1
Introduction

1.1
Basic Questions

"I go to the Buddha as my refuge.
I go to the Dharma as my refuge.
I go to the Sangha as my refuge."

To repeat these words with sincerity after a preceptor in the proper ritual setting is to take Buddha (Teacher), Dharma (Practice of the Teaching), and Sangha (Spiritual Community) as one's ultimate refuge in this life and beyond, and thereby to enter into the ancient community of followers of the Buddha. This simple ritual has been an important marker of religious identity in each Asian Buddhist culture. Yet its implications are anything but simple.

Mahāyāna Buddhists in India and Tibet have carried into their practice of refuge their belief in numberless Buddhas whose attainment is unbounded in space and time. Mahāyāna practice of refuge in Buddha has been framed by authoritative texts that declare Buddhas completely freed from the suffering nature of our world, yet limitlessly active within it to the end of time, helping others to the same freedom. The Buddhas are those who have attained personal freedom from mental components that construct a deluded and suffering world, while remaining compassionately engaged within the world until all others are freed. It is by having seen through the nature of beings' delusions that Buddhas are said to have the wisdom to guide others to freedom.

These two qualities—freedom from the deluded world and compassionate participation within it—are a critical part of what has qualified Buddhas as worthy

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objects of ultimate refuge in Indo-Tibetan Mahāyāna traditions. Yet those very qualities, even as they provide a key doctrinal basis for Mahāyāna refuge practice, appear to be logically inconsistent. Don't each of the qualities preclude the other? If one's mind has stopped constructing a suffering world, hasn't one thereby stopped participating in such a world? In Indian and Tibetan Mahāyāna, to practice refuge in Buddha is to performatively answer this question with a resounding "No!," to affirm one's faith that the Buddhas will always appear and give guidance as one is karmically ready to perceive them, whether in meditative visions, dreams, in pure realms, or on earth. Yet how is one to make sense of this affirmation of faith?

In Mahāyāna literary and practice traditions of India and Tibet, practice of refuge in Buddha is associated with the impulse for enlightenment called *bodhicitta* (mind of enlightenment). In one of its principal senses, it refers to the powerful impulse that propels a person from entry into the Mahāyāna path to its completion: the intense aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. The questions raised above return again in new form in connection with *bodhicitta:* What precisely does it mean for one to "seek Buddhahood for the sake of all beings," to commit oneself both to attain freedom from the world's delusions and to continue participating in that deluded world until all others are freed? How does the culmination of one's present practice fulfill that commitment?

Mahāyānists have looked to their scriptures and treatises for guidance. But the descriptions of Buddhahood in those sources express the logical tensions behind the questions. The mind of the Buddhas is said to abide in immovable equipoise on the emptiness of the entire cosmos, yet the Buddhas' activities are described as inconceivably vast. On the one hand, the Buddhas are entirely freed from the limitations of the dualistic world our minds construct. On the other hand, they pervade this world of our dualistic construction with cosmic power and activity. How can both be the case?

Such questions raise further questions at another level of inquiry: How significant is the autonomous exercise of human reason for determining the answers to such questions about Buddhahood? Or do human inferences about a Buddha's realization fall too far short of their mark? Are the logical tensions of Buddhahood inscribed in Mahāyāna scriptures resolvable only by attaining a Buddha's nonconceptual awareness for ourselves, like the morning mist dissolved by the rising sun? If so, should scriptural expressions of Buddhahood be received primarily as revelation, as revealing something that transcends thought and prodding us to realize in meditation what we cannot grasp conceptually? Or are logical tensions in scriptural descriptions of Buddhahood only apparent tensions, resolvable through careful analysis of the relevant concepts, so that scripture is to be received more primarily as a basis for reasoned and systematic reflection about Buddhahood?

These basic questions, flowing from the doctrinal underpinnings of basic Mahāyāna practices, are the implicit questions behind centuries of disagreement

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by Mahāyāna Buddhist scholars of India and Tibet over the proper interpretation of one of their most cherished texts: the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. Although non-Buddhist theistic religious traditions have engaged in systematic reflection through worldviews quite distant from those of Buddhism, they have struggled with parallel questions concerning the problem of the transcendence and immanence of God, and the capacity of human reason to comprehend God's relation to us. Some contemporary religious scholars have assumed that Buddhism, as a nontheistic religious tradition, has escaped the sorts of logical tensions that inhere in the theistic attempt to specify a relation between a transcendent being and the world. But for centuries Mahāyāna Buddhist scholars have wrestled with parallel questions about Buddhahood through their interpretations of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, indicating that the problem of conceptualizing the transcendent may be more universal a religious phenomenon than has often been recognized.[1]

1.2
Long Controversy over the Abhisamayālaṃkāra on Buddhahood

The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (Ornament of realizations), an Indian Sanskrit commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, was ascribed the highest authority by late Indian Buddhist scholars.[2] From the eighth century C.E., and perhaps earlier, they attributed it to the legendary figure Maitreya, the future Buddha. The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* was probably composed sometime between the fourth and the early sixth centuries C.E.[3] It is a condensed, versified treatise that purports to summarize all of the practices and yogic realizations leading to the different types of Buddhist enlightenment implicitly taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras.[4] The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s eighth and final chapter (*AA* 8), entitled "Dharmakāya,"[5] describes the fullest and most complete form of enlightenment, *samyaksaṃbodhi*, Buddhahood, the final culmination of all the practices described in the prior seven chapters.[6] This chapter, like other Mahāyāna treatises of the period, explicates the *kāyas* (embodiments) of a Buddha: awakened awareness as embodied in its own experience and in its relations to others. With the Buddha *kāyas*, the same chapter elucidates pure mental and physical qualities of a Buddha and enumerates its activities *(buddha-karma)* that pervade the cosmos to guide living beings to spiritual freedom.

At the outset, it is worth noticing two special things about the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra:* first, its great popularity in late Indian and Tibetan scholarship, and second, the long controversy that its eighth chapter on Buddhahood has occasioned in India and Tibet.

On the first point, for reasons we can only speculate upon, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (abbreviated *AA*) became one of the most popular and commented upon texts in late Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Twenty-one Indian commentaries on this one text are extant (most now available only in Tibetan translation in the

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Tibetan Tripitaka), and even more Indian commentaries may have been composed.[7] In Tibet, hundreds of commentaries upon it were written.[8] Perhaps because it lent itself better to Mādhyamika interpretation than other synoptic Indian texts on Buddhist practice (Mādhyamika thought having dominated Tibetan exegesis), the *AA* and its commentaries were chosen by Tibetan scholars as primary Indian sources for systematic description of all phases of praxis in nontantric Mahāyāna Buddhism. In fact, within the great monastic universities of Lhasa, commentaries upon the *AA* have comprised one of the fundamental subjects of monastic study.[9] In sum, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentaries have dominated exegesis in India and Tibet on the implicit meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras for the past fifteen hundred years (since the time of Ārya Vimuktisena, ca. early sixth century C.E.). This has meant that the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s eighth chapter became one of the most important Indian textual sources for Tibetan thought on the nature of Buddhahood. Even up to the present day, if one asks a traditional Tibetan scholar about the qualities of a Buddha, often he will refer to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s eighth chapter (*AA* 8).

On the second point, at least twelve centuries ago in India, *AA* 8 gave rise to an ongoing controversy over the meaning of its verses on complete enlightenment, a controversy that has repeatedly renewed itself in Tibet and continues even to the present day among contemporary Tibetan scholars. The differing interpretations of the text, I argue in this book, are elicited less by the ambiguities of the text than by the differing frames of reference that its interpreters have brought to it. This means that disagreements purportedly concerned only with interpretation of textual passages have both expressed and masked deeper philosophical and theological differences that guided the interpretations. And these underlying differences involve different approaches to the very questions that begin this chapter, namely, How are we to make sense of the two seemingly contradictory qualities of Buddhahood which underpin Mahāyāna practice: a Buddha's simultaneous freedom from and engagement with the world?

Before we return to these larger questions, we must focus more specifically on *AA* 8 and the nature of the interpretive disagreements it occasioned. The eighth chapter, entitled "Dharmakāya," describes Buddhahood by reference to multiple Buddha *kāyas*. *Dharmakāya* is an exalted term, used with the deepest reverence for a Buddha's supramundane, nondual realization of reality as it is.

The fundamental sense of the Sanskrit word *kāya* is "body," meaning the physical body of a living being. The term *kāya* in *rūpakāya* in pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna texts generally referred to a Buddha's *śarīra*, his "body" or "physical form" As with the English word "body," the term also came to possess several derivational meanings. *Kāya* often refers to a collection of things ("corpus"). It can refer to a substratum or a basis of qualities, or to the "embodiment" of those qualities in one's understanding and way of being. It can also be used to connote all such meanings at once. In Indian commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (those by

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Ārya Vimuktisena, Bhadanta Vimuktisena, Dharmamitra, Ratnākaraśānti, and Abhayākaragupta), and in various Indian Yogācāra commentaries, the word *kāya* in *dharmakāya* was generally etymologized in one or more of three ways:

1. *kāya* = "body" in the sense of *saṃcaya*, a collection of components or an accumulation of parts; *dharmakāya* = the collection *(kāya)* of Buddha's excellent qualities *(anāsravadharmāḥ);* in some pre-Mahāyāna texts and a few early Mahāyāna passages, it has also meant "collection *(kāya)* of the Buddha's teachings *(dharma)*";

2. *kāya* = "body" in the sense of *āśraya*, substratum or basis; *dharmakāya* = the substratum *(kāya)* of excellent qualities *(anāsravadharmāḥ)* or the basis *(kāya)* of sovereignty over all phenomena *(sarvadharmāh);*

3. *kāya* = "body" in the sense of embodiment; e.g., *dharmakāya* = that which embodies the real nature of things, the embodiment *(kāya)* of the real nature of things *(dharmatā)* in knowledge.

While *rūpakāya* has been a term of reverence for the physical form in which a Buddha appears to others, *dharmakāya* has often been a reverential term for a Buddha's own enlightened awareness.

Dharma, the first term in the compound *dharmakāya,* is a term with a very broad semantic range in Buddhist texts. *Dharma* refers to the real nature of things, reality as a Buddha knows it. It also refers to the nature and structure of reality as expressed in the Four Noble Truths or the two truths *(paramārtha satya* and *saṃvṛti satya),* and as realized in the direct experience of those truths *(adhigama)* through practice of the Buddha's path. It therefore also refers to the Buddha's teachings of those truths *(āgama)* and the practices to realize them. In its plural form *dharmāḥ* (dharmas), the term refers to the ultimate constituents of the psychophysical world of beings, subtle constituents of mind and body that gradually become perceptible through realization of the path (the *sarvadharmāḥ* of Abhidharma metaphysics). In some contexts, *dharmāḥ* may also refer to the pure constituents of a Buddha's mind or body: excellent qualities that derive from his or her completion of the path *(anāsravadharmāḥ)*. When the term *dharma* appears in Mahāyāna texts as part of the compound *dharmakāya,* it can express many or all of these connotations at once, the diversity of its connotations reflecting the entire history of Buddhist doctrinal development from the earliest period of Buddhism through Mahāyāna. This makes the meaning of *dharmakāya* as a reverent designation of Buddhahood and the title of *AA* 8 enormously rich, complex, and difficult to interpret.

The disagreements of interpretation that *AA* 8 occasioned centered primarily upon the meanings of *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya* in their relation to each other and to other dimensions of Buddhahood. *Svābhāvikakāya* (as I argue in chapter 4 below) may be glossed "the embodiment [of Buddhahood] in its essence, in its real nature." The other dimensions of Buddhahood include *rūpakāyas* (embodiment in forms) and *buddhakarma* (Buddha activity for living beings). The *rūpakāyas* are the forms through which Buddhahood communicates with beings, categorized as

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sāmbhogikakāya (the glorious form through which a Buddha shares the dharma with great bodhisattvas) and *nairmāṇikakāya* (the limitless variety of forms through which a Buddha communicates dharma to the limitless varieties of other beings). *Buddhakarma* refers to Buddhahood's extensive activity for beings through those forms.

An exegete's interpretation of the meanings of *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya* in *AA* 8 automatically affects his understanding of the total number of *kāyas* taught there. In Tibetan commentaries, the interpretive controversy over *AA* 8 has therefore often been summarized as a debate over the number of *kāyas*. But the primary point of disagreement is not the numbers per se but the meanings of the key concepts, especially *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya*.

Ārya Vimuktisena (ca. early sixth century), the first *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentator whose work is extant, believed that *AA* 8 used the terms *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya* to refer to one thing, the essential nondual realization of Buddhahood, that appears to beings of different levels of purity as *sāmbhogikakāya* or *nairmāṇikakāya*. Hence, he wrote that the *AA* teaches three *kāyas* of a Buddha *(dharmakāya/svābhāvikakāya, sāmbhogikakāya, nairmāṇikakāya)*. Haribhadra (late eighth century) reinterpreted the *AA*'s eighth chapter, arguing that *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya* in its key verses refer to two distinct aspects of Buddhahood, which are *not* to be equated with each other, making a total of four Buddha *kāyas* in the text. It appears that Haribhadra's interpretation (and indeed his ascription of four *kāyas* to any such nontantric Buddhist text as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*) was initially controversial. Haribhadra's reputed disciple, Buddhajñānapāda (late eighth century), did not follow his four-*kāya* interpretation of *AA* 8 in his own commentary on the *AA*. Dharmamitra (late eighth century to early ninth century), author of the first subcommentary on Haribhadra's *Sphuṭārthā*, wrote that some Indian scholars rejected the four-*kāya* interpretation of *AA* 8 and found it impossible to believe that Haribhadra, already coming into recognition as a major authority, actually meant it as his own position. Gradually, however, Haribhadra's authority became more weighty, his interpretation of *AA* 8 being accepted as authoritative by a number of later Indian scholars, notably Prajñākaramati (ca. 950–1000 C.E.), Buddhaśrījñāna (ca. 1200 C.E.), and Kumāraśrībhadra (date unknown). Other well-known Indian scholars, however—Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 1000 C.E.) and Abhayākaragupta (ca. 1100 C.E.)—vehemently rejected Haribhadra's four-*kāya* interpretation of the *AA* and argued for a return to Ārya Vimuktisena's prior three-*kāya* view.[10] Several centuries later in Tibet some of the most influential interpreters of the *AA* came also to disagree with each other on the issue. Notably, the Sa skya scholar Go ram pa bsod nams senge ge (1429–89) supported Ārya Vimuktisena in asserting three *kāyas,* while Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357–1419, father of the dGe lugs pa order) and his followers backed Haribhadra's assertion of four. Thus, taking Haribhadra as its initiator, the debate over the Buddha *kāyas* taught in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* has continued for over twelve hundred years, and Tibetan Sa skya and dGe lugs scholars of the present day continue to disagree on the issue.

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What light this long disagreement may shed upon problematics in the development of Mahāyāna thought in India and Tibet has not been previously analyzed in depth. Until recently, most Western scholars, basing themselves on commentaries by Haribhadra and his Tibetan followers, have reported that the *AA* teaches four *kāyas* as if unaware of the controversy.[11] Japanese scholars have recently taken note of the controversy,[12] but leave some of the most fundamental questions unresolved: What did the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* really teach? Looking beyond the surface level of discussion, what different doctrinal perspectives did scholars bring to the text, effecting their readings of it? What underlying problems in Mahāyāna thought were those scholars trying to address through their disagreements over the meaning of that text?

The long history of controversy over *AA* 8 raises for us at the outset some fundamental questions: historical, textual, philosophical, and theological.[13] In what follows, I will focus first on the historical and textual questions, then on the philosophical and theological ones.

1.3
Historical and Textual Issues behind the Controversy

The research presented in this book indicates that, while there is much the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* shares with other classical Indian Mahāyāna treatises of its period (ca. fourth to early sixth centuries), there are also key features unique to the discussion of Buddahood in its eighth chapter. Those features gave the text sufficient ambiguity, at least by the late eighth century, that Haribhadra could plausibly interpret it in significantly new ways, and that later scholars could continue to disagree over his interpretation even to the present day. What are the sources of *AA* 8's unique features? What might they tell us about the author's intention in composing it?

This leads to more technical questions. What prior textual materials and traditions did the *AA*'s author draw from? How did he arrange those specific materials in his redaction of *AA* 8? What does this tell us about his purposes? Questions of this kind organize methods of textual analysis known as "source criticism" and "redaction criticism," literary-critical methods that have been developed in their application to the Bible. To apply these methods to *AA* 8 is to seek to uncover its textual sources (source criticism), to examine how those sources were put together and structured within its composition, and to analyze what that structure likely indicates about the intention of its author (redaction criticism). When source and redaction criticism are applied to *AA* 8, we find much evidence that its composition represents an attempt, probably for the first time in Indian Buddhism, to draw a clear and direct correspondence between two semiautonomous Mahāyāna descriptions of Buddhahood that had become normative: a *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* description

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and a three-*kāya* description found in contemporary Yogācāra śāstras. In other words, *AA* 8 is neither an independent creation of its author nor a simple restatement of what was said in its sources or other texts of its period. Rather, it functions like a grid to map a Yogācāra model of enlightenment onto the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras. When seen in this light, the reasons for each of the unique features that made *AA* 8 ambiguous for later commentators become clear. At the same time, the likely original intention of its author also becomes evident.

The first part of this book, then, seeks the answer to all the textual questions above by analyzing the materials on Buddhahood from *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and Yogācāra treatises from which the *AA*'s author constructed its eighth chapter on *dharmakāya*. This analysis already goes beyond purely textual concerns, however, into the philosophical and theological. For it requires that we explore *Prajñāpāramitā* and Yogācāra concepts of *dharmakāya* from the unique perspective of their contribution to the *AA*. There are features of *Prajñāpāramitā* approaches to *dharmakāya* that stand out more vividly when seen in light of their role in the formation of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. Similarly, there are aspects of Yogācāra buddhological analysis that gain unique significance when viewed in light of the later controversies over *AA* 8. Further, both of these literary traditions presume a background in preceding Abhidharma traditions that they both draw from and depart from.

Of the chapters that follow, chapter 2 focuses on selected aspects of Abhidharma buddhology that contributed to the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and to Yogācāra buddhology, through them to the *AA,* and then to the controversy over its eighth chapter. Chapter 3 centers on *dharmakāya* in *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, focusing on aspects of special interest for their contribution to the *AA*. Chapters 4 and 5 explore classical Yogācāra buddhology, emphasizing new findings on the *kāyas* that emerge in light of Yogācāra contributions to the *AA*. Chapter 6 sets *AA* 8 within the *AA* as a whole, specifies the controversial passages, and delineates the philological disagreements over them in India. Chapters 7 and 8 draw upon the preceding chapters to seek answers to all the textual questions raised above, using source and redaction criticism of *AA* 8. The latter two chapters are quite technical.

Chapter 9 analyzes the commentary of Ārya Vimuktisena on *AA* 8. Among all extant commentaries, Ārya Vimuktisena's was composed closest to the time of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. Steeped contemporaneously in the literary traditions from which the *AA*'s author drew, Ārya Vimuktisena read *AA* 8 as the Yogācāra-*Prajñāpāramitā* grid that it was, demonstrating how the *AA*'s author had matched the three Yogācāra *kāyas*—*svābhāvikakāya (= dharmakāya), sāmbhogikakāya*, and *nairmāṇikakāya*—to specific passages in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*. In doing this, he reiterated an understanding of *dharmakāya* in *Prajñāpāramitā* and Yogācāra literature that had found expression in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra:* dharmakāya = a Buddha's embodiment of dharma *(dharmakāya)* as his real nature, the embodiment of his real essence *(svābhāvikakāya),* i.e., a Buddha's own yogic realization,

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supramundane, beyond dualities of thought, undifferentiated, and inconceivable to others. Chapter 9 contextualizes this by showing how Ārya Vimuktisena's comments on a Buddha's realization resonate both with Yogācāra gnoseology and with that of Candrakīrti, a later Mādhyamika scholar.

Chapter 10 explores Haribhadra's interpretations of *AA* 8. Ārya Vimuktisena's interpretation was accepted as authoritative for more than two centuries. Then, according to our record of extant commentaries, Haribhadra formally rejected his reading of *dharmakāya* and *svābhāvikakāya* as synonyms in key passages, asserting that they must be distinguished as two distinct aspects of Buddhahood, two distinct *kāyas* (giving a total of four). We know *AA* 8 had unique features that could permit it to be reread in new ways in later centuries. But having established through literary criticism that the *AA* actually did teach three *kāyas*, and that Ārya Vimuktisena read it correctly, we are now confronted with a new question. What motivated Haribhadra to go against over two centuries of tradition and challenge the prior authoritative interpretation? This question leads us back to the philosophical and theological concerns with which this chapter began, questions concerning the Buddhas' relation to our world of delusion. For these concerns, it is argued here, are what implicitly motivated Haribhadra's new interpretation of *AA* 8.

1.4
Philosophical and Theological Concerns behind the Controversy

The fact that *AA* 8, read by itself in isolation, could plausibly be viewed in new ways in later centuries does not, in itself, explain Haribhadra's new interpretation. Given the semantic density of the *AA*'s verses, it is unlikely that any scholar, then as now, ever read the *AA* without consulting at least one major commentary. Further, we know Haribhadra was intimately familiar with the principal commentary of his time, Ārya Vimuktisena's, by his own references to it. Read through the lens of Ārya Vimuktisena's interpretations, *AA* 8 does not appear ambiguous. Haribhadra's perspective on the text must have been affected by concerns of his own place and time, concerns acute enough to motivate a new reading.[14]

Ample clues to Haribhadra's implicit concerns are provided in his commentaries on *AA* 8. One theme he repeatedly returns to (on five different occasions, in fact, in his comments on *AA* 8), is the importance of affirming a clear distinction between the ultimate, unconditioned aspect of a Buddha's awareness, on the one hand, and the conventional, conditioned aspect of it, on the other, to show particularly how the latter aspect becomes the basis for a Buddha's activity within this conventional, conditioned world. Clearly Haribhadra was troubled by what he viewed as the lack of a clear ontological basis within the three-*kāya* Yogācāra model for a Buddha's conditioned activity in the world. So he read *svābhāvikakāya* and *dharmakāya* in key verses of *AA* 8 not as synonyms for the Buddha's nondual

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ultimate realization, as Ārya Vimuktisena had done, but as designations for two distinct aspects of Buddha mind: the unconditioned aspect by which a Buddha transcends the conditioned world of delusion (*svābhāvikakāya*, essential body), and the conditioned aspect through which he appears to beings within their world of delusion to work for them (*[jñānātmaka] dharmakāya*, body of dharma-gnoses, conditioned forms of pure awareness). For this reason, Haribhadra makes explicit his concern that *AA* 8 teach four *kāyas* rather than three *(svābhāvikakāya, [jñānātmaka] dharmakāya, sāmbhogikakāya, nairmāṇikakāya)*. All relevant passages of Haribhadra's commentary are translated and analyzed in chapter 10.

In Chapter 10, another reason for Haribhadra's interpretation is suggested that is closely related to the concern above: his interest as a Mādhyamika logician to critique an absolutism he saw in the Yogācāra, three-*kāya* model of enlightenment that he believed had become too generally embedded in late Indian Mahāyāna thought. Haribhadra seems to have felt that the Yogācāra model of *svābhāvikakāya* never properly distinguished the awareness of a Buddha per se (*buddhajñāna*, which Haribhadra asserted to be an impermanent, conventional existent) from the ultimate truth it knows (*śūnyatā*, unconditioned emptiness), thereby seeming to ascribe ultimate status to a conventional thing, an implicit absolutism he found unacceptable for Mādhyamikans. And because a Buddha's awareness and ultimate truth were never formally separated within the Yogācāra model of *svābhāvikakāya/dharmakāya*, which was characterized as permanent by nature, it appeared inexplicable to Haribhadra how the Yogācāras could have posited it as the foundation for a Buddha's activity in the conditioned world.

By creative interpretation of *AA* 8, then, Haribhadra, as an eighth-century Mādhyamika logician, sought to accomplish something which seemed long overdue to him. He sought to "Mādhyamika-ize" the Yogācāra model of Buddhahood that had been uncritically inherited by late Indian Mahāyāna, by making the multiple-*kāya* model of Buddhahood an object of logical analysis that would conform it more clearly to the two-truth ontology of Mādhyamika and account for its simultaneous participation in the unconditioned and the conditioned. Using analytical tools developed in the intervening centuries by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, he thereby sought to resolve what he saw as the logical tension between unconditioned and conditioned aspects in the three-*kāya* model of Yogācāra.

This raises the next question. What is the source of the logical tension with which Haribhadra wrestled? It derives from something more basic in Mahāyāna thought than the particular model he encountered in *AA* 8. When we look at Yogācāra treatises that first formalized the three-*kāya* model expressed in *AA* 8, we find a deeper doctrinal source for the logical tension in that model. The source is a doctrine at the core of developed Mahāyāna soteriology: nonabiding nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭhita nirvāṇa*). This is the doctrine, expressed in many ways throughout Indian Mahāyāna literature, that the nirvāṇa realized by a Buddha is *not* separate from saṃsāra.

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Prior to the rise of Mahāyāna, early Buddhist and Abhidharma traditions had assumed a dualistic understanding of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The five *skandhas* (comprising the mind, body, and conditioned world of beings) were characterized as *duḥkha*, conditioned forms of dissatisfaction and suffering. The completion of the Buddha's path was said to culminate in the attainment of the unconditioned, nirvāṇa, by completely removing the causes of *duḥkha* which are the deepest generative causes of mind and body. Final nirvāṇa *(parinirvāṇa)*, then, the final attainment of the unconditioned upon physical death, involved the complete cessation of all conditioned states of mind and body, the cessation of all participation in this world: "Monks, there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. Monks, if there were not an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, then we could not here know any escape from the born, become, made, conditioned."[15] Logically, this posed no problems. The ultimate attainment of the unconditioned state entailed the abandonment of all conditioned states (the five *skandhas*, which comprise the conditioned world of saṃsāra).

Contributing to the rise of Mahāyāna traditions were several intuitions about further implications of the doctrines inherited from prior traditions. These intuitions gradually converged upon an important new understanding that eventually became dominant in Indian Mahāyāna (common to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, its literary sources, and all its commentators): For a Buddha, saṃsāra is *not* apart from nirvāṇa; nirvāṇa is *not* apart from saṃsāra. With this, the prior dualistic understanding (that final attainment of the unconditioned entails abandonment of the conditioned world) was eradicated. Mahāyāna texts came to assert that a Buddha, upon fully attaining the unconditioned (nirvāṇa), *never* abandons the conditioned world (saṃsāra).

At the beginning of this chapter, *bodhicitta* was invoked as the raison d'être of praxis expressed in classical Indian Mahāyāna texts: the aspiration and strong commitment to attain enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. To attain nirvāṇa in the highest sense (Buddhahood), asserted these texts, is the way to fulfill this commitment, by remaining eternally active in the world as a force for the benefit of others. The Buddhas, through their experience of awakening, have removed the very root of their own conditioned existence, yet pervade the universe of beings with the power of their awareness and compassion, guiding others to awakening until all are freed.

This represented a sea change in the Buddhist worldview, the doctrinal repercussions from which reverberated through the long history of Indian and Tibetan Mahāyāna thought, instantiating in one particular way, I argue in this book, as the doctrinal tension underlying the long controversy over *AA* 8.[16] In classical Indian Mahāyāna texts, a Buddha's nirvāṇa was unconditioned (he was personally freed from the causes of the conditioned world) and at the same time, conditioned (manifesting pervasively in the conditioned world for others). It was given the name "nonabiding nirvāṇa" *(apratiṣṭhita nirvāṇa)*, because it was bound neither to the

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causal chain of conditioned existence, nor to the isolation of a quiescent (pre-Mahāyāna type) final nirvāṇa.[17] On the one hand, it was asserted, Buddhahood is highest nirvāṇa, free from all the dichotomous conceptualization *(vikalpa)* that constructs the phenomenological worlds of suffering beings. On the other hand, Buddhahood remains an active part of saṃsāra by appearing to beings within the phenomenological worlds of *their* conceptual construction.[18] A Buddha had, in some sense, to be both unconditioned and operative within conditions. This paradox is engendered by the enormous leap from pre-Mahāyāna to developed Mahāyāna understandings of nirvāṇa. The debates over *AA* 8 demonstrate one way in which this underlying paradox, without being explicitly invoked, has quietly functioned for centuries as a driving force behind a wide range of doctrinal disagreements over Buddhahood in India and Tibet.

The doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa was formalized and systematized in Yogācāra treatises from ca. fourth to fifth centuries C.E., which Indo-Tibetan traditions have ascribed to Maitreya, Asanga, and Vasubandhu. Formulations of Buddhahood in these texts (including the three-*kāya* model that became part of *AA* 8) developed out of several emergent Mahāyāna intuitions regarding enlightenment: ethical, ontological, gnoseological, soteriological, and theological, all of which found expression in the doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa.[19] Several of these texts and their commentaries note the logical tension within that doctrine (the paradox of Buddhahood being both unconditioned and active within the conditioned world), but they treat it as merely an apparent problem. It is to be resolved not by (futilely) trying to logically analyze a Buddha's realization, but by yogically realizing it for oneself. For this reason, Yogācāra texts really meant it when they claimed that Buddhahood, in essence, is inconceivable *(acintya),* to be known only through personal realization *(pratyātmavedaniya)*. For the Yogācāras (and Mādhyamikas such as Candrakīrti prior to Haribhadra) a Buddha's gnosis was primarily an object of yogic realization, not of philosophical speculation. The realization of Buddhahood was referred to alternatively as *svābhāvikakāya* (embodiment of Buddhahood in its innermost essence) or *dharmakāya* (embodiment of dharma in its ultimate realization). Upon actual attainment of that, what had earlier appeared paradoxical about a Buddha would simply dissolve.[20]

The centuries intervening between these Yogācāra treatises and Haribhadra saw the rise of the Buddhist logico-epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Haribhadra, like other eighth-century Mādhyamikas, was heavily influenced by that tradition. This gave him a different perspective on the apparent paradox of nonabiding nirvāṇa than that of earlier writers. The logical tension from that doctrine, which became inscribed in the Yogācāra three-*kāya* model embedded in *AA* 8, troubled Haribhadra enough to motivate his new interpretation of the text. But Haribhadra, confident in the new found power of Buddhist logic to solve such logical tensions, identified the source of the tension not in the doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa per se (normative for all the Mahāyāna schools of his time),

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but in the Yogācāra three-*kāya* formulation of it. That model, he believed, gave rise to the logical tension because it did not distinguish separate ontological bases in Buddhahood for its transcendence and immanence. So, as noted above, Haribhadra's comments on *AA* 8 revolve around his concern to divide the first of the three Yogācāra *kāyas*, *svābhāvikakāya/dharmakāya*, into two now distinct aspects: an unconditioned, transcendent aspect and a conditioned, immanent aspect. The unconditioned aspect, he argued, was what *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 8 meant by *svābhāvikakāya* (referring to a Buddha's unconditioned purity), while the conditioned aspect must have been what it meant in key verses by *dharmakāya* (referring to a Buddha's conditioned awareness, *jñāna*). Reading this distinction into *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 8, Haribhadra believed, by producing a four-*kāya* model, would give the doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa the logically coherent form that it ought to have, at least from his perspective as an eighth-century Mādhyamikan logician.

By doing this, however, he treated a Buddha's nonconceptual attainment as if it were far more accessible to autonomous logical analysis (apart from yogic experience) than earlier Mahāyāna traditions had believed.[21] *AA* 8 lists twenty-one types of a Buddha's mental qualities (undefiled dharmas), which largely derive from prior Abhidharma traditions that contributed to the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and thence to the *AA*. Haribhadra, who was also an authority of Abhidharma, understood that list to refer to actual conditioned components of a Buddha's mind, analogous to (although purer than) the mental factors cultivated by bodhisattvas on their path to Buddhahood (described throughout the *AA* as elements of the path). Haribhadra's Abhidharmic reading of *AA* 8, then, made the awareness *(jñāna)* of a Buddha a conditioned, composite phenomenon, analogous enough to the minds of ordinary beings that inferences could be drawn about a Buddha's mind from the mental factors that ordinary beings cultivate on their path to Buddhahood. Haribhadra's comments reveal an implicit assumption on his part that the mind of a Buddha *can* be comprehended sufficiently by analogy to the human and that reason can arrive at a logically coherent and accurate model of it. His four-*kāya* reading of *AA* 8 represents an autonomous use of reason to infer that model. Since, in his view, he had arrived at that correct model through a valid inference, that must be the model intended by the author of the text, Maitreya.

This means that Haribhadra (and those, like Tsong kha pa in Tibet, who reaffirmed his interpretation of *AA* 8) understood the primary function of *AA* 8 to be something like systematic theology: to show how a received doctrine, even one that appears to contain logical tension, can be viewed as logically coherent and consistent with the entire system of inherited doctrine in which it is situated. Having read *AA* 8 as a systematic treatise, Haribhadra applied the logical procedures of his time to infer its systematic purpose. His four-*kāya* interpretation, then, implicitly represents a claim that the purpose of *AA* 8 was to present a model of Buddhahood that gave expression to the normative Mahāyāna doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa free from the logical tension with which the three-*kāya* model of it was

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burdened. All of this is explored in chapter 10 by reference to Haribhadra's commentaries.

Chapter 11 examines the views of Indian scholars who commented upon the *AA* after Haribhadra, some of whom were unfamiliar with or ignored his interpretation, some of whom supported it, and some of whom pointedly criticized it. Ratnākaraśānti and Abhayākaragupta directed strong criticism at Haribhadra's reading of *AA* 8, calling for a return to Ārya Vimuktisena's prior interpretation. Their reasons for this are not obvious, and have presented a puzzle for later scholars. One late Tibetan commentarial tradition, heavily influenced by Haribhadra's authority, even came to the conclusion that the interpretive difference between Ārya Vimuktisena and Haribhadra had been entirely philological; Ārya Vimuktisena, it said, had had the very same views on Buddhahood that Haribhadra had, and they differed only in their understanding of the Sanskrit grammar of key verses.[22] This viewpoint would make Ratnākaraśānti's call to return to Ārya Vimuktisena's interpretation a trivial matter. But as the research summarized above indicates, there was much more at stake. And a study of Ratnākaraśānti's writings, in particular, reveals deep differences between lineages of interpretation that go well beyond the philological.

Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms (echoed by Abhayākaragupta and Go ram pa in Tibet) concern two basic interrelated issues. The first issue is whether the nature of a Buddha's mind is as accessible to human thought as Haribhadra assumed, or is only made accessible by its own self revelation to us or by our own yogic attainment of it. The second issue, closely related to the first, is whether *AA* 8 should be read primarily as a reasoned systematization of doctrines concerning *dharmakāya* (as Haribhadra had read it) or as a revelation by *dharmakāya* of itself that points beyond the limits of reason.

On the first issue, Ratnākaraśānti sharply disagreed with Haribhadra's assumption that human thought could accurately represent the core realization of Buddhahood. He believed that logical inference, while important for other purposes, was extremely limited in its ability to ascertain the nature of a Buddha's awareness. He viewed the teaching of *svābhāvikakāya/dharmakāya* in *AA* 8 mainly from the perspective of yogic practice traditions, rather than from Haribhadra's Abhidharma *cum* Buddhist logic perspective.

We find a pattern of concerns in Ratnākaraśānti's corpus of writings on Mahāyāna praxis and Buddhahood that are reflected in his comments on *AA* 8. In Ratnākaraśānti's view, conceptual thought about *dharmakāya* never comes close to an adequate representation of it, precisely because *dharmakāya* is a nonconceptual and nondual yogic attainment, as unbounded as space. Haribhadra was therefore wrong to assume that logical tension in received models of Buddhahood constituted an anomaly to be solved by logical analysis.

Throughout his corpus and in his comments on *AA* 8, Ratnākaraśānti refers back to the textual tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism viewed as a whole (sūtras and

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śāstras, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika). He frequently quotes Yogācāra treatises associated with the three-*kāya* model, several of which had explicitly noted the logical tension in their doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa. Some of these texts extolled that tension as an exalted quality of *dharmakāya*, an indication that it transcends the conceptual dichotomies through which ordinary beings try to think about it. The logical tension created by the attempt to conceptualize *dharmakāya* would disappear, it was believed, not through a more sophisticated conceptual analysis of *dharmakāya* (as Haribhadra had attempted), but by yogic practices that deconstruct all such conceptual frameworks, ultimately culminating in its nonconceptual realization.

In Ratnākaraśānti's view (later shared by Abhayākaragupta and Go ram pa in Tibet), the broad (and indeterminate descriptions) of nonabiding nirvāṇa found in earlier, *trikāya* (three-body) texts were quite sufficient for their purpose: to point practitioners toward Buddhahood, which, in the final analysis, would only be comprehensible when it was (yogically) accomplished. Ratnākaraśānti thought Haribhadra's imputation of conceptual dichotomy upon *dharmakāya* distorted its actual nonconceptual nature. In other words, he felt that the imprecision of the earlier three-*kāya* theory had the merit of leaving unexpressed what was, in fact, inexpressible.

This implies that Ratnākaraśānti (followed in this by Abhayākaragupta in India, and Go ram pa in Tibet) rejected not only Haribhadra's interpretation of verses in *AA* 8 but his understanding of the very status of the text. Haribhadra had read *AA* 8 as a systematic treatise whose purpose was to present a logically coherent model of Buddhahood. His perspective owed much to Buddhist logic and Abhidharma traditions that had sought such systematic coherence. Ratnākaraśānti, basing himself instead on the perspective of nondual yogic traditions, specifically understood the terms *svābhāvikakāya* and *dharmakāya* in *AA* 8 (and throughout Mahāyāna literature) to refer to a Buddha's *own* perspective on the nature of his attainment, *not* to a human perspective on it. Because *dharmakāya* is a nondual yogic attainment, light is shed on it by higher yogic practice. But human reason per se can only generate a human construct of *dharmakāya*, not actual knowledge of it. Therefore, implicit in Ratnākaraśānti's position is the assumption that in canonical and semicanonical texts such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* the expressions of the core realization of Buddhahood through terms like *dharmakāya* are to be read not as systematic analyses but as revelation. *Dharmakāya* expresses itself through the teachings of Buddhas and high bodhisattvas in ways that do contain logical tension. But this is necessitated by the dualistic thought-world of those with whom it communicates. The logical tension itself thus serves to challenge trainees toward deconstructing the dichotomous world of their own conceptual construction which separates them from the attainment of *dharmakāya*. The term *dharmakāya*, then, must necessarily refer to something that transcends human thought or analysis, something that is known accurately only from a Buddha's own point of view. To

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analyze *dharmakāya* as a conceptual slot within a system of doctrines (as Ratnākaraśānti felt Haribhadra had done) is to reduce it to a projection of the limited conceptual schemes through which non-Buddhas try to think about Buddhahood. Because Ratnākaraśānti's views are of such interest and importance, much of chapter 11 is devoted to them.

Chapter 12 focuses upon the continuation of the controversy in Tibet by two important scholars of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. Centuries after Indian Buddhist scholasticism had declined, Sa skya and dGe lugs scholars chose either Ārya Vimuktisena's or Haribhadra's interpretation of *AA* 8 as part of their project of creating a coherent system of thought and practice consistent with the thousands of sūtras, śāstras, and tantric texts Tibet had received from India. Within that project, Tibetan scholars perceived a number of problems as inter-related: problems concerning the two truths, the perfect knowledge of them which is *dharmakāya*, and the relation of that knowledge to the world that is expressed in the *rūpakāya*s. Go ram pa, a Sa skya scholar of great renown, and Tsong kha pa, the founder of the dGe lugs pa school, were two of Tibet's most influential commentators on the *AA*. Tsong kha pa, influenced by the logico-epistemological approach expressed in Haribhadra's work, supported his interpretation of *AA* 8. Go ram pa, drawing from a perspective framed by nondual yogic praxis, supported Ratnākaraśānti's call to return to the Ārya Vimuktisena's previous interpretation. Tsong kha pa's and Go ram pa's interpretations are closely related to their differing perspectives on a Buddha's awareness, which was an explicit topic of discussion in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra,* upon which they both commented. Their views on *AA* 8 in relation to their interpretations of Candrakīrti are explored in chapter 12.

We can begin to see that the ongoing disagreement over *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* chapter 8 has represented an ongoing clash between two fundamental perspectives on enlightenment in Indo-Tibetan Mahāyāna thought that have stood in tension through much of its history: a perspective that views Buddhahood primarily as a nondual yogic attainment beyond conceptual thought or inference, and a perspective that understands Buddhahood inferentially through conceptual thought. In what follows, I call the former perspective on Buddhahood the "nondual yogic-attainment perspective," and the latter the "analytic-inferential perspective." *AA* 8 provided a plausibly ambiguous enough textual basis for these perspectives to come into direct opposition over its interpretation. Haribhadra, and those in India and Tibet who followed his approach, read *AA* 8 as a basis for an analytic-inferential understanding of enlightenment, drawing upon Abhidharma elements of the text and analyzing them through logico-epistemological methods of late Indian Mādhyamika. Ratnākaraśānti, Abhayākaragupta, and those who followed their approach read the same text as one of many Mahāyāna sacred texts, taught by the Buddha or high bodhisattvas, that reveal their own nondual yogic perspective on enlightenment, which is inaccessible to autonomous inference.

The clash between these two perspectives transcends the usual distinctions

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between scholastic schools. It centers specifically on the core enlightenment experience itself, Buddhahood as Buddhas themselves realize and experience it. All the commentators discussed above from Haribhadra's time onward were familiar with procedures of Buddhist logic and theories of yogic praxis, and drew upon each within their corpus of writings. And all of them (including Ratnākaraśānti) understood their views to be consistent with the Mādhyamika tradition. No one chose one of these perspectives, nondual yogic attainment or analytic-inferential, exclusively over the other for all philosophical purposes. But in a specific context (such as *AA* 8) where a Buddha's own core realization comes under explicit discussion, a decisive choice was made as to the uses and limits of human reason and conceptual thought vis-à-vis Buddhahood. Ratnākaraśānti, Abhayākaragupta, and Go ram pa read the teaching of *dharmakāya* in *AA* 8 as part of the sacred Mahāyāna literature that reveals nonconceptual yogic attainment, while Haribhadra and Tsong kha pa read it as part of systematic Abhidharmic analysis informed by Buddhist logic.

From another angle, the two perspectives on enlightenment are distinguished by which of the two Mahāyāna truths each primarily looks to for understanding a Buddha's realization. Are we to understand *dharmakāya* primarily by logical inference, the perspective of conventional truth worked out in human thought? Haribhadra and his followers sought to resolve the logical tension in the underlying doctrine of nonabiding nirvāṇa by such analytic-inferential means. Or are we to understand *dharmakāya* exclusively by reference to the perspective of a Buddha, the perspective of ultimate truth fully realized in yogic praxis? Ratnākaraśānti and his followers thought the logical tension in Mahāyāna descriptions of Buddhahood inheres in dichotomous conceptualization itself. The tension should therefore resolve itself in yogic praxis that reveals ultimate truth directly as nondual reality beyond conceptual dichotomies (nondual yogic attainment).

1.5
Wider Implications for the History of Mahāyāna Thought

We may now sum up the wide range of issues, historical, textual, philosophical and theological, that have been at stake in the ongoing controversy over *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* chapter 8 and point out some of their wider implications for the history of Mahāyāna thought in India and Tibet.

Haribhadra, with whom the controversy over *AA* 8 begins in our written record, was also the first commentator to ascribe the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* to Maitreya, the future Buddha. By Haribhadra's time, then, the *AA*'s authority approached (and exceeded in some cases) the authority of sūtras as an expression of enlightened awareness.[23] Literary analysis indicates that whoever the *AA*'s author may have been, his composition of *AA* 8 expresses a need of his own place and time: the need to draw new, specific correlations between two previously distinct literary expressions of

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Buddhahood that had become normative: Yogācāra and *Prajñāpāramitā* expressions. Because *Prajñāpāramitā* textual sources of *AA* 8 also contained material from prior Abhidharma traditions, *AA* 8 formed a unique, composite product of all three literary sources. Later scholars of different centuries saw different messages in the text through the perspective of the differing traditions in which they situated themselves. The composite nature of *AA* 8 gave it the look of Abhidharmic analysis to Haribhadra and others who saw it through the lens of Buddhist logic *cum* Abhidharma tradition. Other components of *AA* 8 gave it the look of a yogic praxis perspective on *dharmakāya*, guiding the interpretation of Ratnākaraśānti and others. Source criticism of *AA* 8 helps expose the different lenses through which later commentators saw the text.

By making a new interpretation of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (as Haribhadra did), or by calling for a return to prior authoritative interpretation (as Ratnākaraśānti did), scholars gave voice to concerns of their own time and place within the ongoing development of Mahāyāna thought and practice. And by voicing those concerns through their interpretation of a text now ascribed to Maitreya, their historically conditioned understandings appeared only to be clarifying what the future Buddha had intended, the eternal realization that all Buddhas have always had: *dharmakāya*. Philological arguments over *AA* 8, therefore, both express and mask the philosophical concerns behind them and the historical nature of those concerns. By doing philosophy and theology through interpretation of a received text of highest authority, scholars avoided giving the appearance of having a new perspective or making a personal innovation that might render their contributions unacceptable to conservative tradition. But embedded within the composition of *AA* 8 and the stages of debate over it is a history of great development and change in Buddhist thought that reveals itself upon closer scrutiny.

Yet also revealed in the corpus of *AA* 8 commentaries are great continuities, a continual reference back to long-established prior approaches to Buddhahood that transcend the usual distinctions between scholastic schools of Mahāyāna. Debates over *AA* 8 represent, in part, a recurrent collision between these two basic approaches: one approach drawing primarily upon Abhidharma-style analysis of Buddhahood in line with the logico-epistemological tradition and Mādhyamika thought; the other drawing primarily upon ancient traditions of nonconceptual yogic praxis as the main organizing principle behind the *dharmakāya* teaching of Mahāyāna as a whole.

The recurrent collision over *AA* 8 between these approaches reflects continuing disagreement over a wide range of related issues that center upon Buddhahood, and through that upon the nature of reality that a Buddha nondually knows and embodies. Specific disagreements have centered upon the following interrelated problems, couched here as questions:

1. In Mahāyāna tradition, how is the relationship between the unconditioned and conditioned aspects of a Buddha's attainment to be understood? How, in other

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words, are the transcendent and immanent dimensions of a Buddha to be understood?

2. In more specific terms, within the inherited three-*kāya* model of Buddhahood, how is the unchanging *svābhāvikakāya* to function as the basis for the conditioned *rūpakāyas*? Given a Buddha's nondual attainment of the unconditioned, what is the basis for his or her continuing appearances and activities within our conditioned world? In gnoseological models of Buddhahood, what is the relation between a Buddha's nondual awareness of ultimate truth and his or her awareness of our conditioned world?

3. Is the logical tension in such inherited models the result of faulty model-making? Or does the logical tension itself communicate an important fact about Buddhahood: that it lies beyond dichotomous thought, thereby challenging the trainee to enter into the deconstructive yogic practices that attain it?

4. How important should conceptual analysis be in guiding our understanding of Buddhahood? How important should yogic practice be?

5. How accessible is Buddhahood to human thought and reason? Does the term *dharmakāya* in sacred texts refer to something that utterly transcends human analysis, known accurately only from a Buddha's own point of view? Or is the content of a Buddha's mind sufficiently analogous to that of a non-Buddha that valid inferences can be drawn about its nature based on Abhidharma analysis of mental components of the path? Should Mādhyamika philosophers base their understanding of Buddhahood primarily upon the perspective of conventional truth worked out in human thought, or upon the perspective of nondual awareness of ultimate truth, a Buddha's own perspective, as it has revealed itself in sacred texts and is realized in yogic practice?

6. Does *dharmakāya* have two aspects (conditioned and unconditioned, conventional truth and ultimate truth) that are distinguished as distinct from each other within a Buddha's own awareness? This would mean the conditioned and conventional is thoroughly real (confirmed by a Buddha's direct valid knowledge). Or is the conditioned and conventional thoroughly illusory, *dharmakāya* being precisely the ultimate awareness in which their utter deconstruction has culminated?

7. Where a sacred text teaches the *dharmakāya*, should we understand the text to be articulating a key component of a doctrinal system? Or should we view the text as the self-revelation of something that transcends systematic thought?

Differing responses to these questions guided recurrent disagreement over *AA* 8 for over a millennium. This book comprises a study of those responses over the history of Indian and Tibetan Mahāyāna thought, as they come into view through literary-historical analysis of *AA* 8 and by analyzing the writings of its interpreters in each historical period.

Below the surface of this set of interrelated concerns, and driving those concerns, has been a profound logical tension located in the core of classical Indian Mahāyāna thought: the paradox of nonabiding nirvāṇa. From a wider perspective,

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the long controversy over *AA* 8 provides just one complex example of the way in which this underlying paradox, without being explicitly invoked, has quietly functioned as a driving force behind a wide variety of doctrinal disagreements throughout the long history of Mahāyāna thought in India and Tibet.

Although this book specifically analyzes the controversy over *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* chapter 8, then, its implications go well beyond that text. The debates over *AA* 8 serve to illustrate subtle ways that surface discussions among Buddhist exegetes both express and hide their underlying purposes. They show us how scholars' historically conditioned perspectives on underlying philosophical problems implicitly guide their interpretations, even when their mode of expression gives the appearance of merely philological concern ("the verse doesn't say that; its says this"). The philosophical tension generated by the paradox of nonabiding nirvāṇa that drove the *AA* 8 debates has not previously been seen clearly, precisely because of the way the norms of Buddhist exegesis have hidden its own underlying purposes.

Our study of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* therefore sensitizes us to a dual function of traditional Buddhist interpretation that might appear paradoxical: (1) *to clarify* the religious issues of one's place and time through one's interpretation of a received text, and (2) *to hide* the role of historical-cultural change—in other words, to clarify the relevance of tradition to a new place and time, and to hide all signs of newness.

Appreciating this from our study of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* corpus affects our view of a wide range of other doctrinal problems in Indian and Tibetan texts outside of that corpus. In particular, when the tension in the paradox of nonabiding nirvāṇa that drove the *AA* 8 controversy is revealed, we begin to see how the same tension contributed to other disagreements over Buddhahood in other textual domains, whose modes of discourse have also tended to hide its implicit role. And those other disagreements have not been analyzed sufficiently in their relation to that underlying tension, to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* controversy, or to each other.

Those other disagreements over Buddhahood in India and Tibet share with the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* controversy the concern to clarify the relations between the transcendent and immanent poles of nonabiding nirvāṇa: the relationship between Buddhahood as an attainment that transcends the world and the world as the sphere of its immanence and activity. Topics of disagreement have included: (1) the relation between a Buddha's knowledge of ultimate reality and knowledge of the world; (2) how Buddhahood, which has transcended the world, is salvifically active and accessible to beings in the world; (3) how to understand Buddhahood to be embodied in the world; (4) the precise ontological relation between Buddhahood and living beings, including the centrality or marginality of the doctrine of Buddha-nature *(tathāgatagarbha);* (5) the precise way in which enlightenment is made accessible to beings through the path (through the collection of enlightenment's causes, by eliminating what covers an intrinsic purity, simultaneist versus gradual models of awakening, etc.).

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