

Hi,

Below is a very interesting paper in Japanese which I translated over the weekend. It is especially interesting to Buddhists and Hindus alike. Hopefully, we'll get some interesting debate on this matter.

As usual, my Japanese is very POOR and I do not claim that the following represents 100% of what Prof. Matsumoto wanted to say - esp. his scholarly criticisms of his opponents. Be warned ! Also, because I am not a Buddhist scholar, there are certain names and terms which I may have rendered incorrectly.

Regards,

W.F. Wong.

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## THE TATHAGATHAGARBHA THEORY IS NOT BUDDHISTIC

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(Translated from Chapter 1 of the book "Criticisms on the Tathagathagarbha Theory")

As the title implied, I am of the opinion that the Tathagathagarbha theory is not Buddhistic. Below are my arguments to substantiate this claim. In order to discuss this topic, it is necessary to clarify what "Tathagathagarbha Theory" and "Buddhism" mean. Of course, strictly speaking it is my personal opinion of what "Tathagathagarbha Theory" and "Buddhism" which is the subject of this discussion.

First, I would like to clarify what "Buddhism" is to me. In short, Buddhism to me is basically the theory of anatta ("no-soulness") and paticca-samupatta ("dependent origination"). By "dependent origination",

I do not mean (the Mahayanist) "dependent-arising in the Dharmadhatu" or "dependent-arising in the mutual interpenetration and simultaneous arising in space". By "dependent origination" I mean the "Twelve Link Dependent Origination" of the Mahavagga of the Vinaya Pitaka. I believe that it was the realization and the reversal of these 12 links that the Buddha realized at his Enlightenment.

However, by adopting such a view, I am likely to encounter severe scholastic oppositions which hold that the Buddha's Enlightenment has nothing to do with the Twelve Link Dependent Origination or that Dependent Origination was a later invention or the even more extreme view that Buddha's Enlightenment is not much different from the philosophies of the Upanisads or the early Jains. Here, I do not have the space to deal with the difficult problem of primitive Buddhism. But, daringly, I advocate the position that the Twelve Links was what the Buddha realized. I plan to do two things. First, I wish to oppose the view of objective scholasticism, i.e. scholastic studies that claim objectivity, that final judgement on this matter has to be reserved. Second, I wish to challenge the view that the Buddha's enlightenment, and therefore the whole of Buddhism, should not be understood from the point of view of anatta and emptiness but rather from the point of view of atma and form. The stand which I adopt is that the Buddha's enlightenment is the realization of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination and that the doctrine of anatta is a natural consequence of this realization.

Now, I must present the view of Buddhism from the point of view of atma and form. As a representative of this position, I shall use Shinichi Tsuda. As is well known, in the Mahavagga of the Vinaya Pitaka there is a stanza which says that immediately after the Buddha realized the progress and reversal of the Twelve Links, in samadhi (the meditative state), "all dhammas revealed themselves" (*patubhavanti dhamma*) to him. This "all dhammas", according to Dr. Koshiro Tamaki, means the "original state of all dhammas" or "the root of all dhammas". Tsuda maintains that the basis of Dependent Origination is in the structure of the Dharma. In the same paper, he repeatedly used terms such as

"ontological basis", "the existence of the basis", "the one source of the world", etc. The following is an example,

"For example, the previously mentioned 'Sutra of the Elephant's Footprint' contains metaphysical implications that the birth of human is from this unified basis of the world and that his death signifies a reunification with this basis."

This paper of Tsuda's neither express a complex nor a new idea. It is typical and simplistic tathagatha-garbha theory, in other words it is "dhatu vada". He does not seem to realize that all the words which he used, and which I have quoted above, can be better summarized by the word "dhatu". He only assert that the plural dhamma (dhammah) is borned of a singular dhatu. This position of his that the Buddha's enlightenment is based on the "singularly real source" is not acceptable to me. I refer the reader to the second chapter for my criticism of his paper and the discussion about Dependent Origination.

Instead of discussing about "dhatu vada", I would like to move the discussion to the question of "what is the Tathagathagarbha theory?". It is my intention to show that the Tathagathagarbha theory is but dhatu-vada. Before doing so, I wish to ask the reader to discard his conventional preconceptions about what this theory is about. For example, explaining the Dharmadhatu with "the world of Truth" is but a conventional concept. Even taking the word "dharma" to mean "truth" is a mistake. Also, I believe that there is no scripture proof that the doctrine of the "self enlightened mind" is a central doctrine of the Mahayana or that the Prajnaparamita corpus admits this doctrine. According to Dr. Akira Hirakawa, the oldest sutra in the Prajnaparamita corpus is almost certainly the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 lines (Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra) and in it the Sanskrit statement for the "self enlightened mind" (prakrtis cittasya prabhasvara) is not to be found.

Also, I do not think the Tathagathagarbha theory is a theory of equality. In fact, I think it is a theory of discrimination. The reason will be made clear later. For those who accept the Tathagathagarbha theory as

a theory of equality, I wish to refer you to the Mahayanasutralamkara or the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra. The Mahayanasutralamkara is famous for advocating the Yogacarin's position of the reality of the Three Vehicles. In stanza 37 of chapter 9 is the famous "all beings are of the tathagathagarbha". However, in stanza 11 of the third chapter is the mention of the "hetuhina". This is explained in the commentary as "those being complete lacking the seed of Nirvana" (atyantaparinirvanadharman). In other words, what we must take note of here is that the thesis that "all beings are of the tathagathagarbha" is clearly different from the position preached by the Lotus Sutra that "all beings will be Buddhas".

Similarly, in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, although one hears of "all beings possess buddha-nature", there is also numerous mention of the icchantika - "those beings who shall never achieve Buddhahood". In the Tibetan version of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, we have the two following verses,

1. All beings have buddha-nature (buddhadhatu). This nature (dhatu) is in the body. With the cessation of all sufferings, one becomes a Buddha. The exception being the icchantikas.
2. Although the icchantikas too has buddha-nature, it is in infinitely deep dirt. Like a pupa which is unable to break an opening in its own cocoon, for these icchantikas, the buddha-nature encased in the infinitely thick karma is unable to come through. Because of this, they shall never break the cycle of birth and death.

Although Dr. Jikido Takasaki has attempted to explain this "except the icchantikas" problem away, I find his arguments unconvincing. The second verse showed even the icchantikas has buddha-nature. What they are "except"ed from is the fact of "becoming Buddhas". Also, depending on how one reads the (original of the) first verse, the icchantikas may in fact be only an example of the exceptions. In any case, it is quite clear that it is incorrect to equate "all beings have buddha-nature" with "all

beings shall be Buddhas".

It is also now known from Dr. Takasaki's research that in Vasubandhu's "Treatise on the Lotus Sutra" (Saddharmapundarikopadesa) the position of "all beings have buddha-nature" is discussed together with the details of each of the Three Vehicle while denying the position of "all beings shall be Buddhas". Therefore, it is not possible to accept the view that the "tathagathagarbha" or "buddha-nature" theory is but an optimistic interpretation of "the potential of Buddhahood". With the above discussion, if we include the "non-discrimination in the Dharmadhatu" position of the "Treatise on the Meditation on Reality" (Abhisamayalamkara), which we will discuss later, we have the following

All Beings are of Tathagathagarbha  
(Mahayanasutralamkara)

and

All Beings have Buddha-Nature  
(Mahaparinirvana, Saddharmapundarikopadesa)

and

There is No Discrimination in the Dharmadhatu  
(Abhisamayalamkara)

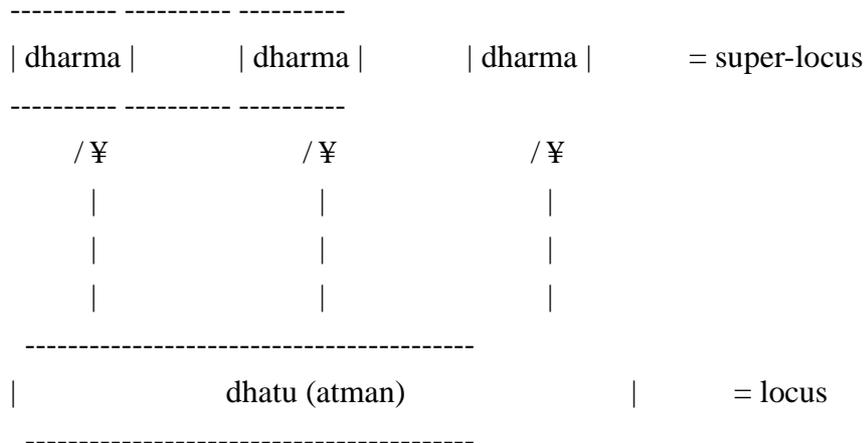
NOT EQUAL

All Beings Shall Be Buddhas  
(Saddharmapundarika)

Now, in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the original word for "buddha-nature" is the word "buddha-dhatu". I cannot understand the relationship between the word "buddha-dhatu" and "the potential to be Buddhas" or "the nature of Buddhas". The word "dhatu" means "a place

for storage". There is therefore no connection between this word and "nature" or "potential".

Here, in order to clarify the meaning of the word "dhatu", I need to discuss the basic principles of the Tathagathagarbha theory and I called "dhatu-vada". "Dhatu-vada" is a term coined by myself and I would like to explain it with the following diagram.



In the figure, the lower part is the locus (which I shall abbreviate as L) and the upper part is the superlocus (abbreviated as S). The following is the basic tenet of dhatu-vada :

1. L is the basis of S.
2. Therefore, S is borned from L.
3. L is singular while there are many S.
4. L is real while S is unreal.
5. L is the atman of S.
6. S is unreal but because it is borned of L which is real, there is a degree of reality in S.

Let us examine the above. Needless to say, (1) is the very basis of dhatu-vada. (2) asserts that S is "borned from" L and therefore the primacy of L is introduced. If we accept that (3) and (4) asserts that L is the sole reality, then we are forced to conclude that S is different from L. But if this is the case, it is meaningless to assert that S is borned of L. As for

(5), we can reason as follows. For the relationship "without a, there is no b" (avinabhava), we can say that atman is the a. Without L, S is not possible. In fact, the major Tathagathagarbha sutras such as the Lion Roar of Queen Srimala and the Mahaparinirvana clearly asserts L as the atman. (6) is the basic principle behind the discriminatory nature of the Tathagathagarbha theory. It can also be seen as the same principle behind the 5 Natures and the caste system. Why is this so ? In the figure, there are 3 dharmas supported by L. Here we can replace them with the icchantikas or the 5 Natures of which contains the agotras (those who will never become a Buddha) in S. Doing so will not set the "all beings have Buddha-nature" and "the icchantikas shall never become Buddhas" principles in contradiction. Indeed, they are consistent. Furthermore, in S we can also place such social classes as kings, peasants and slaves etc. without causing any contradiction. However, the existence of "multiple natures" in S is an unavoidable consequence of the theory - it cannot be removed from the theory. Therefore, the so-called discrimination of existence is made absolute here. To review, the singularity of L (equality) does anything but remove the discriminatory nature of S. Indeed, it supports it and is its source. It is therefore clear that the theory is a discriminatory one.

Summarizing the above dhatu-vada, we have "the singular, real dhatu gives birth to plural dharmas". Simply, it can be thought of as a theory of singular source, multiple ends or as a theory of reality of the source. Elsewhere I have argued that this dhatu-vada as represented by the Lion Roar of Queen Srimala can be seen to have its source in the chapter on the Parable of the Herb of the Lotus Sutra and developing through the Gandavyuha chapter of the Buddha-avatamsaka Sutra maturing in the Sutra of Non Increasing and Non Decreasing. The basis of dhatu-vada can also be found in the following verses from the Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra and the Abhisamayalamkara,

1. anadikaliko dhatuh sarvadharmasamasrayah  
tasmin sati gatih sarva nirvanadhigamo  
"The beginningless dhatu is the basis of all dharmas. This being the case, in it is all meanings and with it is Enlightenment

attained." (Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra)

2. Dharmadhator asambhedad gotrabhedo na yujyate  
adheyadharmabhedat tu tadbhedah parigiyate  
"Because of the non-discriminating nature of the Dharmadhatu,  
discrimination between the different Natures is therefore illogical.  
However, all dharmas which must be based on it are different, we  
therefore speak of discrimination." (Abhisamayalamkara)

In the verse from the Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra, the phrase "tasmin sati" besides indicating the locus also indicate the reason. In the verse from the Abhisamayalamkara while insisting on the non-discriminating nature of the Dharmadhatu finally had to concede to the reality of the discriminatory nature of the various dharmas. This discrimination is common to all Tathagathagarbha based theories.

This "the primordial principle is singular and non-discriminating out of which the discriminating reality is borned and formalized" system of thought is also clearly visible in the Japanese Hongaku (Original Enlightenment) theory which is based on the Tathagathagarbha theory. With regard to this point, I refer to Dr. Noriaki Kotani's paper "A personal view on the background behind thought systems which gives rise to discrimination". In it, Dr. Kotani, based on Dogen's philosophical system, criticized the Hongaku and Tathagathagarbha theories. This interesting paper shows how Dogen's original philosophy evolved in later Soto Zen and how Dogen has targetted the Hongaku theory for criticism.

Similarly, the same thing happened in India. The dhatu-vada which I introduced here was in fact the target of Sakyamuni Buddha's criticism. Needless to say, this was the Brahman-atman idea of the Upanisads. Dr. Takasaki has shown how closely the Tathagathagarbha theory and the philosophy of the Upanisads are related. Although till now there is no work to show that the Buddha was criticizing the dhatu-vada, it is very important to note that Paticca-Samuppada is admitted to be "the sole source for all existence". In other words, it is an anti-thesis to the Tathagathagarbha theory. Therefore, it follows that dhatu-vada is the

object of Buddhism's criticism.

The above is my argument that the Tathagathagarbha theory is not Buddhist. For non-Buddhists, it probably does not matter either way. Believers of the Upanisads would probably find all this quite amusing. It is the Buddhists whom I wish to address. For any who thinks that the Tathagathagarbha theory is Buddhism, I hope you will realize quickly that it cannot be anything other than the "dhatu-vada" which the Buddha set out to criticize. I hope you will return to true Buddhism soon.

This article aims to make three points :

1. The Tathagathagarbha theory is "dhatu-vada".
2. "Dhatu-vada" was what the Buddha set out to criticize.  
Buddhism (Paticca-samuppada) denies the "dhatu- vada".
3. Its time for Japanese Buddhism to reject the Tathagathagarbha theory and to reform Buddhism.