

MRGĀRA'S MOTHER'S MANSION:
EMPTINESS AND THE ŚŪNYATĀ SŪTRAS^(*)

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suññatāvihārenāhaṃ ānanda etarahi bahulaṃ viharāmi /

Cūlasuññata-sutta

ayaṃ kho panānanda, vihāro tathāgatena abhisambuddho yadidaṃ

- sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā ajjhataṃ

suññataṃ upasampajja viharituṃ /

Mahāsuññata-sutta ⁽¹⁾

In the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra*, the Buddha tells Ānanda that he dwells regularly in the 'habitude of emptiness' (*śūnyatā-vihāra*), and that he has done so in the past and does so at present. In the *Greater Emptiness Sūtra*, the Blessed One describes, again to Ānanda, how he himself has understood the 'habitude of emptiness'. These statements place emptiness at the centre of the Buddha's thought and his mode of living, and indeed, many scholars, past and present, have considered emptiness to be the 'central philosophy of Buddhism', the very heart of the Buddha's teaching. Emptiness did not belong to the philosophical terminology of the Buddha's contemporaries, or, as far as can be gauged, to that of his predecessors. The concept of emptiness seems to have been one of the unique contributions that the Buddha made to Indian - and world - thought.

But what is *śūnyatā*? Does it have a single meaning, acceptable to all Buddhists, to all

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⁽¹⁾ Citations from the two Śūnyatā Sūtras are from SKILLING 1994, by *Mahāsūtra* number and section, in this case *Mahāsūtra* 3, §I.4, and *Mahāsūtra* 4, §III.2, respectively.

Buddhist schools of thought? Is *śūnyatā* a description of phenomena? Is it a mode of being? Is it an abstract noun, or is it an entity in itself? Is it a negation? Or is it an attainment? The very idea of emptiness confronts fundamental questions of being and appearance, of ontology and epistemology. It has inspired many of the greatest thinkers that Buddhism has produced. Emptiness has elicited the highest praise - as the peerless key to understanding the true nature of things - and the gravest condemnation, from both Buddhists and from 'outsiders' - as a nihilistic doctrine of nothingness.

Emptiness is a common or shared term in the vocabulary of Buddhism. For the Sarvāstivādins and Sāṃmitīyas - two of the main philosophical schools of north India - and for the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādins of Sri Lanka, emptiness was an important concept in their descriptions of the path of realization. Emptiness meant that all phenomena are empty of self or anything belonging to self. The term was used in specific contexts, and in the early phase did not function as an overarching category applied to all things.

The term 'empty' does not seem to have enjoyed any special prominence in the early Vaibhāṣika school, which developed within the Sarvāstivādin fold. Rather, it was the equal of terms like 'impermanent' or 'without self'. For example, among the sixteen aspects (*ākāra*) of the four truths, there are four for the truth of suffering: *anitya*, *duḥkha*, *śūnya*, and *anātmaka*. In the *Mārgavarga* of the *Udānavarga* (XII, 5-8), we find the following set of four verses:

*anityāṃ sarvasaṃskārāṃ, prajñayā paśyate yadā
atha nirvidyate duḥkhād eṣa mārgo viśuddhaye.*

*duḥkhāṃ sarvasaṃskārāṃ, prajñayā paśyate yadā
atha nirvidyate duḥkhād eṣa mārgo viśuddhaye.*

*śunyataḥ sarvasaṃskārāṃ, prajñayā paśyate yadā
atha nirvidyate duḥkhād eṣa mārgo viśuddhaye.*

*sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ, prajñayā paśyate yadā
atha nirvidyate duḥkhād eṣa mārgo viśuddhaye.*

The *Dhammapada* parallel (vv. 277-79) gives only the 'canonical' triad of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*. Emptiness is not included:

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti, yadā paññāya passati
atha nibbindati dukkhe, eṣa maggo viśuddhiyā.*

*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā ti, yadā paññāya passati
atha nibbindati dukkhe, eṣa maggo viśuddhiyā.*

*sabbe dhammā anattā ti, yadā paññāya passati
atha nibbindati dukkhe, eṣa maggo viśuddhiyā.*

Is it possible that the editors of the Sarvāstivādin versions added the verse on emptiness in order to make the text conform to Vaibhāṣika theory? This - along with other examples of manipulation of 'canonical' scriptures to fit them to doctrinal formulations - is a topic for further research. In any case, it seems that with the passage of time the idea of emptiness gained increased currency as a tool of understanding in early Indian Buddhism, and that different schools and thinkers became concerned to define their interpretations more precisely and to integrate 'emptiness' into their systems.

For the Sāmmittīya school, the term 'empty' was on a par with other aspects of the four truths, as it was for the Vaibhāṣikas. 'Empty' was one of the four aspects of the truth of suffering, one of the seven aspects of the truth of cessation, and one of the seven aspects of the truth of the path. Needless to say, for all of these schools emptiness was also one of the three concentrations (*samādhi*) and one of the three entrances of liberation (*vimokṣamukha: śūnyatā, animitta, and apraṇihita*) - categories that highlight the fact that emptiness plays a role in meditation practice and in the process of liberation.

Debates on the nature and role of emptiness in the Śrāvaka path continued in Tibetan scholasticism, where the question was raised: what is the difference between a Śrāvaka's realization of emptiness and that of a bodhisattva? The problem is discussed, for example, in Gelukpa compendia of tenets studied as part of monastic curricula to this day. We might be forgiven for asking whether this debate is not merely formal, a rehearsal of issues centuries old, but nonetheless it demonstrates how achieving a 'correct' understanding of emptiness, while at the same time realizing that there is more than one understanding, remains a significant topic up to the present.

Sūtra usage tends to be unsystematic. It was left to the *ābhīdharmikas* and *śāstrakāras* to codify the terminology and thought of the *sūtras*, both Śrāvaka and Bodhisattva. In the early systemization of Mahāyāna thought - in the works of Nāgārjuna and in Maitreya's *Madhyāntavibhāga-kārikā - śūnyatā* became a primary category employed to explain the nature of things. Before returning to the *Śūnyatā Sūtras*, I will briefly examine the concept of emptiness according to Nāgārjuna and Maitreya, both of whom accord emptiness a key role, but in very different ways.

II

*yaḥ śūnyatāṃ pratītyasamutpādaṃ madhyamāṃ pratipadaṃ ca /
ekārthaṃ niḥajāda praṇamāmi tam apratimabuddham //*

Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī* p. 53

One of the earliest, and for many the greatest, philosophers of Buddhist India was Nāgārjuna, who lived, approximately, between 150 and 250 CE. Nāgārjuna used emptiness as a conceptual tool in his scrutiny of Buddhist and non-Buddhist thought. He equated emptiness with dependent arising and with the middle path,⁽²⁾ and argued for the absence of *svabhāva* -

⁽²⁾ The equation of dependent arising with the middle path is already found in the *Samyuktāgama*: see

inherent nature - of any sort. Phenomena come into being and cease being through interdependence, and not through the office of any *svabhāva* or of any internal or external agency. Therefore they are empty. Numerous studies have been made of Nāgārjuna's thought, giving rise to diverse and often conflicting interpretations and evaluations. I will not go into any detail here.⁽³⁾

The influence of Nāgārjuna's philosophy was enormous, developing into the several lineages of Madhyamaka in India and then Tibet. In his *Lam rim chen mo*, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) discusses, *inter alia*, the relation between dependent arising and emptiness.⁽⁴⁾ Emptiness in general was a subject of lively, and sometimes vituperative, debate in the Land of Snows up to the time of Mipham (1846-1912), to the twentieth century, and to the present day.⁽⁵⁾

III

abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate //
śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate //

Maitreya, *Madhyāntavibhāga* I, 2

The study of the evolution of Buddhist thought in India is not easy. We have no hard dates or reliable biographies for early Buddhist philosophers, and in most cases we do not even know where they lived and wrote. Nāgārjuna was followed by his direct student Āryadeva (circa 170-270) who also wrote on emptiness. After the works of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, the next exposition of emptiness, as far as I know, is that given in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* or 'Discrimination of Middle and Extremes', which is ascribed by both Chinese and Tibetan tradition to Maitreya, although the transmission of the text is attributed with Asaṅga, to whom it was revealed.⁽⁶⁾

LAMOTTE 1976: 2067-2069. One of the best studies of the text-historical evolution of the concept of emptiness in a Western language remains that published by LAMOTTE (1976: 1995-2027). For dependent arising in Madhyamaka thought, see NAGAO 1989, Chapter 1.

⁽³⁾ For a useful survey see DE JONG 1972.

⁽⁴⁾ WAYMAN 1978: 195-214; TSONG-KHA-PA 2002: 135-153.

⁽⁵⁾ For Mipham see especially PHUNTSHO 2005. For Gendun CHOPEL's radical work on Madhyamaka, see now LOPEZ 2005. WALSER's (2005) recent study on Nāgārjuna raises interesting questions and attempts to explore new avenues, but not entirely successfully.

⁽⁶⁾ This is not the place to go into the question of the identity of the reputed author (see e.g. U_I 1929). For this paper I follow convention and describe the author as 'Maitreya' and the commentators as 'Vasubandhu' and 'Sthiramati' (about the last, I believe, there is not much doubt) in order to invest the work with agency. For a bibliography of *Madhyāntavibhāga* see NAKAMURA 1980: 259-260 and POWERS 1991: 42-44. For early contributions to the problem of the identity of Maitreya, see U_I 1929 and TUCCI 1930. I have been surprised, or dismayed, to find that there is no entry for the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, or for Maitreya as an author, in the recent *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (BUSWELL ed. 2004). None of the English translations of the work - in

The *Madhyāntavibhāga* is available in Sanskrit, with a *bhāṣya* by Vasubandhu and a *ṭīkā* by Sthiramati. All three texts were translated into Tibetan by the same team, Jinamitra, Śūrendrabodhi, and Ye śes sde, circa 800. The *Madhyāntavibhāga* is a mature and self-assured text. It presents its thesis and its description of the bodhisattva path systematically and coherently in five chapters. Questions of date, authorship, relation to the other four of the 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya', and relation to Asaṅga are convoluted and remain intractable. NAKAMURA (1980: 256) assigns the dates 270-350 CE to Maitreya and (p. 264) 310-390 to Asaṅga. To attempt to date 'Maitreya' at all is problematic, given that the idea that he was a human and historical teacher of Asaṅga is an invention of early twentieth-century historicism. Tradition reports that the future Buddha Maitreya transmitted texts to Asaṅga in an encounter or vision in Tuṣita heaven. In any case, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* must fall within the lifetime of Asaṅga, which places it, very broadly, in the fourth century. All 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya' are composed in verse, and all are confident and articulate expositions which advocate the bodhisattva path and the Mahāyāna, from the perspective of different themes: the *Perfection of Wisdom* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*), the message of the Mahāyāna sūtras (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*), the Tathāgatagarbha (*Ratnagotravibhāga*) and the distinction between phenomena and reality (*Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*). By the time these *śāstra* were written, the Abhidharma of the Sarvāstivāda or Vaibhāṣikas, as well as that of other schools, had been codified in numerous manuals, and the practice of composing verse manuals and treatises was well-established. The 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya' are among the earliest verse *śāstra* of Indian Mahāyāna - after those of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva - and they are certainly some of the earliest to survive. They are all remarkable texts, and it will take a great deal of further research and collation before we can begin to understand their significance in the development of Indian Buddhist thought in relation to Abhidharma, to Bodhisattva sūtras, and to Mādhyamika treatises.

The five texts are often classified as 'Yogācārin', but this is problematic.⁽⁷⁾ The works do share important classification systems - such as the three *svabhāva* - and they are seen as foundational in later Yogācāra literature, but their prehistory and individuality are occluded when they are treated as part of a static or abstract 'Yogācāra system'. If I hesitate to categorize the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* as Yogācārin, I am not the first to do so. Mi-pham notes that in Tibet the 'Five Dharmas of Maitreya' were classed in different ways by different traditions, and that among them the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* could be classed as Cittamātrin by some or as Mādhyamaka by others.⁽⁸⁾ For the purposes of this essay I regard the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* as an independent or 'unaffiliated' treatise, in the sense that, while it - inevitably - shares ideas or categories with other texts, it can stand on its own. The author has his own agenda, which he formulates lucidly and eloquently into a distinctive philosophical statement.

The first chapter of the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* explains the relationship between false or falsifying ideation (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and emptiness. The chapter first introduces *abhūtaparikalpa*, then *śūnyatā*. The section on *śūnyatā* discusses the definition (*lakṣaṇa*),

part or in whole - is satisfactory (STCHERBATSKY 1936; FRIEDMANN 1937; KOCHUMUTTOM 1982; ANACKER 1984; WOOD 1991).

⁽⁷⁾ For a bibliography of Yogācāra studies - including an enormous number of studies in Japanese - see NAKAMURA 1980: 253 n. 1.

⁽⁸⁾ MATHES 1996: 182; LEVINSON 2001: 117-118; SCOTT 2004: 58-61.

synonyms (*paryāya*), meaning (*artha*) of the synonyms, categories (*prabheda*) and the *sādhana* of *śūnyatā*. The categories (*prabheda*) are defiled (*saṃkṛṣṭā*) or pure (*viśuddhā*), according to whether emptiness has impurities (*saṃalā*) or is free of impurities (*nirmalā*) (v. 16). There are sixteen types of emptiness (v. 17).⁽⁹⁾ The aim of realizing emptiness is to obtain the two goodnesses (*śubhaṃ = kuśala*) - the constructed and the unconstructed - for the benefit of beings (*satvāhitāya*). The section ends by giving the ‘summarized meaning’ (*piṇḍārtha*) of emptiness.

In Chapter 1, *kārikā* 2, it is noteworthy that a verb for ‘exist’ occurs in each line - *asti* in line a, and *vidyate* in lines b (with a negative), c, and d.⁽¹⁰⁾ *Kārikā* 3 uses the noun *sattva* and its negative *asattva* in the sense of existence:

abhūtaparikalpo ’sti dvayan tatra na vidyate /
śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate //
na śūnyam nāpi cāśūnyam tasmāt sarvaṃ vidhīyate //
sattvā-asattvāt sattvāc ca madhyamā pratipac ca sā //

That is, Maitreya conceives of false ideation and emptiness in terms of existence and non-existence. Emptiness appears to be a state or an existent rather than a relationship. In *kārikā* 15, Maitreya gives the synonyms (*paryāya*) of emptiness:

tathatā bhūtakotiś cānimittaṃ paramārthatā /
dharmadhātuś ca paryāyāḥ śūnyatāyāḥ samāsataḥ //

Suchness, the limit of reality, the signless, the paramount meaning, the *dharmadhātu*:
 These in brief are the synonyms of emptiness.

In the following *kārikā* he gives the meaning of the synonyms (*paryāyārtha*):

ananyathā ’viparyāsa-tan-nirodhāryagocaraiḥ /
hetutvāc cāryadharmamāñāṃ paryāyārtho yathākramam //

This leads us to the following understanding of emptiness:

Emptiness is *tathatā* because it is not otherwise (*ananyathā*).
 Emptiness is *bhūtakoti* because it is not distorted (*aviparyāsa*).
 Emptiness is *ānimitta* because it is the cessation of signs (*tan-nirodha*).
 Emptiness is *paramārtha* because it is the resort of the noble ones (*āryagocara*:
 or according to Vasubandhu, of the ‘wisdom of the noble ones, *ārya-jñāna*,
 since it is the *parama-jñāna-viśaya*).
 Emptiness is *dharmadhātu* because it is the source of the dharmas of the noble
 ones (*hetutvāc cāryadharmamāñāṃ*).

⁽⁹⁾ For an early study see OBERMILLER 1933. One of the best treatments of the lists of emptiness that I know of is LAMOTTE 1976: 1995-2151, ‘Les dix-huit vacuités’. LAMOTTE also discusses the important categories of *sattvaśūnyatā* or *pudgalanairātmya* and *dharmasūnyatā* or *dharmānairātmya*, which I cannot venture into here.

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Vidyate* is from the root *vid*, and can mean ‘be known’, in the sense of *ālambate*. Here, however, its association with the opening *asti* and the following *sattva* suggest that it has an ontological rather than an epistemological application - although the unraveling of the ontological and the epistemological is one of the constant challenges of texts in the Yogācāra lineage.

Commenting on *kārikā* 15, Sthiramati adds further synonyms from the 'word of the Buddha' (*pravacana*):

advayatā avikalpadhātuḥ dharmatā anabhilāpyatā anirodhaḥ asaṃskṛtaṃ nirvāṇādi.

Non-duality, the sphere of non-mentation, true nature, the inexpressible, the unceasing, the unconstructed, *nirvāṇa*, etc.

The source of the terms in the *pravacana* is not given. Some of the terms are more easily found in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, but others are shared vocabulary.

IV

sarvam idaṃ na śūnyaṃ nāpi cāśūnyam /

Prajñāpāramitā

I do not see much in common between Nāgārjuna's emptiness and that of Maitreya. The former emphasizes contingency, conditionality. All things are empty of *svabhāva*: emptiness is a term, a convention, for interactions or interrelations of phenomena. It is a modality of relationship rather than a mode of being. Emptiness is not an entity, not a *Ding an sich*. Emptiness is a remedy for all views, a tool for understanding reality, an intellectual approach - and an insight derived from reflection and meditation that leads to liberation.

The emptiness of Maitreya seems to me to be more substantial, more ontological, even in its denial of ontology. It *exists* in (or is perceived in) the false imagination (*śūnyatā vidyate tv atra*). It is suchness, the limit of reality, the signless, the paramount meaning, the *dharmadhātu*. Unlike Nāgārjuna, Maitreya does not explicitly identify emptiness with dependent arising.⁽¹¹⁾ Nāgārjuna also identifies the middle practice with emptiness: they are one in meaning (*ekārtha*). Maitreya's definition of the middle way is different:

For this reason all things (*sarvaṃ*) [both conditioned and unconditioned] are explained to be neither empty nor non-empty. Because of the fact of existence [of false ideation], of non-existence [of duality of perceptibles and perceiver, *grāhya-grāhaka*], and of existence [of emptiness in false ideation and false ideation in emptiness], this is the middle way.

Vasubandhu explains that it is the middle way because it is neither exclusively empty nor exclusively non-empty. This, he asserts, accords with the *Prajñāpāramitā* and other texts, which state that 'This totality is neither empty nor non-empty':

*yat sarvaṃ, naikāntena śūnyaṃ naikāntenāśūnyaṃ / evaṃ ayaṃ pāṭhaḥ
Prajñāpāramitādiṣv anulomito bhavati 'sarvam idaṃ na śūnyaṃ nāpi cāśūnyam'
iti /*

⁽¹¹⁾ It is true, however, that the basic mechanism of the three *lakṣaṇa* or *svabhāva* of Yogācāra thought, especially *paratantra* and *parikalpita*, is dependence and conditionality.

Maitreya's middle path, then, is not emptiness - but it is not non-emptiness. What is its relation to dependent arising? Even though no explicit relation is drawn, we note that several of the synonyms of emptiness given by Maitreya are often used in connection with dependent arising, for example in the *Nidānasamṃyukta* from Central Asia:⁽¹²⁾

yātra dharmatā dharmasthitā dharmaniyāmatā dharmayathātathā avitathatā ananyathā bhūtaṃ satyatā tattvatā yāthātathā aviparītatā aviparyastatā idaṃpratyayatā pratītyasamutpādānulomatā ayam ucyate pratītyasamutpādaḥ.

If we propose that these terms are used by Maitreya with the same sense that they are used in the *Nidānasamṃyukta*, we may propose that there is a relation between *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda*. But the terms are difficult and multivalent, and they require a thorough study, especially since, in the scholarship of the last century, there was a tendency to reify such terms into solid abstractions, into 'absolutes' and 'essences'.

Can Maitreya's formulation, which might be described as contingent existence-cum-non-existence, be fitted to the general *sūtra* statement of the principle of dependent arising: *asmīn satīdaṃ bhavaty asyotpādād idam utpadyate?*⁽¹³⁾ I do not think so. The *sūtra* formula describes dependent or conditioned arising, while Maitreya's formula describes dependent or contingent - and simultaneous - *existence* and *non-existence*.⁽¹⁴⁾

V

*mahāśūnyatādharmaṃparyāyāḥ katamāḥ? yad utāsmīn satīdaṃ bhavaty
asyotpādād idam utpadyate / yad utāvidyāpratyayāḥ
saṃskārā yāvat samudayo bhavati /*

Nidānasamṃyukta 15.4

It is natural that modern scholars should turn to the *Āgamas* and the *Nikāyas*, the compilations of the 'word of the Buddha' (*buddhavacana*), to search for sources that might have inspired Nāgārjuna's or Maitreya's thought. A number of studies on this subject have been made.⁽¹⁵⁾ The two middle-length *sūtras* cited at the beginning of this essay bear the term 'emptiness' in their titles: *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* and *Greater Emptiness Sūtra*. In extant collections, the two *sūtras* are always paired: in the Sarvāstivādin *Madhyamāgama* preserved in Chinese, in the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Mahasūtra* collection preserved in Tibetan, in the Pāli *Majjhimanikāya* of the Mahāvihāravāsins, and in the *Nges don mdo* compiled in Tibet.⁽¹⁶⁾

(12) TRIPATHI 1962: §14.6. For related strings of terms in the *Māyājāla*, *Pratītya*, *Daśottara*, and *Śālistamba Sūtras*, as well as in the *Vyākhyāyukti-tīkā* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, see SKILLING 1997, Table 25.

(13) TRIPATHI 1962: §14.1.

(14) For some of the interpretations of the formula in the *Vibhāṣā* compendia, see FUKUDA 2003: 268-271.

(15) GOMEZ 1976 is one of the classic studies. LAMOTTE's translations of the *Da zhidu lun* and other works trace sources meticulously.

(16) For bibliographical details see SKILLING 1997. Also important for the study of emptiness is *Majjhimanikāya* 151, *Piṇḍapātipārisuddhi-sutta*, and its Chinese parallel (tr. CHOONG MUN-KEAT 2004: 5-9).

If emptiness was understood differently by different - and often competing - hermeneutical traditions at a given time, and if - whether as a result of the dynamics of internal evolution or of dialogue with others - these understandings have evolved over time, how should we - the community of modern scholars - approach the emptiness of the *Pitaka* traditions? Do we not risk imposing (*samāropa*) received views and later interpretations? Do we not risk finding the emptiness we expect, and not seeing other emptinesses?

How can we retrieve the meaning of emptiness in the two *Emptiness Sūtras*? If we approach them with Madhyamaka thought in mind, their message does not leap off the page. The *sūtras* seem to be unfamiliar terrain: no connections are drawn between emptiness and dependent arising or the middle path in either *sūtra*, and emptiness is not the only subject discussed in the *Greater Emptiness Sūtra*. Furthermore, as far as I know neither *sūtra* is treated as a significant source in Madhyamaka writings - in fact, I have yet to see any explicit reference or even indirect allusion to the either *sūtra* in Madhyamaka writings.⁽¹⁷⁾ In contrast, the *Lesser Emptiness* looms large in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and in Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha thought.

What is the relation between the two *sūtras* and later formulations of emptiness? Is there a rupture between emptiness as revealed in the two *sūtras* and the thought of Nāgārjuna or Maitreya? Are early conceptions of emptiness more complex than modern scholarship has allowed? Do received ideas about emptiness - as developed in later Madhyamaka and Yogācāra writings and in modern manuals - inhibit the understanding of earlier texts?

VI

The *Lesser Śūnyatā Sūtra*⁽¹⁸⁾

The *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* is delivered in the Eastern Pleasance at Śrāvastī, in a building donated to the *saṃgha* by Mr̥gāra's Mother and hence known as 'Mr̥gāra's Mother's Mansion'.⁽¹⁹⁾ Ānanda initiates the discourse. Emerging from solitary meditation in the evening, he goes to the Buddha, pays homage, and sits to one side. He then relates that once, in the Śākya market town of Nagaraka, the Blessed One had said, 'I, Ānanda, dwell regularly in emptiness'. Ānanda asks if his memory is correct, and the Blessed One replies, 'Ānanda, it is so: you heard what I said correctly, you apprehended it correctly, you have born it in mind correctly, you have recalled it correctly, you have comprehended it correctly and not otherwise - it is exactly like that. Why is this? Ānanda, at that time and at present, I frequently dwell in emptiness' (§1.2-7). In the sense that the Buddha refers to his own experience in the first person, this portion of the dialogue may be described as autobiographical.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The sole exception is the reference in Bhavya's *Tarkajvālā*, but the reference concerns textual transmission rather than the hermeneutics of emptiness.

⁽¹⁸⁾ NAGAO (1978) and WOOD (1991) have examined the relations between the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. Here I summarize or translate the 'Mūlasarvāstivādin' *Mahāsūtra* version preserved in Tibetan, which often differs in phrasing from the familiar Pāli *Majjhima-nikāya* version. References are to SKILLING 1994, *Mahāsūtra* 3, by section number.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Mr̥gāra's mother is Viśākhā, one of the chief supporters of the Buddha: for Pāli accounts, see MALALASEKERA [1937] 1983 II 900-904, FALK 1990, and NYANAPONIKA and HECKER 1997: 247-255.

The Buddha opens the discussion of emptiness with an example: Mrgāra's Mother's Mansion is empty of elephants, horses, cows, sheep, roosters, and pigs. It is empty of wealth, grain, money, and gold. It is empty of man-servants and maid-servants, of workers and dependents, of men and women, of boys and girls. But with regard to one thing there is non-emptiness, that is, the community of monks alone (§2.1).

Then comes what will be a refrain throughout the *sūtra* (§2.2-3):

In this way, Ānanda, one sees accurately that that place is empty of whatever is absent there, and one further knows, in accordance with reality, that whatever remains there is there. This entry into emptiness, Ānanda, is in accordance with reality and unmistakable.

It is this refrain that is taken up by a number of *śāstrakāra* in the Yogācāra lineage. The wording of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* version, for example, is very close to that of the *Mahāsūtra*:

evaṃ yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam iti yathābhūtaṃ samanupaśyati yat punar atrāvaśiṣṭaṃ bhavati tat sad ihāstī ti yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti ti, iyaṃ ucyate śūnyatāvakraṅtir yathābhūtā aviparītā.

In his *Abhidharmasamuccaya* Asaṅga uses the formula in his characterization of emptiness. He explains the formula as follows:⁽²⁰⁾

What is not-present there? It is the absence in the aggregates, sense-bases, and elements of any permanent, enduring, stable, unchanging self or anything belonging to self. This is the emptiness. What is it that is present? It is the fact of non-self (*nairātmya*) in the same [aggregates, sense-bases, and elements].

The Ten-Powered One concludes the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* by stating that 'this entry into emptiness has been realized by the Tathāgatas, arhats, Samyaksambuddhas of the past (§10.1), that it will be realized by the Tathāgatas, arhats, Samyaksambuddhas of the future (§10.2), and that it is realized by myself, the present Tathāgata, arhat, Samyaksambuddha' (§10.3). He then exhorts Ānanda to train as follows (§10.4):

'I will dwell having attained and realized with my body this same ultimate entry into emptiness: the liberation that is free of *āsrava* and is un compounded, that results from the destruction of the *āsrava*'. In this manner, Ānanda, should you train.

An interesting feature of the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* is that its contents are for the most part unique, specific to the *sūtra*: that is, it presents original rather than stock material. It deals with emptiness throughout. This emptiness is a relational emptiness, a recognition of the absence or presence of states within the field of awareness of the practitioner. It is a sequence of meditations that lead progressively to the realization of ultimate emptiness, the liberation of the mind from the *āsrava*.

A, with whatever troubles it may entail, is absent, but *B*, with whatever troubles it may entail, remains.

⁽²⁰⁾ Pradhan 1950: 40.10 foll.; Rahula 1971: 64. The passage is missing in the Sanskrit manuscript, so I follow the Tibetan translation rather than Pradhan's Sanskrit restoration, which strikes me as rather flawed: Peking edition, Otani Reprint Cat. No. 5550, Vol. 112, *sems tsam*, li, 90b1 foll.

The formulation of emptiness presented in the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra* is not a minor or aberrant variation on the theme of emptiness - it is the most extensive treatment of the topic in the available *Āgamas* or the four *Nikāyas*. The Blessed One himself lauds this 'entry into emptiness' (*śūnyatāvātāra*) in the highest terms. In the *Mahāsūtra* refrain, he describes the entry as 'in accordance with reality and unmistakable'. The Pāli version reads here 'in accordance with reality, unmistakable, and completely pure' (*yathābhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā*). The final realization of emptiness - freedom from the *āsrava* - is described as *anuttarā* in the *Mahāsūtra*, and *paramānuttarā* in the Pāli. Furthermore, this entry into emptiness is - in the hyperbolic phraseology of legitimation - realized by the Buddhas of the three times

What is the message of the *Lesser Emptiness Sūtra*? Is it an ontological statement, drawn in terms of a series of reflections which are to be taken metaphorically? Is it a blueprint for an ordered intellectual or spiritual exercise? Or is it a series of meditations, a realization of a relational emptiness through manipulation of the perceptual field, that leads to liberation? The last must be the case since in the sūtra the monk - the practitioner - attains the bases of endless space, of endless consciousness, and of nothingness, realizing their emptiness.⁽²¹⁾ Furthermore, the practice involves attention to the realm without mental signs (*animitta-dhātu*: §8, in Pāli here *animitta-cetosamādhī*), and the realization leads directly to *vimukti* (§9.3-4, a topic also important to the *Greater Emptiness Sūtra*).

If the *sūtra* deals with meditation and realization, does it have any ontological or philosophical consequences? For the Yogācārin tradition, which emphasizes the cultivation and psychology of meditation, the answer is yes - the *sūtra* has been enormously important to the development of Buddhist thought.

VII

The Greater Śūnyatā Sūtra⁽²²⁾

The *Greater Emptiness Sūtra* is much longer than the *Lesser Emptiness*, and unlike the latter it shares a number of stock passages with other *sūtras*. Nonetheless, it opens in an unusual setting with an unusual narrative, which sets the occasion for a distinctive progression of thought.

The Blessed One is staying at the Nyagrodha Pleasance at Kapilavastu. After gathering alms-food in Kapilavastu (here stock formulas are used), he goes to the *vihāra* of the Śākya *Kālakṣemaka. In the evening he goes to the *vihāra* of another Śākya, IṬag pa ri, where many monks have gathered to make robes.⁽²³⁾ The Buddha addresses his discourse to

(21) In the Pāli (§VII), he also realizes the *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*.

(22) As in the preceding section, I summarize or translate the Tibetan *Mahāsūtra* version rather than the more familiar Pāli version. References are to SKILLING 1994, *Mahāsūtra* 4, by section.

(23) The names of the two Śākyans occur only in this sūtra, of which no Sanskrit fragments remain. For the first, the Tibetan translation has 'Śākya dus bde' for which one can propose *kāla* (*dus*) + *kṣema* (*bde*) = *Kālakṣemaka, as a counterpart to the Pāli 'Kālakhemaka' (with the variant 'Kāla-' recorded in a footnote in the Pāli Text Society edition: see SKILLING 1994, p. 191, §1.3 and n. 1). I have been unable to come

Ānanda.⁽²⁴⁾ It is noteworthy that at the beginning the Buddha refers to himself in the first person, to his own practice, to his relations with ‘monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen’ - in this sense, like the *Lesser Emptiness*, it is autobiographical.⁽²⁵⁾

The *Greater Emptiness Sūtra* is a complex - and difficult - document, and it elaborates on a number of themes - nineteen, according to the concluding verse *uddāna* (§19).⁽²⁶⁾ The first theme is that seclusion, withdrawal from the chatter of society, is a precondition for the attainment of the happiness of the noble ones (*āryasukha*) and for the attainment of either temporary or enduring liberation of the mind (*cetovimukti*). This sets the stage for the taming of the mind and the realization of emptiness (§§3-6), and the maintenance of mindfulness and awareness (§§7-8, *smṛti-saṃpraṇāyana*, according to the Tibetan) or simply awareness (*sampajañña*, according to the Pāli). It also deals with proper comportment and etiquette. Like the *Lesser Emptiness*, the *Greater Emptiness* is a *sūtra* on training the mind.

In an earlier study I concluded that, despite its title, the *sūtra* as a whole is not about emptiness, and that the relationship between the Buddha and his disciples is the main theme of the text (Skilling 1997: 394-395). It is more pertinent to say that the relationship between the Buddha and his disciples brackets the theme of the practice of emptiness, which is central to the discourse.

In §3, the Buddha describes his own experience:

This being so, Ānanda, this is my abiding: going fully beyond all perceptions of matter, I dwell realizing with the body outward emptiness (**sarvaśo rūpasamjñāṃ samatikramya bahirdhāśūnyatāṃ kāyena sākṣīkṛtvā upasampadya viharāmi*). This I understand and comprehend.

In §§4 to 6 the Blessed One gives instructions on how to realize emptiness through the practice of *dhyāna*:

This being so, Ānanda, if a monk wishes, ‘O, may I dwell having attained and realized outer emptiness with the body’, that monk, Ānanda should settle the mind inwardly alone, settle it completely, settle it wholly, settle it closely, tame it, calm it, thoroughly calm it, make it one-pointed, and concentrate it (§4.1-2).⁽²⁷⁾

up with a plausible Sanskrit equivalent for ‘I Tag pa ri’, for which the Pāli counterpart is the unusual name Ghaṭāya. See SKILLING 1997: 370-373.

⁽²⁴⁾ It is curious that some of the important statements on emptiness are addressed to Ānanda: the two *Emptiness sūtras*, and, for example, *yasmāt ca kho ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño loko ti vuccati* (*Samyuttanikāya* IV 54).

⁽²⁵⁾ See §3.5 for the Tibetan. The Pāli (§III.3), however, mentions ‘monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, kings, royal ministers, other teachers and auditors of other teachers’, and uses Tathāgata rather than the first person. This variation of voice between Sarvāstivādin and Mahāvihārin recensions occurs in other *sūtras*, and needs further investigation.

⁽²⁶⁾ For the structure of the *sūtra* see SKILLING 1994, Tables 33 and 34.

⁽²⁷⁾ The nine verbs represent the ‘nine stages of mental concentration’, and each of the verbs is given a specific technical sense in the literature of the Mūlasarvāstivādins and Yogācārins (the works attributed to Asaṅga). The Pāli has four verbs, which, as far as I know, have no special technical status in the Mahāvihāra tradition.

After this he should attain inner emptiness, then outer-inner emptiness.

The *Samāhitabhūmi* gives a general definition of 'concentration on emptiness' (*śūnyatā-samādhi*) as one-pointed abiding of mind with reference to (*ārabhya*) absence of a sentient being (*sattva*), soul (*jīva*), creature (*poṣa*) or person (*pudgala*).⁽²⁸⁾ It defines 'inward emptiness' as 'the individual is empty of egotism, possessiveness, and attachment to the conceit "I am"' (*ahaṃkāra-mamakāra-asmimānābhīniveśa*).⁽²⁹⁾ 'Outward emptiness' means that the five modes of sense-pleasure are empty (or free) of sensual attachment (*kāmarāga*).⁽³⁰⁾ These definitions may have been inspired, at least in part, by the *Greater Emptiness Sūtra* itself (cf. §11, **kāmaguṇa*, §12, **skandha*).

In the *Greater Emptiness Sūtra*, the designations 'outer', 'inner', and outer-inner' are, I believe, used adverbally, and I do not think that the text originally proposed to set up types or categories of emptiness: an 'inner, internal, or inward emptiness' that is substantially different from an 'outer, external, or outward emptiness' or an 'inner-outer emptiness'. In any case, the three ways of viewing emptiness were soon reified as the compounds *adhyātma-śūnyatā*, *bahirdhā-śūnyatā*, and *adhyātmabahirdhā-śūnyatā*, which stand at the head of later lists of emptinesses, such as the ten emptinesses listed in the *Vibhāṣā*, or those listed in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.⁽³¹⁾

I do not think either of the two *Emptiness Sūtras* deals with emptiness in the manner commonly understood in modern thought, whether scholastic or popular, whether according to Śrāvaka or to Mahāyāna schools. In both the *Lesser* and *Greater Śūnyatā*, the section on emptiness concerns practice - the realization of emptiness - rather than emptiness as a philosophical or ontological doctrine - and indeed the *Papañcasūdanī* refers to 'the practice of the Great Emptiness' (*mahāsuññatā-paṭipatti*).⁽³²⁾ The practice leads to freedom from the *āsrava*, to a state which is empty of desire, empty of aversion, and empty of delusion.

VIII

*ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṃ deseti - avijjāpaccayā
saṅkhārā ... evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hotī ti /*

(28) 162a5 *stoṅ pa ñid kyi tiñ ñe 'dzin gañ ze na, sems can dañ, srog dañ, gso ba dañ, gañ zag ñid med pa las brtsams nas sems kyi gnas pa rtse gcig pa gañ yin pa'o.*

(29) 162a8 *nañ stoṅ pa ñid ni 'di lta ste, ñar 'dzin pa dañ, ña'ir 'dzin pa dañ, ña'o sñam pa'i ña rgyal mñon par zen pa rñams kyi lus stoṅ pa'o.* For the Sanskrit of *ñar 'dzin pa*, etc. see e.g. *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht): 211a, s.v. *ahaṃkāra-mamaṃkāra-smimānābhīniveśānuśaya*. I take *lus* here to mean *ātmabhāva*.

(30) 162b1 *phyi stoṅ pa ñid ni 'di lta ste, 'dod pa'i yon tan lña po rñams, 'dod pa'i 'dod chags kyi stoṅ pa ste, ji skad du rñam pa thams cad du gzugs kyi 'du śes rñams las yañ dag par 'das pas phyi stoṅ pa ñid lus kyi mñon sum du byas nas bsgrubs te gnas par bya'o zes rgya cher gsuñs pa lta bu'o. gzugs kyi 'du śes ni 'dir 'dod pa'i yon tan gyi 'du śes la bya ste, de'i 'du śes las byuñ ba'i 'dod chags spañs pa'i phyir te, de phyi stoṅ pa ñid ces bya'o.*

(31) For the *Vibhāṣā* see LAMOTTE 1976: 2013. For the *Prajñāpāramitā* see LAMOTTE's thorough compilation of sources at *ibid.*, 2027 foll.

(32) Pali Text Society edition IV 156, penult; Mahāmakūṭa edition I 127, antepenult.

Kaccānagotta-sutta⁽³³⁾

I have noted above that the identification of emptiness with dependent arising is central to the thought of Nāgārjuna, who declares in his *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*:

*yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ, śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe
sā prajñaptir upādāya pratīpat saiva madhyamā
apratītyasamutpanno dharmāḥ kaścīn na vidyate
yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmāḥ kaścīn na vidyate.* (24:18-19)⁽³⁴⁾

That which is conditioned arising, that we declare to be emptiness. Emptiness is a relational designation, and it is precisely the middle way. Because there is no such thing as a dharma that is not dependently arisen, therefore there is no such thing as a dharma which is not empty.

Certainly, from the time of Nāgārjuna on, this equation becomes prominent.⁽³⁵⁾ But does the equation predate Nāgārjuna? What is the relation between dependent arising and emptiness? The two are not explicitly identified in the Pāli canon, and it may have been the Sarvāstivādins who first took the step, or at least codified or canonized the concept, which is, after all, a natural outcome of the concepts of non-self and dependent arising, which are already linked in such texts as the *Bimbisārapratyudgamana-mahāsūtra* and its many parallels.⁽³⁶⁾ This identification becomes explicit in the *Mahāśūnyatā-nāma-dharmaparyāya* (above, colophon to §V) and the *Paramārthasūnyatā-sūtra*, two short *sūtras* unique to the Sarvāstivāda transmission.⁽³⁷⁾ The idea is taken up in Bodhisattva *sūtras*, for example the *Kāśyapa-parivarta*, which describes a particular interpretation of *pratītyasamutpāda*, in which each *aṅga* and its cessation is understood to be non-dual, as ‘the middle path, the true understanding of phenomena’ (*madhyamā pratīpad dharmāṅgāṃ bhūtapratyavekṣā*). The identification of the middle path with dependent arising is, of course, canonical, as for example in the *Kātyāyana-sūtra* and other *sūtras* in the *Nidāna-saṃyukta*.⁽³⁸⁾

Later Mādhyamika masters - for example Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* - cite a

⁽³³⁾ *Samyuttanikāya* II 17.

⁽³⁴⁾ *rten ciñ 'brel par 'byuñ ba gañ, de ni stoñ pa ñid du bśad, de ni brten nas gdaḡ pa ste, de ñid dbu ma'i lam yin no. gañ phyir rten 'byuñ ma yin pa'i, chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin pa de phyir stoñ pa ma yin pa'i, chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no.*

⁽³⁵⁾ It is interesting that, while the equations of emptiness and dependent arising as essential understandings for a bodhisattva on the path to unsurpassed perfect awakening (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) became dominant paradigms in *sūtra* and *śāstra*, an old idea that *pratītyasamutpāda* is in particular the province of the Pratyekabuddha persisted in the scholastic literature. For the Pratyekabuddha see KLOPPENBORG 1974 and NORMAN 1983.

⁽³⁶⁾ For the *Bimbisārapratyudgamana-mahāsūtra* see SKILLING 1994, *Mahāsūtra* 2, and SKILLING 1997: 267-333. The *Vibhāṣā* compendia show that within the Sarvāstivāda and among other schools there were many interpretations of dependent arising: see COX 2000.

⁽³⁷⁾ For these *sūtras* see LAMOTTE 1976: 2135-2137. For terminological evolution in the *Āgama* tradition see BABA 2004.

⁽³⁸⁾ TRIPATHI 1962 §§19.8; 15.5b, 7b; 18.6; 20.14.

passage from the *Śālistamba-sūtra* to demonstrate the centrality of dependent arising. The *sūtra* opens with a question put by the Elder Śāriputra to Bodhisattva Maitreya, about a statement reported to have been made by the Blessed One (REAT 1993: 27):

yo bhikṣavaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ paśyati sa dharmam paśyati yo dharmam paśyati sa buddham paśyati.

The remainder of the *sūtra* is taken up by Maitreya's answer. The *Śālistamba* is a challenging *sūtra*; functionally it is a commentary on *pratītyasamutpāda* rich in embedded citations of *Buddhavacana*.⁽³⁹⁾ The radical departure from the *Āgama-Nikāya* tradition in this and other Bodhisattva *sūtras* is the description of *pratītyasamutpāda* as, *inter alia*, 'unborn, unbecome, unmade, uncompounded' (*ajātam abhūtam akṛtam asaṃskṛtam*, REAT 1993: 70). This new vision of *pratītyasamutpāda* is expressed in Bodhisattva *sūtras* like the *Sāgaramatipariṣṭhā* (JACQ HERGOUAL'CH 1992: 228-229)

*ye pratītyasamutpannā na te kecit svabhāvataḥ
ye 'svabhāvān na vidyante na teṣāṃ saṃbhavaḥ kvacit
jānāte ya imāṃ koṭīm akoṭīm jagatas samāṇā
tasya koṭīm gataṃ jñānaṃ sarvadharmmeṣu varttate.*

IX

*suttantā tathāgatabhāsītā gambhīrā gambhīratthā
lokuttarā suññatāpaṭisaṃyuttā /⁽⁴⁰⁾*

The *suttantas* spoken by the Tathāgata on the subject of emptiness are described as profound, profound in meaning, and transcendental. This certainly applies to the two *Emptiness sūtras*. Neither is easy to understand.

The *Emptiness sūtras* are both cited in important works of North Indian philosophy (never, as far as I know, together - that is, they are put to different purposes). The *Lesser Emptiness* is cited by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*, by Bhavya in his *Madhyamakahrdayavṛtti-tarkajvālā*, and in the *Sārasamuccaya-nāma-abhidharmāvatāra-ṭīkā*. Sections are paraphrased by Asaṅga in several of his works. Furthermore, as noted above, portions of the refrain are incorporated into important texts of the Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha streams of thought.

The *Greater Emptiness* is cited (without title) in the *Samāhitabhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* and by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*. It is cited by title by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and by the anonymous author of the *Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti* on *Abhidharmadīpa*. It is cited or referred to by title in the commentaries on the *Abhidharmakośa* by Śamathadeva, Yaśomitra, Pūrṇavardhana, and Sthiramati.

The philosophical literature of the (Mūla)Sarvāstivādins preserved in Tibetan and Chinese is vast, and I suspect that further references to or citations of the *sūtras* wait to be found.

⁽³⁹⁾ It is regrettable that REAT's analysis of the *sūtra* is unsatisfactory.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ LAMOTTE 1976: 2004 with reference to *Samyutta-nikāya* II 267, V 407; *Aṅguttaranikāya* I 72, III 107.

The citations mentioned here are sufficient to show that the *Emptiness Sūtras* were important to some of the greatest thinkers of fourth to fifth century Indian Buddhism. Furthermore, the *Lesser Emptiness* was fundamental to the development of the concept of emptiness in Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha thought. This occurred not through explicit citation, but through incorporation or appropriation - with necessary de- or re-contextualization - of a single passage, the refrain mentioned above. This passage took on a life of its own - and is still alive in debates in Tibet, particularly those on the topic of *gžan ston pa*.

'Emptiness' has clearly meant very different things to different schools of thought. In this it is not alone: another example of a significant term which had radically different meanings in different traditions is *paramārtha*. PHUNTSHO (2005: 5) notes that 'Emptiness, subjected to a rich hermeneutic enterprise, came to mean different things in different schools. Instead of designating an invariant unitary concept, it came to refer to a wide range of contextually varying ontological positions.' The term seems to have been introduced to the vocabulary of Indian thought by the Buddha himself, and it appears to have had several referents from the start. It was connected with the practice of meditation and the *dhyānas*, as is seen in the two *Emptiness Sūtras*.

The evolution of the term *śūnyatā* - or better, the adjective *śūnya* and the noun *śūnyatā* - needs further research. How are the terms used in Bodhisattva or Mahāyāna *sūtras*? The theme of emptiness is developed most famously, perhaps, in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, where it frequently occurs in the triad of *vimokṣamukha*, but it is also present in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.⁽⁴¹⁾ The simile of the 'empty village' (*śūnya-grāma*) is given in *sūtras* like the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi* and *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*.⁽⁴²⁾ Given that very few Mahāyāna *sūtras* have been edited, translated, or studied, there is much work to be done. What relations are there between the thought of Maitreya and that of Nāgārjuna, or of Āryadeva or Asaṅga? Can we discern any dialogue, any appositions or oppositions of interpretations of emptiness?

Available histories of Buddhist thought tend to compartmentalize. One chapter will deal with the evolution of Madhyamaka, starting with Nāgārjuna, while a separate chapter will discuss 'Yogācāra' or 'Vijñānavāda' or 'Cittamātrā', starting with Maitreya, Asaṅga, or Maitreya-Asaṅga.⁽⁴³⁾ Nāgārjuna is presented as the 'founder' of Madhyamaka, Asaṅga as the 'founder' of Yogācāra - assertions that are valid, if at all, only retrospectively. By default *śūnyatā* is associated with Madhyamaka; by default *citta-* or *vijñapti-mātratā* is associated with Yogācāra.⁽⁴⁴⁾ These are oversimplifications of complex intellectual developments over centuries. The compartmentalization may be suitable for textbooks, but we should not forget that the compartments are didactic or taxonomic conventions. All schools, thinkers,

(41) For the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* see DRAGONETTI 2000 and KAJIYAMA 2000.

(42) The six internal sense bases are like an empty village: for the Pāli see *suñño gāmo ti kho bhikkhave, channetaṃ ajjhattikānaṃ āyatanānaṃ adhivacanaṃ*. To trace phrases, images, similes, or ideas to specific 'earlier' or 'primary' sources is a necessary exercise, but we must be aware that the phrases, images, similes, or ideas would have become part of an imagination that was articulated not only through 'canonical' texts but also through memory, ritual, monastic curricula, and sermons. To assume a straightforward linear passage (*saṃkrānti*), without intermediaries, from text 'a' to text 'b' is an oversimplification.

(43) See for example CONZE 1951 and 1962, WILLIAMS 2000.

(44) Various interpretations of emptiness, including Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, were confronted in Tibet: see for example HOPKINS [1999] 2003, 2002.

philosophers had to wrestle with the questions of the nature of emptiness, of being and appearance, of mind, mentation, and experience. Things were never so tidy that exclusive rights over 'emptiness' were handed over to the Madhyamaka, and those over 'mind' to the Yogācāra. To understand the development of Buddhist thought, we need to pay more attention to ideas than to schools and to assess the interpretations of different traditions.

One scholar who did study the development of Buddhist thought as a dynamic and dialectic process, beyond compartmentalization, was the late Gadjin M. Nagao. His 'From Mādhyamika to Yogācāra: An Analysis of *MMK*, XXIV.18 and *MV*, I.1-2' is a profound scrutiny and comparison of key ideas on emptiness expressed by Nāgārjuna in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIX.18 and *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.1-2.⁽⁴⁵⁾ This paper is an imperfect attempt to understand the two *Emptiness Sūtras* in relation to the thought of Nāgārjuna and Maitreya. I offer it in homage to Prof. Nagao in gratitude for his work on the *Madhyāntavibhāga* and his many contributions to the understanding of the elaborations of emptiness.

*yesaṃ sannicayo n'atthi ye pariññātabhojanā suññato animitto ca vimokkho yesaṃ go-
caro ākāse va sakuntānaṃ gati tesāṃ durannayā.*

Dhammapada 92
(cf. *Patna Dharmapada* 87, *Udānavarga* 29.26)

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See NAGAO 1991: 189-199.

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