

The Non-emptiness of the *Tathāgata* in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*-Group

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Thanks to several previous studies, the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (MPNS) has been proved to shift its central thought from the *buddhakāya* idea to the *tathāgatagarbha/buddhadhātu* idea. The present author has shown in another paper (Suzuki [1999]) that the movement between the *buddhakāya* idea and the *tathāgatagarbha/buddhadhātu* idea appears in the larger context including the MPNS, and has extracted this context from the various Mahāyāna *sūtras* under the name of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*-Group (MPNS-G), which consists of the *Mahāmeghasūtra* (MMS), the MPNS, the *Āṅgulimāliyasūtra* (AMS) and the *Mahābheṛīsūtra* (MBhS). While the AMS is a direct successor of the MPNS, the MBhS succeeds the MPNS critically and shifts back its central thought from the *tathāgatagarbha/buddhadhātu* idea to the *buddhakāya* idea again.

The MPNS-G declares or suggests the non-emptiness of the *tathāgata*. This is reinterpretation of the *pratītyasamutpāda* and the *śūnyatā* idea, and follows the rule of the historical Buddhist hermeneutics. It is especially worthwhile to note that the MBhS, like the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* in the *Vijñaptimātra* idea, devaluates the *śūnyatā* idea as imperfect. This quite negative attitude toward the *śūnyatā* idea does not appear in any other Indian texts on the *tathāgatagarbha* idea including the MPNS and the AMS. Aiming at establishing the theory that every sentient beings is able to perform religious efforts and become *buddha* on account of the non-emptiness and the eternalness of the *tathāgata*, the MBhS must reject any *sūtra* concerning the *śūnyatā* idea as imperfect. Though the MPNS is a pioneer in reinterpretation of the the *śūnyatā* idea, the MPNS cannot devaluate it perfectly because the *śūnyatā* idea is one of the main backgrounds to the MPNS. The MBhS's decisive attitude toward the *śūnyatā* idea devaluation becomes possible by having the MPNS as its basis.