Towards a New Working Hypothesis on the Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism

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T HROUGHOUT the nearly two hundred years of modern studies on Mahāyāna Buddhism since E. Burnouf (1801–1852), there have appeared many possible approaches to the long-standing *desideratum* of Buddhist Studies on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism and yet, no one seems to have even sensed a dim light of its solution in the deep mists of uncertainties. What are the real reasons for these uncertainties? We must, at the outset, admit that the source materials for discovering such evidence are indeed very scanty, namely: the historiographies, both Buddhist and Hindu, which are silent on such an event in the critical period, say from the first to the second century C.E.; the historical records, both inscriptional and numismatic, are too numerous, scattered, or specific in their contents to learn anything definite about an event within the religious history of a certain locality or period; the archaeological and art-historical remains, architectural or imagery, are too painfully ruined and pitilessly displaced from their original locations to tell us anything about a particular religious background; Buddhist cultic traditions remain through generations and in localities of transmission only in the remotest terminations, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet or Japan; Buddhist scriptures,

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both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, are too doctrinal in their terminology and too philosophical in their tone to reveal any historical facts on the transition from the former to the latter. Admitting all these and other difficulties associated with the source materials, I still wish to emphasize the necessity of accumulating and correlating every possible information by applying the right approach to each of its parts in order to criticize any prejudiced or unwarranted misconceptions of the traditional Buddhist as well as recent origins that may have crept into contemporary scholarship.

Here, in this paper, I shall start Section I by criticizing eight misconceptions that seem to have been tacitly assumed, but which are actually standing in the way of our further endeavour to solve the fundamental problem of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism. After this I wish to propose a new working hypothesis consisting of four theses, corresponding to each pair of these criticisms. In Section II, I shall try to substantiate these theses, through illustrating them by tracing the development of the fundamental religious experience of *avaivartya* ("non-retrogression") from the pre-Mahāyāna *Mahāvastu* to the earliest section of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*—the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism itself![1]

I. An Attempted Criticism of Eight Misconceptions and a New Working Hypothesis

My current study on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism is being undertaken with the intention to criticize some eight misconceptions as follows:

1) The sacerdotal misconception of the *saṃgha*, exclusive of lay devotees, must be criticized, because originally the Vedic *upavasatha* feast had been instituted and practised by householders under brahmanic officiation and later even by ascetics; hence the Buddhist *upavasatha* (Pāli. *uposatha,* Ch. 布薩) feast must have been offered and participated in by Buddhist lay devotees under the guidance of Buddhist monks. We may say that the Buddhist saṃgha was formed for the purpose of perpetuating this, through the mutual dependence of both lay devotees and monks on an equal footing. It is only much later and even then, only partially, that the saṃgha emphasized strict

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[1] At the Tōhō Gakkai conference, my presentation also included a brief outline of my thoughts on the parallel development of the Buddha images in Mathurā from the pre-Mahāyāna stage to that of the early Mahāyāna by referring to two pieces of art-historical evidence. However, I feel that this topic needs a full paper, which will be written in due course.

observance of the precepts and the exclusion of lay devotees from this ritual.

2) The sectarian misconception of the distinction between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools needs to be criticized, because the Mahāyāna cultic movements must have originated within the traditional saṃgha, consisting of both monks and lay devotees in mutual dependence on each other and accordingly, the monks of the traditional Hīnayāna schools must have participated in and taken leadership of such activities around stūpas. It is only after the formation of Mahāyāna philosophies and yogic practices that sectarian antagonism between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools arose and developed with an emphasis on the latter's doctrinal and practical supremacies.

3) The archaeological misconception of the sectarian attribution of Buddhist sacred places, based only on the inscriptional denomination, needs to be criticized, because such places, with their stūpas and vihāras, were centres of cultic activities and meditative practices for both monks and lay devotees of any sectarian affiliation and hence, should be considered to have been open to pan-Buddhist monks and lay devotees, in spite of their partial or entire donations to some Hīnayāna schools. We should be able to reconstruct these cultic activities and meditative practices, both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, based on archaeological remains as a whole and not merely on the basis of just inscriptional denominations.

4) The art-historical misconception of the independence of Buddha images from their original architectural settings should be criticized, because these must have emerged and developed in accordance with the remarkable innovations of cultic activities and meditative practices around stūpas. Accordingly, they need to be studied, not only as independent art-historical objects, but also with reference to their specific cultic and religious references in relation to stūpas. It is only as the result of modern antiquarianism and commercialism that Buddha images have been displaced and become unrelated from their original archaeological settings.

5) The cultic misconception of the irrelevance of Buddhist sacred places and sūtras to Buddhist cultic activities must be criticized, because in so far as they were 'living' among Buddhists, both monks and lay believers, they had to be the objects of their activities with all possible forms of expressing homage and adoration. We need to be able to interpret these places and sūtras as such, worshipped by Buddhists within their cultic activities in order to attain the fundamental religious experience of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It was

only after the degeneration and disappearance of these activities that such sacred places were deserted and so became ruins and the Buddhist sūtras were hidden or abandoned altogether.

6) The practical misconception of the irrelevance of Buddhist sacred places and sūtras to these Buddhist meditative practices must be criticized, because in so far as these practices were centred around meditation in order to convert practitioners from saṃsāric existence to nirvāṇic, those sacred places and sūtras needed to have been designed ultimately for the attainment of such conversion through contemplating upon their artistic beauty and reciting their true messages in that state. We have to be able to define the fundamental religious experience of the Mahāyāna movements by reconstructing Buddhist meditative practices as practised by means of those sacred places and sūtras.

7) The textual misconception of the transcendence of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna sūtras from their historical development has to be criticized, because, in spite of the transcendence of their messages of the eternal Buddhist truths, such sūtras must have been developed historically, which can only be reconstructed through the careful analyses of their textual strata and mutual relationships. I have so far endeavoured to reconstruct such developments in relation to Hīnayāna sūtras and I am now attempting the same approach in connection with Mahāyāna ones, so as to discover their origin and hence, trace their developments. However, badly wanting are such text-stratum-analytical studies on the *Mahāvastu* as the latest of the Hīnayāna and on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as the earliest of Mahāyāna developments.

8) The doctrinal misconception of the supremacy of Mahāyāna Buddhism over Hīnayāna must be criticized, because, as I have just suggested above, this type of Mahāyāna Buddhism originally had to be related to some cultic movements within traditional Hīnayāna Buddhism in order to achieve the fundamental religious experience of Mahāyāna Buddhism, termed as *avaivartya* or non-retrogression, to be attained in *samādhi* and to be confirmed by the *vyākaraṇa* or the approval of innumerable Buddhas so to become a Buddha in the future. Accordingly, Mahāyāna Buddhism originally had nothing to do with the doctrinal supremacy over Hīnayāna nor with the sectarian antagonism towards the latter.

What working hypothesis, then, can be deduced from the criticisms above? The preceding criticisms of these eight misconceptions are designed to be paired in order to show four theses from these four pairs:

1) The sacerdotal and sectarian thesis may run as follows: Mahāyāna Buddhism was a new pan-Buddhist *upavasatha* movement that may have started among the Mahāsaṃghikas in Mathurā, but was immediately disseminated to all the other Hīnayāna schools in Greater India.

2) The archaeological and art-historical thesis may run as follows: Mahāyāna Buddhism was preceded and enthusiastically promoted by the new art-historical movement to envisage Buddha images emerging from stūpas and so by the new architectural expansion of old style sanctuaries in order to house them.

3) The cultic and practical thesis may run as follows: Mahāyāna Buddhism was a new cultic activity starting with the *bodhicittotpāda* or vow-declaration ceremony, for one to become a bodhisattva and this initiatory cult developed to accompany the recitation of innumerable Buddhas' names and Mahāyāna sūtras in order to experience the "Buddhas in Their Presence."

4) The textual and doctrinal thesis may run as follows: Mahāyāna Buddhism was meant to attain the new religious experiences called *samādhi, vyākaraṇa, avaivartya* or *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and so forth, which might be proven by both the textual analyses of the pre-Mahāyāna as well as the earlier Mahāyāna sūtras.

Thus, I propose, in one word, that Mahāyāna Buddhism was a new pan-Buddhist *upavasatha* movement, through which any monk or lay devotee could become a bodhisattva by performing the *bodhicittotpāda* ceremony or by declaring a set of vows in order to experience "Buddhas in Their Presence," by means of concentration in s*amādhi* through reciting an innumerable number of Buddhas' names or a Mahāyāna sūtra—all this carried out in front of Buddha images, emerging from within stūpas. Let me try to substantiate this thesis in the briefest way in the next section.

II. From the Pre-Mahāyāna *Mahāvastu* to the Earliest Chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*

What, on earth, is Mahāyāna Buddhism? Or, in other words, what is the essential religious experience of Mahāyāna Buddhism? To answer this question, is still a very urgent *desideratum* of contemporary Buddhist Studies, yet this is the very question we are now asking. The proposed working hypothesis above is meant to answer this, by introducing a new viewpoint or observation on Mahāyāna Buddhism as a renaissance movement, to recover the

direct experience of "Buddhas in Their Presence" in a Buddha-less age, when the stūpas, which used to symbolize these Buddhas, even without a Buddha image, gradually lost their original meaning, due to the inevitable degeneration or nihilism of early Buddhist culture since the time of Gotama Buddha. How, then, did the Mahāyāna movement recover this direct experience of "Buddhas in Their Presence"?

The working hypothesis above, proposes that there were two activities, cultic and practical, around stūpas, which enabled the renaissance-pursuing Buddhists to attain this.

1) The *bodhicittotpāda* (発菩提心) ceremony, in which a certain set of vows was declared in front of a Buddha image in order to become a bodhisattva and

2) the [*bahu-*]*buddhānusmṛti* (念佛) practice in which names of a huge number of Buddhas in meditation were recited, again in front of Buddha images, so as to concentrate on the essential truth of those respective Buddhas.

Therefore, these two activities were ultimately meant for the so-called newly-born bodhisattva to attain the fundamental religious experience of conversion in *samādhi* which is technically termed:

3) *anirvartana/avivarta/avinirvartana/avaivartya* or 'non-retrogression' (不退転) and so for him to directly experience "Buddhas in Their Presence," by way of receiving

4) *vyākarana* (授記) or prophecy or approval for him to become a Buddha in a definite future life.

Therefore, I am proposing that the emergence of Buddha images from within stūpas, may have played a fundamental role in the Mahāyāna movement as an auxiliary means for declaring vows and contemplating upon Buddhas in order to experience the "Buddhas in Their Presence" directly. How can I propose such a long-obsolete theory on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism once again to any degree of probability, if not certainty? Here, in this short paper, I shall try to focus on the textual analysis of the pre-Mahāyāna literature of the *Mahāvastu* (*Mv*) and of one section of the earliest stratum of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*AṣṭasP*) and thereby, show that the two activities, both cultic and practical, together with the two fundamental religious experiences, the *avaivartya* and the *vyākarana* above, indeed, developed and hence deepened from the former pre-Mahāyāna stage to the latter earliest Mahāyāna—thus the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism!—and that, in close relationship with the relevant development of the Buddha images in Mathurā.

II.1. The *Bahubuddhasūtra* of the *Mahāvastu*

Although the *Mv*, as a whole, is structured or better superstructured as the Buddha's biography, divided into each single episode of his life, with *jātakas* or *avadānas* inserted to explain the remotest karmic causality of each particular event, there is no doubt that the text is also meant to compile some important pieces of pre-Mahāyāna eulogizing or reciting literature, especially in the first volume of Senart's three-volume edition. I think that among such literary pieces in the *Mv,* the *Daśabhūmisūtra*[2] (*Dbh*) is, by far, the most fundamental and important. Let me try to analyze the superstructural context in which the *Dbh* is embedded.

As is well known, this is found within the superstructure of the four stages of the bodhisattva practice which are as follows:

1) the stage of *prakṛticaryā*, or natural practices
2) the stage of *praṇidhānacaryā*, or vow-declaring practices
3) the stage of *anulomacaryā*, or conforming practices
4) the stage of *anivartanacaryā*, or non-retrogressive practices.

Here eulogized are the four stages of the bodhisattva practice in all the innumerable previous lives of Śākyamuni Buddha: 1) to accumulate the merits through the natural practices of an ordinary sentient being; 2) to become a bodhisattva through performing *bodhicittotpāda* or the vow-declaring ceremony; 3) to carry out the conforming bodhisattva practices as narrated in the *jātakas*, as classified in the six *pāramitās*, but not yet to be given the *vyākaraṇa* so to become a Buddha; and 4) to finally attain the fundamental religious experience of non-retrogression in order to be given the *vyākaraṇa* under innumerable Buddhas (*bahubuddhas*).

Now, the first *bhūmi* of the *Dbh* corresponds to the second stage (or *praṇidhānacaryā*) with its practice of *bodhicittotpāda* or vow-declaration, while the second to the seventh *bhūmi* are the third stage (or *anulomacaryā*). From the eighth onwards is the fourth stage (or *anivartanacaryā*).Very characteristic here in the eighth and the ninth *bhūmi* is the enumeration of the names of innumerable Buddhas, under whom the bodhisattva has practised from the first through the seventh *bhūmi*, a version of the *Bahubuddhasūtra*! Why now does the text suddenly start enumerating the names of innumerable Buddhas? What is the religious meaning of such a *Bahubuddhasūtra* here?

I think that we should interpret this in light of the religious essence of this

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[2] See Senart ed., Vol. 1, *Dbh, Mv* i, 63. 11–157. 17.

eulogizing literature, namely, that to eulogize the bodhisattva practices in words *is* to practise them in act in a certain sense. Thus, to eulogize the names of innumerable Buddhas *is* to experience these Buddhas in a certain sense and so, at its climax while concentrated in *samādhi*, to experience the "Buddhas in Their Presence"—namely the fundamental religious experience of non-retrogression and to be given the *vyākaraṇa* or the approval to become a future Buddha from them.

Thus, I deduce from these observations an interim conclusion that the pre-Mahāyāna *Mahāvastu* presupposes an actual cult of *bodhicittotpāda* or vow-declaration and practice of *bahubuddhānusmṛti*, by way of reciting the names of innumerable Buddhas and accordingly, a real religious experience of *avaivartya* or non-retrogression, and of *vyākaraṇa* or the approval to become a future Buddha, as being really practised by the new pre-Mahāyāna Buddhists of the period.

In this connection, I would like to refer to another peculiar *Bahubuddha-sūtra*[3] embedded immediately after the *Govindīyasūtra*.[4] Though, here, I cannot enter upon any argument, I think that this sūtra can be interpreted as an after story of the two famous episodes of Buddha's biography, namely the *Śakrapraśnasūtra* and the *Brahmaparyeṣaṇā*. Note that these two episodes were designed to explain how Buddha began His teaching "on His golden mouth" and are fundamentally related to the sculptured scenes, in which the first Buddha images emerged: that of the emergence of the preaching Buddha on the occasion of Indra's visit to Indraśaila Cave and the scene of this Buddha accompanied by Indra and Brahmā. If so, the *Govindīyasūtra* with the *Bahubuddhasūtra* to follow may suggest that both Śakro Devendraḥ as well as Brahmā are eager to envisage and listen to Buddha Himself once again even after their first encounter and their ardent wish will now be fulfilled by the emergence of Buddha Himself, through reciting the *Bahubuddhasūtra* here.

II.2. *Upāyakauśalyamīmāṃsāparivarta* (Chap.20) of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as the Earliest Part of the Mahāyāna Stage

How did the pre-Mahāyāna stage of religious activities, namely: 1) the *bodhicittotpāda* and 2) the [*bahu-*]*buddhānusmṛti* and its religious experiences, 3) the *anirvartana* and 4) the *vyākaraṇa* of *Mv* discussed so far, develop into its

[3] Senart ed., Vol. 2, *Mv* iii, p. 224. 1.10–p. 250. 1.7.
[4] Ibid., Vol. 3, *Mv* iii, p. 197. 1. 5–p. 224. 1. 9.

earliest Mahāyāna stage in the *AṣṭasP* ? In other words, in which of the chapters of this text can the above mentioned pre-Mahāyāna religious activities, 1) and 2), and religious experiences, 3) and 4) be identified as continuing on most directly and yet developing into the Mahāyāna essence? With these questions in mind—a way of inquiring into the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism—I have been examining the earliest existent version of the *AṣṭasP* (as represented by Lokakṣema's translation) and have been struck by both the continuity and the discontinuity of Chapter 20, the "Upāyakauśalyamīmāṃsāparivarta" of the oldest existent version of the *AṣṭasP* from the pre-Mahāyāna stage. This chapter definitely continues on from the pre-Mahāyāna religious activities 1) and 2) and experiences 3) and 4), while it does not continue in its Mahāyāna essence therefrom, which is to be seen as follows:

a) The *bodhicittotpāda,* a declaration of a set of vows, is presupposed.

The main theme of Chapter 20 is, no doubt, how a bodhisattva truly practises the three *samādhis*, namely the *śūnyatā-, animitta-* and *apraṇidhisamādhis*, taken from the early Buddhist tradition. But, throughout this chapter, *bodhicittotpāda* is emphasized as the precondition for such true practice of *śūnyatāsamādhi* and therefore it is also expounded in detail which vows to declare. For instance, the reason why a bodhisattva should not directly cut short in order to realize ultimate reality, is given as follows:

> *tathā hi . . . bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya sarvasattvā apari-tyaktāḥ/ tasyeme evaṃ rūpāḥ praṇidhānaviśeṣā bhavanti—mayaite sarva-sattvāḥ parimocayitavyā iti/ yadā bodhisattvo mahāsattva evaṃ cittam abhinirharati—sarvasattvā mamāparityaktāḥ mayaite pari-mocayitavyā iti . . . tadā upāyakauśalyasamanvāgato bodhi-sattvo mahāsattvo veditavyaḥ . . . sa caivāsya cittotpādo yat tasya sarva-sattvā aparityaktāḥ/ . . .*[5]

> Because . . . the bodhisattva, the great being, has never abandoned all sentient beings. He declares the following specific vows: "I shall liberate all sentient beings." If the bodhisattva, the great being, expresses the mind as follows: "I have never abandoned sentient beings; I shall liberate these sentient beings," then it should be known that the bodhisattva, the great being, is fully versed in the arts of expediency. . . . His [*bodhi-*]*cittotpāda* is [nothing, but the fact] that he has never abandoned sentient beings. . . .

[5] Vaidya ed., p. 185. l. 22 f.

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In the following, the specific vows are further expounded in detail. Here, the pre-Mahāyāna *bodhicittotpāda* may be said to have developed into the Mahāyāna benevolence and compassion, based on this new Mahāyāna truth of *śūnyatā*.

b) The [*bahu-*]*buddhānusmṛti* through reciting a huge number of Buddhas' names, is deepened into the *śūnyatāsamādhi* and so on through reciting Mahāyāna sūtras.

I do know that the tradition of *bahubuddhānusmṛti* through reciting a huge number of Buddhas' names in accordance with the *Bahubuddhasūtra* or the like, is transmitted all through the following developments of the *Buddhanāmasūtras* and of the corresponding thousand Buddha images, but it should be noted that here, in Chapter 20 of the *AṣṭasP*, the pre-Mahāyānistic *bahubuddhānusmṛti*, as a means to experience "Buddhas in Their Presence," has been abandoned and, instead, the practice of the three *samādhis*, i.e., *śūnyatā-, animitta-* and *apraṇihitasamādhis* through reciting Mahāyāna sūtras, are here introduced as the new practice of Mahāyāna *samādhi* and are deepened into the Mahāyāna essence so that, here, the true Mahāyāna truth is now revealed.

The reason why this set of three is specifically chosen from among the early Buddhist meditational tradition for the purpose of original Mahāyāna practice, is perhaps that they start with the term *śūnyatā*, which should have been best suited to express this new essential truth. Is it possible to say that the *buddhānusmṛti* was then replaced by the meditative practice through reciting Mahāyāna sūtras, because the essential truth of "many Buddhas in Their Presence" to be attained through reciting the *Bahubuddhasūtras* is now experienced as *śūnyatā* etc. and henceforce the latter Mahāyāna sūtras designed to experience *śūnyatā* etc., begin to develop to be recited?

Now, in Chapter 20, three beautiful illustrations are mentioned in order to explain how to practise each of these three *samādhis*. The first is that of a brave caravan leader ready to save his family in any emergency on a trip, while the second is that of a bird flying in the sky, in which, as is well known, its two wings illustrate both wisdom (*prajñā*) and expediency (*upāyaka-uśalya*). The third is that of a powerful archer who can shoot an arrow into the sky and then keep it there by shooting a second and then a third and so on up until he, himself, wishes to stop. Let me limit myself to quoting only the text on the third illustration:

tadyathā nāma . . . iṣvastraśikṣāyāṃ suśikṣitah . . ./sa ūrdhvaṃ

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kāṇḍaṃ kṣipet/ūrdhvaṃ kāṇḍaṃ kṣiptvā tadanyaiḥ kāṇḍais tat-
kāṇḍaṃ bhūmau patat pratinivārayet/. . . yāvan nākāṅkṣet—aho
batedaṃ kāṇḍaṃ bhūmau pated iti/evam eva . . . bodhisattvo
mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caran upāyakauśalyaparigṛhītaḥ
tāvat tāṃ paramāṃ bhūtakoṭiṃ na sākṣātkaroti . . ./yadā tāni
kuśalamūlāny anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau paripakvāni
bhavanti suparipakvāni/ tadā tāṃ paramāṃ bhūtakoṭiṃ sākṣātkaroti/
tasmāt tarhi . . . bodhisattvena mahāsattvena prajñāpāramitāyāṃ
caratā . . . evam eteṣāṃ dharmāṇāṃ gambhīradharmatā
pratyavekṣitavyā upanidhyātavyā na ca sākṣātkartavyā//[6]

It is, indeed, like an archery master, very well-trained in his arts. . . .
He shoots an arrow high up [into the sky.] Having shot the [first]
arrow high up [into the sky], he can [counter-]shoot the other [fol-
lowing arrows one after another] so that he may prevent the [first
one and all the following] from falling, up until he himself wants
them to fall onto the earth. Just so the bodhisattva, the great one,
practises the *prajñāpāramitā* and yet continues with expediency
(*upāyakauśalya*). In so far as [practising both together], he shall
never realize ultimate reality right away. . . . Only if those roots of
merit are perfectly ripe and very perfectly ripe to accomplish
supreme *samyaksambodhi*, will he realize ultimate reality right
away. Therefore, the bodhisattva, the great being, practising the
prajñāpāramitā, should contemplate and meditate upon the most
profound truth of all these existences as such and should never real-
ize ultimate reality right away.

Therefore, Chapter 20 of the *AṣṭasP* is the first part of a text to introduce the
concept of *śūnyatā* from the early Buddhist tradition of the three *samādhis*
and develop it into the *Prajñāpāramitās* and other Mahāyāna sūtras. This may
be inferred from the following lines at the beginning of this chapter:

prajñāpāramitāyāṃ . . . caratā bodhisattvena mahāsattvena . . .
kathaṃ . . . śūnyatāsamādhiḥ samāpattavyaḥ . . . iha . . . bodhi-
sattvena mahāsattvena prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caratā rūpaṃ śūnyam
iti pratyavekṣitavyam/evaṃ vedanā samjñā saṃskārāḥ/vijñānam
śūnyam iti pratyavekṣitavyam/[7]

[6] Ibid., p. 185. ll. 6–15.
[7] Ibid., p. 183. ll. 2–5.

> How should the bodhisattva, the great one, practising the
> *prajñāpāramitā*, achieve the *śūnyatāsamādhi*? . . . Here, the bodhi-
> sattva, the great one, practising the *prajñāpāramitā*, should con-
> template in a non-distracted way as follows: "the physical body is
> empty [of the individual self], the feeling, the conceptualization,
> the volitions and the (sub-)consciousness are all empty [of the indi-
> vidual self]."

If so, then, I may be allowed to define the philosophical meaning of the con-
cept of *śūnyatā* from the contexts of this chapter as follows:

1) *śūnyatā* is aimed at in the *bodhicittotpāda* ceremony to declare vows not
to abandon sentient beings and liberate them in order to realize their peace—
which may mean the communal essence of all sentient beings.

2) *śūnyatā* is experienced as the essential truth of "many Buddhas in Their
Presence"—which may mean the communal essence of many Buddhas.

3) *śūnyatā* is defined as the emptiness of the individual self—which may
mean freedom therefrom.

In short, *śūnyatā* could mean freedom from the individual self and hence
free realization of the communal essence of all Buddhas and sentient beings.
From then on, a Mahāyāna Buddhist should declare vows and carry out bodhi-
sattva practices in order to be free from the individual self and to realize
śūnyatā or the communal essence of sentient beings and all Buddhas. Thus,
the *buddhānusmṛti* through reciting the *Bahubuddhasūtra*, was replaced by
the meditative practice through reciting Mahāyāna sūtras in order to realize
śūnyatā or the communal essence of all Buddhas, in which the bodhisattva
experiences the "Buddhas in Their Presence."

c) In the following quote from Chapter 20, the pre-Mahāyāna religious expe-
riences of *avinirvataniya* and *vyākaraṇa*, are now Mahāyānized on the basis
of *śūnyatā* as defined above:

> *evaṃ hi . . . bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ pariprasṭavyo bodhisattvena*
> *mahāsattvena anuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisaṃbodhu-*
> *kāmena—katameṣāṃ dharmānāṃ parijayaḥ kartavyaḥ*
> *kiyadrūpāni ca cittāny abhinirhartavyāni . . ./ . . . sa cet taṃ sarva-*
> *sattvāparityāgacittotpādam nopadarśayet upāyakauśalyam vā na*
> *vyākuryāt veditavyam etat . . . nāyaṃ vyākṛto bodhisattvo*
> *mahāsattvo 'nuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhāv avinirvartanīyatve*
> *taiḥ paurvakais tathāgatair . . .*[8]

[8] Ibid., p.187. ll. 17–30.

The bodhisattva, the great being, shall be asked by the [other] bodhisattva, the great one, who aspires to be awakened to the supreme *samyaksaṃbodhi* as follows: "What existences should I overcome to continue? What kinds of mind should I declare? . . . If [the former bodhisattva] does not teach the latter the [*bodhi-*]*cittotpāda* which shall never abandon sentient beings, nor answer him concerning the *upāyakauśalya*, . . . then it should be known that the former [bodhisattva, the great being,] has not been given the *vyākaraṇa* from past Tathāgatas . . . "You shall never retrogress from the supreme *samyaksaṃbodhi*!"

From the concluding section of this chapter, it is possible to deduce that the bodhisattva now performs the *bodhicittotpāda* ceremony by declaring vows to the effect that he will never abandon sentient beings and then go on to practise the *prajñāpāramitā* together with the *upāyakauśalya*, finally attaining the non-retrogressive stage by being given the *vyākaraṇa* from past Tathāgatas. All these fundamental elements of bodhisattva practices take place on the basis of *śūnyatā* as defined above: the communal essence of all Buddhas and sentient beings, in which the latter declare vows and aspire to attain the supreme *samyaksaṃbodhi*, while the former teach and give the *vyākaraṇa* to them—thus communicating between each other. Henceforth, the following stratum of the *Prajñāpāramitās* and other Mahāyāna sūtras, developed to eulogize or recite these fundamental elements of bodhisattva practices, either as vow-declaration (e.g., *Sukhāvatīvyūha*) or *avaivartya* (e.g., the following strata of *Prajñāpāramitās*) or *vyākaraṇa* (e.g. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*), in an attempt to eulogize them even further in order to realize *śūnyatā* more deeply.

d) Nāgārjuna's Witness
Now, do we have any historical evidence to prove that all these elements of bodhisattva practices, based on *śūnyatā*, were, indeed, carried out in front of a Buddha image? At present, I can only quote a few verses from the first Mahāyāna philosopher, Nāgārjuna's **Bodhisaṃbhāra* only existent in Chinese (Taishō no. 1660), which, in my opinion, is authentic. The verses are within the context of a Buddhist's daily activity in front of "either a *stūpa* or a Buddha image or Buddhas visualised in the sky." The text runs as follows:

説悔我罪悪　請佛随喜福　及廻向菩提　如最勝所説
右膝輪著地　一膊整上衣　昼夜各三時　合掌如是作
　・・・

於三解脱門　応当善修習　初空次無相　第三是無願
無自性故空　已空何作相　諸相既寂滅　智者何所願
・・・
我於涅槃中　不応即作証　当発如是心　応成熟智度
如射師放箭　各各転相射　相持不令堕　大菩薩亦爾
解脱門空中　善放於心箭　巧便箭続持　不令堕涅槃
我不捨衆生　為利衆生故　先起如是意　次後習相応⁹

Having performed the ceremony of repentance for the [innumerable] transgressions committed by myself [in past lives], I now request the Buddhas [to turn the wheel of teaching]. I also perform the ceremony of rejoicing with others over their merits and of transferring my own towards perfect enlightenment. All these are in accordance with the Buddhas' teaching.

I worship Them three times a day and night with my hands in the *añjalī mudrā*, my right knee placed on the earth and my upper robe hanging over one shoulder . . . .

I practise the three gates of liberation: 1) *śūnyatā-* 2) *animitta* and 3) *apraṇidhānasamādhi* more deeply in the following way: [Meditate that all existences] do not have an individual self and so are free [from this individual self]; being free [from such a self], they are no longer conceived as individual; having overcome individuality completely in calmness, the wise no longer aspire . . . .

I make my mind resolute [to attain complete awakening] as follows: "I shall not realize complete *nirvāṇa* immediately, but allow *prajñāpāramitā* to ripen [to its perfection]."

Being a great bodhisattva, [I must practise *prajñāpāramitā*] like an archery master, who shoots one arrow after another so that none of the arrows falls [from the sky].

Just in the same way [the great bodhisattva practises] the gates of liberation: [he] shoots the first arrow of mind into the sky of *śūnyatā* and then the succeeding arrows of *upāyakauśalya* one after another, so that none of those practices may fall into *parinirvāṇa*.

First, the great bodhisattva needs to decide [to attain complete *bodhi*] as follows: "I shall never abandon sentient beings, because

⁹ T 32. 531a-532b.

[I shall practise bodhisattva practices] for their benefit," after which
he shall carry out relevant bodhisattva practices.

Is it not as if Nāgārjuna were witnessing how Mahāyāna Buddhism origi-
nated in Chapter 20 of the *AṣṭasP* from the background of the pre-Mahāyāna
religious activities of *bodhicittotpāda* and *bahubuddhānusmṛti*, and the reli-
gious experiences of *avaivartya* and *vyākaraṇa* of the *Mv*—and all that in
front of Buddha images emerging from stūpas?

Concluding Remarks

Here, in this short paper, I have tried to concentrate my attention on the exact
moments of the origination of both the first Buddha image and the first
Mahāyāna sūtra in Mathurā and thus, identify one and the same religious
movement here at work, namely, the experience of "Buddhas in Their
Presence" in the "here and now." I hope that I have been able to discuss some
evidential issues in order for anyone to reconsider the relationship between
these two events. However now, in order to conclude my criticisms and pro-
posals, could I be allowed to suggest some possible lines of future study, espe-
cially by the hands of the younger generation, so as to encourage them towards
one or another meaningful direction?

1) Firstly, it is very important to understand how early Buddhist traditions
ended their Āgamic productivity around the first century C.E., so that the
Mahāyāna sūtra movement could have taken place in its stead.

2) As Professors P. Harrison, S. Karashima, M. Shimoda and others have
been doing, it is fundamentally important to accumulate textual studies of
Mahāyāna sūtras, especially as translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema—their
earliest records—and further to continue on the basis of the newly discovered
Indian manuscripts such as those in the Schøyen Collection and so forth.

3) Isn't it now for us to begin to take into consideration the whereabouts
among the archaeological remains in Gandhāra, Mathurā, Amarāvatī etc.,
namely the original settings, where those Mahāyāna sūtras must have been
produced ?

4) Let us distinguish the Mahāyāna-sūtra-and-cult movement as discussed
here in this paper, from the Mahāyāna-philosophy-and-practice movement as
initiated by Nāgārjuna and carried on by the Yogācāravijñānavādins. Then,
on the basis of this distinction, it is important to explain how the latter began
to develop in continuation to and in parallel with the former.

The present study and these four proposals are, by no means, exhaustive, but I hope that they are enough to invite criticisms, giving rise to fresh ideas and proposals.

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