

A SELF-AGGRANDIZING VEHICLE:  
*TATHĀGATAGARBHA, TĪRTHIKAS, AND THE TRUE SELF*

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**The Buddhist *Ātmavāda***

One of the most influential strands of Mahāyāna thought, at least as it was received outside of the Indian subcontinent, was that espousing the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, which affirmed the existence of some permanent, unchanging nature within the constitution of sentient beings; in several texts referred to also as the essential nature of a Buddha (*\*buddhadhātu*).<sup>1</sup> Some of the earliest surviving Indian texts reflecting this doctrine, among them the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, went so far as to declare that this essential nature can be called the self (*ātman*) of any sentient being. This is in apparent contradiction to the more conventional Buddhist position of *anātman*, which holds that it is inappropriate to discuss the constitution of any sentient being in terms of the presence (or indeed absence) of a permanent, unchanging *ātman*, or “self.” Indian

<sup>1</sup> I supply an asterisk wherever referring to terms such as *\*buddhadhātu* and *\*ātmadhātu*, which are not attested in extant Sanskrit fragments of the *tathāgatagarbha* sources under discussion. However the presence in surviving translations of terms which in all probability reflect these, for example the Tibetan *sangs rgyas kyi khams* and *bdag kyi dbyings/khams*, permit us to discuss with some certainty the use of these specific expressions in underlying Indic texts. See further n. 27; also Radich 2015a: 23–32.

It is clear that some *tathāgatagarbha* authors used both the terms *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddhadhātu* – both seemingly *tatpuruṣa* compounds – to refer to a permanent element (*dhātu*) that belongs to sentient beings, said to be somehow within their bodies: see e.g. Habata 2014. Shimoda Masahiro’s model of the evolution of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (MPNMS) prioritized *\*buddhadhātu* as the older of these terms in the text’s composition; the *dhātu* being the permanent, bodily element of a Buddha, akin to that which would be preserved in a *stūpa*, concealed in the constitution of all beings. A likely understanding of the term *tathāgatagarbha* in the MPNMS is then that beings possess a chamber (*garbha*) for a *tathāgata*, and so can be said to have a *tathāgatagarbha* in their bodies: see Shimoda 1997: 283–292 (English portion 21–22); Radich 2015a: 159–168; also e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 12.885a5–6; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §391,14–16.

Buddhist literature in general holds instead that sentient beings are better understood exhaustively in terms of the five *skandhas*, themselves characterized by dependent arising and impermanence.<sup>2</sup>

It can be contended that *tathāgatagarbha* texts such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, which held that it is indeed correct to speak of sentient beings in terms of their having a permanent, unchanging self, are guilty of some lapse into the kinds of *ātman*-oriented metaphysics otherwise eschewed by Indian Buddhism. Non-Buddhist religious literature typical of classical India – for example the Brāhminic *Upaniṣads*, the *bhakti*-oriented *Bhagavadgītā*, and ‘*nāstika*’ Jain scriptures – frequently conceived of a true self or other lasting, essential nature that transmigrates and can, in some or other fashion, experience liberation from rebirth. The Buddhist tradition was meanwhile marked by a rejection of thinking in such terms; developing a sophisticated, alternative discourse which held such postulations to be erroneous and, ironically, the root cause of our continued suffering.<sup>3</sup> We might call this Buddhist discourse

<sup>2</sup> This is not to understand *anātman*, at least in the pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist discourses attributed to the Buddha, to constitute the negation of *any* notion of selfhood: a view that this literature holds to be an erroneous, annihilationist position (*ucchedavāda*: see e.g. the *Yamakasutta*, SN III 109–115). Rather, as articulated by Albahari (2002), the earlier discourses attributed to the Buddha reject metaphysical positions regarding the *ātman* – its existence or absence among the *skandhas* – in favour of *anātman* best understood as a method for promoting detachment from any notion of a lasting, essential nature. A not dissimilar reading is that of Wynne (2011), who charts the emergence of an interpretation of *anātman* closer to a denial of the self in Abhidharmic sources: one which perhaps had lost the nuance of earlier literature concerning this doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> I will not consider here the exceptional and non-Mahāyānist *pudgalavāda* or ‘personalist’ position, which was held by schools including the Sāmmītiyas and Vātsīputrīyas. This doctrine – concerned with the status of the person (*pudgala*) existing neither within nor apart from the *skandhas* – does not appear to have been an influence upon *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* authors. While both traditions share a concern for preserving some notion of personal continuity in a broader tradition concerned predominantly with impermanence, the *pudgalavāda* affirms personhood strictly in terms of saṃsāric existence, i.e. referring to a person dependent upon the *skandhas*, the ‘bearer’ of them as some ‘burden,’ and who is the subject of transmigration. For texts such as the MPNMS the self is instead that which is fully realized upon awakening: i.e. what is common between (1) a *sattva*, and subsequently (2) a Buddha. In other words, as far as *pudgalavāda* sources tell us their view was that the attainment of *nirvāṇa* results in the end of anything that could have been deemed a self, whereas for *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* authors the goal of awakening is the manifestation of the true self, equated with Buddhahood. For a thorough account of *pudgalavāda* doctrine, see Priestley 1999.

– which spanned early literary occurrences of *anātman* doctrine in the Pāli *suttas*, the scholastic philosophy of the Abhidharma traditions, the Mahāyānist *prajñāpāramitā* literature and beyond – the Buddhist ‘*anātmavāda*.’<sup>4</sup>

What this article shall contend is that the earliest known sources in the *tathāgatagarbha* literature which seemingly depart from this discourse, those adopting forms of ‘Buddhist *ātmavāda*,’<sup>5</sup> did so not as any concession to the long-opposed doctrines of other religious traditions – as early audiences of these texts seem to have suspected – but rather as part of an attempt to affirm the primacy of the Buddhist *dharma* over other known doctrines and practices concerned with liberation from rebirth. Demonstrating this explores also the place of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in regards to an influential and conceptually fruitful development in the Indian Mahāyāna: reconceived as the single vehicle (*ekayāna*) towards liberation, into which the ‘inferior’ vehicles of earlier Buddhist practice were, in a fashion, subsumed and devalued.<sup>6</sup> Authors of what we can call ‘*ātmavādin*’ *tathāgatagarbha* texts contended defensively that non-Buddhist accounts of selfhood must have somehow misunderstood the Buddha’s own doctrine of *ātman*. It was a mechanism associated with the ‘ekayānist’ doctrinal paradigm, I shall argue, which assisted authors in explaining away comparable models of liberation as instruments of the Buddha’s expansive soteriological programme. Said programme – the full

<sup>4</sup> It is certainly the case that Abhidharmic and Mahāyānist articulations of *anātman* doctrine are what we can call metaphysical, i.e. attempting to present accounts of what properly exists: be these substantial *dharmas* or reality understood in terms of *śūnyatā*, *tathatā* etc., though this may not have been what was intended by, or frequently understood of, earlier discourses attributed to the Buddha. Either way, it is true to say that the dominant discourse across Indian Buddhist literature articulated an account of beings without recourse to the category of any permanent, unchanging self, regardless of how one branch or another of Buddhist tradition approached this matter. It is this kind of discourse that I am here calling *anātmavāda*.

<sup>5</sup> I use *ātmavāda* to refer to any doctrine, Buddhist or otherwise, that has at its centre the affirmation of some unchanging notion of selfhood considered to deserve the label *ātman*. Hence while the authors of texts like the MPNMS distinguish their doctrine from all erroneous forms of *ātmavāda*, their own positions (albeit couched throughout in terms of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and aimed at realizing specifically the qualities of a Buddha) still deserve to be categorized as such.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of this doctrine, likely an innovation of the SPS itself, see Williams 2009: 152–155; also Kunst 1977; Hubbard 1995.

extent of the Mahāyāna – directs all beings towards the realization of full awakening; or, in the innovative language of these *ātmavādin tathāgata-garbha* authors, liberation of their essential “Buddha-nature,” which can be called also one’s true self.

The key texts in this discussion belong to what has been called the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*-group of *sūtras*: a set of texts composed in India no later than the early fifth century, and containing likely some of the earliest expressions of *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Of particular significance among these are the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (MPNMS) itself and the *Aṅgulimālīyasūtra* (AMS), which – along with the likely later *\*Mahābherīsūtra* (MBhS) – use the term *ātman* to designate the *tathāgata-garbha*; seemingly, and it seems by their authors’ own admission, generating confusion of their doctrine for that of non-Buddhist *ātmavādin* traditions.<sup>8</sup>

In his recent work concerning the MPNMS, Michael Radich has argued that this text presents likely the earliest form of *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine that is available to us. In contradiction to the earlier, extensive overview of the *tathāgata-garbha* literature produced by Takasaki Jikidō, Radich holds that the MPNMS does not reflect some derivative or (regarding its *ātmavādin* position) more ‘radical’ development of a supposedly older form of *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine, represented by texts such as the *Tathāgata-garbhasūtra* (TGS), *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādasūtra* (ŚDS) and *Anūnatvāpūrnatvanirdeśa* (AAN).<sup>9</sup> These other works all

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Takasaki 1975: 127; Suzuki 2002: 22; Radich 2015a: 34–35, 97–99, also appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup> No complete Sanskrit versions of any of these texts remain, however it is clear that in extant Chinese and Tibetan translations of them the term *ātman* (我 or *bdag*, respectively) was understood to denote the *tathāgata-garbha*. The AMS is noteworthy for preferring the term *\*ātmadhātu* (discussed later) over *ātman*, though it shall be seen that its authors still understood the Buddha to have taught the existence of a self as part of his explanation of the *tathāgata-garbha*. Regarding the relative dating of the AMS, especially in regards to the *\*Mahābherīsūtra*, see Suzuki 2000. For a recent overview of this literature, see Radich 2015b: 264–269.

<sup>9</sup> See Radich 2015a: 23–34. Radich opposes the picture of the *tathāgata-garbha* literature presented by Takasaki (1975: 768–769), which posits the TGS, ŚDS and AAN, together with the RGV(V), to constitute a ‘main current’ of *tathāgata-garbha* thought in India, with the MPNMS-group of texts somewhat sidelined. In a future publication I will explore how far we can discern a development of ideas concerning selfhood throughout

argue for the existence of some reality that is the permanently present, essential nature of sentient beings, without ever deeming it to be a ‘self’: a contrast to a central position of the MPNMS. However they do not attempt to defend the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in general, nor confront any objections that might have occurred to audiences: major concerns of the MPNMS, AMS and MBhS. Moreover, it appears likely that the ŚDS – which provides the doctrinal backbone for the one lasting Indian śāstric authority on this doctrine, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāgaśāstra* (RGV) and its commentary (RGVV) – together with the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS), may well contain material responding to and opposing an older, *ātmavādin* form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine represented by the MPNMS, AMS and MBhS.<sup>10</sup> We must then entertain the possibility that the earliest *tathāgatagarbha* sources known to us presented their doctrine as one of a permanent,

the *tathāgatagarbha* literature as a whole. It is in the meantime clear that the relationship of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine to the category *ātman*, as well as perceived confusion of it for non-Buddhist traditions concerned with the self, is a recurring theme of the MPNMS-group, ŚDS, LAS, and the RGV(V), along with other śāstric sources that refer to the *tathāgatagarbha*. Regarding the TGS, see n. 26; concerning selfhood across these texts more broadly, see Kanō 2016: 385-391.

<sup>10</sup> It is not certain that authors of either the ŚDS or LAS, in denying the appropriateness of the category of selfhood in regards to the *tathāgatagarbha*, had in mind the MPNMS, though evidence suggests this to be likely. The LAS certainly knows of the MPNMS and AMS, mentioning both as authorities in its promotion of vegetarianism (Nanjio 1923: 258,4), and its opposition to the *tathāgatagarbha* conceived in *ātmavādin* terms certainly evokes the language of the MPNMS: see nn. 104 and 119.

The ŚDS employs an account of the (inverted) *viparyāsa*s similar to that found in the MPNMS, and affirms, with three other “perfections,” the *ātmāpāramitā* or “perfection of self” to characterize the *dharmakāya* (see ŚDS: T.353, 222a18–a26; comparing e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862a5–14). It is significant that the ŚDS, unlike the MPNMS, does not attribute selfhood to the *tathāgatagarbha* itself, but only *ātmāpāramitā* to the *dharmakāya*, and is otherwise adamant that the terms *ātman*, *sattva*, *jīva* or *pudgala* are not appropriate designators for the *tathāgatagarbha* (T.353, 222b19–b21). I find it likely that the ŚDS reflects some desire to develop *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine away from any similarity to an *ātmavādin* position, purposefully employing the positive expressions found in the MPNMS to describe only the *dharmakāya*, which is the *tathāgatagarbha* subsequent to its having been cleansed of adventitious afflictions (a formulation developed in greater sophistication by the RGVV: see n. 31). For more on this likely debt of the ŚDS to the MPNMS, see Shimoda 1991.

Finally, the *Anūnatvāpūrnatvanirdeśa* makes no reference to the *tathāgatagarbha* in terms of selfhood, though I agree with Silk (2015: 11–13) that this text appears to owe a debt of influence to the ŚDS, which would have clarified already how the *tathāgatagarbha* is unbefitting of the term *ātman*.

essential nature of a Buddha (*\*buddhadhātu*) in all beings, which authors also held warranted designation as – in the words of the MPNMS – the ‘true self’ of sentient beings:<sup>11</sup>

The Buddha said to Kāśyapa: the true self is the nature of the *tathāgata*. You should know that all sentient beings have this; it is just that being covered by the immeasurable afflictions of those sentient beings it is not manifested.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout its account of this true self the MPNMS certainly shows an awareness that its content crosses some kind of doctrinal Rubicon into foreign, *ātmavādin* territory. Its account of the self, indeed of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a whole, is a defensive one, and elaborated at great length through responses to the incredulity of the *bodhisattva* Kāśyapa, the Buddha’s interlocutor in this part of the *sūtra*.<sup>13</sup> The authors of the

For accounts of the relative dating of *tathāgatagarbha* sources see Takasaki 1975: 119–120, 167; also Radich 2015a: 92–96. For a recent discussion of issues in transmission regarding relevant material of the RGVV, see Ruegg 2015: 317–320; for a recent treatment of the development of this text, see Kanō 2014.

<sup>11</sup> See also Hodge 2010/2012: 42–43; 53–54; 82–84. Hodge argues that the *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented material of the MPNMS was originally concerned with promoting a doctrine of a self in sentient beings, the language of which was gradually redacted towards the *tathāgatagarbha*/*\*buddhadhātu* position represented in versions of the text available to us today.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 883b15–17: 佛告迦葉：真實我者，是如來性。當知一切衆生悉有，但彼衆生，無量煩惱覆蔽不現。Compare MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §376,1–5; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 407b9–10.

<sup>13</sup> The majority of material concerning the *tathāgatagarbha* as a kind of self appears in a set of responses to questions voiced by the *bodhisattva* Kāśyapa. For more on the *arhat* Kāśyapa’s role in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, particularly as representing the continuity of the Buddha’s influence in the world after his apparent departure, see Silk 2003 and Tournier 2014.

The list of Kāśyapa’s misgivings with the teaching of a true self differs across our extant versions of the MPNMS, though the shortest (perhaps earliest) such list occurs at MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 883c7–c18. Herein, Kāśyapa asks how a self could be posited in light of given facts such as the increase in any person’s knowledge over time (a self being something unchanging); the grim realities of birth and death; apparent differentiation between beings (in terms of *varṇas*) determined by *karma*; the wickedness of beings who kill, steal etc.; disability or deformity; and the requirement for the self to reside somewhere, in some discernable fashion, in the body (which, on inspection, it does not). Compare MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 407c20–c26; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §379. Complaints such as these not only strongly suggest real-world objection to a Buddhist account of a self, but also confirm what our authors believed their audience(s) to consider this term to denote: i.e. an unchanging kernel; immune to death and subsequent rebirth; of virtuous and unblemished character; which should be

MPNMS were clearly aware that their ideas jarred with what had previously been received of the *dharma* – that the doctrine of a ‘Buddhist self’ profoundly contradicts what had otherwise been taught – and keenly argue that theirs is not any self known through the language of extraneous religious teachers, or so-called *tīrthikas*.<sup>14</sup> This defensiveness is present also in the AMS, which seems even more aware of non-Buddhist musings on the nature of the self, many of which are reminiscent of the *ātmavādin* perspectives of the *Upaniṣads*, and which is just as adamant as the MPNMS that none of these properly describe the *tathāgatagarbha* that is one’s true self.<sup>15</sup>

Adopting even a carefully qualified *ātmavāda* position seems to have invited confusion and consternation among Buddhist audiences, along with accusations of promoting a false representation of the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>16</sup> It is then clear, and perhaps not surprising, that authors of the MPNMS and AMS faced opposition in advancing such a doctrine, and noteworthy that what are likely later contributions to the evolution of the *tathāgatagarbha* idea, such as those found in the ŚDS, explicitly disassociated this teaching from the language of selfhood.<sup>17</sup> The relative

shared by and undifferentiated across all sentient beings; and which is discernible by them in their constitution.

<sup>14</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 863a9–a16; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 378c28–c29; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §107, 13–27. I choose to leave the term *tīrthika* untranslated, though take it to refer always to teachers belonging to non-Buddhist religious traditions. In particular I reject the still common and very problematic rendering of *tīrthikas* as “heretics:” such a translation is misleading, as the term certainly refers to teachers or religious practitioners extraneous to the Buddhist *saṅgha*; in the language of Western religious history “heretic” commonly denotes those who hold unconventional views *within* the fold of a given tradition. An elegant neologism worthy of further consideration is “allodoxes,” employed by Scherrer-Schaub 1991: xli, n. 63, also 1999: 71, and more recently Eltschinger 2014a: 36, n. 3; 2014b: 194, n. 14. This would reflect well the literal meaning of the common Chinese translation of *tīrthika* as 外道.

<sup>15</sup> See AMS<sup>C</sup> 525b7–14; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 151b1–b4; Q.879, 158b3–b7. Herein we find mention of misguided notions of the self as comparable to the size of a thumb or various grains, featured also in the MPNMS (discussed later); also said to be of various colours, or situated in various locations in the body. Regarding colours of the self in other Indian traditions, see Balcerowicz 2016: 44–54. See also n. 44.

<sup>16</sup> The MPNMS states that its doctrine will be slandered and considered a product of Māra: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 881a9–29; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 404a1–23; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §347–348; also Radich 2015a: 33–34.

<sup>17</sup> See n. 10.

dating of these texts aside, it remains of curiosity why and by what kind of motivation authors of the MPNMS and associated works chose to adopt the language of a self in advancing *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine; inviting predictable opposition from Buddhist audiences who would likely have heard time and again that the Buddha's understanding of personhood avoided recourse to any such category.

Evidence in both the MPNMS and the AMS (which seems in many ways to be its doctrinal successor) suggests that the language of selfhood not only described how their authors conceived of the *tathāgatagarbha* – as a Buddha or awakened subject permanently resident in the constitution of sentient beings – but also facilitated an explanation of the relationship their doctrine had to other, non-Buddhist discourses concerning liberation.<sup>18</sup> It appears that both works supposed the scope of the Buddha's influence in *samsāra* to be greater and more diverse than was immediately apparent to their audiences: a feature of the ekayānist understanding of the Mahāyāna under whose influence many *tathāgatagarbha* sources seem to have been.

### The True Self of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*

The MPNMS is a Mahāyānist retelling of the final days and teaching of Buddha Śākyamuni, based on a narrative found also, for example, in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the Pāli canon.<sup>19</sup> We possess complete versions of three recensions of the text: the shortest through its translation into Chinese by Faxian and Buddhahadra (MPNMS<sup>C1</sup>) between 416–418 CE; the longest being that also into Chinese by Dharmakṣema (MPNMS<sup>C2</sup>) some time between 421–432 CE;<sup>20</sup> and the third being an early ninth century translation into Tibetan (MPNMS<sup>T</sup>) by Jinamitra, Jñānagarbha

<sup>18</sup> It is apparent that the *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* of sources like the MPNMS, affirming the existence of something like an awakened *subject*, can be contrasted to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the ŚDS, AAN and LAS, perhaps a later development, in which this refers to something more like an awakened *substrate* underpinning the existence and liberation of sentient beings. For more on this cautious distinction, see Jones 2016, esp. pp. 113–115.

<sup>19</sup> See DN II 72–168.

<sup>20</sup> This dating of Dharmakṣema's translation work rests on when he is understood to have arrived at Guzang, somewhere between 412 and 421 CE. See Chen 2004 for further discussion of this matter.



and Devacandra (e.g. D.120; Q.788).<sup>21</sup> Notably MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> is around three times the length of the other two translations, though the latter two thirds consist of material found in neither of the others, nor in any extant Sanskrit fragments. This additional material (not necessarily of Indian origin) certainly reflects a more developed take on the *tathāgatagarbha* as *ātman*, which though requiring further study has little bearing on understanding an earlier, common core of *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented material shared by all other extant versions of the MPNMS.<sup>22</sup>

A significant narrative feature of the MPNMS in all versions is that it does not recount the Buddha's actual death. In MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> and MPNMS<sup>T</sup> (together with the first portion of the much longer MPNMS<sup>C2</sup>) the narrative stops short of the Buddha's final moments, though does not state that the Buddha did not at least appear to afterwards depart from the world. A central position of the MPNMS is that the Buddha's enduring existence is apart from what is seen of his activity manifested in the world.<sup>23</sup> As such, the MPNMS is an account of the final days of the Buddha in which it is revealed that his 'passing over' into *nirvāṇa* is not a transition into irrelevance, but rather that he persists and remains influential in *samsāra*.

<sup>21</sup> Available also are 34 published Sanskrit fragments of the text from Central Asia, and a single folio preserved at Kōyasan: see Habata 2007; 2009; Radich 2015a: 21. An important quotation of the MPNMS is preserved also in the RGVV: see Johnston 1991 [1950]: 74,20–75,12.

In a later publication I shall provide full critical editions of the passages discussed throughout this article. In the meantime, material consulted here is drawn from the Taishō edition of the Chinese canon (T), along with the Derge (D) and Peking (Q) editions of the Tibetan *bka' gyur*. In the case of MPNMS<sup>T</sup>, we are lucky to have the critical edition of the text produced by Habata 2013, to which I refer throughout this article.

<sup>22</sup> For more on this material of the MPNMS, see Fujii 1993. The discussion of the *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* in Ruegg 1989: 19–26 is limited to consideration of passages drawn from a Tibetan translation of MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> (e.g. D.121; Q.789), and focuses on material exclusive to Dharmakṣema's version of the text. While valuable in regards to the evolution and later reception of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine this is of less help in consideration of an earlier 'core' text of the MPNMS.

<sup>23</sup> As Radich (2015a: 129–132) has demonstrated, the MPNMS contends that the correct understanding of the Buddha is as the *dharmakāya*, which is apart from any worldly displays of the Buddha's physical body: e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 866a16–18: 善男子，如來身者，是常住身，是不壞身，是金剛身，非穢食身。是則法身，當作是觀 – “Good son, the body of the *tathāgata* is a permanently abiding body, an indestructible body, a *vajra*-body, not a body [sustained by] unclean food; thus see it to be the *dharmakāya*.” Compare MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 382c27–29; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §144. See also Radich 2011 [2012].

An influential stratification of the development of the MPNMS was proposed by Shimoda Masahiro, and takes the original core of the text to have been concerned with the Buddha's permanent existence.<sup>24</sup> Shimoda's argument sees the doctrinal transition from this earlier material of the MPNMS to its *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented content as an internalization of the Buddha's persisting bodily relic (*dhātu*) within the bodies of sentient beings, in such a fashion that emphasis shifts from affirming the permanent (but apparently absent) figure of the Buddha to the also permanent (but commonly indiscernible) 'essential nature' (also *dhātu*) of a Buddha resident in all sentient beings.<sup>25</sup> This later material of the MPNMS concerned with an 'embodied' *\*buddhadhātu* sees the inclusion of a form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine; one which, as Radich argues, may be the earliest known to us and may have grown out of the notion of an internalized and indestructible 'essence' of a Buddha.<sup>26</sup>

The MPNMS uses the terms *\*buddhadhātu* and *tathāgatagarbha* to refer to the lasting presence of some awakened essence in the constitution

<sup>24</sup> See Shimoda 1997: 163–171 (English portion 13); also Shimoda 2015. Radich (2015a: 21–22; appendix 4) has proposed a simpler reworking of this stratification that sees the earlier content of MPNMS (i.e. MPNMS-dhk) end more cleanly at MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 868a17; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 385b5; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §168.

<sup>25</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 885a5–8; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 410a6–a9; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> § 391,14–16. See also Shimoda 1997: 278–298 (English portion 22); Radich 2015a: 159–168.

<sup>26</sup> This overturns the older position, advanced by Zimmermann (2002), that the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (TGS) might constitute our earliest source for the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. As Radich (2015a: 32–57) argues, the TGS does not attempt to explain or defend this doctrine or any aspect of it, and instead likely introduced the expression *tathāgatagarbha* from elsewhere after it had, perhaps, earned some acceptance in wider Buddhist circles. Meanwhile it is clear that acceptance of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is a major concern of the MPNMS-group: see also n. 13. Moreover, the term *tathāgatagarbha* appears only in what Zimmermann (2002: 28–32) had identified as likely the latest material of the TGS, and hence this text – though a rich source of imagery expounding a doctrine of the intrinsically awakened nature of sentient beings – may well not reflect the early development of the *tathāgatagarbha* idea as closely as the MPNMS. All versions of the MPNMS mention by name some *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, though Radich (2015a: 37–40; after Hodge 2010/2012: 36, n. 66) argues that this may be self-referential, i.e. in description of the MPNMS itself: a feature discernable also in versions of the AMS, MBhS and SDS.

However, the suggestion that the MPNMS reflects the *tathāgatagarbha* in a stage of development earlier than in any other known source does not rule out that this expression may have developed outside of the MPNMS known to us today. See Habata 2014: 156, suggesting that the *tathāgatagarbha* as it appears in the MPNMS presumes audiences to have some familiarity with it.

of sentient beings, which remains indiscernible as long as the possessor lacks the vision of a Buddha.<sup>27</sup> As sentient beings are mired by afflictions (*kleśas*: see quotation above), this nature remains hidden, and so they continue to transmigrate and suffer. Significantly, this *tathāgatagarbha* is also deemed by the MPNMS to be a ‘self,’ sometimes qualified in our translations as the ‘true self’ of sentient beings (seen, once again, in the quotation above): an epithet which Indian Buddhist audiences, as much as modern readers, would associate more with non-Buddhist accounts of liberation.

It is apparent that the authors of the MPNMS considered a plethora of objections, either already posed or perhaps preempted, which audiences would have had with this essential nature of sentient beings being presented in such terms.<sup>28</sup> These criticisms are confronted by the MPNMS through a series of parables and similes, claiming also that the *tathāgatagarbha* is not a self as found in any non-Buddhist systems, but that in distinction from these is that which can properly be called the *true* self.

For the earliest occurrence of a comparison between the true self and erroneous ideas of other teachers, we are however required to address what is likely the literary pre-history of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in the MPNMS. Whether or not one accepts models of the development of the text proposed by either Shimoda or Radich, it is certainly the case that for a significant portion of the MPNMS no mention is made of any kind of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, nor is there shown any interest in the possible presence of awakened qualities in the constitution of sentient beings. This is the stratum of the MPNMS which Radich considers to be

<sup>27</sup> Extant translations of the MPNMS reflect preference for terms that seem to render *tathāgatagarbha* (e.g. 如来藏; *de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po*) over *\*buddhadhātu* (e.g. 佛性; *sangs rgyas kyi kham*): see Radich 2015a: appendix 1. Lack of agreement between versions of the MPNMS regarding which Indic term might have occurred where, as well as the absence of the term *\*buddhadhātu* in any extant Sanskrit fragment of the text, should discourage over-thinking the apparent use of one term over the other, ostensibly *tathāgatagarbha* and *\*buddha-/tathāgatadhātu*, underlying any particular lines of our surviving translations. As such, Radich (2015a: 24–32, also 159–168) criticizes the view that the MPNMS advances a doctrine of the “*\*buddhadhātu*” as distinct from, or worse still derivative of, the *tathāgatagarbha*, even if the former term may have led to the adoption, or possibly generation (Radich 2015a: 166–167), of the latter.

<sup>28</sup> See n. 13.

concerned with the permanence of the Buddha understood in terms of his indestructible *dharmakāya* (a stratum that he calls MPNMS-dhk). This very likely pre-dates material in the MPNMS concerned with the doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* (MPNMS-tg); content which, according to Shimoda's earlier hypothesis, developed through the idea of an internalized relic of the Buddha (*\*buddhadhātu*) that resides in all sentient beings.<sup>29</sup>

Material belonging to MPNMS-dhk enigmatically refers to Buddhahood itself in terms of *ātman*, prior to any mention of this being a fitting designator for the *tathāgatagarbha* itself (indeed, before this idea under any name has been mentioned in the text). MPNMS-dhk discusses four distortions (*viparyāsas*) that occur in comprehension of worldly things, which in earlier Buddhist sources commonly describe the errors of attributing *ātman*, *nitya*, *sukha*, or *śubha* to any *dharma* that in reality lacks these.<sup>30</sup> However in material of MPNMS-dhk that survives in Sanskrit (via quotation by the RGVV) the Buddha affirms that these positive attributes do indeed have value, and are what this fragment calls the supreme qualities (*paramadharmā*) that characterize the *dharmakāya*.<sup>31</sup> Following its account of these four qualities, the MPNMS proceeds to defend only its use of the term *ātman*, perhaps implying that among these four positive attributions it was this expression that proved the most difficult for early audiences to accept.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See n. 25.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. in the *Vipallāsasutta*: see AN II 52.

<sup>31</sup> See Johnston 1991 [1950]: 75,6–12; also Ruegg 1969: 364–370. This material in the Sanskrit RGVV seems to accord closest with that found in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> (862b21), which calls the correct position apart from the four distortions the “true *dharma*(s)” (眞實法): best understood as the “true qualities” which characterize awakening. Inversion of the *viparyāsas* to affirm positive attributes of awakening is found also in the *Mahāmeghasūtra* (T.387, 1082a18–20), in a passage that Suzuki (2001) argues is evidence of exchange between this text and the pre-*tathāgatagarbha* material of the MPNMS.

<sup>32</sup> This portion of MPNMS-dhk equates the four positive attributes to four categories of what is supermundane: *ātman* = *Buddha*; *nitya* = *dharmakāya*; *sukha* = *nirvāṇa*; *śubha* = *dharma*: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862a13–14; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 377b21–22; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §101, 10–13. Hodge (2012: 42) suggests that this is likely a later interpolation inserted into the main text, meant to clarify what is certainly a challenging and unclear passage. But presumably this does not extend to the rest of this portion of MPNMS-dhk, concerning as it does *ātman* as befitting the supermundane, in contrast to its meaninglessness in regards to what is only worldly: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862a5–14; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 377b7–c12; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §100–101.

The authors of this material were clearly under no illusion that use of the term *ātman* to refer to an aspect of liberated reality evoked comparison with the ideas of *tīrthikas*. But importantly the introduction of the claim that the Buddha might be described as *ātman* is here not apropos of sentient beings at all; rather, a somewhat special usage of the term *ātman* to refer to the Buddha is distinguished from anything resembling the ideas of rival teachers. Later use of the term *ātman*, in MPNMS-tg, features a second account of the *viparyāsas* clearly distinct from that found in MPNMS-dhk; one in which *ātman* is taken now to refer specifically to the *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>33</sup> Hence this material of MPNMS-dhk pre-dated, but informed in a significant fashion, the *ātmavādin* form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine that would later more properly contrast with *anātmavādin* discourse concerning how one should understand sentient beings.

The key passage of MPNMS-dhk defending the Buddha's use of the term *ātman*, as well as belittling the doctrines of *tīrthikas*, features in a lengthy parable that compares the Buddha to a skilled physician, who is said to replace in his duties another, ignorant doctor who is explained as representing the *tīrthikas*. In this parable the skilled physician alone knows when to prescribe to his patients a milk-based medicine, which had previously been prescribed for any and all ailments (and with understandably mixed results) by his ignorant predecessor.<sup>34</sup> In unpacking the meaning of this story, the Buddha of the MPNMS employs another, shorter comparison: between the aforementioned charlatan physician and the activities of some kind of woodworm.

For example, a sheet of wood possesses a trail of marks, which resemble the king's name, that have been eaten out by an insect. Those who are not skilled in writing consider these to be real letters; those who are skilled in writing know that they are not real. The former [unskilled] doctor was like this: even if [able to] concoct the milk-remedy, he did not discern the right time [to prescribe it].<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This longer account of the *viparyāsas* in MPNMS-tg makes clear that the correct understanding of *ātman* refers certainly to the *tathāgatagarbha* – i.e. some 'self' of sentient beings – while *anātmān* refers only to false notions of the self considered by worldly persons: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 883b3–5; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 407a20–26; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §373.

<sup>34</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862b24–863a3; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 378a17–c18; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §106.

<sup>35</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862c15–c17: 譬如板木有虫食跡，似王<sup>a</sup>名字。不善書者，謂是真字；其善書者，乃知非真<sup>b</sup>。先醫如是：雖合乳藥，不知分別時節所應。

In the subsequent explanation of this passage, in which it is made clear that these insects correspond to the *tīrthikas* and their teaching regarding the self, the MPNMS states that the doctrine of *anātman* was taught by the Buddha in order to undermine extraneous *ātmavāda* positions; *not* because in truth there is nothing properly befitting designation as the self. The most concise form of this thought is presented by MPNMS<sup>T</sup>.

In order to subjugate the *tīrthikas*, I said that there was no *ātman*, no *sattva*, no *jīva*, no *pudgala*.

The *tīrthikas*' teaching of an existing self is like the letters carved out by insects; hence I teach that in all beings there is no self.<sup>36</sup>

This is likely the earliest surviving literary defence of the term *ātman* as a designator for the Buddha (though not, as it came to be in MPNMS-tg, as a designator for the *tathāgatagarbha*), and reflects an important attitude of our authors regarding the veracity and value of non-Buddhist teachings. This passage of the MPNMS not only affirms a correct usage of the notion of *ātman* – opaquely relating to some understanding of Buddhahood – but in so doing implies that discourse on selfhood in general (*ātmavāda*), though generally misguided, bears resemblance to some truth about the status of a Buddha. In other words this passage of MPNMS-dhk opens the door not just to further Buddhist consideration of to what (if anything) the term *ātman* should refer, but moreover takes an important step towards participating in a discourse concerning the nature of sentient beings that had been eschewed by earlier, indeed likely the earliest, Buddhist authors.

For the authors of MPNMS-dhk erroneous teachings concerning the *ātman* can only prefigure the true teaching of the self, so far understood to refer only to the figure of a Buddha. Beyond doubt is the primacy of

<sup>a</sup> 王=生<元><明>

<sup>b</sup> 書者乃知非真=別者知非書字本<三><宮>, 別者乃知非書字本<聖>

Compare MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 378b27–c2; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §106,69–74.

<sup>36</sup> MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §107,7–12: *mu stegs pa rnam tshar gcad pa'i phyir bdag med do // sems can med do // srog med do // gang zag med do zhes gsung ngo // mu stegs pa rnam kyis bdag bstan pa ni srin bus brkos pa'i yi ge dang 'dra ste / de'i phyir nga sems can thams cad la bdag med do zhes bstan pa ston par mdzad do //* Compare MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 863a7–9; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 378c21–c23.

this distinctly Buddhological ‘self’ over worldly *ātmavādin* expressions that may have been known to audiences. It is made clear that any other *ātmavāda* in the world can have only the semblance of truth, and that its *tīrthika* exponents know nothing of what they speak. This attitude is repeated and explored further in MPNMS-tg, where the term *ātman* is now unequivocally used to designate the *tathāgatagarbha* that is the essential nature (of a Buddha) present in all sentient beings. In this portion of the text we find it explained that any resemblance between one’s true *ātman* and the ideas of *tīrthikas* can only demonstrate how the latter is somehow indebted to the Buddha’s own teaching of the *tathāgatagarbha*: a position which suggests much about the relationship of the MPNMS to other themes in wider Mahāyāna literature.

### The Parable of the Lost Sword

A lengthy portion of MPNMS-tg is concerned with the correct understanding of the *tathāgatagarbha* and its distinction from erroneous notions of the self, expressed primarily through short parables that explain this indiscernible yet permanently present content of all sentient beings.<sup>37</sup> The final of these parables (possibly then the ‘last word’ on explaining the *tathāgatagarbha* in MPNMS-tg) affirms the primacy of the Buddha’s own account of the self, and suggests it to be the foundation for other apparently similar doctrines that might be encountered in the world.<sup>38</sup>

In MPNMS-tg the *bodhisattva* Kāśyapa, having been taught the existence of the true self through various parables, asks what is to be understood

<sup>37</sup> This is in what MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> calls the chapter “on the nature of the *tathāgata*” (883b13: 如來性). However these chapter divisions do not feature in either of our other versions of the text, and may have been introduced (perhaps by the translators of MPNMS<sup>C1</sup>) to discern thematically discrete portions of the text. See Habata 2007: li–liv; Hodge 2010/2012: 34, n. 60.

<sup>38</sup> This last portion of the *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented material in the MPNMS exhibits a particularly close relationship to the doctrine of the AMS. It is preceded by an explanation that the *\*buddhadhātu* can be perceived, albeit indistinctly, by the tenth-stage *bodhisattva*: a position not explored elsewhere in the MPNMS, but certainly held by the authors of the AMS. See e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887a8–a16; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412a1–4; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §406; also e.g. AMS<sup>C</sup> 525b24–c2; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 152a1–152a4; Q.879, 159a4–a7.

by the (erroneous) self spoken of by worldly beings.<sup>39</sup> The response is a parable concerning two friends – a prince and a pauper – who travel together to a neighboring kingdom. The prince is in possession of a magnificent sword.<sup>40</sup> After they part ways, the pauper is overheard talking about the sword in his sleep. Summoned before the king, who desires the sword, the pauper confesses that though he has seen this marvelous weapon he does not know it well, nor can he take the king to it. The king dismisses him and has his servants search for the sword, but dies without having found it, leaving only stories of its existence that are then passed down to the next generation.<sup>41</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> then explains the parable as follows.

In this way, the *bodhisattva mahāsattva* when appearing in the world explained for sentient beings the true self.<sup>42</sup> Ignorant persons, hearing that all beings have the nature of a Buddha (*\*buddhadhātu*), did not understand the truth [of that], and so speak with deluded imagination: that the self is like an inch-long lamp in the heart, or various [notions such as] *sattva*, *ātman*, *pudgala*, or *jīva*.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887b24–25: 世尊，世間衆生皆言有我，比義云何？ Compare the quite different MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §416,1–3; and MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412b15–16: 非聖凡夫，有衆生性皆說有我 – “ignoble common folk, having the *sattva-dhātu*, all state that there is a self.”

<sup>40</sup> The form of this parable in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> does not describe a lost sword, but rather a rhinoceros. This must reflect some confusion regarding something like, or derivative of, the Sanskrit *khaḍga*. Curiously MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> describes this rhinoceros as tame (MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887b27: ), which if present in the corresponding Indian text underlying this translation would constitute an entertaining Indian variant, rather than any error or insertion during the act of translation. Due to the agreement of the other two versions of the text, and the similarity of the parable’s explanation across all three (plus the likelihood that the fictional prince would have more reasonably transported a sidearm than a large pachyderm), I choose to follow the explanatory content of the parable found in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> but assume its content to have, in some previous incarnation, referred originally also to a lost sword.

<sup>41</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887b24–887c9; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412b15–412c14; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §416.

<sup>42</sup> MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c14–15 seems also to concern the *bodhisattva*’s arrival into the world (出現於世). From MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §417,1–3 it is clear that the *bodhisattva mahāsattva* arises in the world, teaches regarding the self, and subsequently dies (... *’jig rten du ’byung ste / bdag gi de kho na myid bstan nas ’chi bar byed do*), akin to the departure of the prince in our parable.

<sup>43</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887c9–c12: 如是，菩薩摩訶薩，出於世時，爲衆生說真實之我。其無知者，聞一切衆生皆有佛性，不知其真，便妄想說：我如寸燈，在於心中<sup>a</sup>，種種衆生、我、人、壽命。

<sup>a</sup> [我如…中] 八字 – <聖>

Compare MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c14–c20; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §417,1–11.



So an account of the true self is received by beings who then miscomprehend it and proceed to teach two types of erroneous imaginings: (1) the self said to be hidden somewhere in the body, evoking ideas explored in the upaniṣadic literature,<sup>44</sup> and/or (2) the erroneous, what we might call ‘agentive’ self as worldly subject designated by *ātman*, *sattva*, *puḍgala* etc.<sup>45</sup> All of these reflect wrong views, though as the MPNMS implies they all have some distant basis in an understanding of the *tathāgatagarbha*.

The form of this passage in MPNMS<sup>T</sup> provides a longer list of erroneous views reminiscent of the *Upaniṣads*, including its resemblance in size to a thumb-sized man, the shell of some fruit, or a grain of rice burning in the heart, while MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> provides only these examples (i.e. does not discuss the agentive self mentioned in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup>).<sup>46</sup> This material suggests three things: first, that the authors of the MPNMS were certainly aware of a range of non-Buddhist traditions teaching one or other account of the self, including in all likelihood those of some upaniṣadic sources; and second that their doctrine of the self was likely to be, or had already been, confused with such teachings. Finally, a longer rejection of similar images and expressions found in the AMS, which features more extensive lists of erroneous notions of selfhood still, supports some association between this material of the MPNMS and the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the AMS in general.<sup>47</sup>

This is however not the concluding message of the parable, nor the end of evidence that this account is connected to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the AMS. The MPNMS continues as follows.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. notions of selfhood found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 4.12–13; 6.17 (Olivelle 1998: 394–395; 402–403); also Habata 1990.

<sup>45</sup> Such lists are clearly well established in earlier Buddhist sources, for example in a gloss upon the *Mahāniddeśa*, on the subject of worldly notions of selfhood in the *Aṭṭhaka-vagga* of the *Suttanipāta* (4.6.5), which presents us with a list of ten such ideas or expressions: see La Vallée Poussin & Thomas 1916: 127; also examples in Skilling 1997: 300–301; 331.

<sup>46</sup> See MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §417,11: *skyes bu mthe bo tsam zhes bya ba dang / ldum bu sha ma ka'i 'bras bu tsam dang / 'bras kyi 'bru tsam zhig snying la gnas te 'bar ro shes log par rtog par byed de*. Compare also MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c14–c20.

<sup>47</sup> For more of such lists in these sources, see e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862a2–a5; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 377a25–b5; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §107,13–27; §98,1–§99,5; also AMS<sup>C</sup> 525a21; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 150b7–151a4, Q.879, 158a1–158a6.

...just as that which was said [by the pauper] in his dream was passed on from one person to another, they [,the ignorant persons,] develop distorted views: imagining that there is a self and searching for the nature of the self (\**ātmadhātu*);<sup>48</sup> [then,] not finding the true self, [they] develop the idea that there is no self, while worldly sentient beings constantly develop deluded notions: imputing notions of an existent self and of non-self. Likewise, good son, I say that the nature of the *tathāgata* (\**tathāgataadhātu*) is the supreme truth.<sup>49</sup>

The equivalent passage in MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> states more clearly that the doctrine of *anātmān* is taught by the Buddha to eliminate wrong views concerning the self.<sup>50</sup> The sense in all versions however is that whatever is erroneous about other conceptions of the self, they all have as their origin the *tathāgatagarbha*: the *true* self that is beyond the faculties of sentient beings.

<sup>48</sup> Here 我性 – an expression found only twice in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> – corresponds in MPNMS<sup>T</sup> to the only occurrence of *bdag gi khams* (§417,4–8) in that version of the text, and hence very likely reflects \**ātmadhātu*. This is an expression that dominates the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the AMS (to which we return below) and may even have roots in this passage of the MPNMS. See also Habata 1990: 180.

<sup>49</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887c12–c16: 如彼夢說，展轉相承，皆起邪見，計有吾我，求吾我性。不得實我，作無我說，而諸世間一切衆生常作妄想，計有吾我及無我想。如是，善男子，我說如來之性最爲真實。Compare MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c21–c26; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §417,4–9.

<sup>50</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c23–24: 爲斷如是諸邪見故，如來示現說於無我。It is worth remembering that the authors of the MPNMS certainly accepted some interpretation of *anātmān* doctrine, denying that – just as various plants lack any substantial core to them – there can be no substance underlying the worldly notions of *ātman*, *jīva*, *puḍgala* etc.: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 862a2–5; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 377a25–b5; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §98. The authors clearly held that denying the existence of these is not inconsistent with affirming the *true* self, the *tathāgatagarbha*, which they claim is not like any of these notions. See also n. 13.

It has been suggested that earlier Buddhist literature implicitly gestured towards some self that is beyond the *skandhas*: see Pérez-Remón 1980, and the lengthy rebuttal of this thesis by Steven Collins (1982). Another similar interpretation of early Buddhist sources as espousing something like the upaniṣadic self (still unconvincing) was offered by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, recently made available in English: see Bhattacharya 2015: 1–120. Whether or not such readings are at all persuasive is of little consequence here; it remains the case that however one reads what is *implied* by accounts of (non-)selfhood in the works of pre-*tathāgatagarbha* authors – whether Śrāvakayānist or Mahāyānist in disposition – their shared discourse avoided any explicit postulation (or negation) of a permanent self, i.e. they espoused what I am here calling the *anātmavāda*: see n. 4.

The explanation of this parable goes further still, and introduces some ideas and expressions that we shall see developed further by the AMS. In a tricky passage, the MPNMS suggests that correct discourse on the self, even when apparently found outside of the Buddha’s teaching, is a manifestation still of the Buddhist *dharmā*. As our three versions of the MPNMS here exhibit some pertinent differences, we shall consider the same passage as it is presented by each translation.

#### MPNMS<sup>C1</sup>

If a worldly [person] expounds a self that is in accord with *dharmā*, he should be known to be beyond what is worldly; it should be known that he is an *emanation of a bodhisattva* manifested in conformity to conventional teachings.<sup>51</sup>

The Buddha again said to Kāśyapa: all speech, incantations, and treatises; that which is taught by the Tathāgata is the root of all these.<sup>52</sup>

#### MPNMS<sup>C2</sup>

Good son, if there is some common person (*\*pṛthagjana*) who is able to explain [this] well, then this is in accord with the supreme *dharmā* of the Buddha. If there is someone able to discriminate and propagate this [teaching] accordingly, you should know him to be an *emanation of a bodhisattva*.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Habata 1990: 182–183. This is reminiscent of the activity of the *bodhisattva* – “in accord with what is of the world” – epitomized by texts like the *Lokānuvartanāsūtra* (e.g. T.807,751c3: 隨世間習俗而入, 示現如是), which clearly share a kind of ‘docetic’ Buddhology akin to that found in the MPNMS: see Radich 2015a: 105–158; also Harrison 1982.

<sup>52</sup> MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 887c16-20: 若世間說我隨順法者, 當知是則為離世俗, 當知皆是菩薩變化, 現同俗說。佛復告迦葉: 一切言說、呪術、記論, 如來所說為一切本。My translation disregards a chapter division (after 現同俗說) present in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> and instead follows the division of the text into meaningful sections, following its Tibetan form, in accord with Habata (2013). The material which follows this passage concerns secret properties of *aḥṣaras*, expressing an interest in *mantra* which perhaps speaks further about the interest authors of the MPNMS had with religious ideas and practices beyond commonly held parameters of the Buddhist *dharmā*: see Blum 2013: 357, n. 131. See also n. 37.

<sup>53</sup> MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> here reads 菩薩相貌, which Blum (2013: 254) translates as the “countenance of a *bodhisattva*.” Here 相貌 likely reflects the Sanskrit *\*nimitta*, very possibly reflecting a misreading of *nirmita*; a development suggested by e.g. the likely misplaced occurrence of 相貌 at T.227, 564b15, corresponding to a form of *nirmita* in the Sanskrit *Aṣṭasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*: see Vaidya 1960: 163,13; also Karashima 2011: 308, n. 54. A similar

Good son, all various different discourses, incantations, speech and words, all these are teachings of the Buddha, and not teachings of *tīrthikas*.<sup>54</sup>

### MPNMS<sup>T</sup>

What is well-spoken and in accord with correct *dharma*, even if of worldly persons, should be known as supermundane.

If among the worldly there is that which is in all ways highest *dharma*, then that should be known as an *emanation of a bodhisattva*.

All various treatises, spells and incantations should be known to be pronouncements by the perfect Buddha.<sup>55</sup>

The accounts of our three translations differ somewhat, which may be related to the fact that these are some unusual claims to be found in Indian Buddhist texts. All three seem to agree however that if some individual in the world teaches something in accord with the *dharma* (in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> explicitly concerning the self), and that person is *not* ostensibly a *bodhisattva*, then they should be considered an emanation (*\*nirmita/nirmāṇa*) of just such a being. This explanation departs somewhat from the apparent message of the parable, which implies that the correct comprehension of selfhood has been ‘forgotten,’ and indeed the preceding lines of its explanation, in which non-Buddhist accounts of the self come about by gradual distortion. Nevertheless, these closing lines seem to concern confusion over non-Buddhist ideas, and conclude the text’s discussion of the *tathāgatagarbha* by revealing that worldly persons who teach what is similar to it can be considered creations of or by *bodhisattvas*, and are – despite appearances – expressions still of the Buddhist *dharma*.

misreading may have affected the Chinese translation of this expression in MPNMS<sup>C2</sup>: hence I amend my own translation to also be concerned with *\*nirmita* of *bodhisattvas*.

<sup>54</sup> MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 412c25-413a1: 善男子，若有凡夫能善說者，即是隨順無上佛法。若有善能分別隨順宣說是者，當知即是菩薩相貌。善男子，所有種種異論、呪術、言語、文字，皆是佛說，非外道說。

<sup>55</sup> MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §418,1–6: *legs par smras pa chos dang 'isham pa gang yin pa de ni 'jig rten pa rnams kyi yin na yang 'jig rten las 'das pa yin par rig par bya'o // 'jig rten pa 'i nang na rnam pa thams cad du chos kyi mchog ni / byang chub sems dpas sprul pa yin par rig par bya ste / bstan bcos sam / rig sngags sam / gsang sngags ci yang rung ba de dag thams cad ni / rdzogs pa 'i sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa yin par shes par gyis shig /*

Also curious is the subsequent affirmation that *all* religious utterances are products of the Buddha, and (as MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> makes clearest) not originated by *tīrthikas*. Though it is possible that this final thought is more an introduction to the next portion of the MPNMS – concerned with explaining esoteric meanings of Sanskrit *akṣaras* – it remains at an important juncture in the text’s discussion about the origin and meaning of religious ideas and practices in general. In short, the MPNMS concludes its discussion of the true self with the claim that other teachings similar to the Buddha’s own – and with them what we might call religious pronouncements more generally – derive any authority they may appear to have from teachers of the Buddhist *saddharma* themselves, and not from any extraneous source.

Hence the MPNMS seems to suggest that there are expressions outside of what is ostensibly the *dharma*, i.e. spoken by ‘worldly persons,’ which are properly understood as having been made by individuals who are *\*bodhisattva-nirmita* (or, in a possible reading of MPNMS<sup>T</sup>, such expressions are *\*bodhisattva-nirmita* themselves). MPNMS-tg elsewhere affirms that there indeed exist *bodhisattvas* who, like the Buddha himself, are by their supernatural power capable of displaying an array of forms for different purposes, and cites a text under the name *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* in relation to the Buddha’s producing many magical displays for one or other didactic purpose.<sup>56</sup> MPNMS-tg presents a list of the Buddha’s magical appearances (including as an *icchāntika*, i.e. a Buddhist ‘non-believer’ who rejects the *tathāgatagarbha*, and even as the deity Māra),<sup>57</sup> but none

<sup>56</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 870c15–16; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 388b15–16; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §193. Regarding the title *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra*, see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 870c21: 種種現化，如首楞嚴三昧所說；also MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 388b20–b22; though MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §194,3–4 calls these *cho 'phrul*, which suggests the term *\*(rddhi)prātihārya* over specifically *\*nirmita/nirmāna*. The *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* available to us today indeed mentions a range of magical displays (e.g. T.642, 640a11–12 called herein 神通變化; *\*rddhiprātihārya*), though not emanated forms in the manner detailed by the MPNMS: see Lamotte 1965: 221, §120. Radich (2015a: 51–52; 53–54) presents good reason to conclude that the text referred to by the MPNMS is quite different to any form of the *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra* that survives today; see also Kaneko 1990.

<sup>57</sup> See Karashima 2007: 72–79 regarding the *icchāntikas* as a category in the MPNMS. These are seemingly, in their earliest mention in relation to *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, persons who make false claims to Arhatship, who moreover reject the ‘*vaipulya sūtras*’ and ideas such as the permanence of the Buddha.

of these lists mention the teacher of some *ātmavāda*, or any *tīrthika*, as anything ever generated by the Buddha or *bodhisattvas*.<sup>58</sup> This is however precisely what the text teaches at the climax of defending the *tathāgatagarbha*: that individuals who are not ostensibly *bodhisattvas*, teaching what resembles the Buddha's own account of the true self, should be known as emanations of or by *bodhisattvas*.

It is clear that the MPNMS conceives of the Buddha as a transcendent being intervening in the world by production of one kind of display or another. As Radich has argued, the MPNMS in both of its broad stages of composition is an important example of a Mahāyāna text advancing the Buddha's transcendent, 'docetic' character: only displaying his birth, life and death in the world for the purposes of educating sentient beings.<sup>59</sup> In this vein, the MPNMS states that persons apparently 'of the world' who teach the self can be 'emanations' by some *bodhisattva(s)*, and moreover that any seemingly authoritative teachings spoken by *tīrthikas* are expressions still, ultimately, of the Buddhist *dharma*. All extraneous *ātmavāda* teachings are then derivative of the Buddha's own, and yet – along with all other religious utterances – can be enigmatically produced by Buddhas or *bodhisattvas* whose intention it is to lead all sentient beings to awakening.

The passage discussed above is slippery. We are left wondering, in particular, who precisely these beings that are *\*bodhisattva-nirmita*, seemingly 'of the world,' were, though it is clear that they at least *appear* extraneous to the Buddhist fold. In presenting an account of non-Buddhist teachers and their status, the MPNMS clearly wishes to say something about the relationship between its own teachings and what appears to be similar in the teachings of those who are not (ostensibly) exponents of the *dharma*. In so doing, the MPNMS, affirms both the superiority of the Buddha's account of the self over all others, and moreover the reduction

<sup>58</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 871b15–c26; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 389a27–390a1; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §202–214. In this portion of the text the *tīrthika* is not included in the otherwise diverse productions of the Buddha, but perhaps it is pertinent that this passage has no interest in the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and may belong to a different period of the MPNMS's no doubt complex composition.

<sup>59</sup> Regarding other evidence for the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as an extension of docetic Buddhism, see Radich 2015a: 105–157. See also n. 51.

of wider discourse on selfhood to the activities of *bodhisattvas* and the overarching influence of the Buddha. For what appears to be a development of this idea, we progress to the no less challenging *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the AMS.

### Selfhood in the *Aṅgulimāliyasūtra*

The AMS is another text espousing a form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and is clearly heavily indebted to ideas and images found in the MPNMS. We have available to us two translations, that into Chinese circa 435–453 CE by Guṇabhadra (AMS<sup>C</sup>: T.120) and the Tibetan translation attributed to Dharmatāśīla, Śākyaprabha, and one ‘Tong Ācārya’ dating to the late eighth or early ninth century (AMS<sup>T</sup>: e.g. D.213, Q.879).<sup>60</sup> Like the MPNMS, the AMS re-imagines a narrative known from earlier Buddhist literature: here the conversion of the murderous bandit Aṅgulimāla.<sup>61</sup> It might be easily imagined that the purpose of a *tathāgatagarbha* text focused on the conversion of Aṅgulimāla, and indeed the prediction of his eventual awakening, was to extol the universality of the *tathāgatagarbha* in all beings regardless of past crimes. However as Kanō has pointed out closer attention to the text does not support such a reading; rather, as much as the MPNMS is a text recounting the apparent death of the Buddha in which he does not truly depart from the world, the AMS re-imagines the killings of Aṅgulimāla as only illusory, and uses his example to justify taking arms in defense of the *dharma*.<sup>62</sup>

In describing the *tathāgatagarbha* the AMS does not generally refer to a ‘self,’ though as we shall see it still does use this language, albeit sparingly, in a manner reminiscent of the MPNMS.<sup>63</sup> Its preference is for the term *\*ātmadhātu*, reflected in AMS<sup>T</sup> by *bdag gi khams/dbyings* and

<sup>60</sup> See Kanō 2000: 58. This article remains to date the most thorough treatment of the AMS and its content; see also Suzuki 1999; 2000; 2014.

<sup>61</sup> MN II 97–106.

<sup>62</sup> See Kanō 2016: 4–5, n. 11. See e.g. AMS<sup>C</sup> 528b11–19; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 161a4–b7; Q.879, 168b1–169a6.

<sup>63</sup> We shall address later the one important reference to the Buddha teaching *ātman* in the AMS outside of the form *\*ātmadhātu*. The expression *\*ātmadhātu* in the AMS is certainly in want of further study, building upon Kanō 2000.

in corresponding passages of AMS<sup>C</sup> by 我性/我界. This is likely best understood as “the essential nature of [one’s] self,” i.e. some essence (*\*dhātu*) underlying the worldly *ātman*, or conventional person who acts in the world.<sup>64</sup> In clarifying previous Buddhist teachings which stated that the Buddha found no kind of selfhood amidst *dharmas* (here evoking the language of the *prajñāpāramitā* literature),<sup>65</sup> the AMS reveals that the hidden meaning of such statements was that sentient beings never suffer the absence of the *\*ātmadhātu*, which is clearly synonymous with the *tathāgatagarbha*.

Regarding “that which the Buddha-Tathāgatas did not find,” it is the case that all past Lordly Buddhas, searching very diligently amidst all sentient beings, could not find the absence of the *tathāgatagarbha*.

All Lordly Buddhas of the present, searching very diligently amidst all sentient beings, do not find the absence of the *\*ātmadhātu*.

All future Lordly Buddhas, searching very diligently amidst all sentient beings, will not find the absence of a *\*svadhātu*.<sup>66</sup>

Much of the AMS is concerned with further clarifying *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as likely developed from the MPNMS, including in its perhaps telling preference for the expression *\*ātmadhātu* over *ātman* (an expression no doubt still evoked by use of *\*ātmadhātu*), perhaps leaning away from the claim that the Buddha taught the existence of a ‘self’ *per se*. Like the MPNMS, the AMS denies the similarity of the *tathāgatagarbha*/*\*ātmadhātu* to any worldly notion of selfhood, and rejects a range

<sup>64</sup> See Kanō 2000: 69. Other readings of this compound are possible, but I base this on a passage of AMS<sup>T</sup> that seems to play with a distinction between the conventional self that acts (*bdag nyid*) and an underlying “nature” of the self (*bdag gyi khams*) that is the *tathāgatagarbha*. See AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 192b3–192b6; Q.879, 200a2–200a6; comparing also AMS<sup>C</sup> 539a23–a29.

<sup>65</sup> For example in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Kimura 2007: 54,15-17): *tadyathā ’pi nāma Śāriputra āmeti cocyate, na cātmā upalabhyate, na satvo na jīvo na poṣo na puruṣo na pudgalo na manuḥo ’py upalabhyate, anupalambha-śūnyatām upādāya*.

<sup>66</sup> AMS<sup>C</sup> 525a29–b4: 諸佛如來所不得者，謂過去一切諸佛世尊，於一切衆生所極方便求，無如來藏不可得。現在一切諸佛世尊，於一切衆生所極方便求，無我性不可得。未來一切諸佛世尊，於一切衆生所極方便求，無自性不可得。Compare AMS<sup>T</sup>: D.213,151a6–151b1; Q.879,158a8–158b3. In this we find *\*satvadhātu* (*sems can gyi khams*) substituted for *\*svadhātu*. Regarding *\*svadhātu* see Kanō 2000: 69; 80 n. 22; also Radich 2015a: 29, suggesting *\*maddhātu* for 自性 in the MPNMS.



of suggested sizes, shapes, colours, and locations of the \**ātmadhātu* in the body, which again likely reflects a concern to distance this doctrine from any confusion with the ideas of, for example, the *Upaniṣads*.<sup>67</sup>

However in one significant passage the AMS does indeed appear to use the term *ātman*, and not \**ātmadhātu*, to refer to what the Buddha has taught. Pertinently this occurs in the same passage of the text which teaches, in language reminiscent of the portion of the MPNMS discussed above, that all religious activities observable in the world are emanations and hence, despite appearances, products of the Buddha and his *dharma*.

### The Myth of Buddhamaṭi

The portion of the AMS in question again concerns rival religious traditions; primarily, it first seems, the emergence in the world of various non-Buddhist ascetical practices. These are said to arise as the *dharma*'s influence in the world dwindles, as teachings of the Buddha are distorted and, eventually, forgotten. The authors of this material present the Buddhist *dharma* as the point of origin for all paths aiming at liberation, rather than as only one (correct) body of teaching among competing traditions. The following synopsis reflects the shorter account of AMS<sup>C</sup>, referring to expressions from AMS<sup>T</sup> where it appears to reflect similar underlying Indic terms.

This mythical account describes a previous *kalpa*, after the passing of a Buddha named Kosantabhadrā (AMS<sup>C</sup>: 拘孫陀跋陀羅; AMS<sup>T</sup>: *ko san ta bzang po*), and during the lifetime of the final remaining practitioner

<sup>67</sup> It is also interesting that the AMS lists these notions of the self apart from a list of designators for the agentive self (*ātman*, *jīva*, *pudgala* etc.), which it denies elsewhere and seems to consider to have been rejected *already* by the Buddha's earlier teachings associated with the Śrāvakayāna: see AMS<sup>C</sup> 525a20–a25; AMS<sup>T</sup>: D.213, 150b7–151a4; Q.879, 158a1–158a6. In other words it is possible to read the AMS as having not considered earlier expositions of the Buddha to be concerned with erroneous notions of any 'subtle' self hidden in the body in any manner reminiscent of the *Upaniṣads*. Such a distinction between what we may loosely call notions of an 'agentive' and 'subtle' self, reflected by some separation of two types of erroneous *ātmavāda* discourse in the structure of the AMS, may suggest that the text considered forms of upaniṣadic selfhood to be of a different category to those confronted by earlier pronouncements by the Buddha regarding the *ātman*, *jīva*, *pudgala* etc. See also n. 45.

of the true *dharma*: a forest-dwelling monk named Buddhhamati. The monk receives the gift of a precious robe from a pious layperson, but is seen by a band of hunters who conspire to steal it. Buddhhamati then finds himself kidnapped, stripped, and tied to a tree. He is seen in this state by a passing *brāhmaṇa*, who reasons that Buddhhamati's circumstances must reflect a kind of correct, dharmic practice, and who promptly emulates it. This brings about the emergence of the first \**nir-granthaśramaṇa* (裸形沙門; AMS<sup>T</sup> *dge sbyong gcer bu pa*).<sup>68</sup> Buddhhamati is then able to free himself, covers his body with tree bark and ochre, and fashions a flywhisk from bound grass. Again he is seen by a *brāhmaṇa*, who emulates this and in so doing gives rise to what AMS<sup>C</sup> calls the “renunciate *brāhmaṇas*:” (出家婆羅門; AMS<sup>T</sup> *mur 'dug kun du rgyu ba*, \**tīrtha-parivrājakas*).

The evening of the same day Buddhhamati bathes himself in water, covers his wounds with moss, and dons the discarded clothes of a cowherder. He is seen by a passing wood-collector, who again believes he is witness to the correct path to liberation. Emulating the monk, the wood-collector becomes the first of “*brāhmaṇas* who practice hardships” (苦行婆羅門; AMS<sup>T</sup> *ya mtshan can dka' thub byed pa*). Buddhhamati then finds his body scarred and covered in insect bites, so covers himself in white ash, and rubs his wounds with moss. Then, having been seen by a further *brāhmaṇa* who again copies him, there arise the “ash-smearing *brāhmaṇas*” (灰塗婆羅門; AMS<sup>T</sup> *phyugs bdag pa*, \**pāśūpatas*). Finally, Buddhhamati builds a fire to heat his wounds, but as these become more painful he commits suicide by hurling himself from a cliff. A final *brāhmaṇa* sees this, and gives rise to those who “throw [themselves] from cliffs, and worship fire” (投巖事火; absent from AMS<sup>T</sup>).<sup>69</sup>

A slightly longer list of ascetical practices is reflected by AMS<sup>T</sup>, which may suggest some expansion of this passage after the composition of

<sup>68</sup> It is possible that the AMS here refers to the origins of the Jain tradition, though concerning the term *nirgrantha* more generally see n. 94.

<sup>69</sup> AMS<sup>C</sup>: 541a27–c3. This last practice mentioned only in AMS<sup>C</sup> is among those mentioned in a list of ascetical practices found in the MPNMS, though there the context is the Buddha's clarification that such practices are not among those taught by him, and that whoever claim otherwise are agents of Māra: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 882b19–c4; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 406a16–b6; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §364–365.

AMS<sup>C</sup>, perhaps as contributors to the text encountered or chose to target a greater variety of non-Buddhist practices.<sup>70</sup> The story is amusing, and clearly intended to mock practitioners of one kind of austerity or another that were known to the authors (and likely the audience) of the AMS.<sup>71</sup> Without doubt the sense throughout is the origination of each practice due to the presence of the *dharmā* in the world; without at least a remnant of the Buddha's teaching – here Buddhāmati himself – there do not come about any of these misguided forms of practice aimed at liberation.

So far the Buddhāmati story demonstrates that the authors of the AMS were well-acquainted with non-Buddhist religious practices, but its attitude towards their origins is more in the spirit of the woodworm parable from MPNMS-dhk, in which other practices are misconceptions of the Buddhist *dharmā* and certainly not – as implied later in MPNMS-tg – creations by *bodhisattvas*. As we read on, however, the AMS explains the story to have a different meaning to that which we might expect; chastening both those who do not accept its doctrine – specifically, holding that the Buddha taught non-self – and, jarring as it may be with the preceding narrative, declaring all religious activities in the world to be creations by the Buddha himself.

In such a way, Mañjuśrī, all superior conducts and various kinds of deportments that are produced in the world are all emanations of the Tathāgata (\**tathāgata-nirmīta*). When the *dharmā* has disappeared, then such things arise. In this way the *saddharma* disappears.

Thus, Mañjuśrī, in regards to the true self, worldly beings [have] this-or-that distorted views and various false notions: namely, that liberation is like this-or-that, and that the self is like this-or-that. Regarding the supermun-

<sup>70</sup> At the final stage of Buddhāmati's misadventures, AMS<sup>T</sup> mentions also those who "pursue suffering to a state called 'unmoving'" (*mi g.yo ba'i sar mya ngan du 'gro ba*), which still must have in mind a form of religious suicide. See AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 198b2–199a5; Q.879, 205b8–206b3.

<sup>71</sup> Such blatant mockery challenges the possibility that the *tathāgatagarbha* authors had as their aim appealing to extraneous *ātmavādin* teachers themselves. Though texts within this literature are clearly concerned with the relationship between the ideas of non-Buddhist teachers and their own – perhaps with the aim of appealing to audiences swayed by *ātmavādin* traditions – this does not appear to be in order to convince or convert rival teachers themselves (see however n. 104). Concerning the suggestion that the MPNMS may have been aimed specifically at, or in part preserved by, householders, see Habata 2014: 162–163.

dane, [they] also do not know the concealed teaching of the Tathāgata: namely, saying that non-self is taught by the Buddha, they reason in accord with [that] teaching, just like in the origination of *īrthikas* [described above].<sup>72</sup> Those worldly beings are accordingly foolish; regarding the supermundane [they] moreover lose track of the knowledge that was taught secretly [by the Buddha].

Therefore the Tathāgata taught the middle path of the *ekayāna*, which is apart from the two extremes. He taught the self to be real, the Buddha to be real, the *dharmā* to be real, the *saṅgha* to be real; hence is taught the middle way that is known as the Mahāyāna.<sup>73</sup>

An enigmatic feature in this explanation of the myth is the declaration that the Buddha taught a self (我; *ātman*) along with the three refuges of the Buddha, *dharmā* and *saṅgha*, without use of the term *\*ātmadhātu* so prevalent in the rest of the AMS. The final lines of this material in AMS<sup>T</sup> differ slightly, stating that the Buddha himself (*bdag*) taught the reality of the *dharmā*, Tathāgata and *saṅgha*.<sup>74</sup> It is possible that AMS<sup>T</sup> here reflects Indic material that at some stage listed selfhood as something taught along with the three refuges, and there is no doubt that the rest of the explanation of the myth in AMS<sup>T</sup> still contrasts a correct teaching of the self with erroneous notions found in the world, consistent with the content of AMS<sup>C</sup>. Across both versions, this explanation certainly makes clear that a central error of audiences has been the view that the Buddha's final position was *anātman* – a rejection of any notion of selfhood – which seems to have generated erroneous understandings of the *dharmā*.

<sup>72</sup> AMS<sup>T</sup> here elaborates that the error of holding the Buddha to have taught *anātman* belongs specifically to the *īrthyas* (*mur 'dug*): see D.213, 199b2; Q.879, 206b7.

<sup>73</sup> AMS<sup>C</sup> 541c7–c17: 如是文殊師利，世間一切所作之上尸羅、威儀，種種所作，一切悉是如來化現。法滅盡時，如是事生。若如是者，正法則滅。如是文殊師利，於真實我，世間如是如是邪見諸異妄想：謂解脫如是，謂我如是。出世間者，亦不知如來隱覆之教：謂言無我是佛所說。彼隨說思量，如外道因起<sup>a</sup>。彼諸世間隨順愚癡；出世間者，亦復迷失隱覆說智。是故如來說一乘中道離於二邊：我真實、佛真實、法真實、僧真實：是故說中道名摩訶衍。

<sup>a</sup> [起] – <三>

Compare AMS<sup>T</sup> D.214, 199a7–199b4; Q.879, 206b5–207a1, in which we find *sangs gyas kyi sprul pa*.

<sup>74</sup> AMS<sup>T</sup> D.214, 199b3; Q.879, 206b8–207a1: *bdag tu gtogs pa'i chos kyi de kho na nyid dang / de bzhin gshegs pa dang / dge 'dun gyi de bzhin nyid ni... // I am grateful for the help of Kazuo Kanō in making sense of this passage.*

Though the AMS seems to use the Buddhhamati myth foremost to defend its presentation of the *dharma*, other evidence demonstrates that this myth was received in India as being primarily concerned with explaining non-Buddhist systems and their production by the Buddha. A quotation of the above passage is found in the tenth century *Jñāna-sārasamuccayanibandhana* of Bodhibhadra, commenting on the root text of Āryadeva.<sup>75</sup> This text survives in Tibetan translation, and its key quotation of the AMS follows examination of the different philosophical schools of the Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna, and their collective distinction from extraneous religio-philosophical systems. Bodhibhadra cites the AMS by name and explains the Buddhhamati myth as follows.

Thus, conforming to [the behaviour of] Buddhhamati, monk of the perfectly awakened Buddha Kosanti, the time of the earlier *kalpa* was grounded in the views of the gods of Jambudvīpa. Even the views of people who are outsiders, being [properly] understood, should be opposed but not hated.

It is said in the Mahāyāna *sūtra* called “*Ārya Aṅgulimālīya*,” “Mañjuśrī, it is thus: the performing of worldly deeds, and all practiced rites, are also emanations of the Buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi sprul pa*; \**buddha-nirmita*)”: this is said [by the Buddha] so that those [doing as such] might become objects of compassion.

So is it explained: “the intelligent of each [Buddhist] doctrine should produce compassion for those who are confused, regarding teachings that are distorted.”<sup>76</sup>

Bodhibhadra may not have been convinced by the ‘finality’ of what is taught in the AMS regarding those whom he calls outsiders (*phyi rol pa*; \**bāhyaka*), stating as he does that its message is for the purpose of generating compassion for them, and hence may be merely an expedient

<sup>75</sup> D.3852; Q.5252: *Ye shes snying po kun las btus pa zhes bya ba'i bshad sbyar.*

<sup>76</sup> D.3852 *tsha* 41a5–a7; Q.5252 *tsha* 47b1–b5: *'di ltar yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ko san ti'i dge slong buddha ma ti'i rjes su 'brangs nas / bskal pa dang po'i tshe 'dzam bu'i gling lta ba'i lha rnam la brten te / skyes pa'i phyi rol pa'i lta ba 'di dag kyang khong du chud par byas la de bzlog par bya'i rnam par sdang bar bya ba ni ma yin te / 'phags pa sor mo'i phreng ba la phan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo las / 'jam dpal de ltar 'jig rten pa'i tshul khrims dang spyod pa dang bya ba'i cho ga thams cad kyang sangs rgyas kyi sprul pa'o zhes gsungs pa'i phyir dang / de dag snying rje'i yul du gyur pa'i phyir te // de phyir log par bstan pa yi // grub mthar (D mthā) 'chal ba'i blo can la // re lugs rjes 'jug blo can rnam // snying rje nyid ni rab tu skye // zhes bshad pa'i phyir ro //*

teaching for counteracting hatred of non-Buddhists. However he certainly read this portion of the AMS as concerning the indebtedness of extraneous religious practices to the *dharma*: being little more than emanations of or by a Buddha. Important for understanding both this passage and the similar material found in the MPNMS is Bodhibhadra's clarity in regards to the value of emanated non-Buddhist systems: being products of the Buddha in no way lauds the value of these traditions, so much as explains them as further evidence of the Buddha's pervasive influence in the realm of *samsāra*.

Returning to the myth as explained by AMS<sup>C</sup>, its final lines are particularly significant: declaring the reality of the three jewels and of the (true) self. The AMS considers this to be the middle way of the Buddha, which both translations call also the Mahāyāna and, in AMS<sup>C</sup>, the *ekayāna*: a term that appears frequently throughout both versions of the text.<sup>77</sup> Such a declaration situates the AMS under the influence of the doctrine of the Mahāyāna as the singular, exhaustive vehicle to Buddhist liberation as detailed in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (SPS): a text closely bound to the origins of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and which famously explains earlier Buddhist teachings as having been voiced by emanations (*nirmita/nirmāṇa*), in a similar manner to what we have seen in both the MPNMS and AMS.

### Emanations of the Buddha/Bodhisattvas in *Ekayāna* Sources

Michael Zimmermann has identified strong ties between the SPS and the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, and furthermore with *tathāgatagarbha* thought in general.<sup>78</sup> The SPS is mentioned by name in the MPNMS, and, as seen above, the AMS considers itself to teach according to the *ekayāna*.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Here AMS<sup>T</sup> instead calls this “the vehicle of the *tathāgata*” (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i theg pa*): an expression otherwise absent from this text. However the expression *ekayāna* (*theg pa gcig*) still occurs ten times throughout the rest of AMS<sup>T</sup>: more frequently than in nearly any other text preserved in the *bka'* 'gyur. For more on the occurrence of the term *ekayāna* throughout AMS<sup>C</sup>, see Nattier 2007: 184–185.

<sup>78</sup> Zimmermann 1999; 2014: 519–520.

<sup>79</sup> See MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 893c6; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 420a23–a24; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §495,17; also the Sanskrit fragment no. 21 which features *saddharmapuṇḍar[ī]k(a)[m]*: see Habata 2009: 580. This mention is in connection with the well-known prediction of the SPS that all beings will

There are clear doctrinal similarities between the prediction in the SPS that all beings will eventually attain awakening and the affirmed universality of the *tathāgatagarbha* in texts like the MPNMS and AMS, but for our purposes the SPS echoes two other themes common to the passages addressed above.<sup>80</sup> The first is the ability and disposition of the Buddha to emanate different phenomena for the benefit of different audiences, and the second is the role of expedient soteriological paths as his foremost creations: in the SPS the vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, which are taught in accord with the capabilities of those who are not yet ready to embark upon the path of the *bodhisattva*.

The SPS, like many other Mahāyāna *sūtras*, describes Buddha Śākyamuni employing his supernatural power to achieve some or other aim, for the benefit always of some or other sentient beings. This includes emanating different bodies to teach in different worlds, but more pivotally the appearance and departure of other Buddhas in the world who are associated with having taught the vehicle of the *śrāvaka*.

eventually attain full awakening, relating it to the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha* (e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 893c5–c4). For more evidence of the SPS having influenced the MPNMS-group, including the prophecy complex which unites the MPNMS and other texts, see Radich 2015a: 52; appendix 3; also Hodge 2006; 2012. MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> features a single mention of the *ekayāna* and denial of the *triyāna* doctrine (383a25), though this does not feature in either other translation or any Sanskrit fragment. See also Shimoda 2002.

Further ties worthy of mention connect the SPS to another *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* text in the MPNMS-group. The MBhS not only features versions of the parables of the lost son and of the emanated city, better known through the SPS, but is explicit in connecting the *tathāgatagarbha* with the *ekayāna* and the denial of the *triyāna* paradigm: 若一切衆生有如來藏一性一乘者，如來何故說有三乘聲聞乘、緣覺乘、佛乘？(T.270, 297b20–22) – “If all sentient beings have the *tathāgatagarbha*, which is one [common] nature, one [shared] vehicle; why then does the Tathāgata say that there are three vehicles: *śrāvakayāna*; *pratyekabuddhayāna* and *buddhayāna*?” See Suzuki 2002; 2015 for further evidence of a close relationship between the SPS and MBhS; also Jones 2016.

The ŚDS also advocates the *ekayāna* model of the Mahāyāna (T.353, 220c19–21), but is particularly focused on belittling the value of other Buddhist vehicles as deficient for the purposes of the *bodhisattva*. This may support my suspicion that the ŚDS reflects a re-evaluation of categories drawn from the milieu of earlier *tathāgatagarbha* texts (namely those of the MPNMS-group) and, broader, the *ekayāna*.

<sup>80</sup> Regarding the SPS promising awakening for all beings (or – at very least – for all who have accepted the *dharma* in one or other of its forms), see for example its *Sadāpari-bhūtaparivarta*: Kern & Nanjio 1970: 375–385; also Zimmermann 1999: 165–168; 2002: 77; Suzuki 2015.

So, Mahāpratibhāna, I emanated many figures of the Tathāgata, who across the thousand worlds, in the various Buddha-fields in the ten directions, teach the *dharma* to sentient beings.<sup>81</sup>

Good sons, in the meantime [since my awakening], I emanated those *Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksaṃbuddhas* of whom I spoke, beginning with the Tathāgata Dīpaṃkara, and the final *nirvāṇa* of those *Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksaṃbuddhas*, good sons, for [the purpose of] completing instruction of *dharma* [for sentient beings] by skill-in-means.<sup>82</sup>

The SPS elsewhere compares the two inferior vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* – in this text conceived as only stepping-stones towards the vehicle of the *bodhisattva* – to magical emanations, through the parable of the illusory city. A group of travelers bound for the location of a far-off treasure are deterred due to the great distance between them and their destination. This is until a skilled leader conjures another city *en route*, comparable to the perceived goals of the *arhat* and *pratyekabuddha*, which convinces the party to embark on their journey after all.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding this [cultivation of beings], the Tathāgata, knowing sentient beings to be of feeble aspiration, like the guide who produces the magically made emanated city, so that those beings may have respite...[teaches two provisional, inferior goals].<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Kern & Nanjio 1970: 242,11–12: *tan mayāpi mahāpratibhāna bahavas tathāgata-vigrahā nirmīṭāḥ, ye daśasu dikṣv anyonyeṣu buddhakṣetreṣu lokadhātusahasreṣu sattvānāṃ dharmam deśayanti...*

<sup>82</sup> Kern & Nanjio 1970: 317,10–13: *ye ca mayā kulaputrā atrāntarā tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksaṃbuddhāḥ parikīrtitā dīpaṃkaratathāgataprabhrtayaḥ, teṣāṃ ca tathāgatānāṃ arhatāṃ samyaksaṃbuddhānāṃ parinirvāṇāni, mayaiva tāni kulaputrā upāyakausalya-dharmadeśanābhīnirhāranirmīṭāni /*

The MPNMS also states that the Buddha's apparent departure from the world is an example of his skill-in-means (MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 方便; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> *thabs*) or is merely displayed (MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 示同) for the sake of sentient beings: see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 860c14–15; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 375b4–5; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §79,2–3; also Radich 2011 [2012]: 245–283; 2015a: 105–115. The MBhS – strongly indebted as it seems to be to both the SPS and MPNMS – takes this idea further, holding that the death of the Buddha was shown only to teach beings about the ubiquity of impermanence in *saṃsāra* (e.g. T.270, 296c12–16).

<sup>83</sup> A version of this parable appears also in the MBhS: T.270, 296a7–b7.

<sup>84</sup> Kern & Nanjio 1970: 189,2–4: *tatra tathāgataḥ sattvān durbalāśayān viditvā yathā sa deśikas tadṛddhimayaṃ nagaram abhinirmīmīte teṣāṃ sattvānāṃ viśrāmaṇārtham (...)*. Regarding *abhinirmīmīte*, see Edgerton 1953: 52a.



Hence use of the verb *nir-√mā* in the SPS can refer to the production of past Buddhas themselves and, by implication, all that they were created to teach, i.e. the inferior vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. The vehicles can themselves be compared to illusory creations, issued – as with emanated Buddhas who taught them – for the purposes of leading beings step by step to what is revealed finally in the SPS itself: the *ekayāna*, into which all other Buddhist vehicles can be considered to be subsumed.

We might compare this to use of the same verb in our *tathāgatagarbha* sources (apparent, at very least, where we have encountered the verb *sprul* in Tibetan translation). In both Chinese translations of the MPNMS and its parable of the lost sword, *\*bodhisattva-nirmita* most likely refers to *tīrthikas* themselves, or certainly ostensibly ‘worldly’ teachers. This same content in MPNMS<sup>T</sup>, along with the *\*buddha-nirmita* in the explanation of the Buddhamati myth, in both the AMS and Bodhibhadra’s quotation of it, may however be read to refer to the practices of *tīrthikas* rather than any teachers themselves. Even if we permit that some of these passages may concern the emanation of teachings and not persons, it is likely that here the distinction between some doctrine and those who voice it in the world is not a significant one.<sup>85</sup> Hence we can certainly read both of our *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* sources as holding that religious teachers apparently extraneous to the *dharma* are themselves, along with their doctrines, emanated instruments of the Buddha; of no value next to the Mahāyāna as expounded by these *sūtras*, apart from being further evidence of the Buddha’s creative power and extensive activity for the benefit of all sentient beings.

It is by no means clear that the MPNMS or AMS are developing an account of the Buddha’s activities directly from a source such as the SPS. But bearing in mind themes shared by these three texts – both (1) Śākyamuni Buddha’s permanence beyond any worldly displays, and (2) affirmation of the capacity for awakening in all sentient beings – as well as

<sup>85</sup> This attitude towards *tīrthikas* and their doctrines evokes a statement about the Buddha and his teaching found at the culmination of the *Vakkalisutta* (SN III 119–124): that whosoever sees *dhamma*, sees the Buddha, and *vice versa*. The innovation of the texts discussed here is that whoever sees *any* religious teacher sees, in some refracted form, the Buddha and his *dharma* also.

evidence that both of these *tathāgatagarbha* works knew the SPS and its *ekayāna* position, it is significant that all of them present a similar picture regarding how a transcendent Buddha exerts his influence upon *samsāra*. This is through the production of emanations that are instrumental in the development of sentient beings – and not only those consciously upon the *bodhisattva* path – in the direction of full awakening. In the SPS these emanations are associated with the provisional vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, but in the MPNMS and AMS the activities of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* are expanded to account for any form of ‘religious’ enterprise, including any discourse resembling the Buddha’s account of what is essential to sentient beings, and what it means to attain liberation from rebirth.

The suggestion that a *bodhisattva* might take the form of a *tīrthika* specifically is an uncommon one in Indian Buddhist literature, but not without some precedent. In no doubt a very different doctrinal context, the *Mahāvastu* makes a single mention of the eighth-stage *bodhisattva* becoming a *tīrthika* for the sake of teaching the “destruction of [re]birth” (*bhavasūdana*), presumably – as this text by no means advances any *ātmavāda* doctrine – to be succeeded by the Buddha’s own teaching of *anātman*.<sup>86</sup> So too the *tīrthika* as imagined by the MPNMS and AMS is presumably the mouthpiece for earlier doctrines of the self, expediently produced for the purpose of introducing the very idea of liberating one’s ‘true self’ from rebirth. A significant contrast however is that the *tīrthika* of the *Mahāvastu* prefigures a turn to the doctrine of *anātman* revealed by the appearance of the Buddha, and not the later revelation of the Buddha’s own, definitive *ātmavāda*.<sup>87</sup> The MPNMS and AMS both imply that

<sup>86</sup> Edgerton 1953: 254b; Senart 1882: 106,8: ...*ataḥ prabhṛti tīrthikā vā bhavanti bhavasūdanāḥ*. A similar account of the activities of the eighth-stage *bodhisattva* is found in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (e.g. Kondō 1936: 140,10–141,7; T.287, 560c3–c18), though no mention is made of the manifestation of any *tīrthikas* specifically.

The *Mahāvastu* and its account of the *bodhisattva*’s appearance in the world also exhibits a form of *lokānuvartanā* thinking: holding that the Buddha/*bodhisattva* acts “in conformity to the world” despite being beyond suffering any particular rebirth in *samsāra*. See Radich 2015a: 109; 120–122; also n. 51 above. For more on the range of the *bodhisattva*’s transformations, see Harrison 2003: 144–145.

<sup>87</sup> It is certainly the case that the *Mahāvastu* would have the views of the (*bodhisattva*-)*tīrthika* superseded by the Buddha teaching the doctrine of *anātman*, whereas the MPNMS

such emanations prefigure the Buddha's own 'secret' doctrine of *ātman*, in accord with their revelation of the *tathāgatagarbha*.<sup>88</sup>

This position of both the MPNMS and AMS can be seen to follow an apparent shift in Buddhological paradigm perhaps begun by the SPS: reimagining the three vehicles model (*triyāna*) found elsewhere in Mahāyāna sources into the single vehicle, the *ekayāna*. Under this paradigm, other members of the wider *saṅgha* are held to all be unknowing adherents to provisional expressions of what is really the Mahāyāna.<sup>89</sup> I suggest that in these *tathāgatagarbha* works – the MPNMS and AMS, which espouse not just a universal potential for awakening but one understood in terms of one's *ātman* – we witness an attempted expansion of the Mahāyāna to explain away the existence of wider religious discourse oriented towards the idea of some self that could attain liberation. Within such an expansive religious paradigm, in which the (*ekayāna*) *saddharma* provides an exhaustive account of the *only* kind of Buddhist liberation

holds that the correct understanding of the *dharma* is an original and superior doctrine of (Buddhist) selfhood.

It is because of such a distinction that I am unwilling to consider the innovation of a Buddhist *ātmavāda* in the MPNMS an example of religious 'inclusivism' (one possible interpretation of this Buddhist *ātmavāda* offered, tentatively, in Ruegg 1989: 50–52). An instance of religious inclusivism, at least classically understood (see e.g. articles in Hacker 1995) would reduce the perspective of some other system(s) to a provisional or deficient expression of one's own. However, under this understanding of the term it would then be something else again to promote above these, as the MPNMS does, a seemingly *new* doctrine that is strikingly reminiscent to what is being called deficient or wrong-minded, i.e. clearly resembling the *ātman* doctrines of other, inferior systems. Hence I contend that the language of inclusion may put us on the wrong track. Pending further study, I find it better to think of the authors of the MPNMS as having attempted to expand the boundaries of the *dharma* into a religious discourse that had previously been the accepted domain of rival traditions: the *ātmavāda* which was shared, in broad terms, by other Indian systems. This shared religious discourse constituted a new frontier in which Buddhist innovators and authors might have promoted their own (they would have hoped persuasive) account of some essential nature proper to sentient beings.

<sup>88</sup> The idea of the *tathāgatagarbha* as the secret import of the Buddha's teaching, conveyed via what may be called his *sandhāvacana*, is central to both MPNMS-tg and the AMS: see e.g. Blum 2013: xxi; Radich 2015a: appendix 2. Suzuki (1999) has argued that a key feature of the AMS is its reinterpretation of older Buddhist teachings in terms of the *tathāgatagarbha*: the suggestion being that what was considered a secret newly revealed by the MPNMS can, according to the AMS, be understood as the hidden import of specific, older articulations of the *dharma*.

<sup>89</sup> See sources cited in n. 6.

possible, the *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* explains both the propensity for awakening in every sentient being and, as the correct teaching on the self, that to which all non-Buddhist accounts of liberation must also, despite all of their apparent misconceptions, have aimed. Moreover, declaring *tīrthikas*, whose teachings resemble and perhaps prefigure the Buddha's own *ātmavāda*, to be little more than emanations robs them of any claim to *sui generis* authority: instruments, as they are revealed to have always been, of the only real vehicle to liberation.

Such an attitude to extraneous teachers is not found in the SPS itself, concerned as it is only with the inferiority of the so-called 'Hīnayānist,' and certainly still Buddhist, teachings. However an interesting parallel to what we have seen in both the MPNMS and AMS can be found in another Mahāyāna text espousing the *ekayāna*: namely the *Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvāṇanirdeśasūtra* (BGVNS).<sup>90</sup> The Tibetan version of this text (BGVNS<sup>T</sup>: e.g. D.146; Q.813) has been studied and translated by Jampal, while its two translations into Chinese have been considered by Takasaki and Zimmermann.<sup>91</sup> The later of these Chinese versions (BGVNS<sup>C</sup>: T.272), translated by Bodhiruci in the sixth century, teaches the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, but without developing it in any significant fashion.<sup>92</sup> The meaning of relevant passages is clearer here than in its earlier Chinese counterpart (T.271: translated by Guṇabhadra in the fifth century CE), and hence shall be my focus in discussion of this text.

All versions of the BGVNS contain a lengthy account of the *ekayāna*, denying the independent value of inferior Buddhist vehicles that had previously been taught, and share the SPS's model of a transcendent Buddha, along with similarly powerful *bodhisattvas*, exerting their mastery over skill-in-means in Śākyamuni's Buddha-field.<sup>93</sup> As Zimmermann

<sup>90</sup> See Jampal 2010: xvi.

<sup>91</sup> Jampal 2010; Takasaki 1975: 254–275. Regarding this text as a Buddhist critique of the *arthaśāstra* genre of literature, see Zimmermann 2000.

<sup>92</sup> See BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 359a24–b3. This translation presents similes for the *tathāgatagarbha* similar to those found across the MPNMS, MBhS and TGS. This passage is found in just one (and the most expansive) of the three recensions of the BGVNS, however the inclusion of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in this version complements well its espousing not just an *ekayāna* position, but also the ubiquity of the Buddha's influence via his emanation of different religious teachers. See Zimmermann 2000: 178–180; 194–198; also Takasaki 1975: 257–262.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 326b8–b15.

argues, the BGVNS can in part be considered a work of Mahāyānist *arthaśāstra*, concerned with statecraft and the duties of a king, as its narrative recounts the education of King Caṇḍapadyota by the insightful *nirgrantha* Satyaka.<sup>94</sup> This Satyaka appeals to the authority of the Vedas when celebrating the qualities of the “ascetic Gautama,” but is later in the narrative praised by that same Buddha for himself being a *bodhisattva* skilled in teaching all kinds of beings through the adoption of different guises.<sup>95</sup> Satyaka, as far as the BGVNS is concerned, is the very model of what we might call the ‘*bodhisattva-tīrthika*.’

This narrative device, in which an ostensibly unlikely spokesperson for the Buddha is revealed to be an accomplished *bodhisattva*, is not an unusual feature of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature (we might consider, for just one further example, the AMS).<sup>96</sup> In regards to the BGVNS the choice of Satyaka as a spokesperson for the *dharma* is particularly apposite, as the text attempts to explain – given the powerful cosmic influence of the Buddha that is revealed both here and in the SPS – how there have come about any *tīrthikas* who seem to challenge the authority of the Buddha.

That place [i.e. Śākyamuni’s Buddha-field] does not generate *tīrthikas* etc. Why is that? Mañjuśrī, the *tīrthikas* and *nirgranthas* in my Buddha-field exist due to the sustaining power of the Tathāgata, for the purpose of manifesting the sphere of inconceivable skill-in-means.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> This Satyaka is presumably the same *nirgrantha* known from the *sutta* literature (e.g. the *Mahāsaccakasutta*: MN I 237). The Jain representative of the six *tīrthikas*, in accounts such as that found in the *Sāmaññāphalasutta*: DN I 47–86, is one “Nigaṇṭha” Nātaputta, and the Jain tradition itself accepted this title as denoting one “without ties,” i.e. a member of their own brand of *śramana* tradition. However Jamspal (2010: 143–147) demonstrates how it is simplistic to translate Buddhist usage of the term *nirgrantha* always as referring to the Jains; in the BGVNS the *nirgrantha* Satyaka is both clothed (so apparently not a *digambara* Jain) and moreover appeals to the authority of the Vedas, i.e. cannot be any kind of ‘heterodox,’ *nāstika* brand of *śramana*. The term certainly still denotes a kind of renunciate religious practitioner or teacher not belonging to the *saṅgha*, much akin to how one might understand referents of the term *tīrthika*.

<sup>95</sup> See BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 361b10–c26. Compare BGVNS<sup>T</sup>, D.146, 132b5–134a5; Q.813, 91b2–93a7; translated in Jamspal 2010: 108–109.

<sup>96</sup> See AMS<sup>C</sup> 528b20–25; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 162a1–2; Q.879, 169a6–7.

<sup>97</sup> Rather than any form of the verb *nir-√mā*, 住持力 here probably reflects some form of the Sanskrit *adhi-√sthā* (reflected throughout BGVNS<sup>T</sup> by *byin gyi rlab*s: see Jamspal 2010: 171): a feature of the Buddha’s activity in the world explored in Tournier 2014: 9–13.

Why is this? Because in this place all of these [apparent] *tīrthikas* etc. are founded upon the teaching of inconceivable liberation; all [possessing] great cognition comprehend the teaching of the perfection of insight; all have attained the power of great skill-in-means and vigorous sovereignty; all attain non-abandonment of the recollection the Buddha, *dharma* and *saṅgha*; all having reached the highest perfection use their supernatural power to teach and develop sentient beings; all have attained empowerment by the Tathāgata to teach and develop sentient beings.<sup>98</sup>

The above is followed by an account of the audience being converted from the *śrāvakayāna* to the *ekayāna*, which takes as its goal attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>99</sup> After this the verse portion of the BGVNS clarifies the status of *tīrthikas* as follows.

Those with great powers among the *tīrthikas* are all sovereign *bodhisattvas*: you should know that [my] skill-in-means manifests just such characteristics.

When all the *bodhisattvas* hear that the *tīrthikas* are endowed with the power of skill-in-means, they are greatly pleased.<sup>100</sup>

Hence *tīrthikas* and their teachings, though certainly inferior next to the doctrine of the BGVNS, are revealed to exist not only as displays of the extent of the Buddha's power, but as instruments for the purposes of teaching particular categories of sentient beings. Expansion of the Buddha's sphere of influence to account for extraneous religious traditions indeed seems a logical next step for the *ekayāna* paradigm of the SPS, and moreover what Radich has deemed the development of

<sup>98</sup> BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 326c23-327a2: 彼處不生諸外道等。何以故? 文殊師利, 我佛國土, 有諸外道、尼乾子等, 皆是如來住持力故, 爲欲示現不可思議方便境界。何以故? 此處<sup>a</sup>一切諸外道等, 皆是住於不可思議解脫門故; 皆是大智、究竟般若波羅蜜門故; 一切皆得大方便力奮迅自在故; 一切皆得不捨佛、法、僧等念故; 一切皆到第一彼岸, 以大神力, 教化衆生故; 一切皆得如來加力, 教化衆生故。Compare BGVNS<sup>T</sup> D.146, 97a3-6; Q.813, 53a4-7, translated in Jamspal 2010: 36; also T.271, 306a3-9.

<sup>a</sup> I here amend the Taishō edition of BGVNS<sup>C</sup> in favour of the following: 諸 = 處 <三><宮>

<sup>99</sup> BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 327a3-a5; also Jamspal 2010: 36-37.

<sup>100</sup> BGVNS<sup>C</sup> 327c10-13: 外道大神通 皆自在菩薩 / 汝當知方便 示現如是相 / 一切諸菩薩 聞諸外道等 / 具足方便力 皆發歡喜心。Compare BGVNS<sup>T</sup> D.146, 98b4-5; Q.813, 54b6-7, translated in Jamspal 2010: 39; also T.271, 306c5-6. Both of these versions differ slightly from the verses of BGVNS<sup>C</sup>, and more clearly refer to the *tīrthikas* as creations (e.g. BGVNS<sup>T</sup> *rnam par 'phrul pa; vikurvaṇa*) by *bodhisattvas*.

‘docetic’ Buddhology epitomized by both this text and, notably, the MPNMS.<sup>101</sup> We have seen a similar explanation for *tīrthikas* exhibited by both the MPNMS and AMS, in which all discourse pertaining to liberation must necessarily have its point of origin in the Buddha and his activities for the sake of all beings, including any teaching that appears to challenge the Buddha’s own, superior account of what is essential to them.

In similar fashions, the BGVNS, MPNMS and AMS each imply that extraneous religious ideas and practices emerge only as part of the Buddha’s mysterious and multifaceted influencing of *samsāra*. Importantly, none of these texts deny the supremacy of their own form of the *dharma* over whatever may be taught by these *tīrthikas*: specifically, in the MPNMS and AMS, anything that may resemble the *tathāgatagarbha* as an account of one’s true self. Each of these texts reconfigures representatives of non-Buddhist systems as having derived their influence in the world always from the Buddha: a mechanism likely related to the *ekayāna* paradigm as developed in the SPS.

### The Expansion of the *Ekayāna*

We are now better equipped to explain at least one motivating factor behind the explicitly *ātmavādin* leanings of the MPNMS and AMS, along with their enigmatic suggestion that extraneous religious systems are somehow *\*nirmita* of the *bodhisattva(s)* or Buddha. Two significant ideas inform how we contextualize accounts of non-Buddhist traditions found across both texts: (1) the clear influence of the SPS or its milieu, including its account of the *ekayāna* and the Buddha’s ages-long, skilful adaptation of the *dharma* for different audiences; and (2) the sense that these *tathāgatagarbha* texts, similar to the BGVNS, might have expanded the boundaries of the *ekayāna* to account for advocates of rival systems,

<sup>101</sup> See n. 51. Radich (2015a: 110–112) notes that the view that the Buddha had already attained awakening long before his worldly birth and apparent (though only displayed: see n. 82) passing into *nirvāṇa* is foremost in the doctrine of both the SPS (Kern & Nanjio 1970: 318,13–319,5) and MPNMS (e.g. MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 870c22–23; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 388b22–24; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §194.7–10).

re-imagining them as emanations instrumental in the Buddha's development of all sentient beings.<sup>102</sup>

Emanated creations featured across these texts, most clearly shown in the SPS and BGVNS, are productions of the Buddha that are produced to advance the development of different sentient beings. However revealing religious instructors – be they previous Buddhas or rival *tīrthikas* – to be as such expresses nothing other than the superiority of the (ekayānist) Mahāyāna, and he who reveals it, over any perceived threat to its authority on matters soteriological. Hence we should be clear that when the MPNMS or AMS re-imagine non-Buddhist teachings as pronouncements by some or other emanation it is no endorsement of what such teachers have said or done; rather, this device reduces to nothing any possible opposition to what these *sūtras* declare to be the Buddha's definitive teaching. In the context of these *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* works, there can then be *no* rival discourse on the self as a soteriological category that is not in reality some kind of provisional expression, for some audience, of the Buddhist *dharma*. The MPNMS, AMS, and BGVNS reveal that all apparent rivals to the Buddha are little more than puppets: acting, somehow, for the benefit of one or other group of sentient beings, but of no relevance to those who understand the *saddharma* as these texts themselves reveal it.

Hence the MPNMS and AMS certainly consider their own doctrines to be superior to those of any non-Buddhist system. But their bold presentation of an *ātmavāda*, by these texts' own testimonies against the grain of the *dharma* previously articulated, is complemented by the declaration that any apparently similar teaching in the world can be explained away as a product of the Buddha, or of some *bodhisattva*. This has the added advantage of being able to explain to what all other 'higher' religious

<sup>102</sup> A further curious suggestion of this expanded *ekayāna* paradigm is found in the verses of the LAS, which teaches that the *ekayāna* doctrine (which the LAS considers a provisional teaching) is used to explain the lack of any basis to a set of *five* vehicles: adding to those of the *tathāgata*, *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* both the *devayāna* and *brahmayāna*: see Nanjio 1923: 134–135; also Kunst 1977: 313–314. This reflects the LAS carefully qualifying some form of *ekayāna* teaching in a manner quite different from that found in the SPS, and it is curious that it sees the single vehicle as encompassing two more paths associated with what may refer to non-Buddhist teachings or aspirations.



discourse concerning the self – perhaps others that were persuasive to Indian audiences – must necessarily refer: the Buddha’s own account of the true self, better understood as the *tathāgatagarbha*.

The attitude of these *tathāgatagarbha* authors may well have been similar to that of the SPS, in which the relevance of Hīnayāna teachings pales once one realizes them to be little more than devices for specific (and inferior) audiences. In the spirit (though not letter) of the SPS, realization of the *tathāgatagarbha* constitutes the only kind of liberation – expounded by the Buddha or otherwise – that is ultimately possible. This being the case, it stands to reason that any grain of truth detectable in other accounts of liberation must both gesture towards the Buddha’s own teaching of some self that might be liberated, and moreover lose any relevance once an audience is presented with the definitive account of the true self. All of this fits well with a potentially influential attitude of the SPS regarding the religious other (in that text the adherents to Hīnayāna teachings), as articulated by Jamie Hubbard.

There is no ‘other’ to be located in this approach except within the borders of one’s own discourse; thus, inasmuch as the ‘other’ exists only on one’s own terms, neither self nor other requires critical presentation and evaluation.<sup>103</sup>

An implication in the passages of *tathāgatagarbha* sources that we have addressed is that the interests of anyone actually teaching a rival discourse in the world (i.e. a real-life *tīrthika*) are immaterial. Such teachers are robbed of any independent voice, revealed here to be only instruments of the Buddha. It is then unlikely that the passages discussed above targeted rival religious teachers as a potential audience; rather, any perceived appeal of the *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* must have been to an audience who might have been persuaded by the idea that *tīrthikas* could indeed be expressions of the Buddha’s power.<sup>104</sup> Such an audience may

<sup>103</sup> Hubbard 1995: 131. Hubbard clarifies that the *ekayāna* of the SPS should not be confused with an attempt to accommodate in any tolerant sense the so-called Hīnayāna traditions, but rather states their irrelevance in light of what is revealed in the SPS. Such an attitude seems to underpin also the passages of the MPNMS, AMS and BGVNS under discussion here.

<sup>104</sup> See also n. 71. Notably this is not the opinion of some later texts in the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition: the LAS holds that the *tathāgatagarbha* is taught “for the purpose of

have been sympathetic to some form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, one shaped by the SPS and its universalist account of awakening for all beings, which might have then expressed this universalism in a manner comparable to what was found in competing *ātmavādin* systems. This is what we find in the MPNMS and AMS: an explanation of the capacity for awakening in all sentient beings, i.e., their possession of the *tathāgata-garbha*, explained in terms of the self. Equipping themselves with this terminology, the authors of the MPNMS and AMS were able to advance an account of Buddhist liberation for all beings, as expounded by the SPS, which eclipses all others that may be encountered in the world.

Though we may be able to reconstruct the kind of audience to which these ideas may have appealed, attempting to situate this literature either historically or geographically is of course difficult. Radich has recently contended that evidence within the MPNMS allows us to situate parts of its composition in the second century,<sup>105</sup> while more conservative estimates, taking into account its adoption of a form of *ātmavāda*, associate it with revival of Brāhminic influence in India during the Gupta period, i.e. no earlier than the mid-fourth century.<sup>106</sup> This article offers little assistance

attracting the *tīrthakaras* who are fixated on views of the self” (Nanjio 1923: 79,1–2: *ātmavādābhiniṣṭhānām tīrthakarāṇām ākarṣaṇārthaṃ*). It is safe to say however that the LAS is critical of *ekayāna* doctrine (see n. 102), and is likely to not have represented accurately the intentions of authors responsible for the MPNMS-group of *sūtras*. See also n. 120.

<sup>105</sup> Radich (2015a: 61–82: following Suzuki 1999; 2000 and Hodge 2006; 2012; plus unpublished work), argues this from evidence drawn from a prophecy complex shared by MPNMS-tg and other texts in the MPNMS-group: a detailed argument too long to reproduce here, but notably not central to Radich’s primary claim that the MPNMS is likely the earliest *tathāgatagarbha* source available to us.

<sup>106</sup> Williams 2009: 109 associates the *tathāgatagarbha* with the Gupta era (circa 320–550 CE) – “the high period of vigorous classical Brāhminic ‘Hindu’ culture” – following Nakamura (1980: 212), who situates specifically the MPNMS in this era; see also Chappell 1980: 139–140. For a thorough account of India’s shift to Brāhminic hegemony under the Guptas, see Verardi 2011: 128–196. Eltschinger 2014a: 73–92 discusses the development of Buddhist prophesies of decline in late-Gupta period texts, likely reflecting concerns Buddhists had regarding “a loss of political footing (if not political hostility) and the enmity of non-Buddhist orthodox and sectarian milieux.” These problems can be considered major factors in the evolution of Buddhist apologetics in the sixth century, from which point Buddhist philosophers seem to have shifted their attention to challenges from non-Buddhist systems; problems that had perhaps troubled the certainly earlier authors of the MPNMS and AMS also.

regarding the absolute dating of the MPNMS and AMS, but demonstrates that the authors of these texts were concerned with the ideas and practices of other traditions, and moreover the appeal these had to some or other audience.<sup>107</sup> This expressed itself as the development of a Buddhist discourse on the true self of all sentient beings, certainly influenced by doctrinal innovations of the SPS, and with it an elegant explanation for any similarities this may have born to features of other religious systems, in whose domain *ātmavādin* discourse would have been held to be.

It is also not the case that through surviving *tathāgatagarbha* sources we can necessarily find, in some original form, the beginnings of the adoption of an *ātmavāda* position by any Buddhist community; these *sūtra* texts offer only a small window, and a murky one at that, into positions and opinions that their authors and their communities would have held.<sup>108</sup> But clearly the MPNMS and AMS wished to advance the idea that ultimately sentient beings possess some permanent, unchanging essence that befitted the label *ātman*, and that this properly understood is the uniquely Mahāyānist category of the *tathāgatagarbha*. The disadvantage

<sup>107</sup> The MPNMS and AMS are also key early sources for Buddhist vegetarianism: something better associated with non-Buddhist Indian traditions. In the MPNMS there is clear evidence that what is advocated is however not the ‘vegan’ attitude of those it identifies as *nirgranthas* – drawing a line at the refusal of gifts derived from animal life (butter, silk, leather etc.): see MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 869a8; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 386a28–29; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §175,1–4. It further states that it is wrong to think of plants as hosting life-forces (*jīvas*), in a possible further distinction from Jain attitudes and practices: MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> 882b23–24; MPNMS<sup>C2</sup> 406a24; MPNMS<sup>T</sup> §364.11–12.

Regarding vegetarianism in the AMS, see AMS<sup>C</sup> 540c26–c27; AMS<sup>T</sup> D.213, 197a5–a6; Q.879, 204b3–204b4. See also Ruegg 1980: 236–237; Schmithausen 2003.

<sup>108</sup> It is difficult to account for the apparently earlier equation of the Buddha with the self, found in MPNMS-dhk and underpinning the example of the woodworm discussed earlier. This is significant, as presumably it is only (in Shimoda’s terms) the internalization of the Buddha relic (*dhātu*), i.e. the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha* in sentient beings, by later material of MPNMS-tg that would permit anything in the constitution of sentient beings to warrant designation as *ātman*. Prior to any account of the nature of a Buddha residing in sentient beings, it is perhaps the case that MPNMS-dhk considered the label *ātman* fitting for a Buddha who is revealed to exist permanently and beyond suffering: the major concern of this earlier material of the text. Evoking the four *viparyāsas* to explain awakened reality (see nn. 10 and 31), the authors of MPNMS-dhk arrived at the provocative position that the Buddha himself should be considered *ātman*: of unchanging character, existing permanently and apart from the suffering which characterizes existence in *samsāra*.

of adopting this taboo language is clear: Buddhist audiences seem to have responded critically to adoption of the language, if not also central ideas, of non-Buddhist *ātmavādin* systems, in contravention of perhaps the most fundamental Buddhist teachings regarding notions of selfhood. These authors' intention, however unsuccessful, may have been to promote their own, distinctly Buddhist account of the true self that could compete with and surpass others that were prevalent, and perhaps growing in influence, across the Indian religious landscape of their time.

Whatever the precise circumstances of our authors, we do well to consider early *tathāgatagarbha* sources, likely exemplified by the MPNMS and related texts, to be heavily indebted to the SPS. All of these texts might be grouped together as 'ekayānist' in type (even, as in MPNMS<sup>C1</sup> and MPNMS<sup>T</sup>, when this category does not appear): holding that there is only one possible form of liberation (i.e. Buddhahood), and which, in the *tathāgatagarbha* literature, is the realization of one's own essential (Buddha-)nature. Evidence suggests that during the first half of the first millennium the *ekayāna* was not the dominant Mahāyānist paradigm in India.<sup>109</sup> However for its advocates the notion of a single vehicle may have provided a valuable mechanism for undermining the role of other religious systems, complemented by the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and its account of awakening as a form of 'disclosure' of some essential nature that is proper to all sentient beings.<sup>110</sup>

A central mechanism for defending this doctrine explained rival teachings as expressions of the Buddha's own creative power: an idea with strong doctrinal roots in the SPS, and which warrants further study. We should note that a similar device is employed elsewhere in the SPS, and though not in explicit reference to any so-called *tīrthikas* does attribute the activities of various deities to the methods of a *bodhisattva*. The *Samantamukhaparivarta* describes the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara as displaying (*deśayati*) the forms (*rūpa*) of deities or other categories of divine beings including Śakra, Brahmā, and Maheśvara in order to advance the *dharma*.<sup>111</sup> A similar account, also in praise of Avalokiteśvara and his

<sup>109</sup> Nattier 2003: 174–176.

<sup>110</sup> See Zimmermann 2014: 515–516; 526–527.

<sup>111</sup> Kern & Nanjio 1970: 442,5–445,10.

display of many forms, is found in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*.<sup>112</sup> In neither is reference made to any doctrines of selfhood, but the underlying claim – that figures of religious authority apparently extraneous to the *dharma* may not be as their devotees had thought them – is certainly akin to that exhibited by our *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* authors.

Much later, we observe the same device being employed by Buddhist authors to justify very different, though perhaps equally provocative, excursions into the ideas and practices of rival religious traditions. We find this in legitimations of ritual practices by early Buddhist tantric sources, among them the seventh century *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi* (MVA). A pertinent passage of the text is its fourth verse, which seems to echo the list of docetic displays found in the SPS and *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, and states that the Buddha himself takes the forms of Maheśvara, Brahmā, Nārāyana etc. in order to teach those who are disposed towards following certain deities.<sup>113</sup> This passage can be read as foregrounded reassurance to audiences of the MVA regarding the authenticity of the text's 'Buddhist' content, despite conspicuous resemblance of its content to the language and categories of non-Buddhist ritual traditions.

More is said on this position of the MVA in the eighth century commentary by Buddhaguhya.<sup>114</sup> In his exposition of MVA 1.20, Buddhaguhya undermines erroneous notions of the self (here used as a defining feature of non-Buddhist teachings), and goes on to explain the existence of various deities as little more than emanations of or by a Buddha.

...people seek liberation through relying on the self of foolish, ordinary beings and upon the gods; the blissful liberation that they seek should however be seen to be the cause connecting them to the Lord Vairocana.

<sup>112</sup> Regarding the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, Studhome (2002: 50–52) argues that this text – likely also influenced strongly by the SPS – is also one concerned with at once appropriating and undermining extraneous, primarily Śaiva, doctrinal motifs and practices. See also Eltschinger 2014a: 82–85.

<sup>113</sup> The Sanskrit of this passage is preserved in the 8<sup>th</sup> century *Nāmamantrārthāvalokinī* of Vilāsavajra. A similar position is found in the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, attributing extraneous *tantras* to previous, provisional teachings of the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī. See Sanderson 2009: 131–132, n. 309; Ruegg 2008: 35–36; also Hodge 2003: 52.

<sup>114</sup> D.2663; Q.3490: *rnam par snang mdzad mngon par byang chub pa'i rgyud chen po'i 'grel bshad*.

The gods such as Īśvara, Brahmā and so on are however generally beings of two kinds: (1) those arisen through *karma* and (2) “awareness beings” (*jñānasattva*). Regarding those, such gods are also teachers of common paths to *nirvāṇa* belonging to foolish, ordinary beings, who are lost [in *saṃsāra*].

As the path which they have taught is a cause for attainment made known by the Lord Vairocana, one should view the gods Īśvāra, Brahmā and so on as awareness beings emanated from the body of the Lord Vairocana.<sup>115</sup>

Buddhaghya understood deities such as these (foremost, it seems, Īśvara/Śiva), who were supposedly responsible for the revelation of non-Buddhist *tantras*, to be no more than what are *nirmīta* of or by the Buddha, and their teaching some form of liberation evidence of their derivation from Vairocana. Declaring as much reaffirmed the authority of Buddhist *tantras* as definitive over and against those of (ostensibly) extraneous ritual systems. If we accept that early *tathāgatagarbha* sources – indeed likely the earliest known to us – advanced their own doctrine as a kind of Buddhist *ātmavāda*, it is possible that their motivations may be comparable to those of later Buddhist innovators in their adoption of (predominantly Śaiva) rites and ritual motifs. As much as tantric Buddhist authors sought to emulate the kinds of powers and performances Śaiva traditions offered to their audiences, so might the *tathāgatagarbha* authors pre-dating these developments have sought to present their own, definitive account of the true self to some who might have been swayed by the *ātmavāda* teachings of competing religious groups.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> D.2663 nyu 84a7–84b3; Q.3490 cu 26b1–4: ...*byis pa so so'i skye bo* (D. *so sor 'gro ba*) *rnams kyi bdag dang lha rnams la brten nas rang gi rnam* (D. *bdag cag gi rnam*) *par grol ba 'tshol ba* (D. *btsal ba*) *ste / rnam par grol ba* (D. *grol ba'i*) / *'tshol ba'i* (D. *btsal ba'i*) *bde bde yang bcom ldan 'das rnam par snang mdzad kyi brgyud ba'i rgyur blta 'o // dbang phug chen po* (D. *dbang po chen po*) *dang tshangs pa la sogs pa'i lha de rnams kyang spyir sems can rnam pa gnyis te las las* (D. *las la*) *skyes pa dang / ye shes kyi sems can no // de la skabs 'dir ni* (D. *om. ni*) *lha de rnams kyang byis pa so so'i skye po* (D. *so sor 'gro ba*) *'khyams pa rnams la* (D. *om. la*) / *so so'i mya ngan las 'das pa'i lam ston pa po* (D. *om. po*) *ste // lam* (D. *adds de*) *ston pa yang bcom ldan 'das rnam par snang mdzad kyi mkhyen* (D. *mkhyen : shes*) *nas thob pa'i rgyur sbyor ba yin pas dbang po dang brgya byin la sogs pa'i lha de rnams bcom ldan 'das rnam par snang mdzad kyi sku las sprul pa'i ye shes kyi sems can du blta 'o //*

<sup>116</sup> See Sanderson 2009: 124–242 (especially 124–127) regarding possible early motivating factors behind Buddhist adoption of tantric ritual structures and motifs.

## Conclusions

It seems that in adopting a form of *ātmavāda* doctrine, and in so doing reducing other forms of this discourse to the work of the Buddha also, the authors of the MPNMS and AMS attempted a kind of doctrinal expansion into the intellectual territory of their religious rivals; similar, perhaps, to the gradual adoption of likely extraneous practices, motifs, and deities exhibited by Buddhist *tāntrikas* in later centuries. Our *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* authors seemed to both presuppose and make effective use of the *ekayāna* paradigm of the SPS and its model of a persistently influential, transcendent Buddha; one who, together with advanced *bodhisattvas*, emanates one or other creation for the benefit of the full gamut of sentient beings. This model of the Buddha and his relationship to the world is one eloquently expressed by David Seyfort Ruegg, in relation to the ‘displayed’ deities featured in the SPS and *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, in which “the entire world of *saṃsāra* may then be a kind of stage on which the liberating activity of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas is played out.”<sup>117</sup>

After the Buddhological innovations of the SPS, by which the religious other could be explained away as an expression of the Buddha’s extensive activities throughout *saṃsāra*, extraneous religious discourse oriented about the true self could now be understood as both deficient in outlook or – more aggrandizing for the Buddhist *dharma* still – purposefully emanated as part of the Buddha’s continuing development of all sentient beings. Such a model of the Buddha’s activity complements the (*ātmavādin*) *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as both the point of origin and culmination of all religious discourse concerning the self, and affirms for its exponents the primacy of their understanding of the (ekayānist) Mahāyāna over any other account of liberation from rebirth.

This paradigm enabled Buddhist authors to justify adoption and transformation of features more established in other religious traditions, and in so doing advance what are presented as their own definitive, archetypal models of ideas and practices that may have challenged Buddhist influence. Regarding the *tathāgatagarbha* authors, the ancient rejection of any

<sup>117</sup> Ruegg 2008: 34.

manner of *ātmavāda* discourse was overturned in favour of a doctrine of the *true* self of sentient beings that is their permanently abiding “Buddha-nature.”<sup>118</sup> Developing a form of Buddhist *ātmavāda*, concerned as it seems to have been with its superiority over other accounts of the self, constituted an attempt by some *tathāgatagarbha* authors to engage with a discourse likely to have been pervasive across the religio-philosophical landscape of their time, which had been eschewed by earlier Buddhist communities in their commitment to the doctrine of *anātman*.

In advancing this ‘*ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha*’ doctrine, the authors of the MPNMS and AMS dived boldly into discourse concerning the true self, in order to participate and seek dominance in religious discussion of the self that was a pervasive characteristic of other Indian religious systems. These however were dangerous waters, and it appears that the *ātmavādin* orientations of the MPNMS and AMS were rejected not only by their early audiences, but moreover by later *tathāgatagarbha* authors (such as those of the ŚDS and LAS), who favoured using this category to explain the commonality between beings and Buddhas in a manner that was in greater accord with the more conventionally Buddhist *anātmavāda*.<sup>119</sup> Language surrounding the innovative adoption of an *ātmavāda*

<sup>118</sup> Regarding confirmation that the MPNMS does indeed still accept an interpretation of *anātman*, see n. 50. An interesting development occurs in the MBhS, which argues that a doctrine of *anātman* had been taught simply to refute worldly notions of the self and, moreover, to lead beings to the Buddha as a superior teacher (see T.270, 296b24–c2). The MBhS, which also goes so far to state also that emptiness-oriented *sūtras* are only of incomplete meaning (T.270, 296b8–10), arguably constitutes the apex of substantialist descriptions of the *tathāgatagarbha*, and is certainly deserving of further scholarly attention. For more on this text, see Suzuki 1997; 2000; 2002; 2007; 2014; 2015; also Jones 2016.

<sup>119</sup> The LAS, having rejected the view that *tathāgatagarbha* conceived as a kind of self is anything but an expedient teaching for the benefit of ‘self-obsessed’ *īrthakaras* (see n. 104), states that the Buddha taught this doctrine for “the purpose of ridding fear regarding lack of self among ignorant persons” (Nanjio 1923: 78,8–12: ...*bālānām nairātmya-saṃtrāsapadavivarjanārtham*). A few lines later (Nanjio 1923: 79,9) we also find the curious expression *tathāgatanairātmyagarbha-*, which corresponds to a clearer equation of the *tathāgatagarbha* with *nairātmya* in the Tibetan version of the LAS (D.108, 86b5; Q.775, 95a5–6: *de bzhin gshegs pa ’i snying po bdag med pa*): an interpretation very much contrary to the *ātmavādin tathāgatagarbha* of the MPNMS-group. Evidence suggests that the LAS held some *tathāgatagarbha* sources to have waded problematically into *ātmavādin* waters, but also accepted this doctrine insofar as it was a provisional teaching: an understanding



by the MPNMS and AMS – specifically that which presents its perceived opponents as emanations by the power of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* – does however throw into relief the closeness between early *tathāgatagarbha* sources and other texts espousing the *ekayāna* form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, concerned as this model of the Mahāyāna seems to have been with affirming the Buddha’s expansive – or in some texts even exhaustive – influence over the religious landscape of classical India.

### Abbreviations

AAN	<i>Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa</i>
AMS	<i>Āṅgulimāliyasūtra</i>
AMSC <sup>C</sup>	<i>Āṅgulimāliyasūtra</i> : Chinese translation, 央掘魔羅經, T.120 (Vol. II).
AMST <sup>T</sup>	<i>Āṅgulimāliyasūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation – ‘ <i>phags pa sor mo'i phreng ba la phan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo</i> , e.g. D.213; Q.879.
AN	<i>Āṅguttaranikāya</i> : Pāli Text Society edition.
BGVNS	<i>Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvāṇanirdeśasūtra</i>
BGVNS <sup>C</sup>	<i>Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvāṇanirdeśasūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Bodhiruci, 大薩遮尼乾子所說經, T.272 (Vol. IX).
BGVNS <sup>T</sup>	<i>Bodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvāṇanirdeśasūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation: ‘ <i>phags pa byang chub sems dpa'i spyod yul gyi thabs kyi yul la rnam par 'phrul ba bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo</i> , e.g. D.146; Q.813.
D	Derge edition of the Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur/bstan 'gyur</i> .

of the *tathāgatagarbha* picked up by Candrakīrti in his *Mūlamadhyamakāvātāra Bhāṣya* (see La Vallée Poussin 1912: 198,13–15).

A similar rendering of the *tathāgatagarbha* in terms of non-self, and one of great influence in later Indian and Tibetan reception of this doctrine, is that of the RGVV. Here we encounter again the *ātmapāramitā* as a quality of the *dharmakāya*, drawn from the ŚDS (which, again, may have responded to an account of the *ātman* from the MPNMS: see n. 10). However it is stated that such use of the term *ātman* is “at all times the sense of self that takes self meant as precisely the absence of self” (*sarvakālam ātmābhipretam nairātmyam evātmana iti kṛtvā* – see Johnston 1991 [1950]: 31,14–16; also Schmithausen 1971: 143; 1973: 135–136). The position of the RGVV seems to be that the *tathāgatagarbha/dharmakāya* cannot refer to a form of selfhood, and that using such an expression must be taken as always referring ultimately to some form of *anātmavādin* position. This is certainly a departure from the sustained efforts to defend the distinctly ‘*ātmavādin*’ *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine found in the MPNMS-group of *sūtras*. See also Takasaki 1966: 212, n. 96; Kanō 2016: 385–391.

DN	<i>Dīghanikāya</i> : Pāli Text Society edition.
LAS	<i>Laṅkāvatārasūtra</i> : Nanjio 1923 edition.
MBhS	* <i>Mahābherisūtra</i> : Chinese translation, 大法鼓經, T.270 (Vol. IX); also the Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation – ' <i>phags pa rnga bo che chen po'i le'u zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo</i> , e.g. D.222, Q.888.
MN	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i> : Pāli Text Society edition.
MPNMS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i>
MPNMS <sup>C1</sup>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Faxian, 佛說大般泥洹經, T.376 (Vol. XII).
MPNMS <sup>C2</sup>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Dharmakṣema, 大般涅槃經, T.374 (Vol. XII).
MPNMS <sup>T</sup>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation – ' <i>phags pa yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo</i> , Habata 2013 edition; also e.g. D.120; Q.788.
MPNMS-dhk	Early stratum of the <i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> , concerned with the <i>dharmakāya</i> : see Radich 2015a, appendix 4.
MPNMS-tg	Later stratum of the <i>Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra</i> , concerned with the <i>tathāgatagarbha</i> : see Radich 2015a, appendix 4.
MVA	<i>Mahāvairocanaḥhisambodhi</i>
Q	Pe cing edition of the Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur/bstan 'gyur</i> .
RGV(V)	<i>Ratnagotravibhāgaśāstra(-vyākhyā)</i> : Johnston 1991 [1950] edition.
SN	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> : Pāli Text Society edition.
SPS	<i>Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra</i> : Kern & Nanjio 1970 edition.
ŚDS	<i>Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādasūtra</i> : references herein are to the fifth century Chinese translation by Guṇabhadra 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經, T.353 (Vol. XII).
T	Taishō edition of the Chinese canon.
TGS	<i>Tathāgatagarbhasūtra</i>

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#### ABSTRACT

This article concerns the Indian *tathāgatagarbha* literature: Mahāyānist works, produced no later than the early fifth century, which assert that all sentient beings possess already the qualities of a Buddha. Early works of this tradition – perhaps even the earliest that are available to us – explain possession of the *tathāgatagarbha* to constitute the existence of the self (*ātman*). These sources, foremost the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, show evidence that their authors faced strong opposition from audiences committed to the more conventional Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, but contend defensively that the *ātman* that they teach is nothing like any notion of selfhood found in non-Buddhist religious traditions.

With reference to two of these 'ātmaśādin' *tathāgatagarbha* works, I present evidence that authors of this tradition used the idea of a Buddhist doctrine of the self to undermine non-Buddhist accounts of liberation: not only describing them as deficient, but as having been created (*nirmita*) by the Buddha himself. Such claims expand the boundaries of the Buddha's sphere of influence, after the description of his activities found in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*: a clear influence upon these *tathāgatagarbha* sources. Other Mahāyānist literature of an 'ekayānist' orientation used this strategy also: i.e. that any teaching regarding liberation from *saṃsāra* finds its origin in the activities of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, but has its definitive expression in the Buddhist *dharma*. The *tathāgatagarbha* presented as a Buddhist doctrine of the self can hence be understood as a complement to a certain understanding of the Mahāyāna, here the archetype of all paths that claim to deliver an end to *saṃsāra*, and to an account of the Buddha as the architect of all ostensibly non-Buddhist accounts of liberation.