pa'i mdo sde chen po 'di ni bsod nams kyi phung po chen po yin te | de bas na che ba zhes bya'o*, H §467.1-2.

<sup>69</sup> 此經...亦名菩提不可窮盡, 417b22.

<sup>70</sup> 覺慧無盡 891c7. This phrase could be taken as an epithet rather than a title.

The passage in which this reference to \**Akṣayabodhi-* occurs is of particular interest, moreover, because it falls at a locus where the text is more generally explaining the reason that it has its name, in addition to giving alternate names.<sup>71</sup> This is, of course, a feature that often comes near the end of Mahāyāna sūtras. In this light, it may be significant that at this point, Tib and FX contain a significant passage missing from DhKṣ; DhKṣ re-joins the group briefly for the passage under discussion, before another short passage found only in Tib and FX.<sup>72</sup> We should thus consider the possibility that we have here a “seam” at which originally separate source texts were stitched together into the larger present text, and that the discrepancies between DhKṣ and the other texts are tell-tale signs of this join.

Thus, it seems fairly clear that MPNMS uses the title \**Akṣaya-bodhi-mahāsūtra* to refer to itself.

- 2) \**Sarvapūṇyasamuccaya-sūtra*: Tib reads: “I have taught the *tathāgatarbha*, which is praised by innumerable Buddhas, in the \**Sarvapūṇyasamuccaya-sūtra*, and thus it should be understood that there is no duality in the existence or non-existence of a self. Good sir! On the basis of the \**Sarvapūṇyasamuccaya-sūtra* and the \**Prajñāpāramitā-mahāsūtra*, and on the basis of precisely this illumination of access to non-duality,<sup>73</sup> you should think on (\**anuv smṛ*\*) my teaching that there is no duality in the existence and non-existence of self.”<sup>74</sup> In Tib, this passage could also be taken as referring to a separate text, rather than to MPNMS itself. However, in DhKṣ, the self-reference is clear: “Now, in this Sūtra of the

<sup>71</sup> *de bas na yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po zhes bya'o*, H §467.4-5.

<sup>72</sup> H §466, 467.6-7; FX 891b23-c8, 891c8; cf. MPNMS 89, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Is this to be taken as another text title? – something like \**Advaya-avatāra-āloka*? Cf. n. 102 below.

<sup>74</sup> *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po dpag tu med pa sangs rgyas kyis bsngags pa ni bsod nams thams cad bsodus pa'i mdo las ngas bstan te | bdag yod pa dang bdag med pa gnyis su med par gzung bar bya'o || rigs kyi bu bsod nams thams cad bsodus pa'i mdo dang | shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mdo chen po las | gnyis su med pa la 'jug pa'i snang ba de nyid las bdag yod pa dang | bdag med pa gnyis su med par ngas bstan pa de rjes su dran par gyis shig*, H §400.14-20.

*Accomplishment of All Merits...*<sup>75</sup> FX is ambiguous.<sup>76</sup> The possibility that this may be a self-reference on the part of the text is further affirmed by another passage: “This \**Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, which is a Mahāyāna scripture, [is] a collection of immeasurable, illimitable, inconceivable merits, because it preaches the secret store of the Tathāgata. For this reason, any gentlemen or gentlewomen who wish quickly to understand the secret store of the Tathāgata should skilfully[? 方便] apply themselves to the study of this *sūtra*.”<sup>77</sup> We should also consider the passage discussed immediately above, in connection to the title \**Akṣayabodhi-sūtra*, where it is also said that the text is “a great heap of all merits”.

Interpretation of these references to a \**Sarvaṇyāsamuccaya-sūtra* is further complicated by the fact that a *Sarvaṇyāsamuccaya-samādhi-sūtra* (“SPSS”) does exist.<sup>78</sup> The existence of the Dharmarakṣa translation (late 3rd century) makes it quite plausible that the text could predate MPNMS-tg. This possibility is further supported by the existence of a Gāndhārī fragment of SPSS in Kharoṣṭhī.<sup>79</sup> The MPNMS passage cited above says that the text of

<sup>75</sup> 我今於是一切功德成就經中, 411a5-6.

<sup>76</sup> 我亦說一切/功德積聚經, 886b22.

<sup>77</sup> Translating from DhKṣ: 是大乘典大涅槃經。無量無邊不可思議功德之聚。何以故。以說如來祕藏故。是故善男子善女人。若欲速知如來密藏。應當方便勤修此經, 422b6-9; this reading is confirmed by FX 895a2-5; but Tib merely says *dpag tu med pa*, and unfortunately the relevant part of Skt (if it existed) is omitted by the corresponding SF 22. This is the opening to the section of the text giving the “Kashmir” prophecy (on which see further below), corresponding to and continuing on from MPNMS 104 and 105 (and immediately preceded by 103).

<sup>78</sup> Note that the MPNMS reference does not include *-samādhi*. This title seems to be derived from, or related to, a *samādhi* that appears in SP, Kern and Nanjio (1912): 424.5; 集一切功德三昧, T262:9.55a29; 等集眾德三昧 T263:9.127a28-29; Karashima (2001a): 126. The SPSS is extant in two Ch translations: 等集眾德三昧經 T381, trans. by Dharmarakṣa 法護 (2307-316); and 集一切福德三昧經 T382, trans. attributed to Kumārajīva; and one in Tib, Q 802 (Habata [1992]: 160). On the possibility of close stylistic connections between T382 and the DhKṣ corpus, see Radich (forthcoming b).

<sup>79</sup> Paul Harrison, personal communication, July 2013. Harrison is preparing an edition of this fragment with Timothy Lenz, Lin Qian, and Richard Salomon, “A Gāndhārī Fragment of the *Sarvaṇyāsamuccayasamādhisūtra*,” forthcoming in Jens Braarvig, gen. ed., *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection: Buddhist Manuscripts, Volume IV*.

that name preaches a specific doctrine of non-duality of self and non-self,<sup>80</sup> and as Habata Hiromi has shown, our present SPSS does contain a line that says self and non-self are the same (though not “non-dual”).<sup>81</sup> The SPSS also preaches a doctrine of immortal Buddhas with adamantine bodies that seems to be related to that of MPNMS-dhk.<sup>82</sup>

Broad thematic concerns of SPSS also resonate with MPNMS-common.<sup>83</sup> Habata argues that SPSS and MPNMS share a common concern with “protection of the Dharma”, and shows that in MPNMS, the Buddha’s *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* is presented as the fruit of the merit accrued through protecting the Dharma (e.g. in prior lives).<sup>84</sup> In this case, if “*Sarvaṇya-samuccya*” is a self-reference on the part of MPNMS, then it may refer to MPN-

<sup>80</sup> On the possible connection between this specific type of non-dualism and the *Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras*, see n. 102 below.

<sup>81</sup> *bdag mnyam pa gang yin pa de ni bdag me pa'i myam [sic! > mnyam] pa'o*; 我與無我二俱平等, T382:12.999a26-27; 等於吾我亦等非我, T381:12.983a4; Habata (1992): 161, citing Tib (Peking) 108b5-6. Also on the possible connection between MPNMS-tg and the present SPSS, see Takasaki (1975): 181.

<sup>82</sup> Radich (2011[2012]).

<sup>83</sup> SPSS is set three months before the *parinirvāṇa*, and takes the problem of the Nirvāṇa as its concern; part of its response is to expound upon the Buddha’s immense physical strength (in contrast to his apparent illness and decrepitude). Reflecting these thematic overlaps, SPSS is included in the “Nirvāṇa section” of the Chinese canon. See also Radich (2011[2012]): 238 n. 44, 240 n. 51, 255 n. 110.

SPSS also contains the following additional material echoing DhKṣ-unique (which, however, as such, is tangential to any possible relationship between the *Sarvaṇya-samuccayasamādhi* and MPNMS-tg):

- 1) SPSS tells a story of the Buddha besting strongmen, and expounding upon the immense strength of his “body born of father and mother” (\**mātrpitṛkaśambhavakāya*, for which see Radich [2010]:127-134, 164-170) (which here derives from the eponymous *samādhi* of the text); T382:12.989b28-990c27. Related material is found at DhKṣ(-unique) 457b19-29; see discussion at Radich (2011): 168, 169 (where I overlooked the parallel in SPSS).
- 2) SPSS also contains a passage about using one’s skin for paper, one’s blood for ink, and one’s bone as a pen to preserve the text, T382:12.995c20-996a10 (Harrison [2003]: 127-128) – echoed in DhKṣ-unique 449a19-21.

<sup>84</sup> Habata (1992): 161-167.

MS-dhk, even though the reference falls within MPNMS-tg, which is usually regarded as a separate stratum of the text.

However, these common features of the two texts do not allow us to decide with confidence which came first. Non-duality, including the non-duality of self/non-self, is also a central theme in MPNMS-common, whereas the passage identified by Habata in SPSS only mentions these concepts in passing.<sup>85</sup> In light of the features of MPNMS that suggest it is referring to itself by the title *\*Sarvaṇyāsamuccaya*, we therefore should consider it equally possible that SPSS got the notion of the equivalence or non-duality of self and non-self, and perhaps even its title, from MPNMS, rather than influence flowing the other way.

Thus, in this case, also, it is also equally likely that in referring to a *\*Sarvaṇyāsamuccaya-sūtra*, MPNMS is referring to itself.

- 3) *\*Mahāmeghatathāgatagarbha-sūtra*: Tib reads: “...in the same manner, when the true Dharma is harvested, the rain of the *śrāvaka-dharma* falls from the *Great Sūtra of the Great Cloud of Tathāgatagarbha*, whereupon the harvest will be reaped of great teaching which frees us from the eight pestilences, and is joyful, and is a bumper crop, and is pleasing” (MPNMS 98).<sup>86</sup> Here, fortunately, Skt for the title is known (SF 21): *Mahāmeghatathāgatagarbha-mahāsūtra*[-*śravaṇa-dharmavṛṣṭi*]. The position of *mahāmegha* in this compound makes it clear (in contrast to Tib) that it can only be taken as part of the title. However, Tib is more ambiguous, and in Ch, only DhKṣ mentions rain, without making it sound like a title

<sup>85</sup> The first “*Sarvaṇyāsamuccaya*” passage in MPNMS is part of an extended development of the theme of a non-dualistic understanding of self/non-self: H §395-401, FX 885b23-886c8, DhKṣ 410b17-411a24; this theme continues through to DhKṣ 411b19-20. The general theme of non-dualism (including related formulae like non-identity and non-difference, simultaneous assertions that X is Y and not-Y, etc.) is also found in an extended passage on the *dharmakāya* in MPNMS-dhk; see H §146-147, FX 866a23-866b19, DhKṣ 383a5-383b4.

<sup>86</sup> *de bzhin du dam pa'i chos kyi zhing las byas pa la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo chen po'i sprin chen po las thos pa'i chos kyi char bab na | rims nad rnam pa brgyad las rnam par grol ba dang | bde ba dang | lo legs pa dang | yid du 'ong bar byed pa'i lung bstan pa chen po'i lo thog skye bar 'gyur te*, H §495.13-17.

(如來祕藏無量法雨). In addition, in at least nine passages, MPN-MS describes its own efficacy in terms of the image of a great cloud or rain of Dharma, without presenting the trope as the title of a text.<sup>87</sup> The relationship between MPNMS-tg and the extant *Mahāmegha* (“MM”) is very close, and will be discussed in some detail below. Thus, again, it is likely that MPNMS uses this title in reference to itself.

- 4) \**Tathāgataguhya-mahāsūtra* (\**Tathāgatagarbha-mahāsūtra*?): MPN-MS seems to refer to itself by this title in Tib (this is the only one of the self-references examined here that falls outside MPNMS-tg, in MPNMS-dhk, i.e. MPNMS 3), and we can form a good idea of the underlying Skt on the basis of a parallel passage.<sup>88</sup> In Ch, DhKṣ alone here refers generally to “the profound(ly) secret teaching” 甚深密藏. This fact connects the *sūtra*’s reference to itself by this title (in Tib) to the broad problem of the connection

<sup>87</sup> The passages in question are the following:

- 1) (MPNMS-dhk): *chos kyi sprin chen po las chos kyi char pa bab*, H §50.10; FX 858a7-8; DhKṣ 371c27 (unique passage, perhaps interpolated), 372a4-5; SF 5 corresponds to this locus, but due to its fragmentary nature, the relevant words are missing;
- 2) *sprin chen po ltar chos kyi char dbab*, H §196.29-30; FX 871a10-11; DhKṣ 388c10-12 (the text may or may not refer to itself here);
- 3) *sprin chen po rnams ’brug di ri ri sgrogs shing char chen po ’bebs...ci sprin chen po rnams char mi ’bebs sam...* H §223.1-4; FX 872b17-20; DhKṣ 391a11-15;
- 4) *dam pa’i chos kyi char phab nas*, H §309.9; DhKṣ 398b27-28; not in FX;
- 5) DhKṣ (only) 414a8-9;
- 6) *theg pa chen po ’di las dgongs pa’i tshig de bzhin gshegs pa’i gsang ba’i dam pa’i chos kyi char*, H §461.15-16; FX 891a16-20; DhKṣ 417a21-24;
- 7) *mdo sde chen po ’di las dam pa’i chos kyi char ’bab*, H §472.5-6; FX 892a9-13; DhKṣ 418a4;
- 8) *mdo sde chen po’i sprin ’di las chos kyi char ’bab*, H §480.2-3; FX 892b12-14; DhKṣ 418b21-24;
- 9) *mahāparinirvāṇaṃ sarve sandhāvacaṇa dharmamegha*, SF 22; *sprin rnams kyi char phab nas...de bzhin du | mdo chen po ’di yang ston gyi sprin gyis char phab*, H §519.3-4; FX 895a13-16; DhKṣ 422b19-23.

<sup>88</sup> Tib *de bzhin gshegs pa’i gsang ba’i mdo chen po*; cf. MPNMS 5, *de bzhin gshegs pa gsang ba (sna tshogs kyi dgongs pa’i tshig), tathāgata(-vividha-)guhyaṃ (sandhā-vacaṇaṃ)*; also *sarva-tathāgata-’bhāṣita-saṃdhā-vacaṇa-vividha-guhya-dharma-mukhāni mahāparinirvāṇaṃ...gacchaṃti* etc.; SF 12.7, Habata (2007): 74.

between *tathāgatagarbha* and “secret teaching”, for which see Appendix 2. We should note also that an old colophon to Faxian’s translation of MPNMS, preserved in Sengyou’s 僧祐 (445-518) *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, refers to the text in similar terms, as the “secret store of the Tathāgata”.<sup>89</sup> There thus seem to be no strong reasons to think that the text is referring outside itself to our present *Tathāgataguhyā* (“TGu”).<sup>90</sup>

- 5) *\*Tathāgataśāśvata-mahāsūtra* (?\**Tathāgatanityatva-mahāsūtra?* etc.): Tib reads: “It is thus because of the power of the *Great Sūtra of the Eternity of the Tathāgata*, and therefore, if anyone should read aloud this *mahāsūtra* written in a book...” etc.<sup>91</sup> DhKṣ contains a phrase of roughly equivalent meaning, which does not look like a text title.<sup>92</sup> This would, naturally, be a good descriptive title for

<sup>89</sup> 大般泥洹經如來祕藏, T2145:55.60b5-6; discussed in Hodge (2010/2012): 7.

<sup>90</sup> Most importantly, our present TGu is not a *tathāgatagarbha* text. The TGu is extant in two translations in Ch: 密迹金剛力士會 in the *Ratnakūṭa*, T310(3), trans. ca. 280 C.E. by Dharmarakṣa; and 如來不思議祕密大乘經 T312, trans. Dharmapāla 法護 (fl. 1004-1058); in one Tib translation, *De bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab bstan pa*; and in “substantial portions of the Sanskrit text, in a...manuscript in the possession of the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta” (Paul Harrison, personal communication, July 2013). The *terminus ad quem* in Dharmarakṣa makes it quite possible that this text pre-existed MPNMS-tg. On cursory examination, Dharmarakṣa’s TGu shows some themes shared with MPNMS: secret teachings; the adamant body of the Tathāgata, T310(3): 11.55a29-b9; some docetism – for example, in respect of the *bodhisatva*’s ascetic practice, bathing in the Nairāñjana, accepting the offering of milk porridge, etc., 61a9-c25; the doctrine that *buddhajñāna* is present in the body of all sentient beings, 65c18-24; cf. Dharmapāla, T312:11.732a27-b3; and cf. *Tathāgatopattisambhava-nirdeśa*, discussed in Zimmermann (2002): 56-57, 61-62, 65-66. (Like SPSS [n. 83], TGu also features a variant of the demonstration of the immense strength of the Buddha – here the *bodhisatva*, T310(3):11.75b3-76a12 and ff. This motif is shared with MPNMS-DhKṣ-unique, but therefore lies outside the portion of MPNMS at the focus of the present discussion, namely MPNMS-tg.) Full examination of possible relations between TGu and MPNMS is beyond the scope of the present study, but is a desideratum for future research.

<sup>91</sup> *de bzhin gshegs pa rtag pa'i mdo sde chen po'i mthu'i rgyus de ltar 'gyur te | de lta na gang dag gis mdo sde chen po glegs bam la bris pa bkags sam...* H §496.18-20.

<sup>92</sup> “...because of hearing even briefly this *Mahāparinirvāṇa* and thereby conceiving the notion that the Tathāgata is eternal...” 暫得聞是大涅槃故亦以生念如來常故, 420b9-10; nothing matches in FX; SF 21 corresponds to this general locus, but unfortunately nothing corresponding to possible self-reference by this title is preserved.

MPNMS-common itself, given its strong thematic focus on the doctrine that the Buddha is in fact eternal.

- 6) \**Uttaratantra*:<sup>93</sup> This was, of course, most famously to become, in the later tradition, an alternate title for the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (“RGV”).<sup>94</sup> MPNMS may refer to itself as such in the following three loci:<sup>95</sup>
- i) The “letters” chapter, discussing *u* as meaning *uttara*, “supreme”, “best”: “Therefore it [MPNMS] is called ‘great’, meaning \**uttaratantra*; therefore we say *u*.”<sup>96</sup> This instance is unparalleled in FX and DhKṣ, and therefore may possibly represent a later addition to Tib.
  - ii) MPNMS 99: Tib \**Tathāgatagarbha-uttaratantra* (discussed above, p. 38).
  - iii) A colophon to MPNMS-common/MPNMS-dhk, attested in Skt (SF 24) and Tib (H §588): I already mentioned this colophon above (p. 38), in connection to the title “TGS”, and as there, it is possible that \**uttaratantra* here describes the text, rather than naming it.
  - iv) In addition, we should also note that MPNMS-dhk provides an apparent rationale for the text referring to itself in this

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<sup>93</sup> Hodge has also recently noted the reference of the text to itself as \**Uttaratantra*, and has further speculated that there may be a link between the use of this title and an originally “secret” portion of the text, which “initially circulated privately within a very restricted circle of followers or ‘initiates’;” Hodge (2010/2012): 36 and n. 67, 56-58; also 36, 60. See also n. 56 above, and n. 472 below.

<sup>94</sup> On the title *Uttaratantra* see Habata (2007): 105 n. 3 and Takasaki (1975): 132-136, 770.

<sup>95</sup> In Tibetan only, the text also refers to or cites an \**Uttarottaratantra* in support of a statement that one who falsely claims the *uttarimanuṣyadharmas* cannot be redeemed; *rgyud phyi ma'i yang phyi ma gzhung rdzogs pa las*, H §350.4; FX 881b11-12 and DhKṣ 404b10-12 contain nothing corresponding. My attention was drawn to this reference by Hodge, who regards this citation also as a reference by MPNMS to itself as \**Uttaratantra*; Hodge (2010/2012): 57.

<sup>96</sup> *de bas na che ba zhes bya ste | rgyud phyi ma zhes bya ba'i don to || de bas na u zhes bya ba*, H §423.9; cf. MPNMS 76.



manner in the *Nāmadheyagūṇa* Chapter. This passage shows that the term may be connected to the motif of medicine, the Buddha as doctor, etc., which is extremely widespread in the text.<sup>97</sup>

We should note that the last three of these alternate titles are only attested in Tib (*\*Tathāgataḡuhyā-mahāsūtra*, *\*Tathāgataśāśvata-mahāsūtra*, *\*Uttaratantra*). In the former two cases, however, DhKṣ at least contains phrases that mirror the semantic content given in Tib as a text title; it is only in the case of *\*Uttaratantra* alone that nothing corresponding whatsoever is found in either Ch version. Given that Tib is relatively late, though, it is possible that these last three titles crept into the text over time.

However, in the case of the other three alternate titles (*\*Sarvapuṇya-samuccaya*, *\*Akṣayabodhi*, and *Mahāmegha*), the title in question is attested in more than one version of the text, and it is clear that the text is applying the title to itself (or a part of itself, if the self-reference is a vestige of an originally shorter text that was incorporated into our MPNMS-common). Thus, even excluding the title “TGS”, it seems that the text refers to itself by at least four titles (including “MPNMS”), and possibly more. It is therefore possible that where it mentions the title “TGS”, also, MPNMS is not referring to our present TGS, but to itself (or part of itself). This possibility is further strengthened by the fact that in two instances in MPNMS-tg, the title *Tathāgataḡarbha-sūtra* is associated with other alternate titles: *\*Uttaratantra*, and *Mahāmegha*; and also, by the fact that it refers to a *Tathāgataḡarbha-mahāsūtra*, mirroring the *-mahāsūtra* in its own most common title.

In terms of the relation between these MPNMS passages and extant texts bearing the “titles” they mention, this evidence may hint that Mahāyāna literature includes what we could call “spinoff” texts and titles. A new text might take as its title an alternative or nonce title of a prestigious earlier text (just as it might take it from a phrase in such a text, as

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<sup>97</sup> See Habata (1989a) for a seminal exploration of part of this theme. As Habata notes, echoing in part Takasaki (1987): 8, the title *Uttaratantra* seems to derive from Āyurveda, and there seems to be an especially close relation between MPNMS and the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*. See also n. 473 below.

we have seen SPSS presumably did from SP<sup>98</sup>). If Mahāyāna authors did indeed work this way, we obviously cannot assume, when we encounter what looks like the title (alone) of an extant text A in another text B, that it indicates that B knew A. Though the analogy is imperfect, this might be the same mistake as thinking that the “Tomorrow and tomorrow” soliloquy in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* alludes to William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, it is clear that at least in some cases, MPNMS-tg refers to itself by alternate titles or epithets, some of which may be nonce titles used as part of the text’s rhetoric of self-praise. In light of this pattern, it would be entirely consistent for MPNMS-tg to refer to itself as the “*Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*”, or as a “*tathāgatagarbha sūtra*”. We cannot therefore hold, solely on the basis of the supposed mention of “the title of TGS”, that MPNMS-tg is necessarily referring to our present TGS, and that TGS therefore predates MPNMS-tg.

### 2.1.3 MPNMS references to other Mahāyāna texts by title

In fact, there are very few cases in which MPNMS-tg refers to other Mahāyāna texts by title, where the authors clearly have in mind the contents of our present text of the same name. This fact also works against the presumption that the mentions of a “*Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*” necessarily refer to our extant TGS. In this section, I will briefly discuss the only instances I know where MPNMS-tg might refer to other extant Mahāyāna scriptures.

MPNMS-tg ostensibly cites a *\*Prajñāpāramitā-mahāsūtra* (*Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa’i mdo chen po*) (along with SPSS) in support of the assertion that there is no duality between the existence and non-existence of self (*\*ātman*).<sup>100</sup> The content of the reference is an exposition of the non-

<sup>98</sup> See n. 78.

<sup>99</sup> The true direction of the allusion is, of course, the converse; Faulkner’s title is actually an allusion to Shakespeare’s “...a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing” (*Macbeth* V, 5).

<sup>100</sup> FX 886b24-25; DhKṣ 411a9-10; H §400.17-20. This is the same passage already discussed above in relation to the title *\*Sarvapūṇyasamuccaya*. See n. 74.

duality of self and non-self, for which it is difficult to trace any parallel in the Prajñāpāramitā.<sup>101</sup> However, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures certainly do propound other non-dualisms in a manner similar to MPNMS here.<sup>102</sup> Thus, although the precise passage itself may not derive from any known Prajñāpāramitā text, the fact that it is a plausible “Prajñāpāramitā-style pastiche” indicates in this case that the authors of MPNMS did at least know texts that bore a generic resemblance to our extant Prajñāpāramitā texts.

In two places, MPNMS-tg refers by title to the *Śūraṅgama[-samādhi]-sūtra* (“Śūs”).<sup>103</sup> In both cases, the text is in the throes of an explanation of docetic doctrine, redolent of the *Lokānuvartanā* (“LAN”) and related texts. Such material is indeed found in our present Śūs. The Buddha remains in the *śūraṅgamasamādhi*, but appears to engage in the *bodhisatva* career of practicing the perfections, and then to await his last rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven, enter the womb, be born, take seven steps, etc., live in the palace, leave the world, practice austerities...sit under the *bodhi* tree, defeat Māra, turn the wheel of Dharma, etc.; enter into Nirvāṇa, undergo cremation, have his relics distributed, etc.<sup>104</sup> In this case, then, it is likely

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<sup>101</sup> Kawamura (1972) was also unable to find a parallel.

<sup>102</sup> For example, Aṣṭa propounds non-dualisms between the five *skandhas* (each in turn) and non-arising (*anutpāda*) and non-passing-away (*avyaya*), Vaidya (1960): 13-14, Conze (1973): 92; between beings (*sattvāḥ*) and illusion (*māyā*) or a dream (*svapna*), and between Nirvāṇa and illusion, Vaidya 20, Conze 98-99; between *prajñāpāramitā* and the *skandhas*, Vaidya 89, Conze 138; between *phalaviśuddhi* and respectively *rūpaviśuddhi*, *viññānaviśuddhi*, and *sarvajñatāviśuddhi*, Vaidya 93-94, Conze 142; between *prajñāpāramitā* and the term “*prajñāpāramitā*”, Vaidya 100, Conze 149; between the Thusness of the Tathāgata and that respectively of all *dharmas* and of Subhūti, Vaidya 153-154, Conze 193-194. The text also emphasises non-duality in other more general respects, e.g. of Thusness, Vaidya 134, Conze 177. However, in regard to the doctrine of non-self, Aṣṭa rather maintains a more orthodox view than MPNMS; see particularly Vaidya 187-188, Conze 226; see also Vaidya 235, Conze 276; Vaidya 237, Conze 276. On the theme of *advaya* broadly, cf. Braarvig (1993): 2:lxvi; it is often *advaya* between absolute and phenomenal world, which in principle broadly fits “self and non-self”. See also discussion of non-dualism as expounded in SPSS, n. 81.

<sup>103</sup> 1) FX 870c21; DhKṣ 388b22; H §194.5-6; 2) FX 872a6-7; DhKṣ 390a8; H §215.5.

<sup>104</sup> Lamotte (1975) §122-124. I am grateful to Paul Harrison for pointing out this passage (personal communication, June 28 2011). Śūs also contains the following more generally related ideas: the Buddha is always in Nirvāṇa, and does not in fact “arise” (\*ut

that MPNMS is referring to some prior Mahāyāna text. However, we still cannot be sure that the reference is indeed to Śūs in anything like its present form. MPNMS uses the formula of *lokānuvartanā* but Śūs does not, and MPNMS shares other details with LAN not found in Śūs. Thus, the title “Śūs” here might also refer to a “proto-*Lokānuvartanā*” or parallel *sūtra* that circulated under the title of Śūs.<sup>105</sup>

MPNMS-common also refers to the *Saddharmaṣaṣṭikā* (“SP”), this time with reference to content that can certainly be securely traced to our extant SP.<sup>106</sup> Other evidence also seems to show that MPNMS, and related texts like MM, are indebted to SP.<sup>107</sup>

The example of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, in particular, but also, in some degree, the example of Śūs, does not inspire confidence that in the case of TGS, apparent reference to the title of the text means that the authors of MPNMS knew our present TGS. Indeed, it seems in principle equally possible – as also perhaps in the case of the *Mahāmeḡha*, and of the use of *Uttaratantra* as a title or epithet of RGV – that the authors of the present TGS took the title for their text from a pre-existing MPNMS.

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*ṅpad*), §71-72, cf. also §142-148; the Buddhas have a very long (but not strictly infinite) lifespan, §170-172; Buddhas (as they appear in the world) are in fact unreal, §18-19. Harrison has also pointed out a resemblance between H §201, FX 870b21-26, DhKṣ 388a 23-27 and Śūs §66; Harrison (unpublished).

<sup>105</sup> Our present LAN and Śūs both may be (in part) offshoots of such a common stock. Kaneko (1990) also states that it is “difficult” to find any precise locus in Śūs corresponding to either of the MPNMS references.

<sup>106</sup> SF 21, H §495.17, FX 893c6, DhKṣ 420a23-24; referring to SP, Kern and Nanjio (1912): 218.5 ff., T262:9.36a7-8; Kawamura (1972): 59 n. 15.

<sup>107</sup> Suzuki shows that two key verses are shared, with variation, between SP, MM and Suv; the verses teach that the Buddha does not really enter *parinirvāṇa*, but makes a docetic show of doing so; neither does the Dharma really die out; and Buddhas have an eternal body (but SP: *nityakāla*); Suzuki (1998a): 39 n. 15, discussing SP 323.11-12, 7-9, MM (Peking) Dzu 202b6-7, Suv 19.1-4. Cf. Suzuki (2002) on MBhH. We have seen above that the title *Sarvaṅnyasamuccaya* may be related to a SP *samādhi* of the same name; see n. 78. We will see below that the name of Sarvalokapriyadarśana, a key figure in prophecies connecting the “MPNMS group” to one another, probably also derives from SP; see n. 486, 491. Cf. also Takasaki (1975): 412-445 on SP and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in general; Takasaki 441, Kariya (1979), Zimmermann (1998), Zimmermann (2002): 77 on SP and TGS. For other connections, see n. 122 below, and other loci listed there.

Finally, Habata has pointed out that in DhKṣ alone, MPNMS-common might contain one apparent mention of the \**Dharmapada* by name.<sup>108</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Relations to other texts without mention of their title

In at least two other instances, MPNMS-common contains material similar to the contents of other Mahāyāna texts, but it does not mention the titles of the texts in which that content is presently known to us.

As we just noted, MPNMS-tg mentions ŚŪS, in the context of an exposition of docetic doctrine redolent of LAN. As we also noted, this discussion is paralleled in ŚŪS. However, the parallel in our present ŚŪS is imperfect, and it is particularly notable that the very *lokānuvartanā* formula is missing from ŚŪS, but is found in MPNMS. Other details in MPNMS-tg also match our extant LAN, but not ŚŪS, and we also find broad thematic echoes of *lokānuvartanā* ideas.<sup>109</sup> It is therefore clear either that MPNMS

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<sup>108</sup> 法句之義, DhKṣ 426c25-427a2, following verses paralleling *Dhammapada* 129, 130; Habata (1996): 87, 88-89; Habata notes that it is also possible that *faju* 法句 here might correspond to *dharmaparyāya*, but it seems more likely that DhKṣ knew that the verses were associated with the *Dhammapada*. Despite its title, Hiromi's article does not deal with the citation of any other named Āgama texts in MPNMS, but rather, considers the use of ninefold versus twelvefold rubrics for discussing the canon as a whole, and a sampling of other verses with *Dhammapada* parallels.

<sup>109</sup> LAN-like materials:

- 1) Tib H §187-202, FX 870b10-871b21, DhKṣ 388a11-389b5 (including approx. 12 instances of the *lokānuvartanā* formula);
- 2) Tib H §338-341, 94b-95a, FX 880a22-880b26, 880c23-881a9, DhKṣ 402c25-403b8, 403c10-404a1, and SF 17 (second part only), where we have a valuable Skt instance of the formula, \**sarvāiṣāṃ lokānuvartana-*;
- 3) Tib H §433.4-434, FX 414a18-22, DhKṣ 414a16-22;
- 4) Tib H §454-455, FX 890b3-890b19, DhKṣ 416a22-416b8;

Other briefer instances of the *lokānuvartanā* formula:

- 5) Tib H §438, FX 889a23-27, DhKṣ 414b29-c6 (I owe this reference to Harrison [unpublished]); Tib 'jig rten dang 'thun pa is only partially matched in Ch, FX 隨世言, DhKṣ 一世諦;
- 6) Tib H §446-447, FX 889c7-889c18, DhKṣ 415b5-20 (twice);
- 7) Tib H §456.42-43, FX 890c4-5, DhKṣ 416b29-c2;
- 8) Tib H §457.25-26, FX 890c14-15, DhKṣ 416c14-16;
- 9) Tib H §459.12-13, FX 891a7, DhKṣ 417a8-10;

must be drawing on LAN, or *vice versa*, or that both must be drawing on a common third source (much of the same material is also found in the *Mahāvastu*, for instance). In no instance does MPNMS mention the title “LAN” – though we must also note that other versions of this material, including the early translation by \*Lokakṣema, also do not bear this title.<sup>110</sup>

Shimoda Masahiro has argued that connections can be discerned between the reaction against the *stūpa* cult in MPNMS-tg and the *Maitreyasimhanāda-sūtra* incorporated in the *Ratnakūṭa* (T310(23)).<sup>111</sup> Both texts feature Mahākāśyapa as an interlocutor of the Buddha on the brink of *parinirvāṇa*, discussing rigour in observance of the Vinaya. Most strikingly, both texts also feature an otherwise unusual simile, which compares the situation if the Buddha were to entrust the Dharma to Śrāvakas, to someone entrusting valuable treasure for twenty years’ safekeeping to a person 120 years old and on his deathbed. However, Shimoda interprets this evidence to mean that the *Maitreyasimhanāda* is citing MPNMS, and not the other way around.<sup>112</sup>

10) An unusual instance of the formula (twice in quick succession) at SF 22, Tib H §516.8-10, DhKṣ 422b12-14 (missing in FX) is of particular interest because it is attested in Skt (*lokānuvṛtya...lokānuvartanā*); because it is directly connected to the espousal of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine (MPNMS 104-105); and because it appears in the same passage as the “Kashmir” prophecy (for which see below, p. 66);

11) Tib H §531-532, FX 895a24-896a4, DhKṣ 423c10-23 (I owe this reference to Harrison [unpublished]).

For further discussion of LAN-like docetic material in MPNMS, see below, p. 107 ff. Cf. also similar materials in MM, discussed below p. 63. See also Shimoda (1997): 254-256.

Aspects of the MPNMS discussion also recall the *Upāyakaṣālya* (“Up”): Tib H §205-212, FX 871b25-c20, DhKṣ 389b12-c25. See once more below, pp. 109, 114.

<sup>110</sup> \*Lokakṣema’s title is [Fo *shuo*] *nei zang bai bao jing* [佛說內藏百寶經 (T807), which Harrison translates as *Sūtra of the Hundred Gems of the Inner Treasury [as Expounded by the Buddha]*; Harrison (1982): 211. Candrakīrti refers to this material as “the Verses according to the Pūrvaśailas...” (*shar gyi ri bo’i sde pa dang mthun pa’i tshigs su bcad pa dag*); Harrison 226, 233 n. 28. I am grateful to Paul Harrison for reminding me of this consideration (personal communication, July 2013).

<sup>111</sup> Shimoda (1991).

<sup>112</sup> T310(23):11.503b1-25, Tib (Peking) Q 67a4-68a5, cf. FX 863a24-b15, DhKṣ 379a21-b23, Shimoda (1991): 128-126. Shimoda also notes an echo of MPNMS in a *Maitreyasimhanā-*

In unpublished work, Paul Harrison has also identified a number of significant correspondences between MPNMS and the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, we should note that in a few other cases, scholars have traced connections between the content of MPNMS-common and non-Mahāyāna literature. For example, Shimoda has traced connections to the *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya*, to the *Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, and to the *Vimokkhakathā* of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.<sup>114</sup> He has also shown that some material is shared with the *Aśokāvadāna* and the *Samyuktāgama*.<sup>115</sup> Habata Hiromi has shown connections to the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* (“Elephant’s Footprint Sūtra”).<sup>116</sup> However, in these cases, also, the text makes no mention of any titles of related texts, let alone the titles under which the material is now seen elsewhere. The only case I know of where MPNMS refers by name to a non-Mahāyāna text is that of the “*Ghoṣita-sūtra*”, but even in that case, reference to the title of the text is found in DhKṣ only, and I have thus far

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da passage that speaks of the *bodhisatva* thinking of sentient beings like his only son (*ekaputrasaṃjñā*), and likening this to a man who enters a prison to save his son; 120-119 n. 10. For other resemblances, see Shimoda 125-124.

<sup>113</sup> Harrison (unpublished). These correspondences fall in the first long docetic passage in MPNMS, and are as follows:

- 1) H §188-189, FX 870b16-26, DhKṣ 388a18-29, cf. Lamotte (1962) Ch. V §10-18;
- 2) H §191, FX 870c7-11, DhKṣ 388b4-8, cf. Lamotte V §12;
- 3) H §208, FX 871c1-2, DhKṣ 389b21-23, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 17;
- 4) H §209, FX 871c5-7, DhKṣ 389b27-29, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 29;
- 5) H §209, FX 871c7-9, DhKṣ 389c1-3, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 23;
- 6) H §211, FX 871c15-17, DhKṣ 389c16-19, cf. Lamotte II;
- 7) H §212, FX 871c17-21, DhKṣ 389c19-24, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 24-27 (in the same order);
- 8) H §213, FX 871c21-24, DhKṣ 389c26-28; cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 19;
- 9) H §213, FX 871c24-25, (DhKṣ missing), cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 23;
- 10) H §214, FX 871c26-28, DhKṣ 390a1-3, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 22;
- 11) H §214, FX 872a2-4, DhKṣ 390a3-4, cf. Lamotte VII §6 v. 38.

Harrison also detects echoes of the same passages in MM, adding to the ample evidence of close connections between MPNMS-tg and MM (see p. 62 below).

<sup>114</sup> Shimoda (1994); Shimoda (2000); Shimoda (2008).

<sup>115</sup> Shimoda (1988).

<sup>116</sup> Habata (1989b).

been unable to find anything matching the content mentioned under that title.<sup>117</sup>

Finally, although it is obvious, we should note for the record that MPNMS also shows a clear debt and relationship to the Mainstream *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra/Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*: for example, in its title, its setting, and the basic problematic of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha; in the role of Cuṇḍa in offering the final meal; and in the playoff between the figures of Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa.

Of course, I fully acknowledge that the intertextuality of Mahāyāna *sūtras* is a very complex matter. My remarks here are an attempt to represent the current state of scholarly knowledge about the text, but it is quite possible that further links to other texts await discovery.

In sum, it is rare for MPNMS to draw upon other known Mahāyāna texts, even when it does not mention those texts by title; and in some such instances, this may be because it did not know those texts under their present titles. This also gives us grounds for caution in presuming that the apparent mention of a title known to us necessarily means that MPNMS is referring to the extant text that we know by the same title.

## 2.2 Similarity of one simile between MPNMS-tg and TGS

The other factor that has led scholars to conclude that TGS is prior to MPNMS is that MPNMS contains one simile which is similar in structure to the nine similes of TGS. A poor woman has gold hidden in her house, but does not know it, and a man shows it to her. This is likened to the fact that sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha* within them, but do not know it, until the Buddha shows them (MPNMS 31-32). This resembles the sixth simile of TGS, and indeed, Zimmermann understands that the MPNMS passage is indebted to TGS.<sup>118</sup> However, taken on their own, the

<sup>117</sup> Tib *bcom ldan 'das kyis khyim bdag gdangs can las brtsams te bdud tshar gcad par bka' stsal pa'i tsh*, H §299.4-5; DhKṣ 如瞿師羅經中佛為瞿師羅說, 397b1; FX: 如世尊為長者瞿師羅說, 876b6. The context is a warning about the possibility that Māra might appear in the guise of the Buddha. Cf. the explanation given by Zhiyuan 智圓 (976-1022), X662:37.426c21-427a1. The *Ghosita-sutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya*, despite the fact that it bears the same title, is entirely different in content; S IV 113-114.

<sup>118</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 37, 89.



similes of MPNMS and TGS show no features that allow us to determine that the direction of borrowing was from TGS to MPNMS, and not the other way around (or from an unknown, third common source). Like TGS, MPNMS contains other similes for the presence of *tathāgatagarbha* in sentient beings that are not matched in the other text; and in principle it is equally possible that TGS originated as a set of similes inspired by MPNMS, or that these pericopae in both texts are exemplars of a broader genre.<sup>119</sup>

### 2.3 Summary

In sum, this chapter has argued that internal evidence for relative dating does not prove that MPNMS-tg knows our extant TGS. I argued that where the text appears to refer to a/the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, it is more likely that it is referring to itself under that title. This would be consistent with the pattern we see in other texts of the MPNMS group. This explanation would also be consistent with a pattern whereby MPNMS-tg refers to itself by a number of other titles. It would also be consistent with the overall pattern of reference to other Mahāyāna scriptures within the text – MPNMS-tg refers certainly only to SP, though it may also refer to (some version of) ŚūS, and its authors were familiar with some kind of Prajñāpāramitā literature. MPNMS-tg also does not show broad debts to other Mahāyāna texts, even if we expand our scope to include texts it does not mention by name. Finally, a single simile shared by MPNMS-tg and TGS need not necessarily have been borrowed by MPNMS from TGS. Thus, on the basis of internal evidence, the way is clear to consider MPNMS-tg as possibly earlier than TGS, and therefore, as possibly “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text. In the next chapter, I will argue that available evidence for absolute dates argues more strongly in favour of an early date for MPNMS-tg than for TGS, or for any other early *tathāgatagarbha* scripture.

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Zimmermann (1998): 161-163 on a simile in SP that seems thematically related to TGS similes.



### 3 Evidence for the Absolute Dates of MPNMS-tg and Other *Tathāgataḡarbha* Scriptures

If no internal evidence shows the chronological precedence of MPNMS-tg to TGS or *vice versa*, another line of attack on the problem is to assess our evidence for the date of each text independently. I believe that this approach shows that it is more likely that MPNMS-tg is earlier than TGS. I will first survey evidence for the date of MPNMS-tg; and then, more briefly, for that of TGS. At the end of the chapter, I will briefly survey evidence for other early *tathāgataḡarbha* scriptures.

#### 3.1 Evidence for the absolute date of MPNMS-tg

In terms of its compositional history, MPNMS-common most likely falls into two main parts, corresponding roughly to what I am here calling, from a doctrinal perspective, MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg.<sup>120</sup> There are a number of reasons for regarding these two parts of the text as composed at different dates.

First, each part propounds noticeably different doctrines. MPNMS-dhk emphasises the *dharmakāya*(-cum-*vajrakāya*), the eternity of the Buddha, the docetic view of the *parinirvāṇa* (implicitly at least), the “four inversions” (eternity, bliss, self and purity 常樂我淨), and the idea that the Tathāgata is *ātman*. MPNMS-tg, by contrast, certainly builds on these themes, but at the same time, propounds ideas not seen in MPNMS-dhk: most notably, *tathāgataḡarbha*, secret teachings, the practice of *samādhi*, and “conformity with the world” (*lokānuvartanā*).

The two parts of the text also differ in the types of practice they condone and reflect, suggesting that they are the work of different groups.

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<sup>120</sup> For further discussion of the problem of stratification in MPNMS-common, see Appendix 4.

As Shimoda has shown, MPNMS-dhk contains a highly unusual passage allowing monks to travel in the company of armed lay bodyguards (who are exempt from the five precepts) when passing through lawless, dangerous areas for the purposes of preaching and pilgrimage to *stūpas*.<sup>121</sup> These details seem to suggest that MPNMS-dhk was propounded by itinerant preachers who were possibly only semi-monastic. MPNMS-tg, on the other hand, propounds a complete ban on meat-eating, and in other ways shows a new concern with rigour in Vinaya; perhaps accordingly, it also shows a greater concern with the notion of “purity” in the abstract; and it engages in vehement criticism of bogus monks. These changes suggest a shift to greater sedentary cenobiticism and a closer engagement with the concerns of mainstream Brahmanical Indian values. These possible changes in the social groups reflected in the text seem also to be betrayed by a difference in nomenclature for devotees – MPNMS-dhk calls its exponents “Dharma preachers”, where MPNMS-tg calls its exponents *bodhisatva*.<sup>122</sup>

The two halves also differ in other respects. It is only in MPNMS-tg that we first see discussion of *ratnatraya* (the Three Jewels); criticism of *śrāvakas*; reference to the *sūtra* as a written book; and the doctrine of the *icchantika* (mentioned only once in MPNMS-dhk). MPNMS-tg also shows a shift in emphasis to more intensive meditation practice. This stratification of the text is also supported by the fact that MPNMS-dhk ends with a chapter on the virtues of the name of the *sūtra* (*nāmadheyagaṇa*), a feature commonly found near the end of Mahāyāna *sūtras*.<sup>123</sup> All this means that MPNMS-tg is probably later than MPNMS-dhk.

<sup>121</sup> Tib H §153-154, FX 867a16-a27, DhKṣ 384a22-b11.

<sup>122</sup> See, however, n. 508 below. Note that the theme of “Dharma preacher” proponents of the text, who are in a conflictual relation with other groups of monastics, is shared by MPNMS with SP (with important variations); Karashima (2001b). For other points of contact (some highly circumstantial) between MPNMS and SP, cf. p. 52, n. 78, 106, 107, 119, 202, 270, 486, 492.

<sup>123</sup> Tib H §161-168, FX 867c13-868A17, DhKṣ 384c27-385b5; SF 12.

Compared to other Mahāyāna sūtras, MPNMS-tg is unusually rich in information that might indicate its date,<sup>124</sup> especially when linked to a group of related texts. This information strongly indicates an earlier date than any date indicated for TGS. The main source of such information in MPNMS is found in an extremely specific and unusual set of endtimes prophecies.<sup>125</sup> As has been shown by various scholars, especially, in recent times, Suzuki Takayasu and Stephen Hodge,<sup>126</sup> these MPNMS-tg prophecies can be connected to secular history with the help of similar material found in a small group of related texts: MM, the \*Mahābherihāraka

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<sup>124</sup> Shimoda (2014): 72-73 concurs that MPNMS may be unusual among Mahāyāna scriptures in the prospects it offers for connection to real-world contexts, but on the rather different grounds that it combines Vinaya-like and Abhidharma-like materials.

<sup>125</sup> For points of comparison, see Nattier's magisterial study of such prophecies (1991); more recently, on prophecies in early Mahāyāna scriptures, especially Prajñāpāramitā, see Watanabe (2009).

<sup>126</sup> Suzuki (1999b, 2000) and other publications cited in discussion below; Hodge (2006, 2010/2012, unpublished).

I should clarify the relationship between my argument here and the ideas of Stephen Hodge, in particular. I am very glad to acknowledge my profound debt to Hodge for first alerting me to the possibility of using the prophecy tradition to consider the likely date of MPNMS (Hodge [2006], and unpublished work). However, in published and unpublished work, Hodge has attempted to show links to geographic and historical actualities to a much greater degree than I require for my argument here.

I have several reasons for restricting my use of Hodge's theories. First, I am privy to some of Hodge's arguments only thanks to his generosity in sharing unpublished ideas, and I wish to respect that confidence. Further, Hodge bases his arguments in some cases on complex "retroversions" of Chinese and Tibetan terms (often triangulated with one another) to Indic equivalents, often via hypothetical Prakrit forms. I do not have the necessary specialist knowledge to evaluate those theories, and I hesitate to build an argument on reasoning that I cannot test myself.

I have therefore restricted myself to discussing a relatively small number of details in the prophecy tradition, which furnish us with the most obvious connections to the Śātavāhanas, Kashmir and Kaniṣka. I think these are sufficient for my present purposes, and I hope this conservative strategy leaves my argument less vulnerable to scepticism. As can be seen from detailed references given below, most of these most obvious connections have been noted by scholars as far back as Demiéville (1924) and Lévi (1936), and also by Tucci (1930): 144-147; and more recently, by Takasaki (1975), de Jong (1978), Mabbett (1993): 29-30, Forte (2005/1976) and Ogawa (2001).

(“MBhH”), and the *Mahāyāna Aṅgulimāliya* (“AṅgM”).<sup>127</sup> Following Takasaki and Suzuki, I will refer to these four texts as the “MPNMS group”.<sup>128</sup>

Before we turn to the prophecies themselves, it is important first to note that the texts in the MPNMS group are not only connected by the prophecies discussed here. The links between MM and MPNMS-tg, for example, are especially close. As we have already noted, MPNMS-tg appears to refer to itself by the title of MM; conversely, it is also true that MM refers to itself as the “\**Mahā[pari]nirvāṇa[-sūtra]*”.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MM also echoes that of MPNMS-tg: MM, too, elaborates that theme in connection with a theme of secret doctrine;<sup>130</sup> it

<sup>127</sup> In using the evidence of the prophecy tradition as reported in MM to suggest the state of affairs in India, we must bear in mind possible cross-contamination between the Chinese and Tibetan versions of the text. See de Jong (1978): 159-161; Radich (forthcoming b); n. 496 below.

Any attempt to use evidence in AṅgM as an indication of the state of affairs in India should similarly be aware of a possible complication in the history of our extant versions of the text. Kanō Kazuo has pointed out that the colophon to the Tabo version of AṅgM states that the Tibetan translation was made on the basis of both a Sanskrit manuscript and, where the Sanskrit was lacking, a Chinese translation (*rgya gar dang | rgya'i dar ma dang gtugs te bgyur cing...*). Kanō also notes that one of the contributors to the translation, Tong Ācārya, is called an “Indian *paṇḍit*” (*rgya gar gyi mkhan po*) in the Tabo colophon, but in other bKa' 'gyurs, he is referred to as a “Chinese translator” (*rgya'i lo tshā ba*); and that it is odd that a Chinese translator should be involved in the translation of a supposedly Sanskrit text; Kanō (2000): 75-76 n. 4; private communication, June-July 2014. I am grateful to Mr. Kanō for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>128</sup> Suzuki (2003): 1015. These texts were first treated as a “group” by Takasaki; see e.g. (1974): 127, 182. For Takasaki, the main feature that united them was their use of the term *dhātu*. Suzuki has since extended Takasaki's analysis considerably.

<sup>129</sup> The self-reference is crystal-clear: the *sūtra* has three names, and one of these is “\**Mahāparinirvāṇa*”, because the *Tathāgata* is eternal and there is no entry into *parinirvāṇa* in the ultimate sense, and because all sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha*, 如是經典凡有三名：一名『大雲』、二名『大般涅槃』、三名『無想』...如來常住無有畢竟入涅槃者、一切眾生悉有佛性、故得名為『大般涅槃』, T387:12.1099a26-b2; Forte (2005): 343-344. Elsewhere, the text is explaining the past of one of its protagonists in *avadāna* style, and says that she made great spiritual progress because she heard the “\**Mahānirvāṇa-sūtra*” briefly from a past Buddha 汝於彼佛暫得一聞『大涅槃經』, T387:12.1098a3.

<sup>130</sup> T387:12.1081a7-8; 1082a7; 1083c3-4; 1084b4-7; 1085a16; 1085c18-26; 1090b5-10; 1090b21-22; 1092b28-29; 1093b25-28; 1096c7-14; 1097a28-b2; 1099c4-6; 1102b19-21. Takasaki has suggested that the prevalence of the theme of secrecy in MM may in part be a pro-

speaks repeatedly of “seeing” *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature;<sup>131</sup> and it talks of sentient beings “having” *tathāgatagarbha*, like a separate entity within them.<sup>132</sup> Like MPNMS-tg, MM is also concerned with “LAN-style” doctrine; one of the *samādhis* featured in MM seems to be what we might call a “*lokānuvartanā* practice”, in which the trainee *bodhisatva* meditates upon docetically producing the appearance of all the acts of the Buddha.<sup>133</sup> MM also preaches a docetic view of the *parinirvāṇa*; and it worries that others will accuse its authors of peddling fake *buddhavacana*.<sup>134</sup> Like MPNMS, MM also teaches the “four inversions” (eternity, bliss, self and purity 常樂我淨).<sup>135</sup> The two texts are also linked as part of a small lineage of texts that preach the ban on meat-eating.<sup>136</sup> There is also a close relation between MM and MPNMS doctrines of *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya*; indeed, Suzuki points out that “almost the same passages [are] shared by both *sūtras*” in relation to this doctrine.<sup>137</sup> In fact, the relationship between the two texts is so close that Suzuki, building on Shimoda’s analysis, has proposed that MPNMS-tg bears the mark of recombination through a relationship of “mutual influence” with MM (I will touch upon

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duct of DhKṣ translating MM freely to incorporate more MPNMS themes; Takasaki (1975): 293. See Appendix 2 below on the theme of secrecy in DhKṣ.

<sup>131</sup> T387:12.1081a7-8; 1081b4; 1082c20; 1085b3-6; 1102c12-16 (as the result of a *samādhi*).

<sup>132</sup> T387:12.1082c12-13; 1085a21-22; 1085c18-26; 1099a8-9; 1100a23-27; 1102a29-b4.

<sup>133</sup> T387:12.1101b17-18; in Tib, greatly expanded by comparison to Ch, Lh 323b ff. Cf. connections between MM and MPNMS in docetic material, as detected by Harrison, discussed above n. 113.

<sup>134</sup> T387:12.1100b19-21.

<sup>135</sup> See esp. extended passages at T387:12.1103c24-1104a21, 1104b8-1105a9; see also 1080 c1; 1081a21-22; 1081b6-7; 1081b24-25; 1082a18; 1082a27-28; 1082b29-c1; 1082c6-7; 1082 c20-21 etc.

<sup>136</sup> Suzuki (1990). The other texts in this group are the *Hastikakṣyā-sūtra*, AṅgM, and the *Laṅkāvatāra*.

<sup>137</sup> Suzuki (2001): 1006. This pattern also includes the “Lifespan” chapter of *Suv*; see Suzuki (1998b). Cf. Radich (2011[2012]).

this point again below).<sup>138</sup> Similar thematic links also exist between MPN-MS and MBhH or AṅgM.<sup>139</sup>

Turning to the prophecies, then, various prophecy passages found in these texts interlock to form a consistent picture of a particular historical context. The prophecies are linked by the unusual timetable of an eighty-year period leading up to a deadline 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*; in addition, a number of highly specific place and personal names allow us to locate the prophecies with unusual confidence in the period of the Śātavāhana kings of the Deccan in the second century<sup>140</sup> and then in the Kashmir/Gandhāra region around the time of Kaniṣka. I will discuss each of these features of the prophecies in turn, treating the evidence of all four texts as a synthetic whole, beginning with MPNMS itself.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Suzuki (2001): 34-38.

<sup>139</sup> For instance, Suzuki argues that the eternity of the Buddha is the main theme of MBhH; Suzuki (1997). MBhH also emphasises the notion of secret teachings, and the secret in question is the docetic reinterpretation of the *parinirvāṇa*; Suzuki 40; see also Suzuki (1996a), esp. 18. MBhH also preaches *ātman*; Suzuki (1995): 41, 45 (Suzuki argues that the nuance of the text's *ātman* doctrine differs from MPNMS, 46, 48, 51). MBhH expounds emancipation in a similar manner to MPNMS; Suzuki 44. MBhH also focuses on *tathāgataḡarbhā*/\**buddhadhātu*; 46-48 (\**buddhadhātu* only occurs once). MBhH also features some docetic themes; Suzuki 49-50. AṅgM takes as its central theme *tathāgataḡarbhā* as the secret teaching of the Buddha; Suzuki (1999a): 438-437.

Of course, there are also key differences in the doctrines and emphases of the various texts in the MPNMS group. See Suzuki's works on the topic (esp. 1997, 2000). However, my main focus here is on the close similarities, as evidence that the texts were produced under similar conditions in closely related contexts.

<sup>140</sup> The Śātavāhana polity seems earlier to have been the scene for the elaboration of ideas about the decline of *dharma* outside of Buddhist contexts, also, as evidenced by the *Yuga-purāṇa*, which Mitchiner places in the late first century B.C.E; Mitchiner (1986): esp. 81-82; also Pollock (2006): 70-71.

<sup>141</sup> The main passages here discussed are:

MM 1: T387:12.1107a8-b11, Lh Tsha 334a7 ff., D Wa 212b5 ff.; Demiéville (1924): 229; Lévi (1936): 116-118; Lamotte (1988): 348-349; Forte (2005): 348-349.

MM 2: T387:12.1099c22-1100a16, Lh Tsha 294a6 ff.; Lévi (1936): 115-116; cf. Takasaki (1975): 295-296; Forte (2005): 343-345. Note that Forte merely follows Lévi in reconstructions of the Sanskrit equivalents of names; Forte 349 n. 47. His work should thus not be taken as representing an independent opinion corroborating those reconstructions. However, see also his discussion 31-33, where he notes



MPNMS-tg has the Buddha prophesy that the text will first flourish for “forty years after my *parinirvāṇa*”, but then it will disappear.<sup>142</sup> Subsequently, however, it will re-emerge when the true Dharma (*saddharma*) has eighty years left in the world. It will flourish most in the first forty years of this eighty year period. In other respects, this period will be a terrible “endtimes of the Dharma”, a common theme in the text.<sup>143</sup> Elsewhere, the text specifies that the endtimes will arrive 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*.<sup>144</sup> The text also prophesies that during the endtimes, it will

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that de Jong (1978), while correcting some details of Lévi’s treatment, corroborated its essentials.

MBhH 1: Lh tsa 165b7-166a3; T270:9.294b27-c6.

MBhH 2: Lh tsa 194a3-7, T270:9.298b27-c2; Lh tsa 199a1-5, T270:9.298c19-26, 299a3-10; Lh tsa 201b4, T270:9.299a15-16.

MBhH 3: Lh tsa 201b4-202a3; T270:9.299a12-27.

ÅngM 1: Lh ma 289a1-292a2; T120:2.537c19-538b29, Ogawa (2001): 144-146; cf. Suzuki (2000): 323-322.

ÅngM 2: Lh ma 305a7-307b5; T120:2.542a6-b23, Ogawa (2001): 161-164; cf. Suzuki (2000): 321.

<sup>142</sup> FX 877a2-3, DhKṣ 398a18-19 (Tib anomalously has “for four thousand years”, *lo bzhi stong gi bar du*, H §307.5). The figure of forty years after the *parinirvāṇa*, and even the possible confusion with or substitution by four thousand years, is paralleled in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasamādhi-sūtra* §13B; Harrison (1978b): 102-103, Harrison (1990): 96-98 and n. 2. I am grateful to Paul Harrison for pointing out this passage (personal communication, July 2013).

<sup>143</sup> 1) Tib H §309.2 (again “four thousand”; cf. n. 142), 6; FX 877a26-b4, DhKṣ 398b24-c1. Note that this prophecy is very close to one of our *tathāgatagarbha* passages, MPNMS 22, which presents the doctrine that all sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha* as the essence of MPNMS and the remedy to the endtimes.

2) Again at Tib H §510.1-3, FX 894c8-10, DhKṣ 421c26. This passage falls between MPNMS 102 and 103, and further, occurs shortly before the “Kashmir” prophecy passage (see below), suggesting that the Kashmir prophecy may be associated with the same timeframe.

<sup>144</sup> *nga ’das pa’i ’og tu lo bdun brgya lon pa na*, Tib H §338.2-3, FX 880a22-28, DhKṣ 402c25-403a1 (and ff., for LAn-style doctrine). We have already noted this passage above as presenting *lokānuvartanā* doctrine; see n. 109(2). It, too, occurs in integral relation with *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine: immediately after MPNMS 24 (which, however, is unique to DhKṣ); but more importantly, in conjunction with MPNMS 25 and 26, where *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is an integral part of discussion of the endtimes.

first flourish in the South, like a plentiful rain of Dharma.<sup>145</sup> It will then move to Kashmir, where it will be neglected and dry up as the rains are swallowed by the earth.<sup>146</sup> It is important, for our purposes, to note that these various prophecy passages (and others) not only fall within MPN-MS-tg, but in several cases, are integrally related with, or closely juxtaposed with, expositions of *tathāgataḡarbhā* doctrine.<sup>147</sup>

The striking figure of “700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*” (hereafter “700 p.n.”) is also found in MM, thus constituting a regular part of this MPN-MS group prophecy complex.<sup>148</sup> This number is key to the argument that

<sup>145</sup> Skt: *ida mahāsūtra...anāgate kāle ; sa[ddhar]mavin[āś]aparame...kṣayaṃ yās[ya]ti ; ida sapta-maṃ nimittaṃ ; saddharmāntardhānasyāśeṣāni sa[mṭ]ji nimittāni jñāta[v]ya... SF 22.6; Tib: *ma 'ongs pa'i dus na...dam pa'i chos 'jig pa'i tha mar...dam pa'i chos nub pa'i ltas*, H §518.3-6; FX: 當來之世...壞亂經法... 正法滅盡衰相, 895a10-12; DhKṣ: 當來之世... 正法欲滅... 正法衰相, 422b18-19. I am grateful to Habata Hiromi for allowing me to cite her unpublished work on this Skt fragment. “The South” is here Skt *dakṣiṇāpatha*. Hodge suggests that more specifically, “the *dakṣiṇā-patha* is the Deccan. Indeed, [‘Deccan’] is actually derived from *dakṣiṇā-patha* via the Prakrit form;” Hodge (2006).*

<sup>146</sup> H §519.9-12; esp. FX 895a14-20; DhKṣ 422b21-24; cf. again SF 22.6, cited in n. 145 above. Note that MPNMS 104 and 105 are found at the start of this passage. Cf. MPNMS 103, upon which it follows immediately; MPNMS 106 follows immediately after (but is found only in DhKṣ). This passage, as we have already noted, also contains (an unusual spin on) the *lokānuvartanā* formula (see above n. 109(10)). It also contains “*mahāmegha*” imagery of Dharma rain, and reference (in Tib and Skt only) to the *Tathāgata*’s “secret speech” (i.e. MPNMS 105).

<sup>147</sup> Other related passages:

- 1) merely speaking of a time “many centuries after my *parinirvāṇa*” (*nga 'das pa'i 'og tu lo brgya phrag mang po 'das pa na*, Tib H §176.1, DhKṣ 386b14, FX merely “an age long after my *parinirvāṇa*”, 869a17-18);
- 2) generic mention of the time when the *saddharma* will die out (without a time-frame): *ngan pa 'byung ba'i tshe dam pa'i chos 'jig pa na*, DhKṣ 如來正法將欲滅盡, FX only 我滅度後 (MPNMS 102).

For close connections to *tathāgataḡarbhā* doctrine, see n. 143, 144, 146 above.

<sup>148</sup> 我涅槃已七百年後, *nga thabs kyis yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa'i 'og tu lo bdun brgya lon pa na*.

In MM 2, the timetable is an anomaly even among this “anomalous” group: 1200 years after the *parinirvāṇa*. This figure is found in Ch only; Tib says only “many centuries after my *parinirvāṇa*” (*nga 'das pa'i 'og lo brgya phrag mang po*, Lh 294a6). Perhaps the anomalous figure of 1200 years, found only in this one passage in DhKṣ, may be somehow connected with the use of MM to justify the reign of Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705), as discussed by Demiéville (1924): 218-230; Forte (2005).

MPNMS-tg is most plausibly to be dated early, and thus requires careful discussion.<sup>149</sup>

First, we should note, with Nattier, that it is “anomalous” to place the endtimes so specifically 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*. That is to say, unlike, for example, “500 years after the *parinirvāṇa*”, the figure of 700 years is not just part of a “prophecy boilerplate” that we might expect authors to trot out automatically. As Nattier herself suggests, this gives these MPNMS prophecies an “*ex post facto*” air, which is to say, the most likely reason for their existence is that they were composed to comment upon a context that was understood by its authors actually to fall 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*.<sup>150</sup>

Of course, we cannot simply treat such numbers as unproblematically indicating simple historical fact. First, the extreme complexity and diversity of Buddhist traditions about the dating of the *parinirvāṇa*, relative to other events, is well known, and amply attested by the vast range of evidence surveyed by contributors to the project on the Buddha’s dates led

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However, if MM and MPNMS are particularly closely related and probably developed in tandem, as Suzuki proposes (2001), the absence of the timetable from MBhH and AṅgM may be because they were composed slightly later, when the 700-year mark had already passed. The timetable may thus have been dropped in case it reduced the perceived relevance of the prophecy and the texts.

<sup>149</sup> In a sense, it is odd that MPNMS dates any events any amount of time “after the *parinirvāṇa*.” The central theme of the entire MPNMS is the doctrine of the docetic *parinirvāṇa*, by which the Buddha does not actually enter *parinirvāṇa* at all. In addition, the text has a structure like that of the “curious incident of the dog in the night-time” (as in the Sherlock Holmes story “Silver Blaze”): the title of MPNMS declares that the text is about the *parinirvāṇa*, and it centres on an already known plot, which pivots on the fact that the Buddha actually dies. In a remarkable plot twist, however, this time, the most significant fact about the *parinirvāṇa* is that it does not actually take place. In fact, at the end of MPNMS-tg (also the end of MPNMS-common as a whole), the Buddha lies down in lion’s pose (SF 24 “on one side”, *eka-pārśve*; FX 右脇著地 899c23; DhKṣ 右脇而臥, 428b11-12). For any Buddhist audience, this would have been interpreted as meaning that he was lying down *on his deathbed*, i.e. was on the very brink of death. Here, however, in a kind of “eternal cliff-hanger”, the text simply ends! In light of this central, determined erasure of the *parinirvāṇa*, it might be thought odd that MPNMS feels so little compunction at using the *parinirvāṇa* as its point of reference for dating its prophecy.

<sup>150</sup> Nattier (1991): 37-40.

by Heinz Bechert.<sup>151</sup> Bechert raises another important factor when he observes, referring to the contribution of Carl J. Classen to the project, that classical traditions often deploy “fictitious numbers” for various reasons.<sup>152</sup>

Against these possible objections, however, we should first consider that there is (at least to my knowledge) no particular symbolic significance to the number 700, or the period of 700 years. In fact, across a broad range of Buddhist texts, the highly specific time “700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*” is quite rare, as can be seen from the examples discussed below.

Second, the main question we need to consider is not the actual absolute date that fell 700 years after death of the Buddha (even if that could be determined with certainty), but the point in time that *the portion of the Buddhist tradition in question would have regarded* as falling then. In this regard, most of the herculean efforts of modern Buddhologists and other specialists to investigate traditions about the date of the *parinirvāṇa* are of relatively little help – first, because they have been overwhelmingly focused on the attempt to determine as accurately as possible matters of historical fact; and additionally, because the figure of 700 years is so rare that it has very seldom entered into their deliberations.

We should also note that when the texts have the Buddha say “700 years after my *parinirvāṇa*”, we cannot be sure that this was intended, or read, to mean “after a full 700 years have elapsed”. Rather, it is also possible that such figures mean something similar to the English expression “in (during) the seventh century after my *parinirvāṇa*”, meaning the period from the 601st to the 700th year inclusive.<sup>153</sup> Thus, even if we were to calculate the time when this period should fall, we would have to build a

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<sup>151</sup> Bechert (1991-1997, 1995b).

<sup>152</sup> Bechert (1995a): 24-25. For the Buddhist case, Bechert gives the example of the number eighteen.

<sup>153</sup> See Matsumura (1997): 37 for a summary of a long controversy on this question in Buddhological scholarship, citing the opinions of Takakusu, Thomas, Barnett, Peri, Franke and Frauwallner. More recently, the possibility that such dates refer to “ongoing centuries” has been raised again by Palumbo, who suggests, in fact, following Falk, that such a system of reckoning might have been peculiar to the Kuṣāṇas; Palumbo (unpublished): 11.

latitude of 100 years into our calculations. However, as I will argue below, it is also not necessary to enter into such calculations at all, for the purposes of the present attempt to situate the MPNMS in time *relative* to other *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures.

Next, I turn to evidence that the date “700 p.n.” is an unusual *type* of date, in the broader context of Buddhist sources. Generally speaking, of course, wording about “a certain number of years after the *parinirvāṇa*” is frequent in Buddhist texts, and is so generic that we cannot justifiably link such dates with particular points in historical time. However, when we examine traditions regarding “700 p.n.”, unusually enough, we can discern an association with a relatively focused time and context. First, as already mentioned, this figure is unusual, which suggests it was not just widespread generic boilerplate. Second, although this means that the quantity of evidence is admittedly small, it is notable that all the solid Indic sources I could find associate this figure with Kashmir/Gandhāra and/or the era or person of Kaniṣka. “700 p.n.” is associated with Kashmir/Gandhāra 罽賓 in the *Za bao zang jing* 雜寶藏經; in this same text, moreover, this time is associated with the era of Kaniṣka.<sup>154</sup> An anonymous preface to \*Saṅgharakṣa’s *Buddhacarita* 僧伽羅刹經序 preserved in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 also states that \*Saṅgharakṣa was born in Surāṣṭra 須賴國 “700 p.n.”, and then went to Gandhāra 捷陀越土, where he became preceptor to “\*Candra Kaniṣka” 甄陀罽膩王.<sup>155</sup> The same time period is also associated with the supposed author of another *tathāgatagarbha* text, \*Sāramati; this time, the link to \*Sāramati points us to Central India as well, but we should not overlook the fact that this

<sup>154</sup> T203:4.483a20-23, Chavannes (1910-1934): 3:82, Willemsen (1994): 178-180. This reference occurs in story no. 91 in the text, which concerns an Arhat named \*Jeyata 祇夜多; in story no. 93, Jeyata is said to be a contemporary of Kaniṣka 梅檀罽尼吒, T203:4.484a12-13, Chavannes (1911): 3:85, Matsumura (1997): 21, 35-36. Willemsen notes that the *Za bao zang jing* as a whole seems to show a particular connection to Gandhāra/Kashmir; 3-4. On complications in the identification of the referent of the toponym “Jibin” 罽賓, which seems to have referred at various times to both Kashmir and Gandhāra, see Kuwayama (1990): 43-53, and Enomoto (1994).

<sup>155</sup> 佛去世後七百年生此國、出家學道遊教諸邦、至捷陀越土、甄陀罽膩王師焉, T2145:55.71b3-5, also found at T194:4.115b18-20, translated in Demiéville (1954): 363-365; see also Matsumura (1997): 21; Palumbo (unpublished): 4-5; Lévi (1936): 86.

tradition comes to us once more via Central Asia (more specifically, Khotan).<sup>156</sup>

The only other mentions of “700 p.n.” that I have been able to find originate in East Asia, and so most likely derive from these Central Asian traditions, quite possibly attesting indirectly to the massive influence of MPNMS itself.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the “*Mahāmāyā-sūtra*” 摩訶摩耶經, probably composed in China in the fifth century, says that Nāgārjuna will appear 700 p.n. to momentarily *stave off* the destruction of the Dharma.<sup>158</sup> The “*Testament of Samantabhadra Bodhisatva Sūtra*” 普賢菩薩說證明經 also features a prophecy placed 700 p.n.; however, this text, which was rediscovered at

<sup>156</sup> Fazang 法藏 (643-712) reports a “tradition of the Western regions” 西域相傳 learnt from his master Devendraprajña (who was Khotanese) that \*Sāramati 娑囉末底, under discussion as the author of the \**Mahāyānadharmadhātunirveśa* 大乘法界無差別論 (T1626, T1627), was “born into a great *kṣatriya* clan in Central India 700 years after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*” 於佛滅後七百年時、出中天竺大剎利種; T1838:44.63c5-6, c14-21; discussed and translated in Silk (unpublished), Appendix 3. On Devendraprajña (including his name), see Forte (1979).

<sup>157</sup> According to Bechert, who bases himself upon private communications from David MacKenzie and Ronald Emmerick, very little is known directly from Central Asian sources about chronology traditions that may have been current there; Bechert (1995a): 32 n. 84.

<sup>158</sup> T383:12.1013c8. This prediction is made in the context of an ongoing timetable extending many centuries more. Utsuo argues that the composition of the *Mahāmāyā* dates between 443 and 479 C.E.; Utsuo (1954): 25[L]; see also Nattier (1991): 168-170. Nattier seems to have been unaware of the possibility that the text was composed in China; however, given that, as Nattier herself notes (215 n. 8), its version of the “Kauśambī story” shares an otherwise unknown detail with MPNMS, we should consider the possibility that aspects of the text in fact derive from MPNMS. On the *Mahāmāyā*, see also Durt (2007, 2008).

On the basis of this passage, some Chinese scholiasts concluded that the period of the “Semblance Dharma” 像法 (on which see Nattier [1991]: 86-89) was to commence immediately after Nāgārjuna’s time. More broadly, an East Asian tradition placing Nāgārjuna 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa* may derive entirely from this text. To give just a few relatively early examples of the popularity of this tradition among Chinese authors: Jizang 吉藏 (549-623) cites this same *Mahāmāyā* passage to date Nāgārjuna to the same period, T1720:34:34.384c13-14; T1824:42.18b26; T1827:42.233a16-17 etc. Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597) (or Guanding 灌頂, 561-632) reports the same date, T1705:33.285b21; Guanding again reports the same tradition, explicitly citing the *Mahāmāyā*, T1767:38:38.100b5-7; Wonch’ŭk 圓測 (613-696) matches Zhiyi verbatim, T1708:33.425b23-24; Falin 法琳 (572-640) reports a similar tradition at greater length, T2110:52.513c3-4.

Dunhuang, bears many features that strongly suggest it was composed in China.<sup>159</sup> Otherwise, I have only been able to find trivial, derivative or irrelevant instances of the mention of 700 p.n.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, outside the MPNMS group itself, such rare mentions of “700 p.n.” as do exist seem to be confined to contexts associated with the person or era of Kaniṣka, with the Kashmir-Gandhāra region (with additional links to central India and Surāṣṭra), and with *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine (in the case of \*Sāramati). This association with Kaniṣka and his era gives us an absolute date with which to associate these traditions – 127 to 151 C.E.<sup>161</sup> As we will see below, this date is all the more significant given its

<sup>159</sup> T2879:85.1366a21 ff. Fu Andun 福安敦 and Gu Zhengmei 古正美 have estimated that this *sūtra* was composed under the Sui. The text was among the sources of the commentary on the *Mahāmegha-sūtra* associated with the reign of Wu Zetian (cf. n. 148); Gao (2004): 295, 297; Forte (2005): 351-364, 370 etc.

<sup>160</sup> Few other traditions are associated with the time 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa* in the Chinese tradition. Jizang reports that the *Abhidharma[-hṛdaya]* was created by Fasheng 法勝 (\*Dharmottara? elsewhere transcribed 達磨多羅, translated 法救 \*Dharmatrāta, cf. T1821:41.11c13-14) at this time, T1824:42.44b26-27; T1853:54.65a29. Jizang also places Harivarman 700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*, T1853:54.65b2-3. Palumbo shows that in other writings (besides the preface to T194 already discussed above, n. 155), Dao’an understood his own time to be a thousand years p.n. This understanding was widespread in several of Dao’an’s contemporaries and immediate successors in China. This understanding meshes well with the calculation of “700 p.n.” to the time of Kaniṣka, especially when we reckon in ongoing centuries. Also compatible with this chronology is a preface to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* 佛般泥洹經 T5:1.175c22-26, which equates 887 p.n. with a year Palumbo argues persuasively should be equated with 358 C.E.; Palumbo (unpublished): 4-7. Yamada Ryūjō 山田龍城 suggested that the *Anan qi meng jing* 阿難七夢經 T494 might also contain a 700-year timetable, but Nattier convincingly rejects this possibility; Nattier (1991): 40-41.

<sup>161</sup> Falk (2001) (2004). If the figure of 700 p.n. indeed overlaps with the reign of Kaniṣka, and if that figure refers to an ongoing century, then defined most broadly, the “700 p.n.” of the prophecy tradition might refer to any time from 28 C.E. (if the hundredth year of the ongoing century falls in the first year of Kaniṣka) to 250 C.E. (so that the first year of the ongoing century falls in the last year of Kaniṣka). However, the later end of this range is rendered quite unlikely by the fact that the prophecy holds that the move to Kashmir will take place in the latter part of the last eighty years within the “700 years”. This would be an odd way of speaking if the actual 700th year was held to have already occurred before the eighty years began. Regardless of these details, however, for our purposes, this broad period of time still implies that MPNMS is most likely earlier than any of our other *tathāgatagarbha* texts.

approximate synchrony with other features of the prophecy tradition in question, which associate the prophecy and the texts it speaks of (and in which it features) with the Śātavāhanas, who were predecessors and rough contemporaries of Kaniṣka. We will return to this point immediately below.

Of course, even if we can determine that there is a close link between “700 p.n.” and this particular period and historical context, a sceptic might always ask why we should believe that the prophecy was written in or close to that time and context, rather than later on. As Lévi has amply shown, the “Śātavāhana king” acquired legendary status in the tradition, and continued to have symbolic value well after his actual historical era.<sup>162</sup> In the case under discussion here, however, that possibility is made quite unlikely by particular features of the prophecy’s contents.

Like MPNMS-tg, other texts in the MPNMS group also feature parts of the pattern in which “the *sūtra*” (usually, presumably, in self-reference to whichever *sūtra* we are reading at the time) is first to circulate for forty years immediately after the *parinirvāṇa*; go into abeyance; reappear eighty years prior to “700 p.n.”; and flourish most in the first forty years of that eighty year period, before entering a difficult time. MM states that the text will circulate for forty years after the *parinirvāṇa* and (later) for eighty years before the disappearance of the Dharma.<sup>163</sup> It will be taken to the North forty years before the demise of the Dharma.<sup>164</sup> In MBhH 1, \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana will preach “this *sūtra*” in the name of the Bud-

<sup>162</sup> Lévi (1936).

<sup>163</sup> T387:12.1099b8-10; Forte (2005): 344. Tib only matches the first half here (*lo bzhi bcu'i bar du dzam bu'i gling na spyod par 'gyur*), and for the second half, merely talks about the latter days, when the Dharma will decline etc. (*de'i 'og tu phyi ma'i dus na dam pa'i chos spong ba dang | rgyal po'i 'khrug pa dang | dam pa'i chos nub par 'gyur ba ma 'ongs pa'i dus*, Lh 292b1-2).

<sup>164</sup> T387:12.1098b20-24. I have been unable to match this passage in Tib. A king is named, 安樂. Note that the Tib *Suhrllekha* names its recipient king, unusually, bDe spyod (other traditions make the recipient a “Śātavāhana”, probably Gautamiputra Śātakarṇi; see n. 481 below), for which Lévi gives Skt *su(sukha)-cara(-cārin* etc.); Tāranātha gives, as equivalent of this bDe spyod (or bDe byed) Utrayana = Udayana; Lévi (1936): 110. This is a reasonable match for Ch 安樂. Thus, we should consider the possibility that this is yet another name for the great Śātavāhana king. Cf. also the MM 2 variant given in n. 172 below.



dha eighty years before the *saddharma* disappears. MBhH 2 says that the text will circulate for the first forty years after the *parinirvāṇa*, and then in the last eighty years before the end of the Dharma; during that time, \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana will be the chosen one who can protect and keep the Dharma (or MBhH itself) (in the South). AṅgM 1 uses elaborate analogies to say that it will be a “difficult deed” to teach the *sūtra* in the last eighty years before the disappearance of the Dharma (which means preaching *tathāgataḡarbha*).<sup>165</sup>

When the prophecies lay out this very particular timetable, then, they also say specifically that the texts in which they feature will be especially useful as an antidote to the dire conditions of the final eighty years. Hodge has cogently suggested that this feature of the prophecies themselves would have given them a “shelf life” or “use-by date”, very close to the actual historical time to which they refer.<sup>166</sup> There would be little “marketing value” in writing such a prophecy if the eighty years in question already lay in the past; it would be like marketing a product today to inoculate computers against the “Y2K bug”. This makes it unlikely that the prophecies would have been composed after the period of which they speak, with reference to a period that was by then a feature of earlier historical memory. Rather, it is most plausible that they were composed to refer to contemporary events.

Not only are the links thus unusually strong (for a Mahāyāna *sūtra*) between MPNMS and a particular era in history. The prophecy tradition we are examining also shows unusually strong associations between the texts, including MPNMS, and particular geographical regions – Kashmir, and “the South”. As we already saw above, the prophecy tradition mentions in several places that the texts in question will originate in the South, and then be taken to the North (MM 2, MBhH 2, MPNMS-tg). Like

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<sup>165</sup> 於未來正法住世餘八十年，安慰說此摩訶衍經常恒不變如來之藏，是為甚難，T120:2.537c21-23). It is also a difficult deed to take up earnest practice after hearing the teaching of *tathāgataḡarbha* in the *sūtra*. Lh ma 289a4-5, T120:2.537c24-25, Ogawa (2001): 144.

<sup>166</sup> Hodge (unpublished). Note that this possibility may be supported by the fact that the specific figure of “700 p.n.” is dropped in MBhH and AṅgM, which may be later; see n. 148 above.

MPNMS-tg, AṅgM 2, in particular, refers specifically to the combination of the South and Kashmir, and to the port of Bharukaccha.<sup>167</sup>

This talk of “the South”, moreover, is only one of many clues that point to a link between this prophecy tradition, and the texts that contain it, and the *Śātavāhanas*. The most significant evidence connecting these prophecies to the *Śātavāhanas* is found in proper names contained in the prophecy passages. A Chinese transcription in MM 2 clearly names the *Śātavāhanas*.<sup>168</sup> The highly unusual MM 1 prophecy is set in South India, and speaks in both Tib and Ch of a country called “Benighted”, probably for Skt \**andha* (“blind”), referring to “Andhra” via Prakrit or creative etymology.<sup>169</sup> It also mentions a river called the “Black”, i.e. the *Kṛṣṇa* (Krishna);<sup>170</sup> and a city called “Richly Endowed”/“Ripe Grains”, probably the Andhra/*Śātavāhana* capital of *Dhānyakaṭaka* on the *Kṛṣṇa* (probably modern *Dharaṇīkoṭā*, near *Amarāvati*).<sup>171</sup> It speaks of a lineage (or king) called *rGud pa gso ba*, which seems to refer to the epithet of *Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi* (r. ca. 86-110), “restorer of the lineage”, known from

<sup>167</sup> Kha che'i yul, 罽賓國; Bha ru ka tsa ba rnam, 伽樓迦車城; Lh ma 306a5, T120:2.542 a23, Ogawa (2001): 161. On the identification of Bharukaccha, see Ogawa (2001): 161 n. 9; Hodge (2006). Bharukaccha is modern Broach/Bharuch, at the mouth of the *Narmadā* in Gujarat; a sometime possession of the *Śātavāhanas*, and also, apparently, of *Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi*'s rival *Nahapāna*. See Lévi (1936): 67-72.

<sup>168</sup> 我涅槃後千二百年、南天竺地有大國、王名娑多婆呵那。法垂欲滅餘四十年... T387:12.1099c22-24.

<sup>169</sup> 南天竺/*lho phyogs kyi rgyud*; 無明/*Mun pa can*, D 212b6.

<sup>170</sup> 黑闇/*Nag po bzang* D 212b6; Lévi (1936): 116-117.

<sup>171</sup> *dPal yon can des pa* D 212b6; 熟穀; Lévi (1936): 117. *Dhānyakaṭaka* was probably the capital of *Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāvi*, at least for a time. However, *Dhānyakaṭaka* is also associated with another set of vigorous Southern patrons of Buddhism, the *Ikṣvākus*, by mention in inscriptions at *Nāgārjunikoṇḍa*; Osto (2008); 108-109, 158 n. 14, 15. Scholars have also disputed whether a key line in *Nāsik* Inscription 3 should be read as *Dhanakaṭa* or *Benākaṭaka*; see e.g. Bakhle (1928): 74, 88-95; Senart (1905-1906): 65, 66 n. 5, 68. On *Dhānyakaṭaka*, see Mabbett (1993), summarising a line of earlier scholarship by Sewell, Fergusson, Burgess, Watters, Bareaud, Vogel, La Vallée Poussin, Tucci, Sircar, Misra, Sarcar, Lamotte and others. Overall, scholars have tended to see *Dharaṇīkoṭā* as the location of *Dhānyakaṭaka*, though two other sites have been proposed. In any case, all proposed sites fall within the same stretch of approximately 100 miles on the *Kṛṣṇa*.

Nāsika Inscription 2.<sup>172</sup> It also mentions a king called variously “Increased Glory” (Tib dPal ’phel) or “Equal Vehicle” (Ch 等乘), probably also to be identified with Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi.<sup>173</sup>

This link between the prophecies and the Śātavāhanas, as I have already mentioned, is roughly compatible with the association of the time 700 years p.n. with the era of Kaniṣka. Historians have had difficulty in establishing the dates of the Śātavāhanas with certainty, but various calculations place them somewhere in the period between 48 and 181 C.E.<sup>174</sup> For our purposes, which are merely to show that MPNMS-tg most likely precedes other *tathāgatagarbha* texts, this suffices, and we need not seek any further precision.

We can analyse these prophecies in light of Nattier’s useful criteria for “extracting historical data from a normative source”.<sup>175</sup> First, Nattier’s “principle of irrelevance” states, “We may draw with some confidence on data...[comprising] items unrelated to the author’s primary agenda.”<sup>176</sup> I have already implicitly applied this criterion above to the time “700 p.n.” To give other examples, there are no discernible symbolic or allegorical reasons that the prophecies should state that the teachings of the text will arrive in the South and then be taken to the North, or Kashmir; that the text will circulate in the final eighty years leading up

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<sup>172</sup> Lh 294a6-7; *śātavāhanakulayaśapratithāpanakarasa*, Senart (1905-1906): 60, 61; cf. Takasaki (1975): 295-296, 301 n. 19. For rGud pa gso ba, cf. brGyud pa gso ba in MM 2 (Lh); var. bDe spyod, “enjoyment, prosperity” (D); cf. also the Tib tradition about the recipient of the *Suhṛllekha*, for which see n. 164.

<sup>173</sup> For dPal ’phel (D 212b7), cf. *yaśapratithāpana* in the epithet just discussed, n. 172. Lévi explains Ch 等乘 as *sāta* “united, equal” = 等; 乘 = *vāhana*, Lévi (1936): 107.

<sup>174</sup> Recent calculations of a “short chronology” place the kings of the second florescence of the Śātavāhanas for whom there is the firmest evidence between approximately 86 and 181 C.E. For a tabulated summary of this chronology, see Sinopoli (2001): 167, after Ray (1986). Sinopoli states that this chronology is more widely accepted; 166. For convenience, dates for Śātavāhana rulers cited in the present study will be taken from this table. For a summary of the evidence for dates in this period, and its problems, see Sinopoli 162-164. Hodge, citing studies by Seeley and Cribb and by Bhandare, follows earlier dates, putting Gautamīputra either in ca. 48-71 C.E. or 60-85 C.E.; Hodge (2010/2012): 31 and n. 54.

<sup>175</sup> Nattier (2003): 63-68.

<sup>176</sup> Nattier (2003): 66.

to “700 p.n.”, or that those eighty years will be divided into two forty-year periods differing in character. Likewise, the principle of irrelevance also directs us to pay special attention to the identification of very specific places, again without apparent allegorical value.

In addition, while I have so far confined myself to principal features of the prophecies, which can be identified with some confidence with particular places and contexts, this prophecy complex also contains an unusual wealth of other such detail, which I have relegated to Appendix 3. In the absence of any obvious symbolic overtones, those details, too, should be interpreted in accordance with this same “principle of irrelevance”; even if we cannot identify their referents, they strengthen the general impression that the texts were written to refer to a very concrete context, probably contemporary with authorship of the text.

Further, Nattier’s “principle of embarrassment” (the term itself derives from New Testament studies) states: “When an author reveals... something that is quite unflattering to the group or the position that he or she represents, there is a high degree of probability that the statement has a basis in fact.”<sup>177</sup> This principle is also germane in considering the historical value of this group of prophecies. In a tradition dominated by patriarchal values, for example, MM 1’s motif of the “wheel-turning queen” might be a potential “embarrassment” in this sense.<sup>178</sup> This principle also applies to the fact that instead of depicting their proponents as triumphantly sweeping all before them, these *sūtras* depict them encountering hostility, persecution, and frequent criticism of their texts and teachings as forgeries and the lies of Māra.<sup>179</sup>

In combination, then, all these factors make it likely that the prophecies of the MPNMS group were indeed composed in the temporal and geographic contexts they depict – in the eighty-year period leading up to the time that the authors of the texts regarded as falling “700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*”, in the South under the Śātavāhanas, and then in “Kashmir” roughly in the era of Kaniṣka.

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<sup>177</sup> Nattier (2003): 65.

<sup>178</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>179</sup> See Appendix 3.

As further circumstantial but not conclusive evidence for the date I am suggesting, we might also note that the production of the endtimes thinking of MPNMS (especially MPNMS-tg) in this time and place would be consonant with the conclusions reached by Nattier in her study of the roots of endtimes doctrine in the “Kauśāmbī story”.<sup>180</sup> According to Nattier, “The earliest surviving sources are unanimous in attributing [the] catastrophe to failings on the part of Buddhists themselves.”<sup>181</sup> Nattier argues that the Kauśāmbī story “took shape during the period 100-250 C.E.” in “the far northwest of India, and possibly...Gandhāra itself”. She further argues that the story “makes sense as the product of a Kushan environment”, suggesting that the combination of monastic corruption and lavish but wrongheaded royal patronage, which is key to the plot, might reflect the concerns of a “cultural golden age” in which “Buddhist subjects of a cosmopolitan realm...enjoy[ed] all the spiritual and material benefits afforded by the long-lasting *pax kushanica*.”<sup>182</sup>

The features observed by Nattier in the Kauśāmbī story fit with patterns in MPNMS-common (again, mainly MPNMS-tg), including the specific inflection of endtimes doctrine, and its socio-economic context. A central motif in MPNMS is recurring, vituperative jeremiad against monks greedy for “profit and patronage” 貪求利養. For the sake of profit, they cosy up to kings and courtiers, and flatter their patrons; they preach the Dharma for profit, and they also associate with precept-breakers if there is profit in it.<sup>183</sup> Out of this same greed for profit, evil *bhikṣus* might even rejoice that the Tathāgata enters *parinirvāṇa* - while he was in the world, he stood in the way of their profiteering (利, *lābhasatkāra*); but now that he is gone, there will be nobody to stop them, and they can take back for themselves the “profit and patronage of the Ta-

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<sup>180</sup> Although a version of the Kauśāmbī story does appear in MPNMS (Natter [1991]: 215 n. 8), the fact that it falls in DhKṣ-unique makes it irrelevant to the present analysis. Rather, my focus here is upon broader relations between the Kauśāmbī story and the type of endtimes doctrine found in MPNMS-common.

<sup>181</sup> Nattier (1991): 120. Some of the reflections that follow here were stimulated by Eltschinger (2010).

<sup>182</sup> Nattier (1991): 224-227; see also 284-286.

<sup>183</sup> DhKṣ 384b12-28; cf. Tib H §155, FX 867a27-b6; SF 10 (Matsuda [1988]: 70-71).

thāgata” 如來利養。<sup>184</sup> One vivid passage caricatures the psychology of a scheming false pretender to high spiritual status and its rock-star perks:<sup>185</sup>

“How shall I make the people of the world recognise me for sure as a mendicant, and therefore, make it so that I achieve fame and fortune 利養名譽?...In truth, I have never attained [any of] the four fruits of the monastic life 四沙門果<sup>186</sup>—but how can I get the people of the world to say I have? And how can I make *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* all point at me and say, ‘That man is [full of] merit; he is a real saint?’” [Then] he thinks, “[Thus,] only out of greed for gain, and not out of any quest for the Dharma, [let me,] wherever I go, in public or in private, walking or resting, maintain a tranquil demeanour; hold my alms bowl without ever breaking with proper deportment; and sit alone in desolate places like an Arhat, to make all the people of the world say, ‘This is the best sort of *bhikṣu*; he is ardent in his austerities, and practices the Dharma [that leads to] peace and cessation.’ Because of this, I will win lots of followers and disciples, and people will give me lots of offerings, and clothes, and food and drink, and beds, and medicine, and I will also make lots of women respect me and love me.”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>184</sup> DhKṣ 399a12-18; cf. Tib H §314, FX 877c12-16 (in FX only, those who think this are identified as non-Buddhists (外道, \**tīrthikas*); SF 16.9.

<sup>185</sup> Note that Karashima has proposed that in its original meaning, the very term *icchāntika*, for which MPNMS is so notorious, referred to those who falsely make such claims (√iṣ); Karashima (2007).

<sup>186</sup> I.e. the status of “stream-enterer” (*śrotāpanna*), “once-returner” (*sakṛdāgamin*), “non-returner” (*anāgamin*) or Arhat.

<sup>187</sup> 「云何當令諸世間人，定實知我是乞士也？以是因緣，令我大得利養名譽....我實未得四沙門果，云何當令諸世間人謂我已得？復當云何令諸優婆塞優婆夷等，咸共指我作如是言：『是人福德，真是聖人。』」如是思惟：「正為求利，非為求法。行來出入、進止安詳，執持衣鉢，不失威儀，獨坐空處如阿羅漢，令世間人咸作是言：『如是比丘善好第一，精勤苦行修寂滅法。』以是因緣，我當大得門徒弟子。諸人亦當大致供養、衣服飲食、臥具醫藥，令多女人敬念愛重，」 DhKṣ 405b19-c5; cf. Tib H §358, FX 882a16-21.

Further, if the invective of the text itself is any indication, it seems that some monks in its context did in fact accumulate wealth (otherwise its polemic would be rendered implausible). The text rails against various types of illicit wealth, which the text famously epitomises in a rubric of “eight impure objects”.<sup>188</sup> Another passage paints bogus monks coveting wealth and appurtenances of station such as “royal parasols, jars of oil, grains, fruit and melons”.<sup>189</sup> In yet another passage, the miscreants are parodied as declaring:

The Buddha has permitted *bhikṣus* to keep slaves and impure objects, [such as] gold, silver, jewels, hoards of grain, cows, sheep, elephants and horses; and to trade [in such things] for profit. Because he takes pity on his children in times of famine, he permits *bhikṣus* to keep reserves in store and produce food by their own hand, [so that they may] eat without receiving from others.<sup>190</sup>

Of course, we should not too hastily conclude that this pattern is a “smoking gun” that necessarily points to the Kuṣāṇa era. In his study of the *Rāṣṭrapālāpariṣcchā-sūtra*, for instance, Boucher has also linked similar complaints of corrupt monastic practice, and an endtimes mentality, to the sociological and economic conditions that would have attended the rise of a “highly organized, sedentary monastic system with a complex administration...[and] legal system”, and the widely evidenced accumulation of significant monastic wealth.<sup>191</sup> However, the evidence of succes-

<sup>188</sup> 八不淨法, DhKṣ 401a20-b8; 八種不淨之物 400b23. As Blum points out (Bl 353 n. 95), the text never specifies what these eight things are: “Two lists commonly cited are: gold, silver, male and female slaves, cattle, stores, and farmed crops; and cultivated lands, personally farmed crops, stores of grain or cloth, servants, animals or birds, money or jewels, cushions or pans, and furniture decorated with ivory or gold.”

<sup>189</sup> DhKṣ 384b13, Tib H §155.2-3. FX differs in gist here, saying that a true Dharma-preacher and precept-keeper can possess such things without compromising his proper monastic practice; 867a27-b1.

<sup>190</sup> 佛聽比丘畜諸奴婢、不淨之物，金銀珍寶、穀米倉庫、牛羊象馬，販賣求利，於飢饉世憐愍子故，聽諸比丘儲貯陳宿，手自作食，不受而噉， DhKṣ 401c26-29. I cannot find a parallel to this sentence in Tib or FX.

<sup>191</sup> Boucher (2008/2011): 67-68, following Schopen’s extensive work on monasticism in the “Middle Period of Indian Buddhism” (the first half of the first millennium). See also more generally Boucher 64-68, 71, 78, 83, 140-144.

sive Chinese translations would seem to indicate that much of this material found its way into the *Rāṣṭrapālāpariṣcchā* later than the period that concerns us here (between Dharmarakṣa and \*Jñānagupta, i.e. sometime between 270 and 585). Nonetheless, some material in the earlier layer also echoes similar concerns:

They will value worldly goods...be avaricious for upper-class patrons... covetous of reputation....They will enter a village for the sake of seeking profit...these ignoramuses will assert themselves wise.... they will take satisfaction in the teaching...only for profit...they will assert about themselves “we are ascetics” only for the sake of reputation and profit... Desirous of profit, [the corrupt bodhisattva] goes to the wilderness, but there he only seeks material gain...<sup>192</sup>

The case of the *Rāṣṭrapālāpariṣcchā* seems to show that these issues remained alive later than the Kuṣāṇa period. In addition, Boucher has shown that some of these complaints already find precedents in Mainstream canonical (Pali) materials.<sup>193</sup> It is therefore not my intention to claim that the presence of this material necessarily links MPNMS to the Kuṣāṇa context. However, as I stress elsewhere in this book, all our arguments are probabilistic, and we are better to regard ourselves as in

<sup>192</sup> *āmiṣapriyās ca bhaviṣyanti...kulamatsarāḥ... kṣātragarukāḥ...lābhaparyeṣṭyartham ca te grāmaṃ pravakṣyanti...te ajñānino jñānanimittam ātmānaṃ pratijñāsyanti... lābhāmātrakeneha śāsane tuṣṭim utpādayiṣyanti...jñātralābhāmātrakena śrava[>ma]ṇāḥ sma ity ātmānaṃ pratijñāsyanti... lābhārthiko 'raṇyam upeti vastum gaveṣate tatra gataś ca....*, RP 2, prose prologue and v. 2.4, Finot (1901): 34-36, Boucher (2008/2011): 142-144; cf. Boucher 108-109. Some passages in the later layer of RP, though they probably reflect a later period, may also give us an idea of the way the Indic MPNMS might have sounded: “They keep cows, horses, asses, livestock, male and female slaves. These ignoble ones are continually preoccupied with agriculture and trade” (*gogardabhāśvapaśudānāt saṃbhavate hi dāśya pi teṣāṃ | kṣīkarmavānījyaprayogā yuktamanās ca te 'niśamāryāḥ*), RP 1 v. 180, Finot 29, Boucher 138 (cf. 234 n. 237); “They will have stores like householders, possessing many goods and attendants” (*grhiṣaṃcayās ca bhavitāras te ca prabhūtabhāṇḍaparivārāḥ*), RP 1 v. 200, Finot 31, Boucher 140; “Alas! When many monks have appeared who are preoccupied with profit and inimical to virtue, it won’t be long before the teaching of the most excellent of Victors hastens toward ruin” (*hā śāsanam jinavarasya nāśam upekṣya hi nacireṇa | lābhābhībhūta guṇadvīṣṭā bhikṣavaḥ prādurbhūta bahu yatra*), RP 1 v. 202, Finot 31, Boucher 140.

<sup>193</sup> Boucher (2008/2011): 69-71, citing texts in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and *Theragāthā*.



search not of hard facts, but of the best hypothesis. In this light, the resonance of the MPNMS version of endtimes doctrine with the pattern discerned by Nattier in the Kauśāmbī story at least serves to show that the concerns of the text are consonant with the same date and geographic origin suggested by our other evidence.

One objection against the use of the above prophecy traditions to date MPNMS specifically as a *tathāgatagarbha* text is that MPNMS was, by all accounts, composed in stages. We must therefore consider the possibility that the prophecies and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine belong to different strata of the text, and different periods in its development. However, the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the texts of the MPNMS group cannot easily be dissociated from their prophecies. Rather, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is intimately intertwined with the prophecies in key passages. For example, MBhH 3 speaks of the rain of Dharma and the docetic display of *parinirvāṇa* (mounted by none other than \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana, on whom see Appendix 3). We have seen these themes elsewhere. The same passage also appears to refer to MBhH itself by creative epithets or descriptions that could be mistaken as titles.<sup>194</sup> In AṅgM 1, it is a difficult deed – proper to the difficult times prophesied – to take up earnest practice after hearing the teaching of *tathāgatagarbha* in the *sūtra*; and the text is itself called “this Mahāyāna *sūtra* which preaches *tathāgatagarbha*”.<sup>195</sup> AṅgM 2 echoes these ideas, adding the detail that the key teaching is that *tathāgatagarbha* (interchangeably with the *Tathāgata*) is eternal, changeless, sempiternal etc.<sup>196</sup> In MPNMS-tg itself, finally, prophecies about the

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<sup>194</sup> Tib: *rnga bo che chen po'i mdo las gsung pa'i chos kyi dung dang chos kyi rgyal mtshan sgrog par 'gyur ro || gnyis pa theg pa chen po'i mdo stong pa nyid kyi gtam smra bar 'gyur ro || gsum pa sems can gyi khams rtag pa'i gtam dang | rnga bo che chen po'i mdo'i gtam smra bar 'gyur ro*, Ch: 為說大法鼓經、第二為說大乘空經、第三為說眾生界如來常住大法鼓經. The impression that these are not fixed titles is increased by the variation between Ch and Tib. In connection to *sems can gyi khams rtag pa'i gtam*, note that both Tib and Ch speak of the *sūtra* as preaching a doctrine that the \**sattvadhātu* (the *dhātu* within beings?) is eternal.

<sup>195</sup> Lh ma 289a4-5, T120:2.537c24-25, Ogawa (2001): 144; *theg pa chen po'i mdo sde de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po ston pa de ni*, Lh ma 289a2-3, T120:2.537c21-23, Ogawa (2001): 144.

<sup>196</sup> Lh ma 305a7-307b5; T120:2.542a6-b23, Ogawa (2001): 162-164.

move of the text to Kashmir, etc., occur cheek by jowl with key passages advocating *tathāgatarbha* doctrine.<sup>197</sup>

In sum, we have an unusual wealth of evidence upon the basis of which to consider the likely date of MPNMS-tg. It is most likely that the tradition represented by the texts had its start in a period proponents regarded as leading up to the time “700 p.n.” Depending upon whether or not the authors of the texts counted completed or ongoing centuries, this could mean either after 700 years had fully elapsed since the *parinirvāṇa*, or sometime in the seventh century after the *parinirvāṇa*. The additional specifications in the prophecies about the eighty-year period leading up to this date gives us, perhaps, a broadest possible range of 520–700 years after the *parinirvāṇa*. However, in evaluating this tradition, what matters is less the exact point in time at which we might calculate this date against our own historical understanding of the Buddha’s actual dates, and more the period that the authors of the texts themselves would have thought to correspond to this dating. In this regard, as we have seen, there are indications that the very unusual figure of “700 p.n.” was important specifically in the Kashmir/Gandhāra region, and associated with the era of Kaniṣka.

In addition, we also have evidence that the group espousing these texts, and the life of the texts themselves, probably began in the South, in Andhra country, under the Śātavāhanas, in a time when Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi or his name was influential.<sup>198</sup> Chronologically speaking, this aspect of the tradition is roughly compatible with the possibility that the group that produced MPNMS and related texts would have moved to Kashmir, forty to eighty years after its inception, to arrive approximately under the reign of Kaniṣka.

In fact, in light of other details in the prophecies (discussed in Appendix 3), it seems that the group met with various vicissitudes. It probably

<sup>197</sup> See e.g. the passages discussed above n. 143, 144, 146, 147.

<sup>198</sup> For a variety of reasons, some better than others, scholars have long associated Andhra country with a nexus of Mahāsāṃghika and *tathāgatarbha* doctrine. See e.g. Barber (2008); Wayman (1978): 42–43. Hodge points out that archaeological evidence shows that the Mahāsāṃghika were influential in Śātavāhana territory, dovetailing with Shimoda’s evidence of connections between MPNMS-dhk and their Vinaya (see n. 114 above).

began in a situation of relative obscurity and neglect (as Shimoda has argued, pointing to passages about travelling through dangerous hinterlands), but may then have won royal sponsorship and become less itinerant and more sedentary. However, it perhaps only enjoyed this comfort for a short time before again falling on hard times and being forced to move to “the North”, in a region then thought of as part of “Kashmir”. A central figure in the group, moreover, may have been someone called \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana.

For our present purposes, however, these additional details are dispensable. The most important finding of this examination of the prophecy tradition in the MPNMS group is that in comparison to the vague situation that usually prevails with most Mahāyāna (or indeed, Indian) scriptures, these prophecies provide us with unusually strong reasons to believe that the text was closely associated with a particular point in time, falling around the era of the florescence of the Śātavāhana kings and Kaniṣka. For the purposes of my present argument, it suffices to observe that this period must fall somewhere in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. As I will now attempt to show, this is significantly earlier than any sound dates we might associate with any other *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures.

### 3.2 Independent evidence for the absolute dates of TGS

Against this rich evidence suggesting a close relation of MPNMS-tg to a specific historical time and geographic place of origin, we have far less independent information to help us date TGS. Such evidence as we do have does not give us sufficient grounds to believe that the text is older than MPNMS-tg.

Zimmermann concludes that TGS probably dates to the middle of the fourth century (ca. 350 C.E.) at the latest.<sup>199</sup> The main evidence for this conclusion is: 1) the *terminus ad quem* in the Buddhahadra translation of the early fifth century; 2) information in the Chinese bibliographic tradi-

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<sup>199</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 79.

tion about a possible earlier translation by Faju 法炬 (fl. 290-306),<sup>200</sup> and 3) the fact that TGS is cited in RGV, taking RGV itself to date to the late fourth century.<sup>201</sup> Even if we allow that this estimate is conservative, and the text might be up to a century older (as Zimmermann himself suggests), this is too late, on the evidence we have studied, to make it necessarily earlier than MPNMS-tg.<sup>202</sup>

Zimmermann argues that other evidence also places TGS before MM: a list of plant products (“fruit of a palmyra palm, a mango tree and a cane”) is shared by the two texts.<sup>203</sup> As we have seen above, the relationship between MPNMS-tg and MM is very intimate, and they must derive from nearly the same milieu. If Zimmermann’s conclusion were true, then, it would probably imply that MPNMS-tg was also later than TGS. However, even if the trope of this group of plants is indeed unique to these two texts, there is nothing about the evidence that Zimmermann presents to show the direction of borrowing, and it could equally be the case that TGS took it from MM.

We have already examined above apparent instances in which MBhH and AṅgM refer to “TGS”, and shown that these are likely to be self-references to the text, perhaps as “a *tathāgatagarbha sūtra*”, as in MPNMS-tg. Thus, we also have no strong reasons to suppose a relative dating of TGS earlier than MBhH and AṅgM.

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<sup>200</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 71-73. Zimmermann concludes that it is not possible, on the basis of evidence presently to hand, to decide for certain whether this translation was really of TGS, but that we should therefore not dismiss the possibility. However, Faju was active from approx. 290-306, and such a translation would still not necessarily show that TGS dates before MPNMS-tg.

<sup>201</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 77-79. Zimmermann bases his date for RGV on Schmithausen’s complex work on the relationships between RGV, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, LAS and the *Triṃśikā*.

<sup>202</sup> One circumstantial piece of evidence that perhaps suggests that TGS is later than MPNMS-tg is that TGS is not defensive about its doctrine. Zimmermann has argued on similar grounds that the *Sadāparibhūta* story in SP seems to reflect an earlier stage of development of the doctrine, because it describes harsh reactions from detractors; Zimmermann (2002): 79-80. In this connection, see once more my comments above p. 33.

<sup>203</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 89, and n. 198.

Thus, in sum, we have no strong reasons to regard the absolute date of TGS as earlier than 250 at the earliest.

### 3.3 Summary

Thus far in this chapter, we have examined evidence for the independent dating of MPNMS-tg and TGS respectively. The MPNMS group prophecy tradition seems to link the composition and initial circulation of MPNMS-tg to the period from the late first to the mid-second century C.E. The exposition of this prophecy tradition is intimately linked with the exposition of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, so that we have no reason to separate parts of the text exposing this doctrine from parts supporting this date and provenance. By contrast, we have no strong evidence that allows us to date TGS before 250 at the earliest, and more conservative estimates of its date place it as late as 350.

In combination with the re-evaluation in Chapter 2 of the internal evidence scholars usually use to date TGS earlier than MPNMS, these findings mean that although TGS is usually taken to be our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* text, MPNMS-tg is most likely earlier. However, before concluding that MPNMS-tg is in fact “our earliest” such text, we should compare it with other *tathāgatagarbha* texts that scholars usually regard as early. In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to show that there are also no strong reasons to regard any other *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures as earlier than MPNMS-tg.

### 3.4 Takasaki’s chronology: The *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* and *Śrīmālādevīsīḥanāda-sūtra*

In his monumental work reconstructing the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, Takasaki Jikidō not only regards TGS as earlier than MPNMS, but places the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa* (“Anūn”) earlier too.<sup>204</sup> He also

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<sup>204</sup> Takasaki generally treats MPNMS as a single unit (though see Takasaki [1974]: 182) for brief contemplation of an alternative scenario, in which MPNMS is stratified). Thus, for the purposes of this discussion of Takasaki’s arguments, it will usually not be use-

grapples with the problem of whether the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda* (“Śrīm”) might be earlier than MPNMS.<sup>205</sup> Thus, before we can conclude that MPNMS-tg may be our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* text, we must also consider Takasaki’s somewhat complex arguments in favour of his chronology.

First, when Takasaki posits the chronology TGS → Anūn → Śrīm, he relies heavily on what he sees as the gradual development of a model of “three stages” (*san bun’i* 三分位) in the soteriological development of sentient beings:<sup>206</sup>

- 1) In TGS §6B, on Takasaki’s reading, *sattva* (“beings”) are already divided into three groups:<sup>207</sup>
  - i) “[the sentient] being”, *sattva* (*sems can*, 有情), which Takasaki thinks is described in the following passage: “...the true nature (*dharmatā*) of a tathāgata, being in the womb (*garbha*)<sup>208</sup> inside the sheaths of [such] defilements [as] desire, anger, misguidedness, longing and ignorance...”

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ful to distinguish between MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg. I will occasionally make this distinction, nonetheless, where it clarifies what is at stake for my own argument.

External evidence for the dating of Anūn is particularly sparse. The text is preserved only in one Ch translation (T668), by Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (?-527) in the early sixth century. The best we can say is that it must be prior to RGV, which quotes it; i.e. earlier than about 350 C.E.

<sup>205</sup> The chronology TGS → Anūn → (Śrīm) → MPNMS underlies the arrangement of Takasaki’s book (Takasaki [1974]), and presentation of his evidence and arguments in favour of that chronology thus occupies much of Part 1, Ch 1 (1.1, 1.2, 1.3), and Ch. 2.2, i.e. pp. 39-190 (see also, however, Ch. 3.1, 376-401, on MM). See particularly 41, 46, 48, and passages discussed below. See also 769 (table).

<sup>206</sup> Takasaki (1975): 62-63, 73-79, 113-114.

<sup>207</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 127, 294-295: *de la ’dod chags dang | zhe sdang dang | gti mug dang | sred pa dang | ma rig pa’i nyon mongs pa’i sbubs kyi nang na snying por gyur pa de bzhin gshegs pa’i chos nyid de ni sems can zhes bya ba’i ming du chags so || de la gang bsil bar gyur pa de ni mya ngan las ’das pa ste | ma rigs pa’i nyon mongs pa’i sbubs yongs su sbyangs pa’i phyir || sems can gyi khams kyi ye shes chen po’i tshogs su gyur pa gang yin pa de ni rnyed pa’o || sems can gyi khams kyi ye shes chen po’i tshogs dam pa de ni | de bzhin gshegs pa ji lta ba de bzhin du smra bar lha dang bcas pa’i ’jig rten gyis mthong nas | de bzhin gshegs pa zhe bya ba’i ’du shes du byed do ||*

<sup>208</sup> Tib *snying por gyur pa*, \**garbhagata*, \**garbhasṭha*?; Zimmermann (2002): 127 n. 159.

- ii) “the [core] element or common domain of [the sentient] being”, *sattvadhātu* (= the *bodhisatva*; see below), described thus: “When it has become cool, it is extinct (*nirvṛta*). And because [it is then] completely purified [from] the sheaths of defilements of ignorance, [it] becomes a great accumulation of knowledge<sup>209</sup> [in the] realm of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*).”
- iii) the Tathāgata: “The world with [its] gods (*sahadevo lokah*), having perceived that supreme, great accumulation of knowledge [in the] realm of sentient beings speaking like a tathāgata, recognizes [him] as a tathāgata.”

Takasaki himself says that the division into three stages is not particularly clear here. I presume that by this he refers to the fact that it seems that (2) and (3) actually both refer to the same stage, that of the Tathāgata. However, he also refers to TGS § 9B.<sup>210</sup>

[Using] the *vajra*[-like] hammer of the Dharma, the Tathāgata then hews away all outer defilements in order to entirely purify the precious tathāgata-knowledge of those *bodhisatva-mahāsattvas* who have become calm and cool.

Takasaki further refers to TGS §8B.<sup>211</sup>

It will happen that one day the tathāgata [who has] entered [and] is present within you will become manifest. Then you will be designated “*bodhisattva*”, rather than “[ordinary]

<sup>209</sup> *ye shes chen po'i tshogs.*

<sup>210</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 141-142, 318-319: *de la byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po gang dag zhi zhing bsil bar gyur pa de dag gi de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes rin po che yongs su sbyang ba'i phyir | de bzhin gshegs pa chos kyi rdo rje'i tho bas phyi rol gyi nyon mongs pa thams cad 'gogs so ||*

<sup>211</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 137-138, 310-311: *khyed la de bzhin gshegs pa zhugs pa yod pa dus shig na 'byung bar 'gyur te | khyed byang chub sems dpa' zhes bya ba'i grangs su 'gro bar 'gyur gyi | sems can zhes bya bar ni ma yin no || der yang sangs rgyas shes bya ba'i grangs su 'gro'i | byang chub sems dpa' zhes bya bar ni ma yin no...*

sentient being (*sattva*). [And] again in the next stage you will be designated “buddha”, rather than “bodhisattva”.

On this basis, Takasaki argues that (ii) above refers to the *bodhisattva*, yielding a three-stage model: *sattva* → *bodhisattva* [*bodhi-sattva*] = *sattvadhātu* → Tathāgata.

- 2) In Anūn, this threefold division is taken as the basis for the doctrine of the three stages of the *\*dharmakāya*:<sup>212</sup>
  - i) The *sattvadhātu* (or merely *\*sattva*<sup>213</sup>), referring to the *\*dharmakāya* “concealed in a limitless sheath of defilements” (*aparyantakleśakośakoṭigūḍhaḥ*).
  - ii) The *bodhisattva*, referring to the *dharmakāya* when it has become averse to the suffering of *saṃsāra* and has begun practicing for the sake of awakening;
  - iii) The Tathāgata, referring to the *dharmakāya* when it has been completely liberated from the sheaths of the defilements (*sarvakleśakośaparimukta*).
- 3) In Śrīm, this model is echoed in the formulation, “Precisely this *dharmakāya*, when it is not liberated from the sheath of the defilements, is termed *tathāgatagarbha*.”<sup>214</sup> It is also echoed in the line, “Whoever does not have doubt concerning the *tathāgatagarbha*

<sup>212</sup> Takasaki (1975): 73, 93 n. 12, 77-79; referring to T668:16.467b6-16, Skt in RGV, Johnston (1950): 40.16-41.5, cf. Takasaki (1966): 231-233: *ayam eva śāriputra dharmakāyo 'paryantakleśakośakoṭigūḍhaḥ | saṃsārasrotasā uhyamāno 'navarāgrasamsāragaticyuty-upapattiṣu saṃcaran sattvadhātur ity ucyate | sa eva śāriputra dharmakāyaḥ saṃsārasrotoduḥkhanirviṇṇo viraktaḥ sarvakāmaṣayebhyo daśapāramitāntargatais caturaśītyā dharmaskandhasahasrair bodhāya caryāṃ caran bodhisattva ity ucyate | sa eva punaḥ śāriputra dharmakāyaḥ sarvakleśakośaparimuktaḥ sarvaduḥkhātīkrāntaḥ sarvopakleśamalāpagataḥ śuddho viśuddhaḥ paramapariśuddhadharmatāyāṃ sthitaḥ sarvasattvalokaniyāṃ bhūmim ārūḍhaḥ sarvasyāṃ jñeyabhūmāv advitīyaṃ pauraṣaṃ sthāmaprāpto 'nāvāraṇadharmāpratihatasarvadharmaiśvaryaabalatām adhigatas tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddha ity ucyate |*

<sup>213</sup> Ch 眾生, T668:16.467b8, as opposed to *sattvadhātu* in the quotation in RGV. For discussion of this difference, see Takasaki (1975): 78.

<sup>214</sup> *ayam eva...tathāgatadharmakāyo 'vinirmuktakleśakośas tathāgatagarbhaḥ sūcyate*, RGV Johnston (1950): 12.14, Takasaki (1966): 167.



[as it is] concealed in the sheath of countless defilements, will also have no doubt concerning the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata [as it is] liberated from the sheath of all the defilements.”<sup>215</sup> Takasaki argues that Śrīm’s use of this formula is later than Anūn partly because it refers to it as a known quantity, rather than explicating it.

Takasaki also argues that Śrīm is later than Anūn on the basis of the use of other terms, such as *amuktajñā/amuktajñāna*;<sup>216</sup> and on the grounds of perceived broader doctrinal developments.<sup>217</sup> For our present purposes, however, it is most important to focus on aspects of his arguments with implications for the dating of MPNMS relative to these other texts.

Takasaki argues that Anūn is earlier than MPNMS primarily because he reconstructs the history of the term *dhātu* in *tathāgatagarbha* discourse as follows, partly on the basis of the succession traced above:<sup>218</sup>

<sup>215</sup> yo...sarvakleśakośakoṭigūḍhe tathāgatagarbhe niṣkāṅkṣaḥ sarvakleśakośavinirmuktes [read: -vinirmukte, with Takasaki 312 n. 16] *tathāgatadharmakāye* ‘pi sa niṣkāṅkṣa, RGV Johnston (1950): 79.11-12, Takasaki (1966): 312.

<sup>216</sup> Takasaki (1975): 82-84, 114. In the first part of its definition of *dharmakāya*, Anūn says that it is inseparable from qualities of wisdom (*avinirbhāgajñānagaṇa*) more numerous than the sands of the Ganges; T668:16.467a19-26, RGV Johnston (1950): 39.5-8, Takasaki (1966): 228-229. Takasaki argues that this usage develops on the basis of the ordinary terms *avinirbhāgadharman* or *avinirmuktagna*, under the influence of the term *tathāgatajñāna* as it is used in the *Tathāgatotpattisambhava-nirdeśa*, and then in TGS (as an equivalent for *tathāgatagarbha*). In Śrīm, a further step occurs when *amuktajñāna* is used as a modifier to describe “Buddha *dharmas* more numerous than the sands of the Ganges”: T353:12.221c10, RGV, Johnston (1950): 12.11-13, Takasaki (1966): 167-168, n. 29; the epithet *amuktajñā* is missing from Skt, but is in Śrīm, \**Anuttarāśraya-sūtra* 無上依經 T669, and *Foxing lun* 佛性論 T1610. The gist of Takasaki’s argument is that these terms could develop thus from Anūn to Śrīm, but not the other way around.

<sup>217</sup> For example, Takasaki claims that Śrīm inherited from Anūn the identification of *tathāgatagarbha* and *dharmakāya*, and worked out the unresolved problem of its relation to *saṃsāra* and the *kleśas*; Takasaki (1975): 111. The answer is Śrīm’s doctrine of “empty” and “non-empty” *tathāgatagarbha*, which thus represents a further step from Anūn; 114-117, 120. A doctrine connected to the “non-empty aspect”, viz. the “four inversions” or “four perfections” (eternity, bliss, self and purity; *nitya*, *sukha*, *ātman*, *śubha*; 常樂我淨) shows that Anūn is earlier than Śrīm, because it is absent in Anūn but present in Śrīm; 115-116.

<sup>218</sup> See especially Takasaki (1975): 75-76, 85-89, 167; Takasaki (1965): 99.

- 1) The term has its seeds in the single instance of *\*sattvadhātu* in TGS §6B, as already seen above.<sup>219</sup>
- 2) In Anūn, *\*sattvadhātu* is identified with the *dharmakāya*.<sup>220</sup> The concept is further enriched by the following steps:
  - i) It is articulated with the term *\*dharmadhātu* (法界).<sup>221</sup> Takasaki takes Anūn to allude to the *\*dharmadhātu* in the classic Mahāyāna sense of the domain or essence of all *dharmas*, as viewed in truth (which he also takes to have already been present in TGS in *\*dharmatā, chos nyid*).
  - ii) The term *\*ekadhātu* (一界) is used to express the unity of *tathāgatagarbha* with the qualities of the Buddha (*\*buddhaguṇāḥ, \*buddhadharmāḥ*).<sup>222</sup>
  - iii) The term *\*sattvadhātu* (眾生界), derived from the single TGS usage, is applied to emphasise this unity, by emphasising that this “single domain/realm/element” inheres within (ordinary) sentient beings.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>219</sup> So far as I can determine, this is the only instance of *\*sattvadhātu* in TGS. Otherwise, *\*dhātu* occurs in TGS mainly in the sense of “world” (*jig rten gyi khams, khams gsum*; §0D, §0J, §8.4, §10B, §10E, §11B, §11D, §11G).

<sup>220</sup> 不離眾生界有法身、不離法身有眾生界。眾生界即法身、法身即眾生界, T668:16.467b16-18.

<sup>221</sup> 一切愚癡凡夫、不如實知一法界故、不如實見一法界故、起邪見心、謂眾生界增眾生界滅, T668:16.466b8-10; 我依此不生不滅常恒清涼不變歸依不可思議清淨法界、說名「眾生」。所以者何?言「眾生」者、即是不生不滅常恒清涼不變歸依不可思議清淨法界等異名, 467c10-13.

<sup>222</sup> T668:16.466c29-467a7.

<sup>223</sup> Takasaki himself notes that *sattvadhātu* is a relatively unusual term. He states that it is found only in Buddhism, and even then, is unattested in Pāli materials; Takasaki (1975): 75. More recently, however, Silk has noted an instance of *sattvadhātu* in an inscription discussed by Sanderson; Silk (unpublished): 14 n. 56, citing Sanderson (2009): 71 n. 85. The term *\*sattvadhātu* is attested, in a Prākṛit form *sattadhāuṃ*, in a verse of LAn cited by Candrakīrti; Harrison (1982): 225-226 (I am grateful to Paul Harrison for pointing out this instance; personal communication, July 2013).

- 3) In MPNMS, the term *\*buddhadhātu*/*\*tathāgatadhātu* is coined, on the basis of Anūn’s *\*sattvadhātu*, as an equivalent of *tathāgatarbha*. (It is important for us to note, in preparation for later discussion following Shimoda below, that in considering this development, Takasaki only ever considers abstract, doctrinal meanings of *dhātu*; he never considers a possible relation to the meaning “relic”.)

In this process, the meaning of *tathāgatarbha* shifts as follows:<sup>224</sup>

- 1) In TGS, it is a *bahuvrīhi*: *sarvasattvās tathāgatarbhāḥ*.<sup>225</sup>
- 2) Building on this *bahuvrīhi* interpretation, the formula “All sentient beings have a *tathāgatarbha*” comes to mean that all sentient beings have within them the same nature (*tokushitsu* 特質, *honshitsu* 本質) as a Tathāgata. *Garbha* thus comes to mean “embryo”. The doctrine comes to mean that sentient beings will become Buddhas in future, and are causes of buddhahood.
- 3) It becomes possible for the meaning of the TGS formula to shift to *\*sarvasattveṣu tathāgatarbho ’sti = \*asti tathāgatarbhaḥ sarvasattveṣu*.
- 4) On this basis, MPNMS applies the “technical term” (*jutsugo* 術語) *dhātu*, meaning both “nature” and “cause”, to this *dharmatā* of the Tathāgata = cause of the Tathāgata, yielding the formula *\*asti buddhadhātuḥ sarvasattveṣu*.<sup>226</sup>

<sup>224</sup> Takasaki (1975): 178.

<sup>225</sup> Takasaki interprets this phrase to mean, “All sentient carry within them [= are pregnant with] the Tathāgata 一切衆生は如来を内に宿すものたちである,” i.e. he reads *-garbha* as meaning “womb”, yielding “All sentient beings have a womb of the Tathāgata;” Takasaki (1975): 178.

<sup>226</sup> It is ironic how close Takasaki comes here, in his Step (3), to what we have seen above is most probably the actual formula in SF underlying MPNMS-tg 一切衆生悉有佛性 – seemingly without realising it. However, he may then go a bridge too far in his Step (4), which may therefore be a red herring. At least, we have no attested Skt in MPNMS-tg that comes as close to (4) as we do for (3). See discussion of MPNMS 33 above, p. 25.

On these bases, Takasaki is unequivocal that he thinks Anūn precedes MPNMS.

Takasaki is much less certain about the likely chronological relation between Śrīm and MPNMS, but in the balance, he is inclined to think that Śrīm is probably earlier. His main reason is that MPNMS uses the term *\*buddhadhātu* quite copiously, whereas in Śrīm, *dhātu* is used almost not at all.<sup>227</sup> In making this judgement, Takasaki is heavily influenced by the fact that he perceives *dhātu* as an abstract, *śāstric* (*rontenteki* 論典的) term; and also by his consistent assumption that greater abstraction indicates later developments.<sup>228</sup>

Note, however, that Takasaki himself is not unequivocal about this judgement. For example, he also says that he “hesitates” to say MPNMS is later than Śrīm, because both Śrīm and Anūn are quite standardised and systematised, whereas MPNMS is somewhat chaotic and inconsistent, suggesting a doctrine in the process of formation.<sup>229</sup> Indeed, he even says that MPNMS looks older than Anūn and Śrīm in discussions of the four epithets of permanence (*nitya*, *śāśvata*, *dhruva*, *śiva*) and the “four inversions” (permanence, bliss, self, purity).<sup>230</sup> It is only the fact that these two texts do not use, and “therefore” do not know, the “important and useful” term *dhātu*, that outweighs these other types of evidence in his mind, and tips the balance to show that MPNMS is later.<sup>231</sup> Elsewhere, Takasaki considers the possibility that Śrīm and MPNMS are close contemporaries, and might have mutually influenced one another; or that both might have been influenced by some third source (for the four “inversions”).<sup>232</sup> He also considers an alternate scenario in which MPNMS might be complex and stratified, yielding a chronology MPNMS(old) →

<sup>227</sup> Takasaki (1975): 111-112, 768.

<sup>228</sup> Takasaki (1975): 177, 180-181; Takasaki (1965): 94, 97.

<sup>229</sup> Takasaki (1975): 169, 177.

<sup>230</sup> Takasaki (1975): 119-120, 167.

<sup>231</sup> “正にこの重要で便利な用語の使用がない故に、『不増不減経』と『勝鬘経』は、この語を知らなかった、従って、二経は『涅槃経』よりも古い、と断言したいところなのである;” Takasaki (1975): 177-178.

<sup>232</sup> Takasaki (1975): 181.

Anūn → Śrīm → MPNMS(new).<sup>233</sup> On the whole, however, Takasaki holds that MPNMS is certainly later than Anūn, and probably later than Śrīm.

Thus, largely on the basis of a hypothetical development in the term *dhātu*, through several intervening terms, to the *\*buddhadhātu* of MPNMS, Takasaki holds that MPNMS is later than Anūn (which, for him, is later than TGS), and probably also later than Śrīm.<sup>234</sup> He further characterises the lineage TGS → Anūn → Śrīm (→ RGV) as “orthodox” or “mainstream”, against which MPNMS represents the inception of a “branch” or “side-line”, characterised by the use of the (“heterodox”?) term *\*buddhadhātu* – comprising, basically, the texts of the MPNMS group.<sup>235</sup>

There is no doubt that Takasaki’s brilliant and erudite observations uncover important relationships between TGS, Anūn and Śrīm in particular. However, the evidence he points to does not necessarily compel us to accept his chronology. This is, first, because his analysis in general rests upon several questionable assumptions:

- A “higher degree of abstraction” can be used as a sign of a later date.
- Ideas uniformly develop over time to become clearer, more standardised, and more sophisticated, and to work out conceptual problems implied by earlier phases of development. Takasaki implicitly excludes the possibility of reverse types of development (e.g. when a later author is a less clear thinker, or rejects “solutions” of his predecessors).
- *Tathāgatagarbha* texts were conservative, in the specific sense that they would normally take over and preserve the terms of their predecessors. Thus, if a term is absent from Text A but present in Text B, Text B is probably later than Text A.

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<sup>233</sup> Takasaki (1975): 182. Note that this “MPNMS(old)” and “MPNMS(new)” would not map onto my MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg.

<sup>234</sup> The dangers of constructing chronology entirely on the basis of perceived doctrinal developments are illustrated by the fact that Oda sees Anūn as *later* than Śrīm, also on the basis of such criteria; Oda (1993): 575-577.

<sup>235</sup> Takasaki (1975): 84-85. See n. 17 above.

- All *tathāgataḡarbha* texts extant at a given point in time knew one another.
- The texts of the *tathāgataḡarbha* tradition normally relate to one another as part of a unilinear development, like beads on a string. (The sole exception that Takasaki makes to this assumption, in regard to the texts that concern us here, is to treat the MPNMS group as a branch or side-line development.)
- RGV can be taken as a guide to the reconstruction of the chronology of *tathāgataḡarbha* scriptures.<sup>236</sup> (This assumption may be reasonable to a certain point, but it also runs the risk of anachronism.)

Second, Takasaki does not always apply these assumptions consistently. For example, although he sometimes assumes that texts should conserve the terminology of their predecessors, at other times, he entertains the possibility that a text has deliberately excluded terms that it knew from a predecessor.<sup>237</sup> Again, Takasaki holds that Anūn articulates clearly the relationship between *dharmakāya* and *tathāgataḡarbha* (via the notion of *sattvadhātu*). However, if we assume that subsequent texts conserve the advances of their predecessors, this leaves unexplained the fact that this same relationship between *dharmakāya* and *tathāgataḡarbha* is for Takasaki almost completely obscure in MPNMS (and should therefore make Anūn later than MPNMS).

Most important for our present purposes, however, are the parts of Takasaki's analysis that might prevent MPNMS-tg being earlier than other *tathāgataḡarbha* scriptures. As we have seen, Takasaki judges that MPNMS is later than Anūn and Śrīm almost entirely on the basis of his hypothetical ordering of developments in the use of the term *dhātu* – even to the extent that (in the case of Śrīm) he allows this consideration to override other, possibly contrary evidence. Moreover, his judgements about the order of these developments rely heavily in turn upon his perception of the degree of abstraction in the term *dhātu* (e.g. in comparison

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<sup>236</sup> Takasaki (1975): 48, 69, 117-119.

<sup>237</sup> E.g. Takasaki (1975): 181-182.

to the term *garbha*). However, to anticipate Ch. 6, the fog that enshrouds these arguments evaporates in the strong light of Shimoda's penetrating insight that much of the doctrine of MPNMS, and the term *\*buddhadhātu* in particular, should be interpreted in relation to relics (*dhātu*). This gives us a much simpler explanation for the adoption of the term *\*buddhadhātu* in MPNMS. In fact, in this light, if we were to apply consistently Takasaki's own criterion of concreteness versus abstraction (which I entertain here only for the purposes of argument), *dhātu* as "relic" is much more concrete than *dhātu* in the rarefied and etiolated senses of *dharmadhātu*, *sattvadhātu* etc. as found in Anūn; so that by that yardstick, too, MPNMS should be earlier.

If we set aside these arguments adduced by Takasaki, examination of Anūn also shows no other, firmer grounds upon which to judge its relation to MPNMS. The notion of *sattvadhātu*, central to Anūn, is certainly found in MPNMS-tg, where it seems to be particularly closely associated with the discernment of the correct understanding of the newly Buddhist doctrine of *ātman* (e.g. MPNMS 38, 41, 48, 78). However, the *sattvadhātu* of Anūn, by contrast, is identified with the *dharmakāya*; is called "the one *dhātu*"; and is the basis upon which the text teaches its eponymous doctrine that there is neither increase nor decrease (viz. in said *sattvadhātu-cum-dharmakāya*).<sup>238</sup> This is all quite different from the way the term *sattvadhātu* is used in MPNMS-tg.

Anūn also differs from MPNMS-tg in numerous other significant details. Anūn teaches the eternity of the *dharmakāya*, which reminds us of MPNMS-common's concern with the eternity of the Buddha in the *dharmakāya*. However, Anūn again differs from MPNMS-common in explaining that the *dharmakāya* is eternal in virtue of the Buddha's identity with the Dharma; in adding the predicates of "cool" and "unchanging" to the *dharmakāya*; and in making it the *dharmakāya* that is "encased in defilements".<sup>239</sup> Anūn mentions the *icchantika* once, but without apparently feeling any need to explain the term, which suggests that it is already known from another context.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Anūn only mentions *tathāgata*-

<sup>238</sup> T668:16.467b16-18, 466c29-467a5.

<sup>239</sup> T668:16.467b1, b2; 467b3-5; 467b6-7.

<sup>240</sup> T668:16.467c23-24.

*garbha* twice: 1) in order to identify it with both *sattvadhātu* and *dharmakāya*, in a manner unknown to MPNMS-common; and 2) to expound a complex threefold rubric of its relation to i. pure *dharmas*, ii. impure *dharmas*, and iii. the “eternal *dharmatā* coterminous with the ultimate limit”.<sup>241</sup> None of this treatment of *tathāgatagarbha* has parallels in MPNMS-tg.

Again, like MPNMS-tg, Anūn contains a prophecy about the decline of the Dharma, including worries about false monks. However, this surface similarity is belied by the details. The Anūn prophecy features the common timetable of 500 years after the *parinirvāṇa*, rather than the distinctive 700-year MPNMS timetable.<sup>242</sup> We also find none of the other specific identifying features of the MPNMS group prophecy discussed above. Anūn also says that one of the reasons that people hold the false view (of “decrease and increase”) is that they “do not know the *parinirvāṇa* of the Tathāgata as it really is”, apparently referring, more specifically, to the fact that they fall prey to extinctionist views through misunderstanding of the *parinirvāṇa*, and thereby conceive of the “decrease” (reduction) of the actually immutable *sattvadhātu*.<sup>243</sup> This view has a broad relation to the docetic *parinirvāṇa* espoused by MPNMS, but the manner of its exposition is not specific enough to allow us to postulate a close relationship between the two texts.

Thus, while the general atmosphere of Anūn shows it to share broad concerns with MPNMS-common, no details of the internal evidence show that relationship to be particularly close, nor do they allow us to determine the direction of the relationship.<sup>244</sup> From external evidence, on the other hand, the best we can say is that Anūn must be prior to RGV, which quotes it; i.e. earlier than about 350 C.E. This is not early enough to make it necessarily earlier than MPNMS-tg.

<sup>241</sup> T668:16.467a18-19, 467b20-c10.

<sup>242</sup> T668:16.466b11.

<sup>243</sup> 不如實知如來大涅槃故 T668:16.466b25; T668:16.466b25-26; cf. also 466c1-2.

<sup>244</sup> We might also note that Anūn, in Ch, apparently mentions once “conforming with the world” 隨順世間, but context, and Skt extant in RGV, shows that this is not the *lokānuvartanā* formula; T668:16.467b6-7; Takasaki (1965): 107, citing RGV 40.16-41.5.



In a similar vein, Suzuki thinks that similarities between Anūn and MBhH show that MBhH borrowed from Anūn and is later than it. Given that MBhH is, by Suzuki's reckoning, later than MPNMS-tg, this need not prevent us dating MPNMS-tg earlier than Anūn; but given that the prophecy traditions examined above closely associate both MPNMS-tg and MBhH with the same rough historical context, Suzuki's evidence, if correct, might suggest that MPNMS-tg is also later than Anūn. However, I can see nothing in Suzuki's evidence that shows that the borrowing must have gone from Anūn to MBhH, rather than the other way around, or from a third (perhaps unknown) common source.<sup>245</sup>

In sum, there is no solid reason to regard Anūn as earlier than MPNMS-tg. There is even less reason to assume that Śrīm is earlier than MPNMS-tg. The earliest external evidence we have for Śrīm, to my knowledge, is: citations in RGV; the translation by Guṇabhadra (394-468), T353; and the Schøyen manuscript, which Sander dates "into the 5th century".<sup>246</sup> This evidence does not allow us to conclude that the text existed any earlier than the fourth century.

### 3.5 Chronological relations between MPNMS-tg and other texts in the MPNMS group

For some of the purposes of this study, it would suffice for the texts of the MPNMS group as a whole to be probably earlier than other *tathāgata-garbha* texts. Chronological relations between the individual texts of the MPNMS group are thus not as important as relations between the MPNMS group as a whole and other *tathāgata-garbha* scriptures. However, it is worth observing that our best indications are that MPNMS-tg (perhaps

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<sup>245</sup> Suzuki (1997): 43-44, esp. n. 12; 45. Epithets of the Tathāgata appear in the same fixed order in both texts; MBhH also features the idea that the *sattvadhātu* knows neither increase nor decrease. Another instance of an (implied) progression from Anūn → MPNMS, without any particular reasons being given, is Grosnick (1977): 30. Silk, by contrast, opines (plausibly, to my mind) that Anūn is not particularly early, based upon the "terse manner in which it introduces each of its key terms, almost without exception free from explanation or argument"; Silk (unpublished): 8.

<sup>246</sup> Sander (2000): 293.

alongside MM) also probably represents the earliest phase among texts in the MPNMS group.

The best evidence we have for the date of MM is the extremely close pattern of relation between prophecy traditions common to it and MPNMS-tg (and MBhH and AṅgM), as already discussed above. The most reliable evaluation of the relative dates of MPNMS-tg and MM is Suzuki's theory (partly following Shimoda), that the two texts formed in a process of "mutual influence"; thus, we should not assume that either has clear chronological precedence over the other.<sup>247</sup> Otherwise, MM is quoted very briefly in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* ("LAS"), and its title is mentioned in the *Mañjuśrīpariṣcchā* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* ("MPPU").<sup>248</sup> Chinese translations of these texts give a *terminus ad quem* of roughly the fourth century.

As for MBhH and AṅgM, Suzuki regards both as later than MPNMS-tg. He also treats both as later than MM, and MBhH as later than AṅgM.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Suzuki seems at first to propose clear priority of MM: "MPN[M]S seems to have been expanded to Group 2 under the influence of the MM[S];" (2001): 1005. However, a page later, he makes it clear that influence was bidirectional: "mutually influenced...each other;" 1004. In other work, however, Suzuki seems to espouse a simpler model of MPNMS-dhk → MM → MPNMS-tg; Suzuki (2003); Suzuki (2002): 1015-1014. See now also Suzuki (2014): 176-178. None of the evidence Suzuki discusses seems to me to necessarily require us to posit borrowing from MM to MPNMS-tg, where the two overlap in ideas.

Note, however, that Takasaki has argued that MM precedes MPNMS. He bases his judgement on the fact that MM does not include the "four inversions" (eternity, bliss, "self" and purity 常樂我淨), which he regards as characteristic of the phase of *tathāgatagarbha* history represented by Śrīm and MPNMS (without considering it possible to determine which of those two texts first elaborated the doctrine); and that MM does not feature the term *\*buddhadhātu*, which he regards as having been introduced by MPNMS; Takasaki (1975): 293-295. Obviously, like many of Takasaki's other claims about relative chronology, this judgement rests on the assumptions that the various *tathāgatagarbha* texts usually knew one another, and conserved all important material from their predecessors.

<sup>248</sup> Suzuki (1998b): 5, 41 n. 14. Given problems surrounding the authorship and compilation of MPPU, we should not follow Suzuki in thinking that we can therefore place MM before Nāgārjuna.

<sup>249</sup> Suzuki (1997): 44-45, 52, 53; 50; Suzuki (2000): 320-318. He suggests that MBhH may be even later than AṅgM; (1997): 48. One of the main reasons that Suzuki concludes that

This yields an overall relative chronology running MPNMS/MM → MBhH → AṅM. In terms of absolute dates, Suzuki follows Takasaki in regarding MBhH as dating to the mid-fourth century, with a *terminus ad quem* for MBhH in the Guṇabhadra translation of ca. 435-436.<sup>250</sup> This evidence, too, suggests that MPNMS-tg is earlier than these other texts in the MPNMS group.

### 3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has examined independent evidence, including both external evidence and hints from prophecies contained in some texts, for the absolute dates of TGS and MPNMS-tg; and evidence and arguments pertaining to both relative and absolute dates that might help us place MPNMS-tg relative to Anūn, Śrīm, and other texts in the MPNMS group (MM, MBhH and AṅM). In sum, I have argued that the evidence of the prophecy complex common to the texts of the MPNMS group gives us relatively strong reasons to place MPNMS-tg in the second century C.E. By contrast, we have no strong reasons to place TGS so early. I have also argued that Takasaki's arguments placing MPNMS (which he treats as a whole) later than Anūn and Śrīm are not persuasive, and that even when we set his arguments aside, we do not have any strong reasons to place Anūn and Śrīm earlier than MPNMS-tg. Finally, I have also argued that within the MPNMS group, our best evidence to date, as identified by Suzuki, is that MBhH and AṅM are later than MPNMS-tg, and MM may be approximately of the same vintage as MPNMS-tg.

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AṅM precedes MBhH is the use of the tell-tale term *phan par ston pa* = 安慰說者 (\**hito-padeṣṭr*) to name the proponents of the text; Suzuki (2000).

<sup>250</sup> Suzuki (1996a): 3-4.



## II The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* and the Origins of *Tathāgatagarbha* Doctrine

### Introduction

In Chapter 1, I argued that we have every reason to regard MPNMS-tg as a “*tathāgatagarbha* text” – at least as much reason as we do for TGS – rather than treating it, as Takasaki does, as a side-line or offshoot development in the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. In Chapter 2, I argued that the reasons for which scholars have usually taken MPNMS-tg as later than TGS – apparent mention of TGS by title, and the presence of a common simile in both texts – are not, in fact, sufficient to show that MPNMS-tg is later than TGS. In Chapter 3, I argued that we have stronger evidence for an early absolute date for MPNMS-tg than for TGS, and in fact, that the evidence for an early date is stronger for MPNMS-tg than for any other *tathāgatagarbha* scripture.

Taken together, these arguments in Part I mean that MPNMS-tg is the *tathāgatagarbha* text that we have the strongest grounds to regard as early, with the possible exception of MM (which may be of approximately the same vintage). On this basis, I propose that we should regard MPNMS-tg as “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* scripture.

If correct, this finding is significant, first, because it allows us to say that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is *at least* as old as MPNMS-tg. Previously, where scholars assumed that TGS was the earliest text, the date of that text (as late as ca. 350, according to Zimmermann) would have been taken as the approximate period in which *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine originated. I believe the arguments presented here give us quite strong grounds to hold that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine dates to the second century. This obviously has numerous potential implications for how we think the doctrine might relate to other developments in the history of the Mahāyāna, and its broader historical contexts.

However, as I mentioned in the Introduction to Part I, when I call MPNMS-tg “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text, I have in mind more than the mere task of establishing chronology. Rather, I intend this revision of our chronological assumptions to prepare the ground for a heuristic exercise in the interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and its history. If we consider MPNMS-tg as our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* text, what might that perspective suggest about the context in which the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* was first elaborated, and factors contributing to this new doctrinal development?

This heuristic exercise will be the focus of Part II. In Chapter 4, I will argue that in the context of MPNMS-tg, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is closely related to Mahāyāna docetism about the corporeal existence of the Buddha. Viewed within the frame of the larger patterns of docetic thought, *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine can be regarded, more specifically, as a positive, soteriologically efficacious, religiously valorised substitute for one particular life-phase in the Buddha’s fleshly existence, namely, his conception, gestation and birth. In Chapter 5, I will build on the work of Shimoda Masahiro to articulate this understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, as a piece of a larger pattern of positive corollaries to docetic Buddhology, with the way *tathāgatagarbha* is related to Buddha relics in MPNMS (both MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg).

Schmithausen’s criteria for a “scenario of origin” for Buddhist concepts

In examining MPNMS-tg for clues about the origin of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, I will apply a methodology loosely modelled on that used by Lambert Schmithausen in his study of *ālayavijñāna*. I have adapted this method to some degree, but I take Schmithausen’s method to consist of two basic steps, which looks for three elements:

- 1) Identify “the earliest pertinent source” for the concept.<sup>251</sup>
- 2) Look for a “systematic/dogmatical or exegetical situation” that

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<sup>251</sup> Schmithausen (1987): 1:11.

- i) could have motivated the introduction of the new concept, and
- ii) can also “render fully plausible the choice of the term” [used to label the concept].<sup>252</sup>

These steps allow us to identify what we might call a “scenario of origin” for the concept under study, just as Schmithausen identifies an “Initial Passage” for *ālayavijñāna*.<sup>253</sup> In order to clarify exactly what I think can be achieved by such a method, I believe that it is important to add one caveat, and one observation.

First, the caveat: Our evidence may not allow us to definitively determine which extant text(s) or passage(s) featuring a given concept are earliest. It is also possible that our record does not preserve the first context in which a concept was elaborated. I have tried to highlight this problem by consistently speaking of MPNMS-tg as “our earliest source” for *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, rather than “the earliest source”. However, this limitation on our powers need not make us throw up our hands in utter despair. We need only keep clearly in view that our task is to determine, *as best we can with our evidence*, what was *the most likely* point of origin and set of reasons for the elaboration of a concept; and bear in mind that any result so derived is *our best hypothesis*, without claiming that it is a totally objective fact.

We should also observe that the two main steps in the method outlined above are not entirely independent. Of course, as much as possible, we should first determine which text(s) or passage(s) are most likely to be our “earliest source”, on grounds independent of doctrinal content.

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<sup>252</sup> Schmithausen (1987): 1:14-15.

<sup>253</sup> Schmithausen (1987): 1:18 ff. We might also facetiously speak of a “primal scene” for the concept. I mean this crude psychoanalytic joke to point readers to a dimension of the problem of the origin of *tathāgatagarbha* that I cannot explore in detail here, which I also do not intend to address myself in any future work. Suffice it to say: 1) As I will argue below, some of the roots of the problem may be found in a matrix that links *tathāgatagarbha* to the problem of maternity. 2) Our curiosity about origins here overlaps oddly with that of early Mahāyāna Buddhists themselves. Where they ask: “Where do Buddhas come from?” we ask: “Where did *tathāgatagarbha* come from?” Cf. Cole (2005); Kosawa (1931, 1953).

However, the second step also presents a criterion that makes it more likely that a text or passage shows us something close to the origin of a concept. If we can identify in a given context motives for the introduction of the new concept, and reasons for its name, that makes it more likely that the concept was new in the context in question. It is less likely (though not impossible) that a new concept will first appear in a context where the concept and its name appear entirely unmotivated. Of course, whether or not such a motive is discernible lies partly in the eye of the beholder. However, once more, all this means is that a result is our best hypothesis, and not an incontrovertible objective fact.



## 4 *Tathāgatagarbha*, the Problem of Maternity, and Positive Corollaries to Docetic Buddhology

“Be as I am – the primal mother, eternally creative beneath the surface of incessantly changing appearances, eternally forcing life into existence, forever satisfying myself with these changing appearances!”

– Nietzsche<sup>254</sup>

In this chapter, I will undertake the first part of the heuristic exercise proposed above. On the basis of the presumption that MPNMS-tg is “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text, as argued in Part I, I will ask what light might be shed on the origins of the concept by the doctrinal context of MPNMS-tg. This exercise can also be regarded as a kind of exploration of an “imaginative logic” or “root metaphor”. I will argue that this dimension of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS-tg can only be properly understood in light of a much further-reaching set of motifs in the Buddhist *imaginaire*, which may serve as a subterranean link between domains of Buddhist ideology and practice that we sometimes treat as more distinct than they deserve, including Abhidharma, “high” Mahāyāna doctrine, relic worship, and narrative literature.

### 4.1 Terms

A key claim in this chapter is that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is part of a far-reaching pattern related to docetic Buddhology. I will use the terms “docetism”, “docetic” etc. to refer to ideas holding that the Buddha’s appearance and action in the world is in some sense only an appearance

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<sup>254</sup> Nietzsche (1872): 80.

(Gk. *dokesis*, “semblance, appearance”, *dokein* “seem, appear”).<sup>255</sup> The corollary of such docetism is that the reality of the Buddha’s true nature, being etc. differs in some significant respect from that appearance. In using the term “docetism”, which is obviously derived from a specific context in Christian history, I do not mean to imply any particular degree of comparative or historical affinity with the doctrines of the Christian sect of the Docetae.

In its classic form, docetism is usually framed in negative terms, and it is also most natural to conceive of it negatively. That is to say, docetic Buddhology is first and foremost about what and how the Buddha is *not* – generically speaking, that the Buddha is not really as he appears. However, it will also be key to my argument below to establish that such negative claims can also be attended and reinforced by positively framed corollaries. That is to say, as an extension of the more readily recognisable, negatively framed docetic denial that the Buddha was the ordinary human he appeared to be, positive statements are advanced about the kind of being he was instead. Those positive statements, too, are an integral part of the overall pattern of docetic thought.

I will further propose that it is useful to posit two types of positive corollary for negatively framed docetic Buddhology.

Some positive corollaries of docetic Buddhology are still what we might roughly call “material”. They propose that Buddhas, of their nature, have special qualities or powers, which are yet broadly recognisable as visibly manifesting themselves in the physical world, broadly defined, as it is understood in traditional Buddhist cosmology. For example, ordinary human bodies have such shortcomings as weakness, or susceptibility to harm. It is proposed that Buddhas, by contrast, are physically so strong that even in advanced old age, they can fling about massive boulders with gay abandon, or that they are immune to sickness or injury. Such positive claims extend the pattern of docetic thought elsewhere expressed by the negative denial that Buddhas have ordinary human bodies, but they still present Buddhas as having visible bodies that behave recognisably like other bodies. The key difference is that the Bud-

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<sup>255</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Docetae”; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Docetae”.

dha's body, like that of the "bionic man" in the old TV series, is "better...stronger".

However, I will also propose that other positive corollaries of docetic Buddhology are more radical, and break with the domain of the visible and material altogether. In these corollaries of docetic Buddhology, the true nature of the Buddha is often presented as pertaining only and entirely to the realm of ultimate reality and final liberation. For convenience, I will characterise this set of positive corollaries of docetic Buddhology as *soteriological*, inasmuch as they often relate to the soteriological goal and/or means to its realisation; and *transcendent*, in the sense that they often present Buddhas, in their true nature, as entirely beyond the fold of the *saṃsāric* world.

To anticipate, then, the central claim of this chapter will be that the *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine of MPNMS should be interpreted as a positive, soteriological-transcendent corollary to more stereotypical docetic denials of the Buddha's ordinary human embodiment. In order to explain fully what I mean by this claim, however, it will be necessary first to sketch a broad background, drawing on a range of Buddhist literature.<sup>256</sup>

## 4.2 Docetism as a corporeal issue

The problem of the nature of the Buddha's body, and the implications of the Buddha having a body at all, is central to Mahāyāna docetic Buddhology.<sup>257</sup> In other words, this docetism is, to its core, a corporeal issue.

The first extended exposition of docetism in MPNMS, for instance, closely parallels parts of the *Lokānuvartanā-sūtra* ("LAN").<sup>258</sup> MPNMS de-

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<sup>256</sup> In earlier drafts of this work, I characterised my claims by saying that *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine is a form of "kataphatic gnostic docetism". See Appendix 5.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Harrison (1995): 14-15.

<sup>258</sup> 內藏百寶經 T807. For Tib of LAN, I refer primarily to the sTog Palace version, bKa' 'gyur, mdo ste vol. zha 239a-246a = Arabic numeral pagination 477-491; I used pdf scans of the text from E. Gene Smith's Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (accessed through the Harvard University Library web portal, 13 April 2007). I also checked the text against the Derge (sDe dge) version of the text, bKa' 'gyur, mdo ste vol. tsha 303a-308a = Arabic numeral pagination 605-615; for this text I also worked from TBRC pdfs,

nies the reality of the Buddha's apparently marrying and begetting his son Rāhula.<sup>259</sup> It also denies his birth (see below); that he has a crown to his head, such that it that could be shaved;<sup>260</sup> that he had his earlobe pierced; that he enjoyed sense pleasures; that he urinated, defecated and breathed; that he experienced hunger and thirst; that he slept, felt pain or fell ill; that he needed to maintain physical hygiene (i.e. had an unclean body); and that he had blood relations.<sup>261</sup> These various motifs all concern bodily realities, and between them, they account for a significant proportion of the docetic doctrine of the passage as a whole.

A second MPNMS passage begins with a piece of the MPNMS group prophecy already discussed in §3.1 above.<sup>262</sup> The passage explains that in the endtimes, Māra will appear, take on the guise of a Buddhist leader and saint, and preach false doctrines designed to destroy the Dharma. Now, the first of these false doctrines is precisely the denial of docetism. Once again, some of these doctrines are specifically corporeal: that the Buddha was conceived and born (see below); and that he had wives and concubines and indulged in sensual desires with them.<sup>263</sup> Some of the same claims – most significantly for our purposes, the claim that the Tathāgata's birth and death are docetic, and the connection of this claim specifically to his body (including the marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*) – are recapitulated again elsewhere in MPNMS.<sup>264</sup>

Similar corporeal concerns also constitute a major part of docetic doctrine found in other related texts, including the *Mahāvastu* ("MV"),

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from their CD Rom version of the bKa' 'gyur. Where Sanskrit parallels exist, I refer to Harrison (1982) ("PH"). On LAn, see also Harrison (1995). For the reader's convenience, I also provide references to Guang Xing's (2006) English translation from T807.

<sup>259</sup> Tib H §187-193, DhKṣ 388a11-b19, FX 870b10-c11; Tib H §215, DhKṣ 390a10-13, FX 872 a10-12.

<sup>260</sup> Recall that hair and barbering can also be regarded as impure. Impurity is also one of the main aspects of the notion of the Buddha's real human embodiment that docetic texts reject. Cf. n. 287 below.

<sup>261</sup> Tib H §197-204, DhKṣ 388c12-389b2, FX 871a11-871b22.

<sup>262</sup> Tib H §338, DhKṣ 402c25 ff., FX 880a23 ff.

<sup>263</sup> Tib H §341, DhKṣ 403b1-8, FX 880b21-26.

<sup>264</sup> Tib H §454-455, DhKṣ 416a22-b8, FX 890b3-19.

LAn, and the *Upāyakauśalya-sūtra* (“Up”) (to which we will return below).<sup>265</sup>

Thus, many of the details of docetic doctrine, in its *loci classici*, show it to be a profoundly corporeal matter. Indeed, the fact that docetism is corporeal is sometimes also made explicit. For instance, MPNMS says, in docetically denying the reality of the Buddha’s actions as a baby:

People said that I was a baby; but for countless *kalpas* now, this body of mine has long been removed from such things. The body of the Tathāgata is...not some thing constituted by flesh, blood, sinews, veins,

<sup>265</sup> MV (references to verse number by numbering in PH): walking, standing, sitting, lying down (2); the very body itself (3); eating (4); washing feet (9); bathing (10); oral hygiene (11); avoiding sun and sitting in shade (13); sickness and medicine (14); eating and drinking (16-17); cutting hair (19); aging (20); conception (22); fathering Rāhula (23). See also Jones (1949-1956): 132-134. Elsewhere, MV also provides an elaborate (“material-miraculous”) explanation of the actual process whereby Rāhula was conceived (without sex): Jones 1:121-122.

Many of the MV verses already discussed in n. 265 are paralleled in LAn. Additional elements in Tib/Ch: [the body and] all physical actions (*sku dang sku yi 'phrin las dang*, 身所行); that the light emanating from his body appears to reach only to one fathom (*'dom gang 'od*, 七尺光明), though it is actually infinite; his feet do not really touch the ground, and yet he appears to leave footprints (*zhabs gnyis sa la mi reg ste/ 'on kyang lam srang de ston pa*, 佛未嘗持足踏地); six years’ austerities (*dka' spyod*, 勤苦); urination and defecation, even though his body is in fact like adamant (*sku mkhregs rdo rje 'dra ba'i phyir/ zag pa dag ni mi mnga' yang/ gshang ba'i sar ni gshegs mdzad pa*, 佛身如金剛、淨潔無瑕穢、無清便、現人大小清便); physical weakness (*nyam chung*, 羸瘦疲極); a “purulent” body (prob. \**pūtikāya*), despite really having a *dharmakāya* or *manomaya-kāya* (*yiḍ kyi sku dang ldan pas na/ de bzhin gshegs pa chos sku yang/ rnag can sku ni ston mdzad pa*, 佛身如幻、以經法名為身、現人惡露身); taking shelter from the rain (*char pa'i skyabs*, 見天雨持傘蓋); the appearance of multiple bodies, when in fact all Buddhas have only one body (*de dag sna tshogs sku med kyang/...sku lus sprul pa mdzad pa ni*, 佛無本、隨世間所喜色現身如是、本一); needing the aid of attendants (in old age) (*zham ring pa dag tshol*, 衰老求人給使). For an English translation of relevant passages, see respectively Guang Xing (2006): vv. 1, 5, 6, 10, 21, 24, 26, 37, 41, 83, pp. 313-314, 316-319, 326.

Up: Bathing at birth, Tatz (1994): 56-57; wives and sense-pleasures, 58, 59-60; his son Rāhula, 58; the cutting of hair upon renunciation, 61-62; ascetic austerities, 62-67; eating before awakening, sitting on (comfortable) grass, 67; foot was pierced by a thorn, 73-77; ill and required medicine, 77-78; backache and headache, 84-85. For Up’s docetic denial of the Buddha’s conception and birth, see below. On Up, see Harrison (1995): 8-10.

bones and marrow (如來身者...非是肉血筋脈骨髓之所成立; Tib *nga ni...rus pa dang rgyus ba dang sha dang khrag gi lus ma yin*). I [only] show myself as a baby, in order to conform with the ways of the world.<sup>266</sup>

Similarly, in its other extended docetic passage, MPNMS prophesies that the evil Māra will magically appear (化作, *\*nir√mā*) in the *body* of a holy person of any grade from *śrotāpanna* to Arhat, or the *\*rūpakāya* of a Buddha 佛色身, thus “presenting his defiled body as an undefiled body”.<sup>267</sup> The anti-docetic doctrines this miscreant is then shown preaching begin with the proposition, “He was born *in this body* due to the lustful copulation of his father and mother.”<sup>268</sup> The text could hardly state any more explicitly that docetic doctrine addresses a problem of embodiment.

#### 4.3 The extension of docetism beyond death and birth

From early in the development of Mahāyāna doctrine, the problem of docetism was not confined to the final lifetime and apparent earthly, human body of Śākyamuni Buddha. Rather, it was extended in both directions, beyond his death and birth respectively, to encompass what we might call “post-mortem” and “prenatal” dimensions of his being (with due allowance for the obvious fact that the significance of “death” and “birth” differs in a worldview that assumes reincarnation). What I am here calling “post-mortem” docetism has been treated in greater detail

<sup>266</sup> DhKṣ 388c2-5 (my emphasis); cf. Tib H §196.9-14, FX 870c29-871a3. I am grateful to Paul Harrison for the observation that Tib here could naturally be construed as a *ba-huvrihi* (personal communication, July 2013). Cf. also the following statements (which feature in contexts discussed further below): “Ultimately, the Tathāgata does not take on a female *body*” 如來畢竟不受女身, DhKṣ 389b25-26, cf. Tib H §209.1-3, FX 871c4; “Because I wish to save base and mean persons, I show myself as going among them and expounding the Dharma for them; but it is not the case that I receive *such a body* because of evil *karma* 非是惡業受是身也. [In fact,] the Tathāgata, the Saṃyaksambuddha, thus dwells in peace in great Nirvāṇa,” DhKṣ 390a3-5, cf. Tib H §214.18-21, FX 872a2-4.

<sup>267</sup> 以此有漏之形作無漏身壞我正法; DhKṣ 402c27-403a2; cf. Tib H §338.9-18, FX 880a28-b5.

<sup>268</sup> 依因父母愛欲和合生育是身, DhKṣ 403a4; cf. Tib H §338.10-13, FX 880a29-b1.

by prior scholarship (though not usually in precisely such terms), and so I will discuss it first.

First, Mahāyāna texts deny the reality of the Buddha's death (*parinirvāṇa*) itself. Elsewhere, I have traced in detail the emergence of this docetic treatment of the *parinirvāṇa*, and its connection to claims that the Buddhas are in fact immortal, as it is reflected in the evidence of the Chinese translation record.<sup>269</sup> I will not repeat the details of that argument here. In sum, in the Chinese record, this claim first emerges in a cluster of texts translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (230?-316): *Tathāgatopattisambhava-nirdeśa*, \**Lokottara(-parivarta)-sūtra*, SPSS, and especially SP.<sup>270</sup> This trend may be represented by a passage from SP:

Although in fact [I have long since] accomplished all that a Tathāgata ought to accomplish, I make a show of attaining buddhahood here and now. [In reality] it is an immensely long time since I attained buddhahood and realised *saṃyaksambodhi*; [my] lifespan is immeasurable; [I = the Tathāgata (Skt)] endure forever, and do not become extinct...In fact, it would not be possible for me to fulfil the limit of my lifespan even in all the time I have practiced *bodhisatva* practices through all my past lives, even from the very beginning; nor even in twice the enormous span of time since I became Buddha, as conveyed by the analogy I gave earlier. Nonetheless, I [say I] am “about to enter *parinirvāṇa* in the *nirvāṇa[dhātu]* without remainder”. Why is this? In order to convert sentient beings.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Radich (2011[2012]).

<sup>270</sup> T291:10.611c29-612a17; T292:10.625b5-12, 634c28-635a1, 638b1, 645b15-17; T381:12.980 b1-2, 986c7-8; T263:9.113b1-6; Kern and Nanjio (1912): 316, Vaidya (1960c): 189, Hurvitz (1976): 237, Watson (1993): 225; T263:9.113b6-27, Kern and Nanjio 316-317, Vaidya 190-191, Hurvitz 237-238, Watson 225; T263:9.113b27-29; T263:9.113b27-c2, Kern and Nanjio 317, Vaidya 190, Hurvitz 238, Watson 225-226; T263:9.113c3-5, Hurvitz 238, Watson 226; T263:9.113c8-11, 113c10, Vaidya 190, Kern and Nanjio 318. On other connections between MPNMS and SP, see n. 122 above, and other loci listed there. Cf. other relations between SPSS and MPNMS discussed above, p. 42.

<sup>271</sup> T263:9.113c20-23, Kern and Nanjio (1912): 318-319, Vaidya (1960c): 190; T263:9.113c23-28, Kern and Nanjio: 319, Vaidya 190-191; cf. Hurvitz (1976): 239, Watson (1993): 227.

Notably, we also find this very doctrine articulated in MPNMS. At the outset of one of two key docetic passages, MPNMS says, “At times, I show [myself entering into] *parinirvāṇa* in the Jambudvīpas of a billion worlds, and yet, ultimately, I do not take *parinirvāṇa*.”<sup>272</sup> Of course, this is entirely of a piece with perhaps the most central burden of MPNMS – to rewrite the *parinirvāṇa* (the backdrop of the entire text) so that, in effect, it never happened, and thereby to proclaim the Buddha’s actual eternity.<sup>273</sup>

Not only is the reality of the Buddha’s death denied, however. Texts also deny the reality of the primary products of that death and the subsequent disposal of the corpse, namely, the Buddha’s relics.<sup>274</sup> For example, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra* (“Suv”) (borrowing, in fact, from MM) attacks corporeal relics by saying that there can be no relic where there is no bone or blood.<sup>275</sup> Such docetic denial of the reality of the relics is clearly connected to a much broader, very widespread polemic against relics as the most meritorious objects of worship, which hyperbolically extols the far greater merit-generating powers of alternatives (like texts).<sup>276</sup>

<sup>272</sup> DhKṣ 388b22-24, Tib H §194.7-10. Cf. also DhKṣ 381c18-20; DhKṣ 389b5-9, Tib H §203; (once more) DhKṣ 416a24-26, Tib H §454.17-18; DhKṣ 421a13-b10, Tib H §503-506; DhKṣ 480b29-c27, Y477-478. I take 三千大千世界, *trisahasrāmahāsaḥarāloka dhātu*, to mean 1000<sup>3</sup> worlds. See AKBh 3.73, Pradhan (1967): 171.10-18, T1558:29.61a5-11, la Vallée Poussin (1980): 2:170. I am grateful to ōtake Susumu 大竹晋 for pointing out this interpretation of the term (personal communication). On various interpretations of the term in primary sources, see Osto (2008): 16, and the sources discussed there.

<sup>273</sup> The theme of the Buddha’s eternity runs very widely through MPNMS. According to Shimoda’s stratification, this doctrine is a property of the oldest layer of the text, MPNMS-dhk. Cf. the alternate title *\*Tathāgataśāśvata-sūtra/Tathāgatanityatva-sūtra*, discussed above p. 47.

<sup>274</sup> On the production of relics as the principal point of the Buddha’s funerary rites, see Strong (2004): 23, and Chapter 4.

<sup>275</sup> *anasthirudhire kāye kuto dhātur bhaviṣyati*; Nobel (1937): 18, Emmerick (1970): 6-7. The passage goes on immediately to extol instead the virtues of the *vajrasaṃghanakāya*, the *dharmakāya* and the *dharmadhātu* – in my terms, positive corollaries of the relics. Suzuki Takayasu has shown that the passages in question are interpolated into Suv from MM; Suzuki (1998a), Suzuki (1998b).

<sup>276</sup> See e.g. Aṣṭa Ch. 3; the seminal Schopen (1975); Kajiyama (1985); Shimoda (1997) *passim*; Tuladhar-Douglas (2009); and also Radich (2007a), §4.3.2.



Polemical claims about the unreality of relics, or their relative lack of merit and power, are also matched by the articulation of corresponding positive corollaries. I argued above that the *Vajrābheda-kāya* Chapter of MPNMS propounds *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* as a positive corollary to its negative denial of the reality of the Buddha's embodiment in fallible flesh. Elsewhere, however, I have argued at length that in fact, *dharmakāya* may have been proposed primarily as such a positive alternative not to the historical body of Śākyamuni, but rather, to the relics of that body.<sup>277</sup> In light of this possibility, the relation proposed by Shimoda between the relic cult and the emergence of "Buddha nature" (*\*buddhadhātu*) also acquires particular significance:<sup>278</sup> "Buddha nature" is proposed as a positive alternative to the Buddha's *dhātu* seen in relics, just as various special "Buddha bodies" (*buddhakāya*), beginning with *dharmakāya*, were proposed as positive alternatives to the "Buddha bodies" (*buddhaśarīra*) seen in relics. In Chapter 5, I will return to the relation between this problematic and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in MPNMS-tg.

Thus, docetism about the body was applied beyond Śākyamuni's final lifetime, to the relics of that body. We also find, however, that the same docetic logic was extended in the opposite direction in time, before the Buddha's birth.

The liminal phase between the Buddha's physical conception in the womb of his mother in his final lifetime, and his actual birth in the Lumbinī grove, is ambiguous in status, since it falls before his birth, but can obviously also be regarded as part of the existence of his final earthly

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<sup>277</sup> The arguments required to establish this claim are complex, and rest on a body of evidence too large for me to do justice to it here. It requires in part that we recognise that relics themselves were regarded as veritable bodies of the Buddha, for which see Radich (2007a), Chapter 4.1. It also requires establishing that there is not sufficient evidence that other doctrines of *dharmakāya* (or other *buddhakāya*) predate the *dharmakāya* in key Mahāyāna texts, for which see Radich (2007a), Chapter 3.2, revised as Radich (2007b); Radich (2009); Radich (2007a), §4.2.3-4.2.6. Next, it requires showing when and how the Mahāyāna *dharmakāya* does appear in our record, for which see Radich (2007a), Chapter 4.5. Finally, it also demands that we show how the emergence of *dharmakāya* doctrine was articulated with the early Mahāyāna polemic against the relic cult (for some of which, see Shimoda [1997]). I plan to substantially revise these arguments in monograph form.

<sup>278</sup> Shimoda (1997): 278-298, 82-85, 39[L]; Shimoda (2003).

body. In any case, it will be the primary focus of my argument below, and so I will here set it aside.

Turning, then, to a phase of the Buddha's embodiment even earlier, during the many lifetimes of his *bodhisatva* career, here too, docetic arguments are applied. For example, Up is concerned to explain away the fact that the Buddha, in a former incarnation as Jyotis, gave himself in sexual union to a female water-carrier; and to free a monk called Vimala, a prior incarnation of Maitreya, from rumours of sexual misconduct.<sup>279</sup> This same concern is also found in MPNMS(-tg). In the first and longest of its docetic passages, as discussed above, MPNMS also extends docetism to the *bodhisatva*'s prior incarnations, and shows concern with perceived bodily defilement and imperfection: that he was once reborn as a "female who became a Buddha"; that he is reborn in bad rebirth destinies; that he is reborn as a vulture living in charnel-grounds; that he visits brothels; and that he frequents pubs and gambling dens.<sup>280</sup>

In sum, the corporeal nature of the problem confronted by docetism, in combination with the fact that the *bodhisatva*-Buddha was held to have had or still to have very many bodies, conditioned a logic in which docetic ideas could find application over the entire range of what we might

<sup>279</sup> Tatz (1994): 34-35, 35-36.

<sup>280</sup> DhKṣ 389b12-c25, Tib H §205-212, FX 871b25-c17; DhKṣ 389b23-25, Tib H §209.1-5, FX 871c2-5; DhKṣ 389b27-29, Tib H §209.8-11, FX 871c5-7; DhKṣ 389c13-16, Tib H §211.6-8, FX 871c14-15; DhKṣ 389c3-7, Tib H §210.1-4, FX 871c12-13; DhKṣ 389c9-13, Tib H §211.1-5, FX 871c13-14.

The notion of the *bodhisatva* frequenting various dens of iniquity as an *upāya* is also part of the *Problematik* of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, Vim §2.3 (Lamotte's section numbering), Study Group (2006): 16, Lamotte (1962): 128; §2.4, Study Group 16, Lamotte 128 (cf. §3.62-67, Study Group 38-41, Lamotte 204-211). More broadly, of course, Vim also comprises part of the same broad docetic pattern, in its central preoccupation with Vimalakīrti's apparent sickness; indeed, it is fair to say that docetism is a central theme of the *sūtra* as a whole. See, on sickness, §2.7, Study Group 17, Lamotte 131, ff. and *passim*; on the body and docetism, particularly §2.12, Study Group 18-19, Lamotte 138-142; §3.43, Study Group 33, Lamotte 185; §3.45, Study Group 34, Lamotte 187; and on transformations of bodies as *upāya*, §5.8, Lamotte 239; §5.16, Study Group 61, Lamotte 256; §6.14-16, Study Group 72-74, Lamotte 280-283; §9.4, Study Group 91, Lamotte 322; §9.7, Study Group 93, Lamotte 324-325. See also §7.1, which states that the *bodhisatva* might appear ugly, weak or poor in body, but in fact has the body of a Nārāyaṇa; and that his age and sickness is only apparent too; Study Group 77, Lamotte 287.

call, after John Strong, the Buddha's very long "biographical process".<sup>281</sup> I will now attempt to show that this is also true of his embodiment during the period of his gestation in his mother's womb, in regard to which we find both negative docetic denials of ordinary human realities, and the articulation of positive corollaries as well.

#### 4.4 Negatively-framed docetism about the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth

Unsurprisingly, given that docetism was extended to the *bodhisatva's* earlier lifetimes, it was also extended to the liminal phase of transition between prior lifetimes and this one – namely, to his conception, gestation and birth.<sup>282</sup> I will first discuss negatively-framed denial that the Buddha

<sup>281</sup> Strong (2004): 5, 229. The central contention of Strong's book is that relics can be understood as "extensions" of this "biographical process", so that the rubric covers all of the bodies in which the Buddha is present in the world, from the inception of his *bodhisatva* career to the final destruction of his relics.

<sup>282</sup> Silk (2003) also treats the elements discussed below as part of a broader pattern, and also in the explicit terms of docetism. However, Silk approaches these materials from a somewhat different angle, analytically separating two motifs: 1) miraculous elements, and 2) docetism proper (explicit statements that the events concerned were illusory). For Silk, miraculous dimensions of the *bodhisatva's* conception, gestation and birth are part of a pattern that presents the Buddha's final awakening as the fruit of a long path of practice pursued over very many lifetimes ("Model 1"; see Table, 870). This is one of two patterns structuring the Buddha's hagiography – one focused on the inception of the path, and one on its completion – and these two patterns are in tension with one another (this is the "paradox" of Silk's title). The other pattern centres on the tale of an ordinary person's encounter with the grim realities of life, which impel him to seek liberation ("Model 2").

Within this frame, then, "docetism", on Silk's narrower definition (that is, narrower than the one I apply here), represents, in one sense, an attempted resolution of this tension – the *bodhisatva's* ordinary human frailty and fallibility were only apparent, and so there is no real contradiction with his originally perfected, godlike status. In another sense, however, Silk presents docetisation of the narrative as a failure of moral courage and insight, because it abandons a dimension of the hagiographical complex generative of genuine truth – with docetism, we lose the "encounter with real human finitude" (877).

I do not think that the conclusions of Silk's insightful analysis and my own are mutually exclusive. However, a key difference (driven, it seems, by differences in questions and analytic purpose) is that for Silk, "docetism" means only the overt assertion

really experienced ordinary human birth, and then the elaboration of some positive alternative visions of what happened instead.

First, it is important to recognise that the same MPNMS passages discussed above, which articulate other dimensions of corporeal docetism, also deny the reality of the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth.<sup>283</sup> We already noted above that in its second extended docetic passage, MPNMS-tg is explicitly concerned to deny the Buddha's fleshly conception and birth (again deploying a "LAN-style" rhetoric).<sup>284</sup> MPNMS says:

At times, I show myself entering into my mother's womb in Jambudvīpa, and let my father and mother think of me as their child; and yet, ultimately, this body of mine is not engendered by lascivious copulation. For countless *kalpas*, I have already long been far removed from all lascivious desire...I [only] show myself entering into the womb, in order to conform with the ways of the world. Gentle sir, I [only] show myself being born from my mother Māyā in the Lumbinī grove here in Jambudvīpa.<sup>285</sup>

Similarly, Up devotes considerable attention to denying or reinterpreting the conception (entry into the womb) and birth.<sup>286</sup> In Up, the emphasis

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that an incident is illusory. By contrast, for the purposes of my argument, I take it that the contradiction between miraculous and ordinary human birth (one cannot, for example, be born *both* through the birth canal and out of an armpit) implies a denial of the reality of apparent ordinary human biological experiences, and on this basis, I treat such elements as part of a complex that is "docetic" in this extended sense. It is only on this basis that I can speak of "kataphatic docetism" (see Appendix 5).

<sup>283</sup> For a detailed survey of motifs connected with the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth, see Sasson (2007): Chapter 3; Sasson (2009); see also Obeyesekere (1973): 221-228. For aspects of the views of ordinary conception, gestation and birth processes against which these docetic views should be read, see Hara (1980); Boisvert (2000); Kritzer (2009); Sasson (2009): 64-65.

<sup>284</sup> See n. 268. The passage goes on to say, "[The Buddha] shows himself to have a father and mother, and to be engendered by their lustful copulation. He engages in this show in order to conform to the ways of the world;" DhKṣ 403a13-14, Tib H §338.21-22, FX 880b6-7.

<sup>285</sup> DhKṣ 388b24-28, Tib H §195, FX 870c23-26.

<sup>286</sup> Tatz (1994): 52-53; Tib Lh zha 80b5-82b2. Most of these elements are already in Dhararakṣa, our earliest version of Up: T345:12.160b8-c20.

seems to be on the ways the *bodhisatva*'s wondrous birth helped him avoid various kinds of impurity.<sup>287</sup> The *bodhisatva* could avoid “entering the womb and coming into contact with impurity” if he so chose, but this would lead sentient beings to doubt his teachings, so he shows himself to “abide in the womb [here *ma'i mgnal, mngal gyi mal* etc.]”. “The Bodhisatva is clean in his habits, so he no longer enters a womb.”<sup>288</sup> “The Bodhisattva is best in the triple world for cleanliness of habits.”<sup>289</sup>

MV also says that the *bodhisatva* is not conceived by intercourse,<sup>290</sup> and goes to some lengths to show that from the very night of the conception, his mother withdraws from her husband (the king) and observes chastity until the end of her life.<sup>291</sup> LAn (Ch) also features a verse stating that the *bodhisatva* does not enter or exit from his mother's womb, but makes a show of entering his mother's womb.<sup>292</sup> We occasionally encoun-

<sup>287</sup> On impurity and purity as a keynote of traditions about the Buddha's birth, see Obeyesekere (1973): 218 and *passim*. There is likely to be some connection here between concern about the *bodhisatva*'s contamination by the impurity of his fleshly mother and the motif of female impurity more broadly, surveyed so strikingly by Elizabeth Wilson; Wilson (1995, 1996). On another note, Hara Minoru has also argued persuasively that another dimension of what I call below positive corollaries to docetism may also have been motivated by attempts to avoid aspects of gestation and birth associated with suffering (*garbhaduḥkha, janmaduḥkha*); Hara (1980), esp. 147, 148-149; cf. also Kritzer (2009): 74-75, 81-82, 86.

<sup>288</sup> *gtsang mar spyod pas slar yang mngal gyi mal du mi 'jug ste*, Lh zha 81a6, Tatz (1994): 53. Dharmarakṣa only matches inexactly here, 菩薩之瑞所化清淨, T345:12.160b19.

<sup>289</sup> *byang chub sems dpa' ni | gtsang mar spyod la 'jig rten gsum po thams cad kyi mchog yin pas*, Lh zha 82a7, Tatz (1994): 55. From the perspective of possible connections to *tathāgatarabha* doctrine, Dharmarakṣa is interesting here: 菩薩至尊三界之上、雖處胎中、如日照水、淨無所著、不增不減, T345:12.160c18-19 (cf. Anūn).

<sup>290</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:114-115.

<sup>291</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:159-162 (on Sudipā, mother of Dipamkara); 2:5-8 (on Māyā).

<sup>292</sup> 菩薩亦不入母腹中、亦不從母腹中出...菩薩現人入母腹中、隨世間習俗而入、示現如是. The interesting reason is given that the *dharmadhātu* penetrates everywhere, 經法本界無所不入, T807:17.753b1-3, Guang Xing (2006): 324 v. 71. This may be related to another verse immediately below, stating that the Buddha enters into “the *samādhi* of emptiness” in his mother's womb, and therefore comprises the domain of [all] the Buddhas, which is [always] one and the same; so that it is only a show that *bodhisatvas* manifest themselves as each being born according to particular human circumstances, 菩薩母腹空定、含受一佛境界。菩薩各各現人因緣生、隨世間... 753b6-7, Guang

ter brief, negatively-framed docetic statements about the *bodhisatva*'s birth elsewhere.<sup>293</sup> The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya Saṅghabheda-vastu* ("MSV SBhV") does not deny that the *bodhisatva* entered the womb, but denies that he was defiled by any of the filth found there.<sup>294</sup> Thus, denial of the reality of the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth is a major part of the overall docetic pattern.

#### 4.5 "Material-miraculous" positive corollaries of docetism about the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth

Such negative docetic denials of the Buddha's conception, gestation and birth are frequently accompanied by positive claims about what really took place instead.<sup>295</sup> Here we draw close to the link between the larger pattern I am tracing, and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. In this section, I will discuss a first set of positive corollaries to negatively framed docetic denial of this dimension of the Buddha's ordinary humanity. This vision depicts alternate Buddha-bodies that are still broadly "material", in that they are visible in the world and behave like better versions of ordinary bodies. These alternatives also tend to be miraculous, that is, they operate in a wondrous mode that transcends the ordinary bounds of material reality. I will therefore refer to these positive corollaries of docetic Buddhology, and later, other similar ideas, as "material-miraculous".

We already saw above that Up denies that the *bodhisatva* really enters into his mother's womb. In the same passages, Up also furnishes positive information about the reality behind the illusion. First, the *bodhisatva* remains in Tuṣita Heaven the whole while, but enters into a special *samādhi* called "Immaculate" (*vimala*), which allows him to project emanation bo-

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Xing 324 v. 73. I cannot find a verse exactly matching either of these in Tib, but for the second, cf. *rtaḡ tu chos kyi dbyings mtshungs te/ 'jug pa med cing 'byung med kyang/ 'gro ba gnas pa ston mdzad pa/ 'di ni 'jig rten mthun 'jug yin* (this verse is paralleled in Candrakīrti's *Sūnyatāsaptatīrtī*, but only in Tib; see PH 227, 233 n. 31, 32).

<sup>293</sup> E.g. Lalit 普曜經, T186:3.483b19-21.

<sup>294</sup> Gnoli (1977-1978): 1:42; T1450:24.107c3-6; again at Gnoli 1:45, T1450:24.108a12-13.

<sup>295</sup> Obeyesekere has invoked the concept of docetism in discussing some of the passages analysed here; Obeyesekere (1973): 222, 224-227; as has Sasson (2009): 59-60.

dies (\**nirmita*, \**nairmāṇika*).<sup>296</sup> This is the means by which he shows himself engaging in all the typical acts of a *bodhisatva*-Buddha, including conception and birth.<sup>297</sup>

Of course, *nairmāṇikākāya* (whether specifically named as such or not) is the typical means by which the docetic appearances of the Buddhas' apparent lives and acts are explained, so much so that it seems likely that the docetic impulse is the *raison d'être* for the concept of *nairmāṇikākāya* itself. As I have suggested may be the case for *dharmakāya*, then, *nairmāṇikākāya* may be intimately connected to docetism at its root, and this is an important topic for future investigation. What matters most for my argument here, however, is that *nairmāṇikākāya* articulates a positive vision of what is true, instead of the illusory appearance that docetism negatively denies. In the terms laid out above, therefore, it presents a positive corollary to docetism about the Buddha's body (bodies).

Some features of this positive alternate vision of how the Buddha appeared to be born seem to have developed from possibly earlier materials in the *Acchariya-abbhūta-sutta*, *Majjhima-nikāya* 123.<sup>298</sup> Without denying the reality of the *bodhisatta*'s conception and birth, this *sutta* teaches that it was miraculous: the *bodhisatta* was mindful and aware when he dwelt in Tusita, and when he descended into his mother's womb; a great light filled the cosmos as he descended; he and his mother were guarded by deities during the pregnancy; his mother became abstinent, virtuous and chaste; the pregnancy was blissful; it conferred health and wellbeing upon her; she could see the *bodhisatta* within her womb as clearly as a thread within a beryl gem; she gave birth standing up; he was received by the gods; he did not touch the earth; "he came forth unsullied, unsmearred by water or humours or blood or any kind of impurity, clean, and unsullied;" he and his mother were miraculously bathed by two jets of water from heaven; he stood and walked; the cosmos was bathed in wondrous light again when he was born; and his mother ascended to Tu-

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<sup>296</sup> Tib *sprul pas*, \**nairmāṇikena*, \**nirmitena*, Lh zha 81a4; *de thams cad ni | byang chub sems dpa'i sprul pa yin no*, 81a5; Tatz (1994): 53. Dharmarakṣa: 無所不變, T345:12.160b18.

<sup>297</sup> Tatz (1994): 53.

<sup>298</sup> M III 118-124, Nāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 979-984.

sita when she died. Almost all of these details are paralleled in Up, MV, etc., even where I do not discuss them explicitly below.<sup>299</sup>

However, like a number of texts, Up goes further in the articulation of this vision. Up explains that the *bodhisatva* enters his mother's womb through her right side (i.e. he is not conceived there by the normal means), taking the form of a white bull elephant for the purpose, but that "Māyā has no wound or scar on her body after he enters." The text also explains that the gods pay the *bodhisatva* visits during his gestation period. Moreover, "during that period while the Bodhisattva dwells in her womb, [Māyā] experiences pleasure such as she has never felt before." The *bodhisatva*'s birth causes Māyā no pain, as shown by the fact that she is capable of giving birth while leaning casually on the *sāla* tree.<sup>300</sup> He is born from her right side, "rather than emerging from her vagina or some other part of her body", because "the Bodhisattva is best in the triple world for cleanliness of habits;" "He does not dwell in a vagina."<sup>301</sup> Thus, the usual routes of entry and exit to and from the womb, the usual nature of the womb, the usual discomforts and suffering it entails for the mother, the usual intimate association with impure female genitalia – all are systematically displaced by positive substitutes.

Of course, Up is not alone in articulating such "material" alternate visions of the real nature and process of the *bodhisatva*'s conception, gestation and birth. MV, for example, is even more elaborately detailed.<sup>302</sup> The

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<sup>299</sup> Cf. also *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, D II 11-15, Walshe (1987): 202-205; Fukita (2003): 7(13.6)-10(20.6), 52-69.

<sup>300</sup> Tatz (1994): 53-54. A docetic explanation is also given for the fact that Māyā dies seven days after the *bodhisatva* is born, Tatz 57.

<sup>301</sup> Tatz (1994): 54-55. For ideas about the impurity of the vagina in the *Garbhāvākṛānti-sūtra* (T317, T310(13), T310(14)), see Kritzer (2009): 80; Kritzer (2014): 20-24. In the *Garbhāvākṛānti* §5, defects of the *mṅgal* = *garbha* are said sometimes to be responsible for a failure to conceive, and in this connection, Kritzer notes "*garbha* (*mṅgal*)...seems sometimes to refer to the uterus, sometimes to the vagina, and sometimes to the female genitals in general" (Kritzer 2014: 5 n. 10; my emphasis).

<sup>302</sup> Principal MV passages expounding this doctrine are: in relation to Dīpaṅkara, Jones (1949-1956): 1:157-176; in relation to Śākyamuni, 2:3-21 (these two passages contain many exact parallels, but some significant differences); in relation to the tenth *bhūmi*, 1:112-119.



*bodhisatva* chooses his place of birth and mother. The text denies that his conception is by intercourse, and in fact, his mother secludes herself from her husband (thereby making sex impossible) precisely on the night that the *bodhisatva* enters her womb. He enters the womb mindful and self-possessed, adopting the form of a six-tusked white bull elephant. While he is in the womb, he does not assume undignified postures and enjoys freedom of movement.<sup>303</sup> Despite being in the womb, he is utterly pure:

...not polluted by bile, phlegm, blood or any other unclean matter. For the Bodhisattva, while he is in his mother's womb, is rubbed with perfumes and washed clean. He is able to see his mother, while she, in her turn, can see the Bodhisattva in her womb like a body of pure gold...It is as though a jewel of beryl were placed in its crystal casket.<sup>304</sup>

In the womb, the *bodhisatva* lives a refined life, attended by constant music, showers of blossoms, and the scent of aloe-wood, holding court for a constant stream of divinities who come to pay homage. Even the talk there is pure: either the visitors praise the *bodhisatva*, or he describes his previous existences. Yet none of this causes his mother any discomfort. In fact, the pregnancy confers upon her supreme well-being and invulnerability to harm, and brings with it the solicitude and praise of celestial hosts. The pregnancy also profoundly affects his mother in other ways: seemingly conditioned by the requirement that the *bodhisatva* is tainted by no impurity, the text has her observe absolute chastity from the night he enters her womb, along with a range of other virtuous precepts that make her into a virtual nun, in a kind of Order of Perfect Motherhood.<sup>305</sup> This perfect virtue lasts until her very death, but even that death, as is well known, is precipitate, coming only seven days after the birth of the *bodhisatva*; the text is quite explicit that this is necessary

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<sup>303</sup> Respectively, Jones (1949-1956): 1:157-162, 1:113, 2:4-5; 1:114-115, 1:159-162, 2:5-8; 1:163, 1:164, 2:9, 2:11; 1:162, 1:164, 2:8, 2:11; 1:169, 2:14.

<sup>304</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:169-170; see also 2:14-15, 1:176, 2:21.

<sup>305</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:170, 1:114, 2:15; 1:170-171, 2:15-16; 1:114, 1:117, 1:167, 1:170, 2:13, 2:15; 1:167-169, 2:13-14; 1:114-115, 1:159-162, 2:5-8.

because it would be unseemly for one who bore the *bodhisatva* to indulge in “love” thereafter.<sup>306</sup>

When the time comes for the birth, the very grove in which the *bodhisatva* is born is cleansed and adorned in preparation, and in one passage, the birth actually takes place on a perfect island (in a lake) elaborated just for the purpose by the *bodhisatva*’s supernatural power. The *bodhisatva* issues from his mother’s right side (which is “like gold”) without piercing it, thus leaving no scar or wound; and the process is painless.<sup>307</sup> This is possible because “Tathāgatas are born with a body that is made of mind (*manomayena rūpena*).”<sup>308</sup> His mother stands throughout the birth, which seems to express either the notion that it inflicts upon her no indignity, or the ease of the process.<sup>309</sup> The birth is pure, “perfectly free of bile, phlegm, blood or any other foul and unclean matter, but [nonetheless] his body is bathed with perfumes and washed clean.”<sup>310</sup> The baby is examined by seers and declared to have a “wholly flawless body”; this statement is explicitly connected to his possession of the body characterised by the thirty-two marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*.<sup>311</sup> This entire process, from the descent from Tuṣita Heaven until after birth, is watched, guarded and celebrated by a vast chorus of thrilled divinities.

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<sup>306</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:157-158, 2:3. The text is clear that the *bodhisatva*’s mother is not killed off to fulfil this requirement, however; rather, the *bodhisatva* uses his supernatural knowledge to choose a woman who has just this lifespan remaining to her. Other rationalisations are also found in other texts, e.g. that it would have broken her heart to see her son renounce the world (Lalit), Vaidya (1958): 70.25-29, Bays (1983): 1:147. See also Sasson (2013): 156-157.

<sup>307</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:171-172, 1:117-118, 2:16-17; 1:173 (in the context of the story of Dīpaṅkara); 1:174, 2:19; 1:173-174, 1:176, 1:117, 1:118, 2:18, 2:20.

<sup>308</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:174, 2:18 and n. 3. Note the obvious connections to the doctrine of *manomayakāya*.

<sup>309</sup> Jones (1949-1956): 1:173, 2:18. Cf. Up, Tatz (1994): 54.

<sup>310</sup> Jones (1949-1956): Jones 1:173, Senart (1882-): 1:218; Jones 2:18, Senart 2:20.

<sup>311</sup> *sarvam anavadyaḡātra*, Jones (1949-1956): 2:25-26, Senart (1882-): 2:29-30, esp. 29.7; *sarvānavadyaḡātra*, Jones 1:180-182, Senart 2:226-227, esp. 226.4. The body featuring the marks of the *mahāpuruṣa* is arguably another positive corollary of docetic Buddhism, but consideration of this possibility lies beyond the scope of the present study.

A still more elaborate version of these events is related at great length in the *Lalitavistara* (“Lalit”).<sup>312</sup> We need not examine this version in detail, but we will return to one key feature below. Extended treatments are also found in the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 and the related *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經.<sup>313</sup> Similar long accounts also feature in the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經; in the \**Abhiṅskramaṇa-sūtra* 佛本行集經; in MSV SBhV; and in the *Nidānakathā*.<sup>314</sup> These treatments often include further signs and wonders, in addition to those discussed already, which space forbids us examining here. The “Womb Sūtra” takes this alternate, material-miraculous “womb” as its entire *mise-en-scène* for the predication it records, and also contains an elaborate positive vision of the alternate reality that obtains during the *bodhisatva*’s gestation.<sup>315</sup> In these contexts, the various elements of these positive alternate visions of the *bodhisatva*’s entry into the world are not necessarily associated with explicit negatively-framed docetism. This is also true of a number of shorter treatments containing similar elements.<sup>316</sup>

<sup>312</sup> Vaidya (1958): 14.8-82.31; Foucaux (1884): 20-88; Bays (1983): 1:36-170, T186:3.485a25-497a16, T187:3.541c15-557c22. See also Strong (2004): 63-64; Winternitz (1933): 2:249-251.

<sup>313</sup> T184:3.463a26-464a27, T185:3.473b14-474a2. These texts between them probably contain (a) relatively early version(s) of the traditions under discussion. T185 was translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 (ca. 192-252?), perhaps on the basis of a lost earlier version of T184. T184 is likely to comprise a lost base text translated under the late Han, ca. 190-220, which may have been revised by Zhi Qian to produce T185, with additions and revisions not later than the fourth century; see Nattier (2008): 102-108, 135. For a Dutch translation of T184 (which, regrettably, I cannot read) see Zürcher (1978).

<sup>314</sup> T189:3.623a24-627c3; T190:3.682c14-692a11; Beal (1875): 36-52; T1450:24.106b6-108a26, Gnoli (1977-1978): 1:39-57; Jā I 48-54; Rhys Davids (1880): 60-68.

<sup>315</sup> 菩薩從兜術天降神母胎說廣普經, T384:12.1015b21-c15. Note that Nattier has recently suggested that this text, like T309, might have been composed by its ostensible “translator”, Zhu Fonian, on the basis of materials in Chinese; Nattier (2010): 256. On this text, see also Legittimo (2008).

<sup>316</sup> See MSV *Ḷṣudraka-vastu*, T1451:24.297c6-298a17; the first chapter of the *Buddhacarita* 佛所行讚, T192:4.1a14-1b16, Olivelle (2008): 2-7 (followed by other signs and wonders); the \**Mahāsammatarāja-sūtra*, T191:3.938c19-939b14 (a late translation by Faxian 法賢 under the Song); (very simply) in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhikṣuṇī-vinaya*, T1443:23.907c28-908a11, closely paralleled in MSV *Pravrajyā-vastu*, T1444:23.1020c14-29, Dutt (1950): 4:5.1-20; the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha* in the *Ratnakūta*, T310(6):11.104b25-c2;

#### 4.6 The material-miraculous, “docetic” womb

A key element in some of these material-miraculous alternate visions of the Buddha’s gestation is an alternate understanding of the nature of the “womb” in which it takes place.<sup>317</sup>

For instance, in one version of Up, when the gods visit the *bodhisatva* in his mother’s womb, they behold his “palace (*\*paribhoga*), a storied mansion (*\*kūṭāgāra*), an array of jewels (*ratnavyūha*), which surpasses all the palaces (*paribhoga*) of the gods”.<sup>318</sup>

In Lalit, this doctrine is developed in much greater detail.<sup>319</sup> First, the problem represented by human corporeality is articulated in stark terms:

Any of the gods from the assembly of the Four Great Kings withdraws in disgust from the human body (*manuṣyāśraya*); not to mention other higher gods, [such as] the Thirty-Three, or the Yāmas, or of Tuṣita. How then can it be that the Bodhisattva, who is elevated above all worlds, who is pure, free of noisome stench (*nirāmagandha*), a gem among beings, having fallen from the divine assembly in Saṃtuṣita, now dwells for ten months in a stinking (*durgandha*) human body, in the womb (*kukṣi*) of his mother?...It is astonishing how disgusting is womankind (*mātrgrāma*)...and how it is [yet] the object of passion. Yet

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the *\*Candragarbhaipulya-sūtra* in the *\*Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra*, T397(15):13.330c24-29. Cf. also the striking miracles that accompany the birth in GV, Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 376.9-379.16, T278:9.752c4-753b24, T279:10.403b25-404b10, Cleary (1989): 266-268. See also MPPU, T1509:25.418c28-419a17, Lamotte (1966-1980): 5:2438-2439, commenting on *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* T223:8.257c2-3, Dutt (1934): 1:224.

<sup>317</sup> On aspects of these jewelled wombs, see also Granoff (1998): 356-361; Sasson (2013): 158.

<sup>318</sup> *longs spyod (\*paribhoga) rin po che bkod pa'i (\*ratnavyūha) khang pa brtsegs pa (\*kūṭāgāra)*, Lh cha 107a3, Tatz (1994): 53-54 (Tatz mistranslates *\*paribhoga*). This section is only found in the *Ratnakūṭa* version, which is the more expansive and probably later of the two Tib texts Tatz translates (Tatz’s “R”); cf. T310(38):11.600b9-10 (on the relation between the two texts, see Tatz 17-18). The passage is also missing from Dharmarakṣa.

<sup>319</sup> Vaidya (1958): 47.6-54.6, Foucaux (1884): 59-70, Mitra (1881): 92-100, Bays (1983): 1:102-116; Durt (2003): 50-52.

this is more astonishing [viz. that the Buddha would stoop to such a disgusting habitation!]<sup>320</sup>

In response to Ānanda's astonishment and bewilderment, the Buddha shows him the "jewelled palace (*ratnavyūha*), the pleasure[-palace] (*paribhoga*) of the Bodhisatva, which was enjoyed (*paribhoga*) by him as he dwelt in his mother's womb (*kuṣi*)".<sup>321</sup> This *ratnavyūha* was carried away after the *bodhisatva*'s birth by Brahmā to his realm, and the Buddha summons Brahmā to retrieve it.<sup>322</sup>

The *ratnavyūha-paribhoga* now displayed is resplendent and effulgent, and as pure as perfectly refined gold. It dazzles the eyes of the gods. It is filled with all conceivable riches. It is made of mind-bogglingly valuable materials. Those materials are beautifully fragrant – made of a fabulous sandalwood called *uragasāracandana* – and the whole is bestrewn with flowers, as if to sharpen the contrast with the "stench" of the ordinary womb.<sup>323</sup> The *ratnavyūha* also has an elaborate triple structure (comprising three turrets or penthouses [*kūṭāgāra*]), made of impossibly valuable

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<sup>320</sup> Vaidya (1958): 47.6-15, Foucaux (1884): 59-60, Mitra (1881): 92, Bays (1983): 1:102-103. See also the following passage later in the text, portraying monks who doubt its docetic doctrine of the purity of the *bodhisatva* in the womb: "The Bodhisatva entered into the womb of his mother and mingled with crap, scum and filth (*uccāraprasrāvamaṇḍa*). Is this pure action? It is said that he was born from his mother's right side, that he was not soiled by the maternal womb (*anupalipto garbhamalena*). How is that possible?" Vaidya 64.5-7, Foucaux 81, Mitra 117, Bays 1:135.

<sup>321</sup> Vaidya (1958): 47.15-16, Foucaux (1884): 60, Mitra (1881): 92, Bays (1983): 1:103. On *paribhoga*, see Edgerton (1953) s.v.; Mitra 104-15 n. 7. Through the long passage that follows, this structure is alternately called *ratnavyūha* and *paribhoga*, and often, both conjointly. (Bays's translation as "sanctum" is not helpful.) In verse at 6.24, it is called a *mahāvīmāna*, Vaidya 54.13. When Brahmā carries it off after the birth (see n. 330), it is called a *kūṭāgāra* (cf. also n. 323).

<sup>322</sup> Vaidya (1958): 47.18-48.6, Foucaux (1884): 60-61, Mitra (1881): 92-93, Bays (1983): 1:103-104.

<sup>323</sup> Vaidya (1958): 48.20-50.10, Foucaux (1884): 61-64, Mitra (1881): 93-95, Bays (1983): 1:105-108; Vaidya 49.7-10, Foucaux 62-63, Mitra 94, Bays 1:106. The structure is called, in this connection, the *gandhakūṭāgāra*, Vaidya 49.8. There may be a connection here to the *gandhakuṭi* as a feature of Buddhist monastic architecture, for which see Strong (1977), Norman (1908).

materials.<sup>324</sup> It has a TARDIS-like character, which defies the usual laws of space and allows it to contain vast multitudes and structures.<sup>325</sup> The *bodhisatva* dwells in this palace, from the very outset fully formed and luminous in body, and utterly self-possessed in mind.<sup>326</sup> Much of what goes on echoes what we have already seen in Up and MV: his mother can see him; he holds court for a string of divinities and preaches to them; and so on.

As John Strong has pointed out, this *ratnavyūha* also has features that echo those of relics.<sup>327</sup> First, it is “solid, indestructible, like adamant”.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> The use of this term points us to various features shared by the *ratnavyūha-paribhoga* and the *kūṭāgāra*. *Kūṭāgāra* are also often depicted as jewelled or made of (the seven) precious substances. They are also called, or associated with, *vyūha* (“displays”, “arrays”). They are also identified, sometimes by implication, with the *dharmadhātu*. Cf. Granoff (1998); see also Osto (2008): 20-22, 49-53, 66-68, 89-90, 102-103. In the connection to the *dharmadhātu*, we may once more hear an echo (however remote) of *dhātu* meaning “relic” (see further below). It would be worth undertaking a full study of the motif of the *kūṭāgāra*, including its connections to the *ratnavyūha* – and possibly to lotus imagery, where there may again be connections to *tathāgatagarbha* via the calyx of the lotus (*padmagarbha*) (see also n. 325 following).

<sup>325</sup> The TARDIS (“Time And Relative Dimension[s] In Space”) is Doctor Who’s mode of transport and dwelling. From the outside, it appears the size of a London police box, but inside, it is disproportionately vast. In various senses and at various times, the *ratnavyūha* is also a palace within a palace, or within many palaces; Vaidya (1958): 45.24-46.23, Foucaux (1884): 58-59, Mitra (1881): 91-92, Bays (1983): 1:100-102; Vaidya 48.1-3, Foucaux 61, Mitra 93, Bays 1:104. This *mise en abyme* structure (worlds within worlds etc.) makes it part of a far-reaching pattern in Mahāyāna symbolism. Important for us is the echo in certain versions of the *buddhāvataṃsaka* miracle, in which a Buddha projects countless lotus blossoms from the pores of his skin, and each lotus contains a Buddha, or a world, and so on. Arguably, we also see variants of this same pattern in Maitreya’s *kūṭāgāra* in GV; in Vimalakīrti’s room; and in Huayan notions like Indra’s net. Cf. n. 333 below.

<sup>326</sup> Vaidya (1958): 50.6-21, Foucaux (1884): 64-65, Mitra (1881): 96, Bays (1983): 1:108-109; Vaidya 51.12, Foucaux 66, Mitra 97, Bays 1:110; Vaidya 52.5, Foucaux 67, Mitra 98, Bays 1:112; Vaidya 53.23, Foucaux 68, Mitra 98, Bays 1:113; on the phrase *smṛtaḥ saṃprajānas* (Pāli *sato saṃpajāno*), see Edgerton (1953): 577 s.v. *saṃprajāna*, and Hara (1980): 145 n. 12, citing Franke and Lüders.

<sup>327</sup> Strong (2004): 63-64. Cf. also the explicit analogy drawn in NK between the womb of the *bodhisatva*’s mother and the reliquary chamber of a *caitya* (*bodhisattena vasitakucchi nāma cetiyagabbhasadisā hoti*), Jā I 52; Rhys Davids (1880): 65. The only other serious

As I have shown elsewhere, the hardness of adamant is often associated with relics, and characterisation of the *ratnavyūha* in these terms arguably presents it as a kind of relic or substitute for one; the same might be argued, for instance, of the *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* of MPNMS, which is also characterised precisely as *vajra* and *abheda*.<sup>329</sup> Second, the *ratnavyūha* is also like a relic in that later, after Ānanda and the assembled multitudes have seen it, it is carried away to the Brahmaloaka again, where a *caitya* is built for it, with the understanding that it will be the relic-like object of cultic worship.<sup>330</sup> Indeed, as David Drewes has pointed out, in the *Nidānakathā*, Māyā herself is also compared to a *ceṭiyagabbha* (\**caityagarbha*, the relic chamber of a *caitya*) while she bears the *bodhisatva*; and MV uses the term *sphāṭikasamudga*, which could refer to a crystal reliquary, in discussing the fact that Māyā can clearly see the *bodhisatva* within her.<sup>331</sup> These overtones of relic symbolism are an important dimension of the pattern of parallels between the *ratnavyūha* and *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature as taught in MPNMS; recall that, as we noted

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consideration of the *ratnavyūha* motif known to me in secondary scholarship is Sasson (2009): 60-62.

<sup>328</sup> "...and yet as soft to the touch as if it were made of *kācilinda* cloth," *dr̥ḥasāro 'bhedyo vajropamaḥ sparśena ca kācilindikasukhasaṃsparśaḥ*, Vaidya (1958): 49.10-11, Foucaux (1884): 63, Mitra (1881): 95, Bays (1983): 1:106-107. On the translation "adamant" for *vajra*, see Radich (2011[2012]): 228 n. 5.

<sup>329</sup> Radich (2011[2012]). A further parallel with MPNMS is that Lalit, too, worries that some among its audience will reject its doctrines, and makes them the subject of a prophecy from the Buddha that such bad monks will be cast into Avīci Hell for their doubts; Vaidya (1958): 64.1-65.5, Foucaux (1884): 81-82, Mitra (1881): 116-118, Bays (1983): 1:134-136.

<sup>330</sup> Vaidya (1958): 54.5-6, Foucaux (1884): 70, Mitra (1881): 100, Bays (1983): 1:116; see also Vaidya 61.26-27, Foucaux 78, Mitra 114, Bays 1:130-131; Drewes (2007): 110.

<sup>331</sup> *yasmā ca bodhisattena vasitakucchi nāma ceṭiyagabbhasadisā*; Drewes (2007): 107-108, 109-110, citing Fausbøll (1887-1897): 1:51-52. The same trope is also repeated in the *Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā* and the *Buddhavaṃsa-aṭṭhakathā*. I am not completely persuaded by all the details of Drewes's treatment of the analogy between Māyā and the *caitya*, 107-110, but his basic point strikes me as insightful and convincing. Drewes also discusses MV, in which the comparison to the *caitya* is not explicitly stated; but he argues that the underlying analogy between Māyā and the *caitya* accounts for such elements as the worship that Māyā receives from the gods, and the fact that she is impervious to harm.

above, Shimoda has argued that Buddha nature (*\*buddhadhātu*) seems to be presented as a deliberate substitute for the (external, material) Buddha relic (*dhātu*). We will return to some further implications of this parallel in Chapter 5.

A related account appears in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (“GV”).<sup>332</sup> Māyā describes how, when she was pregnant with the *bodhisatva*, her body miraculously came to embrace the entire world, and her womb became as expansive as all space, although, at the same time, both remained concordant with normal human proportions; *all* the magically manifested palaces that serve as dwelling places in the womb for *bodhisatvas* in all the ten directions then entered into her body.<sup>333</sup> Not just one *bodhisatva*, but an entire host of *bodhisatvas*, as countless as grains of sand in all the Buddha-fields, then entered into [these dwellings in] Māyā’s womb.<sup>334</sup> Each of these *bodhisatvas* was ensconced within a *kūṭāgāra* made of jewels from the bellies (*?garbha*) of serpent-kings.<sup>335</sup> This miraculous palace-womb is then the site of various grandiose practices of taking *darśan* of, worshipping, and hearing the Dharma from the *bodhisatva*. The lesson of the episode is that

<sup>332</sup> For Ch parallels to the passages discussed here, see T278:9.763c5-764c6, T293:10.800a12-c29, Cleary (1989): 311-315. For discussion, see Osto (2008): 102-104; Ohnuma (2012): 76-78. As Ohnuma points out, the Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī portion of GV also contains a mind-bogglingly hyperbolic extension of the docetic birth motif; Ohnuma 77, referring to Cleary 259-273; see Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 365-385, T278:9.751a1-755b16, T293:10.777c24-784a26.

<sup>333</sup> *daśasu dikṣu bodhisattvagarbhāvāsabhavanavyūhāḥ*, Ch 十方菩薩莊嚴宮殿 T278:9.763c26, 十方菩薩宮殿莊嚴 T293:10.800b15 (a couple of lines later, this entire collection of palaces is called *bodhisattvagarbhāvāsabhavanavyūha-paribhoga[sya]*); Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 439.23-26, Granoff (2004): 132. On the extraordinary commodiousness of Māyā’s womb, see also Suzuki and Idzumi 440.22-23, Granoff 133. On the *mise en abyme* motif here, see once more n. 325.

<sup>334</sup> Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 440.1-14, Granoff (2004): 132-133.

<sup>335</sup> *nāgendragarbhāmanikūṭāgāragata[iḥ]*; Granoff translates “crests” for *garbha*. Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 440.6-7, Granoff (2004): 132. Māyā’s womb is also equated with *bodhisatva* palaces (termed *bhavanavyūhaparibhoga...sarvabodhisattvaparibhogāḥ...kūṭāgāraparibhogā[ḥ]* etc.) in the eighth miracle attending the birth of the *bodhisatva*, when all the palaces of all *bodhisatvas* emerge from her womb and are arrayed in the Lumbinī grove; Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 378.14-22, T278:9.753a24-29, T279:10.404a16-22, Cleary (1989): 268. (Cleary’s “furnishings” for *paribhoga*, via his construal of his Ch text, is not helpful for our present purposes; cf. n. 321 above.)



Māyā is always the mother of all *bodhisatvas* in all worlds, even when they take birth by other means, such as arising in a lotus flower (in which case Māyā will be the goddess of the lotus pond), or being born into a Buddha-field (in which case Māyā is the goddess of the seat of awakening). Thus, Māyā’s apparent motherhood of the Buddha, in all these cases, is an expedient means (*upāya*), just as much as the various modes of birth are expedient means “displayed” (*saṃdarśayanti*) by the respective *bodhisatvas*.<sup>336</sup>

The *ratnavyūha* also features in Surapati’s *Śākyasiṃha-stotra*, and something like it is reported (as the doctrine of “some” other party) in MPPU.<sup>337</sup>

In these texts, I contend, we see a material-miraculous, positive corollary to docetic Buddhology, articulating an alternate vision of a specific element in the Buddha’s embodiment, namely, the womb in which the *bodhisatva* gestates. In earlier sections of this chapter, we already saw that texts docetically deny the reality of the *bodhisatva*’s apparent, human-physiological gestation and birth, and tell us in positive terms what was true instead. In the doctrine of *ratnavyūha*, they tell us what kind of a womb produces him, given that it is impossible that he could be nourished by and emerge from something as hellish, impure and debased as a real human womb.

#### 4.7 *Dharmakāya* and *vajrakāya* as positive corollaries of corporeal docetism

The extent to which docetic doctrine is corporeal in MPNMS is even clearer when we consider what I regard as the text’s first positive corollary to negatively-framed docetic Buddhology – the *dharmakāya-vajrakāya*. In discussing the first docetic MPNMS passage cited above (p. 109), I omitted key phrases, for the sake of expository clarity. MPNMS actually says:

<sup>336</sup> Suzuki and Idzumi (1936): 441.1-445.18, 441.11-13; Granoff (2004): 134.

<sup>337</sup> Pandey (1994): 84.2; MPPU citation above in n. 316.

For countless *kalpas*, I have already long been far removed from all lascivious desire, *and this body of mine is now the dharmakāya*; I show myself entering into the womb in conformity with the ways of the world.<sup>338</sup>

Similarly, in docetically denying the *bodhisatva*'s actions as a baby, the text says:

People said that I was a baby; but for countless *kalpas* now, *this body of mine has long been removed from such things. The body of the Tathāgata is a dharmakāya, not some thing constituted by flesh, blood, sinews, veins, bones and marrow.* I [only] show myself as a baby, in order to conform with the ways of the world.<sup>339</sup>

The fact that *dharmakāya* is thus expounded exactly in connection with docetism draws our attention to the fact that MPNMS expounds *dharmakāya* at greatest length precisely in connection with a docetic denial of the ordinary body. In the overarching *mise-en-scène* of MPNMS, the assembled hordes of worshippers are confronted by a terrifying spectacle: The Buddha – the being they believe to be their sole hope for salvation – is apparently languishing on his deathbed. For obvious reasons, therefore, they are obsessed with the apparent frailty of his earthly body. *Dharmakāya* is presented as the solution to this problem:<sup>340</sup>

O good man! The body of the Tathāgata is an eternal body, an indestructible body, an adamant body (*\*vajrakāya*); it is not a body sustained by various kinds of food. That is to say, it is the Dharma Body (*\*dharmakāya*).<sup>341</sup>

<sup>338</sup> DhKṣ 388b26-27 (see also n. 285); emphasis mine: 我今此身即是法身隨順世間示現入胎; cf. Tib *sha'i lus ma yin gyi chos kyi sku yin no*, H §195.5-6. Again, this Tib could be interpreted as a *bahuvrīhi* (cf. n. 266).

<sup>339</sup> See n. 266.

<sup>340</sup> These passages are examined from a different perspective in Radich (2011[2012]).

<sup>341</sup> 如來身者是常住身 (Tib *rtag pa'i sku*, *\*nityakāya*), 不可壞身 (*mi shigs pa'i sku*, *\*abhedakāya*), 金剛之身 (*rdo rje'i sku*, *\*vajrakāya*), 非雜食身 (Tib only an inexact equivalent, *sha'i sku* “a body of flesh”, as elsewhere for the same term), 即是法身 (*chos kyi sku*, *\*dharmakāya*); DhKṣ 382c27-29; H §144. Skt reconstructions from Shimoda (1993): 254.

Do not say now that the body of the Tathāgata is soft, can easily be broken, and is the same as that of common mortals. O good man! Know now that for countless billions of *kalpas*, the body of the Tathāgata has been strong, firm, and indestructible. It is neither the body of a man nor of a god; it is not a body susceptible to fear; nor is it a body sustained by various kinds of food...<sup>342</sup>

[T]he Tathāgata's body [is] the eternal *dharmakāya*, the body of peace and bliss (安樂之身)...Yes, indeed, the Tathāgata's Dharma-Body is adamant and indestructible.<sup>343</sup>

These excerpts are merely highlights of an extended chapter (the *Vajrābhedakāya* Chapter), which arguably forms the Buddhological core of the MPNMS (especially its earliest portions). This chapter almost immediately precedes the first and largest LAN-style docetic passage examined immediately above. Its contents are inseparably intertwined with the doctrine, equally central to MPNMS as a whole, of the true eternity of the Buddha. In this sense, the doctrine of the *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* resolves the problem of the application to the Buddha of one of the oldest formulae for the inadequacy of the given body (which is echoed in the MPNMS wording above):

This body of mine is material (*rūpi*), made up from the four great elements, born of mother and father, fed on rice and gruel, impermanent, liable to be injured and abraded, broken and destroyed, and this, my consciousness, is bound to it and dependent on it.<sup>344</sup>

<sup>342</sup> 汝今莫謂如來之身不堅 (Tib *sob sob po'i lus*) 可壞、如凡夫身。善男子！汝今當知：如來之身無量億劫堅牢難壞 (Tib *mi shigs pa'i sku*)、非人天身、非恐怖身、非雜食身；DhKṣ 383a3-5, H §146.2, 5.

<sup>343</sup> 如來法身金剛不壞 (*rdo rje lta bur mi shigs pa'i sku*); DhKṣ 383b17-19; H §148.6. This Tib would correspond to something like *\*vajropamābhedakāya*, and seems to say only that the body is *like* adamant, not that it *is* adamant; however, as Habata Hiromi helpfully points out (private communication, January 8 2014), Skt fragments elsewhere have only *vajrābhedakāya* (SF 12), corresponding similarly to Tib *rdo rje lta mi shigs pa'i sku*. Cf. Shimoda (1993): 266 n. 64 (Shimoda notes a parallel in *Vim*, Lamotte 82).

<sup>344</sup> DN 2, *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*: *ayaṃ kho me kāyo rūpi cātummahābhūtika mātāpettikasambhavo odanakummāsūpacayo aniccucchādanaparimaddanabhedanavidhamsanadhammo. idaṃ ca*

*Dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* is thus a positive corollary to the negatively phrased denial of the reality of the impermanent, food-fed, vulnerable body of the Buddha. It gives a positive answer to the implicit question: If the Buddha does not have such a flawed body, what does he have instead? *Dharmakāya* is thus the first instance in MPNMS itself of what I am calling positive corollaries to docetic Buddhology – that is, it reinforces the docetic denial of the Buddha’s ordinary humanity, through the articulation of a positive alternative to the embodiment denied. In fact, I believe, it can be demonstrated that *dharmakāya* doctrine is also presented as such a positive corollary to docetic Buddhology in other key contexts, such as LAn and the *Aṣṭasāharikā prajñāpāramitā* (“Aṣṭa”), and this feature is key to explaining the elaboration of *dharmakāya* doctrine *per se*. Detailed demonstration of this claim, however, must await another venue.

In the terms described above, moreover, *dharmakāya* doctrine is a specific type of positive corollary to docetic Buddhology as articulated in negative terms. In §4.5 and 4.6, I argued that texts like Up, MV, and Lalit present “material-miraculous” alternate visions of the true conditions of the Buddha’s embodiment. *Dharmakāya* doctrine, by contrast, is a more radical doctrine of embodiment, in that it breaks with the domain of the visible and material altogether. I suggested above that this type of positive corollary to negatively-framed docetic Buddhology can be characterised as “soteriological-transcendent”. However, *dharmakāya* doctrine does not yet extend this set of alternatives to the specific realities of the Buddha’s conception, gestation and birth. That step, I argue, occurs with the elaboration of *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine.

#### 4.8 *Tathāgatagarbha* as a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary to docetism about the Buddha’s conception, gestation and birth

As we have already seen above, MPNMS-tg features sustained development of docetic themes (indeed, MPNMS as a whole has an unusually full

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*pana me viññāṇaṃ ettha sitaṃ ettha paṭibaddhan ti*; D I 76, Walshe (1987): 104; see Radich (2007a): §2.3.3.

complement of elements of this theme).<sup>345</sup> Now, where other texts examined above feature the material-miraculous positive corollaries of docetic Buddhology regarding the *bodhisatva*'s conception, gestation and birth, it is as if the authors have asked, "If the ordinary human womb, with its impure bodily fluids, is not an appropriate dwelling place for the *bodhisatva*, then what kind of womb (*garbha*) does he dwell in?" Strikingly, however, MPNMS-tg elaborates relatively little on negative statements of docetism with regard to the conception, gestation and birth of the Buddha.<sup>346</sup> It also does not contain any mention of "material-miraculous" corollaries to docetism, viz., of the jewelled palace of the *bodhisatva* in Māyā's womb, etc.

I suggest that this may be because the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS-tg fulfils the same structural role fulfilled elsewhere by other doctrines about the Buddha's mother(s), conception, gestation and birth. Simply put, MPNMS-tg answers the question, "Where do Buddhas come from?" by saying, "They can come from inside the body of every sentient being;" and it answers the question, "What kind of womb (*garbha*) does the Buddha gestate in?" by saying that there is such a *garbha* in the body of every sentient being (*sems can thams cad gyi lus la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do; ...tathāgatagarbho 'sti*).

I suggest that we can characterise this doctrine, like *dharmakāya* doctrine, as a "soteriological-transcendent" corollary to docetic Buddhology. That is to say, like the "material-miraculous" visions of the *ratnavyūha-paribhoga* discussed in §4.8, *tathāgatagarbha* functions as a solution to the docetic problem of the Buddha having a mother.<sup>347</sup> It identifies a positive

<sup>345</sup> MPNMS-dhk features some docetism (in part implicit) about the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* and his body. However, the docetic theme is much stronger in MPNMS-tg, as can be seen, for example, from instances of the "*lokānuvartanā* formula" already listed above (n. 109).

<sup>346</sup> The main exceptions are the passages cited above, n. 268, 284, 285.

<sup>347</sup> Recently, Ohnuma has also usefully treated *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in connection with larger ideas about the problem of Buddhas' mothers; Ohnuma (2012): 154-159. However, Ohnuma warns that "we should be careful not to overemphasize the degree to which *tathāgata-garbha* necessarily invokes the idea of pregnancy", partly because *garbha* has other possible meanings than "womb" or "embryo", and partly because "the concept of *tathāgata-garbha* was soon subjected to substantial philosophical analysis" (155-156). Characterising such "highly philosophical" discourse as distant from

substitute for the docetically denied fleshly conception and womb of the *bodhisatva*-Buddha.<sup>348</sup> However, this solution is of a different type. This time, the substitute *garbha* is elaborated in the key of soteriology, in the sense that *tathāgatagarbha* is a pivotal element in the soteriological promise and process envisioned by the text. This solution may also be called “transcendent”, in the sense that the soteriological potential it points to is proper to a domain beyond the fold of the ordinary *saṃsāric* world. By contrast, even such better Buddha-embodiments as the *ratnavyūha-paribhoga* still adhere more closely to the order of that world.

This interpretation has the virtue of showing that the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS is part of large and consistent patterns in the text – the same patterns to which I have argued *dharmakāya* doctrine belongs. Those patterns also incorporate the text’s docetism about the *parinirvāṇa*. The same patterns extend to what may be synthesis of *both* a “material-miraculous” and a “soteriological-transcendent” corollary to corporeal docetism, whereby MPNMS-dhk culminates with the proclamation that the Tathāgata’s true body is the *dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* (thereby connecting the concerns of the first and second halves of the text).<sup>349</sup> This interpretation also has the strength of showing how *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine relates to MPNMS-tg’s general and consistent concern with broader docetism à la LAN.

This interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in MPNMS-tg thus matches the second of the “Schmithausen criteria” laid out above for identifying a “scenario of origin” for a new Buddhist concept – it points to a “systematic/dogmatical or exegetical situation” that could have mo-

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“the poetic images and metaphors used in [the] original context” of the doctrine (which she takes to be TGS), Ohnuma restricts her discussion to the eighth simile of TGS (the pregnant woman), because “the imagery of pregnancy is actually invoked” (156). It will be clear, from the entirety of my discussion here, that I think that this caution is excessive.

<sup>348</sup> Strong observes of the *ratnavyūha*: “The embryonic imagery here recalls the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*,” Strong (2004): 64. Kritzer has also briefly discussed *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a positive transformation of the womb, from the negative connotations it has in such texts as the *Garbhāvākraṅti-sūtra*; Kritzer (2009): 88.

<sup>349</sup> On the conundrums presented by the connections between what Shimoda calls the first and second layers of MPNMS, see e.g. Habata (1992); Habata (2014).

tivated the introduction of the new concept, and it can “render fully plausible the choice of the term” for that concept (*tathāgatagarbha*). In addition, the interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary to docetic Buddhism helps us better understand three other large features of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in MPNMS-tg.

(1) First, the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS-tg is insistently corporeal, in a way that cannot be entirely accounted for by the mere notion that the text wants to claim that buddhahood is ultimately available to all.<sup>350</sup> As I have already mentioned, the text sometimes claims, quite concretely, that all sentient beings have *tathāgatagarbha* in their bodies.<sup>351</sup> One of the most significant such passages repeats formulaically the idea that the *bodhisatva-mahāsattvas* of the tenth stage see (if “hazily”) the *tathāgatagarbha* or the *\*buddhadhātu* (both terms are used interchangeably) in their own bodies (we will return to this passage below).<sup>352</sup> This insistence that *tathāgatagarbha* is in the *body* of the sentient being makes much more sense if we think of *tathāgatagarbha* as a “soteriological-transcendent” substitute for other types of “Buddha womb”.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>350</sup> On ways in which the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS is corporeal, see also Shimoda (1997): 278-279, 282, 301-302, 501 n. 50, 594 n. 59.

<sup>351</sup> H §351, FX 881b24-c3, DhKṣ 404c4-11 (3x); H §357, FX 888b11-13, DhKṣ 405b8-12; H §415.12-13, FX 887b21-23, DhKṣ 412b10-12; [worldlings] have the “element of self” (*\*ātmadhātu*) in their own bodies, *rang gi lus la bdag gi khams yod*, H §417.7-8 (FX has only “all sentient beings have *\*tathāgatagarbha*”, 887c10-11; missing entirely from DhKṣ). Cf. Habata (2014): 158.

<sup>352</sup> E.g. *de bzhin du | sa bcu thob pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnam kyis kyang | rang gi lus la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod bzhin du yod par 'ol phyir mthong bar zad*, etc., H §408-414 (eight times); FX 十住菩薩亦復如是，於自身中觀如來性亦生惑想, 887a21-b17 (seven times); DhKṣ only speaks directly of seeing *tathāgatagarbha* “in the body” once in the same passages, 412a13-14. In the case of TGS, interestingly enough, the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* (etc.) being in the body of the sentient being seems to feature mainly in Ch translations only.

<sup>353</sup> A more widespread conceit has it that various qualities related to the Buddha or realization indwell specifically in the body, and that this fact confers upon the sentient being various merits and benefits. Drewes has suggested that we should connect this conceit to understandings of *caityas*. Other examples are the indwelling in the body (*sarīra*) of recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) in the *Visuddhimaggā*; and Nāga-

(2) Second, as this latter passage indicates, in MPNMS-tg, *tathāgatagarbha* is also consistently realised through what we might call a “soteriology of vision”. In other words, what liberates sentient beings to the potential buddhahood within them is the act of *seeing* it; and what differentiates Buddhas from all other beings, among many other things, is that only Buddhas see *tathāgatagarbha* with perfect clarity. The “soteriology of vision” is also a theme common to all the similes of TGS.<sup>354</sup>

The theme of seeing in *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine can also be understood better in light of certain features of other types of docetism about the *bodhisatva*'s intrauterine life. As we have already seen in part above, seeing the Buddha is a common theme in narrative traditions articulating “material-miraculous” alternate visions of the *bodhisatva*'s intrauterine exploits.<sup>355</sup> Crowds of deities come to visit, and they can see the *bodhisatva* within his *ratnavyūha* (e.g. in Up). In many of these traditions, moreover, Māyā (and/or others) can see the *bodhisatva*, who is already perfect in body, sitting in the womb. This notion is often expressed by similes like “as clearly as a thread running through coloured beryl”, etc.<sup>356</sup>

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senā, in the *Milindapañha*, in whose torso or body (*khande*) mindfulness and wisdom are established; Drewes (2007): 105-106, 110-111.

<sup>354</sup> This theme is so frequent in MPNMS that it would require a separate study to document it fully. In MPNMS-tg, in contrast to TGS, the key to liberation is for the sentient being him- or herself to come to see the *tathāgatagarbha* within (although only Buddhas can see it perfectly). In TGS, by contrast, it is the Buddha who sees, by means of his divine vision; he then directs sentient beings to act in such a way as to discover the “hidden treasure”.

<sup>355</sup> Sasson notes the importance of this dimension of the Buddha's intrauterine existence; Sasson (2009): 56-58.

<sup>356</sup> E.g. M III 121, Nāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 981; D II 13-14, Walshe (1987): 203-204; *Mahāvādāna-sūtra*, Fukita (2003): 8(15.5)-9(16.6), 56-59; NK, *bodhisattañ ca antokucchigataṃ vipṣasanne maṇiratane āvutaṇḍusuttaṃ viya passati*; Jā I 51-52, Rhys Davids (1880): 65; Lalit: “...like a flash of lightning breaking through clouds”, Vaidya (1958): 50.21-22, Foucaux (1884): 65, Mitra (1881): 96, Bays (1983): 1:109; Lalit: “as a face is seen in a mirror”, Vaidya 53.19-20, Foucaux 69, Mitra 99, Bays 1:115, T187:3.550c28-551a1; T190:3.698b28-c2, abridged in Beal (1875): 61; MV 2:16, Jones (1949-1956): 2:14-15; MSV SBhV, Gnoli (1977-1978): 1:42, T1450:24.107c6-9.

This simile is used in other contexts for other purposes, perhaps most notably in the section of the *Sāmaññaphala/Srāmaṇyaphala* known to modern scholarship as the “*Tathāgata-Predigt*”, where it is used (by a somewhat obscure logic) to illustrate the



As we have already seen, MV may express this conceit by saying that the *bodhisatva* could be seen as clearly as if he were in a crystal reliquary.<sup>357</sup> In this connection, we should remember that far more frequently than it speaks of *tathāgatagarbha*, TGS actually speaks of sentient beings having within them the body of a Tathāgata (and a “full-fledged” one, to use Zimmermann’s phrase).<sup>358</sup> In TGS, the “soteriology of vision” entails, specifically, the *seeing* (by the Buddha’s divine vision) of these inner Buddha-bodies.<sup>359</sup> In light of these analogues, it is clear that “seeing the *tathāgata*

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moment when the meditating monk perceives the unsatisfactory nature of the ordinary fleshly body in these terms: “This body of mine is material, made up of the four great elements...and this consciousness of mine is bound to it and dependent upon it;” D I 76-77, Dutt (1950): 2:247-248, *Dīrghāgama* T1:1.85c19-20, 86a1-6, Meisig (1987): 328-329, 335, Walshe (1987): 104; cf. discussion above p. 131. This realisation is immediately succeeded by the elaboration of a (presumably better) “body made of mind” (*manomayakāya*). The relationship between the use of this simile in these different contexts is obscure, but it is noteworthy that an image of insight into the dissatisfactory nature of the ordinary fleshly body has been turned to express the perfection of the body of the nascent Buddha (and of his mother).

<sup>357</sup> See n. 331.

<sup>358</sup> E.g. §0H, *sku*, Zimmermann (2002): 98, 238-239; §0I, *sku*, Zimmermann 99, 240-241; §1C (1.2, 1.3, 1.5), *lus/sku*, Zimmermann 108-109, 258-262; §5C (5.3), Zimmermann 124, 290-291; §6C (6.2), *lus*, Zimmermann 130; §7B, *lus*, Zimmermann 133, 302-303; §7C (7.4), *lus/sku*, Zimmermann 134, 206-207, cf. Zimmermann 104 n. 60, 105 n. 64, 105 n. 66 (2), 109 n. 80, 109 n. 83, 109 n. 84, 124 n. 151, 130 n. 170, 134 n. 193, 134 n. 196, 137 n. 204 (3), 137 n. 206, 138 n. 207, 138 n. 212, 139 n. 213, 139 n. 215 (4), 141n. 227, 142 n. 231. In the Ch translations, as Zimmermann mentions in many of the notes listed above, we sometimes see a shift to the statement that the Tathāgata is within the body of the sentient being (rather than the body of the Tathāgata being within the sentient being). For the phrase “full-fledged”, see Zimmermann (2002): 62-64.

<sup>359</sup> Zimmermann argues that in TGS, a “revelational” model of liberation predominates over a “developmental” model. He rests his argument in part on the fact that the “Tathāgatas within” are “full-fledged”; Zimmermann (2002): 42, 62-64. He has a point here, but he also presumes that Buddhas develop like ordinary sentient beings. However, the “material-miraculous” corollaries to docetic Buddhology imagine *precisely* full-fledged Tathāgatas within the body of Māyā. The “full-fledged” and yet “intrauterine” Tathāgatas of TGS are thus, from this point of view, just “normal” Buddhas. Further, Zimmermann finds it “surprising” that the *upameyas* of TGS similes “propound the idea of buddhas seated within living beings”, and thinks that in using such *upameyas*, the authors of the *sūtra* “have recourse to just another metaphor”; Zimmermann (2002): 52. However, the “material-miraculous” corollaries to docetic Buddhology

*garbha*” is just the MPNMS-tg version of the motif of “seeing the [intrauterine] Buddha” in these other contexts.

In MPNMS-tg, moreover, *tathāgatagarbha* functions in various ways as a full substitute for a present Buddha – for example, by constituting the true Buddha-refuge (see the passage discussed below, p. 140). In this light, it is clear that the motif of “seeing the *tathāgatagarbha*” is the text’s version of the much more widespread motif of “seeing the Buddha”, i.e. “Buddhist *darśan*”.<sup>360</sup> We should recall that the same motif of *darśan* was also connected to the *dharmakāya*, which I have argued above is another large element in MPNMS’s positive corollaries to docetic Buddhology.<sup>361</sup> It also seems likely that the motif of seeing the Buddha (or his nature, or seeing the *tathāgata*’s *garbha*) is somehow connected with early Mahāyāna visualisation meditations (*buddhānumṛti*) and the motif of the “vision quest” (though it is difficult to say exactly how these things are connected).<sup>362</sup>

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gy show that some Buddhists of that era might have thought it literally possible that a fully-fledged Buddha could sit within a living being.

Zimmermann’s view of the TGS doctrine as a metaphor therefore might not be a reliable guide to the way the TGS authors thought; it might better be read as representing the limits of our contemporary assumptions about the nature of reality, and the difficulty they can give us in interpreting Buddhist ideas. For reflections on the difficulty of distinguishing metaphorical from literal ideas in reference to worldviews that we do not share, see discussion in Radich (forthcoming a). In brief, there is usually a zero-sum relation between miracle and metaphor. What is miraculous precisely cannot be metaphorical, and *vice versa*.

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Eck (1985); Eckel (1992): esp. 37-38, 47-48, 53, 55, 58, 60, 62, 96-97, 128, 134-141; also McMahan (2002): 114-116, 122-123, 125-126, 127-130, 130-137, 143-146, 149-158; Rotman (2009): 151-153, 157-175, 189-192, 268 n. 80.

<sup>361</sup> I am referring, of course, to developments of a motif often traced back to the *Vakkali-sutta*: *yo...dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati, yo maṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati* etc., S III 120, Bodhi (2000): 939. The development of the idea of seeing the *dharmakāya* is complex, but see for example T220:6.1068a19-23, 1068b1-5 etc.; T222:8.198b22-23; T270:9.299b1-10.

<sup>362</sup> See Harrison (1978a); Beyer (1977); Osto (unpublished). Zimmermann suggests: “Intimately bound up with the idea of a buddha within living beings may be the practice of buddha visualisation (*buddhānumṛti*),” referring to the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi-sūtra*; Zimmermann (2002): 52 n. 83. In a characteristically suggestive comment, Harrison has suggested of *buddhānumṛti*, “The self-referential nature of this practice has been under-emphasised: it is not simply the worship of the Buddha

(3) Once we see the “soteriology of vision” as the MPNMS-tg version of “Buddhist *darśan*”, we can also better understand a third feature of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the text. In a number of passages, MPNMS-tg speaks of *tathāgatagarbha* not just as an abstract buddhahood within the sentient being, but in terms redolent of particular, special Buddha-bodies.

First, the text repeatedly connects the theme of *tathāgatagarbha* to the eventual perfection of the *dharmakāya*, saying, for instance, most strikingly, “In this manner, the seeds of the *dharmakāya* are in my body.”<sup>363</sup> This feature of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the text reinforces the connection between the two main halves of MPNMS-common, a problem we already touched on above.<sup>364</sup> MPNMS-dhk argues that buddhahood is eternal because Buddhas are truly embodied in the adamant, indestructible *dharmakāya*. The authors of MPNMS-tg, however, add a new spin to this idea, showing that *dharmakāya* can nonetheless in a paradoxical sense continually emerge anew, from where it lies concealed in the bodies of ordinary sentient beings.

MPNMS-tg also connects *tathāgatagarbha* with another special kind of Buddha-body – the body that bears the corporeal marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*:

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as other, but the evocation of *the Buddha in oneself, or of oneself as the Buddha*: the point of the exercise is self-transformation;” Harrison (1995): 20. Rotman has noted, for the *Divyāvadāna* and related contexts, that seeing is intimately related to faith (both *śrad-dhā* and *prasāda*); Rotman (2009): esp. 24, 30-37, 43, 52-56, 65-69, 71-74, 110-111, 118-119. It would thus perhaps be worth investigating the relation between seeing *tathāgatagarbha* and faith in MPNMS.

<sup>363</sup> *nga'i lus la chos kyi sku'i sa bon de lta bu yod do*, H §397.7-8; FX: 能知我身有/微妙法身種, 886a13; DhKṣ 410c13-14; the same passage also says that the seeds of bliss are in the body, H §397.1-2; FX 886a9; DhKṣ 410c11. Cf. also DhKṣ 411c7-11, which says that hearing “this *mahāsūtra* called *The Secret Store of the Tathāgata*” makes the *dharmakāya* grow 增長法身 (Tib and FX do not mention the *dharmakāya*). DhKṣ 416b29-c1 also says that the “true nature of the Tathāgata” is the *dharmakāya*, a body without birth, 如來實性 ...即是法身是無生身; but again, Tib and FX do not support the idea that *tathāgatagarbha* is at issue.

<sup>364</sup> See once more n. 349.

Those with faith in this sūtra are themselves the three refuges, and certainly have a refuge within them, so that they do not need the three refuges. This is because they reflect on the fact that they have the \**tathāgatagarbha-buddhadhātu* [Tib uses both terms in conjunction: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po sangs rgyas kyi khams*], and say, “I have the \**buddhadhātu* in my body.” Rather than going to the three refuges, they themselves become the Dharma and Saṅgha refuges, and objects of worship for Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas; and thus, they set out in the Mahāyāna. In this manner, the \**buddhadhātu*, the thirty-two major marks, and the eighty minor marks are inconceivable.<sup>365</sup>

Once more, then, the implication is that the hidden buddhahood within the bodies of sentient beings itself takes the form of a body – the special body of a Buddha. If MPNMS-tg is indeed “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text, then, it thus already contains implicitly the later explicit doctrine that *tathāgatagarbha* is the *dharmakāya* while it is still covered in defilements.<sup>366</sup>

<sup>365</sup> *mdo 'di la mngon par dad pa rnam ni rang nyid skyabs gsum lags te | des ni bdag nyid la skyabs su mchi bar bgyi'o || gzhi gsum la ni mi dgos lags so || de ci'i slad du zhe na | de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po sangs rgyas kyi khams mchis pa'i slad du'o || rnam par brtags nas bdag gi lus la sangs rgyas kyi khams mchis so zhes brjod par bgyi'o || de ltar 'tshal nas des skyabs gsum du yang mchi bar mi bgyi ste | de nyid chos dang dge 'dun gyi skyabs su gyur pa dang | nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas rnam kyi rtag tu phyag bgyi ba'i gnas lags so || de bas na theg pa chen po bsrub pa brtsam par bgyi'o || de ltar na sangs rgyas kyi khams dang | mtshan sum cu rtsa gnyis dang | dpe byad bzang po brgyad cu ni bsam gyis mi khyab lags so, H §394.13-25; FX 885b7-21; DhK§ 410b6-14. Compare the ascription of the thirty-two marks to the Tathāgata (again, “inside the body of all sentient beings”) in the *Laṅkāvatāra*: sa [*tathāgatagarbho*]...*dvātriṃśallakṣaṇadharaḥ sarvasattvadehāntargato mahārddhamūlyaratnamalinavastra pariveṣṭitam iva*; Nanjio (1923): 77.14 ff.; Suzuki (1932): 68; cited in Zimmermann (2002): 52 n. 84; cf. Ruegg (2004): 40.*

Cf. also DhK§: “All sentient beings have the *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu*, and because of this *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu*, they have in their bodies the ten powers, the thirty-two major marks, and the eighty minor marks [of the *mahāpuruṣa*] 一切眾生悉有佛性。以佛性故眾生身中即有十力三十二相八十種好, 419a9-10 (FX says here only that all are *bodhisattvas* because they have *tathāgatagarbha*, 892c12-13; Tib says only that sentient beings have within them the virtue of the *tathāgatagarbha*, and [therefore] have a Buddha, *sems can thams cad la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i yon tan rnam yod do || sangs rgyas yod do*, H §483.10-11).

<sup>366</sup> E.g. in Śrīm: *ayam eva ca bhagavaṃs tathāgatadharmakāyo 'vinirmuktakleśakośas tathāgatagarbhāḥ sūcyate*, T353:12.221c10-11; Johnston (1950): 12.14; Takasaki (1966): 167-168.

If we widen our frame somewhat, then, it is possible to see *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a particularly Buddhist twist on what Nancy Jay memorably called “birth done better” – the attempt to arrogate (part of) the biological procreative power from women, and instead reframe it as a religious (usually male) monopoly.<sup>367</sup> Unexpected confirmation of this reading comes from one very striking passage in MPNMS itself, which comes close to making this concern explicit.<sup>368</sup>

The text first recites a screed of misogynist complaints against women: they are a cause for all things evil (*chos ma yin pa*, \**adharmā*); their lust, especially, is insatiable; they “guzzle” (*’thung bar byed pa*) the wealth, desires, and vital fluids of men. Basing itself on an apparent equation between masculinity and *tathāgatagarbha*, the text then claims that a pious follower will reject womanhood and seek masculinity. The gender juggling of the resulting passage is especially mind-bending if we keep the primary meaning of *garbha* at the forefront of our minds:

Thus, gentle sir, when you have heard this \**Mahāparinirvāṇa*, you should adopt a frame of mind that is not attached to womanhood; you should adopt a frame of mind [conducive to] transformation to masculinity (*skyes pa’i rang bzhin*, \**pauruṣam*). This is because this *sūtra* is a complete instruction in *tathāgatagarbha*-[cum]-[masculinity] (\**pauruṣa-tathāgatagarbha-saṃdarśana*). [??] is not to be taken as masculinity(??);<sup>369</sup> it is *tathāgatagarbha* that is the “man” (\**puruṣa*). Any men

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<sup>367</sup> Jay (1992): xxiv; cf. once more the passage cited in n. 22 above. Of course, in Jay’s original use, the phrase refers to sacrifice as a patriarchal substitute for biological processes of maternity. For the use of Jay’s phrase in connection with other substitutions for natural maternity in Buddhism, see Ohnuma (2012): 162. This significantly complicates Gross’s celebration of *tathāgatagarbha* as a blow *against* the patriarchy, “providing a remarkably strong basis for feminist interpretations and criticisms of Buddhism... This doctrine would be extremely difficult to use in any attempt to justify gender hierarchy”; Gross (1993): 186-189. Ohnuma has already cogently disputed Gross’s interpretation on other grounds; Ohnuma (2012): 158.

<sup>368</sup> The passage as a whole runs H §512-515, and incorporates MPNMS 103 in my numbering; FX 894c16-895a2, DhKṣ 422a15-b6. I am grateful to my student Ali Tilley for drawing my attention to this passage.

<sup>369</sup> Tib is especially obscure to me at this point: *skyes pa’i rang bzhin ni mi zhes bya’o*. FX and DhKṣ are no help.

(\**puruṣa*) that there are in the world, because they do not know that there is *tathāgatagarbha* in the/their self (*bdag nyid la*), are not [in fact] masculine. I [the Buddha, who is speaking] say that anyone who does not know *tathāgatagarbha* is a woman. Those who do know that there is *tathāgatagarbha* in the/their self, by contrast – they are to be counted among the supreme men (*skyes pa'i mchog*, \**puruṣottama*); even though they be women, they are to be counted among the supreme men.<sup>370</sup>

Thus, by the logic of the text, the ultimate man is one who knows that he has a “womb” or “embryo” in his body (a better kind of “womb”, of course). Not only that, but should a mere woman be lucky enough to win the same insight, she too will earn the honour of being considered an ultimate man!

In sum, then, I suggest that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine developed in MPNMS-tg at least in part as a soteriological-transcendent type of positive corollary to the docetic Buddhology that denies the Buddha’s ordinary humanity. We see in *tathāgatagarbha* a type of womb or seedbed for buddhahood, in substitute for the fleshly womb of the *bodhisatva* rejected by docetism. This alternate vision proposes a positive alternative for that rejected dimension of the *bodhisatva*’s fleshly existence, and this alternative is soteriological and transcendent, because it is oriented towards the promise of liberation from the world entire.

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<sup>370</sup> *rigs kyi bu de bas na yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po 'di thos nas bud med kyi rang bzhin la ma chags pa'i sems bskyed par bya ste | skyes pa'i rang bzhin du 'gyur bar sems bskyed par bya'o || ci'i phyir zhe na | mdo 'di ni skyes pa'i rang bzhin de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yang dag par ston pa'i phyir ro || skyes pa'i rang bzhin ni mi zhes bya'o || de bzhin gshegs pa'i rang bzhin ni skyes pa'o || 'jig rten na skyes pa yod pa gang yin pa de dag kyang bdag nyid la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod par mi shes pa'i phyir | skyes pa'i rang bzhin ma yin no || de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po mi shes pa gang yin pa de dag ni bud med yin no zhes nga zer ro || de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po bdag la yod do snyam du yang dag par shes pa gang yin pa de dag ni skyes pa'i mchog tu gtogs te | bud med yin du zin kyang skyes pa'i mchog tu gtogs so, H 515. I have tried by my translation to reflect places where I find the exact meaning unclear. However, the overall gist seems beyond question. Note especially the phrase that apparently directly equates *tathāgatagarbha* and “masculinity”, when MPNMS itself is presented, apparently in a single compound, as a \**pauruṣa-tathāgatagarbha-saṃdarśana*, *skyes pa'i rang bzhin de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yang dag par ston pa*; FX 此摩訶衍般泥洹經說如來性丈夫法; DhKṣ 是大經典有丈夫相，所謂佛性。*

In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly indicate two further dimensions of the pattern of docetic ideas and their corollaries, in texts further afield. Observation of these pieces of the puzzle suggests that a semi-systematic docetism drives an even wider range of Buddhist ideas. I will then close by considering a few further implications of this overall pattern.

#### 4.9 Docetism and the problem of the Buddha's mother(s)

The material studied above shows amply that Buddhism was embarrassed by the fact that the Buddha had a mother. If it was not appropriate that the Buddha underwent conception, gestation and parturition in the usual physical manner, that meant as much as to say that it was inappropriate for him to have an ordinary human mother. It is therefore unsurprising that we also find various docetic doctrines relating to the Buddha's mother, or mothers.<sup>371</sup>

The Buddha's birth mother, "Queen Māyā", is subject to various docetic elaborations.<sup>372</sup> It may be significant, in this connection, that her

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<sup>371</sup> See Durt (2002): 188-187 (=43-44). Durt has pursued the theme of the Buddha's mothers in a series of publications (1996, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008). The most detailed study of the theme of the Buddha's mothers is now Ohnuma (2012), especially Chapters 3-5; Chapter 6 also touches on a number of the themes I treat here. I was able to obtain Ohnuma's book only after I had written the bulk of the present study. I was encouraged to find that she too discerned many parts of the same overall pattern I do. See also Sasson (2007). Ohnuma insightfully realises that Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī must be understood in concert, and her analysis on that basis is extremely fruitful. As Durt realised, however, a full study of the motif of the Buddha's various mothers should ultimately also be extended beyond Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī to include figures like Kacaṅgalā, for whom see e.g. MSV *Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Dutt (1950): 1:20-24, Yao (2011): 329-331, Durt (2005).

<sup>372</sup> On Māyā, see primarily Durt (1996, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008); Young (2004): 23-32; Sasson (2007): 105-108; and now Ohnuma (2012): Chapters 3 and 5. I think that Ohnuma implies too strongly, in part by an overemphasis on contrasts between Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī, that Māyā is relatively unproblematic for the Buddhist tradition; see e.g. 67-68. By contrast, it will be clear from my discussion that I think the figure of Māyā, taken as representing the (somewhat hypothetical) baseline historical reality that Śākyamuni had a human mother, was equally problematic – a fact that can be

name can also (eventually) mean “illusion” (*māyā*).<sup>373</sup> We saw above that she is sometimes held to have conceived the Buddha without ordinary

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measured in part from the fact that she was the object of a docetic reworking at least as sedulous as that practiced on Mahāprajāpatī.

<sup>373</sup> The name *Māyā* for the Buddha’s mother seems not to be known in the Pāli Vinaya; it does feature in *Dīgha-nikāya* 14 (often regarded as late); D II 8, Walshe (1987): 201. The ordinary word *māyā* is very old. It certainly comes to mean “illusion” by the time of Advaita Vedānta, but it is unclear how early the word first acquired this sense. For what I term “docetic” implications of the name, see also Ohnuma (2012): 76; Obeyesekere (1973): 226.

The name *Māyā* is only one of several places where the material treated in this study touches on themes in Indian religion beyond Buddhism. On the term *māyā* in non-Buddhist sources, see Gonda (1959); Goudriaan (1978); O’Neil (1980): 29-39. Gonda recapitulates a long and controversial history of interpretation in the secondary literature. *Māyā* seems originally to have meant something closer to “a power of marvellous creative action”, by dint of which the gods manifested themselves in various forms, animated the natural phenomena of the world, achieved feats of battle, etc. Intermittently, *māyā* in this sense takes on personified maternal qualities. In *Atharvavedasaṃhitā* (“AV”) 8.9.5, *māyā* is compared to a mother: *bṛhatī pári mātṛyā mātúr mātṛádhi nírmitā | māyā ha jajñe māyāyā māyāyā mātālī pári*; Whitney (with a possibly problematic “illusion” for *māyā*): “*Bṛhatī* the measure (*mātṛā*) was fashioned forth out of measure [as] a mother; illusion (*māyā*) was born from illusion [*māyā*]; *Mātālī* out of illusion [*māyā*];” Whitney (1905): 507 (discussed in O’Neil 34). According to Gonda, AV 8.10 “recites the curious migrations and metamorphoses of *Virāj* – a creative principle”. *Virāj* clearly has maternal qualities: “Each class of creature milks her and her milk...is mostly identical with the ‘idea’ or ‘substance’ indicated” by the special name given her by the class of creatures in question. In the case of the asuras (whom Gonda associates with “intellectual activity”), that name, essence and milk is called *māyā*, “upon which the asuras are said to subsist” (AV 8.10.22); Gonda 155-156; cf. Whitney 511-516. At AV 10.8.34, *māyā* is spoken of as a generative power at the hub of a wheel in which creatures are the spokes, and compared to a lotus (*yatra devās ca manuṣyās cārā nābhāv iva śrītāḥ | apām tvā puṣpaṃ pṛcchāmi | yatra tan māyayā hitam*; Gonda 158-159, Whitney 600). Gonda also notes that the word *māyā* is probably etymologically and conceptually connected to *nirvāṇa* (key to the terminology of Buddhist docetism in *nirmita*, *nairmāṇikāyā* etc.); Gonda 167-168, 174-177, 176-177; *vṃā* may mean more specifically producing *through mental operations*, 170. (Cf. the etymology reported by Crosby for *mātikā/mātṛkā*, n. 414 below.) Later in the tradition, *Prakṛti*, spouse of *Viṣṇu*, is identified with *māyā* or called *Māyā* in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.10; in the *Kūrma Purāna*, this same *Māyā* is said to “bring forth the entire world”; and the “rather recent” *Kṛṣṇa Upaniṣad* makes her *Kṛṣṇa*’s mother, *Devakī*; Goudriaan 47. *Māyā* was also connected to (Vedic senses of) *prajñā*, as a kind of “active wisdom”; here, we might think of the “maternal” aspect of *Prajñāpāramitā* (see below), and the creative powers ascribed to Bud-



sexual intercourse. Texts also state that her conduct throughout the pregnancy was perfectly moral and pure (and, in particular, she never felt concupiscence).<sup>374</sup> Her sight or touch had powers of healing.<sup>375</sup> She was sustained on heavenly food and did not need to eat normally.<sup>376</sup> She was also wonderfully perfumed.<sup>377</sup> Perhaps most strikingly, many traditions hold that Māyā died a week after the birth of the *bodhisatva*.<sup>378</sup> Applying Nattier’s “principle of embarrassment”, we might suspect that this tradition is rooted in historical fact.<sup>379</sup> Certainly, it looks suspiciously as if giving birth to the *bodhisatva* was somehow fatal, and the tradition seems to have worked hard to obviate the embarrassment with varied and inventive explanations.<sup>380</sup> Alternatively, texts tell us that Māyā’s life was already destined to end, and the *bodhisatva* chose her as his mother

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dhas in virtue of their *jñāna/prajñā*. Suggestive connections of this nature might reward further study.

<sup>374</sup> E.g. MV 1:145-147, Jones (1949-1956): 1:115-116; MV 2:5-9, 14-15, Jones 2:5-9, 13; Lalit, Vaidya (1958): 53.7-9, Foucaux (1884): 68-69, Bays (1983): 1:114; T189:3.624b24-25; T190: 3.698b15-18; MSV SBhV, Gnoli (1977-1978): 1:42-43; T1450:24.107c10-13.

<sup>375</sup> See Durt (2003): 53-57. Examples: Lalit, Vaidya (1958): 53.9-21, Foucaux (1884): 69, Bays (1983): 1: 114-115; T187:3.550c21-28; T190:3.698c3-7; Durt (2004): 64-65. Durt mentions that “popular editions” of the *Buddhacarita* “used in contemporary India...contain interesting verses discarded by Johnston” featuring this curative power; Durt (2004): 60-61.

<sup>376</sup> T184:3.463c9-11; T185:3.473b28-c1; Karetzky (1992): 13; T189:3.624b25-26.

<sup>377</sup> MV 2:15-16, Jones (1949-1956): 2:13-14.

<sup>378</sup> E.g. T145:2.869b28-29; T156:3.124c2-3, 137a10-11; T187:3.555c22-23; T189:3.623b8-10; T196:4.158c7; T1450:24.109a18-20; T1451:24.405a1-2; see also other passages cited in the present paragraph.

<sup>379</sup> Nattier (2003): 65-66.

<sup>380</sup> Māyā “could not bear the delight” caused by seeing “the immense might of her son”, *Buddhacarita* 2.18, Olivelle (2008): 42-43; Māyā pined away because she was no longer worshipped by gods, and missed the bliss of having the *bodhisatva* in her womb, T190: 3.701a27-b1; (the Sarvāstivādins are reported to say that) Māyā was overpowered by joy when she saw the incredible child to whom she had given birth, and died of this joy, T190:3.701b7-10, Beal (1875): 63; Māyā is so pure that Tuṣita Heaven is the appropriate abode for her (and indeed, while she is pregnant with the *bodhisatva*, the gods come to her to provide her with the luxuries of Tuṣita even here on earth), 186:3.494 c23-495a14.

for that reason.<sup>381</sup> We are also assured that she was reborn in a heaven.<sup>382</sup> We might also regard this tradition as conveniently spiriting away a significant component of the problem of the Buddha's mothers.<sup>383</sup>

Many traditions hold that after Māyā died, her sister Mahāprajāpatī (who was also another of the *bodhisatva's* father's wives) took on the role of wet nurse to the *bodhisatva*, and raised him as her own. Mahāprajāpatī (Pāli: Mahāpajāpatī) is thus also the Buddha's "step-mother", in a sense, and she is just as much a part of the problem of the Buddha's mothers as Māyā.<sup>384</sup> Two main traditions about the figure of Mahāprajāpatī are arguably part of the docetic project to deny or sacralise all dimensions of the Buddha's worldly corporeality.

First, Mahāprajāpatī is known as "the first nun", in the sense that she was the leader of the first group of women ordained, and texts depict her as winning permission from the Buddha for the ordination of women in general.<sup>385</sup> There are many senses in which ordination and subsequent monastic life function as a termination, negation or substitution of ordinary bodily existence and the kinship networks it entails. When Mahāprajāpatī takes ordination, she symbolically and actually renounces the reproductive womanhood and place in a family that has in large part defined her social role up to that point. When she joins the Saṃgha, more-

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<sup>381</sup> For example, the *bodhisatva* chose her in the knowledge that she would die seven days after his birth, because (he) could not bear to have her (live longer and) pay (him) homage(?), T185:3.474b9-10; or because a truly virtuous woman would not be able to bear to be paid the homage (only due to the mother of a Buddha) (?), T189:3.627c19-21, cf. also 623b8-10; or because it is a constant rule (*dharmatā*) that *bodhisatvas* go forth into the homeless life when still young, and this would break a mother's heart, T190:3.701b2-6, Beal (1875): 63, Lalit, Vaidya (1958): 70.25-29, Foucaux (1884): 88-89, Bays (1983): 1:147. Cf. Durt (2004): 65.

<sup>382</sup> T184:3.465a23-24; T185:3.474b7-9; T189:3.627c18-19; Karetzky (1992): 30; T156:3.136 c25-26; T190:3.701b11-12, Beal (1875): 63; MV 3:109, Jones (1949-1956): 3:107. On the various reasons given for Māyā's precipitous death, see also Ohnuma (2012): 79-82.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Ohnuma (2006): 885-886.

<sup>384</sup> On Mahāprajāpatī as part of a larger system of notions about Buddhas' mothers, see Ohnuma (2012), esp. 86-133.

<sup>385</sup> Heirman (2001): 278-289; Ohnuma (2006); Anālayo (2011); Sponberg (1992): 13-18. Heirman and Anālayo cover primary sources very thoroughly, and I will not repeat those sources here.

over, she joins a kind of substitute “Buddha family”, and the relation between her and the Buddha is reversed; where she was the Buddha’s physical mother, he now becomes her spiritual parent – perhaps, indeed, her mother.

As Ohnuma has shown, the texts are alive to these symbolic dimensions of the situation. One of the arguments by which Ānanda is shown to persuade the Buddha to admit Mahāprajāpatī and her companions is that the Buddha owes Mahāprajāpatī a “milk debt”.<sup>386</sup> In other words, the Buddha (if only in a sense, and in part) gives Mahāprajāpatī ordination (and the other benefits of the Dharma) in exchange for the breast milk on which he was suckled as an infant.<sup>387</sup> This exchange could be interpreted as merely a very special instance of a very general function by which the Buddha (as the ultimate “field of merit”), in virtue of his spiritual perfection, transforms worldly goods into spiritual ones, as, for example, when he is the recipient of offerings of food (especially those of Sujātā and Cuṇḍa), robes, flowers, and so on. Indeed, in the *Gotamī Apadāna* (“GA”, extensively paralleled in the *Therīgāthā* commentary), this underlying equation is rendered explicit. Mahāprajāpatī says, “Well-gone-one, I am your mother;/ you’re my father, O wise one/...Gotama, I’m born from you!”<sup>388</sup> Further, the text goes on to give a remarkable “soteriological-transcendent” counterpart of the milk itself: Mahāprajāpatī is made to say, “I fed you the milk that quenches thirst just for a moment – but you fed me the dharma-milk that is perpetually tranquil!” The relationship is also corporeal in a further sense – by this milk, the Buddha has nourished his mother’s “flawless *dharma*-body”.<sup>389</sup>

Mahāprajāpatī’s status as an ordinary mother is also modified, and thus the fact that Buddhas have mothers is arguably docetically reinter-

<sup>386</sup> Ohnuma (2006): 864-872; Ohnuma (2012): 165-166.

<sup>387</sup> Ohnuma (2006): 873-880.

<sup>388</sup> GA 31, Walters (1995): 121; Pruitt (1998): 188.

<sup>389</sup> GA 32-33, Walters (1995): 121; Pruitt (1998): 188; Ohnuma (2006): 880; now also Ohnuma (2012): 94-110. Cf. also Ohnuma 92. Cf. also particularly interesting parallels in the *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* or *\*Sūtrālaṃkāra-śāstra*, T201:4.333c21-29, 335c19-336a21 etc. The *Apadāna* passage is one of only four instances of the term *dhammakāya* in the Pāli canon. See Jantrasrisalai (2007): 283-343; on this passage in particular, see 315-326.

preted, in remarkable *Apadāna* accounts of her *parinirvāṇa*.<sup>390</sup> In many respects, this is depicted as equivalent to the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha himself.<sup>391</sup> It is portended by earthquakes and thunder; Mahāpajāpati declares that she is going to the unconditioned state, free of death and decay; Ānanda weeps; and Mahāpajāpati's followers (who are depicted almost as worshippers) wail and gnash their teeth, and beg her not to enter *nirvāṇa*.<sup>392</sup> She rises into the air and performs a set of miracles, including the “double miracle” (*yamakaprātihārya*; the simultaneous production of fire and water) and producing many different copies of herself; these miracles are sometimes regarded as the exclusive purview of Buddhas.<sup>393</sup>

<sup>390</sup> Walters (1994, 1995). I will use the Pāli name when discussing Pāli sources. See also Ohnuma (2006): 887-888; Wilson (2011); Ohnuma (2012): 127-131.

<sup>391</sup> Walters notes that the word *parinibbāna* is significant here; aside from the Buddha, only Mahāpajāpati is said to attain *parinibbāna* in the *Apadānas*; other figures attain *nibbāna*. Walters (1994): 373. On parallels between the *parinibbāna* of Mahāpajāpati and the Buddha, see Walters (1994): 373-376.

<sup>392</sup> GA 6, Walters (1995): 119, Walters (1994): 375 n. 52, cf. Pruitt (1998): 197; GA 14, Walters (1995): 119; cf. Pruitt 190; GA 61, Walters (1995): 124; cf. Pruitt 190 (the motif of Ānanda's grief echoes the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha in the Pāli MPNS); GA 141-142, Walters (1995): 133; cf. Pruitt (1998): 197.

<sup>393</sup> GA 80-90, Walters (1995): 126-127; cf. Pruitt (1998): 192-193. On the *yamakaprātihārya*, see Schlingloff (1991); Skilling (1994): 2:303-315; Rhi (1991): Chapter 2; Anālayo (2007); Fiordalis (2008): 99. This miracle is also ascribed to Mahāpajāpati in MSV *Ḳṣudrakavastu* and the *Ekottarikāgama*. The *yamakaprātihārya* is regarded as unique to Buddhas by the *Paṭisambhidā-magga*, the *Dhammapada* commentary and the *Milindapañha*. The miracle is also performed on two occasions by the Buddha's relics in the *Mahāvamsa*. However, Anālayo notes that some traditions also record that others besides the Buddha performed the *yamakaprātihārya*, e.g. Dabba Mallaputta in the *Samyuktāgama*, or Uruvilvā Kassapa and Mahāmoggallāna in MSV SBhV, the *Madhyamāgama* and the *Ekottarikāgama*; etc. For more complications, see Skilling, who concludes, perhaps significantly for the example of the *Apadāna*: “The Mūlasarvāstivādins, Sarvāstivādins, Lokottaravādins, Mahīśāsakas, Aśvaghōṣa, and Asaṅga along with the *Ratnaguṇasamcaya*, *Ekottarikāgama*, *P'u yao ching*, and *Book of Zambasta*, agree against the Theravādins that an auditor as well as a Buddha could perform the *yamakaprātihārya*...;” 315.

The boundary between the production of fire and water and the Buddha's self-replication is sometimes blurred when the latter element is also included under the head of the term *yamakaprātihārya*. The Buddha multiplies himself in various ways in various texts, such as the *Dhammapada* commentary, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Pañcasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā*, SP and GV; see also Fiordalis 165-168. The miracle of self-multiplication is held to be unique to Buddhas in the *Divyāvadāna*, but in that version, each of the

She herself tells a kind of *avadāna/jātaka* about one of her former lives.<sup>394</sup> She ascends stepwise to the eighth *jhāna*, and then back down to the fourth, at which point she enters *parinirvāṇa*.<sup>395</sup> The cosmos is shaken, and other portents ensue.<sup>396</sup> Gods and other supernatural beings participate in the mourning.<sup>397</sup> She is elaborately cremated, leaving behind relics.<sup>398</sup> The Buddha informs the crowd that she had already perfected her divine eye in prior rebirths, making her sound like a kind of *bodhisatva*; and he advises them to be “lamps/islands unto yourselves” (*attadīpā...hotha*), as on his own deathbed.<sup>399</sup> As Walters has argued, these events makes her a kind of “female counterpart of the Buddha”.<sup>400</sup>

In sum, then, these traditions about Mahāprajāpatī rectify the embarrassment of the Buddha having a mother in several ways. When she becomes a nun, and indeed, the founder of the order of nuns, she becomes a celibate woman defined by her denial of motherhood and family. The Buddha also becomes her spiritual progenitor, rather than the other way around, requiting and cancelling out her mothering of him. Moreover, by her ordination as the first nun, Mahāprajāpatī assumes a position that structurally mirrors that of the Buddha himself – if he is the first male Buddhist monastic, and the spiritual “father” of the order of monks, she is the first female, and the spiritual “mother” of the order of nuns. This

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duplicate Buddhas performs a separate action, all at the same time; Skilling 309; Co-well and Neil (1886): 162-163; Rotman (2008): 279-280. It is less clear to me that the production of multiple self-replicas who all act in lockstep is a unique property of Buddhas.

<sup>394</sup> GA 95-114, Walters (1995): 128-130; cf. Pruitt (1998): 193-195.

<sup>395</sup> GA 145-148, Walters (1995): 133-134; cf. Pruitt (1998): 197.

<sup>396</sup> GA 148-150, Walters (1995): 134; cf. Pruitt (1998): 197-198.

<sup>397</sup> GA 151, 163-166, 169-170, 172, Walters (1995): 134-136; cf. Pruitt (1998): 198.

<sup>398</sup> GA 175-176, 178, 181, Walters (1995): 136-137; cf. Pruitt (1998): 200. Terms for her relics are *aṭṭhi*, GA v. 176, *dhātu* v. 178, *sarira* v. 181.

<sup>399</sup> GA 185,189, Walters (1995); 137-138; cf. Pruitt (1998): 200-201.

<sup>400</sup> Walters (1994): 373; Walters (1995): 117. Walters also points out that the story refers to her only by her clan name, Gotamī, rather than her personal name, Mahāpajāpatī, as if to emphasise her equivalence with Gotama. The similarities between Gotamī and the Buddha have limits, however, and other interpretations are available; see also Schopen (1996 [2003]): 348 and 358 n. 66; Wilson (2011): 143 and *passim*.

symmetry is also found in traditions about her *parinirvāṇa*, where she again appears as a kind of “female counterpart” to the Buddha. The overall effect is to convince us that the Buddha did not have an ordinary mother, as ordinary sentient beings do; rather, the woman who acted as his mother actually partakes of the same extraordinary order of reality and truth as he does.

Various Buddhist traditions also eventually elaborate what we could call “soteriological-transcendent” mothers for the Buddha – various alternate “Buddha mothers”, so-called, especially the Perfection of Wisdom and various *dhāraṇī*. The study of this motif is potentially a very large task, and I will confine myself to pointing out a few representative instances.<sup>401</sup>

In *Aṣṭa, Prajñāpāramitā* is explicitly called the mother of the Buddhas, etc. For example, an elaborate analogy compares the care and effort that all the *Tathāgatas* devote to the promotion of *Prajñāpāramitā* with the diligence of many sons in working for the health and happiness of their mother, and states clearly that she is the Buddhas’ mother: “So fond are the *Tathāgatas* of this perfection of wisdom, so much do they cherish and protect it. For she is their mother and begetter...”<sup>402</sup> This conceit is expressed in other ways, as, for instance, when such things as all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*) and the relics are said to be “born of” (*nirjāta*) *Prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>403</sup> The *Ratnagaṇasamcayaśāstra* also states repeatedly that *Prajñāpāra-*

<sup>401</sup> On this motif, see Macy (1976, 1977); Conze (in a somewhat sexist and fancifully Jungian vein) (1959): 80-81; Conze (1960): 124-125; Cabezón (1992); Sponberg (1992): 26-27; Kinnard (1999): 123-130, 131-143; now also Ohnuma (2012): 148-154; and, tangentially, Conze (1949-1951).

<sup>402</sup> *evaṃ te putrās tāṃ mātaraṃ sarvasukhopadhānaiḥ samanvāhr̥tya kelāyeyur mamāyeyur go-pāyeyuḥ - eṣāsmākaṃ mātā janayitrī*, Vaidya (1960a): 125, Conze (1973): 172; discussed by Ohnuma (2012): 149-151. See also Vaidya 134, Conze 177; Vaidya 228, Conze 267; Vaidya 229, Conze 268; Vaidya 250, Conze 289. *Aṣṭa* also states that *Prajñāpāramitā* is the mother of the *bodhisatvas*; *mātā...bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ*, Vaidya (1960a): 86, Conze (1973): 135. Cf. Kajiyama (1985): 9-10.

<sup>403</sup> Vaidya (1960a): 29, Conze (1973): 105-106; Vaidya 36, Conze 108; the *upāyakauśalya* of the *bodhisatvas*, Vaidya 38, Conze 109; Vaidya 48, Conze 116; Vaidya 49, Conze 117; the *dharmadeśanā* of the Buddhas, Vaidya 50, Conze 118.

mitā is the mother of Buddhas.<sup>404</sup> Elsewhere in the Prajñāpāramitā literature, verses by Rahulabhadra cited in MPPU, for instance, make Prajñā the mother of all the Buddhas and *bodhisatvas* (and hence the grandmother of all sentient beings, since the Buddha is their father).<sup>405</sup> In other parts of the Prajñāpāramitā literature, Prajñāpāramitā is similarly said to be the mother of all Buddhas; of all good *dharmas*; etc.<sup>406</sup>

This motif of furnishing Buddhas with *dharmic* mothers in place of Māyā or Mahāprajāpatī is not unique to the Prajñāpāramitā literature. For example, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* also proclaims “Prajñāpāramitā is the mother of *bodhisatvas*.”<sup>407</sup> In the *Fo bao en jing* 佛報恩經 (probably composed in China), *dharma* is the mother of the Buddha(s).<sup>408</sup> In the *Bensheng xindi guan jing* 本生心地觀經, the “Dharma-refuge of the one vehicle” is the mother of the Buddhas; in another passage, the Buddha praises Mañjuśrī (the *bodhisatva* who represents wisdom, let us recall) by saying that he is the mother of the Buddhas.<sup>409</sup> In GV, likewise, Mañjuśrī is said to be

<sup>404</sup> *Ratnagaṇasamcayagāthā* (Vaidya 1961) 12.1-2, Conze (1973): 31; 1.15, Conze 10; 3.4, Conze 15; 7.7, Conze 24; 14.3, Conze 34; 27.4, Conze 59. See Cabezón (1992): 183, 194-195 n. 12.

<sup>405</sup> T1509:25.190b28-c2; Lamotte (1966-1980): 2:1061-1062.

<sup>406</sup> Some examples from the Chinese translation record (in approximate chronological order): T221:8.78a25-26; T223:8.326a7, 423c19-20; T231:8.722a16-23; T220:6.558b11-15, 560c6-7, 561a8-9, 561a11-12, 562a10-12, 564a17-19 etc.; T228:8.664b21-22, 673a7-8, 673 a19-20, 676b14-15 etc.; T230:8.684c8-11. Cf. also T259:8.854a13-14; T851:18.106b21-28; T245:8.831a2-3 (the “apocryphal” *Sūtra of Humane Kings*); cf. also T220:7.443b17-19. Cabezón also discusses examples in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the *A ma lta ba ngos ’dzin* of lCang skya rol pa’i rdo rje (1717-1786), and the *Lam rim chen mo* of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419); Cabezón (1992): 185-187.

<sup>407</sup> *prajñāpāramitā mātā bodhisatvāna*; Vim §7.6 v. 1, Study Group (2006): 79. This section (§7.6) also plays on the idea of *dharmic* substitutes for other family members, and falls in a chapter dominated by the theme of *docetic* display in general. I am grateful to Paul Harrison for pointing me to this passage (personal communication, July 2013).

<sup>408</sup> “The Buddhas take the Dharma as their teacher; Buddhas are born from Dharma; the Dharma is the mother of the Buddhas; the Buddhas depend upon Dharma to endure” 佛以法為師，佛從法生；法是佛母，佛依法住, T156:3.157b10-13. On the Chinese composition of T156, see e.g. Naitō (1955).

<sup>409</sup> 一乘法寶諸佛母/三世如來從此生/般若方便無間修/解脫道成登妙覺, T159:3.305a3-4; 印文殊師利言。善哉善哉。汝今真是三世佛母。一切如來在修行地, 326 c15-18; cf. also 326c28-327a1.

“the mother of hundreds of thousands of *niyutas* of *koṭīs* of Buddhas”.<sup>410</sup> The portion of MPNMS unique to DhKṣ says that *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu*, which is equated with the *śūraṅgamasamādhī*, is the mother of all Buddhas.<sup>411</sup> In the *Hevajra-tantra*, “Prajñā is called the Mother, because she gives birth to the world”.<sup>412</sup>

Another species of “soteriological-transcendent” Buddha-mother is arguably the *dhāraṇī*. It is common to speak of *dhāraṇī* as “mothers of the *dharma*”, mothers of Buddhas, etc.<sup>413</sup> This turn of phrase could be connected to the idea of a \**dharmamātrkā*, i.e. a proto-Abhidharmic mnemonic master-list of *dharma*s (recalling the functions of *dhāraṇīs*, too, as mnemonics or epitomes).<sup>414</sup>

<sup>410</sup> *mātā maṅjuśrīḥ kumārābhūto buddhakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāṇām*, Vaidya (1960b): 418. Cf. also the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā*: 譬如世間小兒有父母，文殊者佛道中父母也，T629:15.451a18-19, discussed by Lamotte (1960): 93-94 and n. 223; Kinnard (2002): 97-98.

<sup>411</sup> DhKṣ 524c18-19, Y370.

<sup>412</sup> *jananī bhanyate prajñā janayati yasmāj jagat*, Conze (1970): 176, 186 n. 25, citing Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1:16.

<sup>413</sup> Several examples can be found in the “*Dhāraṇī* Chapter” of the *Sūryagarbha* in the *Mahāsaṃnipāta*: T397(13):13.239a26-28, 240a11-12, 242a23, 245a4, 247b5-6, 248b27-29. See also Suv, T664:16.386b14-16 (\**Jñānagupta*), T665:16.433a25-b3 (*Yijing*); \**Dharmabhadra*’s (Song) *Māyājālamahātānta* T890:18.568c29-569a4; Bodhiruci’s *Fo xin jing* 佛心經, T920:19.4b21-22, the *Yi zi fo ding lun wang jing* 一字佛頂輪王經, T951:19.225c14-18; Fa-zhong’s 法眾 (fl. 401-411) *Dafangdeng tuoluoni jing* 大方等陀羅尼經, T1339:21.643a3-8.

<sup>414</sup> Cf. Gethin (1992). See also Clarke (2004) on *mātrkā* in Vinaya. Space prevents me from entering further into this complex question here. Another far-flung branch of the complex of substitutes for “maternity” may be seen in the use of Abhidharma texts (“matrices”) to ritually construct a new foetus for the soul of the dead at funerals; McDaniel (2008), (2009): Chapter 8. Crosby (2008): 40 argues that the notion of “mother” or maternity is significant and strong in the idea of the *mātikā* (Crosby also reflects an etymology of *mātikā* which derives it from the root *vmā*, “create, construct”, which is also connected to the name of *Māyā*; cf. n. 373 above). Ronkin (2014) argues at greater length that the *mātikā* might furnish contemporary feminist projects with good working materials. Ronkin says relatively little to show that associations of femininity or maternity were active in the use of this notion, but see 58, 61, 67-68, 74 (following Crosby [2008]: 40 in comparing *mātikā* and *prajñāpāramitā*), and 79-81 (expanding on Crosby [2008]: 42-44 to suggest a parallel between *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and *yogāvacara* or “Theravāda Tantric” practices to build a *dhammakāya* within the practitioner through visualised ingestion of *dhammas* = *mātikās*).



Another twist on the same motif is found when whole texts refer to themselves as Buddha-mothers. For example, \*Mandrasena's Chinese translation of the *Ratnamegha* refers to itself as \**dharmamātrkā*, giving both transcription and an interlinear Chinese gloss.<sup>415</sup> In like vein, the \**Tathāgatajñānamudrā* refers to itself as the mother of all Buddhas past and future.<sup>416</sup>

The overall range of “soteriological-transcendent” mothers also includes other variants. For example, in Dharmapāla's *Ratnamegha*, *dharmatā* is said to be the mother of all *dharmas*.<sup>417</sup> The *Dao shenzu wuji bianhua jing* 道神足無極變化經 says, more specifically, that Prajñāpāramitā is the true mother of the Buddha-body that bears the marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*.<sup>418</sup> The Tantric deity Cuṇḍī is referred to as a “Buddha mother” in some contexts.<sup>419</sup> In Tantric texts, the term “Buddha mother” features in the names of some *bodhisatvas*, and undergoes other rich developments.<sup>420</sup> GV puts yet another twist on this notion when it celebrates Māyā as the mother of all Buddhas and *bodhisatvas*.<sup>421</sup>

This sample has merely scratched the surface of a rich body of material, and the motif of soteriological, transcendent or *dharmic* substitutes for the mother of the Buddhas will have to await full study elsewhere. This brief foray should suffice to show, however, that the motif is very widespread and elaborately developed.

<sup>415</sup> 微妙甚深修多羅經...是一切法摩德勒伽(此云法母)而能受持讀誦宣說恭敬供養...T659:16.274c13-18. Cf. T660:16.328a26-28.

<sup>416</sup> T633:15.470a22.

<sup>417</sup> 此法性者是諸法母 etc., T489:14.751a1-5; Cf. T634:15.479b24-25.

<sup>418</sup> T816:17.805c3-7.

<sup>419</sup> T855:18.173b6-7; T864b:18.204c6.

<sup>420</sup> E.g. in the *Yiqie rulai da mimi wang weicengyou zuishang weimiao da mannuluo jing* 一切如來大祕密王未曾有最上微妙大曼拏羅經: 佛母般若波羅蜜多菩薩, T889:18.550c26-27; 佛母金剛界菩薩, 佛母祖那菩薩, 551a6-7; or the second fascicle of the *Jingang feng louge yiqie yuqie yuqi jing* 金剛峰樓閣一切瑜伽瑜祇經, T867:18.259c27-260a25 ff.

<sup>421</sup> *sarvabodhisattvajñājanetrīprañidhānaniryātām*, Suzuki and Izumi (1956): 438.8, Cleary (1989): 311; *sarveṣu ca teṣu tāsu tāsūpapattiṣu māyādevī bodhisattvasya janani babhūva*, Suzuki and Idzumi 377.14-15, T278:9.753a10-11, T279:10.403c29-404a1, Cleary 267.

In sum, we find, in various departments of the tradition, a range of strategies by which the denial of ordinary, human, flesh-and-blood maternity for Buddhas is matched by various positive visions of better alternatives. Both of the Buddha's historical, human "mothers", Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī, are the focus of various traditions which function as positive corollaries to negatively-framed docetic Buddhology, by showing that these women were not like ordinary mothers at all. We also find "soteriological-transcendent" positive corollaries to docetism about the Buddha's mother, in which the true mother of all Buddhas is variously Prajñāpāramitā, various *dhāraṇī*, *tathāgatagarbha* itself, special texts, and so on. Thus, if *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu* doctrine is a positive, soteriological-transcendent substitute for the womb from which the Buddha sprang, as I argued above (§4.8), this phenomenon is best regarded as part of a much broader pattern, docetic in its broad thrust and orientation, of positive alternatives for the Buddha's mothers writ large.

#### 4.10 Docetic reinterpretations of other branches of kinship

Even more broadly, the large docetic pattern I have tried to sketch surely ramifies still further, to encompass the Buddha's other kinship relations. Docetism had the potential to be applied to all facets of the Buddha's biological being, including the entirety of the processes of sex and reproduction, and all the blood relations of kinship in which he was embroiled by his human biology.<sup>422</sup> Without attempting to adduce evidence for each point, which would entail a considerable study in its own right, the pattern of docetism about kinship probably also includes: the Saṃgha as a surrogate family; the old idea that monks are "sons of the Buddha", and the rich development from that of the idea of lineage, patriarchy, heritage, transmission, etc., especially, in the long view, in Tantra and Chan/Zen.<sup>423</sup> A similar logic arguably underpins the conceit of sentient beings

<sup>422</sup> On ersatz kinship relations in Buddhism, see also Wilson (2014), esp. 189.

<sup>423</sup> M III 29: *bhagavato putto oraso mukhato jāto dhammajo dhammanimmito dhammadāyādo no āmisadāyādo*, Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 902. See also Cousins (2003): 13 and n. 49; Cole (2005, 2009); Young (2004): 76-77; Ohnuma (2012): 159-164, 76, 118-119. Young (2004): 75-78 argues that male-only lineages, such as guru-disciple transmission and the *tulku* system, are a part of a broad pattern of Buddhist deprecation of the repro-

as the Buddha's children, and in particular, of them being like Rāhula, his only son;<sup>424</sup> the conceit of the Buddha himself as a mother;<sup>425</sup> the notion of Buddha "families" (*gotra, kula* etc.);<sup>426</sup> and the eventual complete "upload" of sex itself into the Dharmic realm and soteriological practice, as seen in Tantra.

#### 4.11 Summary

In sum, I have argued in this chapter, first, that docetism in Buddhism is a fundamentally corporeal matter – it concerns itself with all the dimensions in which possession of and incarnation in a body might demean or defile the Buddha. Docetic thinking was extended beyond the Buddha's final earthly lifetime in both directions. Applied to the time after his death, it affected understandings of the relics. Docetism was also applied to the Buddha's earlier lifetimes on the *bodhisatva* path, and to the phase of his last earthly lifetime spanning his conception, gestation and birth. Ultimately, then, the entirety of the Buddha's extended "biographical process", in Strong's sense, was subject to docetic modifications.

I argued further that the pattern of docetism in Buddhism goes far beyond negatively phrased denials of the reality of the Buddha's earthly appearance. It also includes a wide range of positively articulated alternatives to ordinary worldly humanity and embodiment. Wherever such positive corollaries to docetic Buddhology are elaborated, they also im-

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ductive power of women and their replacement by androcentric mechanisms and institutions. I do not think the docetic replacement of family I argue for here is incompatible with Young's interpretation; rather, I think that docetism and the deprecation of women are probably complementary factors playing into a larger, overdetermined pattern.

<sup>424</sup> Cf. the *ekaputrasaṃjñā* of MPNMS, which expresses (repeatedly) the idea that the Buddha regards all sentient beings as if they are his only son.

<sup>425</sup> Gombrich (1972): 67-68, 69-78; Hallisey (1988): 118. Cf. the MPNMS-tg parables in which the Buddha is likened to a nursing mother, e.g. H §377-378, FX T376:12.883b26-c6, DhKṣ 407b29-c19. Cf. Bynum (1982).

<sup>426</sup> Ruegg (1969).

ply negative docetism, and negative docetic Buddhology proper and its positive corollaries reinforce one another.

We can identify several main types of positive corollary to docetic Buddhology. I have called “material-miraculous” a set of claims that the Buddha is in fact embodied in various wondrous, visible forms that still accord with our basic intuitions about bodies and the material world. These forms are often adamantine, and include the *vajrakāya* and the wonderful jewelled palace he resided in while ostensibly in Māyā’s womb. Another key type of positive corollary to docetic Buddhology, however, is what I have called the “soteriological-transcendent” type. A key example of such a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary to docetic Buddhology is the *dharmakāya* (eventually understood as embodiment in perfect wisdom, the *dharmatā* of all *dharmas*, or even the teaching that points us towards those truths).

The main goal of this chapter was to argue that *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature was also propounded in part as such a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary to docetic Buddhology. On this interpretation, *tathāgatagarbha* serves as a positive, soteriologically-oriented substitute for the fleshly womb, which docetic Buddhology holds could not possibly be the real seedbed for a being as perfect and exalted as a Buddha. I suggest that MPNMS-tg, taken as “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text, was the key context that elaborated this new perspective on the question of how buddhahood comes to be in the world. This heuristic exercise of locating the initial elaboration of *tathāgatagarbha* in MPNMS-tg allows us to discern a “systematic/dogmatical or exegetical situation” which could plausibly have motivated the introduction of the new concept of *tathāgatagarbha*, and “render fully plausible the choice of the term” *tathāgatagarbha* to label that new concept.

I also related this development of *tathāgatagarbha*, as a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary to docetic Buddhology, to other key features of the doctrinal system of MPNMS. MPNMS is rich in other docetic elements, and this context connects *tathāgatagarbha* with other docetic themes. This interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu* doctrine in MPNMS also helps us better to understand such themes as the insistence on corporeal motifs in *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine; and the “soteriology of vision”, whereby liberation ensues upon *seeing* the *tathāgatagarbha*,

which I connected with “Buddhist *darśan*” and visualisation practice. This interpretation also helps us to understand better the conceptual links between the two main strata of MPNMS-common, namely, MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg.

Finally, I suggested that the pattern of docetic Buddhology and its corollaries, specifically regarding the Buddha’s conception, gestation and birth, eventually grew also to include other alternate visions of Buddhas’ mothers, including various forms in which the Buddha’s mothers by blood and milk, Māyā and Mahāprajāpatī, were docetically reinterpreted; and the elaboration of a range of alternative “soteriological-transcendent” or *dharmic* “Buddha mothers”. This pattern of corollaries to docetic Buddhology arguably extends even further, to the whole range of ideas about the kinship of the Buddha.

However, I do not claim that the arguments of this chapter can exhaustively account for the origins of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. In Zimmermann’s words:

It would certainly be inappropriate to assume a model which reduces the range of possible motives to a single one. The first appearance of *tathāgatagarbha* theory in India may well have been due to several different motivations, brought together by possibly more than a single author. It is thus natural to seek out several complementing motives...<sup>427</sup>

In the next chapter, I will try to account for another part of the overall set of factors contributing to the emergence of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in MPNMS-tg, by considering the links between *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and what the text has to say about the relics of the Buddha.

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<sup>427</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 75.



## 5 *Garbha* and *Dhātu*

In the Introduction to Part II, I laid out a set of criteria, derived from Schmithausen, for identifying a scenario of origin for new Buddhist concepts like *tathāgatagarbha*. The second of these criteria was that the context in question should feature a “systematic/dogmatical or exegetical situation” which could both have motivated the introduction of the concept, and “render fully plausible the choice of the term” used to label that concept. In Chapter 4, I argued that the broad impulse to docetically reinterpret the Buddha’s corporeal existence comprised the larger situation motivating the introduction of the notion of *tathāgatagarbha*, in which context it functions as a specifically “soteriological-transcendent” type of solution to the overall docetic problematic, and as a solution specifically to the phase of his corporeal existence connected with conception, gestation and birth. I argued, further, that this situation accounts for the term *tathāgatagarbha*, since the conceit of a *garbha* or “womb” for Buddhas obviously meets the requirements of this broadly docetic agenda.

In §1.1, I argued that the term *tathāgatagarbha* is used more or less interchangeably with the term *\*buddhadhātu*/Buddha nature in MPNMS-tg. In this chapter, I will consider the implications of this fact for my suggestion that MPNMS-tg can usefully be regarded as a scenario of origin for *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine.<sup>428</sup> In other words, in order to support this

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<sup>428</sup> For an alternate attempt to account for the connection between *garbha* and *dhātu*, see Hirakawa (1990): 74. Following Hara’s (1987; cf. also 2012) study of the term *garbha* on the basis of numerous instances in the *Mahābhārata*, Hirakawa proposes that *garbha* had an extended range of meanings that included not just embryos, but new-borns and even children as old as six. Thus, he argues, the term grew in the direction of *gotra*, understood to mean “kin, kindred”, to encompass the whole notion of (the Buddha’s) *bloodline* or lineage. Hirakawa sees the word in this sense as overlapping with *dhātu*, to mean “semen, seed, posterity” (in making this argument, he exploits the

suggestion more fully, I will attempt to show that my “Schmithausen criteria” can also be satisfied for the term *\*buddhadhātu* in MPNMS-tg. In my consideration of this question, I will build on insightful arguments presented by Shimoda Masahiro, relating the notion of *\*buddhadhātu*, and the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of MPNMS-tg more broadly, to worship of the Buddha’s relics.

Shimoda has argued that the MPNMS-tg notion of so-called “Buddha nature” (*\*buddhadhātu*, *\*tathāgataadhātu*) may be connected to an attempt to elaborate a substitute for Buddha relics (likewise, *dhātu*). In other words, the claim encapsulated in the term *\*buddhadhātu* and associated doctrine is that buddhahood is present internally to the practitioner/worshipper, in opposition to the idea that it is externally present in the relic in the *stūpa*.<sup>429</sup> In my terms, *\*buddhadhātu* is a “soteriological-transcendent” positive corollary of docetism about the relics.

If, as I have argued, *tathāgatagarbha* is used interchangeably with *\*buddhadhātu*, we should consider the possibility that like *dhātu*, the term *garbha* is connected to the cult of the relic and the *stūpa*. For instance, we have already seen above that the *Nidānakathā* compares Māyā, when the *bodhisatva* is within her, to a *ceṭiyagabbha*, i.e. the reliquary chamber of the *stūpa*.<sup>430</sup> More evidence for such a connection can be discerned in the use of the term *dhātugarbha*, as Shimoda has in part already pointed out.<sup>431</sup>

Some evidence for such a connection can be found in a passage in the *Aṣṭa*.<sup>432</sup> Over the course of several pages, the text (in the manner of the “cult of the book”) extols the merit that will be generated by study,

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semantics of Jpn. *shushō* 種性 = 種姓, = Skt *gotra*; cf. the alternate orthography of *foxing*, 佛姓 “Buddha clan”).

<sup>429</sup> Shimoda (1991); Shimoda (1997): 82-85, 85-86, 278-298, 39[L]; Shimoda (2008). Shimoda (2003) traces the idea further afield, in the *Buddhacarita*, the *Anuttarāśraya-sūtra*, RGV and the *Kriyāsaṃgraha*.

<sup>430</sup> See n. 331. The term *ceṭiyagabbha/caityagarbha* seems to occur less frequently than *dhātugarbha*. I have only been able to find one passage in Skt using the term *caityagarbha*: the *Mahākarmavibhaṅga* speaks of women offering fragrant ointments to *caityagarbhagrhas*; Lévi (1932): 103.

<sup>431</sup> Shimoda (1991): 123-122.

<sup>432</sup> Vaidya (1960): 31-36, Conze (1973): 107-108.



preaching, worship and other activities that take the text itself as object, saying that this merit will be far greater than that generated by worship of *stūpas*.<sup>433</sup> Key for us is the fact that the *stūpa* is described as *tathāgata-dhātugarbha*.<sup>434</sup> For example:

[Even] if a gentleman or gentlewoman were to make from the seven precious substances *stūpas containing the relic of the Tathāgata (tathāgata-dhātugarbhān stūpān)* by the myriad, for the purpose of worshipping the Arhat Samyaksambuddha Tathāgata who has entered *parinirvāṇa*, and then, so long as life should last, were to respect, honour...and reverence those [*stūpas*] with heavenly flowers, incense, perfumes...and rows of lamps all around...much greater would be the merit generated by a gentleman or gentlewoman who had faith in... listened to...preached...studied...and promulgated this *Prajñāpāramitā*, or put it in a book and kept it and stored it away, in order that the true Dharma might last a long time...<sup>435</sup>

We have already seen above that MPNMS-tg refers to some *Prajñāpāramitā* scripture by name, and seems to know some of its content. However, we cannot be sure, on the basis of this passage, that this conceit was known to the authors of MPNMS-tg. We cannot know what

<sup>433</sup> On the “cult of the book”, see Schopen (1975); also Kinnard (2002); Drewes (2007); Tuladhar-Douglas (2009).

<sup>434</sup> Ruegg has returned a number of times to the theme of the possible connection between *tathāgatagarbha* and the notion of *dhātugarbha*, including this Aṣṭa passage. See e.g. Ruegg (1969): 505, 515-516 (in part following Liebenthal [1956]); Ruegg (1977); Ruegg (2004): 27-28 n. 36. See also Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* 409 n. 3, cited in Schopen (1988): 163 n. 40; Shimoda (1991): 122; Shimoda (1991): 122; Suzuki (1998): 31. Cf. also Shimoda (1997): 301-302; Habata (unpublished): 18.

<sup>435</sup> *yaḥ kaścit kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā tathāgatasāyārhatāḥ samyaksambuddhasya parinirvṛtasya pūjāyāḥ koṭīśaḥ saptaratnamayāms tathāgata-dhātugarbhān stūpān kārayet | kārayitvā ca tān yāvaj jīvaṃ divyair divyair dhūpair divyair gandhair...samantāc ca dipamālābhīh...satkuryāt gurukuryāt...apacāyēt...ataḥ sa kauśīka kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā bahutarāṃ puṇyāṃ prasavati, ya imāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ abhiśraddhadhad...śṅṅuyād...pravartayed deśayed...antaśaḥ pustakagatām api kṛtvā dhārayet sthāpayet saddharmacirasthithetoḥ...; Vaidya (1960): 31-32. My ellipses abbreviate long and often pleonastic lists of paraphernalia used in the worship of the *stūpa*, actions undertaken by the faithful worshipper, etc. which are repeated formulaically throughout the long passage in question.*

version of the Prajñāpāramitā was known to the authors of MPNMS, and it is not certain that Aṣṭa already contained the above formula at the time of MPNMS-tg.<sup>436</sup>

In addition, the characterisation of the *stūpa* as “having a relic in its *garbha*” can be found in quite a number of other texts. Other uses of the compound *dhātugarbha* in connection to the *stūpa* (or *caitya*) can be found in the *Caityavandanāstotra*, the *Aśokāvadāna*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Kaṭhināvadāna*, the *Mahākarmavibhaṅga*, and the *Manuśrīmūlakalpa*.<sup>437</sup> Glossing Pāli *dhātugabbha* as “an inner chamber or building containing a relic”, Cone lists examples from the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (*Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā*), the *Visuddhajanavilāsini* (*Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā*), the *Mahāvamsa*, and the *Paramatthajotikā* I (*Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā*).<sup>438</sup> We also seem to see

<sup>436</sup> Early Chinese translations do not allow us to be sure that Aṣṭa already contained the key phrase *tathāgatadhātugarbhān stūpān kārayet* at the time of MPNMS-tg. They are all very similar. \*Lokakṣema: 取舍利起七寶塔, T224:8.432b17-18; Zhi Qian is identical, T225:8.484a28-29; “Zhu Fonian”: 取舍利供養、起七寶塔, T226:8.514c21; Kumārajīva: 以供養如來故、起七寶塔, T227:8.542c26. Even Xuanzang does not suggest our present Skt: 為供養佛設利羅故、以妙七寶起窣堵波, T220:7.775c29; 為供養佛設利羅故以妙七寶起窣堵波, T220:7.874a18-19. However, we must also consider the fact that Ch translations do not always give word-for-word correspondences to Skt in any case. Tib reflects our Skt: *mchod rten de bzhin gshegs pa'i ring bsrel gyi snying po can*. See Karashima (2010): 414.

<sup>437</sup> *ye ca syur dhātugarbhā dasabalatanujāḥ kumbhasamjñās ca caityāḥ*, *Caityavandanāstotra* v. 5, Pandey (1994): 77; *astamgate mayi bhaviṣyati saikarājā yo 'sau hy aśoka iti nāma viśālākīrtiḥ | maddhātugarbhaparimaṇḍitajambuṣaṇḍam etat kariṣyati narāmarapūjitaṃ nu*, Mukhopadhyaya (1963): 34.10-13, Strong (1983): 204; (the same verse, with variants) Vaidya (1959): 232.10-12; Hiraoka (2007): 369 (2:75); *āropya hr̥ṣṭaḥ prathamam mahātmā | chattraṃ purā kāśyapadhātugarbhe...*, *Kaṭhināvadāna* 30.7.2, Degener (1990): 32, 53; *mālyam vicitraṃ pravaram sugandham | praharṣaṇam pritikaram narāṇam | prasannacitto muni-dhātugarbhe | tathāgatebhyas ca dadāti yo vai | sa divyamālyābharaṇajjalāṅgaḥ | śrīmat sukham prāpya diviḥ caiva etc.*, Lévi (1932): 99.2-7, 144; *anye vā rahasi bhūbhāge udaye vā suśobhite | devyātanaramyeṣu stūpe cāpi mahocchrite | dhātugarbhe tathā caitye etc.*, Vaidya (1964): 410.1-3 (47.67); *jambudvīpa imaṃ kṛtsnam stūpālaṅkṛtabhūṣaṇam | kārayantu bhavanto vai dhātugarbhām vasundharām*; Vaidya (1964): 474.15-16 (53.342); *sa tasya tathāgatasya pūjārtham tathāgatadhātugarbhāni caturaśīṣṭīstūpakoṭiṣahasraṇi kārayām āsa*, Vaidya (1961b): 218.8. Cf. also *Divyāvadāna*, Vaidya (1959): 150, discussed in Shimoda (1991): 122, 118 n. 24.

<sup>438</sup> Cone (2001-): 2:482 s.v. *dhātu*, citing Sv 613,6, Ap-a 439,12, and Mhv 34:49; loc. cit. s.v. *dhātuka*, Pj I, 1 222,1. A search of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka* database confirms that *dhātugabbha* is post-canonical in Pāli texts.

reference to the *stūpa* containing a \**śarīradhātugarbha* 如來身界藏 of the Tathāgata in a \**Mahāvibhāṣā* comment on a canonical text (also cited in Vasubandhu’s AKBh), which states that \**brāhmaṇya* can be generated by establishing a *stūpa* for the Tathāgata’s relics in a place where none has been before.<sup>439</sup> Evidence that such a connection may have been widespread is also found in the etymology of English “dagoba” via Sinhalese *dāgaba*.<sup>440</sup> Now, as far as I can tell, none of this evidence necessarily shows that reference to the *stūpa* as *dhātugarbha* was already current by the time of MPNMS-tg. However, the distribution of this notion through this relatively wide range of Buddhist genres and contexts suggests that it could have been relatively early.<sup>441</sup>

If the formula seen here in Aṣṭa was already in circulation by the time MPNMS-tg was composed, then, its authors could quite naturally have closely associated the terms *dhātu* and *garbha*, in connection to the cult of relics and the *stūpa*. Against this background, it might have been natural for them, in elaborating the new doctrine that sentient beings are shrines of present buddhahood after the manner of the *stūpa*, to use the two somewhat interchangeably (as we have seen they do), and to play on both.<sup>442</sup>

<sup>439</sup> The last of four reasons that this act generates “Brahma merit” is “because [one] establishes the \**śarīradhātugarbha* of the Tathāgata 四安置如來身界藏故”, T1545:27. 426b17-20. The *sūtra* in question is cited in AKBh ad 4.124, and fuller wording is preserved in Yaśomitra’s commentary; the *sūtra* was identified by La Vallée Poussin with EĀ 21.5; cf. Xuanzang’s AKBh T1558:29.97c16-23; Pāsādika (1986): 93; Salomon and Schopen (1984): 116-117. I have been unable to find any Skt corresponding to the wording of the \**Mahāvibhāṣā* comment.

<sup>440</sup> “Etymology: < Sinhalese *dāgaba* < Pali *dhātugabbho* < Sanskrit *dhātu-garbha* relic-receptacle (Yule);” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “dagoba”. Edgerton (1953): 2:284 s.v. *dhātugarbha*, defines the compound as “‘containing relics’ i.e. relic-shrine, dagoba”; but the only example he gives is the *Divyāvadāna* (*Aśokāvadāna*) example already cited above n. 437. See also Clough (1892): 239 (giving variant transcriptions *dāgaba*, *dāgoba*, *dāgēba*); Carter (1924) s.v. *dāgaba*, *dāgāba*, *dāgoba*; also s.v. *dā*.

<sup>441</sup> For further evidence supporting the connection between *stūpa* and *dhātugarbha*, see Roth (1980): 201-202; Shimoda (2003): 256-257, citing Benisti on the *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, Foucher, Roth and Ruegg.

<sup>442</sup> Cf. Strong’s suggestion that “at times...the *ratnavyūha* seems more like a reliquary than a relic...The embryonic imagery here recalls the notion of the *tathāgatarbha*, a doc-

In this light, we can reread both *garbha* and *dhātu* as they are used in MPNMS-tg. Let us consider *garbha* first. In the Aṣṭa passage above, for instance, *-garbha*, in the compound *dhātugarbha*, most likely merely means “inside”, as Zimmermann has argued it does in the TGS formulation.<sup>443</sup> The same is true of many of our other examples of *dhātugarbha*. However, this does not prevent the phrase from being used in creative doctrinal wordplay.

We have seen that the most common MPNMS-tg expression of the doctrine is that “there is a *tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings” (*sems can thams cad la de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod*, 一切眾生悉有佛性, etc.); and that the slightly fuller formulation is that sentient beings have this *tathāgatagarbha* in their bodies (*lus la* etc.). As Zimmermann has argued, in contrast to TGS, MPNMS-tg seems here to envisage *tathāgatagarbha* as a separate entity within the sentient being. However, given that *garbha* can also mean “chamber” or “space” (as in the calyx of the lotus, indeed), there is very little to separate an understanding on which a *stūpa* is *dhātugarbha*, meaning that it “has a relic inside”, from an understanding on which it is *dhātugarbha*, meaning that it “has a relic chamber [inside it]”. Thus, if MPNMS-tg wants to say that sentient beings are like *stūpas*, only better, it can more or less equally say that they have a *dhātu* of the Tathāgata inside them, or that they have a *garbha* – a chamber or container – for a Tathāgata inside them.<sup>444</sup> (Indeed, if it wants to say that they contain not a relic of a past Buddha, but a full-fledged Buddha-in-waiting, *garbha* is arguably an even better way to put it; of which more below.)

In fact, this possible background in the relic cult even casts new light on the “standard” *bahuvrihi* reading of TGS, *sadaivaite sattvās tathāgatagarbhā iti*, “these sentient beings always contain a *tathāgata*”.<sup>445</sup> Where the *stūpa* is said to be *tathāgatadhātugarbha*, i.e. to contain the *relic* of a Tathāgata, the sentient being simply contains a Tathāgata *tout court* – not the

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trinal expression, perhaps, of some of the same ambiguities,” Strong (2004): 64 (already cited in part above, n. 348).

<sup>443</sup> Zimmermann (2002): 41-44.

<sup>444</sup> On the reading of *-garbha* as “container” in MPNMS-tg, see Shimoda (1991): 122.

<sup>445</sup> See n. 26.

vestige of a Tathāgata left behind after his (apparent) death, but a “full-fledged” Tathāgata (in Zimmermann’s phrase), living, present, here and now. If the image of the *stūpa* is still “alive” in the interpretative context (i.e. actively generating associations in the minds of the text’s authors and audiences), that might be grounds for reading the *bahuvrīhi* in less abstract, more concrete terms. On such a reading, *-garbha* would mean not so much “inside”, but “chamber”, and the whole formula would mean, “These sentient beings always have a container of a Tathāgata.” On this reading, the TGS *bahuvrīhi* formula is only a syntactically different expression of the same semantic content as the MPNMS-tg formula.

In this wordplay on the *\*tathāgatadhātugarbhistūpa* formula, an important imaginative transformation is achieved. When MPNMS-tg speaks simply of *tathāgatagarbha*, omitting the relic (“-dhātu-”) from that formula, the locus of the presence of buddhahood within the sentient being becomes *-garbha* itself (“*tathāgata-garbha*”).<sup>446</sup> But if there is “a *garbha*”, as a “separate entity”, within a sentient being – and indeed, within *the body* of the sentient being, no less – it is most natural to think of that *garbha* as a womb. Of course, this interpretation is rendered all the more likely by the fact that this *garbha* is a locus of incipient or future buddhahood. Thus, by what Shimoda has called the “internalisation” of the *stūpa*, the funerary monument of a lamented dead Buddha is transformed instead into the seedbed of new buddhahood for the future.<sup>447</sup> Tomb becomes womb.<sup>448</sup> Sentient beings become the mothers of Buddhas; and the despair of the *parinirvāṇa* – the *mise-en-scène* for the entire MPNMS – is transformed into hope.

This same imaginative work also redounds upon the understanding of the term *dhātu*. Indeed, perhaps we should understand in this light the equation of interchangeability that MPNMS-tg sets up between the two

<sup>446</sup> If the *-garbha* in *dhātugarbha* originally conveyed only an abstract sense of “inside”, this move may have consisted in returning, to the implicit dead metaphor, an underlying, original concrete conceit.

<sup>447</sup> The conceit of “seed” is not merely my fancy: *nga’i lus la chos kyi sku’i sa bon de lta bu yod do*, H §397.7-8; FX: 能知我身有/微妙法身種, 886a13; DhKṣ 410c13-14; see also e.g. MPNMS 28.

<sup>448</sup> There might be scope for careful comparison of the transformation from *stūpa* to *garbha* with the symbolism of Christ’s tomb.

terms (*-dhātu* and *-garbha*). In the context of the relic cult, *dhātu* had meant a vestige of buddhahood. However much the relic might be thought to instantiate the presence of the Buddha, or be treated as “living”, the basic understanding was that the epicentre of the buddhahood instantiated by the relic lay in the past. The buddhahood of the relic cult is thus past its zenith; and in the prevalence of the “endtimes” motif, we see a keen consciousness of its impending decline and extinction, and the fear and even panic that it engendered.

When *dhātu* is equated with *garbha*, however, so that the two are functionally equivalent, other resonances among the rich semantic resources of the term *dhātu* begin to resound: “raw material”, “component element”, “cause”.<sup>449</sup> Thus, *dhātu* is transformed from a remnant of past buddhahood (the erstwhile existence of a single, exceptional and surpassingly rare being) into the promise of future buddhahood (in and for all).<sup>450</sup> It does not seem overly rhetorical to say that in the alchemy so wrought on the word *dhātu*, buddhahood rises like a phoenix from the ashes of the funeral pyre.<sup>451</sup> It is surely not hard to understand the immense appeal this message seems to have exerted in subsequent Buddhist history.

As I have already noted above, texts in the MPNMS group as a whole have often been treated as a single group because they feature the term *\*buddhadhātu*.<sup>452</sup> On the assumption that other *tathāgatagarbha* texts ex-

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<sup>449</sup> These resonances, of course, were to become the keynote of the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition, as it culminates in RGV.

<sup>450</sup> Using an analogy from science fiction, we might say that the relic cult is “cryogenic”, i.e. it seeks to freeze the old Buddha in a state of utter permanence so that he does not fade from the world. *Tathāgatagarbha*, on the other hand, resorts to “regenerative cloning”, i.e. it proposes a mechanism for generating new carbon-copy Buddhas, potentially in vast or even infinite numbers, throughout all time.

<sup>451</sup> A virtue of this reading is that it connects *tathāgatagarbha*, and the portion of MPNMS that espouses it, with *dharmakāya*, the central concern of the other part of MPNMS (-common). I have already addressed elsewhere some of the links between *dharmakāya*, particularly as espoused in MPNMS, and relics; Radich (2011[2012]). On the conundrums presented by the connection of MPNMS-dhk with MPNMS-tg, see e.g. Habata (1992); Habata (2014).

<sup>452</sup> See n. 128.

isted prior to the texts of the MPNMS group, moreover, scholars have supposed that *\*buddhadhātu* was like a graft onto existing stock – a modification of a *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine that already existed, and thus an offshoot or bywater in the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a whole. However, if MPNMS-tg is “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* text, and if the concept of *\*buddhadhātu* was intertwined at its very inception with the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* itself, the role of *\*buddhadhātu* in that history may have been quite different. *\*Buddhadhātu* might have been to *tathāgatagarbha* something like the launch tower or booster rocket for an Apollo spacecraft – it may have helped launch *tathāgatagarbha* from the launching pad of reaction to the relic cult, but then have fallen away or been jettisoned, as the new concept took flight and began to trace its own trajectory.

In sum, this chapter has argued that in accordance with what I have called “Schmithausen criteria”, MPNMS-tg, as our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* text, may provide us with a plausible scenario of origin for the notion of *\*buddhadhātu*, just as it does for *tathāgatagarbha* – that is to say, a context in which we can plausibly account for systematic or doctrinal motives for the introduction of the concept, and for the choice of the term used to express it.

At the risk of oversimplification, the underlying imaginative logic that I have attempted to reconstruct is as follows. The text proposes that the object of highest religious value is not an external Buddha relic (*buddhadhātu*), but an internal “Buddha nature” (*\*buddhadhātu*); this *dhātu* is within (*garbha*) the body of the sentient being like an element or raw material (*dhātu*) from which new buddhahood can spring. The space “within” (*garbha*) containing this element (*dhātu*) is like the reliquary chamber (*garbha*) of a *stūpa*, with the key difference that where the latter preserves the vestiges of buddhahood past, this element harbours a seed or potential for the future. In this light, this space “within” (*garbha*) can, exploiting the polysemy of the term *garbha*, also legitimately be regarded as a matrix or womb (*garbha*) for the production of new buddhahood (*\*buddhatva*, *tathāgatatva*); and this paronomasia in turn allows the doctrine to slot into place as part of the large patterns of docetism discussed in Chapter 4, including most pertinently docetic doctrines about the *parinirvāṇa* (the eponymous “topic”, or at least occasion, of the entire MPN-

MS), and the *bodhisatva*-Buddha's conception, gestation and birth, that is, his genesis.

This interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha*/\**buddhadhātu*, taken as two facets of the same doctrine, has the added advantage of accounting for connections between MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg. That is to say, again at the risk of oversimplification – the Buddha is dead, and our chances of salvation are thereby already drastically compromised; to make matters worse, the Buddha has prophesied a decline of his Dharma in the world, and that dark hour has also now arrived. Where are we then to find hope?

The first solution put forward for this problem, in MPNMS-dhk, is that in fact, the *parinirvāṇa* never took place; it was a mere docetic show, conjured up to guide sentient beings to salvation. In fact, it is impossible that the Buddha die, because his true body is not the fleshly, corruptible, destructible body in which he docetically appears to ordinary eyes; his true body is the Dharma (or *dharmas*), and it is adamant and utterly indestructible, and in it, he is eternal.

However, this solution could perhaps be regarded as solving only half the problem. It secures the Buddha's continued existence, but leaves open the question of how sentient beings within the fold of the world will have access to him. The second (part of the) solution to the problem, then, put forward in MPNMS-tg, is that the Buddha is primarily accessible not in his physical remnants as enshrined within *stūpas*, but within sentient beings themselves, as an element or matrix harbouring the potential for full buddhahood. This potential is called *tathāgatagarbha*, or \**buddhadhātu*.



## 6 Conclusions

### 6.1 Summary

In the Introduction to Part II, I laid out two main “Schmithausen criteria” for identifying a scenario of origin for a Buddhist concept: that the source be the “earliest pertinent source” for the concept; and that we be able to account plausibly for both the motives driving the elaboration of the concept, and the selection of terms to describe it. I also observed that these two criteria are not entirely independent, because a context in which we plausibly discern motives for the concept and its name is, in that measure, all the more likely to be where it originated, and therefore our earliest source. I therefore intend the arguments and evidence of this book as a whole to constitute, in combination, a single case that MPNMS-tg is best regarded as “our earliest” *tathāgatagarbha* scripture.

In Part I, I first argued that MPNMS is every bit as much a *tathāgatagarbha* scripture as TGS (Ch. 1). In fact, it speaks of *tathāgatagarbha* a great deal more than TGS. It also speaks of *tathāgatagarbha*, on the whole, more than it speaks of *\*buddhadhātu*; and on the whole, it also uses the terms *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu* interchangeably. I then examined internal and external evidence for the relative and absolute dates of MPNMS-tg and TGS, and (less exhaustively) other *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures (Chs. 2 and 3).

Scholars have in part regarded TGS as earlier than MPNMS on the basis of a supposed reference to TGS by title in MPNMS, and also on the basis of a simile in MPNMS which they took to be borrowed from TGS. I argued that these reasons are not adequate to show that TGS is in fact earlier. MPNMS refers to something like a “*tathāgatagarbha* scripture” several times, but it is more likely that it is referring to itself by an alternate title in these instances, in keeping with patterns observed in other MPNMS group scriptures (§2.1.1), and in a range of other titles within MPNMS

itself (§2.1.2). In fact, it is relatively unusual for MPNMS to refer to any other Mahāyāna scriptures by title, especially in a manner that actually shows familiarity with the contents of extant texts with the same titles (§2.1.3, §2.1.4). In the resulting absence of clear internal criteria to show TGS earlier than MPNMS, we cannot determine the direction of borrowing for the simile shared between the two texts (§2.2).

The unusual and detailed prophecy traditions shared by the texts of the MPNMS group show that MPNMS-tg is likely to date to approximately the late first or early second century C.E. (§3.1). By contrast, we have no evidence to show TGS earlier than 250-350 C.E. (§3.2). Thus, on such criteria as we can use to suggest absolute dates, MPNMS-tg is likely to be significantly earlier than TGS. In fact, we also have no reasons to regard MPNMS-tg as later than Anūn and Śrīm (§3.4) or the other texts of the MPNMS group (with the possible exception of MM) (§3.5). As such, MPNMS-tg is the *tathāgatagarbha* text for which we have the strongest grounds to ascribe the earliest date.

In Part II, I took these findings as a basis for a heuristic exercise in the interpretation of the history of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. Using criteria derived from Schmithausen's treatment of *ālayavijñāna*, I argued that we can see, in MPNMS-tg, plausible motives for both the elaboration of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and the application to it of the terms *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu*. The notion of "Buddha-genesis" labelled by the term *tathāgatagarbha*, I argued, is best regarded as a "soteriological-transcendent" positive substitute for the corrupt, impure and demeaning fleshly conception, gestation and birth that the *bodhisatva* would have had to undergo if he were an ordinary human being (§4.8). As such, *tathāgatagarbha* is part of a much broader pattern of docetism about all aspects of the Buddha's corporeal existence, and shows discernible relations with other docetic doctrines about the *bodhisatva's* birth, gestation and conception (Ch. 4 *passim*). Similarly, the exposition of the same concept under the name of *\*buddhadhātu* connects the doctrine to dimension of Mahāyāna docetic Buddhology articulated in response to the relic cult (Ch. 5).

## 6.2 Directions for future research

In closing, I would like to identify several directions for future research, which I believe are raised by the present study.

First, I have suggested in this study that docetism was at its root a corporeal issue (§4.2). Moreover, I have also suggested that if *tathāgatagarbha*/"Buddha nature" doctrine was first elaborated in MPNMS-tg, it was intimately related there to the *dharmakāya/vajrakāya* doctrine of the same text. Elsewhere, I have recently argued that MPNMS(-dhk) was also central in the early elaboration of the doctrine of *vajrakāya* itself.<sup>453</sup> I believe that it might also be worthwhile to examine the place of MPNMS-dhk in the development of *dharmakāya* doctrine *tout court*. Full consideration of this question, however, will require far-ranging attention to underlying problems such as the origin of the very notion that the Buddha has special "bodies" (*kāya*) at all; the inception and development of Buddhist docetism, considered as a whole; and doctrines about other kinds of Buddha bodies. This topic must therefore await future work.<sup>454</sup>

The material surveyed in this study raises some large comparative questions, and these too might reward careful exploration. The "tomb to womb" motif, whereby aspects of the relic cult are transformed into the seedbed of new salvific life (the rejuvenation of buddhahood in the world), has some echoes with the message of the empty tomb of Christ. The docetisation of Māyā in particular, and to a lesser extent of Mahāprajāpatī (especially insofar as she is a kind of "female equivalent" of the Buddha, as Walters argues) raises obvious questions about parallels with the figure of "the Virgin Mary". Conze has commented (if only succinctly) on the interest of comparison between Prajñāpāramitā and Sophia, including their maternal qualities.<sup>455</sup> However, we might also ask more broadly: What differences are there between the specific features of docetic doctrines, and their history, in Buddhism and Christianity respec-

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<sup>453</sup> Radich (2011[2012]).

<sup>454</sup> See n. 277 above. I have made a first stab at parts of this work in Radich (2007a), but I am dissatisfied with the results, and chafing to revise that work. See also Radich (2010, 2011[2012], forthcoming a).

<sup>455</sup> Conze (1970): 176.

tively?<sup>456</sup> Why might it be that Christianity condemned docetism as a heresy (seminally at the Council of Nicea), whereas in Mahāyāna Buddhism, at least, it seems to have ultimately become standard fare? Might this comparative problem of docetism thus furnish us with a useful focal point for the examination of larger differences in underlying orientation between the two traditions? Could the difference, for example, have something to do with what we might call an overarching “metaphysical docetism” in Mahāyāna Buddhism, whereby not just the apparent (“phenomenal” < *phaínein*, φαίνεiv; 所現, 所示) body of the Buddha, but all phenomenal existents are held to be deceptive and unreal?<sup>457</sup>

Finally, much remains to be done in the study of MPNMS itself. It is sobering to consider that the present work seems to be the first monographic treatment of any aspect of MPNMS in English. MPNMS is a large, complex and historically significant Mahāyāna scripture. In addition, MPNMS survives in four main extant textual witnesses, each of which is, in various ways, difficult to interpret, and the relations among which are difficult to unravel. Problems of textual history alone thus pose serious challenges, and call for detailed (and demanding) study; and notwithstanding some outstanding research to date (mostly in Japanese), the text also still cries out for fuller study of its contents. In addition, MPNMS also had a tremendous impact in China, and ultimately in all of East Asia, and its reception in China, and its impact on other developments, also demands monographic treatment. In this regard, the provenance, nature and contents of portions of the text unique to DhKṣ would also merit detailed study; as would exegetical attention devoted to the text in China in the fifth century, as reflected in the *Compendium of Commentaries*

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<sup>456</sup> Comparisons to docetism are frequently made in passing by scholars of Buddhist Studies, but it seems that little work addresses the problem of Buddhist docetism directly. The most interesting treatment I know of is Silk (2003); see esp. 875-877. Lai’s treatments of the question are founded on an unhelpful understanding of the potential uses of the term “docetism”, and a selective reading of evidence in the service of an obscure apologetic agenda; Lai (1981a), (1981b): 447-448, 464. Conze comments very briefly but usefully, in the context of a comparative discussion of “gnosis” more generally; Conze (1970): 177.

<sup>457</sup> Cf. Gómez (1977): 224-227, 229, 231-234; Conze (1970).

on the \*Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra (大般涅槃經集解, T1763) compiled in 509 by Baoliang 寶亮.



## Appendix 1 Terms related to “*tathāgataḡarbha*” in MPNMS

I believe that the *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine of MPNMS is still understudied, and its study to date has been hampered by the flawed assumptions that it (with other texts in the MPNMS group) is later than other *tathāgataḡarbha* texts, and represents a strange offshoot in the development of the doctrine. Renewed study of the *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine of the text is thus a desideratum, and I have compiled the following table as a tool for closer examination of this aspect of the text.

The table lists terms corresponding or related to *tathāgataḡarbha*, and the exposition of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine, in MPNMS. MPNMS-dhk contains very few relevant passages, but I have included such passages as it does contain (MPNMS 1-3). The table covers only MPNMS-common; that is to say, I have excluded the massive unique portions of DhKṣ, because textual-historical problems mean that it is of dubious evidential value for the phase of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine at issue here.

In the first column, I have given each passage a number. I refer to passages by these numbers in the main body of this study.

In places, for the sake of brevity, I have included multiple instances of key terms in a single table cell, where they appear in a single contiguous “passage”. However, the definition of “passage” for these purposes is arbitrary, and “passages” represented by consecutive cells are often in fact also directly contiguous. I have sometimes given minimal context for a term in square brackets, where I believe it will help the reader’s understanding.

Where an entire passage is missing from a given version of the text, I mark the fact with a hyphen (see e.g. MPNMS 1 FX). Where a given passage does exist in a version of the text, but a term corresponding to \**tathāgataḡarbha* etc. is missing, I mark the fact with “X” (see e.g. MPNMS 6 FX, Tib, Skt). As much as possible, where a single “passage” (by my arbitrary definition) contains multiple relevant terms, I have tried to match them

up one to one in all the versions of the text. Where a passage in one text contains more relevant terms than parallels in another text, I try to help the reader keep track of the alignment of terms by using “X” where there is no corresponding term in a version of the text (see e.g. MPNMS 27 FX, Tib). However, in some cases, the correspondence between versions is too loose to allow such treatment, and in such cases, there is a mismatch between the number of terms listed in each version of the text (the main passages where I encountered this problem were MPNMS 3, 7, 8, 42, 43, 83).



	DhKṣ	FX	Tib	Skt
1	甚深祕密之藏 376a17 <sup>458</sup>	-	theg pa chen po'i rgyud phyi ma §85.4-5 <sup>459</sup>	
2	祕密藏 376c10	決定義 861c8	[de bzhin gshegs pa'i] yon tan che ba nyid(?); yi ge 'bru gcig pa'i thig le (!?) §90.7-8	
3	≈ 甚深密藏 380b3-4, 甚深 義 380b7	如來[一切種智] 863c25-26, 甚深經義 863c26, 如來深 法藏 863c29	de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba'i mdo chen po [las thams cad mkhyen pa], de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba bstan pa'i don §118.4-5	
4	[如來所說十二部經及]祕 密藏 385b18-19	[如來]方便密教 868a29-b1	[de bzhin gshegs pa las] gsang ba [sna tshogs thos na] §170.3-4	
5	如來微密無上法藏 385c21	如來寶藏祕密法 868c5	de bzhin gshegs pa gsang ba sna tshogs kyi dgongs pa'i tshig §171.63-64	tathāgata-vividha- guhyaṃ sandhā- vacanaṃ SF13
6	無上祕密之藏 385c28	X	X	X [missing from SF13]
7	[解脫涅槃摩訶般若成]祕 密藏 387b11-12	種種祕要方便密教(?) 870a5	dgongs pa'i tshig gsang ba sna tshogs bstan pas(?) §182.13	
8	如來性 387c8	equivalence unclear	equivalence unclear	

<sup>458</sup> Loci in Bl can be found easily enough using the DhKṣ page and register numbers Blum provides in the margin, and so I do not give them separately here. All passages treated in this Table fall within the range translated in Bl, and so I do not provide references to Y.

<sup>459</sup> Reference to Tib by section number and line number in H.

9	如來性 389b8	如來法身 871b24	de bzhin gshegs pa §203.5
10	祕密藏 390b16, 密語...密藏 390b17, 祕密藏 390b20, 祕密之藏 390b21, 祕藏 390b24, 藏 390b24, 祕藏 390b26, 如來祕藏 390b28	隱祕之法 872a26, 隱祕 872a28 (only)	gsang ba (4x), gsang chen §219.1, 2, 8, 10
11	祕藏 390b26, 390c1-2, 390c15, 如來祕藏 390b28, 390c3, 藏 390c4, 390c6, 390c11, 覆藏 390c12	-	-
12	祕藏 390c21, 藏 390c24, 如來祕藏 390c24	隱覆 872b4, 隱覆 (2x) 872b6-7	gsang ba (3x) §221.3, 6, 8
13	藏 390c26, 390c27	隱覆 872b9	gsang ba §222.3
14	藏 391a5 [...如來有]祕密藏 391a6-7	X	gsang ba (2x) §222.20-21
15	如來[實無]所藏 391a16-17, 所祕藏	≈ [大泥洹]微密法 872b19, X	≈ [yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po] gsang chen §223.5, X
16	X	如來藏 (2x) 874c11	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §272.2
17	佛性 (2x) 395b13	[真實無我]佛性[顯現] 875a9-10	sangs rgyas kyi khamas [gang yin pa de ni yod do] §279.4
18	佛性 (2x) 395c16	X	X
19	佛性 395c18, 佛性 395c21	-	-
20	如來 396a19, 396a20, 如來性 396a20	如來 (2x) 875b9, 875b11	de bzhin gshegs pa (3x) §285.3-4, 6-7, 10
21	如來 396b2, 396b5 (2x), 如來之性 396b5	如來 875b17 (2x), 875b21 (2x)	de bzhin gshegs pa (3x) §287.4, 8-10

22	[眾生悉有]佛性 399a6-7	[眾生各各自分有]如來性 877c6-7	[sems can thams cad la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod do] §313.15-16	tathāgatagarbhaḥ [sarvbasatvānām] SF16
23	如來深密藏 402a8, 是藏 402a8	如來方便密教 879c16-17	[≈?] dgongs pa'i tshig de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba §333.4 <sup>460</sup>	
24	[一切眾生悉有]佛性 402c8-9	-	-	
25	佛祕藏[甚深經典] 404c4, [一切眾生皆有]佛性 404c4-5, 是性 404c5, 佛性 (3x) 404c8-11	如來藏[經] 881b24, [一切眾生皆有]佛性, 身中有[佛性] (etc.) (total 5x) 881b24-c3	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[ 'i mdo sde chen po], ... [sems can thams cad la ni] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod], ...khams de [rang rang gi lus la 'chang], sangs rgyas kyi khams (2x), [chos de] §351.1-2, 2-3, 3, 7, 10 <sup>461</sup>	
26	如來無上法藏 404c17-18, [身有]佛性 404c18	≈ 百千諸法寶藏 881c7-8, 如來真性[由斯顯現] 881c7	≈ chos kyi phung po 'bum, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod pa] §352.9-11	

<sup>460</sup> If I am right in identifying the match between DhKṣ and FX/Tib, DhKṣ is somehow out of sequence.

<sup>461</sup> This same passage also clearly states that the so-called \**Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* teaches that with the exception of the *icchantika*, “all sentient beings, once they have eliminated the *kleśas*, will become Buddhas”, *sems can rnams kiyis nyon mongs pa'i rnam pa zad par byas nas sangs rgyas su 'gyur*.

27 <sup>462</sup>	[見於]佛性 405a19, [一切眾生雖有]佛性 405a19-20, [見]佛性 405a20, [一切眾生有]佛性 405a24-25, 有佛性 405a22, 佛性 405a29-b1, 佛性 405b2, 如來甚深祕密藏 405b4-5, [有]佛性 405b5, 祕密之藏 405b5-6, [一切眾生悉有]佛性[...見] 405b9, [有]佛性[...有]佛性 405b13-14, [有]佛性 405b16	佛性 882a2, [眾生皆有]佛性 882a3, X, X, [一切眾生皆有]佛性 882a5, X, X, [方等]要藏[摩訶衍海] 882a7-8, ≈ [一切眾生有]如來性 882a10, X, [有]佛性 882a11, X, X, X	sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod] §355.7-8, sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod] §355.9, sangs rgyas kyi khams [mchis] §356.2, sangs rgyas kyi khams §356.9, [sems can thams cad la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod] §356.11-12, X, X, X, [bdag gi lus la] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod] §357.1, X, X, X de bzhin gshegs pa'i che ba nyid, shin tu rgyas pa'i mdo sde rnams, ...[bdag la] sangs rgyas su 'gyur ba'i sa bon de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [zhes bya ba yod], ...[dge bsnyen khyed rnams la yang] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod] §359.8, 9, 11-12, 14-15
28	[我今亦有]佛性 405c12-13, ...有經名曰如來祕藏 405c13, ...[諸優婆塞...汝等盡有]佛性 405c15	方等般泥洹經 882a24, ...[自身]如來種子 882a26, ...[令]佛性[開發顯現] 882a26, ...[汝等皆成]如來之性 <sup>463</sup> 882a27	
29	如來真法藏 406c8-9, 如來藏 (1x only) 406c11-12, 如來密藏 406c14, 如來祕密藏 406c16-17	如來性 883a3, 如來常住之性 (2x) 883a5-6, 如來性 883a8, 如來性...如來實(寶) 883a9, 如來性 883a10	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (6x) §369.2-20

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Hodge (2010/2012): 68-69.

<sup>463</sup> The match between this phrase in FX and phrases in DhKṣ and Tib is ambiguous, because they also contain phrases stating that someone or other “will become Buddha”: *bdag gis sangs rgyas thob par 'gyur ro...bdag cag kun kyang sangs rgyas su 'gyur zhing de bzhin gshegs pa'i sa thob par 'gyur ro*; 我當必定得成佛道, DhKṣ 405c13-14; 我之與汝俱當安住如來道地, DhKṣ 405c15-16.

30	佛性 407a22, 佛性 407a23-24	如來性 (1x only) 883b4	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (1x only) §373.4-5	
31 <sup>464</sup>	[我者即是] 如來藏 [義, 一切眾生悉有] 佛性 407b9-10	[真實我者是] 如來性, 當知一切眾生悉有] 883b15-16	[bdag ces bya ba ni] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [i don to  ] sangs rgyas kyi khams [ni sems can thams cad la yod] §376.2-3	
32	佛性 407b21, 407b23, 407b25, 407b27	X, X, 如來之性 883b24-25, ≈ 如來性 883b26 (partial match)	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (3x), sangs rgyas kyi khams §376.24, 27-28, 30, 35	
33	如來藏 407c17, 如來祕藏 407c19	X	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (2x) §378.16, 19	tathāgatagarbho [’sti] (2x) SF 18
34	我 <sup>465</sup> (4x) 407c20-23	我 (4x) 883c7-10	bdag [mchis, rtag] (3x) §379.7, 8	
35	佛性 [常住], [有]我, 佛性 [常] 407c23-27	[有]如來性 (2x), [有]如來之性 883c10-14	de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams [rtag pa], bdag [mchis] (2x), khams §379.10, §380.1	
36 <sup>466</sup>	佛性 [常] 407c28-29	[有]如來性 883c14-15	khams [mchis] §380.3	
37	我性 [常] 407c29-408a1	X	(khams [mchis]) [implied from previous by context] §380	

<sup>464</sup> See also Hodge (2010/2012): 53-54.

<sup>465</sup> I have included this passage discussing Ch wo 我, Tib *bdag* (= Skt \**ātman*) because it falls in a context in which it is used, as the continuation of the passage shows, interchangeably with terms related to *tathāgatagarbha*, such as Ch *foxing*, *rulaixing*, Tib *khams*, *de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams*, *sems can gyi khams* etc.

<sup>466</sup> Cf. Hodge (2010/2012): 83-84.

38 <sup>467</sup>	我性[常] 408a1-2	[有]如來性 883c15-16	sems can gyi khams [rtag pa] §380.6
39	我性[常] 408a2-3	X	X
40	我[常] (2x) 408a3-6	X	X
41	我[常] (2x), 我 408a6-9	[有]如來性 (1x only) 883c16-18	bdag sems can gyi khams [...rtag pa], bdag §380.9, 11
42	佛性 408a25, 408b1, 如來微密寶藏 408b3, 我之真性 408b4, 無我真性 408b6, 有我真性 408b7, [有]佛性 408b8, 佛性 408b10, 如來祕藏 408b11-12	如來之性 884a1, X, ≈ 如來之性 884a2, 真實之我 884a5, 如來之性 (1x only) 884a6-7	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod], X, X, bdag med pa'i de kho na nyid, X, X, X, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (2x) §382.1-2, 24, 33, 35
43	如來祕藏 408b22-23, 佛性 408b24, 佛性 408b26-27, 佛性 408b27-28, 佛性 408b28-29, 我性...如來祕密之藏 408b29, 祕藏 408b29-c1	≈ 如來性 884a14, ≈ 如來之性 884a15, 如來性 884a16, ≈ 如來之性 884a17, ≈ 如來之性 884a18, ≈ 如來性故 884a20 <sup>468</sup>	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, X, de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams, X, X, ≈ de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, ≈ khams §383.16-17, §384.1, 5-6
44	佛性 408c6-7, X, 佛性 408c13	X, 如來性 884a20, X	[-] (omitted by ellipsis) [yod], X, sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod] §384.14, 25
45	佛性 408c18, X, 佛性 408c20	如來之性 884a23, 如來性 884a24, ≈ 如來之性 884a24-25	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, X, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §385.5-6, 9

<sup>467</sup> See also Hodge (2010/2012): 53.

<sup>468</sup> The general sentiment of this passage in FX (that *\*tathāgatagarbha* cannot be killed, and thereby confers immunity to death) is similar to that in DhKṣ and Tib, but the precise wording is very different, so that no one-to-one correspondence can be established between key terms in this and other texts.

46	如來祕藏 409a22, 409a23	X	dgongs pa'i tshig §386.7
47	佛性 409b4	≈ [方等]大乘密教 884b6	dgongs pa'i tshig §387.14
48	佛性 409b9, X, X	如來法性, 彼性, 我性 884b9-10	khams de ni, nga yi khams yin sems can khams §387.27-28
49	我之性 409b12, 我性有佛 性 409b13, 祕密藏, X 409b14	如來性 884b12, [自身]如來 藏 884b13, X, X	bdag nyid khams, [nga yi sku la] khams yod, ≈bdag nyid, nga yi khams §387.30, 31, 34
50	無我 409b21	佛性 884b17	bdag med §388.5
51	[如來]祕密之寶藏 409c9	X	[de bzhin gshegs//] dgongs pa §388.34
52	微密藏[var. 義, Korean only] 409c11	X	dgongs pa §389.4
53	[我性及]佛性[無二無差別] 409c22	X	≈ bdag kyang khyod dang [ 'dra bar ni] §390.8
54	佛性 409c29	佛 884c23	sangs rgyas nyid...de bzhin gshegs pa nyid §391.5-6

55	如來祕藏 410b5, 如來祕藏 [有]佛性 <sup>469</sup> 410b7, [身中盡 有]佛性 410b8, 佛性 410b13, 如來藏 410b16-17	如來藏 885b8, 如來微妙藏 885b11, [各各自身有] 如來 微妙藏 885b14, 如來性 885b20, 如來藏 885b23-24	≈ de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [=]sangs rgyas kyi khams [mchis pa], [bdag gi lus la] sangs rgyas kyi khams [mchis], sangs rgyas kyi khams, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §394.12, 16-17, 18, 24, §395.4
56	如來祕藏 410b26-27	≈ 佛性 885c13	≈ de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [la sogs pa chos gzhan dag la ni bdag yod] §395.26
57	≈ 如來祕密之藏[清淨]佛性 [常住不變] 410c5-6, 如來 微密藏 410c9, [我身即有] 佛性種子 410c13-14, 如來 祕藏 410c16	[其平等性者是名]如來藏, 如來性[...常住不變易] 886a2-4, 微密教 886a5, [我 身有微妙]法身種 886a13, ≈ 如來真法性 886a17	[yang dag pa'i khams...]de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, sangs rgyas kyi khams[...rtag pa dang brtan pa], dgongs pa'i tshig, [nga'i lus la chos kyi sku'i sa bon...yod], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §396.8, 9, §397.1, [7,] 13
58	如來祕藏 410c29, 如來祕 藏 411a2	如來性 886b16, 如來藏 886b21	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, sangs rgyas, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §400.5, 9, 14

<sup>469</sup> It seems from comparison with Tib that DhKṣ has likely mistranslated here, and \**tathāgatagarbha* is being identified with \**bud-dhadhātu/buddhatva*.



59	佛性 411b21, 佛性 411b23, 佛性 411b28, X	-, 如來之性[...自性清淨] 886c9, 佛性...如來性 886c14	-, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (3x) §401.34, §402.6, 8
60	佛性[...不可得見] 411c3-4, [見]佛性 411c5, 如來微妙 之相 411c6-7, 一切如來所 說祕藏佛性 411c8, [大涅槃 名為]如來祕密之藏[增長 法身] 411c10-11, X, 佛性[... 難見] 411c15	≈ 如來之性 886c18, X, 如來 之性 886c20, 密教法藏...如 來之性 886c21-22, X, X, 如 來之性[...難見] 887a3	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[...bdag med pa bzhin du snang la], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[ 'i shes pa skye bar 'gyur], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod par yang dag par mi shes], dgongs pa'i tshig, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod par yang dag par shes pa], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[...mthong bar shin tu dka' ba] §403.3-4, 6-7, 10, 12, 14-15, §404.2-3
61	佛性 411c18, [見...]佛性 411c25, [見]佛性 411c29	X, [於自身中觀察]如來真 實之性 887a10, 如來之性 [難見] 887a12	- (ellipsis), de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[...mthong], nga'i khams[...mthong] [the Buddha is speaking] §405.14-15, 19
62	如來性[知見] 412a3	[自身中觀]如來性 887a14- 15	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod par...mthong] §406.6-7
63	如來性[知見] 412a6	[自身中觀]如來性 887a18	[rang gi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [byas pa ma yin pa'i khams yod par...mthong] §407.4-5

64	如來性[知見] 412a10	[自身中觀]如來性 887a22	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod bzhin du yod par...mthong] §408.6-7
65	-	[自身中觀]如來性 887a25-26	-
66	[自身中見]如來性 412a14	[自身中觀]如來性 887a28-29	[rang gi lus la] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod bzhin du yod par...mthong] §409.6-7
67	[於己身見]如來性 412a16-17	[自身中觀]如來性 887b2	[rang gi lus la] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod par...mthong] §410.5-6
68	[於己身見]如來性 412a21	[自身中觀]如來性 887b5-6	[rang gi lus la] sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod bzhin du bdag gi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod do snyam du...mthong] (sic!) §411.7-9
69	[於己身中見]如來性 412a24-25	[自身中觀]如來性 887b8-9	[rang gi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod bzhin du yod par...mthong] §412.6-7
70	[於己身分見]如來性 412a28	[自身中觀]如來性 887b10-11	[rang gi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod bzhin du yod par...mthong] §413.5-6
71	[於己身分見]如來 412b3-4	[自身中觀]如來性 887b13-14	[rang gi lus la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod bzhin du yod par...mthong] §414.7-8

72	佛性[難得知見] 412b5, 如來性 412b7, 佛性 412b7	如來之性[甚深難見] 887b14-15, 如來教法 887b16, 如來之性 887b17	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[...mthong bar shin tu dka'], nga'i bstan pa, - (ellipsis) §414.9-10, 12
73 <sup>470</sup>	[自知己身有]如來性 412b11-12, 佛性 412b13, [非聖凡夫]有眾生性[皆說有我] 412b15-16	知其自身有如來性 887b22-23, 如來之性 887b23, 世間眾生皆言有我 887b25	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod par yid ches par bya], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §415.12, 14
74	佛性 (2x) 412c26	如來之性 (1x only) 887c15	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (1x only) §417.21
75	如來之性 413b8	X	X
76 <sup>471</sup>	如來之性 413b12, 如來微密祕藏 413b14, 如來祕密之藏 413b15	如來真實之性 888a26-27, X, 如來藏 888a28	≈ mdo 'di, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (2x) §423.13, 14, 17
77	如來祕密之藏 413c1	如來甚深法藏 888b10	de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba §426.4
78	[伽者名]藏、藏[者即是]如來祕藏 [一切眾生皆有]佛性 413c2-3	[伽者, ]藏[也, 一切眾生有]如來藏 888b11	[ga zhes bya ba ni] snying po[ 'i don te   sems can thams cad la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod pa], §426.6-7
79	如來祕藏 414a15-16	如來正僧(!) 888c13-14	dge 'dun (!) §433.4-5

<sup>470</sup> Cf. Hodge (2010/2012): 83.

<sup>471</sup> See also Hodge (2010/2012): 66-67.

80	佛性 414a25 [...性本淨 414a26], 佛性 414a28	≈ 如來性, 佛性 889a1	≈ lus kyi khams (!)...khams [de yang rang bzhin gyis yongs su dag pa], ≈ chos kyi de kho na nyid(!), ≈ de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying pos khyab pa'i khams §435.5, 5[-6], 8, 10
81	如來之性 414b9	X	X
82	[己身有]佛性 414c11, [自身 有]佛性 414c17, [自身有]佛 性 414c23, [己身有]佛性故 414c28-29, [有]佛性 415a2	[於自身]如來之性 889b3-4, X, [於自身]如來之性 889b9, [於自身]如來之性 889b15, 如來之性 889b17	[bdag la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod pa] (4x), de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §439.11, §440.13, §441.13, §442.14, §443.6
83	如來之性[清淨無染、猶如 化身] 415a19	X	≈ sangs rgyas rnam's kyi chos nyid(?)... ≈ yid kyi rang bzhin(?) §445..14, 16- 17
84	[不自見有]如來性 415c16, 密教 415c16-17	[不自見身]如來之性 890a8-9, 微密教 890a10	[bdag nyid la] snying po[ 'i mchog yod pa bdag gis mi mthong], dgongs pa'i tshig §451.3-4, 5
85	如來性[實無涅槃] 416a24- 25, 如來之性[實無生滅] 416a26	[其實]如來不生[不滅] 890b6, X	de bzhin gshegs pa (2x) §454.18, 19-20
86	如來實性[...即是法身、是 無生身、方便之身、隨順 於世示現無量本業因緣] 416b29-c2	如來[法身真實無有變異... 以方便身現種種相....現百 千變隨順世間...] 890c3-5	de bzhin gshegs pa [yang chos kyi sku yin bzhin du thabs kyi sku.... 'jig rten thams cad dang 'thun par mdzad pa] §456.40-43

87	如來 (2x) 416c9, 如來身血 416c12, 如來之身 416c13, 如來[真實] 416c13, 如來[滅盡] 416c14, 如來性[真實無變、無有破壞、隨順世間如是示現] 416c15-16	如來 (1x only) 890c10, 佛身 890c11, 佛身 890c12, 如來法身 890c12, 如來法身[真實無有損壞、現損壞相隨順世間] 890c14-15	de bzhin gshegs pa, de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku, de bzhin gshegs pa, de bzhin gshegs pa [ni rang bzhin kho nar bzhugs...jig rten dang 'thun pa] §457.15, 20, 21, 23-24, 25	
88	如來所說方等大乘微密之教 417a21-22, 佛如來微密之教 417a25, 微密教誨[如來常住性無變易] 417a26-27, 如來性[實無長短、為世間故示現如是、即是]諸佛真實法性 417a28-29	如來所說方等大乘微密之教 891a16-17, 佛方便微密之教 891a20-21, 如來常法 891a22, 如來[隨順世間現] 891a23	theg pa chen po 'di las dgongs pa'i tshig de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba'i dam pa'i chos, dgongs pa'i tshig, sangs rgyas kyi tshe bstan pa sangs rgyas kyi gnas rgya chen po, de bzhin gshegs pa...yang dag par snang ste....sangs rgyas rnam's kyi chos nyid §461.15-16, 21, 25, 29-30	
89	如來微密之性 417b17-18	如來微妙之性 891b11	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §465.6	
90	-	如來[常住法] 891c8	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [rtag pa] §467.6	
91	諸佛甚深祕藏[謂]佛性是 417c17-18	[開發]一切如來性 891c23	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yang dag par ston pa] §470.8	
92	[佛為眾生說有]佛性 418c23	X	X	X SF 20
93	[不見]佛性 418b29	X	X	X SF 20

94	[一切眾生悉有]佛性[、以]佛性[故眾生身中即有十力三十二相八十種好] 419a9-10, [有]佛性 419a14	[一切皆有]如來性 892c13, X	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po['i yon tan rnams yod do   sangs rgyas yod do], X §483.10-11
95	[大乘方等如來祕藏、一切眾生皆有]佛性 419a18-19	[如來記說一切眾生皆有]佛性 892c18-19	[sems can thams cad la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod pa[s sangs rgyas su lung ston par byed] §484.4-5
96	[一闍提雖有]佛性 419b5, X	[一闍提於]如來性[所以永絕] 893a8, 如來性 893a10	['dod chen po rnams la yang] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [yod mod kyi], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §485.6-7, 9
97	如來性 419b12	如來之性 893a15	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §486.6
98	[大乘大涅槃...]如來微密之教 420a18, 如來祕藏[無量法雨] 420a21, [能令眾生見於]佛性 420a23	[大乘般泥洹經]微密之教 893c3-4, X, [現]如來性 893c5	[yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo chen po...mdo chen po 'di las] dgongs pa'i tshig, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po['i mdo chen po'i sprin chen po las thos pa'i chos kyi char bab na], X 495.9, 13-14

[mahāparinirvāṇaṃ mahāsūtre] saṃdhāvacanaṃ, [mahāmegha-] tathāgatagarbha- [mahāsūtra-śravaṇa-dharmavṛṣṭi], X SF 21

99	[教學]如來祕藏...如來 [常]...大乘典大涅槃經 420c12-14	[教學此]摩訶衍般泥洹經... 如來性[是常住法], X 893c28-29	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po[ 'i rgyud phyi ma las] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po [rtag go zhes ston pa]...de bzhin gshegs pas yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo chen po §498.18- 19, 21-22	
100	如來微密之藏 421a11-12	X	mdo chen po'i mdo §502.5	
101	[一切眾生有]如來性 421b22, 如來微密之藏 421b25, 密語之法 421b26- 27, 如來微密之教 421b28	[如來者即]如來性[、一切 眾生身中悉有] 894b22-23, 如來微密之教 894b24, X, X	[sems can thams cad la] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po yod do, dgongs pa'i tshig (3x) §507.25-26, 30	
102	如來微密之藏 421c10, 如 來微密藏 421c12	X, X	dgongs pa'i tshig, dgongs pa'i tshig gsang ba'i tshigs, dgongs pa'i tshig §508.12, 15-16, 19	
103	佛性 (6x) 422b1-5	如來性 (3x only) 894c27- 895a1	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po, de bzhin gshegs pa'i rang bzhin, de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (3x) §515.4-5, 7, 9, 11, 13	
104	如來祕密藏 422b7-8, 如來 密藏 422b8-9, 如來微密藏 422b11	如來性 (3x) 895a3-6	de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po (3x) §515.17, 19, §516.3	tathāgata-garbha, tathāgata-garbhe, tathāgata-garbha SF 22
105	X	X	dgongs pa'i tshig §519.6	sandhā-vacana SF 22
106	[知見]佛性 422c9-10, [見] 佛性[而為常] 422c10	X	X	
107	佛性 422c29, 423a3	其性 895a26, X	rang bzhin (2x) §520.21, 24	

108	佛性 423a7, 佛性 423a8, 如來密藏 423a9, 成佛時...得知 423a9-10, [一切眾生有] 佛性、佛與眾生有何差別] 423a11-12, [眾生皆有] 佛性 423a13, 佛性 423a16	X, X, 摩訶衍般泥洹經 895a29, 如來之性 895b1, [一切眾生皆有]佛性[而無差別] 895b2-3, X, X	rang bzhin, sangs rgyas kyi khams [yod pa], de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo sde, sangs rgyas kyi khams [rtogs par], [sems can thams cad dang de bzhin gshegs pa rnamz tha dad pa], ?, X §521.4, 7, 9, 10, [§522.2-3]
109	如來密藏大涅槃 423a22	≈ 方便密教 895b8	de bzhin gshegs pa'i mya ngan las 'das pa gsang ba §522.25-26
110	X, [聲聞 X ...緣覺 X ...菩薩 X ...世尊 X] 423b2-3, [一切眾生]性相 423b4-5, [凡夫之!]性 423b6	如來之性 895b14, [聲聞]如來之性 895b16, [緣覺]如來之性 895b17, [菩薩摩訶薩]如來之性 895b18, [諸佛]如來其性 895b19, [一切眾生其]性 895b21, 如來真實之性 895b23	khams, [nyan thos...dang rang sangs rgyas rnamz kyi] khams, [byang chub sems dpa' rnamz kyi] khams, sangs rgyas rnamz kyi khams, [sems can thams cad kyi] khams, de bzhin gshegs pa'i khams §524.2, 6, 7, §525.2, 5
111	[正法者、即是]如來微密之藏 425c8-9	真實如來之性 897b26	[chos kyi de kho na nyid] de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po §552.2-3
112	祕蜜藏義 426a8-9	如來方便密說 897c16-17	dgongs pa'i tshig §555.10



## Appendix 2 Chinese *zang* 藏 (esp. in DhKṣ) and “secret teachings”

I have included in the table in Appendix 1 quite a large number of passages in which the texts clearly speak of “secret teachings”, “teachings of hidden intent”, etc. In this note, I will briefly sketch the way this theme features in the text, and give three reasons that I thought it significant enough to include in the table.<sup>472</sup>

The theme of “secret teachings” already occurs, to a limited extent, in MPNMS-dhk. For instance, the closing chapter on “the virtue(s) of the name(s) [of the *sūtra*]” (*nāmadheyagaṇa*) says:

Again, just as, for example, the branches of knowledge, viz. medicine, the three *vedas*, etc., each gathers together in a single highest teaching (*uttaraṃ tantraṃ*) proper to each respective [branch of knowledge] (*svaṃ svam*); in just this manner, the various secret doorways to the Dharma taught in words of esoteric meaning by all the Tathāgatas gather together in just the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, and for that reason, it is called *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> See also Takasaki (1975): 770-771. Hodge has recently suggested that MPNMS in fact was divided at some point in its redactional history into two texts, a “[\*]*Tathāgataniṭya-sūtra*” and a “[\*]*Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*”, and that the latter was “quasi-secret or ‘private’”, that is, circulated only among a restricted inner circle of initiates. The main portions featuring the theme of secrecy analysed here would then have been a feature of this latter text or portion of the text; Hodge (2010/2012): 36, 48-49, 56-58, 60. See also above n. 56, 93.

<sup>473</sup> *punar aparāṃ tad-yathā nāma vaidyaḥ kaś citravidyādayo [vaidya{h}ka{sci}tr-<i>vidyādayo; \*vaidyaka-trividyādayo, following Habata] vidyāḥ svaṃ svam uttaraṃ tantraṃ eva samavasaraṇaṃ gacchanti evam eva sarva-tathāgata-bhāṣita-sandhā-vacana-vividha-guhyā-dharma-mukhāni mahā-parinirvāṇam eva samavasaraṇaṃ gacchanti, tasmān mahā-parinirvāṇam ity ucyate*, SF 12; Tib H §164.1-6; FX 867c22-24; DhKṣ 385a10-13; Takasaki (1987): 8; Habata (2007): 74-75; Habata (1989a); cf. n. 97 above, n. 478 below.

See also MPNMS 1, 2 and 3 (especially in DhKṣ).

However, the prevalence of the theme of “secret teachings” increases greatly in MPNMS-tg, beginning with its very opening (MPNMS 4, 5, 6). Here, it seems to be based upon a neat homology: *tathāgataḡarbha*, though it is present within the sentient being, is hidden to ordinary eyes; *tathāgataḡarbha* as a teaching is secret, or hidden from ordinary hearing.<sup>474</sup> In many passages, the theme occurs in all three (or four) versions of the text, showing clearly that it was there in the original (MPNMS 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 23, 57, 60, 77, 84, 88, 98, 101, 109, 112). In some passages, moreover, its exposition is closely bound up with the exposition of *tathāgataḡarbha* doctrine (MPNMS 57, 60, 84, 98, 101). This theme can be summarised as an explanation of how it is that the new doctrines were never seen in the old (e.g. twelvefold) *sūtras* – they were hidden, esoteric or secret teachings. The theme thus reveals an anxiety on the part of the authors of the text that they would be accused of heterodoxy and forgery of scripture.

It is notable that DhKṣ features the theme of secrecy more than other versions of the text. In many loci and passages, where DhKṣ uses the language of secret doctrines, etc. (primarily 祕, 密, 藏 and various combinations thereof), nothing corresponding is found in FX or Tib (MPNMS 1, 2?, 6, 11, 25, 27, 28, 29, 33, 41, 42, 43, 49, 55, 56, 57, 58, 76, 78, 79!, 89, 91, 95, 99, 100, 104, 108, 111). Arguably, in these passages, DhKṣ plays on the theme of secrecy in a sophisticated manner, and in so doing, exploits a key ambiguity in the term *zang* (the cognate and homographic verb *cang* 藏 means “to hide”, and *zang* therefore means “a store” in the sense of “what is hidden away”). Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that for DhKṣ, the main translation of *\*tathāgataḡarbha* is “secret store of the Tathāgata” (如來祕藏, 如來祕密之藏 etc.). *Rulaizang* 如來藏 alone (with no element meaning “secret”) appears only four times in DhKṣ’s MPNMS-tg (and 如來之藏 not at all); but 如來祕藏 appears 21 times; 如來密藏 four times; 如來祕密藏 twice, 如來祕密之藏 eight times, etc. for a total of 35 times or more. Moreover, these passages include instances where the text, according to my analysis, may well be referring to itself

<sup>474</sup> Cf. the possible reference of the text to itself by the title *Tathāgataḡuhya*, discussed above p. 46.

by a description or fanciful title (佛祕藏甚深經典 MPNMS 25; 有經名曰如來祕藏 MPNMS 28; 如來祕藏...如來常...大乘典大涅槃經, MPNMS 99), showing that this notion of the secret or hidden is central to DhKṣ’s understanding of the text.

I thus considered this material worth including in the table, first, because in the case of DhKṣ, the wordplay in places makes it difficult to determine where the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine ends and the theme of secrecy begins. We should also not exclude the possibility that DhKṣ thus reveals to us a dimension of the meaning of the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* that would otherwise be much more obscure. However, I also considered this material important for two other reasons.

First, DhKṣ’s wordplay on “secret” may help explain the prevalence of *zang* in that translation (we already observed above that in FX, we find terms featuring *zang* only about ten times; n. 32).<sup>475</sup> More importantly, however, it may be part of the reason that *zang* was chosen as a translation of *garbha* in the first place (it is a translation that has given scholars difficulty in the past,<sup>476</sup> and it is difficult to find instances of the term that are clearly earlier than DhKṣ and FX).<sup>477</sup> It may also explain why the term

<sup>475</sup> Cf. Habata’s suggestion that variable Chinese translations may also have been conditioned by other considerations, including metre and prosody (already mentioned above, n. 20). She includes under this head such circumlocutions (especially in DhKṣ) as 如來祕藏, 如來祕密之藏, and 如來微祕密藏; Habata (unpublished): 19-21.

<sup>476</sup> Hirakawa comments on this difficulty; Hirakawa (1990): 73-74.

<sup>477</sup> The term does appear in profusion in translations by other translators contemporaneous with or slightly later than FX and DhKṣ: Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (fl. 435-468) (AṅM T120, many instances; MBhH T270, many instances; Śrīm T353, many instances; LAS T670, many instances); and Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅 (who worked with FX) (TGS T666, many instances; *Buddhāvataṃsaka* T278, in only a few instances with hazy connections to *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine: T278:9.414c20-21, 493a8, 542b9, 573a4, 631a26, 710c21, 774c10).

Rare earlier occurrences and exceptions to this pattern are found in Dharmarakṣa (*Daśabhūmika* T285:10.491b25-26; *Tathāgatopattisaṃbhava-nirdeśa* 291:10.605c12); Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (*Ekottarikāgama* T125:2.550c3; T309:10.1003a8-9; T656:16.14a13, 31a16, 64a10, 116c28); Kumārajīva (*Daśabhūmika* T286:10.498a10-11, 529c15); and Shengjian 勝堅 (GV T294:10.862b7). These instances warrant further investigation; but they are intermittent at best, and at least on cursory examination, none of them is obviously connected with *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine proper. A significant number of these instances are in the proto-*Buddhāvataṃsaka* corpus; in this connection, it is worth recall-

“took” or “stuck”, to become the standard term in East Asian Buddhism thereafter.<sup>478</sup>

Second, the prevalence of the theme of secrecy provides some further circumstantial evidence for my claim that MPNMS-tg is an early instance of *tathāgatagarbha* literature (though this evidence alone does not require it to be “our earliest” instance). The anxiety about how the new teaching will be received, and the concern to explain it away with talk of “esoteric” doctrine, is understandable in a text introducing radical new teachings (other signs of this anxiety can be found elsewhere in the text, such as descriptions of the hostile reactions preachers of the text might meet and criticisms the text itself might face; these signs are shared by other texts in the MPNMS group). By contrast, where a text is treating a doctrine that has already been established in other scripture, there

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ing that of course, a *Tathāgatotpattisambhava-nirdeśa* passage is famously often regarded as a “precursor” of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine (see e.g. Johnston [1950]: 22-23; Takasaki [1966]: 189-192; Takasaki [1974]: 48). Cf. Takasaki (1975): 507-602; n. 498 above.

As we have already noted (n. 200), Sengyou transmits a tradition that TGS was translated by Faju. This translation would have been much earlier than any of the evidence above (except Dharmarakṣa). Sengyou calls this text the *Rulaizang jing*, but also notes that an “old catalogue” calls it the *Fozang jing* 佛藏經: 『大方等如來藏經』、一卷。舊錄云『佛藏方等經』...右四部、凡十二卷、晉惠懷時、沙門法炬譯出 (T2145:55.9c20-10a2). Even setting Faju aside, if the “old catalogue” in question was that of Dao’an 道安 (312/314-385), and if the text in question really was the TGS, then it would mean that -zang was being used as a translation of -*garbha* earlier than DhKṣ and FX. However, scholars differ over the identification of the “old catalogue” in question; Tokiwa thinks it is that of Dao’an, but Hayashiya thinks it is that of Zhu Daozu 竺道祖, compiled in 419; Zimmermann (2002): 71. Moreover, the so-called *Fozang jing* might not necessarily have been a TGS. For instance, Kumārajīva also translated a *Fozang jing* 佛藏經 (T653), which is identified as the *Buddhapitakaduḥśilanirgraha-sūtra*.

<sup>478</sup> Zimmermann has suggested that another factor in the choice of this translation may be the notion of the “five internal organs” 五藏 in traditional Chinese medicine; Zimmermann (2002): 30 n. 14. Compare Habata’s suggestion that *dhātu* in Sanskrit may also have had overtones derived from medical discourse; Habata (1989a); cf. n. 97, n. 473 above. Hirakawa discusses the problem of how *zang* became the accepted translation without referring to MPNMS translations. Referring instead primarily to Śrīm, he suggests that the use of *zang* may have been connected to a conflation of *garbha* and the *kośa* (“sheath”) of defilements that covers over (and thereby conceals) *tathāgatagarbha* in the ordinary sentient being. There is some overlap between this suggestion and my claim here: secrecy and covering are connected ideas. See Hirakawa (1990): 73-78.

would be less reason to expect such anxieties.<sup>479</sup> TGS contains no such elements.

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<sup>479</sup> This theme continues in other texts of the MPNMS group, as mentioned above (see n. 130, n. 139). Suzuki has argued that the central theme of AṅgM, in particular, is the hermeneutics of Mahāyāna teachings, which is merely the theme of secrecy in another guise; Suzuki (1999a). As Suzuki notes, this theme is of course not unique to *ta-thāgatagarbha* scriptures, and can also be seen, for example, in Yogācāra, as in the title of the *Samdhinirmocana*; Suzuki (1999a): 438-437.



### Appendix 3 Further apparent historical detail in the MPNMS group prophecy complex

As I mentioned above (p. 76), the prophecy complex shared by texts of the MPNMS group, which connects MPNMS to the Śātavāhanas, then to Kashmir, and most likely to the era of Kaniṣka, also contains an unusual wealth of additional detail. I suggested there that in line with Nattier’s “principle of irrelevance”, and (to a lesser extent) her “principle of embarrassment”, we should interpret this evidence as further indication that the text is pointing to features of the real-world context in which it was composed, even where we cannot determine with certainty the exact referents of these items in the texts.

The purpose of this Appendix is twofold: 1) to list, for the reader’s convenience, further detail which, due to difficulties of identification, I thought secondary to the main contentions I was advancing in my argument in the body of this book; and 2) to point to a few circumstantial details that might invite speculation about links between the content of MPNMS (and other texts in the MPNMS group) and features of the social context seemingly indicated by these apparent historical details.<sup>480</sup>

#### 1 \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana

As Takasaki, Suzuki and Hodge have observed, a common thread tying the *sūtras* and their prophecies together is the central presence of the figure called \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana.<sup>481</sup> MM 2 predicts that (in the South,

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<sup>480</sup> In published and unpublished work, Stephen Hodge has gone considerably further than I have in attempting to identify real-world referents for detailed features of this prophecy complex; Hodge (2006, 2010/2012, unpublished). See n. 126 for my reasons for my more conservative interpretations of this evidence.

<sup>481</sup> Takasaki (1975): 295-296, 301 n. 20; Suzuki (1999b); Hodge (2006). Suzuki has shown that the name is attested in a portion of MM that has survived in Skt as an interpola-

tion in Suv; Suzuki (1996b); discussed in Forte (2005): 83-85; for the Skt, see Nobel (1937): 13.1-2. The name is usually Tib 'Jig rten thams cad kyiis mthong na dga' ba, Ch 一切眾生所樂見; var. (in AṅgM) Tib 'Jig rten thams cad kyiis blta na sdug pa (\*Sarvalokadarśanīya), Ch 一切世間現 (\*Sarvalokadarśana).

Walser discusses the hypothesis that this figure is to be identified with Nāgārjuna, who was also reputedly active under the Śātavāhanas. Walser suggests that this was not the original intent of the prophecy, but that it had been “conscripted” to that use by the time of Candrakīrti; Walser (2002): 239, 261, Walser (2005): 71-73; see also Tucci (1930): 144-147; Forte (2005): 47, 344-345 n. 33.

However, even if we thus cannot identify Sarvalokapriyadarśana directly with Nāgārjuna, a looser set of connections between Nāgārjuna and the doctrines and contexts discussed here may be relevant. First, the connection between Nāgārjuna and the Śātavāhanas (or, more broadly, the south) is hard to shake. Later tradition, though it is naturally of more circumstantial value, increasingly associated Nāgārjuna with the Śātavāhanas. Xuanzang holds that a Śātavāhana king was Nāgārjuna's patron; according to Yijing, the same king was the recipient of the *Suhṛllekha*; T2087:51.929a26-27; Yijing: 南方大國王、號娑多婆漢那、名市寅[var. 演 Song Yuan Ming] 得迦 (Lévi suggests \*Jantaka), T2125:54.227c13-15); Beal (1892): 6-7; Lévi (1936): 104. Dietz notes further traditions supporting the friendship of Nāgārjuna with a Śātavāhana ruler, but also notes that there are no strong reasons for believing traditions either of Nāgārjuna's authorship or the Śātavāhana addressee; Dietz (1995): 61-63, 71-72. Cf. n. 164. Further on Nāgārjuna and the Śātavāhanas, see Walser (2005): 61, 63-69, 71-87; a reworking of Walser (2002). On a number of even later associations between Nāgārjuna and Dhānyakaṭaka in the Tibetan tradition, see Mabbett (1993): 31-32; on Nāgārjuna and the Śātavāhanas, see Mabbett (1998): 336, 339-341, 343-345.

Now, if this long-standing tradition is true, and if parts of the MPNMS (or other texts of the MPNMS group) also developed in this same context, Nāgārjuna and *tathāgatarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine might have rubbed shoulders. Indeed, Mitrikeski (2009) argues on external and stylistic grounds that the *Nirauṇamastava* is an authentic work of Nāgārjuna, and discusses in this light the very striking language of vv. 21 and 22, which has several possible echoes of *tathāgatarbha*/Buddha nature scriptures (the triad of *nitya-dhruva-śiva*, the docetic *parinirvāṇa*, the idea of *ekayāna* [but not the exact term], the idea of *dharmakāya* [but not the exact term], *dharmadhātu*, *aśambheda*). Mitrikeski may be overly precise in suggesting that these ideas must be connected specifically to Śrīm, but if *Nirauṇamastava* is indeed authentic, they might suggest that Nāgārjuna was aware of ideas concentrated in *tathāgatarbha*/Buddha nature texts more generally. This might be another small piece of evidence for the antiquity of such ideas. On the other hand, we should not make too much of such faint echoes; *tathāgatarbha* itself is not directly mentioned in Nāgārjuna's text, and many of the ideas he does mention are also connected to LAn-like docetic contexts, as Harrison has discussed; Harrison (1982): 224-225. (I am grateful to Paul Harrison for reminding me of the relevance of his observations in this article; personal correspondence, July 2013).



“700 p.n.”) a great *bodhisatva* and preacher (of the MM etc.) will be born, named \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana, in the country of \*Surāṣṭra,<sup>482</sup> in a village (Ch) or city (Tib) called “Garland” 華鬘 (\**mālā*).<sup>483</sup> MBhH 3 specifies that Sarvalokapriyadarśana will be born (now in “the South”) in a village called “Great Garland” \*Mahāmālā (*phreng ba chen po*).<sup>484</sup> In AṅgM, \*Sarvalokapriyadarśana is the original name of Aṅgulimāliya himself.<sup>485</sup>

The synonymous Sarvasattvapriyadarśana is the name of a *bodhisatva* who features twice in SP.<sup>486</sup> In one SP passage, the Buddha’s maternal aunt, milk nurse and (in a sense) stepmother, Gautamī (i.e. Mahāprajāpatī), is given a prophecy that in the remote future she will become a *bodhisatva* and *dharmabhāṇaka*, and then become a Buddha called Sarvasattvapriyadarśana. Hodge has suggested that here, too, we may see a connection to the Śātavāhanas.<sup>487</sup> As his matronymic shows, one of the most powerful Śātavāhana kings, Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi, was the child of a woman, Gautamī Bālaśrī, who shared a name with the Buddha’s “mother”.

<sup>482</sup> 須賴吒 (cf. *Fan fan yu* T2130:54.1034c20), i.e. the Kathiawar Peninsula, modern Gujarat. On the identification of the Chinese transcription with Skt Surāṣṭra, see Demiéville (1954): 363-364 n. 6. Surāṣṭra is listed as one of the possessions of the Śātavāhanas in Nāsik Inscription 2, Senart (1905-1906): 60, 61; Tib: Drang srong byi bo (??).

<sup>483</sup> Or \**mālya*, *mālaka*, etc.; cf. *Fan fan yu* T2130:54.998c21 etc.; Tib Bye ma chen po, “Big Sands”(\**mahāvālikā*?). The village is supposed to be by a river called “Good Expedient” 善方便 or mDzes ’byor (“Rich and Handsome”?). Cf. MBhH below.

<sup>484</sup> Ch calls the village “Great Protector” (\*Mahāpāla, 大波利; cf. T2130:54.1041b2), perhaps by a misreading of a letter, or a sound shift, or a misremembering. The city is called dMag gis mi tshugs pa (not named in Ch); the clan is called Ka yo ri/迦耶梨. Cf. MM above, n. 483. The country is Mu rung(?) or \*Mandara 文荼羅國 (cf. *Fan fan yu*: 譯曰「漫」也、『法鼓經』, T2130:54.1037b6). Could this be the Muruṇḍa, with metathesis in Ch, 文荼羅 ← \*Muruṇḍa for \*Muruṇḍa? In approx. 240-245 C.E., Chinese ambassadors heard of a mission from Funan 扶南 to a King Maolun 茂論, whom Pelliot and Lévi identified with Muruṇḍa; *Liang shu* 梁書 54; Lévi (1896): 235-242; Lévi (1936): 82, Pelliot (1903): 268, 272, 293, 303.

<sup>485</sup> Lh ma 196b7 ff.; T120:2.512b17-18; Ogawa (2001): 29 and 30 n. 27.

<sup>486</sup> Kern and Nanjio (1912): 268.6-269.5. We have already seen some of the evidence showing that SP is the Mahāyāna text to which MPNMS-tg is most clearly indebted; see loci listed in n. 122; see also n. 492.

<sup>487</sup> Hodge (2006).

This fact would have opened up ample opportunities for flattery by means of texts featuring a similarly named figure in glorious roles.<sup>488</sup>

Hodge has also argued that Sarvalokapriyadarśana may be present – in disguise, as it were – in MPNMS itself, despite the fact that he never appears by that name.<sup>489</sup> A key, unnamed *bodhisatva* and interlocutor of the Buddha in the text is always referred to by the epithet “kinsman of Mahākāśyapa”.<sup>490</sup> In the other SP passage about Sarvasattvapriyadarśana, a *bodhisatva* of that name is depicted performing the role performed by Mahākāśyapa for Śākyamuni, namely, he is entrusted with the Dharma and the relics at the time of the *parinirvāṇa*.<sup>491</sup> Hodge suggests that the MPNMS epithet is thus a veiled reference to Sarvalokapriyadarśana (Sarvasattva~), alluding to the fact that he is destined to perform the role of Mahākāśyapa in the SP prophecy.<sup>492</sup>

## 2 A “\*cakravartini”

The prophecy in MM contains further details that were destined to give the text a long post-history in China.<sup>493</sup> In MM 1, the prophecy states that in a country called “Benighted” (\*Andhra), on the south bank of a river called the “Black” (\*Kṛṣṇa), a daughter named “Rich Crops” ([lha mo] Lo

<sup>488</sup> Cf. discussion of the Śātavāhana matronymic Vāsiṣṭhīputra, n. 495 below.

<sup>489</sup> Hodge (2006).

<sup>490</sup> Skt Mahākāśyapaikagotra (SF 11); Tib 'Od srung chen po dang rus gcig pa; Ch simply 迦葉 (FX), 迦葉菩薩 (DhKṣ).

<sup>491</sup> Kern and Nanjio (1912): 404.2-414.4.

<sup>492</sup> In combination, the two SP passages about Sarvasattvapriyadarśana mean that “Sarvalokapriyadarśana” and “Gautamī” would be “the same” person, in different incarnations. I am not sure how this works out for Hodge’s suggestion (partly anticipated by Takasaki [1974]: 295-296, 301 n. 20) that there was a real person called Sarvalokapriyadarśana, who preached MPNMS and related texts, who was under the patronage of Gautamī Bālaśrī (or her children and grandchildren).

<sup>493</sup> The use of the prophecy as political propaganda by the Zhou thearch Wu Zetian is the subject of Forte’s *tour de force*; Forte (2005), *passim*. This part of the prophecy in MM has been known to Western scholarship at least since the work of Chavannes (1902): 235-236; and, before Forte, was also considered by Demiéville in an Appendix to his stunning debut opus; Demiéville (1924): 218-230.

tog 'byor ma)<sup>494</sup> or “Increase” 增長<sup>495</sup> will be born to the king “Increased Glory” (Tib dPal 'phel, \*Yaśiprasthāna?) or “Equal Vehicle” 等乘 (\*Śāta-vāhana?) in a city called “Richly Endowed”/“Ripe Grains” (\*Dhānyakaṭaka). Her birth is attended by auspicious signs often associated with the birth of a Buddha or *cakravartin*. After the king dies, the girl is pressed to assume the throne,<sup>496</sup> and reigns (Ch only: for twenty years) like a kind of

<sup>494</sup> D 213a3. Cf. the name of the city of Dhānyakaṭaka: *dhānya* “consisting of or made of grain” (MW s.v. *dhānya*).

<sup>495</sup> Note that more than one Śātavāhana king in this approximate period bears the matronymic Vāsiṣṭhīputra (Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puḷumāyi/Puḷumāvi [r. ca. 110-138], Vāsiṣṭhīputra Śātakarṇi [r. ca. 138-145]). Puḷumāvi, in particular, is mentioned alongside Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi in the Nāsik Inscriptions, as the grandson of Gautamī Bālaśrī (see Nāsik 2, Senart [1905-1906]: 60, 62, but cf. 64-65; Puḷumāvi also mentioned in Nāsik 1, Senart 59; Nāsik 3, Senart 65, 67). It is tempting to speculate that in this group of prophecy traditions, a powerful queen by the name Vāsiṣṭhī is made the subject of elaborate flattery. For example, if the name was glossed (bearing in mind that such glosses need have no relation to etymological fact) as \*Varṣiṣṭhī, it could have been derived < √vr̥dh “to increase, to prosper”, with the superlative suffix -iṣṭha (for which see Whitney [1889]: §467), to mean “greatest prosperity” (cf. “Increase” 增長, “Rich Crops”). At the same time, however, a pun is possible with the same suffix to the root √vr̥ṣ “to rain”, meaning something like “greatest of rains”; by which a nexus of associations is mobilised, in which, on the one hand, rain and prosperity are associated; and on the other hand, these features of the good queen’s reign are homologised with the Dharma rain and “crop” of the Buddha (or the next best thing, the contemporary *bodhisatva* preacher of MM, MPNMS, MBhH etc.). The whole “*mahāmegha*” conceit would take on new light as part of such a pattern. Cf. discussion of Gautamī above.

The name Vāsiṣṭhā/Vāsiṣṭhī/Vāsiṣṭhī is known in Buddhist sources, beginning with the *Therīgāthā*, as that of a woman who was driven insane by the loss of her children, but was cured and converted by the sight (*darśan*) of the Buddha; Durt (2001). She appears briefly in MPNMS, but in DhKṣ-unique; see Radich (2011): 168-170.

<sup>496</sup> Tib is even more dilatory at this point: “Then the people of city, town and realm gathered, and they thought: ‘There is no prince who is fit to be king, but it would be good if this Queen “Rich Harvest” brought some such a prince in name only[?] and installed him in the royal palace for consecration as king.’ Thereafter the Queen and the Prince were made to rule as [under the name of] ‘Mr and Mrs Wudi’. [Thus,] she enjoyed the great kingship in her own land with the form of a woman.” *de nas grong khyer dang | grong rdal dang | yul gyi mi rnams 'dus te | gzhon nu rgyal po nus pa 'ga' yang med kyi | lha mo lo tog 'byor ma 'di nyid rgyal por dbang bskur la rgyal po'i pho brang du de 'dra ba'i gzhon nu 'ga' zhig ming khyer tsam du bzhag ste | de ltar byas na legs so snyam mo || de nas lha mo de dang | rgyal bu gzhon nu der rgyal po byed du bcug ste | pho 'ud ti mo 'ud ti bzhin du snyad btags nas bdag nyid kyi yul du bdag nyid kyis bud med kyi gzugs kyis rgyal srid chen po*

“wheel-turning queen” (a “\**cakravartinī*”, to coin a phrase), during which period she assiduously espouses MM and the construction of jewelled *stūpas* for the worship of Buddha relics.<sup>497</sup>

This depiction of a situation in which a woman holds real political power is very unusual, and might resonate with the appearance of significant women in the Śātavāhana inscriptional record.<sup>498</sup> The Śātavāhana royalty of the time, including its women, such as Gautamī Bālaśrī herself, are known to have styled themselves as grand patrons of Buddhism. This is amply attested by the inscriptions at Nāsik, which record munificent gifts, including the carving of the caves themselves.<sup>499</sup> Osto has also argued that GV has links with Dhānyakaṭaka, and suggested links to the prominent position of women in that text, also.<sup>500</sup> However, we should

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*yongs su spyad de*, D 213a3-5. However, de Jong has suggested insightfully that this particular passage, unique to the Tibetan, must be a reference to Wu Zetian, which was somehow added to the text at a later date; de Jong (1978): 159-161. I have followed de Jong in translating “Mr and Mrs Wudi” (“Monsieur Wu-ti et Madame Wu-ti”).

<sup>497</sup> D 213a5 ff. The latter point is in stark contrast with the complete rejection of relics that Suzuki takes as the keystone of MM; Suzuki (1998a). Lévi suggests it might be connected to the construction of the great *stūpa* of Nāgārjunikoṇḍa; Lévi (1936): 118. Note, however, that Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, though its inscriptions also record a number of powerful women as sponsors, is more associated with the Ikṣvākus than the Śātavāhanas.

<sup>498</sup> The great “Queen Mother” Gautamī Bālaśrī figures large in the Nāsik inscriptions (esp. 2); Senart (1905-1906): 60-65; cf. also Nāsik 5, “king’s queen mother”, *rañho...mahādeviṃya*, Senart 73. Other scattered features of the *tathāgatagarbha* literature might also be interpreted as attempts to appeal to women. As is well known, the *Śrīmālādevī* (“Śrīm”) depicts a queen of unusual spiritual attainments; which led Wayman and Wayman (somewhat speculatively, in my view) to suggest historical links to the Ikṣvākus; Wayman and Wayman (1974): 1-2. Again, MPNMS 103 promises that the text will confer “liberation” from female embodiment (MPNMS 103 leads directly into the “Kashmir” prophecy).

<sup>499</sup> See Fynes (1995).

<sup>500</sup> GV says that the hometown of its protagonist, Sudhana, is Dhanyākara, and scholars have suggested that this should be identified with Dhānyakaṭaka; Osto (2008): 108-109, 158 n. 14, 15, following Lamotte, Dutt and Afshar; see also Mabbett (1993): 30. GV features women as 21 out of its 53 “good friends”, and Sudhana’s encounters with these women occupy 51% of the text. It also features a more positive attitude towards female embodiment than many other Buddhist texts. See Osto (2008): esp. 29-31, 88-104, 111-113, 114-116; also McMahan (2002): 124-125. Osto thinks that Dhānyakaṭaka connects GV principally to the Ikṣvākus, though he also discusses the Śātavāhanas.

note that any attempt to connect the position of female figures in Mahāyāna scriptures with historical realities confronts difficulties at every turn.<sup>501</sup>

### 3 Trials and tribulations of the espousers of the MPNMS group

AṅgM 1 seems to preserve a vivid vignette of a time when the proponents of the *sūtra* found very little favour in the world (and in this regard, echoes many passages in both MPNMS-dhk<sup>502</sup> and MPNMS-tg). Among the “difficult deeds” that the passage enumerates are: bearing persecution from ruffians and being willing to give up one’s life to preach the *tathāgatagarbha*; being able to bear being slandered as an *icchantika*; being unable to get the ear of the powerful for one’s preaching of *tathāgatagarbha*; and living in impoverished and trouble-ridden borderlands in a condition of penury and disrepute.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> For instance, Śātavāhana kings bore matronymics. However, we cannot infer easily from such nomenclature to any real political power for women, let alone matrilineal descent in the royal line, as some scholars have argued; the complexities at play are amply illustrated by the discussion in Trautmann (1981): 363-375, esp. 372-375. Again, Schopen has shown that in donative inscriptions on images, female patronage (though of nuns, rather than laywomen) is a norm rather than an exception “everywhere... apart from the Kharoṣṭhī area and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa”, at least until the fourth to fifth centuries, when men suddenly predominate; Schopen (1988-1989): 248-250.

<sup>502</sup> For example, cf. n. 121.

<sup>503</sup> Lh ma 289b3-290a5, T120:2.538a5-15; Ogawa (2001): 144-145.



## Appendix 4 “MPNMS-dhk” and “MNPMS-tg”

In this study, I have divided MPNMS-common into two portions, “MPNMS-dhk” and “MPNMS-tg”. This division is based in part on content,<sup>504</sup> but also on textual evidence. In this Appendix, I will briefly lay out my reasons for adopting this simple model, and in so doing, not entirely following previous scholarship.

In the most notable study to date of the compositional history of MPNMS-common, Shimoda has proposed a more complex theory, on which the composition of MPNMS-common proceeded in two main phases, with the second phase further subdivided into two subordinate phases. Shimoda calls these layers “1”, “2a” and “2b”:

- 1) Ch. 1-7 in Faxian’s text, excepting the “Longevity” chapter (Ch. 5), i.e. H §1-112, §144-168; FX 853a7-863b20, 866a15-868a17; DhKṣ 365c6-379b23, 382c27-385b5; Bl 3-71, 91-105;
- 2a) Ch. 8 only in Faxian, i.e. H §169-293, FX 868a25-875c21, DhKṣ 385 b13-396c10, Bl 107-167;
- 2b) Faxian’s Ch. 5, “Longevity”, i.e. H §113-143, FX 863b22-866a14, DhKṣ 379b23-382c25, Bl 71-89; and Ch. 9 onwards, i.e. H § 294-588, FX 875c29-end, DhKṣ 396c18-428b12, Bl 169-337.

Shimoda’s “Layer 1” corresponds approximately to my MPNMS-dhk, and “Layer 2” to MNPMS-tg. The exception is the portion corresponding to Faxian’s “Longevity” chapter (H §113-143, FX 863b22-866a14, DhKṣ 379b 23-382c25, Bl 69-89), which Shimoda regards as a later interpolation into Layer 1. Shimoda’s main bases for this hypothesis are:

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<sup>504</sup> For a brief summary of differences in the content of these two parts of the text, see pp. 59-60 above.

- 1) The *sūtra* gives conflicting accounts of the parties to whom the *sūtra* is to be “entrusted” (to Mahākāśyapa, or to the *bodhisatvas* [and Mahākāśyapa, in some versions]). Moreover, the second account, just before the “Longevity” chapter, differs between FX and DhKṣ-Tib (perhaps suggesting an imperfectly constructed seam).
- 2) The second account claims that the *sūtra* is to be entrusted to *bodhisatvas*, and in the “Longevity” chapter, the key figure of Kāśyapa is transformed from a *bhikṣu* into a *bodhisatva*; but the term *bodhisatva*, referring to practitioners (or “Träger”) of the doctrines of the text, is, on Shimoda’s account, otherwise usually characteristic of Layer 2.
- 3) Two sets of questions are posed – one at the beginning of the “Longevity” chapter, and the other at the end of the preceding chapter – and the earlier set of questions is answered *after* the interceding “Longevity” chapter, beginning from the next chapter – suggesting that the “Longevity” chapter originally did not intervene at this point.
- 4) The “Longevity” chapter includes a “Table of Contents” laying out the structure of the remainder of MPNMS-common as a whole, including Shimoda’s “Layer 2”, and can thus be explained as an interpolation aiming to integrate the two layers.<sup>505</sup>

This component of Shimoda’s theory of the composition of the text is interesting, but I am unsure about some of the details. For example, the *bodhisatva* Kāśyapa and the Venerable Mahākāśyapa seem to be entirely different characters, and the text also returns to the idea that MPNMS will (eventually) be entrusted to Mahākāśyapa much later, at the very end of Shimoda’s “Layer 2”.<sup>506</sup> Thus, entrustment of the text to the Venerable Mahākāśyapa and entrustment to the *bodhisatvas* do not seem to be irreconcilable, or necessarily to belong to different layers of the text. Again,

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<sup>505</sup> Shimoda (1997): 220-230, 18-19[L] (English summary).

<sup>506</sup> H §587, FX 899c20-22, DhKṣ 428b8-10. I am grateful to my students Hadleigh Tiddy and Ali Tilley for bringing this passage to my attention.



it is true that *bodhisatvas* are usually not mentioned in Shimoda’s “Layer 1” as the practitioners the text envisages,<sup>507</sup> but there are also exceptions within parts of the text that Shimoda regards as Layer 1.<sup>508</sup> Moreover, I am also unsure about the connection between the questions that precede Shimoda’s conjectured interpolation and the “answers” thereto that he sees in the chapter following the “Longevity” chapter; and I am similarly unsure that Kāśyapa’s questions in the “Longevity” chapter work as a “Table of Contents” for the remainder of MPNMS-common, including the remainder of Shimoda’s Layer 2. These objections are not necessarily fatal to Shimoda’s hypothesis, but they are sufficient to give me pause in following him.

For my present purposes, it is also not necessary to ascertain the compositional history of the text in such great detail.<sup>509</sup> For example, among the instances of terminology related to *tathāgatagarbha* tabulated in Appendix 1, only one, MPNMS 3, falls within the “Longevity” chapter, and would change in status depending upon whether we accept or reject Shimoda’s hypothesis.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, I have judged it sufficient to rely upon a relatively simple division of the text into MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg. Roughly speaking, this means that the end of MPNMS-dhk falls at H §168, FX 868a17, DhKṣ 385b5, Bl 105, and MPNMS-tg comprises the remainder of MPNMS-common. This division is relatively conservative, and is supported by many factors: in addition to the numerous differences in content already noted, the presence of a “*Nāmadheyagaṇa*” chap-

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<sup>507</sup> *Bodhisatvas* are mentioned quite a number of times, but they tend to be: “celestial” *Bodhisatvas*, such as those who arrive from other Buddha-lands; Śākyamuni himself, in prior lives; in passages found only in DhKṣ (e.g. 372a27-b7, Bl 32-34; 377c11-12, Bl 61); or some instances where the speaker is identified, e.g. as “the *bodhisatva* Kāśyapa”, where Tib either does not identify the speaker at all (e.g. saying merely *bka’stsal pa*), or identifies him as ’Od srung chen po dang rus gcig pa = \*Mahākāśyapa-ekagotra.

<sup>508</sup> E.g. H §157, SF 11, FX 867b16, DhKṣ 384c1, Bl 99; H §157, SF 11, FX 867b19-20, DhKṣ 384c5-6, Bl 100; H §162, SF 12, [FX -], DhKṣ 385a3, Bl 103; H §167, FX 868a9, DhKṣ 385a27, Bl 104.

<sup>509</sup> By Shimoda’s own account, the subdivision of Layer 2 into two parts is “not as clear-cut”; Shimoda (1997): 19[L].

ter, which is a common formal device for *sūtra*-ending,<sup>510</sup> that fact that, with the declaration of the Buddha's immortal embodiment in the *dharma-kāya-cum-vajrakāya*, the central *Problematik* of MPNMS-dhk has been satisfactorily resolved; the fact that MPNMS-tg displays a style we might characterise loosely as more "commentarial", listing various doctrinal rubrics and giving creative interpretations of them; and so on.

Stephen Hodge is also currently working on a complex theory advocating a finer stratification of MPNMS(-common only), on the basis of close comparison of the Tibetan version, the two most important Chinese versions, the Sanskrit fragments, and a reconstruction of the stemma of the text.<sup>511</sup> However, by Hodge's own account, these indications of his findings are preliminary, and are based upon complex considerations that will only be fully revealed in future work.

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<sup>510</sup> H §161-168, SF 12, FX 867c13-868a17, DhKṣ 384c27-385b5, Bl 103-105.

<sup>511</sup> Hodge (2010/2012) *passim*, but esp. 35-36 and 101.

## Appendix 5 “Kataphatic gnostic docetism”

In earlier drafts of this work, I used the phrase “kataphatic gnostic docetism” to characterise my claim that *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine is a positive, soteriologically-oriented corollary of negative docetism (Chapter 4). Discussions with colleagues subsequently persuaded me that the terms “kataphatic docetism” and “gnostic” were possibly inaccurate in some respects, and for some readers, might confuse matters more than clarify them. Meanwhile, however, Shimoda Masahiro has cited my use of these terms (on the basis of an earlier draft of the present work) in support of his argument that *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine should be regarded as soteriological in import.<sup>512</sup> In order not to pull the rug out from under Professor Shimoda’s feet, therefore, it seems appropriate to explain how I intended those terms. I also think that the notions of kataphasis and gnosticism still have genuine connections to the interpretation I advance here.

I used the terms “apophatic” and “kataphatic” to echo issues raised by Robert Gimello,<sup>513</sup> referring to characterisations of the Buddha or buddhahood in broadly negative or positive terms respectively. I used these opposed terms loosely:<sup>514</sup> “apophatic docetism” meaning any negatively framed claim that the Buddha is *not* as he appears, and “kataphatic docetism” meaning any corresponding attempt to state or depict how he really *is*. I meant these terms to show that negative denial of the Buddha’s apparent ordinary humanity is the inextricable flipside of the positive counterparts proposed for it by the tradition, be they material-miraculous or salvific-transcendent. I also meant to suggest possible connections between these positive corollaries of negative docetism and other

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<sup>512</sup> Shimoda (2014): 5-6, 88-89.

<sup>513</sup> Gimello (1976).

<sup>514</sup> Cf. Williams (2000): 1-10.

facets of Buddhism that have been, or might be, characterised as kataphatic: I have in mind, in particular, such things as the use of anthropomorphic Buddha-images, as opposed to “aniconism”; the very attribution to Buddhas of extraordinary bodies of various types, broadly conceived; and other features of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine itself, more commonly discussed by scholars under the head of “kataphasis”.

Following David Seyfort Ruegg,<sup>515</sup> I used the English word “gnosis”, “gnostic” etc. to refer to Buddhist cognates such as *jñāna*, *prajñā*, etc., referring loosely to any special, salvifically efficacious knowledge; soteriological schema holding that liberation is achieved by such gnosis; and so on. As I discuss above (p. 136), MPNMS holds that liberation is achieved precisely by *seeing* Buddha nature. At first blush, this frequent refrain lends itself easily to interpretation as meaning that liberation is attained by the acquisition of a certain type of knowledge, and in this sense, it could possibly be regarded as a gnostic doctrine.

It must be admitted, however, that in reading Buddhist texts (like other texts from remote cultural and conceptual contexts) it is often difficult to determine where the literal ends and the figurative begins.<sup>516</sup> This is one such case.<sup>517</sup> For example, at the end of the *Vajrābhedakāya* chapter (i.e. in MPNMS-dhk, and probably earlier than almost all exposition of *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine in the text), the Buddha declares that “the body of the Tathāgata is the indestructible *vajra* body,” and a *bodhisatva* should practice to attain the correct view that this is so. This will allow the practitioner to *see* the indestructible *vajra* body of the Buddha *as clearly as he sees shapes (or his own reflection) in a mirror*.<sup>518</sup> In this context, it seems as if “seeing” is being used in a sense rather more concrete than the figurative sense of “understanding”. We should also bear

<sup>515</sup> Ruegg (1989): 48, 95 n. 179, 107, 112; (2004): 35-36, esp. n. 49.

<sup>516</sup> Radich (forthcoming a).

<sup>517</sup> I am especially grateful to Alan Wagner for pushing me to think more carefully about my assumptions in this regard.

<sup>518</sup> SF 12.1-2, Tib H §160, FX 867c8-11, DhKṣ 384c21-25, Matsuda (1988): 30, Habata (2007): 68; Skt: “the *bodhisatva-mahāsattva* clearly sees the body of ultimate truth, as [he sees] *his own reflection in a mirror*,” (*bodhisa-*)[*tvaḥ mahāsa*]tva vyaktaṃ paśyati paramārthakāyaṃ yathādarśatale svarūpapatibimbakam.

in mind that even in MPNMS-tg itself, as noted several times above (e.g. p. 135), the text says specifically that *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature is “*in the body*”; again, it is difficult to see how this specification would make sense if “seeing” was merely figurative.<sup>519</sup> If the motif of “seeing” is transferred from (other types of) Buddha-bodies, like the *vajrakāya*, to *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature, then it seems we cannot be certain that it is not a quite literal sort of “seeing”, and its salvific efficacy something akin to the power of “taking *darśan*”.

Even with these provisos, however, it seems to me that the liberatory power of “seeing Buddha nature” might in a sense lie on a continuum with other types of insight or epiphany that are held to have soteriological efficacy in a range of Buddhist systems. For instance, a little further afield, in TGS, the recurring scenario is that sentient beings have something equivalent to *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature within them, *but do not know it*, and they are freed when someone comes along and shows it to them. In this sense, at least in some contexts, *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature figures as the object of a special liberatory knowledge, and in this sense, it is meaningful to speak of it in terms of the broad category of “gnosis”.

Thus, with some caveats, we can characterise *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine as *gnostic*. In Chapter 4, I also argued that it is a corollary of *docetism* about the Buddha’s ordinary fleshly embodiment – Buddhas are not engendered in fleshly wombs, but in the potential for full buddhahood somehow inherent in sentient beings. Insofar as the doctrine is a positive statement about the true nature of Buddhas or buddhahood, as opposed to a negative docetism articulated as the denial of propositions about the Buddha’s ordinary human conception, gestation and birth, it is also possible to characterise it as a *kataphatic* extension of the basic thrust of docetic thought. It is this understanding that *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature is a *gnostic* and *kataphatic* element of a broader *docetic* Buddhology that I meant to convey by characterising it as a “kataphatic gnostic docetic” doctrine.

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<sup>519</sup> My thanks to Michael Zimmermann for encouraging me to consider this aspect of the problem more closely.

As I already mentioned, the advantage of this characterisation is to suggest possible connections to other domains of Buddhist thought and practice. In particular, in the present context, I believe it helps highlight links between *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature doctrine, and doctrines about Buddha-bodies – that is, the various extraordinary types of embodiment that Buddhas accede to in virtue of their status as Buddhas, including but not limited to “bodies” unique to Buddhas.

Broadly speaking, Buddha-body doctrine as a whole can be regarded as a set of kataphatic corollaries to apophatic (negatively stated) docetic claims about the corporeal dimensions of the Buddha’s apparent ordinary humanity. Negatively framed docetic discourse systematically denies the reality of each detailed facet of the Buddha’s apparent possession of a fleshly human body. At the same time, these claims are extended and reinforced in a set of positively framed, i.e. kataphatic, discourses about the wondrous types of bodies that Buddhas have instead.

Particularly relevant to the present context is one specific variety of Buddha-body discourse, namely, *dharmakāya* doctrine. Eventually, the “high Mahāyāna” version of that doctrine holds that the Buddha is most properly embodied in the *dharmatā* of all *dharmas*, etc.; in *dharma* in the sense of “the” Dharma (*deśanādharma*), which teaches sentient beings about that ultimate reality; and (therefore) in the Buddha’s liberatory gnosis of that Dharma. In the terms that I am proposing here, such *dharmakāya* doctrine is perhaps the paradigmatic case of a “kataphatic gnostic docetic” doctrine of the Buddha’s embodiment. In the more particular *dharmakāya* doctrine of MPNMS, it is certainly true that many elements of this full-blown doctrine are not yet found. Nonetheless, I suggest that the developments evidenced by MPNMS are part of a broad development which eventually culminated in this “high Mahāyāna” doctrine. In this light, when we characterise both the *dharmakāya* doctrine and the *tathāgatagarbha*/Buddha nature of MPNMS as “kataphatic gnostic docetic” extensions of ideas about the Buddha’s embodiment, we can see more clearly some of the relations between MPNMS-dhk and MPNMS-tg, and also, between the text as a whole and a range of broader developments in the history of Buddhist ideas and practice.

## Abbreviations

AKBh	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i>
AkṣM	<i>Akṣayamatīnirdeśa-sūtra</i>
AṅgM	(Mahāyāna) * <i>Aṅgulimāliya-sūtra</i> 央掘魔羅經 T120
Anūn	<i>Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa</i> 不增不減經 T668
ARIRIAB	<i>Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University</i>
Aṣṭa	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā</i>
AV	<i>Atharvavedasaṃhitā</i>
BÉFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
Bl	Blum (2013)
Ch	Chinese
D	Derge (Kanjur)
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
DhKṣ	*Dharmakṣema (usu. his translation of MPNMS, T374)
DhKṣ-unique	Portions of DhKṣ not matched in any other version of MPNMS, i.e. 428b19-end.
EĀ	* <i>Ekottarikāgama</i> 增壹阿含經 T125
Eng	English
FX	Faxian (usu. his translation of MPNMS, T376)
GA	<i>Gotamī-apadāna</i>
GV	<i>Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra</i>
H	Tibetan MPNMS, as in Habata (2013). Citation by Habata's section numbers with the siglum §.
IBK	<i>Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū</i> 印度学仏教学研究
IJ	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i> (Fausböll 1877-1897)
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JIABS	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>

JIP	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
KBDDKK	<i>Kokusai Bukkyōgaku daigakuin daigaku kenkyū kiyō</i> 国際 仏教学大学院大学研究紀要
Lalit	<i>Lalitavistara</i>
LAn	<i>Lokānuvartanā-sūtra</i> , 內藏百寶經 T807 (etc.; see n. 258)
LAS	<i>Lañkāvatāra-sūtra</i>
Lh	Lhasa (edition of the Kanjur)
M	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
MBhH	* <i>Mahābherihāraka-sūtra</i>
MM	<i>Mahāmegha-sūtra</i>
MPNMS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> . References to Tib are to Habata (2013). Ch versions are identified as DhKṣ and FX respectively. “Skt” refers to Habata (2007), using her numbers (“SF”). “MPNMS” followed directly by a passage number refers to passages as numbered in the table in Appendix 1, where reference is given for each passage to specific loci in all four important versions. For MPNMS-common, loci in Bl[um 2013] can be easily located by reference to the Taishō page numbers (from DhKṣ) printed in Blum’s margins. For the remainder of DhKṣ (portions unique to DhKṣ), not included in Bl, I give page numbers in Y.
MPNMS-common	Portions of MPNMS common to Tib, DhKṣ, FX and the range covered by SFs.
MPNMS-dhk	The “ <i>Dharmakāya</i> Portion” of MPNMS-common, approx. = Shimoda’s “first layer”
MPNMS group	MPNMS, MM, MBhH and AṅgM
MPNMS-tg	The “ <i>tathāgatagarbha</i> portion” of MPNMS (excepting parts of MPNMS unique to DhKṣ); approx. = Shimoda’s “second layer”
MPNS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra/Mahāparinibbāna-sutta</i> (Mainstream)
MPPU	* <i>Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa</i> 大智度論 T1509
MSV	<i>Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya</i>
MSV SBhV	<i>Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya Saṅghabhedavastu</i>
MV	<i>Mahāvastu</i>



MW	Sir Monier Monier-Williams, <i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
NK	<i>Nidānakathā</i>
PH	Harrison (1982)
p.n.	“post <i>nirvāṇa</i> ”, i.e. (in dates) years after the <i>parinirvāṇa</i>
PTS	Pāli Text Society Reference to PTS editions of canonical texts by volume and page number, e.g. S IV 35
Q	Peking (Kanjur)
RGV	<i>Ratnagoṭravibhāga</i>
RP	<i>Rāṣṭrapālapariṣcchā-sūtra</i>
SF	Sanskrit Fragment (of MPNMS, numbered following Habata [2007])
Skt	Sanskrit
SP	<i>Saddharmaṇḍarīka-sūtra</i>
SPSS	<i>Sarvaṇḍarīkasamuccayasamādhī-sūtra</i>
Śrīm	<i>Śrīmālādevīsīmaṇḍarīka-sūtra</i>
Śūs	<i>Śūraṅgamasamādhī-sūtra</i>
Suv	<i>Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經 (CBETA version) References to the Taishō follow the order: Text number, volume number, page, register and line number. Thus e.g. T225:8.483b17 is text number 225, volume 8, page 483, second register, line 17.
TGS	<i>Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra</i> (section numbers follow Zimmermann [2002])
TGu	<i>Tathāgataguhya-sūtra</i>
Tib	Tibetan
Up	<i>Upāyakauśalya-sūtra</i>
Vim	<i>Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa</i>
Y	Yamamoto (1973-1975)



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Note: I have endeavoured to use the date of first publication as the principle date in citation of each item, in order to convey to readers an accurate picture of the chronology of the scholarship cited. Where the version of a work that I actually consulted was a later edition or reprint, etc., I note the fact by providing the later publication details in addition to the date of first publication.

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<sup>520</sup> I cannot find any indication in this volume of who translated this piece, and my efforts to find out by other means have been fruitless.

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