

Beings, Non-Beings, and Buddhas: Contrasting Notions of *tathāgata* in the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta* and **Mahābherī Sūtra*

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This article concerns a little studied text of the Mahāyānist *tathāgata* literature, namely the **Mahābherī Sūtra*, and its relation to other Indian texts which advance forms of *tathāgata* doctrine. Its focus will be the contrast between the content of this *sūtra* and the only other text of the *tathāgata* tradition which discusses a particular issue: the unchanging mass of existing sentient beings, without the possibility of any decrease or increase in their number. This is an issue addressed also by the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta*, which I shall argue presents a more sophisticated and likely later consideration, both of this matter and of *tathāgata* doctrine, than that exhibited by the **Mahābherī Sūtra*. Though it is not clear that either text knew of the other, their different treatments of how one should understand the nature and number of existing sentient beings casts light on their respective places in two distinct strains – one very likely older than the other – of Indian *tathāgata* thought.

Introduction

In Indian Mahāyānist literature the expression *tathāgata* refers in one or other manner to an innate potential, possessed by all sentient beings, to achieve the status of a Buddha (or *tathāgata*). The *Ratnagotravibhāga Śāstra* (*RGV*), an influential but comparatively late source for this doctrine, preserves Sanskrit text that understands the expression to be a *bahuvrīhi*, i.e. that ‘all

beings are *tathāgatagarbha*’ (*sattvās tathāgatagarbhāḥ*).¹ Such is the reading of this compound which Michael Zimmermann argues is most frequent across all forms of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* (*TGS*), which understands all sentient beings to be containers (*garbha*) for a *tathāgata* in some nascent state; rid of mental afflictions (*kleśas*), which obscure ever-present awakened qualities, a sentient being is nothing less than a Buddha. However in other *tathāgatagarbha* sources, where this expression appears interchangeably with what has been translated as a ‘Buddha-nature’ (**buddhadhātu*), it appears that the expression *tathāgatagarbha* is better understood as a *tatpuruṣa*.² This takes sentient beings to be in possession of some entity called the *tathāgatagarbha* (**sarvasattveṣu tathāgatagarbho ‘sti*); this is an embryo or chamber (both possible interpretations of the Sanskrit *garbha*) for a Buddha which is itself part of the constitution of every sentient being.

These different understandings of this compound characterize two strains of *tathāgatagarbha* thought in India, discussed in depth by various works of Takasaki Jikidō.³ Takasaki argued for the chronological primacy of a ‘triad’ of *tathāgatagarbha*-oriented *sūtras*: the *TGS* itself, along with the *Anūnatvāpūrṇa tvaṇirdeśaparivarta* and *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra*. These texts were major influences upon the *RGV* and its prose commentary (*vyākhyā*), and after it upon most later discussion of the *tathāgatagarbha* idea in India and beyond.⁴ Since Takasaki’s work it has generally been held that the latter form of this doctrine, in which the central expression is a form of *tatpuruṣa*, derived from the former, and that equation of the *tathāgatagarbha* with a **buddhadhātu* possessed by sentient beings was a later development. This relative chronology of *tathāgatagarbha* works was inherited by Zimmermann, who in his meticulous study of the *TGS* argued that this work likely represents the earliest *tathāgatagarbha* text available to us. The *TGS* is for the most part an unsystematic collection of

¹ Johnston 1950: 73,11-12. See also Zimmermann 2002: 41-50; Ruegg 1969: 499-516.

² See Radich 2015a: 26-27; 164-165. I here employ an asterisk to denote reconstruction of the term **buddhadhātu*, as this expression does not survive in any Sanskrit fragments of relevant *tathāgatagarbha* works. However the prevalence of expressions reflecting this term, such as the Chinese 佛性 and Tibetan *sangs rgyas kyi kham/dbyings*, found across translations of such texts confirms beyond reasonable doubt the presence of this term in underlying Indian works.

³ Foremost Takasaki 1975. A recent collection of his English language works in this area is Takasaki 2014.

⁴ Takasaki 1975: 768-769. For the purposes of this paper I will henceforth employ the abbreviation *RGV* to refer to the verse text together with its prose commentary.

different perspectives on how beings can be considered to possess the qualities of a Buddha, while the other two texts of Takasaki's presumed triad – along with the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (*LAS*) – all employ the expression *tathāgatagarbha* to refer to the correct manner of comprehending what a sentient being properly is.

The earliest surviving text to equate the *tathāgatagarbha* with a **buddhadhātu*, an entity within sentient beings, is the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra* (*MPNMS*). This text was studied in detail by Shimoda Masahiro, who argued that the earliest content of this *sūtra* is not that concerned with the *tathāgatagarbha* / **buddhadhātu* at all, but rather material which upholds the enduring existence of the Buddha after his apparent departure from the world.⁵ Shimoda holds that in a later stage of the text's composition, veneration of the indestructible relic (*dhātu*) of a Buddha, thought commonly to reside in *stūpas*, was redirected to a similarly enduring element or nature (also *dhātu*) of a Buddha, now within sentient beings and also called their *tathāgatagarbha*.⁶ This *dhātu*-oriented form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is shared and developed by two more texts showing clear evidence of influence by the *MPNMS*, namely the *Āṅgulimālīya Sūtra* (*AMS*) and the **Mahābheri Sūtra* (*MBhS*), which both belong to the so-called 'MPNMS-group' of *sūtras*.⁷ All three of these texts declare that the *tathāgatagarbha* can be thought of as a permanent self (*ātman*) resident in any sentient being – an idea clearly at odds with wider Indian Buddhism's ancient and enduring rejection of just such a category.⁸

In the last year two significant studies in Indian *tathāgatagarbha* literature have sparked further discussion concerning both the interpretation of this doctrine and the relative chronology of those texts that develop it. The first was Jonathan Silk's study of the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta* (*AAN*), a short *sūtra* available in full only via one Chinese translation.⁹ This text is concerned with the correction of wrong views regarding the realm of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*), and its constancy in size in spite of the apparent passing of Buddhas into *parinirvāṇa*. This is explained by identifying the underlying nature of beings – their *tathāgatagarbha* – with the *dharmakāya*, the timeless

⁵ Shimoda 1997: 239-251 (English portion p.20); also Radich 2015a: 21-22; appendix 4.

⁶ Shimoda 1997: 278-298 (English portion p.22); Shimoda 2015: 159-164.

⁷ See e.g. Takasaki 1975: 127; Suzuki 2002: 22; Radich 2015a: 34-35, 97-99, appendix 3; also Radich 2015b: 267-270.

⁸ See Jones (forthcoming).

⁹ Silk 2015. The text itself is Taishō (T) 668.

‘*dharma*-body’ of a Buddha.¹⁰ Silk presents the *AAN* as a text veering close to a kind of Buddhist monism, in which the *dharmakāya* is presented as an ‘absolute principle of transcendent reality’: a kind of substratum which is known, in its defiled form, as the *tathāgatagarbha*.¹¹ Contra Takasaki, Silk also argues that the *AAN* probably post-dates another, more influential *tathāgatagarbha* text, the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra* (*ŚDS*), and likely inherits elements of its doctrine.¹²

Published around the same time as Silk’s analysis of the *AAN* was Michael Radich’s study – the first in English – of the *MPNMS*.¹³ In opposition to both Takasaki and Zimmermann, Radich argues that the *MPNMS* may reflect the earliest account of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine available to us. He suggests that the **buddhadhātu* doctrine may well have originated in the manner hypothesized by Shimoda, and given rise to the idea of a chamber (*garbha*) for a Buddha/*tathāgata*, akin to that found within a *stūpa*, which exists in the bodies of all sentient beings.¹⁴ The central claim of Radich’s thesis is that the *MPNMS* most likely pre-dates Takasaki’s triad of more influential *tathāgatagarbha* works – the *TGS*, *AAN* and *ŚDS* – and by implication that the sense of the *tathāgatagarbha* as a contained entity (indeed as something which was even called one’s true ‘self’) is likely to be the earliest.¹⁵ It is especially significant, if Silk is right about his relative dating of the *AAN*, that the *MPNMS* seems very likely to pre-date the *ŚDS*. This is particularly visible where the *ŚDS* denies the *tathāgatagarbha* couched as a kind of self, and then goes on to understand the *dharmakāya* as exhibiting the ‘perfection of self’ (*ātmapāramitā*), which seems to be a qualified revision of more radical language used by the *MPNMS*.¹⁶

¹⁰ Silk 2015.

¹¹ Silk 2015: 33-35.

¹² Silk 2015 10-13 (especially fn.36); contra Takasaki 1975: 82-84; 111-121.

¹³ Radich 2015a.

¹⁴ Radich 2015a: 35-57.

¹⁵ Radich 2015a: 85-97.

¹⁶ The *MPNMS* inverts the four distortions (*viparyāsas*), which in wider Buddhist literature refer to the error of, for example, holding there to be an *ātman* in regards to what is properly *anātman*. The *MPNMS* does this to proclaim first that the Buddha (e.g. *MPNMS*^{CJ} 862a5-14) and later the *tathāgatagarbha* (e.g. *MPNMS*^{CJ} 883b3-5) are indeed *ātman*. The *ŚDS* (and after it the *RGV*) also inverts these distortions, but only to attribute to the *dharmakāya* four ‘perfections’ (*pāramitā*), including that of the self (T.353, 222a18-a26; also Johnston 1950: 31, 10-16). It is perhaps significant that these perfections (a qualification absent from the *MPNMS*) are attributed not to the *tathāgatagarbha* itself, but only the *dharmakāya* that is its ‘purified’ form, in accord with the strong denial of the *ŚDS* that the *tathāgatagarbha* is any kind of self: see fn.19.

If Silk's assessment of the *AAN* as later than the *ŚDS* is correct, then this leaves only the *TGS* as a rival contender for being our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* source. Radich points out that Zimmermann's study of the *TGS* found the expression *tathāgatagarbha* to feature only in what seems to be the latest material of the text, perhaps introduced from some other source.¹⁷ Much like in the *ŚDS* and *AAN*, use of the term *tathāgatagarbha* in the *TGS* seems to presume that it is already accepted, whereas much of the content of the *MPNMS* is concerned precisely with exploring and defending the idea that sentient beings possess some kind of awakened nature. Indeed the *MPNMS* (along with the *AMS* and *MBhS*) is preoccupied with distinguishing the *tathāgatagarbha* from erroneous accounts of a permanent nature, and makes frequent reference to resistance from audiences who did not accept its heterodox ideas.¹⁸ All of this – including Radich's suggestion that the expression **buddhadhātu* provides insight into the origins of the term *tathāgatagarbha* itself – suggests that the *MPNMS* may well reflect our earliest source for the development of this doctrine.

An implication of this revised chronology of texts, as this article will explore, is that the form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine exhibited by the *AMS* and *MBhS*, closely related to that of the *MPNMS*, should have us reconsider the relative dating of these works also. As already mentioned, these *sūtras* share with the *MPNMS* the sense that the *tathāgatagarbha* is some element (*dhātu*) in the constitution of sentient beings, and can also be called their *ātman*. This is in apparent contradiction to what we can call the *anātmavāda* position of wider Buddhist literature, which – in many fashions and for many reasons – rejects such a category outright. By contrast, we might understand these three texts as developing an '*ātmavādin*' *tathāgatagarbha* position: that what is otherwise called the essential nature of a Buddha (**buddhadhātu*) in beings is a kind of enduring subject, which both undergoes transmigration and has the capacity to be liberated from it. Any such language in reference to the *tathāgatagarbha* is rejected by both the *ŚDS* and *LAS*, strongly suggesting that both texts knew of some *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine either purposefully couched as a doctrine of selfhood or frequently mistaken for one.¹⁹

¹⁷ Zimmermann 2002: 12, 28-31.

¹⁸ Radich 2015a: 32-34: *MPNMS*^{C1} 881a9-29; *MPNMS*^{C2} 404a1-23; *MPNMS*^T §347-348. The *MBhS* states that some beings are simply not yet ready to accept the *tathāgatagarbha*, and hence should not have it taught to them: see *MBhS*^C 298a3-6; *MBhS*^T D.222, 112b1-2; Q.888, 117b3-4.

¹⁹ See *ŚDS* 222b19-b21: 世尊，如來藏者，非我，非衆生，非命，非人 – 'Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is not an *ātman*, a *sattva*, a **jīva*, nor a **pudgala*.' Regarding the *LAS*, see Nanjio 1923: 79,1-9.

The *tathāgatagarbha* of the *ŚDS* and *AAN* (and, at a further remove, the *LAS* also) is of a quite different character. Silk's argument for the relative dating of the *AAN*, not unlike that of Radich concerning the *MPNMS*, observes that the *AAN* does little to unpack its understanding of the term *tathāgatagarbha*, which appears markedly close to that expounded by the *ŚDS*.²⁰ While the *MPNMS* seems to lay the groundwork for (at very least) the *ātmavādin* *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the *MPNMS*-group, the *ŚDS* develops a more sophisticated account of the *tathāgatagarbha* that is then put to broader doctrinal use by the *AAN*: to explain its notion of a 'single *dharmadhātu*' (**ekadharmadhātu*), which is the metaphysical basis for both transmigrating beings and awakened Buddhas.

The *ŚDS* makes the important claim that the *tathāgatagarbha* is the foundation or basis for *saṃsāric* existence.²¹ It also explicitly identifies the *tathāgatagarbha* and the *dharmakāya*.²² Hence while the *ŚDS*, like many Mahāyāna texts, is not so clear on what precisely the *dharmakāya* is, it certainly permits the idea that it is some kind of awakened reality that somehow underpins transmigration.²³ The *AAN* too identifies the *tathāgatagarbha* with the *dharmakāya*, and from there develops the idea that the latter not only designates what is achieved by *nirvāṇa*, but – together with the *tathāgatagarbha* – accounts for *saṃsāra* as well. So the *ŚDS* and *AAN* develop between them the *tathāgatagarbha* as a metaphysical substratum, identical to the *dharmakāya*, which is, at least for the *AAN*, the true form not only of the Buddha but also of reality (**tathatā*) properly understood.²⁴ It is this kind of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine which appears to have

²⁰ See fn.12.

²¹ *ŚDS* 222b5: 世尊，生死者，依如來藏 – 'Lord, *saṃsāra* rests upon the *tathāgatagarbha*' (quoted in the *RGV*, Johnston 1950: 73,6: *sati bhagavaṃs tathāgatagarbhe saṃsāra*); 222b10-12 非如來藏有生有死。如來藏(〔者〕 – <三> <宮> <知>)者，離有爲相。如來藏常住不變：是故如來藏是依、是持、是建立 – 'It is not the case that the *tathāgatagarbha* has either birth or death. The *tathāgatagarbha* is apart from the characteristics of what is conditioned. The *tathāgatagarbha* is permanent and unchanging: hence the *tathāgatagarbha* is the basis, support and foundation [for *saṃsāra*].'

²² *ŚDS* 221c10-11: 世尊，如是如來法身，不離煩惱藏，名如來藏。 – 'Lord, in such a fashion is the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata, not rid of the stores of afflictions, called the *tathāgatagarbha* (quoted in the *RGV*, Johnston 1950: 12,14: *bhagavaṃs tathāgatadharmakāyo 'vinirmuktakleśakośas tathāgatagarbhaḥ sūcyate*). See also Ruegg 2015.

²³ For more on the range of ideas expressed by the term *dharmakāya*, see e.g. Harrison 1992; Radich 2011.

²⁴ See Silk (2015: 113, §16); *AAN* 467c15: 皆真實如不異不差。 – 'All [three forms of the *tathāgatagarbha*, i.e. distinguished by their purity] are true thusness (**bhūta*)*tathatā*), not distinct and not separate'. See also La Vallée Poussin 1930.

met the approval of the *LAS*, a text which mentions the *ŚDS* by name, and holds that the *tathāgatagarbha* is no different from the *ālayavijñāna*, the mental substratum upon which saṃsāric existence can be said to depend.²⁵ Finally there is the *RGV*, which quotes from both the *ŚDS* and the *AAN* in its exposition of the *tathāgatagarbha* and *dharmakāya* as names for reality (*tathatā*) according to whether it exists with defilement (*samālā*) or without (*nirmālā*) respectively.²⁶

Such metaphysical abstraction takes us a long way from the doctrine of the *MPNMS*, in which the *tathāgatagarbha* appears to be a constituent, embodied element located in sentient beings.²⁷ The *MPNMS* also features a quite different account of the *dharmakāya*: as the permanent, indestructible body of the Buddha that surpasses the corporeal body he merely displays to the world.²⁸ It can hence be contended that the *MPNMS*, concerned foremost with explaining the permanent existence of the figure of the Buddha, together with the invariable presence of a *tathāgatagarbha* in the constitution of each sentient being, propounds a conceptually simpler doctrine than that developed across the *ŚDS* and *AAN*. It remains very plausible also, as Radich has suggested, that if the *MPNMS* in all likelihood represents the oldest form of *tathāgatagarbha*

²⁵ *LAS* (Nanjio 1923: 221, 12-13): *aparāvṛtte ca tathāgatagarbhaśabdasaṃśabdite ālayavijñāne nāsti saptānāṃ pravṛttivijñānānāṃ nirodhaḥ* / – ‘...if there is no reversion on the part of the *ālayavijñāna* called by the name ‘*tathāgatagarbha*’, there is no cessation of the seven active consciousnesses.’

²⁶ *RGV* 1.23, Johnston (1950: 21, 3-4): *samālā tathatā atha nirmālā vimalā buddhaguṇā jinakriyā / viṣayaḥ paramārthadarśināṃ śubharatnatrayasambhavo yataḥ* // – ‘Reality with defilement; [reality] without defilement; the qualities of a Buddha and the actions of a victorious one: these are the object of those perceiving what is supreme, from which are generated the three pure jewels.’ Amended following Schmithausen 1971: 140: *-sargako > -sambhavo*.

²⁷ E.g. *MPNMS*^{Cl} 881b7: 汝等身中皆有佛性。 – ‘You all have in your bodies the **buddhadhātu*’: compare *MPNMS*^{C2} 404c8; *MPNMS*^T §357.1. This language can be found also in the *AMS*: e.g. *AMS*^C: 525b24-c2: ‘...於自身中，觀察自性...’, where 自性 (**svadhātu*) is another name for the *tathāgatagarbha*; *AMS*^T: D.213, 152a1-152a4; Q.879, 159a4-a7. See also Habata 2014.

²⁸ See Radich 2011; 2015: 129-132. This is what Radich calls the docetic streak which develops in Indian Buddhist literature, epitomized by two passages of the *MPNMS*: *MPNMS*^{C2} 388c3-4: 如來身者即是法身，非是肉血筋脈骨髓之所成立。 – ‘The body of the Tathāgata is a *dharmakāya*, not something constituted by flesh, blood, sinews, veins, bones and marrow’ (compare *MPNMS*^{Cl} 871a2; *MPNMS*^T §196.11-14); *MPNMS*^{C2} 382c27-29: 如來身者是常住身，不可壞身，金剛之身，非雜食身，即是法身 – ‘The body of the Tathāgata is a permanent body, an indestructible body, a *vajra* body; it is not a body sustained by various kinds of foods: that is to say, it is the *dharmakāya*’ (compare *MPNMS*^{Cl} 866a16-18; *MPNMS*^T §144): translations drawn from Radich 2015a: 130.

doctrine available to us, then the *AMS* and *MBhS*, which share many of its ideas and terms, may well pre-date other texts concerned with the *tathāgatagarbha*, such as the *ŚDS* and *AAN*.²⁹

In support of this hypothesis, I will explore the differences between these two distinct strains of *tathāgatagarbha* thought, which are set in relief by two representative treatments of what seems to be the same conceptual issue. This is an issue addressed both by the *MBhS* and the *AAN*: namely how the number of sentient beings in existence exhibits neither decrease (**anūnatva*) nor increase (**apūrṇatva*). The two discussions of this matter highlight differences between the closely related *MPNMS*-group and another seemingly related set of *tathāgatagarbha sūtras* – namely the *ŚDS*, *AAN*, and, to a lesser extent, the *LAS* – whose primacy in the development of the *tathāgatagarbha* idea in India is now in question.

The Realm of Beings (*sattvadhātu*) in the *AAN*

The position of the *AAN* is made very accessible through the clarity of Silk's edition, analysis, and translation of that text (passages of which are reproduced throughout this section). Our primary source for the *AAN* is its Chinese translation, completed by Bodhiruci in 520CE, though several Sanskrit quotations survive in the *RGV*.³⁰ The text opens by rejecting various wrong-minded ideas about a decrease, increase, beginning or end to the realm of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*). In particular the idea that their number might decrease is presented as following from the erroneous position that the achievement of *nirvāṇa* is a movement from this realm to some other plane, or even (upon bodily death) into a kind of oblivion.³¹

Having listed various erroneous views concerning rebirth and liberation, the *AAN* goes on to state that there exists only a single realm, which it calls the 'single *dharma*-realm', or **ekadharmadhātu*' (一法界).

Because all foolish common people, Śāriputra, do not know the single *dharma*-realm (一法界; **ekadharmadhātu*) in accord with

²⁹ See Radich 2015a: 97-99. For the argument that the *AMS* pre-dates the *MBhS*, see Suzuki 2000a; 2014.

³⁰ See Silk 2015: 9-10.

³¹ See Silk 2015: 15-16, which recognizes the likely influence of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, and its lengthy discussion of annihilationist (*ucchedavāda*) and eternalist (*śāśvatavāda*) views, upon the *AAN*.

reality, because they do not see the single *dharm*-realm in accord with reality, they entertain ideas informed by mistaken views, thinking that the realm of beings increases or that the realm of beings decreases.³²

The singularity of this *dharmadhātu* is explained through a series of identifications, at the centre of which is the equation of the essential nature (or, preserving Silk's translation, the 'quintessence') of beings – also called *sattvadhātu* – with the *tathāgatagarbha*. This nature, in turn, is none other than the *dharmakāya* replete with the qualities of a Buddha.

The extremely profound purport, Śāriputra, is precisely the supreme truth. The supreme truth is precisely the quintessence of beings (衆生界; *sattvadhātu*). The quintessence of beings is precisely the embryo of the *tathāgatas* (如來藏; *tathāgatagarbha*). The embryo of the *tathāgatas* is precisely the *dharm*-body (法身; *dharmakāya*).³³

The *AAN* reaffirms these equations in several different forms. Particularly relevant for our later comparison with the *MBhS* is the following passage, in which the 'realm of *dharm*s' (*dharmadhātu*) – also none other than the *tathāgatagarbha* – is revealed to be the correct name for what are only conventionally called 'beings'.

Regarding this unborn, unperishing, eternal, tranquil, unchanging refuge [i.e. the *tathāgatagarbha*], Śāriputra, the inconceivable, pure *dharm*-realm (*dharmadhātu*), I term it 'beings' (衆生; *sattvas*). Why? To say 'beings' is (only) a synonym for precisely this unborn, unperishing, eternal, tranquil, unchanging refuge, (this) inconceivable, pure *dharm*-realm, and so on. With this intention, regarding those qualities, I term it 'beings'.³⁴

³² Silk 2015, 65 (§4i), *AAN* 466b8-10: 一切愚癡凡夫不如實知一法界故, 不如實見一法界故起邪見心, 謂衆生界增, 衆生界減。

³³ Silk 2015, 94 (§10iii), *AAN* 467a16-19: 舍利弗, 甚深義者即是第一義諦。第一義諦者即是衆生界。衆生界者, 即是如來藏。如來藏者, 即是法身。

³⁴ Silk 2015: 123 (§19ii), *AAN* 467c10-14: 我依此不生、不滅、常恒、清涼、不變歸依、不可思議、清淨法界, 說名衆生。所以者何, 言衆生者, 即是不生、不滅、常恒、清涼、不變歸依、不可思議、清淨法界等異名。以是義故, 我依彼法, 說名衆生。

As Silk writes, identification of the *dharmadhātu* with the realm of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*), playing on the dual senses of *dhātu* as both ‘realm’ and ‘nature’, is not unique to the *AAN*. Another elegant example is found in the *Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā*, which holds that it is the absence of any essence (*dhātu*) to sentient beings that explains the non-existence of any ‘realm’ (also *dhātu*) of theirs at all.³⁵ But what is almost unique to the *AAN* (with the exception, as we shall see, of the *MBhS*) is the use of a form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine to explain constancy in the number of sentient beings. Here the *tathāgatagarbha* is the common nature possessed by all beings (i.e. is their *sattvadhātu*), and nothing more than the *dharmakāya* replete with the qualities of a Buddha.³⁶ Hence all beings – indeed all reality (‘*sattvas*’ having been identified already with the *dharmadhātu*, shown in the passage above) – are something akin to modes of some absolute principle: the *dharmakāya*. In the passage below I adjust Silk’s translation, in particular preserving forms of *dhātu*, to demonstrate the bivalency of each usage – as ‘realm’ or ‘nature’ – at play throughout the passage.

Therefore, Śāriputra, not separate from the *sattvadhātu* (衆生界) is the *dharmakāya* (法身), not separate from the *dharmakāya* is the *sattvadhātu*. The *sattvadhātu* of beings is precisely the *dharmakāya*, the *dharmakāya* is precisely the *sattvadhātu*.³⁷

This affirms both the fundamental qualitative (*dhātu* as nature) and numerical (*dhātu* as realm) identity of beings with Buddhas. In equating beings with the *dharmadhātu* – the nature/realm of *dharmas* – the *AAN* can be considered to have explained this ‘single *dharmadhātu*’ both in the sense of a common nature shared by all sentient beings, and in the sense of a single realm of existence to which all sentient beings belong.

Again, this account likely has roots in the *ŚDS*: in particular the identification of the *tathāgatagarbha* with the *dharmakāya*, and the dependence of *saṃsāra* upon the *tathāgatagarbha*.³⁸ The idea that the *tathāgatagarbha* is the *dharmakāya* somehow polluted is also echoed by the *AAN*.

³⁵ Silk, 2015: 26-28; citing Hikata 1958: 14.20-15.24; de Jong 1977: 192-193.

³⁶ See Silk 2015: 100-101 (§13i-ii), *AAN* 467a27-b5.

³⁷ Silk, 2015: 112 (§15ii), *AAN* 467b16-18: 是故，舍利弗，不離衆生界有法身，不離法身有衆生界。衆生界即法身。法身即衆生界。

³⁸ See fn.21-22.

When this very same *dharm*-body, Śāriputra, ensnared by limitless defilements greater in number than the sands of the Ganges, drifting on the waves of the world from beginningless ages, comes and goes through birth and death, then it is termed ‘beings’.³⁹

What are here called ‘beings’ and ‘Buddhas’ are for the *AAN* expressions of the *dharmakāya* exhibiting different levels of defilement. Rid of all impurities, attaining ‘sovereign power over all things’ (於一切法中得自在力), the *dharmakāya* is called a Buddha.⁴⁰ Hence the *AAN* develops the notion that the *tathāgatagarbha* / *dharmakāya* is the common basis underlying what are conventionally called ‘beings’ and ‘Buddhas’; they are no different, at the ultimate level, from the single realm of *dharmas* (*dharmadhātu*), or reality itself.⁴¹

All of this seems very distant from the understanding of the *tathāgatagarbha* found in the *MPNMS*. If Radich’s hypothesis concerning the relative dating of the *MPNMS* is correct, then the *AAN* (after the *ŚDS*) reflects a later development of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, here serving broader conceptual purposes than those for which it was originally conceived. For a very different account of sentient beings, Buddhas, and their commonality, which betrays an understanding of the *tathāgatagarbha* closer to that in the *MPNMS*, we turn to the **Mahābheri Sūtra*.

An Overview of the *MBhS*

The *MBhS* exists in two versions. The Chinese text is a fifth century translation by Guṇabhadra (*MBhS*^C T.270), while the Tibetan translation was made in the ninth century by Vidyākaraṇa together with the Tibetan dPal gyi lhun po

³⁹ Silk 2015: 103 (§14i), *AAN* 467b6-8: 舍利弗，即此法身過於恒沙無邊煩惱所纏，從無始世來隨順世間波浪漂流，往來生死，名為衆生。

⁴⁰ Silk 2015: 108-109 (§15i), *AAN* 467b15-16: 於一切法中自在力，名為如來、應、正遍知。This passage is quoted in the *RGV* (Johnston 1950: 41,5-6) wherein we find, for 一切法中得自在力, *sarvadharmaiśvāryabalaṭām*. We shall see that *aiśvārya*, ‘sovereignty’, is key to how the *MBhS* understands awakening, and it is interesting that the *AAN* employs this expression (far from ubiquitous across Mahāyāna literature) when describing what characterizes a Buddha manifested in the world. This *aiśvārya* is also used throughout the *ŚDS*, and so while this does not necessarily prove greater proximity between the *MBhS* and *AAN*, the use of this expression across *tathāgatagarbha* literature in general deserves further study.

⁴¹ See fn.24.

(*MBhS*^T e.g. D.222; Q.888).⁴² The Tibetan translation is noticeably longer and lacks no material present in the Chinese, but also has what appear to be minor alterations in the flow of its text, some of which attempt to make sense of difficult content found also in *MBhS*^C.

The relationship between the *MBhS* and other Mahāyāna *sūtras* certainly requires further study. On the one hand it belongs to the *MPNMS*-group of texts – together with the *MPNMS*, *AMS* and *Mahāmegha Sūtra* – with, among other features, a shared belief that in each case the *sūtra*'s reappearance in the world marks the final eighty years of the *dharma*'s presence.⁴³ Together with the *MPNMS* and *AMS*, the *MBhS* presents the *tathāgatagarbha* as an essential nature (*dhātu*) of sentient beings, called also their (true) *ātman*. Like the *MPNMS* (specifically what may be its earliest material), the *MBhS* is foremost concerned with affirming the continuing existence of the Buddha after his apparent bodily demise. But whereas the *MPNMS* does not explain in detail in what manner the Buddha continues to exist, the *MBhS* frames the *nirvāṇa* at which all *bodhisattvas* aim as a kind of permanent existence free from bondage to rebirth.

The Buddha's permanence is also a central concern of the other main influence upon the *MBhS*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*SPS*). Suzuki has argued that the presentation of the *dharmabhāṇaka* in the *MBhS* evokes that found in the *Dharmabhāṇakapariivarta* of the *SPS*: both texts affirm that recitation of the *sūtra* constitutes the Buddha's recurring presence in the world.⁴⁴ Besides this there is a wealth of other features in the *MBhS* which clearly echo the *SPS*, including 1) an account of incredulous monks leaving before the *sūtra* proper is expounded; 2) the parables of the illusory city and of the lost son, which explain the existence of the lesser vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*; 3) the doctrine of the *ekayāna*, which considers these two vehicles to be subsumed within the Mahāyāna; and 4) discussion of an enigmatic but much revered monk named Sarvalokapriyadarśana

⁴² *MBhS*^C will be my basis for translations presented in this article. In future I intend to make available critical editions of all passages considered herein. For now I present text as it appears in the Taishō edition (T) of the Chinese canon (though modifying punctuation where this is required), or as found in the Derge (D) and Peking (Q) editions of the Tibetan *bka'* 'gyur.

⁴³ For more on the intricacies of this prophecy complex, which if nothing more reinforces the sense of a common milieu shared by the *MPNMS*-group of texts, see Radich 2015a: 61-82; Hodge 2006.

⁴⁴ Suzuki 1999a.

(who appears also across other texts of the *MPNMS*-group).⁴⁵ It is clear that the *MPNMS* (which mentions the *SPS* by name⁴⁶) and likely the *AMS* (which makes frequent reference to the *ekayāna* model of the *dharma*⁴⁷) knew the *SPS*. However the *MBhS* alone reflects a marrying of ideas from the *MPNMS* – the permanence of the Buddha and of the *tathāgatagarbha* – with content and imagery drawn transparently from the *SPS*.⁴⁸

Much like the *MPNMS*, the *MBhS* claims to reveal a secret teaching of the Buddha that was not apparent in earlier expressions of the *dharma*.⁴⁹ However whereas both the *MPNMS* and *AMS* generally consider this secret teaching to be the revelation of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the *MBhS* takes it to refer only to the permanent existence of the Buddha.

The secret teaching [of this *sūtra*] is that, while it is said that the Tathāgata has completely passed over into *nirvāṇa*, in reality the Tathāgata is permanent, abiding, and without destruction: *parinirvāṇa* is not characterized by destruction.⁵⁰

Before turning to what the *MBhS* says about the existence of beings, together with its presentation of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, it is interesting to note which terms central to the *AAN* are entirely missing from its content. Firstly, there is no mention of the *dharmadhātu*: the nature/realm of *dharma*s, which the *AAN* equates with the *sattvadhātu*. Occurrences of the term *dharmadhātu* are sparse across the *MPNMS*-group as a whole, but this is especially conspicuous

⁴⁵ See Radich 2015a: 199-202; Suzuki 1999b. Regarding the parable of the lost son across the *SPS* and *MBhS*, see Suzuki 2015.

⁴⁶ See *MPNMS*^{C1} 893c6; *MPNMS*^{C2} 420a23-a24; *MPNMS*^T §495,17. A Sanskrit fragment (no.21) provides *saddharmapaṇḍar[ī]k(a)[m]*): see Habata 2009: 580; Radich 2015a: 52.

⁴⁷ Nattier 2007: 184-185.

⁴⁸ Regarding the *SPS* as an influence upon the *TGS*, see Zimmermann 1999; for further evidence of the ‘ekayānist’ heritage of the *MPNMS*-group, see Jones (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ For more on this theme in the *MPNMS*, see Radich 2015a: appendix 2; regarding its role in the *AMS*, see Suzuki 1999b. See also Ruegg 1989.

⁵⁰ *MBhS*^C 291a29-b1: 隱覆說者, 謂言如來畢竟涅槃, 而實如來常、住、不滅; 般涅槃者非毀壞法。 I take 非毀壞法 to translate some compound ending in *-*dharmān/-dharmin* (where *MBhS*^T provides simply *nyams par mi 'gyur pa*). Compare also *MBhS*^T: *rtaḡ pa / brtan pa / zhi ba / ther zug pa* (D.222, 88a3-4; Q.888, 92a6-7), which suggests that ‘常、住、不滅’ refers to a list of a discrete qualities.

here in material addressing the scope of what can be said to exist.⁵¹ The *AAN* furthermore relates the *dharmadhātu* to the notion of an intrinsically pure mind (**cittaprakṛtiprabhāsvara*), an influential category for the later *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the *RGV*, but also absent from the *MBhS*.⁵²

On several occasions our translations of the *MBhS* clearly reflect use of the term *sattvadhātu*, but in contrast to the *AAN*, this does not refer to a ‘realm’ of beings but only to some *dhātu* that is their essential nature, what is also called their *tathāgatagarbha* or (frequently) the *ātman*. The *MBhS* employs four similes to explain its understanding of the *tathāgatagarbha*, which the text describes as a *sattvadhātu* possessed by both the Buddha and sentient beings.

Hence, by means of these four examples, you should know that just as I [, the Buddha,] possess the *sattvadhātu*, all sentient beings are also like this. That *sattvadhātu* is immeasurable and pure.⁵³

While this *dhātu* of the *MBhS* is clearly an ‘essential nature’ possessed by beings, rather than a ‘realm’ to which they belong, the text still plays on the manifold nuances of this term taken in just the first sense. Two explanations of the *ātman*’s inaccessibility to ordinary beings rely on connotations of the term *dhātu* wider than we have so far discussed. In one example, sentient beings are compared to a goldsmith searching for the cause of impurities in gold, which likely plays on the sense of *dhātu* as meaning raw mineral.⁵⁴

⁵¹ The term *dharmadhātu* occurs only in Dharmakṣema’s translation of the *MPNMS* (*MPNMS*^{C2}: 389b9; 393b12), and appears just once in only the Tibetan translation of the *AMS*. This version of the *AMS* states that one should not eat meat because the *dhātu* of all beings (*sems can thams cad kyi dbyings*; **sarvasattvadhātu*) is the **dharmadhātu* (*chos kyi dbyings*): D.213, 197a5-6; Q.879, 204b3-4. As this is the only apparent occurrence of the term *dharmadhātu* in either translation of the *AMS* (the Chinese version instead equates the **sattvadhātu* with the **ātmadhātu* (我界), another name for the *tathāgatagarbha*: see T.120, 540c26-27), this may be a later contribution to the text, employing a category not used by earlier authors responsible for *AMS*^C. See also Ruegg 1980: 236-237.

⁵² See e.g. Silk 2015: 38-41; 118 (§17ii; also appendix 1), *AAN* 467b28-29.

⁵³ *MBhS*^C 297b17-19: 如此四種譬喻因緣，如我有衆生界，當知一切衆生皆亦如是。彼衆生界無邊明淨(明淨＝淨明<三><宮>); compare *MBhS*^T (D.222, 111a4; Q.888, 116a4), in which it is clearer still that the **sattvadhātu* is some nature ‘within’, or at least possessed by, beings: *nga la sems can gyi khams yod pa de bzhin du sems can thams cad la yang yod par rig par bya’o*.

⁵⁴ This is clearer in the *AMS*, which contains a comparison of the *tathāgatagarbha* to gold ore (*ser gyi dbyings*: **suvarṇadhātu*) sought amidst impurities: see *AMS*^T D.213, 195a5-195b1; Q.879, 202b4-202b6; also *AMS*^C 540a20-a25.

Lines later, another simile compares beings who aspire to know the true self to students of language who want to know the meaning of verbal roots (字句界; *skad kyi dbyings*) before having sufficiently studied them (presumably meaning that they have not yet committed them to memory).⁵⁵ Both translations of this second example clearly reflect *dhātu*, here in the sense of a verbal root that is the ‘essence’ of different expressions. But despite prevalence of the term *dhātu qua* element, neither version of the *MBhS* shows any evidence of the expression *sattvadhātu* in the sense of any ‘realm’ to which sentient beings belong.⁵⁶

Finally, the *MBhS* makes only a very fleeting mention of the *dharmakāya*, which in this text does not seem to have the more abstract metaphysical flavour that we find in the *AAN* and the *ŚDS*. The *dharmakāya* is mentioned only briefly, and seems to refer only in vague terms to the true form of the Buddha: a permanently existing body, which a *bodhisattva* might some day see if he adheres to the *dharma* as expounded by the *MBhS*.

Because of this [adherence to the *dharma*], before one dies one [will] directly see the permanently abiding *dharmakāya* manifesting great supernatural powers.

Kāśyapa, to such good men and women, whether living in villages or cities, I will display the *dharmakāya* and declare: Good men and women! The Tathāgata is permanently abiding!⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *MBhSC*: T.270, 297a17-27; *MBhST* D.222, 109b4-110a7; Q.888, 114b1-115a6.

⁵⁶ This is especially striking if, as suggested by Suzuki (1997: 43-44), the *MBhS* owes a debt to the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra* (*AMN*). The *AMN* uses the image of a hair scooping out the water of the ocean to explain the inexhaustibility of the *sattvadhātu*, certainly used here in the sense of a realm of sentient beings (see Braarvig 1993: 343-345). The *MBhS* echoes this image (*MBhSC* 294c6-17), but instead uses it to explain the scope of ‘the great mass of sentient beings’ (衆生大聚), where the expression *sattvadhātu* would still seem apposite; the authors of the *MBhS* may have wanted to avoid use of this expression in this context. Further evidence of the *MBhS* knowing the *AMN* comes in the declaration by the former that so-called *śūnyavāda sūtras* are only of provisional value (*MBhSC* 296b8-b10; *MBhST* D.222, 107b6-108a1; Q.888, 112b2-3); this reverses the explicit claim by the *AMN* that it is *śūnyatā*-oriented sūtras which convey final meaning (*nītārtha*); see Braarvig 1993: 451.

⁵⁷ *MBhSC* 299b13-17: 以是因緣現前得見常住法身現大神力，然後命終。迦葉，如是善男子善女人，隨所住處城邑聚落，我爲是等示現法身。而說是言：「善男子善女人，如來常住」。 Compare *MBhST*: D.222, 124a4-6; Q.888, 130b7-131a1.

The second mention of the *dharmakāya* in the above translation corresponds to the only likely occurrence of this term underlying *MBhS^T* (reflected by *chos kyi sku*). For the first we find instead ‘the indestructible body [of/that is] the permanent Tathāgata’ (*de bzhin gshegs pa rtag pa mi phyed pa'i sku*). This is unlikely to be a translation of the expression *dharmakāya* itself, but reflects an understanding of the Buddha’s indestructible body similar to that found in the *MPNMS*.⁵⁸ As Radich writes, the *dharmakāya* in the *MPNMS* is presented as the transcendent counterpart to the Buddha’s earthly body, the manner in which the Buddha exists, permanently, despite his apparent departure from the world; but it is important to note that this seems to be in no sense any foundation for reality in general.⁵⁹ The *dharmakāya* of the *MBhS* is only revealed late in the text and concerns the Buddha’s existence beyond his earthly body, and is less metaphysically abstract than the *dharmakāya* of the *AAN*. Such a notion is entirely lacking from the *MBhS*, which derives its Buddhology from the *SPS* and *MPNMS*, and appears too sophisticated for what is essentially an account of the Buddha as a kind of liberated agent exerting influence upon *samsāra*.

Decrease and Increase in the *MBhS*

We have seen that the expression *sattvadhātu* was used by the authors of the *MBhS* to refer to the nature of sentient beings: explained in terms of their *tathāgatagarbha*, also called their *ātman*. But despite lacking a sense of *sattvadhātu* *qua* realm of sentient beings, the *MBhS* also discusses how there is neither decrease nor increase in their number in its own, rather unconventional terms. This discussion occurs when the text is dealing with its two primary concerns: the permanence of the Buddha and the existence of a true self (one’s *tathāgatagarbha*). In order to understand how these inform an account of the constancy of sentient beings, we must first attend to how the *MBhS* understands the goal of awakening itself.

For the *MBhS*, the *ātman* is more than simply the *tathāgatagarbha* dwelling hidden in the constitution of sentient beings: it is that which is

⁵⁸ This ‘indestructible body’ (*mi phyed pa'i sku*) appears also in the *MPNMS*, and the expression *vajrābhedyakāyo* (corresponding to *rdo rje ltar mi shigs pa'i sku* found in *MPNMS^T*) survives in a Sanskrit fragment (no.12) of that text: see Radich 2015a: 131, fn.343.

⁵⁹ See fn.28. Radich (2015: 139-140) sees the *MPNMS* as having the germ of the idea that the *tathāgatagarbha* is an afflicted *dharmakāya*, though there is certainly still some distance between this and the sense of either term found in the *ŚDS* and *AAN*.

fully realized upon the attainment of awakening, and characterized by a kind of sovereignty (自在; *dbang phyug*; *aiśvarya*) that is lacking so long as a sentient being is bound to *samsāra*.⁶⁰ The *MBhS* holds that the Buddha, in contrast to sentient beings, is not constrained by conditioned existence.⁶¹ Such supernatural self-determination is moreover what the Buddha's disciples might have erroneously perceived him to lack when he appeared to die. The *MBhS* indeed states that the Buddha's *nirvāṇa* (*MBhS^T parinirvāṇa*) was displayed only to teach impermanence, and showed an absence of 'sovereignty' for the benefit of his audience.

[Seeing the Buddha's demise] sentient beings say: 'Even the Buddha had a demise, and does not attain sovereignty: how much more so we who have [the notions of] 'I' and 'mine'?'⁶²

The *MBhS* holds that sovereignty should go hand in hand with liberation from rebirth. However the authors of the *MBhS* infer that in order for this to be the case there must be some entity capable of enjoying this power: i.e., some *ātman*, a term describing both what is present in any sentient being now and what survives the attainment of liberation.

Kāśyapa said to the Buddha: Lord, [if sentient beings] attain liberation and sovereignty, one should know that sentient beings certainly ought to have permanence.

For example, when one sees smoke one knows that there is necessarily fire. If there exists a self, there must be liberation. If it is taught that there is a self, this is the liberation with a form that was already explained [above]; this is not the worldly view of a self, nor

⁶⁰ See Suzuki 1997: 48.

⁶¹ This evokes arguments in support of the *anātman* doctrine found in earlier Buddhist literature, in which lack of power (*vaśa*) over one's existence is proof of the absence of any self: see e.g. the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (*SN.III.66*) and the *Cūḷasaccaka Sutta* (*MN.III.231*); also Collins 1982: 97. Accordingly, the *MBhS* argues that the mark of the *true* self, fully realized upon liberation, is sovereignty over one's own existence.

⁶² *MBhS^C* 296c15-16: 衆生謂：佛尚有終沒(沒=歿<三><宮>*)不得自在，何況我等有我我所？ Compare *MBhS^T* D.222, 109a1-3, Q.888, 113b5-8.

is it expounding annihilationism or eternalism.⁶³

This ‘liberation with a form (**rūpa*)’ (有色; *gzugs dang bcas pa*) is mentioned fleetingly earlier in the text, where the *MBhS* claims that this understanding of liberation was taught to beings after they had properly understood the teaching of emptiness (considered by the *MBhS* to be an ‘incomplete’ teaching).⁶⁴ The *MBhS* goes on to state that the Buddha teaches, for one audience or another, both a liberation that is annihilation, without self (解脫滅盡無我; *thar pa chud gzon pa nyid kyi bdag med pa*), and a liberation that is a kind of existence (解脫是有; *thar pa yod pa nyid*).⁶⁵ The latter appears to be the more definitive teaching, and corresponds to ‘liberation with a form’, but as the above passage shows, it should still not (tempting as it may be) be mistaken for ‘eternalism’.⁶⁶

So the liberation of the *MBhS* is both somehow ‘with a form’ and sovereign over one’s existence: both features relate to liberation as the realization of the (true) *ātman*.⁶⁷ This is no worldly view of the self, and indeed *anātman* is taught to distinguish the true self, bound impotently in *saṃsāra*, from erroneous notions

⁶³ *MBhS*^C 296c8-11: 迦葉白佛言：世尊，得解脫自在者，當知衆生必應有常。譬如見煙，必知有火。若有我者，必有解脫。若說有我，則爲已說解脫有色。非世俗身見，亦非說斷常。 Compare *MBhS*^T D.222, 108b7-109a1; Q.888, 113b3-5.

⁶⁴ *MBhS*^C 296b24-c2: 入佛法已，信心增長，勤修精進，善學空法，然後爲說常住安樂有色解脫。 Compare *MBhS*^T: D.222, 108b2-5; Q.888, 113a6-b1; *MBhS*^T D.222, 107b6-108a1; Q.888, 112b2-3. Regarding the *MBhS* and its rejection of emptiness-oriented *sūtras*, see *MBhS*^C 296b8-b10; *MBhS*^T D.222, 107b6-108a1; Q.888, 112b2-3. The *MBhS* does not unpack this ‘liberation with a form’ further, though it is probably meant to contrast with a kind of liberation according with *śūnyavāda* as understood by this text, i.e., unduly annihilationist in character.

⁶⁵ *MBhS*^C 296c2-7; *MBhS*^T D.222, 108b5-7; Q.888, 113b1-3.

⁶⁶ See fn.31. If the positions of annihilationism and eternalism are the Scylla and Charybdis of how a Buddhist text should conceive of *nirvāṇa*, it is very easy to read the *MBhS* as sailing far too close to the idea that liberation is indeed a kind of eternal existence. This may be a reason why the ideas of this text were not cited by any later Indian sources known to us.

⁶⁷ See also *MBhS*^C 296b22-24: 乃至衆生輪迴生死，我不(我不 = 不得 <元> <明>)自在。 – ‘So long as beings transmigrate in *saṃsāra*, the self does not attain sovereignty’. This material in *MBhS*^T (D.222, 108b1-2; Q.888, 113a5-6) is different and unclear: here **aiśvarya* is missing, and instead it is said that as long as beings transmigrate, then the self is ‘*jug pa yin*. The unusual expression *bdag ’jug pa* appears in the Tibetan *Ugrapariprcchā Sūtra* (e.g. D.63, 266b5; Q.760.19, 308a8), in which it appears to mean preoccupation with one’s (worldly) self. In the *MBhS* however this expression may reflect some sense of the unliberated self as being subject (**anuvṛtta*) to the conditions of transmigration, or even having entered (**praviṣṭa*) into them, though this remains unclear.

of it. The *MBhS* compares the true self to an imprisoned king, who as long as he is in chains must resign himself to having lost his power.⁶⁸

Like this, so long as sentient beings wander in *saṃsāra*, the self [of each] lacks sovereignty. Due to the lack of sovereignty, there is taught the doctrine of non-self.⁶⁹

MBhS^T here states that *anātman* is taught because beings have ‘views of the self’ (*bdag tu lta*), which presumably means all erroneous views that fall short of what is revealed by the *MBhS*. Anything that lacks sovereignty, hence any being still undergoing transmigration, cannot be the *ātman*. However *ātman* does remain the correct designator for that which can eventually enjoy, as a Buddha, the sovereignty of liberation.

Having explained a commonality between the bound *ātman* (otherwise, we must remember, the *tathāgatagarbha*) and a liberated Buddha, the *MBhS* turns its attention to how this explains constancy in the number of existing sentient beings.

The Tathāgata is a god among gods. If *parinirvāṇa* were complete annihilation, the world would be [gradually] destroyed. If [*parinirvāṇa*] is not annihilation, then it is permanently abiding and joyful. Since it is permanently abiding and joyful, then certainly there exists a self, just as [where there is] smoke, there is fire.⁷⁰

Differences in the corresponding passage of *MBhS^T* are minor: *nirvāṇa* is described as stable and tranquil (*brtan pa zhi ba yin*); since it is stable (*brtan pa yin*), there must exist a self (*bdag yod par rig par bya*).⁷¹ If the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* were a kind of annihilation, then the number of beings in existence would surely diminish (‘*grib pa*’) when one attains liberation. But as *parinirvāṇa* is *not* annihilation, then it requires some kind of subject to enjoy it; hence there must exist a self. The question of what persists into this liberated state appears to be answered with the *tathāgatagarbha*: one’s true and enduring self.

⁶⁸ *MBhS^C* 296c16-18: 譬如王，爲隣國所執繫縛枷鎖，作是思惟：「我今復是王是主耶，我今非王非主。何緣乃致如是諸難？由放逸故。」

⁶⁹ *MBhS^C* 296c18-20: 如是衆生，乃至生死輪迴，我不自在。不自在故，說無我義。Compare (for the example of the imprisoned king in full) *MBhS^T* D.222,109a3-5; Q.888,113b8-114a1.

⁷⁰ *MBhS^C* 296c23-26: 如來是天中之天。若般涅槃悉磨滅者，世間應滅。若不滅者，則常住安樂。常住安樂，則必有我，如煙有火。

⁷¹ See *MBhS^T*: D.222, 109a7-b1; Q.888, 114a4-6.

The *MBhS* then distinguishes what is from what is not a self: its unconventional position being that ‘selves’ of some sort do indeed exist. The passage in question is challenging, and differences between our two translations compel us to consider both available versions of this content in full.

MBhS^C

Then again, if there existed that which is without self, and [then] there existed a self, then beings would increase [which is untenable].

[If] truly there is a self, then this would negate the [principle of] absence of self, and also [this self] could not be destroyed.

[But] if truly there were the absence of self, the self would not be established [as it just has been, above].⁷²

MBhS^T

Then again, if what is without a self becomes a self, then one must understand there to be an increase of beings [which is untenable].

Even if there is a true self, then neither is it a [conventional] self [i.e., what is rightly taught to be *anātman*], nor can it be destroyed.

[But] if in truth there is [only] the absence of self, the self would not be established [as it just has been, above].⁷³

The first and third of these statements seem to reflect clear *reductio* style arguments. The first denies the possibility of any increase in the number of sentient beings, as this would mean that a self could arise where previously there was none (clearly held to be an untenable position). This refutes the idea that upon awakening any sentient being ‘produces’ a self as they become liberated: instead some permanent self must pre-exist this achievement. The third statement reaffirms

⁷² *MBhS^C* 296c26-c27: 若復無我，而有我者，世間應滿。實有我，非無我亦不壞。若實無我，我則不成。

⁷³ *MBhS^T* D.222, 109b1-2; Q.888, 114a5-6: *gal te yang bdag med pa bdag tu gyur na de'i tshe 'jig rten 'phel ba nyid du rig par bya'o // bdag bden yang bdag kyang ma yin la 'jig par yang mi 'gyur ro // bdag med pa bden na bdag 'thad par (Q. 'thar par) mi 'gyur ro //*

I take the expressions 世間 and *'jig rten*, though more literally denoting ‘the world’, to have here the sense of the totality of (sentient) beings.

that indeed the Buddha has taught a kind of selfhood in this *sūtra* (in the passage previously cited). The middle statement is significant as it seems to reflect what is indeed the line of the *MBhS*: i.e. that something called a self does indeed exist. However here our two translations differ problematically (primarily due to *MBhS*^C 非無我 corresponding to *MBhS*^T *bdag kyang ma yin*): the result being that we cannot easily square these versions with one another, nor reconstruct with much ease with much ease the sense of what either underlying Indic text was saying was saying about how the true self relates to some other notion(s) of selfhood.⁷⁴ Sticky as this seems to be, both versions do still clearly agree that a (true) self as expounded by the *MBhS* is something which cannot be destroyed: it is that which persists into the liberated state of Buddhahood.

The *MBhS* then finally clarifies its position regarding sentient beings themselves, and the impossibility of any increase or decrease in their number. At this juncture, Kāśyapa (the Buddha's interlocutor throughout the *sūtra*) enquires what precisely is meant by 'a being' (有者; *MBhS*^T *mchis pa*, but then in the Buddha's ensuing response *yod pa*: perhaps **bhāva*), to which the reply is that it is those entities which are subject to the twenty-five types of existence (**pañcaviṃśatibhava*) which sentient beings may experience while undergoing transmigration.⁷⁵ At no point does the *MBhS* detail what these categories of rebirth are, but the same expression occurs also in the *MPNMS*, specifically in its account of the *tathāgatagarbha* as the true self persisting through *samsāra*.⁷⁶ What the *MBhS* does clarify, however, is that the categories of 'sentient being' and 'non-being' are fixed, so that the world cannot increase or decrease by virtue of what is one ever becoming the other.

⁷⁴ My solution in the above translations is to read the *bdag bden* of *MBhS*^T to be strongly contrasted with the following *bdag* (which the *bdag bden* is said *not* to be), of which the latter is any self that is denied when the Buddha teaches *anātman*. This can then almost be squared with *MBhS*^C, which states that the self that *does* exist contrasts to what is (properly) without a self (無我).

An alternative solution may be to suppose that *MBhS*^T has (in all editions I have so far consulted) omitted an important further negation, i.e., wants for ...*bdag med kyang ma yin*. The clearer sense of both versions would then be that a true self would be not whatever is without self (i.e. not *anātman*), and hence cannot be subject to destruction.

⁷⁵ *MBhS*^C 296c28-29: 二十五有衆生行; *MBhS*^T D.222,109b2-3, Q.888,114a6-7: *sems can gyi spyod pa srid pa nyi shu rtsa lnga pa*.

⁷⁶ See Nakamura 1980: 1045c; Blum 2013: 372. Chinese tradition takes these 25 as 14 existences in the *kāmadhātu*; 7 in the *rūpadhātu* and 4 in the *arūpyadhātu*.

‘Non-being’ means an entity without mind.

If a non-being were [to become] a sentient being, then that [sentient being] must come [into being] from elsewhere [, which is untenable].

If entities with minds were destroyed, then sentient beings would decrease [in the world, which is untenable].

If non-beings were [to become] sentient beings, they would fill up [the world, by increase, which is untenable].

Because sentient beings do not come into existence, nor are they destroyed, [their numbers] neither decrease nor increase.⁷⁷

This distinction between sentient beings – which, we recall, are those possessing the *tathāgatagarbha* – and non-sentient entities is not without basis elsewhere in related literature: the *MPNMS* affirms that non-sentient entities do not have life in them and so, it is implied, have no *tathāgatagarbha*.⁷⁸ Notably *MBhS^T* concludes specifically that ‘these two (i.e. beings and so-called ‘non-beings’) do not arise and are not destroyed’ (*de gnyis mi skye zhing nyams par mi ’gyur*): confirming that things without minds, so-called ‘non-beings’, must be real entities also. Nevertheless there is clearly an important distinction between entities with minds (有思; *sems can*) and those without (無思之物; *sems pa med pa ’i dngos po*): the latter do not participate in the cycle of rebirth. A sentient being cannot result from any change to a so-called non-being, i.e., to one without a mind (the sense of ‘becoming’ is clearer in *MBhS^T*: *med pa sems can du gyur*). This is untenable, and hence so also is the idea of any increase in the number of sentient beings. Predictably, no being with a mind can ever be destroyed: beings either continue to transmigrate or, owing to their possessing a self (which cannot be destroyed), attain *nirvāṇa*, which is a kind of liberated existence. Hence there can be no decrease in the number of sentient beings either.

This passage leads Kāśyapa to enquire further about the true self, to which the Buddha responds with the analogies of the goldsmith and of the students of

⁷⁷ *MBhS^C* 296c29-297a3: 非有者，無思之物。若(若+(不壞)<元><明>)非有是衆生者，應從他來。設有思之物壞者，衆生當滅。若非有是衆生者，則應充滿。以衆生不生不壞故。不滅不滿。Compare *MBhS^T*: D.222, 109b2-4; Q.888, 114a7-b1.

⁷⁸ *MPNMS^C* 882b23-24; *MPNMS^C* 406a24; *MPNMS^T* §364, 11-12. This could easily be read as a response to Jain doctrine concerning the ubiquity of *jīvas*, but in a text very much concerned with understanding what is proper to *sattvas* is likely meant to clarify where sentient life, and consequently the *tathāgatagarbha*, is and is not to be found. See Schmithausen 2009: 113-115.

language (mentioned in the previous section). Hence the discussion of the *MBhS* concerning the impossibility of decrease or increase in regards to sentient beings is framed by its account of what precisely a sentient being *is*: i.e. a sentient entity, in possession of a self, otherwise known as the *tathāgatagarbha*. Such beings are bound to *saṃsāra* (i.e. lacking sovereignty over conditioned existence), but, having the *tathāgatagarbha*, are both essentially indestructible and capable of attaining a kind of permanent, liberated existence akin to that of the Buddha.

The *MBhS* in Contrast with the *AAN*

It could seem as if the authors of the *MBhS* missed a trick. The bivalency of *dhātu*, frequently attested across Mahāyāna sources, allows texts like the *AAN* to address both ‘what (in total) exists’, in the sense of the realm of beings, and ‘what (properly) exists’ as essential to any one of them: two issues that the *AAN* can take as interrelated.⁷⁹ However the conspicuous omission of the term *dhātu* as anything like ‘realm’ in the *MBhS* suggests something important about its doctrine: that its interest is not the number of existing beings that could be considered to constitute reality as a whole (i.e., which could be identifiable with something like the *dharmadhātu*). Rather, the *MBhS* is concerned simply with the nature of discrete sentient beings, which all, individually, can be said to be of like kind: namely, possessing the (or perhaps better ‘a’) *tathāgatagarbha*. In other words the account of neither decrease nor increase in the *MBhS* is a discussion not about an underlying metaphysical unity, but simply part of an account of what it is to be a sentient being, and how, in turn, we should understand liberation from rebirth.

We recall that in the *AAN* the label ‘sentient being’ is a provisional one given to what is better understood as the *tathāgatagarbha/dharmakāya*: in this text something that underpins *saṃsāric* existence. In the *MBhS* sentient beings are discussed in more definitive terms: as existing entities which, due to being in possession of a self (the *tathāgatagarbha*, or otherwise *sattvadhātu*), are capable of realizing Buddhahood, which is understood as a kind of permanent, ‘sovereign’

⁷⁹ This bivalency may speak to Western philosophers who subscribe to Martin Heidegger’s account of metaphysics as ‘ontotheology’: asking at once ‘what *is* a being?’ (ontologically, in the sense of what status is common to all ‘beings’) and ‘*what* is a being?’ (‘theologically’, in the sense of what things can be said to exist). The authors of the *AAN* perhaps play on the bivalency of *dhātu* as both the ‘essence’ of sentient beings and the ‘expanse’ of them, employing what may be a comparable kind of semantic play: see Thomson 2000: 299-303.

existence. It is clear that the *MBhS* exhibits a form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine closer to that found in the *MPNMS*, and a Buddhology informed by both this and the *SPS*, concerned with the status of Buddhas as personal, influential, but fundamentally discrete entities. This is in contrast to the *AAN*, which considers the *tathāgatagarbha* – identified with a quite different idea of the *dharmakāya* – to be a basis for what are only conventionally called ‘beings’ and ‘Buddhas’, and holds both of these to be something like modes of a single metaphysical substrate.

Hence these texts exhibit two very different accounts of how there is neither decrease nor increase in the total number of sentient beings – *sattvas* and Buddhas together – and while both *sūtras* have recourse to some notion of the *tathāgatagarbha*, they understand this doctrine in profoundly different ways. The *MBhS* holds awakening to be the liberation of one’s proper, sovereign self, i.e. some kind of permanent *subject*. This is realization of a *dharmakāya* – an expression used only fleetingly by the *MBhS* – which is an indestructible body contrastable with any finite, material body bound to *saṃsāra*. In the *AAN*, echoing the *ŚDS*, awakening is understood as the purification of the *tathāgatagarbha* that is more like a permanent *substrate*, and identifiable with a quite different notion of *dharmakāya*, which is here the underlying basis for both sentient beings and Buddhas.

Finally, the concern of the *MBhS* to distinguish sentient from non-sentient beings raises a further question: what, for either text, is the status of non-sentient entities? The *MBhS* recognizes the existence of both 1) sentient beings, possessing the *tathāgatagarbha*, and 2) entities without minds. Though the latter are also called ‘non beings’ (無有; *med pa*: **abhāva*), for at least *MBhS^T* they are also without beginning or end, and are certainly real (non-sentient) entities. In the *AAN* (and implied by the *ŚDS*), sentient beings are simply manifested from the *dharmakāya*, and the status of non-sentient beings is not addressed: reality seems to be explained exhaustively in terms of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the *dharmakāya*, and the intrinsically pure mind. Let us remember that it was the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of the *ŚDS* – the first text in this tradition to conceive of the *tathāgatagarbha* as a kind of substrate – which seems to have influenced the *LAS*. This is a Yogācārin work, for which non-sentient phenomena do not exist independently of the original foundation of the mind, the *ālayavijñāna* (identified here with the *tathāgatagarbha*).⁸⁰ Arguably the metaphysics of the *AAN* lends itself to the position that non-sentient entities are in a sense epiphenomenal, though this seems distant from the comparatively ‘realist’ character of the *MBhS* and its account of what things exist.

⁸⁰ See fn.25.

Hence the *MBhS* and *AAN*, though each employing a notion of the *tathāgatagarbha* to confront the issue of decrease or increase in the number of sentient beings, represent two distinctive traditions of how this doctrine was conceptualized. It is also clear that their interests in dealing with this issue are not the same. For the *AAN* (as the title of Silk's study suggests) this is a matter of demonstrating the underlying unity of all existing (sentient) things, both *sattvas* and Buddhas, which are projections of (or, perhaps, onto) the *dharmakāya*. For the *MBhS*, the issue is rather the constancy of a number of discretely existing beings, all of whom are in possession of some awakened essence, their true self, which can be liberated from *saṃsāra*.

Conclusion

Silk is certainly right to hold that the *AAN* is, in likelihood, a late work among Indian *sūtras* that espouse the *tathāgatagarbha*. It seems to be informed by the *ŚDS*, and hence is very probably pre-dated by the *MPNMS*.⁸¹ However there is I think an inconsistency between this and Silk's other suggestion, made only in passing, that the *MBhS* reflects a 'more advanced' account of the realm of sentient beings than that found in the *AAN*.⁸² When we hold that a text is more advanced, we may have in mind 1) the complexity of its thinking, 2) the clarity or coherence of its arguments, or, demonstrable by either of the above, 3) its dating relative to other texts. Having demonstrated that in the first two of these senses the *AAN* indeed seems the more advanced text – espousing a sophisticated account of the *tathāgatagarbha* / *dharmakāya* as a kind of metaphysical substrate, for which we find no evidence

⁸¹ Silk 2015, 10; Radich 2015a: 88-97.

⁸² Silk 2015, 2 fn.6; 50.

in the *MBhS* – I find it very likely that the *MBhS* is the earlier of these two works.⁸³

The account of the constancy of beings in the *MBhS* does not feature the *sattvadhātu* as a realm of sentient beings, the *dharmakāya* as a pervasive reality, or indeed the *dharmadhātu* at all. It is concerned simply with beings and Buddhas (and to some extent ‘non-beings’ which exist apart from these), and not any grand metaphysical abstractions as expounded in the *AAN*. Moreover its account of beings and Buddhas is even quite crude: there exist simply a vast number of sentient beings, which by virtue of each having the *tathāgatagarbha*, their ‘true self’, can all, eventually, attain the state of Buddhahood. This attainment is the acquisition of a (barely mentioned) *dharmakāya*, which designates permanent, sovereign existence without bondage to an unending cycle of death and rebirth.

Furthermore, where the *AAN* identifies wrong views – primarily of the annihilationist kind, which hold *nirvāṇa* to be a kind of oblivion – it certainly evokes what is discussed in greater depth by the *MBhS*: clear opposition from audiences well-versed in *sūtras* of a *śūnyavādin* orientation. Opposing these audiences is a primary concern of the *MBhS*, and some views deemed erroneous by the *AAN* appear in the *MBhS* to be more immediately present and very much in conflict with its form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. For example, the *AAN*

⁸³ This opposes Suzuki (1997: 43-44, fn.12), who suggests that material on neither decrease nor increase in the *MBhS* was likely influenced by that of the *AAN*. We have recognized a conspicuous absence of the term *sattvadhātu* qua ‘realm of sentient beings’ in the *MBhS*, and moreover of *dhātu* in the sense of any ‘realm’ at all; these are categories so central to the *AAN* that it is hard to fathom why authors influenced by it, and addressing an issue so pivotal to it, would omit them. Furthermore, the absence of the identification of the *tathāgatagarbha* and *dharmakāya* in the *MBhS* suggests a major difference between this text and the *AAN*. This is explainable not necessarily by any silent presumption of this equation, but by the *MBhS* being closer to the quite different and probably earlier form of *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine found in the *MPNMS*. See also Radich 2015a: 96-97; Grosnick 1977.

Suzuki (2002; 2007; 2016) further suggests that the *MBhS* is significant in the history of *tathāgatagarbha* literature for opening something of a conceptual gap between the *tathāgatagarbha* and *dharmakāya*, in order to tackle the problem of how the former can be thought of as somehow afflicted while the latter must be intrinsically pure. Without attending to every detail of Suzuki’s otherwise groundbreaking treatment of the *MBhS*, I believe that a better understanding comes from treating this text as pre-dating the kind of *tathāgatagarbha* / *dharmakāya* equation found in the *ŚDS* and *AAN*. Thus the *dharmakāya* of the *MBhS* is nothing like a substratum for the existence of sentient beings, but rather (albeit enigmatically) designates just the permanent existence of a Buddha beyond his worldly body. Presuming otherwise accords with Takasaki’s chronology of *tathāgatagarbha* sources, prioritizing the *TGS*, *ŚDS*, and *AAN* over the *MPNMS*-group of texts, but this chronology is due for reconsideration in light of Radich’s proposals regarding the relative dating of all of these texts.

criticizes the view that ‘sentient beings are an illusory creation’ (衆生幻化所作見), which Silk points out ‘could be doctrinally acceptable from a *śūnyavādin* point of view, or even a Mahāyānist point of view more generally’.⁸⁴ The *MBhS* identifies annihilationist understandings of emptiness to be a major obstacle to the acceptance of its own doctrine.

[Members of the *saṅgha*] in the expressions ‘there is a self’ and ‘there is absence of self’ fear the expression ‘there is a self’; they adopt the annihilationist view of great emptiness, and cultivate non-self. In this way they do not produce faith in the very profound *sūtras* of the *tathāgatarbha*, and of the permanent abiding of the Buddhas.⁸⁵

The *MBhS* is committed to the idea that the liberation of Buddhas is a kind of enduring existence, and advances the *tathāgatarbha* of sentient beings as that aspect of them which will eventually enjoy this status. The *AAN* is similarly concerned with explaining how sentient beings are on a fundamental level not different from awakened Buddhas, but does this by explaining both to be nothing other than the *dharmakāya*. Hence, despite sharing some similar concerns, it is clear that these two texts belong to different traditions of understanding the *tathāgatarbha*: the *MBhS* – following the *MPNMS* – concerned with describing a lasting subject, articulated where this reality is described in terms of the *ātman*; while the *AAN* – following the *ŚDS* – describes an awakened substrate, which only on a conventional level permits talk of discrete ‘beings’ becoming ‘Buddhas’.

A fresh appreciation of the *tathāgatarbha* literature as a whole, with attention to relatively overlooked works in this tradition, will unpack better the similarities and differences across these two sources and others. For the time being it is enough to conclude that this idea was handled very differently by the *MBhS*, in which the *tathāgatarbha* designates something closer to the potential to become an awakened agent, and on the other hand by the *AAN*, which exhibits a more sophisticated, even metaphysically abstruse, doctrine. Only the latter, evidenced by quotation of the *AAN* in the *RGV*, seems to have had much influence upon later Indian Buddhist thought.

⁸⁴ Silk 2015: 80 (§6), *AAN* 466c10-14.

⁸⁵ *MBhS*^C: T.270,298a10-a12: 於有我無我聲，畏有我聲，入於大空斷見，修習無我。於如是如來藏諸、佛常住甚深經典，不生信樂。Compare *MBhS*^T: D.222,115b4-5; Q.888,121a7-8. See also fn.56 and 64.

Abbreviations

<i>AMN</i>	<i>Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra.</i>
<i>AMS</i>	<i>Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra.</i>
<i>AMSC</i>	<i>Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra</i> : Chinese translation, 央掘魔羅經, T.120 (Vol.II).
<i>AMST</i>	<i>Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation – <i>'phags pa sor mo'i phreng ba la phan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo</i> , e.g. D.213; Q.879.
<i>AAN</i>	<i>Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta</i> : Chinese translation, 佛說不增不減經, T.668 (Vol.XVI).
<i>D</i>	<i>Derge</i> edition of the Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> / <i>bstan 'gyur</i> .
<i>LAS</i>	<i>Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra</i> : Nanjio edition (1923).
<i>MBhS</i>	* <i>Mahābherī Sūtra.</i>
<i>MBhSC</i>	* <i>Mahābherī Sūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Guṇabhadra, 大法鼓經, T.270 (Vol.IX).
<i>MBhST</i>	* <i>Mahābherī Sūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation of Vidyākaraṇa and dPal gyi lhun po: D.222, Q.888.
<i>MN</i>	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> (Pāli Text Society edition).
<i>MPNMS</i>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra.</i>
<i>MPNMSC¹</i>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Faxian, 佛說大般泥洹經, T.376 (Vol.XII).
<i>MPNMSC²</i>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra</i> : Chinese translation of Dharmakṣema, 大般涅槃經, T.374 (Vol.XII).
<i>MPNMST</i>	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra</i> : Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> translation – <i>'phags pa yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa chen po'i mdo</i> , Habata edition (2013); also e.g. D.120; Q.788.
<i>Q</i>	<i>Pe cing</i> edition of the Tibetan <i>bka' 'gyur</i> / <i>bstan 'gyur</i> ; volumes in Suzuki (1955-61), <i>The Tibetan Tripitaka</i> , Tokyo: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute.

<i>RGV</i>	<i>Ratnagotravibhāga Śāstra</i> (plus its vyākhyā): Johnston edition (1950).
<i>SN</i>	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> (Pāli Text Society edition).
<i>SPS</i>	<i>Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra</i> : Kern & Nanjio edition (1970).
<i>ŚDS</i>	<i>Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra</i> : references herein are to the fifth century Chinese translation by Guṇabhadra, 勝鬘師子吼一乘大方便方廣經, T.353 (Vol.XII).
<i>T</i>	Taishō edition of the Chinese canon.
<i>TGS</i>	<i>Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra</i> .

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