

The *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*: Its Basic Structure and Relation to the Lotus Sūtra

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In his comprehensive study of the development of the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching, J. Takasaki also deals with the sūtra which bears the name of this Mahāyāna philosophical current.¹ The *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (*TGS*) has

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The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

- Bth* Ms Kanjur from 'Ba' thang in Tibet, now in the Newark Museum
Ch₁ *Da fang deng rulai zang jing* 大方等如來藏經 (*T* 666)
Ch₂ *Da fang du rulai zang jing* 大方廣如來藏經 (*T* 667)
D₁, D₂ MSS A and B of the *SP* discovered in Gilgit; romanized texts in: Shoko Watanabe (ed.), *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Manuscripts Found in Gilgit*, Part Two: Romanized Text, Tokyo 1975 (The Reiyukai)
K *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, eds. H. Kern & B. Nanjio, St.-Petersbourg 1912 (Bibliotheca Buddhica X)
O Petrovsky MSS of the *SP* discovered in Kashgar; romanized text in: Hirofumi Toda (ed.), *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, Central Asian Manuscripts, Romanized Text*, Tokushima 1981 (Kyōiku Shuppan Center)
Q Peking xylograph Kanjur-Tanjur (Ōtani reprint), Kangxi edition of 1717-20 with missing parts supplied from the Qianlong edition of 1737; the *TGS* is found in vol. 36, *mDo sna tshogs Zhu* 259b4-274a1, no. 924
RGV(V) *Ratnagotravibhāga(vṛtti)* (Sāramati?), ed. E. H. Johnston (*The Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra*), Patna 1950
SP *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*
T *The Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō (The Tripiṭaka in Chinese)*, eds. J. Takakusu & K. Watanabe, Tokyo 1924ff.
TGS *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*
TGS₁ The first recension of the *TGS* represented by *Ch₁*
TGS₂ The second recension of the *TGS* represented by *Ch₂*, *Tib* and *Bth*
Tib Translation of the *TGS* as contained in the main Kanjurs
TUSN **Tathāgatopattisambhavanirdeśa* (part of the *Avatamsakasūtra*)

generally been referred to as the earliest expression of this doctrine and the term *tathāgatagarbha* itself seems to have been coined by this very sūtra. In this paper I intend to introduce the textual history and doctrinal content of the *TGS* and offer some speculations concerning the possible motivations lying behind its compilation. By pointing out some interesting parallels concerning the structure and formulations in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* (*SP*), I shall then suggest that the *SP* and the *TGS* carry a similar compositional line. Finally, I shall determine the position and role of the *TGS* in Mahāyāna Buddhism as a sūtra presupposing the doctrine of the *SP* and providing its metaphysical foundation.

The textual history of the *TGS*

The *TGS* is a relatively short sūtra. It covers about 15 folios or six complete pages in the Peking Kanjur corresponding to less than four or, depending on the recension, six pages in the Chinese Taishō.² No Indian manuscript has been found until now. In 1959 a critical Tibetan edition collated with the two Chinese translations was established.³ However, as many new materials have become accessible since then, a more comprehensive textcritical edition remains a desideratum. My study of the textual history of the *TGS* has so far yielded the following general conclusions.⁴

¹ Jikidō Takasaki 高崎直道, *Nyoraizō shisō no keisei (Formation of the Tathāgatagarbha Theory)* 如来藏思想の形成, Tokyo 1974 (Shunjū-sha): pp. 40-68.

² *Q*: vol. 36, *mDo sna tshogs Zhu* 259b4-274a1, no. 924; *Ch*₁: 457a-460b; *Ch*₂: 460b-466a.

³ The edition of the *TGS* collates only the Kanjurs from Derge, Peking and Narthang and is not always reliable: Kyōshun Tōdō 藤堂恭俊, *Nyoraizōkyō — kan zō san yaku taishō (Comparative Study in Chinese and Tibetan Texts of Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra)* 如来藏經—漢藏三訳対照, (Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo 仏教文化研究所), Kyoto 1959.

⁴ A critical edition of the *TGS* is part of a Ph.D. dissertation to be submitted at the University of Hamburg. The collation comprises the versions of the *TGS* as contained in the Kanjurs from Berlin, Derge, Lithang, London, Narthang, Peking (Ōtani reprint), Phug brag (three versions), Stog, Tabo (fragmentary) and Tokyo (Tōyō Bunko) compared with the two Chinese translations and the translation from Bathang, now in the Newark Museum. The following is the result of my research on the *TGS* so far. The full philological details shall be given in the above mentioned Ph.D. dissertation.

It is now clear that we can speak of two recensions of the *TGS* which are different in length and wording. The first recension (*TGS*₁) is represented by the Chinese translation of Buddhahadra done in 420 CE (*Ch*₁).⁵ All other three existent translations are based on the second recension (*TGS*₂). They are:

- a. the Chinese translation by Amoghavajra dating from the middle of the 8th century (*Ch*₂),⁶
- b. the apocryphal Tibetan translation from the period before the compilation of bilingual compendiums like the *Mahāvvyutpatti* or the *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, as found in the Newark Manuscript Kanjur from Bathang (*Bth*),⁷ and
- c. the canonical Tibetan translation as found in the “common” Kanjurs (*Tib*) which was done, or at least revised, on the basis of the compendiums mentioned in b.

Two earlier Chinese translations of the *TGS* done in the Western Jin 西晉 Dynasty, between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century, are mentioned as lost by the catalogues and have not come down to us.⁸

A philological analysis of the two recensions shows that there are several passages in *TGS*₂ which are not found in *TGS*₁. That these passages must be judged as later interpolations becomes clear by their “redundant” character: omitting these passages, the immediate sections before and behind the inserted element join smoothly. In general *TGS*₂ is more extended and detailed than *TGS*₁, which in many instances appears to show less vividness and distinctness in the

⁵ The date of translation is according to the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記 (T 2034, 71a13): 元熙二年.

⁶ For Amoghavajra’s (不空) life data (705-774 CE) cp. Shinkō Mochizuki 望月信亨, *Bukkyō daijiten* (**Buddhist Dictionary*) 佛教大辭典 s.v. *Fukū*.

⁷ For more information about this translation cp. the author’s “A Second Tibetan Translation of the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* in the Newark Manuscript Kanjur from Bathang: A Translation of the Early Period (*snga dar*)”, in *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies*, No. XLIII, 1998: 33-50.

wording of the similes. This, as well as its comparatively early date of translation would naturally suggest *TGS*₁, i.e., the translation of Buddhahadra, as the archetypal recension. The situation is not, however, so simple. Besides the obvious interpolations, the relation between the two recensions is not an ancestral one. Neither of the two can be said to have grown out of the other recension. In many instances the recensions are simply different in content – sometimes so different that it is hard to imagine that a common archetype had ever existed.

That the earlier date of translation of *TGS*₁ is not a proof of a higher degree of “originality” is further documented by another observation: if we turn to the verses of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (*RGV*) reproducing the nine similes of the *TGS*, it becomes evident that this reproduction is based on, or has at least partly made use of, *TGS*₂ or a version close to *TGS*₂.⁹ The date of the compilation of the *RGV* is, again, unknown. However, the year 443 CE functions as a *terminus ante quem*. This is the year in which the first translation of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* by Guṇabhadra is said to have been completed.¹⁰ The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* in its Chinese version translated by Guṇabhadra presupposes doctrinally the existence of the *RGV*.¹¹ It thus becomes obvious that the translation of *TGS*₁ by Buddhahadra in 420 and the first evidence for the existence of *TGS*₂ in 443 are practically contemporaneous. This fact rather seems to suggest that the two recensions of the *TGS* circulated among Indian speaking Buddhist communities from a more or less early date on.

⁸ The relevant catalogue entries regarding these 3rd and 4th century translations are cited and discussed in the work of Kyōshun Tōdō (see n. 3), pp. 1f. It remains an open question how reliable the information of the catalogues are.

⁹ This is clear as the reproduction of the *TGS* in the *RGV* (I.96-126) shows contents which are not attested in *Ch*₁ but appear in *TGS*₂.

¹⁰ *T* 670; for the year of translation cp. Mochizuki (op. cit.) s.v. *Nyūryōgakyō*.

¹¹ The *RGV* itself consists of several textual layers. However, as L. Schmithausen has shown, the reproduction of the *TGS* is already part of the oldest stratum of the *RGV* (“Philologische Bemerkungen zum Ratnagotravibhāga”, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* XV, 1971: 123-177, mainly p. 129).

The two recensions differ minimally in the overall doctrinal message. They contrast more in the choice of specific Buddhist technical terms and, as mentioned above, in the degree of explicitness.¹² Yet the relative brevity of the sūtra does not allow an easy determination of an underlying tendency in each of the recensions or even the socio-religious background of their respective proponents.¹³

The content of the TGS

Let me now shortly turn to the content of the TGS and sketch its line of composition:

- A. Description of the setting in Rājagṛha. The Tathāgata with his supernatural power creates lotuses in the air with buddhas seated in their calyxes. Then he lets the flowers wither. The buddhas seated within remain unaffected. Vajramati, the representative of the participating bodhisattvas, inquires about the reason for this supernatural manifestation. (Q 259b5-262a3)
- B. Then the Tathāgata starts to expound the TGS. Beginning with the scenery of the lotuses he expounds eight further similes in order to illustrate how all living beings contain a buddha within themselves. (Q 262a3-269a7)
- C. He continues to speak about the enormous amount of merit resulting from the propagation of the TGS and its joyful approval (*anumodanā*). (Q 269a7-270b4)

¹² As for the technical terms, *Ch₁* does not show a rendering for *dharmatā* in the sense of True Nature of living beings. But in this sense it is frequently attested in *TGS₁*. Also the term *bodhisattva* appears in the similes twice as often in *TGS₂* as in *Ch₁*. In these passages *Ch₁* does not mention anything corresponding to *bodhisattvas* or speaks of “living beings” (衆生) instead.

¹³ For the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, which is a much longer text, such an analysis has been done by M. Shimoda. He concludes that its two main parts as well as the three extant translations can be connected to different socio-religious groups. (Masahiro Shimoda 下田正弘, *Nehangyō no kenkyū – daijō kyōten no kenkyū hōhō shiron* (A Study of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra with a Focus on the Methodology of the Study of Mahāyānasūtras) 涅槃經の研究 — 大乘經典の研究 方法試論, Tokyo 1997 (Shunjū-sha)).

D. He then tells the story of *Sadāpramuktaraśmi and *Anantaraśmi. Still in the womb of his mother the bodhisattva Sadāpramuktaraśmi emitted light with a highly beneficial effect on all living beings. He continued to emit this light throughout his life and even after, with his relics still shining. Having become a tathāgata, at the request of the bodhisattva Anantaraśmi, he expounded the *TGS* for ages. Just by listening to him, all but four bodhisattvas attained awakening. Three of them are identified with the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteśvara. Anantaraśmi himself is said to be now the bodhisattva Vajramati. (Q 270b4-273a3)

E. Ānanda questions the Tathāgata from how many buddhas one has to hear the Dharma in order to attain perfection. In his answer the Tathāgata does not restrict their number, but stresses the importance of generating the aspiration for awakening immediately. (Q 273a3-273b4)

Section E can be said to be an interpolation and is not found in *TGS_J*.

F. The Tathāgata describes the praise and virtue obtained by holding the *TGS* in the hands. (Q 273b4-273b7)

G. Description of the praise and joy of the audience. (Q 273b7-273b8)

It is a typical feature of many Mahāyāna sūtras that the main actor delivering the sermon, be it the Tathāgata himself or one of his main disciples, refers to the same sūtra during his sermon. For the main actor and narrator, in our case the Tathāgata, the *TGS* can only be section B, i.e., the nine similes, which the Buddha introduces in the following way:

① *rigs kyi bu dag de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po zhes bya ba'i mdo shin tu rgyas pa yod de / de rab tu bstan pa'i phyir / de bzhin gshegs pas snang ba'i mtshan ma 'di lta bu 'di byas so // de'i phyir legs par rab tu nyon la yid la zung shig dang bshad do // (Q 262a3f.)¹⁴*

¹⁴ For citations of the *TGS* I shall refer to the “standard” Tibetan translation as contained in the main Kanjurs (*Tib*). Only if the transmission of *Tib* is obviously not based on the Indian or in case that *Bth* or the Chinese translations show relevant divergences, (also) these readings shall be given. The citations themselves are taken from the already prepared critical edition which is part of my doctoral dissertation (see

Sons of good family (*kulaputra*), there is a sūtra of great extent (*vaipulya*) called *Tathāgatagarbha*. In order to teach it the Tathāgata has produced these signs (*nimitta*) [which have] appeared [to you]. Listen therefore closely, be attentive, and [I] shall teach [you].

It is only this section B which contains the message centering around the term *tathāgatagarbha* and it can only be this section which, under the name *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, has already been taught by the tathāgata Sadāpramuktaraśmi (section D). The similes are the actual sūtra within the sūtra. They alone embody the new and central message of the text, embedded in the more or less standard framework consisting of the setting, a passage expounding the merit of propagating the sūtra and a story of the past.

The doctrine of the *TGS*

What now is the doctrine exposed in section B? After the initial fragment with withered lotuses in the sky with buddhas sitting in their centers, unaffected by the putrid petals around, the Tathāgata, as the narrator of sections B to F, proclaims that the same is true for all living beings: though they are wrapped in different kinds of *kleśas*,¹⁵ all living beings carry a tathāgata within themselves. This could be the birth hour of the term *tathāgatagarbha* which, after all, in the *TGS* appears only in this first of the nine similes. S. Matsumoto is definitely right, when he suggests a close connection between the terms *padmagarbha*, the “lotus calyx”, in which the buddhas are found, and *tathāgatagarbha*, which according to my understanding should be analyzed as *bahuvrīhi* relating to living beings as “containing a tathāgata” or even “having a tathāgata [as their essence]”.¹⁶ Right

n. 4). I have indicated after the quotation where the correspondent passage in *Q* can be found.

¹⁵ Whereas *TGS*₂ describes living beings themselves as wrapped in *kleśas*, *Ch*₁ speaks of the wrapped tathāgatas within living beings.

¹⁶ The interpretation as *bahuvrīhi* has been questioned recently by S. Matsumoto’s analysis of the compound as *tatpuruṣa* in the sense of [*Living beings are*] containers of a tathāgata. However, even if this analysis does not seem completely impossible, I still prefer to stick to the more natural *bahuvrīhi* alternative. No early uses of *-garbha* at the

in the middle of this introductory simile appears also what one could call the sūtra's condensed doctrinal essence:

② *rīgs kyi bu dag 'di ni chos rnam kyi chos nyid de / de bzhin gshegs pa rnam byung yang rung ma byung yang rung / sems can 'di dag ni rtag tu de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po yin na*¹⁷

Sons of good family, the True Nature (*dharmatā*) of the *dharmas* is this: whether or not tathāgatas appear in the world, all these sentient beings continuously contain a tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*).

Once this fundamental definition is established, the Tathāgata goes on to illustrate it by making use of eight further similes. The relation between the tathāgata, found within living beings, and the enveloping *kleśas* functions as the *tertium comparationis*, when comparing it to (2) honey protected by bees, (3) kernels enclosed by their husks, (4) a gold nugget in excrement, (5) a hidden treasure beneath the house, (6) a sprout in the seed becoming a huge tree, (7) a tathāgata image wrapped in rotten rags, (8) a *cakravartin* in the womb of a despised, orphan woman and (9) a golden figure within a burned clay mold.

Each of the similes accentuates different aspects associated with the *tertium comparationis*. A very important element seems the fact that living beings are unaware of their inherent tathāgata. It is only through their encounter with the Buddha that they can find out this truth. Just to mention the main points, similes (4) and (6) stress the indestructibility of the buddha-nature in living beings, (7) highlights the complete unexpectedness of a precious image in rotten rags

end of a compound indicating his understanding in Buddhist literature have been pointed out by Matsumoto. On the other hand, we can find plenty of examples with *-garbha* at the end of bodhisattva names (*Ratnagarbha*, *Vajragarbha*, *Śrīgarbha* etc.) which are most likely to be analyzed as *bahuvrīhi* referring to *bodhisattva*. Of course the two alternatives still suggest the same relation between the living being and the embraced tathāgata and consequently only differ from a grammatical point of view. (Shirō Matsumoto 松本史朗, *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū* (*A Critical Study of Zen Thought) 禅思想の批判的研究, Tokyo 1994 (Daizō Shuppan); pp. 485ff., 498ff.).

I admit that for my second rendering of the compound designating the tathāgata as essential I cannot submit any philological proofs. However, the context of the introductory simile itself and the statement that the *kleśas* of living beings are only accidental (*āgantuka*) imply such an understanding (cp. Q 265a5f.).

¹⁷ Q 263a1f.; for the citation in the *RGVV* cp. ⑧.

whereas (8) concentrates on showing that the woman's defeatism is without any reason and admonishes to strive energetically after awakening.

The similes reveal the basic pattern how the relation between sentient beings and buddhahood has to be imagined: an already fully developed, perfect tathāgata is found inside them. He constitutes the nature of living beings. This does not allow any doubt that the Tathāgata and living beings have the same nature:

③ *nyon mongs pa thams cad kyis nyon mongs pa can du gyur pa de dag gi nang na / de bzhin gshegs pa'i chos nyid mi g.yo zhing / srid pa'i 'gro ba thams cad kyis ma gos pa dag mthong nas / de bzhin gshegs pa de dag ni nga dang 'dra'o zhes smra'o // (Q 262b3ff.)*

[The Tathāgata], having perceived inside those [sentient beings] defiled by all defilements (*kleśa*) the True Nature of a tathāgata (*tathāgatadharmatā*) motionless and unaffected by any of the states of existence, says: 'Those tathāgatas [within sentient beings] are just like me!'

That there is absolutely no room to conceive the nature of living beings as something not yet complete is further shown by the terminology chosen for its designation.¹⁸ Among them are, depending on the recension, terms as *tathāgatajñāna*, *tathāgatajñānadarśana*, *tathāgatadhātu*¹⁹, *dharmatā*²⁰, *buddhātva*, *buddhabhūmi* and *svayambhūtvā*. They all are related to the state of being a buddha, the ultimate form of realization in Mahāyāna Buddhism. We must therefore conclude that according to the TGS buddhahood is inherent in all living beings. However, though buddhahood is the nature of living beings, yet they cannot be designated as buddhas as long as their nature is hidden in the *kleśas*. Only by the process of purification shall their buddhahood become manifest and efficacious. That is to say, the conception of becoming a buddha is that of a **manifestation process** of something living beings have always been equipped

¹⁸ Though the similes of the sprout in the seed becoming a huge tree (6) and of the *cakravartin* embryo in the womb of a despised, orphan woman (8) could easily imply the connotation of a transformational process of growing, yet the terminology employed in the sūtra clearly shows that this is not at all the intention of the author(s)'.

¹⁹ Tib (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i rigs*; Q 267b8-268a1): *tathāgatagoṭra*; the passage has no direct parallel in *Ch*₁. *Ch*₂: 如來界 (463c15). *Bth*: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i kham*s (252a8).

²⁰ Cp. n. 12.

with. It cannot be interpreted as the acquisition of something they do not have from outside, an essential transformation or even ripening process of a yet embryonic nucleus as implied by the later interpretation of the term *tathāgatagarbha* as “buddha embryo”.²¹ Characteristic for this process of manifestation are the words of the Tathāgata in the simile of the orphan woman:

④ *rigs kyi bu dag khyed bdag nyid sro shi bar ma byed par khyed brtson 'grus brtan par gyis shig dang / khyed la de bzhin gshegs pa zhugs pa yod pa dus shig na 'byung bar 'gyur te / (Q 268a2)*

Sons of good family, apply energy without giving in to despondency! It shall happen that one day the existence of the tathāgata [who has] entered within you shall become manifest.

Concerning the purification of buddha-nature the *TGS* gives most weight to the *kleśa* destroying activity of the Tathāgata. By an often repeated set phrase throughout the nine similes we understand that the Tathāgata perceives the true nature of living beings and thereupon destroys their *kleśas*. This activity, though not always without ambiguity, should probably be identified with the Tathāgata's engagement in revealing the Dharma.²² As a representative example of this kind we find:

⑤ *de bzhin du / rigs kyi bu dag de bzhin gshegs pas kyang sangs rgyas kyi mig gis sems can thams cad de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying por mthong nas / sems can de dag gi 'dod chags dang / zhe sdang dang / gti mug dang / sred pa dang / ma rig pa'i nyon mongs pa'i sbubs dbye ba'i phyr chos ston te / (Q 262b8-263a1)*

In the same way, sons of good family, with the vision of the Buddha, also the Tathāgata perceives all sentient beings as containing a tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*), and [therefore] teaches the Dharma [to them] in order to peel off the covering of those sentient beings [encased in such] defilements (*kleśa*) [as] passion, hatred, wrong orientation, longing and ignorance.

²¹ Cp. *RGVV* 72.8f.: *trividhabuddhakāyotpattigotrāsadbhāvārtham adhiḥṛtya tathāgatadhātur eṣāṃ garbhaḥ sarvasattvānām iti paridīpitam /*.

²² This is explicitly stated in *Q* 268b7f., where the Tathāgata is said to eliminate all outer defilements in order to entirely purify the precious tathāgata-knowledge of the bodhisattvas by using the “*vajra*[-like] hammer of the Dharma” (*chos kyi rdo rje'i tho ba*).

It goes without saying that this conception of purification of living beings' buddha-nature by an almighty Tathāgata does not grant much importance to the individual striving of living beings. As a matter of fact, throughout the section of the similes, passages pointing to the active participation of living beings are rare. Such statements seem somehow sporadic and much more a lip service rather than an organic part of the basic idea expressed by the nine similes. As one of these passages we find:

- ⑥ 由聞法故則正修行即得清淨如來實體* [*禮 emended to 體 according to the Jin Edition (金藏廣勝寺本) to be found in the *Zhonghua dazangjing* 中華大藏經 and according to the Korean Edition of the Chinese Canon (高麗藏)] (*Ch*₂: 461c18-19)²³

Because [sentient beings] listen to the Dharma [they] accordingly practice in the right way and then gain the pure real essence of a tathāgata.

The view of the composer(s) of the *TGS* on the role of living beings in their own liberation is expressed in the following section C, where we find a long description of the merit accumulated through the propagation of the *TGS* and its joyful approval (*anumodanā*).

The rare mentioning of living beings' role in the liberation process in the similes is paralleled by another aspect: throughout section B we find a great number of statements stressing the fact that living beings who have manifested their true nature, in other words, who are tathāgatas, will perform the tasks of a tathāgata. With that the *TGS* once again proves the enormously important role attributed to the Tathāgata and future tathāgatas considering the benefit of all sentient beings.

Possible motivations for the composition of the *TGS*

The employment of similes aims in general at the elucidation of an unfamiliar point in terms of commonly known, more familiar situations. That the main

²³ I am here citing *Ch*₂ as *Tib* does not show an intelligible wording. In *Ch*₁ the passage is abbreviated to the statement that the Tathāgata manifests the buddhahood (of living beings): 顯現佛性 (*Ch*₁ 457c7).

section B of the *TGS* consists exclusively in similes indicates that the author(s) considered their message of the hidden buddha-nature in all living beings as something requiring concrete illustration. It is obvious that the triviality of the chosen similes is directed towards an ordinary audience, an audience probably not quite versed and interested in scholastic matters. We may not have any problems to think about the nature of living beings, as we are used to express our beliefs in abstract terms. The situation about 1700 years ago might have been different and we should probably not take for granted the fact that abstract ideas like the innateness of buddhahood or *dharmatā* were easily understandable for the Buddhist believers of that time. As mentioned at the beginning, the *TGS* is most likely the earliest text in the corpus of the *tathāgatagarbha* thought. Without doubt, this rendered the author(s) task still more difficult.

However, as a matter of fact, we do not know what the Buddhist community of that time really looked like. It was perhaps a less “pure” Buddhist environment than we would expect today. Our (mis-)conception of Buddhism tends to overlook the fact that the average Buddhist follower probably knew very little of the doctrinal issues of his religion. We forget that the Indian believer lived in a cultural environment which can only be called multireligious, making it sometimes difficult to draw sharp borderlines between single beliefs and cults. Speaking from a doctrinal point of view, the *TGS* certainly shall not be easily subsumable under what we consider mainstream Mahāyāna tenets. It seems that the composer(s) of the *TGS* were less guided by questions concerning what might be doctrinally Buddhist or not, than rather by their concern for the well-being of other sentient beings. Most probably the main motive to compose the sūtra was the earnest wish to let people know that there is nobody excluded from buddhahood, to strengthen their soteriological self-confidence, and to encourage them to a Buddhist practice leading finally to the manifestation of what was believed to be their true nature.²⁴

²⁴ The *RGV* seems to confirm such an analysis at least partly by stating that one of the motifs for the exposition (*deśanāprayajana*) of the buddha-nature doctrine is the

That the *TGS* is operating with the powerful image of buddhahood invariably innate in living beings is therefore not surprising. To simply set free something that is already there, sounds definitely the easier task than the vague future perspective of attaining buddhahood through a gradual transformation along a difficult path of spiritual and ascetic practices. Not making use of such a precious essence might evoke the feeling of wasting one's most fundamental potential. On the contrary, a less definite formulation of buddhahood as something still to be attained might easily lead believers to ignore that that possibility applies also for them and thus remain without consequences for their soteriological striving.

The *TUSN* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* – two predecessors of the *TGS*

As mentioned above, the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine as revealed in the *TGS* can hardly be considered to belong to the mainstream of Mahāyāna thought. Already the first and only *sāstra* dealing systematically with this teaching offers also a different interpretation of the compound *tathāgatagarbha*, which relegates buddhahood as the nature of living beings to a mere germ for future awakening.²⁵ J. Takasaki refers to a passage of the *Tathāgatotpattisambhavanirdeśa* (如來性起品) of the *Avatamsakasūtra*, which is also quoted by the *RGVV*, as a direct predecessor of the *TGS*.²⁶ There, also in form of a simile, the idea that all living beings carry the *tathāgatajñāna* within themselves is expressed. It is beyond any doubt that the passage of the *TUSN* had a crucial impact on the doctrine and the composition of the similes of the *TGS*.²⁷ However, Takasaki

abandoning of a depressed mind (*līnaṃ cittam*) and of self-contempt (*RGV* I.156f.; I.161). As I shall suggest below, to explain **why** all living beings can attain buddhahood might have been felt as a theoretical need.

²⁵ Cp. n. 21.

²⁶ Cp. Takasaki (op. cit.), pp. 46ff.; also Matsumoto (op. cit.), pp. 478ff. The passage is quoted in *RGVV* 22.10-24.8

²⁷ This holds true for the basic structure of the simile as well as for the emphasize of the usefulness of the *tathāgatajñāna* for the world after its manifestation. The term *tathāgatajñāna* appears also frequently in the *TGS*. Even the same verb *bhinatti* ("to split, to break"; *RGVV* 23.12), in the *TUSN* used to describe the splitting of the atomic

classified also the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (*SP*) as one of the two main doctrinal sources for the formation of the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching.²⁸ In the following I shall attempt to show that the influence the *SP* had on the composer(s) of the *TGS* might have been even stronger than believed until now. We can thus understand against this background that the doctrine of the *TGS* was developed as a metaphysical foundation for the *ekayāna* concept, which is characteristic for the *SP*.²⁹

Structural and formal parallels between the *TGS* and the *SP*

I shall start with some observations concerning the general structure and line of composition of the sūtras.

It is common to *TGS* and *SP* that they both repeat in verses what appeared immediately before in prose. The *TGS* follows rigidly this scheme throughout the whole text while in the *SP* this pattern is less used especially in the chapters towards the end.

Both settings are located on the Gṛdhrakūṭa mountain near Rājagṛha. After the enumeration of the names of the attending bodhisattvas, by means of his supernatural power, the Tathāgata, withdrawn for meditation, produces myriads of huge lotuses in the sky (*TGS*). In the *SP* such a supernatural manifestation is

particle containing the whole universe in painted form, occurs in the *TGS* ('*byed*; in *Q* (262b7) it appears erroneously as '*phyed*) in the first simile as part of the description of the liberation of the petal-wrapped buddhas inside the disgusting lotuses.

²⁸ Cp. Takasaki (op. cit.), pp. 412-445; for the *SP* as a predecessor of the *TGS* see p. 441. Matsumoto (op. cit.) describes the relation of the sūtras in terms of the common imagery of the lotuses rising into the sky (pp. 447ff.; 526f.). I shall deal with this point later. For a stimulating treatment of the relation between the *SP* and the *TGS* cp. Sadahiko Kariya 荻谷定彦, "*Hokkekyō to nyoraizōkyō – issaishujō kaishitsu bosatsu to shitsuubusshō*" (*"The Lotus Sūtra and the Tathāgatagarbhasūtra – 'All Living Beings are Bodhisattvas' and 'All Living Beings have Buddha-nature'") "法華經と如來藏經 — 一切衆生皆悉ほさつと悉有佛性 — ", in *Mori Mikisaburō Hakase Shōju Kinen Jigyōkai, Tōyōgaku ronshū* 森三樹三郎博士 頌壽記念事業會, 東洋學論集, 1979: pp. 1127-1140.

²⁹ It shall not be possible to take into consideration theories about the textual history of the *SP*. Though the *SP* definitely consists in different textual strata, there are no indications suggesting that the *TGS* might be influenced just by a certain part of the *SP*.

formed by a ray of light issuing from between the eyebrows of the Buddha illuminating many buddha-fields. Also the tathāgatas seated within the lotuses of the *TGS* emit rays of light that shine on the buddha-fields. Finally, the bodhisattvas Maitreya (*SP*) and Vajramati (*TGS*) respectively ask for explanation. In both texts the supernatural manifestations are said to be signs announcing an exposition of the Dharma.

The following disclosure by the Tathāgata can be labeled the central doctrinal part in both sūtras.³⁰ In the *TGS* it comprises the analogy between the tathāgatas in the lotus calyxes and living beings' buddha-nature culminating in the statement cited in ②. As the central passage in the *SP* is too long to be quoted completely I have to limit my quotation to the most relevant parts:

⑦ *ekakṛtyena śāriputraikakaraṇīyena tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddho loka utpadyate ... yad idaṃ tathāgatajñānadarśanasamādāpanahetu-nimittam sattvānāṃ tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddho loka utpadyate / ... ekam evāhaṃ śāriputra yānam ārabhya sattvānāṃ dharmam deśayāmi yad idaṃ buddhayānam / na kiṃcic chāriputra dviṭiyam vā tṛṭiyam vā yānam samvidyate / sarvatraiṣā śāriputra → dharmatā daśadigloke← / ...*³¹

With a single duty, Śāriputra, with a single task the Tathāgata, *Arhat* and Perfectly Awakened One appears in the world ... Namely, in order to inspire living beings to the mental vision of a tathāgata (*tathāgatajñānadarśana*), the Tathāgata, *Arhat* and Perfectly Awakened One appears in the world ... With reference to only a single vehicle, Śāriputra, I teach the Dharma for living beings, namely, the vehicle of the buddhas. Śāriputra, there is not any second or third vehicle. This, Śāriputra, is the True Law everywhere in the worlds of the ten regions.

Let us recollect the corresponding central doctrine ② of the *TGS* as it is cited in *RGVV* 73.11-12:

³⁰ *TGS*: Q 262b5-263a2; K 39.7-41.9.

³¹ (All citations of the *SP* are taken from *K*. Variants of *D*₁, *D*₂ and *O* are only given if they substantially affect the understanding of the passage or throw light on the comparison with the *TGS*.)

K 39.13-40.15; the text between the arrows in *O*: → *dharmāṇāṃ dharmatā daśasu dikṣu loka sarvabuddhakṣetreṣu*←; here the Tibetan translation in the Peking Kanjur (Ōtani reprint) follows *K* (vol. 30, Chu 19b6).

⑧ *eṣā kulaputra dharmāṇām dharmatā / utpādād vā tathāgatānām
anutpādād vā sadaivaite sattvās tathāgatagarbhā iti /*

As a matter of fact ⑧ represents a traditional Buddhist formula found in many other texts, originally associated with the law of *pratītyasamutpāda*.³² The authors of the *SP* must have had this formula in mind, too, when they first speak about the Tathāgata's appearance (*utpadyate*) and then declare the Dharma of a single *buddhayāna* to be the True Law (*dharmatā*). The surprising fact now is not that both sūtras operate with this common formula but rather their similarity in structure: at the beginning of the Tathāgata's sermon we find a kind of a summary of the main tenets, interwoven with the known formula. The following similes in both texts just serve to illustrate these main tenets.³³

Besides the sections on the merit resulting from the propagation of the sūtra and the joyful approval (*anumodanā*), which are found in the *TGS* as well as in the *SP*, the *TGS* tells us also a story of the past (section D). In the story no reason is given why four bodhisattvas did not awake and one is immediately reminded of the narration in the first chapter of the *SP* in which one of eight sons is equally said not to have attained awakening. The *SP*, however, tells us why. He did not attain awakening because of his desire for fame and his slothfulness.³⁴ The *TGS* identifies three of the figures who have not reached awakening with Mañjuśrī, Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteśvara, who all maintain an eminent position in the *SP*. It then states that the fourth is now Vajramati, the main representative of the bodhisattvas, acting as the questioner of the Tathāgata. The same circumstance, i.e., the identification of Maitreya, to whom the sermon of Mañjuśrī in this first chapter of the *SP* is directed, with the slothful son, is, again,

³² For the appearance of this formula in other Mahāyāna texts, cp. David Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, Paris 1969 (École Française d'Extrême-Orient): pp. 330f.

³³ It is true that in the *TGS* this summary is found in the middle of the first simile of the lotuses. However, the first simile functions also as the introductory scenery and basic pattern for the *tertium comparationis* of all following similes. It can therefore duly be considered the "guideline" for the whole sūtra.

³⁴ The story is expounded in *K* 18.2-22.13 (in particular 22.4-13) and I.90-95.

found also in the *SP*. Besides, it is striking that the name *Mati* of the bodhisattva not yet awakened in the *SP* is also part of the name *Vajramati* in the *TGS*. This could at least partly be the reason why the non-prestigious name *Vajramati* was chosen for the main character in the bodhisattva congregation in the *TGS*.

However, the same story in the *TGS* has further particularities which show certain affinities with the *Sadāparibhūtaparivarta*, chapter XIX of the *SP*. Again, it is not the story as such but rather several formal elements that are worth our attention. The bodhisattva *Sadāparibhūta* as the main character of the story gained his name due to his habit of declaring to all monks and nuns as well as lay devotees that they were not despised (*aparibhūta*) because they were all following the course of conduct of a bodhisattva (*bodhisattvacaryā*) and should eventually become a buddha.³⁵ Apparently, this provoked unpleasant feelings in the audience which sometimes escalated even into bodily attacks. *Sadāparibhūta* endured this patiently. Towards the end of his life he hears the Lotus Sūtra from a tathāgata. Whereupon he venerates myriads of tathāgatas and expounds the sūtra for aeons. *Sadāparibhūta* is finally identified with the Buddha Śākyamuni himself.

First of all, it is the name of one of the two heroes in the story of the *TGS* which might have been influenced by the *SP*. He is named **Sadāpramuktaraśmi*³⁶. As in the case of *Vajramati* and *Mati*, *sadā-* as part of the name compound is also found in *Sadāparibhūta*.³⁷

³⁵ *Nāham āyusmanto yuṣmākaṃ paribhavāmi / aparibhūtā yūyam / tat kasya hetoḥ / sarve hi bhavanto bodhisattvacaryāṃ carantu* / bhaviṣyatha yūyam tathāgatā ... (K 378.1-3). *O: caratha; O so also in the parallel 378.7 against K, D₁, D₂: caradhvam. In the corresponding verse XIX.3d D₁, D₂, K and O all coincide in the form caratha. All these forms, typical for Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, most probably represent the imperative mood (cp. F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, Vol. I: Grammar, §26.12f.).*

³⁶ *Tib, Bth: rtag tu 'od zer gtong; Ch₁, Ch₂: 常放光明.*

³⁷ Another, though less probable reconstruction of the name, based on the Tibetan and Chinese, could be *Sadāraśmimukta* (instead of *Sadāpramuktaraśmi*). *Bahuvrihi* compounds with perfect passive participles at the end are frequently attested in Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit (cp. J. S. Speyer, “Über den Bodhisattva als Elefant mit sechs

Also the otherwise rare introductory formula of both stories agrees nearly perfectly:

⑨ *anenāpi tāvan*³⁸ *mahāsthāmaprāpta paryāyeṇaivam veditavyam yathā ya imam evamrūpaṃ dharmaparyāyam ...* (K 375.1-2)

The parallel of the story in the *TGS*:

rdo rje 'i blo gros rnam grangs 'dis kyang 'di ltar chos kyi rnam grangs 'di ji ltar ... rig par bya 'o // (Q 270b4-5)

Vajramati, also through this [following] kind [of exposition] (*paryāya*) thus (*evam*) it is to be known that (*yathā*) this Dharma discourse ...

The end of the prose section of the chapter in the *SP* agrees less literally but carries the same thoughts as the final part of the corresponding section in the *TGS*. The benefit of preserving, preaching, etc. the sūtra is first expounded, followed by an exhortation directed to the bodhisattvas:

⑩ *evam iyaṃ mahāsthāmaprāpta mahārthasya dharmaparyāyasya dhāraṇā vācanā deśanā bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ anuttarāyāḥ samyak-sambodher āhārakā saṃvartate*³⁹ *tasmāt tarhi mahāsthāmaprāptāyaṃ dharmaparyāyo bodhisattvair mahāsattvais ... dhārayitavyo vācayitavyo deśayitavyaḥ saṃprakāśayitavya iti //* (K 383.3-6)

The end of the prose in the *TGS*:

Hauzählen", in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Bd. 57, 1903, pp. 305-310: pp. 309f.). The prefix *pra-* of *pramukta* may not be part of the name as the reading *rab (tu) gtong* for **pramukta* in *Bth* in other passages of the *TGS* is testified. If we assume the name *Sadāraśmimukta* as original, its similarity to the name in the *SP* is even more striking because both names show a nearly identical sequence of vowels.

A similar slightly modified adoption of a name from the *SP* may be *candanagarbha* from *candanagandha*, as pointed out by Matsumoto (op. cit., p. 413 n.5). The term *-candanagandha* appears in the *SP* (239.5) as an attribute of the rising stūpa at the beginning of chapter XI (cp. n. 44). Matsumoto discusses as one alternative that the name of the *kūṭāgāra Candanagarbha* (Tib: *tsan dan gyi snying po*; *Ch*₁: 梅檀 (*candana*); *Ch*₂: 梅檀藏), which serves as the location where the Buddha teaches the *TGS*, might have been inspired by that description in the *SP*.

³⁸ *Tāvāt* is missing in *D*₁, *D*₂, *O* and the Tibetan (Peking (Ötani) vol. 30, *Chu* 159a8): *mthu chen thob rnam grangs 'dis kyang 'di ltar rig par bya ste ...*

³⁹ The syntax of *D*₁ and *D*₂ differs as the subject is *puṇyaskandha* (also in the Tibetan) to which the compound *dhāraṇādeśanāsahagata* is attributed. The term *mahārtha(ka)* appears in the nominative referring to *puṇyaskandha*. Instead of *āhārakā*: *D*₁, *D*₂: *āharaṇatāyai*; *O*: *āharaṇatāyai*.

*rdo rje'i blo gros de ltar de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i chos kyi rnam
grangs 'di thos pa tsam gyis byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po
rnams la / sangs rgyas kyi ye shes sgrub pas don che ba yin no // (Q
272b4-5)*

Vajramati, thus this Dharma discourse (*dharmaparyāya*) [called] *Tathāgata-garbha* is of great benefit (*mahārtha(ka)*) since just listening [to it leads to] the realization of buddha-knowledge (*buddhajñāna*) for the bodhisattvas *mahāsattvas*.

In the final *pādas* of the verse section the *TGS* adds:

*de bas byang chub sems dpa' mkhas rnams kyi //
rtag tu mdo mchog 'di ni gzung bar bya // (Q 273a3)*

Therefore wise bodhisattvas should always adopt (**udgrhṇāti*) this excellent sūtra!⁴⁰

As another formal element common to both stories, the question why *Sadāparibhūta/Sadāpramuktaraśmi* were called like this functions as the starting point for the actual core of the stories. These cores, i.e., the description of the somehow provoking activities of *Sadāparibhūta* and of the beneficial radiation of light of *Sadāpramuktaraśmi* are in a way isolated. The connection with the following narration of the sūtra-teaching activities of the two is loose. In both cases it is not at all evident, why these two core stories have been chosen. Also surprising and sudden is the identification of one of the main characters with persons being present at the time of narration (cp. above). It is obvious that the authors of the sūtras somehow felt the necessity to weave a more interlocked tie between the two main units: a core story, probably taken from a common pool of more or less mahāyānized narrations circulating among preachers and storytellers, and a second part serving as the authorization of the sūtra by locating it into the historic context created by the first unit.

It goes without saying that also in the *SP* the similes play an important role and have considerably contributed to the sūtra's popularity. Of the eleven similes in

⁴⁰ *Ch₁* exhorts also to teach the *TGS*: 是故諸菩薩 應持說此經 (460b11).

the *SP*,⁴¹ that of the man carrying a jewel in the hem of his garment without knowing it, appears to originate in a compositional environment close to the *TGS* similes.⁴² When later the man faces some serious difficulties in life, he has to wait for his former friend to be told about the jewel in his garment and to be able to exchange it for money in order to overcome the difficulties. The similarity to the similes of the *TGS* is obvious: this simile operates with the topos of the precious hidden in the soiled. The carrier of the jewel is completely unaware of it. The simile shows about the same length as the ones of the *TGS* and perfectly matches their worldly, simple and concrete character.⁴³ It could easily be applied

⁴¹ The number of similes found in the *SP* gives rise to questions. Whereas the only Indian commentary on the Lotus Sūtra (*T* 1519, 1520), ascribed to a Vasubandhu, mentions only seven similes, the impartial reader of the sūtra counts eleven. The two similes in the later half of chapter V, missing in Kumārajīva's translation, the simile of the man digging for water on waste-land in chapter X and, finally, the simile of the young man with hundreds of children older than himself (XIV), are not taken into consideration by the commentator. There is thus no reason to speculate that the number of similes in the *SP* had any influence on the total of nine similes in the *TGS*, a number otherwise not very common.

⁴² *SP* 210.5-212.2 and VIII.36-45.

⁴³ This easily understandable, concrete character of the similes is in opposition to, e.g., the simile of the *TUSN*, which can be called a forerunner of the *tathāgatagarbha* thought in the *TGS* (see above). The similes of the *TUSN* as a whole show quite a different compositional line. Their world consists of the nature with its elements, the sphere of divinities, spirits, supernatural manifestations, fantasy and the universe. This might be partly due to the fact that the *TUSN* is mainly dealing with the description of the wonderful characteristics of the Buddha. However, it is hardly imaginable that the author(s) of the *TGS* got their inspiration for their similes from the *TUSN*.

The close relation between the simile of the *SP* and the *TGS* becomes also evident in some formulations. So for instance when the friend calls upon the man unaware of the jewel in the hem of his garment to make use of it:

a. *gaccha tvaṃ bhoḥ puruṣaitan maṇiratnaṃ grahāya ... / tena ca dhanena sarvāṇi dhanakaraṇīyāni kuruṣveti // (K 211.6f.)*

The parallel in the *TGS* is the direct speech of a divinity urging a man to take out a nugget of gold which had fallen into a heap of excrement and remained hidden there for many hundreds of years:

kye mi khyod song la 'di ni / rin po che 'i mchog gser ... de byi dor gyis la gser gyis gser gyi bya ba gyis shig ces ... (Q 264b8)

In its second simile, the *TGS* also speaks about the honey after the bees have been expelled:

... bung ba de dag thabs mkhas pas bskrad nas / sbrang rtsi des sbrang rtsi 'i bya ba byed do // (Q 263b3)

as an illustration of the buddha-nature of living beings. In the *SP*, however, it aims at elucidating the fact that *arhats* are not aware of their earnest wish (*praṇidhāna*) for *sarvajñatā* made a long time ago and erroneously contend to the miserable life with only limited knowledge (*parīttena jñānena*).

Finally, when speaking about non-doctrinal resemblance, we should not forget that the imagery of the lotus bears a central role in both sūtras. It is part of the title of the *SP*. In the *TGS* it forms the central imagery of the introductory scene which is also the first simile. The formation of the term *tathāgatagarbha* and thus also the title of the *TGS* is probably due to this introductory description. The imagery of the lotus with the buddhas sitting in their centers can therefore be considered the departure point for all further similes of the *TGS*. It functions as joint between the wondrous, fantastic world so typical for Mahāyāna sūtras and the more realistic terms of the following similes.⁴⁴

When the friend realizes that the man has not made use of the jewel though he is badly suffering, he remarks:

b. *na ca nāma tvaṃ bhoḥ puruṣa pratyavekṣase / kiṃ mama baddhaṃ kena vā
baddhaṃ ko hetuḥ kiṃnidānaṃ vā baddham / etad bālajātīyas tvaṃ bhoḥ puruṣa
yas ... (K 211.4f.)*

In the simile of the depressed woman who carries a *cakravartin* embryo (*sattva*; *sems can*) in her womb without knowing it, it is also described that she does not try to understand what she carries inside her body:

*bud med de mngal na 'dug pa 'i sems can de la bdag gi mngal du zhugs pa 'i sems
can 'di ci 'dra ba zhig snyam du yang yid la mi byed / bdag gi mngal du zhugs
sam / ma zhugs snyam du yang de de na yid la mi byed kyi / (Q 267b5f.)*

⁴⁴ As I already mentioned in n. 28, Matsumoto (op. cit.) considers the lotuses rising into the sky as the common link between the two sūtras (pp. 447ff.; 526f.). According to him, the *TGS* followed the descriptions in the *Stūpasamdarśanaparivarta* of the *SP*. There, in two passages, large lotuses rise into the sky with bodhisattvas seated inside (pp. 446f.). He relates this scenery, which he claims to be evolved against the background of the Pure Land Sūtras (pp. 451; 526), to the main theme in the same chapter, i.e., the rising stūpa with the tathāgata Prabhūtaratna seated within (pp. 448f.). It is, in fact, interesting that the term *padmagarbha* does not appear in any of these passages. On the other hand, it is probably an oversimplification to assign the “discovery” (発見) of the *padmagarbha* “concept” (概念) to the *TGS* (p. 526) and to base an important part of his argumentation for the chronology of the sūtras involved in the formation of the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching on this observation. Leaving aside the frequent appearances of the compound *padmagarbha* in other early texts (e.g. *Rāmāyaṇa* 3.50.18d; *Mahābhārata* (crit. ed.) VI.61.44, XIII.17.103, XIII.17.131, XIII.135.51), his *padmagarbha*-based chronology would compel him to assume that the

I am aware of the problems involved when arguing that the *TGS* is related to the *SP* based on non-doctrinal observations. Mahāyāna sūtras draw from a common pool of patterns, imageries, stories, similes and other literal elements. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to determine the degree of stylistic, formal or structural similarities which allows us to suppose a relation going beyond the general scope of similarities characteristic of a certain textual class. Yet it seems that within this category of Mahāyāna sūtras the *TGS*, though much shorter and plain in its structure, shows the same compositional line with some parts of the *SP*. They both are sūtras within a sūtra and start with a doctrinal exposition in which a traditional Buddhist formula is interwoven. The doctrine is illustrated with similes. Both texts try to strengthen their authoritative status by embedding the “core sutra” in a historical context, that is its history of transmission and

Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra, which “most probably knew the concept of *padmagarbha*” (p. 445), must also be of later origin than the *TGS*.

Nevertheless, I surely agree with Matsumoto that the descriptions in the *Stūpasamdarśanaparivarta* of the *SP* might have been an important source of inspiration for the main imagery of the rising lotuses in the *TGS*.

For a similar attempt to trace the introductory scenery of the *TGS* back to the *SP*, Kariya (op. cit., cf. n. 28) refers to the *Nidānaparivarta* and chapter XX, the *Tathāgatarddhyabhisamskāraparivarta*. There it is described how from the rays of light issued from the tongues of the tathāgatas Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, myriads of bodhisattvas come forth, seated on a “lion throne [consisting in a] lotus calyx(?)” (*padmagarbhe simhāsane*). Even if the passage that contains the term *padmagarbha* does not appear in Dharmarakṣa’s and Kumārajīva’s translations and is most likely a later interpolation, it might well be the case that also this description had an inspirational effect on the author(s) of the *TGS*. The fact that it follows immediately the story of Sadāparibhūta which, as I have tried to point out, probably had an impact on the *TGS*, makes this assumption even more plausible. Furthermore, as a part of this possible “inspirational block” consisting of chapters XIX and XX we find another element which appears slightly modified in the *TGS*: at the end of chapter XX there is a number of verses (XX.5, 6, 9, 10, 11) in which the qualities and benefits of those who preserve (*dhārayati*) the sūtra are praised. In all these verses the preservers of the sūtra are referred to in a relative clause: *ye dhārayiṣyanti ’maṁ sūtram agram* (5c), *ye sūtra dhārenti idaṁ śubham sadā* (6d), *bhavye yo dhārayi sūtram etat* (9d), *yo dhārayet sūtr’imu bhūtadharmam* (10d), *yo dhārayet sūtram idaṁ viśiṣṭam* (11d). In section F which originally immediately followed the story of Sadāpramuktaraśmi, the *TGS* contains a triplet verse with the same content. In all the three verses those who hold the sūtra in their hands are referred to by making use of a stereotyped relative clause: *gang gi lag na mdo sde ’di yod pa* // (Q 273b5-6).

propagation. Both rely on the practice of the propagation of the sūtra and joyful approval (*anumodanā*) as the main means for attainment of merit. The similes of both sūtras testify the same concrete and vivid character and their target is rather the faithful believer than the scholastically versed specialist or mystic. Due to these structural and formal similarities it seems plausible to assume that the *SP* must have had a strong impact on the composition of the *TGS* and that, consciously or unconsciously, various topics and features of the *SP* were eclectically incorporated in a more or less modified form. First and foremost, the common points are the imagery of the lotus, the simile of the jewel in the hem and the story of Sadāparibhūta.

The *TGS* as a doctrinal successor of the *SP*

Doctrinally speaking, it is even more obvious that the *TGS* must be seen as having close relations with the *SP*.⁴⁵ In particular the enormously important role of the Tathāgata, repeatedly represented as a father in the similes of the *SP*,⁴⁶ and the concept of buddhahood as the only valid soteriological goal for all the children of the Tathāgata, i.e., all living beings, are clearly presupposed in the *TGS*. The *SP* authors appear to have set as their main task the creative formulation, establishing and eloquent defense of these doctrines in a religious environment that most probably did not always heartily welcome them. The composer(s) of the *TGS*, on the other hand, could build their idea of an inherent

⁴⁵ For the question how far the *SP* can be seen as a doctrinal predecessor of the *TGS* cp. Takasaki (op. cit.) pp. 412-445.

⁴⁶ Cp. Takasaki (op. cit.) pp. 430ff. A similar important role of the Tathāgata in the *TGS* is shown by the fact that only the Tathāgata himself can see the buddha-like character of living beings with his supernatural vision. It is therefore accurate to speak of the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching as a form of “downwards Buddhism that views living beings from the enlightened position of a Buddha” (Kyōkō Fujii 藤井教公, “*Nyoraizō kei no bukkō*” (“Buddhism of the Tathāgatagarbha Line”) “如来蔵系の仏教”, in *Bukkyō no tōzen – higashi ajia no bukkō shisō I* (**The Eastwards Transmission of Buddhism – Buddhist Philosophy of East Asia I*) 仏教の東漸 – 東アジアの仏教思想 I (シリーズ・東アジア仏教 2), eds. Jikidō Takasaki (高崎直道) and Kiyotaka Kimura (木村清孝), Tokyo 1997 (Shunjū-sha), pp. 153-202: p. 157).

buddhahood on this already prepared ground. No mentioning is made anymore of the insufficiency of other means of deliverance. Their categorization as mere *upāya* of the Tathāgata becomes naturally unnecessary. The target group might have been different from the one of the *SP*, rendering a contentious style superfluous. However, it seems more reasonable to me that by the time the *TGS* was composed, the idea of buddhahood as the general goal evoked less objections and one was ready to think about the implications of this idea. In other words, the *TGS* would be a typical case of a subsequent theory for a doctrine vehemently put forward. The impetus of the *TGS* is thus rather to explain **how** buddha-nature relates to all living beings than to maintain **that** all living beings can become a buddha. It answers their doubts whether the *ekayāna* theory includes them too and if it does, what is the main mechanism which accounts for it. It may not be meaningless that the story of the bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta appears in the *SP* and that the *TGS* seems to show common elements in particular with this chapter. Sadāparibhūta had to face unpleasant reactions when confronting monks, nuns and lay Buddhists with the statement that all of them should become buddhas. The fact that he could not justify his words with a convincing reason made his message difficult to believe. As the narrative proves, his approach was widely felt as a provocation and in some way he can be called a forerunner of his time. The *TGS* clearly goes beyond the frame of the *SP* and elucidates the reason why all living beings can realize buddhahood.⁴⁷ It provides an explanatory mechanism

⁴⁷ I cannot follow S. Kariya (op. cit., cf. n. 28) in the reasons for his evaluation of the *TGS* as a text reflecting the “step towards a polished and intellectual, philosophical thought” which he connects with a “process of increasing monastic features” (pp. 1136-1139). As for the “fundamental difference” (p. 1136) between *SP* and *TGS*, he claims it to be the complete lack of any discussion regarding the elimination of *kleśas* and consequently the missing reference to a personal practice of deliverance in the *TGS*. I cannot deal here in detail with the arguments why Kariya, on the contrary, tends to consider the *SP* a typical proponent of texts proposing such a practice. However, none of the similes of the *SP* puts weight on such a personal practice. They rather operate with the almighty figure of the protecting father (burning house), the rich nobleman and father (the prodigal son), the guide through a waste-land (VII), the man who put a jewel in his friend’s garment (VIII), the king and general of the army (XIII), the 25 years old father of hundreds of grown up men (XIV) and the physician and father who lets his

for the general allegation of the *SP* that *tathāgatajñāna* is the ultimate goal for all living beings.⁴⁸ Of course, strictly speaking, the buddha-nature theory is not a proof and it becomes nothing but another allegation of the Tathāgata. A supernatural vision is necessary in order to perceive it so that in the end, as in the *SP*, the follower had no other way but to have faith in the authoritative words of the Buddha. However, the representation of the matter by easily understandable, this-worldly similes definitely invited to take the analogy in the metaphysical realm for granted. In other words, to understand how buddha-nature relates to living beings overshadowed the axiomatic question if such buddha-nature can really be found in living beings.

children believe that he was dead (XV). All these figures are, as a matter of fact, then compared to the Tathāgata. For me it seems quite obvious that the *SP* as well as the *TGS* in the first place prescribe the practice of faith in the Tathāgata's teaching and the propagation of the sūtra as means leading to buddhahood, elements found abundantly in both texts.

As I have pointed out above, the *TGS* does not treat the participation of living beings in their own process of liberation at great length in the similes. The main goal there is rather to provide living beings with an encouraging reason why their striving makes sense at all. Of course this does not mean that living beings have to be passive and it is therefore not adequate to impute to the *TGS* the idea that the *kleśas* would "vanish naturally" (p. 1136).

Finally, that the *TGS* is not a text with a "polished and intellectual, philosophical thought" is clear from the fact that two of the similes could easily be interpreted in a divergent way (cp. n. 18). Such a lack of distinctness would hardly occur if the *TGS* were based on a well-grounded, doctrinally sophisticated background or scholastic system. The similes are nearly all taken from daily life and easy to understand. There are just a few technical terms. It is very unlikely that the similes are the product of an indifferent intellectual as Kariya seems to believe. I further think that he can equally not provide any evidence for his assertion that the step from the *SP* to the *TGS* reflects a shift from laymen to monastic Buddhism.

⁴⁸ It is symptomatic that among the similes of the *SP* in particular the one of the man unaware of the jewel in the hem of his garment shows close resemblance to the *TGS*. For it is this simile alone that not only postulates that all living beings should become buddhas but it also gives the reason why this is possible. The earnest wish from a long time ago (*prañidhānapūrvakam*, VIII.42), illustrated by the hidden jewel, is this reason. However, within the *SP* this thought cannot be called mainstream and, at least for the author(s) of the *TGS*, it was probably not believed to have enough persuasive power. Metaphorically speaking, the jewel hidden somewhere in the hem of the garment had to become a paramount tathāgata filling up the center of a lotus.

In this sense, the *TGS* establishes a kind of metaphysical axiom for the Mahāyānist ideal of buddhahood open to all living beings, in general, and the *ekayāna* theory of the *SP*, in particular.