The Double Structure of Dharmadhātu (Realm of Reality) and the Meaning of Sokushin

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It has been traditionally acknowledged that the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra (華嚴經) forms the theoretical basis of the Vairocanabhisambodhi-sūtra (大日経), the fundamental scripture of the Shingon-sect (真言宗) of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. As a matter of fact, we find in the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra almost all the important terms of the Vairocanabhisambodhi-sūtra such as Vairocana, vikurvita, adhiṣṭhana, simhavijṛmbhita, vyūhālamkāra etc.. It is our surmise, however, that the more important point of the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra as the theoretical foundation of the Vairocanabhisambodhi-sūtra lies in the fact that it offers us an image of the realm of reality (dharmadhātu 法界), the double structure of which is completely similar to that of the world of the Vairocanabhisambodhi-sūtra. This double structure of dharmadhātu clarifies the true meaning of the word sokushin (即身 “participant existence”) and offers us a new understanding of the idea of sokushin-jōbutsu (即身成仏), the religious ideal of Japanese esoteric Buddhism proclaimed by Kūkai (空海 774–835 A. D.), the founder of the Shingon-sect.

It is our fundamental understanding of the essential character of Tantric Buddhism that it is a compound of two contrastive, incompatible factors presented in the Vairocanabhisambodhi-sūtra and Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra (初会金剛頂経), “the two fundamental scriptures” of the Shingon-sect: the Mahāyānic ideal of difficult deeds (難行) accumulating two kinds of merits moral and intellectual (福智二資糧) over the unimaginably long period of three great uncountable aeons (三大阿僧祇劫) and the idea of yoga unifying the individual existence with the ultimate reality through the symbolic actions of the body, the mind and the speech (身口意三密).

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For a practiser of the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra*, the goal is set up in the unimaginably far distance of three great uncountable aeons. However, when he set his first step for this remote goal, or as long as he continues walking towards it, he is included in the realm of reality; and what assures him of this state of the existence is nothing but the double structure of *dharmadhatu* which is to be found commonly in both the *Buddhāvatamsaka-sūtra* and the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra*. On the other hand, the practiser of the *Tattvāsamgraha-tantra* can attain enlightenment quickly by unifying himself with *Vajradhatu* (金剛界, “the adamantine sphere”) which has already appeared to him externally on the top of Mt. Sumeru as a substantial matrix; and this is possible only because the double structure has been destroyed in this *tantra*.

Kūkai, once accepting from his Chinese master Keika (惠果阿闍梨 746–805 A.D.) the idea of sokushin-jobutsu (quick attainment of enlightenment), tried to change this meaning of the word secretly in his main work *Sokushin-jobutsu-gi* (“the Meaning of Sokushin-jobutsu”) as he is well aware of the critical character\(^1\) of Tantric Buddhism; he shifted the ideal of the *Shingon-sect* from the slope\(^2\) of genuine Tantrism to the slope of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The cream of the *Sokushin-jobutsu-gi* is expressed in following two verses of eight lines\(^3\):

六寛無礙常瑜伽 四種曼茶各不離
法然具足薩般若 心數心王過剝隣
三密加持速疾顯 重重帝網名即身
各具五智無際智 円鏡力故実覚智

It is in the fourth line that Kūkai reveals his true intention by synonimizing *sokushin* (即身) with *jūjātaimō* (重重帝網), an essential term for understanding the contents of the *Buddhāvatamsaka-sūtra*.

The term *jūjātaimō* expresses the state of the existence of a human being in the ideal realm of the *Buddhāvatamsaka-sūtra*. There, the whole world and each of individual existences included therein reflect each other or participate in each other; and these inexhaustibly multiplex relations form harmoniously the one and the only *dharmadhatu* (法界 the realm of reality) without hindering each other. This state of things is compared to the multiplex relations (重重) of mutual reflection between each of *maṇi*-jewels and all other *maṇi*-jewels tied on each knot of the net covering the palace of Indra (帝網).
The Double Structure of Dharmadhatu (Realm of Reality) (S. Tsuda)

Hôzô (法藏 643–712 A. D.), the greatest authority of the Chinese studies of the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra, clearly relates the term jūjūtai to the dharmadhatu of Samantabhadra bodhisattva (善賢法界) in the following sentence of his main work Kegonyōtangen-ki (華嚴經探玄記):

依善賢法界帝網重重主伴具足故名円教。

(“The teaching of the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra) is called ‘the complete teaching’ because the realm of reality (dharmadhatu) of Samantabhadra bodhisattva is the world the whole and each of the component parts of which are multiply pervading each other without obstructions as is compared to the net of Indra each mañi-jewels of which reflect all other mañi-jewels multiplyly.”)

We realize the fact that the realm of sokushin (即身 “participant existence”), the state of which is only provisionally identified with the state of enlightenment (成仏) in the above-mentioned second verse of the Sokushin-jobutsu-gi, corresponds to the dharmadhatu of Samantabhadra of the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra, the structure of which is to be reconstructed similarly to that of the world of the Vairocanâbhisambodhi-sūtra from the pilgrim story of Sudhana-śreṣṭhidāraka (善財童子) of the Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra, which is the last chapter of the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra and is commonly called Nyūhokkai-bon (入法界品 “entry to the realm of reality”).

The boy Sudhana starts his pilgrimage from the teaching of the first “good friend” (善知識) Mañjuśrī bodhisattva (文殊師利), that is the starting point of the process of promotion of mind viz. ten kinds of faith (十信). He visits “good friends” one after another and finally reaches to the pavilion of Maitreya bodhisattva (弥勒). Maitreya speaks highly of Sudhana who endured the entire process of the long, toilsome pilgrimage and finally reached the goal, and teaches him the true nature of the mind of enlightenment (bodhicitta 菩提心), which is the mind aiming at enlightenment and is at the same time the enlightenment itself.

Maitreya opens the door of the entrance and makes the boy enter into the pavilion, the inner dharmadhatu. The boy sees therein the inexhaustible ornaments (vyūha 荃嚴), that is, miraculous figures appeared from Maitreya through his miraculous ability, not only filling the pavilion but also pervading the entire
realm of reality (the outer dharmadhatu) and doing the deeds of benefiting all the living beings. The entire of these inexhaustible ornaments is “the purified body of reality” (浄法身) of Maitreya and is at the same time the body of the ultimate reality (dharma-kāya 身法) of Vairocana tathāgata as is suggested by the name of the pavilion Vairocanavyāhālāmākārargharbhahāmakātagara (嚴净藏楼閣 “the great pavilion named the storehouse of the ornaments of Vairocana”).

This name of the pavilion instantly reminds us of “the storehouse of inexhaustible ornaments of the sameness of the body, speech and mind” (身語心平等性無尽莊厳藏, Kāyavākcittasamata-kṣayavyāhālāmākārargha?) of the Vairocanabhśambodhi-sūtra which spatially corresponds with “the palace of the great adamantine realm of reality” (大金剛法界宮), the inner dharmadhatu, and at the same time spreads to the entire realm of reality, the outer dharmadhatu.

Sudhana thus reached to the goal, the realm of ideal (the inner dharmadhatu); but Maitreya does not allow him to stay there and instructs him to go back to Mañjuśrī. Sudhana goes to Mañjuśrī again; Mañjuśrī repeats his rudimentary teaching of faith (sraddha 信) and makes the boy enter into the abode of Samantabhadra bodhisattva, the Vajrasāgaragarbhā-bodhimāṇḍa (金剛藏道場), on the spot. Samantabhadra teaches the boy that as long as he holds faith, the most rudimentary thing, the realm of ideal is very near to him.

The double structure of dharmadhatu thus shown by the whole story of the pilgrimage of Sudhanaśreṣṭhidāraka indicates us the true meaning of sokushin (即身) which was defined, by Kūkai in his Sokushinjōbutsu-gi, to be the state of jūjutaimo (重重道網), the existence in the dharmadhatu of Samantabhadra.

We enter into the region of sokushin on the very moment that we start our first mind of aiming at enlightenment (初発心) as was shown in the case of Sudhana who entered into the outer dharmadhatu of Samantabhadra when he started his pilgrimage at the place of Mañjuśrī aiming at the remote goal, the inner dharmadhatu of Maitreya. We can keep ourselves existing in the realm of sokushin (the outer dharmadhatu) as long as we continue walking, on our own initiative, to the remote goal (the inner dharmadhatu) which is to be attained only through the long, toilsome process of accumulating merits over the long period of the three great uncountable aeons metaphorically shown by the course
We may find here a malicious paradox. We are able to enter into the dharmadhātu of Samantabhadra when we start faith. However, this faith can be realized only when we obtain the complete understanding of the reality of the world; and it takes us the three great uncountable aeons to do it. In the case of the Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra, we are included in the realm of sokushin, that is, the dharmakāya of Vairocana, the omniscience (sarvajñājñāna一切智智), when we accept on our own existence the three conditions of the omniscience, that is, “the three phrases” (三句): “the cause is the mind seeking for enlightenment” (菩提心為因); “the root is the compassion” (大悲為根); “the final aim is means (practically employed for the benefit of all the living beings in the world)” (方便為究竟); and these conditions are fulfilled only when we attain enlightenment after the period of the three great uncountable aeons.

However, we notice the fact that it is the very ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Kūkai as well to accept this paradox positively if we probe the import of the double structure of dharmadhātu more deeply into the theme of “the conversion of the basis of human existence” (āsravaparāvṛtti or āsravapariṣṭtī 転依) as is hinted by Kūkai by the word enkyō (円鏡) in the eighth line of the abovementioned verses of the Sokushin-jōbutsu-gi; the word enkyō reminds us of daienkyō-chi (大円鏡智 adarśajñāna) which is realized through the conversion of the basis of alaya-vijñāna (阿賴耶識). From this point of view, nothing is more encouraging than the well-known statement of Asaṅga shown in his Mahāyāna-saṃgraha (摄大乘論), which says with regards to the conversion of the basis of alaya-vijñāna as follows:

最清净法界所流正開熏習為種子故出世心得生。  
(“The converted mind arises from the seed of the remaining impression of the sacred (teaching) heard, which is nothing but the stream come from the completely purified realm of the truth.”)

It was necessary for Sudhana to endure the entire course of his toilsome pilgrimage to realize the fact that the conversion occurred to him when he started pilgrimage. However, once the meaning of the pilgrimage of Sudhana revealed to us through “the sacred (teaching) heard”, the Gañḍavyūha-sūtra
itself, we can experience the same conversion when we establish our own faith to the true nature of the dharmadhātu which is to be acquired from our understanding of the contents of the Buddhāvatamsaka-sūtra.

Kūkai who was well aware of the “critical character” of Tantric Buddhism finally took his stand on the slope of Mahāyāna Buddhism; he chose in his last work Unji-gi (吽字義) the abovementioned “three phrases” (三句) of the Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra as the religious ideal of Japanese esoteric Buddhism before the Tantric ideal of the Tattvasaṃgraha-tantra to attain enlightenment quickly through the yogic practice of uniting himself with the entire Vajradhātu (金剛界), which corresponds only with the inner dharmadhātu of the Vairocanābhisambodhi-sūtra.

The “three phrases”, being purely Mahāyānic, do not necessitate any tantric methods such as maṇḍala, mantra, mudrā etc.; we realize the efficacy of these tantric elements for the first time when we turn the aim of employing them from attaining enlightenment quickly (即身成仏) uniting ourselves with the absolute reality external to us (the inner dharmadhātu) such as Vajradhātu to entering into the realm of sokushin (即身), the inner dharmadhātu, or to converting the basis of our existence. This is the reason we estimate the religious attainment of the esoteric system of Kūkai very highly.

1) For the “critical character” of Tantric Buddhism, see S. Tsuda, A Critical Tantrism, Memoires of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, No. 36, 1978.
2) Tsuda, op. cit. p. 167f.