

Article

Meditative Experiences of Impurity and Purity—Further Reflection on the *aśubhā* Meditation and the *śubha-vimokṣa*

K. L. Dhammajoti

School of Philosophy, Renmin University of China, Beijing 100872, China; djoti@hku.hk or dhjoti@gmail.com or dhjoti@126.com

Abstract: In this paper, I would firstly like to supplement my observations and the materials used in the earlier paper “The *aśubhā* Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda”. I shall remark on the authenticity of the suicide tradition, and show further how the *aśubhā* meditation continued to be recommended in all the Buddhist traditions. A major concern of my discussion will focus on the Buddhist traditional understanding of the meditative transition from the experience of the impure to that of the pure. In the context of this developmental process, I shall further attempt to demonstrate that: along this traditional understanding, Mahāyānistic and even Tantric elements came to be interfused with the traditional—especially Abhidharma—meditative doctrines in the milieu of an increasing interest relating to buddha-visualization.

Keywords: Buddhism; Sarvāstivāda; *aśubhā*; *śubha*; buddha-visualization; impurity; purity; meditation



Citation: Dhammajoti, K. L. 2021. Meditative Experiences of Impurity and Purity—Further Reflection on the *aśubhā* Meditation and the *śubha-vimokṣa*. *Religions* 12: 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020086>

Academic Editor: Michel Mohr
Received: 19 December 2020
Accepted: 16 January 2021
Published: 28 January 2021

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2021 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Preliminary Remarks

In an earlier paper dealing with the *aśubhā* meditation (Aśu Medn),¹ I discussed the Buddhist meditation on the impure or unpleasant (*aśubha*) in various doctrinal and meditative contexts preserved in the different Buddhist traditions—including the Pāli texts (also the Chinese Āgama texts), Northern Abhidharma tradition (and also to some extent the Yogācāra tradition) and the “*dhyāna sūtras*”—but with special reference to the Sarvāstivāda sources. I pointed out that quite in spite of the general tradition, both Pāli and “northern” sources, of the episode of monks committing suicide as a result of practicing the *aśubhā* meditation, this meditation continued to be underscored and in fact developed. I have further highlighted the interesting—and inspiring in terms of doctrinal development—meditative experience of the pure/beautiful (*śubha*) in connection with, or consequential upon, the *aśubhā* meditation.

In this paper, I would firstly like to supplement my observations and the materials used in the earlier paper. I shall remark on the authenticity of the suicide tradition, and show further how the *aśubhā* meditation continued to be recommended in all the Buddhist traditions. A major part of this paper will be a lengthy discussion focusing on the Buddhist traditional understanding of the meditative transition from the experience of the impure to that of the pure. This transition is equally discernible within the three interrelated traditional meditative schemes: the eight *vimokṣas*, eight *abhibhāvāyatanas* and ten *kṛtsnāyatanas*. In the context of this developmental process, I shall further attempt to demonstrate that: along this traditional understanding, Mahāyānistic and even Tantric elements came to be interfused with the traditional—especially Abhidharma—meditative doctrines in the milieu of an increasing interest relating to *buddha*-visualization.

Before proceeding further, some clarification of a few key terms is in order: The term *śubha* (Pāli: *subha*) connotes “splendid”, “beautiful”, “pleasant”, “good” (often synonymous with *kuśala*), “pure” (sometimes also synonymous with *suddha*), “auspicious”, etc.² I mostly

¹ See Dhammajoti (2009).

² In terms of moral actions, *śubha* and *aśubha* also connote *kuśala* and *akuśala* respectively. e.g., AKB, 8: *śubhāśubha iti kuśalākuśalaḥ* |.

render it in this discussion as “pure” or “beautiful”. The term *aśubha* connotes the opposite; generally rendered here as “impure”.³ The **Śāriputrābhidharma* sums up these connotations:

What is said to be *śubha* (淨)? The *rūpas* that are beautiful/lovely (好), mutually splendid, agreeable, always pleasant to behold, are said to be *śubha*.⁴

The term *aśubhā* as a feminine noun means “impurity”, “ugliness” or “loathsomeness”, and connotes the meditation on the impure, used synonymously with *aśubha-bhāvanā*. Thus, in AKB, we have *aśubhā-vimokṣa*, ‘liberation of the impurity-meditation’ (Tibetan: *mi sduḡ pa’i rnam par thar pa*, Xuanzang: 不淨觀解脫); *aśubhā-svabhāva* “impurity-meditation in intrinsic nature”, etc.⁵ Likewise, in *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*, we see clear readings of *aśubhā-sahagata*, *aśubhā-manaskāra*, etc.—e.g., *aśubhāmanaskārānantaram smṛti-saṃbodhyaṃgamā bhāvayati*⁶ “he develops the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness immediately after the mental application (meditation) of the *aśubhā*”; *nāśubhayā kleśaprahāṇaṃ viṣkaṃbhaṇāmātram tu bhavati*⁷ “There is no abandonment of defilements by means of the *aśubhā* (meditation), but mere suppression occurs”.

2. Further Canonical Evidence for the Consistent Recommendation on the *aśubhā*

In *Asu Medn*, I have already referred to the Buddha’s exposition on mindfulness (*satī*) of the body specifically in terms of contemplating its physical impurities and loathsomeness in such *suttas* as the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*, *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, etc.⁸ By way of supplementing the relevant Pāli canonical references and other relatively later sources in the Sanskrit and Chinese translations, I shall begin in this section with a brief survey of numerous places in the Pāli *Sutta-piṭaka*, where the praxis of *aśubha* contemplation is highly recommended or praised.

In the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*, the Buddha explains how *kāyagatāsati* brings about great fruit and great benefits.⁹ He explains the development of this mindfulness first in terms of (1) the mindfulness of breathing and of (2) the four postures, followed by (3) contemplation on the bodily impurities, and on (4) the elements (*dhātu*) constituting the body. This is again followed by (5) the nine charnel ground contemplation, which is another aspect of the impurity meditation, culminating in the contemplation of the skeleton that remains after the other bodily parts have fully decayed. Finally comes the description of (6) the *jhāna* attainments.

In the Buddha’s explanations herein (as in the Sarvāstivāda *Dharmaskandha-śāstra*),¹⁰ contemplations on the impurities occupy a major part, comprising (3) and (5). Mindfulness of breathing precedes as the first mention, without any suggestion or hint of its superiority or advantages over the impurity contemplation. In fact, all the six types of *kāyagatāsati* practices are equally described as leading to the state wherein all the practitioner’s recollection and intentions relating to the household life are relinquished, and consequently his thoughts become unified and equipoised.¹¹ It is further to be noted that the *jhāna* attainments explained in (6) actually presuppose detachment from sensuality, for which the impurity contemplation is taught to be the main antidote.¹²

³ Elsewhere, I have rendered this also as “loathsome”.

⁴ 《舍利弗阿毘曇論》T 28, No. 1548, p. 640a24–25: 何謂淨? 諸色好、展轉相照、適意、觀無厭, 是名淨。

⁵ See Hirakawa A., et al. *Index to the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. Part I, under “*aśubhā*”.

⁶ Vy, 247.

⁷ Vy, 526.

⁸ See *Aśu Medn*, §2.

⁹ MN, *sutta* No. 119, 89 ff: *kāyagatāsati kathaṃ bahulīkatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā?*

¹⁰ Cf. *Aśu Medn*, 255 f.

¹¹ *tassa evaṃ appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato ye gehasitā sarasāṇikappā te pahīyanti | tesāṃ pahānā ajjhātam eva cittaṃ santiṭṭhati sannisīdati ekodī hoti samādhīyati |*.

¹² See *Aśu Medn*, §2.2, and n. 29.

There are numerous other *suttas* in which contemplation of bodily impurities and repulsiveness are decidedly recommended, without even an indirect warning of its possible danger.

In MN (i, 424), the Buddha directly advises Rāhula to practice *asubha-bhāvanā* for the abandonment of greed (*rāga*).

AN likewise recommends the *asubha* contemplation in numerous places. Thus, the *Pathamasāññā-sutta* speaks of seven ideations (*saññā*) that beget great fruits and benefits, culminating in the Deathless (*amata*). Of these, two—*asubha-saññā* and *āhāre paṭikūla-saññā*—pertain respectively to impurity-ideation and ideation on the repulsiveness of food.¹³ The *Rāga-peyyāla* mentions *asubha-saññā* as among seven things to be developed for direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) of *rāga*.¹⁴ In the *Pabbajjā-sutta*, the Buddha urges the *bhikkhus* to familiarise their thought in accordance with their going forth (*yathāpabbajjā-paricita*). This is by way of ten ideations, one being the *asubha*-ideation. Practicing so leads to either full knowledge or the state of a non-returner.¹⁵ There is a rather interesting episode in the *Girimānanda-sutta*. The Buddha tells Ānanda to preach ten ideations to the sick Girimānanda, saying that after hearing them the latter's afflictions might on the spot subside. Ānanda does accordingly, and Girimānanda indeed, on hearing them, comes to be cured of his affliction. Both the *asubha*-ideation and mindfulness of breathing are among the ten.¹⁶

In the *Aṭṭhikamahapphala-sutta*, the Buddha teaches that the skeleton-ideation (*aṭṭhika-saññā*), when cultivated together with the enlightenment-factors (*bojjhaṅga*), brings great fruits and benefits: "either perfect knowledge (*aññā*) in this very life; or, clinging remaining, the state of a non-returner."¹⁷

In the *Kāya-sutta* of the *Bojjhaṅga-saṃyutta*, the Buddha highlights the frequent improper attention to the signs of the beautiful (*subha-nimitta*) as that which nourishes sensual desire.¹⁸ In contrast, frequent proper attention to the signs of the impure (*asubha-nimitta*) is declared as its denourishment.¹⁹

In the *Mettāsahagata-sutta* of the same *Bojjhaṅga-saṃyutta*, the Buddha explains how the Buddhist praxis of the *brahma-vihāra* meditations differs from that of the heretics. In the Buddhist case, when a *brahmavihāra* meditation—e.g., *mettā-bhāvanā*—is practiced in conjunction with the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*), it is firstly on the bases of seclusion (*viveka*), detachment (*virāga*) and cessation (*nirodha*), and is within the context of developing letting-go (*vossagga-pariṇāmin*). When so practiced, the practitioner comes to achieve mastery over the perception of repulsiveness and non-repulsiveness:

- I. If he wishes: "may I abide perceiving the repulsive (*paṭikūla*) in the non-repulsive (*appatikūla*)," he abides therein perceiving the repulsive.
- II. If he wishes: "may I abide perceiving the non-repulsive in the repulsive," he abides therein perceiving the non-repulsive.
- III. If he wishes: "may I abide perceiving the repulsive in both the repulsive and the non-repulsive," he abides therein perceiving the repulsive.
- IV. If he wishes: "may I abide perceiving the non-repulsive in both the repulsive and the non-repulsive," he abides therein perceiving the non-repulsive.
- V. If he wishes, "may I abide equanimous, mindful and properly aware, getting rid of both the repulsive and the non-repulsive," he abides therein being equanimous, mindful and properly aware.

Or, he abides having fully attained the beautiful liberation (*subhaṃ . . . vimokkhaṃ*).
O *bhikkhus*, for a *bhikkhu*, who has acquired wisdom in this case without penetrating into a

¹³ AN, *Sattaka-nipāta*, 46.

¹⁴ AN, *Sattaka-nipāta*, 148; in *Nava-nipāta*, it is listed as one of nine.

¹⁵ AN, *Dasaka-nipāta*, 107 f.

¹⁶ AN, *Dasaka-nipāta*, *Girimānanda-sutta*, 108 ff.

¹⁷ SN, V, 129.

¹⁸ SN, V, 64, 102 f.

¹⁹ SN, V, 105.

higher liberation, I say that his mental liberation through loving-kindness culminates in the beautiful (*subha-paramā*).²⁰

This fivefold mastery is described as *ariyā iddhi* in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. For II, it is explained that in the agreeable objects he pervades with the *asubhā* (*asubhāya vā pharate*) (same can also be seen for IV).²¹ Accordingly, it is clear that the “repulsive” and “non-repulsive” in the discourse concerned include what are *subha* and *asubha* respectively.

3. The Question of Authenticity of the Suicide Story

On the basis of the consistently strong recommendation of the *asubhā* practice in the early discourses, as seen above, it begs the question of the authenticity of the account in the *Vesāli-sutta* of SN, which relates the suicide episode.²²

It is true, as pointed out in Aśu Medn, that the later Abhidharma tradition does seem to have inherited this suicide story, and links it up with its doctrine of the *cetanā-dharman* practitioners.²³ For instance, MVŚ enumerates the six types of *arhat*—*parihāṇa-dharman*, *cetanā-dharman*, *anurakṣaṇā-dharman*, *sthitākampya*, *prativēdhanā-dharman* and *akopya-dharman*—and explains the *cetanā-dharman* as one “who volitionally (*cetayitvā*) kills himself with a knife” (思法者, 謂: 彼思已持刀自害).²⁴ Nevertheless, it is generally a later tradition. The only possibly earlier canonical mention is the *Madhyamāgama*, which enumerates the *cetanā-dharman* type as the first, and the *ubhayato-vimukta arhat* as the last, of nine types of non-trainees (*āśaikṣa*; i.e., *arhat*), who, together with the trainees (*śaikṣa*) are worthy of offerings.²⁵ But the corresponding *Āṅguttara-nikāya* version here simply states that the *sekha* and the *asekha* are the two types of person who are *dakkhiṇeyya*.²⁶ Accordingly, the *Madhyamāgama* version—affiliated with the Sarvāstivāda school—could well have been a later insertion when the Sarvāstivādin typology of the *arhats*, which includes the *cetanā-dharman* and the *ubhayato-vimukta arhats*, etc., had come to be more or less standardized.

The episode occurs, in a more elaborate and even bizarre form than the *sutta/sūtra* version, in the extant Vinaya texts of some six Buddhist schools.²⁷ It constitutes the justification for the Vinaya promulgation of rule for killing. As in at least some other cases, such as the justificatory stories for the promulgation of rules against serious sexual offences, such *nidāna* stories, to say the least, might not have been wholly factual. They could have been partly fabricated for the purpose of explicating the need for the particular promulgation concerned. I am inclined to believe that the *Samyutta/Samyukta* version is actually derived from the Vinaya version; not conversely. In the *sūtra* version, the Buddha, after emerging from seclusion, simply notices the big decrease of the number of monks participating at the *prātimokṣa* recitation, and is then told by Ānanda of the mass

²⁰ SN, *Mahāvagga*, *Bojjhaṅga-samyutta*, *Mettāsahagata-sutta*
kathaṃ bhāvitā ca, bhikkhave, mettācetovimutti, kiṃgatikā hoti, kiṃparamā, kiṃphalā, kiṃpariyosānā?
idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu mettāsahagatāṃ satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti . . . pe . . . mettāsahagatāṃ upekkhāsambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ
nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmaṃ |
so sace ākaṅkhati “appaṭikūle paṭikūlasaṇṇī vihareyyan”ti, paṭikūlasaṇṇī tattha viharati | sace ākaṅkhati “paṭikūle appaṭikūlasaṇṇī vihareyyan”ti | appaṭikūlasaṇṇī
tattha viharati | sace ākaṅkhati “appaṭikūle ca paṭikūle ca paṭikūlasaṇṇī vihareyyan”ti, paṭikūlasaṇṇī tattha viharati | sace ākaṅkhati “paṭikūle ca appaṭikūle ca
appaṭikūlasaṇṇī vihareyyan”ti, appaṭikūlasaṇṇī tattha viharati | sace ākaṅkhati “appaṭikūlaṇ ca paṭikūlaṇ ca tadubhayaṃ abhinivajjetvā upekkhako vihareyyaṃ
sato sampajāno”ti, upekkhako ca tattha viharati sato sampajāno |
subhaṃ vā kho pana vimokkhaṃ upasampajja viharati | subhāparamāhaṃ, bhikkhave, mettācetovimuttiṃ vadāmi, idhapaṇṇassa bhikkhuno uttarivimuttiṃ
appaṭivijjato |

²¹ *Khuddaka-nikāya*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Paññāsvagga*, *Dasāiddhiniddesa*:
kathaṃ appaṭikūle paṭikūlasaṇṇī viharati? iṭṭhasmiṃ vatthusmiṃ asubhāya vā pharate | aniccato vā upasaṃharati | evaṃ appaṭikūle paṭikūlasaṇṇī viharati |
kathaṃ appaṭikūle ca paṭikūle ca paṭikūlasaṇṇī viharati? iṭṭhasmiṃ ca anīṭṭhasmiṃca vatthusmiṃ asubhāya vā pharate | aniccato vā upasaṃharati | evaṃ appaṭikūle
ca paṭikūle ca paṭikūlasaṇṇī viharati |

²² Cf. Aśu Medn, §2.2.

²³ Aśu Medn, §§ 2.2, 6.

²⁴ MVŚ, 319c8-14.

²⁵ T01, No. 26, 616a17–19.

²⁶ AN, II, 4.4: *dve kho, gahapati, loke dakkhiṇeyyā: sekho ca asekhā ca | ime kho, gahapati, dve loke dakkhiṇeyyā | ettha ca dānaṃ dātubbaṃ |*.

²⁷ I have briefly discussed this in Aśu Medn, 256 f. For a recent comprehensive discussion on the suicide episode, see [Anālayo \(2014\)](#).

suicide. For all the severity of the happening, the Buddha gives no explanation at all on why the suicide could have happened, or how it could have been avoided. He simply teaches the monks *ānāpānasati* as conducing to peaceful and sublime abiding. But how can one reconcile such seeming serious misjudgment and lapse as a spiritual guide with the perfection of the Buddha's Wisdom and the consistent recognition of his being the *anuttaro purisadamma-sāratthi* ('supreme charioteer of persons to be tamed')? Moreover, as we have stressed above, in all the occasions when the *āsubhā* meditation is praised and recommended, we do not see the Buddha or the Buddhist elders sounding a word of warning. We find, of course, in some *dhyāna sūtras* of the later period, one or two places where such a danger is alluded to. For instance, in the *Chan-mi-yao-fa Jing* (禪秘要法經), it advises:

Upon the accomplishment of the *āsubhā*, the body must not be given up. [Instead,] the pleasant contemplation should be taught. This is the pleasant contemplation: visualize white light issuing from between the [bone-]limbs, intensely radiating, like the snow mountain.²⁸

Likewise, in the *Siwei Lüeyao Fa* (思維略要法), the meditator on the *āsubhā* is warned to guard against extreme aversion to the body:

He attentively contemplates that there is nothing worthwhile at all in this body. In this way, disgust will arise in the mind. He remains always mindful of impurity . . . until [the *āsubhā*] is achieved. When he becomes extremely disgusted with his body, he should enter into the contemplation on the white bones, or the first *dhyāna*.

At the time of death, the practitioner committed to the ideal of the Mahāyāna will be reborn into the presence of the Buddhas accordingly as he has wished. Otherwise, he will definitely go to the Tuṣita heaven, where he can meet with Maitreya [Buddha].²⁹ (For the significance of the last paragraph, see discussion below, §8)

Two Contrasting Emphasis: *Ānāpānasati* vs. *Āsubhā*

Apart from the *Vesāli-sutta* and the corresponding *Samyuktāgama* version, there is no evidence in the discourses that the *ānāpānasati* meditation is taught only after the mass suicide episode. We gather from the Buddha's biographical accounts that *ānāpānasati* was in fact a prominent meditative practice in his struggle for Enlightenment. In the *Ichchānaṅgala-sutta* of SN and the corresponding *Samyuktāgama* version, the Buddha instructs the monks to tell the heretical mendicants that during the Rains retreat, he dwells mostly in the equipoise of *ānāpānasati*.³⁰ He in fact declares the equipoise of *ānāpānasati* as the "Tathāgata's dwelling (*tathāgata-vihāra*)", praised as a "noble dwelling" and a "divine dwelling".³¹ Now, this *sutta* is under the same *Ānāpāna-samyutta* of the same *Mahā-vagga*, as the *Vesāli-sutta*, which almost immediately precedes it (*Vesāli-sutta* is No. 9; it is No. 11). In fact, the very first *sutta* under this *Ānāpānasati-samyutta*, praises the *ānāpānasati* as "the one *dhamma*, which, when cultivated and repeatedly practised, brings about great fruit and great merits."³² Noticeably, just as in the *Ichchānaṅgala-sutta*, there is not a word about the *asubha-bhāvanā*—its danger or otherwise.

The same tradition is found the Sarvāstivādin MVŚ:

The outsiders (外道; heretical wanderers) might come and ask you: "What meditation does your Master enter into in the two (three?) months of meditative [retreat]?" You should answer: "It is the *ānāpāna-smṛti*."

Question: "The heretics do not even know the name '*ānāpāna-smṛti*', how much less its intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Why then does the Fortunate One say thus?"

²⁸ 《禪秘要法經》T15, No. 613, p. 244b29–c1: 不淨想成時, 慎莫棄身。當教易觀。易觀法者: 想諸節間, 白光流出; 其明熾盛, 猶如雪山。

²⁹ 《思維略要法》T15, No. 617, p. 298c10–18: 諦觀此身, 無一可取。如是心則生厭惡。常念不淨三十六物, 令得成就。若極厭惡其身, 當進白骨觀; 亦可入初禪。行者志求大乘者, 命終隨意, 生諸佛前。不爾, 必至兜率天上, 得見彌勒。See also, Yinshun (1989), 《華雨集(二)》, 245a10–246a5.

³⁰ SN V, *Mahāvagga*, *Ichchānaṅgala-sutta*: *tesaṃ aññatitthiyānaṃ paribbājakaṇaṃ evaṃ byākareyyātha*: "*ānāpānasatisamādhinā kho, āvuso, bhagavā vassāvāsāṃ bahulaṃ vihāsi*" ti | T02, 207a14–24.

³¹ loc. cit: *yañ hi taṃ, bhikkhave, sammā vadamāno vadeyya*: "*ariyavihāro*" iti pi, "*brahmavihāro*" iti pi, "*tathāgatavihāro*" iti pi; *ānāpānasati-samādhinā sammā vadamāno vadeyya*: "*ariyavihāro*" iti pi, "*brahmavihāro*" iti pi, "*tathāgatavihāro*" iti pi | T02, 207a28–b4.

³² SN, *Mahāvagga*, *Ānāpāna-samyutta*, *Ekadhamma-vagga*, *Ekadhamma-sutta*: *ekadhammo, bhikkhave, bhāvito bahulīkato mahapphalo hoti mahānisaṃso | katamo ekadhammo? ānāpānasati* |.

Answer: “This is in order to attract the *vineyas*, the heretics, etc., into the *Buddha-dharma*: There are heretics and their followers who, on hearing that the Buddha, the Fortunate One, enters into *ānāpāna-smṛti* during the two-month (three-month?) meditative [retreat], generate a thought of wonder. They visit the Buddha. The Buddha preaches to them and they accept and commit to it.

Moreover, it is in order to protect the new *bhikṣus* so that they do not turn away from the *Buddha-dharma*: There are some *bhikṣus* who have newly entered into the *Buddha-dharma*. Having practised *ānāpāna-smṛti* with a disrespectful attitude, they intend to return to the heretics and seek a different *Dharma*. On account of these words of the Buddha, the heretics come to the Buddha and respectfully accept the *Dharma*; as a result, those *bhikṣus* overcome their thought of retreat [from the *Buddha-dharma*].”

Question: “When the Buddha is meditating, he enters into all *dhyānas*, *vimokṣas*, *samādhis* and *samāpattis*; why is he only said to enter into *ānāpāna-smṛti*?”

Answer: “Although he enters into all *dhyānas*, *vimokṣas*, *samādhis* and *samāpattis*; *ānāpāna-smṛti* is foremost of them all. Hence, it is specifically mentioned. Moreover, all *dhyānas*, *vimokṣas*, *samādhis* and *samāpattis* are the retinues (眷; *parivāra*) of *ānāpāna-smṛti*—either preceding or succeeding it. Hence the Fortunate One [specifically] mentions it.”³³

The general Abhidharma tradition promotes both the *aśubhā* and the *ānāpānasati* as the two “*amṛta-dvāra*” (‘gateway to immortality’) leading to Nirvāṇa.³⁴ However, the above MVŚ passage, besides showing the Abhidharma continuation of the *sūtra* tradition of the Buddha’s own emphatic recommendation of the *ānāpānasati*—without a negative contrast with the *aśubhā*—further underscores the practice as being unique to the *Buddha-dharma*, unshared by the heretical traditions. From this perspective, we might even consider the possibility that the mass suicide account in the *Vesālī-sutta* could suggest a tension between two sections among meditators:

One section is more concerned with the uniqueness and the temperament-wise universal applicability of the Buddhist practice of *ānāpāna-smṛti*, and perhaps also less ascetic. It advocates the latter over the *aśubhā*. These meditators are amply discernible in the forgoing survey. The following is yet another context essentially highlighting the superiority of *ānāpāna-smṛti* over the *aśubhā*—but again noticeably without condemning the latter as conducive to a suicidal tendency:

Question: Why does the *sūtra* speak of *ānāpāna-smṛti* as being applicable in all the four *smṛty-upasthānas*?

Answer: It is thus spoken of because it can induce the four *smṛty-upasthānas*. . . . Moreover, *ānāpāna-smṛti* enhancing the *dharma-saṃjñā* as it does, constitutes the basis for contemplation on emptiness, and can therefore swiftly induce the four *smṛty-upasthānas*. . . . The *aśubhā* enhances the *sattva-saṃjñā*, and thus cannot swiftly induce the four *smṛty-upasthānas*, . . . Moreover, *ānāpāna-smṛti* is generated only among the Buddhists, unshared by the heretics, and therefore capable of swiftly inducing the four *smṛty-upasthānas*, . . . The *aśubhā* is also generated among non-Buddhists, and [thus] incapable of swiftly inducing the four *smṛty-upasthānas*. . . .³⁵

The other section, more fundamentally concerned with the problem of overcoming sensual attachment in the spiritual struggle, and perhaps also more ascetic, seriously examines and consistently highlights the Buddha’s recommendation of the *aśubhā* meditation in its various forms and contexts. In MVŚ, we see this section of meditators explaining why the *aśubhā* is highlighted as the “*pratimukhī smṛti*” (‘face-to-face mindfulness’):³⁶

Question: Why herein, the *aśubhā* alone is said to be “*pratimukhī smṛti*”, not the *ānāpāna-smṛti* and the *dhātu-bheda* contemplation?

Answer: . . . Further, the *aśubhā* is the initial contemplation. That is: the *aśubhā* precedes all contemplations. The meditators mostly enter into the Noble Path with the *aśubhā* as the supporting base, not with *ānāpāna-smṛti* or *dhātu-bheda* contemplation; hence it is specifically mentioned. . . . Among the five hindrances [to be eradicated for meditative success], sensual craving is the most serious. Moreover, it is [enumerated] at the beginning,

³³ MVŚ, 136a1–16.

³⁴ Cf. MVŚ, 384b16–17, 662c8–9.

³⁵ MVŚ, 134b17–c15.

³⁶ Cf. Aśu Medn, 254 f.

hence specifically mentioned. Its direct antidote is the *aśubhā*; when sensual craving is abandoned, the other [hindrances] will accordingly be abandoned.³⁷

4. The Psycho-Spiritual Significance of the *aśubha*-to-*śubha* Transition and the Eight-*Vimokṣa* Scheme of Praxis

It follows from the foregoing discussion (§2) that, when mental liberation (*cetovimuktī*) is acquired through a properly practiced meditative praxis, the mind becomes spiritually pliable, rather than being rigidly conditioned to only one or the other mode of perception—the experience exclusively of what is *śubha* / *apratikūla* or of what is *aśubha* / *pratikūla*. The important implication is that the *aśubhā*, properly practiced, does not render the practitioner incapable of perceiving the beautiful/pure as the beautiful/pure, less still becoming pathologically depressed.

This point is also corroborated by the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. There, certain recluses and Brahmins falsely accuse the Buddha as teaching that in the *subha-vimokkha* (the meditative attainment of the ‘beautiful liberation’) the meditator perceives exclusively everything as being ugly/impure (*asubhanteva sañjānātīti*). The Buddha denies this, and states his teaching thus: “When one abides having fully attained the *subha-vimokkha*, one truly knows it exclusively as beautiful.”³⁸ Thus, the Buddha, while affirming the exclusive perception of the ugly or impure in the *aśubhā* practice, does not deny the practitioner’s capability of the pure and beautiful.

In this connection, it is noteworthy that the above-cited *Mettāsahagata-sutta* (*loc. cit.*) states that the mental liberation through the *mettā* meditation in conjunction with the enlightenment factors can culminate in the beautiful. In the same manner, the mental liberation acquired through the Buddhist *karuṇā* meditation is said to be capable of culminating in meditative attainment of the sphere of the infinity of space (*ākāśānañcāyatana-paramā*); *muditā*, the sphere of the infinity of consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*); *upekkhā*, the sphere of nothingness (*ākāśañcāyatana*).

In brief: In the Abhidharma—and for that matter, early Buddhism in general—progressive meditative attainments are accompanied by a state of joy or happiness. Thus, when a practitioner progresses from the sensuality sphere and enters into the first *dhyāna* (/ *jhāna*), he experiences rapture and happiness born of seclusion (*vivekajaṃ prītisukham*); ascending from the first *dhyāna*, he experiences rapture and happiness born of equipoise (*samādhijaṃ prītisukham*); etc. The *Pañcakaṅga-sutta* speaks of happiness of the first *jhāna* as being more excellent and sublime (*sukhaṃ abhikkantatarāṇi ca pañītatarāṇi ca*) than sensual happiness; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the second *jhāna*; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the third *jhāna*; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the fourth *jhāna*; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the sphere of infinity of space; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the sphere of infinity of consciousness; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the sphere of nothingness; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the sphere of neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation; more excellent and sublime than that is happiness in the sphere of cessation of ideation and sensation (*saññā-vedita-nirodha*).³⁹ In brief, the progressive spiritual attainments in Buddhist praxis are characterized by increasingly subtler states of blissfulness and peace—the most profound of which is the bliss of *Nirvāṇa*. (See also §7 below)

³⁷ MVŚ, 205a21–b9.

³⁸ DN, iii.24, *Pāṭika-sutta*: *evaṃvādīṃ kho maṃ, bhaggava, evaṃ akkhāyīṃ eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā asatā tucchā musā abhūtena abbhācikkhanti: “viparīto samaṇo gotamo bhikkhavo ca | samaṇo gotamo evaṃ āha: “yasmīṃ samaye subhaṃ vimokkhaṃ upasampajja viharati | sabbaṃ tasmīṃ samaye asubhanteva sañjānātī” ti | na kho pañāhaṃ, bhaggava, evaṃ vadāmi: “yasmīṃ samaye subhaṃ vimokkhaṃ upasampajja viharati, sabbaṃ tasmīṃ samaye asubhanteva pajānātī” ti | evaṃ ca khvāhaṃ, bhaggava, vadāmi: “yasmīṃ samaye subhaṃ vimokkhaṃ upasampajja viharati, subhanteva tasmīṃ samaye pajānātī” ti |*

³⁹ SN, *Salāyatana-vagga*, *Vedanā-saṃyutta*, *Pañcakaṅga-sutta*. See also the *Nirāmisā-sutta* (*loc. cit.*), which likewise speaks of progressively more profound and spiritual (*nirāmisā*) types of rapture (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*), equanimity (*upekkhā*) and liberation (*vimokkha*). The equanimity “more spiritual than the spiritual” (*nirāmisā nirāmisatara*) is the blissful state of mind wherein all defilements are destroyed; the liberation “more spiritual than the spiritual” is that resulting therefrom.

4.1. The Eight-Vimokṣa Scheme of Praxis

The above description of the culminating state of the beautiful in such early discourses as the *Mettāsaṃbhava-sutta* will make better sense when we consider the doctrinal scheme of the eight liberations (*vimokkha*; *vimokṣa*). I have discussed this scheme at some length in the context of the *aśubhā* meditation in Aśu Medn.⁴⁰ What follows may be considered supplementary to the earlier discussion.

The term “*vimokṣa*” may be rendered as “liberation” or “emancipation”. There are eight progressive states of attainment in this scheme:

1. Possessing matters, one sees matters (*rūpī rūpāṇi paśyati*).
2. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally (*adhyātman arūpasamjñī bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyati*).
3. Realizing the pure/beautiful through the body, one abides having accomplished it. (*śubham vimokṣam kāyena sākṣātkṛtvopasampadya viharati*).
- 4–7. Correspondingly, the four successive meditative attainments pertaining to the non-materiality sphere.
8. The meditative attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*)⁴¹

Among other things, the eight *vimokṣas* are eight increasingly higher domains of meditative experiences. In this context, “*vimokṣa*” is glossed as “*vaimukhya*”,⁴² which represents experiential transcendence. MVŚ explains as follows:

What is the meaning of *vimokṣa*?

Answer: Its meaning is *vaimukhya* (棄背; ‘turning away from’, ‘turning the back on’).

... The first two *vimokṣas* turn away from the thought of craving for visible forms (*varṇa-rāga*). The third *vimokṣa* turns away from the thought of the *aśubhā*. The four non-materiality-spheres (*ārūpyāyatana*), in each case, turns away from the thought of the sphere immediately below. The [last], *saṃjñāveditanirodha-vimokṣa* turns away from all thoughts having cognitive objects (*sālabhāna-citta*).

According to Venerable Vasumitra: they are called liberation because the thought is liberated from defilements and becomes pure. According to the Bhaddanta: they are called *vimokṣa* on account of *vimokṣa* being acquired by virtue of *adhimokṣa* / *adhimukti* (‘affirmative resolve’).⁴³ According to Pārśva: It is *vimokṣa* because of something being turned away from.⁴⁴

The first two liberations counteract greed for the visible forms: Cultivated in the first two *dhyānas*, they counteract greed for the visible forms pertaining to the sensuality-sphere; cultivated in the second *dhyāna*, they counteract those pertaining to the first *dhyāna*. But the sunken mind resulting from the *aśubhā* meditation must now be counteracted for the practitioner to ascend to the higher meditative domains. This is achieved by the *śubhā* meditation, the third liberation.⁴⁵

4.2. Sarvāstivāda Explanation of the Process of Successive Achievement of the Vimokṣas

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tradition provides comparatively more detailed and articulate explanations on the actual process in the development of the *vimokṣas*. I shall quote below a lengthy description from Saṃghabhadra’s **Nyāyānusāra* explaining the progression from the first to the third, *śubhā-bhāvanā*—the impurity-to-purity transition that we are chiefly interested in:

⁴⁰ Aśu Medn, especially §2.4.

⁴¹ In the Theravāda: *Mahānidāna-sutta*, DN, ii, 70 f; *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, DN, ii, 111 f; *Mahāsakuludāyī-sutta*, MN, ii, 12 f; *Atthasālinī*, 190; etc. In the Sarvāstivāda, references are numerous, especially in the Abhidharma texts; *Dīrghāgama*, T1, 490c, 489b; *Madhyamāgama*, T1, 582a, 694a f; SgPŚ, T26, 443a–b, Saṅgītiparyāya-pāda, T26, No. 1536, 443a26–445b13; *Prakaraṇa-pāda*, T26, 712c–713a; MVŚ, 434b–c; **Śāriputrābhidharma*, T28, 639c–642a; **Amṛtarasa-śāstra*, T28, 976a; AKB, 454–456; etc.

⁴² Cf. AKB, 455: *vaimukhyārthao hi vimokṣārtha itī* |.

⁴³ For *adhimokṣa* / *adhimukti* as a meditative experience, see Dhammajoti (2019), “*Adhimukti*, Meditative Experience and *Vijñaptimātratā*”, 135 ff.

⁴⁴ MVŚ, 434c1–9.

⁴⁵ For a fuller Abhidharma account for the rationale for the practice of the *śubhā* meditation after the *aśubhā*, see Aśu Medn, 277 f.

... the first *vimokṣa* has not eradicated ideation of the inner *rūpas*. ... The meditator, though having been freed from sensual greed, in order to consolidate [the detachment], further meditates on the external *rūpas* with the mode of activity (*ākāra*) of impurity. As a result of repeatedly contemplating on the external *rūpas* [as impure], he comes to generate dispassion/disgust (*nir-√vid*) with regard to the internal *rūpas* as well. ... It is only after having in this way first meditated on the external signs of impurity that, the inner material body being likewise impure and the meditating thought being pure, he perceives—as [clearly as] the various distinctly coloured things within a case—the body within as being filled with thirty-six types of impurity. This is said to be the stage of full accomplishment of the first *vimokṣa*. At this stage of accomplishment, what *dharma* has been liberated from? With regard to *rūpas*, the thought does not delight therein; it is averse to them, scorns them, loathes them, and prevents sensual greed towards them. This is the liberation from sensual greed, being non-greed in its nature.

Subsequent to this, the meditator gradually further eradicates the ideation that takes the inner *rūpas* as cognitive objects (*adhyātmarūpa-ālambana*). That is: by means of *adhimokṣa*, he visualizes himself dying; his body being brought and abandoned at the grave-yard, devoured by competing beasts and animals, ... dissipated through fire, water, etc.; until the body is no more and only the fire etc. is visible. This is said to be the “*vimokṣa* of one devoid of ideation of the inner *rūpas* contemplating the external *rūpas*.” (*adhyātmam arūpasamjñī bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyati*. See §4.1 above) Because this *adhimokṣa* effectuates the eradication of *rūpa*-ideation, it does not perceive the body even though it arises taking the body as cognitive object. Having eradicated the ideation that takes the inner *rūpas* as cognitive objects, his thoughts serially continue without other activities, and the sublime happiness of pliability (*praśrabdhi*) manifests spontaneously. At this stage, he repeatedly practices taking objects of the *rūpāyatana* with the mode of activity of aversion (*vaimukhya*). This is said to be the accomplishment of the second *vimokṣa*. Just as the first [liberation], it is a liberation from sensual greed.

But although previously by cultivating the *aśubhā* ideation, he has acquired liberation from sensual greed taking *rūpas* as objects, yet it is difficult to get rid of self-attachment (*ātma-sneha*) which has existed from beginningless time. Worrying that if he perceives the body as being existent, he might still retrogress to generate [self-attachment], he thus subsequently again practises the ideation without inner *rūpas*, his meditation on loathing *rūpa* becoming purer than before. The meditator then becomes deeply attached to these two meditations acquired with the first *dhyāna* as support. To develop this further, he enters into the second *dhyāna* and again practises the two *vimokṣas*, again practising the two *dharms* in the same sequence as before. Why is it that the ideation therein, loathing *rūpas* as it does, can be said to be conjoined with the sensation of rapture (*prīti-samprayukta*)? This is so by virtue of the stage (*bhūmi*) pertaining thereto, ... Or rather, seeing that the skilful roots (*kuśala-mūla*) being cultivated have now been accomplished, he gives rise to rapture. Since he has acquired liberation with regard to ideation of the visibles, rapture can arise even in meditating on the loathsome.

Next, he further enters into the third *dhyāna*. Being obsessed with the sublime happiness [therein], his thought becomes indulgent. He therefore cannot cultivate the *vimokṣas*, and generates only skilful roots that are semblance of a *vimokṣa*. In this *dhyāna*, it is the nature of things that by virtue of the stage, neither a meditation effectuating delight nor disgust can be accomplished.

Following this, he enters into the fourth *dhyāna*. Owing to the dominance of equanimity (*upekṣā*), thought comes to be gradually purified, and the ideation of impurity is no more dominant. Thus it is not called the first two *vimokṣas*, but only “semblance of the skilful roots”.

[The purity-meditation (*śubha-bhāvanā*)]

The *yogācāra* having meditated on the *aśubhā* for a long time, operating in the mode of loathfulness, his thought becomes depressed. To temporarily gladden his thought, or to be temporarily relieved from tiredness, or for the sake of testing for himself the capability of the *aśubhā*,⁴⁶ he further supported upon the fourth *dhyāna*, generates the *adhimukti* for purity with regard to the *rūpas* pertaining to the sensuality-sphere. First he apprehends the sign of purity of a jewel, garment, flower, etc.; and through the force of *adhimukti* he gradually expands (*√spha*) his visualization to pervade the entirety of the cognitive objects with the mode of activity of purity (i.e., he pervasively visualizes all cognitive objects as being pure). Just as is said in the *sūtra*: “He subsequently should apprehend a limited sign of purity, and applies his thought [in this way] to all *rūpas*.” This exercises (*pra-√grah*) thought without exciting it. While meditating on the sign of purity, he does not give rise to greed. Having known the dominance of the power of the skilful root, he further concentrates his thought on the object-domain, and abides contemplating purity with regard to a single cognitive object. This is said to be the consummation of the *śubha-vimokṣa*, capable as he is of abandoning the impurity ideation ...

⁴⁶ For other reasons given here for the need now to cultivate *śubha-bhāvanā*, see §7.

Why does a practitioner cultivate the *vimokṣas*, etc?

In order to further distance from the defilements, and to acquire mastery (*vaśitva*) over the meditative attainments (*samāpatti*). With the acquisition of [this] mastery, he can then effectuate various qualities, such as non-conflict (*araṇā*), etc., and also supernormal powers with which he can transform object-domains and perform acts of extending and shortening (*utsarjanādhiṣṭhāna*) [his life-span], etc.⁴⁷

Among other things, the above account shows that, in the Abhidharma context, the *śubha-bhāvanā* is not an automatic sequel necessarily occurring after the *aśubhā*. It has to be intentionally cultivated after the *aśubhā* by applying *adhimukti* on a *śubha* object. MVŚ in fact narrates a story which shows that there are certain innately endowed individuals, such as those reborn from among the gods delighting in purity, who specifically cultivate the *śubha-bhāvanā* culminating in the attainment of arhathood.⁴⁸

On the other hand, we have also pointed out in Aśu Medn that according to the Abhidharma master, Saṃghabhadra, all *aranyaka* meditators proclaim that upon the ultimate completion of the *aśubhā*, “a sign of purity manifests all of a sudden.”⁴⁹ However, this latter tradition need not contradict our earlier observation. It represents the meditator’s ultimate culmination of the meditative achievement of complete detachment from sensuality (*vairāgya*). It can therefore be properly understood as being quite in line with the overall picture that emerges for us throughout this paper: The higher meditative progression requires detachment from sensuality, to be achieved either through *aśubhā* or otherwise. Once the meditator has been fully detached from sensuality, he necessarily experiences joy, pleasantness, equanimity, etc. As Saṃghabhadra explains, the *vimokṣas* are practiced not as ends in themselves, but as means for further spiritual development.

4.3. The **Tattvasiddhi* (成實論) Perspective of the *Vimokṣas*

Harivarman (c. 4th century CE.), the author of the **Tattvasiddhi*, was said to have studied under the Dārṣṭāntika master, Kumāralāta, and been influenced by the Mahāsāṃghikas. According to Yinshun:

The **Tattvasiddhi* is [doctrinally] close to the Sautrāntika doctrines. But it cannot be described as Sautrāntika. In terms of its sectarian affiliation, it can be considered as constituting a school in its own right.⁵⁰

It is well known that this text advocates the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*)—though not necessarily identical with that of the full-fledged Mahāyāna. Its *śūnyatā* perspective is also clearly discernible in its comments on the progressive attainments of the *vimokṣas*.⁵¹ It criticizes the Abhidharma perspective, and instead explains in terms of the meditator’s progressive realization of emptiness—from emptiness of the *rūpas* to the emptiness of the *vijñānas* to finally the total cessation (emptiness) of all *rūpas* and *cittas* in the eighth *vimokṣa*:

The Sūtra teaches the eight *vimokṣas*. In the first, the meditator, internally having the *rūpa-saṃjñā*, contemplates on the external *rūpas*, and with this he destroys (i.e., he realizes the emptiness of) the *rūpas*. How is it known? In the second *vimokṣa*, it is said that internally without *rūpa-saṃjñā*, he contemplates on the external *rūpas*. He is said to be internally without *rūpa-saṃjñā* on account of having destroyed the internal *rūpas*. Thus, we know that in the first *vimokṣa*, the meditator has gradually destroyed the bodily *rūpas*. When he enters into the second *vimokṣa*, the internal *rūpas* have been destroyed and only the external *rūpas* exist.

In the third *vimokṣa*, the external *rūpas* too having been destroyed, he sees neither any internal nor external *rūpa*. This is called the emptiness of *rūpas*. . .

In the [next] four [*ārūpya*] *vimokṣas*, [the Sūtra] teaches the emptiness of the *vijñānas*. . . In these four *vimokṣas*, the *vijñānas* are destroyed. In the eighth *vimokṣa*, all are ceased (一切滅盡; **sarvaṃ niruddham*). This is because: when both *rūpa* and *citta* are ceased, all the

⁴⁷ Ny, 772c4–773c8.

⁴⁸ See Aśu Medn, p. 278.

⁴⁹ Ny, 672a3–6: . . . 至此不淨觀成，諸所應為皆究竟故。住空閑者作如是言：「此觀爾時有究竟相，謂：有淨相歟爾現前。」 See Aśu Medn, p. 276.

⁵⁰ Yinshun (1968), 《說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究》，580a13–14.

⁵¹ See discussion by Fukuhara (1969, p. 318 f).

conditioned things (*saṃskṛta*) is absolutely ceased. This is called the fruit of *arahat*-hood. It is through such a progressive sequence that the *nirodha*[-*saṃāpatti*] can be attained. These are called the eight *vimokṣas*.

(Criticism of the Abhidharma perspective)

According to some: “The first two *vimokṣas* are *aśubha*; the third is *śubha*.” This is not correct. These are called “*vimokṣas*”. No one can be liberated (*vimucyate*) by means of the *aśubha*-*bhāvanā*; nor is there *vimokṣa* through the *śubha*-*bhāvanā*. It is only through meditation on emptiness (*śūnyata*-*saṃjñā*) that *vimokṣa* can be attained. Moreover, the outsiders (followers of the heretical traditions) [also] can attain the *aśubha*- and *śubha*-*bhāvanā*; yet they are not said to attain liberation (*vimokṣa*).⁵²

It is to be noted in this connection that, from the perspective of the **Tattvasiddhi*, the Sūtra speaks of *nirodha* in a generic manner, without distinguishing the *nirodha* of thought and that of defilements. In fact, the Sūtra teaches two types of *nirodha*—gradual *nirodha* (次第滅) and the *nirodha* that is *Nirvāṇa*. It also teaches two types of *Nirvāṇa*—*Nirvāṇa* at the present and absolute *Nirvāṇa*. (And, likewise, two types of *yoga-kṣema*; etc.) It teaches only that a trainee (*śaikṣa*; an *ārya* who is not yet an *arhat*) can attain the nine successive *saṃāpattis*; but not the (true) *nirodha*.⁵³ Accordingly, from the **Tattvasiddhi* perspective: the *vimokṣa* doctrine is a doctrine of liberation from defilements and the gradual spiritual progression culminating in the attainment of *Nirvāṇa*—and this progression is only possible through gradual realization of firstly *śūnyatā* of *rūpa*; and then of *citta*/*vijñāna*; and finally, of all conditioned things.

4.4. Why the Śubha-Vimokṣa and the Nirodha-Samāpatti Are Described as Being Directly Realized through the Body

The Ābhidharmikas and other Buddhist masters highlight the fact that, of the eight *vimokṣas*, the *śubha* meditation and the *nirodha*-*saṃāpatti* alone are specifically spoken of in the sūtras as being directly realized through the body (*kāyena sāksātkṛta*). We have seen in Aśu Medn, §4.1, that according to the MPPU, in the case of the *śubha*-*vimokṣa*, it is because it is an experience of rapture and happiness pervading the whole body.⁵⁴ MVŚ offers various reasons. Among them: (1) Because they pertain, respectively, to the final sphere of the *rūpa*- and *ārūpya-dhātu*. (2) Because each is attained through great effort.⁵⁵ (3) The *śubha*-*vimokṣa* is so described because it is distinguished—it does not generate defilement despite grasping the pure/beautiful signs of visible forms. The *saṃjñā-vedita-nirodha-vimokṣa* is so described because, being devoid of mentation (*acittaka*), it pertains to the body and is generated by virtue of the body.⁵⁶

Samghabhadra records another reason:

According to some: the third [*vimokṣa*] at first, through the power of *adhimukti*, grasps the pure sign with regard to the body, and then gradually eradicating [it] accomplishes *vimokṣa*. Being the culmination of the *vimokṣa* that takes the body as cognitive object, it is specifically said to be directly “realized through the body.”⁵⁷ ...

Yaśomitra additionally explains in terms of their excellence in accomplishing the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parivṛtti*):

Because the third *vimokṣa* excels the first and second *vimokṣas* in respect of the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parivṛtti*) on account of the complete abandonment of the hindrance to the *vimokṣas* of the *rūpi* [*dhyānas*], the third [*vimokṣa*] is spoken of as a direct realization. Likewise, it is because of the excellence of the eighth [*vimokṣa*] in respect of the

⁵² 《成實論》, T32, No. 1646, 339a16–b4.

⁵³ 《成實論》, T32, No. 1646, 339b11–28.

⁵⁴ T25, no. 1509, 215c1: 遍身受樂, 故名為「身證」.

⁵⁵ Cf. AKB, 456: *kasmāt tṛtīyāṣṭamayor eva sāksātkaraṇam uktaṃ nānyeṣāṃ ? pradhānatvād dhātubhūmi-paryantāvasthitatvāc ca* |.

⁵⁶ Cf. MVŚ, 776a19–b10.

⁵⁷ Ny, 773b27–29.

transformation of the basis on account of the complete abandonment of the hindrance to the *ārūpya vimokṣas* that it is spoken of as a direct realization . . . ⁵⁸

Sthiramati also offers a similar reason in his *Abhidharmasamuccaya-bhāṣya*:

These eight *vimokṣas* are called [noble] abodes, because of the noble ones abiding in them. Among these, though, they abide mostly in the third and the eighth, on account of their excellence. Hence, [the *sūtra*] statement with regard to these two, and to other [*vimokṣas*], “having directly realized with the body, he abides in full attainment”—because of the complete abandonment of the hindrances to the *vimokṣas*, respectively, of the *rūpa*-[*dhyanas*] and the *ārūpya*-[*samāpattis*]. For another reason: it is because of the realization of the full transformation of the basis.⁵⁹

But the “transformation of the basis” in the above MVŚ passage is not necessarily a Yogācāra doctrine. In MVŚ, the Sarvāstivāda master Vasumitra explains that one entering the fourth *dhyaṇa* acquires the “transformation of the basis” (轉依): Subtle Great Elements pertaining to the fourth *dhyaṇa* arise in the body, closing all its pores rendering the body incapable of functioning as the support-basis for breathing—and according breathing ceases.⁶⁰

5. The Canonical Mention of the Seven-Element Doctrine and the *Vimokṣa* Doctrine

A possible early inspiration for the eight-*vimokṣa* doctrine is the seven-element doctrine in the *Sattadhātu-sutta*. Seven elements are enumerated therein: (1) light-element (*ābhā-dhātu*), (2) purity-element (*subha-dhātu*), (3) infinity-of-space-sphere element (*ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu*), (4) infinity-of-consciousness-sphere element (*viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu*), (5) nothingness-sphere element (*ākāṅkāṇñāyatana-dhātu*), (6) neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation-sphere element (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu*) and (7) element of cessation of ideation and sensation (*saññāvedita-nirodha*):

[1] The *ābhā-dhātu* is discerned (*paññāyati*) on the basis of darkness (*andhakāra*); [2] *subha-dhātu*, impurity (*asubha*); [3] *ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu*, visible matter (*rūpa*); [4] *viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu*, *ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu*; [5] *ākāṅkāṇñāyatana-dhātu*, *viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu*; [6] *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu*, *ākāṅkāṇñāyatana-dhātu*; [7] *saññāvedayitanirodha-dhātu*, *nirodha*.

These elements are said to be attained as meditative attainment (*samāpatti pattabbā*): The *ābhā-dhātu* upto *ākāṅkāṇñāyatana-dhātu* are to be attained as meditative attainments of ideation (*saññā-samāpatti*). The *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu* is to be attained as meditative attainment with residual conditionings (*saṅkhārāvasesa-samāpatti*). The *saññāvedayitanirodha-dhātu* is to be attained as meditative attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*).⁶¹

⁵⁸ Vy, 690: *prathamadvitīyābhyāṃ vimokṣābhyāṃ tṛtīyasya vimokṣasya prādhānyāt* | rūpivimokṣāvaraṇa-sākalyaprahāṇād āśrayaparivṛttitas tṛtīyasya sākṣātkaraṇam uktam | *evam aṣṭamasyāpi prādhānyāt* | ārūpyāvimokṣāvaraṇa-sākalyaprahāṇād āśrayaparivṛttitāḥ sākṣātkaraṇam uktam |

⁵⁹ *Abhidharmasamuccaya-bhāṣya*, §153: *ete caṣṭau vimokṣā viharā ity ucyante, ebhir āryāṇāṃ viharāṇāt* | *tatrāpi bahuḷam ābhyāṃ vimokṣābhyāṃ viharanti, tṛtīyenāṣṭamena ca prādhānatvāt* | *ata eva cānayoḥ kāyena sākṣātkṛtyopasampādya viharatīti vacanaṃ nānyeṣu, rūpyarūpivimokṣāvaraṇāśeṣaprahāṇād yathākramam* | *tayoḥ saṃpūrnāśrayaparivṛttisākṣātkaraṇam upādāyety aparāḥ paryāyaḥ* | | .

Cf. T31, No. 1606, 758b29–c4; Derge, 264a: འཕགས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ནི་འདི་དག་གིས་གནས་པའི་ཕྱིར། འདི་དག་ནི་འཕགས་པ་གནས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་བརྒྱུད་ཅེས་བྲི། | དེ་ལ་འཕགས་པ་དང་གནས་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ལན་མང་དུ་གནས་ཏེ། གསལ་པ་དང་བརྒྱུད་པ་ལ་མཚན་གཅིག་ལྟ་གནས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི། | དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་གཉིས་ལས་ཀྱི་མངོན་གསུང་དུ་བྱེད་དེ་ཚོགས་པར་བྱས་ནས་གནས་པ་ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་གཞན་རྣམས་ལ་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། | གཞུགས་ཅན་དང་གཞུགས་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་ལ་བྱེད་པ་མ་ལུས་པར་བྱངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་གོ་མཁས་བཞིན་ནོ། | རྣམ་གྲངས་གཞན་དུ་ནི་དེ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གནས་ཐུང་པ་ཚོགས་པར་མངོན་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི། |

In AKB, the Sautrāntikas mention their doctrine of *āśraya-parivṛtti* in two contexts: when repudiating the Sarvāstivāda doctrine of *prāpti* (AKB, 63), and when discussing what constitute the fivefold *punya-kṣetra* (AKB, 232). Noticeably, in the corresponding contexts in Ny, Saṃghabhadra, while disagreeing with Vasubandhu/Sautrāntikas, does not specifically reject this notion, even though ostensibly avoiding using the term.

⁶⁰ MVŚ, 132b21–24.

⁶¹ SN, *Nidāna-vagga*, *Dhātu-saṃyutta*, *sattadhātu-sutta*, 149 f: “*sattimā, bhikkhave, dhātuyo* | *katamā satta? ābhā-dhātu, subha-dhātu, ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu, viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu, ākiñcaññāyatana-dhātu, nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu, saññāvedayitanirodha-dhātu* | *imā kho, bhikkhave, satta dhātuyo*” | . . . *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, ābhā-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu andhakāraṃ paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, subha-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu asubham paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu rūpaṃ paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, ākiñcaññāyatana-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ paṭicca paññāyati* | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, saññāvedayitanirodha-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu nirodhaṃ paṭicca paññāyati*” | *“ . . . imā nu kho, bhante, dhātuyo kathaṃ samāpatti pattabbā”* | | ?

“*yā cāyaṃ, bhikkhu, ābhā-dhātu yā ca subha-dhātu yā ca ākāsānañcāyatana-dhātu yā ca viññāṇañcāyatana-dhātu yā ca ākiñcaññāyatana-dhātu—imā dhātuyo saññā-samāpatti pattabbā*” | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, nevasaññānāsaññāyatana-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu saṅkhārāvasesa-samāpatti pattabbā*” | *yāyaṃ, bhikkhu, saññāvedayitanirodha-dhātu—ayaṃ dhātu nirodhasamāpatti pattabbā*” | |

Cf. *Samyuktāgama*, T02, 116c.

The *Samyuktāgama* version is very similar. But there are some differences as regards how these *dhātus* are discerned: As regards the bases for discerning the *ākāśānāntyāyatana-dhātu*, the *naīva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā-āyatana-dhātu* and the *nīrodha-dhātu*, the description⁶² essentially agree with those in MVŚ (see below). The same remark also applies to the differences as regards the type of *saṃāpattis* with which corresponding *dhātus* are to be attained.

The **Śāriputrābhidharma*, in a long enumeration of over 150 *dhātus*, also mentions towards the end the seven *dhātus*. But it differs slightly from the above-mentioned *sūtra* list in giving the “material *dhātu* (色界)”⁶³ as the third (see the MVŚ description below, especially on the *ākāśānāntyāyatana-dhātu* being designated on the basis of “the material domain”), and culminating with the *naīva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā-āyatana-dhātu*, and not *nīrodha-dhātu*.⁶⁴ “光界、淨界、色界、空處界、識處界、不用處界、非想非非想處界”. Its explanation on the *śubha-dhātu* is perhaps also noteworthy:

What is the *śubha-dhātu*? The *śubha-vimokṣa*, and other *śubha rūpas*: that which beautifies *rūpas*, [rendering them] agreeable and are untiring to behold, is called the “*śubha-dhātu*”. (Or: ‘The *śubha-vimokṣa*, and other *śubha rūpas* can beautify *rūpas*, [rendering them] agreeable and are untiring to behold; thus, called the “*śubha-dhātu*”’)⁶⁵

What is sufficiently clear is that: the *śubha-dhātu* is said to comprise not just the *śubha-vimokṣa*, but also “other *śubha rūpas*.” For one thing, this may imply that, in a broader sense, not only the third *vimokṣa* in the fourth *dhyāna* is to be regarded as a *śubha*—properly so called—but also all the meditative attainments, *rūpa*- and *ārūpya*-, which are devoid of *akuśala* states, and in which there are increasingly pleasant experiences. This is in line with what we have tried to describe in §4. At least in the northern Abhidharma tradition, the *śubha-dhātu* could have been conceived as an efficacy or potentiality for the spiritually beautiful meditative experiences.

5.1. Commentarial Remarks in MVŚ

The commentarial tradition sees the above doctrine as being in correlation to the eight-*vimokṣa* doctrine. Thus, MVŚ alludes to the above *sūtra* statement, which apparently in their version is given as the Buddha’s answer to a *bhikṣu*’s questions on his teaching of the seven elements. It comments that the *bhikṣu* asks implicitly in relation to the eight *vimokṣas*, and the Buddha too answers with the same implicit reference:

The *ābhā-dhātu* refers to the first two *vimokṣas*. The *śubha-dhātu* refers to the third *vimokṣa*. The four *ārūpya-āyatana dhātus* refers to the four *ārūpya-vimokṣas*. The *nīrodha-dhātu* refers to the *saṃjñāveditanīrodha-vimokṣa*. . . .

“The *ābhā-dhātu* is designated on the basis of darkness”: Darkness refers to the greed that takes the *rūpāyatana*s in the *kāma-dhātu* as cognitive object. The first two *vimokṣas* counteract this; thus, it is designated on the basis of this.

“The *śubha-dhātu* is designated on the basis of the *aśubha*”: The *aśubha* refers to the first two *vimokṣas*. The third *vimokṣa* counteracts this; thus, it is designated on the basis of this.

“The *ākāśānāntyāyatana-dhātu* is designated on the basis of the material domain⁶⁶”: material domain refers to the fourth *dhyāna*. The fourth *vimokṣa* counteracts it; thus, it is designated on the basis of this.

“The *viññānānāntyāyatana-dhātu* is designated on the basis of the extremity (*pariyanta*)”: The extremity refers to the *ākāśānāntyāyatana*, on account of it being situated at the extremity of *rūpa*. The fifth *vimokṣa* counteracts it; thus, it is designated on the basis of this.

“The *ākāśānāntyāyatana-dhātu* is designated on the account of some existent (所有)”: ‘Some existent’ refers to the *viññānānāntyāyatana-dhātu*, on account of there being infinite *ākāras* arising. The sixth *vimokṣa* counteracts it; thus, it is designated on the basis of this.

⁶² 無所有入處界者，緣所有(故)可知。非想非非想入處界者，緣有第一故可知。滅界者，緣有身(故)可知。

⁶³ This is unlikely to be identical to the first 色界 mentioned at the very beginning, and the 色界 mentioned later on clearly in the standard *three-dhātu* context—欲界、色界、無色界—of its enumeration. However, the enumeration appears to be quite an unorganized one.

⁶⁴ I have used the Sanskrit terms here for reason of convenience, though we in fact cannot be certain as regards the language of the Indian original.

⁶⁵ 云何淨界? 淨解脫, 及餘淨色。能淨色, 適意見無厭, 是名淨界。My translation here is somewhat tentative.

⁶⁶ 色趣, probably corresponding to *rūpagata* (ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་) .

“The *naiva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā-āyatana-dhātu* is designated on the basis of the existent body”: The ‘existent body’ refers to the *ākiñcanyāyatana*, on account of there still being the body subject to death and birth, and not that there is absolutely nothing. The seventh *vimokṣa* counteracts it; thus it is designated on the basis of this.

“The *nirodha-dhātu* is designated on the basis of the cessation of the existent body (有身; *satkāya*)”: The ‘cessation of the existent body’ refers to the *naiva-saṃjñā-nāsaṃjñā-āyatana*, on account of its bringing to cessation the existent-body *dharma*s of the *ākiñcanyāyatana*. The eighth *vimokṣa* counteracts it; thus it is designated on the basis of this. . . .

Among the MVŚ comments on the *śubha-dhātu*, the expositions by “some” (有作是說, **kecid āha*) are of interest:

According to some: “The *śubha-dhātu* indicates succinctly the detachment from sensuality (*kāma-vairāgya*; Xuanzang: 離欲界染⁶⁷ ‘detachment pertaining to the sensuality-sphere’)”⁶⁸

Some say: . . . The *śubha-dhātu* indicates in details detachment pertaining to the *rūpa-dhātu*. For, all the four *dhyānas* are said to be *śubha*.⁶⁹

The above commentarial remarks once again indicates that although *śubha-bhāvanā* properly so called refers to the third *vimokṣa* pertaining to the fourth *dhyāna*; in a broader or more general sense, all the meditative attainments pertaining to the *rūpa-dhātu* are all described as *śubha*. Among other things, it means that on account of the absence of the *akuśala* therein, these higher meditative domains are states of increasing pleasantness and peace.

5.2. Commentarial Remarks in YBŚ

The *Vastu-saṃgrahaṇī* of YBŚ also contains commentarial explanations corresponding to the seven *dhātus* in the *Samyuktāgama* context.⁷⁰ They help us somewhat better understand the MVŚ statements on the designation of the *ākiñcanyāyatana-dhātu* and the *nirodha-dhātu*: They are designated in relativistic terms. Thus, the *ākiñcanyāyatana-dhātu* is designated on account of *kiñcana* (由少所有以為緣故, 施設無所有處).⁷¹ The *nirodha-dhātu* is designated as the highest *nirodha* (施設滅界為滅無上) on account of the abandonment of the defilements associated with the *satkāya*.⁷² It is attained by not applying the mind to all signs (*mtshan ma thams cad yid la mi byed pa*) and applying the mind to the signless *dhātu*—the *nirodha-samāpatti*, the *nirodha-dhātu*, is attained on account of the absence of signs; not attained by means of effortful *samāpatti*.⁷³ The existence-peak (*bhavāgra*) is the highest of existence; *nirodha* is the highest of all *dharma*s.⁷⁴

The comments therein also specifically correlate the seven *dhātus* with the meditative attainment of the eight *vimokṣas*:

Among them, with the attainment of the first *dhātu* (*ābhā-dhātu*), the first and second *vimokṣas* can be attained. With the second *dhātu* (*śubha-dhātu*), the third *vimokṣa* can be attained. With the remaining five *dhātus*, the other five *vimokṣas*, respectively, can be attained.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ See his corresponding trans in AKB(C).

⁶⁸ 有作是說: 淨界者略顯離欲界染。

⁶⁹ 淨界者廣顯離色界染; 以四靜慮等皆名淨故。

⁷⁰ Lü Cheng, had demonstrated for the first time in his 《雜阿含經刊定記》 (first published in 1924) that fascicles 85–98 of this early stratum of YBŚ constitute largely a *mātrkā* of the *Samyuktāgama*. Yinshun (1981) subsequently elaborated (with supplementation and revision) on Lü Cheng’s original discovery.

⁷¹ Tib is not expressed in quite the same way as YBŚ(C): ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པ་ནི་དངོས་པོ་མེད་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་ཕྱིར་ནི།

⁷² Tib: འགོག་པའི་ཁམས་ནི་འཇིག་ཚིགས་དང་ཐུན་པའི་ཉན་མངས་པ་མཁས་ཅད་ཐུངས་པ་ལ་བཞིན་ནས་ཡོད་དོ།

⁷³ Tib: འགོག་པའི་ཁམས་ཀྱང་མཚན་མ་མཁས་ཅད་ཡོད་པ་མི་བྱེད་པ་དང་། མཚན་མ་མེད་པའི་ཁམས་ཡོད་པ་བྱེད་པས་ན་འཇིག་ཚིགས་ལ་འགོག་པའི་ལྷོ་མས་པར་འཇུག་པ་མཚན་མ་མེད་པས་ཐོབ་པར་བྱ་བ་ཡིན་གྱི་འདུ་བྱེད་གྱི་ལྷོ་མས་པར་འཇུག་པས་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ།
YBŚ(C): 於一切相不思惟故。於無相界正思惟故。薩迦耶滅由無相故。隨順獲得滅定滅界。如是二種。不由行定隨順獲得。

⁷⁴ YBŚ(C): 當知有頂是有無上, 滅於諸法皆是無上。 Tib: མིང་པའི་ཆེ་མོ་ནི་མིང་པའི་ནང་ན་ཟླ་ན་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི། འགོག་པའི་ཁམས་ཅད་གྱི་ནང་ན་ཟླ་ན་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་ནི།

⁷⁵ Derge, 131-1-290b. YBŚ(C), 847c14–18.

5.3. Summary

The above discussion on the *Sattadhātu-sutta* and its corresponding *Samyuktāgama* version, together with the commentarial explanations in MVŚ and YBŚ, suggest that the eight-*vimokṣa* doctrine had probably derived inspiration from an early *sūtra* source. In the above-discussed related sources, we may well discern the doctrinal significance of the *śubha-dhātu*, and the corresponding *śubha-vimokṣa*: The notion of the *śubha-dhātu* may indicate the early Buddhist awareness of the potential causal efficacy in innate human experience—an important signification of “*dhātu*”—that can bring about the experience of “purity”, “goodness” and “pleasantness” in the spiritual development through meditative praxis. The process of this praxis necessarily entails a transcendence of sensual attachment (whether through the *aśubhā* or meditative practices), which necessarily results in the “pure” and progressively peaceful higher meditative attainments—all capable of being predicated in a broader sense as “*śubha*”.

6. The Abhibhāvāyatana-Scheme and the Kṛtsnāyatana-Scheme, and Their Correlation with the Vimokṣa-Scheme

In the Buddhist system of meditative praxis, the eight-*vimokṣa* scheme came to be considered as intimately related to two other schemes: the eight “spheres of conquest” (*abhibhāvāyatanas*) and the ten “spheres of entirety/pervasiveness” (*kṛtsnāyatana*) (§5.2).

The Eight Spheres of Conquest (*abhibhāvāyatana*)

1. Internally possessing matter-ideation, one sees matters externally, limited, beautiful or ugly. Conquering/mastering those matters he knows them, conquering/mastering them he sees them—and he comes to ideate thus. (*adhyātmaṃ rūpasamjñī, bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyati parittāni suvarṇadurvāṇāni | tāni khalu rūpāṇy abhibhūya jānāti abhibhūya paśyati; evaṃsamjñī ca bhavati |*).
2. Internally possessing matter-ideation, one sees matters externally, unlimited, beautiful or ugly. Conquering/mastering those matters he knows them, conquering/mastering them he sees them—and he comes to ideate thus (*adhyātmaṃ rūpasamjñī, bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyaty adhimātrāṇi suvarṇadurvāṇāni | tāni khalu rūpāṇy abhibhūya jānāti abhibhūya paśyati; evaṃsamjñī ca bhavati |*).
3. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally, limited, beautiful or ugly. Conquering/mastering those matters he knows them, conquering/mastering them he sees them—and he comes to ideate thus (*adhyātmaṃ arūpasamjñī, bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyaty parittāni suvarṇadurvāṇāni | tāni khalu rūpāṇy abhibhūya jānāti abhibhūya paśyati; evaṃsamjñī ca bhavati |*).
4. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally, unlimited, beautiful or ugly. Conquering/mastering those matters he knows them, conquering/mastering them he sees them—and he comes to ideate thus. (*adhyātmaṃ arūpasamjñī, bahirdhā rūpāṇi paśyaty adhimātrāṇi suvarṇadurvāṇāni | tāni khalu rūpāṇy abhibhūya jānāti abhibhūya paśyati; evaṃsamjñī ca bhavati |*).
5. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally—blue (*nīla*), of blue colour (*nīla-varṇa*), ... like the *umaka-puṣpa* (flax flower). ...
6. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally—yellow (*pīṭa*), of yellow colour (*pīṭa-varṇa*), ... like the *karṇikāra-puṣpa* (*pterosperrum acerifolium*). ...
7. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally—red (*lohita*), of red colour (*lohita-varṇa*), ... like the *karṇikāra-puṣpa* (*pterosperrum acerifolium*). ...
8. Internally without matter-ideation, one sees matters externally—white (*avadāta*), of white colour (*avadāta-varṇa*), ... just like the planet Venus (*osadhi-tārakā*). ... ⁷⁶

Of these eight: the first two correspond to the first *vimokṣa*; the next two, to the 2nd *vimokṣa*; the other four, to the third, *śubha-vimokṣa*. The difference between the *vimokṣa*-

⁷⁶ *Saṅgītiparyāya-sāstra* 《阿毘達磨集異門足論》T26, No. 1536, 445b22–c18. For the Sanskrit, which agrees perfectly with the Chinese, see Lamotte (1970). *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*), Tome III, 1283–1285; AKB, 457 (only Sanskrit for the 1st *abhibhāvāyatana* is given in full).

scheme and the *abhibhvāyatana*-scheme is that: through the former, the practitioner only becomes capable of “turning his back” on the cognitive object (he achieves *vaimukhya* = *vimokṣa*). But through the latter, he furthermore achieves mastery or conquest of the cognitive object (*ālambanābhibhavana*): He can cognize them in any manner as he affirmatively resolves—i.e., through an affirmative resolve of the object as blue or green, etc., (*nīlapītādy-adhimokṣāt*),⁷⁷ he can accordingly cognize blue in one moment or yellow in another moment, etc.—and no arising of defilement results in cognizing them.⁷⁸

The Ten Spheres of Pervasiveness (*kṛtsna-āyatana*)

1. The earth element as being all-pervasive.
2. The water element as being all-pervasive.
3. The fire element as being all-pervasive.
4. The wind element as being all-pervasive.
5. The colour blue as being all-pervasive.
6. The colour yellow as being all-pervasive.
7. The colour red as being all-pervasive.
8. The colour white as being all-pervasive.
9. The sphere of infinity of space (*ākāśa-ānantya-āyatana*).
10. The sphere of infinity of consciousness (*viññāna-ānantya-āyatana*).

In brief: The ten *kṛtsna-āyatanas* (Pāli: *kaṣiṇa-āyatana*) consist of ten basal elements: earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, space and consciousness. As shown in the table above, the first eight are of the same nature as the *śubha-vimokṣa*, and likewise to be developed in the fourth *dhyāna*. MVŚ explains that “pervasion” refers to two aspects:

They are called ‘pervasion-spheres’ (/‘spheres of pervasiveness’) because of the total pervasion of their cognitive objects (廣普 **kṛtsna-spharaṇālambaṇa*)⁷⁹, and their affirmative resolve (*adhimukti/adhimokṣa*) is boundless (*nīrananta*).⁸⁰

Elsewhere, MVŚ offers a similar definition, but with some elaboration:

For two reasons they are called ‘pervasion-spheres’: (1) because of being non-intervened, (2) because of being pervasive (廣大, **spharaṇa*). Being ‘non-intervened’ refers to the fact that the *adhimukti-manaskāras* on the exclusively blue, etc., are not intermixed (相間雜 **vyavakīrṇa*). Being ‘pervasive’ refers to the fact that the object-sign (境相; **viśaya-nimitta*) of the *adhimukti-manaskāras* on the exclusively blue, etc., are boundless.⁸¹

6.1. The Correlation of the Three Meditative Schemes in the Context of the *aśubha-to-śubha* Transition

I tabulate below the correlation of these three meditative schemes with the two spheres (*rūpa-dhātu* and *ārūpya-dhātu*), the meditative attainments (*samāpatti*), in respect of the *aśubha-to-śubha* transition (Figure 1):

⁷⁷ For the power of affirmative resolve (*adhimokṣā/adhimukti*) in cognitive transformation, see Dhammajoti (2019), “Adhimukti, Meditative Experience and *Vijñaptimātratā*”, 135 ff.

⁷⁸ Cf. AKB, 457: *yathā prathamam vimokṣa evaṃ dve abhibhvāyatane prathamam dvītiye | ... yathā dvītiyam vimokṣa evaṃ dve abhibhvāyatane tṛtīya-caturthe | ... yathā śubham vimokṣa evaṃ anyāni catvāri | ayaṃ tu viśeṣaḥ tair vaimukhya-mātram | ebhis tv ālambanābhibhavanam yathecccham adhimokṣāt kleśānutpādā ca |*; Vy, 691 f.

⁷⁹ Cf. AKB, 457: *daśa kṛtsnāyatanāni nīrantarakṛtsnaspharaṇāt |* Also cf. Pradhan, P. (ed), *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 96: *kṛtsnaspharaṇālambanatām upadāya kṛtsnāyatanānity ucyate |*.

⁸⁰ MVŚ, 727a23–24: 問: 何故名遍處? 答: 所緣廣普, 勝解無邊, 故名遍處。

⁸¹ MVŚ, 440b17–23.

	8 Vimokṣa	8 Abhibhāvāyatana	10 Kṛtsnāyatana	9 Samāpatti	
<i>aśubha</i>	1st, 2nd	1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th		1st <i>dhyāna</i> 2nd <i>dhyāna</i>	rūpa-dhātu
	–	–	–	3rd <i>dhyāna</i>	
<i>śubha</i>	3rd	5th, 6th, 7th, 8th	1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th	4th <i>dhyāna</i>	
(* <i>śubha</i>)	4th		9th	<i>ākāśānantya- āyatana</i>	ārūpya-dhātu
	5th		10th	<i>vijñānānantya- āyatana</i>	
	6th			<i>akīñcanya- āyattana</i>	
	7th			<i>naīvasamjñā- nāsamjñā-āyatana</i>	
	8th			<i>nirodha-samāpatti</i>	

Figure 1. Correlation among the *vimokṣas*, *abhibhāvāyatanas*, *kṛtsnāyatanas* and the two *dhātus*, in respect of the *aśubha*–to–*śubha* transition.

As is clear from the Figure above, besides the eight-*vimokṣa* scheme, in the eight-*abhibhāvāyatana* and the ten-*kṛtsnāyatana* schemes too, the *aśubha*–*śubha* division is unmistakable. Of the eight *abhibhāvāyatanas*, the first four are like the *aśubha* meditation,⁸² and the remaining four are like the *śubha* meditation.⁸³ Of the ten *kṛtsnāyatanas*, all the first eight are *śubha* meditations, and like the *śubha-vimokṣa* belong to the fourth *dhyāna*. The last two are equipoised pure *ārūpyas*.⁸⁴ It should be noted that these *aśubha* and *śubha* states, distinctively highlighted in the three meditative schemes, are meditative experiences pertaining to the higher spheres: the fine-materiality-sphere (*rūpa-dhātu*) and non-materiality-sphere (*ārūpya-dhātu*). This means that the meditator must first experientially transcend the lower and inferior sphere of sensuality (*kāma-dhātu*)—he must be “detached” from sensual greed (*vīta-rāga*) rooted in the very existence of all unenlightened worldlings. This explains why the *aśubhā* is so fundamentally important as a first step.

The nine meditative attainments (*samāpatti*) are called “sequential meditative attainments” (*anupūrvā-samāpatti*), because the meditator can progress upwards only sequentially. That is, he must first be detached from sensuality to enter the first *dhyāna*, then the second, then the third, then the fourth—in each transition he must become freed from the greed for the lower state and inspired by and drawn towards the superior state. It is in the fourth *dhyāna* that he can attain the *śubha* experiential state. I have marked out the meditative states pertaining to the non-materiality-sphere with an asterisked *śubha* (**śubha*) by way of indicating that: although in the narrower sense, it is the fourth *dhyāna* that is specified as the “pure liberation” (*śubha vimokṣa*), all the non-materiality are also “*śubha*” in the broader sense since they are freed from unwholesomeness (they cannot be *akuśala*), and peaceful and blissful in nature (see §4, §5).

6.2. Progressive Development from the *Vimokṣas* to the *Abhibhāvāyatanas* and the *Kṛtsnāyatanas* and the *aśubha*–to–*śubha* Transition

In the early discourses, these three meditative schemes are proclaimed by the Buddha as three distinct doctrinal categories of praxis. For instance, in the *Mahāsakuludāyī-sutta*, at the end of each of the three descriptions, the Buddha says:

⁸² AKB, 457: *teṣāṃ dvayam ādyavimokṣavat | yathā prathamam vimokṣa evaṃ dve abhibhāvāyatane prathamā-dvītiye | dve dvītiyavat yathā dvītiyo vimokṣa evaṃ dve abhibhāvāyatane tṛtīya-caturthe |*

⁸³ AKB, 457: *yathā śubho vimokṣa evaṃ anyāni catvāri |*

⁸⁴ Cf AKB, 458.

Therein, many are my disciples who abide having attained consummation and perfection of direct knowledge⁸⁵

This clearly means that, according to the Buddha: each of the three meditative schemes is in itself sufficient as a praxis leading right up to arahant-hood.

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma tradition also distinguishes the three schemes. For instance, in the canonical Abhidharma text, *Saṅgītipariyāya*, the three categories are separately discussed, in each in great details.⁸⁶

However, the three came to be taught as interrelated meditative achievements, and spoken of as being one leading on to another. Thus, MVŚ:

The *vimokṣas* effectuate *vaimukhya*. The *abhibhāvāyatanas* effectuate conquest/mastery (*abhibhava*) over the object-domains. The *kṛtsnāyatanas* effectuate pervasiveness in respect of cognitive objects.

Furthermore, one who acquires the *vimokṣas* has not necessarily acquired the *abhibhāvāyatanas* and the *kṛtsnāyatanas*. One who acquires the *abhibhāvāyatanas* has not necessarily acquired the *vimokṣas*, has not necessarily acquired the *kṛtsnāyatanas*. [On the other hand,] if one acquires the *kṛtsnāyatanas*, one has necessarily acquired the *vimokṣas* and the *abhibhāvāyatanas*. This is because: from the *vimokṣas* one enters into the *abhibhāvāyatanas*; from the *abhibhāvāyatanas* one enters into the *kṛtsnāyatanas*.⁸⁷

MVŚ explains how, on the basis of the *śubha-vimokṣa*, the meditator can progressively enter into the other two. The explanation at the same time shows the interrelatedness of the three schemes of praxis:

[The meditator gives rise to] the *śubha-vimokṣa* in the fourth *dhyāna*, whence he can enter into the last four *abhibhāvāyatanas*. [From] these last four *abhibhāvāyatanas* he can further enter into the first eight *kṛtsnāyatanas*. . . . The first four *kṛtsnāyatanas* do not only conceptualize blue, yellow, red and white; they can also effectuate the mode of activity of infiniteness (無邊行相; **ananta-ākāra*, **kṛtsna-ākāra*). That is: he visualizes blue, etc., in each case, being infinite. Then reflecting on the support-basis of blue, etc., he realizes that they are supported upon the Great Elements (*mahābhūta-āśrita*). He thus further visualizes earth etc., in each case, being infinite. Further reflecting on how this *rūpa* being cognized comes to be pervasive, he realizes that it is on account of space (*ākāśa*), and next gives rise to the *ākāśānāntyāyatana*. Further reflecting on the support-basis of this awareness, he realizes that it is supported upon the pervasive consciousness, and thus gives rise to the *viññānānāntyāyatana*. Since this supporting consciousness is not supported by anything else, the higher [*ārūpya* stages] are not designated as *kṛtsnāyatanas*.⁸⁸

Succinctly put: what emerges distinctively from all the explanations of the three schemes is the tradition of meditative praxis involving a progression from the *aśubhā* meditation to the *śubha* meditation, both being centred around firstly the contemplation of the impurity of visible forms and then going on to the attainment of the contemplation of purity. The necessary contribution of the *śubha* meditation to the progression onto the higher meditative attainments is also underscored by MVŚ, which explains why the *śubha* meditation must have the fourth—not the third—*dhyāna* as its support basis:

The first three *dhyānas* are accompanied by *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *prīti* and *sukha*, and are disturbed by breathing, etc.; hence there is no *śubha* meditation therein. The latter four *abhibhāvāyatanas* and the first eight *kṛtsnāyatanas*, which cognize pure and sublime objects [and yet] can suppress defilements—such an extremely difficult task can only be accomplished with the undisturbed stage (i.e., fourth *dhyāna*) as the support-basis.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ MN, sutta No. 77, 13, 14, 15: *tatra ca pana me sāvakā bahū abhiññāvosānapāramippattā viharanti* |.

⁸⁶ For the 8 *vimokṣas*: T26, No. 1536, 443a26–445b13; for the 8 *abhibhāvāyatanas*: 445b22–446a19; for the 10 *kṛtsnāyatanas*: 447a24–449c2.

⁸⁷ MVŚ, 442b6–14.

⁸⁸ MVŚ, 440b27–c9: . . . 以淨解脫在第四靜慮; 由此能入後四勝處。此後四勝處復能入前八遍處。 . . . 謂: 觀青等一一無邊。復思青等為何所依; 知依大種故, 次觀地等一一無邊。復思此所覺色, 由何廣大? 知由虛空故, 次起空無邊處。復思此能覺, 誰為所依? 知依廣識故, 次復起識無邊處。此所依識無別所依, 故更不立上為遍處。

⁸⁹ MVŚ, 441b23–26.

AKB likewise describes the successive achievement from the *vimokṣas* to the *abhibhāvāyatanas* to the *kṛtsnāyatanas*; “because that which arises subsequently excels that which precedes.”⁹⁰ The Yogācāra tradition too describes similarly.⁹¹

The description below in MPPU, which continues immediately from the passage quoted in more details in §7.1, also explains how the *śubha-vimokṣa* so achieved being further developed into the corresponding *abhibhāvāyatana* and *kṛtsnāyatana*:

Since he has not destroyed the outflows (*āsrava*), thoughts of defilement might in the interim arise, following which he can become attached to the *śubha rūpas*. He therefore further applies effort vigorously to eliminate this attachment. [He comes to realize that] such a *śubha* vision is generated from a mental ideation—just as a magician watching his own magical creation, he is aware that the vision is generated from his own mind. He does not give rise to attachment, becoming free from the sway of the cognitive objects. Thereupon, the *vaimukhya* (*/vimokṣa*) is transformed into what is called an “*abhibhāvāyatana*”.

But although he has thus conquered (*abhi-√bhū*) over the *śubha* vision, he is still unable to expand (*√spha*) it. The practitioner then returns to grasp the *śubha-nimitta*, by means of the power of *vimokṣa* (*/vaimukhya*) and *abhibhāvāyatana*. He grasps the sign of the pure Earth (*śubha-prthivī*), and gradually expands it in the empty space of the ten directions; likewise, water, fire and wind. He grasps the sign of Blue, gradually expanding, also extensively throughout the empty space in the ten directions; likewise, yellow, red and white. At that time, the *abhibhāvāyatana* is further transformed into a “*kṛtsnāyatana*”.⁹²

7. The Significance of the *aśubha-to-śubha* Transition in Terms of the Meditative Doctrines

Thus, in both the *vimokṣa*-scheme and the *abhibhāvāyatana*-scheme, meditative progress proceeds sequentially from the contemplation of the impure (*aśubha*) to that of the pure and pleasant (*śubha*). The praxis of the *kṛtsnāyatana*-scheme begins in the fourth *dhyāna*, and the first eight practices are *śubha* meditations, and the last two are also subsumable as “*śubha*” in the broader sense. Among other things, this is because, as argued above (§§ 2, 4, 6.1), in one’s progressive experiences of the higher and sublime meditative stages—starting from sensual pleasure in the *kāma-dhātu* (see above, especially the *Pañcakaṅga-sutta*) to the subtle pleasure in the *nirodha-samāpatti*—one must first detach from sensual desires. This is achievable through the *aśubhā* which is in fact practiced only by one in the *kāma-dhātu*, not one in the *rūpa-* or *ārūpya-dhātu*.⁹³ The intrinsic nature of the *aśubhā* is non-greed (*alobha*), and it has the mode of activity (*ākāra*) of impurity. Saṃghabhadra explains that, “being of a skilful (*kuśala*) nature, its intrinsic nature is pure. It is said to be [a contemplation on the] impure because of its mode of activity.”⁹⁴

Having been detached from the *kāma-dhātu*, one must then ascend successively to the higher and more sublime happiness in a positive mind-frame; and the *śubha* meditation serves as a most effective means for this. Abhidharma explains that in meditative progression, defilements are to be further distanced from (*dūrī-√kr*) and meditative mastery is to be advanced in the *ārūpya-dhātu*, through the cultivation of the *vimokṣas*.⁹⁵

From the second *dhyāna* onwards, the meditator (and one born into these realms) is freed from greed for visible forms (*varṇa-vītarāga*), there being no visual consciousness;⁹⁶ there is therefore no use for the *aśubhā*. But the practitioner must be uplifted from the sunken mental mode for his mind to experience the higher and subtler happiness of the higher meditative stages. The *śubha* meditation (3rd *vimokṣa*) serves this purpose. It is in fact explained that, on account of this absence of greed for visible forms and of being agitated

⁹⁰ AKB, 458: *vimokṣapraṇēśikāny abhibhāvāyatanāni | abhibhāvāyatanapraṇēśikāni kṛtsnāyatanāni | uttarottaraviśiṣṭatvāt |*

⁹¹ Delhey (ed), *Samāhitā Bhūmi* (4.1.1.4.1): *pūrvam tāvad yogy adhimucyate, tato 'bhibhavati | tato 'bhibhavavāsitām labdhvā paścāt tad eva kṛtsnam āyatanam yathākāram adhimucyate | ata eṣām iyaṃ ānupūrvā |* T30, 337a15–18.

⁹² MPPU, 215c2–10.

⁹³ MVŚ, 206c22–23: 所依者, 唯依欲界身; 以色無色界身不起此觀故。

⁹⁴ Ny, 672c5–7.

⁹⁵ Cf. AKB, 456: *dvābhyām hi kāraṇābhyām yogino vimokṣādīn utpādayanti | kleśadūrikaraṇārthaṃ samāpattivaśitvārthaṃ ca |*.

⁹⁶ Cf. Vy, 688.

by the cream of happiness (*sukhamandeñjita*) that there is no *vimokṣa* in the third *dhyāna*.⁹⁷ Going further up in the *ārūpya-dhātu*, there also cannot be the *aśubhā* which necessarily takes *rūpa-dharmas* as cognitive objects.⁹⁸ The *ārūpya vimokṣas* (4th to 7th *vimokṣas*) have the *śubha* *ārūpyas* as their intrinsic nature. Here “*śubha*” (‘good’) signifying the equipoised skilful (*kuśalāḥ samāhitāḥ*) *ārūpyas*.⁹⁹ (See also §6.1 above) Thus, from this perspective, the *śubha vimokṣa* serves as the necessary transitional stage to render the mind fit for experiencing the higher meditative bliss, wherein the good/pure and the beautiful converge.

This is not to say that the *śubha* meditation is taught as a *sine qua non* for higher meditative attainment. There are indeed practices such as *ānāpānasmyti*, etc., which can also conduce to the achievement of sensual detachment. In fact, MVŚ asserts that not all practitioners are fit or capable for the *aśubhā*.¹⁰⁰ But it is a very effective cultivation, because it completes and ensures the achievement of detachment from sensual greed, and renders the mind fit for and in tune with the higher meditative experience. But irrespective of whether one cultivates the *śubha* meditation or not, the *suttas* teach that, for emancipation, the prospective practitioner necessarily goes through a progressive sequence—as a matter of natural principle—of more and more sublime joy, peacefulness and mental integration. The *Cetanākaraṇīya-sutta*, for instance teaches the following sequence:

ethical alignment (*sīla*) → non-regret (*avippaṭisāra*) → joyousness (*pāmojja*) → rapture → tranquillity (*passaddhi*) → happiness (*sukha*) → equipoise/integration (*samādhi*) → knowledge of things truly as they are (*yathābhūta-nāṇa*) → disenchantment (*nibbidā*) → knowledge-vision of emancipation (*vimutti-nāṇadassa*)

The *sutta* states that, in each case, no volition need be exerted (*na cetanāya karaṇīyam*) for the achievement of the succeeding factor (e.g., rapture) so long as the preceding factor (e.g., joyousness) has been fulfilled.¹⁰¹ (See also §4 above)

7.1. Contribution of the 3rd Dhyāna in the *aśubha*-to-*śubha* Transition

As seen above, the 3rd *dhyāna* is not apt for supporting the generation of the *śubha-bhāvanā*. MVŚ explains this ineptitude in various ways. The following passage illustrates this:

The third *vimokṣa* occurs in the fourth *dhyāna*. Although there are also semblances of the *kuśala-mūla* in the lower stages (*bhūmi*), the third *vimokṣa* is not established [therein]. This is because, the establishing of the *śubha-vimokṣa* is intended for turning the back (*vaimukhya*) on the thought of the *aśubhā*. In the lower stages, [the *śubha-vimokṣa*] is not established because therein [the thought] is overpowered by the power of the *aśubhā*, and there is thus no extensiveness and clarity. Although the *aśubha-vimokṣa* is absent in the third *dhyāna*, there is perturbation (迷亂; **vibhrama*) by excellent happiness (*sukha*), thus no [mental] extensiveness and clarity; hence [the *śubha-vimokṣa*] is not established therein.¹⁰²

In a similar manner, AKB underscores this ineptitude of the third *dhyāna* as owing to being agitated by the quintessence of happiness (*sukhamandeñjita*).¹⁰³ Elsewhere, MVŚ explains the ineptitude of the first three *dhyānas* as due to the presence of *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *prīti*, *sukha* and breathing; the *sukha* in the third *dhyāna* being the most excellent in saṃsāric existence.¹⁰⁴ We saw above also similar explanation by Saṃghabhadra (§4.2), who asserts further that: “in this *dhyāna*, it is the nature of things that by virtue of this [third] stage, neither a meditation effectuating delight nor disgust can be accomplished.” Thus,

⁹⁷ AKB, 456: *kasmān na tṛtīye dhyāne vimokṣaḥ ? dvitīyadhyānabhūmikavarṇarāgābhāvāt, sukhamandeñjitatvāc ca* |.

⁹⁸ MVŚ, 206c20–21: For this reason the *aśubhā* pertains to only the *kāmadhātu* and the *rūpadhātu*.

⁹⁹ AKB, 455.

¹⁰⁰ See Aśu Medn, §4.2.

¹⁰¹ AN, *Dasa-nipāta*, *Ānisaṃsa-vagga*, *Cetanākaraṇīya-sutta*; *Madhyāma-āgama*, T01, No. 26, 485b22–c18 (which describes the progressive sequence as a ‘natural nature of things’ 但法自然). As another example, we may consider the transcendental twelve-link principle of conditioned co-arising in SN, *Nidāna-saṃyutta*, *Upaniṣṣa-sutta*: *dukkha* → *saddhā* → *pāmojja* → *pīti* → *passaddhi* → *sukha* → *samādhi* → *yathābhūta-nāṇadassana* → *nibbidā* → *virāga* → *vimutti* → *khaye nāṇa*.

¹⁰² MVŚ, 434c18–24. See also, Aśu Medn, §4.2.

¹⁰³ AKB, 456.

¹⁰⁴ MVŚ, 441b23–26. See also above, §6.2.

Samghabhadra too, throughout his detailed description of the whole process of attaining the *vimokṣas*, simply denies any contribution from the third *dhyāna*.

However, it would still seem unreasonable to assume that, of all the nine successive *samāpattis*, the third *dhyāna* alone makes no contribution at all to this continuous meditative progression.

In this connection, it is interesting to observe the description in MPPU on the developmental process of the *śubha-vimokṣa*:

Furthermore, the meditator first contemplates that the body is impure. . . . He then generates disgust (*nirveda*), and his craving, hatred and delusion become thinned. Thereupon he is awakened in shock: “I have been without eyes — this body being [impure] like this, how could I have come to be attached?” He concentrates his thought on the truth, so as not to err any more. His thought having been tamed and pliable, he visualizes the impurities of the skin, flesh, blood and marrows being removed, with only the white bones remaining. He fixes his thought on the skeleton; if it wanders outward, he concentrates on it to fetch it back. As a result of concentrating his thought profoundly, he sees light issuing from the white bones, like conches and shells which illuminate things within and without. This constitutes the initial gateway of the *śubha-vimokṣa* (淨背捨).

Following this, he visualizes the skeleton being dissipated, and sees only the light of the bones. He grasps the sign (相; *nimitta*) of pure external *rūpas*. Furthermore, he grasps these signs and focusses his thought for the meditation on purity (繫心淨觀): diamond, pearl, jewels like gold, silver, . . . Accordingly as each of these *rūpas*, [he sees] in the corresponding case, its illumination of purity. At that time, the meditator acquires the experience of joy (*prīti*) and happiness (*sukha*) pervading the whole body. This constitutes the *śubha-vimokṣa*. Because it takes the *śubha* as cognitive object (*ālambana*), it is called the “*śubha-vimokṣa*”. Because of the experience of happiness pervading his body, he is said to have realized it by the body” (*kāyena sāṅśāt-√kr*). Having acquired this mental happiness (心樂), he turns his back on the fivefold sensuality, and there is no more joy or happiness therein; hence it is said to be *vaimukhya/vimokṣa*.¹⁰⁵

According to the above passage (especially the underlined parts), the *śubha-bhāvanā* is progressively achieved, beginning with the *aśubhā*. It is when the meditator comes to be awakened—through the *aśubhā*—into the folly and worthlessness of clinging to the impure body that he proceeds further to visualize removing the impurities of the skin, etc., until white bones are left, whereupon he sees white light issuing from the white bones. Up to this point, he has gained entry into the *śubha-vimokṣa* (its “initial gateway”). But this is not the attainment of the *śubha-vimokṣa* yet.

Next, he continues to visualize the skeleton dissipating and grasps the sign of an external pure object, and with intense concentration he sees its illumination of purity, and experiences joy (*prīti*) and happiness (*sukha*). This is likely to be an allusion to the contribution in the *aśubhā* process in the 2nd *dhyāna*. We saw above Samghabhadra’s explanation (§4.2) that *prīti* can arise even in the *aśubhā* when *vimokṣa* from the visibles is achieved. He must now grasp the *nimitta* of a pure *rūpa* and fix his thought on the *śubha* visualization until he sees its pure radiance. This is the attainment of the *śubha-vimokṣa*. But this it would seem, is not its culmination, and he now experiences the mental happiness (*citta-sukha*) pervading his body. This can only be the third *dhyāna*.

It is noteworthy that MPPU agrees with the general tradition that “there is great *prīti* in the second *dhyāna*, and great *sukha* in the third *dhyāna*;¹⁰⁶ and describes that “this *sukha* of the third *dhyāna* pervades the whole body”.¹⁰⁷ Just as in Abhidharma, MPPU also asserts that “because of there being little (spiritual) qualities but abundant happiness, no *vimokṣa*, *abhibhvāyatana* or *krtsnāyatana* occur in the third *dhyāna*.”¹⁰⁸

Returning to the above passage: The meditator is now able to “turn his back on the fivefold sensuality; and there is no more joy and happiness therein.” This is the culmination

¹⁰⁵ MPPU, 215b16–c2.

¹⁰⁶ MPPU, 123a6–7: 二禪大喜、三禪大樂、喜、樂放逸。

¹⁰⁷ MPPU, 186b13–14: 「受身樂」者，是三禪樂，遍身皆受。However, it is an Abhidharma controversy as to whether the *sukha* in the third *dhyāna* is bodily only, or is both bodily and mental. (Cf. AKB, p. 439).

¹⁰⁸ MPPU, 121a5–6: 三禪中諸功德少，樂多故，無背捨、勝處、一切入。

of the *śubha-vimokṣa*, wherein the meditator now transcends both joy and happiness. He is now in the fourth *dhyāna*—where according to MPPU, in agreement with the Abhidharma tradition—only *aduḥkḥāsukhā vedanā*, *upekṣāpariśuddhi smṛtipariśuddhi* (besides *saṁādhi*) are said to occur (no *prīti* or *sukha*).¹⁰⁹

Accordingly, the above MPPU passage seems to account for the successive contribution, from initial entry to culmination of the *śubha-vimokṣa*. And among other things, the role and contribution of the third *dhyāna* therein are articulated: From 2nd *dhyāna* (*prīti*, *sukha*) → 3rd *dhyāna* (*sukha*) → 4th *dhyāna* (altogether transcending *prīti* and *sukha*, and all attachment to *rūpas*: “不復喜樂”)—perfection of the *śubha-vimokṣa*.

In his *Great Śamatha-vipaśyanā* (摩訶止觀), Zhiyi (智顗; 538–597 CE), the founding master of the Chinese Tiantai school, certainly understands the above passage as stating that the *śubha-vimokṣa* is developed in both the third and fourth *dhyānas*—the former is its initial stage; the latter, its full accomplishment:

Here, [MPPU] regards the two *dhyānas* as both pertaining to the *śubha-vimokṣa*. Since it states that there is happiness pervading the body in the third *dhyāna*, this is proof that [the third *dhyāna*] is the initial stage [of the *śubha-vimokṣa*]. Its full accomplishment occurs in the fourth *dhyāna*, which is capable of accomplishing the *abhibhāvāyatana*. Accordingly, it is understood that the stage of *śubha-vimokṣa* is in the third *dhyāna*. The word “*śubha*” is glossed in the Commentary (MPPU) thus: “It is said to be ‘*śubha*[*-vimokṣa*]’ because it takes *śubha* cognitive objects.”¹¹⁰ The eight visibles are already pure (*śubha*) *dharma*s [in themselves]; but they have not been polished by the pure cognitive objects. The culmination of a pure visible occurs in the fourth *dhyāna*. When this visible arises, it polishes the eight visibles, rendering them more resplendently pure. Hence it says, “It is said to be ‘*śubha*[*-vimokṣa*]’ because it takes *śubha* cognitive objects.” “Experiences [happiness] pervading his body”: the culmination of happiness occurs in the third *dhyāna*—thus, the two *dhyānas* (third and fourth) are together taken as the *śubha-vimokṣa*.¹¹¹

7.2. Summary on the *aśubha*-to-*śubha* Discussion So Far

(1) From the period of Early Buddhism, the four *dhyānas* (and not the *ārūpya samāpattis*) occupy the central position in the cultivation of meditative insight, and the fourth *dhyāna* is the supporting basis for the development of not only the important spiritual qualities like non-conflict (*araṇā*) and the supernormal powers (*ṛddhi*) of the noble ones, but most importantly, liberative insight itself.¹¹²

(2) The Abhidharma tradition inherited this, though at the same time apparently influenced by the development of the scheme of the nine *anupūrva-samāpattis* which had already come to be integrated into the meditation doctrines since the *Sūtra-piṭaka* period.

(3) The transition from the *aśubha* to the *śubha* meditation is a decisively significant step of meditative progress in several ways: (i) It positively strengthens the meditator’s mind so that it becomes fit for experiencing progressively blissful and peaceful meditative stages. (ii) That the *śubha-vimokṣa* is said to occur only in the fourth *dhyāna*, is itself probably indicative of the central emphasis of the *dhyānas*—not the higher *ārūpya* stages—in Early Buddhism.

¹⁰⁹ MPPU, 186b19–23: 以斷苦樂，先減憂喜故，不苦不樂，捨念清淨，入第四禪。」是四禪中無苦無樂，但有不動智慧。以是故，說第四禪「捨念清淨」。第三禪樂動故說苦，是故第四禪中說「斷苦樂」。

See AKB, p. 438: *caturtham dhyānam antyam | tatra catvāry āṅgāni | aduḥkḥāsukhā vedanā upekṣāpariśuddhiḥ smṛtipariśuddhiḥ samādhī ca |*.

¹¹⁰ 緣淨故淨。MPPU, 215b29–c1: 緣淨故，名為「淨背捨」。遍身受樂，故名為「身證」。

¹¹¹ 《摩訶止觀》(Mohe Zhiguan) T46, No. 1911, 123b5–12: 今以兩禪共淨背捨。既言三禪有遍身樂，可以為證，即是其初。成就在四禪，能具足勝處。故知，淨背捨位，在三禪也。「淨」者，釋論云：「緣淨故淨」。八色已是淨法；而未被淨緣瑩練。淨色極在四禪；此色起時，瑩於八色，更轉明淨。故言「緣淨故淨」。「遍身受」者：樂之極，在三禪。故總此二禪為淨背捨也。See also the sub commentary 《止觀輔行傳弘決》 by 湛然, T46, No. 1912, 421a15–b5.

¹¹² e.g., see the *Bhayaḥherava-sutta* account in MN, of the Buddha’s achievement of final liberation on the basis of the *jhānas*.

(4) Already in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, we see the four *ārūpya* stages, plus the *nirodha-samāpatti*, being systematized with the four *rūpa dhyāna* and integrated into a scheme of nine successive meditative attainment. The Ābhidharmikas (and also the Yogācāras), duly recognizing this fact, had to provide the rationale for, as well as correlate, the three distinctive meditative schemes—eight *vimokṣas*, eight *abhibhāvāyatanas* and ten *kṛtsnāyatanas*. Their attempt at this is not adequately satisfactory, and at times only goes to betray the fourth *dhyāna*—along with the *śubha* contemplation—as the culminative and decisive transformational meditative stage serving as the proper basis for achieving final liberative insight.

8. From the *aśubhā* to *śubha-bhāvanā*, to Mahāyānistic Buddha-Visualization

8.1. Some Clues to the Development from the Early Discourses

In an article discussing the *aśubha-bhāvanā* in the *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*, Abe Takako concludes that the light-ideation (*āloka-saṃjñā*) in the process of *aśubha-bhāvanā* is a teaching unique to the *śrāvaka-bhūmi*, and this has extremely important implication for the development of the doctrines on meditative praxis in the *Vijñaptimātratā* texts.¹¹³ In this connection, he points out that, of the various aspects of the contemplation on the body in the Pāli *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, there is no item on the purity of the body, which however is found in the corresponding version of the Chinese *Madhyamāgama* (T01, No. 26). The *aśubha-bhāvanā* in the second *Yogasthāna* of the *śrāvaka-bhūmi* accords with this *Madhyamāgama* version.¹¹⁴ But, Takako's observation notwithstanding, it should be noted that in another related discourse, the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*, this item does indeed occur, immediately following the nine charnel ground contemplation and the first three *jhānas*—i.e., significantly, in the description of the fourth *jhāna*:

Furthermore, . . . after abandoning pleasure and pain, . . . a *bhikkhu* abides in full attainment of the fourth *jhāna*. He sat down, pervading this very body with a fully purified and bright mind (*kāyaṃ parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena pharitoṃ nisinno*). There is no part of his whole body that is not pervaded with the fully purified and bright mind. . . . In this way too, . . . a *bhikkhu* develops mindfulness of the body.¹¹⁵

The sequence in this connection is noteworthy: it follows immediately after the nine-charnel-ground contemplation of impurity, and develops in the fourth *jhāna*. This sequence is significantly in line with the eight-*vimokṣa* praxis in which the *śubha-vimokṣa* is developed in the fourth *dhyāna* after the impurity contemplation of the preceding *dhyānas*.

The same item is also discernible in the corresponding *Madhyamāgama* version (T26, No. 81), in a similar, though not exactly the same sequence: . . . *ānāpānasamṛti*, the first three *dhyānas*, and the contemplation on the mentally purified body. In the case of this *sūtra*, the impurity contemplation on the 32 loathsome bodily parts comes almost immediately after this item. The description here also more explicitly relates the contemplation to *adhīmokṣa* / *adhīmukti*:

The *bhikṣu*, with regard to this body, abides in full attainment, entirely pervading it through resolute affirmation (意解; *adhi-√muc*) of a purified mind. . . .¹¹⁶

Equally significantly, exactly as in the *Madhyamāgama Smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (No. 98), —and in virtually identical wording—this is immediately followed by the item of *āloka-saṃjñā*:

A *bhikṣu* develops mindfulness of the body. The *bhikṣu* attends to the *āloka-saṃjñā*, well grasped (善受善持; *sugṛhīta*) and well kept in mind (善意所念; **sumanaskṛta*, **susmṛtita*)—as in front, so behind; as behind, so in front; as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day; as below, so above; as above, so below. In this way, not being topsy-turvy, not

¹¹³ See Abe (2018).

¹¹⁴ Abe Takako, loc. cit.

¹¹⁵ MN, No. 119, *Kāyagatāsati-sutta*: *puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sukhassa ca pahānā . . . pe . . . catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati* | so *imam eva kāyaṃ parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena pharitoṃ nisinno hoti* | *nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa parisuddhena cetasā pariyodātena apphutaṃ hoti* | . . . *evam pi, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāyagatāsatiṃ bhāveti* |.

¹¹⁶ 《中阿含經》T01, No. 26, p. 555c17–19: 比丘修習念身, 比丘者於此身中, 以清淨心意解遍滿成就遊; 於此身中, 以清淨心無處不遍。

mentally entangled, he develops the thought of *āloka*, and his thought is never concealed by darkness. . . .¹¹⁷

The association of the contemplation of purity with that of impurity—whether one preceding or succeeding the other—and the practice of the *āloka-saṃjñā* following the purity contemplation in the fourth *dhyāna*, may well have contributed to visualization, and the resulting vision, of radiance of light at the last stage of the impurity contemplation in the form of the nine charnel ground, as seen in MPPU and the *dhyāna sūtras*. This extent of development is made possible with the doctrine of *adhimukti*/*adhimokṣa* as applied to meditative visualization. For through *adhimukti*, the *aśubha* and then *śubha* visualization become comprehensible. Equally, the doctrine of the progression too, from the *vimokṣas* to the *abhibhāvāyatanas*, and further, to the *kṛtsnāyatanas*, can well account for achievement of the vision of the pervasiveness of the pure cognitive object—including white light-radiance.

In fact, the possibility of this kind of *buddha*-visualization may be said to be anticipated from some early discourses such as the *Gayāsīsa-sutta* and the corresponding *Tianji* (天經)¹¹⁸ in the *Madhyamāgama*.¹¹⁹ In the *Gayāsīsa-sutta*, the meditator first visualizes light through *adhimutti* (the actual word used therein is *sañjāneyyaṃ*: ‘if I would perceive/ideate light’). When this is accomplished, he is able to see the pure forms of the *devatās* in the light envisioned:

... Later on, O *bhikkhus*, dwelling heedful, zealous, intent, I indeed perceive light as well as the [divine] *rūpas*. And I stay together with those *devatās*, converse with them and engage in discussion with them . . .¹²⁰

Yinshun remarks that this type of *adhimukti*-based meditative vision—of pure *rūpas* and divine beings, with whom the meditator can engage in conversation—in fact would have contributed to the proto-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna teaching of meeting *buddhas* in meditation in such scriptures as the **Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*:

Such kind of meditative vision (定境) reminds us of manifestation of Amitābha-buddha in the 《般舟三昧經》 (**Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*) before the meditator, with whom he can engage in discussion (he does not only see physical forms, but also hear sound). Asaṅga practises the Maitreya-dharma, ascending to Tuṣita, meeting with Maitreya Bodhisattva and receiving the *Yogācārabhūmi* from him; in the Tantric School, when one accomplishes the practices, the deity (本尊) manifests before one and gives instructions—the principle involved is the same [in these cases]. The only difference is with regard to the practitioner’s object of faith. . . .¹²¹

8.2. Development: From *aśubhā* to Vision of Light-Radiance, to *buddha*-Visualization

But for the gradual development of this meditative doctrine of *buddha*-vision resulting from the *śubha*-to-*aśubha* transition, in the meditation manuals (*dhyāna sūtras*) discussed above, we probably have to wait till the milieu of 4th or 5th century CE, when *buddha*-visualization was gaining ground as an important meditative praxis, and the development was promoted by the interfusion of traditional meditative praxis with Mahāyānistic elements, including those of Tantric Mahāyāna.

Apart from the above-mentioned early discourses, which provide us with some general clues to this development; in the later period, there is only the “*Yogalehrbuch*” which offers us some further clues in this direction. This text has been carefully analyzed in this connection by Yamabe (1999b).¹²² Other than these, there is no extant Indic text that

¹¹⁷ T01, No. 81, 555c26–556a2.

比丘修習念身。比丘者念光明想，善受善持，善意所念，如前後亦然，如後前亦然，如晝夜亦然，如夜晝亦然，如下上亦然，如上下亦然，如是不顛倒，心無有纏，修光明心，心終不為闇之所覆。

¹¹⁸ T01, No. 73, 540b–c.

¹¹⁹ See Dhammajoti (2019), pp. 163–66.

¹²⁰ AN, Aṭṭhakanipāta, *Gayāsīsa-sutta*, 303: *so kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, aparena samayena appamatto ātāpī pahitatto viharanto obhāsañceva sañjānāmi, rūpāni ca passāmi; no ca kho tāhi devatāhi saddhiṃ santiṭṭhāmi sallapāmi sākaṃcchāmi samāpajjāmi.*

¹²¹ Yinshun (1984), 《空之探究》，75a7–10. Also cf. Yinshun (1976) 《初期大乘佛教之起源與開展》，847f.

¹²² See Yamabe (1999b), 300 ff.

can directly help us understand the textual tradition on the basis of which the continuous process of development can be mapped.

It is true that, as we have mentioned, the doctrine is clearly seen in the MPPU. But scholars have raised doubt as to the extent to which it is properly a translation of an original Indic text.¹²³ Moreover, at least half of the extant *dhyāna sūtras*¹²⁴ are notably translation by the same Kumārajīva, the purported translator of MPPU, with the assistance of his Chinese colleagues and disciples. Buddhahadra is said to have translated two.¹²⁵ Both Kumārajīva and Buddhahadra were meditation masters and had several learned Chinese disciples practising meditation and learning under them. MPPU, intended as a commentary on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, is probably a translation from an Indic text, with insertions and elaborations made by Kumārajīva and his Chinese disciples and assistants. Sengrui's (僧叡) preface in *Chu Sanzang Ji* to Kumārajīva's translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》), we learn of the process of his translation of the *sūtra* and MPPU: He read out the Sanskrit text, and some 500 scholarly Chinese monks participated in the deliberation of the Chinese rendering, finally written down by Sengrui. The translation of MPPU, was then commenced. But as this was proceeding, the *sūtra* translation was continually checked against it, and necessary adjustments were made on the latter; it was finalized only when the MPPU translation was concluded (是以隨出其論, 隨而正之。釋論既訖, 爾乃文定).¹²⁶ However, notwithstanding that the Chinese accounts appear to suggest the credibility of the Indic original of MPPU, some of its contents could well have been contributed by Kumārajīva himself, or his assistants, on the basis of oral teachings learned or of their own convictions derived from their own meditative praxis. Influences from other contemporary textual traditions must have also been a contributing factor.¹²⁷

At any rate, the Chinese accounts show unmistakably that Kumārajīva, Buddhahadra, etc. are all associated with regions in Central Asia (Jibin, Yutian, “Western Region” 西域); so are at least some of their Chinese disciples and colleagues. This was the region, wherein, in that milieu, Mahāyāna teachings and meditative praxis, including *buddha*-visualization, were flourishing. It was in this same milieu that Tantric elements within the Mahāyāna were seen to be gaining ground. As Yinshun points out: there existed considerable common tacit acceptance at the time, by both the Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna meditative traditions, that visualization practices serve as a means for attaining *samādhi*. As a result, we can discern some interfusion of Śrāvakayāna, Mahāyāna, and even Buddhist Tantric elements in these meditation manuals (the “*dhyāna sūtras*”). Referring to Buddhahadra's translation of **Dharmatrāta Dhyāna Sūtra*, Yinshun opines that the meditative doctrines transmitted therein represent the Śrāvakayāna Yoga of the Sarvāstivādin *yogācāras*:

During this period, when Mahāyāna was flourishing and Tantric Mahāyāna (秘密大乘) were also gradually in the making, all the Sarvāstivādins in Jibin, excepting the strictly conservative Ābhidharmikas, were exhibiting considerable amount of tacit mutual agreement (for instance, in replacing *dhātu-bheda* with *buddhānusmṛti*)—all the more so since Mahāyāna and Tantric Mahāyāna have as a matter of fact evolved within the commonly inherited Buddhist tradition.¹²⁸

¹²³ For instance, see discussion in Yinshun (2005). 《永光集》, 102a2–110a6. Yinshun himself, however, defends the traditional Chinese view that Nāgārjuna was indeed the author.

¹²⁴ e.g., 《坐禪三昧經》 T15, No. 614, 《禪法要解》 T15, No. 616, 《思惟略要法》 T15, No. 617, 《禪祕要法經》 T No. 613.

¹²⁵ 《達摩多羅禪經》 T15, No. 618, 《佛說觀佛三昧海經》 T15, No. 643.

¹²⁶ 《出三藏記集》 T55, No. 2145, p. 53b3–13: 以弘始五年歲在癸卯四月二十三日, 於京城之北逍遙園中出此經。法師手執胡本, 口宣秦言。... 與諸宿舊義業沙門釋慧恭... 等五百餘人, 詳其義旨, 審其文中, 然後書之。以其年十二月十五日出盡。校正檢括。明年四月二十三日乃訖。文雖粗定, 以釋論檢之, 猶多不盡。是以隨出其論, 隨而正之。釋論既訖, 爾乃文定。See also Yinshun's discussion on this (《永光集》2005: 5a11–7a8).

¹²⁷ For instance, it is not easy to imagine how someone like the author of MPPU—focussing on the *śūnyatā* doctrine of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* as he does—could subscribe emphatically to such doctrines as rebirth (*pariṇāminī cyutiḥ*; 變易(生)死) of *arhats* as a result of *anāsrava-kleśas* outside the triple sphere of existence, asserted with citation from the *Saddharmapundarika-sūtra*. See MPPU, 714a9–15: 問曰: 阿羅漢先世因緣, 所受身必應當滅。住在何處而具足佛道? 答曰: 得阿羅漢時, 三界諸漏因緣盡, 更不復生三界。有淨佛土, 出於三界, 乃至無煩惱之名。於是國土佛所, 聞法華經, 具足佛道。如《法華經》說: 「有羅漢, 若不聞法華經, 自謂得滅度。我於餘國, 為說是事: 『汝皆當作佛。』」。

¹²⁸ Yinshun (1968). 《說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究》, p. 629.

The *Sūtra on the Samādhi-ocean of Buddha Visualization* (《觀佛三昧海經》) is another important meditative manual translated by Buddhahadra. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, through a thorough philological analysis of this manual, concludes that it “was a cross-cultural product compiled in Central Asia”¹²⁹, and “an apocryphal text originally written in Chinese”.¹³⁰ Like the **Dharmatrāta Dhyāna sūtra*, and in fact more so, this text exemplifies the interfusion of Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyānist meditative doctrines. As its title indicates, its central concern is the exposition of *buddha*-visualization. In this exposition, we firstly see the influence of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*—perhaps in part due to Buddhahadra’s own involvement with this textual tradition, being its first translator (sixty-fascicle, Chinese version). In the “Chapter on former Acts 本行品” (chapter 8), it actually refers directly to the **Avataṃsaka-sūtra* / *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (雜華經):

The Buddha tells Ānanda: “The Tathāgata possesses the thirty-two marks of a Great Man and eighty secondary marks. . . . Now, to this assembly and to King Śuddhodana, I shall briefly expound on the marks and secondary marks. . . . When I first attained Enlightenment in Magadha, in the *Nirvāṇa-bodhimandala*, I have already expounded in details in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (/ *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*; 雜華經) to the great *bodhisattvas*, Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, etc. . . . ”¹³¹

The recurring description in this text of the majestic manifestation on lotus flowers, of innumerable *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* in the ten directions, unmistakably reminds us of the majesty of the vision of the *Kusumatalagrabha-vyūhālankāra* (華藏莊嚴世界) in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. The allusion to *mantra* recitation¹³² and *abhiṣeka* (also occurring in other *dhyāna sūtras*) indicate Tantric influences.¹³³ Yet, at the same time, the fundamental Buddhist doctrines and doctrinal concerns are far from being absent. In the above-cited passage, it proceeds to state that the *Dharma* is there briefly expounded

for the sake of those who vilify the *Vaipulya sūtras* (a Mahāyāna stress), commit the five *ānantaryas*, transgress the fourfold serious prohibitions (i.e., the *pārājikas*), steal from the Saṅgha, have sex with the *bhikṣuṇīs*, break the eightfold *posadha* precepts, commit all evil deeds, harbor false views (all, excepting perhaps the first, are common Buddhist emphases)—so that if they can for even a single day and night mindfully focus on the Tathāgata’s *lakṣaṇas* and *anulakṣaṇas*, their hindrances of evil transgressions would be fully ceased.¹³⁴

The purpose of teaching the *buddhānusmṛti* is further underscored as not just the cultivation of faith, but for all those desiring to practice mindfulness, contemplation, *dhyāna*, and attain *samādhis* and *samāpattis*.¹³⁵ Similar inclusivistic—i.e., not excluding or humiliating any particular Buddhist tradition—common Buddhist concerns are also reflected in the following exhortation:

In the future times, the disciples should practice three *dharma*s. What are the three? (1) recite the *sūtras* and the profound scriptures; (2) observe with purity the precepts without any transgression; (3) mindful meditation, without the thoughts being dispersed.¹³⁶

In chapter six, on visualization of the Tathāgata’s four deportments, among the innumerable *buddhas* emanating from the pores of the Buddha, some are said to teach the “*Śrāvaka Dharma*” to the *śrāvakas*, in the form of innumerable ideations, including *ānāpānasamṛti*, issuance of light from the white bones, ideation of purity (*śubha-saṃjñā*), ideation of the *aśubhā*, etc.¹³⁷ The highlighting of the *śubha* and *aśubha* meditations are of

¹²⁹ Yamabe (1999b), p. 2.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³¹ T15, No. 643, pp. 687–18.

¹³² e.g., T15, 647b3–6.

¹³³ See Yinshun (2005), 《永光集》, 161a02–163a6. Yamabe (1999a), *op. cit.*, section III.I.

¹³⁴ T15, 687b14–18.

¹³⁵ T15, 647c7–9.

¹³⁶ T15, 648a1–4. See also the *sūtra*’s statement on the fourfold *dharma*s as sufficient constituents of the “*Bodhisattva Dharma*”: T15, 682b29–c3.

¹³⁷ T15, 682b26–29.

especial interest for our discussion. The following is a most spectacular and interesting account in chapter nine—exhibiting influence from the **Avataṃsaka Sūtra*—of the meditator’s transition from the *aśubhā* to the vision of purity—with the spiritual empowerment of the emanation *buddhas* in his visualization of walking of the *buddha*-statues:

One visualizing the walking of the *buddha*-statues sees that the spheres of the ten directions are full of statues walking in the sky and on ground. He sees each statue rising up from the seat. When each statue is rising up, there are 500 billions of jewel-flowers, each possessing infinite radiance, and in each radiance innumerable emanation *buddhas* appear accordingly as wished in the mind. During the interval between the seated statue’s rising up and standing, the white turf (*ūrṇā*) between the eye-brows curl and stretch becoming long or short, as if a real Buddha is radiating white light; . . . within a multitude of white light are innumerable silver statues, with bodies of white silver, . . . Then, both the golden and silver statues move their bodies, getting ready to rise up. In the navel of each statue are generated lotus flowers; and from these lotus flowers spring up innumerable hundreds of thousands of emanation *buddhas*. Each emanation *buddha* radiates golden light, illuminating the meditator’s body.

Thereupon, the meditator, entering into *samādhi*, sees the thirty-six parts of his own body exposing as impurities. When these impurities appear, he should quickly eliminate them, thinking thus: “Buddhas in the three periods of time are pure in body and mind. I shall now train in the truly pure *Dharma*-body of the *buddhas*. This envisioning of impurity is produced from greed; it is false and unreal. What is the use of this visualization!” Having reflected thus, he should himself meditate on his own body, transforming the impurities into white crystals. He sees his body like a white crystal vessel, empty both within and without. When he is doing this visualization, he should take ghee and medicines to ensure that the body does not become feeble. When this contemplation/ideation (*saṃjñā*; 想) is accomplished, all the statues rise up as before, standing . . . ¹³⁸

The *aśubhā* exposition is also met with elsewhere in the *sūtra*. In chapter seven,¹³⁹ the Buddha is described as confronting the evil prostitutes himself, in order to tame them. At the end, these prostitutes become remorseful after hearing the censor of the *buddhas* emanated from the Buddha. Hearing their words of remorse, these emanation *buddhas*

expound to them in details the *aśubhā* meditation: the nine-ideation, the ten-ideation, the thirty-ideation, the *ānāpānasmṛti*. Hearing the *aśubhā*, those women come to find delight in the *Dharma* and the *dhyānas*, not in sensual desires.¹⁴⁰

Another occurrence of the mention of *aśubhā* is in chapter three, the longest chapter, on the Buddha’s bodily marks. The description, in the context of the Bodhisattva conquering Māra, subduing the latter’s three daughters—personifying greed, hatred and delusion—is rather elaborate. The Buddha causes them to see all the impurities within their bodies: pus, snot, saliva, billions of worms moving within the big and small intestines, etc (description is quite “graphic”). “Seeing them, the daughters begin to vomit endlessly. They then see that in their bodies, on the left is born a snake-head; on the right, a fox-head; in the middle, a dog-head. On these heads are emanated carcasses of nine colours, as in the visualization on the nine-stage decomposition of a corpse¹⁴¹ (described here in great details).” “This is the Bodhisattva’s first discourse under the Bodhi-tree, on the gateway of the *aśubhā*.” The three daughters further have the vision that they are carrying an old mother, aged and black-skinned like a living carcass. In their chests, they are carrying a little dead child, with bus oozing from the six cavities, . . . Finally, they manage, with great hardship, to get back to Māra, who out of anger wants to destroy the Bodhisattva with his sword. But his son advises against it, saying that the Bodhisattva coursing in purity (行淨) cannot be destroyed. “Upon this advice, the Bodhisattva then with the radiation of white light from his turf, causes Māra’s retinue to become happy in body and mind, just as a *bhikṣu* entering the third *dhyāna* (wherein happiness is supreme)” The *pretas* too, witness tens of thousands of

¹³⁸ T15, No. 643, p. 692a6–23.

¹³⁹ See discussion in Yamabe (1999b) on this chapter: *op. cit.*, 377 ff. The part on the *aśubhā* translated here is omitted in Yamabe’s discussion (*ibid*, p. 383).

¹⁴⁰ T15, 685b2–8.

¹⁴¹ On the meditation on the nine-stage decomposition of a corpse, see Aśu Medn, §2.2.1.

billions of great emanation *bodhisattvas*, who enter into the *Samādhi* of Excellent *Maitrī-citta* (勝意慈心三昧), causing the fire experienced by the *pretas* to be extinguished.

Being then spontaneously free from hungry, the *pretas* rejoice in mind and body, and generate the *bodhi-citta*. They now see their bodies like white crystals, like *vaidūrya* (琉璃) mountains, like *sphaṭika* mountains, like gold mountains, like *aśma-garbha* (瑪瑙) mountains; . . . Some of these *pretas* generate the *bodhicitta*. Some, having established the causal conditions of being *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, will be reborn in the happy abodes among humans and gods.¹⁴²

This elaborate account constitutes the Mahāyānistic symbolization of the transition from the *aśubha* to the *śubha* meditative experience. It can also be taken as an account of the spiritual transformation achievable through the *aśubhā* meditation—a doctrine already taught in the *Sūtra-piṭaka*, *Abhidharma* and the *dhyāna-sūtras*, etc. This then excellently exemplifies a doctrinal interfusion of Mahāyāna with Śrāvakayāna. Moreover, the specific mention of the Buddha's transforming power through *maitrī* is interesting. It reminds us of the *Mettāsaṅgāgata-sutta*, which already teaches that the *brahma-vihāra* meditation, when practiced in conjunction with the *bojjhaṅgas*, leads to the mastery over the perception of repulsiveness and non-repulsiveness (cf. *supra*, §1). The result of this transformation here is the *pretas'* experience of joy, beauty and purity—the *pretas'* vision of their bodies as *vaidūrya*, etc. While some of them are said to generate the *bodhi-citta*—undoubtedly a Mahāyānistic stress—others are said, without any suggestion of derogation, to have established the causal conditions as *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.

There is a much simpler and much less colourful, but chronologically earlier, Chinese translation of Mahāyāna *sūtra*, in which we find the description of the Buddha vision following the white-bone culminative stage of the *aśubhā* practice. This is the longer version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (《大般涅槃經》) translated by Dharmakṣema. In its 7th chapter entitled “The Noble Practice” (聖行品), there is a description of the *aśubha-bhāvanā*. The tone is decidedly Mahāyānistic. The *bodhisattva mahāsattva* begins by contemplating that the body contains nothing but impurities—hairs, nails, teeth, . . . (a long list of bodily parts). He inquires: “Who has this Self?”, “To whom does the Self belong?” “Where does it abide”, “Who belongs to the Self?”. “Then, he removes the skin and flesh, contemplating only on the white bones.” When he accomplishes this contemplation, he eradicates greed for appearance, postures and fine tangibles. Next, he contemplates the bones as being green, yellow, red, etc., seeing in each the green sign everywhere.

Contemplating in this way, there issues from between the Bodhisattva's eyebrows, in each corresponding case, radiation of green, yellow, etc. In each radiation of light, he sees Buddha images. Whereupon he asks: “Such a body being formed from an assembly of impure causal conditions—how is it capable of sitting, arising, walking, . . . ? There is no controlling agent therein; who brings about these [actions]?” Having asked thus, the Buddhas in the radiance suddenly disappear. He further thinks: “Perhaps consciousness is the Self, due to which the Buddhas do not explain to me.”

In a similar manner, he comes to reflect: “Perhaps the in- and out-breathing is the Self,” “Perhaps the four *mahābhūtas* are the Self.” Eventually he realizes that there is no Self in all that pertains to the body. “Thus, this body is formed by an assembly of causal conditions whence arises this sensual greed? . . . whence arises this hatred? . . . ” He realizes that there being the body, he is susceptible of being attacked. If he cannot endure, he will lose proper mindfulness (*samyak-smṛti*), as a result of which he will commit evil. “Contemplating thus, the *bodhisattva*, having acquired the fourfold *smṛtyupasthāna*, comes to abide in the Stage of Endurance (堪忍地).”¹⁴³

In the Tiantai tradition, this is said to be the first stage (*bhūmi*) in the Bodhisattva's path of progress, equated with the *Pramuditā Bhūmi* in the standard Mahāyāna list of *daśa-bhūmi*. Zhiyi explains it as a unique spiritual attainment of the *bodhisattva*:

Just as among the *śrāvakas*, those who abide in the endurance *dharma* will never retrogress to commit the fivefold ‘mortal sin’ (*pañcānantaryāṇi*) and become *icchantikas*, a *bodhisattva*

¹⁴² Cf. T15, 652b10–653a26.

¹⁴³ 《大般涅槃經》 T12, No. 374, pp. 433c25–434b23.

abiding in the Endurance Stage will never give rise to any serious transgression that obstructs the Path.”¹⁴⁴

Zhiyi, who is much influenced by Dharmakṣema’s version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, stresses the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas* in connection with the eight-*vimokṣa* meditation, etc., and underscores that the Bodhisattva’s praxis of the *smṛtyupasthānas*, being grounded on great compassion, is superior and thus uniquely capable of leading to this Mahāyāna Stage of Endurance:

The eight *vimokṣas* constitute the contemplation (觀) of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. The nine successive *samāpattis* constitute the refining (練) of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. The *Simha-vijṛmbhita(-samādhi)* constitutes the perfuming (熏) of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. The *Vyutkrāntaka-samādhi* constitutes the development (修) of the fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. The two *yānas* cultivate these ... for the sake of their own salvation; ... their accomplishment of the fourfold withered *smṛtyupasthānas* are not called the ‘Stage of Endurance’. The Bodhisattvas deeply contemplate on the *smṛtyupasthānas* for the sake of transforming sentient beings, ... accomplishing the flourished fourfold *smṛtyupasthānas*. This is Mahāyāna, and is called the ‘Stage of Endurance’.”¹⁴⁵

However, this portion of the *sūtra* (fascicle 12), was translated by Dharmakṣema (421–428 CE), and is supplementary to the earlier six-fascicle (六卷) version by Buddhabhadra (416–418), in which no such white-bone radiance is found. Its account of the *buddha*-vision in the radiance from the bones may well be a later insertion on the part of Dharmakṣema or his Chinese associates. Moreover, its authenticity has been doubted by scholars. And, like in the case of at least some of the *dhyāna sūtras* discussed above, its composition has been argued to be at best of Central Asian origin. On this issue, Stephen Hodge’s observation below seems pertinent:

[I]t seems to be tacitly accepted by many critical scholars that this part of the text is, at best, of Central Asian origin—indeed, there are some who believe that no underlying Sanskrit version ever existed, the whole thing having been written in Chinese from the start. I would not go so far to assert that such is the case, for such would have required a fairly extensive conspiracy involving Daolang, Huisong and many others to conceal the deception, but circumstantial evidence tends to suggest that there is little likelihood that this material did actually originate in any Indian Buddhist community. In other words, it must be assumed that it was composed in somewhere Central Asia. But I shall go even further than this: I suspect that this material was actually manufactured by Dharmakṣema himself somewhere during his absence from Guzang, or else, at best, “commissioned” by him for his own reasons. This, in my view, considerably reduces the value of this material, despite the high esteem in which it was held amongst Chinese Buddhists in the past and apparently by some scholars in the present.¹⁴⁶

8.3. Summary

In the milieu of the 5th century CE, we witness in Chinese translations of the *dhyāna-sūtras*, proto-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna texts, an interfusion of Śrāvakayāna doctrinal and meditative concerns with the majestic Mahāyāna *buddha*-visualization. This was the milieu of increasing popularization of Mahāyānist doctrines and practice of *buddha*-visualization, much of which being centred around the *aśubhā* praxis. Excellent exemplification of this interfusion are such *dhyāna-sūtras* as the *Dharmatrāta Dhyāna Sūtra* and the *Sūtra on the Samādhi-ocean of Buddha-visualization*. But these texts are unlikely to be of Indic origin, and probably composed in Central Asia. The same remark applies to the chronological earlier longer version of *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, said to be “translated” by Dharmakṣema, in which this interfusion is also evident. The “*Yogalehrbuch*”, decidedly an Indic text, is an exception—although the extant portion is fragmentary, and it is probably of a somewhat later date.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Cf Zhiyi’s *Mohe Zhiguan* 《摩訶止觀》 T46, No. 1911, 129a26–28: 如聲聞若住忍法，終不退作五逆闡提。菩薩住堪忍地，終不起障道重罪也。

¹⁴⁵ 《妙法蓮華經玄義》 T33, No. 1716, p. 720a19–24: 八背捨觀四念處、九次第定練四念處、奮迅熏四念處、超越修四念處。二乘為自滅度，修此五禪，成四枯念處，不名堪忍地。菩薩為化衆生，深觀念處，慈悲誓願，荷負衆生，成四榮念處。是摩訶衍，名堪忍地也。

¹⁴⁶ Hodge (2012), p. 26.

¹⁴⁷ Cf Yamabe (1999b), p. 64.

There is, therefore, still much to be desired in terms of understanding the developmental process culminating in the doctrines of (1) the meditative vision of radiance and purity at the final stage of the *aśubhā* contemplation of the white bones, and (2) the vision of encountering *buddhas* in such radiance—prominently featuring in the above-discussed texts. However, we may see such early discourses as the *Kāyasati-sutta* and the *Gayāsīsa-sutta* (and their corresponding Chinese *Āgama* correspondences) as having possibly provided some initial inspiration, at least in a generic sense, for the development in this direction.

9. Concluding Summary

Even a brief survey of the relevant material in the *Sutta-piṭaka* should suffice to show that the goal of Buddhist praxis is the attainment of perfect peace, bliss and harmony. The early discourses amply illustrate how a genuine and successful practitioner naturally experiences progressively higher states of peace and bliss, conducive for the final spiritual perfection. But to begin with, he must develop an awareness or mindfulness of the fact that the type of sensual pleasure—though not to be denied, and less still escaped from—is intrinsically unsatisfactory and detrimental to the unfolding of the human potential. It must be transcended through dedicated effort of meditation (*samādhi*, *samāpatti*). This is the essential meaning and doctrinal significance of transcending sensual attachment (*virāga*, *vairāgya*). The culmination of the Buddhist spiritual struggle is *nibbāna* / *nirvāṇa*, an absolute state of perfect harmony (freedom from the existential disharmony highlighted by the Buddha as *dukkha*). I believe the discussion in this paper has demonstrated that: for Buddhism, in this perfect state, beauty or purity (*subha* / *śubha*) in the spiritual sense is also at once the true and the good—all three being included within the connotation of the notion of the *śubha*. And for this attainment, the Buddha has consistently recommended the *aśubhā* meditation.

In this connection, the episode of mass suicide as a result of the *aśubhā* practice probably originated as a justificatory *nidāna* in the Vinaya tradition, and subsequently also used in the Sutta/Sūtra tradition as a rationale for the Buddha's teaching of the mindfulness of breathing. Its reverberation is undoubtedly also seen in some later contexts, such as the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma doctrine of the *cetanā-dharman* type of *arhats* and some Sarvāstivāda meditation manuals that remind us not to be overwhelmed by any suicidal thoughts possibly arising in the praxis. I have further suggested that the episode might be an indication of a tension between two divisions of Buddhist meditators, one advocating the *aśubhā*, the other the mindfulness of breathing.

The lengthy discussion, spanning sections four to seven, constituting a major focus of this paper, reinforces the preceding observation that both the early discourses and Abhidharma texts, while differing in certain aspects of interpretation, essentially agree that the meditator, through progressively higher levels of transcendence, arrives at the culminative experience of the pure/good (= the beautiful = the true). This is here particularly demonstrated in the various doctrinal explanations of the progression within the eight-*vimokṣa* scheme, and that, interrelatedly, through the schemes of the eight *vimokṣas*, eight *abhibhoāyatanas* and ten *kṛtsnāyatanas*. Most of the traditional explanations could yield the impression that the third *dhyāna* (/ *jhāna*) serves no function in the said progression, particularly as regards the attainment of the *śubha vimokṣa*. However, on the basis of MPPU (c. 3rd century CE) and Zhiyi's *Great Śamatha-vipaśyanā* (6th century CE), I have attempted to show that the third *dhyāna* does indeed make a specific contribution in this regard. In fact, according to Zhiyi's understanding, both the third and the fourth *dhyānas* pertain to the *śubha-vimokṣa*. As regards the common Buddhist tradition that the *śubha-vimokṣa* and the *nirodha-samāpatti*, alone, are described as being “directly realized through the body”, I have offered here some lesser known explanations by the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra masters. Both Yaśomitra and Sthiramati explain this in terms of the excellence of these two meditative attainments in accomplishing *āśraya-parivṛtti*.

In section five, I highlighted the *sutta/sūtra* doctrine of the seven *dhātus*—of which the *śubha-dhātu* is one—as possibly an early inspiration for the meditative doctrine of

the eight *vimokṣas*. This suggestion is unmistakably corroborated by the commentarial expositions on this doctrine in MVŚ and the *Vastu-saṃgrahaṇī* of YBŚ. This suggestion, if essentially valid, points to the fact that, in respect of the three meditative schemes (*vimokṣa*, *abhibhāvāyatana* and *krtsnāyatana*), the eight-*vimokṣa* scheme was the first that came to be fully formulated in Buddhist meditative praxis, on the basis of which the other two came to be developed. This, of course, does not preclude the possibility that, in terms of praxis, at least some aspects or constituent forms of all the three schemes could have practiced more or less concurrently. Furthermore, the *sūtra* and commentarial sources herein can be an indication of the early Buddhist awareness of the potential causal efficacy, signified by the notion of *dhātu*, in innate human experience that contributes to the experience of the pure and beautiful in meditative praxis.

In the final section, I made a brief attempt to derive some understanding of the developmental process leading to the doctrine of the meditative vision of purity and beauty at the culminative stage of the *aśubhā* meditation, and of encountering *buddhas* in the issuing radiance. This development, exhibiting an interfusion of Śrāvakayāna doctrines and praxis with Mahāyānistic and Tantric teaching of *buddha*-visualization, is majestically illustrated in some *dhyāna-sūtras*, proto-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna scriptures in the milieu of the 5th century CE. It was probably initially inspired in some way by such early discourses as the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and the *Gayāsīsa-sutta* (and their Chinese *Āgama* counterparts). We can in fact also see it as a culminating manifestation of the Buddhist meditative doctrine, essentially common to all Buddhist traditions, of the transformation of the *aśubha* into the *śubha*: of the impure and unwholesome into the pure/good, the true and the beautiful.

All Buddhist traditions of meditation—early Buddhism and Abhidharma on the one hand, and proto-Mahāyāna, Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, on the other—acknowledge the same basic premises and principles. But within the context of the three meditative schemes, the former, conserving the early teachings, developed the meditative experience of the vision of pure radiance issuing from the white-bones. The latter proceeded in a different direction. Increasingly stressing *buddha*-visualization and following the Mahāyāna ideal, it developed the vision further into one of encountering *buddhas*, in the form of Śrāvakayāna-Mahāyāna interfusion as seen in the *dhyāna-sūtras*, etc.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

AKB	<i>Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam</i> of Vasubandhu. Ed., Pradhan, P. 2nd ed. (Patna, 1975).
AKB(C)	阿毗達磨俱舍論 T29, no. 1558. Xuanzang's translation of the <i>Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya</i> .
AN	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i> .
Aśu Medn	Dhammajoti, K.L. "The <i>Aśubhā</i> Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda." <i>Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies Sri Lanka</i> VII (Dhammajoti 2009).
Derge	Derge edition of the <i>Tibetan Tripiṭaka</i> .
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> .
MPPU	* <i>Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa</i> 大智度論 (T25, no. 1509).
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> .
MVŚ	* <i>Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣā</i> 阿毗達磨大毗婆沙論 (T27, no. 1545).
Ny	* <i>Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra</i> 阿毗達磨順正理論 (T 29, no. 1562).
SN	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> .
T	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經. Ed., Takakusu, J. (1924–1932).
Tib	Tibetan text quoted from the Derge Edition of the <i>Tibetan Tripiṭaka</i>
Vy	<i>Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośabhāṣya-vyākhyā</i> . Ed., Wogihara U (Tokyo, 1971).
YBŚ = YBŚ(C)	<i>Yogācāra-bhūmi-śāstra</i> of Asaṅga (T30, no. 1579).

References

Primary Sources

- Āṅguttara-nikāya*. 1885–1900. Edited by R. Morris and E. Hardy. London: Pali Text Society.
- Dīgha-nikāya*. 1890–1911. Edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Majjhima-nikāya*. 1888–1899. Edited by L. Feer. London: Pali Text Society.
- Samyutta-nikāya*. 1884–1898. Edited by T.W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam* of Vasubandhu. 1975. Edited by P. Pradhan, 2nd ed. Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute.
- Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośabhāṣya-vyākhyā*. 1971. Edited by Wogihara U. Tokyo.
- rnal 'byor spyod pa'i sa las gzhi bsdu ba*. Tibetan translation of the *Vastusamgrahaṇī* Section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. Derge no. 4039, sems-tsam, zi 127a4–335a7.
- 阿毗達磨大毗婆沙論 Xuanzang's Chinese translation of the **Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣā* (T27, no. 1545).
- 阿毗達磨俱舍論 Xuanzang's Chinese translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (T29, no. 1558).
- 大智度論 **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa* (T25, no. 1509).
- 阿毗達磨順正理論 Xuanzang's Chinese translation of the **Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra* (T29, no. 1562).
- 瑜伽師地論 Xuanzang's Chinese translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi(-śāstra)* (T30, no. 1579).

Secondary Sources

- Abe, Takako. 2018. 『聞地』不淨觀——光明想再考——(*Aśubhabhāvanā* in the *Śrāvakabhūmi*—A Re-examination of the *Ālokaśamjñā*). *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* LXVII: 376.
- Anālayo. 2014. The Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and Vinaya Literature. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies* 7: 11–55.
- Dhammajoti, K. L. 2009. The *aśubhā* Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka* VII: 248–95.
- Dhammajoti, K. L. 2019. Adhimukti, Meditative Experience and Vijñaptimātratā. In *Investigating Principles—International Aspects of Buddhist Culture. Essays in Honour of Professor Charles Willemen*. Edited by L. Shrivak and S. Rai. Hong Kong: The Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, pp. 137–74.
- Fukuhara, Ryōgon. 1969. *A Study on Jōtitsu Ron*. Kyōto: Nagata Bunshōdō.
- Hodge, Stephen. 2012. *The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra: The Text and Its Transmission*. Corrected and Revised Version of a Paper Presented at the Second International Workshop on the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra. Munich: Munich University.
- Lamotte, Étienne. 1970. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*. Louvain-la-neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, vol. 3.
- Yamabe. 1999a. Nobuyoshi. 山部能宜. The Significance of the “Yogalehrbuch” for Investigation into the Origin of Chinese Meditation Texts. *Bukkyō Bunka* 教文化 9: 1–74.
- Yamabe. 1999b. Nobuyoshi. 山部能宜. The Sūtra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha: The Interfusion of the Chinese and Indian Cultures in Central Asia as Reflected in a Fifth Century Apocryphal Sūtra. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, New Heaven, CT, USA.
- Yinshun. 1968. *A Study of the Śāstras and Ācāryas of the Sarvāstivāda and Other Schools* 說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究. Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.
- Yinshun. 1976. *Origin and Development of Early Mahāyāna Buddhism* 初期大乘佛教之起源與開展. Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.
- Yinshun. 1981. *A Collated Edition of the Saṃyuktāgama* 雜阿含經論會編. Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.
- Yinshun. 1984. *An Investigation Into Śūnyatā* 空之探究. Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.
- Yinshun. 1989. *The Huayu Collection* 華雨集(二). Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.
- Yinshun. 2005. *The Yongguang Collection* 永光集. Taipei: Zhengwen Publication Society.