

Michael Radich

Ideas about “Consciousness” in Fifth and Sixth Century Chinese Buddhist Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, and the Chinese Background to **Amalavijñāna*
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Chen-kuo Lin / Michael Radich (eds.)

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in memoriam

John R. McRae (1947-2011)

Ideas about “Consciousness” in Fifth and Sixth Century Chinese Buddhist Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit, and the Chinese Background to **Amalavijñāna*

Michael Radich

Introduction

As is well known, the Chinese Buddhist world in the fifth through early sixth centuries was the scene of debates about whether or not some part of the sentient being does or does not survive death, to transmigrate and reap *karmic* rewards. Buddhist thinkers were concerned to argue, against what seems to have been the default position of their opponents, that something does survive death. This should not surprise us, since it was understood that otherwise the doctrine of *karma* was incoherent.¹

A significant thread running through Buddhist contributions to these debates is the use of terms meaning “consciousness” for the transmigrating entity. In the present paper, I will explore this aspect of the debates. This study is part of a larger project in which I am examining possible antecedents to the **amalavijñāna* (*amoluoshi* 阿摩羅識, “taintless consciousness”) doctrine of Paramārtha (Zhendi 真諦, 499-569) in both In-

¹ On these debates or parts thereof, see Balazs, 1932; Liebenenthal, 1952 (it must be noted that Liebenenthal’s translations are often misleading; I nonetheless give references to them where relevant below, because they are often still the only English translations in existence); Hurvitz, 1957: 106-112; Balázs, 1964: 266-276; Forke, 1964: 266-274; Robinson, 1978: 196-199; Wagner, 1969: 198-207; Chang, 1973; Hachiya, 1973; Schmidt-Glintzer, 1976; Pachow, 1978; Vande Walle, 1979; Lai, 1981a, 1981b; Nakanishi, 1983; Frisch, 1985: 106-117; Itō, 1986; Liu, 1987; Lo, 1991; Jansen, 2000: 216-217, 235-246; de Rauw, 2008: 97-123. Further sources cited in Wagner 198 n. 1; de Rauw 98 n. 265.

dia and China.² Through this research, I hope to address possible relations between **amalavijñāna* and the so-called “sinification” of Buddhist concepts. Through this case study, in turn, I hope to address larger methodological problems in the study of so-called “sinification” itself. Consequently, I will make a few preliminary remarks in the present paper about the significance of my findings as part of the background to **amalavijñāna*.

In the main, however, the present paper will focus on tracing the place of concepts of consciousness in the debates in question, from the early fifth through to the early sixth centuries; and, particularly, on presenting a new interpretation of Liang Wudi’s (梁武帝, r. 502-549) *Shenming cheng fo yi* (神明成佛義, “On the Attainment of Buddhahood by the *Shenming*”) and its relation to its scriptural sources and intellectual-historical context. The debates on the survival of death, themselves, have also sometimes been taken as part of the process of the so-called “sinification” of Buddhism. On the basis of my examination of the role of the concept of consciousness in those debates, I will also suggest that this way of reading the debates is probably misleading.

As the story is usually told, the debates in question can be traced back as far as the generation of Xi Chao (郗超, 336-377) and Dai Kui (戴逵, ca. 335-396),³ through the writings of Lushan Huiyuan (廬山慧遠, 334-416) and a piece by the shadowy Zheng Daozi (鄭道子, d.u.); and then through Zong Bing (宗炳, 375-443); He Chengtian (何承天, 370-447); a debunking Confucian riposte from Fan Zhen (范縝, ca. 450-515); and reactions against the latter, lasting through to the early Liang, including contributions by Xiao Chen (蕭琛, 478-529), Cao Siwen (曹思文, d.u.), Fayun (法雲, 467-529), Lu Chui (陸倕, d. 517), Liang Wudi, Shen Ji (沈績, d.u.) and Shen Yue (沈約, 441-513).

² The first part of this study has already appeared as Radich, 2008. I presented earlier versions of other parts of the study as Radich, unpublished, at both the 2010 meeting of the present project, and the June-July 2011 meeting of the International Association of Buddhist Studies; and as a draft paper at the June 2011 meeting of the present project. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for Hamburg University Press for suggesting several improvements.

³ See also Itō, 1986: 221-222 for a very interesting early passage, around the time of this same generation, from Yuan Hong’s (袁宏, 326-379) *Hou Han ji* (後漢紀).

Before beginning our discussion, I would like first to set aside as misleading the most common label in English-language scholarship for the issue at stake in these debates: “the *immortality* of the soul”. The most common phrase used in Chinese is *shen bu mie* (神不滅) (and variants thereon). It is true that this wording implies a limited kind of “immortality”, in that it refers to something that “does not perish/is not extinguished” at the moment of a given death, in a chain of multiple lifetimes. However, in English, “immortality” typically has the additional connotation of surviving death *and then “living” for ever more*, and I do not believe that this connotation is necessarily entailed by the Chinese Buddhist claims under discussion. In addition, to translate “soul” for *shen* is perhaps understandable, but I believe that the Chinese has stronger connotations of the mental component in the human being (as in the opposition between *shen* [神] and *xing* [形], roughly “mind” and “body”) than “soul” has, at least to the ears of modern English speakers. In an attempt (doubtless fated to be less than perfectly successful) to avoid some of these connotations, I will speak instead of the “survival of death” by the “spirit”.⁴

The debates on the survival of death can be regarded as part of the background to **amalavijñāna* in two respects: in terms of the general outline of the Chinese Buddhist views at play; and more specifically, in terms of certain key terminology that appears in places in the relevant texts.

In more general terms, I believe that we must be careful not to exaggerate the similarities between the general contours of the ideas at stake in this debate, and of **amalavijñāna* doctrine. In particular, we must avoid a simplistic interpretation of the “immortality of the soul” debates (the popularity of this term to label the debates is itself indicative of the problem I have in mind) that sees in them a Chinese failure to understand basic Buddhism, and a lapse into heterodox “*ātmavāda*”. For a start,

⁴ The phrase “survive death” might sound oxymoronic. Throughout this paper, however, following the usage in my primary materials, I use the phrase “survive death” to indicate that the pertinent part of the sentient being is understood *not* to be destroyed by death. On one occasion, the Ch. *Dhammapada* even states that “spirit does not die” (*shen bu wang* 神不亡, T4:210.574b4). Typically, in these contexts, texts understand “death” to be primarily a corporeal matter, i.e. something that happens to the body.

as we will see in part here, there was a sound basis in translated Buddhist scriptures (or texts that appeared as such to Chinese readers) for the notion that some constituent of the person does transmigrate (this constituent was often called “consciousness”). More broadly, as I hope to show elsewhere – and indeed as should be well known – it is not apostasy for Buddhists to admit *some* kind of notional hook on which to hang the idea of such continuity across multiple incarnations (e.g. *saṃtāna*, *saṃtati*, *karma* – and, of course, concepts closer to the heart of the present study like *gandharva* and *vijñāna* itself). Second, the terms at issue (*shen* etc.) are not personal pronouns, nor words that were used in Chinese to denote the ego, identity or self-understanding of the person; other such terms, which did exist, were avoided (we will touch below on one such term, *shenwo* 神我). Rather, as I have already mentioned, *shen* has overtones of the mental constituent in the human constitution. Third, we must remember that all polemical utterance is “targeted”, that is, it is molded to the contours of the position it aims to refute. In this case, the Buddhists’ opponents propounded an absolute extinction of the person at death, and the concomitant discontinuity of moral responsibility beyond the frame of a single earthly lifetime. Against this, in order for basic Buddhist concepts to cohere and prevail, it was necessary to argue that there was indeed some thread of continuity between multiple rebirths, and this is what *shen* and related notions achieved (retooled for the purpose from the uses they served in the older Chinese background). Thus, Chinese assertions that a *shen* survived death had a stronger warrant in Indic Buddhist materials, and are less necessarily congruent with doctrines supposedly “heterodox” to Indian Buddhism, than prior scholars have often assumed.

With these caveats, we can still recognize that a few key features of the Chinese Buddhist views formed and displayed through these debates anticipate **amalavijñāna* doctrine. The putative transmigrating entity in question is said to be mental; it is a thread of continuity between successive incarnations; it becomes entangled with the phenomenal world through ignorance; and sometimes, it is depicted as a kind of “subject” of liberation. In all of these respects, the surviving component of the person, by whatever name, has structural similarities to *vijñāna* as it features in **amalavijñāna* doctrine and its contexts.

On occasion, however, a more specific set of terms was used that brings us closer to meaningful antecedents to **amalavijñāna* doctrine. In particular, we can trace a subset of contributors to the debate who use “consciousness” (*shi* 識) in a recognizably Buddhist sense, or *shishen* (識神, “consciousness-cum-spirit”)/*shenshi* (神識, “spirit-cum-consciousness”) to refer to the transmigrating entity in question.⁵

Lushan Huiyuan

We turn first to Huiyuan, who is often treated as the starting point of the debate (though, in fact, the issue is clearly older than his time; Nattier, 2008: 127 and n. 42; Zacchetti, 2010).⁶ Oddly, perhaps, the most interesting thing about Huiyuan’s writings, for us, is that terms for consciousness appear *not* to feature in his discussion of the problem of survival of death,⁷ even though, by his time, texts existed in which the connection between that problem and consciousness was available for use. This perhaps indicates that even learned Chinese Buddhists embroiled in the

⁵ Many key figures in the broader debates, as usually treated in more general scholarship, do not mention “consciousness” in the sense that interests us here. We therefore set aside texts by such figures as Luo Han (羅含, d. after 373?); Huilin (慧琳, d.u.); He Cheng-tian; Fan Zhen; Xiao Chen; and Cao Siwen. Park (2012) includes the most extensive published research to date on the term *shenshi/shishen*; however, the book did not appear until after the present study was finalized. Cf. Radich (2013).

⁶ I am currently preparing a companion to the present study examining some of this pre-history, in particular reference to terms for consciousness (Radich, in preparation).

⁷ A cursory search through Huiyuan’s writings seems to indicate, in fact, that Huiyuan only ever uses *shi* as an ordinary verb meaning “know” etc., or an ordinary noun meaning “knowledge, intelligence”. In some instances, the term is difficult to understand (see e.g. HMJ T52:31c10, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:286, 290 n. 29; Kimura, 1960-1962: “Texts and Translations” 394-395 n. 29). The overall pattern of Huiyuan’s use of the word, however, makes it implausible to me that in this instance only does he mean to refer to the *vijñānaskandha*. In one instance, Huiyuan does say that when the spirit takes up residence in the body, it “*jin chang ming shi*” (津暢明識) (“Letter to Huan Xuan”, HMJ T52: 33b13, Makita 2:310, Liebenthal, 1952: 358). However, this phrase is difficult to interpret: Does it mean “permeates [the body] and illuminates it with consciousness”? – or “permeates [the body] and brings consciousness to awareness”? – or (with Makita), “the clear function of consciousness springs from [the body in which the spirit has lodged]”? – or (with Guo, 2007: 309) “provid[es] a smooth conduit for bright awareness”?

thick of the debates took some time to discover those resources and deploy them accordingly.

Zheng Daozi

At the next discernible stage, in Zheng Daozi, we find a curious situation: the term “consciousness” is only used by the opponent, and not by Zheng himself. From the outset of the essay, the opponent frames his questions in terms of consciousness (*shi* 識) (among other terms), referring to the concept three times.⁸ It is difficult to know what to make of this fact, partly because of difficulties in dating the text; however, if it is as early as Liebenenthal thinks,⁹ it may represent the first mention of consciousness in these debates. Again, the fact that consciousness enters almost through the back door, so to speak – in the mouth of an opponent – may indicate that the Buddhists who spoke on behalf of Buddhism in the debates had not yet realized the potential use of the term in defending their claims.

Zong Bing

We finally see the connection between the transmigrating entity and consciousness clearly made in Zong Bing’s *Ming fo lun* (明佛論). It is clear

⁸ “Most hold that the body and spirit perish together, and that illumination and consciousness are extinguished in tandem” (多以形神同滅、照識俱盡; HMJ T52:27c29, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:251, Liebenenthal, 1952: 346-347); “Not only would there be nothing on the basis of which to establish speech, there would also be nothing on the basis of which to establish consciousness; and if consciousness is not established, upon what will spirit depend?” (非但無所立言、亦無所立其識矣。識不立則神將安寄; 28a25-26, Makita 2:253, Liebenenthal 348); “...that grasses and trees have neither spirit nor consciousness” (草木之無神無識; 28b12-13, Makita 2:255, Liebenenthal 349). The only instance of *shi* outside utterances of the opponent is in a simple verbal sense meaning “to know”: “...does not know benevolence and righteousness” (*bu shi ren yi* 不識仁義; 29a14-15, Makita 2:260, Liebenenthal 353).

⁹ Forke proposes that “Zheng Daozi” may have been Zheng Daozhao (鄭道昭, d. 516) (Forke, 1964: 265-266). However, Liebenenthal suggests the earlier Zheng Xianzhi (鄭鮮之, 364-427) (Liebenenthal, 1952: 346-354).

that at least in places, Zong Bing uses *shi* (識) to mean *vijñāna* in a specifically Buddhist sense, as a member of the twelvefold *nidāna* chain and a key link in the process of reincarnation.¹⁰ According to Zong Bing, reincarnation occurs because the continued functioning of mind keeps *vijñāna* active, so that successive *vijñānas* follow one after another (presumably, through multiple lifetimes) (*Hong ming ji* [hereafter “HMJ”] T52:11a16-17, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:98, Liebenenthal, 1952: 392-393). “The structure [comprising] *saṃskāra* and *vijñāna* [ensures] the subtle continuity between new and old [lifetimes]” (情識之構既新故妙續, HMJ T52:11a18-19, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:98, Liebenenthal, 1952: 393; cf. Makita 2:317 n. 6). However, this *vijñāna*, described as “the *vijñāna* that thinks and constructs” (*siying zhi shi* 思營之識), is missing in the enlightened being, who possesses (or is) only *shen* (神); and liberation is described as a process whereby *saṃskāra* and *vijñāna* cease (upon the cessation of mental functioning), and the *shenming* (神明, “spirit-cum-awareness/illumination”; see below) is complete (HMJ T52:11a12-18, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:98, Liebenenthal, 1952: 393).¹¹

Zong Bing further explains the relation between *vijñāna* and the approach to awakening by the old analogy of a mirror obscured by dust, where *vijñāna* is the dust: just as a mirror can be obscured by a thin or a thick layer of dust, so spirit (*shen* 神) can be obscured by fine or coarse *vijñāna*, which “sticks” (*fu* 附) to spirit and obscures its original nature (like the “original brightness” [*benming* 本明] of the mirror). However, practicing (contemplation of) emptiness works to reduce the layer of obscuring *vijñāna*, and when it is eliminated entirely, “original spirit” (*ben-shen* 本神) is consummated (*qiong* 窮). The resulting state is *nirvāṇa* (HMJ T52:11b1-7, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:100, Liebenenthal, 1952: 394).¹²

¹⁰ E.g. “Now, intention[?] and other *saṃskāras* combine interdependently to constitute *vijñāna*, and *vijñāna* precipitates the formation of *nāmarūpa*” (夫億等之情·皆相緣成識·識感成形), describing the process of taking a new incarnation, where *qing* (情), *shi* (識) and *xing* (形) are *saṃskāra*, *vijñāna* and *nāmarūpa* respectively (HMJ T52:11a9-10, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:97, Liebenenthal, 1952: 392).

¹¹ See n. 61. This remarkable passage does much to anticipate Liang Wudi, and we will return to it below; see p. 499.

¹² Note the overtones here of the “return to the origin” motif.

In one or two places, further, Zong Bing also discusses consciousness, as the subject of transmigration, in a manner that seems to connect it to Buddha-nature, or, more broadly, to the possibility of attaining buddha-hood – another respect in which he breaks new ground. (Recall that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* [hereafter “MPNMS”], which more or less introduced “Buddha-nature” to a Chinese readership, had only been translated a decade or two before Zong Bing wrote.) For instance, Zong Bing says that it is in virtue of the fact that the unperishing spirit (*shen* 神), transmigrating through multiple lifetimes, contains awareness (*shi* 識, “consciousness”, here conceivably simply “knowledge”) of Yao[’s virtue], that it is ultimately possible to become Buddha (今以不滅之神含知堯之識...由此觀之，人可作佛，其亦明矣; HMJ T52:10b25-c1, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:92; Liebenthal, 1952: 387-388). In the most striking passage in this respect, he says:

If consciousness (*shi* 識) can make lucid (*cheng* 澄) the origin (*ben* 本) that does not become extinct (*bu mie* 不滅, [i.e. survives through various incarnations]), and accept the learning/practice that daily reduces, “reducing ever more day by day, until it necessarily arrives at non-action”,¹³ then it will no longer have any greedy passionate impulses (*yuyu qing* 欲欲情),¹⁴ so that only the spirit (*shen* 神) shines, and there will then be no more rebirth. Where there is no rebirth, there is no body; and where there is no body but there is still spirit, we term it *dharmakāya* (識能澄不滅之本，稟日損之學，「損之又損，必至無為」，無欲欲情，唯神獨映，則無當於生矣，無生則無身。無身而有神，法身之謂也; HMJ T52:10c7-10, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:93-94; Liebenthal, 1952: 388).

¹³ *Laozi* 48: 損之又損、必至無為 (Chen, 1987: 250, Lau, 1963: 109). Zong Bing refers to this model again elsewhere (HMJ T52:14a23, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:126).

¹⁴ Liebenthal notes that from Huiyuan onward, Chinese Buddhists of this era saw in *qing* (情) the motive power that drove reincarnation (he translates “will to live”), making it something like *saṃskāra* (Liebenthal, 1952: 388 n. 249). Cf. the passage cited above n. 10, where the equivalence to *saṃskāra* seems clear.

This passage is also notable because it features the motif of the return to the origin, and also (though in quite unusual terms) of the luminosity of liberated mind (“so that only the spirit *shines...*”).

It is of interest to note that Zong Bing also emphasizes a kind of rough idealism, i.e. the doctrine that all *dharma*s are created by mind, citing the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and a *Dhammapada* verse already connected with the *Yin chi ru jing* (HMJ T52:11a3-6, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:95-96, Liebenenthal, 1952: 391-392);¹⁵ and, in the same passage, emphasizes “purification of mind” (*qing xin* 清心) (though here as a means to rebirth in a “wondrous, glorious realm”, not to final liberation) (HMJ T52:11a6).

In sum, Zong Bing represents an important watershed in the developments we are tracing. He specifically makes *vijñāna* the thread of continuity in transmigration; he discusses it, implicitly, in terms of the removal of defilements, through the analogy of the mind as a mirror; he may include inklings of a connection to Buddha-nature, or the potential of attaining buddhahood; and he links his ideas to the claim that all that exists is mind only.

An anonymous Liu Song text

A next important step is found in a brief, anonymous Liu Song text (perhaps by Huiguan 惠觀, d. 443-447?) (X77:1523.354a8-b7).¹⁶ This essay

¹⁵ Citing *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* verbatim from Zhi Qian’s translation (T14:474.523a25), Skt. *sarvadharmāś cittaparikalpenôtpadyante* (Study Group, 2006: 30; cf. Makita 2:97 n. 29); and *Dhammapada* (心為法本, T4:210.562a13, a15, T4:211.583a7, a9, T4:212.760a11, a21, b9, b11, *Dhammapada* 1.1, 1.2, *Udānavarga* 31.23, 24, Pāli *manopubbaṅgamā dhammā*, Skt. *manahpūrvaṅgamā dharmā*, Mizuno, 1981: 1:82-83). For the *Yin chi ru jing* use of the *Dhammapada* passage, see T33:1694.10a12-14 (Lai, 1986: 87; and Radich, in preparation).

¹⁶ This short essay has been preserved in Sōshō’s (宗性, 1202-1278) *Meisō den shō* (名僧傳抄) X1523, which excerpts Baochang’s (寶唱, fl. 502-after 519?) otherwise lost *Mingseng zhuan* (名僧傳). It thus dates before Baochang, at the latest. It appears in a section which lists biographies of a number of figures, but there is no notice of which of the various figures listed wrote the text that concerns us. Liebenenthal therefore seems to be conjecturing that the text is by Huiguan, on the basis of the fact that he is among the figures listed (Liebenenthal, 1952: 396 n. 305; 宋道場寺釋惠觀七, X77:1523.347c2). However, the figures in question are all from the Liu Song (劉宋, 420-479). We can thus tentatively regard the text as dating before 479. The essay is translated in Liebenenthal

makes an unusual contribution to these debates by *denying* the doctrine of a *shen* that survives death, but doing so in *defense* of correct Buddhism (usually, Buddhists defend the survival of the spirit against non-Buddhist critics). However, the terms used here are different from those usually deployed, and show that the author – and it is possibly significant that this author was a monastic¹⁷ – is attempting to defend a more “correct” view, inspired by MPNMS.

The entity the essay denies is called a *shen* (眾生...無常住之神, X77:1523.354a16), but also, tellingly, a *shenwo* (神我, “spirit-*ātman*”) (four times at X77:1523.354a8-15). This shows clearly that the author is concerned about *ātmavāda* heresy. By the time this text was written, *shenwo* had emerged in Chinese Buddhist contexts as a technical term for the *ātman*. The use of this term may also have recalled to contemporary readers’ minds the discussion in SA 196 (corresponding to the MN *Aggivačchagotta-sutta*) of whether or not a sentient being has a *shenwo* that exists after death (the use of the term *shenwo* here is unique in the Chinese *Āgamas*).¹⁸ It also features in this role in such seminal texts as the **Tattvasiddhi* (which was the focus of intense scholastic activity in this

396-397, but the translation is short, and so I will not cite Liebenenthal at each instance below.

¹⁷ Although the author is unknown, we know he was a monastic because his views are reported in the context of monastic biographies; see n. 16 above.

¹⁸ The question is put by a figure called in Chinese **Vatsaputra* (Duzi 犢子, Pāli *Vacchagotta*), a name which might also have associated these doctrines, and the text, with the *Pudgalavādins* (especially the *Vātsīputrīyas* [*duzibu* 犢子部]; cf. n. 21 below) (Priestley, 1999: 34-36; on possible connections between **amalavijñāna* doctrine and *pudgalavāda*, see Radich, unpublished). **Vatsaputra* asks: “Does the *shenwo* of the sentient being, that dies here and is born there [in a next or other world], exist or not, or does it both exist and not exist, or does it neither exist nor not exist?” (眾生神我·死此生彼·為有為無·亦有亦無·非有非無·非非有非非無; T2:100.445a18-19, cf. 445b1-3). In the parallel *Aggivačchagotta-sutta* MN 72, these questions correspond to questions about the “*tathāgata*” (PTS MN I:484-486, *Nānamoli* and *Bodhi*, 1995: 591-592; cf. also SA no. 202, 448c6-7; paralleled in *Kimdiṭṭhika* [*Diṭṭhi*], PTS AN V:186, Woodward and Hare, 1995: 5:128). Woodward (128 n. 2) notes that the Pāli commentary interprets *tathāgata* here as “just a being” (cf. Cone, 2001-2010: 2:286 s.v. *tathāgata*, citing the present passage and others using roughly parallel formulae; also *Anālayo*, 2011: 1:391 and n. 13). Thus, the SA translation as “sentient being” may not be discrepant.

period, alongside MPNMS);¹⁹ commentaries on MPNMS (collected in the *Da banniepan jing ji jie* 大般涅槃經集解, hereafter “DBJJJ”) by Fayao (法瑤, fl. ca. 423-462),²⁰ Sengzong (僧宗, 438-496)²¹ and Baoliang (寶亮, 444-509) (who mentions the concept by far most frequently out of these three authors);²² and a few other texts.²³ In many of these contexts, it is clear that *shenwo* corresponds to *ātman* (as a concept that heretics propound, and Buddhism denies). In MPNMS commentaries, it is also sometimes opposed (as here) to Buddha-nature (as a “true” self), and discussed in distinction to it.

The predicate denied of *shenwo* in the essay under discussion is not “extinction” (*mie* 滅), as is more usual, but “eternity” or “permanence” (*chang* 常, **nitya*), echoing the preferred phraseology of the MPNMS. Against this false construct, the essay opposes Buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性) and simply *buddha* (*fo* 佛), which is said to be the “true self” (*zhenwo* 真我), in terms again redolent of MPNMS (X77:1523.354a9, 354a11, etc.).²⁴

¹⁹ T32:1646.254b19 – clearly corresponding to *ātman* (Katsura, 1974: 22, 36); also 323b15; 363b10; 372c3-4.

²⁰ DBJJJ T37:462b16-19, distinguishing between Buddha-nature and the false *ātman*.

²¹ Clearly referring to Puḍgalavādins (*duzi daoren* 犢子道人, 460a13-14; also 577a13).

²² Opposed (by Baoliang) to Buddha-nature as the “true” self of MPNMS (DBJJJ T37:447b 19-20); distinguishing between the case of the ordinary sentient being and that of the Buddha (459a13-18, 459b5-8; see also 443b21; 491a10; 524c6; 548c17-23; 577a15, a18).

²³ In the **Bodhisattvabuddhānusr̥tisamādhi* (*Pusa nian fo sanmei jing* 菩薩念佛三昧經), trans. *Guṇabharman? (功德直, fl. ca. 462) (T13:414.801a7-9); Kumārajīva’s *Qian fo yin-yuan jing* (千佛因緣經) (seemingly with reference to a “Vedic” *ātman*) (T14:426.71b5-8); and in the **Upāyahṛdaya* (*Fangbian xin lun* 方便心論) ascribed to Jijiaye (吉迦夜, fl. ca. 472) (T32:1632.24b18-23) (Tucci back-translates **ātmabhāva*, Tucci, 1929: 9.7). The term also appears in the *Scripture of Brahma’s Net* (*Fan wang jing* 梵網經) (composed in China in this same period) (T24:1484.998c17-19, 999c27-1000a3).

²⁴ Outright discussion of the “true self” is relatively unusual even in MPNMS itself, but see the following passages: “The ‘true self’ now expounded by the Tathāgata is termed ‘Buddha-nature’” (今日如來說真我，名曰佛性，MPNMS T12:412c25-26, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:200) (where nothing corresponds exactly to this phrase in either Faxian [法顯, 320?-420?] or Tib.); “Those without the heavenly eye (**divyacakṣus*) do not recognize the ‘true self’, and arbitrarily conceptualize it as a self (**ātman*)” (無天眼者不知真我橫計我, 415c17, Yamamoto 1:214; Tib. *lha’i mig med pa’i mi rnam kyis ni bdag la bdag yod du zin kyang mi mthong ste*); (see also 590a20, Yamamoto 3:942; unique to *Dharmakṣema, no parallels).

In part, as elsewhere, the issue here hinges on the efficacy of moral action – phrased in terms of **brahmacaryā* (X77:1523.354a14-16). Significantly for our purposes, when the essay denies that a *shen* exists, it proposes instead, as a thread of continuity guaranteeing the efficacy of moral acts, “mind” (*xin* 心). In an echo of a rough “mind-only” doctrine, this mind is said to be the factor that governs (or perhaps even creates?) “heaven and hell”, i.e. all rebirth destinies (眾生雖無常住之神，而有善惡之心).²⁵ The essay winds up by puzzling somewhat inconclusively over the problem of how mind can secure this continuity between rebirths, when it is also momentary (*niannian bu zhu* 念念不住; X77:1523.354a19-20). In this detail, this small essay may constitute a key step in the development of the ideas we are tracing here (or at least reflect such a key turning point, which might also have been more broadly current in texts lost to us): as we will see immediately below, the problem of the relation between a momentary (surface layer of) mind and an underlying constant substratum is pivotal to the important essay by Liang Wudi, who may have been in part reacting to the ideas seen here.

This short essay is also important because for the first time, it clearly connects these debates to MPNMS and the doctrine of Buddha-nature. In so doing, it also connects the “entity” in question more clearly than previously to the problem of becoming Buddha, as well as that of ordinary transmigration and the efficacy of ordinary karmic action.

Liang Wudi and Shenji’s *Shenming cheng fo yi*, and its contexts

These ideas reached a watershed in the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. Soon after coming to the throne (between 502 and 508), Wudi is supposed to have written a very short treatise entitled *Shenming cheng fo yi* (神明成佛義, “On the Attainment of Buddhahood by the *Shenming*”),

²⁵ This *xin* is, moreover, the “master” (or source?) (*zhu* 主) of all conditioned things, the “root” (*ben* 本) of rebirth in the five destinies, etc. (善惡之心為萬行之主，天堂地獄以心為本, X77:1523.354a16-18).

HMJ T52:54a8-c20),²⁶ which is accompanied in HMJ by learned interlinear notes by Shen Ji. Much about this text, as I will demonstrate below, is representative of broader trends in the Buddhist thought of its time, and the essay is thus a useful lens through which to examine an important phase in the history that concerns us here.

In both the text and commentary of *Shenming cheng fo yi*, we see two broad developments. First, for the first time in these debates, we see the influence of the wave of **Tattvasiddhi* and MPNMS scholarship that famously swept the south in the fifth through sixth centuries.²⁷ We also see consciousness linked much more closely to the problem of attaining buddhahood, and to Buddha-nature more specifically. However, in order to fully appreciate the ideas espoused by Wudi and Shen Ji, it will be necessary for us to look more closely than previous scholars into the scriptural background of their work, especially in MPNMS and the *Śrīmālādevīsīmaṇāda-sūtra* (hereafter “*Śrīm*”); and its more immediate historical background in the exegetical scholasticism of their time.

Wudi uses the term *shenming* (神明, “spirit-cum-awareness/illumination”)²⁸ for the single, fundamental ground of all the mind’s various “functions” (*yong* 用), which is unchanging (夫心為用本，本一而用殊。殊用自有興廢，一本之性不移...一本者，即無明神明也; HMJ T52:54b19-21, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 172). Throughout his essay, he also calls this mental instance simply “mind” (*xin* 心). However, Wudi approaches this “undying” entity with a new question: “Who achieves buddhahood?” (*shui cheng fo hu* 誰成佛乎, HMJ T52:54b14, Makita, 1973-

²⁶ On the title and date, see Itō (1986: 229). In addition to Makita (1973-1975), translations are found in Itō (1978: 233-244), and Liebenthal (1952: 376-378), but I will not cite them for every reference below.

²⁷ In fact, Nakanishi has usefully suggested in passing that we might see a central thrust behind Wudi’s essay as issuing from the confrontation of an Abhidharmic (thus, in Wudi’s context, **Tattvasiddhi*-derived) doctrine of the momentariness of mind, and the diametrically opposed implication that mind must be permanent or eternal, which arises as soon as we identify MPNMS’s Buddha-nature with mind (Nakanishi, 1983: 118).

²⁸ As we will see below, this term is highly ambiguous, and can scarcely be translated into English in a way that makes sense of all the various connotations with which Wudi employs it.

1975: 3:477-478, Lai, 1981b: 171). In answer, Wudi implicitly identifies this substrate of mind with Buddha-nature – in part via two references to MPNMS (one of which, as we will see, is actually inaccurate, and one of which harbors problems of translation!). One of these passages, moreover, hinges on the notion of the “primary cause” or “cause proper” (*zhengyin* 正因) of the attainment of buddhahood, reference to which, as we will see below, helps us contextualize Wudi’s ideas among those of his contemporaries.²⁹ Thus, Wudi builds upon the connection to Buddha-

²⁹ “The *sūtra* says, ‘The mind is the cause proper, which ultimately brings to completion the Buddha-fruit’ (經云：「心為正因，終成佛果」；HMJ T52:54b16, Lai, 1981b: 171, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478). This citation is incorrect in the sense that MPNMS does not contain these words (Makita 481 n. 12, Liebenenthal n. 170). However, Nakanishi has pointed out that Wudi’s claim here may be justified in light of MPNMS, which explains that the effect (e.g. yogurt) is in an important sense present in its cause, and then says, “So, too, with sentient beings: they all have mind, and all things that have mind will certainly attain to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*; it is on the basis of this principle that I always preach that all sentient beings without exception have Buddha-nature” (眾生亦爾，悉皆有心想，凡有心者，定當得成阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。以是義故，我常宣說一切眾生悉有佛性；MPNMS T12:524c7-10, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 2:658; Nakanishi, 1983: 118).

In raising the problematic of *zhengyin*, Wudi seems to be thinking of some part of a long discussion in MPNMS (T12:530b26-28 ff.), which opposes “primary cause” (*zhengyin*) to “ancillary cause, supporting condition” (*yuanyin* 緣因); and most probably, more specifically, of the following line: “Noble scion! For this reason, I expound two kinds of cause, [namely] cause proper, and ancillary cause. Cause proper is what is termed ‘Buddha-nature’. The ancillary cause is the conception of *bodhicitta*. It is by this pair of causes that one attains *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*” (善男子，以是義故，我說二因：正因、緣因。正因者，名為佛性。緣因者，發菩提心。以二因緣得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提；T12:533b3-6, Yamamoto 2:697). Thus, where MPNMS says that the cause proper of awakening is Buddha-nature, Liang Wudi states that it is mind, implying that the two concepts were perhaps somehow interchangeable in his thinking or context.

Wudi further supports his contention with another verbatim quote from MPNMS (this time correct): “That which functions/exists as ignorance transforms itself into illumination” (若無明轉，則變為明；HMJ T52:54b18, citing MPNMS T12:411a23, Yamamoto 1:294). Oddly enough, the idea for which he cites the passage seems to be an artifact of an ambiguous (or even incorrect) translation by *Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385-433), where the original passage may have meant more or less the opposite (i.e. that knowledge becomes ignorance): Faxian has, “Because one commits *karmic* [acts] and misdeeds, knowledge is transformed into ignorance” (行業過故，明非明轉, T12:376.886c7-8); Tib. has, “There is [in fact] no duality in ignorance and knowledge; but nonetheless, through the *karmic* [acts] and evil deeds of sentient

nature drawn by the anonymous Liu Song author discussed above, and more broadly, also builds further on anticipatory moves in that same author, and perhaps even Zong Bing, to connect the thread of continuity through transmigration to the “subject” of liberation.

Wudi also uses the term “consciousness” (*shi* 識). To some extent, both Liang Wudi and Shen Ji treat *shi* as synonymous with “mind” (*xin* 心) (the latter explicitly so, citing the **Tattvasiddhi*) (HMJ T52:54b5-6, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:487, Lai, 1981b: 171; citing **Tattvasiddhi* T32:1646.274 c19).³⁰ We must therefore be careful not to exaggerate the significance of this choice of vocabulary. However, the way this consciousness is discussed is informed by the new scholastic flavor of Wudi and Shen Ji’s writings; central to their discussion is the fact that this consciousness is momentary (HMJ T52:54b14, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:477, Lai, 1981b: 171). In this detail, too, Wudi’s essay may betray connections with our anonymous Liu Song author; but he may also be showing the influence of **Tattvasiddhi* scholarship and its Abhidharmic categories.

In his interlinear comments on Wudi’s essay and his Preface, Shen Ji speaks of the entity that does not perish at death as both *shenshi* (神識) and *shishen* (識神) (HMJ T52:54a12-13, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:475, Lai, 1981b: 170; HMJ 54b15, Makita 3:478, Lai 171; HMJ 54b16-17 [twice], Maki-

beings, precisely knowledge itself is transformed to take on the appearance of ignorance,” *ma rig pa dang rig pa gnyis su med mod kyi sems can rnam kyī las kyī nyes pas rig pa gang yin pa de nyid ma rig pa lta bur gyur te* (D Tha 111b).

Note further that, *pace* the *Foguang dacidian* (193 s.v. *eryin* [二因] (1)), it is clear from context that the terms for the two types of cause at issue in the first quote are not the same in meaning as *shengyin* (生因, *kāraṇahetu*) and *liaoyin* (了因, *jñāpakahetu*) (for which see Radich, 2008: 125 n. 345); although there is an attempt – typical of MPNMS in its creative or confused character – to identify them with those categories (531b17-19). The problem of doctrines of causation in MPNMS is extremely tangled, but promises to reward careful study.

³⁰ Katsura points out that this **Tattvasiddhi* passage parallels AKBh 2.34ab, *cittaṃ mano ’tha vijñānam ekārtham* (Pradhan, 1967: 61, la Vallée Poussin, 1980: 1:176; also paralleled in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*) (Katsura, 1974: 133). Cf. also *shilü* (識慮) (HMJ T52:54b25, Makita 3:479, Lai 172).

ta 3:475, Lai 171).³¹ In glossing Wudi's comment that "consciousness" is impermanent, further, he states that the "essence of *shenshi*" (*shenshi zhi xing* 神識之性) is limpid and unmoving (*zhanran bu yi* 湛然不移, HMJ T52:54b15, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 171). When Wudi states that mind has a single, unchanging, underlying essence, moreover, Shen Ji says that if one removes defilements and impurities, the "fundamental consciousness" (*benshi* 本識) will shine/be clear (淘汰 [var. 沐, Song, Yuan, Ming] 塵穢, 本識則明; HMJ T52:54b20, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 172). This is, moreover, Shen Ji's reading of the "transformation" (from ignorance to the liberated state) spoken of in Wudi's second MPNMS quote.³² Similarly, Shen Ji also states, "Illumination is [our] fundamental nature, and we are therefore susceptible to becoming illuminated; but because consciousness is defiled by objects without, we cannot avoid delusion within" (明為本性, 所以應明。識染外塵故, 內不免惑; HMJ T52:54b26, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:479, Lai, 1981b: 172). Thus, it is clear that for Wudi and especially Shen Ji, consciousness is the transmigrating entity, and also the "subject" of liberation.

Shen Ji's comments are also the first time we have so clearly seen the language of an underlying "clear essence" of mind/consciousness in the context of these debates. We will see below that debts to Śrīm in both these essays and their wider context make it likely that this trope can be connected quite directly with *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. Moreover, whereas Wudi identifies a generic "mind" as the "cause proper" (*zhengyin*) of buddhahood, for Shen Ji, the cause proper is specifically *shenshi* (略語佛因其義有二：一曰緣因，二曰正因。緣者，萬善是也。正者，神識是也。萬善有助發之功，故曰緣因。神識是其正本，故曰正因; HMJ T52:54b16-17, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 171). Thus, the link between consciousness (specifically, rather than a more general notion of "mind") and liberation is drawn closer than ever before.

³¹ Note that Shen Ji also uses *shi* as an ordinary verb meaning "to know", e.g. "being 'insentient' is not knowing" (匪情莫識, HMJ T52:54b23, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 172).

³² See n. 29 above. Shen Ji: 明闇相易，謂之「變」也。若前去後來，非之謂也 (var. 非「變」之謂, Song, Yuan, Ming, "Palace") (HMJ T52:54b20-21, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 172).

Shen Ji also cites a key work of Zhi Qian (支謙, fl. 223-253) as an authority for the claim that “spirit does not perish” (HMJ T52:54b8-9, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:477, Lai, 1981b: 171).³³ This shows that his comments have deeper roots than modern scholars have usually recognized in the history we are tracing here. In what follows, I will trace in some detail other, hitherto largely unrecognized connections between Wudi and Shen Ji’s work and three important reference points: Śrīm; MPNMS; and the exegetical practice and theories of some of their most important contemporaries. In light of these connections, we can see the full significance of Wudi and Shen Ji’s use of the concept of consciousness as a possible antecedent to **amala vijñāna* doctrine.

First, it is significant that a pivotal concept underlying Wudi’s essay – namely, *avidyāvāśabhūmi* (Ch. *wumingzhudi* 無明住地) – ultimately derives from Śrīm (in Guṇabhadra’s [Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅, 394-468] translation).³⁴ It is natural enough that Wudi would have taken up a key

³³ Makita and Lai were unable to trace this passage; however, it is a verbatim quote from Zhi Qian’s *Taizi rui ying benqi jing* (太子瑞應本起經) (T3:185.475a1-3; noted in Itō, 1986: 235 n. 6). This passage has partial parallels in the *Xiuxing benqi jing* (修行本起經) (T3:184.467a21, cf. Karetzky, 1992: 57); and in Dharmarakṣa’s *Pu yao jing* (普曜經) (T3:186.503b1-2) (which is not an independent witness, being drawn from T185; Nattier, 2008: 127 n. 42). The passage seems to have no parallels in the *Lalitavistara*, *Mahāvastu* or *Buddhacarita*. Note that the *Taizi rui ying benqi jing* also contains other passages that could support a similar view (including its very opening, 472c6-9, where the transmigrating entity is *jingshen* 精神; 478b3-6, *hunshen* 魂神; 479c17-23, where, pivotally for our purposes, “mind is the *jingshen*” 意為精神 and rebirth is explained by the arising of consciousness [and *saṃjñā?*] 識想; Itō, 1986: 219-200).

³⁴ Cf. Makita (1973-1975: 3:481 n. 16) (which mentions Jizang’s commentary on Śrīm, T1744) and Lai (1981b: 377 n. 172) (tracing this rubric only as far as the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* [菩薩瓔珞本業經], where it appears at T24:1485.1022a6-8). Itō (1986: 240 n. 1) notes the connection to Śrīm, but does not explore it any further (see also Nakanishi, 1983: 123-125). Aside from Śrīm, the following texts prior to Wudi also mention *avidyāvāśabhūmi*: Guṇabhadra’s *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (T16:670.510b7-8, 512b17-18, 513a25-27, 513b10); *Pusa yingluo benye jing* (T24:1485.1022a6-8); and *Mandra[sena]’s (曼陀羅仙, fl. 503) *Ratnamegha* (T16:659.277b21-25). This means that it may not be possible to identify Wudi’s source for the concept with absolute certainty. However, two factors argue in favor of Śrīm: 1) it contains the most extensive discussion of the concept, where the other texts largely only mention it in passing; 2) Wudi also mentions the momentariness of ordinary mind, which also features in Śrīm (see below). The Skt. *avidyāvāśa-*

concept from Śrīm, given the interest in the text in the period, as indicated by the series of (now lost) commentaries mentioned or cited in Jizang's (吉藏, 549-623) commentary, the *Shengman bao ku* (勝鬘寶窟, T1744) (Tsurumi, 1977).³⁵

It is difficult to find a simple, clear translation of *avidyāvāsabhūmi* into English. *Āvāsa* means “dwelling-place, residence”, and *bhūmi* has a broad range of meanings centered on the notion of “place”;³⁶ basically, then, the term suggests a type of ignorance (*avidyā*) so profound and fundamental that it is as if the sentient being has set up residence (*āvāsa*) in it, so that it operates as a “home base” or place of identification, which is the point of departure and reference for all of the sentient being's more specific knowledge and acts. We might perhaps translate *āvāsabhūmi*, more loosely, “[ignorance in/of/as] the very condition of existence”.³⁷

bhūmi is known from citation of Śrīm in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (Johnston, 1950: 33-34, Takasaki, 1966: 217).

³⁵ The term **avidyāvāsabhūmi* appears nowhere else in HMJ (nor *Guang hong ming ji* [廣弘明集] T2103). However, evidence of interest in the concept is seen in such luminaries of Wudi's time as Fayun (who some have suggested might have ghost-written Wudi's essay) (T33:1715.573b3-9; 588a2-3, 603c9-11, 606b28-c5, 654b18-19); Baoliang (DBJJJ T37: 392a10, 404c22-25, 526b3-12, 551a4-5, 600b13-14, 611a4); and Sengzong (413b4, 485 a15-16, 551a17); and it appears in the *Liang Cibe daochang chanfa* (慈悲道場懺法) (T45: 1909.927c4-7, 946b24-25, 947c24-26).

³⁶ I take *bhūmi* here to refer primarily not to anything analogous to the more familiar *bhūmi* of the *bodhisattva* path, but to the “earth”; the text speaks in several passages of this fundamental defilement as a kind of soil from which the other particular defilements grow.

³⁷ Wayman and Wayman (1974) translate by the somewhat impenetrable phrase “nescience entrenchment”. Exploiting a useful etymological ambiguity in English, we might also translate *āvāsa* as “habitat”, i.e. somewhere that the sentient being “inhabits” (*ā/vas*), and say that “dwelling” in this habitat also “habituates” us to commit particular defiled (morally harmful) acts (compare the Yogācāra term *vāsanā*, perhaps from the same root). In both these senses, the notion of “habitat” could even be fruitfully understood on the basis of a selectively retooled use of the term *habitus* (after Mauss, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu). Thus, **āvāsakleśa* might be something like a latent global tendency to karmically negative action, including, perhaps most saliently, the very basic act of taking rebirth itself; whereas “active *kleśas*” are explicitly realized acts instantiating that underlying tendency. There are apparent structural analogies between this deeper layer of defilement in Śrīm and the notion of *ālayavijñāna* in early Yogācāra texts.

We realize that Wudi has this concept in mind when he says:

The coming into being and passing out of being [of things] takes place over and above the essence of “ignorance” [non-illumination, *wuming* 無明 = **avidyā*]. This coming into being and passing out of being consists in the various functions [of fundamental “ignorance”], but the character (*yi* 義) of mind *qua* “ignorance” (*wuming*) remains unchanged. However, there is a danger that, seeing the variety in its functions, [people] will say that mind passes out of existence along with its object (*jing* 境, **viṣaya*). For this reason, the term “dwelling-place” (*zhudi* 住地, **āvāśabhūmi*) is added immediately after the word “ignorance” (*wuming*). This shows that “ignorance” is identical with *shenming* (神明), and the nature (*xing* 性) of *shenming* is unchanging.³⁸

In his interlinear comments, Shen Ji reiterates the same point: “By attaching [the term] ‘dwelling-place’ to ‘ignorance’, the intention is to chastise those whose minds are muddled; but fools who are full of doubts have never understood this [point].”³⁹ In other words, both writers seem to have had in mind some text (other than their own) in which *wuming* appeared together with the term *zhudi* (住地) = *āvāśabhūmi*.

Śrīm discusses this *avidyāvāśabhūmi* at some length (T12:353.220a1-c7, Ogawa, 2001: 189-191, Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 84-89). It is presented as one of five *āvāśabhūmi*, the remaining four of which, briefly, are similar, existentially foundational defilements through attachment respectively to 1) incorrect views; and 2-4) existence in each of the three realms (*kāmadhātu*, *rūpadhātu*, *ārūpyadhātu*). These five foundational defilements are the basis upon which “active defilements” (*qi fannaο* 起煩惱) arise in turn.

Significantly for our purposes, these “active defilements” are defined in Śrīm thus: “Active [defilements]’ refers to the momentary (**kṣaṇika*) mind and its momentary concomitant factors (**caitta*)” (此四種住地，生

³⁸ 無明體上，有生有滅。生滅是其異用，無明心義不改。將恐見其用異，便謂心隨境滅。故繼「無明」名下，加以「住地」之目。此顯無明即是神明，神明性不遷也；for reference, see n. 39 following.

³⁹ 「無明」係以「住地」，蓋是斥其迷識，而抱惑之徒未曾喻也 (HMJ T52:54b26-c7, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:479, Lai, 1981b: 172).

一切起煩惱。起者，剎那心，剎那相應; T12:353.220a4-5).⁴⁰ This gives us a clue as to where Wudi gets his concern with the momentariness of mind, already touched on above. At the opening of the essay, he says (ventriloquizing an imaginary interlocutor):

The wondrous result [of the path of practice, i.e. buddhahood], the ultimate acme of essence, is eternal; but subtle spirit cannot but be impermanent. “Impermanent” means that a prior [entity] goes out of existence and a latter one comes into existence, without enduring even for a *kṣaṇa* (moment) (妙果體極常住，精神不免無常。無常者，前滅後生。剎那不住者也; HMJ T52:54b10-12, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:477, Lai, 1981b: 171).⁴¹

This leads to the conclusion that each moment of mind (*shi*, “consciousness”) should differ from its predecessor, and go out of existence together with its object; and this in turn sets up the central question of Wudi’s tract: “Who becomes *buddha*?” (若心用心於攀緣 前識必異後者，斯則與境俱往，誰成佛乎; HMJ T52:54b13-14, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:477-478, Lai, 1981b: 171). In the argument that he gives in answer to this question, Wudi distinguishes between a momentary, changeable, phenomenal layer of mental content, and an underlying substrate of the essence or nature of mind – very much as Śrīm distinguishes, in the passage where *avidyāvāsabhūmi* features, between incidental phenomenal instances of defilement, and underlying, enduring structural conditions for it.

Indeed, the underlying nature of the basic question Wudi uses this doctrine to answer (“Who becomes Buddha?” or how buddhahood is attained) bears further resemblances to the question at issue in Śrīm’s *avidyāvāsabhūmi* passage. Śrīm is at pains to stress that the *avidyāvāsa-*

⁴⁰ A few lines later, Śrīm clearly says that *avidyāvāsabhūmi*, by contrast, is dissociated from thought (*cittaviprayukta*) (心不相應無始無明住地, T12:353.220a6).

⁴¹ We should note that the use of technical Buddhist terms, especially transcription terms from Skt. like *kṣaṇa*, is very unusual in the debates we are following here (which tend to be dominated rather by reference to non-Buddhist Chinese terms and texts); and indeed, Shen Ji feels a need to gloss *kṣaṇa*. This makes it all the more likely that the word *kṣaṇa* derives from some other textual source that Wudi is taking as the occasion of his argument.

bhūmi is by far the most “powerful” of all the *āvāsabhūmis* (如是無明住地力，於有愛數四住地，無明住地其力最大 etc. [at some length]; T12:353.220a9-10 ff.; Ogawa, 2001: 189 ff., Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 84 ff.). This difference in power lies in the fact that Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas and lower-level Bodhisattvas are capable of destroying the other *āvāsabhūmis*, and are therefore exempt from ordinary embodiment; but they are, nonetheless, prone to embodiment in a “body made of mind” (*manomayakāya*), and this is because they have not broken the type of attachment to existence constituted by the *avidyāvāsabhūmi* (T12:353.220a16-18 ff.; Ogawa, 2001: 189 ff., Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 85 ff.; *evam eva bhagavann avidyāvāsabhūmipratyayā anāsravakarmahetukā arhatāṃ pratyekabuddhānāṃ vaśitāprāptānāṃ ca bodhisattvānāṃ manomayā trayāḥ kāyāḥ saṃbhavanti* etc., Johnston, 1950: 33-34, Takasaki, 1966: 217). In fact, the only power that can destroy the *avidyāvāsabhūmi* is the awakening and wisdom of the Tathāgata (阿羅漢辟支佛智所不能斷。唯如來菩提智之所能斷; T12:353.220a13-15, Ogawa, 2001: 189, Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 85). But this means, of course, that the elimination of the *avidyāvāsabhūmi* is the key to the process of attaining buddhahood – precisely the problem that preoccupies Wudi.

Thus, Śrīm – one of the most seminal *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures – is a pivotal reference point for Wudi and Shen Ji’s ideas. We will see further below, moreover, that it was also a key reference point for their prominent contemporaries when they discussed closely allied ideas. This alone is sufficient to show a close, direct textual link between Wudi’s ideas and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. However, comparison with his source in Śrīm shows that Wudi’s use of the idea of *avidyāvāsabhūmi*, and indeed, his use of the term *wuming/avidyā* / “ignorance” itself, seems unusual and problematic at first blush. The problem lies in the fact that Wudi poses a radical and startling underlying identity between this “ignorance” and *shenming*, whereas these two terms would more normally look like opposites (一本者，即無明神明也; HMJ T52:54b21, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:478, Lai, 1981b: 172; 無明即是神明; 54c5-6, Makita 3:479, Lai 172). This leads us in the direction of a second key element among Wudi’s sources, namely MPN-MS and its Buddha-nature doctrine.

It is tempting, perhaps, at first, to think that Wudi’s strategy of identification here is based upon the fortuitous fact that *shenming* (“spirit-

cum-illumination”) and *wuming* (“ignorance”, more literally, “lack of illumination”) contain the same constituent syllable, *ming* (明, “illumination”, “awakening”, “awareness”), and that this furnishes Wudi with a hinge by which to join the two. However, Wudi is able to cite scriptural authority, again from MPNMS, in support of this identity, so that it is not at all idiosyncratic (善男子，明與無明，亦復如是。若與煩惱諸結俱者，名為無明，若與一切善法俱者，名之為明; MPNMS T12:411b17-19, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:195). It is significant that this quote forms a pair with one of his earlier quotes from MPNMS.⁴² If we back up a little, moreover, the MPNMS passage in question as a whole begins by saying (in the Chinese Wudi would have been referring to⁴³):

If we say that conditioned things have ignorance as their cause and conditions, then ordinary people, hearing this, will falsely imagine the concept of a duality between “illumination” (*ming*) and “non-illumination” (*wuming*) [i.e. ignorance]. The wise, however, understand that in essence, they are not dual, and that this non-dual essence is the true nature [of things] (若言無明因緣諸行，凡夫之人聞已分別生二法想，明與無明，智者了達其性無二，無二之性即是實性; MPNMS T12:410c20-22, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:192-193).⁴⁴

⁴² The present quote caps a long passage (MPNMS T12:411a7-b23, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:194-195), which is immediately preceded by Wudi’s second quote (see n. 29). The two quotes in combination can be understood to refer to the passage as a whole. Remarkably, the entire paragraph intervening between the two quotes seems to be an interpolation into *Dharmakṣema’s version only of MPNMS; it is absent from Faxian, Tib. and Skt. fragments (even though it occurs in the portion of *Dharmakṣema’s MPNMS that is generally paralleled by other versions).

⁴³ It is an important methodological principle, in treating the scriptural bases of Chinese developments like those under study here, to distinguish between the way the Chinese would naturally have been read by Chinese readers, in Chinese, and what we can determine the original Indic text might have meant before passing through the translation process. This principle is particularly important in dealing with texts like *Dharmakṣema’s MPNMS, where the Chinese is often significantly at variance with other known versions of the text.

⁴⁴ This is reasonably close to Tib: “The benighted, due to [their] ignorance, maintain that there is duality in so-called conditioned things; but the wise know that there is [in fact] no duality in the difference [between] ignorance and knowledge;” *byis pa rnam ni ma*

The entire passage that follows (ending with Wudi’s second quote) explains a series of such non-dualisms, which are taken by the ignorant as dual, in light of the paradoxical identity-in-difference of causes and effects, using the metaphor of various dairy products. (The concern with the mysteries of causation, and the elaborate dairy metaphors, are both prominent features of MPNMS as a whole.) The connection between this problem and Wudi’s concern with the problem of the “cause proper” (*zhengyin*) of buddhahood is obvious. Thus, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that Wudi’s entire essay is a comment on the larger MPNMS passage we have identified here, by way of the Śrīm concept of *avidyāvāśabhūmi* as the ultimate impediment to the attainment of buddhahood.

These echoes of Śrīm and MPNMS help us make better sense of other aspects of Wudi and Shen Ji’s ideas. Wudi unpacks the MPNMS non-dualism between ignorance and illumination by saying that there is a surface level at which mind merely functions (*yong* 用) to engage with phenomenal objects, whereas beneath this level, there is an underlying substratum of substance (*ti* 體) which remains untouched.⁴⁵ In glossing the Emperor’s comments, Shen Ji specifies further that mind/consciousness falls prey to delusion because it is defiled by external objects;⁴⁶ elsewhere, he specifies that the reverse process is also possible, and consciousness can be purified of defilements to return to its pristine illumination.⁴⁷ The broad lineaments of these ideas should be familiar. They bear a close resemblance to the idea of a fundamental purity covered by “adventitious defilements” (*āgantukakleśāḥ*) elaborated in various Indic texts (even though the usual, more exact translation terms associated with that doctrine are not used here). It is significant, in this light, that Wudi’s key MPNMS quotes come from a context where the text is ex-

rig pa'i rkyen gyis 'du byed rnam zhes bya ba la gnyis su 'dzin to | shes rab can rnam kyis ni ma rig pa dang rig pa tha dad pa gnyis su med par shes so (D 110b).

⁴⁵ See n. 39 above. It is common for scholars to see Wudi’s essay as the first use of the *ti-yong* paradigm in specific Buddhist applications; Itō, 1986: 241-242; but cf. Nakanishi, 1983: 114, 128 n. 21.

⁴⁶ Passage discussed p. 488 above.

⁴⁷ Passage discussed p. 488 above.

plaining Buddha-nature (*foxing yi er* 佛性亦爾, MPNMS T12:411b21-22, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:195);⁴⁸ in fact, immediately following the second of his quotes, the text goes on to state that the reason sentient beings cannot see their Buddha-nature is that it is covered by adventitious defilement (煩惱覆故眾生不見...但為煩惱客塵所覆; Tib. *nyon mongs pa rnams ni glo bur du byung ba yin te* etc.; MPNMS T12:411b23-c1, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:195-196). Thus, although Wudi's tract mentions Buddha-nature nowhere, Shen Ji seems to be right when he alludes to it in his Preface as the issue at stake (至於佛性大義，頓迷心路; HMJ T52:54a22-23, Makita, 1973-1975: 3:476, Lai, 1981b: 170).⁴⁹

Another key context, without reference to which we cannot hope to fully understand Wudi and Shen Ji's ideas, is the ideas of their learned contemporaries.⁵⁰ We have already mentioned the fact that Wudi and Shen Ji's interest in Śrīm (as shown by appeal to the notion of *avidyāvāsa-bhūmi*) was fairly typical of this period. This is also true of their concern with the problem of the "primary cause". We saw above that Wudi identifies "mind" (*xin* 心) as the "cause proper" of buddhahood, and that Shen Ji further specifies that this "cause proper" is *shenshi*.⁵¹ This state-

⁴⁸ Comparison shows that the last words of the passage are unique to *Dharmakṣema.

⁴⁹ As Itō has pointed out, MPNMS contains one remarkable passage that seems to make exactly the equation Wudi and Shen Ji are hinting at here: "Again, there is an interpretation that holds that *vijñāna* is Buddha-nature (*shi wei foxing* 識為佛性), and that because of *vijñāna* as a cause, it is possible to attain the undifferentiated mind of the Tathāgatas. Although the mind and *vijñāna* of sentient beings is impermanent, the succession of *vijñānas* [comprises] an unbroken continuum, and this is why it is possible to attain the true, eternal mind of the Tathāgata. It is like [the relation between] heat and fire: although the fire is impermanent, heat is not impermanent. So it is, too, with sentient beings and Buddha-nature, and this is why it is held that *vijñāna* is Buddha-nature" (MPNMS T12:556b17-21, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 3:800, Itō, 1986: 235 n. 3). The context is a passage that argues by turn that all the *skandhas* are identical to Buddha-nature, and so the claim for *vijñāna*, in particular, is not especially significant; nonetheless, it could have been a useful proof-text for Wudi's claims. In fact, however, the passage seems to have disappeared without a trace in the later Chinese tradition, except that it is quoted once in Guanding's (灌頂, 561-632) commentary (X36:659.747c 7-9).

⁵⁰ Attention is given to aspects of this problem by Itō (1986), for which see immediately below; and Nakanishi (1983: 109-117).

⁵¹ See above n. 29 and p. 488.

ment can be further illuminated by reference to the works of eminent exegetes roughly contemporary with Wudi and Shen Ji, who also evinced considerable interest in the problem of the “cause proper” of buddhahood.

As Itō Takatoshi has shown, evidence preserved in the *Silun xuan yi* (四論玄義)⁵² reports that Sengrou (僧柔, 431-494) and Zhizang (智藏, 458-522) declared that the “cause proper” of buddhahood was “mind-consciousness” (*xinshi* 心識), which “ultimately becomes the great sage” (*zhong cheng dasheng* 終成大聖, X46:784.601c15-23, Itō, 1986: 226);⁵³ Fa’an (法安, 454-498) held that the cause proper was mind (*xin* 心), which he contrasted with a deluded **manas* (*yi* 意) and **vijñāna/shenshi* which are functions and susceptible to change (601c1-3; Itō 227); and Baoliang is supposed to have held that “true spirit” (*zhenshen* 真神) is the cause proper (601b20-c1; Itō 227);⁵⁴ or that the “principle of Thusness” (*zhenruxing li* 真如性理) is the cause proper, where ordinary mind is produced on the basis of a substratum of Thusness (601b15-20; Itō 227)⁵⁵ (this view is also supposed to have been shared by Fa’an, Fayun and Huiyan [慧琰, d.u.]; 601c4-9; Itō 228). In commenting on MPNMS, further, Baoliang connects *zhengyin* to mind, and in support, cites Śrīm on **prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta* (DBJJJ T37:447c11-20; Itō 238).⁵⁶ Sengzong calls *shenming* (神明) itself the *zhengyin* (DBJJJ T37:586c20-23; Itō 239; Nakanishi, 1983: 112-113; cf. also DBJJJ 454b26).

⁵² By Huijun/Hyegyun (慧均, d.u., fl. 574-580s?) (Radich, 2008: 121-122 n. 330).

⁵³ Huijun’s account of this position includes the notion of “return to the origin” (*fan ben zhi li* 反本之理).

⁵⁴ Huijun also ascribes this view to Wudi himself. A related view is ascribed to Baoliang by Jizang (T38:1768.237c4-9).

⁵⁵ As Itō notes, this position is particularly important in light of the doctrines ascribed to the Dilun school. Itō suggests, in fact, that the very term *zhenru* is very early here, as it is usually taken to date from Bodhiruci; of course, there is also a possibility that its use indicates that Huijun’s doxographical information has been contaminated by ideas intervening between Baoliang and himself.

⁵⁶ The exact terms in which Baoliang connects *zhengyin* (and *yuanyin* 緣因) to mind are obscure to me: “Both *zhengyin* and *yuanyin* are paths of spirit and(?) thought” (緣正兩因並是神慮之道).

As this last comment of Sengzong's suggests, Wudi's essay is also representative of the views of the scholarly elite of its time in the very use of its titular concept of *shenming* (神明). Surprisingly, to my knowledge, scholars who have worked on Wudi's essay have not generally explored the background of this term in any depth (but cf. Nakanishi, 1983: 110-117). One possible remote source of the term is in An Shigao – where, remarkably for our purposes, it is already used for the transmigrating entity, in a manner that may sometimes correspond to *vijñāna* – but this single passage is unique in the Āgamas and separated from the period under discussion by many years, and so we should probably not make too much of it.⁵⁷ *Shenming* is also used at least once, in the GSZ biography of *Dharmamitra (曇摩密多), as an ordinary word for the spirit or intelligence of a person (T50:2059.342c8-9; translated as *seishin* 精神, Yoshikawa and Funayama, 2009: 310). In the “apocryphal” “Consecration *sūtra*”, *shenming* is the name for the transmigrating entity.⁵⁸

On the whole, however, *shenming*, in any sense close to Wudi's, is a relatively rare term in Buddhist texts outside the present debates. By contrast, within those debates, it begins to appear in senses more closely related to Wudi's as early as Zheng Daozi (*shenming zhi ben* 神明之本, HMJ T52:28a1-3, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:251, Liebenthal, 1952: 347; *shenming lingji* 神明靈極, HMJ 28b7-9, Makita 2:254, Liebenthal 349). It is especially frequent in Zong Bing. In his “Letter to He Chongtian”, for instance, it appears as a general term for spirits; and also in a formulation describing liberation as “making luminous the *shenming* and directing it towards the birthless state” (HMJ T52:18a9-12, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:163; HMJ 18c3-5,

⁵⁷ *Shenming* is found five times in a discussion of various reincarnation destinies in Buddhist cosmology in An Shigao's *Daśottara-sūtra*, where it corresponds to Pāli *satta* (Skt. *sattva*); this, in turn, corresponds to a list of “states of consciousness” (*viññāṇaṭṭhiti*) in another *sutta* (T1:13.239a9-16; PTS DN III:263, Walshe, 1987: 506; PTS DN II:68-69, Walshe 228-229).

⁵⁸ In a list of things that the faithless do not believe: “They do not believe that when the person dies, the *shenming* is born again” (不信人死神明更生, T21:1331.534b23-24). According to Sengyou, this *sūtra* was composed by Huijian (惠簡, fl. ca. 457) under the Liu Song (Makita, 1976: 14).

Makita 2:169).⁵⁹ One key passage in Zong Bing is particularly telling for our purposes; describing accession to the liberated state, the text says:

The spirit (*shen* 神) of the sage illuminates [things] in a sublime manner, while remaining free of the [ordinary] consciousness that thinks and constructs (無思營之識); this is because when the mind (*xin* 心) withdraws from [association with external] things, only spirit [remains], and nothing more. For this reason, the source of empty illumination (*ming* 明) endures at all times (lit: “from start to finish”), and cannot perish. If, on the one hand, one engages with [external] things, and does not maintain unity with the spirit, then even though one might have the subtlety of a Yan Hui, one must nonetheless strive diligently, “loving benevolence and delighting in mountains” (好仁樂山),⁶⁰ [and yet still] falling short and suffering penury. All this is [because] the function of the mind (*xinyong* 心用) is consciousness/cognizing (識, *viv/jñā); one function necessarily follows another imperceptibly, so that consciousness after consciousness join in an imperceptible continuum, just as in a fire, flame after flame join in succession to constitute a blaze. If, on the other hand, one awakens to emptiness and extinguishes mind, then mental functions are extinguished and volition and consciousness cease, and then *shenming* is complete.⁶¹

⁵⁹ In addition to other Zong Bing passages discussed immediately below, see also, in *Ming fo lun*, HMJ T52:10a1-3 (Makita, 1973-1975: 2:87, Liebenthal, 1952: 383); HMJ 11b22-25 (Makita 2:102); HMJ 12b13-16 (Makita 2:108); HMJ 14a27-b1 (Makita 2:126); HMJ 15 a12-15 (Makita 2:134); HMJ 16a17-19 (Makita 2:142).

⁶⁰ *Analects* 6.2: 知者樂水，仁者樂山; “Those with wisdom delight in water, those with ‘benevolence’ delight in mountains.”

⁶¹ 夫聖神玄照而無思營之識者，由心與物絕，唯神而已，故虛明之本，終始常住，不可凋矣。今心與物交，不一於神，雖以顏子之微微，而必乾乾鑽仰，好仁樂山，庶乎屢空。皆心用乃識，必用用妙接，識識妙續，如火之炎炎相即而成爛耳。今以悟空息心，心用止而情識歇，則神明全矣 (HMJ T52:11a12-19, Makita, 1973-1975: 2:98, Liebenthal, 1952: 392-393, Guo, 2007: 240-242). My translation here benefited considerably from consulting Guo, and from suggestions from the anonymous reviewer. Similarly, elsewhere, the phrase “consummated the ultimate limit of the *shenming*” (*qiong shenming ji* 窮神明極) is used to describe the liberation of the Tathāgata (13c23-26, Makita 2:121).

Thus, already before it is taken up by Wudi, *shenming* refers to a key component of the mind of sentient beings, which others had already asserted survives death, and was in some sense the subject of liberation.

In comparison to the relatively scant and non-technical ways it was used previously, however, the term *shenming* saw an explosion of technical usage in the hands of the eminent exegetes of Wudi's day,⁶² and it is in their writings that we find the most illuminating background to Wudi's own use.

For example, not only does Sengzong claim that *shenming* is the cause proper, as we just saw above; he also uses it in his explanation of the sense in which MPNMS can say that there is a "great self" (*dawo* 大我, **mahātman*). If we hold that there is absolutely no self, we fall into the extreme of nihilism; if we hold that there is an eternal, unperishing (*bumie* 不滅) self within *saṃsāra*, we fall into the opposite extreme of eternalism. Between these two extremes, Sengzong suggests, we should recognize that even though there is no self, "The essential principle is not destroyed, and upon the basis of it, the *shenming* [continues] without being cut off."⁶³ Elsewhere, Sengzong uses the notion of *shenming* as cause proper to explain how sentient beings in *saṃsāra* can be spoken of as having "[the Buddha] nature", even though *saṃsāra* is impermanent (DBJJJ T37:545a13-16).

Baoliang speaks of *shenming* as the "ineffable essence" (*shenming miaoti* 神明妙體), and the one, true, unconditioned *dharma* (DBJJJ T37:488c 13-15).⁶⁴ He also speaks of *shenming* as the new knowledge that is taught, for the first time, by MPNMS itself (strongly suggesting that he identifies it with Buddha-nature); he alludes in this connection to the Śrīm doc-

⁶² Wang Jing's (王靖, d.u.) comment seems to reflect this situation: "Opinions are many and various about the purport of [the notion of] *shenming*" (神明之旨 · 其義多端, HMJ T52:66a27; cited in Nakanishi, 1983: 120).

⁶³ 性理不亡 · 神明由之而不斷也 etc. (DBJJJ T37:459b11-15, commenting on MPNMS T12: 410b18-24, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 1:191; this passage discussed in Nakanishi, 1983: 111).

⁶⁴ Baoliang also speaks of the *shenming miaoti* elsewhere (e.g. DBJJJ T37:547a15, and passages cited below in n. 65 and p. 501); as does Sengzong (519b15-16).

trine that *saṃsāra* is based upon *tathāgatagarbha*.⁶⁵ In another telling passage, Baoliang glosses the idea that buddhahood does not arise *ex nihilo* (非本無今有) with reference to the Śrīm doctrine that *saṃsāra* is based upon *tathāgatagarbha*, and says that the *shenming* is the “nature/essence” (*xing* 性) of the cogitating intellect (*lüzhi* 慮知); *saṃsāra* only arises because the *shenming* becomes entangled in causes and conditions, whereas if it can disentangle itself, “the false dies out, and the true remains” (DBJJJ T37:521c19-22). Elsewhere, he describes the highest kind of faith as faith in the ineffable essence of *shenming* and the highest [truth?] of Thusness (信神明妙體真如之第一; DBJJJ T37:538b3).

Such relations between Wudi’s essay and its milieu are thrown into particularly sharp relief if we examine Baoliang’s comments on exactly the main MPNMS passage that I have argued lies behind Wudi’s essay. In explaining the opening of this passage, Baoliang says that its non-dualist understanding of the relation between ignorance and “illumination” is a middle path, which presents things in their true aspect. He then goes on immediately to say, “It recognizes the Thusness of the ineffable essence of *shenming* as true reality” (識神明妙體真如為實; DBJJJ T37:460c3-5).⁶⁶ Baoliang returns to the topic of *shenming* in commenting on the passage immediately following Wudi’s second quote, in which MPNMS explains that Buddha-nature is not seen because it is covered over by adventitious defilements. The terms of his comment closely echo those of Wudi’s essay:

[When MPNMS says,] “Buddha-nature is not a conditioned *dharma*,” [it] means that Buddha-nature, as the cause proper (*zhengyin*), is not affected by good or bad [actions]; how [then] could it be created? Thus, we know that the essence of the *shenming*, at its fundament, has this **dharmatā* as its source...If the *shenming* in all cases arose from that which is constructed out of causes and conditions, and it did not have this as its essence, how then would it be possible for [the *sūtra*] now to

⁶⁵ 自四時經教，無有此言。今大乘法，其旨始判，得知神明以真俗為質也 etc. (DBJJJ T37:489c22-23); 從昔教來，學者未體乎大理，見法未分明。不知身為佛因。今於此教，識因果性，知神明妙體，生死依如來藏 etc. (528c15-17; cf. also 537a25-26).

⁶⁶ I read *shi* (識) here as an ordinary verb.

say that there is a wondrous king of all medicines within the poisonous body? ...Thus, we know that [the *sūtra*] is speaking in reference to the cause proper (*zhengyin*). If it was of the nature of a causal product, then that would automatically mean that the principle (*li* 理) would not exist within the poisonous body. On the other hand, we also should not make the result dependent upon the cause. If it were indeed the case that result is dependent upon cause, then the *Śrīmālādevī* should say “On the basis of *saṃsāra*, there is *tathāgatagarbha*,” whereas it actually says, “On the basis of *tathāgatagarbha*, there is *saṃsāra*” (DBJJ T37:462a25-b7).⁶⁷

Aspects of this comment are admittedly obscure. For our purposes, however, it suffices to note the following points, which are clear: like Wudi, Baoliang understands the key issue to be the “cause proper” of buddhahood; like Wudi, he closely identifies *shenming* with the cause proper; in the background, via MPNMS, is the doctrine of Buddha-nature; like Wudi, Baoliang links the MPNMS passage to ideas from *Śrīm*; and as with Wudi, his explanation has echoes of the doctrine of the aboriginal purity of mind.

In fact, we even find echoes of Wudi and Shen Ji’s treatment of consciousness/*shenshi* in Baoliang and Sengzong. For instance, in another passage also discussing the “cause proper” (*zhengyin*), Baoliang speaks of a type of “middle path with reference to principle” (*li zhong zhongdao* 理

⁶⁷ 「佛性非是作法者」，謂正因佛性非善惡所感，云何可造？故知神明之體，根本有此法性為源...若神明一向從業因緣之所構 [for 稱, reading with the v.l. in the 甲 m.s.] 起，不以此為體者，今云何言，毒身之中有妙藥王...故知據正因而為語也。若是果性，則毒身之中，理自無也。復不應以果來依因。若以果來依因者，『勝鬘經』應言，「依生死故有如來藏；」而云，「依如來藏有生死」。The *Śrīm* reference is to the following passage (from the opening of the **prakṛtiprabhāsvāra* chapter!): “Birth-and-death [*saṃsāra*] is grounded upon *tathāgatagarbha*, and it is with reference to *tathāgatagarbha* that it is taught that the ‘original limit’ [?] *bhūtakoṭi* is unknowable. O Bhagavan! It is because *tathāgatagarbha* exists that we speak of *saṃsāra*” (生死者依如來藏，以如來藏故，說本際不可知。世尊，有如來藏故說生死; T12:353.222b5-7, Ogawa, 2001: 199-200, 238, Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 104); *sati bhagavaṃs tathāgatagarbhe saṃsāra itī parikalpam asya vacanāyēti* (Johnston, 1950: 73, Takasaki, 1966: 292); however, this Skt. may be uncertain, and according to Takasaki, we should read, with Ch. and Tib., something more like, “O Bhagavan! It is [only] because there is *tathāgatagarbha* that *saṃsāra* is a meaningful concept” (Takasaki 292-293 n. 185).

中中道) which he sees instantiated in the fact that all [beings] possessed of *shenshi* know in every moment (**kṣaṇa*) to avoid suffering and seek happiness (*pi ku qiu le* 避苦求樂),⁶⁸ and this understanding in them is Buddha-nature, as the “cause proper” (DBJJJ T37:545a24-27).⁶⁹ Again discussing the “cause proper”, Baoliang reiterates that all [beings] with *shenshi* have an innate understanding of the principle of seeking happiness and avoiding pain (DBJJJ T37:554c28-555a8).⁷⁰ In another passage, the Bodhisattva Lion’s Roar asks (in MPNMS): “if the five *skandhas* comprising the sentient being are empty and do not exist, then who is it that receives teachings and practices the path?” (眾生五陰空無所有。誰有受教修習道者; MPNMS T12:537a28-29, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 2:714). Commenting on this passage, Sengzong paraphrases the problem thus:

If the essence [= Buddha-nature?] [already] exists within the cause, and is enwrapped by ignorance, then [since the progression] from cause to result, to eliminate ignorance, is called “practice”, [and] the capacity to eliminate ignorance is already [inherent] within [the essence], it is established that it is meaningful to practice the path; but if no essence exists within the cause, then there is only arising and extinction, which is momentary and impermanent, and even in its

⁶⁸ As Nakanishi notes, this phrase (which may well be Baoliang’s own coinage; it is unattested before him) is relatively central to Baoliang’s understanding of Buddha-nature, *shenming*, *zhengyin* etc. (cf. also DBJJJ T37:447c17, 500b13, 547b10-11, 550a15-19, 555a2-4; see n. 69 below). Nakanishi further plausibly suggests that we may hear here an echo of Śrīm (also from the chapter on **prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta*): “If there were no such thing as *tathāgatagarbha*, it would not be possible to conceive of disgust for suffering and hanker after *nirvāṇa*, or seek it” (若無如來藏者，不得厭苦樂求涅槃，*tathāgatagarbhaś ced bhagavan na syān na syād duḥkhe ’pi nirvinna nirvāṇa icchā vā prārthanā vā praṇidhir veti*, T12:353.222b14-15; Ogawa, 2001: 200, 239; Wayman and Wayman, 1974: 105; Johnston, 1950: 36, 73; Takasaki, 1966: 221, 293) (Nakanishi, 1983: 115).

⁶⁹ 理中中道，即是一切眾生避苦求樂，解正因佛性。夫中道之義，本是稱理之心，然有神識者，無一剎那心中無有此解 (commenting on MPNMS T12:523b23-24, Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 2:653). In this same comment, Baoliang also cites Śrīm on **prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta*: “This is why Śrīm takes up the topic of *tathāgatagarbha* and **prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta*” (是以『勝鬘經』說出如來藏與自性清淨心，545b6-7); and says that both cause proper and conditions have Thusness as their essence (二因乃同用真如為體，545b12-13). This passage is discussed by Nakanishi (1983: 115).

⁷⁰ Commenting on MPNMS T12:530b17-19 (Yamamoto, 1973-1975: 2:685).

substance, [the sentient being] becomes extinct, [in which case,] who is there to practice the path, and attain *nirvāṇa*? (若因中有性，為惑所纏，從因至果除惑說修，既有除惑之功，則修道義立。若因中無性，則唯是生滅，念念無常，當體自滅，誰有修道至涅槃耶? DBJJJ T37:560b2-5).

The echoes with Wudi's problematic are obvious: the meaning and nature of practice; and the problem of "Who becomes Buddha?" in face of the momentariness of the constituents of the ordinary sentient being. Even further echoes of Wudi and Shen Ji are heard when Baoliang says, in discussing this same passage, "One intent of this passage is to show that it is possible for the sentient being to practice the path, even though its *shenshi* is extinguished from moment to moment" (第一明眾生，神識雖念念滅，得有修道之義, DBJJJ T37:560b12-13).

These examples could be further multiplied, but full treatment of the background of Wudi's essay in the Buddhist exegetical studies of his time would require broaching unstudied problems in Chinese Buddhist doctrinal history, which lie far beyond the scope of this study. Even this cursory examination, however, should suffice to show that Wudi's essay is merely the tip of an iceberg of ideas current in his time, and quite representative of contemporary developments. Indeed, as Itō points out, facts like those discussed above, and the way Wudi made use of the expertise of such leading clerics in other textual projects and on other doctrinal issues, makes us suspect that the *Shenming cheng fo yi* might have been written with the input of some of these figures, and even represent a kind of collective, official position on the issues it addresses (Itō, 1986: 239). Hopefully, the above examination will also serve to demonstrate that Wudi's essay has deep roots in scripture, and the scholastic engagement with those sources that animated his Buddhist world; indeed, that his essay cannot properly be understood without reference to this broader intertextual framework.

In sum, then, Wudi's essay, in conjunction with Shen Ji's more expansive comments, marks a significant new stage in the development of the ideas we are examining. These ideas had formed in the hands of the learned Southern exegete monks that Wudi gathered around him early in his reign, out of the encounter between the topics of earlier contro-

versies about survival of death, as sharpened by the provocative polemic of Fan Zhen, with the new scholastic engagement with the Abhidharmic categories of the **Tattvasiddhi*, the Buddha-nature and causality doctrines of MPNMS, and the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Śrīm. In this new synthesis, the focus is now upon consciousness less as the thread of continuity between ordinary incarnations, but rather, as the thread of continuity between the deluded and the liberated state. The distinction between an underlying, substantial or essential ground and a surface, epiphenomenal level of functioning in mind allows for an attempted resolution of the relation between ordinary momentary *vijñāna* (in a sense apparently indebted to Abhidharma) and an original, pure mind/consciousness which enables liberation and perhaps, by implication, endures into the liberated state. The texts clearly claim that this underlying essential substratum of mind-cum-consciousness is aboriginally pure and luminous. Obviously, in this latter dimension of the doctrines, the old theme of liberation as a return to the origin endures, even if it remains largely implicit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the notion of “consciousness” (*vijñāna*), under a variety of labels, but most importantly called *shenshi/shishen*, became increasingly important in medieval Chinese debates about the survival of death. Related developments were seen in the use of the broader term “mind” (*xin*), and in the use of the term *shenming*. This study has traced those developments, most importantly, through Zong Bing; an anonymous Liu Song monastic author; Liang Wudi and Shen Ji; and previously under-explored context for the latter in the exegetical scholarship of the late fifth and early sixth century, especially Baoliang and Sengzong. These authors all ground their arguments more in Buddhist scripture than other contributors to the debates (including Huiyuan), who, by contrast, had a tendency to appeal to Chinese classics (with an emphasis on the neo-Daoist canon). These developments therefore seem to be linked to an ongoing process of increasing engagement with new scriptural sources translated around the turn of the fifth century, especially MPNMS, Śrīm and the

**Tattvasiddhi*; and especially with developments in scholastic comment and system-building on the basis of those sources.

Already from Zong Bing, these authors link *vijñāna* to the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, where, of course, the concept already played a pivotal role in theories of the precise mechanism of rebirth (see below). *Vijñāna* was understood by these authors to be a continuum or succession of momentary states of mind, a dimension of its significance which puzzled our anonymous Liu Song monastic author; the resolution of the dilemma posed by survival of death by a momentary entity is a central agenda for Wudi. Again beginning with Zong Bing, we see indications of the trope of a fundamentally pure mind which needs cleansing from adventitious defilements, and this aspect of the doctrine merely increases in strength over time as well. Behind this doctrine, we can discern the shadowy presence of liberation as a “return to the origin”. As this dimension of these ideas suggests, from Zong Bing onwards, the concepts of *vijñāna* and mind in question were not only applied to resolve the dilemma of rebirth for ordinary sentient beings, and the continuity through successive lifetimes of ordinary *karma*; they were also connected to the problem of liberation, and there was a growing sense in which the entities so named figured as a kind of “subject” of liberation. Throughout these developments, further, the link to Buddha-nature doctrine grows increasingly clear, until in Wudi, Shenji, Baoliang and Sengzong, it is made explicit by clear and pivotal reference to MPNMS and Śrīm.

Previous scholars have often taken these entire debates about the survival of death by the spirit as evidence for, and an important part of, the “sinification” of Buddhist concepts. According to such a reading, Chinese Buddhists did not appreciate *anātman* doctrine, and could not understand the ins and outs of a theory of reincarnation without an essence of the person to act as the vehicle of rebirth. They thus wound up ironically propounding an “*ātmavāda*” in the name of Buddhist apologetics; that is, they attempted to convince their skeptical non-Buddhist contemporaries that a transmigrating person *did* exist, when the essence of Buddhist orthodoxy in India was precisely to hold, controversially, that it did not.

I hope that this study will help to show that such a reading is excessively simplistic (cf. Nakanishi, 1983: 120-121). First, such arguments

typically overlook the fact that key terms in the more sophisticated versions of the Buddhist position that developed over time were linked to *vijñāna*, not to a “self”, a “person” or any concept directly commensurable with the polemical targets of *anātman* doctrine. Second, it can be shown that important aspects of ideas about *vijñāna* and related concepts in India were directly comparable to important parts of the doctrines of consciousness traced in this paper.⁷¹ Third, the uses of *vijñāna* traced here through fifth and sixth century debates also have a longer history in China than is usually recognized.⁷² As Itō Takatoshi has suggested, these notions may have had their origin in the translation of *jātaka/avadāna* literature, which required, in the Chinese context, that readers be given an explanation of how a person could be “the same” across multiple lifetimes, merely in order that the plotlines of the literature in question could be understood (Itō, 1986: 219-200). Examination of these deeper roots in Chinese Buddhist texts strengthen the claim that Chinese Buddhist doctrines about the “survival of death” could legitimately trace their provenance and pedigree back to India; as indeed, as we have seen, this is also the case when we more accurately trace the actual scriptural sources of the ideas of Wudi and his contemporaries. In this light, it is far from certain that we require a hypothesis of “sinification” to account for the ideas under study.

As I mentioned in opening, this paper is intended as part of a larger study into the possible background of **amalavijñāna* doctrine in both India and China, also taken as a case study in the problem of supposed “sinification” of Buddhist ideas. The ideas traced in this paper have many resonances with the shape eventually assumed by **amalavijñāna* doctrine: they concern a type of *vijñāna*, specifically linked to the problem of rebirth in *saṃsāra* through the *karmic* efficacy of defilements; but this *vijñāna*, in a Janus-faced manner, also has an aspect that is directed

⁷¹ The details required to demonstrate this lie beyond my scope here (see Radich, 2008: 95-97, and studies cited there; to which should be added Vetter, 2000: 66-73, and the studies he cites at 68-69).

⁷² Demonstration of this claim is once again beyond the scope of the present paper. I address this problem in the companion piece to the present article (Radich, in preparation).

towards liberation, which is understood as a purification of an original or underlying substrate of the mind, and so has possible connections to *tathāgatagarbha*, Buddha-nature, Thusness, and so forth. I certainly think it is true, then, that the ideas traced here could be regarded as forerunners to, and possible influences upon, the eventual formation of **amala-vijñāna* doctrine, as is also true of a number of other ideas current in China in roughly the same period, such as the antecedents to “survival of death” debates already mentioned; the trope of liberation as a “return to the origin”; aspects of the doctrines of the early **Buddhāvataṃsaka* commentator Lingbian (靈辯, 477–522) and of the Dilun master Fashang (法上, 495–580); and so on. By the same token, however, I also hold that we can identify similarly ample possible antecedents to **amala-vijñāna* in Indian materials.⁷³ It is therefore not possible to claim simply that **amala-vijñāna* is necessarily either entirely Indian or entirely Chinese (though this has been the typical strategy of most scholars who have analyzed the concept and its history to date). This leads to methodological reflections on the ways the problem of the possible “sinification” of Buddhist ideas might be addressed, but such considerations will have to await future research.

Abbreviations

AKBh	<i>Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya</i>
AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ch.	Chinese
D	Derge
DBJJJ	<i>Da banniepan jing ji jie</i> (大般涅槃經集解) T1763
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
GSZ	<i>Gao seng zhuan</i> (高僧傳) T2059
HMJ	<i>Hong ming ji</i> (弘明集) T2102
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
MPNMS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> (T374 etc.)
PTS	Pali Text Society

⁷³ Radich (unpublished).

SA	<i>Samyuktāgama</i> T99, T100
Skt.	Sanskrit
Śrīm	<i>Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> (大正新脩大藏經). Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, 2008. References to the Taishō follow the order: volume number: text number. page/register/line number. Thus, e.g. T8:225.483b17 is volume 8, text number 225, page 483, second register, line 17. I omit text numbers when using abbreviated titles, e.g. MPNMS, DBJJJ, HMJ.
Tib.	Tibetan
X	<i>Shinsan dai Nippon zokuzōkyō</i> (已新纂大日本續藏經). References formatted as for T.

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