

Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Some *Mahāratnakūṭasūtras*

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This essay will deal primarily with an interesting event that occurs in some Mayāyāna Buddhist sūtras: “changing the female body.” As primary sources, four sections from the Chinese translation of the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* have been used, and comparisons have been made with passages from the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtra*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdēśa* and the *Srimālāsimhanādasūtra*. The four *Mahāratnakūṭa* scriptures used are:

1. *Ta-pao-chi ching, Miao-hui t'ung-nü hui* (*Mahāratnakūṭasūtra, Sumatidārikā-parivarta*), T.11.310(30) (hereafter cited as the *Sumi-sūtra*)¹
2. *Ta-pao-chi ching, Hēng-ho-shang yu-p'o-i hui* (*Mahāratnakūṭasūtra, Gaṅgottaropāsikā-parivarta*), T.11.310(31) (hereafter cited as the *Gaṅgottara-sūtra*)²
3. *Ta-pao-chi ching, Wu-kou shih p'u-sa ying-pien hui* (*Mahāratnakūṭasūtra, Vimaladattā-bodhisattva-pratibhāna-parivarta*), T.11.310(33) (hereafter cited as the *Pure Gift Sūtra*)³
4. *Ta-pao-chi ching, Ching-hsin t'ung-nü hui* (*Mahāratnakūṭasūtra, Viśuddhiśraddhādārikā-parivarta*), T.11.310(40) (hereafter cited as *Pure Faith's Question*)⁴

This study makes use of only a few of the Mahāyāna sūtras which deal with “changing the female body,” and leaves untouched the vast majority of Mahāyāna texts which have women as central figures or which contain important discussions about women. My intention has been to make an intensive examination of a selected group of texts, in order to identify some important characteristics of the “changing the female body” theme.

Although it is assumed that all the sūtras discussed in this essay

were originally composed in India, most do not survive in their original languages. All exist however in Chinese translations, which I have used and translated for this essay. The scriptures provide information on the evolution of Mahāyāna thought in India, and the existence of Chinese translations of them also suggests some things about Chinese assimilation of Indian Buddhist thought and about the impact of these translated scriptures on Chinese ideas and attitudes. The span of time over which the translations of the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtras* were made is very great, more than 500 years, and the impact made by the various translations discussed here is difficult to trace. I will, therefore, confine myself in this essay to an examination of the contents of the sūtras themselves, and to a few brief remarks on the circumstances of their translation into Chinese.

The Mahāratnakūṭasūtra and Mahāyāna Buddhist Attitudes Toward Women

There are many Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras which have something to say about women. Some are quite hostile; many of these uphold the old clerical biases against women which have cropped up from time to time in the various Buddhist sects. Har Dayal, in his *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (pp. 223–4), catalogues some of the more unpleasant responses to women found in Mahāyāna texts.

But there are many Mahāyāna scriptures which insist that only the ignorant make distinctions between the religious aspirations and intellectual and spiritual capacities of men and women. This position is the only one which is consistent with the Mahāyāna doctrine of the emptiness of all phenomena. This is the doctrine which lies at the heart of many Mahāyāna scriptures, beginning with the Perfection of Understanding Sūtras (*Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*). It is the position of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* texts discussed in this essay.

The *Mahāratnakūṭasutra* is a large, composite sūtra, in 49 sections, as it now appears in the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist canons. The 49 sections were originally separate sūtras, and were apparently first grouped together under the single title *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* in T'ang China.⁵ Several of the 49 sūtras were originally translated much earlier, some as early as the Later Han Dynasty (2nd century A.D.). During the T'ang Dynasty, under imperial auspices and with a team of Chinese assistants, the Indian monk-scholar, Bodhiruci, gath-

ered together and examined all extant translations of the 49 sūtras. He re-translated those which, in his opinion, were not of good quality and provided original translations of those which were not yet available in Chinese. The work was carried out from 706 to 713 A.D. during the reigns of Emperors Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung, the two sons and successors of Empress Wu Tse-t'ien.

Bodhiruci himself translated for the first time two of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* sūtras discussed here, the *Gangottara-sūtra* and *Pure Faith's Question*, and retranslated the *Sumati-sūtra* and the *Śrīmālāśimhanāda*. Soon after his arrival in China from India, in 693 A.D., he had participated in the translation of other sūtras which contain important statements on women: the *Ratnamegha-sūtra* and the *Avatamsaka*. Bodhiruci was a monk and scholar of some reputation, who had come to China at the invitation of T'ang Empress Wu Tse-t'ien, and for twenty years he received the support and patronage of the Empress and of her two sons and successors. In return Bodhiruci lent his prestige to the Empress' claim to be legitimate ruler of China in her own right: she was the only woman in Chinese history who ever ruled in her own name as *emperor* of China, not merely as regent for a prince.⁶ Although she has been castigated since by Confucian historians because she was a woman and a usurper, she seems to have been regarded by her subjects as a capable and constructive ruler. She claimed to be the legitimate ruler, as well, on the grounds that she was a Bodhisattva and a Buddhist universal monarch, whose rule as a woman was the most appropriate response the Bodhisattva could find to the needs of the people at that time and in that place.⁷ The Empress' Buddhist supporters, with at least the tacit approval of Bodhiruci, argued further that the Empress' reign had been predicted by the Buddha himself in certain Mahāyāna sūtras (the *Ratnamegha*, *Pao-yü ching*, and the *Mahāmegha*, *Ta-yün ching*).

That Mahāyāna scriptures could be used to argue for the right of a woman to wield absolute power in one of the world's great empires reveals that some leading Buddhist scholars in China were quite aware of the positive Mahāyāna attitudes toward women. They could have cited several other scriptures in their cause. I cannot assess Bodhiruci's personal attitudes toward women, but I think it is important to recall that, at a period in Chinese history when the prominence of women was a timely concern, Bodhiruci helped make available to Chinese readers a number of Mahāyāna scriptures which argue for the spiritual and intellectual equality of women.

Dharmarakṣa (Chu Fa Hu) had done the same for an earlier audience. Among the more than 150 translations by the great 3rd-4th century master are several Mahāyāna scriptures on women—e.g., *Fo-shuo a-tu-kuan-wang nü a-shu-ta p'u-sa ching* (T.12.337), *Fo-shuo wu-kouhsien-nü ching* (T.14.562), *Fo-shuo fan-chin-nü shou-i ching* (T.14.567), the *Sumati-sūtra*, and several others.⁸ He also made the first translation of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtra*, and his translation does include the famous Dragon-princess episode, which will be discussed in this essay. He retranslated the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* as well, but his translation has been lost. Dharmarakṣa was a great propagator of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China. Inevitably, while he was making various aspects of Mahāyāna thought accessible to Chinese readers through his very faithful translations, he was also making available current Mahāyāna views on women. Whether or not this had any immediate impact, the information had been made available and was there to exert whatever influence it might on sympathetic minds for centuries after.

Women's Bodies and the Characteristic Marks of the Great Man

A spectacular event climaxes several Mahāyāna sūtras on women: the female protagonist causes her own body to change abruptly from female to male.⁹ To a modern woman who reads them, this is a most disconcerting feature of these scriptures. The women who change have already shown themselves, in the texts, to be in command of a highly developed comprehension of Dharma (truth). Why, one must ask, should they have to admit to a supposed biological inferiority and undergo a saving sexual metamorphosis? This phenomenon requires a closer investigation.

In Buddhist tradition, although it is often recognized that a woman can attain liberated understanding, it is asserted that there are five states of existence in the world for which her female body renders her unqualified: she is barred from becoming a Buddha,¹⁰ a universal monarch (*rāja-cakravartin*), a Śakra-god, Brahmā-god or a Māra.¹¹ For all of these five, maleness is an indisputable part of their being: could the gods Śakra, Brahmā or Māra be other than male? And as is well known from Buddhist literature, both the Buddha and the *cakravartin* conform to a specific physical type, the Great Man or *mahāpuruṣa*, who is also very specifically male. Numbered among his 32 characteristic marks (*lakṣaṇā*), which identify him as the Great Man, is that of having the penis covered with a sheath.¹²

The 32 major and 80 minor marks of the Great Man are the visible characteristics which reveal that he has accumulated great merit by the performance of an enormous number of specific virtuous actions over an enormous period of time. Visibly, a woman's body does not testify to these accomplishments, and her physical characteristics, which anyone can see, had to prohibit her from being a Great Man, whether he was a universal monarch or a Buddha. The 32 marks were, in Buddhist tradition, the key to visual identification of a Buddha, and were indispensable to the depiction of the Buddha in art and to the visualization of the Buddha in meditation. But in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, visual evidence of Buddhahood came to be regarded as of limited relevance. The 32 marks are not necessarily taken literally—for example, as the *Diamond Sūtra* argues, the Tathāgata cannot be seen by his marks, rather he is to be known from his characteristic of having no marks.¹³ The *Ta-chih-tu-lun*¹⁴ explains that from the point of view of conventional understanding the Buddha has 32 marks, but from the point of view of ultimate truth or perfected understanding there are no marks whatever. Moreover, there are two paths which the Buddhist may cultivate, the way of merit (*punya*) and the way of perfected understanding (*prajñā*); for the former, the 32 marks are relevant, for the latter they are not. The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* goes on to argue that other characteristics of sentient beings, such as being pure or good, male or female, etc., which are conventionally regarded as real, are actually relative in the same sense as the 32 marks of the Great Man, and when one has attained perfect understanding these too can be "destroyed." That is, one can recognize that these supposedly real characteristics are mere designations (*prajñapti*) and do not define what is real. The 32 marks of the Great Man and the characteristics maleness, femaleness, and the rest, do, however, serve a purpose in this world as we live in it; they are not aberrations, and to speak of them is not—necessarily—wrong.

It is the argument of this essay that because Mahāyāna Buddhist writers recognized that from the ultimate standpoint the 32 marks of the Great Man and the characteristics maleness, femaleness and the rest are not real, but they are very relevant to life in this world for most sentient beings and thus "true" from the conventional point of view, the question of what women were traditionally thought able and unable to do had to be confronted. Certainly the Mahāyānist could not ignore the fact that there was a strong tradition in Buddhism that women were limited by their biological characteristics. The question had to be faced. How could it be handled most effectively?

Summary of Four Mahāratnakūta sūtras

In order to understand what these four scriptures reveal about the Mahāyānist views of women, one should know first what the texts are about. Summaries of the *Sumati-*, *Pure Gift*-, *Gangottara*- and *Pure Faith's Question-sūtras follow.*

(1) *Sumati-sūtra*¹⁵

While preaching to an assembly of monks and Bodhisattvas on the Vulture Peak near the city of Rājagrha, the Buddha is addressed by Sumati, the 8-year-old daughter¹⁶ of a householder of that city. This child had, in previous existences, made offerings to the Buddhas and accumulated merit. She asks the Buddha to resolve her doubts concerning certain aspects of Bodhisattva practice, and asks him a question in ten parts which he then answers in ten tetrads in prose and verse (total of 40 items). She asks: (1) how can the Bodhisattva be born with a beautiful appearance that delights everyone, (2) how attain great wealth, (3) how keep a retinue that will not be dispersed, (4) how be reborn by transformation on a 1,000-petalled lotus in the presence of the Dharma-king,¹⁷ (5) how obtain the bases of supernormal power¹⁸ so that one can travel to Buddha-lands and revere all the Buddhas' (6) how to be free from ill-will and envy; (7) how to speak so that those who hear will have confidence in what one says, and practice it; (8) how to avoid wrongdoing, (9) how to be beyond Māra's reach, and (10) how at the moment of death to see the Buddha standing before one preaching the Dharma so that one will never again fall into an unfortunate rebirth.¹⁹

The Buddha replies at some length that to accomplish these ten things the Bodhisattva must above all develop to the highest degree right attitude and conduct toward others in order to help them advance toward liberation; give untiringly to others; make offerings to the Buddhas, Buddha-images and stūpas; teach; and attain supreme realization.²⁰ Having received the Buddha's instructions, Sumati resolves to fulfil all the 40 disciplines he has set for her.

Mahāmaudgalyāyana²¹ then speaks up, remarking that the discipline the Buddha has taught is difficult; therefore how can Sumati, a small girl, accomplish it?²² Sumati then performs two acts of truth:²³ "If I now speak the truth, that I am one who can carry out these 40 practices, then because of me may all the countless world-

systems quake six times, heavenly flowers rain down and musical instruments sound of themselves." This happens, as she has said it. Then: "If my words are true and not false, that before long I am to be a Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha, may everyone in this assembly turn the color of gold." This too happens and Mahāmaudhalyāyana commits himself to the Bodhisattva way, for it must be the best of ways since it makes it possible for an 8-year-old girl Bodhisattva to do as Sumati has done.

At this point, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva²⁴ challenges Sumati's understanding in a series of six questions (eight in Bodhiruci's text):

(1) "In what dharma do you abide that there should be manifested such a response (to your words)??" Sumati: "Dharma cannot be reckoned, therefore there is no abiding anywhere²⁵ . . . you should not ask this. (2) . . . in no dharma is there any abiding or any doubt or any saying 'this is right, this is wrong.'" (3) Mañjuśrī: "Did the Tathāgata originally perform no actions?" Sumati: "Like the moon reflected in water, like a dream or a mirage or an echo deep in the mountains—the Tathāgata's original actions are like this." (4) Mañjuśrī: "By accumulating these things it is possible to attain Buddhahood, is it not?" Sumati: ". . . There is no difference between wise and foolish actions. All dharmas are the same . . . whether it is 'true dharma' or 'false dharma' there is no abiding anywhere and no grasping and no letting go, (for) emptiness²⁶ has no form at all." (5) Mañjuśrī: "How many are there who can explain this meaning?" Sumati: ". . . The transformations which a magician can make are limitless. So, too, are confidence in and understanding of this dharma." (6) Mañjuśrī: "If I originate actions without transformation and without illusion, what dharma is thereby united to the Way?" Sumati: ". . . The condition of all dharmas is without either 'being' or 'non-being.' To reach Tathāgatahood is neither a uniting nor a dispersing (of dharmas)." (T.12.334, pp. 77.c.12–78.a.3)

Very pleased at these replies, Mañjuśrī praises Sumati, and the Buddha then says she had conceived the aspiration to attain enlightenment aeons ago and has just now attained the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise.²⁷ Mañjuśrī thereupon asks, "Why have you not changed your female body?" and Sumati replies, "It cannot be apprehended²⁸, for dharmas are neither male nor female. But now I must remove your doubts . . . If it is true that I shall attain Tathāgatahood . . . may I now . . . change into a man." And immedi-

ately she turns into a young novice monk. Sumati then makes a resolve concerning her future Buddha-land, that in it there will be nothing having to do with Māra, no hells and no “women’s demeanor.”²⁹ And she adds, “If I shall accomplish this, let my body be like that of a 30-year-old monk.” This, too, occurs. More resolves having to do with her Buddha-land follow. The Buddha then makes the prediction that Sumati-Bodhisattva will before long become a fully enlightened Buddha. Finally he proclaims the virtues of studying and preaching this sūtra, various members of the audience reach new levels of attainment on the path to enlightenment, and all are delighted at what they have heard.

(2) *Pure Gift Sūtra*³⁰

At one time the Buddha was staying in the Jeta grove at Śrāvastī, with a large entourage of monks and Bodhisattvas, all Arhats. One morning eight disciples (*ti-tzu, śrāvaka*), Śāriputra, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, Subhuti and others, and eight Bodhisattvas, including Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, set out together on a morning’s alms rounds. Each of the sixteen resolves to bring a specific blessing to the people of the city of Śrāvastī while begging his food. Śāriputra resolves that by the power of his deep concentration (*san-meī, samādhi*) all shall hear the Four Noble Truths preached, Mahāmaudgalyāyana that all shall be free of the Māras, Mañjuśrī that everything in the city shall send forth the sound of emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, etc. Each of the others makes a resolve of similar scope, appropriate to his own special accomplishments.

Approaching the city the mendicants meet the daughter of King Prasenajit, Pure Gift,³¹ aged 12 years, who, with a company of 500 women and 500 Brāhmaṇas, is going forth from the city to perform a Brahmanic rite. Considering the mendicants an inauspicious sight, the Brāhmaṇas wish to turn back, but Pure Gift begins to praise the Buddhists and the Buddha. When the Brāhmaṇas chastise her for this, she reveals that seven days after her birth 500 gods had appeared before her and proclaimed the virtues of Buddha, Dharma and Saṃgha, because, seeing into her heart, they realized she was ready for this instruction. They described the Buddha’s own person in considerable detail, and what they described was the Great Man (*mahāpuruṣa*)

endowed with his characteristic marks.³² From that time forth, says the princess, she has constantly recalled the Buddha³³ as he was described to her, and day and night only looks upon all the Buddhas. She has gone to hear the Buddha preach the Dharma as often as possible, has become detached from all worldly things and is entirely devoted to the Three Jewels. At this, the 500 Brāhmaṇas conceive the aspiration to become fully enlightened Buddhas.

Pur Gift's father, the king, who has come upon the scene and heard her words, asks Pure Gift why she is sad and displeased with her life. She answers:

"Great king, are you not aware of the sufferings of existence (*shêng-szu, samsâra*), of the pain resulting from the aggregates³⁴—the frailty of the body and desirous thoughts? Whatever one does is like illusion. Life does not stop for a moment . . . It is like trying to sleep peacefully among poisonous snakes . . . Since I have seen the Victor and Lord . . . I have conceived the aspiration which will make me attain Buddhahood . . ."³⁵

Pure Gift then turns to the eight disciples and eight Bodhisattvas, and poses a question to each about the special mastery reputed to be his. She begins with Śāriputra, who is first in understanding, and asks:

"Is your understanding constructed or not-constructed?³⁶ If it is constructed then it is a thing which can be produced and destroyed, and is a dharma which is false. If it is unconstructed it lacks the three marks . . . for it does not come into being. If it does not come into being, then it cannot come to be associated with the one who understands, for it is entirely non-existent." (T.12.338, p. 91.c.16–25)

Śāriputra is rendered speechless, then tells Mahāmaudgalyāyana that he cannot reply because Pure Gift has asked about the unconstructed, which cannot be expressed verbally.³⁷

Pure Gift turns next to Mahāmaudgalyāyana, who is first in mastery of the bases of supernormal powers (*shen-tsu, rddhipâda*). She asks:

"When you establish the bases of supernormal power, do you have the notion of persons or of dharmas? If of persons . . . , a person is empty and not real, thus the bases of supernormal

power are also empty. If of dharmas . . . , dharmas are not created and what is not created cannot be grasped. Because they cannot be grasped, there can be no notion of them" (T.12.338, p. 91.c.26–92.a.4)

Mahāmaudgalyāyana, too, is silenced.

Moving from one disciple to the next, Pure Gift silences them all, and then turns to the eight Bodhisattvas, beginning with Mañjuśrī, who is here called first among those who have confidence in and understand what is most profound. She asks:

"Is (enlightened understanding) profound because of the profundity of the 12 causes,³⁸ or is it because of the profundity of its self-existence?³⁹ If it is because of conditioned arising . . . conditioned arising has no 'coming' or 'going.' It is impossible to discern by means of visual-consciousness, or by hearing, smell, taste, touch or mind-consciousness . . . If it is because of the profundity of its self-existence . . . there are none who can penetrate this self-existence." Mañjuśrī: "'Reality-limit'⁴⁰ . . . is *called* profound." Pure Gift: "'Reality-limit' has no limits . . . (and) is not to be understood." Mañjuśrī: "If there can be no knowledge, there will be perverted views. 'Reality-limit' is a conventional designation only." Pure Gift: "Absence of knowledge means there are also no perverted views . . . The Tathāgata's understanding goes beyond verbal expression . . ." (T.12.338, p. 92.c.5–19)

Mañjuśrī is silenced, but the debate over the use of words is continued when Pure Gift confronts Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.⁴¹ On the way to the city of Śrāvastī, Avalokiteśvara had resolved to bring about freedom from bondage for all who live there. Pure Gift asks him if his compassionate action involves attachment or not. If it does, it is no different from the actions of ordinary people. If it does not, then efficacious action is impossible because without attachment there is no action at all. Avalokiteśvara does not reply because what Pure Gift has asked about is (he admits) inexpressible. But she says that it *is* possible to make an explanation using words, provided there is no attachment to the words for when there is no attachment to them, words are not themselves a hindrance.⁴² This freedom from hindrances is the *dharmadhātu*,⁴³ since those who know the Dharma are free from attachment.

To the Bodhisattva Nondeluded Views, Pure Gift points out that the Tathāgata cannot be seen at all, for his truth is formless⁴⁴ and whoever sees his material body does not see the Buddha. She reminds

the Bodhisattva Abandoning Evil Destinies that he cannot lessen people's misdeeds or the sufferings they undergo because of them by the power of his resolve, because all the phenomena of this world, the dharmas, are fundamentally the same and cannot be diverted or changed by anyone. Against Bodhisattva Hindrances Removed, she argues that one cannot destroy others' ignorance and create merit for them by the power of one's own concentration, even by concentration on friendliness, for all the Buddhas always practice the concentration on friendliness and there are still beings whose understanding is obstructed. All the Bodhisattvas are silenced.

In debate with the Bodhisattvas Pure Gift has challenged the Bodhisattvas' imperfect understanding of the meaning of their own vows to lead all beings to liberation. It cannot be done, she says, by attempting to divert the sufferings of others, it can be done by skillful teaching. To teach, it is essential that one understand how to use words correctly. She sets out next, therefore, to make correct use of words in conversation with the Buddha himself. She asks him a question in 18 parts which he answers in 18 tetrads, prose and verse.⁴⁵ She asks how to follow the Bodhisattva career and especially how to realize the more extraordinary attainments of the Bodhisattva who has progressed close to Buddhahood itself. She asks: (1) how to subdue the Māras, (2) how to shake the Buddha-lands, (3) how to illumine all Buddha-lands with rays from the body, (4) how to obtain the magical formulas (*tsung ch'ih, dhāraṇī*), (5) the concentrations (*san-meī, samādhi*), (6) the bases of the supernormal powers (*shen-tsū, rddhipāda*), (7) a noble appearance which will delight those who see it, (8) transformation-rebirth (*hua-sheng*), (9) great wealth, (10) great understanding; (11) how one can be aware of previous existences, (12) and be together with all the Buddhas; (13) how one obtains the 32 primary marks (of the Great Man, *mahāpuruṣa*), (14) and the 80 secondary marks; (15) how one can attain skill in discourse, (16) a Buddha-land, (17) a following which is always in harmony and will not be dispersed, and (18) rebirth in the Buddha-land one has mentally resolved upon.

The Buddha's reply to Pure Gift exhorts her to perfect herself in commitment to others, generosity, deep understanding of Dharma together with the responsibility to teach it; and to venerate her teachers, and make offerings to the Buddhas, their stūpas and their images. Furthermore, the Bodhisattva should actually make Buddha-images (in order to attain transformation-rebirth in a Buddha-land);

should practice the *samādhi* of recalling all the Buddhas (in order to be together with all the Buddhas); and attain tolerance of the profound Dharma (so that one can cause all the Buddha-lands to shake).

Pure Gift acknowledges the Buddha's instruction and resolves not to fail to carry it out. But Mahāmaudgalyāyana comes forth and accuses her of treating the Bodhisattva-career lightly, and not understanding it, for one cannot attain perfect enlightenment with a woman's body.⁴⁶ Thereupon Pure Gift performs an act of truth:

"If my words are true and not false, and I shall in a future existence attain . . . the perfect enlightenment of the Buddhas (*samyaksambodhi*) . . . may all the great world systems quake six times . . . heavenly flowers rain down and musical instruments sound of themselves; and may my female form change into that of a boy of 8—I make this resolve" (T.12.338, p. 96.a.19–25).

All happens as she says, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana praises the Bodhisattva-way which makes it possible for a young girl to accomplish such a transformation.

The Buddha smiles and illumines all the world systems, and announces that, like Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Pure Gift first aspired to perfect Buddhahood aeons ago, and she will attain it.

After all this, Mahāmaudgalyāyana again challenges Pure Gift: since you have been so long established in understanding, why hadn't you changed your female body before this? And she answers: "The World-Honored One has praised you as best in the attainment of the bases of supernormal powers. Why haven't you changed your male body?"⁴⁷ Mahāmaudgalyāyana is again speechless, but Pure Gift continues: "Neither with a female body nor with a male body is true enlightenment attained . . . for there is no achieving perfect enlightenment in any way" (T.12.338, p. 96.c.25–27).

The sūtra ends with Mañjuśrī joining the Buddha in praise of Pure Gift. The Buddha announces she has for aeons practiced the concentration on emptiness, has developed the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise, learned about the Bodhisattva way and by making offerings to countless Buddhas has mastered the concentration which enables her to teach others. The Buddha then finishes the prophecy of Pure Gift's Buddhahood, prophesies that of the 500 Brāhmaṇas as well, and the sūtra ends.

(3) Pure Faith's Question (translated by Bodhiruci)

In the Jeta grove at Śrāvastī, the Buddha is staying with a large gathering of monks, Bodhisattvas, gods and ordinary people. King Prasenajit's young daughter, Pure Faith, who had planted wholesome roots and trained in the Mahāyāna, goes with 500 women companions to the Buddha and questions him about the practices of a Bodhisattva. The Buddha's answer is in twelve parts, prose and verse; eight practices are taught in each of the twelve parts (total of 96).⁴⁸ She asks: (1) how the Bodhisattva shall be firm, brave and tireless in life (*sheng-szu, samsāra*), (2) how to abide in the certainty of the sameness of all beings, dharmas, all knowledge, actions, etc., (3) how the Bodhisattva shall avoid love and hatred, (4) how avoid being wearied by life (*sheng-szu, samsāra*), (5) how make thought as impartial as earth, water, fire, space, etc., (6) how generate enlightenment, (7) acquire the magical formulas (*t'o-lo-ni, dhāraṇī*) and unimpeded eloquence (8) how to be reborn by transformation (*hua-sheng*) in a lotus in the presence of all the Buddhas, (9) how to acquire merits from the ascetic practices (*t'ou-t'o, dhuta*), (10) how subjugate the Māras; (11) how the Bodhisattva can be near to enlightenment, (12) and realize the way of the nectar of deathlessness (*kan-lu, amṛta = nirvāṇa*).

The Buddha's reply amounts to a comprehensive summary of the Bodhisattva's practices and the perfection of understanding: the Bodhisattva's primary task is to help others free themselves and attain enlightenment; to do this, the Bodhisattva must be constantly perfecting his or her own attitude and conduct toward others. Part of the training is following the Noble Eight-fold Path, part is learning the Dharma, for the sake of which one must revere one's teachers; and in order to mature one's practice and understanding one must be ready to accept the discipline of solitary dwelling as an ascetic. What the Bodhisattva must understand is the sameness of all beings, all dharmas, all ways of comprehending. When one then knows phenomenal existence for what it is, one can accept it without fear and exert oneself fully for the sake of all beings, actualizing the six perfections. When one is living like this, with mind expanded and made pliant by meditative practices (*samādhi* and *anuśmṛti*), and when the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise has been attained, one is solidly on the "deathless path" and perfect enlightenment is not far away.

Pleased with this long exposition, Pure Faith asks yet another question: what must a woman do to change her female body? In

answer, the Buddha enumerates 16 things (two groups of eight each), a woman must do to bring this about: avoid envy, stinginess, flattery, anger, be truthful, slander no one, abandon desire, and all wrong views; revere Buddha and Dharma, make offerings to monks and to Brāhmaṇas, give up attachment to home and family, accept the precepts, have no evil thoughts, become indifferent to her female body, abide in the thought of enlightenment and the dharmas of the Great Man, regard worldly life as like an illusion, like a dream. This second reply of the Buddha to Pure Faith is much simpler, much more prosaic than the beautiful discourse on the Bodhisattva-way which he had delivered just before. Both his replies are very specific to the questions asked: the first question was, what is the Bodhisattva-way, and the reply was a complete description of it, appropriate for Pure Faith or any other aspirant to *bodhi*. Pure Faith's second question shows where *she* is, on the path; she has obviously not attained understanding of the sameness of all dharmas, for she now distinguishes between female and male. It is she who wants to change her body, which is called impure. No one challenges her to do so. A few moments before, the Buddha had said that in order to subdue the Māras, the Bodhisattva must stop discriminating between dharmas. Pure Faith obviously has not yet subdued the Māras.

Pure Faith and her 500 companions scatter garlands and jewelry over the Buddha, which are magically transformed in space into golden-towered palaces. All resolve to follow the Bodhisattva-path and to abandon the corruptions of the female body. The Buddha smiles and predicts that at the end of their present lives, Pure Faith and her 500 companions will abandon their female bodies and be reborn in the Tuṣita Heaven to serve and make offerings to Maitreya (who is to be the next Buddha in this world-system) and all the Tathāgatas of the present era. Then, after countless aeons, Pure Faith will become a Buddha with her own Buddha-land, and the 500 women will be the leaders of her retinue. The sūtra ends with this promise: if a woman hears this sūtra, accepts it and recites it, when her female body dies, she will never again be reborn a woman and will quickly attain to perfect enlightenment.⁴⁹

(4) *Gaṅgottara-sūtra* (translated by Bodhiruci)

While the Buddha is staying in the Jeta grove at Śrāvastī, a

woman of that city, Gaṅgottara the lay disciple (*yu-p'o-i, upāsikā*) comes to greet him, and the Buddha engages her in a dialogue. He asks:

“Where do you come from?” She replies: “World Honored One, if one asks a magically created being,⁵⁰ ‘where do you come from?’ how should the question be answered?” The Buddha: “A magically created being neither goes nor comes, is neither born nor destroyed, so how can it be said that it comes from somewhere?” Gaṅgottara: “Is it not true that all dharmas are like magical creations? . . . Then how can you ask me ‘where do you come from?’” The Buddha: “. . . Are you like a magically created being?” Gaṅgottara: “. . . I see no difference between myself and a magically created being. (Therefore) how could it be said that I shall go to any of the evil destinies or reach *nirvāṇa*?” (T.11.310(31), p. 549.b.23–c.4)

The Buddha then asserts that *nirvāṇa* is “non-arising” (*wu-sheng*). And he acknowledges that what he had asked about has no objective support;⁵¹ yet he raised the question, because there are in the assembly sons and daughters of good family who are ready to be matured by it. This can occur, even though, as the Tathāgata knows, no dharmas and no designations at all can be apprehended. Gaṅgottara then asks, if nothing whatever can be apprehended or gotten at, how can wholesome roots be accumulated for the sake of enlightenment; and the Buddha replies that when wholesome roots are being accumulated there is “no thought” of them (*wu-hsin*), no attempt to know or grasp anything by thinking. For all dharmas are like empty space which knows no impediments. Thus, he goes on, although I use words to refer to “self,” “form,” “*samsāra*” (*sheng-szu*), “*nirvāṇa*” (*nieh-p'an*), etc., no characteristics of any such entities can ever be apprehended. The one who sees that dharmas cannot be apprehended is the one who truly lives the pure life (*fan-hsing, brahmacaryā*). This is the dharma which stops the cycle of rebirth. What is this dharma? asks Gaṅgottara. The Buddha replies: “That which stops the cycle of rebirth is what is called the inconceivable element which is the reality-limit.⁵² This dharma cannot be damaged or destroyed. Therefore it is called the dharma which stops the cycle of rebirth.” (T.11.310(31), p. 550.a.11–14)

Then the Buddha smiles, illuminates countless universes and announces that the Dharma he has just preached has been preached in the past by a thousand Tathāgatas to a thousand assemblies, and always these assemblies have been led by an *upāsikā* Gaṅgottara.

Hearing this, Gaṅgottara and the whole assembly go forth from home life to become monks or nuns in order to progress toward *nirvāṇa*. Then the gods who had listened to this preaching magically create all sorts of rare heavenly flowers and shower them upon the Buddha observing: “This *upāsikā* is truly extraordinary, for she is able to converse fearlessly with the Tathāgata. In the past she must have associated with countless Buddhas, made offerings to them and thus planted all sorts of wholesome roots.” (T.11.310(31), p. 550.b.1–3)

Then all are filled with great joy, accept the teaching with conviction and reverently practice it.

Although “Bodhisattvas” are mentioned only once in the sūtra of Gaṅgottarā the *upāsika*, and future *nirvāṇa*, not future Buddhahood, is promised for this wise woman, the doctrine taught is that found in other Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*. It is worth noticing that the point of departure for the teaching in this text is the proposition of a magically created being, to which all beings and all phenomena are likened since all are equally impossible to apprehend as really existing entities with definable characteristics. Here, then, as in the *Sumati-*, *Pure Gift-* and *Pure Faith-sūtras* it is established that dharmas cannot be discriminated, for at the ultimate level there is nothing which differentiates them. The use of words is not on that account prohibited, however, even though words too are not ultimately true; verbal teaching is necessary, for it can cause unenlightened beings to progress toward enlightenment. It is also worth noticing that, as the gods say at the end of the sūtra, the woman Gaṅgottara and the Buddha converse at the same high level of understanding, as do, for example, Subhuti and the Buddha in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. Gaṅgottara’s very deep understanding of the Dharma, which may not be equal to that of the perfected Buddha but is beyond that of most other beings, is also reminiscent of Vimalakīrti’s and that of the women Sumati and Pure Gift who can vanquish even the wisest of Bodhisattvas in debate.

Changing the Female Body: the Event and its Meaning

Let us now recount again briefly from the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift Sūtras* the action of the event, “changing the female body,” so that it may be compared with the relevant sections of the *Vimalakīrtinirdesā* and *Saddharmaśūnyaśāstra*.

There are two separate parts to the sequence of events surrounding the change of sex in the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift Sūtras*. In the *Sumati*, we are dealing with a child of 8, daughter of a householder, who has already accumulated merit in the past by making offerings to the Buddhas. Her capacity to follow the Bodhisattva's vocation and her understanding of that vocation are challenged. *Part I* of the sequence of events: (1) Mahāmaudgalyāyana tries to invalidate her resolve to carry out the Bodhisattva practices by saying, you are only a small girl and can't do it. (2) She performs an act of truth: if I am able to carry out the Bodhisattva practices, let the worlds shake, heavenly flowers rain down and music sound; (3) and then a second act of truth: if I shall soon become a perfect Buddha let everyone here turn the color of gold. (4) All this happens, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana acknowledges the superiority of the Bodhisattva-way. *Part II*: (1) Sumati debates with Mañjuśrī and demonstrates her understanding of the emptiness of all dharmas and the consequent impossibility of discriminating any of them. (2) The Buddha acknowledges that long ago she had aspired to attain perfect enlightenment (*bodhicittotpāda*) and just now has attained the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise (*anutਪattikadharma&kṣanti*). (3) At this point, Mañjuśrī challenges her, saying: "Why haven't you changed your female body?" and (4) the answer is, "Femaleness cannot be apprehended, because dharmas are neither male nor female." Mañjuśrī has apparently just discriminated among dharmas. Sumati, who has attained *anutਪattikadharma&kṣanti*, does not discriminate among dharmas. (5) But, in order to eliminate any possible doubts Mañjuśrī might have about her understanding and her capacities, she performs a third act of truth: if it is true that I shall attain Buddhahood, may I now change into a man. She becomes a young male novice in the Buddhist clerical order. (6) She then makes a resolve (*prañidhāna*) concerning her future Buddha-land, including the proviso that there will be nothing in it having to do with women, and the resolve functions also as an act of truth: if my Buddha-land shall be so, may my body be like that of a 30-year-old monk. (7) This too happens, and finally the Buddha predicts that Sumati will soon become a fully enlightened Buddha.

The *Pure Gift Sūtra* has a 12- (or 8-) year-old princess as the central figure, daughter of King Prasenajit, who had also accumulated great merit in past existences. In the scripture, the princess demonstrates, at great length, her deep understanding of Dharma in debate with 16 disciples and Bodhisattvas. Then comes the sequence

of events surrounding her change of body. *Part I*: (1) as in the *Sumati-sūtra*, Mahāmaudgalyāyana accuses the princess of not understanding the Bodhisattva-way, for one cannot attain perfect enlightenment with a woman's body. (2) She performs an act of truth: if I shall truly become a Buddha in the future, let the worlds shake, heavenly flowers rain down, music sound and let my female body change into an 8- (or 16-) year-old boy's. (3) This happens, and Mahāmaudgalyāyana praises the Bodhisattva-way. *Part II*: (1) the Buddha announces that Pure Gift, like Mañjuśrī, aspired to attain perfect Buddhahood long before and both Bodhisattvas will attain it. (2) Not yet finished, Mahāmaudgalyāyana again challenges Pure Gift, saying in effect, since you have been so wise for so long, why hadn't you changed your female body before this? (3) She retorts, if you are really first in the practice of supernormal powers, why haven't you changed your male body?; and he is speechless. (4) She then affirms that perfect enlightenment cannot be attained by a woman or by a man, for it is completely impossible to grasp it. (5) Mañjuśrī then joins the Buddha in praising Pure Gift; the Buddha announces she has already mastered the concentration on emptiness, attained the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise and the ability to teach others, and will soon attain Buddhahood.

The confrontation between Śāriputra and the goddess in the *Vimalakīrtinirdesā* has much in common with the events recounted from the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*. In Chapter 7 of the *Vimalakīrtinirdesā*, "Examining Sentient Beings,"⁵³ a goddess suddenly manifests in visible form after listening to Vimalakīrti tell Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva that all beings should be regarded as like creatures created by a magician or like a mirage, etc. This is the point of departure for the confrontation between the goddess and Śāriputra. Pleased with what she has heard, the goddess causes heavenly flowers to be scattered over everyone in the assembly gathered at Vimalakīrti's house. The flowers roll off the bodies of the Bodhisattvas present, but stick to those of the disciples, who cannot get rid of them even by using their supernormal powers. The goddess asks Śāriputra, wisest of the disciples, why he wants to be rid of the flowers. He replies that they are not proper for disciples (monks are prohibited by monastic regulation from adorning themselves with flowers). The goddess accuses Śāriputra of falsely distinguishing "proper" from "improper"; it is because he does this that the flowers appear to stick to his body while not troubling the Bodhisattvas at all, for the Bodhisattvas have freed

themselves from the habit of discriminating among things. Śāriputra is silenced.

All of this is preliminary to the sex change which climaxes the chapter. The preliminary section is similar in content to the discussions in the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*, which precede and provoke the sex changes in those texts. Śāriputra is guilty of imperfectly understanding reality; he assumes that things can really be distinguished from one another. When he then discriminates female from male, taking them for two real and distinct phenomena, he is affirming his disciple's view of reality. The change of sex proceeds from that point: (1) He asks the goddess why she does not change her female body. (2) She says she has sought femaleness for the 12 years she has lived in Vimalakīrti's house but has not found it, for what one calls a woman is something created by magic—and can one ask something created by magic to change its femaleness? (3) Thereupon she uses her supernormal powers to exchange forms with Śāriputra, so that Śāriputra appears in the form of the goddess and she appears in his. She then asks him: (4) Why don't you change *your* female form?, to which he replies that he doesn't even know how he acquired this female body. (5) The goddess then makes her point: You, Śāriputra, like all women, appear in the form of a woman, yet you and the others are not really "women" at all, for as the Buddha says, no dharmas are either female or male. (6) She causes the two of them to regain their original forms, and Śāriputra concedes her point, but goes on to ask (7) where she will be reborn next. She says she will be reborn where the Buddha's transformations (*hua, nirmāna*) are reborn.—But these are *not* reborn (says Śāriputra). And so it is with all beings, says the goddess: they are not born. (8) Śāriputra asks when the goddess will attain perfect enlightenment; the goddess replies that no one can ever attain perfect enlightenment, for enlightenment has nothing to rest upon, it cannot be grasped. (9) Vimalakīrti then explains to Śāriputra that the goddess has already served countless Buddhas in the past, has attained the super-knowledges,⁵⁴ fulfilled her resolves, attained the tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise and will never turn back from the Bodhisattva path. Because of her resolve (*pranidhāna*) she can appear wherever she wishes in order to teach and develop living beings.

It is in the *Lotus sūtra* (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*) that the *locus classicus* for the change of sex is found. This is the episode of the daughter of the Dragon-king Sāgara, which occurs at the end of the 11th chapter

(in the Sanskrit version) or the 12th chapter (in Kumārajīva's and Dharmarakṣa's Chinese translations).⁵⁵ The Buddha has just recounted the tale of a previous existence of himself and his cousin and rival, Devadatta. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is present, having just returned from a sojourn in the Dragon kingdom and he is asked by Prajñākūta Bodhisattva how many beings he had converted there and whether any of them by understanding and practicing the *Lotus'* teaching would be able to attain Buddhahood. Mañjuśrī replies, there was one, the 8-year-old daughter of the Dragon-king Sāgara, who is superior in knowledge and understanding, has made wide-reaching resolves and practices faultlessly.⁵⁶ Prajñākūta observes that the Bodhisattva way is very difficult, it takes much time to attain perfect enlightenment and he doubts that such a young girl could do it. Then, (1) the Dragon-princess suddenly appears, praises the Buddha whose body bears the 32 characteristics of the Great Man and vows to attain Buddhahood. (2) Śāriputra speaks up, charging that she cannot become a Buddha, despite what she has accomplished, because a woman's body is prohibited from five ranks of existence:⁵⁷ a woman cannot be a Śakra-god, Brahmā-god, Māra-god, universal monarch or a Buddha. (3) Undismayed, the Dragon-princess presents the Buddha with a precious gem which he accepts at once, and she asks Śāriputra to confirm that he took it quickly, not slowly. (4) She then says, "Now I shall seize the unexcelled perfect way and achieve supreme enlightenment even more quickly than that."⁵⁸ (5) She immediately changes into a male Bodhisattva; and then at once becomes a Buddha who is endowed with the 32 primary and 80 secondary characteristics. (6) Everyone in the assembly is astonished, many gain immediate advancement on the Way, some aspire to attain future Buddhahood, and the worlds quake. (7) Śāriputra and Prajñākūta Bodhisattva are silent.

The passage on changing the body in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* is less dramatic and much less elaborate than the passages in the *Vimalakīrtinirdesa* and the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*. But the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* presents the basic argument clearly and boldly: the old notion that a woman's body disqualifies her from Buddhahood is wrong, for here is a Buddha-to-be (the Dragon-princess) who was born female and is moreover still a child, only 8 years old. Bodhisattva-hood is not inconsistent with having a female body; in fact, one can be reborn as a woman, as the Dragon-princess was, after having progressed very far on the path to Buddhahood—she cannot, after

all, have accomplished so much in the few brief years of her present life. (This point is explicit in Kumārajīva's text, but is only implied by Dharmarakṣa's and T.9.265.) The *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*'s argument is directed against the notion that some *bodies* (male) are fit for the highest destinies, and other *bodies* (female) are not. It is the body of the Great Man with its 32 major and 80 minor characteristics which is the physical model to which women cannot conform, according to some Buddhists. The *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* identifies those Buddhists as disciples (*śrāvakas*) or "Hīnayānists," by putting the challenge of the female body into the mouth of Śāriputra, wisest of the disciples. This bias against femaleness was widely enough held to provoke the Māhāyānist authors of the *Lotus* to refute it squarely. It is the understanding of the disciples which is at fault; those who understand the *Lotus*' teaching—like Mañjuśrī—see no problem in the sex or the age of the girl-Bodhisattva.

So far as I know, no other sūtras containing a change of the female body follow the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*'s model exactly. The *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* seems to have closed this particular phase of the argument, which was directed against a particular doctrine of particular Buddhists. When the authors of other sūtras took up the theme of "changing the female body," they opened new areas of debate.

In the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*, there is again a specific challenge to the combination of possession of deep understanding with possession of a female body; and in the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*, at least, there are still clear references to the ideal body of the Great Man. But the intention of these three sūtras is to establish *why* physical differences between male and female are irrelevant to the attainment of enlightenment. The differences are, from the point of view of perfected understanding, not real, for there is no apprehending "real" differences between any phenomena at the level of ultimate truth. The distinction of male and female is essentially a matter of incomplete understanding. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the two *Mahāratnakūṭa* sūtras teach the doctrines of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the sameness (*samatā*) of all the dharmas; they are doctrinally related to the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*. In the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, as is well known, the doctrine of emptiness is not a major teaching, and for this reason, it seems to me, the handling of the sex change is less satisfactory there than in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the other sūtras. Change of sex does seem to be necessary, according to the *Lotus*, if a woman is to take the final step to Buddhahood. In the

other texts, change of body is like a magician's transformations, and so is *everything* which ordinary persons take to be real in this world. Femaleness, and the transformation into a male, are not ultimately real, but both can be used by the Bodhisattva to reach and instruct benighted sentient beings. In these texts, magic is a metaphor for the enlightened way of dealing with the utter fluidity of reality. In Kumārajīva's *Lotus*, and in the Sanskrit version, there is some mention of magic and supernormal powers (see note 58). It is quite possible that these touches were added later under the influence of texts like the *Vimalakīrti* and the *Mahāratnakūṭa* sūtras where magic is an essential component of the "changing the female body" scenario.

The *Saddharmapundarīka* offers one literary model for dealing with the theme of changing the female body, and the *Vimalakīrti*, *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras* offer another. But these latter three texts differ from one another in several details. Magic, playfully performed, is a prominent motif in the entire *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*—Vimalakīrti himself is a master magician, and the goddess uses magic freely. But it is Śāriputra she confronts, and Śāriputra is not comfortable with magic. The issue in the *Vimalakīrti* is, above all, the contest between true understanding and imperfect understanding, and magic is an appropriate metaphor for the one and a suitable corrective for the other. The *Pure Gift-* and *Sumati-sūtras*, by presenting Mahāmaudgalyāyana as challenger, seem to stress magic as technique for instruction, for Mahāmaudgalyāyana is master of supernormal powers in Buddhist tradition. Here he meets his match, and the old conjuror is out-conjured by mere girls.

In the *Sumati-sūtra* Mahāmaudgalyāyana does make the initial challenge to Sumati, but it is Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva who questions her femaleness. Mañjuśrī is a prominent figure in the other texts as well, but his role is always that of one who tests or testifies to the woman's understanding. The implication is that the woman's understanding is at least equal to his own; this is especially clear in the *Pure Gift-sūtra*, where the Buddha finally reveals that Pure Gift and Mañjuśrī have had parallel histories and are equally certain to reach the highest goal, Buddhahood. Mañjuśrī, Bodhisattva of highest wisdom, is linked to these wise women; they are his equals. Why then does he question Sumati's femaleness after he has tested her understanding? He seems to come out the loser when he does, for Sumati points out that *he* is guilty of making false distinctions, but to resolve *his doubts* she will transform herself. It does seem that, here, the woman's superiority

over the wisest of male Bodhisattvas is asserted. Pure Gift silences Mañjuśrī in debate; but the Buddha insists on the essential equality of the two Bodhisattvas. The *Sumati-sūtra* is provocative at this point; but the sequence of events reads somewhat oddly because Mañjuśrī is made to usurp what should be Mahāmaudgalyāyana's rôle, and thereby the confrontation between Mahāyāna and "Hinayāna" is obscured.

There is a dramatic coherence in the goddess chapter of the *Vimalakirtinirdeśa*, and in the *Pure Gift Sūtra*, which is lacking in the *Sumati-sūtra*. In the *Vimalakirtinirdeśa*, there is a single sequence of events; everything proceeds consistently to a single climax, the goddess' playful exchange of bodies with Śāriputra. The sequence of events in both the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras* is in two parts: the first part looks like a standard scenario for the change of sex, which is brought about by the performance of an act of truth and accompanied by a variety of supernatural occurrences. A scenario like this, with Mahāmaudgalyāyana, master of the *riddhi*, as challenger, could easily have been incorporated into a number of sūtras, with variations in detail. The principal variation in these two sūtras is that Mahāmaudgalyāyana's challenge provokes Pure Gift to change her female body, but not Sumati. The second part of the episode in the two sūtras resembles that in the *Vimalakirtinirdeśa* even more closely, and has as its point the irrefutable demonstration of the impossibility of making distinctions between phenomena, including the phenomena "male" and "female."

The sequence of events is actually more complicated in the *Sumati-sūtra* than in the *Pure Gift Sūtra*. Sumati's change involves two challengers, three acts of truth and consequent wondrous occurrences, one formal resolve (*pranidhāna*), a change of body in two stages; and all of this arranged as two separate sequences of events; each with its own dénouement. Pure Gift's experiences are more coherently developed, and the second part of the sequence is only the explanation of what the change of sex has already demonstrated. The *Pure Gift Sūtra*'s scenario looks very much like a formula which may have been worked out, under the inspiration perhaps of the *Vimalakirtinirdeśa*, so that it could be adapted to use in other sūtras where the "changing the female body" theme was to play a role. The *Sumati-sūtra*'s could easily be a variation on this formula.

In *Pure Faith's Question*, the matter of changing the female body is brought up, but because of the level of understanding at which

Pure Faith and her companions find themselves, a sudden, magical change of the body is not possible for them. If they continue to discipline themselves and to develop their understanding, the Buddha promises that they will be able to abandon femaleness forever at the end of their present lives and will only be reborn thereafter as males. The argument of the sūtra itself is, from the outset, that all beings, all dharmas, all conceptions are fundamentally lacking a fixed reality, for all are equally empty of a unique essence or self-hood. Although this sūtra urges the Bodhisattva to concrete action, such as making Buddha-images and venerating stūpas, the authors insist that all actions and all phenomena must finally be recognized to be like an illusion, for no thing comes into being or is destroyed, all dharmas are forever still. It is Pure Faith who retains the habit of discriminating between right action and wrong, female and male. Thus she herself is not ready for a magical transformation of her body. The only magical transformation which occurs in the sūtra is that of the garlands Pure Faith and the others offer to the Buddha. Transformation of the person is only possible for those with enlightened understanding, for it is all a matter of how one looks at reality.

It is the intention of the *Gangottara-sūtra* to establish that everything one believes to be “real” is like a magical creation. Above all, one’s own person must be so regarded—and thus the question of transforming a body which is already recognized to be “like a magically created being” never arises. The magic in this sūtra is reserved for the ending, when the gods cause magically created flowers to rain down from the sky while they praise the wise “woman,” Gangottara. This sūtra is not a dramatic narrative with a didactic purpose, as the others are. It is a pure exposition of doctrine, in traditional Buddhist dialogue form, and in this respect resembles several of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Vajracchedikā*, *Hṛdayā*, etc. In it the understanding of reality which the other sūtras—*Vimalakīrti*, *Sumati*, *Pure Gift*, *Pure Faith* and even the *Lotus*—reveal dramatically, is presented directly. The dramatic event of changing the female body is irrelevant there.

The *Śrīmālāśimhanādasūtra*⁵⁹ is another text which celebrates the wisdom of a woman without raising the question of a change of sex. Like Gangottara, Queen Śrīmālā converses with the Buddha at an exalted level of understanding, especially in the latter half of the scriptures, when she preaches “the embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine that was held by all the Buddhas”: there she speaks from the stand-

point of complete Buddhahood, although this is because she is inspired to do so by the Buddha's power.⁶⁰ The queen's understanding, guided by the Buddha, is not faulty. But the sūtra does contain some motifs connected in the *Pure Gift-* and *Sumati-sūtras* with changing the female body. At the beginning of the text, Queen Śrīmāla has never seen the Buddha, but hearing of him and hearing that he has come for the world's sake, wishes that he will show himself to her out of compassion. He appears in space, she sees his inconceivable body, praises him, and asks that she may always see him. This he promises her, because she has accumulated great merit in the past by praising the Buddha's qualities; so, wherever she is born, she will see and praise him and make offerings to innumerable Buddhas.⁶¹ Then, in the future, she will attain Buddhahood herself. The queen thereupon makes ten great vows (*pranidhāna*) which are, in sum, to observe morality, revere teachers, cultivate right attitude and conduct toward others, teach and help others and embrace the Dharma.⁶² Then she goes on:

“... some sentient beings with meager roots of virtue might think, ‘Oh, those ten great vows are difficult to uphold,’ and would have doubt or hesitation toward me. Lord, by so thinking they would incur for a long time much harm, suffering and disaster. Lord, for the sake of helping precisely such persons, I wish to perform in the presence of the Lord this ‘Blessing of Truth’: Lord, just as surely as I have taken exactly these ten great vows, and if they are just as stated by me, then, Lord, by dint of this, my word of truth, may a shower of heavenly flowers descend upon the group and may divine sounds be heard sounded!” (Wayman, pp. 66–67).

All happens according to her words. Those in the assembly are freed from their doubts and resolve to remain always with Queen Śrīmāla. The Queen herself then goes on to make her three great resolves, which comprise all the Bodhisattva aspirations: to comprehend the true Dharma, to teach it to all beings and to uphold it even at the cost of body, life and possessions.

This episode is very nearly the same scenario found in the *Pure Gift-* and *Sumati-sūtras* which culminates however in those texts with the change of the female body. In the *Śrīmālāśimhanāda-sūtra* no one challenges the queen's femaleness, yet she performs her act of truth in order to remove the doubts of any of her hearers who might

think her incapable of carrying out her vows. But there is no equivocation in the Śrīmālā's attitude toward women. Although the text repeats patterns found in older texts on women, Queen Śrīmālā is frankly accepted as a true teacher of the Dharma. Her understanding is never tested in debate. She is simply presented as a woman wise through the Buddha's guidance and inspiration. A change of sex is, in the context of her sūtra, as irrelevant for her as for Gaṅgottara.

It is not possible to generalize about the historical development of Mahāyāna Buddhist views on women, using only the information provided by the texts discussed in this essay. But in this group of texts itself, an evolution of thought and an exploration of various ways of looking at women's capacities does seem evident. The *Vimalakirtinirdeśa*, *Pure Gift* and *Sumati-sūtras* were translated into Chinese during the 3rd century A.D., and certainly existed some time before that in their original languages, perhaps as early as the 2nd century A.D. The *Lotus* is also at least that old. The Śrīmālā was first translated into Chinese in the 5th century A.D., by Dharmakṣema (translation no longer extant), and then in the same century by Guṇabhadra. It is probably not as ancient as the four texts just mentioned. Wayman suggests that the text was composed in India in the 3rd century A.D.⁶³ The *Gaṅgottara-* and *Pure Faith-sūtras* were first translated into Chinese in the early 8th century by Bodhiruci, which suggests that they were composed more recently than any of the other texts discussed in this essay. The *Gaṅgottara* seems to represent the logical development of the tendencies found in the Śrīmālā. *Pure Faith's Question* is doctrinally consistent with the other Mahāyāna sūtras, as indicated above. Perhaps its unusual representation of a woman who is *not yet* wise can be assigned to a period when the issue of distinction-making between male and female was no longer critical, and an audience could agree that a woman could not only be wiser than others, but that she could also be as benighted as any man.

Magic in Buddhism

Queen Śrīmālā's sūtra also touches on the matter of magical creations, especially on the phenomenon of "transformation"—death and rebirth. After discussing the *nirvāṇa* of Arhats and Pratyeka-Buddhas, the text adds that there are two kinds of death—the ordinary kind, and the "inconceivable transformation" which belongs to Arhats, Pratyeka-Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have attained

power. “Inconceivable transformation” belongs to bodies made of mind.⁶⁴ This means death and rebirth outside the normal processes, and, especially, free of the karma-process itself. Arhats, Pratyeka-Buddhas and power-wielding Bodhisattvas are those who have freed themselves from the influences (*asravas*) which bind one to the cycle of rebirth but have not yet totally freed themselves from ignorance (*avidyā*). Ignorance still conditions their death and rebirth, for as long as they do not fully comprehend all the dharmas they do not eliminate all faults and do not attain complete *nirvāṇa*. But “rebirth” occurs for them as a pure body made of mind.⁶⁵ Only the enlightenment of the Buddhas destroys all ignorance and *all* rebirth.

The *Sumati*, *Pure Gift*- and *Pure Faith-sūtras* all refer to transformation-rebirth on a lotus in the presence of the Buddhas, a notion which also became familiar in Pure Land Buddhism in China and Japan. In the *Mahāratnakūṭa* texts, the idea seems closely bound up with the ideas of magical creations of bodies and supernatural transformations which premeate these works.

That an adept can employ an advanced meditation technique to create a body made by his or her own mind is an opinion found in ancient Buddhist scriptures and elaborated in later treatises.⁶⁶ This is a pan-Buddhist notion. The power to transform one’s own body into another form and the power to create bodies “made of mind” are two among the *rddhi*, or supernormal powers, explained in the *Visuddhimagga*.⁶⁷ According to the tradition of the pre-Mahāyāna schools, one must have mastered the practice of the *dhyānas* (contemplations) in order to make free use of the *rddhi*. Essentially, one must be in total control of one’s mental processes, and one must have acquired the *rddhi-pāda*, the four concentrations which are the foundations of success in *rddhi* (see note 18).

In pre-Mahāyāna tradition, in order to attain *vikurvanā-rddhi*, which is the power to transform oneself, one is to resolve to appear in different forms—a snake, tiger, god, young boy, etc.—while disguising one’s natural form. Having entered *dhyāna*, using one or another meditation-object,⁶⁸ one should arise from the meditation and contemplate oneself having the form of—for example—a boy. Having done this one should re-enter *dhyāna* and resolve, “May I be such and such a boy.” With resolve, one becomes so. Similarly, in order to exercise *manomayā-rddhi*, the power of creating a body by mental powers, arising from *dhyāna* and contemplating the body one should

resolve “Let the body be a hollow.” The body becomes a hollow, one contemplates another body within one’s own, resolves again and there is another body within oneself. One removes it, as a reed from its sheath, and the two are distinct but one is the duplicate of the other.⁶⁹ Thus, one uses a progressive visualization exercise, in either case, and the end result is said to be the production of a new body, visible to others.⁷⁰

Few can achieve *vikurvanā-ṛddhi*; it is a difficult attainment. But Buddhas, Pratyeka-Buddhas and chief disciples are said to attain it automatically when they become Arhats, that is, when they attain liberation from the cycle of rebirth.⁷¹

According to Hinayāna and Mahāyāna tradition, *ṛddhi* is one of the five or six *abhiññā*,⁷² the supernormal intellects or super-knowledges which are realized by those who have advanced very far in the spiritual life. And, according to the Mahāyānist *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, a Bodhisattva who attains *anutpattikadharmaṅkṣānti* always obtains, as fruit of that *kṣānti*, the *abhiññā*.⁷³ The Bodhisattva cultivates *ṛddhi-abhiññā* in order to advance a great many beings toward liberation; without it, relatively few beings can be matured. For this purpose, a Bodhisattva can make for him- or herself the body of a *cakravartin*, a Śakra, a Buddha, or whatever is required to effect someone’s liberation. Such transformations (*nirmita*) are true and not false, for no dharma has a fixed characteristic (*niyatālakṣaṇa*).⁷⁴

This résumé of early Buddhist notions of the working of the supernormal power of transformation, and the Mahāyāna explanation of the purposes for which it is used, show us the nexus of ideas within which the authors of the *Pure Gift Sūtra* and the rest were working. The Mahāyāna interpretation of magical transformations is, as the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* says, that a transformation-body is as true as any other form we see around us, because nothing is absolutely fixed and unchangeable—that is, because everything is empty, everything is fluid. The specific connection established between the attainment of *anutpattikadharmaṅkṣānti* and the power to transform and to create bodies make it clear, I believe, why the transforming women of the sūtras are said to have attained this *kṣānti* just before the event. *Anutpattikadharmaṅkṣānti* means the tolerance of the notion that no dharmas whatever are born, that none therefore has a fixed reality or anything to define, that all dharmas are as fluid or as deceptive as illusion (*māyā*) and are fundamentally impossible to apprehend as dis-

tinct entities.⁷⁶ For the one who has reached such an insight, the world is completely open, and “transformations” are possible.

Buddhānusmṛti, the calling to mind of the Buddha or Buddhas, is another of the important basic notions common to most of the sūtras on women discussed here. *Buddhānusmṛti* is a meditation wherein the totality of the physical, mental and moral attributes which constitute Buddhahood become the object of contemplation. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is pre-eminently a visualization meditation by means of which the presence of the Buddha or Buddhas is imaginatively evoked so that the meditator can contact and venerate them or be guided or taught by them. The meditator sees with the mind the image of the Buddha(s), specifically including the 32 characteristic marks of the Great Man.⁷⁷ This is what Pure Gift does, after she has heard of the Buddha’s qualities and visible marks. Pure Gift and Sumati are told to make images of the Buddhas in order to see them and be with them always; the sculptures or paintings are then, presumably, to serve as guides or supports to meditation.

Now, what are these images cultivated in the mind? According to the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvastitasamādhisūtra*, one of the earliest and most informative extant Mahāyāna scriptures on *buddhānusmṛti*, images of the Buddhas developed in *samādhi* can be seen and spoken to, but the meditator must finally realize that these images are nothing but mental constructs. The one who can concentrate on the Buddha without apprehending him, fixing upon him or discriminating him, obtains the *samādhi* of emptiness.⁷⁸ Such a Bodhisattva can contemplate the Buddha’s body without entertaining a false discrimination connected with the body, or with the dharmas, and thus he or she does not apprehend body or dharmas. If one does not apprehend any dharmas, one does not imagine or falsely discriminate, and this is unobstructed knowledge.⁷⁹

The *Mahāratnakūṭa* sūtras on women are all constructed against the background of the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness. All the discourses on bodies, on magical transformations, on visions of Buddhas and on conduct which will lead to liberation, are consistent with each other within that framework.

The Act of Truth

An act of truth precipitates the climactic change of body in the

Sumati- and *Pure Gift-sūtras*, and figures prominently in the *Śrīmā-lāsiṃhanādasūtra*. Since the act of truth plays such a critical role in the scenario of the change of body, and since it is intimately interwoven with the themes of magic and wonders and the Bodhisattva's resolve (*pranidhāna*), it requires further examination.

The act of truth (*satyakriyā*⁸⁰) is well-known in ancient Indian literature, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Examples occur in the Buddhist *Jātakas*, in Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, and a classic discussion of truth acts is found in the *Milindapañha*. They are also very familiar from such non-Buddhist texts as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Ramāyāna*, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the earlier Vedic literature.⁸¹ Burlingame has defined the act of truth as "a formal declaration of fact, accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished." The basis of the truth act, according to W. Norman Brown, is the singleness of purpose with which one has fulfilled his or her duty: when one fulfills one's own duty, no matter what that duty is, "the individual achieves personal integrity and fits the cosmic purpose. Life then becomes a sacrificial act, a rite (*kriyā*), and as such, when perfectly executed, it can accomplish any wish, compelling even the gods."⁸² *Satyakriyā* is speaking one's own truth, affirming that one has done one's duty. It is this affirmation which is the ritual act, not merely the performance of one's duty. By speaking, one lays claim, in effect, to participation in truth on a cosmic scale, which includes the natural operation of cosmic forces, such as that which makes the rain fall, the sun rise and set, and so on. To speak the truth, one must know the truth. Knowing one's own truth opens the way to understanding ultimate truth. According to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-* and *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣads*, the one who knows all has power over all;⁸³ or, in a Buddhist context it might be more correct to say, the one who knows all, transcends all limitations.

In ancient India, a woman's duty was far more rigidly defined than a man's; it was limited to her sexual functions so that if a woman performed a truth act it would affirm the fulfillment of her duty as devoted wife, or as successful prostitute.⁸⁴ Perhaps the most striking evidence for the very different attitude toward women found in some Mahāyāna Buddhist texts is the fact that a woman is no longer identified merely by her sexual function; when she performs a truth act it is grounded on the fact of her true aspiration to the attainment of Buddhahood and on her unshakable commitment to the Bodhisattva

career. Sumati, Pure Gift and Śrīmālā know their truth; and in fact, their truth is that they are rapidly coming to know ultimate truth. Like the Buddha himself, who is already all-knowing, the three truth-sayers are in knowing harmony with reality and therefore can appear to transcend what the unknowing take to be unalterable natural laws.⁸⁵ Ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) in Mahāyāna Buddhism cannot be confined to any concept or any verbal definition. “Magic” and “wonders,” “female” and “male” are some of the definitions the unknowing impose on aspects of their incomplete view of reality. One must do this so as to give some order to one’s experience of life. But even a Bodhisattva or the Buddha himself uses words to communicate with and to help ordinary beings in the world—as the Buddha tells Gaṅgottara the laywoman. However, one who truly understands uses words without any attachment to them, and thus words are no obstacle to understanding or to compassionate action.⁸⁶

Satyakriyā is compassionate action, in the eyes of Śrīmālā, and of Pure Gift and Sumati. It is performed in order to remove all doubts the hearers might have about the woman’s capacity to follow the Bodhisattva path, for if one harbors doubts about what is actually true one would suffer pain and the disaster of remaining far from liberating truth (as the *Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra* says). *Satyakriyā* is thus understood, in these *Mahāratnakūṭā-sūtras*, to be part of the Bodhisattva’s effort to effect the liberation of all beings. That is what the Bodhisattva has resolved upon when uttering his or her original vow (*pranidhāna*) to strive for Buddhahood so as to deliver others from suffering. The functions of *satyakriyā* and *pranidhāna* begin to merge in the *Sumati-*, *Pure Gift-* and *Śrīmālā-sūtras*, until finally Sumati can make a *satyakriyā* out of her own *pranidhāna* to have in future a Buddha-land which is free from deceit and suffering.

Conclusion

“Changing the female body” is a narrative theme which was probably developed by Mahāyānist writers in order to confront traditional Buddhist views of the spiritual limitations of women. It challenges the earlier notion that women’s bodies are visible evidence that they have not reached a high level of spiritual maturity and cannot therefore be candidates for Buddhahood. In Mahāyāna texts such as the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift-sūtras*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Ta-chih-*

tu lun, this notion is criticized and put in its proper place according to the perspective of the *śūnyavāda*. In these texts, the supposition that maleness and femaleness are ultimately real is negated by the realization of the universal emptiness and sameness of all dharmas.

In ordinary worldly life, however, people exist as male or female, obviously, and apprehend themselves as sexually differentiated: Pure Faith for example is aware of herself as female. In the sūtras examined for this essay, there is no attempt to demean or exalt anyone's ordinary existence in the world as man or woman. The world is a busy place, and people live in it as best they can, finding ways to deal with the richness they find there. But in the case of those who commit themselves to the spiritual life and thus cease to value ordinary life in the world as others do, the matter of sex distinctions must be looked at differently. The purpose of the five *Mahāratnakūṭasūtras*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdēśa* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is to assert that for those committed to the Bodhisattva career distinctions on the basis of sex no longer have any meaning. When one consciously sets out on the Bodhisattva path, one abandons identification with the traditional roles of either sex. The religious life, whether it is lived as a cleric or as a layperson, is a third alternative: it is a new birth into a new kind of creative living.

The act of committing oneself to this other way of living creatively in the world is ritualized, in Mahāyāna literature, as a formal resolve, the *pranidhāna*, taken in the presence of a Buddha. In the *Sumati*, *Pure Gift*, *Śrīmālā* and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtras* it is further ritualized as *satyakriyā*, act or rite of truth. In these texts, in fact, *pranidhāna* and *satyakriyā* function so similarly that distinctions between them begin to blur. In the *Sumati*, *Pure Gift*, *Śrīmālā* and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtras*, it is women who are committing themselves once again to the path to the ultimate attainment of Buddhahood. In earlier Buddhist literature, and in non-Buddhist Indian texts, a woman performing *satyakriyā* would affirm her commitment to a traditional woman's life in the world, in *samsāra*. Here, the truth-sayers re-commit themselves to the attainment of perfect enlightenment instead. This abandonment of ordinary life as a woman in this world is symbolized by abandoning the female body and assuming the body of a male ascetic, of a young boy or of a Buddha. Despite the maleness of these new bodies, it seems fair to assume from the context that the transformation signifies the transcendence of ordinary worldly life and the sex distinctions that are part of it.

Magical displays enliven these sūtras on women. The metamorphosis from female to male is accomplished by magic and accompanied by it. Magic is, in the sūtras studied here, a metaphor for the enlightened way of dealing with the utter fluidity of reality. It is a metaphor for efficacious action in an empty world. Magical transformation of the body is possible only for those who have awakened their understanding to a considerable degree: only those who have attained the tolerance of the notion that dharmas are not really produced or destroyed can transform themselves. They realize that it is an illusion that there are absolute differences between dharmas, for all dharmas are equally empty. Radical transformation of the person, by magic, and transcendence of the apparent laws of nature, are symbolic of the attainment of this conviction. The metamorphosing women of these sūtras all have this understanding and this consequent freedom of action.

But “changing the female body” is a narrative theme which recurs in many Mahāyāna sūtras. And it is a very dramatic event, used as the climax of a didactic narrative. As a literary devise, it crystallizes the various ideas referred to above, as well, no doubt, as others not mentioned. It is dramatically effective, and when its doctrinal implications have been explored it is intellectually acceptable too. It “works” in the narrative, and that is, I think, largely because the women’s motivation for transforming themselves is compassion. By their remarkable actions they resolve a man’s doubts and thus bring him closer to liberating understanding. What happens to the woman Bodhisattva herself is secondary to this. She actively demonstrates her total commitment to the Bodhisattva’s way of doing everything possible to effect others’ liberation.

Can a woman, or a man, then, be a Bodhisattva and follow the path to the attainment of perfect, complete Buddhahood? No, for “neither with a female body nor with a male body is true enlightenment attained,” says Pure Gift. And as these sūtras reveal, from the very moment that one truly commits oneself to the Bodhisattva path, one is no longer either female or male.

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NOTES

1. Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō (hereafter, T.) vol. 11, pp. 547–549, translated by Bodhiruci, T'ang Dynasty (706–713 A.D.). There are three other Chinese translations:

Fo-shuo hsü-ma-t'i p'u-sa ching (*Buddha-bhāṣitā-sumati-bodhisattva-sūtra*) T.12.334, pp. 76–78, translated by Dharmarakṣa (Chu Fa Hu), Western Chin Dynasty (between 266–308 A.D.) (cited in *Ch'u-san-tsang-chi-chi*, hereafter referred to as CSTCC, T.55.2145, p.8a)

Fo-shuo hsü-ma-t'i p'u-sa ching (Sanskrit as above), T.12.335, pp. 78–81, attributed to Kumārajīva, Later Ch'in Dynasty (early 5th century A.D.)

Hsü-ma-t'i ching (*Sumati-sūtra*), T.12.336, pp. 81–83, translated by Bodhiruci (identical with T.11.310(30))

(See also *Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, No. 760(30))

2. T.vol.11, pp. 549–550, translated by Bodhiruci, T'ang Dynasty (706–713 A.D.). (See also *Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, No. 760(31)) Publication of a complete English translation of the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra*, including the *Gaṅgottara-sūtra* translated by Yang Tze-ming (Taiwan, 1973), is planned by Dharma Publishing.

3. T.vol.11, pp. 556–564, attributed to Nieh Tao-chēn, Western Chin Dynasty (early 4th century). This translation is not cited in CSTCC; later catalogues attribute several translations to Nieh Tao-chēn, but none are mentioned in the early catalogues of Tao-an or Seng-yu. (E. Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, Leiden, 1972; I, p. 68) There are two other Chinese translations:

Fo-shuo li-kou-shih-nü ching (*Buddha-bhāṣitā-vimaladattā-dārikā-sūtra*), T.12.338, pp. 89–97, translated by Dharmarakṣa (Chu Fa Hu), Western Chin Dynasty (in 289 A.D.; cited in CSTCC, p. 7c)

Té-wu-kou-nü ching (*Vimaladattā-dārikā-sūtra*), T.12.339, pp. 97–107, attributed to Gautama Prajñāruci, Eastern Wei Dynasty (between 534–550 A.D.)

(See also *Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, No. 760(33))

An English translation by Hsu Yang-chu (Taiwan, 1975) will be included in Dharma Publishing's *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra*.

4. T.vol.II, pp. 623–627, translated by Bodhiruci, T'ang Dynasty (706–713 A.D.). (See also *Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, No. 760(40)) An English translation by Hsu Yang-chu will be included in Dharma Publishing's *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra*.

5. See S. Mochizuki, *Bukkyō Daijiten*, Kyoto, 1954, pp. 3618a-b, on the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* translation. See also the *Preface* to the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* by T'ang Emperor Jui-tsung in T.vol.11, p. 1.—The tradition that there existed in India a large sūtra in many parts called *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* is found in Chinese documents and in Tibetan. So far as I know, no evidence has yet been found from India itself which could prove that such a text was known there. Many of the 49 individual sūtras are quoted in Indian works, e.g. the *Śikṣasamuccaya* of Śāntideva, but are never identified as belonging to a single larger text. In China itself, also, until the mid-7th century, those of the 49 sūtras which were known were treated as individual, unrelated texts. Dharmarakṣa, for example, translated at least 13 of the 49 sūtras, without ever suggesting that they were

in any way related to each other. The existence of a *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* is first attested in the *Life of Hsüan-tsang* by Hui Li, where it is stated that Master Hsüan-tsang was urged shortly before his death to translate the whole *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra*. He began the project, but abandoned it almost immediately (664 A.D.), regretting that “the conditions are not yet right among all beings of the world for this sūtra.” (Mochizuki, p.3618.b.1–2) Some 40 years after this, in 706 A.D., Bodhiruci and his associates undertook the task at the “request” of Emperor Chung-tsung. They completed it in 713 A.D. Tibetan references to a *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* are all of much later date—e.g., Buston’s and Tāranātha’s Histories.

6. On the Empress Wu and the propaganda campaign carried out by her Buddhist supporters on her behalf, see A. Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the 7th Century*, Naples, 1976, and R. W. L. Guisso, *Wu Tse-tien and the Politics of Legitimation in T'ang China*, Bellingham, Washington, 1978. On Bodhiruci's connection with the translation of the *Ratnamegha-sūtra* (*Pao-yü ching*) and the interpolation made into it in support of Empress Wu's claim to be a Bodhisattva and Buddhist universal monarch, see Forte, pp. 125 ff. The *Mahāmegha* (*Ta-yün ching*) contains a similar passage which is authentic. On the status of the *Mahāmegha*, see Forte, p. 22, note 58. Forte is preparing a full study of Bodhiruci and his activities.

7. See Forte, *op.cit.*, pp. 268–9 and 146–7. See also the composition of the Empress' supporters, the *Commentary on the Meaning of the Prophecy about Shen-huang in the Ta-yün-ching*, in Forte, pp. 245–6. There are other sūtras, besides the *Mahāmegha*, which assert that at a given time and in a given place it is a woman who can best respond to the needs of beings who are to be saved. The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* is one: T.12.375, pp. 605.c, 607.a-b; see K. Yamamoto, *The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* 1973; Vol. I, pp. 5–6, 10–11, 14. The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* is another: see J. Przyluski, “Les Vidyārūja, contribution à l'histoire de la magie dans des sectes Mahāyānistes,” *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*, 23, 1923, p. 309.

8. CSTCC, pp. 7b–9c. On Dharmarakṣa's activities, see Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, I, pp. 65–70.

9. “Change the female body” is *chuan nü shen* in all four Chinese translations of the *Sumati-sūtra*, the three of the *Pure Gift Sūtra*, the three of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the single Chinese translation of *Pure Faith's Question*. The three Chinese translations of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* consulted for this essay (T.9.262, 263, 265) write “change into a man,” *pien-wei nan-tzu* or *pien-ch'ēng nan-tzu*. The other sūtras just named use this in addition to *chuan nü shen*. Lamotte assumes an original *parinam(asi) stribhava* for “change the female body,” based on the Tibetan of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*: *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*, Louvain, 1962, p. 280. Another phrase used is *stri-puruṣa-vyañjanaparivartana* found in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*: see G. Nagao, *Index to the Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*, Tokyo, 1958; Vol. I, p. 275. The Sanskrit equivalent for “change into a man” in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* is:

*sāgaranāgarājāduhitā . . . tat strīndriyam puruṣendriyam
ca prādurbhūtam bodhisattvabhūtam cātmānam samḍarsayati.*

(H. Kern and B. Nanjio, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīkāsūtra*, St. Petersbourg, 1908–12, p. 265).

10. Pre-Mahāyāna references in: *Anguttara-nikāya* (Pāli Text Society, London, 1955), I, p. 28; *Majjhima-nikāya* (Pāli Text Society, London, 1960), III, pp. 65–66. As

Lamotte points out, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse* (Louvain, 1949), I, p. 134, n.1, in the *Madhyamāgama* passage which parallels *Majjhima* III, pp. 65–66, there is no mention at all of any obstacles in the way of women: T.1.26, pp. 723–4.) Mahāyāna references: *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*: Kern and Nanjo, p. 264; T.9.262, p. 35.c.9–11 (Kumārajīva); T.9.263, p. 106.a.14–16 (Dharmarakṣa). T.9.265, the anonymous early translation of this part of the sūtra, makes no mention of the five obstacles; this translation is older than any other extant versions of the sūtra.—Lamotte, *op.cit.*, also points out that the *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, the great commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā* (= *Traité*) attributed to Nāgārjuna and translated by Kumārajīva, clearly repeats the traditional formula that there are five superior ranks from which women are barred—and then proceeds to name only four of them: *cakravartin*, Śakra, Māra and Brahmā. This occurs in two separate passages in the text (*Traité*, I, pp. 134 and 535) which means that the omission of one rank is deliberate. The *Ta-chih-tu-lun* thus carefully avoids saying that a woman cannot become a Buddha, for its author must have known that certain Mahāyāna sūtras, above all the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, do recognize that a woman can become a Buddha.

11. In Buddhist legend, a *rāja-cakravartin*, “wheel-turning universal monarch,” is a human being who has performed meritorious acts in past existences and has finally been born as *mahāpuruṣa*, his body marked by the 32 major and 80 minor signs of his status. Such a person is ready to attain supreme temporal authority (*cakravartin*) or Buddhahood itself. Śakra, or Indra, king of the gods, and Brahmā, the creator, and lord of the Brahma-worlds, were borrowed from the ancient Brahmanic pantheon and made into adherents of the Buddha. Māra is the god who tempts and destroys, lord of love and death. In Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, none of the gods is held to be eternal and the number of Śakras, Māras, etc., is considered unlimited, so that there is ample opportunity for those who have accumulated certain kinds of merits to be reborn for a time in one or another of these classes of deities.

12. *Dīgha-nikāya* (Pāli Text Society, London, 1960), III, p. 143; *Sutta-nipata* (Pāli Text Society, London, 1965), verse 1022; Lamotte, *Traité*, IV, pp. 1911–12. The Pāli phrase is *kosohita-vattha-guyho*, “having that part which is concealed by clothing covered by a sheath;” *Traité* adds, “like a stallion.” For lists of the 32 *lakṣaṇa* see: *Lakkhansuttanta*, *Dīgha-nikāya*, III, pp. 142–179; *Traité*, I, pp. 271–281, and IV, pp. 1909–1913.

13. E. Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, London, 1966, pp. 28–29, 60–63. In the *Vajracchedikā* it is specifically pointed out that if the Tathāgata could be recognized by his marks, then a universal monarch would be a Tathāgata: *ibid.*, pp. 62–63. The *Pure Gift Sūtra* says the same (quoting an unnamed text):

“As the Bhagavan says,
‘He who sees my visible form,
Or follows me by means of sound,
He holds false views—
This person does not see the Buddha.’

But if (he is to be known) by means of the *Dharmakāya*, the *Dharmakāya* is impossible to perceive. Why? Without eye-consciousness, there is no forming a conception.”

(T.12.338, p. 92.c.25–27, Dharmarakṣa’s version; T.11.310(33), p. 559.a.24–27, and

T.12.339, p. 101.c.1–4, are similar.) This is the same passage, apparently from a *Prajñāpāramitā* text, which is quoted in the *Prasannapadā*: L. de la Vallée Poussin, *Mūlamadhyamakākārikās de Nāgārjuna* (Osnabrück, 1970), p. 448, lines 11–15.

14. *Traité*, IV, pp. 1913–1918.

15. This summary is based on T.12.334, by Dharmarakṣa, late 3rd century A.D. T.12.335, attributed to Kumārajīva, is nearly identical with T.12.334. T.11.310(31) and T.12.336, two transcriptions of the same translation by Bodhiruci, differ from T.12.334 and 335 in many details, but the differences are not of major significance. It is possible that T.12.334 and 335 are also two transcriptions of the same translation, for the differences between them are minuscule; there is an occasional difference of a *tzu*, and T.12.334 usually translates technical terms and names while T.12.335 often transliterates them. A translation of a *Hsü-ma-t'i p'u sa ching* is ascribed to Dharmarakṣa by CSTCC, p. 8.a.8, but there appears to be no record of such a work by Kumārajīva earlier than the *Li-tai san-pao-chi* of 597 A.D.; see *K'ai-yüan shih-chiao lu*, T.55.2154, p. 512.b.18.

The major differences between T.12.334 and 335 as they now appear in *Taishō* is the long interpolation made into the text of T.12.335 near the end. It is a lengthy passage from T.14.567, *Fo-shuo fan-chih-nü shou-i ching*, translated by Dharmarakṣa (CSTCC, p. 8.a.2). This text, which has somehow been confused with the *Hsü-ma-t'i p'u sa ching*, also has a woman as chief figure, and as it happens the discussion going on at this point in T.14.567 fits well enough into the context of T.12.335: the topic is whether persons and dharmas are like illusions. The passage from T.14.567 concludes with the Buddha's prediction that the Brāhmaṇī Shou-i, the protagonist, will "change her female body" (*chuan nü shen*) at the end of her present life because of the wholesome roots she has already planted: that is, she shall never again be reborn as a female. This is the same sort of "change" spoken of in *Pure Faith's Question*, discussed in this essay.

16. The "women" in the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift Sūtras* turn out to be children. Pure Gift is said to be 8 years old in T.11.310(30) and 12 years old in the other two Chinese translations (T.12.338, 339). Ages are not given for the women in any of the other sūtras discussed, except for the Dragon King's daughter in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* who is also 8 years old. There are other Mahāyāna scriptures also where the main figure is a child, usually a girl, occasionally a boy; examples are the *Bodhisattvacaryānirdeśa* (T.14.488) and *Candrottaradārikāvivākāraṇa* (T.14.480). It seems that the point of presenting a wise young girl as the Buddha's interlocutor is to demonstrate that this child is really a Bodhisattva, has already pursued the Bodhisattva career through many previous existences, has reached a high level of attainment, and nonetheless is now reborn in female form. Femaleness is thus not incongruent with the highest levels of understanding.

Furthermore, these young children have not yet reached puberty, and have thus not yet begun to participate in a woman's traditional way of power: a life committed to creating and nurturing new life. Sumati and Pure Gift commit themselves instead to the perfection of insight, which is a different kind of creativity than that available to them as the result of their biology. This choice is symbolized by the sex change these children undergo in the sūtras, and there maleness is used as image of commitment to the religious life. (Diana Paul's *Women in Buddhism, Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition* (Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1979) contains much information on sex

transformations in Buddhist literature, but was not available to me when this essay was written.)

The goddess of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* is ageless. It may be worth noting, however, that at one point she says she has been in Vimalakīrti's house for 12 years.

17. T.12.334, p. 76.b.18–19. *Hua-sheng*, "transformation-rebirth," is probably Sanskrit *aupapaduka*. *Hua-sheng* occurs in all Chinese translations of the *Sumati-sūtra*, the *Pure Gift Sutra* and *Pure Faith's Question*. According to T.12.334, *hua-sheng* means born by spontaneous generation, without benefit of parents. In the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* (Kern and Nanjio, pp. 260, 455), the *Sukhāvatīryūha-sūtra* (ed. F. M. Müller, Oxford, 1883; pp. 65, 66), the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-vaiduryaprabharājusūtra* (cited *Śikṣāsumuccaya* of Śāntideva, ed. C. Bendall, Osnabrück, 1970; p. 175), spontaneous generation on a lotus is mentioned, as here. It happens as the result of accumulated merits.

18. T.12.334, p. 76.b.19–20. *Shen-tsū*, *rddhipāda*: the four concentrations which are the foundations of supernormal or magic powers. The four are the concentrations giving predominance to zeal (*chanda*), to energy (*vīrya*), to thought (*citta*) and to examination (*mīmāṃsā*). See Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), translated Bhikku Nānamoli, Colombo, 1964, p. 421; Lamotte, *Traité*, III, pp. 1178–79.

19. The *Sumati-sūtra* bears an evident relationship to the *Sukhāvatīryūha-sūtra* and possibly to other early Pure Land scriptures, in particular in its acceptance of the doctrine of the saving appearance of the Buddha at the moment of one's death. The *Sumati-sūtra*, and also the *Pure Gift* and *Pure Faith* scriptures, seem to assume a critical attitude toward texts such as the *Sukhāvatīryūha*, and attempt to interpret coherently some important early Pure Land concepts in the light of the doctrine of emptiness. Thus, their position with respect to the *Sukhāvatīryūha* is similar to that of the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvastitasamādhisūtra*: see Paul Harrison, "Buddhanusmṛti in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvastitasamādhisūtra*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 6 (1978), pp. 35–57.

20. The Buddha's reply is detailed, and is a summary of the Bodhisattva path. The more spectacular achievements are actually the product of carefully disciplined selfless conduct capped by the attainment of deep concentration (*saṃādhi*) and/or full enlightenment: to attain transformation-rebirth on a lotus in the presence of the Buddhas (4) one must pound lotuses to powder and sprinkle them over the Buddha or his relics in a stūpa, make images of Buddhas seated on lotuses, avoid angering others, and attain supreme realization. To attain supernormal powers and travel to other Buddha-lands (5) one must not interfere with someone who is creating merit nor with someone explaining Dharma, keep a burning lamp in the Buddha-temple, and, entering *saṃādhi* (*san-mei*), travel to all places. To remain out of Māra's reach (9), always recall the Buddha (*nien-yü-fo*, *buddhanusmṛti*), be energetic, recall the Dharma (*nien-ching-fa*, *dharma-nusmṛti*) and establish merit. To have the Buddha appear at the moment of death (10), the Bodhisattva must fulfill his/her resolve made for the sake of all beings, try to satisfy all the desires of others, help others with their charitable acts and make offerings to Buddha, Dharma and Samgha.

21. In early Buddhist tradition, Mahāmaudgalyāyana is one of the Buddha's two chief disciples, known especially as the master of supernormal powers, the *rddhi*. Śāriputra, the other of the two, was known as first among the disciples in understanding, *prajñā*.

22. T.12.334 and 335. In Bodhiruci's translation, Mahāmaudgalyāyana merely observes that the task is difficult, but challenges neither the girl's sex nor her age.

23. On the "act of truth" see pp. 52–54 of this essay.—This passage is T.12.334, p. 77.b.29–c.12.

24. Mañjuśrī is, in Mahāyāna tradition, the wisest of the Bodhisattvas.

25. T.12.334, p. 77.c.13–16. "No abiding" is *wu-so-chu*, which probably translated Sanskrit *apratisthita* or a related form. This means, the mind, when awakened, does not fix on or attach itself to anything, grasps at no sense-object as support and thus abides or settles no place in particular.

26. T.12.334, p. 77c.25: *k'ung*: *śūnyatā*. "Eminess" points to the fact that nothing exists absolutely, in and of itself; everything exists relative to other things and nothing can be independently apprehended, fixed upon, settled down in, etc.

27. "Conceived the aspiration to attain enlightenment": *fa-wu-shang-p'ing-teng-tu-i*, *anuttarasamyaksambodhicittotpāta*, T.12.334, p. 78.a.6–7. "Tolerance of the notion that dharmas do not arise": *wu-so-ts'ung-sheng-fa-jen*, *anupattikadharmaśānti*, T.12.334, p. 78, a.9. *Bodhicittotpāta* is the first event in the Bodhisattva's career, when he or she first realizes that it is possible to aspire to attain the enlightenment of the Buddhas. *Anupattikadharmaśānti* is the gradually won ability to accept and tolerate the all-important notion that phenomena do not come into existence or cease to be, that they are therefore impossible to grasp or to conceive of in any way, that nothing whatever is to be apprehended for nothing can be "fixed."

28. T.12.334, p. 78.a.14. *Wu-so-tè*: *anupalabdhī*, *anapalambdha*, etc. Since nothing is fixed or definable, nothing whatever can be apprehended; there are no "real" objects which can serve as supports for ordinary cognition. The Mahāyāna sūtra categorically denies the position of the older Buddhist schools, which had affirmed that maleness and femaleness are irreducible realities, distinguishable by means of the sex organs. (See *L'Adhidharmaśā* de Vasubandhu, translated L. de la Vallée Poussin, Bruxelles, 1971; Vol. I, Ch. I., p. 101.)

29. *Nü-jen t'ai*, T.12.334, p. 78.a.23. Bodhiruci writes "no names of women," *wu-yu nü-jen chih ming*, T.11.310(30), p. 549.a.6–7. I believe both texts may mean by this that there shall be in Sumati's Buddha-land nothing which is to be distinguished as female as opposed to male, thus putting the emphasis on the difference between enlightened understanding which does not discriminate "male" and "female" and unenlightened understanding which does. That would be consistent with the debate with Mañjuśrī, just concluded. However, it must be recalled that the *Sukhāvatīvyūhopadeśa*, the commentary on the *Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra* attributed to Vasubandhu, explicitly states that there will be neither bodies nor even names (designations) of women in Amītabha's Pure Land; see M. Kiyota "Buddhist Devotional Meditation: A Study of the *Sukhāvatīvyūhopadeśa*," in *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation, Theory and Practice*, Honolulu, 1978, p. 282.

30. The summary follows the Dharmarakṣa translation, T.12.338. The major difference between this and the other two translations, T.11.310(33), attributed to Nieh Tao-chèn of the Western Chin, and T.12.339, attributed to Gautama Prajñāruci of the Eastern Wei, is that Dharmarakṣa's version of Pure Gift's question to the Buddha is clear and concise in 18 parts. The same question in the other two translations is much expanded and set into verse.

31. Pure Gift, like Pure Faith, whose sūtra is also discussed in this essay, is called a daughter of King Prasenjit of Kosala. So, of course, is Queen Śrīmālā in the *Śrīmālā-*

sūtra. These three “sisters” from the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* do not seem to appear in other texts and are not known from Pāli sources as Prasenajit/Pasenadi’s daughters. See A. and H. Wayman, *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, New York, 1974, pp. 3–4, for comments on King Prasenajit’s family.

32. None of the Chinese texts uses the expression “*mahāpuruṣa*,” but a comparison with the list of the 32 *lakṣaṇa* found in the Pāli *Lakkhanasuttanta* (*Dighanikāya*, III, pp. 142–179) and in the *Ta-chih-tu-lun* (*Traité*, IV, pp. 1910–13) shows that the *Pure Gift Sūtra* enumerates some 20 or 21 of the 32. Dharmarakṣa does not mention the mark of having the penis covered by a sheath, but both of the other translations do.

33. T.12.338, p. 91.a.25: *nien-fo: buddhānusmṛti*. On *buddhānusmṛti*, see p. 52 of this essay; see also note 61.

34. T.12.338, p. 91.b.25: *yin: skandha*. The fundamental experience of being in the world, which is regarded as suffering, is classified by Buddhists into five aggregates or groups: body (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedāna*), notion or perception (*saṃjñā*), impulses or motivations (*saṃskāra*) and cognition or consciousness (*vijñāna*).

35. T.12.338, p. 91.b.25–c.15. It seems to me that the *Pure Gift Sūtra* attempts to establish some parallels between the biography of the princess and that of Prince Siddhārtha who became Gautama Buddha; the conversation here with her royal father is a notable instance. (Compare Aśvaghosa’s *Buddhacarita*, Canto V, verses 28–38 (ed. E. H. Johnston, Lahore, 1936).) The parallelism is rather vague, at best, but it does serve the purpose of helping to establish the princess as a credible candidate for Buddhahood.

36. T.12.338, p. 91.c.18: *yu-wei/wu-wei: saṃskṛta/asaṃskṛta*. According to pre-Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, *saṃskṛta* dharmas come into being dependent on other dharmas which cause and condition them in various ways. *Saṃskṛta* dharmas are characterized by the three marks of phenomenal existence: impermanence (*anityā*), suffering (*duḥkha*) and total absence of a unique essence or “self” (*anātman*). An *asaṃskṛta* dharma is totally independent of the action of anything else; *nirvāṇa* is *asaṃskṛta*, unconstructed or unconditioned.

37. This part of the *Pure Gift Sūtra* resembles the dialogue between the supremely wise Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti and the other Bodhisattvas and disciples in the *Vimalakīrtinirdēśa*: see Lamotte, *L’Enseignement*, pp. 141–218, and Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, University Park and London, 1976, pp. 24–41. It is probable that the *Pure Gift Sūtra* was modelled after the *Vimalakīrti*, which appears to be the older of the two texts. The *Vimalakīrti* was first translated into Chinese by Chih Ch’ien between 222–229 A.D. (Lamotte, *op.cit.*, pp. 2–3), the *Pure Gift Sūtra* not until 289 A.D. (CSTCC, p. 7c), although the dates of the original composition of the two sūtras are of course unknown.

38. T.12.338, p. 92.c.6. The “12 causes,” *shih érh yuān*, means *pratītya-samutpāda*, conditioned co-arising, the doctrine that everything that comes into being and is part of phenomenal existence as we experience it, is produced dependent on other things as its causes and conditions. Everything thus exists relative to everything else.

39. T.12.338, p. 92.c.7 *Tzu-jan*: that which exists independently of anything else, in contrast to that which is caused and conditioned by other things. Neither *nirvāṇa* (according to the older Buddhist schools) nor the perfect enlightenment, *samyak-sambodhi*, of the Buddhas (according to Mahāyāna Buddhists) is produced by any cause.

40. T.12.338, p. 92.c.12; *pen-chi: bhūtakōji*. *Bhūtakōji* is one of the synonyms for ultimate truth, *paramārtha-satya*, listed at *Mayāvīyutpatti* 1705–1723. “Reality” (*bhūta*) is

undistorted truth; “limit” (*koti*) means the extreme beyond which there is nothing to be known by anyone. (See Thurman, *op.cit.*, p. 163, quoting Sthiramati.)

41. Avalokiteśvara is the Bodhisattva of compassion.

42. If words are held to be fixed and changeless, truly definitive of something real to which they eternally correspond, they are only an obstacle and lead to misunderstanding. If one is not attached to them as absolutes but regards them as useful devices only, they can be used beneficially. This seems to have been Mañjuśrī’s point. Pure Gift, however, was getting at the fact that enlightenment itself is completely beyond words. But in Avalokiteśvara’s case the question is the possibility of efficacious action in the world and for that purpose words can be used if used properly.

43. T.12.338, p. 93.b.11. *Fa-chieh*: *dharmadhātu*, which is another of the synonyms for ultimate truth given at *Mahāvyutpatti* 1705–23. *Dhātu* is the basic “element” or the fundamental reality of all the phenomena (*dharma*) which make up our empirical world, including the Dharma taught by the Buddhas. See *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, I.14 (edited G. M. Nagao, Tokyo, 1964; p. 23).

44. T.12.338, p. 92.c.23. *Fa-shen*: *dharmakāya*, “the body of the Truth”; that is, ultimate truth as the real nature of the Buddha, the identification of Buddha and Dharma. It is contrasted here with the Buddha’s material body, *sē-shen*, *rūpakāya*. (See also note 12, above.)

45. Pure Gift’s question is much like Sumati’s; in fact seven of Sumati’s ten points are also raised by Pure Gift. Pure Gift’s question, parts 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15 and 17 correspond to Sumati’s, parts 9, 5, 1, 4, 2, 7 and 3. The Buddha’s reply to Pure Gift also resembles that made to Sumati, but, in the case of the seven points the sūtras have in common, the Buddha’s replies are not the same in detail, even in the Dharmarakṣa translations of the two texts.

46. T.12.338 and T.11.310(33), say this. T.12.339, a 6th century translation, is milder, saying: it is rare indeed that a woman should cultivate this practice. (Compare also the difference in the Bodhiruci and Dharmarakṣa translations of the *Sumati-sūtra*: see note 22 above.)

47. T.12.338, p. 96.c.24–25. T.12.339 lacks Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s second challenge, but does contain Pure Gift’s assertion that *bodhi* is not attained by a male or a female.—The resemblance of this exchange to the goddess/Sāriputra contest in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* is obvious.

48. Here, as in the later translations of the *Pure Gift Sūtras*, the woman’s question to the Buddha has apparently been expanded. The Buddha replies to a 12-part question, but the question in the text is longer than that, repetitive, and the order of the parts is different. In my summary, I follow the organization of the Buddha’s reply.

49. There are other sūtras in which the Buddha predicts that at the end of her present life or a series of lives as a female, such and such a woman will thenceforth only be reborn as a male. The *Fan-chih-nü shou-i ching* mentioned above is one (see note 15); the *Ta-yün ching* (*Mahāmegha-sūtra*, T.12.387) is another; a third is the *Śūramgama-samādhi-sūtra* (see E. Lamotte, *La Concentration de la Marche Héroïque, Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, Vol. 18, Bruxelles, 1965: pp. 198–199 and 216–217).

50. *Hua-jen* at T.11.310(31), p. 549.b.24, *huan-hua-jen* at p. 549.b.29. This would be *nirmāṇa-* or *nirmita-*, something created by means of extraordinary powers,

such as those thought to be acquired by the enlightened ones. Powers of this kind are the *rddhi*.

51. T.11.310(31), p. 549.c.14: *p'an-yüan, ālambana*: an object on which the mind or the sense-faculties rest or dwell, using it as a support or basis for knowledge.

52. T.11.310(31), p. 550.a.13. *Shih-chi pu-szu-i-chien: bhūtakoti-acintyadhātu*. These two terms are among the synonyms for ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) listed at *Mahāyutpatti* 1705–1723. On *bhūtakoti* see note 40 above. *Acintyadhātu*: *dhātu* is the basic “element” or fundamental reality of all phenomena, and it is inconceivable, or impossible for conventional thought to apprehend: compare note 43 above.

53. Chapter 7 in the Chinese translations. Lamotte numbers it Chapter 6. He and Thurman title it “The Goddess,” based on the Tibetan text.

54. *Abhijñā, shen-tung* in Chinese, which means “supernatural penetrations.” The supernormal or magical powers, the *rddhi*, are the one group among the five or six *abhijñā*. See note 72.

55. Whether or not this portion of the text was originally part of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* has long been a matter of controversy. It is on Kumārajīva’s translation (T.9.262) and to a lesser extent on the Kern-Nanjo Sanskrit recension that the controversy has centered. For various opinions see: Kern and Nanjo, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*, p. 256, n. 5; W. Baruch, *Beiträge zu Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, Leiden, 1938, pp. 40–43 and 35; P. Demiéville, *Bibliographie Bouddhique*, VII–VIII, 1937, pp. 93–96 (review of K. Fuse, *Hokkekyō seiriritsu shi*); Lamotte, *Traité*, I, pp. 294–5, n. 1.—For the purposes of this essay, there is no need to comment on this controversy, but only to note the following: the so-called “Devadatta Chapter,” equivalent to Kumārajīva’s Chapter 12, which includes the Dragon-princess episode, is genuinely ancient, for it was included from the beginning in Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*. He was the first to translate the entire *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* into Chinese, in 286 A.D. (T.9.263). Moreover, this portion of the text appears to have been circulated from an early date in China and in Central Asia as a separate text: T.9.265, which may be as early as the late 2nd or early 3rd century A.D., includes only this part of the text with some introductory material (Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, II, pp. 344–5, n. 246; Baruch, *op.cit.*, pp. 40–42, thinks it is the work of Dharmarakṣa himself). My summary of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* passage follows the texts of Dharmarakṣa and T.9.265, which are quite similar.

56. Kumārajīva adds that she has accumulated merit in past existences.

57. T.9.265, alone among all versions of the text, says nothing about ranks of existence from which women are excluded. Kumārajīva, whose text is more elaborately detailed than Dharmarakṣa’s here, adds that a woman’s body is impure and not a fit receptacle for the Dharma.

58. Kumārajīva reads: “By means of your supernormal power you will see me attain Buddhahood still more quickly than that.” The Sanskrit text has: “If . . . I were a great magician, I should achieve right, perfect, enlightened intuition more quickly yet. Nor would there be any recipient for this jewel.” See L. Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, New York, 1976, pp. 201 and 379. Thus these two later versions of the *Lotus* make some reference to magic or to supernatural power in the context of the change, a reference which is quite central in the *Sumati-* and *Pure Gift Sūtras*, and in the *Vimalakīrtinirdesā*.

59. The *Śrīmālāśimhanādasūtra* now constitutes section 48 of the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* in the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist canons. It exists in two Chinese translations, Guṇabhadra's 5th century translation (T.12.353) and Bodhiruci's 8th century version (T.11.310(48)). Alex and Hideko Wayman have translated it into English (see note 31).

60. Wayman, *Lion's roar*, p. 18.

61. Guṇabhadra's translation, T.12.353, p. 217.b.14; and see Wayman, pp. 62–63. Śrīmālā's exposition of doctrine is, like Pure Gift's, preceded by the attainment of a vision of the Buddha: see pp. 31–32 above. Śrīmālā has, however, invoked the presence of the Buddha, while Pure Gift sees him in a meditative vision based on what she has been told about him. After the initial vision, Pure Gift continues to call the Buddha to mind (*buddhānusmṛti*); and Śrīmālā is promised by the Buddha that she will always “see” him in the future. Both texts seem to be referring clearly to the meditation practice *buddhānusmṛti*, even though the Śrīmālā describes it as the supernatural manifestation of an “other” being.

62. Wayman, pp. 64–66. The ten vows are a guide to basic Mahāyāna Buddhist conduct.

63. On the Chinese translations, see Wayman, p. 9; on the original Indian text, see pages 1–2 and 5.

64. Wayman translates “inconceivable transference”; on these concepts, see *Lion's Roar*, pp. 82–86, and n. 58 on p. 85; also pp. 28–31 and 34. Guṇabhadra's text says “inconceivable transformation,” *pu-szu-i pien-i*: probably *acintya-parināma*. Bodhiruci has only *pien-i*. “Body made of mind” is *i-sheng-shen*: *manomayā-kāya*.

65. Wayman, p. 29, also observes that, according to the *Mahāvastu*, a text belonging to the Lokottaravāda school, when a Tathāgata is born he causes no pain to his mother because he comes forth from her body with a body made of mind.

66. For discussions see: *Visuddhimagga* (*Path of Purification*), pp. 409–10, 414–15, 444; *L'Abhidharmaśāstra*, Vol. 5, Ch. 7, pp. 112–115; *Traité*, IV, pp. 1906–7. See also: *Dīgha-nikāya*, I, p. 77; II, p. 213; *Kathāvatthu* (London, 1894–97), p. 343; *Milindapañha* (London, 1962), p. 343.

67. The *Visuddhimagga* lists 10 *rddhi* (Pāli *iddhi*: *Path of Purification*, pp. 414–20; variant lists appear in other Pāli sources): 1) when by resolve one person appears as many; 2) transformation into various shapes (*vikurvaya*, Pāli *vikubbanā*); 3) mentally creating something, as projecting a mentally created body from one's physical body (*manomayā*); 4) the success of knowledge, as when eliminating passions through insight knowledge; 5) the success of concentration, as in the inhibition of hindrances through the stages of *dhyāna* meditation; 6) equanimity when meditating on repulsive objects; 7) travelling through the air as birds, deities, etc., can because of *karma*; 8) travelling through the air as the result of merit, as the *cakravartin* does; 9) magical arts, as when one uses spells to fly through the air, show forms in the sky, etc. (*vidyāmaya*, Pāli *vijjāmaya*); 10) success of right application, as in the banishment of sensual desire by renunciation.—The assumption that the attainment of extraordinary levels of understanding of reality naturally entail the attainment of extraordinary powers is common to ancient Indian thought. It has been a Buddhist assumption since the days of the founder, to judge by the literary record. This should occasion no embarrassment. The implication is, simply, that one who knows reality is totally in harmony with truth on a cosmic scale, and thus what appear to be indefatigable limitations on human action for most people are not held to be so for the knower. See W. N. Brown, “The Metaphysics of the Truth Act

(*Satyakriyā), *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris, 1968), pp. 174–5; and Paravahera Vajirañāna Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation*, Colombo, 1962, p. 422. Buddhists have attempted to distinguish between those who acquire and practice supernormal powers for unworthy goals, and those who practice them without attachment and thus for non-selfish reasons. See P. Demiéville, "Sur la mémoire des existences antérieures," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, 27, 1927, pp. 289–91.

68. One should use the *kṛṣṇā* (Pāli *kasinā*), which are "devices" used as meditation objects. There are ten, representing four elements (earth, water, fire, air), four colors (blue, yellow, red, white), space and consciousness. One makes a blue disc, for example, gazes at it, fixes the image in the mind—visualizes it—and uses it to induce *samādhi*, deep concentration. See *Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 139–165.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 440; *Dīgha-nikāya*, I, p. 77.

70. *L'Abhidharmakośa*, Vol. 5, Ch. 7, pp. 119–120. The *Abhidharmakośa* recognizes two classes of *rddhi*: that of changing places (*gamana*) and that of creation (*nirmita*): *ibid.*, p. 113. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* also knows two *rddhi* (which can be manifested in various ways): transformation (*pārināmikī*) and creation (*nairmānīkī*): Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, pp. 113–16.

71. *Path of Purification*, p. 412; *Buddhist Meditation*, p. 429.

72. Lists of five and of six are known in Mahāyāna and in Hīnayāna texts. The five are: 1) *rddhi*, 2) divine hearing, 3) knowledge of others' thoughts, 4) recollection of former existences, 5) divine eye, or knowledge of the death and rebirth of others; the sixth is the knowledge that the influences (*āśravas*) have been destroyed. For useful summaries and references, see *Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 441–453, and Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, pp. 106ff.—The first five *abhijñā* are accessible to Buddhists and non-Buddhists, but they are said to be inferior attainments in one not on the Buddhist path.

73. *Traité*, IV, p. 1826.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 1823. See also Har Dayal, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–116, quoting *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and other Mahāyāna texts.

75. *Traité*, IV, pp. 1906–7; and p. 1821. Dharmas which have no fixed characteristics are, of course, empty; all the *rddhi* are to be considered empty, also, for they lack any support or basis. The *rddhi* are as true as anything else, then, since everything is equally empty: *Traité*, III, p. 1195. See also *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (ed. P. L. Vaidya, Darbhanga, 1960), pp. 243–44, 252–53, the incident of the appearance of Tathāgatas to Sadāprarudita while he is in *samādhi*.

76. *Traité*, III, pp. 1193–4; Lamotte, *L'Enseignement*, pp. 411–13; Thurman, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–5.

77. See Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 38ff., especially p. 45; and *Traité*, III, pp. 1329–62.

78. Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 45, 46–48. Harrison's article provides much valuable information on the theory and practice of *buddhānusmṛti* in early Mahāyāna Buddhism.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Harrison's article shows that the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra* clearly interprets *buddhānusmṛti* in terms of the doctrine of *śūnyatā*. He feels that the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra* criticizes the "materialist" interpretation of *buddhānusmṛti* found in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*. He points out that the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* asserts that the appearance of Amitābha to the faithful is not like that of a magically created (*nirmita*) body; it is an actual event. He also observes that Bodhisattva Dharmodgata resolves that all beings in his Buddha-ksetra will possess the *abhijñā*, but that the *Pratyutpanna* sees no need for the attainment

of magic powers, for one can do everything necessary to meet the Buddha with the mind alone. The *Pratyutpanna* emphasizes *samādhi* exclusively. But then Harrison concludes that the association of *buddhanusmṛti* with the *abhibjñā* necessarily implies a "materialist" interpretation of all these experiences. This may indeed be so in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, but I hope my essay demonstrates that this is not at all the case with the *Mahāratnakūṭa* sūtras, which see *abhibjñā* and *rddhi* as well as *samādhi* in the light of *śūnyatā*.

80. Other Sanskrit terms used are: *satyavacana*, *satyavādya*, *satyādhishṭhāna*, *satyopavācana*, *satyavākyā*, *satyaśrāvana*. See W. N. Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 171, quoting E. W. Burlingame, "The Act of Truth (*saccakiriyā*): A Hindu Spell and its Employment as a Psychic Motif in Hindu Fiction," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1917, pp. 429–67.

81. For references, see Burlingame, *op.cit.*; Brown, *op.cit.*, pp. 171–78; Brown, "The Basis for the Hindu Act of Truth," *Review of Religion*, Nov. 1940, pp. 36–45; Alex Wayman, "The Hindu-Buddhist Rite of Truth—an Interpretation," *Studies in Indian Linguistics (Prof. M. B. Emeneau Śāstipūrti Volume)*, Poona, 1968, pp. 365–69; examples in *Milindapañha*, pp. 119–123; *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, pp. 382–85; *Prajñāpāramitā-ratnaguṇasamuccayagāthā*, ed. A. Yuyama, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 82–84.

82. Brown, "Basis . . .," p. 39.

83. Brown, "Metaphysics . . .," pp. 174–5, cites *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.4.10, and *Mundaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.2.

84. Brown, "Basis . . .," p. 39, and "Metaphysics . . .," p. 172: Damayanti's affirmation of devotion to her future husband Nala in *Mahābhārata*, III.52–79. *Milinda-dañha*, pp. 121–22: Bindumatī, the prostitute of Pātaliputra, affirms the perfect freedom from discrimination between rich and poor, high and low, with which she performs her services.

85. Wayman, "Hindu-Buddhist Rite of Truth . . .," p. 368.

86. *Pure Gift Śūtra*: T.12.338, p. 93.b.8–12. See p. 33 above.

Chinese Glossary

chuan nü shen 轉女身

fa chieh 法界

fa shen 法身

fa wu shang p'ing teng tu i 發無上平等意

fan hsing 梵行

Fo shuo a she shih wang nü a shu ta p'u sa ching

佛說阿闍貢王女阿術達菩薩經

Fo shuo fan chih nü shou i ching 佛說梵志女首意經

Fo shuo hsü ma t'i p'u sa ching 佛說須摩提菩薩經

Fo shuo li kou shih nü ching 佛說離垢施女經

Fo shuo wu kuo hsien nü ching 佛說無垢賢女經

Hsü ma t'i ching 須摩提經

hua jen 化人

hua sheng 化生
huan hua jen 幻化人
i sheng shen 意生身
kan lu 卡露
k'ung 空
nieh p'an 涅槃
nien ching fa 念經法
nien (yü) fo 念於佛
nü jen t'ai 女人態
p'an yüan 攀緣
pen chi 本際
pien ch'eng nan tzu 變成男子
pien i 變易
pien wei nan tzu 變為男子
pu szu i pien i 不思議變易
san mei 三昧
se shen 色身
shen tsu 神足
shen t'ung 神通
sheng szu 生死
shih chi pu szu i chieh 實際不思議界
shih erh yüan 十二緣
Ta pao chi ching, Ching hsin t'ung nü hui 大寶積經淨信童女會
Ta pao chi ching, Heng ho shang yu p'o i hui 大寶積經恒河上優婆夷會
Ta pao chi ching, Miao hui t'ung nü hui 大寶積經妙慧童女會
Ta pao chi ching, Wu kuo shih p'u sa ying pien hui
大寶積經無垢施菩薩應辦會
Te wu kuo nü ching 徒無垢女經
ti tzu 弟子
t'o lo ni 陀羅尼
t'ou t'o 頭陀
tsung ch'ih 總持
tzu jan 自然
wu hsin 無心
wu sheng (chè) 無生者
wu so chu 無所住
wu so tê 無所得
wu so ts'ung sheng fa jen 無所從生法忍
wu wei 無爲
wu yu nü jen chih ming 無有女人之名
yin 陰
yu p'o i 優婆夷
yu wei 有爲