Reshaping Timelessness: Paradigm Shifts in the Interpretation of Buddhist Meditation

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Meditation is a timeless practice and experience. This is what gurus,  
pundits, and enthusiasts have been telling us for decades.¹ And our  
Zeitgeist — so heavily in-formed by New Age presuppositions — has fallen  
in love with the appraisal. We have granted meditation a privileged locus in  
our mental landscape viewing it as a ‘singularity’ where (trans-)  
psychological forces work in different, even mysterious, ways. Deep  
contemplative experiences and the philosophical conclusions which they  
yield are beyond history. Or are they?...

This paper irreverently argues for a different view. Meditation is, I  
believe, as historical and as prone to interpretative fiddling as any other  
human act and product. How do I know it? I’m not a meditation enthusiast,  
let alone a guru or a pundit, but I have a better source of knowledge: the  
Buddhist sources themselves, though admittedly not in a straightforward  
manner. In spite of the much-favoured strategy of preaching ad hominem,  
epitomised by the ideal of skilful means (upāya), as well as of the  
ineclusivistic approach seen in numerous Buddhist sources, it cannot be  
denied that there are countless statements about the Teaching, practice  
included, made sub specie aeternitatis.²

¹ See, for instance, ‘[…] the yogic experience of a timeless, utterly detached,  
transic peace was an important ingredient and determinant of the Buddhist  
conception of Nibbāna; that is, it is an experience-produced doctrine’ (King 1992,  
VII). Also cf. the title of Sayadaw U Pandita’s book: Timeless Wisdom: Teachings on  
the Satiţpaththana Vipassana Meditation Practice.
So if it’s not the primary sources per se which deny the changeless, timeless nature of meditation, how do I know it? To be more precise, my conclusions are the result of an analysis based upon a philologico-historical methodology and historicist premises. Does such an analysis ensure a more ‘objective’ understanding of the subject? Since I adopt it, I obviously believe so. Whoops! This already smells of circular judgement…. The problem of proof is beyond the scope of this paper, but I shall frankly admit that to a (hopefully tolerable) degree, circularity is present in this as in many (most?) other judgements. I also admit that the philologico-historical methodology cannot ensure the same objectivity as mathematical truths, not even guarantee the uniformity of conclusions. My findings will therefore be unavoidably contaminated by a dose a subjectivity. Hopefully, it is not such as large as the dose of subjectivity in judgements relying on personal experience, feelings, unchecked hearsay, and (worst!) wishful thinking.

This said, what does my philologico-historical approach reveal? Similarly named or described contemplative techniques and states are not necessarily construed and evaluated identically. Different texts confront us with different definitions, interpretations, even technical advice for what superficially appear to be similar practices. From a historicist perspective, this hardly comes as a surprise. Texts, sacred or profane, are authored and redacted by flesh-and-blood human beings. No matter how skilled in meditation, how versed in contemplative psychology they may have been, these people lived and expressed their conclusions under the constraints of their age (as actually everyone else, including scientists, empirical

\[2 \text{ For more details, see Addendum I.}\]

\[3 \text{ To some, if not many, readers, this may seem a matter a fact, but it is quite difficult to prove it independently of empiric ‘common-sense’ criteria. This is not, however, the place to engage in a philosophical discussion on the validity of methodological presuppositions.}\]
philosophers, and historians).

When the divergences in the theory and praxis of meditation are wide enough, we can speak of paradigm shifts. In this paper, I identify and focus on four such paradigm shifts in the history of Yogācāra Buddhism.\(^4\) I shall call them (1) ‘subsumption’, (2) ‘inversion’, (3) ‘augmentation’, and (4) ‘substitution’.

1. Subsumption

Imagine for a moment you are a meditation devotee somewhere in Northern India around the middle of the 3\(^{rd}\) century C.E. As luck (or rather karma) would have it, you will encounter a Buddhist contemplative thoroughly versed in spiritual cultivation (yoginā yogajñena). After being enquired about your motivation and judged to be well beyond the regular monastic dabbler, you will be encouraged to focus on the benefits of the meditative training. ‘Very well, good Sir! (sadhu, sādhu, bhadramukha)’, the master will say, ‘whilst [ordinary people] are shackled to passion, aversion, and bewilderment, thou wishest to break these [very] shackles’.

Our kind-hearted expert will thereupon instruct you on five points (pañcasu sthānesu), to wit, guarding and accumulating the requisites necessary for meditation (samādhisambhārarakṣopacaya), solitude (pṛṇāvivekya), mental focusing (cittaikāgratā), purification from hindrances (āvaranaviśuddhi), and cultivation of contemplation (manaskārabhāvanā). The last point includes five basic techniques, i.e. meditating upon the impure (aśubhā), friendliness (maitrī), dependent origination (idampraty-ayatāpratityasamutpāda), analysis of elements (dhātuprabheda), and

\(^4\) Such patterns of re-interpretation are not limited to Yogācāra in particular or Buddhism in general. They can be found in many, if not most, spiritual traditions. Again, this is not the place to attempt a comparative survey.
mindfulness of breathing (anāpānasamrti). The master will assign you one of these methods depending on the defilement dominating your psychological profile. To boost your training, he may also initiate you into practice of the four absorptions (dhyāna) and four immaterial attainments (ārūpyasamā- patti).

Many familiar with early Yogācāra sources will have recognised that this fictional scenario is based upon the 3rd century treatise Śrāvakabhūmi. And in one form or another, most of the techniques above are traceable to canonical sources and later became adopted as basic meditative recipes in many Buddhist traditions. Details aside, we can assume that this must have been how a neophyte was trained in the early ascetic communities.

Kindly indulge me a little longer with our imaginary Dharma trip and try to picture yourself putting every drop of energy into the meditative methods you learned under the Śrāvakabhūmi master. And do it year after year in the wilderness, far away from the madness of civilisation.

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5 For the first paragraph of this section, I have relied on ŚR Bh-TG #22, 10-12. Much of my presentation cum partial translation comes from the following passage: evam ca ṁna ayacitena yogiṇa yogajitena sa adikarmikas tatprathamakarmiko yogamanasikāre prayuktukāmah śālduśaśalṣṇair vacanapathaiḥ samuttejasayitavyah samprahārasyayitavyah prahāne cānuṣamso varṇayitavyah. “sādhu, sādhu, bhadra- mukha, […] rāgadvēsamohanigadabandhanāyām(1) bandhanānī chettukāmāh.” (ŚR Bh-TG #22, 12.3-10)

(1) ŚR Bh-TG #22 reads “bandhitāyām. I prefer the ŚR Bh-MS reading. Skt. ‘bandhita’ has a causative meaning (see MW s.v.) which does not make sense here. (I am grateful for this suggestion to Professor Emeritus Dr. Lambert Schmithausen.)

The phrase ‘[the master] instructs [the novice] on five points’ (pañcasu sthānesu vinayate) occurs at id. 28.4.

The exposition of these points forms the content of the rest of Yogasthāna III.

The practice of the absorptions and attainments is detailed in the Laukikāmārgā Chapter of Yogasthāna IV (for edition, translation, and study, see Deleanu 2006).

6 For more details, see Addendum II.
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(monasteries, included...). One day you will decide to check out the results of your arduous training and return to the benevolent Śrāvakabhūmi master. But alack, much to your chagrin, impermanence took its toll and he has passed away. The only meditation studio (as well as the latest rage) in the ascetic community follows a new ‘curriculum’: the Bodhisattvabhūmi.\(^7\)

Since it looks pretty close to what you have been practising, you decide to give it a go.

But your first meditation session will be a bombshell! You’ll be stunned to learn that you got it wrong! The only consolation may be that you’re not the first one. Generation after generation of contemplatives who have followed the traditional paradigm have committed the same error. But don’t worry! The Bodhisattvabhūmi master will teach you how to fix the mistake:

The path of (preliminary) practice\(^8\) shall be correctly followed in order to eliminate this [i.e. ideation (samjñā)]. Through thine understanding (buddhi) which carefully (su\(^8\)) investigates (vicārita\(^8\)) all objects of knowledge and by [keeping in mind] the ideation that all

\(^7\) Both Śrāvakabhūmi and Bodhisattvabhūmi are now included in the encyclopaedic Yogācārabhūmi. For details concerning formation and dating, see Deleanu 2006, 147–247.

\(^8\) Or simply: ‘path of practice’. In many contexts, prayoga seems to be virtually identical with yoga or ‘practice’. The Bodhisattvabhūmi itself (BoBh-W 81.18–21; BoBh-D 58.19–21) defines prayoga in general terms, i.e. continuous and arduous practice in various types of training (sikhṣapadesa). But we also know that in a more technical sense, typical of Abhidharma scholastics, prayogamārga is construed as ‘path of preliminary practice’ (e.g. AKBh 320.14). Such a use must have also been known to the Bodhisattvabhūmi authors. Actually, here we have the compound prayogamārga rather than prayoga. All things considered, it is hard to decide whether our passage employs prayogamārga as a generic term for ‘method of meditative training’ or in its specialised sense of ‘preliminary phase of practice’. 

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[other] ideations of phenomena (dharma) are adventitious,³ thou shalt thus repeatedly remove all ideations [conducive to] the proliferation (praṇaṇa) of any phenomena whatsoever⁴ and shalt consistently dwell on the thing [-in-itself] by means of a non-conceptualising (nirvikalpa) mental state which functions by grasping only the object without characteristics (nirnimitta). Thou shalt thus attain [a state of] mental focus [which stems] from the lineage of the pure contemplation of the Tathāgata Supreme Cognition. Thou shalt not relinquish (mā riṇciṣyaṇi) this mental orientation (manasikāra) [even] when practising meditation upon the impure. [Likewise.] thou shalt not relinquish this very mental orientation [even] when practising meditation upon friendliness, dependent origination, analysis of elements, mindfulness of breathing, the first absorption [and so on] up to the station of neither ideation nor non-ideation [as well as] the bodhisattva’s countless meditations, supernatural faculties, contemplations, and attainments.¹¹

(tasyā vibhāya prayogamārgah samyak parigṛhito bhaviṣyaṭi. sa tvam evam sarvajñeyasuvicāritayā buddhyā sarvadharmasamjñāsv āgamtukasamjñāyā sarvadharmeṣu sarvapraṇaṇasamjñām apaniyāpaniya nirvikalpeṇa cetāṣā nirnimittenārthamātragrahaṇapraṇavṛttanāśmin vastuni bahulaṁ vihara. evam

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³ Literally, 'by the ideation of adventitious[ness] directed at the ideations of all phenomena'.
⁴ Literally, '[directed] at all phenomena'.
¹² BoBh-D adds evam te after buddhyā.
¹³ BoBh-D reads nirvikāreṇa. See, however, Tibetan rendering rnam par mi rtoogs pa’i sems (D Wi 203b2) and Chinese translation 無分別 ［…］ 之心 (T 30.572a6).
¹⁴ Wogihara reads ‘tasmin’. Tibetan reads de (D Wi 203b3) while Chinese renders 此 (T 30.572a7). Both Wogihara and Dutt readings are possible, but I prefer the latter.
te tathāgatajñānaviśuddhisamādhiḥgotrāc\textsuperscript{15} cittasyaikāgratā\textsuperscript{16} pratilabdha bhaveṣyati. sa tvam saced aṣubhāṃ manasikaroṣi, etam\textsuperscript{17} manasikāram mā riṇicīṣyasi. sacen maitrīm idampratayatāpratītyasamutpādaṁ dhātuprabhedam ānāpānasmitiṁ prathamam dhyāṇam vistareṇa yāvan naïvasamjñānā- samjñāyatanam\textsuperscript{18} apramāṇabodhisattvadhyānābhijñāsamādhisamāpattir manasikaroṣi, etam eva manasikāram mā riṇicīṣyasi.\textsuperscript{19}

And if you think this is a brand-new development, the Bodhisattvabhūmi master will stun you again. This — he will stress — is a timeless recipe set

\textsuperscript{15}BoBh-W: “jñānā”.

\textsuperscript{16}Ch. 無倒心一境性 suggests * aviparitā cittasyaikāgratā. Tib. reads together with the Skt., i.e. without * aviparitā.

\textsuperscript{17}Both Nanjio and Dutt read: ena. I suggest the emendation above with some hesitations. True, if we adopt strict Pāṇinian rules, etam is the correct reading. Neither Vedic Skt. nor Pāṇinīn Skt. admit of ena at the beginning of a sentence (see Wackernagel and Debrunner [1954] 1987, Vol. III, 523–526; PW I 1097–8, s.v.; MW 232, s.v.; Speijer [1886] 1988, 205; Gotō 2013, 71), but in the less strict varieties of the language, such as Epic Skt. (‘un language à pureté amoindrie, ouvert aux facilités qui entraîne l’exercise d’un idiom populaire’, Renou 1956, 104), the restriction can be ignored, albeit often for metrical reasons (as Hopkins said, ‘metre surpasses grammar’) – see Oberlies 2003, 109. And in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (at least, some texts: e.g. Aṣṭa-pp), the rule no longer holds good (Edgerton [1953] 1985, Vol. I, 117, §§ 21.48–49). If the BoBh occurrence discussed is a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit vestige (or lowbrow/non-Śiṣṭa Sanskrit), then the emendation is not necessary. The issue is, however, further complicated by the fact that at the end of the passage above, we see etam eva manasikāram, which in spite of its different syntactic structure, pleads for the emendation to etam. A definitive conclusion will be possible only after a thorough investigation into the use of the pronoun in the manuscript witnesses of the BoBh in particular and Buddhist literature (especially full- and quasi-Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit) in general.

\textsuperscript{18}BoBh-D: *samjñāyatanam.

\textsuperscript{19}BoBh-W 396.12–25; BoBh-D 273.15–24. For the Tibetan translation of the passage, see D Wi 203b2–5. Xuanzang’s 玄奘 Chinese rendering is found at T 30.572a3–12.
forth by the past, present, and future Tathāgatas for the benefit of the
novice bodhisattva (bodhisattvam ādikarmikam).

20 As for your Śrāvakayāna past, don’t fret about it! ‘Even the followers of the Disciples’ Vehicle
who practise by means of this mental orientation will quickly become more
proficient in supernatural faculties and reach the realisation of [the essence of]
phenomena’ (śrāvako ’pi cānena manaskārena prayujyamanah kṣip-
rābhijnataraḥ syād dharmābhīsamayāya [...]).

21 From a historicist perspective — pace the Bodhisattvabhumi author(s)
— we have here a paradigm shift in the interpretation as well as practice of
meditation. Traditional techniques become subsumed under a new model
of praxis tailored to suit a new philosophical agenda. Meditating on the
impure, etc. is not altered in its main framework, let alone discarded. But all
perceptive data yielded by these traditional exercises are now governed by
a higher perceptive filter categorising them as ‘adventitious’ and prodding
cognition into a ‘non-conceptual mental state’ which gives access to the
thing-in-itself (vastumātra), the epistemic and soteriologic ideal of the
Bodhisattvabhumi.

22

2. Inversion

Another interpretative strategy is the reversed evaluation of what appear

20 See BoBh-W 397.2–5; BoBh-D 273.24–274.2.

21 BoBh-W 397.5–7; BoBh-D 274.2–3.

22 For more details on the epistemological ideas and spiritual praxis of the
Bodhisattvabhumi, see Deleanu 2013.

23 This section was inspired by Schmithausen 2007, whose insights brought to my
attention the discrepancies between the Śrāvakabhumi and the Viniscayasamgraha-
ni passages discussed below (see Schmithausen 2007, mainly pp. 223–224; 233–234).

More on the meditative practices in these texts is found in Schmithausen’s
outstanding study (2007). Deleanu 2012 also gives a detailed presentation of the path
of spiritual cultivation in the Śrāvakabhumi.
to be similar meditative experiences. One example is provided by a Śrāvakakṣhāmi passage detailing the so-called supramundane path (lokkottaramārga). This arduous spiritual process includes a step where the yogi must focus on the mind itself as the object of meditation. In the peculiar terminology used the text, this is part of the contemplation leading to [characterised by] conviction (ādhimokṣiko manaskāraḥ).

In order to eliminate the existential conceit or notion of a Self (asmimāna), which prevents the mind from staying firmly riveted to the ultimate goal of Nirvāṇa, the contemplative turns his/her concentration towards mind itself. He/she gradually gains direct insight into the fact that the mind, too, is impermanent, conducive to suffering, empty, and no (n) Self. Eventually, as the Self-notion is discarded (asmimānam prahāya), the yogi reaches a trance-like state in which the mind appears to have no object (anālambana), to have ceased (vīgata) altogether into complete calmness (praśānta).

24 ŚrBh-Sh 495.15–502.14. The mastery of this contemplation is explained as corresponding to the attainment of the supreme mundane factors (laukikā agradharmāḥ): tasya yāval laukikebhya 'gradharebhyā ādhimokṣiko manaskāraḥ. (ŚrBh-Sh 502.12–13).

25 Many, if not most, of the traditional Indian sources, Buddhism included, usually employ only masculine forms (‘he’, ‘his’, etc.) when speaking of contemplatives. Seen from the paradigm of our age, such a usage is sexist. One should, however, add that there are also traditional sources clearly referring to female meditators, too (see, for instance, the examples analysed in Silk 2000). The monastic Order of nuns likewise attests to the fact that women were not barred from spiritual praxis. I shall try to reflect the gender duality in my descriptions of the accounts, but as far as the translations from the originals are concerned, I shall use only masculine forms. This should be understood as an attempt to stay close to the conventions of the traditional wording rather than making sexist assumptions.

26 ŚrBh-Sh 497.3–499.12.

27 tasya tac cittam tasmin samaye nīruddham iva khyāti, na ca tan nīruddham bhavati. anālambanam(1) iva khyāti, na ca tad 'an-ālambanam bhavati(2) tasya tac
But this is only a temporary experience. Neither the vanishing of the object nor the complete calmness are ever-lasting. There are, however, some people — the Śrāvakabhūmi adds — who are slow-witted (manda⁵), deluded (momūha⁵), and conceited (abhimāna) enough to take this state to be the very realisation (abhisamaya) of the Four Noble Truths. Wrong! — the text warns us. The first actual insight into the Noble Truths — the Śrāvakabhūmi continues — occurs after the emergence from this trance. This is a moment of non-conceptual (nirvikalpa) cognition based on direct perception (pratyakṣaṣajñāna) which brings into full effect the certain knowledge (niścayajñāna) associated with the highest spiritual realisation (abhisamaya).²⁹

The Śrāvakabhūmi doesn’t tell us who the slow-witted are, but a similarly ‘deluded’ interpretation of an apparently kindred state is advocated by ... no other than the Viniścayamgrahaṇī. The latter, needless to say (at least for specialists), is part of the same encyclopaedic treatise Yogācārabhūmi which includes the Śrāvakabhūmi itself. In tune with the mūla-text upon which it glosses and elaborates, the Viniścayamgrahaṇī holds that the bodhisattva’s practice must aim at the

cittam praśāntam vigatam iva khyāti, na ca tad vigatam bhavati. ŚrBh-Sh 499.20-500.1.

¹ ŚrBh-Sh reads: [...] samaye khyāti niruddham iva, na ca tan niruddham. bhavatya anālambanam [...] which seems to be a misplacement cum mis-punctuation. (I am indebted to Prof. Schmithausen for bringing this detail to my attention.)

² ŚrBh-Sh and ŚrBh-MS read: na ca tadālambanam. The emendation is based on Ch. and Tib. See also Schmithausen 2007, 223, n. 38. The general purport of the passage also makes the emendation necessary.

²⁸ ŚrBh-Sh 500.4-6.

²⁹ ŚrBh-Sh 500.6-17.

³⁰ The passage in question comes from the Bodhisattvabūmiviniścaya, the exegetical section on the Bodhisattvabhūmi. For more detailed references, see below.
eradication of the conceptual knowledge (vikalpa) and its replacement with correct knowledge (samyagijnāna) giving access to the Supreme Reality (tathāta). As imperfectly as words can approximate this trans-linguistic Reality, here is the Viniścayasamgrahani definition of it:

What is the pure Essence of Phenomena (dharmadhātu)? It is the Supreme Reality (tathāta) [attained] through the cultivation (bhāva-nā) of the correct knowledge (samyagijnāna) which has eliminated all images of appearances (nimitta).

(chos kyi dbyings rnams par dag pa gang zhe na | yang dag pa'i shes pa bsgom pa la brten nas mtshan ma thams cad bsal | bas de bzhin nyid gang yin pa ste )

In the Viniścayasamgrahani, nimitta refers to the world of appearances, i.e. the diversity of phenomena conceptually constructed (vikalpita) by ordinary sentient beings. The experience of Supreme Reality seems to

31 The Supreme Reality is equated by the text with the ineffable thing-in-itself (vastu). See VinSam-K 69, § 2.4; VinSam-Ta 121, § 1.2.4; VinSam-Ch: T30.696a4–5.

Let us also note that in this passage the Sanskrit terms in brackets are reconstructions. The Viniścayasamgrahani has mostly survived only in Tibetan and Chinese translations. Since the mūla-text is, however, extant in Sanskrit, too, we can be fairly sure that many of these reconstructions reflect the original.

32 Ch: 法界清浄 'purification [/purity] of the dharmadhātu'.

33 C, D: bsal; G, N, P: gsal. I read here with the C, D stemma (as Kramer 93 and Schmithausen 2007, 234, n. 81, also do).

34 Viniścayasamgrahani, Kramer ed. 93, § 3.5.2.4.1. Cf. VinSam-Ch: 云何名為 法界清浄？謂：修正智故，永除諸相 證得真如。 (T 30.701c4–5).

35 In our text, nimitta is defined as the thing (vastu) which serves as the basis of the verbal expression (see VinSam-K 69, § 2.1; VinSam-Ta 121, § 1.2.1). The latter is a misleading epistemic tool when it comes to expressing the Supreme Reality. The original Sanskrit presupposed by Tib. mtshan ma in the passage cited here is most likely nimitta as also suggested by Ch. 相. But this raises a problem since nimitta in its technical sense is rendered into Tib. as rgyu mtshan. (The Chinese translation
 imply the complete lack of mental images or, in other words, the absence of
discrete cognitive objects (anālambana), which sounds similar to the state
described in the Śrāvakabhūmi passage cited above. This comes as no
surprise for a Mahāyāna text. The Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā had long
ago declared the samādhi leading to the realisation of the sameness of all
phenomena (sarvadharmsamatā) to be the ‘king of contemplations’
(samādhirāja).36

It is, however, striking that (what later became) two sections of the
same text give different evaluations to a more or less similar contemplative
experience. For the Viniścayasamgrahāni, the undifferentiated, objectless
experience is identified with the realisation of the Supreme Reality while
the Śrāvakabhūmi considers it a preliminary (albeit important) step
preparing the yogi for the actual insight into the Noble Truths. The
Viniścayasamgrahāni also speaks of the discernment of the Four Truths,
but this is a phase subsequent to the objectless experience of the Supreme
Reality. Answering an opponent who points out that the realisation of the
Four Truths preached by the Buddha implies conceptual discernment
(Skt. *parivitarkayati;37 Tib. yongs su rtog par byed; Ch. 分別), i.e. reflective

remains, however, 相.) Tib. mtshan ma used in our passage suggests rather the
commoner meaning of nimitta as ‘characteristic’ or ‘mental image’ (in meditation,
etc.). It is hard to know why the Tibetan translators decided to differentiate here (an
interpretative rendering meant to underline the precise nuance of the word in this
context?). But even if we read the term in the sense of ‘characteristic’ or ‘mental
image’, the purport of the passage does not change substantially.

36 AṣṭaPp-W 987.9–10. AṣṭaPp-V 259.18. See also various other samādhis directed
at the uniformity (samatā) at AṣṭaPp-W 985–987; AṣṭaPp-V 259. Cf. ‘due to the
uniformity of all phenomena, the perfection of wisdom [shares the same] uniformity’
sarvadharmsamatayā prajñāpāramitāsamatā (AṣṭaPp-W 985.25–26; AṣṭaPp-V
259.4). See also DaBh-K 96; DaBh-D 47. § A (describing the sixth stage on the
bodhisattva’s path). Let also note here that the Daśabhūmikasūtra exerted a
noticeable influence on the formation of the Bodhisattvabhūmi, which also cites from
the text (for more details, see Deleanu 2013).
mode of cognition accompanied by objects/characteristics (*sanimitta; mtshan ma dang bcas par 'gyur 有相), the Viniścayasamgrahani argues:

The pure cognition, both mundane and supramundane, regarding the [Four Noble] Truths is achieved through the power of cognition without mental images (*animitaṅkā; mtshan ma med pa’i shes pa; 無相智). Thanks to this [power], the afflictions (*kleśa) are [also] eliminated. Therefore, the cognition without mental images — which is the cause of the cognition regarding the [Truth of] Suffering, etc. as well as of the elimination of the afflictions — is figuratively designated (*upacāra; nye bar gdags pa; 假 說) as the cognition regarding the [Truth of] Suffering, etc. [like] in cases of naming the result for [/instead of] the cause. Hence, there is no error [as assumed by the opponent].

(bden pa rnam la 'jig rten pa dang 'jig rten las ’das pa’i shes pa rnam par dag pa ni mtshan ma med pa’i shes pa’i dbang gis byung ba yin pa’i phyir | de nyid kyis nyon mongs rnam par spangs pas na mtshan ma med pa’i shes pa sdug bsgal la sogs pa’i shes pa’i rgyur gyur pa nyon mongs pa spong bar byed pa gang yin pa de nyid la rgyu la ’bras bu gdags pa byas nas sdug bsgal la sogs pa shes pa)\(^{40}\) nye bar gdags pas nyes pa med do \||\(^{41}\)

\(^{37}\) Or *parikalpate.

\(^{38}\) Literally, ‘and brings about the elimination of afflictions’.

\(^{39}\) This is an instance of the logical method of superimposing the name of the result upon the cause (*hetau phalopacāra). (I am grateful to Prof. Schmithausen for this detail.)

\(^{40}\) G, N, P: par, C, D: pas.

\(^{41}\) Viniścayasamgrahani. Kramer ed. 92–93, § 3.3.4. The Chinese translation passage, including the opponent’s argument, reads: 問：苦等諸智 世尊説為得清淨因。若苦等智 於苦等諦 分別苦等，應成有相。若不分別苦等諸智，便非是有。彼無有故，云何能得畢竟清淨？答：由無相智增上力故，於諸諦中極善清淨 通世、出世分別智生，即名已斷所斷煩惱。其無相智 是苦等智因，正能斷滅所斷煩惱。於此因中 假立
In the *Vinīścayasamgrahani*, the objectless cognition is the actual experience of Awakening while the reflective cognition of the Four Truths, often presupposed by the traditional approach, is derived from it. Roughly speaking, this is an inversion of the place and importance given to more or less similar meditative experiences.\(^\text{42}\)

3. Augmentation

The passage I have chosen to illustrate the augmentative strategy represents a milestone in the history of Buddhist philosophy. It is probably the earliest attested statement of the representation-only \(*vijñaptimātratā*\) doctrine, which marks the birth of the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda as a distinct philosophical school. The so-called \(*vijñaptimātra*(tā)\) passage\(^\text{43}\) occurs in the Maitreya Chapter (*Maitreyaaparivarta*) of the *Sanādhinirmocanasūtra*, a text most probably compiled in first half of the 4\(^{\text{th}}\) century.\(^\text{44}\)

The entire chapter is dedicated to the path of spiritual cultivation, basically framed upon the practice of tranquillity (śamatha) and insight (vipaśyanā).

But let us first take a look at an earlier passage which may have paved the way for the birth of the *vijñaptimātratā* Weltanschauung. It is found in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* where it is introduced as a citation from a canonical text.

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\(^{42}\) I say ‘roughly’ because the *Śrāvakabhūmi* paradigm also contains a non-conceptual moment of direct perception. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact mental process involved here, but it seems to suggest an intuitive internalisation of the Truths rather than an entirely objectless experience.

\(^{43}\) The passage is known in Japanese Buddhist studies as the *yuishiki-dan* 唯識段 or *yuishiki no kyōmon* 唯識の経文.

\(^{44}\) This is the title according to the Tibetan translation: *Byams pa'i le'u*. In Xuanzang’s rendering of the text, it is entitled ‘The Chapter on the Examination of Spiritual Practice’ (*Yogapariksāparivarta*).

For the date of the text, see Deleanu 2006, 172-176.
The Śrāvakabhūmi calls it the Muktakasūtra, but in modern Buddhist studies, it is often referred to as the Revatasūtra (after the Buddha’s interlocutor’s name). Speaking of the objects visualised in meditation, the Muktakasūtra/Revatasūtra describes them as follows:

He [i.e. the contemplative] does not see the [visualised] object itself in a non-mediated, direct manner but generates a replica or image [which is] nothing but cognition, nothing but visualisation, nothing but recollection.

(sa na tad eva jñeyam vastu samavahitam sammukhibhūtam paśyatī, api tu tatpratirūpam asyotpadyate tatpratibhāsam vā, jñānamātram vā, darśanamātram vā, pratismṛtamātram vā.)

The viññaptimātratā thesis in the Samdhinirmocanasūtra is likewise pronounced in a context discussing the nature of the visualised objects in the vipaśyanā practice. Vipaśyanā is defined as a reflective process which,
benefiting from the calmness brought by śamatha meditation, can be directed at images perceived in inner concentration (adhyātmasamādhi-gocara-pratibimbā; nang du ting nge ‘dzin gyi spod yul gzugs brnyan; 内三摩地所行影像). 51 These images as well as the cognitive objects (jñeyārtha; shes bya’i don; 所知義) 52 which they represent become the focus of the yogi’s examination (vīcaya; rnam par ‘byed pa; 思 擇), intense examination (pravīcaya; rab tu rnam par ‘byed pa; 最 極思 盪), thorough inspection (parivītarka; yong sti riog pa; 周遍尋思). 53

It is at this juncture that the nature of the images meditated upon in vipaśyana becomes an issue. Asked by Bodhisattva Maitreya whether these images are different from the contemplating mind, the Buddha declares them to be ‘non-different’ (abhinnā; tha dad pa ma yin; 無異). These images are, he says, representation-only (vijñaptimātra; rnam par rig pa tsam; 唯 [...] 識). 54 But what makes the Samdhinirmocanasūtra special is the fact that the scope of definition is expanded to all cognitive acts:

I declare that the consciousness (vijñāna) 55 is constituted (prabhāvita)

51 Most of the reconstructions of Sanskrit terms in the Samdhinirmocanasūtra passages quoted here are based on Lamotte 1935. (For simplicity’s sake, I omit the asterisk in this section.)

52 Literally, jñeya translates as ‘cognisable’.

53 See ch. VIII. § 4. (The paragraph enumeration follows Lamotte ed.).

54 In the Tibetan rendering, the sentence reads: gzugs brnyan de rnam par rig pa tsam du zad pa’i phyir te | (P Ngu 29b1; D Ca 27a4; sTog Na 38b2; Lamotte ed. 91.4–5, § 7; Dunhuang MS: Hakamaya 2008, 122.27–28). Ch.: 由 彼 影 像 唯 是 識 故。 (T 16.698b2).

(NB: In the citations from and references to the Samdhinirmocansūtra, the siglum ‘Ch.’ should be understood as referring Xuanzang’s translation into Chinese (Taisho Canon Vol. 16. # 676). A more thorough investigation would require collating all extant Chinese translations.)

55 Schmithausen (2014, 503) suggests a more precise, if explanatory, translation of
by mere representation [/appearance] (vijñapatiṣṭrá) of [/as] the cognitive object [/support] (ālambana).\textsuperscript{56}

(Skt. *tadālambanavijñaptimātra-prabhāvitam vijñānam (iti)(aham) vadāmi;\textsuperscript{57} Tib. rnam par shes pa n\textsuperscript{58} dmigs pa dmigs pa rnam par rig pa -tsam gyis rab tu phy e ba yin no\textsuperscript{59} zhes ngas bshad do || P Ng u 29b1; D Ca 27a4; sTog Na 38b2; Lamotte ed. 91.4–5, § 7; Dunhuang MS: Hakamaya 2008, 122.28–29. Ch. 我說：識所縁唯\textsuperscript{60}識所現故。T 16.698b2)\textsuperscript{61}

The Buddha goes on explaining that ‘the inherent (prakrtistha)\textsuperscript{62} mental


\textsuperscript{56} My translation here owes much to Schmithausen 2014, 503 (see also 400–1; et passim). For other renderings, see Lamotte 1935, 211; Powers 1995, 155

\textsuperscript{57} The words in brackets are optional. I declare (d)’ could be also reconstructed as mayoktam or maya deśitam.

The Sanskrit reconstruction follows — or rather sums up — Schmithausen 2014, 395, 397–8, et passim. The philological and historical problems connected to the so-called \textit{vijñaptimātra(ta)} passage are brilliantly addressed in Schmithausen 1984 (for conclusions regarding the Skt. reconstruction, see p. 437: *ālambanavijñaptimātra-prabhāvitam vijñānam ‘consciousness is characterised by [the fact that its] object is nothing but representation’) and Schmithausen 2014, 387–505 (see also 507f. for the meaning of \textit{prabhāvita}). The latter monograph offers an extensive and superbly argued discussion of other reconstructions and latest interpretations.

\textsuperscript{58} Lamotte ed.: \textit{pa’i}. Lamotte ed. contains no note accounting for this reading. It might be an emendation on the basis of Xuanzang’s rendering (and/or other sources?), but nothing is said to this effect either.

\textsuperscript{59} D adds: || (i.e. double shad).

\textsuperscript{60} Song ed. [未, in Taishō sigla], Old Song ed. [宫, in Taishō sigla]: 惟.

\textsuperscript{61} In Xuanzang’s rendering, the sentence is rather differently worded: ‘I declare that [this is] because 故 the object [/support] of consciousness is only a manifestation 所現 of the consciousness.’

\textsuperscript{62} Tib. \textit{rang bzin du gnas pa} literally translates ‘abiding as/in self-nature’. (Cf. Ch. 自性而住) And so would Lamotte’s Sanskrit reconstruction *\textit{svabhāvasthita}. The Sanskrit compound is linguistically possible, but as far as I know, it does not seem to
images (cittabimba) of the appearances (abhāsa) of visible forms (rūpa), etc. [perceived by] sentient beings (sattva) are not different (abhinna; tha dad pa ma yin; 無異) from the mind. The fools (bāla; byis pa; 愚夫) however, unaware of the fact that these mental images are nothing but representation (vijñaptimātra; rnam par rig pa tsam; 唯[...]) 識), fall into trap of distorted cognition (viparyastacittatā; phyin ci log tu sens; 作顛倒解).

The contemplative must, of course, fully comprehend and eventually transcend the epistemic mechanism of the vijñaptimāratā. By 'yoking together' (yuganaddha; zung du 'jug pa; 和合俱轉) the insight and tranquillity into a single act of mental one-pointedness (cittaikāgratā; sems rtse gcig pa nyid; 一心一境性), the yogi reaches a state in which:

he realises that these images (pratibimba) which pertain to the

occur in Buddhist literature. Rang bzhin du gnas pa (or rang bzhin gyis gnas pa) rendering prakrtistha is, on the other hand, well-attested in Buddhist, especially Yogācāra, sources: e.g. BoBh-W 3.2; 331.12; 401.7; MSA 11.12; etc. Chandra 1994, s.v., also registers rang bzhin du gnas pa as equivalent to prakrtistha on the basis of the Pravrajyāvastu. (The testimony of Chandra [1959] 1971, s.v., can be dismissed as hypothetical since it records the compound on the basis of the same Samdhinirmokacanasūtra passage under discussion here). Prakrtistha (literally, 'naturally/spontaneously abiding') means 'inherent', 'original', 'innate' (as well as 'abiding in the original state', 'genuine', etc., though the latter semantic ramifications are not relevant here).

The idea conveyed by the text, whether the Sanskrit original was *prakrtistha or *svabhāvasthita, seems to be that the mental images of phenomena are inherent to the mind, occurring spontaneously, rather than being caused or depending on external objects.

63 Tib. sems can rnams kyi gzugs la sogs par snang ba sems kyi gzugs brnyan rang bzhin du gnas pa (Lamotte ed. 91, § 9); Ch. 若諸有情 自性而住 緑色等心 所行影像。（T 16.698b9–10).

My understanding of the Tibetan is closer, though not identical, to Lamotte 1935, 212, rather than to Powers 1995, 155. Ch. is rather free but the purport is the same.
domain of concentration (samādhigocara) are nothing but representation (vijñaptimātra), and having realised this, he contemplates [/focuses upon)](manaskaroti) the Supreme Reality (tathatā).

(Tib: ting nge ’dzin gyi sphyod yul gzugs brnyan de la ’di ni rnam par rig pa tsam yin no zhes bya bar rtogs te | de rtogs nas de bzhin nyid du yid la byed pa gang pa yin pa’o] Lamotte ed. 92.11–13, § 9. Ch: 謂通達三摩地所行影像 唯是其識，或通達此已 復思惟如性。T 16.698b23–24)

Whether this amounts to a variety of idealism which denies categorically the existence of objects exterior to the mind remains an issue of (often bitterly fought) controversy. I cannot enter into details here, but no matter what interpretation we adopt, its importance for our discussion does not change. The Śrāvakabhūmi describes the nature of the visualised objects as a mere cognitive act (jñānamātra) within the limited experience of meditation. The Samdhinirmocanasūtra, on the other hand, enlarges the scope to all objects of knowledge. Whatever we perceive is representation-only (vijñaptimātra), all ‘objects’ we see or hear are ultimately of the essence and reducible to the mind.

4. Substitution

The fourth interpretative strategy refers to a process of semantic transplant widely seen throughout Buddhist history, meditation being only one of its areas of application. It involves investing established technical terms with new meanings.65

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64 Taishō reads: 所云. This must be a scribal (or typographical?) error for 所行 = gocara. Cf. Ch. and Tib. translations in note 63 above.

65 This interpretative strategy has been quite prolific throughout the whole Buddhist history. And Buddhist authors, mainly Mahāyānist and Tantric, made extensive use of it declaring new meanings to be revelations made, more often than
Here we shall examine how the Sarvāstivādin five-step model of the
spiritual path was adopted in Yogācāra Buddhism with a complete
revamping of its semantic content. Let’s first have a brief look at the
description of the Sarvāstivādin path to Arhatship in the Abhidharmakośa.

(1) After fulfilling the fundamental requirements of developing the
resolution (prāṇidhāna) to attain Nirvāṇa and leading a holy life in
accordance with the ethical code of the monastic Order,

(2) the practitioner embarks upon the preparatory path (prayogamārga).
This step consists in three distinct phases: (a) basic meditative
training, i.e. cultivation of the impure and/or mindfulness of breathing;
(b) the four applications of mindfulness, practised in a manner similar to
the descriptions in canonical sources; and (c) the wholesome roots
(kuśalamūla) conducive to insight (nirvedhabhāgiya) into the Noble
Truths, which continue the four applications of mindfulness, laying the

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not, by the Buddha Himself. The very title of the Samdhinirmocanasūtra, i.e. The
Scripture on the Unravelling the Hidden Meaning, hints to its semantic mission. Just
before its famous announcement of the third turning of the Wheel of Teaching
(dharmacakra), the text elaborates on the implicit meaning which requires proper
explanation (neyārtha) vs the explicit or definitive meaning (nitārtha) (see Lamotte

With the advent of Tantric Buddhism, we witness even more radical examples
of semantic remodelling such as, for instance, the famous identification of the five
aggregates (paśca skandhāḥ) with the Five Fundamental Buddhas (e.g. Guhyasa-
māj.atantra ch. XVII ver. 50. Matsunaga ed. 1978, 104, also cited in the (Tantrika)
Āryadeva’s Caryāmelāpakaṇḍapradīpa, Wedemeyer 2007, 350)

66 AKBh ch. VI ver. 24c. See also AKBh ch. III ver. 44c; ch. IV ver. 124; ch. VII ver.
30; ch. VII ver. 34.
67 AKBh p. 334.
68 See AKBh ch. VI ver. 17−25 & commentary.
69 AKBh ch. VI ver. 9−11.
70 AKBh ch. VI ver. 12−13.
71 AKBh ch. VI ver. 14−16.
72 AKBh ch. VI ver. 17−25.
emphasis on the contemplation of the Four Noble Truths in sixteen aspects.\(^{73}\)

(3) The third step, called the ‘path of vision’ (\textit{darśanamārga}),\(^{74}\) is described as the ‘realisation (\textit{abhisamaya})[leading to the] insight into the Truths [effected] by non-contaminated wisdom’.\(^{75}\) This realisation will, however, stamp out only the proclivities (\textit{anuśaya}) related to such intellectual defilements (\textit{kleśa}) as wrong views (\textit{drṣṭi}) concerning the existence of a self, etc.

(4) The subtler defilements stemming from emotional attachments like lust (\textit{rāga}) and hatred (\textit{pratigha}) or from our fundamental ignorance (\textit{avidyā}) can only be abandoned at the next level named the ‘path of cultivation’ (\textit{bhāvanāmārga}).\(^{76}\) This is a long, arduous process of meditation on the Noble Truths which gradually eradicates all traces, no matter how subtle, of latent proclivities.

(5) The culmination of this process is known as the ‘path requiring no more training’ (\textit{aśaiksamārga}), which is the moment and state of Arhatship, of Awakening to the Truth and Liberation from the cycle of rebirth.\(^{77}\)

The five-step paradigm of spiritual progression was also adopted in Yogācāra Buddhism but not without semantic substitutions. The \textit{Mahāyānasūtrālāmākāra} is probably the earliest Yogācāra text which makes use of it. Verses (\textit{śloka}) 6–10 and their prose commentary (\textit{bhāṣya})\(^{78}\) in the Chapter on Reality (\textit{Tattvādhikāra}) sketch out what will

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\(^{73}\) \textit{tac catuh satyagocaram, śodaśākāram}. (AKBh ch. VI ver. 17 b-c)

\(^{74}\) AKBh ch. VI ver. 25–32.

\(^{75}\) \textit{darśanābhisamayo ‘nāsravayā prajñayā satyānām} (AKBh 351.12)

\(^{76}\) AKBh ch. VI ver. 33–44.

\(^{77}\) \textit{Tatksayāptyā kṣayajñānam, āśaikṣo ‘rhann asau tadā}. (AKBh ch. VI ver. 45ab)

\(^{78}\) Traditionally, the authorship of the verses is attributed to Maitreya while the commentary is, more often than not, considered to be the work of Vasubandhu. The latter attribution is rather controversial. The issue is far from settled, but the \textit{Mahāyānasūtrālāmākārabhāṣya} is not included in the corpus believed to have been
become the basic model of the Yogācāra spiritual ladder. In spite of a terminology which is identical to Sarvāstivādin and Sautrāntika texts, the content of each step is construed in a different manner. Let us have a look at one example: ⁷⁹

The second stanza [sets forth] the abiding (avasthāna) in [the realisation that] the manifestation of the [cognitive objects] is mind-only (cittamātra), [realisation achieved after] having comprehended that the objects are nothing but mental verbalisation. This is the bodhisattva’s station of [cultivating the wholesome factors] leading to the penetration [of the Truth] (nirvedhabhāgiyāvasthā). From this point on, as [the yogi] reaches direct perception (pratyakṣa) into the Essence of Phenomena (dharmaṭu), [he] becomes dissociated from the characteristic of the [cognitive] subject-object (grāhya-grāhaka) duality. ⁸⁰ This is the station of the path of vision authored by Vaubandhu the Kośakāra (see Deleanu 2006, 186). The fact remains, however, that the verses were compiled by person(s) different from the author the bhāṣya, which reflects a more developed stage in the history of the Yogācāra doctrine.

⁷⁹ The citation comes from the commentary (bhāṣya) ad verse (śloka) 7.

⁸⁰ Professor Schmithausen kindly suggested the possibility of a different reading. If we emend pratyaksato gamane dvaya’ to pratyaksatāgamanam | dvaya’, the meaning would become: ‘Thereupon the dharmaṭu is directly perceived.’¹ [That the dharmaṭu is] dissociated from the characteristic of duality (verse 6.7d) [refers to the dissociation] from the characteristic of [the epistemic split into] subject and object.’ The passage is actually cited as such in Jñānaśrimitra’s Sākārasiddhiśāstra (Thakur ed. 507.12f): tataḥ parena dharmaṭoḥ pratyaksatāgamanam, yo dvaya’, where the gloss on dvayalakṣanena viyukto is syntactically connected with the preceding sentence by introducing the relative pronoun yo (referring to dharmaṭu). The suggestion is certainly worth considering, especially if we suppose Jñānaśrimitra cited the sentence from a textual version closer to the original rather than rephrased it for exegetical purposes. Tentatively, I
(darśanamārgāvasthā).
(dvitiyena manojalpamātrān arthān viditvā tadābhāse cittamātre 'vasthānam. iyam bodhisattvasya nirvedhabhāgiyāvasthā. tataḥ pareṇa dharmadhātoḥ pratyakṣato gamane dvayalakṣanena viyukto grāhyagrāhakalakṣanena. iyam darśana- mārgāvasthā.)

The direct perception into the Essence of Phenomena is then explained as abiding in the realisation that even mind-only does not exist since without a cognised object there can be no cognising subject (cittamātrasya nāstītvāvagamanam grāhyābhāve grāhakābhāvāt). And the station of the path of cultivation (bhāvanāmārgāvasthā), which also is equated to the transformation of the basis of existence (āśrayaparivartana), consists in the attainment of the undifferentiated state (samatā) of Reality by means of non-conceptual cognition (avikalpañāna).

Similar structural categories are thus revamped to accommodate new philosophical ideals and praxis paradigms. The largely reflective meditation directed at the internalisation of the Four Truths in the traditional approach is replaced with contemplative practices aiming at the non-conceptual cognition of the undifferentiated Supreme Reality and resting

stick, however, to Lévi’s edition since the emendation would not alter the basic meaning of the sentence.

(1) Literally, 'becomes pratyakṣa = is directly manifest', pratyakṣa being used here as a qualification of the object (cf., for instance, AbhSam 105.8f. = AbhSamBh 152.27).


81 MSA reads grāhyabhāve. I emend together with Limaye 1992, 73. See also Ch. 所取物 無故 as well as Uī’s translation into Japanese (1961b, 110). For entire commentary ad śloka 8, see MSA 24.12–16.

83 For the bhāṣya ad śloka 9, see MSA 24.16–20.
upon the idealist presupposition that the objects of ordinary perception are nothing by mind.\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{Epilogue}

\textbf{History: In or Beyond?}

The fact that Buddhism has found various ways to interpret and redesign its meditative repertoire is not a weakness. It attests to flexibility and openness to diversity, an attitude which is often seen in its inclusivistic approach. In the case of Yogācāra Buddhism, for instance, we see the spirit of inclusivism in the encyclopaedic \textit{Yogācārabhūmi} treatise which embraces various meditative traditions. A similar attitude is also displayed by Kumārajīva (ca 339–409)\textsuperscript{85} in his anthology dedicated to contemplative practice known as the \textit{Zuochan sanmei jing} 坐禪三昧經 or \textit{The Scripture on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation} (*Dhyānasamādhiśūtra*).\textsuperscript{86} It is true that the inclusivistic approach is rarely, if ever, impartial. Quite often it reflects hierarchic patterns. Kumārajīva’s \textit{Zuochan sanmei jing} symptomatically states that ‘those whose wisdom regarding [the essence of] phenomena [/essential factors of reality] (\textit{dharma}) is shallow are called Arhats, those [whose wisdom] is intermediate are called Solitary Buddhas (\textit{pratyekabuddha}), and those [whose wisdom] is profound are called Buddhas’ (於諸法中, 智慧淺入名阿羅漢。中入名辟支佛。深入名佛。T 15, 281a7–8). And a similar view is professed by countless Mahāyāna sources.

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\textsuperscript{84} For the use of ‘idealism’ in relation to Yogācāra Buddhism, see Addendum III.

\textsuperscript{85} Kumārajīva’s dates are not known with precision. 344–413, 350–409, etc. have also been put forward. See Kamata 1983, 213–226.

\textsuperscript{86} The \textit{Zuochan sanmei jing} is largely based on original Indic sources translated by Kumārajīva at the request of his Chinese disciples. Although it probably reflects syncretic approaches current in Northwestern India and/or Serindia, the work as such is the product of Kumārajīva’s editorial efforts, with possible exegetical/authorial contributions. (The text is also accessible in English translation thanks to Yamabe and Sueki 2009).
In spite of its hierarchical partiality, this inclusivist paradigm strikes a chord with our modern Zeitgeist.

This degree of openness and flexibility should not, however, be confused with an understanding of history similar to modern secular views. Whatever particular form they may take, the latter are usually based upon historicist presuppositions. Historicism\textsuperscript{87} itself has been formulated in different ways, but the mainstream understanding is best described by the following definition given by Thornhill (1998):

Historicism defined as ‘the affirmation that life and reality are history alone’ by Benedetto Croce ([\textit{History as the Story of Liberty}] 1938:65), [...] is an insistence on the historicity of all knowledge and cognition [...] . It is intended as a critique of the normative, allegedly anti-historical, epistemologies of Enlightenment thought, expressly Kant. [...] [One of its main assumptions is] that the truth-content of cognition is dependent not on categorical logic, but upon its situatedness in, and constant attentiveness to, history.

This is not the way traditional Buddhism understands the relation between history and Truth, including the teachings and practices leading to it.

Does then Buddhism totally lack a historical perspective on the way teachings and practices are transmitted? There seem to be only two traditional models attempting a more or less ‘historical’ approach to doctrinal change.\textsuperscript{88} The first one is the periodisation of the Buddha’s

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{87} The concept is also referred to as ‘historism’ and, less frequently, as ‘historicity’.

\textsuperscript{88} I do not take into consideration here the Buddhist historiographical (or rather historico-hagiographical) literature represented by such genres as the \textit{Vamsas} in Pali, \textit{Chos ’byung}s in Tibetan, \textit{zhuans} 傳 in Chinese, etc. Although they display (albeit not constantly and consistently) criteria similar to modern historiography, such texts are not canonical and therefore not representative of the core}
missionary activity. This was one of the most convenient and prolific hermeneutical tools accounting for the plurality (often of a contradictory nature) of the Buddhist teachings and scriptures. The paradigmatic scriptural model is provided by the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*. The text proclaims that the Buddha turned the Dharma-Wheel (*chos kyi ’khor lo* [...]* rab tu bskor*), i.e. expounded the basic tenets, three times, each revealing a deeper layer of Truth. The first time, he taught the Four Noble Truths for the benefit of the Śrāvakayāna followers. The second time, he set forth the doctrines of emptiness of no intrinsic essence, no arising, no passing away, etc. for the sake of Mahāyāna followers. The revelation, however, was made in statements whose ultimate meaning requires to be determined (*neyārtha; drang ba’i don*). It was at the third turning of the Dharma-Wheel that he taught the definitive meaning (*nītārtha; nges pa’i don*) of emptiness, sense which is (of course!) conveyed by the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*.

The second ‘historical’ approach is the idea that the teaching (*sāsana*) of each Buddha is doomed to a cycle of deterioration. Typically, it starts with a period when the True Dharma (*saddharma; dam pa’i chos*; 正法) thrives during the lifetime of a Buddha. After the Buddha passes into the *parinirvāṇa*, the teaching loses its former vigour entering the period of the ‘semblance Dharma’ (*saddharmapratirūpaka; dam pa’i chos kyi gzugs brnyan; 像 法*). Finally, the True Teaching enters its latter days

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89 The model was also famous in Tibetan Buddhism (see, for instance, Bu-ston’s *Chos ’byung*; cf. Obermiller [1932] 1996, 53–54).
90 Tib.: Lamotte ed. ch. VII, § 30 (pp. 85–6); cf. Ch.: T 16.697a-b.
91 This periodisation formula will enjoy huge popularity in East Asian Buddhism, contributing to the formation of such elaborate doctrinal classifications 教判 as ‘the teachings of the five periods’ 五時教 or ‘the five periods and eight teachings’ 五時八教 in the Tiantai/Tendai tradition 天台宗 and ‘the five teachings and ten principles’ 五教十宗 in the Huayan/Kegon school 華嚴宗.
experiencing increasing decay and finally annihilation (saddharmavipralopa; dam pa’i chos rab tu rnam pa ’jig pa; 末法).\textsuperscript{92}

Both approaches are, however, a far cry from the way secular historians look at the doctrinal and textual change. They could at best be described as ‘quasi-historical’ attempts which do not rest upon historicist presuppositions. This does not mean that they do not function within the traditional Buddhist paradigm. And my discussion here is not meant to deny the right of existence of this paradigm in the modern world. I only wish to highlight its peculiar nature. To my (historicist) mind, the only problematic issue is the attempt to combine the traditional and modern paradigms in an unsystematic, inconsistent way, to talk about the timelessness of a subject while professing to examine its ‘history’ or presenting it as satisfying empirical criteria.

I hope this paper does not muddle paradigms and criteria. It is, once again, based upon historicist premises and attempts to tackle meditation as described in primary sources from a philologico-historical viewpoint. The conclusion yielded by this attempt is that meditation is as firmly anchored in historicity as any other mental state. Far from being an ahistorical black-box, it is a permeable process subject to a wide range of factors from personal psychological profiles to large cultural paradigms. This in itself is not a flaw or weakness but it does not guarantee claims that contemplative states are ‘pure’ or ‘beyond history’.

\textbf{Addendum I}

We shall look here only at just a handful of sources stating the timelessness

\textsuperscript{92} The idea exists in various hues and shapes in both Mainstream and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Even a sketchy sketch would not, however, do justice to its complexity. For an excellent monograph, focusing on the Buddhist prophecy of decline known as the ‘Kausambi Story’, see Nattier 1991.
and universality of the Buddhist Teaching, praxis included. They come from different ages and traditions attesting to the centrality of the motif throughout Buddhist history.

The idea is already found in the early Canon. According to a famous stanza in the *Samyuttanikāya*, the Buddhas of the past, present, and future dwelled, dwell, and will dwell in as well as revere the True Dharma (*saddhamma*). And the scripture concludes, ‘this is the Universal Norm of [all] the Buddhas’ (*esa bhuddhānam dhammatā*).\(^{93}\)

Similarly, the fact that all conditioned phenomena (*sākhārā*) are impermanent (*aniccā*), begetting suffering (*dukkhā*), and no (*n*)-Self (*anattā*).\(^{94}\) remains a [universal] principle (*dhātu*), the lasting nature (*ṭhitatā*) of the truth (*dhamma*), the fixed course (*niyāmatā*) of the truth (*dhamma*) whether Tathāgatas arise or not.\(^{95}\)

In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, the Truth (*dharma*) [of the Single Vehicle (*ekayāna*)] revealed by the Buddhas is likewise described as having a lasting nature (*dhammasthitīṃ*), fixed course (*dharmaniyāmataṃ*), and unshakable, eternal stability in the world (*nityasthitāṃ loki imām akampyām*).\(^{96}\)

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\(^{93}\) Ye ca atitā sambuddhā, ye ca buddhā anāgatā |  
Yo c-etàrahi sambuddho, bahinam sokanaśano ||  
Sabbe saddhāmmagaruno, viharimsu viharanti ca |  
Ato pi viharissanti, esā buddhānam dharmatā || (SN I 140.10-14)

\(^{94}\) In the Pali tradition, these are called the ‘three distinctive marks’ (*tilakkhana*) of the Buddhist teaching. In East Asian Buddhism, they are usually known as the ‘three Dharma-seals’ 三法印.

\(^{95}\) Upādā vā, bhikkhave, tathāgatānam anupādā vā tathāgatānam, ōtiyā sa dhātu dhammaṭṭhitātā dharmamāyāmatā. Sabbe sākhārā aniccā. [...] Sabbe sākhārā dukkhā. [...] Sabbe dhammā anattā. [...] (AN I 286). The precise sense of the key terms dhātu dhammaṭṭhitātā dharmamāyāmatā is not exactly clear, and neither are the glosses in the traditional Pali commentaries. Cf. also Woodward [1932] 1979, Vol. I, 264–5; Bodhi 2012, 363.

\(^{96}\) dharmasthitīṃ dharmaniyāmataṃ ca nityasthitāṃ loki imām akampyām |
Key practices leading to the supreme Truth can also appear qualified as universal or uniquely superior. In such cases, the implication is that they function beyond historical limitations or personal peculiarities.

In the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, the Buddha ends his exposition of the tranquillity-insight (*samathavipaśyanā* 止觀) practice by declaring it to be the perfect and pure path of spiritual cultivation (*yogamārga; rnal 'byor kyi lam;* 瑜伽道) which was taught by the Buddhas of the past and will be taught by the Buddhas of the future.\(^{97}\)

In the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, the yogi who succeeds in abandoning all mental images [/constructs] (*nimitta*) and reaches an imageless state (*nirābhāsam* [...] *bhavet*)\(^{98}\) is blessed by the Buddhas coming from all lands. The sutra also refers to its doctrines and practices as representing the teachings of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.\(^{100}\)

In the *Compendium of the Essence* (Skt. *Hṛdayānīkṣepa,*\(^{101}\) Tib. *Snying buzhā ca bodhīṃ prthiviya manda prakāśayisvanti upāyakahīlam ||

(Kern and Nanjio ed. 53.9-10; Waghara and Tsuchida ed. 51.19–21; ch. II. ver. 103)

Ch. 是法住法位 　世间相常住
於道場知已　導師方便說（T 9.9b10–11）
(Cf. preceding stanza, too.)

\(^{97}\) Tib.: Lamotte ed. ch. VIII, § 39, p. 120. Ch.: T 16.703a11.

\(^{98}\) Śīksānanda Chinese translation: ‘dwells in [a state] without object [/support]’

\(^{100}\) E.g. Nanjio ed. 1923 [1956], 1: 98 (passage subsequent to the verse cited above); 260; etc.

\(^{101}\) Skt. title according to a rather unclear transliteration (P Gi 10a; D 293b). Another possible, albeit unattested, reconstructions would be *Hṛdayasamīkṣepa.*
po nges par bsdu ba), the Mādhyamika-cum-Tantrika master Atiśa (982–
1054) gives a succinct description of the bodhisattva path which he
declares to be ‘the essence preached by the Buddhas of the three periods
[i.e. the past, present, and future]’ (dus gsum sangs rgyas kyis gsung pa’i |
snying po [...]).102

To change the cultural landscape, similar ideas are also seen in Dōgen’s
道 元 (1200–1253) works. In his (symptomatically entitled) Universal
Recommendation of the Method of Sitting Meditation 普勧坐禪儀, the
Japanese Zen master tells that all accomplished practitioners, whether of our
cosmic realm or others, whether from India or China, equally have the
Buddha-seal and have devoted themselves only to the zazen practice 唯務
打坐.103 The latter is identical with the shikan taza 只管打坐 or ‘single-
minded meditation’, the paramount means and goal in Dōgen’s teachings.
And in the (substantially different) redaction of the same work,104 Dōgen
declares that basically there are no differences in the Buddha’s teachings,
whether it is in this or other cosmic realms (凡夫自界他方 佛法本無異法。
T 82.2a21–22).

Addendum II

The five basic techniques of meditation discussed in Section 1 was a
popular combinatory formula found in many Northern schools of Indian
Buddhism, first and foremost, in Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika, and Yogā-
cāra.105 They will become even more popular in East Asian Buddhism,
where they are mainly known as ‘the five contemplations for stilling the

102 For Tib. text, see Sherburne 2003, 374. A similar verse is found in the sNying po
bsdru ba (id. 368).
103 凡夫自界他方 西天東地 等持佛印, 一檀宗風, 唯務打坐。（T 821b13–14）
104 Preserved at the Komazawa University Library (see T 821 l, n. 2).
105 For a detailed study of these five meditative techniques, see Ōminami 1977.
mind’ 五停心観.\(^{106}\)

Let us look again at the set in the Śrāvakabhumī, which is one of the earliest sources attesting the combinatory formula, adding the recommended categories of practioners for each meditation. This suggests that the neophytes were not supposed to master the entire set. It rather appears that they were taught only one particular technique in accordance to the dominant proclivity affecting each individual’s psyche.\(^{107}\)

1. Meditation on impurity (aśubhā) 淨觀, recommended for meditators dominated by sensual passion [/lust](rāgaścārī) 貪欲.
2. Meditation on friendliness (maitrī) 慈悲觀, for meditators dominated by hatred (dveśacārī) 聲準.
3. Meditation on dependent origination (idampratyasamutpāda) 因緣觀, for meditators dominated by bewilderment (mohacārī) 惑癮.
4. Analysis of the elements [of existence](dhātupabheda) 界分別觀,\(^{108}\) for meditators dominated by arrogance (māṇacārī) 我慢 (我見).
5. Mindfulness of breathing (ānāpānasruti) 息觀,\(^{109}\) for meditators dominated by restless thoughts (vitarkacārī) 散亂心.

This is not, however, the only combinatory and terminological formula. There are other patterns, too, one of them being ‘the five types of meditation’ 五門禪.\(^{110}\) The latter consists of the same members as the set

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\(^{106}\) See Huiyuan’s 净影寺慧遠 (523–592) Meanings and Writs of the Great Vehicle 大乘義章 (T 44.697c); Zhiyi’s 智顕 (538–597) Arcane of Meaning of the Lotus Sutra 法華玄義 (T 33.707c, 786a), Great Tranquillity and Insight 摩訶止観 (T 46.35c, 51b, 117b), etc.

\(^{107}\) See Śrībh-TG II 50.14–52.10; Śrībh-Sh 198.12–199.9; also Śrībh-TG II 58.7ff.; Śrībh-Sh 202.3ff. For a more detailed discussion, see Deleanu 2012.

\(^{108}\) Also rendered as 六界觀, 界方便観, etc.

\(^{109}\) Also rendered as 持息観, 安那般那観, 安般観, etc.

\(^{110}\) This is a set apparently originating with the so-called ‘meditation scriptures’ 禪經, a corpus of texts surviving mainly in Chinese translation and/or compiled in
above with one exception. It replaces the analysis of the elements (duḥtuprabheda) with the Buddha recollection (buddhānusmṛti) 念佛観, which is recommended to meditators equally 等分 afflicted by lust, hatred, bewilderment, and restless thoughts.

**Addendum III**

Qualifying Yogācāra Buddhism as ‘idealistic’ will surely make (quite?) a few learned eyebrows rise. The academic community is far from having achieved consensus on the proper terminology describing the philosophy of the school. A growing number of scholars in the West (e.g. Lusthaus 2002) as well as the East (e.g. Shiba 2003) argue that Yogācāra is far closer to phenomenology.

My understanding of the classical Yogācāra philosophy (intrinsically

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China (more or often than not on the basis of Indian sources). Their scholastic affiliation is difficult to pinpoint, but roughly speaking, they tend to mix a large dose of Śrāvakayāna (often Šrāvastivādin and Sautrāntika) doctrines and practices with Mahāyāna elements.

The rendering ‘five types of meditation’ hinges on construing 門 as ‘category’ or ‘method’, rather than ‘gate’. I adopt the former but if the latter meaning was intended, the translation should be ‘the five meditations [serving as] gateway [to the path toward the Awakening]’. Cf. the term avatāramukha ‘gateways for the entrance [to the path]’ in the Bodhisattvabhūmi (BoBh-W 110.21–22 and 25). The latter compound is translated into Chinese by Xuanzang as 趣入門 (T 31.504b).

Note, however, that the Bodhisattvabhūmi does not use the numeral ‘five’ although this is the number of techniques referred to here.

111 The Zuochan sanmei jing 坐禪三昧經 calls it the ‘bodhisattva concentration on the Buddha recollection’ 菩薩念佛三昧 (T 15.281b25).

112 This is the antidote prescribed in the Zuochan sanmei jing （若多姦欲人, 不淨法 門治。若多瞋恚人, 慈心法門治。若多愚癡人, 思惟觀因緣法門治。若多思覺人, 念息 法門治。若多等分人, 念佛法門治。T 15.281c2-5). Other meditation scriptures prescribe it, however, for other types of affliction.

113 I understand ‘classical Yogācāra’ as referring to the subtly different but
linked to my labelling it ‘idealism’) is along the same lines advocated by the excellent study of Birgit Kellner and John Taber (2014)(also containing a survey of the scholarly discussions on the subject). As for the term ‘idealism’, I follow the definition given by the British philosopher Timothy L.S. Sprigge (1998):

Idealism is now usually understood in philosophy as the view that mind is the most basic reality and that the physical world exists only as an appearance to or expression of mind, or as somehow mental in its inner essence. However, a philosophy which makes the physical world dependent upon mind is usually also called idealist even if it postulates some further hidden, more basic reality behind the mental and physical scenes (for example, Kant’s things-in-themselves).

The classical Yogācāra philosophy seems to match the definition, albeit in a unique way. The problem underlying a lexeme like ‘idealism’ is that it denotes a wide genus whose semantic sphere includes numerous species and subspecies. The ‘Yogācāra species’ of idealism is not completely identical with the Platonic idealism or Berkeley’s idealist philosophy. Actually, depending on the semantic scale at which you set your judgements, you may also say that they represent different philosophies. But when looking from a more encompassing perspective, they can be seen

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kindred strains of philosophy which start with the texts (mostly verses) ascribed to Maitreya (mid-4th century), is systematised by the Asaṅga (ca 330–405) and Vasubandhu (ca 350–430, and continue with such exegetes as Sthiramati and Dharmapāla in the 6th century. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, when expressing their ontological views (the former more than the latter), can also be regarded as roughly belonging to the classical period. This phase comes to an end with the rise and dominance of the Hybrid Yogācāra-Madhyamaka current(s) represented by Jñānagarbha (ca 700–760), Śāntarakṣita (ca 725–788), Kamalaśīla (ca 740–795), etc. in the 8th century.
as sharing enough similarities to come under the definition above.

There is, hence, no harm in comparing and finding similarities between Yogācāra and phenomenology. And I believe that some points of similitude exist such as, for instance, those between the non-conceptual forms of Yogācāra meditation and the phenomenological ideal of epoché. But there are also other areas in which their approach is quite different. Overemphasising the similarities in an attempt to accommodate Yogācāra under a phenomenological umbrella is a Procrustean approach. But even if the phenomenological reading of Yogācāra were correct, it would not change my label of ‘idealist’. To my mind, the unwarranted (almost mystical) belief in intuitive knowledge seen in phenomenology (especially in its Husserlian and Heideggerian varieties) is a type of idealism.

What further complicates our understanding and labelling the Yogācāra philosophy is that its tenets are often stated in relation to spiritual and soteriological ideals (like most other Buddhist schools, for that matter). Actually, the very term ‘representation-only’ (vijñaptimātratā or vijñaptimātratva) is used with a double, if closely connected, meaning. At one level, it is a convenient, if not perfect, description of the reality as seen by ordinary people (prthagjana): the objects which they perceive as external to the mind are merely products of their wrong representation. In this sense, vijñaptimātratā is an epistemological/ontological descriptor. But on a higher, spiritual level, this descriptor is itself incorrect and non-functioning = non-existent. At this higher semantic dimension, the vijñaptimātratā becomes the platform for its own denial. Verses 25 to 30 in Vasubandhu’s Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi make this abundantly clear.\textsuperscript{114} Equally revealing is the discussion of the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra in Section 4 above.

I would therefore suggest that the term ‘self-deconstructing subjective

\textsuperscript{114}{} For critical Sanskrit and Tibetan editions of the mūla-text and Sthiramati’s bhāṣya, see Buescher 2007, 132–143.
idealism’ might work as a species descriptor for the classical Yogācāra philosophy.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

Citations of and references to Pali sources are done according to the following model: SN III 174.3 stands for *Samyuttanikāya*, volume III, page 174, line 3. (For Pali sources, whose titles have been abbreviated according to the widely accepted conventions detailed in the *Epilegomena to Vol. I of A Critical Pāli Dictionary*, I refer to the PTS editions.)

Citations of and references to Sanskrit sources are done according to the following model: AKbh 351.12 stands for the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, page 351, line 12. Alternatively, I refer to the verse rather than to the page. Thus, AKbh ch. VI ver. 17 b-c stands for the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, chapter VI, verse (*kārikā*) 17, second and third quarter.

Citations of and references to Tibetan translations are done according to the following model: D Wi 111a1 stands for the *sDe-dge Canon*, volume Wi (i.e. traditional Tibetan numeration), folio 111, recto, line 1.

Citations of and references to Chinese translations are done according to the following model: T 30.527b16 stands for the *Taishō Canon*, volume 30, page 527, segment b (middle segment), column 16.

AbhSam = *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (see Pradhan 1950)
AbhSamBh = *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* (see Tatia 1976)
AKBh: *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (see Pradhan 1975)
AṣṭaPp-V: *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (see Vaidya 1960)
AṣṭaPp-W: *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (see Wogihara 1932-1935)
BHS: Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
BoBh-D: *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (see Dutt 1978)
BoBh-W *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Wogihara [1936] 1971)
C: Co-ne edition of the bsTan ‘gyur
Ch.: Chinese translation
D: sDe-dge edition of the Tibetan Canon (see Takasaki et al. 1980)
DaBh-K: Daśabhūmikasūtra (see Kondō 1936)
DaBh-R: Daśabhūmikasūtra (see Rahder 1926)
G: Golden edition of the bsTan ‘gyur
MBh: Mahābhārata
MSA: Mahāyānasūtrālāmkāra (see Lévi 1907)
N: sNar-thang edition of the bsTan ‘gyur
Skt.: Sanskrit original
ŚrBh-MS: Śrāvakabhūmi Manuscript (see Taishō University and China

ŚrBh-Sh: Śrāvakabhūmi (see Shukla 1973)
ŚrBh-TG II (see Shōmon ji Kenkyū-kai 2007)
ŚrBh-TG # 22: Śrāvakabhūmi (see Shōmon ji Kenkyū-kai [ = Taishō Group

   of Research on the Śrāvakabhūmi] 2008)
sTog: sTog pa Palace edition of the Tibetan Canon
T: Taishō Canon (see Takakusu and Watanabe [1922–1933] 1991)
Tib.: Tibetan translation
VinSam-Ch: Chinese translation of the Viniścayasamgrahaṇī in T = Taishō

   Canon
VinSam-K: Viniścayasamgrahaṇī (see Kramer 2005)
VinSam-Ta: Viniścayasamgrahaṇī (see Takahashi 2005)

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chūshin toshite 『菩薩地』「真実品」から「摂決択分中菩薩地」への 

Takakusu Junjiro 高橋順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, chief 

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