

ASPECTS OF THE STUDY OF THE (EARLIER) INDIAN MAHĀYĀNA*

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Il est aussi facile dans l'Inde de constater des prolongements que malaisé d'assister à des ruptures. (L. Renou, *Études védiques et pāṇinéennes*, tome VI [Paris, 1960], p. 11)

Proem

As a continuation of his monumental *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, published in 1958, Étienne Lamotte once envisaged writing a second volume to be devoted to the Indian Mahāyāna. This second part was, however, never to appear, although Lamotte had already published in 1954 a preliminary study entitled 'Sur la formation du Mahāyāna'.¹ He did, however, complete several major, and very extensive, publications on the Mahāyāna, such as his richly annotated translations of Śāstras like Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, Vasubandhu's *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, and the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*) ascribed to (a) Nāgārjuna,² as

* This paper had its origin in an outline of some important topics and problems in the history of Mahāyāna which was prepared for a conference on early Mahāyāna Buddhism in 2001. This will explain the necessarily minimalist, and somewhat aphoristic, treatment of certain topics in this paper. A full and complete study would of course fill volumes and constitute a comprehensive history of the subject. Needless to say, then, this paper claims to be neither an exhaustive account of the topics touched on nor a comprehensive survey of all research relevant to them. The purpose of these lines is also not to propound final — much less ready-made or theory-determined — solutions but, rather, to point up topics and problems in the history of Mahāyāna, and to indicate possible approaches to their study taking account of historical, philological, and theoretical issues. No hesitation has been felt in referring, in a few places, to a Tibetan source or interpretation because, although of course not contemporary with the issues being addressed here, for certain purposes such a source can be as valuable as the Western secondary literature.

¹ In: *Asiatica* (Festschrift F. Weller, Leipzig, 1954), pp. 377-96.

² In addition to Lamotte's *Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna* (5 volumes, Louvain/Louvain-la-Neuve, 1944-1980), reference can be made to his *Der Ver-*

well as no less important translations of Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the *Samdhinirmocana*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*. He moreover published valuable studies on the Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. Lamotte's works on the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* virtually amount to encyclopaedias of Mahāyāna, but not of course to histories strictly speaking of Mahāyāna.

It may be that Lamotte soon came to realize the truly daunting nature of any attempt to write a connected narrative history of the Mahāyāna as a whole, or even of the earlier Indian Mahāyāna alone. And this could explain why he never published such a work. In the circumstances, the most practical approach may well be the one actually adopted by him, namely the exploration of individual problems and topics in the Mahāyāna on the one hand, and on the other the copiously annotated translation of Mahāyānist canonical texts and their commentaries.

It might also be that any single project — such as the one discussed at the First (and only) Lamotte Memorial Symposium held in September 1989 in Brussels³ — for a comprehensive and connected history will fragment and break up in the face of the complexity of the Mahāyāna as a religious, philosophical and social movement.⁴

It is worthy of notice, moreover, that the great treatises of leading Mahāyānist doctors have actually utilized only a portion of the vast stock of ideas and impulses found in the Mahāyāna Sūtras. This appears to hold true for Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, and for Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as well as for later masters who composed more or less encyclopaedic *Summae* of Buddhist doctrine (such as the Tibetans Klon chen pa [1308-1363] and Tson kha pa [1357-1419]).

fasser des Upadeśa und seine Quellen (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, I. Philolog.-Historische Kl., Göttingen, 1973).

³ See *Premier colloque Étienne Lamotte* (Bruxelles-Liège 24-27 septembre 1989; Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991), Avant-propos, p. vii.

⁴ An outline of several aspects of Mahāyānist thought has been provided by P. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the doctrinal foundations* (London, 1989); but as is indicated by the subtitle, this book is not intended by its author as a history of the Mahāyāna in the sense under discussion here. Among other recent publications, reference can also be made to Hirakawa Akira, *A history of Indian Buddhism* (Honolulu, 1990), Part III: Early Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The terminology: Mahāyāna, Bodhisattvayāna, Vaipulya, etc., in relation to Śrāvakayāna, Hīnayāna, Sthaviravāda / Theravāda, etc.

Doubtless, for many students of Buddhism, the expression Mahāyāna ‘Great Vehicle’ is (in part at least) tolerably well-understood as to its reference or denotation.⁵ The same does not, however, hold true for the entirety of the connotations and implications of this term and concept.

The meaning of the expression Mahāyāna may be defined for instance by reference to the correlative, but antonymic, term Hīnayāna, or to the descriptive and more neutral term Śrāvakayāna — the ‘Vehicle’ of the Buddha’s Auditor-disciples — and eventually also by reference to Pratyekabuddhayāna and Vajrayāna or Mantrayāna / Mantranaya (on which see below). But the pair Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna ‘Lower Vehicle’ is not always semantically well-defined and referentially unproblematic (see below).⁶ *Agrayāna* ‘foremost Vehicle’ is regarded as an equivalent of *mahāyāna*.

Whilst a follower of the latter — the *mahāyānika* / *mahāyānīya* — might very well describe himself as such, a follower of the other, ‘lesser’, Yāna would not normally call himself a Hīnayānist. But the term *śrāvakayānika* / *śrāvakayānīya* may be applied to him. As for the appellation Theravādin (or Sthaviravādin) for a proponent of the Theravāda (Sthaviravāda), originally its meaning does not seem to have been defined in opposition to the Mahāyāna (whatever may be the case in much more recent times; see below).

Mahāyāna may be defined in terms of its quasi synonym Bodhisattvayāna: the way, or ‘Vehicle’, of the Mahāyānist is indeed the way of the (aspirant) Bodhisattva leading, ultimately, to buddhahood. It also came to be widely known as the Pāramitāyāna (Tib. *phar phyin gyi theg pa*)

⁵ It has been argued by S. Karashima that alongside the word *mahāyāna* the term and concept of *mahājñāna* needs to be taken into consideration in the present context; both terms being derivable from MIA *mahājñāna*, a play on both meanings of this word was thus possible. See most recently S. Karashima, ‘Who composed the Lotus Sūtra’, *ARIRIAB* 4 (2000), pp. 171-2; id. ‘Some features of the language of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*’, *IJJ* 44 (2001), pp. 215-17. Cf. O. von Hinüber, *Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick* (Vienna, 2001) §251.

The word *yāna* may mean either ‘vehicle’ (Tib. *theg pa*) or ‘way’ (Chin. *dao*). The connotations of the word have been discussed recently by T. Vetter, ‘Once again on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism’, *WZKS* 45 (2001), p. 62 f.

⁶ cf., e.g., D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘Some observations on the present and future of Buddhist studies’, *JIASB* 15 (1992), p. 110 ff.

‘Vehicle of the Perfections’, even though *pāramitās* are recognized also within the Śrāvakayāna and although the Mahāyāna may on occasion embrace in addition the Vajrayāna or ‘Adamantine Vehicle’.⁷

In addition to the expression *bodhisattvayāna*, the term *bodhisattvacaryā* ‘practice of the Bodhisattva’ is also found. It is attested for instance in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* xxiv.32 — a text of the utmost importance for the early history of the Mahāyāna since it is evidently as old as many a Mahāyānasūtra (and older indeed than some). This idea was later to be expounded in Śāntideva / Śāntadeva’s renowned *Bodhi(sattva)caryāvatāra*.

In the final analysis, Mahāyāna may be understood as ‘Buddhayāna’. The term *buddhayāna* is found for example in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* xvi (p. 319), alongside *bodhisattvayāna* (and *bodhisattvayānika*), and in the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§§ 12 and 118). This idea may be understood against the background of theories of the Buddha-lineage or Buddha-class (*buddhagotra*) and the Single Vehicle (*ekayāna*), and hence of the doctrine of the ‘Embryo’ of the Tathāgata (*tathāgatagarbha*) according to which sentient beings (*sattva*) without exception are ‘buddhamorphic’, that is, that they all possess within themselves a naturally existing ‘lineage / gene’ (*prakṛtisthagotra*) for supreme and perfect Awakening (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*) and thus have the capacity of sooner or later becoming *buddhas*. On the other hand, the idea of the Bodhisattvayāna, or of the Buddhayāna, can also be understood within the frame of the theory of three ultimate Vehicles (*triyāna*) according to which only those beings possessing the *gotra* of buddhahood — i.e. those following the Bodhisattvayāna / Mahāyāna — will finally become *buddhas*, whereas beings of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* classes follow the Śrāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddhayāna and so ultimately become Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas.⁸

⁷ Also attested is the term *pāramitānaya*, which is then contrasted with *mantranaya*, i.e. Vajrayāna or Mantrayāna. Together this pair *pāramitānaya* and *mantranaya* constitutes the Mahāyāna in Advayaśāstra’s *Tattvaratnāvalī*. This is of course not the place to pursue the question of the classical dichotomy between Sūtra and Tantra, it being recognized that in earlier times texts classified as Sūtras may contain (proto-)Tantric elements.

⁸ For aspects of these doctrines see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra* (Paris, 1969).

In his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* xii.36, Candrakīrti interprets *mahāyāna* — which he derives in this case from **mahad-yāna* according to the *pr̥ṣodara* formation in Pāṇini

The Mahāyānist is known in canonical sources as *mahāyānika*, and also as *mahāyānānuyāyin* ‘following the Mahāyāna’, *mahāyānasamprasthita*, ‘set out (or: entered / engaged, Tib. *yañ dag par žugs pa*) in the Mahāyāna’, and *mahāyānādhimukta* ‘adhering with conviction (Tib. *mos pa*) to the Mahāyāna’. The *mahāyānika* is contrasted with the *śrāvakayānika* and the *pratyekabuddhayānika*. As for the *bodhisattva*, he is described as the child of the Buddha or Jina (*jinaputra*, etc.). But as said in Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra* (i.1) following the *Kāśyapaparivarta* (§ 88), *buddhas* are born of *bodhisattvas*; and, as also stated in Nāgārjuna’s *Ratnāvalī* (ii.74), the triad of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), the mind of non-duality (i.e. non-dual discriminative knowledge, *prajñā*), and the *bodhicitta* are the causes of the *bodhisattva*, *mahākaruṇā* being here the chief. *Prajñāpāramitā* is the mother (*mātr*, Tib. *yum*) or genetrix of the *bodhisattva* and *buddha* (*jinajanani*, etc.).

The contextual position of the Mahāyāna

The question arises as to how, in the Buddhist traditions, the expressions Mahāyāna ‘Great Vehicle’, Śrāvakayāna ‘Vehicle of the Auditor’ and Hīnayāna ‘Lesser / Inferior / Defective Vehicle’ have actually been used. Meaning is, after all, determined through use, that is, through linguistic usage and the corresponding discursive concepts.

In the first place, it has to be observed that Śrāvakayāna is not necessarily just a polite (and perhaps ‘politically correct’) expression for Hīnayāna. The word ‘Śrāvakayāna’ has been used by scholars as a general (if sometimes imprecise) term to cover (i) teachings of ‘Early Buddhism’ (reputedly) delivered by the Śākyamuni to his auditor-disciples (*śrāvaka*) and contained in the old canon (the Āgamas / Nikāyas, the Vinaya, and even the Abhidharma in canons where the latter has been accepted as *buddhavacana*), and (ii) doctrines set forth in commentarial and scholastic treatises belonging to the various old orders / schools (*nikāya*) (such as the

(VI.iii.109) — as the *yāna* of the *buddhas* (ed. La Vallée Poussin, p. 400.9-10). In the same passage he refers to the *ekayāna* doctrine, describing the *trīyāna* doctrine as only *ābhiprāyika* ‘intentional’ (p. 399.10).

For the Bodhisattva in general, Har Dayal’s *The Bodhisattva doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit literature* (London, 1932) remains useful.

Abhidharma and the writings of the Sautrāntikas). Between these two uses of the word there is, unfortunately, room for overlapping and, hence, imprecision and ambiguity. As for the term ‘Hīnayāna’, it is conceptually narrower than ‘Śrāvakayāna’, and strictly speaking it would apply to doctrines antithetical to the Bodhisattvayāna (regardless of where these doctrines might be found). At all events, the fact remains that usage has varied through the enormous and (synchronically and diachronically) various literary output of Buddhism, and that the two words have not always been sharply defined in relation to each other. In practice, they have sometimes been used with a virtually identical reference in so far as the two *may* denote the same thing: the way of the Arhat. But even on the level of the old canon it would be possible to distinguish between what is (broadly speaking) Śrāvakayānistic (that is, more or less continuous with Mahāyāna) and what is, strictly speaking, Hīnayānistic (that is, discontinuous with and antithetical to Mahāyāna).

Secondly, even if ‘Arhat’ and ‘Bodhisattva’ appear as contrastive, antithetical, terms and if the types of persons referred to by these two expressions are not only distinct but opposable, it has nevertheless to be recalled that *arhant* — alongside *bhagavant* and *samyaksambuddha* — is a regular and altogether standard epithet of a *buddha*. In other words, it cannot correctly be held that, in all circumstances, the ideal of Arhatship is antithetically opposed to (and even contradictory with) that of bodhisattvahood or buddhahood. This well-established and essential fact is sometimes lost sight of in discussions of the denotation and connotations of the terms Bodhisattvayāna and Mahāyāna.⁹

⁹ It may be observed that a word such as **arhad-yāna* does not seem to be attested, so that the distinction between the two Vehicles is not reflected in a technical vocabulary of *this* particular sort. For the ‘way of the Arhat’ in Chinese, however, see T. Vetter, *loc. cit.*, p. 63.

Concerning the old canonical (Nikāya/Āgama) metrical formula that lists epithets of the Bhagavant, see H. Bechert, “*Alte Veḍhas*” in *Pali-Kanon* (NAWG, Philol.-hist. Kl., Göttingen, 1988), pp. 126-7, where in a Sarvāstivādin version of the formula the word *arhant* is lacking (reading *bhagavāṃs tathāgataḥ*... against a Mūlasarvāstivādin version in the *Dīvyāvadāna*, p. 196, which reads *bhagavāṃs tathāgato ’rhan*...). The Pali formula lacks the word *tathāgata* and reads *bhagavā arahaṃ*... (The different versions all have *sugata*.) As for the Mahāyāna, in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (pp. 48, 368), *arhant* follows immediately on *tathāgata*. The formula has been explained by Haribhadra, *Abhisamayālamkāralokā* ii.11 (p. 183), as well as in the **Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* ascribed to Nāgārjuna (see E. Lamotte, *Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, i [Louvain, 1944], p. 127).

Among the great Mahāyānist treatises, the fourth chapter of the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikās* — the Śrāvakatattvaviniścayāvatāra — by the sixth-century Mahāyānist doxographer and master of the (Svātantrika-)Madhyamaka school Bhā(va)viveka (Bhavya) contains a critical discussion of Śrāvakayāna in relation to Mahāyāna. Asaṅga's earlier *Mahāyānasamgraha* can also be mentioned. The works by Mahāyānist masters referring to the Śrāvakayāna are too numerous to list here.

With reference to the Mahāyāna as a canonical literary corpus or teaching — in other words the Bodhisattvapiṭaka —, the term *vaipulya*, denoting one of the (twelve) *aṅgas*, has also been used in Sanskrit sources.¹⁰

It should be observed, moreover, that certain Mahāyānist sources relativize, or perhaps rather deconstruct and so to say 'zero', the very notion of a 'Vehicle' (*yāna*) — even *mahāyāna* itself and *ekayāna* — by invoking the idea of *ayāna* 'no-vehicle'.¹¹ Such deconstruction or 'zeroing' of a concept is a frequent and very characteristic feature of Mahāyānist thought which is applicable also to the Tathāgata's verbalized teaching (*akṣara*, *deśanā*, etc.), i.e. the object and content of a '*yāna*'.¹²

The semantic value of the term Mahāyāna will, then, vary according to whether the context in which it is invoked is the *triyāna* system — that

¹⁰ See Asaṅga, *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (ed. Wogihara), p. 96, and *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (ed. P. Pradhan), p. 79 — where in addition to *vaipulya* (*žin tu rgyas pa'i sde*) the equivalents *vaidalya* (*rnam par 'thag pa*) and *vaitulya* (*mtshuhs bral*) are enumerated, as they also are in the *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*, p. 96, where the three terms are in fact described as *paryāyas* of *mahāyāna* — and p. 83 ff.; and Vasubandhu, *Vyākhyāyukti* (D), ff. 82b-83a, 96b ff. In some texts *vaitulya* replaces *vaipulya*. The *Vibhāṣāprabhāvyrti* on the *Abhidharmadīpa* (ed. Jaini, p. 101) refers to the *vaitulikaśāstra*; elsewhere the same work refers several times to the *vaitulika*.

Cf. recently P. Skilling, *Mahāsūtras* ii (Oxford, 1997), pp. 31-42. And for the Vetulaka see A. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule* (Saigon, 1955), pp. 254-6. Concerning the Bodhisattvapiṭaka, see U. Pagel, *The Bodhisattvapiṭaka* (Tring, 1995).

¹¹ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, pp. 74, 181, with *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* ii.203-205 (and x.457-459) (cf. iii.1a = x.188a).

¹² See *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* iii.1b (= x.188b); and the *Tathāgataguhyasūtra* (quoted by Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* xviii.7 [p. 366] and xxv.24 [p. 539]). Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Three studies in the history of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophy* (*Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka thought*, Part I, Vienna, 2000), p. 113. In its turn, this idea of *ayāna* is no doubt linked with that of Āryan Silence (*ārya-tūṣṇībhāva*), on which see *ibid.*, pp. 154-5, 213; and *id.*, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy: Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā i.I and Tsoṅ kha pa / rGyal tshab rje's dKa' gnad / gnas brgyad kyi zin bris* (*Studies in Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka thought*, Part II, Vienna, 2002), pp. 19 (on the difference from *mūkatā* 'speechlessness'), 99.

is, the system of three essentially different, and potentially opposed, spiritual ways of the Śrāvaka, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva (or future Buddha) — and the connected system of three distinct ‘lineages’ / spiritual ‘genes’ (*gotra*) which postulates *ultimately and finally* distinct spiritual goals (i.e. buddhahood *vs.* arhatship) as well as paths, or whether, on the contrary, the given context is the *ekayāna* system of the Single (unique) Vehicle — according to which the way of the Śrāvaka merges, at a certain stage, with that of the Bodhisattva or future Buddha.¹³

In addition, as noted above, Mahāyāna has often been used as an equivalent of Pāramitāyāna / Pāramitānaya ‘way/method of the (Mahāyānist) Perfections’ (and of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*), in contrast to the Vajra- / Mantra-yāna / °naya (which, as a so-called ‘experiential’ way, may also be complementarily opposed to a scholastic and analytical Lakṣaṇayāna / Lakṣaṇanaya, the way or method of technical philosophical analysis and definition).¹⁴ But at other times Mahāyāna comprises both the Pāramitāyāna and the Vajrayāna.

The terms just discussed — *mahāyāna*, *pāramitāyāna*, *śrāvakayāna*, *hīnayāna*, *sthavira* / *thera-vāda*, etc. — are thus not wholly symmetrical and neatly demarcated as either synonyms or antonyms. And it is clear that, philosophically (gnoseologically) and soteriologically, the term and concept *mahāyāna* has had several distinguishable uses and connotations, and sometimes indeed even denotations, depending on the exact way it has been employed in a particular context or situation.

Theravāda / *Sthaviravāda*, and the question of a ‘Common’, ‘Mainstream’ or ‘Conservative’ Buddhism

Terminological and historical confusion has unfortunately been injected into our discussions by writers who (perhaps out of a desire to be polite

¹³ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*.

¹⁴ T. Vetter has, however, argued for the existence at an early time of a major difference between *Prajñāpāramitā* and Mahāyāna in his article ‘Once again on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism’, *WZKS* 45 (2001), pp. 59-89, opining that *Prajñāpāramitā* was once connected with Śrāvakas rather than with Bodhisattvas and the way to Buddhahood. See also his earlier article ‘On the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the subsequent introduction of *Prajñāpāramitā*’, *AS/EA* 48 (1994), pp. 1241-81.

and non-judgemental) have, quite unwarrantedly, renamed the Śrāvakayāna or Hīnayāna ‘Theravāda’ (or ‘Sthaviravāda’).

The Pali word *theravāda* has (at least) three distinct meanings: (i) ‘Teaching of the Elders’ (and thus not a particular school or Nikāya but, rather, the pristine tradition of the Buddha’s immediate disciples, this usage being attested in several sources including ones counted as scriptural); (ii) the tradition of the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka (statistically this may be the most common use of the word in non-canonical Pali); and (iii) the Pali equivalent of Skt. *sthaviravāda* (i.e. a primary Nikāya of which, e.g., the Sabbatthivāda [Sarvāstivāda] is a division, this being accordingly a doxographical use of the word).

In terms of the last usage, *theravāda* is, of course, only one of the many orders / schools (*nikāya*) of the Śrāvakayāna. And it cannot therefore be considered as coextensive and coterminous with either Śrāvakayāna or Hīnayāna.

Furthermore, it appears that the Bodhisattva’s career as a spiritual model is not entirely unknown to Śrāvakayānist schools such as the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda, which is regarded as a division of the old Sthaviravāda / Theravāda.¹⁵

The use of the description ‘mainstream Buddhism’ basically to refer to the Śrāvakayāna, or to the way of the Arhat, is also problematic. It would seem to imply that, beside it, the Mahāyāna was somehow just a turbulent eddy or stagnant backwater in the great flow of Buddhist thought (which is, incidentally, tantamount to suggesting that the Mahāyāna was no true *mahāyāna*). Some scholars have instead preferred the appellation ‘Conservative Buddhism’, an expression not open to the objection just

¹⁵ On the Bodhisattva in the Pali canon and in the Theravāda, etc., see W. Rahula, ‘The Bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda and Mahāyāna’, in: *Zen and the taming of the bull* (London, 1978), pp. 71-77; A.L. Basham, ‘The evolution of the concept of the Bodhisattva’, in: L. Kawamura (ed.), *The Bodhisattva doctrine in Buddhism* (Waterloo, Ont., 1981), pp. 45-73; and J. Samuels, ‘The Bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhist theory and practice: A re-evaluation of the Bodhisattva-Śrāvaka opposition’, *PEW* 47 (1997), pp. 399-415. For some references see also the remarks by D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘Some observations on the present and future of Buddhist studies’, *JIAS* 15 (1992), p. 112 n. 6. The place of the Bodhisattva in the Theravāda, in particular in the *Jātakanidāna* and related texts, has recently been studied by S. Gaffney, *The Jātakanidāna* (Univ. of London thesis, 2003).

mentioned. But it should be remembered that, in some of its traditions, Mahāyāna itself may be 'conservative' (those following it sometimes, e.g. in Tibet, incorporate Āgamic and Śrāvakayānist elements into their practice, and follow a Vinaya; see below, pp. 30-31).

The degree to which the Mahāyāna was a minority movement has still to be explored thoroughly. It was presumably so at the very outset. But — the testimony of the literary texts being sometimes difficult to assess (and notoriously subject to more or less tendentious interpretations), and it being no simple thing accurately to evaluate the evidence of inscriptions — how in fact are the relevant materials to be understood and checked for any given epoch and region? For example, are Hsüan-tsang's (602-664) and Yi-ching's (635-713) accounts complete and conclusive in this regard?¹⁶ There may here exist the risk of trying to explain the unknown by the equally (or more) unknown: *obscurum per obscurius*.

It is on the other hand quite appropriate to speak of a 'Common Buddhism', one shared by Mahāyānists and Śrāvakayānists (see below, pp. 29, 38-39).

Types of sources for the history of the earlier Indian Mahāyāna

For the history of Mahāyāna the evidence from inscriptions is of major significance. Its value lies first in the pieces of information which inscriptions yield directly, on their own account, and secondly in the means of comparison and control which they provide for what is found in Sūtras and Śāstras. Here it is necessary to take account of two main types of evidence. On the one side there are written textual sources, both literary and epigraphical, the literary ones being usually subdivided into canonical scripture (Sūtra) and non-canonical scholastic comment (Śāstra). On the other side there are so-called material remains, many of which provide only indirect, inferential, evidence; such remains are monumental (architectural, archaeological, etc.) and iconographical (sculpture, painting, etc.); coins and artefacts also merit consideration.

¹⁶ See E. Lamotte, 'Sur la formation du Mahāyāna', p. 393 ff.; *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 597 ff. See further B. Wang, 'Buddhist Nikāyas through ancient Chinese eyes', in: F. Bandurski *et al.* (ed.), *Untersuchungen zur buddhistischen Literatur* (Göttingen, 1994), p. 181 ff.

Starting mainly, but not solely, from about the fifth century CE, i.e. from the Gupta period, a considerable number of Indian inscriptions bear witness to the existence of the Mahāyāna. The expression *mahāyānānu-yāyin* ‘following the Mahāyāna’ (and, occasionally, *mahāyānika*) appears — in conjunction with the expressions *śākyabhikṣu* and *paramopāsaka* — in inscriptions dating from the sixth century. Also, beginning for the most part with the Gupta period, the idea that *all* sentient beings may attain the *anuttara(buddha)jñāna* ‘supreme Gnosis (of a *buddha*)’ — a concept that is entirely in harmony with the Mahāyāna in general and, in particular, with the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine — is found in inscriptions. This idea is, however, already attested in an earlier Brāhmī inscription from Govindnagar (Mathurā) dating from the reign of the Kuṣāṇa ruler Huveṣka / Huviṣka.¹⁷ Similarly, the attainment by *all* sentient beings (*sarvasattva*)

¹⁷ The Govindnagar (Mathurā) Brāhmī inscription from the time of Huveṣka / Huviṣka (the successor of Kaniṣka I) — dated in the year 26, i.e. the year 104 CE according to G. Fussmann, ‘La place des *Sukhāvātī-vyūha* dans le bouddhisme indien’, *JA* 1999, p. 541 — has: ... *imena k(u)śalam(ūlena sar(va)(sat)[v]ā anut(t)ara(m) bud(dh)ajñānaṃ prā(pnva)ṃ(tu)* ... Concerning this inscription see further below; it was discussed by G. Schopen in *JIAS* 10 [1987], p. 101. (Kuṣāṇa chronology has recently been examined by J. Cribb, ‘The early Kushan kings’, in: M. Alram and D. Klimburg-Salter, *Coins, art, and chronology* [Vienna, 1999], pp. 177-206; id., ‘Early Indian history’, in: M. Willis, *Buddhist reliquaries* [London, 2000], p. 46 ff.; and H. Falk, ‘The *yuga* of Spḥujiddhvaja and the era of the Kuṣāṇas’, *Silk Road art and archaeology* 7 [2001], pp. 121-36, who opts for 127 CE as the date of accession of Kaniṣka.) Regarding Huviṣka, see below. — For ... *sarvasatvānāṃ anuttarajñānāvāptaye* in the Toramāṇa Śāhī inscription from Kurā (Panjab), dated to the early sixth century, see G. Schopen, *EB* 32 (2000), p. 15. — Further references in Brāhmī inscriptions to the attainment by all beings of supreme Gnosis associated with a *śākyabhikṣu* or *śākyabhikṣuṇī* as donor — but with no explicit mention of the *mahāyāna* —, are found among the epigraphs dated to the Gupta period published by H. Lüders, *Mathurā inscriptions* (Göttingen, 1961) §§ 8, 67, 186 (cf. 185). In this corpus, however, there appears to exist no fixed and regular correlation between the dedication of a Bodhisattva (image) and either the Mahāyāna or the *śākyabhikṣu*. In connexion with the dedication of a Bodhisattva (image), the ‘Samitiyas’ are mentioned in § 80 of Lüders, and the Dharmaguptakas in § 150; and in the very fragmentary § 134 and § 157, the Mahāsāṃghikas may perhaps be found. Regarding the *anuttarajñāna* formula in inscriptions, see also D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, p. 31 n. 2.

Concerning the general question of evidence for early Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions, this line of research has been pursued — following notably on M. Shizutani (‘Mahāyāna inscriptions in the Gupta period’, *IBK* 10 [1962], p. 358 ff.; cf. *Indo buddhō himēi mokuroku* [Kyōto, 1979]), and Ajay Mitra Shastri, *An outline of early Buddhism (A historical survey of Buddhology, Buddhist schools and Sanghas mainly based on the study of pre-Gupta*

of *nirvāṇa* has been alluded to in a Kuṣāṇa inscription from Hidda; this idea is again in keeping with the soteriological universalism of the

inscriptions [Vāraṇasī, 1965]) — by G. Schopen; see his ‘Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions’ *IJ* 21 (1979), pp. 1-19; ‘Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism’, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985), p. 38 ff.; ‘The inscription on the Kuṣāṇa image of Amitābha and the character of the early Mahāyāna in India’, *JIAS* 10 (1987), pp. 99-137; and ‘The Mahāyāna in the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism’, *EB* 32 (2000), pp. 13 f. (concluding, p. 15: ‘In India, it appears more and more certain that the Mahāyāna was not institutionally, culturally or art historically significant until after the 5th century, and not until then did the Mahāyāna doctrine have any significant visible impact on the intentions of Buddhist donors’); and R. Salomon and G. Schopen, ‘On an alleged reference to Amitābha in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription on a Gandhāran relief’, *JIAS* 25 [2002], pp. 3-31 (this inscription is very unfortunately quite fragmentary). See also R. Salomon, *Indian epigraphy* (New York, 1998), pp. 241-42 (on the significance for Buddhist studies of the inscriptional evidence in general); id., ‘A fragment of a collection of Buddhist legends’, in: J. Braarvig, *Buddhist manuscripts* (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection III, Oslo, 2002), Vol. ii, p. 256 (for a palm-leaf manuscript fragment dated to the fourth century in which King Huveṣka / Huviṣka — presumably the Kuṣāṇa king — is described as [mahā]yā[nasa]mpraśtita); id., ‘A stone inscription in Central Asian Gāndhārī from Endere (Xinjiang)’, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 13 (2002) (for an inscription dated to the middle of the third century where a ruler of Kroraina / Shan-shan is described as mahayanāsampraśtita- and sacadharma stida-). For the epithet mahāyāna-sampraśtita, see also the Niya document no. 390 in: A.M. Boyer et al., *Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in Chinese Turkestan* (Oxford, 1920), Pt. i, p. 140.

Regarding the expressions *śākyabhikṣu* and *paramopāsaka*, their exact extensional reference in Indian inscriptions is not entirely clear, although (as already mentioned above in this note) the association with the Mahāyānist idea of the attainment of supreme Buddha-Gnosis by all beings is frequent. Subsequently, among the Newars of Nepal, the two highest ‘priestly’ classes are the *śākyabhikṣus* (now connected with a conventual *bahī*) and the *vajrācāryas* (now connected with a *bahā*), the first name having a long and complex history in Nepal. On the terms *śākyabhikṣu* and *paramopāsaka*, see recently L. Cousins, ‘*Śākyabhikkhu* / *sakyabhikkhu* / *śākyabhikṣu*: A mistaken link to the Mahāyāna?’’, *Nagoya Studies in Indian culture and Buddhism* 23 (2003), pp. 1-28.

As for the question whether the phrase *ayāya sambodhiṃ* / *nikrami sambodhi* (etc.) in Aśoka’s Rock Edict VIII might already refer to wide accessibility of Awakening (a fundamental Mahāyānist idea), see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra* (Paris, 1969), p. 32 note; id., *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l’Inde et du Tibet* (Paris, 1995), p. 61 n. 124. (Pali *sambodhiparāyana* and Skt. *sambodhiparāyana*, meaning ‘aiming at Awakening’ and applied to a certain category of being, are, of course well-attested in canonical and commentarial texts; see our *Théorie*, pp. 196-8.) Cf. L. de La Vallée Poussin, *L’Inde aux temps des Maurya* (Paris, 1930), pp. 104-108. T. Vetter’s cursory discussion in ‘On the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the subsequent introduction of *Prajñāpāramitā*’, *AS/EA* 48 (1994), p. 1243, n. 3 — referring only to A. Basham, ‘Sambodhi in Aśoka’s 8th Rock Edict’, *JIAS* 2 (1979), pp. 81-83, and ‘The evolution of the concept of the Bodhisattva’, in: L. Kawamura (ed.), *The Bodhisattva doctrine in Buddhism* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1981), pp. 45-73 — is not conclusive.

Mahāyāna.¹⁸ Moreover, a *pratimā* or image of the *bhagavant* and *buddha* established in honour of ‘all the *buddhas* (*sarvabuddha*)’ has been mentioned in the Govindnagar inscription just cited.¹⁹

It is no doubt not entirely certain just what inferences are to be drawn from the use of such formulae in regard to religion. At all events, with the very important exception of a few epigraphs from the Kuṣāṇa period mentioned above — the Govindnagar inscription alluding to the attainment of the *anuttara jñāna* by all *sattvas*, the Hidda inscription mentioning the attainment of *nirvāṇa* by all beings, and an inscription in Central Asian Gāndhārī from Endere (Xinjiang) referring to one who is *mahāyānasamprasthita* — it is noteworthy that the available inscriptional evidence for the Mahāyāna post-dates by far our earliest evidence for the existence of important literary texts of the Mahāyāna. The precise significance of the absence of more abundant early epigraphic evidence for the Mahāyāna is, however, not easy to assess. It might perhaps be interpreted as indicating that, in the earlier period, the Mahāyāna was only a minority movement relatively to so-called ‘mainstream’ (see above, pp. 11-12) Buddhism, or maybe even that it was some kind of hidden or esoteric movement. But we must ask ourselves just what sort of testimony inscriptions can, in principle, be expected to provide in matters of religion and philosophy. The above-mentioned reference to one who is *mahāyānasamprasthita* provides one such piece of evidence. And the reference to the attainment by all sentient beings of *anuttarajñāna*²⁰

¹⁸ This Kharoṣṭhī inscription from Hidda near Jalalabad on a jar containing a *bodhisattva*-relic is dated to the year 28 of the Kuṣāṇa era; it refers to the requisites for the *nirvāṇa* of all beings as the purpose of the deposit. See S. Konow, *Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions* (CII, 1929), p. 158.

See also the materials assembled in R. Salomon and G. Schopen, ‘On an alleged reference to Amitābha in a Kharoṣṭhī inscription on a Gandhāran relief’, *JIAS* 25 (2002), p. 15. This article refers to the identification of a sculpture earlier identified as being of Amitābha by J. Brough (‘Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara in an inscribed Gandhāran sculpture’, *IT* 10 [1982], pp. 65-70) and by G. Fussman (‘La place des *Sukhāvati-vyūha* dans le bouddhisme indien’, *JA* 1999, p. 543). — In his recent *Beiträge zur Erklärung der Senavarma-Inscript* (AWL Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- u. Sozialwiss. Kl., 2003), pp. 47-48, O. von Hinüber has observed that it is not quite certain whether, in the first century, King Senavarma of Oḍi was hoping for *nirvāṇa* for himself alone or for all beings, but he adds that the (unclear) context suggests the latter interpretation.

¹⁹ See G. Fussman, ‘La place des *Sukhāvati-vyūha* dans le bouddhisme indien’, *JA* 1999, p. 541; and R. Salomon and G. Schopen, *JIAS* 25 (2002), pp. 19, 24.

²⁰ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, p. 31 n. 2. Compare, however, G. Schopen, *IJJ* 21 (1979), pp. 7-8.

as well as the reference to the attainment of *nirvāṇa* by all beings yield very significant further pieces of early evidence. This might hold even for the mention of ‘all buddhas’ (*sarvabuddha*) in the Govindnagar inscription, as well as in other epigraphs (although in inscriptions connected with, e.g., the Mahāsāṃghika and ‘Samitiya’ schools of the Śrāvakayāna this idea is perhaps rather a proto-Mahāyānist feature). (It seems that no mention has been made in inscriptions of a *bodhisattvayāna*.)

Now, early Mahāyāna would appear neither to have been generally established as an organized institutional entity nor to have constituted a socio-religious order separate and apart from the Nikāyas of the Śrāvakayāna, which are better attested epigraphically at this early time. Accordingly, the absence from many a donative inscription of mention of either the Mahāyāna or the Mahāyānist is perhaps just what might be expected in the circumstances. Even if they were Mahāyānists, should dedicators of icons and foundations necessarily have mentioned this circumstance explicitly in their public donative epigraphs? It has been emphasized by Gregory Schopen that the Mahāyāna and Mahāyānists are only rarely mentioned as such in earlier donative inscriptions. But an argument from silence can have force only if there exists a cogent reason for expecting a given document to refer to some thing had it in fact been in existence at the time of the writing of the document. Otherwise, the *argumentum e silentio* is at best an inconclusive one. (Mention of the Mahāyāna in a votive inscription, and in a longer descriptive or narrative inscription attached, e.g., to an image or wall-painting, would perhaps be more expected.) In sum, concerning the frequency and distribution of Indian epigraphical evidence for the Mahāyāna, it is no simple matter to evaluate just how much can conclusively be deduced, statistically, geographically and demographically, from the failure of more inscriptions to refer to it explicitly at an early date.²¹

²¹ Lamotte’s observation that ‘[c]e mouvement, plus insinuant que révolutionnaire, prit le nom de Mahāyāna. [...] Il ne constituait pas une secte nouvelle, [...] mais il se développa au sein même des communautés religieuses’ (*Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, iii [Louvain, 1970], p. xiii), remains valid (except perhaps for his use of the word ‘secte’).

For the use by Mahāyānists of the Vinaya of a Śrāvakayānist Nikāya see below. On Mahāyāna at Ajanṭā, see recently G. Schopen, ‘The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism’, *EB* 32 (2000), pp. 17-18, who also refers (p. 16) to a couple of donative inscriptions — one from Gunaighar (Bengal, dated to the Gupta year 188) and the other

To the present writer it would appear that we have here a problem, methodological as well as epistemological, that has still to be resolved.²² The meticulous studies and analyses by Gregory Schopen of proto- and early Mahāyānist materials contained in the epigraphical evidence and his confrontation of it with other forms of literary evidence have been both refreshing and fruitful; and they have contributed appreciably to a better awareness among historians of Buddhism about the fundamental question as to what we know (and/or think we know). Nevertheless, the present writer would hesitate to go as far as Schopen has done in at least some of his publications in contrasting literary texts with inscriptions: the latter are after all themselves texts, and presumably no less subject to their own conventions and constraints than are religious and philosophical writings. It would seem problematic to set this fact aside and to treat texts inscribed on stone, clay, metal, etc., as somehow more privileged, reliable and historically significant than other kinds of texts written on palm leaf, birch bark, paper, etc. (The religious content of the two kinds of textual documentation — that coming from inscriptions and that provided in manuscripts — have on occasion converged, without of course becoming totally indistinguishable, as may be seen from parallels existing between certain epigraphs and some manuscript colophons.)

The problem under discussion also shows up through the gap appearing to exist between the image of the earlier Mahāyāna as a minority movement that is seemingly provided by earlier inscriptions on the one side, and on the other side the picture of the Mahāyāna as a powerful and dynamic movement that is found already in earlier Mahāyānist Sūtras (and Śāstras) available either in an Indian language or in the older Chinese translations (notwithstanding the fact that this movement has occasionally presented itself in its literature as a contested or embattled one).²³

from Jayarampur (Orissa) — where *mahāyānikas* are mentioned, along with the name Avalokiteśvara.

²² In *JIAS* 10 (1987), p. 125, G. Schopen observed, somewhat cryptically, that, 'if we are to make progress in our understanding we may have to finally realize that the history of the Mahāyāna *literature* and the history of the religious movement that bears the same name are not necessarily the same'. He then adds: 'This, I would think, should raise some interesting questions'. What these questions are, and what the answers might be, he did not then say.

²³ Concerning the important matter of a difference between the situation of the

This is of course not to contest in the slightest the fact that historically — by reason precisely of the very often more mundane contents of inscriptions as well as of their brevity and very nature not to speak of their more lasting material supports (stone, metal, etc.) — epigraphic evidence has been, in more than one civilization, different in kind from the sort of evidence provided by literary texts in the narrower sense. Concerning the archaeological, art historical, numismatic, and iconographic evidence, it is not possible to go into it here except to recall once more its very great importance for the history of Buddhism.

Some factors involved in the composition and transmission of Mahāyāna Sūtras

Among the factors favouring the composition (oral or written) of certain Mahāyāna Sūtras we meet with the concepts of the *anugraha* ‘kind

Mahāyāna as reflected in earlier Indian sources and the picture gained through Chinese sources — that is, on what he has termed the ‘non-alignment’ of these two pictures — see the valuable remarks made by G. Schopen, ‘The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism: Through a Chinese looking-glass’, *EB* 32 (2000), pp. 1-25. Schopen was right to call attention to such ‘non-alignment’, and perhaps even to speculate that ‘the history of the Mahāyāna in China may well have been the single most powerful determining force in how the history of the Mahāyāna in India was perceived and reconstructed’ (*ibid.*, p. 1). But then to conclude from such observations that ‘the Mahāyāna may have been assigned a place in the history of Indian Buddhism that it does not deserve’ (*ibid.*, p. 1) is something of a leap, aligning quantitative evaluation with historical and religio-philosophical study and analysis (which is in large part qualitative). To observe that Mahāyānists were not demographically dominant in a given period in India tells us little about what their qualitative religious and philosophical, and also historical, significance may have been. And the fact that (Buddhist) monks have not infrequently been the object of mirth or ridicule in certain circles of Indian society (see *ibid.*, pp. 3-4) tells us very little about the place of the Prajñāpāramitā, and of the Mahāyāna, in the thought of the ‘cultured Indian upper classes’. Monachism and monasticism — indeed sometimes even *saṃnyāsa* ‘renunciation’ (sometimes included among the *kalivarjya*) — have in fact been delicate and controversial matters in classical Indian society. The issue has no doubt to do also with questions as to the degree to which the Mahāyāna was a ‘mainstream’ or a minority movement (see above, pp. 11-12). Regarding Schopen’s discussion, on the basis of the *Ratnāvalī*, of the Mahāyāna as the object of scorn and attack at the time of Nāgārjuna (*ibid.*, p. 7 ff.), it should be kept in mind that in one form or another the *topos* of a *mahāyāna* under threat is a familiar one in Mahāyānist literature — both earlier, when the Mahāyāna was presumably still a minority movement within Buddhism, and later, when quantitatively it was (at least nominally) predominant in a given area —, and that this *topos* can concern not only menace and attack from outsiders but also internal pressures and decay among its nominal followers.

assistance', the *anubhāva* / *prabhāva* 'might', and the *adhiṣṭhāna* 'sustaining force' which the Buddha / Tathāgata deploys for the sake of his disciples as deliverers of Sūtras. Alongside these factors may be mentioned this promulgator's *pratibhāna* 'inspired intelligence, (expository) presence of mind';²⁴ this is the fourth of the analytical powers (*pratisamvid*) with which disciples are endowed, and which allows them to penetrate and give expression to the deepest 'thought' of the Buddha. Meditative visualization of the Buddha — a continuation of traditional *buddhānusmṛti* 'rememoration of the Buddha' rendering him immediately present — has also played a highly significant role, for instance in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra*. These factors require further detailed study and monographic treatment, for so many of the Sūtras of the Mahāyāna, whether delivered by the Buddha himself or not, can be described as inspirational or visionary, or both together.

Prefixed to different texts of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* we have a highly renowned *Prajñāpāramitastotra*, a devotional hymn to *Prajñāpāramitā* ascribed to Rāhulabhadra, and to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* there is attached a praise of the Mahāyāna entitled *Saddharmapuṇḍarikastava* also ascribed to Rāhulabhadra. And preceding the *Candrapradīpa* / *Samādhirājasūtra* there is found a hymn to the Mahāyāna that mentions both Candraprabha, the Bodhisattva *kumārabhūta* interlocutor of the Buddha, and the *Candrapradīpa* itself.

That there has, moreover, existed in the Mahāyāna a 'cult' of the book — or of the Sūtra as the 'body / icon of the Buddha' (*jinavighraha*) — is a well-known fact.²⁵

Compare the materials assembled by G. Schopen, *ibid.*, pp. 19-21. See n. 70 below.

²⁴ Rather than just 'eloquence' (as *pratibhāna* has so often been rendered), eloquence being rather the outcome of *pratibhāna*. For an example of the corresponding verb *pratibhā-*, see for instance the *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanādasūtra* referred to below, n. 35.

²⁵ See G. Schopen, 'The phrase *sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caitryabhūto bhavet* in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the cult of the book in Mahāyāna', *IJ* 17 (1975), pp. 147-81 (and id., 'The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism', *EB*, 32 [2000], p. 5). See also T. Vetter, 'On the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism', *AS/EA* 48 (1994), pp. 1242, 1266-72. It may be noted that the characterization of a Sūtra as *jinavighraha* is found for instance in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*.

In his article 'How the Mahāyāna began', *The Buddhist Forum* 1 (1990), pp. 21, R. Gombrich has written: '[...] the rise of the Mahāyāna is due to the use of writing. To put it more accurately: the early Mahāyāna texts owe their survival to the fact that they were writ-

It has been suggested (as seen in the preceding note) that the rise of the Mahāyāna was inseparably bound up with the use of writing. Writing and scripts (*lipi*) have indeed been mentioned in Sūtras.²⁶ And it may be taken for granted that the use of writing very significantly facilitated its development and spread: the Mahāyāna could hardly have assumed the form we now know, and which it has had for very many centuries, had it not been for the use of writing for recording its literature. But it seems that the further supposition that writing was a necessary precondition for the rise of the Mahāyāna would require considerably more supporting evidence than has hitherto been adduced. (Indeed, by a number of scholars it has been assumed that Mahāyāna Sūtras were originally composed and transmitted orally, in some cases perhaps in Middle Indo-Aryan.)

On versions and recensions of Mahāyāna Sūtras

Certain Mahāyāna Sūtras have been transmitted in two (or more) distinct recensions which cannot, it appears, be regarded as deriving from mere (scribal or aural) variants or revisions of either a single unified oral composition (perhaps in Middle Indo-Aryan) or from a single written text (be it in Middle Indo-Aryan or in [Buddhist] Sanskrit).

This is the case for example for the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, of which different recensions have been identified.²⁷ We are seemingly confronted

ten down; and any earlier texts which deviated from or criticized the canonical norms (by which I mean approximately the contents of the *Vinaya Khandhaka* and *Suttavibhaṅga* and the Four *Nikāyas*) could not survive because they were not included among the texts which the Saṅgha preserved orally.' Here the separate matters of the rise and the survival of the Mahāyāna have been telescoped together. There are of course indications that some Mahāyāna Sūtras were not set down in a single written redaction, and hence that they may have sometimes been transmitted orally.

²⁶ References — not all of Mahāyānist origin — to scripts are found, e.g., in the *Mahāvastu* (I, p. 135) and in the *Lipiśālāsamdarśanaparivarta* of the *Lalitavistara*. — On the use of writing by Buddhists, see O. von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien* (AWL, Mainz, 1989) (Stuttgart 1990). Cf. H. Falk, *Schrift im alten Indien* (Tübingen, 1993) §14.

²⁷ See the (fragments of) a Central Asian recension of this Sūtra published by H. Bechert, *Über die "Marburger Fragmente" des Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (NAWG, Göttingen, 1972), from the so-called 'Kashgar Manuscript' (actually from Khādaliq) various leaves of which are kept in different libraries. See further H. Bechert, 'Remarks on the textual history of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*', in: *Studies in Indo-Asian Art and Culture* 2 (Raghu Vira Commemoration Vol., New Delhi, 1973), pp. 21-27; id., 'Foreword' to Lokesh Chandra (ed.),

here with a remarkable and highly important phenomenon in the history of religio-philosophical literature that has still to be fully addressed by

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-Sūtra: Kashgar Manuscript (Tōkyō, 1977). Bechert's conclusion there (p. 6) is that the Central Asian manuscripts represent not 'just another recension of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, but an earlier stage of textual development', whilst 'the Nepalese-Kashmiri recension is the result of the work done by an individual scholar who has carefully remodeled the text of the Sūtra. His work shows the impact of Sanskrit renaissance on the development of Mahāyāna literature.' See recently G. Fussman, 'Les *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* indiens', *Annuaire du Collège de France* 1995-6, pp. 779-86; *Annuaire* 1996-7, pp. 749-763. — Romanized texts of parts of the manuscript recensions of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* have been published by (amongst others) S. Watanabe, Jiang Zhongxin, and H. Toda, who has also published a *Note on the Kashgar manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (Tōkyō, 1977) and studies on the manuscripts. See also K. Wille, *Fragments of a Manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra from Khādaliq* (Tōkyō, 2000); id., 'Weitere kleine *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*-Fragmente aus der Sammlung Hoernle', in: P. Harrison *et al.* (ed.), *Sūryacandrāya* (A. Yuyama Festschrift, Swistal-Odendorf, 1998), pp. 241-56. A new synoptic edition of the Sanskrit texts of the Sūtra (chap. 13) together with the Tibetan and Chinese translations in parallel is published by S. Karashima in 'A trilingual edition of the Lotus Sutra', *ARIRIAB* 6 (2003), pp. 85-182. — The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* indeed offers an advanced example of a Sanskrit Sūtra work the distinct recensions of which have often employed different wordings to express (approximately) the same basic content, but which it is hardly possible to trace back to a single *Urtext*, to one unique archetype. (Cases where the Chinese versions of a Sūtra differ significantly, and suggest the existence of distinct Indian recensions, are of course well known.)

Concerning the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, see J.W. de Jong, 'Sanskrit fragments of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*', in: *Beiträge zur Indienforschung* (Festschrift E. Waldschmidt, Berlin, 1977), pp. 247-55, who concluded (p. 255): 'The *Kāśyapaparivarta*, in which the verse parts are later than the prose parts, offers an interesting example of a text in which the verses, written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, are definitely later than the prose parts, the language of which is much closer to standard Sanskrit'. For this work see recently M. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya in collaboration with S. Karashima and N. Kudo, *The Kāśyapaparivarta: Romanized text and facsimiles* (Tōkyō, 2002). Concerning the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, see A. Mette, *Die Gilgitfragmente des Kāraṇḍavyūha* (Swistal-Odendorf, 1997). Regarding the *Samādhirāja*, see A. Skilton, 'Four recensions of the *Samādhirājasūtra*', *III* 42 (1999), pp. 335-56. As for the *Sarvabuddhaviṣayāvatāra-Jñānālokāṇkārāsūtra* (~ *Tathāgataguṇajñānācintyaviṣayāvatāranirdeśa*?), quotations from it cited in the commentary to the *Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* (ed. Johnston) differ on occasion from the text found in the manuscript recently published by T. Kimura *et al.* (Tōkyō, 2004); whether in the commentary we simply have quotations from memory or whether there existed (at least) two distinct recensions of the Sūtra is not yet clear.

Regarding the use in connexion with Mahāyāna Sūtras of the terms 'Buddhist Sanskrit', 'Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit', etc., see recently D. Seyfort Rugg, 'On the expressions *chandaso āropema*, *āyataḡitassara*, *sarabhañña* and *ārṣa* as applied to the "Word of the Buddha" (*buddhavacana*)', in R. Tsuchida and A. Wezler (ed.), *Harānandalaharī* (M. Hara Felicitation Vol., Reinbek, 2000), pp. 297-304.

Finally, it may be recalled that recensional variation in the wording of related formu-

modern scholarship, namely a Sūtra extant in recensions closely related in their contents but not necessarily in their verbal expression. (This textual state of affairs is in fact what would differentiate a recension in the specific meaning under discussion here from variant versions of a Sūtra belonging to a reconstructible line of textual transmission derived from a single *Urtext*, as well as from a version of an *Urtext* that has been deliberately revised editorially.)

Were it true that writing was being employed from the beginning for composing and transmitting a Sūtra, then, evidently, this did not necessarily result in its text being definitively fixed in one single, 'original', redaction with only textual (scribal or aural) variants supervening in the course of its subsequent transmission. But (as noted above) it is in fact far from clear that, from the start, writing was being regularly used when Mahāyāna Sūtras were being composed and first transmitted. And to postulate some *Urtext* from which distinct recensions derive, in the manner of a *stemma codicum*, would here appear to constitute a misapplication of otherwise sound philological method. What we seem to have before us in such cases is, instead, records of a set of teachings / ideas / narratives in

lae, strings and pericopes are to be found not only in Mahāyāna Sūtras but also in versions of the old Āgamas. Cf., e.g., G. von Simson, 'Zur Phrase *yena ... tenopajagāma/upetya* und ihren Varianten im buddhistischen Sanskrit', in: H. Härtel (ed.), *Beiträge zur Indienforschung* (Festschrift E. Waldschmidt, Berlin, 1977), pp. 479-88; O. von Hinüber, *Untersuchungen zur Mündlichkeit früher mittelindischer Texte der Buddhisten* (AWLM, Abh. der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftl. Kl., Nr. 5, Mainz, 1994) (on variation between an *uddāna* and its canonical reference text, see id., in *JAOS* 123 [2003], pp. 222-3); M. Allon, *Style and function* (Tōkyō, 1997) (with bibliography, to which might be added P. Tuxen, 'Einige Bemerkungen über die Konstruktion der Pālitexte', *Festschrift H. Jacobi* (Bonn, 1926), pp. 98-102). Attempts have been made to explain these recensional variations, regarding them, e.g., as reflecting variations in improvisatory oral recitation, differences in redactorial usages between Buddhist schools/orders (*nikāya*), processes of Sanskrit or Pali linguistic standardization, etc. In the case of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* mentioned at the beginning of this note, the processes underlying recensional variation do not however seem to have yet been sufficiently clarified. Should one perhaps look, *inter alia*, in the direction of variant redactions/recensions resulting from varying oral traditions? (On orality in relation to the Buddhist canons, see the previous section.) Orality *per se* may not, however, supply a full explanation of what is to be observed (for instance in the case of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*). And in oral performance (as distinct from the oral and then written transmission of a text fixed *verbatim*), it is to be asked what role may have been played by the inspirational processes of *anubhāva*, *prabhāva*, *adhiṣṭhāna* and *pratibhāna* (cf. n. 24 above and n. 35 below). A stage of oral recitation marked by inspirational processes giving rise to redactional/recensional differences could lie behind certain variations, which were then fixed in

parallel wordings, oral or written, that are all somehow linked with a more or less compact — but nevertheless not univocally expressed — Sūtra tradition that came to be expressed in distinct recensions.²⁸

It has also to be kept in mind that a shorter, or simpler, version of a text is not *necessarily* and *invariably* older than a longer, or more elaborate, version. Fragments of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* kept in the Schøyen collection in Oslo, which have been dated to Kuṣāṇa times, present a text that is evidently closer to that of the later Nepalese manuscript tradition than to the chronologically closer text of the Indo-Scythian (Yüeh-chih) Lokakṣema's Chinese translation dating to the the second century of the Common Era.²⁹ This sort of evidence should incite us to

writing in differing recensions. All this requires further study.

²⁸ The problems of multiple textual transmission and of so-called 'anonymous literature' in India have been addressed notably by Paul Hacker (for the Purāṇas, following on W. Kirfel) and by Madeleine Biardeau (for the *Mahābhārata*, who postulates, however, for this text a [probably] single authorship). See also O. von Hinüber, 'Remarks on the problem of textual criticism in editing anonymous Sanskrit literature', in: *Proceedings of the First Symposium of Nepali and German Sanskritists 1971* (Kathmandu, Inst. of Sanskrit Studies, Tribhuvan Univ., 1980), pp. 28-40; and J. Silk, *The Heart Sūtra in Tibetan* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 6-17. Comparison may be made with the editing procedure adopted for a complex text — as distinct from manuscript — tradition by F. Edgerton, *The Pañcatantra reconstructed* (New Haven, 1924), where an 'original' *Pañcatantra* text, of unknown authorship, has been constructed on the basis of various extant recensions and of parallel versions (including the *Hitopadeśa*).

This matter of multiple transmission and of the Indian anonymous literature differs from cases of multiple transmission, perhaps contaminated, of a text of single authorship as studied in western philology, notably since G. Pasquali's *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (Florence, 1952). Pasquali pertinently posed the question as to whether there has always existed an archetype. More recently, the question of 'open recension', which does not allow the construction of an archetype and where manuscripts cannot be assigned to a *stemma*, have been discussed by M.L. West, *Textual criticism and editorial technique* (Stuttgart, 1973), p. 37 ff.

²⁹ See L. Sander, "'Die Schøyen Collection" und einige Bemerkungen zu der ältesten Aṣṭasāhasrikā Handschrift', WZKS 44 (2000), pp. 87-100; and 'Fragments of an Aṣṭasāhasrikā manuscript from the Kuṣāṇa period', in J. Braarvig (ed.), *Buddhist Manuscripts* (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection I, Oslo, 2000), Vol. i, p. 1. (For the history of this text see also L. Schmithausen, 'Textgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zum 1. Kapitel der Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā', in: L. Lancaster [ed.], *Prajñāpāramitā and related systems* [Studies in honor of Edward Conze, Berkeley, 1977], pp. 35-80; and L. Lancaster, 'The oldest Mahāyāna Sūtra: its significance for the study of Buddhist development', *Eastern Buddhist* 8 (1975), pp. 30-41. And on the place of this text in India as compared with China, see G. Schopen, 'The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian

exercise caution, and to develop a methodology of textual criticism that is adequate to the very considerable complexities of the traditions and their (written or oral) transmission in ‘floating’ texts, with a view to avoiding over-simplified stratifications of texts and analyses of their doctrines.³⁰ An exclusively linear and stratigraphical model of the development in time of texts and their doctrines may not always be appropriate.

Versions of other Mahāyāna Sūtras, such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the *Suvarṇa(pra)bhāṣottama*, the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, etc., have by now received considerable attention from scholars. But much work remains to be done in this very important area of Mahāyāna studies.

The matter of laymen (gṛhin, gṛhapati, gṛhastha) and of stūpas

The hypothesis that the Mahāyāna was either mainly or in essence a development owing its origin to laymen is surely excessive.³¹ In any case, in the history of Buddhism the simple and neat opposition layman or householder as against monk or monastic tends to break down.

Buddhism’, *EB* 32 [2000], p. 3 ff.; Schopen avers, p. 4, that evidence for the ‘popularity’ of this work comes ‘predominantly from the Late Pāla Period, that is, the 11th and 12th centuries’, without mentioning that Haribhadra wrote his great comment on it c. 800.) — On Lokakṣema see P. Harrison, ‘The earliest Chinese translations of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Some notes on the works of Lokakṣema’, *BSR* 10 (1993), pp. 135-77.

³⁰ On textual and doctrinal stratification, and on the problem of stratigraphical models, see our observation in ‘Some reflections on the place of philosophy in the study of Buddhism’, *JIAS* 18 (1995), p. 178, as well as below, pp. 36, 60. And for a discussion of earlier attempts at stratification of the text of the *Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyānottara-tantraśāstra*, see D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘The meaning of the term *gotra* and the textual history of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*’, *BSOAS* 39 (1975), pp. 341-63. — More generally, reference might be made to G. Schopen, ‘If you can’t remember, how to make it up: Some monastic rules for redacting canonical texts’, in: P. Kieffer-Pülz and J.-U. Hartmann, *Buddhaviśvāśudhākaraḥ* (H. Bechert Festschrift, Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997), pp. 571-82.

³¹ See in particular G. Schopen, ‘Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism: the layman/monk distinction and the transference of merit’, *SIJ* 10 (1985), pp. 9-47 = *Bones, stones, and Buddhist monks* (Honolulu, 1997), pp. 23-55; and, recently, id., ‘The bones of a Buddha and the business of a monk: Conservative monastic values in an early Mahāyāna polemical text’, *JIP* 27 (1999), pp. 279-324, with reference to the *Maitreya(mahā)śiṃhānāda*. — Cf. E. Lamotte, ‘Le bouddhisme des laïcs’, *Studies in Indology and Buddhology* (S. Yamaguchi Felicitation Volume, Kyōto, 1955), pp. 73-89 (esp. p. 86 f.); H. Durt, ‘Bodhisattva and layman in early Mahāyāna’, *Japanese Religions* 16/3 (1991), pp. 1-16; and T. Vetter, ‘On the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the subsequent introduction of *Pra-*

In Buddhist society there has existed the category of *gomins* (rendered in Tibetan by *btsun pa*, a word which is, however, the regular equivalent of *bhadanta*). Only rarely mentioned, this type was apparently in status both a religious and a layman (i.e. not a *pravrajita*, being neither a novice *śrāmaṇera* nor a fully ordained *bhikṣu*), as exemplified in the person of Candragomin. The celibate and abstinent *gomin* observing *brahmacarya* ‘chastity’ has also been defined as one wearing the religious robe, the outer distinctive mark of the monk.³² In terms of morphology and taxonomy, this category was apparently a somewhat anomalous and rather exceptional one because of its ambivalence. For in some way its membership partook simultaneously of the state of monk and layman; and it was, therefore, not readily definable in terms of the standard classifications of Vinaya and Śāstra Buddhism (e.g. Abhidharma), where one is either a *pravrajita* religious or one is not. (In Tibet, in particular among rñin ma pas, an ambivalent category of householder-religious has survived in connexion with the Vajrayāna and the vow of the Vajrācārya in particular.)³³

jñāpāramitā, AS/EA 48 (1994), p. 1275.

³² On Candragomin as a *go mi dge bsñen*, see Tāranātha, *rGya gar chos 'byuñ* (ed. Schiefner), p. 117. According to the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, the *go mi dge bsñen* observes so long as he lives the fundamental and ancillary precepts of the *upāsaka*, and he also wears the robe of the religious (*btsun pa'i cha lugs*). The principal observance for him was, then, the fivefold *śikṣāpada* or *pañcaśīla*.

For the two types of *upāsaka*, mentioned for example in Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkāralokā* ii.21-23 (ed. Wogihara, p. 331) — i.e. (1) the type defined by his simply having taken the threefold refuge and (2) the one defined additionally by observing the five *śikṣāpadas* —, see the references in E. Lamotte, *Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, p. 829 n. 3. — Concerning the further category of Bodhisattva-Upāsaka, see P. Kieffer-Pülz, ‘Die buddhistische Gemeinde’, in: H. Bechert (ed.), *Der Buddhismus*, i (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 370-1.

³³ The *gomin* is not to be confused with what is in Tibetan called a *ser khyim pa* ‘householder dressed in monastic garb’, sometimes a term of reproach directed against laymen who inappropriately dressed as monks and wrongly claimed the latters’ status. Tibetan tradition has been doubtful about one described as a reverend (*bhadanta*) who is neither layman nor monk (*jo btsun skya min ser min*). Nor does the *gomin* appear to correspond precisely to the *śākyabhikṣu* of the Newars, for there seems to exist no evidence that the *gomin* is first ordained as a *bhikṣu* and then sets aside this state in order to revert to the status of *upāsaka* (as does this category of Newar society through the ceremony of *pravrajyāvisarjana* [or *vratamokṣaṇa*]). Cf. S. Lienhard, *Diamantmeister und Hausväter* (Vienna, 1999), p. 97 ff.

For Tibetan understandings of the three vows — the *sdom pa* = *saṃvara* of the Bhikṣu (i.e. the *prātimokṣa*), the Bodhisattva, and the Vajrayānist Mantrin — see J. Sobisch, *Three-*

In terms of the Brahmanical system of the four stages of life (*āśrama*), whilst the Buddhist *bhikṣu* largely corresponds to the *saṃnyāsin* in the fourth *āśrama*, the (chaste) *upāsaka* (Tib. *dge bsñen*; fem. *upāsikā*, Tib. *dge bsñen ma*) observing the (five) *śikṣāpadas* could probably best be seen as corresponding in some respects, if only roughly, to the Brahmanical category of the (chaste) *vānaprastha* in the third *āśrama*, rather than to the *gṛhastha* or lay householder in the second *āśrama* begetting children. In Buddhist society it was, then, the *gṛhapati* (Tib. *khyim bdag*) ‘householder’ — also referred to as *gṛhin* (Tib. *khyim pa*) or *gṛhastha* (Tib. *khyim na gnas pa*) — who can most appositely be described as the layman *par excellence*. At all events, the class of *upāsaka* is narrower than that of *gṛhapati*; for not all *gṛhapatis* — not even those who might act as *dānapatis* or almsgivers to the Buddhist Saṃgha — were properly speaking committed *upāsakas* observing the *śikṣāpadas*.³⁴

Concerning the Buddhist class of monks — i.e., the category of the *pravrajita* (Tib. *rab tu byuñ ba*) or person who has left home and entered into the religious life (*pravrajyā*) —, it can be defined as made up of the ‘novice’, male (*śrāmaṇera[ka]*, Tib. *dge tshul*) and female (*śrāmaṇerikā*, Tib. *dge tshul ma*), as well as the monk (*bhikṣu*, Tib. *dge sloñ*) and nun (*bhikṣuñī*, Tib. *dge sloñ ma*); but it is only the latter two who have received *upasampadā* (Tib. *bsñen rdzogs*) or full ordination. As for the Buddhist Community (*saṃgha*), it is conventionally divided into four assemblies (*pariṣad*), namely *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās*. The universal Noble Community described as being ‘of the four directions’ (*cātur-diśa-āryasaṃgha*) is stated to be composed of *bhikṣus*; and it may be divided into the eight types of Noble Persons (*āryapudgala*, later subdivided into twenty types). The *āryasaṃgha* could also include Bodhisattvas. Distinguishable from this is the *bodhisattvasaṃgha* or Community of Bodhisattvas (who are either monks or not as the case may be). The Buddhist religious has in addition been regularly referred to as a *śramaṇa* (Tib. *dge sbyoñ*), a term that is however applicable also to non-Buddhists. (The categories of religious just named were of course represented among Mahāyānists, although in Tibet the group of fully ordained *dge sloñ mas*, as distinct from *dge tshul mas* or ‘novice’ nuns, died out only to be revived recently.)

vow theories in Tibetan Buddhism (Wiesbaden, 2002).

³⁴ In his article ‘Sur la formation du Mahāyāna’, p. 378, Lamotte has described the *upā-*

A major Mahāyānist figure like the householder-religious and Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti could be considered as a sort of ideal model or exemplar for a certain religiously and philosophically — and perhaps also ‘mystically’ — inclined spirituality described in the renowned *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. The layman Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti would seem to fit the above-mentioned category of *gomin*, who was clearly a religious though not a *pravrajita* or monk in the strict sense of one having full *upasampadā*.

A major Sūtra, the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda*, is represented as being expounded with inspired intelligence and presence of mind (*pratibhāna* = *spobs pa*) by Queen Śrīmālā in virtue of the Buddha’s kind assistance and sustaining force.³⁵

As for the supposed link between the cult of the *stūpa* and the Mahāyāna — and also between the *stūpa* and the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching —, it has no doubt existed. But it was scarcely a peculiar characteristic and defining feature specific to the Mahāyāna alone, nor above all was it evidently a practice in the first place of laymen.³⁶

saka as a member *minuto iure* of the Saṃgha.

³⁵ For the Sanskrit, see the fragment of the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādasūtra* edited by K. Matsuda in J. Braarvig (ed.), *Buddhist manuscripts* (Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection I), Vol. i, p. 68: *anyo 'pi me 'tra bhagavan bahūpakāro 'rthanirdeśaḥ tathāgatānugraheṇa pratibhāyati/ pratibhāya śubhe devīti bhagavatā[nu]jñātā/* For *anugraha* in the Skt. manuscript, rather than *rjes su 'dzin pa* ‘kind assistance’ the Tibetan translation has *mithu* (= *prabhāva*) ‘might’. As noted above, the process by which a person other than the Buddha is represented as expounding a Sūtra through the Buddha’s kind assistance (*anugraha*), might (*anubhāva*, *prabhāva*), or sustaining force (*adhiṣṭhāna*) awaits detailed study. (For the semantics of *adhi-ṣṭhā-* in the Vinaya, see H. Hu-von Hinüber, *Das Poṣadhavastu* [Reinbek, 1994], p. 182 ff.) See the criteria for *pratibhāna* in the *Adhyāśayasamcodanasūtra*, cited in *Badhicaryāvatārapañjikā* ix.43.

³⁶ See G. Schopen, ‘Two problems...’ (= *Bones, stones, and Buddhist monks*, Chapter 5); and, recently, id., ‘The bones of a Buddha and the business of a monk...’, *JIP* 27 (1999), pp. 279-324. Cf. A. Hirakawa, ‘The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its relationship to the worship of Stūpas’, *Memoirs of the Research Dept. of the Tōyō Bunko* 22 (1963), pp. 57-106. Since Hirakawa, the matter of the part played by laymen and the worship of the *stūpa* in the origins of the Mahāyāna has been discussed by T. Vetter, ‘The origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the subsequent introduction of *Prajñāpāramitā*’, *AS/EA* 48 (1994), pp. 1241-81. See also P. Harrison, ‘Who gets to ride in the Great Vehicle?: Self-image and identity among the followers of the Early Mahāyāna’, *JIAS* 10 (1987), pp. 67-89; and R. Gombrich, ‘Organized Bodhisattvas’, in: P. Harrison *et al.* (ed.), *Sūryacandrāya* (A. Yuyama Festschrift, Swisttal-Odendorf, 1998), pp. 43-56.

Concerning the *tathāgatagarbha* and the (*tathāgata*)*dhātugarbha* / *dāgāba*, viz. *stūpa* (a theme that requires further investigation), see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, pp. 505 n. 4, 515-16; and id., ‘The *gotra*, *ekayāna* and *tathāgata-*

The relation between Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna / Hīnayāna: opposition and complementarity

In Buddhist history, the Mahāyāna / Hīnayāna contrast or opposition has sometimes been used polemically — indeed even quite militantly — by both Mahāyānists and Śrāvakayānists.³⁷ The two being held to be opposed or antithetical, the Mahāyāna was on the one hand thought by some of its enthusiastic advocates to supersede the Hīnayāna. On the other hand it was, on the contrary, considered by ‘conservative’ detractors to be inauthentic — that is, not genuine *buddhavacana* — and so to be rejected by the true follower of the Buddha. Still, long ago, André Bareau called attention to how little critical discussion of anything that can be regarded as necessarily and solely ‘Mahāyāna’ is in fact to be found in major Śrāvakayānist treatises.³⁸

From another viewpoint, the term *mahāyāna* may instead belong to a classificatory or taxonomic, and also a doxographic, differentiation.

garbha theories of the Prajñāpāramitā according to Dharmamitra and Abhayākaragupta’, in: L. Lancaster (ed.), *Prajñāpāramitā and related systems* (E. Conze felicitation volume, Berkeley, 1977), p. 288 (referring to the passage ... *saptaratnamayāṃs tathāgatadhatu-garbhān stūpān kārayet* ... in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* iii, p. 62 ff.). — A fairly early literary (i.e. non-technical) passage attesting the religious connotations of *dhātu* ‘(precious) element’, ‘(precious) deposit, relic’, and ‘(precious) substance, ore’ appears in Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita* xxvii.76-78 (a passage concerning the Buddha’s bone-relics held in a reliquary which is unfortunately not available in the original Skt., but the Tibetan version of which reads [P, ñe, f. 118b-119a ~ D, ge, f. 98b]:... *gser gyi bum pa rnam kyis rab tu spyan draṅs so / /d’i ni ri bo chen po’i rin chen kham bžin du/ /dge legs gañ ba chen po rnam ni /džin pa ste/ /mtho ris dag na lha yi gtso bo’i kham bžin du/ /kham ni me yis log par sbyor ba ma yin ñid/* ...). For this set of semantic associations, cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘The meanings of the term *gotra* and the textual history of the *Ratna-gotravibhāga*’, *BSOAS* 39 (1976), 341-63.

³⁷ For a Mahāyānist view, reference may be made for instance to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. See, e.g., F. Tola and C. Dragonetti, ‘The conflict of change in Buddhism: the Hīnayānist reaction’, *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996-97), pp. 233-54.

³⁸ A. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, p. 299 ff. The *Vibhāṣāprabhāṛti* on the *Abhidharmadīpa* contains references to the *bodhisattva*, the *bodhisattva-mārga*, and the *bodhisattvayāna* as opposed to the *śrāvaka*- and *pratyekabuddha-yāna*, as well as to the *pāramitās* and to the three *bodhis*, in its Chap. iv and vi. At p. 199 (ed. Jaini), the term *bodhisattvacaryā* refers to Śākyamuni’s earlier spiritual career. The same text refers to a ‘critique of authenticity’ of the Mahāyāna, with references to the *kṛṣṇapadeśa* and *śuklāpadeśa* (p. 197). — Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti* engages in a defence of the Mahāyāna against criticisms coming from ‘conservatives’; see J. Cabezón, ‘Vasubandhu’s *Vyākhyāyukti* on the authenticity of the Mahāyāna Sūtras’, in: J.R. Timm (ed.), *Texts in*

Buddhist doxographical (i.e. Siddhānta / Grub mtha'-type) texts from Tibet in fact have interesting things to say about what *mahāyāna* means. These still remain to be fully explored.

To sum up very briefly the gist of a couple of these analyses, it is recognized that a given Sūtra may present both Mahāyānist and non-Mahāyānist teachings 'in common' (cf. *theg pa che chuñ gi grub mtha'i thun moñ du 'dod pa'i mdo sde du ma'i dgoñs pa*).³⁹ Also, there exist persons whose spiritual 'lineage' / 'gene' (*gotra* = *rigs*) is indeterminate or indefinite (i.e. still 'unexpressed') (*aniyata* = *ma ñes pa*), rather than definitively 'expressed' as either Mahāyānist or Śrāvakayānist, so that they require a common, undifferentiated teaching.⁴⁰ (As noted above, p. 6, there is a close correlation between aspects of *yāna*-theory and *gotra*-theory.)

In particular, a very significant distinction has been established between a person who is spiritually a Hīnayānist (*theg dman gyi gañ zag*) and one who just advocates Hīnayānist doctrines (*theg dman grub mtha'smra ba*) (e.g. the Sarvāstivāda / Vaibhāṣika or Sautrāntika). And a parallel distinction applies between one who is spiritually a Mahāyānist — that is, one who duly practises the Bodhisattva's way founded in both discriminative understanding (*prajñā*) and conduct (*caryā*, or salvific method, *upāya*), as well as in the *bodhicitta* and in compassion (*karuṇā*) — and one who simply advocates doctrines of the Mahāyāna (viz. the Cittamātra = Vijñānavāda or Madhyamaka).⁴¹ Such analytical distinctions are of course highly important for the historian of Buddhist religion and philosophy, for they relate to the distinction between spiritual practice and philosophical position as understood in Buddhism. This distinction between *mahāyāna* as a set of teachings or texts and *mahāyāna* as spiritual practice and intellectual penetration appears to echo in part two established uses of the term *dharma*, namely (i) a verbalized teaching (*deśanādharmā* = *bstan pa'i chos*) and (ii) ethical practice and intellectual understanding (i.e. *adhigamadharmā* = *rtogs pa'i chos*, *rig par bya ba'i chos*).

context: *Traditional hermeneutics in South Asia* (Albany, 1992), pp. 221-43.

³⁹ See 'Jam dbyaṅs bžad pa, *Grub mtha' chen mo*, ga, f. 4a2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ga, f. 5a5.

⁴¹ See lCañ skya Rol pa'i rdo rje, *Dag yig mkhas pa'i 'byuñ gnas*, ja (Grub mtha'),

The three spiritual categories of person (*skyes bu gsum*) — the worldly person, the follower of the Lower Vehicle and the follower of the Mahāyāna — is the subject of many texts such as Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* and Tsoñ kha pa's *Lam rim* texts and their commentaries. The triad of *hīna*, *madhya* and *śreṣṭha* is already found in a quotation in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (iii.94, p. 182, even though in this work on Śrāvakayānist scholasticism Vasubandhu does not treat of the Mahāyāna as such⁴²).

Co-existence of Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna

It is furthermore to be observed that, whilst the contents of the major part of the Tibetan Sūtra and Śāstra collections — the bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur — are indeed Mahāyānist, it would still be quite inaccurate to state that Tibetan Buddhism is solely Mahāyānist to the exclusion of all that may properly be considered Śrāvakayānist. Thus, within Tibetan Buddhism, the monachal code or Vinaya binding on all monks — that belonging to the order (*nikāya*) of the Mūlasarvāstivādins — is naturally reckoned as part of the Old (i.e. Śrāvakayānist) Tripiṭaka. And although the Āgamas of the Śrāvakas as such have not indeed been included *en bloc* in the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur (as they have largely been in the Chinese Buddhist canon), textual materials belonging to these Āgamas are nevertheless found in that canonical collection as individual Sūtras or incorporated either into the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya or into other texts.

In his great *Summa* of Mahāyānist thought and practice, the *Lam rim chen mo*, Tsoñ kha pa has included much material from the *Śrāvakabhūmi* (see below, p. 39). Moreover, in the curriculum of the Tibetan seminaries (*grva tshañ*), the Vinaya as well as Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* — connected with the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools — and its commentaries are the subject of regular and systematic study in the final classes ('*dzin grva*). As for logic and epistemology (*tshad ma* = *pramāṇa*) — which cannot be classified specifically and *per se* as either Mahāyānist

f. 8a2 = p. 253. Cf. 'Jam dbyaṅs bžad pa, *Grub mtha' chen mo*, kha, f. 2a.

⁴² In *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* vii.34 there is found only a passing reference to the *yāna-traya*, in which a Buddha is said to establish disciples. The Bodhisattva is mentioned a number of times in the *Kośa*. (For their part, the *Abhidharmadīpa* and *Vibhāṣāprabhāṛtī* do

or Śrāvakayānist — they are studied towards the start of the Tibetan scholastic curriculum. In Tibet, *tshad ma* has in effect been considered to be either ancillary to or convergent with Mahāyānist philosophy (witness, for instance, the dual compound *dbu tshad* ‘Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa’).

The preceding examples have mostly been drawn from a more recent period in the long history of the Mahāyāna. It will be necessary to try to establish the extent to which patterns found in later times may also apply to an earlier period in the development of the Mahāyāna. That Mahāyānists both lived in the same monastic communities as Śrāvakayānists and followed the Vinaya of an old Nikāya is known for instance from Hsüan-tsang (602-664), who also refers to what is known as ‘Mahāyāna-Sthaviras’ (see n. 81 below).

Buddhism and the ambient Indian religions, and the problem of the relationship between Mahāyāna and Brahmanism / Hinduism

It is necessary to situate Mahāyāna not only within the overall framework of Buddhism as a whole but also in the context of non-Buddhist Indian religions and civilization. This undertaking confronts us with the question of the relation between the Mahāyāna and the ambient religions and culture(s) of India.

To take one significant example, certain areas of Mahāyāna have shared features of the *bhakti* movement with other Indian religions: this movement is not confined exclusively to one or two traditions and appears almost pan-Indian, a fact overlooked in many publications on the subject (see also below, p. 49).

The question of what may be more or less pan-Indian is a complex and rather vexed one, both historically and theoretically. That the Mahāyāna, together with Buddhism as a whole, was a product of Indian civilization is self-evident: they have, in very large part at least, a shared cultural matrix as well as geographical milieu. And in history many Buddhists have been brahmans by family background and personal education. But questions still arise as to how this interrelationship was to develop and express itself over time, and on how we can model this interrelationship. If it is true that Buddhism has much in common with Brahmanism / Hinduism, it appears that the latter has on occasion also borrowed from

the former. And that Buddhism formed part of the so-called ancient Indian ‘Śramana’ culture is no less clear. Yet a precise general determination of Buddhism’s relation to Brahmanism / Hinduism, and to Jainism, is not always an easy one to make and continues to pose many a problem.⁴³

That there have existed identifiable historical borrowings between Buddhism and other Indian religious traditions appears incontrovertible, as just noted. But the generalization of a Borrowing Model / Paradigm alone to account for resemblances between Buddhism and Brahmanism / Hinduism is at the very least problematic, as is probably also the universalization of a Syncretism Model: it would seem necessary to reckon in addition with a Substratum Model / Paradigm. The Substratum Model does not, of course, automatically and of itself rule out individual historical instances of borrowing.

It might be that the use here of the term *substratum* is problematic. But suitably employed and defined it seems serviceable; at all events, whatever its shortcomings might be, no convenient alternative has been found which is less problematic.⁴⁴ It should be noted that the expression *substratum* is not being used here in the sense it has in linguistics. Rather, it is being employed with reference to the characteristic idea found in Buddhism of the *laukika* ‘mundane, worldly’ as a level that is systemically and structurally contrasted / opposed to the *lokottara* ‘transmundane, supramundane’, but which has nonetheless been acknowledged, and integrated, by Buddhists within their religious world. In Buddhist thought, this structural contrast *laukika* / *lokottara* constitutes a highly important ‘emic’ distinction. Whilst *laukika* (Pali *lokiya*) refers to the worldly or mundane level, which Buddhists share with other Indians, *lokottara* regularly denotes what is specific to Buddhism in the view of its followers. It may well be that the clarification of ‘emic’ usage is a prerequisite for

refer to the three *yānas* as well as to the Bodhisattva; see n. 38 above.)

⁴³ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘Sur les rapports entre le bouddhisme et le “substrat religieux” indien et tibétain’, *JA* 1964, pp. 77-95; and ‘A note on the relationship between Buddhist and “Hindu” divinities in Buddhist literature and iconology, the *laukika* / *lokottara* contrast and the notion of an Indian “religious substratum”’, in C. Cicuzza et al. (ed.), *Le parole e i marmi* (R. Gnoli Felicitation Volume, Rome, 2001), pp. 735-42 (with a selected bibliography). Cf. F. Sferra, ‘Some considerations on the relationship between Hindu and Buddhist Tantras’, in: G. Verardi and S. Vita (ed.), *Buddhist Asia I* (Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, Centro di Studi sul Buddhismo, Kyōto, 2003), pp. 57-84.

our being able usefully and effectively to pursue 'etic' analyses and comparisons.

As indicated above, the Substratum Model does not automatically rule out specific, historically identifiable, instances of syncretism; but the concept of syncretism can present serious difficulties if it is taken as a universally generalizable key or paradigm.⁴⁵

Alongside the Substratum Model, the idea of religious and cultural *symbiosis* also has a useful and important part to play. All this requires further detailed study.

A further possible way of defining the relationship between Mahāyāna and Brahmanism / Hinduism is in terms of the concept of *docetism* whereby a Buddha or Bodhisattva is deemed to deploy soteriologically appropriate expedient means (*upāya*) in order to effect the benefit of sentient beings in general (*sarvasattva*), or of a given set of trainees (*vineya*, *vaineya*) in particular, these expedients being suited to disciples who may not yet be able to absorb anything but 'mundane' (*laukika*) notions. Yet docetism does not, of course, relate solely — or perhaps even mainly — to interreligious phenomena. In Buddhism it is a feature characteristic of, for example, the fundamental Mahāyānist doctrine of the Buddha's three Bodies (*trikāya*) which includes the *nirmāṇakāya* or ectypal 'phantom Body'. In other words, it is a concept that may be invoked not only with reference to what is external to Buddhism properly speaking but also with reference to different levels of teaching and understanding within Buddhism itself.

The geographical milieu

The geographical spread of early Mahāyāna would appear to have been characterized by polycentric diffusion. In India, after the demise of the Buddha, earlier Buddhism indeed possessed no institutionalized ecclesiastical authority; for the purposes of the Vinaya it was organized into local *sīmās* 'parishes'.

From the start, an important part in the spread of Mahāyāna was no doubt played both by the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent and by the

⁴⁴ See the second article cited in n. 43 above.

Āndhra country in south-central India, but presumably neither was the sole place of its origin. Bihar, Bengal and Nepal too were important centres of Mahāyāna. Sri Lanka also was involved in the history of the Mahāyāna, for the so-called Vetullakas were known there (see n. 10) and the great Mādhyamika thinker Ārya-Deva, the disciple of Nāgārjuna, is reported to have been born there.⁴⁶

For the Mahāyāna, then, multiple geographical origins — even a sort of plurigenesis in several geographically distant Śrāvakayānist orders / schools (*nikāya*) — seems to be much more likely than geographical monogenesis. A definitive clarification of this question is probably little nearer today than when Lamotte and Bareau addressed the problem of Mahāyāna origins in the 1950s.⁴⁷

Significant developments in the Mahāyāna then took place in Central Asia also. Because of the importance in a large sector of Mahāyānist thought of the *arapacana* syllabary (in the Avatamsaka, Prajñāpāramitā, etc.) — with its ligature *ysa*, the sound [za] common in Iranian languages and in ‘Tocharian’ — which constitutes the *dhāraṇī* or ‘mnemonic’ of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the question has arisen of possible Central Asian and Serindian influence (through the Śakas / Scythians and Kuṣāṇas) in the history of the Mahāyāna in the early part of the first millennium. Without it being necessary to go so far as to postulate a Serindian origin for Mañjuśrī,⁴⁸ there seem to exist interesting avenues of investigation to be followed up here.

⁴⁵ See the first two articles cited in n. 43 above.

⁴⁶ On Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka, see recently M. Deegalle, ‘A search for Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka’, *JIABS* 22 (1999), pp. 343-57; and S. Mori, *Mahāyāna Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (A Report, Nagoya, 1999).

⁴⁷ See E. Lamotte, ‘Sur la formation du Mahāyāna’ (using data derived *inter alia* from Fa-hsien’s and Hsüan-tsang’s records and including Central Asia); and A. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, p. 297 ff (calling attention to the importance of Sri Lanka for the Vajrayāna).

⁴⁸ S. Lévi, ‘Ysa’, in: *Mémorial Sylvain Lévi* (Paris, 1937), pp. 355-63.

The *arapacana* mnemonic formula — derived from the standard syllabary or ‘alphabet’ in sources in Kharoṣṭhī script — is found in Prajñāpāramitāsūtras; see e.g. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* (ed. N. Dutt), pp. 212-13. For the place of this *dhāraṇī* in the *Bhadrakalpika*, see P. Skilling, ‘An Arapacana syllabary in the *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra*’, *JAOS* 116 (1996), p. 522 f. Concerning this syllabary, and for the sign *ysa* in it, see R. Salomon, ‘New evidence for a Gāndhārī origin of the Arapacana syllabary’, *JAOS* 110 (1990), pp. 255-73; id., ‘An additional note on *arapacana*’, *JAOS* 113 (1993), p. 275;

Moreover, at the end of the first millennium of the common era, clear references to Islam and the Middle East are found in the literature of the Kālacakra.

The geographical horizon of the Mahāyāna thus came to cover an area extending from the Near East to Japan, and from Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and Indonesia to Serindia and on to Siberia.

Two problems in comparativism: Gnosticism and Manichaeism

At least since the time of I.J. Schmidt's *Über die Verwandschaft der gnostisch-theosophischen Lehren mit den Religionssystemen des Orients, vorzüglich dem Buddhismus* (Leipzig, 1828), consideration has from time to time been accorded to the hypothesis that Gnosticism and Manichaeism are somehow related to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism (and even to Buddhism generally). It seems unlikely that Mahāyāna Buddhism is to any great degree directly dependent on either of these religions: systemically, it appears very different indeed. An essential difference appears to lie in the fact that Mahāyānist (and Vajrayānist) thought is usually not dualist but grounded in the principle of non-duality (*advaya*). Still, given the fact that Buddhism has spread in areas where these movements were established, and the possibility that certain of its component elements might even have developed there, it may be useful to study parallels between them in case at least certain currents in later Buddhism should turn out to share a common background with these two movements.⁴⁹

and O. von Hinüber, *Das ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick* §193.

⁴⁹ On the question of Buddhism and Gnosticism, Manichaeism, etc., see E. Conze, 'Buddhism and Gnosis', in: U. Bianchi (ed.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 651-67. The characterization given of Gnosticism in the proceedings (p. 27) of this Messina conference of 1966 — viz. 'not every *gnosis* is Gnosticism, but only that which involves in this perspective the idea of the divine consubstantiality of the spark that is in need of being awakened and re-integrated...' — might even be seen as applying to the *tathāgatagarbha* theory. See also G. Tucci, 'Some glosses upon the *Guhyasamāja*', *MCB* 3 (1935); id., 'Animadversiones indicæ', in: C. Vogel (ed.), *Jñānamuktāvalī* (J. Nobel Commemoration Vol., New Delhi, 1959), pp. 226-7 (on the three-*gotra* theory of the Mahāyāna), as well as G. Tucci and W. Heissig, *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei* (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 28; H. de Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris, 1952), pp. 21-27; J. Ries, 'Bouddhisme et manichéisme: Les étapes d'une recherche', in: *Indianisme et bouddhisme* (Mélanges offerts à Mgr. Étienne Lamotte, Louvain, 1980),

Periodization

A problem soon confronting us in the study of the Mahāyāna is its periodization. This concept is normally understood in terms of temporal sequence and chronological stratification; and this use of the concept is of course pertinent and useful.

No less important is what might be called systematic periodization, which in essence is not automatically equatable with chronological and temporally sequential stratification.⁵⁰ In Tibetan hermeneutical systems that relate to the Buddha's three 'turnings' of the Wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakrapravartana*), the first Cycle (corresponding roughly to the Āgamas and Vinaya) is not simply cancelled or superseded by the Sūtras of the last two Cycles (i.e. the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, and then certain Sūtras linked with the teaching of either the Vijñānavāda or the Buddha-nature / *tathāgatagarbha*); nor does the third Cycle of the *buddhavacana* necessarily (according, e.g., to Tibetan Mādhyamikas) replace or supersede the second Cycle of the Prajñāpāramitasūtras, which is deemed to retain its full force.

The Tibetan hermeneutical systems based on three Cycles of *buddhavacana* do not appear to operate in precisely the same way as Chinese *p'an-chiao* systems.⁵¹ (In the East Asian tradition, the metaphor of the five

pp. 281-95; the relevant recent publications of H. J. Klimkeit, including his *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic texts from Central Asia* (San Francisco, 1993); and V. Wallace, *The Inner Kālacakratānta* (New York, 2001), p. 143 ff. Cf. S. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden, 1998). The question of a relation between these religions becomes acute for the history of the later Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna, for instance in the case of certain concepts clustered around the *bodhicitta* (: *pneuma, sperma*). See M. Eliade, 'Esprit, lumière et semence', in: *Occultisme, sorcellerie et modes culturelles* (Paris, 1976) (French version of *Occultism, Witchcraft and cultural fashions* [Chicago, 1976]). G. Verardi, 'The Buddhists, the Gnostics and the Antinomistic society, or the Arabian Sea in the first-second century AD', *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 57 (1997), pp. 323-46 (with bibliography), has extended the comparison to an earlier period in the history of Buddhism also.

As for Mani, he was familiar with Buddhism. However, the existence of Manichaean elements in Tibetan religion once posited by A. A. Georgi(us) in his *Alphabetum tibetanum* (Rome, 1762; annotated German translation by P. Lindegger, Rikon, 1999), and then speculated upon by A. Grünwedel and accepted by H. Hoffmann, *Die Religionen Tibets* (Freiburg-Munich, 1956), p. 40 ff. — and envisaged also by G. Tucci, *Il libro tibetano dei morti* (Milan, 1949), p. 45, and *Die Religionen Tibets*, p. 237 n. 4 — although conceivable does not actually seem all that easy to substantiate in detail.

⁵⁰ See above, p. 24, and the end of the present article.

⁵¹ See, e.g., D. Lopez (ed.), *Buddhist hermeneutics* (Hawaii, 1988), Index s. v. *p'an-*

‘milky tastes’ seems to presuppose a chronological succession in the Buddha’s teaching.⁵² Of considerable interest is the fact that the Tibetan hermeneutical systems, though of course referring back to Sūtras, are often derived from Śāstra sources, whereas Chinese Buddhist hermeneutical systems seem usually to be rooted in Sūtras alone.

Hermeneutics in Mahāyāna

In terms of the distinction between Sūtras of provisional, ‘surface-level’, meaning (*neyārtha*) and those that are of definitive, ‘deep-level’, meaning (*nītārtha*), in Tibet it is sometimes the second Cycle and sometimes the third Cycle (*’khor lo = cakra*) of the Buddha’s teaching that is held to be of definitive meaning, the other two Cycles being then very often (though not invariably; see below) considered to be of provisional meaning given the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra*’s definition of the *nītārtha* as being concerned with the ultimate sense (*śūnyatā*, etc.). It should also be noted that, contrary to a current rendering, *neyārtha* properly means not ‘interpretatable’ — all meaningful utterances, including accordingly the whole of the *buddhavaṇana*, are after all interpretable in a standard and appropriate sense of this word —, but ‘requiring interpretation in a further (and different) sense’. Nor is *neyārtha* necessarily coterminous with ‘non-literal’ (*na yathārūta*, *sgra ji bžin ma yin pa*) and *nītārtha* with ‘literal’ (*yathārūta = sgra ji bžin pa*); for the criterion accepted for instance by the Mādhyamikas following the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra* depends not on the verbal expression in a Sūtra — describable as either literal or not literal — but on its intended purport.⁵³

Some Tibetan hermeneuts have developed a system of interpretation according to which the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras — which are attached to the Third Cycle of the *buddhavaṇana* — are to be understood in conformity

chiao. See also M.-W. Liu, ‘The Chinese Madhyamaka practice of *p’an-chiao*: the case of Chi-tsang’, *BSOAS* 56 (1993), pp. 96-118; B. Petzold (in collaboration with Shinshō Hanayama and Shohei Ichimura), *The classification of Buddhism. Bukkyō kyōhan. Comparing the classification of Buddhist doctrines in India, China and Japan* (Wiesbaden, 1995).

⁵² See also *Hōbōgirin*, s. v. Daigo.

⁵³ For the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka*

with the *nītārtha* Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras belonging to the Second Cycle. And in this case they too are deemed to be *nītārtha*.⁵⁴

It is to be observed that in Sūtra-hermeneutics a statement contained in *buddhavacana* is held to be either provisional, and of ‘surface-level’ (*neyārtha*) meaning, or definitive, and of ‘deep-level’ (*nītārtha*) meaning, within the frame of the exegetical system of a single school. In the Vajrayānist hermeneutics of the Tantric *ṣaṭkoṭi*⁵⁵, however, the situation is more complex; for there the same statement might be interpreted by one interpreter, according to circumstances, as *neyārtha* or *nītārtha*.

The problem of the classification of Sūtras as Mahāyānist, and the referential extension of the expression ‘mahāyāna’

A problem sometimes arises with the traditional classification of a Sūtra as Mahāyānist or otherwise. For instance, in its title the *Śālistambasūtra* is described as a Mahāyānasūtra; but there is in fact very little in its content that would seem to be specifically, much less exclusively, Mahāyānist (apart perhaps from the fact that it is the Bodhisattva Maitreya who teaches it to Śāriputra).⁵⁶ The *Lalitavistara*, a biography of the Buddha, is also described in its title as a Mahāyānasūtra; but very much of the work is far from being specifically Mahāyānist.⁵⁷

It is to be recalled, furthermore, that major works of the Mahāyāna are not exclusively Mahāyānist in their contents. Thus the *Yogācārabhūmi* ascribed to Asaṅga — under the inspiration of Maitreya(nātha) — contains, alongside the properly Mahāyānist *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, a *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*, and much further material besides that could be described as

philosophy, pp. 81, 257 ff.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, p. 393, etc.; id., *Le traité du tathāgatagarbha de Bu ston Rin chen grub* (Paris, 1973), Introduction.

⁵⁵ The *ṣaṭkoṭi* = *mtha’ drug* (or *ṣaṭkoṭika vyākhyāna*), namely *nītārtha* = *ñes don*, *neyārtha* = *drañ don*, *saṃdhyā bhāṣita* = *dgoñs bžad / dgoñs pa can*, *na saṃdhyā bhāṣita* = *dgoñs min*, *yathāruta* = *sgra ji bžin*, and *na yathāruta* = *sgra ji bžin ma yin pa*.

⁵⁶ On Maitreya outside the Mahāyāna see, e.g., P. Jaini, ‘Stages in the career of the Tathāgata Maitreya’ in his *Collected papers on Buddhist studies* (Delhi, 2001), pp. 451-500.

⁵⁷ On the question of the school / order affiliation of this Sūtra, see J.W. de Jong, ‘Recent Japanese studies on the *Lalitavistara*’, *IT* 23-24 (1997-8), p. 250 f.

Dharmarakṣa’s Chinese translation of this Sūtra contains the Arapacana formula sacred to the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī; see J. Brough, ‘The *Arapacana* syllabary in the old *Lalita-*

common to Buddhism as a whole.⁵⁸ It is furthermore to be observed that, in his great *Summa* of Mahāyānist thought and practice, the *Lam rim chen mo*, Tsoñ kha pa has made extensive use of the *Śrāvakabhūmi*, notably in his detailed treatment of Tranquillity (*ṣi gnas* = *śamatha*).

It thus appears that no hard and fast line, no rigid and impassable barrier, has been erected by such authorities between Mahāyāna and other strands in Buddhism even when they maintained its distinctiveness.

A doctrinal and philosophical criterion for the Mahāyāna

The doctrine of the non-substantiality of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya* / *dharmaniḥsvabhāvatā*, i.e. *svabhāva-sūnyatā* ‘Emptiness of self-existence’) has very often been regarded as criterial, indeed diagnostic, for identifying a teaching or work as Mahāyānist. For this there may of course be a justification. But it has nevertheless to be recalled that by the authorities of the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyānist philosophy, it is regularly argued that not only the Mahāyānist but even the Śrāvakayānist Arhat must of necessity have an understanding (if only a somewhat limited one) of *dharmanairātmya*.⁵⁹ This very remarkable feature of Buddhist philosophical thinking has often been overlooked by historians of the Mahāyāna.

A few other characteristically Mahāyānist ideas have been briefly touched on above (pp. 6-7, 13-16).

The doctrinal classification of individual Mahāyānasūtras

The doctrinal and philosophical classification, or categorization, of many Mahāyāna Sūtras according to their contents may pose interesting problems.

For example, although the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* refers to *cittamātra*, i.e. ‘mind only’ (in chap. vi), this text is nonetheless an important source for

vistara’, *BSOAS* 40 (1977), pp. 85-95. Cf. n. 48 above.

⁵⁸ For the expressions *yogācāra* / *yogāvacāra* in Buddhism, see J. Silk, ‘The *Yogācāra Bhikṣu*’, in J. Silk (ed.), *Wisdom, compassion and the search for understanding* (G.M. Nagao Felicitation Volume, Honolulu, 2000), pp. 266-314. Interestingly, in the Sanskrit title of the *Yogācārabhūmi* as preserved in the Tibetan bsTan ’gyur, the word *yogācārya* is found instead of *yogācāra*.

⁵⁹ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 7 n. 16; id., *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy*,

Mādhyamikas; and this reference is accordingly not understood by Madhyamaka commentators as referring specifically to the Cittamātra (*sems tsam*) = Vijñānavāda.⁶⁰

A comparable problem arises for the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, which is cited by Mādhyamikas as well as by Vijñānavādins. Besides, this work (chap. iii) presents a special form of the *tathāgatagarbha* as already endowed with the thirty-two distinctive marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of a *buddha*, which it then compares with the *ātmavāda* of the heterodox (*tīrthakara*, i.e. the Brahmans / Hindus). The *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is accordingly described in the Sūtra as having been intended by the Teacher to remove for inexperienced disciples their innate fear of non-substantiality (*nairātmyasaṃtrāsa*), that is, in effect as being an ‘intentional’ (*ābhiprāyika*, i.e. *neyārtha*) teaching.

The doctrinal classification of the tathāgatagarbha teaching

The question has then arisen whether the Sūtras teaching the *tathāgatagarbha* are Vijñānavāda or Madhyamaka in their philosophical position. Although several scholars have taken these Sūtras to be linked with the Vijñānavāda, many Tibetan interpreters connect them rather with the Madhyamaka (even though, as mentioned above, they attach them to the third Cycle of the Buddha’s teaching). Concerning the commentary on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* ascribed in the Tibetan tradition to Asaṅga (but in the Chinese to a certain *Sāramati), this master’s true intent (*abhiprāya* = *dogs pa*) is held to have been in accord with the Madhyamaka (and therefore to be definitive rather than provisional in meaning). However unexpected this type of exegetical classification and hermeneutics might appear to us today, the historian of Mahāyāna is obliged to take account of it.⁶¹

It is to be noted that no form of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine has been taught in the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* ascribed to Nāgārjuna. But references to it are found in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* also attributed to him.⁶²

pp. 100, 227 ff., 245, 247.

⁶⁰ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy*, pp. 203-04.

⁶¹ See the works cited in n. 54 above.

⁶² P. 172 ff. (ed. Pāsādika, in citations from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*), rather than from more ‘standard’ Sūtras expounding the *tathāgatagarbha*. On the *Sūtrasamuccaya* see below,

Scripture (Sūtra) and commentary (Śāstra) in Mahāyāna

A further interesting question in the history of the Mahāyāna is the diachronic relationship holding between a basic Sūtra text (sometimes available in more than one recension) and its commentaries (often very numerous).

An example of this intertextual relation is (1) the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, (2) the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* ascribed to Maitreya(nātha), and (3) the many commentaries on the latter such as those by the two Vimuktisēnas (the Ārya and the Bhadanta), Haribhadra (the *Abhisamayālaṃkāralokā Prajñāpāramitavyākhyā*), and Ratnākaraśānti (the *Sāratamā*). Such sets of intricately related texts — in this case a three-stage or three-tier set — characterize much of Mahāyāna literature. And this in turn poses the crucial question of the relation between (1) scriptural text (i.e. Sūtra), (2) semi-scriptural comment (i.e. Śāstraic exposition such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*), and (3) ordinary (sub)commentary (*Vṛtti*, etc.). We thus see how complex a historical phenomenon the Mahāyāna is, not only in its canonical Sūtras but also in its Śāstraic stages of elaboration.

Certainly, on the level of their expression, Sūtras and Śāstras differ from each other in so far as the former are very often characterized by tropes and figurative language making use of metaphor or metonymy and illustrating the topic being treated (the *upameya*) by means of comparisons (*upamāna*) and more or less elaborate parables. Sūtras are moreover marked quite often by irony, paronomasia, paradox, and antiphrasis. These are not necessarily just word-plays and riddles, rhetorical devices or playful literary conceits; at once conceptual and linguistic, they may be motivated by the perceived difficulty of conveying a deep intended sense — one more or less inexpressible through ordinary linguistic-conceptual means — and be defined by analogical or anagogic processes, which may then be associated with conceptual inversions or reversals (*viparyaya*, etc.) and, especially in the Vajrayāna, with the occasional feature of transgressive transvaluation of received norms (antinomianism or anomianism). Śāstras on the other hand are generally characterizable by their more technical vocabulary as well as by their scholastic style and contents (even if they too may make use of *upamānas*).

As already observed (p. 37), on the level of content, the hermeneutical distinction between the provisional (and eventually non-explicit)

neyārtha and the definitive *nītārtha* (explicit or not as the case may be) basically concerns the *buddhavacana* — in other words Sūtras (and Tantras) which are regarded as taught by the Buddha, or under his sustaining force — rather than Śāstras, which are taken to be not only explicit in their wording but definitive in their contents (in the frame, of course, of the particular system to which they belong).

On two early masters of the Mahāyāna: Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu

The polysemy, and the resulting potential ambivalence, of the term Mahāyāna and the problem of pinning down precisely to what it may refer is reflected in discussions that have taken place as to whether, for example, Nāgārjuna (first/second century) and An Shih-kao (An Shigao, second century) were Mahāyānists. In his fundamental, and criterial, *Madhyamakakārikās* Nāgārjuna has not cited any particular Mahāyānist source, the only explicit reference there being to a Śrāvakayānist one (the *Kātyāyanāvavāda*, in xv.7). In the case of An Shih-kao, the Parthian translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, no translations of specifically Mahāyānist texts are attributed to him in the Chinese canon.⁶³ But, taken by themselves, these circumstances do not appear to justify (much less to necessitate) the conclusion that neither Nāgārjuna nor An Shih-kao was a Mahāyānist.⁶⁴

The division between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna / Śrāvakayāna has impinged also on modern scholarly discussions concerning the existence of more than a single author named Vasubandhu. Opponents of Erich Frauwallner's thesis distinguishing between two authors of this name seem to have on occasion overlooked the fact that he supposed both that his Vasubandhu I (the master referred to as the *Vṛddhacārya*?) was a Mahāyānist and that his Vasubandhu II (the *Kośakāra*) became a Mahāyānist

pp. 44-45, 48 n. 76.

⁶³ On An Shih-kao see P. Harrison, 'The *Ekottarikāgama* translations of An Shigao', in: P. Kieffer-Pülz *et al.* (ed.), *Bauddhavidyāsudhākaraḥ* (Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997), p. 261 ff.; T. Vetter and P. Harrison, 'An Shigao's Chinese translation of the *Sapta-sthānasūtra*', in P. Harrison *et al.* (ed.), *Sūryacandrāya* (A. Yuyama Festschrift, Swisttal-Odendorf, 1998), pp. 197-216; S. Zacchetti, 'An early Chinese translation corresponding to Chapter 6 of the *Peṭakopadesa*', *BSOAS* 65 (2002), pp. 74-98. See also A. Forte, *The hostage An Shigao and his offspring: An Iranian family in China* (Kyōto, 1995).

⁶⁴ See Bangwei Wang, 'Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna: A reconsideration of the *yāna* affiliation

in his later career. The fact that Sautrāntika (and hence so-called 'Hīnayānist') presuppositions are detectable in the *Viṃśatikā* or *Triṃśikā* (*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhiḥ*)⁶⁵ — works ascribed by Frauwallner to his Vasubandhu II — is inconclusive for the discussion as to whether the different works attributed to (a) Vasubandhu were in fact composed by more than one author bearing this illustrious name when Vasubandhu II was according to Frauwallner a master of both Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna (and when his Vasubandhu I could have been building on Śrāvakayānist material). Still, in discussions as to the possible multiplicity of Vasubandhus, the question of the relation between Mahāyāna and pre- or non-Mahāyāna has crystallized around the person of this great figure. There seems to exist no conclusive proof that at the time he wrote his *Abhidharmakośa* the Kośakāra was — or alternatively was not (yet) — a Mahāyānist; nor does there even appear to exist a compelling reason for assuming that the author of this Abhidharma-treatise should have felt obligated to address in it the Mahāyāna had he already been a Mahāyānist.⁶⁶ In short, the fact that Vasubandhu's treatise on Abhidharma — a subject that was essentially Śrāvakayānist (even though Asaṅga is credited with the Mahāyānist *Abhidharmasamuccaya*) — does not bear on the Mahāyāna can *per se* tell us little if anything about whether its author was already a Mahāyānist at the time of its composition.

A problem also arises in relation to the difficult question as to whether the works ascribed to (a) Nāgārjuna might in fact have been composed by more than one author having this name. Even if ultimately germane to the problem of the multiplicity of masters bearing the renowned name of Nāgārjuna, the observation concerning the absence in Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikās* of any explicit reference to a Mahāyānist textual source (see above) should in no way oblige us to conclude that their author was not (yet) a Mahāyānist.⁶⁷ In itself, this circumstance is independent of the

of An Shigao and his school', *Bauddhavidyāsudhākarah*, pp. 689-99.

⁶⁵ See L. Schmithausen, 'Sautrāntika-Voraussetzungen in *Viṃśatikā* und *Triṃśikā*', *WZKS* 11 (1967), pp. 109-30.

⁶⁶ See recently P. Skilling, 'Vasubandhu and the *Vyākhyāyukti* literature', *JIAS* 23 (2000), p. 309 f.

⁶⁷ At all events, the *Ratnāvalī* also ascribed to Nāgārjuna does know the Mahāyāna. On the Mahāyāna in this text see recently G. Schopen, 'The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period

question of the multiplicity of authorship of the works ascribed to Nāgārjuna. Discussion concerning these two quite distinct matters of multiplicity of authorship for the works attributed to Nāgārjuna on one side and of Nāgārjuna I's relation to the Mahāyāna on the other side can thus avoid being vitiated by circularity in argument.

An effort has to be made, if not positively to prove (or disprove) the traditional ascription of a given work to Nāgārjuna I — which in some cases may be practically impossible in the absence of conclusive content-bound diagnostic criteria, as well as of formal (e.g. stylometric) criteria when the relevant text is available only in Chinese or Tibetan translations — then at least to develop criteria that might be able to make an attribution likely — or, alternatively, doubtful — on other than (more or less) impressionistic, subjective, grounds, or on the basis of an argument from silence. As things now stand, with the exception of the *Madhyamakākārikās* — usually taken as a reference point and standard for ascribing any other doctrinal work to Nāgārjuna I — there is scarcely a text attributed to this early master — beginning with the **Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, proceeding on to the *Ratnāvalī* and finishing, e.g., with the **Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā* (T. 1521, translated by Kumārajīva) — whose ascription to him has escaped being questioned in recent years. Similar problems arise also for the hymns ascribed to Nāgārjuna.⁶⁸ For the historian of the Mahāyāna, this is truly a troubling state of affairs.

In the case of the **Akutobhayā*, an argument against the attribution to Nāgārjuna I was already adduced in the Tibetan tradition. This is based on the fact that, in one place in chap. xxvii, this commentary quotes a verse found in the *Catuḥśataka* by Nāgārjuna's pupil Ārya-Deva, and on the assumption that a master will not quote his own disciple.⁶⁹

The *Sūtrasamuccaya*, an anthology of scriptural texts of the Mahāyāna ascribed to Nāgārjuna, should in principle be of very special interest for

in Indian Buddhism: Through a Chinese looking-glass', *EB* 32 (2000), p. 6 ff., with n. 70 below.

⁶⁸ cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India*, especially p. 33 ff. See also D. Seyfort Ruegg, 'Le *Dharmadhātustava* de Nāgārjuna', in: *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris, 1971), p. 448 ff. For some methodological issues in the case of Nāgārjuna, see our *Literature*, pp. 8-9, 33 f.

⁶⁹ See *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India*, p. 48 n. 120.

The relation of the *Akutobhayā* to Buddhapālita's commentary on the *Madhyamakākārikās* remains to be fully investigated in published form. Cf. C.W. Huntington, 'A lost

the discussion of the earlier Mahāyāna. For, if in fact by Nāgārjuna I, this compilation would take us back to a quite early stage in the history of the Mahāyāna, in all probability to the first or second century CE. And it would supply the historian of the Mahāyāna with a very valuable *terminus ante quem* for (at least parts of) the Sūtras included in it. But historical and textual problems arise. Not only is the *Sūtrasamuccaya* not available in the original Sanskrit — it is extant solely in two quite late translations, a Tibetan one attributed to Ye šes sde (c. 800) and a Chinese one attributed to Fa-hu (from soon after the year 1000) — but there also exists the real possibility that, in the course of its textual transmission over the centuries, such an anthology might have been open to expansion and interpolation (e.g. in the matter of the extracts in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* taken from the *Laṅkāvatāra* relating to the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine; see above, p. 40). Still another difficulty arises from the fact that the illustrious name Nāgārjuna has evidently been borne by more than one important Indian Buddhist master and author; and the question has therefore to be investigated whether the Nāgārjuna to whom the compilation of the *Sūtrasamuccaya* is ascribed was in fact the same person as the author of the *Madhyamakakārikās*. In this connexion it is noteworthy that the Chinese version of this work is (by Chinese standards) relatively late. But at the same time it may be observed that in his *Madhyamakaśāstrastuti* (v. 10) Candrakīrti — who lived in the seventh century, about half a millennium after Nāgārjuna I — counted the *Sūtrasamuccaya* as one of the latter's works. Candrakīrti has also referred to it in his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (ed. La Vallée Poussin, p. 402) in connexion with the *ekayāna* doctrine. The *Sūtrasamuccaya* has also been ascribed to Nāgārjuna by the author of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* v.106. In sum, therefore, the *Sūtrasamuccaya* could be of crucial importance for our present purposes if its ascription to Nāgārjuna I is correct. But, as already noted, the dates of the Chinese and Tibetan translations leave open to question its evidential value for describing as early either an idea or a given passage of a Sūtra; for we have always to reckon with the possibility of its expansion / interpolation even if, in its core, this anthology were to be ascribed to Nāgārjuna I.⁷⁰

text of the early Indian Madhyamaka', *AS/ES* 49 (1995), p. 693 ff.

⁷⁰ cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddhist Studies Review* 17 (2001), pp. 222-4. As pointed out

Concerning the very important *Ta-chih tu-lun* (**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T 1509) also ascribed to Nāgārjuna, and available only in Chinese, further research has no doubt still to be carried out on the question whether this work was actually composed by its (supposed) Chinese ‘translator’, the Kuchean Kumārajīva (344-413 / 350-409?), perhaps on the basis of extensive Indian Madhyamaka materials to which he may have had access during his period of study in Kashmir.⁷¹ At all events, Lamotte’s later hypothesis attributing this treatise to a Sarvāstivādin Deutero-Nāgārjuna⁷² does not seem necessary in order to explain the evidence.⁷³ Still, although most unlikely to have been composed by Nāgārjuna I, and therefore not genuine in the usual sense, this work does possess great significance

above (p. 40), the *Sūtrasamuccaya* quotes the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* on the *tathāgatagarbha*, whereas the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, also ascribed to Nāgārjuna, does not seem to mention this doctrine.

The *ekayāna* as opposed to the *triyāna* theory has been fleetingly mentioned also in the *Ratnāvalī* (iv.88) ascribed to Nāgārjuna. Now, in his recent article ‘The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism’, *EB* 32 (2000), p. 9, G. Schopen has invoked this passage as a piece of evidence in support of his thesis that, at the time of the author of the *Ratnāvalī*, the Mahāyāna had not gained wide acceptance, and that this royal counsellor was nevertheless hoping that it would at least be ‘tolerated’. But to the present writer this passage does not appear to have anything to do with (in)tolerance of the Mahāyāna by others. Rather, the allusion in question relates to these two theories *within* the Mahāyāna, and concerning which the royal recipient of the *Ratnāvalī* is asked by its author not to take sides but to maintain an attitude of impartiality (*upekṣā*). It is, after all, not the task of a ruler as such to take sides in such difficult, and controversial, matters of religio-philosophical hermeneutics, any more than it would be for the king to pass judgement on the hermeneutical problems posed by utterances (*abhisamdhyaōktāni*, iv.88) ascribed to the Buddha which have traditionally been regarded as allusive or ‘intentional’. No reason seems therefore to exist for describing this passage as having ‘the smell of a retreat’ by the author of the *Ratnāvalī*, and to claim that it is a piece of ‘sectarian rhetoric’ (*ibid.*, p. 9). Quite the reverse, in fact, for this admonition addressed to the ruler by the author of the *Ratnāvalī* represents a regular Buddhist procedure. The question here, then, is whether the problematic of the *ekayāna* as opposed to the *triyāna* had already been thematized at the time of Nāgārjuna I, the author of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, in connexion with the idea of intentional utterances. — On the *ekayāna*, see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, p. 177 ff.; and on intentional utterances and *abhisamdhya* in Buddhist thought, see *id.*, ‘Allusiveness and obliqueness in Buddhist texts’, in: C. Caillat (ed.), *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes* (Paris, 1989), pp. 295-328. Concerning the relation between the temporal and religious authorities, compare our *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l’Inde* (as in n. 17 above).

⁷¹ See *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India*, pp. 32-33. See also P. Demiéville, *L’Inde classique*, ii (1953), §§2079, 2130.

⁷² See E. Lamotte, *Des Verfasser des Upadeśa* (as in n. 2 above).

for the history of the Madhyamaka in North India and Central Asia as well as in East Asia. It may accordingly be said to possess what might be termed true doctrinal authenticity.⁷⁴

It is clear that the historical and methodological problems attaching both to the figure and to the authorship of Nāgārjuna have not yet been sufficiently probed, much less fully resolved, despite their crucial importance for the history of the early Mahāyāna. Certain proposed solutions seem to have involved unexamined premisses and circularity in argument taking what is only a hypothesis to be already proved.

Some other problems of authorship and authenticity in earlier Mahāyānist literature

The *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun* (**Mahāyānaśraddhotpādaśāstra*) ascribed to Aśvaghōṣa in the Chinese tradition — T. 1666 [Paramārtha's [500-569] translation] and T. 1667 [Śikṣānanda's [652-710] translation] — is no doubt not by this old Indian author but, instead, a work produced in China owing to Paramārtha's teaching activity there in the sixth century. It nevertheless possesses very considerable doctrinal interest; and for Paramārtha's school of Vijñānavāda it can be said to have true doctrinal authenticity, containing as it does important and genuine philosophical material.⁷⁵ A further problem of authenticity concerns the so-called **Buddhatā-śāstra* (T. 1610) ascribed to Vasubandhu and supposedly translated by Paramārtha.

Questions concerning sources and the circumstances of composition also arise later for the so-called **Vijñaptimātratā-siddhi* (T. 1585) compiled and redacted by Hsüan-tsang (602-664), but on the basis of Indian materials going back to the Vijñānavādin Dharmapāla and other Indian commentators on Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* and collected by this Chinese scholar during his long period of study in India in the seventh century.

⁷³ cf. *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India*, pp. 32-33.

⁷⁴ On the general question of authenticity, see R. Buswell (ed.), *Chinese Buddhist apocrypha* (Hawaii, 1990).

⁷⁵ See P. Demiéville, *L'Inde classique*, ii (1953), §2148; and, more recently, J. Takasaki,

The Bodhi(sattva)caryāvatāra

In the later history of the Madhyamaka, even Śāntideva / Śāntadeva's *Bodhi(sattva)caryāvatāra* — ascribed in the Chinese canon to Nāgārjuna himself, and in one Tibetan version (from Dunhuang) to a certain Blo gros m(y)i zad pa (Akṣayamati) — poses curious and interesting problems concerning still another important Mahāyāna treatise.⁷⁶ This later work is alluded to here since it shows that some of the above-mentioned historical problems in the earlier history of the Mahāyāna are not met with exclusively at the beginning of this tradition. In the history of the Mahāyāna, Śāstra as well as Śūtra will continue to give us much food for thought and discussion. Śāstras — i.e. works not classified as *buddhavacana* — should not be excluded in principle from the investigation of even the earlier Mahāyāna.⁷⁷

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Beside the approaches to the history of Mahāyāna outlined above, a further highly important avenue consists in the study of the figures of the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas. There already exist a number of valuable monographs relating to the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara (e.g. de Mallmann), Tārā (from G. de Blonay to P. Arènes), Maitreya / Ajita,⁷⁸ Mañjuśrī (e.g. Lamotte and de Mallmann), and Vajrapāṇi (e.g. Lamotte).

'Textual problems of the *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda*', *ABORI* 68 (1987), pp. 413-24.

⁷⁶ See A. Saito, *A study of Akṣayamati (= Śāntideva)'s Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra as found in the Tibetan manuscripts from Tun-huang* (Miye University, 1993); *A study of the Dun-huang recension of the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* (Mie, 2000); and 'Remarks on the Tabo Manuscript of the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*', in: C. Scherrer-Schaub and E. Steinkellner (ed.), *Tabo studies II: Manuscripts, texts, inscriptions and the arts* (Rome, 1999), pp. 175-89. Cf. A. Saito, 'Śāntideva in the history of Mādhyamika philosophy', in: *Buddhism in India and abroad* (Mumbai-New Delhi, 1996), pp. 257-63. Śāntideva's work has been dated to the second half of the seventh century or the first part of the eighth century. The reference in this work (v.106) to Nāgārjuna's *Sūtrasamuccaya* has been discussed by A. Saito, 'Notes on the interpretation of *Bodhi(sattva)caryāvatāra* V.104-106', in: H. Bode-witz and M. Hara (ed.), *Gedenkschrift J. W. de Jong* (Tōkyō, 2004), pp. 134-47.

There is uncertainty in some sources as to the form of the name Śāntideva or Śāntadeva. (The proper name Śāntideva is attested in the Gunaighar (Bengal) copper-plate inscription of Vainya Gupta, but it does not refer to the author of our text.)

⁷⁷ For a recent contribution to the study in a fairly old Śāstra of the problem of Mahāyāna in relation to Hinayāna, see M. D'Amato, *The Mahāyāna-Hinayāna distinction in the Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra: A terminological analysis* (University of Chicago thesis, 2000).

⁷⁸ See, e.g., E. Abegg, 'Der Buddha Maitreya', *Mitteilungen der schweizerischen*

Study of the Mahāyāna may furthermore focus on its multiplication of Buddhas / Jinas / Tathāgatas in addition to the Buddha Śākyamuni and his (putative) human predecessors. Prominent among the (so-called cosmic) Buddhas are Akṣobhya and Amitābha to each of whom is assigned a pure Buddha-field, respectively the Abhirati and the Sukhāvati. The Vajrayāna was then to push further this process of multiplication of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as tutelaries (Tib. *yi dam*) with the development of, for instance, Tathāgata-pentads and the corresponding *maṇḍalas*.

It is in relation to the Buddha and to Bodhisattvas, and also of course to his immediate spiritual master (*guru*, Tib. *rtsa ba'i bla ma*),⁷⁹ that the Mahāyānist displays a strong strand of religious devotion (*bhakti*, Tib. *gus pa*, *dad pa*; also *ādara*, *gaurava*, *preman*, etc.), spiritual inclination or affection (*bhāva*, Tib. *gus pa*, *bsam pa*) and tranquil receptivity or clarity of spirit (*prasāda*, Tib. *dad pa* 'faith'), expressed both earlier and later in an extensive literature of hymns and eulogies (*stotra* and *stava*).⁸⁰ This very noteworthy feature seems to have become prominent in Buddhism at about the same time that *bhakti* movements were spreading in Hindu India, but in this matter it is no easy thing to establish a direct dependence of Buddhism on Hinduism (or *vice versa*).

Antecedents and prefigurations of Mahāyānist doctrine in the thought of Śrāvakayānist orders / schools (nikāya)

A further interesting problem arises when an effort is made to trace the antecedents of Mahāyānist doctrines within Buddhism.

In the search for these origins and precursors of Mahāyāna we should not expect to find any single origin and source: monocausality seems in fact to be ruled out by the evidence available. No one Śrāvakayānist order / school (*nikāya*) of Buddhism can be identified as the single source of the

Gesellschaft der Freunde Ostasiatischer Kultur 7 (1945), pp. 7-37; E. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, pp. 775-88; A. Sponberg and H. Hardacre (ed.), *Maitreya, the future Buddha* (Cambridge, 1988); M. Deeg, 'Das Ende des Dharma und die Ankunft des Maitreya', *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 7 (1999), pp. 145-69; P. Jaini, *Collected papers on Buddhist studies* (Delhi, 2001), pp. 451-500.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., the *Gurupañcāśikā* ascribed to Aśvaghōṣa and the related literature.

⁸⁰ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, 'Le Dharmadhātustava de Nāgārjuna', pp. 454-7; id., *The literature of the Madhyamaka school of philosophy in India*, pp. 31, 55.

Mahāyāna as a whole, or even as its main source. And in a number of cases, Mahāyānists have cohabited in the same monastic community with Śrāvakayānists of various orders or schools.⁸¹

Whilst the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, for instance, has sometimes been linked with the Mahāsāṃghikas,⁸² its precursors, or at least adumbrations of it, appear to have been multiple and complex.⁸³ Exponents of this doctrine sometimes connect it with the Luminous Mind (*prabhāsvaraṃ cittam*, Pali *pabhassaraṃ cittaṃ*) of the old canonical Āgama (including the Pali canon of the Theravādins).⁸⁴ And as a prefiguration it is no doubt possible to point to the idea of a ‘Buddha-Seed’ (*buddha-bīja*) — and (to an extent) even to the *bīja* theory — as well as to the (*prakṛtistha*) *gotra*, all of which are of course not exclusively Mahāyānist.⁸⁵

On the related, but distinct, religious and spiritual factors of *anugraha*, *prabhāva*, *anubhāva* and *adhiṣṭhāna*, see above pp. 18-19.

⁸¹ See E. Lamotte, ‘Sur la formation du Mahāyāna’, p. 394 ff., as well as L. de La Vallée Poussin, ‘Opinions sur les relations des deux Véhicules au point de vue du Vinaya’, *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (Académie Royale de Belgique), 16 (1930), pp. 20-39. And on ‘Mahāyāna-Sthaviras’ in Sri Lanka, see H. Bechert, ‘Mahāyāna literature in Sri Lanka: the early period’, in: L. Lancaster (ed.), *Prajñāpāramitā and related systems* (Studies in honor of Edward Conze, Berkeley, 1977), pp. 351-8 (with id., ‘Notes on the formation of Buddhist sects and the origin of Mahāyāna’, in: *German scholars on India*, Vol. 1 [Varanasi, 1973], pp. 6-18). — For the Mahāyānist community of monks, see recently P. Kieffer-Pülz, ‘Mahāyāna- und Vajrayāna-Mönche’, in H. Bechert et al. (ed.), *Der Buddhismus*, i (Stuttgart, 2000), p. 303 ff.

⁸² It may be (?) that the *tathāgatagarbha* teaching was linked with the Mahāsāṃghika / Ekavyāvahārika school in Bhavya’s *Nikāyabhedavibhaṅgavyākhyāna* where we read: *de bñin gžegs pa thams cad kyi gsuñ ni sñiñ po la mñon par mos pa’o* (cf. A. Bareau, *JA* 1956, p. 173). Concerning possible Mahāsāṃghika links, see *Théorie*, pp. 47 ff., 412, 441 ff., 474. See also M. Shimoda, ‘The relationship between the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and the Mahāsāṃghika’, *IBK* 42/2 (1994), pp. 22-27.

⁸³ One of the main sources for the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is the (Mahāyānist) *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, to which M. Shimoda has devoted a major study: *Nehangyō no kenkyū* (Tōkyō, 1997). For the relation of this Sūtra to the *Mahāmeghasūtra* see T. Suzuki, ‘The recompilation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* under the influence of the *Mahāmeghasūtra*’, *IBK* 49/2 (2001), pp. 1007-03. Another major source, the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, has been studied by M. Zimmermann; see his ‘The *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, its basic structure and relation to the Lotus Sūtra’, *ARIRIAB* 2 (1999), pp. 143-68; and id., *A Buddha within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (Tōkyō, 2002).

⁸⁴ See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Théorie*, p. 411 ff. (where the Mahāsāṃghikas are mentioned as advocates of the theory).

⁸⁵ See the discussion in *Théorie*, *passim*; and D. Seyfort Ruegg, ‘La traduction de la

In their respective ways, the (Lokottaravādin-)Mahāsāṃghikas (in relation for instance to the Madhyamaka tradition)⁸⁶ and the Sautrāntikas (in relation for example to Vasubandhu and the Vijñānavāda)⁸⁷ have played significant parts in the elaboration and development of Mahāyānist thought. But there is no reason to believe that they were alone in this. It has been possible to link the famous *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*) ascribed to (a) Nāgārjuna with Sarvāstivāda tradition (and the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya).⁸⁸

As for Śrāvakayānist antecedents of the *ālayavijñāna*, in his *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (§ i.11-12) Asaṅga has cited the *mūlavijñāna* of the Mahāsāṃghikas, the **āsāṃsārikaskandha* of the Mahīśāsakas, and the *bhavāṅga* (Pali *bhavaṅga*) of the Tāmraśāṭīyas / Tāmraparṇīyas (i.e. the Staviras, and more specifically, the Theravādins).⁸⁹

Furthermore, Mahāyānist monks have followed the Discipline-books of a Vinaya-school, the Chinese using the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya for instance, and the Tibetans the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya (see pp. 30-31 above).

In sum, no single philosophical doctrine and no single religious practice — not even the Bodhisattva-ideal or the *svabhāva-śūnyatā*- (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) or *dharmanairātmya*-doctrine⁹⁰ — can of and by itself be claimed to be the main religious or philosophical source of the Mahāyāna as a whole. And it would seem in large part to be a fallacy to attempt to link the origins of the Mahāyāna with any one particular Śrāvakayānist Nikāya.

terminologie technique de la pensée indienne depuis Sylvain Lévi' forthcoming in the Proceedings of the S. Lévi Memorial Symposium (Paris, 2003).

⁸⁶ See Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* vi.44 (pp. 134-35), where the Pūrvaśāila branch of the (Lokottaravādin-)Mahāsāṃghikas is specified as the source. See also Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, xxvi.2 (p. 548), where the source of two verses of the same material is given as *āgamasūtrāṇi*. On these verses see D. Seyfort Ruegg, 'Le *Dharmadhātustava* de Nāgārjuna', in: *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, pp. 459-60. In his *Śūnyatāsaptatīpti*, Candrakīrti also cites a couple of verses from the same material. The source appears to be the **Lokānuvartanasūtra*; see P. Harrison, 'Sanskrit fragments of a Lokottaravādin tradition', in: L. Hercus et al. (ed.), *Indological and Buddhist studies* (J.W. de Jong Felicitation Volume, Canberra, 1982), pp. 211-34. — Relevant groups are known in Pali as Andhakas.

⁸⁷ See above, n. 65.

⁸⁸ See E. Lamotte, *Der Verfasser des Upadeśa und seine Quellen* (see n. 2), together with his French translation of the **Upadeśa*: *Le traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*. For links with the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins and the date of the latter, see G. Schopen, 'The bones of a Buddha and the business of a monk...', *JIP* 27 (1999), p. 293.

But it remains perfectly legitimate, and of course very useful, to try to identify in the thought of an earlier Buddhist school / order antecedents, precursors and prefigurations of — or at least parallels to — a given component element of the Mahāyāna.⁹¹

The question of so-called ‘merit-transfer’

An idea that has posed a number of thorny questions and conceptual difficulties for Buddhist thought and the history of the Mahāyāna is that often referred to as ‘transfer of merit’ (*puṇyapariṇāmanā*). The process of *pariṇāmanā* (Tib. *yoṅs su bsṅo ba*) in fact constitutes a most important feature in Mahāyāna, where it denotes what might perhaps best be termed the dedication of good (*puṇya*, *śubha*, *kuśala[mūla]*; Tib. *bsod nams*, *dge ba[’i rtsa ba]*) by an exercitant in view of the attainment by another karmically related person (such as a deceased parent or teacher) of a higher end. Yet such dedication appears, *prima facie*, to run counter to the karmic principle of the fruition or retribution of deeds (*karmavipāka*). Generally accepted in Buddhism, both Mahāyānist and non-Mahāyānist, this principle stipulates that a karmic fruit or result (*karmaphala*) is ‘reaped’, i.e. experienced, solely by the person — or more precisely by the conscious series (*saṃtāna*) — that has sown the seed of future karmic fruition when deliberately (*cetayitvā*) accomplishing an action (*karman*).

The related idea of acquisition / possession (of ‘merit’, Pali *patti*, Skt. *prāpti*), of assenting to and rejoicing in it (*pattānumodanā*), and even of its gift (*pattidāna*) are known to sections of the Theravāda tradition; and

⁸⁹ See the discussion in L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna* (Tōkyō, 1987).

⁹⁰ See above, p. 39.

⁹¹ Account must be taken of the fact that a given doctrine of a Śrāvakayānist Nikāya, as now available to us, is not *automatically and necessarily* earlier historically than a comparable idea of the *earlier* Mahāyāna.

According to certain records, for instance the legend of Mahādeva and the Council of Pāṭaliputra, the Mahāsāṃghikas were linked from early times with the Mahāyāna and had a Bodhisattvapiṭaka and a Dhāraṇīpiṭaka. For the *arapacana* formula see above, nn. 48 and 57. And on *dhāraṇīs*, or mnemonic formulae, see T. Vetter, ‘On the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism’, *AS/EA* 48 (1994), pp. 1244, 1272-3.

For the Śrāvakayānist Nikāyas — in particular the Mahāsāṃghikas but also the Dharmaguptakas and Harivarman’s **Satyasiddhiśāstra* — in relation to the Mahāyāna, see A. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, p. 296 ff. Cf. D. Seyforth Ruegg, ‘Über die Nikāyas der Śrāvakas und den Ursprung der philosophischen Schulen des Bud-

this concept — absent in the oldest canonical texts in Pali, but found in later Pali tradition (*Petavatthu*, *Buddhāpadāna*) — has been explained by some writers as being due to Mahāyānist influence, and by reference to Nalinaksha Dutt's category of 'semi-Mahāyāna'.⁹²

The dedication of good by one sentient being in favour of others has of course to be kept separate from that particular kind of *karman*, also known in Buddhism, which is held in common (*sādhāraṇaṃ karma*) by karmically related sentient beings, who then share in the fruition of these actions in one single container-world (*bhājanaloka*).⁹³

The *pariṇāmanā* of salutary roots (*kuśalamūla*) in view of supreme Awakening (*anuttarā samyaksambodhiḥ*) appears also to violate another important principle, that of the momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*, *kṣaṇikatā*) of things. For, given this very widely accepted principle, the question arises as to just how there can exist a link (*samavadhāna*) between the mental event of joyful approval (*anumodakaṃ cittaṃ*, *anumodanāmanaskāra*) of a salutary act — the antecedent of the *pariṇāmaka-citta* / *pariṇāmanāmanaskāra* — and the subsequent moment of its dedication.⁹⁴

Aspects of the concepts expressed by the terms *pariṇāmanā* and *patti* have been considered by a number of scholars, and the matter awaits full treatment.⁹⁵ When speaking of the Mahāyāna, it is essential to remember

dhismus nach den tibetischen Quellen', in: H. Bechert (ed.), *Zur Schulzugehörigkeit von Werken der Hīnayāna-Literatur*, Part 1 (Göttingen, 1985), p. 111 ff.

⁹² See N. Dutt, *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its relation to Hīnayāna* (London, 1930), pp. 36-39.

⁹³ For some references concerning this kind of *karman* that does not belong solely to a single conscious stream, see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy*, p. 204 (n. 79).

⁹⁴ This matter has been discussed in detail by Haribhadra in his *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-ālokā* ii.21-23, in his comments on chapter ii, the *Anumodanāpariṇāmanāparivarta*, of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. For *kṣaṇikatva* compare Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* ix.6 f. with Prajñākaramati's commentary (in this work's section [iii.6-7] on *pariṇāmanā*, this problem has not been raised).

⁹⁵ The literature on *puṇyapariṇāmanā* and *patti* in Buddhism is extensive. See, e.g., J.-M. Agasse, 'Le transfert de mérite dans le bouddhisme pāli classique', *JA* 1978, pp. 311-32; J. Filliozat, 'Sur le domaine sémantique de *puṇya*', in: *Indianisme et bouddhisme, Mélanges É. Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980), pp. 101-16; G. Schopen, 'Two problems in the history of Buddhism', *SIJ* 19 (1985) = *Bones, stones and Buddhist monks*, p. 36 ff. (with the bibliography in n. 104); H. Bechert, 'Buddha-field and transfer of merit in a Theravāda source', *SIJ* 35 (1992), pp. 95-108, with a comprehensive bibliography of the problem and a discussion of the studies by G. Schopen ('Two problems in the history of

that all this takes place against the background, implied or expressed, of the Emptiness of self-existence (*svabhāvaśūnyatā*) and the Non-substantiality (*niḥsvabhāvatā, nairātmya*) of all things, and of the absence of objectification (*anālambana*, etc.).

Mahākaruṇā, or nirālambanā karuṇā, and sarvākāravaropetā śūnyatā

There exists in the Mahāyāna the idea of salvific activity, exercised by the Buddha or by a Bodhisattva, which benefits a collectivity inasmuch as this activity exercised by them, and marked by their highly expert use of the appropriate salvific devices (*upāya*), does not take as its object any single, individualized beneficiary of compassion. Essential to this kind of activity appears to be on the one side the ethical and spiritual autonomy of its numerically unlimited beneficiaries and on the other side the soteriological action of the Buddha and Bodhisattva as agents of this ‘interpersonal’ — but none the less universalized and non-objectifying — activity.

Non-objectifying compassion (*nirālambanā karuṇā*) — in other words *mahākaruṇā* ‘Great Compassion — having as it does the quality of being non-reifying and unhypostatized, is moreover a component feature of that form of Emptiness which has been described as endowed with all excellent modes (*sarvākāravaropetā śūnyatā*).⁹⁶ The realization of this characteristically Mahāyānist principle brings into play, and engages in their fullness, all the Perfections (*pāramitā*) under the guidance of the sixth, namely discriminating understanding (*prajñā*).

The complexity of the concept of Mahāyāna

Some modern writers have perhaps been inclined to use the terms ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hīnayāna’ somewhat unreflectively if not carelessly, without

Buddhism’) and L. Schmithausen (‘Critical response’, in: R.W. Neufeldt [ed.], *Karma and rebirth* [Albany, 1986], pp. 203-30). This article by Bechert is a revised version of his ‘Buddha-Feld und Verdienstübertragung: Mahāyāna-Ideen im Theravāda-Buddhismus Ceylons’, *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (Académie Royale de Belgique) 62 (1976), pp. 27-51. — For the idea of merit-transfer in Brahmanism/Hinduism, see M. Hara, ‘Transfer of merit’, *ALB* 31-32 (1967-68), pp. 383-411; id., ‘Transfer of merit in Hindu literature and religion’, *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 52 (1994), pp. 103-35.

having paid due attention to semantic nuance and to important gnoseological and soteriological distinctions. Before such terminology can be securely and meaningfully taken over, a careful 'emic' analysis, based on the original Buddhist categories, is required of the synchronic, and systematic, uses made of it by a given text or set of related texts, as well as by the scholastic traditions deriving diachronically from the textual corpus.

In its philosophical thought, ethical practice and religious discipline the Mahāyāna, including also its earlier forms, evidently embraced various currents and strands of theory and practice. Apparently these components were sometimes in tension with each other.

It would seem, for example, that as a whole the Mahāyāna was neither a one-sidedly lay, or 'popular', movement nor was it exclusively an ascetic or monachal, and so-called 'elitist', one (at least to the extent that these pairs of opposed descriptions are to be considered as defining mutually exclusive and contradictory extreme positions — in other words, in Buddhist parlance, as *antas*). In the Mahāyāna we find criticized and repudiated certain forms of austerity; and excessive forms of it could even be represented by Māra, being induced by his 'acts' (*māra-karman*),⁹⁷ or again by Devadatta.⁹⁸ Yet we find also recognized in the Mahāyāna the famous qualities (*dhuta-/dhūtaguṇa* = *sbyaṅs pa'i yon tan* 'factors of purification, austerities') of the ascetic or *pāṃśukūlika*.⁹⁹ Such an opposition between contrasting forms of religious life and discipline is in part congruent with the well-known distinction between wilderness-dwelling eremitic monks and town-dwelling coenobitic monks (*āraṇyaka* / *grāmāṇtika*, *araññavāsī* / *gāmantavihārī*, who may be identified as Dharmabhāṇakas).¹⁰⁰ It was no doubt not asceticism as such that was repudiated in the

⁹⁶ This last concept has historical links with the concept of the Empty of the heterogeneous (*gṛāṇ stoṇ*), as distinct from the *raṇ stoṇ*, i.e. *svabhāvaśūnyatā* 'Emptiness of self-existence'.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Chapter xxi, p. 391 ff.

⁹⁸ cf. B. Mukherjee, *Die Überlieferung von Devadatta ... in den kanonischen Schriften* (Munich, 1966), p. 75 ff., discussing the views of the Śrāvakayānist (!) sources on this matter; and M. Deeg, 'The Saṅgha of Devadatta', *JICABS* 2 (1999), pp. 183-218. An echo of the view of Devadatta as an advocate of extreme asceticism is to be found much later among the songs of 'Brug pa Kun legs, fol. 19b and 30b (see R.A. Stein, *Vie et chants de 'Brug-pa Kun-legs le Yogin* [Paris, 1972]).

⁹⁹ See, e.g., J. Dantinne, *Les qualités de l'ascète* (Brussels, 1991). Cf. G. Schopen, *EB* 32 (2000), p. 22 f.

Mahāyāna, but those forms of it that were not governed by the Perfections, and in particular by the foundational Perfection of liberality (*dāna-pāramitā*) and the key central Perfection of discriminative understanding (*prajñāpāramitā*). As already observed above (p. 27), the ‘householder’ Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti might possibly be seen as emblematic of a combined lay-religious current within Mahāyāna.¹⁰¹ It may also be recalled that, in Buddhist tradition continued by both the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Abhidharma*, the category of *Pratyekabuddha* is subdivided into two, the *khaḍgaviṣṇānakalpa* (*bse ru lta bu*), who lives as a solitary ascetic (*ekavihārīn*), and the *vargacārīn* (*tshogs spyod*), who is linked with a Śrāvaka (*śrāvaka-pūrvīn*) and the Śrāvakayāna.

Indeed, as is so often the case in the study of Indian religion and thought, for the history of the Mahāyāna we shall no doubt need to adopt in many a case a ‘both... and’ view which is ‘emically’ based, renouncing the specious clarity and simplicity of some stark ‘either... or’ dichotomy couched in terms of ‘etic’ categories. We shall surely have to eschew any generalizing reductionism that transforms the whole of the Mahāyāna into some one-sided dogma or praxis (even if, at some times and places, we do indeed find extreme and unilateralist positions expressed in our sources).

By way of conclusion

In scholarly research, the tracing of both continuities and discontinuities is one of the first tasks the historian will set himself. In many of its aspects, the Mahāyāna appears not so much as a radical break in the course of Buddhist thought — one that is markedly discontinuous with

¹⁰⁰ See lately F. Deleanu, ‘A preliminary study on meditation and the beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism’, *ARIRIAB* 3 (1999), pp. 65-113; S. Karashima, ‘Who composed the Lotus Sūtra?’, *ARIRIAB* 4 (2000), pp. 143-82; and D. Boucher, ‘The textual history of the *Rāstrapālāparipṛcchā*’, *ibid.*, pp. 93-115. Aspects of this problem have also been treated by J. Silk in his 1994 University of Michigan thesis: *The origins and early history of the Mahāratanakūṭa tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, with a study of the Ratnarāśīsūtra and related materials*.

¹⁰¹ Another, somewhat different, case is the householder Ugra of the *Gṛhapati-Ugrapariṛcchāsūtra*. Cf. J. Nattier, *A few good men: The Bodhisattva Path according to the Inquiry of Ugra* (Honolulu, 2003).

A diplomatic edition of the Sanskrit text of a manuscript of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* was

the rest of the 'Buddha-Word' (*buddhavacana*) or the Buddha's teaching (*dharma, śāsana*)¹⁰² — but rather as continuing elucidation and persistent elaboration. It reveals itself as a development of much of what was said in other sections of the Buddha's teaching, of which the Mahāyāna scriptures are indeed deemed by its followers to form part and parcel. In other words, the Mahāyāna may often be regarded as representing changes in emphasis or perspective, destined perhaps for a particular spiritual type or category (*gotra*, etc.) of persons as defined by their mental aptitudes and predispositions and by their spiritual aspiration (*āśaya*, etc.). And topics merely foreshadowed earlier, or only roughly sketched out previously, are there thematized and developed. A good number of the fundamental ideas of the Mahāyāna in fact turn out to have antecedents, precursors or prefigurations in the old canonical scriptures (*Āgamas / Nikāyas*) and their commentaries.

In its historical stages, what we know as Mahāyāna would appear to have been a complex and many-layered, as well as a geographically widely diffused and polycentric, set of teachings and practices that relate to a mentality, ideal and movement having multiple religious and philosophical expressions as well as social and geographical origins. It presents itself as an aspiration toward a spiritual goal: immediately the practice or path of a Bodhisattva (*bodhisattvacaryā, bodhipatha*, etc.) and ultimately the state of a Buddha (*buddhatā*, etc.).

Concerning the description as 'mysticism' that has not infrequently been attached to one or the other feature of Mahāyānist thought, given that in its usage this expression seems to bear so many heterogeneous meanings, its applicability and usefulness here are problematical. As a whole, the Mahāyāna seems to have little to do with a *via unitiva* or *unio mystica*; rather, in Mahāyānist thought, a key idea is *advaya* 'non-duality' (which is something different even from Vedāntic *advaita* or monism). It is true that in Mahāyāna, the ineffable — that is, the conceptually and speculatively unthinkable (*acintya, atarkya*, etc.) and verbally inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*, etc.) ultimate reality of the (*aparyāya*)*paramārtha* — is a very prominent theme. And throughout Buddhist thought the *avyākṛtavastus* 'unexplicated points' and Āryan Silence (*ārya-tūṣṇībhāva*)

occupy a conspicuous place.¹⁰³ But inexpressibility and indeterminability do not seem to be equatable for instance with the *arrheta* ‘unspeakable’, much less with the *aporrheta* ‘forbidden’, as found in the secrecy of the Greek mysteries. With reference to *bodhi* ‘Awakening’, it may of course be understood as a sort of *illuminatio* — one not induced from without (*aparapratyaya*; cf. *pratyātmavedya*, etc.) —, with the Bodhisattva’s path then constituting a sort of *via illuminativa*. But since — rather like ‘shamanism’¹⁰⁴ — ‘mysticism’ seems to mean quite different things to different people, and since it therefore has only a limited heuristic value because it begs many a question and probably raises more problems than it actually clarifies, it had perhaps best be used sparingly (after being defined for a specific context) if not avoided altogether.¹⁰⁵ Concerning the matter of experience, mystical or otherwise, it may be recalled that Candrakīrti has provided an interesting, if brief, critique of *anubhava*.¹⁰⁶ As for ecstasy, it seems correct to say that in its outlook and techniques the Mahāyāna has been more enstatic than ecstatic.¹⁰⁷

If, then, it is to be invoked at all in connexion with the Mahāyāna, the description as mysticism will be either general and unspecific, and hence fairly vague, or, on the contrary, restricted to what relates to insight and inner understanding of the *paramārtha* (cf. *pratyātmavedya*, etc.), or again

on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature at the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism of Taisho University.

¹⁰² Although it may of course so appear in certain of its sources.

¹⁰³ cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *La théorie du tathāgatagarbha et du gotra*, p. 105 n. (on the difference from *avaktavya*, *avācya*), and Chap. v (with id., ‘On the knowability and expressibility of absolute reality in Buddhism’, *IBK* 20 [1971], pp. 495-489); id. *Three studies in the history of Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophy*, Section II.

¹⁰⁴ cf. recently *Revue Diogenes — Chamanismes* (Paris, 2003); H.-P. Francfort and R. Hamayon, *The concept of Shamanism: Uses and abuses* (Budapest, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ The ancient Greek ‘mysteria’ — a word etymologically connected with ‘mysticism’ and derived from Gk. *muō* ‘to initiate’ — have been surveyed by W. Burkert, *Ancient mystery cults* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 7 ff. He comes up with the following description (p. 11): ‘mysteries were initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal and secret character that aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred’. Almost all of Burkert’s description would be problematical for ‘mystery’ to the extent that this notion is applicable in the Mahāyāna (and perhaps even in the Vajrayāna). On mysticism in Asia, compare, e.g., F. Staal, *Exploring mysticism* (Berkeley, 1975); S. Weightman, *Mysticism and the metaphor of energies* (SOAS, London, 2000).

¹⁰⁶ *Prasannapadā* i.1, p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ On an aspect of this issue and of shamanism (in regard to a Buddhist work that

to what might be called visionary insight (as in the case of, e.g., the *Sarva-buddhaviṣayāvatāra-Jñānālokālaṃkārasūtra*).

The Mahāyāna is not an entirely uniform and monolithic movement. Nor does it even pretend to be such in so far as it insists that it was taught by the Buddha and his followers for the benefit of types of persons having different mental aptitudes and spiritual predispositions. And in its historical origins it was not totally homogeneous. Rather than monogenesis, and unilinearity, plurigenesis and polycentricity have marked both its origins and subsequent development. This fact will, however, hardly justify speaking in relation to it of 'Buddhisms' or of 'Mahāyānas' (in the plural): this procedure would appear to possess little heuristic and explanatory value, and it seems merely to displace the problems resulting from the complex nature of the Mahāyāna without providing us with a new and fruitful avenue for research and clarification. As for the masters and schools of Mahāyāna in both its Sūtra (*Prajñāpāramitā*, *Samādhinirmo-cana*, *Tathāgatagarbha*, etc.) and Śāstra (Madhyamaka, Vijñānavāda, etc.) forms, they were of course very much aware of the variety of ideas and doctrines that have been subsumed under the name of Mahāyāna.

The Mahāyāna appears, then, less as a monothetic entity than as a poly-thetic structure with so to say 'family resemblances' connecting various components. The multiple aspects and facets of the Mahāyāna locate themselves, in a quasi-historical narrative, within a religio-philosophical view and frame where the Buddha figures as Teacher, Buddha-Word (*buddhavadāna*) is its verbal expression, and buddhahood (*buddhatā*, etc.) is its ultimate end. For its followers, within the very considerable diversity of its teachings and practices, there have of course existed over-arching principles and themes, many of them newly found and elaborated. It is these, together with the stages of development through which the Mahāyāna has passed, that need also to be identified and explored in detail in our research.

Still another of the facets of the Mahāyāna (and of Buddhism in general) deserving mention is its link with medicine and healing, Bodhisattvas as well as the Buddha himself being thought of, metaphorically and literally, as physicians and healers.¹⁰⁸

is not Mahāyānist), see D. Seyfort Ruegg, 'On a Yoga treatise in Sanskrit from Qizil',

The critical exploration of the Mahāyāna towards which we strive as scholars will, needless to say, be historical, philological, archaeological, art historical, inscriptional (with the *caveat* entered above, pp. 15-18), sociological, religious, and philosophical. When appropriate, other disciplines, for instance numismatics, may also have to be called upon. The study of the recensions of Mahāyāna Sūtras, based on the Indian originals and their Chinese, Tibetan and other old versions, still remains to be carried further (see pp. 20-23 above). All this is clearly a very time-consuming task requiring a large force of experienced scholars. We of course already have available a number of valuable articles and books concerned with the Mahāyāna in and/or outside India. Because of the obstacles and difficulties outlined above, however, there has so far appeared no comprehensive and continuous narrative treatment of the history of the Mahāyāna, or even of its more ancient Indian periods, to complement Lamotte's masterly volume of 1958 devoted to the earlier history of Indian Buddhism. Such an undertaking would require the concerted and sustained efforts of a large group of scholars. In the circumstances of today, the number of qualified researchers available to undertake these tasks remains, however, relatively small, and it is scarcely adequate for the many tasks before us.

A matter of considerable importance for our quest, relating as it does to the epistemology as well as the data of Mahāyāna studies, seems to be the following consideration. Employing the standard and well-tested methods of the philological and historical sciences — and in a very legitimate search for origins, core data and textual or doctrinal strata through employing a more or less chronological and stratigraphical kind of analysis —, we sometimes find that the object of our enquiry so to say breaks up and becomes fragmented and impalpable, somewhat like the proverbial onion when being peeled. What are then additionally required are approaches to the subject that are thematic and hermeneutical, exploring religio-philosophical topics and structures (*topoi, philosophoumena*, etc.) in their various contexts, and seeking to lay bare the systematic significance of the constituent parts. Rather than limiting itself exclusively to bringing to light vertical, chronological-stratigraphical, layers, our study will sometimes need to be more comparable to tomography, where the image may reveal cross-linkages in a horizontal, synchronic, slice. It may also be appro-

priate to bring together materials from the geographically far-flung traditions of Buddhism. In such work the comparative method too will have a very important part to play. It will, however, still be possible for the enquiry to be diachronic whenever this appears to be appropriate and desirable, for we shall no doubt continue to wish to work forwards and backwards in time. And our study will thus not cease to be historical in the narrower, and modern, sense of this word. Yet at the same time it will need to bring to bear descriptions and analyses that are not exclusively stratigraphical and hence relatable in their procedures either to the evolutionary models of palaeontology proper to natural science, or to the methods of archaeological excavation. Therefore, far from being either ahistorical or antihistorical by seeking to overthrow the necessary techniques of philology and history, this study will prove to be historical also in the wider, and original, meaning of this word. In this way our quest can also be *historia* in the sense of *enquiry* and of its product, an *account* of this enquiry.

Finally, when we approach the study of early Mahāyāna, non-scriptural texts — those not classifiable as Sūtras — are not automatically to be excluded from our attention. It is of course only good philological and historical practice to turn to the old Sūtra works that constitute the acknowledged foundations of the Mahāyāna. But given the very nature of Mahāyānist sources — and in the light of the fact that the precise dating of many a Mahāyāna Sūtra is in any case problematical and may in some cases place it in the same period as a Śāstra — basic exegetical works originating in the older period, such as those of Nāgārjuna, also need to be taken carefully into account. Indeed, Śāstra literature can yield invaluable avenues of approach even to the earlier Mahāyāna.

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