Dhammakāya in the Pali Canon
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I. Why ‘Dhammakāya’ in the ‘Pali Canon’?

The term dhammakāya/dharmakāya appears in Buddhist literature of different schools. Previous scholars have done excellent work on interesting aspects of studies regarding the term, mostly in relation to its notions in Mahāyāna Buddhism. But its usages have not been studied in detail, and what the present study offers is a close examination of the term in the Pali canon.

Admittedly, many previous studies mention the appearance of the term dhammakāya in the Pali canon, but only brief references have been made, most occurrences missed out altogether and some significant aspects not yet touched upon.

1 The topic was originally presented in the Annual Conference of the Australasian Association of Buddhist Studies (AABS) in December 2007 at the University of Western Sydney and once again in the International Seminar on Early Buddhism (ISEB) in August 2010 at the University of Sydney. The present paper is a revision of such presentations and a slightly revised edition of an earlier paper: Chanida Jantrasrisalai, “Early Buddhist Dhammakāya and Its Relation to Enlightenment,” in The Pathway to the Centre - Purity and the Mind: Proceedings of the Inaugural International Samādhi Forum, ed. Edward F. Crangle (Sydney: Dhammachai International Research Institute Inc., 2010).


Most of them refer only to the *Aggañña-sutta* passage,\(^4\) missing out the three *Apadāna* references.\(^5\) The reason could be either that the scholars concerned have taken the aforementioned text as representing ‘early Buddhism,’\(^6\) while the *Apadāna* is usually seen as a later compilation,\(^7\) or that the *Apadāna* literature was not accessible at the time of those studies.

The present paper concentrates on overlooked parts of the Pali canon on *dhammakāya*. It places the use of the term in a distinct context, in a way not presented previously. Rather than treating the Pali canonical references either as purely representing ‘early Buddhist ideas’ or simply sectarian ‘Theravāda thoughts,’ it understands the function of the Pali canon as something in between that reflects the understanding of the term in an early Theravāda community that sought to preserve and understand the Buddha’s teachings as they are.\(^8\) By means of this more direct approach, the resulting interpretation, while dissimilar to most previous studies, will be interestingly more or less in correspondence with the majority of traditional understandings, which have been too downplayed by contemporary academics. The following will briefly explain how and why the present study differs from previous works with respect to their research approaches.

\(^{4}\) D.III.84.


II. The Different Approach

A fairly established academic understanding has settled regarding the term *dhammakāya* in the Pali canon, that it was used merely in the sense of the ‘Buddha’s teachings.’ In concluding so, most studies refer to a few canonical passages where the Buddha appears to equate himself with *dhamma*. The first passage frequently mentioned is located in the *Aggañña-sutta* where the term *dhammakāya*, along with three other terms, are said to designate the *Tathāgata*. The second is a passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* where the Buddha is said to say that the teaching taught and the discipline laid down by him (*dhamma-vinaya*) would be the future teacher after his passing. The third is the Buddha’s discourse delivered to the elder Vakkali which states that it is useless to long for seeing the Buddha’s corruptible physical body, for he who sees the *dhamma* sees the Buddha and he who sees the Buddha sees the *dhamma*.

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8 It is usually debatable to determine the position of the Pali canonical context at all. To rely on it as purely early Buddhist thought requires caution, for there are at least some signs of later re-arrangement. But to view it as only *Theravāda* could mean to deprecate the effort of the old Buddhist community who sought to preserve the Buddhist teachings intact at best of their ability, as may be observed by its separation of *Theravāda* traditional writing in commentarial and postcanonical accounts rather than adding them to the canon. The well-preservation of the Pali suttas can be witnessed also by its close correspondence with the content of ancient Gāndhārī Buddhist manuscripts, dated 1st-5th century CE, known to be the earliest Buddhist manuscripts ever found. To stratify the older and later layers of parts of the canon is also not an easy task and not always perfectly correct.

9 For example, see Dutt, op. cit., p. 142; Reed, op. cit., pp. 28-29; Xing, op. cit., p. 74; Williams, op. cit., p. 352, n.10; Harrison, op. cit., p.50.

For example of different voices that are the minority of academic interpretations, see Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, op. cit., p. 234; Frank E Reynolds, “The Several Bodies of the Buddha: Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition,” *History of Religion* 16(1976), p. 376, n. 6; David Norton Need, “Rendering the Body: Etherealization and Sense in Vedic and Early Buddhist in Religiosity” (University of Virginia, 2004), pp. 383-387. It is interesting to note that the minority of academic interpretations of the term *dhammakāya* accord with the majority of Theravādin interpretations, as detailed in the Appendix. But very few instances of traditional understandings on the term agree with the interpretation of the academic mainstream.

10 The three terms are *dhammabhūta*, *brahmakāya*, and *brahmabhūta*.

11 D.III.84.

12 D.II.154.

13 S.III.120.
Of the three canonical passages mentioned above, only the first, namely the Aggañña-sutta passage, contains the term dhammakāya, while the other two do not. The reason for which all these passages are employed as being Pali references to dhammakāya is the seeming identification of the Buddha and his teachings. This may reflect the scholarly methodology employed whereby previous studies were set off from a preconception regarding the early meaning of dhammakāya, as if the term dhammakāya/dharmakāya was exclusively related to the Buddha.

The present study employs a different approach. Rather than beginning from the preconception of such an exclusive relation of the term to the Buddha, it simply starts from listing Pali canonical passages in which the term dhammakāya appears. The use and meaning of the term dhammakāya in each passage is then assessed, by means of text critical analysis, from each passage’s environmental setting. On providing interpretations, it considers the philosophical background existing in the Pali canonical context as a key tool to determine the intention of particular expressions. A review of contemporary academic interpretations will be made according to each particular passage as we proceed. By means of a neutral method of assessment, it hopes to provide resultant interpretations which are more direct and inclusive.

Below is the list of all Pali canonical passages containing the term dhammakāya.

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14 It is possible that the identification of dhammakāya with ‘dhamma in the sense of teaching,’ which has become a common practice in many previous works, was influenced by different factors. A possibility is some of Buddhaghoṣa’s writings viewed through the researchers’ preferred style of interpretation. For example of this case, see Dutt, op. cit., p. 138-142. Reed and Xing seem to follow Dutt’s lead. Reed, op. cit., p. 29; Xing, op. cit., pp.35-36. But for some scholars, the idea seems to have been influenced partly by the authors’ aversion of Mahāyāna conception of ‘dhammakāya’ as ‘transcendent body,’ or more specifically of ‘kāya’ as ‘body.’ For example, see the expression in Harrison, op. cit., pp. 74-76. Cf. Chanida Jantrasrisalai, “Early Buddhist dhammakāya: Its Philosophical and Soteriological Significance” (University of Sydney, 2009), pp. 18-19.
III. References to ‘Dhammakāya’ in the Pāli Canon

In the Pali canon, the term dhammakāya appears four times; once in the Aggañña-sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya and three more times in Apadāna literature. They can be listed as follows:

1. Aggañña-sutta: Dhammakāya as the Tathāgata’s Designation (D.III.84)

Of these four passages, only the first was cited in previous scholarly works that refer to the term dhammakāya in the Pali canon, while the latter three seem to have been unknown to them.\(^\text{15}\) The present study takes all these references as a whole to reflect the use and understanding of the term in the early Theravāda community - the Pali canonical period.\(^\text{16}\)

We shall now look at each passage in detail.

\(^{15}\) With the exception of a PhD dissertation (Need, op. cit.), other scholarly works do not mention the appearance of the term dhammakāya in the Apadāna literature.

\(^{16}\) Even though the Apadāna literature is usually viewed as a later added part, its canonical status in all editions of the Pali canon is beyond doubt.
IV. Reference 1: Dhammakāya as the Tathāgata’s Designation

The first Pali reference to the term dhammakāya that is well known to all previous works is a passage in the Aggañña-sutta, wherein the term is said to designate the Tathāgata. The narrative setting is a conversation between the Buddha and two novices, namely Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, who went forth from Brahmin families and were awaiting higher ordination (upadampadā). In the Buddha’s discourse being delivered, the term dhammakāya is mentioned in the context of a definition of ‘an heir of dhamma’ or ‘the Tathāgata’s true son:’

yassa kho pan’ assa vāseṭṭha tathāgate saddhā niviṭṭhā mūla-jātā patiṭṭhitā dalhā asaṃhārikā samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmiṃ, tass’etaṃ kallaṃ vacanāya: “bhagavato’mhi putto oraso mukhato jāto dhamma-jo dhamma-nimmito dhamma-dāyādo” ti. Taṃ kissa hetu? Tathāgatassa h’etaṃ Vāseṭṭha adhivacanaṃ “dhamma-kāyo iti pi brahma- kāyo iti pi, dhamma-bhūto iti pi brahma-bhūto iti pīti.”

17 This passage is claimed in some scholarly works as being the sole appearance of dhammakāya in the Pali canon. For example, see Williams, op. cit., p. 284, note 5; Harrison, op. cit., p. 50.

18 The vocative ‘vāseṭṭha’ in this passage is variably written in different editions of the Pali sutta. The PTS and CS versions put the word in singular form, while the BJ and SR versions show the word in plural form ‘vāseṭṭhā.’ The singular form implies that the Buddha was speaking to vasettha only, while the plural form implies both vāseṭṭha and bhāradvāja. (The latter is a reduced form of a dvanda compound in which there remain only one component and the plural number.) the present paper takes this to be plural, as it is stated at the beginning of the story that both novices approached the Buddha together [D.III.80], and at the end of the story that both of them were delighted and rejoiced at the Blessed one’s speech.’ [D.III.98].

19 Some manuscripts write ‘asaṃhāriyā.’

20 SR edition writes, ‘vācāya.’
Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, he whose confidence in the Tathāgata is settled, rooted, established, solid, irremovable by any ascetic or brahmin, any deva or Māra or Brahmā or anyone in the world, can truly say: ‘I am a son of the Blessed one, born of his mouth, born of dhamma, created by dhamma, an heir of dhamma.’ Why is that? Because, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, this designates the Tathāgata: ‘dhamma-bodied,’ ‘brahma-bodied,’ ‘(who) become dhamma,’ or ‘(who) become brahma.’

The passage lists four words by which the Tathāgata may be denominated: ‘dhammakāya,’ ‘brahmakāya,’ ‘dhammabhūta,’ and ‘brahmabhūta.’ As the context of this passage is complicated, it requires a lengthy discussion.

**Previous Scholarly Interpretations**

Previous scholars interpret the term dhammakāya in this passage either as a substantive or an adjective. Most of them interpret the first component, i.e., dhamma, in the sense of ‘the Buddha’s teaching(s).’ For example, Dutt interprets the term as being a tappurisa compound referring to a ‘collection of the Buddha’s teachings and disciplines.’ Reed interprets it in the same way that it refers to ‘the body of the Buddha’s verbal teachings.’ Similarly, Kajiyama notes that the later expression of dharmakāya as a ‘collection of Buddhist sūtras’ agrees with its meaning in the Pāli Nikāya. Xing also interprets the term dhammakāya in this passage as ‘the Buddha’s collective teachings.’

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21 The two latter compounds are undoubtedly adjectives, as their last component ‘bhūta,’ which is a past participle modifying the subject, indicates. The first two compounds, each consists of two substantives, while being potential to be translated as one among the two alternative compounds, i.e., kammadhāraya (Skt.karmadhāraya), or tappurisa (Skt.tatpuruṣa), seems more likely to be a bahubbīhi,21 being a designation of the Tathāgata, as Harrison has suggested. Harrison, op. cit., p. 50.

22 Dutt, op. cit., p. 139.

23 Reed, op. cit., pp. 28-29.


25 Xing, op. cit., pp. 71, 74.
Gombrich, while differently translating the term in this passage as a bahubbīhi compound ‘dhamma-bodied,’ similarly interprets it as an indication that the Buddha’s true import is due to ‘his teaching,’ not his personality.\textsuperscript{26} Likewise, Harrison proposes that the term dhammakāya in the Aggaṇīṇa-sutta is to be translated as a bahubbīhi compound,\textsuperscript{27} and that its first component, dhamma, is used in the sense of the Buddha’s teaching.\textsuperscript{28}

In contrast, Need believes that the meaning of ‘dhammakāya’ in this passage is unclear and can hardly be certain. Nevertheless, he suggests a caution against the interpretation of the first component, ‘dhamma,’ in the sense of text.\textsuperscript{29} Similarly, Reynolds seems to suggest that the interpretation of ‘dhammakāya’ in the early Pāli suttas as ‘teaching’ or scripture has been developed at a later date.\textsuperscript{30} Nitta, while reluctant to ascribe an exact meaning to the term dhammakāya in the sutta, similarly expresses a disagreement towards the claim that the original meaning of dhammakāya is exclusively a ‘collection of the teachings.’\textsuperscript{31}

Harvey is more specific in regard to the interpretation of the term ‘dhamma’ as the first component of ‘dhammakāya.’ On interpreting the term in the Aggaṇīṇa-sutta, he suggests a bahubbīhi compound, interpreting ‘dhamma,’ that is the Tathāgata’s body, as the noble eightfold path.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{27} Harrison, op. cit., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{29} Need, op. cit., pp. 377-378. As he comments:

......care should be taken with respect to reading the compound as “one who has the teachings as his body,” or “one whose body has been developed in accordance with the teachings,” where teachings is understood as “text” or “canon”.

\textsuperscript{30} Reynolds, op. cit., p. 376 n. 6. He comments:

As we shall see, the term dhammakāya was already in use in the canon. However in the later context it is clear that dhammakāya is being identified with the scriptural legacy.

\textsuperscript{31} He notes further that, even though the term has encountered a series of changes of meanings in the Pāli commentarial tradition, it has consistently been employed to express the Buddha’s essence. Tomomichi Nitta, “The Meaning of “Dhammakāya” in Pāli Buddhism,” \textit{Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies} 51, no. 1 (2002), p. 47.

\textsuperscript{32} Harvey, \textit{The Selfless Mind}, op. cit., p. 234. Harvey also interprets ‘dhamma’ that is the Tathāgata’s nature as Nibbāna.
In brief, contemporary academics refer to the term *dhammakāya* in the *Aggañña-sutta* either as a noun or an adjective. As a noun, the term is interpreted mostly as the Buddha’s teachings collected together. As an adjective, the term’s first component ‘*dhamma*’ is also mostly interpreted in the sense of the Buddha’s teaching collected together, with a few exceptions.

The translation of the term *dhammakāya* in this passage as a *bahubbīhi* compound agrees with explanations given by traditional Pāli commentators, Buddhaghoṣa and Dhammapāla. The former explains the term as ‘(he) who has *dhamma* as body,’ and interprets its first component either as the Buddha’s verbal teaching\[^{33}\] or as the ninefold transcendent *dhamma* (*navavidha lokuttaradhamma*).\[^{34}\] The latter refers to the ninefold transcendent *dhammas* (*nava-lokuttara-dhamma*) as being the *Tathāgatas*’ nature or ‘body.’ He relates it with the Buddhas’ enlightenment that it is ‘the *dhamma* which all Tathāgatas have attained and have become.’\[^{35}\]

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\[^{33}\] DA.III.865.  
\[^{34}\] SA.II.313. Even though this is not a direct commentary to the *Aggañña-sutta*, its mention of ‘*dhamma* that is the *Tathāgata*’s body’ refers directly to the term *dhammakāya* in the *Aggañña-sutta*. Note that the expression ‘ninefold transcendent *dhamma*’ (*navavidha lokuttaradhamma*) is a commentarial expression collectively referring to nine *dhammas* mentioned in the canon, i.e., the ‘four transcendental fruits (*phalas*)’ along with their ‘corresponding paths (*maggas*)’ and *Nibbāna.*  
\[^{35}\] ThrA.II.205.  
_Dhammabhūtehīti dhammakāyatāya dhhammasabhāvēhi, navalokuttaradhammato vā bhūtehi jātehi, dhammaṃ vā pattehi._  
Having become *dhamma* means having *dhamma* as their own nature, for they (the *Tathāgatas*) have the *dhamma* as body. In other words, they have become or have been born through the ninefold transcendent *dhamma*, or they have attained the *dhamma.*
Points to Consider

It may be observed that the difference in previous scholarly interpretations of the term *dhammakāya* in this passage mainly pertains to the inter-relatedness of two distinctive meanings of the term *dhamma*, i.e., the reality the Buddha has realized and its verbal expression, i.e., his teaching(s). Closer attention is therefore required regarding prior fine distinctions, in order to re-interpret the term *dhammakāya* more precisely. Also, more attention needs to be paid to the nuance of the context. At least, three inter-connected issues required a close reading:

1. *saddhā*: the criterion of being the *Tathāgata’s son*
2. implication of parallel descriptions between monks and brahmins
3. implication of parallel usage of the terms *dhamma* and *brahma*

The following section will assess these points more closely. It will then determine the most probable meaning of the term’s first component, ‘*dhamma*’, followed by considering the most appropriate meaning of the term’s second component, ‘*kāya*’.

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36 The two inter-related meanings of *dhamma* may be distinguished according to the context of the following passage:


This *dhamma* attained by me is deep, hard to see, hard to comprehend, serene, subtle, beyond the dominion of reasoning, recondite, apprehensible only to the wise. … Would I preach the *dhamma*, others will not understand.

In this passage, which is generally regarded as a revelation of the Buddha’s thought after his perfect enlightenment and prior to his first teaching, the word *dhamma* is used in two distinct contexts. Its first appearance in the phrase ‘*dhamma* attained by me’ (*adhigato... dhammo*) represents the ‘reality realised’ or spiritually experienced by the Buddha. Its occurrence in the second phrase ‘would I preach the *dhamma*’ (*dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ*) stands for the ‘teaching taught’ by the Buddha which can be regarded as the ‘verbal expression’ of the reality he has realised.
Saddhā: Criterion of being the Tathāgata’s Son

The first point to be looked at is the criterion of being the Buddha’s ‘true son’ which is, in this passage, defined by means of his irremovable confidence in the Tathāgata. The degree of saddhā is described here as ‘settled, rooted, established, and solid’ so that it cannot be altered either by the one who possesses magical power, or who is of so-called high birth, or by divine power, evil power, or highest power these being symbolized by the titles ‘ascetic, brahmin, god, Māra, and Brahmā’ respectively.

According to Buddhist philosophy in the Pali canonical context, this kind of unshakeable confidence is not merely a ‘strong belief’ or ‘firm faith’ in the ordinary sense, but is a specific quality of noble persons (ariya-puggala) who have witnessed the reality and become independent or self-reliant regarding Buddha’s dhamma, as is evident in a passage describing the spiritual attainment of a Stream-enterer:

seyyathâpi nàma suddhaṃ vatthaṃ apagatakâḷakaṃ sammad eva rajanaṃ paṭīgaṇheyya, evam eva tassa purisassa tasmiṃ yeva âsane virajam vâtamalam dhammacakkhuṃ udapâdi yam kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodha-dhamman ti. athakho so puriso diṭṭhadhammo pattadhammo viditadhammo pariyogâḷhadhammo tiṇṇavicikiccho vigatakathâṃkatho vesârajjappatto aparappaccayo satin suṇane.

37 Buddhist noble ones are those who have spiritually realised/experienced the reality and hence have been transformed by means of a permanent eradication of certain influxes (āsavas). They are classified into four main levels; 1) sotāpanna - Stream-enterer, 2) sakadāgāmī - Once returner, 3) anāgāmī - Non-returner, and 4) arhant - Arhat. A Stream-enterer (sotāpanna) is a noble disciple of the lowest degree of enlightenment. According to Buddhist philosophy, a stream enterer (sotāpanna) has uprooted three fetters: 1) the view that the assemblage of five aggregates subject to clinging (pañca-upādāna-khandha) is ‘self’ or ‘belonging to self’ (sakkāyadiṭṭhi), 2) the doubt regarding truth or realities (vicikicchā), 3) the practice of discipline or ceremonial observances without right understanding that could lead to strong attachment (sīlabbataparāmāsa). This is elaborated in detail in the Mahānīddesa. Nd1.27, 141, 507.
Just as a piece of clean cloth that is deprived of dirt would well-absorb the dye, the pure and clear eye of dhamma (dhammacakkhu) arose to the man, on that current seat, that whatever whose nature is to arise, are those whose nature is to cease. At that time, the man has seen dhammas, attained dhammas, known dhammas, dived into dhammas; has crossed beyond doubt, deprived of uncertainty; has obtained confidence in the master’s teaching, without having to rely on others.

As a consequence of transformation resulting from their spiritual realization of realities, these noble disciples have eradicated at least the three lower fetters (samyojanas), including doubt (vicīkicchā). Therefore, the quality of saddhā in the Pāli Aggañña-sutta as a property of the Buddha’s ‘true son,’ indicates the person’s state as being a noble disciple who has witnessed the truths, rather than ‘anyone who claim himself a Buddhist.’

The definitions of ‘true son’ reaffirm his state of being a noble disciple. Here, he is entitled a) a son of the Blessed Lord, b) who is born of his mouth, c) who is born of dhamma, d) who is created by dhamma, and e) an heir by (of) dhamma. These titles refer to different aspects of the same person. Each of them corresponds, in one way or another, to the activities and qualities of a Stream-attainer.

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See note 37 above.

As Harvey rightly states in The Selfless Mind, op. cit., p. 234: “A person of such firm faith is clearly at least a Stream-enterer, one who has entered the ‘stream’ of the Holy Eightfold Path (S.V347) and is endowed with ‘unwavering confidence’ in the three refuges: the Buddha, Dhamma and the Holy Sangha of Stream-enterers and other saints (S.II.68).”
Different sets of qualities of a Stream-attainer as mentioned in the canon are as follows:

1. Being possessed of four activities: a) association with a virtuous one, b) listening to his teaching, c) proper contemplation on the teaching heard, d) proper practice according to the teaching. D.III.227, S.V.347.

2. Being possessed of the noble eightfold path, and, to some extent, the qualities of a non-trainee (asekhadhamma). S.V.348, S.V.380-385.

3. Having witnessed (seen, known, attained, penetrated) the truth and becomes independent or self-reliant regarding Buddha’s dhamma. Vin.II.192, A.IV.186, 210, 213.

4. Being endowed with four qualities of a Stream-attainer (sotāpattiyaṅga), namely, unwavering confidence in the Buddha, dhamma, Sangha; and the perfect virtues beloved of the noble ones (ariyakanta-sīla). D.II.93-94.

5. Having quitted of the five evils, as well as having penetrated the truth to be realised - the dependent causation (paṭicca samuppāda). S.II.68-70, S.V.387-389.

It is more likely that a Stream-attainer possesses all of these qualities, rather than some of them. These different descriptions seem to represent different steps in the process of realisation of an individual, rather than representing different individuals.
This corresponds to the set of four activities\textsuperscript{41} belonging to a Stream-attainer (sotāpattiyaṅga) which brings about other sets of qualities. The titles ‘born of dhamma’ (dhammaja) and ‘created by dhamma’ (dhamma-nimmita) imply a further step - the realization or attainment of dhamma, and the consequent transformation of the person. Having listened to the teaching, having contemplated on it, and practised according to it, the person then attains or spiritually realizes the realities. Consequently, some fetters (saṃyojanas) have been eradicated and superior transcendent qualities have arisen in him.\textsuperscript{42} In other words, the person’s mental qualities have been raised up from an ordinary level to a supramundane level; in which case he is said to be (re)born of dhamma (dhammaja) and created by dhamma (dhammanimmita).

\textsuperscript{41} See no. 1 of note 40.

While it is evident in the canon that some noble disciples could attain their noble state through a single hearing of the Buddha’s discourse without other preparatory activities, it can be explained that, during the time of their listening and understanding of the discourse, their mental qualities have been gradually purified and thus prepared. All their three modes of activities, i.e., body-speech-mind, were all ‘at peace,’ and hence considered ‘right’ or ‘wholesome’ in accordance with the first six constituents of the noble eightfold path. This engenders the seventh (sammāsati) and eighth (sammāsamādhi) constituents of the path, which can be identified with the ‘appropriate state of mind’ which is ‘instrumental’ to the realisation. As is usually described in the canon, when the mind of listeners becomes ‘workable’ as such, the Buddha would consider it is ‘the right time’ to deliver a deeper discourse associated with the four noble truths in order to ‘direct the listener’s workable mind’ to the realisation of the truth. In this manner, a single listening to the discourse can be equated with the ‘right practice’ elaborated into these four activities.

\textsuperscript{42} The mention of the rise of new qualities does not preclude the idea that the person attains the previously hidden qualities.
Therefore, the titles *dhammaja* and *dhammanimmita* indicate the person’s acquisition of a new state – being his rebirth to the dharmic plane, obtained through the penetration of the *dhamma*.\(^{43}\) As Horner notes, ‘a spiritual paternity and sonship are meant, not a physical one.’\(^{44}\)

The last title ‘an heir by means of *dhamma*’ (*dhammadāyāda*) is generally employed to refer to a noble disciple, and more specifically an Arhat.\(^{45}\) It indicates the acquisition of the same sort of qualities as those possessed by the Buddha - the qualities arising as a consequence of spiritual realization of the reality. Such qualities or properties, being the indicators of the noble lineage, must effectively distinguish both the Buddha and his dharmic inheritor from a worldly individual (*puthujjana*).

Hence, the description of his ‘unwavering confidence’ in the Buddha and the various descriptions of such a ‘true son’ indicate his state as a noble disciple (*ariya-sāvaka*). This point will be helpful for further understanding of other implications as will be discussed below.

We shall now proceed to the next point.

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\(^{43}\) This is, perhaps, as Eliade observes, ‘for the Buddha, one can be ‘saved’ only by attaining nirvāṇa - that is, by going beyond the plane of profane human experience and re-establishing the plane of the unconditioned. In other words, one can be saved only by dying to this profane world and being reborn into a transhuman life impossible to define or describe.’


\(^{45}\) For example, see M.II.25-29, S.I.221-222, Ap.II.544.
Implications of Parallel Descriptions of Monks and Brahmins

As Gombrich points out, the passage in question is comparable to the Brahmins’ claim:\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{quote}
brāhmaṇā va brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā brahma-jā brahma-nimmitā brahma-dāyādā.

D.III.81.

The Brahmins are Brahmā’s own children, born of his mouth, born of Brahmā, created by Brahmā, heirs of Brahmā.
\end{quote}

Grammatically, the component ‘brahma-’ in the three compounds brahmajā, brahmanimmitā, and brahmadāyādā may be translated either as a masculine Brahmā which refers to the bramanical creator, or a neuter brahman which represents brahmanical ultimate reality.\textsuperscript{47}

Therefore, from the above two parallel passages, the comparable context may be arranged in two forms, according to two different translations of the term ‘brahma-’ as follows.

\textsuperscript{46} Gombrich, op. cit., p. 163.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p. 165. Here, Gombrich briefly mentions the distinction between the masculine Brahmā (the creator) and the neuter brahman (ultimate reality).
From the table, two possible translations of ‘brahma’- suggest different sets of parallels implied in the context. This may be summarized as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Brahmā’s children</td>
<td><em>Tathāgata</em>’s sons</td>
<td>Mythical paternity &amp; Spiritual paternity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brahmā &amp; <em>Tathāgata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Born of Brahmā’s mouth</td>
<td>Born of <em>Tathāgata</em>’s mouth</td>
<td><em>Brahmā</em>’s mouth &amp; <em>Tathāgata</em>’s verbal teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Born of Brahmā Born of brahman</td>
<td>born of <em>dhamma</em> (<em>dhamma-ja</em>)</td>
<td><em>Brahmā</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>brahman</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>created by Brahmā created by brahman</td>
<td>created by <em>dhamma</em> (<em>dhamma-nimmita</em>)</td>
<td><em>Brahmā</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>brahman</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>heirs of Brahmā heirs of brahman</td>
<td>heirs of <em>dhamma</em> (<em>dhamma-dāyāda</em>)</td>
<td><em>Brahmā</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>brahman</em> &amp; <em>dhamma</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Parallel descriptions of noble disciples and Brahmins**
1. The Tathāgata and Brahmā, the creator god.  
2. The Tathāgata’s mouth (verbal teaching) & Brahmā mouth.  
3. The dhamma and Brahmā, the creator god; or  
The dhamma and Brahman, the ultimate reality.

In both instances of the alternative translations of brahma-, it appears that there are different degrees of semantic depth of terms in the whole passage. In the brahmanical claim, the passage first refers to Brahmā’s mouth, but later on to the Brahmā as a whole. The same holds true for the Aggañña-sutta passage. At the beginning, the context refers to the Tathāgata’s mouth, which implies his verbal teaching, comparable to Brahmā’s mouth. But afterward it refers to dhamma, which is comparable to Brahmā the creator, or Brahman the ultimate. With this fine distinction, it seems not appropriate to readily conclude that the term ‘dhamma’ in the passage refers to the Buddha’s ‘verbal teaching’ simply because the passage begins with the phrase mukhato jāto (born of mouth). Hence, our study will closely examine the above two sets of parallels one after another.

48 Note that ‘Brahmā’ in Brahmanical sense is different from the ‘Brahmā’ as beings in form (rūpāvacara) or formless (arūpāvacara) realms in Buddhist philosophy.  
49 As shown in the above parallel, to equate the Tathāgata with his verbal teaching is like to equate the Brahmā with his mouth.
In the case that ‘brahma-’ refers to the masculine ‘Brahma’

In case of the term ‘brahma-’ in the three compounds\(^{50}\) being translated as a masculine ‘Brahmā,’\(^{51}\) the comparison of the first and the third parallels suggests that the Buddha compares both himself and the dhamma with the brahmanical Brahmā, the creator. Thus, he is also equating himself with the dhamma. The reason given immediately afterward reinforces this point: ‘Why is that? Because the Tathāgata is designated ‘dhamma-bodied’ (dhammakāya) and he who has ‘become dhamma’ (dhammabhūta), so the noble disciples are entitled ‘born of dhamma,’ ‘created by dhamma,’ and ‘heir (by means) of dhamma,’ as they are named the Tathāgata’s sons. According to this line of thought, the sense of the Tathāgata’s paternity is retained throughout the passage. The Tathāgata’s designations and the noble disciples’ titles are thus connected together, implying that the term dhamma in all these compounds, both the designations of the Tathāgata and the titles for his noble disciples, carries the same connotation; the connotation that is comparable to the brahmanical Brahmā, the creator.

In order to determine which connotation of dhamma is meant here, it is necessary to understand the distinction between the Tathāgata’s spiritual paternity and the Brahmā’s mythical fatherhood. According to the brahmanical claim, Brahmā may simply create Brahmins through his mouth, out of his desire.\(^{52}\) In contrast, the Tathāgata’s ‘creation’ of a Buddhist noble disciple through his verbal teachings involves the entire process of spiritual realisation.

As discussed earlier, the titles of the Tathāgata’s true son as ‘born of dhamma,’ and ‘created by dhamma,’ imply the person’s transformation from a worldling (puthujjana) into a noble one (ariya-puggala). His title as an ‘heir of dhamma’ implies similar qualities he shares with the Buddha which indicates the noble (ariya) heredity. Therefore, the component ‘dhamma’ in all these compounds must

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50 This refers to the compounds ‘brahma-ja,’ ‘brahma-nimmita,’ and ‘brahma-dāyāda.’
51 Gombrich chooses to translate ‘brahma-’ in this instance as ‘Brahmā.’ Ibid., pp. 163-165.
refer to something which ‘transforms’ the person into noble states, so that itself is comparable to the creator. At the same time, it must refer also to the shared or same kind of qualities or essence of the Buddha and his noble disciples which are distinct from those of worldly people.

According to the Buddhist philosophy of the Pāli canon, transformation arises in succession of, and as a consequence of, the realization of truths. It involves the elimination of particular fetters, as well as the rise of new qualities. In such a circumstance, the dhamma which transforms a worldly human (puthujjana) into a noble disciple (ariyasāvaka) may be identified either with defilement-uprooter, the resultant qualities or with both of them.

In this regard, the Paṭisambhidāmagga describes that the four transcendent paths function in eradicating different sorts of defilements. Once a particular ‘transcendental path’ (lokuttara magga) eradicates particular defilements, a set of new resultant qualities arises. Each set of ensuant qualities is identified with a particular ‘transcendental fruit’ (lokuttara phala) by which the person is then said to have achieved a corresponding noble state.

A similar statement is made in the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta that the middle way, i.e., the noble eightfold path, leads to Nibbāna. Also, as stated in Magga-saṃyutta, the noble eightfold path once cultivated to the degree that the practitioner ‘is endowed with it’ or ‘has attained it,’ is destined to experience the removal of lust, anger, and delusion. Hence, it may be said in general terms that the noble eightfold path functions by eradicating defilements.

While being addressed with different titles, ‘the noble eightfold path’ may be considered comparable to the four transcendent paths in certain respects. As some scholars have suggested, the ‘path’ may be developed to higher levels until the point of final liberation. For example, Govinda suggests a ‘spiral-like’ progression of the noble eightfold path.

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54 S.V.421.
55 S.V.5-6.
[R]ight concentration, again, becomes the basis of right views, right aspirations, and other steps of the noble eightfold path, which is now experienced on a higher level, and this spiral-like progression is continued until complete liberation is attained.

Similarly, Harvey explains the development of the threefold path in different levels up to the point where Arhatship is attained:

With each more refined development of the virtue-meditation-wisdom sequence, the path spirals up to a higher level, until the crucial transition of Stream-entry is reached. The holy path then spirals up to Arahatship.

Harvey’s explanation of the development of the path-function is quite explicit in its relation to the attainment of different levels of noble states. The development of the threefold path in this manner is comparable to that of the noble eightfold path, previously explained by Govinda, as these two titles of ‘path’ correspond to one another.

Thus, certain levels of the noble eightfold path can be comparable to the four transcendent paths, just like the same road leading straight up to a destination being addressed with different titles at certain points along the way. The four transcendent *maggas*, in functioning by eradicating defilements, must be constitutive of the eight elements of the noble path that are instrumental to enlightenment.

As these transcendental paths and fruits function in transubstantiating a person into noble states, they may be considered comparable to Brahmā, the creator. Indeed, as these supramundane paths and fruits can be regarded also as ‘shared or the same kind of properties/qualities’ of the Buddha and his noble disciples which distinguish them from worldly people (*lokiya puthujjana*), they seem to fit in the meaning of ‘*dhamma*’ in our quest.

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58 M.I.301.
59 In the Pāli canon, the noble eightfold path is mentioned as the best of all ‘conditioned states.’ A.II.34. The Theravādins also understand the four transcendent maggas as ‘conditioned.’ Kv.318, Kv.580.
60 Cf. Harvey’s interpretation of *dhamma* that is the *Tathāgata*’s body as the noble eightfold path, as mentioned earlier.
With regard to dhamma as the ‘essence’ of the Buddha and Arhat disciples, however, it may be more appropriate to refer to ‘Nibbāna,’ for once they have attained Buddhahood and Arhatship their spiritual qualities are transformed and they have passed beyond the earlier paths and fruits by means of the permanent destruction of certain defilements. Besides, the Buddha’s designation dhammabhūta, ‘(he) who has become dhamma,’ indicates that previously he was not a dhamma-being, but that he becomes dhamma later. Such a ‘later’ time in this case must refer to the time of his enlightenment, when he could declare himself ‘Buddha.’ This, again, implies dhamma at the level of enlightenment, and seems to support the earlier interpretation as ‘transcendent dhammas’ especially ‘Nibbāna.’

In this case, it does not mean that all the noble ones possess all transcendental paths and fruits. The noble disciples of lower levels have not possessed the higher paths and fruits. Nevertheless, as the word ‘heir’ indicates, while the properties shared by the father and the son are of the same kind, those belonging to the son may be less or of lower quality than those belonging to the father. In a similar way, the qualities/properties possessed by the noble disciples could be of a lower level than that possessed by the Buddha. But they must be of the same sort, which in this case means ‘lokkuttara,’ that differs from those belonging to the worldlings.

As discussed above, the Tathāgata’s designation\textsuperscript{61} being related as the reason for the true son’s titles\textsuperscript{62} renders it necessary in both cases that the term dhamma carries the same connotation in all compounds. Thus, it may be concluded heuristically that the term dhamma as the first constituent of the compound dhammakāya and dhammabhūta may be identified in a general term such as ‘transcendent dhamma.’

We shall now turn to examine another possibility by which the term brahma- is translated in the compounds as brahman.

\textsuperscript{61} This refers to the designations dhammakāya and dhammabhūta.

\textsuperscript{62} This refers to the titles dhammaja, dhammanimmita, dhammadāyāda.
In the case that ‘brahma-’ refers to the neuter ‘brahman’
In the other case in which the term brahma- is translated as ‘brahman’ the ultimate, the third parallel suggests that the term dhamma in the passage equals ultimate reality, but in the Buddhist sense. This directly precludes the interpretation of the term dhamma in the passage as the Buddha’s ‘verbal teaching,’ while allowing its interpretation as ‘transcendental realities.’ The equation of the Buddha and dhamma, as well as the connection between the Buddha’s designations and the titles of his ‘true son’ is implied in the same manner as in the above case.

Thus, the translation of ‘brahma-’ in the Brahmins’ titles either as the masculine ‘Brahmā’ or as the neuter ‘brahman’ leads to the same conclusion that the term dhamma constituting the compound dhammakāya refers to ‘transcendental realities.’ It refers to the dhamma that is the incorruptible Buddha’s essence; dhamma which gives birth to noble disciples, dhamma which is the shared qualities of the Buddha and his noble disciples which distinguishes them from worldly people, and dhamma the ‘verbal expression’ of which is regarded as the Buddha’s verbal teaching. Therefore, the present study concludes that dhamma, that is, the ‘body’ of the Tathāgata, refers to ‘transcendental realities’ in general.

63 Some scholars are more inclined to choose this translation. For example, see Wilhelm Geiger, “Dhamma Und Brahman,” Zeitschrift für buddhismus (1921): 73-83, 79, Harrison, op. cit., note 20, p. 78. Here, Harrison refers to a number of scholars who translate ‘brahma-’ in this case as 'brahman,' which he thinks more correct. Gombrich, while translating the term in this case as the masculine ‘Brahmā,’ acknowledges also the possibility of translating it as the neuter ‘brahman.’ Gombrich, ‘The Buddha’s Book of Genesis?’ op. cit., p. 165.


65 As a reminding, the ‘third parallel’ refers to the parallel of the term ‘dhamma’ in the three titles of Buddhist noble disciples (dhammaja, dhammanimmita, dhammadāyāda) with the term ‘brahman’ in the titles of brahmins (brahmaja, brahmanimmita, brahmadāyāda.)

66 Cf. S.III.120. ‘Seeing the Buddha’ purportedly means ‘seeing the Buddha’s incorruptible nature or essence’ as opposed to ‘seeing the Buddha’s corruptible physical body’ which is useless.
While a conclusion is proposed here to some extent, it may be useful to examine further implications from the parallel usage of the term ‘dhamma’ and ‘brahma’ elsewhere, for it may add further understanding to the present conclusion regarding the four designations of the Buddha.

Implications from Parallel Usage of Dhamma and Brahma

Of the four designations of the Buddha, scholars note also the parallel usage of ‘dhamma’ and ‘brahma’ that seems to equate ‘dhammakāya’ with ‘brahmakāya’ and ‘dhammabhūta’ with ‘brahmabhūta.’ The same parallel can be found also in other passages where, for example, ‘brahmacakka’ replaces ‘dhammacakka’ or where ‘brahmacariya’ and ‘dhammacariya’ appear to correspond.

The parallel usage of the two terms appears to have some significance. On their own, both terms can carry different connotations in different contexts. But their analogous usage restricts their possible interpretations to some degree. It is observed that, whenever both terms are mentioned together in parallel, they usually refer to the state of highest purity, or at least signify ‘the best.’

The parallel between dhammayāna and brahmayāna points to this direction. In Magga-saṃyutta, the noble eightfold path is entitled either ‘the path to/of brahma’ (brahmayāna), ‘the path to/of dhamma’ (dhammayāna), or ‘the supreme path of victory in the battle’ (anuttara saṅgāmavijaya). This is because such a noble path, once cultivated and frequently practised to the degree of attainment, leads to the removal of lust, anger, and delusion. Hence, the terms dhamma and brahma in this case refer to the state of supreme purity,

69 Dhammacariya-sutta, Sn.49.
70 DA.III.865. Cf. S.V.4-6.

While the term yāna is used usually in the sense of ‘vehicle,’ its meaning in the ancient Indian traditions is ‘path.’ As brahmayāna and dhammayāna in this passage refer to ‘the noble eightfold path,’ they are, hence, translated as ‘path to brahma’ and ‘path to dhamma’ respectively. Thanks are due to Prof. Richard Gombrich for teaching me its ancient meaning.
71 S.V.5-6.
where all fetters are uprooted, or at least they signify the ‘best’ state.\textsuperscript{72}

The same may be said for the parallel of \textit{dhammacariya} and \textit{brahmacariya}. Although these two compounds are normally used in different senses,\textsuperscript{73} in the passage where they appear together, both are said to be the highest ways of living.\textsuperscript{74}

It is likely that the analogue of both terms in ‘\textit{dhammakāya},’ ‘\textit{brahmakāya},’ ‘\textit{dhammabhūta}’ and ‘\textit{brahmabhūta}’ in the \textit{Aggañña-sutta} can be understood in the same way. The notion of ‘\textit{brahmabhūta}’ found elsewhere seems to reinforce this. It always refers to an Arahant, who has eradicated all defilements.\textsuperscript{75} Sometimes, an Arahant is described with the expression ‘lives by means of self having become \textit{brahma}.’\textsuperscript{76} In these cases, he is said to live without burning himself or others, satisfied, extinguished, tranquil, and experiencing happiness presently.\textsuperscript{77} Sometimes an Arahant who ‘lives with his self and becomes \textit{brahma}’ is explained as passionless, as opposed to worldly people who passionately seek material properties.\textsuperscript{78} Therefore, the word \textit{brahmabhūta} indicates the state of having eradicated all traces of defilements and sufferings - that he becomes one with the ultimate peace and happiness.

Geiger remarks that the word \textit{Brahman} here is synonymous to Buddhist \textit{Nibbāna}.\textsuperscript{79} He notes also the use of the word ‘\textit{brahmapatha}’\textsuperscript{80} which in a Pāli manuscript\textsuperscript{81} is glossed as ‘\textit{amatapatha}’ - the way to the deathless. It is expressed explicitly that ‘\textit{brahma}’ in the passage is to be understood as \textit{Nibbāna}, ‘the undying,’ which is the highest goal of Buddhists.

\textsuperscript{72} Harvey, The Selfless Mind, op. cit., p. 271.
\textsuperscript{73} The former generally refers to the renunciation (living the holy life), while the latter to the virtuous observances (living the righteous life).
\textsuperscript{74} Sn.49.
\textsuperscript{75} S.III.83.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{brahmabhūtena attanā viharati} . For example, see M.I.348-349, M.I.413, A.II.208-211.
\textsuperscript{77} so anattantapo aparantapo diṭṭhe va dhammam nicchāto nibbuto sitibhūto sukhapaṭisaṃvedi brahmabhūtena attanā viharati. M.I.348-349, M.I.413, A.II.210-211.
\textsuperscript{78} M.II.160-162.
\textsuperscript{79} Geiger, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
\textsuperscript{80} A.III.346.
On the whole, it appears that the terms *dhamma* and *brahma* constituting four designations of the *Tathāgata* are used in the sense of the ‘highest.’ It is most likely that they refer to *Nibbāna.*

This is in line with our earlier proposed interpretation that the term *dhamma* in the designations of the Buddha refers to ‘transcendental realities’ (*lokuttara dhammas*), the highest of which is that the essence of the Buddha is *Nibbāna.* According to Buddhist philosophy, the *dhammas* that ‘create’ or ‘give birth’ to a Buddhist disciple could be referred to also as the ‘highest’ or ‘ultimate,’ as they transcend the realm of *saṃsāra.* These are systematized later as the ninefold transcendental *dhamma* (*navavidha lokuttaradhamma*), subsuming the four supramundane paths, their corresponding fruits, and *Nibbāna.* Thus, from all the implications discussed above, the present study concludes that the term *dhamma* in the compound *dhammakāya* and *dhammabhūta* refers to the ninefold transcendental *dhamma* in general.

Next, we shall determine the meaning of the second component ‘kāya.’

**The Meaning of ‘Kāya’ in the Aggañña-sutta Passage**

The term *kāya* may be translated into English either as ‘body’ or ‘collection,’ which sometimes can be used interchangeably. However, these English words have different senses in their main definitions. The word ‘body’ is used mainly in the sense of ‘the entire structure of an organism.’ But the word ‘collection’ merely provides the sense of ‘a number of things collected together.’ This suggests both their similarities and differences which may be considered in two aspects: ‘structure’ and ‘function.’

Structurally, both ‘body’ and ‘collection’ consist of a number of elements or individual members. A ‘body,’ as the ‘entire structure of an organism,’ consists of organs which are entitled ‘limbs and parts’ (*aṅga-paccāṅga*). A ‘collection’ also consists of several things which may be either similar or different. Thus, both ‘body’ and ‘collection’ can be reduced to individual members or elements. This may be regarded as their similarity.

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82 An example is the expression ‘body of people’ and ‘collection of people’ which can be used interchangeably.
Functionally, however, both terms seem to imply a different relationship between individual members and the ‘totality’ of the whole ‘body’ or ‘collection.’ As a ‘body,’ the ‘totality’ of the whole organism is important for an organ to function. Once an organ is cut off from the ‘whole,’ it cannot function anymore. Likewise, if the sense of ‘totality’ or ‘whole’ is lost, in which case the organism is considered ‘dead,’ all organs cannot function, even though they are still attached to that ‘dead body.’ Thus, in case of a ‘body,’ the functional ability of its limbs and parts depends on the sense of ‘functioning totality’ or the ‘living body.’ In contrast, the word ‘collection’ does not imply any sense of such functional dependence. It seems to hold loosely its individual members or ‘several things’ under the same title of the group. Even though the ‘totality’ or the ‘collection’ is not retained, individual members do not lose their identity or function. Thus, from the functional aspect, the words ‘body’ and ‘collection’ are different.

In order to determine the most probably meaning of the term kāya constituting part of ‘dhammakāya,’ it is helpful to recollect how our study has arrived at the conclusion that the component ‘dhamma’ in the Tathāgata’s designation refers to ‘transcendental dhamma.’ To reiterate, the titles of the noble disciples are connected with the designations of the Tathātata by means of this reasoning; because the Buddha is ‘dhamma-bodied’ and ‘become dhamma,’ thus ‘his son’ can be entitled ‘born of dhamma,’ ‘created by dhamma,’ and ‘an heir by means of dhamma.’ The term dhamma in all these compounds carries the same connotation comparable to the ‘creator,’ or the dhamma that ‘transforms’ a worldly human into a noble one. This refers to transcendental ‘paths’ and ‘fruits.’
The parallel usage of dhammakāya and dhammabhūta with brahmakāya and brahmabhūta suggests further that the term dhamma in the passage should refer to Nibbāna. Indeed, it is possible also to say that Nibbāna itself can ‘transform’ beings as well, for the realization of it engenders the transformation from worldly people to noble persons.\textsuperscript{83} Our study thus concludes, in general terms, that ‘dhamma’ in all these compounds refers to ‘transcendental dhamma.’\textsuperscript{84} As the significance of such a conception of ‘dhamma’ is determined by ‘its function’ as ‘transformer’ or ‘defilement eradicator,’ the meaning of ‘kāya’ as ‘body’ is more appropriate.

Each transcendental path or fruit can be understood as a totality of various qualities. As an example, the Stream-attaining path (sotāpattimagga) is composed of path-constituents at the level of the Stream-attaining state.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, the path itself is the ‘whole’ or the ‘totality’ of all path-constituents at the corresponding level. It could be possible that different path-constituents may perform different functions in the elimination of defilements. But the effective elimination of corresponding fetters (saṃyojanas) requires the ‘whole’ or ‘totality’ by which the particular ‘path’ is named. In other words, the effective functions of individual path-constituents are ‘dependent’ on this ‘whole’ or ‘totality’ which is identified with the particular ‘path.’ Thus, the text mentions the eradication of particular fetters in accordance with different levels of the functioning path, from the path to Stream-entry (sotāpattimagga) up to the path to

\textsuperscript{83} As the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta suggests, there can be different levels of the realisation of the four noble truths. These many levels may well correspond to different levels of transcendental states. In other words, the trainee (sekha-puggala) from the Stream-attainer (sotāpanna) to the Non-returner (anāgāmi) have realised Nibbāna also to their corresponding degrees.

\textsuperscript{84} Rather than limiting its interpretation to only ‘Nibbāna,’ the present study proposes a broader context of ‘dhammakāya’ as ‘transcendental dhamma’ (lokkuttara dhamma) in order to avoid the preclusion of noble disciples of lower levels, e.g., the stream-attainer (sotāpanna) to the non-returner (anāgāmi) which appear to be included also in the sutta. Cf. Harvey, The Selfless Mind, op. cit., pp. 233-4.

\textsuperscript{85} S.V.348.
Arhatship (arahattamagga).\textsuperscript{86} Therefore, the particular path is not a mere ‘collective title’ of the path-constituents but the ‘essential totality’ by which a ‘body’ is defined.

The dependence of functions of individual constituents on the ‘totality’ of the particular transcendental path allows its definition as a kind of ‘body.’ The same could be said for transcendental fruits (lokuttara phala) and Nibbāna. Thus, the transcendental dhamma should be defined as a ‘body’ rather than being a mere collection of those functional qualities.

From the above conclusion regarding the meanings of both components ‘dhamma’ and ‘kāya,’ we now come to the re-interpretation of ‘dhammakāya’ as a whole.

Possible meanings of Dhammakāya in the Aggañña-sutta

In the above discussion, the present study tentatively translated the term dhammakāya as an adjective ‘dhamma-bodied’. Based on the above concluded meanings of ‘dhamma’ and ‘kāya,’ the term ‘dhammakāya’ as an adjective conveys the meaning that transcendental dhamma or Nibbāna is the Buddha’s ‘body.’ As ‘dhammakāya’ in this instance designates the Buddha, such a translation as an adjective is naturally reasonable. However, as the context of the passage does not preclude the translation of the term as a substantive,\textsuperscript{87} it may be interesting to try also the other two grammatical forms that give the translation of the compound as a noun.

\textsuperscript{86} Ps.I.96.

\textsuperscript{87} Even though ‘dhammakāya’ here is used to designate the Tathāgata, along with three other designations, two of which are apparently adjectives, it needs not mean that the term dhammakāya must necessarily be an adjective, for they are not synonymous in the sense of English grammar. These designations may well be similar to the Buddha’s epithets that are simply listed together, while some epithets are adjectives (e.g. vijjācaraṇasampanno) and some are substantives (e.g. satthā devamanussānaṃ).
First, as a kammadhāraya compound, the translation of the term dhammakāya will be ‘the body that is transcendental (lokuttara) dhamma’ or ‘the body that is Nibbāna.’ This gives a similar sense as that of the translation of the term as an adjective that the Tathāgata’s body is the transcendental dhamma(s) or Nibbāna. The only difference is the shift of identification of this dhamma-body, from ‘belonging to the Tathāgata’ to ‘itself being (identified with) the Tathāgata’ or his essence.

This translation seems also appropriate, considered from the parallel usage of dhammakāya and dhammabhūta. The Buddha has become the transcendental dhamma or Nibbāna, having such dhamma as his nature. Also, as discussed above, the transcendental dhamma itself possesses a property of ‘body.’ Hence, it is possible to say that the Buddha is the body that is transcendental dhamma, or Nibbāna.

Alternatively, as a tappurisa compound, ‘dhammakāya’ may be translated as the ‘body pertaining to transcendental dhamma.’ Also, as a particular ‘transcendent dhamma’ consists of corresponding constituents, the term ‘dhammakāya’ may be translated as a tappurisa compound as ‘body of transcendental dhammass,’ where ‘dhammass’ in the latter refers to those constituents. Hence, when designating the Tathāgata, the translation of ‘dhammakāya’ in

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88 As stated at the beginning, the English expression as ‘dhamma-body’ corresponds to both translations of dhammakāya as a substantive, i.e., ‘body that is dhamma’ and ‘body of dhamma.’ For the sake of simplicity and understanding, the present work refers sometimes to dhammakāya as a noun simply as ‘dhamma-body.

89 When translating the term as an adjective, as the Buddha ‘has dhamma as body,’ it can be said that ‘the body which is dhamma’ belongs to him. But when the term is translated as a noun, it means that the Tathāgata is ‘the body that is (transcendental) dhamma.’ In other words, the dhamma-body (the body which is dhamma) is the Tathāgata.
this sense conveys the meaning that the Tathāgata is the body pertaining to transcendental dhamma or Nibbāna, or he is the body of those transcendent qualities. This is similar to the kammadhāraya compound in that it provides the sense of an identification of the Tathāgata with ‘dhammakāya.’

To conclude, our study proposes that ‘dhammakāya’ as it designates the Tathāgata may be translated either as an adjective (bahubbīhi compound) which conveys the meaning that transcendent dhamma or Nibbāna is the Tathāgata’s body, or as a noun (kammadhāraya or tappurisa compound) being the dhamma-body with which the Tathāgata is identified.

In the next part, the study will examine another Pāli passage that is related to Paccekabuddhas, the self-enlightened persons.
V. Reference 2: Dhammakāya and Paccekabuddhas

A Paccekabuddha is counted as one of the two types of Buddhas.⁹⁰ According to Buddhist philosophy, a Paccekabuddha is a person who is of the highest wisdom of realization that he can be self-enlightened, in the same way as a Buddha can. However, he is said to lack teaching ability in that he cannot teach a body of people to

⁹⁰ A.I.77. Some scholars argue that the concept of a Paccekabuddha is originally non-Buddhist, and that it has been included into Buddhist texts later. A reason given is that the references to Paccekabuddhas are found also in the canon of Jainism. Gombrich proposes also that the assimilation of the concept regarding Paccekabuddhas into Buddhist canon could have resulted from an actualisation of ‘an interstitial category’ inferred logically. Norman, likewise, claims that the concept regarding this type of enlightened beings is ‘pre-Buddhist’ and ‘pre-Jainist.’ The issue is discussed in detail in K. R. Norman, “The Pratyeka-Buddha in Buddhism and Jainism,” in Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern (London: Curzon Press, 1983). However, this can be looked at also from a different point. In the Buddha’s time, Buddhism was not regarded by the Buddha or his disciples as a particular ‘school of thought.’ Rather, it seems to be seen as ‘a way of practice’ or ‘a way of life.’ The Buddha’s main concern of delivering his teaching is the audience’s enlightenment or spiritual realisation, as mentioned in the Abhayarājakumāra-sutta (M.I.395) where he declares his speaking characters, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Knowing what is untrue, incorrect, and useless, whether or not it will be dear or agreeable to the audience, the Buddha would not speak it.

2. Knowing what is true, correct, but useless, whether or not it will be dear or agreeable to the audience, the Buddha would not speak it.

3. Knowing what is true, correct, and useful, whether or not it will be dear or agreeable to the audience, the Buddha would know the right time to speak it.

The point of this declaration is that, the Buddha would say only what he knows is true, correct, and beneficial to listeners and at an appropriate time. Even though it is not dear or agreeable to his audience, he would know the right time to speak it. This is done for the audience’s good. He compares this with taking out a stick or pebble from a child’s mouth, even if it means drawing blood, in order to save that child. The Buddha’s speech is thus characterised by his compassion to beings. Considering the characteristics of his speech as such, it is more likely that the Buddha does not think of Paccekabuddhas as ‘Buddhist’ or ‘non-Buddhist’ but rather ‘enlightened beings.’ The same holds true for his statement regarding any noble disciples. For example, the Buddha would call anyone who possesses qualities of a Stream-attainer as a ‘Stream-attainer’ (sotāpanna). The categorisation of ‘Buddhist’ and ‘non-Buddhist’ by means of ‘registering’ to a ‘particular school of thought’ seems to be a later classification or merely scholarly definition or differentiation for the convenience of discussion proposed within the academic arena.
obtain enlightenment in the same way as the Buddha can. Therefore, a Paccekabuddha does not need a teacher for his enlightenment, nor is he himself regarded as a teacher. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Paccekabuddhas are usually described as travelling alone like the single horn of a rhinoceros. Due to his enlightening superiority and purity, a Paccekabuddha is then ranked as second to the Buddha, and is said to be the second superior field of merit.

Buddhist traditions hold that many Paccekabuddhas can arise in the world in the same age, while only one perfectly enlightened Buddha (sammāsambuddha) can arise in the world at a time. Paccekabuddhas are persons who deserve - people's veneration by stūpas (thūpāraha), possess human essence (sattasāra), are free from trouble (anigha), desireless (nirāsa), free from grief (visalla), well-enlightened, superior men (naruttama), having great powers (mahānubhāva), and whose craving for rebirth is exhausted.

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91 While it is possible for a Paccekabuddha to teach an individual which finally leads to that person’s enlightenment, he does not teach to a multitude of people in the same way as a Buddha does. Hence, a Paccekabuddha is not regarded as being a ‘teacher’ in general sense. Also, their discourses are brief and mainly concerned with the praise of solitude, rather than containing instructions on how to practise oneself in order to gain spiritual realisation. See, for example, Ap.I.7-14.

92 Although the Pāli word ‘khaggavisāna’ could mean either the ‘rhinoceros’s horn’ or the animal ‘rhinoceros’ itself, this work chooses the former definition for it better symbolises the Paccekabuddhas’ solitude.

93 The first superior field of merit is the Buddha (sammāsambuddha). M.III.254.

94 It is mentioned in the Isigili-sutta that five hundred Paccekabuddhas lived together at the Isigili mount in Magadha. M.III.68.

95 D.II.142-143.

96 M.III.69.

97 M.III.71.
In the *Apadāna* literature, besides the life history of the Buddha and his disciples, a section is devoted to a depiction of the characteristics of Pacceka-buddhas. This section is entitled ‘Paccekabuddhāpadāna.’ At verse 52 of the section, there is a mention of ‘dhammakāya’ in relation to Paccekabuddhas:

Mahantadhammā bahudhammadāya, cittissarā sabbadukkhagatiṇṇā; udaggacittā paramatthadassī, sīhopamā khaggavisāṇakappā.


(The Paccekabuddhas) whose dhamma(s) is great, having many dhmmas as body (or having many dhamma-bodies), whose mind is independent (without attachment), have crossed beyond the flood of all sufferings, delighted minded, the seers of supreme welfare, comparable to sīha (the king of forest), and the horn of a rhinoceros.

In this verse, many words seem to carry various connotations in themselves. The term ‘mahantadhammā’ is a bahubbīhi compound meaning ‘whose dhmmas are great,’ qualifying ‘Paccekabuddhas’ To consider what is meant by the term dhamma(s) in this compound, it is helpful to look at the preceding verses of the same story.

Immediately preceding the verse in question, two other verses refer to Paccekabuddhas in general as follows: 98

Visuddhasīlā suvisuddhapāṇī samāhitā jāgariyānuyuttā Vipassakā dhammadivesadassī maggaṅgabojjhāṅgagate vijāñṇā. Puññappanidhiṁ (suññatāpanihitaṁ) ca tathānimuttaṁ āsevayitvä Jinasāsanamhi ye sāvakattaṁ na vajanti dhīrā bhavanti paccekajinā sayambhū.

They whose virtue and wisdom are supremely purified, composed minded, vigilant, gifted with introspection, the seers of superior dhmmas, cognizing dhmmas included in path-constituents and elements of enlightenment. The wise, having cultivated three deliverances, do not proceed to discipleship in the Buddhas’ teaching, [but] become Paccekabuddhas, the self-enlightened.

These verses describe the *Pacceka* or *Paccekabuddha* s as ones possessed of supreme purity, wisdom, wakefulness, composure, and having the ability for seeing and knowing. In other words, they are full of realizing capacity, and so finally become self-enlightened. Then, it is likely that the term ‘*dhamma*’ in the qualitative compound *mahantadhammā* ‘having great *dhammas*’ are those pertaining to such a realizing capacity. Certainly, these qualities of *Paccekabuddha* s are great, compared to those of the noble disciples.

The second *bahubbīhi* compound qualifying ‘*Paccekabuddha* s’ is ‘*bahudhammakāyā*’. Grammatically, this may be translated in two different ways: ‘having many *dhammas* as body’ or ‘having many *dhamma*-bodies.’ The former conveys the meaning that a *Pacceka* has many *dhammas* as his body, whereas ‘many *dhammas*’ refer to those pertaining to the capacity of self-enlightenment, as elaborated in the previous verses above. The latter implies that a *Pacceka* could have more than one ‘*dhamma*-body.’

Information provided in the canon seems insufficient to determine this with certainty. Therefore, the present study holds that both translations are possible, for there is no indication in the

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99 Cf. Need, op. cit., p. 380. Need seems inclined to interpret the term in this way, as he states: “[I]t is unclear whether the term modifies *dhamma* or kāyā – although *dhammakāya* is not plural, the sense could be “manifold body of *dhamma*”, rather than “body of manifold *dhammas*”.”
early texts that ‘dhammakāya’ must be singular. In any case, the verse conveys the meaning that a Paccekabuddha has dhamma(s) as his body (or bodies), where ‘dhammas’ refers to the qualities pertaining to self-enlightenment. Here again, we note the connection between the term dhammakāya and enlightenment.

The adjectival (bahu) dhammakāya in the case of Paccekabuddhas is comparable to that in the case of the Buddha’s designation. We noted earlier that scholars tend to interpret the component ‘dhamma’ as ‘teaching.’ However, this does not fit the adjective ‘(bahu)dhammakāya’ referring to Paccekabuddhas, for Paccekabuddhas do not need a teacher and they themselves are not ‘teachers.’ They are ‘enlightened beings.’ This then reinforces the notion that the term dhamma in the adjective ‘dhammakāya’ corresponds to enlightenment; i.e., transcendental dhamma(s).

It may be argued that the Buddha and Paccekabuddhas are not the same. As the Buddha is a teacher, then it should be fine to say that he ‘has teaching as body.’ This is unlikely, however, for it would be strange to differentiate that the component ‘dhamma’ of the adjectival dhammakāya refers to ‘teaching’ in the case of Buddha, while referring to ‘transcendental dhamma’ in the case of Paccekabuddhas. Such would give an impression that a Buddha is a ‘non-enlightened being,’ which is incorrect. The study of this passage thus reinforces our earlier conclusion regarding dhammakāya and the Buddha that the component dhamma in the adjective dhammakāya does not refer to ‘teaching,’ but ‘transcendental dhamma’ relating to spiritual realization.

In conclusion, our study in this part adds further information that dhammakāya is related not only to the Buddha but also to the enlightenment of Paccekabudhas. We shall now proceed to examine further the meaning of dhammakāya in relation to noble disciples.

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100 As Harrison states, the understanding that dhammakāya must be singular is ‘later traditional belief’ that links ‘dhammakāya’ with other words for reality such as dhammatā, dhammadhātu, etc. Harrison, op. cit., pp. 44, 48. As observed above, ‘dhammakāya’ may be identified with any transcendental path, fruit, or Nibbāna. This seems to allow the possibility of different levels of dhammakāya. The study of dhammakāya and noble disciples below will affirm this point.
VI. Reference 3: Dhammakāya and Noble Disciples

Besides the term’s relation to the Buddha and Paccekabuddhas, a Pāli canonical reference mentions also the relation of dhammakāya with noble disciples. This is found in the seventeenth story of the Theriyāpadāna which records the autobiography of the great nun Gotamī - the aunt and foster mother of the Buddha.

The narrative setting is that the nun considered her day of passing and went to see the Buddha for the last time. On the way to the Buddha’s residence, her declaration to female lay supporters who lamented on her parting indicates that Gotamī was an Arhat, who has completely destroyed all fetters (saṃyojanas), and whose trace of rebirth has been uprooted. In the first part of her acknowledgement regarding her intention of passing, in the presence of the Buddha, she makes the comparison of her motherhood to the Buddha’s fatherhood. The relevant lines are as follows:

31. āhaṃ sugata te mātā tvāṁ ca dhīra pitā mama; saddhammasukhado nātha, tayā jāt’amhi gotama.
32. saṃvaddhitoyaṁ sugata rūpakāyo mayā tava; anindiyo dhammakāyo mama saṃvaddhito tayā.
33. Muhuttaṃ tanhāsamanam khirem tvāṁ pāyito mayā; tayā’ham santam accantaṁ dhammakhiṁram hi pāyitā.

Ap.II.532.

31. I am your mother, O Sugata; and, O the wise, you are my father; O Gotama the refuge who gives happiness of truths, I have been born through you.
32. This physical body of yours, O Sugata, was brought up by me; The blameless (pleasurable) dhamma-body of mine was brought up by you.

101 Ap.II.531. Here, she declares the following points: 1) her realisation of the four noble truths, by three rounds - twelve steps, 2) she has completely finished the course of practice laid down by the Buddha, 3) her release 4) her destruction of all desires 5) her complete attainment of successive fruits of renunciation, and 6) her absence of all fetters (saṃyojanas).
102 Another manuscript gives ‘~sukhada’ indicating the vocative case.
103 A Sinhalese and a Burmese Mss. gives ‘ānandito.’ SR version: ‘ānandiyo’
104 Here, the CS and SR versions of the Tipitaka record the term as ‘dhammakāyo.’ But the BJ and PTS version writes ‘dhammatanu,’ which has the same meaning as that of dhammakāya. The Pāli term ‘tanu’ usually refers to ‘body’ in the physical sense.
33. You were fed by me the milk that could relieve thirst (only) momentarily;
But I was fed by you the dhamma-milk that is perpetually peaceful.

In this passage, a comparison is made between worldly motherhood and spiritual paternity, the fostering of the physical body and that of the dhamma-body, the thirst-relieving efficacy of ordinary milk and the milk that is dhamma. In all cases of such a comparison, the superiority of the spiritual side over the worldly side is demonstrated. According to the verses quoted above, some points can be made of verses in particular

Verse 31 implies that Gotamī was ‘spiritually reborn’ to the noble clan through the realization of truths, initiated with the teaching of the Buddha. Thus, the Buddha is her spiritual father. Such a declaration indicates her state of being a noble disciple, as her declaration of emancipation affirms. The mention of ‘happiness of truths’ implies also that such a realization brings about happiness.

In verse 32, she declares that her blameless or pleasurable dhammakāya was brought up by the Buddha. This has a number of implications regarding dhammakāya. First, the term dhammakāya in this passage is used as a substantive ‘dhamma-body.’ Secondly, her mention of ‘my dhammakāya’ (dhammakāyo mama) implies its relation to her spiritual attainment, being her new identity corresponding to her spiritual new birth in the supramundane plane. Once obtained, it is ‘her dhammakāya.’ Thirdly, the statement that her dhammakāya was brought up (saṃvaḍḍhita) by the Buddha implies its different levels. It suggests that there can be a number of levels of dhammakāya, and that the dhammakāya can be developed to a higher state up to its final perfection. Fourthly, her dhammakāya is regarded as blameless (anindito, anindiyo), or pleasurable (ānandiyo, ānandito). While more information is required in order to further analyze these aspects of dhammakāya precisely, at least some initial implications can be appreciated right away. For example, its quality as being blameless implies its completeness or perfection, and its quality as being pleasurable connotes joy, delight, or happiness. This could be
related also to the happiness arisen from the realisation of truths, as mentioned in the previous verse.

In verse 33, Gotamī is said to have been fed on the ‘dhamma-milk.’\textsuperscript{105} Because it is fed to her by the Buddha, it sounds likely that such ‘milk’ refers to his ‘teaching.’ However, its quality as ‘unceasingly peaceful’ indicates the state to which the teaching has brought her. That is to say, she is led from the initial introduction to the inner experience of the reality, so that she can eventually and actually ‘taste’ or realize it through her spiritual attainment. Rather than being sustenance to her physical body, the dhamma-milk is fed to nourish the growth of her dhamma-body (dhammakāya). Thus, in her declaration ‘I was fed by you,’ the ‘I’ refers here to her dhamma-body (dhammakāya) rather than her physical body. This expression implies her identification with the dhammakāya. It affirms the earlier statement that the dhammakāya is ‘a new and now true identity’ that corresponds to her spiritual rebirth in the noble plane. This could also, in a way, clarify why the Buddha is designated ‘dhammakāya,’ as mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{106} It implies his identity with dhammakāya from the time of his enlightenment. This is affirmed by the parallel usage of dhammakāya and dhammabhūta (become dhamma). Therefore, observations regarding dhammakāya from this declaration may be made as follows:

\textsuperscript{105} Dhammakīraṃ. This is a Kammadhāraya compound, translated literally as ‘milk that is dhamma.’

\textsuperscript{106} D.III.84.
1. The term *dhammakāya* is related to enlightenment. This agrees with our earlier observation regarding the relation of ‘*dhammakāya*’ to the Buddha and *Paccekabuddhas*.

2. *Dhammakāya* is not exclusive to the Buddha, but attainable also to his disciples. Once obtained, it is ‘his/her *dhammakāya*.’

3. The phrase ‘my *dhammakāya*’ spoken by Gotamī precludes the interpretation of the term as ‘teaching,’ but allows an interpretation as ‘quality/property.’ Whereas the ‘teaching’ belongs generally to the Buddha, ‘quality/property/capacity’ can belong also to anyone who obtained it.

4. The *dhammakāya* can be brought up (*saṃvaḍḍhita*) - can be developed to a higher level until the highest perfection is met. This implies that there are at least two different levels of *dhammakāya* which supports our earlier conclusion from the *Aggañña-sutta* that the term could refer to a particular transcendental state, and that each state being a ‘whole’ or ‘totality’ of transcendental constituents in the corresponding level.

5. Unlike ‘*dhammakāya*’ in the *Aggañña-sutta* which can be translated as an adjective, ‘*dhammakāya*’ in this passage is used strictly as a noun. It affirms that both forms of translation should be accepted according to the context of the passage where the term is located.

6. With the description of *dhammakāya* in the passage, the term *dhamma* in the compound seems to convey the sense of ‘transcendental reality’ that is attainable and developable to its perfection. Gotamī’s mention of ‘my *dhammakāya*’ also affirms our earlier remark, that both the Buddha and his noble disciples have some properties or qualities in common. Such properties refer to *dhammakāya*(s). Thus, the great nun’s mention of her *dhammakāya* suggests that she is ‘an heir’ by *dhamma*, and that such a title arises on her acquisition of *dhammakāya*. 
In regard to the different levels of dharmakāya, the canon talks about the different states of trainees (sekha) and non-trainees (asekha). The former refers to states in which a further course is yet to be accomplished, while the latter requires no further course. The Pāli canon distinguishes these two types of noble disciples by qualities they possess. The text enumerates the tenfold quality (dasa asekha-dhamma) that identifies a person as ‘a non-trainee’ (asekha puggala),\textsuperscript{107} who is a virtuous one,\textsuperscript{108} or a more-virtuous-than-virtuous virtuous one.\textsuperscript{109} But sometimes, a trainee (sekha) is said also to possess the same ten qualities.\textsuperscript{110} In this latter case, the ten qualities belonging to a ‘non-trainee’ (asekha) is differentiated by an addition of a qualitative ‘asekha,’ meaning ‘pertaining to a non-trainee,’ which precedes the title of each of the ten qualities.\textsuperscript{111}

Likewise, the partial or entire practice of the four foundations of mindfulness differentiates between noble disciples as ‘trainees’ (sekha) and as ‘non-trainees’ (asekha). Thus, these qualities belonging to trainees (sekha) and to non-trainees (asekha) could characterise different levels of the dhamma-body.

Traditional accounts make further classifications of trainees according to different transcendental paths and their corresponding fruits as understood in the early Theravāda community. As is evident in the canon, a standard formula is usually employed to enumerate the members of the assembly of noble disciples (ariya saṅgha), i.e., four pairs of persons, the eight individuals.\textsuperscript{112} The ‘eight individuals’ refer to noble disciples who have achieved different levels of

\textsuperscript{107} D.III.271, M.III.75-76.

\textsuperscript{108} A.II.222.

\textsuperscript{109} S.V.20. In this reference, a virtuous one is identified with a ‘trainee’ (sekha) noble disciple. Therefore, a ‘non-trainee’ (asekha) is said to be more virtuous.

\textsuperscript{110} S.V.380-385.

\textsuperscript{111} See, for example, M.I.446-447, A.V.221.

supramundane paths and fruits.\textsuperscript{113} The ‘four pairs’ are mentioned instead when particular paths and their corresponding fruits are collectively called under the same titles. Of the eight transcendental levels, the first to the seventh titles refer to the quality of ‘trainees,’ while the last refers to that of ‘non-trainee.’ In this context, different levels of \textit{dhammakāya} may correspond to all these transcendental states.

This agrees with our earlier observation that these transcendental paths and fruits as well as \textit{Nibbāna} can be identified with \textit{dhammakāya}. Gotamī’s speech, that her \textit{dhammakāya} has been ‘brought up’ (\textit{saṃvaḍḍhita}), indicates the development of her \textit{dhammakāya} from an initial state as a ‘trainee’ which refers to any of the first seven levels of noble persons. As far as a person is still a trainee (\textit{sekha-puggala}), he/she still needs further development. Once he/she has attained the eighth state - the state of a non-trainee (\textit{asekha-puggala}), no further growth is needed. This is one of the reasons why a general expression that is often found for an Arhat is ‘exhausted is my rebirth, completed by me is the course of practice, done by me is what needs to be done, there is no further course for me to undertake.’\textsuperscript{114} Therefore, we could say that \textit{dhammakāya} needs to be developed until it reaches the final perfection.\textsuperscript{115}

Nevertheless, on the way to the final goal, each level of \textit{dhammakāya} of a ‘trainee’ could be said also to be ‘complete’ or ‘sufficient’ in regard to its function, as discussed earlier regarding

\begin{itemize}
\item[113] M.III.255, S.III.168. The eight noble persons are as follows:
\begin{enumerate}
\item an arhat (arahant)
\item a person who proceeds to the realisation of the fruit of Arhatship (arahattaphalasacchikiriyāya paṭipanna)
\item a non-returner (\textit{anāgāmi})
\item a person who proceeds to the realisation of the fruit of Non-returning (anāgāmiphalasacchikiriyāya paṭipanna)
\item a once-returner (sakadāgāmi)
\item a person who proceeds to the realisation of the fruit of Once-returning (sakadāgāmiphalasacchikiriyāya paṭipanna)
\item a stream-attainer (\textit{sotāpanna})
\item a person who proceeds to the realisation of the fruit of Stream-attaining (sotāpattiphalasacchikiriyāya paṭipanna)
\end{enumerate}
\item[115] S.III.167-169.
\end{itemize}
the function of each particular transcendent dhamma.\textsuperscript{116} The totality of transcendental qualities constituting each transcendental state, which is identified earlier with dhammakāya, denotes a degree of sufficiency in performing its function. This agrees with Gotami’s expression that her dhammakāya is ‘blameless.’

Also, as noted above, the term dhammakāya is related to enlightenment, where the experience or the witness of realisation is required and the consequent transformation takes place. Once each kind of defilement is abandoned and eradicated, the noble disciple experiences happiness from release (vimutti-sukha), and the knowledge of such happiness (ñāṇa) arises.\textsuperscript{117} This corresponds to Gotami’s claim of happiness arisen from realisation, and her possible expression that the dhammakāya is pleasurable.

To conclude, some further remarks and re-affirmation regarding dhammakāya could be observed from this Apadāna passage. Firstly, it re-affirms that dhammakāya is connected to enlightenment. Secondly, it affirms that the term dhammakāya can be translated as a substantive, denoting the body that is identified with, or pertaining to, transcendental dhamma. Thirdly, it gives further implication that Buddhist disciples can attain dhammakāya, and once so attained, it could be called ‘his/her’ dhammakāya. Fourthly, it implies that there are different levels of dhammakāya, plausibly each corresponding to a particular level of transcendental state, and therefore also to each level of noble disciples. Fifthly, different levels of dhammakāya or transcendental reality can be said to be sufficient or complete in performing their functions, and thus are entitled ‘blameless.’ Sixthly, every time a transformation takes place, happiness of release (vimutti-sukha), as well as the knowledge regarding one’s release, arises. Therefore, each instance of realization or enlightenment brings about happiness, and so dhammakāya is said to be pleasurable. Next we shall proceed to a close reading of an ambiguous Pāli reference to dhammakāya.

\textsuperscript{116} See earlier discussion under the heading ‘The Meaning of ‘Kāya’ in the Aggañña-sutta Passage.’
\textsuperscript{117} Ps.I.195-196.
VII. Reference 4: *Dhammakāya and Previous Buddha*

Another Pāli passage that shows the relation of *dhammakāya* with the Buddha is found in the *Aṭṭhasandassakathera-apadāna*. But here the narrative relates the term with a previous Buddha. The whole story is the autobiography of the elder Aṭṭhasandassaka who recounts the meritorious deeds performed at the time of the Padumuttara Buddha. The term *dhammakāya* appears in the expression of his appreciation of the Buddha. The elder, being Nārada brahmin at that time, praised the Padumuttara Buddha with the following three stanzas.

Satasaḥassatevijjā chaḷabhiṅṇā mahiddhikā
dīpentaṃ ko disvā nappasīdati?
Naṭe upanidhā yassa na vijjati sadevake
anantaṅāṇaṃ sambuddhaṃ ko disvā nappasīdati?
Dhammakāyaṃca dīpentaṃ
dīpenti ko disvā nappasīdati?


A hundred thousand (monks) possessing the threefold knowledge, the sixfold superknowledge, endowed with great supernatural powers, are surrounding the enlightened one; having seen him, who is not pleased? Among human and gods, nobody is found comparable to him in knowledge; having seen the perfectly enlightened one whose knowledge is endless, who is not pleased? No-one can upset the *dhamma*-bodied who is illuminating all around, being the mine of jewels; having seen him, who is not pleased?

In this praise, the term *dhammakāya* is found in the last stanza, which is the most ambiguous and difficult to translate. Difficulties involve the manifold meaning of each term, as well as the ambiguous structure of the verse. However, a survey of the popular usage of each term in different instances helps to overcome the difficulties to some extent.

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118 Padumuttara Buddha is a previous Buddha of a hundred thousand kalpas ago.
119 CS version: dipentaṃ; BJ version: dipentaṃ; PTS and SR versions: dipenti.
120 CS version and a Sinhalese mss: vikappetuṃ.
Generally, the term ‘kevala’ is translated either as ‘only’ or ‘entirely.’ It is observed that, whenever the term appears together with another word that conveys the meaning of ‘emanating,’ ‘illuminating,’ or ‘enlarging,’ the term kevala carries the meaning of ‘entirely’ or ‘all around.’ In this sentence, the word kevala comes immediately after the verb ‘dīpentaṃ’ which conveys the meaning of ‘illuminating.’ It is thus translated here as ‘all around.’

Another term that can convey different connotations is ‘ratanākara.’ This term is found representing the ‘Vinaya’ that the elder Upāli maintains. It also refers to the elder nanda who is the treasurer of the dhamma. But sometimes it represents the elder nanda who is the treasurer of the dhamma. As this verse is the praise of the Buddha, the term dharmakāya can be translated as an adjective, ‘dhamma-bodied,’ qualifying the Padumuttara Buddha. Need agrees with this way of interpretation. He translates the term dharmakāya in the verse as an epithet of the Buddha. In this case, the notion of ‘dharmakāya’ would be the same as that in the Aggañña-sutta passage.

However, the ambiguous structure of the verse allows some space for alternative translations. Here, the terms dharmakāya and ratanākara, as well as the present participle dīpenta, are written in the same case, i.e., accusative. This allows the term dharmakāya to function either as the subject or object of dīpenta. In the former case, the term dharmakāya functions as an adjective, qualifying the Padumuttara Buddha, as in the tentative translation presented above. But in the case that dharmakāya functions as an object of dīpenta, it refers to ‘what the Padumuttara Buddha demonstrates.’ This gives an alternative translation of the last stanza of the above quote as follows:

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122 Th.93.
124 Need, op. cit., p. 381. He writes:

Because of the syntax of the verse, and because the Dīgha Nikāya passage indicates that the Buddha is designated as such, it seems possible to read dharmakāya as a epithet of the Buddha. However, the surrounding context also permits one to read dharmakāya as a gloss for nāna and perhaps for the kinds of knowledges and powers cited in the first verse. In this sense we are again in the context of those dharmas which are conducive or related to the realization of Nibbāna.
No-one can upset the (Padumuttara Buddha) entire mine of jewels, who is demonstrating the dhammakāya; having seen him, who is not pleased?

In order to clarify further regarding the precise connotation of dhammakāya in this latter case, it would be useful to look at a Pāli passage that refers to what the Buddha demonstrates. In the Sambuddha-sutta, the Buddha explains that he demonstrates the path.\(^{125}\)

Monks, the Tathāgata, who is the perfectly enlightened Arhat, has given rise to the path that had not risen, has generated the path that had not been generated, has proclaimed the path that had not been proclaimed. He is the path-knower, wise in the path, skilled in the path. Monks, but the disciples now are the path followers who live endowed with the path later.

This suggests that the term dhammakāya in this passage, which is demonstrated or proclaimed by the Buddha, refers to ‘the path’ (magga). Due to the inter-related nature of the ‘reality’ and ‘teaching,’ it is possible that the expression ‘the path’ may refer either to ‘attainable reality’ or ‘prescriptive teaching’ that is the method to realization. But the statement that monks ‘live endowed with the path’ seems to suggest the former interpretation. Hence, the interpretation of this Apadāna passage, while being ambiguous, seems to lead to the same or similar conclusion regarding the term dhammakāya as in other passages.

VIII. Conclusion
The present study re-evaluated academic interpretations of the term dhammakāya used in the Pali canon. It identified the aspects omitted in previous studies of the term in the Pali canon and proposed to fill in the gap by means of a different approach.

\(^{125}\) Tathāgato bhikkhāve arahaṁ sammāsambuddho anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā maggaññū maggavidū maggakvido. Maggānugā ca bhikkhāve etarahi sāvakā viharanti pacchāsamannāgatā. S.III.66.
The research approach employed in the present study is intended as a more direct, analytical and inclusive one than previous approaches to this question. It is more direct in that it set off by documenting all Pali canonical passages that contain the term *dhammakāya*, and then interpreted the meaning of the term from its surrounding context in each particular passage. It is more analytical than previous interpretations in regard to the differentiation of the fine distinction between two inter-related meanings of *dhamma*, i.e., reality and its verbal expression. It is more inclusive in terms of the relation of the term with noble persons. In other words, it avoided the exclusive relation of the term with the Buddha and allowed possible connection of the term *dhammakāya* with other persons, as is evident in the passages being studied.

By means of this different approach, the present study has come to a conclusion that the close readings of different Pali passages all point to the same direction and reinforce each other. This, in a way, shows the consistency of understanding regarding the term *dhammakāya* in the early Theravādin community. As a whole, the study has shown that the term *dhammakāya* as understood in the Pali canonical context does not relate exclusively to the Buddha, but to noble persons of all types, i.e., Buddhas, *Paccekabuddhas* and noble disciples. The term may function either as an adjective or a substantive.

As an adjective, *dhamma* that is the *Tathāgata’s* body may be defined in a general term as transcendent *dhamma*, being the pure nature of the *Tathāgata*, comparable to ‘the creator’ that spiritually transforms beings into supramundane level and being the same sort of quality/property/capacity shared by the Buddha and his noble disciples that distinguishes them from worldly people. The reference to *dhammakāya* in relation to *Paccekabuddhas* affirms its connotation as transcendent *dhamma*, being the body of enlightening capacity instrumental to spiritual realisation, while effectively negating its interpretation as ‘teaching.’
As a noun, the term refers to the new identity of a noble person once he/she is transubstantiated either from the worldly plane to a supramundane plane or from a lower transcendent state to a higher. A close reading suggests that there are different levels of dhammakāya and they can be developed up to the final perfection. Nevertheless, dhammakāya in each level can be regarded as being ‘sufficient’ as a ‘complete body’ capable of performing the function pertaining to that particular transcendent state.

Dhammakāya, therefore, represents the reality spiritually realized by, and identified with, the Buddha, rather than his teaching. In other words, dhammakāya in the Pali canonical context represents the dhamma-body instrumental to enlightenment. It is the body from which the Buddha’s teachings originate, rather than being a ‘collection of his teachings’ as has been previously claimed.

Appendix: Theravādin Views on the Term Dhammakāya
Traditional writings mark the attempts of the early community to understand the Buddhist teaching(s) intellectually. In the Theravādin traditional writings, two commentators who provide main explanations of the term are Buddhaghoṣa126 and Dhammapāla.127

Buddhaghoṣa, in most instances, refers to dhammakāya substantively. He either relates the term to the Buddha’s purified

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126 around 5th century CE.
127 around 6th century CE.
mental qualities or purity, or identifies it with realities to be attained or experienced spiritually by noble disciples through the penetration of the noble paths. In one instance, he connects the term with the Buddha’s teachings and disciplines collected together, i.e., the *dhamma-vinaya* which takes on the role of the teacher after his passing.

In some explanations, Buddhaghosa uses the term *dhammakāya* as an adjective, qualifying the *Tathāgata* as ‘having *dhamma* as body.’ In this case, he identifies ‘the *dhamma*’ either as the ninefold transcendental reality or as the Buddha’s verbal teaching.

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128 At Vism.I.227, Buddhaghosa explains the Buddha’s *dhammakāya* as being succeeded or prosperous with treasured qualities (guṇa-ratana) such as the body of virtue (silakkhandha) that is pure in all respects, “yopi so bhagavā... sabbākāraparisuddhasilakkhandhadīgūṇaratanasamiddhadhammakāyon...” The ‘aggregate of virtue’ or silakkhandha could refer to the first member of either the three, four, or five *dhamma*-aggregates (dhammakkhandhas). See D.I.206, D.III.229, and D.III.279 for respective examples of these different enumerations of *dhamma*-aggregates. The five refers to virtue (sīla), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā), release (vimutti), and the knowing and seeing of one’s own release (vimuttināṇadassana). The last one and two members are dropped out in the sets of four and three *dhamma*-aggregates respectively. In the Pali canon, these *dhammas* generally refer to qualities (to be) accomplished.

It may be argued that, being qualities (to be) accomplished, these five *dhammas* may also be regarded in another aspect as being a set of ‘prescribed practices’ or the Buddha’s ‘verbal teachings.’ Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine how a practitioner would actually ‘practise these *dhammas,*’ as they indeed arise as the ‘result of practice,’ rather than being the ‘practice’ itself. Overlooking this fine distinction, a reader may mistake these ‘qualities’ for ‘teachings’ in an exclusive sense.

129 Vism.I.204, VinA.I.124, KhpA.108. In these passages, Buddhaghosa relates the Buddha’s endowment of *dhammakāya* (*dhammakāyasampatti*) with his state of having all hatred destroyed (bhaggadosatāya). This connects the term *dhammakāya* with the Buddha’s destruction of defilements.

130 SnA.I.34, SnA.II.594.
131 DA.I.34.
132 SA.II.313, SnA.I.34.
133 DA.III.865.
Dhammapāla, like Buddhaghoṣa, employs the term *dhammakāya* mostly as a noun, and relates it either with the Buddha’s mental qualities and purity,\(^\text{134}\) with the enlightenment either of the Buddha\(^\text{135}\) or his noble disciples,\(^\text{136}\) with reality visible through the ‘seeing’ (*dassana*) of the noble truths\(^\text{137}\) or with ‘self.’\(^\text{138}\) As an adjective, he identifies ‘the dhamma that is the Tathāgatas’ body as the ninefold transcendental dhamma (*nava-lokuttara-dhamma*).\(^\text{139}\) In one instance, he uses the term *dhammakāya* in the sense which may be interpreted either as ‘teaching’ or ‘truth’ that can be expressed by the preaching of true dhamma.\(^\text{140}\)

\(^{134}\) At ThrA.I.115 and DṬ.II.201, Dhammapāla follows Buddhaghoṣa that the Buddha’s *dhammakāya* is prosperous with treasured qualities such as the overall-pure aggregate of virtue.

At ItA.I.13, ThrA.II.121, CpA.332, UdA.87-88, VvA.213, DṬ.I.130, DṬ.II.4, MṬ.II.51, AṬ.III.76, AṬ.III.216, and AṬ.III.261, he refers to *dhammakāya* as bodies of those extraordinary qualities connected with the Buddha’s mental purity such as the ten powers (*dasa bala*), four causes of intrepidity (*catu vesārajja*), six kinds of unshared knowledges (*cha asādhāraṇañāṇa*) and eighteen exclusive Buddha’s qualities (*aṭṭhārasāveṇikabuddhadhammā*). Note that the qualities enumerated here are similar to those expressed by the Sarvāstivādin, but the details of the qualities mentioned in both traditions are slightly different.

At ItA.II.102, UdA.310, he refers to the equality of the Buddha with previous Buddhas by means of his physical body and *dhamma*-body (*dhammakāya*).

\(^{135}\) MṬ.I.46-7, AṬ.I.40. The connection of the term *dhammakāya* to the Buddha’s own benefit, rather than to others’ benefit, indicates its relation to the Buddha’s spiritual realisation or enlightenment.

\(^{136}\) ItA.II.115, ThrA.I.37.

\(^{137}\) UdA.310, ThriA.28.

\(^{138}\) CpA.332 and DṬ.I.86.’

\(^{139}\) In his explanation of the term *dhammabhūta* (having become dhamma) at Thr.A.II.205, Dhammapāla connects the Buddhas’ *dhammakāya* with the ninefold transcendental dhamma and the Buddhas’ attainment of the dhamma.

\(^{140}\) DṬ.I.449:

\begin{quote}
Evarūpassāti sammāsambuddhattā aviparītadhammadesanatāya evampākaṭadhammakāyassa satthu.
\end{quote}

The Buddha is said to have the *dhamma*-body (*dhammakāya*) revealed as such because of his preaching of true dhamma, because he is the perfectly self-enlightened one (sammāsambuddha).
In addition to the above two commentators, Upasena and Buddhadatta\(^\text{141}\) are also Pali commentators who lived around the same times.\(^\text{142}\) Upasena agrees with Buddhaghoṣa in regard to his interpretations of *dhammakāya* as related to the Buddha’s qualities or spiritual attainment.\(^\text{143}\) None of his writings interprets the term *dhammakāya* in the sense of ‘teaching.’ Likewise, Buddhadatta differentiates *dhammakāya* or *dhamma*-body from the Buddha’s physical body (*rūpakāya*).\(^\text{144}\) He expresses the beauty of the Buddha by means of the properties (*guna*) of both his physical body and his *dhamma*-body.\(^\text{145}\)

Later in the eleventh to twelfth centuries CE, two commentators of the Pali *Vinaya* differ slightly in their interpretations of *dhammakāya*. Vajirabuddhi usually interprets the term *dhammakāya* in the sense of Buddha’s teaching or *dhamma*-vinaya that takes the role of the teacher after the Buddha’s passing,\(^\text{146}\) while Sāriputta prefers to relate the term *dhammakāya* with the Buddha’s enlightenment\(^\text{147}\) or to identify it with the Buddha’s qualities (*buddhaguṇa*)\(^\text{148}\) and as that which can be seen through the disciples’ spiritual attainment.\(^\text{149}\)

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\(^\text{141}\) Buddhadatta’s *Abhidhammāvatāra* may be regarded either as an introductory summary or as one of the oldest sub-commentaries (ṭīkā) on the Pali *abhidhamma*.

\(^\text{142}\) Approximately 5th century CE.

\(^\text{143}\) For Upasena’s work, see Nd1A.II.265 (cf. VinA.I.124, Vism.I.204), Nd2A.31-32 (cf. SnA. II.594).

\(^\text{144}\) AbhAv.I.241:

> Tattha satthari kaṁkhanto tassa rūpakāyadhammakāyāṇaṁ vijjamāṇataṁ, avijjamāṇataṁ kaṁkhati
> Among the three gems, a person while doubting in the teacher (Buddha), would doubt in the existence and non-existence of his physical body and *dhamma*-body.

\(^\text{145}\) AbhAv.II.106-7.

\(^\text{146}\) VjB.15, VjB.19.

\(^\text{147}\) At SrD.I.211, the Buddha is said to have been born twice; first by his physical body at the Lumbini forest, and later by his *dhamma*-body (*dhammakāya*) under the bodhi tree. Here, Sāriputta further connects the Buddha’s birth through his physical body with compassion (karuṇā) and other people’s benefit, and his birth through the *dhammakāya* with equanimity (upekkhā) and the Buddha’s own benefit.

\(^\text{148}\) SrD.I.310-311; SrD.I.352.

\(^\text{149}\) SrD.III.299.
In a few passages, however, Sāriputta also refers to the term *dhammakāya* in the sense of the Buddha’s teaching.\(^{150}\)

On the whole, traditional Theravādins interpret the term *dhammakāya* mostly in the sense of the Buddha’s qualities or realities to be realised or attained spiritually. The term is related to the Buddha’s mental purity or to enlightenment either of the Buddha or of his disciples. In a few instances, however, the term is interpreted as the Buddha’s collective teaching which takes on the role of the master after his parinibbāna. Likewise, when used as an adjective, it is used more in the sense of the ninefold transcendental dhamma (nava-lokuttara-dhamma) and less in the sense of the Buddha’s verbal teaching.

**Abbreviations**

A  Aṅguttara-nikāya  
Ap  Apadāna  
BJ  Sinhalese Buddhajayantī version of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*  
CS  Burmese Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā version of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*  
D  Dīgha-nikāya  
DA  Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā  
DṬ  Dīghanikāya-ṭīkā  
Kv  Kathāvatthu  
M  Majjhima-nikāya  
Mss.  Manuscripts  
P.  Pali  
Ps  Paṭisambhidāmagga  
PTS  The Pali Text Society  
S  Saṃyutta-nikāya  
SA  Saṃyutta-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā  
Skt.  Sanskrit  
Sn  Suttanipāta  
SR  Thai Syamraṭṭha version of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*  
Th  Theragāthā-Therīgāthā  
ThrA  Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā  
Vin  Vinaya-piṭaka

\(^{150}\) SrD.II.166-7; SrD.I.126.
Bibliography


