

The Real Tathāgatagarbha

Preface

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Since beginning Buddhist practice, we have repeatedly observed Buddhist practitioners who, following Buddhist studies scholars with monotheistic backgrounds, assert that “the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is not the Buddha’s teaching.” Thus, they repudiate the *tathāgatagarbha* teachings in the scriptures of the *Mahāyāna Vijñaptimātratā*¹ (*Vijñāna-Only, Consciousness-Only*) lineage. Even more troubling, prominent Dharma masters and lay Buddhist teachers accept the conclusions of these monotheistic scholars’ Buddhist research, sending their disciples abroad to study under them. In the course of their studies, these disciples come to doubt the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and eventually deny or critique it. Some even write books advocating the fallacy that “the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is not the Buddha’s teaching.” This is tantamount to severing the root of the great tree of the Buddha Dharma.

The *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is the foundation of the Three-Vehicle Buddha Dharma and all worldly phenomena. If it is abandoned, then all dharmas (including monotheistic religions), all worldly phenomena, and even the stems, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits of the Three-Vehicle Buddha Dharma will have no foundation and will completely disintegrate. As a result, the Buddha Dharma will be reduced to mere Buddhist studies.

Buddhist studies would then become merely worldly knowledge and could thus be categorized as part of Eastern philosophy. This perfectly aligns with the underlying intentions of monotheistic scholars researching Buddhism. They heighten themselves as Buddhist studies experts within the monotheistic–religion dominated world, and they eventually gain fame and material benefits. At the same time, they can belittle the profound greatness of the Buddha Dharma and attempt to secure a precarious continued existence for monotheistic religions over the next century or two. Many

¹ 唯識

Buddhist disciples fail to perceive this scheme and fall into it. Among them are outstanding talents of our generation who participate in non-Buddhists' attacks on the Buddha's teachings, thereby severing the roots of the great Dharma tree. This is a tragedy for Buddhism and a testament to the diminished merit of sentient beings in this Dharma-Ending Age.

Buddhist researchers are not necessarily believers in the Buddha Dharma, let alone actual practitioners. Thus, Buddhist disciples should exercise caution when reading their publications. It is acceptable to approach such writings with a critical and investigative mindset, but they should never be relied upon for Buddhist cultivation. For example, many expert scholars specialize in Consciousness-Only studies, yet most of them are not practitioners and write books about the Consciousness-Only theory based solely on academic research. Lacking direct personal realization and possessing no genuine attainment, they produce works riddled with errors arising from mere intellectual speculation. At best, only their textual research may be somewhat worth reading, but even this offers no benefit to the practice and realization of the Buddha Dharma. On the contrary, it may diminish practitioners' faith in the Buddha Dharma and mislead them regarding the correct path of cultivation and realization. Therefore, when Buddhist disciples read the works of various scholars, they must exercise discernment and avoid blind faith in these scholars based on their reputation, authority, or worldly status, lest they be led astray by such individuals.

The path to quick fame for Buddhist researchers is to be contrarian and bold. Researchers who select scriptures from the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition, conduct textual research on them, and declare them to be spurious—fabricated by later generations after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*—will certainly become celebrated figures, achieving fame overnight as well as material benefits and lifelong prestige. Such individuals care nothing about karmic retributions in their future lives, for these karmic consequences manifest only at the time of death. Because karmic retributions do not immediately appear when these individuals commit the aforementioned actions, they do not believe in the cause and effect of slandering the Dharma. If they can achieve fame and material benefits in one stroke, they do not care about whether their actions will have consequences after their death. They are truly foolish.

Yet, there are even more foolish ones—Buddhist disciples who follow and propagate erroneous views. Non-Buddhists who deny the scriptures obtain fame and material benefits, but these Buddhist disciples gain nothing in this life from spreading such Dharma-slandering views, and they will suffer severe karmic retribution after death. Truly, they are the most foolish of all!

Buddhist researchers often use the time when Buddhist *sūtra* appeared as their basis for authenticating them. They do not realize that the Three Baskets of Buddhist Scripture (*Tripitaka*) include those taught in the human realm, those taught in the Dragon Palace, those taught in the Heaven of the Four Kings, those taught in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven..., and even those taught in Akaniṣṭha Heaven. If bodhisattvas possess great supernatural powers, they can travel to the Dragon Palace or even to the Heaven of Paranirmita-vaśavartin to study the Buddhist scriptures that exist there. If bodhisattvas have attained the First Ground or above, they can even journey to Akaniṣṭha Heaven to personally meet the magnificent *sambhogakāya* of Śākyamuni Buddha—Vairocana Buddha—and receive teachings directly from Him. When these bodhisattvas return to the human realm and record what they have seen and heard through their supernatural power of knowledge of past lives, writing it down without omitting a single word, how can anyone claim that their writings are not the words spoken by the Buddha?

The *Dàzàngjīng* (Chinese Tripitaka) contains both authentic and spurious scriptures, and only those who have attained true realization can distinguish between them. For example, the *Sūtra of the Eight Yang Divine Spells*² is authentic, while the *Sūtra of the Heaven and Earth Eight Yang Divine Spells*³ is spurious. Likewise, the *Sūtra on the Great Causal Conditions and Benefits of the Name of Amitāyus Buddha*⁴, included in the *Continued Tripitaka*, is apocryphal because it contradicts the principles taught by the Buddha. Similarly, among the Chan patriarchs recorded in various sectarian texts, some attained true enlightenment, while others had mistaken enlightenment. As for Dōgen Zenji, the central figure of Japanese Zen studies, as

² 《佛說八陽神咒經》

³ 《佛說天地八陽神咒經》

⁴ 《佛說無量壽佛名號利益大事因緣經》

recorded in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, that he truly attained enlightenment is questionable. Contemporary scholar Fu Wei-Hsun studied Dōgen's works and wrote a book titled *Dōgen*⁵, in which he extracted and translated what he considered the most notable post-enlightenment discourses. However, I believe that these discourses do not prove that Dōgen had attained enlightenment. It is hoped that someone proficient in Japanese will translate Dōgen's complete discourses and writings from Volume 82, pages 1–309 of the *Taishō Tripiṭaka* into Chinese so that a proper judgment can be made. We should not assume that Dōgen was enlightened merely because he is the central figure of Dōgen Zen studies.

The same principle applies to Buddhist scriptures: Their authenticity should not be determined by when they appeared but by whether their contents accord with the Buddha's intent. When we examine the Consciousness-Only scriptures, such as those of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage, we find that they not only accord with the four *Āgamas* of Early Buddhism but also complete and substantiate them. They make the Buddha's teachings on *śrāvakas* and pratyekabuddhas in the four *Āgamas* unassailable, such that no non-Buddhists, humans, or devas can refute them.

However, the *Mahāyāna* Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage are extremely profound, far beyond the comprehension of *śrāvaka* arhats or pratyekabuddhas. Even after bodhisattvas' initial realization (sudden enlightenment), they still cannot fully comprehend these teachings. They must attain sudden enlightenment before they can enter the gradual-enlightenment bodhisattva stage. Based on their realization of the *tathāgatagarbha*, they must then cultivate by following the Buddha (or the Consciousness-Only *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures taught by the Buddha). Only then can their gradual enlightenment progressively deepen. Those who have not experienced sudden enlightenment cannot attain gradual enlightenment by merely reading the aforementioned scriptures. In addition, ordinary Consciousness-Only scholars, Buddhist disciples with mistaken realizations, and those who either believe in the teachings of monotheistic religions or do not believe in Buddhism yet conduct textual research on Buddhist scriptures cannot attain gradual

⁵ 《道元》

enlightenment.

Only Buddhist disciples who have truly attained sudden awakening can—based on the general characteristic of the *tathāgatagarbha* that they have realized—gradually awaken to the various specific characteristics of the *tathāgatagarbha*'s essence and functions as expounded in the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage, and experience them. Therefore, the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage are authentic, and all truly awakened practitioners know this. Only those who have not yet awakened or have mistakenly awakened declare them to be false, relegating them and other Buddhist scriptures to the category of Eastern philosophy, turning them into mere worldly knowledge that can only serve as material for international Buddhist conferences or as a means to gain worldly fame and respect. What these people say and write invariably invites ridicule from those who have attained realization. How does this benefit liberation?

In the early years of the Republic of China, an eminent master advocated “Buddhism for Human Life” and devoted his entire life to propagating it. This was the correct approach. In the past 10-plus years, another master has advocated “Humanistic Buddhism.” This is acceptable if the goal is to spread Buddhism widely and ensure its long-term continuance in the human world. However, confining Buddhism to the human realm is absolutely unacceptable because this would render it inferior to monotheistic religions—with their heavens—and would lead to the extinction of the Pure Land school. Therefore, the doctrine of Humanistic Buddhism raises concerns about self-imposed limitations.

Throughout the four *Āgamas*, it is taught that celestial beings regularly come to pay homage to the Buddha and study the Dharma. Moreover, there are bodhisattvas in the human realm who have attained the Grounds and can manifest their magnificent *sambhogakāya* (reward body) to personally meet the Buddha's *sambhogakāya* in various celestial palaces. How, then, can Buddhism be confined to the human realm? From ancient times to the present, there have been numerous cases with clear auspicious signs verifying rebirth in the Western Pure Land. How, then, can Buddhism be restricted to the *Sahā* world of the galaxy system? Therefore, the doctrine of

Humanistic Buddhism is tantamount to viewing a leopard through a bamboo tube and seeing only one spot, and thus cannot escape ridicule.

All three realms are mind-only, and all phenomena are Consciousness-Only⁶. Worlds undergo the continuous repeating cycle of formation, abiding, destruction, and emptiness because this is induced by the collective karma contained in the *tathāgatagarbhas* of karmically connected sentient beings. They are co-created solely through the unknowable appropriation within the true minds of sentient beings; they neither exist naturally nor are created by any deity. The arising, abiding, change, and destruction of all dharmas in the three realms are all manifested by the *tathāgatagarbha--ālayavijñāna*, through its perceived portion and perceiving portion (the seven evolving consciousnesses). However, the operation of the perceiving portion of the seven evolving consciousnesses cannot be separated from the external and internal perceived portions of the *tathāgatagarbha--ālayavijñāna*. Separated from these, the perceiving portion of the seven consciousnesses cannot operate; thus, neither can our minds capable of knowing and perceiving operate. Therefore, it is said that the Dharma characteristics are Consciousness-Only—that is, all dharmas are inseparable from the first to the eighth consciousnesses. All enlightened practitioners (except those with erroneous enlightenment) can verify the principle that “all three realms are mind-only, and all phenomena are Consciousness-Only” through their realized *tathāgatagarbha--ālayavijñāna* and the seven evolving consciousnesses it produces. This is beyond what unenlightened or falsely enlightened Buddhist disciples can know, much less by monotheistic believers or by scholars of Buddhist studies who do not believe in Buddhism. This is why Master Xuanzang displayed the following prominently at the city gate of Chang'an: “True *Pramāṇa* of Consciousness-Only.” This pronouncement remained undisputed throughout his lifetime, and to this day, no one has been able to refute it.

The phrase “True *Pramāṇa* of Consciousness-Only” refers to the “validity of the *tathāgatagarbha*” and the “validity of reality-suchness.” Even past general enlightened Chan masters could not fully understand the profound meaning of this phrase; how

⁶ 三界唯心，萬法唯識

much more for past or present falsely enlightened Chan masters or unenlightened ordinary beings? This is precisely why Chan Master Yaoshan Weiyan and others devoted themselves to the intensive study of the scriptures after their awakening.

However, many enlightened Chan patriarchs become arrogant due to their realization, and reject Consciousness-Only studies. This stems from their misunderstanding of such studies. As mentioned earlier, the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage are extremely deep and difficult to comprehend. Even for truly enlightened practitioners, attempting to thoroughly integrate and penetrate these teachings is no easy matter; thus, most Chan masters are daunted by this task and retreat from it. This is not the fault of these Buddhist disciples. Attaining true awakening is already extremely difficult; attempting to penetrate the Consciousness-Only *sūtra* and treatises of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage after enlightenment is doubly so. Without wholesome roots, faith roots, merit, and causal conditions cultivated over many kalpas, one cannot encounter a truly enlightened mentor who penetrates both principles and scriptural teachings while equally maintaining the cultivation of *samādhi* and *prajñā*. To thoroughly comprehend the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage is truly a formidable undertaking.

After attaining realization, practitioners who have not first thoroughly integrated and penetrated the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage absolutely cannot explore *Cheng Weishi Lun* and comprehend its true meaning. How much more for falsely enlightened practitioners or unenlightened Buddhist studies researchers? Thus, after Master Xuanzang established the Yogācāra school, only Master Kuiji continued to expound and propagate it, and after several generations, it died out. However, this was not the fault of these two great masters. *Cheng Weishi Lun* presents extremely profound principles that even enlightened practitioners have difficulty comprehending thoroughly. How much more for unenlightened or falsely enlightened practitioners? Furthermore, those who lean toward concentration or wisdom cannot penetrate such principles. Only those who penetrate both principles and scriptural teachings while equally maintaining the cultivation of *samādhi* and *prajñā* can truly have unobstructed understanding of it.

When Buddhism spread eastward, it was divided into eight schools. All eight schools are authentic Buddha Dharma and should not be divided into separate sects or factions. Therefore, I wrote this book not merely to propagate the Yogācāra Consciousness-Only school but also to safeguard the foundation of the Buddha Dharma. Given that the *tathāgatagarbha* is real and not false, for the sake of the vast multitude of Buddhist disciples in this Dharma-Ending Age, I needed to speak out and write this book. However, many Chan masters, Dharma teachers, lay Buddhists, and Buddhist researchers do not believe in the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha* because they have not realized it. Thus, they conclude that the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage were not taught by the Buddha because they appeared in the human world relatively late. Thus, I do not cite the Consciousness-Only scriptures of the *tathāgatagarbha* lineage and others as evidence in this book; instead, I rely purely on the universally recognized four *Āgamas*, the *Mahāyāna Prajñāpāramitā* teachings on emptiness, and correct logical principles to correct misunderstandings and prove that the *tathāgatagarbha* exists.

All ordinary beings who oppose the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine actually possess an inherent *tathāgatagarbha*. Even the so-called omniscient and omnipotent God of monotheistic religions also possesses the *tathāgatagarbha* without being aware of it. Those who carefully read this book will understand this principle and will not need to engage in a debate on it.

Although in the clarifications I make in this book, I cannot violate the Buddha's injunctions by revealing my stage of realization, I have nevertheless inevitably transformed my experiential realization into theoretical discourse while concealing its esoteric meaning. Awakened practitioners will immediately understand this upon reading this book, and this can further deepen their post-enlightenment *prajñā* wisdom. Those with sharp faculties who have not yet awakened may attain realization through the subtle clues in this book. Then, the world will gain several more kindred spirits. Would this not be a great joy on the bodhisattva path? Thus, this book is titled *The Real Tathāgatagarbha* [C: *Zhenshi Rulai Zang*].

Preface for the Second Printing

The first edition of *The Real Tathāgatagarbha*, with 2,000 copies, was published

in December 1997. By now, slightly more than two years later, all copies had sold out. It is truly remarkable for such a profound and specialized book to sell out within two years and four months. Many Buddhist publishers in Taiwan typically print 1,000 copies per edition of a Buddhist book, and these copies are often not sold out even after two years. Yet this specialized and profound book has achieved such feat, demonstrating that the depth of understanding of Buddhist practitioners in Taiwan is quite impressive, and that those who seek to elucidate the true Dharma need not worry about lacking successors. This is deeply gratifying.

As I planned to reprint this book, I reread it and found several minor flaws that had to be corrected in the revised edition, as shown below.

1. There was one missing character.
2. There was one part requiring additional wording for clarity.
3. Four parts with problematic wording had to be corrected.
4. Sixteen incorrect characters had to be corrected.
5. Three corrections regarding the knowledge-of-aspects had to be made.
6. In one part, a patriarch's name had to be deleted.
7. One mention of previous views on Tibetan Tantric Buddhism had to be corrected.
8. To save space, 15 blank pages had to be removed, requiring adjustment of the page numbers throughout the book.

For the above eight reasons, the book required re-typesetting. Thus, this revised edition has been reprinted.

Furthermore, many people outside the Association have suggested changing the book cover's color scheme because in Chinese culture, the colors black and white are generally avoided. Thus, I decided to follow public opinion and change the cover color. This will also make it easier to distinguish between the first and revised editions.

Respectfully,
Buddha's Son Xiao Pingshi
Preface written in March 2000
At the Abode of Clamour, Taipei