



The
**Bodhisattva
Ideal**

*Essays on the
Emergence of Mahāyāna*

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

ESSAYS ON THE EMERGENCE OF MAHĀYĀNA

This book brings together six essays on the origin and history of the bodhisattva ideal and the emergence of the Mahāyāna. The essays approach the subject from different perspectives—from scholarly examinations of the terms in the Nikāyas and Āgamas to the relationship of the bodhisattva ideal and the arahant ideal within the broader context of the social environment in which Mahāyāna formed and further developments that lead to the formulation of the fully fledged bodhisattva path. As such, the collection provides a good overview for a wider Buddhist readership of the history of changes that eventually led to the emergence of the Mahāyāna.

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Contents

Contents iii

Preface vi

Contributors vii

Abbreviations viii

Arahants, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas 1

| | |
|--|----|
| Competing Buddhist Ideals | 1 |
| Looking to the Buddha as the Ideal | 3 |
| The Perspective of the Nikāyas | 4 |
| How the Buddha is Distinguished from Other Arahants | 8 |
| The Bodhisattva Problem | 11 |
| The Transition towards the Full-fledged Bodhisattva Concept | 16 |
| The Emergence of the Mahāyāna as the Bodhisattva-vehicle .. | 18 |
| Breaking down Old Stereotypes | 22 |
| Towards a Healthy Integration of the Vehicles | 27 |
| Notes | 29 |

The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Theory and Practice 31

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 31 |
| The Scope of the Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Buddhism ... | 34 |
| A Re-evaluation of the Bodhisattva-Śrāvaka Opposition | 41 |
| Acknowledgments | 43 |
| Notes | 44 |

Bodhi and Arahattaphala 51

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Notes | 65 |
|-------------|----|

Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisattva in India 69

| | |
|---|----|
| Conventions | 69 |
| Preface | 70 |
| I. The quiet revolution in Buddhist Studies | 72 |
| II. Points of Terminology | 75 |
| The Śrāvakayāna and the eighteen Buddhist schools | 79 |
| The three vehicles | 82 |
| III. Vedalla, Vaidalya, Mahāyāna and other names | 84 |
| Vedalla as a genre or category of the Buddha's teaching (aṅga) | 86 |
| Discussions about Vedalla (vedallakathā) and future threats ... | 87 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Vedalla/Vaitulya as a system of thought (vāda) | 88 |
| The Vedalla/Vetulla Piṭaka | 89 |
| Vaidalya as an epithet for Mahāyāna sūtras | 90 |
| Nāgārjuna's Vaidalya-prakaraṇa | 92 |
| Vetullavāda and Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka | 92 |
| Vedalla/Vaidalya and Mahāyāna in India | 94 |
| Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya in the north Indian tradition ... | 95 |
| The Mahāyāna according to Asaṅga | 97 |
| IV. What Mahāyāna is not | 98 |
| V. What was the Mahāyāna? Grasping the Inconceivable | 107 |
| VI. Hermeneutics and debate | 109 |
| VII. The Bodhisattva | 111 |
| VIII. Points of Difference | 113 |
| IX. Recapitulation: the burden of terminology | 116 |
| Acknowledgements | 119 |
| Notes | 120 |
| Appendix I | 157 |
| The nine and the twelve categories/genres of the Buddha's teaching | 157 |
| Appendix II | 158 |
| Glossary of terms and titles | 158 |

The Evolution of the Bodhisattva Concept in Early Buddhist Canonical Literature 165

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction | 165 |
| Gautama as a Bodhisattva | 166 |
| Gautama's Marvellous Qualities | 171 |
| The Lineage of Former Buddhas | 179 |
| Gautama's Vow | 181 |
| Maitreya's Prediction | 186 |
| Conclusion | 193 |
| References | 194 |
| Notes | 196 |

Orality, writing and authority in South Asian Buddhism: Visionary Literature and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the Mahāyāna 209

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 209 |
| Orality in Early Buddhism | 212 |
| Writing and the Survival of the Mahāyāna | 215 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Sacred Texts and Sacred Sites | 216 |
| Writing and the Visual | 221 |
| The Buddha-Vacana and Strategies of Legitimation in the Mahāyāna | 225 |
| Visionary Literature and Grounds for Legitimacy | 230 |
| Conclusion | 235 |
| Notes | 237 |

Preface

This book brings together six essays on the origin and history of the bodhisattva ideal and the emergence of the Mahāyāna.

The essays approach the subject from different perspectives—from scholarly examinations of the terms in the Nikāyas and Āgamas to the relationship of the bodhisattva ideal and the arahant ideal within the broader context of the social environment in which Mahāyāna emerged and further developments that lead to the formulation of the fully fledged bodhisattva path. As such, the collection provides a good overview for a wider Buddhist readership of the history of changes that eventually led to the emergence of the Mahāyāna.

The essays are revised versions of earlier articles published in various sources. In this collection, they are mainly arranged in order of ease of understanding. The first essays can be read by a general reader who has a basic knowledge of Buddhism, while the last essays are written mostly for an academic specialist readership and therefore assume more knowledge of modern scientific theories of the history of Buddhism. Despite being less accessible, parts of these essays will also be of interest to a general reader and will serve as a good introduction into the world of modern scientific scholarship on Buddhism.

Due to the essays being contributed by various authors there might be some internal inconsistency with regards spelling and other conventions.

The BPS is grateful to the authors of these essays for kindly contributing them to be included in this collection. We also thank Judy Caughley for her kind help in proofreading and editing these essays.

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Abbreviations

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Pāli Canon are from the roman script edition of the Pāli Text Society.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| A | Āṅguttara Nikāya (PTS edition page number). |
| Abhidh-k | <i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i> |
| AN | Āṅguttara Nikāya (Book & Sutta Number) |
| ARIRIAB | <i>Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University</i> |
| BCE | Before Christian Era |
| BHSD | Franklin Edgerton, <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary</i> . Vol. II: <i>Dictionary</i> . [New Haven, 1953] Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972. |
| BMSC | Jens Braarvig (General Editor). <i>Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection: Buddhist Manuscripts, Vols. I-III</i> . Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2000–2006. |
| Bv | Buddhavaṃsa |
| CBETA | Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association |
| CE | Christian Era |
| D | Dīgha Nikāya (PTS edition page number). |
| D | Derge edition (Only used a few times in the notes to Bhikkhu Anālayo's essay.) |
| DĀ | Dīrgha-āgama (T 1) |
| DN | Dīgha Nikāya (Sutta Number) |
| Dhp-a | <i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> |
| EĀ | Ekottarika-āgama (T 125) |
| EB | <i>The Eastern Buddhist</i> |
| E ^e | PTS edition |
| EnB | Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Editor in Chief), <i>Encyclopedia of Buddhism</i> . 2 vols. (Macmillan Reference, 2004). |
| ERE | James Hastings (ed.), <i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> , Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Vols. I–XII, 1908–1921. |
| It | Itivuttaka |
| J | Jātaka (story number) |
| Ja | Jātaka (verses and commentary) |
| JIABS | <i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i> |
| JPTS | Journal of the Pali Text Society |
| JRAS | <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> |
| Kv | Kathāvatthu |
| M | Majjhima Nikāya (PTS edition page number). |
| MĀ | Madhyama-āgama (T 26) |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| MN | Majjhima Nikāya (Sutta Number) |
| PED | T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. <i>The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary</i> . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul /The Pali Text Society, 1972. |
| PTS | Pāli Text Society |
| Ps | <i>Papañcasūdanī</i> |
| Q | Peking edition |
| S | Samyutta Nikāya (PTS edition page number). |
| SĀ | Samyukta-āgama (T 99) |
| SĀ ² | 'other' Samyukta-āgama (T 100) |
| Sn | Suttanipāta |
| SN | Samyutta Nikāya (Book & Sutta Number) |
| SHT | Sander, Lore et al. <i>Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden</i> , Teil V, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1985. |
| Th | Theragāthā |
| Th-a | <i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i> |
| Ud | Udāna |
| Vin | Vinaya-piṭaka |
| T | Taisho edition (CBETA) |

Arahants, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas¹

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Competing Buddhist Ideals

The arahant ideal and the bodhisattva ideal are often considered the respective guiding ideals of Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. This assumption is not entirely correct, for the Theravāda tradition has absorbed the bodhisattva ideal into its framework and thus recognizes the validity of both arahantship and buddhahood as objects of aspiration. It would therefore be more accurate to say that the arahant ideal and the bodhisattva ideal are the respective guiding ideals of Early Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

It is important to recognize that these ideals, as they have come down to us, originate from different bodies of literature stemming from different periods in the historical development of Buddhism. If we don't take this fact into account and simply compare these two ideals as described in Buddhist canonical texts, we might assume that the two were originally expounded by the historical Buddha himself, and we might then suppose that the Buddha—living and teaching in the Ganges plain in the 5th century B.C.E.—offered his followers a choice between them, as if to say: “This is the arahant ideal, which has such and such features; and that is the bodhisattva ideal, which has such and such features. Choose whichever one you like.”² The Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (the Lotus Sūtra), give the impression that the Buddha *did* teach both ideals. Such sūtras, however, certainly are not archaic. To the contrary, they are relatively late attempts to schematize the different types of Buddhist practice that had evolved over a period of roughly four hundred years after the Buddha's parinirvāna.

The most archaic Buddhist texts—the Pāli *Nikāyas* and their counterparts from other early schools (preserved most fully in the Chinese *Āgamas*)—depict the ideal for the Buddhist disciple as the arahant. The Mahāyāna sūtras, composed a few centuries later in a

distinctly Buddhist form of Sanskrit, depict the ideal for the Mahāyāna follower as the bodhisattva. Now some people argue that because the arahant is the ideal of Early Buddhism, while the bodhisattva is the ideal of later Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Mahāyāna must be a more advanced or highly developed type of Buddhism, a more ultimate teaching compared to the simpler, more basic teaching of the *Nikāyas*. That is indeed an attitude common among Mahāyānists, which I will call “Mahāyāna elitism.” There is an opposing attitude common among conservative advocates of the *Nikāyas*, an attitude that I will call “Nikāya purism,” which rejects all later developments in the history of Buddhist thought as deviation and distortion, a fall away from the “pristine purity” of the ancient teaching. Taking the arahant ideal alone as valid, Nikāya purists reject the bodhisattva ideal, sometimes forcefully.

In this essay I try to find a point of view that can do justice to both perspectives, that of the *Nikāyas* and the early Mahāyāna sūtras, to fashion a hermeneutic that can accommodate their respective strengths without falling into a soft and easy syncretism, blotting out conceptual dissonances, or abandoning faithfulness to the historical records. Yet I also believe we must recognize that these records are by no means crystal clear, that they cannot be treated invariably as verbatim transcripts of teachings, and that they are unlikely to be free of bias. This is by no means easy. It is much simpler to adopt either the standpoint of “Nikāya purism” or of “Mahāyāna elitism” and hold to it without flinching.

The problem with these two standpoints, however, is that both are obliged to neglect facts that are discomfoting to their respective points of view. Although I am ordained as a Theravāda Buddhist monk, in this paper I am not going to be defending the opinions of any particular school of Buddhism or trying to uphold a sectarian point of view. My first purpose is to draw out from the texts what they say explicitly, and *also what they imply*, about these two competing ideals of the Buddhist life. At the end, when I draw my conclusions, I will clearly state them as such, and they will be entirely my own. Sometimes I will not be drawing conclusions but instead raising questions, pointing to problems in the history of Buddhism that I am acutely aware of but cannot solve. It is quite possible that what I consider a nuanced and balanced point of view will draw fire from partisan advocates on both sides of the divide.

Looking to the Buddha as the Ideal

I want to start by making what I think is an extremely important but seldom made observation, namely, that both types of texts—the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas* on the one hand, and the Mahāyāna sūtras on the other—are in a sense *looking to the Buddha himself as the ideal*. That is, it is not the case that Early Buddhism overlooks the Buddha and instead takes his disciples as the ideal, while Mahāyāna Buddhism comes to the rescue and recovers what the “Hinayanists” had missed, namely, the inspirational impetus imparted by the Buddha himself. Rather, I want to maintain that followers of both forms of Buddhism—and the authoritative texts from which both forms of Buddhism develop—are looking upon the Buddha as the exemplary figure that a true follower of the Dharma should emulate.

The two differ primarily in so far as they view the Buddha from two different perspectives. I will use an analogy to illustrate this and then provide a fuller explanation. The Buddha Hall here at our monastery has two entrances situated on either side of the Buddha image. If one looks at the image after entering the hall by the west entrance, the Buddha appears in one way; the angle highlights certain characteristics of the face. If one looks at the image after entering the hall by the east entrance, the Buddha appears in a different way; the angle highlights other characteristics of the face. I see this as a fitting simile for the way the two traditions view the Buddha and his enlightenment. I see both the early suttas of the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas* and the Mahāyāna sūtras as giving us different perspectives on the Buddha and his enlightenment, and thus as offering different understandings of what it means to be a true follower of the Buddha.

I would briefly characterize their difference by saying that the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas* give us a “historical-realistic perspective” on the Buddha, while the Mahāyāna sūtras give us a “cosmic-metaphysical perspective.” By using these terms, I am not intending to use the *Nikāyas* to trump the Mahāyāna sūtras—though naturally I hold they are more likely to be closer to the Buddha’s own verbal teachings. Rather, I am just trying to characterize the standpoints that they use to look at the Buddha and interpret his significance for the world. These two perspectives then ‘define’ what the Buddha accomplished through his enlightenment. When we adopt the historical-realistic perspective, the Buddha’s significance lies in the fact that he was the first person in

this historical era to become an arahant and to proclaim to others the path to arahantship. However, though being an arahant, he was what we might call “an arahant with differences.” Moreover, these differences were not regarded as merely incidental, but as substantial enough to eventually elevate him to a distinct level, that of the *Bhagavā*, a world teacher, one who towered above all the other arahants by virtue of his personal qualities and his unique function.

These differences called out for explanation, and thus they opened the door, so to speak, to the “cosmic-metaphysical perspective” on the Buddha as a way to account for them. Once this door was opened, the Buddha was seen by the diverse Indian Buddhist traditions, both early and late, as the one who brought to consummation a long career extending over countless eons, who passed through cosmic periods in which he sacrificed himself in various way, many times, for the good of others: this is the *cosmic* aspect of that perspective. Thus the Buddha begins to come into the picture as the culmination of the bodhisattva path. Again, in the quest to find a more philosophical understanding of the nature of the Buddha, he was seen as the one who arrived at ultimate reality. In the early period he achieved this status by virtue of his cognition of the vital salvific truths; at a somewhat later stage he came to be seen as the one who embodies ultimate reality, a viewpoint already foreshadowed in some early texts that speak of the Buddha as one who is *dhammabhūta*, “who has become the Dhamma.” At a later stage he is said to be called the Tathāgata in the sense that he has come from Suchness (*tathā + āgata*) and gone to Suchness (*tathā + gata*), and yet abides nowhere: this is the *metaphysical* aspect of that perspective, which became characteristic of the Mahāyāna.

The Perspective of the Nikāyas

As I indicated above, there is a sense in which both the *Nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna sūtras take it as their project to demonstrate what is required of one who wants “to follow in the footsteps of the Master.” But they take up this project from these two different standpoints. I will explain first the standpoint of the *Nikāyas* and then the standpoint of the Mahāyāna sūtras.

The *Nikāyas* begin with our common human condition and depict the Buddha *as starting from within this same human condition*. That is, for the *Nikāyas*, the Buddha starts off as a human being sharing fully in our humanity. He takes birth among us as a man subject to the frailties and limitations of human life. As he grows up, he is confronted with inevitable old age, sickness, and death, which reveal to him the deep misery that perpetually lies hidden behind the glittering facade of youth, health, and life, mocking our brightest joys. Like many other thoughtful Indians of his time, he seeks a way to liberation from life's afflictions—and as he tells it, he seeks liberation primarily *for himself*, not with some grand aim of saving the world. He goes forth into the homeless life, becomes an ascetic, and engages in a relentless struggle for deliverance. Finally, after numerous wrong turns, he finds the correct path, follows it through its stages, and attains the bliss of *nirvāna*. After his attainment, he considers whether he should make the path available to others, and *his first impulse is to remain silent*. Note that he *almost* follows the route of a *paccekabuddha*, one who gains enlightenment without a teacher and does not attempt to convey his realization to others. It is only when the deity Brahmā Sahampati entreats him to take up the task of teaching that he leaves the bliss of seclusion to begin his long career of sharing the path with others. His major achievement is to have attained *nirvāna*, the state free from all bondage and suffering. This is the great goal, the final end of all spiritual striving, the peace beyond all the anxiety and unrest of the ordinary human condition. By teaching the path, the Buddha makes this goal available to others, and those who follow the path reach the same goal that he himself attained.

The Buddha is the first of the arahants, while those who reach the goal by following his path also become arahants. In the verse of homage to the Buddha, it is said: “*Iti pi so Bhagavā Arahamaṃ ...—The Blessed One is an arahant ...*” Shortly after his enlightenment, while walking to Benares to meet the five monks, a wanderer stopped the Buddha and asked who he was. The Buddha replied: “I am the arahant in the world, I am the supreme teacher” (*ahañhi arahā loke, ahaṃ satthā anuttaro*; MN 26/M I 171). Thus the Buddha declares himself first of all to be an arahant. The defining mark of an arahant is the attainment of *nirvāna* in this present life. The word “arahant” was not coined by the Buddha but was current even before he

appeared on the Indian religious scene. The word is derived from a verb *arahati*, meaning “to be worthy,” and thus means a person who is truly worthy of veneration and offerings. Among Indian spiritual seekers in the Buddha’s time, the word was used to denote a person who had attained the ultimate goal, for this is what made one worthy of veneration and offerings. From the perspective of the *Nikāyas*, the ultimate goal—the goal in strict doctrinal terms—is nirvāna, and the goal in human terms is arahantship, the state of a person who has attained nirvāna in this present life. The Buddha’s enlightenment is significant because it marked the first realization of nirvāna within this historical epoch. We might say that the Buddha rises above the horizon of history as an arahant; in his historical manifestation he dawns upon human consciousness as an arahant.

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha makes the path to enlightenment available to many others. Enlightenment is valued because it is the gateway to the ultimate freedom of nirvāna. In the *Nikāyas*, we find several descriptions of the process by which the Buddha attained enlightenment, and there are corresponding texts that describe the disciples’ process of attaining enlightenment in the same terms. In MN 26, the Buddha says that “being myself subject to birth, ageing, sickness, and death, I attained the unborn, ageless, sickness-free, deathless, supreme security from bondage, nibbāna” (M I 167). A few months later, when he taught the Dhamma to his first five disciples, he says of them: “When those monks were instructed and guided by me, being subject to birth, ageing, sickness, and death, they attained the unborn, ageless, sickness-free, deathless, supreme security from bondage, nibbāna” (M I 173). Thus the attainment of these monks is described in exactly the same terms that the Buddha uses to describe his own attainment. Again, in several suttas—MN 4, MN 19, MN 36—the Buddha describes his attainment of enlightenment as involving two main stages. First comes the attainment of the four jhānas. Second, during the three parts of the night, he realized three higher knowledges: the recollection of past lives, the knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings according to their karma, and the knowledge of the destruction of the *āsava*s, the primordial defilements that sustain the round of rebirths. Now several suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 27, MN 51, MN 53) describe the enlightenment of the disciple in just this way as the attainment of the four jhānas and realization of the three higher

knowledges. While not all disciples attained the jhānas and most probably did not attain the first two higher knowledges, these achievements seemed to mark an ideal standard within the early Saṅgha—a standard that the Buddha and the great arahants shared in common.

At SN 22:58, the Buddha says that both the Tathāgata and the arahant disciple are alike in being liberated from the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness. So, the Buddha asks, what is the difference between them? The answer he gives points to temporal priority as the distinction: the Tathāgata is the originator of the path, the producer of the path, the one who declares the path. He is the knower of the path, the discoverer of the path, the expounder of the path. His disciples dwell following the path and become possessed of it afterwards. But, this sutta asserts, they both walk the same path and attain the same final goal.

Thus, according to this sutta and others of the same genre, the Buddha is distinguished from the arahant disciples, not by some categorical difference in their respective attainments, but by his role: he is the first one in this historical epoch to attain liberation, and he serves as the incomparable teacher in making known the way to liberation. He has skills in teaching that even the most capable of his disciples cannot match, but with regard to their world-transcending attainments, in relation to the goal of the Dharma, both the Buddha and the arahants are *buddha*, “enlightened,” in that they have comprehended the truths that should be comprehended. They are both *nibbuto*, in that they have extinguished the defilements and thereby attained the peace of nirvāna. They are both *svvimutta*, fully liberated. They have fully understood the truth of suffering; they have abandoned craving, the origin of suffering; they have realized nirvāna, the cessation of suffering; and they have completed the practice of the noble eightfold path, the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

As the first to accomplish all these worthy achievements, the Buddha fulfills two functions. First, he serves as an example, the supreme example; almost every aspect of his life is exemplary, but above all, his very person demonstrates the possibility of attaining perfect freedom from the fetters of the mind, complete release from suffering, release from the pitfalls of birth and death. Second, as aforesaid,

he serves as the guide, the one who knows the path and can teach it in its most intricate details. As the guide, he constantly exhorts his disciples to make a dedicated effort to attain the ultimate goal, nirvāna. He admonishes them to strive as diligently as a man whose turban is on fire would strive to put out the fire. The fires of the human heart are greed, hatred, and delusion; their extinction is nirvāna. Those who extinguish greed, hatred, and delusion are arahants.

How the Buddha is Distinguished from Other Arahants

Nevertheless, it would hardly be correct to say that temporal priority is *the only thing* that distinguishes the Buddha from the arahants. To bring out the difference, I want to take two stock formulas that occur many times in the texts, one for the Buddha and one for the arahants. I already quoted the opening of the Buddha formula; now let me take it in full: “The Blessed One is an arahant, a perfectly enlightened one, possessed of true knowledge and conduct, a fortunate one, a knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, enlightened, the Blessed One.”

There are nine epithets here. Of these nine, four are also used for arahant disciples: arahant, possessed of true knowledge and conduct, a fortunate one, enlightened; five are used exclusively for the Buddha: perfectly enlightened one, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Blessed One. Note that of these five, two explicitly refer to the Buddha’s significance for others: “unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed” and “teacher of devas and humans.” This aspect is also likely to be implied by the word “Bhagavā,” whose exclusive use in relation to the Buddha seems to highlight his role as a world teacher. Even the epithets signifying knowledge are intended to establish him as a reliable authority; that is, by reason of his wisdom or knowledge, he is someone whom others can trust as a source of guidance. So when the Buddha is designated a *sammā sambuddha*, “a perfectly enlightened one,” this highlights not only the fullness of his enlightenment, but his authority and reliability as a spiritual teacher.

The formula for the arahant reads thus: “Here a monk is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, who has lived the spiritual life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, one completely liberated through final knowledge.” Now all these epithets are true for the Buddha as well, but the Buddha is not described in this way; for these terms emphasize the attainment of one’s own liberation, and the Buddha is extolled, not primarily as the one who has attained his own liberation, but as the one who opens the doors of liberation for others. That is, even in the archaic suttas of the *Nikāyas*, an “other-regarding” significance is already being subtly ascribed to the Buddha’s status that is not ascribed to the arahant.

While the content of the Buddha’s enlightenment, according to the *Nikāyas*, does not qualitatively differ from that of other arahants, it plays a different role in what we might call the cosmic scheme of salvation. The Buddha’s enlightenment has an essentially “other-directed” component built into it from the start. By virtue of attaining enlightenment, the Buddha serves as the great teacher who “opens the doors to the Deathless.” AN 1:170/A I 22 says he is “the one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings.” MN 19/M I 117–18 compares him to a kind man who leads a herd of deer (signifying sentient beings) from a place of danger to a place of safety; MN 34 compares him to a wise cowherd who leads his cows—the noble disciples—safely across the river. According to MN 35/M I 235, the Buddha is honoured by other arahants because he is one who, having attained enlightenment himself, teaches the Dhamma for the sake of enlightenment; having attained peace, he teaches for the sake of peace; having attained nirvāna, he teaches for the sake of nirvāna. He is perfect in all respects, and the most important of his perfections is his ability to teach the Dhamma in ways that are best suited to the capacities of those who come to him for guidance. To this end, he possesses the ten Tathāgata powers (*dasa tathāgatabalāni*) and four kinds of fearlessness (*cattāri vesārajāni*), by reason of which “he claims the herd-leader’s place, roars his lion’s roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the wheel of Brahmā” (MN 112; I 69–72). His teaching is always exactly suited to the capacities of those who seek his help, and when they follow his instructions, they receive

favourable results, whether it be merely the gain of faith or the attainment of liberation.

Other arahants can certainly teach, and many do teach groups of disciples. Nevertheless, as teachers they do not compare with the Buddha. This is so in at least two respects: first, the Dhamma they teach others is one that comes from the Buddha, and thus ultimately the Buddha is the source of their wisdom; and second, their skills in teaching never match in all respects the skills of the Buddha, who is the only one who knows the path in its entirety. The Buddha can function so effectively as a teacher because his attainment of enlightenment—the knowledge of the four noble truths which culminates in the destruction of the defilements—entails the acquisition of several other types of knowledge that are considered special assets of a Buddha. Chief among these, as mentioned just above, are the ten Tathāgata powers, which include the knowledge of the diverse inclinations of beings (*sattānaṃ nānādbhimuttikataṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇaṃ*) and the knowledge of the degree of maturity of the faculties of other beings (*parasattānaṃ parapuggalānaṃ indriyaparopariyattaṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇaṃ*). Such types of knowledge enable the Buddha to understand the mental proclivities and capacities of any person who comes to him for guidance and to teach that person in the particular way that will prove most beneficial, taking full account of his or her character and personal circumstances. He is thus “the unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed.” Whereas arahant disciples are limited in their communicative skills, the Buddha can communicate effectively with beings in many other realms of existence, as well as with people from many different walks of life. This skill singles him out as “the teacher of devas and humans.”

Thus we can see the respects in which the Buddha and disciple arahants share certain qualities, above all their liberation from all defilements and from all bonds connecting them to the round of rebirths. And we also see how the Buddha is distinguished from his disciples, namely by: (1) the priority of his attainment, (2) his function as teacher and guide, and (3) his acquisition of certain qualities and modes of knowledge that enable him to function as teacher and guide. He also has a physical body endowed with thirty-two excellent characteristics and with other marks of physical beauty. These inspire confidence in those who rely on beauty of form.

The Bodhisattva Problem

I said above that each extreme attitude—“Nikāya purism” and “Mahāyāna elitism”—neglects facts that are discomfiting to their respective points of view. “Mahāyāna elitism” neglects the fact that in his historical manifestation, so far as we can determine through the early records of his teachings, the Buddha did not teach the bodhisattva path. This path emerges only in documents that start to appear at least a century after his passing. What the Buddha consistently taught, according to the early records, is the attainment of nirvāna by reaching arahantship. The problem besetting “Nikāya purism” is the figure of the Buddha himself; for in the Buddha we meet a person who, while an arahant, did not attain arahantship as the disciple of a Buddha *but as a Buddha*. In the *Nikāyas* themselves, he is depicted not merely as the first of the arahants but as one member of a class of beings—the Tathāgatas—who possess unique characteristics that set them apart from all other beings including their arahant disciples. The *Nikāyas*, moreover, regard the Tathāgatas as supreme in the entire order of sentient beings: “To whatever extent, monks, there are beings, whether footless or with two feet, four feet, or many feet, whether having form or formless, whether percipient or non-percipient, or neither percipient nor non-percipient, the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One is declared the best among them” (AN 4:34/A II 34).

Now since the Buddha is distinguished from his liberated disciples in the ways sketched above, it seems almost self-evident that in his past lives he must have followed a preparatory course sufficient to issue in such an exalted state, namely, the course of a bodhisattva. This conclusion is, in fact, a point of common agreement among the Buddhist schools, both those derived from Early Buddhism and those belonging to the Mahāyāna. According to all Buddhist traditions, attainment of the supreme enlightenment of a Buddha requires that an aspirant make a deliberate resolution and fulfill the spiritual perfections, the *pāramīs* or *pāramitās*; and it is a bodhisattva who consummates the practice of these perfections. However, the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*, the most ancient texts, are strangely silent about this very issue.³ In the *Nikāyas*, the Buddha does refer to himself as having been a *bodhisatta* in the period prior to his enlightenment: in his immediately preceding life, when he dwelled in

the Tusita heaven, and during the period of his final life, as Gotama of the Sakyan clan, before his enlightenment.⁴ But he says nothing to suggest that he had been *consciously* following a deliberate course of conduct aimed at the attainment of buddhahood. Moreover, soon after his enlightenment, when the Buddha considered whether or not to teach the Dhamma, he says that he first inclined to “dwell at ease” (*apposukkatāya cittaṃ namati* MN 26/M I 168; Vin I 5), that is, *not* to teach, which suggests that even after his enlightenment he might not have fulfilled the function of a *sammā sambuddha*, but could have become a *paccekabuddha*, the so called “silent buddha” who does not try to share his realization with the world.

There are, however, other passages strewn across the *Nikāyas* that prevent us from definitively drawing the conclusion that the Buddha somehow stumbled upon buddhahood merely by chance or that his hesitation to teach implied a genuine possibility of choice. These passages suggest, to the contrary, that his attainment of buddhahood was already prepared for in his previous births. Though they do not say that in his past lives he was deliberately following a bodhisattva path to attain buddhahood, the *Nikāyas* do depict him as dwelling in the Tusita heaven in his immediately past existence (as I noted just above), destined to become a fully enlightened Buddha in his next life as Gotama of the Sakyan clan, and this implies that in his past lives he must have fulfilled the most demanding prerequisites to take on such an exalted role, to become the loftiest and most highly venerated being in all the world. When he descends into his mother’s womb, a great measureless light appears in the world surpassing the light of the devas; and such a light appears again at his birth. When he is born, he is first received by deities, and streams of water pour forth from the sky to wash him and his mother. Immediately upon his birth, he takes seven steps and declares himself the best in the world (MN 123/M III 120-23). The gods sing songs of delight, declaring that the bodhisattva has arisen for the welfare and happiness of the human world (Sn 686). Such passages, of course, could be seen as later additions to the *Nikāyas*, indicative of a stage when the “Buddha legend” was already making inroads upon the most ancient texts. Nevertheless, given that the law of cause and result operates in the spiritual dimensions of the human domain as much as in any other domain—and given, too, the extraordinary stature that the early texts ascribe to a Buddha—it seems virtually

impossible that at any point in its history of self-reflection Buddhist tradition could have regarded someone as capable of this attainment without an adequate preparatory background, that is, without having made a deliberate effort over many lives to reach the supreme state of buddhahood.

Despite such considerations, in the *Nikāyas* the Buddha is never seen teaching others to enter a bodhisattva path. Whenever he urges his monastic disciples to strive for any goal, it is to strive for arahantship, for liberation in this very life, for nirvāna. Whenever monastic disciples come to the Buddha to make inquiries about the practice, they ask for guidance in following the path to arahantship. The monks that the Buddha praises in the midst of the Saṅgha are those who have attained arahantship. We never read of a distinction between monks following a path to arahantship and monks on a bodhisattva path. Mention is often made of lay disciples who attain the three lower stages of liberation, from stream-entry to non-returning. Those who lack the potential for world-transcending attainments aim at a heavenly rebirth or at a fortunate rebirth back into the human realm. But we do not read of a lay disciple treading the bodhisattva path, much less of a dichotomy between monastic arahants and lay bodhisattvas.

We need not, however, simply take the *Nikāyas* at face value; we can raise questions about the texts themselves. Why is it that in the *Nikāyas* we never find any instance of a disciple coming to the Buddha to ask for guidance in following a bodhisattva path to buddhahood? And why is the Buddha never seen exhorting his followers to take up the bodhisattva path? The questions themselves seem perfectly legitimate, but none of the answers that one might offer is perfectly satisfactory.

One explanation that might be given is that there were instances when this happened but they were filtered out by the compilers of the texts because such teachings were not consistent with the teachings aimed at arahantship. This hypothesis seems unlikely because, if discourses on the path to buddhahood had the imprint of genuine teachings of the Buddha, it is improbable that the monks compiling the texts would have omitted them. Another explanation is that in the earliest phase of Buddhism, the *pre-textual* phase, the Buddha was simply regarded as the first arahant who taught the path to arahantship and he did not differ significantly

from those among his arahant disciples who possessed the three higher types of knowledge and the *iddhis*, the supernormal powers. According to this account, the *Nikāyas* are the product of several generations of monastic elaboration and thus already show traces of the apotheosis of the Buddha, his elevation to an exalted (but not yet superhuman) status. On this hypothesis, if we could take a time machine back to the Buddha's own time, we would find that the Buddha differed from the other arahants mainly in the priority of his attainment and in certain skills he possessed as a teacher, but these differences would not be as great as even the old *Nikāyas* make them out to be. This position, however, seems to strip away from the Buddha that which is most distinctive about him: his uncanny ability to reach deep into the hearts of those who came to him for guidance and teach them in the unique way suitable for their characters and situations. This ability betokens a depth of compassion, a spirit of selfless service, that harmonizes better with the later concept of the bodhisattva than with the canonical concept of the arahant as we see it portrayed, for example, in the verses of the Theragāthā or the *muni* poems of the *Suttanipāta*.

In the final analysis, I have to confess that I cannot provide a cogent explanation. In view of the fact that in later times many Buddhists in Theravāda lands as well as in the Mahāyāna world have been inspired by the bodhisattva ideal, it is perplexing that no teachings about a bodhisattva path or bodhisattva practices are included in the discourses regarded as coming down from the most archaic period of Buddhist literary history. In any case, the texts that we do inherit from the early period do not show as steep a difference between the Buddha's "other-regarding" functions and the so-called "self-enlightenment" of the arahants as later tradition makes them out to be.

We find in the *Nikāyas* a fair amount of emphasis on altruistic activity aimed at sharing the Dhamma with others. Most of this emphasis comes from the Buddha himself in the form of injunctions to his disciples, but we have little reason to doubt that this advice was heeded. Thus, several texts distinguish people into four types: those concerned only with their own good, those concerned only with others' good, those concerned with the good of neither, and those concerned with the good of both; these texts praise as best those who are devoted to the good of both. And what is meant by

being devoted to the good of both is practicing the noble eightfold path and teaching others to practise it; observing the five precepts and encouraging others to observe them; working to eliminate greed, aversion, and delusion and encouraging others to eliminate them (AN 4:96–99/A IV 95–99). In other suttas the Buddha urges all those who know the four foundations of mindfulness to teach their relatives and friends about them; and the same is said about the four factors of stream-entry and the four noble truths (SN 47:48, 55:16–17, 56:26). In the beginning of his ministry, he exhorts his disciples to go forth and preach the Dhamma “out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings” (Vin I 21).

Among the important qualities of an outstanding monk are abundant learning and skill in expounding the Dharma, two qualities that are directly relevant to the benefiting of others. Also, we must remember that the Buddha established a monastic order bound by rules and regulations designed to make it function as a harmonious community, and these rules often demand the renouncing of self-interest for the sake of the larger whole. Regarding the lay followers, the Buddha praises those who practise for their own good, for the good of others, and for the good of the whole world (see especially AN 8:25/A IV 220–22). Many prominent lay followers converted their colleagues and neighbours to the Dharma and guided them in right practice. Thus, we can see that while Early Buddhism emphasizes that each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own destiny, that no one can purify another or rescue another from the miseries of *saṃsāra*, it includes an altruistic dimension that distinguished it from most of the other religious systems that flourished alongside it in northern India. This altruistic dimension might be seen as the “seed” from which the bodhisattva doctrine developed and thus as one of the elements in ancient Buddhism that contributed to the emergence of the Mahāyāna.

The Transition towards the Full-fledged Bodhisattva Concept

Perhaps for a full-fledged bodhisattva doctrine to emerge in Buddhism, something more was needed than the concept of the Buddha that we find in the ancient texts of the *Nikāyas*. Thus the common project of comparing the arahant of the *Nikāyas* with the bodhisattva figure of the Mahāyāna sūtras may be somewhat misguided. As I see it, one of the factors that underlies the emergence of the well-developed bodhisattva doctrine was the transformation of the archaic Buddha concept of the *Nikāyas* into the Buddha figure of Buddhist religious faith and legend, which took place mainly in the age of Sectarian Buddhism, that is, between the phase of Early Buddhism represented by the *Nikāyas* and the rise of early Mahāyāna Buddhism. During this period, two significant developments of the Buddha concept occurred. First, the number of Buddhas was increased; and second, the Buddhas came to be endowed with increasingly more exalted qualities. These developments occurred somewhat differently in the different Buddhist schools, but certain common features united them.

The *Nikāyas* already mention six Buddhas preceding Gotama and one, Metteyya (Skt: Maitreya), to follow him. Since cosmic time is without any discernible beginning or conceivable end, the inference was drawn that there must have been even earlier Buddhas, and thus the number of past Buddhas was increased. Stories about some of these entered into circulation and brought them to life. Since space was likewise unbounded, with world systems like our own spread out in “the ten directions,” some schools posited the *present* existence of Buddhas in other world systems beyond our own—Buddhas still alive whom one might worship and, by means of meditative power, actually see with contemplative vision. While the school derived from the Pāli Canon held to the thesis that Buddhas arise only in our own world system, other schools—most notably the Mahāsāṅghikas—proposed that Buddhas were spread out throughout the boundless cosmos and that they might be discerned by those with sufficient powers of mental concentration.

The texts of Sectarian Buddhism increased a Buddha’s faculties of knowledge until they eventually ascribed to him nothing short of

omniscience. He came to possess numerous miraculous powers. Eighteen special “Buddha-dharmas,” not mentioned in the old suttas, were added. Legends and stories entered into circulation describing the wonderful ways he taught and transformed others. Such stories did not mark a radical departure from the canonical view of the Buddha, for we find in the suttas reports of the Buddha’s wondrous powers, “the miracle of instruction” by which he teaches others exactly in the way needed to open their hearts to the Dharma. Thus in the suttas we read about his encounters with the serial killer *Āṅgulimāla*, the fierce demon *Āḷavaka*, the poor leper *Suppabuddha*, the angry brahmin *Bhāradvāja*. These stories increased exponentially, painting a picture of the Buddha as the incredibly resourceful teacher who redeems from misery and delusion people of every type. He breaks the pride of haughty brahmins; he brings consolation to distraught mothers and wretched widows; he dispels the complacency of proud warriors and beautiful courtesans; he outdoes clever scholars in debates and rival ascetics in feats of supernatural powers; he teaches avaricious millionaires the wonders of generosity; he inspires diligence in heedless monks; he wins the reverence of kings and princes.

As Buddhist devotees looked back on their deceased Master and pondered the question of what accounted for his extraordinary greatness, in no long time they realized that what was most outstanding about him was his boundless compassion. Not content with confining his compassionate concern for others to a single life, they saw it as spread out over innumerable lives in the chain of samsaric existence. Their creative imaginations thus gave birth to a vast treasury of stories about the Buddha’s previous births. These stories—the *Jātakas* or Birth Tales—told of how he had prepared himself for his mission as a Buddha by treading the path of a bodhisattva for unimaginable eons. The keynote of the most memorable of these stories is service and self-sacrifice. It was by serving others and sacrificing himself for their good that the bodhisattva earned the merits and acquired the virtues that entitled him to attain buddhahood. Thus, in Buddhist thought right across the schools of Early Buddhism, the altruistic dimension of the Buddha’s enlightenment came to the forefront, memorialized in stories and poetry and literally carved in stone—in pillars and monuments stretching from Afghanistan to Indonesia and Japan.

From this perspective, the Buddha's enlightenment was significant, not merely because it opened the path to nirvāna for many others, but because it consummated an eons-long career that began with an altruistic motivation and endured across many eons sustained by an altruistic resolve. During this career, it was held, the bodhisattva qualified himself for buddhahood by fulfilling certain supreme virtues, the *pāramīs* or *pāramitās*, which now took the place that the factors of the noble eightfold path held in Early Buddhism. This understanding of the Buddha, I must stress, was common to all the schools of Sectarian Buddhism, including the Theravāda.

During the age of Sectarian Buddhism, the Early Buddhist schools came to admit three roads to enlightenment, which in some schools were depicted (by a change of metaphor) as three vehicles: the vehicle of the disciple arahant, the *śrāvaka-yāna*, to be taken by the greatest number of disciples; the vehicle of the "solitary enlightened one" who attains realization without a teacher but does not teach, the *pratyekabuddha-yāna*, which is still more difficult; and the vehicle of the aspirant to buddhahood, the *bodhisattva-yāna*, also sometimes named after its fruit as the *buddha-yāna*. Once it became widespread in mainstream Indian Buddhism, the idea of the three careers was not only taken up by the Mahāyāna but was eventually also absorbed back into the schools of the elders, including the conservative school based at the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka. Thus we read in the later Pāli commentaries, such as those by Ācariya Dhammapāla and others, of three kinds of *bodhi*, each implying a distinct means to their attainment: the enlightenment of disciples, the enlightenment of *paccekabuddhas*, and the enlightenment of *sammā sambuddhas*.⁵

The Emergence of the Mahāyāna as the Bodhisattva-vehicle

Now at some point during this period, the altruistic interpretation of the Buddha's enlightenment that culminated in the concept of the bodhisattva path flowed back upon the Buddhist community and, for some members at least, took on a *prescriptive force*. We can speculate that as they reflected deeply on what it meant to be an ideal follower of the Buddha, certain Buddhist disciples concluded that to

follow in the Buddha's footsteps in the highest sense, it was no longer sufficient simply to walk the noble eightfold path aimed at the attainment of nirvāna. This was still seen as a valid option, an option that culminated in liberation for oneself and those one might immediately influence by teaching and example; but, they may have held, the Buddha himself had aimed at a state that would enable him to promote the welfare and happiness of many beings, "the hosts of devas and humans." Thus, these thinkers may have felt, the superior choice, the higher way to follow the Buddha, was to set out on the same quest that the Buddha had set for himself: by taking the vows of a bodhisattva and following the bodhisattva course. This would have marked the emergence of the *bodhisattva-yāna* as a conception of the *ideal* Buddhist way of life, the way binding upon those followers of the Enlightened One who wanted to emulate his example in all respects.

This ideal emerged from a different starting point than Early Buddhism. It was cast against a different visionary background. Whereas Early Buddhism, as we saw above, adopts the common human condition as its starting point, and even views the Buddha as initially subject to our shared human frailties, Mahāyāna Buddhism in its early phase takes as its starting point the long-range cosmic background to a Buddha's attainment of buddhahood. It looks back for inspiration to his first conception of the *bodhicitta*, his original vows, and his practice of the *pāramitās* over countless lives. Further, it treats these as the paradigm for practice. That is, it sees this process, not merely as a *description* of the path that a Buddha follows, but as a *recommendation* of the path that his true disciples could follow, perhaps even the path that they *should follow*. Later articulations of Mahāyāna saw this as the actualization of a potential for buddhahood already embedded deep within us, the *tathāgatagarbha* or "embryo of the Thus-Come One."

What comes next will be largely an exercise in imagination and speculation, but, given that the oldest Mahāyāna sūtras already depict a well-articulated understanding of the bodhisattva path, imagination and speculation may be the only resources available to us in attempting to reconstruct the emergence of a primeval form of the Mahāyāna, or better, a pre-Mahāyāna type of Mahāyāna. We can imagine a period when the *bodhisattva-yāna* had been consciously adopted by a growing number of Buddhists (probably first within

small circles of monks), who still sought to guide themselves by the teachings of the *Nikāya-Āgama* paradigm and the Jātaka stories dealing with the Buddha's past practice of the *pāramitās*. These devotees remained members of sectarian Buddhist communities and probably had not yet even become conscious of themselves as branching off to form a new tradition. They would not have thought of themselves as "Mahāyāna Buddhists," as we understand the term today, but simply as individuals and as communities pledged to follow the *bodhisattva-yāna*, which they might have designated the *mahāyāna* simply in the sense that it constituted a "great course" to enlightenment. However, although they may have tried to remain within the fold of mainstream Buddhism, once they began to openly propagate the bodhisattva ideal, they may have found themselves coming into open confrontation with those who adhered more strictly to the ideas and ideals of the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*. This confrontation would have heightened their sense of distinctness and thus led to their conscious amalgamation into communities revolving around a new vision of the Buddhist path and goal.

At this point they might have found that the teachings of the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*, which describe the practices needed to attain personal liberation from the round of birth and death, no longer met their needs. They would, of course, still have accepted these teachings as authoritative, since they stemmed directly from the Buddha, but they would also felt the need for scriptures rooted in the same authority—the authority of the Buddha—which yet provided detailed teachings about the practices and stages of the bodhisattva path, which aimed at nothing less than perfect buddhahood. It was to fill this need, presumably, that the Mahāyāna sūtras began to appear on the Indian Buddhist scene perhaps as far back as the second century B.C.E. Exactly how these sūtras were first composed and made their appearance is a matter about which contemporary scholarship is still largely in the dark;⁶ for all we have at our disposal are Mahāyāna sūtras that are fairly well developed and represent Mahāyāna Buddhism at what we might call "stage two" of its development. Unfortunately, we cannot use them to peer back into the more distant past and draw definitive conclusions about the very earliest stages of the Mahāyāna, when these sūtras were first starting to take shape, or even past that period, when Mahāyānist ideas were still in the stage of gestation, seeking articulation without yet having

come to expression in any literary documents.

There are two attitudes noticeable in the early Mahāyāna sūtras regarding the older paradigm based on the arahant ideal. One is to affirm it as valid for the typical Buddhist follower, while extolling the bodhisattva path as the appropriate vehicle for the person of excellent aspirations. This attitude treats the old arahant ideal, or the *śrāvaka* paradigm, with respect and admiration, while lavishing the greatest praise on the bodhisattva ideal. When this attitude is adopted, the two paths—together with the path to the enlightenment of a *pratyekabuddha*—become three valid vehicles, the choice of which is left to the disciple. The other attitude seen in the Mahāyāna sūtras is one of devaluation and denigration. It involves not simply comparing the path to arahantship unfavourably with the bodhisattva path (for all the Buddhist schools recognized the superiority of the bodhisattva's way to buddhahood), but belittling and ridiculing the old ideal of ancient Buddhism, sometimes treating it almost with contempt. The first attitude is seen in such early Mahāyāna texts as the *Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras. The latter in fact are depicted as being taught principally by the great arahant disciples such as Sāriputta and Subhūti.⁷ Over time, however, the second attitude became more prominent until we find such texts as the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, which ridicules the great disciples of the Buddha like Sāriputta, Upāli, and Puṅṅa Mantāniputta; or the *Aśokadattā Sūtra*, in which a young girl bodhisattva refuses to show respect to the great arahant disciples; or the *Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra*, which compares the nirvāna of the arahants to the wages of a hired laborer. In some sūtras, it is even said that arahants feel shame and reproach themselves for attaining arahantship, or that arahants are conceited and deluded. It is indisputable that the Mahāyāna sūtras often have passages of great depth and beauty. I believe, however, that a more conciliatory attitude towards the older form of Buddhism would have made the task of achieving harmony among different Buddhist schools today much easier than it is. Within the Theravāda school, the Mahāyāna teachings on the bodhisattva ideal and the practice of the *pāramitās* were incorporated into the later commentaries but never in a way that involved denigration of the older, more historical Buddhist goal of arahantship, which still remained paradigmatic for the great majority of Buddhists.

Breaking down Old Stereotypes

In this part of my presentation I want to use this historical analysis to break down old stereotypes and the prejudices that have divided followers of the two main contemporary forms of Buddhism. From there we can work towards a healthy rather than competitive integration of the two. The two main stereotypes are as follows:

(1) Arahants, and Theravādin Buddhists, are concerned exclusively with their own salvation as opposed to the benefit of others; they have a narrow fixation on personal liberation because they are “fearful of birth and death” and therefore have little compassion for others and don’t undertake activities intended to benefit them.

(2) Followers of the bodhisattva ideal, and Mahāyāna Buddhists, are so much involved in social projects aimed at benefitting others that they don’t take up the practice that the Buddha assigned to his disciples, namely, the taming of the mind and the development of insight. They have overwhelmed themselves with social duties and forsaken meditation practice.

I’ll take the two stereotypes in order, and begin with the ancient arahants. Although the Buddha was the pioneer in discovering the path to liberation, this does not mean that his arahant disciples just selfishly reaped the benefits of the path and did nothing for others. To the contrary, in the suttas we can see that many of them became great teachers in their own right who were capable of guiding others towards liberation. The best known among them are Sāriputta, Mahākaccāna, Moggallāna, and Ānanda. There was the monk Puṇṇa who went to the dangerous Sunāparanta country, risking his life to teach the Dhamma to the people there. There were such nuns as Khemā and Dhammadinnā, who were outstanding preachers, Paṭācārā, who was a master of the discipline, and many others. For four hundred years, the Buddhist texts were preserved orally, transmitted from teachers to pupils, and obviously thousands of monks and nuns had dedicated their lives to learning the texts and teaching them to their pupils, all for the purpose of preserving the good Dhamma and Vinaya and ensuring that it would last long in the world.

The example established by the Buddha's great arahant disciples has been the model for the followers of the arahant ideal throughout history. While those who pursue this ideal do not make such lofty vows as do followers of the bodhisattva ideal, they are inspired by the example of the Buddha and his great disciples to work for the spiritual and moral uplift of others to the best of their ability: by teaching, by example, and by direct spiritual influence, guided by the Buddha's command to "wander forth for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings."

The life pattern of a follower of the arahant ideal conforms in many respects to that of the Buddha. I take as an example those who may not necessarily have achieved arahantship itself but are practising within this framework and have reached some higher stage of spiritual accomplishment. In the early part of their lives, they may go to a forest monastery or to a meditation centre to train under a competent teacher. Then, after reaching a sufficient level of maturity to practise on their own, they will go into solitude to develop their practice for a period that might last five years or longer. At a certain point their achievements will start to exert an influence on others. They might start to teach on their own initiative, or their teacher might ask them to begin teaching, or prospective students might realize they have achieved some superior state and request guidance from them. From this point on, they will begin to teach, and in time they might become well respected spiritual teachers, with many disciples and many centres under their guidance.

In contrast to the image of "selfish personal liberation" that Mahāyāna Buddhists ascribe to the arahants and those following the *śrāvaka-yāna*, the most eminent masters of the Theravāda tradition often teach thousands of disciples, monastic and laity. Some may work ten or more hours a day. For example, in recent times, Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw established hundreds of meditation centres in Burma and presided over the Sixth Buddhist Council. Ajahn Chah had a main monastery and many branch monasteries in Thailand, one specifically for foreign monks. Ven. Pa Auk Sayadaw, U Pandita Sayadaw, and Bhante Gunaratana—present-day Theravāda meditation teachers—travel throughout the world conducting courses. Ajahn Maha Boowa, reputed to have been an arahant, supported sixty

hospitals in Thailand, and regularly visited them to console patients and distribute medicines. Those who are not competent to function as meditation teachers might still become masters of Buddhist texts and philosophy and devote themselves selflessly to guiding others in understanding the Dhamma, whether by training monks and nuns, by giving instructions to the laity, by teaching in Buddhist monastic schools, or by preaching in Buddhist temples.

From the Theravāda perspective, while social work is certainly praiseworthy, of all benefits that can be conferred on others the most precious benefit is the gift of the Dhamma. Thus the quest for liberation as an arahant is not a purely private undertaking but has a far-reaching influence and can make its impact felt upon a whole society. In the traditional Theravāda countries, before the corrupting influence of the West set in, the whole life of the community revolved around the Dhamma. The monks who meditated in the forests and mountains were the inspiration and model for the society; those who preached and taught in the villages helped to transmit the Dhamma to the people. The lay community, from the king down to the villagers, saw their principal duty to be the support of the Saṅgha. So the supreme goal of arahantship became the focal point for an entire social system inspired and sustained by devotion to the Dhamma.

Those who seek the goal of nirvāna do not wait until they become arahants before they start helping others. Within this system, giving is regarded as the foundation for all other virtues; it is the first basis of merit and the first of the ten pāramīs. Thus the Pāli scriptures, and monks in their preaching, encourage people to give to the best of their ability. Lay people support the Saṅgha with their simple material needs of food, robes, dwellings, and medicines. They also give generously to the poor and disadvantaged. In Sri Lanka, for example, blood donation campaigns are common on Buddhist holidays, and many people donate their eyes to eye banks and their bodily organs to medical schools for medical research after their death. I learned some time ago that in Sri Lanka more than 200 monks donated a kidney; this was done without any thought of remuneration or any other personal benefit but solely for the privilege of giving a bodily organ.

Monks with knowledge of the Dhamma and skill in speaking become preachers and teachers. Those with managerial skills might

become administrators of monasteries. The few who are strongly motivated to make the effort to win liberation in this very life dedicate their energy to meditation in forest hermitages. Accomplished meditation teachers will devote their time to teaching meditation and will also try to find time to develop their own practice. Sometimes they have to delay their own practice in order to fulfill their teaching duties.

So much for misunderstandings concerning the arahant ideal. Now for *the bodhisattva ideal*. It would be an oversimplification to assume that an aspirant on the bodhisattva forgoes all training on the path to liberation in order to devote their energy to social service. In the Mahāyāna sūtras and commentaries the foundation of the bodhisattva path is said to be the arising of the *bodhicitta* (*bodhicittotpāda*), the aspiration to supreme enlightenment. This usually arises only through diligent training in meditation. According to the authoritative sources on Mahāyāna Buddhist meditation, to generate the *bodhicitta*, one must systematically train the mind to perceive all beings as one's mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and arouse towards them boundless loving-kindness and great compassion, until such a perception becomes natural and spontaneous. This is not at all easy. Such an attainment cannot be achieved just by casually engaging in a little social service and then convincing oneself that one has aroused the *bodhicitta*.

It is true that the bodhisattva vows to work for the welfare of others in a broader way than the follower of the *śrāvaka* vehicle, but all such efforts are superficial if they are not motivated and supported by the true *bodhicitta*. Besides generating the aspirational *bodhicitta*, the bodhisattva must apply the *bodhicitta* through the practice of the six *pāramitās* and other great deeds of self-abnegation. The *pāramitās* begin with *dāna-pāramitā*, the perfection of giving. Social engagement can certainly be included under this category, as it involves giving others material gifts and the gift of security. But these gifts, as worthy as they are, do not equal in value the gift of the Dharma, which alone leads to the permanent extinction of suffering. To be qualified to give this gift requires skills that go beyond social service.

The next spiritual perfection is *sīla-pāramitā*, the perfection of morality. Social engagement can be included under the morality of altruistic action, acts that benefit others, but in most Mahāyāna

traditions it is expected that earnest followers of the bodhisattva path will undergo monastic ordination and take on the discipline of the Vinaya, the code of monastic rules; an exception is Japan, where the orthodox monastic lineage has vanished. While engaged in social service, a bodhisattva must also practise patience—patience in enduring difficult conditions, patience in enduring disregard and abuse from others; so he is fulfilling *keṣānti-pāramitā*, the perfection of patience. And the work of social service demands energy, which helps to fulfill the *virya-pāramitā*, the perfection of vigour. Thus social engagement can contribute towards the fulfilment of four of the six *pāramitās*.

But the bodhisattva must also fulfill the *dhyāna-pāramitā* and the *prajñā-pāramitā*, the perfections of meditation and wisdom, and these two perfections require the adoption of a contemplative lifestyle. The *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras say that *prajñāpāramitā* guides and directs the other five *pāramitās*, and the other five *pāramitās* become “perfections” or transcendent virtues only when they are connected with *prajñāpāramitā*. But *prajñāpāramitā* can only be attained through contemplative practice, by seeking out a lifestyle similar to that of one seeking arahantship.

The early Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra*, do not recommend that the novice monastic bodhisattva immerse himself in social work; rather, they point him to the forest and instruct him to devote his efforts to meditation. If we look at the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism, whether in India, China, or Tibet, we would see that the great Mahāyāna masters such as Nāgārjuna, Asanga, and Atīsha in India; Hui-neng, Zhi-yi, and Xuan-cang in China; Longchen, Gampopa, and Tsongkhapa in Tibet, were not renown for their engagement in social service but for their accomplishments as philosophers, scholars, and meditation masters. The Buddha himself achieved the highest attainments in meditation. Since bodhisattvas aim to become Buddhas, it is only natural that they should perfect the meditative skills that are characteristic of a Buddha.

Although the motivation and philosophical basis for followers of the bodhisattva vehicle differ from that of followers of the *śrāvaka* vehicle, the lifestyles of the two are not very different. The popular images of the withdrawn, solitary arahant, and the gregarious, super-active bodhisattva are fictions. In real life, the two resemble each

other much more than one would think. The arahants, and those who seek to attain arahantship, often work assiduously for the spiritual and material improvement of their fellow human beings. The bodhisattvas, and bodhisattva aspirants, often must spend long periods in solitary meditation cultivating the meditative skills that will be necessary for them to attain buddhahood. They will also have to study all the doctrines and the paths of the *śrāvaka* vehicle, yet without actualizing those paths. The bodhisattvas will have to learn to enter the meditative absorptions, practise them, and eventually master them. They will have to contemplate the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self and acquire insight into these three characteristics. They differ from *śrāvakas* in so far as a *śrāvaka* aims to use insight-knowledge to attain realization of nirvāna. A bodhisattva will link his or her practice of insight with the *bodhicitta* aspiration, the bodhisattva vows, and the spirit of great compassion. Sustained by these supports, a bodhisattva will be able to contemplate the nature of reality without attaining realization of nirvāna until he or she has matured all the qualities that come to perfection in buddhahood. Among these is the perfection of giving and the conferring of benefits on sentient beings. But the greatest gift that one can give is the gift of the Dharma, and the kindest benefit one can confer on sentient beings is teaching them the Dharma and guiding them in the Dharma. Though a bodhisattva can certainly engage in social service as an expression of his or her compassion, to reach the higher stages of the bodhisattva path the aspirant will require a different range of skills than is exercised in social engagement. The skills that they need are closer to those possessed by the arahant.

Towards a Healthy Integration of the Vehicles

In my own view, both paths (or vehicles)—the arahant path and the bodhisattva path—can be seen as valid expressions of the Buddha’s teaching. However, to be seen as valid they must both conform to certain formal criteria. In matters of principle, they must conform to such teachings as the four noble truths, the three characteristics, and dependent origination; and in matters of practice, they must embody ethical conduct and follow the scheme of the threefold training in

morality, concentration, and wisdom. Nevertheless, even when these criteria are fulfilled, we must further avoid any type of syncretism that leads to the denigration of the original teachings of the historical Buddha, regarding them as mere expedients or adaptations to the Indian religious climate of his age rendered irrelevant by teachings arisen at a later period. The kind of tolerance that is needed is one that respects the authenticity of Early Buddhism in so far as we can determine its nature from the oldest historical records, yet can also recognize the capacity of Buddhism to undergo *genuine* historical transformations that bring to manifestation hidden potentials of the ancient teaching, transformations that enrich the tradition springing from the Buddha as its fountainhead.

When we adopt this approach, we can truly venerate those practitioners who work diligently to realize the final goal of the Dharma here and now, to reach nirvāna, the extinction of suffering, by following the noble eightfold path to its very end. We can venerate those who glorify the teaching by showing that it truly leads to ultimate liberation, to the plunge into the unborn and unconditioned state, the deathless element, which the Buddha so often extolled, calling it the wonderful and marvellous, the peaceful purity, the unsurpassed liberation. Again, by taking this approach, we can also venerate those compassionate ones who vow to follow the route of the bodhisattva, and who make this vow as an act of supererogation, not because it is a necessary condition for their own true deliverance. We can revere and cherish their loving-kindness, their great compassion, their high aspirations, and their self-sacrificial service to the world. True Buddhism needs all three: Buddhas, arahants, and bodhisattvas. It needs Buddhas to discover and teach the path to liberation. It needs arahants to follow the path and confirm that the Dharma does indeed lead to liberation, adorning the teaching with examples of those who lead the purest holy life. It needs bodhisattvas to make the resolve to perfect those qualities that will enable them at some point in the future, near or distant, to become Buddhas themselves and once again turn the unsurpassed Wheel of the Dharma.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of the essay earlier published on the Bodhi Monastery website: <http://bodhimonastery.org>.
2. There is also a third model of the Buddhist spiritual life, that of the *paccekabuddha* or *pratyekabuddha*. The *paccekabuddha* is similar in many respects to the disciple arahant, except that where the disciple arahant attains enlightenment under the guidance of a Buddha, the *paccekabuddha* gains enlightenment without any outside guidance and does not attempt to bring enlightenment to others. Otherwise, the combination of qualities that constitute this type is essentially the same. In the literature of the Buddhist systems, we often read of three types of enlightened ones— Skt: *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *samyak sambuddhas* (Pāli: *sāvakas*, *pacceka-buddhas*, and *sammā sambuddhas*)—and of the three vehicles that lead to these attainments: the *śrāvaka-yāna*, the *pratyekabuddha-yāna*, and the *bodhisattva-yāna*.
3. There is at least one possible exception to this. MĀ 32, the Chinese Āgama parallel to MN 123, states at T I 469c24: “The Blessed One at the time of Kassapa Buddha made his initial vow for the Buddha path and practised the holy life.” (I am indebted to Bhikkhu Anālayo for this reference.) The idea suggested at MĀ 32 seems to me very improbable. For in MN 81 (with a parallel at MĀ 132), the potter Ghaṭikāra, a lay disciple of Kassapa Buddha and a non-returner, is a friend of the brahmin Jotipāla, the bodhisattva who is to become the Buddha Gotama. During the reign of Gotama Buddha, Ghaṭikāra appears as an arahant dwelling in one of the celestial Pure Abodes. The above statement would imply that in the time that Ghaṭikāra advanced from the non-returner state to arahantship, the bodhisattva had traversed the entire path to buddhahood from the first generation of the aspiration to the final fruit of buddhahood with all its extraordinary knowledges and powers.
4. Incidentally, in any Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) language, the word would be *bodhisatta*. This was Sanskritized as *bodhisattva*, “enlightenment being,” and we take this meaning for granted; but the Sanskritized form might be an erroneous back-formation. For MIA *bodhisatta* could also represent Sanskrit *bodhisakta*, meaning “one intent on enlightenment,” “one devoted to enlightenment,” which in context makes better sense than “an enlightenment being.”
5. The expressions for the three yānas and the three kinds of bodhi are not used in the commentaries ascribed to Buddhaghosa. Expressions for the three kinds of bodhi are common in the commentaries and subcom-

mentaries ascribed to Dhammapāla and later Pāli commentators. The only texts in the corpus of Pāli commentarial literature that make use of the expressions *buddhayāna*, *paccekabuddhayāna*, and *sāvakayāna* are the *Vajirabuddhi-ṭīkā*, a Vinaya subcommentary, at p. 14 of the VRI edition, and the *Silakkhandhavagga-abhinavaṭīkā*, a subcommentary to the first part of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, at p. 3 in the VRI edition.

6. But see the symposium on Early Mahāyāna in *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 35 (2003), especially Paul Harrison, “Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras,” pp. 115–51.

7. See Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), which offers a translation of this sūtra along with an extremely illuminating introduction. Of special relevance to the present paper are chapters 4, 7 and 8 of the introduction.

The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Theory and Practice¹

Jeffrey Samuels

Introduction

In the academic study of Buddhism, the term “Mahāyāna” is sometimes set in opposition to the non-Mahāyāna schools of early Buddhism (Nikāya Buddhism) with regard to their aspirations, teachings and practices. Such distinctions made between Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhism, however, force the schools into neat, isolated and independent categories that often undermine the complexities that exist concerning their beliefs, ideologies, and practices. While some of the categories used to differentiate the Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhism are helpful in the study and interpretation of Buddhism, these distinctions must continually be reviewed. This article attempts to review one such distinction: the commonly held theoretical model that postulates that the goal of Mahāyāna practitioners is to become Buddhas by following the path of the bodhisattva (*bodhisattva-yāna*), whereas the goal of Nikāya Buddhists is to become arahants by following the path of the Hearer or the Buddha’s disciples (*śrāvaka-yāna*). Focusing on Pali and vernacular (Sinhala, Burmese, and Thai) texts and inscriptions, this essay will investigate the presence and scope of the bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhist theory and practice.

By raising issues surrounding the Mahāyāna-Theravāda opposition, however, I am not suggesting that distinctions cannot be made between the two vehicles, nor am I proposing to do away with the terms “Mahāyāna” and “Theravāda.” Rather, in exploring the oversimplifications inherent in the Mahāyāna-Theravāda dichotomy, it is my intention to replace the theoretical model that identifies Mahāyāna Buddhism with the bodhisattva-yāna and Theravāda Buddhism with the śrāvaka-yāna with one that is more accurate. In doing so, the implied purpose of this article is, as John Holt said in

his study of the place of Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka, to “raise questions among students of Buddhism regarding the very utility of the terms Mahāyāna ... and Theravāda as designating wholly distinctive religio-historical constructs.”²

Before turning to the presence and scope of the bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhism (the only extant school of Nikāya Buddhism), I will briefly turn to the sources that identify the bodhisattva-yāna with Mahāyāna Buddhism and the śrāvaka-yāna with Nikāya Buddhism. Before doing so, however, I will investigate the writings of three Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers in which this bifurcation is suggested.

One of the first Mahāyāna Buddhists who identifies the bodhisattva-yāna with Mahāyāna Buddhism and the śrāvaka-yāna with Nikāya Buddhism is Nāgārjuna. In his *Precious Garland of Advice for the King* (*Rājaparīkathā-ratnamālā*), Nāgārjuna rhetorically asks “Since all the aspirations, deeds and dedications of Bodhisattvas were not explained in the Hearers’ vehicle, how then could one become a Bodhisattva through its path?”³ In another instance, Nāgārjuna writes that “[In the Vehicle of the Hearers] Buddha did not explain the bases for a Bodhisattva’s enlightenment.”⁴ While Nāgārjuna compares the śrāvaka-yāna with the bodhisattva-yāna in these first two passages, he later states that “the subjects based on the deeds of Bodhisattvas were not mentioned in [non- Mahāyāna] sūtras.”⁵ Nāgārjuna’s third passage, then, suggests that subjects concerning bodhisattvas are found only in Mahāyāna texts and are absent from all non- Mahāyāna texts.

Another Mahāyāna Buddhist to uphold a Mahāyāna-Nikāya distinction based on a bodhisattva-śrāvaka opposition is Asaṅga. As Richard S. Cohen illustrates,⁶ Asaṅga posits, in his *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*, that the Great Vehicle and the Hearers’ Vehicle are mutually opposed.⁷ Their contradictory nature includes intention, teaching, employment (i.e., means), support (which is based entirely on merit and knowledge), and the time that it takes to reach the goal.⁸ After Asaṅga discusses the opposing nature of these two vehicles, he then identifies the śrāvaka-yāna as the lesser vehicle (Hīnayāna), and remarks that the lesser vehicle (*yānaṃ hīnaṃ*) is not able to be the great vehicle (Mahāyāna).⁹

Candrakīrti is yet another Mahāyāna thinker who views the Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhism as being mutually opposed. Like

Asaṅga, Candrakīrti uses the bodhisattva-śrāvaka distinction to separate Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhism as well as to promote the Mahāyāna tradition over and against Nikāya Buddhism. In his *Mādhyamakāvatāra*, for instance, he remarks that the lesser vehicle (Hīnayāna) is the path reserved solely for disciples and solitary Buddhas, and that the greater vehicle (Mahāyāna) is the path reserved solely for bodhisattvas. Not only does Candrakīrti associate the bodhisattva-yāna with Mahāyāna Buddhism, he also clings to the belief that the Hīnayāna schools know nothing of the “stages of the career of the future Buddha, the perfect virtues (*pāramitā*), the resolutions or vows to save all creatures, the application of merit to the acquisition of the quality of Buddha, [and] the great compassion.”¹⁰ In other words, for Candrakīrti (as for Nāgārjuna), the non-Mahāyāna schools do not present a bodhisattva doctrine.

The points raised by these Mahāyāna Buddhists are problematic for three reasons. First, the dichotomy presented by both Asaṅga and Candrakīrti sets up an opposition between an ideology and an institutional affiliation. Rather than comparing an ideology with an ideology (bodhisattva and śrāvaka) or a Buddhist school with another Buddhist school, this opposition contrasts one ideology (arahantship through following the śrāvaka-yāna) with an institutional affiliation (Mahāyāna Buddhism). In order for a more accurate distinction to be constructed, then, we must either compare the bodhisattva-yāna with the śrāvaka-yāna, or compare a Mahāyāna Buddhist school with a non-Mahāyāna Buddhist school.

Another problem with the ideas put forth by Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Candrakīrti concerns their statements that Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhist schools are mutually contradictory and exclusive. These assertions undermine the fact that Nikāya and Mahāyāna refer to numerous schools and that the category of Nikāya includes even a number of “proto-Mahāyāna” schools (e.g., the Mahāsaṅghikas).¹¹ By using the terms Mahāyāna and Nikāya monolithically, these thinkers ignore the plurality of doctrines, goals and paths that are present in the schools.

The third problem inherent in the statements of these writers, and which will be the focus of this article, is that they assume that all followers of non-Mahāyāna schools are śrāvakas striving to become arahants while all followers of the Mahāyāna are bodhisattvas on the path to buddhahood. As we shall see through the example of the

only extant Nikāya school, the Theravāda tradition, this is clearly not the case.

Before re-evaluating the bodhisattva-śrāvaka opposition, it is first necessary to ascertain the presence and scope of the bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhism. This will be accomplished by looking at the presence of the ideal in the Theravāda Buddhist Pāli Canon (theory) as well as by investigating how the same ideal permeates the lives of Theravāda Buddhists (practice).

The Scope of the Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Buddhism

The presence of the bodhisattva ideal in the Theravāda Buddhist Pāli Canon is primarily restricted to Gotama Buddha. The use of the term “bodhisattva” occurs in a number of the suttas (Skt: sūtra) in the *Majjhima*, *Aṅguttara*, and *Samyutta Nikāyas* where the Buddha is purported to have said: “Monks, before my awakening, and while I was yet merely the Bodhisatta [Skt: bodhisattva], not fully-awakened....”¹² In addition to referring to the present life of Gotama, the term “bodhisattva” is also used in relation to the penultimate life of Gotama in Tusita (Skt: Tuṣita) heaven, as well as his conception and birth.¹³

In later canonical texts, the bodhisattva ideal is further developed and associated with numerous concepts. These developments (which include the concept of a bodhisattva vow) may be said to introduce “into Theravāda Buddhism what in Mahāyāna studies has been called ‘the Bodhisattva ideal.’”¹⁴ In the *Sutta Nipāta*, for example, the term “bodhisattva” refers to the historical Buddha prior to his enlightenment *and* signifies a being set on buddhahood.¹⁵ In addition, the bodhisattva ideal in this text is also associated with the quality of compassion. This is exemplified by the sage Asita’s remark to Gotama’s father (Suddhodana) that the young bodhisattva-prince “will come to the fulfilment of perfect Enlightenment... [and] will start turning the wheel of Truth out of compassion for the well-being of many.”¹⁶

In a later canonical text, the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the bodhisattva ideal is developed to the greatest extent. Here, the bodhisattva ideal refers

to an ideal personage who makes a vow to become a fully and completely enlightened Buddha (*sammāsambuddha*) out of compassion for all sentient beings,¹⁷ who performs various acts of merit,¹⁸ and who receives a prophecy of his future buddhahood.¹⁹ In addition, the bodhisattva depicted in the *Buddhavaṃsa* makes a vow to become a bodhisattva only once the attainment of arahantship becomes within reach. This is portrayed in the chronicle of Sumedha. While Sumedha was lying in the mud and offering his body to the Buddha Dīpaṅkara to walk on, Sumedha thought: “If I so wished I could burn up my defilements today. What is the use while I (remain) unknown of realizing dhamma here? Having reached omniscience, I will become a Buddha in the world with the devas.”²⁰

Another idea that arises in conjunction with the bodhisattva ideal is the need to complete a number of bodhisattva perfections (*pāramitā*); this can be found most clearly in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Cariyāpīṭaka*.²¹ In these two texts, ten perfections are delineated, as opposed to six perfections described in certain Mahāyāna texts (e.g., the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* and the *Ratnagaṇa-saṃcayagāthā*). The *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Cariyāpīṭaka* also outline how each of the ten perfections may be practised at three different levels: a regular degree, a higher degree, and an ultimate degree of completion. Though the concept of three degrees of perfection is suggested in the *Buddhavaṃsa*,²² it is explored in more detail in the *Cariyāpīṭaka*, especially with the example of the first *pāramitā*—giving (*dāna*). To exemplify how the perfection of giving was completed in the lowest (or regular) degree, we find stories of how the bodhisattva gave people food; his own sandals and shade; an elephant; gifts to mendicants; wealth; clothing, beds, food, and drink; offerings; and even his own family members.²³ To illustrate how the same perfection was fulfilled in the middle (or higher) degree, we read how the bodhisattva gave away his bodily parts such as his eye.²⁴ And finally, to demonstrate how the perfection of giving was fulfilled in the highest (or ultimate) degree, we find a story of how the bodhisattva gave away his own life when he was a hare.²⁵

In other Pāli texts, the term “bodhisattva” is even used in reference to other previous Buddhas. For instance, in the *Mahāpadānasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the notion of past Buddhas (and hence past bodhisattvas) is elucidated. In the beginning of this sutta, the six Buddhas who preceded Gotama are mentioned as well

as their names, the eons when they became Buddhas (i.e., when they attained enlightenment and taught), their caste, their clan, their life span, the trees where they attained enlightenment, the number of their disciples, their personal attendants, and their parents.²⁶ After briefly outlining the lives of these six Buddhas, Gotama begins an in-depth recollection of the first Buddha, Vipassī, from his life in Tusita heaven until he dispersed his monks for the purpose of spreading the teachings. In this narration, the Buddha not only refers to Vipassī up to his enlightenment as a bodhisattva,²⁷ but also takes the life events of Vipassī as the example for all future bodhisattvas and Buddhas, including (retroactively) Gotama himself.²⁸

Another section of the *Sutta-piṭaka* where the term “bodhisattva” pertains to each of the six previous Buddhas is the *Samyutta Nikāya*. In the fourth section of the second book, for instance, we find the phrase “To Vipassi, brethren, Exalted One, Arahant, Buddha Supreme, before his enlightenment, while he was yet unenlightened and Bodhisat[ta], there came this thought....” This same phrase, then, is used in conjunction with the other five previous Buddhas in the following verses: Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Konāgamaṇa, and Kassapa.²⁹

While most of the uses of the term “bodhisattva” concern Gotama Buddha as well as the Buddhas who preceded him, there are also references in the Pāli Canon to the possibility of future Buddhas (and hence current bodhisattvas). For example, in the *Cakkavatisihanādasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha foretells of the future when “an Exalted One named Metteyya [Skt: Maitreya], Arahant, Fully Awakened [i.e., *sammāsambuddha*], abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, and Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now,” will arise.³⁰

Though Maitreya is the only future Buddha mentioned specifically, the possibility of attaining buddhahood is not restricted solely to him. In the *Sampasādanīyasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, for instance, Sāriputta is professed to have said: “In the presence of the Exalted One have I heard him say and from him have received, that... in times gone by and in future times there have been, and will be other Supreme Buddhas equal to himself [i.e., Gotama] in the matter of Enlightenment.”³¹ Thus, no longer is the term “bodhisattva” used solely in conjunction with Gotama, with other past Buddhas, and with

Maitreya; the bodhisattva-yāna is regarded as a possible, albeit difficult, path open to anyone who desires buddhahood.

This more expanded use of the term “bodhisattva” is explicitly expressed in the *Khuddakapāṭha*. In the eighth chapter of this canonical text (the *Nidhikandaṣutta*), the goal of buddhahood is presented as a goal that should be pursued by certain exceptional beings. After demonstrating the impermanence and uselessness of accumulating and storing material possessions or treasures, the sutta mentions another type of treasure that is more permanent and which follows beings from birth to birth. This treasure results from giving (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), abstinence (*saṃyama*), and restraint (*dama*). This treasure fulfills all desires, leads to a rebirth in a beautiful body, enables one to become sovereign of a country and a loving spouse, and leads to rebirth in the human realm (from which liberation is possible). Moreover, the qualities of charity, virtue, abstinence and restraint lead to the wisdom which produces the “bliss of Extinguishment” of either arahants, pratyekabuddhas, or completely enlightened buddhas. We read:

Discriminating knowledge, release of mind, the perfections of a Noble Disciple (of a Buddha) [i.e., *sāvaka-pāramī*], the Enlightenment of a Silent Buddha [i.e., *paccekabodhi*] and the requisites for (Supreme) Buddhahood [i.e., *buddhabhūmi*], all these (qualities) can be obtained by this (treasure)... Therefore wise and educated men praise the acquisition of meritorious actions.³²

This sutta illustrates that the goal of buddhahood and the path to the goal (i.e., bodhisattva-yāna) are no longer simply associated with specific Buddhas of the past and future; rather, buddhahood is one of three possible goals that may be pursued by “wise and educated” people.³³

Though the idea that anyone may become a Buddha through following the bodhisattva-yāna is only present in seed form in some of the early Pāli texts, it appears to have been taken seriously by Theravāda Buddhists. This is illustrated in the lives of numerous Theravāda kings, monks, and textual copyists who have taken the bodhisattva vow and are following the bodhisattva-yāna to the eventual attainment of buddhahood. The relationship between kings and bodhisattvas has its source in the bodhisattva career of Gotama as depicted not only in his life as Prince Siddhārtha (Pāli: Siddhattha), but also in his penultimate earthly life when he was King Vessantara.

As King Vessantara, the bodhisattva exhibited his compassion by fulfilling the perfection of giving. For instance, we find that the bodhisattva gave away his elephant to alleviate a drought in nearby Kāliṅga, his wealth, his kingdom, and his wife and children, and was even willing to give away his own life out of compassion for other beings.

Though the paradigm for the close association between the institution of kingship and buddhahood was derived from stories about Gotama when he was a bodhisattva, it was quickly adopted by Theravāda kings by the second century B.C.E. and fully incorporated after the eighth century C.E. In the early examples, we find the relationship drawn between kings and bodhisattvas in more tempered ways. For instance, King Duṭṭagāmaṇī exhibited the quality of compassion by refusing to enter the heavenly realm after his previous life as an ascetic (*sāmaṇera*) so that he could be reborn as a prince and unite the regional rulers of Sri Lanka as well as help develop the Saṅgha and the Buddha's teaching.³⁴ Though Duṭṭagāmaṇī is not referred to as a bodhisattva in the *Mahāvamsa*, he appears to demonstrate certain bodhisattvic qualities. Just as a bodhisattva renounces the enlightenment of an arahant so that he could be reborn countless times in this world of impermanence and suffering out of compassion for all beings, so, too, did King Duṭṭagāmaṇī renounce the world of the devas in order to return to this world of suffering for the sake of the Buddhist doctrine and out of compassion for all inhabitants on the island of Sri Lanka.

Similar examples of bodhisattva-like compassion are exhibited by King Sirisaṃghabodhi who is said to have risked his life to save the inhabitants of Sri Lanka from a devastating drought³⁵ and who even offered his own head in order to divert a potential war,³⁶ by King Buddhadasa, who created "happiness by every means for the inhabitants of the island... [and who was] gifted with wisdom [i.e., *paññā*] and virtue [i.e., *sīla*],... endowed with the ten qualities of kings [i.e., the ten *rājadharmas*],... [and] lived openly before the people the life that bodhisattas lead and had pity for (all) beings as a father (has pity for) his children";³⁷ and especially by King Upatissa, who fulfilled the ten bodhisattva perfections during his reign.³⁸

By the eighth century C.E., the amalgamation between the institution of kingship and bodhisattvas was even stronger. At this time, we find evidence of certain Theravāda kings in Sri Lanka,

Burma, and Thailand who openly declared themselves to be bodhisattvas. For example, King Niśśanka Malla (1187–1196 C.E.) of Polonnaruva, Ceylon, states that “I will show my self in my [true] body which is endowed with benevolent regard for and attachment to the virtuous qualities of a bodhisattva king, who like a parent, protects the world and the religion.”³⁹ In other inscriptions, there is a reference to King Parākramabāhu VI as “Bodhisattva [sic] Parākrama Bāhu.”⁴⁰ Finally, the conflation of kings and bodhisattvas on the island of Sri Lanka is established most strongly by King Mahinda IV, who not only referred to himself as a bodhisattva as a result of his bodhisattva-like resolute determination,⁴¹ but who even went so far as to proclaim that “none but the bodhisattas would become kings of prosperous Laṅkā.”⁴²

In Burma, the relationship between kings and bodhisattvas is exemplified with King Kyanzittha, who claimed himself to be “the bodhisattva [sic], who shall verily become a Buddha that saves (and) redeems all beings, who is great in love (and) compassion for all beings at all times... [and] who was foretold by the Lord Buddha, who is to become a true Buddha.”⁴³ In another instance, King Alaungsithu wrote that he would like to build a causeway to help all beings reach “The Blessed City [i.e., nirvāṇa].”⁴⁴ Finally, Kings Śrī Tribhuvanāditya, Thiluiṅ Mañ, Caṅsū I, and Nātoṅmyā all referred to themselves as bodhisattvas.⁴⁵

In Thailand, a similar connection is drawn. We find, for instance, that King Lu T'ai of Sukhothai “wished to become a Buddha to help all beings... leave behind the sufferings of transmigration.”⁴⁶ The relation between King Lu T'ai and bodhisattva-hood is also manifested by the events occurring at his ordination ceremony that were similar to “the ordinary course of happenings in the career of a Bodhisattva.”⁴⁷

While it may be argued that these bodhisattva kings were influenced by certain Mahāyāna doctrines when they appropriated certain bodhisattvic qualities or took the bodhisattva vow, this does not invalidate the relationship between kingship and bodhisattvas in Theravāda Buddhism. Though a link may be established between these bodhisattva kings and Mahāyāna Buddhism, this does not dismiss the fact that the bodhisattva ideal was taken seriously by Theravāda kings or that the bodhisattva ideal has a place in Theravāda Buddhist theory and practice. Moreover, while it may be

possible to posit that these kings were influenced by Mahāyāna concepts, it is impossible to demonstrate that these kings were only influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism; just because a king may have been influenced by Mahāyāna ideas does not mean that certain Theravāda ideas, including the ideas of a bodhisattva as found in the *Buddhavamsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka*, were not equally influential.

The presence of a bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhism is also represented by the numerous examples of other Theravāda Buddhists who have either referred to themselves or have been referred to by others as bodhisattvas. The celebrated commentator Buddhaghosa, for example, was viewed by the monks of the Anurādhapura monastery as being, without doubt, an incarnation of Metteyya.⁴⁸ There are even some instances of Theravāda monks who expressed their desire to become fully enlightened Buddhas. For instance, the twentieth-century bhikkhu, Doratiyāveye of Sri Lanka (ca. 1900), after being deemed worthy of receiving certain secret teachings by his meditation teacher, refused to practise such techniques because he felt that it would cause him to enter on the Path and attain the level of arahant in this lifetime or within seven lives (i.e., by becoming a *sottāpanna*). This was unacceptable to Doratiyāveye because he saw himself as a bodhisattva who had already made a vow to attain buddhahood in the future.⁴⁹

The vow to become a Buddha was also taken by certain Theravāda copyists and authors. The author of the commentary on the *Jātaka* (the *Jātakatṭhakathā*), for example, concludes his work with the vow to complete the ten bodhisattva perfections in the future so that he will become a Buddha and liberate “the whole world with its gods from the bondage of repeated births... [and] guide them to the most excellent and tranquil nibbāna.”⁵⁰ Another example of a Theravāda author who wished to become a Buddha by following the bodhisattva-yāna is the Śrī Laṅkān monk Mahā-Tiṭṭhaka Cūlābhaya. In his twelfth-century subcommentary on the Questions of King Milinda, he “wrote in the colophon at the end of the work that he wished to become a Buddha: *Buddho bhaveyyam* ‘May I become a Buddha.’”⁵¹

A Re-evaluation of the Bodhisattva-Śrāvaka Opposition

While many early Pāli uses of the term “bodhisattva” refer to Gotama prior to his attainment of buddhahood, in other canonical texts (such as the *Buddhavaṃsa*) the term designates a being who, out of compassion for other beings, vows to become a fully and completely enlightened Buddha (*sammāsambuddha*), performs various acts of merit, renounces the enlightenment of arahants, receives a prophecy of his future buddhahood, and fulfills or completes the ten bodhisattva perfections. In addition, the bodhisattva ideal was developed in terms of its application. Not only does the word “bodhisattva” pertain to Gotama and all previous Buddhas before their enlightenment, it also applies to any being who wishes to pursue the path to perfect buddhahood. This new development resulted in a more general adherence to the ideal by numerous Theravāda kings, monks, textual scholars, and even lay people.⁵²

The presence and scope of the bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhist theory and practice, then, appears to belie Nāgārjuna’s, Asaṅga’s, and Candrakīrti’s claims not only that the “subjects based on the deeds of Bodhisattvas were not mentioned in the [non-Mahāyāna] sūtras,” but also that non-Mahāyānist knows nothing of the “stages of the career of the future Buddha,⁵³ the perfect virtues (*pāramitta*), the resolutions or vows to save all creatures, the application of merit to the acquisition of the quality of Buddha, [and] the great compassion.” In addition, the presence of a developed bodhisattva doctrine in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Cariyāpiṭaka* also calls into question the commonly held belief that the bodhisattva ideal underwent major doctrinal developments in early Mahāyāna Buddhism; indeed, there are numerous similarities between the bodhisattva ideal as found in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and as found in certain early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts such as the *Ratnagūṇa-saṃcayagāthā*.⁵⁴ Both of these texts, for instance, discuss the need for the completion of certain bodhisattva perfections, the importance of making a vow to become a Buddha, the notion of accumulating and applying merit for the attainment of buddhahood, the role of compassion, and the implicit presence of certain bodhisattva stages.

Even though the bodhisattva ideal did not undergo substantial doctrinal developments between the later canonical texts and certain early Mahāyāna texts, it was developed in terms of its application. Whereas the goal of becoming a Buddha becomes the focus of the Mahāyāna tradition, this goal remains de-emphasized in the Theravāda tradition. In other words, although the bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism becomes a goal that is applied to everyone, the same ideal in Theravāda Buddhism is reserved for the exceptional person. This distinction is described by Walpola Rāhula:

Though the Theravādins believe that anyone can become a bodhisattva, they do not stipulate or insist that everyone must become a bodhisattva—this is not considered to be reasonable. It is up to the individual to decide which path to take, that of the Śrāvaka, that of the Pratyekabuddha, or that of the Samyaksambuddha [i.e., *sammāsambuddha*].⁵⁵

The state of buddhahood is highly praised in both traditions. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, this praise for and focus on the ideal of buddhahood has resulted in a vast amount of literature centred on the bodhisattva ideal. In the Theravāda tradition, on the other hand, the high regard for buddhahood has never led to a universal application of the goal, nor has it resulted in a vast amount of literature in which the bodhisattva concept is delineated. As K. R. Norman posits: “The *Buddhavamsa* is therefore a developed Bodhisattva doctrine, but it was not developed further, even in the *Abhidharma*.”⁵⁶

These above-mentioned differences between the two traditions are essential and are a useful means to distinguish Theravāda from Mahāyāna Buddhism. Rather than simply identifying the bodhisattva-yāna with the various Mahāyāna schools and the śrāvaka-yāna with numerous non-Mahāyāna schools (as does the old model, which illustrates the ideas put forth by Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Candrakīrti), the revised theoretical model may more accurately portray the differences that exist between the two yānas by referring to Mahāyāna Buddhism as a vehicle in which the bodhisattva ideal is more universally applied, and to Theravāda Buddhism as a vehicle in which the bodhisattva ideal is reserved for and appropriated by certain exceptional people. Put somewhat differently, while the bodhisattva-yāna and the goal of buddhahood continues to be accepted as one of three possible goals by followers of Theravāda

Buddhism, this same goal becomes viewed as the only acceptable goal by followers of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Hence, it should be stressed that the change introduced by the Mahāyāna traditions is not so much an invention of a new type of saint or a new ideology, but rather a taking of an exceptional ideal and bringing it into prominence.⁵⁷

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Notes

1. This is a slightly revised version of the essay earlier published in *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 47, Number 3, July 1997, pp. 399–415. Reprinted with permission of the author.
2. John C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. viii–ix.
3. Nāgārjuna, *Precious Garland of Advice for the King and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins and Lati Rimpoché, The Wisdom of Tibet Series, No. 2 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), v. 390.
4. *Ibid.*, v. 391.
5. *Ibid.*, v. 393.
6. Richard S. Cohen, “Discontented Categories: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in Indian Buddhist History,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1) (1995): pp. 2–3.
7. Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, trans. Surekha Vijay Limaye, *Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica Series*, no. 94 (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992), 1:9.
8. *Ibid.*, 1:10.
9. *Yānaṃ hīnaṃ hīnam eva tat na tan mahāyānaṃ bhavitum arhati* (*ibid.*). The identification of the non-Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism with the śrāvaka-yāna made by Asaṅga has been adopted by certain later scholars. For instance, Har Dayal makes this same identification as follows: “Corresponding to these three kinds of bodhi, there are three yānas or “Ways,” which lead an aspirant to the goal. The third yāna was at first called the bodhisattva-yāna, but it was subsequently renamed mahā-yāna. The other two yānas (i.e., the śrāvaka-yāna and the pratyekabuddha-yāna) were spoken of as the hīna-yāna” (*The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975], p. 11). The identification of non-Mahāyāna Buddhism with the śrāvaka-yāna is also made by scholars like Leon Hurvitz, in *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) , p. 116, and M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. 1097.
10. Louis de La Vallee Poussin, “Bodhisattva,” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 8:334.
11. Andre Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Vehicule* (Paris: Ecole

Francaise D'Extreme-Orient, 1955).

12. *Pubbe va me, bhikkhave, sambodhā, anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattassa sato, edad ahoṣi.* The suttas in which the word “bodhisattva” follows this prelude are: M I 17, 92, 114, 163, 240; 2:93, 211; 3:157; A III 240; IV 302, 438; and S II 4; III 27; IV 233; V 281, 316.

13. M III 119–120, and D II 108.

14. Richard Gombrich, “The Significance of Former Buddhas in the Theravāda Tradition,” *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, ed. Somaratna Balasooriya *et al.* (London: Gordon Fraser Gallery, 1980), p. 68.

15. H. Saddhatissa, trans., *The Sutta-Nipata* (London: Curzon Press, 1985), v. 683.

16. *Ibid.*, v. 693.

17. The vow to become a Buddha includes both the qualities of mental determination (i.e., *manopañidhi*) and aspiration (*abhinīhāra karaṇa*) to attain buddhahood; to engage in the long and arduous path to complete and perfect Enlightenment (i.e., *sammāsambuddha*). Whereas the mental determination to become a Buddha is made silently to oneself and is analogous to the Mahāyāna concept of *bodhicitta* or “thought of Enlightenment,” the aspiration is usually made in the presence of an existing Buddha. Though the mental determination to become a Buddha occurs only once, the aspiration to attain buddhahood must be repeated in the presence of all subsequent Buddhas (I. B. Horner, introduction to the *Buddhavaṃsa [Chronicles of the Buddha], Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. 31 [London: Pāli Text Society, 1975], pp. xiv-xv). The clearest example of a bodhisattva vow is found in *Buddhavaṃsa* 2A:56 ff., where the bodhisattva Sumedha thought:

What is the use of my crossing over alone, being a man aware of my strength? Having reached omniscience, I will cause the world together with the devas to cross over. Cutting through the stream of saṃsāra, shattering the three becomings, embarking in the ship of Dhamma, I will cause the world with the devas to cross over.

18. A list of the various meritorious acts performed by Gotama to each of the twenty-four previous Buddhas is delineated by I. B. Horner in her introduction to the *Buddhavaṃsa*, pp. xlix ff. One example of a meritorious act performed for a Buddha can be found in the chronicle of Sumedha. When Sumedha heard that the then Buddha, Dīpaṅkara, was to pass along a road, he, as an act of merit, offered to clear a section of the path:

When I heard “Buddha,” zest arose immediately. Saying “Buddha, Buddha” I expressed my happiness. Standing there elated, stirred in mind, I reasoned, “Here will I sow seeds [of merit]; indeed, let not the

moment pass! If you are clearing for a Buddha, give me one section. I myself will also clear the direct way, the path and road” (*Buddhavaṃsa* 2A:42 ff.).

Before Sumedha was able to finish the section of the road allotted to him, Dīpaṅkara arrived accompanied by four hundred thousand arahants. As a result of not having finished his task of preparing the road, Sumedha prostrated himself in the mud and offered his body to Dīpaṅkara for walking on (2A:52–53).

19. See, for instance, *Buddhavaṃsa* 2A:61 ff. These developments have a great effect on the ways in which the term “bodhisattva” is used. As Gombrich posits, “Any future Buddha is a Bodhisattva (by definition), but with the appearance of this theory, one formally becomes a Bodhisattva by taking a vow in the presence of a Buddha and receiving his prediction” (“The Significance of Former Buddhas,” p. 68).

20. *Buddhavaṃsa* 2A:54–55.

21. The ten perfections are mentioned numerous times in the *Buddhavaṃsa*. See, for example, *Buddhavaṃsa* 2A:117 ff., 4:14, 5:20, and 6:14.

22. In *Buddhavaṃsa* 1:76–77, Sāriputta asks the Buddha about his process of awakening and how he fulfilled the ten perfections. He then asks: “Of what kind, wise one, leader of the world, were your ten perfections? How were the higher perfections fulfilled, how the ultimate perfections?”

23. *Cariyāpiṭaka* 1:1–1:8 and 1:9.

24. *Ibid.*, 1:8:2–3.

25. *Ibid.*, 1:10:9, 1:10:22–23.

26. D II 1–7.

27. For instance, we find: “Now Vipassī, brethren, when as a Bodhisat[ta], he ceased to belong to the hosts of the heaven of Delight, descended into his mother’s womb mindful and self-possessed” (D II 12).

28. In many of the following paragraphs, for instance, we find the phrase “It is the rule, brethren, that....” (*Ayam-ettha dhammatā*) used to refer to the paradigm set by Vipassī.

29. S II 4 ff. The six previous Buddhas mentioned in the *Dīgha* and *Samyutta Nikāyas* are increased to twenty-four and then to twenty-seven in later canonical texts such as the *Buddhavaṃsa*. In yet a later canonical text, the *Apadāna* of the *Khuddaka-Nikāya*, the number of previous Buddhas increases to more than thirty-five.

30. D III 76.

31. Ibid., 3:114. Though the possibility for the existence of other future Buddhas beside Metteyya is mentioned only briefly in the Pāli Canon, in other post-canonical Theravāda texts, there are more specific references to future bodhisattvas and Buddhas. For instance, in the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, the *Dasabodhisattaddesa*, and in one recension of the *Anāgatavaṃsa Desanā*, the nine bodhisattvas who will follow Maitreya are mentioned. Moreover, in one recension of the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, we even find the places of residence of seven of the ten bodhisattvas: Metteyya, Rāma, Pasena, and Vibhūti are presently residing in Tuṣita heaven and Subhūti, Nālāgiri, and Pāreyya are now in Tāvatiṃsa heaven. Thus, it appears that the Theravāda tradition acknowledges certain “celestial” bodhisattvas who are currently residing in various heavenly realms and not that the only recognized bodhisattva in Theravāda Buddhism is Maitreya (Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies: Selected Essays* [Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967], p. 38).
32. *Khuddakapāṭha* 8:15–16.
33. Though the accessibility of these three goals to all beings is only briefly mentioned in the *Khuddakapāṭha*, in the *Upāsakajanālanikāra* (a twelfth-century Pāli text dealing with lay Buddhist ethics), all three ways of liberation are clearly admitted (Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* [Osaka: Kufs Publication, 1980], p. 119).
34. *Mahāvāṃsa* 22:25–41.
35. Ibid., 36:76. There is a remarkable parallel between King Sirisaṃghabodhi, who risked his life to avert a devastating drought, and King Vessantara, who gave away his precious elephant to avert a drought in Kālīṅga.
36. *Mahāvāṃsa* 36:91 ff. The willingness to offer his own life to avert the potential suffering of his subjects appears to have some origin in the life of King Vessantara, who was willing to offer his life to fulfil the perfection of giving. After commenting on the bodhisattva-like nature of King Sirisaṃghabodhi, John Holt argues: “By his actions, Sirisaṃghabodhi very clearly cuts the figure of an earthly, royal bodhisattva, and almost a Mahāyāna bodhisattva at that” (*Buddha in the Crown*, p. 59).
37. *Cūlavāṃsa*, 37:106 ff.
38. Ibid., 37:180.
39. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, 2:76.
40. Ibid., 3:67. This passage is translated on pages 68–69 of the same volume.

41. *Ibid.*, 1:227.
42. *Ibid.*, 1:240.
43. *Epigraphia Burmanica*, 1:146.
44. G. H. Luce and P. M. Tin, “The Shwegugyi Pagoda Inscriptions, Pagan 1141 AD,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 10 (2) (1920): 72.
45. T. Tun, “Religion in Burma, AD 100–1300,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 42 (1959): 53.
46. E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 47.
47. B. W. Andaya, “Statecraft in the Reign of Lu T’ai of Sukhodaya,” in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, Burma*, ed. Barwell L. Smith (Chambersburg: Conocosheague Associates, 1978), p. 13.
48. *Cūlavamsa* 37:242. In commenting on this story, Holt posits: “What this... seem[s] to suggest is that not only did Maitreya come to be associated with visions of perfected kingship, but he also seems to have been continuously associated with the ideal of the perfected monk” (*Buddha in the Crown*, p. 8). Even though Buddhaghosa was depicted as being an incarnation of Metteyya, he is never described as taking a bodhisattva vow and as practising certain bodhisattva perfections.
49. F. L. Woodward, trans., *A Manual of a Mystic: Being a Translation from the Pali and Sinhalese Work Entitled “The Yogavachara’s Manual,”* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. xvii–xviii.
50. H. Saddhatissa, *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas and the Dasabodhisattuppattikatha, Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. 29 (London: Pāli Text Society, 1975), pp. 38–39.
51. *Milinda Tīkā* (Pāli Text Society), p. 73; quoted in Walpola Rahula, “L’ideal du bodhisattva dans le Theravada et le Mahāyāna,” *Journal Asiatique*, 1971, p. 69.
52. There is evidence that suggests that certain lay people living in Sri Lanka took bodhisattva vows to attain buddhahood. For example, we find that two Sri Lankans, after freeing their children and wives from slavery, dedicated the merit derived from these actions “for the benefit of all beings” (*Epigraphia Zeylanica*, 4:133, nos. 1–4) as well as to their own attainment of “Buddhahood as desired” (*ibid.*, 4:133, nos. 2–3). We also find a similar wish made by a “lay” person who lived between the fifth and eighth centuries and who sculpted or commissioned the sculpting of a rock in the shape of a stūpa. The person then dedicated the merit accrued from his undertaking for the benefit of all beings and for his attainment of buddhahood. He writes:

By this merit, may I be able, in every succeeding rebirth, to relive all the suffering of the world and to bestow complete happiness [on humanity]. [May I also always] be full of forbearance and compassion.

By this merit, may I vanquish the foes, Māra ... and sin; and having attained to that supreme state of Buddhahood, may I, with my hand of great compassion, deliver suffering humanity from the extensive quagmire of saṃsāra (*ibid.*, 3:161). (Neither the [] brackets nor the ellipses are mine).

One cautionary note concerning these examples must be made. While there is evidence that certain Sri Lankans took a bodhisattva vow, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that these people were, in fact, Theravāda.

53. While the concept of the bodhisattva stages is not overtly delineated in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, it is implicit in the text. However, the stages found in the *Buddhavaṃsa* closely resemble the four *bhūmi* outlined in one section of the *Mahāvastu*, and not the traditional ten stages found in the *Daśābhūmika Sūtra*. These four stages outlined in the *Mahāvastu* (1:1 and 46 ff.) are: (1) the natural career (*prakṛti-caryā*), in which a bodhisattva acquires merit by living a righteous life, giving alms to the Saṅgha, and honouring the buddhas; (2) the resolving stage (*praṇidhāna-caryā*), in which a bodhisattva makes a vow to attain buddhahood; (3) the conforming stage (*anuloma-caryā*), in which a bodhisattva advances to his goal by fulfilling the perfections (*pāramitā*); and finally, (4) the preserving stage (*anivartana-caryā*), whereby a bodhisattva is destined to become a Buddha and cannot turn back from the path to buddhahood.

In the *Buddhavaṃsa*, these four stages are implicit in the chronicle of Sumedha. For example, Sumedha first performed an act of merit to the Buddha Dīpaṅkara by lying in the mud (natural career); he then made a mental resolution to become a Buddha in the future (resolving stage); he then examined (and worked on completing) the ten perfections (conforming stage); and finally, he became assured of the attainment of buddhahood by receiving a prediction from Dīpaṅkara and by the occurrences of certain supernatural events that caused him to resolve to attain buddhahood (preserving stage). Contrary to the *Mahāvastu*, however, all of the four stages implicit in the *Buddhavaṃsa* are reached in each lifetime of Gotama's bodhisattva career and not over a number of lifetimes.

54. This point is more fully developed in Chapter 4 of my M.A. thesis, "Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Buddhism: With Special Reference to the Sūtra-Piṭaka" (University of Colorado, 1995). It may be argued,

however, that while the *Buddhavaṃsa* contains the central doctrines associated with the bodhisattva ideal, this text was heavily influenced by certain Mahāyāna Buddhist schools of thought. While this idea is sometimes asserted (E. J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953], pp. 147–148), it has not been confirmed. In fact, the opposite assertion may also be made. This may be supported by the dating of texts. For example, though the *Buddhavaṃsa* is a relatively late addition to the Pāli Canon, according to certain scholars (e.g., Gombrich, “The Significance of Former Buddhas,” p. 68, and A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991], p. 298), this text may be dated from the third to the second century B.C.E. This approximate date is also supported by the fact that there is a parallel version of this text in the *Mahāvastu*, which has been dated to the first century B.C.E. (Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Saka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin [Paris: L’Institute Orientaliste de Louvain, 1988], p. 158). Hence, the *Buddhavaṃsa* may actually precede the earliest Mahāyāna text, the *Ratnagūṇa-saṃcaṃyagāthā* (which has been dated by Conze to the first century B.C.E.) by at least one hundred years.

55. Walpola Rahula, “L’ideal du bodhisattva dans le Theravada et le Mahāyāna,” *Journal Asiatique*, 1971, p. 69.

56. K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All the Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism, A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 7, fasc. 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), p. 94.

57. Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study of Buddhist Values and Orientations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 251.

*Bodhi and Arahattaphala: From Early Buddhism to Early Mahāyāna*¹

Karel Werner

The event of enlightenment which made the ascetic Gotama into the Buddha of our epoch is several times described in the Pāli Canon, particularly in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (e.g. in suttas nos. 4, 19, 26, 36). We learn from these accounts that while still a bodhisatta he had already acquired proficiency in meditation practices and was able to enter concrete as well as abstract absorptions (*rūpa* and *arūpa jhānas*) at will, but recognised that none of these states of mind was in itself a solution to the riddle of existence, a permanent achievement or the final liberation from saṃsāra. The jhānic states were, indeed, satisfying in their way and highly valued in contemporary Yoga circles, but to rest content with them would mean stagnation and eventual regress into lower saṃsāric states again. The bodhisatta was now aware that what was needed was the discovery of the cause of conditioned life in saṃsāra in order to remove that cause and break the chain of conditionality.

Sitting under the tree which became hallowed in subsequent times as the Tree of Enlightenment, the bodhisatta entered the fourth jhāna and with his mind firmly anchored in total equanimity, which is the main characteristic of this jhāna, he turned his attention to the past. He succeeded in breaking through the barrier of oblivion and recollected his previous lives, one by one, by the hundreds and by the hundreds of thousands, during the whole present world period, and, still further into the past, during uncounted previous world periods. In this way he obtained knowledge of his entire past, which became to him a vivid personal illustration of the beginningless cyclic world of saṃsāra.

Next he turned his attention to the world around him, with its innumerable living beings. With his clairvoyant eye (*dibbacakkhu*) he could now see all the beings in saṃsāra with all their achievements, anxieties and endeavours and he saw how at every moment a large number of them died only to be reborn elsewhere in higher or lower worlds according to their actions. In this way he obtained another

knowledge, another vivid illustration of the vast world of saṃsāra, this time as it existed around him, simultaneously with his own life.

With these two knowledges the bodhisatta acquired a direct and concrete picture of the way the law of karma worked and he also saw the repetitiveness of saṃsāric existence. Looking back over his beginningless past he realised that he had travelled through all possible spheres of life and had occupied all possible stations in saṃsāric life several times over. Looking around himself he now saw those spheres of life and stations within them in their seemingly infinite variety occupied by other beings. So, basically, the saṃsāric life of his past and the saṃsāric world around him were the same.

If there had still been any doubt in him as to the desirability of leaving the saṃsāric existence behind, his double vision of the totality of saṃsāric forms of life² would have brought home to him that there was no point in going on and on in the same way. There was nothing new in saṃsāra to which he could look forward and which would not be a repetition of what he had been through before more than once. The temporary detachment from and equanimity towards saṃsāric life as achieved in the state of the fourth jhāna could now only become permanent and effortless for him and he thus won complete detachment from saṃsāra and any form of longing to remain within it as an involved participant. The remaining question was: Why? Why does this whole spectacle of saṃsāric life go on and why is one involved in it?

In a way, the answer to this question was already there, known to the bodhisatta as well as to most of the other ascetics of the time, because it formed the basis and motivation of their quest. Saṃsāric life was unsatisfactory and one was involved in and bound by it because of the cankers (*āsavas*), i.e., because of the influx of sensual desire (*kāmāsava*), continued existence (*bhavāsava*) and essential ignorance (*avijjāsava*). This motivating knowledge was, however, more like a working hypothesis which had not yet been verified or a religious belief which had not yet been substantiated by personal experience. But now, when the vision of the totality of saṃsāra both in its personal and cosmic context as described above had been achieved, the bodhisatta recognised that a realistic basis had been created for the tackling of the last problem, namely the cause of it all. And so in the third watch of the night of Enlightenment he knew exactly where to turn his attention next.

From the basis of the fourth jhāna the bodhisatta now applied his mind to the realisation of the destruction of cankers.³ He saw clearly as it actually was the truth of the unsatisfactoriness of saṃsāric life, how it arose, how it was made to cease and what the way was leading to its cessation. He also saw the true nature of the cankers, how they arose, how they were stopped and the way to their stopping. “Thus knowing and thus seeing, this mind of mine became liberated from the canker of sensual desire, liberated from the canker of becoming, liberated from the canker of ignorance. The knowledge: ‘This is being liberated’ arose in the liberated one. I knew: ‘Birth is exhausted, the divine faring completed, what was to be done has been done, there is no other life like this to come.’”⁴

We can easily see that the knowledge of the destruction of cankers is in fact the knowledge of the four noble truths, which form the basis, the core and the goal of the early Buddhist teaching and practice. Naturally, there are a number of discourses dealing with them in detail. Very briefly summarised: the first truth asserts the unsatisfactoriness of the whole of saṃsāric existence in its four main aspects: (1) that of personality, composed of five groups of constituents to which one clings as one’s own although they do not belong to one (*pañc’upādānakkhandhā*), (2) that of the conscious life of the personality represented by the six internal (*ajjhātika*) and six external (*bāhira*) bases (*āyatana*s), i.e., the five sense organs and the mind with their respective objects, (3) that of the world as constituted by the six external *āyatana*s, and (4) that of the world as analysed into its four basic forces or great elements (*mahābhūta*); the second truth obtains its elaboration in the form of the twelve links of the process of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*); the third truth is also explained in the context of dependent origination, this time contemplated in reverse order; and the fourth truth is the eightfold path with all its intricate methods of progress and realisation.

These then are, as far as we can gather from the early sources, the contents of *bodhi* which made the bodhisatta into the Buddha of our historical period. They are often referred to, in a succinct formulation, as the three knowledges: (1) remembrance of former existences (*pubbenivāsānussati*), (2) knowledge of destinations according to actions (*yathākammūpagañāna*) or the celestial eye (*dibbacakkhu*) and (3) knowledge of the destruction of cankers (*āsava*kkhayañāna). This list was later extended to six “higher

knowledges” (*abhiññās*), the three additional ones, preceding the original three, being (1) magic powers (*iddhividhā*), (2) celestial ear (*dibbasota*) and (3) the capacity to know the minds of others (*cetopariyañāṇa*).⁵

None of these knowledges remained peculiar to the Buddha, and on various occasions he gave the standard descriptions of the accomplished monk as possessing the three knowledges (e.g., DN 13) or the six higher knowledges (e.g., DN 34; MN 6, 7). This implies that there was no essential difference between the Enlightenment of the Buddha and the Enlightenment of his accomplished disciples. That applied even to the faculty of teaching the Dhamma to others. When Māra urged the Buddha after his Enlightenment to enter the final nibbāna (*parinibbāna*), the Buddha refused, saying: “I will not pass into final nibbāna, O Evil One, as long as no *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, *upāsakas* and *upāsikas* of mine become *sāvakas* and *sāvikas*—accomplished, disciplined, skilled, true hearers, preservers of Dhamma who have reached complete harmony with the Dhamma, have entered upon the proper course, are of perfect conduct, and having acquired mastership of their own, will expound, show, make known, establish, reveal, analyse and make clear the Dhamma, and having well and with logic refuted arisen adverse opinions, will show this striking Dhamma.”⁶ From this passage it is clear that accomplished disciples (= *sāvakas* and *sāvikas*) were foreseen by the Buddha just after his Enlightenment as becoming fully fledged teachers of the Dhamma.⁷

Thus originally there was to be no difference between the *bodhi* of the Buddha and the *bodhi* of his accomplished disciples. They were all equally enlightened as to the causes of saṃsāric existence and therefore equally free from them, having reached nibbāna. They had the three knowledges or the six higher knowledges and they had a capability to teach the Dhamma which practically equalled that of the Buddha himself. The Pāli Canon comprises a number of discourses on various aspects of the teaching and practice given by accomplished disciples which do not differ in style or contents from those ascribed to the Buddha. Moreover, each of these discourses was subsequently endorsed by the Buddha when reported to him.⁸ One difference, however, remained clear: the Buddha was the first one to attain *bodhi* and he did it by his own effort; he was also the first and most skilful one to teach the Dhamma. On account of this he was

hailed as the perfect teacher and his Enlightenment as the incomparable perfect Enlightenment. (*anuttara sammā sambodhi*).⁹

But of course, once a difference is admitted in any aspect, it tends to be widened and extended to further aspects. And that happened very early, although in one respect the Pāli tradition has remained consistent: however superior the Buddha was to his arahants in teaching skill and however incomparable his Enlightenment may have been, this had no bearing on the fact of being freed from saṃsāra, having reached final nibbāna. Liberation was the prime aim and that, essentially, was what made one an arahant. Those seeking a quick shortcut to liberation soon discovered that it was the third knowledge, that of destruction of cankers (*āsavaḥkhayañāna*), which was the decisive factor for the attainment of nibbāna. The knowledge of one's own past lives and of the comings and goings of other beings may have been important to a solitary truth seeker to demonstrate to himself the futility of saṃsāric involvement and motivate him for the final effort to destroy the cankers, but a disciple of a fully enlightened teacher may have found enough motivation for his struggle in accepting the teaching of his charismatic master in full without personal verification and yet have been able to complete his struggle and destroy the cankers on the basis of his grasp of the four noble truths.

So, as the number of the accomplished disciples grew, fewer and fewer of them were known to have all the three knowledges in full, let alone all the six higher knowledges, and some of them apparently possessed only the one which was indispensable for liberation, i.e., the third knowledge or the sixth higher knowledge (*āsavaḥkhayañāna*). Later Pāli tradition therefore classifies it as supramundane (*lokuttara*) and the remaining two or five as mundane (*lokiya*), since they could be acquired to a certain degree by anybody without bringing him nearer to final liberation; they still belonged to and kept one within saṃsāra. They greatly enhanced, of course, the possibility of liberation when properly used, but they also represented a danger, since they could be misused or prove a distraction or diversion, if the last, supramundane, knowledge was not developed simultaneously or soon afterwards.

Thus we have at a quite early stage in the Pāli canonical tradition several types of liberated ones who had attained nibbāna, but who were not equal to each other in the attainment of higher

spiritual powers. Yet they were recognised as arahants who had destroyed their cankers. The foremost arahant was the Buddha, who had all six higher knowledges and the supreme skill of an incomparable teacher; next came his great arahants who also possessed all¹⁰ or nearly all these qualities, although perhaps in a slightly smaller measure, and whose teaching skill was not their own, but derived from their being the disciples of the Buddha; then followed arahants who fully possessed only the third knowledge (the sixth higher knowledge) and one or two of the other faculties; and last we find arahants who possessed only the third knowledge (sixth higher knowledge) of the destruction of cankers which they had obtained through their understanding of the four noble truths and particularly of the chain of dependent origination. This amounted to acquiring wisdom and therefore they were called wisdom-liberated (*paññāvimutta*).¹¹ They did not even have to become proficient in the attainment of absorptions (*jhānas*). Those who did achieve *jhānas* as well as liberation through wisdom were described as “both ways liberated” (*ubhatobhāgavimutta*). It does not, however, follow that they always used their *jhānic* proficiency for the attainment of further knowledges; they could have rested content with their supramundane knowledge of the destruction of cankers. But the matter is far from being entirely clear. Later Pāli tradition elaborated the path to liberation which bypasses *jhānas* and develops only the one supramundane knowledge into a method known as “dry” or “pure” insight (*sukkha* or *suddha vipassana*).¹²

From what has just been said we can see that the Pāli tradition has tended from quite early times to narrow down the contents of the fruit of arahantship (*arahattaphala*) so that—although it represented full liberation—it does not quite merit the designation of “enlightenment” (*bodhi*) which is too reminiscent of the events of the night of Enlightenment. It was therefore hardly ever used to describe directly a disciple’s final achievement. (The Sanskrit Buddhist tradition, however, did use the term and in Mahāyāna texts the term *śrāvakabodhi* is current, denoting the limited achievement of Hīnayānists, but it percolated into Pāli writing in the twelfth century with a somewhat upgraded meaning—see later). The reason for this was probably the urgency of winning liberation as quickly as possible without spending time and energy on developing *jhānas* and mundane knowledges.

However, there is a pitfall in this development. Through forsaking the experience of the totality of *samsāra* as provided by a complete knowledge of one's past lives and the comings and goings of all other beings, there arises the problem of the reliability or otherwise of a would-be arahant's knowledge of the destruction of his cankers. As mentioned earlier, by definition this knowledge is supramundane and whoever possesses it is in no doubt and cannot deceive himself. But this does not prevent those who do not possess it from deceiving themselves and thinking that they do have it. During the Buddha's lifetime, with his power of knowing the minds of others (*cetopariyañāṇa*), his confirmation of the achievement of a newly born arahant gave it absolute authenticity both for him and other members of the Buddhist community, and other great arahants could do the same even when the Buddha had passed away, although perhaps with less acceptable authority for some. But the time would inevitably come when no one could provide this service and the danger of self-deception as to one's own achievement, and deliberate deception on the part of false monks going undetected, must have been recognised. The Buddha himself seems to have anticipated the problem and gave a discourse in which he enumerated the criteria of arahantship in the form of questions to be put by others (obviously unable to confirm the achievement by their direct knowledge) to one who made the declaration of arahantship (MN 112). These criteria concern the unshakable freedom of the mind from the influence of senses, from the constituents of personality, from the elements constituting the world, from the sixfold internal and external sense spheres and from the bias of the notion of "I" and "mine".

Still, it could easily happen that a devout follower leading an austere life and practising diligently could reach a state of inner balance and detachment resembling, to him, the final attainment as defined by the third knowledge while his cankers would still exist in him in a latent form. Examples of this happening can be found in commentaries, e.g., the stories of the *theras* Mahā Nāga and Mahā Tissa (*Manorathapūraṇī*) who believed for sixty years that they were arahants until Dhammadinna, a pupil of theirs, reached arahantship together with four higher knowledges, and seeing that his teachers were only learned worldlings, helped them recognise it and complete their path.¹³

From this we can see that there was enough ground for starting to look down upon *arāhattaphala* in comparison with *bodhi* unless one painstakingly discriminated the types of arahantship and remained entirely clear about the point that it was the third knowledge which made for final liberation and that in this respect there was no difference between the Buddha and any type of arahant. The Theravāda tradition scrupulously guarded this position, but outside it the situation was different. Perhaps the confusion brought about by instances of seeming attainments of arahantship such as those referred to above (but with a less fortunate outcome) contributed to the development of the view that arahants were liable to fall away from nibbāna, as held by Saṃmitīyas, Vajjiputtakas, Sarvāstivādins and some Mahāsaṅghikas.¹⁴

The nature of the attainment of arahantship was further made questionable by the very issue which brought about the schism of the Saṅgha to which the Mahāsaṅghikas owed their origin and which concerned the status of the arahant. The impression one gets from the scanty accounts of the event in the fragmentary sources is that at the bottom of it all was a desire to make the proclamation of arahantship more easily available. One can wonder why this should be desired when arahantship meant the destruction of cankers and consequent freedom from saṃsāric life after death and total equanimity towards it while still alive, so that the question of status inside and outside of the Saṅgha was totally irrelevant to it. However, we have to allow for the fragility of human nature even on the part of ordained monks if they are not liberated. *Arahant* originally meant “worthy”, which implies that, like the whole *sāvakaśaṅgha*, he is “worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation, an incomparable field of merit to the world,” as the standard description goes. Although the word *arahant* or any of its derivatives is not used in it, the implication is clear and the *Vimānavatthu Aṭṭhakathā* spells it out when it defines the *arahant*, among other things, as deserving requisites, such as food, etc. (*paccayānaṃ arāhattā*).¹⁵

Thus, it is easy to imagine that in the climate of decline of standards in the Saṅgha of Maurya time, when richly endowed and well supported monasteries became desirable places to inhabit, a substantial proportion of their residents had rather more mundane reasons for becoming monks than the quickest way to final

liberation, while the acquisition of the status of an arahant in the eyes of others, particularly lay patrons, would be highly desirable to them.

The tendency to revise the criteria of the attainment of arahantship undoubtedly also existed among genuine monks who did not belong in the fold of Theravāda—with good reason. The image of the Buddha had by this time undergone a considerable change. He was no longer seen by most as a mere man who had found the way to and attained Enlightenment and preached it to others to enable them to reach the same, but more of an embodiment of the cosmic principle of Enlightenment; and with this view was changed also the idea of the contents of Enlightenment. The first two knowledges in their original form were no longer impressive enough. The cosmic principle of Enlightenment as manifested in the person of the Buddha caused him to become omniscient in every conceivable respect. Claims of omniscience had been made in the time of the Buddha for other ascetic teachers, e.g., Mahāvīra (MN 79), and it is understandable that such a claim would eventually be made also for the Buddha, but it is clearly absent in the early discourses, and the claim of omniscience in leaders of non-Buddhist sects was moreover rejected in them.

Yet when this claim was made of the Buddha in the process of later development of Buddhist sectarian views, it was transferred also onto the arahant; this shows that the original tradition—according to which the achievement of the arahant was practically identical with that of the Buddha not only in the certainty of liberation, but also in the other knowledges—was still very much alive. It also shows that the Theravāda tradition allowing for final liberation of an arahant through the third knowledge only (*paññāvimutti* of a *sukkhavipassaka*) was not universally shared and may have been a very early, purely sectarian Theravāda development. It probably saved the Theravādins from the dilemma faced now at this later stage by the other sects, for the requirement of omniscience for the attainment of arahantship appeared to many, quite naturally, as unacceptable.

At the occasion of the schism, both these revisionist tendencies were incorporated—together with a third one—into five points by the monk Bhadra (or Mahādeva) who sought to redefine the concept of arahantship as totally distinct from the attainment of Buddhahood

or Enlightenment. He claimed that an arahant (1) could still be seduced by deities in dreams and have seminal discharge while asleep, (2) might be ignorant of some matters, (3) might have doubts, (4) might be instructed by other persons, and (5) could enter the path as a result of the spoken word.¹⁶

Points 2–4 apparently arose from confusion about omniscience. Clearly, even genuine arahants lacked knowledge of all matters and facts of saṃsāric reality, e.g., expert knowledge of sciences and crafts, had doubts and were uncertain as to the outcome of ordinary events, e.g., whether they would obtain almsfood in a certain village, and needed instruction or information from others, e.g., to find their way in a strange locality. The Theravādins who dealt with all the five points in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Kathāvatthu II, 1–6) would concede points 2–4 in this form not only for arahants, but also for the Buddha. But they would carefully make clear that these points did not apply to the knowledge of the Dhamma which both the Buddha and the arahants possessed in full. They had no doubt about it and could not be instructed in it by anybody with lesser achievement. Bhadra's deviation from the early canonical view was twofold: he would ascribe, wrongly, but in agreement with the tendency of the time, omniscience to the Buddha in all matters, both mundane and supramundane, while denying it, rightly, to arahants; but he would further allow, wrongly, for some measure of ignorance and doubt in arahants even in questions concerning the Dhamma, i.e., in their supramundane (third) knowledge of being liberated, and for the possibility of arahants being instructed in these questions even by non-arahants.¹⁷

As indicated above, these points (2–4), although arising from conceptual confusion about supramundane and mundane forms of knowledge, could be regarded as stemming from genuine problems experienced by earnest monks and they might have been solved in an enlightened discourse between Bhadra's party and the *theras*.¹⁸ The first point, however, was one which undoubtedly aroused suspicion as to its motivation and betrayed eagerness to acquire an external status rather than an internal realisation. At best it showed deep ignorance of the nature of the third knowledge, namely the destruction of cankers. This by definition transcended the normal knowledge of the surface consciousness and penetrated the entire mind with all its layers freeing it from cankers completely. Bhadra's

first point would allow monks who had acquired equanimity in their daily life by the routine practice of renunciation to consider themselves and be acknowledged by others as arahants even if their cankers were suppressed only partly by being driven into the unconscious, from where they could influence dreams. Such achievement, however, if not further perfected, has to be regarded as relative and not final, and could be lost in the face of powerful impetuses from the outside. Undoubtedly this must have happened to monks who regarded themselves and were regarded by others as arahants, and that would be one of the factors leading to the development of the view that arahants could fall away.

The Theravādins were very clear about all this and, remaining adamant about the true nature of arahantship as the final and supramundane achievement of liberation, i.e., nibbāna, they refuted the first point outright.¹⁹ As it seems, however, they were in a minority, and from then on their influence in India declined, though they have continued to flourish in Sri Lanka till the present day. In India the Mahāsaṅghika concept of the omniscient Buddha as the embodiment of the cosmic principle of Buddhahood became the basis for further elaboration of Mahāyāna Buddhology, which led also to the birth of great schools of Buddhist philosophy, thereby enriching the whole field of Indian philosophical and religious thought.

However, the outcome of the redefinition of arahantship cannot be looked upon as successful. The relaxed criteria would have enabled many monks of lesser attainment as well as status-seeking monks, whose general conduct and knowledge of the Dhamma were observably insufficient to meet the strict criteria adhered to by Theravādins (MN 112), to proclaim themselves arahants. We need not doubt that many took advantage of this opportunity, so that a profusion of arahants may have occurred in the India of the time. We do not know to what extent this status helped them to acquire the desired benefits, at least in the short term, but the long-term downgrading of the criteria was counterproductive. In the creative climate of religious fervour and quest for perfection which became conspicuous a century or two after the Mahāsaṅghika schism and led to the appearance of new sūtras which reformulated the soteriological message of the Dhamma, the achievement of arahantship ranked low, was not seen to be final and was even

compared to a children's toy (*Saddharmapundarika Sūtra* III, 70–90). In its devalued form it simply could not satisfy the spiritual aspiration of those who sought the realisation of the ultimate goal.

Thus it was necessary to look again to the achievement of the Buddha himself, and in the absence of the original concept of the arahant who is practically equal in knowledge and teaching activity to the Buddha, it was the Buddhahood itself with its perfect Enlightenment and capacity to save innumerable beings through teaching which became the goal. So, instead of following the eightfold path, the aspirant now embarked on the path of a bodhisattva in order to develop perfections (*pāramitās*) and to become the Buddha of a future age.²⁰ This, of course, is no innovation, for that is what the last Buddha had to go through and so had his predecessors and so will those who will come in the future, like Metteyya. What is new is the prescription that this path to full Buddhahood be followed by everybody, a requirement which could not but eventually be felt to be unrealistic. After all, there is no need for so many Buddhas, even if worlds are innumerable. Yet the goal to be achieved could not be devalued again, and there was no way in which arahantship could be rehabilitated—an arahant simply no longer was seen to be truly enlightened, as a Buddha was. The thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) became the most powerful motivation, and so the designation *bodhisattva*, a being intent on Enlightenment, was the only one acceptable, even though the original aim of the path of a bodhisattva, namely to become the Buddha of a certain world period as its perfect teacher, was abandoned. Thus was developed a concept of *bodhisattvas* as a class of enlightened beings in their own right who need never become Buddhas yet are very close to them, both in the quality of their Enlightenment and in their capacity to teach and generally help other suffering beings. As these bodhisattvas are usually in the retinue of a Buddha, they have a position which is virtually equivalent to that of the great arahants in the retinue of the historical Buddha.

Further development followed, but at this particular point the evolution of Buddhist ideas came full circle. The debasement of the original ideal of spiritual accomplishment of arahantship—which, in a way, had started quite early with the introduction of the concept of *paññāvimutti*, defined as lacking all the enlightening knowledges but

one, and which reached its nadir with Bhadra's reform—was made good for Buddhism in the north by a reformulation of this spiritual ideal under the label of *bodhisattvayāna*. The fact that the Theravādins in the south have preserved the ideal of arahantship virtually unscathed when it was devalued in the north gives them the right to refuse to fit neatly under the heading Hīnayāna and to brush aside the Mahāyāna criticism of the goal of arahantship as they understand it. The criticism of the Mahāyāna sūtras was justifiable, prompted by the debased image of arahantship in the wake of Bhadra's reform and does not in the least apply to the great enlightened arahants of early Buddhism, with their proficiency in attaining jhānas, three *ñānas* or six *abhiññās* and many other qualities, as contained in the standard descriptions in the *suttas*, including the capacity of giving enlightened discourses and leading scores of disciples. Thus arahants are fully comparable to Mahāyāna bodhisattvas. Since the reputation of the great arahants of early Buddhism never entirely vanished, arahants still play a certain role in some sects of Mahāyāna and are regarded at least as equal to bodhisattvas of the sixth plane, *bhūmi*.²¹

The Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka later tried, after some centuries of interchange with Mahāyāna, to hammer home the point of equality of the *bodhi* achievement of the disciples and the Buddha by introducing the Mahāyāna terms *śrāvakabodhi* (*sāvakabodhi*), with a much higher meaning than the Mahāyāna sūtras allow for it; it underlines it even more by calling accomplished disciples *sāvakabuddhas*.²² But these terms never became current.

In any event, the conclusion, I believe, must be that the historical controversy between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, justified at a time in India when the ideal of early Buddhism was obscured and its inheritors were truly "*hīna*", is pointless if applied today to the whole of early Buddhist tradition as preserved in the Pāli Canon and to the surviving schools of Mahāyāna. It further appears clear that the whole Buddhist tradition is vested in the concept of *bodhi* as defined by the Buddha's attainments in the night of Enlightenment and matched by the achievements of the great arahants. That means that the contents of *arabhattaphala* must equal or be very closely comparable to *sammāsambodhi* (*samyak sambodhi*), since, as soon as it started being narrowed down, its further debasement could not be stopped, and a reformulation of the ideal of the ultimate

accomplishment became necessary. In so far as the Theravāda school has preserved the early understanding of the nature of *arahattaphala*, it is not a lesser vehicle, since it offers the ultimate Buddhist realisation, namely nibbāna, to all beings—which is exactly the proclaimed aim of Mahāyāna, too. Open to question remains the tendency to rest content with *sukkhavipassanā* practice, a development within Theravāda which is nowadays favoured in many quarters of that school.

Notes

1. This is a slightly revised version of the essay published in the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4, 1981, 70–84. Reprinted in: *Buddhist Studies; Ancient and Modern (Collected Papers on South Asia* No. 4, Centre of South Asian Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), ed. by Denwood, Philip and Alexander Piatigorsky, Curzon Press, London, 1983, 167–181. Reprinted with permission of the author.
2. Cf. Karel Werner: ‘The Indian Experience of Totality’, pp. 229–231, in: *Wege zur Ganzheit. Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Lama Anagarika Govinda*, Almora 1973, pp. 219–232.
3. *āsavānaṃ khayaññāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim*. MN 4/M I 23.
4. Ibid.
5. Cf. DN 34; MN 3, 6 and 77.
6. DN 16/D II 104–105. I have abridged my translation by including the four types of disciples in one single paragraph, while the Pāli original gives four parallel paragraphs.
7. Technically, a *sāvaka* or *sāvikā* is *ariya puggala*, i.e., one of the eight types of holy persons, starting with the one on the path to stream-entry and ending with the one who has acquired the fruit of arahantship. All together they form the *sāvakaśaṅgha*, comprising both ordained and lay disciples, as distinct from *bhikkhūśaṅgha*, comprising only ordained monks who may have attained the state of *sāvakas* = holy disciples = *ariyapuggalas*, or may still be ordinary “worldlings”—*putthujanas*. Cf. Walpola Rāhula: “The Problem of the Prospect of the Śaṅgha in the West”, in: *Zen and the Taming of the Bull*, London 1978, pp. 55–57.
8. E.g., Sāriputta’s discourse with wanderers of other sects in SN 12:24/S II 31–34.
9. For the epithet *anuttara* cf. EnB vol. III, p. 179 and DN 30/D III 159.
10. E.g., Kassapa, see SN 16:10–11/S II 216–222.
11. MN 70: M I 477–478; SN 12:70/S II 123–124.
12. See *Visuddhimagga*, chapter XVIII; cf. Also references in P. Vajirañña’s *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, Colombo 1962, p. 141, note 1.
13. A free rendering of these episodes was published in *Stories of Old*, Kandy 1963, pp. 8–11.
14. Cf. EnB, vol. II, p. 47.

15. Ibid. p. 42.

16. See A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi 1970, pp. 214–218; cf. E.J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, London 1967 (repr. of 2nd edition; first 1933), pp. 33, 173; E. Conze, *Buddhism, its Essence and Development*, London 1957 (3rd edition; first 1951), pp. 119–120; also *Buddhist Thought in India*, London 1962, p. 197.

17. See Louise de la Vallée Poussin, ‘The Five Points of Mahādeva and the Kathāvattu’, *JRAS* 1910, pp. 413–423.

18. One can understand that there was confusion about arahants’ knowledge of the Dhamma as expressed by Bhadra’s points 2–4 in face of the division of vocation among ordained monks, some specialising in learning, teaching and interpretation of suttas, others seeking quick emancipation through intense practice after a brief instruction in meditation. This allows that a monk of the latter category, who might have attained arahantship, might be less knowledgeable conceptually about the teaching, and therefore willing to accept explanation from a monk of the former category who may not have been himself an arahant. The commentarial *Stories of Old* (see note 11) do contain such cases.

19. Again, one has to allow for confusion in the minds of ordinary monks even in the Theravāda fold, which makes Bhadra’s first point understandable, although not justifiable. One example of monks thinking that an arahant can still enjoy sensual pleasure is furnished by *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* in the story of the rape of Uppalavaṇṇā. This young nun became an arahant and then lived alone in a forest hut near Sāvathī, where one day she was ambushed and raped by a young brahmin. Later monks discussed the case in this way: “Even those that have rid themselves of the depravities (*āsavas*) like the pleasure of love and gratify their passions. Why should they not? They are not kolāpa-trees or anthills, but are living creatures with bodies of moist flesh. Therefore, they also like the pleasures of love and gratify their passions.” When the Buddha learned of it, he instructed them: “Monks, they that have rid themselves of the depravities neither like the pleasures of love or gratify their passions. For even as a drop of water which has fallen upon a lotus-leaf does not cling thereto or remain thereon, but rolls over and falls off, even as a grain of mustard-seed does not cling to the point of an awl or remain thereon, but rolls over and falls off, precisely so twofold love does not cling to the heart of one who has rid himself of the depravities or remain there.” E.W. Burlingame’s translation in his *Buddhist Legends*, Harvard U.P. 1921, part 2, p. 129.

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20. Cf. Warder, *op. cit.*, pp. 355–358.
 21. Cf. EnB, vol. II, p.46, note 1.
 22. See Walpola Rāhula, *op. cit.*, p. 75 (article “The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda and Mahāyāna”). On the other hand, some Pāli commentaries confuse the matter even further by using the term *buddha* with qualifications also for minor achievements: those learned in Dhamma are called *bahussutabuddhas*, although—one can presume—they might even be *putthujanas*, and arahants are termed *catusaccabuddhas*, meaning apparently those who became free through the third knowledge; the Buddha himself is ascribed omniscience as a *sabbāññubuddha*. For references see EnB, vol. III, p. 357.

Handwritten text in Sinhala script, likely a portion of the Long Prajñāpāramitā sutra. The text is densely packed and written in a traditional style.

Handwritten text in Sinhala script, continuing the sutra. The script is consistent with the previous section.

Handwritten text in Sinhala script, continuing the sutra. The script is consistent with the previous sections.

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Handwritten text in Sinhala script, continuing the sutra. The script is consistent with the previous sections.

Golden manuscript of the Long Prajñāpāramitā, found at Jetavana, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. After von Hinüber.

Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisatva in India: An Essay towards Historical Understanding

Peter Skilling

Conventions

Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own. I have translated technical terms and titles into English as far as possible. The titles are given in full small caps; they are provisional renderings for the purpose of this essay, and may differ from the translations of published versions. The original titles and terms and titles are listed in the Glossary of Terms and Titles in Appendix II.

I give technical terms in Sanskrit or/and in Pali as appropriate.

I spell the names of the languages Pali (Pāli) and Gandhari (Gāndhāri) without diacritics, in order to be consistent with the long-established custom of spelling Prakrit (Prākṛta) and Sanskrit (Sāṃskṛta) without diacritics. It seems to me that it is high time to naturalize Pali and Gandhari.

Here and there I use terms like Sāsana, Dharma, or Saddharma to give the overused ‘Buddhism’ a rest. For ‘the Buddha’ I also use the Fortunate One, the Master, Śākyamuni, and Gautama.

Taking into account a recent article by Gouriswar Bhattacharya, I choose to write ‘bodhisatva’ rather than ‘bodhisattva’: see Gouriswar Bhattacharya, ‘How to Justify the Spelling of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Term Bodhisatva?’, in Eli Franco and Monika Zin (eds.), *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday* (Rupandehi: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), pp. 35–50. The form with single ‘t’ is used in all early Sanskrit inscriptions and manuscripts, as well as in Gandhari Prakrit *bosisatva*, and in many loan words (for example in Khotanese, Sogdian, and Thai), as well as in transliteration into Tibetan.

This is not a bibliographic essay. The notes refer to the textual sources of my statements and ideas, and to useful secondary

literature, with an emphasis on the most current, which should generally make reference to earlier literature.

Preface

This essay presents some thoughts about ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Bodhisatva’ in India during the early period, from about the third/second century BCE up to the fourth/fifth centuries CE. I examine proto-Mahāyāna in terms of the texts and ideas of the ‘Vaidalya movement’, using an early term which occurs in Sanskrit as Vaidalya, Vaitulya and Vaipulya – the latter being the best-known – and in Pali as Vedalla, Vetulla, and Vepulla.¹ My ideas are inspired by the reading of primary sources, as far as possible in Sanskrit and Pali, in translations from Sanskrit into Tibetan, or in translations from Chinese into European languages. I do not pretend to have read all of this literature, which is vast and extraordinarily diverse – the size and variety of its corpus is at once one of the joys of the Mahāyāna and one of the obstacles to its easy understanding. The essay is only a preliminary reconnaissance of a complex topic. Further studies, especially of Chinese sources, are needed. Still, I hope at least to have made a start, and to have laid out the issues as I see them.

I frequently find the secondary literature on Mahāyāna to be at variance with the texts. If we want to understand the Mahāyāna, we should put some effort into finding out what its literature is trying to tell us. This means that we should read, reread, and reflect upon the texts, by which I mean the Mahāyāna sutras and śāstras. If we find that commonly accepted ideas are off the mark, we should rethink them.

This essay has nine parts. Part I frames the discussion to follow in the context of what I call the ‘quiet revolution in Buddhist studies’ – a steady but nonetheless dramatic transformation of the field that has resulted from new archaeological and new manuscript discoveries. Part II confronts some of the terminological difficulties that complicate any attempt to study the Mahāyāna. Part III examines the ancient term Vedalla/Vaidalya – or, rather, the triad of terms Vedalla/Vetulla/Vepulla (Pali) and Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya (Sanskrit): their definitions, their scope, and their relationship to the Mahāyāna.² By necessity, this section is somewhat technical, and its phrases and sentences are hung with long

garlands of footnotes teeming with unwieldy references to Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan sources. I crave the reader's indulgence, and I hope that she will understand the need for this bulky apparatus, and learn to love the labyrinthine byways of philological peregrinations. Part IV approaches Mahāyāna from the perspective of what it is not, by arguing against fifteen received ideas about Mahāyāna that are, I feel, ready to be put out to pasture. Part V attempts to grasp the inconceivable, and ask what the Mahāyāna might have been. Part VI discusses hermeneutics and debate in early Buddhism, Part VII the figure of the Bodhisattva. Part VIII looks at some of the points of difference between the Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna conglomerates. Part IX returns to the unavoidable problem: the burden of terminology.

Many are the questions about how the Mahāyāna arose; many are the questions about the nature of the Mahāyāna. To start with, I find the binary Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna model to be ahistorical, and to be fundamentally inappropriate as a frame for the study of Buddhism. The terms Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are absent in the known literature of the Śrāvaka schools, including the entire premodern Pali literature,³ and they are not the organizing principle of any Indian or Tibetan histories of the Sāsana that I know. This must mean something. Buddhist texts themselves present doctrinal development in terms of eighteen orders or four schools, or of the three potentialities or awakenings. In this essay, I examine the role of the terms Vedalla/Vaidalya and their cognates, which include Vaipulya, well known as an epithet of Mahāyāna sūtras. From the viewpoint of the eighteen schools, Vedalla/Vaidalya is both an insider's term and a rejected 'other'. It is an insider's term as a category (*aṅga*) of the Buddha's teaching, but it is a term for the 'other' when used with disapprobation for Mahāyāna ideas and practices. This points to a conceptual fissure, a quandary in the works, which needs to be explained. Understanding Vedalla/Vaidalya may help us understand the evolution of the Mahāyāna and its position within the monastic orders and schools. The evolution of what became, and what we now call, the Mahāyāna, was incremental and asymmetrical. The Mahāyāna was not a conscious programme or a streamlined movement; it did not develop in isolation, but in active conversation with the shifting religious ideas and trends of South Asia. As a dynamic complex in a network of social and intellectual exchange, the Mahāyāna was unpredictable. This is one of the reasons that its study is both difficult and rewarding.

I. The quiet revolution in Buddhist Studies

In the last twenty years, and even in the last ten years, what we call ‘Buddhist studies’ has seen a dramatic, if quiet, revolution. This revolution has been inspired by new discoveries in archaeology and manuscripts, and stimulated by new methodologies, today increasingly animated by interdisciplinary exchange. The new discoveries in archaeology include stūpa complexes like Panguraria and Deorkothar in Madhya Pradesh,⁴ Phanigiri in Andhra Pradesh,⁵ Bhon in Maharashtra, and, above all, Kanaganahalli in Karnataka.⁶ Significant new sites have been uncovered in the scores across India, and the map of ancient Indian Buddhism from north to south and east to west needs to be completely redrawn.

The impact of the new manuscripts that have been discovered or have become accessible in the past two decades is staggering.⁷ The finds may be compared to the great discoveries along the Silk Route(s) at the beginning of the last century, or even to the discovery of the ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ in Palestine over sixty years ago. In the past decade, studies, editions, and translations of an emerging corpus of fragmentary texts in Gandhari Prakrit have been published, as have new texts in new varieties of Buddhist Sanskrit or Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.⁸ These ancient documents have radically transformed our picture of Buddhism by opening new windows on the development of the Dharma in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, thereby immensely enriching our understanding of Buddhist languages, geography, manuscript practices, canons, and literature. The manuscripts include hitherto unknown recensions of what we had formerly thought were well-known texts, as well as entirely new texts and genres. Their study brings new insights into the multilayered process of transmission.

The earliest Buddhist manuscripts that survive today – and the earliest manuscripts of India – are from the northwest of the subcontinent (that is, from present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan). They are birchbark scrolls written in Gandhari Prakrit, and seem in many cases to belong to the Dharmaguptaka school. Among the texts we find new, Gandhari, versions of old classics like the STANZAS ON THE DHAMMA and the RHINOCEROS SUTTA, and of more technical compendia like the SUTTA ON CHANTING THE DHAMMA IN UNISON. They also include several Dhāraṇīs and fragments of Mahāyāna sūtras

– including the PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN EIGHT THOUSAND STANZAS,⁹ the BODHISATVA PĪṬAKA, the CONCENTRATION THAT COLLECTS ALL MERITS, and the FORTUNATE AEON.¹⁰

A collection of birchbark manuscripts from Bajaur, Pakistan, includes some of the earliest extant records in the subcontinent of Mahāyāna thought and literature.¹¹ One of these is a unique Mahāyāna sūtra. Dated to the first/second century CE, it has no parallel in preserved Mahāyāna literature in any language.¹² In the long, but unfortunately incomplete, manuscript – by far the largest scroll of the whole Bajaur collection – the Buddha Śākyamuni uses ideas and tropes related to those of the SPLENDID ARRAY OF AKṢOBHYA to convey his teachings to Śāriputra and eighty-four thousand deities (*devaputra*), whom he predicts to perfect awakening. That the thought and narrative of the ‘Bajaur Mahāyāna scroll’ depend on the thought and narrative of the SPLENDID ARRAY OF AKṢOBHYA implies that the SPLENDID ARRAY must have already been in circulation at the time when and in the area where the scroll was composed. The ‘Bajaur Mahāyāna scroll’ is therefore important for the study of the history of the SPLENDID ARRAY OF AKṢOBHYA in India.

Mahāyāna sūtras were transmitted from (mainly Northwestern) India to Central Asia, and they began to be translated into Chinese by the second half of the second century CE. Scholars often describe certain Mahāyāna sūtras as ‘early’ simply because they were translated during the earliest period. But in some of these – for example in the KĀŚYAPA CHAPTER and other Chinese translations of Lokakṣema (active in the second half of the second century) – the technical terminology, the hierarchy of ideas, and the presentation of the path of the Mahāyāna system are already well developed. That is, the ‘early sūtras’ are already stylistically and ideologically mature. Falk and Karashima have described the Prakrit PERFECTION OF WISDOM as going back ‘deep in the first century BCE’.¹³ The intended or addressed audience is the ‘son or daughter of good family’ (Gandhari *kulaputa*, *kuladhita*), a shift from the ‘monks’ (*bhikkhave*, *bhikṣavaḥ*) of the Nikāyas and Āgamas.¹⁴ There is a hyperbolic emphasis on merit, shared with many Mahāyāna sūtras. Frequent use of the verb ‘to write’ (*likh*) and the noun ‘book’ (Gandhari *postao* = Skt. *pustaka*)¹⁵ foreground writing and copying as part of the text’s ideational package. We find technical terms of the bodhisattva path

like ‘non-regression’ from the achievement of Buddhahood (*anavatiya*). The idea of a false or counterfeit (*prativarna*) Perfection of Wisdom has already developed. The phraseology and literary modules are sufficiently consistent and sufficiently established that passages can be abbreviated through the use of the word *piao* = *peyāla*.¹⁶ This small word, or the practice to which it testifies, is of great significance, because it shows that by the first century BCE the PERFECTION OF WISDOM was already a developed literature.¹⁷ The Prakrit PERFECTION OF WISDOM, the Bajaur Mahāyāna sutra, and other discoveries turn previous speculations on their heads by giving access to an early phase of the Mahāyāna in Northwestern India. Together with the sūtras, vinaya texts, narratives, poems, and technical-cum-exegetical works, many of them hitherto unknown, the texts present completely new perspectives on the intellectual and cultural histories of Buddhism and Northwestern India, a key area in the transmission of ideas and cultural practices to Central Asia and beyond.

Beyond the archaeological and codicological discoveries, there have been major advances in research and publication. These include research on and translation of the Āgamas and other scriptures that are preserved in Chinese translation but are generally lost in the original Indian languages.¹⁸ This is a field that has advanced immensely in the past decade.¹⁹ Āgama research and translation can promote deeper, holistic understanding of how the teachings of the Fortunate One were transmitted, and lead to a balanced and nuanced picture of the early phases of the Dharma, placing the Pali canon in the broader spectrum of early Buddhist teachings. The Pali canon – no longer boxed off as the sole representative of ‘early Buddhism’ – takes its rightful place within the broadband of Buddhist canons as the only early canon that is preserved in full in an Indic language. Hence it is one of the most precious resources for the study of the Buddha’s way.

Publications on other subjects, such as Yogācāra Buddhism, have set new standards and transformed their fields.²⁰ There are also significant new researches on Khotanese, Chinese, and Tibetan manuscripts, but these are beyond the scope of this essay.

II. Points of Terminology

And at that moment in Jambudvīpa the views of beings were twofold: some believed in the Mahāyāna, others despised it.

The Golden Light Sūtra²¹

The Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna model

I do not use the polemical term ‘Hīnayāna’ (lesser vehicle, low(er) vehicle, inferior vehicle).²² Hīnayāna is a dependent concept which cannot stand alone: it can only be used in contrast to ‘Mahāyāna’ or a similar antithetical term. ‘Hīnayāna’ was coined by certain advocates of the Mahāyāna to stigmatize a rhetorical ‘other’, as a foil for Mahāyānist self-esteem. It is used only in some Mahāyāna texts (by no means all); it is used only in certain contexts (by no means universally); it is used only with specific referents (by no means indiscriminately).²³

The historiography of Buddhism in the West is a rambling edifice erected on a shaky quicksand of myths and misunderstandings.²⁴ One of these is the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna model, which has dominated the field from the nineteenth century to the present. It is in part inspired by models from the very different histories of a Christianity divided into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism familiar to the early generations of European scholarship on Buddhism.²⁵ The bifurcation of the history of these ‘great religions’ begs many questions. Why is the Eastern Orthodox Church left out of the model? Should not the model incorporate the Syriac and Coptic churches, or, especially, the Nestorians and other groups that were significant historically across Asia – and are neither Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, nor Protestant? One might conclude that the binary model of Christianity is selective to the point that it is spurious.

The Eastern Church experience may have more instructive parallels for the study of Indian and ‘migrant’ or ‘export’ Buddhism. In both cases, the holy lands were disrupted by invasion with the eruption of Islam from the seventh century, with the result that, while Buddhism and Christianity weakened and withered in their places of origin and growth, new centres of power and prosperity evolved in neighbouring territories, and gradually developed into a number of ‘national’ bodies.²⁶ Another question in these equations is, what is Protestantism? Does the term mean the same thing to the

British as it does to Europeans? Does ‘Protestant’ mean the same to the Czechs, the Cantonese, the Swedes, the Sinhalese, the French, the Koreans, or the Irish? Obviously, the answer is ‘no’, it means very different things. Which of the many churches, then, represents Protestantism in these trans-religious paradigms? It would seem that to draw on Christian models is unhelpful if not misleading.

A hundred years ago, T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) wrote in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* that the term Hīnayāna ‘might be now left in fit obscurity, had it not been adopted by one or two well-known Chinese and European writers, to whose sympathies it appealed, and who have made it a cornerstone of their views on the history of Buddhism’.²⁷ Whatever the case, the term has stood fast for nearly a century, until it has finally begun to lose ground. In a short entry in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* published in 2004, John Strong wrote that instead of the ‘pejorative term’ Hīnayāna, the *Encyclopedia* would use ‘mainstream Buddhist schools’.²⁸ But this new term brings a new set of problems, and it has not been universally accepted.

The very idea of ‘Hīnayāna’ did not exist during the first four or five centuries of the Śāsana.²⁹ There was never, during any period of Indian history, anywhere or at any time, any body of people or any social group – any sect, any faction, any monastic order, or any lay community – which identified itself as ‘Hīnayāna’. The Hīnayāna never existed, anywhere or at any time, as an establishment or organization, as a social movement, as a self-conscious historical agent. Nor was Hīnayāna a stage or period in the development of Buddhism. What, then, was the referent of the term? What was its societal reality? Its referent was a body of ideas, not a social body. The Hīnayānist was defined by Mahāyānist polemics; he was a dogmatic construction, not a social identity. He was a straw man, a will-o’-the-wisp, a *māyāpuruṣa*.³⁰

The term Mahāyāna is equally polemical and equally problematic, and it cannot be taken at face value. The term Mahāyāna, ‘Great Way’ or ‘Great Vehicle’, is not dependent on its opposite, Hīnayāna; rather, it has an independent history, and an independent, or in later periods perhaps only autonomous, existence. Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are not ‘co-natals’ (*sahajāta*): it is the notion of Hīnayāna that depends on Mahāyāna, and not vice-versa.³¹ The Mahāyāna sūtras regularly laud the Great Way, indeed often at great length, without any reference or contrast to the Hīnayāna. The origins of the notion of the inferiority of the way of the arhat and of

the pratyekabuddha may perhaps be sought, in part, in the concept of ‘inferior aspiration’ (*hīna-adhimutta*, *hīna-adhimuttika*), already found in Pali and early sources.

Karashima has proposed that the word *yāna* was a phonetic development from Prakrit *jāna*, meaning ‘wisdom’ or ‘insight’ (Sanskrit *jñāna*, Pali *ñāna*, Gandhari *ñāṇa*), in texts transmitted in Middle Indic, the most important being the LOTUS SŪTRA, for which the evidence is preserved in Chinese translations and Sanskrit manuscripts.³² A combination of semantic ambiguity and wordplay led from *mahājāna* to *mahājñāna*/*mahāyāna*.

Buddhism is a complex entity which has evolved over a vast area for more than two thousand years. To force its development – whether social or historical, whether philosophical or ritual or art-historical – into an artificial and binary Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna model is a fundamental distortion. For these and other reasons (there are too many to develop here), Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are not appropriate categories for historical or social analysis.³³ Despite this, the terms have a long legacy, and they been used, almost without question, during more than a century of modern scholarship.³⁴ In recent decades, scholars have tried out other descriptors for Hīnayāna, but the old terms still linger on. This is not for any good reason – I doubt whether any can be given – but rather from the inertia of convention, and because concerned scholars have been unable to agree on any of the alternatives proposed. Here the problem may well be that they have sought out a *single* substitute or a *single* alternative for Hīnayāna. Might it not be more realistic to use different terms for both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna according to circumstances, according to contexts? If no single universal term for Hīnayāna ever existed in India, why should we impose single or universal terms of our own choosing? Might not the failure to come up with a new blanket term mean something in itself? Have we been barking up the wrong tree? To abstain from reification, from the construction of arbitrary monoliths, can help deconstruct received paradigms which portray Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna as dyed-in-the-wool adversaries who perpetually glower at each other across an unbridgeable gulf.³⁵ What have been neatly classified as ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hīnayāna’ are inalienable parts of the same dynamic; they are abstractions of complex interactions over long centuries across the wide landscapes of Asia and, finally, across the world map.

The history of Indian Buddhism has been too often presented as linear and sequential: Hinayāna leads to Mahāyāna and then on to Vajrayāna.³⁶ This periodization is hard to justify, even as a textbook convenience. It ignores chronological and geographical complexities, and gives the false impression of uniform and pan-Indian continuities. That the saṃgha was diverse from the start is recognized in the early sūtras. A good example is the Pali CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON ELEMENTS, which points out in several ways how different people have different tendencies, and how those of similar tendencies associate with one and other. Specifically, the Buddha points to different groups of monks who are walking back and forth with one or the other of the great disciples. He explains that each group shares particular proclivities, for example:³⁷

The Blessed one asked the monks, ‘Do you see, O monks, the many monks walking back and forth with Sāriputta?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘All of those monks have great wisdom.’ ...

‘Do you see the monks walking back and forth with Puṇṇa Mantaniputta? ... All of those monks are expounders of Dhamma.’

‘Do you see the many monks walking back and forth with Upāli? ... All of those monks are Vinaya masters.’

‘Do you see, the many monks walking back and forth with Ānanda? ... All of those monks are deeply learned.’

‘Do you see, O monks, the many monks walking back and forth with Devadatta?’ ... All of those monks have evil intentions.’

‘Beings come together and congregate because of their proclivities: those intent on lower things with those intent on lower things, those intent on the good with those intent on the good. This was so in the past, this will be so in the future, and this is so at present.’

This picture of the saṃgha suggests that human diversity led to the formation of interest groups with different ideas and aims, and that it was natural and inevitable that the monastic community would eventually regroup into a number of communities.³⁸ But even if the saṃgha was diverse from the start, its members were united by their adherence to the same code of conduct, the Prātimokṣa, and by shared oral traditions, practices, and lineages. Out of these traditions and lineages, with increasing innovation and individualization, developed ‘early Buddhism’. The Vaidalya traditions developed from early Buddhism, but at present we simply do not know when, where, why,

or how. Many of the ideas that were developed in the Vaidalya texts are present in the Āgamas and Nikāyas, the early repositories of the Buddha's word.³⁹ How soon did the Vaidalya movement develop these ideas into the distinctive and innovative bodies of thought and practice that would eventually become the Mahāyāna? Evidence available at present suggests that the process would probably have begun in the post-Aśokan period, but this is only conjectural.⁴⁰

By the first century BCE, 'proto-Hīnayāna' and 'proto-Mahāyāna' were developing in tandem, in dialogue and contention, at different paces in different places. The evolution of the Sāsana was multifaceted and organic; it was much messier than either the traditional doxographies or the latter-day academic models have pretended it to be. We need to develop new categories – less restrictive and more flexible – that respect the diversities and uncertainties of the evolution of Buddhism in Asia. This development was a process, a series of negotiations at multiple levels, not only among the Buddhists themselves but with other Śramaṇa traditions, especially the Jains, with the diverse brahmanical traditions, and with society as a whole.

The Śrāvākayāna and the eighteen Buddhist schools

Indian Buddhist texts present doctrinal development in terms of eighteen or four schools, or of the three potentialities or awakenings. One looks in vain for the terms Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in the literature of the eighteen schools or in any Pali works. This must mean something. In my own writing, and in this essay, I use the relatively neutral terms 'Śrāvaka' and 'Śrāvākayāna' to refer, not to any monolithic institution, but to the (conventionally enumerated) eighteen Vinaya orders or schools (*nikāya*).⁴¹ I use the terms in the sense that, according to their own traditions, all schools or orders go back to the first council or communal recitation, at which the Śrāvakas – the Buddha's direct 'listeners' or 'auditors' – collected, codified, and committed to memory the corpus of the Buddha's teachings.⁴² The monastic and textual lineages of the Dharma-Vinaya all claim to descend from these auditors. 'Śrāvaka' and 'Śrāvākayāna' refer to the practices and texts authorized by the Śrāvakas, transmitted by the Śrāvakaṣaṅgha through the *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*

lineages, and expounding primarily the insight [into the four truths] of the Śrāvaka (*śrāvakābhisamaya*) and the Śrāvaka's path to awakening (*śrāvakabodhi*).⁴³

Unlike the notional Hīnayāna, the Śrāvaka schools did exist in history, and they did assert their own identities. This is proven by epigraphy and literature. But we must bear in mind that the record is fragmentary, and that eighteen is only an approximate figure. At some points in history there were fewer than eighteen schools, at other points there were more than eighteen, and it is certain that all eighteen schools never existed at the same time or in the same place.⁴⁴ Several schools had brief or localized existences, or, at least, they have left very few traces. The tradition of the Śrāvaka schools might also be called 'Nikāya Buddhism', with qualifications.⁴⁵ No term for the conglomerate that was early Buddhism is perfect; each term or label raises its own problems. It makes better sense to give up the idea of finding a 'perfect' replacement for Hīnayāna, and to use alternative terms as circumstances or contexts require.⁴⁶ It makes better sense to be flexible.

The eighteen schools were not 'belief systems'. They were monastic orders, each of which transmitted its own collections of texts, its own interpretations of the Dharma, and its own devotional and ritual practices. At a certain stage of development, some schools arranged their texts into 'three baskets', Tripiṭakas, but there were other models, and it is not proven that each and every school possessed a distinctive Tripiṭaka. For this reason, to refer non-specifically to 'the canon', 'the Buddhist canon', or 'the Tripiṭaka' is imprecise – there were canons, there were Piṭakas, and there were Tripiṭakas.⁴⁷ For Buddhist communities, Tripiṭaka came to mean a complete and ideal corpus of a Buddha's teachings, rather than the historically grounded corpus of Śākyamuni's words as collected and transmitted by his disciples.⁴⁸ In the scholastic Buddhology of the Theravāda, as a principle bodhisatvas learn the Tripiṭakas of the Buddha's teachings and then develop insight.⁴⁹ In the BIRTH STORY ON THE EIGHT REQUISITES of the Pali FIFTY BIRTH STORY COLLECTION, the Bodhisatva (that is, the future Śākyamuni), after he has been predicted to Buddhahood by Sumaṅgala Buddha, takes full ordination and 'masters the entire Tepiṭaka of the Buddha's teachings'.⁵⁰ The Tripiṭaka becomes a constant feature of the Buddhas of all times, and a potent trope for the Dharma, like the

trope of the 84,000 bundles of the Dharma.⁵¹

Hartmann remarks that we do not know ‘how many versions of the Sūtraṭīka were once transmitted by the various schools in India’ or ‘the number of languages and dialects used for this purpose’.⁵² Today, only one complete Triṭīka survives: that preserved in the Pali language and transmitted by the descendants of the Mahāvihāra Theravāda.⁵³ The scriptures of some other schools, such as the Mahāsāṃghikas or Sarvāstivādins, are only partly preserved, whether in original Indic languages or in Chinese and Tibetan translations.⁵⁴ The Āgamas and Vinayas of most other schools are lost. Some schools transmitted collections of texts related to the bodhisattva path, known as Bodhisattva Ṭīkas, as well as Collections of the Magicians, known as Vidyādharma Ṭīkas,⁵⁵ or collections of mnemonic texts and protective charms called Dhāraṇī Ṭīkas.⁵⁶ Not a single Bodhisattva, Vidyādharma, or Dhāraṇī Ṭīka survives today, not even a single table of contents which might tell us how many and what texts such collections would have contained.

Modern understanding of the textual history of Indian Buddhism is based on only a fraction of the huge corpus that once existed. Evidence for the textual traditions of schools whose canons do not survive is preserved in references and citations in treatises and commentaries like Bhāviveka’s sixth-century BLAZE OF REASON, which cites passages from the scriptures of each of the eighteen schools (and is the only work known so far to do so).⁵⁷ Further information is available from the lists of manuscripts that Xuanzang (ca. 602–664) brought back from India to the Middle Kingdom in 645;⁵⁸ from the description of the Ṭīkas of the four schools given by Yijing (635–713);⁵⁹ from miscellaneous texts preserved in Chinese translation;⁶⁰ and from the emerging corpus of Gandhari and Northwestern texts (see above).

By approximately the fifth to sixth centuries CE, four orders – Sthavira,⁶¹ Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, and Sāṃmitīya – dominated North Indian monasticism, and they continued to do so up to the demise of monastic Buddhism in the subcontinent. Hence later texts regularly refer to ‘the four schools’.⁶² Because the four-school model evolved in Magadha and Northern/Northeastern India, it ignores the schools that were active in the Northwest of the subcontinent. Other models, preserved or compiled in Chinese, list five or more schools, including Northwestern traditions like the Dharmaguptakas.⁶³

The three vehicles

The Śrāvakayāna is the first option in a three-tiered classification of Buddhist spiritual careers into vehicles or paths (*yāna*):

1. The Listeners' vehicle (Śrāvakayāna), leading to a listener's awakening (*śrāvakabodhi*, arhatship);
2. The Pratyekabuddha vehicle (Pratyekabuddhayāna), leading to a pratyekabuddha's awakening (*pratyekabodhi*);⁶⁴
3. The Bodhisatva vehicle (Bodhisatvayāna), leading to buddhahood (ultimate, perfect awakening, *anuttara-samyaksambodhi*) and omniscience (*sarvajñatā*).

The bodhisatva vehicle is also known as the 'vehicle of the practice of the perfections' (*pāramitāyāna*). Related terms in Gandhari include 'bodhisatva dharma', 'bodhisatva training', and 'vehicle of perfect Buddha[hood]'. These are used in one of our earliest extant records of Mahāyāna thought and literature, the first/second century CE Mahāyāna sūtra on a birchbark scroll from Bajaur mentioned above.⁶⁵

The Mahāyāna has not as such come into the picture at this time. Both the available scriptures of the Śrāvaka schools and a good many Mahāyāna sūtras allow and even encourage all three options: it is up to the individual to decide whether to become an arhat, whether to become a pratyekabuddha, or whether to become a samyaksambuddha, and to then pursue the appropriate path. The eighteen or four schools accommodate the three *yānas*.⁶⁶ At an uncertain point, let us say in the first century BCE, groups of monks, nuns, and lay-followers began to devote themselves exclusively to the Bodhisatva vehicle. Eventually, some of them exalted this option to the point of asserting that everyone else not only *should* but *must* join a bodhisatva community and set out on the path to full awakening. For them, the Bodhisatva vehicle became *the* Great vehicle, the Mahāyāna.⁶⁷ The origins of the Mahāyāna as an identity and as a conscious movement lie in this conceit.

The eighteen schools and Mahāyāna thought exist within a single belief system, which for convenience we call Buddhism.⁶⁸ Standing on common ground, they accept the same cosmological principles and the same fundamental postulates, such as action and its results, not-self, dependent arising, and the four truths of the noble

ones.⁶⁹ They employ the same categories, such as aggregates, sense-bases, and elements, and they cultivate the same practices, such as the thirty-seven qualities that contribute to awakening (*bodhipāṅśikadharmā*). Within this shared system – these shared systems – however, there exists a great variety of philosophical opinion and practice. Neither the votaries of the schools nor the votaries of the Mahāyāna shied from diversification or innovation.

The early centuries BCE were an age of encounter. The Saddharma spread along the trade routes of flourishing empires; it confronted new cultures and ideas and established its own pilgrimage routes, monastic networks, and teacher-disciple lineages.⁷⁰ It was during this period of lively debate on matters of concern to Buddhist communities that the Vaidalya or ‘proto-Mahāyāna’ sūtras were compiled. The increasing distance from the Buddha in time and space and the new social and intellectual environments raised new problems. Ideas about the Bodhisattva and Bodhisattvas, the Buddha and Buddhas, the nature of reality and the nature of the path, began to coalesce into distinctive systems which would eventually travel under the ideological umbrella of the Mahāyāna. As an aggregate of ideas and trends, the Mahāyāna was a sensitive organism which had to react and to adapt to its environment in order to survive. It never closed and it is still evolving.⁷¹ The texts that have their origins during this period testify to these problems and to the attempts that were made to solve them. One of the especially interesting features of the Mahāyāna sūtras is that they preserve traces of these debates, tensions, and insecurities.⁷² Its literature is a by-product of anxiety, of a need felt by individuals and groups to assure and reassure themselves in unstable circumstances, to imagine and to elaborate agendas and wish lists. Proponents of the Mahāyāna actively constructed an identity – rather, identities – through narrative and polemic. Fortified by devotion, meditation, and speculation, these identities inspired the great monument of the literature of the Great Way. For this and other reasons, the Mahāyāna sūtras cannot be ignored in the writing of the history of Buddhism.

III. Vedalla, Vaidalya, Mahāyāna and other names

In this essay, I examine early Buddhism not in terms of Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna, but in terms of the eighteen schools and of the ancient scriptural category or genre Vaidalya. I do not propose this term as an alternative to Mahāyāna. It is not. I use it provisionally for an early period of Indian Buddhism, for the Mahāyāna *avant la lettre*, that is, for the proto-Mahāyāna, during an age of post-Aśokan ferment when lines were not yet drawn and boundaries were much less clear than scholarship prefers to assume. Vaidalya was one of the responses to intellectual and spiritual change, when Buddhist thinkers and leaders developed new ideas, new solutions, and new systems that rephrased and rebooted Buddhist thought. New texts were composed, drawing on already extensive oral legacies preserved by the monastic orders. This did not involve schism in the orders, but it must certainly have provoked conflict and competition within them. Perhaps the first individuals to consciously break away from the established systems and to stake out new social territories were the *dharmabhāṇakas* – ‘dharma-reciters’ or ‘dharma-orators’.⁷³ These reciters are stock-in-trade in many of the important Mahāyāna sūtras, and it is likely that they played key roles in the compilation, transmission, and propagation of the ideas and texts of the Mahāyāna. Regular performers in the narrative and rhetoric of the Mahāyāna sūtras, they were clearly men of persuasion and power, jockeying for status, security, and wealth. We cannot ignore them. There are far more references to Dharma-orators in Mahāyāna sūtras than there are to *bhāṇakas* in Pali.

The term Vedalla/Vaidalya has had an enduring usage, in Pali and in Sanskrit, especially in the earlier period, but also throughout the history of Indian Buddhism. My hypothesis is that this term is an important clue in the early history of Buddhism and of the Mahāyāna. The equation of Vaidalya and Mahāyāna is, however, nothing new. The ancient Sinhalese knew it, masters like Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in north India knew it, commentators like Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE) in Sri Lanka and the Dīpakāra in North India knew it. The connection was recognized early on by pioneering European stalwarts like Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), Hendrik Kern (1833–1917),⁷⁴ Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1869–1938), and by the great Sri Lankan historian S. Paranavithana.⁷⁵ As

Buddhist Studies progressed in the twentieth century, Lamotte and Warder and other scholars returned to the subject.

In the following section, I examine three Sanskrit words as used in Buddhist texts – Vaidalya, Vaitulya, and Vaipulya – and their Pali counterparts Vedalla, Vetulla, and Vepulla.⁷⁶ Both sets derive from a single term, but in their present forms they are no longer etymologically cognate.⁷⁷ The three Sanskrit terms are used interchangeably in a wide range of sources. In later manuscript traditions, the most common Sanskrit form by far is Vaipulya, which occurs both in original Indic languages and in translation.

The three terms derive from different roots: *vi-√dal* (to burst); *vi-√tul* (to weigh); *vi-√pul* (to be large, to be great).⁷⁸ The words *vaidalya* and *vaitulya* are met with infrequently, and seem to have been used only in restricted and technical contexts. That is, we do not have examples of everyday use which might throw light on their meaning. Only *vi-√pul* is common, in words like *vipula* and its cognates. Which of the three was the original root? The most likely candidate is *√dal*, ‘to burst’, giving rise to *vidalana*, then *vaidalya/vedalla*.⁷⁹ Much has been written about the term, and this is not the place to go into detail.⁸⁰ The latter form is preserved in several Mahāyāna sūtras and in the title of Nāgārjuna’s VAIDALYA TREATISE (see below). The root *vi-√dal* is also preserved in the definition of Vaidalya in the COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA, which explains that the Vaipulya genre is also called Vaidalya ‘because it destroys all obstacles’ (*sarvāvāraṇa-vidalanataḥ*: see below). It is likely that the earliest form was Vedalla/Vaidalya, and that this developed into Vetulla/Vaitulya and Vepulla/Vaipulya.⁸¹ After a time Vaipulya won out, and became the familiar term, with the result that earlier or alternate forms like Vaidalya and Vaitulya were erased from the record by progressive normalization. Fortunately, some stages or layers of the transition from Vaidalya to Vaitulya to Vaipulya can be seen when comparing chapters and text titles in Sanskrit manuscripts and their translations (see below). Very few surviving manuscripts preserve the forms Vaidalya or Vaitulya, and even in cases where the manuscript does retain these forms, the Tibetan translations will usually have instead *shin tu rgyas pa*, the standard equivalent for Vaipulya. It may be that the manuscripts used in the translation actually read Vaipulya, or that the Indo-Tibetan translation teams ‘updated’ the reading to the by that time familiar Vaipulya.

Vedalla as a genre or category of the Buddha's teaching (aṅga)

The primary usage of Vedalla in Pali and Vaipulya in Sanskrit is as the name of one of the nine or twelve genres or categories of the Buddha's teaching (see Appendix I).⁸² Vaidalya is one of the least understood, but, from the viewpoint of doctrinal history, one of the most significant, of the nine categories. Advocates of the Mahāyāna claimed that their literature belonged to this category. The ideologues of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda/Vaibhāṣika schools did not concede any rights to the Mahāyānists to occupy or share the space, and Vaidalya became a contested site. For Mahāyānists, Vaidalya was the nexus that linked the Mahāyāna to the 'official', or at least traditional, categories of the Buddha's teaching. The Śrāvaka schools denied this, and constructed notions of the Vaidalya genre that fit their own agendas.

Buddhaghosa explains Vedalla as follows:⁸³

All the suttantas requested to be preached as a result of repeated attainment of wisdom and delight, such as Cullavedalla, Mahāvedalla, Sammādiṭṭhi, Sakkapañha, Saṅkhārabhājanīya, and Mahāpuṇṇama Suttas and others should be known as Vedalla (Analyses).

Other texts like the GREAT COMMENTARIAL ANALYSIS emphasize diversity, profundity, and extensiveness, coupled with analysis.⁸⁴ I do not find Buddhaghosa's treatment of the term especially compelling. It may be, as Kalupahana has suggested, that in Buddhaghosa's time, the meaning had been forgotten. Nonetheless, since Buddhaghosa discusses the terms in other contexts, he must have known the equation Vedalla = Mahāyāna, but in his definition of the Vedalla genre, the great Ācariya confines the term to certain named suttas. Could this have been an attempt to close the genre, to block any attempts to locate Vaidalya-cum-Mahāyāna sūtras in the Vedalla category? To exclude the Mahāyāna from the nine categories would deny the Mahāyāna sūtras Buddhavacana status.⁸⁵

Discussions about Vedalla (vedallakathā) and future threats

An unusual use of Vedalla occurs in the cluster of suttas on ‘future threats’ in the NUMERICAL DISCOURSES. These are twenty suttas, four sets of five each, in which the Buddha warns the monks about threats, perils, or dangers (*bhaya*). The third threat of the third set is described as follows:⁸⁶

Again, in the future there will be bhikkhus who are undeveloped in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom. While engaged in talk pertaining to Dhamma,⁸⁷ in questions-and-answers,⁸⁸ they will slide down⁸⁹ into a dark Dhamma but will not recognize it. Thus, bhikkhus, through corruption of the Dhamma comes corruption of the discipline, and from corruption of the discipline comes corruption of the Dhamma. This is the third future peril as yet unarisen that will arise in the future. You should recognize it and make an effort to abandon it.

Here it is said that those who are undeveloped, or spiritually immature, engage in discussions on Abhidhamma (*abhidhammakatham*) or discussions on Vedalla (*vedallakatham*), and fall into ‘dark Dhamma’ without being aware of it: this is a future threat. The passage is difficult, and the commentary is not of much help. When we reflect that ‘future threats’, *anāgatabhayāni*, is one of the titles that Aśoka recommends to the four assemblies in the Calcutta-Bairāt edict,⁹⁰ and when we consider the juxtaposition of the terms ‘discussions on Abhidhamma’, ‘discussions on Vedalla’, and ‘dark Dhamma’ of the third SUTTA ON FUTURE THREATS, and ‘profound’, ‘supramundane’, ‘related to emptiness’, and ‘crafted by poets’ in the fourth SUTTA ON FUTURE THREATS, we might conclude that the perils of the future are doctrinal. The phraseology of the fourth sutta was adopted in a number of texts, including Mahāyāna sūtras, to different ends.⁹¹ The third sutta could refer to delusions arising from unprincipled speculations about Abhidhamma or Vedalla – a warning against, or a reaction to, excessive ontological or metaphysical speculations or currents of thought or practice that we would eventually know as Mahāyāna. The results would lead to ‘darkness’, that is the negative side of the coin (*kaṇhapakkha*) rather than to wholesomeness (*kusalapakkha*), or, symbolically, to being

overcome by Māra – Kaṇha being, after all, one of the names of the Tempter. The term *anāgata-bhaya* occurs in the PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN EIGHTEEN THOUSAND STANZAS,⁹² and is invoked in the ORNAMENT OF THE SŪTRAS OF THE GREAT VEHICLE.⁹³ The ‘future peril’ genre and the implications of the concept warrant serious study.

Vedalla/Vaitulya as a system of thought (vāda)

The name Mahāyāna is not known to occur in Pali.⁹⁴ Pali texts use ‘Vetullavāda’ for a complex of ideas and practices that modern scholarship has identified as ‘Mahāyānist’.⁹⁵ Unlike Vedalla, which has a positive status as one of the nine categories of the Buddha’s teaching, Vetulla in Vetullavāda is used only negatively, for unacceptable ideas or theories, in connection with doctrinal controversies that arose from the third to the second centuries BCE onwards. Its use is limited to the histories of the Island of Lanka and the Sāsana, notably the CHRONICLE OF THE ISLAND [OF LANKA] and the GREAT CHRONICLE, and to commentaries like that on THE POINTS OF DEBATE. The term Vetullavāda retained its currency in later Sinhala works, such as the fourteenth-century COMPENDIUM OF SCHOOLS.⁹⁶ In north India, at the other end of the subcontinent, the Vaibhāṣika author of the fifth-century LAMP OF ABHIDHARMA used an equivalent Sanskrit term, Vaitulika, to censure Vasubandhu for his Mahāyānist ideas.⁹⁷

In north Indian sources, Vaidalya is a positive term, and we find several general statements on the metaphysical position of Vaidalya, or, in the sources studied here, Vaipulya. The last part of Chapter 2 of Asaṅga’s COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA is a eulogy of the Vaipulya, defined and explained as the Piṭaka of the bodhisatva perfections. Asaṅga discusses why some people fear the Vaipulya Dharma, and why others, even though they are drawn to it, cannot obtain emancipation. He discusses the significance of classic doctrinal statements found in the Vaipulya like ‘all dharmas are without substance’ and are ‘un arisen, undestroyed, at peace from the beginning, and extinguished by nature’. In conclusion, Asaṅga praises Vaipulya as the Dharma that brings happiness and welfare to all.⁹⁸ In another work, the SUMMARY OF THE GREAT VEHICLE, Asaṅga gives an exposition of the Great Vehicle as taught by the

Buddhas, the Fortunate Ones in the Vaipulya.⁹⁹ Note the plural: this Vaipulya is a general system taught by Buddhas, not just a historical system established by Śākyamuni. In Vasubandhu's LOGIC OF EXEGESIS, a hypothetical opponent raises the objection that the Mahāyāna cannot belong to the Vaipulya genre, because it propounds doctrines like those just mentioned, 'which contradict the well-known teaching of the Buddha'. Interesting is a statement in the 'Chapter with Verses' of the SŪTRA ON THE BUDDHA'S VISIT TO LANKA that uses the phrase Vaipulya-naya, of which one should know the 'hidden meaning'.¹⁰⁰ The verses that follow evoke 'Mind only' metaphysics.

The Vedalla/Vetulla Piṭaka

Mahāvihāra sources were familiar with a Vedalla/Vetulla Piṭaka, which corresponds to the Vaidalya or Vaipulya Piṭaka of the Mahāyāna. PLEASING FROM ALL SIDES, the commentary on the Vinaya, refers to a Vedalla/Vetulla Piṭaka in a list of texts which are 'emphatically not the word of the Buddha'.¹⁰¹ The GREAT CHRONICLE states that the Abhayagiri monks, followed by the Jetavana monks, expounded the Vetulla Piṭaka, which is not the Buddha's teaching, as the Buddha's teaching.¹⁰² The SAMYUTTA COMMENTARY states that 'this Vedalla Piṭaka is not the word of the Buddha: it is only a counterfeit of the scriptures of the Saddhamma'.¹⁰³ The SAMYUTTA SUBCOMMENTARY equates Vedalla with Vetulla, and adds:¹⁰⁴

They [the adherents of Vedalla] assert that [the Vedalla] "was brought from the world of the Nāgas". Others say, "this is [only] a statement made by a [particular] school of thought (*vāda*)". [Vedalla] is not the word of the Buddha, because it contradicts the Buddha's word, and the Sambuddha does not contradict himself. It is a thorn; it does not conduce to the control of defilement – on the contrary, it is a contributing factor for defilement to arise.

This layered text is especially interesting. The notion of 'counterfeit scriptures' is an old and potent one, and here it is connected with texts brought from the Nāga world. I do not know where in Indian sources the earliest reference to the retrieval of scriptures from the Nāga world occurs. A number of Mahāyāna

sūtras are taught by the Buddha in the Nāga world, and in the opening of the SŪTRA ON THE BUDDHA'S VISIT TO LANKA, the Fortunate One visits Malaya Mountain in Lanka after preaching in the underwater palace of the Nāga King Sāgara for seven days. In a biography translated into Chinese by the Kuchean Kumārajīva (384–417) between 401 and 409, Nāgārjuna visits the palace of the Mahānāga Bodhisatva where he studies many profound Vaipulya teachings.¹⁰⁵ Other, later, versions include that given by Bu ston in his HISTORY OF BUDDHISM.¹⁰⁶ Early references to the legend in European scholarship were made by Vassilief and other scholars like Fergusson.¹⁰⁷

The accusation of the Theravādins and others that the Mahāyāna scriptures were counterfeit is reflected in the PERFECTION OF WISDOM SŪTRAS, which warn against those who may come, usually in the guise of a monk, and charge that the Mahāyāna is not the Buddha's word but is a forgery.¹⁰⁸ In some sūtras, such as the QUESTIONS OF RĀṢṬRAPĀLA, the tone of contention is particularly acrimonious.¹⁰⁹ Similar charges are laid in the TROVE OF PRECIOUS JEWELS and other sūtras.¹¹⁰

Vaidalya as an epithet for Mahāyāna sūtras

Mahāyāna sūtras often describe themselves internally as Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya.¹¹¹ The term, which seems to have been a shared self-identity of emergent Mahāyāna literature, usually normalized as Vaipulya, is regularly used as an epithet in chapter colophons or in concluding colophons. Vaipulya is one of the several epithets of the greatest Mahāyāna anthology of all, the BUDDHĀVATAMSAKA.¹¹²

'Mahāyāna Vaidalya Sūtra' is one of the titles given at the very end of the SŪTRA OF THE GREAT VEHICLE, THE BUDDHĀ PIṬAKA, THE SUPPRESSION OF IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR.¹¹³ *Sūtrānta-pravicaya,¹¹⁴ *Mahāyāna-vaidalya-sūtra, *Buddha-piṭaka, *Duḥśīlanigraha.

Even more instructive is the case of the COMPLETE COMPENDIUM OF VAIDALYA, which is partly preserved in Sanskrit.¹¹⁵ In the lexicon *Mahāvvyutpatti* (§ 1385), the title is given as *Sarva-vaidalya-saṃgraha* = *Rnam par 'thag pa thams cad bsdus pa*. The Tibetan Kanjur version retains the form Vaidalya in the title: *Rnam par 'thag pa thams cad bsdus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i*

mdo.¹¹⁶ The title colophon is not preserved in the Sanskrit manuscript fragment, but the preserved folio does contain an internal title, in this case with Vaitulya: *Sarva-vaitulya-saṃgraha*. Yet the Tibetan translation is again equivalent to Vaidalya: *Rnam par 'thag pa thams cad bsdus pa'i chos kyī rnam grangs* = *Sarva-vaidalya-saṃgraha-dharmaparyāya*. Here, where the manuscript evidence is for Vaitulya, the Tibetan is for Vaidalya. The sūtra is cited by Śāntideva (c. 650–750) in his great thematic anthology of sūtra literature, the COMPENDIUM OF TRAINING,¹¹⁷ where in the Sanskrit text the title is given with an added 'dharma' as *Sarva-dharma-vaipulya-saṃgraha-sūtra*, but remains *Sarva-vaidalya-saṃgraha-sūtra* in the Tibetan translation (*Rnam par 'thag pa thams cad bsdus pa'i mdo*). In two citations given by Kamalaśīla (c. 740–795) in his STAGES OF MEDITATIONAL CULTIVATION, the title is *Sarva-dharma-saṃgraha-vaipulya*, keeping the word 'dharma' but reversing the order of the last two components.¹¹⁸ This shows the complexity of the problem: even when Sanskrit is available, Vaidalya becomes Vaitulya becomes Vaipulya, and the translations are different again.

Like many other Mahāyāna sūtras, the COMPLETE COMPENDIUM OF VAIDALYA is self-referential from the very start:

The Fortunate One is staying on Vulture's Peak in Rājagṛha. A God from the family of the Pure Abodes named Maheśvara comes to him with a huge retinue, and asks him to teach the *Sarvavaidalya-saṃgraha-dharmaparyāya*, which formerly was taught by the Tathāgatas of the past, for the benefit and happiness of the many and for the long life of the Śāsana. The Fortunate One signals his assent by staying silent. Then he says to Bodhisattva Maitreya: 'Ajita, there has not been any Tathāgata in the past who did not teach the *Sarva-vaidalyasaṃgraha-dharmaparyāya*, and there will be no Tathāgatas in future who will not teach this Dharmaparyāya.'

One of the concerns of the sūtra is the rejection of the True Dharma (*saddharma-pratikṣepa*). It remains to be seen whether or how the use of Vaidalya in the title relates to the questions examined in this essay.¹¹⁹

The form Vaitulya is preserved in two texts that once belonged to a large sūtra anthology, inscribed in Sanskrit on palm leaf and dated palaeographically to the fifth century CE – in the colophon of the LION'S ROAR OF QUEEN ŚRĪMĀLĀ,¹²⁰ and internally in the EXPOSITION ON THE NON-ACTIVITY OF ALL DHARMAS, where the

word occurs twice.¹²¹ In the case of the latter, the Tibetan translation has in both cases *shin tu rgyas pa* = Vaipulya. In the fragmentary GREAT SŪTRA OF THE GREAT NIRVĀNA from Central Asia, however, where the Sanskrit has Vaitulya, the Tibetan agrees, using *mtshungs pa med pa* (= Vaitulya).¹²² Similar transitions from Vaitulya to Vaipulya are seen in the chapter colophons of Central Asian and Nepalese LOTUS SŪTRA manuscripts.¹²³

The terms occur in other sources preserved in Chinese translation, for example, in Vasubandhu's TREATISE ON THE BODHISATTVA VOW.¹²⁴ Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya was a prestige epithet, so it was always in demand. Vaipulya can be used as an epithet for Tantras. The ROOT RITUALS OF MAÑJUŚRĪ styles itself 'Vaipulya Sūtra of the Great Vehicle' and 'Bodhisattva Piṭaka, Avatamsaka'.¹²⁵ The SŪTRA OF THE DIRECT AWAKENING OF VAIROCANA in Chinese translation uses the term at least three times.¹²⁶

Nāgārjuna's Vaidalya-prakarana

One of the works of Nāgārjuna (second century CE) bears the title VAIDALYA TREATISE. Unfortunately it is preserved only in Tibetan.¹²⁷ The introductory stanza clarifies the meaning of the title, which is to grind into pieces or to pulverize the views of opponents:¹²⁸

I will teach the Vaidalya in order to extinguish the pride
Of those who are attached to disputation, out of pride in their
knowledge of logic.

If that is clear, the connection between the title – here of an authored work, a śāstra – and the Vaidalya as a genre or a system of thought is not clear. Given Nāgārjuna's connections with Mahāyāna, the choice of the title is unlikely to be accidental.

Vetullavāda and Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka

The well-endowed, lush isle of Lanka lay at the crossroads of the southern and maritime networks of contact and exchange. Its ancient centres of learning and its holy landscape made it a perennial

destination for seekers and pilgrims. A great deal has been written about Vedalla and Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka.¹²⁹ The sources for Vedalla are textual – the commentaries and chronicles cited above – and there is no sure epigraphic evidence for Vedalla/Vaidalya or related terminology.¹³⁰ For the Mahāyāna, there is textual evidence, and, for the later period in Sri Lanka (let us say, 500–1000 CE), epigraphic and iconographic evidence for Mahāyāna is exceptionally abundant.¹³¹ According to the chronicles, the Vetullavāda developed in Anurādhapura in the reign of King Vohārika-Tissa (r. 269–291). From then on, the Mahāyāna had a continuing history on the island up to at least the time of King Parakkamabāhu’s twelfth-century reforms. This is evident from references in the chronicles, from foreign sources (mainly Chinese), and from archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence. I am not certain whether such a continuing history of Mahāyāna can be traced anywhere else in South Asia – continuing, but not continuous, since our records are uneven, and because, at least according to the GREAT CHRONICLE, the Vetullavāda was periodically repressed, with its books burnt and its advocates banished to India. The records associate Vetullavāda (viz., Mahāyāna) activity and practices with the Abhayagiri monastery, one of the two great monasteries of ancient Anurādhapura,¹³² and with a group called the Dhammarucikas. The GREAT CHRONICLE explicitly describes Vetullavāda monks as residents of the Abhayagiri monastery, describing them as ‘thorns in the Victorious One’s Sāsana’.¹³³

Whether or not Abhayagiri was receptive to unorthodox ideas (that is, ‘unorthodox’ as seen through Mahāvihāran spectacles), at the same time it retained its identity within the Theravaṃsa lineage. Out of the Abhayagiri views and theories recently brought together from Mahāvihāra sources by Lance Cousins, not a single one is Mahāyānist.¹³⁴ All of them belong to Theriya trends of thought, to the extent that the vocabulary of the points of disagreement does not even make much sense in north Indian Abhidharma. These are insider debates within the dynamics of Theriya Abhidhamma. The commentarial tradition ascribes the views that do resonate with Mahāyāna ideas to the Vetulla, not to the Abhayagiri.

Amongst the textual evidence, there is the mystery of the SŪTRA ON THE BUDDHA’S VISIT TO LANKA. This is the only Mahāyāna sūtra set in Lanka. Does it have any historical connection with the island, or is the setting purely literary, a theatrical stage for the fast-paced

exchange of ideas between Bodhisatva Mahāmati and others? In the introduction, the King of Lanka – none other than the ten-headed Rāvaṇa of Rāmāyaṇa fame – invites the Buddha to Lanka.¹³⁵

I am Ravana who comes before you / the ten-headed king of the
yakshas / may the Buddha favor this Lanka of mine / and all who
dwell in its towns /

Buddhas of the past within its cities / upon its jewel-strewn
peaks / spoke of what they themselves attained / the realm of self-
realization /

May the Bhagavan do so as well / together with these sons of
the victors / the residents of Lanka and I would listen / to his
teaching of the purest Dharma.

At one point, the Fortunate One criticizes a group known as Icchantikas (beings who are beyond all redemption, who have lost forever the capacity to achieve Nirvāṇa):¹³⁶

Herein, what is the relinquishing of all roots of goodness? It is the
rejection and disparagement of the Bodhisatva Piṭaka. Saying
things like, ‘these sūtras do not conduce to discipline or to
liberation’, by relinquishing their roots of goodness, they do not
go to Nirvāṇa.¹³⁷

These accusations are close to those directed at the Vetullavāda in the Pali commentaries. But they also belong to a fund of stock critiques of Mahāyāna, and it is not possible to connect the passage to Lanka as such. The Pali chronicles recount the details of three visits paid by Sakyamuni to Lanka, and they are an integral element in the mythology of the island.¹³⁸ Was the Buddha’s visit to Rāvaṇa also a local tradition? If so, it seems to have left no traces.

The engraving of Mahāyāna Sūtras and Dhāraṇīs on gold, silver, copper, or stone, and their ceremonial installation within stūpas or other monuments is attested at Anurādhapura in Sri Lanka from about the eighth to the tenth centuries. The texts include the KĀŚYAPA CHAPTER,¹³⁹ the long PERFECTION OF WISDOM,¹⁴⁰ and Dhāraṇīs.¹⁴¹

Vedalla/Vaidalya and Mahāyāna in India

Literary sources explicitly connect Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya, the Mahāsāṃghika school, and the Mahāyāna. Indian masters record that several of the Mahāsāṃghika schools had a Vaipulya Piṭaka – the

Bhadrāyānīyas according to Bhāviveka, and the Aparasāilas and Pūrvaśāilas according to Candrakīrti. The TREATISE ON THE MEANING OF THE ANTHOLOGY OF VERSES, which is ascribed to Vasubandhu,¹⁴² identifies the Vaipulya genre with the ‘texts of the Ārya Mahāsāṃghikas’. On the other hand, Vasubandhu’s LOGIC OF EXEGESIS explicitly identifies the Vaipulya genre with the Mahāyāna. The fourth-century master Asaṅga does the same in his COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA and his BODHISATVA LEVELS. The latter states that out of the twelve genres, Vaipulya equals the Bodhisattva Piṭaka, while the others all belong to the Śrāvaka Piṭaka.¹⁴³ In the COMPENDIUM OF EXEGESIS, Asaṅga again identifies the Vaipulya with bodhisattva path.¹⁴⁴

In sum, Mahāyāna scholastic traditions themselves associate the Vaipulya genre with the Mahāsāṃghikas, the Mahāyāna, and the Bodhisattva Piṭaka. In many cases, we cannot be sure of the original Indic form, which might have been Vaidalya or Vaitulya. These are, of course, positive associations: the terms Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya do not, as far as I know, have any negative connotations in Mahāyāna usage. At the same time, as seen above, the Sri Lankan Theravāda excludes the Vedalla Piṭaka from the word of the Buddha. A Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin Vinaya manual on rules of conduct, ABHISAMĀCĀRIKĀ DHARMĀḤ, does not, however, single out Vaipulya for any special attention; it simply classes the Vaipulya with the rest of the ‘nine types of *sūtrānta*’ under ‘Abhidharma’.¹⁴⁵

Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaipulya in the north Indian tradition

North Indian masters like Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Saṃghabhadra retain and equate the three forms Vaidalya, Vaitulya, and Vaipulya, and give their own definitions. Asaṅga’s COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA defines the three as follows:¹⁴⁶

What is Vaipulya? It is speech connected with the Bodhisattva Piṭaka. The Vaipulya is also called Vaidalya and Vaitulya. Why is it called Vaipulya, ‘Expansive’? Because it is the foundation for the benefit and happiness of all beings, and because it teaches the Dharma excellent and profound. Why is it called Vaidalya,

‘Demolisher’? Because it demolishes all obstacles.¹⁴⁷ Why is it called Vaitulya, ‘Incomparable’? Because it is without compare.¹⁴⁸

In his LOGIC OF EXEGESIS, Vasubandhu explains the terms as follows:¹⁴⁹

The name Vaipulya is used for the Mahāyāna. It is called Vaitulya, because it is without compare. With regard to the other genres, it is the ‘Crest-jewel (*cūḍā*) which demolishes’ and the ‘Great demolisher’. It demolishes the defilements with their residues. Herein,

Because it is expansive, it is Vaipulya,
 Because it is without compare, it is Vaitulya,
 Because it demolishes all views,
 It is also called the Demolisher.

The three terms are also equated by the Sarvāstivādin master Saṃghabhadra, a senior contemporary of Vasubandhu, in his **(Abhidharma) Nyāyānusāra-śāstra* (阿毘達磨順正理論 (*Apidamo*) *shun zhengli lun*).¹⁵⁰

Vaipulya refers to the extensive analytical clarification of dharmas by means of logical reasoning (*zhèng lǐ* 正理; **yukti*, **nyāya*); for, all dharmas have numerous natures and characteristics which cannot be analytically clarified without extensive discussion. It is also known as extensive bursting (*guǎng pò* 廣破; *vaidalya* < *vi* + *√dal*), for this extensive discussion is capable of bursting the extremely strong darkness of nescience (*ajñāna*). It is also known as unmatchability (*wú bǐ* 無比); *vaitulya* < *vi* + *√tul*), for this extensive discussion has subtle and profound principles which cannot be matched.

This shows that the three terms were used in Sarvāstivādin scholasticism, not only in Mahāyāna writings. The three terms and their definitions are retained in later Tibetan literature, such as by Jamgön Mipham (1846–1912).¹⁵¹

The definitions given in these sources are abstractions, wordplays on the roots and derivatives of a term or terms the original senses of which are not, at least at present, clear. At any rate, it is probable that some advocates of the proto-Mahāyāna – whatever and whenever that was – adopted the terms to describe their own texts and, perhaps, their collective identity. The Vaidalya genre was the entry point for Mahāyāna ideas and texts. In this case, obviously,

the terms do not have any pejorative sense. This needs further investigation: how did a term that was shared by the different schools as one of the nine or twelve categories of the Buddha's teaching take on different forms, meanings, and values? Why did the Mahāyānist thinkers choose to appropriate this term, rather than, for example, 'sūtra' or 'upadeśa'? The blanks in the historical record make these questions difficult to answer.

The Mahāyāna according to Asaṅga

As for the term Mahāyāna, 'great vehicle': the question here is 'what makes this vehicle great?' What does *mahā-* mean? Why is it a great vehicle, in contrast with the 'other', the lesser or lower (*hīna* vehicle)?¹⁵² The commentary on the COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA offers elaborate – and highly idealized – glosses:¹⁵³

Vaipulya, Vaidalya, and Vaitulya are synonyms of Mahāyāna. Because it has seven types of greatness, it is called the vehicle of greatness (*mahattvayāna*). This is the sevenfold greatness:

(1) Greatness of support (*ālambana*): the path of the bodhisattva is supported by the limitless teachings of the [PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN] ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND VERSES and other texts;

(2) Greatness of practice (*pratipatti*): the comprehensive practice for the benefit of self and others (*sva-para-artha*);

(3) Greatness of understanding (*jñāna*): from understanding the absence of self in persons and phenomena (*pudgala-dharmānairātmya*);

(4) Greatness of energy (*vīrya*): from devotion to many hundreds of thousands of difficult tasks during three incalculable great aeons (*mahākālpa*);

(5) Greatness of resourcefulness (*upāyakaśālyā*): because of not taking a stand in Saṃsāra or Nirvāṇa;¹⁵⁴

(6) Greatness of attainment (*prāpti*): because of the attainment of immeasurable and uncountable powers (*bala*), confidences (*vaiśāradya*), and dharmas unique to Buddhas (*āveṇika-buddhadharma*);

(7) Greatness of deeds (*karma*): because of willing the performance of the deeds of a Buddha until the end of Saṃsāra by displaying awakening, etc.

IV. What Mahāyāna is not

At this juncture, it may be useful to discuss what Mahāyāna is *not* and what it does *not* do. The points listed below address current or modern misconceptions – current in the sense that they are contemporary, that they are common today, and modern in the sense that they were constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by (mainly) European scholarship. They are projections of (largely) Western preconceptions and preoccupations. They have no foundation in Buddhist thought itself; nonetheless, many of them have infected Buddhist self-consciousness, whether in South Asia, Southeast Asia, or East Asia, in Europe or in the Americas. Each point could be developed into an essay, and many more points could be raised.

(1) The Mahāyāna was¹⁵⁵ not a religion or a church or a sect.¹⁵⁶ In India, the Mahāyāna did not have any independent institutional existence. It did not have any geographical centre or base; it did not have any headquarters, any Rome or any Constantinople. Those who practised and promoted the Great Vehicle were largely dependent on the monasteries and nunneries of the eighteen schools, and they were dependent on lay support and mercantile and court patronage.

(2) The Mahāyāna was not an ideological or philosophical monolith. The canopy of the Mahāyāna sheltered a wide range of divergent positions and practices. The Mahāyāna had no single voice, the Mahāyāna had no single position. It was a seminar, a series of conversations, a play of counterpoints.

(3) There is no particular connection between the use of Sanskrit, or any other language, and the Mahāyāna. The eighteen schools used several languages – Prakrits including Pali and Gandhari, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Buddhist Sanskrit, and classical Sanskrit. Mahāyāna literature was composed in Gandhari, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Buddhist Sanskrit, and classical Sanskrit.

(4) The Mahāyāna did not reject the Śrāvaka texts or practices. It accepted them, more or less in their entirety, at the same time developing new hermeneutical strategies to accommodate, to reinterpret, to revalorize – and to subordinate – them. The study of the Śrāvaka Piṭakas was essential to the Mahāyāna masters, and the great Mahāyāna sūtras cannot be understood without a thorough

grounding in the Śrāvaka Piṭakas. Passages, verses, and narratives from the Śrāvaka Piṭakas were absorbed into Mahāyāna sūtras,¹⁵⁷ and cited and embedded in Mahāyāna śāstras.¹⁵⁸

(5) The Mahāyāna is not an ordination lineage or a monastic order (*nikāya*). Monks and nuns who boarded the Great Vehicle did so as ordained members of one or the other Vinaya schools. The fourth-century philosopher Asaṅga was ordained as a Sarvāstivādin. The sixth-century master of the ORNAMENT OF REALIZATION Vimuktisena was a Sāmmittīya. Dīpaṅkaraśrīñāna (Atiśa), a tenth- to eleventh-century adept from Bengal, travelled to Tibet, where his teaching had an enormous impact. He had been ordained as a Mahāsāṃghika, but in the Land of Snows he lived in the midst of Sarvāstivāda monks. Tāranātha (1575–1634) and other Tibetan historians record Indian traditions, thumbnail biographies, of masters of Mahāyāna and Tantra, which make reference to their ordinations in one or the other of the four orders well into the Pāla-Sena periods (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries). During this period, the Sthavira order is least in evidence. But earlier, in the seventh century, the Tang pilgrim Xuanzang used the ambiguous term ‘Mahāyāna-Sthavira’ to describe the affiliation of some of the monasteries that he visited or learned about during his travels in India. The meaning of the phrase is debated; one possibility is that at these centres the monks (and, possibly, nuns) followed the Vinaya of the Sthavira order, but were committed to Mahāyāna/Bodhisattva practice.¹⁵⁹

(6) The Mahāyāna was not a lay movement. Mahāyāna literature addresses the four assemblies – monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen – within a predominantly monastic milieu. Many of the interlocutors in Mahāyāna sūtras are monastics, while others are laymen and laywomen, merchants, kings, and queens. Sūtras are also addressed to gods – to Śakra or to various Brahmās – or to supernatural beings like *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *kinnaras*, and *gandharvas*. As the narratives unfold, selected members of the cast commit themselves to awakening, advance on the path, or receive predictions to Buddhahood. The extraordinary diversity of the narrative audience raises intriguing questions. How do we explain this universal outreach? What are the narratives trying to say?

The Śrāvaka schools and the exponents of Mahāyāna were all obliged to address the needs of both lay-people and monastics.¹⁶⁰ To

reduce institutional or religious history to a lay/monastic dichotomy is unwarranted. Buddhist institutions did not exist in isolation, or address themselves only to 'Buddhists', to lay-followers, or to their own monastic members. They interacted with a complex of social groups – with rulers, courtiers, and soldiers, with merchants, traders, artisans, and farmers, with brahmans, renunciants, and ascetics, with Jainas, Śaivas, and Vaiṣṇavas. All Buddhist communities had to respond to the changing problems, needs, and pressures of society.

(7) The Mahāyāna was not morally lax, or a compromise in ethical standards as a concession to the needs of the laity. Admittedly, the moral stance of Mahāyāna literature is decidedly equivocal. Sūtras like the QUESTIONS OF RAṢṬRAPĀLA advocate a rigorous morality, including a strict ascetic life in the wilderness, and pointedly criticize settled and corrupt monks. Treatises like the voluminous LEVELS OF YOGA PRACTICE devote long and detailed chapters to traditional categories of ethics and meditation.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, sūtras like the EXPOSITION OF VIMALAKĪRTI advocate flexible or transgressive interpretations of the moral codes, embedding their rhetoric in colourful, fast-paced, and betimes bewildering narratives.

(8) The Mahāyāna was not a movement initiated or sustained by forest or ascetic monks. The forest – the jungle, the desert, the wasteland – and the town belonged to a single landscape, a continuum in terms of human and social ecologies. The social organism was not partitioned, and country and town cannot be separated out.¹⁶² There were no permanent forest or town vocations; urban and forest monasticism were shifting and interrelated.

(9) It is not accurate to describe the Mahāyāna as a 'minority movement'. That the Mahāyāna was a minority movement is most often presented as a fact rather than a hypothesis. Its proponents do not say what they mean by 'minority', a relational concept which can only be understood in terms of interactions between individuals and groups. Does it mean a minority within the ordained saṃgha as a whole, or within a specific order? Does it mean a minority among committed Buddhists in general? Or does it mean a minority within the Indian society of the time? What are the terms of reference? Are we talking about the whole of India, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, or about a particular region? How can the idea of Mahāyāna as a disembodied 'minority movement' possibly be grasped? It is not

until the mediaeval period, at best, that we begin to have any statistics, any social indicators, that might enable us to estimate the demographics of religious movements, and even then for certain areas only – at a time when Buddhist communities were no longer significant if they even existed.

A priori notions of ‘minority’ or ‘majority’ do not work for the religions of India in the early periods. And even if they did, their relevance to the history of ideas can certainly be questioned. A small number of thinkers can change the course of history. I would contend that, in the history of Buddhism, the pioneers of Buddhist thought did just this. Thought leads the world (*cittena nīyate loko*); thought transforms the world.¹⁶³

(10) The theory that the Mahāyāna was a ‘minority movement’ is bound up with the notion of ‘mainstream Buddhism’. But how do we define this mainstream?¹⁶⁴ If we interpret the Sāsana as grounded in the saṃgha, in the Vinaya schools, then which of the eighteen monastic orders was the mainstream? If we interpret the Sāsana in terms of metaphysics/Abhidharma, ethico-ritual systems, or scriptural and liturgical languages, then which of these constituted the mainstream of Indian Buddhism? If numerical majority is our yardstick, then in the second century after the Buddha, the Mahāsāṃghika school would have been the mainstream in Magadha. If we follow Xuanzang’s estimates of monastic populations in the seventh century, the Sāṃmatīya *nikāya* was the largest of the four schools.¹⁶⁵ Were, then, the Sāṃmatīyas the mainstream? But they maintained the existence of a *pudgala* or person: other schools saw this *pudgala* as on a par with a ‘soul’, and dubbed them Pudgalavādins – ‘Personalists’ who assert the substantial existence of an individual person. Were the Personalists the mainstream in the seventh century? If so, do we have to revise our notion that Buddhism is characterized by the doctrine of ‘non-self’? These and many other points raise the question whether a ‘mainstream Buddhism’ was ever historically possible at all.

To keep the metaphor, there were many streams of monastic praxis, and many currents of thought; they intermingled and branched off, in different regions, zones, and periods. Gandhara had its several streams, North or Central India others, and Andhra and the South had their own streams. Archaeological remains in Sri Lanka testify to continuous cultural and religious development for

well over two thousand years; uniquely, this is documented in a continuous written record, the GREAT CHRONICLE, compiled from the standpoint of a single institution, the Mahāvihāra. For most other regions, we lack any sort of documentation whatsoever, and we have little if any evidence to help determine what school or schools might have been predominant. What school or schools were active, say, in third-century Orissa, in fourth-century Chhattisgarh, or in fifth-century Punjab and Haryana? The notion of ‘Mainstream Buddhism’ is an artificial and ahistorical abstraction.

The ‘mainstream hypothesis’ is contradicted by the strong Vetulavāda activity in Sri Lanka during the early centuries CE, as related in the Mahāvihāra chronicles themselves. The hypothesis also conflicts with the evidence of Indian or Indianised centres such as Khotan in the fifth and sixth centuries where Mahāyāna thought and practice were unequivocally mainstream, not to speak of the relative predominance of Mahāyāna in East Asia from an even earlier period.¹⁶⁶

The use of the term ‘mainstream Buddhism’ devalues Mahāyāna thought and practice, as if ‘the Mahāyāna was somehow just a turbulent eddy or a stagnant backwater in the great flow of Buddhist thought’.¹⁶⁷ The term also suggests that the Mahāyāna was insignificant in Indian intellectual history and Indian art history. This is certainly not the case. To use the term ‘mainstream’ is to participate in a judgement that excludes not only all Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism but also the many inflections of Tantra and Vajrayāna, effectively marginalizing all of ‘Northern’ and especially Central Asian and East Asian Buddhism. Much of Buddhism – in history, in geography, in literature, in philosophy, in the arts – becomes a sideshow. Is it helpful to study centuries of Buddhist evolution across the length and breadth of Jambudvīpa from the fixed perspective of the inappropriate category of ‘mainstream’, simply because the term is (ostensibly) inoffensive and politically correct?

I do not mean to suggest that Buddhism has no mainstream elements. ‘Mainstream elements’ and ‘mainstream Buddhism’ are not the same thing. Certain practices, such as going to the Three Jewels for refuge, undertaking precepts, reciting texts, and venerating relics and images, or the maintenance of hierarchies within communities and the designation of sacred and ritual space – all of these are ‘shared’ or ‘mainstream’. There are many shared values in social practice, ethics, and meditation. Grouped practices like charity,

moral conduct, and mental culture, or moral conduct, meditation, and wisdom:¹⁶⁸ these – however differently they may be defined – are mainstream practices. The quest for merit (*puṇya*), the mobilization of the faithful through the promise of rewards or blessings (*anuśamsa*), and the offering of protection (*rakṣā*) are mainstream mechanisms or ideologies.¹⁶⁹ It is in these senses that I use the word mainstream. I believe that it is important to recognize the existence of mainstream elements in the heart of the historical Śāsana, and to understand how they were interpreted and put into practice by diverse communities across schools and across time.

(11) The texts of the Śrāvaka/Nikāya schools are not uniformly ‘early’. The texts of the Bodhisattvayāna/Mahāyāna are not uniformly ‘late’. Each corpus, each body of texts, has many layers or strata, and as a whole embodies centuries of development. The Śrāvaka collections have many layers, from the earliest Sūtras and Dharmaparyāyas to the later Apadānas, Avadānas, and Lineages of Past or Future Buddhas. They preserve some of the oldest known texts from the pre-Aśoka period, like the RHINOCEROS SUTTA, the STANZAS ON THE DHAMMA, the CHAPTER OF THE EIGHTS, and the WAY TO THE BEYOND, titles so famous that they are cross-referenced in texts. They include the titles recommended by Aśoka in the Calcutta-Bharat edict, as well as formally structured and carefully edited grand collections like the Āgamas/Nikāyas. At a certain point, Abhidhamma works were finalized and added to the canon to make THREE BASKETS, Tripiṭakas. The Bodhisattva and Mahāyāna canons also contain many strata, with the earliest phases overlapping the latest phases of the Śrāvaka literature. Mahāyāna sūtras also embed and recycle passages from the Śrāvaka scripture, although it is open to question whether the trajectory into a Mahāyāna text was from a developed Śrāvaka canon or directly, from pre-canonical oral traditions. One example is the famous ‘parable of the raft’, which occurs in Pali in the DISCOURSE ON THE SIMILE OF THE SNAKE,¹⁷⁰ and in several Mahāyāna sūtras including THE DIAMOND CUTTER and the QUESTIONS OF BODHISATVA LOKADHARA. Multiple use is made of a short passage in which the Buddha warns Ānanda not to judge people: only the Buddha has the ability to assess people. The warning occurs twice in the NUMERICAL DISCOURSES.¹⁷¹ It is given as an embedded citation in no less than four Mahāyāna sūtras: the EXPOSITION ON THE NON-ACTIVITY OF ALL DHARMAS,¹⁷² UGRA’S QUESTIONS,¹⁷³ the

CONCENTRATION OF HEROIC PROGRESS,¹⁷⁴ DISPELLING THE GUILT OF KING AJĀTAŚATRU,¹⁷⁵ and, one imagines, others, not to speak of citations in technical literature, for example in Skandhila's ENTRANCE TO THE ABHIDHARMA, in Kamalaśīla's COMMENTARY ON THE COMPENDIUM ON REALITY, and so on.

The early oral collections of the 'Buddha word' developed through a generally undifferentiated 'Dharma-Vinaya period' to grow into the Piṭaka collections. These collections underwent periodic editorial attention, systemization, and codification, leading to increasing differentiation as the individual schools evolved distinctive editorial and linguistic identities. The end product was the Indian Śrāvaka Piṭakas that we know (very incompletely and very imperfectly) today. At certain points in this process, some individuals or groups drew on the existing fund of Piṭaka material and genres to compose new Vaidalya sutras that introduced new metaphysical formulations and new visions of goal and the path. This probably began in the early post-Aśokan period, or certainly by the second and first centuries BCE. Some centuries later, Vaidalya texts were co-opted by the emergent Mahāyāna to become 'Mahāyāna sūtras'.

(12) The Śrāvaka texts and the Vaidalya or proto-Mahāyāna sūtras began to be written down during about the same period, starting from the first century BCE, if not even earlier. Theravādin tradition states that the Pali Tripiṭaka was written down in the first century BCE. We do not know any of the technical details of the project, and no manuscripts from the period survive. Sources preserved in Tibetan state that scriptures were written down 'after the Third Council', which here would mean one of the Northwestern councils, perhaps that held by King Kaniṣka, in the second century CE.¹⁷⁶ The earliest Buddhist manuscripts that survive today – and the earliest manuscripts of India – are the birchbark scrolls written in Gandhari Prakrit mentioned above. They represent an eclectic collection of literature, both Śrāvaka and Vaidalya.

The Mahāvihāra system of thought as we know it today – an Abhidharma school asserting inter alia a bounded dharma theory within a theory of momentariness (*keśanikavāda*) – was codified in Sri Lanka by the celebrated fifth-century scholar Buddhaghosa.¹⁷⁷ The early scholars of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika and several other schools preceded Buddhaghosa by centuries. The early Mahāyāna masters – Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, for

example – all preceded Buddhaghosa. The encyclopaedic TREATISE ON THE GREAT PERFECTION OF WISDOM (a commentary on the long PERFECTION OF WISDOM SŪTRA), attests to the developed state of Mahāyāna exegesis and the intimate relation of this exegesis to Śrāvaka thought in the second half of the fourth century. The TREATISE ON THE GREAT PERFECTION OF WISDOM is earlier than Buddhaghosa's *magnum opus*, the PATH OF PURIFICATION.

These examples should not be misconstrued as an argument for an absolute priority of Mahāyāna over Śrāvaka thought. There are no absolute priorities – the development of Buddhist thought was complex and interactive, and to periodize it in terms of artificial 'vehicles' is not helpful to historical or philosophical analysis.

(13) There is no such thing as a 'Hīnayāna period' in art or architecture, or a 'Hīnayāna iconography'. The earliest monuments were produced for the use of the early monastic orders and lay communities, centuries before the words Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna were invented. Mahāyāna thought, meditation, and ritual inspired rich iconographies, but Mahāyāna is not a school or a style of art. Buddhist art evolved in response to ritual needs and ideological trends, in dependence on patronage and material and technological capabilities.

(14) Spells, incantations, and mnemonic formulae (Mantra and Dhāraṇī) do not belong to any particular school or any particular vehicle. Mantra and Dhāraṇī are found in sūtras, vinayas, and liturgies of several of the Śrāvaka schools, some of which transmitted their own Dhāraṇī Piṭakas.¹⁷⁸ Both Mantra and Dhāraṇī are widely used in Mahāyāna sūtras, several of which include chapters on Dhāraṇī. Dhāraṇīs are not necessarily 'tantric' or markers of Vajrayāna. They are shared elements of Buddhist practice with specific functions, usually mnemonic or apotropaic, according to contexts. The history of the development of Mantra and Dhāraṇī practices remains to be written.

(15) There is no inherent connection between Mahāyāna practice and the cults of relics, stūpas, or images. These cults are shared by all schools. The cults of relics and stūpas have been, for example, fundamental to the sacred space and the institutional identity of the Theravaṃsa, and most certainly to the Mahāvihāra Theravāda.¹⁷⁹ This is reflected in its distinctive literature, which includes the GREAT CHRONICLE for cults in general, the CHRONICLE OF THE STŪPA for the Great Stūpa at Anurādhapura, the CHRONICLE OF THE TOOTH-

RELIC, the CHRONICLE OF THE FOREHEAD-BONE RELIC, and the CHRONICLE OF THE GREAT BODHI-TREE. All of these works, preserved in Pali and Sinhala versions, are unique to the Theravāda. Together with related devotional, homiletic, and ritual literature, they show that the Theravāda of the Mahāvihāra tradition gave a special position to the cult of relics.¹⁸⁰

The Mahāyāna did not attempt to supersede the cult of relics with a 'cult of the book'. The idea that some Mahāyāna sūtras devalue relics vis-à-vis scriptures stems from an overly literal reading of literary hyperbole, a genre that the compilers of Mahāyāna sūtras used with gusto. The hyperbole depends on the very fact that the object or objects of contrast are highly valued. The Vaidalya/Vaitulya/Vaidalya ideas were promoted by Dharma-reciters or Dharma-orators (*dharmabhāṅakas*), who specialized in the preaching and dissemination of sūtras.¹⁸¹ They encouraged the veneration of texts in multiple ways. One of these was the production of manuscripts, for which they developed ideologies that emphasized the power and prestige of the written word. This may have begun as a strategy to preserve and propagate the texts in question. It is probable that, unlike the Āgamas and Vinayas, which were transmitted by established Vinaya lineages, the fledgling Vaidalya sūtras had no guaranteed support system – no settled regional or transregional communities to maintain them. With the passage of time, after their codification in Bodhisatva Piṭakas or Vaidalya Piṭakas, they would have been stored in monasteries in the cities, towns, and wilderness retreats of different regions of India – in Magadha, Gandhara, Andhra, Karnataka, and elsewhere. As they were further incorporated into curricula, liturgy, and ritual practice, their future became more secure. Inscriptions and manuscripts from northern India record court sponsorship of the production of PERFECTION OF WISDOM and other manuscripts. In any case, the veneration of texts – ideally, hierarchically, and materially/physically – soon became part of the aggregate of worship and devotional practice.

V. What was the Mahāyāna? Grasping the Inconceivable

The beginnings of Mahāyāna lay in responses to changing realities during the early centuries that followed the Buddha's demise. Nurtured by members of the saṃgha, the Mahāyāna was the product of negotiations within the fourfold community as a conglomerate of broad-based intellectual movements, with the participation of people from many social roles and positions. It was a learned movement, fostered by literati – Dharma-orators, Dharma-preachers, Sūtra-bearers, Vinaya-bearers, Summary-bearers – who were well versed in the scriptures and in the nine and the twelve teaching genres. Although Mahāyāna had no physical locus, it was centered around a growing corpus of texts, which by their very presence sanctified the physical environment, creating new orders of sacred space. These innovators developed new metaphysics, new ideals, and new practices. At times their innovations brought conflict with conservative elements, inspiring the sharp polemics in which some Mahāyāna sūtras gleefully indulge, for example the EXPOSITION OF VIMALAKĪRTI and the EXPOSITION OF BODHISATVA PRACTICE.

In the EXPOSITION OF BODHISATVA PRACTICE, the three-year old boy Ratnadatta rebukes the Senior Monk Mahāmaudgalyāyana on the ontological status of awakening and of the Tathāgata:¹⁸²

Then the venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana himself addressed the boy Ratnadatta: But, my boy, has not the Tathāgata realized the incomparable and perfectly complete awakening, does he not teach the Dharma?

Ratnadatta answered: the wise should not make awakening the object of discursive thoughts, or construct the Tathāgata through conceited thoughts. He should not make constructions like 'moments of existence (*dharmas*) do not arise'; he should not make constructions like 'all moments of existence are composite'; he should not make constructions like 'all moments of existence are noncomposite'; he should not make constructions like 'being born and unbornness', 'existent and non-existent', 'grasping and giving up', 'connection and disconnection', 'going and coming', 'remaining and changing existence', 'states of desire, dislike or bewilderment'; he should not make constructions like 'truth or untruth'.

‘Because of ignorance there is birth in the states of ordinary men, disciples, isolated buddhas, in impure and pure states, in states with form, without form, with or without conceptual thinking, with or without essential character, of pure conduct, where things are seen as universally equal or non-equal, in body, mind, where all things are fundamentally understood or not fundamentally understood’; such constructions he should not make.¹⁸³

So what do you mean, Maudgalyāyana, has the Tathāgata realized the incomparable and perfectly complete awakening?

Unlike that of the Pure Lands – the perfect, smooth and level ‘fields’ or lands of the Buddhas created by their former vows – the landscape of the Mahāyāna sūtras is uneven, and some strata reveal sharp fissures within Mahāyāna communities themselves. Many of the better-known sūtras present warm, opulent and tolerant narrative settings, but others are cold and harsh, even paranoid in their tropes of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁸⁴ Several sūtras in the ‘Buddha nature’ (Tathāgatagarbha) family denounce those who do not accept the beautiful idea that all beings possess Buddha-nature, and threaten them with punishment in the hells.¹⁸⁵

The Mahāyāna is a body of ritual practice, precepts, mental cultivation, philosophy, and, especially, a body of literature. The sūtras are repositories of ‘rhetorics of emptiness’ and of bold, spirited, and fantastic narratives – allegories, pageants of light and space painted on the canvas of the mind.¹⁸⁶ The massive production of literature in the sūtra genre is a hallmark of the Mahāyāna, and its great sūtra classics are matchless contributions to Buddhist, South Asian, and world literature.¹⁸⁷ Proponents of bodhisatva ideologies produced the vast and abstruse PERFECTED OF WISDOM and the elaborate, mind-blowing, and equally enormous BUDDHĀVATAMSAKA. In our attempt to grasp the Mahāyāna, we should never lose sight of its complexity and diversity. In many ways, as the sūtras and śāstras themselves claim, the Mahāyāna is inconceivable (*acintya*), and it does not sit easily in the received categories of religious studies. We need to bear in mind the lack of data, the loss of entire Bodhisatva Piṭakas and Dhāraṇī Piṭakas. We are fortunate indeed that some exceptionally early manuscript fragments have been preserved in the Northwest of the subcontinent, in Afghanistan, and in Central Asia, but this must be weighed against the nearly total loss of the scriptural legacies of central, western, and southern India, not to speak of early Southeast Asia.¹⁸⁸

VI. Hermeneutics and debate

Buddhist literature may be seen as an attempt to record and to understand, to explain and to elaborate, what Gautama the Buddha taught – or was believed to have taught – during his forty-five years of preaching. Exegesis was necessary from the start,¹⁸⁹ and it continues today in new languages and new forms.¹⁹⁰ The eighteen schools transmitted the teachings of the Buddha, the *Buddhavacana*, in their collections, their Piṭakas, and Tripiṭakas. During the Master's lifetime, people sought out learned monks, nuns, and lay-followers, and asked them to explain his words. The sūtras record many instances of this. One example is the well-known text in which a layman questions the nun Dharmadinnā, known in Sanskrit as the SŪTRA SPOKEN BY THE NUN DHARMADINNĀ and in Pali as the LESSER VEDALLA SUTTA.¹⁹¹ An example of an adroit lay expositor is Citta Gahapati, to whom a chapter is devoted in the Pali CONNECTED DISCOURSES.¹⁹² Interreligious encounters between Śāriputra and wanderers (*parivrajakas*) are presented in the CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON JAMBUKHĀDAKA and the CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON SĀMAṆḌAKA in the same collection.¹⁹³

With the passage of time, the need was felt to define the terms of the Buddha's teaching more precisely. Exegetical traditions were codified, committed to memory, transmitted orally, and finally written down. The exegetical method of the surviving examples of the early period – for example the Vibhaṅgas of the Vinayas, or the Niddesas of the Pali MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTION, was primarily definition of terms through synonym and example. The Pali PATH OF PENETRATING INSIGHT and some of the main Abhidharma texts of the several schools employ similar intellectual approaches, and they also attempt to epitomize and to abstract dharmas – to 'abstract' by removing them from their original didactic and narrative contexts into a coherent system of relations by drawing up 'definitive' lists.¹⁹⁴

The texts mentioned so far are anonymous.¹⁹⁵ They take their methodology for granted, and they do not step beyond themselves. Two interesting and challenging Pali works, the EXPLANATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE PIṬAKA and the GUIDEBOOK TO METHODOLOGY, attest to the development of self-conscious principles of exegesis. The forebear of the Pali EXPLANATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE PIṬAKA was apparently composed by a monk

named Kātyāyana (Pali: Kaccāna, Kaccāyana), and may have been one of the earliest exegetical texts of central India. It is mentioned in Chinese sources, and there is an early Chinese translation of part of Chapter 6 by the illustrious Parthian translator An Shigao (active from 148 CE on, during the Later Han Dynasty).¹⁹⁶ Fragments of a Gandhari commentary on selected canonical verses employ similar principles.¹⁹⁷ The EXPLANATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE PĪṬAKA and the GUIDEBOOK TO METHODOLOGY do not depend on any particular Buddhist system, and may have been studied by students and scholars of different schools. By good fortune, the two texts were translated into, or transmitted in, Pali and were preserved in Lanka within the Theravaṃsa. I would describe the EXPLANATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE PĪṬAKA and the GUIDEBOOK TO METHODOLOGY as ‘exegetical texts preserved and transmitted by the Mahāvihāra Theravādin school of Sri Lanka’ rather than ‘Theravādin’ or ‘Mahāvihārin’ texts.¹⁹⁸

Discussion and debate are core features of Buddhist literature. Both the Sarvāstivādins and the Theravādins included collections of debates – The CONSCIOUSNESS GROUPS and the POINTS OF DEBATE, respectively – in their Abhidharma Piṭakas. These two works are significant testimonies to early developments in Buddhist thought. They are sober and formal: a view is presented and debated, and each side cites scriptures – the word of the Fortunate One – to support its position. In the end, the view that has been singled out is shown to contradict scripture and is accordingly rejected. The GREAT COMMENTARIAL ANALYSIS (a work that is difficult to date, but let us say *circa* first to second century CE) is at the same time a presentation of ideas that developed within the Sarvāstivādin philosophical tradition and a compendium of debates about these ideas. Later works like the TREASURY OF THE ABHIDHARMA and the LAMP OF THE ABHIDHARMA (both *circa* fourth century CE) re-enact debates from the GREAT COMMENTARIAL ANALYSIS and also broach new topics.

Mahāyāna sūtras may be read as records of debates and negotiations, as attempts to resolve contradictions and tensions in Buddhist doctrine and practice. These debates evolved in different places and at different times – unfortunately we rarely if ever know when or where – and they do not present any sort of unified position. The PERFECTION OF WISDOM SŪTRAS contain debates about the nature of dharmas and the path. The question of the life span of the Buddha

was a profound concern to all Buddhists – how could the Compassionate One have left the world behind so soon? – and became a central element in the LOTUS SŪTRA and the GOLDEN LIGHT SŪTRA. Buddhaghosa also addresses the issue in the Pali commentaries.¹⁹⁹ Debates on the spiritual status and potential of women, often embedded in narrative as dramatic dialogues, are written into any number of sūtras. One of the most famous is the confrontation between a goddess and Śāriputra in the EXPOSITION OF VIMALAKĪRTI. In other narratives, precocious children perform miracles and show preternatural wisdom, as does the three-year old Licchavi wunderkind Ratnadatta in the EXPOSITION OF BODHISATVA PRACTICE (see above).

The early sūtras are inchoate, unsystemized; the śāstras attempt to synthesize and standardize this material, and to address some of its metaphysical or moral inconsistencies.²⁰⁰ The act of commentary itself, through the process of definition and selection, solidifies lines of thought into schools, and this process gives rise to further incompatibilities, to new tensions in the interpretation of the ‘intention of the Fortunate One’. Early masters like Nāgārjuna and ‘Maitreya’ set the wheels of verse commentary rolling, to be followed by Asaṅga, Vasubandhu and others with verse and prose compositions. Ārya Vimuktisena attempted a synthesis of the ORNAMENT OF REALIZATION and PERFECTION OF WISDOM thought in the sixth century; Śāntarakṣita undertook a synthesis of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in the eighth century.²⁰¹ In the eleventh century, Abhayākara Gupta presented his own synthesis, the CLUSTER OF BLOSSOMS OF THE MIDDLE WAY PHILOSOPHY. In the twelfth century, Daśabalaśrīmitra composed a massive compendium of Buddhist thought, the ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOUNDED AND THE UNCOMPOUNDED. Further refinements followed in India itself, in Nepal, China, and Tibet, and they continue today.²⁰²

VII. *The Bodhisattva*

The Mahāyāna has no monopoly on the ‘Bodhisattva’. The term and concept evolved within the Śrāvaka schools, which compiled their own Bodhisattva literature, largely in the Jātaka genre.²⁰³ One of these schools in particular – the Theravāda of Sri Lanka – transmits a robust Jātaka literature, the 547 ‘canonical’ birth stories plus,

amongst the Thais, an additional (approximate) fifty, in the FIFTY BIRTH STORY COLLECTION.²⁰⁴

In brief, the elaborated Bodhisatva paradigm runs something like this. Buddhism is a quest for comfort in an uncomfortable world. Daily life is discomfort; Nirvāṇa is comfort. A Bodhisatva is aware of discomfort – of his own discomfort and that of others – and seeks the ease of Nirvāṇa. When he attains Nirvāṇa, he teaches the Dharma, in order to lead the comfortless world to release and felicity. Śākyamuni's quest for release led to his awakening to the four truths of the noble ones beneath the Bodhi-tree at Bodh Gaya. The four truths of the noble ones are the heart of his teaching, his Sāsana, and the heart of the teaching of all Buddhas. Śākyamuni's attainments and his spiritual and teaching careers are the paradigm for all Buddhas, past, future, and present.

Tradition has it that all Buddhas turn the wheel of the Dharma, and teach the SŪTRA ON THE TURNING OF THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA – indeed, in the very same Gazelle Park near Varanasi. This does not simply mean that they deliver a sermon in a pleasant spot surrounded by gentle and graceful gazelles, while five followers dutifully lend ears. To turn the wheel is to teach the Dharma and to generate the eye of the Dharma (*dharmacakṣus*) or the path of vision (*darśana-mārga*) in the mind of another.²⁰⁵ 'Turning the wheel of the Dharma' is a metaphor for the transmission of the Dharma. In the case of Śākyamuni, only when the eye of Dharma has arisen for Kauṇḍinya is it announced that the wheel has been turned (in Pali, *pavattite dhammacakke*). This event is literally world-shaking: at this moment the earth trembles, and the deities, from those of the earth up to those of the highest heavens, proclaim triumphantly that the wheel of the Dharma has now been turned. The turning of the wheel of the Dharma is a grand and cosmic event, glorified at length in the SŪTRA OF EXTENSIVE DIVERSION, a metaphor recycled in the PERFECTION OF WISDOM SŪTRAS,²⁰⁶ and a constant theme in Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras.²⁰⁷

Śākyamuni's life was codified and generalized as the 'twelve acts of a Buddha': descent from Tuṣita Heaven, entry into the womb, birth, and so on, up to the Parinirvāṇa. His career became the model for the Bodhisatva path. Those who take the Bodhisatva vow aim to become a Buddha and perform the 'twelve acts'. This is repeated and rephrased again and again in Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras. The career

of the Bodhisattva taught in the Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras is a generalization, elaboration, and idealization of Śākyamuni's life story. The paradigm for the past and future Buddhas of all schools, and for the present 'celestial Buddhas' of the Mahāyāna, such as Amitābha, Akṣobhya, or Bhaiṣajyaguru, is Śākyamuni. In this sense, the description of the Bodhisattva and the prescription of his task depend on Śākyamuni, the 'historical Buddha', the Buddha of the present age. But Śākyamuni himself, before his awakening, was a Bodhisattva, not only in his present existence, but in the earlier existences narrated in the birth stories. In this sense, the Buddha depends on the Bodhisattva. Buddhas arise from Bodhisattvas, and without Bodhisattvas there can be no Buddhas – a frequent theme in PERFECTION OF WISDOM and other sutras. Therefore Bodhisattvas commit themselves to Bodhi to maintain the 'unbroken lineage of the Buddha and the Three Jewels'.²⁰⁸

VIII. Points of Difference

Among the four schools there is no definite classification as to which ones should be put under Mahāyāna and which ones under Hīnayāna ... Through an examination of their practices, we see no differences in their disciplinary rules and restrictions. Both of them classify the Vinaya rules into five sections and practise the four noble truths. Those who worship Bodhisattvas and read Mahāyāna scriptures are named Mahāyānist, and those who do not do so are called Hīnayānist.

Śramaṇa Yijing (late 7th century)²⁰⁹

Both the Śrāvaka and the Mahāyāna conglomerates developed historically from the teaching of Śākyamuni. They share, and they contest, the core concepts of Buddhist ideology. Historically, they grew up together in the same or in adjacent nunneries and monasteries; they grew up in contact and exchange, not in isolation. But in another sense, from the practical, human point of view, Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna ideologies live together in the individual or practitioner – in the same fathom long body, the same mind, the same five aggregates. That is, a Mahāyānist nun or monk takes the Śrāvaka vows, studies and teaches Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna scriptures, cultivates shared and unshared practices, and engages in shared and unshared rituals.

But if we recognize this common ground, we should not ignore the differences. The defining difference between Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna is not one of doctrine or even scripture. It is a matter of aim. A follower of the Śrāvaka method aims to become an *arhat*; a follower of the Pratyekabuddha method aims to become a *pratyekabuddha*; a follower of the Bodhisatva method aims to become a Buddha – to attain omniscience through supreme, perfect and full awakening (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*).²¹⁰ It is formal and ceremonial aspiration to full awakening, ‘giving birth to *bodhicitta*’, that sets the Mahāyāna apart. As twentieth-century Tibetan scholar Böttrül notes, there are many different ways of distinguishing the vehicles and schools of thought of Buddhism:²¹¹

Others make the distinction between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna, by only the generation of the mind [of awakening]. This is just a distinction of intention. There is a vast difference in view, meditation, conduct, and fruition.

To generate the aspiration to awakening is more than a dry doctrine: it was and it is a (usually) public ritual act, a social performance. The earliest text we know for this is the THREE BODIES OF RITUAL, to which reference is embedded in several Mahāyāna sūtras, for example in UGRA’S QUESTIONS, UPĀLI’S QUESTION, THE DETERMINATION OF THE VINAYA, VIMALADATTA’S QUESTIONS, and THE EXPOSITION ON DREAMS, – all in the HEAP OF PRECIOUS JEWELS collection²¹² – as well as in the QUESTIONS OF THE NĀGA KING ANAVATAPTA.²¹³ What defines Mahāyāna is its orientation: out of compassion for the world of sentient beings, a Bodhisatva aims for ultimate awakening.

Other significant differences were noted by Yijing in the late seventh century: the Mahāyānist is distinguished by the ‘worship of Bodhisatvas and the reading of Mahāyāna sūtras’. But this is done *in addition to* the veneration of Buddhas and study of the classical Piṭakas – it does not *replace* them. Mastery of the categories of the Dharma – the Vinaya, the Sūtras, the Summaries²¹⁴ – is essential to the practice of the Dharma, and Mahāyāna texts exhort the Bodhisatva to master the nine or twelve forms of the Buddha’s teaching. That is, a Bodhisatva must know and teach the discourses, the birth stories, the Vinaya, and so on. Furthermore, it is impossible to read Mahāyāna sūtras without knowing the common categories,

the shared vocabulary, of the Sāsana. The Bodhisattvas do not tear down the old Śrāvaka edifice: they simply add some new wings and towers, and then refurbish it.

The basic qualities of a Buddha are similar in all schools,²¹⁵ but the careers, qualities, and capacities of a Bodhisattva are not. The Theravādin description of the Bodhisattva path differs from that of other Śrāvaka schools and of the Indian Mahāyāna on many points. In the classical system of the latter, a Bodhisattva practises the six or ten perfections, and progresses through ten stages (*bhūmi*) to Buddhahood. Bodhisattvas possess ten powers (*bala*, *vaśitā*: the former to be distinguished from the ten powers of a Buddha, which are common to all schools). The Theravāda has its own set of ten perfections, which are further developed in three grades, rising hierarchically: perfection, intense perfection, ultimate perfection (*pāramī*, *upapāramī*, *paramatthapāramī*).²¹⁶ It defines three types of Bodhisattvas, who progress to Buddhahood at different paces.²¹⁷ These classifications are not known in Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, or Mahāyāna scholasticism – they seem to be unique to the Theravāda.

In Mahāyāna praxis, a Bodhisattva formulates specific vows to perfect his or her future Buddha-field. Classical examples are the vows of Amitābha, Akṣobhya, and Bhaiṣajyaguru. This concept is unknown in Theravāda or Sarvāstivāda, perhaps because these schools, or at least the former, do not accept the simultaneous existence of Buddhas in different universes. In Theravādin thought, our world is the ‘Auspicious Universe’ (*maṅgala-cakkavāla*) – the Sahadhātu in which Buddhas appear in succession, never simultaneously. Buddhas never arise in any other world-system, and for this reason our universe is called ‘auspicious’ (*maṅgala*). For the Theravāda, Buddhas are particularized in space, but infinite in time, whereas for some of the early Śrāvaka schools they are infinite in both space and time. This latter idea was inherited and became fundamental to Mahāyāna thought and literary expression.

The evolution of Buddhist thought is anything but simple.²¹⁸ Certain liturgical texts transmitted in Siam seem to go against Theravāda doctrine and accept the existence of several Buddhas at a time. Ten Buddhas are invoked in the ‘Verses on the Buddhas of the Ten Directions’. This particular text exists only in Pali; it is transmitted within the Theravādin tradition only, in the liturgical collections of Siam, from the premodern period to the present. The

names of the ten Buddhas do not correspond to any of the known lists of Mahāsāṃghika or Mahāyāna texts. Another example of doctrinal anomaly is the commonly recited verse:

*ye ca buddhā atītā ca, ye ca buddhā anāgatā
paccuppannā ca ye buddhā, ahaṃ vandāmi sabbadā.*

Those who were the Buddhas of the past,
Those who will be the Buddhas of the future,
Those who are the Buddhas of the present:
I pay homage to them always.

Here the devotee pays homage not only to the Buddhas of the past and the Buddhas of the future, but also to the Buddhas, plural, of the present, even when this contradicts ‘official’ doctrine.²¹⁹

Stanzas like these should not be uncritically dismissed as ‘Mahāyāna influence’. Rather, we should try to understand what they imply in the context of Ayutthaya or Ratanakosin Buddhism, and ask to what degree liturgy need necessarily follow doctrine. Liturgy has its own concerns, such as invocation of the power and blessings of the Three Gems and protection against the vicissitudes of life.

For the schools that we know of, the number of future Buddhas is infinite. In the Theravādin tradition, ten bodhisattas are identified by name, and their careers are described in the works belonging to the textual family of the *Anāgatavamsa* or CHRONICLE OF THE FUTURE.²²⁰ These future Buddhas are at present Bodhisatvas. With the exception of Maitreya, they do not seem, however, to have enjoyed any individual cult comparable to those of Avalokiteśvara, Kṣitigarbha, or Mañjuśrī, although some chants invoke them as a group for blessing and protection. In contrast, in the Mahāyāna sūtras we meet with living, personalized Bodhisatvas with their own biographies and personalities, who are immediately accessible through cult and meditation. The result is a huge corpus of texts of every possible genre devoted to these bodhisatvas.

IX. Recapitulation: the burden of terminology

Coming to terms with terminology is one of the burdens that historians and thinking Buddhists must bear. But the burden of terminology is heavy. In this age of information fragmentation and

information glut, it is important that we try to clarify our terms and lighten our load. The significations of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna and their historical and ideological developments were complex and multifaceted in India alone, not to speak of during their long periods of naturalization and translation across much of Asia. The relative merits of the options and paths open to those who pursue the Dharma have always been debated. There are no easy solutions, either historically or philosophically, and the debates will surely continue.

The Mahāyāna is an ineluctable element in the cultural and spiritual legacy of the Sāsana. Mahāyāna practice once flourished in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Cambodia, but by the mediaeval period the very name was forgotten, although elements of Mahāyāna thought and practice may have been absorbed into the later mainstreams.²²¹ As a basic orientation in Buddhist studies, the bifurcate Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna is not a natural category or established fact. Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna have long and interdependent histories, rooted in Indian polemics, embellished as they passed through Central and East Asia, before being brought to the fore in the late nineteenth century.²²² In our study of Mahāyāna we are, by necessity, groping in the dark, trying to gauge the features of the elephant. We can examine the development of Buddhism from many angles – from the point of view of monastic orders and philosophical currents, of regions, periods or dynasties, of scriptural language or ethnicity. There is the Buddhism of the Mauryan or Śuṅga periods, or under the Gupta or Pāla dynasties. There is Nikāya Buddhism, Mahāyāna, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda. There is Gandharan Buddhism, Swat Buddhism, Bamiyan Buddhism, Malwa Buddhism, Andhra Buddhism, Karnataka Buddhism, Tamil Buddhism,²²³ Sinhala Buddhism. There is the Buddhism of the Maldives, or of Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, or Kashmir. All are legitimate manifestations of the Saddharma, and all have equal rights in the forum of historical research.

Vedalla/Vaidalya was a major moment and a major movement. It was a major system of thought, and a major genre in literary imagination and production. It stands for a defining moment in the history of Buddhist thought in South Asia. Even if the immediacy of that moment eludes us, there is still considerable evidence to help reconstruct how that moment was described and interpreted by later schools and thinkers. This small term carries us a long way across the

changing landscapes of Buddhist thought. Vedalla/Vaidalya is still a living term inasmuch as history, or the discourse of history, projects ideational force into the present and the future. Walpola Rahula (1907–1997), writing over fifty years ago, said that ‘Even today in Ceylon any Buddhist who holds new ideas against the accepted beliefs and practices is branded as a Vaitulya’.²²⁴ From the standpoint of the Theras of Sri Lanka, the Vetulla was indeed dissident and unorthodox, but it was certainly not marginal or peripheral. As a forebear and forerunner of the Great Way, this dissident movement deserves a place in Buddhist history and in Buddhist studies.

This essay is a small attempt to learn more about a small term with big dimensions. I have tried to introduce new perspectives and new analytical models – to bring Vaidalya out of cold storage into the forum of ideas. The points I discuss are contested, and they will continue to be contested. If my own views, my own polemics, inspire reflection and provoke criticism, I will have achieved something. As noted at the outset, I have produced this study at time of great change, of revolution, in Buddhist studies. Further developments and discoveries are to be expected, and they will bring new perspectives and will raise new problems.

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Note

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I have also drawn on an unpublished paper, ‘Relations between Śrāvaka and Vaitulya Sūtra Literature’, presented at the workshop ‘Investigating the Early Mahāyāna (Stanford Centre for Buddhist Studies, Asilomar, 15–19 May, 2001).

Notes

1. I am not entirely at ease with ‘Vaidalya movement’, here a stopgap for ‘proto-Mahāyāna’. The idea of a ‘Vaidalya movement’, or better, ‘Vaidalya movements’, can, however, be justified by the use of ‘Vetulyavāda’ in Lankan sources (I do not think that any combined forms with *vāda* are met with in Sanskrit sources). In any case, we need to recognize that the Vaidalya ideas and texts were produced and promoted by people, by social groups – that ideas do not just spring up in a vacuum. Ideas are not fortuitously arisen without any cause (*ahetusamutpanna*; cf. Pali *adhiccasamuppanna*).
2. There is nothing new about this connection, as will be seen below.
3. The one place that we do find the term is in the *Visuddhimagga-nidānakathā*, ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGINS OF THE PATH OF PURIFICATION. This modern Pali work was composed by a group of Burmese monastic scholars under Mahāsi Sayadaw at Kaba Aye in Rangoon, Burma, in the 1950s, at the time of the ‘sixth council-cum-communal recitation’ (This text is on the digital Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka of the Vipassana Research Institute at <http://www.tipitaka.org>). The collective composition discusses Vedalla/Vetulla/Vepulla, and associates it with the Bodhisatta Piṭaka, citing in addition to Pali sources the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*. (I am grateful to Mattia Salvini for making me aware of this work, and to D.C. Lammerts for information about its history.)
4. See Oskar von Hinüber and Peter Skilling, ‘Two Buddhist Inscriptions from Deorkothar (Dist. Rewa, Madhya Pradesh)’, ARIRIAB XVI (2013), pp. 13–36 and pls. 4–11; Oskar von Hinüber, ‘A Second Inscription from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh): Dhammasena’s Donation’, ARIRIAB XV (2012), pp. 3–10 and pls. 1–2; idem, ‘Again on the Donation made by the Vinayadhara Dhammasena and on Other Inscriptions from Phanigiri’, ARIRIAB XVI (2013), pp. 3–12 and pls. 1–3.
5. Peter Skilling, ‘New Discoveries from South India: The life of the Buddha at Phanigiri, Andhra Pradesh’, *Arts Asiatiques* 63 (2008), pp. 96–118; Oskar von Hinüber and Peter Skilling, ‘An Epigraphical Poem from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh) from the Time of Rudrapuruṣadatta’, ARIRIAB XIV (2011), pp. 7–12 and pls. 3–6.
6. We await the report forthcoming from the Archaeological Survey of India. See Monika Zin, ‘Māndhātār, the Universal Monarch, and the Meaning of the Representations of the *Cakravartin* in the Amaravati School, and of the Kings on the Kanaganahalli *Stūpa*’, in Peter Skilling

and Justin McDaniel (eds.), *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond* (Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), pp. 149–164; Michael W. Meister, ‘Palaces, Kings, and Sages: World Rulers and World Renouncers in Early Buddhism’, in Eli Franco and Monika Zin (eds.), *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dieter Schlingloff on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, Vol. II (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), pp. 651–670.

7. The most thorough and up-to-date survey of the status of a wide range of manuscript collections, including those of Siam and Lanka, is the collective volume edited by Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, *From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research (Papers Presented at the Conference Indic Buddhist Manuscripts: The State of the Field, Stanford, June 15–19 2009)*, forthcoming.

8. These have mainly been published in Jens Braarvig (Gen. ed.), *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection: Buddhist Manuscripts* (Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 3 volumes to date); see also Jens Braarvig and Fredrik Liland, *Traces of Gandharan Buddhism: An Exhibition of Ancient Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection* (Hermes Publishing, Oslo, Bangkok, 2010). A good survey is Mark Allon, ‘Recent Discoveries of Buddhist Manuscripts from Afghanistan and Pakistan and their Significance’, in Ken Parry (ed.), *Art, Architecture and Religion Along the Silk Roads* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 153–178.

9. See Harry Falk and Seishi Karashima, ‘A first-century *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Gandhāra – *parivarta* 1’, ARIRIAB XV (2012), pp. 19–61 with pls. 5–7 (Texts from the Split Collection 1); idem, ‘A first-century *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Gandhāra – *parivarta* 5’, ARIRIAB XVI (2013), pp. 97–169 with pls. 52–53 (Texts from the Split Collection 2). See also Seishi Karashima, ‘Was the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* compiled in Gandhāra in Gāndhāri?’, ARIRIAB XVI, pp. 171–188. The *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript belongs to a collection that is divided among several owners: see Harry Falk, ‘The “Split” Collection of Kharoṣṭhī texts’, ARIRIAB XIV (2011), pp. 13–23.

10. See Mark Allon and Richard Salomon, ‘New Evidence for Mahayana in Early Gandhāra’, EB, New Series, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2010), pp. 1–22.

11. The Bajaur manuscripts are currently under study by Ingo Strauch: see www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/indologie/bajaur/ and idem, ‘More Missing Pieces of Early Pure Land Buddhism: New Evidence for Akṣobhya and Abhirati in an Early Mahayana Sutra from Gandhāra’, EB 41 (2010), pp. 23–66.

12. The same is true for some of the other Gandhari texts – they are precious survivors from a huge literature that has been lost in the turmoil of history. There must have been many more: this is another reason for being cautious in drawing broad conclusions about the development of Mahāyāna and even of Buddhism in general.
13. Falk and Karashima, ‘A first-century Prajñāpāramitā, parivarta 5’ (2013), p. 100.
14. The term *kulaputta* (not paired, though, with *kuladhītā*) does occur in Pali suttas, but rather rarely.
15. For *potthaka* in Pali sources several centuries later, see Toshiichi Endō, “Potthaka” (Book or Manuscript) in the Pāli Commentaries’, in *Buddhist and Indian Studies in Honour of Professor Sodo Mori* (Hamamatsu: Kokusai Bukkyoto Kyokai [International Buddhist Association], 2002), pp. 79–90.
16. See Falk and Karashima, ‘A first-century Prajñāpāramitā manuscript’ (2012), p. 22. For Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *peyāla*, see BHSD, p. 354; the Pali spelling is *peyyāla*, PED 473.
17. The immense importance of the ‘*peyāla* principle’, which entails both contraction and expansion, for the understanding of Buddhist literature has unfortunately scarcely been recognized. We could learn a lot by analyzing the many uses of *peyāla* (Pali *peyyāla*). See Rupert Gethin, ‘What’s in a Repetition? On Counting the Suttas of the Saṃyutta-nikāya’, JPTS 29 (2007), pp. 365–387.
18. For an overview of Chinese ‘canons’, see Christophe Kleine, ‘Kanonisierungsansätze im ostasiatischen Buddhismus: Von der Kanon Bibliothek zur buddhistischen Bibel?’, in Deeg et al., *Kanonisierung und Kanonbildung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte* (2011), pp. 259–319.
19. For an overview, see Anālayo, ‘Āgama/Nikāya’, forthcoming in Oskar von Hinüber (ed.), *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). For publications by Bhikkhu Anālayo, see www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/pdf/analayo/publications.htm.
20. An outstanding example is the 1429-page long volume edited by Ulrich Timme Kragh, *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Department of South Asian Studies/Harvard University 2013).
21. *tena ca samayena tasmiñ jambudvīpe dvidhāḍḍṛṣṭiḥ sattvānam abhūt: kecin mahāyānam abhiśraddhayanti, kecit kutsayanti*: Prods Oktor

Skjærvø, *The Most Excellent Shine of Gold, King of Kings of Sutras: The Khotanese Svārṇabhāsottamasūtra* (Cambridge, Mass: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2004 [School of Oriental Languages and Literatures 60–61. Central Asian Sources V–VI]), Vol. I, pp. 316–317. Translation by R.E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a translation of the Svārṇabhāsottamasūtra* (Third [revised] edition, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1996), p. 84.

22. With the proviso that, when the term does occur in a specific text or context, that particular usage and its significance must certainly be addressed. For the term Hīnayāna, see Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugrapariprcchā)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), pp. 172–174 (reprinted as *The Bodhisattva Path: Based on the Ugrapariprccha, a Mahayana Sutra*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2007).

23. T.W. Rhys Davids, 'Hīnayāna', ERE VI (1913), p. 684 (full article, pp. 684–686) even stated that 'the use of the term [Hīnayāna] in India, however, is exceedingly rare' and he was most probably right. In a study of eleven early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna sūtras, 'produced in the second half of the second century CE, or shortly thereafter, by a small group of translators working in the Han capital of Luoyang', Harrison found that *xiaodao* – 'small way', Hīnayāna – occurs only four times: Paul Harrison, 'Who gets to ride in the Great Vehicle? Self-image and identity among the followers of the early Mahāyāna', Chapter 37 in Paul Williams, *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, Volume III, *The Origins and Nature of Mahāyāna Buddhism; Some Mahāyāna Religious Topics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). Nattier notes that 'given the fact that all extant versions of the *Ugra[pariprcchā]* use the term Mahāyāna, it is noteworthy that the corresponding term Hīnayāna ... does not occur in any version of our text' (*A Few Good Men*, p. 172).

24. I cannot say anything about East Asian historiography: I regret that I am unable to consult translations, or to benefit from research in the Chinese, Korean, or Japanese languages. For a recent example of the latter relevant to this essay, see Horiuchi Toshio, *Vasubandhu's Proof of the Authenticity of the Mahāyāna as Found in the Fourth Chapter of his Vyākhyāyukti* (Tokyo: The Sankibo Press, 2009), pp. 39–45.

25. The first entry for Hīnayāna in the Oxford Dictionary from 1868 is a comparison with Christianity, drawn from James Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship: or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the First and Fourth Centuries after Christ from the Sculptures of the Buddhist Topes at Sanchi and Amravati*, ([London: India Museum, 1873] Asian

Educational Services, New Delhi and Chennai, 2004, p. 70): ‘Mahâyâna, or as M. Julien translates it, the “Grand Véhicule”, as opposed to Hīnayâna or the “Petit Véhicule”; the distinction between the two being in almost every respect identical with that which exists between Evangelical and Mediaeval Christianity’.

26. In continental India, Buddhism also suffered periodic violence at the hands of militant Hinduism, especially Śaivism: see Giovanni Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011). The reasons for this antagonism were many and complex; they included the Buddhist rejection of the authority of the Vedas and of the caste system. For the latter, see Vincent Eltschinger, *Caste and Buddhist Philosophy: Continuity of Some Buddhist Arguments against the Realist Interpretation of Social Denominations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2012).

27. Rhys Davids, ‘Hīnayāna’, ERE VI (1913), p. 684 (full article, pp. 684–686). This may be read fruitfully with Louis de La Vallée Poussin, ‘Mahāyāna’, ERE VIII (1915), pp. 330–336. The two articles present a good picture of the state of European knowledge of these two terms one hundred years ago. (I am curious to know the identity of Rhys Davids’ ‘one or two well-known Chinese and European writers’.)

28. John D. Strong, ‘Hīnayāna’, EnB 1, p. 328. It will become clear that I do not consider ‘Mainstream Buddhism’ to be a useful concept, but the entry on ‘Mainstream Buddhist Schools’ by Collett Cox (EnB 2, pp. 501–507) is excellent regardless. The translators of *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus* by pioneering Austrian Indologist Erich Frauwallner (1898–1974) into English have changed the author’s ‘Hīnayāna’ to Śrāvakayāna: see Erich Frauwallner, *The Philosophy of Buddhism* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers), 2010, p. 65, n. 1.

29. The earliest datable occurrences of the term ‘Hīnayāna’ seem to be in Chinese translations of the late second century CE: see Harrison, ‘Who gets to ride in the Great Vehicle?’ One hundred years ago, in 1913, T.W. Rhys Davids wrote that ‘the oldest datable mention of the word [Hīnayāna] is in the *Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms* by Fa-Hian, written shortly after his return to China in A.D. 414’ (ERE VI, p. 684). Dating and datability have their ‘use by dates’.

30. The use of the term Hīnayāna to disparage the ‘other’ might be fruitfully compared with that of words like ‘pagan’, ‘infidel’, or ‘idolater’ for Christians in general, or, for the English Protestants, ‘Romish’ or ‘papist’, though all of these are perhaps more aggressive in their demonization.

31. For a conspectus of ideas about Mahāyāna and vehicles, see J. Rahder, 'Daijō', *Acta Orientalia* XVII (Leiden, 1939), pp. 1–16, reprinted in *Buddhist Poetry, Thought and Diffusion*, Volume I (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2010), pp. 551–566. An important essay is Étienne Lamotte, 'Sur la formation du Mahāyāna', in *Asiatica, Festschrift Friedrich Weller* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1954), pp. 377–396: an English version is available, but in a very much condensed form, in Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (eds.), *The World of Buddhism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984, pp. 90–93). See especially the magisterial essay by Hubert Durt, 'Daijō', in *Hobōgirin: Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, Septième volume: Daijō–Daishi (Paris–Kyōto, 1994), pp. 767–801.
32. Seishi Karashima, 'Who Composed the Lotus Sutra?', ARIRIAB IV (2001), pp. 143–179. Karashima recently gave a detailed exposition of the theory in a talk entitled 'What did the word mahāyāna originally mean?', given at the Institute of Indology and Central Asian Studies, Leipzig University, in conjunction with his receiving the 'Friedrich Weller Prize 2013' at the Spring Session of the Saxon Academy of Sciences, Leipzig (April 12, 2013).
33. See Anālayo, 'The Hīnayāna Fallacy' (forthcoming).
34. For examples of the promotion of the term Mahāyāna in the negotiation of early Buddhist modernity at the great field of contestation that was the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago, see Todd LeRoy Perreira, 'Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term', Chapter 12 in P. Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012). See also Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For late nineteenth century Thai encounters with the terminology Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, see Arthid Sheravanichkul, 'Thai Ideas about Hīnayāna–Mahāyāna: Correspondence between King Chulalongkorn and Prince Narisanuvattivong', Chapter 11 in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*
35. Early expositors of this paradigm include Japanese scholars like D.T. Suzuki, who wrote that 'Buddhism was now split into two great systems, Mahāyānism and Hīnayānism', and 'the distinction of Mahāyānists and Hīnayānists became definite' – quoted from *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 1907, pp. 2, 8, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*,

Second Edition [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989]), Vol. VII, p. 240, s.v. Hinayana.

36. I will not tilt here at the spinning windmill of Vajrayāna. I only note that Vajrayāna, Mantrayāna, Mantranaya, and so on, are presented in the sources as options or paths *within* Mahāyāna, not as a separate vehicle (admittedly, for didactic or polemical ends it may sometimes seem so, but still within broader contexts). See most recently Vesna A. Wallace, ‘A Brief Exploration of Late Indian Buddhist Exegeses of the “Mantrayāna” and “Mantranaya”’, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, Third Series, no. 13 (Fall 2011), pp. 95–111; Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

37. Léon Feer (ed.), *Samyutta-nikāya*, Part II, *Nidāna-vagga* (London: The Pali Text Society, [1888] 1970), pp. 155–157, abbreviated. The key module in the section is *dhātuso bhikkhave sattā saṃsandanti samenti, hīnādhimuttikā hīnādhimuttikehi saddhiṃ saṃsandanti samenti, kalyāṇādhimuttikā kalyāṇādhimuttikehi saddhiṃ saṃsandanti samenti* (see also, with interesting variants, *Itivuttaka* (ed. Ernst Windisch, London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975 [first publ. 1889]), pp. 70–71. The phrase takes on added significance when one reflects that the module is cited in the *Prajñāpāramitā*: see Ryusho Hikata (ed.), *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-Paripṛcchā Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., 1983; first published 1958), p. 60.12, *etac ca me Śāradvatīputra saṃdhāya bhāṣitam: dhātusaḥ satvāḥ saṃsyandanti, hīnādhimuttikā hīnādhimuttikair udārādhimuttikā udārādhimuttikair iti*. The understanding of the diverse natures of beings is one of the insights of the Tathāgatas – cf. H. Kern and Bunyiu Nanjio, eds., *Saddharmapundarīka*, ([1908–1912] Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1992), p. 40.15, where the Fortunate One explains to Śāriputra that the Tathāgatas of the past, the future, and the present teach the Dharma after understanding the variety of the dispositions, temperaments, and aspirations of sentient beings (*nānādhimuktānāṃ sattvānāṃ nānādhātvasāyanāṃ āśayaṃ veditvā dharmam deśitavantaḥ ... deśayiṣyanti ... deśayanti*).

38. It is difficult not to see in the *Dhātusamyutta* prefigurations of the theories of ‘lineage’ (*gotra*) that became important in Abhidharma and Mahāyāna thought.

39. The Āgamas (Sanskrit and Pali, *āgama*, received tradition, canonical text, scriptural authority) and the Nikāyas (Sanskrit and Pali, *nikāya*, collection, corpus) are the collections of discourses handed down within

the Śrāvaka schools. There may be four – the collections of Long, Middle Length, Connected, and Numerical Discourses – or five, with the addition of a collection of lesser or miscellaneous texts (*Kṣudraka-āgama* or *Khuddaka-nikāya*). The known Sanskrit traditions tend to prefer the name Āgama. The use of ‘Nikāya’ for a collection of scriptures is generally restricted to Pali (but see Hartmann [ref. below], p. 11); the Pali commentarial tradition does sometimes use the word Āgama, which in any case is a shared term in Indian religion for authoritative tradition or text. See Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing, 2011), Vol. 2, p. 864, n. 45. For the Āgamas see Lü Chêng, ‘Āgama (1)’, in G.P. Malalasekera (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I fasc. 2 (1963), pp. 241–244; Shōzen Kumoi, ‘Āgama (2)’, ib., pp. 244–248; Jens-Uwe Hartmann, ‘Āgama/Nikāya’, EnB 1, pp. 10–12.

40. Assigning dates to the personalities and events of early Buddhist, or Indian, history is always problematic and tentative. The period of the formation of the school identities would have been a time of intellectual ferment, innovation, and reaction – but when was that? Before or after Aśoka? For the alternative theories, see Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna* (University of Hawaii Press, 1990 [Asian Studies at Hawaii, No. 36]), Chapters 8 and 9.

41. *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1955), by André Bareau (1921–1993) is by far the most comprehensive work on the subject; outdated in many respects, it is nonetheless an invaluable reference. An English translation by Sarah Boin-Webb, edited by Andrew Skilton, is forthcoming as *The Buddhist Schools of the Small Vehicle* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013). The evolution of the schools is, to put it mildly, complicated. In addition to Bareau, one may consult Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism from the Origins to the Śāka Era* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988 [first published in French in 1958]), Chapter Six, ‘The Buddhist Sects’, I, ‘Origin and Distribution of the Sects’; Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Chapter 8, ‘The Development of Nikāya Buddhism’.

42. Bhikṣu Vīryasrīdatta, in his commentary on the *Arthaviniścaya-sūtra*, defines *śrāvaka* as *bhagavato buddhasya pareṇa śrāvyaṅta iti śrāvakāḥ*: N.H. Samtani (ed.), *The Arthaviniścaya-sūtra & Its Commentary (Nibandhana)* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1971), p. 253.6; for a translation, see idem (tr.) *Gathering the Meanings: The Compendium of Categories: The Arthaviniścaya sūtra and its Commentary Nibandhana* (Berkeley: Dharma

Publishing, 2002), p. 182, ‘Śrāvakas are so called because they are subsequently (*pareṇa*) brought to hear [the teaching] of the Buddha, the Blessed One’. I find the passage, and Samtani’s translation, problematic. Mattia Salvini suggests, ‘Of the Bhavaḡat, the Buddha, they are made to hear by someone else, thus they are ‘Śrāvakas’ (email, 23 April 2013). Samtani points out a definition of Śrāvakayāna in the LOTUS SŪTRA, *kecit sattvāḡ paragoḡaśrāvānugamanam ākāṅkṡamānā [...] te ucyante śrāvakayānam ākāṅkṡamānāḡ* (Kern and Nanjio, *Saddharmapundarika*, p. 80.5).

Buddhaghosa defines *sāvaka* as ‘they are ‘listeners’ because they listen attentively to the instructions and teachings of the Fortunate One’ (*bhagavato ovādānusāsaniḡ sakkaccaḡ suṇanti ti sāvaka*): Henry Clarke Warren (ed.), revised by Dharmananda Kosambi, *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya* ([1950] Repr. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1989) § 7.90.

43. Śrāvakayāna is a goal or an ideal, rather than a social or historical group: for this reason, I generally prefer to use ‘Śrāvaka’ rather than ‘Śrāvakayāna’ for historical description.

44. For tables of school affiliation, see Rupert Gethin, ‘Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin? Buddhist Identity in the Pali Commentaries and Chronicles’, Chapter 1 in P. Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*, p. 58; for earlier tables see Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, pp. 16–30; Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 529–546; Hirakawa, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 112–116. The choice of the figure eighteen, which became standard for the number of schools by at least the first centuries CE, may have been influenced by the common use of ‘eighteen’ as a standard or ideal number. For the figure eighteen in Sinhalese chronicles, see Gananath Obeyesekere, ‘Myth, History and Numerology in the Buddhist Chronicles’, in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *The Dating of the Historical Buddha/Die Datierung des historischen Buddha*, Part 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 152–182 (especially pp. 154–157).

45. *Nikāya* here means a monastic order and the system of practices and ideas that it transmits. The complication is that Mahāyāna systems and ideas developed *within* the monastic orders, although they do not seem to have been transmitted exclusively *by* any of the orders. Mahāyāna and Nikāya overlap and intersect. In general, the evolution of *nikāyas* is inaccurately presented according to a ‘schism model’, in which ‘sects’ break away from some kind of ‘central church’, from an enduring centre, rather than as a complex evolution over a widespread area.

46. Some of the terms used in recent scholarship are especially unsatisfactory. These include ‘sectarian Buddhism’, ‘traditional Buddhism’, and ‘mainstream Buddhism’. ‘Sectarian Buddhism’ conflates the Buddhist monastic *orders* with Christian lay *sects*; this obscures the nature of religious affiliation and commitment and the nature of social change. If we propose to use ‘traditional Buddhism’ as our analytical category, then how do we define ‘tradition’? As centuries passed, Buddhism underwent continual diversification. New trends developed in monasticism, meditation, and philosophy, and the social and material forms of Buddhism were shaped and reshaped by regional, cultural, and ethnological conditions. Which tradition should we choose? Similar complications bedevil the notion of ‘mainstream Buddhism’ (for which see below). Other unsatisfactory terms include ‘primitive Buddhism’ and ‘orthodox Buddhism’.

47. For the idea of ‘canon’, see Paul Harrison, ‘Canon’, EnB 1, pp. 111–115. For the process of scripture formation, see Richard Salomon, ‘An Unwieldy Canon: Observations on Some Distinctive Features of Canon Formation in Buddhism’, in Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, and Christoph Kleine (eds.), *Kanonisierung und Kanonbildung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte* (Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), pp. 161–207; idem, ‘Recent Discoveries of Early Buddhist Manuscripts and Their Implications for the History of Buddhist Texts and Canons’, Chapter 14 in Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 CE to 400 CE* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 349–382. For the Pali canon in particular, see Oliver Freiberger, ‘Was ist das Kanonische am Pāli-Kanon?’, in *ibid.*, pp. 209–232.

48. The lives of texts as ideal corpora or ‘imaginary exemplars’ that circulate across aeons and throughout the universe is an extraordinary notion that is regularly exploited in Mahāyāna sūtras.

49. I.B. Horner (ed.), *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā of Buddhaghosācariya*, Part III (London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1976 [first published 1933]), 282.18 *bodhisattā ... tepitakam Buddhavacanam ugganhitvā ... vipassanam vaddhetvā yāva anulomam ñānam āhacca tiṭṭhanti*.

50. *Atṭhaparikkhāra-jātaka*, Birth story No. 18 in Padmanabh S. Jaini (ed.) *Paññāsa-jātaka or Zimme Pannāsa*, Vol. I (London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1983), p. 211.16, *sabham pi tepitakam buddhavacanam ugganhāti*; for a translation see I.B. Horner and Padmanabh S. Jaini (tr.) *Apocryphal Birth-Stories (Paññāsa-jātaka)*,

Vol. I, London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1985), p. 227.

51. For these see Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 148–149.

52. Hartmann, ‘Āgama/Nikāya’, p. 11.

53. Rhys Davids (ERE VI, p. 685, n. 5) quotes Pischel [Richard Pischel, 1849–1908] (*Leben und Lehre des Buddha*, Leipzig, 1910, p. 6): ‘The Pali canon is only the canon of *one* sect’, and comments that ‘This is inaccurate in several ways. It implies that there were sects (like European sects); that each had a separate canon; and that each canon stood on a level in respect of age. Not one of these implications is supported by the evidence.’ This important observation remains valid.

In this essay, reference to Theravāda is largely to the Mahāvihāra school (and Sarvāstivāda subsumes Mūlasarvāstivāda). Yijing (writing at the end of the seventh century) and Vinītadeva (writing at the beginning of the ninth century) list three Sthavira lineages from Ceylon – Jetavaniya, Abhayagirivāsīn, and Mahāvihāravāsīn: see Bareaux, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, pp. 24–25 and 205–244, and Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 544–546. For the problem of the emergence of the two or three *nikāyas* in Ceylon, see most recently L.S. Cousins, ‘The Teachings of the Abhayagiri School’, Chapter 2 in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*

For useful surveys of the Pali canon and Pali literature, see Russell Webb, *An Analysis of the Pali Canon*, and Bhikkhu Nyanatusita, *A Reference Table of Pali Literature* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011); Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); Somapala Jayawardhana, *Handbook of Pali Literature* (Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd, 1994).

54. For a recent survey of available Śrāvaka texts, see Thomas Oberlies, ‘Ein bibliographischer Überblick über die kanonischen Texte der Śrāvakayāna-Schulen des Buddhism (ausgenommen der des Mahāvihāra-Theravāda)’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* XLVII (2003), pp. 37–84.

55. See Marcelle Lalou, ‘À la recherche du Vidyādharaṭṭhaka: le cycle du *Subāhupariṭchātāntra*’, in *Studies in Indology and Buddhology Presented in Honour of Professor Susumu Yamaguchi on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1955), pp. 68–72.

56. The BASKET OF CONDUCT of the Mahāvihāra MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTION contains thirty-five verse Jātakas which illustrate seven of the ten perfections. Its size shows that ‘Piṭaka’ could be used for relatively short works.

57. The author is also known as Bhavya or Bhāvaviveka. See P. Skilling, ‘Citations from the Scriptures of the “Eighteen Schools” in the Tarkajvāla’, in Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (eds.), *Bauddhavidyāsudhākarah: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997), pp. 605–614. For the entire chapter, the *Śrāvakatattva* (Reality according to the Śrāvakas), see Malcolm David Eckel (ed., tr.), *Bhāvivēka and His Buddhist Opponents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

58. Li Rongxi (tr.), *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty, translated from the Chinese of Śramaṇa Huili and Shi Yancong (Taishō, Volume 50, Number 2053)* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995), p. 174. Regrettably, many or most of these were never translated, and the original Indian manuscripts were eventually lost. As far as I know, there is no comprehensive study of this list in terms of school affiliation and its relation to extant translations by Xuanzang or others.

59. J. Takakusu (tr.), I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion: As Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671–695)*, ([Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896]: reprint New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005), pp. 7–8; Śramaṇa Yijing, *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia: A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas*, translated from the Chinese (Taishō Volume 54, Number 2125) by Li Rongxi (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000), pp. 10–11.

60. Chinese translations rarely specify the school of the texts, and much research remains to be done on the school affiliation of the ‘independent’ sūtra and other translations.

61. The Indic form is ill-attested, and it is not possible to decide whether the preferred form was ‘Sthavira’, ‘Sthāvira’, or Sthāvīriya.

62. The origins of the four lineages go back much earlier, to before the Christian Era, but the explicit quadripartite model was probably only formulated in the early centuries CE. After the initial division into Sthavira and Mahāsāṃghika, the Sāṃmitīya (or, more accurately, its forerunner, the Vātsīputrīya) and then the Sarvāstivāda developed within the Sthavira fold. Lines of affiliation of the ‘lesser schools’ – and were there no ‘unaffiliated schools?’ – were no doubt more complex than later doxographers would have it. The four-school model can be read retrospectively, without violence, into several of the accounts of school evolution. See P. Skilling, ‘Theravāda in History’, *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, Third Series, Number 11 (Fall

2009), pp. 61–93. All schools would have regarded themselves as legitimate descendents of the ‘original saṃgha’ through the first two Councils. How did the schools position themselves vis-à-vis their fellow monastic orders? To what degree did they claim exclusive legitimacy? Was the hardline stance of the Lankan Theravāda exceptional? In what way has the very idea of Theravādin exclusivity been influenced by colonial and post-colonial preconceptions of religion and sectarianism? It is time to review these questions in the broader context of Indian Buddhism and religion. (Gethin, ‘Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin?’, reexamines Theravādin self-definitions of identity to find that they may have been more inclusive than previously imagined.)

63. See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 536–538.

64. At an early date, the Pratyekabuddha (a concept originally shared with at least the Jains) was thoroughly naturalized into the Buddhist scheme of things. Scholasticism ranked him second in the three-tiered model of spiritual paths. Since Pratyekabuddhas arise only in ages when there are no Buddhas, they enjoy a significant role in narrative, especially in the *avadānas*, as the field of merit in periods ‘empty of Buddhas’. For a recent study, with copious reference to earlier literature, see Anālayo, ‘Pacceka-buddhas in the *Isigili-sutta* and its *Ekottarika-āgama* Parallel’, *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* No. 6 (2010), pp. 5–36. To aspire to Pratyekabodhi does not seem to have been a popular option (see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 139–140), although there is occasional epigraphical or other evidence for this.

65. Gandhari *bosivatvadharmā, bosivatvaśikṣā, samasabudbhayāna* = Sanskrit **bodhisatvadharmā, bodhisatvaśikṣā, samyaksambudbhayāna*. I am grateful to Ingo Strauch for this information (email, 11 June 2012).

66. It is largely the advocates of the bodhisatva path who used the term *yāna* in their scholastic and narrative literature – the schools refer rather to Śrāvaka-bodhi, Pratyeka-bodhi, and Samyak-sambodhi. (There are, however, important exceptions, in a few places in the *Vibhāṣā* literature, for example: see e.g. KL Dhammajoti, ‘From Abhidharma to Mahāyāna: Remarks on the early Abhidharma doctrine of the three *yāna*-s’, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies Sri Lanka* IX [2011], pp. 153–169.) See Anālayo, ‘Yāna’, in W.G. Weeraratne (Editor-in-Chief), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VIII, fasc. 3 (Sri Lanka: 2009), pp. 778–780. The complexities of the concepts of *yāna* – including further Ekayāna, Mantrayāna, and Vajrayāna, etc. – and *vāda* – Theravāda, Vetullavāda, Vijñānavāda, etc. – await elucidation (as does the concept of *naya* in for example Mantranaya).

67. Important concepts I cannot go into here include *bodhisattva-prātimokṣa*, *bodhisattva-śīla*, *bodhisattva-gaṇa*, and *avaivartaka-bodhisattva* – especially the degree to which the latter two might have been the chosen identities of historical social groups.
68. I am not at all happy with ‘belief system’, which I use as a term of convenience. The shared values – both as social products and as social determinants – reach beyond Buddhism into Indian society, whether in the time of the Master himself or in much later periods, but this is not to say that the values were universal, self-explanatory, or unchanging.
69. *Ārya-satya*, *ariya-sacca*, here ‘truths of the noble ones’, is often translated as ‘noble truths’. However, the usage of the sūtras and the commentaries make it clear that the meaning is ‘truths realized by the noble ones’. See Peter Harvey, ‘The Four Ariya-saccas as “True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled” – the Painful, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Way Going to This – Rather than “Noble Truths” Concerning These’, *Buddhist Studies Review* 26.2 (2009), pp. 197–227; K.R. Norman, ‘The Four Noble Truths: A Problem of Pāli Syntax’, in L.A. Hercus (ed.), *Indological and Buddhist Studies, Volume in Honour of Professor J.W. de Jong on his 60th birthday* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984), pp. 377–391 (repr. as § 49 in K.R. Norman, *Collected Papers* (Volume II, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1991), pp. 210–223; Anālayo, ‘The Ekottarika-āgama Parallel to the Saccavibhaṅga-sutta and the Four (Noble) Truths’, *Buddhist Studies Review* 23.2 (2006), pp. 145–153.
70. For an early epigraphic record of two lineages within the Bahuśrutīya school in the eastern Vindhyas, see von Hinüber and Skilling, ‘Two Buddhist Inscriptions from Deorkothar’. For a network of inscribed reliquaries commemorating a Hemavata lineage in the central Vindhyas, see Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India* (London: British Museum Press, 2000); Michael Willis, ‘Buddhist Saints in Ancient Vedisa’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 11.2 (2001), pp. 219–228.
71. This is equally true of Theravāda.
72. These insecurities lie behind some of the debates in our oldest Mahāyāna document, the Gandhari PERFECTION OF WISDOM.
73. One is reminded here of the literary figure of the monk Indrasukha, who possessed great magical ability, who was an upholder of the True Dharma (**saddharmaparigrāhaka*) and a bearer of Vaipulya sūtras (**vaipulya-sūtra-dhara*), who was respected by King Aśoka, and took the Dharmaparyāya to the northern country – where it was not very successful (Derge Kanjur, Toh. No. 146, *mdo sde, pa*, 140b1, *de'i tshde de'i*

dus na dge slong dbang po bde zhes bya ba rdzu 'phrul che ba, mthu che ba, dam pa'i chos yongs su 'dzin pa, shin tu rgyas pa'i mdo sde 'dzin pa, rgyal po'i rigs las rab tu byung ba ... chos smra ba). The Dharmaparyāya is the *Satyaka-parivarta*, otherwise known by the rather unwieldy title *Ārya-bodhisattva-gocara-upāyaviśaya-vikurvāna-nirdeśa*: for a complete translation, see Lozang Jamspal (tr.), *The Range of the Bodhisattva, A Mahāyāna Sūtra (Ārya-bodhisattva-gocara), The Teachings of Nirgrantha Satyaka* (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies/Columbia University Center for Buddhist Studies/Tibet House US, 2010) (for the passage translated here, see pp. 120–121). However one may regard the historicity of the passage, it shows that the Theravādins were not the only ones to lay claim upon the great king as supporter.

For Dharma-reciters, see Graeme MacQueen, 'Inspired Speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism', Chapter 43 in Williams, *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, Volume III, pp. 312–343; Richard Nance, 'Indian Buddhist Preachers Inside and Outside the Sūtras', *Religion Compass* 2.2 (2008), pp. 134–159; David Drewes, 'Dharmabhāṅakas in Early Mahāyāna', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 54 (2011), pp. 331–372; Natalie D. Gummer, 'Listening to the *Dharmabhāṅaka*: The Buddhist Preacher in and of the Sūtra of Utmost Golden Radiance', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.1 (March 2012), pp. 137–160; Richard Nance, *Speaking for Buddhas: Scriptural Commentary in Indian Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 45–80. I do not think there are any early inscriptions explicitly mentioning *dharmabhāṅaka* (there are other sorts of *bhāṅakas*, of course), but we meet with them in the Upper Indus: see Oskar von Hinüber, 'The Saddharmapūṇḍarikasūtra at Gilgit: Manuscripts, Worshipers, and Artists', *The Journal of Oriental Studies* Vol. 22 (2012), pp. 52–67; see also idem, *Die Palola Śāhis: Ihre Steininschriften, Inschriften auf Bronzen, Handschriftenkolophone und Schutzauber, Materialien zur Geschichte von Gilgit und Chilas* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2004), Verzeichnis der Namen und Titel, p. 207 s.v. Dharmabhāṅaka. For epigraphic and textual references to *bhāṅakas* and *dharmabhāṅakas*, see Keisho Tsukamoto, *Source Elements of the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Integration of Religion, Thought, and Culture* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 2007), pp. 179–190.

74. Over a century ago, Kern had already observed that where most (Nepalese) manuscripts read *vaipulya*, others (notably the 'Kashgar manuscript' of the *Saddharmapūṇḍarika-sūtra* from Central Asia) read *vaitulya*: H. Kern, 'Vaitulya, Vetulla, Vetulyaka', *Verspreide Geschriften*, Vol. III, 'S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1915, pp. 99–104. Kern's

article was summarized by Louis de La Vallée Poussin in 'Review of Books', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 39.2 (April 1907), pp. 432–434. La Vallée Poussin opened with the statement that 'This short but important article throws new light on the history of the two Vehicles of Buddhism'. Earlier on, Kern had offered a number of insights into the significations of Vaipulya, Vedalla, and Vaidalya in his 'History of Buddhism in India', where he concluded, 'Whatever genre the Vaipulyas corresponding to the Vedallas actually designate, they have nothing in common with the Vaipulya sūtras of the Mahāyāna': H. Kern, *Histoire du bouddhisme dans l'Inde*, traduite du néerlandais par Gédéon Huet, Tome Deuxième (Paris: Ernest Leroux, Éditeur, 1903 [Annales du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque d'Études, Tome Onzième] pp. 402–403.

75. S. Paranivatana, in H.C. Ray (Editor-in-Chief), *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Volume I, Part I (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1959), p. 249, writes, 'The Vetullavādins who disturbed the equanimity of the orthodox Church in Ceylon in the reign of Vohārika Tissa must ... be taken as Mahāyānists'.

76. At present we have insufficient information about the variant forms of the three terms in Pali manuscript traditions. For Vetulyavāda at *Mahāvamsa* 36.41a, Geiger records the variants Vetula°, Vetulla°, Vetullya°, and Vetulya°. The Commentary has Vetullavāda, variant Vetulya°: G.P. Malalasekera (ed.), *Vamsathappakāsīnī, Commentary on the Mahāvamsa* (London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Pail Ltd., 1977), Vol. II, p. 662.15. Note that the form Vetulya occurs in a Lotus Sūtra manuscript from Central Asia: see below, n. 123.

77. For Vedalla, see Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 144. Regarding Vetullavāda, K.R. Norman writes that 'the only explanation for the variations of the sect's name [that is, Vetullavāda], lies in a Prakrit origin. *Vaitulya* and *Vaipulya* must be back-formations from Prakrit *ve(y)ulla*, and *vevulla*, which are presumably merely variants of the same word with -y/-v- glide consonant alternation. There is no way of telling which, if either, of the forms with -t- or -p- is historically correct': K.R. Norman, 'The role of Pali in early Sinhalese Buddhism', § 34 in *Collected Papers* (Volume II, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1991), pp. 43-45. The attested Gandhari forms, but in a different context, are *vehula* (< *veulla* < *vevulla* < *vaipulya*); *vipula* (< *vipula*) (Kāraśhima, 'Was the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* Compiled in Gandhāra?', p. 176 and n. 12). Kalupahana remarks that 'it would seem that by the time of Buddhaghosa the correct interpretation of the word [vedalla] had been forgotten': D.J. Kalupahana, 'Aṅga', *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. I,

fasc. IV (1965), pp. 618–619. Warder suggests that Vaitulika had the sense of ‘Magicians’, from *vaitālika*, ‘able to raise the dead, etc.’, ‘but [it can] perhaps [be] also *vaidālika*, ‘destruction’: A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p. 414. The first is untenable, and the second should not be interpreted in the sense of ‘annihilationist’ applied here by Warder. For other interpretations of *vedalla*, see Anālayo, *Madhyama-āgama Studies* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2012), Vol. 1, pp. 60–61, and n. 54.

78. Only the last-named is included in the Tibetan lexicon *Madhyavyutpatti*, compiled by Indian and Tibetan pandits circa 800: *vaipulyam zhes bya ba ni vipulasya [bhā]va vaipulya zhes bya ste, shin tu rgyas par bshad pas sam, mdo sde rgya chen po'i nang nas sa dang pha rol tu phyin pa la sogs pa shin tu rgya che zhing yangs par bshad pa yin pas na shin tu rgyas pa'i sde zhes bya*, Mie Ishikawa (ed.), *A Critical Edition of the Sgra sbyor Bam po Gnyis pa, an Old and Basic Commentary on the Mahāvūyutpatti* (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1990), § 135, p. 54.

79. So Dhammajoti: ‘*vedalla* (Skt. *vaidalya*): derived from √*dal* meaning to “crack”/ “open”’: Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, Fourth revised edition, 2009), p. 3.

80. For a lucid summary see Y. Kajiyama, 1989, pp. 132–133.

81. The Pali tradition, however, explains *Vedalla* as *veda* + *lla*, connecting it with √*vid*. Robert Caesar Childers, in *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London, 1874), p. 561b, s.v. *vedalla* already noted that that the derivation from *vidala* + *ya* was preferable: ‘*Vedallaṃ*: name of one of the nine *aṅgas* or divisions of the Buddhist scriptures according to matter. Buddhaghosa says of this *aṅga*, *Cūlavēdala-mahāvēdalla*- ... Burnouf believes it to be *vidala* + *ya* (*vaidalya*), see Lot[us p.] 754, which is doubtless the true etymology, though Kaccāyana makes it *veda* with an affix *lya*.’

82. The *navāṅga-satthasāsana* or *dvādaśāṅga-buddhavaṇana*: see Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 143–147; Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Tome V (Louvain-la-Neuve, Université de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1980), pp. 2281–2305; Hikata, *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-Paripṛcchā Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra*. Introductory Essay, pp. 55–58; Akira Hirakawa, ‘The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Its Relationship to the Worship of Stupas’, *The Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* XXII (1963), pp. 61–65 (full article, pp. 57–106; idem, *History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 74–75. One of the early scholars to discuss the

aṅgas and the Vaipulya as *aṅga* was Eugène Burnouf: see his *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, translated by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 97–110 (for Vaipulya see pp. 106–107, 110). The classic modern study of the nine *aṅgas* remains Oskar von Hinüber, ‘Die Neun Aṅgas – Ein früher Versuch zur Einteilung buddhistischer Texte’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, Band XXXVIII (1994), pp. 121–135. See, in Japanese, Egaku Mayeda, *A History of the Formation of Original Buddhist Texts* (Tokyo: Sankibo-Busshorin Publishing Co., Ltd., 1964), pp. 389–428 (English summary, pp. (31)–(32)). Jan Nattier, ‘The Twelve Divisions of Scriptures (十二部經) in the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations’, *ARIRIAB VII* (2003), pp. 167–196, with tables giving ‘The Twelve Aṅgas in Selected Chinese Sources’, pp. 191–194 and bibliography (pp. 195–196), does not discuss the Vaidalya genre separately; it appears that the sources consulted by Nattier all translate a form meaning Vaipulya.

83. Translation from N.A. Jayawickrama (tr., ed.), *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidāna, being a Translation and Edition of the Bāhiraṇidāna of Buddhaghosa’s Samantapāsādikā, the Vinaya Commentary* (London: Luzac and Company, 1962) § 31, English, p. 26, Pali p. 155, *Cullavedalla-Mahāvedalla-Sammādiṭṭhi-Sakkapañha-Saṅkhārabbhājanīya-Mahāpuṇṇamasuttādayo sabbe pi vedam ca tuṭṭhim ca laddhā laddhā pucchitasuttanta vedallan ti veditabbam*. In n. 31.9, p. 102, Jayawickrama discusses Vedalla: ‘To my mind vedalla means “subtle analysis” coming from an older *vaidārya* from *vi* and root *ḍī* “to tear apart”; hence, “analyse or break down into fundamentals”. Hence Vedalla should be rendered as “Analyses”.’

84. For a note on Vaipulya with further definitions and references, see Peter Skilling, *Mahāsūtras: Great Discourses of the Buddha* (Vol. II, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1997), pp. 31–42.

85. This very hypothetical question depends in part on the nature of the two titles, Lesser Vedalla and Greater Vedalla. The Sanskrit counterparts have different titles – for example *Mahākauṣṭhila-sūtra* for MN 43, *Bhikṣuṇīdharmadinnā-sūtra* for 44 – and we do not so far meet any other sūtras with Vedalla/Vaidalya in their titles anywhere in the Āgama/Nikāya literature. Why the two Pali suttas and no others bear these titles remains to be explained. Could the titles have been assigned to establish an official set of ‘orthodox’ Vedalla suttas?

86. *Āṅguttara-nikāya, Pañcaka-nipāta, Yodhājīva-vagga, Anāgatabhaya-sutta*: E. Hardy (ed.) *The Āṅguttara-nikāya, Part III, Pañcaka-nipāta, and*

Chakka-nipāta (London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1976 [first published 1897]), p. 107; translation from Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Bristol: The Pali Text Society/Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p. 714.

87. ‘Talk pertaining to Dhamma’, *abhidhammakathā*: Bhikkhu Bodhi (n. 1086, p. 1733) notes, ‘I take the word *abhidhamma* here to have a purely referential function, that is, to mean “pertaining to the Dhamma, relating to the Dhamma.” It does not denote the canonical collection of that name or its philosophy. See DOP sv *abhidhamme* [Margaret Cone, *A Dictionary of Pali*, Part I (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001), p. 198]. Mp [*Manorathapūraṇī*, the *Aṅguttaranikāya* commentary], too, appears to recognize that the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is not relevant here, explaining *abhidhammakathaṃ* in this passage as a discussion on “the supreme teaching concerned with virtuous behaviour, etc.” (*silādi-uttamadhammakathaṃ*).’ See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p. 3, ‘*abhidhamma-kathā* – a solemn dialogue between two *bhikkhus* concerning the spiritual path’. Nonetheless, I feel the term may indeed mean here discussions on Abhidhamma as a system of, or tendency in, Buddhist thought.

88. ‘Questions-and-answers’, *vedallakathā*: in note 1086 (p. 1733), Bhikkhu Bodhi summarizes the gloss of the commentary: ‘It takes *vedallakathaṃ* to be a “miscellaneous talk on knowledge connected with inspirational joy” (*vedapaṭisaṃyuttaṃ ñāṇamissakakathaṃ*) ... The “dark Dhamma” (*kaṇhadhammaṃ*) is said to occur by way of fault-finding with a mind bent on criticizing others (*randhagavesitāya upārambhaparīyesanavasena*).’ See also Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, p. 3, ‘*vedalla* ... the extensive unravelling of the profound doctrinal meanings that have been hidden. In form, it consists of a question and answer session on doctrinal matters with a scope apparently broader than that in *abhidhamma-kathā* – either between the Buddha and the fourfold disciples (with others listening) or among the disciples themselves.’

89. 107.4 *abhidhammakathaṃ vedallakathaṃ kathentā kaṇhaṃ dhammaṃ okkamamānā na bujjhissanti*. Pertinent here are the ‘five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true Dhamma’: see Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Vol I (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 681, from *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (PTS) II 224.29, *pañca kho me kassapa okkamaniyā dhammā saddhammassa*

sammosāya antradhānāya samvattanti. The five dhammas are to be disrespectful to the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, the training, and concentration. The Commentary (p. 204.25) glosses *okkamaniya* as *avakammaniya*, meaning ‘going downwards’, that is, decline (*tattha okkamaniyā ti avakkamaniyā heṭṭha-gamanikā ti attho*).

90. See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 235. With only a title – *anāgatabhayāni*, ‘future threats’, plural – to go on, it is impossible to know which of those mentioned, for example in the Group of Fives of the NUMERICAL DISCOURSES, Aśoka might have had in mind.

91. *Gambhīra, lokuttara, suññatapaṭisaṃyutta, kavikata*: these are some of the terms used in dialogues on authenticity in the Pali Nikāyas, in the PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN EIGHT THOUSAND STANZAS, in the SŪTRA ON THE CONCENTRATION THAT DIRECTLY FACES THE BUDDHAS OF THE PRESENT TIME, and other texts. See P. Skilling, ‘Scriptural Authenticity and the Śrāvaka Schools: An Essay towards an Indian Perspective’, EB Vol. 41, no. 2 (2010), pp. 1–47, especially pp. 16–17.

92. Edward Conze (ed., tr.), *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā Chapters 70 to 82 corresponding to the 6th,, 7th and 8th abhisamayās* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1974, p. 8.22.

93. Skilling, ‘Scriptural Authority’, p. 18.

94. The closest *apparent* parallel is the ‘Mahābodhiyāna’ of the COMMENTARY ON THE BASKET OF CONDUCT, but this is a term of restricted use and different application. See *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views*, translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), pp. 44, 243.

95. For Vetullavāda, see G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* ([1937] New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), Vol. II, p. 918. The term is frequently spelt Vetulya°; here I standarize to Vetulla°.

96. C.M. Fernando (tr.), *The Nikāya Saṅgrahawa*, revised and edited by Mudaliyār W.F. Gunawardhana (Colombo: H.C. Cottle, Government Printer, 1908) p. 9.

97. See Padmanabh S. Jaini (ed.), *Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Insitute, 1977), Introduction, pp. 123–128.

98. Summary after Walpola Rahula (tr.), *Le Compendium de la Super-Doctrine (Philosophie) (Abhidharmasamuccaya) d’Asaṅga* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1971), Introduction, p. xviii.

99. Étienne Lamotte (ed., tr.), *La somme du Grand Véhicule d'Asaṅga (Mahāyānasamgraha)* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1973, II, 26 [Tibetan text, Tome I, pp. 37–38; translation, Tome II, pp. 120–122]). See also VI, 6 (Tibetan text, Tome I, p. 70; translation, Tome II, p. 217), which refers to the *'Dul ba bsñad pa shin tu rgyas pa'i mdo*, rendered by Lamotte as *Vinayaghoṣavaipulyasūtra* (which I do not find very convincing). The sūtra is so far unidentified.

100. *Lankāvātāra-sūtra, Sagāthakaṃ*, v. 142. For an English translation, see Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (tr.), *The Lankavatara Sūtra, A Mahayana Text, Translated for the first time from the original Sanskrit* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., [1932] 1973), p. 237.

101. J. Takakusu and Makato Nagai (eds.), *Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka*, Vol. IV (London: The Pali Text Society/Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1967 [first published 1934]), p. 742 ult. *vedalhapīṭakādīni pana abuddhavacanāni yevā ti vuttaṃ*, with the variant *vedalla°*, as also given in the Thai-script printed edition, *Samantapāsādikāya nāma vinayaṭṭhakathāya dutiyo bhāgo mahāvibhaṅgavaṇṇanā, Vajirañānena Mahāsamañena sodhitā, Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaye ganthādhikārattherehi puna sodhitā* (Bangkok: Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya, [Thai Buddhist Era] 2522 [1979], first published 2462 [1919]), p. 292 ult.

102. *Cūlavamsa* 78:221–222.

103. F.L. Woodward (ed.), *Sārattha-ppakāsinī, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Saṃyutta-nikāya*, Vol. II (London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977 [first published 1932]), p. 202.1 *vetulla-pīṭakan ti, idaṃ abuddhavacanam pariyatti-saddhammapaṭīrūpakam nāma*, with variant *vedalla°*. The PTS edition of the *Sārasaṅgha* (ed. Genjun H. Sasaki, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1992), p. 45.29, reads *vetullapīṭakādīni*.

104. *Saṃyutta-ṭīkā (Dutiyo bhāgo)* (Marammaratṭha Buddhasāsanasamiti, 1961), p. 171.4, *vedallapīṭakan* (variant 'in some manuscripts *vedalḥa*) *ti vetullapīṭakam. taṃ nāgabhanato ānītan ti vadanti. vādabhāsitan ti apare. abuddhavacanam buddhavacanena virūjhanato. na hi sambuddho pubbāparaviruddham vadati. tattha sallam upaṭṭhapenti kilesavīnayaṃ na sandissati, aññadatthu kilesuppattiyaṃ paccayo hoti ti*. I am indebted to Mattia Salvini for pointing out these passages.

105. Li Rongxi, 'The Life of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva', in *Lives of the Great Monks and Nuns* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2002), pp. 17–27. See also Roger Coreless, 'The Chinese Life of Nāgārjuna', No. 41 in Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 525–531.

106. E. Obermiller (tr.), *History of Buddhism (Chos-hbyung) by Bu-ston*, II. Part, *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (Heidelberg, 1932), p. 124.
107. M.V. Vassilief, *Le bouddhisme: ses dogmes, son histoire et sa littérature*, Première partie, *Aperçu Général*, traduit du russe par M.G.A. La Comme (Paris: August Durand, Librairie/V^{ve} Benj. Duprat, Librairie, 1863), p. 119; cited by Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, pp. 69–70. For Nāgārjuna, see Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
108. See, for example, Edward Conze (tr.), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary* (Bollinas, California: Four Seasons Foundation, Second printing with corrections, 1975), pp. 139, 202.
109. See, for example, Daniel Boucher (tr.), *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahāyāna: A Study and Translation of the Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā-sūtra* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 137, section subtitled 'Reactions of Co-Religionists to This Teaching'.
110. See Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, Introduction, pp. 71–72.
111. Internal titles – those embedded in the narrative or rhetoric of the *sūtra* – generally give more reliable evidence of usage than do the concluding manuscript titles. Closing titles, including translation titles, were often added in later projects of bibliographic standardization. It does not seem that there are any broad-based studies of the self-representation of Mahāyāna *sūtras* through epithets and vocabularies of glorification. Such studies are needed to advance the general understanding of questions like these.
112. For this anthology, see P. Skilling and Saerji, 'The Circulation of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* in India', ARIRIAB XVI (2013), pp. 193–216.
113. Tibetan translation done by Dharmasrīrabha and Dpal gyi lhun po in about the early eighth century: *Buddhapīṭakaduḥśīlanigrāhī-nāma-māhāyānasūtra*, *Sangs rgyas keyi sde snod tshul khrims 'chal ba tshar gcod pa shes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Otani Catalogue No. 886, Reprint Vol. 35, mdo, tshu, 81b2, *mdo sde rab tu rnam par 'byed pa zhes bya ba dang, rnam par 'thag pa theg pa chen po'i mdo zhes bya ba dang, sangs rgyas keyi sde snod ces bya ba dang, tshul khrims 'chal ba 'tshar gcod pa zhes bya ba rdzogs so*. The list of titles is effectively a colophon. A Chinese translation in three *juans* is ascribed to Kumārajīva, CE 405: Lewis R. Lancaster in collaboration with Sung-bae Park, *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) § 529, Fo zang jing, *Buddhapīṭaka-sūtra (= Taishō 653).

114. *Mdo sde rab tu rnam par 'byed pa*. In technical literature, *rab tu rnam par 'byed* translates the noun *pravicyaya* or the verb *pravicinoti*: see J.S. Negi, *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*, Vol. 14 (Sarnath, Varanasi: Dictionary Unit, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2004), pp. 6249-6250.

115. Or.15010/43: see Seishi Karashima (ed.), 'The Sanskrit Fragments Or.15010 in the Hoernle Collection', in Seishi Karashima and Klaus Wille (Editors-in-chief), *The British Library Sanskrit Fragments*, Vol. II.1, Texts (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University, 2009), pp. 399-402; Vol. II.2, Facsimiles, Pl. 245.

116. Tōhoku Cat. No. 227, *mdo sde, dza*, 177a.3–188b7.

117. Cecil Bendall (ed.), *Çikshāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Teaching compiled by Çāntideva chiefly from earlier Mahāyāna-sūtras* (St. Pétersbourg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1897–1902; repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.), pp. 95.11–97.15. For translation, see Cecil Bendall and W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), *Śikshā-samuccaya, a Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), pp. 96–99. For the author Śāntideva, see recently, with references to earlier literature, Paul Harrison, 'The Case of the Vanishing Poet. New Light on Śāntideva and the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*,' in Konrad Klaus and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (eds.), *Indica et Tibetica: Festschrift für Michael Hahn: zum 65. Geburtstag von Freunden und Schülern überreicht* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2007), pp. 215–248.

118. *First Bhāvanākrama*, in Giuseppe Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts*, Parts One and Two ([Rome 1956, 1958], repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), p. 505.18 [original pagination, Part II, p. 195] *yat sarvadharmasamgrahavaipulye coktaṃ* (addressed to Mañjuśrī); *Bhāvanākrama* III (Tucci) p. 26.9 *tathācoktaṃ sarvadharmavaipulye* (addressed to Maitreya). The Tibetan has *Chos thams cad shin tu rgyas par bsdus pa* = °vaipulya°. The abbreviated quotation is probably derived directly from the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.

119. Together with Mattia Salvini, I am preparing a study and translation of this sūtra.

120. Schøyen collection, MS number 2378/1, in BMSC I: Kazunobu Matsuda, 'Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādanirdeśa', p. 74.6, *samāpta(m) śrīmālādevīsīṃha [nāda]nirde [śa] (sūtram |) [e] (kāyāna) ṃ [ma] (h) [opā] yavaitulye abhijñā [taṃ] śrī [mā] lā [sūtra] m etat | |*. The Tibetan title is embedded in a stock formula used for sūtra titles in the Kanjur HEAP OF PRECIOUS JEWELS collection and does not correspond. Regarding the

Chinese, Matsuda's n. 23 states that 'Although there are many tentative points in the first line, if my reconstruction is correct, the title of this sūtra given here is practically identical with the title used by Guṇabhadra in his Chinese translation', done in 436.

121. MS number 2378/1, in BMSC I: Jens Braarvig, 'Sarvadharmā-pravṛttinirdeśa', p. 103, 3 lines from bottom, *vaitulyasūtrāmtānām ca varṇaṃ saṃprakāśayiṣyanti sarvadharmā ca vaitulyā jñāsyanti*, Tibetan p. 104.15 *shin tu rgyas pa'i mdo mams kyi bsngags pa yang rjod la, chos thams cad shin tu rgyas pa yang 'tshal bar 'gyur*.

122. Hiromi Habata (ed.), *Die Zentralasiatischen Sanskrit-Fragmente des Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra: Kritische Ausgabe des Sanskrittextes und seiner tibetischen Übertragung im Vergleich mit den chinesischen Übersetzungen* (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 2007), § 16.2, pp. 81–82. Habata discusses Vaitulya (Vaipulya) in her Einleitung, § 24. See also Hiromi Habata, 'The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* Manuscripts in the Stein and Hoernle Collections', in Karashima and Wille, *The British Library Sanskrit Fragments*, Vol. II.1, Texts, p. 567.

123. The 'Kashgar manuscript' reads, with some variants, *Saddharmapūṇḍarīke mahāvaitulyasūtraratne*, while the Farhād-Beg manuscript has *Saddharmapūṇḍarīke mahāvaitulyasūtraratnai* (Chapter 11), *Saddharmapūṇḍarīke mahāvetulyasūtraratne* (Chapter 12), etc. Where the Kashgar manuscript describes future bodhivatvas as 'bearers of the Vaitulya sūtrāntas', the Nepalese manuscripts and the Tibetan translation have 'bearers of the Vaipulya sūtrāntas': (*vaipulyasūtrāntadhara, shin tu rgyas 'dzin pa*). For occurrences of *vaipulya* in the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka*, with the Tibetan translations *shin tu rgyas pa* or *rab rgyas*, see Yasunori Ejima et al., *Index to the Saddharmapūṇḍarīkasūtra – Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese – fasc. IX* (Tokyo: The Reiyukai, 1991), p. 959. In general, in the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* and other sūtras, the Nepalese manuscripts use the form Vaipulya. These are only examples; detailed comparative studies of Indic manuscripts and Chinese and Tibetan translations are needed.

124. Bhikshu Dharmamitra (tr.), *Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Bodhisattva Vow: A Discourse on the Bodhisattva's Vow and the Practices Leading to Buddhahood, Treatise on the Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sūtra by Vasubandhu Bodhisattva (circa 300 CE)* (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009), pp. 17 ('the mahāvaiṣṭvā teachings'), 143 ('the vaipulya Mahāyāna's treasury of bodhisattva scriptures'). The contexts of usages like this in Chinese sources need to be scrutinized in future to complete our understanding of Vaidalya/Vaipulya, but that is beyond the scope of this essay.

125. *Mahāyānavaipulyasūtra*, *Bodhisattvapīṭakāvataṃsaka*, Tib. *Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde shin tu rgyas pa Byang chub sems dpa'i sde snod phal po che*: for discussions of these epithets, see Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat (eds.), *L'Inde classique: Manuel des études indiennes*, Tome II (Paris: Payot, 1953), § 2015, and Ariane Macdonald, *Le Maṇḍala du Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962, pp. 3–10).
126. Rolf W. Giebel (tr.), *The Vairocanābhisambodhi Sūtra* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005), p. 228, 'the Broad (Vaipulya) Vehicle' (twice), p. 271, 'the Vaipulya scriptures of the Great Vehicle'.
127. For an edition of the Tibetan, see Y. Kajiyama, 'The Vaidalya-prakarāṇa of Nāgārjuna', reprinted in Y. Kajiyama, *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy (Selected Papers)* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., Ltd., 1989), pp. 361–387; for an English translation, see Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti, *Nāgārjuna's Refutation of Logic (Nyāya) Vaidalyaprakarāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995 [Buddhist Tradition Series, Vol 24]). See also Chr. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the writings and philosophy of Nāgārjuna* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1982), Chapter IV (reprinted in Chr. Lindtner, *Master of Wisdom: Writings of the Buddhist Master Nāgārjuna*, Oakland: Dharma Publishing, 1986, pp. 273–278).
128. *rtog ge shes pa'i nga rgyal gyis / gang shig rtsod par mgon 'dod pa / de yi nga rgyal spong pa'i phyir / zhib mo rnam 'thag bshad par bya*.
129. A classic source is Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anurādhapura Period, 3rd Century BC–10th Century AC* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., [1956] Second edition, 1966), Chapters 6 and 7, especially pp. 87–111. Sodō Mori, *Mahāyāna Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Nagoya, March, 1999), addresses his topic from several fronts.
130. I have been unable to check the use of 'the word "Vaitulyavāda"' in a 'fragmentary slab-inscription in Sinhala from Jetavanārāma' mentioned, according to Mori, by Mudiyanse (Mori, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 17–18).
131. The best source for iconographic evidence, with well-informed commentary, is Ulrich von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka* (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications Ltd., 1990), especially pp. 209–307. For earlier surveys, see Nandasena Mudiyanse, *Mahayana Monuments in Ceylon* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., 1967) and Diran Kavork Dohanian, *The Mahāyāna Buddhist Sculpture of Ceylon* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977).
132. The chronological table published by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification [Visuddhimagga] by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa*

(Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975) pp. x–xii, gives a good conspectus of Abhayagiri and Vetulya activities, or rather, royal efforts to suppress the Vetulya, up to the third century CE (reign of Mahāsenā, 277–304).

133. Wilhelm Geiger (ed.), *The Mahāvamsa* (London: The Pali Text Society/Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1958 [first published 1908]), 36:111, *Vetulyavādino bhikkhū abhayagirinivāsino ... jinasāsanakaṇṭake*. See also 78:21, and Wilhelm Geiger (ed.), *Cūlavamsa, being the more recent part of the Mahāvamsa*, Vols. I, II, London: The Pali Text Society/Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, 78:21.

134. Lance Cousins, ‘The Teachings of the Abhayagiri School’, in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*

135. Translation by Red Pine, *The Lankavatara Sūtra* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), p. 26.

136. Definition from Robert E. Buswell, ‘Icchantika’, EnB 1, p. 351.

137. Chapter 2, § XXII, in Bunyiu Nanjio (ed.), *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Kyoto: The Otani University Press, 1923), p. 66.2, *tatra sarvakuśalamūlotsargaḥ katamo? yaduta bodhisattvapiṭakanikṣepo ’bhyākhyānāṃ ca naite sūtrāntavinayamokṣānukūlā iti bruvataḥ sarvakuśalamūlaotsargatvān na nirvāyati*. This seems to be the only reference to Bodhisattvapiṭaka in the sūtra. For Suzuki’s translation from Sanskrit, see *The Lankavatara Sūtra*, pp. 58–59, ‘What is meant by abandoning all the stock of merit? It refers to [those Buddhists] who have abandoned the Bodhisattva collection [of the canonical texts], making the false accusation that they are not in conformity with the sūtras, the codes of morality, and the emancipation. By this they have forsaken all the stock of merit, and will not enter into Nirvana.’

138. For the Buddha’s visits to Lanka from the viewpoint of Theravādin sources, see Frank Perera, *The Early Buddhist Historiography of Ceylon* (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen, 1979), pp. 115–124.

139. S. Paranavitana, ‘Īṅdikaṭusāya Copper Plaques’, *Epigraphia Zeylanica* III (1933), no. 20 (pp. 199–212); idem, ‘A Note on the Īṅdikaṭusāya Copper Plaques’, *Epigraphia Zeylanica* IV (1939), no. 30 (pp. 238–246). For a survey of these and other ‘Mahāyānist’ epigraphic materials, see Mudiyanse, *Mahayana Monuments in Ceylon*, pp. 79–105. A new study of these materials in the light of recent advances in Buddhist studies is a desideratum.

140. Oskar von Hinüber, *Sieben Goldblätter einer Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā aus Anurādhapura* (Göttingen: Verlag Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983 [Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1983, Nr. 7]).

141. See Gregory Schopen, 'The Text of the "Dhāraṇī Stones from Abhayagiriya": A Minor Contribution to the Study of Mahāyāna Literature in Ceylon', *Jiabs* 5.1 (1982), pp. 100–108, with reference to earlier literature.

142. I now hesitate to follow the Tibetan tradition that ascribes the *Gāthasamgrahārthaśāstra* to Vasubandhu the Kośakāra, as I had done earlier in P. Skilling, 'A Survey of the *Vyākhyāyukti* Literature', *Jiabs* 23.2 (2000), pp. 305–307 (full article, pp. 297–350).

143. U. Wogihara (ed.), *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Tokyo: Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, [1936] 1971), p. 96.6, *tatra dvādaśāṅgād vaco-gatād yad vai-pulyaṃ. tad bodhisattva-piṭakam. avaśiṣṭaṃ śrāvaka-piṭakam veditavyaṃ.*

144. Nance, *Speaking for Buddhas*, Appendix C, p. 182. The original Sanskrit title is not attested so far. Nance uses the reconstructed title **Vivaraṇasamgrahaṇī*. I use the title **Vyākhyāsamgrahaṇī*, which is preferred in recent research.

145. *abhidharmmo nāma navavidho sūtrānto sūtram geyaṃ vyākaraṇam ... vaipulyādbhutādharmmā*: Die Abhisamācārikā Dharmāḥ: *Verhaltensregeln für buddhistische Mönche der Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins*, herausgegeben, mit der chinesischen Parallelversion verglichen, übersetzt und kommentiert von Seishi Karashima unter Mitwirkung von Oskar von Hinüber, Band I (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2012 [Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica XIII, 1]), § 7.5. As Karashima points out (§ 7.5, fn. 2), the same definition of Abhidharma (without listing the nine components) is given in the Nun's Vinaya (*Bhikṣuṇīvinaya*) of the same school. It is also given in the Mahāsāṃghika Nun's Vinaya preserved in Chinese translation: see Hirakawa (tr.), *Monastic Discipline of the Buddhist Nuns*, p. 314. These are commentaries on specific passages (in the first, *abhidharmmeṇa vā abhivinayena vā*). Commentarial interpretations are context- and usage-bound, and not necessarily meant to be independent or universal statements about the words upon which they comment. How far the statement might be taken as a general definition of Abhidharma needs to be investigated.

146. Pralhad Pradhan (ed.), *Abhidharma Samuccaya of Asaṅga* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1950 [Visva-Bharati Studies 12]), p. 79.1; Rahula, *Le Compendium de la Super-Doctrine*, p. 132. Note that only about

forty percent of the Sanskrit is preserved – Pradhan translated the rest back into Sanskrit from the Tibetan and Chinese parallels in comparison with the commentary (*Bhāṣya*), with the result is that his edition is at best only an approximation of the original. Unfortunately, this includes the sections discussed here, for which I have consulted the Tibetan.

147. *sarvāvaraṇa-vidalanataḥ*, Tib. *ci'i phyir rnam par 'thag pa zhes bya zhe na? sgrub pa thams cad rnam par 'thag pa'i phyir ro*.

148. Walpola Rahula, writing in the 1950s, states that ‘The term Vetulla or Vaitulya literally means “dissenting” or “different” (secondary derivative form from *vi + tulya*): *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p. 90, n. 1. Mori (*Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 14) gives a similar interpretation, ‘... *vi-tulya*, that is, “not the same as oneself”, “diverse”, “heretics”.

149. Vasubandhu in Jong Cheol Lee (ed.), *The Tibetan Text of the Vyākhyāyukti of Vasubandhu, critically edited from the Cone, Derge, Narthang and Peking Editions* (Tokyo: The Sankibo Press, 2001 [Bibliotheca Indologica et Buddhologica 8]), p. 161.12.

150. Translation from Saṃghabhadra, T 29, 595a–b by KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma*, pp. 3–4. See also KL Dhammajoti, ‘Abhidharma and Upadeśa’, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, Vol. III (August, 2005), pp. 112–113.

151. Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche, *Gateway to Knowledge: The treatise entitled the Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita*, tr. James Gentry and Erik Pema Kunsang (Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, Volume IV, 2012), pp. 68–69.

152. Rhys Davids (‘Hīnayāna’, p. 684) gives ‘*Hīna* means ‘abandoned’, ‘low’, ‘mean’, ‘miserable’; *yāna* means ‘carriage’, ‘means of progression’, ‘vehicle’; the compound word *Hīnayāna*, as used of religious opinions, means a wretched, bad method, or system, for progress on the way to salvation.’

153. Nathmal Tatia (ed.), *Abhidharmasamuccaya-Bhāṣyam* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1976), p. 96.3. Seven similar reasons are given in the *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālamkāra* (ed. Sylvain Lévi, Paris, 1907), p. 171.10 (translation by same, Paris, 1911, p. 280); another seven in Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti* (Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking edition, Otani Catalogue No. 5562, Reprint Vol. 113, *Sems-tsam, Si*, 97b6 = Jong Cheol Lee (ed.), *The Tibetan Text of the Vyākhyāyukti*, pp. 160–161), cited by Bu ston in *Bu ston chos 'byung* (Krung go bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1988), p. 21 = E. Obermiller (tr.), *History of Buddhism (Chos-hbyung)* by Bu-ston, Part I, *The Jewelry of Scripture* (Heidelberg, 1931), pp. 38–39. One is tempted to add a further gloss, the ‘greatness of hyperbole’.

154. The concept of ‘resourcefulness’ or ‘skilled means’ is not uniquely Mahāyānist – it is the application and interpretation of the term that determines its ideological status. For a Pali example, see Peter Skilling, (ed.), *Past Lives of the Buddha. Wat Si Chum – Art, Architecture and Inscriptions* (Bangkok: River Books, 2008), translation p. 119 and p. 118, n. 2. In general, see Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* ([London: Duckworth, 1978] Second edition, Routledge, London: 2003); Bhikkhu Pāsādika, ‘Upāyakaūśalya’, W.G. Weeraratne (Editor-in-Chief), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol VIII, fasc. 2 (Sri Lanka: 2008), pp. 439–442.

155. I use the past because I am writing about Indian Buddhism. Needless to say, the Mahāyāna continues to exist and is active around the world today, and many of the points still hold.

156. I do not find it very fruitful to compare the Mahāyāna to the ‘new religious movements’ (NRMs), one of the current categories of Religious Studies. The new religions of the modern period are lay movements that have formed around charismatic lay leaders in urban, salaried societies, and have been built up into mass organizations with their own property, institutions, and liturgies. It is hard to see much resemblance to the growth of the Mahāyāna as a congeries of ideas and practices within the monastic traditions of India during periods of growth and decline in urbanization. Although our information about how the Mahāyāna worked is skimpy at best, it seems to have been characterized by an absence of settled institutional bases – that is, its practitioners and advocates were largely based in established monasteries throughout the entire course of its development in India. The agricultural support base of the monasteries was in part based on land grants, rather than the voluntary financial donations of individual and family units characteristic of NRMs. This is not to say that in India Mahāyāna adherents did not participate in and influence the life of the monasteries: that is another question. If there is any resonance it with NRMs it might lie in rhetorical constructions of group or community identity.

157. See, for example, Peter Skilling, ‘Unsettling Boundaries: Verses shared by Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna texts’, *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies IX* (2005), pp. 99–112. In general, see Masahiro Shimoda, ‘The State of Research on Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Mahāyāna as Seen in Developments in the Study of Mahāyāna Sūtras’, in *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture 96: Mahāyāna Buddhism: Its Origins and Reality* (Tokyo: The Tōhō Gakkai, 2009), pp. 1–23.

158. See P. Skilling, 'Nets of Intertextuality: Embedded Scriptural Citations in the Yogācārabhūmi', in Ulrich Timme Kragh (ed.), *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Department of South Asian Studies / Harvard University 2013), pp. 772–790.

159. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, p. 37; Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 540 (271 Mahāyāna-Sthavira monasteries with over 24,800 monks; over 200 of the monasteries and over 20,000 of the monks being in Ceylon, which he did not visit); Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, pp. 256–258. Most recently, see Max Deeg, 'Sthavira, Thera, and "Sthaviravāda" in Chinese Buddhist Sources', in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*, pp. 150–156 (full chapter, pp. 129–163).

There is no epigraphic reference to Mahāyāna-Sthavira in India. The sole lithic record is from central Thailand, about four centuries after Xuanzang, in the eleventh century. According to a Khmer-language stele from Bang Pa In or Lopburi, in Śaka 944 (CE 1022) King Sūryavarman (I) ordered the 'bhikṣu Mahāyāna-Sthavira' to offer the fruit of their ascetic practice (*tapas*) to him: George Coëdès (ed., tr.), *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam, Deuxième Partie: Inscriptions de Dvāravatī, de Çrīvijaya et de Lavo* (Deuxième édition, Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 2504 [1961]), Inscription XIX, 'Stèle khmère du Sāl Sūn', pp. 10–12 and Pl. V. We cannot say with certainty whether Xuanzang and Sūryavarman I used the compound in the same sense, but in any case Coëdès' translation of the term as a *dvandva* – 'ceux qui ont pris les ordres comme moines (bhikṣu) dans (la secte) Mahāyāna ou (dans la secte) Sthavira' – is incorrect, given that there is no such thing as a Mahāyāna bhikṣu ordination. See Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, *The Ascendancy of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silk-worm Books, 2010), p. 88.

160. For lay and monastic bodhisattvas and other relevant points see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, Chapter 4, 'The Institutional Setting'.

161. See Gareth Sparham, 'Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi*: The Morality Chapter', Chapter 34 in William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (eds.), *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); see also William Edelglass, 'The Bodhisattva Path: Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*', Chapter 33 in *ibid*.

162. See Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the Forest: Early India,' in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds.), *India's Environmental*

History, Vol. 1, *From Ancient Times to the Colonial Period: A Reader* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), pp. 105–126; Aloka Parasher-Sen, ‘Of Tribes, Hunters, and Barbarians: Forest Dwellers in the Mauryan Period’, in *ibid.*, pp. 127–151.

163. Here we may also mention the Jains, who, whether or not they were numerically significant – and the impression is that usually they were not – have made enormous and enduring contributions to Indian literature, philosophy, art, and architecture. Or, to turn to Europe, consider the following: ‘The Enlightenment has also been accused of being the exclusive concern of a small coterie of intellectuals scattered across Europe. ... But if the coterie was relatively small, the diffusion of its works was immense’ Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment: And Why It Still Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), p. xii.

164. A thesaurus gives the synonyms ‘normal, conventional, ordinary, orthodox, conformist, accepted, established, recognized, common, usual, prevailing, popular’, and the antonym ‘fringe’.

165. For this school of thought, see Leonard Priestley, *Pudgalavāda Buddhism: The Reality of the Indeterminate Self* (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1999); Dan Lusthaus, ‘Pudgalavāda Doctrines of the Person’, Chapter 24 in Edelglass and Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*.

166. A major problem with ‘mainstream’ is that it cannot be adequately translated into even major European languages – several of which use ‘Mainstream Buddhism’ as a loanword in translations of English-language books on Buddhism – let alone into Thai, Korean, Japanese, or Chinese. Surely something is wrong.

167. D. Seyfort Rugg, ‘Aspects of the Study of the (Earlier) Indian Mahāyāna’, *JIAS* 27.1 (2004), p. 11 (full article, pp. 3–62).

168. *Dāna, śīla, bhāvanā; śīla, samādhi, prajñā*.

169. And not a few of the ideologies are shared, or at least have structural counterparts, in other Indian religions.

170. *Majjhima-nikāya*, Sutta No. 22: see Anālayo, *A Comparative Study*, I, p. 152.

171. *Āṅguttara-nikāya* (PTS) III 350.4, V 140.18, *tasmā ti h’ānanda mā puggalesu pamāṇikā ahuvattha, mā puggalesu pamāṇaṃ gaṇhittha. khaññati h’ānanda puggalesu pamāṇaṃ gaṇhanto. abhaṃ vā ānanda puggalesu pamāṇaṃ gaṇheyyaṃ yo vā pan’assa mādiso*: for translation see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 913, 1434.

172. Braarvig, ‘Sarvadharmāpravṛttinirdeśa’, *BMSC* I, p. 132.

173. Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 263–264.

174. E. Lamotte (tr.), *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra: The Concentration of Heroic Progress, an early Mahāyāna Buddhist Scripture translated and annotated by Étienne Lamotte*, English translation by Sara Boin-Webb (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press in association with the Buddhist Society, 1998), § 103, p. 184. This passage is cited in *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Cecil Bendall ed., *Çikṣāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Teaching*, p. 92.1).

175. P. Harrison and J.U. Hartmann, ‘Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodana’, *BMSC I*, pp. 211–212.

176. See P. Skilling, ‘Redaction, Recitation, and Writing: Transmission of the Buddha’s Teachings in India in the Early Period’, Chapter 4 in Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown (eds.), *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 60–63.

177. For Buddhaghosa, see Gethin, ‘Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin?’. For the theory of momentariness, see Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality* (Hong Kong: Centre for Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2010), Chapter 17. For Dharma and dharmas, see Rupert Gethin, ‘He Who Sees Dhamma sees Dhammas: Dhamma in Early Buddhism’, in Patrick Olivelle (ed.), *Dharma: Studies in Its Semantic, Cultural and Religious History* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd., 2004), pp. 91–120; for the dharma theory, see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition* (London & New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

178. Dhāraṇī had been integrated into the Sūtras and Vinayas of the North Indian (Gilgit) and Central Asian (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda by the middle centuries CE. The Mantra genre has been significant in Theravādin liturgical practice for centuries, but in our present state of ignorance it is impossible even to suggest when or where Theravāda saṃghas developed the genre and its attendant practices. Some of the elements belong to a pool of liturgical modules shared with other schools, or better, beyond school boundaries (for example, the incantatory module *hulu hulu hulu*). Others, grounded in Pali and Theravādin doctrinal categories, are unique to the Theravādin traditions. See Rangama Chandawimala, ‘Tantric Buddhist Influence on Sri Lankan *Pirit (Paritta)*’, in KL Dhammajoti and Y. Karunadasa (eds.), *Buddhist and Pali Studies in Honour of The Venerable Professor Kakkapalliye Anuruddha* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2009), pp. 591–602.

179. See Peter Skilling, 'Cutting across categories: The ideology of relics in Buddhism', ARIRIAB VIII (2005), pp. 269–322.

180. These assertions go against the modern notion of a 'non-ritualistic' Theravāda.

181. For Dharma orators, see above.

182. Translation by Jens Braarvig, in 'Rhetoric of Emptiness', in *Zen Rhetoric and Doctrine – Indian Origins and East Asian Developments* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), p. 110. With the author's permission, I have made a few small changes and dropped the parenthetical Sanskrit. See also idem, 'The practice of the bodhisattvas: negative dialectics and provocative arguments: edition of the Tibetan text of the *Bodhisattvacaryānirdeśa* with a translation and introduction', *Acta Orientalia*, 55 (1994), pp. 112–160. For the Tibetan and Chinese texts and English summary, see Bibliotheca Polyglotta, [www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=library &bid=2](http://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/index.php?page=library&bid=2). For reflections on the notion of emptiness in sūtra and śāstra see P. Skilling, 'Mṛgāra's Mother's Mansion: Emptiness and the Śūnyatā Sūtras', *Journal of Indian and Tibetan Studies* 11 (2007), pp. 225–247.

183. Many of these categories correspond to those of the early Summaries; they played an important role in structuring Buddhist metaphysics, not only in the Abhidharma but also in the Sūtra genres, including the Vaidalya sūtras.

184. One example is the *Samghāṭa-dharmaparyāya*: see Giotto Canevascini, *The Khotanese Saṅghāṭasūtra: A critical edition* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1993), which was widely copied in Gilgit and Central Asia.

185. See e.g. the many sūtras cited by Dolpopa in Jeffrey Hopkins (tr.), Kevin Vose (ed.), *Mountain Doctrine: Tibet's Fundamental Treatise on Other-Emptiness and the Buddha Matrix by Dol-Bo-Ba Shay-Rap-Gyel-Tsen* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2006).

186. In general, modern scholarship on Buddhist narrative is still in an embryonic stage. See P. Skilling, 'Thoughts on Buddhist Narrative', in Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel (eds.), *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond* (Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), pp. ix–xi, and the essays collected in the volume.

187. We still need, however, more precise understandings of the significance of the elements Nirdeśa, Paripṛcchā, Samādhi, Vyūha, etc., that are often affixed to the titles of Mahāyāna sūtras. We do not even understand the sūtra genre itself – for example, the stages of its journey

from relatively short ‘Dharma teaching’ (Dharmaparyāya) to voluminous Vaipulya-sūtra.

188. No early palm-leaf manuscripts survive in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The rich Pali manuscript collections date to the second millennium, mostly to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although we have solid epigraphic evidence for the circulation of Pali texts in Southeast Asia from the fifth or sixth century on, we have no manuscripts. Nor do any of the Mahāyāna manuscripts of any period survive.

189. See P. Skilling, ‘Commentary at Nālandā in the Age of Dharmapāla: Viryaśridatta’s *Nibandhana* on the *Arthaviniścaya-dharmaparyāya*’, in Martin Straube, Roland Steiner, Jayandra Soni, Michael Hahn and Mitsuyo Demoto (eds.), *Pāsādikadānaṃ: Festschrift für Bhikkhu Pāsādika* (Indica et Tibetica Verlag Marburg, 2009), pp. 399–447.

190. The modern exegetical enterprise enlists footnotes, tables, graphic and typographic conventions, bibliographies, indexes, and so on.

191. For a study of the Chinese *Madhyamāgama* version, see Bhikkhu Anālayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing, 2011), pp. 276–286. For a translation of the Tibetan version with a comparison to the Pali *Cūlavedalla-sutta*, see Bhikkhu Anālayo, ‘Chos sbyin gyi mdo, Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā Proves Her Wisdom’, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, Vol 24 (2011), pp. 3–33 (reprinted in Anālayo, *Madhyama-āgama Studies*, pp. 39–66). Remember that this is one of the two Pali Vedalla or Vaidalya suttas (the known counterparts of other schools have different titles and do not use Vedalla/Vaidalya).

192. *Samyutta-nikāya*, *Salāyatana-vagga*, Chapter 51, *Citta-samyutta*.

193. P. Skilling, ‘Śāriputra and *Jambuchhāyaka: Three Citations from the Tibetan Tanjur with Parallels in the *Jambukhādaka-samyutta*’, *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* No. 14 (2013), pp. 119–133.

194. The Ābhidharmikas are, as Yaśomitra and others note, *lākṣanikas*.

195. In India there were several traditions regarding the authorship of the six or seven books of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma; they were generally held to have been composed or compiled by named individuals – the Buddha’s close disciples or others.

196. See the invaluable articles of Stefano Zacchetti: ‘An early Chinese translation corresponding to Chapter 6 of the *Peṭakopadesa*: An Shigao’s *Yin chi ru jing* T 603 and its Indian original: a preliminary survey’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, I (2002), pp. 74–98; ‘Some Remarks on the *Peṭaka* Passages in the *Da zhidu lun* and their

Relation to the Pāli *Peṭakopadesa*’, ARIRIAB V (2002), pp. 67–85.

197. See Stefan Baums, *A Gāndhārī Commentary on Early Buddhist Verses: British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragments 7, 9, 13 and 18* (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2009).

198. I prefer to use this convention to describe many other texts: they do not *belong* to this or that school, but have come to us *as transmitted* by this or that school.

199. See Yang-Gyu An, ‘Buddhaghosa’s View of the Buddha’s Lifespan’, *Buddhist Studies (Bukkyō Kenkyū)* XXIX (March, 2000: Special Issue in Celebration of Kōgen Mizuno’s 99th Year), pp. 129–147.

200. On aspects of the relationship between sūtra and śāstra, see Skilling, ‘Mrgāra’s Mother’s Mansion’.

201. See David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), pp. 101–103 and 87–100, respectively.

202. For a recently published example of a fifteenth-/early sixteenth-century Tibetan master’s reconciliations of the schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy, see Yaroslav Komarovski (tr.), *Visions of Unity: The Golden Pandita Shakya Chokden’s New Interpretation of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

203. See especially Anālayo, *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2010). For the state of the art a century ago, see Louis de La Vallée Poussin, ‘Bodhisattva’, *ERE* II (1909), pp. 739–753.

204. See Peter Skilling, ‘Jātaka and Paññāsa-jātaka in South-East Asia’, *JPTS* XXVIII, pp. 113–173, reprinted in Claudio Cicuzza (ed.), *Peter Skilling. Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia: Selected Papers* (Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, 2009), pp. 161–217.

205. See Louis de La Vallée Poussin (tr.), *L’Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, Tome IV (Brussels: Institut belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1971), pp. 245–249 (ad VI: 54cd); Gelong Lodrö Sangpo (tr.), *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) commentary*, Vol III (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 2012), pp. 1978–1979.

206. See for example Conze, the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, p. 150.

207. For the *Lalitavistara*, see Chapter 26, *Dharmacakrapravartana-parivarta*; for English see *The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of*

Compassion, translated into English from the French by Gwendolyn Bays (Berkeley, Dharma Publishing, 1983), Vol. II, pp. 635–663.

208. *buddhavaṃśānupaccheda*, *triratnavāṃśānupaccheda*.

209. Li Rongxi (tr.), Śramaṇa Yijing, *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia: A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000, p. 14. For an early translation, see J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695)* ([Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896] New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982), pp. 14–15. See also Bangwei Wang, ‘Buddhist Nikāyas through Ancient Chinese Eyes’, in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *Untersuchungen zur buddhistischen Literatur, Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden*, Beiheft 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), p. 181, and Deeg, ‘Sthavira, Thera, and “*Sthaviravāda” in Chinese Buddhist Sources’, in *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*, p. 154.

210. My description of the paths is necessarily an over-simplification. The scholastic literature of different schools of thought elaborates much more complex options and classifications, with a growing trend towards subordination and synthesis.

211. Mdo snags Bstan pa’i nyi ma, Bod pa Sprul sku, 1898–1959: translation from Bötrül, *Distinguishing the Views and Philosophies: Illuminating Emptiness in a Twentieth-Century Buddhist Classic*, translated, annotated, and introduced by Douglas Samuel Duckworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 92–93.

212. Tibetan *Ratnakūṭa* collection Sūtra nos. 19, 24, 33, 4, respectively. See further Pierre Python, ‘Le rituel du culte mahāyānique et le traité tibétain ’phags pa Phuṅ po gsum pa (sanskrit: *Ārya-Triskandhaka*)’, *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* XXXV.2 (1981) pp. 169–183; Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 117–121, 259–260; Paul Harrison, ‘Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras’, *EB* XXXV, New Series, nos. 1 & 2 (2003), pp. 115–151, p. 137.

213. *Anavataptanāgarāja-paripṛcchā*: Tibetan Tripiṭaka, Peking edition, Otani Cat. No. 823, Repr. Vol. 33, *mdo*, *pu*, 217b3.

214. Summaries, Mātṛkā, were early lists, schedules, and digests of dharmas that developed into the Abhidharma systems. See Rupert Gethin, ‘The Mātikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List’, in Janet Gyatso (ed.), *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 149–172.

215. The Buddhological elaborations and the stages of apotheosis seem to have followed similar trajectories, without, however, being either uniform or universal.

216. *Pāramī*, *upa-pāramī*, *paramattha-pāramī*: see the Commentary on the Basket of Conduct in Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views*, pp. 298–300 (where they are translated as ‘basic pāramī, intermediate pāramī, and ultimate pāramī’).

217. See Peter Skilling, ‘Three Types of Bodhisatta in Theravādin Tradition: A Bibliographical Excursion’, in *Buddhist and Indian Studies in Honour of Professor Sodo Mori* (Hamamatsu: Kokusai Bukkyoto Kyokai [International Buddhist Association], 2002), pp. 91–102.

218. The current general studies are Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (Routledge, Second edition, 2009); Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (Routledge, 2012).

219. For multiple but successive or sequential Buddhas, see P. Skilling, ‘The Sambuddhe Verses and Later Theravādin Buddhology’, *JPTS XXII* (1996), pp. 151–183, reprinted in Claudio Cicuzza (ed.), *Peter Skilling. Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia: Selected Papers* (Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, 2009), pp. 128–154.

220. For this genre, see P. Skilling, ‘The Place of South-East Asia in Buddhist Studies’, p. 58 in Cicuzza (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 46–68; pp. 136, 140, 147 in ‘The Sambuddhe verses and later Theravādin Buddhology’.

221. See for example Arthid Sheravanichkul, ‘Thai Ideas about Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna: Correspondence between King Chulalongkorn and Prince Narisanuvattivong’, Chapter 11 in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*

222. See Todd LeRoy Perreira, ‘Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term’, Chapter 12 in Skilling et al., *How Theravāda is Theravāda?*

223. For Tamil Buddhism, see Peter Schalk, ‘Canon Rejected: The Case of Pauttam among Tamils in Pre-Colonial Tamilakam and Īlam’, in Deeg et al., *Kanonisierung und Kanonbildung*, pp. 233–257.

224. Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p. 90, n. 1.

Appendix I

The nine and the twelve categories/genres of the Buddha's teaching

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) |
| sūtra | sutta | sūtra |
| geya | geyya | geya |
| vyākaraṇa | veyyākaraṇa | vyākaraṇa |
| gāthā | gāthā | gāthā |
| udāna | udāna | udāna |
| | | nidāna |
| itivṛttaka | itivuttaka | ityuktaka |
| jātaka | jātaka | jātaka |
| vaipulya | abbhutadhamma | vaipulya |
| adbhutadharma | vedalla | adbhutadharma |
| | | apadāna |
| | | upadeśa |

(1) *Abhisāmācārikā Dharmāḥ* (Karashima 2013) § 7.4.

(2) *Alagaddūpamasutta: Majjhima-nikāya Sutta* No. 22, PTS edition Vol. I pp. 133.24, 134.6.

(3) Edward Conze (ed., tr.), *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, Chapters 55 to 70 corresponding to the Fifth Abhisamaya*, Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1962 (Serie Orientale Roma, Vol. XXVI), p. 171.21. Note that in other manuscripts, what is here *apadāna* is usually *avadāna*, and that the manuscript apparently reads *apadeśa*. Other lists usually have *upadeśa*, however, and the Tibetan translation has *gtan la dbap pa'i bstan pa'i sde*, the standard translation of *upadeśa*.

Appendix II

Glossary of terms and titles

Functions in the transmission of the Dharma-vinaya

DHARMA-ORATOR, DHARMA-RECITER, *dharmabhāṇaka*

DHARMA-PREACHER, *dharmakathika*

SŪTRA-BEARER, *sūtra-dhara*,

VINAYA-BEARER, *vinaya-dhara*

SUMMARY-BEARER, *māṭṛkā-dhara*

Collections

TRADITIONS, COLLECTIONS, Āgama / Nikāya

BASKET OF TEACHING, COLLECTED TEACHINGS, Piṭaka

THREE BASKETS OF THE TEACHINGS, Tripiṭaka

BASKET OF SŪTRAS, Sūtra Piṭaka

BASKET OF MONASTIC DISCIPLINE, Vinaya Piṭaka

BASKET OF ABHIDHARMA, Abhidharma Piṭaka

BASKET OF TEXTS CONCERNING THE BODHISATTVA PATH,
Bodhisatva Piṭaka

BASKET OF TEXTS CONCERNING THE LISTENERS' PATH, Śrāvaka
Piṭaka

BASKET OF EXTENSIVE TEXTS, Vaipulya Piṭaka

BASKET OF MNEMONIC TEXTS AND PROTECTIVE CHARMS, Dhāraṇī
Piṭaka

BASKET OF TEXTS CONCERNING MAGICIANS, Vidyādhara Piṭaka
SUMMARIES, Māṭṛkā

BIRTH-STORIES, Jātaka

HEAP OF PRECIOUS JEWELS, Ratnakūṭa

Āgama sūtra titles

SŪTRA SPOKEN BY THE NUN DHARMADINNĀ, *Bhikṣuṇī-Dharmadinnā-sūtra*

SŪTRA ON THE TURNING OF THE WHEEL OF THE DHARMA,
Dharmacakrapravartana-sūtra

Mahāyāna sūtras and ritual texts

BUDDHA AVATAṂSAKA

CONCENTRATION OF HEROIC PROGRESS, Śūraṃgamasamādhi

COMPLETE COMPENDIUM OF VAIDALYA, *Sarvavaidalya-saṃgraha*

CONCENTRATION THAT COLLECTS ALL MERITS, *Sarvapūṇyasamuccaya-samādhi*

DIAMOND CUTTER SŪTRA, *Vajracchedikā*

DIRECT AWAKENING OF VAIROCANA, *Vairocanābhisambodhi*

DISPELLING THE GUILT OF KING AJĀTAŚATRU,

Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodana

EXPOSITION OF BODHISATVA PRACTICE, *Bodhisatvacaryā-nirdeśa*

EXPOSITION OF VIMALAKĪRTI, *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*

EXPOSITION ON DREAMS, *Svapna-nirdeśa*

EXPOSITION ON THE NON-ACTIVITY OF ALL DHARMAS

Sarvadharmāpravṛtti-nirdeśa

GOLDEN LIGHT SŪTRA, *Suvarṇabhāsottama/Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*

GREAT SŪTRA OF THE GREAT NIRVĀṆA, *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*

KĀŚYAPA CHAPTER, *Kāśyapa-parivarta*

TROVE OF PRECIOUS JEWELS SŪTRA, *Ratnarāśi-sūtra*

LION'S ROAR OF QUEEN ŚRĪMĀLĀ, *Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda*

PERFECTION OF WISDOM, *Prajñāpāramitā*

PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN EIGHT THOUSAND STANZAS,

Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā

[PERFECTION OF WISDOM IN] ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND STANZAS, *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*

QUESTIONS OF ANAVATAPTA THE NĀGA KING, *Anavataptanāgarāja-paripṛcchā*

QUESTIONS OF BODHISATVA LOKADHARA, *Lokadharaparipṛcchā*

QUESTIONS OF RĀṢṬRAPĀLA, *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā*

ROOT RITUALS OF MAÑJUŚRĪ, *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*

SPLENDID ARRAY OF AKṢOBHYA, *Akṣobhyavyūha*

SŪTRA ON THE BUDDHA'S VISIT TO LANKA
 SŪTRA ON THE CONCENTRATION THAT DIRECTLY FACES THE BUD-
 DHAS OF THE PRESENT TIME, *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāv-*
asthita-samādhi
 SŪTRA OF EXTENSIVE DIVERSION, *Lalitavistara*
 SŪTRA ON THE FORTUNATE AEON, *Bhadrakalpika*
 THREE BODIES OF RITUAL, *Triskandhaka*
 UGRA'S QUESTIONS, *Ugrapariṭcchā*
 UPĀLI'S QUESTIONS, THE DETERMINATION OF THE VINAYA,
Vinayaviniścaya-upāli-pariṭcchā
 VIMALADATTA'S QUESTIONS, *Vimaladatta-pariṭcchā*

Pali titles

(Titles preceded by an asterisk have parallels in Gandhari.)
 ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGINS OF THE PATH OF PURIFICATION,
Visuddhimagga-nidānakathā
 BASKET OF CONDUCT, *Cariyā-piṭaka*
 BIRTH STORY ON THE EIGHT REQUISITES, *Aṭṭhaparikkhāra-jātaka*
 CHAPTER OF THE EIGHTS, *Aṭṭhaka-vagga*
 COMMENTARY ON THE POINTS OF DEBATE, *Kathāvatthu Aṭṭhakathā*
 CONNECTED DISCOURSES, *Samyutta-nikāya*
 CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON ELEMENTS, *Dhātu-samyutta*
 CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON JAMBUKHĀDAKA, *Jambukhādaka-*
samyutta
 CONNECTED DISCOURSES ON SĀMAṆḌAKA, *Sāmaṇḍaka-samyutta*
 DISCOURSE ON THE SIMILE OF THE SNAKE, *Alagaddūpama-sutta*
 EXPLANATION OF MATTERS RELATED TO THE PIṬAKA, *Peṭaka-*
upadesa
 FIFTY BIRTH STORY COLLECTION, *Paññāsa-jātaka*
 GREATER VEDALLA SUTTA, *Mahāvedalla-sutta*
 GUIDEBOOK TO METHODOLOGY, *Netti-pakarāṇa*
 LESSER VEDALLA SUTTA, *Cūlavedalla-sutta*
 MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTION, *Khuddaka-nikāya*
 NUMERICAL DISCOURSES, *Āṅuttara-nikāya*

PATH OF PENETRATING INSIGHT, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*
 PATH OF PURIFICATION, *Visuddhimagga*
 PLEASING FROM ALL SIDES, *Samantapāsādikā*
 POINTS OF DEBATE, *Kathāvatthu*
 *RHINOCEROUS SUTTA, *Khaggavisāṇa-sutta*
 *STANZAS ON THE DHAMMA, *Dhamma-pada*
 SAMYUTTA COMMENTARY, *Samyutta-aṭṭhakathā*
 SAMYUTTA SUBCOMMENTARY, *Samyutta-ṭīkā*
 *SUTTA ON CHANTING THE DHAMMA IN UNISON, *Samgīti-sūta*
 SUTTA ON FUTURE THREATS, *Anāgatabhaya-sutra*
 WAY TO THE BEYOND, *Parāyana*

Chronicles (Pali, Sinhala)

GREAT CHRONICLE, *Mahā-vaṃsa*
 CHRONICLE OF THE STŪPA, *Thūpa-vaṃsa*
 CHRONICLE OF THE TOOTH-RELIC, *Dāṭha-vaṃsa*, *Dantadhātu-vaṇṇanā*
 CHRONICLE OF THE FOREHEAD-BONE RELIC, *Nalāṭadhātu-vaṃsa*
 CHRONICLE OF THE GREAT BODHI-TREE, *Mahābodhi-vaṃsa*
 CHRONICLE OF THE ISLAND [OF LANKA], *Dīpa-vaṃsa*
 COMPENDIUM OF SCHOOLS, *Nikāya-saṅgrahava* (written in Sinhala)

Treatises and commentaries in the Sarvāstivāda tradition

Devaśarman. THE CONSCIOUSNESS GROUPS, *Vijñānakāya*
 GREAT COMMENTARIAL ANALYSIS, *Mahāvibhāṣā*
 Skandhila. ENTRANCE TO THE ABHIDHARMA, *Abhidharmāvatāra*
 Author unknown. LAMP OF THE ABHIDHARMA, *Abhidharma-dīpa*

Treatises and commentaries in the Mahāyāna tradition

Abhayākaragupta. CLUSTER OF BLOSSOMS OF THE MIDDLE WAY PHILOSOPHY, *Madhyamaka-mañjari*
 Asaṅga. BODHISATVA LEVELS, *Bodhisatvabhūmi*
 Asaṅga. COMPENDIUM OF ABHIDHARMA, *Abhidharma-samuccaya*
 Asaṅga. COMPENDIUM OF EXEGESIS, *Vyākhyāsaṅgrahaṇī*

- Asaṅga. LEVELS OF YOGA PRACTICE, *Yogācārabhūmi*
- Asaṅga. SUMMA OF THE GREAT VEHICLE, *Mahāyānasamgraha*
- Bhāviveka. THE BLAZE OF REASON, *Tarkajvālā*
- Daśabalaśrimitra. ANALYSIS OF THE COMPOUNDED AND THE UNCOMPOUNDED, *Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta-viniścaya*
- Kamalaśīla. COMMENTARY ON THE COMPENDIUM OF REALITY *Tattvasamgrahapañjikā*
- Kamalaśīla. STAGES OF MEDITATIONAL CULTIVATION, *Bhāvanākrama*
- Kumārajīva (tr.). TREATISE ON THE GREAT PERFECTION OF WISDOM, *Da zhidu lun* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經釋論 / **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa*. Attributed to Nāgārjuna.
- Nāgārjuna. VAIDALYA TREATISE, *Vaidalya-prakarāṇa*
- Vasubandhu. LOGIC OF EXEGESIS, *Vyākhyāyukti*
- Vasubandhu. TREASURY OF THE ABHIDHARMA, *Abhidharmakośa*
- Vasubandhu. TREATISE ON THE MEANING OF THE ANTHOLOGY OF VERSES, *Gāthāsamgrahārthaśāstra*
- Vimuktisena, Ārya. ORNAMENT OF REALIZATION, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*



Bajaur Mahāyāna scroll. Picture courtesy of Ingo Strauch.

The Evolution of the Bodhisattva Concept in Early Buddhist Canonical Literature¹

Bhikkhu Anālayo

Introduction

The notion of a bodhisattva is such a central motif in Buddhist thought that the way in which this basic idea may have come into existence is almost beyond being questioned. Intending to do just that, I invite the reader to join me in a search for what could be found in the textual corpus of early Buddhist discourses that may be related to the arising of this conception.

The chief material on which my study is based are the discourses found in the four main Pāli *Nikāyas*, together with material from the fifth *Nikāya* that may reasonably be held to belong to roughly the same textual stratum (*Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka* and *Sutta-nipāta*). These “early discourses”, transmitted by the Theravāda tradition, have counterparts in a number of Sanskrit fragments and in the Chinese *Āgamas*, in particular in a *Dīrgha-āgama* generally held to stem from the Dharmaguptaka tradition, a *Madhyama-āgama* probably from the Sarvāstivāda tradition, a *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99) usually associated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, and a partial *Samyukta-āgama* (T 100) whose school affiliation is at present still under discussion. Besides these collections, several individual discourse translations are extant in Chinese, in which case the respective school affiliation is, however, difficult to ascertain. In addition to the material preserved in Chinese translation, discourses from the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition are also extant as quotations in the Tibetan translation of a commentary by Śamathadeva on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. It is this range of material that I refer to with the expression “early discourses”.

When, on comparison, parallel versions of an early discourse differ, at least one of them must have suffered from some alteration

or error. Though in this way different textual layers can be discerned—and whenever possible I will point out aspects that suggest a relative chronology between individual texts or passages—as a whole this corpus of early discourses nevertheless does seem to contain the earliest layer of Buddhist textual activity and thus has the potential of taking us back to the beginnings of Buddhist thought, in as much as it has left its traces in literature.

The Chinese translation of an *Ekottarika-āgama* of uncertain school affiliation differs from the above delineated textual corpus in that material found in this collection stems from a longer time span than what is reflected in the other *Āgamas* and the four Pāli *Nikāyas*. While the *Ekottarika-āgama* does contain a number of early texts, other passages found in this collection pertain to a much later period, showing that the collection must have remained open to the integration of new material and ideas for a considerable time span. This collection is therefore best considered on a par with texts like the *Mahāvastu*, a *Vinaya* text from the Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṃghika tradition that similarly contains a mixture of early and late material. For my present study these two works, together with several Buddha-biographies, are also of considerable relevance, as they tend to show further developments of what manifests in an incipient stage in the early discourses.

Gautama as a Bodhisattva

In the discourses collected in the Pāli *Nikāyas* of the Theravāda tradition, the term bodhisattva (or more precisely its Pāli counterpart *bodhisatta*) is used predominantly by the Buddha Gautama (Pali: Gotama) to refer to his pre-awakening experiences, the time when he was ‘the bodhisattva’ *par excellence*. Such usage usually occurs as part of a standard formulaic phrase, according to which a particular event or reflection occurred “before (my) awakening, when still being an unawakened bodhisattva”, *pubbe va (me) sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass’ eva sato* (henceforth referred to as the ‘before awakening’ phrase).

The majority of occurrences of the ‘before awakening’ phrase in the Pāli discourses are related to various aspects of the bodhisattva Gautama’s meditative development. The relevant instances, which I now briefly survey, cover three main themes: the bodhisattva’s

overcoming of unwholesome states of mind, his development of mental tranquillity, and the growth of his insight.

An aspect of the bodhisattva's struggle with unwholesome mental qualities is taken up in a Pāli discourse and its *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel, which describe how he faced fear that had arisen while he was living in seclusion.² Another Pāli discourse and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel record how the bodhisattva developed a clear distinction between those of his thoughts that were unwholesome and those that were wholesome.³ Out of various possible types of unwholesome thoughts, several discourses highlight in particular the bodhisattva's struggle with sensuality.⁴

The bodhisattva's development of mental tranquillity appears to have stood in close relationship to the roads to [psychic] power (*rddhipāda*), as three Pāli discourses mention these as central aspects of his pre-awakening development.⁵ As a meditation technique, according to a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* he predominantly engaged in the practice of mindfulness of breathing.⁶ Other discourses report that, with deepening concentration, he experienced mental light and meditative forms,⁷ whose stabilization enabled him to attain full absorption (*dhyāna*).

The growth of the bodhisattva's insight appears to have been based on his pre-awakening investigation of the dependent arising of *dubkha*.⁸ Other discourses describe his examination of the true nature of feelings,⁹ of the four elements,¹⁰ of the five aggregates,¹¹ of the six senses and their objects,¹² and of the world.¹³ These passages thus highlight various aspects of Gautama's development of insight, which in turn became facets of the comprehensive realization he attained on the night of his awakening.

In sum, the above surveyed texts, in which the 'before awakening' phrase occurs, depict the bodhisattva Gautama's struggle with unwholesome thoughts—in particular fear and sensual desire—as well as his development of tranquillity and insight. These stand out as the central aspects of his progress to awakening.

The descriptions given in these discourses are fully within the scope of standard accounts given in early Buddhist discourse of an arahant's progress towards awakening. The central import of the term bodhisattva that emerges from these passages could thus be summed up as presenting the bodhisattva Gautama in search of awakening. To the bodhisattva's quest I turn next.

The ‘before awakening’ phrase occurs in some discourses in relation to the bodhisattva Gautama’s going forth. These instances record his reflection that the confinement of the household life does not offer the appropriate conditions for fully dedicating oneself to progress towards liberation.¹⁴ That is, from the bodhisattva’s perspective, going forth was a necessary foundation for his awakening.

Additional detail on the bodhisattva Gautama’s reflection that motivated him to set out on his quest can be gathered from another occurrence of the ‘before awakening’ phrase, found in the Discourse on the Noble Quest, the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.¹⁵ The two discourses contrast an average person’s quest for worldly things that are subject to decay and death to the noble quest for what is not subject to decay and death. Both reveal that this noble quest motivated the bodhisattva to go forth in search of awakening, presenting his reflection in nearly identical terms:

“Being myself subject to old age ... and death, now suppose I were to search for what is free from old age ... and death, for the unsurpassable peace from bondage, Nirvāṇa.”¹⁶

“Being myself truly subject to old age and death ... suppose I were to search ... for what is free from old age and death ... for the unsurpassable peace from bondage, Nirvāṇa.”¹⁷

This appears to be the only passage in the Pāli *Nikāyas* that explicitly formulates what motivated the bodhisattva Gautama to set out in search of awakening. Notably, this formulation does not in any way reflect a concern for others. Rather, according to this autobiographical report the bodhisattva Gautama’s motivation was to find a solution for the problem of being “himself” subject to old age and death etc.¹⁸

The same trait recurs in the description of the successful completion of the bodhisattva’s quest, given in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and its parallel. According to both versions, having arrived at the unsurpassable peace from bondage that is free from old age and death, Gautama realized that he had fully liberated himself from the prospect of future birth and existence.¹⁹ Here, too, there is no reference at all to being able to save others. Instead, the way the Buddha perceived his own awakening—according to early Buddhist discourse—is formulated entirely in terms of having freed himself.

The conspicuous lack of any concern for others becomes even more prominent with the next episode recorded in the

Ariyapariyesanā-sutta, according to which the newly awakened Buddha was disinclined to teach others and decided to rather remain content with having reached liberation himself. Notably, this entire episode is not found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel. Thus this part of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, with its report of an intervention by Brahmā in order to convince the Buddha to spread the message of liberation, could be a later addition. Be that as it may, given that Brahmā's intervention is documented in a range of other sources,²⁰ the implications of this episode deserve further attention.

The Pāli commentary on the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* explains that the Buddha only hesitated to teach because on examination he had realized the degree to which people were under the influence of defilements. The commentary adds that the Buddha also wanted Brahmā to invite him, since this would instil respect for the Buddha's teachings among people in the world.²¹

The first of these explanations seems to confuse the temporal sequence of events in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, where the Buddha's reluctance to teach occurs before he surveyed the degree to which beings are defiled.²² On surveying their condition, according to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*'s report, the Buddha realized that some would understand his message, which motivated him to accept Brahmā's invitation to teach.

The second explanation would imply that the Buddha acted with the ulterior purpose of enhancing his reputation by getting Brahmā to invite him, an idea not easily compatible with the total detachment from fame and glory which the discourses usually associate with the condition of being fully awakened. Besides, according to an earlier section of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* the Buddha quite explicitly informed the monks listening to his autobiographical report of his initial disinclination to teach: "Considering like this, monks, my mind inclined to inaction, not to teaching the Dharma".²³ This does not give the impression that he was anticipating an invitation from Brahmā. The passage reads more naturally if one were to assume that it means precisely what it says, that is: the Buddha was reluctant to teach.

Such reluctance on the part of the newly awakened Buddha is not easily reconciled with the notion common to all Buddhist traditions that he had prepared himself over immense periods of time with the sole intention of executing the task of leading others to

liberation. Judging from the account given in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, the reason for the Buddha's disinclination to teach was that it would be fatiguing and vexing for him if others should fail to understand the profound truth he had realized. Similar reasons recur in other reports of his initial hesitation to teach, found in an *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse, in the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*, and in the *Vinayas* of the Dharmaguptaka, Lokottaravāda-Mahāsāṃghika, Mahīśāsaka and Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions.²⁴

That is, when reflecting on the possibility of sharing his discovery with others, according to a range of sources the Buddha considered the matter entirely from the perspective of how it would affect himself. This ties in with the observations made above regarding his motivation and his reaching of the final goal. Throughout, according to these texts the Buddha's predominant concern is with himself, when he forms his initial motivation to set out for awakening, when he successfully completes his quest, and even when he reflects about what course of action is to be taken next.

This certainly does not imply that from the perspective of the early discourses the Buddha was not compassionate. The *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* reports that, once Brahmā intervened, the Buddha surveyed the world out of compassion.²⁵ Another discourse clarifies that compassion is a quality inherent in the Buddha's attainment of full awakening.²⁶ However, the early discourses do not give any indication that a concern for others was part of the motivation of the bodhisattva Gautama to set out on his quest for awakening,²⁷ nor does the successful reaching of this goal show any immediate relationship to teaching activity. This applies also to the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* which, though lacking the Brahmā episode, nevertheless agrees with the Pāli account in presenting the future Buddha's motivation and his successful reaching of the goal entirely in terms of finding liberation for himself and having liberated himself.

The passages surveyed above reveal that the early Buddhist conception of the bodhisattva's motivation did not allot a prominent role to compassionate teaching activity for the sake of delivering others, a quality that only becomes evident after the bodhisattva has reached awakening and decided to teach.

Gautama's Marvellous Qualities

Instead of compassion, the emphasis in the early discourses is on a range of other qualities of the bodhisattva. A detailed exposition of what tradition considered to be particularly inspiring about the bodhisattva can be found in the Discourse on Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, and in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities.²⁸ As these two discourses are of central importance for my exploration of the conception of the bodhisattva, in what follows I briefly survey the Pāli version in comparison with its Chinese counterpart. Then I examine the function of this discourse, after which I turn to its contribution to the development of the bodhisattva concept.

The speaker of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is Ānanda, who lists a series of wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Buddha. In the Pāli version, he begins by describing that the bodhisattva Gautama was endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension when arising in Tuṣita, during his sojourn there — which lasted for the whole of his lifespan—and when departing from this realm.²⁹ The *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not mention his mindfulness or clear comprehension when being reborn in Tuṣita. Instead, this version reports that he outshone other heavenly beings (*deva*) with respect to lifespan, appearance and glory. The two versions agree, however, that the bodhisattva entered into his mother's womb with clear comprehension, an event that was accompanied by an earthquake and the manifestation of a great light.

The *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* continues by depicting the conditions of the bodhisattva's sojourn in his mother's womb, reporting that four heavenly beings protected him; that his mother was virtuous, free from sensual thoughts, but at the same time endowed with the five types of sense pleasures; and that she was able to see the bodhisattva in her womb, comparable to seeing a beryl strung on a coloured thread. None of these marvellous qualities occur in the *Madhyama-āgama* version. Though the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse also describes the conditions of the bodhisattva in the mother's womb, it instead notes that inside the womb he rested on his right side, with his body fully stretched.

Next the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* reports that the mother passed away seven days after giving birth, followed by indicating that the pregnancy lasted ten months and that the mother gave birth while standing. None of these qualities is found in the Chinese parallel.

The two versions agree that on being born the bodhisattva was not sullied by any bodily impurities and was received by four deities. They also agree that two streams of water appeared in the sky to bathe him, and that on being born the bodhisattva took seven steps. The Pāli version records a declaration made by the newly born bodhisattva on this occasion, in which he proclaims his superiority in the world and his transcendence of future existences, a declaration absent from the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

The two versions agree again that the birth was accompanied by another earthquake and the manifestation of a great light. While in the Pāli version the listing of marvellous qualities by Ānanda comes to an end at this point, in the *Madhyama-āgama* account he continues by mentioning several remarkable events that took place during the Buddha's youth and after his awakening. The two versions agree in concluding the discourse with the Buddha highlighting another marvellous quality of his, namely his ability to be aware of the arising, continuity and disappearance of feelings, perceptions and thoughts.

As this brief survey shows, the two versions differ considerably from each other. The bodhisattva's descent from Tuṣita into his mother's womb and the extraordinary form and circumstances of his birth seem to be their common starting points, from which the two versions appear to have developed the theme of the marvellous qualities of the bodhisattva in independent ways.

As a result of these independent developments, their present listings of marvellous qualities show more differences than similarities.³⁰ The two discourses thereby diverge from each other to a greater degree than usually found between discourses in the *Majjhima-nikāya* and their *Madhyama-āgama* parallels. This circumstance suggests a comparatively late date for the coming into being of each version in its final form.

Regarding qualities found in only one of the two versions, given that the presentation in both discourses conveys the same attitude towards the marvellous nature of the Buddha, the possibility

that a quality now found in only one version was on purpose omitted in the parallel version can safely be set aside. Since both discourses otherwise show no sign of textual loss, it seems also improbable that one version lost a whole series of qualities, which are now found only in the other version. Thus in the case of qualities that occur in only one of the two versions, the most straightforward explanation would be that these are later additions.

A sign of later addition in the Pāli version can in fact be found in relation to the passing away of the mother seven days after giving birth to the bodhisattva. The placing of this particular event in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is out of sequence, as it occurs after several marvels that, in a chronological order, depict his birth and life in Tuṣita, his descent from Tuṣita and his subsequent sojourn in his mother's womb. In continuation of this pattern, the bodhisattva's birth should be the next marvel, yet in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* his birth is mentioned only after the passing away of his mother has been described.

As the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not refer to her passing away at all, it seems safe to assume that the reference to the death of the mother is a later addition. In fact, one would not naturally place the early death of the bodhisattva's mother under the heading of being a marvel of her son.³¹ A discourse in the *Udāna* reckons her early death as a marvel in general, a probably more straightforward way of qualifying this event.³² Perhaps due to a growing interest in marvellous qualities of the Buddha, at some point during oral transmission this *Udāna* passage may have come to be added to the account of marvels in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*. If that should indeed be the case, then this addition took place without awareness of the chronological sequence of marvels otherwise observed in this discourse.

The function of this listing of marvellous qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel is reflected in a peculiar feature found in both versions, which rarely occurs in other early discourses. Both follow each quality with a remark by Ānanda that he keeps this marvel in mind.³³ In this way, each marvellous quality is described twice, once as an actual description and again as something that Ānanda keeps in mind.

Now in the thought-world of the early discourses, Ānanda stands out as the disciple foremost in memory.³⁴ The same quality is

also reflected in the circumstance that, according to the account of the so-called first council in the different *Vinayas*, he had memorized all the discourses spoken by the Buddha.³⁵ Thus the fact that he keeps each of the Buddha's marvellous qualities in mind would not require any explicit highlighting. Besides, this much is anyway self-evident, since otherwise he would not have been able to list them.

In addition to stating an obvious fact, these refrain-like statements would have the effect of indicating to the audience that each of these qualities is worth being memorized. In this way, the pattern observed throughout both versions—where hearing that the bodhisattva had such-and-such a quality is followed by remembering that the bodhisattva had such-and-such a quality—would encourage others to keep this quality in mind.

Another noteworthy feature of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is its recurrent use of visual stimulants. The first of these is the description of an earthquake accompanied by a great light of such intensity that it outshines even the moon and the sun, reaching areas of utter darkness where beings for the first time are able to see each other. The second image illustrates the mother's ability to see the bodhisattva in her own womb with the example of seeing a coloured thread strung through a well-cut beryl of pure quality. The third image compares the newly born bodhisattva to a gem placed on Kāśī cloth, and the fourth image again depicts the appearance of a great light together with an earthquake.³⁶

These visual stimulants, with their symbolic allusion to the dispelling of darkness through the teaching activity of the Buddha (whom tradition considers the first of the three 'gems'), are set in a frame that alludes to meditation. The first marvel in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* highlights the bodhisattva's possession of mindfulness and clear comprehension on appearing, remaining in and leaving Tuṣita. The last marvel, mentioned by the Buddha in reply to Ānanda's exposition, describes the Buddha's awareness of feelings, perceptions and thoughts as they arise, are present and disappear, an ability presented elsewhere in the discourses under the heading of clear comprehension.³⁷

Thus underlying the listing of qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* a circular pattern can be discerned that moves from the bodhisattva's clear comprehension via the manifestation of a great light to the description of a jewel, and then

continues from another jewel via another manifestation of a great light to the Buddha's clear comprehension. That is, the recollection of the Buddha's marvellous qualities in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* proceeds in an almost rhythmic pattern that takes off and concludes with meditative qualities, and whose trajectory progresses through a set of images that have a strong visual and symbolic component. In this way, the discourse exhibits considerable evocative qualities, revealing that the purpose of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is probably best understood as inviting recalling, perhaps even visualizing, in a rather lively manner the marvellous qualities of the Buddha.

Now the act of becoming a Buddhist involved taking the three refuges. Once the Buddha passed away, new converts would have lacked an opportunity to establish a direct rapport with the first refuge, the Buddha. In line with a general trait of religious traditions, the passing away of the founder inevitably creates a vacuum not easily filled. In the case of early Buddhism, this vacuum would have been particularly challenging for those who could not find all the inspiration they needed in the teachings alone, who were in need of something more personal that touched the heart. The recollective and evocative message of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would thus have been of particular importance for the early Buddhist community after their founder had passed away, especially for disciples who had never met the Buddha. Lacking the experience of a personal encounter with the living Buddha, and given that during the early period the Buddha was not represented in sculpture or painting, discourses like the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would have enabled new converts to engage in some form of emotional contact with their teacher, by memorizing and perhaps even visualizing his marvellous qualities.

The *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta's* taking up of common events like pregnancy and birth can be understood as a means of addressing such needs by uplifting and inspiring its audience through a stimulating description of the marvellous way the Buddha-to-be passed through these experiences, common to all human beings. By treating events familiar to anyone who had lived or still lived in an ancient Indian household, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* treads common ground and at the same time creates distance and evokes awe through the medium of the marvels that accompany these events.

Thus, the didactic function of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* would have been to stimulate and strengthen devotion based on the superior nature of the Buddha, evident in the marvels that accompany his god-like descent from heaven to the world of human beings.

The important function that the marvels would have assumed in this respect provides the background for the coming into being of a rather significant development in regard to the bodhisattva concept that manifests in the *Acchariyabbhuta-dhamma-sutta*. This occurs in the discourse's description of how, on just being born, the bodhisattva takes seven steps and then proclaims:

"I am supreme in the world, I am the highest in the world, I am the first in the world; this is my last birth, there will be no further existence".³⁸

The marvellous character of this quality in the Pāli version appears to be in particular what the bodhisattva said, since according to the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* another boy was also able to speak right after his birth. Instead of making a majestic proclamation, however, this boy asked his mother to wash him, because he had such dark skin. The *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* reports that people who witnessed his ability to speak at birth drew the conclusion that he must be a goblin (*piśāca*).³⁹ Thus the mere ability of an infant to speak at birth was in itself not necessarily seen in a positive light. Besides, according to the Pāli *Jātaka* collection already in two previous existences the bodhisattva was able to speak right after being born.⁴⁰ Since these instances are not explicitly reckoned as marvels, in the present case the marvel would be the content of his proclamation.

The *Madhyama-āgama* version differs from the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* in as much as it only records the seven steps, without any proclamation made at all.⁴¹ In addition to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, a range of sources record a proclamation made by the newly-born bodhisattva Gautama, though varying on its precise content.⁴² When considered from the perspective of the didactic function of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*, the proclamation made by the bodhisattva Gautama may at first have come into being as just another facet in the overall scheme of exalting the Buddha. Yet, this particular marvel has consequences that originally may have been neither intended nor foreseen.

The significance of this proclamation emerges once it is compared with the passages examined earlier. These passages

invariably indicate that the bodhisattva was not yet awakened, *anabhisambuddho*, which holds true even in the case of those versions that do not employ the term bodhisattva. Thus, from the perspective of this general consensus among early Buddhist discourses, the bodhisattva would have been able to make the claim that “this is my last birth, there will be no further existence” only once he had become a Buddha.

In the Pāli discourses in general, the claim that this is one’s last birth etc. is invariably a statement made after someone has reached full awakening.⁴³ The majority of these passages describe the Buddha’s own awakening, introducing the proclamation “this is my last birth, there will be no further existence” by indicating that on that occasion “knowledge arose” of having reached this condition.⁴⁴ One discourse explicitly indicates that this knowledge attained by the Buddha was “born of awakening”.⁴⁵ Considering these formulations, it seems safe to conclude that when these descriptions of the Buddha’s awakening came into being, the idea had not yet arisen that already at his birth he knew that this was going to be his last birth. In other words, the proclamation made by the infant bodhisattva in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* involves a clear shift of a claim, originally made after awakening, to the time when the bodhisattva Gautama had just been born.⁴⁶ Further, as the passages surveyed above make clear, in his progress towards awakening the bodhisattva had to struggle with various mental defilements, such as fear and sensual desire, whose roots must thus have been present in his mind at the time of his birth. From the perspective of these passages, the bodhisattva would not have been able to claim supremacy in the world, neither when he was a newly born infant nor when he eventually went forth in quest of awakening.

In contrast, from the perspective of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* the simple fact of being the bodhisattva, however much he may be just a newly born infant, enables him to profess to be foremost in the whole world and to have already transcended future becoming. In this way, the bodhisattva’s announcement of having reached the last birth and his proclamation of being foremost in the world reflect a clear change in the conception of the nature of the bodhisattva. An inevitable outcome of this shift of perspective is that the bodhisattva’s progress to awakening—depicted in the

passages surveyed earlier—loses importance. Once Gautama is already accomplished at birth, the stages of his progress must necessarily have taken place earlier, that is, in some former life or lives. An evident expression of this shift of perspective in the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* itself is its employment of the term bodhisattva for the previous life of the Buddha in Tuṣita, whereas in the discourses surveyed earlier the same term was only used in relation to his last life as a human.

Besides this temporal expansion of the usage of the term bodhisattva, the proclamation of superiority and final accomplishment has a rather weighty ramification, as it establishes the notion that the bodhisattva was already at birth invariably destined to become a Buddha. The same is also reflected in a listing of five great dreams of the bodhisattva in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, another passage that employs the ‘before awakening’ phrase. These five dreams are portents of his future success in reaching full awakening, in teaching the path to awakening, in having a substantial congregation of lay disciples, in having monastic disciples from all four castes, and in receiving ample support without being attached to it.⁴⁷ From the perspective of such passages, the bodhisattva’s quest for awakening, described in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and elsewhere, was destined to end successfully.

In sum, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* reflects a significant change in the bodhisattva conception: namely, that already at birth the bodhisattva is in possession of the supreme degree of perfection that other discourses consider the final result of his prolonged quest for awakening. As a consequence of this shift of perspective, the superiority associated with the status of the Buddha now becomes a birthright of the bodhisattva. The *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* is not unique in this respect, as other texts also show signs of a tendency to endow the bodhisattva with qualities whose full development the early discourses reckon as something the Buddha attained in the night of his awakening. Thus the *Saṅghabhedavastu* suggests that the bodhisattva was already at birth endowed with the divine eye.⁴⁸ According to the *Divyāvadāna*, the bodhisattva was in possession of this ability even in a previous birth.⁴⁹ The *Mahāvastu* proclaims that the bodhisattva reached dispassion already at the time of Dīpaṅkara and had attained the perfection of wisdom since countless crores of aeons.⁵⁰

The Great Discourse on the Life History [of Buddhas], the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, takes a position similar to the *Saṅghabhedavastu* in relation to the former Buddha Vipasyī. It indicates that Vipasyī, too, was already in possession of the divine eye when he was born.⁵¹ This takes me to the next step in my inquiry, to the lineage of former Buddhas described in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*.

The Lineage of Former Buddhas

The whole of the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s description of the bodhisattva's marvellous qualities recurs in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s depiction of the pre-awakening period of the six previous Buddhas, which appears to be patterned on the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s description.⁵² Support for this suggestion can be gathered from a closer inspection of the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s description of the former Buddha Vipasyī. Passages in this description that parallel the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* refer to Vipasyī as the "bodhisattva", whereas other passages that portray events of his youth refer to him as "prince".⁵³ Once the infant Vipasyī is qualified as a bodhisattva, it is difficult to imagine a cogent reason for discontinuing that qualification when describing his childhood and youth. Hence this pattern gives the impression that an earlier account of the experiences of 'prince' Vipasyī was subsequently expanded by adding the description of marvels from a discourse like the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*.

Whatever may be the final word on this suggestion, what the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* definitely does is that it places the theme of the wonderful qualities of a Buddha-to-be within a wider framework, indicating that such marvels are to be expected of all those who are about to become Buddhas. That is, while the discourses surveyed so far spoke of a single individual, the bodhisattva Gautama, the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* employs the term bodhisattva in a generic manner, informing its audience of the qualities of bodhisattvas who became Buddhas in the past. Independent of whether this discourse constitutes the historically first occasion for these developments, it does constitute a testimony to them and thus exemplifies with considerable probability the basic pattern of what took place.

Buddhist literature reflects an increasing interest in the lineage of former Buddhas, which may well be related to its function to authenticate the Buddha's message.⁵⁴ In this way, the Buddha could be shown to have had a line of predecessors comparable to the *tīrthamkaras* of the Jaina tradition, or to the Vedic sages of the Brahmanical traditions.

In view of this purpose a perhaps unintended side-effect of the application of the bodhisattva's marvels to the *Mahāpadāna-sutta's* scheme of former Buddhas is to ascribe the acquisition of these marvellous qualities to anyone who is about to become a Buddha. That is, with the marvels in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta's* account of previous Buddhas, the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta's* presentation of an individual case becomes the norm for anyone on the path to buddhahood.

This is a significant step in the direction of the bodhisattva concept becoming an ideal to be emulated. It needs to be noted, however, that at this stage the idea of a direct relationship between a bodhisattva and a former Buddha has not yet made its appearance. The *Mahāpadāna-sutta's* portrayal of former Buddhas does not refer to any meeting between a Buddha of the past and the bodhisattva Gautama and thus provides no indication of a direct relationship between them. All it does is to show that these individual instances conform to the general pattern that governs the life of a Buddha.

Nevertheless, once the proclamation "I am supreme in the world, I am the highest in the world, I am the best in the world" is made in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* by all bodhisattvas, it naturally follows that the same claim can be made by anyone who is about to become a Buddha. In this way, world-wide superiority becomes a birth right of a bodhisattva in his last life. Due to being a bodhisattva already at birth—provided this is going to be one's last birth—one is the foremost, highest and best being in the whole world. The resultant sense of superiority can be seen to pervade the development of the bodhisattva conception in later texts, such as in the case of the *Mahāvastu* or in early Mahāyāna texts.⁵⁵

The development surveyed so far does not yet involve an incipient stage of the bodhisattva ideal, an ideal that as such is not found within the textual corpus of early Buddhist discourses. Though in regard to matters of conduct the Buddha at times sets himself as an example to be imitated,⁵⁶ when it comes to the spiritual quest the

models to be followed are his disciples who have reached the final goal by becoming arahants.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, with the above described shift in the bodhisattva conception the necessary foundation is laid, and based on this foundation the next steps can take place. These involve the idea of a vow for buddhahood—taken at some time in the past when the decision to pursue the career of a bodhisattva was taken—and the prediction received thereupon from another Buddha that this quest will meet with its successful conclusion. In what follows I will turn to the first of these two ideas: the vow.

Gautama's Vow

The counterpart to the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta* in the *Madhyama-āgama*, entitled ‘the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities’, also contains a passage that reflects a rather important idea in relation to the bodhisattva conception. The passage in question reports the vow taken by the bodhisattva Gautama to become a Buddha in the future. This vow occurs as the first of the marvels listed and, according to this marvel, the bodhisattva took his initial vow to become a Buddha when he was a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa:

“The Blessed One, at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, made his initial vow to [realize] buddhahood [while] practising the holy life”.⁵⁸

The circumstance that the present quality is without a counterpart in the Pāli version makes it quite probable that this particular marvel is a later addition, similar to the case of the proclamation made by the bodhisattva right after being born, which is found only in the Pāli version.

The assumption that this particular marvel may be a later addition receives further support from a closer examination of the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama*. The bodhisattva’s initial vow to pursue buddhahood occurs not only as the first marvellous quality, but is repeated again in relation to the second marvel (the bodhisattva’s rebirth in Tuṣita) and in relation to the third marvel (the bodhisattva excelling other heavenly inhabitants of Tuṣita, where moreover his rebirth in Tuṣita is also repeated). From the fourth marvel onwards, however, the discourse simply lists each marvel singly, without repeating those that had been mentioned

earlier.⁵⁹ The irregularity found at the beginning of the listing in relation to the bodhisattva's vow gives the impression that some form of change took place during the transmission of the discourse, quite probably caused by the inclusion of the bodhisattva's initial vow to pursue buddhahood in the listing of marvels.

Such an inclusion of the marvel of the bodhisattva's initial vow, taken under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa, would have been a natural result of the temporally wider frame adopted in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse. While the *Acchariyabbhutadhammasutta* lists marvels that occurred from the time of the bodhisattva's arising in Tuṣita to his birth, the *Madhyama-āgama* version covers marvels that happened before his arising in Tuṣita and marvels that took place after his birth. As according to the Sarvāstivāda tradition the bodhisattva's life in Tuṣita was preceded by his monkhood under the Buddha Kāśyapa,⁶⁰ it is only natural that the temporally expanded framework adopted in the *Madhyama-āgama* version brings in a marvel that took place at that time.

Another argument in support of the assumption that the bodhisattva's initial vow is a later addition to the *Madhyama-āgama* listing of marvels can be gained from the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* that records the meeting between the Buddha Kāśyapa and the bodhisattva Gautama, who at that time was a young brahmin who went forth as a Buddhist monk.⁶¹ This *Madhyama-āgama* discourse does not in any way mention that the young brahmin, who was to become the Buddha Gautama, decided to pursue the career of a bodhisattva. This is remarkable, given that this decision is reported in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the same *Madhyama-āgama* collection. Such a decision would be too important to be overlooked in an account of the meeting between the bodhisattva and the Buddha Kāśyapa. This suggests that the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* may well stem from a time when the idea of a decision taken by the bodhisattva at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa to pursue the path to buddhahood had not yet come into being.

Other texts associate the bodhisattva's embarking on the quest for buddhahood with a considerably more remote lifetime. As mentioned earlier, according to the *Buddhavaṃsa* Gautama had already received a prediction of his future buddhahood at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara, the first in a series of twenty-four former

Buddhas, of which Kāśyapa is the last.⁶² Other traditions vary, some also associating such a prediction with the time of Buddha Dīpaṅkara,⁶³ while others allocate it to an even earlier time.⁶⁴ A general tendency apparent in these accounts is that Gautama's embarking on the quest for buddhahood shifts ever more into the distant past.

As a consequence of this shift, with works like the *Avadānaśataka*, the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Jātakanidānakathā*, the *Mahāvastu* and the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, the bodhisattva's meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa acquires the function of confirming his quest.⁶⁵ Such confirmation of the bodhisattva Gautama's future attainment of buddhahood by the Buddha Kāśyapa then forms the last in a series of such proclamations made by former Buddhas.

Now most of the sources that record the taking of such a vow by the bodhisattva Gautama or the predictions he received from other Buddhas belong to a later textual stratum than the early discourses. This makes it reasonable to assume that the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities may have preserved a remnant of an incipient stage in the development of the idea that in a former life the bodhisattva Gautama made a vow to follow the path to buddhahood. That is, in the beginning stages of the development of this idea the vow was—quite naturally one might say—associated with the Buddha that immediately preceded the Buddha Gautama. With the passing of time and the increasing glorification of the Buddha Gautama, the period he was held to have required for developing the necessary qualifications would naturally have expanded, causing a shift of the starting point of his quest for buddhahood to a more distant time in the past.⁶⁶

On the assumption that the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* testifies to an incipient stage in the development of the notion that the bodhisattva took a vow to pursue the path to buddhahood, the question could be asked whether the context in which this vow occurs provides any rationale for the arising of such a notion. In other words, does the tale found in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel give any indication as to what might have been responsible for the arising of the idea of a vow, taken by the bodhisattva at that time?

When considered from this perspective, it is noteworthy that, after reporting that the bodhisattva went forth under the Buddha

Kāśyapa, the *Majjhima-nikāya* and *Madhyama-āgama* discourses give no further information about him. That is, in these two discourses another protagonist, a potter, shows exemplary conduct and exhibits praiseworthy qualities, whereas nothing particularly inspiring is recorded about the bodhisattva. This is remarkable, since the bodhisattva usually, though not exclusively, assumes the role of a shining example in a *jātaka*, as, from the perspective of tradition, the events portrayed serve to highlight some particular quality he developed during that life in the past.

In the present case, however, the tale is set in a former life of the bodhisattva Gautama at a very close temporal distance to his lifetime as a Buddha, and he plays only a secondary role in the story. Instead of exhibiting an inspiring conduct, the bodhisattva does not even want to meet the Buddha Kāśyapa and makes a derogatory remark about him.⁶⁷ Furthermore, once he has developed faith and has gone forth as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa, nothing more is heard about him. No exemplary deed or attainment worth recording is reported in the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta* or in its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel from the period that the bodhisattva spent as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa. Instead, both discourses focus on the inspiring qualities of the potter.

However, with the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities, this somewhat uninspiring record of the bodhisattva's monkhood under the previous Buddha Kāśyapa turns into a marvellous and wonderful quality through a simple but ingenious shift of perspective: it is only natural that no further attainment or distinction achieved during his life as a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa has been recorded, as at that time he decided to pursue the career of becoming a Buddha in the future. That is, far from being a failure, his period as a monk under the previous Buddha becomes inspiring and marvellous since "at the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa, [he] made his initial vow to [realize] buddhahood [while] practising the holy life". This marvel thus explains why he did not take full advantage of the instructions on the path to awakening, directly available to him from a fully awakened Buddha, to attain liberation himself.

A version of the same tale in the *Mahāvastu* tackles the same issue in a more explicit manner. It reports that, on an occasion, after the young brahmin had gone forth, the Buddha Kāśyapa assembled

his monks and told them to sit in meditation without getting up until their defilements were destroyed.⁶⁸ This instruction quite dramatically highlights the type of conduct that, from the perspective of the early discourses, would be appropriate for someone who goes forth under a Buddha. The *Mahāvastu* proceeds by recording that the young brahmin instead aspired to become a Buddha himself. This obviously excuses him from not carrying the determined sitting to its successful conclusion.

The way the *Mahāvastu* quite directly confronts the problem of the bodhisattva's lack of attainment highlights the ingenuity of the solution to this dilemma through the idea that at that time he had decided to pursue the path to buddhahood. In this way, a clear precedent is set for later developments, and it is only a further step to assume that the bodhisattva became a monk under the Buddha Kāśyapa precisely to promote his own progress towards buddhahood, a step taken in the *Kathāvatthu* and in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*.⁶⁹

In this way, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* may well testify to an important intermediate stage in the development of the bodhisattva concept, when the idea of a vow to embark on the path to buddhahood emerges. Thus the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities reflects a rather significant development of the bodhisattva conception, which lays a crucial foundation for the emergence of the bodhisattva ideal.

Still missing in the development surveyed so far within the textual corpus of the early discourses is the idea of a prediction of future buddhahood given by a Buddha to an aspiring bodhisattva. Among the early discourses, a record of Gautama receiving such a prediction is not found. Nevertheless, the missing piece in the puzzle can be discovered within the same textual corpus, namely in another discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama*. In this discourse, the Buddha Gautama gives such a prediction to Maitreya, the next Buddha to arise in the future. To this prediction, found in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past, I turn next.

Maitreya's Prediction

The Discourse on an Explanation about the Past begins with the monks discussing whether a lay person would derive greater benefit from giving alms to a virtuous monk or from making a fortune.⁷⁰ To illustrate the superiority of providing a virtuous recipient with food, Anuruddha describes how in a past life as a poor scavenger he offered a meal to a Pratyekabuddha, as a result of which he was reborn seven times as a king of gods and seven times as a king of men.⁷¹

The Buddha, who has overheard the conversation with his divine ear, joins the monks. Being told that Anuruddha has been delivering a tale of the past, the Buddha proposes to teach a tale of the future, to which the monks happily agree.

The Buddha thereupon narrates in detail how in a future time, when human lifespan will reach up to eighty thousand years, a wheel-turning king by the name of Śaṅkha will arise, who eventually will go forth and reach liberation. On hearing this description, a monk by the name of Ajita stands up and, with hands held in respectful gesture towards the Buddha, aspires to become the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha at that future time. The Buddha rebukes Ajita for postponing what could already be accomplished now—namely attaining liberation—after which he nevertheless predicts that Ajita will indeed become the wheel-turning King Śaṅkha.

The Buddha continues by describing the Buddha Maitreya under whom Śaṅkha will go forth. Another monk by the same name of Maitreya stands up and, with hands held in respectful gesture towards the Buddha, formulates the aspiration of becoming the future Buddha Maitreya. The Buddha praises him for making such an aspiration and predicts that he will indeed become the future Buddha Maitreya.

Māra enters the scene, trying to confound the listening assembly of disciples with a set of stanzas in praise of being reborn as a handsome, well adorned and merry-making citizen in the realm of the future King Śaṅkha. The Buddha immediately recognizes him and replies with a set of stanzas in praise of living the holy life under the future Buddha Maitreya for the sake of liberation. The discourse ends with the disappearance of the defeated Māra and the delight of the listening monks.

A significant difference between the present discourse and descriptions of the future wheel-turning King Śāṅkha and the Buddha Maitreya in the Discourse on the Wheel-turning King in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and its Chinese *Āgama* parallels is that none of these records anyone who, while listening to this tale, forms the aspiration of becoming either the future wheel-turning king or the future Buddha.⁷² The same is also the case for partial parallels in the *Ekottarika-āgama* and in an *Udāna* collection extant in Chinese translation.⁷³ An exception to this pattern is a discourse preserved as an individual translation into Chinese, which in other respects is so similar to the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past in the *Madhyama-āgama* that it quite probably stems from a closely related transmission lineage.⁷⁴

Thus, apart from the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and this parallel version, within the textual corpus of the Pāli *Nikāyas* and Chinese *Āgamas* such future aspirations do not appear to be recorded.

Now the tale of the future King Śāṅkha suits the Discourses on the Wheel-turning King quite well, which begins with the reign of another wheel-turning king in the past, followed by depicting a gradual decline of living conditions in the world that in turn leads over to a gradual improvement of conditions that eventually culminate in the reign of the wheel-turning King Śāṅkha.

In contrast, judging from its title the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past may initially have been concerned only with the past, namely with the *avadāna* of Anuruddha.⁷⁵ This tale of Anuruddha's past life experiences also fits the introductory narration of the discourse, as it provides an illustration of the benefits of giving alms to a virtuous monk, whose merits excel any material wealth.

For the Buddha then to come in and propose to relate a tale of the future is unusual in view of a standard pattern found in other early discourses. According to this standard pattern, on coming to join a group of monks the Buddha will continue with the theme the monks have been discussing.⁷⁶ The present case differs, in that here the Buddha right away broaches a different subject.⁷⁷ This gives the impression that the tale of Śāṅkha and Maitreya may have been appended to a discourse that originally was only concerned with the former life of Anuruddha, the two parts being fused together

through the introduction of a proposal by the Buddha that he may give a teaching related to the future.⁷⁸

Whatever may be the final word on the evolution of the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past (and by implication of its individually translated parallel), to be sure a rather significant contribution to the development of the bodhisattva notion can be discerned at this point, even though the term ‘bodhisattva’ itself is not used: in these twin discourses, a monk disciple of the Buddha Gautama reveals himself as being a bodhisattva, who not only formulates his aspiration to become the next Buddha, but is also given a corresponding prediction.

This involves a shift from a retrospective perspective prevalent in the conception of a bodhisattva representing former experiences of the present or past Buddhas to a forward perspective: a monk disciple of the present Buddha will in future become a Buddha. Though this shift is a logical consequence of the notion of multiple Buddhas, it is only once this shift has taken place that the bodhisattva conception can become an ideal to be emulated by others.

The prediction given according to the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past by the Buddha Gautama in reply to this monk’s aspiration reads as follows:

“Maitreya, in the distant future, at a time when human lifespan will be eighty thousand years, you will become a Buddha called the Tathāgata Maitreya, free from attachment and fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, charioteer of the path of Dharma,⁷⁹ a teacher of gods and men, called a Buddha, an assembly of blessings—just as now I am a Tathāgata, free from attachment and fully awakened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a Well-gone One, a knower of the world, an unsurpassable person, charioteer of the path of Dharma, a teacher of gods and men, called a Buddha, an assembly of blessings.

In this world with its gods, Māras, Brahmas, recluses and brahmins, from men to gods, you will understand and awaken by yourself, dwell achieving realization by yourself—just as I now in this world with its gods, Māras, Brahmas, recluses and brahmins, from men to gods, have understood and awakened by myself, and dwell having achieved realization by myself.

You will teach the Dharma that is sublime in the beginning, sublime in the middle, and also sublime in the end, with the [right] meaning and phrasing, revealing a holy life that is endowed with purity—just as I now teach the Dharma that is sublime in the beginning, sublime in the middle, and also sublime in the end, with the [right] meaning and phrasing, revealing a holy life that is endowed with purity.

You will spread the holy life extensively, to countless great assemblies, from men to gods, revealing it well—just as I now spread the holy life extensively, to countless great assemblies, from men to gods, revealing it well.

You will have a community of countless hundreds and thousands of monks—just as I now have a community of countless hundreds and thousands of monks”.⁸⁰

In the above translated section, each of the qualities of the future Buddha Maitreya recur in the present Buddha’s indication that he possesses the same qualities now. Besides this internal repetition, which emphasizes that the future Buddha Maitreya will have all the qualities and achievements with which the present Buddha Gautama is endowed, the whole above text occurs four times (with the appropriate changes between the expressions “there will be”, “I shall be” and “you will be”):

1. at first the Buddha describes the future Buddha Maitreya,
2. then the monk Maitreya aspires to become the future Buddha,
3. then the Buddha quotes the aspiration made by Maitreya,
4. and lastly the Buddha predicts Maitreya’s future buddhahood.

That is, the basic themes taken up in the above passage are brought to the notice of the audience for eight consecutive times. Even for those used to repetition as a characteristic feature of early Buddhist discourse, this does convey a considerable degree of emphasis by repeatedly confirming and reinforcing the central message given in this passage.

Quite obviously it is impossible to be certain that the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and its parallel constitute the historically first occasion for the arising of the idea of a prediction. Yet, in view of the fact that this appears to be the only instance of such a prediction within the textual corpus of the early discourses, it

seems reasonable to explore the possibility that these twin discourses could be testimonies to the arising of this idea, at least until evidence—be this epigraphic, textual or iconographic—for an earlier occurrence of this notion can be located.⁸¹

If the notion of a prediction given to a bodhisattva by a Buddha should indeed have originated in relation to the text now available to us in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and in its parallel, the question could be asked if the present case provides any rationale for the arising of such a notion.

Now the central message underlying the above declaration centres on the three refuges. This starts with the standard listing of the qualities of the Buddha, elsewhere employed in the discourses for recollecting the Buddha, followed by affirming realization reached on one's own, the quality that makes someone a Buddha. Next the passage describes the Dharma with another standard set of epithets, and then turns to the community of disciples, with particular emphasis on a large following of monks.

These themes are already part of the description of the future Buddha Maitreya in the Discourses on the Wheel-turning King in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Dīrgha-āgama*.⁸² With the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past and its parallel, however, these same themes become considerably more tangible and alive. This takes place on the one hand through the active intervention of the two monks who will take up the central roles in this future utopia, and on the other hand through the repetition of the same message again and again, something that in an oral performance situation of the text would not have failed to leave a strong impact on the audience.

The import of this passage seems to be related to a point I mentioned earlier: the need of the faithful to engage in some form of direct rapport with the three refuges, especially with the first refuge of the Buddha, after he has passed away. Underlying the above passage the same need makes itself felt, reflected in the description of a future time when all three refuges can be encountered again. At the time of the glorious reign of a wheel-turning king (whose description is given with the same number of repetitions), there shall be another Buddha, endowed with the same qualities as Gautama Buddha. Needless to say, these qualities are precisely what a faithful disciple would have been evoking regularly when recollecting the Buddha. This future Buddha will teach the Dharma to a large assembly of

disciples—a rather heartening prospect at a time when the Buddha Gautama has become a fading memory of the past and his disciples are struggling to ensure their continuity amidst competing religious groups.

Besides giving an assurance of the advent of a future Buddha, the prediction given by the Buddha Gautama establishes Maitreya as a bodhisattva, even though the term itself is not used. This implies that he becomes part of the lineage of Buddhas and therewith shares their qualities. Thus at the time of his last birth he will be endowed with the same superior qualities that the Discourses on Marvels attribute to the newly born Gautama, sharing the nature (*dharmatā*) of all those who are about to become Buddhas.⁸³ As part of the same pattern, he will also take birth and live in Tuṣita before becoming a Buddha, as is the rule for all Buddhas.

That is, besides the explicit promise of the advent of the Buddha Maitreya, underlying the prophecy of Maitreya's future buddhahood is also an implicit assurance of the bodhisattva Maitreya's taking up residence in Tuṣita. Thus the present passage already contains the germs of two aspects of Maitreya: the future Buddha and the present bodhisattva dwelling in Tuṣita. This rather effectively fills up the vacuum created by the Buddha's demise.

In sum, the primary purpose of the above translated passage in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past appears to be similar in kind to the two Discourses on Marvellous Qualities, in that each of these discourses addresses the needs of the faithful in search of a way of compensating for the loss of leadership and inspiration after the demise of the teacher. The Discourses on Marvellous Qualities do this by nurturing a sense of awe in regard to the qualities of the deceased Buddha. The Discourse on an Explanation about the Past more directly addresses the dilemma of the teacher's disappearance by providing a substitute for the deceased Gautama: the bodhisattva Maitreya who will continue the lineage of Buddhas by becoming the next fully-awakened Buddha.

The underlying message would be an assurance of continuity. Such an assurance would be especially important for those who fail to make substantial progress now—perhaps precisely because they lack the guidance of a Buddha—reassuring them that there is no need to despair by offering them a guarantee that there is someone else ready to help those who need assistance. The final episode with Māra

entering the scene builds on this by clarifying that the purpose of aspiring to come to the presence of Maitreya should not be for the sake of enjoyment, but rather in order to progress towards awakening.

From this perspective, the number of repetitions of the above quoted passage in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past—achieved through the narrative frame of an intervention by the aspiring monk and the consequent prediction by the Buddha—seem to serve mainly to strengthen the impact of the message of assurance in an oral setting. That the fourth repetition of the above paragraph takes the actual form of a Buddha giving a prediction that confirms a bodhisattva's aspiration to future buddhahood does not appear to be central to the discourse, in fact the monk who aspires to become the future wheel-turning king receives the same type of prediction that his aspiration will be successful. The central point rather seems to be the providing of encouragement and reassurance to the audience through the medium of repeating the prophecy over and over again.

Thus the prediction of a bodhisattva's future buddhahood might be a by-product of the main purpose of the discourse. If the present instance should indeed be the original occasion for the arising of the notion of a prediction, which is at least possible, then the tale of the Buddha Maitreya in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past would have had an effect similar to the tale of the meeting between Gautama and the last Buddha Kāśyapa, which may well have occasioned the arising of the notion of a vow taken by the bodhisattva to pursue the path to buddhahood.

The relationship between these two tales becomes particularly evident in one of the numerous versions of the Maitreya legend, in which Upāli questions the Buddha about the monk who has been predicted as the future Buddha Maitreya. In his query, Upāli expresses his puzzlement about the fact that this monk neither engages in the development of concentration nor eradicates his defilements.⁸⁴ This brings to mind the problem underlying the tale of the bodhisattva Gautama's period spent as a monk disciple of the former Buddha Kāśyapa, which the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on Marvellous Qualities resolves through the notion of a vow taken by him at that time to pursue the path to buddhahood.

Building on the elements surveyed so far, discourses in the *Ekottarika-āgama* complete the picture. Two *Ekottarika-āgama*

discourses record the Buddha presenting Maitreya, who is explicitly introduced as a bodhisattva, as an example for the monks, who should emulate his diligence.⁸⁵ Another discourse in the same collection then reports how the bodhisattva Maitreya approaches the Buddha for instructions on the bodhisattva path, in particular on the development of the six perfections (*pāramitā*).⁸⁶

Conclusion

The starting point of my exploration were passages that describe the period from Gautama's going forth to his becoming a Buddha, depicting Gautama as a bodhisattva in quest of awakening. With the *Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta*'s exposition of marvels, in which the qualities of the Buddha's awakening are associated with the time of his birth, we see a shift of the bodhisattva concept towards standing for a being inevitably destined to reach awakening. With the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its parallels, the marvels of the bodhisattva Gautama become the norm for a bodhisattva in general, thereby introducing the generic concept of a bodhisattva who is destined for awakening.

The problem caused by the uninspiring canonical record of Gautama's past-life meeting with the previous Buddha finds an ingenious solution in the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities in the *Madhyama-āgama* through the idea that the bodhisattva vows to become a Buddha at the time of that meeting.

The advent of the future Buddha Maitreya then could have led to the idea of a prediction given to the one who aspires to become the next Buddha, a development reflected in the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past.

With these various strands of thought—the generic notion of a bodhisattva, the idea that a bodhisattva is inevitably destined to reach awakening, the notion that a bodhisattva takes a vow to pursue the path to buddhahood, and the prediction a bodhisattva receives from a former Buddha—the basic ingredients of the bodhisattva ideal seem to fall into place.

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Notes

1. The present paper is based on extracts from Anālayo; 2010.
2. MN 4 at M I 17,6 (page and line references are to the occurrence of the 'before awakening' phrase), where the counterpart EĀ 31.1 at T II 665b22 also employs the term bodhisattva: “formerly, at the time when I had not yet accomplished Buddhahood, when I was practising as a bodhisattva”, 我曩昔未成佛道時，為菩薩行。
3. MN 19 at M I 114,23, where the parallel MĀ 102 at T I 589a13 does not employ the term bodhisattva: “formerly, at the time when I had not yet awakened to unsurpassable, right and complete awakening”, 我本未覺無上正盡覺時。
4. MN 14 at M I 92,1, where the parallels MĀ 100 and T 55 do not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening period, while another parallel, T 54 at T I 848b18, has such a reference and employs the term bodhisattva: “formerly when I was in quest of Buddhahood ... at the time when I was a bodhisattva”, 我故求佛道者 ... 我為菩薩時, though this passage does not describe the bodhisattva's struggle with sensuality. Another relevant discourse is SN 35.117 at S IV 97,17, where the parallel SĀ 211 at T II 53a27 does not mention the term bodhisattva, reading “formerly, at the time when I had not yet accomplished full awakening”, 我昔未成正覺時. Yet another relevant discourse is AN 9.41 at A IV 439,21, of which no parallel seems to be known.
5. AN 5.68 at A III 82,11 (where the 'before awakening' phrase has the alternative reading *pubbāhaṃ sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*); cf. also SN 51.11 at S V 263,12 and SN 51.21 at S V 281,11. No parallels to these discourses seem to be known.
6. SN 54.8 at S V 317,7 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*), which continues by indicating that, dwelling much in the practice of mindfulness of breathing, the bodhisattva's mind was liberated from the influxes through not clinging, *imīnā vihārena bahulaṃ viharato ... anupādāya ca me āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccati*. That is, mindfulness of breathing would have been the method he used to develop the absorptions (*dhyaṇa*) that then enabled him to attain the three higher knowledges (*trividyā*). The partial parallel SĀ 814 does not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences.
7. MN 128 at M III 157,29 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*) and AN 8.64 at A IV 302,8 (reading *pubbāhaṃ sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*), where the respective

parallels MĀ 72 at T I 536c19 and MĀ 73 at T I 539b22 do not use the term bodhisattva: “formerly, at the time when I had not yet attained awakening to the unsurpassable, right and true path”, 我本未得覺無上正眞道時。

8. SN 12.10 at S II 10,1 and SN 12.65 at S II 104,6, where the parallels SĀ 285 at T II 79c28 and SĀ 287 at T II 80b25 actually speak of a previous life of the Buddha, while another parallel, EĀ 38.4 at T II 718a14, employs the term bodhisattva: “formerly, at the time when I was a bodhisattva and had not yet accomplished Buddhahood”, 我本為菩薩時，未成佛道。A counterpart in Sanskrit fragment Pelliot Rouge 14 (7) V3 in Bongard-Levin 1996: 38 does not employ the term bodhisattva.

9. SN 36.24 at S IV 233,12, where the parallel SĀ 475 at T II 121c12 does not employ the term bodhisattva, reading: “at the time when I had not yet accomplished Buddha-[hood]”, 未成佛時。

10. SN 14.31 at S II 170,1, no parallel seems to be known.

11. SN 22.26 at S III 27,27, where the parallel SĀ 14 does not refer to the Buddha's pre-awakening period.

12. SN 35.13 at S IV 6,25 and SN 35.14 at S IV 8,3 (in both cases S^c reads *pubbe me sambodhāya*); no parallel seems to be known in both cases.

13. AN 3.101 at A I 258,23, no parallel seems to be known.

14. MN 36 at M I 240,20 (after the 'before awakening' phrase): “dwelling at home is oppressive, a path for the dust [of passion], going forth is [like emerging] out in the open. It is not easy to live the holy life entirely complete and pure like a polished shell while dwelling at home”, *sambādho gharāvāso rajāpatho, abbhokāso pabbaj-jā, nayidaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekantaparipuṇṇaṃ ekantaparisuddhaṃ saṅkhalikitaṃ brahmācariyaṃ caritum*; repeated in MN 100 at M II 211,28.

15. MN 26 at M I 163,9 (reading *pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno*). The parallel MĀ 204 at T I 776a26 does not employ the term bodhisattva: “formerly, at the time when I had not [yet] awakened to unsurpassable, right and complete awakening”, 我本未覺無上正盡覺時。

16. MN 26 at M I 163,18: *yannūnāhaṃ ... attanā jarādhammo samāno ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno ... ajaraṃ ... amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkehamāṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyaṃ*.

17. MĀ 204 at T I 776a27: 我自實老法，死法 ... 我今寧可求 ... 無老，無死 ... 無上安隱涅槃；for further parallels cf. Schmithausen

2000: 122 note 16, who already drew attention to the absence of any reference to compassionate concern for others in these passages.

18. Wangchuk 2007: 82 explains that “there is no canonical evidence for the theory that the main motive for the Buddha's appearance in the world was for the sake of others. This idea is found only in the post-canonical literature. The overwhelming majority of the canonical material suggests that ... he was concerned with his own release”.

19. MN 26 at M I 167,12: “being myself subject to old age ... being myself subject to death ... I attained the supreme peace of Nirvāṇa which is free from old age ... free from death ... this is the last birth”, *attanā jarādhammo samāno ... attanā maraṇadhammo samāno ... ajaram ... amataṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjhagamam ... ayam antimā jāti*; MĀ 204 at T I 777a13: “I searched for what is free from old age and free from death ... and attained the supreme peace of Nirvāṇa which is free from old age and free from death ... birth has been extinguished”, 我求 ... 無老, 無死 ... 便得無老, 無死 ... 無上安隱涅槃 ... 生已盡.

20. The need for Brahmā to intervene in order to convince the newly awakened Buddha to share his discovery with others is reported in other Pāli discourses, MN 85 at M II 93,26 and SN 6.1 at S I 137,15 (cf. also Vin I 6,4); in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, EĀ 19.1 at T II 593b4; in several biographies of the Buddha preserved in Chinese, T 189 at T III 643a4, T 190 at T III 806a14 and T 191 at T III 953a2; in the *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra*, fragment S 362 (46) V4, Waldschmidt 1952: 29; in the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 394,8; in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 315,1; in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 786c25; in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 103c24; in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 128,30; and in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin I 5,23.

21. Ps II 176,21 and Ps II 177,11.

22. MN 26 at M I 168,1 reports the Buddha's reluctance to teach, whereas his surveying of the degree to which beings are defiled is described only at M I 169,7.

23. MN 26 at M I 168,9: *iti ha me, bhikkhave, paṭisañcikkhato appossukatāya cittaṃ namati, no dhammadesanāya*.

24. MN 26 at M I 168,2: *so mam' assa kilamatho, sā mam' assa vibhesā*; cf. also the reference to “perception of harm”, *vihimsasaññī* at M I 169,26. Similar expressions can be found in *Catuṣpariṣat-sūtra* fragment M 480 R5, Waldschmidt 1952: 44: *vihīḥaprekṣe*, the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 319,5: *vibheṭasaṃjñāṃ*; the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 130,10: *vibheḥaprekṣī* (the Chinese counterpart in T 1450 at T XXIV 126b14

speaks of “weariness”, 勞, and of “vexation”, 惱; and the Tibetan version in Waldschmidt 1957: 111,2 of “fatigue”, *dub pa*, and “weariness”, *ngal ba*. EĀ 19.1 at T II 593a29 similarly gives the reason for the Buddha's disinclination to teach as 損, for which one of the equivalents listed by Hirakawa 1997: 556 is \sqrt{hims} , and as 勞, “weariness”; a term used in the same context in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 786c6 and the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 103c13.

25. MN 26 at M I 169,5: “having come to know the request by Brahmā, with the eye of a Buddha I surveyed the world, out of compassion for beings”, *brahmuno ca ajjhesanaṃ viditvā sattesu ca kāruṇṇataṃ paṭicca buddhacakkhunā lokam volokesiṃ*; cf. also Sn 693.

26. MN 55 at M I 370,32 clarifies that the Buddha had eradicated all those mental defilements that could be responsible for an absence of compassion; cf. also MN 58 at M I 395,23, which emphatically states that the Buddha had compassion for beings.

27. Compassion as a quality developed during the period previous to his awakening comes up in the *Mahāgovinda-sutta* and its parallels, according to which in a former life the bodhisattva practised meditation on compassion, DN 19 at D II 239,20; DĀ 3 at T I 32b14 (where he practises all four *brahmavihāras*); T 8 at T I 211a9; and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 210,10. The point of this practice, however, was not progress towards becoming a compassionate teacher in the distant future. Instead, his meditative development of compassion was undertaken out of the wish to have direct communion with Brahmā.

28. MN 123 at M III 118,9. The title of MĀ 32 at T I 469c20 is: 未曾有法經.

29. MN 123 at M III 119,21: *sato sampajāno bodhisatto tusitaṃ kāyaṃ uppajji*. This passage thus uses the term bodhisattva for a past life of the Buddha.

30. More than half of the qualities listed by Ānanda in MN 123 are not found at all in MĀ 32, and several others are treated quite differently. Minh Chau 1991: 165 concludes that “the accounts of the Buddha's ... marvellous qualities are not the same in both versions, each seems to derive from an independent source”.

31. The mother's death differs from other qualities related to her well-being or virtue during pregnancy, as at that time the bodhisattva was still present in her womb, whereas in the case of her death he obviously was no longer physically connected to her.

32. Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,4: “it is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous,

venerable sir, how short-lived, venerable sir, the mother of the Blessed One has been. Seven days after the Blessed One had been born, the mother of the Blessed One passed away”, *acchariyaṃ bhante, abbhutaṃ, bhante, yāvad appāyukā hi “bhante” bhagavato mātā abosi. sattāhajāte bhagavati bhagavato mātā kālaṃ akāsi.*

33. Thus in the case of the early death of the bodhisattva's mother, MN 123 at M III 122,1 reads: “I heard this from the Blessed One's own lips, venerable sir, I received it from his own lips: ‘Ānanda, seven days after the bodhisattva has been born, his mother passes away and arises in the Tusita Heaven’; venerable sir, that ... , this too, venerable sir, I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One”, *sammukhā me taṃ, bhante, bhagavato sutāṃ, sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ: 'sattāhajāte, ānanda, bodhisatte bodhisattamātā kālaṃ karoti, tusitaṃ kāyaṃ uppajjati'ti; yam pi, bhante, ... idam p' ahaṃ, bhante, bhagavato acchariyaṃ abbhutadhammaṃ dhāremi* (the elision is found in the original). It is noteworthy that the first section of this passage in MN 123 still conforms to the general pattern observed in other Pāli discourses, where the term bodhisattva is only used by the Buddha, whose words are just quoted by Ānanda. In the second section, however, the part not fully given in the editions would have to be supplemented with *sattāhajāte bodhisatte bodhisattamātā kālaṃ karoti*, so that here the term bodhisattva would be used by Ānanda in what is no longer a direct quote (that the term *bodhisatta* is to be used at this point can be seen from the full text given in relation to earlier qualities, cf. e.g. M III 119,21). This stands in contrast to the way he formulates the same state of affairs in Ud 5.2 at Ud 48,6, where he instead uses the respectful term “Blessed One”, *bhagavant*. Thus the present instance would not agree with the usage of the term bodhisattva elsewhere in the Pāli discourses and might be due to simply copying the formulation employed in the first part. This supports the impression that the refrain-like section could indeed be an addition during oral transmission.

34. AN 1.14 at A I 24,32 and EĀ 4.7 at T II 558a26; cf. also Th 1024.

35. Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 968b15; Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at XXII 491c2; Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 191a18; Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 407a3; Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 449a20; Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 287,12.

36. These occur in MN 123 at M III 120,6, M III 121,20, M III 123,1 and M III 123,28. The parallel MĀ 32 at T I 470a15 and T I 470b5 only reports the two earthquakes accompanied by appearances of a great light and thus does not have a counterpart to the images of a beryl and a gem.

37. SN 47.35 at S V 180,27.

38. MN 123 at M III 123,21: *aggo 'ham asmi lokassa, seṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa, jeṭṭho 'ham asmi lokassa, ayam antimā jāti, n'atthi dāni punabbhavo.*

39. DN 3 at D I 93,11: “on being born this one spoke, a dark one has been born, a goblin has been born”, *ayam sañjāto paccābhāsi, kaṇho jāto pisāco jāto.* One of the parallels to this passage, DĀ 20 at T I 83a10, reports that people even tend to be frightened by an infant's ability to speak. For another instance where a baby is able to speak soon after being born cf. Ud 2.8 at Ud 17,27.

40. J 546 at Ja VI 331,15 and J 547 at Ja VI 485,14 report that Mahosadha and prince Vessantara conversed with their respective mother right after being born.

41. MĀ 32 at T I 470b29. Nakamura (1980/1999: 18) is probably right when he concludes that “the verse claimed to have been proclaimed by the Buddha at his birth was composed very late”.

42. The bodhisattva's proclamation of his own supremacy right after birth is recorded in several Buddha-biographies preserved in early Chinese translations, cf. T 184 at T III 463c14; T 185 at T III 473c2; and T 188 at T III 618a19; to which a range of sources add that he also announced to have reached his last birth, cf. SĀ 604 at T II 166c2 (this is part of the *Aśokāvadāna*, which would not have been part of the original *Samyukta-āgama* collection; with a counterpart in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 389,20); T 189 at T III 625a27; T 190 at T III 687b10; the *Buddhacarita* 1.15, Johnston 1936/1995: 2; the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 85,1 (cf. also T 186 at T III 494a27, where the last birth is not mentioned explicitly, and T 187 at T III 553a21); the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 24,8; and the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 45,13 (cf. also T 1450 at T XXIV 108a16).

43. DN 29 at D III 134,12; MN 26 at M I 167,28 and M I 173,19; MN 128 at M III 162,25; SN 14.31 at S II 171,2; SN 14.32 at S II 172,12; SN 22.26 at S III 28,33; SN 22.27 at S III 29,29; SN 35.13 at S IV 8,2; SN 35.14 at S IV 8,26; SN 35.15 at S IV 9,30; SN 35.16 at S IV 10,21; SN 48.21 at S V 204,12; SN 48.28 at S V 206,6; SN 56.11 at S V 423,10; AN 3.101 at A I 259,11+32; AN 7.47 at A IV 56,15; AN 8.64 at A IV 305,4; and AN 9.41 at A IV 448,19. The discourses MN 4 at M I 23,24; M 19 at M I 117,18; MN 36 at M I 249,17; MN 85 at M II 93,23; MN 100 at M 212,17; MN 112 at M III 36,26 and AN 8.11 at A IV 179,7 make a statement to the same effect in terms of having eradicated birth. Exceptions to this pattern of associating such a statement with the actual experience of awakening are

the present passage in MN 123 and the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, DN 14 at D II 15,12.

44. E.g. in the case of the *Ariyapariyesana-sutta*, MN 26 at M I 167,27: “knowledge and vision arose in me that ... this is the last birth, there will be no further existence”, *ñānañ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi ... ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*. The parallel MĀ 204 at T I 777a17 similarly indicates that on that occasion “knowledge arose and vision arose that ... birth has been eradicated ... there will be no further experiencing of existence”, 生知生見 ... 生已盡 ... 不更受有.

45. DN 29 at D III 134,11: “with regard to the future, knowledge born of awakening arises to the Tathāgata that this is the last birth, there will be no further existence”, *anāgatañ ca kbo addhānaṃ ārabha tathāgatassa bodhijam ñānaṃ uppajjati, ayam antimā jāti, n’atthi dāni punabbhavo*. The parallel DĀ 17 at T I 75b29 indicates that “regarding the future, [the Tathāgata knows it through his] knowledge born of the path”, 於未來世, 生於道智, though DĀ 17 does not follow this with any further specification about knowing that this is his last birth etc.

46. A similar instance can be found in Sn 683f, according to which the *devas* rejoice that “the bodhisattva has been born in the world of men for [their] welfare and happiness ... the supreme of all beings, the best of all persons ... supreme among all mankind”, *bodhisatto ... manussaloke hitasukhatāya jāto ... sabbasattuttamo aggapuggalo ... sabbapajānam uttamo*. This set of verses thus likewise shifts the superiority of the Buddha to the time of his birth.

47. AN 5.196 at A III 240,15. Though no *Āgama* parallel to this discourse seems to be known, a similar listing of dreams can be found in the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1890: 136,14. Rahula 1978: 259 comments that “although the Buddha’s discipline and doctrine has no place ... for ... the belief in ... premonitory signs and dreams, the zealous propagators could not neglect” such popular ideas, “whence we find Siddhārtha having propitious dreams before his grand success”. According to the *Divyāvadāna* in Cowell 1886: 247,29, the bodhisattva experienced a number of premonitory dreams already at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

48. Gnoli 1977: 52,7: “on being born, the bodhisattva was endowed with the divine eye, through which he sees for a whole league by day and night”, *sāmpratajāto bodhisattva ... divyena cakṣusā samanvāgato yenāsu paśyati divā ca rātrau ca samantayojanam* (this ability is not identical to the exercise of the divine eye developed on the night of the awak-

ening, which witnesses the passing away and reappearing of beings, but instead would be a less developed form of this particular supernormal power); cf. also its Chinese counterpart in T 191 at T III 940c18.

49. Cowell 1886: 315,28.

50. Senart 1882: 170,3+5: “the Tathāgata is free from lust since [the time of] Dīpaṃkara ... having attained perfection of wisdom for countless crores of aeons”, *dīpaṃkaram upādāya vītarāgas tathāgataḥ ... kalpa-koṭīm asaṃkhyeyāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ gatā*.

51. DN 14 at D II 20,12: “monks, the divine eye manifested to the prince Vipassī on being born, as a result of [his former] deeds”, *jātassa kḥo pana, bhikkhave, vipassissa kumārassa kammavipākajaṃ dibbaṃ cak- khuṃ pātur abosi*, followed by indicating that with the help of this divine eye he was able to see for the distance of a whole league by day and night.

52. According to Gombrich 1980: 65, the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*'s “account of ... six predecessors is patterned on the story of Gotama's own life”.

53. DN 14 qualifies Vipassī as a *bodhisatta* from D II 12,3 to 15,28, which records the marvels accompanying his descent from Tusita Heaven and his birth (starting from DN II 12,5, these marvels are presented as the general rule for any future Buddha, *dhammatā*). When describing the period from his birth until his going forth, DN 14 from D II 16,1 to 30,9 refers to him simply as “prince”, *kumāra*; after which DN 14 at D II 30,10 reverts to the qualification *bodhisatta*, a change that occurs in the middle of a paragraph that reports how, on hearing that ‘prince’ Vipassī had gone forth, a great group of people decide to go forth under the ‘bodhisattva’ Vipassī. The remark in Walshe 1987: 561 note 280 that “Vipassī is here called the Bodhisatta for the first time, having now ‘gone forth’” is not correct, as the same qualification is already used earlier, cf. DN 14 at D II 12,3: “then, monks, having passed away from the Tusita realm the bodhisattva Vipassī entered his mother's womb with mindfulness and clear comprehension”, *atha kḥo, bhikkhave, vipassī bodhisatto tusitā kāyā cavitvā sato sampajāno mātukucchim okkami*. Similar patterns also manifest in the Sanskrit and Chinese parallels, cf. Anālayo 2010: 47 note 89.

54. Gombrich 1980: 71.

55. In relation to the *Mahāvastu*, Rahula 1978: 54 observes that “‘future *bodhisattvas*’ seem ... to have been more influenced by the Buddha's personality and glory than by serious contemplation of the woeful condition of the suffering masses. The enthusiastic desire to become equal of the present Buddha predominates their thoughts in the moment of

bodhi-citta-utpāda ... attaining of personal beauty and transcendental glory plays a prominent part in the formula of resolve (*prañidhāna*). According to Harrison 1995: 19, in some Mahāyāna texts the bodhisattva ideal involves “a kind of power fantasy, in which the Buddhist practitioner aspires ... to the cosmic sovereignty and power represented by complete Buddhahood – not the destruction of ego, but its apotheosis”. Nattier 2003a: 146 highlights that “a stimulus to pursuing the bodhisattva path” is “the goal of becoming the highest being in the universe”.

56. Thus e.g. in MN 65 at M I 437,16 and its parallels MĀ 194 at T I 746b21 and EĀ 49.7 at T II 800b28 (cf. also the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 359b11), the Buddha encourages the monks to follow his own example of eating only a single meal per day.

57. Bodhi 2003: 288 points out that “when the Buddha speaks about his quest for enlightenment in previous lives, he usually stresses that at such times he was following a wrong path to deliverance, not a temporally extended version of the correct path”. “He urges his bhikkhu disciples to take the arahants Sāriputta and Moggallāna as their model; he does not ask them to take himself as a model. Similarly, he urges his bhikkhunī disciples to take Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā ... as their model”.

58. MĀ 32 at T I 469c24: 世尊迦葉佛時，始願佛道，行梵行； translated by Minh Chau 1991: 159 as “at the time of the Buddha Chia-yeh (Kassapa), the W. H. One began to make the vow to become a Buddha and to practise the brahma-life”. The far-reaching implications of this sentence depend on a single character, namely 始, “initial”.

59. Thus the pattern of marvels in MĀ 32 proceeds like this: 1, 1+2, 1+2+3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

60. MĀ 32 at T I 469c27 presents this life of the bodhisattva under Buddha Kāśyapa as the last existence before his life in Tuṣita, whence he descended to become a Buddha; the same is the case for the *Saṅgha-bhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 21,1. According to Ja I 47,16 and Ps IV 169,7, however, in the life that preceded his stay in Tusita he was prince Vessantara, described in detail in *Jātaka* tale no. 547 at Ja VI 479-596.

61. For a study and translation of the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Ghaṭikāra-sutta*, MĀ 63, cf. Anālayo 2009.

62. *Buddhavamsa* stanza 2.54 in Bv 12,21 reports that in a former lifetime as Sumedha the bodhisattva vowed to become a Buddha, whereupon he received a corresponding prediction by Dīpaṃkara Buddha. Nattier 2004: 230 concludes that “Dīpaṃkara's complete absence from

the Pāli sutta literature makes it virtually certain that traditions concerning this buddha did not gain currency until several centuries after Śākya-muni Buddha's death".

63. Discourse versions of the prediction by Dīpaṃkara Buddha can be found in EĀ 20.3 at T II 599b14 and EĀ 43.2 at T II 758b26, instances that betray the incorporation of later elements in this collection.

64. According to the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 891c29, Gautama's initial vow to become a Buddha took place long before his meeting with Dīpaṃkara Buddha. The same is the case for the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell 1886: 227,4.

65. *Avadānaśataka*, Speyer 1906/1970: 239,7 and 1909/1970: 23,5, 51,8 and 88,1; *Buddhavaṃsa* stanza 25.16 at Bv 93,6; *Jātakanidānakathā* at Ja I 43,20; *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882: 332,2; and *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 163,15 and 1978: 3,26, 52,7 and 67,9.

66. Wangchuk 2007: 92f notes that "the changing view of the nature of the Buddha directly affected how his initial resolution was viewed". "When and how the historical Buddha resolved to become a *buddha* for the first time was [thus] perceived differently at different times and places in different texts and traditions".

67. MN 81 at M II 46,11 and MĀ 63 at T I 500a21; a remark also reported in the other parallels, cf. the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1882: 320,3; the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1978: 23,19 and D 1 'dul ba, ga 5a4 or Q 1030 nge 4b5; as well as T 197 at T IV 172c23

68. Senart 1882: 329,17.

69. Kv 288,34: "it was said by the Blessed One: 'Ānanda, I lived the holy life under the Blessed One Kassapa for the sake of full awakening in the future'", *vuttam bhagavatā: kassape aham, ānanda, bhagavati brahmacariyaṃ acariṃ āyatim sambodhāyāti*, a quote not found in the Pāli discourse collections. The *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 20,17, refers to "the Buddha, the Blessed One by the name of Kāśyapa ... in whose presence the Bodhisattva, the Blessed One, had lived the holy life for the sake of his aspiration for awakening in the future", *kāśyapo nāma ... buddho bhagavān, yasya antike bodhisattvo bhagavān āyatyaṃ bodhāya praṇidhāya brahmacariyaṃ caritvā*.

70. MĀ 66 at T I 508c9-511c12.

71. MĀ 66 at T I 509a20.

72. DN 26 at D III 75,19; DĀ 6 at T I 41c29; and MĀ 70 at T I 524b29, where Maitreya is not mentioned at all.

73. EĀ 48.3 at T II 787c14; EĀ 51.7 at T II 818c18; and T 212 at T IV

609c21, which do not give an account of the course of events from the time of the past wheel-turning king through the intervening period of decline etc., but only describe conditions at the time of the Buddha Maitreya.

74. T 44 at T I 829b6-831a1. Quotations from a version of this discourse are preserved in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, with the tale of Anuruddha found at D 4094 *mngon pa, ju* 244b3 or Q 5595 *tu* 279a6, while the tale of Maitreya (without the section on the wheel-turning King Śaṅka) is quoted in D 4094 *mngon pa, nyu* 90b1 or Q 5595 *thu* 138a3.

75. The character 本, found in the title of MĀ 66 at T I 508c9: 說本經, recurs in what would be the counterpart to *avadāna* in listings of the *aṅgas* in the *Madhyama-āgama*, rendered as 本起 in MĀ 1 at T I 421a19, MĀ 172 at T I 709b7 and MĀ 200 at T I 764a14; cf. also the title of MĀ 72 at T I 532c9. The parallel version T 44 at T I 829b6, however, takes the Maitreya tale into account, as it is entitled "Discourse Spoken by the Buddha on Former and Future Times", 佛說古來世時經 (where the 佛說 "spoken by the Buddha", would be just a standard phrase often added by Chinese translators to titles). Thus MĀ 66 may still be testifying to the time when the title of the discourse had not yet been adjusted to its expanded content.

76. Among passages that I have been able to locate among the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the Chinese *Āgamas*, which report the Buddha joining a group of monks in discussion, none depicts him as broaching a different topic in the way this happens in MĀ 66. Instead, two patterns can be observed on such occasions. One is that the Buddha delivers further teachings on the topic the monks had been discussing, examples for which are: DN 1 at D I 2,33 and its parallels DĀ 21 at T I 88c9, T 21 at T I 264b12, and Weller 1934: 8,28 (§ 8) and D 4094 *mngon pa, ju* 142a7 or Q 5595 *tu* 163b3; DN 14 at D II 2,6 (cf. also D II 10,16) and its parallels Sanskrit fragment 363 folio 115 R in Fukita 2003: 4, DĀ 1 at T I 1b26, T 2 at T I 150a17, T 4 at T I 159b9, and EĀ 48.4 at T I 790a23; MN 26 at M I 161,34 and its parallel MĀ 204 at T I 776a1; MN 119 at M III 89,8 and its parallel MĀ 81 at T I 555a6; MN 123 at M III 119,15 (here the Buddha encourages Ānanda to expand on the topic that has been discussed by the monks); AN 4.195 at A II 197,19 and its parallels SHT V 1348 V in Sander 1985: 235 and MĀ 12 at T I 434b14 (here the Buddha continues a discussion that took place between a single monk and a visitor); DĀ 30 at T I 114b22; MĀ 59 at T I 493c5; MĀ 160 at T I 682c1; and EĀ 40.1 at T II 735c10. The other pattern is that the Buddha rebukes the monks for

engaging in unbecoming conversation, such as in: AN 10.50 at A V 89,13; AN 10.69 at A V 128,29; Ud 2.2 at Ud 11,15; Ud 3.8 at Ud 31,12 (cf. also T 212 at T IV 629a5); Ud 3.9 at Ud 32,11; SĀ 408 at T II 109b10; SĀ 409 at T II 109b23; SĀ 410 at T II 109c4; SĀ 411 at T II 109c15; SĀ 412 at T II 109c29; SĀ 413 at T II 110a10; SĀ 414 at T II 110a25; SĀ 415 at T II 110b12; EĀ 47.4 at T II 781c7; EĀ 47.5 at T II 782a14 (here the rebuke comes after giving some explanations); EĀ 47.6 at T II 782c5; EĀ 47.7 at T II 783a14; cf. also SĀ 1108 at T II 291c11 and SĀ² 37 at T II 385b21 (here the Buddha rebukes a monk for not accepting an apology). In both types of cases, however, the Buddha takes up the topic that the monks have been discussing.

77. After the Buddha has joined the monks and inquired about why they have gathered, the monks reply, MĀ 66 at T I 509c1: “we were sitting together in the assembly hall today because the venerable Anuruddha has been teaching the Dharma in relation to a past event”, 我等今日以尊者阿那律陀因過去事而說法故，集坐講堂 whereupon the Buddha asks them: “do you wish to hear the Buddha teach the Dharma right now in relation to a future event?”, 汝等今日欲從佛聞因未來事而說法耶, to which they agree.

78. In fact another version of the Anuruddha tale, found in T 190 at T III 928b19, similar to MĀ 66 reports that the Buddha overheard the tale told by Anuruddha with his divine ear (T III 929c25), but concludes at that point, without the Buddha giving a discourse on future events. Other parallel versions found in Th-a III 72,20, commenting on Th 910; in Dhp-a IV 120,23; or in T 203 at T IV 470c25, also do not proceed from the past to the future, documenting the independent existence of this narration.

79. MĀ 66 at T I 511a16: 道法御. Nattier 2003b: 227 explains that “having taken *anuttarapurusa* as a separate title ... translators were left to explain the epithet *damyasārathi* on its own. In ... Prakrit languages ... *damya* would have been written *damma* ... Ignoring the unaspirated character of the initial *d-*, this word was apparently read as *dhamma*, and the resulting **dhammasārathi* interpreted as ‘charioteer of the Dharma’”; cf. also Minh Chau 1991: 326.

80. The translated passage covers T I 511a14 to T I 511a29.

81. The account of the bodhisattva’s meeting with the Buddha Kāśyapa in the *Mahāvastu* does mention such a prediction, Senart 1882: 332,2, which is not found in the parallel versions. On the evident lateness of this particular episode cf. Oldenberg 1912: 139. This passage seems in

line with a general pattern in the *Mahāvastu* to incorporate later elements that reflect embryonic Mahāyāna tendencies. Therefore it seems quite probable that an already existing notion of a prediction was adopted in the *Mahāvastu*, whereas to assume that this notion originally arose in the *Mahāvastu* and then influenced the *Madhyama-āgama* Discourse on an Explanation about the Past seems rather improbable.

82. DN 26 at D III 76,1 and DĀ 6 at T I 41c29; cf. also T 212 at T IV 610a3. EĀ 51.7 at T II 819a22 only lists the ten epithets of the Buddha Maitreya. In regard to the relevant passage in DN 26, Collins 1998: 612 note 28 comments that “this is a standard and very well-known list ... someone reading this ... would probably have recited it as a chant”. The evocative nature of this 'chant' becomes even more evident with the number of repetitions made in the Discourse on an Explanation about the Past.

83. Thus e.g. one of the *Maitreyasamiti* texts, T 455 at T XIV 426c28, as well as the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* in Lévi 1932: 385 (2.38), report how Maitreya, after taking seven steps on just being born, proclaims that this is his last birth, a clear parallelism to the description in MN 123 at M III 123,21 of the bodhisattva Gautama.

84. T 452 at T XIV 418c7 reports that, after noting that Maitreya is still an ordinary worldling (凡夫 / *pṛthagjana*), who has not eradicated the influxes (漏 / *āsrava*), Upāli points out that “even though this man has now gone forth, he does not develop concentrative absorption and does not eradicate the defilements”, 其人今者雖復出家，不修禪定，不斷煩惱。

85. EĀ 20.6 at T II 600a20 and EĀ 42.6 at T II 754b17.

86. EĀ 27.5 at T II 645b1.

Orality, writing and authority in South Asian Buddhism: Visionary Literature and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the Mahāyāna¹

David McMahan

Introduction

The doctrinal differences between the sūtras of the Pāli canon and the Mahāyāna sūtras composed in South Asia have been widely commented on and debated by scholars, but seldom has attention been given to what the strikingly contrasting literary styles of the Pāli and Mahāyāna sūtras themselves might reveal about Buddhism in South Asia. Scholars have had many productive debates on whether the doctrine of emptiness is a radical departure from early Buddhism, whether the Mahāyāna introduces a subtle self (*ātman*) that contradicts the doctrine of *anātman*, and whether the Yogācāra was really “idealist” or not. But the literary styles in which these doctrines emerge in the Mahāyāna sūtras is so strikingly divergent from that of the Pāli sūtras that an exploration of what might contribute to this divergence might be as fruitful for the study of the Indian Buddhist world as that of their doctrinal differences. Indeed, even attention to only the introductory passages of certain sūtras opens up a number of important issues in the study of Buddhism.

Notice, for example, the introductory passages to two sūtras. The first is an early Pāli text, the *Salāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta*, which discusses the sense fields (*āyatanas*). It begins: “Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying at Sāvattī, in Jeta Grove at Anāthapiṇḍika. The disciples greeted the Lord, and the Blessed one said: ‘Disciples, I will now discuss the distinctions between the six sense fields.’”² This, of course, is the standard introduction that is common to virtually all of the Pāli suttas. The Buddha then goes on to give a straightforward presentation of the doctrine of the six

āyatanas in the typical repetitive style of the *Nikāyas*, with many formulaic expressions repeated often throughout the text for purposes of memorization. Compare this with the introduction to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, a Mahāyāna text from about the second or third century C.E., which is set in the same location: “Thus have I heard. At one time the Lord was staying in Śravastī, in a magnificent pavilion in the garden of Anāthapiṇḍika in Jeta Grove, together with five thousand bodhisattvas, led by Samantabhadra and Mañjuśrī.”³ So far, except for the mention of the bodhisattvas, the two passages are almost identical—but the similarities dissolve quite abruptly. After the names and good qualities of a number of the bodhisattvas present are listed, the bodhisattvas observe that most beings are incapable of comprehending the great merits and abilities of the Tathāgata, and they ask the Buddha telepathically, not to *tell* them, but to *show* them (*saṃdarśayet*) these things. In response, the Buddha enters a state of profound concentration, and suddenly:

“the pavilion became boundlessly vast; the surface of the earth appeared to be made of an indestructible diamond, and the ground covered with a net of all the finest jewels, strewn with flowers of many jewels, with enormous gems strewn all over; it was adorned with sapphire pillars, with well-proportioned decorations of world-illuminating pearls from the finest water, with all kinds of gems, combined in pairs, adorned with heaps of gold and jewels, and a dazzling array of turrets, arches, chambers, windows, and balconies made of all kinds of precious stones, arrayed in the forms of all world-rulers, and embellished with oceans of worlds of jewels, covered with flags, banners, and pennants flying in front of all the portals, the adornments pervading the cosmos with a network of lights.... The Jeta grove and buddha-fields as numerous as atoms within untold buddha-fields all became co-extensive.”⁴

The text goes on in this vein for quite a few pages, describing in the most lavish terms the luxuriant scene that suddenly arises before the group right there in Jeta Grove, the sight of so many of the Buddha’s talks. There are endlessly winding rivers of fragrant water that murmur the teachings of the Buddhas; palaces that float by in the air; countless mountains arrayed all around; clouds laced with webs of jewels and raining down diamond ornaments, garlands, flowers, and even multicolored robes; celestial maidens fly through the air with banners trailing behind them, while countless lotus

blossoms rustle in the incense-filled air. After the initial description of the scene, bodhisattvas from distant world systems begin to arrive, and with each of their appearances, more wonders are revealed penetrating to the farthest reaches of the most remote worlds, then zooming back to the body of the Buddha, to the tips of his hairs or the pores of his skin, within which are revealed countless more world systems.

What can account for the striking stylistic differences between these two texts, and why would many Mahāyāna sūtras make such a radical departure from the accepted genre of sūtra composition established by the earlier sūtras? The standard answer would be, perhaps, that the Mahāyāna, being originally a lay movement, was more disposed toward literary extravagance, mythical imagery, and themes appealing to the popular religious imagination. All of this is true, but it is not the end of the story. For a fuller understanding of the stylistic differences between “Hīnayāna” and Mahāyāna sūtras, at least two more factors must be addressed. One is the fact that the Mahāyāna was a written tradition, while many pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist works of literature are written versions of a vast corpus of orally transmitted sayings. One of the important changes in Indian culture at the time of the arising of the Mahāyāna was the development of writing. The beginnings of the widespread use of writing in India contributed to some of the transformations Buddhism faced a few hundred years after the founder’s death and was crucial to some of its most significant cultural and religious developments. Literacy disrupted the continuity of the oral tradition and reoriented access to knowledge from the oral- and aural-sense world to the visual world. The transition from pre-Mahāyāna to Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, then, provides a valuable case study of the changes that may occur during the transition from oral to written culture.

But the transition from orality to literacy was part of a wider concern for the Mahāyāna—the difficulty of establishing legitimacy and authority as a fledgling heterodox reform movement facing a well-established monastic orthodoxy. The orality of early Buddhism was not only an instance of historical happenstance but also an important means by which the early Saṅgha made its claim to authority. Pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism was, in fact, quite self-consciously an oral tradition, relying on the oral recitation and

hearing of the Buddha's discourses—talks that were maintained in the memories and mouths of monks who were, according to tradition, repeating, generation after generation, the very words that the Buddha himself spoke. This tradition of recitation, then, was the way by which the Saṅgha established its claim to the *Buddhavacana*—the words of the Buddha—which conferred authority and legitimacy to the early Buddhist community.

Initially, the Mahāyāna sūtras, composed hundreds of years after the Buddha's death, enjoyed no such institutional maintenance and legitimacy and, thus, had to look elsewhere for legitimation. That “elsewhere” was the higher visionary worlds supposedly visible only to those more advanced followers of the Great Vehicle, whose visionary capacities revealed the bases for the unorthodox doctrinal claims of this new form of Buddhism. The Mahāyāna sūtras bear the marks of the movements efforts to legitimate its novel doctrines and practices in the face of orthodox monastic communities with implicit authority, which by and large rejected its innovations. The otherworldly imagery in the Gaṇḍavyūha and other Mahāyāna sūtras has roots not only in the vivid experiences and religious inspirations of early Mahāyānists but also in the challenges that this heterodox minority movement faced in its struggle for legitimacy, patronage, and membership.

Orality in Early Buddhism

Early Buddhist culture was an oral culture. The earliest archeological evidence of an Indian language being written in India, with the exception of the Harappān seals, are the inscriptions of Aśoka dated circa 258 B.C.E. The early Buddhist sūtras were not written documents but verses committed to memory and recited by monks who specialized in the memorization and recitation of what were understood to be the words of the Buddha. The orally preserved teachings were the substitute for the actual speaking presence of the Buddha; they were not merely the words of the teacher, but, after his death, they were the teacher itself. As the Buddha says in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*: “It may be, Ānanda, that some of you will think ‘The word of the teacher is a thing of the past; we have now no teacher.’ But that, Ānanda, is not the correct view. The doctrine and

discipline, Ānanda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone.”⁵ Hearing and the spoken word were also inextricably tied to authority in early Buddhism. The *śrāvakas* (hearers) claimed to have directly heard and reported the words of the Buddha when he taught in India, and elaborate institutional efforts were employed by the Saṅgha to keep these words alive. The source of authority for the early teachings was the fact that they were heard from the self-authenticating presence of the Buddha. The repetition of these words was itself the Dharma and was the link to the living presence of Gautama who was now gone forever.

In an article on orality in Pāli literature, Steven Collins shows that the monastic Buddhist tradition was, even after the introduction of writing, largely an oral and aural one.⁶ The traditional method of educating monks and nuns was for these students to hear and commit to memory the words of their teacher, and most of the words in the Pāli literature referring to the learning process are related to speaking and hearing.⁷ The monumental task of committing the received words of the founder to memory and reciting them regularly was based on the need to maintain the Dharma and protect it from corruption and innovation, as well as on the mandate to train disciples and maintain mindfulness of the teachings. Collins maintains that the oral/aural aspects of Pāli literature are important “both as a means of preservation and as a facet of the lived experience, the ‘sensual dimension’ of Buddhist scriptures.”⁸ From Collins’s arguments, it is evident that this “sensual dimension” was, in the first few centuries after the Buddha’s death, primarily oriented toward one particular sense—that of hearing.

While Buddhist vocabulary was rife with visual metaphor, vision in a literal sense and visual imagery were not emphasized as a way of communicating the teachings, as the aniconic nature of early Buddhism indicates. The earliest phases of Buddhism produced none of the elaborate monuments and sculptures so characteristic of its later developments. Making images of the Buddha was discouraged, and the only early representations of the Awakened One were aniconic suggestions of his life and teachings such as the footprint symbolizing both the Buddha’s absence and the path that he left behind. Hearing the words of the Awakened One, either through

being in his presence during his lifetime or by hearing his teachings recited, was the primary and perhaps only way of receiving and engaging the teachings. Even after texts were being written down, it was not for the purpose of their being read privately—the *Vinaya* gives detailed lists of all the items of property a monk may have but never includes books or writing utensils.⁹ Rather, the Buddha's words were committed to palm leaf so that they would be preserved and read aloud in the context of instruction or public recitations.

By current scholarly consensus, it is only after the Buddha had been gone for some four hundred years that the Saṅgha wrote down his words. In and of itself, writing seems to have been held in some degree of suspicion, as indicated by the *nīti* verse with which Collins begins his study: "Knowledge in books [is like] money in someone else's hands: when you need it, it's not there."¹⁰ Writing was dangerous in that it relinquished control over the distribution of the Dharma and removed the words of the Buddha even further from their original source in his living speech and presence. Lance Cousins has argued that systematic oral transmission within institutions such as the Saṅgha is more likely to preserve texts intact than writing would, because in the former situation, it takes the agreement of a large number of people to make changes to the text. Manuscripts, on the other hand, can be changed by any individual scribe.¹¹ For an orthodoxy trying to maintain the authenticity of its founder's teachings, writing was probably seen as a danger that eventually became a necessary evil. Pāli commentaries claim that the writing down of sūtras began only after there was merely one man left alive who had a particular text committed to memory and that the text was written down for fear of its being lost forever.¹²

Donald Lopez suggests that the reluctance of the Saṅgha to commit the sūtras to writing may have to do with an "ideology of the self-presence of speech," that is, the notion that only the Buddha's *speech* could truly present the Dharma, the uncreated truth, as he discovered it and that writing stands further removed from this truth—derivative, displaced, and dead.¹³ The repetition of words that were heard from the Buddha by a disciple, then transmitted to his disciple, and so on through a lineage of hearers, not only had the effect of rendering the Dharma in the manner that most closely approximated its original utterance but also provided a source for genealogical legitimacy. The introduction of writing could not help

but rupture this sense of authentic presence and continuity. In the early Buddhist tradition, then, the written word had little inherent value; it was seen, at best, as a merely instrumental vehicle for the spoken word.

Writing and the Survival of the Mahāyāna

In the Mahāyāna, however, the written word took on quite a different significance, especially with regard to Mahāyāna sūtras. Writing was crucial to the development and character of the Mahāyāna in at least three respects: first, written texts were essential to the survival of this heterodox tradition; second, they provided a basis for one of the most important aspects of early Mahāyāna practice, that is, the worship of written sūtras themselves; and third, writing contributed to a restructuring of knowledge in such a way that vision, rather than hearing, became a significant mode of access to knowledge.

The first point is offered by Richard Gombrich, who has suggested that the rise and sustenance of the Mahāyāna was largely due to the use of writing.¹⁴ He notes that the task of preserving the immense Pāli canon orally was made feasible only through the considerable efforts of the Saṅgha, which was organized enough to train monks in the memorization and recitation of the oral teachings. The Saṅgha had standards for determining whether or not an utterance was authentic and should be considered the word of the Buddha; if it did not meet these standards, it was not preserved.¹⁵ Because the preservation of extensive oral teachings required the institutional organization and systematic efforts of the Saṅgha, teachings that were not accepted and preserved by this collective effort most likely withered away. Gombrich suggests that many monks and nuns may have had unique visions or inspirations that led them to formulate new doctrines and teachings, but if those teachings were not preserved by the Saṅgha, they were lost forever. The Mahāyāna, however, arose at about the same time writing was becoming prevalent in India, and writing provided a means by which heterodox teachings could be preserved without the institutional support of the Saṅgha. Gombrich argues that this was a major factor in the ability of the Mahāyāna to survive.

I would add to this observation that the sacred status that many Mahāyāna sūtras ascribed to themselves, both as bearers of doctrine and as material objects, encouraged their reproduction and dissemination and thus contributed to their survival. In addition to introducing the notion of sacred books to India, many Mahāyāna sūtras present the copying of these texts as a highly meritorious act. A number of sūtras devote a considerable amount of space to extolling their own greatness and telling of the immense benefits to be gained from reading, copying, memorizing, promoting, and distributing them. The *Saddharmapundarika Sūtra* (the Lotus Sūtra), for example, promises to those who promulgate even one of its verses incalculable moral and spiritual benefits, including great wisdom, compassion, rebirth in luxurious heavenly realms, and intensification of the sense capacities for receiving broad ranges of stimuli; also included were more mundane benefits, such as an abundance of food, drink, clothing, and bedding, and freedom from disease, ugliness of countenance, bad teeth, crooked noses, and imperfect genitals.¹⁶ Even illiterate devotees of sūtras copied their script in hopes of gaining such benefits. Thus, writing, combined with the promise of merit through reproduction of the texts, gave many sūtras a built-in promotional device and distribution system. Evidently, what made the orthodox tradition wary of writing—fear of losing control over teachings—was worth the risk for Mahāyānists, who were attempting to expand and spread their movement.

Sacred Texts and Sacred Sites

According to recent scholarship, the earliest forms of the Mahāyāna were probably cults centred around the worship of the movement's new sūtras, and these cults played an important part in the growth of the Mahāyāna. Certain Mahāyāna sūtra manuscripts were considered sacred objects with the power to consecrate places, thereby establishing sacred sites and Mahāyāna centres of worship that were similar to, and modelled on, stūpa cults that were already prevalent. To understand the importance of this phenomenon, it is first necessary to consider briefly these sūtra cults and their socioreligious significance.

The primary sacred places that existed within the early Buddhist tradition were designated by stūpas—reliquaries containing remain of the Buddha and, later, disciples or revered monks. Stūpa building and stūpa reverence most likely started among the laity and was an important part of lay practice. The eight stūpas within which the Buddha's relics were supposedly housed after his death became places of pilgrimage and thriving centres of both religious and commercial activity, populated by lay religious specialists as well as by merchants who would all gather for religious services and festivals. These centers may have been more popular among laypersons than the monastic community, who were not permitted to participate in commercial activities, pluck living flowers for offerings, listen to worldly stories and music, or watch dancing, all of which were part of the festivities at the stūpas.¹⁷ According to Akira Hirakawa, the congregations that developed around these centres of worship gradually developed into lay orders that were stūpa cults not directly tied to monastic Buddhism.¹⁸ As iconic art began to develop, the stūpas often contained illustrated scenes from the *Jātaka* stories, detailing the amazing and selfless deeds of Gautama in his past lives as a bodhisattva. Hirakawa speculates that the repeated telling and interpreting of these scenes to pilgrims by the religious specialists gave rise to forms of Buddhism that emphasized the salvific power of the Buddha and promoted worship and devotion toward him. The stūpas, therefore, were important factors in the development of the devotional elements that would constitute certain aspects of the Mahāyāna. Hirakawa also suggests that this was the origin of groups that considered themselves to be bodhisattvas, distinct from the Śrāvakas and Arhats, and who would be presented as the most advanced disciples in most Mahāyāna texts.¹⁹

As much as stūpa culture may have directly contributed to the Mahāyāna, it also served as a complex arena of tension and conflict between these cults and the wisdom schools. While Hirakawa makes a good case for the contributions of stūpa cults to the development of the Mahāyāna, he admits that the origins of some of the most important Mahāyāna literature, the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) texts, must be sought for elsewhere.²⁰ This body of literature, along with a number of Mahāyāna wisdom texts, downplays the value of stūpa/relic worship in comparison to devotion to the text itself, that is, the written manuscript of a Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra. The rea-

son for the devaluing of stūpas in Mahāyāna literature is both doctrinal and pragmatic. One of the earliest Perfection of Wisdom texts, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (henceforth, *Aṣṭa*), contains an interesting discussion indicating the ambivalence and tension between stūpa cults and the emerging groups devoted to Mahāyāna wisdom texts. In one passage, the Buddha questions Śakra about the value of the relics contained in stūpas compared to the Perfection of Wisdom, asking which he would prefer if he had the choice between an enormous number of relics of all the Tathāgatas and one written copy of the text. He, of course, chooses the Perfection of Wisdom, arguing for its primacy over relics, since the Perfection of Wisdom is the cause of the wisdom of the Tathāgatas, rather than its depository.²¹ The value of relics is derivative in that they, being identified with the enlightened Buddhas, are the results of, and are pervaded by, the Perfection of Wisdom. Furthermore, he claims, the Perfection of Wisdom supersedes relics (*śarīra*) insofar as it is itself the “true body of the Buddha,” which is the body of the Dharma (*dharmakāya*).²² This passage illustrates the effort by the followers of the Perfection of Wisdom to replace, or at least augment, devotion to the physical remains of the Buddha enshrined in stūpas with both the message and physical presence of the written text of the *Prajñāpāramitā*; invoking the traditional notion of the functional equivalence of the Dharma body, as the collected teachings of the Buddha, with the Buddha himself.²³

In addition to the doctrinal disagreements between the emerging textual traditions of the Mahāyāna and the stūpa cults, more concrete concerns regarding the establishment of places of worship may have been operative. During the earliest developments of the Mahāyāna, sacred places associated with the life of the Buddha were controlled by the stūpa cults connected to the orthodox traditions. Evidence exists in the Perfection of Wisdom texts that the Mahāyāna polemics against the Hīnayāna stūpa cults were not only about doctrine but were also about the struggle of the Mahāyāna to establish its own sacred places. Gregory Schopen deals with this issue in his study of the early Mahāyāna as a loose federation of different “cults of the book” in which sūtras themselves become objects of worship and the cults who worshipped them were structured similarly to stūpa cults.²⁴

Schopen argues that the tradition of the cult of the book drew from the idea that the presence of the Buddha in a particular place

during a significant episode of his life rendered that place sacred. This was also the rationale behind early stūpa cults. The idea was combined with the notion expressed in the stock phrase “Whoever sees the Dharma, sees the Buddha,” which indicated that wherever the teachings were set forth, the Buddha was effectively present. From this idea, “it followed naturally that if the presence of the *Bhagavat* at a particular place had the effect of sacralizing that spot, then by extension, the presence (in some form) of the *dharmaparyāya* [setting forth of the Dharma, i.e., a sūtra] must have the same effect.”²⁵ Reciting a text purporting to be the words of the Buddha over a particular place, then, would render it sacred in the same sense in which a stūpa is a sacred place, that is, in that the Dharma was taught there, and even in that it contained “part” of the Buddha himself, in this case his Dharma body rather than merely his physical remains. Schopen argues that this was one way in which early Mahāyānists dealt with the problem of “localization of the cult of the book” by way of “authoritatively legitimating that spot as a cultic centre.”²⁶ This was a way of establishing new sacred places that probably served as permanent teaching centres that were not tied to those sacred sites associated with the Buddha’s life, which were under the control of more orthodox groups.

Furthermore, the recitation of a sūtra or formula at a particular place was not the only way to consecrate the site; the presence of a written copy of a sūtra was understood to have the same effect. Schopen argues that the shift from a primarily oral to a primarily written tradition was important to the establishment of these Mahāyāna cultic centres, because the presence of the written sūtra eliminated the need for oral consecrations by the monks who specialized in reciting sūtras (*bhāṅakas*). The written sūtra could serve as a focal point of the cult and as a permanent source of the power and presence of the Dharma, independent of the need for recitation.²⁷ This, in turn, freed Mahāyānists from the need to have the institutional sanction and support of the Saṅgha.

The transposition of the Dharma into physical form to be worshipped, combined with the promises of great benefits gained from copying and promoting the sūtra, ensured that devotees would reproduce and distribute the texts widely, expanding the influence and power of the Mahāyāna cults and contributing to its devotional flavor. The *Aṣṭa* presents a compelling picture of some of its cult’s

practices in passages suggesting what activities are most meritorious with regard to the sūtra:

“If a son or daughter of good family has genuine confidence and trust in this Perfection of Wisdom [i.e., the *Aṣṭa*], is intent on it, has a clear mind, has thoughts raised to awakening, has earnest resolution, and bears it, grasps [its meaning], speaks it, studies it, spreads it, demonstrates it, explains it, expounds it, repeats it, makes it manifest in full detail to others, makes its meaning clear, investigates it with the mind, and with superior wisdom examines it thoroughly; then copies it in the form of a book, bears it in mind and preserves it so that the good Dharma will last long, so that the guide of the Buddhas will not disappear, and so that the bodhisattvas may incur benefits by means of this flawless guide; indeed, that son or daughter of good family who makes this Perfection of Wisdom his or her teacher, honours and respects with flowers, incense, perfume, garlands, ointments, powders, raiment, parasols, emblems, bells, banners, with lamps and garlands all around it; whoever pays obeisance to it in these various ways will generate great Merit.”²⁸

In addition to its emphasis on promotion and distribution, this passage shows how a text like the *Aṣṭa*, usually known for its early enunciation of the most abstract philosophical concepts of the Mahāyāna, had more uses than just the development of the movement’s theoretical foundations. In fact, it and other early sūtras were the object of perhaps some of the earliest forms of Buddhist *bhakti* or worship, which suggests how inseparable the traditions of high philosophy were from devotional practices. The passage also shows another facet of the importance of the physicality of the Dharma in the form of the written book in the early Mahāyāna.

Closely connected to this issue is another implication of the uses of writing in the Mahāyāna—and particularly in its written sūtras—namely, that it challenged the traditional notions of sacred space. As a heterodox minority movement, the early Mahāyāna was enabled through writing to expand and develop by granting to the book the sacrality of the Buddha himself, thus providing lay followers with forms of devotion and, through the consecrational power of these manuscripts, creating new sacred sites under its control. Cults of the book also attempted to establish a new relation to sacred space that was not tied inevitably to those traditional sacred sites associated with the life of the founder and that were controlled by orthodox monks

or stūpa cults. The fact that anywhere the text was placed could now become a sacred place equivalent to those associated with the life of the Buddha had the effect of de-emphasizing the significance of the specific, localized, and temporal presence of Śākyamuni. Sacred space was now mobile. This is perhaps the beginning of a marked tendency in the Mahāyāna, which I will discuss later, toward a more general dislocation of the sacred from the locus of the “historical” life of Śākyamuni in favour of more abstract and unlocalizable understandings of the sacred and of the Buddha.

Writing and the Visual

A further way in which writing was significant to the Mahāyāna in particular, and to all of Buddhism and South Asian thought, practice, and literature in general, was that it shifted access to and organization of knowledge from a primarily oral and auditory mode to a primarily visual mode. In order to explore some of the implications of this shift, it is necessary to make a digression into some general theoretical observations about these two cognitive-perceptual orientations and the effect that they may have on consciousness and culture. While these general observations about hearing, vision, and writing may be useful to a greater or lesser extent depending on the specific cultures to which they are applied, I outline them here because they seem relevant and applicable to the case of South Asian Buddhism.

A number of scholars have attempted to elucidate the ways in which vision and hearing each orient consciousness to the world in distinctive ways. Drawing mainly from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hans Jonas, David Chidester notes that hearing is associated with time and sequence, while seeing is associated with space; that is, the eye sees objects in space while the ear hears sounds arising and passing away in time.²⁹ The “dimension,” as it were, of sound is time, while the three dimensions of space are the medium in which objects of vision subsist. Auditory experience is inherently related to flux and discontinuity in that it structures and presents things in a temporal sequence. The kind of sound that is most important to this inquiry, the spoken word, is paradigmatic of this sequentiality, being what Merleau-Ponty calls “an indefinite series of

discontinuous acts.”³⁰ A word, like any sound, is an event that is always passing away, always mobile. Because words are always disappearing as they are pronounced, Walter Ong suggests that orality is essentially dialogical and that, in oral cultures, thought must be “shaped into mnemonic patterns ordered for oral recurrence” and consist of rhythmic and repetitious patterns and formulaic expressions.”³¹ This, of course, is precisely the constitution of the early Buddhist sūtras, such as our example, the *Salāyatana-vibhaṅga*.

Vision, on the other hand, suggests a different orientation toward knowledge and its organization. The visual system is capable of apprehending a variety of things simultaneously and is less tied to temporal sequence. It apprehends a number of co-present things and unifies them in the moment, making them more susceptible to analysis. Chidester suggests that visual perception is more conducive to the discernment of patterns and to detached contemplation, while hearing, particularly hearing a voice, may be more apt to induce action, since it informs the hearer of an event or a change in the situation that calls for response.³² These observations apply not only to visually apprehended objects but also to the written, as opposed to the spoken, word. Ong asserts that writing “restructures consciousness” and that the literate mind is forever changed in its thinking and orientation to the world, not only when engaged in reading or writing, but even when speaking, hearing, and composing thoughts orally: “More than any other invention, writing has transformed consciousness” because, among other things, it “moves speech from the oral-aural to a new sensory world, that of vision [and therefore] transforms speech and thought as well.”³³

The implications of these suggestions on ways in which oral-aural and literate-visual modalities structure consciousness and culture cannot be fully drawn out in the limited space of this essay, but some points about South Asian Buddhism in this regard can be noted. The difference between accessing the teachings of the Dharma through hearing and through reading undoubtedly had significant effects on the ways in which Buddhists appropriated the sūtras. Writing was a medium that was uniquely appropriate to the Mahāyāna and its creative reinterpretations of doctrine in that it freed access to texts from being dependent on the collective activities of chanting and recitation and thus from the need for the institutional sanction of the monastic Saṅgha. Further, because the

written manuscript frees the reader from being locked into the temporal flow of the recitation and to the particular place where the recitation is performed, it lends itself to appropriation in ways very different from those that are possible in either the performing or hearing of oral recitation. Since the manuscript is present in its entirety, rather than constantly passing away in time, as is the case with oral utterance, a greater degree of analysis and reflection on the material is possible. A reader can move back and forth through a text at will, drawing correlations between different passages, analyzing and comparing statements, and cross-referencing with other texts. These activities allowed more individual reflection, interpretation, and analysis, which may have predisposed readers to novel interpretation, individual insight, and embellishment.

The analytic and interpretive activities to which writing lent itself were not confined to the Mahāyāna but had an impact on all of the Buddhist schools. It is around the time of the emergence of writing that systematic philosophy and analysis of doctrine, such as that found in the Abhidharma, begins to take shape. Ong has suggested that analysis and philosophy are only possible in a literate culture.³⁴ If the early Pāli sūtras that we possess today are anything like their oral antecedents (which they most likely are), this is obviously not true in the case of Indian Buddhism. Considerable theoretical reflection and analysis is present in these texts. However, it seems clear that extensive analysis of the sūtras themselves arose in conjunction with the development of writing. The attempt to systematize the teachings of the sūtras into a consistent order came about from the relative freedom from temporal sequence that writing afforded. Abhidharma thought, with its extensive lists, categories, correlations, headings and subheadings, bears the marks of literate composition in that it culls teachings from a number of different sources and attempts to systematize, synthesize, and categorize them. Such activities would be extremely difficult if one were limited to the sequentiality that structures oral recitation of memorized utterances. The simultaneous presence of written texts in visual space is necessary for such work. The multiple categories and subcategories in the Abhidharma and other commentarial literature are, in part, the products of the ability to represent complex classificatory schemas spatially. In contemporary books dealing with the Abhidharma, one can scarcely come across a discussion of this

literature that does not contain at least one chart in which the various elements of existence (*dhammas*) are laid out spatially, allowing all the complex classifications and their relationships to present themselves spatially.

The fixed, static nature of the book, and its passive unresponsiveness, may also give it a sense of implicit authority and unchallengeability on an intuitive level, particularly to those for whom writing is a new phenomenon. Ong suggests that writing establishes a “context free” or “autonomous” discourse that is more detached from its authors than oral discourse and, therefore, cannot be questioned directly.³⁵ These points are helpful when thinking about the Mahāyāna and heterodox movements in general. Writing helps in establishing an unorthodox movement because written words may have their own implicit authority; they do not call for justification, response, and argumentation as easily and immediately as spoken words. Their soundless presence is perhaps more likely to evoke a sense of implicit legitimacy than is a human voice, whose authority depends on the social position of the speaker in a given context. The impassivity of the written word may evoke a sense of authority that gives the appearance of being free from or floating above social context, since the conditions of its production (at least in the case of Mahāyāna sūtras) are obscure. Its very unresponsiveness may seem to elevate it above the spoken word, which tends to call for an immediate response.

In many cultures in the early stages of literacy, writings confer on themselves a self-authenticating and sacred quality perhaps because of the mute, unresponsive authority that they present or because sacred words are among the things most likely to be written down.³⁶ Furthermore, by providing a technology by which any literate person could access and interpret the Dharma outside the context of the Saṅgha, writing encouraged unorthodox insight, creativity, and dissent. The writer could compose his or her own ideas, which would be present before the eye, laid out with the same seeming permanence and unassailability as the *Buddha-vacana*. The physical presence of the written manuscript, in turn, contributed to the likelihood that these ideas would not die the moment the author’s voice fell silent. Therefore, the inherently conservative tendencies of the oral tradition, which strove to maintain the integrity of the words of the founder through its various

institutional practices and rules, were subverted in part by the introduction of writing.

Finally, in looking at the introductory passages of the sample sūtras, the most obvious difference is that they are unmistakably structured around different sense modalities, the sūtra on the sense fields being composed in mnemonic patterns for oral memorization and recitation and the Gaṇḍavyūha being written as a visual extravaganza not only in its barrage of vivid imagery, but in its frequent use of visually oriented language and metaphor. The emphasis throughout the text is on what is seen rather than what is heard.

The emergence of visionary literature is not confined to Mahāyāna Buddhism but is a pan-Indic phenomenon beginning around the first or second century B.C.E.—the same time as the emergence of writing. Parts of the *Bhagavadgītā* and the Pure Land texts are the most ready examples of such visually oriented literature emerging around this period. It is also noteworthy that visualization practices became more elaborate and important in both Buddhism and Hinduism at this time. I would not want to attribute all of this exclusively to the emergence of writing, but the coincidence of a wave of visionary literature and practice sweeping India at about the same time as literacy was becoming widespread does suggest that writing and the attendant shift to the visual sense modality played a significant part in the development of visionary literature in India.

The Buddha-Vacana and Strategies of Legitimation in the Mahāyāna

Of course, the implicit advantages of writing and written sūtras were not the only factors in the relative success of the Mahāyāna movement(s) in South Asia. Aside from being composed in the propitious medium of written language, the content of Mahāyāna sūtras written in South Asia went to great lengths to attempt to establish the movement's authority and legitimacy—something that would have been quite difficult for what was probably a minority reform movement facing well-established and powerful monastic institutions with their own claims to authority and legitimacy. The contention of this article is that at least one factor in the evocative

imagery and rhetorical style of many Mahāyāna sūtras involved its use as such a strategy of legitimatization. Before examining a specific instance of such a use, though, it would be helpful to place this claim in context by discussing some of the ways in which the early Mahāyāna struggled against the more orthodox schools' claims to exclusive authority based on possession of the *Buddha-vacana*, the words of the Buddha. As we have seen, the early Buddhist community's identity involved its role as the keepers of the *Buddha-vacana* given by Gautama and, according to tradition, memorized by his disciples and passed orally from generation to generation. This community considered itself to be those who heard, either directly or through others, the words of the Buddha. Thus, the hearers of the *Buddha-vacana* were not only those who were actually present at the talks of the Buddha, but also disciples who received the teachings through hearing oral recitation. Although not the only criterion for legitimacy, the most important and unambiguous way in which a teaching was understood to be authentic was that it was considered to be the very words that the Buddha spoke.³⁷ Thus the *Buddha-vacana* was the primary seal of authenticity.

Concern for the word of the Buddha continued in the Mahāyāna but became a more complex issue. A sūtra is a composition containing a talk given by the Buddha and is therefore by definition *Buddha-vacana*. Whether from the Pāli Canon or the Mahāyāna, all sūtras start out with the narrator uttering the same words: "Thus have I heard . . ." (*evaṃ mayā śrutam*). Following this is a description of the particular place the sermon was heard, individuals and groups that were present, and so forth—all reports that would seem to provide verification that the original hearer was in fact in the specified place at the time of the talk. Yet it is clear to modern scholars, as it probably was to most Buddhists in ancient India, that the Mahāyāna sūtras were composed quite a long time after the death of Gautama and that it is highly unlikely that the "historical" Buddha ever spoke any of them.

Thus, the need to explain the existence of these sūtras and the attendant novel doctrines was of great concern to the Mahāyāna and is an issue addressed, directly or indirectly, in many sūtras and commentaries. It is impossible to reconstruct precisely the attitudes and motivations of these early Mahāyāna, sūtra writers—to imagine what they conceived of themselves as doing when, hundreds of years

after the Buddha's death, they wrote the words "*evaṃ mayā śrutam.*" Perhaps they had powerful insights that they were convinced were inspired by the Buddha or perhaps stories and ideas generated in the environments of the stūpa cults eventually were considered to be part of the Buddha's dialogues. These late sūtra writers may have simply had a far more liberal interpretation of what counts as the word of the Buddha than did their orthodox contemporaries. It is conceivable that many doctrines and practices that we now consider uniquely Mahāyāna were in existence from very early but were simply marginalized by those who determined the legitimacy of teachings; thus we know nothing about them until the Mahāyāna became more organized and began writing its own texts.

Despite the inevitable obscurity to historical investigation of the intentions of these late sūtra writers, many indications do exist as to how Mahāyānists construed their creative reformulations of the Dharma and justified them to themselves and to outsiders once they were written. A number of explanations were offered for the emergence of these new sūtras. According to one ancient reconstruction of the Mahāyāna, the *śrāvakas* did not have the capacity to understand the advanced teachings of the Great Vehicle, so they were taught to otherworldly beings and hidden until teachers emerged who could understand them.³⁸ Another explanation was that the original hearers did not understand the content of these talks but transmitted them anyway for later generations better equipped to comprehend them.³⁹

The claim was prevalent that certain teachings were revealed only to a select few. Many Mahāyāna commentators went to great lengths to reconcile the teachings of the Hīnayāna with those of the Mahāyāna by a careful reworking of the story of the Buddha's life in which every teaching ever attributed to him was understood to be given to particular disciples on various levels of spiritual attainment. In these scenarios, less spiritually-developed people were given teachings of the Hīnayāna, while bodhisattvas and other nearly enlightened being received the higher teachings of the Mahāyāna.

The text that is perhaps the most replete with explanations of novel Mahāyāna doctrines and practices is the Lotus Sūtra. The rhetoric of the Lotus is suggestive of the polemical context in which these doctrines and practices developed. It directly addresses the contradictions between its Mahāyāna teachings and those of the

Nikāyas, much like the Christian Church explained its relationship to Judaism, by claiming supersession. It presents three specific types of people on the Buddhist path—the *śrāvaka*, who hears the words of the Buddha; the *pratyekabuddha* who attains salvation through his own efforts and without a teacher; and the bodhisattva, who renounces his own entry into nirvāṇa until all sentient beings are saved. After warning that this teaching would be quite disturbing to both human beings and gods, the Buddha explains that all of the teachings held by those on these three paths are merely skilful means (*upāya*) that he employed to lead them all to the one true vehicle to Buddhahood, the Mahāyāna. The teachings held by the three archetypal figures on the path were given because the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* were capable of understanding only limited truths, such as the doctrine of causes and conditions, and of attaining freedom from rebirth and suffering in the quiescence of nirvāṇa. In the most famous parable of the Lotus, these doctrines were likened to promises told to children in order to lure them out of a burning house.⁴⁰ At one time, says the Buddha, these inferior teachings may have been necessary, but now the time has come to reveal the full extent of the Dharma in the teachings of the Lotus. The claim, then, that the Hīnayāna teachings were merely skilful means to prepare disciples to receive the higher truth of the Mahāyāna explained the discrepancies between the two, while at the same time asserting the superiority of the new teachings.

The theme of secrecy was also an important factor in explaining novel texts and contradictory doctrines. The arising of additions to the Dharma and the discrepancies between sūtras were sometimes explained by the claim that the Buddha communicated secret Mahāyāna teachings to certain people, at times even in the midst of giving a Hīnayāna teaching. The most complex examples of this claim occurred outside India, for example, in the Chinese systems of doctrinal classification (*p'an chiao*). Perhaps the most elaborate of such systems was that of the great Chinese thinker Chih-i. According to Chih-i, the Buddha taught different sūtras to people with different levels understanding and spiritual development, intuiting who was ready to hear advanced teachings and who could only appreciate limited teachings. After teaching the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* immediately preceding his Enlightenment, he then moderated his approach, proceeding from the more digestible Hīnayāna

teachings through to the *Vimalakīrtinīrdeśa*, the *Śūnyavāda* teachings, and others, until finally he revealed the perfect expression of the Dharma, the Lotus Sūtra.

Most interesting is Chih-i's notion of the secret methods by which the Buddha communicated all these divergent doctrines to different people, according to their level of understanding. The "secret indeterminate" teachings were those in which the Buddha said the same thing in such a manner that different listeners, each unaware of the other, heard the teachings in a different way and thus came away remembering completely different discourses. In other cases, the Buddha spoke secretly to separate individuals, each of whom thought that he alone was the exclusive recipient of the message; but, in fact, others were present, magically concealed from each other so that, again, they came away with contradictory teachings. In the "express indeterminate" teachings, Chih-i asserts that the Buddha said the same thing, but different people—this time all present and aware of each other—heard distinctly different sermons; thus, again, each came away with different doctrines.

All of these explanations served, first, to explain the wide variety of seemingly conflicting doctrines all claiming to be the words of the Buddha; second, to impose a hierarchical structure on the various doctrines with the teachings of one's own school on top; and third, to try to determine the highest teaching, namely, that which was closest to representing the Buddha's own enlightenment.

What is important about Chih-i's attempt to understand the great diversity of teachings all claiming to be the words of the Buddha is that it epitomizes the way in which, even after the Mahāyāna attained dominance in China, the Great Vehicle struggled both to subvert and reconcile itself to most orthodox Buddhist doctrine and practice. Although it reached its most elaborate forms in China, this effort began with the early Mahāyāna in India. Virtually every school of Buddhism in India had its own version of which doctrines had definitive meaning (*nīṭārtha*) and which had merely provisional meaning (*neyārtha*), and since there were no univocally accepted standards for deciding such matters, each school drew this distinction on the basis of its own doctrinal suppositions. The organization of doctrines based on the notion that some were merely skilful means indicates the strong need felt by Mahāyānists to legitimate their novel teachings, while maintaining a connection of

lineage with Śākyamuni. It is noteworthy that, while the orthodox schools often criticized the Mahāyāna as being inauthentic, the Mahāyānists never questioned the legitimacy of the Hīnayāna sūtras, that is, that they were records of talks that the Buddha actually gave. The effort to authenticate the Mahāyāna sūtras was aimed at explaining how the Buddha actually gave doctrines that contradicted each other—how a unity of thought and intention could be understood to lie beneath the apparent discrepancies between the large and small vehicles. The rhetorical devices used to establish legitimacy in the Mahāyāna were always a hermeneutic of inclusion—albeit an inclusion that was also a subversion, for while the Hīnayāna sūtras were considered authentic, they were relegated to being merely provisional.

Visionary Literature and Grounds for Legitimacy

Having suggested the significance of writing and various strategies of legitimation for the emerging Mahāyāna movement in South Asia, I now return to the introductory passage from the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and to the question of the pronounced difference in literary style between the Hīnayāna sūtras and many of the Mahāyāna sūtras. Recall the stark contrast between the sparse style of the Pāli sūtras and the lush visionary images of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. While the *Gaṇḍavyūha* is probably the most effusive example of such literary style in Buddhist writings, it is not alone among Mahāyāna sūtras in presenting dazzling scenes attendant on the Buddha's preparing to deliver a discourse. Many such sūtras begin in similar, albeit toned-down ways.

It is tempting to attribute the “magical” elements in Mahāyāna literature to the fact that the movement began among the laity and that these features were products of the popular religious imagination. But, while the laicizing tendencies of the Mahāyāna were certainly important to the development of many novel features of these texts, the works themselves were obviously written by an educated elite who were thoroughly familiar with all facets of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Furthermore, in addition to the nourishing of the popular need for salvific figures, and of the new religious specialists' predilection for visionary experience, there is embedded in these lavish presentations highly polemical rhetoric

designed both to explain the emergence of previously unknown sūtras and to establish them as superior to the Hīnayāna.

Thus, the visionary elements of Mahāyāna sūtras, in addition to weaving an aesthetically rich and fascinating fabric of symbolic imagery that would nourish the Buddhist imagination up to the present day, made a unique contribution to the aforementioned strategies of legitimatization. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* makes these polemical strategies quite clear. Continuing with the passage presented at the beginning of this study, we find that after the extensive description of the transfigured Jeta Grove and the wonders attending the arrival of the otherworldly bodhisattvas, the narrator points out that the *śrāvakas* who were present, such as Śāriputra, Mahākāśyapa, Subhūti, and others who are the frequent interlocutors of the Buddha in the sūtras, were completely oblivious to the entire miraculous scene. The reason they did not see it is because, among other defects, they “lacked the roots of goodness conducive to the vision of the transfiguration of all buddhas ... and did not have the purity of the eye of knowledge.”⁴¹ Furthermore, they did not have the “power of vision” to see these things because they were of the vehicle of the *śrāvakas*, who had neither the “developed bodhisattva’s range of vision” nor the “eyes of the bodhisattvas.”⁴²

Part of the significance of these elaborate visionary depictions, then, is to establish a kind of spiritual hierarchy with those who merely heard the words of the Buddha, the *śrāvakas*, on the bottom, and those bodhisattvas who saw the true transfigured state of the Buddha and his surroundings on top. The fact that the bodhisattvas are depicted as seeing the vision, while the *śrāvakas* remain oblivious, is at once an assertion of the value of seeing over hearing and of the Mahāyāna over the “Hīnayāna.”

While the *Gaṇḍavyūha* is the text that makes this strategy most obvious, other Mahāyāna sūtras employ similar devices, often involving visions of the higher bodies of the Buddha. The Lotus sūtra is one of the early Mahāyāna texts that lays the groundwork for the importance of having visions of the Buddha, insofar as it explicitly claims that the Buddha is actually a transcendent being.⁴³ This theme is taken up in the sūtra when the Buddha discusses the countless numbers of beings that he has led to buddhahood in his past lives. In a rare moment of doubt and confusion, Maitreya broaches the subject of how the Buddha could have led to

enlightenment these many beings in countless ages past if Gautama had himself only attained enlightenment in this lifetime and only relatively recently. The answer is a bombshell. The stories of the Buddha's life, his leaving the household, his achieving Awakening under the bodhisattvas tree, and his warning that he would soon be gone, were themselves all merely *upāya*, skilful means to lead less developed beings toward the higher teachings of the Great Vehicle. In fact, he reports he attained enlightenment innumerable eons ago and has been teaching the Dharma in this and countless other world systems for incalculable ages. The reason he teaches certain beings that the appearance of a Buddha in a world is rare and that he will soon be gone forever is so that they will practise the Dharma with vigor and be diligent in striving for awakening. But in reality, he says, he is always present and never perishes, is unlimited by time and space, and is able to manifest in the world whenever he is needed.⁴⁴

The notions of the transcendence of the Buddha and the fictitiousness of the received stories of his life were powerful tools in the struggle of the Mahāyāna for legitimacy. First, these ideas de-emphasized the "historical" Śākyamuni and presented many of the core elements of orthodox Buddhism as irrelevant. Second, they gave an additional rationale for the emergence of new sūtras and doctrines. The idea that the Buddha had not, in fact, passed into nirvāṇa but continued to teach on an as-needed basis could serve, in combination with the doctrine of *upāya*, as an explanation for the introduction of new teachings. Paul Williams points out a tradition in some Mahāyāna literature in which the origins of certain Mahāyāna sūtras were associated not with the historical Buddha *per se* but with the visionary experience and inspiration by the supermundane Buddha or Buddhas who exist in Pure Lands or buddha fields. He offers a passage from the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* that gives instructions for visualizing the Buddha Amitāyus in his Pure Land teaching the Dharma and in which the meditator is actually given teachings by this Buddha: "While remaining in this very world-system, that bodhisattva sees the Lord, the Tathāgata Amitāyus; and conceiving himself to be in that world-system he also hears the Dharma. Having heard their exposition he accepts, masters and retains those Dharmas. He worships, venerates, honours and reveres the Lord ... Amitāyus. After he has emerged from that *samādhi* [meditative absorption] that

bodhisattva also expounds widely to others those Dharmas as he has heard, retained and mastered them.”⁴⁵ It is possible, then, that some Mahāyāna sūtras were the result of what the author considered a direct visionary revelation of the Dharma from a transcendent source, one that at once augmented and surpassed the teachings in the Pāli canon.

Another idea that comes into play here is the importance in Buddhist literature of seeing a Buddha. Even in the early literature the sight of a Buddha is considered to be auspicious, but nowhere are the benefits extolled so much as in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*:

The word of a Buddha is hard to come by even in a billion eons;

How much more so the sight of a Buddha, which ends all craving.⁴⁶

Those who have seen the Buddha, the supreme man, are certain of [their own] enlightenment.⁴⁷

All obstructions are removed when a Buddha is seen, Increasing the immeasurable virtue whereby enlightenment will be attained.

The sight of a Buddha severs all the doubts of sentient beings And fulfills all purposes, mundane and transcendent.⁴⁸

While in earlier texts, seeing the ordinary form of a Buddha was enough, the Mahāyāna increasingly emphasized the resplendent enjoyment body (*sambhoga-kāya*), the body formed as a result of the meritorious karmic accumulations of the Buddha.

The idea of supermundane Buddhas and the significance of seeing their transcendent form deflected the importance of having heard the words of Śākyamuni when he was in Jeta Grove. While hearing the words of the Buddha was the basis for authenticity and legitimacy in the orthodox traditions, it became less important, if not associated with a handicap, according to certain Mahāyāna sūtras: according to the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, having heard a discourse from the finite form of the Śākyamuni in an ordinary park merely showed the hearer's limitations, that is, his inability to see the higher form of the Buddha and his Pure Land, which is coextensive with the ordinary world.

Thus, in contradistinction to the ordinary settings of early sūtras, in which a group of simple monks gather in a park to hear the

Buddha give a talk, many Mahāyāna sūtras begin by depicting the Buddha revealing himself in his enjoyment body. In another Perfection of Wisdom text, the *Pañcaviṃśatisahāsrīkā*, for example, before giving his talk, the Buddha's body suddenly becomes radiant, and rays of light emit from his "divine eye," his toes, legs, ankles, thighs, hips, navel, arms, fingers, ears, nostrils, teeth, eyes, and hair pores. This light illumines all the multiple world systems in the triple cosmos. Only after an extensive description of the resplendence of the Buddha's form and the attendant miraculous events does he actually begin his sermon.⁴⁹ This preliminary visual display is one of the primary means of attempting to establish the legitimacy of the Mahāyāna sūtra—perhaps more so than the dubious claim of the narrator to have heard the sūtra from Śākyamuni. The idea of the transcendent Buddha allowed a reversal of value with regard to the spoken word. The fact that the monks who committed the Pāli sūtras to memory claimed to have heard the teachings of the Buddha as a man in a specific place and time was the seal of authenticity in the Pāli sūtras but is presented as a sign of limitation in the Lotus and other Mahāyāna sūtras. If the Buddha were actually a transcendent being, and the ability to see his higher form was contingent on one's spiritual development, then hearing him preach in the voice of a man, in an ordinary body, at a typical place and time, as depicted in the Hīnayāna sūtras, was simply an indication of the limited capacities of the hearer.

These elaborate introductions are intended to establish the transcendent source of the teachings contained in the sūtras and serve to relativize the comparatively prosaic Pāli accounts. While Mahāyāna sūtras continued invariably to begin according to standard form—with the narrator claiming to have heard the dialogue in a particular historical place and time, thus preserving the legitimacy and connection to received tradition and lineage conferred by the phrase "*evaṃ mayā śrutam*"—the presentation of the transcendent form of the Buddha in his Pure Land served to mitigate the importance of any particular time or place. The tendency of the Mahāyāna sūtras, then, was to disembed the teachings from Deer Park and re-embed them in a transcendent realm. The Mahāyāna attempted to transfer the basis of legitimacy from the spoken word of Śākyamuni to the vision of the transcendent Buddha, which rendered the specificity of the places that the Buddha spoke during

his lifetime less relevant. The transfiguration of Jeta Grove shows that the locale in which the *Gaṇḍavyūha* was given was not really Jeta Grove at all but a kind of placeless place in which the wonders of the Buddha and his world were revealed.

The displacement of the Buddha's teaching parallels the displacement of sacred spaces occasioned by the cults of the book. Both tended to deemphasize the particularities of time and place associated with the Buddha's life in favour of creating the ideal of a universal sacred space that was at once everywhere and yet nowhere in particular. The image of the ground turning into a transparent diamond in our passage from the *Gaṇḍavyūha* is a most powerful symbol of this displacement—rather than the hills, trees, and other landmarks of Jeta Grove that must have been familiar to the disciples who lived in the vicinity or had visited the place on pilgrimage, the land becomes a uniform crystalline diamond extending in all directions. Such a landscape allows for no distinction or particularity and thus symbolizes the universality and undifferentiation of all spaces—a condition that many Mahāyāna sūtras claim is true from a higher point of view. It reflects, thus, the Perfection of Wisdom texts' assertion that all elements of existence (*dharmas*) are undifferentiated, placeless (*adeśa*), and without locality (*apradeśa*), like space itself.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The foregoing consideration of the literary style of different sūtras opens up a number of issues involving the development, sustenance, and establishment of the Mahāyāna. Writing allowed its heterodox teachings to survive and instituted forms of sūtra worship that would serve to expand the movement, not only through spreading its doctrines but by consecration of places. The development of writing also shifted access to and organization of knowledge from an exclusively oral/aural mode to one that included visuality, and this allowed for greater analysis and commentary, as well as for dissent. The Mahāyāna's embracing of the shift from oral/aural to literate/visual also challenged the authority of the orthodox traditions in a number of ways, the most vivid example being the use of visionary literature to establish authority and supersession. Examining what was at stake in the conflicting claims between the Mahāyāna and the

more orthodox schools helps to elucidate the concrete concerns that constituted the conditions under which these Mahāyāna sūtras were produced. All of this suggests some of the social and historical factors that contributed to the intense visual imagery of some Mahāyāna sūtras and that made a highly visual orientation well-suited to the Mahāyāna.

We should be careful not to oversimplify or overstate the point here. It is not that Mahāyāna sūtras were exclusively focused on vision, and Pāli sūtras on hearing and recitation. In fact, some of the resources for the visionary material in the Mahāyāna are found in the Pāli texts in a more subtle form, and these early texts also contain many ocular metaphors, such as the frequent pairing of knowledge and vision. Conversely, traditions of recitation and mnemonic devices are not absent from Mahāyāna sūtras, and some of these sūtras extol the virtues of those who are able to recite long texts from memory. The point is, first, that the Mahāyāna tended to emphasize vision to a greater extent than the orthodox traditions, who emphasized hearing, and second, that these respective orientations were specifically involved with each tradition's claims to authority and legitimacy.

It would also be inadequate to claim that the sole function of and reason for visionary literature in the Mahāyāna was to serve as a strategy of legitimatization. As was mentioned, much non-Buddhist Indian literature at the time of the composition of these sūtras was of a similar visionary style, and in many ways these sūtras reflect a pan-Indic visionary trend in literature in the first couple centuries before and after the beginning of the common era. However, the polemical uses of such literature should not be overlooked, for they shed light on the historical and social context in which the Mahayana emerged. Nor do these considerations necessarily mitigate the impact and religious significance of this extraordinary visionary literature and the visionary experiences they depict—they do suggest, however, that even the most otherworldly visions are often intertwined with this-worldly concerns.

Notes

1. First printed in *History of Religions*, Vol.37, No.3, Feb 1998, pp. 249-274. Reprinted with permission of University of Chicago Press.
2. *Salāyatana-vibhaṅga suttam*, in *Majjhima-Nikāya*, ed. Robert Charles (London: Luzac, for the Pāli Text Society, 1960), pp. 215-22.
3. *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no. 5 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), p. 1 (hereafter cited as *Gaṇḍavyūha*).
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
5. H. C. Warren, trans., *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, in *Buddhism in Translation* (New York: Atheneum 1984), p. 107.
6. Steven Collins, "Notes on Some Oral Aspects of Pāli Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992): 121-35.
7. For example, Collins (p. 124) notes the following: *vāceti*, "to make (the pupil) recite"; *uddisati*, "teaches, recites"; *suṇāti*, listens; *uggaṇḥati*, grasps in memory"; *adhīyati* and *pariyāpūṇāti*, "learns (by reciting)"; *sajjhāyati*, "recites"; and *dhāreti*, "retains (what he has learnt in memory)."
8. Collins, p. 129.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
11. Lance Cousins, Internet communication, Buddha-L discussion group, February 7, 1996.
12. Richard Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna Began," in *The Buddhist Forum*, vol. 1, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (London: School of Oriental and African Studies), p. 28.
13. Donald Lopez, "Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna," *Numen* (1995): 20-47, quote on 39.
14. Gombrich, pp. 21-30.
15. For a discussion of rules for determining textual authenticity, see Étienne Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" trans. Sara Boin-Webb, in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald Lopez (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 1988), pp. 11-28.
16. *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no. 6 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), pp. 265-67; see chaps. 17-19 for discussions of merit.
17. Kajiyana Yuichi, "Prajñāpāramitā and the Rise of Mahāyāna" in *Buddhist Spirituality*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad, 1993), pp. 143-44.

18. Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, trans. Paul Groner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 270-74.

19. While Hirakawa associates the birth of the Mahāyāna directly with the laity and the stūpa cults, which he claims were almost exclusively the domain of the laity, Paul Williams argues that the laity did not themselves bring about Mahāyāna Buddhism. Rather, the Mahāyāna, or at least its literature, was the product of monks within the established traditions whose understanding of the Dharma was more inclusive of the laity and their practices and perspectives. See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 20-23.

20. Hirakawa, p. 274.

21. "Perfection of Wisdom" is used in this sense as the state of enlightenment or that which leads to such a state, as well as the text itself.

22. *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no. 4 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), p. 49.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 96. The reference to *dharmakāya* is likely a later interpolation; nevertheless, it shows one way in which the cult of the *Prajñāpāramitā* attempted to supersede devotion to relics by playing the terms *śāvira* and *kāya* off of each other.

24. Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivipradeśā caityabhūto bhavē' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in the Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (November-December 1975):147-81.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Aṣṭa*, pp. 46-47.

29. David Chidester, *Word and Light: Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 9.

30. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 193, quoted in Chidester, p. 9.

31. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 34. While some of Ong's other generalizations about oral cultures seem disproved by the case of early Buddhism, such as the requirement that they are "agonistically toned" (p. 43) and would never contain "a vehicle so neutral as a list" (p. 42), the observation regarding mnemonic patterns certainly applies to the early sūtras.

32. Chidester, p. 11.
33. Ong, pp. 78, 85. See also, on the shift from ear to eye, Marshall MacLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
34. Ong, p. 15.
35. Ibid., p. 78.
36. For examples, see Jack Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
37. The other three criteria were that it be the words of a formally constituted Saṅgha, of a small group of elders, or of a single learned monk. It should also be in harmony with the other sūtras and the *Vinaya*.
38. Tāranātha, *Taranatha's Geschichte des Buddhismus in Indien*, trans. Anton Schiefner (Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1965), pp. 61 ff., cited in A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p. 6.
39. Lopez (n. 12 above), p. 39.
40. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (n. 15 above), pp. 44-50.
41. *Gaṇḍavyūha* (n. 2 above), p. 14.
42. Ibid., p. 15.
43. The notion of the Buddha as a transcendent, godlike being, however, is not unknown in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Mahāsaṅghikas taught the notion of a supermundane Buddha, e.g., in the *Mahāvastu*. See Williams (n. 18 above), p. 18.
44. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, p. 16.
45. Williams, p. 30, citing the translation by P. M. Harrison in "Buddhānusmṛti in the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1978): 35-57, quote on 43.
46. *Gaṇḍavyūha*, p. 23.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 24.
49. Edward Conze, trans., *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom (Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 38-39.
50. See, e.g., *Aṣṭa* (n. 21 above), pp. 196, 476.

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