

Critical Buddhism and Returning to the Sources

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C RITICAL BUDDHISM WAS INEVITABLE. That it was given voice by prominent Japanese scholars noted for their work in non-East Asian Buddhism was also inevitable. That it has provoked strong, even hostile, reactions was inevitable as well. Inevitable means that the causes and conditions that gave rise to Critical Buddhism can be analyzed and understood to show that it has a context, a history, and a necessity. Critical Buddhism is necessary. Thinking about what arises through causes and conditions, especially in terms of how that impacts on cultural and social realities, is a principal component of both Critical Buddhism and Buddhism properly practiced.

This essay will examine some—but certainly not all—of the factors that have contributed to Critical Buddhism. Some arguments and observations will be offered that, while not retellings from the writings of the Critical Buddhists, run parallel to them. These parallels, which I offer as supplements, recast some of their arguments and focus on issues and areas germane to their undertaking. After discussing the inevitability of Critical Buddhism in the context of twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist scholarship, I will turn to some of the events that took place in China during the seventh and eighth centuries that were decisive for the prevalence in East Asia of the type(s) of Buddhism they criticize. This will be followed by a critique of what has happened to the notion of enlightenment in East Asian Buddhism, particularly in the Ch’an and Zen traditions, with reference to the problem of *hongaku* (original enlightenment) and the authority of lineage transmission. Then, stepping back into a wider context, I will suggest that, far from being the idiosyncratic, misguided departure depicted by its detractors, Critical Buddhism is the inevitable revisiting of a theme that has been central to Buddhism since its onset. All the above

points concern inevitabilities: the trajectory and accomplishments of Japanese scholarship in this century coupled with the crisis of Buddhism in the modern world; the decisive historical events that have established a pervasive ideological underpinning in East Asian Buddhism that Matsu-moto and Hakamaya have labeled *dhātu-vāda*, combined with the exclusion of other, counteracting Buddhist tendencies found elsewhere in the Buddhist world, such as Buddhist logic; the undermining of certain foundational Buddhist notions, such as enlightenment, as a result of or in tandem with the growth of *dhātu-vāda* ideology; the persistent self-criticism and self-reevaluation that Buddhism has subjected itself to, often glorifying the critique and the critics (Nāgārjuna being the most famous example)—all these points have made it inevitable that Critical Buddhism appear today in Japan (and elsewhere). Finally, while examining an aspect of Matsu-moto's critique of *The Record of Lin-chi*, I will suggest some tactical distinctions that should be considered by those critical of Critical Buddhism.

THE TWO INEVITABILITIES

Critical Buddhism has arisen from a convergence of two inevitabilities. I will mention but not document them here, and speak of them in general terms with a few illustrations.

The first is the prevailing sentiment over the last few decades that Buddhism, particularly East Asian Buddhism, and especially Japanese Zen, has become deficient in the area of ethics.¹ Conferences have been held and papers have been written decrying this deficiency, and various proposals have been advanced to remedy it. In Japan Buddhist insensitivity to the plight of minorities and oppressed people, and other lapses of strong ethical leadership, have raised questions in the mind of the Japanese public about the ethical backbone and vision of some Buddhist sects.²

The second inevitability, which is more far-reaching in terms of general Buddhist history, derives from the increasing attention Japanese Buddhist scholars have paid to Sanskrit and Tibetan materials over the last century. Such studies have forced a reevaluation of the East Asian sources and traditions. East Asian scholars, but most especially Japanese scholars, have also rediscovered India and the Indian materials, albeit sometimes in their extant Tibetan versions.³ At the very least, these discoveries have dramatically recontextualized the East Asian understanding of India, leading to a questioning of age-old traditional East Asian

assumptions about, first, what was happening in India before and during the transmission of Buddhism to China. Until this century, there had been virtually no interest whatsoever on the part of Korean or Japanese Buddhists concerning Indian or non-East Asian Buddhist developments subsequent to the Sung dynasty. A second result of these discoveries is that there is a questioning of the traditional ways in which the East Asian traditions have anchored themselves to Indian Buddhism.

One can quickly gauge the increasing accuracy and sophistication with which Japanese and international scholars are rediscovering the Indian context by surveying some accomplishments of the last hundred years or so. Two bibliographical works written by Japanese scholars in English afford convenient examples for those unfamiliar with Japanese scholarship. Nanjō Bun'yū's English translation, published in 1883, of a Ming dynasty catalogue of Chinese translations of Indian materials—which was a great boon to Buddhist scholars of the day unfamiliar with East Asian languages⁴—offered reconstructed Sanskrit titles for the works listed. Those reconstructions were more often fanciful than correct.

Nearly one hundred years later Nakamura Hajime published his *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*.⁵ While not entirely free of fanciful title reconstructions and East Asian presuppositions,⁶ this work demonstrates how far Japanese scholarship had come.⁷ Comparisons of the Chinese Buddhist corpus with extant versions of the same or related texts in Sanskrit and Tibetan are systematically undertaken; discussions of the East Asian corpus are frequently supplemented by analyses of Indian and Tibetan texts unavailable in Chinese; and bad, incomplete, and problematic translations are identified as such.⁸ Nakamura, in a sense, presents a fuller reconstruction of the Indian Buddhist textual scene than East Asia had ever seen, since many of the materials he discusses had never been translated into Chinese and had therefore been unknown, unappreciated, and unaccounted for during the development and consolidation of East Asian Buddhism.

I do not mean to imply that Nakamura accomplished this single-handedly. On the contrary, his work became possible only because of the labors of fellow scholars who have perused, catalogued, and studied the widest range of Buddhist texts, from more cultures, more periods, and in more languages than has ever been possible in history. In short, Nakamura's survey shows a vastly superior familiarity with and command of the non-Chinese materials than did Nanjō's *Catalogue*. Yet his critical

appraisal of these materials is still tinged with a *dhātu-vāda* outlook, that is to say, he still interprets Buddhist literature through East Asian models and assumptions.⁹ Nanjō offers erroneous “facts” or details; his catalogue merely lists texts with minimal information; he offers little if any interpretation. Nakamura has “corrected” many of the details, but the full import of the material he surveys *and interprets* for and from the East Asian vantage point has not yet become apparent.

As Japanese studies grew more sophisticated, noticeable subtle shifts in attitudes about Indian sources emerged. When D.T. Suzuki published his first solo English work in 1900, a translation of the Śikṣānanda version of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*,¹⁰ he devoted much of his introduction to passionately defending the traditional East Asian belief that the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* was an authentic Indian text authored by Āśvaghōṣa, and spared no sarcasm and scorn for those who might question that attribution. The *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* had long been suspected as a Chinese apocryphal text, in fact almost from the moment it appeared in China in the sixth century. By the early 1930s Suzuki had studied Sanskrit and Tibetan sources for his *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (1930, repr. 1981) and his translation into English of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (1932; repr. 1978).¹¹ In *Studies*, he initially referred to the *Awakening of Faith* as Āśvaghōṣa’s text but later hedges slightly with the phrase “usually ascribed to Āśvaghōṣa.”¹² Two years later, in the introduction to *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (xxxix), he wrote:

The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna is generally ascribed to Āśvaghōṣa. While *he may not have been the author* of this most important treatise, ...there was surely a great Buddhist mind, who...poured out his thoughts in *The Awakening*. Some scholars contend that *The Awakening* is a Chinese work, but this is not well grounded. [emphasis added]

While still stubbornly rejecting Chinese authorship of *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (scholars today almost unanimously consider it a Chinese creation), he was clearly backing off from his original position. In the thirty years between his first work and this revised opinion, Suzuki must have learned about Āśvaghōṣa, who was not a Mahāyāna Buddhist,¹³ and whose extant Sanskrit works, such as *Buddhacarita*, bear no resemblance whatsoever to the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*’s ideology.¹⁴ That Suzuki’s underlying commitment to East Asian assumptions only underwent minor modifications as his familiarity with Sanskrit and

Tibetan materials increased is evident throughout his *Lañkāvatāra* works. His attempt in *Studies* to sharply distinguish between the “Zen” ideology of the *Lañkāvatāra* on the one hand, and Yogacara on the other (oddly enough, on the grounds that Zen and *Lañkāvatāra* are forms of “Transcendental Idealism,” whereas Yogacara is not), is embarrassing and naive, and driven by his conviction that the *Lañkāvatāra* lay at the core of Zen, a conviction that the Zen tradition has insisted upon for over a thousand years. The Ch’an opinion of Yogacara (or the Zen opinion of Hossō) has always been derogatory.

Such reexaminations of historical origins have been going on in earnest for many decades, the work of Yanagida Seizan and others on Zen lineages and history being the best known examples. These reexaminations have determined that many, possibly most, of the presumed connections between Indian Buddhism and the Ch’an schools—such as the transmission to China by Bodhidharma—are largely later East Asian constructions, as are many of the early Ch’an lineages, and for that matter, the patriarchal lineages of T’ien-t’ai, Hua-yen, and Pure Land.¹⁵

While it may appear that the need to validate historical claims should not be as urgent for East Asian Buddhism as it is for so-called historical religions, such as Christianity,¹⁶ it is important nonetheless, especially for Zen, which has, with an air of weighty circumstance, rested the authority and validity of Zen on the notion of a transmission of “enlightenment” from teacher to disciple, thus making the validation of these transmission lineages themselves crucial for maintaining that authority. In other words, in the absence of *bone fide* lineages, Zen’s own authority is in question, an issue I will return to later.

The East Asian traditions have always emphasized their perceived continuities with their Indian ancestors, rather than discontinuities or disparities, but the rediscovery of Indian Buddhism—based on both careful examination of a fuller range of Indian materials than had previously been available in Chinese translations as well as a reevaluation of the events and factors in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese history that have shaped East Asian Buddhism’s self-image—has reasserted the disparities. These include elements of Indian Buddhism that were never adequately conveyed to China as well as elements with Indian precedents that, for various reasons, the Chinese and other East Asians have refashioned into theories and practices significantly removed from and even at odds with their antecedents. The full range of these disparities is too vast to list or

discuss here, but some fundamental features and their effects on contemporary East Asian scholarship may be cited.

DECISIVENESS OF THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CENTURIES FOR CHINESE BUDDHISM

One of the dominant forces affecting twentieth-century Japanese understanding of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism is the pioneering work of Ui Hakuju, who recognized the centrality of Yogacara thought for the development of East Asian Buddhism. While the work of Ui Hakuju did much to increase awareness of the importance of Indian thought for properly understanding East Asian Buddhism, his innovative studies of the relation between Indian and Chinese Buddhism viewed the former through the presuppositional prism of the latter, as, for instance, when he championed Paramārtha's sixth-century translations from Sanskrit into Chinese over those of Hsüan-tsang in the seventh century, despite the superior accuracy of Hsüan-tsang's works. Ui was echoing a decisive ideological decision made by East Asian Buddhists twelve hundred years earlier. The establishment of the hegemony of *dhātu-vāda* ideology in eighth-century China relied in no small part on the rejection of Hsüan-tsang's presentation of Indian Buddhist ideas, a rejection accompanied by a return to the ideology expressed in the works of Paramārtha and other earlier thinkers.

This moment in Chinese Buddhist history proved pivotal. East Asian Buddhism returned with deliberateness and passion to its own earlier misconceptions instead of returning to the trajectory of Indian Buddhism from which it believed it had been spawned. The history of the misconceptions leading up to these moments of the late seventh and early eighth century can easily be traced through the surviving texts of the earlier periods, and many are well known to present-day scholars: From the attempts by the early so-called Prajna schools to smuggle an eternal self or spirit (*shen*) into their formulations;¹⁷ to the writings of Kumārajīva's contemporary, Hui-yüan, on the eternal spirit;¹⁸ to the excitement created in China when it appeared that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*'s doctrine of Buddha-nature gave scriptural credence to the ubiquitous underlying metaphysical substratum that the earlier Chinese Buddhists had been so eagerly seeking; to the displacement of Nāgārjuna's actual Madhyamakan thought by the *Ta chih tu lun*, a text with *dhātu-vāda* tendencies that, because it was ascribed to Nāgārjuna, gave the Chinese an image of

Nāgārjuna as a *dhātu-vāda* thinker;¹⁹ to the equivalence—frequently made—between the terms “spirit,” “Mahayana” (which in Chinese and Korean writings often takes on a talismanic air rather than simply denoting a sectarian preference), and *tao*;²⁰ to the dominant notion of a pure, eternal consciousness or Mind in the sixth century;²¹ to the full-fledged *dharmadhātu(-vāda)* systems of the T’ang and Sung (Hua-yen, Ch’an, Pure Land, the short-lived Chinese Tantra school, and, to a lesser extent, T’ien-t’ai). The repeated attempts to return to this metaphysical foundation—though frequently challenged by other Chinese Buddhists—was always deliberate, but by the eighth century this turn had become decisive and irreversible. While one of the key slogans of the day was “return to the source,” it was in many ways a “return” to Chinese metaphysical assumptions that had flourished in China before Buddhism’s arrival. It was a “return” to an underlying, invariant, universal metaphysical “source” rather than a return to the sources of Buddhism, that is to say, Indian Buddhist thought. Fa-tsang, the seminal Hua-yen thinker, played a key role.²² It might be useful to quickly recount some key events of this period.

Hsüan-tsang—the famous Chinese pilgrim who, after studying Buddhism in India for sixteen years, returned to China to translate seventy-four texts—devoted his life to recontextualizing the Chinese Buddhist thought of his day. While in India he recognized that the orientation of Chinese Buddhism was at variance in some very fundamental ways from what he was discovering in India. Some, but not all, of that variance coincides with what Critical Buddhism has labeled *dhātu-vāda*. When he returned to China he endeavored to bring Chinese Buddhism back into line with normative Indian Buddhist thought, in part by retranslating texts that were already popular in China, such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, which was the basic text of Paramārtha’s school. Hsüan-tsang, to make sure this text would be understood properly, free of what he considered to be Paramārtha’s distortions, also translated two commentaries on it, one by Vasubandhu and the other by *Asvabhāva.²³ Hsüan-tsang also introduced new materials with which the Chinese were not familiar, such as a Vaiśeṣika text,²⁴ and, most importantly, *he was the first ever to translate any Indian logic texts into Chinese.*

Medieval Indian Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan philosophy are virtually inconceivable without Dignāga and his logic. Hakamaya and Matsumoto propose that Buddhism should engage in critical, rational thinking, namely the sort of thinking for which Dignāga’s logic became

foundational outside East Asia. While prior to Hsüan-tsang some of Dignāga's epistemological writings had been introduced by others,²⁵ Dignāga's works on the syllogism—precisely those works that had made him famous throughout India, even to non-Buddhists—remained unknown in China. Hsüan-tsang translated one of Dignāga's strictly logical works, the *Nyāyamukha*,²⁶ along with a synopsis of Dignāga's logical system by Śaṅkarasvāmin called *Nyāyapraveśa* (T No. 1630). Hsüan-tsang had discovered that Indian Buddhism was permeated with logic,²⁷ that in the seventh century the study and application of rigorous syllogistic logic was synonymous with the practice of Indian Buddhism, regardless of sect.²⁸ Yet nothing of this basic discipline, nothing of this fundamental method, was as yet known in China.²⁹ Despite Hsüan-tsang's efforts, the Chinese found Indian logic so arcane that by the end of the eighth century it was virtually forgotten.

Hsüan-tsang's translation work began in 645, when he arrived back in China, and ended with his death in 664. During his last years Fa-tsang briefly joined Hsüan-tsang's translation committee, but as Fa-tsang was already firmly attached to the Sinitic "misconceptions" established by Paramārtha and others, he considered Hsüan-tsang to be a dangerous revisionist and left, finding support for his rejection of Hsüan-tsang's understanding of Buddhism in the teachings of Chih-yen (later considered the second Hua-yen patriarch, with Fa-tsang being considered the third). Chih-yen was critical of Hsüan-tsang's teachings and decried the strong influence they were then exerting on the capitol, and indeed throughout East Asia at that time, since Hsüan-tsang was clearly the most eminent and famous Chinese Buddhist of his day. Students came to him from Korea and Japan as well as from all over China.

When Hsüan-tsang died he was succeeded by K'uei-chi, whom Fa-tsang attacked, vying for the patronage and attention of Empress Wu. In the end Fa-tsang won out. His polemics against Hsüan-tsang's and K'uei-chi's version of Yogacara were encapsulated in several slogans: Yogacara was concerned with characterizing dharmas (*fa-hsiang*), whereas True Buddhism (i.e., Fa-tsang's Sinitic version) dealt with Dharma-nature (*fa-hsing*); Yogacara's expertise was restricted to defiled consciousness (*wei-shih*, Fa-tsang's misinterpretation of *viññapti-mātra*), while True Buddhism comprehended the One Mind that alone is the ground of reality (*wei-hsin*); Yogacara rejected the soteriological significance and ontological reality of *tathāgata-garbha*, while True Buddhism saw the latter as another

synonym for the ground of reality in its dynamic functioning; Yogacara understood the Three Self-Natures (*trisvabhāva*, *san tzu-hsing*) as ultimately affirming the causality of *pratitya-samutpāda* in terms of *para-tantra* (*yi-t'a san-tzu-hsing*, “dependent on others nature”), while True Buddhism affirmed the non-obstructed mutual interpenetration of principle and events (*li-shih wu-ai*) as True Emptiness and Wondrous Being (*chen-k'ung miao-yu*) in terms of *pariniṣpanna* (*yüan-ch'eng san-tzu-hsing*, “perfected nature”). The question of whether Fa-tsang’s characterization of Hsüan-tsang’s teachings was accurate or not aside, it is clear that each of his preferred positions invokes the sentiments of *dhātu-vāda*.

This point bears emphasis. In early T’ang China (7th–8th century) there was a deliberate attempt to divorce Chinese Buddhism from developments in India. Ostensibly that move, promoted by Fa-tsang, Tsung-mi, and many others,³⁰ was cast as a turn from sastra to sutra, from the technical interpretive literature of the Indians to the texts purporting to record the words of the Buddha himself. Leaving aside the historical complication that the sutras to which they turned were invariably Mahayanic, which is to say, they were composed five or more centuries later than the last words ever uttered by the Buddha, and the further complication that some of the sutras they took to be genuine translations of Indian texts were in fact written in China, we can say that the key thrust of this turn (and its major consequence) was to deliberately free Chinese and other East Asian Buddhists from Indian interpretations and thereby open Buddhism to specifically East Asian readings and concerns. In short, the sensibilities of Indian Buddhism were intentionally displaced by East Asian models, such as Buddha-nature (*fō-hsing*), sudden versus gradual enlightenment, *p’an-chiao* (classification of teachings), and so on.

As I will argue shortly, these sorts of debates, between substrative ideologies and their deconstruction, have recurred throughout Buddhist history. The most significant series of debates for the development of East Asian Buddhism occurred between the sixth and eighth centuries, from the Sui through mid-T’ang dynasties. Hsüan-tsang, as it turned out, was in many ways the last chance for non-*dhātu-vāda* Buddhism to establish a firm root in China (though his works are not entirely devoid of those elements either). But Chih-yen and Fa-tsang ultimately prevailed. The polemical division drawn by Fa-tsang between *fa-hsing* and *fa-hsiang* (or between *wei-hsin* and *wei-shih*), cuts remarkably along the same lines as those between *dhātu-vāda* and Critical Buddhism. It is *fa-hsing*, whose

central tenet is an ubiquitous underlying nature called *dharmā-dhātu*, that has dominated Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhism. We may even consider *fa-hsing* a synonym for *dhātu-vāda*.

Though the problem of *dhātu-vāda* ideology infiltrating Buddhism did not begin in China or East Asia, it intensified there, not only because the *dhātu-vāda* side gained hegemony, but also because the loyal opposition (with a few possible exceptions) virtually disappeared from the scene.³¹ There can be no real debate with only one side present, and the intersectarian debates of East Asian Buddhism are all *between dhātu-vāda* schools, which is to say, the notion of *dhātu-vāda* is *not* what they are problematizing or questioning. By the eighth century the Chinese and other East Asians were no longer interested in Indian developments. Thus, Dignāga's logic, minimally introduced by Hsüan-tsang, is forgotten and abandoned; Dharmakīrti, Candrakīrti, and Śāntarakṣita never appear in Chinese translations and thus never affect the East Asian intellectual scene. It is in these last-named thinkers that the weapons against *dhātu-vāda* were most sharply honed and deployed in India (and later in Tibet). Since missionaries continued to arrive in China to translate Sanskrit materials through the thirteenth century, one can only wonder why no one ever chose to translate the works of the most dominant thinkers on the Indian scene since the late seventh century.³²

WHEN IS ENLIGHTENMENT NOT ENLIGHTENMENT?

Noticeable and radical shifts in methodology (*mārga*), affecting both theory and practice, occur between the Buddhism(s) of India and China, including: Indian syllogistic reasoning was displaced by Chinese hierarchical classification and crypto-Taoist dialectical reasoning;³³ the elaborate Indian meditation practices were ultimately reduced to “just sitting” (*shikan-taza*)³⁴ and “reciting a Buddha's name” (*nenbutsu*);³⁵ and, perhaps most significantly, the very notion of enlightenment itself was transformed from that of a *singular* ultimate peak experience that resolved all of life's difficulties, to the *multiple* awakenings one reads of in Ch'an and Zen biographies and autobiographies,³⁶ each subsequent awakening correcting and supplanting its predecessor. In India enlightenment was considered the culmination of one's practice of the Buddhist method (*mārga*). In China, Korea, and Japan that sort of culminating enlightenment gets deferred to a final, ultimate enlightenment, usually denoted in East Asian

texts by the transliterated phrase found in the *Heart Sutra* and elsewhere: *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, “unexcelled, complete awakening.” Thus, as opposed to the single enlightenment one finds discussed in India, East Asian Buddhism proposes, on the one hand, multiple enlightenments, each successively superior to its predecessors, and, on the other hand, the notion of a final, culminating enlightenment. When speaking of “enlightenment” in the Zen tradition, one should keep in mind that the enlightenment being spoken of there may differ radically from what is meant by enlightenment in Indian Buddhism. As we shall see in a moment, the progressive enlightenments of East Asian Buddhists are not grounded in their *telos*, the final unexcelled enlightenment, but rather in an “original enlightenment” that is beginningless, ever-present, and yet-to-be-actualized for most if not all people. Moreover, by the Sung dynasty, “enlightenment” is no longer an enlightenment for humans only—as had been repeatedly stressed by Indian texts—but an enlightenment in which everything participates beginninglessly, including the non-sentient components of the universe.³⁷

These complications derive from two basic sources:

1. Complex literature on the stages of a bodhisattva’s progress that, as early as the dispute between Kumārajīva and Hui-yüan in the early fifth century, fueled opposing formulations and controversies in China, and seemed to be easily resolved or sidestepped by the universal Buddha-nature theory first brought to China from Central Asia with the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sutra*;³⁸ and
2. the famous passage in the apocryphal *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* that is also the seed of *hongaku* (original enlightenment) thought:

On the basis of original enlightenment, there is non-enlightenment. On the basis of non-enlightenment, there is said to be initial enlightenment. Further, becoming enlightened to the Mind-Source is called final enlightenment.³⁹

This passage is cryptic, illogical. What does it mean to say that non-enlightenment arises from or is produced by original enlightenment? This begs the classical problem of theodicy; how did evil (non-enlightenment) arise from an originally good world (original enlightenment)?⁴⁰ The rhetoric of “purity” that is attached to *hongaku*—especially by Hua-yen in China, but by virtually all Japanese Buddhist sects, including Tendai—only exacerbates the tension, since highlighting the “pure, good, universal,

ubiquitous” nature and principle of mind and *dharmadhātu* logically precludes the possibility of ignorance, bad, or evil ever arising,⁴¹ and it was precisely this that Sung T’ien-t’ai criticized in various “Off-Mountain” T’ien-t’ai groups that began to echo the Hua-yen rhetoric—indicating clearly that an awareness and critique of this problem has already occurred within Chinese Buddhism. The late Sung “On-Mountain” T’ien-t’ai group, especially the writings of Chih-li,⁴² may have been the last concerted moment of Critical Buddhism in China, and, though further studies of these materials need to be done, perhaps this group was its finest, most rational and coherent, hour.

Not only did the above-cited passage from the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* put the idea of an original, pure, eternal, immutable “enlightenment” on center stage,⁴³ it also introduced the distinction between “initial enlightenment” and “final enlightenment.” The *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* treats initial enlightenment as a synonym for *bodhicitta* or *cittotpāda* (“arousing the aspiration for enlightenment”), which, in fact, is precisely the point of both its title and content.⁴⁴ Moreover, this formulation, as interpreted by its Chinese advocates, thereby conflated initiating the desire to *pursue enlightenment* with the *actual enlightenment* experience itself. Fa-tsang offered detailed rhetorical explanations for why just setting foot on the path with initial faith (the first stage of the ten or fifty-two bodhisattva stages) was tantamount to completing and fulfilling the path (the tenth or fifty-second stage)—analogous to his “ten coin” example (see below).⁴⁵ Tsung-mi (and later the seminal Korean Sōn master Chinul) applied the distinction between initial and final enlightenment to the problem of sudden versus gradual enlightenment: Sudden enlightenment (= initial enlightenment) needed to be followed by gradual practice (the ten stages) in order to reach final enlightenment, which, in true *hon-gaku* fashion, amounted to original enlightenment recovering itself. In terms of Ch’an/Zen theory, the duration between initial enlightenment and final enlightenment can occasion multiple “provisional” enlightenments.

As mentioned earlier, research into the history of Ch’an has irrevocably undermined the traditional transmission legends of Bodhidharma and the six patriarchs, as well as the traditional accounts of lineage transmissions. For centuries these transmission stories had served as support and guarantee of the authenticity of Ch’an (tracing it back to Buddha himself) and of the authority and veracity of a particular teacher. But we now know that Ch’an did not come from India, much less Buddha; and with-

out certified lineages, how can an aspiring student assure herself that a “master” she studies with is either as enlightened as his position denotes, or even if the “enlightenment” he teaches reflects the type of enlightenment attained and taught by Buddha? If Hui-neng’s “enlightenment” was not validated by Hung-jen, what, besides the weight of a tradition that has always assumed Hui-neng received the transmission from Hung-jen, assures us that Hui-neng was indeed enlightened, especially when we recognize that the redactions of *The Platform Sutra*—which even the tradition never claimed was actually written by Hui-neng—are so at variance with themselves and susceptible to being revised in conformity with ongoing polemics over the centuries, that we have no sure way of knowing what Hui-neng himself may have said or thought? The same doubts can be raised about Lin-chi (Rinzai) and “his” *Record*.⁴⁶ That certain readers may find these works edifying is insufficient.⁴⁷ Edification alone is not a sign of enlightenment.

The most common retort to this criticism is that Zen is valid with or without the support of any particular lineage; it validates itself existentially in the enlightenment experiences of its practitioners.⁴⁸ But this, in part, begs the question, since if the lineages do not record actual enlightenment transmissions, one simply falls back on blind faith when insisting that such things have been happening to someone, even if not those named in the lineages. And, as the multiple enlightenment stories recorded by the Zen tradition demonstrate, even the most earnest aspirant can believe mistakenly that some experience he has had is complete enlightenment when further experience shows that it is not. Even if we grant some sort of unrecorded “lineages” or transmissions, the notion of “enlightenment” itself becomes problematic in the Zen tradition, since there is no guarantee that what is being transmitted under the name “enlightenment” accords in any authentic sense with the experience of Siddhārtha under the Bodhi tree. Matsumoto and Hakamaya contend it does not.

IS CRITICAL BUDDHISM THE RECURRENCE OF AN INTRINSIC BUDDHIST DEBATE?

The lines cannot be drawn as sharply between India and East Asia as my preceding comments might suggest. The issues raised by Critical Buddhism revisit an old debate in Buddhism, one that has been occurring

almost since its inception—and perhaps, according to Matsumoto, since its inception, even in the mind or rhetoric of Buddha himself.⁴⁹ In simple terms, as one sees it highlighted in Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka approach, it is the difference between holding a substrative metaphysics (*svabhāva*) as opposed to a vision of nonsubstrative causal conditions, conditions that, under analysis, decenter into other decentering causal conditions—what Candrakīrti called *pratyayatā matreṇa*, “utter conditionality.”⁵⁰ Nāgārjuna, in other words, focuses on purifying one’s thinking, one’s cognitive actions, from any vestige of substrative, substantialistic, universalistic, essentialistic notions. Critical Buddhism focuses on the substrative metaphysics that have dominated East Asian Buddhism since the mid-Tang, which they have labeled *dhātu-vāda*. *Dhātu-vāda*—intimately connected with *tathāgata-garbha* thought, original enlightenment thought (Jpn. *hongaku*; Chn. *pen-chüeh*), mind-nature (Chn. *hsin-hsing*), original mind (Chn. *pen-hsin*), Buddha-nature (Chn. *fō-hsing*)—is a special form of substrative ontology, one that is monistic. But the usual Buddhist critique of substrative ontology is not confined to monistic substrates—any substrate conceived in terms of any individual entity or group of entities is rejected. Typical terms for this substrateless vision include non-self (*anātman*), non-self-nature (*niḥsvabhāva*), and purified *paratantra*.⁵¹ In Medieval Indian philosophy, the Buddhist critique of substrates went beyond attacking theories of substance per se, and involved the critical rejection of universal classes, perduring entities, unchanging identity (which invariably presumes an abstract self-same substrate), and any claims touting unobservable “realities.” In other words, for Buddhists the criterion by which something was deemed real (*dravya-sat*) was that it must discharge an observable effect. It had to display causal characteristics (*nimitta-kāraṇa*), and it was only real at the moment this effect was being caused,⁵² which is to say, the essentialistic notion of latency or potentiality was also rejected, or at least made problematic.⁵³

This last point is crucial. The first chapter of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla-madhyamakakārikā* begins by stating that nothing causes itself, is caused by another, both causes itself and is caused by another, or is neither caused by itself nor caused by another. This is frequently interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the very idea of causality itself. That interpretation is buttressed by repeated statements in *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras and other Mahayanic works about “non-arising” (*anutpattika-dharma*, *anutpāda*, etc.). It is not without significance that the first Buddhist texts to receive

serious, sustained attention in China, and around which the earliest schools arose, were *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Where causality was so important in Early Buddhism that it may be fairly argued that for centuries theoretical Buddhism was little more than causal analysis, this new Mahayanic anti-causal rhetoric—initially promoted to strip earlier causal theories of their substrative assumptions and vestiges—becomes eventually part of the foundation for the establishment of a primordial Buddhist substratum: *dharmā-dhātu* = Buddha-nature = emptiness = *dharmā-kāya* = one mind = the beginningless, eternal, endless substratum. The notion of a primordial Nature, *mūla-prakṛti*, repeatedly rejected by Buddhists when, for example, asserted by the Sāṃkhya, thus begins to find a home in Buddhist language and settles beneath the edifice of the East Asian Buddhist sects.

All Indian Buddhist causal theories concern *efficient cause*. The formal and teleological causes advanced by orthodox Brahmanic thinkers were always sharply refuted by the Buddhists.⁵⁴ Chinese causal theory had a markedly different history than did the Indian theories,⁵⁵ and this shows itself most strikingly in the way Chinese Buddhists “interpreted” and reconstructed causal arguments from the Indian literature. *Efficient causality was transformed into formal causality*.⁵⁶ The best known examples are Fa-tsang’s two causal arguments: the ten coins “cause” each other, and the roof beam is the “cause” of the house. In the first example, the first coin “causes” the second to be second, the third to be third, etc., and the tenth coin “causes” the first to be first, and so on. In the second example the crossbeam that holds up the roof is the “cause” of the house. As is evident neither example is a case of efficient causality; rather, both appeal to formal causal principles, especially the first example. The history of metaphysics amply documents the intimacy between substrative metaphysics and formal causal thinking; from the perspective of such metaphysics efficient cause only describes the less real “phenomenal” shadows (what Matsumoto calls “super-locus”) of their formally causal ground (“locus”).

The tension between causal vs. non-causal, or efficient causal vs. formal causal versions of “Buddhism” is only one place we find this Buddhist dichotomy. Critical Buddhism is largely a replay of various debates going back to Indian Buddhist thought, reargued under different venues and with different vocabularies in China, and then throughout the Buddhist world. In fact, one finds these debates everywhere in Buddhist history.

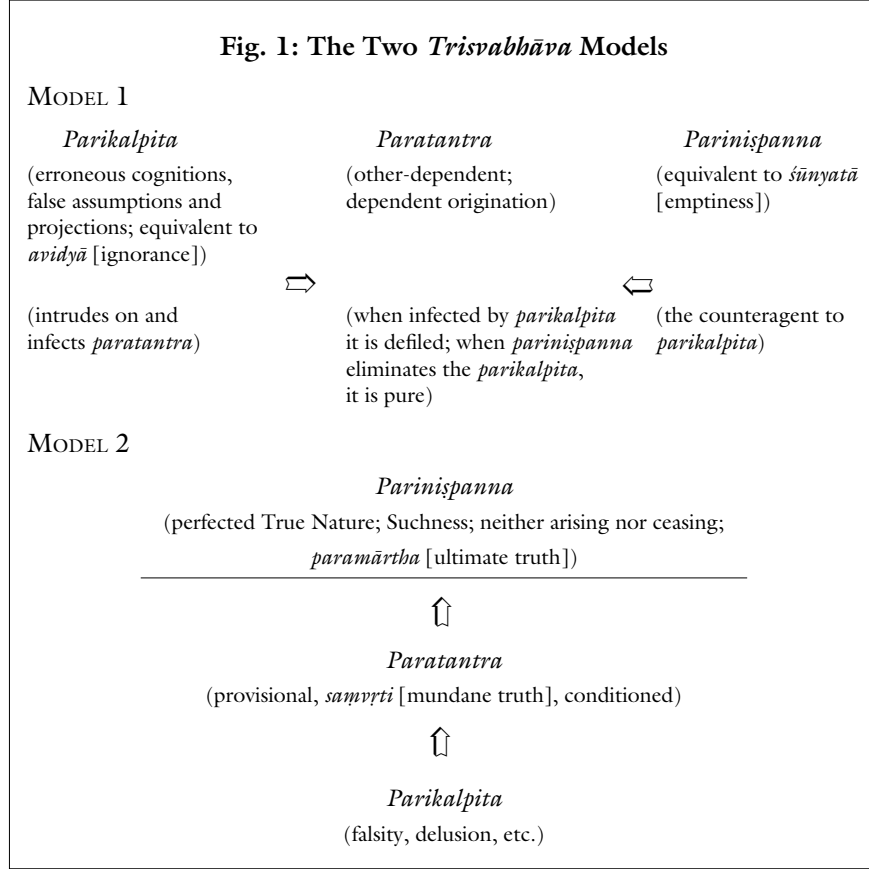
The most famous examples are:

1. No-self (*anātman*) vs. *puḍgala-vāda*, and the complications introduced into the no-self doctrine by the implicit “self” implied by the jataka stories.⁵⁷
2. Enlightenment conceived as pure *citta* (mind) vs. enlightenment as the dissolution of *viññāna* (consciousness). Suggestions of both conceptions can be found in various sections of the Pali texts, and this debate reached center stage with the emergence of *tathāgata-garbha* thought. Since many texts and schools considered *citta* and *viññāna* to be synonymous in many contexts, this tension cannot be solved satisfactorily by the typical East Asian move of treating *citta* as the metaphysical ground realized in enlightenment and *viññāna* as the defiled consciousness that needs to be overcome.
3. *Tathāgata-garbha* and the *ātman* polemics of such texts as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* vs. the emptiness and radical *paratantra* of certain strands of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* as interpreted by Madhyamika and Yogacara. These were played out in the two versions of *trīsvabhāva* (outlined below), one that privileges *pariniṣpanna* and the other that privileges *paratantra*.

Thus the tensions highlighted by Critical Buddhism are clearly discernible in various strata of the Indian Buddhist materials.

Some of these tensions can be neatly summarized by reviewing the two opposing interpretations of the *trīsvabhāva*. Some texts, such as the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* and *Mahāyānasamgraha*, present both versions, sometimes only separated by a few verses. Other texts clearly side with one model over the other (see fig. 1). In terms of the Hsüan-tsang vs. Fa-tsang controversy mentioned earlier, Hsüan-tsang favored the first of the two models, while Fa-tsang vigorously argued for the second.

Model 1: In this version, *paratantra* (other-dependent) is the critical member. When obscured or contaminated by *parikalpita* (erroneous cognition) it is “defiled *paratantra*,” but when devoid of *parikalpita* it is “pure *paratantra*.” The “antidote” (*pratipakṣa*) to *parikalpita* is *pariniṣpanna* (perfected), which empties the *parikalpita* out of *paratantra*, leaving it pure. *Paratantra* in this model is synonymous with conditioned co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*), and purified *paratantra* is the culmination of one’s practice. This sense of realizing the middle nature, *paratantra*, as the solution is one of the reasons for the title of the *Madhyānta vibhāga* (Discourse about the middle between extremes).



Model 2: Instead of viewing the three natures as dialectical interactions coming home to the Middle Way, this model takes them as a straight and ascending hierarchy. *Paratantra* (considered as *saṃvṛti*) is a median position on the way to *pariniṣpanna* (considered as *paramārtha*). *Pariniṣpanna* is the culminating, fulfilling eternal “purity” beyond the arising and ceasing flux of *paratantra*. It is suchness (*tathatā*), *dharmā-dhātu*, etc. Thus *parikalpita* is the lowest, *paratantra* is higher, and the highest achievement is the pure *pariniṣpanna*. It is this version that presupposes and supports *dhātu-vāda*.

While model 1 promotes a clear rational understanding of causes and conditions and locates enlightenment and freedom *within* conditions, model 2 seeks to transcend or escape causality altogether, to merge with

an eternal, primordial ground. Throughout the ages Buddhist literature has given expression to this ambivalence.

Similarly, the problem of a transcendental subject lying behind the noetic act has been rigorously scrutinized by Buddhists, who, in the main, argue against it. However, one does find Buddhist literature that speaks about a “true” or “pure” self, particularly in the Tantric tradition (cf. *Guhyasamājatantra*, ch. 12 v. 4). East Asian Buddhism, especially in Japan, has developed an entire rhetoric about the “true” or “authentic self.”

For instance, late in the *sagāthakam* portion of the *Laṅkāvatāra* (vv. 746–850) we find an entire section devoted to an oddly un-Buddhistic glorification of atman (self). Some examples (Suzuki’s translation):

- 746. The ego (*ātma*) characterized with purity is the state of self-realization; this is the Tathagata’s womb (*garbha*) which does not belong to the realm of the theorists....
- 753. The Mind, primarily pure, is with the secondary passions, with the Manas, etc. and in union with the ego-soul [atman]—this is what is taught by the best of speakers....
- 755. The ego [primarily] pure has been defiled on account of the external passions since the beginningless past, and what has been added from outside is like a [soiled] garment to be washed off.
- 756. As when a garment is cleansed of its dirt, or when gold is removed from its impurities, they are not destroyed but remain as they are; so is the ego freed from its defilements....
- 760. As the womb is not visible to the woman herself who has it, so the ego-soul is not visible within the Skandhas to those who have no wisdom...
- 763. When there is no true ego-soul, there are no stages, no self-mastery, no psychic faculties, no highest anointing, no excellent Samādhis.
- 764. If a destroyer should come around and say, “If there is an ego, show it to me”; a sage would declare, “Show me your own discrimination.”

In these verses not only is the idea of atman promoted as if it were “good Buddhism,” but rebuttals also are offered to some of the typical Buddhist arguments *against* the self, such as that there is no sixth thing in a person beyond the five skandhas, or the non-demonstrability of the “self.” If there is any doubt as to the intent of these verses, the next four are unequivocal.

- 765. Those who hold the theory of non-ego [*anātman*] are injurers of the Buddhist doctrines, they are given up to the dualistic views of being

and non-being; they are to be ejected by the convocation of the Bhikshus and are never to be spoken to.

766. The doctrine of an ego-soul shines brilliantly like the rising of the world-end fire, wiping away the faults of the philosophers, burning up the forest of egolessness.

767. Molasses, sugar-cane, sugar, and honey; sour milk, sesame oil, and ghee—each has its own taste; but one who has not tasted it will not know what it is.

768. Trying to seek in five ways for an ego-soul in the accumulation of the Skandhas, the unintelligent fail to see it, but the wise seeing it are liberated.

Followers of *anātma-vāda* are to be ostracized as heretics, while visions of atman are liberating!⁵⁸

To be fair to the *Laṅkāvatāra*, it also offers many verses denouncing atman and proclaiming *anātman*, such as vv. 60, 281, and 728 in the *sagāthakam* section, but this only adds to the ambivalence. Not unexpectedly, when ambivalence and ambiguity pervade a text, a wide hermeneutic space allowing vastly disparate interpretations arises. A simple case in point is the following verse, also from the *sagāthakam* section:

419. Purity is not obtained by body, speech, and thought [i.e., karmic activity]; the Tathagata-lineage (*gotraṃ tathāgatam*), being pure, is devoid of karma. (my translation)

Gotra, which means “family” or line of descent, has since the earliest Buddhist texts been used to counter caste-consciousness by means of substituting a functional meaning for the term rather than an essential or ontological meaning.⁵⁹ Simply, one is what one does (*karmaka*), rather than what one claims to be (*ātmāna*). The *Sonadanda sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* is a good example of this genre of redefining caste and class terms into functional, ethical terms, in that case through the word *brahmin* (priestly caste). A Brahmin is not such by virtue of birth or nature, it argues, but in virtue of personal character and present actions; hence even those not Brahmin by caste can be “functional Brahmins” if their behavior is upright. Thus the *Laṅkāvatāra* verse poses the paradox that those who functionally follow the Tathagata are acting without acting, i.e., their action does not produce karma. More specifically, it is claiming that “purity” cannot be achieved through karmic means, since purity signifies, by definition, the absence of karma. The point is methodological, procedural. D.T. Suzuki, accurately reflecting the East Asian tradition that

would be disposed to interpret these ideas essentialistically, not only so interprets it but also actually translates the above passage accordingly:

419. The pure [essence of Tathagatahood] is not obtained by body, speech, and thought; the essence of Tathagatahood (*gotram tathāgatam*) being pure is devoid of doings. (insertions by Suzuki, *Laṅkāvatāra*, 258)

Suzuki has not only essentialized the verse, he has also obscured its basic point—the overcoming of karmic-activity. “Purity” becomes the property of an essentialistic ontological being, perhaps even an essential property, rather than the characterization of a methodological and behavioral condition. That this type of hermeneutic stance produces a rhetoric of “True Self” goes to the heart of the conflict between Hsüan-tsang and those Yogacaric schools and trends in China that he attempted to overcome. Some texts clearly side with one camp or the other, but the *Laṅkāvatāra* is all the more intriguing in that it offers both a *dhātu-vāda* ideology and that ideology’s antithesis without resolving the tension. And as we see with Suzuki’s “interpretation,” a predisposition to read a text in a certain way will affect the meaning one derives from that text.

This sort of double possibility—reading certain passages in a functional way as opposed to reading them in an essentialistic way, and vice versa—remains an open hermeneutic space in many Buddhist texts. When a culture promotes and reinforces one reading while denigrating the other, the promoted reading will appear “obvious” to most readers. That is the danger, even for contemporary scholars, of the *dhātu-vāda* milieu. The full impact of that danger is only now starting to be challenged by Critical Buddhists. As an example we can note that, as a result of the foundational significance the *Hua-yen (Avatamsaka) Sutra* has acquired in East Asian thought—especially in China and Korea, and to a slightly lesser extent in Japan (where the *Lotus Sutra* gained hegemony)—East Asian scholars until quite recently have assumed that an “Avatamsaka” school must have flourished in India, despite the lack of any evidence in Indian sources for such a school and the fact that the *Hua-yen Sutra* was transmitted to China largely from Central Asia, not India.⁶⁰

ON BEING CRITICAL OF CRITICAL BUDDHISM

Critical Buddhism has challenged a plethora of long-held, pervasive assumptions along with the people and institutions who adhere to them,

and has done so in a style that is uncharacteristic of Japanese discourse (viz., directly and explicitly rather than indirectly and muted), so it is not surprising that it has stirred up forceful opposition from a variety of fronts. There are many who wish that Critical Buddhism would just go away, and in order to hasten its demise these opponents search for every and any weakness in its presentation they can find (including ad hominem characterizations of its principle advocates). In their eagerness to refute Critical Buddhism and thereby dismiss it, they sometimes act as if refuting a single issue or aspect is sufficient for dismissing all of the claims and arguments of the Critical Buddhists. Critical Buddhism must, of course, accept criticism as a legitimate and even necessary activity. However, criticism should be reasonable. As a caution against making overly hasty dismissals, opponents should differentiate three distinct areas: target, argument, and positive proposals.

Hakamaya and Matsumoto have attacked an extremely wide range of *targets*, including historical, sociological, institutional, textual, nationalistic, cultural, ideological, and political issues. The appropriateness of each of these targets needs to be evaluated individually. The choice of some targets may be patently legitimate, while others less so. If, for example, one concludes that *wa* (“harmony”)⁶¹ is an inappropriate target—and one can substantiate that conclusion with sound reasoning—that does not permit one to dismiss the critique of *dhātu-vāda*, *tathāgata-garbha* ideology, or any of the other countless targets. Conversely, if one concludes that attacking social discrimination in Japan is legitimate, that does not automatically vindicate every other target or claim advanced by Critical Buddhists. Each must be judged on its own merits. One may ask meta-questions, such as “Has Critical Buddhism taken on too many targets?” (a strategic or tactical question), or “Do the variety of targets offer a proper focus, or does their diversity and disparity diffuse the basic points?” (tactical and rhetorical questions), and so forth. Microquestions on the appropriateness of targeting particular texts, or the interpretations of particular passages or terms, or particular individuals and institutions, might also be raised. Is, for instance, *dhātu-vāda* a useful, or a counterproductive, neologism?⁶² Further, one may think that a target that in general is appropriate (such as *dhātu-vāda* or *ātma-vāda*) is being inappropriately attributed to a certain text or thinker;⁶³ even if the specific attribution can be refuted, that does not delegitimize the general target in other contexts.

The question as to whether a certain target is or is not appropriate is separate from the question of the quality of the argument(s) advanced to critique that target.⁶⁴ One may accept, for instance, that *wa* is a legitimate target for critique, and yet decide that some of the *arguments* advanced in the critique are nonetheless flawed. The failure of an argument does not invalidate the appropriateness of its target (though the argument will need to be improved). This caveat is especially important for Western scholars, who will find that, even though Matsumoto and Hakamaya argue in a more direct manner than is typical for Japanese scholars, their style of argumentation is still heavily Japanese, aimed as it is at a Japanese audience. By Western standards the style of Japanese argument seems circular, verbose, evasive, at times too emotional. If Critical Buddhism is to become part of the discourse of Buddhist scholarship in the West—rather than merely an object for academic reporting—its arguments will have to be recast in forms more suitable to Western tastes and methodologies.

One can also ask whether a particular *argument* is methodologically sound, whether it is coherent and cohesive, whether it is logical, whether it contradicts or concords with other aspects of the claims made by Critical Buddhists, and so on. All that rests and falls on such questions, though, is the validity of the particular argument, not the appropriateness of a particular target, much less the thrust of Critical Buddhism as a whole (unless it can be demonstrated that some particular argument is foundational for everything else advanced by Critical Buddhism). One may, of course, find their arguments well constructed and still remain unconvinced about the appropriateness of their targets or the feasibility of their proposals (well constructed arguments are “valid” but not necessarily “true”).

Finally, both Hakamaya and Matsumoto offer numerous *positive proposals*. For instance, Hakamaya declares that genuine Buddhism must involve critical thinking and causal analysis (in fact, critical thinking *about* causal analysis), and Matsumoto further insists that it entail a correct ethical orientation. These proposals are separable from specific targets and the quality of particular arguments. For instance, whether rational thinking rather than mindless empty-headedness is integral to Buddhism is a separate issue from whether *dhātu-vāda* is a valid target or not. Similarly, while the quality of their arguments may go to the question of how persuasively they are presenting their proposals, one may find value in their proposals even while being dissatisfied with certain arguments. For instance, one may find appealing Matsumoto’s proposal to accept as

foundational for all Buddhist thinking the classical form of *pratītya-samutpāda* as expressed in the *Mahāvagga*⁶⁵ and yet still decide that the reasons he proffers for this are inadequate.⁶⁶ Similarly, even if one resists accepting all of their targets as valid, their proposals may prove inspiring regardless. Conversely, even if one ultimately rejects their proposals, one may still find their arguments and targets valid.

In short, each of these three spheres needs to be evaluated separately. Weaknesses either perceived or imagined in any one sphere do not provide grounds for dismissing the other spheres. Even after two spheres on a particular issue have been refuted, the third will not have been refuted thereby. Let me offer an example.

In Part III of his *Critical Studies on Zen Thought* (1994), Matsumoto attempts to locate the atman theory in the famous passage from the *Lin-chi lü* (Record of Lin-chi): “On your lump of red flesh, there is a true man of no rank always going in and out of the face of every one of you.”⁶⁷ Focusing on the term “face” (literally, “face gate”), Matsumoto argues that it derives from one of three Indian models:

1. The *Atharva Veda*’s notion of a pure atman situated in the body that goes out to encounter sense objects through the nine “gates”⁶⁸ of the body reflecting those encounters back *inward*, as a king would *exit* and *reenter* his quarters;
2. The Jain notion of sensory “gates” through which *āsava* (karmic material particles) *enter*, obstructing and restricting the otherwise omniscient self (atman⁶⁹);
3. An early Buddhist notion, devoid of atman, in which the mind generates *āsava* (fundamental emotional and cognitive proclivities) so that they are considered “*outflows*” rather than *in-flows*.⁷⁰

Which of these three theories, he asks, is behind Lin-chi’s notion of “face-gate”?

More by implication than explicit argument he concludes it is the atman theory of the *Atharva Veda* that Lin-chi is invoking, since the “true man of no rank” is going in *and* out of the face just as the atman goes in and out, like the king leaving and returning to his quarters. The Jain and early Buddhist models, on the other hand, only describe an inward flow (Jain) or an outward flow (Buddhist), but not both. His “arguments” are philological in style. He interprets the phrase “lump of red flesh” to signify the heart (*hṛdaya*).⁷¹ He argues that the conjunction

of “gate” with “face” is unattested in Pali or Sanskrit Buddhist literature (*mukha-dvāra*, “face gate”), while the five senses may on occasion be described as “gates.” He substitutes terms and concepts from *The Platform Sutra* to explicate terms in the *Lin-chi lü*, in particular relating the “true man of no rank” to *The Platform Sutra*’s notions of “self-nature” (*svabhāva*) and “mind-ground” (*hsin-ti*), terms he associates with an atmanic *dhātu-vāda* ideology.⁷² How did such a Hindu model reach the author(s) of *Lin-chi lü*? Matsumoto speculates that it was brought to China with tantra, since tantric literature, in key texts like the *Mahāvairocana Sutra*, clearly displays atmanic thinking with notions such as the “great self.”

My purpose in summarizing this argument is neither to confirm nor to refute it, but instead to use it as an example of how the three areas—target, argument, proposals—should be dealt with separately. The target here is a key phrase in the *Lin-chi lü*. There are several arguments, primarily philological in style. In this case, no specific positive proposal—such as critical thinking, causal thinking, or ethical orientation—appears explicitly, though one may claim it contains certain implicit general proposals, such as: Consider this phrase, since it is atmanic, to be non-Buddhistic; Buddhism will only correct itself from its dangerous deviations once it has ferreted out and freed itself from such non-Buddhistic rhetoric and ideologies.

Whether one considers *Lin-chi lü* fair game as a target will depend to some extent on one’s prior feelings about the importance and veracity of the text.⁷³ Such feelings may or may not be affected by any argument Matsumoto or someone else might offer. One who has seized on *Lin-chi lü* as one’s own sacred scripture will, at least initially, resent any challenge to its sacred status. Conversely, one may find the particular phrase under investigation to be a legitimate and even important target, but may nonetheless decide that the proffered arguments are insufficient.⁷⁴ Again, one may decide that the arguments are compelling while nevertheless one attempts to “save” *Lin-chi* from the attack by taking refuge in the notion that the *Lin-chi lü* was compiled after *Lin-chi*, that it was redacted and amended numerous times, and so this phrase—while universally recognized as one of *Lin-chi*’s most famous—is dispensable without damage to the image of *Lin-chi* as an enlightened Ch’an master.⁷⁵ The point I wish to make is that one may reject the target and still find the arguments valid; one may reject the arguments and still find the target appropriate.

Even if one refutes the arguments and the target in *this specific instance*, one still lacks grounds for rejecting any other targets or arguments elsewhere.

It may be disingenuous of Matsumoto to reduce the language of *Lin-chi lü* to that of the *Platform Sutra*—the latter’s language is indeed teeming with *dhātu-vāda* imagery and implications.⁷⁶ Despite the “traditional” linkage of Lin-chi to Hui-neng, in virtue of both being of the Ch’an lineage, there are tremendous differences between them in style, content, vocabulary, and method. Lin-chi’s language *can* be read in different ways. For example, while the *Platform Sutra* frequently opposes “external” things and ideas to the “inner” original nature, Lin-chi explicitly rejects that dichotomy. He says:

There is no Buddha, no Dharma, no training, and no realization. What are you so hotly chasing? Putting a head on top of your head, you blind fools? Your head is right where it should be.... But you do not believe it, and so turn to the outside to seek. Do not be deceived. If you turn to the outside, there is no Dharma; neither is there anything to be obtained from the inside.⁷⁷

Does this suggest that the “inner/outer” distinction drawn upon by Matsumoto to delineate the three “door” models may be off target? Is it Matsumoto himself who presupposes the Jain model in the very manner that he frames the question of “Buddhism” becoming “defiled” by external impurities (*dhātu-vāda*)? Has the purity of Buddhism been defiled from outside (by Hindus, Taoists, animists, nationalists, etc.)? If *The Platform Sutra*’s teachings are indeed “tainted” with *ātma-vāda* and *dhātu-vāda* non-Buddhist defilements, is Matsumoto perhaps defiling Lin-chi by imposing on it *The Platform Sutra* and *Arthava Veda* from without? Matsumoto claims that the third model, the early Buddhist model—which he says is anti-atman—has the *āsava* flowing *out* of the mind. A common description in early Buddhism for awakening, equivalent to “understanding *pratītya-samutpāda*,” is “eliminating the *āsava*.”⁷⁸

Matsumoto repeatedly evokes certain sections of the Pali literature and Nāgārjuna as his touchstones for authentic Buddhism. How is the early Buddhist elimination of *āsava* (fundamental mental problems) any different from Nāgārjuna’s aim to put *prapañca* (misguided cognitive-linguistic proliferation) to rest (*prapañcōpaśama*)? And how is that different from Lin-chi’s “place where your thought-instant of mind comes to rest”?⁷⁹ Lin-chi’s analysis of language is not only “critical,” but also a

faithful echo of Nāgārjuna’s analysis of *prapañca*.⁸⁰ These sorts of questions raise the issue of whether *Lin-chi lü* is a legitimate target. Does the fact that the true man of no rank is *on* the lump of red flesh, rather than residing *in* it, disturb Matsumoto’s inner/outer analysis? That sort of question addresses the quality of his arguments. In the end, it may be that Lin-chi agrees with many of Matsumoto’s positive proposals: ethical advancement, critical thinking, and critiquing substantialism and essentialism.

We have seen that Critical Buddhism marks the conjunction of certain inevitabilities. We have also seen that the emergence and institutionalization of *dhātu-vāda* Buddhism required sustained misreadings of ambivalent passages and models.⁸¹ A Yogacarin might note that, hermeneutically speaking, such misreadings indicate an inability to cognize “things in the manner they become” (*yathābhūtam*). But such blatant misreadings (or the naive Nichiren view that the *Lotus Sutra* actually records the words of the historical Buddha) are not nearly as problematic and difficult to identify as the more subtle substantialistic readings. Buddhism began by noting that the underlying belief in an eternal self—expressed in a variety of forms—was the deepest, most pernicious, most intractable thing to which humans cling. *Ātma-dṛṣṭi* is the prime barrier to enlightenment. Later Buddhists gave the name *jñeyāvaraṇa* to this intractable *dṛṣṭi*, and they too saw it as the main obstacle to enlightenment. Thus we should not be surprised that East Asian Buddhists, not being enlightened despite the belief that all possess “original enlightenment,” should tenaciously cling to this *dṛṣṭi*. Critical Buddhists are reminding us that the debate is not over; it has only been on hold for twelve hundred years.