

**TWO COMMENTARIES ON THE
SAMDHINIRMOCANA-SUTRA
BY ASANGA AND JNANAGARBHA**

John Powers

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Dedication

To my mother,
for her encouragement and support.

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Abbreviations

BCLS: Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Académie Royale de Belgique.

BEFEO: Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Bhāṣya: Asaṅga's *Āryasaṃdhinirmocana-bhāṣya* ('phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa'i rnam par bshad pa), Sde dge version (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, vol. *mdo sde ngi*, pp. 2-22).

BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

D: Sde dge version of the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*.

EB: *The Eastern Buddhist*.

IA: *Indian Antiquary*.

IBK: *Indogaku Bukkyō-gaku Kenkyū*.

JA: *Journal Asiatique*.

JIABS: *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*.

JRAS: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

KDBK: *Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyō-gakubu Kenkyūkiyō*.

KDBR: Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyō-gaku Ronshū.

Lamotte: Étienne Lamotte, *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra: L'explication des Mystères* (Louvain and Paris, 1935).

MCB: Mélanges Chinoises et Bouddhiques.

Peking A: Peking Tripiṭaka version of Asaṅga's *Āryasamdhinirmocana-bhāṣya*, vol. 104.1.1.1-7.5.1.

PEW: Philosophy East and West.

Stog: Stog Palace version of the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*.

TBS: Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Tohoku: Tohoku Catalog number (UI Hakuju et al. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon*. Sendai: Tohoku Imperial University, 1935).

Wonch'uk: *Ārya-gambhīra-samdhinirmocana-sūtra-ṭīkā* ('phags pa dgongs pa zab mo nges par 'grel pa'i mdo'i rgya cher 'grel pa). Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1985, *mdo 'grel*, vol. *ti* (118), by Wonch'uk.

WZKSOA: Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens.

Preface

This book began as a part of a project to translate the *Sam̐dhinirmocana-sūtra*, one of the most influential texts of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and the primary scriptural source of the Yogācāra school. The initial work was done in India under the auspices of a grant from the American Institute of Indian Studies at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath. While in residence there, I had the good fortune to come in contact with Professor Yeshe Thabkhe, who agreed to work with me on the translation of the commentary attributed to Jñānagarbha, which discusses the eighth chapter of the *Sam̐dhinirmocana*. In addition, he was kind enough to help with difficult passages in an already-completed draft translation of the commentary attributed to Asaṅga, which provides selective discussions on some important topics in the sūtra. As an expert on Indian Buddhist commentarial literature, his help was invaluable.

Although this work was initially intended as an ancillary part of the translation project, it soon became apparent that these two commentaries had merits of their own and were helpful in drawing out the thought of difficult passages in the sūtra and in making decisions concerning the translation of technical terms. Thus, after completing the translation of the sūtra, I decided that a separate book containing translations of these important commentaries and discussions of their doctrines and purported authors would be valuable for people interested in Buddhist philosophy in general, and Yogācāra in particular. My hope in publishing this volume is that it will prove useful for people interested in the sūtra and how it has been interpreted by those who inherited it and were faced with the often difficult task of making sense of its often enigmatic teachings.

I would like to particularly thank Professor Thabkhe for his help and for the enormous amount of time he spent going over difficult passages, commenting on the philosophical ramifications of the text, and discussing the ranges of meanings of

technical terms. Thanks are also due to Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche, principal of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, for making available the resources of his school. One of the greatest resources was Ven. Ngawang Sherap, Librarian of the Institute, who was very helpful in finding rare reference materials, dictionaries, and manuscripts of the texts.

Another scholar who was of great help in this project was Geshe Palden Drappa, Librarian of Tibet House in Delhi, who donated his time and vast knowledge of Indian commentarial literature. I would also like to offer my special thanks to Professor Jeffrey Hopkins, my graduate advisor, who read every line of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* with me, checked every part of the translation with great thoroughness and wonderful patience, and who read and emended many parts of the commentaries in this volume. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the help of Professor William Magee of the University of Virginia, whose advice on computer problems, terminology, and philosophical issues has been invaluable.

Introduction

1. The *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* and Its Commentaries

The *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, one of the seminal works of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, has influenced Buddhist thought in every country to which Mahāyāna travelled. Its influence is evidenced by the number of texts which quote it and by the number of commentaries on it. In the Tibetan canon alone, there are four commentaries on the sūtra: (1) Wonch'uk's *Extensive Commentary on the Profound Superior Sūtra Explaining the Thought* ('phags pa dgongs pa zab mo nges par 'grel pa'i mdo'i rgya cher 'grel pa, *ārya-gambhīra-samdhinirmocana-sūtra-ṭīkā*);¹ (2)

¹Peking #5517. vol. 106, pp. 1-345; Tohoku #4016. Wonch'uk (Tibetan: Wen tshegs; Chinese: Yüan-ts'e, 圓測) was a Korean student of Hsüan-tsang (玄奘) who lived in Ch'ang-an during the T'ang dyanasty and wrote in Chinese. This author and his commentary on the *Samdhinirmocana* have been the subject of several articles by IIDA Shotaro: (1) "The Three Stūpas of Ch'ang-an", in *Papers of the First International Conference on Korean Studies* (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies, 1980), pp. 486-7; (2) "A Mukung-hwa in Ch'ang-an - A Study of the Life and Works of Wonch'uk (613-696)", in *Proceedings, International Symposium Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Korean Liberation* (Seoul, 1975), pp. 225-51; and (3) "Who Can Best Re-turn the Dharma-cakra?", in *IBK* #27.1, 1986, pp. 948-51. The history of the transmission of this text from China to Central Asia and Tibet is discussed in John Powers, "Accidental Immortality: How Wonch'uk Became the Author of the *Great Chinese Commentary*" (forthcoming in *JIAS* #15.1, 1992). My translation of the sūtra contains numerous translated excerpts from this commentary (forthcoming from Dharma Publishing, Berkeley, CA). Regarding Wonch'uk's dates, see NAKAMURA Hajime, *Shin Bukkyō Jiten* (Tokyo: Seishin Shobo, 1961), p. 60. See also the "Enjiki" entry in the *Hobogirin* catalogue, ed. Paul Demiéville et al. (Paris and Tokyo, 1978).

Byang chub rdzu 'phrul's *Explanation of the Superior Sūtra Explaining the Thought* ('phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa'i mdo'i rnam par bshad pa, ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-sūtrasya-vyākhyāna);¹ (3) Jñānagarbha's *Commentary on Just the Maitreya Chapter from the Superior Sūtra Explaining the Thought* ('phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa'i mdo las 'phags pa byams pa'i le'u nyi tshé'i bshad pa, ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-sūtre-ārya-maitreya-kevala-parivarta-bhāṣya);² and (4) Asaṅga's *Commentary on the Superior Sūtra Explaining the Thought* ('phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa'i rnam par bshad pa, ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-bhāṣya).³ The Tibetan canon also contains a text that discusses the sets of reasonings presented in the tenth chapter of the sūtra, entitled *Summary of the Sūtra [Explaining the Thought] by Way of Valid Cognition of Correct Words* (bka' yang

The original Chinese text was in ten *chūan*, but the only extant version, in the *Dai-nihon Zokuzōkyō* (大日本續藏經, *hsü tsang ching*; Hong Kong Reprint, 1922, pp. 134.d - 535.a), is missing the first portion of the eighth *chūan* and all of the tenth *chūan* of the original text. These have been reconstructed from the Tibetan translation of Fa-ch'eng (法成; Tibetan: Chos grub) by INABA Shoju: *Enjiki Gejinmikkyōsho Sanitsububan no kanbunyaku* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1949. See also Inaba's *Restoration of Yūan-tse's Chieh-shên-mi-ching-shu Through Its Tibetan Counterpart* (Kyoto: Heirakuji, 1972); reviewed by NAGAO Gadjin, in *Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan Kenkyū Nempō* #9, 1972, p. 95. Inaba discusses his methodology in his article "On Chos-grub's Translation of the *Chieh-shên-mi-ching-shu*" (*Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization*, ed. Leslie Kawamura and Keith Scott; Emeryville, CA: Dharma Press, 1977, pp. 105-113).

¹Peking #5845, vol. 144, p. 191 - vol. 145, p. 89; Tohoku #4538. No author is mentioned in Peking, but Sde dge states that it was written by Byang chub rdzu 'phrul, an epithet of King Khri srong lde brtsan. This text is discussed by Ernst Steinkellner, "Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul", *Berliner Indologische Studien*, 1989, pp. 229-251. Numerous passages of this text have been translated or paraphrased in the notes to my translation of the sūtra (mentioned in the previous note).

²Peking #5535, vol. 109, pp. 196-211; Tohoku #4033. This has been studied and translated into Japanese by NOZAWA Jōshō in his *Daijō-Bukkyō Yuga-gyō no kenkyū* (*Studies in the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*; Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1957. This work contains the text of the "Maitreya" chapter of the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* and the Tibetan and Chinese texts of Jñānagarbha's commentary and the commentary on the eighth chapter of the sūtra from the commentary attributed to Byang chub rdzu 'phrul.

³Peking #5481, vol. 104, pp. 1-7; Tohoku #3981. Excerpts have been edited and translated by Étienne Lamotte, *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra: L'explication des Mystères* (Louvain and Paris: Université de Louvain & Adrien Maisonneuve, 1935).

dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo btus pa), attributed to Khri srong lde brtsan.¹ In addition, the *Compendium of Ascertainments* (*vinīścaya-saṃgrahaṇī*, *rnam par gyan la dbab pa'i bsdu ba*),² attributed to Asaṅga, quotes most of the sūtra and prefaces each chapter with short summaries of its main points.³

In addition to these texts, Bu ston mentions five other commentaries (now apparently lost) in his *Catalogue of Translations of Doctrine* (*chos bsgyur dkar chag*), which are listed by Ernst Steinkellner in his article, "Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul?"⁴ After Bu ston's time, Tibetan scholars of the Dge lugs pa school created an extensive tradition of oral and written commentary on the sūtra that begins with Tsong kha pa's *Essence of the Good Explanations* (*legs bshad snying po*). The first section of this work, entitled "Mind Only" (*sems tsam*), discusses the *Samdhinirmocana* at length and focuses on its presentations of Buddhist hermeneutics. Tsong kha pa's work, in turn, has inspired at least twenty other Dge lugs pa sub-commentaries, and the philosophical and doctrinal ramifications of the *Samdhinirmocana* (as presented by Tsong kha pa) are still actively debated today in Dge lugs pa monastic colleges.⁵ There is also a commentary on the sūtra dubiously attributed to Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi, 774-835, the founder of the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism), entitled *Explanation of the Sūtra Elucidating the Profound Secret* (*chieh*

¹Peking #5839; Tohoku #4352. This has been briefly discussed by: (1) Ernst Steinkellner ("Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul", pp. 241-3); (2) Giuseppe Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, part I, (Rome, 1958, pp. 122-5); (3) R.A. Stein, "Une mention du Manichéisme dans le choix du Bouddhisme comme religion d'état par le roi Tibétain Khri-sroñ-lde-bcan", in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme: Mélanges offerts à Mgr. Étienne Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980, p. 333); and (4) Ariane MacDonald, "Une Lecture des Pelliot Tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047, et 1290. Essai sur la formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sroñ-bcan-sgam-po", in *Études Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris, 1971), pp. 367ff.

²Peking #5539, vol. 110, p. 233 - vol. 111, p. 121; Tohoku # 4038.

³These comments are all translated in the section below which discusses Asaṅga's commentary on the sūtra. For studies of this text and questions about its formation, see Lambert Schmithausen, *Der Nirvāṇa-Abschnitt in der Vinīścayasamgrahaṇī der Yogācārabhūmiḥ* (Wien: Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Sprachen und Kulturen Süd- und Ostasiens, Heft 8, 1969), and *Ālayavijñāna* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987).

⁴Steinkellner, "Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul", pp. 245-6.

⁵Tsong kha pa's text, along with the oral and written traditions that derive from it, are the subjects of a forthcoming study by Jeffrey Hopkins, entitled *Reflections on Reality*.

shen mi ching chu (解深密經註),¹ which contains the Chinese text of the sūtra with interlineal comments.

The past and present interest in the sūtra bears witness both to the profundity of its thought and the difficulties involved in trying to understand it. The *Samdhinirmocana* is a multi-faceted and penetrating analysis of some of the most important topics of Buddhist philosophy, e.g., the nature of consciousness, the path to enlightenment, the differences between the perceptions of ordinary beings and those who are enlightened, and rules for interpretation of scriptures. It has inspired and perplexed Buddhist thinkers, both because of its rich insights and thought-provoking analogies and the portions of the text that are abstruse or that lend themselves to multiple interpretations. For these reasons, Buddhist scholars in India, China, Korea, and Central Asia have commented on its thought, and Tibetan and Mongolian scholars continue to debate doctrinal issues raised by the sūtra.

Despite the wide-ranging influence of this text and its philosophy, the *Samdhinirmocana* has received surprisingly little attention from Western scholars. Étienne Lamotte's 1935 French translation has been the only extensive study of the sūtra in any Western language, and my forthcoming translation will be the first in English.

The commentaries on the sūtra have received even less attention. The only work by a Western scholar that discusses them at length of which I am aware is Steinkellner's "Who is *Byaṅ chub rdzu 'phrul*". None of the commentaries have previously been translated into any Western language, with the exception of the excerpts of Asaṅga's commentary translated into French by Lamotte in his *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra: L'explication des Mystères*. The only other translation of one of the commentaries on the sūtra of which I am aware is the Japanese translation of Jñānagarbha's treatise by NOZAWA Joshu, which is accompanied by a critical edition of the Tibetan text.²

The present study is an attempt to partially rectify this oversight. The commentaries translated and discussed below, attributed to Asaṅga and Jñānagarbha, contain useful discussions of difficult points and technical terms in the *Samdhinirmocana* and are invaluable aids for anyone wishing to understand the thought of the

¹*Chieh shen mi ching chu* (Taiwan, 1975).

²For further information regarding scholarly studies of the *Samdhinirmocana* and its commentaries, see John Powers, *The Yogācāra School of Buddhism: A Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991).

sūtra and how it has influenced, and been interpreted by, Buddhist authors. They are quite different in style and presentation: Asaṅga's text is the shortest extant commentary on the sūtra and mainly summarizes some of its important ideas and passages. Jñānagarbha's commentary is a detailed discussion of the eighth chapter of the *Samādhinirmocana* that comments on most of the important passages and technical terms of that section of the sūtra.

If they were indeed authored by Asaṅga and Jñānagarbha (which will be discussed below in greater detail), they also represent two very different periods of Indian Buddhist literature. Asaṅga, who lived in India around the third or fourth centuries A.D., was one of the most influential figures in the early formative period of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy and is credited in Tibet with being the main founder of the Yogācāra school. Yogācāra was one of the two main philosophical schools of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism (the other being Madhyamaka), and Asaṅga's treatises, along with those of his brother Vasubandhu, defined the outlines of the thought of Yogācāra. Since the *Samādhinirmocana* is the main scriptural source for that school, if the commentary that bears his name was actually authored by Asaṅga, this is an important resource for determining the philosophical and doctrinal connections between the sūtra and the founder of the school that was inspired by it.

The other Indian commentary, attributed to Jñānagarbha,¹ comes from a period just after the apogee of development of Mahāyāna thought, around the eighth cen-

¹Whether or not this text was authored by Jñānagarbha, I think that the style and syntax clearly mark it as an Indian text. Indigenous Tibetan texts generally read differently than Tibetan translations of Sanskrit works, and the text attributed to Jñānagarbha has the ambiance of an Indian work. The commentary attributed to Byang chub rdzu 'phrul, on the other hand, reads like the work of a Tibetan author, and I agree with Steinkellner's assessment that this is probably an indigenous Tibetan work. In his "Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul" (pp. 240-1), he point out that in the Sde dge edition of the Tibetan canon it occurs in the "Miscellaneous" (*sna tshogs*, vols. *cho* and *jo*) section, which contains a number of works by Tibetan authors. Steinkellner, following Bu ston's *Chos bsgyur dkar chag*, thinks that the probable author was the Tibetan translator Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan. Bu ston's contention that the author is actually Klu'i rgyal mtshan is also cited by Ser shul Dge bshes Blo bzang phun tshogs in his commentary on Tsong kha pa's *Legs bshad snying po* (entitled *Drang nges rnam 'byed kyi zin bris zab don gsal ba'i sgron me*; Mysore: Sere Byes Monastery, n.d., p. 29b.4), and he concurs with Bu ston's thought that the author is the translator (*lo tsa ba*) Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan (although Ser shul Dge bshes incorrectly cites the work in which Bu ston makes this assertion as the *Chos 'byung* rather than

tury A.D., and is concerned only with the eighth chapter, which is a dialogue between the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the Buddha. The main focus of the chapter is meditation, with a particular emphasis on the topics of calming (*zhi gnas, śamatha*) and insight (*lhag mthong, vipaśyanā*). This is one of the more difficult chapters in the sūtra, both in terms of thought and style, and Jñānagarbha's commentary is a valuable resource for anyone wishing to grapple with the sūtra's presentation of meditation theory and the nature of consciousness. It is a meticulous and exacting commentary which moves through the chapter line by line, often paraphrasing questions or answers and providing explanations of key terms and concepts. Whether or not it was authored by Jñānagarbha, it is clearly the work of a scholar who was well-versed in Buddhist philosophy and psychology, and the number of objections to the sūtra's ideas and the doctrinal debates that it addresses indicate that this is a commentary of a relatively late date in the development of Indian Buddhism.

Both of these commentaries has proven to be useful in studying the thought of the *Sam̐dhinirmocana-sūtra*. Their approaches and styles are very different, but taken together they complement each other, and each offers insights into the philosophy of this difficult text. The primary value of Asaṅga's commentary is that it provides a map through the thought of the *Sam̐dhinirmocana*, which serves as a guide to the relations between sections of the sūtra and which gives a good overview of the text. Jñānagarbha's commentary provides insightful commentary on one of the more difficult sections of the sūtra, indicates some of the possible and actual objections that could be raised with respect to some of its doctrines, and presents fine distinctions of technical terms. It is a masterpiece of traditional scholarship and provides incisive and cogent explanations for almost every passage of the chapter. Unlike Wonch'uk's work, which quotes extensively from a wide range of Buddhist literature, quotations from other sources are rare in Jñānagarbha's text, and most of the opinions appear to reflect the author's own ideas. Both of these commentaries provide insights into the meaning of difficult and obscure passages, and they are invaluable resources for those who wish to explore the thought of the sūtra.

the *Chos bsgyur dkar chag*). If Bu ston's speculation is correct, this would mean that the probable time of composition of this text was during the reign of King Ral pa can (who ruled from 815-838), since according to Tsepon Shakabpa (*Tibet: A Political History*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, p. 49) this was the time of Klu'i rgyal mtshan's greatest productivity.

Part One: A Study and Translation of Asaṅga's *Ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-bhāṣya*

1. Introduction

According to Tibetan traditions, Asaṅga is one of the two great “openers of the chariot ways” (*shing rta srol 'byed*) who clarified Mahāyāna doctrines in accordance with earlier prophecies that foretold their coming.¹ The other “opener of the chariot ways” was Nāgārjuna, who developed and spread the Madhyamaka school on the basis of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras, while Asaṅga developed and spread the Yogācāra school, relying mainly on the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*.²

Given the importance of this author, the Yogācāra school, and the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to the commentary on the sūtra attributed to Asaṅga, entitled *Commentary on the Superior Sūtra Explaining the Thought* (*ārya-saṃdhinirmocana-bhāṣya*; Tibetan: *'phags pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel pa'i rnam par bshad pa*).³ Since Étienne Lamotte's partial French translation in 1935,⁴ I am aware of no contemporary scholar who has studied this text, and there is no complete translation in any Western language. This neglect is probably due to a number of factors, including the brevity of the commentary and the difficulty of its style. It is a generally very terse work that summarizes large

¹This idea is found in Tsong kha pa's *Legs bshad snying po* (Sarnath: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Printing Press, 1973), pp. 3-4.

²See Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom, 1983), pp. 358-9.

³Sde dge #3891, pp. 1-22; Peking #5481, vol. 104, pp. 1-7.

⁴Étienne Lamotte, *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra: Explication des Mystères* (Paris and Louvain, 1935). This text will be referred to in this study as Lamotte.

sections of the sūtra with short comments, and parts make little sense on their own apart from the sūtra. It is clearly written for scholarly monks who were deeply immersed in the complexities of Buddhist philosophy, and this makes the commentary difficult to understand and to translate in places. Judging from the style and content, along with the fact that the author only discusses certain (generally difficult or obscure) passages, it may well be that this is a text composed or dictated by a senior teacher for students to provide them with guidelines and insights into a difficult text. The brevity of the commentary indicates that it was never intended to be a comprehensive discussion of the whole sūtra, and was instead a selective commentary on particular points.

Despite its brevity and terseness, however, it is an invaluable aid to understanding some difficult parts of the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, and my decision to publish a translation of it is based on the help that it provided in translating the sūtra. The primary value of the commentary for anyone reading the sūtra is that it provides a map through this difficult text. It mainly focuses on the more difficult passages of the sūtra, but hardly mentions those which are easily understandable. For instance, the first chapter of the commentary is mainly concerned with the introduction to the sūtra (in my opinion one of the most difficult parts of the text), and only a few lines are given over to comments on the main topic of the chapter, the designations of the “compounded” (*'dus byas, saṃskṛta*) and the “uncompounded” (*'dus ma byas, asaṃskṛta*). Because of this focus, it is invaluable as a guide through some of the murkier parts of the sūtra.

2. Overview of the Commentary

Chapter one is the longest section of the *Bhāṣya*, but, as mentioned above, it mostly discusses the introduction to the sūtra, which describes the place in which the teaching of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* takes place. This is said to be a vast celestial palace that extends throughout innumerable world systems and that reflects the good qualities of the Buddha who created it. The palace is the residence of many advanced Buddhist practitioners, both Hīnayānists and Mahāyānists. The *Bhāṣya* lists eighteen perfections that characterize the palace, then lists several divisions of the good qualities of the Buddha. It then discusses the various attainments of the Hīnayānists and Bodhisattvas who reside in the palace. These lists and divisions take up most of the chapter, and then a short discussion is devoted to Buddha's use of the terms

“compounded” and “uncompounded”. The *Bhāṣya* mainly echoes the contention of the *Saṃdhinirmocana* that these are terms designated by Buddha for particular didactic purposes. The use of these terms is purely pragmatic, and Buddha realizes that the terms do not express the reality of things, but they are useful for those of his followers who have not intuitively realized the ultimate (*don dam pa, paramārtha*).

Chapter two follows the second chapter of the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, which begins with a statement that the ultimate is “a character that completely transcends argumentation”. This point is illustrated in the sūtra by a story told by the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata (the main interlocuter of the chapter) of some non-Buddhists whom he observed debating about the ultimate. The sūtra indicates that their understandings of the ultimate were flawed by their adherence to wrong views and that they were prone to quarrels and acrimony. The *Bhāṣya* indicates that their faulty understanding of the ultimate is due to the fact that they rely on teachings by others (rather than on their own meditative experience), their limited achievements in meditation (which cause them to imagine that they have progressed farther than they actually have), their exaggerated adherence to their own views and philosophical systems, and their propensity toward becoming angry with others who do not share their views. Most of the second chapter of the *Bhāṣya* deals with this opening story and its ramifications for the thought of the sūtra, but the rest of the chapter is not discussed in detail.

Asaṅga indicates that the sūtra's third chapter is concerned with Bodhisattvas on the level of engagement through belief (*mos pas spyod pa' i sa, adhimukticaryā-bhūmi*) who, like the non-Buddhists discussed in the second chapter, are unable to understand the ultimate due to mental obscurations. They do not properly understand imputations or reasonings and “are estranged from sūtras of definitive meaning”. This appears to mean that they cling to sūtras of interpretable meaning while distancing themselves from sūtras that contain Buddha's definitive teachings. As a result, they understand what is unimportant but fail to grasp what is important, and this leads them to create confused and mistaken doctrinal formulations regarding the ultimate. They fail to understand the *Saṃdhinirmocana*'s teaching that the ultimate is “a character that transcends sameness and difference”, and as a result they propound doctrines that are at variance with Buddha's definitive instructions concerning the ultimate (which are presumably those contained in the *Saṃdhinirmocana*).

The discussion of chapter four of the sūtra is extremely brief. Asaṅga characterizes the teachings of the chapter in terms of three kinds of “boastful pride” (*mngon pa'i nga rgyal, abhimāna*) and then divides the chapter into three parts, each of which refers to a particular aspect. The topic of boastful pride is an important one in the sūtra, since it is said to be one of the primary obstacles to direct, intuitive understanding of the ultimate.

Chapter five of the sūtra focuses on the question of why Buddha describes certain Bodhisattvas as “wise with respect to the secrets of mind, sentience, and consciousness”. The *Bhāṣya* divides the fifth chapter into discussions of five types of obscuration with respect to the secrets of mind. It then briefly discusses the concept of “basis-consciousness” (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa, ālaya-vijñāna*), one of the most important doctrinal innovations of the Yogācāra school. The *Bhāṣya*'s discussion mainly focuses on an objection that is often made to this doctrine, that the basis-consciousness is equivalent to the Hindu *ātman*, which is said to be eternal, unchanging, and pure consciousness. Asaṅga replies that the basis-consciousness cannot be equated with the *ātman* because it is changing from moment to moment and has no essence apart from the seeds that comprise it. Every mental event deposits a concordant seed in the basis-consciousness (for example, if one is angry, this creates a concordant seed which is deposited in the continuum of the basis-consciousness and which will predispose one toward anger in the future). Since, the *Bhāṣya* argues, there is no basis-consciousness apart from these seeds, and since its constitution is continually changing in accordance with the production of new seeds, it is completely different from the *ātman*.

The sixth chapter of the sūtra begins with a question by the Bodhisattva Guṇākara, who asks Buddha why he designates some Bodhisattvas as being “wise with respect to the character of phenomena”. Buddha answers by indicating that there are three characters of phenomena and that Bodhisattvas who fully apprehend this teaching merit that designation. Each of these characters is a particular quality in terms of which phenomena may be viewed, a property that defines phenomena in a particular way. These are: (1) the imputational character (*kun brtags pa'i mtshan nyid, parikalpita-lakṣaṇa*), which includes ideas falsely attributed to phenomena; (2) the other-dependent character (*gzhan gyi dbang gi mtshan nyid, paratantra-lakṣaṇa*), the quality that phenomena have of being produced through the power of causes and conditions external to themselves (rather than by their own nature or necessarily); and (3) the thoroughly established character (*yongs su grub pa'i*

mtshan nyid, pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇa), which the sūtra equates with the ultimate. This character is said to be the absence of the imputations that are mistakenly superimposed onto the other-dependent character, and it is also said to be the final nature of phenomena. Asaṅga states that the discussion of these characters in the sūtra can be characterized according to six instructional purposes. As he develops this idea, Buddha is said to have taught these three characters in order to benefit Bodhisattvas in six ways, and each successive part of the chapter is said to lead them to a higher level of understanding, culminating in a description of how to attain the state of an "exalted knower of all aspects" (*rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa, sarvākāra-jñāna*).

Surprisingly, although the seventh chapter of the sūtra is one of the most important texts for Buddhist hermeneutics, the *Bhāṣya* barely mentions any of the statements of the sūtra that are relevant to this topic. In the sūtra, the Bodhisattva Paramārthasamudgata begins by questioning Buddha about some types of statements that he had made previously which conflict with certain statements made on other occasions. Much of the discussion of the seventh chapter of the sūtra is devoted to indicating how the doctrinal conflicts can be overcome and to providing rules in terms of which Buddhist exegetes may resolve similar problems. Chapter seven of the *Bhāṣya* indicates that the teachings of the seventh chapter of the sūtra serve as counteragents to four kinds of mistaken conceptions, and it divides Buddha's intended audience into five categories, each of which is characterized by the level of belief of its members.

Chapter eight of the sūtra contains a seminal discussion of the doctrine of "cognition-only" (*rnam par rig pa tsam, vijñapti-mātra*), in which Buddha tells the Bodhisattva Maitreya that the things perceived in ordinary perception are images of mind and are "cognition-only". This discussion is one of the seminal statements of Buddhist idealism, and its ramifications are still being debated today in Tibetan monastic colleges, but the *Bhāṣya* does not even mention it, perhaps because the author thought that the sūtra's statements are unequivocal and do not require further commentary. The *Bhāṣya* states that in the eighth chapter Buddha teaches his audience about yoga in six ways, and Asaṅga divides the chapter into six parts in accordance with this division. His comments indicate that he thinks that Buddha's purpose in this chapter is primarily therapeutic. He states that particular statements in the chapter are directed toward certain mental obscurations and that Buddha teaches as he does in order to lead his followers toward deeper understanding

through yogic practice. Buddha then tells them how they can preserve the insight they gain and maintain a high level of enthusiasm for meditative practice.

The ninth chapter of the sūtra focuses on the perfections (*pha rol tu phyin pa, pāramitā*) and the Bodhisattva levels (*sa, bhūmi*). The *Bhāṣya* states that the emphasis of the chapter is on the training by means of which the perfections are developed and how this relates to the levels. Asaṅga states that the sūtra presents an analysis of things that are inimical to cultivation of the perfections, along with discussions of meditative practices that counteract them. The purpose of this meditative training is twofold: (1) by developing the perfections, one progresses in merit and wisdom, overcomes mental obstructions and faults, and thus accomplishes one's own welfare, and (2) this development in turn enables one to work for the benefit of others and help them to reach their own spiritual goals.

Although the tenth chapter is one of the longer parts of the sūtra and contains a discussion of the nature and characteristics of Buddhahood (which is the final goal of Mahāyāna practice), the *Bhāṣya* has only a brief summary. Asaṅga states that in this chapter Buddha's teachings serve as antidotes to misconceptions concerning the nature of the bodies of a Buddha. He adds that all the teachings of the Tripiṭaka serve this function. This is followed by a question and answer concerning "imputation of what is not real" (*yang dag pa ma yin pa kun tu rtogs pa, abhūta-parikalpa*), which seems out of place in this text, since the term does not occur either in the tenth chapter of the *Samḍhinirmocana* or anywhere else in the sūtra. The *Bhāṣya* divides this into eight categories and then provides short explanations of these and further divisions. The text ends with a quotation from an unnamed source (which is not the *Samḍhinirmocana*) which does not seem to have any connection with any part of the *Samḍhinirmocana*.

This section seems rather out of place in the commentary, and I have not been able to identify any part of the sūtra to which it could intelligibly be connected. It is also odd that this follows a very abbreviated discussion of an important and lengthy chapter and that this discussion fails to mention many of the important issues raised in that chapter.

The section appears to have been tacked on to the *Bhāṣya*, perhaps by a later redactor. It could also be the case that the whole text is a series of notes on the *Samḍhinirmocana-sūtra* and that the discussion moved on to issues not directly addressed in the sūtra. In any case, it is difficult to see how this section could be a commentary on the *Samḍhinirmocana*.