

Tathāgatagarbha Influences in the Three Nature (*trisvabhāva*) Theory of the Maitreya Works

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Abstract: Retaining the Abhidharma distinction between the "real" (*dravyasat*) factors of existence (*dharma*) and the mere nominal existence (*prajñaptisat*) of false projections, the Yogācāras restricted the emptiness of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras to the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*). The latter is taken to be a product of dependently arising dharmas, i.e., the dependent nature, which is admitted a higher degree of reality than the one of the imagined nature. Together with the perfect nature (*pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*), defined as the absence of the fictive from the real, the imagined and dependent natures constitute the Yogācāra model of reality. Besides this Yogācāra type of ontological distinction between real and nominal existence there are also, throughout the Maitreya Works, influences of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* model of an ultimate *tathāgatagarbha* (once even referred to as such in one of the Yogācāra texts of the Maitreya Works, namely in MSABh on IX.37) that is devoid of adventitious stains. In the present paper it is argued that the integration of the *tathāgatagarbha* model of reality contributes to remedying the flaws Yogācāra has in the eyes of Mādhyamikas, namely that a considerable group of sentient beings is completely cut off from liberation or that a dependently arising mind exists on the level of ultimate truth.

Das Nichts ist niemals nichts, es ist ebenso wenig ein Etwas im Sinne eines Gegenstandes; es ist das Sein selbst, dessen Wahrheit der Mensch dann übereignet wird, wenn er sich als Subjekt überwunden hat, und d.h., wenn er das Seiende nicht mehr als Objekt vorstellt.

Nothingness is never nothing, even less is it a something in the sense of an object; it is what truly exists itself, whose truth man is then appropriated when he has overcome himself as a subject, and that is, when he no longer presents the being as an object.

Martin Heidegger (2003: 113)

Looking for that, which truly exists behind the seeming reality of a subject and object, Martin Heidegger proposed his famous "ontological distinction" between the "Sein" and the "Seiende", i.e., the ontic existence of what truly exists (Sein) and the ontological "being" (Seiende) of the cognitively processed data of our daily experience. In Buddhism, the Ābhidharmikas distinguished in a similar attempt the truly existent (*dravyasat*) factors of existence (*dharma*) from the mere nominal existence (*prajñaptisat*) of false projections; and in order to retain an ontological distinction (even though in a modified way), the Yogācāras restricted the emptiness of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras to the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*). The latter is taken to be a product of false imagining (*abhūtaparikalpa*), i.e., the dependent nature of mind, which is accorded a higher degree of reality than the imagined nature. These two natures, together with the perfect nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*), which is defined as the absence of the imagined nature from the dependent nature, constitute the Yogācāra model of reality. Parallel to it, two further Mahāyāna models of reality emerged, the Tathāgatagarbha model of distinguishing a buddha nature from its adventitious stains, and the Madhyamaka model of relative and ultimate truths.

The present paper identifies influences of the Tathāgatagarbha model in the three Yogācāra texts of the Five Maitreya Works (i.e., the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*).¹ It will be argued that the integration of a particular understanding of buddha nature contributes to remedying the flaws Yogācāra has in the eyes of Mādhyamikas, namely that a considerable group of sentient beings is completely cut off from liberation or that a dependently arising mind exists on the level of ultimate truth.

The Original Yogācāra Model

With their three nature model, the Yogācāras managed to reconcile the old Buddhist ontology of momentary conditioned factors of existence (*dharmas*), which consist of an own-being

1 The remaining two works are the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (which is a summary of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*) and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (the standard Indian treatise on buddha nature).

(*svabhāva*), with the outright denial of such an independent existence in the Madhyamaka interpretation of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras.² In other words, the distinction between true and nominal existence is maintained by ascribing to the dependent nature the status of a real, yet mental substratum, which contains, as the carrier of *karman*, mental imprints or seeds responsible for the false projection of the perceived object (*grāhya*) and the perceiving subject (*grāhaka*). The duality of a perceived and perceiver, i.e., what is normally considered a point of reference and its perception, is entirely unreal. This is made very clear in Sthiramati's commentary on *Madhyāntavibhāga* III.9c, where the truth of the path is explained in terms of the three natures. While the imagined can only be thoroughly known for what it is, namely non-existent, the dependent must be thoroughly known and abandoned, because *karmakleśa*-defilements³ are by their nature real things:

As for the thorough knowledge of the imagined, as it does not exist at all, [it need be] only thoroughly known, not abandoned. For it does not make sense to abandon something non-existent. As for the thorough knowledge and abandonment of the dependent, its non-existence should be known [to refer to] the way it appears. Unlike the imagined, it is not completely non-existent in terms of its nature. Since *karmakleśa*[-defilements] are real things by nature, [the dependent, which is constituted by these defilements] must be abandoned.⁴

In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, which serves as a basis for the development of the three nature theory,⁵ Asaṅga takes issue with a pure nominalist position, arguing against Prajñaptivāda, and possibly, also Madhyamaka:

There are some who say: "Everything is designation only; this is reality. If one sees in this way, one sees correctly." Since for them there is no thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*) as the basis of designation, the designation itself can by no means exist.

2 In Abhidharma, a *svabhāva* is attributed to conditioned *dharma*s on the grounds that they do not depend on parts for their existence. Nāgārjuna contends, however, that the dependent origination of *dharma*s is incompatible with any supposed possession of a *svabhāva*. See Burton 1999: 90 & Rospatt 1995: 69ff.

3 According to MAVBh I.11cd there are three *kleśa-saṃkleśas* (ignorance, thirst, and grasping) and two *karma-saṃkleśas* (karmic dispositions and becoming). See MAVBh 21₂₀₋₂₁: *kleśasaṃkleśo 'vidyātrṣṇopādānāni | karmasaṃkleśaḥ saṃskārā bhavas ca |*.

4 MAVṠ 122₁₁₋₁₆: [*parikalpitasya parijñāna i*]ti | *parikalpito 'tyantam asann eveti tasya parijñānam eva na prahānam | na hy asataḥ prahānam yujyate | paratantrasya parijñāne prahāne ca paratanthro hi yathā khyāti ta*[*hāsattvaṃ vijñeyaṃ na tu sarvātmavēnāsattvaṃ kalpitavat | karmakleśayor vastv^aātmavā*]t prahatavyaś ca |. The text in square brackets is reconstructed by Yamaguchi. ^a Yamaguchi reads *bhāv*- instead of *vastv*-

5 See Rospatt 1995: 72.

How could there be, then, a reality which consists of designation only? Therefore, in this way, they have wrongly denied both reality and designation. Wrongly denying designation and reality, the [Prajñaptivādin] should be understood to be the foremost nihilist.⁶

The Sautrāntika ontology of ultimate truth in terms of momentary real particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) shines through here. The thing-in-itself does not need to be external matter. In fully developed, Mahāyānist Yogācāra it refers to the inexpressible, bare particulars of the dependent nature. Although purely mental, they exist substantially (i.e., in their own right) on account of being actualities that cannot be further reduced.⁷ This is what is referred to as substantial existence (*dravyasat*) in Yogācāra.⁸ In other words, the particulars can only be some true nature behind the deluding duality of the imagined, i.e., beyond the level of *definiens* and *definiendum*.⁹ Salvini (2015:44-50) shows that for Sthiramati ultimate and relative existence are the same as *dravyasat* and *prajñaptisat* and thus the dependent and imagined natures respectively. This distinction is also at work in Vasubandhu's texts, with the restriction, however, that the dependent is not explicitly said to exist ultimately. Of interest is his commentary on MAV I.3d ("Because of its non-existence, this does not exist either."),¹⁰ where he makes it clear that only consciousness in its aspect of a perceiving subject (*grāhaka*) is negated:

Because of its (i.e., the perceived object's) non-existence, this (i.e., consciousness) — inasmuch as it is the perceiving subject — does not exist either.¹¹

6 BBh 46₁₂₋₁₉: *bhavanty evaṃvādināḥ prajñaptimātram eva sarvam etat tattvaṃ yaś caivaṃ paśyati sa samyak paśyatīti teṣāṃ prajñaptiyadhiṣṭhānasya vastumātrasyābhāvāt saiva prajñaptiḥ sarveṇa sarvaṃ na bhavati | kutaḥ punaḥ prajñaptimātraṃ tattvaṃ bhaviṣyati | tad anena paryāyena tais tattvaṃ api prajñaptir api tadubhayam apy apavāditaṃ bhavati | prajñaptitattvāpavādāc ca pradhāno nāstiko veditavyaḥ ||*. See also Salvini 2015: 29.

7 See Arnold 2003: 142.

8 See also Hacker's (1985: 109) definition of "substance".

9 Even though the *Caturmudrānvaya* is much later and not exactly a Yogācāra work, it characterizes the true nature of phenomena with the compound *akṛtrimasvalakṣaṇa* "the particular (i.e., actual reality) of the uncontrived." See CMA 94₁₄₋₁₅: "For inasmuch as the true nature of all phenomena, namely what is called the co-emergent, is the "actual reality" of the uncontrived. ..." (*yasmāt sahaḥajam nāma svarūpaṃ sarvadharmāṇām akṛtri* (text: -ti-) *masvalakṣaṇam iti yāvāt*)

10 MAV I.3d (MAVBh 18₂₂): *tadabhāvāt tad apy asat |*. For a translation of the entire verse and commentary, see D'Amato 2012: 119.

11 MAVBh 19_{3,4}: *tasya grāhyasyārthasyābhāvāt tad api grāhakaṃ vijñānam asat |*

Sthiramati makes it clear that the mind as the dependent nature or false imagining¹² is not included in this negation:

It cognizes; thus it is consciousness. In the absence of a perceived [object], the very act of cognizing does not make sense. Therefore, given the object's non-existence, consciousness as the subject of cognition is non-existent, but not as [the consciousness, which has] objects, sentient beings, a self, and cognitions as its appearance.¹³ If the latter did not exist, complete nonexistence would follow.¹⁴

It has been argued that the Yogācāra texts of Maitreya negate the real existence of non-dual mind, because in the formulas defining the fourfold Yogācāra practice, which leads to the realization of a state free from perceived and perceiver, "mind-only" (*cittamātra*), or "cognition-only" (*vijñaptimātra*) is also left behind. False imagining (i.e., "mind-only" as the dependent) is said to exist,¹⁵ however, and only abandoned at the time of liberation, not during the fourfold practice. Moreover, it is unlikely that *vijñaptimātra* or *cittamātra* in the following formulas refer to false imagining or the dependent nature. Vasubandhu's commentary on MAV I.6cd reads:

Based on the non-perception of a [perceived] object, the non-perception of mere cognition (*vijñaptimātra*) arises.¹⁶

It is clear that *vijñaptimātra* is here not the technical term referring to the Yogācāra tenet of everything existing as cognition-only, but simply expresses the logical impossibility of cognition without any object. The formula in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, verse VI.8 conveys the same sense:

Having understood with intelligence that there is nothing apart from the mind,

12 Even though equated with the dependent nature in MAV I.5 (MAV 20₁₉₋₂₀: *abhūtaparikalpaḥ paratantraḥ svabhāvaḥ*), false imagining is best described as the functioning of the impure dependent that manufactures the perceived and perceiver of the imagined nature.

13 I.e., taking *arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsam* in the root text (MAV I.3, MAVBh 18₂₁₋₂₂) as a *bahuvrīhi* depending on *vijñānam*. Based on that, Harunaga Isaacson pointed out (according to Salvini 2015:42, fn. 30) that the compound *arthasattvātmavijñapti-pratibhāsatayā* implies a *bahuvrīhi* relationship with *vijñāna*.

14 MAVṚ, 20₁₋₄: *vijñānāṅ vijñānam grāhyābhāve vijānanāpy ayuktam | tasmād arthābhāvād vijñātrīvena vijñānam asad | na tv arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsatayā | tadasattve hi sarvathā 'bhāvaprasaṅgaḥ |*. See also Salvini 2015: 41-42.

15 MAV I.1a (MAVBh 17₁₆): *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti*.

16 MAVBh 20₃₋₄: *arthānupalabdhiṃ niśrītya vijñaptimātrasyāpy anupalabdhir jāyate |*

One realizes that [even] the mind does not exist.

Thus the wise understand that duality does not exist,

And abide in the *dharmadhātu*, in which this [duality] is not contained.¹⁷

That which is apart from the mind, and mind, are taken up as a duality in the second part of the verse, which means that mind refers here to its aspect of being a perceiving subject (*grāhaka*). This, at least, is what Vasubandhu explains in his commentary on this verse:

Having understood that there is no perceived object (*grāhya*) apart from the mind, the non-existence of even this mere mind (*cittamātra*) is realized by the wise. This is because in the absence of a *grāhya* there is also no *grāhaka*.¹⁸

The relevant passage in Vasubandhu's *Dharmadharmatāvibhāḡavṛtti* makes good sense, too, when one follows the same line of interpretation:

Correct practice (*prayoga*) is comprehended under four points, namely,

because of the practice of apprehending [means]: because one apprehends [the fact that everything is] a cognition only (*viññaptimātra*);

the practice of not apprehending [means]: because one does not apprehend [referential] objects;

the practice of not apprehending apprehending [means]: because in the absence of an object mere cognition (*viññaptimātra*) is not apprehended [that is to say,] because cognition (*viññapti*) is not admissible in the absence of an object of cognition;

the practice of apprehending by not apprehending [means]: because nonduality is apprehended by not apprehending duality.¹⁹

To sum up, the original Yogācāra model is centred around a real dependent nature. What is negated in the fourfold practice is only the imagined nature of a perceived and perceiver.²⁰

17 MSABh 24.3-4: *nāstīti cittāt param etya buddhyā cittasya nāstītvam upaiti tasmāt | dvayasya nāstītvam upetya dhīmān saṃtiṣṭhate 'tadva(text: -ga-)ti dharmadhātau || VI.8.*

18 MSABh 24₁₃₋₁₅: *cittād anyad ālambanaṃ grāhyaṃ nāstīty avagamyā buddhyā tasyāpi cittamātrasya nāstītvāvagamanaṃ grāhyābhāve^o grāhakābhāvāt |^a Lévi: grāhyabhāve*

19 DhDhVV_s 83-94: ***samyakprayogapraveśaś caturbhir ākārais tadyathopalambhaprayogato viññaptimātropalambhāt anupalambhaprayogato 'rthānupalambhāt | upalambhānupalambhaprayogato 'rthābhāve viññaptimātrānupalambhād viññaptiyarthābhāve viññaptiyogāt | nopalambhopalambhaprayogataś ca dvayānupalambhenādvayopalambhāt*** | (the root text is in bold letters).

20 See also Salvini (2015: 42f), who reaches a similar conclusion when criticizing Brunnhölzl (see for example, 2004: 472f.) for reading the denial of any real or ultimate existence of "mere mind" into these passages.

Within the original Yogācāra model with its Abhidharma equation of substantial existence with ultimate truth, the dependent nature is real in the sense of existing on the level of (the Abhidharma) ultimate truth.

Madhyamaka Influences

In the third chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, the three nature theory is discussed in relation to other models of reality, such as the four noble truths, or, in Madhyamaka, the two truths system. Of interest for our discussion here is, as I have noted on another occasion,²¹ that in MAV III.10d only the perfect nature is accepted as ultimate truth:

But the ultimate is [to be viewed] in terms of [only] one.²²

Vasubandhu comments:

Ultimate truth should be understood in terms of the perfect nature alone.²³

Sthiramati even more explicitly denies the dependent the status of the ultimate:

It is impossible for the imagined and dependent [to exist] ultimately. Truth should be understood in terms of the perfect nature alone.²⁴

In his commentary on the first verse of the *tattva*-chapter in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, Vasubandhu excludes the imagined and dependent from the ultimate truth. The chapter on true reality (*tattva*) starts with an exclusion of existence and non-existence and has in the second part of the first verse also elements that are typical of Tathāgatagarbha thought, a point we will get back to later. MSA VI.1 is as follows:

Neither existent nor non-existent; neither identical nor different;

21 Mathes 2000: 210.

22 MAV III.10d (MAVBh 41₁₄): *paramārthan tu ekataḥ* ||.

23 MAVBh 41₁₅₋₁₆: *paramārthan tu ekataḥ* || *paramārthasatyam* | *ekasmāt pariniṣpannād eva svabhāvād vedīṭavyam* |. The translation mainly follows D'Amato 1012: 149.

24 MAVṬ 125₆₋₇: *kalpitaparatantra*[*yoḥ paramārthato 'sambhāvyam* | *satyam punar* (^a*ekasmāt pariniṣpannād eva svabhāvād*^a) *vedīṭavyam* ||].

^a Yamaguchi's reconstruction *ekataḥ pariniṣpannasvabhāvo* is based on the *bhāṣya*.

It neither arises nor departs; neither decreases nor increases;
Is neither purified nor [not]²⁵ purified—
This is the defining characteristic of the ultimate.²⁶

Vasubandhu comments:

The ultimate has the meaning of nonduality. It is taught in five points. **Neither existent**, [i.e.,] in terms of the imagined and dependent marks **nor non-existent**, [i.e.,] in terms of the perfect mark; **neither identical**, because the perfect is not one with the imagined and the dependent, **nor different**, because it is also not different from the two. **It neither arises nor departs**, because the *dharmadhātu* is not produced; **neither decreases nor increases**, because it is so grounded (i.e., in the *dharmadhātu*) when defilements cease, and purification occurs; **is neither purified**, because it is not defiled by nature; **nor not purified**, because adventitious defilements are absent [from it]. It should be known that this fivefold mark of nonduality is the mark of the ultimate.²⁷

The Madhyamaka dictum of avoiding the extremes of existence and non-existence is reflected here in the assertion maintaining that the ultimate exists as neither the imagined nor the dependent. To come back to the original Yogācāra model, if an ultimately existing dependent nature, or false imagining, were abandoned in MAV III.9c, there would be an increment of the *dharmadhātu* as it grows into the space vacated by false imagining. A decreasing or increasing *dharmadhātu* can only be avoided by including false imagining within adventitious defilements, which is indeed the most natural reading of Vasubandhu's commentary here. A similar inclusion of false imagining within adventitious defilements or stains is called for in the second part of the first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (see below), and Vasubandhu's concluding summary of fundamental transformation in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti*.²⁸

25 Added on the basis of Vasubandhu's commentary (see below).

26 MSA VI.1 (MSABh 22₁₂₋₁₃): *na san na cāsan na tathā na cānyathā na jāyate vyeti na cāvahīyate | na vardhate nāpi viśudhyate punar viśudhyate tat paramārthalakṣaṇam ||*.

27 MSABh 22₁₄₋₂₁: *advayārtho hi paramārthaḥ | tam advayārthaṃ pañcabhir ākārāiḥ saṃdarśayati | na sat parikalpītaparatantralakṣaṇābhīyāṃ na cāsat pariniṣpannalakṣaṇena | na tathā parikalpītaparatantrābhīyāṃ pariniṣpannasyaikatvābhāvāt | na cānyathā tābhīyāṃ evānyatvābhāvāt | na jāyate na ca vyety anabhisamskṛtatvād dharmadhātōḥ | na hīyate na ca vardhate saṃkleśavyavadānapakṣayor nirodhotpāde tathāvasthatvāt | na viśudhyati prakṛtyasaṃkliṣṭatvāt na ca na viśudhyati āgantukopakleśavigamāt | ity etat pañcavidham advayalakṣaṇam paramārthalakṣaṇam vedītavyaṃ ||*

28 See Mathes 1996: 152-54.

Such Madhyamaka influences of ascribing to the imagined and dependent natures the status of relative truth are by no means sparse, forming a central part, for instance, in Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti*, where the two truths are discussed in the context of the discussion whether the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras are nihilistic:

Question: The Illustrious One taught in the *Pāramārthaśūnyatā[sūtra]*: "Both *karman* and retribution [for it] exist, but an acting subject is not perceived."²⁹ Does this [refer to] the ultimate or relative truth? [...] If [*karman* and retribution exist] ultimately, how is it, then, that all phenomena lack an own-being? If they exist on the level of relative [truth], one should not say that an acting subject is not perceived, since the latter, too, exists on the level of relative [truth].³⁰

In pointing to the problem to which the ontology of the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras leads, Vasubandhu operates here within the Madhyamaka system of two truths. In light of the emptiness of all phenomena, *karman* can only exist on the level of relative truth, but then the distinction between the real factors of existence (*karman* etc.) and a purely imagined personal self gets lost, since both of these must be relegated to the level of relative truth. This is what makes the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras so dangerous in the eyes of Vasubandhu. What is offered, then, is a three nature model with both the imagined and dependent being relegated to the level of relative truth:

First of all, what is this "relative" and what the ultimate? By [finding answers to] this, one should come to know what exists on the level of relative [truth] and what exists ultimately.

If [the Śrāvakas] answer: "The relative consists of names, expressions, designations and conventions, the ultimate being the particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) of phenomena," [one should consider the following:] In this case, since both *karman* and retribution exist as either names or particulars, [whether they pertain to the ultimate or not] depends on one's idea of existence, [namely] in accordance with how these two (i.e., *karman* and retribution) are taken.

29 See AKBh 468_{20,21}: *bhagavatā paramārthaśūnyatāyām | iti hi bhikṣavo 'sti karmāsti vipākaḥ kāraṅkas tu nopalabhyate.*

30 VY 236_{1,9}: *bcom ldan 'das kyis don dam pa stong pa nyid las | las kyang yod rnam par smin pa yang yod la byed pa po ni mi dmigs so zhes gsungs pa gang yin pa de ci don dam pa nyid du 'am | 'on te kun rdzob nyid du yin zhe na | [...] gal te don dam pa nyid du yin na | ji ltar na chos thams cad ngo bo nyid med pa yin | gal te kun rdzob tu yin na byed pa po yang kun rdzob tu yod pas byed pa po ni mi dmigs so zhes brjod par mi bya'o zhe na....* First quoted and translated in Mathes 2007: 335.

We maintain the following: A person[al self] exists on the level of relative [truth], but not as something substantial, for it is [only] the *skandhas*, which are given its name. *Karman* and retribution exist on the level of relative [truth] as something substantial, but not ultimately, because they are the experiential object of worldly knowledge. The ultimate (*parama*) is supramundane wisdom, and being the object (*artha*) of the latter, it is the ultimate object (*paramārtha*). The particular factors (*svalakṣaṇa*) of these [other] two (i.e., *karman* and retribution) are not an experiential object of it, since [any] experiential object of it is an inexpressible general characteristic.³¹

Karman and retribution fall within the false imagining of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. Thus, in the final analysis, the dependent nature is also taken here to belong to the relative truth. The reason for this is not only that the particular factors (*svalakṣaṇa*) of *karman* and retribution are not experienced by supramundane wisdom, but also that their ultimate existence would contradict the Prajñāpāramitāsūtras' stance that phenomena are empty of such particulars. It should be noted that Vasubandhu responds to a Śrāvaka who would obviously prefer to distinguish the two truths in the context of his Abhidharma system (and thus our original Yogācāra model above).

With a dependent nature restricted to the level of relative truth, the corresponding three nature model becomes compatible with either Svātantrika-Madhyamaka, which allows the relative to be explained in terms of either Sautrāntika or Yogācāra; or else with the Tathāgatagarbha model, which finds a place for the dependent within its adventitious defilements.

Tathāgatagarbha Influences

Even though Tathāgatagarbha influences in the Yogācāra texts of Maitreya are numerous, the technical term *tathāgatagarbha* is mentioned only once, namely in *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, verse IX.37:

31 VY 236₁₁–237₃: *re zhig kun rdzob ces bya ba 'di ni ci yin | don dam pa ni gang zhig yin | de las ci kun rdzob tu yod dam | ci don dam par yod par shes par bya'o || ming dang | brjod pa dang | gdags pa dang | tha snyad ni kun rdzob yin la chos rnams kyi rang gi mtshan nyid ni don dam pa ma yin no zhe na | 'o na de lta na las dang rnam par smin pa gnyis ming du yang yod | rang gi mtshan nyid du yang yod pas de gnyis ji ltar 'dod par yod pa nyid du rtog (text: rtogs) la rag go || nged ni gang zag kun rdzob tu yod kyi rdzas su ni ma yin te | phung po rnams la de'i ming gdags pa'i phyir || las dang rnam par smin pa dag ni kun rdzob tu rdzas su yod | don dam par ni med de | 'jig rten pa'i shes pa'i yul yin pa'i phyir ro || dam pa ni ye shes 'jig rten las 'das pa yin te | de'i don yin pas don dam pa'o || de gnyis kyi rang gi mtshan nyid ni de'i yul ma yin te | de'i yul ni brjod du med pa'i spyi'i mtshan nyid yin pa'i phyir ro ||*. First quoted and translated in Mathes 2007: 336.

Even though suchness is undifferentiated in all [sentient beings],
In its purified form it is the state of a Tathāgata.
Therefore all living beings
Have the 'seed/nature' (*garbha*) of him (i.e., the Tathāgata).³²

In Vasubandhu's commentary, the full technical term for buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is used, in the way common to Tathāgatagarbha literature, namely as an exocentric compound qualifying sentient beings (*sattvās*):

Suchness is undifferentiated in all sentient beings, and the Tathāgata is by his nature the purity of this suchness. Therefore, it is said that all sentient beings have the Tathāgata as their nature.³³

The way buddha nature is explained here exactly matches its definition as "suchness accompanied by stains"³⁴ (*samalā tathatā*) in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the Maitreya work that interprets buddha nature from a Yogācāra perspective.³⁵ As mentioned above, this requires to include the dependent within adventitious stains.

One problem with the thesis of a consistent Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis, however, is the teaching of a "cut-off potential" (lit. "those without a family") in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, verse III.11:

Some are solely [destined] for bad conduct.
[Then] there are those whose positive qualities are destroyed,
[Or] those who lack the virtue conducive to liberation.
And some have few positive [qualities]. But there are also those without [any] cause.³⁶

Vasubandhu explains:

What is meant here regarding those who are without the capacity [to attain] perfect *nirvāṇa*, is the cut-off potential. In short, there are two types. Those who are cut

32 MSA IX.37 (MSABh 40_{13,14}): *sarveṣāṃ aviśiṣṭāpi tathatā śuddhim āgatā | tathāgatatvaṃ tasmāc ca tadgarbhāḥ sarvadehinaḥ ||*

33 MSABh 40_{15,16}: *sarveṣāṃ nirviśiṣṭā tathatā tadviśuddhisvabhāvaś ca tathāgataḥ | ataḥ sarve sattvās tathāgatagarbhā ity ucyate |*

34 See Mathes 2012: 192-93, fn. 17.

35 See Mathes: *in print*.

36 MSA III.11 (MSABh 12_{21,24}): *aikāntiko duścarite 'sti kaścīt kaścīt samudghātitaśukladharmā | amokṣabhāgīyaśubho 'sti kaścīn nihīnaśuklo 'styapi hetuhīnaḥ ||*

off³⁷ temporarily and those who are cut off completely. Of those who are cut off temporarily, there are four types. Those who are solely [destined for] bad conduct, those whose roots of virtue are cut off, those who are without the roots conducive to liberation, and those who have few roots of virtue. They are those whose accumulations are incomplete. Those who are completely (*atyanta-*) without the capacity [to attain] perfect *nirvāṇa*, without any cause [so to say], lack [any] potential to attain perfect *nirvāṇa* at all (*eva*).³⁸

Now, if the four types with a temporary cut-off potential are already described in such a desperate way, the complete cut-off potential does not leave much room for interpretation and can be only taken in the sense that a group of sentient beings will never attain liberation. This, however, is in direct contradiction to the statement in MSA IX.37 that all sentient beings have buddha nature. Again, we have here an element from the original Yogācāra model, i.e., a strict *gotra*-system with an explicitly permanent exclusion of a group of sentient beings from liberation, over against Yogācāra strands that show Tathāgatagarbha and/or Madhyamaka influences. A possible solution to this problem is offered in *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* on I.41:

Again, the saying: "Icchantikas (lit. 'those with great desire') do not have at all the capacity [to attain] perfect *nirvāṇa*" is taught with the hidden intention of another time to remove hatred towards the Mahāyāna doctrine, this being the reason why they [themselves] are Icchantikas. Indeed, since [everybody has] the potential of natural purity, it cannot be that there should be anybody whose nature is the exact opposite of purity.³⁹

A strict *gotra*-system with a cut-off potential and an ultimately existing dependent nature have in common their incompatibility with the Tathāgatagarbha model of reality. Their respective tensions with it are explained away in different ways, though: while a hidden intention is attributed to the *gotra*-system, the dependent nature is relegated to the level of relative truth in the Yogācāra passages that were subjected to Madhyamaka and, as we will see now, also

37 I.e., using in translation the intended meaning of *aparinirvāṇadharmā* in order to avoid clumsy repetitions.

38 MSABh 12₂₅-13₂: *parinirvāṇadharmaka etasmīn agotrastho 'bhipretaḥ | sa ca samāsato dvididhaḥ | tatkālāparinirvāṇadharmā atyantam ca | tatkālāparinirvāṇadharmā caturvidhaḥ | duścariṭaikāntikāḥ samucchinnaśalamūlaḥ | amokṣabhāgīyakuśalamūlaḥ hīnakuśalamūlaś cāparipūrṇasambhāraḥ | atyantāparinirvāṇadharmā tu hetuḥiṅo yasya parinirvāṇagotram eva nāsti |*

39 RGVV 37_{1,4}: *yat punar idam uktam icchantiko 'tyantam aparinirvāṇadharmeti tan mahāyānadharmapratigha icchantikatve hetur iti mahāyānadharmapratighanivartanārtham uktam kālāntarābhiprāyeṇa | na khalu kaścit prakṛtīśuddhī^agotrasambhavād atyantāśuddhidharmā bhavitum arhati |.*

^a Johnston –*viśuddha-*; see Schmithausen 1971: 146.

Tathāgatagarbha influences. One could further argue, if one's *gotra* or state without a *gotra* does not exist ultimately (just as the dependent nature), the ultimate goodness of an all-pervading *dharmadhātu* or buddha nature can still co-exist as the ultimate nature of all sentient being, even of those with a cut-off potential.⁴⁰

The word *tathāgatagarbha* itself is not found in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, but the way emptiness is presented in the second part of its first chapter is identical with the *Ratnagotravibhāga*'s definition of buddha nature as suchness accompanied by stains (*samalā tathatā*). In the final version of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* — Takasaki (1966) and Schmithausen (1971) identified older layers of this text — buddha nature is restricted to the notion of a positively understood suchness which is also luminosity.⁴¹ Such a luminous suchness or emptiness accompanied by stains is also found in the said passage of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, verse I.22 (the root text being integrated in Vasubandhu's *bhāṣya*):

[Emptiness is] neither defiled nor undefiled, neither pure nor impure. How is it that it is neither defiled nor impure? It is because of the natural luminosity of mind. How is it that it is neither undefiled nor pure? It is because of the adventitious nature of defilements.⁴²

In other words, emptiness as the existence of non-duality is not only an endorsement of duality's nonexistence but also positively understood as the natural luminosity of mind. Just as in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* this luminous emptiness is compared to the natural purity of water, gold, and space, all of which can co-exist with their

40 D'Amato (2003: 126f.) tries to resolve this contradiction by taking *atyantam* in the sense of "forever" instead of "absolutely", suggesting the reading that even though all sentient beings have the potential to become a Buddha, some simply never actualize this possibility. Based on Haack (1978: 170), D'Amato argues that by employing modal concepts, the compound *atyantāparinirvāṇadharmā* can be understood to refer to somebody who only happens to never accumulate the causes for a potential to attain *nirvāṇa*.

41 This understanding is clear from the fourth simile of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (i.e., the gold nugget in excrement): RGV I.148 "Its nature being unchangeable, sublime, and pure, suchness is illustrated by a piece of gold." (RGVV 71_{5,6}: *prakṛter avikāritvāt kalyāṇatvād viśuddhitāḥ hemaṇḍalakaupamyam tathatāyām udāhṛtam* ||) is explained by Asaṅga as follows: "Although the mind is accompanied by limitless phenomena which are defilements or suffering, it itself does not undergo change, on account of its natural luminosity. This is why it is called suchness, for it will never become something else, any more than sublime gold will." (RGVV 71_{7,8}: *yac cittam [tad?] aparyantakleśaduḥkhadharmānugatam api prakṛtiprabhāsvaratayā vikāraṃ na bhajate [??]*^a *kalyāṇasuvarṇavad anyathā^b bhāvārthena tathatety ucyate* |)

^a Johnston — *vikāranudāhṛter atah* ^b Johnston *anyathā-*

42 MAVBh 27_{5,6}: *na kliṣṭā nāpi vākliṣṭā śuddhā 'śuddhā na caiva sā | katham na kliṣṭā nāpi cāśuddhā | prakṛtyaiva | prabhāsvaratvāc cittasya | katham nākliṣṭā na śuddhā | kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ* | First quoted and translated in Mathes 2008: 19.

respective adventitious stains. Thus the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* states:

How should the differentiation vis-à-vis emptiness be understood? **[In the sense of emptiness] being defiled as well as pure** (MAV I.16a). Thus is the differentiation vis-à-vis it. In what state is it defiled and in what is it pure? **It is accompanied as well as not accompanied by stains** (MAV I.16b). When it occurs together with stains, it is defiled, and when [these] stains are abandoned it is pure. If, after being accompanied by stains, it becomes stainless, how is it then not impermanent, given that it has the property of change? **This is because its purity [can] be considered to be like that of water, gold, and space** (MAV I.16cd). [A change is admitted] given the removal of adventitious stains, but there is no change in terms of its own nature.⁴³

It should be noted that the terms "defiled" and "pure" which dominate the first part of the first chapter in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, are explicitly equated with "accompanied by stains" and "stainless" — terminology probably imported from the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*.⁴⁴ Now, it is difficult to see how false imagining retains its central position as the existing ground or basis of negation. In other words, if the adventitious stains consist of the perceived and perceiver alone, false imagining must co-exist — in the same ground of negation, so to say — with luminous emptiness. This, at least, is not accepted in a passage in the *Sāgaramatipariprcchā* quoted in Asaṅga's commentary on *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* I.68, in which the example of an ever-pure *vaīḍūrya* stone drawn out from mud is taken to illustrate the relation between the luminous mind and adventitious stains:

In the same way, O Sāgaramati, the Bodhisattva knows the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. He [here] again perceives that it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Then the Bodhisattva thinks as follows: These defilements will never penetrate into the natural luminosity of the mind of sentient beings. These

43 MAVBh 24₄₋₁₃: *kathaṃ śūnyatāyāḥ prabhedo jñeyah | saṃkṣiptā ca viśuddhā ca | ity asyāḥ prabhedaḥ | kasyām avasthāyāṃ saṃkṣiptā kasyām viśuddhā | samalā nirmalā ca sā | yadā saha malena varttate tadā saṃkṣiptā | yadā prahīṇamalā tadā viśuddhā | yadī samalā bhūtvā nirmalā bhavati kathaṃ vikāradharminītvād anityā na bhavati | yasmād asyāḥ abdhātukanakākāśasuddhivac chuddir iṣyate || āgantukamalāpagamān na tu tasyāḥ svabhāvānyatvaṃ bhavati |*. First quoted and translated in Mathes 2008: 20.

44 RGVV 21₈₋₁₀: "Of these, the suchness accompanied by stains is the [buddha] element when not freed from the sheath of defilements. It is called buddha nature. Stainless suchness is that [element] called the *dharmakāya* of a Tathāgata, that which has the defining characteristic of [having undergone] a fundamental transformation at the level of a Buddha." (*tatra samalā tathatā yo dhātur avinirmuktakleśakośas tathāgatagarbha ity ucyate | nirmalā tathatā sa eva buddhabhūmāv āśrayaparivṛttilakṣano yas tathāgatadharmakāya ity ucyate |*)

adventitious defilements have sprung from false imagining.⁴⁵

To sum up, the presentation of false imagining in the first part of the first chapter is structured around the original Yogācāra model with its dominating Abhidharma background of the said *dravyasat / prajñaptisat* distinction. As we have seen, this translates into a substantially, or ultimately, existing false imagining (dependent nature). In passages displaying Madhyamaka and/or Tathāgatagarbha influences, the dependent nature becomes the relative truth of the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas, or else subsumed under the adventitious stains in the Tathāgatagarbha system. This is fully in line with the general trend of early Mahāyāna to label Abhidharma ontology as relative truth in Madhyamaka. Similarly, as we have seen, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* accepts original Yogācāra elements such as the cut-off potential only as a teaching with a hidden intention.

Original Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha Elements — Unbalanced Strands of Thought or Admitting of a Synthesis?

In the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* no attempt is made to synthesize the verse on buddha nature in the ninth chapter with the traditional *gotra*-model in the third chapter. While the *Ratnagoṭravibhāgavyākhyā* offers a solution by claiming that the doctrine of a cut-off potential was given with a hidden intention, the single vehicle (*ekayāna*) theory, which is directly related to the Tathāgatagarbha teachings, was taught with a purpose in MSA XI.54:

The perfect Buddhas have taught
The unity of the vehicle (*ekayānatā*)
For the sake of those who are not determinable,
To attract some and to hold others.⁴⁶

Vasubandhu's introductory remarks to this verse are as follows:

Buddhahood is the single vehicle. Thus the unity of the vehicle must be understood, with such and such intent in this and that sūtra. But it is not that the three vehicles

45 RGVV 49_{9,12}: *evam eva sāgaramate bodhisattvaḥ sattvānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām cittasya prajānāti | tāṃ punar āgantukopakleśopakliṣṭāṃ paśyati | tatra bodhisattvasyaivaṃ bhavati | naite kleśāḥ sattvānām cittaprakṛtiprabhāsvaratāyāḥ praviṣṭāḥ | āgantukā ete kleśā abhūtaparikalpasamutthitāḥ* | First translated and quoted in Mathes 2012: 194.

46 MSA XI.54 (MSABh 69_{3,4}): *ākaraṣaṇārtham ekeṣām anyasaṃdhāraṇāya ca | deśitānyatānām hi sambuddhair ekayānatā ||*

do not exist. Why again did the Buddhas teach the unity of the vehicle with such and such intent?⁴⁷

Sthiramati's sub-commentary classifies the single vehicle theory as a teaching with provisional meaning (Tib. *bkri ba'i don* being an alternative translation to *drang ba'i don*, Skt. *neyārtha*):

As for the explanation of "single vehicle" here, it must be taken to have provisional meaning, because he (i.e., the Buddha) taught it with a [specific] intent, [namely] for the sake of sentient beings. The teaching of three vehicles has definitive meaning.⁴⁸

Going by the hermeneutics of the *Vyākhyāyukti*, though, every sūtra (including definitive ones), has an aim or intent that needs to be identified. In other words, one does not need to follow Sthiramati's conclusion and ascribe the single vehicle theory the status of *neyārtha*, the three vehicle theory being *nītārtha*, for in the light of this hermeneutical strategy, MSA IX.37 (the verse on buddha nature) would become a statement of provisional meaning, too. In his commentary on MSA XI.53, Vasubandhu makes it clear that MSA XI.54 must be taken in the light of MSA IX.37:

Sharing the same *dharmadhātu*, there is the unity of the vehicle. Because the Śrāvakas and the others are not separate from the *dharmadhātu*, the [single] vehicle must be taken.⁴⁹

This leads us to the related issue of a substantial (*dravyasat*) false imagining that is not accepted as ultimate truth in the third chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV III.10d). Moreover, it is replaced in its central position in MAV I.1-12 by a positively understood emptiness. In Mathes 2000, I suggested that in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* two three nature models, similar to Sponberg's pivotal and progressive models,⁵⁰ existed side by side in an unbalanced way.⁵¹ Without questioning my original analysis, I propose here that the two models may be less unbalanced if one accepts that the final author of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* attempted a synthesis of Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha thought, a synthesis that can also be found in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*

47 MSABh 68₂₇-69₂: *buddhatvam ekayānam evaṃ tatra tatra sūtre tena tenābhiprāyeṇaikayānatā vedītavā na tu yānatrayaṃ nāsti | kimarthaṃ punas tena tenābhiprāyeṇaikayānatā buddhair deśitā |*

48 MSABh 196_{a,7}: *de la theg pa gcig go zhes bshad pa ni sems can gyi don du dgongs pa'i dbang gis gsungs pas ni bkri ba'i don zhes bya ba la | theg pa gsum du gsungs pa ni nges pa'i don yin te |*. I thank Prof. Luo Hong (Sichuan University, Chengdu) for this observation.

49 MSABh 68₁₇: *dharmatulyatvād ekayānatā śrāvakādīnāṃ dhamadhātor abhinnavāt yāvatyaṃ yānam iti kṛtvā*.

50 Sponberg 1981: 99.

51 Mathes 2000: 200f.

and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*. This requires a shift from the original Yogācāra model of an ultimate dependent to a Madhyamaka ultimate beyond dependent origination, i.e., emptiness. Understood positively as luminosity (as in the emptiness passage of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*), it could then also be the buddha nature of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*.⁵² If this luminous emptiness is taken as the ultimate, the initial distinction between an existent false imagining and a non-existent duality would describe what is true and false on the level of relative truth only, just as in the *Vyākhyāyukti* passage quoted above.

The initial verse of *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV I.1) would then present the thesis of such a Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis. It should be noted that in accordance with *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.5⁵³ the imagined nature is duality, the dependent nature false imagining, and emptiness the perfect nature:

False imagining exists.
 Duality is not found in it.
 Emptiness is found there (i.e., in false imagining)
 And it (false imagining) is found in it (emptiness).⁵⁴

The ontological distinction of the first two lines between the substantial existence of false imagining and the nominal existence of duality is fully contained within the relative truth of the Tathāgatagarbha model of reality. The third and fourth lines would then be an explanation of the relative and ultimate truths in this model. This means that emptiness is not only the absence of duality but also luminosity (see MAV I.16 and I.22). Emptiness pervades the dependent nature's 'bearers of properties' (*dharmīn*) as their *dharmatā*, while false imagining exists in

52 As I have shown elsewhere (Mathes 2008), this requires reading a subtle distinction between *tathāgatagarbha* and the *dharmakāya* to accommodate the Yogācāra notion of the three *kāyas* emerging from the naturally present and fortified potentials. While the original Tathāgatagarbha notion of a permanent *dharmakāya* can fit, for example, into the framework of Nāgārjuna's *Nirāupamyastava*,^a the Yogācāra interpretation of buddha nature requires the latter to be a dynamic continuum that can blossom naturally from a potential into a fully developed Buddha.

^a See NS 21 (NS 14₁₁₋₁₂): "Your body, consisting of buddha qualities (*dharmas*) (i.e., the *dharmakāya*) is permanent, imperishable, peaceful, and victorious; but for the sake of people who need to be trained, cessation has been taught by you." (*nityo dhruvaḥ śivaḥ kāyas tava dharmamayo jinaḥ | vineyajanaheṭo ca darśitā nirvṛtis tvayā ||*)

53 See MAVBh on I.5 (MAVBh, 9₁₉₋₂₀): *arthaḥ parikalpitaḥ svabhāvaḥ | abhūtaparikalpaḥ paratantraḥ svabhāvaḥ | grāhyagrāhakābhāvaḥ pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvaḥ |*. This does not directly support the equation of duality (*grāhyagrāhaka*) with *parikalpita*, but from MAVT 57₁₈ it is clear that *parikalpita* not only includes *dharmas*, but also *pudgala*. First quoted and translated in Mathes 2012: 190-91.

54 MAVBh, 17₁₆₋₁₇: *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate | śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate ||*

emptiness as *dharmin*.⁵⁵ Read in the terminology of the emptiness passage (MAV I.13-22), false imagining comprises, as *dharmin*, the adventitious stains that cover up a positively understood emptiness that is, as already mentioned, the buddha nature of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. In the final analysis, then, the perfect is empty of not only the imagined but also the dependent.⁵⁶ This allows not only for a consistent reading of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* but also for a synthesis with the Tathāgatagarbha theory. It should be noted that this restriction of the dependent to the relative truth also enables the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla.

A way into a Yogācāra-Tathāgatagarbha synthesis can be also found in the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* and its commentary by Vasubandhu. The technical terms for the three natures are not found in it, and not even in the commentary. Nor is there mention of relative and ultimate truths. Still, the two truths system finds a correspondence in the distinction between phenomena (*dharma* or *dharmin*) and their true nature (*dharmatā*). The respective definitions are as follows:

As to the defining characteristics of *dharmas*, they are dualistic appearances and [that which appears] in accordance with expressions; [all of them are] false imagining.⁵⁷

As to the defining characteristic of *dharmatā*, it is suchness, in which there is no differentiation between a perceived object and a perceiving subject, an expressed object and expression.⁵⁸

The relation between the two is explained as follows:

The two (i.e., *dharma* and *dharmatā*) are neither identical nor separate, because there is, and also not, a difference between the existent [*dharmatā*] and non-existent

55 This is as explained in Stthiramati's commentary (MAVṠ 15₁₇₋₁₈): "The existence of emptiness in false imagining [must be understood] in terms of the latter's *dharmatā*. False imagining, in turn, completely exists in emptiness in the form of the 'bearers of properties' (*dharmin*)" (*śūnyatāyās tu sattvam abhūtaparikalpe taddharmateti kṛtvā śūnyatāyām tu sarvam* (text: *sarvam*) *abhūtaparikalpo dharmirūpeṇa vidyate*).

56 Such a three-nature formula finds doctrinal support in the extensive commentary on the larger Prajñāpāramitāsūtras (i.e., the *Bṛhatīkā*), which takes the perfect to be empty of the dependent and imagined (see Mathes 2004: 317; Brunnhölzl 2011: 26f).

57 DhDhVK 19-22: | *de la chos kyi mtshan nyid ni* | | *gnyis dang ji ltar mngon par brjod par* | | *snang ba yang dag ma yin pa'i* | | *kun rtog pa ste...*

58 DhDhVK 26-29: | *gzhan yang chos nyid mtshan nyid ni* | | *gzung ba dang ni 'dzin pa dang* | | *brjod par bya dang rjod par byed* | | *kyad med de bzhin nyid yin no* |.

[*dharmas*].⁵⁹

Even though false imagining is here the defining characteristic of non-existing *dharmas*, it is not completely negated, since it exists as mere delusion, i.e., that which generates dualistic appearances.⁶⁰ In other words, it partakes of a higher degree of reality, just as in the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. This is also clear from the definition of *dharmatā*, where the duality of a perceived object and perceiving subject, and of an expressed object and a corresponding expression, is negated but false imagining is not. In the final analysis, it must be included within the adventitious stains which do not appear anymore upon completion of the fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*):

One comprehends the nature [of *āśrayaparivṛtti* when it is known as] the stainlessness of suchness so that adventitious stains do not appear [anymore], and [only] suchness appears.⁶¹

The whole remaining part of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, which is more than half of the text, expounds the *āśrayaparivṛtti* theory in a way similar to the second chapter of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, which is on enlightenment.⁶² To be sure, the term *tathāgatagarbha* is not found in the whole of the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* or its commentary, but its proximity to the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* is evident, as can be gathered from Vasubandhu's final summary:

Since that [change]⁶³ does not exist, the true nature of phenomena (*dharmatā*) and the fundamental transformation (*āśrayaparivṛtti*), which is constituted by it, are permanent. Here, with the examples of gold and water, only a quality [of these objects of comparison], not [their] substance, was taught as being analogous [to the transformation]. With the example of space, it (i.e., the transformation) was taught completely.⁶⁴

59 DhDhVK 38-41: | *gnyis po dag ni gcig nyid dang* | | *so so ba yang ma yin te* | | *yod pa dang ni med pa pa dag* | | *khyad par yod dang med phyr ro* |. The additions in brackets are in accordance with Vasubandhu's commentary (see Mathes 1996: 122).

60 See Mathes 1996: 255.

61 DhDhVV_s 12-13: *svabhāvapraveśas tathatāvaimalyam āgantukamalatathatāprakhyanaprakhyanāya*.

62 See Mathes 2005: 3.

63 This follows up a discussion whether the *āśrayaparivṛtti* entails change.

64 DhDhVV 706-8: | *de med pas ni chos nyid dang* | *des rab tu phye ba'i gnas yongs su gyur pa rtag pa yin no* | *'dir gser dang chu'i dpes ni rdzas la ma ltos par yon tan tsaṃ chos mthun par bstan pa yin la* | *nam mkha'i dpes ni thams cad bstan pa yin no* |

It should be noted that the examples of gold, water, and space for the revelation of a positive ultimate — Vasubandhu equates the *āśrayaparivṛtti* with luminosity — ⁶⁵is shared by the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*.

Conclusion

In Maitreya's Yogācāra texts, there are at least two models of reality. Besides the common ontological distinction between the nominal and substantial (i.e., the imagined and dependent natures) there is also the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* model of a positive ultimate (once even referred to as *tathāgatagarbha* in MSABh on IX.37) that is devoid of adventitious stains. Echoes of the Madhyamaka model of the two truths are found in the context of relating the three natures to the relative and ultimate truths. In the light of these Tathāgatagarbha and Madhyamaka strands, the original Yogācāra notion of a cut-off potential in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* can be relativized, too. While Vasubandhu goes in this direction, Sthiramati sticks to a strict *gotra* distinction over against the Tathāgatagarbha model, ascribing provisional meaning (*neyārtha*) to *ekayāna* and implicitly, buddha nature. The *Madhyāntavibhāga* can be taken as a synthesis of Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha thought, a synthesis that is also at work in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* and the *Dharmadharmatā-vibhāga*. The Yogācāra model of this synthesis describes, then, relative truth in a way similar to Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka.

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CMA: *Caturmudrānvaya*

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 2015: 389-402.

DhDhVK: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgakārikā* (Tibetan translation)

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 1996: 104-14.

DhDhVV: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti* (Tibetan translation)

Ed. by Klaus-Dieter Mathes. See Mathes 1996: 69-98.

DhDhVV_s: *Dharmadharmatāvibhāgavṛtti* (Sanskrit fragment)

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65 DhDhVV 701: | *de bzhin du gnas yongs su gyur pa la yang rang bzhin gyis 'od gsal ba gang yin pa*

- BBh: *Bodhisattvabhūmi*
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- MAV: *Madhyāntavibhāga*
See MAVBh
- MAVBh: *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*
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- MAVṬ: *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*
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Derge Bstan 'gyur 4034, sems tsam, vol. mi, 1b₁-283a₇
- RGV: *Ratnagotravibhāga*
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