The Yogācāra Doctrine of Buddha-Nature: Paramārtha vs. the Fa-hsiang School

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Abstract

There were two main streams in Yogācāra Buddhism. On the one hand, there was the Old School of Sthiramati and Paramārtha. On the other hand, there was the New School of Dharmapāla and Hsuan Tsang. Due to the work of Yoshifumi Ueda and Gadjin Nagao in Japan, the distinction between Paramārtha and the Fa-hsiang School has been to a large extent clarified. The difference between their doctrines on Buddha-nature has been, however, relatively neglected by modern scholarship. This paper aims to clarify the distinction between Paramārtha and the Fa-hsiang’s doctrines of Buddha-nature. Following Ueda, this paper will also differentiate Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature from the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha presented in the Awakening of Faith. Especially, we will see that Buddha-nature in the Awakening of Faith and the Fa-hsiang School are committed to a version of essentialism. Finally, it will discern some interesting parallels between Paramārtha’s doctrine and the perfect teachings of T’ien T’ai Buddhism.
There were two main streams in Yogācāra Buddhism. On the one hand, there was the Old School of Sthiramati and Paramārtha. On the other hand, there was the New School of Dharmapāla and Hsuan Tsang. Due to the work of Yoshifumi Ueda and Gadjin Nagao, the distinction between Paramārtha and the Fa-hsiang School has been to a large extent clarified. The difference between their doctrines on Buddha-nature has been, however, relatively neglected by modern scholarship. This paper aims to clarify the distinction between Paramārtha and the Fa-hsiang’s doctrines. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to differentiate Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature from the doctrine of the tathāgatatagarbha presented in the *Awakening of Faith*. The concepts of Buddha-nature in the *Awakening of Faith* and the Fa-hsiang School are committed to a version of essentialism. Paramārtha, on the other hand, provides a more dynamic theory of Buddha-nature that effectively corrects the shortcomings of both the *Awakening of Faith* and the Fa-hsiang School. Furthermore, being consistent with the Mahāyāna commitment to equality, Paramārtha’s doctrine bears significant affinity with the perfect teachings of T’ien T’ai Buddhism.

Traditionally, the *Fo-hsing lun* (*Theory of Buddha-Nature*) has been identified as the most important text on Buddha-nature in Yogācāra Buddhism. Mou Tsung-san (1909-1995)—a major founder of contemporary Neo-Confucianism—develops an interpretation of this text in his *Fo-hsing yu po-je* (*Buddha-Nature and Prajñā*). In order to pursue this line of thinking, we will start with a critical examination of Mou’s interpretations, and then indicate our agreement with Ueda’s differentiation of Paramārtha’s doctrine from the *Awakening of Faith*. This will give rise to a separation of Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature from more traditional interpretations.

Historically, the Korean monk Yuan Hsiao (Wenhyo, 617-686) might be the first scholar who tried to discern between Paramārtha’s and Hsuan Tsang’s doctrine of Buddha-nature. In the *Nie-p’on tsong-yao* (*Nehanshuyo, A Summary of the School of Nirvāṇa*), he writes:

The sixth group of masters identifies the *amalavijñāna* as the enlightened understanding of the *tathatā* to be the essence of Buddha-nature. As the Sūtra says, “Buddha-nature is the name of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the superior sense.” This is Paramārtha’s doctrine [of Buddha-nature].

Yuan Hsiao then contrasts Paramārtha’s doctrine with that of the new Fa-hsiang School:
The thesis that the natural seeds of the *ālayavijñāna* as the essence of Buddha-nature is held by the New School [of Yogācāra Buddhism] and others. This is basically the position of masters belonging to the newly founded Fa-hsiang School of the T’ang dynasty.⁶

Yuan Hsiao’s characterization of Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature is consistent with the one given by Chi Tsang before.⁷

In modern scholarship, the Japanese scholar Daijo Tokiwa’s *Busshō no kenkyu* (A Study of Buddha-Nature) is a classic work on the problem of Buddha-nature in Yogācāra Buddhism.⁸ In his treatment of the distinction between Paramārtha’s and the Fa-hsiang doctrine of Buddha-nature, however, Tokiwa only focuses on the contrast between the *ekayāna* and the *triyāna* positions. Following the Chinese, as well as the Japanese tradition, Tokiwa interprets Paramārtha’s doctrine in terms of the *tathāgatagarbha* presented in the *Awakening of Faith*.⁹ In the Western scholarship, John Keenan follows this line of hermeneutics.¹⁰

Although Mou knows that Paramārtha has been the alleged translator of the *Fo-hsing lun*, for some reason he assigns this text to the lineage of the Fa-hsiang School. Following Masaaki Hattori, however, we would rather argue that one finds Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature in the *Fo-hsing lun*. Accordingly, we will develop an alternative interpretation of this text to the one proposed by Mou. This will enable us to recognize the affinity between Paramārtha’s and the T’ien T’ai doctrine of Buddha-nature. For both of them, Buddha-nature is neither determinately pure, nor determinately impure. My understanding of Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature is not only different from the traditional interpretation, but also confirms Ueda’s differentiation of Paramārtha’s Yogācāra thought from the doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* presented in the *Awakening of Faith*.

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According to Mou, the concept of the seed (*bīja*) traditionally plays an important role in the Yogācāra. The natural seed generally represents the force that continues from our previous deeds. As the cause of results (*vipāka*), which gives certain responses, it can lead to future actions, and is in sense inheritable. As is well known, there is a distinction between the pure and impure seeds. In contrast to the impure seeds, the pure seeds can lead to positive result in attaining Buddhahood. Mou, however, claims that “Vasubandhu’s *Fo-hsing lun* does not consider the natural seed to be the essence of Buddha-nature.”¹¹ Buddha-nature in the Fa-hsiang sense is not identical with the concept of the pure seed. Mou points out that there is
Mou further points out that for the Fa-hsiang School, the pure seeds, in principle, are not to be equally distributed. That is to say, it is purely contingent for one to have the pure seeds. As a result, there is a class of sentient beings that entirely lack the pure seeds. This is exactly what the Fa-hsiang School means by the *icchantika*. For Mou, this points to another essential distinction between the rational Buddha-nature and the naturally inherent pure seeds: While the distribution of the rational Buddha-nature is universal and necessary, the distribution of the pure seeds is particular and contingent.

Mou says of the Fa-hsiang School, “the rational Buddha-nature cannot be confused with ‘the tathāgatagarbha of the originally pure mind.’” In his eyes, unlike the *tathāgatagarbha* of the originally pure mind in the sense of the *Awakening of Faith*, the rational Buddha-nature understood by the Fa-hsiang School cannot be characterized as being originally equipped with all *asamskṛta* virtues. Yet the rational Buddha-nature is not a mind at all. Secondly, in opposition to the doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* presented in the *Awakening of Faith*, the *tathatā* in the sense of the Fa-hsiang School does not function as a transcendental ground of the world. For the Fa-hsiang School, the ground for the rise of the world
is to be found in the ālayavijñāna. The ālayavijñāna is here conceived both as an ontological principle and a principle of cognition. The Fa-hsiang School insists that even after enlightened transformation, the ālayavijñāna is needed for the cognition of the tathātā. As the correlate of the transformed eighth consciousness, the tathātā remains an objective principle. This indicates that for the Fa-hsiang School, after enlightenment, the relationship between the eighth consciousness and the tathātā is still understood in terms of a subject-object dichotomy. Viewed from this perspective, there is an unbridgeable epistemic gap between the transformed eighth consciousness and the tathātā. In particular, the parinīspañña is understood as referring solely to the tathātā, in the sense of the objective, static principle of sūnyatā. That is, the consummative nature (pariniñña) is achieved purely in terms of freeing oneself from any attachment to the seeing part as the ego and the seen part as a substantial thing. This, however, does not give rise to a real identity between the transformed eighth consciousness and the tathātā. Mou concludes that, for the Fa-hsiang School, the rational Buddha-nature belongs to the objective side, and the practical Buddha-nature belongs to the subjective side. To the extent that the pure seeds only belong to subjectivity, they are different from the rational Buddha-nature.

When the Fo-hsing lun claims that Buddha-nature, itself, potentially has all the virtues that it deserves to acquire, Mou indicates that this does not imply that these virtues can be generated from the rational Buddha-nature alone. That is to say, such an acquisition is not a priori guaranteed; neither is there any absolute guarantee for any pure seed to become maturely grown. This explains why, for the Fa-hsiang School, both the success of the acquisition and full growing is purely a matter of contingency. Only Buddha-nature in an ideal sense can claim these virtues. In short, the Fa-hsiang concept of the tathāgatagarbha is not identical with a transcendental mind. It signifies the tathātā as an objective principle, rather than as an activity. Accordingly, the rational Buddha-nature is only the principle (of emptiness) to be witnessed. Being inactive, it is different from the tathāgatagarbha in the sense of the Awakening of Faith. The latter represents a principle of subjectivity. Thus, while the tathāgatagarbha of the Fa-hsiang School is a static principle, the tathāgatagarbha of the Awakening of Faith is an active transcendental mind.

It is clear that, for the Yogācāra doctrine of Buddha-nature, the pure seeds also contribute to the attainment of Buddhahood. According to the modern Chinese monk Master Yin Shun (1906-2005), this signifies an unnecessary complication. Mou, however, holds that this is only due to Master Yin Shun’s overlooking of the fact that there are two kinds of
Buddha-nature: the rational and the practical Buddha-nature. As is seen above, for the Fa-hsiang School, the rational Buddha-nature is emptiness (śūnyatā) as an objective principle, and the practical Buddha-nature, consisting of the pure seeds, is a subjective principle. The abiding place for the pure seeds is the ālayavijñāna, rather than the rational Buddha-nature. As the principle of emptiness, the rational Buddha-nature is not understood as the dynamic ground for the possibility of becoming enlightened. It is only the static principle to be witnessed. This indicates that there is a distinction between emptiness and the principle of emptiness. The efficient effort for attaining enlightenment is exclusively found in the pure seeds. The growth of the naturally inherent pure seeds is solely responsible for the activity in attaining the āśraya-parāvṛtti.\(^{19}\) Therefore, it is not repetitive for the Fa-hsiang School to introduce the pure seeds as the necessary condition of attaining Buddhahood.

Mou’s articulation of the Fa-hsiang doctrine of Buddha-nature is basically consistent with Yuan Hsiao’s report. From a historical standpoint, their accounts are faithful to K’uei Ch’i’s understanding of the distinction between the rational Buddha-nature and the practical Buddha-nature. In the Miao-fa lien-hua ching hsuan-tsan (An Illumination of the Mystical Meanings of the Lotus-sūtra), K’uei Ch’i writes: “While all sentient beings have the rational Buddha-nature, only some have the practical Buddha-nature.”\(^{20}\) Mou’s articulation can also help to clarify K’uei Ch’i’s thesis in the following way: First, as an objective principle of emptiness (śūnyatā), all sentient beings possess the rational Buddha-nature. Second, given the unequal distribution, as well as the contingent nature of the pure seeds, it is legitimate to claim that some, but not all, sentient beings can have the practical Buddha-nature. With his account of the difference between the two kinds of the Buddha-nature, K’uei Ch’i aims to settle the controversy between the ekayāna and the triyāna. While the ekayāna insists that all sentient beings can become Buddhas, the triyāna only allows a certain class of sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. For the latter, the fruits of praxis are different for the bodhisasattva, the pratyekabuddha, and the śravāka. In terms of the universality of the rational Buddha-nature, K’uei Ch’i argues that the Fa-hsiang School is more than just a doctrine of the triyāna. Mou’s articulation of the contingent nature of the pure seeds (and hence of the practical Buddha-nature), however, shows that the Fa-hsiang School is, in reality, committed to the doctrine of the triyāna, rather than that of the ekayāna.

Critically, Mou’s interpretation of the Fo-hsing lun as the Fa-hsiang doctrine of Buddha-nature is not a faithful interpretation of the text. The reason is two-fold. First, from a philological standpoint, as Massaki Hattori points out, the author of the Fo-hsing lun is not Vasubandhu, but
Paramārtha.²¹ Lu Ch’eng also remarks that even Hsuan Tsang himself did not assign this text to Vasubandhu.²² Secondly, Mou himself does not deny that there is a difference between Paramārtha’s and the Fa-hsiang doctrine of Buddha-nature. One can hardly believe that Paramārtha would have translated a text that only accords with his opponent’s position. Finally, in interpreting the concept of dhātu, there is a quotation from a passage from the Srimālādevi-sūtra, which is found only in Paramārtha’s translation of the Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya: “The tathāgatagarbha is the dharmadhātugarbha, the dharmakāyagarbha, the lokottaragarbha, and the prakṛtipariśuddhivgarbha.”²³ This passage also appears in the Fo-hsing lun for the sake of clarifying the essence of Buddha-nature.²⁴ Evidently then, Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature is consistent with the position of the Fo-hsing lun.

I

Despite Paramārtha’s doctrinal kinship with the Fo-hsing lun, it is not necessary for us to accept the traditional interpretation of his doctrine of Buddha-nature. According to this interpretation, Paramārtha tries to synthesize Yogācāra Buddhism with the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha presented in the Awakening of Faith. This could be supported by Paramārtha’s above-mentioned interpolation of the text from the Srimālādevi-sūtra into his translation of the Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya. Traditionally Paramārtha is the alleged translator of the Awakening of Faith, as well as the founder of the She-lun School. All this indicates that Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature results from the development of the idea of the tathāgatagarbha from the Ratnagotravibhāga and the Awakening of Faith into Yogācāra Buddhism. Paramārtha’s concept of the amalavijñāna (immaculate consciousness) is therefore only a Yogācāra correspondent to the tathāgatagarbha in the sense of the Awakening of Faith. In short, according to the traditional interpretation, Paramārtha introduces an eternal pure consciousness into the Yogācāra doctrine of Buddha-nature.

In the Awakening of Faith, such an originally pure mind of Buddha-nature has been identified as the central reality of all reality. Paramārtha supposedly transforms the essence of the ālayavijñāna. In particular, as Master Yin Shun claims, Paramārtha introduces the concept of the “enlightening ālayavijñāna.”²⁵ According to the original position of Yogācāra Buddhism, the ālayavijñāna is strictly defiled. Under the influence of the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha represented by the Awakening of Faith, however, Paramārtha is obliged to distinguish between two kinds of the ālayavijñāna: the “defiled ālayavijñāna” in the traditional sense, and the “enlightening ālayavijñāna.”²⁶ While the former
is identical with the impure *paratantra*, the latter coincides with the pure *paratantra*. Like the pure mind of the *tathāgatagarbha* in the sense of the *Awakening of Faith*, Paramārtha’s pure mind of Buddha-nature is called “*tathāgatagarbha*” when covered by obstruction. Conversely, it is called “*Dharmakāya*” when it is free from any obstruction. In itself, the pure mind of the *tathāgatagarbha* is said to have potentially acquired infinite virtues. Ontologically, such a pure mind functions as the transcendental ground for the possibility of both the supramundane and mundane world. On the level of praxis, it is a synonym for original enlightenment in the *Awakening of Faith*.

From a historical standpoint, this traditional interpretation of Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature has the virtue of being able to explain why his version of Yogācāra did not fare so well. In identifying Buddha-nature as the eternal pure mind (or the original enlightenment), it signifies a modification of the *Mahāyānasūtra* along the lines of the *Awakening of Faith*. This also subsumes Yogācāra thought under the doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* presented in the *Awakening of Faith*. There is, as a result, the danger of undermining Yogācāra Buddhism in favour of the latter doctrine. Therefore, Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature has been rejected as a heretical Yogācāra. Historically, this kind of critique has prevailed since K’uei Ch’i. Even today this is considered to be evidence for Paramārtha’s deviation from the original position of Maitreya, Asanga and Vasubandhu.

This traditional interpretation of Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature is, however, highly problematic. First, mainly thanks to the efforts of Ueda, modern scholarship has already reached the consensus that it is highly improbable that Paramārtha was the translator of the *Awakening of Faith*. Second, there is an essential distinction between Paramārtha’s and the *Awakening of Faith*’s doctrines of the *tathāgatagarbha*. Buddha-nature in the *Awakening of Faith* is absolutely pure. In contrast, for the *Fo-hsing lun*, Buddha-nature “is neither determinately pure nor determinately impure.” This shows that Paramārtha’s Buddha-nature is not absolutely pure. As Paramārtha explains, “If it is determinately pure, then it is not identical with ignorance.” To this extent, his theory of Buddha-nature is rather similar to that of T’ien T’ai Buddhism. In claiming that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature, like the T’ien T’ai Buddhists, he assigns impurity (= ignorance) and purity (= bodhi) to the Being of sentient beings. For the author of the *Fo-hsing lun* and T’ien T’ai Buddhism, apart from ignorance, there is no Buddha-nature.

In terms of their divergent conceptions of ignorance, one can discern another essential distinction between Paramārtha’s and the *Awakening of Faith*’s doctrines of Buddha-nature. For Paramārtha,
ignorance is an immanent possibility of Buddha-nature. It is for this reason that he declares Buddha-nature to be neither determinately pure, nor determinately impure. Apart from ignorance there is no Buddha-nature. Accordingly, in attaining Buddhahood one only has to manifest the possibility of purity, rather than impurity. On the other hand, according to the Awakening of Faith, ignorance is extrinsic to Buddha-nature. Here, the Buddha-nature itself is absolutely pure. Consequently, Buddha-nature and ignorance constitute an exclusive either/or relation.

Although Paramārtha and the Awakening of Faith both employ the phrase “the original pure mind” in characterizing their respective conceptions of Buddha-nature, they differ in their understanding of its meaning. The same linguistic phrase should not blind us to the semantic distinction. The traditional interpretation of Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature results from overlooking this important distinction.

Positively speaking, the uniqueness of Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature is evidenced in the Fo-hsing lun:

In essence, there are three types of Buddha-nature. These three are the so-called three types of Buddha-nature as the three grounds. These three grounds refer to: (1) the ground for the deserved attainment; (2) the ground for the endeavour (prayoga); (3) the ground for perfection. The ground for the deserved attainment refers to the tathatā manifested by the śūnyatā of the dual [i.e., self and dharmas]. In virtue of such a śūnyatā, one deserves to attain the mind of the bodhi, the endeavour, etc., and even the post-path Dharmakāya. That is the reason why it is called “the deserved attainment.” The ground for the endeavour refers to the mind of the bodhi. In virtue of such a mind, one can attain the thirty-seven ranks, ten bhumi, ten pāramitā, the auxiliary skills and even the post-path Dharmakāya. That is the reason why it is called “the ground of the endeavour.” The ground for perfection basically refers to the endeavour. In virtue of the endeavour, one can attain both the ground of perfection and the fruit of perfection. While the ground for perfection refers to happiness, wisdom and praxis, the fruit of perfection refers to the transcendence of favours and virtues in terms of wisdom. Among these grounds, the first one has its essence in the asamśkrta in accordance with the principle [of emptiness]; the latter two have their essence in the saṃskṛta wish and action.31
For Paramārtha, there is a three-fold structure of Buddha-nature. First, Buddha-nature functions as the ground for the deserved attainment. Second, it functions as the ground for the endeavour (prayoga). Third, it functions as the ground for perfection. More precisely, that which functions as the ground for the deserved attainment is “the tathātā manifested by the emptiness of self (ātman) and things (dharmas).”32 Insofar as this ground refers to the asaṃskṛta tathātā, it constitutes the rational Buddha-nature. Conversely, that which functions as the ground for the endeavour (prayoga) and for perfection is the mind of the bodhi and the endeavour. Since these two grounds refer to the asaṃskṛta wish and action, they constitute the practical Buddha-nature.

It is possible that Paramārtha is trying to articulate the point made by Asanga in the Mahāyānasamgraha: “The supramundane mind arises because its seed is the impressions of hearing [the Dharmas] that flows from the purest Dharmadhātu.”33 Paramārtha tries to articulate Asanga’s concept of the purest Dharmadhātu from the standpoint of Buddha-nature. Such a possibility is anticipated by Vasabandhu’s thesis in his commentary on the Madhyāntavibhāga: “It is called ‘dharmadhātu’ because the holy Dharma functions as the ground.”34 The origination of the pure seeds, and hence of the supramundane mind, is traced back to the pure possibility of Buddha-nature. When Buddha-nature is in the state of impurity, it is attached to the external world. When the pure possibility of Buddha-nature is realized, however, it becomes identical with the purest Dharmadhātu.

Unlike in the case of the Fa-hsiang School, Paramārtha does not identify the practical Buddha-nature with the pure seeds. For him, while the former signifies a condition of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, the latter represents the actual condition of realizing Buddhahood. The practical Buddha-nature consists of the ground for the endeavour and perfection. This can be understood, in modern terms, as the existential-ontological possibility of becoming enlightened. To be an existential-ontological possibility means to be a mode of Being of the sentient being. This is so because the Fo-hsing lun states, “All sentient beings have the tathāgatagarbha,” as well as, “All sentient beings are the tathāgatagarbhā.”35 This shows that apart from the tathāgatagarbha, no sentient being is possible. In other words, the tathāgatagarbha belongs to the Being of sentient beings.

On the other hand the pure seeds result from hearing the virtuous teachings and practicing Buddhist Dharmas. We could say that there is an ontological difference between the practical Buddha-nature and the pure seed: While the practical Buddha-nature is an ontological concept, the pure seed is an ontical concept. That is to say, the practical Buddha-nature
constitutes the Being of sentient beings, whereas the pure seeds are contingently acquired by sentient beings. For Paramārtha, practical Buddha-nature and the pure seeds are different things. In contrast, for the Fa-hsiang School, the practical Buddha-nature and pure seeds are identical. Moreover, Paramārtha’s practical Buddha-nature meaningfully involves both the determination of the mind and the endeavour. According to him, both the rational and the practical Buddha-nature are essentially active and dynamic. For the Fa-hsiang School, however, only the practical Buddha-nature is active, whereas the rational Buddha-nature remains static. Finally, since the Fa-hsiang School denies the universality of the practical Buddha-nature, it is not wholly faithful to the Mahāyāna standpoint. In granting the practical Buddha-nature to all sentient beings, Paramārtha makes possible the doctrine of the ekayāna. Particularly, following Asaṅga’s thesis that all pure seeds result from new permeation, Paramārtha does not allow the pure seeds to be only possible for a certain and limited class of sentient beings. The practical Buddha-nature in Paramārtha’s sense is therefore entirely different from that employed by the Fa-hsiang School.

III

In claiming that Buddha-nature is neither determinately pure nor determinately impure, the Fo-hsing lun also states: “This [Buddha-] nature is non-abiding, non-attaching and groundless.” 37 Buddha-nature, in Paramārtha’s eyes, does not function as the transcendental ground for the possibility of the world as does the tathāgatagarbha in the Awakening of
Faith. The Yogācārin Paramārtha, on the contrary, tries to explicate the meaning of Buddha-nature in terms of the Three Natures, for “such Three Natures embrace the tathāgata in an exhaustive manner.”\(^{38}\) In this context, The Three Natures not only covers the parikalpita (imaginary nature), the paratantra (other-dependent nature) and the pariniṣpanna, but also include the Three Non-Natures, i.e., the laksananiḥsvabhāvatā (non-essence of characteristics), the utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā (non-essence of origination) and the paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā (non-essence of superior truth). To say that “the Three Non-Natures are non-ground,” is equivalent to saying that Buddha-nature is groundless.\(^{39}\) This is another sign of Paramārtha’s existential-ontological approach.

The Mahāyānasamgraha states: “The destruction of defilement by the Bodhisattvas signifies the reach of the non-dual nirvāṇa.”\(^{40}\) As Vasubandhu explains, this thesis aims to say:

> The bodhisattvas do not see the difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa...The bodhisattvas have already attained the non-discriminating wisdom (nirvikalpaññā). Since there is no difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, they are non-dual.\(^{41}\)

Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature is generally close to the perfect teachings in the T’ien T’ai Buddhist sense. In fact, Chih I (538-597), the founder of T’ien T’ai Buddhism, notes that the Mahāyānasamgraha has the tendency towards the position of the perfect teachings. In the Ching-kuang-ming-ching hsuan-i (On the Mystical Meaning of the Suvarnprabhāsa-sūtra), Chih I writes:

> When one follows the simile of the contamination of gold by soil in the Mahāyānasamgraha, then one can discover that it points to the position of the perfect teachings. Here soil signifies the ādāna. The contamination signifies the ālaya. And gold signifies the amala. Clearly, this is a doctrine of the perfect teachings.\(^{42}\)

In illuminating Chih I’s point in the Ching-kuang-ming-ching hsuan-i che-yi-chi (An Explication of the Mystical Meaning of the Suvarnprabhāsa-sūtra), Chih Li (960-1028), a major representative of the T’ien T’ai School during the Sung period, likewise states:

> If one wants to develop the perfect teachings, it is necessary to follow the thesis in Mahāyānasamgraha that
a lump of gold, soil and the contamination are inseparable from each other. As a result, all the minds of the Śrāvaka, the Bodhisattva and the Buddha are equipped with these three kinds of viśñōna.\textsuperscript{43}

In this way, Chih I and Chih Li find a germ of the perfect teachings in Paramārtha’s translation of the Mahāyānasamgraha. Regrettably, they fail to recognize the homogeneity between Paramārtha’s and their own doctrines of Buddha-nature. In particular, Chih I classifies Yogācāra Buddhism as of the distinctive, rather than of the perfect, teachings in his syncretism.

In introducing the simile of the contamination of gold by soil, what Asaṅga has in mind is the two-fold status of the paratantra in his doctrine of the Three Natures. As Vasubandhu expounds, “The point of the thesis that the paratantra is equipped with two parts is to stress that all dharmas are neither real nor unreal.”\textsuperscript{44} In explicating this important thesis of the Yogācāra Buddhist founders, Paramārtha writes:

The Two Truths can neither be said to be real nor to be unreal. It is because they are neither real nor unreal. The paramārtha (Superior Truth) can neither be said to be real nor to be unreal. It is due to the fact that man and dharmas are unreal, the paramārtha cannot be said to be real. And it is due to the fact that the paramārtha clearly serves the manifestation of emptiness of the two [i.e., self (ātman) and things (dharmas)], it cannot be said to be unreal. It is due to the parikalpita that the saṃvyrti cannot be said to be real. And it is due to the paratantra that the saṃvyrti (Conventional Truth) cannot be said to be unreal. In addition, the paramārtha is indeterminate regarding reality or non-reality. Man and dharmas are both at the same time real and unreal. Even their śūnyatā is at the same time real and unreal. The same holds for the saṃvyrti. It is due to the parikalpita that the saṃvyrti cannot be said to be determinately real. And it is due to the paratantra that the saṃvyrti cannot be said to be determinately unreal.\textsuperscript{45}

In Paramārtha’s eyes, there are two kinds of the paratantra: the impure and the pure. While the impure paratantra depends on the parikalpita, the pure paratantra depends on the tathatā.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, to say that the paratantra is of two kinds implies that the saṃvyrti can neither be said to
be determinately real nor determinately unreal. Correlatively, the paramārtha can neither be said to be real nor unreal. This indicates that there is a dependence of the Two Truths upon the Three Natures. With the Two Truths one explains the world, but with the Three Natures one aims to transform the world. According to the original position of Yogācāra Buddhism, practical philosophy is primary. More importantly, Paramārtha tries to radicalise this thesis from the standpoint of Buddha-nature. Accordingly, he declares, “If one does not speak of Buddha-nature, then one does not understand emptiness.” To this extent, Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature results from a radical development of Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s Yogācāra thought. In this way, he harmonizes Yogācāra Buddhism with the Madhyamikā.

Mou might be the first scholar to remind us of the above-mentioned important remarks made by Chih I and Chih Li on the Mahāyānasangraha. Unfortunately, like Chih I and Chih Li, he fails to appreciate Paramārtha’s affinity with the T’ien T’ai School’s perfect teachings. As a consequence, he also misses the real difference between Paramārtha’s and the Fa-hsien doctrine of Buddha-nature. Despite these limitations, Mou must be appreciated for working out the major characteristics of the perfect teachings of T’ien T’ai Buddhism. With the help of these essential ideas one can confirm Paramārtha’s affinity with the perfect teachings. First, T’ien T’ai practitioners reject the transcendental-grounding approach. Instead, they stress the idea of the non-abiding ground. From a non-abiding ground, nonetheless, all dharmas emerge. Likewise, Paramārtha speaks of “the non-abiding nirvāṇa.” Accordingly, Buddha-nature in his sense does not function as a transcendental ground for the possibility of the world of dharmas. In claiming that the Three Non-Natures are groundless, Paramārtha also recognizes that all dharmas are given to us via the mano-jalpa. As a Yogācārīn, he accounts for the origin of the world in terms of the seeds. Unlike the Fa-hsien School, however, he does not treat the seeds as substantial. Rather, Paramārtha identifies the seeds as something postulated from the standpoint of the present moment. Thus, he characterizes the seeds as virtual in regard to their ontological status.

Secondly, according to the T’ien T’ai, even after enlightenment, the world remains. To experience the emptiness of the world does not imply any destruction of the world itself. What is to be removed is only the sickness (= the attachment to the world and the ego), but not the dharmas. In other words, the world remains intact even after the removal of ignorance. As Ueda points out, for the Old School of Yogācāra Buddhism, the pṛṣṭha-labdaḥ-jitāna (the subsequently acquired wisdom) has the form of the “non-discriminating discrimination.” It has the fundamental aspect
of non-duality, but also the aspect of duality, i.e., subject-object distinction. The validity of the subject-object schema is not, however, absolute; rather it is relativized. It is conceived as a necessary moment of wisdom. In order to emphasize this fact, Paramārtha coins the term amalavijñāna (immaculate consciousness). In reality, the amalavijñāna consists of two aspects: the aspect of the identity between the knowing subject and the known object, and the aspect of the opposition of the knowing subject and the known object. Certainly, the identity aspect is the more fundamental of the two. With the help of such a non-discriminating discrimination, the world of dharmas remains even when all the ignorance is removed.

Thirdly, in opposition to the absolutely pure mind as presented in the *Awakening of Faith*, the T’ien T’ai speak of the mind of ignorance and Dharamatāś. In other words, for the perfect teachings, both authenticity and inauthenticity qua possibilities are immanent to the Being of humans. This implies that humans are responsible for their fallenness. This, however, also signifies that no one can be *a priori* excluded from the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. In claiming that Buddha-nature is neither determinately pure nor impure, Paramārtha aims to assign the possibility of attaining Buddhahood to all sentient beings. In expounding the concept of the bipartite paratantra in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, he proclaims: “While the opposition between the state of sentient being and that of the enlightened is the opposition between the blind and the sight, these two states belong to one and the same person.” Thus, like T’ien T’ai Buddhism, Paramārtha considers saṃsāra and nirvāṇa to be non-differentiated.

Finally, according to the T’ien T’ai, affliction is identical with the bodhi, and the bodhi is identical with affliction. Paramārtha says that “The realm of sentient beings is not different from the Dharmakāya, and the Dharmakāya is not different from the realm of sentient beings.” They share the aim to stress that both authenticity and inauthenticity belong to the Being of sentient beings.

Our association of Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature to the T’ien T’ai doctrine by no means implies that they are identical with each other. First of all, the Yogācāra theory of the pure seeds is missing in T’ien T’ai Buddhism. From Paramārtha’s emphasis on the importance of the hearing permeation, one can also infer that he would reject the path of sudden enlightenment. Such a possibility is nonetheless open for T’ien T’ai Buddhism. As Ueda observes, the emphasis on the relation between the knowing subject and the known object is unique to the Yogācāra. More importantly, Paramārtha, unlike the T’ien T’ai, does not grant Buddha-nature to non-sentient beings such as grass and tiles. Paramārtha is
not so radical in claiming that Buddha-nature has evil.

Critically, one could raise the following challenge: "What is the virtue of stressing that Paramârtha’s Yogâcâra thought belongs to the dimension of the perfect teachings?" In order to answer this important question, let us consider the difference between the distinctive and the perfect teachings. As Mou points out, both the doctrine of the tathâgatagarbha presented in the *Awakening of Faith* and the Fa-hsiang School belong to the dimension of the distinctive teachings. For the distinctive teachings, the supramundane pure mind is separated from the world. In other words, the world does not belong to the Being (or ontological structure) of the pure mind (in the empirical or transcendental sense). On the other hand, according to the perfect teachings, the mind and the world are inseparable. In modern terms, the mind is essentially a being-in-the-world. The removal of defilements only signifies the mind’s release from attachments to the world. This does not imply that the mind and the world constitute a zero-sum game. Furthermore, with its idea of non-ground, the perfect teachings do not identify the mind as the transcendental ground for the possibility of the world. Thereby, the perfect teachings avoid the danger of subjectivising the world. Failing to see the difference between the perfect and the distinctive teachings, the traditional interpretation errs in identifying Paramârtha’s Buddha-nature as the transcendental ground of the world.

Undeniably, as far as understanding Buddha-nature is concerned, there is also a fundamental distinction between the Fa-hsiang School and the *Awakening of Faith*. The Fa-hsiang School holds the theory of the “five distinct lineages (gotrâ).” It admits the group of sentient beings who are completely devoid of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. Accordingly, its approach is non-egalitarian. For the *Awakening of Faith*, however, all sentient beings must have Buddha-nature, and their Buddha-nature is absolutely pure. To this extent, it is faithful to the Buddhist ideal of equality. They are, however, common in being “deterministic” in their approaches. While the Fa-hsiang School’s discriminative distribution of the pure seeds gives rise to the five fixed types of lineage, the *Awakening of Faith* adheres to the concept of an absolutely pure Buddha-nature. From an existentialist standpoint, both are committed to the error of granting priority to “essence” over “existence.” That is to say, both understand Buddha-nature from an essentialist perspective. In contrast, in claiming that Buddha-nature is neither determinately pure nor determinately impure, Paramârtha is consistent with the existentialist thesis that “existence precedes essence.” This shows that Paramârtha’s theory of Buddha-nature is “existentialistically” justified.
The Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra can lend support to Paramārtha’s theory of Buddha-nature. This sūtra states: “The icchantikas are indeterminate…Even the srota-āpānams and the pratyekabuddhas are indeterminate…If an icchantika is rid of his ichantikahood, he can attain Buddhahood.” 61 On the way towards Buddhahood, no sentient being is determinate. This is an implication of Paramārtha’s claim that “All sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” 62 As Mou insightfully observed:

Such a position in granting indeterminacy to different finite existential stages is reminiscent of the French existentialist Sartre’s thesis of the “undefinability of man.” 63 If man is defined according to a certain ideal type, then he would become a sentient being of a determined essence…If this is the case, then the attaining of Buddhahood would become an impossible dream. In this way, Buddha would only be an ideal archetype which is never attainable. But the principle of “indeterminacy” in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra rejects this idea.

The principle of indeterminacy in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra shows that in granting Buddha-nature to all sentient beings, its position is anti-essentialist. Indeed, it also states: “Buddha-nature is neither saṃskṛta nor aсаṃskṛta, therefore it is not discontinuous.” 63 Paramārtha’s view—that Buddha-nature is neither determinately pure nor determinately impure—is a consistent development of this position.

In regard to Jikido Takasaki’s puzzle, “Was Paramārtha’s Yogācāra doctrine (= theory of the Three Natures) not influenced by the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha [along the lines of the Awakening of Faith] at all?” one can answer as follows: 64 In employing the language of the texts belonging to the lineage of the Awakening of Faith, Paramārtha developed an innovative doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha. While Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature is close to the perfect teachings, the Awakening of Faith’s doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha belongs to the distinctive teachings.

One can articulate the essential differences between Paramārtha’s and the Fa-hsiang doctrine of Buddha-nature as follows: First, for Paramārtha, the rational and practical Buddha-nature are basically two aspects of one and the same coin; both are dynamic in character. Conversely, according to K’uei Ch’i, the practical and rational Buddha-
natures are separated from each other: While the rational Buddha-nature is basically static and objective, the practical Buddha-nature is dynamic and subjective.

Second, the practical Buddha-nature, in Paramārtha’s sense, signifies an existential-ontological possibility for sentient beings. The possibility of becoming a Buddha is primarily grounded in the practical Buddha-nature, rather than in the acquisition of pure seeds. For Paramārtha, the pure seeds are only the empirical, ontical condition of attaining Buddhahood. Insofar as the pure seeds constitute the condition of the realization of Buddhahood, they contribute to the process of becoming a Buddha. With the claim that “all sentient beings have Buddha-nature,” however, Paramārtha is able to defend the Mahāyāna spirit of Yogācāra Buddhism. For the Fa-hsiang School, the practical Buddha-nature is reduced to the naturally inherent pure seeds. The pure seeds, however, are only attributed to some sentient beings. There is thus an inequality among sentient beings regarding their possibility of attaining Buddhahood. As a result, the Fa-hsiang School can hardly demonstrate the Mahāyāna spirit.

In conclusion, we can say that since Paramārtha’s doctrine of Buddha-nature grants a priority to the practical, he more closely adheres to the original spirit of Yogācāra Buddhism. On the other hand, while being imprisoned in the primacy of knowledge, the Fa-hsiang School’s doctrines actually undermine the importance of praxis. This contrast also shows us in what ways one can achieve a Yogācāra doctrine of Buddha-nature that is compatible with the position of the ekayāna.
NOTES


2 In Taishº, Vol. 31, pp. 787-813; Vasubandhu is labeled as its author, and Paramârtha as its translator.


4 I benefit from the comments of an anonymous referee in developing these lines.

5 Taishº, vol. 38, p. 249.

6 Ibid.


9 Ibid, p. 188.

10 Actually these two terms were introduced by K‘uei Ch‘i. But Mou applies these two terms in characterizing the Fo-hsing lun.


14 Cf.: Ibid, pp. 322-323. This could well be Mou’s tactic in interpreting the following thesis in the Fo-hsing lun: “The tathatā is neither determinately pure nor determinately impure.”


17 Cf.: Fo-hsing yu po-je, p. 311ff.

18 Taishº, Vol. 34, p. 656.


26 Cf.: Ju-lai-tsang chih yen-chiu, p. 212.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, p. 794.
32 Ibid, p. 787.
34 Taishō, Vol. 31, p. 452.
38 Ibid, p. 794.
40 Ibid, p. 129.
41 Ibid, p. 247.
42 Taishō, Vol. 39, p. 5.
47 Cf. Ibid, p. 808.
48 Ibid, p. 787.
52 Cf.: Ibid, p. 199ff. See also: Bukkyo shishitsu kenkyu, p. 140ff.
57 Taishō, Vol. 31, p. 796.
58 Yoshifumi Ueda, Daijobukkyoshisō (The Thought of Mahayana Buddhism).


63 Ibid, p. 494.


paṭipatti