



**A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF MAHĀPRAJÑA NIKĀYA IN
MAINLAND CHINA: DOCTRINE, PRACTICE, AND MASTERS**

JIAHUAN CAO

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN GLOBAL BUDDHISM
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE INNOVATION AND CULTURE
RAJAMANGALA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY KRUNGTHEP
ACADEMIC YEAR 2024
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the Mahāprajñā Nikāya tradition in modern Mainland China, focusing on its philosophy, meditative practices, and pedagogical roles. Using qualitative methods, including textual analysis and interviews, it highlights the tradition's emphasis on cultivating wisdom (prajñā) and realizing emptiness (śūnyatā). Addressing gaps in scholarship, the research examines foundational doctrines like impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). Key texts, including the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, Lamrim Chenmo, and Master Nenghai's Collected Works, underpin the study's insights. Wisdom emerges as the core doctrine, realized through meditation practices such as mindfulness (sati) and concentration (samādhi). Teachers are critical in mentoring students, adapting ancient teachings for modern contexts, and providing moral guidance. The study concludes that the Mahāprajñā Nikāya exemplifies a holistic integration of philosophy, practice, and pedagogy, contributing significantly to contemporary Chinese Buddhism. Recommendations include teacher training, inter-tradition collaboration, and digital dissemination, enriching the understanding of Buddhism's evolution in China.

Keywords: Mahāprajñā Nikāya, Prajñā (Wisdom), Śūnyatā (Emptiness),
Meditation Practices, Chinese Buddhism

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Jiahuan CAO

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to the study, encompassing the research background, rationale, research questions, objectives, scope, and definitions of key terms. It also outlines the conceptual framework that guides the study and highlights its significance. By addressing these elements, Chapter I establishes the foundation for understanding the study's context, purpose, and potential contributions to the field.

1.1 Research Background

Mahāprajña Nikāya is a Buddhist tradition that emphasizes the cultivation of wisdom (prajñā) and comprehension of emptiness (śūnyatā). This tradition integrates the teachings of diverse teachers and commentaries that underscore the significance of wisdom as the primary path to enlightenment. The teaching of Mahāprajña, which translates to "great wisdom," asserts that all phenomena lack a permanent substance and are inherently empty (Collins, 1998). Mahāprajña Nikāya is a significant area within the Buddhist tradition that has a lengthy history and substantial impact on the evolution of Buddhism, particularly in mainland China. This research is significant because Mahāprajña Nikāya provides a distinct viewpoint in comprehending Buddhist doctrines emphasizing wisdom and enlightenment. This phenomenon impacts religious rituals, fosters interfaith discourse, and enhances cross-cultural comprehension in contemporary society.

The research conducted in mainland China on the Mahāprajña Nikāya has primarily concentrated on its historical and textual dimensions. Chün-Fang Yü (1981) illustrates how the teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya were examined and instructed throughout the Ming Dynasty period. This study offers a significant understanding of Mahāprajña Nikāya's past impact. However, it fails to examine the current practices and teachings of this doctrine by present-day teachers in mainland China. Furthermore, a comprehensive examination of Buddhist practices in China during the early 1900s was done by Homes Welch (1967). Welch (1967) analyzes Chinese Buddhism's ritual and

monastic elements, explicitly focusing on the impact of Mahāprajña Nikāya. Nevertheless, this research neglects the significance of particular current instructors who are crucial in revitalizing and disseminating the teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya.

Various disputes regarding Mahāprajña Nikāya primarily revolve around its early origins and foundational texts. This type of research frequently emphasizes the genesis of Mahāprajña Nikāya, the evolution of fundamental teachings, and the significant contributions made by notable personalities throughout its history. Kenneth Ch'en's (1964) research offers a comprehensive account of the development of Mahāprajña Nikāya across different Chinese dynasties, as well as the methods of studying and teaching the sacred scriptures associated with this tradition. Another study by Wright (1959) highlighted the significance of classical texts and their interpretation in shaping the identity of the Mahāprajña Nikāya. The primary objective of these studies is to comprehend the historical and doctrinal settings that underpin the Nikāya Mahāprajña flow. However, they also frequently delve into the practical application and adaptation of these teachings in a contemporary setting.

In addition, Daniel Overmyer (2002) emphasizes different religious customs in China, such as the Mahāprajña Nikāya. Overmyer asserts that there is a deficiency in the existing body of literature concerning how the concepts of the Mahāprajña Nikāya are modified and put into practice in contemporary socio-cultural environments. Similarly, Kieschnick's (2003) study demonstrates the impact of Buddhist teachings, such as the Mahāprajña Nikāya, on the material culture of China. However, John Kieschnick's research primarily examines the overall influence of Buddhism and does not extensively go into the specific practices of the Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings among modern Chinese Buddhist communities. In a separate study conducted by David Wank (2009), the focus is on investigating how Buddhism has adjusted to the contemporary social and economic conditions in China. According to Wank (2009), there exist intricate interactions between conventional teachings and the difficulties of adapting to modernization that Buddhist communities, including the Mahāprajña Nikāya, encounter. Nevertheless, this study primarily examines the impact of social change while giving little consideration to the development of doctrine and the influence of particular teachers in disseminating Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings.

Therefore, research that connects this divide is necessary, particularly emphasizing how the theory is incorporated into everyday implementation and the involvement of instructors in this procedure. This research diverges from earlier analogous studies that predominantly concentrated on the initial historical period and classical writings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya school. This study integrates doctrinal analysis with current practice and examines the role of instructors in disseminating these teachings in Mainland China.

1.2 Rationale

This section provides a detailed analysis of the scope of the previous study, emphasizing the significance of studying the mahāprajña nikāya in Mainland China. It specifically focuses on the doctrine, practice, and masters associated with this study. The reasons for considering this research essential and how it differs from previous research are thoroughly explained in this section. Prior studies primarily concentrate on the early history and classical literature of the Mahāprajña Nikāya school. For instance, Wright (1959) and Kenneth Ch'en (1994) conducted research highlighting the historical and doctrinal background underpinning the Mahāprajña Nikāya school, but this aspect is frequently absent. It examines the use and modification of these principles in contemporary settings.

Furthermore, comprehensive research on the role of contemporary educators in shaping and advancing this religious tradition is necessary. Modern instructors have a crucial role in passing on the teachings and practices of the Mahāprajña Nikāya to younger followers. They serve as both educators and spiritual mentors while acting as intermediaries between traditional teachings and modern socio-cultural environments. Further investigation will uncover how these educators interpret and implement conventional teachings to confront contemporary obstacles, such as globalization and evolving societal norms.

Moreover, this study integrates instructors' doctrine, practice, and role in examining the Mahāprajña Nikāya. Integrating the principles, application, and the instructor's function in Mahāprajña Nikāya investigation is crucial as it yields a more holistic and profound comprehension of this educational institution. Doctrine serves as

the intellectual and theological foundation, while practice demonstrates the practical implementation of the teachings in daily life. The teacher plays a crucial role in conveying and explaining the teachings to their followers. By integrating these three elements, we gain insight into the underlying workings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya, particularly its ability to adjust to evolving circumstances and contemporary obstacles. This comprehensive research also aids in addressing deficiencies in current literature, which frequently concentrates on one facet, such as doctrine or the historical background of classical writings.

Furthermore, by examining social and cultural significance, we can gain insight into applying these teachings in present-day situations and teachers' crucial role in interpreting the doctrines in current settings and creating pertinent methodologies. This also offers a comprehensive understanding of how the teachings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya impact the lives of its adherents regarding their spiritual beliefs, moral values, and everyday actions. Therefore, this research contributes substantially to the study of Mahāprajña Nikāya and enhances our comprehension of broader religious and social phenomena in Mainland China.

1.3 Research Questions

Three research questions were established based on the aforementioned background and rationale:

- 1) What is the perceived Mahāprajña Nikāya doctrine in China's mainland?
- 2) How does Mainland China implement the religious practices of Mahāprajña Nikāya?
- 3) What role does a teacher have in disseminating and developing Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings in mainland China?

1.4 Research Objectives

This research has three primary aims, which are derived from the three formulated research questions:

- 1) Explore the usage of the Mahāprajña Nikāya doctrine in Mainland China.

2) Explore the Mahāprajña Nikāya's religious practices taught and practiced in Mainland China.

3) Explore the role of educators in disseminating and cultivating the teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya in Mainland China.

1.5 Research Scope and Limitations

1.5.1 Research Scope

This research focuses on analyzing the primary text of the Mahāprajña Nikāya to investigate the doctrine inside the Mahāprajña Nikāya tradition. Moreover, a comprehensive examination was conducted on the religious customs, contemplative exercises, and day-to-day observances performed by adherents of the Mahāprajña Nikāya lineage to gain insights into their religious practices. Research also investigates instructors' function in conveying teachings, offering spiritual direction, and instructing followers of the Mahāprajña Nikāya.

1.5.2 Research Limitations

The limitations of this research are its regional scope and the sources of research data. This study focuses exclusively on the practices of Mahāprajña Nikāya in Mainland China, excluding any Mahāprajña Nikāya communities in other countries. Additionally, the data sources employed consist of traditional literature and interviews conducted with instructors and followers of the Mahāprajña Nikāya. However, it is essential to note that these sources do not encompass the broader population.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Mahāprajña Nikāya

The Mahāprajña Nikāya is a prominent Buddhist school that emphasizes the cultivation of profound wisdom (Mahāprajña) as the means to attain enlightenment. The term "Mahāprajña" originates from Sanskrit and signifies "profound wisdom," and "Nikāya" denotes "compilation" or "assembly." This educational institution prioritizes cultivating profound comprehension and spiritual illumination by examining and applying Buddhist doctrines.

1.6.2 Doctrine of Mahāprajña Nikāya

The Mahāprajña Nikāya doctrine encompasses the fundamental teachings and intellectual foundations that underpin this school within the Buddhist tradition. This theory centers around profound insight, known as "Mahāprajña," which is pivotal in achieving enlightenment within this institution.

1.6.3 Practice of Mahāprajña Nikāya

The practice of Mahāprajña Nikāya encompasses a diverse range of spiritual exercises and disciplines that adherents do to cultivate wisdom and achieve enlightenment. This practice centers on applying doctrinal teachings to daily life.

1.6.4 Meditation

Meditation is a cognitive and metaphysical discipline encompassing diverse methodologies to attain mental clarity, attentiveness, and a more profound comprehension of one's being and the nature of existence.

1.6.5 Mahāprajña

The doctrine of Great Wisdom (Mahāprajña) asserts that profound wisdom is the primary means to attain enlightenment. Mahāprajña encompasses a profound comprehension of the essence of being impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and the absence of a permanent self (anattā). This wisdom is acquired via meditation, diligent study of sacred scriptures, and the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher.

1.6.6 Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is a set of doctrines that prescribe the correct way to follow the Main Path. It comprises eight aspects: proper perspective, right intention, right speech, right action, the right way of living, right effort, adequate attention, and right concentration. This pathway serves as a pragmatic blueprint for attaining wisdom and enlightenment.

1.6.7 Master Nenghai

Master Nenghai (1879-1947) was an eminent monk of modern Chinese Buddhism, a disciple of the Gelug Tibetan Buddhism school, and the Mahāprajña Nikāya's founder. Master Nenghai, whose lay surname was Gong, became a monk at a young age and studied in Xizang, where he was personally taught by eminent monks such as Khangser Rinpoche. He deeply understood Tibetan Buddhist doctrine and

practice and was committed to integrating them into Chinese Buddhism. Master Nenghai advocated the recitation of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra, the practice of śamatha and vipaśyanā, and the strict observance of precepts, initially forming the prototype of the Mahāprajña Nikāya. On this basis, he widely propagated the Dharma, establishing monasteries in Shanghai, Mount Wutai, and other places, cultivating monastic talents, developing the sangha, and promoting Buddhist education. Master Nenghai's thought was profound, and his writings were extensive. He made essential contributions to doctrinal classification, Yogācāra, and Hetuvidyā, as well as to the reform of Buddhism and the exchange between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism during the Republican period.

1.6.8 Sinicization of Buddhism

The Sinicization of Buddhism refers to the process of adaptation and transformation that Buddhism underwent after its introduction to China to adapt to the Chinese social and cultural environment. Specifically, it manifests in the integration of Confucian and Taoist ideas in the translation of scriptures, the interpretation of doctrine, and the practice of cultivation, responding to the inherent Chinese way of thinking and concerns, thus forming a Buddhist cultural form with Chinese characteristics. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, with the translation of many Buddhist scriptures and the participation of Chinese monks, Buddhism achieved complete localization in China, eventually forming schools such as Tiantai, Huayan, Chan, Pure Land, and Vinaya. The Sinicization of the Buddhist movement during the Republican period was reflected in the modern interpretation of doctrine, the reform of the monastic system, and the social participation of religious organizations.

1.7 Research Framework

This research explores the doctrine, practice, and role of the master in the teachings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya. This study will employ a comprehensive method that integrates the doctrine, practice, and the teacher's position within the Mahāprajña Nikāya. An essential aspect of Mahāprajña Nikāya research is integrating doctrine, practice, and the teacher's function. This approach enables a more thorough and profound comprehension of this particular school. Doctrine serves as the intellectual

and theological foundation, while practice demonstrates the practical implementation of the teachings in daily life. The teacher plays a crucial role in conveying and interpreting the teachings to their followers. Researchers analyzed original texts to gather doctrinal information from the teachings of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya. This analysis included four specific documents: the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, Edward Conze's *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, Tsongkhapa's work, Shantideva, *Collected Works of Master Nenghai* (能海大師全集), as well as contemporary literature by Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi. The analysis of this material was further enhanced by conducting in-depth interviews with three experts in Mainland China. The data regarding the practices and responsibilities of teachers were acquired through comprehensive interviews and supplemented by an analysis of Thich Nhat Hanh's (1999) teaching guide on heart meditation, as well as his (1975) work titled 'The Miracle of Mindfulness'.

To summarize, the research framework is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

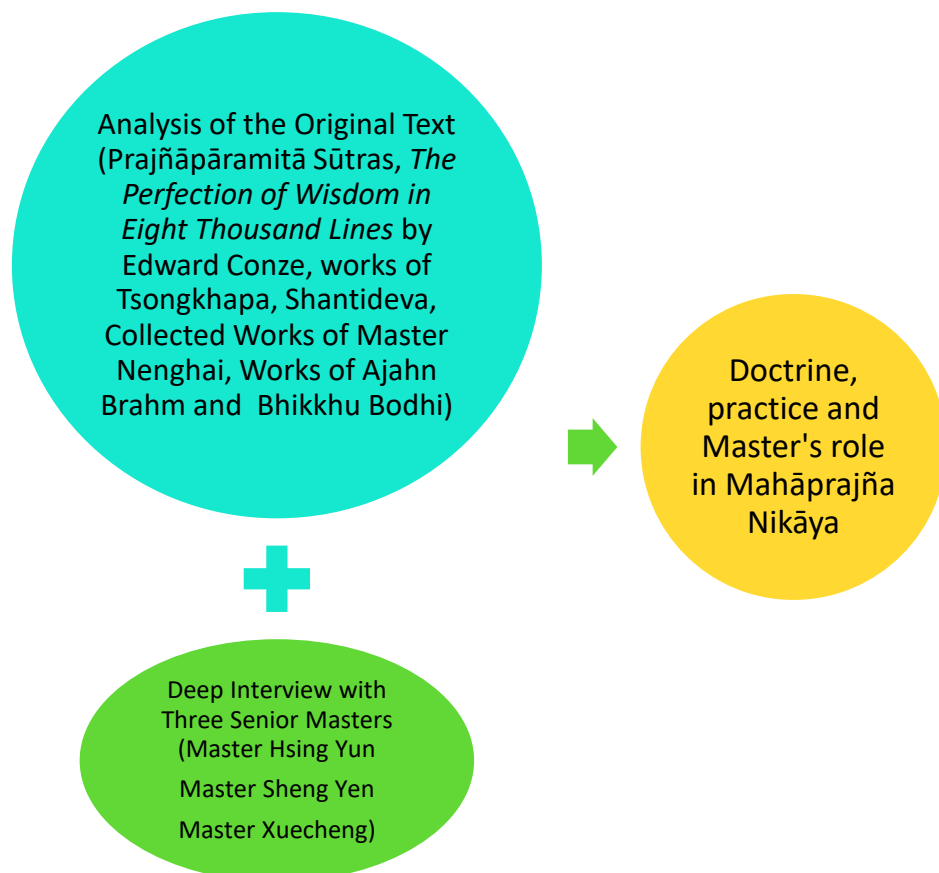


Figure 1.1 Research Framework

1.8 Significance of the Research

A systematic examination of the ideological system of the Mahāprajña Nikāya has the following aspects of significance:

1.8.1 Academic Value

By sorting out the characteristics of the Mahāprajña Nikāya in terms of doctrine and practice and clarifying its uniqueness, we can enrich our understanding of the various Buddhist sects during the Republican era and improve the overall picture of the development of modern Chinese Buddhism. At the same time, examining the characteristics of the Mahāprajña Nikāya's integration of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism also provides a vivid example for our study of the exchange and integration of different Buddhist traditions.

1.8.2 Practical Significance

The Mahāprajña Nikāya emerged during the turbulent period of the Republican era, adapting to specific demands of modern Chinese intellectuals to integrate the three teachings (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) and life philosophy. Examining this sect helps us reflect on the role of Buddhism in the process of modernization. At the same time, the doctrinal system and cultivation methods advocated by the Mahāprajña Nikāya can also provide valuable references for the reconstruction of doctrine and the revival of practice in contemporary Chinese Buddhism.

1.8.3 Practical Value

Through the examination of the Mahāprajña Nikāya's monastic organization and cultivation methods, we can gain a more concrete understanding of how eminent monks practiced the Dharma and benefited sentient beings under specific historical backgrounds, providing valuable experiences for the construction and development of contemporary Buddhist organizations. Moreover, this study will also focus on how eminent monks such as Master Nenghai responded to the times and propagated the Dharma to benefit sentient beings, which can provide valuable insights into how contemporary Buddhists can base themselves in the present era and continue the wisdom of the Buddha.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II provides a review of important theoretical concepts and previous research. The theory addressed includes 1) the Mahāprajñā Nikāya theory, 2) Three distinguishing features of Mahāprajñā Nikāya, 3) The Formation and Evolution of Mahāprajñā Nikāya in China, 4) The primary path to follow is the Noble Eightfold Path. 5) The Mahāprajñā Nikāya focuses on its main doctrinal arguments. 6) The Mahāprajñā Nikāya has a compilation of doctrines and a canon with significant doctrinal implications. 7) The Mahāprajñā Nikāya emphasizes the importance of practicing its teachings. 8) Meditation is a key aspect of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya.

2.1. Related Theory

2.1.1. Theory of Mahāprajñā Nikāya

The Mahāprajñā Nikāya is founded on the fundamental principles of Buddhism, with a particular focus on the cultivation of wisdom (prajñā) and the comprehension of emptiness (śūnyatā). This philosophy is derived from significant literary works like the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, which highlight the idea that all phenomena lack a lasting substance and are thus seen as empty (śūnyatā). In this sense, wisdom refers to a profound comprehension of emptiness that enables an individual to perceive the genuine nature of existence, free from the illusion of duality (Collins, 1998).

The significance of this wisdom and emptiness is cultivated through the Bodhisattva path, which prioritizes the cultivation of compassion and dedication to assisting all beings in attaining enlightenment. Tsongkhapa, a renowned Buddhist scholar, stressed the significance of adopting a progressive method in spiritual cultivation, first with the establishment of moral principles as a fundamental basis, followed by the cultivation of concentration, and ultimately culminating in the development of wisdom (Jinpa, 2018). Comprehending the concept of emptiness is crucial in this doctrine as it is pivotal in unlocking genuine understanding. In addition,

the theories were enriched by the teachings of Master Nenghai and the modern perspectives of teachers like Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi, which provided practical applications. They highlight the significance of jhāna meditation and Vipassanā practice to cultivate insight and attain enlightenment. This philosophy encompasses the four noble truths and eightfold path as the primary foundations for attaining liberation from suffering (Bodhi, 2000).

In Mainland China, teachers employ the Mahāprajñā Nikāya theory in teaching and guidance practices such as lectures, group discussions, and personal guidance. They employ narratives derived from silk and tangible illustrations to enhance pupils' comprehension and application of instruction. This approach demonstrates that wisdom and emptiness are not solely abstract philosophical ideas; they must also be actualized in everyday behaviors and interactions (Epstein, 2018).

2.1.2. Three Characteristics of Mahāprajñā Nikāya

The three defining characteristics of Mahāprajñā Nikāya are Aniccatā (Impermanence), Dukkha (Suffering), and Anattā (Nonself).

2.1.2.1. Aniccatā (Impermanence)

The Paṭisambhidāmagga provides a concise explanation of aniccatā, stating that it refers to something impermanent due to its eventual decay or destruction. The user's text is "(khaya- atthēna)". All impermanent phenomena exist transiently, inside a particular temporal and spatial context, before ending in that very moment. An object that existed in the past is no longer in existence in the present, and an object that exists in the present will not exist in the future. Objects or concepts do not persist in a constant or unchanging manner. Post-canonical sources provide additional insights and present a variety of interpretations of this definition. For instance, upon initial observation, it is evident that an individual's existence commences at the moment of birth and concludes at the instance of death. Upon careful examination, one can observe a progressively increasing rate of birth and decline occurring within various time intervals such as age periods, years, seasons, months, days, and even a few minutes. Each moment's constant rise and fall can be challenging for most individuals to perceive. Recent scientific breakthroughs, particularly in the field of physics, have contributed to the understanding and validation of impermanence. Several scientific

ideas, such as those concerning the formation and demise of stars or the process of atomic decay, exemplify the principle of impermanence.

Aniccatā is defined in many ways in the comments. For instance, something is deemed impermanent due to its inherent uncertainty and instability (aniccantikatāya) and its definitive beginning and end (ādi-antavantatāya). An often-employed definition is that something is deemed impermanent after it has come into existence and then ceases to exist (hutvā abhāvatt̐thena). Occasionally, other words are included in this expression, such as when something is regarded as impermanent since it originates, ceases to exist, and transforms into something else (uppādavayaññathattabhāvā hutvā abhāvato vā).

2.1.2.2. *Dukkha*

The Paṭisambhidāmagga provides a succinct explanation of dukkhatā: something is deemed dukkha because it is susceptible to peril or vulnerability (bhaya-aṭṭhena). Bhaya can alternatively be interpreted as 'perilous' or 'terrifying'. Every conditioned phenomenon inevitably disintegrates and dissolves, providing no genuine safety, solace, or guarantee. Any such occurrence is at risk of being destroyed and falling apart. The object, therefore, poses a threat - both in terms of terror and danger - to everyone who becomes connected to it.

The commentators expound upon the meaning of dukkhatā, providing detailed explanations for two often employed definitions. Firstly, everything is deemed as dukkha because it is constantly subjected to the forces of emergence and disintegration, as indicated by the terms uppādavaya-paṭipīlanatt̐thena or uppādavaya-paṭipīlanatāya. All entities that come into contact with the item experience pressure, while the object is subjected to stress from its constituent elements. Secondly, it is considered a basis for suffering, as shown by the terms "dukkha-vatthutāya" or "dukkha-vatthuto". An object afflicted by dukkha is a foundation for suffering, such as inducing pain. Put simply, dukkha refers to the act of inflicting suffering.

The commentaries provide the most comprehensive collection of meanings for dukkha, which are as follows. Something is deemed dukkha due to four specific factors: Abhiñha-sampatipīlanato means that something is constantly oppressed or subject to continuous pressure due to its arising and disintegration. It also refers to persistent friction among its component components or associated situations.

Dukkhamato refers to the inherent difficulty of enduring something, as it lacks durability and cannot be sustained in its original state. It is bound to change, transform, and lose its identity due to its arising and ceasing nature. The concept of Dukkha-vatthuto refers to the fundamental cause of suffering and the underlying source of pressure and tension.

This implies that humans generate diverse forms of suffering, such as pain, discomfort, and anguish. Sukha-paṭikkhepatto refers to something that is in opposition to pleasure or happiness (sukha). The inherent factors of pressure, friction, and instability are barriers or hindrances to ease and relaxation. To attain pleasure, individuals must endeavor to govern specific aspects. Primarily, pleasure is solely a sensation known as vedanā. The fundamental state is dukkha - a state of pressure, tension, and friction inherent in all formations.

2.1.2.3. Anattā (Nonself)

Anattā can be interpreted as 'not-self', 'selfless', or 'nonself'. The term 'all things are anattā' signifies that all things possess their inherent nature and live or function accordingly. They lack a distinct 'self' or autonomous entity capable of exerting deliberate control. To grasp the nature of nonself, it is essential first to know the concept of attā, as anattā is essentially a negation of attā. Attā, also known as ātman in Sanskrit, denotes a perpetual self or substance that is believed to be the fundamental nature of any given entity, residing permanently within it. The entity in question serves as both the proprietor and overseer, acting as the primary recipient of knowledge and the driving force behind actions. The underlying force behind all phenomena, including life itself, can guide and control things according to their requirements and desires.

Some religions assert that a greater 'Self' or 'Spirit' governs all worldly events, controlling all living beings' souls and inanimate objects' souls or essences. They assert that this great Spirit is responsible for the creation and governance of all things and serves as the origin and ultimate destination of all things and life. In Hinduism, the divine entity is referred to as Brahmā or Paramātmā. The essence of the teaching on anattā is denying a permanent, unchanging self, both in ordinary life and spiritual realms. It affirms that this self is merely a concept arising from a misunderstanding by unenlightened individuals who fail to perceive the true essence of

reality. Individuals construct and impose a perception of their identity onto the world, hindering their ability to sense objective reality.

Comprehending the concept of the self eliminates misunderstanding and eradicates the confusing notion of the self. The idea of nonself instructs us to use wisdom to recognize that all things, including all elements of reality, exist and function by their inherent essence. No concealed, enduring personality exists as an owner or director; things are not subordinate to an internal or external authority. To both conditioned phenomena and the Unconditioned, selflessness can be defined as the state in which all things live per their inherent nature without being subject to external authority. If there were a significant, dominant entity present within objects, phenomena would be unable to exist and function in accordance with their inherent characteristics. The inherent essence of events demonstrates the quality of not having a self.

2.1.3. The Origination and Development of Mahāprajña Nikāya in China

As mentioned earlier, the formal establishment of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya" was officially proposed by Master Nenghai during a lecture on the scriptures and thus formally announced to the world. Therefore, for us, later generations, to explore the origin of the thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya" is actually to examine the lineage of Master Nenghai himself. Thus, in this section, we will discuss three aspects: Master Nenghai's reasons for studying the Dharma, Master Nenghai's lineage of Vajrayana, and the fundamental origins of Master Nenghai's thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya" in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

We first look at Master Nenghai's reasons for studying the Dharma. As is well known, the thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya" proposed by Master Nenghai is famous for its feature of "simultaneous study of exoteric and esoteric teachings." Therefore, we first discuss Master Nenghai's reasons for and experience in studying Vajrayana.

Master Nenghai's lay surname was Gong, and his name was Xueguang. He was born in 1886 in Mianzhu County, Sichuan. In his early years, he attended a private school and received a traditional cultural education. Around 1900, Master Nenghai began to pay attention to current affairs and developed a strong interest in the

reform movement. He hoped to save the declining Qing government through reform and achieve national strength. To realize his ideal of saving the country, Nenghai engaged in business and joined the military, but ultimately failed to fulfill his wish due to the turbulent times and the chaos of warlords. In 1914, Nenghai met the lay Buddhist Xie Zihou in Chongqing and learned from him that Master Foyuan of Sanyi Temple in Chengdu was lecturing on the scriptures, and thus the idea of studying Buddhism arose. This was the first time Nenghai came into contact with the Dharma, laying the foundation for his later conversion to Buddhism. Around 1915, Master Nenghai traveled to Japan to investigate and was impressed by the prosperity of Japanese Buddhism, the grandeur of the temples, and the flourishing of Dharma affairs. He soon returned to Beijing and had the opportunity to attend lectures on Buddhism by the lay Buddhist Zhang Kecheng. Master Nenghai listened devoutly and thus gained a deeper understanding and experience of Buddhist principles. He deeply felt that the vastness and profundity of the Dharma was the golden key to solving the fundamental problems of life. The wisdom of the Dharma inspired Master Nenghai's aspiration to save the country and the people. He gradually realized that the country's security and prosperity ultimately depend on the human mind. Only by propagating the Dharma and enlightening the human mind can social problems be fundamentally solved. Therefore 1924, at 38, Master Nenghai had already devoted himself to the Dharma for many years and felt that he had formed an extraordinary connection with the Buddha. To realize his ambition of saving the country and the people, Master Nenghai resolutely decided to renounce his wife and children and formally became a monk. That year, at Tianbao Temple in Chongqing, Master Nenghai took Master Foyuan as his teacher, shaved his head, and became a monk with the Dharma name Nenghai and the courtesy name Kuochu, belonging to the Linji school of monks. It is worth noting that although Master Nenghai belonged to the Linji school of Chinese Buddhism, he was open-minded and wise and did not limit himself to a single school or sect. On the contrary, he widely studied the scriptures and treatises of various schools, mastering them thoroughly, which laid a solid foundation for his later exploration of Tibetan Vajrayana.

After becoming a monk, Master Nenghai diligently studied both the exoteric and esoteric schools of Chinese Buddhism but still felt it was insufficient. By

chance, he discovered from a catalog of the Tibetan Canon that Tibetan Buddhist scriptures were extremely rich, and many had not been translated into Chinese. Thus, he developed the idea of personally going to Xizang to seek the Dharma. In the spring of 1926, Nenghai and more than ten others, including Master Dayong, set out for Xizang but could not make the journey due to various causes and conditions, such as the passing of Master Foyuan. Master Nenghai stayed at Paoma Mountain in Ganzi. During this period, he translated treatises such as *the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: The Lamrim Chenmo* and the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* and had initial contact with Tibetan Vajrayana empowerments and rituals. In the autumn of 1926, he went to Namu Temple in Litang with Master Yongguang to study the Six Perfections and the Doma Ritual, laying the foundation for his practice and realization of Tibetan Vajrayana.

In June 1928, Nenghai went to Xizang again, enduring hardships, and arrived in Lhasa in September. At Drepung Monastery, Master Nenghai took refuge with Khangser Rinpoche to study exoteric and esoteric teachings and received supreme Dharma methods. Khangser Rinpoche was the twenty-eighth lineage holder of Tsongkhapa's direct lineage, and it was scarce for Master Nenghai to be able to follow him closely. During his time with Khangser Rinpoche, Master Nenghai was diligent and tireless. The central exoteric and esoteric teachings he studied were:

In terms of exoteric teachings, he intensively studied *the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: The Lamrim Chenmo*, combined with scriptures such as *the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, and logic treatises, as well as commentaries from various schools, mastering them all.

In terms of esoteric teachings, he studied various empowerment rituals, mainly the *Ritual Commentary of Mañjuśrī* (《文殊大威德仪轨》), and personally participated in the practice of Vajrayana. In addition, Master Nenghai also received the supreme dharma inheritance from Khangser Rinpoche, the twenty-eighth generation of Tsongkhapa's direct lineage, which can be said to be the essence of Tibetan Vajrayana.

During this time, Master Nenghai translated and expounded the Dharma and repeatedly invited Khangser Rinpoche to propagate the Dharma in China. However, it did not come to fruition due to various causes and conditions. In the spring

of 1932, Master Nenghai ended his five-year stay in Xizang, loaded with Dharma treasures, and returned to Shanghai. In 1940, to invite Khangser Rinpoche to propagate the Dharma in China, Master Nenghai went to Xizang for the third time, arriving in Lhasa in September of that year, and once again took refuge with Khangser Rinpoche, completing and supplementing his previous studies. In half a year, he received more than four hundred empowerments from Rinpoche. He obtained all the Dharma methods of Vajra, Homa, and Mandala without omission, obtaining the complete lineage of Tsongkhapa's Dharma and becoming a long-tested disciple of Khangser Rinpoche. This can be proved from the records of *the Biography of Master Nenghai*:

The lama passed on to the guru all the clothing and Dharma instruments he had used throughout his life to propagate the Dharma, such as the tricāvara, dongka, uttarāsaṅga, antaravāsaka, pātra, Dharma conch, bumpa, topa, ghanta and vajra, boots, as well as the sacred objects of the exoteric and esoteric teachings.

Although the thought of the "Mahāprajñā Nikāya" advocated by Master Nenghai was established under a name he created, it originated from the lineage of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Next, we will continue to clarify the lineage of the thought of the "Mahāprajñā Nikāya" for everyone.

From the above, it can be seen that Master Nenghai's Vajrayana lineage comes from the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, and the path of his lineage is roughly as follows: "Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug school — Khangser Rinpoche, the twenty-eighth lineage holder of Tsongkhapa's direct lineage — Master Nenghai." Therefore, we can see that Master Nenghai's thought of the "Mahāprajñā Nikāya", especially its inherent system of prajñā thought, is also inseparable from the Buddhist idea of the Gelug school. Consequently, we will introduce some information about the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Gelug school was founded in the late 14th century by the Tibetan Buddhist reformer and renowned monk Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa (1357-1419). Faced with the situation of various sects of Tibetan Buddhism contending with each other, attacking each other, having complex doctrines, and declining monastic discipline, Tsongkhapa was determined to reform Tibetan Buddhism, revive the monastic community, and revitalize the Dharma. He extensively adopted the essence

of the doctrines of various sects, absorbed the thought of the Indian Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika school, and integrated skillful means with wisdom, creating a new sect that harmonized exoteric and esoteric teachings—the Gelug school. In 1409, Tsongkhapa established Ganden Monastery near Lhasa, marking the formal establishment of the Gelug school, and Tsongkhapa was honored as the first patriarch of the Gelug school. The Gelug school inherited the thought of Candrakīrti of the Indian Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika school, taking the Madhyamaka texts of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, and Candrakīrti as the fundamental basis, emphasizing the principles of the two truths, dependent origination, and emptiness. Tsongkhapa wrote numerous exoteric and esoteric treatises, laying the theoretical foundation for the Gelug school. His representative works include *the Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: The Lamrim Chenmo*.

In terms of exoteric teachings, the Gelug school emphasizes the systematic study of the five great treatises of Hetuvidyā, Prajñāpāramitā, Madhyamaka, Vinaya, and Abhidharma, stressing the combination of doctrinal dialectics and scriptural evidence. In terms of esoteric teachings, the Gelug school transmits the Anuttarayoga Tantra and the Great Perfection (Dzogchen) teachings, mainly practicing the Mahāvairocana-sūtra and the Vajraśekhara-sūtra, focusing on the actual practice of different Stage-s. The Gelug school generally emphasizes the view of emptiness and Madhyamaka in theory and practice; it stresses the equal importance of exoteric and esoteric teachings and the cultivation of merit and wisdom. It advocates upholding renunciation and bodhicitta, gradually studying and practicing exoteric and esoteric virtuous Dharmas, and ultimately achieving Buddhahood.

Moreover, as the founder of the Gelug school, Tsongkhapa established a comprehensive monastic education system, emphasizing the purity of moral discipline and the study of Buddhist doctrine. Gelug monasteries have both exoteric and esoteric colleges. Monks first systematically study the five great treatises of Hetuvidyā, Madhyamaka, Prajñāpāramitā, Vinaya, and Abhidharma in the exoteric college and then take the Geshe Lharampa degree examination. Those with excellent results enter the esoteric college to study the Four Classes of Tantra.

The exoteric college is divided into ten to twenty study halls, each cultivating monks' understanding of scriptures and doctrines and their debating skills

through teaching, debate, and discussion. Monks take monastic debate examinations according to their seniority, and those who pass can obtain different levels of Geshe degrees, with the highest level being Lharampa Geshe.

The esoteric college teaches the Four types of Secret teachings. Monks study through listening, contemplation, meditation, practicing visualization, receiving empowerment, and transmitting teachings, ultimately becoming Khenpos or Tulkus. The Gelug school also has various monastic positions, obtained through examinations on scriptures and doctrines and selection based on seniority, with the highest position being the Ganden Tripa of the Three Great Monasteries.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see that the Gelug school, as the most influential sect in Tibetan Buddhism, has inherited and developed the quintessential thought of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, forming a unique doctrinal system and educational tradition. The model of emphasizing both exoteric and esoteric teachings and the practice of both monastics and laypeople, established by masters such as Tsongkhapa, played a key role in the revival and spread of Tibetan Buddhism. It is also the profound foundation laid by Tsongkhapa that later facilitated Master Nenghai's elaboration of the thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya."

2.1.4. Four Noble Truths

These truths are the Truth of Suffering, The Truth of the Cause of Suffering, The Truth of the End of Suffering, and The Truth of the Path that Leads to the End of Suffering.

2.1.4.1. Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)

The first truth posits that existence is replete with suffering and dissatisfaction. Suffering encompasses not only physical or emotional pain but also encompasses sentiments of dissatisfaction, sadness, and impairment experienced by humans. The experience of suffering can arise from many factors, including but not limited to bereavement, sickness, aging, mortality, and unfulfilled aspirations.

2.1.4.2. Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Samudaya)

The second truth is that suffering emerges from desire and connection. The pursuit of hedonistic pleasures, dominance, and financial abundance, coupled with an emotional connection to both tangible and intangible aspects, gives

rise to a recurring cycle of anguish. Dissatisfaction emerges when our desires are unfulfilled or when we experience the loss of our possessions.

2.1.4.3. Truth of the End of Suffering (Nirodha)

The third truth asserts that suffering can be eradicated by eliminating wants and attachments. Upon attaining enlightenment (nirvana), individuals are liberated from the perpetual circle of suffering. Nirvana is a state in which all wants, hatred, and ignorance cease to exist, and individuals attain a state of complete inner tranquility.

2.1.4.4. Truth of the Path that Leads to the End of Suffering (Magga)

The fourth truth elucidates the noble road of eight, which is the requisite route to attain the cessation of suffering. The route is comprised of eight disciplines, which are categorized into three primary groups: wisdom (including true perspective and true purpose), ethics (including correct words, right actions, and true livelihood), and mental discipline (including real effort, true attention, and true concentration). By implementing these eight practices, individuals can cultivate their spiritual growth and ultimately attain it.

2.1.5. Mahāprajña Nikāya's Interpretations of Mahāprajña Teachings and Its Primary Doctrinal Argumentations

As mentioned earlier, since Master Nenghai is the founder and advocate of the thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya," the core content of this school—the thought of prajñā—is Master Nenghai's thought of prajñā. Therefore, analyzing and exploring Master Nenghai's thought of prajñā is analyzing and exploring the thought of prajñā in the "Mahāprajña Nikāya." Consequently, this section will mainly analyze and explore Master Nenghai's thoughts on prajñā.

From the above, it can be seen that the prajñā thought in the Gelug doctrine inherits the Madhyamaka philosophy while also emphasizing practice—especially in terms of practice, it stresses the cultivation of both merit and wisdom and also emphasizes that practitioners need to practice according to a gradual sequence. Therefore, based on this reasoning, as a successor of the Gelug school and the founder of the thought of the "Mahāprajña Nikāya," Master Nenghai's thought of prajñā should also focus on these two aspects.

A prominent feature of Master Nenghai's thought of prajñā is the emphasis on practice, seen in his writings and the focus of his Dharma propagation. Although prajñā is the core of his thought, apart from a few works specifically explaining the principles of prajñā, Master Nenghai's writings mainly focus on practice. When he taught and expounded the Dharma, he also focused more on specific practices and rarely discussed philosophical propositions of prajñā. Although Master Nenghai raised the banner of the "Mahāprajñā Nikāya," he was not keen on empty talk about the principle of prajñā and emptiness. However, he strongly emphasized how to implement prajñā in practice.

Although Master Nenghai showed unique ingenuity in his thought of prajñā practice, his theoretical foundation was still based on Madhyamaka philosophy, especially the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika doctrine inherited and developed by the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. As the founder of the Gelug school, Tsongkhapa took the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika view as his guide, particularly emphasizing the principle of the unobstructed harmony of dependent origination and emptiness and used this as the theoretical cornerstone of the Gelug practice system.

Although Tsongkhapa shared the exact origin and lineage of the early Madhyamaka scholars, there were differences in their theoretical approaches, mainly due to the different historical circumstances they faced. Early Madhyamaka scholars such as Buddhapālita and Bhāviveka primarily confronted the trend of substantialism in sectarian Buddhism. To destroy the attachment to substantial existence, they mainly argued from the perspective of emptiness, expounding the ultimate meaning that all phenomena are empty. However, by Tsongkhapa's time, another tendency emerged within Buddhism: some claimed to be Madhyamaka but fell into the view of nihilism. These people one-sidedly emphasized the emptiness and tranquility of all phenomena, denied the law of karma and its fruits, abandoned the observance of moral precepts, and had many deviations in their actual practice.

Perceiving that these malpractices all stemmed from a one-sided misinterpretation of the Madhyamaka principles, Tsongkhapa thoroughly criticized many seemingly accurate but false nihilistic views based on the tenets of the Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika school. While refuting erroneous views, Tsongkhapa also focused on expounding the harmonious meaning of dependent origination and

emptiness, emphasizing that the two are inseparable. In his view, dependent origination is emptiness, which must manifest in dependent origination. Apart from dependent origination, emptiness cannot be established, as stated in the *Madhyamaka-śāstra*:

*All dharmas arising from causes and conditions,
I speak of this as emptiness (śūnyatā),
Which is also a provisional designation,
And also the meaning of the Middle Way (madhyamā-pratipad).*

Master Nenghai's exploration of prajñā practice unfolded against this ideological background. Although his writings rarely directly quote Tsongkhapa's treatises, the various characteristics reflected in Nenghai's thought of prajñā practice, such as the harmonious understanding of the relationship between dependent origination and emptiness, the refutation of both the views of nihilism and eternalism and the meticulous argumentation of the stages of realization, are all in tacit agreement with Tsongkhapa's theoretical approach. Nenghai particularly valued *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra* and inherited Tsongkhapa's model of interpreting prajñā. It can be seen that Tsongkhapa's approach of penetrating dependent origination and emptiness and determining the stages of realization with the meaning of Madhyamaka Prāsaṅgika provided a key clue for Nenghai to excavate the profound meaning of prajñā, enabling him to integrate exoteric and esoteric teachings and develop a harmonious practice.

The integration of dependent origination and emptiness also means that the depth of understanding of the two corresponds. The extent of understanding of dependent origination also indicates the depth of understanding of emptiness and vice versa. Therefore, if one thinks one has realized emptiness but ignores the role of dependent origination, there will be an unavoidable self-contradiction and a deviation from the correct Madhyamaka view. Conversely, developing a subtle understanding of the meaning of dependent origination will directly promote the realization of emptiness. Master Tsongkhapa states in his "*Three Principal Aspects of the Path*" (《圣道三要颂》, also known as 《三主要道颂》):

When one knows the infallibility of pratīyasamutpāda and the appearance of phenomena and has understood śūnyatā by abandoning all assertions,

if at any time these two appear separately, then one still obscures the intent of the Muni (Buddha).

As soon as one sees the complete infallibility of pratītyasamutpāda, grasping the characteristics of genuinely existent objects ceases.

When these arise simultaneously, without alternation, at that time, one's vipaśyanā has been perfected.

Tsongkhapa emphasizes here that even if one can understand the dependent origination of all phenomena and realize the emptiness of dharmas through analysis, if this dependent origination and emptiness are two opposing aspects, seeing emptiness without seeing dependent origination and knowing dependent origination without seeing emptiness, then dependent origination and emptiness are still contradictory. One has not penetrated the Buddha's intention. Conversely, if one can see the emptiness of phenomena at the very moment of seeing their dependent origination, then at this time, dependent origination and emptiness are integrated, and this kind of observation is perfect. Therefore, one must first understand the profound meaning of dependent origination to realize emptiness. Master Nenghai says that "Prajñā is without characteristics, yet it is inherent within the Śaṭpāramitā and the myriad practices. "

This means that the emptiness of prajñā has no concrete entity but is directly manifested in the practice of the six pāramitās and myriad actions based on dependent origination. If one seeks prajñā apart from practice, it goes against the principle of the Buddha's prajñā. To realize emptiness, one must start from the practice of dependent origination.

Realizing emptiness is considered the key ability and mark of achieving liberation in Buddhism and is the goal of Buddhist practitioners. However, emptiness is not a concrete goal nor an object of ordinary consciousness. Therefore, when directly taking emptiness as the goal, one has already gone astray and may even "harm existence with emptiness." On the other hand, dependent origination is something everyone can recognize and experience. By practicing based on dependent origination, one can steadily and swiftly realize emptiness. Dependent origination refers to the practice of the conventional truth. This idea provides unprecedented theoretical support and emphasis on practice, making the Gelug school emphasize the importance

of practice everywhere. The theoretical basis for Master Nenghai's focus on practice in his prajñā thought also lies in this.

However, it needs to be added that, according to the thought of Tsongkhapa and Master Nenghai, realizing "emptiness" by following "dependent origination" only emphasizes this sequence in practice. In theory, it is still not the ultimate Madhyamaka view, which means there is still a distinction between dependent origination and emptiness rather than a proper integration. Master Tsongkhapa further states in his *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, "Moreover, by using appearances to eliminate the extreme of existence, and by using emptiness to eradicate the extreme of non-existence, if one knows that appearances and emptiness are the causes and effects of each other, then the grasping at extremes cannot rob one of this view. "

To eliminate the attachment to the existence of inherent nature, one need not find another emptiness to accomplish it. The phenomenon of dependent origination itself has already dismantled the existence of intrinsic nature. The understanding and application of dependent origination are the application of emptiness. The practice based on dependent origination itself is the embodiment of emptiness. Dependent origination and emptiness are integrated and non-dual. This idea constitutes the theoretical core of Master Nenghai's thought on practice. When we understand the practice mentioned by Master Nenghai, it not only refers to the cultivation method but also fundamentally points to the Middle Way practice, where dependent origination and emptiness are integrated and inseparable. Proper practice is a means to realize emptiness and unfold the wisdom of emptiness itself. To realize emptiness, one need not seek externally; practicing according to the Dharma within this dependent origination is sufficient.

2.1.6. Mahāprajñā Nikāya's Doctrinal Compilation and Canon and Its Doctrinal Implications

The practice referred to by Master Nenghai is not only a concrete method of cultivation but also a fundamental Middle Way practice that points to the integration and inseparability of dependent origination and emptiness. Therefore, the importance of practice in the thought system of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya is self-evident. Master Nenghai's practice-oriented approach to prajñā thought originates from the

commentaries he relied on when interpreting the prajñā sūtras. Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka-śāstra* focuses on expounding the principle of emptiness from a theoretical perspective with a distinct philosophical, analytical color. In contrast, the *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra* integrates prajñā through the three kinds of cognition, four applications of religious training, and eight chapters on the Dharmakāya. Its content almost entirely revolves around the stages of practice, covering all the practices from generating bodhicitta to attaining Buddhahood, emphasizing that all virtues must be perfected in practice. Although the prajñā theory expounded in the *Madhyamaka-śāstra* has universality, it cannot directly guide specific practices. In actual practice, it is often limited to serving as an object of contemplation for the view of emptiness or the Madhyamaka view. Traditional Buddhism is mainly limited to this when applying prajñā thought to guide practice. It is undeniable that the contemplation of emptiness, especially in meditation, is a necessary condition for deeply realizing emptiness. However, mere contemplation of emptiness can easily overlook most of the meaning of the prajñā sūtras. Moreover, it overemphasizes the non-conceptual concentration that transcends words and characteristics, easily neglecting the role of dependent origination, such as language and words, leading to passive behavior. The traditional approach of interpreting the prajñā sūtras with Nāgārjuna's thought often overlooks Nāgārjuna's other treatise, *the Bodhisambhāra-śāstra*. This treatise extensively discusses various specific practices for accumulating merits and purifying obscurations, indicating that the realization of prajñā is not solely based on the contemplation of emptiness but must rely on particular practices. If one interprets the prajñā sūtras based on the *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra*, one can directly obtain a practice guide for realizing emptiness. Master Nenghai says that "the more than 660 dharma aspects and 70 topics (in the *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra*) are all the sequential steps leading to realization and actualization. Therefore, one can realize all insights by practicing according to the sūtras. Moreover, "the path of omniscience is the path of the Buddha, the great Bodhi path from generating bodhicitta to attaining Buddhahood, which is also the entirety of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*."

Therefore, the prajñā sūtras describe the practical methods for realizing the omniscience of the Buddha. This is why Master Nenghai's prajñā thought emphasizes practice. Master Nenghai stresses practice because realizing emptiness

cannot be accomplished solely through theoretical analysis but must be achieved through practice, which is why the prajñā sūtras discuss practice in great detail. The contemplation of emptiness in traditional prajñā thought also belongs to practice, but it focuses on the ultimate truth perspective. In contrast, the practice emphasized by Master Nenghai primarily refers to the cultivation of the conventional truth. He says that "prajñā arises from the cultivation of saṃvṛti-satya (traditional truth); only then can it give rise to subtle functions and avoid becoming an emptiness shrouded in avidyā (ignorance) and:

"Merely thinking that all dharmas are like illusions does not constitute realization. Suppose one does not practice according to the pañcamārga (five paths) when facing situations. In that case, one will still make calculations based on true grasping and will not be able to comprehend the principle of śūnyatā (emptiness) of the pañcaskandha (five aggregates)."

Merely understanding the principle of emptiness theoretically cannot function in the realm of phenomena, let alone realize emptiness. One can recognize emptiness only by relying on practice and effectively eliminating afflictions and attachments.

Master Nenghai's prajñā thought focuses on practice also because, firstly, the exposition of prajñā principles has been quite comprehensive since ancient times, especially in Xizang, where the study and commentaries are exceptionally abundant and readily available without the need for much elaboration. More importantly, Master Nenghai's understanding of prajñā thought makes him not keen on specifically expounding the profound emptiness principles of prajñā (unless debating with others) but rather embodying the principles of emptiness in the process of expounding practical theories because emptiness itself cannot be expressed through language and need not be expressed through language. Master Nenghai says:

The paramārtha-satya (ultimate truth) siddhānta cannot be elaborated upon because it is beyond words and language. When expounded upon, each of the 70 topics always begins and ends with elucidating this meaning. Discussing the 70 topics is like discussing them 70 times, but the central

focus differs each time. It is necessary to consult the relevant passages from the Mahāyāna sūtras

Emptiness is not the realm of verbal expression, so it cannot be directly expounded. However, each of the seventy topics in the *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra* implicitly contains the meaning of emptiness, which can only be revealed in conjunction with the prajñā sūtras themselves. Therefore, not discussing emptiness does not mean disregarding emptiness or not realizing emptiness, but rather that the principle of emptiness is already embodied within the seventy topics related to practice.

Taking the chapter on omniscience as an example, the ten topics in this chapter are both practical methods and the objects of omniscience. Understanding and practicing these ten topics naturally leads one towards omniscience. The emptiness principles of omniscience are directly integrated into the practice of the ten topics. Omniscience, the ten topics, and other practices, like water and milk, form a seamless integration. Water will necessarily yield milk, while not taking water means milk cannot be obtained. Therefore, Master Nenghai's teaching system focuses on the "taking of water," i.e., the practice, and the "milk" will be obtained accordingly, rather than merely discussing the shape and color of the "milk" without knowing how actually to obtain it.

Moreover, Master Nenghai's emphasis on practice is closely related to the theoretical form of his prajñā thought. Although the *Madhyamaka-śāstra* is relatively extensive and rich in theoretical argumentation, its core idea is "the emptiness of dependent origination." In theory, extensive argumentation is required to establish this conclusion and explain the relationship between emptiness and various complex phenomena and principles. However, theoretical descriptions are unnecessary when realizing emptiness, and verbal thoughts are unnecessary. Simply contemplating a huàtóu (crucial phrase) is sufficient in Chan Buddhism.

Nevertheless, the practical methods for realizing emptiness involve a highly complex process, which must be discussed in detail to avoid meaningless work. Even Chan Buddhism has numerous monastery rules to guide practice. The practice system expounded in the *Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra* aims to guide practice directly, so its detail is almost exhaustive. It systematically organizes the Buddhist practice method

to avoid confusion and disorientation amidst many theories. It also analyzes and clarifies the relationship with other theories, requiring significant time and energy to achieve mastery. Therefore, Master Nenghai's emphasis on practice and the study of practical theories is also due to the complexity of prajñā practice and practical theories, which makes his prajñā thought focus on the exposition of practice and pragmatic theories.

Finally, and most importantly, the emphasis on practice in Master Nenghai's prajñā thought is a requirement of the emptiness of prajñā itself. Although emptiness cannot be expressed through words, the wisdom of emptiness is the antidote to the grasping of self and phenomena. Whether a person has penetrated the wisdom of emptiness can be seen in whether their two types of grasping have been eliminated. The higher the realization of emptiness, the lesser the two kinds of grasping. The reduction of the two types of grasping means that the self-centeredness in one's behavior also decreases accordingly, manifesting as compliance with the Buddhadharma in Buddhism. Master Nenghai says that "direct perception is thusness. Thusness, the nature of dharmas, and the ultimate reality cannot be described and do not rely on explanation. One should not try to grasp or elaborate upon thusness" and "Thusness means truly being able to practice as taught. The noble path should be cultivated according to the Dharma, and the defilements should be eliminated according to the Dharma."

Thusness is another name for emptiness. Realizing emptiness necessarily requires reasonable practice. If one cannot practice reasonably, it indicates that afflictions and attachments still exist and emptiness has not been realized. Therefore, even if one directly analyzes the principle of emptiness, one will still conclude that practice is essential rather than merely remaining at the level of theoretical analysis. Since this is the case, why not directly cultivate emptiness instead of relying on conventional truth practices to realize emptiness? Master Nenghai says:

By cultivating in this way, gradually and meticulously, based on the saṃvṛti-satya (conventional truth), one can counteract the manifest kleśas (afflictions) such as rāga (attachment). Subsequently, by entering into the meaning of śūnyatā (emptiness) and cultivating based on the paramārtha-satya (ultimate truth), one observes that the ṣoḍaśākārā (sixteen aspects)

of the catuḥ-satya (four noble truths) are all anālambara (without object), thus eliminating the grasping at actual existence. Why is it necessary to cultivate according to the distinctions of the skandhas (aggregates), āyatanas (sense bases), dhātus (elements), catuḥ-satya, ṣoḍaśākārā, and so forth, instead of merely cultivating the general characteristic of anālambara? If one does not do so, it will result in a vague and general tathatā (thusness), and one will not be able to eradicate the kleśas truly.

Emptiness cannot be expressed or discerned through words. If one discriminates with the conscious mind, it is no longer emptiness. How can one use it for practice if one does not discriminate with the conscious mind? Therefore, ordinary students cannot directly approach emptiness to realize it but must practice reasonably according to practical methods such as the sixteen contemplations of the Four Noble Truths. Thus, Master Nenghai states:

Therefore, it is said that the Buddha-dharma is beyond words. One must rely on the actual practice of the Buddha's teachings to attain it and not merely engage in the idle play of words and phrases. Before attaining realization, one cannot depart from the Buddha-dharma's prajñapti (conventional designations). After attaining realization, one also does not contradict the Buddha-dharma's prajñapti.

In summary, emphasizing practice is a requirement of prajñā thought. However, the complexity of practice and related theories is common among Buddhist schools. The unique aspect of Master Nenghai's Mahāprajña Nikāya in emphasizing practice lies in the following: Master Nenghai prioritizes practice based on prajñā thought, which is distinctly different from previous prajñā thoughts or practice views. At earlier emptiness contemplations and other practices, prajñā emptiness was the object of observation, and the practice itself was in a subject-object oppositional relationship. However, from the above arguments, it can be seen that for Master Nenghai, prajñā emptiness, and practice are like water and milk, inseparable.

Furthermore, prajñā and practice are in a non-dual relationship. Prajñā is the goal of practice, and the attainment of prajñā wisdom is manifested in Dharma practice. The establishment of the practice sequence is accomplished by prajñā wisdom, and through practice, one can realize prajñā wisdom.

Moreover, regarding the thought classics of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya, apart from the aforementioned Buddhist scriptures such as the Madhyamaka-śāstra, the Abhisamaya-alāṅkāra, and the classics composed by Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug school, such as the Lamrim Chenmo, the writings and translations of Master Nenghai himself also constitute the classic content of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya practice thought system. Current scholars such as Zongxing (2023) have organized Master Nenghai's writings and translations based on the currently available collected materials. The author also presents Master Nenghai's writings and translations in tabular form as supplementary information for readers to understand the works included in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya thought system.

2.1.7. Practice of Mahāprajñā Nikāya

The understanding of Mahāprajñā Nikāya can be traced back to the core teachings of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism. The Mahāprajñā Nikāya, translated as "a compilation of profound wisdom," is a textual work that highlights the significance of wisdom (prajñā) in attaining enlightenment. In the framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Prajñā is frequently linked to a profound comprehension of emptiness (śūnyatā) as expounded by Nāgārjuna in his mūlamadhyamakakārikā. Nāgārjuna posits that all phenomena lack inherent existence, leading to liberation from attachment and suffering (Williams, 2009).

Furthermore, the application of mahāprajñā nikāya can be observed from the perspective of theravāda, where wisdom is regarded as one of the three primary components of the noble eightfold path: precepts (morality), samādhi (concentration), and prajñā (knowledge) (Gethin, 1998). The policy in question in Theravāda requires a profound comprehension of the four noble truths and the principles of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā).

The framework is further reinforced by classical writings like the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, which define perfect wisdom as a transcendental form of knowledge that surpasses conventional duality and conceptions (Conze, 1975). This technique entails engaging in profound meditation and rigorous investigation of reality to attain intuitive comprehension that surpasses conceptual comprehension. The practice of Mahāprajñā Nikāya can be seen as the amalgamation of fundamental teachings from both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism. It highlights the

significance of cultivating wisdom by comprehending the concept of emptiness and implementing the noble eightfold path. The practice can be better understood and developed by studying literature such as the works of Nāgārjuna, Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, and classical theravāda writings, as they give a robust theoretical framework.

2.1.8. Meditation in Mahāprajña Nikāya

Meditation in Mahāprajña Nikāya is a prominent spiritual practice in the theravāda Buddhism school. The Mahāprajña Nikāya, a component of the Pāli canon, offers many Buddhist teachings that underscore the significance of meditation as a means to attain enlightenment. In this setting, meditation is commonly centered around cultivating complete mindfulness (*sati*) and deep concentration (*samādhi*), both of which are regarded as crucial in the spiritual progression of a practitioner. The Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings emphasize two primary forms of meditation: *samatha* (calm) meditation and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation. *Samatha* meditation strives to cultivate mental tranquility and enhance profound levels of concentration. In contrast, *Vipassanā* meditation centers on attaining a profound comprehension of the fundamental essence of existence, including impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). Both forms of meditation are mutually beneficial and are seen as a potent means of attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death, known as *Samsara* (Analayo, 2003; Gethin, 1998).

In addition, the Mahāprajña Nikāya provides detailed explanations of several pragmatic approaches and methodologies for meditation, encompassing practices such as focused breathing exercises, mindful bodily observation, and the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Each of these approaches is specifically designed to assist practitioners in cultivating an elevated degree of attention and mindfulness. As an illustration, observing one's breath (*ānāpānasati*) is a fundamental technique commonly taught as a starting point for meditation. This exercise facilitates the pacification of the mind and the concentration of attention, which serves as a crucial foundation for cultivating a profound state of *Samādhi*. Furthermore, cultivating love seeks to eradicate animosity and enhance favorable attributes within oneself, which is crucial for attaining inner tranquility and enlightenment (Nyanaponika Thera, 1996).

Within the social and cultural framework, meditation in Mahāprajñā Nikāya is a significant catalyst for advancing ethical principles and moral values. The practice of meditation serves the purpose of personal growth as well as fostering social cohesion by cultivating empathy and compassion. Therefore, meditation is not solely regarded as a means to personal enlightenment but also as a significant contribution to society's well-being. The teaching of Mahāprajñā Nikāya emphasizes the significance of maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between spiritual attainment and societal obligations, a fundamental precept in the Buddhist tradition (Harvey, 2013).

2.2. Related Study in Mahāprajñā Nikāya

The "Mahāprajñā Nikāya" study has examined several facets of knowledge and meditation in Buddhist traditions, particularly within the Mahāyāna and Theravāda contexts. The Mahāprajñā Nikāya, translated as "a compilation of profound wisdom," comprises comprehensive teachings that highlight the significance of cultivating prajñā (wisdom) through meditation and profound comprehension. Within the framework of mahāyāna, literature such as prajñāpāramitā sūtras assume the primary role as sources of reference. In his book "The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary," Edward Conze emphasized the definition of wisdom according to the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras. According to these sutras, wisdom is a form of knowledge that goes beyond dualistic conceptions and encourages practitioners to comprehend the concept of emptiness (śūnyatā).

In the Theravada tradition, scholarly investigations frequently center on the study of Vipassana (insight meditation) and samatha (tranquility meditation). In "In the Buddha's Words," Bhikkhu Bodhi explains that Vipassanā meditation is intended to cultivate a profound understanding of the impermanence (Anicca), unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha), and non-self (Anattā) aspects of existence. This practice facilitates individuals in comprehending and relinquishing their worldly attachments, attaining liberation from suffering (Bodhi, 2005). Furthermore, Ajahn Brahm's recent research in mindfulness, as outlined in his work "Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond," offers practical instructions for meditation that combine the principles of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions. Brahm highlights the significance of mindfulness as a foundation

for cultivating profound levels of concentration and intuitive understanding necessary for attaining nirvana (Brahm, 2006).

Another notable study is Tsongkhapa's contribution to *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (Lamrim Chenmo), where he presents a methodical approach to spiritual growth within the Gelugpa Mahāyāna tradition. Tsongkhapa highlighted the integration of moral conduct, focused meditation, and profound insight to attain enlightenment (Tsongkhapa, 2000). Shantideva's treatise, *"A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life"* (Bodhicaryāvatāra), offers valuable insights into the disciplines of knowledge and compassion in the Mahāyāna tradition. Shantideva emphasized the significance of cultivating Bodhicitta (the aspiration to attain enlightenment) and wisdom to accomplish a Bodhisattva's objectives (Shantideva, 1997).

Richard Gombrich's study in *What The Buddha Thought* offers a comprehensive examination of the authentic Buddhist teachings, encompassing the notions of wisdom and meditation. Gombrich elucidates the evolution and interpretation of these teachings across different Buddhist traditions throughout history (Gombrich, 2009). Peter Harvey's book, *"Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices,"* offers a thorough examination of the fundamental principles of Buddhism, emphasizing the significance of meditation and wisdom in the pursuit of spiritual growth. Harvey elucidated that Buddhist traditions emphasize distinct components of Buddhist teachings while prioritizing cultivating wisdom (Harvey, 2012).

The Nikāya Mahāprajña study explores many techniques highlighting the significance of formulating policy through meditation and profound comprehension. The works of Edward Conze, Bodhi, Ajahn Brahm, Tsongkhapa, Shantideva, Richard Gombrich, and Peter Harvey have significantly contributed to the understanding and advancement of this practice, serving as the basis for attaining enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, providing a detailed explanation of the design, participants, data collection procedures, research instruments, and data analysis techniques used to investigate the research questions. The choice of methodology is critical in ensuring that the study is reliable and valid, allowing for meaningful and accurate conclusions.

First, the research design is presented, detailing the framework guiding the study and the rationale behind its selection. The section on participants follows, describing the population from which the sample was drawn and the criteria used for inclusion. Next, the data collection methods are discussed, outlining the processes through which data was gathered to address the study's objectives. Then, a description of the research instruments used to collect data is provided, highlighting their relevance and suitability. Finally, the data analysis approach is explained, illustrating how the collected data was processed and interpreted to conclude.

By presenting the research methodology in this manner, this chapter ensures transparency and replicability, offering a clear roadmap for how the study was conducted and providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the methods employed.

3.1. Research Design

This research investigates the teacher's doctrine, practice, and role in the mahāprajña nikāya. This study employs a qualitative methodology to explore and examine the teachings and practices associated with Mahāprajña Nikāya within the framework of Buddhism. Data is acquired through two primary sources: examining religious literature and comprehensive conversations with Buddhist instructors. The analysis of religious texts involves comprehensive examinations of primary literature, such as *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* by Edward Conze, *Tsongkhapa, Collected Works of Master Nenghai*, and contemporary literature. These works offer valuable insights into the doctrine and fundamental

principles of Mahāprajña Nikāya. This analysis uses the hermeneutic approach to comprehend the significance of a text within its historical and philosophical framework. Furthermore, comprehensive interviews were conducted with Buddhist teachers with firsthand knowledge and expertise in Mahāprajña Nikāya. This interview employs semi-structured procedures to facilitate a thorough examination of the interviewee's comprehension of the doctrine, meditation practice, and the significance of instructors in acquiring and implementing these teachings.

3.2. Participant

The participants selected for the research interview were carefully chosen to ensure they possess pertinent knowledge and experience, enabling them to offer comprehensive insights into the teacher's doctrine, practice, and role. The selected participants are highly experienced Senior Buddhist Teachers with extensive knowledge and expertise in teaching and practicing the teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya. They possess the capacity to elucidate the concepts and fundamental principles and offer a comprehensive viewpoint on the teacher's role in spiritual guiding.

Table 3.1 presents the data of senior Buddhist teachers selected for the study.

Table 3.1 Data for an In-depth Interview with a Senior Buddhist Teacher

No	Name	Biography	Information
1	Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師)	One of the most important leaders in contemporary Buddhism in China and the entire world, Fo Guang Shan (潛光山), is the founder of the Buddhist Organization.	His background, accomplishments in advancing humanistic Buddhism, and the significance of teachers in Buddhist education
2	Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師)	Master Sheng Yen, renowned as a profound thinker and essential teacher of Chan Buddhism, is the esteemed	Master Sheng Yen's Perspective on Chan Meditation and the Role of Teachers in the Chan Buddhism Tradition offers a

No	Name	Biography	Information
		founder of Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山).	comprehensive understanding.
3	Master Xuecheng (学诚法师)	Master Xuecheng is President of the Chinese Buddhist Association and Abbot of Longquan Monastery (龙泉寺) in Beijing and Guanghua Temple (广化寺) in Fujian.	Master Xuecheng's expertise in guiding a sizable Buddhist institution and its significance in reforming Buddhist education in China

3.3. Data Collection

To obtain thorough and detailed data, the researcher employed two integrated methodologies to collect information on the teacher's doctrine, practice, and role in the Mahāprajña Nikāya. The techniques employed encompass document analysis and comprehensive interviews. The details of which are described below:

3.3.1. Documents Analysis

An extensive analysis of religious texts is conducted to gather information on the doctrine in Mahāprajña Nikāya. This analysis focuses on studying the primary literature, such as the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines by Edward Conze, Tsongkhapa's works, Shantideva's writings, and the Collected Works of Master Nenghai. Additionally, contemporary literature by Ajahn Brahm and Bodi Bodhi is consulted for further insights into the doctrine and fundamental principles of Mahāprajña Nikāya.

To obtain information on the practice at Mahāprajña Nikāya, the examined document consists of instructions and guidelines for meditation, as well as the recommended readings for the Buddhist community, specifically "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching" by Thich Nhat Hanh and "The Miracle of Mindfulness" by Thich Nhat Hanh.

3.3.2. Deep Interview

To obtain information regarding the doctrine in Mahāprajña Nikāya, the interview question is centered around assessing the participant's comprehension of the fundamental teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya. This includes a grasp of concepts such as wisdom (prajñā), emptiness (śūnyatā), and the path to enlightenment.

To obtain information regarding the practice of Mahāprajña Nikāya, an interview was conducted with the specific aim of exploring how the teacher applies the teachings of Mahāprajña Nikāya in both meditation practice and everyday life. Queries encompass the specific meditation methods employed, the regularity and length of meditation sessions, and the difficulties and advantages they encounter.

To obtain information regarding the role of the teacher in Mahāprajña Nikāya, interview questions focused on the teacher's responsibilities in guiding and assisting practitioners. This includes inquiries about the teaching methods employed and the specific sorts of guidance provided.

3.4. Instrument

The instrument utilized in the present study includes:

3.4.1. Religious Document Analysis Worksheet

The research focuses on analyzing four primary texts: the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines by Edward Conze, Tsongkhapa, Shantideva, and the Collected Works of Master Nenghai (能海 大師 全集). Additionally, current literature by Ajahn Brahm and Bodi Bodhi is also included. (see in Appendix 1-6)

3.4.2. Semi-structure Interview

Interviews were conducted with Buddhist instructors with knowledge and expertise in the Mahāprajña Nikāya. Semi-structured interviews comprised seven open-ended questions to investigate the participants' comprehension of the Mahāprajña Nikāya philosophy, meditation techniques, and the instructor's role in providing spiritual direction. The interview was recorded and transcribed for subsequent study (see Appendix 7).

3.4.3. Ethical Consideration

For the ethical consideration of conducting this study, the present study had already provided clear information regarding the aim or purpose of the study, research procedures, and potential outcomes before the research participants participated in his research. The researcher also provided a consent letter explaining the terms and conditions of becoming voluntary respondents and their rights, including the right to withdraw from this research at any point without any repercussions. Next, keeping the participants' identities and personal information as confidential data was also guaranteed. All the obtained data were put into anonymized respondents.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employs a thematic methodology to ascertain and elucidate the primary patterns within the acquired data. The initial stage of this data analysis involves transcribing the in-depth interviews. Following the transcription of the data, the researcher engaged in a comprehensive process of re-reading to gain a deep understanding of the context of each interview. In addition, academics engage in data coding, which involves categorizing material into specific groups such as "Policy Doctrine," "Practice Meditation," and "The Role of the Teacher." The code was performed manually.

Following the completion of the coding procedure, the subsequent phase involves conducting a thematic analysis to ascertain the primary themes and sub-themes pertinent to the research objectives. This analysis entails a comprehensive examination of each theme to comprehend how notions like doctrines, meditation practices, and the role of teachers are expressed and implemented within the framework of Mahāprajña Nikāya. Researchers use triangulation to validate and ensure the consistency of research results by comparing findings from interviews and text analysis. This process of triangulation aids in the identification of parallels and contrasts in perception and practice while also offering a more comprehensive understanding and application of the mahāprajña nikāya.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Chapter IV provides an overview of the results from the study conducted on the Mahāprajñā Nikāya, which includes doctrine, practice, and the role of the teacher. The research findings are presented based on a research methodology that involves analyzing four primary documents to gather information on doctrine and two primary documents to gather information on meditation practices in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya. This is followed by conducting in-depth interviews. Subsequently, the researcher integrates the analysis of documents and the results of interviews to address the research questions.

4.1. Findings from Document Analysis

4.1.1. Analysis of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* by Edward Conze

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, also known as the Perfection Wisdom Sūtras, comprise a set of Mahāyāna scriptures that center around the notions of prajñā (wisdom) and śūnyatā (emptiness). These scriptures highlight the significance of perceiving all occurrences as lacking separate existence, which is the core of ultimate wisdom. The sūtras mentioned vary in length, ranging from the Prajñāpāramitā in 8,000 Lines to the Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Heart Sūtra).

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras consists of three fundamental doctrines: 1) the concept of emptiness (śūnyatā), 2) the concept of wisdom (prajñā), which asserts that all phenomena lack inherent substance and are inherently empty, and 3) the bodhisattva path, which underscores the importance of wisdom and compassion in attaining enlightenment.

The initial doctrine of emptiness (śūnyatā). The "Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras" emphasizes the concept of emptiness, which asserts that all things lack a permanent and autonomous nature. All things that exist are merely a manifestation of the interplay of causes and conditions and, hence, lack any inherent existence. According to the information provided on page 142:

"舍利子, 色不異空, 空不異色, 色即是空, 空即是色; 受想行識, 亦復如是" *Shèlìzǐ, sè bù yì kōng, kōng bù yì sè, sè jí shì kōng, kōng jí shì sè; shòu xiǎng xíng shì, yì fù rúshì*

"Śariputra, rūpam śūnyatā, śūnyatāiva rūpam; rūpānna pṛthag śūnyatā, śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpam. Yad rūpam sā śūnyatā, yā śūnyatā tad rūpam"

The second doctrine of this teaching is Wisdom (prajñā). Wisdom entails a profound comprehension of emptiness. This is not merely cognitive information but a profound understanding acquired through meditation and spiritual discipline. This insight enables individuals to perceive beyond the deceptive perception of opposing forces and attain enlightenment.

As indicated on page 201:

"Yaḥ paśyati prajñāpāramitāyā śūnyatām, sa paśyati sarvadharmāṇām tattvam."

"Seeing emptiness with absolute insight reveals the truth of all phenomena."

The third doctrine is the Bodhisattva Path. The "Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras" educate on the path of bodhisattvas, who aim to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all creatures. Bodhisattvas cultivate six paramitas (perfections): charity, morality, patience, persistence, concentration, and wisdom.

As stated on document page 314:

"Bodhisattvaḥ prajñāyā na saṁgrhṇāti, tathāpi sarvasattvānām duḥkhāt mocayitum prajñām bhāvayati."

"A real bodhisattva is not wedded to wisdom but practices wisdom to liberate all creatures from suffering."

4.1.2. Analysis of Tsongkhapa's Works

Tsongkhapa, a prominent intellectual in the Tibetan Gelugpa lineage, authored significant literary compositions, including the Lamrim Chenmo (Stages on the Path to Enlightenment). This study presents a systematic approach to achieving enlightenment, drawing from the teachings of the Buddha.

The core tenet of this philosophy is the prioritization of progressive practice, starting with fundamental practices like morality and advancing to more

advanced practices like concentration and wisdom. Tsongkhapa emphasized the significance of comprehending and valuing emptiness through profound analytical meditation and studying scriptures. As stated in document 302:

"rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i chos med pa, thams cad kyang gzhi la bdag nyid med pa tsam du rnam par rig pa la ni 'dzin pa med pa yin no." (རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གུབ་པ་འི་ཚོས་མཐའ་དག་ཀྱང་གཞི་ལ་འདྲེན་པ་ལ་ཉི་འཛིན་པ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།)

འདི་ཚོས་མེད་པ་, མཐའ་མཐའ་ཡང་གཞི་ལ་བདག་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཚམ་དུ་ནམ་པར་རིག་པ་ལ་ནི་འཛིན་པ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།)

4.1.3. Analysis of the Collected Works of Master Nenghai" (能海大師全集)

Master Nenghai (能海大師) was a prominent role in the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism in China throughout the 20th century. The "Collected Works of Master Nenghai" (能海大師全集) has a plethora of unique insights into Buddhist ideas, particularly those pertaining to the Mahāprajñā Nikāya.

Master Nenghai's teachings, known as the "Nenghai Grand Collection," consist of four doctrines:

1) Voidness (Śūnyatā)

The Mahāprajñā Nikāya prominently features the notion of emptiness, also known as śūnyatā. Master Nenghai clarified that emptiness does not denote a state of nothingness but rather the recognition that all phenomena lack a stable and autonomous nature.

Master Nenghai expressed the following statement:

“空性即是不依自性而存在，一切法皆因缘所生，故无自性。”

“Emptiness refers to existence without an independent essence; all phenomena occur as a result of conditions and causes, and so have no permanent essence” (page 142)

Master Nenghai highlighted the importance of comprehending emptiness in transcending attachment and gaining enlightenment.

2) Prajñā or Wisdom

Wisdom, also known as Prajñā, refers to a profound understanding of the fundamental essence of existence that goes beyond the limitations of dualistic thinking and conventional ideas. Master Nenghai emphasizes the significance of meditation

and contemplation in cultivating this insight. Master Nenghai expressed the following statement:

“智慧非仅是知识，而是对实相的直接洞见，此洞见来自于禅修与反。

"Wisdom is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but rather the ability to gain direct understanding of the true nature of reality through the practices of meditation and contemplation." (Page 201)

Master Nenghai highlighted that wisdom results from profound and rigorous spiritual cultivation.

1) Bodhisattva

The Mahāprajñā Nikāya describes the Bodhisattva path as the chosen path for individuals who are resolute in pursuing enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings. Master Nenghai outlined the six paramitas, the essential qualities a Bodhisattva must cultivate.

Master Nenghai expressed the following statement:

“菩萨修行六度，即布施、持戒、忍辱、精进、禅定、智慧，乃成就圆满佛果之道”

"A Bodhisattva cultivates the six paramitas, which are charity, morality, patience, persistence, meditation, and knowledge, to attain complete enlightenment."

This passage highlights Master Nenghai's strong emphasis on the significance of cultivating the six paramitas as a means to attain enlightenment.

2) Non-Duality

The Mahāprajñā Nikāya's doctrine of non-duality posits that all distinctions between subject and object are illusory, and ultimate truth surpasses all duality. Master Nenghai frequently explores this subject through meditation and firsthand encounters.

Master Nenghai stated:

“非二即是对实相的认知，不见自他分别，万法一如。”

"Non-duality is the acknowledgment of the genuine nature of reality, where

there is no distinction between oneself and others, and all phenomena exist as a unified whole." (Page 456).

Master Nenghai stressed that achieving non-duality is the outcome of intensive meditation practice.

4.1.4. Analysis of the Works of Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi

Ajahn Brahm, a contemporary Theravāda monk, authored numerous publications on meditation and Buddhism. His works, including titles like "Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond," center around practicing jhāna meditation and cultivating knowledge through profound meditative experiences. Bhikkhu Bodhi, a Buddhist scholar and translator, has authored numerous significant works, including the Majjhima Nikaya and Samyutta Nikaya translations. His book *In the Buddha's Words* is an anthology that compiles the principal lessons from the Pali Canon about the Buddha.

The primary doctrines in this instruction are:

Ajahn Brahm emphasized the significance of jhāna meditation as the fundamental practice for attaining enlightenment. In addition, he underscored the significance of comprehending anatta (the absence of a permanent self) and the means to transcend dukkha (the state of suffering) through the cultivation of meditation and the acquisition of wisdom.

According to the information stated on page 123 of the document:

"Jhānam paramasukham" signifies that "Jhāna represents the utmost state of happiness."

Bhikkhu Bodhi stressed the significance of acquiring a profound comprehension of the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha) by engaging in the scholarly examination of holy sources. The teachings encompass a comprehensive examination of the Four Noble Truths, which are suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. The teachings include the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of the correct view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Furthermore, the teachings incorporate the concept of

Theravāda Buddhism, which emphasizes moral discipline and meditation as the means to attain liberation.

"Dukkham parijānāti, dukkhasamudayaṃ parijānāti, dukkhanirodham parijānāti, dukkhanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadam parijānāti." (Pali: दुःखं परिजानाति, दुःखसमुदयं परिजानाति, दुःखनिरोधं परिजानाति, दुःखनिरोधगामिनिं पटीपदं परिजानाति.) (page 45)

4.1.5. Analysis of the Document 'The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching' by Thich Nhat Hanh (1999)

Thich Nhat Hanh discussed many meditation techniques associated with Buddhist teachings in his book "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching." Meditation serves as a means to attain profound self-awareness and comprehension of the universe. Thich Nhat Hanh stressed the significance of complete awareness as the central aspect of meditation practice. Complete consciousness entails complete focus in the present moment, encompassing respiration, daily tasks, and social engagement.

"Meditation is not just sitting in a quiet place but living every moment of our life with mindfulness. By being fully present with each breath, each step, and each action, we cultivate a deep sense of awareness and presence." (Nhat Hanh, 1999, p. 112)

This book provides a comprehensive guide to meditation, outlining the specific methods and techniques to be followed.

- Meditation position: Nhat Hanh emphasizes the significance of assuming a comfortable and steady bodily position for meditation, such as sitting cross-legged on the floor or in a chair.
- Breathing exercises: The primary strategy is to focus on your breath. Nhat Hanh instructed on the practice of mindfully perceiving each inhalation and exhalation.

4.1.6. Analysis of the Document 'The Miracle of Mindfulness' by Thich Nhat Hanh (1975)

"The Miracle of Mindfulness" is a practical manual that elucidates the concept of complete awareness and provides instruction on implementing mindfulness

in all areas of life. This book centers on the utilization of complete mindfulness in day-to-day tasks. Nhat Hanh instructs that mindfulness can be employed during eating, walking, or conversing.

“Mindfulness is for sitting meditation and every moment of life. When you eat, eat with full awareness. When you walk, walk with full awareness. Every action can be an opportunity to practice mindfulness.” (Nhat Hanh, 1975, p. 45)

This book provides a comprehensive guide to the complete practice of meditation.

- Eating meditation: Nhat Hanh provides guidance on practicing mindfulness when eating, emphasizing the need to attentively observe the flavor, consistency, and scent of food.
- Walking meditation: Nhat Hanh offers methods for meditation while walking, in which each step is taken with complete mindfulness.

4.2. Finding from Interview

The interview focuses on three experienced masters with a deep understanding and extensive practice in Mahāprajña Nikāya. The interview question aims to assess the candidate's comprehension of the philosophy of Mahāprajña Nikāya, which encompasses the doctrines of wisdom (prajñā), emptiness (śūnyatā), and the route to enlightenment, including the four noble truths and the eightfold path. Furthermore, this interview aims to investigate the application of meditation in everyday life, encompassing the specific meditation techniques employed, the frequency and duration of meditation sessions, and the difficulties and advantages encountered. Additionally, it seeks to examine the role of the instructor in directing and assisting practitioners, including the teaching approaches employed and the nature of the guidance provided.

Table 4.1 Category and Transcript of Interview

Category	Interview Transcript	Interpretation
Doctrine	<p>Researcher:</p> <p>What is your comprehension of the concepts of wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) and emptiness (<i>śūnyatā</i>)?</p> <p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p> <p><i>In my perspective, wisdom, also known as <i>prajñā</i>, refers to a profound comprehension of the genuine essence of all things. Emptiness (<i>śūnyatā</i>) refers to the absence of a permanent and independent essence or existence in all occurrences. The outcome of each situation is contingent upon the underlying causes and conditions. We can transcend our attachment and ignorance by comprehending the concept of emptiness.</i></p> <p>Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):</p> <p><i>Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) in understanding reality and overcoming suffering. Wisdom allows us to perceive the emptiness of all occurrences and remove the attachment that creates suffering.</i></p> <p>Master Xuecheng (学诚法师):</p> <p><i>Wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) is the ability to perceive and comprehend reality without distortion. <i>Prajñā</i> encompasses knowledge, direct experience, and intuition, empowering individuals to overcome ignorance and suffering.</i></p> <p><i>While Emptiness (<i>śūnyatā</i>) refers to the realization that nothing has a lasting existence, the void permits us to perceive reality clearly and gain a profound understanding.</i></p>	<p>The doctrine of the name in the mahāprajña nikāya pertains to wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) and emptiness (<i>śūnyatā</i>).</p> <p>Masters believe that wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) is crucial for comprehending genuine reality and liberating oneself from suffering. By applying knowledge, we can perceive the inherent lack of substance in all occurrences, thereby transcending the clinging that gives rise to suffering.</p>

Category	Interview Transcript	Interpretation
	<p>Researcher:</p> <p>What is your comprehension of the journey towards enlightenment, which encompasses the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path?</p> <p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p> <p><i>The four noble truths serve as the foundation for Buddhist teachings, providing a road map for understanding and overcoming suffering. The route of eight is a practical roadmap that enables us to use this insight in everyday situations. Following the path of eight can help us conquer suffering and gain enlightenment.</i></p> <p>Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):</p> <p><i>The four noble truths describe the structure of suffering and how to overcome it, while the path of eight provides a practical strategy for achieving that aim. We can steadily achieve enlightenment and overcome suffering by adopting the eight-based paths.</i></p> <p>Master Xuecheng (學誠法師):</p> <p><i>The four noble truths provide a framework for understanding and overcoming suffering, while the eight-fold path offers practical strategies for applying this teaching in everyday life. Following the eight routes, we can train ourselves to create the appropriate perception, real intentions, and actual acts, all contributing to enlightenment.</i></p>	
Practice	<p>Researcher:</p> <p>Which meditation technique do you employ?</p>	<p>Meditation is essential in the practice of worship</p>

Category	Interview Transcript	Interpretation
	<p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p> <p><i>In my tradition, we practice various meditation techniques, including seated meditation (zazen) and breathing meditation. Sitting meditation helps relax the mind and focus during this time, whereas breathing meditation focuses on breathing awareness and soothes the body and mind.</i></p> <p>Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):</p> <p><i>My meditation practice includes a sitting meditation known as "chan" or "zen".</i></p> <p>Master Xuecheng (学诚法师):</p> <p><i>I practice "full attention meditation" or "mindfulness" meditation. This technique entails complete observation of the body's thoughts, feelings, and sensations without evaluation.</i></p> <p>Researcher:</p> <p>How long and how frequently do you typically meditate?</p> <p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p> <p><i>I meditate twice daily, in the morning and evening. Each meditation session lasts one or two hours.</i></p> <p>Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):</p> <p><i>Meditation is a regular practice in my tradition, performed daily without fail. Typically, I dedicate one to two hours each morning to sit down.</i></p> <p>Master Xuecheng (学诚法师):</p> <p><i>I engage in daily meditation, dedicating one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening for each session.</i></p>	<p>ideology in the mahāprajña nikāya.</p> <p>Furthermore, masters believe meditation can enhance attention, foster inner tranquility, and facilitate a profound comprehension of oneself and the nature of existence.</p> <p>The masters possess a diverse range of meditation practices.</p>

Category	Interview Transcript	Interpretation
	<p>Researcher:</p> <p>What challenges do you encounter while meditating, and what advantages do you derive from this practice?</p> <p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p> <p><i>Overcoming mental and emotional instability is one of the most challenging aspects of meditation. Meditation, on the other hand, has numerous advantages, such as improved attention, inner tranquility, and a better understanding of oneself and reality.</i></p> <p>Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):</p> <p><i>Meditation challenges can include difficulty focusing and overcoming bodily or emotional discomfort. However, meditation can also provide benefits such as growing inner serenity, deep insight, and the ability to face life calmly and mindfully.</i></p> <p>Master Xuecheng (学诚法师):</p> <p><i>One of the most challenging obstacles is overcoming boredom and dissatisfaction while meditating. However, meditation can also benefit people by increasing self-awareness, improving stress management, and developing deep inner calm.</i></p>	
Master role	<p>Researcher:</p> <p>What is your involvement in providing guidance, including selecting instructional methods and the nature of the guidance?</p> <p>Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):</p>	<p>The teacher's function in imparting doctrine is primarily that of a guide. The instructor offers</p>

Category	Interview Transcript	Interpretation
	<i>As a teacher, I guide and encourage students on their spiritual journeys. My teaching approaches include lectures, group discussions, and practical activities. I frequently use examples from ordinary life to explain Buddhist teachings and facilitate discussions addressing emerging issues or misconceptions.</i>	direction and assistance to students as they navigate their spiritual path.
	Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師): <i>As a teacher, I support students' spiritual progress through suitable counsel and effective ways. I use a variety of approaches to teach, including lectures, interactive discussions, and meditation training.</i>	
	Master Xuecheng (学诚法师): <i>As a teacher, I help pupils understand Buddhist teachings and practices. My teaching methods include lectures, meditation training, and private guidance.</i>	

4.3. Integrating the Results of Document and Interview Analysis to Answer Research Questions

RQ1: What is the perceived Mahāprajña Nikāya doctrine in China's mainland?

The research of materials and in-depth interviews with the master revealed that the primary theory of Mahāprajña Nikāya centers around the cultivation of wisdom (prajñā) and the comprehension of emptiness (śūnyatā). After analyzing the four key documents, we have identified 11 doctrines:

1. The Prajñāpāramitā sūtras consist of three fundamental doctrines: 1) teachings on emptiness (śūnyatā), which explain that all phenomena lack permanent substance and are inherently empty; 2) wisdom (prajñā), which is the perspective that

encompasses the understanding of emptiness; and 3) the Bodhisattva path, which emphasizes the cultivation of wisdom and compassion as the means to attain enlightenment.

2. Tsongkhapa's theory emphasizes a step-by-step approach to spiritual activities, starting with fundamental exercises like morality and progressing to more advanced exercises like concentration and wisdom. It also emphasizes the significance of emptiness.
3. Master Nenghai's teachings (能海 大師 全集) are centered around four doctrines: emptiness (śūnyatā), prajñā (wisdom), bodhisattva, and non-duality.
4. Comparison of Doctrine in Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi Jhāna meditation is crucial for attaining enlightenment and understanding the four noble truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the method to the cessation of suffering, which is the noble eightfold path. This path encompasses the right view, right intention, right speech, and other aspects. Indeed, the essence of Theravāda Buddhism lies in the genuine practice of virtuous behaviors, sincere dedication, genuine exertion, unwavering focus, and deep concentration. This tradition greatly emphasizes moral conduct and meditation as means to attain freedom.

Based on interviews, the masters assert that the theory of wisdom (prajñā) is crucial for comprehending genuine reality and attaining liberation from suffering. By applying knowledge, we can perceive the inherent lack of existence in all phenomena, transcending the attachment that gives rise to suffering. Experts also believe one can transcend suffering and progress towards enlightenment by following the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path principles.

RQ2: How does Mainland China implement the religious practices of Mahāprajñā Nikāya?

Through interviews and research of Thich Nhat Hanh's books, "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching" (1999) and "The Miracle of Mindfulness" (1975), it has been determined that meditation practices are a crucial element in the religious practice of Mahāprajñā Nikāya. Meditation is regarded as a means to attain profound self-

awareness and comprehension of the universe. Masters universally acknowledge that meditation is an essential element of devotion, as they practice daily.

Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師):

I usually meditate twice daily, in the morning and evening. Each meditation session lasts one or two hours.

Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師):

Meditation is a daily practice in my tradition. I usually set out one to two hours each morning to sit down.

Master Xuecheng (学诚法师):

I meditate daily, with the primary session lasting an hour in the morning and another at night.

RQ3: What role does the teacher have in disseminating and developing Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings in mainland China?

The teacher plays a dominant role as a mentor to guide students on their spiritual path while imparting the principles of Mahāprajña Nikāya. This role encompasses several key aspects:

1. Individualized mentoring

Master's programs in Mainland China offer students extensive and profound personal mentorship. This guidance entails one-on-one consultation, in which the teacher assists students in comprehending the personal obstacles they encounter in their spiritual practice. The teacher offers customized guidance to meet all students' requirements and capabilities. Master Xuecheng (学诚 法师) offers individual guidance sessions to students who struggle with comprehending the notion of emptiness or sustaining a consistent meditation practice.

2. Development of Morals and Ethics

Teachers are crucial in cultivating their students' moral and ethical development. This aligns with the principles of Mahāprajña Nikāya, highlighting the significance of morality as a fundamental basis for cultivating wisdom. The teacher imparts ethical values and exemplifies them through their conduct. Master Hsing Yun frequently imparts personal anecdotes and daily practices that

exemplify Buddhist ethics, enabling students to observe the tangible manifestations of these teachings.

3. Instruction was delivered via lectures, and group discussions were facilitated. The teacher imparts the doctrines of Mahāprajña Nikāya through collective lectures and debates. This lecture frequently entails a comprehensive elucidation of sūtra, associated remarks, and practical implementation of teachings in daily life. Group conversations facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences among students while supervised and directed by the teacher. Master Hsing Yun, a notable example, frequently conducts post-lecture discussion sessions to ensure students' comprehension of the presented content and ability to apply it in their practice.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter V presents three significant findings that align with the research's questions. The first aspect to consider is the doctrine of Wisdom (Prajñā), the fundamental element in the journey towards enlightenment. Furthermore, meditation is the primary method for cultivating insight and comprehending the concept of emptiness. In the Mahāprajñā Nikāya tradition, the teacher assumes the role of a guide, offering guidance in meditation and comprehension of the teachings. Finally, the research conclusion and recommendations are also given in Chapter V.

5.1. Discussion

5.1.1. The Doctrine of Wisdom, Known as Prajñā, is Considered the Fundamental Essence of the Way towards Enlightenment

Research on the Mahāprajñā Nikāya reveals that the doctrine of wisdom (prajñā) plays a crucial role in the journey towards enlightenment. Prajñā refers to a profound and instinctive comprehension of the fundamental reality of all things, which is closely connected to the notion of emptiness (śūnyatā), asserting that all things lack a permanent and autonomous identity as one of the monks asserted that "Prajñā was more than just knowledge; but it represented a deep insight of the existence of the nature and human. It also transformed how people saw and perceived themselves and the world. Only with prajñā people could truly progress into the path to enlightenment." This finding aligns with previous research, specifically the study by Paul Williams, which highlights the significance of prajñā in the Mahayana tradition as a crucial element in attaining enlightenment (Williams, 2009). According to Williams, wisdom entails the capacity to perceive beyond deceptive appearances and comprehend the true nature of existence as emptiness. This understanding enables individuals to liberate themselves from attachment and suffering.

Furthermore, Conze's (2008) research emphasizes that wisdom within the Mahayana framework encompasses more than mere intellectual knowledge but

involves profound firsthand experience. Conze (2008) further highlights that *prajñā* plays a fundamental role in cultivating morality and focus, which are integral aspects of the Eightfold Path. This demonstrates that *prajñā* is inseparable from other elements of Buddhist practice and holds a pivotal position in achieving enlightenment.

When examining the role of wisdom (*prajñā*) in the way to enlightenment, it is crucial to emphasize how contemporary Buddhist practitioners implement this method in everyday practice. As one of the monks mentioned in his words, "For the monk, wisdom was not just a level concept, but a guiding principle. Every day, the monk attempted to see many things, internalize their actions, and act compassionately. This approach helped the monk stay mindful and onto enlightenment." Wallace's (2007) research emphasizes incorporating Buddhist wisdom teachings with contemporary scientific study, namely in neuroscience. According to Wallace (2007), engaging in meditation techniques that aim to cultivate *prajñā* can lead to beneficial alterations in the structure and functioning of the brain, hence promoting mental and emotional well-being. This study highlights the ongoing significance of wisdom teachings in modern circumstances, where a profound comprehension of emptiness and reality contributes to spiritual enlightenment and yields scientifically quantifiable practical advantages. This reinforces the assertion that knowledge is a crucial component of the Buddhist tradition, with broad relevance to different facets of life, encompassing both spiritual and worldly domains. The lineage between minor Buddhism and the Mahāprajñā Nikāya was acknowledged as a minor Buddhist tradition as a unique lineage within the broader scope of Buddhism, emphasizing the cultivation of wisdom (*prajñā*) deeply as the essential pathway to enlightenment. This religious practice emphasized *prajñā* as the means to gain deeper insight into the reality of nature, especially the understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the interdependent nature of all phenomena. While the Mahāprajñā Nikāya lineage connected to many elements of teachings with Mahayana Buddhism, it emphasized distinct doctrines and practices that place *prajñā* as the main guiding principle, different from other schools that may give more balanced emphasis to both compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom.

The lineage of Mahāprajñā Nikāya was also formed by a line of monk teachers dedicated to maintaining and transmitting this wisdom-hub approach, enhancing a community focused on meditation to gain deeper insight. Masters within

this tradition were regarded as carriers of a specific understanding of *prajñā* that integrates rigorous philosophical study with contemplative practice. This lineage was probably small compared to other Buddhist schools. However, it remained significant for the people who tried to find an intense focus on wisdom as the core of spiritual experience. The *Mahāprajñā Nikāya* lineage changed and evolved, especially in local regions such as mainland China, where it interacted with other Buddhist traditions while preserving its unique views on enlightenment through true wisdom.

5.1.2. Utilizing Meditation as the Principal Method for Cultivating Insight and Comprehending the Concept of Emptiness

The second finding of this research highlights meditation as a fundamental method for cultivating wisdom (*prajñā*) and comprehension of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This finding highlights the significance of meditation as a valuable technique for achieving mental tranquillity. By doing so, individuals can gain a clear and unbiased perception of reality, free from the influence of illusions or attachments. For instance, sitting meditation (*zazen*) and mindfulness meditation concentrate the mind and enhance comprehension of emptiness. This method aligns with the conclusions of Kabat-Zinn (1990), who asserted that mindfulness meditation is linked to heightened consciousness and decreased stress levels, enabling individuals to approach life with greater wisdom and tranquillity. Jon Kabat-Zinn's study demonstrates that meditation not only aids in managing stress and enhancing mental health but also fosters the cultivation of wisdom by promoting heightened self-awareness and a more profound comprehension of the nature of ideas and emotions. Kabat-Zinn asserts that mindfulness meditation enables individuals to recognize the transient and mutable quality of their experiences, akin to the concept of emptiness taught in the *Mahāprajñā Nikāya*. This comprehension assists practitioners in relinquishing attachments and illusions, which is a crucial stride toward enlightenment.

Lazar et al. (2005) conducted more research that offers additional evidence supporting the advantages of meditation in cultivating knowledge and comprehension of emptiness. Lazar discovered a correlation between extended periods of meditation and an augmentation in the thickness of the cerebral cortex in various brain regions linked to attention and sensory processing. These findings indicate that meditation has the potential to enhance the brain's ability to achieve heightened

consciousness and a more accurate perception of the world, which is crucial for the cultivation of *prajñā*. These findings reinforce the perspective that meditation is not solely a spiritual activity but also possesses a robust scientific foundation in enhancing brain functionality and psychological welfare.

In addition, Ricard's (2006) research highlights the significance of meditation in cultivating wisdom and comprehension of emptiness. Ricard emphasized that meditation can pacify a restless mind and enable individuals to perceive reality with more clarity, free from the influence of illusions or emotional attachments. Ricard highlighted that comprehending this concept is crucial for attaining genuine happiness and spiritual flourishing, representing the Buddhist discipline's ultimate objective. Moreover, a study conducted by Davidson (2012) demonstrates that meditation can induce alterations in the structure and function of the brain, which facilitate the cultivation of wisdom and enhanced comprehension. Davidson's research revealed that regular meditation can enhance neural activity in specific brain regions linked to attention, awareness, and positive emotions. These cognitive processes are crucial for the cultivation of *prajñā*. The findings affirm that meditation yields psychological advantages and facilitates the cognitive and emotional changes necessary for enlightenment. Hence, as the primary instrument in the *Mahāprajña Nikāya*, meditation holds spiritual significance and is substantiated by scientific research, demonstrating tangible advantages in daily existence.

5.1.3. In the Mahāprajña Nikāya Tradition, Teachers Serve as Mentors who Guide Meditation Practice and Comprehension of the Teachings

The final finding derived from the research on the *Mahāprajña Nikāya* reveals that the Master assumes the role of a mentor, offering guidance in both the practical aspects of meditation and the comprehension of the teachings. In addition to instructing meditation practices, teachers assist students in surmounting challenges and attaining a profound comprehension of Buddhist teachings. According to Collins (1998), research supports the idea that in the Buddhist tradition, teachers are responsible for offering comprehensive spiritual advice and influencing students' spiritual development through teaching and personal demonstration. According to Collins (1998), teachers act as tangible embodiments of Buddhist principles, offering inspiration and encouragement to pupils in their pursuit of enlightenment. Similarly,

Bhikkhu Bodhi's (1999) research in "The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering" demonstrates the significant importance of the teacher in facilitating students' comprehension and application of the Eightfold Path. Bhikkhu Bodhi highlights the role of the instructor in guiding the student to cultivate accurate comprehension, proper intention, and appropriate application of the Buddha's teachings. The Master offers explicit guidance on incorporating each element of the Eightfold Path into the student's meditation routine and everyday existence.

In addition, Epstein (2018) emphasizes the significant contribution of instructors in the contemporary Buddhist setting. Epstein elucidates that contemporary educators offer spiritual direction and assist pupils in assimilating Buddhist methodologies into the intricate fabric of modern existence. Teachers offer instruction on navigating distinctive emotional and psychological obstacles within the framework of modern existence, assisting students in maintaining their connection to Buddhism in their daily lives. In addition, Rinpoche's (2019) study demonstrates the significant impact that teachers can have on directing pupils in a very individualized manner. Rinpoche (2019) highlights the significance of establishing a profound bond between a teacher and a pupil, wherein the teacher offers emotional and spiritual assistance that empowers the disciple to confront the trials of life and death with bravery and sagacity. Personal experiences and direct assistance from teachers facilitate the cultivation of a profound comprehension of Buddhist teachings and their practical application in students' lives.

Furthermore, Analayo (2020) highlighted the crucial significance of the teacher's role in guaranteeing the efficacy and accuracy of meditation practice. Analayo highlights the need for professors to offer explicit guidance and essential feedback to assist students in avoiding typical errors in meditation. Teachers facilitate students' comprehension of their meditation experiences and guide them toward profound insight and enlightenment. In the contemporary Buddhist tradition, teachers fulfill the dual role of educators and guides, serving as mentors and spiritual exemplars. They assist pupils in surmounting obstacles and attaining a profound comprehension of Buddhist doctrines. Their function is crucial in ensuring that students comprehend the teachings cognitively and incorporate them into practical applications and everyday existence.

5.2. Conclusion

This research significantly enhances the practicality of Mahāprajña Nikāya Buddhism. This study investigates three primary facets of the teachings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya, including the doctrine, practice, and the role of the teacher. The research findings indicate that these three factors are interconnected and serve as a crucial basis for implementing Mahāprajña Nikāya Buddhism in Mainland China. The doctrine of wisdom (prajñā) is a key element in the journey towards enlightenment. This insight is based on a deep comprehension of emptiness (śūnyatā), which asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence. By attaining this comprehension, individuals can perceive the genuine nature of existence and ultimately reach a state of enlightenment.

Furthermore, meditation is the foremost method for cultivating insight and comprehending the concept of emptiness. Meditation methods, such as jhāna, are crucial for cultivating profound focus and self-reflection, subsequently facilitating the acquisition of wisdom. In the Mahāprajña Nikāya tradition, instructors play a crucial role as guides, offering guidance in meditation and comprehension of the teachings. Teachers offer individualized mentorship, deliver informative lectures, and facilitate group discussions to enable students to comprehend and effectively implement the teachings. Additional research could conduct a comparative examination of the teachings of the Mahāprajña Nikāya and other Buddhist traditions, such as Zen, Theravāda, or Vajrayāna. This study aims to discern commonalities and disparities in the methodologies employed in exploring wisdom, emptiness, and the significance attributed to instructors.

5.3. Recommendation

5.3.1 Recommendations for Buddhist Leaders

- 1) They are expected to establish a better organized and systematic training program for teachers. The program should prioritize the incorporation of teachings on wisdom (prajñā) and emptiness (śūnyatā), together with practical techniques for teaching meditation and offering spiritual counsel.

2) Communicate and collaborate with Buddhist traditions, such as Zen, Theravāda, and Vajrayāna, to share knowledge and practices. This will enhance the comprehension and methodology of theory, meditation practice, and the teacher's function in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya tradition.

5.3.2 Recommendation for Master

1) Teachers must consistently enhance their proficiency through continuous instruction in wisdom, emptiness, and meditation practices. Participating in workshops, retreats, and advanced training programs will yield significant advantages.

2) Provide enhanced individualized support to pupils. Teachers will help students comprehend and implement the teachings more effectively by discerning students' unique requirements and offering suitable guidance.

3) Employ pedagogical techniques such as lectures, group debates, and guided meditation exercises to facilitate structured learning.

5.3.3 Recommendation for Students

1) It is anticipated that the individual will exhibit a profound commitment to the exploration of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya teachings, with a particular emphasis on comprehending the principles of wisdom (prajñā) and emptiness (śūnyatā), engaging with foundational literature like the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras and the writings of Tsongkhapa.

2) Engage actively in meditation programs conducted by the local community or monastery. Jhāna and vipassanā meditation are crucial techniques that facilitate the cultivation of profound focus and self-reflection.

3) Participate in talks and group discussions facilitated by Buddhist teachers or prominent individuals in the Buddhist community.

4) Proactively seek counsel and instruction from instructors in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya tradition.

5.3.4 Recommendation for Research

Considering the present study's limitations and understanding of the practices of Mahāprajña Nikāya doctrine and its ritual in mainland China, the following research recommendations could provide a deeper understanding of the following inquiry. First, as one of the study's limitations was that it did not address the cultural variations of research participants, future studies could emphasize regional cultural variations in understanding the practices and doctrine of *Mahāprajña Nikāya*. This would allow for a more in-depth analysis of how local wisdom and cultural contexts may impact the interpretation and practice of the rituals.

Secondly, as ritual of *Mahāprajña Nikāya* is also influenced by historical factors such as government policy and religious policy, then researching the potential shift of *Mahāprajña Nikāya* practices could provide deeper insights into how the adaptive strategies employed by religious communities over time in line with the changes of government policy and religious regulations. Finally, as technological development has shifted many aspects of human life, including the education field, and as the role of teachers is central in disseminating Mahāprajña Nikāya practices in school contexts, future studies could probably explore how modern digital technology and social media applications influence teaching approaches and the role of virtual communities in fostering the growth of the *Mahāprajña Nikāya*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines Karya Edward Conze Document

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN 8,000 LINES



The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines, gold calligraphy on handmade manuscript

The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines (RiBa). (2010, May 30). *Rangjung Yeshe Wiki - Dharma Dictionary*, . Retrieved 17:37, August 9, 2018
from [http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php?title=The_Perfection_of_Wisdom_in_8,000_Lines_\(RiBa\)&oldid=421601](http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php?title=The_Perfection_of_Wisdom_in_8,000_Lines_(RiBa)&oldid=421601).

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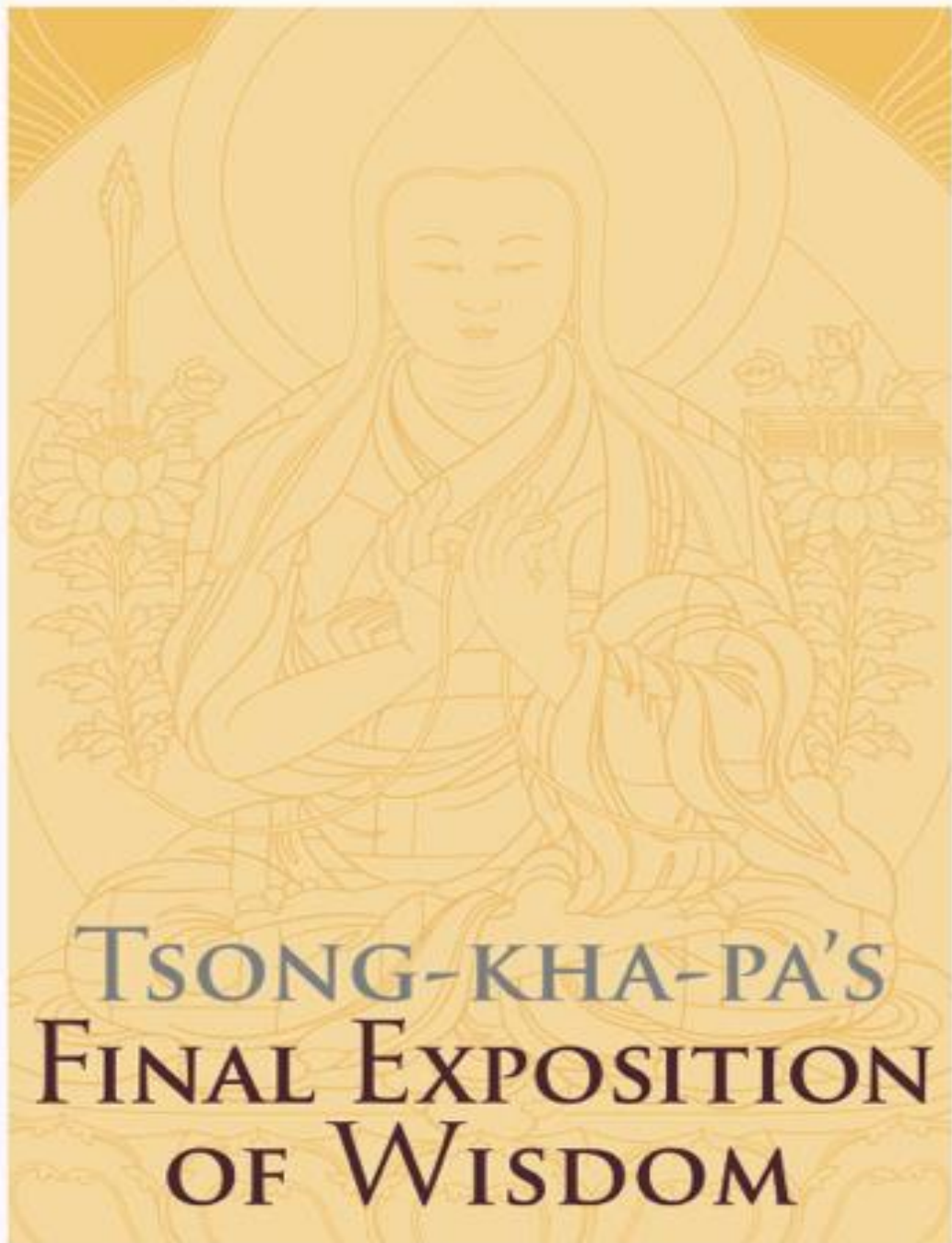
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Appendix 2

Tsongkhapa

JEFFREY HOPKINS



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Appendix 3

Doctrinal of Master Nenghai" (能海大師全集)

THE "CHINESE LAMA" NENGHAI

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Nenghai's Doctrinal Tradition

Nenghai's Tibetan Lineage: Khangsar Rinpoché

Khangsar Rinpoché (1890–1941, fig. 1) was a Tibetan *lama* of the Drepung monastery in Lhasa.⁶ Although his complete biography in Tibetan has not yet become available, a summary version is found in the posthumous work of the noted scholar Dungkar Lozang Trinlé. Nenghai's disciples, however, refer to only a few Chinese texts that discuss him, and even these contain curious anomalies and contradictions.



FIG. 1 Khangsar Rinpoché and lama Nenghai.
(Courtesy Duobaojiang Monastery.)

In order to better focus on the information regarding Khangsar's life and teachings that were available to his Chinese followers, let us first consider a partial translation of what is, to my knowledge, the only extant Chinese-language essay completely devoted to him. It was originally composed on the basis of Nenghai's recollection upon his return to China:

The doctrinal tradition of lama Tsongkhapa was transmitted to Kangsa⁷ Rinpoché. Because that lama Tsongkhapa received the transmission of the "Gradual Path to bodhi"⁸ directly from the

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BUDDHISM BETWEEN TIBET AND CHINA

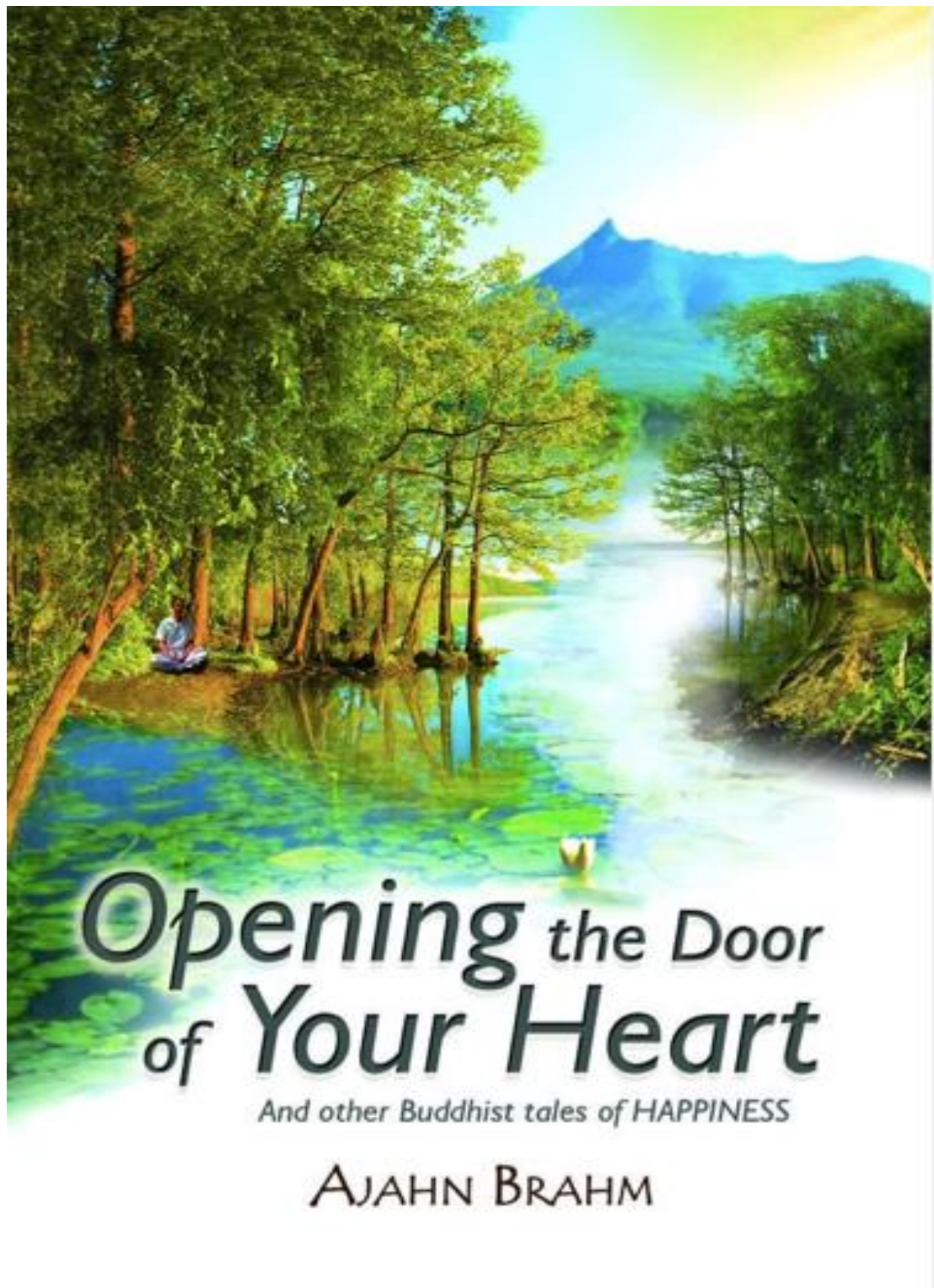
Buddha, Kangsa Rinpoché's teaching is nothing but the [original] teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha, which has been transmitted without interruption to our times. [...] Kangsa Rinpoché was thus bestowed the transmission of Śākyamuni's lineage. Beginning with the Buddha onward, [this teaching] has been sublime throughout all time. [Among those who received it,] there is no one who did not achieve realization, there is no one who could not attain supreme realization. According to historical documents, all teachings and practices belonging to this [specific] group have been taught by Śākyamuni Buddha himself, and have subsequently been passed down from master to master in an uninterrupted line of transmission. [Therefore,] Kangsa Rinpoché is nobody else than lama Tsongkhapa; likewise, both of them have the same "real aspect" (*zhen xiang*) as Śākyamuni Buddha. Those who encountered [Kangsa] or who could listen to his words were all granted a "fortunate karmic retribution and good roots" (*fubao shan gen*). [...]

Kangsa's name is Tibetan; *kang* refers to [the region of] Kham, while *sa* means "place."⁹ Lama Rinpoché¹⁰ was so called because his former incarnation was from the lands of Kham. This was not a [real] name but a form of respect, in the same manner as Tsongkhapa (Ch. Zongkapa) was called after the [river district] of Tsong[*-kha*] (Ch. Zongshui). Lama Rinpoché's former incarnation was born in Litang, thirteen stations from Daxianghu and a five or six day walk from Hekou. As a child he moved to the Drepung monastery in Lhasa, which included four Monastic Colleges (Ch. *zhacang*).¹¹ Most of the Chinese who went there [to study] stayed at Loseling, but Lama Rinpoché resided at Gomang College. Loseling College used to lodge more than three thousand people and Gomang more than four thousand. The other two colleges were Deyang and Ngakpa, where a few hundred people lived. The first two [colleges] were specialized in exoteric teachings (Ch. *xianjiao*), while the other two particularly treated tantric teachings (Ch. *mijiao*).

Once he achieved the title of *geshé* (Ch. *gexi*), Lama Rinpoché also obtained the title of *khenpo* (Ch. *kānbu*) at Gomang College; *mkhan* means "good and sage in methods," while *po* is an honorific suffix. The two terms thus mean: "he who is extremely good and sage in methods."¹² By the time he retired as "elder khenpo,"¹³

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Works by Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi



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The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching'' by Thich Nhat Hanh



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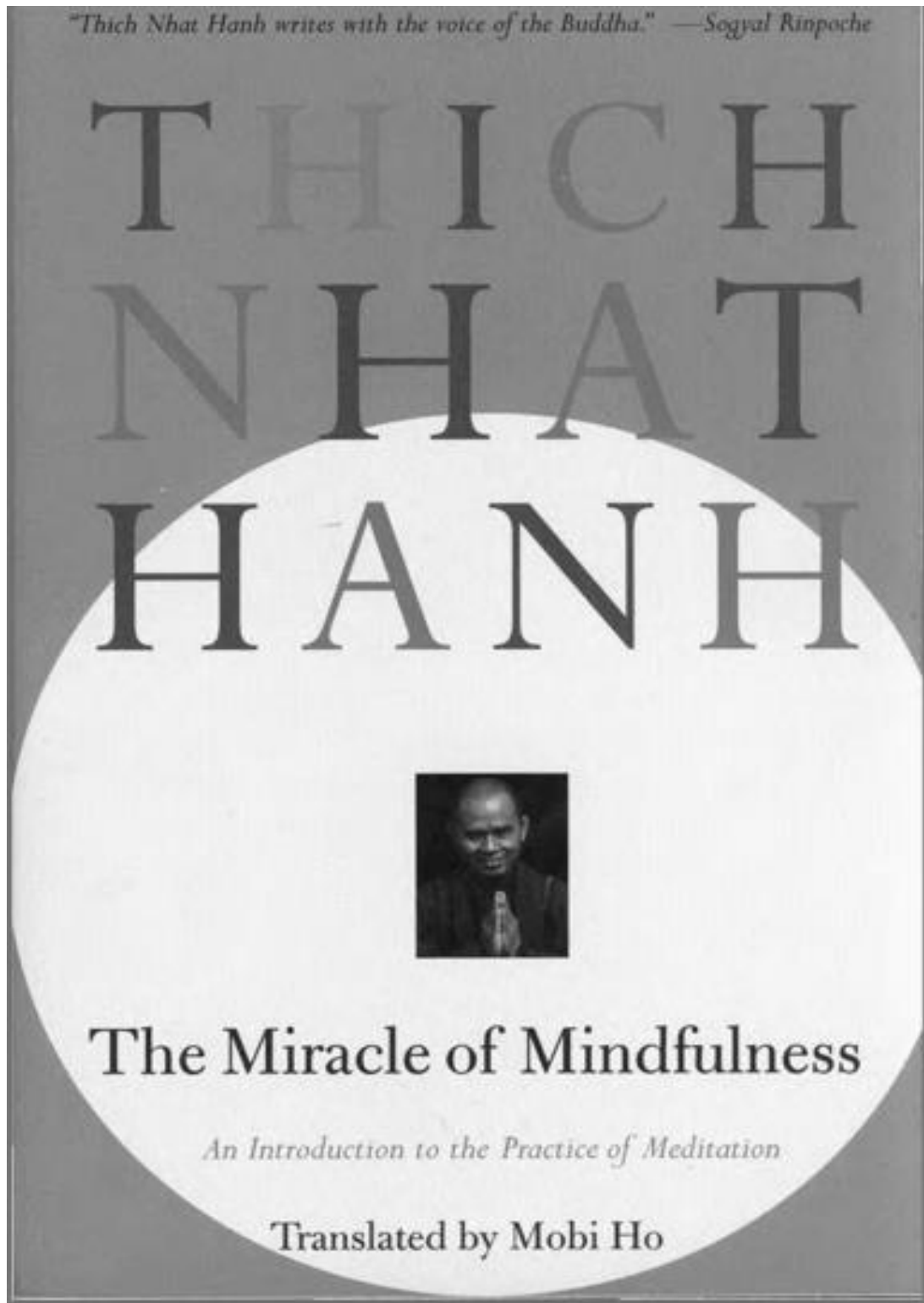
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Semi-structure Interview

- 1) How do you interpret the concepts of wisdom (prajñā) and emptiness (śūnyatā)?
- 2) What is your comprehension of the journey towards enlightenment, encompassing the four noble truths and the eightfold path?
- 3) Which meditation practices do you employ?
- 4) What is the frequency and duration of your typical meditation sessions?
- 5) What obstacles have you encountered while practicing meditation, and what advantages have you gained from this discipline?
- 6) What kind of guidance do you offer, and what instruction methods do you employ?

BIOGRAPHY

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