

The Correct Meanings of the Āgama Sūtra: Exploring the Origin of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only

Preface

(Part 2/3)

Master Xiao Pingshi

(5), among the sound-hearer *saṃghas*, ordinary individuals were originally the majority. By the time of the Second Buddhist Council, convened with 700 monks, the vast majority were ordinary monastics. Most of these ordinary monastics within the sound-hearer tradition neither believed in the Buddha Bodhi Path nor in the inconceivable wisdom state of the Buddha Ground. They believed only in the Path to Liberation as taught by the World-Honored One, and even that, they misunderstood. During the Buddha's time, they were unwilling to listen to the *Lotus Sūtra* and other teachings on the Buddha Bodhi Path. How, then, could they possibly compile and transmit these teachings? How could they expound them to the masses? It is understandable and indeed inevitable that they would oppose the *Mahāyāna* doctrines. Therefore, it is comprehensible that sound-hearer monastic orders, such as the *Sautrāntika*, would stand in doctrinal opposition to bodhisattva *saṃghas* such as the *Mahāsāṃghika* in terms of the dissemination of Dharma teachings.

It may seem that there is opposition between the two sects, but in fact, only the sound-hearer *saṃgha* groups of *Sthaviravāda* oppose the bodhisattva groups of *Mahāsāṃghika*, not the other way around. Why? The *Sthaviravāda* simply did not understand the *Mahāyāna* doctrines expounded by the Buddha in the *sūtras*. Consequently, the *sūtra* teachings of the Buddha's second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel, which originally belonged to the *Mahāyāna* doctrines, were compiled into the *Āgamas* of the *Hīnayāna* Path to Liberation. For example, it is evident in the other two translated versions, apart from the four-volume *Aṅgulimāliya Sūtra*, which was compiled by *Sthaviravāda saṃghas*; these versions were extremely abbreviated and did not touch upon the profound meanings of *Mahāyāna*. Such compilations were not faithful to the Buddha's original intent. In contrast, the later *Mahāyāna sūtra* compilations were true to the Buddha's intentions. These compilations can be verified by all enlightened bodhisattvas of that time, the present, and future generations, as well as by bodhisattvas, who have attained knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths (S: *margajñata*), from the First Ground up to the stage of Virtual Enlightenment. Moreover, even arhats of that time or hundreds of years later could not dismiss these *Mahāyāna sūtra* compilations as apocryphal scriptures. This proves the authenticity

of the *Mahāyāna sūtras*; they are texts that even great arhats can scarcely comprehend, let alone critique.

Thus, the sound-hearer monks of the Two Vehicles, lacking a comprehensive understanding of the doctrines, engage in disputes with the *Mahāsāṃghika* bodhisattva *saṃghas*, are indeed disputers. The *Mahāsāṃghika* bodhisattvas, on the other hand, can verify the authenticity of the Buddha's complete and perfect doctrines and have realized the Two-Vehicle Bodhi. For the benefit of sentient beings, they have vowed to be reborn in this world to correct the sound-hearers' misinterpretations of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines. Thus, the bodhisattva *saṃghas'* exposition aims not to dispute but to protect the True Dharma and prevent the doctrines of the sound-hearer *saṃghas* from falling into the annihilationist view. Their goal is to guide others to rectify their wrong doctrines and reveal the true essence of the Buddha Dharma, and revitalize the original, wondrous, and perfect doctrines of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi. Therefore, the *Mahāyāna* council's *sūtra* compilation, which highlights the grave deficiencies in the doctrinal understanding of the sound-hearer *saṃghas*, is not an act of contention but one of guidance, protection, and support. However, many among the sound-hearer *saṃghas* who cannot believe or accept these correct teachings may oppose and debate against the *Mahāsāṃghika* bodhisattvas, creating the appearance of a dispute.

Just as contemporary masters such as Yinshun and others from various schools either deny the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha* or misunderstand it, they also uniformly regard mental consciousness as the object of realization, which is drastically different from my approach. Observing that all of these masters were misleading practitioners, I initially critiqued their views without disclosing their names, hoping they would rectify their errors and avoid the transgression of misleading sentient beings. However, after several years, these Dharma masters not only refused to amend their teachings but also continued to privately boycott and defame me. As a result, I was impelled to act openly, explicitly naming them while clarifying their erroneous teachings. This also served to rescue a multitude of misguided practitioners. My actions were obviously not intended as disputation, but rather as an effort to uphold the True Dharma, protect the authentic Buddhist doctrines, and rescue these masters who have misunderstood the Buddha Dharma. However, followers of Yinshun, as well as Hsing Yun, Chao Hwei, Cheng Yen, and others, are unable to accept this. They frequently promote erroneous views, allowing their followers to vastly disseminate misinformation about me on websites and in private, utilizing various unsubstantiated arguments, and engaging in verbal sophistry. Such an improper mental approach constitutes genuine disputation. Nevertheless, the

Dharma principles I expound are demonstrably accurate and irrefutable. When one speaks what is true and correct, it cannot be considered disputation.

Therefore, those who expound the true and correct Dharma principles, in their various statements refuting the erroneous and revealing the correct, are not engaging in disputation with others but are merely stating facts. Only those who are wrong in their understanding of the Dharma principles and forcefully argue for their interpretations truly engage in disputation with others. Thus, it is the sound-hearer monks who engage in disputation, while the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva monks do not. For this reason, individuals such as Yinshun, Chao Hwei, and Chuandao should not say, “The *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva monks dispute with the sound-hearer monks.” Instead, they should say, “The sound-hearer monks dispute with the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva monks.” This is because the teachings of those who expound the true and correct Dharma principles are never words of disputation, while the words of those who are wrong in their Dharma principles and forcefully engage in sophistry are indeed words of disputation. This is analogous to the non-Buddhists disputing with the Buddha: although the Buddha extensively refuted the fallacies of non-Buddhists, which made them defiant and led them to dispute with the Buddha, the Buddha Himself was not engaging in disputation. This is because the principles of the Dharma that He taught were true and correct, and He aimed to save the non-Buddhists by refuting their erroneous views and revealing the correct Path to Liberation.

(6), the Path to Liberation is the conventional truth; its practice mainly focuses on observing and contemplating the illusory nature of the aggregates, sense fields, and elements of the mundane world. As these conventional dharmas are readily observable and comparably easier to manage than those of the Path to Buddhahood, it is not surprising that the sound-hearer sages constitute the majority of the Buddhist community. On the other hand, the sign of reality of the dharma realm, the *tathāgatagarbha* (the fundamental reality), does not belong to a dharma of the phenomena realm but is the source of all aggregates, sense fields, and elements; thus, practitioners rarely touch on the *tathāgatagarbha* and even rarely personally realize it. For this reason, enlightened bodhisattvas are always a minority among the *saṃghas*, especially, extremely rare in the monastic community. Therefore, during the initial compilation of the scriptures, as the *Mahāyāna* doctrines of the sign of reality *prajñā* teachings are profound and difficult to understand, the ordained and lay bodhisattva monks who had already realized it were extremely few, significantly fewer than the sound-hearer noble monks. Thus, it was inevitable that the First Council primarily focused on the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, which was universally accepted by sound-hearer practitioners. As a result, there was no disputation among the assembly,

no disagreement, and the compilation was easily accomplished. Consequently, during the first compilation by the 500 compliers, only the scriptural doctrines of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation were included, which was an inevitable outcome. It is important to note that the bodhisattva monks also studied, practiced, and realized the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation. Moreover, they were all able to truly understand and realize the hidden *Mahāyāna* meanings within the sound-hearers' Path to Liberation.

Therefore, during the First Buddhist Council, which compiled the four *Āgamas*, although many of the scriptures originally contained *Mahāyāna* doctrinal teachings, the sound-hearer practitioners who had heard the Buddha's teachings did not comprehend the true meanings of the *Mahāyāna* elements within them. They understood only the doctrines pertaining to the Path to Liberation. Consequently, the *Mahāyāna* scriptures compiled by the sound-hearer practitioners during this First Council inevitably became scriptures focused on the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, with the *Mahāyāna* doctrinal meanings omitted from the record. This outcome was inevitable. The bodhisattvas, naturally dissatisfied with the results of this compilation, would undoubtedly have expressed their intention to undertake a separate compilation of the scriptures then and there. Thus, many texts within the four *Āgamas* originally contained *Mahāyāna* teachings, but these *Mahāyāna* principles became unclear and obscure because they were largely abbreviated or omitted. However, hidden in the *sūtras*, which the Two-Vehicle sound-hearer sages could not possibly leave out, were plenty of *Mahāyāna* terms associated with the general aspects conveyed therein. If the Two-Vehicle sound-hearer sages abandoned those terms, then the Path to Liberation that the Two-Vehicle sound-hearers realized would have fallen under the view of nihilism. As such, when the Two-Vehicle sages compiled the *sūtras*, they inevitably needed to incorporate parts of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines taught by the Buddha into the *sūtra* compilation to demonstrate and legitimize the principle of the Two-Vehicle Bodhi *Āgamas* as the Path to Liberation that they were cultivating. Indeed, under such circumstances, both non-Buddhist views of eternalism and nihilism cannot undermine the original intent of the Buddha. My objective assessments are indeed factual. Even now, one can still examine the four *Āgamas* to verify this. The evidence will be presented in this book series because these are all clearly demonstrable facts.

(7), Buddhism in the human world is mainly represented by the ordained monastic community. This includes the ordained noble monks of the *Sthaviravāda* and other sects, primarily sound-hearer monks, with few bodhisattva monks. In contrast, the *Mahāyāna* monastic community is made up entirely of bodhisattva monks, where the number of lay bodhisattvas far exceeds that of ordained bodhisattvas. However,

the figure of the Buddhist leader in the human realm must present the outward appearance of an ordained monastic *saṃgha*. The ordained bodhisattva monks of the *Mahāsāṃghika* group were a minority, significantly fewer than the sound-hearer monks of the *Sthaviravāda* sect. Thus, during that era, Buddhism was naturally represented by the *Sthaviravāda*, which had a large number of ordained monks, rather than by the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas, who had fewer ordained monks among them. As a result, the sound-hearer monks within the Buddhist monastic community at that time constituted an absolute majority, while the ordained bodhisattva monks were notably scarce. This is because the profound *Mahāyāna* Dharma is inherently difficult to practice and realize.

The lay bodhisattvas at the “three stages of worthiness” and the “noble stage” adhered to the Buddha’s words and consistently positioned themselves in the role of protectors and supporters of the monastic community. Although they were individuals with valid knowledge of the advanced-level Buddha Dharma, they all occupied only the positions of supporters of the *saṃgha* community, not the positions of representatives upholding the True Dharma in the human world. Hence, when the *Sthaviravāda* sound-hearer monks were compiling the scriptures, the bodhisattvas faced challenges in guiding the compilation process, leading to an initial bias toward the Dharma principles of the Path to Liberation practiced by the *Hīnayāna*. The sound-hearer monks were neither willing to compile the Dharma principles of the Path to Buddhahood practiced and realized by the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva monks nor capable of compiling them, as can be anticipated. Consequently, the four *Āgamas* compiled during the first *sūtra* compilation were primarily based on the input of the *Sthaviravāda* sound-hearer monks. As a result, some of the *Mahāyāna sūtras* taught by the World-Honored One during the *Prajñā* and *Vaipulya* periods were, unsurprisingly, compiled into the scriptures of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, such as the *Ekottara Āgama* and the *Samyukta Āgama*.

When the enlightened *Mahāyāna* practitioners realized that the contents compiled by the *Sthaviravāda saṃghas* were biased toward the Path to Liberation by excluding the Path to Buddhahood, they declared that they had personally heard the wondrous *Mahāyāna* doctrines from the Buddha and urged the sound-hearer *saṃghas* to include these teachings in the *sūtra* compilation. However, when their lengthy communication of this matter failed, the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas embarked on another compilation. It makes compelling sense that the enlightened *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas would do this for the preservation of the True Dharma. As noted above, the *Aṅgulimāliya Sūtra* was composed in three different versions by the compilers of different sectarian groups; two of them became the *Hīnayāna* doctrines, which focus

on attaining the highest fruition of the Path to Liberation, while the *sūtra* compiled by *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas was about the ultimate fruition of the Path to Buddhahood: that of becoming a Buddha. In other words, the Buddha preached the same *sūtra* back then, but the meanings of the *sūtras* that were compiled became different due to individuals' different capacities. The compilation of the *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* *sūtras* was done in this manner. At the time of the first compilation, the *Ekottara Āgama* and *Samyukta Āgama* were compiled as teachings on the Path to Liberation for the Two Vehicles and were still classified among the four *Āgamas*. That is, when the *Mahāyāna* monks and lay bodhisattvas' proposal to compile the *Mahāyāna* teachings spoken by the Buddha was rejected by Mahakashyapa and others, the *Mahāyāna* monks and lay bodhisattvas proceeded to compile them separately; whether they were the first to compile the *sūtras* should not be the deciding factor in determining whether these *sūtras* were actually spoken by the Buddha. Thus, the authentication of *sūtra* (the Buddha's words) should be based on the True Dharma (*Saddharma*)—that is, whether the meanings conform to the Buddha's intent and accurately correspond to the true principles of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi—rather than on the *sūtras*' compilation and revelation time.

The chaste man **Sarvaloka-priyadarśana** promised the Buddha that he would protect and sustain the wondrous Three-Vehicle Dharma in the final age only after all the great arhats were no longer willing to protect the Tathāgata's True Dharma in the last era. My authorship of this book series, which elucidates the *Mahāyāna* doctrines implied and concealed within the *Āgamas*, follows the same principle: I waited for an extended period, anticipating that monastic or lay masters from various traditions would produce such a work, but to no avail; only then did I undertake its composition. It was utterly implausible for me to have preemptively authored this work because I had never utilized the Path to Liberation expounded in the *Āgamas* as the central theme of my Dharma propagation. However, some questioned this by asking, "Could others not create such principles and teachings? Why must we wait for you, Pingshi, to start creating them? The teachings in the *Āgamas* are originally about the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation; there are no profound *Mahāyāna* doctrines of the Path to Buddhahood hidden in it. Therefore, the text you wrote, lay Pingshi, is a latter-day work, and latter-day works are very problematic! So what you have written here is considered groundless by the great masters of various traditions." However, upon examining the doctrinal principles presented in this book series and comparing them with the Three-Vehicle scriptural doctrines, it becomes evident that what I have expounded actually aligns with the Buddha's original intent. This revelation highlights a significant issue: the teachings propounded by earlier authors, such as Yin Shun, Chao Hwei, Hsing Yun, and

Cheng Yen, are fraught with substantial problems. Therefore, using the superficial criterion of chronological precedence in publication as evidence for the authenticity or falsity of scriptures is a grave error. Those genuinely engaged in the study of Buddhism should focus on discerning the authenticity of the doctrinal principles within the *sūtras* rather than relying on the chronological order of publication. Whether a *sūtra* was published or made publicly available earlier or later than another should not serve as a basis for determining the credibility or authenticity of the Dharma principles expounded in it.

Similarly, individuals such as Yin Shun and Chao Hwei, who have not grasped the Buddha's original intent, have followed Tibetan Tantric Buddhism and certain Japanese Buddhist scholars who deny the existence of the seventh and eighth consciousnesses. They have erroneously authored books interpreting the *Āgamas* according to their own speculations, falsely claiming that the *Āgamas* do not mention the seventh and eighth consciousnesses. Such erroneous discourse has been misleading the Chinese Buddhist community for a century. The subsequent widespread dissemination of these ideas by Yin Shun, Chao Hwei, and others predates my work, but their interpretations do not align with the true principles of the *Āgamas*. What relevance does chronological precedence have if the content is inaccurate?

I waited for a long time for monastic masters to expound the correct principles implied in the *Āgamas*, but to no avail. Only then did I proceed to author various works elucidating the doctrinal principles, substantiating them with the true meanings implied in the *Āgamas*, as follows: “Śākyamuni Buddha did indeed imply *Mahāyāna* doctrines in the *four Āgamas*; it is not that he never taught them. The Buddha did expound the seventh and eighth consciousnesses in the *four Āgamas*; it is not that he never mentioned them. It was simply that the *Sthaviravāda* adherents, other sound-hearer sages of the Two Vehicles, and ordinary monks were unable to comprehend them and thus could not compile them. Therefore, it was necessary to wait for the *Mahāyāna* monastic *saṃghas* to separately compile the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and the extensive *Vaipulya Sūtras* of knowledge-of-all-aspects from the *Vijñaptimātratā* texts for the Buddhist scriptures to truly reveal the Buddha's original intent and become the scriptures of the Three Vehicles.” Although these doctrinal expositions and books were published later, how does this detract from the veracity of their teachings? From the present time to future generations, no one will be able to refute the facts, as I have stated, unless the four *Āgamas* were to become completely lost, rendering it impossible to provide textual evidence.

Nonetheless, there may still be unwise people today or in future generations who,

having heard my words and read my writings, still cannot understand their meanings and implications. These people may say, “No eminent masters have ever mentioned the existence of the seventh or eighth *vijñāna* (consciousness) in the *Āgamas*. Neither have any of them ever said that the *Mahāyāna* dharmas were expounded in the four *Āgamas*. Therefore, lay Buddhist Pingshi’s book series *The Correct Meanings of the Āgama Sūtra*, which was published later, is not reliable. We should instead rely primarily on the treatises published earlier by renowned ancient sound-hearer masters regarding the Dharma.” Such people do not understand the Buddha’s original intent in the teachings of the *Āgamas*. They can distinguish matters based only on the chronological order of their appearance, but they cannot grasp the significance of the doctrines within the *four Āgamas*. Indeed, they are unwise.

(8), according to the *Buddha Nirvāṇa Sūtra* in the *Long Āgama Sūtra* (*Dīrghāgama*), it was clearly recorded that the *Āgamas* were fully compiled during the First Buddhist Council participated in by 500 monastics, headed by Bhikṣu Mahākāśyapa. This indicates that both the *Samyuktapiṭaka* and the *Vinaya-piṭaka* were fully incorporated during the first round of the *Āgamas’* compilation. The *Tripitaka* was already complete, not requiring a second or third recompilation of the *Āgamas*. Thus, we cannot say that the second and third *sūtra* compilation events also involved the compilation of the *Āgamas*. As such, it cannot be further assumed that the *Mahāyāna sūtras* were created and assembled over a long period by Buddhist disciples after the rise of Sectarian Buddhism. Moreover, upon the sound-hearer monastic Mahākāśyapa’s completion of the *Āgamas’* compilation, bodhisattvas immediately raised objections, saying, “We also wanted to compile the *sūtras*.” Obviously, their council must have begun shortly after their protest. This compilation should have been completed before the emergence of the second council participated in by 700 people, which happened 110 years after the Buddha’s passing. In addition, the latter compilation collected only the monastic precepts of the Two Vehicles and did not touch upon the Buddha’s doctrinal discourses. The foregoing proves that the *Mahāyāna* scriptures were compiled shortly after the aforementioned objection was raised and acted upon. This confirms that the *Mahāyāna* scriptures are indeed the Buddha’s teachings rather than only having been developed, created, and compiled by the sound-hearers’ descendants over a long time. The truth is that sound-hearer practitioners will never have the faintest concept of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines. They do not even have the knowledge-of-general-aspects pertaining to *prajña*. How can we expect them to compile the Consciousness-Only *sūtra* of the knowledge-of-all-aspects? Only bodhisattvas are capable of compiling the *Mahāyāna* scriptures. Master Yinshun claimed that the *Āgamas* were not fully compiled during the first council.

This statement is inaccurate and blatantly contradicts the actual record found in the *Long Āgama Sūtra*. Moreover, unlike sound-hearers, bodhisattvas not only take the Path to Liberation but also primarily aim at practicing the Bodhi Path to attain Buddhahood. This also proves that the *Āgamas* contain the Dharmas solely for sound-hearers and solitary realizers on the Path to Liberation, which certainly do not cover the bodhisattvas' Path to Buddhahood. Naturally, there must have been other *sūtra* compilations for the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel after the compilation of the *Āgamas*.

There are also scriptural passages in the *Āgamas*, which prove that sound-hearers merely cultivate the teachings on the Path to Liberation to enter *nirvāṇa* and have never practiced the Path to Buddhahood. As *Ekottara Āgama* Vol. 14 states:

Bhishus should make the following observation: As the **sound-hearers** detest and suffer from [their] eyes, detest and suffer from forms, detest and suffer from eye-consciousness; if pain or pleasure arises from [visual objects encountered by their] eyes, they should also detest from that. They should also detest and suffer from the ears, detest from sounds, and detest from ear-consciousness; if pain or pleasure arises from ear-consciousness, they should also detest from that. They should also detest from the nose, tongue, body, mind, and phenomena. If suffering or pleasure arises from the mind, they should also detest from that. Having detested and known suffering, they will attain liberation. When they are liberated, they will attain the wisdom of liberation: the cycle of birth and death ceases, the pure practice has been accomplished, and what must be done has been done, so one has exhausted all future existence. We should understand this as it really is.

The aforementioned ways of practicing the Path to Liberation do not encompass the contents of the sign of reality of the dharma realm in the Bodhisattva Path, yet they are the only obligatory essential practice for **sound-hearer disciples**. These correct concepts pervade throughout the four *Āgamas*, though they do not expound in detail on the practice of *prajñā* (wisdom of the sign of reality in the dharma realm of the Bodhisattva Path) as taught by the Buddha. From this, we can see that the four *Āgamas* of the Path to Liberation, even though they include *Mahāyāna sūtras* that were once heard by sound-hearers, have been compiled into doctrinal interpretations of the sound-hearers Dharma pertaining to the Path to Liberation. Thus, it was only natural that the separately compiled *Mahāyāna sūtras* on *prajñā* and *vaipulya* by bodhisattvas were expounded by the Buddha in person during the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel. If that were not the case, what had happened to the

Mahāyāna doctrines (Path to Buddhahood) practiced by bodhisattvas and taught by the World-Honored One then? Would the World-Honored One exclusively teach those methods in the heavenly realm and ignore the human world? Or did the World-Honored One enter *nirvāṇa* without completing his teaching mission? Could it be that those sound-hearer saints and their later generations, who actually lack the knowledge and understanding of the notion of *prajñā* and knowledge-of-all-aspects, single-handedly create such *Mahāyāna* scriptures merely based on their long-lasting yearning for the Buddha? Would those people, including Master Yinshun, be able to provide answers to the Buddhist community and academia regarding this issue?

(9), monastic dharma teachers in Taiwan and mainland China often make this claim: “The four *Āgama sūtras* are the true and non-dual Buddha Dharma. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism cannot be accomplished without relying on the four *Āgama sūtras*. Therefore, all *Mahāyāna* scriptural doctrines must be based on and validated by the *Āgamas*. This makes the four *Āgama sutras* superior to *Mahāyāna* scriptures.” However, such an assertion is contrary to factual evidence and the correct principles.

The truth is that the contents of the four *Āgamas* consist solely of the Two-Vehicle Bodhi (Path to Liberation) on the notion of the **observation of renunciation**¹ and do not discuss the **observation of tranquility**² in *Mahāyāna*. The *Āgamas* only mention the name or concept of the *Mahāyāna*'s observation of tranquility and do not explicitly and openly elucidate the sign of reality of the intrinsic nature of all phenomena pertaining to the dharma realm. Nor do they explain the connotation of the intrinsic limit of remainderless *nirvāṇa*. How all arhats must proceed to achieve the meritorious quality of Buddhahood and to attain Buddhahood after having attained the fruition of liberation is not expounded. Nor do they explain what specific methods and contents great arhats must cultivate to become buddhas. While the Buddha already mentioned the term “observation of tranquility” in the *Dīrgha Āgama*, He did not expound on it. In other words, the four *Āgamas* teach only the Two-Vehicle doctrines and do not teach the *Mahāyāna* aspects of **observation of tranquility** in detail. It was not until later that the four assemblies of *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas compiled the *vaipulya* and *vijñaptimātra sūtras* that these teachings were expounded upon. As such, the *Mahāyāna sūtras* had been compiled in this way; the Path to Buddhahood will then be completed. The notion of **observation of tranquility** once spoken by the Buddha in the *Āgamas* remains intact. Only in this way can the Path to Buddhahood be correctly practiced and eventually perfectly achieved.

¹ 出離觀 (C: *Chū lí guān*)

² 安隱觀 (C: *Ān yǐn guān*)

When the World-Honored One appears in this world, it is certain that only after fully accomplishing the grand propagation of the Path to Buddhahood would it become possible for the Buddha to manifest the *parinirvāṇa* in the human realm. As we now observe, the World-Honored One has already undergone *nirvāṇa*. This must mean that He has already completed the full propagation of the Buddha Dharma and the act of guiding beings to the Buddhist path. Therefore, we must understand that the *sūtras* of the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel truly represent the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist teachings because the *Mahāyāna* doctrines were not expounded in detail within the four *Āgamas*.

However, upon examination of the four *Āgamas*, we find that they primarily expound on the dharma of the **observation of renunciation** and related teachings. The notion of the **observation of tranquility** associated with *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is not fully elucidated, appearing only as a term, without detailed exposition. This fact indicates that the four *Āgamas* predominantly focus on the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, which enables practitioners merely to escape from the delimited birth and death within the three realms. These texts do not extensively address the **tranquility** path to Buddhahood, nor do they provide comprehensive guidance for attaining Buddhahood. Consequently, it can be asserted that the four *Āgamas* do not expound on the wondrous *Mahāyāna* doctrine of **observation of tranquility**! Given this context, the intricate principles of *Mahāyāna* **observation of tranquility** necessitated further elucidation in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Vaipulya* Consciousness-Only *sūtras*, leading to the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel. This logical progression supports the authenticity of the *Mahāyāna* scriptures as the Buddha's real teachings. The *sūtras* of the second turning of the Dharma Wheel had already expounded on *prajñā* of both the knowledge of general and specific aspects concerning the sign of reality of the dharma realm. The *Vaipulya* Consciousness-Only *sūtras* of the third turning of the Dharma Wheel elucidate the knowledge-of-all-aspects essential for attaining Buddhahood. Notably, the terms "*Mahāyāna* Middle-Way *prajñā*" and "knowledge-of-all-aspects" are mentioned in the four *Āgamas*, albeit briefly. This reasoning affirms the authenticity of the *Mahāyāna* series of *Vaipulya* Consciousness-Only *sūtras* as the real teachings of the Buddha because they elaborate on the **knowledge-of-all-aspects** related to the true reality of *prajñā* in the dharma realm. Only through the cultivation and realization of knowledge-of-all-aspects can one complete the Path to Buddhahood, thus revealing the state of ultimate **tranquility**. This logical argument can be verified through an examination of the extant four *Āgamas* and is not merely my baseless assertion.

The doctrine of the Path to Liberation's **observation of renunciation** expounded

in the four *Āgamas*, if divorced from the *Mahāyāna* principles, becomes vulnerable to refutation by eternalist non-Buddhist schools. Furthermore, without the profound and wondrous principle of the eighth consciousness or *tathāgatagarbha* as explicated in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures, and without **the factual existence and experiential reality of the *tathāgatagarbha*** as expounded in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures, the state of remainderless *nirvāṇa* in the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation risks devolving into a nihilistic view and becoming a dharma of nihilist non-Buddhists. This fact has been demonstrated in my works *The Undeniable Existence of the Tathāgatagarbha* and the 10-volume *An Exposition on the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Therefore, early Buddhism should encompass the *Mahāyāna sūtras* of the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel because they are also teachings of the Buddha. The foundational four *Āgamas* actually rely on the profound *Mahāyāna tathāgatagarbha* doctrine for their establishment and completion, and cannot be separated from the true meaning expounded in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures.

In fact, the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation depends on the profound meaning of the *tathāgatagarbha* as taught in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures to avoid destruction by eternalist non-Buddhist schools and to prevent merging with nihilistic views. Consequently, it can be stated that the four *Āgamas* rely on and are rooted in the profound principle of **tranquility observation** from the *Mahāyāna* scriptures for their existence and propagation. Otherwise, the subtle principles of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation would be conflated with nihilistic views or refuted by eternalist schools, and the doctrine of *nirvāṇa* as transcendence from the cycle of birth and death, **observation of renunciation**, in the three realms would not be established. Therefore, the assertion by certain masters who favor *Theravāda* tradition of Buddhism and by individuals such as Yinshun that “*Mahāyāna* Buddhism is established based on the four *Āgamas*” is erroneous and contrary to logical reasoning. In this book series, I explicitly explain the implicit *Mahāyāna* Consciousness-Only teachings in the four *Āgamas*, demonstrating that some of these scriptures originally expounded *Mahāyāna* doctrines. However, these teachings were beyond the comprehension of the arhats of the *Sthaviravāda* and other schools of the Two Vehicles. They lacked the capacity to compile these teachings and were unwilling to do so. Therefore, during the compilation, they collected only the portions related to the Two-Vehicle doctrines and compiled them into *sūtras*. They omitted from their compilation the *Mahāyāna* doctrines that they could not understand, realize, or remember due to their lack of knowledge and attainment. They retained only the minimal *Mahāyāna* terminology necessary to prevent the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation from falling into nihilism, thereby ensuring that the remainderless *nirvāṇa* attained by arhats would not be trapped in a predicament of annihilationism.

Therefore, it was impossible for the majority of sound-hearer-natured individuals in the *Sthaviravāda* school to compile the *Mahāyāna* teachings they had heard into *Mahāyāna* scriptures. They could not acknowledge the *Mahāyāna* scriptures compiled by bodhisattvas shortly after, nor would they record the compilers, times, or locations of such compilations. This mindset is understandable to all enlightened bodhisattvas. (Part 2/3)

正覺