

The International Journal for Field-Being

Buddha-Fields and Field-Being in Mahayana Buddhism


by **Mu Soeng**

Barre Center for Buddhist Studies
Barre, MA, USA

IJFB, Vol. 1(1), Part 2, Article No. 5, 2001.

Citation URL: <http://www.iifb.org/ijfb/MSoeng-2-5>

- ¶1. This paper seeks to explore a possible definition of the term "Field-Being" in Mahayana Buddhism, through the notion of Buddha-Fields in its Indian and Chinese traditions. It takes the typology of the *Bodhisattva* as its basic frame of reference to understand how the Mahayana notion of Field-Being may be of relevance to us in view of our contemporary scientific and psychological understandings. I use here certain terms that occur with great frequency in Mahayana Buddhism, and my hope is that a creative understanding of these terms will throw some light on what might be meant by Field-Being in Mahayana. These terms are: *bodhi* (awakening), *sattva* (being), *bhumi* (field or land), and *kshetra* (field or land). Three composite terms—*Bodhi-sattva*, *Bodhisattva-bhumi*, and *Buddha-kshetra*—provide the bulk of the argument in this paper. In trying to find parallels for these terms in current scientific understanding, I interpret the generalized term "Field-Being" as the "space-time" continuum of quantum physics. There are three perspectives in the various strata of Mahayana that can be brought to bear on the issue of Field-Being: the phenomenological (from the Madhyamaka tradition), the psychological (*alaya-vijnana*), and the cosmological (three bodies of the Buddha), both from the Yogachara tradition. The cosmological perspective of Buddha-fields is shared both by the Prajnaparamita and the Yogachara traditions. Given the limitations of this paper, I can only make cursory references to some of these perspectives.
- ¶2. In the Yogachara tradition of later Mahayana, we find the formulation of *alaya-vijnana* (the storehouse-consciousness) which is itself a refinement of earlier Buddhist theory of "self." The Buddhist understanding of "self" is that it is made up of five "heaps" or "aggregates" (*skandhas*)-body, feelings, perceptions, formations, consciousness. Each aggregate is, in turn, a multiplicity of *dharmas* (elements). This, in essence, is the field theory of being shared by all schools of Buddhism.

- ¶3. In this theory, the body is the spatial-temporal canvas on which the drama of 'Field-Being' is played out. The "field" in this case are the "formations" (*samskaras*), the latent tendencies in the consciousness, that become the agent of how the other three aggregates of feelings, perceptions, and consciousness (which, together, we might call "being") are receiving and processing the data being encountered in the phenomenal world. In this formulation, it is appropriate to use the term name-form (*nama-rupa*) or mental-physical that the Buddhists themselves use, in the sense of an inseparable Field-Being unity.
- ¶4. In a broader classification, the four aggregates of feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness function as mental aspects (*nama*) against the background of form or body (*rupa*), but in a further sub-classification, the aggregate of formations functions as the "field" in which the "being" (feelings, perceptions, and consciousness) is manifesting itself. Since the "field" and the "being" are in an interdependent relationship to each other, it is more appropriate to speak of them as a Field-Being rather than two separate, independent entities. This is the essential teaching of the second noble truth of interdependent origination (Sanskrit: *pratitya-samutpada*). The Yogachara formulation of *alaya-vijnana* postulates a substratum of consciousness in which the active levels-"being" (feelings, perceptions, and consciousness combined), produce a "seed" (*bija*) or result which then drops down and becomes part of the passive levels-"field" (formations). Here is an attempt to look at the Field-Being theory of Yogachara in a visual sense:
- ¶5. 
- ¶6. The "valleys" in the above visual are the "field" which acts as a backdrop, what we might provisionally call the "unconscious," which is the storehouse for latent tendencies. The "peak" is the "being," representing the momentary appearance of feelings, perceptions, and consciousness in response to encounters with data from the phenomenal world. In its arising, the "being" is filtered through the existing "field" of latent tendencies; in its "dissolution," after its reconfiguration through encountering data from the phenomenal world, it becomes a "result" in the next moment, and becomes part of the next field. This process goes on ad infinitum, and the field itself is nothing more than an accretion of countless processes of being.
- ¶7. This interdependence of field and being is understood by the Madhyamaka tradition in a phenomenological sense. The famous lines from the Heart Sutra, having established that all five *skandhas* are empty, go on to say that "form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. That which is emptiness is form, that which is form is emptiness." In an absolute sense, both "field" and "being" are empty, but in a relative sense, both are the agent and result of each other.

- ¶8. Through this template it may be easier to understand the Buddhist karma-rebirth formulation. Rebirth is a process of momentary appearance and reappearance of being. It is the product (appearance) of past and present karma and also the agent of present and future karmic formations (fields), which is the reappearance of karma in a different configuration after it has been filtered through latent factors in the consciousness. The word *samsara* describes the Buddhist understanding of the cyclical nature of this Field-Being/karma-rebirth paradigm. The purpose of Buddhist meditation is the "purification" of this Field-Being so that consciousness cuts through the workings of past formations and, eventually, the karma-rebirth cycle.
- ¶9. Having outlined this theory of Field-Being primarily through the Yogachara formulations, I want to address the issue of "field of merit" which in turn gives rise to the notion of Buddha-fields. Historically, this idea finds mention in all the Nikayas (*Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta*, and *Anguttara*), and the idea here is that a noble disciple of the Buddha, through the power of his or her practice, not only benefits from the results of his/her own merit, but also creates a field of merit around him/herself, much like the field around a magnet, in which others may perform meritorious actions and reap extraordinary results. The analogy here is with a seed planted in a field with extraordinarily good growing conditions; the seed here is the meritorious action of a supplicant and the field with extraordinarily good growing conditions is the field of merit created by the practitioner.
- ¶10. The Arhat ideal of Nikaya Buddhism proposed that once a person has completely purified his/her field of merit/Field-Being, he or she will be reborn no more; no more field, no more being. Of course, so long as the Arhat was alive, others could participate in the field of merit he or she had created. In the Madhyamaka tradition of early Mahayana, the purification comes about through the application of a rigorous dialectic to see through to the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena, thus allowing no new formations to come into place, and letting all past formations be eradicated.
- ¶11. The tradition that we today call Mahayana emerged in ancient India, some time around 200 BCE, in incremental and barely discernible stages. In contrast to the Arhat model of the earlier layer, it proposed a new goal of practice and a new ideal called the Bodhisattva. The term "bodhisattva" and its usage is crucial in the development of Mahayana Buddhism, so much so that in the earliest stages of its growth the Mahayana movement was known as bodhisattva-yana (the bodhisattva-vehicle or path). Many of the Mahayana sutras/texts are celebratory hymns to the endeavor of the bodhisattva and elaborate upon the virtues (paramitas) of the bodhisattva.

- ¶12. What, then, we may ask, is a bodhisattva in Mahayana understanding? The word itself is a composite of two words: *bodhi* + *sattva*. *bodhi* is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *budh*, which means "to know" or "to be awakened." In a slightly different understanding, *bodhi* is the field of awareness in which an awakened consciousness dances its dance. The word "*sattva*" has a wider range of meanings; in one sense it means "a being;" hence a bodhisattva is "a being headed for awakening." A second meaning of *sattva* is "mind" (*citta*) or "intention" (*abhipraya*). In this sense, a bodhisattva would be one who cultivates bodhicitta (wisdom mind) directed toward awakening. A third meaning of *sattva* is strength or courage; in this sense the bodhisattva is one whose entire effort is directed toward awakening.
- ¶13. This, then, is the premise of this paper: bodhi/field and *sattva*/being in the bodhisattva typology symbolizing the area or field of activity of an awakened consciousness/being. In the newly-emergent Mahayana in ancient India, the term *bodhisattva* was given a radical, new interpretation and applies to anyone aspiring to Buddhahood. According to a contemporary scholar of Buddhism,

Motivated by extreme compassion (*karuna*), and tempered by the perfection of wisdom (*prajna*), the bodhisattva first completes three basic prerequisites that includes generating the thought of Awakening (*bodhicitta*), undertaking a formal vow to gain complete, perfect Awakening for the sake of all sentient beings (*pranidhana*), and receiving a prediction with regard to future attainment (*vyakarna*). Then, a path known as the bodhisattva path, and including ten stages (*bhumis*), is traversed. This path requires....deliberate rebirth in the cycle of samsara, and a sharing of all merit accrued with other sentient beings. [\[1\]](#)

- ¶14. In the new Mahayana movement, the training of the bodhisattva became prescriptive and was capped by a series of training steps. This new system of training was claimed by its proponents as a substitute for, or even superior to the Eightfold Path of the earlier classification. In later Mahayana tradition, Indo-Tibetan scholars translated bodhisattva as *byan chub sems dpa* ("Awakening-mind-hero"). This is an articulation of the bodhisattva as a new type of spiritual hero.
- ¶15. The enterprise of Mahayana Buddhism was: (1) to insist that the enlightenment experience of the Buddha was ahistorical; (2) that there could be many Buddhas; (3) that there could be many Buddhas simultaneously; and (4) to lay down a path of spiritual progress for the bodhisattva that would eventually lead to Buddhahood.

- ¶16. On all counts, the path of the Bodhisattva became a core doctrinal innovation in the emerging Mahayana movement. It incorporated elements that were already present in the earlier Eightfold Path classification but rearranged them in a different order and added some of its own. The attainment of Buddhahood was deliberately made much more difficult in order to distinguish itself as a greater (*maha*) engagement. This progression on the path of bodhisattvahood eventually came to consist of ten stages or *bhumis*. A *bhumi* is also translated as land or field; a bodhisattva-*bhumi*, then, is the Field-Being that becomes the ground or context for awakening and helping others.
- ¶17. A critical understanding in the formulation of ten-stages path of the bodhisattva is the inseparability of *bhumi* and *sattva*. Although, linguistically, *bhumi* (field) is a spatial term and *sattva* (being) is a temporal term, there is that essentialization of the two into one single term, bodhisattva-*bhumi*, so that it is used more in the sense of time-space continuum of physics. Much of Mahayana Buddhist literature is devoted to the issues of the manner in which human beings attain the perfection of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the manner in which, in turn, they help other beings in their quest for liberation from *samsara*. Just as the monastic community of early Buddhists was a *mélange* of the newly-ordained and the under-informed, and those of long standing and attainment, the bodhisattvas are also classified in the Mahayana texts as a mixture of different aspirations and persuasions:

- 1) The newly-set-out bodhisattvas who have not heard or who have rejected or will reject the perfection of wisdom (i.e. *Shunyata* or emptiness);
- 2) Bodhisattvas who have set out for a long time but who have not heard or who have rejected or will reject the perfection of wisdom (i.e. *Shunyata*);
- 3) Newly-set-out bodhisattvas who hear and accept the perfection of wisdom;
- 4) Bodhisattvas who have set out for a long time and who hear and accept the perfection of wisdom;
- 5) Irreversible bodhisattvas who will no longer backslide; these are the seventh-stage bodhisattvas, also called the *mahasattvas*;
- 6) Irreversible bodhisattvas who have received knowledge (prediction) of where they will be reborn as celestial bodhisattvas to continue their work;
- 7) Celestial bodhisattvas who work in different Buddha-fields to help all beings, such as Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara;
- 8) Samyaksambuddha, the Perfected Buddha, or Tathagata, who consciously choose to be reborn into the human world to help teach others, such as Shakyamuni Buddha before his *paranirvana*;
- 9) Samyaksambuddha who have become the *Dharmakaya* and are no longer manifest in the world, such as Shakyamuni Buddha after his *parinirvana*.

- ¶18. The Mahayana bodhisattva doctrine, a logical development from the older Buddhism but influenced by a complex set of factors, peopled the heavens with forces of goodness, and presented Buddhism with a new mythology. The new movement prospered greatly in the northwestern part of India where it was open to many influences from the Persian (the cult of Mithra, to take one example), the Middle Eastern, and the Mediterranean religions. Not the least of these influences on the development of Mahayana was a parallel rise of the *bhakti* (devotional) movement in a resurgent Hinduism.
- ¶19. But something remained constant at the core of these doctrinal and cosmological innovations: creating a "field of merit." However we understand the phrase in either Nikaya or Mahayana formulations, there was no denying that the purification of consciousness had tangible consequences. The only controversy was that the Mahayana followers accused the Arhats of creating a rather limited field of merit that will only help a few people. The Mahayanists proclaimed that the bodhisattva created a field of merit not for his personal liberation but for the liberation of all beings because he could not separate his own being from the being of sentient creatures.
- ¶20. The transitional literature from Nikaya Buddhism to Mahayana-the *Avadana*-contains a number of stories, each one of which is a description of the great fruits that come from planting a merit-seed in the field of a Buddha either while he is alive or after he has passed away. In fact, the *Avadana* literature makes the notion of buddha-field absolutely necessary to the path of Awakening; only by planting a merit-seed in such a field can one start out on the path of Awakening at all. Thus, the Buddha-field becomes the ground from which further awakened beings will grow. This theory provided the justification for the extravagant donations made to stupas and to the "Fragrant Chambers" (conceived as rooms in which the Buddha actually dwelled) established in each Buddhist monastery of the sub-continent. In this way, the Buddha, though totally unbound (*Dharmakaya*), still remained as a field of potential energy that might actualize itself as visions to the devotee, as well as a field in which the devotee's potential for awakening could grow. The movement from a new mythology to a new cosmology was but a logical step for the Mahayanists in ancient India. The new cosmological perspectives put forward by the Mahayanists spoke of "3,000 chiliocosms," each chiliocosms being a world-system of 1,000 million worlds.

Mahayana developed early notion of the supernatural and the sacred that guaranteed an exalted status to the symbols of its mystical and ethical ideals. Its notion of extraordinary beings populating supernal Buddha-fields and coming to the aid of suffering sentient beings necessitated a metaphysic and cosmology that could offer concrete images of a transcendent sacred. Accordingly, the abstract apophatic concept of emptiness was often qualified by, or even rejected in favor of, positive statements and concrete images. [\[2\]](#)

- ¶21. In the development of the bodhisattva mythology/typology in ancient India, the two classifications above point to Perfected Buddhas (Samyak-sambuddha), each of whom creates a "field of merit" to be called the "Buddha-field."

The universe of the classical Buddhist Indian imagination was a system of parallel worlds, all of which shared a similar structure. Although simple worlds could cluster in different ways into more complex world spheres or world systems, each individual world had the same number of continents, with the same shape and the same rivers and mountain ranges. The worlds differed, however, in the degree of happiness and virtue enjoyed by human beings by inhabiting each one of them. Some of these worlds-the most fortunate-were blessed by the presence of a perfectly enlightened buddha. This buddha presided over the spiritual life of his world, making it his own "buddha-field," or sphere of spiritual influence. It was believed that in some of these worlds the presiding buddha had "purified" his "field" to the point of transforming his world into a land completely free of evil, suffering and unhappiness. A "purified field" did not fit the mold of the standard world system-even its topography was often different. It would be replete with beautiful gardens; the air would be permeated by sweet fragrances and enchanting melodies; the land would be endowed with many marvels, and its inhabitants with miraculous powers-in short, these lands were veritable paradises. [3]

- ¶22. The notion of the Buddha-field is perhaps more easily understood through the doctrine of trikaya, or the Three Bodies of the Buddha. These three bodies are the *Dharmakaya*, the "Dharma Body;" *sambhogakaya*, the "Bliss body" or "enjoyment body;" and *Nirmanakaya*, the "constructed body" or "phantom body." Both the *sambhogakaya* and the *Nirmanakaya* are projections of the *Dharmakaya*.
- ¶23. *Nirmanakaya* is the body of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha, visible to ordinary human beings, intended to inspire people to embark on the path of Dharma. *Nirmanakaya* is the proactive aspect or projection of *Dharmakaya* in the phenomenal world; it is an act of reimagination of a Buddha in the ordinary world. *Nirmanakaya* operates in human time. *Sambhogakaya* is the subtle, quasi-material body, neither a fully relative nor a fully absolute body through which the Buddha guides highly developed practitioners on the path of Buddhahood. *Sambhogakaya* is also translated as "communal enjoyment body" which communicates the idea of sharing in the joy of a community both in causal and effective modalities; it operates in non-human time. In later Mahayana/Yogachara developments, the typology of *sambhogakaya* served as an ideal for practitioners to engage in visionary experiences that are essentially shamanic at their core. In early Mahayana cosmological formulations, the *sambhogakaya* came to be associated with a number of celestial Buddhas and

bodhisattvas. In Vajrayana (the later, esoteric tradition within Mahayana) the depiction of *sambhogakaya* became a complex iconographical phenomenon. In this perspective, the *sambhogakaya* is seen as an archetype, a symbolic representation of certain qualities of Buddhahood; it is the wisdom of *Dharmakaya* enjoyed by the Bodhisattvas in meditation.

- ¶24. The *Dharmakaya* is the unformed, unmediated, primordial consciousness. It is a synonym for ultimate reality itself, the final development of Buddhahood, an abstract resolution of all dualities (in *Shunyata* or emptiness), beyond any conceptualization or designation. *Dharmakaya* is beyond time and space. In this formulation, *Dharmakaya* is the Field-Being of the cosmos itself; the *Nirmanakaya* is the Field-Being of the *Dharmakaya* in human dimension; and the *sambhogakaya* is the Field-Being of the *Dharmakaya* in non-human realms. In this sense, the *Dharmakaya* is the entire quantum field wherein the quanta are manifesting themselves either as *nirmanakaya* or *sambhogakaya*. As a synonym for both the quantum field and *Shunyata* (emptiness) formulations, the notion of *Dharmakaya* also points to the interdependent nature of reality; what we call "Field-Being" is a non-local, interdependent process underlying the world of phenomena.
- ¶25. The basic notion of the Trikaya doctrine is that the Buddhas operate simultaneously in the conventional and absolute realms. It might be more accurate to say that their consciousness remains grounded in a realization of *Shunyata* or emptiness as the ultimate non-dual nature of reality even as they engage in the world of appearances and conventional reality. In the literature of early Mahayana, we find the paradigm of (1) a bodhisattva arousing the thought of *bodhicitta* in the presence of a Buddha; (2) receiving a prophecy of future birth as a Buddha; (3) progressing spiritually on the *bodhisattva-bhumi* over countless lifetimes; (4) becoming a Perfected Buddha (*samyak-sambuddha*); (5) simultaneously with 3 & 4, creating a Buddha-land (Buddha-*kshetra*) in which all aspirants can hope to be reborn, and work on their aspiration to be a Perfected Buddha.
- ¶26. In this literature, bodhisattvas can be incarnated as human beings, or even as animals; but the more advanced bodhisattvas, who have the greatest power for good, must be divine beings in the heavens. Though neither omniscient nor almighty, these divine bodhisattvas might be worshipped and prayed to without any misgiving, for it was part of their mission to answer prayers. Thus the bodhisattva-yana opened two possible paths or journeys for a Mahayana believer: (1) perfecting oneself in the ten stages of the *bodhisattva-bhumi*, or (2) beseeching a Perfected Buddha for protection and guidance. Mahayana was not content merely with creating the bodhisattva typology to distinguish itself from the earlier Buddhist ideals of the arhat; it also created a distinction between earthly bodhisattvas and the celestial or transcendent bodhisattvas. Again, a parallel with the creation of cosmic deities through the medium of Purana literature in Hinduism at about the same time has to be kept in mind. The earthly bodhisattvas embody altruistic compassion as well as the cultivation of

bodhicitta, the potential for Awakening. The transcendent bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have actualized the paramitas (perfections) over many eons and have attained Buddhahood, but have postponed their entry into complete nirvana. They are in possession of the perfect wisdom (of *Shunyata*) and are no longer subject to rebirth in samsara. But they continue to exist in extra-human realms and assume many forms as Upaya (skill-in-means) in order to help sentient beings on the path to Awakening.

- ¶27. The noble and beneficent bodhisattvas in the pantheon of Mahayana cosmology are objects of veneration and devotion by the believers. The best-known of these transcendent bodhisattvas are Avalokitesvara (also called Padmapani), the bodhisattva of compassion; Manjushri (the bodhisattva of wisdom); Vajrapani (destroyer of negative formations); Kshitigarbha (the guardian of purgatories who is seen not as a torturer but rather the superintendent of a model prison, doing his best to make life tolerable for his charges; he is also a protector of deceased children); Mahasthamaprapta (who brings to human beings the knowledge necessary for attainment of Awakening); and Samantabhadra (protector of all those who teach the Dharma and embodiment of the unity of nirvana and samsara.)
- ¶28. The premise that there could be other Buddhas in other world systems was always embedded in Buddhist cosmological perspectives. The notion of the Buddhas of the past and future, as well as extra-human realms of consciousness, is already present in the Pali Canon. The idea of Buddhas existing in other world-systems was first articulated in the *Akshobhyavyuha Sutra*, translated into Chinese during the second century CE. It was further elaborated with greater success in the *Saddharamapundarika Sutra* (the Lotus Sutra), making it perhaps the most influential sutra in East Asian Mahayana.
- ¶29. Though the Mahayana agrees with Early/Nikaya Buddhism that the world is full of sorrow and suffering, it is more optimistic. The presence of transcendent bodhisattvas is a ray of hope for those who, for whatever reasons, cannot work on their Awakening and wish to seek the help of fully liberated, compassionate beings.
- ¶30. The journey of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, both earthly and celestial, is said to begin with the arousing of *bodhicitta* (potential or thought of Awakening). In Mahayana, *bodhicitta* is used both in the sense of a determination to become a Buddha as well as the actual state of awareness of a Buddha. *Bodhicitta* is one of the key concepts in later Mahayana and is often equated with Buddhahood as well as Tathagatagarbha. Implicit in this understanding is the notion that each "bit" of *bodhicitta* contains, in a way, all of Buddhahood, as in a hologram. In this sense, *bodhicitta* also becomes a "field" in which and through which a consciousness develops itself and becomes complete when it realizes its non-separation from *Dharmakaya*.

- ¶31. The later Zen tradition encapsulates this holographic aspiration in more poetic and graphic terms. The Four Great Vows are part of the daily recitation in all Zen monasteries. The first of these vows says: "All beings, one body, I vow to liberate." This vow, from the Mahayana perspective, works on several levels and a deeper understanding of it reveals the core teachings of the tradition. It shows the non-separation of one individual being from others; all beings are seen as one single body which is not different from one's own body-being. The aspiration to liberate one's body-being is intimately linked to the Awakening of all body-beings because one contains the many, and the many is none other than the one.
- ¶32. This holographic model finds striking parallels in quantum physics where an electron is found to be not one thing but a totality or ensemble enfolded throughout the whole of space much like *Shunyata* or *Dharmakaya* would be viewed in Mahayana. David Bohm, one of the leading quantum physicists of this century, uses the term "implicate order" to refer to a "field" out of which an "explicate order," or a "phenomenon-being" may emerge. A Bohmian interpretation of the phrase "All beings, one body" would be to see this process of interaction as a "holomovement," which tries to convey the dynamic and ever-active nature of incalculable "enfoldings" and "unfoldings" that moment-by-moment create our universe. The example that Bohm uses to describe his sense of the implicate and the explicate orders is that of a geyser. In impossibly unpredictable ways, a geyser shoots out of a body of water and immediately collapses back into it. The shooting geyser is indistinguishable from the body of water out of which it emerged and into which it will collapse back. It is both the "Field-Being" and "being-field" at the same time. This interdependence Field-Being perspective as the hallmark of Mahayana Buddhism is now finding some resonance in the interface between Buddhism and science in our time. Both religion and science have the tools, if used properly, to approach the vastness and mystery of the universe in ways that affirm our sense of interconnectedness with everything in the universe. In her ground-breaking book on a comparison between the teaching of mutual causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory in science, Joanna Macy explores the systems view of reality, arising in our century from biology and extending into the social and cognitive sciences and finds:

As the pattern-building interactions of phenomena were studied, a different kind of causality came into view, one that is mutual, involving interdependence and reciprocity between causes and effects. Such a notion, which is an anomaly within the linear paradigm that has dominated Western culture, bears striking similarity to the Buddhist teaching of causality...[\[4\]](#)

¶33. Furthermore,

For reality itself, in the systems view is dynamic, flowing ever breaking upon us like the waves of the living sea. And the cognitive system, the mind, rides it by the continual process of perceiving and elaborating meanings. [5]

¶34. The systems view of reality-that it is dynamic, and mutually caused and interdependent-finds resonance in the Mahayana understanding of Field-Being, for it has always seen the microcosm and the macrocosm as reflecting each other. Everything in the universe is interwoven and the Bodhisattva archetype is an expression of that interweaving. This way of thinking has enormous potential for the future of the earth as a single integrated eco-system. Damaging one part of the whole means endangering the whole planet. This planetary ecological and holographic awareness finds its parallel in the wisdom teaching of Indra's Net in the Hua-yen school (based on the Avatamsaka Sutra) of the Mahayana tradition.

Because a dust-mote is [identical with, or is] an expression of the ultimate Reality, it can therefore contain all things... Since all the universes contained within a dust-mote are also expressions of Reality, they too contain all other universes...this observation goes on indefinitely, and thus realms-embracing-realms ad infinitum are established. An illustration of this truth can be seen by either the demonstration of the interreflection of mirrors, or by the metaphor of the marbles of Indra's Net... [6]

¶35. Quantum physics holds that at the quantum level there is nothing other than energy and information. Each particle binds an incredible amount of energy, as witnessed, on the cosmic level, in the spectacle of streaking comets, burning stars, and scattering radiation. At the same time, each particle, though its composition is extremely complicated, is a carrier of information about the fundamental laws that govern its behavior at the elementary levels. The quantum field is the field of pure potentiality and it is influenced by attention, as seen in experiments where the mere act of observation alters the behavior of the particle, as wave or particle, in unpredictable ways. While, on the material level, human beings share the same basic elements such as oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen with, say, a tree-and thus part of the same quantum field-at the level of attention, and its attendant intention, human beings have a much greater potentiality for manifesting the unmanifest. Because human consciousness is infinitely flexible, it is capable of expanding the boundaries of its awareness endlessly to include and influence all areas of energy and information in the quantum field.

- ¶36. If we transpose the quantum physics model to Buddha's Awakening experience, we can say that the field of awareness of the Tathagata (the fully awakened Buddha) became infinite and was able to access all the information about beings past and present, the specifics of their repeated rebirths as well as the patterns of interdependent origination each one shares with all others in the universe. To put it another way, the consciousness of the Tathagata covers the entire quantum [cosmic] field and is capable of influencing any or all parts of it through intention and attention. A celestial bodhisattva is an embodiment of the same field of awareness and sets up the intention to guide all beings caught up in samsara.
- ¶37. Physicists allow that in quantum field there are no boundaries, no hard edges. Energy and information flow into each other without impediments. Each quantum reference point is instantly connected with all other quantum points holographically. The ebb and flow of energy and information in the quantum field is porous and containerless. Although beings, visible and invisible, may be a manifestation of this quantum field, this field itself is not limited by their manifestation. In the Yogachara formulations, the *Dharmakaya* too is not limited by the manifestation, or lack of the manifestation, of beings in it. In that sense, the Yogachara formulation finds resonance in the quantum field equation; energy and information (in the *alaya-vijnana*) are transformed through attention and intention (of the bodhisattva).
- ¶38. In conclusion, synonymous terms such as Dharmakya, Buddhahood, bodhicitta, *Shunyata*, even though of different linguistic usage, are trying to express the same Field-Being paradigm as *Bodhi-sattva*, *bodhisattva-bhumi*, and *Buddha-kshetra*. In the folk Buddhism of East Asia, the Buddha-fields have been taken as literal constructions but we might want to use these fields as metaphors or archetypes for certain qualities in the human mind where a bodhisattvic intention is indistinguishable from bodhisattvic attention. The intention-attention paradigm is the Field-Being of the bodhisattva in the same sense that quantum physics speaks of space-time continuum. Both are fields of pure potentiality.

END NOTES

1. Charles Prebish, *Historical Dictionary of Buddhism*, Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press (1993), 75.
2. Luis O. Gomez, *Buddhism in India in Buddhism and Asian History*, New York: Macmillan Press (1000), 80.
3. Luis Gomez, *The Land of Bliss*, Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press (1996), 8-9.

- [4.](#) Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory* , Albany: State University of New York Press (1000), 92.
- [5.](#) *ibid.*, 86.
- [6.](#) Garma C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality* , University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University (1000), 165-166.

ISSN 1548-6001

Professor Lik Kuen Tong, Ph.D., Editor
Professor Curtis R. Naser, Ph.D., Co-Editor
Professor Theresa Dykeman, Ph.D., Managing Editor

IIFB - Fairfield University - Fairfield, CT - 06430
Tel: (203) 254-4000 Ext. 2857, 2851 Fax: (203) 254-4074
ltkong@iifb.org -- cnaser@iifb.org -- <mailto:cnaser@iifb.org>

Site Design by [Commonwealth WebWorks](#)
Database to Web Programming by [Eidos Virtual Web](#)
Powered by *ColdFusion*