

**The “Mahāyāna” in the *Awakening of Faith*  
in *Mahāyāna*: Its Meaning and Use,  
and the Confusion thereof**

Tao Jin (金濤)

(Illinois Wesleyan University)

**국문요약**

이 논문은 『대승기신론』, 특히 대의장인 「입의분(立義分)」에서 ‘대승(mahāyāna)’이라는 단어 해석에 초점을 맞췄다. 일반적으로 많은 현대 학자들은 “대승”이라는 단어는 (소승불교에 대응하는) ‘대승(Mahāyāna)’ 불교라기 보다는 소위 ‘일심’으로 이해해 왔다. 즉, 진여로서 그리고 현상으로서 동시에 존재하는 마음으로, 이런 의미에서 정적인 상태나 동적인 상태 모두에서 이중

적인 절대성으로 이해되어왔다. 논이 그것 자체로 ‘대승’ 불교의 가르침이 되어야 한다고 주장하는 것은 몇몇 학자들에 의해 ‘대승’이라고 이름붙여진 ‘일심’에 대한 이러한 설명 때문이다. 이 논문은 ‘대승’을 이와 같이 ‘절대적’으로 읽는 것을 반박하고자 한다. 『대승기신론』에서 ‘대승’이라는 단어는 지속적으로 그리고 배타적으로 ‘대승’ 불교 또는 그것의 가르침을 가리킨다는 것을 논증한다. 그 ‘대승’이라는 단어가 대의장인 「입의분」에서 각각 ‘쿰’과 ‘수례’로서 절대적인 것으로 특징지어지고 비유하는데 사용되었고, 그렇게 함으로써, ‘대승’으로서 ‘대승’ 불교를 실현하고 숭상하는데 사용되었다는 것을 논증한다. 그리고 ‘대승’이라는 단어의 의미와 사용의 혼동이 ‘대승’을 절대적인 것으로 읽는 현대적 읽기를 초래했음을 논증하고자 한다.

주제어: 대승(mahāyāna), 절대성, 입의(立義), 법의(法義), 위대함(大)의 7가지 요소, 자기 숭배, 요시토 하케다

The familiar Buddhist term “mahāyāna”, in both its Chinese translation (i.e., “*dasheng*” 大乘) and transliteration (i.e., “*moheyan*” 摩訶衍), appears a total of eleven times in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* 大乘起信論 (“*Qixinlun*” henceforth in its popular Chinese abbreviation).<sup>1)</sup> Of these eleven appearances, one occurs in the title, four in the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi* (i.e., *Liyi fen* 立義分), and the other six scattered among various places of the treatise. While in its six scattered occurrences the word “mahāyāna” is understood, unsurprisingly, as referring to the “Mahāyāna” (as opposed to the “Hīnayāna”) school of Buddhism and thus as the name of a religion and its teaching,<sup>2)</sup> the “mahāyāna” in the *Liyi* (and occasionally also in the title) is often accorded, interestingly, a quite unexpected reading in modern scholarship. In his 1967 English translation of the treatise, Yoshito Hakeda 羽毛田義人 explicitly and emphatically identifies the “mahāyāna” in the *Liyi* and the title as the name of the Absolute,<sup>3)</sup> referring to the so-called “One Mind” (*yixin* 一心), a mind that unifies *dharma*s both mundane and supramundane and in that sense exists simultaneously in both its quiescence and dynamicity.<sup>4)</sup>

1) For an explanation of the method for documenting Buddhist canonical texts, see References.

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are and all emboldening (in Section II) is mine. I would like to thank JEONG Juhee of the CRBS for translating my abstract into Korean.

2) for the obvious reason that they have attracted little exegetical and scholarly attention, a fact suggesting that there seems to be no disputes over such a reading in these six “mahāyānas”

3) See Hakeda (1967), 28: “It should be noted that the term ‘Mahayana’ here is not used in the usual sense of the word, that is, Mahayana versus Hinayana. According to the definition given in the discussion immediately following, Mahayana designates Suchness or the Absolute. The title of the text, the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, should therefore be understood as the ‘Awakening of Faith in the Absolute,’ not in Mahayana Buddhism as distinguished from Hinayana Buddhism.”

Such “Absolute” reading is obviously unusual,<sup>5)</sup> but there seems to be quite a consensus among modern *Qixinlun* scholars, who widely, though differently, read “Absolute” in “mahāyāna”.<sup>6)</sup>

What, one may thus ask, exactly does this “mahāyāna” mean in *Qixinlun*? Does it name a religion and its teaching, or does it refer to the Absolute this religion teaches about? How are these two readings – i.e., the religion reading and the “Absolute” reading – related to each other? Why did it often happen in the interpretations of the *Liyi* and (sometimes) the title?

4) See *Qixinlun* at T32n1666p575c22: 是心則攝一切世間法、出世間法。 “This mind incorporates (in itself) all *dharma*s in (both) the mundane and the supramundane worlds.”

5) for most traditional commentaries read “religion” or “teaching” in “mahāyāna”, rather than “Absolute” – see Section I for further discussions.

6) Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1900, 47) translates the Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 word for the Absolute, “*you-fa*” 有法 (i.e., “*fa*” 法 in the Paramārtha 真諦 version of *Qixinlun*), directly as “mahāyāna”, and further makes the *Qixinlun* author declare through his English translation that “mahāyāna” is the “Soul” (i.e., Suzuki’s word for the Mind, or the Absolute): T32n1667p584b23 言有法者, 謂一切眾生心。(i.e., T32n1666p575c21 所言法者, 謂眾生心 in the Paramārtha version) “What is the Mahāyāna? It is the Soul of all sentient beings.” Kawano Shigeo 河野重雄 (1973& 1974) distinguishes between the translation and transliteration of the word, i.e., “*dasheng*” 大乘 and “*moheyan*” 摩訶衍, arguing that the former names the religion, while the latter refers to the Absolute; Sung-bae Park (1983, 35-42), in his discussion of the structural relationship in the title of the treatise, identifies “mahāyāna” as the Absolute, and the “awakening of faith” as its function; and, more recently, Ishii Kōsei 石井公成 (2006, 11) argues that, under the influence of the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* 勝鬘經, *Qixinlun* uses the “mahāyāna” in its Chinese transliteration to name the “true reality” (*jissō* 實相), or the “state” (*kyōkai* 境界) of reality knowable only to the Buddha, in the same way as the word refers to the *Tathāgatagarbha* 如來藏 in the *Śrīmālā Sūtra*. For other examples, see Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1923, 38), Ui Hakuju 宇井伯壽 (1936, 100), Walter Liebenthal (1958, 165), Takemura Shōhō 武邑尚邦 (1959, 29), Hirakawa Akira 平川彰 (1973, 53), Kashiwagi Hirowō 柏木弘雄 (1991, 56), and Takasaki Jikidō 高崎直道 (2009, 33).

And, last but not the least, what makes this unusual reading possible?

Addressing such questions, this paper argues that the word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* refers consistently and exclusively to (and in that sense means) the “Mahāyāna” Buddhism or its teaching; that the word is used in the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi* to respectively characterize and metaphorize the Absolute as “great” (i.e., “mahā”) and “vehicle” (i.e., “yāna”) and, in doing so, to praise and glorify “Mahāyāna” Buddhism as a “great vehicle” and thus a superior teaching; and that the confusion of the meaning and the use of the word results in the modern reading of “mahāyāna” as the Absolute.

This paper thus consists of three sections, with the first proposing the “meaning” of “mahāyāna” in the treatise, the second discussing the “use” of the word in *Qixinlun* and its traditional commentaries, and the third exploring the confusion between the “meaning” and “use” of the word in modern *Qixinlun* scholarship as the possible cause of its “Absolute” reading.

## I. The Meaning of “Mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun*

The word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* refers consistently and exclusively to the religion or teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Such religion reading is a commonsense knowledge to traditional commentators, is not unusual even in modern scholarship where the “Absolute” reading seems to be the consensus, and is shown clearly in the treatise itself in its use of a “*shuo-fa*” 說法 formula throughout the treatise and a “*fa-yi*” 法義 structure within the *Liyi*.

As a commonsense knowledge, such religion reading dominates the

traditional interpretations of the treatise. To Tanyan 曇延 (516-588) and Wōnhyo 元曉 (617-686), “mahāyāna” constitutes the “tenet” (*zong* 宗, or *zongti* 宗體) of the treatise.<sup>7)</sup> As such, it offers in Fazang’s 法藏 (643-712) words a unified message of the undifferentiated truth, a message metaphorized as the “Mahāyāna of one flavor” (*yiwei dasheng* 一味大乘)<sup>8)</sup> and identified as the “ultimate and fundamental Dharma” (*jiujing genben fa* 究竟根本法) of Buddhism.<sup>9)</sup> Teaching such “Dharma”, the “Mahāyāna” rivals (and is of course superior to) the Hīnayāna Buddhism.<sup>10)</sup> And, naming such a teaching, “mahāyāna” constitutes the most obvious alternative for the many names of the highest teaching in Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the “One Vehicle” (*yisheng* 一乘) and “Buddha Vehicle” (*fosheng* 佛乘).<sup>11)</sup> These examples

7) See Tanyan at X45n755p156a8: 以大乘為宗“...with ‘mahāyāna’ as its tenet”, and Wōnhyo at T44n1844p203b6: 大乘是論之宗體“The ‘mahāyāna’ is the central tenet (*zongti*) of the treatise.” Wōnhyo’s “*zongti*” is a different form of “*zong*” – for a discussion of “*zong*” and its related concepts, see my 2009 study (56) of the “introductory topics” in Buddhist commentaries.

8) See Fazang at T44n1846p241b1: 謂以巧便開一味大乘。作法義二種。“(This) means that (it) expediently unfolds the Mahāyāna of one flavor into the two categories of the ‘*fa*’ and ‘*yi*’.”

9) See Fazang at T44n1846p248b12: 未知於何乘起行。謂於大乘。以是究竟根本法故。“One may ask in what vehicle/*yāna* (i.e., teaching) should (one) cultivate (him/herself). The answer is that (it should) be in ‘mahāyāna’, for it is the ultimate and fundamental Dharma.”

10) Thus, specifying Hīnayāna as the teachings of the *Śrāvakas* and *Pratyekabuddhas*, Wōnhyo comments at T44n1844p202c5: 不與聲聞辟支佛共故。名為大乘。“Not in common with the *Śrāvakas* and the *Pratyekabuddhas*, it is thus named the ‘Mahāyāna’,” and Fazang remarks at T44n1846p245b18-b19: 又亦起大乘之信。則對宗別行行。非小乘信也。“(It) also (means) to awaken the Mahāyāna faith – (this is) to distinguish between the practices according to (their) schools, (and this means that it) is not the Hīnayāna faith.”

11) See Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592) at T44n1843p175b15-b16: 總而言之。亦名一乘。無異趣故。亦名佛乘。佛所乘故此皆是。名雖有異。其實不改。故言大乘也。“Spoken together, (they are) also called the ‘One Vehicle’. Undivided in their (spiritual) pursuit, (they are) further called the ‘Buddha Vehicle’, for (all) Buddhas ride in this same vehicle. (And), while (these) names

and more<sup>12)</sup> should suffice to show that such religion reading is a prevailing opinion in the traditional interpretations of the treatise.<sup>13)</sup>

In the same time, such reading is not unusual even among modern scholars of the treatise. Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, for example, clearly states that "mahāyāna" refers to the "purport" (*kyōgi* 教義) of Mahāyāna doctrines,<sup>14)</sup> and Yusuki Ryōei 湯次了榮, for another example, explicitly defines "mahāyāna" as "the truth" (*shinri* 真理) of life and universe.<sup>15)</sup> Similarly, to Taixu 太虛,

---

are different, their essential nature remains unchanged, and as such (they are also) called the 'Great Vehicle' (i.e., 'Mahāyāna')."

12) For a few further examples, see Tankuang 曇曠 at T85n2813p1092a21, T'achyōn 太賢 at T44n1849p411a14-a15, Zhenjie 真界 at X45n762p336b16-b17 and Zhengyuan 正遠 at X45n763p370b18.

13) The *Shimoheyān lun* 釋摩訶衍論 seems to have suggested an "Absolute" reading in its concept of "non-dual mahāyāna" 不二摩訶衍 (T32n1668p596c28-c29), but its avowed goal is to "re-explain" 重釋 the "mahāyāna": T32n1668p592b21 論曰。今造此論重釋摩訶衍。"(Thus) speaks the treatise: The writing of this treatise today is (designed) to re-explain the 'mahāyāna,'" and such a goal is in obvious imitation of *Qixinlun*'s "re-expounding" 重說 of the "Dharma/teaching" 法: T32n1666p575c7 問曰: 修多羅中具有此法, 何須重說? "Question: This Dharma/teaching is (already) available in *sūtras* - why (then) is it necessary to expound (it here) again (in a treatise)?" Such an obvious and consciously executed imitation clearly identifies the "mahāyāna" in the *Shimoheyān lun* as the "Dharma/teaching" in *Qixinlun*. Consistent with such a reading, Morita Ryūsen 森田龍遷 (1935, 84) identifies "mahāyāna" as the content of teaching, i.e., the "principle" (*ri* 理), or the "perfect and true principle" (*enman shinri* 圓滿真理): 大乘には總じて教、理、行、果の四法がある——尅實すれば四法は理の一法に歸し、かくて大乘と即ち圓滿真理の異名にほかならぬこととなる。"Generally speaking, there are the four *dharma*s of 'teaching, principle, practice and result' in the 'mahāyāna' - (but) more usefully (speaking), the four *dharma*s can be summarized in the one *dharma* of 'principle', thus (making) this 'mahāyāna' nothing but a different name of the perfect and true principle."

14) Mochizuki (1932), 1: 大乘の二字は、所信の理論的教義を擧げたもので "The two words of 'mahā-yāna' capture the purport of the doctrines in which the 'faith' (is awakened) ..."

“mahāyāna” is the “only true vehicle (i.e., teaching)” (*weiyi zhensheng* 唯一真乘),<sup>16)</sup> and to Yinshun 印順, the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi* summarizes the “mahāyāna” as “the fundamental teaching of the Tathāgata” (*rulai de genbenyi* 如來的根本義).<sup>17)</sup> That is, even amidst the trend of “Absolute” reading among modern scholars, there is still a remarkable agreement on the religion reading of the “mahāyāna”.

Such reading is shown more clearly in the treatise itself. More specifically, it is shown in a “*shuo-fa*” 說法 formula as it appears in various forms throughout the treatise, and also in a “*fa-yi*” 法義 structure as it outlines the main teachings of the treatise in the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi*. Of these two expressions, the first identifies “mahāyāna” as the object of doctrinal exposition, hence reading it as a religion or its teaching, and the second gives this “mahāyāna” the “*yi*” 義 of the Absolute as its content, hence reinforcing such a religion reading.

In the first case, the *Qixinlun* is designed, as it claims, to “*shuo-fa*” 說法, or to “expound the Dharma” of the Buddha – thus the following words:

15) Yusuki (1941), 58: 摩訶衍即ち大乘なるものは、實に宇宙人生の真理にして、如來八萬四千の法門と云ふも、皆此を説明せしものに外ならず——“In fact, the ‘Mahāyāna’, or the ‘Great Vehicle’, constitutes the truth of life and universe, and the so-called 84000 teachings of the Tathāgata are nothing but the explications of such (truth) ...”

16) See Taixu’s (1920) interpretation of “mahāyāna”: (聲聞/獨覺等) 不得謂之乘; 唯一真乘, 但是從菩薩而如來之大乘耳。“(The *Śrāvakas* and the *Pratyekabuddhas*) shall not be named a ‘vehicle’; the only true vehicle can only be the Mahāyāna that comes from the bodhisattvas.”

17) Yinshun (1960), 45: 立(大乘) 義的義, 即總說大乘——如來的根本義 “To establish (*li* 立) the ‘purport’ (*yi* 義) of the (Mahāyāna), i.e., to ‘*li-yi*’, is to generally summarize the Mahāyāna – the fundamental teaching of the Tathāgata.”



1. There is a Dharma that can awaken (in sentient beings) the faculty of Mahāyāna faith, and for this reason (this Dharma) should be expounded.<sup>18)</sup>
2. This Dharma is (already) available in *sūtras* – why (then) is it necessary to expound (it here) again (in a treatise)?<sup>19)</sup>

This “*shuo-fa*” formula also appears under other guises – i.e., to “compose” (*zao* 造) or to “expound” (*shuo* 說) the “treatise” (*lun* 論) that contains the Dharma:

1. It is for these reasons that this treatise is composed.<sup>20)</sup>
2. Therefore, designed to generally summarize the boundless meanings of the vast and profound Dharma of the Tathāgata, this treatise should be expounded.<sup>21)</sup>

or to “generally summarize” (*zongshe* 總攝), to “reveal” (*xianshi* 顯示), or to “expound” the “purport” (*yi* 義) of the Dharma:

1. Therefore, designed to generally summarize the boundless purport of the vast and profound Dharma of the Tathāgata, this treatise should be expounded.<sup>22)</sup>
2. It is in this (nature) of the mind that the purport of Mahāyāna is revealed.<sup>23)</sup>
3. The profound and vast purport of all Buddhas, I have now expounded in a

---

18) T32n1666p575b18: 有法能起摩訶衍信根, 是故應說。

19) T32n1666p575c7: 修多羅中具有此法, 何須重說?

20) T32n1666p575c5-c6: 有如是等因緣, 所以造論。

21) T32n1666p575c16-c17: 如是此論, 為欲總攝如來廣大深法無邊義故, 應說此論。

22) See Note 21.

23) T32n1666p575c23: 依於此心顯示摩訶衍義。

synopsis, accommodating (in the same time those of inferior) capacities.<sup>24)</sup>

or to “generally enunciate” (*zongshuo* 總說) the Dharma that is hailed as the “Great Vehicle” (i.e., “Mahāyāna”):

1. (This teaching, under the name of) ‘Mahāyāna’, is to be generally enunciated from two (perspectives).<sup>25)</sup>
2. Thus, (this) Mahāyāna (teaching), which is the secret treasure of all Buddhas, I have now generally enunciated.<sup>26)</sup>

Occurring in similar contexts, and making similar statements, these various formulations of the same structure equate “expound” (*shuo* 說) with “compose” (*zao* 造), “summarize” (*she* 攝) and “reveal” (*xianshi* 顯示) as verbs, and “mahāyāna” with “Dharma”, “treatise” and “purport” as the objects of such verbs. As the object of “expounding”, and of the same nature of the “Dharma”, “treatise” and “purport”, this “mahāyāna” refers unmistakably to the teachings of the Mahāyāna Buddhism, rather than to the Absolute, as Hakeda and others have claimed.

In the second case, such a “mahāyāna” is outlined in the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi* in a twofold structure of “*fa-yi*” 法/義:

(This teaching, under the name of) ‘Mahāyāna’, is to be generally enunciated

24) T32n1666p583b15: 諸佛甚深廣大義，我今隨分總持說。

25) T32n1666p575c20: 摩訶衍者，總說有二種。

26) T32n1666p583a23: 如是摩訶衍諸佛祕藏，我已總說。

from two (perspectives). What are these two (perspectives)? The first is (the perspective of) the ‘*fa*’, and the second is (the perspective of) the ‘*yi*’.<sup>27)</sup>

Of these two components of the structure, the “*fa*” 法 names the Absolute,<sup>28)</sup> and the “*yi*” 義 provides three different but related meanings surrounding the concept of the Absolute. Of these three meanings, the “*yi*” refers, first, to the characterization of the Absolute in three aspects of “greatness” (i.e., “mahā”), which is further metaphorized as the “vehicle” (i.e., “yāna”):<sup>29)</sup>

The so-called ‘*yi*’ thus consists of (a characterization of the Mind) in three aspects. What are these three (aspects)? First, the greatness of (its) essence ...; second, the greatness of (its) attributes ...; third, the greatness of (its) function .... (In short, this teaching of the Mind – in its three aspects of greatness – is the vehicle on which) all Buddhas had previously ridden (to arrive at their

27) T32n1666p575c20-c21: 摩訶衍者，總說有二種。云何為二？一者、法，二者、義。

28) It must be noted that this “*fa*” is not the same “*fa*” in the “*shuo-fa*” formula, although they share the same word. That is, while it refers to the teaching in the “*shuo-fa*” formula, in the “*fa-yi*” structure it names the Absolute. Thus Fazang explains this “*fa*” as the “essence of dharmas in the Mahāyāna” (i.e., *dasheng fati* 大乘法體, T44n1846p250b5), and Zixuan 子璿 (965-1038) reads it as the “essence in the Mahāyāna” (i.e., *dasheng ti* 大乘體, T44n1848p326a15). Indeed, if it refers to “teaching” as it does in the “*shuo-fa*” formula, it would overlap with the “*yi*” 義 of the “*fa-yi*”, which refers primarily to the purport of the Mahāyāna.

29) Such a relationship between the two component words of the “mahā-yāna” is clearly explained in Taixu’s (1920, section 4) words: 原論主之意，‘大乘’之‘大’，乃彰表詞，‘大乘’之‘乘’，乃比況詞。“According to the author of the treatise, the ‘mahā’ of the ‘mahāyāna’ is a word for the description (of the nature of the Absolute), and the ‘yāna’ of the ‘mahāyāna’ is a word (used as) a metaphor (for this Absolute).” For further discussion of this relationship, see Section II.

Buddhahood), and all bodhisattvas are riding to reach the stage of Tathāgata.<sup>30)</sup>

This metaphorized characterization is consciously summarized in the two words of “great” and “vehicle”, i.e., of “mahā-yāna” – thus the “*yi*” also refers to the “meanings” of “mahā” and “yāna”. Such characterization (*yi* 義) of the Absolute, thus summarized in the “meanings” (*yi* 義) of “mahā-yāna”, serves ultimately to provide the basis for the expounding of the “Mahāyāna” teaching – “it is in this (nature) of the mind that the purport of Mahāyāna is revealed,”<sup>31)</sup> – thus the “*yi*” refers ultimately to the essential “purport” (*yi* 義) of the Mahāyāna teaching.

In other words, the “mahāyāna” in the *Liyi* is presented through the structure of “*fa-yi*” 法/義, i.e., first through the identification of its Absolute (*fa* 法), which is the One Mind, and second through an analysis of its purport (*yi* 義) as summarized in the metaphorized characterization (*yi* 義) of this Absolute and expressed with the meanings (*yi* 義) of the words “mahā” and “yāna”. In still other words, the presentation of the “mahāyāna” is focused on the “*fa*/Absolute” as its object, but consists in the threefold exposition of the “*yi*” of the “*fa*/Absolute” as its content. Thus giving “mahāyāna” the “*fa*”-based “*yi*” as its content, the “*fa-yi*” structure identifies the “mahāyāna” as a religion, or its teaching, hence reinforcing the religion reading of “mahāyāna”. It is perhaps in this sense that Fazang remarks on the task of *Qixinlun*:

30) T32n1666p575c25-p576a1: 所言義者, 則有三種。云何為三? 一者、體大, … 二者、相大, … 三者、用大, …。一切諸佛本所乘故, 一切菩薩皆乘此法到如來地故。

31) T32n1666p575c23: 依於此心顯示摩訶衍義。

(This) means that (it) expediently unfolds the Mahāyāna of one flavor into the two categories of the ‘*fa*/Dharma’ and ‘*yi*/purport’ – (it) lays out the ‘Dharma’ of One Mind and then presents (it) from two perspectives, and analyzes the ‘purport’ (of such) oneness and then presents (it in) three (aspects) of greatness.<sup>32)</sup>

The “Mahāyāna of one flavor” is apparently the teaching, and the expounding of this teaching consists in the presentation of the “*fa*”, which is the “One Mind” or the Absolute, and of the “*yi*” in its three aspects of “greatness”, as metaphorized as “vehicle”.

This religion reading of “mahāyāna”, as illustrated through the “*fa-yi*” structure, is aptly summarized in Yinshun’s comments: “The *Qixinlun* expounds the Mahāyāna Dharma on the basis of the mind of sentient beings (i.e., *fa*) and through the explication of its essence, attributes and function (i.e., *yi*).”<sup>33)</sup> That is, the goal is to present the “Mahāyāna” Dharma/teaching (*Dasheng fa* 大乘法), and such teaching takes as its content the characterization (*yi* 義) of the Mind (*zhongshengxin-[fa]* 眾生心[法]) as the greatness in the three aspects of essence, attributes and function. Such reading is more succinctly summarized in the title Mochizuki gives to his discussion of the *Liyi*: “The Outline of This Treatise, the Mahāyāna Dharma and the Tathāgatagarbha Mind.”<sup>34)</sup> That is, the *Liyi* constitutes the synopsis or the “outline” (*kōryō* 綱領) of the treatise, such a synopsis summarizes

32) T44n1846p241b1-b2: 謂以巧便開一味大乘。作法義二種。分一心法。復作二門。析一義理。復為三大。

33) Yinshun (1960), 12: 起信論依眾生心(法), 顯示體、相、用(義), 以說明大乘法。

34) Mochizuki (1922), 353: 本論の綱領、摩訶衍法と如來藏心。Also see a discussion of similar implication on page 356.

the “Mahāyāna” or the “Mahāyāna Dharma” (*Makaen-hō* 摩訶衍法), and the essence of such a Dharma lies in the presentation of the “Tathāgatagarbha Mind” (*Nyoraizō-shin* 如來藏心), a presentation made up of the characterization of the Mind.

Thus, as the object of “expounding”, and with the “*yi*” of the Absolute as the content of such “expounding”, the word “mahāyāna” in this treatise refers unmistakably to the religion/teaching of the “Mahāyāna” Buddhism.

## II. The Use of “Mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun*

While the word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* refers consistently and exclusively to “Mahāyāna Buddhism”, it has an additional role to play in the treatise: It is used, through the reading of its two component words, to respectively characterize and metaphorize the Absolute as “great” (i.e., “mahā”) and “vehicle” (i.e., “yāna”), and, in doing so, to praise and glorify the form of Buddhism that teaches about such Absolute as a “great” and superior teaching, a teaching that deserves the name “Mahāyāna”. Such use, in other words, justifies the name “Mahāyāna” with the characterization “mahā-yāna”, marked in that sense by a “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic.

Such use occurs, implicitly, in the second half of the *Liyi* chapter. While the word “mahāyāna” itself does not appear in the section, its two component words are consciously and meticulously woven into a succinct presentation of the Absolute, with the “mahā” (“great”) embedded to outline three aspects of its “greatness”:

First, the **greatness** of (its) essence – i.e., all *dharmas* are (ultimately the Mind in its state of) Suchness, undifferentiated, un-discriminated, neither increasing, nor decreasing; second, the **greatness** of (its) attributes – i.e., (such a Mind, in the form of) Tathāgatagarbha, is fully endowed with innumerable inherent meritorious qualities; third, the **greatness** of (its) function – i.e., (this Mind) produces all kinds of good work in (both) the mundane and supra-mundane worlds.<sup>35)</sup>

and the “yāna” (i.e., “vehicle”, but in its verbal form “ride” in this context) to highlight its role in bringing about enlightenment:

(In short, this teaching of the Mind – in its three aspects of greatness – is the vehicle on which) all Buddhas had previously **ridden** (to arrive at their Buddhahood), and all bodhisattvas are **riding** to reach the stage of the Tathāgata.<sup>36)</sup>

More specifically, the “great” component of the word is used to describe the nature of the Absolute, which is, in many exegetical analysis, unlimited,<sup>37)</sup> immeasurable,<sup>38)</sup> all-encompassing,<sup>39)</sup> beyond words and intellection,<sup>40)</sup> all

35) T32n1666p575c25-c28: 一者、體大，謂一切法真如平等不增減故。二者、相大，謂如來藏具足無量性功德故。三者、用大，能生一切世間、出世間善因果故。

36) T32n1666p575c29-p576a1: 一切諸佛本所乘故，一切菩薩皆乘此法到如來地故。

37) See Wōnhyo at T44n1844p202a27.

38) See Huiyuan at T44n1843p175b10-b11.

39) See Wōnhyo at T44n1844p202b29, Fazang at T44n1846p245b13, and Zongmi and Zixuan in their interpretation of the Fazang interpretation.

40) See Tanyan at X45n755p153c6-c7, and Wōnhyo at T44n1844p202a27-a28.

knowing<sup>41)</sup> and universally salvific,<sup>42)</sup> and the “vehicle” component is used to explain, metaphorically, the function of the Absolute,<sup>43)</sup> which, comprising both wisdom and compassion,<sup>44)</sup> “transports” (i.e., as a “vehicle”) and thus delivers the sentient beings from the ocean of suffering in the *Saṃsāra*.<sup>45)</sup> Thus presenting the Absolute as “mahā” and “yāna”, such use of “mahāyāna” highlights the absoluteness of the Absolute, and, in the sense that the superiority of content often bears witness to the superiority of a teaching, defines the form of Buddhism that teaches about such Absolute as the superior “Mahāyāna” teaching.<sup>46)</sup> As indicated above, such use is designed to justify the name “Mahāyāna” with the characterization “mahā-yāna”, a justification marked conspicuously by the “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic.

Such implicit use of “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* is explicitly testified to in the traditional commentaries of the treatise, where it is highlighted and elaborated upon, with its “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic consciously and consistently reproduced in all such interpretations. Tanyan, for example, describes the Absolute as both “mahā” and “yāna”, and with such description accounts for the name “Mahāyāna”, a name of the “tenet” and thus the teaching of the treatise.<sup>47)</sup>

---

41) See Tanyan at X45n755p153c7-c8.

42) See Tanyan at X45n755p153c8.

43) See Fazang at T44n1846p245b14-b21.

44) See Tanyan at X45n755p153c11-c12.

45) See Huiyuan at T44n1843p175b11, Wōnhyo at T44n1844p202c1, and Fazang at T44n1846p245b14.

46) See Section I for a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between the characterization of the Absolute and the Mahāyāna teaching.

47) See Section I for a brief discussion of Tanyan’s religion reading.



1. Thus this Suchness is described as 'great' in its portrayal, and called a 'vehicle' in its actions of compassion and wisdom,"<sup>48)</sup>
2. For these three (aspects of) greatness<sup>49)</sup> ... the name of 'Mahāyāna' thus comes into being."<sup>50)</sup>

Huiyuan, for another example, offers a similar presentation of "mahā" and "yāna", and concludes that presentation with a similar justification of the name "Mahāyāna":

That which is described as 'great' is portrayed as such because nothing surpasses (it) ...; that which is labeled as 'vehicle' is defined (as such) because it 'transports' (as a 'vehicle') (i.e., 'delivers' the sentient beings from the *Samsāra*). It is for (these two components that such a teaching) is called the 'Mahāyāna'.<sup>51)</sup>

His explanation of the "mahā" and "yāna", obviously borrowed from the *Liyi*, apparently characterizes the Absolute, and such characterization is designed, as apparently, to account for the name of a superior teaching, such as "One Vehicle", "Buddha Vehicle" or simply "Mahāyāna" in the context of *Qixinlun*.<sup>52)</sup> In other words, the logic in his explanation is conspicuously also "mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna". In the same line of thought, Wōnhyo and Fazang explain the "mahāyāna" through an explanation

---

48) X45n755p153c1-c12: 故此真如。目之曰大。悲智所遊履謂為乘。

49) with the metaphor of "vehicle" omitted, perhaps for the sake of conciseness

50) X45n755p154a4-a5: 由此三義大故... 大乘之名。從此生矣。

51) T44n1843p175b10-b16: 所言大者。物莫能過。目之為大...所言乘者。運載為義...故言大乘也。

52) See Section I for a brief discussion of Huiyuan's religion reading.

of its two component words (with Fazang almost reproducing Wōnhyo verbatim):

- a. Of the so-called ‘mahāyāna’, the ‘mahā’ is a name that focuses on (and thus describes) the Absolute, and its meaning is ‘all-encompassing’; and, the ‘yāna’ is a name that metaphorizes (this Absolute), and it (refers to) transportation (i.e., deliverance of the sentient beings) as the function (of this Absolute).<sup>53)</sup>
- b. The ‘mahā’ is focused on the Absolute, and its meaning is ‘encompassing’; and, the ‘yāna’ is a name that metaphorizes (this Absolute), and it (refers to) transportation (i.e., deliverance of the sentient beings) as the function (of this Absolute).<sup>54)</sup>

Their explanation of the “mahā” and “yāna”, as noted above, is used to characterize the Absolute, and this twofold characterization is used to account for the “mahāyāna”, which refers to the “Mahāyāna” teaching, as opposed to the “Two Vehicles” of the *Śrāvakas* and the *Pratyekabuddhas* (in Wōnhyo’s words), or simply to the Hīnayāna (in Fazang’s words).<sup>55)</sup> That is, both commentators also justify the “Mahāyāna” with the “mahā-yāna”, clearly reproducing the same “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic.

Such implicit use of “mahāyāna”, as explicitly testified to in its elaboration in the traditional commentaries of the treatise, is, however, not unique to *Qixinlun* itself. It is, in fact, adapted from an older and perhaps more popular

53) T44n1844p202b29-c1: 言大乘者。大是當法之名。廣苞為義。乘是寄喻之稱。運載為功。

54) T44n1846p245b13-b15: 大者。當體為目。包含為義。乘者就喻為稱。運載為功。

55) See Section I for a brief discussion of Wōnhyo and Fazang’s religion reading.

model in the Mahāyān tradition, a model that consists in the presentation of the “mahā” alone, rather than both “mahā” and “yāna”, and is thus marked by a “mahā therefore Mahāyāna” logic, rather than the “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic of the *Qixinlun*.

Such a model appears in many works in the Mahāyāna tradition. The *Mahāyānābhīdharma-samuccaya-vyākhyā* 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論, for example – as pointed out by Fazang in his explanation of the “mahāyāna”<sup>56</sup> – highlights the “seven aspects of greatness” (*qizhongdaxing* 七種大性) to account for the “great vehicle” (i.e., “mahāyāna”):

(It is) called the ‘Mahāyāna’ because (it) corresponds to seven aspects of greatness. What are called the ‘seven aspects of greatness’? They are: first, the **greatness** of the object (of the teaching) ...; second, the **greatness** of the practices (introduced in the teaching) ...; third, the **greatness** of the wisdom (revealed by the teaching) ...; fourth, the **greatness** of the diligence (promoted in the teaching) ...; fifth, the **greatness** of the skillful means (presented in the teaching) ...; sixth, the **greatness** of the attainment (resulted from the teaching) ...; and seventh, the **greatness** of the actions (performed in accordance with the teaching) ...<sup>57</sup>)

As further noted by Fazang, many others also apply this formula in their explanation of the “mahāyāna”:<sup>58</sup>)

56) See Fazang at T44n1846p245b24-c8.

57) T31n1606p743c27-p744a7: 由與七種大性相應故名大乘。何等名為七種大性。一境大性 ... 二行大性 ... 三智大性 ... 四精進大性 ... 五方便善巧大性 ... 六證得大性 ... 七業大性 ...

58) See Fazang at T44n1846p245c5-c8.

The *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* and the *Xianyang shengjiao lun* also adopt such a theory.<sup>59)</sup> In the *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālamkāra*, the sixth is named the ‘greatness of the result’ (produced by the teaching), referring to the attainment of Dharmakāya; the seventh is named the ‘greatness of the deeds’ (performed in accordance with the teaching), referring to the awakening of the *Bodhi* (mind).<sup>60)</sup> The rest agree with (those in) this (theory). There is also another (theory) that discusses the ‘mahāyāna’ from seven perspectives, which is explained in the *Dvādaśanikāya-śāstra*.<sup>61)</sup>

In all these examples, the “mahāyāna” refers to the teaching, identified sometimes as the guide for the attainment of the “Dharmakāya” or the “Bodhi”, and sometimes as “bodhisattva vehicle”,<sup>62)</sup> and such teaching is accounted for through a discussion of the “great” component of the word “mahāyāna” – hence the “mahā therefore Mahāyāna” logic.

59) T30n1579p548c12, and T31n1602p520c12

60) T31n1604p654c21

61) T30n1568p159c14: 瑜伽顯揚亦同此說。莊嚴論中。六名果大。謂得法身等。七名事大。謂示成菩提等。餘同此也。又有七義釋大乘。如十二門論辨。

62) See *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* 瑜伽師地論 at T30n1579p548c12: 諸菩薩乘與七大性共相應故說名大乘。 “These bodhisattva vehicles correspond to the seven (aspects of) greatness and are thus called the ‘great vehicle’ (i.e., ‘Mahāyāna’),” and *Xianyang shengjiao lun* 顯揚聖教論 at T31n1602p520c12: 大乘性者。謂菩薩乘與七大性相應故。說名大乘。 “(Regarding) the nature of the ‘mahāyāna’ – the Bodhisattva Vehicle corresponds to the seven (aspects of) greatness and is thus called the ‘Great Vehicle’ (i.e., ‘Mahāyāna’).” Also see *Asaṅga’s* commentaries on the *Diamond Sūtra*, i.e., the *Jingang boruo lun* 金剛般若論 (at T25n1510ap759b6-b8), and the *Jingang boruo boluomi jing lun* 金剛般若波羅蜜經論 (at T25n1510bp767c14-c16), the *Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra* 菩薩地持經 (at T30n1581p937b9-b17), the *Pusa shanjie jing* 菩薩善戒經 (at T30n1582p999c24-p1000a8) and Asvabhāva’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha-bhāṣya* 攝大乘論釋 (at T31n1598p380b4-b7, and T31n1598p417b12-b23).

Adapted from such a model, the *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna” both reproduces and revises its prototype in the tradition. Obviously, it reproduces the use of “mahā” in the presentation of the “greatness” of the Mahāyāna teaching, but in the process it extends the discussion of “mahā” to include both “mahā” and “yāna”, giving the latter to the former as a metaphor, comparing the “greatness” (“mahā”) of the Absolute to a “vehicle” (“yāna”) that transports the sentient beings from bondage to salvation. The *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna” further revises the immediate object of its model. While the theory of “seven aspects of greatness” discusses seven aspects in the greatness of the Mahāyāna teaching, the *Qixinlun* use of the word places its attention on three aspects in the greatness of the Absolute, which constitutes just one aspect in the greatness of the Mahāyāna teaching.<sup>63)</sup>

As an adaptation of such model, the *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna” is often placed in the context of its prototype for clarification, with perhaps the assumption that origin helps to explain its offshoot. Thus, in the two examples immediately above, Fazang cites the theory of the “seven aspects of greatness” to explain the *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna”. And, Wōnhyo, from whom Fazang borrowed (with some modification) his explanation, discusses the *Qixinlun* “mahāyāna” from the perspectives of both the “seven” and the “three” aspects of greatness:

(The explanation of the ‘mahāyāna’) from the perspective of the treatises

---

63) Grosnick (1989, 68-69) suggests, following Takasaki Jikidō and Kashiwagi Hiroo, that, while the two theories appear to share the same origin in terms of their glorification of the Mahāyāna, the *Qixinlun* version, in its “three aspects of greatness”, seems to have another origin in a Yogācāra analysis of faith, i.e., faith in the ultimate reality, its virtue, and its capacity to produce future results.

consists of (the theory of) ‘seven’ (aspects of greatness) and (the theory of) ‘three’ (aspects of greatness).<sup>64)</sup>

Apparently, to both Wōnhyo and Fazang, the *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna” is developed from an older model in the Mahāyāna tradition, and thus must be understood against the background of its original expression.

Such a relationship between the model in tradition and its reformulation in *Qixinlun* is not unknown to modern scholars. Mochizuki, for example, quite straightforwardly points out that the older formula provides the basis for the development of the new theory in *Qixinlun*.<sup>65)</sup> Less directly, but no less clearly, Yinshun presents the two as the two different ways of explaining the “mahāyāna”:

The overall interpretation of ‘mahāyāna’ can be performed from the two perspectives (of *fa* and *yi*) – this is how the treatise explains the ‘mahāyāna’. In the same way as the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* explains (the ‘mahāyāna’) with (the theory of) ‘seven (aspects of) greatness’ . . ., this treatise ‘generally summarizes’ (the ‘mahāyāna’) from (these) two perspectives.<sup>66)</sup>

While different as ways, they are apparently the same in terms of goals – they are just two different versions of the same interpretative theory of the

64) T44n1844p202c23: 依論明者有七有三。

65) See Mochizuki (1922), 356: 恐らく今の摩訶衍説の由漸となったものであらうと思ふ。“(The older formula) is perhaps that which gives rise to this theory of ‘mahāyāna’ (in the *Qixinlun*).”

66) Yinshun (1950), 45: 大乘義, 可以從兩點 (法、義) 去總說; 這是本論說明大乘的方法。如瑜伽以七大來說明…; 本論是「總說」為二義。

“mahāyāna”, with the *Qixinlun* use of the word (marked by the “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic) as an obvious offshoot of the self-glorification theory in the tradition (marked by the “mahā therefore Mahāyāna” logic).<sup>67)</sup>

In short, the *Qixinlun* use of “mahā-yāna” participates in a popular self-glorification discourse in the Mahāyāna tradition, a discourse that glorifies the Mahāyāna teaching through a presentation of its “mahā”, i.e., greatness, in several (sometimes seven) aspects. Reformulating such a discourse, the *Qixinlun* use of “mahā-yāna” reads its two component words to characterize (i.e., with a metaphor) the Absolute, and with that characterization praises and glorifies the superiority of the Mahāyāna. Thus justifying the name “Mahāyāna”, this *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna” characterizes but does not name the Absolute.

### III. The Confusion of the Meaning and Use of “Mahāyāna” in Modern *Qixinlun* Scholarship

As shown in the first two sections, the word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* means “Mahāyāna Buddhism”, but is also used, with its characterization of the Absolute as “mahā” (“great”) and “yāna” (“vehicle”), to praise and glorify

67) Yinshun actually mentions another possible model of the *Qixinlun* use of “mahāyāna”, which is omitted above for the sake of convenience in discussion. It is the so-called “ten aspects of excellence” (*shi shusheng* 十殊勝) in the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* 攝大乘論, in which the “greatness” is replaced by the “excellence” (*shusheng* 殊勝) – See Yinshun (1960, 45) for that omitted example: 如瑜伽以七大來說明, 攝大乘論以十殊勝來說明。 “In the same way as the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* explains the ‘mahāyāna’ with (the theory of) ‘seven (aspects of) greatness’, the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* explains with (the theory of) ‘ten (aspects of) excellence’.”

Mahāyāna Buddhism as a “great vehicle” and thus a superior teaching. The use, through its characterization, justifies the meaning – it is such characterization that qualifies the religion for the name “Mahāyāna” – but does not in itself constitute the name of the Absolute. Such a relationship between the two readings appears to be a common sense knowledge to traditional commentators, but is often confused in modern studies of the treatise, with the use mistaken for the meaning, or, more specifically, with the characterization of the Mind (i.e., “mahā” and “yāna”) mistaken for the name (i.e., “Mahāyāna”) of that Mind – hence the “Absolute” reading of “mahāyāna”.

Not all modern *Qixinlun* scholars confuse these two readings, but they (including even those religion readers) seem in general not consciously aware of such relationship. They may sometimes appear inconsistent in their reading of “mahāyāna”, identifying the same word in the same context with its two different readings. Mochizuki Shinkō, for example, reads in the same “mahāyāna” first the “fundamental Dharma” (*konponhō* 根本法) and then the “Tathāgatagarbha mind” (*nyoraizōshin* 如來藏心):

And then the so-called ‘mahāyāna’, as (a form of) that fundamental Dharma –  
What exactly (it) is? It is not anything outside; it is the Tathāgatagarbha  
mind of the sentient beings (such as) us its very self.<sup>68)</sup>

And Yinshun, for another example, reads in the same word both “teaching” (*famen* 法門) and the “mind of sentient beings” (*zhongshengxin* 眾生心):

68) Mochizuki (1922), 355: 而して其の根本法たる所謂摩訶衍なるものは、果たして何物であるかといふと、それは外でもない、即ち吾等衆生の如來藏心そのものであるといふのである。



The 'mahāyāna' is just the mind of sentient beings; ... the 'awakening of faith in mahāyāna' is the (awakening of) faith in the teaching which is based on the mind of the sentient beings.<sup>69)</sup>

They may sometimes simply appear unclear about the relationship between the two readings. In his interpretation of "mahāyāna", Yusuki Ryōei first identifies the religion reading as the norm (or the "tsūrei" 通例, i.e., the customary reading), and then, drawing on the Fazang commentary, introduces the use of "mahāyāna" as its "elaboration" (*hakki* 發揮):

According to the customary reading, (the word) 'mahāyāna' is explained as the opposite of the 'Hīnayāna'. However, in master Genju's (i.e., Fazang) *Giki* ...

69) Yinshun (1960), 13: 大乘就是眾生心；...大乘起信，是信得以眾生心為本的法門。Such inconsistency is in fact only apparent, for to mention both "teaching" and "Absolute" in the same time in such cases most likely only means that the "teaching" of Mahāyāna Buddhism is centered on the "Absolute" as its content, rather than that this "mahāyāna" refers at once to both the "teaching" and the "Absolute". It is, in that sense, only inaccurate use of language, rather than an expression of inconsistency. This is perhaps more clearly illustrated in another remark Mochizuki (356) makes: 斯様に摩訶衍なる根本法は、即ち吾等眾生の如來藏心そのものを指すとし、而して...一心二門の教義と稱し、更に...三大の説と呼ぶのである。"Thus, under the name 'mahāyāna', the 'fundamental Dharma' refers to the Tathāgatagarbha mind of sentient beings, and then ... to the teaching of 'one mind in its two gates', and further ... to the theory of the three (aspects of) greatness." While apparently inconsistent between teaching (i.e., the fundamental Dharma) and the Absolute (i.e., the Tathāgatagarbha mind), Mochizuki explains "mahāyāna" first as the "the teaching of 'one mind in its two gates'", and second as the "the theory of the three (aspects of) greatness", quite clearly indicating that "mahāyāna" refers to the teaching, not the mind, and that the teaching teaches about the mind. Unreal as it may seem, however, such apparent inconsistency, i.e., such inaccurate use of language, quite clearly points to a lack of attention to or conscious awareness of the distinction between the two readings.

there is extensive elaboration (on ‘mahāyāna’), and therefore it is necessary to summarize below the essentials (of such elaboration).<sup>70)</sup>

However, Yusuki has never explained exactly how the use of “mahāyāna” “elaborates” the “customary reading” of the word. Apparently, by “elaboration” Yusuki is only introducing a new topic in his discussion of “mahāyāna”. He does not seem to know, or even to have paid attention to, how these two readings should be related to each other. He is, in other words, quite unclear about such a relationship even though he has adopted a position in the reading of the word.

Thus not consciously aware of the relationship between the two readings of “mahāyāna”, modern *Qixinlun* scholars, primarily those “Absolute” readers, often miss the fact that the same word “mahāyāna” actually serves two different purposes in its two different forms (i.e., as one single word and in its two component words), and that it names a religion in the former, and characterizes the Absolute of that religion in the latter. They thus often explain their “Absolute” reading of “mahāyāna” with a presentation of how its two component words, i.e., “mahā” and “yāna”, characterize this Absolute Mind, apparently assuming that, since “mahāyāna” in its separate components describes the Absolute, it as one single word should name the Absolute as well. In other words, the “mahā-yāna therefore Mahāyāna” logic in the *Qixinlun* tradition turns, because of that confusion, into a “mahā-yāna therefore Absolute” logic among many modern *Qixinlun* scholars.

70) Yusuki (1941), 38: 大乘に就ては通例の解釋に従ひ、小乘に對するものとして説明せり、然れども賢首大師の《義記》には——大に發揮する所あれば、更に其の大要を摘示すべし。

In such confusion, Hirakawa reads “mahāyāna” as the Mind because the Mind is characterized as “mahā” and yāna. :

The mind of ours is in itself the ‘mahāyāna’. ...Speaking of why this is the case, (it should be noted that) the explanation of this (lies in) the second (of the *fa-yi*, i.e.), the ‘yi’. (That is), as the mind of sentient beings, the ‘mahāyāna’ has in it the quality of **greatness** in the three (aspects of) essence, attributes and function.<sup>71)</sup>

Takasaki Jikidō高崎直道 argues explicitly that the Mind is named “mahāyāna” because it has the quality of “mahā-yāna”, i.e., because it is both “mahā” (great) and “yāna” (riding/vehicle):

And, (regarding) the fact that it (i.e., the Absolute) is called ‘mahāyāna’, there is a reason why it is called such. That is, it is (first) a **great** matter, and then also a **riding** matter (i.e., a vehicle).<sup>72)</sup>

Such explanation is readily echoed in Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 discussion of “mahāyāna”:

---

71) Hirakawa (1973), 11: われわれの心がすなわち“大乘”であるというのである。…それはなぜであるかといえば、それを示すのが、第二の“義”である。眾生心たる大乘には、體大/相大/用大という三つの大きな特質がある。Note: The metaphor of this “greatness”, i.e., the “vehicle”, is omitted here.

72) Takasaki (2009), 33: そしてそれが大乘と呼ばれるのは、そう呼ばれるだけの内容をもっている。つまり、それは大きいものであり、そして、乗りものであるということです。

To the question ‘what is mahāyāna’, the *Qixinlun* answers that it is the mind of the sentient beings (such as) us. ...The mind of sentient beings is described as ‘great’, for it is endowed with these three attributes (of greatness), and is named the ‘vehicle’, for it is the instrument (with which one) becomes a Buddha.<sup>73)</sup>

In the same line of thought, Kashiwagi argues that the characterization of the Mind in three aspects of greatness gives the word “mahāyāna” a “*shutai-teki*” 主體的character, i.e., an independent and proactive character, which refers quite obviously to the character of the Absolute:

Since (the treatise) seems to have fully discussed ... the fact that this mind of sentient beings conveys the excellent idea about the greatness in the three aspects of (its) essence, attributes and function, it is clear that the word ‘mahāyāna’ in its use has a very independent and proactive character in comparison with various other scriptures.<sup>74)</sup>

In other words, Kashiwagi also accounts for his “Absolute” reading of “mahāyāna” by applying the quality of “mahā-yāna” to the Absolute. That is, the “mahāyāna” refers to the Absolute because the Absolute is both “mahā” and “yāna”.<sup>75)</sup>

73) Liang (1923), 38-39: 問大乘作何解，起信論以吾輩眾生之心解之。…眾生心具此三德，故名為大。憑藉此心成佛，故名為乘。

74) Kashiwagi (1991), 57: この眾生心が體/相/用の三大義のすぐれた意趣をもつことを…論述し盡くそうというのであるから、摩訶衍の語の用例…諸經論に比して非常に主體的な性格をもっていることがあきらかである。

Such confusion is sometimes also expressed in the identification of the “mahāyāna” as the “*fa*/Dharma” in the “*fa-yi*” structure in the *Liyi*, although such identification – i.e., “mahāyāna is the *fa*” – normally means that “mahāyāna is the teaching”. In the first few lines of the synoptic chapter:

(This teaching, under the name of) ‘Mahāyāna’, is to be summarized from two (perspectives). What are these two (perspectives)? The first is (the perspective of) the ‘*fa*’, and the second is (the perspective of) the ‘*yi*’. The so-called ‘*fa*’ refers to the mind of sentient beings.<sup>76)</sup>

the “*fa*” refers to the Absolute,<sup>77)</sup> so to read “mahāyāna” as the Absolute is also to read it as the “*fa*”. Thus Suzuki Daisetsu, as mentioned earlier, translates this concept of “*fa*” 法 (i.e., “*you-fa*” 有法 in his case) directly as “mahāyāna” (“What is the Mahāyāna? It is the Soul of all sentient beings [sarvasattva] ...”).<sup>78)</sup> Similarly, Hirakawa, Kashiwagi and Kawano each in his own way makes the same identification of “mahāyāna” as the “*fa*”:

1. The ‘*fa*’, as the first (of the two-fold ‘*fa-yi*’ structure), is the ‘mind of sentient beings’ ... (and this) mind of ours is the ‘mahāyāna’.<sup>79)</sup>

75) with, again, the metaphor “yāna” omitted

76) T32n1666p575c20-c21: 摩訶衍者，總說有二種。云何為二？一者、法，二者、義。所言法者，謂眾生心…

77) For a discussion of the “*fa-yi*” structure, see Section I.

78) T32n1667p584b23: 言有法者，謂一切眾生心。For more details of this translation, see Note 6.

79) Hirakawa (1973), 11: 第一の法とは“眾生心”のことであるといっている … われわれの心がすなわち“大乘”であるというのである。

2. The first (of the two-fold '*fa-yi*' structure), which is the 'mahāyāna' itself (i.e., the '*fa*') – what is it? <sup>80)</sup>
3. It is here contemplated: That which corresponds to this '*fa*' (of the two-fold '*fa-yi*' structure) – is it not the 'mahāyāna' its very self?<sup>81)</sup>

Such identification (i.e., “mahāyāna=*fa*”), as the result of the confused “Absolute” reading, may sometimes be further confused to account for the “Absolute” reading itself (i.e., “mahāyāna=*fa*” therefore “mahāyāna=Absolute”). Hakeda, for example, explains why “mahāyāna” refers to “Absolute” by identifying “mahāyāna” as the “*fa*”, a “*fa*” that refers explicitly to the Absolute in the *Qixinlun* (i.e., “that which is called the '*fa*' is the mind of sentient beings”).<sup>82)</sup> This is, however, a circular reading. In the sense that the *fa* itself is already the Absolute, to explain why “mahāyāna” is the Absolute by identifying it as the *fa* is simply to answer a question with the question itself – i.e., it answers why “mahāyāna” is the Absolute by identifying “mahāyāna” as the Absolute (i.e., the “*fa*”) – a fact that further complicates the already confused understanding of the relationship between the two readings of “mahāyāna”.

Despite its wide acceptance among modern scholars, however, the “Absolute”

80) Kashiwagi (1991), 53: 第一に、大乘の當體 (“法”) とは何であるか。

81) Kawano (1972-1973), 671: ここで、この法にあたるのが摩訶衍自体ではなかつたかと推測されるのである。

82) Hakeda says (1967, 28): “According to the definition given in the discussion immediately following, Mahāyāna designates Suchness or the Absolute,” and this “discussion immediately following” refers to the following assertion: T32n1666p575c21 所言法者，謂眾生心。“That which is called the '*fa*' is the mind of sentient beings.” Thus, to Hakeda, “mahāyāna” refers to the Absolute because it refers to the “*fa*” in the first place.

reading of “mahāyāna” does not necessarily reflect how these self-proclaimed “Absolute” readers really understand the word. While conspicuously an “Absolute” reader, Hirakawa sometimes inadvertently shows a tendency to religion reading. For example, he concludes one of his discussions as follows:

According to the discussion above, the human mind is ‘mahāyāna’, and that means that, in its true nature, the human mind is an innately pure mind, unadulterated and immaculate (in essence).<sup>83)</sup>

What he means by “the human mind is ‘mahāyāna’” is apparently not that this Mind is called “mahāyāna”, but that it has the attributes of “mahā” and “yāna”, attributes that will eventually make this Mind “unadulterated and immaculate” or “innately pure”. In other words, here the “mahāyāna” only describes, but does not name, the Absolute. Indeed, his paralleling of the “Great Vehicle” with the “Two Vehicles” further betrays his instinctive religion reading, a reading he may consciously deny, though:

Sometimes the aspiration for the Two Vehicles arises, because the fear for *Samsāra* is strong and the will to benefit others is weak; some other times (however) the resolve is made to seek the Mahāyāna successfully and (thus) to become a Buddha.<sup>84)</sup>

---

83) Hirakawa (1973), 12: 以上の如き意味で人間の心は大乗であるが、それは人間の心の本性が純粹清淨なる自性清淨心であるという意味である。

84) Hirakawa (1973), 305: あるいは生死の世界への怖れが強く、利他の心を欠いて、二乗に向う心を起こす。あるいは首尾よく大乗を求め、成佛の決心を起こす。

Hirakawa argues all along that “mahāyāna” refers to the Absolute, but somewhere in his subconscious he seems to have admitted that the “mahāyāna” in its two component words only characterizes, but does not name, the Mind.

#### IV. Conclusion

As amply shown above, the word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* has two different but related roles to play. As a single word, it refers to (and in that sense means) “Mahāyāna” Buddhism, and, in its two component words, it is used to characterize the Absolute as both “mahā” and “yāna”. Of these two roles, the latter is designed to justify the former, for the absoluteness of the Absolute, characterized as “mahā” and “yāna”, qualifies the religion that teaches about such an Absolute for the status of the “Mahāyāna”. Such a relationship between the two readings is often confused in modern studies of the treatise, with the use mistaken for the meaning, or, more specifically, with the characterization of the Mind mistaken for the name of that Mind – hence the “Absolute” reading of “mahāyāna”.

The root of such confusion is found ultimately in the synoptic chapter of the *Liyi*. It is where the word “mahāyāna” appears in its two different forms and serves two different purposes, and is thus the place where, since both forms of “mahāyāna” share the same word, their two different purposes – i.e., meaning and use – can easily be confused with each other. Such possibility of confusion becomes a more real one through the interpretations



of title in traditional *Qixinlun* commentaries. Summarizing the central purport of the treatise, the title – its “mahāyāna” in particular – gives rise to numerous discussions centered around and elaborating upon the use of the word in the *Liyi*, a practice that highlights the close relationship between the word “mahā-yāna” and the Absolute it characterizes. While traditional commentaries rely heavily on the use of “mahāyāna” in their glorification of the “Mahāyāna” and thus seem to know the distinction between the two readings well, modern studies of the treatise, not religious in nature, not designed to glorify the treatise, and thus not as consciously aware of the distinction between these two readings, somehow tend to mistake the characterization of the Absolute for the name “Mahāyāna”, hence the remarkably widespread confusion of the use for the meaning of the “mahāyāna”.

### 참고문헌

In documenting sources from the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, I remain consistent with the method I began to use in my 2008 dissertation, identifying a text with the capital letter “T” for its volume number in the *Taishō* collection, and then the lowercase letters “n” for its serial number, “p” for its page number, and “a”, “b”, or “c” for the line number – respectively and in that order – in any of the upper, middle or lower section of a page. Another collection of Buddhist texts, *Xuzangjing* 續藏經, is identified in a similar format, except that the “T” is replaced with “X”, indicating the change of the collection.

#### Primary Sources

- Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, attributed to Aśvaghōṣa 馬鳴 for composition and to Paramārtha 真諦 for Chinese translation. T32n1666.
- Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, attributed to Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 for a second Chinese translation, 2 vols. T32n1667.
- Dasheng qixinlun jieyao* 大乘起信論捷要, by Zhengyuan 正遠. X45n0763.
- Dasheng qixinlun lueshu* 大乘起信論略述, by Tankuang 曇曠. T85n2813.
- Dasheng qixinlun yiji* 大乘起信論義記, by Fazang 法藏. T44n1846.
- Dasheng qixin lun yishu* 大乘起信論義疏, by Tanyan 曇延. X45n755.
- Dasheng qixinlun yishu* 大乘起信論義疏, by Huiyuan 慧遠. T44n1843.
- Dasheng qixinlun zuanzhu* 大乘起信論纂註, by Zhenjie 真界. X45n762.
- Dvādaśanikāya-śāstra* 十二門論, attributed to Nāgārjuna 龍樹, and translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什. T30n1568.

*Mahāyānābhīdharma-samuccaya-vyākhyā* 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論, composed by Sthiramati 安慧, and translated into Chinese by Xuanzang 玄奘. T31n1606.

*Mahāyāna-Sūtrālamkāra* 大乘莊嚴經論, composed by Asaṅga無著, and translated into Chinese by Prabhākaramitra 波羅頗蜜多羅. T31n1604.

*Qixinlunshu bixiaoji* 起信論疏筆削記, by Zixuan 子璿. T44n1848.

*Qixinlun shu* 起信論疏, by Wōnhyo 元曉. T44n1844.

*Shimoheyān lun* 釋摩訶衍論, attributed to Nāgārjuna 龍樹. T32n1668

*Taesūng Kisillon naeüi yakt'amgi* 大乘起信論內義略探記, by T'aehyōn 太賢. T44n1849n44.

*Xianyang shengjiao lun* 顯揚聖教論, composed by Asaṅga無著, and translated into Chinese by Xuanzang 玄奘. T31n1602.

*Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* 瑜伽師地論, attributed to Maitreya彌勒 as author, and translated into Chinese by Xuanzang 玄奘. T30n1579.

### Secondary Sources

Grosnick, William H.

1989. "The Categories of *T'i*, *Hsiang*, and *Yung*: Evidence that Paramārtha Composed the *Awakening of Faith*." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12.1, 65-92.

Hakeda, Yoshito 羽毛田義人, trans.

1967. *The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hirakawa, Akira 平川彰.

1973. *Daijōkishinron* 《大乘起信論》. Butten Kōza 佛典講座22. Tōkyō 東京: Daizō *shuppan-sha*大藏出版社.
- Ishii, Kōsei 石井公成.
2006. “Daijō kishinron ni okeru ‘daijō’ to ‘makaen’” 『大乘起信論』における「大乘」と「摩訶衍」. *Komazawa tankidaigaku bukkyō ronshū* 《駒澤短期大学仏教論集》12, 1-18.
- Jin, Tao 金濤.
- 2007/2009. “The Formulation of Introductory Topics and the Writing of Exegesis in Chinese Buddhism.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 30.1-2, 33-79.
- Kashiwagi, Hiroo 柏木弘雄.
1991. *Daijō to wa nani ka : Daijōkishinron o yomu* 《大乘とは何か：「大乘起信論」を読む》. Tōkyō東京: Shunjūsha春秋社.
- Kawano, Shigeo 河野重雄.
- 1972-1973. “Daijō kishinron ni okeru shujōshin ni tsuite” 大乘起信論における衆生心について. *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 《印度學佛教學研究》21.2, 671-672.
- 1973-1974. “Shintai yaku kishinron no onyakugo to kanyakugo” 真諦訳起信論の音訳語と漢訳語. *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 《印度學佛教學研究》22.2, 837-841.
- Liang, Qichao 梁啟超.
1923. *Dasheng qixin lun kaozheng* 《大乘起信論考證》. Shanghai 上海.
- Liebenthal, Walter.
1958. “New Light on the Mahayana-sraddhotpada sastra.” *T'oung Pao* XLVI, 155-216.

Mochizuki, Shinkō 望月信亨.

1922. *Daijō kishin ron no kenkyū* 《大乘起信論の研究》. Tōkyō 東京: Kaneo Buendō 金尾文淵堂.

1932. "Daijōkishinron kaidai" 大乘起信論解題. In *Kokuyaku issaikyō: ronshūbu 5* 《国譯一切經: 論集部5》, 1-4. Tōkyō 東京: Daitō shuppansha 大東出版社.

Morita, Ryūsen 森田龍遷.

1935. *Shaku makaen ron no kenkyū* 《釋摩訶衍論の研究》. Kyōto 京都.

Park, Sung-bae.

1983. *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Suzuki, Daisetsu Teitaro, trans.

1900. *Āsvaghoṣa's Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company.

Takasaki, Jikidō 高崎直道.

2009. *Daijōkishinron, Ryōgakyō* 《大乘起信論・楞伽經》. Tōkyō 東京: Shunjūsha 春秋社.

Takemura, Shōhō 武邑尚邦.

1959. *Daijōkishinron kōdoku* 《大乘起信論講讀》. Tōkyō 東京: Hyakkaen 百華苑.

Taixu 太虛.

1918. *Dasheng qixin lun lueshi* 《大乘起信論略釋》. Hankou 漢口.

1920. *Dasheng qixin lun bieshuo* 《大乘起信論別說》. Wuchang 武昌.

Tanxu 倭虛.

1935. *Dasheng qixinlun jiangyi* 《大乘起信論講義》. Qingdao 青島.

Ui, Hakuju 宇井伯寿.

1936. *Daijōkishinron* 《大乘起信論》. Tōkyō 東京: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店.

Yinshun 印順.

1960. *Dasheng qixin lun jiangji* 《大乘起信論講記》. Taibei 臺北: Zhengwen chubanshe 正聞出版社.

Yusuki, Ryōei 湯次了榮.

1941. *Kanwa ryōyaku daijō kishinron shinshaku* 《漢和兩譯大乘起信論新釋》. 7<sup>th</sup> reprint. Kyōto 京都: Kōkyō shoin 興教書院.

Abstract

**The “Mahāyāna” in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*: Its Meaning and Use, and the Confusion thereof**

Tao Jin (金濤)

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

This paper is focused on the reading of the word “mahāyāna” in the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (or *Qixinlun* in its popular Chinese abbreviation), particularly in its synoptic chapter, namely, the *Liyi fen* (立義分). To many modern scholars, it refers not to the “Mahāyāna” or “Great Vehicle” Buddhism (as opposed to the “Hīnayāna” or “Lesser Vehicle” Buddhism) as it is popularly understood, but to the so-called “One Mind” (*yixin* 一心), a mind that exists simultaneously as Suchness and Phenomena and constitutes in that sense a dual-natured Absolute in both its quiescence and dynamicity. It is for this presentation of the “One Mind”, labelled “Mahāyāna” by some, that the treatise claims itself to be the teaching of the “Mahāyāna” Buddhism. This paper proposes to dispute this “Absolute”

reading of “mahāyāna”. It argues that the word “mahāyāna” in *Qixinlun* refers consistently and exclusively to (and in that sense means) the “Mahāyāna” Buddhism or its teaching; that the word is used in the synoptic chapter of the *Li-yi* to respectively characterize and metaphorize the Absolute as “great” (i.e., “mahā”) and “vehicle” (i.e., “yāna”) and, in doing so, to praise and glorify “Mahāyāna” Buddhism as a “great vehicle” and thus a superior teaching; and that the confusion of the meaning and the use of the word results in the modern reading of “mahāyāna” as the Absolute.

**Keywords** : mahāyāna, Absolute, *Li-yi*, *fā-yi*, seven aspects of greatness, self-glorification, Yoshito Hakeda,

2017년 10월 5일 투고  
2017년 12월 1일 심사완료  
2017년 12월 5일 게재확정