“Mindfulness of Breathing in the Dhyāna Sūtras.”
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Mindfulness of Breathing in the *Dhyāna Sūtras*

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Together with the meditation on the impure (*āsūbhāsmṛti*), mindfulness of breathing (*Pali*, ānāpānasati; *Sanskrit*, ānāpānasmrī; variously rendered into Chinese as 安般守意, 安般念, 阿那般那観, 念出入息, 持息会, 數息觀, etc.) represents one of the main forms of spiritual cultivation in the Early and Schismatic Buddhism.1) Abhidharma literature often celebrates these two meditative practices as “the two gates of ambrosia (*amṛta*)”, “the two main gates of entering spiritual cultivation入修要二門,”2) and “the two paths leading to Nirvāṇa趣涅槃二種.”3) Mahāyāna Buddhism, most notably the Representation-only School,4) retains mindfulness of breathing amongst its spiritual techniques, but its role is much diminished as the dominant posi-

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1) In what follows I shall avoid the usage of the rather pejorative term of Hīnayāna or Lesser Vehicle and replace it with Schismatic Buddhism or Conservative Buddhism.


3) *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 阿毘達磨俱舍論 (*T29, 117b6)*, *Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-śāstra* 阿毘達磨順正論 (*T29, 671a1*).

4) *Abhidharmāmṛta-śāstra* 阿毘曇甘露味論 (*T28, 975b11–12*).

5) We find, for instance, the mindfulness of breathing extensively discussed in the *Yogācāryabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論 (*T30, 430c–433b*). However, we must note that this fragment is included in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and the *Boddhisattvabhūmi* contains only a brief mention of it: “vitarkapratipakṣen’ānāpāna-smṛṭirn” (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ed. by Unrai Wogihara, Tokyo, 1930, p. 204); 為欲對治諸尋思故修習息念 (*T30, 527a2*).
tion is now occupied by devotional practices, visualization exercises, meditation aimed at the realization of emptiness, etc.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the treatment of the mindfulness of breathing, especially the relation between "the sixteen bases" and "the six aspects," in the so-called *dhyāna sūtras* or "meditation scriptures." The term *dhyāna sūtra* represents a reconstruction of the Chinese *chan jing* 禪経, which appears in the titles of a certain group of texts as well as in the writings of Chinese Buddhists of the early 5th century AD as Sengrui 僧叡, Huiyuan 慧遠, and Huiguan 慧覧.

This group represents treatises or manuals of meditation belonging to or, at least, partly drawing their inspiration from Sarvāstivāda tradition. We must not forget, however, that many of the *dhyāna sūtras* are, as it were, a common product of the Buddhist traditions from North-West India, Central Asia, and China. Although the basic material of these texts doubtlessly comes from Indian Buddhism, we must not exclude the possibility that they were compiled in Central Asia or that Buddhist monks from Central Asia, who in most of the cases were those who brought the *dhyāna sūtras* to China, had a more or less substantial influence on the final form of the scriptures in the process of translating them into Chinese. Kumārajīva would be perhaps the most eloquent example of this case.

6) I could find no evidence in Indian sources and Tibetan translations that the *chan jing* stands for an original *dhyānasūtrāṇi* or something similar. The *dhyāna sūtras* represents only a reconstruction whose only advantage is that it suggests better that we are actually dealing with a category of texts which, regardless of their compilation process, contain doctrines and practices that can be traced back to Indian Buddhism.

7) V. T55, 65a-b. Sengrui also uses the term *chan yao* 禪要 or "meditation summaries."

8) V. T55, 65b–66a.

9) V. T55, 66b–67c. Huiguan also calls such texts *chan dian* 禪典 or "meditation scriptures."
Doctrinally, the *dhyāna sūtras* range from a basically orthodox Sarvāstivāda standpoint to a substantial compromise with Mahāyāna teachings and practices. In some cases, this compromise is so advanced that it is very difficult to make a distinction between such a text and a *samādhi sūtra* (*sanmei jing* 三昧経), which represents a purely Mahāyānist scripture. Texts like An Shigao’s 安世高 (fl. 148–170 AD) translations: the *Da anban shouyi jing* 大安般守意経 (T15, 163c–173a), the *Skandhadhätvāyatana-sūtra* 陰持入経 (T15, 173b–180b), Saṃgharakṣa’s *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* 大道地経 (T15, 230c–236b) (partial translation); the first 27 chapters 品 of the present version of Dharmarakṣa’s 竺法護 (239–316) translation of Saṃgharakṣa’s *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra* 修行道地経 (T15, 181c–223a); Buddhahadra’s 佛駄跋陀羅 (359–429) translation of Buddhasena’s *Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra*, also called the *Dharmatāra dhyāna-sūtra* or *Dharmatrāta dhyāna-sūtra* 修摩多羅寐経 (T15, 300c–325c); etc. belong to an orthodox Sarvāstivāda position. On the other hand, we have *dhyāna sūtras* that combine to various extents the meditative system of the Conservative Buddhism with Mahāyāna meditation and teachings. Their way of mixing the two systems is not uniform. Kumārajīva’s 鳳摩羅什 (344–412) translation or compilation of the *Dhyānasamādhi-sūtra* 坐禅三昧経 (T15, 269c–286a), although

10) Mizuno Kōgen 水野弘元 distinguishes in his “Introduction to the History of the Meditation Doctrines in China before the Formation of the Chan School” 禪宗成立以前のシナの禅定思想史序説 (*Komazawa daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 駒沢大学研究紀要, No. 15, March 1957, p. 20) between a broad sense of the *chan jing (zen kyō)* 禪経 which encompasses all sources used by the Buddhist practitioner as reference materials for his practice and a narrow sense which refers only to the meditation manuals compiled by the Yogācārin of North-West India. It goes without saying that my usage of the term *dhyāna sūtras* belongs to the narrow sense. However, Mizuno includes many *samādhi sūtras* in his list of *chan jing* in the narrow sense (id., pp. 21–23), which seems to me to be a rather loose usage of the term *chan jing*. Despite all difficulties of distinguishing some *chan jing* from the *sanmei jing*, I think it is, nevertheless, more appropriate to treat the two categories separately.
largely based on traditional meditative practices and theories, deals in
its last part with the spiritual cultivation of the Bodhisattva and at-
ttempts to encompass the two paths in a harmonious pattern. Other
texts like Kumārajīva’s translations: the Chan mi yaofa jing禪秘要法經
(T15, 242c–269c), the Siwei liē yaofa 思惟略要法 (T15, 297c–300c); Dharmamitra’s 暮摩蜜多 (356–442) translation of the Wumen chan jing-
yao yongfa 五門禪經要用法 (T15, 325c–333a); Juqu Jingsheng’s 沮渠
京声 (5th century AD) translation of the Zhi chanbing mi yaofa 治禪病
秘要法 (T15, 333a–342b); etc., although still indebted more or less to
the meditation system proper to Conservative Buddhism, include a
considerable number of Mahāyāna practices and theories or re-inter-
pret traditional methods in a Mahāyānist spirit.\footnote{11}

Although the textual formation of many of these dhyāna sūtras re-
 mains a very complicated process, the original texts or, at least, much
of the meditation practices and doctrines, especially those associated
with Conservative Buddhism, can be traced back to the Kashmirian
Yogācāra school belonging to the Sarvāstivāda tradition. Most of
these meditation manuals were compiled or, at least, reflect the prac-
tice and theory of the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins of the first four cen-
turies of our era. We know that long before the rise of the Vijñānavāda
or Representation-only Yogācāra school, a certain group of “masters
of spiritual cultivation” or Yogācārya 瑜伽師, specializing in medita-
tion, were active inside the Sarvāstivāda tradition, especially in Kash-
mir and North-West India.\footnote{12} Abhidharma literature, especially the
Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā-sāstra, offers an abundance of examples of
the Yogācāryas being quoted as a most reliable source.\footnote{13} Apart from

\footnote{11} I have included in the list above only the major extant dhyāna sūtras.

\footnote{12} On the Kashmirian Yogācāra school, v. Paul Demiéville, “La Yogā-

\footnote{13} Nishi Giyū 西義雄, “The Yogācāryas and Their Role in Schismatic
Buddhism” 部派佛教に於ける瑜伽師とその役割, Bukkyō kenkyū 佛教研究, Vol.
their role in the formation and development of the Sarvāstivāda system of spiritual practice, the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins composed their own meditation manuals and treatises which represent the dhyāna sūtras in their original form.\textsuperscript{14)} These dhyāna sūtras clearly show that the Yogācārins were more interested in the concrete details of the spiritual training than in the philosophical speculations of the Abhidharma and that, although part of the Sarvāstivāda tradition, they proved to be open to influences coming from other schools and Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is quite possible that on the base of their discoveries and insights resulting from their spiritual quest as well as under the pressure of the growing Mahāyānist trend around them, this group of “masters of spiritual cultivation” or, at least, a part of them were led to elaborate new theories and practices which, eventually, served as the base of the Representation-only school.\textsuperscript{15)} However, much of this historical process of transition from the Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra to the Vijñānavāda Yogācāra remains to be elucidated. And we must not forget that, as Demiéville aptly puts it, “for whoever takes the risk of making the history of Indian Buddhism according to Chinese texts, prudence is a must, not only in chronological matters.”\textsuperscript{16)}

As I have already shown, mindfulness of breathing is a central practice in Conservative Buddhism and it loses much of its importance in Mahāyāna. A similar phenomenon is to be found in the dhyāna sūtras. Ānāpānasmṛti is extensively treated in those texts belonging to the orthodox Sarvāstivāda. These sūtras are, therefore, the object of my examination here. On the other hand, mindfulness of breathing tends

\textsuperscript{14)} cf. Nishi Giyū, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{15)} Yaoabe Nobuyoshi calls what I term here the “Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra” the “Proto-Yogācāra,” which denotes the stage before the formation of the Vijñānavāda school proper (cf. “An Shigao as Proto-Yogācāra,” 1991, unpublished manuscript).

\textsuperscript{16)} \textit{op. cit.}, p. 358.
to become a marginal technique in those dhyāna sūtras influenced by Mahāyāna teachings and practices. The Siweī lüe yongfa, for instance, makes no mention of the mindfulness of breathing. The Wumen chan jingyao yongfa, although supposed to deal with "the five meditation gates," makes only few brief remarks concerning the ānāpānasmiti at the beginning of the sūtra (T15, 325c), but it gives no further details on it. The Chan mi yaofa jing contains a whole section on the mindfulness of breathing (T15, 256c–258b), but apart from a few lines dealing with breathing counting, the ānāpānasmiti appears to be an auxiliary technique included into the larger frame of the meditation on the impure, which is, however, treated from a Mahāyānist viewpoint and has little in common with its counterpart in Conservative Buddhism, as it lays more emphasis on the visualization of different images resulting from this method.

Before dealing with the ānāpānasmiti, we need a few words on the textual history of the main dhyāna sūtras examined here. First, the Da anban shouyi jing represents an extremely corrupt text which gathers together An Shigao's original translation, almost impossible to reconstruct, fragments from An Shigao's own commentary as well as fragments from glosses by Chen Hui 陈慧, Kang Senghui 康僧会, Zhi Dun 道安, and Xie Fu 謝敷. The original text, most probably written in Gāndhārī and entitled *Ānāpānasvadi, was a small manual of the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins compiled around 100 AD. The Parthian monk An Shigao translated this manual into Chinese by the middle of the 2nd century, but the present text dates from the end of the 6th century.17) Saṃgharakṣa's Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra was translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 284. Its present text obviously

contains two different sūtras: the first 27 chapters, which represent the Sarvāstivāda Yogācāra meditation system, and the last three chapters, which are a Mahāyānist appendix added in China around the middle of the 4th century most probably in keeping with the growing interest in the teachings of the Greater Vehicle. The Dhyānasamādhi-sūtra, translated or compiled by Kumārajīva in 407, is a systematical presentation of both Conservative and Mahāyānist meditation practices and theories. The chapter dealing with the mindfulness of breathing doubtlessly relies on materials belonging to Sarvāstivāda. According to Sengrui's preface, which carefully notes the authors whose texts were used in compiling the sūtra, "the gāthās dealing with six mental impediments 六覚 represent Aśvaghoṣa's practice" (T55, 65b2-3) and "the six aspects 六事 of [the mindfulness of] breathing gate have been taught by various Vaibhāṣikas or Abhidharma masters 論師" (id., b4–5). We find, indeed, the six mental impediments similarly treated in Aśvaghoṣa's Saundarananda-kāvyā, Chapter 15, which actually concludes with the recommendation that one should remove them through the ānāpānasamṛti practice (15; 64). And as we shall see below, the six aspects represent a technique elaborated by Abhidharma masters. Buddhāsenā's Yogācārabhūmi-sūtra was composed by the Kashmirian Yogācārya Buddhāsenā around 400 and translated by his disciple Buddhābhudda sometime after 413. The present text in the Taishō daizō kyō is called Damoduola chanjing 達摩多羅禪經, as it is wrongly attributed to Dharmatāra or Dharmatrāta. It devotes the whole of its first juan to a very detailed discussion of the ānāpānasamṛti, whose practice is divided into four stages, i.e., retrogression 退分, establishment 住分, progression 升進分, and completion 決定分, each treated from two viewpoints, i.e., method or the preparatory way (prayoga-mārga 方便道) and insight aspects or superior way (viśeṣamārga 勝道).¹⁸

¹⁸) For the textual history of the above texts, cf. Satō Taishun's 佐藤泰舜 (Continued to next page)
The actual technique of the mindfulness of breathing described in the *dhyāna sūtras* consists of two methods, i.e., 'the sixteen bases' and the 'six aspects.' The sixteen bases represent a very old technique dating back, most probably, to the earliest days of Buddhism. Lambert Schmithausen and Johannes Bronkhorst point out that mindfulness (*sati*), which in the beginning merely concerned the body, played an important role in original Buddhism, 'although it may have been borrowed from outside movements, because it appears to be known to Jainism.' The subject is too complex and I intend to deal with it on another occasion, but I think we can agree that the sixteen bases of the mindfulness of breathing are a practice peculiar to Buddhism and that they belong to the earliest Buddhist stratum. Certainly, India has an extremely long tradition of breathing practices, but the Buddhist *ānāpānasīrtri* must not be confused with a respiration control technique. At no stage does the Buddhist practitioner try to control or change something in the natural process of breathing. *Ānāpānasīrtri* consists of a careful concentration on breathing in and out.

(Continued from page 48)
with all its physiological and psychological implications. On this ba-
sis, the Buddhist practitioner expands his field of observation to im-
permanence, detachment, etc. Let me quote from the Ānāpānasati
sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 118):

Mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Whether he
breathes in a long (breath) he comprehends (pājānatī) ‘I am
breathing in a long (breath)’; or whether he is breathing out
a long (breath) he comprehends, ‘I am breathing out a long
(breath)’; or whether he is breathing in a short (breath) he
comprehends, ‘I am breathing in a short (breath)’; or whether
he is breathing out a short (breath) he comprehends, ‘I am
breathing out a short (breath).’ He trains himself (sikkhati),
thinking, ‘I will breathe in experiencing (paṭisanāvedi) the whole
body.’ He trains himself, thinking, ‘I will breathe out experi-
cencing the whole body.’ He trains himself, thinking, ‘I will
breathe in tranquillising (passambhayām) the activity of the body
(kāyasamkhāra).’ He trains himself, thinking, ‘I will breathe out
tranquillising the activity of the body.’ He trains himself, think-
ing, ‘I will breathe in... breathe out experiencing rapture (pīti).’
He trains himself, thinking, ‘I will breathe in... breathe out
experiencing joy (sukha).’ He trains himself, thinking, ‘I will
breathe in... breathe out experiencing the activity of thought
(cittasamkhāra)... tranquillising the activity of thought... ex-
periencing thought (citta)... rejoicing (abhippamodayam) in
thought... concentrating (samādahām) thought... freeing (vi-
mocayām) thought.’ He trains himself, thinking. ‘I will breathe
in... breathe out beholding (anupassi) impermanence (anicca)
... beholding detachment (vīrāga)... beholding stopping (ni-
These sixteen stages or sixteen bases (solasavatthuka), as Buddhaghosa calls them,\(^{22}\) are found in all the dhyāna sūtras that discuss the anapanasmita. They are called “the sixteen excellent [practices]” 十六勝 in An Shigao’s translation of the *Ānāpānasvadi (=As) (cf. T15, 165a8–19) and 十六常勝 in Samgharakṣa’s Yogācārabhūmi translated by Dharmarakṣa (=SYb) (cf. T15, 216a15–28)\(^{23}\) or “the sixteen limbs” 十六分 (*sodasaṅga) in the Dhyānasamādhi-sūtra (=Ds) (cf. T15, 275b19–276a5) and Buddhasena’s Yogācārabhūmi (=BYb) (cf. T15, 310b22). However, the same BYb also uses the translation 十六行 (*sodasaṅcara) (cf. T15, 302b1–14). On the whole, these sixteen practices are similar to the original pattern found in the Pāli text above. A detailed discussion of each particular text is not possible here. In what follows I shall point out the most conspicuous differences. The As seems to contain the largest number of differences, but the text is so unclear and corrupt that it is difficult to decide whether it represents a variant or just a very clumsy rendering into Chinese. The

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order of the description is not identical to the one found in the Pāli text: after the stage of comprehending the movement of the body 动身, the practitioner returns to respiration and observes whether he breathes faintly 微, whether his breath has stopped or not 止·不止, etc. The text says nothing about experiencing, etc., the activity of thought. The impermanence is not translated by the usual 無常, but by a periphrasis: “he breathes and comprehends that all the things in this world (‘the ten thousand things’) [are bound to] perish and there is no way to obtain them back” 念万物已去不可復得喘息自知. The text ends with the stage of beholding detachment 棄捐所思 and stopping 放棄軀命, which means that it lacks the paṭinissagga phase of the Pāli text. We also find some differences in the Ds, which lacks some of the stages pertaining to the activity of the thought and the thought described in the Ānāpānasati sutta. Besides, the thirteenth stage, which is called “the observation of vanishing 出散観 of the conditioned (samskṛta) dharmas 有為法,” has no equivalent in the Pāli source.

The above dhyāna sūtras as well as many of the Abhidharma treatises also contain a second technique of the ānāpānasmrīi called “the six aspects” or “the six means.” I shall first present “the six means” (saḍkāraṇa 六因) according to the Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya 阿毘達磨俱舍論,24) since Vasubandhu’s systematic way of explaining them will allow us to understand the variants appearing in the dhyāna sūtras and Abhidharma sources. The practice starts with “counting” (gaṇanā 数), which consists in counting breathing from one to ten. When this is accomplished without any counting failure (doṣā 失), the practioner advances to the second step, i.e., “pursuing” (anugama 随), which means intently following the inhalation as it enters the body and moves from the throat, through the heart, the navel, the kyndneys, the thighs to the toes and then the reverse movement of the exhalation until it

leaves the body. Next comes "concentration" *(sthāpanā 止)* which
denotes focusing one’s attention on some part of the body from the tip
of the nose to the big toe. In the fourth step, called "observation"
*(upalakṣanā 視)*, the practitioner discerns that the air breathed in and
out as well as form *(rūpa 色)*, mind *(citta 心)*, and mental functions
*(caittā 心所)* ultimately consists of the four great [basic] elements
*(mahābhūta 大種)*. He thus analyzes all the five aggregates *(pañca
skandhāh 王蕴)*. Next follows "the turning away" *(vivarta 転)* which
consists of changing the object of observation from the air breathed in
and out to "the wholesome roots" of purity *(kūsalamūla 善根)* and
ultimately to "the highest mundane dharma" *(aggradharma 世間第一
法)*. The last step is called "purification" *(pariśuddhi 淨)* and it
marks entering the stage of "realization of the Way" *(darsanamārga
見道)*, which in Abhidharma literature denotes the stage of "the stream
entry" *(srotā āpti-phalla)* that will inevitably lead the adept to
*Nirvāṇa* in no more than seven lives.25

Before examining this technique in the *dhyāna sutras*, it is necessary
to note that the sixteen bases and the six means represent historically
different practices. It is quite obvious that both methods lead the
practitioner to very high stages of spiritual achievement. It is very
hard to imagine that a practitioner who has reached *paṭinissagga* or
darsanamārga needs to return to such elementary techniques like
counting or mere mindfulness of the length of breathing respectively.
Judging from a logical viewpoint, we are bound to say that the two
techniques are independent and seem to lead to approximatively equiv-

25) The six means are also treated in the *Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā-sāstra*
阿毘達磨大婆沙論 (T27, 134c26–135b17), the *Samyukta abhidharmahydaya-
sāstra* 雜阿毘毘婆沙論 (T28, 934a23–b10), the *Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-sāstra*
阿毘達磨順正論 (T29, 673c10–674a24). In the Theravāda tradition, the *Vi-
suddhi-magga* divides the same practice into eight stages called "the mental
[training] methods" *(manasikāravidhi)* (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 278–87). For others
sources, see below.
alent stages of spiritual achievement. The sixteen bases go back to the earliest stratum of Buddhism, while the six means date not earlier than the 2nd or 1st century BC. The Pāli suttas contain no reference to anything similar to the six means or gaṇanā in the sense of breathing counting. The seven fundamental Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma treatises contain no mention of the six means, but we must bear in mind that breathing and ānāpānasīmṛti do not get an extensive treatment here. It is, therefore, unclear whether the six means did not exist at the time of the compilation of the oldest of these texts or whether they were still a minor practice unworthy of the attention of the Sarvāstivādin masters. The earliest mention or, at least, the record of what appears to be the earliest form of this practice is found in the Vimutti-magga解脱道論 (T32, 430b17-29). The dating of this text is very difficult, yet the 1st century AD seems to be the most probable date. Its author Upatissa refers to “the four ways of practicing the mindfulness of breathing” 四種修念安般 as the teaching of “the ancient masters” (pubbācariya 先師), which suggests that the technique was older than the date of the composition of this treatise. Furthermore, we have here only four methods of practice, i.e. 算, 随逐, 安置, and 随観, which correspond to the first four stages of the six means. Not only that we do not have the last two steps, but “observation” 随観 refers here to the mindfulness of such psychological states as joy, rapture, etc., and not of the four great elements. All these facts prove that we have here a very early model of the six means, which I would ven-


27) I owe this information to Ven. Sumanasāra Thera who also suggests the possibility that breathing counting was borrowed from Hinduist practices.

ture to place somewhere in the 1st century BC. Since the six means/eight methods practice is shared by both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda traditions, it is possible that the primitive pattern dates from a period prior to their schism. Of course, there is also the possibility of its being created by one sect and borrowed by the other, but this must have happened at very early date, too. However, if we accept the first alternative, then the origin of this practice may be placed as early as the 2nd century BC. There is no doubt, however, that this practice was originally an auxiliary exercise devised by the Abhidharma masters.

The second stage in the historical development of the six means practice is reflected in the _As_ and the _SYb_. In both _sūtras_, we find that the practice has now all the six stages, but the newly added steps are, however, explained in a manner different from the _Kośa_. The _As_ text describing the last two stages of “the six aspects” 六事 (*ṣādvastu*) is extremely corrupt and our interpretation is in danger of taking a later Chinese gloss for the original _sūtra_, but it seems that “turning away” 還 corresponds to the stage of “practicing the Way” 行道 (T15, 165a28) and “purification” 淨 represents “entering the Way” 入道 (T15, 165a28–b1). 還 and 淨 are also explained as “eliminating the fetters (sāmyojana)” 棄結 (T15, 167a19), which, if we are to believe the Chinese gloss, itself ambiguous and contradictory, would mean casting away of the physical and verbal defilements and elimination of the mental defilements respectively. Furthermore, unlike the _Vimutti-magga_, “observation” 観 is now explained as observing the five aggregates (T15, 167a7–8). The _SYb_ speaks about “four aspects” 四事, but in reality, we have six stages, i.e. 息数, 相随, 止, 観, 還, 淨 (T15, 216a29–b23), counted in a different way. Their explanation is very summary and rather unclear. The last two stages are described as “fixing one’s attention on the tip of the nose, one must observe the breathing counting and be aware of the breathing out
and in” (T15, 216b18-19), which represents an explanation much earlier than the Kośa. Both the As and the SYb reflect the six aspects practice around 100 AD, when the last two stages had not been fully co-related with Abhidharma categories.

The last phase starts with the Mahāvibhāṣā, from the middle of the 2nd century AD on, when all the stages of the six means practice, despite certain differences between various texts, become very well defined and included within the larger frame of the Abhidharma theories of the spiritual path. Most of the differences concern the interpretation of the last two stages. The Ds and the BYs as well as most of the Abhidharma sources belong to this third phase of development of the six means. The Ds calls this practice “the six gates of the ānāpānasamādhi” and describes the fifth stage, i.e., observation, as observation of the impermanence of the five aggregates which leads to the elimination of the five obstacles. Purification is described in relation to the practice of the four fields of mindfulness (catvāri smṛty-upasthānāni), which leads to the attainment of the four wholesome roots and finally to the Arhatship (T15, 275b7-19). The BYs, which gives the most detailed treatment of the six means, holds that “interior attachment” disappears when counting is perfectly practiced (T15, 307c8), that “exterior attachment” is eliminated at the stage of pursuing (T15, 306b10), and that doubt is cut off at the stage of observation (T15, 307a29). The turning away is presented as the stage of cultivating wisdom (prajñā) (T15, 307b16). The BYs considers that a purification is obtained after each of the previous levels, but purification as a stage in itself is described as the cessation of all the evils which have constituted the base of the defiled life.

29) In the Mahāvibhāṣā (T27, 125a23-25), it is at the stage of turning away that the adept practices the four bases of mindfulness.
How did the Yogācārins correlate the sixteen bases with the six means, which originally had been independent, parallel techniques, in actual practice? The As, the SYb, and the BYs as well as the Vimuttimagga, the Mahāvibhāṣā, and the Abhidharma nyāyānusāra-sāstra simply describe the two practices without giving any detail on how they relate to each other. The Ds, in a passage rather difficult to interpret (T15, 275b19-20), seems to suggest that the six means are included in the first step of breathing in and out of the sixteen bases. In a similar way, the Visuddhi-magga tries to include the eight mental methods into the sixteen bases, between the first and the second tetrads. Yet we must never forget that many details concerning the actual practice were transmitted orally and are impossible to reconstruct now. What we can say in conclusion is that Buddhism, as many other religions, has often found creative solutions by trying to harmonize what originally represented different or even contradictory practices.