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Committee on the Study of Religion
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“Yogâcâra Buddhism Transmitted or Transformed?
Paramârtha (499-569) and His Chinese Interpreters.”

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PREVIEW

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Interpreters

A dissertation presented

by

Ching Keng

to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

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PREVIEW

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**“Yogācāra Buddhism Transmitted or Transformed? Paramārtha (499-569 CE)
and His Chinese Interpreters”**

Abstract

This dissertation argues that the Yogācāra Buddhism transmitted by the Indian translator Paramārtha (Ch. Zhendi 真諦) underwent a significant transformation due to the influence of his later Chinese interpreters, a phenomenon to which previous scholars failed to paid enough attention.

I begin with showing two contrary interpretations of Paramārtha’s notion of *jiexing* 解性. The traditional interpretation glosses *jiexing* in terms of “original awakening” (*benjue* 本覺) in the *Awakening of Faith* and hence betrays its strong tie to that text. In contrast, a contrary interpretation of *jiexing* is preserved in a Dunhuang fragment Taishō No. 2805 (henceforth abbreviated as T2805).

The crucial part of this dissertation consists in demonstrating that T2805 and the *Awakening of Faith* represent two competing lineages of the interpreters of Paramārtha. The first clue is that modern scholars have voiced objection to the traditional attribution of the *Awakening of Faith* to Paramārtha. In addition, I discovered that striking similarities exist between T2805 and Paramārtha’s corpus with respect to terminology, style of phrasing, and doctrine. I further draw attention to the historical testimonies about two different doctrinal views held by Paramārtha’s interpreters. Therefore, I argue that there were two lineages in the name of Paramārtha’s disciples around 590 CE: the indirect lineage interpreted Paramārtha through the lens of the *Awakening of Faith*; and the direct lineage—represented by T2805—preserved Paramārtha’s original teachings but

died out prematurely. Later Chinese Buddhist tradition mistakenly regards the indirect lineage as Paramârtha's true heir and attributes the *Awakening of Faith* to Paramârtha.

This implies that Paramârtha may have agreed with Xuanzang 玄奘 (600-664) much more than scholars used to assume. For example, Xuanzang's characterization of the notion of "aboriginal uncontaminated seeds" looks very similar to how Paramârtha depicts *jiexing*. It also implies that we should distinguish the strong sense of the notion of "tathāgatagarbha" in the *Awakening of Faith* from its weak sense. The fact that even Vasubandhu endorses the weak sense of "tathāgatagarbha" strongly challenges the received wisdom that Yogâcāra and Tathāgatagarbha were two distinct and antagonistic trends of thought in India.

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PREVIEW

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Abbreviations and Convention

AKBh: *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Vasubandhu.

CWSL: *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 translated by Xuanzang, Taishō. No. 1585.

DT: sDe-dge bsTan 'gyur (Tōhoku 東北 Edition)

FDJL: *Fodi jing lun* 佛地經論 translated by Xuanzang,¹ Taishō. No. 1530.

FXL: *Foxing lun* 佛性論 translated by Paramārtha, Taishō. No. 1610.

MSA: *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (Verses only).

MSA-Bhāṣya: *Mahāyānasūtrālamkārabhāṣya*.

MSg: *Mahāyānasamgraha* by Asaṅga. I follow the section numbers designated by Lamotte (1973), Nagao (1982-1987), or Griffiths et al. (1989).

MSgBh: *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya* by Vasubandhu (when referred to Vasubandhu's original text).

RGV: *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (Verses only).

RGV-Vyākhyā: *Ratnagoṭravibhāgavyākhyā*.²

Shelun: Paramārtha's Chinese translation of the *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya* by Vasubandhu, Taishō. No. 1595.

T2805: The Dunhuang fragment Taishō No. 2805.

T: *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經.

X: *Shinsan Dai Nihon zoku Zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經.

¹ The Sanskrit title of this text has been constructed differently. John Keenan (1980) and Dan Lusthaus (2002) reconstruct the original Sanskrit title as the **Buddhabhūmy-upadeśa*, which is different from the Tibetan translation of the **Buddhabhūmi-vyākhyāna* attributed to Śīlabhadra (Nishio 1982). The precise relation among these two commentaries on the **Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* and the *Cheng weishi lun* goes beyond the scope of this dissertation (Cf. Lusthaus 2002: 400ff.). To avoid confusion, I choose to use Xuanzang's Chinese title throughout this dissertation.

² There are many confusions regarding the title of the *RGV*. E.H. Johnston's Sanskrit edition puts it as "Ratnagoṭravibhāgo mahāyānottaratantraśāstram" (Prasad 1991: 69). Based on the Tibetan translation of the commentary, E. Obermiller reconstructs the Sanskrit title of the commentary as "Uttaratantra-vyākhyā" (Ibid.: 220). Takasaki notes that "Being the explanation of the meaning of the śloka the commentary seems to be called the 'Ślokārthasamgrahavyākhyāna.'" (Takasaki 1966: 11)

XGSZ: *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, Taishō No. 2060.

Ch. : terms in Chinese

Skt.: terms in Sanskrit

Tib.: terms in Tibetan

[] Brackets in English translation: insertion by the author.

() Parenthesis in English translation: paraphrase, explanations, etc.

In citing the Taishō (T) and the *Zoku Zōkyō* (X) Chinese canons, I give the number of the text, followed by the volume, page, register and line numbers, for example: T1595:31.156c9-22. Throughout, I regularly re-punctuate citations from Chinese texts without notice in order to show my understanding of the quoted passages.

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PREVIEW

Dedicated to

My grandma, my parents, and my wife

PREVIEW

0. Introduction

0.1 Yogâcâra and Tathâgatagarbha as Two Competing Traditions

This dissertation argues that our current understanding of an important Indian scholarly monk and translator in China named Paramârtha (Zhendi 真諦; 499-569 CE) is fundamentally distorted. I argue that the traditional image of Paramârtha, to which many modern scholars still subscribe, is a product of later Chinese reinterpretations of his work through the lens of the *Awakening of Faith*. More importantly, by establishing the close relation between a long-lost fragment and Paramârtha, I try to recover the authentic teachings of Paramârtha, which have been lost since only a few decades after his death. Finally, I elucidate how my refutation of the traditional image of Paramârtha helps us better understand the development of Buddhist thought both in China and in India.

This chapter aims at a general introduction to the whole dissertation. It consists of four parts: first, some general background information about the Buddhist intellectual context in India and in China where Paramârtha was located; second, a summary of the traditional image of Paramârtha, which is the main target of this dissertation; third, a review of previous scholarship on Paramârtha while at the same time pinpointing three dubious assumptions that mislead previous scholars; and fourth, an outline of chapters.

Yogācāra Tradition¹ (Acquired Gnosis) v.s. Tathāgatagarbha Tradition (Inherent Gnosis)²

Among the world's religious traditions, Buddhism occupies a special position as it emphasizes neither faith in God nor the merits accumulated, but rather stresses the attainment of gnosis (*jñāna*), i.e., a pure cognitive state that perceives the world as it really is.³ The shared thesis for various Buddhist traditions is that once a sentient being comes to realize what there is in reality, then she would naturally be freed from suffering and other forms of bondage, as all these are merely derivatives of her initial ignorance. The differences among various Buddhist traditions lie in the different ways they propose to solve the problem of how to obtain this gnosis.

¹ Here I am using the term "tradition" in a somewhat vague sense, meaning something like "doctrinal trends." The Yogācāra tradition might not have been a body of organized people or a distinct lineage in its primitive phase, but it appears that some time between Vasubandhu and the time when Xuanzang traveled to India (ca. 629-645), it became a more organized scholastic group: Kuiji reported that there were ten foremost masters composing commentaries on Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* before Xuanzang. In contrast, we know so little about the Tathāgatagarbha tradition that we do not even know in what sense it was indeed a separate tradition from other scholastic traditions such as Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. Given the limitation our current knowledge of Indian Buddhism, it is very difficult to determine how texts were circulated and teachings were spread in ancient India. Silk's erudite article "The *Yogācāra Bhikṣu*" only shows us that, in order to trace the origin of the Yogācāra-vijñānavāda school, "we probably cannot look to an analysis of the term Yogācāra for help" (Silk 2000: 314).

² Toward the end of this dissertation, I shall point out that Vasubandhu has incorporated the Tathāgatagarbha notion. It is worth further exploring whether Vasubandhu and people afterwards also adopted the model of "inherent gnosis" (or better, whether Vasubandhu and people afterwards regarded the non-discriminating cognition as unconditioned) as a result. Hence the contrast I propose here between Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha may not be an accurate depiction of the development of the Yogācāra tradition after Vasubandhu.

³ Thanks to Professor Leonard van der Kuijp, who rightly pointed out that the Sanskrit term here should be *jñāna* instead of *prajñā*.