

EMERSON'S "GOD-WITHIN" AND THE BUDDHIST "BUDDHA-WOMB"

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Abstract: Emerson wrote with excitement of his discovery of "God-within" in his poem "Gnothi Seauton": "There doth sit the Infinite embosomed in a man." He furthermore preached in his sermon "The Genuine Man" that "the essential man" dwells in the innermost soul, and that this indwelling essential self is a higher self, God's image, and "Reason." The doctrine of "Buddha-womb," tathāgatagarbha meaning "essence of self" or "Buddha-nature," buddhadātu meaning "true self," is an important teaching in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which affirms that each sentient being contains the indwelling potency for attaining Buddhahood and enlightenment. This notion is explained when referring to the boundless, nurturing, sustaining, and deathless Self of the Buddha. The affinities between Emersonian Transcendentalism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially Zen, have often been pointed out. In this article the comparison between Emerson's "God-within" and Mahāyāna Buddhism's "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" will be examined.¹

Introduction

Daisetsu Suzuki (1870–1966) is well known as a Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher and scholar. He made a significant contribution to Western philosophical thought by bringing the teachings of Zen Buddhism to the attention of the Western world through his numerous books in English and lectures made in America and European countries. Suzuki was undoubtedly the principal figure driving the popularization of Zen in the West during the middle of the 20th century. In his college days, when he began to develop his own Zen ideas while training himself in Zen exercise, Suzuki turned to reading Emerson's essays. The first essay he wrote was "Emāson no zengaku ron" [Zen Theory of Emerson] (1896). In this essay he deeply sympathized with Emerson, exclaiming, "It is becoming clearer that Emerson preached on the cultivation of the mind in the same way as Zen does."² About fifty years later, at the age of seventy-seven, Suzuki recollected his first experience of reading Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" in *Tōyō teki na mikata* [Oriental Points of View] (1959):

I was deeply moved when I first read this essay. This is self-reliance! This is freedom! This is true independence! We don't need to feel mean only because we are little. We can express anything we have regardless of our great or little ability. This is sincerity! In this way I was deeply impressed. (Suzuki, 1979, 277)

Suzuki, discovering the remarkable affinity between the Zen spirit and Emersonian Transcendentalism, had a feeling of great intimacy with Emerson throughout his life. Van M. Ames, finding Zen spirit in American thought and calling Emerson the

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² *Zen shū* 14, separate vol. 1 of *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū*, 17-25.

“American Bodhisattva,” writes the following in his book *Zen and American Thought*:

Here, in the first paragraph of his essay on “Spiritual Laws,” Emerson expressed the insight of Zen, much as it was put by Tao-hsin, the Fourth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism in China. Tao-shin said: “When the mind is tranquillized in its deepest abode, its entanglements are cut asunder. ... Therefore, let a man discipline himself first of all in the realization of a perfect state of quietude in his mind and also in his world. ...” Such a parallel between Zen and Emerson would account for his appeal in China and Japan. (Ames, 1962, 277)

Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933), a poet, author of children’s literature, and agricultural scientist in northeastern Japan, read Togawa Shūkotsu’s translation of Emerson’s essays.³ He is known to have been influenced by Emerson’s ideas, especially regarding poetry, art, and the Over-Soul, in developing his pantheistic view that all beings can embody the nature of the Buddha and teach their Dharma here and now, based on the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most important scriptures of Buddhism. (Nobutoki. 131-50) Emerson also had the opportunity to take an interest in Buddhism when he read the *Preaching of Buddha* (“White Lotus of the Good Law”) printed in the “Ethnical Scriptures” section in the *Dial* published in January, 1844.⁴ As has been described, the affinities between Emersonian Transcendentalism and Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism, have often been pointed out by some literary men, thinkers, and scholars. In this article a comparative examination will be made from the viewpoint that one of the reasons for the comparison may be that there are similarities between Emerson’s “God-within” and the Buddhist “Buddha-womb.”

I. Emerson’s “God-within”

Emerson wrote in his journal dated July 6, 1831, with excitement of his discovery of “God-within” in his inner soul in his poem “Gnothi Seauton”:

If thou canst bear
Strong meat of simple truth

³ Togawa Shūkotsu (1870–1939), a literary critic and essayist, published *Emāson onbun shū*, a translation of Emerson’s essays in two volumes, in 1911 and 1912. Emerson’s prestige in Japan reached its apogee in the Taisho period with the publication of the eight volumes of *Emāson zenshū* [Complete Works of Emerson] in 1917, translated by Hirata Tokuboku (1873–1943), an essayist and scholar of English literature, and Togawa Shūkotsu.

⁴ The *Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1961), vol. (No. 3, January 1844), 391-401. The original work in Sanskrit was discovered by M. Hudgson and examined by M. Eugène Burnouf (1801–52), a French scholar and orientalist. “The White Lotus of the Good Law” is a translation of chapter five “Herbs” in the *Lotus Sutra* into English from a French translation. John G. Rudy writes in his book *Emerson and Zen-Buddhism*: “From this work alone, Emerson would have become substantively familiar with two important concepts of Buddhism: first, in the words of Robert Linssen, that “Everything moves, is transformed, both materially and psychologically” and second, that all things are void or empty of identity, that, to borrow again from Linssen, “There is not really any continuous entity always identical with itself but perpetually changing succession of ‘cause and effect’” (9-10).

If thou durst my words compare
 With what thou thinkest in the soul's free youth
 Then take this fact unto thy soul ——
 God dwells in thee. —— ...
 He is in thy world
 But the world knows him not
 He is the mighty Heart
 From which the life's varied pulses part
 Clouded and shrouded there doth sit
 The Infinite
 Embosomed in a man
 (Emerson, 1960-82, 3:290-29)

Emerson, moreover, confessed to the audience that he had received a revelation from God in his sermon "Religion and Society" delivered on October 27, 1833: "Man begins to hear a voice in reply that fills the heaven and the earth, saying, that God is within him, that *there* is the celestial host" (Emerson, 1989-92, 4:215). He then said, "I recognize the distinction of the outer and the inner self,—of the double consciousness, ... there are two selves, one which does or approves that which the other does not and approves not; or within this erring, passionate, mortal self, sits a supreme, calm, immoral mind" (*Ibid.*, 215). Emerson's "God-within" is closely related to his view of Jesus Christ. During his time as a Unitarian minister, he adhered to the Unitarian doctrine of the unity of God, denying the divinity of Jesus Christ. In his sermon "The Authority of Jesus" delivered on May 30, 1830, he thus dismisses Jesus' divinity as the source of his authority. Rather, he declares that the source of Jesus' divine authority is the moral truth of his teachings:

A great error to which we are liable on this subject, is, that we are apt to separate the truth taught by Jesus from his office, and suppose that it was his divine authority, his peculiar designation to the office of Messiah that gives authority to his words, and not his words that mark him out as the Messiah. The utterance of that Truth is his office. It is his Truth that made him Messiah. (*Ibid.*, 2:364).

Emerson thus elevates moral truth above the historical Jesus as the core of Christian faith and the universal and eternal principle. He furthermore asserts that Jesus holds no monopoly on moral truth, but rather that anyone may possess it, sharing in the authority it confers:

[A]s this authority belonged to this truth and not to any person, so it is not confined to the pure and benevolent Founder of Christianity but may and must belong to all his disciples in that measure in which they possess themselves of the truth which was in him. Jesus has not monopolized it. (*Ibid.*, 364-65)

Therefore, for Emerson, Jesus represented not a special object of worship as the Son of God, or the mysterious and supernatural Messiah, but rather a great religious man who has embodied to the highest degree the moral truth inherent in any person. Emerson views Jesus as a mediator between God and human beings; people, united with the truth taught by Jesus, save themselves. Hence, Emerson refers to Jesus as a "friend," "teacher," and "fellow," employing such expressions as "the soul's personal Friend" (Emerson, 1989-92, 2:119), "our Common Teacher" (*Ibid.*, 362), and "thy fellow worshipper" (Emerson, 1960-82, 5:231). Emerson thus values the moral

function manifested in Jesus rather than the doctrinal authority of the Son of God and the Messiah. However, as Emerson's thought developed, he went beyond the Unitarian emphasis on the moral growth and self-cultivation of the individual, proceeding to a unification of the Christian principle with the truth dwelling in the heart. He wrote in his journal:

You must be humble because Christ says, 'Be humble.' 'But why must I obey Christ?' 'Because God sent him.' But how do I know God sent him? 'Because your own heart teaches the same thing he taught.' Why then shall I not go to my own heart at first? (Emerson, 1960-82, 4:45)

Quakerism was an important influence on this inward turn of Emerson's developing thought on the human mind. Emerson's "God within" bears a notable resemblance to the Quakers' "Inner Light," that is, the power of God continuously working within every human mind (Irie, 1967, 44-47). In his sermon "The Genuine Man" (Emerson, 1989-92, 4:409-16), delivered in October, 1832, he preached that "the essential man" dwells in the innermost human soul, and that this indwelling essential self is a higher self, God's image, and "Reason." Developing this idea, he states that a genuine man always listens to "the inner Voice" and "the invisible Leader," that is, "the Spirit of God in us all," as well as to universal reason. Here Emerson's thought seems to have been influenced by the Quaker doctrine of the Inward Christ, a doctrine the Puritans repudiated as heretical. Quakers believed that "pre-existent Logos" works as saving power in every human mind, and even in nature, and they placed greater importance on the "eternal Christ" than the "historic Christ." (Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*) Emerson explicitly acknowledged his affinity for Quakerism; when asked about his religious standpoint, during his stay in New Bedford, Rhode Island, in February 1834, he answered, "I believe I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the 'still small voice,' and that voice is Christ within us." (Emerson, 1888, 48) His view of Jesus thus stresses the moral truth, God-within, and the inward Christ, as he expressed it—in an intimate relationship to the Transcendentalist concept of Reason—in the following statement from his journal: "Jesus Christ was a minister of the pure Reason" (Emerson, 1960-82., 5:273). This statement, placing Reason over Jesus, may be understood to mark the completion of Jesus as a historic figure of relative rather than exceptional moral greatness.⁵

II. The Development of the Idea of "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature" in Buddhism

The Buddhist conception of "Buddha-womb" (如来藏) or "Buddha-nature" (仏性) may be considered analogous to Emerson's "God-within," therefore it is important to consider the notions of "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature." "Buddha-womb" comes from the Sanskrit word "tathāgata-garba," meaning containing a "tathāgata" (如来) in the womb. The idea of "Buddha-womb" is based on the Buddhist doctrine that every human contains a "tathāgata" as an embryo in his mind. "Tathāgata" has two meanings: the one who has reached the truth and attained the Buddhahood and

⁵ As for Emerson's view of Jesus Christ and the Quaker influence on Emerson, see Takanashi, *Emerson and Neo-Confucianism*, 129-32

the one who comes from the truth to save other sentient beings. According to the doctrine of "Buddha-womb," every sentient being, endowed inherently with an undefiled and pure mind (自性清淨心), has the potential to become a "tathāgata" or a Buddha. The mind, essentially the pure and illuminating "tathāgata" as the Buddha-body, is in a defiled state because many kinds of outside carnal desires have come attached to it like dusts (客塵煩惱). It is therefore preached that it is possible to recover the essentially undefiled and pure state and completely remove the cover of earthly desires by aspiring toward the Buddhahood, devoting oneself to the practice of Buddhist austerities, and eventually attaining spiritual awakening. It is written in the *Tathāgata-garbha Sutra* (如来藏經) that a tathāgata, observing with its Buddha eyes that all sentient beings are in its womb, preaches the Dharma in order to remove the cover of their carnal desires caused by such adherences and mindlessness as greed, anger, and ignorance. The *Srīmālā Sutra* (勝鬘經) preaches that anyone believing in the tathāgata-garbha veiled with all kinds of earthly desires has no suspicion that the tathāgata as the Buddha-body is emancipated from the cover of all kinds of earthly desires. Furthermore, the word "Buddha-nature," used to mean almost the same as "tathāgata-garbha," comes from the Sanskrit word "buddha-dhātu," meaning the essence of the Buddha or the potentiality to become the Buddha.

Next an outline of the history and development of the conceptions of "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature" will be provided. Such Buddhist sutras as the *Amitabha Sutra* (阿弥陀經), the *Srīmālā Sutra* (般若經), the *Lotus Sutra* (法華經), and the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (華嚴經) were formulated during the early period of the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement after the first century. It is preached in the *Lotus Sutra* that only through the essentially true teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* can all living things, equally the Buddha's children, acquire wisdom in the same way as the Buddha. It is written in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that the tathāgata's wisdom—immeasurable, undefiled, and benefiting—is permeated extensively in the consciousness of all sentient beings. These two sutras comprise the foundation of the conception of the Buddha-womb. This conception, first presented in the *Tathāgata-garbha Sutra*, was succeeded by the *No Increase, No Decrease Sutra* (不增不減經) and the *Srīmālā Sutra*. The expression "All sentient beings have the Buddha-nature without exception" (一切衆生悉有仏), meaning that all living things with consciousness have the Buddha-nature, namely, the essence of the Buddha, can be found in the *Nirvana Sutra* (涅槃經), which first presented the conception of the Buddha-nature, developing the notion of the Buddha-womb. These conceptions of the Buddha-womb and the Buddha-nature preached in the above-mentioned sutras were theoretically systematized in the *Ratnagotravavibhāga* (宝性論).

Buddhism steadily developed in India even after its founder Gautama Buddha (Śhākya-muni, ca. 463BC–ca. 383BC) entered nirvana, and came to be cordially protected and promulgated especially by the great Asyoka emperor (268BC–239BC) during the Mauryan dynasty (ca. 317BC–ca. 180BC). From around the beginning of the first century the Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle") reform movement was inaugurated. Mahāyāna Buddhism sought the path of the Bodhisattva, criticizing the traditional Buddhists for committing fully to their own release from suffering and attainment of nirvana and actively resolving to liberate all other sentient beings from suffering even after achieving the Buddhahood. During the Gupta dynasty (ca. 320–

ca. 550) after the fourth century, however, Hinduism extended its power and Buddhism was obliged to be incorporated with Hinduism to keep its influence. It is considered that under this religious circumstance the conceptions of “Buddha-womb” and “Buddha-nature” were formulated into the doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism influenced by the Upanishad doctrine of the ultimate identity of Brahman, the highest principle of the Universe, and Atman, the essence of individual self. After the seventh century Esoteric Buddhism arose in Mahāyāna Buddhism influenced by Tantric Hinduism and prospered into the twelfth century. The doctrines of “Buddha-womb” and “Buddha-nature” contributed to the formulation of the doctrine of Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism, however, came to lose its identity by incorporating with Hinduism and was destined to disappear from India during the thirteenth century because of the Muslim propagation.

Next, focusing on the conceptions of “Buddha-womb” and “Buddha-nature,” a brief outline will be provided on the history of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which exerted great influences on China and Japan. In the third century, Nāgārjuna (龍樹 ca. 150–ca. 250), considered as the founder of the Maydhyamaka School (中觀), wrote *Mūlamaddhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way, 中論). Theoretically systematizing the conception of *śūnyātā* (emptiness 空), the central conception of Mahāyāna Buddhism first developed in the *Śrīmālā Sutra*, he preached that all things in the phenomenal world, existing only in the relation of causes and effects to other things (緣起), have no immutable substance of their own (無自性). On the other hand, the theory of the consciousness-only (唯識) that all things are made up of only consciousness was first preached by Maitreya (弥勒 ca. 350–ca. 430), and was systematized by two brothers, Asaṅga (無着 ca. 395 to ca. 470) and Vasubandhu (世親 ca. 400–ca. 480). This theory is characterized by the preaching that there are two kinds of subconsciousness in addition to the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind): one is the storehouse consciousness (阿賴耶識), lying at the depth of the mind, and the other is the defiled mental consciousness (末那識), having the function of causing self-attachment. It is preached that through the practice of yoga the defiled state of consciousness could be purified, leading to the attainment of enlightenment. The conception of “Buddha-womb” is conjectured to be formulated about the same time as the Yogācāravada School (瑜伽行派), appearing after the Maydhyamaka School, presented the theory of consciousness-only. This theory was introduced to China by Xuanzang (玄奘 602–64), who went to India to study, stimulated the making-up of the Hosso sect (法相宗), and was also introduced to Japan. The *Awakening of Faith* (大乘起信論), analyzing the state of the mind grounded in the conception of the “Buddha-womb” and the theory of consciousness-only, and treating the central Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines from both theoretical and practical viewpoints, is considered to have been formulated between the fifth and sixth centuries. It is alleged to have been written by Aśvaghōṣa (馬鳴), an Indian Buddhist poet, around the second century. However, the fact that there remains no Sanskrit and Tibetan translation but a Chinese one makes some scholars doubt whether this was written in India, while others suppose that this might have been written in China. As for the Chinese translations, the one by Paramārtha (真諦 499–569) is most commonly used. The *Awakening of Faith* has exerted tremendous influences on the formulation of the doctrines of major Chinese

Mahāyāna Buddhist sects such as Kegon (華嚴), Tendai (天台), Zen (禪), and Pure Land (淨土), and of Esoteric Buddhism (密教), and moreover, was enthusiastically read in Japan. In the *Awakening of Faith* the original enlightenment (本覺) inherently dwelling within sentient beings and that is analogous to "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature," is contrasted with the actualization of enlightenment (始覺) attained after following the teachings and practicing the exercises. In the Kegon doctrine the active mind is considered to be the original enlightenment, and, furthermore, the Japanese *Tendai hongaku* [original enlightenment] philosophy, advancing the view of the original enlightenment as indwelling, developed the doctrine that the original enlightenment has already been manifested in the phenomenal world and the actual world itself can be regarded as the living appearance of the absolute truth. The conceptions of "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature," moreover, are supposed to influence Kukai (空海 774–835), a Japanese monk and the founder of the esoteric Shingon ('Mantra' or 'True Word') School, who preached that the present physical body itself has the potentiality of becoming the Buddha-body (即身成仏) by incorporating with "Mahavairocana" (大日如来).

III. Comparative Investigations between Emerson's "God-within" and Buddhist "Buddha-womb"

The summary account of Emerson's "God-within" and Buddhism's "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature" is followed by the central theme of this article: a comparative examination of the affinities between Emerson's thought based on "God-within" and the Buddhist doctrine of "Buddha-womb."

III-1 The affinities between "God-within" and "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" First, Emerson's expression about "God-within" in the poem "Gnothi Seauton"—"Clouded and shrouded there doth sit the Infinite embosomed in a man ..." will be taken note of. This can be considered analogous to the conception of "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature." The actual mind is in a defiled state because of worldly desires, while the original mind houses the unblemished and pure "tathāgata" or "Buddha-womb." Emerson also came into contact with the word "tathāgata" when he read "White Lotus of the Good Law" in the *Dial* in 1844: "The Tathāgata is equal and not unequal towards all beings, when it is the question to convert them." (The *Dial*, vol. 4, 392) He provides the following expressions for "God-within": "[T]he Whole is now potentially in the bottom of his heart" (Emerson, 1960-82, 4:87), and "[Y]ou are the Temple of the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Emerson, 1989-92, 3:90). He furthermore uses such terms as "essential man," "genuine man," "higher self," and "Reason" as being synonymous to "God-within." Likewise "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" has almost the same meaning as "the undefiled and pure mind," "tathātā" or "suchness" (真如), "seeds" (種姓), "Dharma-body" (法身), "Dharma-nature" (法性), and "Dharma-realm" (法界). In Emerson's belief God is immanent in each individual's self, while at the same time transcending that self. He writes the following: "God in us worships God" (Emerson, 1960-82, 3:273), "It is ... God only within that worships God of the Universe" (213), and "I the imperfect, adore my own Perfect" (Emerson, 1971-2013, 2:175). He refers to the Universal Being over the individual self as super-personal "Over-soul" rather than personal "God," "Lord," or "Father." "Over-soul," changeably put in terms such as

“Unity universal,” “law of laws,” “the Original,” “the Universal,” and “the eternal One,” is based on the view of God as the original, universal, and unified principle of the Universe.

Emerson’s “God of the Universe” may be paralleled to such Mahāyāna Buddhist transcendent, original, and principal conceptions of the Buddha as “The Eternal Life of the Buddha” (久遠実成仏), “Vairocana-Buddha” (毘盧遮那仏), “Mahavairocana,” and “Amitabha Tathāgata” (阿弥陀如来). In the *Lotus Sutra* “The Eternal Life of the Buddha” preaches that Gautama (釈迦) attained enlightenment in the eternal past after seeking the truth as a Bodhisattva (菩薩) and that since then and even after entering Nirvana he has been enlightening sentient beings:

Since I attained Buddhahood, immeasurable hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kojis* of incalculable *kalpas* have passed. I have been constantly teaching the Dharma through these immeasurable *kalpas*, leading and inspiring innumerable *kojis* of sentient beings and enabling them to enter the Buddha path. Using skillful means I have manifested the state of Nirvana to bring sentient beings to this path; Yet I have not actually entered Nirvana, but continuously abide here expounding the Dharma.” (Kubo and Yuyama, 2007, 228)

“Vairocana-Buddha” in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* is the Dharma-body Buddha that embraces all Buddhas and has immeasurable light and life just like Esoteric Buddhist “Mahavairocana” and Pure-land Buddhist “Amitabha Tathāgata.” In this way the Buddha is the preacher of truth as well as the truth of the Universe itself. However, the Buddha with no figure or form, unable to preach in words, is considered to have been sent into this world taking on the human figure of Gautama. The truth of the Universe is “tathātā” (如), the ultimate nature of all things, and so Gautama and all Buddhas, the perfected ones coming from “tathātā,” are called “tathāgata.” This Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine that contrasts the Buddha as the truth of the Universe with Gautama as a historic human is similar to the Quaker’s contrast between the “eternal Christ” and “historic Christ.” According to the Quaker doctrine which places emphasis on the universality of Light, God has appeared in nature, prophets, and pre-Christian philosophers even before Christ’s coming, and Jesus is considered to appear as the consummation of God’s long process of revelation. (Brinton, 39) Thus “tathāgata” can be paralleled to the Quaker’s “Inward Christ” and Emerson’s “God-within,” “God’s image,” and “moral truth.”

It should be noted that Emerson’s understanding of God’s revelation through nature departs from traditional Judeo-Christian teachings. The concept of creation expressed in the Scriptures is that the world was created by God’s omnipresent will from nothingness. A fundamental distinction between the Creator and his creatures is evident here. For Emerson, humans and nature are continuous manifestations of the God of the Universe, or the Over-soul, and all things exist not in a fixed but rather in a flowing state. Hence, a continuity rather than a disparity exists between God, human beings, and nature. God, “God-within,” and all things are related to each other, even if they are of different natures. Contrary to Christianity that emphasizes the supernatural nature of God’s creative abilities and the utter dependence of the created world upon the one absolute God, Buddhism has no monotheistic God. Siddhartha Gautama is a human being who perceived the Dharma (truth or law) of human existence and achieved the perfect enlightenment.

III-2 Conquest of the Self

Emerson's "Over-soul" has two aspects of divinity: transcending "God-within" and growing toward "the God of the Universe" as well as dwelling within the human soul. Therefore "Over-soul" can be considered itself a dynamic process itself of conquering and transcending the individual soul rather than a fixed and static conception of God. Emerson talks about the double consciousness of the self in his sermon "Religion and Society": "I recognize the distinction of the outer and the inner self,—of the double consciousness, ... there are two selves, one which does or approves that which the other does not and approves not; or within this erring, passionate, mortal self, sits a supreme, calm, immortal mind, ..." (Emerson, 1989-92, 4: 215). He also makes a point of seeking the inner, original, and universal Self by conquering the outer, superficial, and selfish self, as he writes in "The Divinity School Address": "A man in the view of absolute goodness, adores, with total humility. Every step so downward, is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself by so doing" (Emerson, 1971-2013, 1:78). He moreover preaches that the aboriginal Self, or the original life and wisdom, in which the self is grounded, is closely related with such involuntary perceptions as spontaneity, instinct, and intuition, as he writes in his essay "Self-Reliance": "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" (*Ibid.*, 2:30), and "Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and know that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due" (*Ibid.*, 37).

Emerson's distinction between the selfish self and the original Self may be analogous to the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of the defiled mental consciousness and the storehouse consciousness. The storehouse consciousness, lying at the base of all of mental functions—perception, recognition, reasoning, and self-consciousness—has functions such as instinctively keeping life activity, creating all states of existence, and storing the impressions as "seeds" (種子) in the mind. On the other hand, the defiled mental consciousness—reflecting the storehouse consciousness and having the involuntary mental functions of creating self-consciousness—is the origin of ego-attachment, earthly desires, and ignorance. The storehouse consciousness is considered to be bestowed on all sentient beings, while the defiled mental consciousness is only bestowed on humans. The explanation about the functions of the storehouse consciousness is found in the *Awakening of Faith*:

The Mind as phenomena (samsara) is grounded on the *tathagatagarbha*. What is called the storehouse consciousness is that in which "neither birth nor death (nirvana)" diffuses harmoniously with "birth and death (nirvana)," and yet in which both are neither identical nor different. This consciousness has two aspects that embrace all states of existence and create all states of existence. They are: 1) the aspect of enlightenment, and 2) the aspect of non-enlightenment. The essence of Mind is free from thoughts. The characteristic of that which is free from thoughts is analogous to that of the sphere of empty space that pervades everywhere. The one [without any second, i.e., the absolute] aspect of the world of reality (*dharmadhātu*) is none other than the undifferentiated *dharmakāya*, the "essence body" of the Tathāgata. [Since the essence of Mind is] grounded on the *dharmakāya*, it is to be called the original enlightenment. Why? Because "original enlightenment" indicates [the essence of Mind (*a priori*)] in contradistinction to [the essence of Mind in] the process of actualization of enlightenment; the process of actualization of enlightenment is none other than [the process of integrating] the identity with the original enlightenment. (Hakeda, 1967, 16-17)

As is described in the above quotations, the storehouse consciousness has two aspects in its function: the aspect of enlightenment (覺) and wisdom, realizing the true state of things as “Suchness” and that of non-enlightenment (不覺) caused by ignorance and earthly desires. In the state of non-enlightenment the mind is actually attached to the ego, while having the function of returning to the original state of enlightenment. Enlightenment has the function of opposing that of non-enlightenment, and then the actualization of enlightenment (始覺) comes into operation, proceeding toward the attainment of awakening by the function of the original enlightenment (本覺) itself endowed inherently in the mind. In this way an elaborate analysis is made of the mutual relation in function between ignorance and enlightenment in the *Awakening of Faith*. The function of enlightenment that the storehouse consciousness has, namely, that of removing the cover of ignorance and earthly desires can be compared with Emerson’s action of self-abandonment and Self-reliance of conquering the superficial and selfish self and becoming united with God. Emerson preached in his sermons: “[W]e are to give ourselves in every moment living sacrifices” (Emerson, 1989-92, 2:249), and “[I]n this self-reliance ... in listening more to our own soul we are not becoming in the ordinary sense more selfish, but ... falling back upon truth and God” (*Ibid.*, 267).

Emerson’s “Self-reliance” is entrusting one’s will to God’s Will, which leads to faith in God, as he writes: “And when he is wholly godly or the unfolding God within him has subdued all to himself, then he asks what God wills and nothing else and all his prayers are granted” (*JMN*, 3:308). “Self-reliance,” therefore, can be contrasted with Mahāyāna Buddhism’s absolute faith in “Tathāgata” as the foundation of life. “Awakening of faith” means having faith in the Mahāyāna Buddhist ultimate principle, that is, seeking after the Buddhahood and eventually achieving enlightenment through the practice of Buddhist disciplines by believing that the “Buddha-womb,” originally pure in its nature as “Suchness” and “Buddha-body,” has immeasurable virtues. The following can be found in the *Awakening of Faith* regarding the four kinds of Buddhist faith:

Briefly, there are four kinds of faith. The first is the faith in the ultimate source. Because [of this faith] a person comes to meditate with joy on the principle of suchness. The second is the faith in the numberless excellent qualities of the Buddhas. Because [of this faith] a person comes to meditate on them always, to draw near to them in fellowship, to honor them, and to respect them, developing his capacity for goodness and seeking after the all-embracing knowledge. The third is the faith in the great benefits of the Dharma (the teaching). Because [of this faith] a person comes constantly to remember and practice various disciplines leading to enlightenment. The fourth is the faith in the Sangha (the Buddhist community) whose members are able to devote themselves to the practice of benefiting both themselves and others. Because [of this faith] a person comes to approach the assembly of bodhisattvas constantly and with joy and seek instruction from them in the correct practice. (*The Awakening of Faith*, 71)

IV. Conclusion from an Examination on the Two Respects of "God-within" and "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature"

The comparative consideration taken hitherto has made it clear that there are remarkable similarities between Emerson's "God-within" and Mahāyāna Buddhism's "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature." It is well known that his aunt Mary Moody Emerson (1774–1863), who had a strong interest in Hinduism, inspired the young Emerson, and in the 1820s he began reading Indian poetry and mythology. Reading in 1845 the English translation from Sanskrit of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, one of the most important pieces of ancient Indian religious poetry, by Charles Wilkins (1749–1836), an English Orientalist, he learned of the Upanishad doctrine of the ultimate identity of Brahman, the highest principle of the Universe, and Atman, the essence of individual self. An affinity can be clearly recognized between Emerson's "God in us worships God" and the doctrine of the identity of Atman and Brahman. In poems such as "Hamatreya" and "Brahma," and in essays such as "The Over-Soul," "Fate," and "Illusions," the influence of Hinduism on Emerson is clear. Specific similarities have been pointed out by many scholars between the Hindu doctrines of karma, māyā, and the transmigration of the soul, and the Emersonian concepts of compensation, fate, and immortality. (Takanashi, 2014, 2-3)

The influence of the Hindu doctrine of the ultimate identity of Brahman and Atman can also be recognized regarding the "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" in the same light as Atman. During the early periods of accepting Buddhism in China, a remarkable tendency was found in understanding *śūnyatā* (emptiness), the central conception of perfection of wisdom (般若), through the Daoist notion of "Non-being" (無). Laozi (老子 ca. 600BC–ca. 501BC) wrote in the *Laozi or Dao De Jing (The Classic of the Way and its Virtue)*: "All things come from being. And being comes from non-being" (Chan, trans. and comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 160). Zhuangzi (莊子 ca. 369BC–ca. 286BC) advanced beyond Laozi and presented the doctrine of the equality of all things (万物齐同) in the *Zhuangzi*: "The Dao identifies them all as one. What is division is production, and what is production is destruction. Whether things are produced or destroyed, Dao again identifies them all as one. Only the intelligent knows how to identify all things as one" (184). Buddhist philosophy, especially the doctrine of the Kegon (flowery splendor) School, teaches that the realm of law exists where the ultimate and the phenomenal are united and non-dual (一体不二): "One moon is reflected in all waters, and every reflection involves the moon." (Chan, 1989, 299) In this way, influenced by the Hindu doctrine of the identity of Brahman and Atman and the Daoist doctrine of non-being and non-duality, the doctrines of "Buddha-womb" and "Buddha-nature" strengthen the substantive and existent inclination, and the non-substantive and non-existent aspect of *śūnyatā* became weakened. Ames, pointing out the affinity between Chinese Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism merged with Daoism, and Emerson's Transcendentalist view of nature, writes in *Zen and American Thought*: "Daoism, and the combination of Daoism and Buddhism which led to Zen, seem closer to him than Hinduism. Zen's naturalization of Buddhism, lowering the transcendental to earth, would have appealed to Emerson ..." (Ames, 1962, 69). "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature," consequently, becoming the eternal, immortal, and substantive principle just like Atman, can be considered to be almost the same as Emerson's "God-within."

By focusing on the substantive and indwelling aspect of “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature,” the argument has been put forward to make clear its identification with Hindu Atman and Emerson’s “God-within.” However, there needs to be an examination of the non-substantive and non-existent aspects of “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature,” and their affinity with Emerson’s “God-within” should be taken into consideration. From the standpoint of emptiness viewing all things as having no immutable substance of their own, “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature” can be considered to have no eternal and immutable existence in its nature.⁶ The Over-soul as God of the Universe can be attained through “God-within,” as Emerson writes in his journal: “It is ... God only within that worships God of the Universe” (Emerson, 1960-82, 3:213). The Over-soul is expressed as “the Unattainable,” “the Unknown,” or “the Lonely, Original, and Pure.” Emerson, having embraced a super-personal concept of God as the Over-soul, further developed the impersonal concept of God as “Godhead” (Emerson, 1971-2013 3:44). He sheds additional light on his concept of Godhead with the description in the closing part of “Worship” in *The Conduct of Life*: “The nameless Thought, the nameless power, the super-personal Heart” (*Ibid.*, 6:128). This shows that it has the impersonal and non-substantive aspect with no name and form. Therefore it can be apprehended that “God-within” as well as the Over-soul has an inclination of proceeding toward the ultimate state of transcendence, which resembles Buddhist emptiness. As Suzuki points out regarding the interesting similarity of Emersonian Transcendentalism and the Zen concept of “emptiness,” “Emerson’s allusion to ‘sky-void idealism’ is interesting. Apparently he means the Buddhist theory of *śūnyatā* (emptiness or void)” (Suzuki, 1959, 343).

Suzuki at the same time writes: “Emptiness is the state in which all things in nature are in disorderly and infinite play” (Suzuki, 1979, 71-72). This is not the same as viewing all things as having no immutable substance of their own. It can be considered that Suzuki looks upon emptiness as “non-duality” (不二), the original state before the separation of things into dual appearance. His understanding is not grounded in the strict way of interpreting emptiness taken by the Maydhyamaka School but views emptiness as being substantive in its nature similar to the Daoist “non-being” (無). Therefore, from the standpoint of emptiness of viewing all things as having no immutable substance of their own, the essential difference between the transcendence of “God-within” and the emptiness of “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature” can be pointed out: Whereas the Buddhist emptiness is the state in which the self dissolves into oneness with nature, abandoning personality, Emerson’s transcendence is the state in which the self transcends its individuality to unite with the super-personal Over-soul and, furthermore, with the impersonal Godhead. The Buddhist emptiness is the absolute extermination of the attachment to the self and the phenomenal world, while Emerson’s transcendence is the ultimate state attained by the changing and flowing movement in the creative process of divine power. It is true that Emerson’s “God-within” and “Buddha-womb” or Buddha-nature have an affinity of having an inclination toward transcendence over the human self and the phenomenal world, but their directions are quite opposite: “God-within” takes a

⁶ Contrary to the Yogācāra School that stresses the substantive and indwelling aspect of “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature,” the Maydhyamaka School preaches that “Buddha-womb” or “Buddha-nature” has no immutable existence and its nature is emptiness.

positive direction toward unity, while "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" takes a negative direction toward annihilation.

From the comparative investigations we have made hitherto on Emerson's "God-within" and Mahāyāna Buddhism's "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature," we can conclude that the affinities between them can only be recognized from the standpoint of viewing "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature" as being substantive and indwelling in its nature.

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