

Origin of the Term *taizang* 胎藏 (Jp. *taizō*; womb):

With a Focus on Amoghavajra's 不空 Translations

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This article investigates certain key terms found in the translations by Amoghavajra (or Bukong) 不空 (705–774). This work is intended to facilitate further in-depth research into Amoghavajra's doctrinal views. It presents findings establishing that in Amoghavajra's translations a close relationship can be found between *garbha* and *taizang* 胎藏 (Jp. *taizō*; womb). Furthermore, I also examine the use of *taizang* in the translations attributing to Amoghavajra to reconsider the origin(s) of the term *taizang*.

1. *Taizang* 胎藏 (Jp. *taizō*) in Amoghavajra's translation of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*

While the original Sanskrit sutra is not extant for comparison, two recensions of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sutra* are extant in Chinese: the *Da fangdeng rulaizang jing* 大方等如來藏經 (*T* vol. 16, no. 666), translated by Buddhahadra 佛陀跋陀羅 (358–429) in the Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), and the *Da fangguang rulaizang jing* 大方廣如來藏經 (*T* vol. 16, no. 667), translated or refurbished by Amoghavajra (or Bukong) 不空 (705–774)¹⁾ under the Tang 唐 (618–907).

To attain a detailed understanding of Amoghavajra's translation of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, the following paragraph should be discussed prior to others.

[A] 如是，如是！善男子！如來，應，正等覺，以佛自己智慧光明，眼見一切有情欲，瞋，癡，貪，無明，煩惱。彼善男子，善女人，為於煩惱之所凌沒，於胎藏中有俱胝百千諸佛，悉皆如我。如來智眼，觀察彼等有佛法體，結跏趺坐寂不動搖，於一切煩惱染污之中，如來法藏本無搖動，諸有趣見所不能染。是故我今作如是言：彼等一切如來如我無異。²⁾

An extremely significant term appears in Amoghavajra's translation, namely, *taizang*. To the best of my knowledge, although *taizang* had been deployed a few times before Amoghavajra's works, as in the development of East Asian Esoteric Buddhism, it was its appearance in the translations and commentaries compiled by Amoghavajra and his

contemporary Buddhist monks that had the most influential and direct role. In both the Tibetan and Buddhahadra's translations of the *Tathāgatarbha-sūtra*, no term adequately corresponds to *taizang*. One possible reason for this is that Amoghavajra intentionally inserted this classical Chinese term to make enable the use of the *Tathāgatarbha-sūtra* as support for Esoteric Buddhist doctrine to bring it into use as part of the background of East Asian Esoteric Buddhism.

2. Use of *taizang* in Amoghavajra's other translations

According to Misaki Ryōshū, the term *jingang jie* 金剛界 (Jp. *kongō kai*; Diamond Realm) originated during the Tang 唐 Dynasty (618–907) in China, while the term *taizang jie* 胎藏界 (Jp. *taizō kai*; Womb Realm), originated in the treatises of the Japanese Buddhist monk Annen 安然 (841?–915?).³⁾ That is to say, we should not ignore the fact that although both *taizang* (Jp. *taizō*) and *taizang jie* (Jp. *taizō kai*) are the more significant doctrinal conceptualizations in East Asian Buddhism, especially Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, in Chinese and very early Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, the term *taizang* was the more prevalent terminology including the senses of both 'womb' and 'embryo.'

We certainly observe find this term in the translations and treatises related to Yixing 一行 (683–727) and Amoghavajra, the earliest two Esoteric Buddhist monks in China. However, in his own commentaries, Yixing only mentions *taizang* in the *Da piluzhena chengfo jing shu* 大毗盧遮那成佛經疏. The *Dari jing* 大日經 [= Chin. *Da piluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* 大毗盧遮那成佛神變加持經; Jp. *Dainichi kyō*] is the first true Buddhist tantra, the earliest comprehensive manual of tantric Buddhism. Only a few fragments of the Sanskrit text of the *Dari jing* have been collected, but it survives in Chinese and Tibetan translations. Śubhakarasiṃha 善無畏 (637–735) and Yixing translated this text into classical Chinese in 724, when Amoghavajra was 19.⁴⁾ In this Chinese translation, the term *taizang* appears 12 times, whereas nearly half of them are either the term *dabei taizang* 大悲胎藏 (the womb of great compassion) or the expression in this context.⁵⁾ For his part, Amoghavajra, or some texts attributed to him, used *taizang* a few times. Among these texts, non-Chinese texts are available for the *Da fangguang rulaizang jing* 大方廣如來藏經 and the *Jingangding yiqie rulai zhenshi shedasheng xianzheng dajiaowang jing* 金剛頂一切如來真實攝大乘現證大教王經 [= Chin. *Jingangding jing*; Jp. *Kongōchō kyō*; Skt. *Vajraśekhara Sūtra/Tantra*]. In the *Da fangguang rulaizang jing*, as observed, Amoghavajra sometimes

translates some other terms as *taizang*. Therefore, identifying the underlying Sanskrit terminology rendered as *taizang* in the *Jingangding jing* becomes very important.

In the *Jingangding jing*, translated by Amoghavajra, the term *taizang* is mentioned only twice, both in the same paragraph, given below.

從一切如來心纔出已，一切虛空平等性智善通達故…善修習故，金剛薩埵三摩地，一切虛空界胎藏所成，一切世界遍滿等量出生大金剛寶形，住佛掌中。從彼金剛寶形出一切世界微塵等如來身，出生已，作一切如來灌頂等，於一切世界作一切如來神通遊戲。虛空界胎藏妙出生故，金剛薩埵三摩地極堅牢故，聚為一體，生虛空藏大菩薩身，住世尊毘盧遮那佛心。⁶⁾

The term *taizang* is mentioned only two times in this paragraph, appearing as the compound term *xukong jie taizang* 虛空界胎藏. Furthermore, this *xukong jie taizang* is considered a fundamental basis from which worlds and realms can be generated. Compared to *dabei taizang* mentioned above, this term *xukong jie taizang* is only found in the *Jingangding jing*, translated by Amoghavajra, in Chinese Esoteric Buddhist texts. For this reason, it is possible that having been influenced by the term *dabei taizang* which derives from the *Dari jing*, Amoghavajra coined the term *xukong jie taizang* to further unpack *taizang*, the term we find in his Chinese translation of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*.

To further understand the origin of this classical Chinese term, it is necessary to examine part one of the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* [the Compendium of Truth (or Essence) of all the Buddhas], which corresponds to Amoghavajra's Chinese translation. This Sanskrit text reads as follows:

suparibhāvitatvāc ca vajrasattvasamādheḥ sarvākāśadhātugarbhamayaḥ sarvalokadhātusamavasaraṇapramāṇo mahāvajraratnavigrahaḥ prādurbhūya, bhagavataḥ pāṇau pratiṣṭhitaḥ / atha tasmād vajraratnavigrahāt sarvalokadhātuparamāṇurajaḥsamās tathāgatavigrahāḥ prādurbhūya, sarvatathāgatābhiṣekādīni sarvatathāgatarddhivikurvītāni sarvalokadhātuḥ kṛtvā, sarvākāśadhātugarbhasaṃbhavatvād vajrasattvasamādheḥ sudṛḍhatvāc caikaghaṇaḥ ākāśagarbhamahābodhisattvakāyaḥ saṃbhūya, bhagavato vairocanaśya hṛdaye sthitvedam udānam udānāyām āsa ॥⁷⁾

Since the meditation (*samādhi*) of Diamond Being (*vajrasattva*) can embrace and contain, it is possible that [this meditation] takes the whole space [or vacuity] (*ākāśa*) realm (*dhātu*) as the womb (*garbha*) and appears as the status of the huge and great Diamond Gem-consecration (*mahāvajraratnavigraha*) which is as large as the space combining all of worlds and realms (*sarvalokadhātu*). All of these are established and exist (*pratiṣṭhita*) above the hands of the Buddha. Then, based on the Diamond Gem-consecration (*vajraratnavigraha*), a numerous number, as many as the number of minimal dusts (*paramāṇuraja*) in all of worlds (*sarvalokadhātu*), of the

bodies of the buddhas (*tathāgatavigraha*) appeared. From this, all buddhas' supramundane power (*sarvatathāgatarddhivikurvītāni*), such as the ablution (*abhiseca*) of all buddhas, appeared in all worlds and realms (*sarvalokadhātuṣu kṛtvā*). The meditative absorption (*samādhi*) of the Diamond Being (*vajrasattva*) can be generated from all wombs of space [or vacuity] (*sarvākāśadhātugarbha*). This is extremely solid [and tough] and can be condensed into one existence (*sudṛḍhatvāc caikaghana*), followed by becoming the body (*kāya*) of the space-womb bodhisattva (*ākāśagarbhamahābodhisattva*). This [space-womb bodhisattva] lives in the heart of the Buddha and Vairocana.⁸⁾

It is clear from the Sanskrit text that the classical Chinese term *xukong jie taizang* 虛空界胎藏 does not correspond to one term alone. Both *ākāśagarbha* and *ākāśadhātugarbha* are translated by Amoghavajra as *xukong jie taizang* in the *Jingangding jing* (Jp. *Kongōchō gyō*). One of the common translations of the two Sanskrit terms indicates that *ākāśa* is space or vacuity (Chin. *xukong* 虛空), and *dhātu* is realm, element or nature (Chin. *jie* 界 or *xing* 性). The problematic term, *garbha*, means womb. It is well known that *garbha* was normally translated as *zang* 藏 (Jp. *zō*). However, Amoghavajra translates this term as *taizang*.

As mentioned above, influenced by the Chinese rendering of the *Dari jing*, Yixing merely mentions *taizang* in the *Dari jing shu* 大日經疏, which is a Chinese commentary. When Amoghavajra began to study under the tutelage of Vajrabodhi, Yixing had already even completed the *Dari jing shu*. Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing translated the *Dari jing* into Chinese in 724, and composed a commentary on this sutra in 725, the sixth year since Amoghavajra took Vajrabodhi as his teacher. Furthermore, based on the brief overview of their lives, it is likely that Amoghavajra already read the *Dari jing* and the *Dari jing shu* when he was translating the *Jingangding jing* and the *Da fangguang rulaizang jing*. For this reason, it is very likely that the uses of the term *taizang* in Amoghavajra's translations bore the influence of the *Dari jing* and the *Dari jing shu*.

However, it should also be considered that it is difficult to determine a single Sanskrit correlate of the Chinese term *taizang* in extant Sanskrit texts. Thus, there are two possibilities here. First, Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing also translated *garbha* as *taizang*, which indicates that Amoghavajra inherited the interpretation of these two translators regarding this key term. Second, Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing rendered some other Sanskrit words as *taizang*. This implies that Amoghavajra originally translated *garbha* as *taizang*, no matter what its parallel word was in Sanskrit texts. Both of these observations confirm the

significance of the appearance of the term *taizang* in Amoghavajra's translations.

Concluding Remarks

Garbha was usually translated as *zang* (Jp. *zō*), but Amoghavajra translated it as *taizang* in the *Jingangding jing*. Both *ākāśagarbha* and *ākāśadhātugarbha* are translated by Amoghavajra as *xukong jie taizang* in the *Jingangding jing*. This is not limited to the case of the *Jingangding jing*, but also includes the *Da fangguang rulaizang jing* as well. When Amoghavajra began his course of learning under the guidance of Vajrabodhi, Yixing had already completed the *Dari jing shu*. For this reason, it is very likely that the cases of the term *taizang* in Amoghavajra's translations were deeply informed by Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing's works, such as the *Dari jing* and the *Dari jing shu*. There are two possibilities here. First, Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing also translated *garbha* as *taizang*, which indicates that Amoghavajra inherited the interpretation of these two translators. Second, Śubhakarasiṃha and Yixing rendered some other Sanskrit words as *taizang*. This implies that Amoghavajra originally translated *garbha* as *taizang*.

Notes

- 1) Regarding the biography of Amoghavajra, see Yoritomi Motohiro, "Chūgoku mikkyō no nagare," 1999; Chou Yi-liang, "Tantrism in China," 1945.
- 2) *Da fangguang rulaizang jing* 大方廣如來藏經, 1 *juan*, translated by Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774), *T* no. 667, vol. 16, 1:1, 461c03–21.
- 3) Misaki Ryōshū, *Taimitsu no kenkyū*, 1988, p. 486.
- 4) Stephen Hodge, *The Maha-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra, With Buddhaguyā's Commentary*, 2003, p. 17.
- 5) In the main body text, excluding the *jisong* 偈頌 (chants or hymns), of the Chinese *Dari jing* 大日經, almost all of the cases in which *taizang* 胎藏 appears as the term *dabei taizang* 大悲胎藏. There is only one exceptional case in which *fajie taizang sanmei* 法界胎藏三昧 is used in the main body text of this text.
- 6) *Jingangding yiqie rulai zhenshi shedasheng xianzheng dajiaowang jing* 金剛頂一切如來真實攝大乘現證大教王經, 3 *juan*, translated by Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774), *T* no. 865, vol. 18, 3:1, 209c20–210a03.
- 7) TITUS Version, line 15 of p. 19 – line 6 of p. 20. This text edition is an edited one based on both Yamada Isshi's work (Yamada Isshi, *Sarva-Tathāgata-Tattva-Saṅgraha nāma Mahāyāna-Sūtra, A critical edition based on a Sanskrit manuscript and Chinese and Tibetan translations*, 1981) and Lokesh Chandra's work (Lokesh Chandra, *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṅgraha*, 1987), by Jost Gippert in Frankfurt. (See <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/ind/aind/bskt/stts/stts.htm>)
- 8) There is one published Japanese translation from the first part of the *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṅgraha*, the original Sanskrit text of the *Jingangding jing* translated by Amoghavajra. Tsuda Shinichi, *Bonbun-*

wayaku Kongōchōgyō, 2016. In addition, Dale Todaro also translated a part of the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha* with Kūkai 空海's commentary. See Dale Allen Todaro, *An Annotated Translation of the 'Tattvasaṃgraha' (Part 1) with an Explanation of the Role of the 'Tattvasaṃgraha' Linage in the Teaching of Kūkai*, 1985.

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Key words *taizang* 胎藏 (*taizō*), *garbha*, Amoghavajra, *Tathāgatarbha-sūtra*, *Jingangding jing*

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