The Perfection of Wisdom Literature

Today, we are going to look at another class of Mahāyāna Sūtra literature called the Perfection of Wisdom Literature or the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra literature. There are quite a number of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras among the better-known Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras. Prajñāpāramitā is, usually, translated as Perfection of Wisdom. The better-known Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras are:

- the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, which is the Perfection of Wisdom in eight thousand lines
- the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, the Perfection of Wisdom in twenty five thousand lines
- the Prajñāpāramitā in one hundred thousand lines (Chinese version translated by Xuan zang)
- the Vajracchedikā, which is often known as Diamond Sūtra or the Diamond Cutter Sūtra.
- the Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra or Heart Sūtra,

The Heart Sūtra among the many Mahāyāna Sūtras is very brief. It is just about a page long. This is the condensation of the Prajñāpāramitā in general. For that reason it is very useful and it has been very popular. This so called Heart Sūtra or the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom is recited in all most all the Mahāyāna monasteries throughout Asia every single day. We find it is recited every day in the Tibetan monasteries. I think it is recited in Chinese, Korean and Japanese monasteries also. This shows how important the Heart Sūtra is.

Why do we have the various versions of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra like the version in eight thousand lines, the version in twenty five thousand lines and the very concise version which runs about a page? We believe that this discourse is expanded and contracted in accordance with the need and capacity of the disciples. Those who have great patience, great diligence might dedicate himself to study and read Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra or Perfection of Wisdom Discourse in twenty five thousand lines. Still others would study Perfection of Wisdom in Eight thousand lines. And many people are contented themselves with reading and studying the condensed Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra (Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra).

We are going to look at the Heart Sūtra today. Now I have selected this Sūtra for an obvious reason. First of all, we couldn't possibly study the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in eight thousand lines thoroughly in just few hours. So the Heart Sūtra, being a very short discourse fits our purposes very well. Just to give you some further idea and further notion of the content and style of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature, I have chosen some excerpts from the Diamond Sūtra or the Vajracchedikā and those we will talk about in the next session. For now we will study the Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya or the Heart Sūtra, which is probably one of the most famous text in the Mahāyāna tradition. It is so famous, holy and revered that it is believed to possess almost magical power. It is said that one of the Chinese pilgrims, who made his way to India by way of crossing the desert of Central Asia, recited this Sūtra throughout his journey across the dangerous Central Asia and this Sūtra protected him against
bandits, wild animals and other dangers that were on the route to India. It is not uncommon for the Mahāyāna Buddhists to recite this Sūtra every day. It is regarded as a protection and auspicious. It is regarded as something that takes care of your life and well-being. (In fact, I also recite this Sūtra every day). Indeed it is an important text for the practitioners of the Mahāyāna.

Now, before we get into the discussion of the Sūtra itself, I want to begin by talking a little bit about the meaning of the term Prajñāpāramitā. Of course, I have said already that the Sūtra contains a lot of substance despite it being short. May be because of the fact that it is short, it has a lot of meaning in few lines. So it will take us little bit of time to extract as much as meaning from this short discourse.

§ 1. The Terminology of Prajñāpāramitā

Prajñāpāramitā literally means ‘Transcendental Wisdom’ or ‘Wisdom Gone Beyond.’ Some people have translated as ‘Climax of Wisdom.’

1.1. Prajñā

Let us look at the first term prajñā which we have translated here as ‘wisdom.’ This term is composed of two parts; the first ‘pra’ is a prefix has the sense of springing up/of spontaneity/of penetration and the root ‘jñā’ which means knowledge or cognition. So together the term prajñā means ‘insight knowledge,’ ‘insight wisdom,’ ‘penetrating wisdom,’ ‘spontaneous wisdom.’ Again this is important to remember that in English, as happened in many translations of the Buddhist terms, the translation ‘wisdom’ for prajñā does not do justice to the original language/term. The original language/term prajñā in Sanskrit has a meaning that is not entirely or even adequately covered by the English term ‘wisdom.’

Wisdom in English has couple of meanings. In case of common wisdom, it simply means prudence. It simply means behaving in a careful or thoughtful manner. If you give greater importance and raise the meaning of wisdom in English, it still tend to mean just accumulation of knowledge or a great understanding and a broad range of understanding. These are the common definitions of the word ‘wisdom’ in English.

But the prajñā here is penetrating wisdom. So it is nothing to do with being careful or to be thoughtful. It is nothing to do with accumulating knowledge or learning and being considered wise and learned person. It is all to do being able to cut through the fabric of ignorance, to be able to see into things as they truly are. That's why it is sometimes called ‘Insight Wisdom’ or ‘Penetrating Wisdom.’ There is a very popular Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna tradition called Mañjuśrī in Sanskrit, and in Chinese I think he is called Wenshu Pusa (文殊菩薩). Mañjuśrī holds a sword and a book in his hand. Sometimes people make rather rude comparison between Mañjuśrī and Islam represented by the Koran and the sword. In this case, the sword that Mañjuśrī holds is for cutting through ignorance. The sword cuts the net of ignorance. Here it represents prajñā or Insight Wisdom.
1.2. **Pāramitā**

In addition to this *prajñā*, the Insight Wisdom, we also have another term *pāramitā*. Now here again we have some difficulties when we try to find the English translation for *pāramitā*, because most commonly it is translated as ‘perfection’ (of wisdom). The Mahāyāna teachers perfect the six perfections and the *Perfection of wisdom* is one of them. But again the perfection is not a good translation for the term *pāramitā*, because the perfection is something static and complete. Perfection is something that does not change. When you achieve perfection there is nothing more to achieve.

But the *Perfection of Wisdom* is dynamic. The *Perfection of Wisdom* is vital. The *Perfection of Wisdom* moves like fire and light. It burns away the darkness of ignorance. So we need to look closely at this term *pāramitā*. What does it exactly mean? And of course, modern translators have realized the shortcomings of the term perfection and have tried other translation. Some of them call *Prajñāpāramitā* as 'Wisdom Gone Beyond.' Some of them call it the 'Climax of Wisdom.' The fact is if you look at the word *pāramitā*, you’ll notice that it has some similarity with the English word ‘Parameter’ and the English term ‘meter.’ So what we can understand from this similarity? Parameter of course means a circle/a limit just as we have a parameter fence around the campus or around the housing. It means a limit, an enclosure, or it has to do with measurement or measuring limit. So the *pāramitā* here has the sense of going beyond the limit/going beyond itself. That is why some translators decided to translate it ‘going beyond.’ We can also call it 'Transcendental Wisdom' or 'Transcendental Insight.' These translations are not bad. Unfortunately, we tend to over use the word transcendental, because really *Prajñāpāramitā* operates also here and now in everyday context. It not something that operate only in the super mundane sphere. So I am not going to leave you any final choice of translation, in fact in the book, *The Tree of Enlightenment*, I stuck with *Perfection of Wisdom*, simply because it is the best known translation. We often tend to make this kind of compromises. We often do it simply because they have become well known.

[If we choose any other words that only make lot more difficult for the people to understand. I always remember Herbert Guenther a good scholar and translator who had a good knowledge of Sanskrit and Tibetan, decided to translate the term ‘bodhi,’ (which is usually translate as enlightenment) as “... limpid clearness”. It is correct but it is so long and so unrealistic that it is impractical to translate ‘bodhi’ as “... limpid clearness” every time it occurs in an original language text. I couldn’t catch Guenther’s translation of the term ‘bodhi’. So sometimes we have to make compromises. We might be settled with a translation which might not be an adequate translation but we try to inform our readers what the real meaning of the term is. And I am trying to do that here.]

Even though I’ll refer to it as the *Perfection of Wisdom* from now on but I do want you to know that in the first place we are not talking about ‘Perfection’ as static quality. We are talking about something transcendental, dynamic quality of insight/of penetration/of seeing into the reality of the thing. So this is what we are talking about when we refer to *Prajñāpāramitā* and at this point, I might use the Sanskrit term *Prajñāpāramitā*. This is what we are talking about. If we limit ourselves to very conventional and narrow understanding of the term *Perfection of Wisdom*, then we miss the point of *Prajñāpāramitā*; we miss the point of *Perfection of Wisdom*. So I
have taken a bit of time to talk about the meaning of the term, because it is such an important term. Because it gives its name to all these very important Sūtras in the Mahāyāna tradition, I thought it is worthwhile spending little bit of time on gaining an understanding of the term.

§ 2. The Six Pāramitā

Prajñāpāramitā or the Perfection of Wisdom is important in general for the practice of the Bodhisattva, for the Mahāyāna Path because it is the Perfection of Wisdom that turns the other practices of the Mahāyāna Path/the Bodhisattva path into Perfection. You may know that in the Mahāyāna we have principally six perfections. When I say perfections, they are ‘pāramitās’ or equivalent to ‘Parami’ of the Theravāda tradition. In the Theravāda tradition, we have ten ‘pāramī.’ As a matter of fact in the Mahāyāna also we have ten pāramitās but the list don’t coincide exactly. Although there are many coincidences, they are not exactly identical. In the Mahāyāna we focus firstly and principally the Six Perfections. They are the perfections of:

- Generosity (dāna pāramitā),
- Morality (śīla pāramitā),
- Patience (kṣānti pāramitā),
- Energy (vīrya pāramitā),
- Concentration (dhyāna pāramitā) and
- Wisdom (prajñāpāramitā).

But the Perfection of Wisdom is the crown jewel of all the other perfections. It is more than the crown jewel of other perfections because other perfections would not be perfections without the Perfection of Wisdom. The Perfection of Wisdom turns the other faculties into perfections. I hope, in course of today and tomorrow's lecture, you'll see how it is true.

Without the Perfection of Wisdom, the practices of generosity, morality, patience and so forth are not perfections. They are not transcendental. They are just meritorious actions. They don’t lead to liberation/to freedom. The Perfection of Wisdom turns them into transcendental perfection, into transcendental activity.

§ 3. The Purpose of the Discourse of Perfection Wisdom

I am going to talk little bit about what does it mean by the transcendental wisdom or what is the purpose of the discourse of Perfection Wisdom. In general, I would say the purpose of the Perfection of Wisdom Discourses is to transform wisdom into transcendental wisdom, to transform wisdom into perfection.

3.1. Wisdom and Perfection of Wisdom in Abhidhamma

Now what do I mean by that and what distinction can we draw between the wisdom and Perfection of Wisdom or wisdom and transcendental wisdom? What is the difference? You know, the foundation for this can also be found in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka of the Theravāda school. And that’s why it is so difficult for me to draw a line between the Mahāyāna and the Theravāda, because wherever I look in the Mahāyāna discourses I see some seed, I see some parallel with things that are found in the Theravāda canon/Pāli texts. For example, yesterday we were talking about Skillful
Means, and I told you the story about the Buddha and how he used skillful means according to the texts that we find in the Pāli canon. And here also I can't help but draw a parallel between particularly the two books of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The two books are

- *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* (Enumeration of Factors), the first book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka
- *Paṭṭhāna* (Foundational Conditions), the last Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

What I am talking about is really the distinction/the different approaches that are embodied in (these two texts) are called as Analytical Wisdom and Relational or Synthetic Wisdom. If you like method rather than result you can call them as 'Analytical Approach/Analytical Investigation' and 'Relational Investigation.'

### 3.1.1. The Analytical Investigation in Abhidharma Ends Up With Elements (*dharmas*)

The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* is all about an Analytical Investigation. It is all about dissection. It is all about breaking/aparting unitary phenomenon into their component parts. It is all about taking things apart including their component element. This is a very basic pattern of investigation. If you give a radio or a toy car to a child what is the first thing he does? Take it apart, no? He will take it apart to find out how it works? Then, of course, he will encounter problem. He won’t be able to put it back together. That does not mean that taking things apart is not very useful. It is very useful investigating tool. And in fact it is the principal method of Western Science also from hundred years ago or less than that and until now has been using to take things apart to analysis. And it came to be known as Reductionism, to take things apart. And we learn a great deal through Reductionism. We learn a great deal of the working of the universe. We learn a great deal what makes up the plant, what makes up the human body and what makes up various physical phenomena. We learn a great deal by taking things apart by analyzing them, by breaking them down in various component parts. But sooner or later that approach has limitation. It has its limitation. For one thing, it does not explain and it does not help us to appreciate a painting. It can't help us appreciate a work of art. It can't help us to appreciate a piece of music. You take whatever music you are fond of, Chinese or Western classical music and then apply analytical method or reductionist approach to it and you come up with that piece of music containing 1340 C notes, 425 C flat or 54 or 120 A minor. This won't help you to appreciate that piece of music. It won't help you to understand that piece of music, because that music only has a meaning, an effect and only works as a whole, only in combination of those notes that produces right emotion/right feelings that you experience when you listen to that music.

Similarly, people can talk about Taj Mahal. If I would give you how many pieces of marble, how many ounces of gold and all structural details it took to build the Taj Mahal, it won't help you to appreciate the beauty of the Taj Mahal. It is in the togetherness of it. It is in the combination of components and how they combined together that beauty; that is where the aesthetic value of the Taj Mahal lies, not in the individual components.
So the Analytical method can take us so far. We are very familiar with the Analytical method in Buddhism. It is one of the principal methods used by the Buddha and used throughout Asia by the Buddhist masters. How do we investigate the concept of the self? What is the most popular way? How do we arrive at the doctrine or the truth of not-self? How do we do, how we approach that? Here we talk about five aggregates. Just take one-step back ward. First we start with one thing that is self. Now we have five. How we get that? By breaking it apart. This is how we get five from one. How we get five from one? Here is a certain person whom we call him Peter. Is he one? No, he is not one. Let’s break him up. He is of mind and he is of body. Now he is already two. Now let’s break up the mind. The mind is not one. It is feeling, perception volition and consciousness. So all of a sudden this one Peter becomes five. And this we get by using the Analytical method. It is same thing with the classical example of Chariot. What is a Chariot? ‘Oh! King Milinda, you came here by a Chariot. What is a Chariot? Is it the wheel? is it the pole? Is it the body or is it the axle?’ ‘No, it is not any of those things. But it is all those things put together we call a Chariot.’ Actually, the pole, the wheels, and the body all things put together is called a Chariot. In fact, we call the body, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness – these five aggregates – a person. But we get the five aggregates by dissection/by analysis/by braking up a whole that appears to be a whole. So we can do the same thing with this table. What is this table? The table has a top, four legs made of wood, the screws and so forth. These things together make up this table. So you can break up every single thing that is a complex phenomenon into its component parts. So when we talk about not-self in Buddhism, it is the result of Reduction Analysis. It is the result of an Analytical Investigation by breaking things into their component parts. And then with self we can go on. The form can be further reduced, can be analyzed into earth, water fire and air. The feeling can be further analyzed into pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent. Then the mental perception can be analyzed, and so also volition. We can continue this process of dissection/the breaking up of the wholes and this is called the Analytical Method. This is used by the Buddhists a lot and used a lot by the by Western science and even in the Western psychology.

Now the best known and most studied book in the Abhidhamma Pitaka is probably the Dhammasaṅgani occupied in the analytical investigation of things/ of phenomenon. But the logic book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is the seventh book, the Paṭṭhāna that is concerned with relation, with how things are related to each other. Relation is just as important as dissection. It is only through understanding of relation that we understand how things actually function. So I give an example. When the child take apart his toy car, he does not understand the relation, so he cannot put it back. He will put a wheel this side and another piece other side but he doesn’t know how to put it back together and only if he can understand the relation about what to go where, (only then) he can put it back together. This applies to Taj Mahal also. If you take it apart and you have tons of marbles, you can’t put it back unless you understand how it fits together. It’s like a jigsaw puzzle. When you take apart a painting, you have little pieces. If you want that picture again you have to put together all the pieces. The only way you can put the pieces together is if you understand the relation between all the pieces. So the Paṭṭhāna talks about
relations. The *Paṭṭhāna* talks about principally Interdependent Co-arising and many other modes of relations. It talks about twenty-four forms of relations in general. This book is not studied in the same degree as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*. But it is equally important.

In fact, the Buddha teaches we should be using the relational methods as much as we use the reductionist method. We should use both analytical and the relational or synthetic methods. For example, we return to the case of ‘self.’ We saw a moment ago how we can break up self through analysis, but we can also arrive at not-self in another way. Why the self not real, why the self not independently existent entity? Because the self exists in relation to/dependent on other things. What are the other things? What are the other things that the self depend upon? The self depends upon ignorance, karma, aversion, attachment and food. The self depends upon the three afflictions, karma and nutrition. We won’t be here, if not for our *kleśas*, karma and the food we eat. So we exist only in dependent upon all these things. We like the flame in the oil lamp that exists in dependent on the oil and the wick. The self exists dependent on a number of conditions. So you can arrive at the not-self of a person, the provisional/conventional or constructive/artificial nature of a person, not only by breaking him up but also by showing how he is depended on other things for his existence. If I don’t eat for few weeks, I don’t exist. So look how fragile, how insubstantial our existence is. This Peter is so fragile. If you take away his food, he ceases to exist just like going out of the flame in the oil lamp after the oil is over. So there are two ways of achieving an understanding of the phenomena: one is the Analytical Approach and the other one is the Relational Approach.

### 3.2. Ābhidharmikas Focused on the Analytical Method and virtually ignored the Relational Method

When I say Ābhidharmika schools in India, I refer to the Theravāda school certainly and also the Sarvāstivāda School and so forth. They focused on the Analytical Method and they virtually ignored the Relational Method/the Relational Approach. Now what the passages from the *Perfection of Wisdom* imply is moving from the Analytical Approach to the Relational Approach. We begin to think about things as relative, as dependent upon other things. In the Abhidharma tradition you have 121 types of consciousnesses, 52 types of volition etc. The problem with Analytical Approach is that no matter how far you go with it, you end up with smaller and smaller particles/smaller and smaller element/smaller and smaller factor. They never go away. They are always there. They are always left with residue of components, bits and pieces floating around. And how they go together? They go together by means of relation. The Analytical Method never gets us to the point where the bits and pieces disappear. We left with elements/with dharmas. This is a big problem.
3.3. The Difference Between the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna

There is a big distinction you find in all textbooks regarding the difference between the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna. What is the difference? One teaches "pudgalanairātmya" and the other teaches "dharmanairātmya" as well as "pudgalanairātmya". What do they mean? These are Sanskrit terms.

- Hīnayāna teaches "pudgalanairātmya", which means insubstantiality of the person or the personality that everybody agree upon.
- The Mahāyāna says it is not only "pudgalanairātmya" that one must realize, but also "dharmanairātmya", insubstantiality of the factor.

There are many different ways illustrating the difference between the Analytical method and the Relational Method.

- The Analytical Method in brief concentrate on reducing complex phenomena into their component parts like taking apart a picture, a building, a table or personality and reducing them into their component parts/into elements/factors of which they are made up.
- The Relational Approach look at the interdependence of the factors. That is all the factors are dependent upon one another for their existence. Darkness has no meaning except in its relation to light.

This table is dependent upon the floor, which supports it. This table is depended upon the wood. This table is depended upon the carpenter who made it. In that sense this table is also insubstantial. It is insubstantial because I can take it apart by using hammer and so forth, which would be the Reductionist Approach. So we can also arrive at the insubstantiality of the table by considering that its dependence on the floor, upon the work of the person who put it together, on the timber, nails and other factors that the table is made of. So it is insubstantial because you can take it apart. Actually the dissection, the Analytical Method is somewhat incomplete, because even if I take this table and break it up all into pieces, those pieces will still be there. So what can I do with those pieces? I can break them up into smaller pieces; still there will be smaller pieces. I can shove them all into fire, burn them but still there will be ashes. The metal won't burn. What should I do with the pieces? So insubstantiality by means of Analytical Method remains partial and incomplete. Bits and pieces will be always there.

3.4. Mahāyāna Emphasizes the Interdependency of the Elements

That's the problem with the analysis of the self into the aggregates and so forth. The bits and pieces are still there. All right we call ‘form’ an aggregate/a process/a collection and same thing to feeling, perception etc. They are all collections not unitary thing. Then what about those self-sections/self-particles? They are still there. Those factors are still there. What about those factors? How do we get rid of those factors? Do we want to get rid of those factors? The Mahāyāna point of view is yes, we want to get rid of those factors because otherwise we still have these dharmas. What we are going to do with these dharmas? The dharmas are still there getting in our way. They are clouding our vision, becoming object, which will be factors. We want to get rid of those factors also. Get rid of them in the sense that we want to
make them harmless. We want to make them insubstantial so that we can’t grasp
them, we can’t hold on to them. The way the Mahāyāna and the Perfection of
Wisdom tradition does that is to emphasize their relation. The fact is, all of these
things are related/inter-depended. This is the real key. In many texts on Buddhism
you will see that the Interdependent Co-arising is the heart of the teachings of the
Buddha. When Ānanda said that the Interdependent Co-arising is quite simple even
though it appears to be complicated, the Buddha said, “Say not so Ānanda,
Interdependent Co-arising appears to be complicated and in fact it is complicated. It
is difficult to understand. It is because not of understanding Interdependent Co-
arising that all living beings have circled for so long in *samsāra*. It is because they do
not understand Interdependent Co-arising they become entangled like rats and
cannot get out of *samsāra*.” So to key to all of these is Interdependent Co-arising.

And the Perfection of Wisdom is saying that by means of the Analytical Investigation
you have reduced the phenomena into factors/into bits and pieces/ into elements/into dharma
s. Now we want to get rid of these bits and pieces. We want to
demonstrate the insubstantiality of the reduced/what is left over after the Analytical
Method has been applied. After the Analytical Method has been applied the bits and
pieces remained. We want to find out the nature of these bits and pieces. The nature
of these bits and pieces is that they are dependent. They are related to other bits and
pieces. That’s the only way they can function. That’s the only way they work. That’s
the only way they exist. So

3.5. Emptiness (śūnyatā) is Just Another Name For
Interdependence

The emptiness is interdependent existence of the factors. Because factors depend
upon each other, they don’t have any self-existence. They don’t have svabhāva. They
don’t exist by themselves. So they are insubstantial. Basically, all the Prajñāpāramitā
literature and later Nāgārjuna tells the Ābhidharmikas, the schools of Hinayāna that
how you people believe in Interdependent Co-arising and by that believe that all the
factors are interdependent, they all depend on each other, and still you believe these
factors exist of their own right? Are they independent? Are they substantial? Do they
have self-existence, svabhāva? This is not correct. You either believe in
Interdependent Co-arising or you believe in independent existence. The two things
contradict each other. If something exists independently, then that exists by itself. If it
doesn’t exist by itself, it is insubstantial and empty. So in fact, all these factors are
empty because they are interdependent just like the flame in the oil lamp depends
on the oil and the wick. The flame isn’t anything in itself. It is interdependently co-
arisen and therefore it is empty. It doesn’t have any self-existence. It doesn’t exist
independently. Take away the oil, take away the wick, it will go out. So it is only
provisional and this provisional kind of existence is emptiness. So this is the first
point to be made.

○ The Analytical Wisdom leads us with the existence of factors of independent
dharmas/self existent dharma.
The Perfect Wisdom, the Relational Wisdom leads us to the view of the world in which all these factors are insubstantial in existence. They depend upon each other for their existence. So they are insubstantial, dependent and empty. Emptiness is just another name for interdependence. It isn't anything metaphysical. It isn't anything mysterious. It is just a word for interdependent existence of things, the fact that the things don't exist by themselves.

§ 4. The Relevance of the Abhidharma to the Perfection of Wisdom

Now I am going to talk about the influence, the relevance of the Abhidharma to the Perfection of Wisdom discourses and particularly to the Heart Sūtra. The relevance of the Abhidharma is not simply in the fact that we are addressing message of investigation, message of understanding reality that are already present in the Abhidharma Piṭaka, in the Ābhidharmika tradition. That might be true. But the Heart Sūtra is a direct contact, a direct assault, and a direct attack on the Ābhidharmika analysis of reality, on the Ābhidharmika view of experience. And all the Ābhidharmika category are systematically and thoroughly declared to be empty, in the Heart Sūtra, in the Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra.

I have to tell you, be sure to dedicate enough time to study Abhidharma. Because whatever Buddhist tradition you want to study, whether it be Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna, you won't understand them without understanding Abhidharma. Abhidharma is like the backbone of the whole Buddhist tradition. Buddhism doesn't make sense without the understanding of the Abhidharma. You have to have patience to understand Abhidharma.