

## MAHĀPRAJŪNA NIKĀYA IN MAINLAND CHINA: DOCTRINE, PRACTICE, AND THE ROLES OF MASTERS

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### Abstract

*This research investigates the practices of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya, the beliefs and implementation of doctrines, and the role of the Master in the advancement and cultivation of the Mahāprajñā Nikāya in Mainland China. The research primarily employed document analysis and in-depth interviews with esteemed teachers from the Mahāprajñā Nikāya. The studied materials comprised excerpts from the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, the works of Tsongkhapa, the teachings of Master Nenghai, and the teachings of Ajahn Brahm and Bhikkhu Bodhi. In addition, in order to gather information about meditation practices in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya, an examination of meditation was conducted using two texts: 'The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching' by Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) and 'The Miracle of Mindfulness' by Thich Nhat Hanh (1975). Subsequently, comprehensive interviews were conducted with three highly experienced teachers. The findings indicate that the doctrine of wisdom (prajñā) is the fundamental essence of the journey toward enlightenment, with the comprehension of emptiness being a crucial element. Meditation has been discovered as the principal method for cultivating wisdom and attaining a profound comprehension of emptiness. Teachers play a crucial role in the Mahāprajñā Nikāya as mentors who guide meditation and comprehension of the teachings. Future research involves conducting a comparative examination of various Buddhist traditions.*

**Keywords:** Mahāprajñā Nikāya, Wisdom (Prajñā) Doctrine, Meditation Practice, Master Role.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a scarcity of research on the Mahāprajñā Nikāya in mainland China (Acri & Rosati, 2022). There are numerous primary categories into which the literature to investigate the school's doctrines, practices, and the influence of its prominent figures can be classified (Yuan, 2005): (1) The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, which are fundamental to Prajñāpāramitā philosophy, are among the canonical texts of Buddhism, these books were first passed on orally then recorded; (2) the



commentaries of great masters such as Xuanzang and Kumarajīva, which provide in-depth interpretations of the original texts in an attempt to adapt the teachings to the Chinese context; and (3) Historical and biographical accounts of the monastic community and notable people inside the institution abound in the Gaoeng Zhuan. Many of these sources' chronological and structural constraints prevent a coherent understanding of the evolution of the Mahāprajña Nikāya's ideas (Acri & Rosati, 2022). Concepts such as śūnyatā (emptiness) and prajñā (wisdom) were methodically expressed using the influence of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophies (Choo, 2003; Laude, 2016), which were spread via trade routes and religious pilgrimages. Rather than via methodical philosophical study, the Mahāprajña Nikāya's philosophy was primarily formed in line with soteriological goals and monastic practice. Like other ancient Indian philosophies, the early lessons of this school cover nomenclature and ideas that later evolved into technical vocabulary (Zimmer & Campbell, 2020). Terms like prajñāpāramitā, tathatā, and upāya first limited themselves to the domains of morality and meditation (Dhammajoti, 2009 & Lusthaus, 2010), but they later evolved to indicate more difficult philosophical ideas.

According to the research conducted by (Nattier, 2003; Williams, 2008 Baggio, 2019 & Kim, 2024), the doctrinal structure of this school was only rendered more coherent by the introduction of new hermeneutic methods by monks and distinguished teachers like Dao'an and Kumārajīva to comprehend the Mahāprajñāpāramitā's teachings. This indicates the transition from practical philosophy to a more rational and reflective system of thought. Nevertheless, the early philosophy of the Mahāprajña Nikāya, in contrast to the Greek or Indian philosophical traditions, was founded on the authority of texts and the oral teachings of renowned teachers rather than on explicit and testable rational arguments.

Research on the main Buddhist schools in mainland China—including Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Chan—in the context of the history and evolution of Buddhist philosophy abounds. Still, the Mahāprajña Nikāya, a school anchored in doctrine interpretation and contemplative practice, is understudied. Most previous studies on the Mahāprajña Nikāya have been limited to descriptive historical studies or textual examination of old manuscripts (Balcerowicz, 2021), without considering the relevance of the actions and responsibilities of the masters in the evolution of the teaching in mainland China. (Chen, 2015), for example, highlights the importance of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā books in the Mahāyāna tradition but does not investigate how the tradition was carried out in the local Chinese cultural setting. Other studies (Yaden et al., 2020 & Zhao & Wu, 2022) have focused on the relationship between popular

Buddhist practices and the Mahāprajña Nikāya. However, it has usually paid little attention to the institutional aspects and masterful leadership in deciding the evolution of this legacy.

Furthermore, typical of these studies is their neglect of a methodical analysis of the Mahāprajña Nikāya's doctrines' interaction with contemplative practices. Underappreciated in past studies are the contributions of the Mahāprajña Nikāya to the philosophical debate of Buddhism in modern China. To so preserve and spread this legacy, it is necessary to look at the theological, pragmatic, and role-related features of the masters.

Research on the Mahāprajña Nikāya in China is often patchy, emphasizing a single element, such as a particular book or practice, rather than a thorough mapping of the interactions between several elements. (Pragya, 2020), for example, it tackles the soteriological debate of Buddhism and the contribution of Mahāprajña theory; but, it ignores how it was applied in meditation. (Zhang, 2023) on the other hand, he notes the part masters play in spreading the Mahāprajña Nikāya, but he does not explain how they changed or reinterpreted the lessons for local audiences. These gaps suggest the need for a more thorough investigation to understand the interaction among doctrine, practice, and mentors in the Mahāprajña Nikāya tradition. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions; 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 is the teacher's role in disseminating and developing Mahāprajña Nikāya teachings in mainland China?

### **The Orientation of *Mahāprajña Nikāya***

Mahāprajña Nikāya, as one of the Buddhist traditions in China (De Bary, 2011 & Guang, 2013), has a unique doctrinal orientation that emphasizes enlightenment through great wisdom “*mahāprajñā*” and deep meditation practice. This tradition emerged from the synthesis of Mahayana teachings with strong local influences, especially in interpreting the doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and the middle way taught by Nagarjuna (Shizhe, OZEKI, & TANAKA, 2024). The main orientation of Mahāprajña Nikāya is on a deep understanding of the nature of reality through meditation practices directed at direct experience “*yathābhūta*” and on the cultivation of wisdom that can penetrate worldly illusions (Aciri & Rosati, 2022). In this tradition, wisdom is seen as theoretical knowledge and insight that liberates from existential suffering.

The Mahāprajña Nikāya's doctrinal orientation also emphasizes understanding subjective experience as a path to enlightenment. Like the Buddha's rejection of ontological speculations that are irrelevant to liberation, the Mahāprajña Nikāya focuses on understanding suffering (*dukkha*) and how to overcome it through meditative practices that focus on the reality of individual

experience (Harvey, 2013; Harvey, 2015; & Harvey, 2022). In many Mahāprajña texts, such as the “Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra,” it is explained that enlightenment is achieved through understanding that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, and this understanding must be gained through direct experience, not merely through conceptual study (Priest, 2023).

Deeply entrenched in the concept that enlightenment results from a major inner metamorphosis is the Mahāprajña Nikāya meditation practice. In this regard, the tradition corresponds with early Buddhist teachings stressing the need to realize mental states as a road to release from the cycle of reincarnation (samsara). For instance, the Mahāprajña texts’ teachings on “āsavas” (mental tendencies) demonstrate that enlightenment necessitates comprehending the mechanisms that perpetuate suffering. This comprehension is acquired through profound contemplation, ultimately ceasing these tendencies and attaining nirvana (Hanson, 2008 & Kuan, 2020). Therefore, the Mahāprajña Nikāya’s orientation can be interpreted as an endeavor to lead the individual to a subjective comprehension of the nature of reality that results in genuine freedom from suffering.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate and examine the teachings and practices associated with Mahāprajña Nikāya within the framework of Buddhism. Data was acquired through two primary sources: examining religious literature and comprehensive conversations with Buddhist instructors. The analysis of religious texts involved 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 offered valuable insights into the doctrine and fundamental principles of Mahāprajña Nikāya. This analysis used 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 employed 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.

## Participant

The participants for the research interview were carefully selected to ensure their possession of pertinent knowledge and experience, enabling them to offer comprehensive insights into the teacher’s doctrine, practice, and role. The participants were also selected due to their self-regarding

as followers of Mahāprajña Nikāya and currently residing in the temples connecting to Nenghai. The selected participants are highly experienced Senior Buddhist Teachers with extensive knowledge and expertise in teaching and practicing at this school. 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 1 presents the data of senior Buddhist teachers selected for the study.

Table 1. Interview Participants with a Senior Buddhist Teacher

No.	Name	Biography	Background Information
1.	Monk A	One of the active senior monks from Jinci si (近慈) 寺 in Chengdu, a Buddhist temple founded by Master Nenghai in 1938.	He is regarded as one of the faithful promoters of Nenghai's teachings and followers of the latter's practice.
2.	Monk B	One of the residential monks in Shancai Cave in Wutai Mountain (五台山善财洞), one of four sacred Buddhist mountains in China. Nenghai has carried out years of meditation retreats.	He is an active meditator, claiming that he inherited the meditation methods from Nenghai.
3.	Monk C	One of the residential monks in Xiangfu si 祥符寺 in Mian Zhu, Sichuan Province. Nenghai ever taught his Dharma in this temple.	He joined the compilation of the Collected Works of Master Nenghai (能海 大師 全集), still promoting Nenghai's teachings among the followers of Xiangfu si.

### Instrument

The instrument utilized in the present study includes a Religious Document Analysis Worksheet and a Semi-structure interview. Documents analysis 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. Interviews were conducted with Buddhist instructors with knowledge and expertise in the Mahāprajña Nikāya. Semi-structured interviews comprise a set of seven open-ended questions to investigate the participant's comprehension of the Mahāprajña Nikāya philosophy, their meditation techniques, and the role of the instructor in providing spiritual direction. The interview was recorded and transcribed for subsequent study.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employed 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 engages in a comprehensive process of re-reading to gain a deep understanding of the context of each interview. In addition, academic data coding involved 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 involved conducting a thematic analysis to ascertain the primary themes and sub-themes pertinent to the research objectives. This analysis entailed a comprehensive examination of each theme to comprehend how notions like doctrines, meditation practices, and the role of teachers were expressed and implemented within the framework of Mahāprajña Nikāya. Researchers utilized triangulation to validate and assure the consistency of research results by comparing the findings from interviews and text analysis. This process of triangulation aided in the identification of parallels and contrasts in perception and practice while also offering a more comprehensive understanding and application of the Mahāprajña Nikāya.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### 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”

Shèlǐzǐ, sè bù yì kōng, kōng bù yì sè, sè jí shì kōng, kōng jí shì sè; shòu xiǎng xíng shì, yì fù rúshì

*“Śarīputra, rūpaṁ śūnyatā, śūnyatāiva rūpaṁ; rūpaṁna pṛthak śūnyatā, śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṁ.  
Yad rūpaṁ sā śūnyatā, yā śūnyatā tad rūpaṁ.”*

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:

*“Yah paśyati prajñāpāramitāyā śūnyatām, sa paśyati sarvadharmaṇām 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 duḥkhaṁ mocayitum prajñām bhāvayati.”*

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

### 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་པའི་ཚོས་མེད་པ་, མཐའ་ཅད་ཀྱང་གཞི་ལ་བདག་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ཙམ་དུ་རྒྱལ་པར་རིག་པ་ལ་ནི་འཛིན་པ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ།)*

### 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)

has a plethora of unique insights into Buddhist ideas, particularly those pertaining to the Mahāprajña Nikāya.

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

1) Voidness (Śūnyatā)

The Mahāprajña 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.

3) Bodhisattva

The Mahāprajña 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 provided a clear outline of the six paramitas, the essential qualities a Bodhisattva must cultivate.

Master Nenghai expressed the following statement:

“菩薩修行六度，即布施、持戒、忍辱、精进、禪定、智慧，乃成就圓滿佛果之道

*“A Bodhisattva cultivates the six paramitas, which are charity, morality, patience, persistence, meditation, and knowledge, in order 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.

#### 4) Non-Dualitas

The Mahāprajña 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.

### **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:

1. 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:

*“Jhānaṃ paramasukhaṃ” signifies that “Jhāna represents the utmost state of happiness.”*

2. 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.

*“Dukkhaṃ parijānāti, dukkhasamudayaṃ parijānāti, dukkhanirodhaṃ parijānāti, dukkhanirodhabagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ parijānāti.” (Pali: दुःखं परिजानाति, दुःखसमुदयं परिजानाति, दुःखनिरोधं परिजानाति, दुःखनिरोधगामिनिं पटीपदं परिजानाति.). (page 45)*

### 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.

1. 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.
2. Breathing exercises: The primary strategy is to focus on your breath. Nhat Hanh instructed on the practice of mindfully perceiving each inhalation and exhalation.

### 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.

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

The research of materials and in-depth interviews with the Master revealed that the primary theory of Mahāprajñā 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. The teachings of Master Nenghai (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, intention, 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. Through the application of knowledge, we can perceive the inherent lack of inherent 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.

## Mainland China Implement the Religious Practices of Mahāprajña 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 Mahāprajña 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.

### Monk A:

*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 usually meditate twice every day, in the morning and evening. Each meditation session typically lasts for one or two hours.*

### Monk B:

*My meditation practice includes a sitting meditation known as “chan” or “zen”.*

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

### Monk C:

*I practice “full attention meditation” or “mindfulness” meditation. This technique entails complete observation of the body’s thoughts, feelings, and sensations without evaluation.*

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

## The Role of 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

Buddhist Monks in Mainland China offer their 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 additionally offers customized guidance specifically designed to meet all student’s individual requirements and capabilities. Monk C 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

The teacher plays a crucial role 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. Monk A 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 silk, associated remarks, and practical implementation of teachings in daily life. Group conversations facilitate the exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences among students while also being supervised and directed by the teacher. Monk A, a notable example, frequently conducts post-lecture discussion sessions to ensure students' comprehension of the presented content and their ability to apply it in their practice.

## Discussion

### **The Doctrine of Wisdom, Known as Prajñā, is The Fundamental Essence of Enlightenment**

Research on the Mahāprajña 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. 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, 2008). 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, 2013b & Conze, 2013a) research emphasizes that wisdom within the Mahayana framework encompasses more than mere intellectual knowledge but involves profound firsthand experience. Conze (2013a, 2013b) 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. (Wallace, 2007; Wallace, 2016; Ma Rhea, 2018) research emphasizes incorporating Buddhist wisdom teachings with contemporary scientific study, namely in neuroscience. According to them, 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.

### **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 tranquility. 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, 2003 & Kabat-Zinn 2013), who asserted that mindfulness meditation is linked to heightened consciousness and decreased stress levels, enabling individuals to approach life with greater wisdom and tranquility. 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. Ramel1 et al. (2004) assert that mindfulness meditation enables individuals to recognize the transient and mutable quality of their experiences, akin to the concept of emptiness taught in the Mahāprajña Nikāya. This comprehension assists practitioners in relinquishing attachments and illusions, which is a crucial stride toward enlightenment.

Lazar et al. (2005), Pagnoni & Cekic (2007); & Desbordes et al. (2015) conducted more research that offers additional evidence supporting the advantages of meditation in cultivating knowledge and comprehension of emptiness. They 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, Kozhevnikov et al.'s (2009) 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. They 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 Kabat-Zinn and 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. Their 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 the perspective that meditation not only yields psychological advantages but also facilitates the cognitive and emotional changes necessary for attaining enlightenment. Hence, meditation, as the primary instrument in the *Mahāprajñā Nikāya*, holds not only spiritual significance but is also substantiated by scientific research, which demonstrates tangible advantages in daily existence.

### **The Role of Master *Mahāprajñā Nikāya* Tradition as Mentors Who Offer Guidance in the Practice of Meditation and Comprehension of the Teachings.**

The final finding derived from the research on the *Mahāprajñā 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. 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 (Schober and Collins, 2012), teachers act as tangible embodiments of Buddhist principles, offering inspiration and encouragement to pupils in their pursuit of enlightenment. Similarly, (Bodhi, 2010 & Bodhi 2023) 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 how to incorporate 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 (2020) study demonstrates the significant impact that teachers can have on directing pupils in a very individualized manner. Rinpoche (2020) 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, (Anālayo, 2020 & Anālayo, 2022) 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.

## 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 are crucial in 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.

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