The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature in Mahayana Buddhism

Tony Sin-Heng See
National University of Singapore.
Email: cnmv65@nus.sg

Abstract

The term Buddha-nature, which is a translation of a Sanskrit term "Buddhadhatu", refers to one of the most important concepts of Mahayana Buddhism. First texts that mention the Buddha-nature were composed around 4th century C.E. In general terms, this concept states that all sentient beings possess the nature of the Buddha and can attain Buddhahood. However, according to some Buddhist scholars, the idea that sentient beings possess something permanent seems to contradict the Buddha's teaching on non-self (anatta), which is in turn one of the most important teachings of early Buddhism. This is most probably the reason why the doctrine of Buddha-nature has been a source of debates. The author suggest that rejection of this concept as "non-Buddhist" is rooted in misunderstanding about the Buddha-nature and makes an attempt to reflect and analyze some critical perspectives on the Buddha-nature to examine whether their arguments are valid. This will be followed by a note on the teaching of non-self and its compatibility with the doctrine of Buddha-nature.

Keywords: Buddhadhatu, Buddhahood, Buddha-nature, Mahayana, Dharmakaya

Introduction

The doctrine of Buddha-nature *(Buddhadhatu)* is one of the most important doctrines in Mahayana Buddhism. This doctrine can be found in a number of Mahayana texts that were composed at least by the 3rd to the 5th century C. E. Traces of this doctrine can be found in the development of Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism. The doctrine of Buddha-nature basically teaches that all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature and that they can all attain Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature is described as pure and immaculate, free from emotional and conceptual defilements that plague sentient beings. This is apparently a very positive teaching that affirms everyone's potential to attain Buddhahood. However, this is quite an independent question from whether it is a "Buddhist" teaching. The idea that sentient beings possess something that is permanent seems to reintroduce the very thing that the historical Buddha rejected, namely, the idea of "self." This is most probably the reason why the doctrine of Buddha-nature has been a source of contention in scholarly debates. The doctrine of Buddha-nature may be regarded as a deviation from the historical Buddha's teaching of "non-self." However, as we shall see, this stems from a misunderstanding about the Buddha-nature. In the following sections, we will critically reflect on some scholarly perspectives on the Buddha-nature, and examine whether their arguments are valid and sound. This will be followed by a note on the teaching of non-self and its compatibility with the doctrine of Buddha-nature.

The Buddha-Nature Texts and Doctrines

The term "Buddha-nature" can be found in a number of Buddhist texts that are composed around the 3rd to 5th century and forms an important part of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. The term "Buddha-nature" is a translation of the Sanskrit term *"Buddhadhatu*," and it can refer either to a "site", "location", or a "potential" for Buddhahood (Takasaki 1966, 74-94). In the history of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, a number of different terms have been used to describe the Buddha-nature. Some of these include the "Store of the Tathagata" *(tathagatagarbha*) which refers to the Buddha-nature in its hidden state, and the "Body of Dharma" *(Dharmakaya*) which refers to the Buddha-nature in its absolutely pure and original state. Modern scholarly research on the doctrine of Buddha-nature is relatively new and did not gain momentum until recent decades. There were, until the 90s, only a limited number of academic works that focused on the Buddha-nature (Ruegg, 1969; Verdu, 1974; Ruegg, 1989; Brown 1991). Research on this doctrine only intensified after Obermiller's translation

of the *Ratnogotravibhaga-sastra*. The next important study which followed was David Seyfort Ruegg's *La Theorie du Tathagatagarbha et du Gotra: Etudes sur la Soterologie et la Gnoseologie du Buddhism* in the sixties. In the seventies, Alfonso Verdu's *Dialectical Aspects in Buddhist Thought: Studies in Sino-Japanese Mahayana Idealism* expanded our understanding of the doctrine of Buddha-nature in the East Asian contexts while Ruegg's study *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective* in the seventies also contributed to our understanding of the Buddha-nature in the Tibetan tradition. In the period stretching from the early eighties to the early nineties, there were also many studies on the Buddha-nature. Here, we will examine three of these interpretations, namely Liu Ming Wood's *The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature in the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-Sutra (1982),* Brian Edward Brown's *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathagatagarbha and Alaya-vijnana (1991)* and Sallie Behn King's *Buddha Nature (1991)*.

Some of the Buddha-nature texts include the *Tathagatagarbha-sutra,* the *SrunaladevTsimhanada-sutra,* the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-sutra*. The *Tathagatagarbha-sutra* is a relatively short sutra, which consists mainly of nine metaphors that illustrate the various different ways in which sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature (Grosnick, 1995; Zimmermann 2002). The text uses a number of metaphors to teach that sentient beings have a Buddha-nature and that they can all attain Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature, for instance, is like a treasury of gold that is hidden in a storehouse etc. This idea is echoed in the *SrlmaladevTsimhanada-sutra,* a text which mainly consists of a dialogue between the queen Sri Mala and her interlocutors. This text teaches that sentient beings have a Buddha-nature by way of the saying that they have a treasure, a "Store of the Tathagata" (Tathagatagarbha), which is hidden from sight. This text also further identifies the tathagatagarbha with the "Dharma body" *(Dharmakaya)* of the Buddha itself. Furthermore, it also uses positive language to describe this, such as "permanent," "unchanging" and it is possessed of innumerable excellent qualities that are merely obscured by defilements and we only need to uncover it (Wayman and Wayman, 1974). Another text which teaches the doctrine of Buddha-nature is the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-sutra*. This text purports to record the Buddha's last teachings prior to his entrance into nirvana, and it has a parallel version in the Theravada tradition. Like the other texts, it also teaches that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature, but what makes this text unique is that it explicitly uses the term "Self' (atman). The text teaches that the Buddha only denied the self because we are attached to the self where there is no self, but this is not a categorical denial of self. Just as we can be mistaken when we see a self where there is none, we can also be mistaken when we see no-self when there is actually a

"self." Of course, the text qualifies this by saying that the "self' that is spoken of here is not the identical to the self that is preached by the other non-Buddhist thinkers, that this "self' is the dharmakaya of the Buddha (Williams 108-109; Zimmermann 2002, 83).

Although the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-sutra* clearly maintains that there is a self, some scholars have argued that this text does not teach that we have a self. In Liu's "The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature in the *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana-Sutra"* (1982), for instance, an argument is made in which the sutra teaches that sentient beings can only "have" the Buddha-nature *in the future,* and that they do not have the Buddha-nature currently (Taisho vol. 12 I-25-C, 1-10) (Liu 1982, 80). Liu also maintains that sentient beings do not have the Buddha-nature because the Buddha-nature is said to "abide nowhere" (Liu 1982, 70, 80). These two interpretative claims, however, seem to contradict other passages in the *sutra*, which clearly states that we have the Buddha-nature. Furthermore, it is also mistaken to claim that "not abiding" means "not existing." In the language of Mahayana Buddhism, the term "not abiding" does not mean "not existing." Rather, it means that the bodhisattva does not abide in either *samsara* nor in *nirvana*. Thus, in retrospect, Liu's argument cannot be accepted as an accurate reflection of what the text is trying to say.

In addition to the *sutras,* the doctrine of Buddha-nature is also more systematically elaborated in a number of *sastras* in Mahayana Buddhism. These are namely the *Ratnogotravibhaga-sastra* (Chinese: *Pao HsingLun*), the *Buddha-Nature Treatise* (Chinese: *Fo Hsing Lun*) and the *Mahayana Awakening of Faith* (Chinese: *Da Cheng Chi Hsing Lun*). The *Ratnogotravibhaga-sastra*, more commonly known as the *Uttaratantra* in the Tibetan tradition, also teaches that the *tathagatagarbha* and the *dharmakaya* are in reality the same thing. This text clarifies that what makes them different is in terms of their modalities – when it is tainted by defilements it is called *tathagatagarbha,* and when it is free from taint it is the *dharmakaya*. In this state, it is radiant, pure and non-dual (Williams 1989, 110). Another text that teaches the doctrine of Buddha-nature is the *Ratnogotravibhaga-sastra*. This text is unique in that while it teaches that there is a Buddha-nature and that it is empty of defilements, it also emphasizes that the Buddha-nature is not empty of positive qualities. The Buddha-nature has its own "intrinsic existence" and short of calling it a "self," the text suggests that the aim of Buddhist practice is not nihilistic nothingness (Williams 1989, 112). In addition to the *Ratnogotravibhaga-sastra,* another important text that teaches the Buddha-nature is the *Mahayana Awakening of Faith*. The text teaches that although the mind is one, it can also have two different aspects, namely, the phenomenal aspect and the transcendental aspects. In other words, the text teaches that the mind has two aspects – "the

Mind as Suchness" which is Absolute Reality itself, and "the Mind as phenomena," which is the same Absolute Reality when it is obscured by defilements. While the use of the word "mind" may be interpreted as a "substratum," there is in fact no reason for thinking so, just as the Theravada would recognize the use of the term "citta" for mind without falling into the view that it is a "substratum," likewise, there is actually no scholarly reason for thinking that this text reads the "mind" as a Brahmanic substratum. The text teaches that defilements come from the differentiation of subject-object in phenomena, and that this arises through fundamental ignorance of one's true nature (Hakeda 1967; Williams 1989, 116). Thirdly, the *Buddha-Nature Treatise* is also an important text that teaches the doctrine of Buddha-nature. The treatise is usually attributed to Vasubandhu by tradition, although modern scholarship deems it to have been composed by its translator Paramartha. Thus, overall these texts teaches that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature and that it can exist in one of two states – in its original pristine condition it is called the *dharmakaya,* and in its defiled condition it is called *tathagatagarbha*.

Although the *sastras* teach that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature and presents systematic argumentation to prove this, some scholars try to prove otherwise. In *Buddha Nature* (1991), King admits that the *sastra* teaches the doctrine of Buddha-nature, but argues that the Buddha-nature is not a thing with "ontological" status and that it only refers to "action" or "Buddhist practice" (King 1991, 174 - 192). King quotes directly from the text to argue that the "essence" of the Buddha refers to the Buddha-nature, while the "functions" of the Buddha refers to his *wisdom, great compassion* and *meditation*. In saying that the "essence" of the Buddha's is *not separate* from the "functions" of the Buddha, it implies that the *Buddha-nature* is *not separate* from the *wisdom, great compassion and meditation* of the Buddha (Taisho 81 lb-c). Next, King goes on to subsume *wisdom, great compassion and meditation* under the category of "action." Thus, King claims that the Buddha-nature is none other than "action" (King 1991, 56). King states, "Thus, the "essence" of Buddha nature *is* its functions; that is, the actions constitutive of great compassion, meditation, and *pragma* are the essence of Buddha nature. Actions, then, or "functions" is the essence of Buddha nature, and the particular character of this action is soteriological: the salvation of oneself and others" (King 1991, 56). When we examine the quotation in question, however, we see that this interpretation is problematic, not least because it seems to commit a *non sequitur* argument of arguing from the inseparability of "essence" and "functions" to their identity, but also from the fact that it contradicts what the sutra themselves say. In the Abhidharma system of both the Mahayana and Theravada systems, we know that the mind (*citta)* and

the mental functions (*citta)* can arise together and are not separable, but this does not mean that they are *identical* with each other.

While scholars have tried to reinterpret the doctrine of Buddha-nature, others have straightforwardly denied that it is a "Buddhist" doctrine. The Critical School of Buddhism, for instance, represented by Matsumoto Shiro and Hakamaya Noriaki, argued that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "non-Buddhist" (Swanson 1997, 6). They argue that the idea of Buddha-nature conforms to a "substance ontology" that has more to do with the Hindu notion of "self' than with Buddhist teachings (Matsumoto 1997, 165-173). It is a form of a form of *dhatu-vada* or "monistic ontology" and the term *dhatu* in the term *buddhadhatu* originally refers to "a place to put something," a "foundation" or a "focus," with no sense of an original "cause" or "potential" for Buddhahood (Matsumoto, 169). Furthermore, since *dhatu-vada* is the very thing that is rejected by the Buddha's teachings of no-self *(anatman*) and the doctrine of dependent-origination *(pratltyasamutpada)* in the *Mahavagga,* hence, it cannot be regarded as "Buddhist" (Matsumoto, 165). Secondly, Matsumoto also argued that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "non-Buddhist" because it supposedly gives rise to social discrimination and justifies social oppression (Matsumoto 1997). Although the doctrine sounds positive and seems to give the impression of teaching equality, he notes that in practice it implies a form of monistic "locus," a "generative monism" or "foundational realism" which maintains the *status quo* because it suggests that good and evil, strong and weak, rich and poor, right and wrong, are fundamentally "the same." This monistic ontology does not give rise to any incentive to correct any injustice or challenge the *status quo* (Swanson 1997, 7). Likewise, Matsumoto argues that the doctrine of "original enlightenment" (*hongaku*) in Japan promotes strong ethnocentric sentiments that glorifies the unique Japanese essence. Although the doctrine suggests that that enlightenment is open to everyone regardless of age, sex, wealth, the doctrine in practice perpetuates the belief that everything is essentially the same, including moral distinctions and the notions of right and wrong. This suggests that there is no need to fight injustice at all, because it is as good as justice (Matsumoto 1997, 167-169). The singular structure of Buddha-nature thought, therefore, does not eliminate differences in spiritual lineage between people, but only serves to make absolute the social discrimination between people (Matsumoto 1997, 170-173). Therefore, Matsumoto Shiro argues, the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "non-Buddhist" because it does not merely submit to a form of monistic ontology but is also promotes social inequality.

While there are many ways of arguing that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "not Buddhist," most of these rely on the commonly held assumption that Mahayana Buddhism

was influenced by Brahmanism and that the influence was unidirectional. While this opinion has been perpetuated for generations, scholarly research has already shown that this view is becoming increasingly untenable. While it is true that Buddhism *as a religion* may have been influenced by Brahmanic beliefs, and scholarly and archeological findings have demonstrated this, it remains to be seen how Buddhism *as a philosophical system* has been shaped by Brahmanism. In fact, there is evidence that the Buddha-nature texts were composed much *earlier* than the Gaudapada period in the 7th century C.E. and that Sankara, the founder of Advaita Vedanta, was influenced himself by Mahayana Buddhist teachings. Just to mention two examples, which are more relevant for our purposes, Richard King's work in the mid-nineties, specifically his *Early Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism: The Mahayana Context of the Gaudapadiya-Karika* (1995), already gave a sample evidence that the philosophical system of Advaita Vedanta was influenced by Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. Recently, Warren Todd's *The Ethics of Sankara and Santideva: A Selfless Response to an Illusory World* (2013), a comparative study on the philosophical ideas of Sankara and Santideva, also seems to point in the same direction, although it seems to maintain a more conservative view that the two systems were not opposed to each another in terms of their views regarding the self and non-self (*atman/anatman)* (Todd 2013). It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on the relationship between Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, nevertheless, we can conclude that where we see similarities between Buddhist ideas and Brahmanic ideas, that it is not a simple and straightforward case of having Buddhism influenced by Brahmanism.

Matsumoto also launched a second argument in support of the idea that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "non-Buddhist." He says that it is a monistic ontology, which may lead to a justification for oppressive conditions. While we agree that monistic ontologies may lead to a legitimation for oppression, we are also hesitant in accepting the idea that it is "non-Buddhist." This is because it seems to maintain the untenable position that whichever idea is susceptible to political manipulation that it is therefore "non-Buddhist." We know that this assumption is untenable and does not hold true to our knowledge because even what is commonly regarded as Buddhist teaching can also be susceptible. Just to name one case study, specifically the one by Brian Victoria Daizen *Zen and War*, which demonstrated that Zen monks in Japan were susceptible to Imperialist Japanese propaganda to the extent of supporting the war effort. While the behavior of the Zen monks were abominable and should be condemned, and we could even argue that they were "non-Buddhist," this by no means suggests that the tenets that they hold on to are "non-Buddhist." We cannot jump to conclusions without an explicit study of their Zen teachings. Suffice it here to say that we cannot reason from the obvious "non-Buddhist" qualities of their behavior to the conclusion

that their teachings were "non-Buddhist." Likewise, even if we should take a second look at the history of the various Buddhist traditions, we might be surprised by the violence perpetuated by those who proclaim themselves Buddhist. However, this does not merit our ascertaining that their teachings are "non-Buddhist." Therefore, there is a need to review the claim by some scholars that the doctrine of Buddha- nature is "non-Buddhist" simply because it may have been misused for political ends. *Even if* this were the case, it calls for greater vigilance against misinterpretation and misuse of the teachings, and not a categorical denial of the teachings' potential for liberation.

The Theory of Subjectivity in Buddhism

Having analyzed the interpretations that say that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is "non-Buddhist" or that the Buddha-nature is non-existent, we must now consider whether it is a "Buddhist" teaching. This is an important question, at least for a Mahayana Buddhist because it pertains directly to the philosophical basis of his or her practice. However, it would be a difficult, if not, impossible task to do so within the limits of academic setting, as competing and sometimes contradictory evidence may seem to emerge. In this paper, we will do so indirectly by comparing the doctrine of Buddha-nature with some tenets in Theravada Buddhism. This by no means directly proves that the doctrine of Buddha-nature is a "Buddhist" teaching, but it at least indicates that the distance between the two traditions is not that great.

It is generally accepted that the doctrine of "non-self' is foundational to Theravada Buddhist philosophy. This doctrine is usually interpreted in a metaphysical sense, and not in an epistemic or phenomenological sense, as a denial of the existence of the self (*anatman*). Paul Williams, for instance, translates *anatman* as "not-Self ' and interprets the doctrine as a denial of the metaphysical self (Williams 2009, 125). The idea of that there is no self, however, is philosophically problematic not in the least, because it seems to go against the Buddha's explicit warning against falling into nihilism, but also from a philosophical standpoint: if there is no self then what undergoes karmic retribution? The examples found in the dialogues with King Milinda, for instance, about the candle flames moving from one candle to another does not say that there is nothing in the strong sense of the word. At the end of the day, the candle flame is indeed impermanent, but it is still something! This is why other scholars such as Steven Collins have offered us a more sophisticated account, in his *Selfless Persons* (1982), by presenting us with a picture in which how it is possible for there to be no permanent self, and yet, having the possibility of psychological continuity

(Collins 1982: 7, 10, 71). A reexamination of what the Buddhist texts themselves say shows that it is not so clear that a metaphysical self is denied in Buddhism (Harvey 1995: 7). The usual interpretation of the Buddha's teaching of the five aggregates *(khandhas)* is that there is no self. In opposition to the idea of a fixed, independently existing self, the Buddha asked if the self can be found in any one of the five constituents that make up the human personality, namely: material form, feeling, cognition, volition and discerning consciousness, and the point of this is that it cannot be found in any of the five constituents (Harvey 1995). One may object to this, saying that this denial of the self in the five aggregates does not preclude that a self cannot be found elsewhere. When we reexamine the teaching on the five aggregates, we read that they are separated from each other at the moment of death, but the last aggregate of "consciousness" is passed on to the next life. This means that we need to reconsider our usual assumption that the doctrine of "non-self" means that there is nothing, which continues to the next life. This is perhaps why Harvey interprets the doctrine of "non-self" in a heuristic sense, taught with the aim of having the students let go of things in this world, to see that they do not belong to his "self," and to enable them to stop clinging to things that appear to be permanent and pleasant but which are in reality impermanent and give rise to suffering. It IS not meant to give rise to the metaphysical view that there is "no self" (Harvey 1995, 45-46). Thus, it would be better to replace the translation of "no self" with the negation of the possessive term as "non-self." From this perspective, the Buddha was not teaching the nihilistic doctrine of nothingness but that permanence cannot be found in the five aggregates (Harvey 1995: 8).

The idea of a substratum was thought to be necessary in Buddhist philosophy because Buddhism is also committed to the view that the individual being undergoes repeated rebirth until they attain enlightenment. If there is no substratum to provide for a basis for continuity, then there is no basis for personal transformation or the religious life (Harvey 1990: 32-46). Of course, accepting the idea that there is a substratum does not mean that this substratum must be permanent. As some traditional scholars have said clearly, this "substratum" is like a torrent of river that flows endlessly. The accepted view that Buddhism teaches no self then would imply that it is committed to the inconsistent position of denying the self and yet maintaining that there must be some entity that can serve as a basis for continuity through different lives at the same time. Another reason for accepting the idea of a substratum consciousness is that, as mentioned, without such a postulate, Buddhist teachings would be regarded as a "nihilism" that promotes extinction. This is clearly not the intention of the Buddha's teachings as stated in the canonical texts, which advises against the belief in eternal

unchanging soul, just as we are also to avoid the nihilistic view that there is "no self." Thus, it is very likely that Buddhism holds that what we usually mistake for "self' is nothing more than a fictional identity that is used to label the coming together of these five factors, but this does not mean that there is nothing, which serves as a basis for the continuity of this fictitious self.

Thus, we find that in some canonical Buddhist texts, there are suggestions of that a "Great self' is assumed in Buddhist thought. The self is identified with one's consciousness or mind (*citta*) itself (Harvey, 1995: 54-55). One of the most important characteristics of this mind is that it is an experience of having broken down the barriers between one's own "self' and "others" in a way that resonates with the idea of a pro-individual or trans-personal manner (M I. 139). The religious aspirant here is to rely on himself so that he or she is not trapped by phenomenal and dogmatic images of thought, so that he can return to his primordial experience of being at one with others. Here, It may seem that we arrive at a somewhat paradoxical situation because the religious aspirant must separate from others and be at home with his own "self" *(citta)* as an island, before he can be truly be at one with others. Finally, he arrives at a condition in which he considers himself a man that is a not a thing that has overcome the boundaries between oneself and others (M III. 45) (Harvey 1995: 62).

In the commentarial tradition, this mind *(citta)* is considered to be "radiant" (Harvey 1995, 170). An important Theravadin commentator, Buddhaghosa, for instance, refers to this radiant mind as a sort of "naturally pure becoming-mind" (A. A. I. 61). This is quite near to the doctrine of Buddha-nature in Mahayana Buddhism. Furthermore, it also states that this consciousness is not simply a static thing but as a sort of "becomingness" (*bhavanga*) (A. A. I. 60) (Harvey 1995: 166, 170). Thus, the mind is considered a "becoming" that can change depending on what kind of thoughts it holds. The mind is considered radiant because it is said to possess the natural qualities of "loving-kindness" *(metta*) (A I. 8-10 and 10-11). This is only covered by defilements such as greed, hatred and delusion (M I 91, Harvey 1995 167). This is the basis for the Mahayana view of the Buddha-nature *(Buddha-dhatu)* and *alaya-vijnana* in Yogacara thought (Harvey 1995: 175).

This conception of the mind, whether it is called "Buddha-nature" or "*bhavanga*," is actually quite similar to the doctrine of the mind in Yogacara Buddhism. In the Yogacara tradition, for instance, human experience is explained in terms of the theory of eight consciousnesses. These are namely the five types of sensory consciousnesses, the sixth mind-consciousness which receives sensory impressions from the five senses, and the seventh "defiled" klista-manas consciousness, which divides the received experience into

subjective and objective poles, the eighth store-consciousness (Alaya-vijnana) which is a repository, which collects and gives rise to further impressions (Williams 1989, 97). This eighth consciousness serves as a "substratum" for the other consciousness and it has been theorized by Asanga and Vasubandhu, the founders of the Yogacara Buddhist tradition to explain karmic continuity between one self and another self. This substratum, however, is not the same thing as permanently existing "self' *(atman)* as taught in the non-Buddhist schools. Vasubandhu likens this "substratum" to a great torrent of water or a river, which changes from moment to moment, but which yet preserves a sort of identity as they share the same karmic energies. In this "substratum" is a collection and repository of maturing and reproducing "seeds" (*bija*), a torrent of tendencies and impressions (*vasanas*) that mutually affect and give rise to each other, forming an identity in the process (Williams 1989: 97). It is clear that this Alaya-vijnana refers to the Buddha- nature when it exists in a state of perturbation.

Understanding the concept of Buddha-nature from the perspective of the theory of Alaya-vijnana in Yogacara Buddhism, we come to see that there is much more in common with the concept of mind in Theravada Buddhism than we have previously thought. In the Theravada theory of mind, for instance, the mind is also analyzed in terms of six different types of sensory consciousnesses. We get a better glimpse of this when we turn to the well- known *Sutta Pitaka*, for instance, which makes many references to the first five consciousnesses together with the sixth consciousness. In the *Salayatana Vagga* section as found in the *Samyukta Nikaya*, for instance, the Buddha delimits our commitment to the "All" by teaching that there is no "All" apart from our six consciousnesses. He states: "What is the All? Simply the eye and forms, ear and sounds, nose and aromas, tongue and flavors, body and tactile sensations, intellect and ideas. This, monks, is called the All" *(Sabba-sutta)*. This passage makes it clear that early Buddhism recognizes different types of consciousnesses in order to facilitate meditative practices. This does not mean that the two systems are identical. Whether they depart from each other is that while Theravada Buddhist teachings seem to stop at the sixth consciousness, the Yogacara texts pushes further to assert that there is a seventh and a eighth consciousness. This, however, does not mean that the two theories are incompatible or contradictory to each other. Again, it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a comprehensive study of all the similarities between the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist theory of mind, however, suffice it here for us to say that a more nuanced reading of the Theravada theory of mind suggests that it is not entirely absent of language which refers to the mind in positive and affirmative terms. In an important passage

in the *Udana*, for instance, there is a passage in which the historical Buddha is recorded as saying that there must be something permanent underlying our experience for liberation to be possible. In this passage, the historical Buddha is recorded as having taught that: "There is, o Bhikkhus, an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed. Were there not, o Bhikkhus, this unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the bom, originated, created, formed. Since, o Bhikkhus, there is an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, therefore is there an escape from the born, originated, created, formed" (Conze, 2014). This passage clearly suggests that while the Buddha would deny that there is a "self' in our afflicted experiences, he would also advise us not to abandon the idea that there remains something, which is unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, etc. In summary, if our interpretation is correct, then Theravada Buddhism also recognizes a state of mind that is pure, shining and filled with positive qualities, although this is not the same as the Brahmanic "self." From the Mahayana perspective, this innately pure and shining mind is none other than the Buddha- nature.

Conclusion

The doctrine of Buddha-nature in Mahayana Buddhism has been a highly controversial teaching in modem Buddhist studies, not least because it seems to reintroduce the notion of "self" that has been rejected in early Buddhist teachings. However, this stems from a broader intellectual prejudice which started in the early nineteenth century, which holds that Mahayana are different from and opposed to Theravada and that they can have nothing in common. Another commonly held assumption is that Buddhist teachings are defined by "non-self' and "impermanence" and that anything that is contrary to this is "non-Buddhist." It is perhaps due to reasons like these, which motivated some scholars have offered various interpretations in order to "prove" that the Buddha-nature does not exist or is "non-Buddhist." However, as we have shown, even the Theravada teachings do contain teachings that describe the state of Buddhahood in positive terms, and that there is a region in which things are not "impermanent," "non-self" and "suffering." Hence, it is important at this stage of Buddhist studies to re-examine some of the assumptions held so dear for decades. In any case, it is our hope that this research suggests that the differences between the two traditions in terms of its understanding of the self or Buddha-nature, may have been over-exaggerated, and that there is more affinity between the Mahayana and the Theravada concept of mind than meets the eye.

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