

ON *DHARMAKĀYA* AS ULTIMATE REALITY  
PROLEGOMENON FOR A BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

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In his book *Christianity Meets Buddhism* Father Heinrich Dumoulin devotes a chapter to "Ultimate Reality and the Personal," and considers aspects of the Buddhist absolute in comparison with the Christian notion of God. The chapter is suggestive of concrete areas for further mutual understanding, and in this paper I should like to follow up on one of them by considering a key term in Buddhism used to designate ultimate reality, as a prolegomenon for further dialogue.

BACKGROUND OF THE TERM *DHARMAKĀYA*

In Pāli texts, the inseparable connection between the *dhamma* (Sk., *dharma*, the truth, teaching, way) and its expounder, the *Buddha* is the key for understanding the basic meaning of *dhammakāya*.

Therefore, O Vakkali, whosoever sees the *dhamma* sees me; whosoever sees me sees the *dhamma*. Indeed, O Vakkali, one seeing the *dhamma* sees me, one seeing me sees the *dhamma* (*Samyutta Nikāya* 3:120).

In reading Pāli texts one can discern the profound respect and esteem the disciples had for their Teacher, as well as their absolute allegiance to the truth he taught: the way to deliverance set out before them in the form of his very own person. These two poles of allegiance, the *Buddha* and the *dhamma*, remain corollaries throughout the history of Buddhism, and the question of priority

between the two will keep on arising as a decisive factor in understanding ultimate reality.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, the *dhamma* is handed down and revered as the way to deliverance, the expression of the ultimate truth of existence whose realization leads living beings from their state of suffering to the state of perfect peace (Pāli *nibbāna*, Sanskrit *nirvāṇa*).<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the profound esteem and reverence shown to the Teacher while he was alive turned into a distinct kind of veneration after his demise. This worshipful veneration issued in a tendency to divinize the image of the Buddha. For instance, the Buddha is portrayed as a super-being who has conquered death, as one who, through his enlightenment, has penetrated the truth of all existence and who therefore possesses a knowledge of all things. Because of this omniscience, he is even revered as superior to the gods—a veritable supreme being.<sup>3</sup>

The Buddha thus becomes an object of worship and veneration, just as the truth which he taught is worthy of absolute allegiance. Later on the *saṅgha*, or Community, dedicated fully to the pursuit of this truth became the third jewel in Buddhism's traditional objects of veneration.<sup>4</sup>

With the rise of the Mahāyāna the divinization of the Buddha was carried still further to new levels. In the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtra* (known popularly as the Lotus Sūtra), for example, the Buddha is portrayed as existing since time immemorial, casting his merciful glance upon all living beings suffering in the triple world, possessed of various powers, and employing all sorts of subtle means to deliver these beings from their state of suffering (Kern 1909).

Mahāyāna speculation likewise brought new levels of understanding to *dharma*. The *Prajñāpāramitā* or Wisdom Sūtras expound the truth (*dharma*) that underlies all things (*sarvadharmāṇāṃ dharmatā*) as emptiness (*sūnyatā*) (See Nakamura 1960). The delineation of the fundamental truth of Buddhism as *sūnyatā* is inevitably tied up with speculation concerning the essential nature of the Buddha: he comes to be identified with this fundamental truth itself, as one essentially possessed of the nature of emptiness

(Poussin 1912, pp. 448-449). Thus, the *real* Buddha is to be conceived as the embodiment of the truth (*dharmakāya*) characterized as emptiness, as distinct from the bodily form (*rūpa-kāya*) which he took in order to lead living beings to the way of deliverance. This distinction between the *dharmakāya* and the *rūpa-kāya* is the starting point for further speculation concerning the body of the Buddha (*buddha-kāya*) (Mitra 1888, p. 513; Conze, pp. 56-57). *Dharmakāya* thus becomes a term referring to the essential nature of Buddhahood, inseparable from the wisdom of enlightenment, and the qualities associated with enlightenment become predicated of the *dharmakāya*.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile the rise of popular faith movements venerating different Buddhas such as Amitābha or Amitāyus, Bhaiṣajyaguru, and others led to the question of the status of these Buddhas in the context of the essential nature of Buddhahood, resulting in the formulation of the teaching of the threefold Buddha-body (Habito 1978).

In tracing this development in the understanding of ultimate reality in Buddhism, the term *dharmakāya* serves as a valuable key. In this paper I will examine the term as it appears in the *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantrasāstra*, an important Indian Mahāyāna treatise expounding the "ultimate meaning of the Mahāyāna." This text had tremendous influence on the development of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism in their attempt to understand ultimate reality in Buddhism.

#### DHARMAKĀYA AS IMMANENT WISDOM IN ALL BEINGS

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* is a systematic on the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha which asserts that all living beings are possessed of an inherent Buddha-nature. In this exposition, the notion of *dharmakāya* plays a key role.

The universal body (*dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgata penetrates all living beings (Johnston ed., 26:8).

. . . all living beings without exception are penetrated by the universal body of the Tathāgata (Johnston ed., 70:16-17).

Indeed, there is not one being among the sphere of living beings who exists apart from the universal body of the Tathāgata, just as no physical form can exist apart from space (Johnston ed., 70:18-19).

In these passages, *dharmakāya* is presented as a principle of the unity of all living beings, enveloping them in the universal presence of the Tathāgata. In short, all living beings said to be worthy of the name Tathāgatagarbha, are inherently possessed of Buddha-nature, because they are penetrated by this universal body of the Tathāgata (Johnston ed., 26:1).

It is significant to note here that *dharmakāya* is used synonymously with *buddhajñāna* (the Buddha's wisdom, the wisdom of enlightenment). It is this wisdom of the Buddha that is first presented as penetrating all living beings. After that, the term *dharmakāya* is substituted (Johnston ed., 22:10-24:8). This teaching on the all-pervasiveness of the Buddha's wisdom comes from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, whose doctrine was in turn taken up by the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, a basic source of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (See Takasaki 1960).

The teaching on the universal reach of the Buddha's wisdom is of course a doctrine traceable to a much earlier stage of Buddhism. In Pāli texts, the Buddha is depicted as having penetrated the secrets of existence, and thus consequently as the knower of all things.<sup>6</sup> There is nothing which escapes the wisdom of the enlightened one. Linked with this omniscience attributed to the Buddha is the capacity to see all things as they are with his enlightened eyes (*buddhacakkhū*): the Buddha is depicted as possessed of a universal, all-seeing eye (*samantacakkhu*) (*Sutta Nipāta*: 1133).

In the Lotus Sūtra, this all-seeing eye of wisdom penetrates two levels. First, the Tathāgata in his wisdom sees the real nature of things, things as they really are (*yathābhūtam*): that "there is

no birth, no death, no being, no non-being. . . ." (Kern 1909, p. 318:8). This is the ultimate truth of all things penetrated by the wisdom of the Tathāgata, a truth which transcends the common sense of ordinary human beings and which can be expressed only by statements of negation.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the enlightened vision of the Tathāgata observes living beings as they suffer in the triple world, and in his compassion the desire to bring these beings out of their suffering comes forth. Here he makes use of all kinds of skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) first to make living beings aware of their miserable situation and then to prompt them to seek liberation from it. These skillful means likewise stem from his wisdom brought into practice in answering the particular needs of every living being (Kern 1909, p. 317).

The portrayal of the Buddha as casting his compassionate glance on all living beings in their suffering and making use of skillful means toward their liberation can likewise be seen in other Mahāyāna sūtras. This theme finds its way into the *Ratnagotravibhāga* by way of a quotation from the *Avataṃsaka*.

There is no one among the group of living beings in whose body the Wisdom of the Tathāgata does not penetrate at all. Nevertheless, [misled by] wrong conceptions, they cannot cognize the Buddha's wisdom residing in themselves. By removing these wrong conceptions, the Wisdom of Omniscience, self-born Wisdom, makes its appearance again without obstruction. . . .

Therefore, the Tathāgata, having observed the state of all the living beings in all the universal regions by his unobstructed Wisdom, with his marvelous perception, exclaims, "What a pity! These living beings cannot cognize properly the Wisdom of the Tathāgata, though it penetrates them. O, I shall try to withdraw all the obstacles made by wrong conceptions for the sake of these living beings through the teaching of [the Eightfold] Holy Path, in order that they would by themselves, by accepting the power of the Holy Path, cast off the entanglement of conceptions

and would recognize the Wisdom of the Tathāgata [within themselves] so they would obtain equality with the Tathāgata. . . . And when all the obstacles created by wrong conceptions are withdrawn, then this immeasurable Wisdom of the Tathāgata becomes useful to all the world (Johnston ed., 22:10-24:8; Takasaki 1966, pp. 189-192).

The teaching of the above passage is that the wisdom of the Tathāgata lies dormant in all living beings who fail to notice it, misled by wrong views and conceptions. It is the immanent presence of this dormant wisdom of the Enlightened One in all living beings that becomes the basis for the doctrine of the inherent Buddha-nature of all living beings as such.

As noted above, this immanent wisdom that is present in all living beings is also synonymous with *dharmakāya*. As long as it is covered by delusions and defilements and prevented from coming to the fore—that is, as long as it remains in the realm of birth and death—it is called *sattvadhātu*, the world of living beings. But as this wisdom begins to be activated and to engage in the practice that leads to enlightenment, it is called *bodhisattva*, being in search of enlightenment. Further, as this wisdom is released from all obstructions and emerges in its original purity, it is called the Tathāgata, the Perfectly Enlightened One (Johnston ed., 40:16-41:5).

#### DHARMAKĀYA AS BUDDHA IN THE PERFECTED STATE

After showing how the essence of Buddhahood encompasses all beings existing in the three stages of ordinary living being, bodhisattva, and Buddha, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* gives a rather detailed description of it as freed from all delusions and defilements and manifesting itself in full brilliance. The essence, thus come fully into its own and freed of all traces of defilements, is the Buddha's own mode of being; it is Buddhahood as the *dharmakāya* par excellence.

The essence of Buddhahood is described as having a twofold purity: the innate purity that belongs to it in essence, whereby any form of defilement is understood as foreign to itself; and the actual purity that is the consequence of being totally freed of such defilements in its realized state. It is possessed of a twofold wisdom: a non-discriminative, supramundane wisdom that sees the emptiness of all things, and a "worldly" wisdom that follows the first and is able to employ skillful means towards the liberation of living beings from their state of ignorance and suffering.

It is further characterized as exercising a twofold activity, activity directed to one's own benefit, and activity directed to and accomplishing the benefit of others. Through the former, one is liberated from all obstructions and their remnants, and thus comes to the attainment of the undefiled state of the *dharmakāya*; the latter is that activity that is explained as unceasing, yet also effortless, exercised on behalf of living beings by means of various manifestations for their teaching and deliverance.

This *dharmakāya* as Buddha in its perfected state is also described as inconceivable (*acintya*), eternal (*nitya*), and everlasting (*dhruva*), quiescent (*śiva*), constant (*śāśvata*), perfectly pacified (*praśānta*), all-pervading (*vyāpi*), and non-discriminating (*vikalpa* or *akalpa*).<sup>9</sup> Other characteristics of *dharmakāya* given are those powers and virtues and marks associated with the attainment of enlightenment as expounded in the various sūtras common to the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna traditions. These include the ten powers, the four forms of intrepidity, the eighteen exclusive properties of the Buddha, as well as the thirty-two marks of the Great Person.<sup>10</sup> Further, this state is described as in possession of Four Supreme Virtues: Perfect Purity, Absolute Selfhood, Perfect Bliss, and Eternity (*śubhātma-sukha-nityatva-guṇa-pāramitā*)—these are the exclusive characteristics of the perfected *dharmakāya*.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the mode of being of this Buddha in its perfected state is described as that of the threefold body (Johnston ed., 85:7-88:14).

## THE THREEFOLD BUDDHA-BODY DOCTRINE

The threefold Buddha-body doctrine crystallizes a long history of speculation surrounding the perfected state of the Tathāgata (see Habito 1978 for documentation). It distinguishes three levels in the mode of being of the Enlightened, the Body of Self-Nature (*svābhāvika-kāya*), the Body of Enjoyment (*saṃbhogika-kāya*), and the Apparitional Body (*nairmāṇika-kāya*).<sup>12</sup>

The *Ratnagotravibhāga* presents the threefold Buddha-body theory in connection with its explanation of the twofold activity of the *dharmakāya* in its perfected state:

Its activity is said to be the accomplishment of its own and that of others' benefit. Now what is the accomplishment of its own benefit and that of others? That which represents the attainment of the undefiled universal body because of liberation from obstructions due to defilements and knowable things and their potential forces is called the accomplishment for one's own benefit. That which comes after this and which manifests a twofold wondrous activity by means of the appearance and the teaching of the two bodies effortlessly as long as the world exists, is called the accomplishment of others' benefit (Johnston ed., 85:7-88:14).

Here the subject is no other than the Buddha himself in his ultimate and perfected state, that is, in a state of perfect purity, peace, quiescence, with all the conceivable (and inconceivable) attributes of *nirvāṇa*, as the previous sections of the treatise stress. And yet being in this quiescent state, it nevertheless finds itself in unceasing activity: the constant attainment of the undefiled *dharmakāya* which is activity for one's own benefit (*sva-artha*), and the constant and unceasing presentation of appearances and teachings guiding seekers after wisdom (*bodhisattvas*) and all living beings towards liberation from their defilements and delusions into the perfected state of the Buddha himself, which is activity for the benefit of others (*para-artha*).



The first kind of activity is proper to the first body in the attainment of self-realization: the Body of Self-Nature. The second kind of activity is the property of two other bodies, the Body of Enjoyment which makes its appearance in the different Buddha-realms expounding the *dharma* on behalf of the bodhisattvas who are nearing the perfection of their self-realization, and the Apparitional Body which appears in the world of living beings in many forms, notably that of Gautama Śākyamuni, expounding the teaching that would lead to their deliverance (Johnston ed., 97:9-14).

The distinction of the three bodies in the mode of being of the perfected Buddha is based on the twofold activity thus described, which in turn correspond to the basic elements of perfected Buddhahood: Wisdom and Compassion. The first body is further described as having the five characteristics of immutability, indivisibility, non-duality, liberation from the threefold obstructions of defilement, ignorance, and distraction, and radiant purity (Johnston ed., 86:18-87:2). The second is presented both as enjoying the fruit as well as manifesting the *dharma*, working for the sake of others, as a natural outflow of the pure compassion of the Buddha.<sup>13</sup> The third is described as having undergone various rebirths culminating in that of Gautama Śākyamuni, who, having attained enlightenment, set the *dharma*-wheel in motion and labored for the sake of living beings through various kinds of skillful means (Johnston ed., 87:15-88:6).

In the *Ratnagotravibhāga* the threefold Buddha-body appears simply as a description of the mode of being of the *one* Buddha in perfected state, called *Tathāgata-dharmakāya*, a mode of being which, although is in perfect quiescence (*nirvāṇa*), is nevertheless engaged in unceasing activity for the realization of Wisdom for itself and the deliverance of others as the outflow of this Wisdom into Compassion. The doctrine of the threefold body of the Buddha, then, is a way of presenting the unceasing activity and dynamic nature of the *dharmakāya*.

## SUMMARY: DHARMAKĀYA AS ULTIMATE REALITY

Different periods in the history of Buddhist thought can be characterized by particular formulations of ultimate reality and the way to its attainment. It must be remembered that Buddhism began as a concrete and practical way to deliverance, a way which set speculation aside as a hindrance to the way.<sup>14</sup> The anti-metaphysical stance of Gautama, however, is not to be taken as an anti-intellectual refusal to pursue ultimate questions. It is rather a concrete stance stressing practice towards an ultimate goal: deliverance from the state of suffering. The pursuit of questions regarding this ultimate goal is therefore not a betrayal of this original stance, but a follow-up aimed at clarifying the nature of that goal and the way that leads to it.

Thus the pursuit of the meaning of ultimate reality in Buddhism is to be seen as a corollary task in discerning the way. In this connection, we may note that the pursuit of the *meaning of nirvāṇa*, for example, is not unrelated to the pursuit of *nirvāṇa* itself, since it throws light on the practice leading toward it (see Welbon 1968).<sup>15</sup> But, speculative endeavors are always liable to become an end in themselves, and to make us content in our own closed world of ideas and concepts, cut off from life. This is the danger that Gautama himself warned against.

With this in mind, let us attempt to outline the features of Buddhist ultimate reality as manifested in the term *dharmakāya*.<sup>16</sup> We must of course situate this term in the context of other key terms previous to it that likewise played an important role in delineating ultimate reality. Examples of such include *nirvāṇa*, which we just mentioned above, as well as *śūnyatā*, *dharmatā*, *buddhadhātu*, among others (Takasaki 1966b). Though intimately connected to one another, each of these terms has its own particular content which merits attention in its own right.

As for *dharmakāya*, we have seen how the term arose with a view to the inseparable link between the *dharma*, understood as the teaching of the way to deliverance, and the person of its expounder, the Buddha, who realized this *dharma* in his own total, bodily existence. The manifold nuances of *dharmakāya* grew out of

this link in the process of development of various ways of understanding *dharma* and the Buddha. The *Ratnagotravibhāga* steps in here to draw these various developments together and organize them into a systematized doctrine, setting the *Tathāgata-dharmakāya* at the center.

This *dharmakāya* is first of all immanent in all living beings, penetrating all living beings even though they may not be aware of it. It is latent in all, dormant and waiting to be aroused and activated. It is this immanent presence that establishes the fact that all living beings are possessed of Buddha-nature, that all are children of the Tathāgata. As this immanent presence is aroused and begins to walk the way towards deliverance, it enters the stage of the bodhisattva or seeker after wisdom. What is sought is simply one's very own self-nature as wisdom, and the way consists in the removal of obstructions and hindrances which prevent this original self-nature from coming out into full light.<sup>17</sup>

Once fully realized, the *dharmakāya* is revealed in splendor as Wisdom and Compassion in the quiescence of *nirvāṇa* and yet manifests unceasing activity aimed at self-realization and the liberation of others. This perfected state is characterized by excellent powers and qualities that can only be called supra-mundane, transcendent, going beyond finite human conceptions.<sup>18</sup>

There is thus an inclusive sense of the term *dharmakāya* that includes all living beings—bodhisattvas as well as the perfected Buddha—as the immanent basis or substratum of these three levels of being: "The realm of living beings is no different from the *dharma-kāya*, for the realm of living beings is no other than the *dharmakāya*, and the *dharmakāya* is no other than the realm of living beings. These are non-dual in meaning, and are different merely in name" (Johnston ed., 41:15-17). But there is also the exclusive sense of the term, referring to the perfected state of Buddhahood itself, a state of having attained liberation from all kinds of defilements in the full realization of innate Wisdom. This state is in full possession of the four Supreme Virtues of Purity, Selfhood, Bliss, and Eternity, and at the same time is moved by compassion to engage itself in unceasing activity for the deliverance of all living beings.

Based on the above, we could go on to argue that the inclusive sense of the term points to a monistic principle immanent in all living beings which grounds the meaning of their existence and points to its ultimate implications (the full realization of this nature of Buddhahood); and that the exclusive sense points to a transcendent realm not yet cut off from the concrete reality of living beings, perfectly at peace and yet constantly engaged in the dynamic activity of Wisdom and Compassion, thus making it worthy of worship and veneration. Such a transcendent realm is itself presented as the ultimate goal of all living beings in their existence, in addition to being presented as an object of religious veneration and supplication. Hymns of veneration usually found prefacing the various Mahāyāna sūtras and treatises are thus understood as addressed to this Ultimate Reality which is the *Tathāgata-dharmakāya*.<sup>20</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: TOWARD DIALOGUE

The notion of *dharmakāya* as denoting ultimate reality in Buddhism is indeed a rich and pregnant one. We have only touched the surface in giving a cursory outline of its main features. The task of further tracing its origins in the history of Buddhist religious consciousness and inquiring into its subsequent development still remains before us.

We have noted the inclusive sense of the term as immanent wisdom that grounds the existence of all living beings,<sup>21</sup> and the exclusive sense as Buddha in a perfected state placed in a transcendental realm but yet active in working for the deliverance of all beings. On the one hand, to give priority to the former inclusive sense is to be led to a religious attitude that starts from a questioning of the ground of one's existence and seeks to penetrate this ground through religious discipline and meditative practice. Here one takes as one's guide the basic Buddhist doctrines of the Fourfold Truth, the Eightfold Path, the Doctrine of Emptiness, and so forth. Such is the religious attitude of a *bodhi-sattva*, a "seeker after Enlightenment" who, in the course of a

search inspired by the teaching (*dharma*) of the Enlightened, discovers experientially an actual oneness with all living beings. This discovery, which is the basis of wisdom, then flows naturally over into compassion for all beings, leading one to partake in their suffering and to commit oneself to the service of their deliverance from suffering. The history of Buddhism is decorated with examples of individuals who have realized this bodhisattva ideal in their lives.

On the other hand, to place priority on the latter, exclusive sense of *dharmakāya* as ultimate reality is to enter into a religious attitude characterized by worshipful veneration, looking upon the Wise and Compassionate One as transcending history throughout the ages, acting in various marvelous ways, and assuming various forms for the deliverance of beings from their suffering. Such is the religious attitude, for example, of those who follow the way of Pure Land Buddhism or other sects that set up a particular Buddha as a center of worship and veneration.

These two modes of religious attitude are not mutually exclusive, and in fact can coexist in the same individual, yet even here, the emphasis will fall primarily on one or the other, depending on which aspect of ultimate reality comes to the fore.

It is thus possible to distinguish two modes of religious attitude in Buddhism, depending on which aspect of ultimate reality is given emphasis. It would be another thing, however, to equate the former with an impersonal, and the latter with a personal relationship to the Ultimate. For one, the former sense stressing immanent wisdom is not exactly "impersonal" precisely because wisdom is involved. Even though it remains latent in living beings, it is the very same wisdom that is activated and comes to perfection in the Buddha. Secondly, the latter is not exactly equivalent to the worship of a Personal Being that stands apart from the self as an "other," since the Perfected Buddha is also understood as a coming to fruition of what is latent in one's own self. In other words, the categories of the personal and the impersonal must be taken in a very tenuous sense when we try to understand the nature of ultimate reality in Buddhism.

The same must be said regarding the categories of "theism," "atheism," and "non-theism." Even while calling forth worshipful veneration, Buddhist ultimate reality is not exactly reducible to a "theistic" viewpoint, in that the notion of absolute dependence of creature upon Creator simply does not apply. Yet it is neither simply atheistic or non-theistic, since it places importance on transcendence, at the same time as it stresses immanence in calling forth worship and veneration.

What comes to us most clearly in our examination of *dharmakāya* as ultimate reality in Buddhism is that this notion, or any other Buddhist notion for that matter, must be grasped from within the thought-context and cultural milieu, as well as from the experiential presuppositions in terms of which it originated and developed. In the case of *dharmakāya*, this means that attention must be prior to the structural framework and background of the Buddhist tradition itself. To do otherwise, simply to take one or the other aspect of the notion and attempt to apply categories from a different, philosophical-religious tradition, such as that of Western Judaism and Christianity, and then to judge the notion on the basis of these categories—is to distort our subject matter or rip it out piece by piece from the living context within which it functions.

The above examination leads us to a conclusion that cannot be stressed strongly enough: fruitful religious dialogue requires first of all a willingness and an openness to see things from the standpoint of the other, to accept the other as a partner worthy of respect, and not to try to mold the other into preconceived images or categories. Religious dialogue is not an exercise in comparative doctrinal history, but an invitation to enter into a new world, a world where our concepts and preconceived categories must fall away and die in order to bear new fruit.

If we are to take Buddhism and Christianity not as mere relics of the past or as sets of fixed and determined religious doctrines and ideas, but rather as *living* traditions that grow and develop as their adherents meet and respond to new situations while yet remaining faithful to their own past, then an encounter between the two will inevitably lead to new and deeper ways of under-

standing and expressing what is proper to each as contact between the two deepens into a tradition in its own right.

#### NOTES

1. For an incisive account of the two trends in the history of Buddhism with regard to the attitude towards ultimate reality, see the articles of Tamura mentioned in the references below.
2. Studies on the richness of the implications of the term *dharma* abound, far too numerous to list here. For a concise summary on the development of understanding concerning *dharma*, see Tamaki 1973.
3. Nakamura 1969, pp. 485-525, gives an account of the various stages in the development of views on the Buddha after his demise, taking as a clue the various appellations accorded him.
4. Nakamura 1955, pp. 31-78, gives examples of textual evidence which indicate that *Buddha* and *Dhamma* comprised a twofold object of veneration at an earlier stage prior to the popularization of the Triple Veneration Formula, i.e., with *Samgha* as the third term.
5. On these *āveṇikā-buddha-dharmāḥ*, qualities peculiar to the Buddha, qualities linked with enlightenment, predicated of the *dharmakāya*, which are inseparably linked with the wisdom of the *Tathāgata*, see Takasaki 1954 and Habito 1977.
6. See for example *Dīgha Nikāya* III, Ch. 33. Also, *Sutta Nipāta* 211, 947, etc.; *Majjhima Nikāya* I, 111.
7. The *Mūlamadhyamakakārika* begins with an eightfold negation which enshrines this "negative way" to ultimate reality in Buddhism.
8. Based on a quotation from the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* on the three levels of existence of *dharmakāya*. See T. 16:467b.
9. The *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* devotes a whole chapter on the characteristics of the Buddha in the perfected state, called the *Tathāgata dharmakāya*, and we are only giving the most salient points in a very cursory way here. See Johnston, pp. 80-85. For a treatment based on the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* and compared with other Mahāyāna treatises, see Takasaki 1961.
10. The *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* relies on traditional teaching for its explanation of the properties of the Buddha. It appears to derive much from the *Dhāranīśvararājasūtra* (T. 13:1-28 and

409-454 as well as from the *Ratnadārikāsūtra* (T. 13:281-40; and 452-473) for its description of the properties and distinguishing marks of the Buddha. See Takasaki 1974, pp. 639-672 and 676-681.

11. "Exclusive" in the sense that the possession of these Supreme Virtues distinguishes the *Tathāgata-dharmakāya* from other beings who do not so possess them, including the *arhat*, the *pratyekabuddha*, and the *bodhisattva*. See *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, Johnston ed., 34:4-5.
12. These three bodies belong to one comprehensive *Tathāgata-dharmakāya*. In some treatises the first of the three is called *dharmakāya* also, and this latter usage seems to have prevailed. The account given by the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* uses the term to refer exclusively to the first body, and with a distinctly different nuance from the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* usage. See Habito 1977b.
13. There is a difficulty in interpretation regarding the second body. The *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* makes it clear at one point that the first body acts for self-benefit and the other two for the benefit of others, the distinction between the latter two being that the second or *sāmbhogika-kāya* appears in the world of bodhisattvas (*jina-maṇḍala*) while the third or *nairmāṇika-kāya* appears in the world of ordinary living beings (*loka*). Yet, the very term *sāmbhogika* cannot exclude self-benefit. In *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* 91:17-18, the three bodies are likened to the sky or atmosphere, the moon, and the image of the moon in the water, respectively, and thus the two levels of appearance of the latter two bodies, with appearance in both cases referring chiefly to the benefit of others. We can note a difference in this *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* treatment with that of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, where the second body is explained as exercising the function of self-benefit, with the third that of the benefit of others. Here the first body is equated with the pure, impersonal truth-realm (*dharmadhātu*), which is the basis or substratum (*āśraya*) of the other two.
14. Recall the noted parable of the poisoned arrow, whereby speculation about who shot the arrow, what caste he belongs to, what color his skin is, what kind of bow he used, etc., comes *after* the primary task of life-and-death, namely of first removing the arrow from one's body lest one die in the meantime.



15. See also the review of this book in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (1971) 1:396-403, for one study on the meaning of *nirvāṇa*.
16. For studies on ultimate reality or the "Absolute" in Buddhism, see de Jong 1972; Ruegg 1971; Takasaki 1961; and Tamaki 1965.
17. In Zen, for example, to "see into one's own nature" is equivalent to realizing Buddhahood. This basic presupposition of Zen practice can be understood in the context of this meaning of *dharmakāya*, i.e., as immanent wisdom.
18. This perfected state of the *Tathāgata-dharmakāya* is characterized as "beyond human conceptions" or "inconceivable" (*acintya*), because of its inexpressibility (*avākyavatva*), because it contains the highest truth (*paramārthasaṃgraha*), because it surpasses the realm of mere rational investigation (*atarka-bhūmi*), and because it is beyond comparison (*upamātivṛtti*). As transcending the dualistic realm of *saṃsaranirvāṇa*, it is a realm which is inconceivable even to human beings of highest attainment. See *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, Johnston ed., 89:18-90:13.
19. A quotation from the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa*. See T. 16:467b.
20. The worshipful attitude toward the *Tathāgata-dharmakāya* is revealed in a significant passage in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* itself in the fifth chapter, wherein "the Lord *Amitāyus*, endowed with infinite light" (*Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, Johnston ed., 119:7) is invoked. Here *Amitāyus* is the particularized name for the Buddha in the perfected stage, also hailed and revered in the introductory section of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* (Johnston 7:9-12).
21. One must note, however, that the Indian world-view considered the "universe of beings" in terms of the six spheres of living beings, the hell-dwellers, ghosts, beasts, demons, human beings, and heavenly dwellers. To these six the Buddhist view adds the realms of the arhat, the pratyekabuddha, the bodhisattva, and the Buddha, to make ten spheres. These are the beings pervaded by the "universal presence" of the immanent wisdom of the Buddha. The question of whether plants, and non-living beings are also included in this universal presence came to be a topic of lively discussion in China and Japan.

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