

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

## **Preface**

(Part 3/3)

Master Xiao Pingshi

Based on the above reasoning, we can verify that the *Mahāyāna* scriptures are indeed the Buddha's teachings and not later fabrications of them. Claiming them to be later fabrications would lead to significant errors, as follows:

(1) The *Mahāyāna* scriptures are evidently superior to the four *Āgamas*. If the *Mahāyāna* scriptures were composed by later individuals, this would imply that these individuals possessed wisdom surpassing that of the Buddha, which is a grave error.

(2) The four *Āgamas* do not fully expound the Path to Buddhahood, which is only comprehensively explained in the series of *Mahāyāna Vaipula* Consciousness-Only scriptures. If the *Mahāyāna* scriptures were not the Buddha's teachings, then attaining final *nirvāṇa* would necessitate the Buddha's reappearance in the human realm after 300 to 500 years to expound the *Mahāyāna* doctrines.

(3) While the four *Āgamas* implicitly contain *Mahāyāna* principles, they do not provide detailed explanations, offering only terminology. Unlike the Two-Vehicle Path to Liberation, which is explained in detail, the four *Āgamas* provide only a detailed exposition of the **observation of renunciation**, which pertains to conventional truth. They neither briefly mention nor elaborate on the **observation of tranquility**, which relates to the ultimate truth. However, the Buddha has already declared in the four *Āgamas* that the Dharma encompasses two contemplative observations: the **observation of renunciation** and the **observation of tranquility**. The latter is explained only in the *Mahāyāna* scriptures, while the four *Āgamas* merely mention its name and do not elucidate its content, focusing instead on the detailed exposition of renunciation. This reveals that the four *Āgamas* do not fully expound the Buddha Dharma, with a significant portion of the Dharma remaining unexpounded, awaiting exposition in later *Mahāyāna* scriptures.

Therefore, the Buddhist disciples of the four assemblies should not judge the authenticity of various *sūtras* solely based on their earlier or later emergence. Instead, they should consider (1) whether the doctrines expounded in earlier and later *sūtras* are mutually contradictory, (2) which of the Three-Vehicle *sūtras*, whether compiled earlier or later, is the most ultimate, (3) which are the most definitive, and (4) which

teachings are the most comprehensive and all-encompassing. These should serve as the principles for discernment. Moreover, Yinshun and all other Buddhist scholars, both domestic and international, lack any substantive evidence to demonstrate that the *Mahāyāna sūtras* were created and compiled by later adherents of Sectarian Buddhism, which follows the sound-hearer dharma, several centuries after the Buddha's passing. Furthermore, as adherents of Sectarian Buddhism belonging to the sound-hearer tradition have not realized the fundamental consciousness (C. *běnnshī*), the *tathāgatagarbha*, how could they create and compile the supreme and profound *Mahāyāna sūtras*? If the later adherents of sound-hearer Sectarian Buddhism, without knowing or realizing the fundamental consciousness, possessed such capability, then Yinshun, with access to more information in modern times, should have been even more capable. Yet, he failed to comprehend these texts, let alone create them. Thus, his assertions are mere delusions.

From my perspective, there are no contradictions among the teachings of the *sūtras* throughout the three turnings of the Dharma Wheel. The distinctions lie solely in the differentiation of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi and in the varying degrees of profundity and scope. There are absolutely no contradictions between the earlier and later teachings. However, the *Mahāyāna sūtras* are far superior to and more profound than the four *Āgamas*. Moreover, the complete Path to Buddhahood and the comprehensive Buddha Dharma can be fully accomplished only through the entirety of the *sūtras* from all three turnings of the Dharma Wheel. For this reason, I authored *The Correct Meanings of the Āgama Sūtra* to elucidate the true principles of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi, the Buddha's words found in the four *Āgamas*. By citing the World-Honored One's golden words from the *Dīrgha Āgama* concerning **the three turnings of the Dharma Wheel**, I demonstrate the authenticity of **the Buddha's teachings in the three assemblies** and prove that the *sūtras* of the three turnings of the Dharma Wheel were indeed spoken by the Buddha himself. This evidence confirms that the *Mahāyāna sūtras* were originally taught by the World-Honored One's golden words and were not long-term creations compiled by later generations. However, the *sūtras* collected and compiled in the tantras as well as the vast majority of scriptures and all tantras in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, including their sequels, were not spoken by the World-Honored One's golden words, given the fact that these texts often contradict the sacred teachings found in the *sūtras* of the three turnings of the Dharma Wheel and deviate from both the Path to Liberation and the Path to Buddhahood.

What are the reasons for the foregoing? Evidently, they are the following. First, the doctrines expounded in the *sūtras* of the *Mahāyāna prajñā* and the knowledge-

of-all-aspects of the Consciousness-Only (*Vijñāna*-Only) school far surpass the scope of the four *Āgamas*. Second, the *sūtras* in the tantric sequels are noticeably inferior to those of the third turning of the Dharma Wheel. Many of these are apocryphal scriptures and often fall within the confines of the phenomenal aspects and the realm of mental consciousness. As for the Tibetan tantras, they are apocryphal *sūtras* and *śāstras* created by the gurus of Lamaism and are not worthy of serious consideration. It has also been observed that in later generations, the many disciples who have truly realized the Three-Vehicle Bodhi have mostly personally attained the ultimate fruition of liberation, and many have even become great arhats with three insights and six supernatural powers, yet none of them have ever dared to claim that they have attained Buddhahood. Furthermore, the *Mahāyāna* doctrines expounded by bodhisattvas in later generations surpassed those elucidated in the four *Āgamas* in profundity and sublimity. The great arhats, adepted in the sound-hearer dharma, were utterly perplexed upon hearing these teachings and were unable to comprehend their significance. Nonetheless, these bodhisattvas, who propagated the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, humbly asserted that their wisdom was far inferior to that of the Buddha. If one were to posit that the later *Mahāyāna Vaipulya sūtras* were fabrications of subsequent bodhisattvas, it would logically follow that these bodhisattvas' wisdom surpassed that of the Buddha. However, not a single truly enlightened bodhisattva has ever proclaimed the attainment of Buddhahood. Instead, they all uniformly take refuge in the Buddha and humbly maintain that they remain far from the Buddha's level of realization. Based on these considerations, it is evident that the *Mahāyāna sūtras* were not fabrications of later bodhisattvas but were compiled and disseminated only after the *Sthaviravāda* sound-hearer *saṃghas* failed to do so. Consequently, the origination of the training in higher wisdom in the Consciousness-Only teachings lies in the *Vaipulya sūtras* of Consciousness-Only expounded during the third turning of the Dharma Wheel. Although the four *Āgamas* occasionally mention terminologies related to Consciousness-Only, they do not provide either cursory or detailed expositions. Thus, the origin of the training in higher wisdom in the Consciousness-Only teachings is not to be found in the four *Āgamas* or in the miscellaneous collection of the *Āgamas*.

In light of the foregoing, practitioners of the *Hīnayāna* Path to Liberation in *Theravāda* Buddhism, whether lay or monastic, should refrain from engaging in polemics with the four assemblies of *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva *saṃghas* in the human realm. The teachings propounded by the bodhisattva *saṃghas* are not intended for contention and are authentic expositions of correct doctrine. Therefore, those cultivating the *Theravāda* Path to Liberation should earnestly investigate the true essence of the *Mahāyāna prajñā* teachings, rather than misinterpreting the Path to

Liberation as the Path to Buddhahood. They must not erroneously conflate and substitute the Path to Buddhahood with a misunderstood Path to Liberation, as Yinshun did. The Path to Liberation pertains solely to the Two-Vehicle doctrine, which is capable only of liberating beings from the suffering of delimited existence within the three realms but is insufficient for attaining the ultimate Buddhahood or realizing the valid knowledge of the Buddha's enlightenment. Consequently, those who pursue liberation without cultivating the Path to Buddhahood as expounded in the *Mahāyāna sūtras* will permanently sever their connection to the Dharma of Buddhahood.

Moreover, it is imperative that Buddhist preceptors and lay adherents assiduously avoid assuming the role of pernicious mentors. Such malevolent mentors, driven by their unabated self-view and concomitant arrogance, remain entrenched in their biased preconceptions. With a disputatious disposition, they engage in criticism and calumny of authentic enlightened mentors and their sublime teachings of the True Dharma. Consequently, upon death, they face inevitable descent into lower realms of existence. So, what is the benefit to oneself or others of assuming the mantle of a Dharma exponent while at the same time acting as a pernicious mentor? The following excerpt from the Buddha's sacred teachings in the *Āgama sūtras* serves as corroborative evidence:

The World-Honored One addressed [the brahmin,] saying: Brahmin, consider the moon in its waning phase. As it traverses day and night, it only diminishes without waxing. It gradually decreases until, at a certain point, the moon becomes invisible, and none can perceive it. Similarly, Brahmin, when an unwholesome mentor passes through days and nights, progressively loses faith and precepts, no longer hearing [the dharma], and loses generosity and wisdom. Bereft of these qualities—faith, precept, learning, generosity, and wisdom—this unwholesome mentor, upon the dissolution of the body and the cessation of life, will be reborn in the hellish [realms]. Therefore, Brahmin, I now declare that an unwholesome mentor is analogous to the moon in its waning phase. (*Ekottara Āgama*, Vol. 8)

How does one define a pernicious mentor? It refers to one who has not yet eradicated one's self-view and refuses to adhere to the correct teachings of a virtuous mentor who has already eliminated this self-view. Instead, they persistently oppose these correct teachings. All such individuals are categorized as pernicious mentors. This is due to their unabandoned self-view and their attachment to preconceptions, which give rise to the fetters of arrogance and conceit. Consider, for instance, the following passage from the *Ekottara Āgama*, in which Aniruddha declares:

The term “**self**” refers to consciousness (*vijñāna*), while “**I**” denotes the physical body. The arising of consciousness within the body leads to the emergence of [the] notions of “self” and “I,” which collectively constitute the fetter of arrogance and conceit. (*Ekottara Āgama*, Vol. 7)

The aforementioned passage implies that those who propagate the Dharma without having eradicated their self-view are inevitably bound by **attachment to the notions of “self” and “I,”** thereby engendering the fetter of arrogance and conceit. Consequently, they may intentionally commit egregious karmic actions by denigrating the Dharma and slandering others. Judicious individuals engaged in Dharma propagation should contemplate this teaching expounded by Aniruddha, exercising introspection and caution. This practice may help avert the otherwise inevitable and unbearable karmic retribution that would manifest over innumerable future lifetimes.

Furthermore, to provide the fourfold Buddhist assembly with a more comprehensive understanding of the World-Honored One’s process of Dharma propagation, this book series explores the origins of Consciousness-Only Theory in the first chapter; with the second chapter compiles the complete text of the *Dirgha Āgama*, demonstrating the Buddha’s own declaration that **the Āgamas were expounded during the first turning of the Dharma Wheel**, thereby affirming that the *sūtras* of *Mahāyāna Prajñāpāramitā*, the *sūtras* of Expanded Teaching, and the *sūtras* of *Vijñāna*-Only were personally articulated by the Buddha during the second and third turnings of the Dharma Wheel. Subsequently, this book series presents essential contemplative practices for observing the true nature of the aggregate of consciousness, aiming to facilitate readers’ actual abandonment of their self-view and the three fetters. Thirdly, this book series then elucidates the relationship between the Ten Links of Dependent Origination and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, assisting readers in realizing the Contemplation of Causes and Conditions. Fourthly, following the historical account of the Buddha’s entry into *nirvāṇa*, from the *Sūtra on the Marching of the Buddha* in Chapter 10, and Chapter 11 offers a miscellany that rectifies distortions of the four *Āgamas* by *Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka* adherents in Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, such as Yinshun, Zhaohui, Xingyun, and Zhengyan. This section aims to reveal the original purport of the Path to Liberation as expounded in the four *Āgamas*, hoping to benefit all four-assembly Buddhists. Fifthly, the book series also provides a detailed explication of the essence of attaining the third fruit (*anāgāmi-phala*), enabling readers to thoroughly examine and ascertain their attainment of the third or fourth fruit, thus avoiding the grave transgression of false speech and validating their realizations. Finally, Chapter 13 briefly addresses significant errors in Yinshun’s *Exploring the Origins of Yogācāra Studies*, aiming to mitigate the pernicious influence of his erroneous scholarship and

guide *Theravāda* practitioners back to correct principles for attaining the fruition of liberation in this lifetime. Furthermore, I aspire to extensively propagate the doctrines of both the *Mahāyāna* and the Two Vehicles so that the vast community of Buddhist practitioners and eminent Dharma masters will be able to comprehend these correct principles in their entirety and, consequently, return to the authentic path to attaining Buddhahood.

For the aforementioned multifarious reasons, I will utilize my intermittent free moments henceforth to compose *The Correct Meanings of the Āgama Sūtra*, aiming to complete this work over the next five years to broadly benefit practitioners of present and future generations. Thus, I composed this preface to elucidate the originating circumstances of this book series.

Respectfully,

Buddhist Disciple Pingshi

On the day of Frost's descent, 2002 CE, at the Abode of Clamor

