

Review Article

**PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE
STUDY OF THE BUDDHA'S BODIES**

MICHAEL RADICH¹

Victoria University of Wellington/Harvard University

Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, xiv + 251 pp. ISBN: 041533344X (hbk); 0203413105 (electronic bk.)

Guang Xing 廣興² is surely right when he opens this book by saying, “The *trikāya* [three body] theory is one of the most important and fundamental doctrinal developments of Mahāyāna Buddhism” (1), though perhaps not in quite the sense or the degree his book implies. For that reason, a new and solid contribution to studies of the subject would be most welcome. In keeping with his ambition to provide such a contribution, Guang’s topic in this book is the origins and development of the key Mahāyāna doctrine

¹ Michael Radich is Lecturer in Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. In a parallel life, he is within inches of finishing his PhD at Harvard, in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, where he works under Robert Gimello and Michael Puett.

² I had difficulty determining the correct Romanization of the author’s name. Library catalogues uniformly give Xing as his surname (British Library, Library of Congress). This cannot be correct, however, since his name appears in Chinese on the internet as 廣興 (e.g. at <http://big5.fjnet.com/gate/big5/magazine.fjnet.com/hykw/fayin/fy200401/g2k0401f12.htm>, accessed April 27, 2006, citing his *Damo qi ren ji qi chanfa* 達摩其人及其禪法). The author himself also lists his own work under “Guang” in his bibliography (241). Though Guang 廣 is indeed a Chinese surname, it is also possible that the name is a precept or ordination name, and so should properly be Romanised as “Guangxing”, with no space. This seems especially likely given that the above website speaks of him as “Guangxing fashi” 廣興法師, i.e. “Dharma Master Guangxing”; it would surely be almost oxymoronic to attach this title to a secular name. I have thought it best here to follow Guang himself, however, and Romanise as if his name is secular and Guang a surname.

(apparently originally Yogācāra) that the Buddhahood enters into a threefold “embodiment” (three kinds of embodiment), namely:

(1) the *dharmakāya*, or “the body of Dharma”, or the *svābhāvikakāya*³ “embodiment with respect to essential nature”,⁴ usually interpreted as a quasi-metaphysical, transcendent or abstract form in which *buddha*(-hood) exists as the true nature of all existence (or existents), this being the form in which buddhahood is embodied for the *jñāna* of (the) *buddha*(-hood) himself/itself;

(2) the *sāmbhogikakāya*, or “embodiment(s) pertaining to common enjoyment”,⁵ i.e. the miraculous body endowed with the major and minor marks of the *mahāpuruṣa* (“great man”), which is golden, gigantic etc., and which is the body seen by congregations of advanced, “celestial” *bodhisattvas* when the Buddha preaches advanced discourses to them;

(3) the *nairmāṇikakāya*, or “embodiment(s) pertaining to illusory manifestation”, i.e. a kind of docetic body deployed by the Buddha to teach ordinary worldlings; in other words, the ordinary mortal body in which he apparently was born in historical India in perhaps the sixth or fifth century BCE as the scion of a princely family, fled to the wilderness to undertake ascetic practices, was enlightened under the bodhi tree, preached for several decades, and died.

As has been shown most thoroughly by John J. Makransky in his recent work *Buddhahood Embodied*, this doctrine of the threefold embodiment (*trikāya*)

³ See John J. Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, n. 39 p. 382, for the pivotal observation that the adjectival forms *svābhāvikakāya*, *sāmbhogikakāya* and *nairmāṇikakāya* are more common in the pertinent early Yogācāra literature than the corresponding substantives *svābhāvakāya*, *sāmbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*, and also for a list of relevant textual loci. I did not note any place in his book where Guang took stock of Makransky’s point here. Perhaps Guang’s failure to absorb this argument accounts, in part, for his incorrect citation of even the *title* of Makransky’s book on at least one occasion (as *The Buddha Embodied*, 79), despite the fact that Makransky clearly chose this title very carefully to reflect the point that these terms label *modes* of embodiment and not substantive “bodies”, and thus to avoid the kind of substantivisation implied by a phrase like “the Buddha” in reference e.g. to the *svābhāvikakāya*.

⁴ Translations for the names of the three Buddha-bodies vary among scholars, often in ways closely related to the interpretations made by those scholars of the pertinent doctrines. Here, in provisionally translating “embodiment” rather than body, I follow Makransky, who on this point in part follows Harrison; see Makransky, 56-58 and n. 42, p. 382.

⁵ Due to the influence of the Chinese translation *baoshen* 報身, generally said to reflect Sanskrit **vipākakāya* or *vaipākikakāya*, this body also sometimes appears in the secondary literature under the guise of the “reward body”.

seems to be characteristic of the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna thought, and to have been first articulated in detail in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (an early Yogācāra work of the fourth or perhaps the third century attributed to Maitreya[-nātha]). Scholars generally agree that the doctrine became normative for broad areas of subsequent Mahāyāna doctrine in East Asia and Tibet, and as such, it constitutes one of the most influential elaborations of the notion of buddhahood in Buddhist doctrinal history. In this book, Guang proposes to present a thorough study of the background and rise of this rubric, and thus to reveal the dynamics that led to its elaboration.

Unfortunately, despite the potential interest of its topic, Guang's book is fundamentally compromised by ubiquitous problems of historical assumptions and method, Buddhological methodology, factual error, loose argumentation, misinterpretation of primary texts, and so on. Guang says little that has not been said before, either in works included in his bibliography or works inexplicably omitted from it, and where he does depart from received opinion, it is usually to poor effect. A reader would therefore be better served by reviewing the small secondary literature already extant in the field (even some items that are now very old), especially Makransky's meticulous study and a small corpus of seminal articles by Demiéville, la Vallée Poussin, Ruben Habito, and Nagao Gadjin. As I will argue later in this review, however, some of the broader conceptual problems that compromise Guang's approach are also shared by the extant secondary literature, and the field as a whole is indeed, as Guang seems in his own way to have observed, ripe for a fresh treatment of this topic, though not the sort of mishandling that Guang has given it here.

Guang Xing's fundamental thesis in this book, as summarised in his "Conclusion" (179-181), can I think be fairly captured in two basic assertions:

(1) Over the course of Buddhist history, the image of the Buddha shifted gradually away from that of an ordinary historical human being towards that of a superhuman, supernatural, omniscient, omnipotent world-saviour, a being which was further hypostasised into a metaphysical absolute ground of all phenomenal existents.

(2) The process of this development may be divided into five successive stages, namely:

(a) an early Buddhism in which the Buddha, though occasionally regarded as endowed with some superhuman traits and miraculous properties, was on the whole regarded as first and foremost a human being.

(b) a later phase, but still in “early Buddhist schools”, in which problems of the relation between the human and the superhuman aspects of the Buddha were worked out in two main ways:

(i) in a (supposed)⁶ Sarvāstivādin theory of two bodies (*rūpakāya* or “body of visible matter” and *dharmakāya* or “body of Dharma/dharmas”), which, relatively speaking, still emphasised the Buddha’s human aspect;

(ii) in a (supposed) “Mahāsaṅghika” theory of an entirely transcendent and all-powerful Buddha, on which theory the Buddha’s historical existence was a mere docetic display for the salvation of sentient beings.

(c) the elaboration in the “early Mahāyāna” of the concept of *tathatā*, which Guang takes for an “ontological”⁷ absolute ground of all phenomena, and the identification of this *tathatā* with the *dharmakāya* (“dharma body”) of the Buddha.

(d) the identification of the *dharmakāya* with still further “new concepts” such as *tathāgatagarbha* (“the embryo of *tathāgatahood*”) and *mahāparinirvāṇa*; Guang here cites such

⁶ Comments in brackets here represent my own skepticism about Guang’s claims, not his claims themselves. For my reasons for skepticism regarding Guang’s characterisations of Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsaṅghika positions, see below.

⁷ I do not have space in this review to lay out in detail my reasons for disputing Guang’s use of the term “ontological” in this connection. Note, however, that Guang never explains his reasons for using the term, and simply applies it in an apparently unproblematic matter to Prajñāpāramitā discourse in particular. For example, he asserts that “the early Mahāyānists . . . attributed philosophical *and ontological* referents to the concept of the *dharmakāya* through the identification of the Tathāgata with *tathatā*, the real nature of all things”; a few lines later, he repeats, “Thus the concept of the *dharmakāya* . . . acquired both *ontological* and salvific meanings” (75, my emphases). Anyone working on Mahāyāna philosophy should be sensitive to the fact that “ontology” is a fighting word, and that to claim that a system ontologises any absolute is tantamount to leveling at it a charge of heterodoxy (viz. *samāropa*), at least in some quarters. We would expect, therefore, that at the very least, Guang would (a) define what he means by “ontology”, and (b) carefully and rigorously show that the materials he is treating fit this definition; in other words, that he would meticulously justify what is, after all, a potentially very controversial claim. Guang does neither, however, and oddly, the whole notion of ontology is in fact entirely absent from his discussion of *tathatā* succeeding the passages cited.

texts as the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, and the *Foxing lun* 佛性論 (T1610).⁸

(e) the development of the *trikāya* (“three bodies”) theory, which Guang pinpoints to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and therefore attributes to “Asaṅga and Vasubandhu”.

Some limited aspects of each of these statements are not objectionable. However, this narrative is problematic in several respects, and inadequate to the evidence of Guang’s own sources.

The thesis that the Buddha undergoes a gradual and increasing apotheosis over the course of Buddhist history is, insofar as it holds, scarcely new or controversial. Indeed, it might be argued that simple dynamics of historical distance, in conjunction with the attribution to such figures of access to transcendent and absolute religious truth, would lead us to expect nothing less in the case of any religious exemplar. What sticks in Guang’s particular exposition of this generally accepted theme, however, is the specific nuances he gives to the narrative, and the downright contradiction they land him in. Briefly, the problem is twofold: that Guang presses too hard to construct the historical Buddha and his Buddhism as “rational” after the image of the types of religiosity stereotypically most valued in modernity (in the “Protestant Buddhist” mould); and that his narrative is structured around a teleological reading of all Buddha-body doctrine as leading up to the final consummation of the three-body model.

Guang exaggerates the humanity of the Buddha in the early period, and correspondingly downplays those superhuman or supernatural aspects to his being that Guang admits exist.⁹ In treating early Buddhism, then, Guang evidences all the signs of what we might impolitely call a “Pāli Text Society” attempt to paint early Buddhism, and in particular the Buddha himself, in tones as rational, human, humanistic, down-to-earth, and this-worldly as possible. Behind his narrative of the gradual apotheosis of the Buddha through doctrinal history, therefore, we can in part detect the barely concealed outlines of a “Golden Age” model of Buddhist history: there was a

⁸ In a good instance of his tendency to uncritically accept the Chinese canonical record as an accurate reflection of Indic developments (for which see further below), Guang ascribes the *Foxing lun* to Vasubandhu, and therefore reads its contents as indicative of a stage contemporary (or even somehow *prior*) to the elaboration of *trikāya* doctrine itself. His reasons for accepting the traditional attribution of this text are put forth in a typical mishandling of such questions of relative chronology, attribution and authorship, and arrived at, also typically, on the basis of outdated scholarship (164); note that in so doing, for example, he follows Nakamura, against Takasaki(!).

⁹ See esp. 8-11; apologetic interpretation of the term *mahāpurisa* after Rhys-Davids and Endo, 14; 15; treatment of some miracles after Gokhale as “natural” [*sic!*], 16; and the very confused treatment of miracles stemming from *iddhi*, 16-17.

brief Golden Age when the Buddha walked the earth, and from then on it was all downhill, as “the faithful” more and more imposed their wrong-headed ideas on the teachings.

A most peculiar thing, however, is that on more usual understandings of such a model, the “rise” of the Mahāyāna is in fact a *fall*—the point where Buddhism reaches the nadir of its debasement—as genuine Buddhist ideas are finally overwhelmed completely by superstition, hypostatisation, metaphysical dabbling, abandonment of right effort to pathetic faith in great powers, and so on. In Guang’s account, however, the rhetoric of this rationalist reading of an early Buddhist “Golden Age” exists in utterly unresolved tension alongside what is usually its polar opposite—the rhetoric of Mahāyāna apologetic teleology. By this, I am referring to other places in which Guang shows signs of seeing the *trikāya* doctrine as the pinnacle of Buddhist doctrine.

This teleological viewpoint is evident in the fact that, against the apparent facts of real chronology in his sources (see below), Guang places the *trikāya* theory as the fifth and last of his “stages”, and furthermore frames his entire book (in its opening sentences) as an attempt to locate and account for the emergence of *trikāya* doctrine. A teleological rhetoric also runs clearly through Guang’s conclusion, for example. “The fifth stage is the formulation of the *trikāya*, the *climax* in the progressive development of the concept of the Buddha. The *trikāya* theory is a result of the complex development of Mahāyāna thought” (181). It may also explain the otherwise puzzling fact that he finished the book on the apparently innocuous phrase, “One of the reasons the Yogācāra masters such as Asaṅga and Vasubandhu established the *trikāya* theory rooted in the doctrines of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* was . . . to solve the complex problem concerning the ontological status of the Buddha” (181). QED, it seems; the problem of the nature of Buddhahood was “solved”, and the rest of Buddhist history can only be mere footnotes.

Guang shares this problematic teleological approach with almost the entire secondary literature on the topic of Buddha bodies, but it is not my intention to broach the broader scholarship in any detail within the limited compass of this review. My first intention in raising the problem here has been to show the way in which, in combination with the “rationalising” interpretation of “early” Buddhism, this teleology distorts the fundamentally plausible thesis that the Buddha was progressively apotheosised over the periods of doctrinal history in question. Between the curiously conflicted poles of the down-to-earth human early Buddha and his transcendently glorified Mahāyāna perfection, both equally celebrated with no apparent consciousness of contradiction, this trajectory is robbed of all its nuance and trouble, and reduced to a cartoon cutout.

The *trikāya* teleology looms very large also in problems that beleaguer the second of Guang’s main theses paraphrased above, namely his five-stage

narrative of the gradual development of the ideas that eventually went into the *trikāya* synthesis. Before I critique some of the specific problems with this narrative, however, I need to prepare the ground a little further by discussing some of the methodological failings of this book. In particular, we need to note that the teleological frame within which Guang studies his questions dovetails with another significant weakness in his approach, namely his very inadequate treatment of questions of textual history and relative chronology.

Guang argues (4-5), on unclear grounds, that it is adequate, in tracing the development of Mahāyāna doctrine in general and *trikāya* doctrine in particular, to periodise Mahāyāna itself into three stages, based upon phases in *Chinese* Buddhist history (mainly translation history). These three stages are hopelessly broad. According to Guang's summary, they are:

- (1) from Lokakṣema roughly to the period of the “Six Houses and Seven Schools” of the fourth century;
- (2) from Kumārajīva to Paramārtha;
- (3) from Xuanzang on.

In support of his claim that this naïve schema is adequate to *Indic* Buddhist history, Guang merely gives an entirely descriptive précis of Chinese translation history, and then asserts point blank that “this brief analysis (*sic*) of the history of Chinese translation suggests that it roughly reflects the development of Indian Buddhist thought.”

The problems with this historical framework are twofold: (1) it is too simplistic; (2) it is Sinocentric. I will briefly discuss each problem in turn. First, to analyse the *origins* of any significant Mahāyāna concept in these terms, as Guang does, is effectively to treat the entire period to 400 as a single essentialisable monolith, and this is to invite all sorts of trouble. Even the pioneering studies of Lewis Lancaster (whom he cites)¹⁰ should have taught Guang that in “the rise” of the Mahāyāna, or any of its specific conceptual content, all the action is well and truly over by 400. What the task requires, therefore, is a fine periodisation *within* those early centuries, as much as such can be achieved; Jan Nattier, for example, has argued convincingly that for the examination of such questions through the lens of the Chinese record, we should posit three phases of the “early” Mahāyāna,¹¹ centering the analysis on three seminal translators, thus:¹²

¹⁰ See, for instance, n. 55, p. 209.

¹¹ Obviously, I do not mean by the use of the word “early” here to imply that even Lokakṣema represents precisely the very inception of Mahāyāna, nor that Nattier thinks so either. It is useful, in this regard, to bear in mind the words of Paul Harrison, from his seminal study of Lokakṣema: “The most salient characteristic of [these] works [is that]

Period I: to 200 CE, represented by Lokakṣema;
 Period II: to 265, represented by Zhi Qian;
 Period III: to 310, represented by Dharmarakṣa.

Even with such fine periodisation as this, breaking down the development of the burgeoning Mahāyāna to strata only a few decades wide, it is possible to trace significant developments from stage to stage. Guang would profit greatly from adopting a similarly fine approach, rather than reducing all the centuries of the Mahāyāna to Kumārajīva (up to five!—if we accept, with Guang, Conze’s suggestion than *Aṣṭa* may date from 100 BCE) to a single undifferentiated mass.

The problem of an inadequately fine chronological frame of reference is most pivotally instantiated in this difficulty periodising the Mahāyāna for the purposes of studying the rise of core doctrinal constructs, but the same problem also extends much further through the problematic of the book.

Guang quite frequently makes assertions about the relative dating of Nikāya and Āgama materials upon which he draws for his portrait of the “early” Buddhist situation, for example, but especially in the case of the Pāli materials, seldom gives any explanation or secondary source for these judgements; this despite the fact that no less an authority than Oskar von Hinüber has opined relatively recently that much preliminary study remains to be done before the field will have any prospect of arriving at an accurate assessment of such matters.¹³

although they obviously reflect an early stage of the Mahāyāna, they are not the products of its primitive or initial phase Rather, the overall content and presentation of the sūtras indicate that by the mid-second century C.E. the movement had already come some distance, and one may point out many well-developed features” (“The Earliest Chinese Translations of Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtras: Some Notes on the Works of Lokakṣema”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, 2 (1993), 170). Guang even cites this seminal article, without, apparently, having absorbed its lessons.

¹² Unpublished talk for the Harvard University Buddhist Studies Forum, October 28 2002. I am grateful to Professor Nattier for her permission to cite this unpublished work.

¹³ At least this is how I understand von Hinüber’s explanation for the fact that his survey covers only “the literary form of the texts”. As he discusses a list of possible research agendas linking Buddhism to various kinds of historical context (the use of formulae shared with Jaina literature and contrasted with the Purāṇas; connections to earlier and contemporary Vedic literature etc.), he says, “Lastly, as far as the dating of texts is concerned, Buddhist literature can be compared to the development of material culture in ancient India, which, e.g., shows that the cultural environment of the first four Nikāyas of the Suttapiṭaka is markedly older than that of the Vinayapiṭaka. Once all these methodological possibilities have been used to uncover the development of early Buddhist texts, this could and must be compared to the development of Buddhism as a religion.” He goes on immediately to say, “It is obvious that research has a long way to go to achieve all of this. Due to the lack of much preliminary study that is still necessary, special attention will be paid in the following to one aspect only, that is, the literary form

Guang's chronological framework is also woefully inadequate for the period in which *trikāya* doctrine is supposed to have been classically elaborated (the fourth-century context of the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*) and beyond. A more adequate approach, surely, would be to extend the kind of fine periodisation I suggested above, after Nattier, into the later history. Thus, we would expect that the "Dharmarakṣa" period would be followed by the period of the "Maitreya[-nātha]" Yogācāra root texts; then by the period of Asaṅga-Vasubandhu; then a periodisation following the waves of great early commentators like Ārya Vimuktisena, Bandhuprabhā, Sthiramati and Paramārtha; a further period distinguishable by the career of Xuanzang and the developments it reflects in India between his time and that of e.g. Paramārtha; and so on.

An adequate chronological framework, against these shortcomings of Guang's approach, would thus require at the least (1) that the analysis of Pāli materials be informed by the current state of scholarship on questions of relative dating (and that the sources of and reasons for these judgements be clearly signalled to the reader at each step), while every reasonable effort was made to ensure that pivotal theses did not rest on circular arguments deriving dates from supposed trajectories of doctrinal development as reflected in the texts; (2) that Chinese materials reflecting the rise of the Mahāyāna be much more finely periodised, to capture as precisely as possible the sequence of doctrinal developments; and (3) that such a fine periodisation be continued down through as many generations of thinkers and texts as is required to capture the ongoing development of these doctrines.

Not only is Guang's schema for periodising "the Mahāyāna" thus overly simplistic, however; it is also, as I said, excessively Sinocentric. There should be a fundamental distinction between the valid methodological posit that the Chinese record is valuable and useful in the study of Indic and pan-Mahāyāna doctrinal history (which surely nobody will dispute), and the over-generalisation of that methodology into a warrant to ignore all non-Chinese evidence. Unfortunately, Guang has adopted the latter view. His only justification for this stance is given in his "Introduction", where he says, "For this study the writer will rely chiefly on primary sources such as the early and middle Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *śāstras* in Chinese translation, *for most original Sanskrit texts are lost*" (3). But this is hardly justification at all. While it is indeed true that some Sanskrit texts have been lost, it is also true that many of the very texts Guang studies are nonetheless extant in Sanskrit; certainly, almost all texts, even those for which Sanskrit has been lost, are extant in Tibetan.

of the texts" (26). Despite this circumspection, von Hinüber not infrequently makes reference to the likely age of a text or texts: e.g. parts of MN seem younger than DN (33).

Such basic facts about the state of our sources, however, could not be discerned from scrutiny of Guang's riddled bibliography. What that exercise teaches us, rather, is that Guang's inadequate chronological schema is buttressed by a systematic disregard of almost all Mahāyāna (and "Schools") sources in languages other than Chinese.¹⁴ Guang does not even list those Sanskrit versions of his texts that *are* extant, nor translations of such in modern languages. Indeed, these facts are if anything further obscured, not only in the Appendix (see below), but throughout the body of the text and the notes, by the inexplicable way Guang also uses the asterisk. Conventionally, of course, prefixing with an asterisk shows that a Sanskrit title (or any term) is a hypothetical reconstruction (as Guang himself states, p. xi). Guang, however, regularly affixes an asterisk to the titles of the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, the *Abhidharmakośa*, and other texts which are extant in Sanskrit; he affixes it similarly to the titles of works like the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda-sūtra*, whose titles are known from other Sanskrit sources even where the text itself is lost; on occasion, he even fails to give the Sanskrit title of such texts at all, as with the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* (Ch. *Bu zeng bu jian jing* 不增不減經, listed p. 185; the Sanskrit of this title is known from the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*¹⁵). Taken as a whole, therefore, Guang's work evidences a cavalier methodological disregard for all Mahāyāna sources except the Chinese (in the case of non-Mahāyāna sources, he at least claims to pay equal attention to the Pāli Nikāyas alongside the Chinese Āgamas¹⁶).¹⁷

¹⁴ Indeed, pronouncements about the methodological validity of relying exclusively on Chinese materials look suspiciously like justifications *ex post facto* for this disregard.

¹⁵ See, for example, Takasaki Jikidō, *A Study on the Ratnagoṭravibhāga (Uttaratantra), Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Rome: Serie Orientale Roma, 1966), 39-40.

¹⁶ Guang 6.

¹⁷ These problems in the historical framework of Guang's work are most starkly reflected, not to say enshrined, in an Appendix entitled "Chronology of Chinese translations of Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras" (182-186), which is given "in order to illustrate that they roughly reflect the development of Buddhist thought in India This is because the first translation reflects the date of appearance of the particular text" (182). It is admittedly commonplace for the date of a Chinese translation to constitute one of the main pieces of evidence for the date of the Indic text itself. In almost all cases, however, this evidence at most enables us to establish a *terminus ad quem*, and it is established principle that careful dating requires attention to other factors, such as the internal relationships of content and doctrine among texts, patterns of citation from one text to another, use of unusual Sanskrit metres, reference to text-external historical facts and events, etc. Dating certainly cannot proceed *a priori* from the dates of the first Chinese translation alone. In fact, Guang shows a strange selective awareness of this fact, in that he periodically uses other dating methods where it suits his purposes. For example, in establishing the relative dates of the *Mahāvibhāṣa* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* (20-22), he follows Yinshun 印順 in using text-internal relative dating methods (noting that MPPŚ cites and refers to *Vibhāṣa*). This is surely because he is concerned to argue, against arguments advanced by Yinshun (in *Chuqi dasheng fojiao zhi qi yuan yu zhankai* 初期大乘佛教之起原與展開, Zhengwen, 1994; cited n. 3, p. 192), that the two-body theory of the Buddha is first found in

Thus, the extreme looseness of Guang's chronological framework for thinking about the relative dating of texts, and the unjustifiable Sinocentric bias in his choice of sources, combined with a rather erratic application even of his own faulty principles in practice, furnish the chaotic methodological background against which Guang elaborates his five-stage narrative of the development of *trikāya* doctrine, and the failings of the five-stage model cannot be understood apart from these methodological problems. When we begin to try and tighten the chronology, however, and inform the analyses with a better understanding of current scholarly consensus on the authorship and dating of key texts, it is immediately possible to identify some fundamental problems with the five-phase model.

For example, Guang figures early Buddhism as an uncomplicatedly pragmatic and down-to-earth system, and as we have seen, he attempts to explain *away*, by various confused strategies, all evidence of the miraculous that troubles this simplistic reading. In fact, however, it is clear that even in the earliest materials we can differentiate, it was understood that the Buddha, like any *arhat*, mastered meditative powers that gave him the ability to elaborate a *manomayakāya*. This means that what I call the simplistic "1-2-3" model, whereby the Buddha has *one* body in the early materials, *two* in the Schools, and *three* in "the" Mahāyāna, is undermined at the very outset, and that therefore, despite the fact that these already plural bodies of the Buddha were not articulated in any coordinated and numerated system (as indeed it seems was not usually the case before *trikāya*), the basic problem of plural

Sarvāstivādin contexts, and not in MPPŚ; and because, in this case, the earliest Chinese translation of the *Vibhāṣa* (by Saṅghabhūti in 383) will not suffice alone to make his case, presumably because it would place the *Vibhāṣa* uncomfortably close to MPPŚ (translated by Kumārajīva in "402-406"; 22). Guang's arguments on this point (following Lamotte as they do) are quite convincing, as it happens (though I can't help suspecting that Yinshun, with his pious insistence on Nāgārjuna's authorship of the MPPŚ etc., made something of a sitting duck). But the larger question is this: Why, if such dating methods are acceptable here, does Guang not generalise them? Why does he rather insist on adhering to his simplistic scheme of dating Indic texts by their Chinese translations? Even in this uncharacteristic display of historical scruples, moreover, Guang's arguments are transparently in the service of a Procrustean fit to his foregone conclusions. He fleetingly entertains the possibility that, despite the general precedence of the *Vibhāṣa* to MPPŚ, "the former text may still have been influenced by or adopted the two-body theory from the latter," since "the *Vibhāṣa* had been revised and enlarged time and again in the course of transmission before it was translated" (22);¹⁷ in other words, the (so-called) "two-body" passages could be later interpolations in the *Vibhāṣa*. No sooner has Guang raised this possibility, though, than he dismisses it on an amazingly slender pretext: "This argument does not hold since the two-body theory is found in all three Chinese translations" and "the earliest translation of the *Vibhāṣa* certainly predates Kumārajīva's translation of the MPPŚ" (by a slender twenty years!). In other words, it is impossible that the two-body theory was introduced in the course of a long textual development because, if it had been, it would certainly be absent from Saṅghabhūti's 383 translation, which can only mean that Guang is assuming that MPPŚ must have been *composed* no more than two decades before Kumārajīva translated it.

embodiments for the Buddha, and the notion of awakening as opening up access to radically transformed modes of embodiment, is as old as anything we know and in that sense fundamental.

To give another example, which seems to me to be potentially extremely important, neither Guang nor any of the other authors in the secondary literature I surveyed on this topic gives any clear grounds for holding that the supposed “schools” phase of development of bodies doctrine chronologically precedes early Mahāyāna developments at all. The relevant considerations here are complex, and I cannot enter into them fully here. I will attempt to state them briefly, however, for the Mahāsāṃghika and the Sarvāstivāda in turn.

“The Mahāsāṃghika”, it seems clear, are a shadowy and thinly attested historical group at the best of times, and appear to have splintered over time into several sub-sects, most notably the “Lokottaravāda” whose name appears to reflect the docetism for which the Mahāsāṃghika as a whole became most known in doxographical accounts. The earliest reliable witness we have for a reputedly Lokottaravāda position, however—indeed, for anything that would answer to the name of “Mahāsāṃghika docetism”—is Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Lokānuvartana-sūtra*, which has been studied by Harrison in his article entitled “Sanskrit Fragments of a Lokottaravādin Tradition”. This text belongs, of course, to the same Lokakṣema corpus in which is found the earliest witness of the (already quite developed) *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*; this corpus, of course, is also no less than the corpus which represents the inception of the Chinese textual witness to Buddhist development *per se*. On what grounds, then, do we say that any purported Lokottaravāda doctrine was a precursor of Mahāyāna ideas about bodies? Nowhere in the literature, and certainly nowhere in Guang, have I yet seen any actual evidence that the “Mahāsāṃghika” docetistic position, which is assigned a pivotal position in the development not just of docetistic ideas but indeed, on occasion, of the Mahāyāna itself, actually does predate early Mahāyāna materials.

The same arguments apply, *mutatis mutandi*, to the Sarvāstivāda case. Right back to the *Vibhāṣa* Sarvāstivādin portray themselves as in debate with (the people *they* call) the Mahāsāṃghika on issues pertaining to the status of the Buddha’s body (or bodies), which means that there are no immediately obvious grounds for assuming the priority of one or the other of these two schools. But the Sarvāstivādin sources, by Guang’s metric, should surely count as later than the *Prajñāpāramitā*, since they were not translated into Chinese for at least another century; and even if we suspend further carping about Guang’s silly approach to dating, and refer instead to considered opinion in the field, it is usually thought that the *Vibhāṣa* must postdate Kaniṣka, which once more gives us no grounds for assuming that

any Sarvāstivāda doctrines pertinent to the question at hand precede the Mahāyāna.

Besides this very large problem of relative chronology, the “Schools” phase of Guang’s five-phase narrative is further compromised by the fact that his account of the contents of the key texts he studies in the relevant chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) is just plain wrong. I will return to this problem below, as an example of the significant errors that dog this book in the execution of the practical craft of scholarship.

To give one final example of the problems that undermine Guang’s five-phase schema, there are fundamental flaws in the very teleological understanding that he shares with the entire field on this question, namely that the *trikāya* doctrine somehow represented a natural endpoint towards which bodies doctrine developed, and that the elaboration of this doctrine “solved” key doctrinal problems and thereby demarcated the end of significant development in that regard. First, it seems clear that even at its very birth, *trikāya* doctrine shared the doctrinal field with a range of other notions about Buddha bodies, including (as Guang himself shows to some degree) the significantly different schemes of decades of bodies found in the proto-*Avataṃsaka* literature, the markedly different notions of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, and also the typically unaccountable ideas found in the *Laṃkāvatāra*. Even more significant, however, is the fact that even after the promulgation of the *trikāya* synthesis, schemes of more than three bodies were elaborated repeatedly in widely separated quarters of Mahāyāna thought, and moreover that these extra bodies were in some cases elaborated independently along the same lines by more than one text.¹⁸ The continual irruption of such schemes of more and more bodies, even *after* the supposed consummation of teleology in *trikāya* doctrine, makes a nonsense of the idea that *trikāya* was anything more than a significant and relatively stable synthesis in the overall development of ideas of the Buddha’s embodiments.

Guang’s five-stage thesis is thus highly problematic, and is perhaps best read as an object lesson in the inherent dangers of the traditional teleologising approach. On the basis of my survey of the secondary literature on this topic, Guang included, I strongly believe that if study of the question of the Buddha’s embodiments, received or ideal, is to progress, the trammels of this teleological framework must be thrown off, and we must survey the whole field of discourse about such embodiments afresh, relegating *trikāya* doctrine to its proper place as but one doctrine among many, albeit a very important one. Of course, I cannot undertake such a reconsideration of the

¹⁸ Makransky, for example, for all that he argues that the *Abhisamayālamkāra* properly teaches three bodies and that it was only Haribhadra’s ingenious reinterpretation that saw in it four, writes an entire book occasioned by a very long-lived competing tradition of four bodies. See also Demiéville’s *Hôbôgirin* article “Busshin” for a remarkably rich set of sources that elaborate more than three bodies in various ways.

question of embodiments here; but I intend to take up this question in detail in future work.

As I already said above, Guang shares this teleological assumption, along with most of the broad outline of his narrative, with the field as a whole. I also said above that there is little about Guang's account that is significant and new, and that on the whole, he does little to go beyond his predecessors. Thus far, however, I have said nothing that would suggest anything more than that Guang's book is unoriginal and fails to break out of the conceptual binds found in his predecessors. Unfortunately, the problems with this book do not stop with these basic flaws in its thesis and the major flaws in general methodological approach outlined above. The book is also characterised by distressingly frequent shortcomings in the detailed handling of primary sources; mistranslations; insufficient familiarity with basic facts in the field of Buddhist studies; *non sequiturs* in reasoning; confusing, unclear or inaccurate expression in the exposition of the argument; inadequate footnoting; and typographical errors. It is my unpleasant duty as a reviewer to alert my readers to these problems also.

Given that these problems are far too numerous to list, and that many should be immediately apparent to any qualified reader of Guang's work, I will confine myself to giving one extended example of such breakdowns in the mechanics of his detailed scholarship: Chapter 2, dealing with Sarvāstivāda doctrines of the Buddha's bodies. This example is worth examining because it shows a further respect in which the five-phase model that is Guang's core thesis crumbles on close examination; what Guang says about the contents of the texts he examines in this chapter is, in important respects, simply incorrect.

Guang makes two important assertions in this chapter about Sarvāstivādin Buddhology: (1) "the *rūpakāya* (*sic*) is characterised in various ways in the *Mahāvibhāṣa*" (23-36), but primarily as characterised by the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the great man, a halo, and a golden complexion; (2) the *dharmakāya* is equated there with the eighteen "exclusive qualities" (*āveṇikadharmā*) (36-44). Both of these assertions, in this form, are inaccurate representations of the doctrines of the text.

In *none* of the passages Guang cites, in his characterisation of "the *rūpakāya*" in the text, does the text ever actually have a term that could be clearly shown to reflect such an underlying Sanskrit. For example, the passages he cites to support his opening characterisation of "the *rūpakāya*",¹⁹ only ever give *shen* 身, not, e.g. *seshen* 色身. This is the case throughout. Where the text does specify more exactly the *kind* of body involved, we get

¹⁹ Guang 23; sources listed in n. 21, p. 194.

rather e.g. *shengshen* 生身, “body of birth”.²⁰ It is especially clear that this is the contrast posited in a passage that makes it explicit: “Generally speaking (*liie*, **samāsenā*), the Buddhas have two kinds of body: first, the body of birth, and second, the *dharmakāya*.”²¹ Despite the fact that this is the terminology of the text, however, Guang illegitimately and misleadingly translates “*rūpakāya*” throughout, thus giving a very false impression that the in fact spurious equation of the statements in the text with a supposed doctrine of *rūpakāya* is copiously supported in the text.

On the other hand, the compound *seshen* occurs only *once* in a context where it clearly does indicate a body being predicated of the Buddha, when it *could* (mistakenly) be interpreted as corresponding to the usual translation for *rūpakāya*. The context here, however, is very specific: a discussion of whether or not it is possible to engage in a contemplation of impurity 不淨觀 taking the *rūpa*[-*skandha*] of the Buddha as the contemplative object (207b2 ff.). The text immediately goes on to use both 佛色 and 佛身 separately in a manner that makes it clear that the association between the two members of the compound *seshen* is here, at best, loose. The passage is worth giving in its entirety for its intrinsic interest to the problem of the status of the Buddha’s body in the text as a whole, and reads (roughly translated) as follows:

Question: Is it possible to engage in contemplation of impurity taking the Buddha’s body of physical form as the meditative object?

[Answer:] Some hold that this is impossible, because the Buddha’s physical form (**buddha-rūpa*, 佛色) is extremely subtle, most exceeding bright and clean, like pure light, and it is therefore impossible to be disgusted by it. Other masters, however, hold that it is possible for a Buddha to engage in contemplation of impurity taking himself as a meditative object, but that it is not possible for other people [to engage in such a contemplation with him as the object]. Others again hold that there are two kinds of contemplation of impurity: (1) of the conditioned nature (**pratītyasamutpannatva*?) of physical form; and (2) of physical form as evil and ill-omened. [It is held that

²⁰ T1545.392a13-15; 229a15-b02; 601c29-602a06, 620c12-18, 620c26-28; 佛生身 698a08-12, 871b29-c20, 391c21-392a11; etc. It is interesting to consider the implication of this term. To refer to a “birth body” in contrast to a “dharma body” would seem, of all the Buddha body theories seen in the course of research for this article, to resonate most immediately with theories, found according to la Vallée Poussin in some Sarvāstivādin sources, that upon his attainment of Nirvāṇa the Buddha either acquires another body (of *dharmā*), alongside which the birth-body persists, or else whips away the birth-body and substitutes for it in the same instant a “fictive” replica. See *Siddhi* “Appendix”, 784. These considerations are of course speculative and should be checked against the sources.

²¹ 諸佛身略有二種。一者生身。二者法身。T1545.342c21.

the contemplation of impurity] of the conditioned nature can take the Buddha as the meditative object, but that [the contemplation of impurity as] evil and ill-omened cannot take the Buddha as the meditative object. Finally, there are those who hold that there are [a different] two kinds of contemplation of impurity: (1) at the level²² of universal characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*); and (2) at the level of particularity (*svalakṣaṇa*). [It is held that contemplation of impurity at] the level of universal characteristics can take the Buddha's body (佛身, **buddhakāya*) as the meditative object, while [the contemplation of impurity at] the level of particularity cannot take the Buddha 佛 as the meditative object.²³

Even in such a brief compass, there are whole worlds of subtlety and controversy never contemplated by Guang. The first point for our purposes here, however, is to note that the loose way in which the passage refers back to the topic of the “Buddha's body of material form” as “the Buddha's material form”, “the Buddha's body”, or just “the Buddha” indicates clearly that *foseshen* here does not refer to any formalised notion of a *rūpakāya* proper or particular to the Buddha. Indeed, the association between the members of this compound (or clause) seems so loose that we might well translate the opening question, “Is it possible . . . taking the Buddha's body *or* material form as the meditative object?”

Astonishingly, given that this is the only passage in which the *Vibhāṣa* comes close to speaking of a *rūpakāya of the Buddha* in any sense at all, Guang does not study it closely.²⁴ Still less, then, does he study the meaning of this term *seshen* (= **rūpakāya*) in the text, despite the fact that it contains much of interest for the history of that term.

In fact, the text uses the term *seshen* in many places, but significantly, apart from this one case, the term is precisely *not* used in discussion of the Buddha. It is used rather in discussing other kinds of sentient beings. For

²² This is a clumsy translation of *jing*, usually for Sanskrit *viśaya*. This term also refers to a kind of cognitive “object”, but I wanted to distinguish somehow in my translation here between this *jing* and *yuan*, usually for Sanskrit *ālambana*, which I have translated “meditative object”. The distinction, I take it, is that the *yuan*=*ālambana* is the general object (or “topic”, if you like) that serves as the occasion for the contemplation as a whole, but the *jing*=*viśaya* is the particular, local aspect of that object with which cognitive engagement is achieved moment-to-moment through the course of the contemplation.

²³ 問有緣佛色身起不淨觀不。有作是說。無有能者。佛色微妙最極鮮潔如淨光明不可厭故。有餘師說。佛能自緣起不淨觀。餘無能者。或有說者。不淨觀有二種。一色緣起。二色過患。色緣起者。能緣佛身。色過患者。不能緣佛。復有說者。不淨觀有二種。一共相境。二自相境。共相境者能緣佛身。自相境者不能緣佛。T1545.207b02-10.

²⁴ He refers to it in passing only once, so far as I could determine, p. 35.

example, in some contexts, it is clear that it refers to one of a pair of possibilities considered: either sentient beings may have a body of material form, or they may not.²⁵

The section of the text in which the notion features most prominently, and the only possible warrant for identifying *seshen* with *rūpakāya*, is an extended discussion of the differences between *sôpadhiṣeṣa-* and *nirupadhiṣeṣanirvāṇa*, “Nirvāṇa with and without remainder” (有/無餘依涅槃),²⁶ where it becomes apparent that the term *seshen* refers to the physical body of the Buddha precisely as *a body he shares with other, unawakened sentient beings*, whereas *shengshen* (“birth body”) refers to that body *as a body of the Buddha, that is, from the perspective of a being who, in being awakened, has transcended it by attainment to some other mode of embodiment*. In other words, while it is indeed to some extent true that a Buddha has a *seshen* = **rūpakāya*, this form of embodiment is shared with many other unremarkable sentient beings, and the text deliberately refers to that body, in the case of a Buddha, by a different term which is surely intended to signify the very different, transformative relation a Buddha enters into with that body in virtue of his awakening. All of these subtleties are completely effaced in Guang’s textually unfounded equation of the two terms.²⁷

Given these facts, it seems clear that, even if we admit that there is one slender justification (never adduced by Guang himself) for the identification of the *shengshen* of the Buddha in this text with “the *rūpakāya*”, this still does not warrant the claims that occupy the bulk of Guang’s attention in this

²⁵ E.g. 有情色無色身 T1545.387b23, 387b25-26; the distinction is discussed at some length 707a03 ff. The text uses the term *seshen* relatively frequently in reference to other kinds of sentient beings (38 times, according to a CBETA CD-Rom search). The most interesting example is perhaps this passage, which is very interesting for the light it casts on possible *Vibhāṣa* antecedents to the notion of the *nirmāṇakāya*; here, *seshen* is predicated, rather, of *tiannü* (“*āpsaras*”), and is specifically said to be a result of the magic they can work: 白尊者言。我四天女。能於四處變化自在。一者隨欲化 (**nir/mā?*) 作種種上妙色身諸相愛者。我等皆能歡娛承事。二者隨欲化作種種上妙衣服。三者隨欲化作種種妙莊嚴具。四者隨欲化作種種上妙花香飲食珍翫諸欲樂具 (T1545.207a01-06).

²⁶ T1545.167b14-168c01. It should be noted that this extended passage does legitimate, in a very restricted sense, the equation that Guang draws between *shengshen* and *rūpakāya*, but only in the sense that, in the case of the Buddha, they refer to the same thing; it is clear, however, that they do so by these different terms because the text has in view a different aspect of the body referred to.

²⁷ This passage promises to amply reward further study. Particularly pivotal is the passage T1545.167c29-168a03, which explains very clearly, in technical terms redolent of [proto-?]Yogācāra, the precise nature of this form of embodiment as it perdures for an awakened being. This passage, to my knowledge, is never cited by Guang at all, probably because it does not contain the word “body” *shen* 身. For current purposes, however, I cannot analyse this passage further than what is necessary to demonstrate the problems with Guang’s working method.

section of his book. For, as we have seen, Guang further claims that this *rūpakāya* of the Buddha is characterised by the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the *mahāpuruṣa*, a halo, a golden complexion, and so on. But these are attributes of the Buddha alone, not shared with other sentient beings or even Arhats; and, as is clear in the long passage I have just referred to, even insofar as the Buddha does have a *seshen*, he *shares it, as such, with all Arhats*, and so it is not an exclusive “body of the Buddha” at all. In this sense, then, it seems likely that it is not incidental, but in fact deliberate and significant, that in passages that do discuss the marks, etc., the text in fact *never* uses even the term *shengshen*, let alone *seshen*: it speaks, rather, of simply *shen* 身 “the body”.²⁸

If, as I believe, this observation requires that we dissociate these features of the “body of the Buddha” from the “body of birth” to which Guang erroneously links it under cover of the spurious translation as “*rūpakāya*”, then a question naturally ensues, which Guang has not even noticed, let alone begun to answer: What then *is* the status of the “body” to which these miraculous characteristics are ascribed? If they are in fact *not* properties of the body in which the Buddha took his birth from Māyā, and which he shared with other ordinary sentient beings and Arhats, then of what body should we predicate them? It is beyond the scope of this article to try to answer these questions and to consider the full dimensions of the term *seshen* and related concepts in this rich text, though I hope to do so in future work. Suffice it to say that they promise to amply reward further study. Guang, however, mesmerised as he is by his preconceptions about what he should be looking for, never even scratches the surface of this material.

This should amply demonstrate that Guang has no grounds for his claim that the *Vibhāṣa* preaches a *rūpakāya* characterised by the thirty-two major marks, etc. As I mentioned above, the second part of his central claim in this chapter, viz. that the *Vibhāṣa* propounds a “two-body theory” of the Buddha, is also equally flawed. Guang’s exact claim is that the second of these “two bodies” is a *dharmakāya* that is understood precisely as comprised of the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas* or “exclusive qualities” of the Buddha. Yet in *none* of the passages he cites from the *Mahāvibhāṣa* on the *āveṇikadharmas* are they equated with the *dharmakāya*; the equivalence seems only to exist in the realm of Guang’s presuppositions. The supposed equation Guang claims breaks down in both directions: first, the doctrines of the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas* summarised by Guang are in fact never associated with the

²⁸ Or, in one passage, “the great body” (? 大身), 159c13-19, repeated almost verbatim 428c01-05.

term *dharmakāya*;²⁹ and second, where the term *dharmakāya* is used, it is not characterised as Guang says it is.

The nearest the text comes to making any statement that might be taken as the identification of the *dharmakāya* with the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas* is a statement (made three times) that all Buddhas are equal in several respects, one of which is that they are equal with respect to the *dharmakāya* 法身等: the gloss given to this statement is “because all Buddhas attain the unsurpassed merits [of] the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, the three establishments of mindfulness, great compassion, the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas* etc.”³⁰ This hardly warrants an *identification* of the *dharmakāya* with the *āveṇikadharmas*. First, it is not possible to be certain that “eighteen *āveṇikadharmas*” here is not being listed *alongside* the other items, as referring to some different set of content, instead of being an overall label for them, as Guang would have it.³¹ Second, and more important, however, what the text says is that Buddhas are equal with respect to the *dharmakāya because of the merits* of (that is, either comprising, or produced by) the qualities listed. This could easily suggest, rather than a close identity between items in the list and the *dharmakāya* itself, something of a disjunction, whereby the possession of these powers etc. produces an incalculable merit that in its turn renders all Buddhas equal in their *dharmakāya*—a formulation, let us note, which still leaves rather vague the question of what exactly the *dharmakāya* actually *is*.

When the text actually does speak directly about the *dharmakāya*, in fact, rather than identifying it with the *āveṇikadharmas*, as Guang claims it does, it identifies it with other qualities of the Buddha. For example, in one passage, in discussing the Buddha as refuge, it refutes the notion that one takes refuge in the Tathāgata’s head, neck, belly, back, hands or feet (which it refers to, like the **Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, as the “body born of father and mother”, which Lamotte reconstructs as Skt. *pīṭṛmāṭṛjanmakāya*), and then says, “When we say, ‘the refuge’ we refer to the *āśaikṣa-dharmas* that

²⁹ Much of the latter part of Guang’s chapter, in which he characterises the *āveṇikadharmas*, is paraphrase of the long passage 1545.158a21-161a08. This passage does not, however, mention any term that could translate *dharmakāya*!

³⁰ 謂諸如來皆得十力四無所畏三念住大悲十八不共法等勝功德故 (T1545.85a26-28, 131b14-19, 624a13-15). See Makransky 25 for a different translation of the passage, based upon la Vallée Poussin’s “Documents d’Abhidharma”, 76.

³¹ The position of the *deng* 等 in particular would suggest the former, as if in fact “eighteen *āveṇikadharmas* was a blanket name encompassing the earlier items, we would expect rather 十力四無所畏三念住大悲等十八不共法.

comprise *bodhi*, that is, the *dharmakāya*".³² The *dharmakāya* is thus, if anything, these *āśaikṣadharmas*,³³ rather than the *āveṇikadharmas*.

Even more pivotally, however, the text tends, on the whole, to identify the *dharmakāya* with the five *anāsravaskandha* or "aggregates without outflow", that is, *śīla*, *samādhi*, *prajñā*, *vimukti* and *vimuktijñāna*. At this point, I am spared the need to go into further detail, since this characterisation of the *dharmakāya* in the *Vibhāṣa* has already been noted by Makransky and la Vallée Poussin, etc.³⁴ In fact, considering Guang's offhand

³² 歸依佛者。歸依如來頭項腹背。及手足等所合成身。今顯此身父母生長是有漏法非所歸依。所歸依者謂佛無學成菩提法即是法身 (T1545.177a15-18).

³³ *Āśaikṣadharmas* are the qualities (*dharmas*) of those who are at the *āśaikṣa* stage of the path, that is, the stage at which one requires "no more learning" (*a-śaikṣa*), i.e. the stage of the *arhat*. See the next note for more details (from Makransky and la Vallée Poussin) on the exact contents of this concept in the current context.

³⁴ Makransky Chapter Two; la Vallée Poussin, "Documents de l'Abhidharma", cited in Makransky; la Vallée Poussin, "Appendice" to **Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, 767, on similar Sarvāstivāda doctrines as found in AK. Note that in many respects, this understanding of the *dharmakāya* as comprised of the five *anāsravaskandhas* is entirely consistent with the doctrine presented in the much later *Abhidharmakośa* (AK), though the latter text seems to elaborate in more detail. Makransky's Chapter 2 provides many of the necessary references to this material. In Makransky's excellent exposition, and the sources he there refers to, it becomes clear, however, that in AK, at least, the five *anāsravaskandha* are merely among the *āśaikṣadharmas* constitutive of *bodhi*; principal among these, rather, are *kṣayajñāna* and *anutpādayajñāna*, "knowledge of the destruction [of the *kleśas*] and of [their] not arising [again thereafter]", to which the five *anāsravadharma* are conceived of as "attendants". Given that these *jñāna*, too, and not just the *anāsravadharma* attendant upon them, are understood as "comprising *bodhi*", it seems to me that the doctrine of refuge in the *Vibhāṣa*, as laid out in the passage already cited above, is probably the same: it speaks explicitly of "the *āśaikṣadharmas* which comprise *bodhi*" (所歸依者謂佛無學成菩提法即是法身; T1545.177a15-18). Now, if this is the case, then the passage that speaks of all Buddhas being the same in virtue of their *dharmakāya* "because of the unsurpassed virtue of the ten powers . . ." etc. can only be interpreted in the following ways. (1) If it means that the *dharmakāya* is to be identified with the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas*, as Guang would have it (which I have argued is not the most accurate interpretation of the text), it means that there are two competing visions of the *dharmakāya* at play in the text. This is not impossible, since a large text like the *Vibhāṣa* need not be univocal, and it is, among other things, a text that records controversies. (2) A remote theoretical possibility is that Guang could still be right, and we could reconcile the two visions of the *dharmakāya*, if some equation is being drawn between the *āśaikṣadharmas* and the *āveṇikadharmas*. I have not found any other passages that would support this possibility. (3) The clear identification of the *dharmakāya* with the *āśaikṣadharmas* could, on the other hand, be a further piece of evidence that this passage is not to be read as positing an identification between the *dharmakāya* and the ten powers, etc., but rather that an equal *dharmakāya* is won for every Buddha in virtue of the immense merit generated by the ten powers, etc. We would then have the further specification that the equal *dharmakāya* so won is the two *jñāna* and the attendant *āśaikṣadharmas* that comprise *bodhi* (and this, incidentally, would make a great deal of sense in the definition of one who is *buddha*, "awakened").

dismissal of Makransky's work,³⁵ it is sobering to observe that a reader would be much better served by Makransky's brief but excellent treatment of the Sarvāstivādin doctrines than by the entirety of Guang's more extensive mishandling of the matter. This contrast is rendered particularly stark by the way Guang does, in fact, enter into a fleeting encounter with the *actual* Sarvāstivāda doctrine of the *dharmakāya* (36), but only to immediately abandon it for some unknown reason, and go off on the wild goose chase that preoccupies him for the rest of the chapter.³⁶

Thus, Guang's assertion that the Sarvāstivāda, as represented in the *Vibhāṣa*, identify the *dharmakāya* with the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas*, is entirely groundless, seriously misleading, and merely casts a veil of obfuscation over the far more interesting facts of the matter. I showed earlier that his assertion that the Sarvāstivāda preach a *rūpakāya* endowed with the major marks etc. is equally unfounded. This means that Guang's overarching claim in his second chapter—that the Sarvāstivāda taught a “two-body” theory of the *rūpakāya* and *dharmakāya* so defined—is entirely wrong, both in its outline and its details.

This extended example shows that all the most major and basic conclusions of Guang's Chapter 2 are simply factually wrong, and that his errors lie in basic problems of care and accuracy in reading the texts. Such examples could be multiplied for much of the work contained in this book. However, given the complexities that we just saw are entailed in

³⁵ Guang says, “Although he devotes two chapters to the concept of the Buddha in the Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma* (*sic italics*) and the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, these merely constitute a survey” (2).

³⁶ In arbitrarily imposing the category of *dharmakāya* onto this material, Guang in fact misses some more interesting things that are going on in the text. For example, in two places (with almost identical wording), the *Vibhāṣa* uses the term *dazhangfushen* 大丈夫身, or **mahāpuruṣakāya* (a term otherwise very rare in the canon as a whole), in discussing the mental powers (or “might”, “strength”; the term includes all of what Guang identifies as the eighteen *āveṇikadharmas*) 意力 of the Buddha. The text explains that “their [i.e. the powers'] support (*āśraya*) is the ‘body of the great man’ [that has its existence] in Jambudvīpa of the *kāmadhātu*; it is only supported by this body that it is possible to attain Buddhahood” 所依者皆依欲界人瞻部洲大丈夫身。唯依此身得成佛故 (T1545.157a8-9, 158b22-23; Guang seems to refer to one of these passages p. 39, when he notes that the four fearlessnesses are identified with some of the ten powers; but he does not actually give a source for the identifications he makes.). Now, given that the passage at T1545.167b14-168c01 cited above suggests that *shengshen* = **janmakāya* of the Buddha is a kind of *āśraya* that is specified as not exclusive to the Buddha, this deliberate identification of a different “kind” of body, and that one named “the body of the *mahāpuruṣa*”, should surely lead us to ask further whether the overall understanding of Buddha bodies in the text is not somewhat different to what has been noted not just by Guang, but by all secondary students of the text to date. In other words, is this “body of the *mahāpuruṣa*” that nonetheless dwells in Jambudvīpa of the *kāmadhātu* and acts as the “support” of Buddhahood also the unspecified “body” of which are predicated the major marks, etc.?

straightening out even a single example, my readers will perhaps forgive (or thank) me if I do not give any other detailed examples.

In conclusion, then, I regret to say that it is difficult to recommend anything about this book. Its overarching thesis of a gradual and ongoing apotheosis of the Buddha is unremarkable insofar as it is right, and wrong insofar as it is at all innovative (in its idiosyncratic combination of the “Golden Age” model of early Buddhism and Mahāyāna triumphalism, for example). Its more specific thesis of a five-phase evolution of Buddha-body doctrine towards the teleological endpoint of *trikāya* doctrine, while in its broad outlines shared with much scholarship to date on like questions, is overly simplistic in its general outline and deeply problematic in many of its details. These problems with the thesis are buttressed by a loose, ill-informed and inconsistently applied chronological frame of reference, and a Sinocentric and methodologically uncountenanceable exclusive reliance on a simplistic reading of the Chinese record to determine the history of Indic doctrines. Beyond these broad problems of conclusions, assumptions and method, the book is also compromised by exceptionally frequent and numerous errors and problems in the use of primary sources, as I have exemplified in my analysis of Guang’s reading of the *Mahāvibhāṣa* in Chapter 2. We also find on almost every page further problems, which I cannot document exhaustively here, such as the disregard or ignorance of matters that should be common knowledge in the field, an extremely superficial engagement with works cited from prior secondary scholarship on the same topic, an only partial coverage of prior secondary scholarship that sees some works never cited or listed at all, and so on.

Guang Xing is to be congratulated for noticing that the topic of the Buddha’s bodies is indeed massively understudied and ripe for a great deal more work than it has enjoyed previously, and he is to be thanked, therefore, for bringing this topic to our attention. This much is hardly enough to justify the publication of an entire book, however, and Guang’s book does nothing to actually fill the gap he has identified. In fact, it is somewhat alarming that a book so problematic could be published in this state by a reputable press, as part of an edited series overseen by two reputable scholars.

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