

# The Oldest Mahāyāna Sūtra: Its Significance for the Study of Buddhist Development

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THE OLDEST extant form of a Mahāyāna sūtra, *Tao-hsing pan-jo ching*, is the translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (hereafter abbr. *Aṣṭa*) done by Lokakṣema in the second century A.D. This translation, when compared with the Sanskrit manuscripts and the later Chinese and Tibetan translations, gives an indication of the major changes which occurred not only in the text itself, but in the whole of the Mahāyāna tradition. The *Aṣṭa* in its early version is preserved in two other translations besides the one by Lokakṣema: the *Ta ming-tu ching* and the *Mo-bo pan-jo-ch'ao ching*.

The *Aṣṭa*, now recognized as the first member of what later grew to be a whole family of sutras called *prajñāpāramitā*,<sup>1</sup> had a central place in the initial development of Mahāyāna in India and later played an important and pioneer role in China. Since it was the first full treatise on Mahāyāna to be made available to the Chinese, it served as an introduction for the literate to the major doctrines of this school of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Feeling that its teachings were compatible with those of the ancient sages of China, the material was eagerly studied and became of key importance to the spread of Buddhism.

(i. *Tao-hsing pan-jo ching* 道行般若經, T. 224)

This pioneer translation was done, say the catalogues, by Chih Lou-chai-ch'an<sup>3</sup> 支婁迦讖, usually put into a Sanskrit form as Lokakṣema. Nanjio sug-

<sup>1</sup> See E. Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature* (Indo-Iranian Monographs No. VI), 's Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960, pp. 51 ff. for a full bibliography of the Tibetan, Mongolian, English, German and French translations.

<sup>2</sup> K. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) pp. 48 ff.

<sup>3</sup> T. 2150-346c; T. 2151-348c; T. 2145-6b; T. 2155-724a; T. 2157-775c; T. 2153-381b; T. 2154-478c; T. 2148-189b; T. 2147-158c; T. 2149-223c.

gested Lokaraksa<sup>4</sup> but this has been criticized by Bagchi<sup>5</sup> and has fallen out of use.

Lokakṣema was an Indo-Scythian monk, who has been associated with twenty-four translation titles,<sup>6</sup> but it is more likely that the number should be twenty-one.<sup>7</sup>

He settled in Lo-yang during the time of the reign of Huan-ti in the year of *Cbien-bo* (A.D. 147)<sup>8</sup> and joined the translation bureau that had been established by An Shih-kao. His work in the city and with that bureau is said to have continued until the third year of *Cbung-p'ing*<sup>9</sup> (A.D. 186) and during this stay he undertook the work of translating the *Tao-hsing pan-jo cbing*. The catalogues tell us that he completed the work in the second year of *Kuang-bo* (A.D. 179–180).<sup>10</sup> In T. 2148, the text has *yuan-bo* which could either be an error for *yuan kuang-bo* or the *yuan* as an error for *kuang*. If it is the first possibility, then the date would be the first year of *Kuang-bo* (178–179 A.D.).<sup>11</sup>

(ii. *Ta ming-tu cbing* 大百度經, T. 225)

A second translation of this same text is said to have been done by Chih Ch'ien 支謙 during the time of the Three Kingdoms under the Wu Dynasty in the year of *Huang-wu* (222–229).<sup>12</sup> Chih Ch'ien was one of the most prolific of the early translators and there are still fifty-three works in the *Taisbō* edition which bear his name on the colophon.<sup>13</sup> However, when the vocabulary and style of these numerous works are compared with one another, the *Ta ming-tu cbing* stands out as a unique document with regard to style and

<sup>4</sup> B. Nanjio, *A Catalogue of the Buddhist Tripitaka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> P. C. Bagchi, *Le Canon Bouddhique en Chine* (Sino-Indica Publications of the University of Calcutta, Tome I, Paris: Librairie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner, 1927), pp. 37–38.

<sup>6</sup> T. 2149–224a.

<sup>7</sup> See Ono, *Bussbo Kaisetsu*, Vol. 12, pp. 32 ff.

<sup>8</sup> T. 2157–776a.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> T. 2145–6b; T. 2153–381b; T. 2154–478c; T. 2157–775c.

<sup>11</sup> T. 2148–189b.

<sup>12</sup> T. 2147–158c; T. 2146–119b; T. 2145–7a; T. 2149–227c; T. 2153–381b; T. 2155–724a.

<sup>13</sup> *Hobogirin*, p. 148.

vocabulary. It is conceivable that someone other than Chih Ch'ien is responsible for its translation, perhaps the early Central Asian monk An Hsüan 安玄.<sup>14</sup>

(iii. *Mo-bo pan-jo ch'ao ching* 摩訶般若鈔經, T. 226)

The third translation of the *Aṣṭa* which belongs to this early textual tradition is attributed to T'an-ma-pi 曇摩婢<sup>15</sup> for whom the Sanskrit equivalent is usually listed as Dharmapriya, an equivalent based on the translation used by the Chinese of Fa-ai 法愛. The date for the translation is said to be 382 A.D.,<sup>16</sup> a date which Hikata questions because he suggests another designation of the translator.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the listing of Dharmapriya, some catalogues list the work as that of Dharmarakṣa who was active in China during the years of T'ai Shib (A.D. 265-274).<sup>18</sup>

A version, listed as being only five *chüan* in length,<sup>19</sup> it is considerably shorter than the eight or ten *chüan* usually quoted for Lokakṣema's text.<sup>20</sup> The difference in length is explained by the fact that only a part of the sutra is contained in Dharmapriya's version, i.e. thirteen chapters which correspond to Chapters I-VIII and XVI-XXIII in the Sanskrit. Tao An explains this partial text as a deliberate policy of translation rather than the loss of the central section, maintaining that whatever was identical with the *Fang-kuang* (放光 T. 221) and *Kuang-tsan* (光讚 T. 222) was not re-translated.<sup>21</sup> A comparison of the content of Chapters IX-XV in Lokakṣema with the early *Pañca vimśati-sāhasrikā* (hereafter abbr. *Pañca*) translation of Mokṣala, fails to show how this

<sup>14</sup> See L. Lancaster, "The Chinese Translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* Attributed to Chih Ch'ien," *Monumenta Serica* Vol. XXVIII, 1969, pp. 246-257 for a full discussion of this theory.

<sup>15</sup> T. 2145-10b; T. 2146-144a; T. 2149-250a; T. 2154-511a.

<sup>16</sup> Kajiyoshi Koun, *Genshi hannyakyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1944), pp. 45 ff.

<sup>17</sup> R. Hikata, *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-pariprccā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Fukuoka, 1958), p. xv.

<sup>18</sup> T. 2146-119b; T. 2148-189b.

<sup>19</sup> T. 2145-10b; T. 2149-250a; T. 2155-724a. T. 2154-511a refers to a seven *chüan* version.

<sup>20</sup> T. 2150-346c; T. 2154-478c; T. 2148-189b; see footnote three for a complete list of references.

<sup>21</sup> Hikata, p. xv; also see T. 2145-52b ff.

material can be judged to be closer to the *Pāṇca* than is that in the thirteen extant chapters. It may have been a deliberate policy decision but it is also feasible to consider it as an accidental loss of a major part of the text.

The three translations of this textual tradition of the *Aṣṭa* appear under a bewildering array of names:

*Lokakṣema* (T. 224)

- (1) *Tao-hsing pan-jo po-lo-mi ching*<sup>22</sup> (道行般若波羅蜜經)
- (2) *Tao-hsing pan-jo ching*<sup>23</sup> (道行般若經)
- (3) *Pan-jo tao-hsing p'in ching*<sup>24</sup> (般若道行品經)
- (4) *Po-lo-mi pan-jo tao-hsing p'in ching*<sup>25</sup> (波羅蜜般若道行品經)
- (5) *Mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi tao-hsing ching*<sup>26</sup> (摩訶般若波羅蜜道行經)

*Cbib Cb'ien* (T. 225)

- (1) *Ming-tu ching*<sup>27</sup> (明度經)
- (2) *Ta ming-tu wu-chi ching*<sup>28</sup> (大明度無極經)
- (3) *Ta ming-tu ching*<sup>29</sup> (大明度經)

*Dbarmapriya* (T. 226)

- (1) *Mo-bo po-lo-jo- po-lo-mi ching-cb'ao*<sup>30</sup> (摩訶鉢羅若波羅蜜經抄)
- (2) *Cb'ang-an p'in ching*<sup>31</sup> (長安品經)
- (3) *Mo-bo pan-jo ching*<sup>32</sup> (摩訶般若經)

<sup>22</sup> T. 2150-346c; T. 2154-478c; T. 2148-189b; T. 2147-158c; T. 2155-724a; T. 2149-223c; T. 2157-775c; T. 2146-119b.

<sup>23</sup> T. 2153-381b.

<sup>24</sup> T. 2151-348c; T. 2155-724a; T. 2145-6b; T. 2157-775c.

<sup>25</sup> T. 2150-346c.

<sup>26</sup> T. 2157-775c; Ono, Vol. 10, 274b.

<sup>27</sup> T. 2146-119b; T. 2147-158c; T. 2148-189b; T. 2145-7a.

<sup>28</sup> T. 2145-7a; T. 2146-119b; T. 2147-158c; T. 2148-189b; T. 2149-227c; T. 2153-381b; T. 2154-487c; T. 2155-724a.

<sup>29</sup> T. 2153-381b; T. 2155-724a; T. 2157-785a.

<sup>30</sup> T. 2145-10b.

<sup>31</sup> T. 2145-10b; T. 2146-144a; T. 2149-250a; T. 2154-511a; T. 2148-196a; T. 2153-381c; T. 2155-724a.

<sup>32</sup> T. 2146-144a.

- (4) *Mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi cbing cb'ao cb'ang-an p'in*<sup>33</sup> (摩訶般若波羅蜜經鈔  
長安品)  
 (5) *Hsu-p'u-t'i p'in*<sup>34</sup> (須菩提品)  
 (6) *Wai-kuo ching cb'ao*<sup>35</sup> (外國經抄)  
 (7) *Mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi cb'ao cbing*<sup>36</sup> (摩訶般若波羅蜜鈔經)  
 (8) *Pan-lo jo*<sup>37</sup> (般羅若)  
 (9) *Mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi cbing*<sup>38</sup> (摩訶般若波羅蜜經)

The variety of names given to those translations creates something of a problem of identification and raises the question of how the Chinese came to have so many titles for one work. The *prajñāpāramitā* texts coming from India and Central Asia in a steady stream were the cause of confusion for Tao An tells us that they had no heading but simply began with some auspicious greeting.<sup>39</sup> As the number of *prajñāpāramitā* texts multiplied it became necessary to give them some designation for the sake of identification. In India this was accomplished at a later date by naming them according to the number of lines which each contained, and so we have the rather mundane list of titles such as *Śatasāhasrikā* (100,000), *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (25,000)<sup>40</sup> etc., but this scheme was never employed by the Chinese. In place of counting the lines, the translations were given titles with reference to some distinctive feature of the work. Lokakṣema's text was entitled *Tao-bring* (道行) based on the heading for its first chapter.<sup>41</sup> Chih Ch'ien's received the name of *Ta ming-tu* (大明度) because this was the particular method of translating *mahā-prajñāpāramitā* as contrasted with the transliteration used previously by Lokakṣema.<sup>42</sup> When the *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* was brought

<sup>33</sup> T. 2148-196a; T. 2153-381c.

<sup>34</sup> T. 2148-196a; T. 2154-511a; T. 2153-381c; T. 2155-724a.

<sup>35</sup> T. 2149-250a.

<sup>36</sup> T. 2154-511a.

<sup>37</sup> T. 2154-511a.

<sup>38</sup> T. 2155-724a; T. 2145-10b.

<sup>39</sup> T. 2145-52c ff.

<sup>40</sup> See Conze, *Prajñāpāramitā Literature* for a full account of all these numerical titles.

<sup>41</sup> T. 224-425c.

<sup>42</sup> T. 224-42 5c: 22 compared to T. 225-483c: 12.

to China, it was given the name of *Fang-kuang* (放光) because it was a longer and more expanded teaching than the *Asta* which was often referred to as *hsiao* (小) or shorter teaching.<sup>43</sup>

These three translations are not the total picture of the *Asta* material available in Chinese, because the text continued to receive attention and was consequently translated four more times:

- (1) *Mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi cbing* (摩訶般若波羅蜜經, T. 227) by Kumārajīva.<sup>44</sup>
- (2) *Fo-mu-cb'u-sbêng san-fa-tsang pan-jo po-lo-mi-to cbing* (佛母出生三法藏般若波羅蜜多經, T. 228) by Dānapāla.<sup>45</sup>
- (3) *Ta-pan-jo po-lo-mi-to cbing* (大般若波羅蜜多經, T. 220 4) by Hsüan Tsang.<sup>46</sup>
- (4) *Ta-pan-jo po-lo-mi-to cbing* (T. 220 5) also by Hsüan Tsang.<sup>47</sup>

In a general division of the texts according to the content, we can put the first three translations, T. 224, T. 225 and T. 226, in one category. They are in basic agreement with one another and represent an early tradition which is similar to the later ones but by no means identical. A second tradition of the text is found in the translation by Kumārajīva (T. 227) and the fifth division of the sixteen part *prajñāpāramitā* collection of Hsüan Tsang (T. 220 5). These two translations are similar in content and chapter divisions, and while they still echo much of the earlier form of the text, it is obvious that development has occurred. Dānapāla (T. 228) and the fourth division of Hsüan Tsang (T. 220 4) are in virtual agreement with one another and they bear a close affinity to the Tibetan and Sanskrit.

For the purpose of this present study, we will turn our attention to the tradition of the three early texts which provide us with insights into the teaching of Mahāyāna at a time when it was in a formative stage. Since the material for comparison involves a drawn out process of matching one trans-

<sup>43</sup> Thus we have the title of *Hsiao-p'in mo-bo pan-jo po-lo-mi cbing* for Kumārajīva's translation, T. 227-537a.

<sup>44</sup> *Taisbō*, Vol. 8, pp. 536-586.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 587-676.

<sup>46</sup> *Taisbō* Vol. 7, pp. 763-865.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 865-921.

lation against another, only four doctrinal items are covered in the remainder of this paper, but they will be sufficient to give an idea of the changes which have occurred within this sūtra.

(i. *Dharma-kāya* 法身)

In the later *prajñāpāramitā* texts, there is the theory of the two bodies of the Buddha, the *rūpa-kāya* and the *Dharma-kāya*, a theory later expanded by the Yogācāra school to its most familiar enumeration of three bodies (*tri-kāya*).<sup>48</sup> In the early translations of the *Aṣṭa*, the conception of the abstract *Dharma-kāya* of the Buddha is not to be found. In every passage where the term occurs in the Sanskrit text or in the later Chinese and Tibetan, it is missing in these three early versions.<sup>49</sup> The one exception is the passage where *Dharma-kāya* is translated as "the collection of Buddha's sūtras," the same meaning we can find in "Hīnayāna."<sup>50</sup> Even in Kumārajīva's translation, the *Dharma-kāya* sections are not to be found in the main body of this first Mahāyāna sūtra.<sup>51</sup>

From this study of the Lokakṣema text, it appears that the earliest ideas in Mahāyāna sūtras were neither the two-body nor the three-body ones, but rather the notion of one Buddha body. We find in a long sermon by Dharmodgata, a description of this Buddha body and how it is brought to perfection. Since much of this sermon can be seen as standing in conflict with the later conception of the *Dharma-kāya*, it is understandable that the sermon was considerably shortened and large parts of it do not occur in any translation after the *Ta ming-tu ching*.<sup>52</sup> The body of the Buddha is described as follows:

<sup>48</sup> See G. Nagao, "On the Theory of Buddha-Body," *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, Vol. VI, No. 1, May, 1973, pp. 25-53 for a detailed study of this development.

<sup>49</sup> Wogihara edition of *Aṣṭa* (abbr. W) 268: 5-6 missing T. 224-435c: 3 ff.; T. 225-485b: 10 ff., T. 226-517b: 18 ff.

W. 277: 26-27 missing T. 224-436a: 24 ff., T. 225-485c: 4 ff., T. 226-518a: 6 ff.

W. 691: 9 missing T. 224-456 a: 16 ff., T. 225-495c: 19 ff., T. 226-528c : 3 ff.

W. 965: 5-6 missing T. 224-476a: ff., T. 225 section missing, T. 226 text missing.

<sup>50</sup> See T. 224-468c: 18 ff and T. 225-502c: 20 ff. This is the use found in D. N. iii, 84.24. Reference also occurs in Edgerton, *Hybrid-Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 277 and Rhys-Davids and Stede, *Pāli-English Dictionary*, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup> See T. 227-545a: 26 ff., T. 227-545c: 8 ff., T. 227-565c: 14 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Compare T. 224-472a: 26 ff., T. 225-504c: 11 ff., with T. 227-582a: 10 and T. 228-670c: 10 ff.

(The Buddha's body) is like an echo in a mountain in that it cannot be constituted of one thing or of two things, but rather there is a mountain, a man, a cry, the ear that hears it and when these are combined, then and only then is there an echo.

O Noble Sir, if you desire to know about the constitution of a Buddha's body (then you should be aware) that it is just like this. There is no shape and there is nothing to which it attaches. (This body) is produced from cause and conditions (*betu-pratyaya*) and the (Buddha) in lifetime after lifetime understood emptiness and coursed in it. All birth and death has a lack of birth and death for its cause and so the Buddha knew and thoroughly understood that originally there is no birth and no death nor is there nirvāna. He appeared in the world in order to preach just this teaching.

O Noble Sir, listen further, the Buddha's body is like a painting: a wall, paint, an artist, a brush, all these things must come together before one can have a painting of a person. If you desire to know about the body of the Buddha, (then you should be aware) that there is not the use of one thing to bring about its constitution, but there is the use of many thousands of things. The Bodhisattva has in the past practiced giving and upheld morality by not transgressing the Ten Rules of Moral Conduct; he constantly followed good teachers and with a resolute mind was concerned about men everywhere (lit. in the ten directions). There were none who obstructed him and so in lifetime after lifetime he saw the Buddha and heard about the practice of the Bodhisattvas. He became firmly established (in those practices), was not forgetful of them and in all of those lifetimes he was never deceitful and was always striving for sincerity.

O Noble Sir, if you desire to know about the body of the Buddha, it is just like this.<sup>53</sup>

Here we have a description of the one body, the Buddha body, bound by the chain of causation, similar to all other physical bodies, but for all of that,

<sup>53</sup> T. 224-476c and T. 225-507b.



a glorified, perfected *rūpa-kāya*, the result of many lifetimes of meritorious activity. In such a teaching, the early Mahāyāna is not different from the "Hīnayāna" for the idea of perfecting the body through the evolution of many eons of Bodhisattva action is quite similar to the rationale behind the recorded *jātaka* tales.

(ii. *Bbūta-koti* 實際, 本際)

In the Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa*, there are ten references to *bbūta-koti*,<sup>54</sup> but only one of these occurs in the *Tao-ḥsing ching*<sup>55</sup> and even this one is missing from the *Ta ming-tu ching*.<sup>56</sup> The Dharmapriya text that is so similar to Lokakṣema's in content has two citations for this term not found in the earlier translation, a rare occurrence of dissimilarity between these two versions.<sup>57</sup>

The early Chinese translation is *pen-chi*<sup>58</sup> (本際) which has a distinct Taoist flavor of "original limit." This can be one explanation of the idea expounded by Hui Yüan that "the release of the spirit is returning to the origin."<sup>59</sup> In all cases, the use of *pen-chi* in the early texts implies the idea of nirvāna, as in Chapter XI where the Bodhisattva is urged by Māra to reach this "original limit."<sup>60</sup> In Chapter XVI, Dharmapriya uses the term *pen-chi*<sup>61</sup> while Lokakṣema has the phrase "the way of the Arhat."<sup>62</sup> The idea that *pen-chi* or *bbūta-koti* is used to mean nirvāna, is supported in Chapter V where Hsüan Tsang omits

<sup>54</sup> W. 67: 20; W. 268: 5-6; W. 288: 13-289: 4; W. 470: 22; W. 525: 2; W. 645: 1; W. 754: 3; W. 756: 23, 757: 20; W. 809: 10; W. 845: 22.

<sup>55</sup> Compare W. 525: 2 with T. 224-448b: 27.

<sup>56</sup> T. 225-491a.

<sup>57</sup> Such differences between the two texts are indeed rare, but they do occur as in T. 224-428b: 29-C: 23 compared to T. 226-511b: 11-27 and T. 224-456c: 20 ff. compared to T. 226-529b: 23.

<sup>58</sup> See T. 224-448b: 27.

<sup>59</sup> R. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 107.

<sup>60</sup> T. 224-442c: 22; T. 226-524b: 13; T. 227-552a: 22 ff. See also W. 523-525, T. 224-448b: 20 ff., T. 227-557b: 7 ff., T. 220(5) 892b: 22 ff., T. 220(4) 813c: 4 ff., T. 228-627c: 18 ff.

<sup>61</sup> T. 224-453c: 8 compared to T. 226-525c: 8.

<sup>62</sup> T. 224-453c: 8.

his usual form of *bbūta-koti* and puts in its place “nirvāṇa.”<sup>63</sup> This may have been an attempt to separate the idea of *bbūta-koti* as nirvāṇa from its later meaning in Mahāyāna. Edgerton has indicated two possible ways to take the term in Buddhist texts, the first has the idea of *koti-gata* or the equivalent of nirvāṇa. However, in the Mahāyāna it can be used as the absolute truth (*paramārtha*).<sup>64</sup> In the *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature* Conze lists a number of equivalent phrases used by Haribhadra in the commentary to the *Aṣṭa*: *bbūta-kāya*, *dharmakāya-pariniṣpatti*, and *Dharma-dhātu*.<sup>65</sup> All of these imply the idea of perfection or the “reality limit” literally translated by the Tibetans as *yan-dag-pa-bi-mthab*.<sup>66</sup> Robinson follows this same pattern by his indication that it can be added to the roster of designations for the absolute<sup>67</sup> and later he translated it “absolute limit”<sup>68</sup> and gives it as the synonym for “the real mark of the dharmas.”<sup>69</sup>

The fact that the early Mahāyāna sūtras refer to this term as meaning nirvāṇa, is another example of the pattern of following the usage found in the *Āgamas* or *Nikāyas* and not the later developed meaning or focus of a Mahāyāna technical term.

(iii. *Advaya* 無二)

This term occurs four times in the standard tradition of the *Aṣṭa*<sup>70</sup> but it is missing completely from the three translations of the earliest form of the text.<sup>71</sup> In Chapter I of the Chih Ch'ien text, there is one reference to *advaya*, but since this chapter has undergone extensive re-working at some later time, it does not belong to the original textual tradition of the Chinese *Aṣṭa*.<sup>72</sup> The

<sup>63</sup> T. 220(4)–783c: 5.

<sup>64</sup> Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 410.

<sup>65</sup> E. Conze, *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature* (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1967), p. 308.

<sup>66</sup> S. Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary* (West Bengal: Government Press, 1960), p. 1127.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, p. 108.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 276.

<sup>70</sup> W. 114: 7; W. 407: 11; W. 620: 17 ff.; W. 666: 6.

<sup>71</sup> See T. 224–428b: 14, 442a: 9, 453b: 5, 454b: 15; T. 226–511a: 28, 523c: 4 ff., 526c: 4; T. 225–488b: 7 ff., 493c: 29, 494c: 1.

<sup>72</sup> T. 225–481b: 23.

omission of this doctrine in the *Stanzas* of Nāgārjuna<sup>73</sup> is also an indication that such concepts may have been lacking in the original *prajñāpāramitā* literature which was used by Nāgārjuna.

(iv. *Dharma-dhātu* 法界)

Here again we have a term which is not included in the *Stanzas*<sup>74</sup> and we find it to be missing entirely from the early translations of the *Aṣṭa*.<sup>75</sup> There are seven places where it can be found in the Sanskrit, but the fact that the term is late in its admission to the *Aṣṭa* text can be seen when one notes that even Kumārajīva's text omits all of these sections and Hsüan Tsang's fifth section has only one.<sup>76</sup>

These four doctrinal items are only a sample of the terms which can be used to check the development of the *Aṣṭa*; it is a list that can be extended to include such key terms as: *upāya-kauṭalya*, *kuṭala-mūla*, *karma*, *Bodhisattva* and others. This early tradition, preserved in Chinese translations, offers us the opportunity to study in detail the process by which the *prajñāpāramitā* texts were being expanded, abbreviated, re-arranged, and generally undergoing major transformations involving doctrinal as well as philological changes. Far too often, there is the tacit assumption that a Sanskrit edition represents the "original," when in fact such editions are usually based on manuscripts that come from a relatively late period of Buddhist history in India. The discovery of fragments and texts in Central Asia<sup>77</sup> and Gilgit<sup>78</sup> has offered addi-

<sup>73</sup> Robinson, p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> T. 224-439a: 26 ff., 439b: 17 ff., 443a: 26 ff., 444a: 26 ff.; T. 225-486c: 25 ff., 487a: 13 ff., 489a: 2, 489b: 8 ff.; T. 226-520c: 15 ff., 521a: 16 ff., 524c: 13 ff.; compare these sections of the Chinese with: W. 357: 22, 359: 1, 360: 1, 364: 9, 428: 24.

<sup>76</sup> T. 220(5)-893b: 10.

<sup>77</sup> See such volumes as A. F. R. Hoernle, *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan* (Oxford: University Press, 1916), and G. Tucci *Minor Buddhist Texts Part I* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1956), Serie Orientale Roma IX, pp. 175-192 for a view of the earliest Sanskrit for the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. From a comparison of these texts with the Chinese one can see how closely certain translations accord with these ancient texts.

<sup>78</sup> Tucci, pp. 175-192.

tional proof that the Sanskrit tradition for Buddhist sūtras was by no means an unchanging one, and the ancient fragments suggest great differences from the manuscripts of the Pāla Dynasty or those preserved in Nepal. While these manuscript finds are few and the hope for uncovering more is remote, we still have before us the dated Chinese translations which in many cases represent the earliest known examples of Buddhist sūtras. By a careful consideration of the content of these translations, we have a glimpse of the way in which Mahāyāna literature developed and in turn the way in which Buddhism as a religious movement was growing and changing. It is no longer feasible to dismiss the differences between the early Chinese versions and the later Sanskrit tradition as only representing abbreviations or the whim of the translators, for there are examples of ancient Sanskrit texts which match very closely the translations made in China.<sup>79</sup>

The view of early Mahāyāna provided in these translations is often startling and the fact that so much of the material is in a form which we can call "Hīnayāna" reminds us once again that Mahāyāna did not spring into life as a full-blown and mature movement, but proceeded through a long period of maturation. The story of that process is found embedded in the translations which early missionary and Chinese monks made centuries ago in China and neglect of these documents deprives us of a most valuable research source.

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<sup>79</sup> See note 77.