CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. New Buddhist Sanskrit Texts from Central Asia: An Unknown fragment of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra by G. M. Bongard Levin
2. Buddhist Hybrid English: Some Notes on Philology and Hermeneutics for Buddhologists by Paul J. Griffiths
3. Nonorigination and Nirvāṇa in the Early Tathāgatagarbha Literature by William Grosnick
4. Multiple Dimensions of Impermanence in Dōgen’s “Genjōkōan” by Steven Heine
6. Metapsychology of the Abhidharma by Shanta Ratnayaka

II. SHORT PAPER

1. The Buddhist “Prodigal Son”: A Story of Misperceptions by Whalen Lai

III. BOOK REVIEWS

1. Lustful Maidens and Ascetic Kings (Buddhist and Hindu Stories of Life) by C. Amore and Larry D. Shinn
2. The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en by Judith A. Berling 101
3. The Memoirs of a Modern Gnostic (Parts I and II) by Edward Conze 102
4. Buddhist Studies by J. W. de Jong 106
5. Sources for a History of the bSam yas Debate by G. W. Houston 107
6. Buddhist Architecture of Western India (c. 250 BC–AD 300) by S. Nagaraju 109
7. The Thousand Buddhas: Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Cave-Temples of Tun-huang on the Western Frontier of China by Aurel Stein 112

IV. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

1. Tasks Ahead: Presidential Address Given on the Occasion of the Third Conference of The International Association of Buddhist Studies, Winnipeg, Canada, August 1980 by Herbert V. Guenther 118

Contributors 124
Nonorigination and Nirvāṇa in the Early Tathāgatagarbha Literature

by William Grosnick

One of the most interesting notions found in the early tathāgatagarbha literature is the idea that nirvāṇa should be understood as nonorigination (anutpāda). This idea is explicitly formulated in two texts, the Ratnagotravibhāga, the only āstra extant in Sanskrit which is completely devoted to the tathāgatagarbha and Buddha-nature teachings, and the Jñānālokaḷaṅkārasūtra, the sūtra upon which the Ratnagotravibhāga bases its exposition of nonorigination. The Jñānālokaḷaṅkārasūtra itself does not speak of the tathāgatagarbha or Buddha-nature doctrines, but the Ratnagotravibhāga takes the Jñānālokaḷaṅkārasūtra explanation of nonorigination and links it to the view of nirvāṇa found in two of the important early sūtras that do speak of the tathāgatagarbha, the Anunatvāpūrṇatvanirdesa and the Śrimālādevīsūtra. This interpretation of nirvāṇa in terms of nonorigination is of considerable importance in understanding the early tathāgatagarbha teaching, for it clarifies certain notions frequently associated with the tathāgatagarbha like the “natural purity of mind” (cittapratītiṣuddhi)—notions which have been hotly debated ever since the doctrine’s inception. It may also tell us something about the conceptual issues which divided the schools of early Buddhism and so hold clues for understanding the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In order to see how the tathāgatagarbha theorists could understand nirvāṇa as nonorigination it is necessary first to examine some of their ideas about nirvāṇa. It is of course well known that the earliest Mahāyāna literature placed great emphasis on the figure of the Buddha, and urged beings to strive for buddhahood rather than personal liberation. At first glance this would seem to give the impression that buddhahood and nirvāṇa were thought of as separate and distinct goals, the understanding being that one should strive for
buddhahood in order to help other beings attain nirvāṇa. Buddhahood would be the higher goal because it represents selfless activity on behalf of others rather than selfish striving for personal release. This indeed is how some Mahāyāna Buddhists apparently understood the relationship between buddhahood and nirvāṇa, for the authors of the so-called “trīyāna” texts like the Samdhinirmocanasūtra and the Mahāyānasūtrālankāra reasoned that certain beings (the tathāgatayānagotraka) had the superior faculties necessary for buddhahood while others (the śrāvakayānagotraka and the pratyekbuddhayānagotraka), had only the faculties necessary for attaining nirvāṇa.¹

But “ekayāna” texts like the Ratnagotravibhāga and the tathāgata-garbha sūtras upon which it relies do not make this conceptual distinction between buddhahood and nirvāṇa. Buddhahood is not simply a superior state of wisdom and compassion from which one helps others attain liberation—it is also itself a state of liberation. Thus the Ratnagotravibhāga maintains that from the highest point of view “buddhahood and nirvāṇa are one and the same”;² and the Svīmālā-devisūtra, in a passage quoted in the Ratnagotravibhāga, says

The śrāvaka and pratyeabuddha vehicles all enter the great vehicle. The great vehicle is the Buddha vehicle. Therefore the three vehicles are the one vehicle. One who attains the one vehicle attains supreme, perfect enlightenment. Supreme enlightenment is the realm of nirvāṇa (nirvāṇadhātu). And the realm of nirvāṇa is the Dharma-body of the Tathāgata.³

Thus buddhahood was not simply understood as the attainment of those various powers and kinds of wisdom by which one might aid others to find liberation in nirvāṇa—it was itself a form of liberation. Indeed, it was the only form of liberation that there was.

What above all made possible this identification of buddhahood and nirvāṇa was the rejection of the notion that nirvāṇa represented extinction. This idea was probably implicit in the doctrine of the eternity of the Tathāgata so vigorously expounded in the Sad-dharmapuṇḍarīka and the first half of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra. But the sūtras of the tathāgata-garbha tradition do not just speak of non-extinction for the Tathāgata, they also make clear that it is wrong to think of any sentient being attaining extinction. In the Anuñat-vāpaṇatrāvanirdeśa, the title of which means the “sūtra which expounds neither increase nor decrease,” the Buddha responds to the question of whether there is any increase or decrease in the number of beings
transmigrating through the triple world first by rejecting the questions as ill-conceived, and then by explicitly attacking both the idea that nirvāṇa represents a kind of severance, destruction, or non-being (the view of “decrease”), and the idea that it represents a reality over and above the phenomenal life that arises suddenly without cause (the view of “increase”). The text goes on to say that these two erroneous views of nirvāṇa would not arise if beings understood the one dharmadhatu. The Śrimālādevisūtra follows a similar line of thought in its discussion of the third noble truth, the truth of the cessation of suffering (duḥkhirodhasatya). In a widely quoted passage the sūtra says:

By the truth of the cessation of suffering, O World-honored One, is not meant the destruction of a single dharma. By the expression “cessation of suffering” is meant the Dharma-body of the Tathāgata, which is beginningless, unproduced, unborn, of no destruction, free from destruction, eternal, pure by nature, free from the covering of kleśas, and inseparable from the buddhadharmas, which are more numerous than the sands of the Ganges River.

The Ratnagotravibhāga comments on this passage by saying that this is how the truth of the cessation of suffering should be understood; it should never be explained that the truth gets its name because of the extinction of something. What this seems to mean is that the authors of the Ratnagotravibhāga and other tathāgatagarbha texts rejected the idea that nirvāṇa was a state of extinction reached when one destroyed one’s ignorance and passions and exhausted one’s rebirths. It is possible that their arguments were directed at the notions of nirvāṇa “with a remainder” (sopādhīśesanirvāṇa) and nirvāṇa “without a remainder” (anupādhīśesanirvāṇa) found in texts like the Itivuttaka, for both of these notions emphasized extinction. Nirvāṇa with a remainder (also called kleśanirvāṇa), represented the extinction of āsravas (“outflows”) like sensual desire, desire for existence, and ignorance and the extinguishing of kleśas like greed, hatred, and pride. It represented the attainment of an arhat who had not yet departed this life. Nirvāṇa without a remainder represented the extinction realized by the arhat at death, when the five skandhas (the “remainder”) are dispersed. Both of these articulations of nirvāṇa suggest that there is a point in time when certain dharmas, be they kleśas or skandhas, are completely extinguished, and this appears to be precisely the kind of extinction which
the *tathāgatagarbha* texts were arguing against. Moreover, the idea that *nirvāṇa* is attained or entered at a particular point in time is also something argued against in the texts. The *Jñānālokālankārasūtra* says that:

It is impossible to see the Tathāgata enter *nirvāṇa*, though sentient beings give rise to such a notion and say that the Tathāgata has attained ultimate *nirvāṇa*. . . . The Tathāgata’s true, all-pervading knowledge is unborn, undying, unoriginated, and undestroyed. . . . From beginningless time he realizes eternal *mahāparinirvāṇa*.9

The view of *nirvāṇa* brought forward in the early *tathāgatagarbha* texts as an alternative to the idea of extinction was the rather remarkable notion of nonorigination. The authors of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Jñānālokālankārasūtra* (and perhaps the other *tathāgatagarbha* sutras), seemed to believe that true attainment is to be found not in the extinguishing of ignorance and passion, but in their nonorigination. This rather ingenious notion is clearly brought forward in the *Jñānālokālankārasūtra* where it is said that:

Where there is neither origination nor extinction, mind, intellect, and consciousness do not take place. When mind, intellect, and consciousness do not take place, there is no false discrimination by which incorrect thought would arise. One who arouses correct thought never originates ignorance. Nonorigination means the non-arising of the twelve parts of existence.10

The idea seems to be that correct practice consists of not generating those mental activities by which illusory realities are conceived. Correct thought seems to be thought which does not originate those notions of “me” and “mine” that in turn give rise to desire, craving, hatred, and the other passions that plague human existence. Correct thought is the nonorigination of any false and foolish conceptions of reality (*prapañca*). And the *Jñānālokālankārasūtra* clearly associates this nonorigination with *nirvāṇa*, the liberation from *samsāra*:

One who has been able to reach the truth does not give rise to vain imaginings (*prapañca*). One who does not give rise to vain imaginings does not act in accordance with falsely posited realities. One who neither imagines nor acts in such ways does not dwell in *samsāra*.11
In the analysis provided by the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, human bondage (*vibandha*) is “the origination of desire, hatred, and ignorance” which is preceded by superficial thought (ayonissomanasthāra). Superficial thought is thought which conceives of and grasps after illusory realities because of its attachment to what are really only the conceptual characteristics (*nimitta*) of things. When one understands that this thought is extinct by nature one ceases to originate duality and discrimination and the suffering associated with them. Therefore the text says, “there is absolutely no origination of suffering.” The text seems to be saying that human suffering is the illusory product of mental activity. When one understands this one's proper response is not to try to destroy suffering, but simply not to originate it. Those practitioners whom the *Ratnagotravibhāga* characterizes as *śrāvakas* do not understand this and therefore seek to destroy suffering. This is probably why the text claims that the obstacle of *śrāvakas* is the notion of suffering (*duḥkha-samjñā*) and the fear of suffering (*duḥkha-bhūrutva*).

Suffering is not a *dharma* one should extinguish, but an illusion one should not produce. In the words of the *Jñānālokaśālakārasūtra*,

If the bodhisattva does not originate mind he does not effect the extinction of dharmas or the origination of dharmas. . . . He sees that dharmas are extinct from the outset and that they are not extinguished.

Thus, rather than understanding the noble truth of the extinction of suffering as a state of nonbeing or extinction, it would appear that the early *tathāgatagarbha* thinkers regarded it as a kind of practice —namely the practice of nondiscriminative wisdom (*avikalpa-jñāna*). Nondiscriminative wisdom is not a practice aimed at deliverance (*vīrāga*), but a practice that is already deliverance, for ignorance and its attendant passions and sufferings are simply not originated. It is also a practice that does not involve the application of correctives (*pratīpākṣa*) for specific ills (as, for example, in the case of a man prone to hatred who might consciously cultivate benevolent thoughts toward his enemies). The mind of one who practices correct thought (i.e., nonorigination), is “pure by nature,” and as the *Jñānālokaśālakārasūtra* puts it, “because mind is pure by nature in one who practices correct thought, there is no need for pratīpākṣa.” This rejection of pratīpākṣa would suggest that the understanding of practice found in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Jñānālokaśālakārasūtra* may have more in common with certain Sino-Japanese views of practice (like the Zen Master
Dōgen’s “enlightenment-based practice”) than it does with more traditional Indian Buddhist understandings of practice like the five path system of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra.

Since the nonorigination of ignorance is an activity, rather than a state of extinction, it is not surprising that the tathāgatagarbha texts portray it using the dynamic, personified figure of the Buddha’s Dharma-body rather than using the traditional term nirvāṇa with its connotation of stasis. It is probably because of this active sense of nonorigination that the Ratnagotravibhāga literally identifies the extinction of suffering with the dharmakāya of the Tathāgata. Indeed, the active nonorigination of ignorance is so central to the tathāgatagarbha theory that some of the texts seem almost to make nonorigination into the defining characteristic of the dharmakāya. The Śrīmālādevīsūtra defines the dharmakāya as beginningless, unproduced, and non-arisen. And the Jñānālokaśālaśāstra says that the pure Dharma-body

is unmoving, does not originate mental actions, does not engage in pointless speculation, and does not reason dualistically. It does not discriminate; it is free from discrimination. It does not speculate; it is free from speculation. It does not imagine; it is free from imagination. It is tranquil and quiescent, of neither origination nor destruction.

In another passage of the Jñānālokaśālasūtra that is quoted by the Ratnagotravibhāga, the text says that “he who is said to be of neither origination nor destruction is called the Tathāgata.”

The understanding of nirvāṇa and the dharmakāya in terms of nonorigination has several important implications for understanding the tathāgatagarbha theory. One of the most obvious of these implications concerns the proper interpretation of the notion of the “natural purity of mind” (cittaprakṛtivivṛddhi) or the “natural luminescence of mind” (cittasya prakṛtiprabhāśvaratā). Some scholars of Buddhism, most notably Obermiller, seem to have felt that these notions imply a sort of Brahmanical monism—that underlying the constant flux of mind-produced illusions there is a sort of pure mental substratum that remains eternally the same. This interpretation would have it that the natural purity of this mental substratum serves as an ultimate refuge from the uncertainties and sufferings of transitory human existence.

It is clear, however, from the idea of the nonorigination of
ignorance that there is no need to go so far as to posit a mental substratum in order to understand the theory of the natural purity of mind. The natural purity of mind can be thought of simply as the awareness of one who does not originate thoughts of “me” and “mine” and other illusory realities. Nothing special is being said about any kind of mystical penetration into an absolute or universal mental nature. The natural luminosity of mind is only the natural purity of one who does not generate foolish thoughts. It is completely unthinkable, unlocalizable, and indescribable,\textsuperscript{24} and thus fully compatible with the \textit{prajñāpāramitā} teaching of emptiness.

A second important implication of nonorigination involves the sister concept of the \textit{tathāgatagarbha}, the Buddha-nature (\textit{buddha-dhātu}). An important problem confronting scholars of the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra} was how to reconcile the various assertions made in the \textit{sūtra} that the Buddha-nature is both a cause and a result; the idea of nonorigination may show how this is possible. For example, in the “Kāśyapa” Chapter of the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra}, the Buddha says that before enlightenment the Buddha-nature is a cause but that after enlightenment it is a result.\textsuperscript{25} Later in the same chapter the Buddha says that when he speaks following his own volition (i.e., not adapting his thought to the capacities of listeners), he explains that the result lies in the cause and the cause in the result.\textsuperscript{26} Unfortunately, the \textit{sūtra} itself does not do much to clarify these rather confusing statements; but if one were to identify the Buddha-nature with the active nonorigination of ignorance, this apparent contradiction between cause and result might be resolved. As noted earlier, the practice of not originating ignorance is not simply the means to liberation (cause), it is also liberation itself (result). By not originating false notions of reality, beings actualize their innate purity. All beings are said to possess the Buddha-nature because they possess the capacity to practice nonorigination—this is the Buddha-nature as cause. When they practice it becomes result.\textsuperscript{27}

It is also interesting to note that the identification of liberation with nonorigination that is found in the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} literature may hold some clues for understanding the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, or at least for understanding the philosophical questions which divided them from their so-called “Hīnayāna” opponents. For it is clear from the \textit{tathāgatagarbha} literature that the early Mahāyāna thinkers had some strong views regarding the nature of \textit{nirvāṇa}. The \textit{Śrīmālādevīsūtra}, as we have noted, is most adamant in asserting that
the truth of the cessation of suffering (duhkanirodhasatyā) should not be thought of as extinction. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that one of the philosophical issues that led Mahāyāna Buddhism to distinguish itself from other Buddhist schools of thought was the proper understanding of nirvāṇa. How far back can one trace the notion that nirvāṇa should be thought of as nonorigination rather than extinction?

If one examines what the historical Buddha is purported to have said about nirvāṇa, it is clear that there was plenty of room for disagreement right from the start. Certainly there are plenty of references to extinction in the Buddha’s utterances—allusions to the extinguishing of a lamp or flame, to the extinction of desire, hatred, and illusion, and even to the “stopping of becoming.” There are also, however, some important qualifications of the idea that nirvāṇa is extinction, perhaps foremost among them being the refusal of the Buddha to answer questions like whether or not the Tathāgata exists after death or whether or not a monk who has destroyed the āsravas exists after the dissolution of the body. It is certainly clear from this that he did not lay down as dogma the notions of nirvāṇa with and without a remainder. Moreover, because of the Buddhist rejection of the reality of the self, or ātman, it is apparent that there is nothing that ever really needs to be extinguished in the first place. In an early discourse attributed to Śāriputra it is concluded that “a Tathāgata cannot be held to be perceived as existing even in this life in truth and reality.” Assertions like these suggest that extinction is in a very real sense already attained, and it is only the illusion of self that could present a problem. The question might well then have become, should one extinguish such illusions or simply not originate them? And finally there is that curious quote from the Udhana, which almost seems to suggest that nirvāṇa should be understood as existing:

There is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded; if there were not, there would not be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded, there is therefore an escape from the born, the become, the made, and the compounded.

It would be stretching things to suggest that this quote expresses the view of nonorigination that is found in the Jñānālokākārasūtra, but it is nevertheless clear that even in those statements attributable to the
Buddha, nonbirth and nonorigination were important notions. Debate over extinction or nonorigination could have begun even during the lifetime of the Buddha.

As a sidelight it is worth noting that the idea of nonorigination might have also figured in the dispute over the backsliding of an arhat that apparently divided some of the splinter schools. Schools like the Theravādins and the Vibhāṣyavādins, which rejected the idea that an arhat can fall back from his attainment, almost always based their arguments on the idea of extinction. The Theravādins, for example, asserted that an arhat cannot backslide because he has destroyed the roots of kleśas. And the Vibhāṣyavādins compared the arhat's destruction of kleśas to a fire reducing a tree to ashes—nothing remains of the original that could grow back.

On the other hand, it would seem that if one thought of practice not as the extinction of kleśas, but as the nonorigination of kleśas, practice would be endless, and would never bring one to any sort of final state. Backsliding would either always remain a possibility, or else it would remain a possibility as long as one had the mistaken idea that at some point in time one's kleśas would be extinct (then, conceivably one might erroneously relax his vigilance). This might have been the reasoning of the Sarvāstivādins, for there is some evidence that they felt that the possibility of backsliding was tied to one's understanding of nonorigination. According to Vasumitra, one of the theses of the Sarvāstivādins was the rather surprising contention that streamwinners (srotāpanna) cannot backslide but arhats can—a contention that is strange because it seems to reverse the traditional order and place streamwinners above arhats. The very next Sarvāstivādin tenet listed by Vasumitra asserts that all arhats do not obtain the wisdom of nonorigination (anutpāda-jñāna), and though no connection is made between these theses in Vasumitra's enumeration, one might conjecture that the second was originally put forward as an explanation for the first. That is, the reason that some arhats slide back is that they have not obtained the wisdom of nonorigination.

All this is highly speculative, and there is no indication that the Vātsiputriyas or Sammitayās followed similar reasoning when they argued for the backsliding of arhats. But it does show that the issue of nonorigination was central to some of the doctrinal disputes among the splinter schools. Mahāyāna Buddhism might well have developed from doctrinal disputes like these.
NOTES

3. T. XII, 220c. RGV quote: T. XXXI, 821a, b and Takasaki, p. 144.
4. T. XVI, 466a, b.
5. T. XVI, 466c.
7. T. XXXI, 824a and Takasaki, p. 167.
9. T. XII, 241c.
11. T. XII, 244b.
12. T. XXXI, 824a, b and Takasaki, pp. 167–69.
14. T. XII, 247b.
15. The RGV explains that deliverance has the common feature of both nirodhasātya and mārgasātya. T. XXXI, 823c and Takasaki, p. 164.
16. T. XII, 244c.
18. T. XXXI, 824a and Takasaki, p. 168.
19. T. XII, 221c.
20. T. XII, 240c.
24. Cf. the following quote from the JAA: “The Tathāgata’s Dharma-body is markless and free from any discernible aspect. It is without location and cannot be localized.” T. XII, 241c.
25. T. XII, 571b.
26. T. XII, 580c.
27. This may be why the Nirvāṇasūtra devotes so much space to discussing the icchantika, a being whose current practices represent the antithesis of correct Buddhist practice.
35. Bareau, p. 140.