

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

Preface

Master Xiao Pingshi

This preface to *The Correct Meanings of the Āgama Sūtra* is a dialectical essay that I, lay Buddhist Xiao Pingshi, wrote in 2002 explaining the causes and conditions for writing the book series and elucidating the correct principle that “*Mahāyāna* IS the Buddha’s teaching” based on ample detailed and authentic scriptural evidence. This book series draws from the four *Āgama sūtras* alone (hereafter, the *Āgamas*), not from the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, to prove the following: that the Dharma discourses of various *Mahāyāna sūtras* of extensive *Vijñāna*-Only (S: *vijñaptimātratā*) teachings have never contradicted those of the Path to Liberation in the four *Āgamas*; that the *Mahāyāna* teachings are not the result of evolution; and most importantly, that when the Buddha expounded the notion of *nirvāṇa* in the original Dharma teachings, He constantly and covertly implied the existence of the eighth consciousness (*vijñāna*), **the inherently abiding dharma**, to prevent the notion of *nirvāṇa* from being equated with non-Buddhist nihilistic views. Additionally, the open teaching of the eighth consciousness (*vijñāna*) should actually be reserved until the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel. In light of the foregoing, the *Hīnayāna* dharmas are essentially expediently taught based on the premise of the *Mahāyāna* dharmas; without the *tathāgatagarbha*, the fundamental mind that is the essence of the *Mahāyāna* teachings, the teachings of Two-Vehicle *nirvāṇa* cannot avoid being ridiculed as a nihilistic view. The nature of such teachings would become the nihilistic emptiness that Yinshun stumbled into.

Furthermore, this book series deliberately excludes the *Mahāyāna* teachings because Yinshun, Zhaohui, and others reject the *Mahāyāna sūtras* in their biased views, considering them to have been gradually constructed and evolved by Buddhists after the period of Sectarian Buddhism, and firmly asserting that they were not spoken by the Buddha himself. Hence, in principle, this book series does not cite the *Mahāyāna* teachings as evidence. Moreover, Lambert Schmithausen, widely regarded as an authority on *ālaya-vijñāna* in Buddhist academia, relied on the later-published *Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* to assert that the original Buddha Dharma had not mentioned the notion of the *ālaya-vijñāna* mind-entity, which appeared only in the passage of the “Basic Section” of the *śāstra*, and that the

notion of mental faculty was not yet established in the “Compendium of Ascertainment Section” and “Verification Section” and appeared only in the later “Extinction of Transmigration Section.” He concluded that the Buddha Dharma had not yet established the notion of manas—the mental faculty—before the appearance of the *Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*. Nonetheless, his assertions completely contradict the historical facts in the earliest documentary records regarding the propagation of the Buddhist teachings. This is because the contents of the *Āgamas*, regardless of whether they are from the Southern or Northern tradition, have already explicitly or implicitly stated the *ālaya*-consciousness. It is just that Schmithausen does not understand the *sūtras*’ meanings. In view of the foregoing, this book series does not cite the *Mahāyāna sūtras* and *śāstras* but quotes exclusively from the four *Āgamas* (Yinshun called these Early Buddhism, a.k.a. Pre-sectarian Buddhism¹) to elicit evidence that the existence of the mental faculty and the *ālaya*-consciousness has already been taught in the *Āgamas*. This is to show that the claims of Western academic researchers believed by Yinshun, Zhaohui, and others are completely erroneous.

Moreover, this book series draws on the teachings of the four *Āgamas* in a comprehensive manner, unlike Yinshun, Zhaohui, Zhengyan, and others, who selectively taught only the Dharma from the *Āgamas* that they preferred while excluding and omitting those teachings that were unfavorable to their arguments. Yinshun even asserted that **the scriptural contents of the four *Āgamas* did not entirely align with the Buddha’s intentions**. Instead, he maintained that only the teachings directly heard from the Buddha fully corresponded to the Buddha’s intended meaning. Hence, Yinshun established a separate category of “**original Buddha Dharma**” (personally hearing the Dharma spoken by the Buddha), distinct from the “**Early Buddhism**” stated in the *Āgamas*. However, even if Yinshun could perhaps truly understand the meaning of the Buddha Dharma by hearing the Buddha preach in person today, albeit only once, and with the existing *Āgamas*, which allow him to study them repeatedly and extensively, there is conclusive evidence to date that he still seriously misunderstood the Dharma teachings. How could he possibly understand the teachings by hearing the World-Honored One speak in person only once? This is simply illogical!

As Yinshun and others already **improperly** negated the *Mahāyāna sūtra*, claiming that they were not the Buddha’s teachings, as well as committed the improper act of establishing a separate “original Buddha Dharma,” their explanation of the *Āgamas* teachings must have already lost much of the original

¹ 原始佛法 (Early Buddhism, a.k.a. Pre-sectarian Buddhism) (C. Yuánshǐ fófǎ)

sūtras’ meanings. Needless to say, Yinshun, Zhaohui, Zhengyan, and the others who have done these deeds have severely misinterpreted the Buddha’s real intent. Moreover, this so-called **original Buddha Dharma** could not possibly exist after the Buddha’s passing, except for those who heard it directly at that time. Thus, at this point, it is definitely impossible to have a valid “original Buddha Dharma”; as such, Yinshun’s proposition is totally meaningless. In contrast, this book series **comprehensively** and **extensively** cites and expounds the teachings of the *Āgamas* so that their true meanings can be presented to many Buddhist learners in this Dharma-ending period. By doing so, it also allows the true meaning of the Path to Liberation taught in the *Āgamas* to reappear in today’s Dharma-ending era. This is the major difference between this book series and those by Yinshun, Zhaohui, and others in citing and expounding the Dharma teachings.

The teachings of the *Āgamas* mainly focus on the Two-Vehicle Bodhi, the doctrines of the Path to Liberation that aim to transcend delimited existence, and do not include the realization of the sign of reality of all phenomena in the dharma realm; hence, the contents of the Two-Vehicle Bodhi have no direct relationship with the Path to Buddhahood in the Buddha Bodhi; it is because the way to Buddhahood must start with the realization of the eighth *vijñāna*, the *tathāgatagarbha*, the origin of all phenomena. The teachings of the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, on the other hand, take place during the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel, are primarily about the Path to Buddhahood, and are based mainly on the wisdom pertaining to *prajñā* of the Buddha Bodhi, inclusive of the teachings about the Path to Liberation in the Two-Vehicle Bodhi. Hence, the *Mahāyāna* Path to Buddhahood covers not only the knowledge-of-general-aspects and knowledge-of-specific-aspects of the *prajñā* of the sign of reality stated in the *sūtra* in the second turning of the Dharma Wheel but also the training in the higher wisdom of knowledge-of-all-aspects, which a practitioner must further realize. The notion of enlightenment takes place with the personal realization of the *tathāgatagarbha* (i.e., triggering the onset of *prajñā*), only by which a practitioner can directly observe the Middle-Way characteristics of the sign of reality. Furthermore, the training in the higher wisdom of knowledge-of-all-aspects is based on the intrinsic nature of the *tathāgatagarbha* and all the seeds it contains (taught in the third turning of the Dharma Wheel). That is, with the complete personal realization of the myriad seeds stored in the mind entity, the *tathāgatagarbha*, the origin of all phenomena, one fully perfects knowledge-of-all-aspects and becomes a Buddha.

As such, the Path to Buddhahood must encompass all kinds of wisdom: the

Path to Liberation, the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-general-aspects, the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-specific-aspects, and the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-all-aspects. This is unlike Yinshun's view that the Path to Liberation of the Two-Vehicle Bodhi alone is the Path to Buddhahood; if this were true, then all arhats would have already attained Buddhahood! However, we can see for ourselves that all arhats are not buddhas, and not one of them has dared to proclaim himself a buddha after the Buddha's passing! Thus, the Path to Buddhahood encompasses the Path to Liberation in the Two Vehicles and the *prajñā* of the knowledge-of-general-aspects, the *prajñā* of the knowledge-of-specific-aspects, and the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-all-aspects, etc., which are unique to the Distinct Teachings of the Great Vehicle! The full accomplishment of all these *prajñā* constitutes the attainment of Buddhahood. However, as the saints of the Two Vehicles realized only the Path to Liberation and not the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-general-aspects, the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-specific-aspects, or the *prajñā* of knowledge-of-all-aspects, how could Yinshun simply equate the limited wisdom of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation with the Path to Buddhahood? Besides, he had already misunderstood the *nirvāṇic* wisdom of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation! However, before he died, Yinshun dared to allow his disciple Pan Xuan to publish his biography with the subtitle *Seeing the Buddha in the Human Realm*, a usurping claim that he had attained Buddhahood while still being an ordinary being. It is evident that he did not understand the Path to Liberation or the Path to Buddhahood.

Due to numerous sound-hearer (*śrāvaka*) inclined masters and lay practitioners who favor the Two Vehicles, along with those who blindly follow certain Japanese, European, and American Buddhist scholars who negate the profound meaning of the *tathāgatagarbha*, as well as those who blindly adhere to the erroneous *Mādhyamika Prāsaṅgika* view that consciousness is the ultimate mind, there are implicit suggestions of the fallacious argument that “*Mahāyāna* is not the Buddha's teaching.” These individuals vehemently defame the correct doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* as expounded in the *sūtras* of the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel, denying the existence of the *tathāgatagarbha*. In private discourse, they frequently engage in baseless defamation, claiming that the original Buddhist scriptures of the four *Āgamas* never mentioned the seventh consciousness (*manas*) nor spoke of the eighth consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), the *tathāgatagarbha*; they also claim that the *tathāgatagarbha* is a concept of the non-Buddhist Divine Self and was sublimated to become a branch of Buddhism; they preach that the *tathāgatagarbha* described in *Mahāyāna sūtras* is heavily colored by the non-Buddhist Divine Self and was

established only later, after the rise of *Mahāyāna*, through a subtle differentiation and evolution from the sixth consciousness. Thus, they claim that the seventh and eighth *viññāna* do not actually exist.

Due to their [the sound-hearer-inclined people] erroneous defamation of the eighth consciousness (this mind-entity), the *tathāgatagarbha*, which is the fundamental basis of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi and can be directly realized, they falsely deny its existence. This causes their propagation of the Two-Vehicle *nirvāṇa* to fall into the nihilistic nonexistence; it also leads to their understanding of *prajñā* as a mere conceptual elaboration of **the emptiness of intrinsic nature in names only**. However, Yinshun's doctrinal classification asserting that "*prajñā* is the emptiness of intrinsic nature in names only" is, in fact, highly unreasonable. This is because the dharmas of the seventh and eighth consciousnesses were originally expounded with hidden meanings throughout the *Āgamas*, but the Two-Vehicle sages lacked the requisite wisdom to comprehend them. Additionally, the profound teachings of *prajñā* and the wondrous knowledge-of-all-aspects were not intended to be elucidated at the initial phase of the Buddha's discourses. Thus, the Buddha established the teachings in Three Phases across the Five Periods. However, these individuals did not have the slightest faith in this truth and vehemently denied the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, slandering them by saying that they were not spoken by the Buddha. For this reason, this book series does not cite the *Mahāyāna sūtras* as proof of the true existence of the *tathāgatagarbha*, but only extracts the teachings and principles relating to the *Mahāyāna* training in higher wisdom of *Vijñaptimātratā* from the *Āgamas*, proving that the teachings of the eighth consciousness were already implicitly taught extensively in the four *Āgamas*. Thus, by citing evidence solely from the *Āgamas*, these [sound-hearer-inclined] people cannot help but have faith, with the aim that the True Dharma of Buddhism will be transmitted unhindered in the future.

In addition, they [the sound-hearer-inclined people] often say that the Consciousness-Only school focuses on discussing technical terms and exclusively explains the illusory nature of various dharmas to establish doctrinal debates solely to subdue non-Buddhists in terms of "knowledge"; it is unrelated to the actual realization of the Buddha Dharma; hence, it is called illusory Consciousness-Only. Because it explains only the six illusory consciousnesses and does not touch on the true meaning of Buddhahood, thus, it is called illusory Consciousness-Only. However, the sublime and wondrous knowledge-of-all-aspects expounded in the Consciousness-Only *sūtra* during the third turning of the Dharma Wheel in the *Vaipulya* period is the real Path to Buddhahood. Because

these people lack the ability to personally realize the *tathāgatagarbha*, they completely miss the essence taught by the Buddha during the third turning of the Dharma Wheel. Disregarding this fact, they wrongly slander the fundamental *vijñāna*, the *tathāgatagarbha*, which they cannot personally realize, as taught in the higher wisdom of Consciousness-Only as a non-Buddhist concept of a Divine Self. For this cause and condition, this book series not only focuses on the explanation of the fundamental teachings of the Path to Liberation in the *Āgamas* but also interprets the *Āgamas* through the realizations and valid knowledge (*pramāṇa* of realization) of the bodhisattva's direct perceptions of the following: (1) realization of the *Mahāyāna* Path to Liberation and the true teachings of *Mahāyāna prajñā*; (2) realization of the *prajñā* in the Path to Buddhahood; (3) attainment of the wisdom of knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths; and (4) attainment of valid knowledge through the direct perceptions of both the Path to Liberation and the Path to Buddhahood. In view of the foregoing, the training in higher wisdom of the *Vijñāna*-Only teachings is already implicitly outlined in the *Āgamas*. Buddha Śākyamuni, at the time of His first turning of the Dharma Wheel, was already fully equipped with the *prajñā* and knowledge-of-all-aspects of the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel. This disproves the claim by those with ulterior motives that Śākyamuni had not yet attained Buddhahood when He expounded the *Āgamas*. By citing revelations found in the *Āgamas*, this book series proves that Śākyamuni had already become a Buddha before he expounded the Consciousness-Only series of *sūtras* in the *Vaipula* period. Thus, the *Āgamas* not only fully cover the dharmas known to the Two-Vehicle saints but also briefly include the inconceivable, wondrous *Mahāyāna* liberation teachings unknown to them. To put it bluntly, some *Āgamas* texts are essentially *Mahāyāna sūtras* that Two-Vehicle saints compiled into *Hīnayāna sūtras* after hearing the Buddha's *Mahāyāna* teachings during the second turning of the Dharma Wheel. With this correct understanding, I decided to write this book series to rectify the misguided direction and content of Dharma transmission that has been led astray by eminent Dharma masters in this Dharma-ending age. I did this for nine reasons, as follows:

(1), the wisdom of sound-hearers is limited and inferior. They do not believe, understand, or realize the *Mahāyāna* dharmas. Despite having heard the *Mahāyāna* teachings, they could not accomplish the mental concomitant of memory for the *Mahāyāna* doctrines. Naturally, they could not recall and retain the *Mahāyāna sūtras* and could only compile what they had heard from the *Mahāyāna* teachings from their limited perspective on the Path to Liberation, unjustifiably turning them into *Hīnayāna sūtras*. They certainly could not include

the implicitly taught *Mahāyāna* doctrines in their compilations. Their compiled *Āgamas* would inevitably emphasize the Path to Liberation realized by the Two-Vehicle saints and would ignore or miss the required practices belonging to the Path to Buddhahood realized by the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas. Such an outcome is only natural because the Two-Vehicle saints could neither comprehend nor cultivate as the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas could.

What is the evidence for the aforementioned assertions? There are scriptural proofs in *SamyuktĀgama Sūtra* Vol. 27.

The *SamyuktĀgama Sūtra*, Vol. 27, No. 727, clearly states:

Thus have I heard. On one occasion, the Buddha was traveling around the residential area of Malla and was dwelling by the river banks of the Nairāñjanā near the Kuśinagara city. He instructed Venerable Ānanda to arrange a fourfold *uttarāsavga* (robe) bedding, stating, “I have a backache and wish to lie down for a while.” The Venerable Ānanda obeyed and arranged the fourfold-robe bedding, and then reported to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, the fourfold-robe bedding has been arranged; it is at your disposal.” At that time, the World-Honored One reclined on the padded *Samghāṭī* pillow on His right side, one foot resting on top of the other, mindfully aware and clearly comprehending. Maintaining right mindfulness and true wisdom, he formed the notion of wakefulness and addressed the Venerable Ānanda, “You speak of the seven factors of awakening.” The Venerable Ānanda then said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, the factor of awakening known as mindfulness is that when the World-Honored One, having self-awakened to the perfect enlightenment, expounds on the basis of being aloof, of being desireless, and of being extinguished, leading toward relinquishment. The factors of awakening known as investigation of dharma, vigor, rapture, pliancy, concentration, and relinquishment are that when the World-Honored One, having self-awakened to [the] perfect enlightenment, expounds on the basis of being aloof, of being desireless, and of being extinguished, leading toward relinquishment.”

Ānanda proclaimed the remaining six factors of awakening in the same manner.

The aforementioned *sūtra* quotes specifically state that an individual who diligently cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment can realize the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment or attain Buddhahood. It can be clearly seen

that the cultivation of the seven factors of enlightenment encompasses the Two-Vehicle wisdom of liberation, knowledge-of-the-general-aspects and knowledge-of-the-specific-aspects pertaining to *prajñā*, and knowledge-of-all-aspects. Thus, only when the cultivation of the seven factors of enlightenment is seen in this way can one rely on it to attain Buddhahood—that is, **fully possessing knowledge-of-all-aspects and the four kinds of wisdom of the Buddha**. However, the cultivation of the seven factors of enlightenment expounded in the *Āgamas* does not include the method of realizing the *tathāgatagarbha* and touches only on the name of the *tathāgatagarbha*. Neither do the *Āgamas* mention that the *tathāgatagarbha* contains all seeds. These *sūtras* also do not teach Buddhist disciples the method of cultivating knowledge-of-all-aspects. How, then, can one possibly attain knowledge-of-all-aspects? If one does not foster, cultivate, realize, and perfect knowledge-of-all-aspects, how can one attain the ultimate Buddhahood and the four kinds of wisdom of the Buddha? Nonetheless, as the *Āgamas* distinctly state that the cultivation of the seven factors of enlightenment can lead to the attainment of ultimate Buddhahood, a portion of the *Āgamas* must originally have been a *Mahāyāna sūtra* to enable practitioners who cultivate them to attain the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. However, when the *Āgamas* were compiled by the *Hīnayāna* saints, they could not understand the profound and wonderful principles of *prajñā* and knowledge-of-all-aspects of Consciousness-Only that they had heard. As a result, they lacked understanding and could not establish the mental function of mindfulness on the content of the Buddha's enlightened wisdom that they had heard. Thus, they were unable to memorize and uphold it. It should be known that what was accomplished after such a compilation must have referred solely to the Path to Liberation as the path to attaining Buddhahood! The words and phrases explicitly recorded in the *Āgamas* are clear evidence of such a misunderstanding. Otherwise, the great arhats—who were twofold-liberated saints, had attained three insights and six supernatural powers, and had already cultivated the seven factors of enlightenment to attain the ultimate fruition of the Path to Liberation—should have already achieved the ultimate Buddhahood. However, none of the arhats dared declare that they attained Buddhahood after the Buddha entered *nirvāṇa*, succeeding the Buddha to propagate the Buddha Dharma! Neither could any arhat be designated by Buddha Śākyamuni as the next future Buddha, like Bodhisattva Maitreya, let alone attain Buddhahood there and then.

(2), although the *Sthaviravāda* had an extremely small number of *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva *saṃghas*, most of them were sages and ordinary people from the sound-hearer vehicle. Even though they were converted to sound-hearers by

following the Buddha's words, oftentimes, the ordinary followers of the sound-hearer vehicle did not believe that the state of the Buddha was different from that of a sound-hearer arhat. Given that the nonbelievers still had a great sense of the concept of "I," they deemed that the wisdom of a Two-Vehicles arhat could be equated with that of the World-Honored One. That is why even after the Buddha preached the *Lotus Sūtra*, they still did not believe in the *prajñā* pertaining to the sign of the reality of a Buddha's state, let alone in the teachings regarding the *Mahāyāna* wondrous Dharma of knowledge-of-all aspects. Hence, 5,000 nonbelievers blatantly walked out of the assembly during the Buddha's preaching on the *Lotus Sūtra*. This recorded incident in relation to the *Lotus Sūtra* supports my point here about the current situation with regard to the Two-Vehicle followers.

Likewise, most *Theravāda* Buddhism believers and proponents in Taiwan today revere only the rudimentary *Āgamas* compiled by sound-hearer followers of the Two Vehicles. Therefore, upon hearing the correct *Mahāyāna* conception of *prajñā* dharmas, which are unheard of and unfamiliar to them, they become annoyed and unwilling to accept or try to understand such dharmas, much less to cultivate them. This is true for some intellectual practitioners in today's information-rich era; thus, ordinary *saṃghas* and noble *saṃghas* with predetermined natures of the sound-hearer-minded monastics from ancient times are likely to be the same when they come across the *Mahāyāna* teachings. Lacking belief in or personal realization of the profound and wondrous *Mahāyāna* Dharma, these sound-hearers are unwilling to compile the *Mahāyāna sūtras* and are incapable of such! Therefore, the exclusive underlying essence of the *Mahāyāna* Dharma taught by the Buddha could not possibly be captured in a *Mahāyāna sūtra* compilation by sound-hearers. For these reasons, the legendary compilation of *Mahāyāna sūtras* took place. After many truly enlightened bodhisattvas heard the *sūtra* compilation of Bhikṣu Mahākāśyapa and other noble *saṃghas*, they were extremely dissatisfied with the compilation. After failing several times to convince the sound-hearers to amend their compilation, these enlightened bodhisattvas immediately expressed their intention to start working on another compilation.

(3), although the sound-hearer followers have heard the *Mahāyāna* teachings, they are unable to comprehend the meanings of these teachings due to their lack of realization of the *tathāgatagarbha*. Therefore, if the *Mahāyāna sūtras* personally spoken by the World-Honored One were to be compiled by the sound-hearer *saṃghas*, the result would inevitably be scriptures of the sound-hearer Dharma's Path to Liberation. This is because the followers of the sound-

hearers will inevitably interpret the meanings of the *Mahāyāna* teachings based on the principles of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, and they will compile the *sūtras* according to their own understanding of the spirit of the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation. Just as in the present day, people such as Yinshun, Hsing Yun, Sheng Yen, Cheng Yen, Zhao Hui, Chuan Dao, and others all use the incomplete principle of the Two-Vehicle **dependent origination without a fundamental cause** to explain the ultimate principle of *Mahāyāna*'s *prajñā* emptiness, without any exception. However, when the sound-hearer noble monks compiled the scriptures of the Two-Vehicle Bodhi Path or Path to Liberation, faint traces of the *Mahāyāna* teachings must have remained in them. The remnant *Mahāyāna* teachings can still be traced because the sound-hearer teachings of the Path to Liberation are inseparable from the true Dharma of the *Mahāyāna prajñā* and thus cannot stand alone. Otherwise, the state of realization of the former would definitely fall under the view of nihilism. To avoid this, the noble sound-hearer *saṃghas* had to preserve the *Mahāyāna* terminologies and Dharma phrases of the eighth *vijñāna* (expounded by the World-Honored One) during their compilation of the *Āgamas* into the Two-Vehicle Bodhi Path or Path to Liberation. For these reasons, I can still trace these *Mahāyāna* teachings in the *Āgamas* today as evidence of my point. The World-Honored One personally taught the *Mahāyāna sūtras* of the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel, and they are the real Path to Buddhahood. This book series presents compelling evidence from start to finish, leaving the sound-hearer-minded monastics who hold the *Theravāda* teachings in high regard both across the Taiwan Strait and in Southeast Asia at a loss for words and unable to refute it. Deep down, they know the truth, but they stubbornly cling to their arguments in a desperate attempt to save face, maintain their reputations, and protect their vested interests.

(4), even if the Two-Vehicle sages were willing to compile the *Mahāyāna*-related *sūtras*, as they did not have a true understanding of what they had heard, they did not have the **mental concomitant** of memorizing them. Thus, they could not compile them, even if they had heard them during the *prajñā* period and the *Vaipula* period. Those who had worked on the first compilation, led by Bhikṣu Mahākāśyapa and the *saṃghas*, were mostly Two-Vehicle sound-hearer *saṃghas* or arhats. On the other hand, the *Mahāyāna* monastic bodhisattvas were very few and outnumbered, and the lay bodhisattvas were not the elders or *sthaviras* (senior monks) in the Buddhist *saṃghas*, so how could they lead and execute the compilation of the *Mahāyāna sūtras* that the majority of the *saṃghas* could not understand or were unwilling to compile? Therefore, it was absolutely impossible for a monastic community primarily composed of sound-

hearer arhats to compile the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, which contain profound teachings that they had heard but did not understand or could not memorize and uphold. Consequently, only after the bodhisattvas' attempts to communicate with the sound-hearer noble monastics proved futile could a small number of ordained bodhisattvas among the *Mahāyāna* practitioners, together with a large number of lay bodhisattvas, separately initiate and promote the compilation of *sūtras* containing *Mahāyāna* doctrines. Only then could they jointly recite, authenticate, and compile these *sūtras* at a later time. The compilation of such *Mahāyāna* doctrinal *sūtras* was inevitably accompanied by a series of twists and turns, which resulted in delays. This is because Buddhism has historically been dominated by the monastic community, with the majority of monks belonging to the sound-hearer tradition and only a small number of monks being bodhisattvas. Consequently, the compilation and dissemination of *Mahāyāna sūtras* in the human realm occurred considerably later than in the *Āgamas*. This phenomenon can be grasped by those endowed with wisdom.

Just as my publications on the profundity of the *Mahāyāna* teachings today could not possibly be written before various criticisms arise, or simultaneously with the works of various masters, it would be impossible to write books revealing the profound and wonderful meanings of the *Mahāyāna* teachings in advance if I had not witnessed many leading contemporary Buddhist monastic masters teaching erroneously everywhere and baselessly slandering the True Dharma that I expound. It would also be impossible to engage in various activities of refuting the wrong and revealing the right, and books on debating profound and wonderful Dharmic principles could not be published. Hence, the publication of my books discussing and debating profound and wonderful Dharmic principles must necessarily come after the publication of erroneous books by various masters. They cannot be published simultaneously with these books or come before them. Only after the masters have seriously misled sentient beings and refuse to correct their wrongdoings can I begin to act. When those ordained great Dharma masters have all interpreted the emptiness of *Mahāyāna prajñā* using the sound-hearer doctrines, when those ordained teachers have all misunderstood Sound-Hearer Bodhi, and when the grave evil acts of destroying Buddhism have appeared as the great Dharma masters boycott the wonderful *tathāgatagarbha* Dharma, which is the foundation of the Three-Vehicle bodhi, only then do I begin to expound on the correct doctrines of Sound-Hearer Bodhi and refute erroneous views to reveal the True Dharma. As such, after propagating the Dharma for more than 10 years, I was then compelled to write the book series *The Correct Meaning of the Āgamas* to prove that a portion of the

Consciousness-Only doctrines was already implicitly expounded in the four *Āgamas*.

The current state of affairs is analogous to that of ancient times: only after the hoped-for compilation of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines by the sound-hearer monks proved to be impossible did the ordained and lay bodhisattvas within the *Mahāyāna* tradition gather together to compile them. For these reasons, the *Mahāyāna sūtras* thus inevitably appeared in this world later than the *Āgamas* did. However, we cannot conclude that the World-Honored One did not teach the *prajñā*, the *vaipulya*, and other teachings after expounding the *Āgamas* merely because the *sūtras* were compiled and appeared later! Why would it not be possible that the World-Honored One imparted His teachings in three phases, with His four assemblies of disciples commencing the gradual compilation of the teachings after His passing? If this reasoning is not accepted, then the same logic could be applied to slander the *Āgamas*, claiming that they were “created” by the sound-hearer *saṃghas* after the Buddha’s passing and thus were not personally taught by the Buddha. As the principle applies to one case, it must also apply to the other.

In the *Mahāyāna* tradition, the bodhisattva *saṃghas* have always consisted predominantly of lay practitioners, with very few ordained bodhisattvas. This is true in all human realms across the worlds in the ten directions (S. *daśa-dig-loka-dhātu*), and in the heavenly realms, there are no ordained bodhisattvas at all; only lay bodhisattvas preside over the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist teachings. This indicates that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is present not only in the human realms but also in the heavenly realms across the worlds in the ten directions. However, in all Buddhist traditions across the worlds in the ten directions, ordained *saṃghas* exist only in the human realm. In this realm, as established by all Buddhas, the ordained *saṃghas* are the primary representatives for upholding the Buddhist teachings, with lay bodhisattvas mostly playing a supporting role. In the heavenly realms and the purest Buddha Purelands across the worlds in the ten directions, there are no ordained bodhisattva *saṃghas* at all! All heavenly beings in the form realm have no family affiliations; thus, there is no distinction between ordained and lay practitioners. Even in the fourth heaven of the desire realm, where Buddhist teachings are propagated, there are no ordained bodhisattvas. Therefore, only in the human realm do ordained bodhisattva *saṃghas* exist. Consequently, in the human realm, for several hundred years after the Buddha’s passing, the ordained bodhisattva *saṃghas* would continue to represent *Mahāyāna* Buddhism because the *Mahāyāna* teachings were propagated later than the sound-hearer teachings

and thus had less momentum.

In both the *Mahāyāna* and *Hīnayāna* traditions of Buddhism in the human world, because the ordained *saṃghas* are the primary presiders over the teachings, all *Mahāyāna* lay bodhisattvas should first respect the ordained noble monks of the *Sthaviravāda* tradition. They should wait patiently, not compiling the *sūtras* according to their own ideas. However, after a long wait, when it became clear that the sound-hearer noble monks would not compile the *Mahāyāna sūtras* but would instead compile them as *Hīnayāna sūtras* of the Path to Liberation, only then did the *Mahāyāna* bodhisattvas gather the four assemblies of lay and ordained bodhisattvas to compile the *sūtras*. Therefore, it is understandable and inevitable that the *Mahāyāna sūtras* appeared after the four *Āgamas*. The *Sthaviravāda* sound-hearer monks were unwilling to publicly acknowledge this, and they certainly would not record the compilation of *Mahāyāna sūtras* in their Vinaya (Basket of Discipline). In fact, the actual existence, propagation, and compilation of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines and *sūtras* were unrelated to the evolution of Sectarian Buddhism. The evolution of Sectarian Buddhism touched only on mundane phenomena and the superficial aspects of dharma propagation by unenlightened ordinary people. These all belong to the contents of sound-hearer teachings and are essentially unrelated to the authentic *Mahāyāna* doctrines. The teachings originally transmitted by the World-Honored One continued to be propagated among truly enlightened *Mahāyāna* practitioners but were not taken as material for textual research and verification.

Furthermore, an examination of the doctrinal materials left by Sectarian Buddhism shows that most of their propagated doctrines contradict the extant Buddha's sacred instructions on the Path to Liberation. This indicates that the evolution of Buddhist teachings within Sectarian Buddhism largely stems from the propagation of erroneous interpretations by unenlightened ordinary individuals unrelated to the True Dharma, as presented in the scriptures. The correct Buddha Dharma, as expounded in the *sūtras*, has been consistently transmitted without alteration. Although its transmission has always been as tenuous as a thin silk thread, it remains unbroken to this day, with the True Enlightenment Practitioners Association maintaining its uninterrupted lineage. We can not only demonstrate this fact but also provide further evidence and explanation for it: the profound meanings of the *Mahāyāna* doctrines have already been implicitly expounded within the four *Āgamas*, which will be demonstrated in this book series. It must be clarified that the historical facts about the expositions of the True Dharma do not equate to the evolving history of the sectarian teachings.

The dissemination of the True Dharma (*Saddharma*) has no relation to the teaching evolution propagated by the unenlightened masters of Sectarian Buddhism. The key issue is their lack of realization of *prajñā* or the true content of the Path to Liberation. The fact is that the canon of the aforementioned sectarian teachings has been taught by unenlightened ones, but the enlightened bodhisattvas' True Dharma on both the Path to Liberation and *prajñā* will certainly impact the sectarian teachings, leading to their gradual evolution across generations; we are not surprised by the similar evolutionary process taking place today, after my extensive elaboration and interpretation of the True Dharma (taught by the Buddha). Many practitioners and masters of contemporary Buddhist society have returned to the true teachings of the Buddha Dharma to a certain degree as a result of this. Most importantly, the truth of the Buddha Dharma has never changed; to this day, the core tenet is on the wondrous doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha*. However, ever since I started the Dharma exposition, I have consistently taught and adhered to the wondrous tenet of the *tathāgatagarbha* without deviation. (Part 1)

