

Hans-Rudolf Kantor

Philosophical Aspects of Sixth-Century
Chinese Buddhist Debates on “Mind and
Consciousness”

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Chen-kuo Lin / Michael Radich (eds.)

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in memoriam

John R. McRae (1947-2011)

Philosophical Aspects of Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Debates on “Mind and Consciousness”

Hans-Rudolf Kantor

1 Introduction

Buddhist treatises and *sūtra* commentaries composed in the sixth century in China often deal with the nature, potential, and functioning of “mind and consciousness” (*xinshi* 心識), and discuss the process of salutary transformation and liberation called “becoming (a) Buddha” (*chengfo* 成佛). Many of these scriptures hold that the realization of truth and Buddha wisdom cannot be separated from the experience of the delusive world of sentient beings. This is also clearly expressed in early Mahāyāna *sūtra* texts. The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, for example, explains that delusion is the inversion of wisdom, just as wisdom is the transformation of delusion (T14:475.544c3-7; 548c29-549b15). To “become (a) Buddha” is to perform a turn (*zhuan* 轉) from a non-awakened to an awakened state of mind, which implies seeing both of these aspects of mind as a whole. In the sixth century, the Chinese Dilun masters (*Dilun shi* 地論師) created the term “conjunction of truth and falsehood” (*zhen wang hehe* 真妄和合) to hint at the inseparability of these opposite aspects in/of our mind and understanding.

This expression seems first to be mentioned in those parts of the Dilun master Huiyuan’s (慧遠, 523-592) works which elaborate on the relationship between the doctrines of *ālaya*-consciousness and *tathāgatagarbha*. However, the fact that the term was adopted not only by the Huayan (華嚴) masters, but also by the Sanlun (三論) master Jizang (吉藏 549-623), as well as later Tiantai (天臺) thinkers – all descending from different exegetical traditions – shows that it may point in the direction of an

essential and general feature of Chinese Mahāyāna thought, and that in a broader sense, it also refers back to the conceptual roots developed in many of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures prior to that period. The present paper therefore uses the English term “*inseparability* of truth and falsehood” to signify this general issue, whereas the expression “*conjunction* of truth and falsehood”, in a more specific or narrow sense, is rooted in Huiyuan’s view of the relationship of *ālaya*-consciousness and *tathāgatagarbha* (a view Huiyuan probably shared with other Dilun masters).

In the exegetical traditions and indigenous schools of China, the understanding of this inseparability nevertheless differs considerably, and is variously discussed. Zhiyi (智顓, 538-597) and other Tiantai masters, for example, hold that “ignorance and the [true] nature of *dharma*(s) are indivisible”; the notion of the “single mind disclosing the two *dharma*-gates of arising and non-arising” is first developed in the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Great Vehicle* (*Dasheng qi xin lun* 大乘起信論) and then adopted by the Huayan masters and combined with the doctrine of the “conjunction of truth and falsehood”; the relationship between the mind as *ālaya*-consciousness and the “three natures” accounts for the Yogācāra view of truth and falsehood; and the differentiation between “two truths” discussed in almost all Chinese Madhyamaka scriptures also implies a notion of inseparability.

All these examples together reveal both the general relevance of that idea, and the diversity of the ways in which it was interpreted. Inseparability correlates with the basic insight of Mahāyāna soteriology that falsehood is a heuristic principle which is essential in disclosing to us the path of liberation from suffering. Moreover, this also implies the ambiguity of falsehood, as is expressed by the famous Huayan master Fazang (法藏, 643-712):

If we follow the stream [and transmigrate through] life/birth and death, then falsehood has effect; [but] although [in these circumstances] it is falsehood that has effect, it cannot arise apart from truth. If we go against the stream [of life/birth and death], and are released from its fetters, then truth has effect; [but] although [under these circumstances] it is truth that has effect, it cannot be manifested apart

from falsehood...It is like the water of the great ocean: there is the motion of the waves owing to the wind, but the mark of the wind and that of the water are inseparable.¹

Falsehood can be deceptive and harmful, as it entails suffering experienced in the form of birth and death; and yet, it may be seen as a heuristic principle, disclosing by inversion the path to true liberation. It thus hints at its opposite and harbors a hidden potential to instruct us; in this sense its ambiguity correlates with the inseparability of truth and falsehood.

Moreover, due to this ambiguity, there are a variety of Buddhist terms throughout the Mahāyāna scriptures accentuating various connotations of falsehood. Characterizing it as unawareness of the delusory state of mind in which sentient beings dwell, falsehood is referred to as “inversion” (*diandao* 顛倒), in the sense of mistaking the unreal for the real. Inversion represents a mode of falsehood in which the very falsehood of falsehood is concealed, and it is thus deceptive. The Chinese term *xuwang* (虛妄), often used in conjunction with inversion, signifies that this soteriologically negative falsehood is deceptive. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*, “inversions and deceptive discrimination” (*diandao xuwang fenbie* 顛倒虛妄分別) prevent sentient beings from understanding true emptiness, leading them astray so that they form harmful attachments and clinging.²

Like falsehood, the term “discrimination” (*fenbie* 分別) seems to be ambiguous as well. On the one hand, as we have just seen, discrimination can be soteriologically negative; but on the other hand, Nāgārjuna paradoxically teaches us to differentiate between two realms of truth, pre-

¹ These are two separate quotations from Fazang’s commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, both of which explain the functioning of *ālaya*-consciousness in the light of the “conjunction of truth and falsehood”; see the *Dasheng qi xin lun yi ji* 大乘起信論義記, T44:1846.275a3-5, and T44:1846.254c13-14, quoting from the *Awakening of Faith*, T32:1666.576 c11-12.

² One of the larger versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* translated by Xuanzang (玄奘, 602-664) states: “All kinds of deluded beings variously produce attachments; in virtue of their differentiations and inversions the thought of real existence arises where there is no real existence...unreality is said to be reality in virtue of deceptive differentiations and inversions within the realm of all constructed *dharma*(s);” *Da bore boluomiduo jing* (大般若波羅蜜多經) (T7:220.418c25-419a4).

cisely in order to understand the profundity of the Buddha-*dharma* beyond all deceptive discrimination (*Zhong lun* 中論 Chapter 24, T30:1564. 32c18-19). In a similar manner, in the Tiantai teaching, the highly ambiguous term “false/provisional” (*jia* 假) includes the sense of a pragmatic instructiveness, that is, a positive falsehood similar to the useful fiction of “skillful means”.³ The Huayan term “illusory existence” (*huanyou* 幻有) seems to hint at the existential relevance and ontological status of a falsehood which inevitably pervades the way we relate to our worlds. Moreover, in contrast to truth or reality, falsehood is never associated with such meanings as indestructibility, permanence, invariability and immutability; the only things that display these features, on a Mahāyāna view, are reality and truth.

Thus, Buddhist discussions of the meaning of truth often analyze falsehood as an inevitable and essential factor in our existence, which bears not only a negative but also a positive significance for our salutary transformation. Hence, the present article attempts to highlight the philosophical implications of the “inseparability of truth and falsehood”, as they were understood by Chinese Buddhist masters elaborating on Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Tathāgatagarbha sources from India. This paper also tries to show that many of the philosophical views that address ontological issues are, in fact, closely bound up with a soteriology which tends to ultimately suspend and deconstruct apodictic claims, or metaphysical positions concerning the nature of reality.

The next three sections of this paper (Sections 2 to 4) discuss sources from the Madhyamaka, Tathāgatagarbha, and Yogācāra traditions which deal with the relationship between truth and falsehood in various ways and from different points of view. Section 5 outlines the positions of Huiyuan (Dilun) and Zhiyi (Tiantai). This article does not attempt to trace the chronological development of thought, nor does it try to reconstruct the transmission of Indian Buddhist doctrines into the Chinese context, or determine the degree of continuity or transformation which that process entailed. Rather, it aims to discuss, analyze, compare, and identify, from a philosophical point of view, similarities and differences between

³ This term corresponds to the Sanskrit *prajñapti*, which unlike the Chinese *jia*, does not combine the meaning of “false” and “borrowing”.

the various views of the relationship between truth and falsehood prevalent in Mahāyāna Chinese Buddhist debates on “mind and consciousness” in the sixth century.

2 Truth and falsehood according to the Madhyamaka view in the *Zhong Lun*⁴

Mahāyāna Buddhism primarily examines the issue of mind from the soteriological point of view. Deluded, mind accounts for the source of our suffering; enlightened and awakened, it guarantees liberation. According to Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha doctrine, mind is both the agent and the object of our soteriological transformation, which is called “becoming (a) Buddha”. However, the Mādhyamika’s notion of transformation does not stress the concept of mind and consciousness; instead, proper understanding of the emptiness of all things is much more important and fundamental than insight into this issue. In Madhyamaka, then, the issue of “mind and consciousness” is subordinated to that of “emptiness”, owing to the fundamental and sustaining significance of the latter for things rooted in interdependent arising.

Many Mahāyāna Buddhists emphasize that the way things appear to us is contingent upon the way our perceptions, thinking, and language refer to them. Everything we encounter or experience in the world we inhabit comes to our attention as a referent of our own intentional acts. This implies that all things are compound phenomena, built upon a manifold of interrelated components. The apparently particular identity which each such thing implies for us in fact involves patterns of interdependence and extrinsic relationships. The first chapter of the *Zhong lun* illustrates this by the example of the correlative dependency be-

⁴ The Chinese *Zhong lun* (中論) is Kumārajīva’s (344-413) translation of Nāgārjuna’s (ca. 150) *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, transmitted together with *Piṅgala’s (3rd century) commentary. The Chinese tradition considered the *Zhong lun* as a unitary and homogeneous text. Together with the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 (Sanskrit: **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśā*) – a commentary on one of the large *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, also translated by Kumārajīva – the *Zhong lun* belongs to those early Madhyamaka sources only known and transmitted in the Chinese tradition. These two texts were fundamental for the development of the Chinese Sanlun, Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan schools.

tween “causes and results” (*yinguo* 因果): A certain thing may appear to be a cause only if there is another thing identified as the result following it; the same also applies in reverse, that is, without a cause preceding it, a certain thing cannot be identified as a result; the identity of things cannot be established beyond such mutual dependency, and nor can their existence.⁵

Emptiness sustains the interdependent arising of all things, thus making it impossible that any particular or specific thing in our world abides in an intrinsic, independent, or invariant nature.⁶ None of the particular things which we identify in virtue of our intentional acts, and to which we refer by means of linguistic expression, is intrinsically, ultimately, and really the thing it appears to be, nor is it self-identical due to the irreversible and unceasing changing in/through time. In other words, none of these things is inherently existent. This emptiness of inherent existence accounts for the unreality or falsehood of all ephemeral things rooted in interdependent arising, and yet it does not equate with the complete nonexistence of things either. Rather, such unreality does have a certain existential relevance, as is proven by the unenlightened or non-awakened way that each of us exists in this world.

In light of that relevance, the interdependent arising of things cannot be confused with the realm of ultimate truth, and hence does not reach beyond the conventional realm of our existence. Pervading the way we conventionally exist, unreality persists, and rests upon true emptiness in the specific sense that emptiness ultimately sustains the interdependent arising of things in our illusory and ephemeral world. In other words, emptiness implies that truth and falsehood are inseparable. Yet according to the *Zhong lun*, a genuine understanding of true emptiness cannot confuse the two, and therefore must differentiate between the realms of

⁵ See Piṅgala’s commentary in the first chapter of the *Zhong lun* (T30:1564.2c13-18).

⁶ Chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun* expresses the sustaining significance of emptiness: “[Only because] there is the meaning of emptiness/ Can all *dharma*(s) [interdependently arising] be complete” (T30:1564.33a22). Similarly, the chapter on “Sentient Beings” in the Kumārajīva version of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* states: “All *dharma*(s) are set up owing to (the root of) non-abiding” (T14:475.547c22). Here, emptiness means “non-abiding” [= not abiding in an intrinsic nature], which is the “root” of the interdependent arising of all things.

the conventional and ultimate.⁷ This differentiation between the two truths realizes and expresses an insight into the inevitable falsehood of the language upon which we must rely even while explicating that sense of true emptiness.

The term “conventional truth” is ambiguous, as truths of this kind are only modifications of the ultimate meaning of the Buddha-*dharma*, and thus cannot be taken literally. Ultimately, they are not true, but false. However, conventional falsehood may inversely point back towards or lead to that truth, and in this sense, it is instructive and not deceptive.⁸ As an instructive sign, such conventional falsehood may carry a truth value in a provisional and limited sense, and only in view of those limitations can we refer to the “conventional” as “truth”.⁹ By the same token, such truth does not become even provisionally true until its limitations are made completely transparent; that is to say, like the deceptive views of the heretics, it must finally be deconstructed – its falsehood must be revealed, as is demonstrated, for instance, by Nāgārjuna’s refutations of the viewpoints of “Small Vehicle” or Abhidharma Buddhists in his *Middle Stanzas* and *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*Huizheng lun* 迴諍論).¹⁰

⁷ See Chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun*: “If a person does not understand how to differentiate between the two truths, he/she does not understand the true meaning of the profound Buddha-*dharma*” (T30:1564.32c18-19).

⁸ The Buddhist notion of “dependent co-arising” is an example of this. From a Madhyamaka point of view, all arising involves patterns of interdependence, and interdependent arising is sustained by emptiness, which yet denies the reality of things based on those patterns. Hence, ultimately, there is no real arising. Dependent arising is a conventional truth which points back to what ultimately is non-arising. See for example the *Da zhi du lun*: “A ‘mark of arising’ is not really comprehensible; therefore, it is called ‘non-arising’” (T25:1509.319a13).

⁹ This conforms to Brook Ziporyn’s explanation, according to which the conventional is “locally coherent, but globally incoherent” (Ziporyn, 2009: 238).

¹⁰ The major content of the *Zhong lun* (*Middle Stanzas*) deals with the refutation of the views ascribed to heretics and the critique of Abhidharma concepts. The first chapter, *Contemplating Causes and Conditions*, for example, starts by refuting heretical views of “arising” (*sheng* 生). These are the four notions of “self-arising”, “arising in virtue of something else”, “both self-arising and arising in virtue of something else”, and “arising without any cause”, classified according to the four alternatives of the *cātuskoṭika* (*si jufa* 四句法). The next step embraces the critique and deconstruction of the Abhidharma understanding of “arising” which is based on the “four conditions” (*catvāraḥ*

All referents of our linguistic expression(s) imply conventional falsehood, as they are built upon interdependencies and correlative oppositions (*xiangdai* 相待) sustained by (their) emptiness. Like “up” and “down”, Buddhist terms such as “suffering” and “liberation”, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, “ignorance” and “wisdom”, “sentient being” and “Buddha”, or “noble” (*sheng* 聖) and “common” (*fan* 凡) are merely correlative opposites, exclusively referring to each other via mutual negation, and thus mutually implying one another. Given that each of these pairs is rooted in emptiness, neither part of each pair can be independently sustained; either one, separate from the other, lacks a core of reality; neither is real; both are empty. If they were not empty, but real, they would not be constituted as opposites via correlative dependency. This means, as was

pratayayāh, *si yuan* 四緣). Similarly, the following chapters deconstruct other Abhidharma categories such as the “five aggregates”, “cause and effect”, “three marks of time”, etc. However, there is a significant difference between refuting heretical views and deconstructing Abhidharma notions. While all heretical views must be abandoned, the usage of Abhidharma terms cannot completely be denied. The critique or deconstruction of the latter just clarifies, outlines, and specifies the limited validity of the conventional truths upon which we must rely to realize the ultimate truth. In other words, the deconstruction of the Abhidharma concepts discloses the permissible and salutary way of dealing with the conventional, and prevents us from mistaking it for the ultimate. Hence, in order for us to realize the true sense of “non-arising”, that is, ultimate truth or true emptiness, it is necessary to maintain a certain sense of “arising”, cleansed from the distorting views of the heretics and the inverse use of the conventional. The *Zhong lun*’s strategy of “deconstruction” (*po* 破) is a constructive critique which grounds the conventional truths in this specific sense of ultimate truth. Piṅgala’s commentary on the first chapter expresses this (T30:1564.1b23-c7), stressing that the initial verse of the “eight negations” (*babu* 八不) fully realizes ultimate truth (T30:1564.1c12). This initial verse is the point of departure from which the *Zhong lun* proceeds with its deconstruction, which discloses and sets up the realm of the conventional truths and justifies their correct use. This also fits with Zhiyi’s Tiantai view in the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀) where he stresses the “indivisibility of deconstructing and setting up” (*jipo jili, jili jipo*, 即破即立, 即立即破), in order to clarify the relationship between the two truths (T46:1911.55a15-24). Also, the whole text of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*Huizheng lun* 迴諍論) consists of Nāgārjuna’s invalidating the objections and arguments of his opponents, which serves the purpose of strengthening and revealing his own view. The sense of truth that these two texts address requires a deconstructive strategy exploiting the instructive force of falsehood. Hence, their compositional structure incorporates the method of refutation as a means of constructive critique.

stated by the early Chinese Mādhyamika Sengzhao (僧肇 374-414), that names are not in conformity with reality, and things designated by names are not real.¹¹

Moreover, the unreality of names and linguistic expressions also applies to the term “emptiness”; hence true emptiness or ultimate truth is inexpressible, inconceivable, and irreducible. “Ultimate emptiness” cannot be conceived of as correlatively opposed to or dependent on non-emptiness, because emptiness itself sustains correlative oppositions such as “emptiness” and “non-emptiness”. In order to accomplish our liberation from suffering via insight into ultimate truth, however, we must terminate our clinging onto such conventional falsehood, including even the term “emptiness”, and realize ultimate true emptiness even within the realm of our ordinary world. We must find the path that dissociates our understanding from all the deceptive influences of the falsehood and reifications which inevitably pervade the linguistic means by which we shape and relate to our world. In spite of these problems, all Mādhyamikas insist on using the “false” expression “emptiness” when disclosing and explicating the realm of liberation. They even admit that this term may become deceptive and harmful to our understanding and path of liberation, if used in an improper way, that is, if taken literally.¹²

In other words, the differentiation between the conventional and ultimate must also be applied to the term “emptiness”. Understood or seen as a “provisional/false name” (*jiaming* 假名), “emptiness” may have an instructive effect on our efforts to realize ultimate truth,¹³ for in most cases, conventional falsehood evades our awareness; even if we point to it, we do this, too, by means of our conventional language. Like a blind

¹¹ See Sengzhao’s dictum, “names and reality do not conform to each other” (*ming shi wudang* 名實無當) (T45:1858.152c23).

¹² *Zhong lun*, in Chapter 1 and 24, points to the deceptive and harmful implication of the term emptiness: “Those of lower capabilities do not properly master the contemplation of emptiness, and thus may harm themselves, just like those who are not skilled in using magic spells or those who unskillfully grasp a poisonous snake” (T30:1564.33 a8-9).

¹³ See *Zhong lun* (T30:1564.30b23). The Sanskrit term is *prajñapti*, and the Chinese translation according to Kumārajīva is *jiaming* (假名). The Chinese term *jia* implies two meanings, “false” and “borrowing”. We will return to this ambiguity in the term below.

spot, it is concealed from us on the level of linguistic expression(s). However, the term “emptiness” may shed light on this problem by falsifying even itself. It paradoxically denies what it simultaneously signifies, to bring about our genuine understanding of the true and ultimate meaning beyond linguistic expression(s). Such self-falsification via “performative contradiction” reveals what the term “emptiness” truly is: It is a “false name” which lays out the inseparability of truth and falsehood in our understanding.

When we attempt to ascertain the ontological status of that falsehood, we also see that emptiness of inherent existence implies ontological indeterminacy. The specific term for this indeterminacy is the “middle way” (*zhongdao* 中道), which denies both the real existence and the complete nonexistence of things rooted in patterns of interdependence. Furthermore, no thing that pertains to the conventional realm has any invariant or definite identity (*juedingxiang* 決定相), which also means that those things are ontically indeterminate. All this correlates with the pragmatic sense of the Buddhist soteriology of detachment and liberation. For instance, a given person may appear to be a teacher in a certain regard and a student in another; ultimately, however, this person must be empty, in order to be constantly ready to adopt either role, contingent upon the ever-changing circumstances.

In a similar fashion, falsehood, though it persists in the conventional realm, is empty or devoid of any invariant or definite quality, since it can be either deceptive or instructive, depending upon the circumstances. Concealed from us, falsehood is deceptive, and may entice us to cling onto the unreal as if it were real, which entails harmful effects. However, falsehood revealed, as is the case with the self-falsifying and conventional term “emptiness”, can be instructive – it may cause us to dissociate our understanding from all deceptive influences or reifying tendencies, and thus trigger or inspire our realization of ultimate truth.

What is crucial here is our insight into this ambiguity of falsehood, which may convert the deceptive into something instructive, as when a medicine is made from poison. Consequently, the *Zhong lun* stresses that we depend upon the conventional, in order to accomplish the ultimate:

To accomplish ultimate truth is to reveal all conventional falsehood, precisely on the basis of the instructiveness of this self-same falsehood.¹⁴

This same approach also seems to be expressed in the way the *Lotus Sūtra* talks about the “ultimate meaning”, the “rare treasure”, or the “One Vehicle”. On the one hand, we are recommended not to take the Buddha’s teachings literally, and not to regard his performances as reflecting the way he truly is in his nature. On the other, the *sūtra* stresses that all the Buddha’s words and appearances are nonetheless trustworthy and not deceptive; indeed, they are even indispensable or essential to our understanding. Because it is inexpressible, the definite content of the “ultimate meaning” is nowhere directly explicated in this *sūtra*; instead, our understanding is guided by the instructiveness of conventional falsehood, here termed “skillful means” (*fangbian* 方便), and the deployment of those means obviously restricts the devaluation of the negative sides of our life.

In a similar way, the *Da zhi du lun* stresses that there is no medicine without sickness; the two, as opposites, are correlatively dependent; also, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and other *sūtras* state that delusions incorporate wisdom. Inversely pointing back to its opposite, the negative aspect of things reveals an instructive, salutary, or positive aspect, which highlights the inseparability of truth and falsehood in Mahāyāna soteriology. Consequently, to understand the positive significance of true emptiness, and thereby to discern an indestructible core that sustains reality in our existence, is always to see fully pervasive falsehood and ever-changing illusion as a constantly present inverse form of instructiveness. However, this realization does not really reach beyond the soteriological point of view in our understanding; any attempt to interpret that reality in ontological or metaphysical terms inevitably provokes us to cling onto reifications, which, instead of revealing falsehood, conceal it, and thus entail further “inversions” and other harmful effects.

Our “inversions”, which are closely bound up with our clinging, mistake falsehood for truth. In other words, we confuse the conventional,

¹⁴ Chapter 24 in the *Zhong lun* says: “If we do not rely upon the conventional truth, we cannot realize the ultimate; without realizing the ultimate, we cannot accomplish *nirvāṇa*” (T30:1564.33a2-3).

upon which we rely, with the ultimate. Therefore, we must constantly differentiate between the two truths, to avoid clinging onto the unreality and reifications which inevitably arise from the conventional level of our linguistic expression(s). To differentiate between the two truths is to rely upon the conventional, and yet maintain the awareness of its emptiness and falsehood. This, effectively, brings about our insight into the ultimate – that is, paradoxically enough, differentiating in this manner in fact *realizes* inseparability, whereas separating, or seeing truth and falsehood as independent or mutually excluding realms, entails reifications *confusing* the two. Such differentiation does not really reach beyond the level of linguistic expression, and thus cannot be taken literally; yet in a provisional sense, it is necessary, in order for us to highlight the inevitable falsehood in our linguistic way of understanding true emptiness.

From the viewpoint of the Chinese sources, the differentiation between the two truths suspends any apodictic claim implying metaphysical or ontological significance. According to Jay Garfield's and Graham Priest's dialetheist reading of the Indo-Tibetan sources of Nāgārjuna's thought, the realms of the conventional and ultimate account for the inconsistent nature of reality; however, even that view contravenes the sense of true emptiness.¹⁵ From the pragmatic point of view in the Chi-

¹⁵ On the basis of Tibetan and Sanskrit sources, Jay Garfield and Graham Priest develop the understanding that Nāgārjuna defends the idea of “true contradictions at the limits of thought”. This further implies that the Madhyamaka notion of the two truths has a metaphysical or ontological significance. That is to say that although two truths doctrine is coherent in terms of rationality, it leads to inconsistency regarding the nature of reality; there must be “two realities”, one indicated by each of the conventional and ultimate respectively, and this is called “di-aletheism”. Such an ontological interpretation of “true contradictions” subsumes the Madhyamaka concept under one of the modern views of logic called “para-consistent logic” (Deguchi, Garfield and Priest, 2008: 395-402; Garfield, 2002: 86-109). Priest explains the ontological implications of this contradiction: “Nāgārjuna’s enterprise is one of fundamental ontology, and the conclusion he comes to is that fundamental ontology is impossible. But that is a fundamental ontological conclusion – and that is a paradox” (Priest, 2002: 214). For a critical discussion of Garfield and Priest’s interpretation, see Tillemans, 2009: 83-101. Moreover, the Chinese exegetical tradition of the early Madhyamaka works does not conform to this interpretation; Sengzhao’s *Emptiness of the Unreal* (*Buzhen kong lun* 不真空論, T1858:45.152a2-153a6) explicitly denies the understanding of the two truths as two realities, or the inconsistency of the nature of reality.

nese *Zhong lun*, by contrast, differentiating in this manner realizes “the profundity of the true Buddha-*dharma*”, enacting an awareness of the inseparability of truth and falsehood in our understanding (*Zhong lun*, Chapter 24, T30:1564.32c18-19).

3 Reality and falsehood according to *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine

As explained above, emptiness sustains the interdependent arising of things, while denying that any of those things inherently or really exists. In order to understand fully, we must realize both the sustaining and the nullifying significance of emptiness. Deconstructing the views of heretics (non-Buddhists) and the Abhidharma, the *Zhong lun* stresses the “skill of extinguishing discursive fiction” (*shan mie zhu xilun* 善滅諸戲論), and seems thereby to expound the nullifying or negative significance of emptiness. On the other hand, the explication of the eighteen types of emptiness in the *Da zhi du lun* includes an account of the positive aspect of emptiness, which it calls “the nature of *dharma*(s)” (*faxing* 法性, **dharma-tā*) and “the real characteristic of all *dharma*(s)” (*zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相) etc. However, these exceptions in the *Zhong lun* aside, the sustaining aspect of emptiness seems more to be the primary focus of the scriptures expounding *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and the texts of the Chinese Dilun and Huayan masters influenced by that teaching.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Tathāgatagarbha* scriptures often incorporate elements of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka teachings, which represent the two major Indian Mahāyāna schools. Yet *tathāgatagarbha* certainly also implies specific characteristics distinct from these other views. In his discussions on the classification of doctrines, Fazang seems to be the first observer to set the particular features of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine apart from those of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. In his commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, he reviews the debates between the Indian Madhyamaka and Yogācāra and concludes: “*Sūtras* and *śāstras* nowadays prevalent in the East encompass the Small and the Great Vehicles; this includes the paths of four [types of] school: first, schools which follow marks and cling to *dharma*(s), namely, all the Abhidharma of the Small Vehicle; second, schools which teaches true emptiness and the nonexistence of the marks, as explicated by the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* etc; third, the school teaching the *dharma*-marks of mere consciousness, as explicated by the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* as well as the *Yogācārabhūmi* etc; fourth, the school teaching dependent co-arising sustained by *tathāgatagarbha*, as explicated by the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, the *Ghanavyūha-sūtra*, the *Awakening of Faith*, and the *Ratnagotra-vibhāga*” (T44:1846.243b23-27).

Huayan Buddhists stress the inseparability of “illusory existence and true emptiness” (*zhen kong huan you* 真空幻有).¹⁷ Things that arise interdependently, and are thus ever changing, are illusorily and not inherently existent; thus each, in its specific way, manifests what truly sustains all unreality - namely, “true emptiness” (*zhenkong* 真空), which is not the same thing as complete nonexistence. Such a manifestation of true emptiness is an inexhaustible and yet inverse form of instructiveness, which we can only disclose if we fully realize the ambiguity of all falsehood - that is, if we always see the instructive and salutary side of unreality, in addition to its deceptive and harmful aspects. According to those who expound *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, this means that there *really* is an indestructible and all-pervasive potential to become (a) Buddha in every sentient being, since our ever-changing and unreal world, which we constantly produce, must be seen as inverse manifestations of buddhahood.¹⁸

Hence, the potential for buddhahood indestructibly persists in our world and, in that sense, is equivalent to the reality that constitutes the positive aspect of true emptiness, sustaining our realm of falsehood and impermanence. This notion calls for further clarification. Buddhists correctly argue that things cannot really exist if they are contingent upon something unreal; hence, the idea of a reality correlatively opposed to and thus dependent upon falsehood is not coherent. Rather, what is meant - reality in the proper sense - is “ultimate emptiness” (*bijing kong* 畢竟空) which is “devoid of both falsehood and reality” (*fei xu fei shi* 非

¹⁷ See, for example, Fazang’s and Chengguan’s (澄觀, 738-839) discussions of “illusory existence and true emptiness”, which are almost identical; Fazang, *Huayan you xin fajie ji* (華嚴遊心法界記) (T45:1877.649c27-650a10); Chengguan, Commentary on the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* called *Da fanguang fo huayan jing shu* (大方廣佛華嚴經疏) (T35:1735.604 b28-c9).

¹⁸ *Tathāgata* is used as a synonym for Buddha, and one of the meanings of *garbha* is “embryo”; the compound expression *tathāgatagarbha* seems to imply that all the delusions and defilements of sentient beings nonetheless contain the potential to become a Buddha, probably on account of their nature as inverse instructiveness. The Chinese translation *rulaizang* literally means “store of the *tathāgata*” and is often used in the sense of storing the innumerable Buddha-virtues and achievements that mark the whole path of transformation of all sentient beings.

虛非實).¹⁹ As demonstrated in the *Da zhi du lun*, terms such as reality or emptiness must be used in this ambiguous way, to reveal their inseparability from falsehood and to realize the inconceivability of what is intended. Consequently, the only thing that can truly constitute the sustaining ground of such opposites as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, as well as all types of interdependence, is reality in this inconceivable sense.

This seems to be the view that may have inspired the discussion about “birth/life and death” in the chapter “Inversion and Reality” in the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra*, a part of which will be examined below. The *sūtra* text refers to inconceivable and indestructible reality as *tathāgatagarbha*, specifying that without it, neither our transformation into the state of liberation, nor the interdependent arising of things, could be grounded and sustained. If we seek to properly comprehend the intention behind the doctrine of this chapter, we must become fully aware of both our inversions, which shape the way we exist in our world, and the real ground which sustains it all. Moreover, on the ordinary or conventional level, which does not consider these crucial issues, our existence seems to be a constant alternation of arising and deceasing, that is, we regard birth/life and death – synonymous with *saṃsāra* – as real.

However, according to both Mahāyāna scriptures expounding true emptiness, as well as the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra*, which deals with related issues, our concepts of beginning and ending, such as birth and death, are false constructions, since no thing that really exists arises from or completely disappears into nonexistence. Consequently, finitude or temporality, in the sense of the limited duration of our existence, as well as discontinuity, interruption, separation, and difference, are all falsely constructed. Many Mahāyāna scriptures stress a) that the interdependent arising of all things entails continuity; and b) that we must face impermanence, or the unceasing change in our worldly realm, in order to achieve liberation from suffering.

As pointed out in the *Zhong lun*, continuity cannot be confused with duration, and the temporality of our existence is devoid of marks quali-

¹⁹ See the *Da zhi du lun*: “Again, all *dharma*(s) are ultimately empty; this ultimate emptiness is also empty; as emptiness is devoid of *dharma*(s), it is also devoid of [the mutual interdependence] of falsehood and reality” (T25:1509.290a4-5).

fying and quantifying time.²⁰ Like any change, the whole process of transformation from an unenlightened into an enlightened being implies both continuity and impermanence. The *Zhong lun* calls all this “neither arising nor cessation, neither permanence nor discontinuity”, and according to the *Da zhi du lun*, Fazang, Chengguan (澄觀, 738-839), Jizang, Zhiyi, and Zhanran (湛然, 711-782), this insight constitutes one of the hallmarks of Mahāyāna thought.²¹ On this basis, *sūtras* such as the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* as well as the Northern and the Southern versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* point to two types of inversions: 1) those of worldly beings who mistake the unreal for the real, that is, they deludedly ascribe duration or permanence to things that are in fact unceasingly changing; and 2) the mistake of taking the real for the unreal, which means not seeing the indestructibility, continuity, permanence and reality of *tathāgatagarbha*, in addition to having insight into worldly impermanence.²²

²⁰ See Chapter 19 of the *Zhong lun* on time, refuting the real existence of marks qualifying time, which, however, at the same time does not deny the temporality of our existence.

²¹ See the statement in the *Da zhi du lun*: “Despite emptiness there is no discontinuity; yet continuity does not equal permanence; in this sense, neither sins nor meritorious action disappear completely” (T25:1509.64c9-10). According to the Tiantai master Zhanran, commenting on Zhiyi’s *Mohe zhi guan* (摩訶止觀): “All things taught by the Buddha are beyond discontinuity and permanence” (T46:1912.198a14).

²² The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* talks about the “four inversions” in two different senses. There are inversions such as the false views of “permanence, bliss, self, and purity” held by sentient beings in bondage to the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness. There are also a further “four inversions”, namely, false views of “impermanence, sorrow, non-self, and impurity”, held by Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas who are beyond these three realms. See the discussion in the Northern version (T12:374.377 b25-c14) and in the Southern version (T12:375.617a26-b16). Chapter 12 of the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* (T12:353.222a9-26) essentially endorses the same view; however, the use of terminology differs from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*: There are “inversions” in terms of “the two extreme views” (*erjian* 二見) of “permanence (*changjian* 常見)” and “discontinuity (*duanjian* 斷見)” which seems to refer to views held by sentient beings in the realm of *samsāra*, while the wisdom of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha, although it is called clear and pure, still fails to realize the “realm of universal wisdom and the *dharma* of *tathāgatagarbha*”, which the *sūtra* describes elsewhere as permanent and invariant. Moreover, the subsequent passage stresses that “some of the sentient beings who believe in the Buddha’s Word develop the thought of permanence, bliss, self,

These considerations seem to aim at a deeper understanding of emptiness. The term *tathāgatagarbha* in the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra*, and the concept of “Buddha-nature” in the two versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, though not completely identical with one another, are predicated upon the same argument, namely, that the term “emptiness”, if taken only as the denial of the reality of all the referents of our intentional acts, tends to overshadow the positive or sustaining significance implicit in the same concept.²³ These two scriptures, as well as the *Awakening of Faith*, stress both “emptiness” (*kong* 空, *śūnya*) and “non-emptiness” (*bukong* 不空, *aśūnya*). According to all these texts, these two terms do not exclude one another, but rather, complement each other. “Non-emptiness” highlights the sustaining aspect of ultimate emptiness, while “emptiness” highlights its nullifying aspect. The two terms thus seem to relate to each other in a dynamic way; the complete nullification of all reifications in our understanding turns into full insight into the sustaining aspect, and *vice versa*; “emptiness” which nullifies all deceptiveness, discloses “non-emptiness”, which is what truly sustains our becoming a Buddha in this specific way.

According to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, those holding to a view that excludes non-emptiness one-sidedly cling onto insights into impermanence, while others, who do not realize emptiness at all, are one-sidedly attached to views of permanence. Therefore, the right view (*zhengjian* 正見, **samyagdṛṣṭi*), which is empty of all clinging, does not fall prey to either type of inversion, instead realizing the dynamics of “the wisdom of the supreme meaning of emptiness” (*diyi yi kong* 第一義空, **para-*

and purity; this is not an inverse view; it is called ‘right view’.” Hence, the text seems to be ambiguous regarding its distinction between the “extreme view of discontinuity” and the deficient type of “wisdom” of the Small Vehicle. Apparently, this *sūtra* uses the term “inversion” only for sentient beings in the *saṃsāric* realm, while the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* seems to apply it to both sentient beings and the Two Vehicles. Nevertheless, the two *sūtras* do not differ in their essential meaning.

²³ See the discussion about the relation of non-exclusion between emptiness and non-emptiness in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T12:374.395b13-c2).

mārthasūnya), which includes both sides, and is also called “Buddha-nature” and the “middle way”.²⁴

Similarly, the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* mentions two sides of the “emptiness-wisdom of *tathāgatagarbha*”. There is “empty *tathāgatagarbha*” and “non-empty *tathāgatagarbha*”, and the opposition between these two seems to correlate with the distinction between “emptiness in accordance with reality” and “non-emptiness in accordance with reality” in the *Awakening of Faith*. These two scriptures thus explain the significance of “emptiness” in a very similar way: Emptiness, understood as the emptiness of our false views, seems to reflect a kind of *a posteriori* viewpoint. Defiled by inversions as we are, reality can only be achieved or accomplished for us *after* our understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* has been dissociated from or emptied of the deceptive influences in our thought (*liwang* 離妄). This is important to mention, because as soon as we refer to it in our usual conceptualizing way, *tathāgatagarbha* is inevitably covered up by falsehood and reifications. Consequently, prior to the view of *tathāgatagarbha* emptied from inversions, there is also the unaffected way *tathāgatagarbha* originally and constantly is. This is invariable reality, which is devoid even of an emptiness nullifying unreality, and is thus called “non-emptiness”.²⁵ Yet, unless we empty our inverse views, we cannot really disclose that aspect of non-emptiness.

These dynamics in our understanding mean that our emptying, or becoming aware of, all inversions, and our seeing the reality of *tathāgatagarbha* are coextensive; this might be the reason why the chapter of the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* in question is called “Inversion and Reality”. In other

²⁴ “Buddha-nature is called the supreme meaning of emptiness. The supreme meaning of emptiness is called wisdom. What we call ‘emptiness’ means not to view emptiness and non-emptiness [as mutually excluding, as in a contradiction]. The wise person sees emptiness and non-emptiness [without contradiction], permanence and impermanence [without contradiction], suffering and bliss [without contradiction], self and non-self [without contradiction]...Seeing the emptiness of all things, but not [their] non-emptiness, cannot be called the Middle Way...The Middle Way is called the Buddha-nature. For that reason, the Buddha-nature is permanent and does not [really] change” (T12:374.523b12-19).

²⁵ See the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra*, T12:353.221c16-17, and the *Awakening of Faith*, T32:1666.576 a27-b5.

words, when we see that *tathāgatagarbha* is the true and real nature of what we inversely consider as life and death, we realize that we perceive, think and talk in such inverse ways only on account of that reality. This level of insight reveals the side of reality which Huiyuan, in his commentary on the *Śrīmālā*, calls the “functioning of the ground” (*yiyong* 依用) (X19:351.892c11-893a20). Huiyuan emphasizes that all falsehood is sustained by reality in this manner, in the same way that when we mistake a rope for a snake in the dark, the snake that we mistakenly see is only seen in virtue of the fact that the rope in fact exists.²⁶ Without a reality of this sort as their basis, none of our misperceptions could arise from our deluded mind. Similarly, the chapter “Inversion and Reality” explains:

O World Honored One, birth/life and death means to be grounded on *tathāgatagarbha*. On account of *tathāgatagarbha*, we say that their initial limit is unknowable. O World Honored One, since there is *tathāgatagarbha*, we speak of birth/life and death; this may be called speaking in a skillful way. O World Honored One, when we say, “birth and death, birth and death”, this means that the sense faculties (*gen* 根, **indriyāṇi*) already apprehending [the sensory realms] pass out of existence, and subsequently, sense faculties that have not [yet] apprehended arise; this is called birth/life and death. O World Honored One, these two *dharma*(s) [called] birth/life and death are, [in fact], *tathāgatagarbha*. According to worldly speech, there is death and there is birth/life, [where] “death” means the passing away of sense faculties, while “birth/life” implies the arising of new sense faculties. However, it is not [really] the case that there is birth/life and death [in the realm of] *tathāgatagarbha* (T12:353.222b5-10).

²⁶ See Huiyuan’s commentary on the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra*, explaining that life and death are not intrinsic or real features of our existence; they are only marks (*xiang* 相) inversely hinting at the reality (*shi* 實) of *tathāgatagarbha*. In the genuine sense, they are nothing but *tathāgatagarbha*, similar to the false snake that is in fact the rope, or the falsely perceived North Pole that is in fact the South Pole. Huiyuan stresses that these images illustrate what the *sūtra* means by the “inseparability (*buyi* 不異) of falsehood and reality” (X19:351.893a10-13).

In order to see what really grounds our false constructions, such as birth/life and death, we must dissociate our understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* from all those views. Hence, the text proceeds:

Tathāgatagarbha is beyond the mark of [false] construction(s); *tathāgatagarbha* constantly endures and never changes; therefore, *tathāgatagarbha* grounds, sustains, and sets up; O World Honored One, it neither leaves, nor interrupts, nor separates, nor differs; it is the inconceivable Buddha-*dharma*; O World Honored One; what reaches beyond interruption, separation, difference, and [thus] grounds, sustains and sets up the constructed *dharma*(s), is *tathāgatagarbha* (T12: 353.222b11-14).²⁷

The phrase describing the nature of *tathāgatagarbha* as “neither leaving, nor separating, nor differing, thus being the inconceivable Buddha-*dharma*” occurs in this *sūtra* three times, and has also been incorporated into the texts of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and the *Awakening of Faith*. Furthermore, most of the eminent Chinese Buddhist masters, such as Huiyuan, Jizang, Fazang, Kuiji (窺基, 632-682) and many others, quote or comment on it. The Chinese wording is rather ambiguous, and allows for different readings. However, all those Chinese commentaries understand this phrase as a predication about the nature of *tathāgatagarbha*, which expo-

²⁷ The *Ratnagotravibhāga* also incorporates this passage; however the wording in the Chinese version of the *sūtra* is differently arranged. Moreover, some of the expressions in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* differ from the *sūtra* text. The only extant Sanskrit version of this passage is that in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, where the first and second parts of the initial phrase are apparently be connected in a genitive relationship, of which Huiyuan, Jizang, Kuiji, and others in their Chinese commentaries were obviously not aware. The translation of the present article follows the “Chinese understanding”, since the wording of the Chinese *sūtra* text does not really match with the reading in Takasaki’s English translation based upon the Sanskrit *Ratnagotravibhāga*: “Therefore, O Lord, the Matrix of the Tathāgata is the foundation, the support, and the substratum of the immutable elements (properties) which are essentially connected with, indivisible from [the Absolute Entity], and unreleased from Wisdom.” Quoted after the *Bibliotheca Polyglotta, Thesaurus Literaturae Buddhicae* (<http://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=fulltext&vid=61&view=fulltext>, last accessed June 24 2013).

ses five of its major properties.²⁸ Perhaps Kuiji’s reading might best represent the way the phrase has been usually understood:

²⁸ The Chinese wording of the *sūtra* text reads: 是故如來藏，是依、是持、是建立。世尊。不離、不斷、不脫、不異(、)不思議佛法。世尊。斷、脫、異外有為法依持、建立者，是如來藏。 If related to the slightly differing phrase in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (T31:1611.839a24-29), this would mean that *tathāgatagarbha* is the ground of both what is never different or separate from the Buddha-*dharma*, and what is different and separate from it. Therefore, it could be also translated as “(2)”: “*Tathāgatagarbha* is the ground, support, and basis, O World Honored One, of what neither leaves, nor interrupts, nor separates, nor differs from the inconceivable Buddha-*dharma*; O World Honored One, *tathāgatagarbha* is [also] the ground, support, and basis of [all] constructed *dharma*(s), in addition to [the views that there is] interruption, separation, and difference.” The crucial point is the Chinese *wai* (外) in the second part of the phrase. According to the reading of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, it would mean “besides” or “in addition to.” However, the commentaries of Huiyuan, Jizang, and Kuiji obviously read *wai* in a different sense, though their understanding of the whole phrase does not really or fundamentally differ from that of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*. Jizang, Huiyuan, and Kuiji univocally state that “interrupting, separating, differing (*duan* 斷, *tuō* 脫, *yì* 異)” are the features of the inverse and constructed realm of life and death from which our understanding of *tathāgatagarbha* must be dissociated. According to them, the character *wai* indicates precisely that *tathāgatagarbha* goes “beyond” that realm characterized by these three aspects.

There is also a third possible reading “(3)” suggested by some of the commentaries: “*Tathāgatagarbha*...is the inconceivable Buddha-*dharma* which neither leaves, nor interrupts, nor separates, nor differs...”

Nevertheless, all three readings do not differ in essence. The translation first given in the main text of the present article “(1)”, following the Chinese commentaries, stresses that *tathāgatagarbha* is the ground of the realm of life and death; the subsequent phrase in the *sūtra* proceeds with the explanation that it is also the ground of the path leading to *nirvāṇa*. In the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, however, that explanation precedes the phrase in question. The differing compositional arrangements in the two scriptures, therefore, suggest differing understandings; however, the two are, nevertheless, unanimous concerning the meaning of *tathāgatagarbha* as the ground of both the constructed and unconstructed realm. See Huiyuan’s commentary on the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T37:1764.701c9-15) as well as his commentary on the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* (X19:351.888a3-b2), both of which come close to (3), while his remarks at X19:351.893a21-b12 come close to (1); Jizang’s commentary on the *Śrīmālā* actually suggests two opposite readings (T37:1744.74a24-b2, T37:1744.83a19-28; the latter is also mentioned in Shōtoku Taishi’s 聖德太子 commentary, X19:353.970c21-24); Kuiji’s *Śrīmālā* commentary comes close to (1) (X19:352.922b13-23); and an anonymous Dunhuang *Śrīmālā* commentary also fits this reading (T85:2762.276c24-277a2). Of course, practically speaking, the English translation must choose one of the three readings, but the Chinese phrase can be and has been understood in this ambiguous yet consistent way;

The second phrase outlines the essentials of this *dharma* of the ground: Owing to its true suchness, permanence, and oneness, it is called “not leaving”; as no falsehood can defile it, it is called “not interrupting”; as it is non-constructed, it is called “not separating”; it is homogeneous and therefore called “not differing”; it is incomprehensible to any of our sense consciousnesses, and thus is called “inconceivable Buddha-*dharma*” (X19:352.922b13-23).

Again, the Chinese *sūtra* passage as a whole describes *tathāgatagarbha* as that which really sustains our experiences of birth/life and death. Those apparent experiences are features empty of an intrinsic nature, and are thus not essentially different from *tathāgatagarbha*. All arising and cessation, as well as all finitude, separation, and discontinuity are unreal; there is only the “non-arising and non-cessation” of *tathāgatagarbha*, which is the true nature of all inversions. However, as inverse modes, our views, constructions, and experiences of birth and death veil that nature and conceal its reality; therefore they are not really and completely identical to it. According to Huiyuan’s commentary, birth/life and death are constructed or inverse “marks” (*xiang* 相), while *tathāgatagarbha* is the non-constructed and real “ground” (*yi* 依). The constructed and non-constructed realms relate to each other as marks and ground, which are “neither different nor identical” (*bu yi bu yi* 不異不一). This means, for our defiled understanding, that they are inseparable, and yet must nonetheless be differentiated from each other.²⁹

Huiyuan further points out that this passage refers to *tathāgatagarbha* not only as the “ground in its defiled mode” (*ranyi* 染依), but also as the “ground in its pure mode” (*jingyi* 淨依) (X19:351.893b9-11). Indeed, the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* text goes on to explain that without *tathāgatagarbha*,

that is, according to commentators such as Huiyuan, the nature of *tathāgatagarbha*, based on this phrase, could be understood in this threefold way. Translation (3) seems to fit the first time the phrase occurs in the Chinese *sūtra* text (T12:353.221c7-11); Translation (2) seems to fit the second time (T12:353.221c17-18).

See also the quotation in the *Awakening of Faith* (T32:1666.579a12-20), Fazang’s commentary on that passage (T44:1846.273b26-c3), and the quotation in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (T31:1611.839a24-29).

²⁹ See Huiyuan’s commentary on the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* (X19:351.892c11-893b12).

our “dislike of suffering” and “delight in the search for *nirvāṇa*” would be groundless (T12:353.222b14-16). “*Tathāgatagarbha*” signifies what really sustains the entire continuing yet changing process of our transformation from a non-awakened into an awakened being: Our ignorance and inverse views are the causes and conditions which lead to harmful fruits full of suffering and our dislike of it, and this in turn triggers or brings about delight in the search for *nirvāṇa* and its ultimate realization, as well as the exploration of the Buddha-*dharma*. In such a way, the “functioning of the ground” (*yiyong* 依用) embraces both the “defiled” and the “pure mode”. The two are interdependent and opposite links, neither of which alone can express a true understanding of the functioning of *tathāgatagarbha* as a whole.

When we understand *tathāgatagarbha* as the ground of both the defiled and the pure mode, it also means that those opposites are not essentially different, that is, not different in nature. Yet the two cannot be viewed as identical either, since as soon as our conceptualizing mind construes identity in seeking to comprehend the inconceivable sense of that reality, we must realize that this is a construction which differs from what is not constructed. In the process of adopting and internalizing the Buddha-*dharma*, we must see our own (mis-)understanding(s) as being sustained by the functioning of *tathāgatagarbha*, which is constantly present to us in the form of such inverse instructiveness. The viewpoint from which the *sūtra* expounds that doctrine is that of our non-awakened mind. As it undergoes the transformation into the state of awakening, this defiled understanding must realize the inseparability of reality and falsehood, precisely by means of differentiating between the constructed and the non-constructed realms.

Consequently, for Huiyuan, who explains that the two stand in a mutual relation of “neither identity nor difference”, such differentiation does not constitute a real duality, nor does their inseparability imply any sense of monism. It would be misleading to propose a polarized opposition between a dualistic pattern in this *sūtra* and a monistic scheme in the *Awakening of Faith*, which stresses the aspect of inseparability. The *Awakening of Faith* expounds the “single mind disclosing the two *dharma*-gates of arising and non-arising”, and thus takes the aspect of differentiation into account, just as our passage from the *Śrīmālā* also considers

inseparability. The viewpoints expressed in the two scriptures are not contradictory, nor do they imply a metaphysical position.

Rather, according to the *sūtra*'s view of *tathāgatagarbha*, the seemingly paradoxical coincidence of inseparability and differentiation accounts for the dynamics of the awareness which is essential if we are to realize the inconceivability of the Buddha-*dharma*. Such a realization must be aware of both the inevitable inversions defiling our understanding and the coextension of those defilements with the undefiled ground sustaining them. In other words, *tathāgatagarbha* must be seen as the intrinsic nature of our ordinary mind, because all the falsehood that inevitably arises as soon as we act upon our conceptual understanding also enfolds within itself an inverse instructiveness embodying the truth and reality that sustains such inversions. Consequently, *tathāgatagarbha*, as the intrinsic nature of our delusions, is the pure mind; in the following section, the *sūtra* speaks of the “intrinsically clear and pure mind which is nonetheless covered up by defilements”.³⁰

Fazang also elaborates on this idea. In his commentary on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, the *Huayan jing tan xuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記, he uses the *sūtra*'s image of an artisan painting on the surface of a wall to illustrate the way that our defiled understanding can be grounded in the functioning of pure mind. In this same connection, he also quotes the well-known passage expounding the “single mind disclosing the two gateways” (*yixin kai ermen* 一心開二門) from the *Awakening of Faith*.

The *Awakening of Faith* says: “There are two gateways based on the *dharma* of one single mind: first, the mind as the gateway to reality; second, the mind as the gateway to arising and cessation.” However, this statement only expresses the point that the two gateways equally embrace all *dharma*(s) [only seen from different points of view]. The image of the painting in the *sūtra* text, further, implies these two meanings: first, on the basis of the wall [itself,] there is nothing more than an even surface; second, it only seems that there are differences

³⁰ T12:353.222b28. “Intrinsically clear and pure mind” is referred to literally as “the mind clear and pure by nature” (*zixing qing jing xin* 自性清淨心).

of high and low due to the skillful mind of the artisan (T35:1733.215 b17-21).

According to Fazang, in actual fact, there exists nothing but the even surface of the wall; yet we tend to see the three-dimensional objects in the painting, because we falsely separate these figures from that wall. Conversely, without the wall, which is in fact even, no image of those illusorily three-dimensional objects would be possible; the three-dimensional space, which is unreal, is grounded upon the even wall, which is real. In the same way, our defiled mind, and its unreal world of the arising and cessation of entities, is grounded upon the intrinsically clear and pure mind, which is devoid of those apparent entities.

The focus on the nature of this pure and clear mind reveals a major difference between the *tathāgatagarbha* view of the process of becoming (a) Buddha, and the Madhyamaka understanding of the same transformation. Both the Madhyamaka teaching of the two truths, and the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine alike, are based on the "inseparability of reality/truth and falsehood". However, they deal with this underlying common ground in opposite ways. The Madhyamaka view seems to emphasize that our realization of truth relies upon the instructiveness of falsehood, while the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, conversely, holds that all falsehood rests upon a reality which, though beyond conceptualization, is essential to our understanding. In other words, the two seem to represent two opposite approaches: The Mādhyamika tries to completely unveil falsehood as falsehood, and seems thereby to focus on the nullifying significance of emptiness; whereas those following the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine intend to expose reality as reality to/in our understanding, that is, they elaborate on the sustaining significance of emptiness, pointing to our indestructible potential to become (a) Buddha. However, this does not necessarily imply that they are contradictory and exclude each other. Rather, the two probably simply stress the epistemic conditions of our realization of the ultimate realm of liberation from opposite points of view. Nevertheless, the two seem to be equally based on the ambiguity of falsehood. The *tathāgatagarbha* approach to transformation develops the view that we must restore an original purity, by seeing that this is the intrin-

sic nature of our deluded mind, which is also our potential for becoming (a) Buddha.

However, we still must reconsider the question of why this pure mind undergoes action and falls into the defiled mode, construing illusory worlds inhabited by suffering beings. If there is nothing real apart from pure mind itself, from where does the impulse emerge that stirs up the pure mind's unreal alter ego? These are the questions which inevitably occur when reading, for example, *The Awakening of Faith*, a Chinese scripture that blends *tathāgata* doctrine with the Yogācāra concept of *ālaya*-consciousness.

This text simply explains that the pure mind, which is originally devoid of arising and cessation, turns into the *ālaya*-consciousness, which performs the functions of arising and cessation, when it is exposed to the influences of ignorance and delusions. Thus covered by delusions, it gives rise to the various realms of our sensory world, and all the unreal apparitions that make up this world, as well as to the ongoing experience of suffering, and birth and death. The concept of mind expounded in this text, also, follows the paradigm of the inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood. The *Awakening of Faith* coins the notion of “the single mind disclosing two gateways” – mind as the gateway to the illusory realm of arising and cessation, and mind as the gateway to the true realm of non-arising and non-cessation. The illusory realm is said to arise from “ignorance without beginning” – a gloss on *ālaya*-consciousness, which, however, does not seem a satisfying or clear answer. In that case, then, can we find an explanation that ultimately clarifies the previously mentioned questions, and yet is consistent with the true meaning of this doctrine?

Indeed, from the viewpoint of the *tathāgata* doctrine, any question involving concepts of beginning and ending, or arising and cessation, is just symptomatic of the delusion of our mind; and yet such an aporetic condition may push our conceptual understanding to the limits of thought and induce an “initial awakening” (*shijue* 始覺), as is described by the *Awakening of Faith*. The scripture discusses the mind's original, pure, and undefiled nature in terms of “original awakening” (*benjue* 本覺) and the “source of the mind” (*xinyuan* 心源), while it calls the

actual and true understanding “ultimate awakening” (*bijing jue* 畢竟覺). The scripture explains:

The expression “awakening” means that the essence of mind is separate from thought [= our conceptual understanding]. [In] this mark of being separate from thought, [it] is like the element of space, which extends everywhere; [it is] the unitary mark of the realm of [all] *dharma*(s), which is the same as the identical *dharma*-body of [all] the *tathāgatas*. On the ground of this *dharma*-body, we refer to it in terms of “original awakening”. Why is it so? The doctrine of original awakening is taught as a counterpart to “initial awakening”; initial awakening means becoming identical with original awakening. [As for] the doctrine of initial awakening, “non-awakening” exists on the basis of original awakening, and on account of such non-awakening we say that there is initial awakening. Again, awakening to the “source of the mind” is called “ultimate awakening”; not being awakened to the source of the mind is not ultimate awakening (T32:1666.576b11-18).

When the text says that “non-awakening exists on the basis of original awakening”, this is another expression for the “inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood”. “Original awakening” constitutes the reality that sustains falsehood or “non-awakening”; this falsehood, in turn, manifests the reality that grounds it in its role as inverse instructiveness. Such falsehood or non-awakening constantly points back to reality or original awakening, and so implies that there must be an initial awakening which will accomplish the ultimate awakening after it has restored or become equal to the original nature of mind, that is, original awakening. The original nature of mind is thus what sustains the whole process of transformation from the non-awakened into the awakened state of mind. This passage simply explains that transformation as the restoration of our mind’s original nature is based on the paradigm of the “inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood”.

4 Truth and falsehood according to the Yogācāra doctrine of mind

This section discusses truth and falsehood as they are viewed according to the Yogācāra concept of mind in Asaṅga's *Compendium of the Great Vehicle* (*Mahāyānaśāstra*, *She dasheng lun* 攝大乘論) which centers on the doctrine of *ālaya*-consciousness. This scripture is extant in Chinese and Tibetan. In the sixth century, Paramārtha's (Zhendi 真諦, 499-569) translation of this treatise (T1593), along with the commentary by Vasubandhu (T1595), had a major influence on the doctrinal development of Chinese Buddhist thought. In addition to this and Buddhaśānta's translation of that time (T1592), there is also Xuanzang's (玄奘, 602-664) version (T1594), produced almost one century later; in addition, Xuanzang also retranslated the commentary of Vasubandhu (T1597),³¹ and another by *Asvabhāva (T1598). Modern scholarship does not regard all of Paramārtha's explanations and the views transmitted in the commentaries of his disciples (known as the the Shelun 攝論 masters, after the Chinese title of the *Compendium*) as identical with Asaṅga's interpretation of the text.³²

The term *ālaya*-consciousness, as is discussed in the *Compendium of the Great Vehicle*, obviously does not imply the notion of a pure mind, constituting reality/truth, and at the same time sustaining worldly falsehood. However, seen from the viewpoint of the Yogācāra conception of transformation, the *ālaya*-consciousness is a crucial link in the process of transforming our deluded mind into a state of true wisdom and realizing

³¹ A third Chinese "translation" of Vasubandhu's commentary is also extant, T1596, ascribed to Gupta (笈多, ?-619) and his collaborators under the Sui.

³² Paramārtha's translation of Vasubandhu's commentary includes interpolated portions expressing his own point of view. Those referred to as the "Shelun shi" (= masters commenting on the *Compendium*) in the ancient sources deal with Paramārtha's but not with Buddhaśānta's translation. The only extant source by one of Paramārtha's direct disciples is Huikai's (慧愷, d.u.) introduction to the *Compendium*. However, there exist later Chinese commentaries composed, for example, by Daoji (道基, 577-637), and Fahu (法護, d.u.), who were recognized as Shelun shi in the sense that they are Paramārtha's indirect disciples in the fourth generation.

the realm of liberation. In this sense, it also has to do with the relationship of the two aspects of reality/truth and falsehood.

Ālaya-consciousness, according to the second chapter of the *Compendium*, refers to a subtle or deeper level of our consciousness, which evades the surface level of our conventional, ordinary, or everyday awareness. Moreover, it is the receptacle of all of our impressions and “habitual forces” (*xiqi* 習氣, *vāsanā*),³³ which shape the way we act, speak, think, and feel, as well as the way we perceive, respond to and build up the world in which we live. Another related term is that of “defiled seeds” (*zaran zhongzi* 雜染種子). In a metaphorical sense, the *ālaya*-consciousness is like a storehouse where those impressions and habitual forces are collected and stored, like seeds in the ground, until all the conditions necessary for their fruition are fulfilled. In this process of ripening, they turn into the fruits that surface on the level of our sensory consciousness, and make up the delusory world of external objects. In addition, our sensory perception, experience, and discrimination of these external but unreal objects are also subject to the same process. Collected and stored as habitual forces, they too undergo the process of ripening, like seeds developing into fruits, and turn into the varying types of sensory consciousness that unfold their cognizing activity on the surface of our conventional awareness. All sensory function and all objects of conventional experience arise from that subtle level of mind. In this sense, *ālaya*-consciousness is called the “ground”, the “storehouse consciousness”, and also “fundamental consciousness”.

In analyzing the surface level of our conventional awareness, *Yogācāra* scriptures, such as the *Jie shen mi jing* (解深密經 T676, *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*), generally enumerate six types of sensory consciousness. These are specified as the five sense-organs and, sixth, “intentional consciousness”, which performs the function of “discrimination” as soon as at least one of the other five is activated. To be present as a particular object means for us that some item or component of our sensory environment comes into sharp focus for our awareness; identified as a cer-

³³ Chinese *xiqi*, which equates to Sanskrit *vāsanā*, is often translated as “impressions”; however the contexts in which it occurs often imply the continuous influences of those impressions and their significance as a habitual force.

tain single thing, it overshadows other things also belonging to its immediate environment. This selection and concentration on the part of our awareness consists of an intentional act of discrimination ascribed to this sixth sense (T16:676.692b20-28). Its function is inseparable from that of the other five, though distinguishable from them; however, all six of these senses are fruits that arise on the surface level of our mind from its more subtle levels.

The *Compendium* designates the *ālaya*-consciousness as the cause which gives rise to both our sensory capacities and to the world of external objects disclosed by the senses. As that which is capable of resuming the influential or habitual forces from such sensory functioning, this same *ālaya*-consciousness is then in addition called “fruit”, or result. This is because its content consists of those impressions which, in a metaphorical sense, it collects and stores like seeds in the ground. In other words, there is a dynamic or interactive relationship between the two levels: The subtle level gives rise to the surface level of our sensory manifold, and the habitual forces of that fruition, in turn, “fumigate” (*xunxi* 熏習) or permeate the subtle level, which is receptive to all impressions. This model of mutual conditioning seems to constitute a circular system of self-perpetuating unreality, which also fits the image of *saṃsāra* – the defiled and self-perpetuating world in which we live. Hence, *ālaya*-consciousness also accounts for the continuous and unceasing process whereby things arise and cease. Moreover, *ālaya*-consciousness is also considered the principle which sets up the life of sentient beings.

The external world, as it is presented to our sensory capacities, is called “defiled” or deceptive, because its unreality and emptiness evades our sensory awareness. Things are mistaken as real entities belonging to an external and independent world; hence, the unreality with which the sensory realm is shot through is beclouded on that level of awareness. Moreover, not only are the external objects of our perceptions illusory and deceptive; the perceiving subject, believed to be the “self” sustaining our sensory functioning, is so, too. The falsehood of this self, which also evades our awareness, represents a source of defilements or deception even deeper than the world of external objects. Chinese Yogācāra scriptures, such as the *Compendium*, often refer to this false self as “defiled intentionality” (*ranwuyi* 染污意, *kliṣṭamanas*). It designates a level of

consciousness which clings onto an illusive self, taking the continuous functioning of the *ālaya*-consciousness as the object of its clinging.³⁴ Though it is the ground of the defiled or deceptive realm that we experience as the world we inhabit, *ālaya*-consciousness does not constitute subjectivity in the sense of a persistent or real self. Our false assumption of a self or subject sustaining our experiences of arising and cessation results from the habitual influences of “defiled intentionality”. Moreover, defiled intentionality is also involved in all delusions related to both selfhood and selfishness.

In many Yogācāra scriptures transmitted in the Chinese tradition, the concept of mind and consciousness is often discussed in terms of three successive levels: 1) Chinese *xin* (心, *citta*), translated as “mind”, represents the level that collects and stores, that is to say, is receptive to the impressions and habitual forces of the other levels and gives rise to them; 2) Chinese *yi* (意, *manas*) constitutes “defiled intentionality”, which constructs selfhood and selfishness; and 3) Chinese *shi* (識, *vijñāna*) refers to the sensory functioning of our conventional awareness.³⁵ Furthermore, perceived objects as well as the perceiving subject or self, both of which make up the world experienced and disclosed through the senses, are nothing but an illusory projection arising from the *ālaya*-consciousness. Given the unreality that permeates our sensory functions, the world, as we experience it, amounts to nothing more than “mere consciousness” or “mere imagination” (*weishi* 唯識, *vijñaptimātra/vijñānamātra*). Viewed from this standpoint, there in fact exists only the projecting activity of self-perpetuating unreality, of which we are unaware on the sensory level.³⁶

³⁴ The Chinese term *ranwuyi* corresponds to the Sanskrit *kliṣṭaṃ manas*; my English translation follows the Chinese of Xuanzang.

³⁵ This scheme is mentioned in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, the *Cheng weishi lun* and many other scriptures. However, its implications often differ in these respective contexts.

³⁶ The Chinese expression literally means “mere consciousness” and corresponds to the Sanskrit *vijñapti-mātra* which signifies “mere imagination”; others translate it as “mere representation”.

In addition to “*ālaya*-consciousness”, the *Compendium* also uses other terms, dependent upon the aspect of the subtle level of our mind and consciousness to which the respective characterization refers. In virtue of its receptiveness to both defiled and pure forces, that mind stores the seeds of our future positive and negative karmic retribution. Defiled seeds are divided into good, evil, or neutral qualities. From the perspective of our transformation, this receptive capacity itself is neutral and unobstructive (*wufu wuji* 無覆無記) to the sacred path (*āryamārga*, *shengdao* 聖道), and hence it is called “consciousness as result of differing maturation”.³⁷ The Chinese term used by Xuanzang stresses that the “result of karmic maturation” (*yishuguo* 異熟果) differs from its causes, even though the two correspond to each other. Evil karma, for instance, precipitates (*gan* 感) a sorrowful existence, but this existence itself is neither evil nor good, otherwise our future states of existence could never change to become blissful (in other words, if the results of karmic maturation were always of the same type as their causes, we would be doomed to suffer forever). The last section in the second chapter of the *Compendium* explains:

Why are good and evil *dharma*(s) capable of precipitating (*gan* 感) maturation that differs [in kind from the *dharma*s themselves, as cause] (*yishu*)? [Why is] the “otherwise [i.e. differently] maturing result” (*yishuguo*) neutral, and without obstruction [for the sacred path]? Because the result of differing maturation is neutral and without obstruction, it contradicts neither the good nor the evil, whereas good and evil are contradictory with one another. If the result of differing maturation were good or evil by nature, the extinction of defilements could not be completed. Therefore, consciousness as result of differing maturation [*yishuguoshi* = *ālaya*-consciousness] is only neutral and without obstruction (T31:1594.137c14-18).

³⁷ The Chinese terms for the Sanskrit *vipāka-vijñāna* mentioned in the compendium are *yishushi* 異熟識 and *yishuguoshi* 異熟果識; Schmithausen translates *vipāka-vijñāna* as the “subliminal mind as the result of karmic maturation” (Schmithausen, 1987: 372, n. 580). The Sanskrit term for the Chinese *wufu wuji* (無覆無記) is *anivṛtāvyaḅkrta*.

In other words, if *ālaya*-consciousness were not thus karmically neutral, it would unceasingly continue to produce either negative or positive karmic retribution. Defiled consciousness could not be turned into pure wisdom, nor could our world of suffering be transformed into the realm of liberation. Equally, the Buddha would never have experienced the transformation from a non-awakened into an awakened being. Again, this means that the receptive function of subtle mind itself is always neutral, even while the defiled seeds contained by it differ in terms of “moral” quality. From the viewpoint of their function, then, mind and seeds can and must be distinguished, even though in fact, they are not really separate entities. The *Compendium* describes their dynamic functioning in terms of interdependent causation (*genghu wei yin* 更互為因). This is similar to the way pieces of bamboo set in an upright bundle support one another, so that the whole bundle does not fall over; or, more dynamically, like the mutual interdependence, in the burning of a lamp, between the flame that continues to come into being, and the candle wick that gradually disappears to make the flame possible.³⁸

The functions and patterns of activity ascribed to the *ālaya*-consciousness are expounded from the soteriological point of view; this implies a concept of transformation, by which deluded sensory consciousness turns into true wisdom. The model of this transformation envisioned by the Yogācāra masters emphasizes that this turn or shift concerns the tendency or quality of the “fumigating” (influential) forces (*xunxi* 熏習). The negative forces or defiled seeds must be diminished by increasing the positive or pure seeds, because the quality of fruition generated by the *ālaya*-consciousness corresponds to and depends upon the quality of the forces to which this receptive level of consciousness has been exposed. However, how can such a shift in quality be accomplished, if the *ālaya*-consciousness has been generating defiled fruition for all time, and thus is constantly exposed to nothing but the negative tendencies of these influential forces? In other words, how can this self-perpetuating

³⁸ The *Compendium* uses many images and illustrations to discuss the interdependent causation between these aspects of the functioning of the subtle level of mind (T31: 1594.134c11-20).

circle of unreality and unwholesome existence be deconstructed and replaced with true wisdom and liberation?³⁹ The *Compendium* explains:

If...consciousness as result of differing maturation is the cause for all defiled *dharmas*), how can it also serve as the seed for the pure mind, [which is] beyond worldliness and capable of healing all defilements? Again, if the mind beyond worldliness has never been cultivated, those habitual forces certainly would not exist. Since there are [then] no habitual forces, from where does [the mind beyond worldliness] arise? Therefore, we respond: It arises from the seeds and influential forces of correct listening [to the Dharma], which stem [“flow”] directly from (*dengliu* 等流, **niṣyanda*) the clearest and purest *dharmarealm* (T31:1594.136b29-c4).

It is listening to the Buddha-*dharmas* that generates the seeds and habitual tendencies based upon which the purified mind gradually evolves. The text proceeds to explain the heterogeneity between those pure seeds and the nature of *ālaya*-consciousness: the seeds merely reside in *ālaya*-consciousness, without really merging into it. Conjoined in mutually conditioning function and operation, the two poles of this relation, seeds and *ālaya*-consciousness, are described as differing from one another like the two constituents in a mixture of milk and water (T31:1594.136c8-11). However, the pure seeds impede the further collection and storage of defiled seeds, and thus exert a healing effect upon the *ālaya*-consciousness, and induce a qualitative transformation in the nature whereby it sustains our world. The increase of the pure seeds thanks to the “habitual forces of correct listening” entails the decrease of the defiled seeds. This gradually terminates the functioning of “consciousness as result of differing maturation”, since that consciousness ceases to function as the cause of all arising defilements.⁴⁰ With the ultimate disappearance of the defiled seeds, the qualitative change of the root of the

³⁹ See also the crucial passage discussing this question in the *Compendium*, T31:1594.136b29-c11.

⁴⁰ “Consciousness as result of differing maturation” gradually decreases until all defiled *dharmas* disappear, that is, it ceases to function as the cause for the defiled *dharmas*), and dissociates from further rebirth (T31:1594.136c22-25, T31:1594.137a4-5).

life of sentient beings is completed, and no further life of suffering arises from the defiled *ālaya*-consciousness; instead, the realm of the existence of sentient beings is now sustained by pure and true wisdom.

This concept of transformation, which is also called “turning deluded consciousness into true wisdom”, implies the replacement of the defiled with the pure seeds. The *Compendium* uses various terms to expose the complexity of the subtle mind, which not only sustains our unreal world but also undergoes this purifying transformation. The terminology seems to differ in accordance with the varying features characteristic of the respective part of the whole process. We encounter such terms as “fundamental consciousness”, “consciousness of all [defiled] seeds”, “consciousness as result of differing maturation” (also referred to as the cause of all defilements), and “*ālaya*-consciousness”, which stresses the function of appropriation and storing; yet the distinctions between these expressions are not always clear or consistent.

However, all of these terms point to the essential role of the consciousness in question, as it is named in the title of this second chapter of the *Compendium*, as “the ground of what is known” (*suozhiyi* 所知依, **jñeyāśraya*). The whole process of purification culminates in “transforming the ground” (*zhuanyi* 轉依, *āśrayaparāvṛtti/āśrayaparivṛtti*), but this does not mean that there is no ground any more after the defiled seeds has been replaced with pure seeds. Despite the fact that it undergoes this purifying transformation, the nature of this consciousness whereby it is a ground does not really change. Both purified wisdom and defiled consciousness arise from the ground qualified by the seeds each respectively contains.

This makes it somewhat difficult to determine whether or not the *ālaya*-consciousness is held to continue to “exist” after the transformation of the ground. In characterizing the process of transforming the ground(s), the scripture sometimes hints at the limitations of using a certain term denoting a specific function or feature of mind, such as “consciousness as result of differing maturation”. However, the text mentions no explicit restriction with regard to the use of the term “*ālaya*-consciousness”. This could mean that the ground it denotes may also include its mode of transformation, because that transformation, radical though it may be, nonetheless does not really affect the basic nature of that con-

sciousness whereby it is a ground. This is indeed a contentious question; however, it could be misleading to say that *ālaya*-consciousness completely ceases to exist after the transformation of the ground, as this would imply discontinuity.

According to the *Compendium*, the aforementioned “neutrality and non-obstruction” of the ground(s) that undergoes transformation is a *conditio sine qua non* for this very process of purifying transformation. The nature of the ground(s) simply consist(s) in containing either kind of seeds and giving rise to the corresponding fruition. The pure seeds are generated by correct listening to the teaching, which issues like a stream directly from “the purest and clearest [*dharmā*-]realm”; and the reality of true wisdom seems to be embodied in this realm, which is not imbued with any of the falsehood arising from the *ālaya*-consciousness. In this sense, reality/truth and falsehood seem to constitute a duality, as they represent two realms which do not mutually permeate or penetrate one another. Yet the existence of sentient beings, as it emerges within the circular system of self-perpetuating unreality, cannot completely be separated from that reality/truth, otherwise correct listening would bear no fruit, and transformation would be impossible. The existence of sentient beings must therefore somehow include the potential for both reality/truth and falsehood. The teaching of the “three natures” represents the Yogācāra attempt to elucidate this potential of/in the existence of sentient beings.

Compared to that of Madhyamaka and Tathāgatagarbha, the Yogācāra interpretation of the relationship between truth and falsehood seems to resort to a more dualistic explanatory pattern. According to the Tathāgatagarbha model, reality/truth sustains falsehood; while the Yogācāra view excludes relationships such as dependency or interfusion between the two terms of the relation. Again, this does not really imply that the negative and positive are completely separated from each other. Based on the teaching of the “three natures” (*trisvabhāva*, *svabhāvatraya*) or “three marks” (*trilakṣaṇa*, *lakṣaṇatraya*), the *Compendium of the Great Vehicle* explains that the negative and positive, though neither interfused nor interdependent, are also not completely separated from each other.

This scripture discusses the concept of *ālaya*-consciousness in conjunction with the doctrine of the “three natures” called “the nature of

other-dependent arising” (*yitaqixing* 依他起性, *paratantrasvabhāva*), “the nature of attachments to what is thoroughly imaginary” (*bianji suozhixing* 遍計所執性, *parikalpitasvabhāva*), and “the nature of perfected reality” (*yuancheng shixing* 圓成實性, *pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*).⁴¹ These “three aspects” characterize the nature of the existence of sentient beings as it arises from the *ālaya*-consciousness. This schema also implies the inseparability of emptiness and unreality. Moreover, the relationship between the “three natures” reflects the Yogācāra view of the relationship between truth/reality and falsehood, or the defiled and pure aspects of the existence of sentient beings. The *Compendium* explains the first “nature” (of other-dependent arising) thus:

This refers to all the various consciousnesses embraced by unreal discrimination (*xuwang fenbie* 虛妄分別), which have the *ālaya*-consciousness as their seeds...In this way, the various consciousnesses [and things perceived by the senses] all fall within the embrace of unreal discrimination; their nature is mere consciousness [= imagination]; they are devoid of [real] existence; they are not intrinsically real and true; [and] they manifest that which they are dependent upon. This is what is called the mark of other-dependent-arising (T31: 1594.137c29-138a11).

The term “mark of other-dependent-arising” thus implies that things are not really what they seem to be, but rather, are mere images or mere consciousness. These things thus point back to what sustains them or sets them up, or manifest that upon what they depend, which is the *ālaya*-consciousness that is receptive to the habituating forces of these images. If the unreality of these things, which is sustained by the “nature of other-dependent-arising”, is not realized, and instead, is confused with reality - that is, if things are seen as real entities inherently existing - then this nature is not pure but veiled or defiled; it appears in the deceptive mode of falsehood called “the nature of attachments to what is thoroughly imaginary”. However, complete awareness of the unreality and emptiness of these apparent things amounts to the realization of the

⁴¹ My English translation of these Chinese expressions follows Xuanzang’s Chinese translation.

true, pure, or undefiled mode called “the nature of perfected reality”. The *Compendium* also explains that these three natures must be distinguished, and yet they are in truth inseparable.

However, the crucial point is that the other-dependent nature cannot itself be viewed as neutral, or neither defiled nor undefiled, since it is not a mode beyond or separate from the other two natures; it appears either in the defiled (deceptive) or in the undefiled/purified mode. Hence, it potentially includes both components – the pure (true) and the defiled (deceptive) (T31:1594.140c7-11). The way in which sentient beings exist in their unreal world that arises from the *ālaya*-consciousness includes the potential for both of these opposites; they are not interfused, and once ripened to fruition, they stand out against each other. The two are opposite and potential modes built into the nature of our existence, which does not extend beyond mere consciousness, and which emerges from the seeds or habitual forces that are collected and stored in the *ālaya*-consciousness.

This key concept accounts for the circle of self-perpetuating unreality in the world of sentient beings. In conjunction with the doctrine of the “three natures”, it also addresses the soteriological conditions of our transformation, implying the potential to develop in the direction of the opposite aspects of truth and falsehood according to which sentient beings variously shape their existence.

5 Truth/reality and falsehood in the Chinese debates on mind

The viewpoint of Huiyuan

In addition to the Chinese *Awakening of Faith*, the earlier Indian *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* also discusses the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in conjunction with the Yogācāra term “*ālaya*-consciousness”. This habit was also adopted by the sixth-century Chinese Dilun masters, who elaborated on the concept of “*ālaya*-consciousness” under the influence of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.

Several decades earlier than Paramārtha’s translation of Asaṅga’s *Compendium*, in 509, Bodhiruci and Ratnamati translated Vasubhandu’s commentary on the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* (Chinese Dilun 地論, whence the name for the eponymous exegetical tradition), and this was the first time

that the term “*ālaya*-consciousness” was transmitted from India to China. Their disciples, who were known as the “Dilun masters”, shaped an exegetical tradition in China which focused on scriptures closely related to Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines. This section discusses the concept of mind according to Huiyuan, known as a third generation Dilun master; and Zhiyi, the principal founder of the Tiantai school, who criticized the Dilun viewpoint.

Several sources indicate that the Dilun masters split into two groups, called the “Southern” and “Northern Way” (*beidao* 北道, *nandao* 南道), and that their differences probably had to do with differing interpretations regarding the concept of “*ālaya*-consciousness”. According to the account of the ninth Tiantai Patriarch Jingxi Zhanran (荆溪湛然, 711-782), one of the contentious points that they debated was the question of whether the *ālaya*-consciousness is constituted of both reality and purity, and is identical with the pure mind (Southern Way), or whether it comprises exclusively falsehood, and is a mind of defilements giving rise to the unreal world of sentient beings (Northern Way).

As Mou Zongsan (牟宗三) points out, it is very likely that this controversial question results from the ambiguous nature of occasional remarks about the meaning of *ālaya*-consciousness in the **Daśabhūmika-sūtra-śāstra*. Mou further claims that the author of the **Daśabhūmika-sūtra-śāstra*, Vasubandhu, must have written the text during the early period of his career, when his understanding of Yogācāra concepts still lacked systematic consistency, and was immature, i.e. not as fully developed as in his later works (Mou, 1981: 277).⁴² Vasubandhu’s commentary apparently does not provide a consistent view of *ālaya*-consciousness, nor is it a crucial term in this scripture, being mentioned only occasionally - even though it became a key concept in the Chinese exegetical traditions based upon the text. This is why Mou considers the question of whether the split of the Dilun masters took place on account

⁴² Mou mentions that Vasubandhu uses the term “mind of intrinsic purity and clarity” very rarely and only in his *Daśabhūmika* commentary; he never combines it with the expression *tathāgatāgarbha*; in his other works, *ālaya*-consciousness is never linked with the pure mind and *tathāgatagarbha*.

of this inconsistency; at least some of the ancient records, like that of Zhanran, seem to support Mou's interpretation.

In Buddhist debates on "mind and consciousness" in sixth-century China, the Dilun and the Shelun masters agreed in assuming that the mind was fundamentally pure, even though they obviously defended contrary positions regarding the interpretation of the concept of *ālaya*-consciousness. On the other hand, the notion of a pure mind was also criticized by those who defended Madhyamaka views based on Kumārajīva's translations, and developed the teachings of the early Chinese Buddhist schools of the Sanlun and Tiantai. These critics developed their own views about the issue of mind, and often framed their views as criticisms of the Dilun and Shelun masters. In contrast to this again, the Huayan masters, at the beginning of the Tang, adopted and further developed the way the idea of pure mind had been previously expounded by the Dilun masters. Another of their sources in this endeavor was the *Awakening of Faith*, which modern scholarship generally agrees must have been composed by authors closely related with the Dilun and Shelun exegetical traditions.

As previously mentioned, the *Awakening of Faith* combines the doctrine of the fundamental purity of mind with the Yogācāra doctrine of *ālaya*-consciousness. However, unlike the *Compendium*, this text considers the pure mind and not the *ālaya*-consciousness as fundamental; the pure mind is devoid of arising and cessation, and the *ālaya*-consciousness gives rise to the modification into the defiled "gateway of arising and cessation". Many of the functions ascribed to the *ālaya*-consciousness in the *Compendium* are attributed to the other levels of mind in the *Awakening of Faith*; moreover, this scripture does not mention the expression "defiled intentionality" (*ranwuyi, kliṣṭamanas*).

Huiyuan seems to be partly influenced by the *Awakening of Faith*,⁴³ but when he explicates his concept of mind and consciousness in his famous *Treatise on the Meaning of the Great Vehicle* (*Dasheng yi zhang* 大乘義章), he also quotes from and refers to the *Compendium*.⁴⁴ Though he also adopts

⁴³ On this question, see the paper by Keng in this volume – ed.

⁴⁴ For the development of Huiyuan's works see Liao, 1999: 27-37.

and modifies the three-level scheme of mind and consciousness, which is variously expounded in the *Awakening of Faith* and the *Compendium*, his interpretation of *ālaya*-consciousness obviously follows the viewpoint of the Southern Way, identifying it with pure mind and *tathāgatagarbha*.

Quoting the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (T44:1851.524b26-27),⁴⁵ Huiyuan distinguishes eight aspects of consciousness divided into three levels (T44:1851.525a1-8): first, the eighth aspect, viz. the *ālaya*-consciousness, which is identical with pure mind; second, the seventh aspect, viz. *ādāna*-consciousness, which is the source of falsehood and similar to “defiled intentionality”;⁴⁶ and, third, the six sensory aspects of consciousness (T44:1851.524b29-c3). Moreover, in the section about mind and consciousness in his *Treatise*, he also lists eight alternative designations for the *ālaya*-consciousness, all of which emphasize its purity and the sense of its reality and truth, or the fact that it is the root or sustaining ground, and the storehouse of all accomplishments (T44:1851.524c18-525a1); whereas the eight alternative names for the *ādāna*-consciousness point rather to a complex range of features and functions of falsehood (T44:1851.524c7-18). Alternatively, in other sections of his *Treatise*, Huiyuan also discusses the three-level scheme of mind and consciousness in terms of “consciousness of reality/truth” or “true consciousness” (*zhenshi* 真識), “consciousness [full of] falsehood” (*wangshi* 妄識), and “consciousness of particular things” (*shishi* 事識) (T44:1851.568a26-28, 686b8-10, 718b17-18, 815c16-29).

In these discussions, Huiyuan emphasizes the significance of the “inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood”.⁴⁷ Although he uses many

⁴⁵ The phrase quoted is used to confirm that the aspects of consciousness are eight in number, and comes from Guṇabhadra’s (求那跋陀羅, 394–468) translation of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (T16:670.496a21-22). However, the *sūtra*-passage does not really mention the eight types that appear in Huiyuan’s list.

⁴⁶ Huiyuan’s understanding of the *ādāna*-consciousness (T44:1851.524c7-18, 528c7-9) differs from that of the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* (T16:676.692b14-16, b18-19, c4-6).

⁴⁷ The way in which Huiyuan conceives of inseparability seems to imply that ontological and epistemological issues coincide. Truth and falsehood as correlative opposites are mutually constitutive and inter-referential. This inseparability, in an epistemological sense, implies that falsehood manifests truth as an inverse form of instructiveness, that is, our understanding of and insight into truth requires and includes the experi-

technical expressions from the Yogācāra tradition, his understanding obviously differs from that tradition, and essentially represents the *tathāgatagarbha* scheme of the pure mind and the inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood. The following passage may exemplify this:

It is as the *Compendium of the Great Vehicle* says: first, [there is] the fundamental consciousness; second, the *ādāna*-consciousness; third, the six operative types of sensory consciousness. These three are like the differentiation that has been previously used with regard to the nature of being dependent on others.⁴⁸ Because falsehood embraces truth/reality, truth/reality develops in accord with falsehood, and, in conjunction (*gong* 共), [the two] constitute sentient beings. Within this conjunction (*gong*), the mind of true consciousness, imbued with the negative karmic habituation that [has existed from] beginningless time, generates the “ground” [or “stage”] of ignorance (*wumingdi* 無明地); but the ignorance so generated [in reality] never departs from the mind of truth/reality; in conjunction, they comprise the root of

ence of falsehood. Moreover, the way we relate to and shape the world we inhabit correlates with the degree to which we realize such an understanding and insight. This means, in an ontological sense, that falsehood is a significant feature of that reality which constitutes the way we exist in our world. Hence, from this ontological point of view, reality and falsehood are also inseparable. The epistemological sense of inseparability coincides with the ontological sense, because both the present world and the way we exist in it are dependent upon our epistemic stance in relation to it. I use the term “inseparability of truth/reality and falseness” to indicate this coincidence of ontological and epistemological issues.

⁴⁸ Trying to specify inseparability and differentiation (*bu yi bu yi* 不異不一) between truth and falsehood in a more elaborated way, Huiyuan also classifies the three levels of consciousness in reference to the Yogācāra concept of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*) (T44:1851.528a9-529c6). His terminology relies on Paramārtha’s translation: “nature of false discriminations” (*fenbie xing* 分別性) corresponds to Xuanzang’s “nature of attachments to what is thoroughly imaginary”; the second and third natures, “nature of being dependent on others” (*yita xing* 依他性) and “nature of truth and reality” (*zhenshi xing* 真實性) do not differ much from Xuanzang’s translation. The core of Huiyuan’s discussion could be summarized as follows: “nature of false discriminations” implies “consciousness full of falsehood” and “consciousness of particular things”; “nature of being dependent on others” embraces “fundamental consciousness”, “*ādāna*-consciousness”, and “the six types of sensory consciousness”; “nature of truth and reality” means “consciousness of reality/truth” (T44:1851.529a7-16).

the spirit (*shenben* 神本), which is called fundamental consciousness (*benshi* 本識, **mūlavijñāna*), which is also called “*ālaya*-consciousness”. Therefore the *Awakening of Faith* explains: “*Tathāgata*garbha is a *dharma* beyond arising and cessation, which, in conjunction (*he* 合) with arising and cessation, is called ‘*ālaya*-consciousness’.”⁴⁹ Permeated by the false view that there is a self [which has existed] from beginningless time, this *ālaya*-consciousness constitutes the seeds of self. On account of the influential force of these seeds, the mind of [the] *ādāna*[-consciousness], which clings onto the self, emerges. Based on this [false] mark of a self, the view [that there is] a self, the conceit of self, and self-love arise. What [then] can be taken to be this self? Based on that fundamental consciousness, a transformation [takes place which] produces the body comprising the [physical and mental traits] of the five aggregates; [sentient beings] are not aware of the fact that this [self] does not [really] exist, and, instead, cling onto it as if it were a [real] self. Again, this fundamental consciousness, because it is permeated from beginningless time by the names of the six sensory consciousnesses, [their respective] sense-organs, and [their respective] objects, constitutes the seeds of those [consciousnesses, sense-organs and sense-objects]; and due to the force of those seeds, [it is] transformed [so that] the six operative consciousnesses, the six sense-organs, and the six sense-objects arise (T44:1851.529c9-21).

Though this passage uses patterns of explanation rooted in the Yogācāra tradition, it clearly stresses the *tathāgata*garbha concept of a true and fundamental mind. This also implies the inseparability of reality/truth and falsehood. On these points, Huiyuan’s view actually differs from the viewpoints of the *Compendium*. Liao Minghuo claims that Huiyuan’s remarks on the *ālaya*-consciousness are not consistent, as this concept seems to be understood in terms of the “pure mind”, but also, as described in the passage quoted above, in terms of the fundamental consciousness implying falsehood. Hence, Liao distinguishes between two different threefold schemes, according to which Huiyuan discusses two different versions of mind and consciousness which are not exactly con-

⁴⁹ See the *Awakening of Faith* (T32:1666.576b6).

sistent with one another. Liao thinks that Huiyuan's inconsistency has to do with the fact that he alternates between resorting to Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha* sources to develop his views (Liao, 1999: 63).

However, as I explained above, the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the "pure mind" implies the "inseparability of truth/reality and falsehood". "Purity by nature", that is, "intrinsic purity" does not really exclude "inseparability". When he interprets the *ālaya*-consciousness in the sense of the pure mind, Huiyuan realizes this, and therefore takes into account the mind's relationship to the aspects of both reality/truth and falsehood. Hence, his exposition is not really inconsistent, just because the way he explains *ālaya*-consciousness varies. His exposition merely indicates that it is necessary for him to adopt various or different viewpoints in the course of his deliberations. The fundamental or sustaining aspect of the mind must be seen in combination with the functions whereby it becomes manifest, which means that it must be seen in terms of inseparability of reality/truth and falsehood.

Huiyuan further specifies how he understands the meaning of the "inseparability of reality/truth and falsehood". He discusses the above-mentioned threefold scheme of the "consciousness of truth/reality, consciousness full of falsehood, and consciousness of particular things" (*zhenshi*, *wangshi*, *shishi*) from multiple points of view, and includes in his deliberations such issues as "dependency and sustaining" (*yichi* 依持) and "root and branch" (*benmo* 本末). However, Huiyuan's discussion of these points does not really go beyond the idea of *tathāgatagarbha*; nor does it bring to light any essentially new thought. It simply testifies to his attempt to reconcile or harmonize the *tathāgatagarbha* concept of a pure mind, on the one hand, with the Yogācāra doctrine of the *ālaya*-consciousness that constitutes the circle of self-perpetuating unreality, on the other. Huiyuan's threefold model of consciousness interprets the conjunction of reality/truth and falsehood in terms of the fundamental mind, which is truth/reality, and yet nonetheless grounds the circle of self-perpetuating unreality.

Thus, when Huiyuan expounds the relationship between reality/truth and falsehood in terms of "dependency and sustaining" or "root and branch", he just reiterates the argument that the "pure mind" implies

the “inseparability of reality/truth and falsehood”. For instance, Huiyuan says:

[Discussion of the] branch (*mo* 末) arising from the root (*ben* 本) can be divided into three parts: 1. Discussing [only] the root and setting aside the branch, meaning that the nature of mind, which is originally pure, through interdependent conditions gives rise to and constitutes the inexhaustible *dharm*a-realm; this is the consciousness of truth/reality (*zhenshi*). 2. The arising of the branch based on the root, meaning mistaking the real for the illusory and considering what does not [really] exist as if it [really] exists; this is the consciousness full of falsehood (*wangshi*). 3. [Once more] the arising of the branch based on the root, which also means mistaking the illusory for the real, and considering unreality as reality; this is the consciousness of particular things (*shishi*) (T44:1851.526a26-29).

This passage emphasizes precisely that the “consciousness of truth/reality” (*zhenshi*) must be discussed in terms of two inseparable yet distinguishable aspects: the nature of intrinsic purity beyond falsehood, and the falsehood which it sets up and sustains. This is important, because we cannot avoid falsehood when discussing that truth/reality. The first aspect, which is called the “root” (*ben*) represents the viewpoint of the “sustaining ground”; and the second, which is referred to as the “branch” (*mo*), accounts for that which is “dependent” upon this root. The “consciousness full of falsehood” (*wangshi*), which corresponds in Huiyuan’s understanding to the *ādāna*-consciousness, confuses the reality of that sustaining ground with the illusory self, while the “consciousness of particular things” (*shishi*) mistakes the unreal apparitions of external objects on the level of our sensory awareness for real things. Similarly, the relationship between reality and falsehood in terms of “depending and sustaining” (*yichi*) means both that reality sustains falsehood, and that falsehood is dependent upon reality, which just reiterates the point that this reality is inseparable from the unreality dependent upon it (cf. T44:1851.532c17-533b4).

Huiyuan also discusses a threefold scheme of “dependent origination” in a similar way as he deals with the concept of mind and consciousness, and there too, he articulates a notion of “interdependence between

truth/reality and falsehood” (*zhen wang xiang yi* 真妄相依), which is compatible with the relationship of “depending and sustaining” (*yichi*) (T44:1851.551a3-25). Truth/reality, which equals emptiness but not complete non-existence, is dependent upon falsehood only insofar as falsehood manifests emptiness in its role as inverse instructiveness; this is not the same thing as the way that falsehood is dependent upon or rooted in that reality. This anticipates the explanation we already encountered above in Fazang, which holds that the two are inseparable from each other like the water and waves of the ocean.⁵⁰

The Tiantai viewpoint of Zhiyi

In this final part of this section, we will discuss the Tiantai critiques of the Dilun concept of mind, and elucidate Zhiyi’s view regarding the “indivisibility of truth/reality and falsehood”. Unlike Jizang, Zhiyi never explicitly mentions Huiyuan in his critiques; nor does he directly refer to the *Awakening of Faith* in his works. His comments on the Dilun masters are exclusively polemic, and often appear in his discussions about mind and consciousness. He does not explicitly mention the split into the two groups of “Northern” and “Southern Way”; he only states that the Shelun and Dilun masters hold opposing positions concerning the concept of the “sustaining ground”. In what follows, I will explain how Zhiyi presents the views of these two exegetical traditions as he develops his Tiantai doctrine of mind.

In the section “Contemplating the Mind as the Inconceivable Realm” (“*Guan xin jishi busiyi jing*” 觀心即是不思議境) in his *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhi guan* 摩訶止觀), Zhiyi holds, based on his understanding of Madhyamaka thought, that the root of the interdependent arising of all things cannot simply be reduced to the sustaining function of a pure mind devoid of falsehood, but nor can the source of all things be viewed as solely constituted by the *ālaya*-consciousness that sustains self-perpetuating falsehood without including the realm of purity (T46:

⁵⁰ See above n. 1.

1911.54a23-b8).⁵¹ He claims that the Dilun masters nevertheless adhere to the first view, and the Shelun masters defend the second. Moreover, the Dilun view that the pure mind is the ground amounts to saying that the “[true] nature of all *dharma*(s)” (*faxing* 法性, **dharmatā*) sustains all things, while the Shelun position, that the ground is the *ālaya*-consciousness, equals the view that “ignorance” (*wuming* 無明, **avidyā*) is the source from which everything arises.⁵² Zhiyi presents the two in such a way that they deny and exclude each other.

Quoting the *Zhong lun*, Zhiyi emphasizes that these mutually exclusive ways of discussing the source of all things imply the same type of fallacy: Given that they deny each other, *dharma*-nature and ignorance are correlative opposites, no one of which can be regarded as the ultimate source of all *dharma*(s) apart from the other. The fact that we cling to either one while excluding the other prevents us from seeing the “inconceivable realm” (*busiyi jing* 不思議境), which is devoid of all reifications. *Dharma*-nature, that is, the true nature of all things, in which they are equally empty and unreal, does not reach beyond the ignorance which is the source of that unreality. Conversely, such ignorance cannot be separated from the nature of things, in which they truly are empty, which sustains the interdependent arising of all unreal things. Briefly, *dharma*-nature and ignorance are indivisible, and the same also applies to truth/reality and falsehood. Only if we understand that *dharma*-nature and ignorance are indivisible can we realize insight into the “inconceivable realm”. This means that when we see all things in each single thing, we really are aware of the falsehood of everything we see, and are thus capable of responding to all contingency in the most salutary possible way. It is the Tiantai contemplation of the “perfect/round teaching” (*yuanjiao* 圓教) that accomplishes the “inconceivable realm”. According to Zhiyi, the Dilun and the Shelun expositions, by contrast, do not realize this crucial point, and thus cannot achieve or enact the ultimate or in-

⁵¹ For a translation of this passage, see Kantor 2009: 334.

⁵² Zhiyi regards the terms *ālaya*-consciousness and ignorance as synonymous: see *Mohe zhi guan* (T46:1911.54a23-b8) and *Fahua xuan yi* 法華玄義 (T33:1716.699c15-16). Similarly, the section in the *Mohe zhi guan* criticizing the Dilun view seems to consider the term “*dharma*-nature” as equivalent to the “pure mind”.

conceivable realm. Thus, so long as they are presented as mutually exclusive opposites, the two views are prey to the same type of fallacy.

This is not to say that Zhiyi denies the relevance of the concept of mind in his vision of soteriological transformation. However, like Jizang, he denies the reality of what is signified by the name “mind”.⁵³ Though he denies the existence of a real mind, he points out that we cannot deny the existential relevance of this false view, as it ineradicably shapes the way we perceive and think of ourselves and our world. We cannot avoid thinking that all things that concern our life, existence, and awareness are comprehended, understood, and judged by an entity that we believe to be our real mind. He therefore holds that, in our practice of contemplation and introspection, the “false/provisional mind” may provide a point of departure for the realization of the full awareness of that falsehood which constantly pervades the way we relate to our world. Zhiyi’s “Contemplating the Mind as the Inconceivable Realm” examines and uses “mind” as a provisional means or useful fiction, by means of which we can reveal the persistent falsehood that would otherwise evade our conventional awareness like a blind spot.

Zhiyi calls the skillful and wholesome way of contemplating “mind” “the threefold contemplation” (*san guan* 三觀). The first mode of this contemplation, which is called “contemplation of emptiness” (*kong guan* 空觀), realizes truth/reality by deconstructing the falsehood of all linguistic expression(s). This nullifies all reifications, but overlooks the instructiveness of that falsehood. Hence, the second mode of contemplation, in opposition to the first, is called “contemplation of the false/provisional” (*jia guan* 假觀), and terminates the previous and one-sided devaluation of falsehood, realizing instead its ambiguous and instructive

⁵³ See Jizang’s argument in his commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra*: “Why is it called the inverted mind? Because no mind can be found if we investigate it with respect to the three temporal marks [consisting of the past, the present, and the future]; yet according to the viewpoint of sentient beings, the mind does exist. However, this is just an ascription of existence to something that does not [really] exist; therefore it is called inversion” (T33:1699.120b12-13). Similarly, Zhiyi comments on the *Golden Light Sūtra* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottama*): “Mind arises from conditions, therefore it is empty. Since we only say that mind exists in a forced sense, it is provisional/false. This does not extend beyond the [true] nature of all *dharma*(s), therefore it is the middle” (T39:1783.8a1-4).

side. The Chinese *jia*, which I have translated as “false/provisional”, mirrors this ambiguity, since it means both “false” and “to borrow [as a skillful means]”. However, these first two modes are correlative opposites, and hence do not embody the inconceivable realm, nor do they completely realize the indivisibility of *dharma*-nature and ignorance. For this reason, the third mode of contemplation, called “contemplating the middle way” (*zhongdao guan* 中道觀), goes beyond both the emptiness that terminates or nullifies falsehood, and the provisional that reifies false names. Its primary focus is the “real mark” (*shixiang* 實相), because the middle way sees the fallacy and limitations in the notion of the first two contemplations and their contents as mutually exclusive, and thus goes beyond both. Even so, it too still does not truly realize the indivisibility between truth/reality and falsehood, or *dharma*-nature and ignorance.

The ultimate step thus consists of realizing that emptiness and the provisional are equally relevant, since each restricts and complements the other. It is this reciprocal relationship that is called the “middle way”; that is to say, the understanding that emptiness and the provisional are *opposite* modes that nevertheless *include* each other. Each of the three terms in this schema – emptiness, the provisional, and the middle – simultaneously incorporates and reveals all three. To realize this dynamic is to contemplate mental activity on the ultimate level, and this is what is called the “threefold contemplation”. It contemplates the nature of the mind as inverse instructiveness, that is, it achieves insight into the indivisibility of truth/reality and falsehood, and realizes the inconceivable realm in the sense of seeing all things in each single thing that we see. The ambiguous Chinese expression “one-moment-thought [as/and/in/of] three-thousand-worlds” (*yi nian sanqian* 一念三千) is the epitome of this insight. It denotes exactly the utmost skill in responding dynamically to all kinds of contingency as we contemplate the “provisional/false, empty, and middle” mind.

To find support in canonical sources for this understanding of mind or mental activity, Zhiyi uses the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* and also resorts, according to Zhanran’s commentary, to Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa* (T46:1912.318c10-14); he does not, by contrast, rely on Yogācāra or *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures. For Huiyuan and others, pure mind in the sense of

the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and *ālaya*-consciousness according to the Yogācāra teaching, represent a Mahāyāna insight into the nature of mind, which is superior to that of the Small Vehicle Buddhists who lack those terms. In his threefold contemplation, however, Zhiyi simply addresses the sixth consciousness of intentionality, as is evident from the discussions in the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46:1911.63c23-64a4) and Zhanran's commentary (T46:1912.318c10-14). This aspect of consciousness, he argues in a pragmatic way, is always accessible to those who are ready to cultivate mind-contemplation, because it certainly operates in each moment of their awareness, and is present as long as the five aggregates arise (T46:1911.52a24-b1). The basis or starting point of his argument is the passage in Buddhahadra's translation of the *Avataṃsaka* that states that there is no essential difference between Buddha (truth, reality), sentient beings (falsehood), and mind, and that all things are modifications arising from our mind.⁵⁴ Each single moment of our mental activity and awareness contains the potential to transform itself into any of the existential possibilities implicit in the "tenfold *dharma*-realm" (*shi fajie* 十法界), which embraces the whole range of all beings, from those dwelling on the lowest stage of ignorance up to the highest Buddha-wisdom.

Unlike Huiyuan's view, which stresses that truth/reality sustains falsehood and that falsehood is dependent upon truth/reality, the Tiantai concept of indivisibility thus implies the mutual inclusion of both sides; truth/reality and falsehood are completely interfused. In the dynamic performance of the "threefold contemplation within/of/qua one-instant-of-mental-activity" (*yi xin san guan* 一心三观), mind recognizes itself as the source of all delusions and falsehood, and at the same time, thereby realizes that this same delusion is precisely identical to the true potential for our transformation. This is regarded as the ultimate skill in dealing with all types of contingency in a soteriologically salutary manner. Achieving the insight that this ambiguity or ontological indeterminacy of mental activity is irreducible – that it is neither mere falsehood nor mere reality/truth – is precisely what is referred to, in the title of

⁵⁴ See T9:278.465c29-466a1 and Zhiyi's reference to it in the *Mohe zhi guan*, T46:1911.52c7-9.

Zhiyi’s work, as “mental activity contemplated as the inconceivable realm”.

6 Conclusion: The Buddhist constructivist approach to the sense of reality

The conceptual context in which Buddhists discuss the nature, activity, and functioning of mind and consciousness concerns the soteriological process of our transformation and liberation, called “becoming a Buddha”. From this point of view, Buddhists further develop a specific way of dealing with the ontological and epistemological implications of truth, reality, and falsehood. Buddhists emphasize that our epistemic stance to the world we inhabit gives rise to the constructive force which shapes this world and all the things existing in it. This ground of all construction is called “mind”. Most importantly, reality in the sense of what constitutes this world and the way in which things and sentient beings exist in it incorporates falsehood sustained by that mind. The functioning of the *ālaya*-consciousness, for instance, enforces our bondage to a circle of self-perpetuating unreality pervading the worldly realm, while the *tathāgatagarbha* sense of truth and pure mind accounts for reality, which grounds the false world of the arising and cessation of entities, as well as the realm of liberation.

In other words, Mahāyāna Buddhists describe our transformation as a turn from the non-awakened to the awakened state of being, and thereby, uphold a constructivist position, according to which ontological and epistemological issues coincide. The “inseparability of truth/reality and falseness” is an epitome for this type of Mahāyāna constructivism. Yet the aforementioned Buddhist models differ considerably regarding their respective understandings of inseparability. However, none of them harmonizes with a metaphysical approach which conceives of ultimate reality as a transcendent realm of truth separated and independent from our illusory world. The true and real nature of mind is empty of any characteristic, and thus cannot be conceptualized in a distinctive way, because falsehood sustained by that mind is never nonexistent in our conceptualizations. Consequently, we must become aware of the inseparability of our mind from falsehood, always seeing its persistent delusiveness. Para-

doxically, such awareness consists in constantly differentiating falsehood from the true sense of reality.

Viewed from the constructivist models discussed in the present paper, “ultimate reality” is ontologically indeterminable, due to its inclusion of, or inseparability from, falsehood. Neither the monistic interpretation of a sustaining and real mind, nor the dualistic view of truth separated from the realm of falsehood reaches beyond our conceptualizing way of understanding. The true sense of reality, according to the previous discussions, just evades those forms of mental construction, which, again, does not mean that our illusory and constructed world constitutes a separate realm of itself. “Ultimate truth”, in this specific sense of inseparability from falsehood, is simply inconceivable, and this excludes the metaphysical concept of transcendence. Zhiyi hints at this, quoting the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*’s statement that there is no essential difference between Buddha, mind, and non-awakened beings. Yet, this does not deny a sense of difference from the epistemological and soteriological point of view. We dynamically realize inseparability by constantly differentiating our never-ending constructions from what is unconstructed.

The *tathāgatagarbha* and Madhyamaka teachings explicitly point to this dynamic manner in which our understanding must deal with the conjoined aspects of truth and falsehood. If we are to realize inseparability *qua* differentiation, we must constantly perform a change of aspects in our understanding, since to understand ultimate truth is to understand persisting falseness, and *vice versa*. Hence, in contrast to the Yogācāra viewpoint, the two teachings take the ambiguity of falsehood into account, and explore this inverse form of instructiveness to acquire wisdom and truth. Our discernment of ambiguity is a crucial step towards this wisdom, and the insight that fully realizes inseparability. The resulting dynamic or reciprocity in our understanding is similar to the way in which sickness and healing relate to one another. Only if we entirely understand the state of sickness can we really master the process of healing, which also requires the reverse: In our controlling the whole process of healing, we fully realize the nature of sickness. To truly understand the one side is to thoroughly discern the nature of the other. This dynamic could be described as a hermeneutical circle, which our understanding must adopt to realize the full sense of ultimate truth.

In the last section of his famous treatise on the meaning and teaching of the One Vehicle (*Huayan yisheng jiaoyi fenqi zhang* 華嚴一乘教義分齊章), Fazang – influenced by *tathāgatagarbha*, *Yogācāra*, and *Madhyamaka* alike – illustrates the dynamics between “truth embracing the branches of falseness, and falseness pervading the source of truth” (T45:1866.499a 22-23):

It is like the bright surface of the mirror, which causes purified and defiled images to appear upon it. Even though the purified and defiled images appear on this surface of the mirror, it never loses its brightness and purity. Only thanks to the brightness and purity of the mirror, which is never lost, can the purified and defiled images appear. We realize the brightness and purity of the mirror due to the appearing of purified and defiled images. Conversely, thanks to the brightness and purity of the mirror, we realize that the purified and defiled images are just apparitions. Hence, the two meanings are of one single nature. Despite the apparition of purified *dharma*s, the brightness of the surface does not intensify. Even though defiled *dharma*s appear, the purity of the surface remains undefiled. Not only is the surface undefiled, on the contrary, it is just because of these [images] that the brightness and purity of the mirror become evident.

We must realize that the principle and way of true suchness is like this. Not only does its immutability and intrinsic purity bring about defiled and purified arising, but also, it is due to this accomplishment of defiled and purified [states] that its intrinsic purity becomes fully evident. Not only does the defiled and purified [arising], which never fully passes away, shed light on that intrinsic purity, but also, it is on account of the intrinsic purity that the defiled and purified [arising] can be accomplished. Therefore, the two meanings entirely embrace each other within one single nature, which is devoid of duality (T45: 1866.499b2-12).

This explanation presents Fazang’s view of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*) interpreted after the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*. The two meanings or aspects of purified truth and defiled falsehood embody non-duality *qua* polarity (inseparability *qua* differentiation), which characterizes not only each of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), but also all three toge-

ther as one dynamic nature in the interplay of distinguishable aspects (T45:1866.499a13-b12).⁵⁵ In the same section, Fazang extends this dynamic perspective also to Madhyamaka and *tathāgatagarbha* doctrines, quoting from the *Dazhi du lun* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. The two aspects of truth and falsehood, or purified and defiled *dharmas*, are correlative opposites, which in fact are equally unreal and empty, like all apparitions. The two are not essentially different from each other, even though they must be differentiated to point back to what truly sustains their interdependency, which is true emptiness (not the same thing as nonexistence), and is here called “intrinsic purity”. Hence, the way in which Fazang describes this dynamic of non-duality *qua* polarity involves three aspects: the two correlative opposites, and intrinsic purity; however, he mentions only two aspects – the two correlative opposites, on the one side, and intrinsic purity, on the other – which actually implies the same meaning. Their interplay in a dynamic whole is also called “the single one nature devoid of duality”. None of the three can be constituted and understood apart from the other two, and neither can the single one nature.

However, the whole section aims at portraying the dynamics of the “*dharma*-realm as interdependent arising” (*fajie yuanqi* 法界緣起) which basically implies the endless interplay of an infinite number of elements, viewpoints, and perspectives mutually constituting, referring to, and mirroring each other, explained in terms of “interpenetration and integration without obstruction and obstacles” (通融無障無礙 *tongrong wuzhang wuai*) (T45:1866.499a23) etc. In order to describe and analyze its differing but interrelated parts, Fazang often uses the two opposite categories “sustaining force of identity” (*tongti* 同體; literally “common body”) and “sustaining force of difference” (*yiti* 異體; literally “differing

⁵⁵ The “two meanings” or “two aspects” of the “nature of perfected reality”, here identified with *tathāgatagarbha*, are called “[change] in accordance to conditions” (*suiyuan* 隨緣) and “invariability” (*bubian* 不變); those of the “nature of other-dependent-arising” are called “apparent existence” (*siyou* 似有) and “emptiness of self-nature” (*wuxing* 無性); those of the “nature of what is thoroughly imaginary” are called “imagined existence” (*qingyou* 情有) and “non-existence in the sense of principle” (*liwu* 理無). Fazang seems to combine or harmonize the *trisvabhāva* (*sanxing* 三性) and *trividhā niḥsvabhāvatā* (*san wuxing* 三無性) doctrines with one another (T45:1866.499a13-15).

bodies”), both of which are coextensive and coexistent and, therefore, without mutual obstruction. To apply these insights to the previous discussion, these two are inseparable in constituting “the single one nature devoid of duality”. In their dynamic interplay, all the differing elements together realize the “one single nature devoid of duality” due to this “sustaining force of identity”. Conversely, in this form of interplay there are differing elements relating to one another only thanks to the “sustaining force of difference”. The two aspects are equally relevant for this dynamic as a whole, which not only integrates but also specifies all elements; in this way, the two also specify each other, while mutually integrating without obstruction.

Oneness in terms of wholeness, on the one side, and diversity in the sense of complexity, on the other, are interdependent. All the uncountable aspects together constitute the dynamic of the interplay between them, in the same way that their interplay constitutes each of those aspects. This is also the case with each single event that arises due to the concurrence of multiple circumstances. Even though those circumstances occur prior to the event that they cause, their meaning and identity as certain circumstances becomes evident only due to the event that follows after them. Both sides must equally be taken into account if we are to see either one of them; non-duality must be seen in terms of polarity in the same way that we must see non-duality to understand polarity; the same is true of inseparability and difference, and of past, present, and future, etc. In our efforts to see and understand our world detached from delusions, clinging, and reifications, we must adopt this dynamic, by constantly performing a change of aspects in our understanding. In the same section, Fazang explains that the number “ten” is the numeric symbol for the complexity in the interplay of differing aspects, while the number “one” stands for the oneness and wholeness of its dynamic nature (T45:1866.503c4–20). Hence, the two are mutually complementary and each embraces the other. This further means that each of the ten embraces all ten, since oneness (= the one) contains all ten, and each of the ten contains the one (T45:1866.503c19). Such mutual embracement marks the oneness of the “*dharma*-realm” as an “inexhaustible complexity of mutually constitutive layers” (*chongchong wujin* 重重無盡).

If adapted to a strategy by means of which the meaning of “*dharmarealm as interdependent arising*” can be fully presented, this insight must be explicated according to ten aspects or viewpoints that simultaneously realize both the infinite complexity and the oneness of that meaning. This furthermore implies that each of these ten aspects must be capable of mirroring or embracing all ten of them. A presentation of this kind would truly realize the sense of “*dharmarealm as interdependent arising*”, and thus conform to the way in which the enlightened being sees the realm of enlightenment – ultimate truth, according to Fazang. With the intention of clarifying this ultimate viewpoint, at the end of the same section, Fazang discusses his master Zhiyan’s (智儼, 602-668) scheme of “interdependent arising viewed from the [perspective of the] tenfold profundity” (*shixuan yuanqi* 十玄緣起) (T45:1866.505a11-507c3). In the tradition of the Huayan school, this scheme is considered to embody the essential tenet of the *Huayan jing* (*Avatamsaka-sūtra*) – the immediate and most complete expression of the viewpoint from which the enlightened being sees the realm of enlightenment.

Fazang’s discussion of the ninth link in this scheme refers to the aspect of mind and the way it functions as the unifying and diversifying force in the complex dynamic of interdependent arising (T45:1866.507a8-15). This short passage particularly emphasizes that all the other nine meanings variously manifest “the one single *tathāgatagarbha* as the intrinsically pure and clear mind”. Diversified into ten virtues (*shide* 十德), this mind is the single force that embraces all ten, in the same way that each of the ten also embraces this mind; thus, it fully realizes the inexhaustible sense of the *dharmarealm*. However, Fazang’s view, which represents the way in which the fully awakened being realizes ultimate truth/reality, does not allow for the ontological primacy of mind, since all ten aspects are equal in realizing their mutual embracement, even though they vary from each other. This could have been the major reason why, in his commentary to the *Huayan jing* (*Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 華嚴經探玄記), Fazang replaced the ninth link, the “gateway of skillful accomplishing through the rotating manifestation of mere-mind” (*weixin huizhuan shancheng men* 唯心迴轉善成門), with the term “gateway of embracing all virtues through the perfect illumination of the mutuality

between the primary and secondary” (*zhuban yuanming jude men* 主伴圓明具德門).⁵⁶

In this scripture, Fazang’s comments on the *sūtra* chapter of the ten *bhūmi* discuss the topic of mind in a modified way, which he calls “mere-consciousness according to the ten gateways” (*shimen weishi* 十門唯識) (T35:1733.346c26-347c24).⁵⁷ The term “mere-consciousness” is explained in the light of various meanings, based on Fazang’s fivefold classification of the doctrine: (1) Small Vehicle Teaching; (2) Initial Great Vehicle Teaching of [*Prajñāpāramitā* and *Yogācāra*]; (3) Final Great Vehicle Teaching of [*tathāgatagarbha*]; (4) Sudden Teaching [of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*]; and (5) Perfect Teaching [of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*]. The varying meanings of “mere-mind” refer only to the four teachings of the Great Vehicle. In the explication of the “perfect teaching”, the two terms “mind and consciousness” do not occur any more, since this ultimate level discloses the “*dharma*-realm as interdependent arising”, and hence accomplishes the “inexhaustible complexity of mutually constitutive layers”. In other words, this level, which presents the viewpoint from which the fully awakened being sees the nature of ultimate reality in its inexhaustible complexity, sublates the concept of “mere-mind”. Fazang seems to see the difference between his teaching (= the perfect teaching of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*) and the *tathāgatagarbha* meaning of pure mind as a question of viewpoint.

The *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine aims at disclosing a sense of ultimate reality for that type of understanding which, even while it is defiled, seeks to accomplish transformation into the state of full awakening by restoring the sense of the intrinsically pure and true nature of mind. By

⁵⁶ Jingyuan’s (淨源, 1011-1088) Song commentary on Fazang’s *Treatise on the Golden Lion* (*Jin shizi zhang yunjian lejie* 金師子章雲間類解) mentions that Chengguan recorded that it was Fazang who made this change (T45:1880.666b3-5). Hence, the Huayan tradition distinguishes between two versions of the “tenfold profundity”: (1) “the old tenfold profundity” in Zhiyan’s commentary to the *Huayan jing* (T35:1732.15a29-b21), his treatise on the tenfold profundity in the *Huayan jing* (T1868), and Fazang’s presentation in his treatise on the One Vehicle; and (2) “the new tenfold profundity” in Fazang’s commentary on the *Huayan jing* (T35:1733.123a27-b5) and in the discussions of later Huayan masters.

⁵⁷ The term *shimen weishi* (十門唯識) occurs at T35:1733.347b28.

contrast, Fazang's understanding of reality suspends and goes beyond the distinction between defiled and pure mind. His inexhaustible sense of "dharma-realm as interdependent arising" accounts for the perspective through which the already fully awakened being entirely oversees the realm of awakening, devoid of any limits and without obstruction and discrimination. This is complete insight, in the sense that such a view embraces not only the *tathāgatagarbha* meaning of ultimate truth, but also the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Hīnayāna (= Small Vehicle) types of understanding. According to this completely awakened state of being, diversity in manifesting the full sense of ultimate reality is coextensive with oneness realized via the mutual reflecting and mirroring of all the various views that aim at disclosing the nature of reality. In other words, Fazang does not really deviate from the constructivist paradigm that understands reality and truth as a system of mutually constituting views and aspects of observation.

This also comes close to Zhiyi's Tiantai view of "contemplating the mind as the inconceivable realm", which highlights the Mahāyāna sense of ontic-ontological indeterminacy. Yet, in contrast to Fazang, Zhiyi's discussion does not really integrate the *tathāgatagarbha* and Yogācāra doctrines of mind into the Tiantai classification of teachings. However, the common basis of all the models discussed in the present paper is the constructivist approach to the sense of reality, which specifically examines the inseparability of truth and falsehood in both our understanding and the way we exist in our world. In this particular respect, all the aforementioned viewpoints are incompatible with the metaphysical concept of transcendence. Constructivist theory in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism thus claims that cognitive systems of sentient beings are not capable of distinguishing between the conditions of real objects and the conditions of their cognition, because their cognition does not have independent access to a reality extrinsic to that cognition. According to those models, without this fundamental insight into the nature of our cognition, which shapes the way we exist in our world, the Mahāyāna sense of awakening, as well as its soteriological significance, cannot be fully realized.

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