

Manifestation
of the
Tathāgata

Buddhahood According to the
Avatamsaka Sūtra

如來性起



Introduced and Translated by
Cheng Chien Bhikshu



WISDOM PUBLICATIONS
BOSTON

© 1993 Mario Pocesi
All rights reserved.

ISBN 0-86171-054-1

WISDOM PUBLICATIONS
361 NEWBURY STREET
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chien, Cheng, 1964-

Manifestation of the Tathāgata : buddhahood according to the
Avataṃsaka Sūtra / introduced and translated by Cheng Chien Bhikshu.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-86171-054-1 (pbk. : alk. paper) :

1. Gautama Buddha. 2. Tripiṭaka. Sūtrapiṭaka.

Buddhāvataṃsakamahāvaiṇyaśūtra—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

I. Tripiṭaka. Sūtrapiṭaka. Buddhāvataṃsakamahāvaiṇyaśūtra.

English. Selection. 1993. II. Title.

BQ882.C45 1993

294.3'823—dc20

93-24080

CIP

96 97 95 94

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Cover Calligraphy by You Shan Tang
Diacritical Garamond created by Pierre Robillard ©1993
Typeset by Andrea Thompson & Andrew Fearnside
Designed by Lisa J. Sawlit

Printed in The United States of America

The Bodhisattvas, seeing the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, the dignity of their appearance, fully endowed with all physical marks, whom people rejoice to see, difficult to meet, possessed of great awesome power; or seeing their absolute freedom to appear everywhere, or hearing their prophecies, or harkening their instructions and injunctions, or seeing sentient beings experience all manner of intense suffering, or hearing the vast Buddhadharma of the Tathāgatas, develop bodhicitta and seek all-encompassing wisdom.

“Ten Abodes” chapter, *Avatamsaka Sūtra*



CONTENTS

Foreword *ix*

Preface *xiii*

Acknowledgements *xvii*

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Conception of Buddhahood 3

 Some Meanings of the Term "Buddhahood" 4

 Significance for Religious Cultivation 9

The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 13

 Origins and Transmission 13

 Distinctive Features 16

 Influence on Chinese Buddhism 18

The "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" Chapter 21

 Chinese Translations and Commentaries 21

 Position in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 23

 Content Summary 26

 Related Doctrines 31

 On Reading the Translation 40

PART TWO: MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

 Prologue 47

 The Characteristics of the Manifestation of the Tathāgata 53

 The Body of the Tathāgata 69

 The Voice of the Tathāgata 81

 The Mind of the Tathāgata 97

The Realm of the Tathāgata	110
The Activity of the Tathāgata	114
The Accomplishment of Perfect Enlightenment of the Tathāgata	117
The Turning of the Dharma-wheel	122
The Parinirvāṇa of the Tathāgata	125
The Wholesome Roots Planted by Seeing, Hearing, and Associating with the Tathāgata	129
Epilogue	135

Notes 141

Glossary 165

Bibliography 169

FOREWORD

The Indian Mahāyāna sūtras can be divided, according to the chronology of their emergence, into three main groups: early, middle, and late. The two most influential works, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, belong to the early group, although the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and its related texts are thought to have appeared somewhat later than the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.

The *Prajñāpāramitā* texts teach the supreme meaning of emptiness. The *Avataṃsaka*, however, using this understanding of emptiness as a foundation, establishes the concept of the “miraculous existence of immaculate, limitless worlds.” Although the text of the *Avataṃsaka* is vast and complex, it has one dominant theme consistently running through it—a characteristic that may indicate that it is not a collection of shorter sūtras.

From the beginning of Buddhism up to the appearance of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, there was a shift in emphasis from a karmically driven causally originated human existence to a view of the world that is causally originated from Pure Mind. Thus it is said in the *Avataṃsaka* that “everything in the Triple Realm is due to Mind” and “the twelve links of conditioned origination are all dependent on the One Mind.”

While the *Prajñāpāramitā* posits the deluded mind as the cause of the twelve-linked chain of conditioned origination, the *Avataṃsaka* speaks about the “Triple Realm” originating from Mind, that is, from Pure Mind. This is the distinctive characteristic of the sūtra. What is the miraculous existence of the immaculate, limitless Pure Mind? The *Avataṃsaka* identifies

FOREWORD

the entire *dharmadhātu* (universe) as the manifestation of Vairocana—the immaculate, *dharmakāya* Buddha. That precisely is the conditioned origination of the miraculous existence from the Pure Mind.

The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* circulated throughout India and China in the years A.D. 150–250. The Chinese translations of this sūtra vary in complexity. There exist both simplified and elaborate versions. In addition to the best known versions in eighty, forty, and sixty volumes, there are also forty-three sūtras which, though different, are founded on the same system of thought as the *Avataṃsaka*. Also, the number of volumes varies, some consisting of only one volume, while others consisting of up to ten volumes. For example, there is a translation by the monk Dharmarakṣa (ca. 266–308) of the Western Chin Dynasty entitled *The Appearance of the Tathāgata Sūtra* (*Ju-lai hsing-hsien ching*) in four volumes. This text is another version of chapter 26 of the eighty-volume *Avataṃsaka*, the “Manifestation of the Tathāgata,” under a different title.

Venerable Cheng Chien is accomplished both as a linguist and as an expert in the foundations of the theory of Buddhism. During the past two years he has paid brief visits to both our Institute of Chung-Hwa Culture in New York City and the Dharma Drum Mountain near Taipei. Through these encounters I learned that he was engaged in researching the *Avataṃsaka* and translating the “Manifestation of the Tathāgata” chapter. Recently he presented me with the completed manuscript.

In addition to translating this text, Ven. Cheng Chien has utilized the works of the ancient Chinese Hua-yen scholars, among them Tsung-mi and Li-T’ung Hsuan, in order to help facilitate the reader’s comprehension of the material. Most important, however, Ven. Cheng Chien lucidly introduces the reader to the meaning of Buddhahood, as well as explains the origin, transmission, and special features of the *Avataṃsaka*

FOREWORD

Sūtra. He also presents us with his understanding of the stature of the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" chapter in the context of the entire sūtra, as well as its relation to other scholastic texts.

The present volume is an excellent work. It is an honor for me to write this foreword to Ven. Cheng Chien's *Manifestation of the Tathāgata*.

VEN. SHENG-YEN, LITT. D.



PREFACE

The idea for undertaking the work on the present volume came as a response to a perceived need to provide authentic and authoritative English language texts about Buddhahood. The Buddha and the reality which he symbolizes are the focal point of Buddhism and the source of ultimate refuge for all Buddhists, embodying all their aspiration. The choice of the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" chapter from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* for this purpose was a natural one for two reasons. First, the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" chapter is one of the most important sections of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Long esteemed by the Buddhist followers in the Far East, this chapter (or *sūtra*) is among the most comprehensive and authoritative texts on the nature of Buddhahood from the perspective of the One Vehicle teaching. The second reason is a personal one. This text is one of my favorite chapters of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; a *sūtra* that over time has proven to be the most valuable source of inspiration and guidance in my religious cultivation, and that I believe can play a major role in the growth of Buddhism in the West. It is my hope that this translation, with all its imperfections, will help to focus more attention on this important text.

The present translation was done from the Śikṣānanda's eighty-*chüan* Chinese translation. In this translation I have tried to keep to the original as closely as possible. In certain instances when a particular passage could have been read in different ways, I have followed the reading of Ch'eng-kuan Ta-shih (738–839) as found in his standard commentary on the *sūtra*. The Chinese editions of the text of the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata"

PREFACE

chapter and Ch'eng-kuan's commentary used for the present volume are those from Tao-p'ei, ed., *Hua-yen ching shu lun tsuan-yao* (*Compilation of the Explication and the Comments on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*). The Taishō references of Ch'eng-kuan's commentary are for reference only.

A previous translation of the Manifestation of the Tathāgata" chapter under the title "Manifestation of the Buddha" appeared in Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 2 (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986), pp. 282–333. I often consulted this translation during the preparation of the present translation, and wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to it. Considering its scope, Dr. Cleary's work is truly commendable; however, there are certain aspects of his translation that allow for improvement. Among them are his rather free style, and his tendency to translate every technical term into English, even when the original Sanskrit is more familiar than his own renditions.

In addition, not only does the sheer volume of the entire scripture put off many readers, but its intricacy, comprehensiveness, and profuse use of symbolism and imagery can prove insurmountable obstacles for even those brave enough to try to tackle its mysteries. It seems to me that a useful approach might be to present the important chapters of the *Avataṃsaka*—which by themselves are independent sūtras—as individual volumes with the appropriate introductory material and annotation to assist the present-day reader. This approach should, of course, supplement the study of the whole sūtra, not replace it. I hope this volume will be followed by others that in a similar way will present the other principal chapters of the *Avataṃsaka*.

The transliterations from the Chinese in this volume are in the Wade-Giles system. The definitions of Buddhist terms usually follow those given in William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Kao-hsiung,

PREFACE

Taiwan: Fo-kuang ch'u-pan she, 1962) and/or Ting Fu-pao, *Fo-hsüeh ta ts'u-tien*, in two volumes (Taipei: Hua-tsang fo-chiao t'u-shu kuan, 1988) The following abbreviations have been used throughout this volume:

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku.
- HTC *Hsü tsang ching*, a Taiwanese reprint of Dainippon zokuzōkyō.
- HYCS *Hua-yen ching shu*, by Ch'eng-kuan.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to the following individuals who contributed to the preparation of this volume: Ko Chiren for comparing most of the translation with the original Chinese text; Stuart Lachs and Cynthia Durgan for reading parts of the manuscript, especially the Introduction, and offering useful suggestions for possible improvements; and Elizabeth Goreham and Jack Matson for expressing interest in my work and providing practical help toward the production of the manuscript. My deep appreciation goes to Nick Ribush, Timothy McNeill, and the staff of Wisdom Publications for their interest in my work and their expertise in the production of this volume. Their dedication to bringing the Dharma to the West serves as a fine example of actively putting the teaching into practice. My special thanks are due to Ven. Sheng Yen for honoring me by assenting to write the Foreword. I also wish to acknowledge the support from Jerry Pan, as well as from Liu Te-wen and the numerous faithful associated with the Texas Buddhist Association, without whose generosity it might have been impossible to bring out this volume in its present form. To them, and to all others who are dedicated to the Buddha's Path of wisdom and compassion, this volume is dedicated.



Part One

INTRODUCTION

11

12

13

14

THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

From the very beginnings of Buddhism the first step toward becoming a Buddhist follower has consisted in taking the three refuges—the refuges in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. The three refuges embody the highest ideals of Buddhism, and provide the ultimate source of inspiration and guidance for the Buddhist follower. Often the three refuges are viewed as three aspects of one reality. This interrelatedness of the three refuges is indicated by the well-known saying of the Buddha about his relationship with the Dharma, as recorded in the Pāli canon: “He who sees the Dhamma (Dharma) sees me; he who sees me sees the Dhamma. For it is when he sees the Dhamma that he sees me; and it is when he sees me that he sees the Dhamma.”¹ With this kind of understanding, sometimes for the sake of better focus the three refuges are condensed into one, which is referred to as the “ultimate refuge.” This is the “one essence” which manifests as three.²

Most often the choice for representing the ultimate refuge falls on the Buddha. That is so in part because for most people the Buddha is the easiest of the three refuges to relate to, and is the most suitable object for the development of faith, which plays an essential role in the cultivation of the Path (*mārga*). So it is natural that we speak of Buddhism (the religion or teaching of the Buddha or about the Buddha), and of Buddhists (the followers of the Buddha). One may, then, conclude that for anyone seriously interested in Buddhism, be it as a philosophical system and a phenomenon in religious history, or in a more personal way as a vehicle of spiritual liberation, the understanding of the

INTRODUCTION

concept of Buddhahood should be of paramount importance.

What is meant by the Buddha? What is Buddhahood? Can we achieve it? And if so, by what means can it be achieved? These are some of the questions that naturally arise in the course of thoughtful consideration of the teaching of the Buddha.

Some Meanings of the Term "Buddhahood"

As even a cursory reading of works on the subject of Buddhism soon reveals, words such as Buddha and Buddhahood are often used in various senses. Normally the term "Buddhahood" is used in a broader conceptual context than the term "Buddha" and has more pronounced impersonal connotations, though the two are often interchangeable. When encountering the term "Buddha" what first comes to mind is the monk who after attaining enlightenment "turned the wheel of the Dharma, which is sublime in the beginning, sublime in the middle, and sublime in the end." This is the Buddha who would put on his robe and go for alms, instruct his disciples, and go to rest at night. The great teacher who initiated one of the great world religions, established the Order that preserved his teaching over the centuries (albeit in a number of different formulations), became old and passed away. Śākyamuni Buddha, or Gotama the Buddha, is the enlightened being to whom Buddhists are eternally indebted for the teaching that leads to the purification of mind and enables one to experience that perfect freedom which cannot be shaken by anything, a teaching that is always accessible to those who are sincere and have faith.

Besides the historical Buddha the scriptures also speak of numerous other Buddhas, such as Kāśyapa Buddha and Akṣobhya Buddha. All these Buddhas are said to be identical in their realization and the virtue they manifest, thus forming a lineage of Buddhas of which Śākyamuni is only the last one to appear in this world.

THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

But often we come to another image of the Buddha: a Buddha whose body pervades the universe, in whose single pore numberless worlds are revealed, who is eternally expounding the Dharma. And even further, sometimes the Buddha is spoken of as emptiness, suchness, the inconceivable reality, the absolute. This is the Buddha whose "body is unborn" and whose "essential nature is quiescent and without any characteristics."³ Here the term is obviously used as an appellation of ultimate reality, rather than of a person.

These different senses in which the term "Buddha" is used have often led to some confusion. A number of disputes and misunderstandings within the Buddhist community from the earliest times have revolved around the status of the Buddha and the nature of Buddhahood. For example, those who are used to the term as commonly employed in the sūtras of the Pāli canon are often baffled when they encounter in the Mahāyāna scriptures the depiction of the Buddha as (what appears to be) a godlike transcendent being. Hence there are accusations about "corrupting influences" from Hinduism, supposedly contrary to the spirit of "original Buddhism." Or when people take literally or out of context some of the statements and symbolism used for the sake of illustration in the Mahāyāna scriptures they are liable to commit gross category mistakes or conceive of all kinds of superstitions. This is usually accompanied by the loss of sight of the ordinariness of the Buddha as a person, and often leads to an attitude that precludes any attempt toward genuine personal transformation.

First of all, terms such as "Buddha" and "Buddhahood" are just that—mere words that assume the meanings we give to them. Many of the arguments in Buddhism are due to overlooking this simple fact. Often proponents of different doctrines simply ignore the definitions of the cardinal concepts and the contexts in which they are used by their self-assigned opponents.

INTRODUCTION

Imputing their own understanding of the concepts and doctrines under discussion, they try to prove their fallacy.⁴

When trying to understand a concept such as “Buddhahood,” it is important to distinguish between the different senses in which the term is used. This is not always an easy task, since often even within a short passage the same term can be used with a variety of connotations with still subtler nuances. In some scriptures, such as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, this technique is often used in order to help the reader to develop an intuitive understanding of the different shades of meaning and integrate them in a holistic, all-inclusive awareness that is able to perceive things as they truly are.

A useful device for distinguishing the different levels of meaning of Buddhahood is the doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha. The three bodies are (1) *dharmakāya*, the essential body of the Buddha, which corresponds to the ultimate reality, (2) *sambhogakāya*, the body of reward, which in its glorified form is revealed to the Bodhisattvas, and (3) *nirmāṇakāya*, the transformation body, which is the physical body of the Buddha as manifest in the human realm. When using this classical Mahāyāna doctrine, however, it is useful to bear in mind that the three bodies lack self-nature and are just three aspects of one ineffable reality, and each body implies the other two. Sometimes only two bodies are spoken of; it is also possible to speak of ten bodies, or some other number, depending on the number of perspectives from which Buddhahood is observed.

The three bodies and their mutual interrelatedness is well illustrated in the last chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the “Entering the *Dharmadhātu*” chapter. Toward the end of the chapter, after Sudhana, the main hero of the scripture, has visited all other teachers in his quest for enlightenment, he comes to Maitreya, the future Buddha, to inquire about the Bodhisattvas’ practice. Having witnessed the miraculous display in the Tower of the Store of Vairocana’s Adornments, Sudhana asks Maitreya

THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

where he comes from. In response Maitreya describes the place of his origin in three different ways. While Maitreya speaks about the place of coming of the Bodhisattvas, the description equally applies to Buddhahood, as the context and the explanation given below demonstrate. First he says:

All Bodhisattvas have no coming and going—thus do they come. They come from where there is no activity or abiding. They come from where there is no abode or attachment, no passing away or birth, no stability or change, no movement or arising, no desire or attachment, no action or result, no creation or destruction, no annihilation or permanence.⁵

Maitreya continues his explanation by shifting the focus of his exposition to another level of meaning. The Bodhisattvas also come—that is, are produced—from great compassion, great kindness, pure discipline, great vows, non-attachment, wisdom, skillful methods, etc. Then Maitreya ends his answer by shifting his perspective once more, and tells Sudhana that he comes from a village called Kuti in his native country Malayadesa.

According to the comments on this passage given by Ch'eng-kuan (738–839),⁶ the reputed fourth patriarch of the Hua-yen tradition, in his reply Maitreya explains “the place from where all Bodhisattvas come” (i.e., Buddhahood) from three perspectives, which are correlated to the three bodies of the Buddha. First is the perspective of the “essence” (*t'i*), which is encompassed in the first part of Maitreya's reply. In terms of the three bodies of the Buddha it corresponds to the *dharmakāya*. This is the essential nature, or the ultimate reality, in which coming and going lose their identity. Because the *dharmakāya* is beyond the sphere of thought and perception, the text presents a series of negations to point to the realm that is beyond conceptual imagination.

The second perspective is that of the characteristics (*hsiang*); it is encompassed in the second part of Maitreya's reply and

INTRODUCTION

corresponds to the *sambhogakāya*, which is born from the myriad practices of the Bodhisattvas. The third perspective is that of the function (*yung*) of Buddhahood; it is its active aspect, which is represented by the *nirmāṇakāya*, the physical body that appears in the world in response to conditions in order to benefit sentient beings.⁷ The *nirmāṇakāya* is alluded to in the last part of Maitreya's reply where he claims Malayadesa (presumably a locality in India) as his native place.

When speaking in terms of principle (*li*) and phenomena (*shih*),⁸ the *dharmakāya* corresponds to the principle, the *nirmāṇakāya* to phenomena, while the *sambhogakāya* is the meeting ground of both.⁹ This explication has direct implications for our understanding of the ways the different aspects of Buddhahood are mutually related.

The limitations of the view that attaches to the Buddha as a person, while a perfectly understandable human tendency with a useful role in the course of religious cultivation, are often pointed out in the sūtras. For example, there are the following verses in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*:

If someone would for a hundred thousand kalpas
Constantly look at the Tathāgata
Without relying on ultimate reality,
But [only] seeing the world's savior,

That person is attaching to forms,
And enlarging the net of ignorance and illusion;
Tied up to the prison of birth and death,
Deluded, he does not see the Buddha.¹⁰

The purpose of the teaching of the Buddha is not to set up some special being as an object of worship and bestower of liberation, but to point to the eternal reality that can be realized by anyone. That is the reason why in the first few centuries of Buddhist history the main object of worship for the Buddha's

THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

followers was the *stūpa*, which represents the Buddha as the formless reality realized by him. As someone who has perfectly comprehended the ultimate reality—or rather has realized his identity with it—and is able to direct others to it, the Buddha symbolizes that reality. Thus his importance lies primarily in what he signifies and indicates to others, rather than what he was as a person.

But disregarding the Buddha as a person and trying to take the teaching completely out of its historical context is also an attitude based on limited understanding. After all, if it were not for the Buddha there would not have been any knowledge about the Buddhadharmā in the world. As the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* states:

Like a jewel in darkness
Which cannot be seen without a lamp,
If there is no one to explain the Buddhadharmā,
Even among the wise no one can realize it.¹¹

As demonstrated by the Hua-yen teaching of the interpenetration and mutual identity of the principle and phenomena (about which more will be said below), a more correct outlook would be one that would simultaneously include the different aspects of Buddhahood in an all-inclusive perspective in which they harmoniously interrelate in perfect freedom and non-obstruction. Or, from the viewpoint of practice,

If someone wishes to know the realm of the Buddha,
He should purify his mind [so that it becomes] like space;
Forsaking false thoughts and attachments,
Having the mind unobstructed amidst all objects.¹²

Significance for Religious Cultivation

Keeping in mind the different conceptions of Buddhahood, we can develop a better appreciation of its centrality in Buddhism

INTRODUCTION

as both the source of the Path and its various formulations, as well as the ultimate goal of the Path. Buddhahood is the central point of Buddhism from which flow the numerous elements that constitute that tradition, and to which they constantly refer and ultimately return.

Buddhahood is the source of the Path within both a historical and conceptual context. From a historical perspective, the various doctrines that elaborate on the form and substance of the Path all have their roots—or at least claim to have—in the Buddha's experience of perfect enlightenment. On a different level, Buddhahood is the source of the Path inasmuch as it is the "seed" present in sentient beings that causes them to aspire toward enlightenment. This seed, according to a certain line of thought, is the pure luminous mind, which is only adventitiously covered with defilements. Simultaneously, Buddhahood is the primordial ground upon which one's practice takes place, which when properly done leads to reversion to the original state of perfect freedom, bliss, and clarity—the state of Buddhahood.

In relation to the realm of practice, Buddhahood can be perceived as the starting point of one's cultivation, the source of guidance during its course, and its final result. It is the starting point because the Buddha and his enlightenment, as the most exalted source of inspiration, serve as the focal object of faith. Faith is an essential quality and prerequisite for any kind of practice, which is why it is regarded as the "source of the Path." As it is stated in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*:

Faith is the source of the Path and Mother of virtue;
Providing nourishment to all wholesome dharmas,
Obliterating the web of doubts and leading away from the
stream of desire,
It shows the supreme path to Nirvāṇa.¹³

During the course of practice Buddhahood also serves as a

THE CONCEPTION OF BUDDHAHOOD

source of direction and guidance for one's cultivation. The active aspect of Buddhahood manifests as the "myriad virtues and practices," the development of which constitutes the Path. Those qualities that are fully developed by the Buddha, and that are constantly manifested in his activity—wisdom, kindness, compassion, etc.—are also the very qualities that have to be developed by the aspiring practitioner. In addition, Buddhahood also provides a framework of standards for evaluating Buddhist teachers, teachings, and spiritual attainments. Clear conceptual understanding of what the Buddha and his teaching stand for (and what they never stand for) can be of enormous use in delineating the actual form and substance of one's involvement with Buddhism. Familiarity with the basic concepts of Buddhism is essential for installing a mature, responsible, and realistic attitude toward the Path. In the case of Buddhahood, that familiarity also helps one to develop a more humble attitude, which in turn prevents one from grasping limited subjective states as constituting any attainment.

Buddhahood is also, ideally, the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. That is to say, the main purpose of Buddhist doctrines is to elaborate a course of religious practice that results in the realization of the perfect freedom the Buddha experienced under the *bodhi* tree.

In light of its centrality to Buddhist theory and practice, in this volume we present a few perspectives on the meaning, characteristics, and significance of Buddhahood. While the text chosen for that purpose is one that has been regarded over the centuries with the greatest esteem by the Buddhists in East Asia, it should be obvious that it is presented from a particular perspective and can only point to the sublime wonder of Buddhahood in a way that is only partially adequate. As the scriptures repeatedly emphasize, Buddhahood is beyond the sphere of thought and language. In order to *fully* understand Buddhahood, one has to

INTRODUCTION

become a Buddha. Because of this, it is often presumed that since the ultimate depth of Buddhahood is not something that can be apprehended on a conceptual level, any attempt toward its conceptual understanding is futile. Yet for almost everyone the highest form of knowing is that which takes place on the conceptual plane, and when we encounter any concept such as Buddhahood, we typically impute some meaning to it. While no explanation, however complete and profound, can ever capture the mystery of Buddhahood (or any similar concept), some forms of understanding are more correct than others. And some are completely wrong. Right and wrong, of course, not in an absolute sense, but in a sense of being or not being conducive to liberation. The kind of basic belief system and conceptual understanding one has—even if one adheres to the fiction of having none—will determine the nature of one's practice and the issuing result—or the lack of it.

Understanding the basic teachings of Buddhism is essential, but that is only one factor in the quest for final liberation. Understanding has to be accompanied with practice and supported by faith. When all of these are fully developed, realization naturally follows.

THE AVATAMSAKA SŪTRA

Origins and Transmission

A n ancient Buddhist tradition relates that after the Buddha realized perfect enlightenment under the bodhi tree in the country of Magadha, from his unobstructed transcendental awareness grounded on his immediate vision of reality he expounded the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* to the vast assembly at the site of enlightenment. The teaching of the sūtra, being a direct expression of the Buddha's realization, discloses the ultimate reality in a "complete and sudden" manner, without any attempt to adjust the exposition to the capacity of the audience. For that reason, when the Buddha expounded the doctrines of the *Avatamsaka*, the story goes, for the most part the listeners stood "as deaf and dumb," failing to understand the teaching which was beyond their power of comprehension. Therefore, for guiding beings inveterate in ignorance, the Buddha resorted to the soteriological contrivance of formulating his instructions in different ways to meet the various abilities of his listeners. From this arose the so-called teachings of the three vehicles.

In accord with the notion that the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* epitomizes the consummate expression of the enlightened mind, the Buddha who figures most prominently throughout the text is Vairocana Buddha. Vairocana represents the absolute aspect of universal Buddhahood. The written version of the sūtra available to humanity is said to be just an extract of the infinite sūtra, eternal and absolute, identical with the ultimate reality of the *dharmadhātu*.¹⁴ This eternal version is said to have been taught by Vairocana Buddha in the Lotus Treasury world while

INTRODUCTION

he was immersed in the Ocean Seal *samādhi*. Being beyond the realm of words and transcending time and space, this sūtra defies all attempts to place it within a historical, cultural, or social context.

Nonetheless, the text of the *Avatamsaka* has been a subject of historical analysis. While there is much that remains unclear about its early provenance, the present state of knowledge seems to suggest that the origins of the text as a literary document can be traced back to the beginning of the Christian era. Since many of the chapters of the *Avatamsaka* exist as independent sūtras, it seems plausible that unknown editors have compiled the various texts into a single volume. The paucity of references to the sūtra in Indian treatises coupled with the appearance of names of sites in Central Asia have led some scholars to even suggest that the texts had been put together outside of India, presumably in the Central Asian area of Khotan.¹⁵ This is further corroborated by the fact that many of the translators of the various sūtras belonging to the *Avatamsaka* corpus were monks from Central Asia.

However, there is no doubt that different versions of the sūtra existed in India, since there are extant manuscripts of the two most important, as well as longest, chapters of the sūtra preserved in Sanskrit as independent sūtras: the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (*Ten Stages Sūtra*) and the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* was—together with its commentary written by Vasubandhu, the *Daśabhūmivivākyāna*, translated into Chinese ca. 508 by Bodhiruci and Ratnamati—a subject of intense study among the learned monks of sixth century China. That was the case especially with those monks who were associated with the Ti-lun school, which was based on its doctrines. The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* corresponds to the longest and most popular chapter of the *Avatamsaka*. Both of these texts can be traced back to the third century at the latest on evidence of

THE AVATAṂSAKA SŪTRA

extant Chinese translations. Moreover, the fact that at certain times parts of the sūtra existed as independent sūtras is by no means a clear indication that the whole text did not exist at the same time. It is well known that for a few centuries after the first Chinese translation of the complete text of the *Avataṃsaka* individual chapters were being translated into Chinese as independent sūtras.

The oldest extant text of the *Avataṃsaka* corpus in Chinese translation is the *Fo shuo t'u-sha ching* (*Tuṣita Sūtra*) in one *chüan*, translated by the Central Asian monk Lokakṣin sometime between 178–189.¹⁶ Other early translations of parts of the sūtra are the *P'u-sa penyeh ching* (*Bodhisattva's Original Acts Sūtra*) in one *chüan*,¹⁷ translated between 222–228 by Chih-ch'ien, a monk from Yueh-chih who came to Lo-yang toward the end of the Later Han Dynasty (25–220); and the *Fo shuo Lo-mo-ch'ieh ching* in three *chüan*,¹⁸ an earlier version of the "Entering the *Dharmadhātu*" chapter, translated between 220–264 by An Fa-hsien, which is unfortunately lost.

There are a few theories about the original title of the *Avataṃsaka*.¹⁹ The most widely accepted reconstruction of the original Sanskrit title is *Buddhāvataṃsaka-nāmamahāvaiṣṭya Sūtra*. The first complete translation of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* into Chinese was done by Buddhahadra (359–429)²⁰ between 418–421. This translation is in sixty *chüan* and has thirty-four chapters; its full title in Chinese is *Ta-fang-kuang fo hua-yen ching*.²¹ A native of Northern India, Buddhahadra was a disciple of Buddhasena. He was a monk of the Sarvāstivāda school which was flourishing in Kashmir, where he spent his formative monastic years. Besides being a scholar and translator, Buddhahadra was also renowned as a specialist in meditation. A new translation of the sūtra under the same title was completed under the patronage of Empress Wu (r. 685–705) during the 695–704 period by the Khotanese monk Śikṣānanda (652–710).²² This

INTRODUCTION

translation is in eighty *chüan*, and has thirty-nine chapters.²³ The two translations are quite similar, the second being perhaps more literal and somewhat longer because it contains new material not found in the older version.

A third forty-*chüan* translation was done between 795–798 by Prajñā,²⁴ another monk from Northern India who specialized in Sarvāstivāda Buddhism.²⁵ This version consists only of the final chapter of the other two versions and never gained the popularity enjoyed by the other two. Besides the Chinese translations of the *Avatamsaka*, there exists a Tibetan translation. Translated around 878–901 by the Indian monks Jinamitra and Surendrabodhi with the help of Ye-śes-sde, this translation is longer than any of the Chinese translations.²⁶

Distinctive Features

Held in highest esteem by the followers of the native Buddhist traditions of East Asia, the text of the *Avatamsaka* is of truly encyclopedic proportions, being one of the longest in the *tripitaka*. All of the important tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism can be found in the *sūtra*, making it one of the most comprehensive compendiums of the Buddhist teaching. The doctrines of the philosophical systems of Indian Buddhism, which were formulated during the first few centuries of the present era, are set in it side by side in a concurrent way, each complementing and shedding more light on the others, thus revealing the Bodhisattva Path in its full depth, glory, and perfection. The principal systems are the Mādhyamika with its apophatic approach based on the teaching of *śūnyatā*, which reveals the absence of inherent self-nature in all phenomena and their dependent origination; the more positive approach of Yogācāra, with its overriding concern of the role of consciousness in the establishment of phenomenal reality, as well as with its transformation which culminates in the attainment of enlightenment; and the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine of the intrinsically pure

THE AVATAṂSAKA SŪTRA

mind. This, of course, does not imply that the sūtra is concerned with the presentation of any of these philosophical systems, or that it is meant to fulfill the same purpose as those treatises that attempt to present the doctrines of a particular Buddhist school. On the contrary, while subsuming all doctrines, the *Avataṁsaka* simultaneously transcends them all and directly discloses the primordial ground from where all doctrines spring, and to which they finally return.

An often quoted feature of the sūtra's exposition of the myriad aspects of the Path is that all of them are presented in the light of the integrative perspective of the one true *dharmadhātu*, of which the mutual non-obstruction and interpenetration among phenomena are salient features stated in a way unique to the *Avataṁsaka*. This theme was extensively elaborated by the Hua-yen masters, and is perhaps more representative of their thought than of the text of the sūtra, though ample evidence for these principles is not lacking in the sūtra itself.

While the *Avataṁsaka* is often understood as a description of the Buddha's enlightenment or a mine of illustrations for the doctrines mentioned above (as well as other doctrines not alluded to), the sūtra can best be appreciated as a practical guide for the Bodhisattva's way of practice. Most of the *Avataṁsaka* is primarily concerned with presenting a detailed explanation of the whole career of a Bodhisattva, from the awakening of *bodhicitta* to the accomplishment of perfect Buddhahood. The Bodhisattva Path is presented in the *Avataṁsaka* in four sets of ten stages, culminating with the two levels of enlightenment. The Bodhisattva Path starts with the awakening of *bodhicitta*, the infinite mind of great compassion set on perfect enlightenment (its noumenal aspect) and salvation of all sentient beings (its phenomenal aspect), which occurs on the first of the ten abodes (*daśa-vihāra*). Then follow the ten practices (*daśa-caryā*), the ten dedications (*daśa-pariṇāmanā*), and the ten stages (*daśa-bhūmi*).

INTRODUCTION

To these four sets of ten articles the commentators have added the ten faiths (*daśa-śraddhā*), which precede the ten abodes and thus form the initial stages of the Path. The Bodhisattva's practice culminates in the attainment of the two levels of equal and sublime enlightenment. When the noumenal realm of fundamental perfection and the phenomenal realm of selfless activity are fully developed in a perfectly balanced way, then wisdom and compassion reach their full potential and, transcending bounds and measures, the Bodhisattva reaches the ultimate stage of Buddhahood.

Influence on Chinese Buddhism

Together with the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* has over the centuries occupied the place of highest prominence among the Buddhist scriptures in China and the rest of East Asia. Its profound teaching has inspired and edified countless students of the Buddhadharmā, and its rich imagery and symbolism have given stimulus to many admirable artistic enterprises. The *Avataṃsaka* exerted great influence on the development of the native Chinese Buddhist traditions. That influence is most readily observable in the case of the Hua-yen school, as the name of the school suggests, Hua-yen being the Chinese translation of *Avataṃsaka*. Points of influence can also to varying degrees be found in the teachings of all new traditions that were formed during the Sui-T'ang period.

The *Avataṃsaka* provided the scriptural basis for the doctrines of the great Hua-yen school. This school's stupendous system was formulated by Chih-yen and Fa-tsang, who later came to be regarded as the second and third patriarchs of the school respectively. The Hua-yen system was further refined by its reputed fourth patriarch Ch'eng-kuan. In many ways this school is considered the highest point of doctrinal development in East Asian Buddhism, whose vision continues to provide an

THE AVATAMSAKA SŪTRA

immensely satisfying view of reality. It is a view of great profundity, beauty, and meaningfulness, which can serve as a unifying factor for bringing the many fragmented facets of human experience and activity into focus. The texts of the Hua-yen school contain much invaluable material for understanding the *Avatamsaka*. They can also serve as excellent manuals for contemplation, as well as provide inspiring and meaningful theory for spiritual practice. Much of the influence the *Avatamsaka* has exerted on East Asian Buddhism has been through the teaching of the Hua-yen school, which served as catalyst for disseminating the message of the sūtra to the wider audience of East Asian Buddhists.²⁷

The *Avatamsaka* was also much used by the Ch'an school, to which testify the copious motifs and quotations from the sūtra in the records of the Ch'an masters. The teaching of Ma-tsu's (709-788) Hung-chou school—which after the ninth century became the most widespread and vital Buddhist school in China—is closely associated with the *Avatamsaka*. Presence of Hua-yen themes can also be discerned in the teachings of Ma-tsu's illustrious contemporary Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien (700-790), especially in his famous poem *Ts'an-t'ung ch'i*.²⁸ The same influence can be found in the five ranks teaching of Tung-shan Liang-chieh (807-869) and Ts'ao-shan Pen-chi (840-901), the reputed founding teachers of the Ts'ao-tung school of Ch'an, and in the sermons of Fa-yen Wen-i (885-958), who is considered to be the founder of the Fa-yen school of Ch'an. The close relationship between Ch'an and the *Avatamsaka*—or, perhaps more accurately, Hua-yen—is perhaps best exemplified in the person and thought of Tsung-mi, one of the most noted monks of T'ang China. Besides being a Ch'an master, Tsung-mi was also recognized as the fifth, and last, patriarch of the Hua-yen tradition.

The *Avatamsaka's* influence continued throughout the later

INTRODUCTION

course of Ch'an history, and is especially noticeable in the thought of Chinul (1158–1210), who during the Koryo Dynasty (937–1392) revived the declining fortunes of the Ch'an school in Korea. Chinul was profoundly influenced by Tsung-mi, as can be discerned by the numerous quotations from Tsung-mi's writings in Chinul's works. Another important influence on Chinul was that of Li T'ung-hsüan (635–730), also an important Hua-yen figure. The *Avataṃsaka's* influence on Ch'an has been such that it has even been suggested that Ch'an is the practical expression of the profound and comprehensive teaching of the *Avataṃsaka*.

From the sixth century on the *Avataṃsaka* also served as an object of veneration for numerous Chinese Buddhists, to which testify numerous stories about miraculous occurrences attributed to the power of the sūtra. The cults based on the worship of the sūtra provided meaningful ways of bringing together great numbers of men and women in devotional acts of penance, recitation of the sūtra, and participation in vegetarian feasts. These communal acts of worship enabled all those who would have otherwise found the abstruse doctrines of the sūtra overly perplexing to deepen their faith, acquire merit, and plant wholesome seeds that, at some later date when the right conditions are present, will blossom in the fruition of unobstructed wisdom.

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

Chinese Translations and Commentaries

The oldest extant Chinese translation of the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra (henceforth abbreviated to the "Manifestation" chapter) is *Ju-lai hsing-hsien ching* (*The Appearance of the Tathāgata Sūtra*) in four *chüan*,²⁹ translated by the Indo-Scythian monk Dharmarakṣa (Fa-hu, active ca. 266–308).³⁰ Born in Tun-huang sometime around 230, Dharmarakṣa is considered the greatest translator of the period before the coming of Kumārajīva (344–413). Fluent in both Chinese and Sanskrit, as well as many other Central Asian languages, he translated 159 works, of which 72 have been preserved. Among them is the first translation of the immensely influential *Lotus Sūtra*.³¹ During most of his translation and teaching career Dharmarakṣa was active in Ch'ang-an, and he is the person most responsible for its transformation into an important center of Buddhist studies.

The ancient texts also provide information about three other translations of the "Manifestation" chapter done about the same time, all of which are no longer extant. They are: (1) *Ta-fang-kuang ju-lai hsing-ch'i ching* (*Extensive Universal Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Sūtra*) in two *chüan*. Its translator is unknown, and it includes the "Names of the Buddhas" chapter of the complete translation of the *Avataṃsaka* as its preface; (2) *Ju-lai hsing-hsien ching* (*The Appearance of the Tathāgata Sūtra*) in one *chüan*, translated by Po Fa-tsu during the Western Chin

INTRODUCTION

Dynasty (265–313); and (3) *Ta-fang-kuang ju-lai hsing-ch'i wei-mi-tsang ching* (*Extensive Universal Arcane Store of the Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Sūtra*) in two *chüan*, also translated during the Western Chin Dynasty by an unknown translator.

In Buddhabhadra's sixty-*chüan* translation of the *Avataṃsaka* the "Manifestation" chapter is chapter 32. Its title is *Pao-wang ju-lai hsing-ch'i p'in*, or "Nature Origination of Precious King Tathāgata" chapter.³² Its Sanskrit title has been reconstructed as *Tathāgatotpatti-sambhava-nirdeśa*. It is from the title of this chapter that the appellation of the important Hua-yen concept of nature origination was taken. In Śikṣānanda's translation of the *Avataṃsaka* the "Manifestation" chapter is chapter 37, and its title in Chinese is *Ju-lai ch'u-hsien p'in*.

While no commentary on Dharmarakṣa's translation has been written, commentaries on the "Manifestation" chapter can be found in the standard commentaries on the *Avataṃsaka* which provide chapter by chapter exegesis of the whole text of the sūtra. The oldest two, done on the sixty-*chüan* version, are: (1) Chih-yen's *Hua-yen ching sou-hsüan chi* (*Record of Investigation into the Mysteries of Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) in five *chüan*,³³ written in 628 when Chih-yen was twenty-six years old; and (2) Fa-tsang's *Hua-yen ching t'an-hsüan chi* (*Record of Inquiry into the Mysteries of Avataṃsaka Sūtra*)³⁴ in twenty *chüan*. Though the second replaced the first, it is in many ways indebted to its predecessor.

Commentaries on Śikṣānanda's translation of the "Manifestation" chapter can be found in: (1) *Hsü hua-yen ching lueh-shu k'an-ting chi* (*Final Version of the Record of the Continuation of the Brief Explication of the Avataṃsaka*),³⁵ in fifteen *chüan*, written by Hui-yüan (673–743), the most renowned among the numerous disciples of Fa-tsang; (2) Ch'eng-kuan's *Hua-yen ching shu* (*Explication of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) in sixty *chüan*,³⁶ which is the most detailed and authoritative commentary on

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

the *Avatamsaka*; and (3) *Hsin hua-yen ching lun* (*Comments on the New [Translation of the] Avatamsaka Sūtra*),³⁷ written by Li T'ung-hsüan toward the end of his life. The last commentary seems to have passed largely unnoticed during the time of its writing and the ensuing few centuries. However, by the time of the Sung Dynasty (960–1279) it gained in approbation, especially among the members of the Ch'an school for whom the simplicity of Li T'ung-hsüan's exegesis as well as his strong emphasis on practical application of the teachings contained in the sūtra had a strong appeal. The two commentaries of Ch'eng-kuan and Li T'ung-hsüan were combined together with the text of the sūtra into a single volume in 1669 by the Ching Dynasty (1644–1912) monk Tao-p'ei under the title *Hua-yen ching shu lun tsuan-yao* (*Compilation of the Explication and the Comments on the Avatamsaka Sūtra*).

Position in the Avatamsaka Sūtra

In his comment on the meaning of the occurrence of the "Manifestation" chapter in its position within the chapter sequence of the *Avatamsaka*, Ch'eng-kuan says:

The previous chapters explained the 'cause' (*hetu, yin*) of the 'fruit' (*phala, kuo*). This chapter discerns the fruit of the cause. Though the essence is equal, the two features are not effaced—the cause comes first, while the fruit comes later.³⁸

The two terms cause and fruit (or result) are used here within the context of the quest and attainment of enlightenment as they are outlined in the *Avatamsaka*. "Cause" refers to the cultivation of the myriad practices of the Bodhisattva, while "fruit" refers to the realization of the primordial quiescence of Nirvāṇa, i.e., the attainment of Buddhahood. Explaining the meaning of cause and fruit in his *Hua-yen i-sheng shih hsüan men* (*Ten Recondite Principles of the One Vehicle of the Avatamsaka*), Chih-yen says:

INTRODUCTION

That which is referred to as cause are the expedient means of conditioned cultivation by which the essence is traced to the very source and the stages [of the Path] are consummated, which is [symbolized by] Samantabhadra, while that which is referred to as fruit is the perfect fruition of the absolute quiescence of that essence, [symbolized by] the realm of the ten Buddhas.³⁹

Therefore, after the preceding chapters of the *Avatamsaka* have expounded the practice of Samantabhadra, which is the cultivation of all virtuous qualities that comprise the Bodhisattva Path, the “Manifestation” chapter presents the consummation of the sūtra, revealing the final result of the Bodhisattva’s practice—the accomplishment of Buddhahood. However, because of the unobstructed interpenetration of all phenomena—one of the basic themes of the sūtra according to the Hua-yen school—Buddhahood is the cause as well as the fruit of the Bodhisattva’s practice. That is to say, the realization of the fruit of practice—the Buddha’s enlightenment—is not only the goal of practice, but is also its supportive cause. In terms of the *Awakening of Faith*, the original enlightenment is the basis that supports the practice (or rather is what makes it possible at all), which in turn culminates in the realization of this original enlightenment that is inherent in everyone. So, from the perspective of the essential nature, the realm of practice (cause) is identical with the realm of realization (fruit). At the same time, from the point of conventional reality, the fruition of Buddhahood can only be realized after the consummation of the Bodhisattva Path, and thus, as Ch’eng-kuan says, the latter precedes the former.

This kind of understanding of the relationship between cause and fruit, practice and realization, is illustrated by the structure of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. The sūtra opens with a majestic portrayal of the enlightenment site, and a beautiful description of the Buddha’s enlightenment:

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

At that time, the World-Honored One, seated on his seat, realized the most perfect knowledge of all dharmas. His wisdom entered the three times, equal in every respect. His body filled all worlds. His voice harmonized with all lands in the ten directions. Like space which contains the multitude of forms, he did not discriminate among all objects. Also, like space which pervades everywhere, he equally entered all lands. His body eternally sat at all sites of enlightenment. Amidst the congregations of Bodhisattvas his sublime light was effulgent like the arising of the sun disk, illuminating the world. The great ocean of his myriad blessings cultivated over the three times was already completely pure; yet he constantly appeared to be born in all Buddha-lands. His limitless body and his perfect light pervaded the whole *dharmadhātu*, equally, without distinction. He expounded all dharmas, like spreading out big clouds. The tip of each of his hairs could contain all worlds without obstruction, each displaying boundless preternatural powers, edifying and civilizing all sentient beings. His body pervaded the ten directions, and yet it had no coming or going. His wisdom comprehended all forms and realized the emptiness and quiescence of all dharmas. Among the miraculous acts of all Buddhas of the three times, there was none that was not completely seen in [his] light. The adornments of all Buddha-lands over inconceivable kalpas he caused all to be manifest.⁴⁰

After this description of the Buddha's enlightenment and the rest of the introductory first chapter, in the early chapters the sūtra proceeds with the presentation of the fruit of Buddhahood, symbolized by Vairocana Buddha. This is done in order to "engender in the listeners a longing for and faith in the Teaching of the Buddha."⁴¹ When, through seeing or hearing about the infinite wonders and perfect freedom of Buddhahood, faith has thus arisen in the future Bodhisattva, undertaking practice is the next natural step. Hence, after the fruit of Buddhahood has been revealed at the beginning of the *Avatamsaka*, that is followed by an exposition of the practices and stages of the Bodhisattva Path,

INTRODUCTION

to which is dedicated the greater part of the *Avatamsaka*.

According to Li T'ung-hsüan the depiction of the Buddha's enlightenment in the first assembly of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* represents the manifestation of Vairocana Buddha. On the other hand, the "Manifestation" chapter depicts the manifestation of the Bodhisattva's consummation of practice and understanding, wisdom and compassion, in his progressive cultivation of the stages of the Path.⁴² Fa-tsang also states that after the previous chapters have explained the cause, this chapter demonstrates the fruit of Buddhahood.⁴³ Hence, the "Manifestation" chapter describes the final attainment of Buddhahood as a consummation of the Bodhisattva Path.⁴⁴

Content Summary

The title of the "Manifestation" chapter directly introduces the main topic of the text. In Śikṣānanda's translation it consists of five Chinese characters. The first two characters (*ju-lai*) are the Chinese translation of "Tathāgata." Tathāgata is one of the epithets of the Buddha, and the two terms are often used synonymously. In Chinese the literal meaning is "Thus Come," or perhaps "One Who has Come from Suchness." The exact etymology of the Sanskrit word is not entirely clear. Besides "Thus Come," Tathāgata can also be interpreted as "Thus Gone," which is closer to the Tibetan translation of the term. In any case, a Tathāgata is someone who has come from and will return to suchness. Having realized his identity with the ultimate reality, he is the living embodiment of it. The next two characters in the title (*ch'u-hsien*) mean "manifestation" or "appearance." The last character is the Chinese word for chapter (*pin*). Thus I have translated the full title as the "Manifestation of the Tathāgata" (chapter).

According to Ch'eng-kuan's explanation of the title, found in his commentary on the *Avatamsaka*, from the perspective of

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

dharmakāya the meaning of Tathāgata is the suchness of all dharmas.⁴⁵ "Because the principle of suchness is always manifest, it is called 'manifestation.'" From the perspective of *sambhogakāya* he is called Tathāgata because, having practiced the True Path, he attained perfect enlightenment. In this case "the sudden simultaneous manifestation of the virtues of the original nature is called 'manifestation.'" From the perspective of *nirmānakāya*, "having assented to the vehicle of all-encompassing wisdom, he has come to edify sentient beings, and is thus called Tathāgata." Then his great function in response to others is called "manifestation." Thus, continues Ch'eng-kuan's explanation, "there is an ancient attainment by a new Buddha," and "a new attainment by an ancient Buddha."⁴⁶ Because it always responds to conditions, the true (*dharmakāya*) is the same as the provisional (*nirmānakāya*). Because the provisional arises dependent on the true, the provisional is the same as the true. Thus the three bodies (or three aspects of Buddhahood) are perfectly interfused. When one discerns the appearance of the provisional, that is also manifestation of the true.⁴⁷

For the sake of easier reading and clearer presentation, in this volume's translation the "Manifestation" chapter has been divided into twelve sections. The original Chinese translation contains no such division; however, its contents and form do implicate such arrangement. The organization of the material reflects the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* editors' predilection for classifying everything in categories of ten. The number ten figures predominantly throughout the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; it symbolizes infinity. Thus, Buddhahood is presented from ten perspectives, the expositions of which, together with the introductory and closing sections, constitute the twelve sections of the text.

The first section contains the introduction which provides the setting, and presents the main protagonists and subject to be discussed. The chief speaker, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, is one of

INTRODUCTION

the two principal Bodhisattvas in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. He represents the active aspect of Buddhahood, or its “cause”—the cultivation of the myriad practices of the Bodhisattvas. The name of the second main Bodhisattva in this chapter, Sublime Virtue of the Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva, signifies the teaching that is to be expounded.⁴⁸ According to Ch’eng-kuan, the word “nature” figuring in his name has two meanings: (1) “seed nature,” which is the cause for the attainment of enlightenment, and (2) “Dharma-nature,” the essential nature of things, which gives rise to both reality and phenomenal appearances.⁴⁹ Both of these meanings are related to the *tathāgatagarbha* (about which more will be said later). Other interpretations of this Bodhisattva’s name, also mentioned by Ch’eng-kuan, point out that Sublime Virtue refers to Mañjuśrī. Mañjuśrī, the second principal Bodhisattva of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, represents wisdom. The great wisdom of Mañjuśrī, explains Ch’eng-kuan, is that which can reveal, while the *dharmadhātu* of Samantabhadra is that which is revealed. When these two are joined together they become the manifestation of Vairocana,⁵⁰ the symbol of universal Buddhahood, which is the topic of this chapter.

The second section relates the characteristics and causes for the manifestation of the Buddha. The manifestation of the Buddha is dependent on the fulfilling of numerous causes and conditions. The intrinsic causes are the untiring cultivation of the Bodhisattva’s attitudes and practices—the development of *bodhi-citta*, cultivation of compassion, kindness, wisdom, virtue, *samādhi*, taking of vows, etc.—as symbolized by the activity of Samantabhadra. The main external conditions are the influences from the Buddhas, especially their teaching of the Dharma which, though of a “single taste,” is presented in numerous expedient ways in response to the abilities of the listeners. However, from the perspective of its essence, Buddhahood has no coming and going, it is formless, like space, not dependent on anything.

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

The next three sections elaborate on the physical, verbal, and mental activity of the Buddha. The body of the Buddha is presented as being immaterial and present everywhere. The Buddha is not to be perceived in just one person or one thing. The Bodhisattvas should perceive the body of the Buddha everywhere, in everything. While the essential body of the Buddha has no form and is impossible to grasp, yet for the sake of liberating sentient beings the Buddha manifests in the world and performs the unobstructed activity of universal salvation. Likewise, the voice of the Buddha is present everywhere. Pervading all sounds, it is ubiquitous, formless, without locus, beyond the reach of conceptual understanding. At the same time it constantly teaches sentient beings to abandon falsehood and cultivate the Path. Though the Buddha is impartial in his teaching and all his teaching has the same taste of liberation, due to the different capacities and mental attitudes of his listeners, his teaching is perceived differently. Likewise, Reality has a single undifferentiated flavor, and the "voice of perfect wisdom" is everywhere equal, but is heard in different ways by different people.

The mental activity of the Buddha is presented as *tathāgatajñāna*, the wisdom of the Buddha. *Tathāgatajñāna* is the foundation of all other kinds of wisdom, pervading them all. While all other kinds of wisdom arise dependent on it, *tathāgatajñāna* itself has nothing as support and does not increase or diminish. *Tathāgatajñāna* is equal, non-dual, beyond discrimination. It is fully present in the minds of all sentient beings, even though they are not aware of it due to their delusion and attachments. If beings, through the practice of the teaching, can let go of their delusions and attachments, then they will realize the infinite wisdom of the Buddha within themselves. This section contains the famous passage with the simile of a large sūtra contained in a particle of dust that affirms the presence of *tathāgatajñāna* in all beings. This is one of the most often quoted sections from the

INTRODUCTION

Avatamsaka Sūtra, and is among the clearest scriptural endorsements of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine.

In the sixth section the realm of the Buddha is presented as the knowing of the totality of the various realms. Further, it is also equated with the realm of mind, which is characterized as being boundless, neither bound nor freed.

The seventh section describes the activity of the Buddha as unlimited and unobstructed, without any abode. Their nature fundamentally quiescent, the Buddhas appear in the world to benefit sentient beings, without discriminating about doing so.

In the eighth section the enlightenment of the Buddha is described as reaching everywhere; it is also stated that it takes place in every thought of every sentient being. The Buddha's enlightenment is not taking place apart from the ordinary mind. Yet, while manifesting in the minds of all beings, the Buddha's enlightenment does not manifest anything. The enlightenment of all Buddhas is eternal and unchanging. Whether there are Buddhas accomplishing perfect enlightenment or not, the Buddha's enlightenment remains the same, neither increasing nor diminishing. The text also emphasizes that all of this is grounded on the understanding of the absence of self-nature in all dharmas. By realizing that all dharmas have no self-nature, the Buddhas accomplish enlightenment and continue to work for the welfare of all sentient beings.

The ninth section briefly recounts the turning of the Dharma-wheel, which symbolizes the teaching of the Buddha. The Dharma-wheel is not different from the speeches of all beings, because the reality of words and sounds is itself the Dharma-wheel.

In the tenth section the Buddha's Nirvāṇa is described as unoriginated, and hence not subject to extinction. From the perspective of the absolute the Buddhas neither manifest in the world nor enter Nirvāṇa, permanently abiding in the pure

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

dharmadhātu. From the perspective of conventional reality, however, the Buddhas manifest in the world for the sake of benefiting sentient beings, and when their work is done they enter final Nirvāṇa.

The eleventh section extols the merits of seeing, hearing, and associating with the Buddha. It also contains injunctions to study the teaching presented and commends its efficacy. These are standard features often found in the closing sections of the sūtras.

The last section through a series of miracles communicates the universal significance of the teaching expounded. On a grand scale characteristic of the sūtra, it depicts the miracles that follow Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's exposition of the Dharma. As that happens in this world, so it is throughout all worlds in the universe. This is followed by the appearance of innumerable Buddhas, each of them called Samantabhadra, who shower praise on Samantabhadra and declare their intention to protect and preserve this Dharma. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva also receives praise from innumerable Bodhisattvas, each of whom is also called Samantabhadra, who come from innumerable lands in order to testify to him.

Related Doctrines

In order to gain better understanding of the teaching of the "Manifestation" chapter it is useful to get acquainted with some of the doctrines that are closely associated with it. From Indian provenance there is the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, for which the present text is one of the main scriptural authorities, and the doctrines of nature origination and conditioned origination, both of which were originated in China by the Hua-yen school on the basis of the teachings of the *Avataṃsaka*.

Tathāgatagarbha. The early origins of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as a separate system of thought are not very clear. There are

INTRODUCTION

passages that echo its basic tenets scattered throughout the earliest parts of the canon. An often-quoted example from the Pāli canon is the passage from the *Anguttara-nikāya*, where the Buddha is recorded as saying: "This mind, monks, is luminous, but it is defiled by taints that come from without. . . That mind, monks, is luminous, but it is cleansed of taints that come from without."⁵¹ Together with such sūtras as the *Śrīmāla*, the *Tathāgatagarbha*, the *Nirvāṇa*, and the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, and *śāstras* as the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the *Fo-hsing lun (Buddha-nature Treatise)*, and the *Awakening of Faith*, the "Manifestation" chapter is the most authoritative statement on this important Mahāyāna doctrine. The *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine exemplifies an ancient tendency in Buddhism to describe reality in positive terms. The *tathāgatagarbha* represents suchness (*tathatā*) manifest among defilements. It is conceived of as an indestructible luminous essence present in all sentient beings, which is the cause for their attainment of Buddhahood. This luminous essence, or "seed," is described as being neither existent nor non-existent. Sometimes it is spoken of as Buddha-nature, the True Mind, the mind ground, etc. It is also described as the suchness of things, their essential nature, or when spoken of in more apophatic terms, their emptiness. According to certain definitions, the *tathāgatagarbha* is also comprehended as the cause, or origin, of all pure and impure dharmas. In this sense it can be identified with the One Mind, about which Ch'an Master Huang-po (d. 850) has said, "All Buddhas and all sentient beings are only One Mind."

The *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine asserts that all sentient beings are endowed with the luminous True Mind of suchness, which is fundamentally enlightened and pure by nature. However, due to the generating force of ignorance this mind is covered with defilements, and thus cannot be perceived by unenlightened beings. Therefore, in *tathāgatagarbha* thought as understood in China, religious cultivation has as its goal the realization of this

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

True Mind, which is all there truly is from the very beginning. Instead of trying to radically transform the mind, one has to remove the defilements that cover it—or, according to certain systems of thought, to simply perceive their empty nature—thus allowing the primordial True Mind to manifest itself in all its purity and perfection.

Tsung-mi (780–841), the reputed fifth patriarch of the Hua-yen school, placed the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine to the highest position in his taxonomy of the Buddhist teachings. In his *Ch'an-yüan chu ch'üan-chi tou-hsü* (*Preface to the Collection of All Explanations on the Source of Ch'an*) he identifies it as the "teaching which reveals the identity of the true mind with the nature." He explains it as follows:

This teaching says that all sentient beings possess the true mind of emptiness and quiescence, whose nature is without inception fundamentally pure. Bright, unobscured, astute, and constantly aware, it constantly abides to the end of time. It is called Buddha-nature; it is also called *tathāgatagarbha* and mind-ground. [Because] from time without beginning it has been concealed by false thoughts, [sentient beings] cannot realize it, and thereby experience birth and death. The Supremely Enlightened, feeling pity for them, manifests in the world to proclaim that all dharmas characterized by birth and death are empty, and to reveal the complete identity of this mind with all Buddhas.⁵²

Tsung-mi continues his explanation of the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching by quoting and explaining the already mentioned passage from the "Manifestation" chapter, which is said to contain the essence of the Buddha's message. This passage has often been used as a scriptural endorsement of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine:

There is no place where the wisdom of the Tathāgata does not reach. Wherefore? There is not a single sentient being that is not fully possessed of the wisdom of the Tathāgata. It is only due to

INTRODUCTION

their false thinking, fallacies, and attachments that beings fail to realize this. If they could only abandon their false thoughts, then the all-encompassing wisdom, the spontaneous wisdom, and the unobstructed wisdom will clearly manifest themselves.... Children of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Tathāgata is also thus—boundless and unobstructed, universally able to benefit all sentient beings, it is fully present within the bodies of sentient beings. But those who are ignorant, prone to false thinking and attachments, do not know this, are not aware of it, and thus do not obtain benefit. Then the Tathāgata, with his unobstructed pure eye of wisdom, universally beholds all sentient beings in the *dharmadhātu*, and says: “Strange! How Strange! How can it be that although all sentient beings are fully possessed of the wisdom of the Tathāgata, because of their ignorance and confusion, they neither know nor see that? I should teach them the Noble Path, thus enabling them to forever leave false thoughts and attachments, and perceive the vast wisdom of the Tathāgata within themselves, not different from the Buddhas’.” Having taught them how to cultivate the Noble Path so that they can forsake false thinking, after they forsake false thinking, they will realize the limitless wisdom of the Tathāgata, thereby benefiting and comforting all sentient beings.⁵³

This passage has often been quoted and commented upon, and is perhaps the best known passage in the *Avatamsaka*. Its direct disclosure of the presence of the Buddha’s wisdom (*tathāgatajñāna*) in the minds of sentient beings had great appeal to the followers of the Ch’an school. The Ch’an teaching of “Mind is Buddha” was very much inspired by its tenor, and there are stirring records about the inspiration derived from its propitious message, as well as its role in providing a meaningful rationale for the process of practice and the actual experience that follows its sincere application.⁵⁴

Nature Origination. The important Hua-yen doctrine of nature origination (*gotra-sambhava*) is closely related to the *tathāgata-*

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

garbha doctrine. It can even be said that nature origination is a Hua-yen appropriation of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as the latter was understood in China. This assertion is supported by Fa-tsang's treatment of nature origination in his commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*. There he identifies nature origination as the unobstructed interfusion of the principle and phenomena, and places it under the rubric of "nature origination of the *tathāgatagarbha*."⁵⁵ The nature origination doctrine was first developed by Chih-yen and is regularly utilized in the exegesis of the "Manifestation" chapter. In his sub-commentary to Ch'eng-kuan's commentary to the "Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra" chapter of Prajñā's translation of the *Avatamsaka*, the *Hua-yen ching hsing yüan p'in shu ch'ao*, Tsung-mi explains nature origination in the following manner:

There is not a single dharma that is not manifestation of the fundamental mind; there is not a single dharma that is not conditionally originated from the realm of reality (*chen-chieh*);⁵⁶ there is not a single dharma that is prior to the *dharmadhātu*. Therefore, the initial origination of the myriad dharmas is dependent on the realm of reality.... [In the compound] nature origination, "nature" corresponds to the realm of reality in the first sentence above, while "origination" corresponds to the myriad dharmas in the second sentence above. That is to say, the entire essence of the nature of the *dharmadhātu* originates all dharmas. Because the teaching of the dharma characteristics (*dharma-lakṣaṇa*) conceives of suchness (*tathatā*) as being congealed and immutable, it does not contain the principle of nature origination.⁵⁷ Because in this teaching⁵⁸ the true nature is transparent, mysterious, and bright, its entire essence being [its] function, it is naturally always the myriad dharmas. Because it is naturally always quiescent, its quiescence being the entire quiescence of the myriad dharmas, therefore it is not like the folly of nihilistic emptiness. Moreover, because the myriad dharmas are entirely quiescent myriad dharmas, it is not like the inverted view of regarding the seeming as the real,

INTRODUCTION

which is obstructed by its reification of things, embracing their distinctiveness and substantiality. Since all mundane and transmundane dharmas are entirely nature originated, there is no dharma outside the nature. Therefore all Buddhas and sentient beings mutually interpenetrate, pure lands and defiled lands are harmoniously interfused, the self and other of each dharma are mutually interconnected, and each particle of dust contains the universe.⁵⁹

Fa-tsang similarly interprets nature origination as “arising of function dependent on the nature.”⁶⁰ According to him the myriad phenomena arise from the nature, which is the way things always are, the suchness of things, when the nature follows conditions.⁶¹ Nature origination thus means that all phenomena are ultimately based on the nature, which is the ultimate source of all mundane and supramundane phenomena in the universe. Therefore, it is said that all Buddhas and all sentient beings arise from the nature.⁶²

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the purport of the nature origination doctrine is not to posit a certain absolute which is the ontological ground of the phenomenal realm, as it is sometimes misunderstood. The “nature” has no substance of its own, it is neither existent nor non-existent. It is the universal nature “which is the absence of nature.”⁶³ It can also be described as the ultimate reality, true suchness, emptiness, all of which are inconceivable, ineffable, beyond the realm of dualistic opposites, the full understanding of which belongs to the realm of direct trans-conceptual realization. It is precisely because things have no self-nature, i.e., are empty and arise dependent on conditions, that we can state that they are nature originated. Here we are not confronted with two distinct orders—absolute and phenomenal—in which the first gives rise to the second. The nature origination doctrine rather clarifies the relationship between the ultimate reality and phenomenal

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

appearances, which is that of interdependency. To say that all dharmas are nature originated means that "there is no dharma outside of the nature."

This topic is lucidly presented by Fa-shun in his seminal treatise *Fa-chieh kuan-men*. In the second section of that work, where he explains the relationship between the principle and phenomena, the third heading is designated as "establishment of phenomena by the principle." Fa-shun explains:

This means that phenomena have no independent substance [of their own]; they can be established only in dependance on the true principle. [That is so] because all [phenomena] are conditionally originated [and thus] have no self-nature, and because all phenomena are established from the principle of lack of [self-] nature.... All dharmas obtain their existence dependent on the *tathāgatagarbha*. Contemplate this!⁶⁴

If we change nature for principle, the meaning here again is that all phenomena are established on the basis of the nature. But this nature is not something outside of phenomena, which depends on it for their existence. This principle, or nature, is in all things—it is the real nature of things. Further, as Fa-shun explains in the next heading, because phenomena are empty, they can "reveal" the principle (which is the principle that phenomena lack independent self-nature).⁶⁵ If it were not for phenomena, there would be no way to discern the principle, which is fully manifest in all phenomena.

Conditioned Origination. Together with nature origination, the doctrine of the conditioned origination of the *dharmadhātu* is one of the hallmarks of Hua-yen Buddhism. The two doctrines are closely related. Both doctrines are concerned with explaining the origination from the *dharmadhātu*, and their differences are due to the different connotations of this important concept.

Dharmadhātu is one of the crucial concepts in Hua-yen

INTRODUCTION

thought. It often appears throughout the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and also figures prominently in the writings associated with the Hua-yen school. Despite its importance, however, often there is certain ambivalence about its precise connotations. Its multifaceted meanings are often difficult to distinguish, and the text of the *Avatamsaka* rarely offers any clue in that respect. The term is a compound of two words: “dharma” and “*dhātu*.” Chih-yen interprets “dharma” in three ways: as “mental object,” “self-nature,” and “norm.”⁶⁶ In his commentary on the *Avatamsaka* Fa-tsang also gives three definitions of “dharma”: “that which upholds the self-nature,” “norm,” and “mental object.”⁶⁷ The original Sanskrit meaning of *dhātu* is “element,” while its Chinese rendering (*chieh*) is usually translated as “realm.” Fa-tsang also defines *dhātu* in three ways: as “cause,” “nature,” and “(that which is) differentiated.”⁶⁸ Depending on the way its two components are defined, the whole compound can be read in several ways. If *dhātu* is defined as “cause” then the compound can be understood as the cause for the attainment of Buddhahood, i.e., the pure luminous mind. If *dhātu* is taken to mean “nature,” then *dharmadhātu* can be understood as the essential nature of things, or the underlying reality behind phenomenal appearances. Both of these interpretations are related to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. In the third meaning of *dhātu* given by Fa-tsang, “differentiated,” the emphasis is on the distinct identity of each and every phenomenon. The meaning of *dhātu* in this case is similar to Fa-tsang’s third definition of dharma given above (that is, mental object). Then the whole compound can be understood to refer to the realm of mutual identity and interpenetration among all phenomena.⁶⁹

In the first two senses—cause and nature—*dharmadhātu* is related to the origination of the phenomenal realm from the true nature (i.e., the *tathāgatagarbha*), which is elaborated in the doctrine of nature origination. In the third sense, it refers to the

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

mutual relationship among all phenomena, which is elaborated in the doctrine of conditioned origination.⁷⁰ The last is the sense in which *dharmadhātu* is usually used in Hua-yen writings when the discussion is based on the perspective of the perfect teaching. In that case it corresponds to the *dharmadhātu* of non-obstruction between phenomena (*shih-shih wu-ai fa-chieh*).⁷¹

The doctrine of the conditioned origination was first employed by Chih-yen, and was further elaborated by Fa-tsang, who established it as one of the cardinal concepts in the philosophical system of Hua-yen. The doctrine of the conditioned origination of the *dharmadhātu* for Fa-tsang epitomizes the highest insight of the *Avatamsaka*, and by implication the highest teaching of Buddhism, which he called the "perfect teaching."⁷² According to this doctrine, based on the absence of intrinsic nature in all phenomena and their dependant origination, each phenomenon is seen as being determined by the totality of all phenomena of which it is a part, while the totality is determined by each of the phenomena that comprise it. Because of this, each phenomenon is determining every other phenomenon and is simultaneously being determined by each and every phenomenon. This feature of mutual determinacy, or interdependency, of all phenomena is sometimes translated as mutual identity. Moreover, according to this doctrine, not only are all phenomena interdependent, but they also interpenetrate without any hindrance. Every phenomenon "contains" every other phenomenon, and every phenomenon also "contains" the totality of all phenomena which interpenetrate in perfect freedom and non-obstruction.⁷³ When this is translated in terms of practice and realization, Fa-tsang says:

Thus, from the mutual interpenetration of the six characteristics in the conditioned origination of the *dharmadhātu*,⁷⁴ there is the simultaneity of cause and fruit, as well as their mutual identity, complete freedom, exclusion, and conformity. The

INTRODUCTION

cause is the understanding and practice of Samantabhadra. With enlightenment, the fruit is the boundlessness revealed by the realm of the ten Buddhas. All this is elaborated in detail in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.⁷⁵

While Fa-tsang placed the doctrine of the conditioned origination of the *dharmadhātu* to the position of prominence in his system, other important Hua-yen figures emphasized the doctrine of nature origination in their exegesis of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. This is especially true of Li T'ung-hsüan and Tsung-mi, both of whom placed greater emphasis on nature origination because of, in their opinion, its greater soteriological value. While conditioned origination of the *dharmadhātu* corresponds to the mutual non-obstruction between all phenomena, nature origination corresponds to the mutual non-obstruction between principle and phenomena (*li-shih wu-ai*). But mutual non-obstruction between all phenomena is only made possible because of the mutual identity and interpenetration of each phenomenon with the principle. Thus, while nature origination indicates that all phenomena are established from the nature, or rather *are* the nature, conditioned origination illuminates the relationship between all phenomena—their mutual interdependency. While every phenomenon is determined by every other phenomenon, it is simultaneously dependent on the nature, which provides the ultimate basis.⁷⁶ Thus conditioned origination can only be established on the basis of nature origination, and is simply an extension of it.

On Reading the Translation

A note on reading the text presented in the translation. The text abounds in similes which, while used solely for the sake of illustration and their full comprehension is not necessary for grasping the essential purport of the text, often utilize themes and motifs from ancient Indian cosmology and mythology with which the

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

modern reader is most likely not going to be familiar. Based on a worldview that is at great variance with our own, and moreover is rather obsolete, the profuse use of symbolism and the numerous similes found in the text might be a source of difficulty to the modern reader unaccustomed to religious literature of this genre. However, provided one has the proper attitude, that does not necessarily have to serve as an impediment; after all, patience is an essential aspect of the correct attitude, and an integral part of the practice whose development necessarily has to precede any genuine understanding of the text!

As with all scriptures of the great religious traditions, the present text has a form and ambience of its own which do not lend themselves to cursory reading. It is meant to be read and reread, contemplated and meditated upon. When approached with the simplicity of an open, humble, and pure mind, with the passage of time the quiet perusal of the scripture challenges one's (primitive) beliefs about oneself and the world, and reveals new perspectives on reality that are forever shut to the selfish small mind entangled in its fantasies and illusions. Thus, the study of the text has potential for leading the reader closer to the comprehension of the practices and vows of Samantabhadra. And that is truly an invitation to follow all the enlightened ones on the journey to the rediscovery of our true nature—the common bond that binds us all together. As Li T'ung-hsüan nicely puts it in his commentary on the "Manifestation" chapter:

This chapter is about one's own progressive cultivation. After the five stations [of the Bodhisattva Path] have been traversed, the principle and wisdom, the myriad practices and great compassion are fully consummated. Then that is the manifestation of one's own Tathāgata; it is the teaching of non-attachment of living in the world and benefiting sentient beings. This chapter is like the great ocean—the rivers of earnest effort (*prayoga*) of

INTRODUCTION

the five stations flow back to the vast ultimate.... The sūtra says, "The water of the great ocean flows under the four continents and the eighty million smaller islands, so that all those who drill inevitably find water."⁷⁷ This simile clarifies that all sentient beings have the ability to investigate for themselves, because there is no one who is not endowed with the mind of the great ocean of the Tathāgata's wisdom. The sūtra also says, "Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know that within their own minds there is always the Buddha's accomplishment of perfect enlightenment."⁷⁸ This [statement] clarifies that all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, do not accomplish perfect enlightenment apart from this mind. Further below it says, "So it is with the minds of all sentient beings—within each of them there are Tathāgatas accomplishing perfect enlightenment."⁷⁹ This clarifies that the essence of the minds of [both] ordinary people and sages is pure and does not differ. There is only ignorance or enlightenment, without the slightest separation between them. If only for an instant false thoughts are not produced, then the mind and objects are both gone. The nature itself is unborn, because when there is no attachment and there is nothing realized, that is the accomplishment of perfect enlightenment. Then, to vastly benefit sentient beings with this Dharma is the practice of Samantabhadra. The sublime wisdom that has no mind, nature, or principle, and differentiates the one vehicle and the three vehicles, the causes and results of [the realms of] gods and humans, and the karmic retribution of the evil paths is called Mañjuśrī. In accord with differentiating wisdom, unwearyingly acting together and benefiting beings while knowing their abilities is called Samantabhadra. With great compassion rescuing all sentient beings is called Avalokiteśvara. To simultaneously cultivate and learn with these three [kinds of] mind is called Vairocana. When these minds become habitual, it is called freedom. When there is not a dharma that is not clearly comprehended, it is called non-obstruction. When wisdom responds in accord with abilities, pervading the ten directions,

THE "MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA" CHAPTER

[its] nature neither going nor coming, it is called preternatural powers. At the beginning of the practice it is habitually complete. [Though] falsehood is produced for many *kalpas*, the sun of wisdom does not change. This is altogether not difficult—why not put it into practice? Even if you study it without attaining anything, the merit thus obtained will still surpass that of humans and gods. [But] if you have no faith and do not practice, how can you end suffering? The great meaning of this teaching of the fruit of Buddhahood of the manifestation of the Tathāgata is that the sublime principle of Mañjuśrī and the sublime practice of Samantabhadra are fully possessed by all sentient beings. Neither past nor present, the nature itself has one essence. In order to influence future students to practice in this way, I sincerely say that it is not far off, so do not create difficulties by yourself.... The main thing is that you should always trust that the different spheres of all your physical, verbal, and mental activity are produced from the different spheres of the physical, verbal, and mental activity of the Tathāgata. They are all devoid of essence, nature, self, and person. [Because] they are conditionally originated from the uncreated self-nature of the *dharmadhātu*, fundamentally no place where their roots have been planted can be found. The nature itself is the *dharmadhātu*, without inside, outside, or between. It should be known and inquired into in this way. Whether you are contemplating yourself or others, it is the same essential nature, without self or anything belonging to self. By the means of the power of *samādhi* and wisdom, practice in this way. When you know for yourself, then contemplate the suffering of sentient beings. Then benefiting oneself and others is like the vast vows and practices of Samantabhadra.⁸⁰

Finally, after fully elucidating the prodigious practices of the Bodhisattvas and the inconceivable realm of the Buddha, the sūtra brings the reader back to the very ground from which all sublime qualities of the unobstructed activity and comprehensive

INTRODUCTION

enlightened awareness spring forth—one's own mind. Behind the depth of thought conveyed both in the recondite teachings and rich symbolism of the *Avataṃsaka*, as well as in the teachings of the ancient masters who derived their abstruse theories from their immediate experience of the teaching of the sūtra grounded on their deep contemplations, one of the primary purports of the sūtra is to offer a fresh perspective on the possibilities open to humanity. And once those possibilities are acknowledged, the *Avataṃsaka* offers an unexcelled guide to the actualization of their potential. The spiritual journey, described in the sūtra in minute detail with great beauty, which culminates in the realization of the highest awareness accessible to humanity, starts in the simple act of awakening of faith. This faith comes from the Buddha-nature inherent in the human heart, and provides the light that leads one beyond the familiar realm of meaningless obsessions, illusions, and worldly sentiments to one's true abode—the boundless *dharmadhātu*.

It is its practical usefulness in providing inspiration and guidance to all those who have the maturity and wisdom to see beyond their self-imposed limitations and dedicate their lives to the highest good that makes the sūtra truly meaningful. The Buddha of the *Avataṃsaka*, glorious and inconceivable as he may appear to be, is truly very close to each of us. He is much closer than anything one can conceive of—pervading everything, there is no place that he does not reach. The realm of the Buddha is the very reality in which the drama of our existence takes place. That same reality manifests completely in the single thought of faith in the mind of each ordinary person. It is the fundamental reality from which unfolds the Bodhisattva Path, which is the cause for the accomplishment of the fruit of Buddhahood—fruit that has been there from the very beginning, imperceptible to those who lack the eye of faith.

Part Two

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA



Prologue

AT THAT TIME, [in the Universal Light hall,]⁸¹ from the white curl between his eyebrows,⁸² the World-Honored One issued a great light called “manifestation of the Tathāgata,”⁸³ which was attended by innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions (*nayuta*) of *asaṅkhyas* of lights. That light illuminated all the worlds in the ten directions throughout the *dharmadhātu*,⁸⁴ circled ten times to the right, manifesting the boundless freedom of the Tathāgata, enlightening the numberless multitudes of Bodhisattvas, quaking all the worlds in the ten directions, extinguishing all the suffering of the evil paths, overshadowing all the mansions of Māra, disclosing all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, sitting at their seats of enlightenment and attaining perfect enlightenment (*samyak-saṃbodhi*), as well as all the assemblies at the sites of enlightenment (*bodhimāṇḍa*). Having done all of that, the light circled the assembly of Bodhisattvas to the right, and entered the crown of the head of Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva.⁸⁵

At that moment, everybody in the assembly at the site of enlightenment was filled with jubilation; enraptured, they all thought: “It is truly extraordinary! Now that the Tathāgata issued this great light, it must be that he is going to expound the deep and profound Dharma.”

Then, on the lotus seat, Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva uncovered his right shoulder, kneeled down on his right knee, joined his palms, and single-mindedly looking toward the Buddha, he uttered the following verses:

Born from the virtue of correct awareness, with great wisdom,
Penetrating all objects, arriving at the other shore,
Equal to all the Tathāgatas of the three times,
Therefore now I respectfully pay homage.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

Having already ascended to the shore of the formless realm,
Yet manifesting a body adorned with sublime marks;
He emits thousands of undefiled lights,
And totally destroys the armies of Māra.

All the worlds in the ten directions
He can cause to quake without exception,
Without appalling a single sentient being;
Such is the awesome preternatural power of the Well Gone.

Equal to the nature of space and the *dharmadhātu*,
He can abide steady like that;
All the numberless living beings
He causes to obliterate evil and eradicate defilements.

Having diligently cultivated ascetic practices for
numberless *kalpas*,
He accomplished unsurpassed enlightenment;
His knowledge unobstructed in all realms,
Of the same nature as all the Buddhas.

The Guide issued this great light,
Quaking all the worlds in the ten directions;
Having manifested boundless preternatural powers,
It returned and entered my body.

Able to learn the definite Dharma well,
Numberless Bodhisattvas have assembled here,
Inducing me to ask about the Dharma,
Hence I now entreat the Dharma-king.

Now everybody in this assembly is pure,
Able to liberate all worlds;

PROLOGUE

Their wisdom limitless, without defiling attachments,
Such exalted sages have all assembled here.

The sublime Guide who benefits the world,
His wisdom and effort boundless,
Now illuminates the great assembly with light,
Causing me to ask about the unsurpassed Dharma.

Who can fully elucidate the profound realm
Of the Great Sage as it truly is?
Who is the Tathāgata's eldest son in the Dharma?
Honorable Guide of the world, please reveal this to us.

At that time, the Tathāgata from his mouth issued great light called "unobstructed (*apratihata*) fearlessness,"⁸⁶ which was attended by innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions of *asankhyas* of lights. That light illuminated all the worlds in the universe, circled ten times to the right, manifesting the boundless freedom of the Tathāgata, enlightening the numberless multitudes of Bodhisattvas, quaking all the worlds in the ten directions, extinguishing all the suffering of the evil paths, overshadowing all the mansions of Māra, disclosing all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, sitting at the seat of enlightenment and attaining perfect enlightenment, as well as all the assemblies at the sites of enlightenment. Having done all of that, the light circled the assembly of Bodhisattvas to the right, and entered the mouth of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-mahāsattva.⁸⁷ After the light entered into him, the body and lion seat of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva surmounted hundredfold his original [body and seat], and the bodies and seats of all other Bodhisattvas, with the exception of the lion seat of the Tathāgata.

Then Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva asked Samantabhadra Bodhisattva: "Son of the Buddha, the Buddha's display of supreme miraculous acts,

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

which causes all the Bodhisattvas to rejoice, is truly inconceivable, unfathomable to [anyone in] the world. What is this auspicious sign?”

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-mahāsattva said: “Son of the Buddha, when in the past I saw all the Tathāgatas, Arhats, Perfectly Enlightened Ones, displaying such supreme miraculous acts, they enounced the Dharma-teaching (*dharmaparyāya*) of the manifestation of the Tathāgata.⁸⁸ I reckon that the display of this sign indicates that this Dharma is going to be expounded.” When [Samantabhadra Bodhisattva] said that, the whole earth quaked and issued countless lights asking about the Dharma.

Then Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva asked Samantabhadra Bodhisattva: “Son of the Buddha, how should all Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas know the manifestation of all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, Arhats, Perfectly Enlightened Ones? Please tell us.

“Son of the Buddha, all these countless hundreds of thousands of billions of Bodhisattvas assembled here have for a long time cultivated pure karma, and their mindfulness and wisdom is consummated; they have come ashore the ultimate supreme adornment, they comprise the dignified activity of all the Buddhas, they correctly recollect all the Buddhas without ever forgetting them, they contemplate all sentient beings with great compassion (*karuṇā*), they definitely realize the realms of preternatural powers of the Bodhisattvas, they are already supported by the preternatural powers of all the Buddhas, they are able to receive the sublime Dharma of all the Tathāgatas—replete with such boundless virtues, they have all assembled here.

“Son of the Buddha, you have already attended and made offerings to countless hundreds of thousands of billions of Buddhas, have consummated the unsurpassed sublime practices of the Bodhisattvas, have attained the freedom of all *samādhis*,

PROLOGUE

have entered the arcane abode of all the Buddhas, you know all Buddhadharmas, have abrogated all doubts, are supported by the preternatural powers of all the Tathāgatas, you know the capacities of sentient beings and according to their predilections you explain to them the authentic Dharma of liberation in accord with the Buddha's wisdom, expound Buddhadharma, have reached the other shore—you are in possession of such boundless virtues. Excellent, son of the Buddha! Please expound the Dharma of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, his physical marks, voice, mind, realm, practices, enlightenment, turning the Dharma-wheel, until his manifestation of entry into *parinirvāṇa*, and the wholesome roots (*kuśala-mūla*) begotten by seeing, hearing, and associating with him. Please explain all these things to us."

Then Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva, wishing to once more enunciate the meaning of this, spoke the following verses to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva:

Excellent, you of unobstructed great wisdom,
Adroitly aware of the limitless realm of equality.
Please explain to us the boundless deeds of the Buddhas;
The children of the Buddha will be delighted to hear.

How should Bodhisattvas accord with and understand
The appearance of the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, in the world?
What are the realms of their body, speech, and mind,
As well as the ground of their activity—please explain all
of these.

How do all the Buddhas accomplish perfect enlightenment?
How do the Tathāgatas turn the Dharma-wheel?
What is the *parinirvāṇa* of the Well Gone?
The great assembly would rejoice to hear.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

Those who see the Buddhas, great Dharma-kings,
And associate with them augment all wholesome roots;
Please tell us about their stores of merit,
And what do the beings who see them obtain?

If one hears the Tathāgata's name,
Whether he appears in the world or [has passed into]
Nirvāṇa,
If one awakens profound faith in his store of merit,
What are the benefits of that, please explain?

All these Bodhisattvas with their palms together
Respectfully behold the Tathāgata, you, and me;
The realm of the great ocean of virtues
Which purifies sentient beings, please tell us about it.

With anecdotes and similes,
Please explain the corresponding meaning of the sublime
Dharma;
When sentient beings hear, they will awaken the supreme
mind,
Their doubts obliterated and their wisdom pure as space.

Like the adorned bodies of all the Buddhas
Manifested throughout all lands,
With sublime voices, anecdotes and similes,
Please reveal the bodhi of the Buddhas like that.

In the myriad Buddha-lands of the ten directions,
For innumerable billions of *kalpas*,
An assembly of Bodhisattvas like this,
In all of them is rare to see.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

These Bodhisattvas are all reverential,
Filled with esteem for the subtle meaning;
Please, with a pure mind fully elucidate
The vast Dharma of the manifestation of the Tathāgata.

The Characteristics of the Manifestation of the Tathāgata

At that time Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-mahāsattva told Sublime Virtue of Nature Origination of the Tathāgata Bodhisattva and all other Bodhisattvas in the great assembly: "Children of the Buddha, this is inconceivable. That is to say, the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, is accomplished because of infinite dharmas. Whence? It is not due to one condition, to one phenomenon, that the manifestation of the Tathāgata is accomplished; it is accomplished by ten boundless *asaṅkhyas* of phenomena. What are the ten? It is accomplished by the boundless *bodhicitta* that embraced all sentient beings in the past. It is accomplished by the past boundless pure superior aspiration. It is accomplished by the past boundless great kindness (*maitrī*) and great compassion that liberated and protected all sentient beings. It is accomplished by the past boundless continual practices (*caryā*) and vows (*praṇidhāna*). It is accomplished by the past boundless untiring cultivation of all blessings (*puṇya*) and wisdom. It is accomplished by the past boundless offerings to the Buddhas and edification of sentient beings. It is accomplished by the past boundless pure ways of wisdom and methods (*upāya*). It is accomplished by the past boundless pure stores of merit. It is accomplished by the past boundless wisdom of the ways of adornment. It is accomplished by the past boundless realization of the meaning of the Dharma. Children of the Buddha, when such infinite *asaṅkhyas* of Dharma-teachings are consummated, one becomes a Tathāgata.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

“Children of the Buddha, it is like the great universe (*tri-sāhasra-mahāsāhasra lokadhātu*) which is not formed by only one condition,⁸⁹ only one phenomenon, but is formed by numberless conditions, numberless phenomena. That is to say, the formation of great clouds, the pouring of rain, and the four wind-circles provide perpetual support.⁹⁰ What are the four? The first is called ‘able to support,’ because it can support the great waters. The second is called ‘able to dehydrate,’ because it can dehydrate the great waters. The third is called ‘establisher,’ because it can establish all places. The fourth is called ‘adornment,’ because adornments are aptly spread everywhere. These are all produced by the collective karma of all sentient beings and by the wholesome roots of the Bodhisattvas, enabling all sentient beings to receive benefits according to what is appropriate. Children of the Buddha, the great universe is formed by such boundless causes and conditions. Such is the Dharmature (*dharmatā*)—without producer or creator, without knower, nothing accomplished, and yet all those worlds are formed.

“The manifestation of the Tathāgata is also thus: it is not brought about by only one condition, one phenomenon. It is brought about by numberless causes and conditions, numberless phenomena. That is to say, hearing, receiving, and sustaining the great clouds and rain of Dharma from the past Buddhas is the cause for the creation of the four wind-circles of the Tathāgata’s great wisdom. What are the four? The first is the wind-circle of great wisdom of *dharanī* that remembers without forgetting, because it can support the Tathāgata’s great clouds and rain of Dharma. The second is the wind-circle of great wisdom that engenders calmness (*samatha*) and insight (*vipasyanā*), because it can obviate all afflictions (*kleśa*). The third is the wind-circle of great wisdom of skillful dedication (*pariṇāmanā*), because it can consummate all wholesome roots. The fourth is the wind-circle of great wisdom which engenders various

unvitiated adornments, because it effectuates the purification of the wholesome roots of all beings who have been edified in the past, and perfects the power of the Tathāgata's undefiled (*anāsrava*) wholesome roots. Such is the Tathāgata's attainment of perfect enlightenment, such is the Dharma-nature: without production or activity, and yet it is accomplished. Children of the Buddha, this is the first characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, like when the great universe is just about to be formed, the rain called ‘inundation’ pouring from the great clouds cannot be taken in or sustained anywhere, except when the universe is about to form. Children of the Buddha, likewise the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, gives rise to a great cloud of Dharma that rains profuse Dharma-rain called ‘consummation of the manifestation of the Tathāgata,’ which those of the two vehicles with their inferior aspiration are unable to take in or sustain, with the exception of the great Bodhisattvas with their continuous mental power. Children of the Buddha, this is the second characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, as the great clouds pour rain due to the power of the actions of sentient beings, which comes from nowhere and goes nowhere, likewise the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, by the power of the wholesome roots of all Bodhisattvas gives rise to the great clouds of Dharma and rains profuse Dharma-rain, which also comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Children of the Buddha, this is the third characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, just as all sentient beings in the great universe cannot know the number [of drops] of the

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

profuse rain pouring from the great clouds, and would become demented if they tried to count them, with the exception of Maheśvara, the lord of the universe, who by the virtue of the power of his wholesome roots cultivated in the past discerns every single drop of water. Children of the Buddha, likewise the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One gives rise to a great cloud of Dharma that showers profuse Dharma-rain, which cannot be known by all sentient beings, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas*, and if they tried to comprehend it, their mind would surely become unsettled. It is only the Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, lords of all universes, who by the power of their enlightened wisdom cultivated in the past can clearly comprehend every single expression and sentence in the minds of [all] sentient beings. Children of the Buddha, this is the fourth characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, like when the great clouds pour rain, there is a great cloud of rain called ‘able to extinguish,’ because it can extinguish fires; there is a great cloud of rain called ‘able to raise,’ because it can raise [the level of] the great waters; there is a great cloud of rain called ‘able to stop,’ because it can stop the great waters; there is a great cloud of rain called ‘able to create,’ because it can create all kinds of *maṇi* jewels; there is a great cloud of rain called ‘differentiator,’ because it can differentiate [the worlds of] the great universe.

Children of the Buddha, the manifestation of the Tathāgata likewise gives rise to great clouds of Dharma that pour profuse Dharma-rain. There is a profuse Dharma-rain called ‘able to extinguish,’ because it can extinguish the afflictions of all sentient beings; there is a profuse Dharma-rain called ‘able to raise,’ because it can give rise to the wholesome roots of all sentient beings; there is a profuse Dharma-rain called ‘able to stop,’ because it can stop the deluded views of all sentient beings;

there is a profuse Dharma-rain called 'able to create,' because it can create all Dharma-treasures of wisdom; there is a profuse Dharma-rain called 'differentiation,' because it can differentiate the predilections of all sentient beings. Children of the Buddha, this is the fifth characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

"Further, children of the Buddha, as the water rained by the great clouds has a single taste, [but] there are numerous variations according to where it rains, likewise the manifestation of the Tathāgata rains the Dharma-rain of great compassion that has a single taste, and yet the explanations of the Dharma in accord with circumstances account for numberless variations. Children of the Buddha, this is the sixth characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

"Further, children of the Buddha, as at the time of the creation of the great universe, first are created the heavenly palaces of the realm of form (*rūpa-dhātu*), then are created the heavenly palaces of the realm of desire (*kāma-dhātu*), and then are created the abodes of humans and other sentient beings. Likewise, children of the Buddha, the manifestation of the Tathāgata first engenders the wisdom of all the practices of the Bodhisattvas, then it engenders the wisdom of all the practices of the *pratyekabuddhas*, then it engenders the wisdom of the practices of all wholesome roots of the *śrāvakas*, and then it engenders the wisdom of the practices of the conditioned wholesome roots of other sentient beings. Children of the Buddha, as the great clouds pour rain that has a single taste, due to the differences in the wholesome roots of all sentient beings the palaces produced are not the same. [Likewise] the Tathāgata's Dharma-rain of great compassion, though of a single taste, does differ according to the capacities of sentient beings. Children of the Buddha,

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

this is the seventh characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, when the worlds are about to be formed, there is a great water created, which fills the great universe. Covering that water grows a great lotus flower called ‘precious adornments of the merit of the manifestation of the Tathāgata,’ whose lustre illuminates all worlds in the ten directions. Then, when Maheśvara and [the inhabitants of] the heaven of purity see that flower, they decisively know that in that *kalpa* such and such Buddha will appear in the world. Children of the Buddha, at that time arises a wind-circle called ‘well-purified light,’ which can engender all the heavenly palaces of the realm of form. There arises a wind-circle called ‘adornment of pure light,’ which can engender the palaces of the realm of desire. There arises a wind-circle called ‘strong, dense, indelible,’ which can engender the great and small circles of the peripheral mountains (*cakravāla*) and the iron mountains. There arises a wind-circle called ‘apical,’ which can engender the ten great mountains. What are the ten? [They are] Khadiraka, Rṣigiri, Fu-mo shan, Ta Fu-mo shan, Yugaṁdhara, Nimindhara, Mucilinda, Mahā-mucilinda, Gandhamādana, and Himālaya mountains. There arises a wind-circle called ‘peaceful abiding,’ which can engender the earth. There arises a wind-circle called ‘adornment,’ which can engender the palaces on the earth and in heaven, the palaces of the *nāgas*, and the palaces of the *gandharvas*. There arises a wind-circle called ‘inexhaustible store,’ which can engender all great oceans in the great universe. There arises a wind-circle called ‘universal light store,’ which can engender all *maṇi* jewels in the great universe. There arises a wind-circle called ‘firm root,’ which can engender all wish-fulfilling trees. Children of the Buddha, the water raining from the great clouds has a single taste, without differentiation—it is only due to the

differences in the wholesome roots of sentient beings that there are various wind-circles, and due to the differences among the wind-circles, the worlds differ.

“Children of the Buddha, the manifestation of the Tathāgata is also like this: consummate with the merit of all wholesome roots, it issues a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘inconceivable wisdom of the continuation of the seed of the Tathāgatas,’ which universally illuminates all the worlds in the ten directions, bestowing to all Bodhisattvas prophecies about their consecration (*abhiṣecana*) by all the Tathāgatas, attainment of perfect enlightenment, and appearance in the world.

“Children of the Buddha, within the manifestation of the Tathāgata there is a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘pure and taintless’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s undefiled boundless wisdom. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘universally illuminating,’ which can engender the inconceivable wisdom of the Tathāgata’s universal entry into the *dharmadhātu*. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘upholding the nature of Buddhahood,’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s immovable power. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘far-gone and indelible,’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s dauntless indelible wisdom. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘all preternatural powers,’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s wisdom of all unique characteristics [of a Buddha] and the all-encompassing wisdom (*sarvajña*). There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘creator of transfigurations,’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s wisdom of the indestructibility of the wholesome roots created by seeing, hearing, and associating [with the Tathāgatas]. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called ‘universal accord,’ which can engender the Tathāgata’s body of boundless merit and wisdom, benefiting all sentient beings. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

called 'inexhaustible,' which can engender the Tathāgata's deep sublime wisdom which, according to that which it is enlightened to, causes the seeds of the three treasures never to be obliterated. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called 'various adornments,' which can engender the body of the Tathāgata embellished with distinguishing marks, causing all sentient beings to rejoice. There is also a light of unsurpassed great wisdom called 'indelible,' which can engender the Tathāgata's supreme life span, equal to the *dharmadhātu* and the realm of space, beyond all limitations.

"Children of the Buddha, the Tathāgata's single-flavored water of great compassion is without differentiation; [however,] because sentient beings' propensities diverge and their natures are each different, it creates various wind-circles of great wisdom, causing all Bodhisattvas to effect the Dharma of the manifestation of the Tathāgata. Children of the Buddha, all the Tathāgatas have the same essential nature; from the sphere of great wisdom they create diverse lights of wisdom.

"Children of the Buddha, you should know that from the single taste of the Tathāgata's liberation arise boundless inconceivable kinds of merit. Sentient beings think that all of these are created by the Tathāgata's preternatural powers. [But,] children of the Buddha, they are not created by the Tathāgata's preternatural powers. Children of the Buddha, it is impossible that there could be even a single Bodhisattva who without planting wholesome roots with the Buddhas could obtain even a small part of the Tathāgata's wisdom. It is only due to the power of the Tathāgata's awesome virtue that all sentient beings consummate the merit of the Buddhas. And yet, the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, have no discrimination. There is no becoming, no dissolution, no originator, and no activity. Children of the Buddha, this is the eighth characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-

mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, the four wind-circles that arise with space as their support can sustain the water-circle. What are the four? The first is called ‘peaceful abiding’; the second is called ‘constant abiding’; the third is called ‘ultimate’; the fourth is called ‘solid.’ These four wind-circles can sustain the water-circle, which in turn can sustain the earth, preventing her from disintegrating. Therefore, it is said that the earth-circle depends on the water-circle, the water-circle depends on the wind-circle(s), the wind-circle(s) depend on space, while space itself depends on nothing. And yet, though it depends on nothing, it enables the great universe to subsist.

“Children of the Buddha, the manifestation of the Tathāgata is also like this—dependent on the light of unobstructed wisdom (*apraṭiṣṭhitajñāna*) arise the four kinds of wind-circles of great wisdom of the Buddha, which can sustain the wholesome roots of all sentient beings. What are the four? They are the wind-circle of great wisdom of aiding sentient beings and bringing joy to all of them; the wind-circle of great wisdom of establishing the proper Dharma and causing all sentient beings to delight in it; the wind-circle of great wisdom of protecting the wholesome roots of all sentient beings; the wind-circle of great wisdom of consummating all methods (*upāya*) and penetrating the undefiled realm—these are the four.

“Children of the Buddha, all the Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, with great kindness liberate all sentient beings, with great compassion rescue all sentient beings, with great kindness and compassion benefit all. Great kindness and compassion themselves depend on great skill in means, great skill in means depends on the manifestation of the Tathāgata, the manifestation of the Tathāgata depends on the light of unobstructed wisdom, while the light of unobstructed wisdom depends on nothing. Children of the Buddha, this is the ninth characteristic of the

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, like when the great universe is formed, it benefits numberless kinds of sentient beings, viz.: the beings living in water obtain the benefits of the water; the beings living on earth obtain the benefits of the earth; the beings living in the [heavenly] palaces obtain the benefit of the [heavenly] palaces; the beings living in space obtain the benefits of space.

“Likewise, the manifestation of the Tathāgata in various ways benefits numberless sentient beings, viz.: those who rejoice in seeing the Buddha obtain the benefits of joy; those who keep the pure precepts (*śīla*) obtain the benefits of pure precepts; those who dwell in all meditations, absorptions, and the [four] boundless [mental states?] obtain the benefits of the great supra-mundane preternatural powers of the sages; those who dwell in the light of the Dharma-teachings obtain the benefits of non-effacement of cause and effect; those who dwell in the light of nothingness obtain the benefits of the non-effacement of all dharmas. Therefore, it is said that the manifestation of the Tathāgata benefits all numberless sentient beings. Children of the Buddha, this is the tenth characteristic of the manifestation of the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One. Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should know it thus.

“Children of the Buddha, when the Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas know the manifestation of the Tathāgata, they know it as boundless, because they know it consummates boundless practices; they know it as vast, because they know it pervades the ten directions; they know it as having no coming and going, because they know it is dissociated from creation, abiding, and destruction; they know it as inactive, without any activity, because they know it is dissociated from mind, thought, and consciousness; they know it as incorporeal, because

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

they know it is like space; they know it as equal, because they know that all sentient beings are devoid of self; they know it as inexhaustible, because they know that it permeates all lands (*kṣetra*) without depleting itself; they know it as non-regressive, because they know it will never evanesce till the end of time; they know it as indelible, because they know that the Tathāgata's wisdom has no analogy; they know it as non-dual, because they know the impartial contemplation of the conditioned and the unconditioned; they know that all sentient beings obtain benefits, because the dedication (*pariṇāmanā*) of the original vows (*pūrvapranidhāna*) is spontaneously consummated."

At that time Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-mahāsattva, wishing to once more enunciate the meaning of this, uttered the following verses:

The Ten-powered Great Hero is equal with the unequaled,
Like empty space, beyond comparison;
His realm is vast beyond measure,
With supreme merit, transcending the world.

The merit of the Ten-powered is limitless,
Inaccessible to conceptual thought;
A single teaching of the lion among men
Cannot be known by sentient beings for a million kalpas.

If the lands in the ten directions were pulverized to dust,
There might be someone able to count the number
[of particles];
The merit of a single hair of the Tathāgata
Cannot be stated in a hundred trillion kalpas.

Like a person trying to measure space with a ruler,
Followed by someone keeping the count,

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

The limits of space cannot be ascertained—
The realm of the Tathāgata is also like this.

There might be someone able within an instant
To know the minds of sentient beings in the three times
For as many kalpas as sentient beings,
Still he would be unable to know the nature of a single
thought of the Buddha.

Like the dharmadhātu which pervades everything,
But cannot be apprehended as being everything,
The realm of the Ten-powered is also thus:
It pervades everything, and yet is not everything.

Suchness is dissociated from falsehood and eternally
quiescent,
Unborn, indestructible, universally ubiquitous;
The realm of all the Buddhas is also thus:
Its essential nature is equal, neither increasing nor
diminishing.

Just as the reality-limit has no limit,
Universally present in the three times, and yet not universal;
The realm of the Guide is also thus,
Pervading the three times without obstruction.

The Dharma-nature is uncreated and immutable,
Like space, originally pure;
The purity of the nature of all the Buddhas is also thus:
The fundamental nature is not nature, beyond existence
and nothingness.

The Dharma-nature is not within [the sphere of] verbalization,

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

Ineffable, beyond speech, eternally quiescent;
The nature of the realm of the Ten-powered is also thus,
It cannot be deliberated in any words.

Realizing the quiescence of the Dharma-nature,
Like a bird flying in air without leaving any traces;
By the power of the original vows manifesting physical body,
Displaying the Tathāgata's great magic transfigurations.

If one wants to know the realm of the Buddha,
He should purify his mind [so that it becomes] like space;
Forsaking false thoughts and attachments,
Having the mind unobstructed amidst all objects.

Therefore the Buddha's children should listen well,
With few similes I will explain the realm of the Buddha;
The merit of the Ten-powered is immeasurable,
For the sake of enlightening beings I will now briefly
outline it.

All the realms manifested by the physical,
Verbal, and mental activities of the Guide,
The turning of the sublime Dharma-wheel and his
parinirvāṇa,
All wholesome roots I will now relate.

Like when the worlds are first formed,
They cannot be created by [only] one cause and condition;
It is innumerable causes and conditions
That create this great universe.

Likewise the manifestation of the Tathāgata is
Consummated by boundless merit;

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

The mind's thoughts numerous as the lands' particles of
dust might still be known,
But the causes for the birth of the Ten-powered cannot be
fathomed.

As at the beginning of a *kalpa* the clouds start to rain
And create four kinds of great wind-circles;
The wholesome roots of beings and the power of the
Bodhisattvas
Establish this universe firmly.

Likewise the Dharma-cloud of the Ten-powered
Gives rise to the wind-circle of wisdom and pure mind;
All sentient beings who have dedicated in the past,
It universally guides them to obtain the unsurpassed fruit.

As the great rain called 'inundation'
Cannot be sustained anywhere,
Except when the worlds are about to form,
By the power of the great wind in clear space.

Likewise the manifestation of the Tathāgata
Universally showers Dharma-rain throughout the *dharmadhātu*,
Which cannot be taken in by those of inferior mentality,
With the exception of those with pure and vast minds.

As a profuse rain pouring in space,
That comes from nowhere and goes nowhere,
Without creator or receiver,
Naturally diffused everywhere.

Likewise the Dharma-rain of the Ten-powered
Has no coming and going, no creation;

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

With the original practices as its cause, by the Bodhisattvas'
power,
All those with magnanimous minds can hear and receive it.

Like a profuse rain pouring from the clouds in the sky,
Nobody can count its drops,
Except the free lord of the universe,
Who through the power of his merit can apprehend them.

Likewise the Dharma-rain of the Well Gone
All sentient beings cannot survey,
Except for those who are free in the world,
Who see it clearly like looking at a jewel in their palm.

As a profuse rain pouring from the clouds in the sky
Can extinguish, can engender, and can destroy;
It can produce all treasures,
Differentiating everything in the universe.

Likewise the Dharma-rain of the Ten-powered
Extinguishes delusions, engenders virtue, destroys all views,
Produces all treasures of wisdom,
And differentiates all predilections of sentient beings.

As the single taste of the rain in the sky
Differs according to the places it rains;
Though the nature of the rain does not differ,
In accord with differences among beings it appears thus.

The Dharma-rain of the Tathāgata is not one or many,
Equanimous and tranquil, beyond discrimination;
Yet in response to the various differences among those edified,
It naturally appears in numberless forms.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

As when the worlds are first established,
First are created the heavenly palaces of the realm of form,
Then the heavens of desire, then the human abodes,
While the palaces of the *gandharvas* are created last.

Likewise the manifestation of the Tathāgata
First engenders limitless Bodhisattva practices,
Then it edifies the *pratyekabuddhas* who delight in quiescence,
Then the *śrāvakas*, then sentient beings.

When all gods first see the auspicious lotus flower,
They know a Buddha will appear, and thereby rejoice;
From water, with the power of wind, the world is created,
So that palaces, mountains, and streams all come to be.

The great light of the Tathāgata's innate virtue
Aptly distinguishes the Bodhisattvas and gives them
prophecies;
The essences of all spheres of wisdom are pure,
Each able to elucidate all Buddhadharmas.

As trees depend on the earth for their existence,
The earth depends on water in order not to disintegrate,
Water depends on wind, wind depends on space,
While space depends on nothing.

All Buddhadharmas depend on compassion,
Compassion in turn depends on means,
Means depend on knowledge, knowledge depends on wisdom,
While the body of unobstructed wisdom depends on nothing.

Like when the worlds are formed,
All sentient beings obtain benefits;

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

Whether living on earth, in water, or in space,
With two or four legs—all obtain benefits.

The manifestation of the Dharma-king is also thus:
It brings benefits to all sentient beings;
Whether seeing, hearing, or associating [with the Buddha],
All effect the relinquishment of delusions and vexations.

The manifestation of the Tathāgata is boundless,
It cannot be understood by those deluded in the world;
For the sake of enlightening all sentient beings,
Where there is no similitude, similes are told.

The Body of the Tathāgata

“Children of the Buddha, how should Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas perceive the body of the Tathāgata,⁹¹ Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One? Children of the Buddha, all Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive the body of the Tathāgata in limitless places. Wherefore? All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should not perceive the Tathāgata in [just] one dharma, one phenomenon,⁹² one body, one land, one sentient being. They should perceive the Tathāgata everywhere.

“Children of the Buddha, like space which is present everywhere, whether there are forms or not, without reaching or not reaching there. Wherefore? Because space is immaterial. Likewise, the body of the Tathāgata is present everywhere, in all sentient beings, all dharmas, all lands, without reaching or not reaching there. Wherefore? Because the body of the Tathāgata is immaterial—it is for the sake of sentient beings that he manifests a body. Children of the Buddha, this is the first characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

“Further, children of the Buddha, though space is vast and formless, it can manifest all forms; yet space does not discriminate, does not engage in conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*). Likewise, because the body of the Tathāgata is completely illuminated by the light of wisdom, it causes all karma of the mundane and supramundane wholesome roots of all sentient beings to be consummated. And yet, the body of the Tathāgata does not discriminate, does not engage in false differentiation. Wherefore? Because from the very beginning all attachments and false differentiations have been permanently obliterated. Children of the Buddha, this is the second characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, as when the sun rises over Jambudvīpa numberless sentient beings obtain benefits. That is to say, it dispels the darkness and brings light, it dries out the humidity, it enables the plants and the trees to grow, the grains to ripen, it makes it possible to see through space, enables the lotus flowers to bloom, the travelers to see the road, the inhabitants to conduct their activities. Wherefore? Because the sun disk emits boundless light everywhere. Children of the Buddha, likewise the sun of the wisdom of the Tathāgata universally benefits sentient beings in limitless ways. That is to say, it obliterates evil and engenders virtue, destroys stupidity and brings wisdom, it rescues with great kindness, it liberates with great compassion, it promotes evolvment of the faculties, their powers, and the conditions leading to enlightenment (*bodhipāṅsika-dharma*),⁹³ it causes the awakening of profound faith (*śraddhā*) and abrogation of the impure mind, it enables one to see and hear [the truth] without effacing cause and effect, it enables one to obtain the heavenly eye and see the places of birth and death [of sentient beings], it makes the mind unobstructed without effacing the wholesome roots, it causes wisdom to cultivate clarity so that the flower of enlightenment will bloom, it causes the arising of

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

the mind [set on enlightenment] and the accomplishment of the primigenial practices. Wherefore? Because the preternatural body of the Tathāgata's sun of wisdom emits boundless light, universally effulgent. Children of the Buddha, this is the third characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

"Further, children of the Buddha, when the sun rises at Jambudvīpa it first shines on Sumeru and the other great mountains, then it shines on the dark mountains, then the high plains, and lastly it shines on the whole earth. [But] the sun does not think: 'I will first shine on this, than on that.' It is only because the mountains and the earth have different elevation that there is sequence in the irradiation. Likewise, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One consummates the sphere of wisdom of the limitless *dharmadhātu*, perpetually emitting the light of unobstructed wisdom, which first shines on the Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, equal to the great mountains, then it shines on the *pratyekabuddhas*, then on the *śrāvakas*, then on sentient beings with decisive wholesome roots, revealing the great wisdom according to their mental capacities, and finally it universally shines on all sentient beings, including even those who are inveterate in fallacy, in order to create beneficial causes that in the future will enable them to reach maturity. But the light of the Tathāgata's sun of great wisdom does not think: 'I should first shine on the Bodhisattvas [with their] superior practices, and in the very end I will shine on those sentient beings who are inveterate in fallacy.' He simply emits the light, equally shining on everyone, without obstruction, without hindrance, without discrimination.

"Children of the Buddha, as the sun and the moon always appear and shine on [both] the high mountains and the deep valleys without any bias, likewise the Tathāgata's wisdom universally shines on all, without discrimination; in accord with the

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

differences in the capacities and the predilections of all sentient beings, the light of wisdom displays various differentiations. Children of the Buddha, this is the fourth characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, when the sun rises, those beings that are born blind cannot see it due to their lack of sight. Although they have never seen the sun, nonetheless they obtain benefits from its light. Whence? Because of it they can know the periods of the day and the night and can avail themselves of clothing and food, making their bodies feel at ease, free from adversity. It is the same with the sun of the Tathāgata’s wisdom: those born blind, without faith and understanding, who break the precepts and hold erroneous views, who support themselves by improper livelihood, because they lack the eye of faith, they cannot see the sun disk of the wisdom of all the Buddhas. Though they fail to see the sun disk of the wisdom of all the Buddhas, they are still benefited by it. Whence? Because the awesome power of the Buddha effects the effacement of their physical pain and their afflictions, which serve as causes for future suffering.

“Children of the Buddha, the Tathāgata has a light called ‘accumulation of all merits’; has a light called ‘universal effulgence’; has a light called ‘pure and free effulgence’; has a light called ‘emanating supremely sublime sounds’; has a light called ‘understanding all speeches and bringing joy to others’; has a light called ‘the realm of freedom which reveals the permanent obliteration of all doubts’; has a light called ‘free universal effulgence of non-abiding wisdom’; has a light called ‘free wisdom which universally obliterates all false differentiations’; has a light called ‘emanating sublime voices according to needs’; has a light called ‘emanating pure free voices, adorning the lands, and bringing sentient beings to maturity.’

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

Children of the Buddha, each pore of the Tathāgata emits thousands of lights like these. Five hundred of these lights universally illuminate all congregations of Bodhisattvas at the sites of the various Buddhas in the various lands of the upper regions, while the other five hundred universally illuminate those in the lower regions. When those Bodhisattvas perceive these lights, they for a time attain the realm of the Tathāgata, with ten heads, ten eyes, ten ears, ten noses, ten tongues, ten bodies, ten hands, ten feet, ten stages, and ten wisdoms, all of them pure. All stations and stages that have already been consummated by all those Bodhisattvas become purer upon perceiving these lights; all their wholesome roots are brought to maturity, and they advance toward all-encompassing wisdom. Those of the two vehicles have all their defilements obliterated. Those other beings who are born blind, their bodies already rapturous, their minds purified, pliant and composed, are thus capable of cultivating mindfulness and wisdom. Those beings who dwell in the hells and the realms of hungry ghosts and animals all obtain happiness. They are released from their suffering, after the ending of the present life to be reborn in the heavens or among humans.

“Children of the Buddha, all those sentient beings have no awareness or understanding of the causes and preternatural influences by which they are reborn here. Those born blind think: ‘I am Brahmā, I am a manifestation of Brahmā.’ At that time the Tathāgata, abiding in the *samādhi* of universal freedom, emanates sixty kinds of sublime voices, telling them, ‘You are not Brahmā, nor are you manifestations of Brahmā, neither were you created by Sovereign Śakra or the guardians of the world (*lokapālas*). All this is due to the awesome preternatural power of the Tathāgata.’

“When those sentient beings hear this, by the Buddha’s preternatural power, they all recollect their past lives and become

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

enraptured. Because their hearts are enraptured, they spontaneously produce clouds of *udumbara* flowers, clouds of incense, clouds of music, clouds of robes, clouds of canopies, clouds of pennants, clouds of streamers, clouds of fragrant powders, clouds of jewels, clouds of lion pennants and crescent towers, clouds of songs and eulogies, clouds of various adornments, and reverentially offer them all to the Tathāgata. Whence? Because all these sentient beings have obtained pure eyes. [Then] the Tathāgata gives them prophecies about their attainment of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. Children of the Buddha, in this way the sun of the Tathāgata's wisdom benefits those sentient beings who are born blind, effectuating their wholesome roots to reach full maturity. Children of the Buddha, this is the fifth characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, the moon has four unique unprecedented characteristics. What are the four? First, it eclipses the lights of all stars; second, with the passage of time it appears as waning and waxing; third, its reflection appears in all clear and still waters in Jambudvīpa; fourth, it is in front of everyone's eyes to see; yet, the moon does not discriminate, has no false differentiation.

“Children of the Buddha, the moon of the Tathāgata's body, likewise, has four unique unprecedented characteristics. What are the four? It eclipses all *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, both those who are still learning and those who are beyond learning; in response to what is appropriate it manifests different life spans, some long and some short, yet the Tathāgata's body has no increase or decrease; it inevitably manifests in the *bodhi* vessels of sentient beings with pure minds in all worlds; all those sentient beings who see it think: ‘The Tathāgata appears only in front of me.’ According to their predilections it elucidates the Dharma to them, according to their stages it leads them to liberation,

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

according to the ways they need to be edified it causes them to see the Buddha's body; yet, the body of the Tathāgata does not discriminate, has no false differentiation—all the benefits it produces are brought to ultimate conclusion. Children of the Buddha, this is the sixth characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, as Brahmā, the ruler of the great universe, can, by a way of small expediency, manifest his body throughout the universe, so that all sentient beings can see Brahmā appearing in front of them. Yet, Brahmā does not divide his body, nor does he have multiple bodies. Children of the Buddha, likewise all the Buddhas, Tathāgatas, do not discriminate, have no false differentiation, nor do they divide their bodies, or have multiple bodies, and yet in response to the propensities of all sentient beings they manifest their bodies, without thinking they manifest many bodies. Children of the Buddha, this is the seventh characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, like a supreme healer who has extensive knowledge of various medicines and incantations, and has at his disposal all the medicines in Jambudvīpa. Because of the power of his wholesome roots from the past, and because of the power of the great bright incantations which he uses as expedient means, when beings see him they are cured of their illnesses. When that great supreme healer perceives that his death is approaching, he thinks: ‘When I die sentient beings will have no one to rely on. I should contrive an expediency.’ Then the supreme healer concocts medicine and spreads it over his body, sustained by the power of the bright incantations, thus ensuring his body not to decompose or decay after his death, so that its semblance, sight, and hearing will be no different from before. In that way it is able to cure all illnesses.

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

“Children of the Buddha, likewise the Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, unequaled supreme healer, has already consummated the medicine of the Dharma refined over boundless hundreds of thousands of billions of *kalpas*. Having cultivated and learned all means, expediencies, and the power of the great bright incantation, he has reached the other shore, and is able to skillfully obviate the illnesses of the afflictions (*kleśa*) of all sentient beings. [The Tathāgata’s] life span is over limitless *kalpas*; his body is pure, without thought, inactive, tirelessly engaging in all Buddha activities. When sentient beings see him, all the illnesses of their afflictions are completely obviated. Children of the Buddha, this is the eighth characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, as in the great ocean there is a great *maṇi* jewel called ‘Vairocana’s depository of all lights.’⁹⁴ If any sentient beings come in contact with its light they become of the same color; if they see it, their eyes become purified. Wherever its light shines it rains *maṇi* jewels called ‘delight,’ which cause all sentient beings to leave suffering and obtain ease. Children of the Buddha, likewise the bodies of all Tathāgatas are great collections of jewels, are great wisdom-stores of all merits. If any sentient beings come in contact with the light of wisdom of the treasure of the body of the Buddha, they become of an identical appearance as the body of the Buddha; if they see it, their Dharma-eyes are purified. Wherever this light shines, it causes all sentient beings to be freed from the suffering of poverty, and finally to fully obtain the joy of the Buddha’s *bodhi*. Children of the Buddha, the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata does not discriminate, has no false differentiation, and yet it can, for the sake of all sentient beings, perform the great Buddha activity. Children of the Buddha, this is the ninth characteristic of the body of the

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Further, children of the Buddha, as in the great ocean there is a supreme wish-fulfilling king of jewels called ‘treasury of the adornments of all worlds’; replete with myriad virtues, it causes all calamities that befall sentient beings at the place where it is to be abrogated, and their wishes to be fulfilled. However, this wish-fulfilling king of jewels cannot be seen by sentient beings with little merit.

“The wish-fulfilling king of jewels of the body of the Tathāgata is also like this: called ‘able to cause all sentient beings to rejoice,’ all those who see it, or hear its name, or praise its virtues will be empowered to permanently leave the suffering and distress of *samsāra*. If all sentient beings in all worlds simultaneously single-mindedly wished to see the Tathāgata, it will enable them to see him, thus fulfilling their wishes. Children of the Buddha, the body of the Buddha cannot be seen by sentient beings with little merit, unless they are disciplined by the free preternatural power of the Tathāgata. If sentient beings by seeing the body of the Buddha plant wholesome roots and mature them, for the sake of their maturation they will be enabled to perceive the body of the Tathāgata. Children of the Buddha, this is the tenth characteristic of the body of the Tathāgata. All Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should perceive it thus.

“Because [the Bodhisattvas’] minds are boundless, pervading the ten directions; because their activity is unobstructed, being like space; because they universally enter the *dharmadhātu*; because they abide in the true limit of reality; because they have neither birth nor death; because they equally abide throughout the three times; because they are eternally dissociated from all discriminations; because they maintain their vows till the end of time; because they adorn and purify all the worlds; because they adorn the body of each Buddha.”

MANIFESTATION OF THE TATHĀGATA

Then Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-mahāsattva, wishing to once more enunciate the meaning of this, uttered the following verses:

As space pervades the ten directions,
Whether with form or formless, existent or nonexistent,
In the bodies of beings and lands throughout the
three times,
Universally present without limitations.

Likewise the true body of all the Buddhas
Pervades all *dharmadhātus*,
Impossible to see or grasp,
But for the sake of edifying beings it manifests forms.

Just as space cannot be grasped,
Yet it enables sentient beings to perform their activities,
Without thinking 'What am I doing now,
How do I do it, and for whom?'

Likewise the physical activity of all the Buddhas
Causes all sentient beings to cultivate wholesome
dharma;
Yet the Tathāgata has never discriminated,
'I have done various things for them.'

As when the sun rises at Jambudvīpa,
Its light completely dispels the darkness;
Mountains, trees, ponds, lotuses, and earth,
All various things obtain benefits.

Likewise the arising of the sun of all the Buddhas
Gives birth to and nourishes the wholesome practices
of humans and gods,

THE BODY OF THE TATHĀGATA

Forever effacing the darkness of ignorance so that they
attain the light of wisdom,
And procure all resplendent joy.

As when the sunlight appears,
It first shines on the great mountains, then the other
mountains,
Then it shines on the high plains and the whole earth,
Yet the sun has never discriminated.

Likewise the light of the Well Gone
First shines on the Bodhisattvas, then on the
pratyekabuddhas,
And then on the *śrāvakas* and sentient beings,
Yet the Buddha fundamentally has no thought
movement.

As though those born blind do not see the sun,
The sunlight benefits them too,
Enabling them to know the time and receive drinks
and food,
To be always free from adversities, and set their bodies
at ease.

Beings without faith do not see the Buddha,
Yet the Buddha bestows benefits on them too;
Learning his name and coming in contact with his light
Can even be the cause for the attainment of bodhi.

As the clear moon in the sky
Eclipses all stars and appears as waning and waxing,
Reflected in all waters,
In front of all those who behold it.