No Turning Back:

The Concept of Irreversibility in Indian Mahāyāna Literature

by

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November 2010

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To Joe and Beth

The problem of the *avaivartika* is one of the most obscure of the Mahāyāna.

Étienne Lamotte

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go through the whole of the difficult "Signs of Irreversibility" section of Tsong-kha-pa's *Golden Garland* (*gSer-phreng*) in great detail with me.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes.

AA	*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*
AA-Ālokā	*Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*
AA-Vivṛti	*Abhisamayālaṃkārakārikā-śāstra-vivṛti (Sphuṭārthā)*
AK	*Abhidharmakośa*
AKBh	*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*
Aṣṭa	*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*
Aṣṭādaśa	*Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*
B-Bhūmi	*Bodhisattvabhūmi*
Daśa	*Daśabhūmika-sūtra*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
KN	*Khuddaka Nikāya*
Laṅka	*Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*
MPPŚ	*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
MSA	*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*
MV	*Mahāvastu-avadāna*
Pañca (D)	Dutt's edition of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*
Pañca (K)	Kimura's edition of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*
PV	*Pramāṇavārttika*
PV-Vṛtti	*Pramāṇavārttika-Svopajñavṛtti*
Rgs	*Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*
Sa-lam	*Sa lam gyi rnam gzhag theg gsum mdzes rgyan*
Saddharma	*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*
Śata	*Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*
SN	*Samyutta Nikāya*
T.	Taisho Tripiṭaka
To.	Tohoku catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist canons

ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of the concept of the irreversible bodhisattva in Mahāyāna. I take the position that although irreversibility was once considered an important and attainable goal in the career of a bodhisattva, it later become an increasingly abstract and remote ideal during the middle and late periods of Indian Mahāyāna. I argue that the concept, which has its origins in the Dīpaṃkara prediction myth, was reinterpreted by the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s in such a way that irreversibility was not seen so much as a milestone in the career of the bodhisattva, or even a function of the strength of the bodhisattva's aspiration for enlightenment; rather, it was seen as the practical application of the doctrine of no own-being (*asvabhāva*) to the traditional practices intended to rid practitioners of defilements that bound them to cyclic existence. This mode of practice, known as "skill-in-means," prevented the bodhisattva from actualising the otherwise natural result of the practices (i.e., *nirvāṇa*), leading instead to a state of all-knowledge (*sarvajña*). Later, the authors of the longer version of the *sūtra* again reinterpreted irreversibility so that it applied only to the second phase of the bodhisattva's career—a phase in which the bodhisattva advanced beyond the level of an arhat. This system was mapped to the various *daśabhūmi* systems such that irreversible *bhūmi* became the seventh or eighth *bhūmi*.

The study is not only a history of Buddhist doctrines. Reader-response theory has been used to examine the self-identity of the first audiences of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and argue that at least some of these people identified themselves as bodhisattvas for whom the irreversible bodhisattva was an ideal to be emulated. Later, however, the normativity of the irreversible bodhisattva ideal diminished, as it became

increasingly remote and idealised during the period known as the "institutionalisation" of Mahāyāna. By applying theories borrowed from a number of modern scholars, an investigation into the status of Mahāyāna as an institution has also been undertaken. This has led to an identification of not only the "institutional basis" of Mahāyāna, but also a sense in which Mahāyāna can be said to have had institutional existence from its earliest days. Finally, the last chapter of the thesis examines the consequences for the concept of irreversibility that follow from Dharmakīrti's axiom that future effects cannot be validly inferred from present causes.

The investigations undertaken in this thesis are important not only for what they tell us about how conceptions of irreversibility changed, but also for the way they improve our understanding of the development of a systematised bodhisattva path in Mahāyāna. They also highlight some of the problems inherent in all attempts to authenticate or certificate spiritual progress.

1 INTRODUCTION

This topic of "irreversibility" aroused a quite extraordinary interest around the beginning of our era.

Edward Conze[1]

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Topic of investigation

My first encounter with the topic of irreversible bodhisattvas was many years ago when, as a monk at Gomang College of Drepung Monastery, I was required to memorise the traditional monastic text for the study of the Mahāyāna, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. The fourth chapter of this important work contains twenty-one verses on a topic known as the "Marks of the Irreversible Bodhisattva Saṃgha,"[2] which, having memorised, I would later study with the aid of a number of classic Tibetan commentaries, even translating one of them into English. As I did so, I discovered that despite being a relatively small component of the monastic curriculum, the topic of irreversible bodhisattvas often generated debates that

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[1] Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 235.

[2] "*Avaivarttika-bodhisattva-saṃgha-lakṣaṇa*" is the title given to the topic by Haribhadra in his shorter *Prajñāpāramitā* commentary, the *Sphuṭāthā*. See *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-kārikā-śāstra-vivṛti*, ed. Koei H. Amano, (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 2000), 69. (Henceforth: *AA- Vivṛti*).

provided valuable insights into one of the most important concepts in Buddhism, namely, the spiritual path, or *mārga*.

While the commentaries had much to say about the various types of irreversible bodhisattvas,[3] and how they differed from their reversible counterparts, it soon became clear that the received Gelugpa position was the product of a long history of revision and reinterpretation of what was once a relatively simple idea. The basic task that I therefore undertake in this thesis is to explore and separate some of those layers of interpretation. By tracing the development of the major strands of thinking surrounding irreversibility in Mahāyāna, I hope to facilitate a clearer understanding of not only this often complicated topic, but also the broader development of the systematised bodhisattva path in Mahāyāna.

This study is not, however, intended to deal with only the academic aspects of irreversibility. In addition to tracing the origins of its current scholarly interpretation, I will also examine what the concept meant to ordinary audiences of those *sūtra*s in which irreversible bodhisattvas are mentioned. I look at how those texts were read and how different audiences may have identified themselves in relation to the sometimes highly idealised descriptions of irreversible bodhisattvas. I also look at irreversibility as a spiritual goal in itself, and how certain milestones in the bodhisattva's career became associated with irreversibility. In the last part of the thesis, I turn my attention to the signs of irreversibility and the question of what, if anything, can be validly inferred from them.

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[3] Among the different types of irreversible bodhisattvas distinguished by the Tibetan commentarial tradition are: (1) those who display signs of irreversibility and those who do not, (2) those who have attained the irreversible stage (*avinivartanīya-bhūmi*) and those who have not, (3) those who are of sharp (*tīkṣṇa*), middling (*madhya*) and dull (*mṛdu*) faculties, and (4) who are "irreversible by the force of lineage" (*rigs kyi stobs kyis phyir mi ldog pa*) and those who are "irreversible by the force of realisation" (*rtogs pa'i stobs kyis phyir mi ldog pa*).

The thesis is therefore not just an account of the doctrinal development of irreversibility, but also a history of its interpretation, or as Hans Robert Jauss, whose ideas will be discussed in chapter 3, puts it, "a history of its reception" (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*).[4] A comprehensive history of the reception of the entire *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* would indeed make a fascinating topic for research, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to complete such a task. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a historical study of one of its more important yet difficult topics will help us better understand the different ways in which both the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* and the bodhisattva ideal in particular have been interpreted by audiences at different times in the history of Buddhism.

1.1.2 Chapter 1 outline

In this introductory chapter, I shall (1) provide a short description of the *locus classicus* that is the foundation of the research undertaken in this thesis and largely determines its scope; (2) explain why the topic is worthy of investigation; (3) discuss a number of methodological issues; and (4) provide an outline of the argument that will be presented in the remainder of the dissertation.

[4] See Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary history as a challenge to literary theory," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970). Reprint: in New directions in literary history, ed. Ralph Cohen; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp.11-41; 1974.

1.2 Scope of the thesis

1.2.1 *Locus classicus*

Chapter 17 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*,[5] known as the "Chapter on the Appearances, Signs and Marks of Irreversibility," [6] contains a long sermon by the Buddha on the characteristics of bodhisattvas who are not liable to turn back (*avinivartanīya*) from their quest for highest enlightenment. The "Signs" chapter, as I shall henceforth call it, was, according to Edward Conze, one of seven monographs that were included in the second stage of development of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, when the basic text was expanded from two to twenty-eight chapters.[7] Conze bases his conclusion on the premise that the first two chapters of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* represent the original *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, together with his observation that there is nothing that corresponds to the "Signs" chapter in those first two chapters.

This is a reasonable conclusion that is supported by at least two other pieces of evidence not noted by Conze, but which suggest that the chapter may have originally existed as a separately authored work that was later incorporated into the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. First, there is Yugen Katsusaki's comparative study of the way in which the various Chinese translations break up the text of the *sūtra*. Katsusaki shows that the "Signs" chapter is always separated from the rest of the *sūtra* at the same points in the text, whereas there is no consistency in the way these translations

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[5] Here and throughout the thesis chapter numbers of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* refer to the Sanskrit version. For the chapter names and page numbers of the corresponding sections of the various Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, see Tables I and II in Ryusho. Hikata (ed.), *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛcchā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (Fukuoka: Kyushu University, 1958).

[6] "Avinivartanīya-ākāra-liṅga-nimitta-parivarta" *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960), 131 ln.1. (Henceforth: *Aṣṭa*). The chapter did not receive its current title until Kumārajīva's translation (T.227) in 408 C.E. Before then the word "sign" does not appear in the title of any version.

[7] Edward Conze, "The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought," in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967), 130.

break up the text in the surrounding chapters.[8] Second, there is a difference in style. Whereas the surrounding chapters are characterised by frequent interlocutory exchanges between the *sūtra*'s main characters, the "Signs" chapter opens with a single question from Subhūti, which is then followed by a long and virtually uninterrupted response by the Buddha for the remainder.

In addition to the many minor accretions and expansions that can be identified by comparing its various Chinese translations, there is also a relatively long passage in the middle of the chapter that seems to have been added later. This passage, which occurs in even the earliest Chinese translation,[9] describes the way irreversible bodhisattvas are not tricked by Māra when he appears in the guise of a *śramaṇa* and attempts to dissuade them from their hopeless endeavour. Despite the great length of the passage, it corresponds to just a single line of the verse summary of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*,[10] and therefore differs significantly from the patterns of correspondence between these two versions of the *sūtra* in most other parts of the chapter. While the 14th century Tibetan scholar Bu-ston recognises the Māra passage as teaching a different type of sign,[11] most commentators do not treat it any differently from the rest of the chapter. Thus, apart from noting that it was probably absent from the earliest versions of the chapter, a similar policy will be followed in this thesis.

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[8] See Yugen Katsuzaki, "小品系般若経へ不退転菩薩品の教説構造," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 49, no. 2 (2001).

[9] See T.224 p454c22-455b02. This text known as the *Dào-xíng* (道行), was translated by Lokakṣema in 179 C.E.

[10] *Rgs* XVII:4 "[They] have passed beyond the domains of Mara. Others cannot lead [them astray]" *mārasya [a]tītaviṣayā aparapraṇeyā / Prajñāpāramitā-ratnaguṇasaṁcaya-gāthā*, ed. E. Obermiller, (Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1937; reprint, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992), 63. (Henceforth: *Rgs* (Obermiller)).

[11] See E. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism 1: The Jewelry of Scripture*, (Heidelberg: Harrassowitz, 1931; reprint, Delhi : Sri Satguru Publications, 1987), 52.

There is another section, found in Chapter 20 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, that also deals with the signs of irreversibility.[12] However, as Conze remarks,

> the argumentation is laborious and fairly incoherent. The style is fumbling and clumsy and the thought mediocre. ... It seems to constitute a kind of afterthought to Chapter 17.[13]

A close reading of this later section also reveals a different kind of "implied audience,"[14] namely, one that is concerned about the interpretation of dream signs and whether they might indicate that the dreamer was irreversible due to having received a prediction in a past life. However, as will be argued in chapter 3, the implied audience of the "Signs" chapter is one that seeks to emulate the ideal behaviour of irreversible bodhisattvas, and is therefore quite different. Moreover, since all *Prajñāpāramitā* commentaries treat the signs of irreversibility in Chapter 20 as an entirely separate topic, they will only be referred to occasionally in our discussions of prediction in chapters 2 and 6 of the thesis.

Having thus introduced the *locus classicus* on irreversible bodhisattvas, a brief overview of its tradition of Indian and Tibetan commentary will now be given.

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[12] See *Aṣṭa*, 188 ln.11 - 190 ln.16. The passage begins midway through Chapter 20 at what seems to be a definite break in the text. The author of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* recognises this break as the point of separation between the 4th and 5th *abhisamaya*s.

[13] Edward Conze, "The composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1952): 257.

[14] The concept of "implied audience", and its application to the interpretation of a sūtras is explained in chapter 3.

1.2.2 The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentarial tradition

Except for the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, [15] attributed to Nāgārjuna, [16] but unknown to Tibetan exegetes, and the *Āmnayānusāriṇi*[17] by Jagaddalanivāsin and the *Ārya-śatasāhasrikā-pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-bṛhaṭṭīkā*[18] by Daṃṣṭrāsena, both of which are known but largely ignored, virtually all extant Indian and Tibetan commentary on the signs of irreversibility follows the interpretive schema of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, where forty-four signs are enumerated and assigned to various stages of the bodhisattva path.[19]

While thirty-six of the signs are found in the "Signs" chapter itself and assigned to the paths of preparation (*prayogamārga*) and seeing (*darśanamārga*), the eight signs that are assigned to the path of cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga*) occur two chapters later.[20] This is an artificial interpretation of the *sūtra* that reflects an attempt by the authors of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* to superimpose a Sarvāstivādin/Yogācāra-type *pañcamārga* soteriology onto the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, while claiming to reveal the *sūtra*'s "hidden meaning." The eight "profundities" (*gambhīra*), whose cognition the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* teaches are the signs of irreversibility of bodhisattvas who abide on the eighth *bhūmi*, are completely unrelated to the signs of irreversibility

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[15] Taisho Tripiṭaka (henceforth: T.) 1509 (大智度論)

[16] For a detailed discussion casting doubt on whether Nāgārjuna could have been the author of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra (henceforth: *MPPŚ*), see Ryusho Hikata, (ed.) *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛcchā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (Fukuoka: Kyushu University, 1958), liii-lxxv; W. de Jong, "Review of Étienne Lamotte, Le Traité de la Grand Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (tome III)," Asia Major 17, no. 1 (1971): 106-109.

[17] A Complete Catalogue of Tibetan Buddhist Canons, ed. Hakuju Ui, et al., (Sendai, Japan: Tohoku Imperial University, 1934), (henceforth, To.), 3811. (Tib. *Man ngag rjes 'brang*)

[18] To.3808 (Tib. *Yum gsum gnod 'joms*). Henceforth, the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*.

[19] See Appendix 1

[20] See *Aṣṭa*, 175 ln.25 - 176 ln.21.

listed in the "Signs" chapter itself, thus belying Conze's observation that,[21] although the broader subdivisions (i.e., its eight *abhisamaya*s) of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s interpretive schema have little foundation in the text of the *sūtra*, the fidelity of the scheme increases at the lower levels.

Despite the artificiality of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s subdivision of the text, except for the three commentaries listed above, all other Tibetan and Indian commentators on the signs of irreversibility reveal the influence of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and count the signs as forty-four, including the eight that come from the later chapter. Moreover, all the intervening text between the "Signs" chapter and the eight profundities, to which the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* devotes seven verses,[22] is included in the traditional exegesis on the topic, even though it is not in any way related to the signs of irreversibility. In this thesis, however, we will take just the "Signs" chapter as the basic textual source for our study, and neither the eight profundities nor any of the intervening text will be examined in detail.

1.2.3 How the thesis will be structured

Monks in Tibetan monasteries do not, as a rule, read the "Signs" chapter itself as part of their study of irreversible bodhisattvas. Instead, they rely on a number of Tibetan sub-commentaries to Haribhadra's *Sphuṭārthā*, a ninth century Indian work that explains and enlarges upon the relatively terse *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, while at the same time being a condensed version of his longer commentary, the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*. Perhaps the most encyclopaedic among the Tibetan sub-

[21] See Edward Conze, "Marginal notes to the Abhisamayālaṅkāra," *Sino Indian Studies*, no. 5 (1957): 24-25.

[22] *AA*, IV : 52-58

commentaries is the *Golden Garland*[23] a classic work by the great savant Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419), composed over a ten-year period and completed at the relatively youthful age of thirty-one. Two other important sub-commentaries for Gelugpa scholars are those written by Tsong-kha-pa's chief disciples: *Ornament of the Essence*[24] by rGyal-tshab-rje (1364 – 1432) and *Illumination of Difficult Points*[25] by mKhas-grub-rje (1385 – 1438). All three texts have been consulted in this study, and some of their differences are discussed in chapter 7.

Tibetan sub-commentaries to the *Sphuṭārthā* follow very similar organisational structures. All begin with an overview (*spyi don*) of the topic, followed by a detailed explanation of every word of both the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and Haribhadra's commentary. Three topics are covered in these overviews: (1) the meaning of irreversibility; (2) the question of at what stage of the path bodhisattvas become irreversible; and (3) how irreversibility is inferred from signs. This structure has been borrowed to divide the present investigation into three parts:

(1) In chapters 2, 3 and 4, we will explore the meaning of irreversibility and the function of irreversible bodhisattvas.

(2) In chapters 5 and 6, we will examine the notion of the irreversible stage (*bhūmi*) and how it fits into the overall description of the bodhisattva path.

(3) In chapter 7, we will look at how Dharmakīrti's position on the impossibility of making inferences about the future impacted on later interpretation of the signs.

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[23] Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, (Mundgod: Drepung Loseling Library Society, 1990).

[24] rGyal-tshab-rje, *rNam bshad snying po rgyan*, (Varanasi: Gelugpa Student's Welfare Committee, 1989).

[25] mKhas-grub-rje, *rTogs dka'i snang ba*, (Mundgod: Gaden Jangtse Library, 1999).

Although several lists have been included in the appendices, the signs will not be individually discussed. Apart from the fact that such a discussion would not contribute to the main arguments set forth in the thesis, the signs are extremely diverse and difficult to group together thematically, and there is no definite way in which they can even be enumerated. The *Āmnayānusāriṇi*, for example, enumerates nineteen signs based on the occurrence of a formulaic refrain in later versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* while the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* enumerates thirty-five signs based on the occurrence of the same refrain in the corresponding passage of the three longer versions of the *sūtra*. Other enumerations are also possible, but to attempt to count the signs is not the aim of this thesis.

1.3 Importance of the research

In this section it will be argued that irreversibility is worthy of study for four reasons: (1) It was an important concern for Buddhists of the past; (2) it contributes to our knowledge of the path in Buddhism; (3) it contributes to our knowledge of the origins of Mahāyāna; and (4) it has until now been largely overlooked by Western scholarship.

1.3.1 Importance of irreversibility to early Mahāyānists

From the frequent mention of irreversible bodhisattvas in the *sūtra*s, it is apparent that the notion of a stage in the bodhisattva's career beyond which it is impossible to turn back was an important concern for early Mahāyānists.

Among the eleven early *sūtra*s translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema between 168 and 189 C.E., we find irreversible bodhisattvas mentioned in six.[26] Apart from T.224

[26] T.224, T.313, T.418, T.458, T.624, and T.626. The term used in these sūtras is *ā wèi yuè zhi* (阿惟越致), i.e., a transliteration of *avinivartanīya*.

(which contains the above-mentioned *locus classicus*), there are notable occurrences of the term in T.313, where bodhisattvas who abide in the pure land of Akṣobhya are said to be irreversible;[27] in T.418, where bodhisattvas who have attained the "certitude that dharmas are not produced" (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*) are irreversible;[28] and in T.458, where irreversibility is mentioned as the second of four activities of *tathāgata*s when they manifest as bodhisattvas.[29] The term is also found in a number of other, more well-known, Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, including the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra*, the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* and the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*.[30]

Although the mere occurrence of the term does not tell us why the concept was important to Mahāyānists, an examination of the contexts in which it occurs suggests at least two types of reasons—polemical and doctrinal. These will now be discussed.

Irreversibility usually has a dual meaning. In the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s it is often described both in terms of not turning *away from* full enlightenment, as well as in terms of not turning *back to* the levels of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. Many of the signs in the Māra passage[31] in the "Signs" chapter are variations on this theme. Other examples of this polemic, and possibly sectarian, sense of irreversibility, in which regression to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* is described as the

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[27] See *Akṣobhya-tathāgatasya-vyūha-sūtra* (阿閦佛國經) T.313 p759b06.

[28] See *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvashita-samādhi-sūtra* (般舟三昧經), T.418 p905b28. The meaning if *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and its relationship to irreversibility is extensively discussed in chapter 6 of the thesis.

[29] See *Mañjuśrī-paripṛcchā-bodhisattva-sūtra* (文殊師利問菩薩署經) T.458 p435b22-24

[30] For precise references, including page numbers, see entry for "*avaivartika*" in Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004), Vol.2 : 79.

[31] This is the interpolated passage referred to above in section 1.2.1, n.9.

gravest of sins a bodhisattva could commit, occur in the *Upāyakauśalya-sūtra*,[32] the *Bodhisambhāra*[33] and the *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā*.[34] While it may be tempting to see such passages as evidence of sectarian rivalry between Mahāyānists and their Mainstream counterparts, to do so entails not only interpreting the *sūtra*s as reflective of historical reality, but also considering Mahāyāna and Mainstream Buddhism as antagonistic sects. Both of these issues will be discussed at length in chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis respectively.

There are also at least two doctrinal reasons why irreversibility was important to Mahāyānists. The first is the doctrine of "three final vehicles," according to which *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s who realise the goal of *nirvāṇa* have reached the end of their path and are therefore forever excluded from the opportunity to attain highest enlightenment. For those who subscribed to such a view, it is clear why a bodhisattva should be warned against opting for the *śrāvaka-yāna* or *pratyekabuddha-yāna*.

The second doctrinal reason may have been a pre-Dharmakīrtian belief in the infallibility of certain causes to produce their results. The Sarvāstivādins, for example, believed that bodhisattvas were fixed (*niyata*) in their destiny once they had created the causes for the major and minor marks of a buddha[35] and that practitioners who had established the "wholesome roots conducive to liberation"

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[32] See *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1961), 40 ln.25-30. Tr. Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse, *Śikshā-samuccaya*, (London: John Murray, 1922), 70.

[33] See T.1660 p527c25 - 26

[34] See T.1521 p040c29 - 41b06

[35] Commenting on the *Abhidharmakośa* (henceforth: *AK*), IV:108b, Vasubandhu writes in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*: "From the commencement of the cultivation of actions which ripen as the [thirty-two] marks, he becomes fixed." *yataḥ prabhṛti lakṣaṇavipākāni karmāṇy ārabhate kartuṃ sa hi tadānīṃ niyatipatito bhavati / Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, ed. Anantalal Thakur, (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), 265. (Henceforth: *AKBh*).

(*mokṣabhāgīya-kuśalamūla*) would definitely attain *nirvāṇa*, even if they were reborn in hell in the meantime.[36] Both these views point to a belief in infallible causes that may have also been held by non-Sarvāstivādin schools. Evidence to support such a conclusion can be found, for example, in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, where we read that bodhisattvas were considered to stand on the irreversible *bhūmi* if they were endowed with skill in means,[37] if their enlightenment had been prophesised,[38] or if they had attained the certitude that dharmas are not produced (*anutpattikadharmakṣāntī*).[39] These qualities may have been considered by early Mahāyānists to be causes that would inevitably lead to buddhahood, and the attainment of irreversibility through the cultivation of such causes was therefore likely to have been have been important to them. However, the extent to which Dharmakīrti's denial of the validity of inferring effects from causes may have impacted on such theories is a topic that will be explored in chapter 7.

1.3.2 The study contributes to our knowledge of the path in Buddhism

It is almost impossible to make sense of the many forms of Buddhism, both past and present, without reference to the path, or *mārga*. This is true not only for the modern scholar, but also for traditional exegetes, who, as Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello have argued, adopted a pragmatic view of truth and evaluated particular doctrines or practices in terms of their efficacy in achieving religious goals.[40] Since Buddhist notions of truth therefore ultimately derive from the primacy of the path,

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[36] For an example that illustrates this, see Robert Buswell, "The path to perdition: The wholesome roots and their eradication," in *Paths to Liberation*, ed. Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 115.

[37] See *Aṣṭa*, 185 ln.31 - 186 ln.10.

[38] See *Aṣṭa*, 168, ln.22-24

[39] See *Aṣṭa*, 165 ln.11-12

[40] See Robert E. Buswell and Robert M. Gimello, "Introduction," in *Paths to Liberation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 4.

Buswell and Gimello argue that it "incorporates, underlies or presupposes everything else in Buddhism,"[41] thus making a strong claim for its status as a worthy object of study.

The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* sets forth a particular version of the path that represents a Buddhist tradition that was dominant in northern India from the sixth to the twelfth centuries C.E., and which was later adopted by Tibetans. It is, however, a highly syncretic and systematised path that combines at least two distinct soteriological models, i.e., one in which progress is described negatively in terms of the gradual abandonment of defilements, and another in which progress is described positively in terms of the achievements of associated with each of the ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is also an explanation of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, whose own version of the path is different again, and which will be shown in this thesis to have undergone significant development between its earlier, shorter, redactions and its later, longer, ones.

The impetus behind efforts by the authors of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* to systematise the bodhisattva path through bringing together several different strands of soteriological thought is likely to have been twofold. First, there may have been a desire to bring a sense of coherence and completeness to Mahāyāna in the face of quite diverse descriptions of the bodhisattva career found in the canonical literature. Second, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* may also have been an attempt to legitimise Mahāyāna discourse through the inclusion and subordination of competing non-Mahāyāna discourses. Thus, the path it describes should be perhaps seen as much more than a map for spiritual progress—it is also a device for promoting and

[41] Ibid., 6.

inculcating a particular worldview.[42] These two motives are further discussed in the final chapter of the thesis.

Most of the various soteriological systems incorporated in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentaries contain the idea that there exists a stage in the bodhisattva's career beyond which he or she is irreversible. Using this stage as a point of reference will help us untangle some of the strands that make up the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s systematised bodhisattva path. Such an approach will not only lead to a better understanding of the kind of path the earliest Mahāyānists believed lay ahead of them, but because of the way that the path underlies everything else in Buddhism, it will also help us to understand their worldview—one that is likely to be quite different from that depicted in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentarial literature.

1.3.3 Relevance of the study of irreversibility to investigation into the origins of Mahāyāna

While this study of irreversibility does not directly address the question of the origins of Mahāyāna, it does deal with a number of relatively early *sūtra*s—the very same sources that many scholars have utilised to formulate historicist explanations of the rise of Mahāyāna. While such scholars generally do not see Mahāyāna *sūtra*s as directly reflective of historical reality, most have not made their theoretical approach for extracting historical information from those *sūtra*s explicit. Since the main task undertaken in chapter 3 is the ascertainment of how the audiences of the "Signs" chapter viewed both themselves and irreversible bodhisattvas, considerable space has therefore been devoted to developing a theory on how prescriptive (as

[42] This point has been well-argued in Georges Dreyfus, "Tibetan scholastic education and the role of soteriology," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1997).

opposed to descriptive) texts should be read as historical documents. It is hoped that the theory, which is based on the philosopher John Searle's classification of speech acts, might be usefully applied to investigations into the origins of Mahāyāna.

A second point relevant to the study of the origins of Mahāyāna is the question of its sometimes disputed status as an institution. By analysing and defining the term "institution" in chapter 4, I make clear the sense in which Mahāyāna can be considered an institution. This will then allow us to apply the results of modern research into the relationship between texts and institutionalisation to investigate the development of Mahāyāna insofar as it can be considered a process of institutionalisation.

1.3.4 Irreversibility has been overlooked by Western scholarship

Until now, the irreversible bodhisattva has not been the subject of a systematic study by western scholarship.[43] There have, however, been a few studies that deal with the topic as part of larger investigations. Nancy Lethcoe, for example, has touched on the different types of irreversible bodhisattva as part of her comparison of the bodhisattva ideal in the longer and shorter versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*,[44] while Louis de La Vallée Poussin,[45] Har Dayal[46] and Nalinaksha Dutt[47] also treat

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[43] However, the Japanese scholar Myouhou Igarashi has written what appears to be a mainly philological study (in Japanese) of *avaivartika* (不退轉) and *niyāma* (正定聚), in which he traces the historical use of these terms in Mahāyāna and Mainstream scriptures using Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese sources. Two chapters are devoted to Mahāyāna canonical literature. See Myouhou Igarashi, *正定聚不退転の研究*, (Tokyo: Daito Publishing (大東出版社), 1999).

[44] Nancy R. Lethcoe, "The bodhisattva ideal in the Aṣṭa. and Pañca. Prajñāpāramitā sūtras," in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*, ed. L. Lancaster (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, 1977).

[45] Louis de La Vallée Poussin, "Bodhisattva," in *Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religion Vol. 2*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910).

[46] Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970).

[47] Nalinaksha Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, Revised ed., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978).

the topic obliquely as part of their analyses of the various presentations of the ten bodhisattva stages, among which the eighth is sometimes known as the "irreversible stage" (*avinivartanīya-* or *avaivartya-bhūmi*). Specific, but brief, attention to a number of important concepts associated with *avaivartika* has been given by Conze as part of his general survey of Buddhist philosophy in *Buddhist Thought in India.*[48]

This apparent lack of scholarly interest in irreversibility may be due to a movement by some Western scholars to engage Buddhism with analytic philosophy,[49] thereby privileging Buddhism's philosophical aspects over religious ones, or it may simply be due to the relatively small number of people working in the field of *Prajñāpāramitā* studies.[50] In either case, the fact that one of the twentieth century's greatest scholars of Buddhism, Étienne Lamotte, has said that "the problem of the *avaivartika* is one of the most obscure of the Mahāyāna, and the long chapter devoted to it by the Prajñāpāramitā ... is not enough to clarify it"[51] should be sufficient justification for a study dedicated to the topic.

Lamotte himself has, without doubt, produced the most detailed study of irreversible bodhisattvas to date in a western language in his monumental, but regrettably incomplete, annotated translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra.* Based on just a few lines [52] from the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, the author of the

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[48] Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 234-237.

[49] See, for example, Mario D'Amato, Jay L. Garfield, and Tom J. F. Tillemans, *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[50] In 1975, Conze observed that there was a "disproportion between the few persons willing to work in this field and the colossal number of documents extant in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan." Edward Conze, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), x.

[51] Étienne Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra: The Concentration of Heroic Progress*, tr. Sara Boin-Webb, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998), 185 n.209.

[52] The lines from the sūtra which are cited in T.1509 at p262a17-18 and p263a21-22 originally occur in T.223 p219a26-9. The corresponding Sanskrit can be found in *Pañcaviṁśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. Nalinaksha Dutt, (London: Luzac & Co., 1934; reprint, Calcutta: R.N. Bhattacharya, 2000), 21 ln.11-12. (Henceforth: *Pañca (D)).*

Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra provides a detailed explanation of the qualities that accompany entry into "the fixed condition of a bodhisattva" (*bodhisattva-niyāma*) and how this differs from the similar Sarvāstivādin notion of entering into "the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*" (*samyaktva-niyāma*).[53] He then goes on to explain what a bodhisattva must do in order to enter *bodhisattva-niyāma*, and finally demonstrates the relationship between this condition and a bodhisattva's attainment of the *avaivartika-bhūmi*. The whole discussion occupies 171 lines of the Chinese text in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*,[54] which when translated into French, annotated, and extensively introduced, covers some twenty-four pages in Lamotte's text.[55]

However, a comment by Lamotte in his translation of the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi-sūtra* reveals a methodological approach that must be questioned. Based on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*'s explanation of irreversible bodhisattvas, Lamotte concludes that there are two types:

> 1. an *avaivartika* incorrectly so called, from the time of entering the *bhūmis*;
> 2. an *avaivartika* correctly so called, starting with the eighth *bhūmi*.[56]

This belief that there are "correct" and "incorrect" uses of the term *avaivartika* typifies an approach to Buddhist Studies that was not uncommon among earlier generations of scholars. In essence, it held that certain doctrines (usually those from earlier periods) represented the true teachings of Buddhism (or perhaps in this case, Mahāyāna), while those doctrines that differed were to be regarded as deviations and corruptions, and it was therefore the task of the researcher to identify and

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[53] An explanation for rendering *samyaktva* as "*nirvāṇa*" is given in below in section 2.6.2.

[54] T.1509 p262a17-264a14

[55] Étienne Lamotte, Le Traité de la Grand Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra), (Louvain: Univerité de Louvain Institut Orientaliste 1949-1980), 1783-1807.

[56] Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 185 n.209.

distinguish the two. In contrast, the approach I take in this thesis is to regard all Buddhist teachings as true, or correct, for those who expounded them. This approach will now be discussed in the next section.

1.4 Methodology

Here I will discuss my method as it pertains to four aspects of the research: (1) subject matter; (2) use of texts; (3) authorial intention; and (4) researcher's agenda.

1.4.1 Subject matter

Luis O. Gómez has distinguished four genres of Buddhist scholarship according to their subject matter, the fourth of which he calls "the construction of history based on the logic of textual evidence."[57] Although our investigation does, to some extent, fit this model of scholarship—and an attempt has indeed been made to trace the developments in the Mahāyāna position with respect to irreversible bodhisattvas—the research also has a sociological dimension. As much as I am interested in establishing a relative chronology of developments and identifying the underlying issues that such developments were intended to address, I am also interested in how they were understood and received by Mahāyānists at different times.

Within the developmental history model of scholarship, Gómez and others[58] have rightly called for a move away from attempts to reconstruct the history of Buddhist thought using a linear model of development. However, rather than reject it completely, I would argue that a modified version of the model remains useful.

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[57] Luis O. Gómez, "Unspoken paradigms: Meanderings through the metaphors of a field," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 203.

[58] See Andrew Rawlinson, "The problem of the origin of the Mahāyāna," in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, ed. P. Slater and D. Wiebe (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University, 1983); Yao-ming Tsai, "Searching for the origins of Mahāyāna and moving toward a better understanding of early Mahāyāna" (PhD, University of California, 1997), 44-61.

While the notion of a one-dimensional, linear chain of events culminating in a fully-formed, coherent, and systematised Mahāyāna is unlikely to reflect historical reality, it is nevertheless still helpful to think of developments occurring as the result of identifiable causes, albeit diverse and multiple causes. Consider, for example, Conze's description of the place of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* in the evolution of the *daśabhūmi* scheme:

> The Mahāsaṃghikas worked out a primitive, and rather unsystematic, scheme in the *Mahāvastu*. Later the *Daśabhūmika*, c. A.D. 100, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, c. 400, and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, c. 650, worked out a neater arrangement, which has become classical in Mahayana tradition. Our Sutra stands halfway between the earlier and the final arrangement...[59]

Obviously, it is simplistic to think of the various *daśabhūmi* systems mentioned by Conze as points on a single developmental line, and it is also clear from even a cursory reading of works such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Daśabhūmika* that their authors drew on a variety of traditions. The various systems of bodhisattva *bhūmi*s mentioned by Conze (and surveyed in chapter 5) should therefore be thought of as the result, or even the culmination, of *several* earlier traditions. Since a multi-dimensional, rather than linear, model of development seems most appropriate for Gómez's fourth genre of Buddhist scholarship, it has therefore been adopted in this thesis.

Working with such a model, one of our tasks will be to identify the various traditions that have been brought together in the later, more systematised, concept of the irreversible bodhisattva. However, apart from accepting that some doctrines found in longer versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* represent later developments of those found in the shorter version and that some ideas relating to irreversibility

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[59] Conze, *Large Sutra*, 23.

derive from pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, I will avoid trying to establish a chronology for the various strands of thinking that were eventually combined by Mahāyānists. By doing so, I allow for the possibility that a number of different views on irreversible bodhisattvas may have existed simultaneously in India.

By not attempting to establish a chronology for the arising of the various strands of thought that produced the developed, or systematised, form of Mahāyāna, we will also avoid the tendency to privilege earlier ideas over later ones on the basis of their being more consistent with the original impulse of Mahāyāna. For example, the image of the ideal bodhisattva found in the *Daśabhūmika* is more glorified than that found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, but that does necessarily mean that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* image was chronologically earlier, more essentially Mahāyānistic or more important than the *Daśabhūmika* image. Moreover, as will argued in chapter 3, since all Mahāyāna *sūtra*s contain ideas borrowed from numerous other sources, the idea that certain *sūtra*s are more original than others is based on a flawed notion of authorship.

1.4.2 Texts

1.4.2.1 Justification for reliance on textual sources

While Gregory Schopen's call (discussed in section 3.2.1 below) for greater attention to archaeological and epigraphic sources is well-founded, I have nevertheless chosen to base my argument almost exclusively on textual evidence. There are two main reasons. The first, which requires little explanation, is that prior to the 3rd century, when the first epigraphic evidence for the existence of Mahāyāna

begins to appear,[60] there are no other sources available for the study of irreversible bodhisattvas other than Mahāyāna *sūtras*.[61]

The second reason, which requires rather more explanation, is that texts not only tell us about Buddhist doctrines, but when interpreted appropriately also have the potential to tell us how ordinary people thought and acted. One of Schopen's criticisms of the exclusive reliance on textual sources is that they merely record "what a small atypical part of the Buddhist community wanted that community to believe or practice."[62] Assuming that the authors of the early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s were monks, it *may* be argued they were not typical members of the Buddhist community, but as far as I can see, there is no evidence to suggest that they were not successful in spreading their own beliefs and practices throughout the rest of the community. On the contrary, the very fact that the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* survives in so many forms suggests that it was one of the more successful texts and that a large number of people did believe and practice its teachings. This notion of successful communication will be a major plank in the case presented in chapter 3 for using prescriptive texts as a source of information about the self-identity of historical audiences of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

Nor is it justified to conclude that the *sūtra*s were only consumed by a literate minority. Instead, the existence of verse summaries (e.g., the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*) suggests the possibility of a tradition of oral

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[60] See Mark Allon and Richard Salomon, "New evidence for Mahayana in early Gandhāra," The Eastern Buddhist 41, no. 1 (2010): 4.

[61] Although they may not have been called 'Mahāyāna sūtras' at the time they were written (see Egil Fronsdal, "The dawn of the bodhisattva path" (PhD, Stanford University, 1998), 64-67.), since they were later called such, I will also refer to them as 'Mahāyāna sūtras'.

[62] Gregory Schopen, "Archaeology and protestant presuppositions in the study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31, no. 1 (1991): 3.

dissemination of the *sūtras* among non-literate people. Gómez is therefore, I think, correct to question the assumption that "textual traditions and textual elites are entities separate from the living traditions and non-elite groups with which they obviously interact."[63]

Schopen was of course right to criticise efforts to find an essence of Buddhism within its doctrines. His argument that due to a Western intellectual tradition of locating the study of a religion in its texts "our picture of Indian Buddhism may reflect more of our own religious history and values than the history of values of Indian Buddhism"[64] is persuasive. However, as I argue in chapter 3, texts can tell us about much more than doctrines. Once we realise this, they can become an extremely valuable resource when they are interpreted appropriately.

There is also validity in Schopen's criticism that some of our textual sources "may not even have been known to the vast majority of practicing Buddhists."[65] While a text may have been popular in one community, it may have been unknown to other communities in different parts of India. Thus, when attempting to draw conclusions about the historical audiences of the early Mahāyāna *sūtras*, it is useful to borrow a term from Jonathan Silk and speak of an "imagined authorial community."[66] This is an expression that allows us to argue, for example, that at least some members of the audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* identified themselves as bodhisattvas, while not saying anything specific with regard to the time and place of such audiences. The term *community* also recognises that authors of the Mahāyāna sūtras wrote with the

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[63] Gómez, "Unspoken paradigms," 206.

[64] Schopen, "Archaeology and Protestant presuppositions," 23.

[65] Ibid.: 5.

[66] Jonathan A. Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism? Problems of definitions and classifications," *Numen* 49, no. 4 (2002): 373.

expectations, values, and norms of their intended audiences in mind, and that, in a sense, those audiences were part of a community that indirectly contributed to the authoring of those *sūtras*.

Despite the reliance on textual sources, it should be clear from the foregoing discussion that I do not view irreversible bodhisattvas as a purely textual phenomenon. It is true that we have no oral or written testimony from any irreversible bodhisattvas regarding their own personal experience of irreversibility or how they achieved such a status. It is also true that the accounts of Chinese pilgrims, which provide us with much valuable information regarding social life in India, provide us with no information about irreversible bodhisattvas.[67] Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that irreversible bodhisattvas (or people who considered themselves to have attained that status) may have once had a flesh-and-blood existence.

1.4.2.2 Which text?

Having set out the reasons for relying on textual evidence for this study, I will now justify my selection of sources.

The "Signs" chapter occurs in many forms: the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, as well as other longer versions of the *sūtra* such as the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and the *Śatasāhasrikā*. As we know from comparing their various Chinese translations as well as the analytical work completed by Conze,[68]

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[67] On the contrary, they provide us with information about persons who may have been considered *reversible* bodhisattvas. See Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), vol.1 : 191, for the case of Guṇaprabha (discussed in section 3.2.6.4 below).

[68] Conze, "The composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā."; Conze, "The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought."

each of these versions underwent several stages of development, thus giving us multiple versions of our *locus classicus*. This raises the question: which version should we use as our basic text, and does it make any difference?

In order to decide, it is helpful to have some method for breaking the chapter into smaller sections so that its various versions can be compared. Despite its shortcomings,[69] I take as a basis for textual subdivision the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s system of enumerating the signs. This allows us to compare versions of the chapter by making statements such as "sign 1 and sign 19 are found in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* but not in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*," or "sign 21 appears in the Sanskrit *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* but not in the *Dào-xíng* (T.224)" etc.

Since such a comparison reveals that the various recensions largely coincide, it will not matter significantly which one(s) we use. However, I will generally use the Sanskrit version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as the preferred source for quotations for the following reasons: (1) it is the "more or less standard form of the *sūtra*"[70] and corresponds, in condensed form, to the first two-thirds of the longer versions;[71] (2) because of its conciseness, citations are not unduly long, as they sometimes are in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* etc.; (3) since it is in Sanskrit, the *lingua franca* of Buddhist Studies, no back-translation from other languages is required; and (4) a highly influential commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* survives in Sanskrit (namely, Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*).

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[69] See Section 1.2.2 above.

[70] Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*, (London: Duckworth, 1978), 103.

[71] See Conze, "The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought," 123, 139-141.

However, it is recognised that the Sanskrit version currently available to us is based on a thirteenth century Nepalese manuscript.[72] This makes it much later than its various Chinese translations, and it must therefore be used judiciously. When significant differences between a passage from the Sanskrit version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and other versions (e.g., T.224, T.227) exist, these will be noted.

1.4.3 Authorial intention

Tom Tillemans has rightly written that "most of us quite naturally feel that we try to understand authorial intent."[73] This is true not only of the modern scholar but also the traditional exegete whose very purpose was to make clear the intention (Skt. *abhipraya*; Tib. *dgongs gzhi*) behind the utterances attributed to the Buddha in the *sūtra*s. While traditional exegetes employ concepts such as "definitive meaning" (*nges don*; *nītārtha*), "interpretable meaning" (*drang don*; *neyārtha*), and "intended trainee" (*ched du bya ba'i 'dul bya*), they do not normally acknowledge the influence of their own philosophical standpoint or agenda. Most modern western scholars, on the other hand, recognise that their presuppositions inevitably colour their interpretations of their textual sources, and it is therefore incumbent on them to make those presuppositions explicit and state any overall agendas as much as possible.

Apart from the normal practice in modern western Buddhist scholarship of not taking the *sūtra*s at face value as the word of the Buddha, I take the position that the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s can be treated both as philosophical texts and as religious propaganda. As philosophical texts, I read them as a critique of *abhidharma* realism.

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[72] See Rajendralala Mitra, *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society Of Bengal, 1882), 188.

[73] Tom Tillemans, "Remarks on philology," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 273.

As religious propaganda, I view them as products of an environment in which there was competition for resources, particularly patrons and followers, who were needed not only to sustain the ordained community but, perhaps more importantly, to produce and reproduce the texts whose dissemination and consumption are, as I shall argue in chapter 4, an essential part of the institutionalisation of any religious movement.

Among these two ways of interpreting the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, I consider the "Signs" chapter to be predominantly religious propaganda. I argue in chapter 3 that it may have been composed in order to provide an exemplary model of behaviour for Mahāyānists, thereby reinforcing not only the *asvabhāva* credo, but also the standards of behaviour that would help the fledging tradition survive in the competition for patronage in the face of real or imagined ideological opposition from Mainstream Buddhism.

There are of course other interpretations of the function of the "Signs" chapter. Although I have argued that it was composed in order to provide an exemplary model of behaviour for Mahāyānists, it is also possible, for example, to read the chapter as a teaching on how to distinguish between the reversible and irreversible bodhisattvas in one's community. While the chapter may well have been interpreted in that way, as I argue in chapter 3, this does not appear to have been the authors' main intention.

The appeal to authorial intention has been used by theorists such as E. D. Hirsch to argue why one interpretation should be preferred over another.[74] Others, however, have argued that there can be no objectivity with regard to statements about

[74] See E. D. Jr. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

authorial intention, since such statements will always be influenced by the inescapable assumptions of the interpreter.[75] The view I take in this thesis is that statements regarding authorial intention are justifiable and, moreover, likely to be accepted by the majority of Buddhist Studies scholars when they are based on evidence and rational argument. As such, they may be regarded as provisionally true, even if they are not apodictically true. However, if new evidence or a flaw in the argument is found, those statements regarding authorial intention would stand in need of revision. This is essentially the position of Tillemans, who states that "we can often get rid of mistaken ideas about what texts and authors thought by means of rational argumentation."[76]

1.4.4 Researcher's agenda

Researchers' interpretations of their sources are not only coloured by their presuppositions, but also their agendas, and must therefore be stated, particularly when they may be in conflict with traditional Buddhist beliefs. Gómez acknowledges the importance of disclosing one's agenda when he writes:

> We would advance considerably in both the goals of scholarship and (paradoxically) the goals of belief and practice if we stopped once and for all the pretence that our scholarship is never inimical to Buddhist belief and practice.[77]

As stated above, the goal of this thesis is to separate some of the layers of interpretation of doctrines relating to irreversible bodhisattvas. Traditional

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[75] Opponents of Hirsch include Stanley Fish, who has famously argued that "There isn't a text in this or any other class if one means by text what E.D. Hirsch and others mean by it, 'an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next' ... but there is a text in this and every class if one means by text the structure of meanings that is obvious and inescapable from the perspective of whatever interpretive assumptions happen to be in force." Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), vii.

[76] Tillemans, "Remarks on philology," 272.

[77] Gómez, "Unspoken paradigms," 212.

Buddhists tend to see both the Mahāyāna worldview and the place of irreversible bodhisattvas within it as ahistorical, timeless truths. They do not see them as created by Buddhist philosophers of the past, and a developmental approach to the topic therefore obviously places us at odds with traditional Buddhist beliefs.

Thus, while I argue that the received interpretation of the irreversible bodhisattva is a later development and that there were Buddhists who viewed the path quite differently to way in which it is viewed by contemporary Buddhists, no judgement will be made with respect to the "correctness" of earlier interpretations based on an appeal to their apparent originality, or consistency with the initial impulse of some sort of true, or essential, Mahāyāna. While it will be shown that Mahāyāna once existed as a tradition in which ordinary followers willingly identified themselves as bodhisattvas—and for whom the irreversible bodhisattva was the ideal type to be emulated—it is not the goal of this thesis to advocate such a version of Mahāyāna as preferable to its later, more developed, versions.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

A summary of the arguments that will be presented in the rest of the thesis will now be given.

1.5.1 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 provides the context for the investigations undertaken later in the thesis with a survey of terms that Buddhists have used to connote notions of irreversibility. Two general ideas are identified: (1) the idea that certain spiritual states or attainments are immutable, in the sense that they can never be lost under any circumstances; and (2) the idea of predestination, which is based on a belief that certain causes cannot fail to produce certain effects. It will be shown that both of

these concepts are incorporated in the notion of *avaivartika* (and its synonyms), a term that is applied only to bodhisattvas and that is translated throughout the thesis as "irreversible." Thus, it will be argued that although *avaivartika* was a Mahāyāna neologism, it drew on a number of other terms expressing a range of senses in which religious practitioners could be said to be "irreversible."

1.5.2 Chapter 3

Having discussed the semantics surrounding Buddhist notions of irreversibility, in chapter 3 the discussion turns to the *function* of irreversibility, or what irreversible bodhisattvas meant *to* Buddhist practitioners of the past. It will be argued that the irreversible bodhisattva functioned as an ideal to be emulated which, although not a particularly profound conclusion, will require the extensive development of a theoretical basis for reading Mahāyāna *sūtra*s as historical documents.

The theory begins with the assumption that a *sūtra* is an element in an act of communication. Then, drawing on a scheme for classification of speech acts set forth by John Searle, it will be argued that since the *sūtra*s are fundamentally prescriptive rather than descriptive they must be judged as successful or unsuccessful rather than true or false. The next phase of the argument draws on the work of Wolfgang Iser and his theory of the "implied reader" of a text, which is defined as the role that must be adopted by actual audiences so that a text can be interpreted and successful communication can take place. Then, an analysis of the "Signs" chapter will reveal an implied audience that identifies itself as an ordinary bodhisattva who views the irreversible bodhisattva as a paragon to be emulated. Finally, evidence will be presented to support the claim that at least some actual audiences shared these same characteristics.

1.5.3 Chapter 4

In chapter 4 the possible link between the apparent disappearance of self-identifying bodhisattvas and the role of the bodhisattva ideal in the rise of what is sometimes called "institutionalised" Mahāyāna will be explored. This will involve an extensive analysis of the meaning of "institution" in a Buddhist context. Beginning with Akira Hirakawa's important question on what constituted the institutional basis of Mahāyāna, I show that this question—as well as issues relating to the development of Mahāyāna—have been differently construed by scholars partly due to a lack of clarity with respect to the meaning of "institution." Drawing on the theories of several well-known modern theorists of institutions, I arrive at a definition of "institution" that allows us to posit an institutional existence for Mahāyāna that dates from the time when the bodhisattva ideal began to be disseminated by means of texts. I then argue that since texts that contain more coherent and less contested discourses are more likely to produce stable institutions, the incorporation of the highly idealised version of the entry level bodhisattva (who was, in effect, irreversible) that we find in relatively cohesive texts such as the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* became the standard description of the bodhisattva in institutionalised Mahāyāna, rather than the "ordinary" bodhisattva that we find in less organised texts such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

1.5.4 Chapter 5

The basic question to be addressed in chapters 5 and 6 is how the irreversible *bhūmi* (*avinivartanīya-bhūmi*) came to be fixed at a very advanced stage of the systematised bodhisattva path. I begin by demonstrating that the systematised path, as it is presented in the works of Haribhadra and his Indian and Tibetan followers, is a synthesis that includes two major strands of quite different soteriological

thinking—the *pañcamārga* of the Yogācāras and Sarvāstivādins, and the *daśabhūmi*, which is found in various forms in a number of *sūtra*s. After surveying both these systems, attention is turned specifically towards a particular feature of the *daśabhūmi* system, namely, the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*, or "irreversible stage." An analysis of the different senses of *bhūmi* will reveal that it has different meanings in different contexts. The remainder of the chapter consists of an argument that in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* was not so much a fixed stage, or milestone, in the bodhisattva's career as much as it was a state, or mode, of progress in which the bodhisattva undertook all the traditional Buddhist practices without viewing them as real.

1.5.5 Chapter 6

In chapter 6 the reason why the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* came to be posited as the seventh or eighth bodhisattva *bhūmi* is explained as the result of two developmental steps.

The first was the delineation in the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* of a bodhisattva path that consisted of two distinct phases. In the first phase the bodhisattva traversed a path in which he gradually abandoned all the defilements (*kleśa*) that bound him to cyclic existence. Thus, in terms of abandonments, this first phase coincided with the path of the *śrāvaka*. In the second phase, which had no *śrāvaka-yāna* parallel, the bodhisattva abandoned all the residues (*vāsanā*) of those defilements.

The second developmental step was the correlation of these two phases of the bodhisattva's career with the ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. Based on an earlier tradition that posited six stages of progress to arhatship to which the stage of a *pratyekabuddha* was optionally added, the first six or seven *bhūmi*s of the

daśabhūmi made up the first phase in which the bodhisattva abandoned all the defilements. The second phase was correlated with the last three *bhūmi*s in the *daśabhūmi* system, thereby making the eighth the irreversible *bhūmi*.

1.5.6 Chapter 7

In chapter 7 I analyse post-Dharmakīrtian commentary on the "Signs" chapter to determine what impact Dharmakīrti's axiom that an effect cannot validly be inferred from its cause may have had on the decline in the practical significance of the irreversible bodhisattva. I begin by discussing the key presuppositions underlying Dharmakīrti's position on inference. Next, I turn to Haribhadra's citation of a verse from the *Pramāṇavārttika*, in which it is implied that the signs taught in the *sūtra* are capable of functioning as a basis for a valid inference concerning the *avaivartika* status of a bodhisattva. Based on an analysis of Haribhadra's major Gelugpa commentators, I argue that through his attempt to invest the signs with deductive force he significantly reduces the scope, and hence the practical significance, of any inferences that can be made based upon them. However, possibly as a strategy to save the signs from such reduced practical significance, Gelugpa commentators allow for more than one interpretation of the signs, including one that is essentially pre-Dharmakīrtian in nature, but which allows for more far-reaching inferences to be drawn.

1.5.7 Chapter 8

In chapter 8 I summarise the arguments presented in the preceding chapters and discuss some of their implications.

2 SURVEY OF IRREVERSIBILITY

Like other Buddhist key terms, the word "irreversible" is not without its ambiguities.

Edward Conze[1]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a survey of a number of Sanskrit terms used by Buddhists to express notions of irreversibility. The aim is to place the irreversible bodhisattva in a broader Buddhist context and to introduce some of the issues that will be examined in more depth later in the thesis. The terms that will be examined are:

(1) *avaivartika*

(2) *avinipāta*

(3) *aparihāṇa*

(4) *vyākṛta*

(5) *niyata*

Two senses of irreversibility are included in these terms: (1) the immutability of a spiritual attainment, such that once it has been gained it can never be lost; and (2) predestination with respect to the practitioner's spiritual goal. Our survey will reveal

[1] Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 243.

that the concept of the irreversible (*avaivartika*) bodhisattva draws on both of these senses, while the remaining terms emphasise one sense or the other.

It is important to note at the outset that there is no single Sanskrit word that covers the generalised notion of irreversibility. While each of the terms discussed in this chapter indicates that a practitioner is irreversible in one or both senses, each does so with respect to a different spiritual attainment. In addition, at least three of the five terms are used by both Mahāyāna and Mainstream Buddhists, albeit in somewhat different ways.

Failure to carefully distinguish between the various notions of irreversibility associated with the different terms, or attempting to incorporate all senses in a single term, may lead to confusion. Consider, for example, Conze's taxonomy of the meanings of irreversibility, in which he identifies four senses:

> [Irreversible] means (1) a condition in which a person can no more be reborn in the "states of woe," i.e., in the hells, or among animals or ghosts. For he has become so pure that he has no affinity with these forms of life, is no longer drawn to them, does no more fall into them. (2) It means that one cannot lapse from any of the *bhūmis* one has attained, does not ever again lose a given spiritual achievement or aptitude. Like everyone else the Buddhists seem to have longed for a definite achievement which cannot again be lost, and they attempted to define the practices which would insure the Yogin against the future loss of what he had attained. (3) It means a condition in which a Bodhisattva is inevitably bound to become a Buddha, either (a) because he has been predicted by a Buddha who preceded him (as Śākyamuni by Dīpaṅkara), or (b) because he is incapable of switching over to the methods of salvation practised by the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, and for that reason is unable to give up the quest for perfect enlightenment. In the huge literature on the attributes of an irreversible Bodhisattva *these four meanings are not always very clearly distinguished* [emphasis added].[2]

As can be seen from the above passage as well as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, Conze considers the word "irreversible" to be somewhat ambiguous.

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[2] Ibid.

However, provided we do not attempt to associate all the senses he mentions with *avaivartika* or its synonyms, some of the confusion can be avoided. For example, although it is true that an *avaivartika* bodhisattva is said to be free from rebirth in the lower realms,[3] it is certainly not true that *avinipāta* can be used as a synonym for *avaivartika*. Similarly, although the second meaning identified by Conze (i.e., "a definite achievement which cannot again be lost") is most applicable to *avaivartika* bodhisattvas in the *Mahāvastu*,[4] who are depicted as irreversible in the sense of not relapsing to a lower *bhūmi*, this is not the principle sense with which the word is used in other works.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid overuse of Sanskrit terminology and to conform with existing conventions, "irreversible" will usually be used as a translation of *avaivartika* and its synonyms, and *avaivartika* bodhisattvas will be accordingly called "irreversible bodhisattvas." When occasionally discussing irreversibility in a more generalised sense, "irreversible" will also be used, but context will make it clear that this general sense is intended.

2.2 *Avaivartika*

In this section, the literal meaning of *avaivartika* and its synonyms will first be identified. Then, some examples of its polemical and neutral usages in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and other Mahāyāna *sūtras* will be given. These will then be compared with examples of its use in non-Mahāyāna literature, and the main differences summarised.

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[3] See *Aṣṭa*, 161 ln.19. The topic of how bodhisattvas take rebirth is discussed below in section 2.3.4

[4] See *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, ed. S. Bagchi, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1970), 59 ln.11. (Henceforth: *MV*).

2.2.1 *Avaivartika* and *avinivartanīya*

The term *avaivartika* has a number of synonyms. According to Franklin Edgerton, it is "perhaps the commonest BHS [i.e., Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit] form of many equivalents." The other forms mentioned by Edgerton in his dictionary are: *avinivartanīya, avaivarta, avivartya, avinivartya* and *avivartika.*[5]

The form most often used in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* is *avinivartanīya. Avaivartika* is never used in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, while in the recast *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* it mainly appears in the division headings and only rarely in the text itself, where *avinivartanīya* is preferred. In the *Śatasāhasrikā* however, there appears to be a preference for *avaivartika.* Compare, for example, the following corresponding passages:

Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā: *avinivartanīyā veditavyāḥ*[6]

Śatasāhasrikā: *avaivartikaveditavyā*[7]

This evidence, together with a preference for *avaivartika* in many *śāstra*s, suggests that *avaivartika* is a later form that has exactly the same meaning as *avinivartanīya.*

2.2.2 Analysis

Avinivartanīya is analysed as follows: it is derived by placing the negative particle *a* before the future passive participle, *vinivartanīya*, which is formed from *vinivṛt* (*vi* + *ni* + √*vṛt*). According to Monier-Williams, *vinivṛt* means

> to turn back, return, to turn away, desist or cease from...[8]

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[5] Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, vol.2 : 79.

[6] *Pañca (D)*, 72 ln.10.

[7] *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. Pratāpacandra Ghoṣa, (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1902-1913), 275 ln.15. (Henceforth: *Śata*).

Tibetans translate *avinivartanīya* as *phyir mi ldog pa*, where *ldog pa* is the intransitive sense of "reverse."[9] Since the future passive participle of an intransitive verb such as *agamanīya*, while technically meaning "not to be gone," would be better rendered into English as "should not go," I have followed Edgerton and translated *avinivartanīya* as "not liable to turn back," as opposed to "not liable to be turned back" or some other similar form that may have been more appropriate if *vinivṛt* had only a transitive meaning.

Monier-Williams' definition suggests a dual meaning of *avinivartanīya*. On the one hand, it means not being liable to turn back, or return, *to* something. On the other, it means not being liable to turn away, or desist, *from*, something else. These two senses are apparent in this definition of an irreversible bodhisattva in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*:

> Furthermore, Subhūti, an irreversible bodhisattva-mahāsattva is one who has turned away from the levels of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s and proceeds in the direction of all-knowledge.[10]

These two meanings correspond to the two general senses of irreversibility identified in section 2.1.1 above. The fact that irreversible bodhisattvas do not turn back to the levels of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s implies the immutability of the bodhisattva's status as a bodhisattva. The fact that they do not turn away from all-knowledge implies predestination with respect to their future attainment of buddhahood. Some examples of the ways in which these two senses exerted either a polemical or neutral effect will now be given.

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[8] Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskṛit-English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), 971.

[9] If they had understood it as a transitive verb they would have used *zlog pa*.

[10] *punaraparaṃ subhūte avinivartanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ śrāvakapratyekabuddhabhūminirvṛttaḥ sarvajñatāyāṃ pravṛtto bhavati* / *Aṣṭa*, 165 ln.24-25.

2.2.3 Polemic force of *avinivartanīya*

Since the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s frequently state that it is the levels of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s from which *avinivartanīya* bodhisattvas turn away, these *sūtra*s tend to invest the term with a certain degree of ideological polemic force. This becomes particularly clear when we read in the "Signs" chapter of irreversible bodhisattvas who do not turn back to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* despite being encouraged to do so by "Māra, the Evil One" (*māraḥ pāpīyan*), who appears in the guise (*veṣa*) of a monk. In this passage, Māra:

(1) extols the virtues of arhatship:

> "End suffering right here and now! You will not experience the suffering and sadness that belong to saṃsāra."[11]

(2) points out the hopelessness of the bodhisattva path:

> "These [bodhisattvas] have stood, thus practiced, and in that manner made endeavours, but still they have not awoken to highest perfect enlightenment."[12]

(3) denies the very existence of the bodhisattva's goal, "all-knowledge":

> "All-knowledge is a non-existent dharma."[13]

Whether Māra here represents a Mainstream position or merely that of the apostate bodhisattva is unclear. What is clear, however, is that it is a position that the irreversible bodhisattva should reject.

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[11] *ihaiva tvaṃ duḥkhasyāntaṃ kuru / na bhūyastāni saṃsārāvacarāṇi duḥkhadaurmanasyāni pratyanubhaviṣyasīti* / Ibid., 164 ln.12-13.

[12] *sthitvā tathā caritvā tathaiva yogamāpadya adyāpi taireva tāvanna anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhirabhisaṃbuddhā* / Ibid., 164 ln.21-22.

[13] *asanneṣa dharmo yaduta sarvajñatā* / Ibid., 165 ln.15.

2.2.4 Neutral sense of *avinivartanīya*

The term is, however, not always used with such polemic force. Many early Mahāyāna *sūtras*, for example, portray irreversible bodhisattvas simply as those destined for full enlightenment, and whose presence amongst the "characterised"[14] audience of the Buddha's sermons functions to lend greater authority to the messages communicated by those *sūtras*. In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, for example, amongst the audience attending the Buddha's sermon at Gṛdhrakūṭa there are "80,000 bodhisattvas, all irreversible, bound by one more birth." [15] In the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* too, irreversible bodhisattvas are often depicted as a superior class of bodhisattva in possession of certain elite qualities. For example, they may be said to be eligible to receive certain teachings for which others are ineligible:

> So deep is this perfection of wisdom, so hard to fathom, so hard to understand, so unlimited that it should not be spoken in the presence of Bodhisattvas who have newly set out in the vehicle.... [Only] in the presence of an irreversible bodhisattva should it be spoken. [16]

Irreversible bodhisattvas are also said to be much rarer than their reversible counterparts. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, for example, describes seven types of bodhisattva, the rarest of whom are "those who, striving and coursing in the perfection of

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[14] "Characterised" audiences are to be distinguished from the "implied" audiences that will be discussed in chapter 3. One of the functions of the former is to guide the response of the latter, something that the latter recognises. As W. Daniel Wilson observes: "The author may create a reader's role with which we are not expected to identify." W. Daniel Wilson, "Readers in texts," *PMLA* 96, no. 5 (1981): 854.

[15] *aśītyā ca bodhisattvasahasraiḥ sārdhaṁ sarvairavaivartikairekajātipratibaddhair Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960), 1 ln.20. (Henceforth: *Saddharma*).

[16] *yathā gambhīreyaṃ bhagavan prajñāpāramitā duravagāhā apramāṇā iyaṃ bhagavan prajñāpāramitā tathā navayānasaṃprasthitānāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ purato na vaktavyā... avinivartanīyasya yaṃ bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya purato bhāṣitavyo... Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed. Takayasu Kimura, (Tokyo: Sankibo Busshorin, 1986-1992), Pt.4 : 15 ln.10-14. (Hereafter *Pañca (K)*)

wisdom, do not turn back and abide at the irreversible stage."[17] In addition, many other superior qualities attributed to irreversible bodhisattvas are mentioned in the "Signs" chapter. These can be found listed in the appendices.

2.2.5 Non-Mahāyāna use of the term

2.2.5.1 Pāli canon

Avaivartika and its related forms do not appear to be used at all in the Pāli canon to describe bodhisattvas. When a form of the word does occur, it tends to be in a literal sense, as for example in the *Kasi-bharadvaja Sutta*, where effort is likened to a yoked ox that takes one to *nirvāṇa*, without ever turning back:

> Effort, my yoked ox—bearing me to release from bondage—takes me, without turning back (*anivattanta*), to where, having gone, one doesn't grieve.[18]

2.2.5.2 *Mahāvastu*

The *Mahāvastu* is an important text belonging to the Lokottaravāda branch of the Mahāsāṃghikas. It contains biographical stories about the Buddha's previous lives, and is estimated to date from as early as the 1st or 2nd century B.C.E.,[19] thus making some of its parts possibly older than the earliest *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s. It also contains many proto-Mahāyāna concepts, such as the descriptions of the ten *bodhisattva-bhūmi*s, which is where we find mention of bodhisattvas who do not turn back (*vivartanti*).

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[17] *tebhyo 'pyalpebhyo 'lpatarakāste ye prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caranto ghaṭamānā avinivartanīyāyāṃ bodhisattvabhūmāvavatiṣṭhante /Aṣṭa*, 30 ln.19-20.

[18] *vīriyaṃ me dhuradhorayhaṃ, yogakkhemādhivāhanaṃ. gacchati anivattantaṃ, yattha gantvā na socati. SN* 1.7.2.1. The same *sutta* is also found at *KN* 5.1.4. (The numbering system used here and throughout the thesis is that of the Digital Pali Reader available from pali.sirimangalo.org)

[19] Nalinaksha Dutt, "The Mahavastu," in *2500 years of Buddhism*, ed. P.V. Bapat (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1956), 128.

Unlike the irreversible bodhisattva of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, where bodhisattvas who turn back abandon the Mahāyāna path in favour of that of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*, in the *Mahāvastu* it seems that they merely regress to a lower level (*bhūmi*) on the bodhisattva path (although other interpretations have also been advocated).[20] According to Kuījī's commentary[21] on Vasumitra's survey of the tenets of the Mainstream sects,[22] the Mahāsāṃghikas held that the first three types of *ārya* were liable to regress from their attainments to a lower level,[23] and it would therefore not be unreasonable to suppose they held a similar view with respect to bodhisattvas "who turn back."

2.2.5.3 Sarvāstivāda

Yet another presentation of irreversible bodhisattvas is found in the *abhidharma* literature of the Sarvāstivādins, where it is said that all bodhisattvas are by definition irreversible. The *Mahāvibhāṣā*, for example, states:

> If, for the sake of all sentient beings, [a practitioner] produces the thought of unsurpassed complete enlightenment which is capable of not turning back, he is henceforth to be called a bodhisattva.[24]

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[20] Another interpretation is that lapse in the sense of failing to progress to the next *bhūmi*: "In these fourteen ways, bodhisattvas who are on the third *bhūmi* regress and fail to reach the fourth." *caturdaśabhir ākāraiḥ bodhisatvāḥ tṛtīyāyāṃ bhūmau vartamānāś caturthāyāṃ bhūmau vivartanti / MV* 71 ln.18-19. Jones suggests that the second locative, *bhūmau*, should be given ablative force – in other words, a bodhisattva abiding (*vartamānās*) at a certain *bhūmi* turns back from the succeeding *bhūmi* as a result of committing certain sins pertaining to the *bhūmi* at which he currently abides. See J. J. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, (London: Luzac, 1949-1956), 70 n.2.

[21] X.844 (異部宗輪論疏敘).

[22] T.2031(異部宗輪論) (Skt. *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*)

[23] See Jiryo Masuda, "Origin and doctrine of early Indian Buddhist schools: A translation of the Hsüan-Chwang version of Vasumitra's treatise," *Asia Major* 2 (1925): 26 n.1.

[24] 問若諸有情發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心能不退轉。從此便應說爲菩薩。(T.1545 p886c29-887a01). A similar view, attributed to the disciples of Kātyāyanīputra, is mentioned in the *MPPŚ*: "A bodhisattva is so-called as soon as he has produced the irreversible mind [of enlightenment?]." 發[阿]耨跋致心，從是已後名菩薩。(T.1509 p86c08-9)

In other words, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* is saying that persons who produce a thought of enlightenment that is liable to be reversed are not really bodhisattvas. A similar view is expressed in the *Abhidharmakośa*, which lists several qualities possessed by all bodhisattvas, the last of which is *anivṛt*.

> [A bodhisattva] is born in good states [or rebirth], is born into [noble] families, [possesses all] organs, is male, remembers [his previous] lives, and does not turn back (*anivṛt*).[25]

Although the Sarvāstivādins are not specific about what irreversible bodhisattvas do not turn back *to*, they clearly agree with the Mahāyāna interpretation that irreversible bodhisattvas do not turn back *from* enlightenment. That this was a quality of all bodhisattvas was apparently a view shared by the authors of some Mahāyāna *sūtras*,[26] and may have been a strategy intended to raise the threshold for becoming a bodhisattva, thereby limiting the number of people who could claim to be bodhisattvas and the superior status that this may have entailed in some communities.[27]

In short, although the Mainstream schools did not devote much attention to the notion of the irreversible bodhisattva, the Sarvāstivādins at least do appear to have agreed with the interpretation by some Mahāyānists that irreversible bodhisattvas are those who possess an especially firm *bodhicitta* that prevents them from

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[25] *AK*, IV: 108cd: *sugatiḥ kulajo'vyakṣaḥ pumān jātismaro'nivṛt* // *AKBh*, 265.

[26] See for example the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*: "Immediately upon this production of the thought of enlightenment, one advances to become a bodhisattva, surpasses the level of an ordinary person, and is born into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva." *yena cittotpādena sahotpannena bodhisattvo'tikrānto bhavati, pṛthagjñānabhūmīmavakrānto bhavati, bodhisattvaniyāmaṁ jāto bhavati, ... Daśabhūmika-sūtram*, ed. Johannes Rahder, (Leuven: Istas, 1926). (Henceforth: *Daśa*). The relationship between the fixed condition of a bodhisattva and irreversibility is discussed in chapter 6.

[27] Harivarman, for example, writes: "The person that has awakened *Bodhi-citta* causing Śūnyatā is salutable by the Arhans. For example, one Śrāmaṇera respects Arhan by accompanying him and carrying his robes and bowl. But when the Śrāmaṇera awakens the highest *Bodhi-citta*, the same Arhan must accompany him and carry his robes and bowl." N. Aiyaswami Sastri, *Satyasiddhiśāstra of Harivarman*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1978), 200:

abandoning their quest for highest enlightenment. Although this interpretation of irreversibility lacks the polemic force that we sometimes find in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, the fact that all bodhisattvas were considered by definition to be irreversible (*anivṛt*) may have exerted a different kind of polemic force through denying ordinary people the right to call themselves bodhisattvas. Alternatively, it may have just been another way in which bodhisattvas were glorified.

2.3 *Avinipāta*

In this section it will be argued that the term *avinipāta* may have been used by Mahāyānists to attribute *āryan* qualities to irreversible bodhisattvas. It will also be shown that during the later stages in the development of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* its application to all bodhisattvas, raised several philosophical problems relating to how bodhisattvas take rebirth.

2.3.1 Meaning

Avinipāta means "not falling down,"[28] and *dharma* means "bearer"[29]. Thus, someone who is *avinipātadharma* bears the quality of not falling.[30] The place to which such a person does not fall is known as a "bad state" (*apāya-durgati*[31]), of which there are usually said to be three (*tri-apāya*[32]). The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* names

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[28] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 970.

[29] Ibid., 512.

[30] See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, vol.2 : 77.

[31] *Pañca (D)*, 70 ln.3.

[32] E.g. *Rgs*, XII:5 "They rescue suffering beings [from] the three woes." *dukhitāṁśca sattva triapāya samuddharanti // Rgs* (Obermiller), 49.

these three as "the hell realm, the animal (realm) and the *preta* realm."[33] The time of not falling is a future rebirth.

This quality of not being liable to be reborn in the three lower realms is mentioned among the signs of an irreversible bodhisattva in both the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*. The longer version of the *sūtra*, however, extends the number of undesirable states to include a variation[34] on a well-known list of eight, to which it also adds freedom from rebirth as a woman:

> [An irreversible bodhisattva] does not hold wrong views, nor is he reborn in the hells, the realm of Yama, as an animal, an Asura, in an outlying region, as a deaf-mute, or as a long-life god. Nor does he take the form of a woman.[35]

On this point, it is noteworthy that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* held that it was not even possible for a woman to become an irreversible bodhisattva in the first place,[36] and that another early *sūtra*, the *Druma-kinnararāja-paripṛcchā*, says that bodhisattvas may show the form (示現) of a woman in order to teach other women, but not actually become women.[37]

2.3.2 Non-Mahāyāna use of the term

There is clearly nothing particularly Mahāyānist (or even Buddhist) about the desire to gain freedom from undesirable states of rebirth. In fact, we often find it

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[33] "A bodhisattva-mahasattva dreams of the three realms, and gets a memory, having seen beings of the hell realm, the animal [realm] and the preta realm." *sacetsubhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'pi nirayagatāṃstiryakpretagatān vā sattvān dṛṣṭvā smṛtiṃ pratilabhate / Aṣṭa*, 189 ln.7-8.

[34] Instead of the *preta* realm, it has the realm of Yama (normally considered synonymous with hell.)

[35] *na mithyādṛṣṭiko bhavati, na narakeṣūpapadyate na yamaloke na tiryagyonyāṃ nāsureṣūpapadyate na pratyanteṣu janapadeṣūpapadyate na jaḍamūko bhavati na dīrghāyuṣkeṣu deveṣūpapadyate na ca strībhāvaṃ parigrhṇāti / Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 143 ln.13-15.

[36] See *Saddharma*, 161 ln.13-14.

[37] T.624 p358c11 六者示現母人身欲多教母人。

mentioned as an attribute of the *srota-āpanna*, who, as is well-known, was an entry-level *ārya*. A typical example is the following formulaic expression from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

> [T]he noble disciple, should he so desire, can declare of himself: "There is no more rebirth for me in hell, nor as an animal or ghost, nor in any realm of woe. A stream-enterer am I, safe from falling into the states of misery, assured am I and bound for Enlightenment."[38]

The theoretical justification for *srota-āpanna*s not being born in the lower realms is provided by *abhidharma* scholars. It is said in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* that *srota-āpanna*s are *avinipātadharma* because they did not accumulate the actions that would result in such a rebirth. If such actions have already been accumulated, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* says that by means of pure thought and practice the *srota-āpanna*'s roots of virtue become powerful, thereby creating unsuitable conditions for the ripening of those actions.[39]

This justification may have been preceded by a more basic religious need arising from arhatship having gradually become an increasingly remote ideal.[40] Although "entering the stream" was not the ultimate objective, at least by attributing *srota-āpanna*s with the quality of *avinipāta* practitioners may have felt reassured that, despite the ultimate goal of arhatship being out of reach in their current lifetime,

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[38] Francis Story and Sister Vajirā, *Last days of the Buddha : The Mahā parinibbāna sutta*, Revised ed., (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), 22. Cf. *DN* 2.3. "Enlightenment" in this context (*sotāpannā avinipātadhammā niyatā sambodhiparāyaṇā*) simply means *nirvāṇa*, not the full enlightenment of the Buddha. For a detailed discussion of this point, see T. W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha, Pt. 1*, (London: Henry Frowde, 1899), 190.

[39] See *AKBh*, 356 ln.27-29. *"kasmādavinipātadharmā bhavati / tadgāmikarmānupacayād upacitavipākadānavaiguṇyāc ca saṃtater balavatkuśalādhi vāsanāt prayogāśayaśuddhitaḥ"*

[40] "[T]he *arahant* concept seems to have developed from an ideal readily attainable in this life (*diṭṭhe va dhamme*) into an ideal considered remote and impossible to achieve in one or even many lifetimes." George Bond, "The development and elaboration of the arahant ideal in the Theravada Buddhist tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 2 (1984): 228.

their achievements would not be lost at death and that they would certainly have the opportunity to attain the ultimate goal in a future life.

2.3.3 *Avinipātadharma* as a quality of *āryas*

While the scholastic justification and religious purpose behind positing irreversible bodhisattvas as *avinipātadharma* is likely to have been similar to that behind attributing the same quality to *srota-āpannas*, it may also have been due to a desire to attribute *āryan* qualities to some bodhisattvas. We know that the term *ārya* was associated in the Vedas with nobility and that the Buddhists appropriated the term to refer to a type of superior practitioner. As the translator of the *Mahāvastu*, J. J. Jones, writes:

> [An *āryan* was] literally a member of an Aryan clan considered to possess superior moral qualities as compared with the indigenous tribes, and by implication denoting a Buddhist as being an Aryan par excellence. Hence "noble" in a moral sense...[41]

The creation of a superior class of spiritual practitioners (whether real or imagined) may have also provided a means to emphasise the importance of key doctrines. For example, just as the essential truths of Buddhism became known as "four truths for *āryas*" (*catur-ārya-satya*), the comprehension of special Mahāyāna doctrines such as the "non-production of dharmas"[42] may have also been privileged through association with certain bodhisattvas who were not only irreversible, but also *āryas*.

2.3.4 Do bodhisattvas willingly take rebirth in the lower realms?

However, the attribution of *avinipātadharma* to irreversible bodhisattvas created a problem. Since it was recorded in many *Jātakas* that Śākyamuni was born as an animal in his former lives, how could he have been reborn in that way if he was an

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[41] Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1 : 81 n.3.

[42] This comprehension, known as *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, is discussed in chapter 6.

irreversible bodhisattva?[43] Attempts to solve the problem centred on whether bodhisattvas were reborn as a result of karma and defilements or as a result of their own volition. Some Mainstream and Mahāyāna views on this issue will now be briefly discussed.

2.3.4.1 Mainstream views

According to the Vasumitra's record of the tenets of the various Mainstream schools, the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*, the Mahāsāṃghikas held that, for the benefit of sentient beings, bodhisattvas could take rebirth in the lower realms if they so wished.[44] On the other hand, the Caityaśaila, Aparaśaila, and Uttaraśaila schools held that bodhisattvas were not free from the lower realms.[45]

The Sarvāstivādins, who also held that bodhisattvas could take rebirth in the lower realms due to their intention to help sentient beings, developed as a consequence of this position an interesting view with respect to being fixed in the lineage of *śrāvaka*s. They held that *śrāvaka*s could not convert to the bodhisattva vehicle once they had attained the *kṣānti* stage of the *prayogamārga* due to their attainment of the non-analytical cessation (*apratisaṃkhyāniroda*) that is the cessation of the necessary conditions for rebirth in the lower realms to come together (although the root causes for rebirth in the lower reams continue to exist). We will return to this topic in our discussion of lineage (*gotra*) in chapter 7.

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[43] It was believed that the *Jātaka*s recount the former lives of the Buddha when he was on the eighth, nineth and tenth *bhūmi*s. See Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1 : 83.

[44] "For the benefit of sentient beings (*sattva*) Bodhisattvas are borne into bad states (*gati*) at will and can be born (lit. go) (into any of them as they like)." Masuda, "Origin and doctrines," 21. Cf. T.2031 p15c10-11 菩薩爲欲饒益有情。願生惡趣隨意能往。

[45] "Bodhisattvas are not free from (metempsychosis into) the bad states of existence (durgati)" Ibid.: 38. Cf. T.2031 p16a22 謂諸菩薩不說惡趣。

2.3.4.2 The *Prajñāpāramitā* view

The *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s contain conflicting views on whether or not bodhisattvas are reborn in the lower realms. Let us first consider a passage from a later chapter of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*. Following a statement by the Buddha that bodhisattvas are fixed[46] from their initial production of the thought of enlightenment, we read:

> Subhūti: "Is a bodhisattva-mahāsattva who is fixed reborn in the lower realms?"
> The Lord: "A bodhisattva-mahāsattva who is fixed is not reborn in the lower realms."[47]

Subhūti then asks how this could be possible, since the *Jātaka*s recount stories of Śākyamuni's former lives in which he was born as an animal. The Buddha responds that it is quite impossible for a bodhisattva to be reborn in the lower realms[48] and that it was not as a result of bad karma that he took the form of an animal. Rather, a bodhisattva can take any body he likes of his own free will in order to accomplish the welfare of beings:

> It is not unintentionally that the Bodhisattva takes a new body. But he [deliberately] takes, for the sake of beings, any kind of body through which he can work the welfare of beings.[49]

There are several reasons to think that this was a position that was formed relatively late. First, it contradicts passages in the *Jātaka*s themselves where, for example, we read in one particular story how the Buddha was reborn as a buffalo due, it is said, to the influence of small portions of bad karma (*karmaleśāṃstāṃstān samāsādya*[50]).

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[46] *Niyata*, a synonym for irreversible, is discussed in section 2.6 below.

[47] *subhūtir āha kiṃ punar bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo niyato 'pāyeṣūpapatsyate? bhagavān āha na subhūte niyataḥ patito bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'pāyeṣūpapatsyate. Pañca (K)*, Pt.6-8 : 131.

[48] *evam eva subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'pāyeṣūpapatsyate naitat sthānaṃ vidyate.* Ibid.

[49] *na punaḥ suhbūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'saṃcintyatam ātmabhāvaṃ parigrhṇāti, yenātmabhāvena sattvānām arthaḥ kartavyaḥ tam ātmabhāvaṃ sattvānām arthāya pratigrhṇāti.* Ibid., Pt.6-8 : 131-132.

[50] *Jātakamālā*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1959), 241 ln.17-18.

Second, to assert that all bodhisattvas were free from involuntary rebirth in the lower realms contradicts the statement in the "Signs" chapter that this was a quality restricted to irreversible bodhisattvas.[51] Third, it also contradicts another passage found in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* that states:

> sometimes [bodhisattvas] are never reborn in evil states, even before they attain the irreversible *bhūmi*.[52]

2.3.4.3 How bodhisattvas take rebirth

One of the questions that concerned later exegetes was not just whether bodhisattvas took rebirth in the lower realms of their own volition or due to the force of karma and delusions, but how they took rebirth generally, whether in the lower or upper realms. The basis for debate is one of the signs of irreversibility that states, "[an irreversible bodhisattva] does not have latent tendencies (*anuśayas*)."[53] This sign does not appear in T.224 or T.227,[54] suggesting that the sign, as well as the idea it expresses, were later developments.

A similar, but somewhat stronger, idea is expressed in the longer versions of the *sūtra*, where bodhisattvas who abide on the seventh *bhūmi* (i.e., the irreversible *bhūmi* in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*'s *daśabhūmi* system[55]) are described as having turned away from not only all defilements, but also the residues relating to them[56]. Here "defilements" is may be read as just another term used to systematise the

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[51] See section 2.3.1 above.

[52] *naivaṃ kadācid apāyadurgativinipāteṣūpapadyante yāvad avinivartanīyabhūmim anuprāpnuvanti Pañca (D)*, 70. Cf. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 73. This passage has no corresponding passage in the *Aṣṭa*.

[53] *niranuśayaś ca bhavati / Aṣṭa*, 162 ln.19.

[54] Were it to appear, it would do so at T.224 p454c07 and T.227 p564a27 respectively. But it does not.

[55] This will be explained more fully in chapters 5 and 6.

[56] *Pañca (D)*, 223 ln.11-12. Cf. *Śata*, 1569 ln.4-5.

bodhisattva's abandonments, which are referred in other texts as "latent tendencies."[57]

While the authors of these later versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* may have simply been attempting to glorify the irreversible bodhisattva, there are some problems with describing them in such terms. The stronger view is rejected by the author of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, who argues that if irreversible bodhisattvas had eliminated "all defilements and the residues relating to them," then they would already be buddhas.[58] Even the weaker view is not taken at face value by a number of Indian commentators. Commenting on a verse in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*,[59] Ārya Vimuktisena says that bodhisattvas do not eliminate *all* the latent tendencies. They do not eliminate sensual desire (*kāmarāga*) or desire for existence (*bhavarāga*) because they intentionally take rebirth in existence, which would be impossible without these two desires.[60] Haribhadra follows Ārya Vimuktisena on this point.[61]

An opposing view, however, is expressed in the *Uttaratantra*, where it is said *āryas* do not take rebirth by the power of karma and defilements:

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[57] Throughout this thesis, I use 'defilements' as translation of *kleśa*. For a detailed analysis of the historical differences in the meaning and function of this and similar terms (e.g., *saṃyojāna*, *anuśaya*, *aśrava*.), see Collett Cox, "Attainment through abandonment: The Sarvāstivādin path of removing defilements," in *Paths to Liberation*, ed. R. Buswell and R. Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 68-77.

[58] " Si le bodhisattva [Śākyamuni] avait depuis longtemps détruit toutes ses passions qu'aurait-il encore à faire au moment de son illumination (*saṃbodhi*)?" Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grand Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, (Louvain: Univerité de Louvain Institut Orientaliste 1949-1980), 1777.

[59] "[The irreversible bodhisattva] loses all latent tendencies." *sarva-anuśaya-hānaṃ*. (*AA*, IV:42a)

[60] See Gareth Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, (Fremont, California: Jain Publishing, 2006-2009), vol.3 : 63-64.

[61] See ibid., vol.3 : 291. Cf. *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā Prajñāpāramitāvyākhyā*, ed. Unrai Wogihara, (Tokyo: Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, 1932; reprint, 1973), 670 ln.16-20. (Hereafter, *AA-Ālokā*)

> The sufferings of death, aging and illness are completely destroyed by *āryas*. Rebirth occurs by the force of karma and defilements, but they are not there [in *āryas*].[62]

Tsong-kha-pa upholds this position, saying that it is through compassion alone that bodhisattvas take rebirth. His position is developed in detail in the *Golden Garland*.[63]

2.4 *Aparihāṇa*

In this section *aparihāṇa* is used as a general rubric under which to discuss the concept of immutability of spiritual attainments in Buddhism. Having analysed the term, there will be a discussion of the permanency of the states of arhatship and buddhahood. Then, a number of related issues that will be dealt with later in the thesis will be introduced.

2.4.1 Analysis of the term

Aparihāṇa literally means "not completely deprived of something." It is formed by joining the negative particle *a* and the prefix *pari* (indicating fullness or high degree) to the past passive participle, *hāna*, of the root √*hā*, meaning "to leave, abandon... to lose, be deprived of."[64] In Sarvāstivādin abhidharma literature, the term is often combined with *dharma*, meaning "bearer,"[65] thus forming *aparihāṇadharma*, meaning someone who bears the quality of not falling from arhatship.

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[62] *mṛtyuvyādhijarāduḥkhamūlam āryair apoddhṛtam / karmakleśavaśāj jātis tadabhāvān na teṣu tat //67// Ratnagotravibhāga*, ed. E. H. Johnston, (Patna: The Bihar Research Society, 1950; reprint, *The Uttaratantra of Maitreya*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), 46 ln.11-12.

[63] See Gareth Sparham, *Golden Garland of Eloquence: Legs-bshad gSer-phreng*, (Fremont: Jain Publishing, 2008-2010), vol.2 : 20-25.

[64] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1296b.

[65] Ibid., 512c.

2.4.2 Immutability of arhatship

The development of a soteriological model that is capable of explaining not only the mechanism by which defilements are abandoned, but also why it is not possible for those defilements to re-emerge, has been described by La Vallée Poussin as "the most complicated problem of Buddhist scholasticism."[66] Only a brief overview of the problem will therefore be given here.

Collett Cox has observed that *aparihāṇadharma* only became a controversial issue in those Abhidharma works that post-date the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (i.e., 2nd century C.E.). However, I would argue that the roots of the problem go back much earlier. Since the earliest days of Buddhism, arhats were portrayed as beings who had perfected themselves and were no longer subject to the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. Evidence from the accounts of the Council of Vaiśālī suggests that that during the early phase of Buddhism, arhatship was not a scholastic or theoretical ideal. On the contrary, it appears that there did exist persons who were considered by many to be living proof that arhatship was an attainable goal.

However, instances of apparently imperfect behaviour by such persons meant that there was a discrepancy between what was theorised and what was observed. This created a tension that was resolved in a number of ways. The Mahāsāṃghikas, for example, accepted that arhats could have four imperfections.[67] The Theravādins, on the other hand, adhered to the position that an arhat was perfect, but within a

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[66] La Vallée Poussin, "Bodhisattva," 744a.

[67] (i) They could be tempted by others; (ii) they still have ignorance; (iii) they have doubt; (iv), they gain spiritual perception by the help of others. For variations on this list, see Janice J. Nattier and Charles S. Prebish, "Mahāsāṃghika origins: The beginnings of Buddhist sectarianism," *History of Religions* 16, no. 3 (1977): 251-255.

restricted concept of what it meant to be perfect.[68] A third approach was to deny that the persons displaying such imperfections were arhats—in essence, questioning the certification process. This, according to Buddhagoṣa's commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*, was the approach taken by the Pūrvaśaila and Aparaśaila schools.[69]

It is strange, and perhaps telling, that, considering its obvious importance, we do not find a great deal of information in Buddhist literature about how the certification of arhatship took place. Apart from the *Chabbisodana Sutta*,[70] which describes a kind of oral examination given to those who had announced their attainment of arhatship, there does not appear to be any other text devoted to the topic. Perhaps the fact that it was difficult to infer from another's observable behaviour that he or she had attained a certain spiritual state was one reason why the ideal was gradually made more remote and more difficult to attain,[71] and the question of certification of arhatship may have therefore become irrelevant. This and other related issues will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8.

The Sarvāstivādin solution to the problem of apparently imperfect arhats was to define two types of arhat—one who was liable to fall from arhatship and one who was not. Arhats who were in possession of two types of knowledge—knowledge of the exhaustion of the defilements (*kṣayajñāna*) and the knowledge that they could

[68] For example, since arhats do not lack knowledge of the path, they do not have ignorance (though they may be ignorant of events in remote times and places). See Shwe Zan Aung and C. Rhys Davids, *Points of Controversy: Translation of the Kathā-vatthu*, (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), 114-117.

[69] Ibid., 111.

[70] MN 3.2.2

[71] The argument that arhatship became increasingly harder to attain is set forth in Bond, "The development of the arahant ideal," 228-235.

no more arise (*anutpādajñāna*)—were said to be *aparihāṇadharma*, while those who possessed only the first type of knowledge were said to be *parihāṇadharma*.[72]

According to the Sarvāstivādins, whether one was liable to fall from any of the fruits of the *āryan* path depended on how the defilements pertaining to that fruit were abandoned. Defilements abandoned by a mundane (*laukika*) path were liable to re-emerge, resulting in a fall from realisation. Since the rank of *srota-āpanna* could only be attained by means of a supramundane (*lokottara*) path, they held that it was impossible for a practitioner to fall below that level and back to that of an ordinary person (*pṛthagjana*).

Despite these differences, all Mainstream schools share the common trait of defining arhatship negatively, i.e., as a state of having abandoned all defilements. The same theory was applied by Mahāyānists to argue for the immutability of buddhahood. This will now be discussed.

2.4.3 The immutability of buddhahood

Some Mahāyānists cite *Pramāṇavārttika* III.143 to show that the state of buddhahood is irreversible:[73]

> Due to the abandonment of the view of self and its seed, [buddhas] are non-returning.[74]

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[72] See Masuda, "Origin and doctrines," 42. The Mahāsaṃghikas, on the other hand, thought of these two kinds of knowledge were two phases of one and the same knowledge. Masuda, ibid., 42 n.2.

[73] *Pramāṇavārttika* III refers here to the "Pramāṇasiddhi" chapter, i.e., I follow the ordering of the chapters according to Tibetan editions of the text. In Sanskrit editions however, the "Pramāṇasiddhi" chapter is the first.

[74] *ātmadarśanabījasya hānādapunarāgamaḥ / Pramāṇavārttikam*, ed. Ram Chandra Pandeya, (Delhi: Motilal Barnarsidass, 1989), 32 ln.10. (Hereafter, *PV*) For English translation of rGyal-tshab-rje's commentary, see Roger R. Jackson, *Is Enlightenment Possible?*, (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1993), 329-331.

The expression "and its seed" contrasts with the Mahāyāna view of arhats, whom they held had not fully abandoned all defilements, since the seeds remained. Another view, found in the *Laṅkāvatāra*, held that although arhats had abandoned "defilement obscurations" (*kleśāvaraṇa*), they had not abandoned knowledge obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). A third view, similar to the first, but expressed slightly differently, is that found in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, which held that although arhats abandoned all defilements, they did not abandon the residues associated with those defilements.

Essentially, the immutability of buddhahood was based on the same logic as the immutability of the state of arhatship, namely that since all defilements as well as their causes had been eliminated, buddhahood was a permanent condition.

2.4.4 The immutability of bodhisattvahood

Although the term *aparihāṇa* is not generally applied to bodhisattvas, at least one commentator considered irreversible bodhisattvas to be similar to arhats who were not liable to lose their attainment. In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, it is stated that:

> There are two kinds of bodhisattva: reversible and irreversible, as in the case of arhats who lose [their attainment] and those who do not.[75]

Since bodhisattvahood was not defined negatively in the way that arhatship and buddhahood were, the fall of the bodhisattva who "turns back" appears to be different from that of the arhat who is *parihāṇadharma*. Yet the questions of what exactly is lost by such a bodhisattva, and what exactly distinguishes an irreversible bodhisattva from a reversible one, are not simple, and we will return to them several

[75]是菩提薩埵有兩種：有「鞞跋致」，有「阿鞞跋致」；如退法、不退法阿羅漢。T.1509 p86b11-13. Cf. Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 243.

times throughout this thesis. As an introduction to the topic, however, it is helpful to consider a key passage in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* where a number of bodhisattvas are described as *parihāṇadharmaka* as a result of becoming arhats.

In the passage in question, the bodhisattvas are not only described as "fallen" (*parihāṇadharmaka*), but also as those whose "minds were free from outflows and without further clinging."[76] Since this is a standard description of arhatship, Śāriputra asks what caused those bodhisattvas to become arhats. The Buddha explains that it occurred because they were separated from the perfection of wisdom and not upheld by skill-in-means.[77]

This passage, occurring in the chapter immediately preceding the "Signs" chapter, serves as an important prelude to the descriptions of irreversible bodhisattvas that follow. From it we learn that two qualities—skill-in-means and wisdom—are essential for bodhisattvas who avoid falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*. Similarly, in their discussions of how a bodhisattva's irreversibility can be inferred from signs, several important Tibetan scholars posit "special method and wisdom" as the main sign of an irreversible bodhisattva. The other signs mentioned in the "Signs" chapter were considered to be effects, (or in the case of Tsong-kha-pa, parts) of this main sign. The views of these Tibetan scholars will be discussed in chapter 7.

Thus, underlying the whole notion of irreversible bodhisattvas there is the implicit belief in special qualities that, by their nature, cannot be lost, and which not only make a bodhisattva irreversible, but make it an immutable condition. Defining those

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[76] *anupādāyāsravebhyaś cittāni vimuktāni. Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 125 ln.12-13.

[77] See Conze, *Large Sutra*, 379-380.

qualities, however, and demonstrating how they could never be lost has, as we shall see in chapter 7, been one of the greatest challenges confronting exegetes who have written on the subject of irreversible bodhisattvas.

2.5 Vyākṛta

In this section the function of prediction and its relationship to irreversibility is discussed. Several topics that will be dealt with later in the thesis are also previewed.

2.5.1 Analysis of the term

Among the several meanings of *vyākaroti* (*vi* + *ā* + √*kṛ*) is to prophesise, or to predict.[78] In Mahāyāna literature, the past passive participle, *vyākṛta*, describes someone who is predicted to attain enlightenment by an already enlightened being.

2.5.2 The prediction myth and its function

Perhaps the most well-known case of prediction is that made by the Buddha Dīpaṃkara. Although accounts of the myth vary, the one alluded to twice in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*[79] accords with the version recorded in the *Mahāvastu*,[80] where Dīpaṃkara predicts that the young brāhman, Megha, will become the Buddha of the present aeon, Śākyamuni.

It is possible that the prediction myth was created to fulfil two functions. First, it showed that Śākyamuni had been anointed by a predecessor, thereby conforming to Indian beliefs about how the rule of kings is legitimised. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* provides support for such a view when it describes how a buddha predicts a bodhisattva's future enlightenment so that there is no interruption (*anupacchinna*) to

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[78] See Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, vol.2 : 517.

[79] See *Aṣṭa*, 24, 181-182. Also *Pañca (K)*, Pt.2-3 : 35 ln.2-16; Pt.4 : 191 ln.27 - 192 ln.11.

[80] See *MV*, 183-192. Tr. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1 : 188-198.

buddha realms (*buddha-loka-dhātu*), "in the same way that kings name their crown prince (*kumāra*), so that by virtue of this transmission their dynasty is not broken."[81] Second, by occurring in what Mircea Eliade has called "sacred time," Śākyamuni's anointment becomes paradigmatic and reoccurring. According to Eliade, such events are more important than those in "profane time," which occur but once and are not recoverable.[82]

2.5.3 Prediction and irreversibility

There is a clear relationship in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s between a bodhisattva's being predicted and being irreversible. The following passage shows how being irreversible and not having received one's prediction were considered a dichotomy:

> O Subhūti, there are irreversible bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who course in the perfection of wisdom. [And] there are unpredicted bodhisattvas who course in the perfection of wisdom.[83]

In the previous section, it was argued that for some Buddhist scholars irreversibility implied that the bodhisattva had established some kind of special infallible cause, or sufficient condition, for enlightenment (e.g., possession of skill-in-means and wisdom). If this were so, we may ask whether a prediction of enlightenment was of and in itself a sufficient condition for enlightenment, or whether it was merely the public recognition by that enlightened being that the bodhisattva was in possession of some other quality that functioned as such a cause.

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[81] "Ainsi les rois désignent leur prince héritier (kumāra) et, en vertue de cette transmission, la dynastie n'est pas brisée." Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1991.

[82] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

[83] *asti subhūte bodhisattvā mahāsattvā avaivartikā ye prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caraṃti. asty avyākṛtakā bodhisattvā mahāsattvā ye prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caraṃti / Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā: Chapters 55 to 70*, ed. Edward Conze, (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Orrente, 1962), 64-65. (Henceforth: *Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*).

The second scenario is suggested by the following passage in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* in which the Buddha recalls receiving his prediction from Dīpaṃkara:

> when that Bhagavat Tathāgata Dīpaṃkara, having known that I was endowed with the requisite roots, predicted my future enlightenment with the words ...[84]

A similar idea is expressed elsewhere in the *sūtra*, where it is implied that a prerequisite for being predicted is the certitude that all dharmas are not produced (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*).

> You have not acquired the patient acceptance of dharmas which fail to be produced and without that you cannot be predicted by the Tathāgatas to full enlightenment.[85]

On the other hand, the positing of a special prerequisite quality for prediction may merely represent attempts to provide theoretical support for a practice that was based on traditions for legitimising the succession kings[86] and naive beliefs in the omniscience of the Buddha. The function of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as sufficient condition for enlightenment and the notion of the Buddha's omniscience and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

2.5.4 Obtaining one's prediction

Corresponding to the above two theories concerning the nature of prediction (i.e., (1) of and in itself a sufficient condition for enlightenment; or (2) recognition of the possession some other infallible quality), the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s contain two descriptions of how unpredicted bodhisattvas could receive their prediction. These

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[84] *tadāhaṃ tena dīpaṃkarena bhagavatā tathāgatenārhatā samyaksaṃbuddhena kuśalamūlasamanvāgato. Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 192 ln.1-3.

[85] *na ca tvayānutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ pratilabdho, yena tvaṃ vyākriyathās tais tathāgatair arhadbhiḥ samyaksaṃbuddhair anuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau*, Ibid., Pt.4 : 161.

[86] See section 2.5.2 above.

two descriptions correspond to two concepts of the Buddha—as a historical person, or as a transcendental being.

The approach corresponding to the Buddha as a historical person was for bodhisattvas simply to try to find out by means of certain signs whether they had already received a prediction in a previous lifetime. The second approach was to work at attaining the necessary prerequisites and then receive one's prediction in the form of a visionary experience. Both methods are implicit in the following statement in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*:

> Flesh-and-blood (肉身) irreversible bodhisattvas are of two types: those who attain their prediction in the presence of a buddha, and those who attain their prediction not in the presence of a buddha. If during a time when there is no buddha, [the bodhisattva] attains the certitude that phenomena are not produced, he attains prediction not in the presence of a buddha.[87]

A passage in Chapter 20 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* describes how bodhisattvas can discover whether they had received a prediction of which they were not otherwise aware by means of signs in dreams. It is also possible that attempts to gain the ability to remember former lifetimes (*jātismāra*) may have served a similar purpose, though the *sūtra* does not explicitly mention this. Other signs such as the power of exorcism and the ability to extinguish a blazing fire on command are also said to indicate (to others, perhaps) that a bodhisattva was predicted (*vyākṛta*). Attempts such as these to demonstrate that a bodhisattva was already predicted are consistent with a conception of the Buddha as a historical person, and not necessarily a transcendental being who was capable of bestowing prediction on bodhisattvas in their present lifetimes.

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[87]肉身阿鞞跋致亦有二種：有於佛前得授記；有不於佛前授記——若佛不在世時，得無生法忍，是不於佛前授記。T.1509 p0580a17-19

In contrast, another passage earlier in the *sūtra* details five similes that indicate how bodhisattvas could expect to receive a prediction in the future. For example, just as the symptoms of pregnancy indicate that a woman will soon bear a child, the bodhisattva's delight in studying the *Prajñāpāramitā* is said to be a sign that he or she will soon receive a prediction:

> When these symptoms are seen, she will surely soon give birth. Likewise, O Bhagavan, when a bodhisattva-mahāsattva's deep perfection of wisdom turns to vision, praise, worship, and hearing, and if, when he hears the perfection of wisdom, his thought delights in it and desire for it arises, then it should be known that he will surely soon receive the prediction to full enlightenment.[88]

The fact that the five similes are preceded by a description of how bodhisattvas can cultivate a vision of the tathāgatas (*tathāgata-darśana*) that will result in prediction suggests that a prediction could also be experienced in a vision of a transcendental enlightened being in the bodhisattva's present lifetime. In light of some of the findings discussed in chapter 6, regarding the fixing of irreversibility at a specific stage in the bodhisattva's career, it is noteworthy that the similes do not suggest that a bodhisattva should first abandon all defilements in order to receive a prediction.

2.6 *Niyata*

As we have seen from the formulaic description of the qualities of a *srota-āpanna* in section 2.3.2 above, "entering the stream" entailed not only freedom from rebirth in the lower realms, but also "being fixed" (*niyata*) with respect to the goal of *nirvāṇa*. The term is also sometimes used in Mahāyāna *sūtra*s in a similar way to describe persons who are fixed on the goal of highest enlightenment. For example, in the opening of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* we read:

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[88] *yathāsyāḥ pūrvanimittāni saṃdṛśyante, tathā nacireṇa bateyaṃ strī prasoṣyate iti / evameva bhagavan yadā bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyeyaṃ gambhīrā prajñāpāramitā upavartate darśanāya vandanāya paryupāsanāya śravaṇāya, śṛṇvataścaināṃ ramate cittamasyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyām, arthikatayā cotpadyate, tadā veditavyamidaṃ bhagavan - nacireṇa batāyaṃ bodhisattvo mahāsattvo vyākaraṇaṃ pratilapsyate'nuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodheriti // Aṣṭa*, 108 ln.24-28.

> All the beings who were touched by this splendour became fixed on unsurpassed, right, perfect enlightenment.[89]

Niyata is the past participle of *ni* + √*yam*, meaning "to fix upon, settle, determine, establish."[90] Thus, describing bodhisattvas or *śrāvaka*s who are *niyata* as "fixed" in terms of their religious goals conveys a sense that they are destined to attain them. In this section, however, we will be mainly concerned with a related substantive form of *niyata*, variously spelt as *niyāma*, *niyama* and *nyāma*. These forms often occur in the expressions "entering the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*" (*samyaktva-niyāma-avakrānti*) and "entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva" (*bodhisattva-niyāma-avakrānti*). We begin with an analysis of *niyāma* and discussion of its various etymologies. This is followed by an overview of the Mainstream concept of *samyaktva-niyāma-avakrānti* and an introduction to the Mahāyāna interpretation of *bodhisattva-niyāma-avakrānti*

2.6.1 Etymology of *niyāma*

Lamotte has observed that:

> the term *niyāma* is difficult because the Sanskrit and Pāli texts spell it in three different ways: *niyāma*, *niyama* and *nyāma*, for which the Tibetan and Chinese versions have different translations.[91]

In the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, Yaśomitra states that *niyāma* and *niyama* are synonyms, and that both are derived from *ni* + √*yam*.[92] Although Lamotte considers

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[89] *ye ca sattvās tayā prabhayā spṛṣṭās te sarve niyatā abhūvan anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau// Pañca (D)*, 7 ln.10-11.

[90] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 552a.

[91] "Le term *niyāma* fait difficulté, car les textes sanskrits et pāli l'orthographient de trois façons différentes : *niyāma*, *niyama* et *nyāma*, pour lesquels les versions tibétains et chinoises des traductions distinctes." Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1784.

nyāma to be erroneous spelling for *niyāma* or *niyama*,[93] there are etymologies to support the spelling of *nyāma* in both Mainstream and Mahāyāna texts, where it is analysed as *nis* + *āma*. The *Mahāvibhāṣā*, for example, explains that *samyaktva-nyāma-avakrānti* occurs when a practitioner attains the path of seeing and that *nyāma* means "separated" (離) from the "rawness" (生) of the defilements:

> Furthermore, all defilements and desires prevent the roots of good from maturing and cause one's faults to increase in various ways. They are therefore called "raw." With the arising of the path of seeing, their power is eliminated, and since it does not return [the Path of Seeing] conquers those "raw" faults. Thus the path of seeing alone is called "separated from rawness."[94]

A similar etymology is found in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, where *āma* is described as a bodhisattva's craving for dharmas (*dharmatṛṣṇā*).[95] Although the Chinese translations of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s by Xúan Zàng, as well as most Tibetan translations, accord with the *nis* + *āma* etymology, many modern scholars nevertheless consider it incorrect.[96]

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[92] "Here, *niyama* is *niyāma*. The way (*niyama*) to *nirvāṇa* is absolute (*ekāntibhāva*). To say *niyāma* is to apply [the suffix] *ghañ*, but we also say *niyama* when we opt for the rule [of Pāṇini, III, 3, 63]: *Yamaḥ samupaniviṣu ca:* [the suffix ap is in conjunction with *ghañ*] after the root *yam* preceded by the prefixes *sam, upa, ni, vi*." Ibid., 1785. Cf. *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, ed. Unrai Wogihara, (Tokyo: Sankibo Buddhist Book Store, 1971), 541 ln.18-21.

[93] "*Nyāma* ... semble être lui-même une orthographe erronée pour *niyāma* ou *niyama*." Lamotte (1949-1980, p.1785).

[94]復次一切煩惱或諸貪愛。能令善根不得成熟。及令諸有潤合起過。皆名為生。見道起已摧彼勢力。令不復為增上生過。由此見道獨名離生。 T.1545 p013a10-13. Cf. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, tr. Leo M. Pruden, (Berkely: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 1055 n.164.

[95] *āma ity āyuṣman śāriputra ucyate bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya dharmatṛṣṇā// Pañca (D)*, 119 ln.9.

[96] In addition to Lamotte (mentioned above), see Masuda, "Origin and doctrines," 27 n.3 (where the false etymology is explained in more detail); La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, 1055 n.164. Conze, however, appears to accept it as a variant etymology. See Conze, *Large Sutra*, 6.

2.6.2 The importance of *samyaktva-niyāma-avakrānti*

Samyaktva-niyāma-avakrānti means "entering into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*." The translation of *samyaktva* as *nirvāṇa* is supported by Vasubandhu's explanation of the expression in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, where he writes: "In a *sūtra* it is said that *samyaktva* is *nirvāṇa*."[97] Similarly, Ratnākaraśānti writes in the *Sāratamā*, "The *nirvāṇa* that is reached by the inferior path is *samyaktva*."[98]

Entrance into "the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*" was an important concept for the Sarvāstivāda school, where it is explained in detail in their early *abhidharma* treatises. The *Dharmaskandha*,[99] for example, which is estimated to have been composed around 300 B.C.E.,[100] clearly equates entry into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa* with entry into the *āryan* path:

> having attained entry into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*, one is thus said to be born into the eightfold *āryan* path.[101]

The importance of entering the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa* is also indicated by the fact that the stage of the path that immediately preceded it, known as "supreme mundane quality" (*laukikāgradharma*), was equally important for the Sarvāstivāda school. As the *Mahāvibhāṣā* states:

> If there is no supreme mundane quality, there is no entry into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*. If there is no entry into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*,

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[97] *samyaktvaṃ nivārṇam ityuktaṃ sūtre* / *AKBh*, 350 ln.6-7.

[98] *hīnamārgalabhyaṁ nirvāṇaṁ samyaktvam… Sāratamā*, ed. Padmanabh S. Jaini, (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1979), 22 ln.9.

[99] This work is said to represent one of the first attempts to systematise Sarvāstivādin soteriology. Robert E. Buswell and Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The development of abhidharma philosophy," in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol. 7*, ed. Karl Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 103.

[100] See Fred Greiner and Karl H Potter, "Summary of the Dharmaskandha," in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol.7*, ed. Karl H Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 179

[101] T.1537 p460a07: 既得趣入正性離生。便名已生八支聖道

> there is no attainment of the fruits of *srota-āpanna*, *sakṛdāgāmin*, *anāgāmin* or *arhat*.[102]

The fact that both the *Jñānaprasthāna* and the *Mahāvibhāṣā* begin with a comprehensive treatment of the stage of "supreme mundane quality," which was the immediate cause of entry into the fixed condition of *nirvāṇa*, has led some scholars to believe that the attainment of this stage was in fact the primary goal for Sarvāstivādins.[103] If this is so, it suggests that by the time these works were composed the certainty of attaining arhatship, rather than arhatship itself, had become the main goal of religious practitioners.

2.6.3 Bodhisattva-*niyāma-avakrānti*

Bodhisattva-niyāma-avakrānti means entering into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. Its past participle form is often mentioned in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, where we find it associated with irreversible bodhisattvas. For example,

> by means of dharmas that are empty of their own marks, an irreversible bodhisattva-mahāsattva has entered into the fixed condition of the bodhisattva.[104]

It is also mentioned as a prerequisite for the attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced:

> without having entered into the fixed condition of the bodhisattva [a bodhisattva] cannot produce the certitude that dharmas are not produced.[105]

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[102]能入正性離生。無有是處。若不能入正性離生。能得預流一來不還阿羅漢果。無有是處。T.1545 p005b14-15

[103] "By opening his work with this stage of the path, Kātyāyanīputra is explaining that the transmutation of the worlding into a saint is the highest aspiration of the Sarvāstivādin school." Buswell and Jaini, "The development of abhidharma philosophy," 109.

[104] *avinivartanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svalakṣaṇaśūnyair dharmair bodhisattvanyāmam avakrāntaḥ / Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 153 ln.8-9.

As was mentioned above,[106] this certitude may have been regarded as a special infallible cause, or sufficient condition to guarantee the attainment of highest enlightenment. Both the certitude that dharmas are not produced and its precondition, entrance into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva, will be further discussed in chapter 6.

2.7 Conclusion

In this survey five terms that connote various senses of irreversibility have been introduced and briefly discussed. The purpose has been to provide a background for the way in which the irreversible bodhisattva was understood in the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition and to introduce some of the issues that will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. I have also aimed to show that although some of the connotations associated with the *avaivartika* bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism may have been new, the concept drew on, and possibly contributed to, a number of other Buddhist ideas relating to the immutability of certain spiritual attainments, as well as the idea that a spiritual goal is inevitable when certain sufficient conditions have been established.

As was pointed out in the section on prediction, however, it is possible that much of the theory surrounding irreversible bodhisattvas was created after the initial formation of the concept in order to describe the future Śākyamuni. The idea that irreversible bodhisattvas were *āryas*, that they possessed the certitude that dharmas are not produced, that they were upheld by skill-in-means, that they could not fall to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*, etc. may have been formulated to provide

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[105] *bodhisattvaniyāmam anavakramya na śakyānutpattikair dharmaiḥ kṣāntir utpādayitum* / Ibid., Pt.5 : 161.

[106] See section 1.3.1.

theoretical support for a concept that was originally based on the prototypical bodhisattva's anointment by his predecessor. In other words, the irreversible bodhisattva may have been a notion that preceded that popularisation of the bodhisattva career and the movement later known as Mahāyāna, in which many Buddhist practitioners began to identify themselves as bodhisattvas who aspired to irreversibility. It is with an examination of this popular self-identification that we begin our story of the irreversible bodhisattva in the next chapter.

3 THE IRREVERSIBLE BODHISATTVA AS AN IDEAL

No text was ever written to be read and interpreted philologically by philologists.

Walther Bulst [1]

Nor, may I add, historically by historians.

Hans Robert Jauss [2]

3.1 Introduction

Having placed the irreversible bodhisattva within a broader Buddhist context, and observed the polemical connotations that Mahāyānists have sometimes associated with the concept or irreversibility, from here on we will limit our attention to this somewhat idealised type of practitioner only. Our main aim is to trace the development of the concept in Mahāyāna literature from what I will argue was its status as a normative ideal to its more or less final form as the eighth stage within the ten *bhūmi*s of the systematised bodhisattva path, as set forth in the works of exegetes such as Haribhadra and his followers. We begin the story with an investigation into the function that the irreversible bodhisattva may have fulfilled in early Mahāyāna culture.

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[1] Quoted in Jauss, "Literary history as a challenge to literary theory," 7.

[2] Ibid.: 7-8.

By defining the irreversible bodhisattva as one who is not liable to turn back from his or her quest for highest enlightenment, we have, in one sense at least, answered the question of what it means to be an irreversible bodhisattva. In another sense, however, we know little about the irreversible bodhisattva, since a debating courtyard definition does not tell us anything about the *significance* of this kind of bodhisattva.

In present-day Gelugpa monasteries, such as the one where some of the research for this thesis was undertaken, the irreversible bodhisattva appears to be no more than an intellectual abstraction with little relevance to daily life. Although monks debate about the qualities of irreversible bodhisattvas, as far as I am aware, they do not pray to become irreversible bodhisattvas, nor is there anyone among their many tens of thousands who is said to have attained such a state.[3] Yet when we read early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, we see that irreversibility is presented as an important achievement in a bodhisattva's career, and the suspicion therefore arises that the authors of those *sūtra*s may not have viewed the irreversible bodhisattvas with the same sense of abstraction with which they are viewed by contemporary Gelugpa monks. In this and the following chapter, I therefore intend to explore what the irreversible bodhisattva meant *to* early Mahāyānists. In other words, we now move on from the nominal definition of the irreversible bodhisattva explored in the previous chapter to a more functionalist definition.

My thesis in this chapter is that the irreversible bodhisattva, as depicted in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, was an ideal bodhisattva. As such, he functioned as a model to be emulated by ordinary people who identified *themselves* as bodhisattvas. Most of the

[3] There are, of course, some monks who are recognised as "tulkus" (*sprul sku*), but they are not typically described as irreversible (*phyir mi ldog pa*) bodhisattvas.

chapter is devoted to methodological issues aimed at providing theoretical support for this position. I begin by arguing for the importance of scriptures over other semiotic forms in the reconstruction of Mahāyāna history. I then show that, without taking into account the essentially normative nature of such scriptures, it is easy to read them as descriptive texts that provide evidence for whatever historical fact one wants to establish. My approach, however, will be to see them as fundamentally *prescriptive*, and proceed from there. By considering the *sūtra*s as essentially a means of communicating a normative message, I will apply an audience-oriented theory of how literary works are received in order to reconstruct a self-identity of the earliest audience of the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. By such techniques it will be demonstrated that among the actual audiences of works such as this, it is highly likely that there were indeed persons who identified themselves as bodhisattvas and for whom the irreversible bodhisattva was an ideal, or paragon, to be emulated.

3.2 Reconstructing a social reality for early Mahāyāna

3.2.1 A recent shift in approach to Buddhist Studies

In an important article published in 1991, Gregory Schopen questioned the then widely held assumption that the primary locus of Buddhist Studies should be its scriptures. He found the predominantly textual orientation of the study of Buddhist history "decidedly peculiar,"[4] since the scriptures were not only "almost never 'historical' in our sense of the term,"[5] but tended to record only "what a small atypical part of the Buddhist community wanted the community to believe or

[4] Schopen, "Archaeology and protestant presuppositions," 1.

[5] Ibid.: 5.

practice."[6] Schopen pointed out that the assumption that the essence of a religion was somehow to be found in its scriptures had, until then, not only been a feature of Buddhist Studies, but of religious studies in general. Having traced this assumption back to sixteenth-century Protestant notions of where the essence of Christianity is located, he persuasively argued the case for a shift in attention within Buddhist Studies away from philology, in favour of what Buddhist practitioners in the past actually did and what they believed. Schopen was not, it should be noted, arguing that the essence of Buddhism lay in the beliefs and practices of ordinary people. Rather, his point was that the common practice among scholars of studying a religion—and in particular, reconstructing its history, based on scriptural evidence alone, while ignoring or relegating to secondary importance the wealth of available archaeological and epigraphic evidence—was simply a hangover from an earlier period of Protestant polemicism.[7]

Schopen's approach has indeed been a helpful correction to what was at the time an imbalance in the focus of Buddhist Studies. It has also yielded valuable results. For example, his study of donative inscriptions accompanying religious images presents a rather different impression of Indian Buddhist monastics than that found in scriptures. As he writes:

> The actual monk, unlike the textual monk, appears to have been deeply involved in religious giving and cult practice of every kind from the very beginning. He is preoccupied not with *nirvāṇa* but above all else with what appears to have been a strongly felt obligation to his parents, whether living or dead. He is concerned as well, for example, with the health of his

[6] Ibid.: 3.

[7] In its most extreme form, this overly philological approach has been described by Luis Goméz as "a rare combination of Protestant models of scripture-centred theology, colonialist presumptions of cultural privilege, and misuse of rationality as a key to understanding the non-rational." Gómez, "Unspoken paradigms," 194.

> companions and teachers. He appears, in short, as very human and very vulnerable.[8]

However, while this approach has met with considerable success in cases where archaeological and inscriptional sources are available, where such materials are scarce or non-existent, it is obviously limited. This is clearly the case as far as Mahāyāna, particularly early Mahāyāna, is concerned, where the paucity of non-textual sources has prompted several scholars to argue instead for the appropriate use of textual sources for reconstructing the history of Mahāyāna. Jan Nattier, for example, writes:

> if we are to say anything at all about the early history of the bodhisattva path, we will be forced to use normative sources, for—at least at this early date—these are the only sources we have.[9]

Paul Harrison expresses a similar view:

> if these texts are used with the appropriate caution, their evidential value is substantial, especially in view of the fact that, apart from a small number of inscriptions, we have little else to assist our enquiries.[10]

This being the case, we need to develop a coherent theory of how to read Mahāyāna scriptures as historical documents. Without such a methodology, the difficulties we experience in trying to establish answers to the many questions that have concerned scholars of Mahāyāna become even more difficult—questions such as whether the first Mahāyānists were predominantly lay or renunciant, whether they dwelt in monasteries or forests, whether they included women among their number or not

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[8] Gregory Schopen, "On monks, nuns and 'vulgar' practices: The introduction of the image cult into Indian Buddhism," *Artibus Asiae* 49, no. 1/2 (1988-1989): 167.

[9] Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to the Inquiry of Ugra*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003; reprint, *The Bodhisattva Path*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007), 63.

[10] Paul Harrison, "Who gets to ride in the great vehicle? Self-image and identity among followers of the early Mahāyāna," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10, no. 1 (1987): 72.

and, most importantly for the purposes of the present investigation, whether early Mahāyānists identified themselves as actual bodhisattvas or merely aspiring bodhisattvas.

3.2.2 The ahistoricity of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s

One of the problems with using Mahāyāna *sūtra*s for reconstructing a Buddhist history is their basic ahistoricity. While it is true that the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, by means of their opening sentence "*evaṃ mayā śrutam / ekasmin samaye bhagavān rājagrhe viharati sma grdhrakūṭe parvate...*," like the Mainstream *sūtra*s, present themselves as having have been taught by the historical Buddha, it is not on account of this attribution that they ultimately stake their claims of authenticity. Although the *sūtra*s are attributed to Śākyamuni, the attribution is made within a kind of cyclical historical consciousness; he is but one of many buddhas who perform the same archetypal activities, and in this way the message of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* is invested with a timelessness and transcendentality. Not only the message, but even the very words of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s are considered timeless. As the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* states:

> It is said that with these very words, these very lines, these very sounds, by just [persons] named Subhūti, by these very monks, has this very perfection of wisdom been expounded, just this very chapter of the perfection of wisdom. With reference to it just the Śakras, Chiefs of Gods, ask questions and counter-questions. At this very spot of earth has just this perfection of wisdom been taught. Maitreya also, the bodhisattva-mahāsattva, after he has won highest enlightenment, at this very spot of earth will teach this very same perfection of wisdom.[11]

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[11] *ebhireva nāmabhirebhireva padairebhirevākṣaraiḥ subhūtināmadheyaireva bhikṣubhiriyameva prajñāpāramitopadiṣṭā, ayameva prajñāpāramitāparivartaḥ / tatrāpi śakrā eva devendrāḥ paripṛcchanti sma, paripraśnayanti sma - asminneva pṛthivīpradeśe iyameva prajñāpāramitā bhāṣitā / maitreyo 'pi bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'nuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhimabhisaṃbudhya asminneva pṛthivīpradeśe enāmeva prajñāpāramitāṃ bhāṣiṣyate iti // Aṣṭa*, 99 ln.4-8.

Such passages suggest that the authors may have been attempting to invest the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s with a kind of transcendental truth, thereby qualifying them with an epistemological significance that was greater than that of the Mainstream *sūtras*, which were true because they were spoken by the historical Buddha. Such an approach was apparently not unique in India, being similar to what Sheldon Pollock has described as:

> the Mīmāṃsā conviction that, existing as the Vedas do out of time (the fact that alone authenticates their claim to truth and authority), they can have no dimension of historical referentiality.[12]

Thus, just as the Vedas have no historical referentiality, and therefore must be true, Mahāyāna *sūtra*s gain their legitimacy from embodying, as Donald S. Lopez puts it, "a truth that exists without being contingent on human agency."[13]

3.2.3 Self-identity of Mahāyānists according to early Western scholarship

In an article published in 1987, titled "Who gets to ride in the great vehicle? Self-image and identity among followers of the early Mahāyāna," Paul Harrison fruitfully analyses the earliest Chinese translations of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s in order to reconstruct the sense of self-identity of the Mahāyānists who lived in what he elsewhere calls the "early middle period of the [Mahāyāna] movement."[14] One of his central claims is that the Mahāyānists of this period identified *themselves* as bodhisattvas. He makes his position clear at the outset when he states:

> This paper sets out to … ask the question 'What did it mean to be a follower of the Mahāyāna?' In other words, who or what is a *bodhisattva*?[15]

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[12] Sheldon Pollock, "Mimamsa and the problem of history in traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (1989): 608.

[13] Donald S. Lopez, "Authority and orality in the Mahāyāna," *Numen* 42, no. 1 (1995): 36.

[14] Paul Harrison, "Searching for the origins of the Mahāyāna: What are we looking for?" *The Eastern Buddhist* 28, no. 1 (1995): 56.

[15] Harrison, "Who gets to ride in the great vehicle?" 67.

He goes on to say that there is "no evidence to suggest a widespread cult of the great bodhisattvas, and no passages recommend devotion to them."[16] More specifically, he concludes that for the early Mahāyāna monks, "*bodhisattvas* were certainly not just semi-mythical beings raised on high to receive the adoration of the masses, but real flesh-and-blood people, among whom they counted themselves,"[17] and that "as far as *bodhisattvas* are concerned, the initial message of the Mahāyāna is clear: people should not worship *bodhisattvas*, they should become *bodhisattvas* themselves."[18]

In order to understand why Harrison emphasises the point that early Mahāyānists identified themselves as bodhisattvas, rather than regarding them as highly idealised beings to be worshipped and venerated, it is necessary to see how up until then the latter view had been common among Western scholars. The reason for its widespread currency seems to have been a result of two major factors. First was the belief that Mahāyāna had arisen as a protest movement against so-called Hīnayāna and that the ideal of the heroic bodhisattva was a key factor in this protest. Second, it was also believed that Mahāyāna had incorporated, or was a concession to, the popular devotional traditions that had existed in ancient India. These two factors will now be briefly discussed.

3.2.3.1 Twentieth century Western historicist accounts of the rise of Mahāyāna

Western scholarship's first encounter with Mahāyāna Buddhism in an Indic language was the collection of Mahāyāna Sanskrit manuscripts discovered in Nepal

[16] Ibid.: 79.

[17] Ibid.: 86.

[18] Ibid.: 80.

in the first half of the nineteenth century by the British Resident in Nepal, B. H. Hodgson.[19] Almost immediately, as a result of the application of historical-critical methods that have been a characteristic feature of Western Buddhist scholarship, but which were relatively new at the time, Western scholars quickly became aware that the Nepalese manuscripts did not represent the teachings of the same historical buddha whose words the Pāli canon purported to record.

We should not overlook the significance of the fact that from this first encounter, Western scholars have approached Mahāyāna scriptures very differently from the way in which the orthodox Buddhist scholar has traditionally approached them. Whereas the orthodox Mahāyāna scholar regards the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s as the word of the historical Buddha (albeit in the form of the emanation body, or *nirmāṇakāya*, of a transcendental buddha) the modern Western scholar sees them as produced by anonymous monks in Indian Mahāyāna communities some four hundred to one thousand years after the demise of the historical Buddha. Thus, virtually from the beginning, modern scholars have adopted a hermeneutic stance with respect to Mahāyāna *sūtra*s that significantly differs from the traditional Mahāyāna doctrine of the "three turnings of the wheel of dharma" (*tridharmacakrapravartana*).

The nineteenth century was also a time when the historical-critical method was becoming popular in Europe. As the historian of religion Walter Burkert writes:

> The historical criticism of the nineteenth century abandoned efforts to fill ancient religion with direct meaning and relevance and devoted itself instead to the critical collection and chronological ordering of the source material.[20]

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[19] For detailed account, see Mitra, *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, iii-xliv.

[20] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, tr. John Raffan, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 1.

One of the consequences of the Western interpretive standpoint was the need to come up with an historical account of the rise of Mahāyāna (something that was of course not an issue for the orthodox scholar). Perhaps inspired by Protestant values, one of the most influential explanations was to see Mahāyāna as a protest movement. Among the most influential proponents of such a view was Louis de La Vallée Poussin, who in 1910 wrote that the Mahāyāna movement was a reaction against the ideal of the arhat, who was perceived as "useless to others and an utter egoist, to the extent of insensibility,"[21] in favour of the heroic ideal of the bodhisattva whose goal was to save the world from suffering. This was a view of the Mainstream tradition that the Mahāyāna texts certainly seemed to endorse, and it is not surprising to find it echoed some two decades later in Har Dayal's classic work on the bodhisattva. Of those monks who pursued the arhat ideal, Dayal wrote:

> They were indifferent to the duty of teaching and helping all human beings. The Bodhisattva doctrine was promulgated by some Buddhist leaders as a protest against this lack of true spiritual fervour and altruism among the monks of that period.[22]

It is thus evident that a number of prominent early twentieth century scholars believed that the rise of Mahāyāna was a result of the formulation of a new heroic ideal, devised as a reaction to perceived shortcomings of the original *arhat* ideal. But unlike the *arhat*, or even the *śrāvaka*, with whom actual people could have conceivably identified themselves, the bodhisattva was often seen by these scholars in superhuman terms, and therefore not a role that actual people would have imagined themselves assuming.

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[21] Louis de La Vallée Poussin, "Mahāyāna," in *Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religion Vol. 8*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 333.

[22] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 3.

In addition to holding a highly idealised conception of the heroic bodhisattva, some earlier Western scholars may not have seen bodhisattvas as ordinary people can be attributed to the traditions of devotion to what some have called "celestial" bodhisattvas. For Dayal, the worship of such bodhisattvas was another instrumental factor that explained the rise of Mahāyāna and the popularisation of the bodhisattva ideal. He wrote:

> The *bodhisattva* doctrine was the necessary outcome of two movements of thought in early Buddhism, viz. the growth of *bhakti* (devotion, faith, love) and the idealisation and spiritualisation of the Buddha. *Bhakti* was at first directed towards Gautama Buddha. But he was soon idealised, spiritualised and universalised, ... He then became an unsuitable and unattractive object for the pious Buddhist's *bhakti*. That deep rooted feeling found an outlet in the invention and adoration of the *bodhisattvas*.[23]

The idea that devotion to "celestial" bodhisattvas was one of the basic practices upon which Mahāyāna was built became widespread in twentieth century Western Buddhist scholarship.[24] The popularity of such a view is perhaps not surprising given that it would likely be supported by any anthropological study of a contemporary Mahāyāna society, where bodhisattvas are typically conceived of as highly idealised "celestial" beings, rather than actual flesh-and-blood people.

3.2.3.2 Opinions of contemporary scholars

However, it is not a view that is always borne out by an examination of *sūtra*s from an earlier period in Mahāyāna history than that represented by those preserved in the Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts. Contrary to the above-mentioned views, and consistent with those of Harrison, a number of recent scholars have also ascribed

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[23] Ibid., 31.

[24] For a list of recent references, see Paul Harrison, "Manjusri and the cult of the celestial bodhisattvas," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 13, no. 2 (2000): 161. For an earlier reference, see Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 178.

bodhisattva self-identity to early Mahāyānists. Jan Nattier, for example, has described an early Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, as "composed by and for men who considered themselves bodhisattvas."[25] Akira Hirakawa considers the "sons and daughters of good families" (*kulaputra* and *kuladuhitṛ*) mentioned in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s to be bodhisattvas, who were the "actual audience" of the *sūtra*s.[26] Graeme MacQueen has described how those persons who had undergone a conversion experience involving the initial generation of *bodhicitta* thereby became bodhisattvas.[27] Daniel Boucher and Reginald Ray also speak of early Mahāyāna fraternities, either living in groups or alone in the forest, in a way that suggests they also see these early Mahāyānists as self-identifying bodhisattvas.[28]

While I am in general agreement with such views, apart from Harrison and Nattier, whose methodologies are discussed below, few scholars have provided us with an explanation as to how they have been able to arrive at conclusions about the self-identity of early Mahāyānists based on textual evidence alone. Perhaps they feel it is self-evident, yet without a clear method for extracting historical information, it is

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[25] Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 10. Elsewhere she writes, "The *Ugra* was evidently intended for an audience consisting exclusively of bodhisattvas, for it never addresses non-bodhisattvas (whether lay or monastic) directly." Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 75.

[26] "The actual audience [of the sūtras] was the bodhisattva, people who were called *kulaputra* and *kuladuhitṛ*." Akira Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its relationship to the worship of stupas," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 22 (1963): 71.

[27] "The initial task of the preacher is to raise up bodhisattvas. This means, among other things, winning people to the group that constitutes Mahāyāna. The conversion occurs through the evocation of a particular religious experience, that of 'the rise of the aspiration for Buddhahood' (*bodhicittotpāda*). This experience defines Mahāyāna as a group, for one who has had it is a *bodhisattva* and belongs to the Mahāyāna, while one who has not had it is no bodhisattva and no member of the movement. When we speak of the spread of Mahāyāna in this early period we are speaking of the progressive evocation of this experience among people." Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," *Religion* 12 (1982): 54.

[28] See Daniel Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of Mahāyāna: A Study and Translation of the Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā-sūtra*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

possible for scholars to arrive at quite different conclusions based on exactly the same textual evidence.

3.2.4 An example that illustrates need for a methodology for extracting historical information from the *sūtra*s

As a case in point, let us examine the question of whether early Mahāyānists lived in physically separate communities or within the Mainstream monastic culture. Schopen summarises the problem thus:

> Mahāyāna may well have been a collection of marginalized ascetic groups living in the forest, or groups of cantankerous and malcontent conservatives embedded in mainstream, socially engaged monasteries, all of whom continued pouring out pamphlets espousing their views and values, pamphlets that we now know as Mahāyāna sūtras. We simply do not know.[29]

One scholar who holds the view that proto-Mahāyānists did live separately from their Mainstream counterparts is Akira Hirakawa. However, based on an alternative interpretation of the same sources, the opposite view is held by Richard Gombrich. There are several aspects to the debate, but for our purposes it suffices to focus on just one—the interpretation of *bodhisattva-gaṇa*.[30]

Based on several occurrences of the term in Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, Hirakawa concludes that it refers to a group of bodhisattvas who existed as a separate organisation from the Mainstream *śrāvaka-saṃgha*. He writes:

> The bodhisattvagaṇa refers to an organisation different from the śrāvakasaṇgha. In this way most Mahāyāna texts enumerate the śrāvakas and the bodhisattvas separately as parts of the congregation, and this is thought to reflect the actual situation of the early Mahāyāna Saṅgha. The bhikṣu and the bodhisattva must have lived independent of each other, because if the

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[29] Gregory Schopen, "Mahāyāna," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan Reference, USA, 2004), 494-495.

[30] For an analysis of the use of *gaṇa* in Buddhist India and argument that it referred to a structured organisation governed on a democratic basis, see K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, (Bangalore: Bangalore Printing and Publishing Co., 1955), 21-25.

> two had led a communal life in the same vihāra, they would probably not be mentioned separately.[31]

For Gombrich, however, Hirakawa's conclusion that the *śrāvaka-saṃgha* and the *bodhisattva-gaṇa* represent two distinct organisations is "fundamentally misconceived." Hirakawa's error, he alleges, is attributing a "literal historicity" to the introductory passages of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. The descriptions of innumerable bodhisattvas in attendance of the Buddha's teaching do not, according to Gombrich, represent historical fact. Although he credits Hirakawa with "the scholarly awareness that the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s are not, from the historical point of view, authentic utterances of the Buddha,"[32] he clearly disagrees with Hirakawa's view that the settings described in the *sūtra*s literally depict a historical reality.

Gombrich says that his own view, unlike that of Hirakawa, "does not depend on ascribing social reality and historical accuracy to religious visions,"[33] but he does not tell us what it does depend on. Does he see all Mahāyāna *sūtra*s as nothing but religious visions, in which case no historical facts at all can be derived from them? Or if they do provide us with information from which we can derive historical facts, how are they to be established? Gombrich does not say. The point here is not to decide whether Hirakawa's interpretation of *bodhisattva-gaṇa* is correct or not—merely to show that without a theory of how these texts are to be read for historical clues about their audiences, it is possible to find what one wants to find, and to arrive at quite different conclusions.

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[31] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 80-81.

[32] Richard Gombrich, "Organized bodhisattvas : A blind alley in Buddhist historiography," in *Studies in Hindu and Buddhist Art*, ed. P.K. Mishra (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999), 323.

[33] Ibid., 324.

3.2.5 Harrison's methodology

Paul Harrison demonstrates his awareness of Schopen's criticism that some scholars have naively utilised texts "as if they were accurate reflections of the religious life and career of actual practicing Buddhist monks in early India"[34] when he cautions against attempting to infer facts about historical reality directly from early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. He says that

> it appears too often to be assumed that these texts are somehow *directly* reflective of the context in which they were produced, and certain historical inferences are drawn from them on that basis which may be unjustified.[35]

He also warns that:

> we should not read these sources uncritically, and mistake their rhetorical and mythical flourishes—to say nothing of their insults and put-downs!—as direct reflections of sociological or historical fact[36]

Instead, he advises us "to decode the fantasies of the Mahāyāna with great care."[37]

Harrison describes his own approach as one in which he "attempts to appropriate the texts in their totality, to read them as wholes, alert to all their meanings and all their silences."[38] This method, which he calls "textual anthropology," contrasts with that of "textual scholars" who "focus on narrow doctrinal or philosophical issues and somehow imagine that they have done justice to their texts."[39] While I am in agreement with the thrust of Harrison's method for extracting historical information from the early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, I do not believe he goes far enough in articulating it. How is it possible to establish historical facts based on Mahāyāna *sūtra*s—texts

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[34] Schopen, "Archaeology and protestant presuppositions," 5-6.

[35] Harrison, "Searching for the origins," 51.

[36] Ibid.: 68.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.: 53.

[39] Ibid.: 54.

that, although claimed to be indirectly reflective of historical reality, seem to move away from the historical consciousness evident in Mainstream *sūtra*s toward a more transcendental, and hence ahistorical, notion of truth? How do we distinguish fact from fiction, other than simply by saying the facts are what is reasonable while the fiction is not?

3.2.6 Nattier's methodology for extracting historical information from *sūtra*s

Jan Nattier has, I think, made a useful contribution to the development of a coherent theory for reading Mahāyāna *sūtra*s for historical information by highlighting their normative nature.[40] We would, she says, commit a "fundamental methodological error" if we were to read normative statements as if they were descriptive and, in order to avoid the "pitfalls awaiting the scholar who attempts to make use of *sūtra* texts to reconstruct the history of Indian Buddhism,"[41] she sets out a methodology for extracting historical information from characteristically normative sources. She provides four principles, each of which will now be discussed:

(1) the principle of embarrassment;

(2) the principle of irrelevance;

(3) the principle of counterargument; and

(4) the principle of corroborating evidence.

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[40] Nattier writes: "The Ugra, like all Buddhist sūtras, is an avowedly normative document: that is, its authors were not concerned with documenting what their fellow Buddhists were actually doing, but with prescribing how the ideal Buddhist ought to behave." Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 103.

[41] Ibid., 16.

3.2.6.1 The principle of embarrassment

The principle of embarrassment has it origins in the arguments set forth by Will Durant for the existence of the historical Jesus.[42] According to the principle, if an event which may be unflattering to the author's position is revealed, then it likely to have a basis in fact. Nattier gives us an example from Mahāyāna Buddhism:

> the authors of the *Lotus Sutra* describe some members of the audience as getting up and walking out when the message of the Lotus was first preached.[43]

Since the *sūtra* depicts audiences rejecting the Buddha's sermon, Nattier concludes, as a historical fact, that it is "extremely likely" that the ideas contained in this *sūtra* met with disapproval at the time of their composition.

While such an interpretation is reasonable, we must still ask ourselves: in what sense is this passage normative? If the intention of the authors was to get audiences to listen to or read the *sūtra*, and not reject it out of a sense of pride or haughtiness, they may have created a "proud" (*adhimānika*), yet purely fictitious, audience who "imagined having attained what they had not, and realised what they had not."[44] In other words, the description of those who got up and left may simply be nothing more than a trope intended to guide actual audiences to be humble. Those who are haughty or proud, the *sūtra* may be saying, will be unable to benefit from studying it, and perhaps should go away and come back only when they have overcome their

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[42] Durant wrote: "Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed—the competition of the apostles for high places in the Kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, the references of some auditors to his possible insanity, his early uncertainty as to his mission, his confessions of ignorance as to the future, his moments of bitterness, his despairing cry on the cross; no one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them." Will Durant, *Christ and Caesar*, The Story of Civilization III, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 557.

[43] Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 65. Cf. H. Kern, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka, or The Lotus of the True Law* 10, Sacred Books of the East, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 38-39.

[44] *aprāpte prāptasaṁjñino'nadhigate'dhigatasaṁjñina* / *Saddharma*, 26 ln.27.

haughtiness. Thus, the passage need not be taken as any more representative of historical reality than the description in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* of those bodhisattvas among the audience whose "minds were freed from outflows without further appropriation" (*anupādāyāsravebhyaścittāni vimuktāni*), [45] an expression that indicates the attainment of the inferior goal of arhatship by those bodhisattvas who are not upheld by skill-in-means and the perfection of wisdom.

My intention is not to dispute Nattier's conclusion that the ideas contained in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* met with disapproval when they were first set forth; rather, that the principle of embarrassment assumes a descriptive content and that when the same passage is interpreted prescriptively other conclusions are possible.

3.2.6.2 The principle of irrelevance

Nattier's principle of irrelevance states that if something pertaining to social life is mentioned incidentally in the context of making a particular normative point, then it can be considered reflective of social life at the time of the text's composition. As an example, she cites a passage from the *Ugraparipṛcchā* in which bodhisattvas are to bestow wealth on their male and female slaves.[46] From this, she argues, it can be inferred that slavery existed in ancient India.

Although this principle is unlikely to help us in our investigation of the self-identity of early Mahāyānists, it is nevertheless quite useful, and may even have the potential to tell us about more than just the social life that existed at the time of the *sūtra*'s composition. Consider the passage in the "Signs" chapter that describes a long list of mundane affairs with which irreversible bodhisattvas are not

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[45] *Aṣṭa*, 155 ln.4.

[46] See Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 224.

preoccupied. The list includes kings and robbers, villages, cities, market towns, countries, kingdoms, capitals, ministers, prime ministers, women, men, neuters, etc. By the principle of irrelevance, it can be therefore inferred that these were all well-known features of social life in ancient India. However, the list extends to include *yakṣa*s, *rākṣasa*s, *preta*s, *kaṭapūtana*s and *kumbhāṇḍa*s, and while we should probably not think of them as part of the social life of the *sūtra*'s authors; by the principle of irrelevance, however, they could certainly be thought of as part of what might be called the "thought-world" of Indian Buddhists.

3.2.6.3 The principle of counterargument

The principle of counterargument is perhaps the most powerful among the four methods for extracting information from normative texts. It says that if there is an injunction to refrain from, or engage in, a certain activity, then it must be because in actuality there were people who were doing the opposite. The assumption is that there must have been some reason for the injunction. Evidence to justify this assumption is to be found in a Theravādin *vinaya* commentary preserved in Chinese translation, in which it is said that the Buddha did not lay down any rules of conduct in advance, but only when an instance of misconduct had occurred.[47]

Applying the principle to the "Signs" chapter, we can conclude that there were Buddhists who venerated non-Buddhist teachers, those whose clothing was infected with lice, or those who made their livelihood through making predictions. Most significantly, the principle also allows us to conclude that there were apostate bodhisattvas who did abandon the *bodhisattva-yāna* in favour of the *śrāvaka-yāna*.

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[47] See P.V. Bapat and A. Hirakawa, *Shan-chien-p'i-p'o-sha: A Chinese Version by Saṅghabhadra of Samantapāsādikā*, (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1970), 139.

However, we should not underestimate the power of religious texts to regulate human behaviour, and although the principle of counter-argument may be invoked to support claims that there were Buddhists who, for example, venerated non-Buddhist teachers, once an injunction to refrain from or perform a certain activity had been made, then it is not unreasonable to believe that the majority of audiences acted accordingly (which is not to deny that some texts may well have remained relatively ignored).

3.2.6.4 The principle of corroborating evidence

Corroborating evidence means evidence from other sources. In our investigation into the self-identity of early Mahāyānists, it is the very lack of corroborating evidence in places where we would expect to find it—in inscriptions and non-Mahāyāna texts such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Kathāvatthu*—that is both curious and revealing. It suggests that despite the great literary productivity of the early Mahāyānists, it seems to have been a tradition that remained outside Mainstream discourse.[48]

Despite their relative lateness, the records of Chinese travellers in India do provide us with one interesting piece of corroborating evidence suggestive of the existence of "reversible" bodhisattvas. Xúanzàng reports that in the land of Matipura there was a certain renowned "master of the śāstras" named Guṇaprabha who was brought up in the Mahāyāna tradition, but later rejected it in favour of the Vaibhāṣika

[48] Further arguments that Mahāyāna, and *Prajñāpāramitā* in particular, remained outside the Mainstream discourse have been presented by Richard Hayes, who points out that the writings of Nāgārjuna were largely ignored by other Buddhists. Hayes writes that "Nāgārjuna's writings had relatively little effect on the course of subsequent Indian Buddhist philosophy.... Aside from a few commentators on Nāgārjuna's works, who identified themselves as Mādhyamikas, Indian Buddhist intellectual life continued almost as if Nāgārjuna had never existed." Richard P. Hayes, "Nāgārjuna's appeal," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994): 299.

tradition, and moreover wrote many treatises criticising the writings of his former teachers.[49]

3.2.6.5 Summary

To summarise, Nattier's four principles are useful in varying degrees for our attempt to show that early Mahāyānists thought of themselves as bodhisattvas. The least useful is perhaps the principle of corroborating evidence, given that such evidence is virtually non-existent. The most useful is the principle of counterargument, since there is little ambiguity about the normative nature of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. One problem with the principle, however, is that that we generally have little information about where and when a particular normative injunction was made, and thus it may be difficult to draw specific conclusions about the proscribed action. The principle of embarrassment is, I would argue, slightly problematic since it requires us to treat certain statements as descriptive, when their authors may have only intended them to be prescriptive.

3.2.7 A radically conservative approach to extracting historical information from Mahāyāna *sūtra*s

The position I will adopt with regard to the "Signs" chapter is that although it *describes* the observable behaviour of an irreversible bodhisattva, the purpose of this description is not to create some sort of social distinction between bodhisattvas by enabling those who were irreversible to be distinguished from those who were not (though this may have indeed been the purpose of the descriptions of predicted bodhisattvas in Chapter 20 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*), but to describe a normative ideal

[49] See Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, vol.1 : 191. Whether Guṇaprabha was regarded as a "bodhisattva" is, of course, unknown.

for people to emulate. Thus, in agreement with Nattier's claim noted in section 3.2.6 above, I consider the "Signs" chapter to basically be a prescriptive text.

Prescriptive texts fundamentally differ from descriptive texts with respect to their relationship with reality. The difference has been formalised by John Searle with the notion of "direction of fit."[50] A descriptive text has a "language-to-world" direction of fit—in other words, it is a text in which language is intended to match the world. Such texts can be said to be true or false depending on whether they accurately represent the world or not. Prescriptive texts, on the other hand, are said to have a "world-to-language" direction of fit—they are typically vows, commands, injunctions and so forth, in which the intention is to try to make the world match the text. It does not make sense to speak of such texts as being true or false; rather, we should think of them as being successful or unsuccessful depending on whether or not the world has been made to conform with the text.

Thus, we should not attempt to extract historical information from the "Signs" chapter by thinking of it as reflective of any social reality, since, being a prescriptive text, it does not have a language-to-world direction of fit. How then, in the absence of anything other than textual evidence, are we to support the claim that members of the historical audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* identified themselves as bodhisattvas? The answer, I propose, is to borrow a theory from literary criticism, which although intended for application to works of fiction, nevertheless has the potential to reveal information about the audiences of those works, including their sense of self-identity. This will now be discussed.

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[50] John Searle, "A classification of illocutionary acts," *Language and Society* 5, no. 1 (1976).

3.3 A reader-response approach to the interpretation of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s

3.3.1 Why reader response criticism is appropriate for the study of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s

In order to argue, without attributing any historical factuality to the events depicted in the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, that there were at least some members of the its original audience who identified themselves as bodhisattvas, I will make use of the concept of the "implied reader," as formulated by members of the so-called "Konstanz School" of reader-response criticism, a group of theorists who worked collectively at the University of Konstanz in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, and among whom Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss are the most well-known.

In general, all reader response critics can be characterised by their interest in the effect that a literary work has upon its audience. They hold that without considering the reader's response it is impossible to determine the meaning of the work. Reader-response criticism can thus be clearly contrasted with the paradigm that it critiqued—that of New Criticism—according to which a literary work was deemed an autonomous entity, independent of author and reader, and whose meaning could be objectively found within the text of the work itself.

A similar shift in paradigm has also been underway in Buddhist Studies for some time. Until the late twentieth century, much of Buddhist Studies was undertaken in accordance with the philosophy of what José Cabezón has called the "positivist" school of thought, according to which the meaning of a work resided in the text itself, and was none other than that intended by its author. The scholar's task, therefore, was to undertake a philological reconstruction of a text such that "its

meaning unfolds from within itself, without any need for interpretation."[51] In this way, the positivist scholar reveals what he or she sees as the author's intention.

More recently, however, scholars belonging to what Cabezón calls the "interpretivist" school have held that a text cannot speak for itself in the way that the philological positivists believe. Interpretivists believe that those who think they are able to interpret a text objectively fail to recognise that "every move in the philological process represents an instance of personal choice and that these choices have their consequences,"[52] and that "the reader … creates or constructs a text in the very act of reading."[53] While this idea that the reader constructs the meaning of a text is entirely consistent with reader-response criticism, it is curious to observe that, apart from a few isolated cases,[54] we have not seen many interpretivist Buddhist scholars adopt such an approach to their often highly textually oriented discipline.

The analysis of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s is particularly suited to reader-response criticism, since the philologist's axiom that authorial intention constitutes the meaning of a text becomes somewhat less relevant in cases where not only is the author anonymous, but also in cases where it is unclear whether there were one or many authors, or even where and when the text was composed. Even if we were to know these things, it is unlikely that it would be particularly helpful, since the texts themselves show little originality, instead consisting of the weaving together of

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[51] J. I. Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies as a discipline and the role of theory," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 246.

[52] Ibid.: 248.

[53] Ibid.: 252.

[54] See John Keenan, *How Master Mou Removes Our Doubts : A Reader-Response Study and Translation of the Mou-tzu li-huo lun*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Ralph Flores, *Buddhist Scriptures as Literature*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 5-6; Douglas Osto, *Power, Wealth and Women in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Gaṇḍavyūha-Sūtra*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

materials from pre-existing sources. Thus, we should look for a *sūtra*'s unity and meaning not in its origins, but in its readers, or audience.

When applying a theory from another discipline, however, it is important to be aware of the differences and similarities between the two disciplines. One of the most important differences between literary criticism and Buddhist Studies is perhaps the desire by the literary critic to identify the features of a work that give it its aesthetic value. Although a Mahāyāna *sūtra* may have had an aesthetic impact on its audience, we will not be concerned with that here. Our main concern will be with the role that a work demands of its audience in order for meaning to be constructed and communication to take place successfully. In this respect, our investigation into the role and identity assumed by historical audiences of the "Signs" chapter shares common ground with reader-response criticism.

Reader-response criticism has already been successfully applied outside the discipline of literary criticism. Not only have the audiences of rhetorical works been analysed,[55] its theories have also been applied to the interpretation of texts from other religious traditions.[56] Most notably as far as the present study is concerned, however, the notion of the "implied reader" has been used to analyse literary works from earlier epochs in order to derive information about the actual audience that existed at the historical moment of the work's appearance[57]— the very task that I

[55] See, for example, Douglas B. Park, "The meanings of 'audience'," *College English* 44, no. 3 (1982).

[56] See for example: J. L. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).; D. F. Tolmie, *Jesus' Farewell to His Disciples*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).; R. Kieffer, "The implied reader in John's gospel," in *New Readings in John*, ed. J. Nissen and S. Pederson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[57] See Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's audiences: Fictional, implied, intended, actual," *The Chaucer Review* 18, no. 2 (1983).

have set myself in this chapter with respect to the "Signs" chapter as well as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* more generally.

Thus, there does not seem to be any good reason why we cannot apply the theories reader-response criticism to an analysis of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, or other and religious and philosophical works more generally. Indeed, this is consistent with the position of Richard Rorty, who remarks:

> I take "literary theory" as the term is currently used in America, to be a species of philosophy, an attempt to weave together some texts traditionally labelled "philosophical" with other texts not so labeled. It names the practice of splicing together your favourite critics, novelists, poets, and such, and your favorite philosophers ...It lets one think of "philosophical" and "literary" texts as grist for the same mill.[58]

3.3.2 Summary of the argument to be presented in the remainder of the chapter

My argument that at least some members of the audience of the "Signs" chapter identified themselves as bodhisattvas rests on the following steps. First, it will be argued that a Mahāyāna *sūtra* should be treated as a communicative speech act. Then, we will consider Wolfgang Iser's argument that the recipient of the message inherent in a communicative speech act must bridge an "interpretive gap" in order to actualise (or "concretise") its meaning. The way the recipient does this is by assuming the role of the implied audience, which is a property of the text that must be identified, and, more importantly, identified *with*, if communication is to be successful. We will then examine the "Signs" chapter and attempt to show that its implied audience is that of the ordinary, human, and potentially reversible, bodhisattva. The concluding step in the argument will be to show that since the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* seems to have enjoyed significant success in India, there must have

[58] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy without principles," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 3 (1985): 463.

been at least some actual audiences who were willing to identify with its implied audience, i.e., the ordinary human bodhisattva.

3.3.3 A Mahāyāna *sūtra* is a communicative speech act

A Buddhist *sūtra* is similar to Iser's conception of the literary work in that they both exert an illocutionary force on their respective audiences.[59] The notion of illocutionary force originates in Speech Act theory as set forth by J. L. Austin, according to whom a speaker performs an illocutionary act when, by means of an utterance, he or she promises, instructs, confirms, or any other similar action that can be expressed using the words, "I hereby...."[60] Since, as argued above, *sūtra*s are prescriptive, they naturally have the illocutionary force of prescribing. They also have a world-to-language direction of fit, and can be thought of as successful or unsuccessful depending on whether the world is made to fit the prescription. It is this quality of being communicatively successful or unsuccessful in terms of the application of illocutionary force that makes *sūtra*s similar to Iser's conception of the literary work.

Just as in normal speech, an illocutionary act gains force only when the speaker's intention, or meaning, comes into being through the appropriate response from the addressee, in Iser's view, the language of fiction gains its force through the appropriate affective response in the reader. Comprehending the meaning of a literary text, he argues, is tantamount to responding appropriately to its illocutionary force. By taking such a view, Iser was trying to devise a critical method with which

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[59] Iser writes: "The language of literature resembles the mode of the illocutionary act." Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading : A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 60.

[60] See Kirsten Malmkjær, "Speech acts," in *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Payne (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1996).

the aesthetic value of a work of fiction could be measured. By considering a work of fiction as an illocutionary speech act, Iser was then able to establish criteria by which he could determine whether a novel was successful or not. He writes:

> The speech-act theory derived from ordinary language philosophy is an attempt to describe those factors that condition the success or failure of linguistic communication. These factors also pertain to the reading of fiction, which is a linguistic action in the sense that it involves an understanding of the text, or of what the text seeks to convey by establishing a relationship between the text and reader.[61]

Since the Mahāyāna *sūtra* is similar to the work of fiction insofar as both can be seen as speech acts invested with illocutionary force, it is possible to apply reader-response theory in order to investigate what the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* actually *did* to its audience, as opposed to simply something whose contents were to be understood.[62] Before doing so, however, the mechanism by which a work exerts an effect on its audience must be discussed.

3.3.4 Bridging the interpretive gap

As acts of communication, both Buddhist *sūtra*s and literary works require a sender, a message, and a receiver. Although the sender and recipient are obviously related in some way, Iser does not accept that the relationship is a simple one. If it were, there could only ever be one interpretation, and misunderstandings between sender and receiver would never occur. But since various interpretations are possible, we must question whether the two parties share a common code of communication, and if not, how communication actually takes place.

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[61] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 54-55.

[62] Iser writes: "What is important to readers, critics and authors alike is what literature *does* and not what it *means*." Ibid., 53.

Iser argues that a common code of communication can never exist between two people. To support his position, he cites the psychiatrist R. D. Laing, who writes:

> your experience of me is invisible to me and my experience of you is invisible to you. I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience ... All men are invisible to one another[63]

In other words, Iser believes that our experiences of the world are necessarily private, and we can never directly know the experiences of others. The best we can do is experience an observation of their behaviour. Iser finds it ironic, however, that it is precisely this invisibility, this "inexperienceability," of others' experiences that produces communication. He writes:

> Social communication ... arises out of the fact that people cannot experience how others experience them, and not out of the common situation or out of the conventions that join partners together.[64]

But due to the structure of interpersonal experience, communication necessarily involves interpretation. The gap that exists between individuals is bridged when we *interpret* others' verbalisations of their experiences. All communication, whether it involves speech, a work of fiction, or a *sūtra*, will require bridging, or filling in, the gaps that necessarily exist between our own experiences and the text into which the sender has encoded his or her message.

For Iser, what distinguishes literature from other forms of communication (including, it would seem, Buddhist *sūtra*s), and gives it its aesthetic value, is the fact that audiences are required to exercise creativity in their interpretation of a text. As they fill in the text's inherent gaps, they actualise, or "concretise," its meaning.

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[63] Cited in Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction between text and reader," in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan J. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 108.

[64] Ibid., 109.

But different audiences fill in the gaps differently, and therefore actualise different meanings. Iser provides an illustrative example:

> two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough and the other will make out a dipper. The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.[65]

Iser's example highlights well the restrictions that exist with respect to how we may interpret a text. Although individuals may interpret a text differently, it contains a structure (its "fixed stars") that sets the limits of allowable interpretation. The implication of this position is that since meaning arises as a result of the reader's interaction with the text, a literary work is neither identical with the text, nor with the reader's actualisation. Rather, it lies between the two and, according to Iser, is therefore always virtual and dynamic in nature.

Religious literature, it may be said, is characteristically less dynamic than literary works. Variation in interpretation is not encouraged, and commentaries exist to ensure that, to use Iser's example, the reader always sees a plough, and never a dipper. Although not as rigid and highly specific as some religious literature,[66] Buddhist *sūtra*s are typical of works that, as Iser puts it, "support prevailing systems" and "affirm specific norms with a view to training the reader according to the social code of the day."[67]

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[65] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 282.

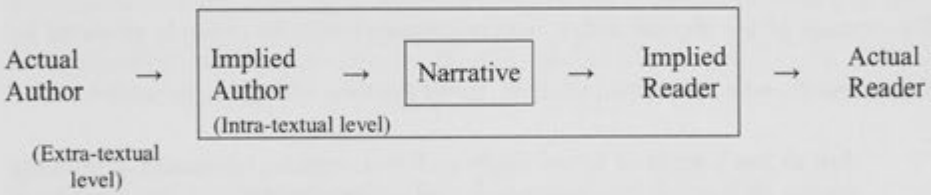
[66] The lack of room for interpretation in religious literature has been well illustrated in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, in which the overly precise style of religious writing that limits alternative interpretations is mocked: "Then, shalt thou count to three, no more, no less. Three shalt be the number thou shalt count, and the number of the counting shall be three. Four shalt thou not count, nor either count thou two, excepting that thou then proceed to three. Five is right out. Once the number three, being the third number, be reached, then..." Terry Gilliam et al., *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* [videorecording] (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Rainbow Entertainment, 2001).

[67] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 77.

Having argued that audiences always construct meaning through their interaction with a text, be it a literary work or a *sūtra*, we now turn to a discussion of the role that audiences must assume in order for communication to occur.

3.3.5 Real and virtual participants in the communication process

Although they differ in terminology, all reader-response theorists distinguish an abstract intra-textual reader from actual extra-textual readers. As explained below, in Iser's terminology the intra-textual reader is called the "implied" reader. He or she (or perhaps more appropriately, "it") is the counterpart to the implied author, which is the author's projected persona, and which may vary between works by the same author. The implied reader, as the following diagram indicates, is the reader to whom the implied author speaks.



Each of these virtual and actual players in the communication process will now be introduced. The extra-textual level of communication will be considered first, followed by the intra-textual level.

3.3.5.1 Actual Author

Generally speaking, the actual author of a text is not problematic. It is simply the person who composed the text. While in the case of contemporary works of fiction, identifying the actual author is usually uncontentious; in the case of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, however, it is not so straightforward, as different readers may posit different actual authors. While modern scholars usually consider the actual authors of the

sūtras to be anonymous monks, traditional Buddhists typically consider the actual author of a *sūtra* to be the historical Buddha.[68] This is an important point to bear in mind, as it will affect the way the *implied* author of a *sūtra* is posited.

3.3.5.2 Actual Reader

The idea of the actual reader is similarly straightforward. It is simply any person who reads the text. For our purposes, we should think of the actual reader of a *sūtra* as including not only members of the authors' community (in whom we are most interested), but later exegetes such as Haribhadra, modern scholars, and even people who may have read but rejected the *sūtra*.

3.3.5.3 Implied Author

The concept of the implied author is best illustrated with an example provided by Wayne Booth, who first coined the term. In the *Rhetoric of Fiction*, he writes:

> Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the different relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.[69]

Traditional Mahāyāna exegetes have long dealt with the fact that different *sūtras* appear to have different implied authors. Although they consider their actual author to be Śākyamuni, they also think of him as adopting different roles depending upon the needs and interests of different audiences. For example, they recognise Śākyamuni as projecting a certain implied authorship role in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, but another in the *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*.

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[68] Even if they believe that the sūtras were taught by Śākyamuni in his *nirmāṇakāya* form.

[69] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 71.

3.3.5.4 Implied Reader

Although all reader-response critics envisage an intra-textual reader that is in some way related to the actual extra-textual reader, they often define the function of intra-textual reader in different ways, with the result that a plethora of terminology has arisen. Accordingly, the intra-textual reader has been variously described as the implied reader,[70] the mock reader,[71] the narratee,[72] the intended reader,[73] the superreader,[74] the informed reader,[75] the ideal reader,[76] the abstract reader,[77] and the characterised reader.[78] Although it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these concepts, a helpful analysis that distinguishes most of these terms can be found in Wilson's article, "Readers in Texts."[79]

Since, in this chapter, we are considering the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in accordance with Iser's already outlined general theory of communication, we will limit ourselves to his conception of the intra-textual reader, namely the *implied*

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[70] Iser, *The Implied Reader*. A fuller discussion of the term is found in Iser, *The Act of Reading*.

[71] Walker Gibson, "Authors, speakers, readers, and mock readers," *College English* 11, no. 5 (1950). Reprint: in Reader-Response Criticism : From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, ed. Jane P. Tomkins; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

[72] Gerald Prince, "Introduction to the study of the narratee," in *Reader-Response Criticism : From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tomkins (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). See also Gerald Prince, *Narratology : The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, (Berlin; New York: Mouton, 1982), 16-26.

[73] Erwin Wolff, "Der intendierte leser," *Poetica* 4, no. 2 (1971).

[74] Michael Riffaterre, "Describing poetic structures: Two approaches to baudelaire's 'Les chats'," in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (New York: Doubleday, 1970; reprint, in Reader-Response Criticism : From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, ed. Jane P. Tomkins; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.), 215.

[75] Stanley Fish, "Literature in the reader: Affective stylistics," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970).

[76] Prince, "Introduction to the study of the narratee," 9-10. For a critique of the concept of the ideal reader, see Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 28-30.

[77] Hannalore Link, *Rezeptionsforschung: Eine Einführung in Methoden und Probleme* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1976). Cited in Wilson, "Readers in texts," 857.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

reader. The way in which readers construct meaning from a text by way of assuming the role of the implied reader will now be discussed.

3.3.6 How actual readers are impelled to construct meaning through assuming the role of the implied reader

Iser defines the implied reader as one who "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down not by an empirical reality, but by the text itself."[80] Wilson takes the idea further, and sees the implied reader as not only a property of literary works, but of all forms of communication. He states that the implied reader "exists in every work, since almost every 'message' presupposes a certain kind of recipient and implicitly defines him or her to some extent."[81] This is a powerful idea that allows us to theorise how communication occurs by oral, and even non-textual, means.

As argued above, since there is no common code of communication between the sender of a message and its recipient, a reader must always interpret a text in order to construct meaning. The concept of the implied reader provides us with a heuristic tool that enables us to explain how a work succeeds or fails to communicate with actual readers. Communication will be must successful when readers succeed in interpreting the text, a process that occurs by means of two steps. First, they must recognise the role that has been cast for them by the author, namely, that of the implied reader. Second, they must be willing to assume that role.

Consider how the author of a rhetorical work, for example, might make certain assumptions about a reader's willingness to be persuaded by rational argument and

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[80] Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 34.

[81] Wilson, "Readers in texts," 848.

compose the text accordingly. The actual reader, then, in order to most successfully construct the author's intended message—regardless of whether he or she is a rational person in real life—must be willing to assume the reader's role, implicit in the text, of a rational person. If the actual reader refuses to adopt the role, the work fails to communicate effectively. Walker Gibson describes how communication fails when readers are unwilling to assume the role expected of them by the text. Although Gibson uses different terminology for the intra-textual reader ("mock reader" for Iser's implied reader), his point is pertinent:

> A bad book … is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, … a role we will not play.[82]

The importance of the actual reader's assumption of the role of the implied reader is also emphasised by Wilson, who writes:

> The implied reader is an essential link in the line of communication between the author and every (real) reader, one that determines to a large extent the success and quality of the communication.[83]

Having thus argued that a work communicates most successfully when actual readers recognise and identify with the role demanded of them by the text, we now turn our attention to the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* to identify what kind of role it appears to demand of its readers.

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[82] Gibson, "Authors, speakers, readers, and mock readers," 5.

[83] Wilson, "Readers in texts," 859.

3.4 Self identity of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s historical audience

3.4.1 Identifying the implied audience

In this section I aim to show that the implied audience of the "Signs" chapter is a (reversible) bodhisattva, who views the irreversible bodhisattva as a model to be emulated.

From here on, I will no longer speak of an implied reader, but of an implied *audience*. This is in recognition of the fact that, in its earliest form, a *sūtra* was more likely to be heard than read. Indeed, it is quite possible that the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as we now have it may in fact represent an oral elaboration on the corresponding verses of the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*. Although it may be argued that the face-to-face nature of oral communication may require audiences to "fictionalise" themselves (to use Walter Ong's description of the process[84]) differently from audiences of written texts, Mahāyāna *sūtra*s appear to have been written down relatively early, and even a scribe needed to envisage a certain type of audience, not physically present at the time of transcription. Furthermore, since most writing on the subject of audience, as Douglas Park has observed, "only tacitly and often ambiguously"[85] distinguishes between readers and audiences, it will be appropriate to use the term "implied audience" for both written and oral texts.

How do we identify a text's implied audience? James E. Porter advises us that

[84] Walter J. Ong, "The writer's audience is always a fiction," PMLA 90, no. 1 (1975), 12.

[85] Park, "The meanings of 'Audience'," 247.

> the key to uncovering the implied reader(s) is in discovering the intertextual base of a text—that is the pre-texts, the knowledge base, that supports the text in question.[86]

Porter goes on to distinguish two types of intertextuality—iterability and presupposition. Iterability refers to the repeatability of stock phrases, references, allusions, and fragments borrowed from other texts. Using post-structuralist terminology, Porter calls these repeated fragments "traces."[87] His second type of intertextuality, presuppositions, refers to the assumptions that the text makes about its audience—things they already know and therefore do not need to be explicitly stated.

Looking at the "Signs" chapter, we find that it consists almost entirely of traces from other texts and contains virtually nothing that is unique. This is particularly apparent in the longer version of the *sūtra*, where standard lists such as the five *skandhas*, the six *pāramitās*, the thirty seven wings of enlightenment (*saptatriṃśad bodhipakṣyā dharma*), etc. make up much of the expanded portion of the text. However, since we are mainly interested in what irreversible bodhisattvas meant to the earliest Mahāyānists, we will confine our attention to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where we also find many traces from standard Buddhist literature. There we read, for example, of irreversible bodhisattvas who observe the ten virtues, enter into the four *dhyānas*, avoid rebirth in the three lower realms, have little sloth and torpor (*styāna-middha*), are unattached to gain, honour, and fame (*lābhasatkāraśloka*), and so on.

The fact that most of these traces are also found in Mainstream *sūtras* would suggest that the implied audience shares a significant portion of its knowledge base with

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[86] James Porter, *Audience and Rhetoric: An Archaeological Composition of the Discourse Community*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 68.

[87] Ibid., 69.

Mainstream Buddhism. Even those passages that appear to be indisputably Mahāyānistic—the attempts by Māra to dissuade the bodhisattva from his quest to gain highest enlightenment and pursue individual *nirvāṇa* instead—echo the "Padhāna Sutta" in the *Sutta-nipāta* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*,[88] which describes how Māra similarly attempts to dissuade the bodhisattva Gautama.

All of this could be interpreted as evidence that the implied audience of the "Signs" chapter is no different from that of the Mainstream *sūtra*s, and therefore *not* a bodhisattva. However, in the following analysis of Porter's second type of intertextuality—presupposition—it will become apparent that the implied audience *is* a bodhisattva, albeit one whose knowledge base is predominantly derived from Mainstream literature.

While the authors of the "Signs" chapter make a number of presuppositions about their audience, to attempt to list them all would be beyond the scope of this chapter and, moreover, unnecessary for supporting my argument that the implied audience is a bodhisattva. Instead, I will mention just four that I see as relevant, among which the third and fourth may be seen as particularly important.

First, the chapter introduces the irreversible bodhisattva without defining him. This suggests that the implied audience is already familiar and concerned with the concept, knowing at least that it referred to a bodhisattva who was not liable to turn back from highest enlightenment.

Second, there is also no explanation about why irreversible bodhisattvas were irreversible. From this we may therefore conclude that the authors assumed their

[88] *KN* 3.2. vv.429-431; Tr. see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1972), 19.

audiences were aware of teachings elsewhere that they were irreversible due to their skill-in-means, or perhaps as a result of having received a prediction.

Third, the fact that the chapter contains details about the many qualities that distinguish reversible bodhisattvas from irreversible ones suggests not only that the implied audience does not know these things,[89] the chapter also suggests that it should. If we further ask ourselves why the implied audience should need to distinguish between the behaviour of irreversible and reversible bodhisattvas, there appear to be two options: (1) the implied audience needs to be able identify other people as being (or not being) irreversible bodhisattvas; or (2) it needs to recognise its own behaviour as conforming (or not conforming) to that of an irreversible bodhisattva. These two possibilities have different implications for the self-identity of the implied audience. The first case does not necessarily imply self-identity as a bodhisattva (though it would imply the existence of bodhisattvas within the implied audience's community), while the second possibility does entail self-identity as a bodhisattva, albeit one who was irreversible.

The fourth presupposition that appears to be made about the implied audience's understanding of the irreversible bodhisattva is that irreversibility is something both desirable and achievable. The desirability of irreversibility is not only implicit in the descriptions of irreversible bodhisattvas as

> good men, great men, first-rate men, excellent men, glorious men, bulls of men, noble men, valiant men, heroic men, foremost of men, lotuses of men,

[89] We should be careful not to overstate this presupposition. Some signs represent virtues that any Buddhist would consider commendable and normative (e.g., wearing clean clothes), and their association with some of the more contentious signs such as how an irreversible bodhisattva earns a living may have been used as a persuasive strategy.

white lotuses of men, thoroughbred men, nāgas of men, lions of men, leaders of men...[90]

but also by the fact that none of the signs indicate that irreversible bodhisattvas are impossibly superhuman. Despite the grandiosity of the above list of epithets, even the most demanding of signs, such as being willing to sacrifice one's life (*ātmaparityāgam*) in order to attain dharma, although extreme, is still within the realms of possible human behaviour.

Thus, based on an analysis of some of the presuppositions that the authors of the "Signs" chapter appear to make about its audience, we can conclude that its implied audience is one that is familiar with many standard ideas found in Mainstream literature, yet is also someone that recognises the desirability and attainability of irreversible bodhisattvahood. Its self-identity therefore would appear to be that of an ordinary (i.e., reversible) bodhisattva who is desirous and capable of "moving to the next level" by emulating the behaviour of irreversible bodhisattva. Even if this interpretation of the implied audience is not accepted, the alternative interpretation is that it lived in a community where other persons were potentially irreversible bodhisattvas, and therefore desired to identify such persons based on their observable behaviour.

3.4.2 Evidence that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was successful in communicating its message

It is important to remember that the implied audience we have just described is an abstract entity. It is a property of the text, and not a real person or group of persons. What we are really interested in is not the implied audience of the "Signs" chapter,

[90] *satpuruṣairmahāpuruṣairatipuruṣaiḥ puruṣapravaraiḥ puruṣaśobhanaiḥ puruṣarṣabhaiḥ puruṣodāraiḥ puruṣaśauṭīraiḥ puruṣapuṃgavaiḥ puruṣadhuryaiḥ puruṣapadmaiḥ puruṣapuṇḍarīkaiḥ puruṣājāneyaiḥ puruṣanāgaiḥ puruṣasiṃhaiḥ puruṣadamyasārathibhiḥ/ Aṣṭa*, 166 ln.11-14.

but its *actual* audience, particularly the actual audience that existed at the time of the text's production.

It was argued above that a Mahāyāna *sūtra* is a normative work with the illocutionary force of prescription, and thus has a fundamentally different direction of fit from a descriptive text. Therefore, rather than try to make judgements about the accuracy with which a *sūtra* represents historical factuality, we should ask whether it was communicatively successful or not. To be "successful" means that the injunctions contained in the *sūtra* were carried out by actual people. This, I have argued, implies that there must have been at least some real people who were prepared to adopt the audience role demanded of them by the text.

Having argued that its implied audience of the "Signs" chapter was the ordinary bodhisattva who desired to emulate the behaviour of the ideal, irreversible bodhisattva, the last step in the argument is to demonstrate that the chapter was successful. If we can do so, we may conclude that there must have been at least some persons among the *sūtra*'s actual historical audience who, even if only temporarily, saw themselves as bodhisattvas and viewed the irreversible bodhisattva as an ideal to be emulated.

Wilson has claimed that the implied audience "will almost certainly possess various characteristics of actual readers and reflect the author's historical setting in many ways."[91] This is a claim that is likely to be valid as far as Buddhist *sūtra*s are concerned, for if the implied audience were something quite different from actual historical audiences, its members would not have seen it as speaking to them, and the *sūtra* would have disappeared without a trace. All the injunctions that we often

[91] Wilson, "Readers in texts," 851.

find in Mahāyāna *sūtra*s about copying out, studying, and teaching the *sūtra* would have been ignored. The mere fact that a *sūtra* has survived suggests that its implied audience resembled actual historical audiences.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the "Signs" chapter appears to have originally been an independent work (a "pamphlet" perhaps, or a sermon that circulated orally) that was incorporated into the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* during the second stage of development of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*.[92] This inclusion is perhaps the first indicator of its success. There is, in addition, other evidence to suggest that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as a whole was successful. It was the basis for extended versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, it was frequently copied, widely disseminated, and translated into other languages, commentaries were written on it, etc. Notwithstanding the fact that sūtras were often reproduced by people who did not understand them simply because it was considered meritorious, it is hard to imagine how this could have occurred if there were not at least some people who saw the *sūtra* as speaking to a role that they were willing to assume, namely that of the ordinary, reversible—but potentially irreversible—bodhisattva.

3.4.3 Conclusion: The relationship between the audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *avinivartanīya* bodhisattva

Most of this chapter has been devoted to establishing a fairly basic thesis that some scholars may see as self-evident. Yet the very fact that in present times people do not typically identify themselves as bodhisattvas or study the "Signs" chapter in order to find out what they must do to become (or at least be considered as) irreversible, requires us to come up with an explanation to support our claims that

[92] See Conze, "The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought," 130.

anyone ever did. The reader-response approach taken in this chapter, while making certain assumptions about the normative nature of the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, has, I believe, provided some theoretical support for the claims that have been made about the self identity of the earliest audiences of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the "Signs" chapter in particular.

In the absence of any other sources of evidence, I suggest that the approach may also be useful to corroborate or call into question the conclusions that have already been drawn by other scholars about the self-identity and possibly the worldview of the audiences of other Buddhist works, complex though those identities and worldviews may be. Indeed, a reader-response approach to the study of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s and their commentarial tradition would make a fascinating study, as the different implied audiences of the commentarial works would reflect the changing views of self and the world among audiences of different eras.[93] A brief attempt to contrast the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* with that of the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* has been undertaken in chapter 8. A more detailed study is, however, unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

Finally, our theoretical approach has at least two weaknesses that must be acknowledged. One which we will return to in chapter 8 is the extent to which it is possible to objectively define the implied audience. Although we have argued that it was the ordinary, reversible bodhisattva who aspired to irreversibility, at least one

[93] Jauss describes the potential of his theoretical approach to the study of works from the past as follows: "The method of the history of reception is essential for the understanding of literary works which lie in the distant past. Whenever the writer of a work is unknown, his intent not recorded, or his relationship to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question of how the text is 'properly' to be understood, that is according to its intention and its time, can best be answered if the text is considered in contrast to the background of the works which the author could expect his contemporary public to know either explicitly or implicitly." Jauss, "Literary history as a challenge to literary theory," 19.

other possibility was considered, albeit one with consequences that did not harm our contention that at least some early Mahāyānists identified themselves as bodhisattvas. The second weakness is that we have partly relied on extra-textual information to establish the "success" of the text. This is not necessarily a fault, as no attempt to establish the self identity of people who lived around two thousand years ago can be expected to rely on one source of information or one method. In this respect, the method that has been adopted in this chapter should be seen as simply one of several that scholars can apply in their historical studies of Buddhism. Where archaeological and epigraphic evidence is lacking, however, it may yet prove to be one of the most useful.

4 THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MAHĀYĀNA

By creating institutional reality, we increase human power enormously.

John Searle [1]

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued that the irreversible bodhisattva functioned as a normative ideal for emulation by ordinary people who identified themselves as bodhisattvas. While this may seem an unsurprising conclusion, it is significant in view of the fact that by the time epigraphic evidence for the existence of Mahāyāna begins to appear in the middle of the third century C.E., persons belonging to the tradition do not refer to themselves as bodhisattvas, preferring instead terms such as those who have "set out on the Mahāyāna path" (*mahāyāna-samprasthita*).[2] Similarly, other inscriptional evidence from the late fifth century C.E. refers to people who are Mahāyānist (*māhāyānika*) and Follower of Mahāyāna (*mahāyānānuyāyin*), but not bodhisattvas,[3]

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[1] John Searle, "What is an institution?" *Journal of Institutional Economics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 11.

[2] See Mark Allon and Richard Salomon, "New evidence for Mahayana in early Gandhāra," *The Eastern Buddhist* 41, no. 1 (2010): 3-4.

[3] See Gregory Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21 (1979): 10.

While the use of such terms does not necessarily mean that these early Mahāyānists did not also see themselves as bodhisattvas, since we do know that in present times people who identify themselves as followers of Mahāyāna do not generally identify themselves as bodhisattvas, it may be hypothesised that this shift in self-identity may have occurred relatively early. In this chapter we will therefore explore the possible link between the apparent disappearance of self-identifying bodhisattvas as a distinct community and what some scholars have spoken of as the "institutionalisation" of Mahāyāna.[4] This was a process that seems to have occurred during the fourth to fifth centuries C.E., prior to which it is likely that there were a number of distinct localised bodhisattva traditions, or "Mahāyāna groups," as they have been described by Jonathan Silk.[5] Whether these traditions were mainly distinguished through their affiliation with different *nikāyas*,[6] or by way of cultic practices centred on different texts,[7] is unclear.

A reader-response analysis of early Mahāyāna *sūtras* would suggest that their audiences may have been quite diverse. While the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, as we have seen, is the human bodhisattva, the almost super-human description of the entry-level bodhisattva in the *Daśabhūmika*, for example, implies

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[4] See, for example, Richard S. Cohen, "India," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 357-358. Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 100, 174.

[5] Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 371.

[6] See Heinz Bechert, "Mahāyāna literature in Sri Lanka: The early phase," in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*, ed. L. Lancaster (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, 1977), 364.

[7] See Gregory Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' in the Vajracchedikā: Notes on the cult of the book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17 (1975): 181.

an audience that was somewhat different.[8] In order to receive the message of such *sūtra*s, actual audiences would have had to assume the role of an aspiring bodhisattva, or perhaps that of a devotee of one of the great bodhisattvas, but not an actual bodhisattva.

The so-called institutionalisation of Mahāyāna may be thought of as a period of "leveling,"[9] during which various Mahāyāna *sūtra*s became widely disseminated and the different discourses that inhabited them became shared. It may also be thought of as a period in which the career of the bodhisattva became more glorified, the bodhisattva path became more systematised, and the Mahāyāna worldview became more expansive, as it included, yet subordinated, other soteriological career options.

To describe these developments as the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna, however, assumes that we know what an "institution" is. While it is not difficult to think of monasteries as institutions, within a general sense of the institution as an organisation in which people's behaviour is regulated by certain rules, to think of Mahāyāna as an institution will, I shall show, require us to define the term more precisely. It will also be necessary to explain institutionalisation—what is it, and how does it occur?

Although it would make a fascinating topic for research, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to write a comprehensive institutional history of Mahāyāna. Were such an

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[8] The *Daśa* states: "Immediately upon producing the thought of enlightenment one advances to become a bodhisattva; one surpasses the level of an ordinary person... through standing on this [stage], a bodhisattva becomes lord of Jambudvīpa..." *yena cittotpādena sahotpannena bodhisattvo'tikrānto bhavati, pṛthagjñānabhūmīmavakrānto bhavati... yo'syāṁ pratiṣṭhito bodhisattvo bhūyastvena jambūdvīpeśvaro bhavati... Daśa*, 11, 21. Cf. Tr. Honda, "Annotated translation of the Daśabhūmika-sūtra," in *Studies in South, East, and Central Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1968), 128, 139.

[9] See Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 371.

account to be written, however, it would, I venture, include some of the topics that will be discussed, albeit in a somewhat abbreviated manner, in this chapter. Thus, it might examine, for example, Akira Hirakawa's by now well-known question regarding the "institutional basis" from which Mahāyāna arose. It might also distinguish the many senses with which the word "institution" has been loosely used in Buddhist Studies. Perhaps most importantly, it would explain the institutionalisation process in terms of the important relationship between praxis, texts, and Mahāyāna discourse.

This chapter, which might be considered a prolegomenon to an institutional history of Mahāyāna, begins with an examination of the basic question raised in Hirakawa's important article on the lay origins of Mahāyāna, namely: what was the institutional basis of Mahāyāna? I argue that, due to the inherent ambiguity of the term "institutional basis," Hirakawa's question has been understood in different ways. While this has led to at least one exciting new theory on how Mahāyāna may have begun, it is my contention that the question will remain disputed as long as we have not clarified exactly what we mean by "institution."

In the second section of the chapter I therefore explore the meaning of "institution" as it is used by several scholars. I argue that their definitions of the concept are too restrictive, leading in one case to the conclusion that Mahāyāna cannot ever be considered an institution, and in the other case to the conclusion that institutionalisation of Mahāyāna means nothing more than its monasticisation. Both these accounts tend to overlook the fact that an enormous amount of literature, known retrospectively as Mahāyāna *sūtras*, was produced and disseminated from the very earliest stages of the movement, a situation that implies, I argue, the

existence of some sort of institution beyond the somewhat limited senses of "monastery" or "*nikāya*."

In the third section of the chapter I work toward a formal definition of "institution" that can be applied to Mahāyāna in both the earlier and later stages of its development. I draw on the theories of several well-known modern theorists of institutions, including Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and John Searle. By citing passages from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, I argue that the bodhisattva and the irreversible bodhisattva were but two of many interrelated institutions in early Mahāyāna. From there, I contend that early Mahāyāna did have an institutional existence, but one somewhat different from that envisaged by those writers who speak either explicitly or implicitly of a pre- and post-institutionalised Mahāyāna.

The fourth section of the chapter is devoted to an explanation of the role of texts in the institutionalisation process. I develop Richard S. Cohen's theory of how Mahāyāna was institutionalised[10] by highlighting the way in which certain *sūtras* are more likely than others to become embedded in the wider discourse, thereby shaping the more-or-less singular entity we can think of as "institutionalised" Mahāyāna.

4.2 The institutional basis of Mahāyāna

4.2.1 Hirakawa's question

Akira Hirakawa's well-known question, "What … constituted the institutional basis from which Mahāyāna arose?"[11] is curious. Why, we may wonder, did he seek to discover the *institutional basis* of Mahāyāna, when most other scholars had tried

[10] See Cohen, "India," 355.

[11] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 85.

instead to identify its *origins*? It is not entirely clear whether he phrased the question the way he did in order to foreshadow his own conclusions, or whether he intended to draw a distinction between two types of origin—doctrinal and institutional. Nevertheless, such a distinction is, I believe, helpful, since it allows us to approach the problem in more than one way: on the one hand, we can explain the origins of Mahāyāna in terms of what people thought; on the other hand we can explain its origins in terms of what people did.

An example of the first type of explanation is A. L. Basham's hypothesis that Mahāyāna grew out of a belief in the existence of past and future buddhas.[12] This explanation, which echoes Mircea Eliade's theory that in ancient societies events in "sacred time" were considered paradigmatic and reoccurring,[13] suggests that without a belief in future buddhas it would have been impossible for anyone to see himself or herself as a potential buddha, and hence as a bodhisattva. This is a doctrinal explanation since it is an account for the origins of Mahāyāna in terms of what people thought.

Examples of the second type of explanation are Gombrich's hypothesis that the rise of Mahāyāna was due to the use of writing,[14] or Schopen's theory that it arose from the bibliolatrous sects that worshipped the "spot on the earth" (*pṛthivīpradeśa*) where certain texts were kept or taught.[15] These may be thought of as institutional,

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[12] A. L. Basham, "The evolution of the concept of the bodhisattva," in *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, ed. Leslie S. Kawamura (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1981), 27-28.

[13] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 70.

[14] Richard Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna began," in *The Buddhist Forum, Vol. 1*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), 21.

[15] Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet'." For Schopen's slightly modified views on the topic, see Schopen, "Mahāyāna," 497.

as opposed to doctrinal, theories since they tend to throw light on how the practices that allowed Mahāyāna ideas to spread and develop.

A study of Mahāyāna that examines its development as an institution as opposed to its development as a system of doctrines may have several advantages. Whereas doctrines may tell us what a few scholars may have thought, institutions, by their nature, tell us about how groups, sometimes large groups, of people acted. Compare, for example, theories on the Buddha's omniscience with the institutionalised taking of the bodhisattva vow. While interpretations of the Buddha's omniscience may have played an important role in the development in Mahāyāna doctrines of three or four *buddhakāya*s, these would have meant little to all but a few scholarly monks. On the other hand, the capacity for the formalised taking of the bodhisattva vow to regulate the behaviour of many ordinary people may, I suggest, have been more significant in the development and spread of Mahāyāna than abstruse theories about the content and extent of a buddha's knowledge.

Returning to Hirakawa's question regarding the institutional basis of Mahāyāna, since his answer is by now well known—and widely disputed[16]—it is not my intention to add to the debate in these pages. What I would like to settle first, however, is exactly what Hirakawa *meant* by "institutional basis," a term that is inherently ambiguous, since it can be parsed in two ways. While most scholars construe it appositionally as "an institution that is a basis" of something (e.g., Mahāyāna), at least one well-known scholar appears to have interpreted it

[16] See, for example, Shizuka Sasaki, "A study on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 30, no. 1 (1997); Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 378-382; Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 89-93.

syntactically with the first term in the possessive case, i.e., as "an institution's basis." These different interpretations will now be discussed.

4.2.2 Ambiguity of the term "institutional basis"

The term "institutional basis" seems to have found a place in the Buddhist Studies lexicon. Apart from featuring in any discussion on the origins of Mahāyāna in which Hirakawa's theory is critiqued, a number of writers have begun to use the term (or a close synonym) in their historical accounts of various Buddhist traditions. A typical example is the following from Georges Dreyfus (emphasis added):

> The other two monasteries, 'Bras spung … and Se ra, were founded shortly thereafter by two of Tsong kha pa's direct disciples, thus creating the famous three seats, the *institutional basis* for the future growth of his tradition.[17]

The first point to note is that in this, and the many other examples to be found in the same volume,[18] "institutional basis" is parsed appositionally such that it refers something that *is an institution*. A second point to note is that it refers to a monastery. Nearly all references to institutional bases outside of critiques of Hirakawa's theories refer to institutional bases in this way; i.e., as institutions in the sense of places of learning, with a physical and geographical presence. This, I submit, is a rather restricted and concrete sense of the word, and it is hoped that the broader definition of "institution" (and by implication, of "institutional basis") to be offered later in the chapter will enable scholars of Buddhism to explore their topics in a more abstract and theoretical way.

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[17] Georges Dreyfus, "Tsong kha pa," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2004), 861.

[18] See Christian K. Wedemeyer, "Bon," in ibid., 67; Jamie Hubbard, "Sanjie Jiao (Three Stages School)," in ibid., 745; Thomas A. Tweed, "United States," in ibid., 866; Cohen, "India," in ibid., 353.

It is noteworthy, however, that Hirakawa does not use the term to refer to a place of learning. When we look at what he argues actually constitutes "the institutional basis from which Mahāyāna arose,"[19] it is clear that he is referring to an institution in the sense of a religious practice, namely, *stūpa* worship. This is evident when he writes, "With the development of *stūpa* worship *as an institution* ..."[20] (emphasis added).

As is well known, Hirakawa argues that *stūpa* worship was not only an institution, it was also the basis of Mahāyāna. He writes:

> Stūpa worship itself cannot be called Mahāyāna Buddhism, but the first step in this direction was taken in the transformation from stūpa worship to bodhisattvayāna.[21]

It is thus clear that Hirakawa intended "institutional basis" to refer to an institution in the sense of a certain kind of regulated religious practice that functioned in this case as a forerunner to Mahāyāna. His critics, however, have sometimes construed the term quite differently. While this may have resulted in their criticisms not quite hitting their mark, they have also been useful for the way in which they have opened up other ways in which to understand the concept of "institution." Two such interpretations will now be discussed.

4.2.3 "Institutional basis" as a body of people

Richard Gombrich's refutation of Hirakawa begins by identifying two of his main conclusions. The first is that "the Mahāyāna adherents were composed of an entirely

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[19] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 85.

[20] Ibid.: 105.

[21] Ibid.

different group of people from the Nikāya Buddhists."[22] The second is that "these adherents were brought together by the cult of the stūpa."[23] In order to refute Hirakawa's thesis, Gombrich holds that it is only necessary to disprove the first conclusion. His reasoning is that if the earliest Mahāyānists were not "a socially distinct" body of people, they could not have existed as a cult of *stūpa* worshippers, the assumption apparently being that members of cults necessarily constitute distinct social groups. He writes:

> I shall concentrate on AH's first conclusion, because if that conclusion is invalid the second one fails automatically.[24]

Gombrich goes further. He argues that Hirakawa's basic question regarding what constituted the institutional basis of Mahāyāna becomes irrelevant if it can be shown that no such basis for Mahāyāna ever existed. He writes:

> [Hirakawa's] question itself has no foundation if one can show that there is no reason to suppose that there was any such institutional base at all.[25]

It seems, however, that Gombrich construes "institutional basis" somewhat differently from the way Hirakawa does when he takes it as referring to the separate and communal nature of a group of religious practitioners, rather than the religious practices themselves. He writes:

> ...when AH asks, half way through his article, "What, then, constituted the institutional base [sic] from which Mahāyāna Buddhism arose?," having

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[22] Gombrich, "Organized bodhisattvas," 308. Original citation in Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 85.

[23] Gombrich, "Organized bodhisattvas," 308. The word "cult" is of course a pejorative term. However, since it is used by both Gombrich and Schopen, whose views are discussed in this section, it is necessary for me to also use it, albeit with some reluctance and with an acknowledgement of its pejorative connotations.

[24] Ibid., 311.

[25] Ibid.

> made it clear that by "institutional base" [sic] he means a body of people entirely distinct from the monastic Saṅgha founded by the Buddha ...[26]

Given that Gombrich talks elsewhere of the *saṃgha* as an institution,[27] we can infer that although the "body of people" he mentions on this occasion is for him an institution, it is one that never existed, and therefore could not have served as the basis of Mahāyāna. But having construed institutional basis necessarily as a *group* of people Gombrich has not, I believe, demolished the foundation of Hirakawa's initial question, as he claims to have set out to do. Only insofar as his assumption that "cultic" practices entail socially and physically separated groups of people is justified, he *may* have succeeded in showing that the earliest Mahāyānists did not constitute a distinct group, but he does not refute Hirakawa's claim that a tradition of *stūpa* worshippers once existed. Moreover, given that Hirakawa does not claim that the members of this so-called cult were actually Mahāyānists, his conclusion that the tradition constituted a kind of forerunner to Mahāyāna (or its "institutional basis"), strictly speaking, remains unaffected by Gombrich's criticisms.

Nevertheless, Gombrich's notion of an institution as a body of people raises several interesting questions. What is it about a group of people engaged in a cultic practice that makes Gombrich label them an institution? Does it have anything to do with the reason why many other scholars consider a monastery an institution? To explore these questions further, let us consider another scholar who, like Hirakawa, thinks of a cultic practice itself as constituting an institution.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] "[T]he institution which performed the function of preserving the Buddhist texts must have been the Saṅgha." Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna began," 25.

4.2.4 "Institutional basis" as a spot on the earth

While Schopen's article on the cult of the book is not specifically devoted to refuting Hirakawa in the way that Gombrich's article is, his own findings, he says, do not support Hirakawa's conclusions. However, he still considers Hirakawa's question important when he writes:

> If, ... [Hirakawa's] conclusions are in doubt, the importance of his initial question as to "what constituted the institutional basis from which Mahāyāna arose" is most certainly not.[28]

Based on his reading of *sūtra*s such as the *Vajracchedikā* and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā,* Schopen states that the "spot on the earth" (*pṛthivīpradeśa*) where a *sūtra* was stored may have been an institutional basis or "organisational centre"[29] from which Mahāyāna arose. He writes:

> we would like only to suggest that such *pṛthivīpradeśāḥ* may well have formed one of the 'institutional bases' ... out of which early Mahāyāna arose.[30]

Clearly, a "spot on the earth" is not itself an institution, but as an organisational centre it could be interpreted as the basis of one. This suggests that Schopen has construed "institutional basis" not appositionally as "institution which is a basis," but syntactically as "institution's basis." The institution in this case is apparently a bibliolatrous cult, while its basis is a *pṛthivīpradeśa*.

Despite construing "institutional basis" differently from Hirakawa, Schopen understands "institution" similarly in the sense of the religious practices performed by a group of people who share a common belief. It should also be remarked that his theory is important for two reasons. First, it allows for a version of early Mahāyāna

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[28] Schopen, "The phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet'," 180.

[29] Ibid.: 181.

[30] Ibid.

that may have been split along "cultic" lines in addition to, or instead of, along sectarian (i.e., *nikāya*) ones. Second, although texts do not necessarily need to be the focus of institutions, they are, I shall argue, an important part of the institutionalisation process, and it is therefore significant that Schopen recognises their great importance in early Mahāyāna. These two aspects of Schopen's theory, which will be taken up again below, are summarised when he writes:

> A corollary to this would be the assumption that, since each text placed itself at the center of its own cult, early Mahāyāna (from a sociological point of view), rather than being an identifiable single group, was in the beginning a loose federation of a number of distinct though related cults, all of the same pattern, but each associated with its specific text.[31]

4.2.5 Summary

Although the contributions of Gombrich and Schopen to the question of what constituted the origins of Mahāyāna are useful, both have interpreted a key term in Hirakawa's initial question in ways somewhat differently from that intended by Hirakawa. I have argued that by "institutional basis that gave rise to Mahāyāna" he was referring to *the institution that was the basis*, or forerunner, of Mahāyāna, which in his opinion was the practice of *stūpa* worship. Although the idea that *stūpa* worshippers were a distinct *gaṇa* may be consistent with other views he has expressed on the origins of Mahāyāna, strictly speaking, his use of the term "institution" does not necessarily imply a socially distinct group of people in the sense understood by Gombrich. Nor does his use of "institutional basis" refer, as Schopen understands the term, to the actual focal point of certain institutionalised practices that may have played a key role in the rise of Mahāyāna, i.e., the *stūpa* itself. The foregoing discussion has revealed the ambiguity surrounding key terms in

[31] Ibid.

Hirakawa's question, the answer to which will remain disputed until we are able to agree on a definition of institution. It is to that task that I now turn.

4.3 Interpretations of "institution" in contemporary Buddhist scholarship

Before developing a formal definition of "institution," however, I shall first explore the way in which two prominent scholars have used the term with respect to Mahāyāna. First, I consider Jonathan Silk's argument that Mahāyāna does not have any independent institutional existence. I argue that his conclusions are based on a restricted concept of institution that only allows him to show that Mahāyānists did not constitute a sect that could be distinguished on the basis of a separate *vinaya*. This, I maintain, is not sufficient grounds to deny Mahāyāna institutional status. I then turn to Reginald Ray's thesis that some of the earliest Mahāyānists were not institutionalised because they did not reside in monasteries. It is anticipated that this discussion will illustrate the need for the more formal definition of "institution" that will be developed in Section 4.4.

4.3.1 Mahāyāna was not an institution because it was not a nikāya

It was noted above that Gombrich has used the term "institution" to refer to the ordained community of monks and nuns, i.e., the Buddhist *saṃgha*.[32] However, such an idea appears to be rejected by Silk, who writes:

> The only meaningful candidate for a "Buddhist Church" in India is the so-called Universal Community, the *saṃgha* of the four directions. However, it appears that this was a purely abstract and imaginary entity, with no institutional existence.[33]

Although it is possible that Gombrich's *saṃgha* and Silk's "*saṃgha* of the four directions" are different entities, Silk's statement is nevertheless interesting for the

[32] See Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna began," 25.

[33] Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 363.

way it implies that institutions should not be abstract entities. Not only does Silk argue that the *saṃgha* had no institutional existence due to being an "imaginary entity," he also claims that both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna lacked any institutional existence for similar reasons. He writes:

> [I]t is quite certain, however, that the referent of the term "Hīnayāna," when it occurs in Buddhist texts themselves, is never any existent institution or organization, but a rhetorical fiction. …[34]

And,

> we posit Mahāyāna Buddhism as a movement …which has doctrinal, but no institutional existence as such …[35]

Hīnayāna's alleged lack of institutional existence does not particularly concern us here, except insofar as its being a "rhetorical fiction" applies also to Mahāyāna. In developing his argument against the institutional existence of Mahāyāna, however, Silk maintains it is because Mahāyāna "is neither a *nikāya*, an orthodox ordination lineage, nor a *vāda*, a school defined by doctrines."[36]

Let us examine these two terms, *nikāya* and *vāda*, more closely. For Silk a *nikāya* is a "sect," i.e., a group distinguished on the basis of its particular *vinaya*. He writes:

> By the term "sect" I follow La Vallée Poussin and intend a translation of the term *nikāya*. A *nikāya* is defined strictly speaking not by any doctrine but by adherence to a common set of monastic rules, a Vinaya.… All independent institutional groups in Indian Buddhism, as defined by their (at least pro forma) allegiance to their own governing Vinaya literature, are sects.[37]

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[34] Ibid.: 367.

[35] Ibid.: 383.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.: 363.

Thus, if Mahāyāna had existed in India as an independent institution, then it would have to have been a *nikāya*. But since it was not,[38] Silk and a number of other scholars argue that it could not have had any independent institutional existence.

The second term, *vāda*, in the sense of a philosophical or doctrinal school, is not considered by Silk to be an institution.[39] He writes:

> The term "school" … refers to the notion designated in Sanskrit by the word *vāda*. Schools are defined primarily by doctrinal characteristics, and are associations of those who hold to common teachings and follow the same intellectual methods, but they have no institutional existence.[40]

Silk's point is that monks who subscribed to the views of different doctrinal schools did not belong to different institutions if they shared a common ordination lineage. Thus, even if Mahāyāna were a *vāda* (a position Silk rejects), it would still not have an independent institutional existence, since the only entities that enjoy such status are *nikāya*s.

In order to better understand Silk's position, it is important to remember that he is not only denying the institutional status of Mahāyāna, but that of Hīnayāna too. He is arguing against the view that the two "traditions" (for want of a better word) represented two antagonistic schools of Indian Buddhism, a position that is typified by remarks such as the following by Nalinaksha Dutt:

> They [i.e., the works of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, etc.] present materials illustrative of the conflict for ascendency that was going on

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[38] Gombrich, for example, writes: "*Mahāyāna is not a sect*: it is a relgious movement which affected monks regardless of their sect….There is no such thing as a Mahāyānist *Vinaya*." Richard Gombrich, "The evolution of the sangha," in *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 82.

[39] Silk does not provide examples of 'schools', but it is reasonable to assume he is thinking of *Madhyamaka*, *Yogācāra*, etc.

[40] Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 364.

> between the Hīnayānists and the Mahāyānists. ...The first two centuries of the Christian era witnessed a conflict between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna ...[41]

It is also an idea that is sometimes found in the works of more recent scholars, such as Jeffrey Samuels, who not only sees Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna as opposing schools, but also as opposing *institutions*. While questioning the validity of distinguishing between *śrāvaka-yāna* and *bodhisattva-yāna* purely along Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna lines, Samuels makes the point that ideology (by which he means the soteriological options of arhatship or buddhahood) must be distinguished from "institutional affiliation," i.e., the memberships of the Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna schools. He writes:

> the dichotomy [between *śrāvaka-yāna* and Mahāyāna] presented by both Asaṅga and Candrakīrti sets up an opposition between an ideology and an institutional affiliation.... this opposition contrasts one ideology (arahantship through following the *śrāvaka-yāna*) with an institutional affiliation (Mahāyāna Buddhism). In order for a more accurate distinction to be constructed, then, we must either compare the *bodhisattva-yāna* with the *śrāvaka-yāna*, or compare a Mahāyāna Buddhist school with a Hīnayāna Buddhist school.[42]

Although Silk is right to highlight the rhetorical nature of the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna dichotomy, his insistence that Mahāyāna did not have any *independent* institutional existence because it did not represent one of the *nikāya* traditions assumes that the *nikāya*s themselves were somehow independent institutional entities. While this may be true if *nikāya*s were distinguished from one another solely on the basis of ordination lineage, there were, as I show below, apparently a number of other bases for distinction. As such, it may be better to think of the *nikāya*s as entities that acquire their institutional nature in a number of ways, and the privileging of ordination lineage over other bases of distinction may therefore be restrictive and unjustified.

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[41] Nalinaksha Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, 2nd ed., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 80-82, 258.

[42] Jeffrey Samuels, "The bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda theory and practice: A reevaluation of the bodhisattva-śrāvaka opposition," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (1997): 400-401.

Silk's position that the basic institutional entities of Indian Buddhism were just the *nikāyas* or "sects" of Mainstream Buddhism was later[43] taken up by Egil Fronsdal. One of the arguments presented by Fronsdal to deny institutional existence for Mahāyāna is its lack of self-identity or self-awareness. Based on evidence from the Chinese translations of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, in which the term "Mahāyāna" appears to refer only to a soteriological option, and not to anything resembling a *nikāya* in terms of self-awareness, Fronsdal rejects the idea of Mahāyāna as "a sociologically or institutionally separate group," [44] and writes that:

> there is no evidence that [the authors of the earliest bodhisattva sutras] considered themselves as belonging to a new and separate institutional or sectarian form of Buddhism.[45]

Apart from the fact that there does not appear to have been anyone who has actually argued that Mahāyāna constituted a nineteenth sect of Indian Buddhism,[46] there are, I believe, several problems with insisting that only *vinaya*-based *nikāyas*, or sects, had institutional existence, and that doctrinally-based schools did not. We cannot ignore the fact that Mahāyāna eventually came to refer to a tradition to which actual people counted themselves as belonging, or "following," as we know from the occurrence in inscriptions of the term *mahāyānānuyāyin*.[47] It thus becomes clear that Mahāyāna developed a sense of self-identity similar to the so-called "sects" in Indian Buddhism, except that it was based on a distinctive soteriological option

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[43] The views of Silk reported in this thesis are to be found in his 2002 article, Jonathan A. Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?". However, they are similar to those he expresses in his 1994 PhD thesis, and which were taken up by Fronsdal in his 1998 PhD thesis.

[44] Fronsdal, "The dawn of the bodhisattva path", 71.

[45] Ibid., 61.

[46] Jean Przyulski, in a passage translated in Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 362., stated that "It seems inexplicable that for such a long time the Mahāyāna has been taken as a 19th sect, separate from the Hīnayānistic 18 sects." However, I am not aware of any scholar who actually described it in such terms.

[47] See Gregory Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions," 10.

rather than a *vinaya* code. Moreover, while Fronsdal makes much of the fact that Mahāyāna shows little awareness of itself as Mahāyāna, he offers no explanation for why, beginning in the fifth century C.E. we find that there is a sudden increase in the identification of texts and persons as Mahāyānist or whether this meant that Mahāyāna did become an institution at this time. He only states that "it would be interesting to study what shift this may represent."[48]

In any case, to insist that Buddhist sects be differentiated only according to their *vinaya* codes may be incorrect. Collett Cox, for example, reports that sectarian fragmentation was based on many factors, and not just *vinaya*. She writes that:

> [D]ifferent source texts emphasize different factors that contributed to sectarian fragmentation. These contributing factors include geographical separation, language differences, doctrinal disagreements, selective patronage, the influence of non-Buddhists, lineage loyalties to specific teachers, the absence of a recognised supreme authority or unifying institutional structure, varying degrees of laxness regarding or active disagreements over disciplinary codes, and specialization by various monastic groups in differing segments of Buddhist scripture.[49]

With such an extensive list of criteria by which one sect may have been distinguished from another, the basis on which a sect may be said to be institutionally distinct becomes somewhat uncertain. Another prominent scholar of sectarian Buddhism, André Bareau, while recognising that the *nikāya*s consisted of people who were "subject to the same rules," also states that they were distinguished from one another on the basis of teachings of different masters:

> We will call *sect* or *school* what Sanskrit Buddhism calls *nikāya* and Pāli Buddhism calls *ācariyavāda*. A *nikāya* is a group of people subject to the same rules. More generally, it is also a collection of objects, such as the collections of *Sūtra*s called *nikāya* in Pāli. … The Pāli word *ācariyavāda* means oral teaching (*vāda*) of a master (*ācariya*) and, rather, corresponds to

[48] Fronsdal, "The dawn of the bodhisattva path", 70.

[49] Collett Cox, "Mainstream Buddhist schools," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 502.

> our word 'school'. As the Sanskrit texts call *nikāya* what the Pāli texts call *ācariyavāda*, we will use the words *sect* and *school* in the same sense. They express the idea of a spiritual association constituted under the patronage of a master whose teaching it follows.[50]

Thus, the fact that a *nikāya* can be distinguished as a distinct institution based on the doctrines pertaining to a particular teacher suggests that it would be reasonable to consider Mahāyāna as an institution, even if it did not have its own *vinaya* code.

To summarise, Silk's and Fronsdal's arguments that Mahāyāna was not institutionally distinct are based on a restricted notion of "institution" as *nikāya*. They may have also overlooked evidence suggesting that the Mainstream sects were distinguished on the basis of doctrinal differences, and not just differences in *vinaya*. This would imply that even though Mahāyāna did not represent a distinct *vinaya* tradition, and is unlikely to have been a singular entity during its formative period, it does not account for the fact that some people did count themselves as followers of Mahāyāna from the third century onwards in a manner similar to that in which earlier practitioners may have identified themselves with a particular *nikāya*.

4.3.2 Early bodhisattvas did not belong to institutions

As observed above, perhaps the most common way in which the term "institution" is used in Buddhist Studies discourse is to refer to places of learning and worship such as monasteries or temples. In this sense, there is clear evidence (albeit somewhat late) that Mahāyāna did indeed have a distinct institutional existence in India. We know, for example, that certain monasteries in the sixth and seventh centuries C.E.

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[50] André Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Vehicule*, (Saigon: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955), 7. Eng. tr.: Migme Chodron. "The Buddhist sects of the lesser vehicle." 2005), 3.

belonged to the *Mahāyānāryabhikṣu-saṃgha*.[51] In addition, Chinese pilgrims who traveled to India also recorded the existence of Mahāyāna monasteries,[52] although they remained fewer in number than their Mainstream counterparts.[53]

Based on his reading of *sūtra*s such as the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* and the *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā*, Reginald Ray sees Mahāyāna as originally being non-monastic in character:

> The Mahāyāna *sūtra*s ... state that the Mahāyāna from the beginning was primarily a forest tradition, entirely nonmonastic in character.[54]

His hypothesis is that "Mahāyāna originated as a tradition of forest renunciation,"[55] and that it later underwent a process of monasticisation, culminating in a stage where

> Mahāyāna would have come to be understood as a major monastic tradition in India alongside Nikāya Buddhism.[56]

His description of the flourishing of Mahāyāna in the north-western region of India as "an institutionalized, monastic movement" [57] reveals that for Ray the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna is equated with its monasticisation.

While Ray's theory on the forest origins of Mahāyāna may be the result of reading a prescriptive text as if it were directly descriptive of the historical situation, it still plausibly accounts for the lack of evidence for the existence of Mahāyāna in

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[51] Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions," 10. (Schopen provides an approximate date for the inscription on p.14)

[52] See, for example, Herbert A. Giles, *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), 63.

[53] See Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 412.

[54] Ibid., 407.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 413.

[57] Ibid., 410.

inscriptions or texts of non-Mahāyāna schools.[58] However, it does not, I believe, adequately account for the prolific literary activity of early Mahāyāna, activity that Ray himself says relied on some sort of institution in order to be maintained. Ray writes:

> These notions of a definitive body of texts in turn presuppose a group of people who have texts in memory, a system of training whereby these documents are transmitted to others, and the commitment of substantial amounts of time to memorizing and reciting. These factors in turn imply, more or less, an institution, with priorities of the preservation of a substantial textual tradition.[59]

If Ray is willing to adopt a broader definition of "institution"—and recognise that the factors he claims are necessary for the preservation of textual traditions (i.e., memorising, reciting, etc.) do not, as he argues, *imply* an institution, but are *in and of themselves* institutions—then it is possible to think of forest ascetics as living some sort of institutionalised existence, albeit not in a monastery.

4.4 "Institution" defined

The discussion so far has revealed, if nothing else, that scholars working in the field of Buddhist Studies do not share a common conception of what constitutes a Buddhist institution. Apart from Silk, who appears to have adopted a specific but, I would argue, restricted definition of the institution as a *nikāya*, most other scholars have assumed a rather general sense of institution as meaning monastery or temple. There are at least two problems that follow from this lack of a precise and commonly accepted definition of institution. The first is that a vague, everyday sense of the term will not enable us to definitively answer important questions within Buddhist Studies such as what constituted the institutional basis of Mahāyāna,

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[58] Ibid., 407-408.

[59] Ibid., 31.

whether Mahāyāna is an institution, and if it is, how, why, and when it became institutionalised. The second is that without a precise definition, it will be difficult for scholars of Buddhism to participate in a wider academic discourse on institutions. Thus, in order to address these problems some definitions of "institution" as formulated by theorists in other disciplines will be discussed.

4.4.1 Organisations and rules

T. R. Voss has identified two distinct, yet related, senses in which the term institution is used:

> In everyday language ... the term "institutions" is often used in a broad and sometimes amorphous way. It is quite common to denote organizations and other corporate actors such as business firms, political parties, schools, and public administrations as "institutions." On the other hand, the term also, more specifically refers to rules and other constraints of human interaction.[60]

The general sense of institutions as organisations and the specific sense of them as sets of constraints on human interaction, Voss maintains, have a cause and effect relationship. Organisations, he says, are the "stable patterns of interaction"[61] that come about as result of "rules, constraints, or norms of human interaction."[62] In response to the question of *how* norms and so forth produce stable patterns of interaction, Voss, like some other institutional theorists,[63] argues that stability within institutions is a result of a system of rewards for conforming to, and sanctions against deviating from, their norms. Voss describes this process as "institutionalisation":

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[60] T. R. Voss, "Institutions," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences Vol. 11*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 7561.

[61] Ibid., 7562.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See, for example, Walton H. Hamilton, "Institution," in *Encylopedia of Social Sciences Vol. 8*, ed. R.A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (New York: MacMillan, 1932; reprint, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 1, no.2 (2005): 233-44); Geoffrey M. Hodgson, "What are institutions?" *Journal of Economic Issues* 40, no. 1 (2006).

> "Institutionalization" means that certain cultural norms become elements of the actors' motivational dispositions, and that norm conformity is rewarded and deviant behaviour appropriately punished by the application of sanctions.[64]

According to this account, a *nikāya*, or sect, would qualify as an institution insofar as it can be thought of as a monastic order within which stable patterns of interaction between members exist as a result of their observance of a common system of rules (i.e., a common *vinaya*). These rules are moreover enforceable by means of a system of sanctions that extend to potential expulsion from the order. Yet we can also imagine how institutionalisation can occur in other contexts, based on other systems of rules. Before discussing Mahāyāna, however, let us consider how institutional rules are enforced, for it is perhaps ironic that the absence of explicit sanctions may indicate the existence of a particularly strong institution.

4.4.2 The controlling force of institutional reality

Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann highlight the power of institutions when they claim that a system of rewards and sanctions is not an essential feature of an institution, but only becomes necessary when institutional reality is questioned. They argue that, although institutional reality is a social construction, it appears as an objective reality, and thus to deviate from the norms of an institution is to reject reality. They write:

> Institutions … by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would be theoretically possible. It is important to stress that this controlling character is inherent in institutionalization as such, prior to or apart from any mechanisms of sanctions specifically set up to support an institution.[65]

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[64] Voss, "Institutions," 7562.

[65] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 72.

Thus, where people are constrained to act in certain ways, independent of any system of sanctions, according to Berger and Luckmann, there must be some kind of institutional reality exerting its force.

It may be helpful here to think of "institutional reality" as equivalent to "worldview," a term that has been fruitfully used by scholars to treat religious and secular systems of belief on equal terms, not only in Buddhist Studies,[66] but also in the study of religion generally.[67] By doing so, we can see how the worldview evident in *sūtra*s such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, in which the vocation of the bodhisattva is valued above that of the *śrāvaka*, can be considered as a powerful form of institutional reality. For a person to freely choose to embark on the long and arduous bodhisattva path, despite there being a much easier and established choice available, strongly suggests, I would argue, the existence of some kind of institution. To argue over whether to call it "Mahāyāna," or "early Mahāyāna," or "the Bodhisattva movement," etc. is to overlook its power to regulate human behaviour.

Having thus argued that there must have been some sort of Mahāyāna institutional reality exerting its force on persons who identified themselves as bodhisattvas, I will now explore the way in which this institution could have existed within a network of other Buddhist institutions. In other words, I wish to show that Mahāyāna was but one of many overlapping and inter-related Buddhist institutions. In order to do so, we will return to John Searle and his explanation of the basic building blocks of institutions.

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[66] See, for example, Dreyfus, "Tibetan scholastic education," 57; Jan Nattier, "The Indian roots of pure land Buddhism: Insights from the oldest Chinese versions of the larger Sukhāvatīvyūha," *Pacific World* 3, no. 5 (2004): 187, 188; Frank J. Hoffman, "Towards a philosophy of Buddhist religion," *Asian Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1991): 26, 27.

[67] See Ninian Smart, *Concept and Empathy : Essays in the Study of Religion*, (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 10-11.

4.4.3 Searle's institutional facts

Searle sees the acceptance of institutional reality as the "glue that holds society together,"[68] and he therefore considers the project of explaining how institutions constrain human behaviour as one of the most important in the social sciences. Searle's approach to the task is to first arrive at a definition of "institution" through analysing what he calls "institutional facts." He writes:

> If we could analyze the nature of institutional facts and how they differ from other sorts of facts, then it seems to me we would be well on the way to answering our question, "What is an institution?"[69]

Searle considers "institutional reality" to be a particular kind of social reality. Thus, just as there are "social facts" that involve the collective intentionality of a group of people,[70] Searle posits a subclass of social facts, called "institutional facts," that owe their existence to the collective assignment of status functions to objects and actions. Searle expresses this assignment in the form, *X counts as Y in context C*. A good example of an institutional fact is speech. Every time we speak we create institutional facts: an acoustic event (*X*) *counts as* a meaningful utterance (*Y*) in the context of the English language (*C*). Consider another example from Buddhism: a particular bronze form of a human figure sitting cross-legged on a lotus becomes an institutional fact when the form (*X*) *counts as* an image of the Buddha (*Y*) in the context (*C*) of a certain group of people's collective recognition of it as such.

Institutional facts are not isolated; they are usually contained within an iterative structure with other institutional facts. Thus, when for a certain group of people the

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[68] Searle, "What is an institution?" 10.

[69] Ibid.: 2.

[70] Searle uses "intentionality" in the phenomenological sense; i.e., it simply refers to "that feature of the mind by which it is directed at, or about, or of, or concerns, objects and states of affairs in the world." Ibid.: 6. It may therefore refer to mental states such as hoping, believing, dreading, etc.

image counts as an actual instance of the Buddha's *rūpakāya*, a further institutional fact is created. Similarly, another institutional fact is created when the movement of one's body in a certain way in front of the image counts as an act of worship in the context of it being collectively assigned such a status by certain devout persons. Similarly, the act of worship might count as accumulation of merit. Accumulation of merit may count as spiritual progress. And so on.

4.4.4 Searle's definition of "institution"

Seale claims that when the practice of collectively counting *X* as *Y* is regularised, it becomes a rule—a particular kind of rule that is *constitutive* of an institutional structure. Constitutive rules, Searle explains, such as the rules of chess, differ from regulative rules, such as laws that stipulate driving on a particular side of the road, since chess cannot exist without its rules, whereas driving can exist regardless of whether one drives on the left or right, or even if one does not drive on a road at all.[71] This allows Searle to define an institution as "any system of constitutive rules of the form *X counts as Y in C*."[72]

Institutional facts, it follows, are particular instances of the application of constitutive rules. Thus, in the above example, the merit that is created when a person moves his or her body in a certain way in front of the bronze form of a cross-legged human figure is an institutional fact that results from the application of certain rules that constitute the institution of worship within Buddhism.

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[71] See ibid.: 9.

[72] Ibid.: 10.

4.4.5 The bodhisattva institution

With Searle's definition of an institution in mind, let us now return to the "Signs" chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. We can see that the whole chapter consists of statements that assign the status of being the sign of an irreversible bodhisattva to certain actions. For example, (1) turning away from form etc. (2) not having any doubts about which teachers to venerate, (3) no longer being liable to take rebirth in any of the eight undesirable states, (4) observing the *daśakuśala* and enjoining others to do so, etc. all count as signs of an irreversible bodhisattva. From there it follows that persons who display these signs count as irreversible bodhisattvas. Thus, it is evident that the chapter teaches a system of constitutive rules that, according Searle's definition of an institution, we might call "the institution of the irreversible bodhisattva."

Pursuing this line of reasoning further, since we have already argued that the apparent success of the "Signs" chapter (as well as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* more generally) implies that actual audiences were willing to identify themselves as bodhisattvas, we may ask, "What counts as being a bodhisattva?" The traditional position is that bodhisattvahood is marked by the production of the thought of enlightenment, and there is no reason to think this did not apply to those self-identifying bodhisattvas who figured among the actual audiences of *sūtra*s such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. The more important question is, "What counts as producing the thought of enlightenment?"

The reason why *X* counts as *Y* (and not *Z*) is because the assignment is, as Searle tells us, dependent on a context *C*. Consider, for example, how the first sign of irreversibility—"turning away from form etc."—meant not seeing form etc. as real,

and therefore counted as a sign of an irreversible bodhisattva in the context of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. It would not, however, have counted as the sign of an irreversible bodhisattva in the context of the realist Ābhidharmika schools.[73] Likewise, in the context of a conversionist bodhisattva tradition such as that described by Graeme MacQueen,[74] it is likely that vowing to attain highest enlightenment counted as producing the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) and, it would seem, becoming both a new member of the group and a bodhisattva.[75] In Mainstream Buddhism, however, vowing to attain enlightenment may have counted as nothing more than a vain aspiration, since, as a verse from the *Buddhavaṃsa* clearly states, only persons who have actually met a living buddha can produce the thought of enlightenment.[76]

While the vow to attain highest enlightenment was an action to which different discourse communities may have assigned different statuses, it is the assignment of new statuses to pre-existing actions that also strongly suggests the existence of a new and distinct institution. In the "Signs" chapter, we can observe that many of the so-called signs of an irreversible bodhisattva are qualities that are also shared by

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[73] For an Ābhidharmika account of irreversible bodhisattvas, see Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 245-246.

[74] MacQueen, "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," 54.

[75] Harrison has also written that "Many people vowed to attain awakening, and thereby became bodhisattvas." Harrison, "Who gets to ride in the great vehicle?" 86.

[76] In the *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Sumedhapatthanākathā*, v.59, eight conditions must be satisfied in order for a vow to count as making one a bodhisattva, the fourth of which would have made it virtually impossible for anyone to qualify. (1) The aspirant must be a human being (*manussattaṃ*). (2) He must be a man (*liṅgasampatti*). (3) His spiritual maturity must be sufficient to attain arhatship if he chose to (root-condition, *hetu*). (4) He must have met a living buddha (*satthāradassanaṃ*). (5) He must have taken up the life of a recluse or a monk (*pabbajjā*). (6) He must have attained supernormal powers through concentration (*guṇasampatti*). (7) He must have made the utmost homage (*adhikāro*) to the "Three Gems" while aspiring to buddhahood. (8) He must have a most ardent will to become a buddha (*chandatā*) *manussattaṃ liṅgasampatti, hetu satthāradassanaṃ/ pabbajjā guṇasampatti, adhikāro ca chandatā/ aṭṭhadhammasamodhānā, abhinīhāro samijjhati/* cited in Ledi Sayādaw, *A Manual of the Excellent Man: Uttamapurisa Dīpanī*, tr. U Tin Oo, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2000), 17. Also translated with commentary in Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1900), 14-15. The commentary states that vow to attain highest enlightenment does not count as a successful vow if it is taken in the presence of a *stūpa* or the Bodhi Tree.

śrāvakas [77] (e.g., observing the *daśakuśala*, having little sloth and torpor, abandoning the *anuśayas*, etc.), yet all of these qualities have been re-assigned a new status. Similarly, standard virtues such as generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*) and so forth are re-assigned a new status in Mahāyāna *sūtras* such that they count as *pāramitās*, the practice of which led to progress on the bodhisattva path. Yet in the institutional reality that was constructed by Mainstream Buddhist discourse the virtues of generosity, etc. count as progress on the *śrāvaka* path.

To recapitulate, in the above discussion, it has been argued that institutions exert a constraining influence on human behaviour principally through the power of a socially constructed reality. The building blocks of this "institutional reality" are the constitutive rules by which certain status functions are collectively assigned to otherwise status-less objects and actions, or "brute facts," as they are sometimes called.[78] The actual status that is assigned will vary according to context. Applying this theory to Buddhism, it was argued that in order for actual people to be counted as bodhisattvas a powerful institutional reality must have been in place, whereby their actions counted as those of a bodhisattva. It has also been shown that institutional realities are not independent, but overlap other institutional realities, often assigning different status functions to the same actions. In this way, the enduring and possibly widespread acceptance of the assignment of bodhisattva status to actions that could be undertaken by ordinary people points I believe not just to the institutional existence of early Mahāyāna, but to what could be a candidate for one of its institutional bases.

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[77] Nattier makes a similar observation with regard to the practices recommended to bodhisattvas in the *Ugraparapṛcchā*. See Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 106.

[78] See G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Brute Facts," Analysis 18, no. 3 (1958).

4.5 How Mahāyāna became "institutionalised"

Although it has been argued that Mahāyāna had an institutional existence from the moment actions such as an ordinary person's vow to attain highest enlightenment were counted as entry into bodhisattvahood, we have not yet accounted for the apparent disappearance of self-identifying bodhisattvas during what some have called the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna. Since I have argued that prior to this period Mahāyāna already existed as an institution, or more precisely, a group of institutions, to describe the development of Mahāyāna during this period as the "institutionalisation" of Mahāyāna is, I would argue, a special use of the term. Although it is true that new Mahāyāna institutions were indeed formed during this period, and in the pages that follow I offer an explanation as to how and why certain institutions were eclipsed by others, I nevertheless feel that "systematisation" may be a more appropriate term to describe the process. However, since other scholars have used the term "institutionalisation," I will also continue to use it when discussing their views within the understanding that this is a special use.

My thesis is that the disappearance of some Mahāyāna institutions during a period when Mahāyāna texts became widely disseminated and consumed from the early fourth century onwards was the due to the fact that such institutions were the products of discourses that were less structured and more contentious than those that survived during this period. In the following paragraphs I argue that the coherent way in which the bodhisattva career is detailed in *sūtra*s such as the *Daśabhūmika*, together with the way they remove potential conflict by describing bodhisattvahood in terms that place it out of reach for ordinary people means that they were better able to provide the context for the constitutive rules of a new and commonly accepted Mahāyāna institutional reality.

4.5.1 The importance of the production and dissemination of texts

Richard S. Cohen has argued that Mahāyāna became institutionalised basically as a result of economic factors.[79] His article is important for the way it draws our attention to the role that the widespread dissemination of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s played in this process. A catalytic moment, he says, was the founding of the Gupta dynasty in north India in 320 C.E. The Guptas allowed petty kings to retain control of the lands within the empire, with the result that the "money economy began to give way to one based upon the ownership of land."[80] This, Cohen argues, meant that Buddhism became dependent on a new kind of patronage—patrons who no longer came from the merchant class, but from the land-owning, or royal, class. The reason why this facilitated the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna, Cohen argues, was because of the abundant royal imagery (e.g., heroic bodhisattvas, buddhas abiding in pure lands with divine retinues, etc.) in Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. This, he argues, had greater appeal for the land-owning class and would have therefore attracted their patronage. This, in turn, would have resulted in greater production and dissemination of Mahāyāna texts, and hence the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna.

While Cohen is correct to highlight the importance of texts in the institutionalisation of Mahāyāna, he may have mistaken the *means* of the institutionalisation for its *cause*. Douglas Osto is nearer the mark when, using a reader-response approach to the analysis of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, he argues that the depictions of wealth and women in the *sūtra* suggest that it was intentionally written for an audience of royal female patrons.[81] In other words, it was no accident, as Cohen seems to imply, that

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[79] Cohen, "India."

[80] Ibid., 357.

[81] See Osto, *Power, Wealth and Women*, 103-116.

Mahāyāna *sūtra*s contain so much royal imagery. Rather, the imagery was there specifically for the purpose attracting patronage.

4.5.2 Texts, discourse, and the formation of constitutive rules

We have accepted Searle's definition of an institution as "any system of constitutive rules of the form *X* counts as *Y* in *C*," but if we want to know *why* an action *X* is assigned a status *Y*, rather than *Z*, we need to understand the context *C* in which the assignment is made. We looked at the particular example of the way in which in some contexts the formal taking of the vow to attain highest enlightenment qualified one as a bodhisattva, while in other contexts it did not (unless it was taken in the presence of a living buddha). Another way of looking at these contextual differences is to think of the assignment of status functions to "brute facts" as reflective of the discourse operating in the community where the assignment is accepted. According to two contemporary theorists on institutions, discourses can be best understood by examining texts in which they reside. As Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy write:

> Texts … can be considered a discursive "unit" and a material manifestation of discourse.[82]

Elsewhere, Phillips, Hardy and Thomas Lawrence highlight the importance of texts in the first two stages in the formation of an institution. The three stages are:

(1) production, dissemination and consumption of texts;

(2) the embedding of texts in discourse; and

(3) the production of the institution from discourse.

These three stages will now be briefly summarised with reference to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in order to show how an institutional reality was created and

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[82] Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 4.

perpetuated based on this text. It will be compared with another *sūtra*, the *Daśabhūmika*, to show how the soteriology of the latter exerted a greater force in the formation of the worldview of so-called institutionalised Mahāyāna.

4.5.2.1 Actions that result in the production of texts

Texts, Phillips et al. argue, result from actions. But not all actions produce texts; those texts that are produced as a result of actions that (1) "require organizational sensemaking"[83] and (2) "affect perceptions of the organization's legitimacy"[84] are more likely to be produced, disseminated and consumed than those that do not. If we substitute the words "bodhisattva community" for "organization" in the above quotations, we can think of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as the result of attempts to make sense of a new and alternative soteriological option, namely the path of the bodhisattva. The fact that the existing Mainstream *sūtra*s did not support the legitimacy of the bodhisattva path at a popular level can also be seen as a cause for the production of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s.

4.5.2.2 Embedding of texts in discourse

Phillips et al. propose that texts are more likely to become "embedded" in discourses when they (1) "are produced by actors who are understood to have a legitimate right to speak,"[85] (2) "take the form of genres which are recognizable,"[86] and (3) "draw on other texts within the discourse and on other well-established discourses."[87] Again, it is quite clear how that the "Signs" chapter—indeed the entire *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*—

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[83] Nelson Phillips, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Cynthia Hardy, "Discourse and institutions," *Academy of Management Review* 29, no. 4 (2004): 642.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.: 643.

[86] Ibid.: 644.

[87] Ibid.

satisfies these conditions. Although not produced by the actors whose dialogues they purport to record, there can be no question about the Buddha's right to speak. The right of other actors, such as Subhūti, to speak as been explained by MacQueen,[88] but further investigation is needed to explain why, as an arhat, Subhūti is seen as an authority on the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The fact that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* conforms to the *sūtra* genre, and (as shown in chapter 3) contains traces of many other texts well-established in Mainstream Buddhist discourse means that the second and third conditions are satisfied, thereby explaining the capacity of the text to become embedded in early Mahāyāna discourse.

4.5.2.3 Discourses that provide contexts for the constitutive rules of institutions

Finally, Phillips et al. propose that discourses that are "more coherent and structured[89] and "supported by broader discourses and are not highly contested by competing discourses"[90] are more likely to produce institutions. In other words, they are more likely to provide the context, *C*, for the assignment (and re-assignment) of status functions to objects and actions. These proposals, I believe, are the key to explaining the preference for the glorified superhuman bodhisattva over the ordinary bodhisattva in the more systematised, or "institutionalised" form of Mahāyāna. While both the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *Daśabhūmika* satisfied the first two sets of conditions and indeed became embedded in the localised discourses that provided the contexts for a variety of Mahāyāna institutions, the *Daśabhūmika* satisfies the third set better than the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and therefore eclipsed the latter in the more

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[88] See Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism I," *Religion* 11 (1981); MacQueen, "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism II."

[89] Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy, "Discourse and institutions," 645.

[90] Ibid.

generalised discourse that provided the constitutive rules of "institutionalised" Mahāyāna. Indeed, while the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s have been described as "no means a work executed on a general plan.... a vast storehouse or jumble of ideas and fragments...,[91] the *Daśabhūmika* has been described as offering "a methodical and coherent scheme" for the division and classification of a *bodhisattva's* career.[92] Not only do we see a far more coherent discourse inhabiting the *Daśabhūmika* than we find in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* but, with its extremely high threshold for entry into the bodhisattva path, it is less in conflict with competing Mainstream discourse such as that contained in the *Buddhavaṃsa*.[93]

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we began by arguing that Hirakawa's question is important in that it suggests that we should be looking for a particular kind of origin for Mahāyāna, namely an institution. Then, having reviewed the way in which the term "institution" has been used by several scholars and found them to be somewhat limited, we have accepted John Searle's definition of an institution as "a system of constitutive rules of the form *X counts as Y in context C*." It was then shown, using some examples from the "Signs" chapter, that, by this definition, the irreversible bodhisattva was an example of an early Mahāyāna institution. It was also argued that the rules that constitute and define institutions take the form they do as a result of different discursive contexts. Citing the work of contemporary theorists, it was argued that certain *sūtra*s had more power than others to embed themselves in Mahāyāna discourse, thereby shaping the "institutionalised" Mahāyāna.

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[91] Conze 1954b p.193

[92] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 283.

[93] See section 4.4.5 above.

The conclusions that have been drawn in this chapter are significant since they demonstrate that, from its earliest days as a conversionist religious tradition,[94] Mahāyāna has always had an institutional existence, albeit in multiple forms and within a network of institutions, rather than as a single independent entity. Among the institutions in that network there were no doubt many that predated the institution of the ordinary human bodhisattva and can therefore perhaps be considered as institutions that were, in a sense, the forerunners of Mahāyāna. For example, the counting of certain tales as events in the former lives of Śākyamuni Buddha could have been one such institution. While Hirakawa would perhaps have not agreed with the contention that this was the institutional basis of Mahāyāna, he would nevertheless have agreed that institutional basis of Mahāyāna did not necessarily have to be an instance of Mahāyāna, and most likely would have agreed that the recounting of *Jātaka* tales was an institution. Other institutions such as becoming an ordinary (reversible) human bodhisattva through the production of the thought of enlightenment, the emulation of the irreversible bodhisattva, not to mention the worship of highly glorified and idealised bodhisattvas, although they may not be bases of Mahāyāna, can still be considered as institutions in the Mahāyāna network, since they all functioned to constrain and enable the activities of those people we call Mahāyānists, whether or not they identified themselves as such.

In the last part of the chapter, we examined the process, sometimes known as the "institutionalisation" of Mahāyāna, that occurred in India from the early fourth century onwards. Although terms such as "systematised" may be more appropriate

[94] See MacQueen, "Inspired speech in early Mahāyāna Buddhism II," 54.

than "institutionalised" to describe this new form of Mahāyāna, this was a period when Mahāyāna underwent a significant transformation from a diverse collection of institutions to the more unified system represented in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentaries. It was also a period in which bodhisattvahood became increasingly idealised and out of reach for most practitioners in their present lifetimes. While this has been explained as a result of the triumph of well-structured and uncontentious discourses over unstructured and contentious ones, other reasons such as the need to circumvent the difficulties inherent in certifying stages of spiritual progress (such as entry into bodhisattvahood) are also possible. These will be discussed further in chapter 8.

5 THE IRREVERSIBLE *BHŪMI* IN THE *AṢṬASĀHASRIKĀ*

The wise bodhisattva … does not experience *nirvāṇa*, but sees phenomena.[1]

Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued that the reason why a more glorified form of the bodhisattva ideal eventually became dominant in Mahāyāna was that *sūtra*s such as the *Daśabhūmika* contained a discourse that was both more coherent and less disputed than that which inhabited the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s. Thus, when Mahāyāna *sūtra*s became widely disseminated due to changed economic conditions during the Gupta dynasty, well-structured and less contested discourses had more power to shape a Mahāyāna institutional reality in which ordinary people may have seen themselves as aspiring bodhisattvas but not actual bodhisattvas. It is hypothesised that this could have resulted in the gradual replacement of self-identifying bodhisattvas with people who instead saw themselves as *māhāyānikas*.

In this and the following two chapters, we turn our attention to the notion of the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*. Taking the bodhisattva path as it is delineated in the works of Haribhadra as representative of systematised Mahāyāna soteriology, I show that it is

[1] *Rgs* XX:14 . *vidu bodhisattvo … na ca nirvṛtiṁ spṛśati paśyati dharmacārī // Rgs* (Obermiller), 76

structured around the systems of the Five Paths (*pañcamārga*) and Ten Stages (*daśabhūmi*), neither of which derives from the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* (at least, not in their earliest forms). Although this systematised bodhisattva path is built around path structures that are foreign to the early versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, it also contains an important concept that does appear prominently in the *sūtras*, namely, the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*. Our task in the following chapters will be to explore the significance of this concept in Mahāyāna soteriology, and trace the changes in its interpretation as it was incorporated into the systematised bodhisattva path.

The basic question to be addressed is: how did *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* come to be fixed at a very advanced stage of the systematised bodhisattva path? The question is significant since it suggests further evidence of the transformation of the irreversible bodhisattva from a normative ideal whose function was to constrain day-to-day human behaviour to a figure so remote that it became an abstract concept of concern only to a scholarly minority.

Chapter 5 begins by demonstrating that what I call the "systematised path," as it is presented in the works of Haribhadra and his Indian and Tibetan followers, is a synthesis of at least two major strands of quite different soteriological thinking. The first of these I call the *pañcamārga* system, a soteriological doctrine that appears to have originated in the Sarvāstivāda school. The second is the *daśabhūmi* system, which is mainly found in Mahāyāna literature, but may have had its origins in the *Jātaka* literature. These two strands are then surveyed and summarised and their differences highlighted. We then turn our attention specifically towards a particular

feature of the systematised path, namely, the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*, and attempt to determine whether or not it represented a fixed milestone in the bodhisattva's career.

In chapter 6, the investigation continues with an examination of the relationship between irreversibility and the concepts of "the fixed condition of a bodhisattva" (*bodhisattva-nyāma*) and the "certitude that dharmas are not produced" (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*). I argue that the placement of the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* at the eighth stage in the systematised bodhisattva path derives from the theory, familiar to the authors of the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, that a bodhisattva's career consisted of two phases.

5.2 The systematised bodhisattva path

5.2.1 Implications of the term "systematised"

Collett Cox has observed that Sarvāstivādin abhidharma texts describe a path that contains such a diverse range of practices, and which is so structurally complex, that a single person could not be expected to implement it. She therefore concludes that the texts describe multiple soteriological options and suggests three ways of approaching the study of such complex presentations of the path, namely: (1) consider the apparent diversity to be the various manifestations of a single underlying principle, and attempt to identify it; (2) assume that the diversity is the result of an attempt to organise a series of historical accretions into a coherent system; or (3) treat the diversity as the scholarly taxonimisation of an inherited collection of non-systematic meditative practices.[2] Whichever approach we choose,

[2] See Cox, "Attainment through abandonment," 64-65.

however, we must not, she warns, operate under the "the naive assumption that the path is an ahistorical harmonious whole."[3]

The approach I adopt in this thesis is the second. That is, I will treat the bodhisattva path as it is set forth in the works of Haribhadra and his Indian and Tibetan followers as "a product of self-conscious doctrinal systematization secondarily applied to a traditional aggregate of historical accretions,"[4] and one in which the exigencies of doctrinal harmony and coherence of worldview often outweigh those of actual practice.

Such an approach is, of course, quite different from that of the traditional exegete, for whom the path is an ahistorical truth. For orthodox Mahāyāna scholars, the bodhisattva path is not something that evolved over time, or was devised by commentators such as Haribhadra—rather, it was taught by Maitreya in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, and all bodhisattvas of the past, present and future must traverse it in order to attain the fully enlightened state of buddhahood. If Haribhadra's version of the bodhisattva path differs from that of other past exegetes, the traditional view is that he was simply describing the path more comprehensively than his predecessors, who may have tailored their descriptions to the needs of their audiences.[5] Alternatively, it may be argued that his version differs from others because it was influenced by his adherence to the doctrines of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika school, who distinguished the three vehicles by positing a different type of abandonment for each.

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[3] Ibid., 65.

[4] Ibid., 64.

[5] Tsong-kha-pa explains that Asaṅga "did not find" all the topics of the *AA* in the way that Haribhadra did because he was "governed by the needs of his students." See Sparham, *Golden Garland*, 36.

While there is nothing wrong *per se* with taking an etic approach to the study of the path (i.e., looking at it from the outside, employing foreign concepts such as "systematised," etc.) it is important that we be aware of the fact when we do so. We must recognise that when we speak of exegetes such as Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Tsong-kha-pa, etc. as systematisers,[6] or speak of a systematised bodhisattva path,[7] or a systematised Mahāyāna,[8] we take a peculiarly Western historicist approach to Mahāyāna soteriology that is quite different from that of the authors whose works we study.

There are many versions of the bodhisattva path that we could call systematised; for example, the paths described in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, and the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* are all, it may be argued, the result of synthesis of the various traditions with which their authors were familiar. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to analyse all of these, and I have therefore chosen the version found in the works of Haribhadra. There are two reasons for doing so: (1) being composed in the late eighth or early ninth century C.E.,[9] the works are relatively late, and therefore represent a more developed, and indeed systematised, path than that found in earlier works; and (2) his works were widely influential; almost all of the hundreds of works explicating the path that were produced in

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[6] For examples, see respectively, Richard King, "Early Yogācāra and its relationship with the Madhyamaka school," *Philosophy East and West* 44, no. 4 (1994): 668; Chr. Lindtner, "The Laṅkāvatārasūtra in early Indian Madhyamaka literature," *Asiatische Studien / Etudes Asiatiques* 46, no. 1 (1992): 277; Robert A. F. Thurman, "Buddhist hermeneutics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1978): 21.

[7] See Francis V Tiso, "The bodhisattva as a Buddhist saint," in *Premier Colloque Étienne Lamotte : Bruxelles et Liège, 24-27 Septembre 1989* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1998), 143.

[8] See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2nd ed., (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 355, n.16.

[9] Haribhadra says that he wrote it with the support of the King Dharmapāla (see *AA-Ālokā*, 994 ln.16-19), who is believed to have reigned 770 to 810 C.E. See also Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.1 : xv.

Tibet—as well as most that were produced in India and survive in Tibetan translation—are based directly or indirectly on the path as it is described in the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* and its condensed version, the *Sphuṭārthā*.

5.2.2 Haribhadra's presentation of the systematised path

In his presentation of the bodhisattva path in his major *Prajñāpāramitā* commentarial works, Haribhadra combines two broad strands of Buddhist soteriological thinking. These two strands, which I will call the *pañcamārga* tradition and the *daśabhūmi* tradition, are also combined with Mādhyamika ontological doctrines derived from the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*. It would be overly simplistic, however, to think of these strands as though they represented three separate rivers flowing into one. Rather, it would be better to think of them as three rivers flowing through a large plain that sometimes floods, causing the waters of the rivers to occasionally mingle before their later confluence downstream. Thus, if we look closely at the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, for example, we find occasional hints of the *pañcamārga* tradition,[10] as well as at least three different *daśabhūmi* traditions.[11] To extend the metaphor further, it is also helpful to think of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* as a broad river containing much more developed doctrines than those found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, which perhaps represents the moment when the flow from a number of nameless streams came together to first form the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* stream.

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[10] E.g., The term "*darśanamārga*" is mentioned in the actual text (as opposed to the system of subdivisions that superimposed later) in *Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 154.

[11] In addition to the so-called "general" and "special" *daśabhūmi* systems (See Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 67.) which are well-known in the *Pañca* and the *Śata*, there is also a mention of the system that was eventually to become dominant—i.e. the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* system. See *Pañca (D)*, 230 ln.20-21.

Although I have described Haribhadra's systematised path as a confluence of three streams, they are not treated with equal importance. The basic path-structure comes from the *pañcamārga*, into which the *daśabhūmi* system is inserted. Since he follows the revisionist position of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* with regard to the soteriology of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, Haribhadra incorporates the original soteriology of the *sūtra*s into the systematised path only indirectly in, what I would argue, is a significantly reinterpreted form. It therefore seems somewhat ironic that Haribhadra's famous *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*, although a commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, is considered foundational to orthodox study of the path.

In the pages that follow, I shall a give a brief overview of the *pañcamārga* and *daśabhūmi* traditions. The former will be relatively brief, its purpose simply being to highlight a number of properties that, while important features of the systematised Mahāyāna path, are quite foreign to the soteriology of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s. The latter will be treated in somewhat more detail, since it is the relationship between the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* and the various *daśabhūmi* systems that will be taken up for further analysis in chapter 6.

Prajñāpāramitā studies in Gelugpa Tibetan monasteries typically begin with the topic of *sa-lam*, or "Stages and Paths." Among these two, the *lam*, or "paths" component consists of an overview of the "five paths" or *pañcamārga*, as they pertain to the three vehicles—*śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha* and bodhisattva.[12] The *sa*, or "stages" component, similarly consists of an overview of the ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. Typically, Tibetan *sa-lam* textbooks contain definitions, subdivisions and boundaries for each path and stage delineated in accordance with what their

[12] For a summary of the *pañcamārga* system, see Herbert V. Guenther, *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*, 3rd ed., (Berkekey and London: Shambhala, 1976), 191-274.

respective authors believe to be the views of Haribhadra. A partial translation of one such textbook can be found in the footnotes of Eugéne Obermiller's groundbreaking work, *The Doctrine of Prajñā-Pāramitā as Exposed in the Abhisamayālaṃkāra of Maitreya.*[13]

5.2.2.1 The *pañcamārga* tradition

The *pañcamārga* system has a long developmental history, beginning perhaps as early as the first century B.C.E.[14] with the doctrine in the *Abhidharmasāra*[15] of 98 types of latencies (*anuśaya*),[16] some of which were to be abandoned by initial cognition of the Four Truths, and others which were to be abandoned by their repeated contemplation. This system, which Erich Frauwallner argues was "created to establish a causal relation between liberating cognition and the disappearance of the *āsravāḥ* [i.e., outflows], in order to explain and clarify the process of liberation," [17] allows for the clear definition of the *darśanamārga* and *bhāvanāmārga* which lie at the heart of the *pañcamārga* system.

The *pañcamārga* system does not appear to be fully formed in Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma* until Vasubandhu systematised it in the sixth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, though three paths—(*darśana*, *bhāvanā* and *aśaikṣa*) and

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[13] E. Obermiller, "The doctrine of Prajñā-Pāramitā as exposed in the Abhisamayālaṃkāra of Maitreya," *Acta Orientalia* 11 (1933). Reprint: *Prajñāpāramitā in Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Harcharan Singh Sobti; Delhi: Classics India Publications, 1988. Cf. 'Jigs-med-dbang-po, *Sa lam gyi rnam gzhag theg gsum mdzes rgyan*, (Mundgod: Drepung Gomang Library, 2005).

[14] Scholars date the composition of the *Abhidharmasāra* between 130 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. See Charles Willemen, "(Bhadanta) Dharmaśrī, Abhidharmahṛdaya or Abhidharmasāra," in *Encylopedia of Indian Philosophies Vol. VII*, ed. Karl H. Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 451.

[15] T.1550. Tr. Charles Willemen, *The Essence of Metaphysics: Abhidharmahṛdaya*, (Buxelles: l'Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Bouddhiques, 1975).

[16] It is noteworthy that *anuśayas* are rarely mentioned as objects to be abandoned in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, where instead we find outflows (*āsrava*) and defilements (*kleśas*) mentioned.

[17] Erich Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, tr. Sohie Francis Kidd, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 157.

three *bhāgīya*s (*puṇya*, *mokṣa*, and *nirvedha*)—are mentioned in the earlier *Mahāvibhāṣā*.[18] Further evidence for the relatively late formulation of the standardised *pañcamārga* comes from the fact that it does not feature in a list of the various five-member classifications of the path in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*.[19]

The *pañcamārga* system was also developed by the Yogācāras,[20] but it was not adopted uniformly—the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, for example, did not adopt it, instead presenting a bodhisattva path consisting of twelve *vihāra*s, organised around the principle of "cultivating signlessness" (*nirnimitta-bhāvanā*).[21] The *Madhyāntavibhāga* is glossed as presenting the *pañcamārga* by its commentators, but the path is not systematically described in this text, nor do the words *darśanamārga* and *bhāvanāmārga* appear in the text itself.[22] The Yogācāra work that expresses the *pañcamārga* system in most detail is perhaps the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.[23]

Although the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* contains some typically Mādhyamika ontological doctrines,[24] it also contains a characteristically Yogācāra presentation of the abandonments and realisations of bodhisattvas on the *darśana-mārga* and *bhāvanā-*

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[18] Chikafumi Watanabe, "A study of Mahāyānasaṅgraha III: A relation of practical theories and philosophical theories" (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, 2000), 38-39.

[19] Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1738-1739.

[20] See Watanabe, "A study of Mahāyānasaṅgraha III", 42-43.

[21] Summary in Nalinaksha Dutt, "Introduction" in *Bodhisattvabhūmiḥ*, ed. Nalinaksha Dutt, (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1978), 35-38. Text in *B-bhūmi*, 217-244.

[22] See Watanabe, "A study of Mahāyānasaṅgraha III", 48-49.

[23] See Walpola Rahula, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, tr. Sara Boin-Webb, (Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 2001), 141-177.

[24] See especially *AA* I:39 and IV:56-59.

mārga.[25] In addition, although it calls the first two paths *mokṣa-bhāgīya* and *nirvedha-bhāgīya* rather than *sambhāra-mārga* and *prayoga-mārga*, it nevertheless clearly presents a version of the bodhisattva path that is structured in accordance with the *pañcamārga*. Conze summarises the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s path structure as follows:

> The Aids to Emancipation are ... of 5 kinds, The Aids to Penetration are 4, the Path of Vision is classified into 16 "moments," and the Path of Development into 9, or more. All these categories are common ground to the Buddhist tradition, and the *AA* presupposes that one is familiar with their broad outlines at least.[26]

Although the categories mentioned by Conze may not have been common to the *entire* Buddhist tradition as he implies, it is nevertheless quite clear that the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* presents a systematised bodhisattva path consisting of these four paths of training (*śaikṣa-marga*) and one path of no more training (*aśaikṣa-mārga*).

Haribhadra's presentation of the *pañcamārga* system is based on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. Accordingly, he describes abandonments that are to be abandoned by seeing (*darśana-prahātavya*) and those that are to be abandoned through repeated cultivation (*bhāvanā-prahātavya*).[27] While this classification is fundamental to the *pañcamārga* system, it is not found in the other major strands of soteriological theory that Haribhadra incorporates into his version of the path. Bodhisattvas' abandonments on the paths of seeing and cultivation are further

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[25] I.e., the four *vikalpas*: Two types of false discrimination with respect to objects (*grāhyavikalpa*) and two types of false discrimination with respect to subjects (*grāhakavikalpa*). See *AA* V:5-16

[26] Edward Conze, "Maitreya's Abhisamayālaṅkāra," *East and West* 5 (1954): 195.

[27] Haribhadra describes the process in *AA-Ālokā*, 98 ln.18 - 99 ln.4. Tr. Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.1:289.

classified into two types of obscurations (*āvaraṇa*)—knowledge obscurations (*jñeya-āvaraṇa*) and defilement obscurations (*kleśa-āvaraṇa*).[28]

Although these are important features of Haribhadra's systematised bodhisattva path, they are not explicitly found in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, and it may therefore seem ironic that the *sūtra*'s dominant commentarial tradition interprets it in accordance with a system that was originally developed by those who, as have some have argued,[29] were the *sūtra*'s ideological opponents. However, since it is neither the structure of the path nor the specific enumeration of dharmas[30] that is being disputed in the *sūtra*, but the ontological status that *abhidharma* scholars assigned to that structure and those dharmas, this is not necessarily a contradiction. As Richard King reminds us, it is virtually impossible to do Buddhist philosophy without recourse to basic abhidharma contexts:

> It is clear that the portrayal of Mahāyāna Buddhists as generally antithetical to the Abhidharma of non-Mahāyāna schools such as the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda remains something of an overstatement in an Indian context. Abhidharma, broadly speaking, is Buddhist philosophy. Mādhyamika and Yogācāra thinkers both established and contested their theories from within a theoretical framework which was unquestionably Abhidharmic in style, content and presentation.[31]

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[28] Tibetan exegetes further classify these two types of obscurations into subtle and gross.

[29] These arguments are critiqued in Yoshinori Onishi, "Is the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra really arguing against the Sarvāstivadins?" *Buddhist Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (1999): 167.

[30] Although the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s do not engage in debate over the enumeration of dharmas, it should be noted that their lists only partly coincide with those of the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins. For the *Prajñāpāramitā* enumeration, see Sten Konow, *The First Two Chapters of the Daśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1941); Conze, *Large Sutra*, 120-122; Linnart Mäll, *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā and Other Essays*, (Tartu: Centre for Oriental Studies, University of Tartu, 2003; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 38-44; Sparham, *Golden Garland*, vol.1 : 90. For the Sarvāstivāda enumeration, see Th. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"*, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1923; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 95-107.

[31] Richard King, "Vijñaptimātratā and the abhidharma context of early Yogācāra," *Asian Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1998): 6.

It is indeed remarkable to see how successfully the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s have been interpreted soteriologically in Sarvāstivāda-Yogācāra terms—so much so, that any other interpretation seems unorthodox. Nevertheless, as will be shown in this and the following chapter, the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, especially earlier versions such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, appear to have viewed the bodhisattva's spiritual progress very differently from the way in which it is set forth in the works of Haribhadra.

5.2.2.2 The *daśabhūmi* tradition

Although, as will be shown in this section, there were several different *daśabhūmi* systems in India, Tibetan exegetes following Haribhadra[32] tend to treat them all as one. To do so, however, is to overlook several important differences, most notably the fact that in the system of ten *bhūmi*s found in the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter of the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s bodhisattvas become irreversible on the seventh *bhūmi*, while in the *Daśabhūmika* system followed by Haribhadra the irreversible *bhūmi* is the eighth. These and other differences will now be explored.

There are at least six different *daśabhūmi* systems in various Indian canonical works. These systems have been compared by Rahder,[33] Dayal,[34] Dutt,[35] La Vallée Poussin,[36] Hirakawa,[37] and Lamotte,[38] but none brings all six together. In this section I therefore provide a brief survey of the six systems, identifying their

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[32] See *AA-Ālokā*, 99 ln.8 - 104 ln.16.; Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.1 : 290-297.

[33] Rahder, "Préface," iii-xx.

[34] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 270-291.

[35] Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 83-135.

[36] La Vallée Poussin, "Bodhisattva," 743-748.

[37] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 65-69.

[38] Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2373-2381.

distinguishing features, their nomenclature, their basic organising principles, and most importantly for our investigations in later chapters, the stage in each system at which a bodhisattva is said to become irreversible.

5.2.2.2.1 *Daśabhūmi* chapter of the *Mahāvastu*

The most interesting thing about this system, which may represent the earliest extant version of the ten *bhūmi*s,[39] is its textual context. It is contained within a Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* text in which various legendary stories concerning the life of Śākyamuni are assembled. The bodhisattva path it presents is therefore, on the face of it, descriptive, rather than prescriptive. Although some passages can be read as injunctions directed at bodhisattvas, they appear to be later interpolations.[40]

The relatively long section devoted to the ten *bhūmi*s contains descriptions (or possibly prescriptions) of the activities that a bodhisattva performs at each level. As such, it is said to represent an advancement on the *daśabhūmi* systems mentioned in other early biographical works[41] in which the ten *bhūmi*s are mentioned but without any details being given.[42] The *bhūmi*s in the *Mahāvastu* may represent a development in the sense that they claim to not just describe Śākyamuni's progress to enlightenment, but the spiritual progress of *all* future buddhas, "having taken the perfectly enlightened Śākyamuni as a prototype."[43]

The ten *bhūmi*s in the *Mahāvastu* are:[44]

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[39] Dutt writes that "Its language and style of composition seem to suggest that the Mahavastu must have been written as early as the 1st or 2nd century B.C." Dutt, "The Mahavastu," 128.

[40] See Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1: 82, n.3.

[41] See Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 65.

[42] See ibid.: 65, n.67. Also, Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2375.

[43] *śākyamuniṃ samyaksaṃbuddhaṃ ādau kṛtvā* / *MV*, 121 ln.6-7. That the ten *bhūmi*s apply to bodhisattvas in general is also clear from the use of plural forms of "bodhisattva" throughout.

[44] Ibid., 56 ln.6-11. Tr. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1 : 60.

(1) *durārohā* (Difficult to Enter[45])

(2) *baddhamānā* (Fastening)

(3) *puṣpamaṇḍitā* (Adorned with Flowers)

(4) *rucirā* (Beautiful)

(5) *cittavistarā* (Expansion of the Heart)

(6) *rūpavatī* (Lovely)

(7) *durjayā* (Difficult to Conquer)

(8) *janmanideśa* (Ascertainment of Birth)

(9) *yauvarājyata* (Installation as Crown Prince)

(10) *abhiṣeka* (Coronation)

Although none of the *bhūmi*s is named "irreversible," a passage occurring in the middle of a list of the qualities of bodhisattvas on the fourth *bhūmi* describes bodhisattvas on the eighth as *anivartiya*.[46] This has led to speculation by some scholars that the *Mahāvastu*'s *daśabhūmi* system may be an elaboration of a shorter list of seven,[47] while others suggest that the irreversible stage was originally the

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[45] For other possible translations, see Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 273-275. Cf. Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2375.

[46] *aṣṭamīprabhṛtiṃ bhūmīṃ gatā te anivartiyā/ MV*, 75 ln.19. Tr. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, vol.1 : 80.

[47] See Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 271; Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 234. Not mentioned by Dayal or Conze as evidence, but nevertheless highly relevant is the following passage: "... this matures in him in the course of his second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh *jātis*." *dvitīyatṛtīyacaturthapaṃcamaṣaṣṭhasaptamāsu jātiṣu vipacyati MV*, 77 ln.3. Cf. Jones, who translates *jāti* as *bhūmi* in this context. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Vol.1 : 82. Cf. also Rahder, "Préface," xvi. : "L'étroite parenté entre les Jātakas et le Daśabhūmaka est mise en lumière par l'équivalence de "jāti" et "bhūmi" dans le passage suivant du Mahāvastu (vol. I, p. 104, 458)"

fourth *bhūmi*.[48] Given the "confused and incoherent"[49] account of the *bhūmi*s in the *Mahāvastu*, both scenarios are indeed possible.

In addition to the ten *bhūmi*s, the *Mahāvastu* also contains a seemingly independent presentation of a bodhisattva path consisting of four *caryā*s, namely: *prakṛti-caryā*, *praṇidhāna-caryā*, *anuloma-caryā* and *anivartana-caryā*.[50] The last of these is also called *avivarta-caryā* and is glossed in contrast to its opposite, *vivarta-caryā*, as follows:

> Turning back and [again] undergoing cyclic existence is the meaning of *vivarta-caryā*, [whereas] being irreversibly set for enlightenment is the meaning of *avivarta-caryā*.[51]

Although the text does not explicitly correlate the four *caryā*s with the ten *bhūmi*s, some scholars have attempted to do so,[52] matching the *anivartana-caryā* with the eighth, ninth and tenth *bhūmi*s. While this may seem reasonable, we should be cautious, since the meaning of *anivartiya* in the four *caryā*s seems to differ from the meaning of *anivartiya* in the ten *bhūmi*s. Up until the eighth *bhūmi*, bodhisattvas are in danger of turning back (*vivartanti*), but not in the sense of forsaking the path entirely, as suggested by the above definition of *vivarta-caryā*. Rather, bodhisattvas on the first seven *bhūmi*s are merely in danger of falling back to a lower *bhūmi* if they engage in certain proscribed behaviours.[53] This, however, is not possible once a bodhisattva has reached the eighth *bhūmi*.

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[48] See Ryusho Hikata, (ed.) *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛcchā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (Fukuoka: Kyushu University, 1958), lxvii.

[49] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 275.

[50] *MV*, 1 ln.3. Cf. Jones, *The Mahāvastu, Vol.1*, 1.

[51] *vivartanti saṃsaranti vivartacaryā // avaivartiyā bodhāya bhavanti avivartacaryā // MV*, 44 ln.4-5.

[52] See Telwatte Rahula, *A Critical Study of the Mahāvastu*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 62. Rahder similarly correlates the four *caryā*s with the ten *bhūmi*s of the *Daśabhūmika*. Also see Rahder, "Préface," iii.

[53] See Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 88.

To summarise, the *daśabhūmi* system found in the *Mahāvastu* may stem from an earlier tradition in which the career of Śākyamuni as a bodhisattva was said to consist of ten stages. It may also have been developed in order to create a normative text for Mahāsāṃghika bodhisattvas. Although the *daśabhūmi* system found in *Mahāvastu* has a nomenclature that differs from that found in Haribhadra's systematised path, they both posit the eighth *bhūmi* as the irreversible stage. Apart from this, however, the two systems have little in common. While Rahder has found several traces of *Mahāvastu* in the *Daśabhūmika*,[54] in the opinion of Dayal the resemblance is "slight and vague." [55]

5.2.2.2.2 "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter of the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*.

This *daśabhūmi* system occurs in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* [56] and the *Śatasāhasrikā*.[57] For each stage a number of preparations (*parikarma*) are detailed. These preparations must be fulfilled before the bodhisattva can progress to the next stage, thus making the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter conceptually similar to a prescriptive interpretation of the *daśabhūmi* section of the *Mahāvastu*. On the first seven stages, most of the preparations are the kinds of activities that ordinary people could be expected to fulfil. For example, on the first stage bodhisattvas take up the life of a renunciant (*abhiniṣkrāmati*) in all their existences; on the second stage they have faith in their gurus, and so on. However, the preparations for the eighth, ninth and tenth levels are much more superhuman in nature. For example, on the eighth

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[54] See Rahder, "Préface," iii-vii.

[55] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 272.

[56] *Pañca (D)*, 214 ln.6 - 225 ln.8. Cf. T.221 p27a14 – p29b29; T.222 p196b8 – p199a5; T.223 p256c4 – p259c15

[57] *Śata*, 1454 ln.1 - 1473 ln.18. Cf. T.220 p303a14 – p309b26

stage bodhisattvas cognise the thoughts of all beings in a single instant, pass from buddha-field to buddha-field, and so on.

Dayal has commented that "it is clear there is no plan or system in this account of the ten *bhūmis*,[58] but given the qualitative difference between the first seven and the last three levels, this cannot be said to be entirely true. In addition, we read that on the seventh *bhūmi*, bodhisattvas rid themselves of all defilements and gain the "certitude of non-production" (*anutpādakṣānti*)—two important milestones that mark a new phase in their careers, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

There are no names for the *bhūmis*, which may be the reason why some scholars to consider this to be a less developed system than that found in the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. As Nalinaksha Dutt writes:

> [T]he treatment of the Bhūmis in the *Prajñāpāramitās* is much simpler than that of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, and it very likely represents a stage in the evolution of the Bhūmi conception standing midway between the *Mahāvastu* and the *Daśabhūmika*"[59]

We should be cautious, however, against placing the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter at the midway point in a linear model of the development of the *daśabhūmi* system. As will be shown below,[60] the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* appears to bring together a large number of trends of Buddhist thought, not just those found in the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter.

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[58] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 277.

[59] Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 88. Cf. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 23.

[60] See section 5.2.2.2.5

5.2.2.2.3 *Daśabhūmikleśacchedikā-sūtra* (T.309)

This *sūtra* (whose Sanskrit title has speculatively been reconstructed) may be called in English: *The Enquiry by Parama about Eliminating Defilements and Cutting Fetters in the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva* (最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經). It was translated into Chinese by Zhú Fónian (竺佛念) who flourished from 399 to 416 C.E.[61] It is also called the *Sūtra on the Samādhi as Bright as Ten Thousand Suns* (十千日光三昧定).[62]

There is some evidence to suggest that it is one of the earliest *daśabhūmi* systems. Rahder reports that, according to the *Nèi dian lù*,[63] a catalogue of the Tripiṭaka made during the Táng dynasty, three titles on the *bodhisattva-bhūmi*s were translated by Zhú Fălán (竺法蘭) at Luòyáng in 68 – 70 C.E. Among them was one called *Cutting Fetters in the Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva* (十地斷結經).[64] Although this translation was unfortunately lost at the time of the Yúan dynasty,[65] the similarity of the title suggests that it may have been the same *sūtra* as T.309.

Rahder has reconstructed the Sanskrit names for seven of the stages. For those stages where he has not provided Sanskrit reconstructions, I speculatively provide my own, together with Rahder's French and Zhú Fălán's Chinese translations. The list is as follows:[66]

(1) *cittotpāda*

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[61] Charles Muller. "Zhu Fonian", Digital Dictionary of Buddhism.

[62] T.309 p966a05

[63] 內典錄 T.2149

[64] See T.2149 p221a

[65] Rahder, "Préface," iii, viii.

[66] Ibid., viii-ix.

(2) *(adhi)śīla*

(3) *adhicitta*

(4) *janmaja* (Rahder: noblesse de naissance; Ch. 生貴)

(5) *pūrvayogasaṃpanna* (Rahder: achèvement de la bhāvanā; Ch. 修成)

(6) *adhimātra-avasthā*

(7) *avaivartika*

(8) *kumāra*

(9) *ekasthāna-asthāna* (Rahder: où manque encore un seul vihāra; Ch. 一住非)

(10) *abhiṣikta*

In Rahder's opinion, since there is "a close relationship"[67] between the purifications (淨) in T.309 and the preparations listed in the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter, the text often resembles the ten-stages of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*.[68] It is also similar with respect to the stage at which a bodhisattva becomes irreversible, namely the seventh.

5.2.2.2.4 The "*Daśavyavasthāna*" chapter[69] of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

There are six versions of this text.

(1) T.278: Chapter 11 of the *Avataṃsaka*,[70] translated (c. 420 C.E.) by Buddhabhadra;

(2) T.279: Chapter 15 of the *Avataṃsaka*,[71] translated (699 C.E.) by Śīkṣānanda;

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[67] "étroite parenté" Ibid., ix.

[68] "Le texte se rapproche souvent du bhūmisambhāra de la Prajñāpāramitā (Śatasāhasrikā)" Ibid.

[69] 十住品

[70] p444c06 – p449a11

[71] p083c29 – p088a27. Cf. Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*, (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1984-1987), 384-400.

(3) T.281: *Bodhisattva-parikarma Sūtra* (菩薩本業經) translated (c. 230 C.E.) by Zhīqīan;

(4) T.283: *Bodhisattva-daśavyavasthāna-carita* (菩薩十住行道), translated by Lokakṣema[72] (fl. 168-189 C.E.);

(5) T.284: *Bodhisattva-daśavyavasthāna Sūtra* (菩薩十住經) translated by Gītamitra (fl. 4th century C.E.);

(6) T.299: *Ratnalokā-nāma-dhāraṇī Sūtra* (總持寶光明經), translated by Fătīan (fl. 973-981 C.E.).

Although none of these texts is extant in Sanskrit, the transliteration of the names in T.283 and T.284 is similar to the names of the ten *vyavasthāna*s listed in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. They are therefore recoverable as:[73]

(1)	*prathamacittopādika*	(Initial Production of Bodhicitta[74])
(2)	*ādikarmika*	(Novice)
(3)	*yogācāra*	(Engaging in Practice)
(4)	*janmaja*	(Noble Birth)
(5)	*pūrvayogasaṃpanna*	(Completion of Earlier Yogas)
(6)	*śuddhādhyāśaya*	(Animated by Pure Resolve)
(7)	*avivartya*	(Irreversible)

[72] Nattier has shown that this *sūtra*, in combination with T.280 and T.282, like T.281, comprises an early, shorter version of the *Avataṃsaka*. She considers that it was translated by Lokakṣema, and that its attribution to Dharmakaṣa is spurious. Jan Nattier, "Indian antecedents of Huayan thought: New light from Chinese sources," in *Reflecting Mirrors: Perspectives on Huayan Buddhism*, ed. Imre Hamar (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).

[73] Quoted in ibid., 123. Also quoted in Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2376. Cf. T.278 p.084a22– a24; T.279 p.084a22 – a24; T.281 p449c15 – c18; T.283 p454c02 – c11; There is separate list of names in T.248. However, when the names appear in the body of the text, they are transliterated as in T.283; T.299 p.886b16 – b18.

[74] Cf. French translation of names: Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2376.

(8) *kumārabhūta* (Crown Prince)

(9) *yauvarājya* (Quality of a Crown Prince)

(10) *abhiṣekaprāpta* (Anointed)

Clearly, this system is closely related to that in T.309, with six of the stages bearing the same names, including the seventh, which is the irreversible *bhūmi*. An early occurrence of the same list is also found in T.778, which was translated into Chinese in 188 C.E.[75]

5.2.2.2.5 The "*Daśabhūmi*" chapter [76] of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (= the *Daśabhūmika sūtra*)

This chapter exists in five Chinese translations:

(1) T.278: Chapter 22 of the *Avataṃsaka*,[77] translated (c. 420 C.E.) by Buddhabhadra;

(2) T.279: Chapter 26 of the *Avataṃsaka*,[78] translated (699 C.E.) by Śīkṣānanda;

(3) T.285: *Gradual Possession of All Knowledge Virtues Sūtra* (漸備一切智德經) translated by Dharmarakṣa (fl. 1004 –1058 C.E.);

(4) T.286: *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* (十住經) translated by Kumārajīva (344 – 413 C.E.);

(5) T.287: *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* (十住經) translated by Śīladharma (fl. 785 – 804);

It is also extant in Sanskrit under the titles, *Daśabhūmika* and *Daśabhūmīśvara*.[79]

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[75] Ulrich Pagel, *The Bodhisattvapiṭaka*, (Tring (U.K.): The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1995), 87, n.30.

[76] 十地品

[77] p.542a01 – p.578a04

[78] p.178b23 – p.210c25; Cf. Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, 695-811.

[79] See Rahder, "Préface,", i.

The names of the ten stages are:[80]

(1)	*pramuditā*	(Joyful)
(2)	*vimalā*	(Immaculate)
(3)	*prabhākarī*	(Illuminating)
(4)	*arciṣmatī*	(Radiant)
(5)	*sudurjayā*	(Very Difficult to Conquer)
(6)	*abhimukhī*	(Face to Face)
(7)	*durańgama*	(Far Going)
(8)	*acāla*	(Immovable)
(9)	*sādhuṃatī*	(Good Thoughts)
(10)	*dharmameghā*	(Cloud of Doctrine)

It is this system that became the standard in many *śāstra*s, and it was the one Haribhadra chose to integrate into his systematised path. The system appears to be quite coherent. As Dayal writes:

> The author takes us through a mighty maze, but it is not without a plan. He manages to place almost all the important concepts and categories of Buddhist philosophy in his scheme of ten *bhūmis*. Thus, for example, he puts the four *saṅgraha-vastus* in the first four *bhūmis*, the four Noble Truths in the fifth *bhūmi*, the formula of dependent origination in the sixth *bhūmi*, and so on. But his system has a certain unity of plan on account of the parallelism between the ten pāramitās and the ten *bhūmis*. A bodhisattva especially cultivates one of the pāramitās in each *bhūmi* … The *Da. Bhū.* thus offers a methodical and coherent scheme, which is now accepted as the standard system of division and classification for a *bodhisattva's* career.[81]

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[80] *Daśa*, 5. Cf. T.278 p.542c27 – a01; T.279 p179b22 – b25; T.285 p.458c19 – c25; T.286 p.498b29 – c03.

[81] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 283.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of one system being superimposed on another. The third *bhūmi* of the *Daśabhūmika*, for instance, is mainly concerned with *dhyāna*, not the third perfection, *kṣānti*. Dayal opines that this indicates the existence of an older system, the first three stages of which were based on the three trainings (*śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*).[82] The names of the second and third *bhūmi*s in T.309 (*adhiśīla*, *adhicitta*) lend support to this opinion.

5.2.2.2.6 *Bodhisattvabhūmi*

Finally, brief mention should be made of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*'s system of twelve *vihāra*s. While the text does not explicitly make any correspondence between the twelve *vihāra*s and the ten *bhūmi*s of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, scholars have noted the parallels.[83] The text also contains a system of seven *bhūmi*s, the fifth of which is called *niyata*, and it represents a new phase in the bodhisattva's career. It corresponds to the Spontaneous and Signless (*anābhogo-nirnmitta*) *vihāra*,[84] a stage at which the bodhisattva "gains the pure, supreme bodhisattva's certitude that phenomena are not produced."[85] Since this, as will be explained in the next chapter, marks the attainment of irreversibility, we can say that the fifth *bhūmi* (or the tenth *vihāra*) is the irreversible *bhūmi* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

5.2.2.2.7 Discussion/Summary

In his analysis of four of the above six systems (nos. 1, 2, 5, 6), Har Dayal remarks:

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[82] Ibid., 287.

[83] See Dutt's analysis in "Introduction," 40-41. Also, Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 132-135.

[84] *anābhogo nirnimitto vihāraḥ niyatā bhūmiḥ / B-bhūmi*, 253 ln.10.

[85] *ihasthaścānutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu paramaṃ bodhisattvakṣāntiṃ suviśuddhaṃ lahate* / Ibid., 239 ln.14.

> It is a curious circumstance that these different schemes of the bhūmis have very little in common with each other.[86]

Hirakawa has also observed that "the organization of the ten stages differ radically from each other,"[87] and sees no grounds to posit a developmental sequence from the *Mahāvastu* to the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*.[88]

Despite the many differences between the various systems, when compared with the other major tradition incorporated into the systematised Mahāyāna soteriology, i.e., the *pañcamārga*, we notice two significant common features. (1) Whereas in the *pañcamārga* system, spiritual progress occurs as a result of the abandonment of defilements, the bodhisattva's progress in all the various *daśabhūmi* systems tends to occur as a result of mastering a series of normative practices. In other words, the *daśabhūmi* systems tend to define a bodhisattva's progress positively in terms of gain, rather than negatively in terms of abandonment. (2) All the *daśabhūmi* systems include an irreversible stage, whereas there is no such concept in the *pañcamārga*, other than the irreversibility of the *ārya*, i.e., once a bodhisattva attains the *darśanamārga* he or she becomes an *ārya*, and can never again become an ordinary person (*pṛthagjana*).

A problem that confronted systemisers such as Haribhadra and Asaṅga[89] was how to combine these two differing systems. Where should the irreversible stage be fitted into the five paths? And what role should the normative practices specified at each stage of the *daśabhūmi* have in the *pañcamārga* system that depends on the

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[86] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 271.

[87] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 67.

[88] See ibid.

[89] The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* also combines the *pañcamārga* and *daśabhūmi* systems. See Rahula, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 238.

abandonment of the two types of *āvaraṇa*s in order to progress? While both questions are important, we will confine our discussion here to the first question only. As mentioned above, to the extent that a notion of irreversibility exists in the *pañcamārga* system, it is generally associated with becoming an *ārya* at the time of attaining the *darśanamārga*.[90] But Haribhadra does not associate the *darśanamārga* with the eighth *bhūmi*; instead, he associates it with the first *bhūmi*.[91] Some other commentators,[92] however, attempted to match the two systems by interpreting the first *bhūmi* as the irreversible *bhūmi*.

Why was it important for Haribhadra to maintain that the eighth *bhūmi* was the irreversible *bhūmi*? Why was it the eighth *bhūmi* in the first place, and why is it the seventh *bhūmi* in some of the earlier systems? To answer these questions, it is helpful to examine the how the term *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* was used in the context of an earlier presentation of the bodhisattva path—that found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. This is the focus of the next section.

5.3 The meaning of *bhūmi*

In order to understand the meaning of *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, it is helpful to distinguish between three metaphorical senses of the word *bhūmi*. The three senses can be identified by comparing the explanations provided by Edgerton,[93] Dayal[94] and Conze.[95] They are summarised in the following table:

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[90] The Sarvāstivāda school, in which the *pañcamārga* system appears to have originated held that *sakṛdāgāmin*s, *anāgāmin*s and even *arhat*s could regress. However, a *śrota-āpanna* could not. See Masuda, "Origin and doctrines," p.26, n.1.

[91] The traditional ten "stages" (*bhūmis*) ... are fitted into the scheme by assigning the first to the path of vision, and the last to the path of development. Conze, "Maitreya's Abhisamayālaṅkāra," 195.

[92] In the *Bṛhaṭṭīka* Daṃṣṭrasena writes: "Having effected the attainment of the first bhūmi, [a bodhisattva] immediately enters into the fixed position of a bodhisattva, i.e., he attains the irreversible stage." *de bas na sa rab tu dga' ba la sogs pa la phyir mi ldog pa'i sa zhes bya'o/* To. 3808, 79B

[93] Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*, Vol.2 : 410-411.

Table 5.1 – Meanings of *bhūmi*

	Meaning	Edgerton	Dayal	Conze
1	a state or condition, not necessarily in the context of spiritual path	✓	✓	
2	a path, or level, within a hierarchy of spiritual paths			✓
3	a sequential stage of development within a systematised spiritual path	✓	✓	✓

Each of these three basic senses will now be discussed and illustrated with examples.

5.3.1 State or condition

Buddhists use *bhūmi* in its most general metaphorical sense to refer to a state or condition. Dayal expresses this sense as follows:

> In a metaphorical sense, it [i.e., *bhūmi*] is employed in a general way to denote "range," "state," "sphere," "station," "condition," "function," etc. We find such phrases as *kāma-bhūmi*, *dānta-bhūmi*, *kumāra-bhūmi*, *nirvāṇa-bhūmi*, *citta-bhūmi*, *kṣānti-bhūmi*, *pṛthagjana-bhūmi*, *tathatā-bhūmi*, etc.[96]

The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* contains a number of examples. We read, for example, of *śrāvakas* who conceive themselves as "situated in the state of *nirvāṇa*,"[97] and worlds whose number "completely surpasses the range of thought."[98] In these examples, *bhūmi* is used to convey a basic sense of a state that is bounded in some way

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[94] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 270-271.

[95] Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 234.

[96] Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine*, 270.

[97] *nirvāṇabhūmisthitāḥ*. *Saddharma*, 51 ln.7.

[98] *cittabhūmisamatikrāntāḥ*. Ibid., 189 ln.26.

(though its limits are not specific) and which, it is important to note, is not part of a series or hierarchy.

5.3.2 Level within a hierarchy of spiritual paths

A second sense of *bhūmi*, not identified by Edgerton or Dayal, is glossed by Conze as follows:

> ... three 'levels' of Disciples, Pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas. These levels are parallel and each leads to its own form of enlightenment.[99]

In other words, *bhūmi* in the sense of "level" is virtually synonymous with path. This is the opinion of the 18th century Tibetan scholar, 'Jigs-med-dbang-po, who explains that this sense of *bhūmi* refers metaphorically to the paths of the three vehicles.

> Calling the paths of the three vehicle "*bhūmi*" is a metaphorical sense of the word.[100]

Thus, when used by the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, the word *bhūmi* is sometimes a synonym for *mārga* or *yāna*. This sense of the term is particularly important for our study, since the bodhisattva is repeatedly warned against turning back to the *bhūmi*s (i.e., levels) of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*.

5.3.3 Sequential stage within a systematised spiritual path

The third metaphorical sense of the word is similar to the first in that it also refers to a state. However, it differs from the first sense in that here the state exists within a

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[99] Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 234. It is curious that the third level is not called the *bodhisattva-bhūmi*. While Linnart Mäll's assertion that "bodhisattva" sometimes referred to practitioners of all three vehicles is a plausible explanation, which is supported by a passage in the *AA-Ālokā* (see *AA-Ālokā*, 22 ln.13-16), further investigation is needed to support his contention that "in most cases a 'bodhisattva abiding on the vehicle of śrāvakas' is denoted by the term śrāvaka." See Mäll, *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 54-55.

[100] *theg pa gsum gyi lam la sa zhe brjod pa ni/ sa btags ba yin zhing/* 'Jigs-med-dbang-po, *Sa-lam*, 71. Interestingly, 'Jigs-med-dbang-po's statement would seem to imply that he did not think of the "path" itself as also a metaphor.

sequential series of such states. It has often therefore been translated into English as "stage." Conze distinguishes three types of stages:

> it denotes either (a) the seven successive stages of the Hīnayāna which end in Arhatship, or (b) the ten successive stages of the Mahāyāna which end in Buddhahood, or (c) some particularly important phases of a bodhisattva's career, like the irreversible stage, the stage of a beginner, the stage of a Crown Prince ...[101]

It is my contention, however, that the third type of stage identified by Conze is quite different from the first two types. I shall argue that since the "phases of a bodhisattva's career" that Conze furnishes as examples of this third type do not usually occur within standard lists of stages, it would be more appropriate to consider them as instances of the first sense of *bhūmi* identified in Section 5.3.1 above; i.e., as "states" or "conditions," rather than members of a series of "stages." Before examining this third type, however, let us briefly look at the first two types mentioned by Conze.

The seven Hīnayāna stages, according to the *Mahāvyutpati*,[102] are:

(1) *śuklavidarśanā-bhūmi* (Stage of Clear Vision, or Stage of Dry Wisdom[103])

(2) *gotra-bhūmi* (Stage of Lineage)

(3) *aṣṭamaka-bhūmi* (Stage of the Eighth Ārya)

(4) *darśana-bhūmi* (Stage of Seeing)

(5) *tanu-bhūmi* (Stage of Refinement)

(6) *vītarāga-bhūmi* (Stage of Freedom from Passion)

(7) *kṛtāvi-bhūmi* (Stage of One whose Work is Done)

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[101] Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 234.

[102] *Mahāvyutpatti*, ed. Ryōzaburō Sakaki, (Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1965), 86-87.

[103] The variant reading, "Stage of Dry Wisdom" (乾慧地), found in some Chinese translations (e.g. Kumārajīva, T.223 p0259c12) is probably due to a faulty reading of *śuṣka* for *śukla* (attested in *Śatasāhsrikā*). See Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2377. Cf. *Śata*, 1563 ln.1.

This list, which occurs at several places in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*,[104] may have been drawn from an earlier *abhidharma* tradition. The complete list of seven is not found in any of the extant Sarvāstivāda literature, though the *Mahāvibhāṣā* contains a number of similar lists with several terms in common.[105] The *Vinayamātṛkā*, whose sectarian affiliation is uncertain, contains a six-member list that is the same as the seven *bhūmi* system, except that it lacks the first *bhūmi*.[106]

The ten successive stages of the Mahāyāna to which Conze refers are the ten bodhisattva stages discussed above in Section 5.2.2.2.

Having shown that the first two types of "stage" identified by Conze refer to *bhūmi* in the sense of a rung on a ladder of spiritual progress, we will now look more closely at Conze's examples of the third type to see whether it should be thought of in the same way.

As we have seen in section 5.2.2.2.4 above, *ādikarmika* (meaning "novice") is also the name of the second *vyavasthāna*, and would therefore appear in that context to define the specific stage of a bodhisattva who has progressed beyond the initial production of *bodhicitta*. In the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, however, the term *ādikarmika-vyavasthāna* does not occur. While we do find *ādikarmika-bhūmi*, it is less common that the bare uncompounded term, *ādikarmika*, which appears to connote the general sense of a novice bodhisattva, rather than a clearly defined stage on the bodhisattva path.

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[104] See, for example, *Pañca (D)*, 230 ln.20-21.

[105] See Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2378-2379; Buswell and Jaini, "The development of abhidharma philosophy," 117.

[106] T.1463 p801b20-25; Cf. Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2379.

The formation of the *bhūmi* compound appears to be optional. While Chapter 15 of the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* opens with a description of how "the bodhisattva who stands on the stage of a novice"[107] should honour his teachers, the corresponding passage in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* simply speaks of *ādikarmika* bodhisattvas.[108] This would suggest that there is no significant difference between an *ādikarmika* bodhisattva and one who stands on the *ādikarmika-bhūmi*.

The so-called "stage of a crown prince" (*kumāra-bhūmi*) is similar to the *ādikarmika-bhūmi* in the sense that it occurs both as part of a series and independently. Its occurrence as part of a series has been noted above, where we saw *kumārabhūta* (童眞) mentioned as the eighth of ten *vyavasthāna*s in the *Daśavyavasthāna* chapter of the *Avataṃsaka*.[109] In the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* it appears independently, i.e., not part of any system of fixed stages, and like *ādikarmika*, often in the bare uncompounded form of *kumāra*. Unlike *ādikarmika*, however, which, as we have seen connotes at least a general sense of being a novice, the following example from the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, suggests being a "crown prince" simply refers to a state of celibacy, a state that may encompass the entire bodhisattva career.[110]

> Some bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, from the first thought of enlightenment onwards, undertake celibacy (*brahmacaryā*), and course as a "crown prince"

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[107] *Rgs*, XV:1a *yo ādikarma sthitu bhūmiya bodhisattvo* / *Rgs* (Obermiller), 56.

[108] See *Aṣṭa*, 146 ln.4.

[109] See section 5.2.2.2.4 above.

[110] See, however, Hirakawa, who opines that in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* the *kumara-bhūmi* represents a stage beyond the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*. Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism : From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, tr. Paul Groner, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 304.

(*kumārabhūta*) in the practice of a bodhisattva until they awaken to full enlightenment.[111]

To summarise, the stage of a beginner (*ādikarmika-bhūmi*) and the stage of a crown prince (*kumāra(bhūta)-bhūmi*) can occur both within systems of graduated spiritual progress as well as independently, and are therefore somewhat ambiguous. While Conze's description of them as "phases" may be apt, in some contexts, it may be better to think of them as referring to a "state" or "condition" whose limits are undefined. We now turn to our main topic of interest, the stage of irreversibility or *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* to determine whether similar conclusions can be drawn.

5.4 The meaning of *bhūmi* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

5.4.1 *Avinivartanīya* and *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*

The term *avinivartanīya* usually occurs uncompounded with *bhūmi* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. In the "Signs" chapter, for example, *avinivartanīya* bodhisattvas are repeatedly mentioned, but only once in the Sanskrit version of the chapter is a bodhisattva said to stand on the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*.[112] When bodhisattvas who stand on the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* are mentioned in other parts of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, it often appears to mean exactly the same thing as being an *avinivartanīya* bodhisattva. Consider the following two examples in which, despite the similarity of the contexts, the word *bhūmi* appears to be optional.

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[111] *keṣāñcid bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ prathamacittotpādam upādāya brahmacaryāsamādānante kumārabhūtā eva bodhisattva cārikāṃ caranto 'nuttarāṃ samykasaṃbodhim abhisaṃbudhyante/ Pañca (D)*, 36 ln.13-15.

[112] See *Aṣṭa* 168 ln.20, 23-24. The term *avinivartanīya bodhisattva-bhūmi* is actually mentioned twice but the context is the same.

(1) In Chapter 3, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* mentions a list of increasingly rare types of spiritual practitioners,[113] seven of whom are bodhisattvas, with the sixth rarest being those who abide on the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*. The *sūtra* states:

> Even fewer [bodhisattvas], practising and striving in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, stand on the *avinivartanīya* bodhisattva *bhūmi*.[114]

In Chapter 25 there is a similar list of increasingly rare bodhisattvas,[115] the last of which are irreversible bodhisattvas. However, *bhūmi* is not used in this context, suggesting that *avinivartanīya* bodhisattvas and bodhisattvas who abide on the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* are the same.

(2) Several passages in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* describe irreversible bodhisattvas as superior to ordinary bodhisattvas because they do not become despondent (*avalīyate*) when they are taught the profound *Prajñāpāramitā*. While the first such passage in Chapter 1 does describe such bodhisattvas as "standing on the irreversible *bhūmi*,"[116] similar passages occurring in Chapters 6,[117] 10,[118] and 15[119] simply describe them as irreversible without any mention of *bhūmi*. This also suggests that *bhūmi* is an optional term.

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[113] *Aṣṭa*, 30 ln.11 - 22. Tr. Edward Conze, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1970), 25-26.

[114] *tebhyo 'pyalpebhyo 'lpatarakāste ye prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caranto ghaṭamānā avinivartanīyāyāṃ bodhisattvabhūmāvavatiṣṭhante / Aṣṭa*, 30 ln.19-20. Note that in T.224 and T.227 much simpler, two-stage list occur. See T.224 p432b07-09, T.227 p542c19.

[115] Ibid., 212 ln.29 - 213 ln.3. Here four types of bodhisattva described. In T.224 p465a24-25 only three types are described. There is no corresponding passage in T.227

[116] *sthito 'vinivartanīyāyāṃ bodhisattvabhūmau.* Ibid., 4. Note that in the corresponding passage in T.224, the term *bhūmi* (地) is missing. See T.224, p426a18.

[117] Ibid., 71 ln.4.

[118] Ibid., 106 ln.5. Note that in T.220(4) p0805c16 the term 'irreversible position' (不退位) is used.

[119] Ibid., 150 ln.23.

While these conclusions may seem somewhat trivial, they are significant in view of the fact that there were some later systematisers of the bodhisattva path who held that there was a difference between the two terms, and that not all irreversible bodhisattvas stood on the irreversible *bhūmi*. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Why then, it may be asked, should the authors have used the term *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* at all? A comparison of the Chinese translations of some passages suggests the *bhūmi* compound may have been formed as a kind of abstract noun meaning "state of irreversibility." Other passages suggest that it may have been used to emphasise the immutability of such a state.

At one point in the "Signs" chapter irreversible bodhisattvas are described as standing in the "element of irreversibility" (*avinivartanīya-dhātu*),[120] a term that appears in T.224 as *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* (阿惟越致地),[121] but in T.227 as "state" (性) of irreversibility.[122] This last translation suggests a Sanskrit term that may have originally been *avinivartanīyatva*, a term that is attested elsewhere in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in Chapter 20, where we see *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* apparently used interchangeably with *avinivartanīyatva*.[123] The passage in question describes the difference between reversible and irreversible bodhisattvas in terms of their answer to a question concerning which dharmas the bodhisattva should master (*parijayati*). If bodhisattvas include skill-in-means (*upāya-kauśalya*) in their answer, they are to be considered as predicted (*vyākṛta*) to full enlightenment and standing on the

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[120] Sign 18 : Ibid., 164.

[121] T.224p455a07, 12.

[122] T.227 p564c01, 06

[123] See *Aṣṭa*, 187 ln.17 - 188 ln.10. Cf. tr. Conze, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 148.

irreversible bodhisattva *bhūmi*. However, if the bodhisattva does not provide such an answer, the Buddha states:

> Subhūti, it should be known that this bodhisattva-mahāsattva has not, in a *state* of irreversibility (*avavinivartanīyatve*), been predicted to full enlightenment.[124]

Thus, the terms avinivartanīya-bhūmi and avinivartanīyatva appear to be interchangeable.

The association here of the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* with prediction also suggests an intention to emphasise the assuredness of the state of irreversibility through association with the word of the Buddha. In other words,, the literal meaning of *bhūmi* as ground, or firm support, is perhaps used to highlight the stability of the condition of being an irreversible bodhisattva in the sense that it is a condition from which one cannot fall.

5.4.2 Does the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* teach a system of *bhūmis*?

Like the various *daśabhūmi* systems surveyed earlier in this chapter, there are a number of schemes that attempt to describe the bodhisattva's career in terms of four phases, or four key events.[125] While the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* makes no mention of a system of ten *bhūmi*s, Hirakawa has claimed that it "establishes four progressive

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[124] *veditavyametatsubhūte nāyaṃ vyākṛto bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'nuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhāvavinivartanīyatve Aṣṭa*, 187 ln.26-27.

[125] In addition to that found in the *Mahāvastu* (see section 2.2.2.1 above.), there is also one found in the Bodhisattva Sūtra on the Enquiry of Mañjuśrī (文殊師利問菩薩署經), where four milestones are mentioned: (1) cittotpāda, (2) avaivartika, (3) sitting under the [bodhi] tree, and (4) complete possession of *buddhadharma*. (T.458 p435b22-24 但薩阿竭署者有四事。何謂四事？一者、發意；二者、阿惟越致；三者、菩薩坐於樹下；四者、具足佛法。是爲四。). Conze has also identified four "fixed points" based on "the Jātakas and other biographical documents about the lives of the Bodhisattva who later on became the Buddha Śākyamuni." They are: (1) the prediction of Dīpaṃkara, (2) the stage when he became irreversible, (3) the sojourn in the Tuṣita heavens, and (4) the attainment of buddhahood (Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 235). These schemes appear to have little in common except for the fact that they contain four members.

stages in the Bodhisattva's practice,"[126] in which the irreversible stage features as the third. Hirakawa's list is as follows:

(1) 初發心菩薩 (*prathamacittopādika-bodhisattva*)

(2) 行六波羅蜜菩薩 (*saṭpāramitācaryā-bodhisattva*)[127]

(3) 不退轉菩薩 (*avinivartanīya-bodhisattva*)

(4) 一生補處菩薩 (*ekajātipratibaddha-bodhisattva* or *abhiṣikta*)

Hirakawa claims that the four stages are established in the three shorter (T.227, T.224, T.225) and three longer (T.220, T.221, T.223) versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. Nattier, however, has questioned Hirakawa's assertion that the four stages occur in the shorter version, writing that she "can see no justification for reading it into the Aṣṭa."[128] It seems that the four types of bodhisattva only appear once in T.227,[129] whilst in the corresponding passage of T.225 the second member is missing,[130] and in T.224 the list does not occur at all.[131] The Sanskrit *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, like T.225, also lacks the second member,[132] though the Tibetan matches T.227 and contains the complete list.[133]

Nattier's claim that the last member of the list only occurs "in materials borrowed from another source"[134] may well be correct, given that the whole *sūtra* is full of

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[126] Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 66.

[127] My reconstruction (no Skt. given by Hirakawa)

[128] Nattier, *A Few Good Men,* 152 n.32.

[129] T.227 p.575a20 – 21.

[130] 新發意閦士隨次第上至不退轉，至一生補處。(T.225 p.501b1)

[131] Were it to occur, it would do so at T.224 p465c03–22.

[132] *Aṣṭa*, 215 ln.21-24. Perhaps because he was working from a different manuscript, Conze gives the full list of four in his English translation. See Conze, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 177-178.

[133] To.12, 235B

[134] Nattier, *A Few Good Men,* 152 n.32. Nattier does not identify the source. In his meticulous analysis of the composition of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, Conze does not identify the passage in which the list occurs as an accretion. See Conze, "The composition of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā," 260.

traces of other texts. However, we should be cautious about using such evidence to conclude that the *sūtra* does or does not say something. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* should not be considered as a single text as much as it should be treated as a family of texts, only a few of whose members have survived. The fact that only some of these surviving members of the family contain a certain passage (particularly one found in all the surviving members of a closely related family, namely, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*), is not, I think, necessarily a reason for saying that the passage should not be "read into" the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

Regardless of whether these four "stages" can be read into the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, a second question concerns whether they should be considered *bhūmi*s. Although Hirakawa's translator typically uses the word "stage" as a translation of *bhūmi*, it is possible that in this case Hirakawa is using "stage" in a more general sense of "phase" or "state," and does not intend to say that the bodhisattva career consists of four *bhūmi*s. Evidence to suggest this comes from the facts that he (or to be precise, his translator) once uses "stage" to refer to the four *caryā*s of the *Mahāvastu*,[135] while on at least three occasions he calls the four stages the "four *types* of bodhisattva."[136]

Thus, we may conclude that although some versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* enumerate four types of bodhisattva that appear to represent stages in the bodhisattva career, apart from the third (*avinivartanīya-bodhisattva*) there is no evidence that these stages were called, or even thought of, as *bhūmi*s. It should be remembered that we

[135] See Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, 66 n.71.

[136] Emphasis added. See ibid.; Hirakawa, *A history of Indian Buddhism : From Śākyamuni to early Mahāyāna*, 305.

are only discussing the shorter version of the *sūtra* here, and that the situation with respect to the longer version is somewhat different.

5.4.3 Attainments that accompany irreversibility in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

In section 5.4.1 a passage was cited in which it was said that bodhisattvas who stood on the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* possessed skill-in-means (*upāya-kauśalya*) and had received a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) of enlightenment. The way in which bodhisattvas gain these two qualities will now be discussed in order to investigate whether or not the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* thought of irreversibility as a fixed point in the career of a bodhisattva.

5.4.3.1 Skill-in-means (*upāya-kauśalya*)

As we saw in section 2.4.4, the relationship between irreversibility and skill-in-means is made explicit in Chapter 16 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where, following the Buddha's sermon on the meaning of suchness (*tathatā*), various members of the audience gain certain archetypical realisations. These include sixty bodhisattvas whose "minds were freed from outflows without further appropriation,"[137] an expression that indicates the attainment of arhatship.[138] When asked by Śāriputra how this could have happened, the Buddha explains by means of a simile of a great bird with undeveloped wings (*ajātapakṣa*) who tries to fly a great distance but ends up crashing to earth: bodhisattvas who lack skill-in-means and who are not upheld by the perfection of wisdom are bound to fall to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*.

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[137] *anupādāyāsravebhyaścittāni vimuktāni* / *Aṣṭa*, 155 ln.4. Cf. T.224 p453c03: "Sixty beginner bodhisattvas all attained arhatship" 六十新學菩薩皆得阿羅漢道。

[138] Cf. ibid., 116 ln.29-30."In this very life, [their] minds having attained freedom from outflows without further appropriation, enter *parinirvāṇa*." *dṛṣṭa eva dharme anupādāya āsravebhyaścittaṃ vimocya parinirvāpayāmiti* /

While the idea of skill-in-means has been interpreted in several ways by Mahāyānists,[139] here we will limit our discussion to its use by the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where it seems to refer to the practical application of the perfection of wisdom, or the doctrine of no own being (*asvabhāva*).[140] An example of how this was to be done is given in Chapter 6 of the *sūtra*, where the bodhisattva's practice of "dedication" (*pariṇāmanā*) of wholesome roots (*kuśalamūla*) is described. Bodhisattvas are instructed to "dedicate their wholesome roots to highest enlightenment through bringing them to mind, but not treating them as signs."[141] The *sūtra* then clearly states that "this should be known as that bodhisattva-mahāsattva's skill-in-means."[142]

In traditional abhidharma philosophy a sign (*nimitta*) was basically an object of perception. Meditators were instructed to cultivate the absorption of Signlessness (*ānimittasamādhi*),[143] in which they refrained from seizing upon the general appearances, or signs, of objects to the senses. For the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, however, treating the data of sensory experience as signs

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[139] The *B-bhūmi*, for example, talks of six kinds of skill-in-means. See *B-bhūmi*, 178 ln.3-11.

[140] The close connection between skill-in-means and the perfection of wisdom is expressed in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* : "What is the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's skill-in-means? It is just the perfection of wisdom." *upāyakauśalyaṃ bodhisatvasya mahāsattvasya katamat? yaduta iyameva prajñāpāramitā / Aṣṭa*, 211 ln.19-20. Michael Pye also writes: "If the Perfection of Insight sutras themselves had not taken *prajñā*... for their titles, one might almost dare to rename them the 'perfection of insight and skilful means literature', so often does one find within them that these two terms are inseparably associated." Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 104.

[141] *atha tannimitaṃ samanvāharati, na ca nimittīkaroti, evaṃ pariṇāmitaṃ bhavati tatkuśalamūlaṃ bodhisattvena mahāsattvenānuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau / Aṣṭa*, 76 ln.19-20.

[142] *idaṃ tadbodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyopāyakauśalaṃ veditavyam* / Ibid., 76 ln.20-21.

[143] *AK* VIII:24a. Cf. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 61-66.

meant to treat them as if they pointed to actually existing objects,[144] and bodhisattvas were therefore taught not to view their experiences in such a manner.

More important for a bodhisattva than the application of skill-in-means to the dedication of wholesome roots, however, was its application to practices that were common to the *śrāvaka-* and *pratyabuddha-yana*s. This enabled a bodhisattva, for example, to practice the *samādhi*s of emptiness, signlessness and wishlessness without entering *nirvāṇa*, or as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* puts it, realising the "reality limit" (*bhūtakoṭi*). As the *sūtra* states:

> He does not realise the reality limit at the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*. Why? because he is upheld by supreme strength and great power—skill-in-means, and the perfection of wisdom.[145]

It is in this context that Nattier has observed that "the term *upāya-kauśalya* as used in the *Aṣṭa* thus refers to what might best be described as a 'balancing act',"[146] since,

> [m]any (if not most) of the practices undertaken by the bodhisattva were the same as those carried out by candidates for Arhatship, which meant that there was a danger, at least for advanced bodhisattvas, of accidentally attaining enlightenment as an Arhat ... The bodhisattva is thus involved in something of a "balancing act," carrying out the practices of his śrāvaka coreligionists while attempting to stave off what would be their natural result.[147]

Thus, while it is apparent that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* deemed that possession of skill-in-means was necessary for a bodhisattva to be irreversible, the question that concerns us here is whether they thought this skill-in-means was

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[144] See Edward Conze, *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1954; reprint, New York etc.: Harper and Row, 1964), 320.

[145] *na tveva bhūtakoṭiṃ sākṣātkaroti, yaduta śrāvakabhūmau vā pratyekabuddhabhūmau vā / tatkasya hetoḥ? tathā hyasya balavattamā dṛḍhatamāś ca parigrāhakāḥ, yaduta prajñāpāramitā upāyakauśalyaṃ ca / Aṣṭa*, 184 ln.22-24. Cf. Lethcoe, "The bodhisattva ideal in the Aṣṭa. and Pañca. Prajñāpāramitā sūtras," 268.

[146] Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 155.

[147] Ibid., 140-141.

something that all bodhisattvas attained once they had reached a certain stage of progress, or whether it was something that could have been gained at any time.

Part of the problem we have in addressing this question is that we know so little about what kind of path the first bodhisattvas believed lay ahead of them. It is not clear whether they imagined themselves eliminating defilements over many lifetimes, or whether they would do it in one sitting just prior to attaining enlightenment. While the apparent obsession by the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s with the four stages of the *āryan* path suggests the former, we do not know whether they believed that all practitioners of all three vehicles traversed this path, or that the paths for the three types of practitioners were fundamentally distinct. While we know from the case of the bodhisattvas described in Chapter 16 that the authors of the *sūtra* believed that some bodhisattvas did not possess skill-in-means, did this mean, as Haribhadra tells us,[148] that the term "bodhisattva" could also be applied to practitioners of all three vehicles?[149]

These are questions that will be further explored in the next chapter. For now, we will merely conclude that there is no explicit evidence in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* that a bodhisattva's ability to apply skill-in-means to his or her practices represented a fixed milestone on the bodhisattva path.

5.4.3.2 Prediction (*vyākaraṇa*)

A general overview of the relationship between prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) and irreversibility has been given in chapter 2, where it was argued that the way prediction is presented in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s implies two different

[148] *AA-Ālokā*, 22 ln.13-16. Tr. Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.1 : 198.

[149] Mäll also expresses such a view. See Mäll, *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 54.

conceptions of the Buddha. First, the fact that bodhisattvas seem unaware of their predicted status and search for signs of it in dreams suggests that they believed they may have received a prediction in a previous lifetime from the historical Buddha. Second, the attainment of prediction in the bodhisattva's present lifetime, possibly in the form of a visionary experience, suggests a belief in the Buddha as a transcendental being. This second presentation of prediction also implies that it may have been seen as a certification that the bodhisattva had gained some sort of special sufficient condition for enlightenment. The longer versions of the *sūtra*, and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra,* as well as some versions of the shorter versions,[150] teach that it is the certitude that dharmas are not produced. In this section, however, we shall limit our concern to the role of prediction in the shorter version of the *sūtra* and try to determine whether its authors believed it occurred at a fixed point in the bodhisattva's career or whether it could occur at any time.

Several passages in the "Signs" chapter relate irreversibility with prediction. We read, for example, of Māra, who appears before the bodhisattva in the guise of a *śramaṇa*, urging him to reject what he has heard, for it is not the word of the Buddha. If, on hearing this, the bodhisattva wavers, the *sūtra* states that

> it should be known that he has not been predicted by the Tathāgata, that he is not fixed on full enlightenment, that he does not stand in the element of irreversibility.[151]

Similarly, when Māra accuses the bodhisattva of lacking the characteristics, signs and marks (*ākāra, liṅga, nimitta*) of an irreversible bodhisattva,

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[150] See T.224 p451a15.

[151] *veditavyametatsubhūte - nāyaṃ vyākṛto bodhisattvastathāgataiḥ / aniyato 'yaṃ bodhisattvo 'nuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau / nāyamavinivartanīyadhātau sthita iti / Aṣṭa*, 163 ln.31 - 164 ln.1. Cf. T.224 p456a12-13

> if the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's mind changes, then Subhūti, it should be known that he has not been predicted to full enlightenment by the Tathāgatas of the past, the unsurpassed fully enlightened Buddhas.[152]

In these examples, a bodhisattva's wavering is considered to be a sign of not only his reversible status, but also of his not having received a prediction to enlightenment. It is important to note the direction of inference here. The *sūtra* is not necessarily saying that prediction is a sign of irreversibility. Any prediction that the bodhisattva may have received is not observed, and therefore not a sign. Rather, it is the bodhisattva's firm resolution that is observed, and from which a prediction by the *tathāgata*s of the past is inferred. Then, based on the belief that enlightened beings can see the karmic causal chains that will lead a bodhisattva to enlightenment and faith in the infallibility of their speech, a predicted bodhisattva is said to be irreversible. The shorter version of the sūtra is not always specific about whether the predicted bodhisattva possesses the certitude that dharmas are not produced, which the longer versions of the *sūtra* often mention as a prerequisite for receiving a prediction.

Although it is a commentary on the longer version of the sūtra, it is nevertheless significant that *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* says that some bodhisattvas are irreversible by virtue of having received a prediction, despite not having gained the certitude that dharmas are not produced. The irreversibility of such bodhisattvas would appear to derive from the Buddha's ability to know the future. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* states:

> There are two kinds of *avaivartika*: (1) the one who has obtained *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*; and (2) the one who has not obtained *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* [but who has received the prediction]. The Buddha

[152] *sacetpunarbodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya anyathā cittaṃ bhavati, veditavyametatsubhūte nāyaṃ bodhisattvo vyākṛtaḥ paurvakaistathāgatairarhadbhiḥ samyaksaṃbuddhairanuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhāviti* / Ibid., 168 ln.13-15.

> knows that because of his past (*atīta*) and future (*anāgata*) karmic causes and conditions, this bodhisattva will necessarily become a buddha for the benefit and happiness of other beings and gives him the prediction (*vyākaraṇa*).[153]

The fact that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* implies (or at least, allows) this second kind of irreversible bodhisattva is significant, for it means that prediction was not necessarily tied to having gained a certain realisation or stage in the bodhisattva's career.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has prepared the ground for a more detailed analysis of the irreversible *bhūmi* in the next two chapters. We began by arguing that the systematised bodhisattva path as presented in the works of Haribhadra and his followers represents the confluence of at least two major strands of Buddhist soteriological thinking. Having reviewed these two strands, it was shown that only one of them, namely, the *daśabhūmi* system, is explicitly found in the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, and even then, in a form that was just one of many that are to be found in Mahāyāna literature. It was also shown that the particular version of the *daśabhūmi* that Haribhadra chose to incorporate into his *Prajñāpāramitā* commentaries differed in some aspects (notably, the position of the irreversible *bhūmi*) from that found in the *sūtra*.

Since the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* represents a fixed stage in the bodhisattva's career when it appears as a member of the various *daśabhūmi* systems, the use of the term in the shorter version of the *sūtra*, where it appears independently of the *daśabhūmi* systems, was examined. Our investigation showed that although the terms

[153] Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1804-1805. Tr: Migme Chodron. "The treatise on the great virtue of wisdom of Nāgārjuna." (Unpublished), 1483-1484.

avinivartanīya and *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* are synonymous in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the latter term may have been used to emphasise the condition or state of irreversibility or perhaps the certainty associated with that condition. Two concepts associated with the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi*—skill-in-means and prediction—were also examined. It was found that although skill-in-means appears necessary for a bodhisattva to stand on the irreversible *bhūmi* and avoid the fruits of the *āryan* path, there was no clear indication in the *sūtra* regarding when bodhisattvas gained this skill, and hence no indication of any fixed "stage" at which they become irreversible. Conclusions are however, difficult to draw since we know little about what kind of the path that authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* envisaged for bodhisattvas. Despite sometimes existing as a somewhat indefinite phase in a three or four phase presentation of the bodhisattva path, rather than considering the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* as a "stage," it seems it would be better to regard it either as (1) a condition that a bodhisattva must enter into at some point in order to avoid actualising arhatship; or (2) a state of certainty with respect to the attainment of enlightenment, which is achieved through having received a prediction. It is likely that these two interpretations originated independently of each other.

6 THE IRREVERSIBLE *BHŪMI* WITHIN THE *DAŚABHŪMI* SYSTEM

Haribhadra's interpretation... runs directly counter to the spirit and intentions of the Prajñāpāramitā and the Mahāyāna.[1]

Étienne Lamotte

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The question to be addressed

The basic question to be addressed in this chapter is: if in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* is not associated with any particular stage of progress, how and why did it come to be the eighth *bhūmi* in later Mahāyāna works? The answer, I will argue, can be explained in terms of two developmental steps.

The first was the formulation in the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s of a bodhisattva path that consisted of two distinct phases. In the first phase bodhisattvas traversed a path in which they gradually abandoned all the defilements (*kleśa*) that bound them to cyclic existence. Thus, in terms of abandonments, this first phase coincided with the path of the *śrāvaka*. In the second phase, which had no *śrāvaka-yāna* parallel, bodhisattvas abandoned all the residues (*vāsanā*) of those defilements. Thus, it was in a sense logically impossible for bodhisattvas who had progressed to the second

[1] Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 219.

phase to revert to the path of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* since they had already abandoned all defilements, and abandonment of defilements was the very function of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* paths. They were therefore, by definition, irreversible.

The second developmental step was the correlation of these two phases of the bodhisattva's career with the ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. Based on an earlier tradition that posited six stages of progress to arhatship to which the stage of a *pratyekabuddha* was added, the first seven *bhūmi*s of the *daśabhūmi* made up the first phase in which the bodhisattva abandoned all the defilements. The second phase was correlated with the last three *bhūmi*s in the *daśabhūmi* system, thereby making the eighth the irreversible *bhūmi*.

6.1.2 Chapter outline

Since all Buddhist theories of the path are attempts to explain how practitioners can achieve the goal of enlightenment, I begin my argument by examining how the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s envisaged the bodhisattva's goal. An investigation of a buddha's knowledge and abandonments as presented in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* shows that the definition of the goal underwent some changes. While the exact nature of the difference between arhatship and "unsurpassed, right, full enlightenment" (*anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*) is not always clear in the earlier version of the *sūtra*, the more developed theories found in the later version provide a much clearer description of how buddhahood was superior to arhatship in terms of both knowledge and abandonments.

I then argue that in order to explain how a bodhisattva eventually reached this superior goal, Mahāyāna philosophers delineated a bodhisattva path that was

divided into two phases. The goals of the first phase were threefold: (1) elimination of defilements; (2) entry into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva; and (3) attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced. The goals of the second phase were: (1) elimination of the residues of those defilements; and (2) attainment of unsurpassed full enlightenment. I argue that the point of demarcation between these two phases became a fixed point in the bodhisattva's career beyond which it was logically impossible for bodhisattvas to progress unless they were irreversible. I also argue that by drawing on earlier traditions that counted six or seven Hīnayāna stages,[2] Mahāyānists set this point of demarcation as the seventh or eighth *bhūmi* in the various systems of ten *bhūmi*s. This then resulted in the irreversible *bhūmi* becoming the seventh or eighth, depending on how the Hīnayāna stages were enumerated.

6.2 Goal of the bodhisattva in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s

6.2.1 Popular and scholastic conceptions of buddhahood

In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, Sadāprarudita declares his ambition to attain highest enlightenment, which he envisages as follows:

> After I have known unsurpassed, right, full enlightenment, I shall gain a golden-coloured body, the thirty-two marks of a great man, the eighty minor marks, the splendour of a halo whose rays extend infinitely, great love, great compassion, great rejoicing, great impartiality, the four fearlessnesses, the four analytical knowledges, the eighteen special dharmas of a buddha, and I shall gain the five superknowledges, an unimaginable purity of conduct, an

[2] I use the term 'Hīnayāna' here not to represent any real tradition, but to refer to the two non-Mahāyāna soteriological options as seen from the Mahāyāna standpoint.

> unimaginable purity of concentration, an unimaginable purity of wisdom, and the ten powers of a Tathāgata.[3]

This is an image of enlightenment that has much in common with the descriptions of a buddha found in the Mainstream literature. The ten powers (*bala*), the four fearlessnesses (*vaiśāradya*), the five superknowledges (*abhijña*), and the four analytic knowledges (*pratisaṃvid*) are all mentioned in the Mainstream *sūtra*s, while the eighteen special dharmas (*āveṇikadharma*) and the four immeasurables (*apramāṇa*, i.e., great love, etc.) are found in the *abhidharma* literature.[4] Although there are some differences in detail between the Mahāyāna and Mainstream lists, broadly speaking, they are very similar.

Yet at the same time the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s also speak of enlightenment in a very profound way. In the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā*, for example, Śākyamuni advises bodhisattvas not to call to attention (*manaskāra*) the qualities of a buddha since they have no self-existence (*svabhāva*):

> Furthermore, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Fully Enlightened One should not be called to attention through the ten powers of a Tathāgata, the four fearlessnesses, the four analytical knowledges, great compassion, great love, or the eighteen dharmas exclusive to a buddha. And why? Because they have no self-existence, and that which has no self-existence is nonexistent.[5]

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[3] *anuttarāṁ samyaksaṁbodhimabhisaṁbudhya suvarṇavarṇaṁ ca kāyaṁ pratilapsyāmahe / dvātriṁśacca mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni aśītiṁ cānuvyañjanāni vyāmaprabhatāṁ ca anantaraśmitāṁ ca mahāmaitrīṁ ca mahākaruṇāṁ ca mahāmuditāṁ ca mahopekṣāṁ ca / catvāri vaiśāradyāni pratilapsyāmahe, catasraśca pratisaṁvidaḥ pratilapsyāmahe, aṣṭādaśa ca āveṇikabuddhadharmāṁ pratilapsyāmahe, pañca ca abhijñāḥ, acintyāṁ ca śīlaviśuddhiṁ, acintyāṁ ca samādhiviśuddhiṁ, acintyāṁ ca prajñāviśuddhiṁ, daśa ca tathāgatabalāni pratilapsyāmahe / Aṣṭa*, 246 ln.14-19.

[4] See Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1505-1704.

[5] *punar aparaṃ subhūte tathāgato 'rhaṁ samyaksaṃbuddho na daśabhis tathāgatabalair manasikartavyaḥ, na caturbhyo vaiśāradyebhyo na catasṛbhya pratisaṃvidyo na mahāmaitryā na mahākaruṇayā na aṣṭādaśabhir āveṇikair buddhadharmair manasikartvyaḥ, tat kasya hetoḥ? tathā hi teṣāṃ svabhāvo nāsti yasya svabhavo nāsti sa abhāva /. Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā: Chapters 70 to 82*, ed. Edward Conze, (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Orrente, 1974), 5. (Henceforth: *Aṣṭādaśa 70 - 82*). Cf. tr. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 551.

Other passages in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s go further, and identify "true reality" (*bhūta-ārtha*), as well as the wisdom that cognises it, with buddhahood itself. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, for example, states:

> True reality is called 'buddha'. Furthermore, Subhūti, when one has fully awakened to that real dharma one is called 'buddha', when one has realised that true reality one is called 'buddha'.[6]

One wonders, however, to what extent non-scholarly audiences of the *sūtra* saw such an abstract sense of buddhahood as the goal of their spiritual endeavours. It seems more likely that most people, like Sadāprarudita, would have viewed the Buddha in rather conventional terms, i.e., as a being who had achieved the ultimate state of existence and who possessed all the pure qualities traditionally listed in the *abhidharma* texts.

Although there may have been differences between the scholarly and common conception of buddhahood, all Buddhists would nevertheless have agreed that it was a state superior to arhatship. The problem that confronted philosophers was explaining exactly how certain practitioners (i.e., bodhisattvas) could arrive at such a superior state, while other practitioners (i.e., *śrāvaka*s) could only attain the lesser state of arhatship. While there are many aspects to the problem, a good understanding of the main issues can be gained by considering two traditional concepts—knowledge and abandonments—and analysing how arhats and buddhas differ with respect to those two concepts.

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[6] *bhūtārtho buddha ity ucyate / api tu khalu punaḥ subhūte bhūtā asya dharmā abhisaṃbuddhās tasmād buddha ity ucyate, bhūto 'syārthaḥ pratividdhas tasmād buddha ity ucyate / Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 140.

Since significant differences exist between the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* with respect the knowledge and abandonments of arhats and buddhas, these two versions of the *sūtra* will be discussed separately.

6.2.2 Early *Prajñāpāramitā* – the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

6.2.2.1 The Buddha's knowledge in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

The bodhisattva's goal is often described in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as the state of all-knowledge (*sarvajñatā*). For example:

> It is so, Subhūti. It is so. Such is the great vehicle of the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas. Trained therein, bodhisattvas reach a state of all-knowledge, have reached it, and will reach it.[7]

However, except for one short and rather general statement,[8] the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* does not specify what this state of all-knowledge actually entails. Did it mean "omniscience" in the popular sense of being simultaneously aware of all objects of knowledge? Or was the *sarva* in *sarvajñatā* used metaphorically, as it is in the *Upaniṣads*,[9] to mean knowledge of some kind of absolute truth, i.e., a buddha knows what is "True," but is not necessarily aware of every worldly fact.

The appearance in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts of *sarvajña* in the sense of "knowing everything at once" suggests that such an interpretation may have been common among the various *śramaṇa* sects during Śākyamuni's time.[10] We

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[7] *evametatsubhūte, evam etat / evaṃ Mahāyānamidaṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānām / atra śikṣitvā bodhisattvairmahāsattvaiḥ sarvajñatā anuprāptā, anuprāpsyate anuprāpyate ca // Aṣṭa*, 12 ln.22-24.

[8] "O Subhūti, all-knowledge is inestimable, and immeasurable." *aprameyā hi subhūte sarvajñatā, apramāṇā hi subhūte sarvajñatā* / Ibid., 151 ln.8.

[9] Alex Naughton writes, "the general tendency of the *Upaniṣads* is to equate omniscience with knowledge of the *ātman* or soul." Alex Naughton, "Buddhist omniscience," *The Eastern Buddhist* 24, no. 1 (1991): 29.

[10] See Nathan Katz, *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), 137.

know, for example, that this sense of *sarvajña* was a quality attributed by Jaina monks to their teacher Mahāvīra,[11] and that other appellations such as *jina* and *arhat* were common to both Mahāvīra and Śākyamuni.[12] Although this suggests the possibility that at least some early Mainstream Buddhists may have thought of their teacher as omniscient in the way the Jainas understood the term, there is also evidence that the compilers of some *sūtra*s did not hold such a view. In the *Tevijavacchagotta Sutta*, for example,[13] the Buddha explicitly rejects the description of himself as "all-knowing, all-seeing" in favour of one in which he is simply someone who has three knowledges: (1) he knows his past lives; (2) he knows the karmic consequences of other beings; and (3) he knows that he has destroyed the *āsrava*s and is therefore liberated.[14]

Regardless of whatever popular sense in which the Buddha was regarded as *sarvajña*, given the stories of well-known arhats such as Maudgalyāyana not knowing his mother's place of rebirth, or Śāriputra's inability to see any meritorious actions in the past lives of a prospective monk,[15]—things that the Buddha knew—it seems likely that in the popular mind, a buddha was at least *sarvajña* in a sense that an arhat was not. While there is some evidence in the Pāli canon to support Nathan Katz's view that the omnisciences of arhats and buddhas are similar in that they both know "whatever was necessary for him to teach the dhamma in an unimpeded

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[11] Ibid., 133; Padmanabh S. Jaini, "On the sarvajñatva of Mahāvīra and the Buddha," in *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I. B. Horner*, ed. L. Cousins, A. Kunst, and K. R. Norman (Dordrecht; Boston: D. Reidel, 1974), 75.

[12] Hermann Jacobi, *Gaina Sutras I*, Sacred Books of the East No. 22, (London: Clarendon Press, 1884), xix.

[13] *MN* 3.3.1.

[14] Katz, *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection*, 135. Sutta passage cited in Jaini, "On the sarvajñatva of Mahāvīra and the Buddha," 81.

[15] See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "On the ignorance of the arhat," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 137.

manner,"[16] to then assert, as Katz does, that "it would be a gross misrepresentation to make the claim that the Buddha and the arahant could be distinguished in terms of omniscience"[17] is unlikely to represent a view that was widely held in ancient India.

Consider, for example, the five well-known points of Mahādeva, among which the second states that arhats still have ignorance.[18] Although such ignorance was confined to everyday matters (and not the path), this view is associated with the southern Mahāsāṃghika schools,[19] which, according to Vasumitra, also held that the Buddha was capable of comprehending all things in a single moment of consciousness.[20] Even the Sarvāstivādins and Theravādins, who did not accept Mahādeva's five points, also recognised that there were certain types of ignorance to which arhats were subject, but a fully enlightened buddha was not.[21]

The question of the Buddha's omniscience is complicated, as I shall show below, by the fact that in the longer versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, *sarvajña* is reinterpreted and replaced by another term, "knowledge of all aspects" (*sarvākārajñatā*). I am inclined to think, however, that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* used the term to refer to the mystical knowledge that all phenomena share the same nature. We know that a recurring theme in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is the

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[16] Katz, *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection*, 138.

[17] Ibid., 140.

[18] See Nattier and Prebish, "Mahāsāṃghika origins: The beginnings of Buddhist sectarianism," 252.

[19] See ibid.: 257-264.

[20] *sems gcig gis chos thams cad rnam par mkhyen to*/ To.4138:142B. Cf. Masuda's translation: "(The Blessed One) understands all things (dharma) with a " moment's mind" (ekakṣaṇikacitta)." Masuda, "Origin and doctrines," 20:

[21] The *Kathāvatthu* reports the Theravādin responses to the claimed ignorance of an arhat. They admit that he may be ignorant of "the name and lineage of a woman or a man, of a right or wrong road," but since he knew the fruits of the *āryaṃ* path, "it should not be said that he lacks knowledge." Aung and Rhys Davids, *Points of Controversy: Translation of the Kathā-Vatthu*, 114-117.

idea that all phenomena are "empty of own marks" (*svalakṣaṇa-śūnya*),[22] and it is therefore not unreasonable to think that the authors of the *sūtra* intended that the bodhisattva's goal of *sarvajña* was to see the world in this way. Tilmann Vetter appears to be approaching this idea when he writes of *sarvajña* in the *Prajñāpāramitā*:

> Omniscience would then no longer mean knowledge of all details, but the knowledge that all details are without essence and real existence.[23]

To summarise, a buddha was clearly believed to know things, such as events in remote times and places, that an arhat did not. While this may have led some followers to apply the term *sarvajña* to the Buddha, it does not initially appear to have had the same meaning it did for the Jainas, who claimed that Mahāvīra knew all phenomena simultaneously.[24] Later, however, this popular notion of omniscience appears to have been attributed to the Buddha by the Mahāsāṃghikas. Although the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* attributed *sarvajña(tā)* to the Buddha, it may have been applied in a special mystical sense of knowing the nature of all phenomena, rather than in the popular sense of knowing every worldly detail.

6.2.2.2 The abandonments of a buddha

The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* has virtually nothing to say about the abandonments of a buddha. Although there is a passage of praise for *Prajñāpāramitā* in deified form at the beginning of Chapter 7, where it says:

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[22] *Aṣṭa*, 165 ln.10.

[23] Tilmann Vetter, "Once again on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Weiner Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 45 (2001): 81.

[24] Such a possibility is explicitly rejected by the Buddha in the *Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta* (*MN* 2.4.10) "There is neither a recluse nor a Brahman who *at one and the same time can know all*." Cited and translated in Jaini, "On the sarvajñatva of Mahāvīra and the Buddha," 82.

> she has abandoned all the residues pertaining to defilement, obscuration and knowledge obscuration,[25]

this appears to be a late accretion, as it does not appear in the corresponding passages of T.224 or T.227, nor is there any other mention of the two types of obscuration anywhere else in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* or even in the longer version of the *sūtra*.[26] The only clue we get with respect to how the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* understood the abandonments of a buddha is the occasional mention of the four fearlessnesses, the second of which is commonly understood to mean that a buddha is fearless due to the knowledge that he has destroyed the *āsravas*.[27] This, however, would not make him superior in any way to the arhat in terms of abandonments. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we may tentatively conclude that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* adopted a traditional view and did not distinguish between the abandonments of an arhat and those of a buddha, and that the *sūtra* may therefore represents a relatively primitive stage in the development of Mahāyāna soteriological thinking.

The superiority of buddhahood over arhatship in terms of knowledge, but similarity in terms of abandonments, points to an unresolved problem in early Mahāyāna. If a buddha were to be distinguished from an arhat in terms of his superior knowledge (i.e., his *sarvajñatā*), how was it produced? It could not have been due to the elimination of more defilements, since arhats and buddhas were the same in that respect. It is possible that early Mahāyānists may have posited a direct relationship

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[25] *sarvakleśajñeyāvaraṇavāsanānusaṃdhiprahīṇatāmupādāya.. Aṣṭa*, 86.

[26] The two types of obscuration do however appear in another relatively early source, namely, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, suggesting that, in addition to the well-known ontological differences, there was also a significant difference between the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Laṅkāvatāra* in terms of soteriology. See for example, *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1963), 98 ln.17-19. (Henceforth: *Laṅka*).

[27] See Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1567.

between merit and knowledge—the great merit accumulated through practicing the *pāramitā*s over countless aeons was a direct cause for his superior qualities, including his superior knowledge. However, it seems that in conformity with the more traditional understanding of the relationship between knowledge and abandonment,[28] Mahāyānists solved the problem by defining buddhahood in a new way. This will now be discussed with reference to the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā.*

6.2.3 Later *Prajñāpāramitā* – the longer *sūtra*s

6.2.3.1 The Buddha's knowledge

In the longer versions of the *sūtra* a new type of omniscience is attributed to a buddha, namely, knowledge of all aspects (*sarvākārajñatā*). We also find the term mentioned in other early Mahāyāna and proto-Mahāyāna sources, [29] but its occurrence there is relatively rare when compared with the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, where it is equated with enlightenment:

> Just enlightenment is the knowledge of all aspects; just the knowledge of all aspects is enlightenment.[30]

The use of the new term suggests that the authors of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* understood the knowledge of a buddha in a new way. Passages in the old *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* that contained the term *sarvajñatā* were revised to contain

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[28] The traditional *abhidharma* view was that knowledge of the four noble truths resulted in destruction of the *āsrava*s, which eventually produced two types of knowledge—knowledge of the destruction of the *āsrava*s (*āsravakṣayajñāna*) and knowledge of no future arising (*anutpādajñāna*)—the attainment of which defined the goal of enlightenment.

[29] "How can the Lord attain knowledge of all aspects without abandoning faults?" *tatkatham bhagavatā sarvākārajñatā prāptā aprahīṇairdoṣaiḥ / Laṅka*, 98 ln.10; "After they have come to the tree of enlightenment, but before they acquire knowledge of all aspects, Buddhas become endowed with the five eyes." *bodhimūlam upagamya cāprāptāyāṃ sarvākārajñatāyāṃ paṃcacakṣusamanvāgatā bhavanti // MV*, 118 ln.10.

[30] *bodhir eva sarvākārajñatā sarvākārajñataiva bodhiḥ/ Pañca (D)*, 51 ln.7.

sarvākārajñatā in the longer versions of the *sūtra*.[31] For example, where the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* reads:

> O Subhūti, all-knowledge is not made, not unmade, not effected.[32]

the corresponding passage in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* reads:

> O Subhūti, the knowledge of all aspects is not made, not unmade, not effected.[33]

However, the old term was not completely abandoned; it was retained in the longer versions of the *sūtra* in new passages that describe the cognition of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, forming part of the well-known classification of three types of omniscience. The three types are listed in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* in an important passage, cited in Haribhadra's *Sphuṭārthā*, where it is said that:

> knowledge of all aspects is [the cognition of] tathāgata-arhats, fully enlightened buddhas, knowledge of paths is [the cognition of] bodhisattvas, and all-knowledge, Subhūti, is [the cognition of] *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.[34]

The *sarvajñatā* of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* appears to be the same *sarvajñatā* that was attributed to buddhas in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. The knowledge of paths (*mārgajñatā*) of bodhisattvas includes knowledge of the paths of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, which they need in order to lead other beings without actualising

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[31] See Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* Bolinas, (Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), xx, n.9.

[32] *akṛtā hi subhūte sarvajñatā avikṛtā anabhisaṃskṛtā / Aṣṭa*, 11 ln.8.

[33] *akṛtā hi subhūte sarvākārajñatā avikṛtā anabhisaṃskṛtā/ Pañca (D)*, 191 ln.17.

[34] *sarvākārajñatā subhūte tathāgatasyārhataḥ samyaksaṃbuddhasya, mārgajñatā subhūte bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ, sarvajñatā subhūte sarvaśrāvakapratyekabuddhānām/ Pañca (K)*, 5 : 124. Cf. *AA-Vivṛti*, 6; T.223, p375b25-27: 薩婆若是一切聲聞、辟支佛智；道種智是菩薩摩訶薩智；一切種智是諸佛智。; Conze, *Large Sutra*, 518. The translation of this passage appears to have presented a challenge to modern scholars. My translation follows Tsong-kha-pa's explanation that the knowledge of all aspects is a 'clear realisation' (*abhisamaya*) of fully enlightened buddhas (see Sparham, *Golden Garland*, vol.1 : 82.) though I have chosen to avoid the specific terminology of the *AA* in favour of "cognition". It therefore differs from Conze who interprets the three knowledges simply as "belonging to" the three types of realised beings, and Lamotte who interprets them as their respective "concerns" ("l'affaire"). Conze, *Large Sutra*, 518; Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1746.

for themselves. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* explains that *sarvākārajñatā* is the cognition of buddhas because they cognise all worldly appearances:

> As many as there are aspects (*ākāra*), signs (*liṅga*) and marks (*nimitta*) by which dharmas are indicated, all those aspects, signs, and marks are understood by the Buddha. Therefore one speaks of a Tathāgata's knowledge of all aspects.[35]

The redefinition of the knowledge of a buddha may represent an attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction between the claimed sameness of dharmas and their obvious diversity. All dharmas, it is said, lack differentiating marks (*vilakṣana*),[36] and are therefore all the same in terms of their ultimate non-existence—an idea that the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* expresses as follows:

> all dharmas are without marks, with one mark only, i.e., with the mark of having nonexistence for their own-being.[37]

Or as Conze expresses it:

> A "mark" (*lakṣana*) is defined as the distinctive property which keeps *dharma*s apart. The most essential mark of a *dharma* is, however, that it is empty, and this mark swallows up all the others, so that all *dharma*s have one and the same mark, i.e., to be empty.[38]

Yet phenomena also have an apparent (albeit nominal) diversity, and the problem for the authors of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* was to explain how fully enlightened beings could know any worldly fact if all they could see was their essential sameness. The answer seems to have been to say that although fully enlightened beings did not know things-in-themselves (which was impossible, given that

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[35] *yāvantaḥ subhūte ākārā liṅgāni nimittāni yair ākārair yair liṅgair yair nimittais te dharmāḥ sūcyante, te ākārās tāni liṅgāni tāni nimittāni tathāgatenānubaddhāni tenocyate tathāgatasyārhataḥ samyaksaṃbuddhasya sarvākārajñatā. Pañca (K)*, 5 : 124. Cf. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 518 n.33.

[36] *sarvadharmāḥ na vilakṣaṇas Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 191 ln.5-6.

[37] *alakṣaṇāḥ sarvadharmāḥ ekalakṣaṇā yaduta abhāvasvabhāvalakṣaṇāḥ* / Ibid., 26.

[38] Edward Conze, "The ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā," *Philosophy East and West* 3, no. 2 (1953): 122.

phenomena have no own-being), they knew their aspects (*ākāra*) while at the same time knowing their mark of no own-being. Thus, the knowledge of a buddha once again came to resemble the more popular understanding of omniscience i.e., the knowledge of all phenomena as they appear, as well as the scholastic understanding of their actual mode of being.

Tibetan scholars understand this sense of omniscience in different ways. Gelugpa scholars, for example, assert that a buddha knows all phenomena simultaneously, defining *sarvākārajñatā* as follows:

> The ultimate knowledge that directly cognises all aspects of conventional and ultimate reality in a single moment.[39]

Some earlier Tibetan scholars, however, appear to hold the view that such knowledge was serial rather than simultaneous. Bu-ston, for example, does not include the expression "in a single moment" in his definition of *sarvākārajñatā*, instead defining it as "the direct knowledge of all aspects, signs, and characteristic marks of all phenomena, both as they are, and as many as there are."[40]

To summarise, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* contains a significant development in the theory of the knowledge of a buddha. Whereas in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* all-knowledge appears to mean knowing the essential nature of all phenomena and thus perhaps represents a metaphorical sense of the word, in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* the term *sarvajñatā* is replaced with the term *sarvākārajñatā*, which conveys a more expansive sense of omniscience since it refers to a knowledge not only of the nature of all phenomena, but also their ordinary appearance. Accompanying this theoretical

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[39] *ji lta ji snyed kyi rnam pa ma lus pa skad cig ma gcig la mngon sum du mkhyen pa'i mthar thug gi mkhyen pa* / 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa, *Don bdun cu'i mtha' dpyod mi pham bla ma'i zhal lung*, (Mundgod: Drepung Gomang Library, 2005), 2. Cf. E. Obermiller, *Analysis of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, (London: Luzac, 1933-1943), 2.

[40] Quoted in Obermiller, *Analysis of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, 2 n.2.

development in the cognition of a buddha was a corresponding theoretical development to explain how it was attained through abandonment. This will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.3.2 The Buddha's abandonments

Unlike the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the longer versions of the *sūtra* make a clear distinction between the level of abandonment of an *arhat* and that of a buddha. The *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā*, for example, clearly establishes the connection between knowledge of all aspects and the abandonment all defilements (*kleśa*) together with their residues (*vāsanā*):

> [The bodhisattva] then attains the knowledge of all aspects and abandons all the defilements together with their residues.[41]

Śrāvakas and *pratyekabuddhas*, on the other hand, are described in the longer version as abandoning only defilements. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, for example, states:

> Subhūti, the *tathāgata*s abandon not only the defilements, but also the residues connected with them, whereas *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s do not.[42]

The idea that *śrāvakas* have not abandoned the residues of the defilements may not be peculiar to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, or even to Mahāyāna. It is possible that the Sarvāstivādin view is represented in Yaśomitra's *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, which states that:

> it is said that in every *śrāvaka* who has formerly acted due to the influence of defilements, there is created by that action a special powerful cause for

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[41] *tasya sarvākārajñatāprāptasya sarvavāsanānusandhiḥ prahīyate / Aṣṭādaśa 70-82*, 116. Tr. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 628.

[42] *na subhūte kleśaprahānasya nānātvam asti, asti punas tathāgatasya sarvavāsanānusaṃdhikleśaprahāṇaṃ, na punaḥ śrāvakasya sarvavāsanānusaṃdhikleśaprahāṇam. Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 126.

> perturbation (*vikāra*) in physical and verbal behaviour. It exists in the mind and is called a residue (*vāsanā*).[43]

The question arises as to exactly when in their careers bodhisattvas abandon these residues. Do they first abandon all the defilements, and then proceed to abandon their residues, or are they able to abandon some of the residues before they have fully abandoned all the defilements? Several theories are discussed in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*,[44] with the author eventually setting forth the view that the defilements are all abandoned when bodhisattvas attain the certitude that dharmas are not produced. Then, when they attain the knowledge of all aspects (i.e., full enlightenment) the residues are exhaustively abandoned.[45]

6.2.4 Summary: a two phase path

It has always been clear from the use of the term *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi* to describe the enlightenment of buddhas that the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* considered it to be superior to that of arhats. However, it was only in the later, longer versions of the *sūtra* that this superiority was clearly delineated in terms of knowledge and abandonments. In the revised version of the bodhisattva's goal, a buddha's superior knowledge is described as "knowledge of all aspects," i.e., knowledge of the appearances of all phenomena as well as knowledge of their lack of own-being. An arhat, on the other hand, possessed only all-knowledge, which may have been simply the knowledge of the essential sameness of all phenomena by

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[43] *śrāvakāṇāṃ yo hi yat-kleśa-caritaḥ pūrvaṃ tasya tat-kṛtaḥ kāya-vāg-aceṣṭā-vikāra-hetu-sāmarthya-viśeṣaś citte vāsanety ucyate / Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*, 647 ln.26-27.

[44] Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1775-1776, 1783.

[45] See ibid., 1780-1781.

way of their lack of own being,[46] This, as we have seen, was earlier advocated as the goal for bodhisattvas by the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.

In accordance with this superior knowledge, the longer versions of the *sūtra* describe a path to buddhahood in which all the defilements are abandoned, followed by the residues of those defilements. Although *śrāvakas* abandon only the defilements and not their residues, their claim to *nirvāṇa* is not openly challenged in the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the way it is challenged in other *sūtra*s such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.[47] *Nirvāṇa* appears to be valid goal for *śrāvaka*s, but it is clearly rejected as a goal for bodhisattvas; as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* states:

> [a bodhisattva] does not think about *nirvāṇa*. ... He does not enter *nirvāṇa* midway (*āntara*), before he has realised the ten powers of a tathāgata, his four fearlessnesses, and the eighteen special dharmas of a buddha.[48]

All of this suggests a two-phase path for the bodhisattva, with the point of separation between the two phases corresponding to the endpoint of the *śrāvaka* path. The transition from the first to the second phase is often described as "entering the fixed position of a bodhisattva" (*bodhisattva-niyāma-avakrānti*), and is said to be accompanied by the attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced. These two important concepts will now be discussed.

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[46] The Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyanika school, to which Haribhadra is said to have belonged, interpreted the *sarvajñatā* of the *arhat* as a realisation of the selflessness of persons (*pudgala-nairātmya*), but not phenomena. Such a doctrine is not explicit in the *sūtra* and may have been formulated later as part of attempts by Mahāyāna philosophers to create a Hīnayāna that could be incorporated into, yet subordinated in the Mahāyāna worldview.

[47] "[*Śrāvaka*s] conceive themselves as situated in the state of *nirvāṇa* ..." *nirvāṇabhūmisthitāḥ smaḥ ityātmanaḥ saṁjānatām. Saddharma*, 51 ln.7.

[48] *sa nirvāṇam api na manyate / ... na cāntarā parinirvāti, aparipūrṇairdaśabhistathāgatabalaiścaturbhistathāgatavaiśāradyairaṣṭādaśabhiś ca āveṇikairbuddhadharmaiḥ / Aṣṭa*, 5 ln.17-21.

6.3 The point of separation—*bodhisattva-nyāma-avakrānti*

It should hardly be necessary to point out that the above description of a two-phase model of the bodhisattva's spiritual progress is quite different from that found in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentarial tradition, where the bodhisattva path is presented as fundamentally distinct from that of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. According to this tradition, most bodhisattvas[49] abandon defilement obscurations (*kleśa-āvaraṇa*) and knowledge obscurations (*jñeya-āvaraṇa*) simultaneously and by degrees, whereas *śrāvaka*s gradually abandon only defilement obscurations, and *pratyekabuddha*s simultaneously abandon defilement obscurations and coarse knowledge obscurations.[50]

We shall now further investigate the two-phase path for bodhisattvas by examining its important point of division, known as entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. This is said to be achieved by "fulfilling" (*paripūrayati*) the paths of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* and "passing beyond them by regarding them with knowledge and vision" (*jñānena ca darśanena ca dṛṣṭvātikrāmati*).

6.3.1 Abandoning all defilements

The necessity for bodhisattvas to abandon all the defilements abandoned by *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s before they can enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva is explicitly stated in the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā*. Referring to the defilements "associated with' *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s,"[51] the *sūtra* states:

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[49] Some bodhisattvas, having already traversed the *śrāvaka* path, abandon only knowledge obscurations. They are called "*dman lam sngon du song ba'i byang chub sems dpa'*" See 'Jigs-med-dbang-po, *Sa-lam*, 93-94.

[50] See Donald S. Lopez, *A Study of Svātantrika*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1987), 383.

[51] *śrāvaka-pratisaṃyukta* and *pratyekabuddha-pratisaṃyukta*. *Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 197

> One who is obscured (*āvṛta*) by these defilements may not enter into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva.[52]

But how do bodhisattvas abandon the defilements associated with the levels of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* without actually standing on those levels?

It will be recalled from section 5.4.1 above that in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* bodhisattvas who know that skill-in-means is necessary for the attainment of highest enlightenment are described as standing in a "state of irreversibility" (*avinivartanīyatva*). It was also shown that for the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* skill-in-means entailed "not making anything into a sign" (*na nimittīkaroti*), and that it was essentially the bodhisattva's practical application of his or her comprehension of the doctrine of *asvabhāva*, i.e., the perfection of wisdom.

This practice, aptly described by Nattier as a "balancing act," was necessary because bodhisattvas needed to undertake common Buddhist practices such as entering into the three absorptions (*samādhi*) on emptiness, the signless and the wishless, yet without realising the "reality limit" (*bhūta-koṭi*). A passage in Chapter 20 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* expresses it thus:

> if a bodhisattva-mahāsattva aspires for the absorption on emptiness, the absorption on the signless, the absorption on the wishless, i.e. for the three doors to liberation, then he should be known as one who is endowed with skill in means, and he will not realise the reality-limit midway, before his buddha-dharmas have become complete. Why? It is this skill-in-means which protects him.[53]

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[52] *yaiḥ kleśair āvṛto bodhisattvaniyāmaṃ na avakrāmet.* Ibid. Cf. translation of corresponding passage from T.220(2) p0353b in Tsai, "Searching for the origins of Mahāyāna", 189.

[53] *śūnyatāṃ ca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati, ānimittaṃ ca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati, apraṇihitaṃ ca samādhivimokṣamukhamabhinirharati, tadā upāyakauśalyasamanvāgato bodhisattvo mahāsattvo veditavyaḥ - nāyamantarā bhūtakoṭiṃ sākṣātkariṣyatyaparipūrṇairbuddhadharmaiḥ / tatkasya hetoḥ? tathā hi asyopāyakauśalyaṃ rakṣāṃ karoti / Aṣṭa*, 185 ln.25-29.

In addition, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* makes it clear that, besides these "three doors of liberation," bodhisattvas must undertake many other practices common to the *śrāvaka-yāna*. These include, for example, the four stations of mindfulness, (*smṛty-upasthāna*), the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment (*bodhi-pākṣika*) and the eightfold path (*ārya-aṣṭāṅga-mārga*). [54] The following passage from the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* also makes it clear that skill-in-means was the practical application of the perfection of wisdom and that without it bodhisattvas would realise the fruits of the *āryan* path:

> Moreover, Subhūti, the bodhisattva-mahāsattva, beginning with the first thought of enlightenment, endowed with skill-in-means courses in the paths of vision, development and abandonment, but does not attain the fruit of a *srota-āpanna*, a *sakṛdāgāmin*, an *anāgāmin* or an *arhat*. And why? Because he cognises all dharmas as empty of own-marks, etc., as not re-produced. Though he courses in these dharmas that act as wings to enlightenment, he passes beyond the level of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.[55]

Clearly then, the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā* posit a bodhisattva path that coincides, to some extent at least, with that of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. Although, as noted above, such an interpretation does not accord with the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* commentarial tradition, it does explain the apparent obsession by the *sūtra*'s authors with the stages of the *āryan* path. It is also an interpretation that should not surprise us, for what other method for abandoning defilements could

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[54] A detailed list (too long to quote here) of such practices occurs in *Pañca (D)*, 19 ln.12 - 21 ln.5. Tr. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 46-47

[55] *punar aparaṃ subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattva prathamacittotpādam upādāya upāyakauśalena samanvāgato darśanabhāvanāprahātavye ca mārge carati, na ca srotaāpattiphalam anuprāpnoti na sakṛdāgāmīphalaṃ na anāgāmīphalaṃ na arhattvam anuprāpnoti. tat kasya hetoḥ? tathā hi sa svalakṣaṇaśūnyān sarvadharmān jānāti yāvad anabhinirvṛttān jānāti. teṣu ca bodhipakṣikeṣu dharmeṣu caraṃc chrāvakapratyekabuddhabhūmim atikrāmati. Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 177. Conze follows the *Pañca* at this point—see Conze, *Large Sutra*, 537. Cf. *Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 148.

the authors of the earliest Mahāyāna *sūtra*s have known, if not the traditional one?[56] Xúan Zàng's translation of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* is particularly clear on this point:

> Because [the bodhisattva] practices the *āryan* path, he will abandon defilements.[57]

Thus, we apparently have a situation in which two types of practitioners—bodhisattvas on the one hand, and *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s on the other—undertake the same spiritual practices, both resulting in the abandonment of defilements, yet because of the practical application by bodhisattvas of the perfection of wisdom, otherwise known as skill-in-means, they do not make anything into a sign and are therefore able to avoid actualising (*sākṣāt-karoti*) arhatship. This means they are then able to progress to the second phase of the bodhisattva path, while the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s who lack such skill-in-means are not.

If we pause for a moment to consider why *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s do not apply skill-in-means to their practices, there appear to be two possibilities—either (1) they are incapable of doing so due to not having trained in the perfection of wisdom; or (2) they are capable, but for some reason, are unwilling to do so. Although it is an interesting problem, it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter to fully explore it here. Nevertheless, two important passages with great bearing on the problem will be noted. The first is the admonition in Chapter 1 of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

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[56] We might insert the word "soteriological" in Andrew Rawlinson's comment that "The mythological, historical and geographical background of the *Aṣṭa* is that of traditional Buddhism" Andrew Rawlinson, "The position of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā in the development of early Mahāyāna," in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*, ed. L. Lancaster (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University. of California, 1977), 15.

[57] 因修聖道斷諸煩惱. (T220 p353b25) Although the corresponding passages in the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* do not actually use the term *āryamārga*, they do provide a list of seven Hīnayāna levels. See *Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 167; *Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 197.

that those willing to train on the level of *śrāvaka*s should make endeavours in the perfection of wisdom.[58] This statement would strongly suggest that at least some *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s indeed possessed the perfection of wisdom. However, we are then left with the problem of explaining why they did not also use skill-in-means in their practices. A second, somewhat more problematic statement is that by the arhat Subhūti, who says his "thought has been freed insofar as [he] has abided nowhere."[59] Since the method of non-abiding (*asthānayoga*) is defined as not "grasping at signs" (*nimittodgrahaṇa*) in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, this would suggest that Subhūti had gained arhatship through his application of skill-in-means.[60] If this were so, it would follow that he was also a bodhisattva—a conclusion that may require us to reassess our understanding of the way the term was used in the early *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition.

The issue of exactly *how* bodhisattvas could abandon defilements by means of practicing the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment and so forth, yet not realise the fruits of the *ārya*n path, was apparently a difficult one, for it is the subject of a long question from Subhūti in the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra.* In it he asks how it is possible that bodhisattvas produce (*utpādyati*)[61] the four *ārya*n paths, fulfil (*paripūrayati*) them, and abandon the respective defilements, yet still manage to

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[58] See *Aṣṭa*, 3 ln.29 - 4 ln.2.

[59] *cittaṃ vimuktaṃ yathā na kvacit sthitvā syām. Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 126.)

[60] Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 656.

[61] The question of whether bodhisattvas actually *produce* the paths of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* appears to have caused some confusion among some redactors of the *sūtra*. In the passage from the 'middle' length *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* cited by Haribhadra in the *Sphuṭārthā*, it says: "Subhūti, bodhisattvas should produce all paths." *sarvva-mārggāḥ Subhūte bodhisatvair utpādayitavyāḥ* (*AA-Vivṛti*, 6.) Cf. *Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 147-148; Conze, *Large Sutra*, 518. However, the corresponding passage in the Sanskrit version of the recast *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* says: "Subhūti, bodhisattva-mahāsattvas should *not* produce all paths." *sarvamārgāḥ subhūte bodhisattvena mahāsattvena notpādayitavyāḥ, Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 125. Similarly, another passage earlier in the *Pañca* also says that the bodhisattva *should fulfil but not produce* the four foundations of mindfulness, etc. See *Pañca (D)*, 19 ln.12-15.

enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. It is impossible, Subhūti thinks, that someone who has become (*bhūtvā*) an *aṣṭamaka* etc. could enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. The question concludes with the following words:

> How then, O Bhagavan, ought this be understood, i.e., that the bodhisattva-mahāsattva, having fulfilled all the paths, enters *bodhisattva-nyāma*, and then reaches the knowledge of all aspects, and abandons the defilements together with their residues?[62]

In response, the Buddha agrees that it would indeed be impossible for someone who has become (*bhūtvā*) an *aṣṭamaka* etc. to enter the *bodhisattva-niyāma*. However, he says that bodhisattvas pass beyond the stages of a *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* "by means of regarding them with knowledge and vision." This concept will now be discussed.

6.3.2 Regarding the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* levels with knowledge and vision

The idea that bodhisattvas enter into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva when they have passed beyond (*atikramya*) the levels of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s is mentioned several times in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*. For example:

> having passed beyond the level of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, [the bodhisattva] enters into *bodhisattva-niyāma*.[63]

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[62] *tat katham bhagavan jānīyāma bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ sarvamārgān paripūrya bodhisattvanyāmam avakrāmati, bodhisattvanyāmam avakramya sarvākārajñatām anuprāpnoti. sarvavāsanānusandhiṃ ca prajahāti / Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 183. Concerning this question Conze writes: "It is not quite clear to me what particular difficulty Subhuti has in mind when he asks this long question. There is something in this whole disquisition on the *bodhisattvanyāma* which continues to elude me, and I can only hope that one of my successors will do better than I did." Conze, *Large Sutra*, 540 n.17. While the emphasis on the fact that the paths of the *aṣṭamaka* etc. are different from one another is puzzling, that basic thrust of Subhūti's question is, I think, clear: since it is impossible for someone who has become a *srota-āpanna* to enter *bodhisattva-niyāma*, how is it that if a bodhisattva fulfils and produces the four *āryan* paths, he did not actually become a *srota-āpanna* etc., thereby precluding himself from entering *bodhisattva-niyāma*?

[63] *śrāvakapratyekabuddhabhūmim atikramya bodhisattvaniyāmam avakrāmati/ Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 168 ln.6-7.

This is of course consistent with our contention that the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* presents a two-phase version of the bodhisattva path, but it does not explain why *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s cannot enter the fixed condition a bodhisattva when they too have abandoned all their defilements. The concept of regarding the *śrāvaka* stages "with knowledge and vision" may, however, provide a clue. Consider the following passage from the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā*:

> Subhūti: Should [a bodhisattva] also acquire the accomplishment (*saṃpat*) of a *śrāvaka* and the accomplishment of a *pratyekabuddha*?
>
> The Lord: Yes, Subhūti, he should acquire the accomplishments of a *śrāvaka* and a *pratyekabuddha*, but he should not abide in them or rely on them. Having viewed them with his knowledge and vision, he should pass beyond them and enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva.[64]

I shall assume that "accomplishment" (*saṃpat*) here refers to a state of having abandoned some or all of the defilements (but not their residues). Thus, the Buddha is saying that bodhisattvas must achieve the states of abandonment of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s before they can enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. However, it also says that bodhisattvas should regard those states "with their knowledge and vision," for by doing so they are able to pass beyond the levels of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.

The *sūtra* is not explicit about what this "knowledge and vision" consists of, though it would certainly appear to be something not possessed by *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s. It may simply be another way of expressing the original sense of skill-in-means, perhaps because at the time of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*'s

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[64] *subhūtir āha: śrāvakasaṃpad api tena pratilabdhavyā pratyekabuddhasaṃpad api tena pratilabdhavyā. bhagavān āha: śrāvakasaṃpad api tena subhūte pratilabdhavyā, pratyekabuddhasaṃpad api tena subhūte pratilabdhyā, tatra ca na sthātavyaṃ na pratiṣṭhātavyaṃ, jñānena ca darśanena ca dṛṣṭvātikramiṣyati bodhisattvaniyāmam avakramiṣyati.* Ibid., Pt.5 : 34. Cf. Conze, *Large Sutra*, 457. This passage is cited by both Haribhadra and Ārya Vimuktisena. See respectively, *AA-Ālokā*, 444 ln.16-17 (tr. Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.2 : 362) and *ibid.* 64 (no published Skt. Source available).

composition it was a term that had come to have other meanings in Mahāyāna (e.g., the Buddha's skill in teaching what is appropriate for trainees). Another explanation is that in the first phase of the path bodhisattvas did not only abandon the defilements abandoned by *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, but other defilements as well. This would be consistent with the doctrines of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika school (to which Haribhadra is said to have belonged),[65] which holds that each of the three types of practitioners cognises a different kind of selflessness,[66] but I can see no evidence that the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s held such a view. Nevertheless, such a position may be implicit in the longer version of the *sūtra*, and it would moreover satisfactorily explain why *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s do not enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva,

To summarise the above, we have seen that a bodhisattva's advance to the second phase of the path involved acquiring the "accomplishments" of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s. With respect to the question of why bodhisattvas do not manifest the fruit of those paths, the *sūtra* tells us that it is because they view those fruits with their knowledge and vision. This practice of "regarding with knowledge and vision" may be another way of saying skill-in-means; however, it may also point to a special knowledge unique to bodhisattvas. We have not, however, fully resolved the issue, and the implications of both positions require further investigation.

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[65] See Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, (London: Rider, 1976), 124.

[66] Ibid., 128.

6.4 *Anutpattikadharmakṣānti*

Since several passages in the *sūtra* indicate that the transition between the two phases is marked by the attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*), this concept will now be discussed.

6.4.1 *Anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as a literary trope

The *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s contain several passages in which, as a result of listening to the Buddha's sermon, members of the audience gain certain realisations. This mimics a common trope in the early canonical literature, the most famous perhaps being the instant attainment of arhatship by the Buddha's five ascetic companions following his first sermon at Sarnath. This event is described in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, which concludes with the following words:

> And while this explanation was being given, the minds of the group of five monks, through lack of clinging, were fully released from *āsravas*.[67]

The purpose of the trope is likely to have been to invest the Buddha's teachings with enlightening powers and to create the impression on audiences that, by listening to or studying the *sūtra*s, they too would gain the realisations obtained by the characterised audience.

In Mahāyāna *sūtra*s one of the common realisations gained by audiences is the certitude that dharmas are not produced. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, for example, contains several instances—in Chapter 13, we read that,

> when this doctrine of unthinkability and so forth was being taught, …twenty thousand bodhisattvas acquired the certitude that dharmas are not produced.[68]

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[67] *imasmiñca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne pañcavaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittāni vimucciṃsūti.* (*SN 3.1.6.7*). For similar examples, see Bond, "The development of the arahant ideal," 228.

while in Chapter 16 it is said that:

> Twenty bodhisattvas acquired the certitude that dharmas are not produced.[69]

The same passage, with five hundred gods (instead of twenty bodhisattvas), also occurs in T.224,[70] indicating that this trope dates from at least the early middle period of Mahāyāna. Besides the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, we find the audience's attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced used to emphasise teachings in a number of other important *sūtra*s, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*,[71] the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi*,[72] and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*.[73] It also occurs twice in passages in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* that have no parallel in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.[74]

6.4.2 What is *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*?

Conze has written that *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* was a reinterpretation of the earlier *abhidharma* concept of "cognition of non-production" (*anutpādajñāna*), i.e., the

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[68] *viṃśatyā ca bodhisattvairanutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ pratilabdhābhūt Aṣṭa*, 139. Cf. *Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 77 ln.9-10.

[69] *devaputrasahasraiḥ pūrvaparikarmakṛtairanutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiḥ pratilabdhā / Aṣṭa*, 155. Cf. *Pañca (K)*, Pt.4 : 125 ln.10-11.

[70] 五百諸天人皆逮無所從生法樂 T.224 p0453c02

[71] E.g., "Three thousand living beings from the congregational circle of the Lord Śākyamuni gained the certitude that dharmas are not produced," *bhagavataśca śākyamuneḥ parṣanmaṇḍalānāṁ trayāṇāṁ prāṇisahasrāṇāmanutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilābho'bhūt / Saddharma*, 161 ln.30. For more examples, see *ibid.*, 235 ln.27-28, 349 ln.14-15.

[72] "While the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi* was thus being taught, innumerable beings produced the thought of supreme and perfect enlightenment; more numerous were those who were established in the irreversible stage; yet more numerous were those who obtained the certitude that dharmas are not produced." T.642 p0645b16-18. Cf. Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 241.

[73] Étienne Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, tr. Sara Boin, (London: The Pali Text Society, 1976), 93, 203, 218.

[74] "When the venerable Subhūti taught the *Prajñāpāramitā*, twelve myriads of gods and humans gained the certitude that dharmas are not produced." *asmin khalu punaḥ subhūtinā prajñāpāramitānirdeśe nirdiśyamāne dvādaśānāṁ ayutānāṁ devamānuṣikāyāḥ prajāyā anutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilambho 'bhūt/ Pañca (D)*, 269 ln.1-3; "When the *Prajñāpāramitā* was being taught, many thousands of gods gained the certitude that dharmas are not produced." *prajñāpāramitāyāṃ nirdiśya mānāyāṃ tatrānekāni devaputrasahasrāṇy anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntiṃ pratilabhante sma/ Pañca (K)*, Pt.2-3 : 184 ln.18-20.

realisation by an arhat that the outflows (*āsravas*) will not arise again.[75] This concept, Conze holds, was taken by the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s and given an ontological significance with statements to the effect that all phenomena never really exist since they are never really produced: no dharma has ever been produced, is produced, or will be produced.[76]

However, the similarity between *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and *anutpādajñāna* appears to be coincidental, and La Vallée Poussin is probably right to conclude that *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* has no parallel in the Pāli *abhidharma*,[77] as is Sakurabe, who states that "the two terms have little to do with each other."[78]

In order to better understand what the term means, it is helpful to analyse its two parts—*anutpattikadharma* and *kṣānti*. These will now be discussed.

6.4.2.1 *Anutpattikadharma*

The "non-production of dharmas" is one of the central themes of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, where it is repeatedly said that dharmas are "unproduced" (*anutpāda*) and "not stopped" (*anirodha*). This is also said to be their "suchness" (*tathatā*), or mode of being. As the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* states:

> Suchness is not produced and does not cease.[79]

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[75] See Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 222. Also Conze, *Large Sutra*, 25

[76] *nātra kaściddharma utpanno nāpi kaściddharma utpatsyate nāpi kaściddharma utpadyate / Aṣṭa*, 82 ln.11-12.

[77] La Vallée Poussin, "Bodhisattva," 751.

[78] Hajime Sakurabe, "Anutpādajñāna and anutpattikadharmakṣānti," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 2 (1966): 889.

[79] *na tathatā utpadyate vā nirudhyate. Aṣṭādaśa 70-82*, 65.

This mode of being is said to be extremely profound and difficult to comprehend, and the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s therefore contain a number of similes (*upamāna*) intended to facilitate understanding of non-production. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* again:

> [The perfection of wisdom is like] a dream, an echo, a reflected image, a mirage, or an illusion; it is an instruction that informs about non-production.[80]

The reason why this theme of non-production is so important in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s may have been because it formed a major plank in an argument directed against not just the doctrines of realists such as the Sarvāstivādins, but also their basic practices. As Conze writes:

> In order to understand why the aspect of non-production (*an-utpāda*) is so much emphasized in these *Sūtra*s, one must bear in mind the tradition within which they stand. They were written for Buddhists brought up on the *Abhidharma* and *Sūtras* of the Sarvāstivādins. To contemplate the rise and fall of *dharmas* had been recommended as one of the central practices of the *Abhidharma*. It is on this kind of *Abhidharma* meditation that the *Prajñāpāramitā* now comments, saying that the experiences made, while perhaps salutary, referred to nothing but an illusion.[81]

6.4.2.2 The meaning of *kṣānti*

While there is little disagreement amongst scholars with regard to the basic meaning of *kṣānti* as "patience" or "forbearance" when used in the context of the six *pāramitā*s, there is less consensus with regard to the translation of the term in the context of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*.[82] However, on the basis of internal evidence within the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* itself, as well as Haribhadra's commentary, I argue that the sense of *kṣānti* in the compound *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* is not "patience"

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[80] *svapnapratiśrutkāpratibhāsamarīcimāyāpāramiteyaṃ bhagavan anutpādavijñāpanatāmupādāya / Aṣṭa*, 102 ln.15-16. For a similar, but longer list of eight similes, see *Pañca (D)*, 4 ln.15 - 5 ln.1.

[81] Conze, "The ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā," 123.

[82] Lamotte, for example, writes "the problem of kṣānti, sometimes 'patience' and sometimes 'certainty', is one of the most complicated ones for scholasticism." Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 143 : n.119

or even "willingness" (as some translators have rendered it), but "conviction," or "certitude."

Genjun Sasaki has argued that *kṣānti* is derived from the Pāli word *khanti*, which comes from √*kam*, meaning "to be pleased or willing to do."[83] The use of the noun *kṣānti* to mean patience, he argues, is an incorrect sanskritisation of √*kṣam*, and should in fact be *kānti*. He therefore believes that the *kṣānti* in *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* should be rendered into English as "a positive acceptance of the Buddhist truth or a willingly [sic] inclination to the ultimate truth."[84] Although not cited by Sasaki, there may be some evidence to support this view in the form of Lokakṣema's translation of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as "*delight* in dharmas not being produced from anywhere" (無所從生法樂).[85]

Hajime Sakurabe points out, however, that the Pāli word *khanti* can mean both patience and willingness,[86] which would suggest that "patience with respect to the non-production of dharmas" may still be a legitimate translation of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. A number of scholars have tried to find English expressions that encompass both the sense of patience and the sense of willingness. Conze, for example, renders it as "patient acceptance,"[87] while Schopen opts for

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[83] Genjun H. Sasaki, "Khanti, kānti, kṣānti," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 7, no. 1 (1958): 359. Cf. Genjun H. Sasaki, *Linguistic approach to Buddhist thought*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 133-140.

[84] Sasaki, "Khanti, kānti, kṣānti," 355.

[85] T.224 p456a2

[86] See Sakurabe, "Anutpādajñāna and anutpattikadharmakṣānti," 886.

[87] Edward Conze, *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1967), 159.

"composure."[88] While there may be reasons why a bodhisattva would have a willingness or patience with respect to the non-production of dharmas,[89] several passages in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, as well as Haribhadra's commentary, suggest that "certitude" or "conviction" should be regarded as the best translation of *kṣānti* in this context, regardless of the Pāli origins of the word.

In the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*, Haribhadra clearly states that *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* is a kind of "special resolute belief" (*viśiṣṭādhimukti*):

> Since all dharmas are without a basis of apprehension, they are ultimately unproduced. From coursing in a conventional sense, through becoming familiar [with the notion that dharmas] are illusory, there comes a special resolute belief with respect to the non-production of dharmas.[90]

This explanation can be usefully contrasted with a passage in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* that says that some bodhisattvas who do not yet have *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* only have (ordinary) resolute belief (*adhimukti*) with respect to the non-production of dharmas:

> Furthermore Subhūti, those bodhisattva-mahāsattvas who course in the perfection of wisdom resolutely believe (*adhimuñcanti*) that all dharmas are not produced but they do not have the certitude (*kṣānti*) that dharmas are not produced.[91]

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[88] Gregory Schopen, "The manuscript of the Vajracchedikā found at Gilgit," in *Studies in the Literature of the Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts*, ed. Luis O. Gómez and Jonathan A. Silk (Ann Arbor: Collegiate Institute for the Study of Buddhist Literature and Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 1989), 139 n.20.

[89] Schopen, for example, argues that "to obtain *kṣānti* is the positive expression for the same state which is negatively expressed by such formulae as 'he is not depressed, not cowed, not dejected... he is not terrified, frightened and does not tremble with fear.' But the opposite of dejection, terror and fear is not patience or endurance, it is rather something more like composure." Ibid.

[90] *sarva-dharmânupalabhād eva paramârtha dvāreṇânupattau māyôpama bhāvanayā saṃvṛtyā caraṇād anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu viśiṣṭādhumuktir bhavati. AA-Ālokā*, 799 ln.26-28.

[91] *punaraparaṃ subhūte ye bodhisattvā mahāsattvāḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ carantaḥ sarvadharmā anutpattikā ityadhimuñcanti, na ca tāvadanutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilabdhā bhavanti / Aṣṭa*, 223 ln.18-19.

In addition, although the following passage from the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* explains *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as ordinary "resolute belief" (i.e., without the qualification "special" (*viśiṣṭa*)), it would nevertheless support a reading of *kṣānti* in the sense of "certitude" or "conviction," as opposed to "patience" or "willingness."

> Because [the bodhisattva] resolutely believes (信解; *adhimucyate*) that dharmas do not arise and are not produced, he possesses the force of certitude that dharmas do not arise (*anutpattikadharmakṣāntibala*).[92]

Thus, based on evidence that *kṣānti* in this context means a special resolute belief, it is appropriate to translate *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as the "certitude (or conviction) that dharmas are not produced," and to conclude that Lamotte was correct to say that:

> this *kṣānti* is the conviction, the certitude, that dharmas do not arise, that things deprived of birth and, as a result, of destruction, are not subject to becoming.[93]

6.4.2.3 *Anutpattikadharmakṣānti* as similar to the knowledge of a fully enlightened being

Through their use in this context of the term *kṣānti*, as opposed to *jñāna*, the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s appear to emphasise the distinction between the certitude, or conviction, that dharmas are not produced and the *knowledge* that they are not produced. This may have been because they saw the knowledge that dharmas are not produced as a unique quality of fully enlightened buddhas. This seems to be the view of Haribhadra, who writes:

> Since the extinction and production of impurities does not exist, the knowledge of the indestructible and the unproduced, which is characterised by the unmistaken cognition of all dharmas, is great enlightenment.[94]

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[92] 信解諸法不出不生故，無生法忍力. Cf. Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1612.

[93] Ibid., vol.4 : vi.

[94] *malānāṃ kṣayôtpādâbhāvād akṣayânutpāda-jñān'ātmikā sarva-dharmâviparītādhigati-lakṣaṇā mahā-bodhir AA-Ālokā*, 879 ln.25-27.

Thus, *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* may be thought of as describing a kind of precursor state to the fully enlightened state. Finally, it may be added that the use of *kṣānti* in this context is not unlike the way the Sarvāstivādins use the term in their exposition of the sixteen moments of the *darśanamārga* to characterise the precursory state leading to *jñāna* of the Four Truths, which suggests that there too, "conviction" may be a better translation than "patience."

6.4.2.4 The function of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*

In addition to the semantic definition of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*, there are two passages in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* that point to a functional, or possibly polemic, meaning of the term, *vis-à-vis* the three *yāna*s. The two passages basically say the same thing, yet as Conze has confessed to not understanding them,[95] they will now briefly be investigated.

In the first passage, the Sanskrit version of the recast *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* reads:

> Śāriputra, all the knowledge and abandonments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s [are] the "certitude" of the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's attainment of certitude that dharmas are not produced.[96]

The second passage, also from the Sanskrit version of the recast *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* is almost identical:

> So it is, O Devaputras, so it is. The knowledge and abandonments up to *pratyekabuddha*s [are] the "certitude" of the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's attainment of certitude that dharmas are not produced.[97]

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[95] See Conze, *Large Sutra*, 74 n.25.

[96] *yac chāriputra sarvaśrāvakapratyekabuddhānāṃ jñānaṃ ca prakāśaṃ ca sānutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilabdhasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya kṣāntiḥ/ Pañca (D)*, 72 ln.7-8. The passage is also cited by Ārya Vimuktisena; see *Abhisamayālaṃkāravṛtti*, ed. Corrado Pensa, (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1967), 45.

[97] *evam etad devaputrā evam etad, yac ca yāvat pratyekabuddhānāṃ jñānaṃ yac ca prahāṇaṃ, sānutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilabdhasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya kṣāntiḥ. Pañca (K)*, 4 : 80 ln.9-12.

I shall refer to these two passages as A and B respectively.

The passages are somewhat problematic for two reasons. The first is the copular relationship between the two terms in the sentence, i.e., (1) the knowledge and abandonments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s; and (2) the "certitude" of the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's attainment of certitude that dharmas are not produced. How can the accomplishments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s <u>be</u> a certitude (or, for that matter, a "patience" or "willingness")?

Before dealing with this question, it is worth noting how the above English translations (strange as they may seem) are supported by Kumārajīva's translation of passage B as it occurs in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* by supplying the copular verb "is just" (即是). The context is part of an explanation as to why bodhisattvas who have attained the certitude that dharmas are not produced do not produce any of the hindrances (障, *āvaraṇa*) such as miserliness and greed:

> Question: The bodhisattva who has not yet attained buddhahood has not yet cut off all defilements, so why do the evil minds such as miserliness and greed never arise?
> Answer: When an irreversible bodhisattva attains the certitude that dharmas are not produced, he abandons all defilements, but he has not abandoned the residues.
> [Question:] If he has not abandoned them how is he always able to avoid producing the hindrances such as stinginess and greed?
> [Answer:] As the [*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*] *sūtra* says: "[The accomplishments of] stream-enterers up to arhats *are just* this bodhisattva's certitude that dharmas are not produced."[98]

[98] T.1509 p572b27-c03：問曰：是菩薩未得佛道，未斷諸煩惱，云何常不生慳貪等諸惡心？答曰：阿鞞跋致菩薩得無生法忍時斷諸煩惱，但未斷習；若不斷者，云何常能不生諸慳貪等障道心？如《經》說：「須陀洹乃至阿羅漢，即是菩薩無生法忍。」Cf. T.223 p328b26-27

The second problem is that the corresponding passages in other versions of the *sūtra* differ. Passage B, for example, reads somewhat differently in the Gilgit manuscript,[99] which Conze translates as follows (emphasis added):

> The patient acceptance of the Bodhisattva, the great being who has gained the patient acceptance of dharmas which fail to be produced, *is superior to* the cognition and forsaking of the Faith-followers, etc. to: Pratyekabuddhas.[100]

However, there is another variant reading that may provide a clue to how the passages should be interpreted. Occurring in the *Śatasāhasrikā* and corresponding to passage A above, it reads:

> Śāradvatiputra, the knowledge of the obtainment of the fruits of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s is the bodhisattva-mahāsattva's certitude.[101]

According to this reading, the certitude (that dharmas are not produced) seems to be equated with a bodhisattva's *knowledge* that he has gained the fruits of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.

This interpretation would also accord with a statement in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* indicating that the certitude that dharmas are not produced is attained upon entry into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva, and thus marks the commencement of the second phase of the bodhisattva path:

> Without having developed the perfection of wisdom, the bodhisattva, the great being, cannot go beyond the level of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s; and without having gone beyond the level of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s he cannot enter on the fixed condition of a bodhisattva;

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[99] See Conze, *Large Sutra*, ix. This version of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* has not been published.

[100] Ibid., 359.

[101] *yacchāradvatiputra śrāvakapratyekabuddhānāṃ phalaprāptijñānaṃ sā bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasa kṣāntiḥ* / *Śata*, 274 ln.13-14.

> and without having entered the fixed condition of a bodhisattva he cannot produce the certitude that dharmas are not produced.[102]

Since, (1) as we have seen, abandoning all defilements is a prerequisite for entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva; and (2) from the passage just cited, entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva is a prerequisite for producing the certitude that dharmas are not produced, by combining these two conclusions, we can now say that any bodhisattva who has produced the certitude that dharmas are not produced must have already gained the knowledge, and eliminated the abandonments, of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s. Thus, the above passages seem to say that bodhisattvas who are certain that dharmas are not produced are also those who have gained the knowledge and eliminated the abandonments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.

Sparham's use of the expression "extends to" in his translation of the passage as it occurs in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-vṛtti* comes close to the idea that the *sūtra* seems to be getting at; namely, the *kṣānti* of *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* has implications beyond simply having conviction that dharmas are not produced. Sparham renders the passage as follows:

> the patient acceptance (*kṣānti*) of a bodhisattva who has realized that dharmas are not produced, is [i.e., extends to] the knowledge and abandonments of all Stream-enterers and Pratyekabuddhas.[103]

The point is that, while there does not seem to be any logical reason why the certainty that dharmas are not produced would entail certainty with respect to the

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[102] *na ca bhagavann abhāvayitvā prajñāpāramitāṃ bodhisattvena mahāsattvena śakta śrāvākabhūmir vā pratyekabuddhabhūmir vā atikramituṃ, anatikramya śrāvakabhūmiṃ pratyekabuddhabhūmiṃ na ca śakyaṃ bodhisattvena mahāsattvena bodhisattvanyāmo 'vakramituṃ, anavakramya bodhisattvanyāmaṃ na śakyaṃ bodhisattvena mahāsattvena anutpattikeṣu dharmeṣu kṣāntim utpādayitu/, Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 191.

[103] Sparham, *Abhisamayālaṃkāra with Vṛtti and Ālokā*, vol.1 : 45, vol.2 : 64-65.

knowledge and abandonments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, by saying that such certainty *is* (or "extends to") the knowledge and abandonments of *śrāvaka*s etc., the authors of the *sūtra* appear to be elevating the certitude that dharmas are not produced over all the attainments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.

6.5 The two-phase path and the irreversible *bhūmi*

6.5.1 Recapitulation

So far, it has been shown that the longer versions of the *sūtra*, unlike the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, divide the bodhisattva path into two phases. The point of separation between the two phases is called the entrance into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva and is marked by the attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced. It has also been shown that the *sūtra* teaches that bodhisattvas who reach this level have abandoned all defilements, and that they do so by means of the traditional practices associated with the stages of the fourfold *āryan* path in conjunction with skill-in-means. Although there does appear to have been some uncertainty amongst redactors of the *sūtra* on the issue of whether such bodhisattvas actually *produce* the *āryan* path,[104] all agree that they do not realise the fruits of the path by actually *becoming* a *srota-āpanna* etc. Instead, they pass beyond the levels of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* by regarding them "with knowledge and vision."

While the *sūtra* is not explicit about the details of the bodhisattva's knowledge and vision, it appears to involve either a cognition of suchness (*tathatā*) that is not accessible to *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, or skill-in-means, or both. There may, however, be unwanted consequences of holding either of these positions. The first is that if *śrāvaka*s attain arhatship without comprehending suchness, it would seem to

[104] See n.61 above.

contradict statements elsewhere in the *sūtra* concerning how practitioners of all three vehicles must train in the perfection of wisdom. It would, however, nevertheless be consistent with the doctrines of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika school, in which the three types of practitioners attain their goals by means of different cognitions. On the other hand, if *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s do train in the perfection of wisdom, and if skill-in-means, in the sense of the practical application of the understanding of emptiness, is the sole criterion by which bodhisattvas are distinguished from *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, we must explain why *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s do not apply their understanding of emptiness to their practices. A third consequence is that in order to distinguish bodhisattvas from *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, we must say that bodhisattvas are irreversible while still in the first phase of their careers (possibly even from the beginning), since, according to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, it is only by skill-in-means—in the sense of not making anything into a sign (*na nimittīkaroti*)—that a bodhisattva is able to undertake the practices of the *ārya*n path while not manifesting its fruits.

It is the third consequence that is most relevant to our investigation, since it concerns the point in the bodhisattva's career at which he or she becomes irreversible. In this final section of the current chapter we discuss the question of how this two-phase path was mapped onto the system of ten *bhūmi*s, with the eighth (or in some cases, seventh) generally posited as the irreversible *bhūmi*.

We shall begin with a discussion of several passages that make clear the association between irreversibility and (1) entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva; and (2) gaining the certitude that dharmas are not produced; in other words, passages that associate the irreversible state with the second phase of the bodhisattva path.

6.5.2 Irreversibility and entering the bodhisattva-*niyāma*.

The longer versions of the *sūtra* establish a clear relationship between entering the fixed condition of a bodhisattva and entering the irreversible *bhūmi*. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, for example, states:

> [The bodhisattva-mahāsattva who courses in the perfection of wisdom] enters into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. Thus, Subhūti, the bodhisattva-mahāsattva who courses in the perfection of wisdom enters the irreversible *bhūmi*.[105]

In contrast with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s rather vaguely defined concept of the irreversible *bhūmi* that was explored in chapter 5, in the above passage there is a clear indication that the irreversible *bhūmi* is equivalent to the second phase of the bodhisattva's career.

Some ambiguity in the longer version remains, however, as there are other passages stating that some bodhisattvas enter the fixed condition right at the beginning of their careers:

> There are [bodhisattva-]mahāsattvas who from just the production of the first thought [of enlightenment] enter into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva, or abide in the irreversible *bhūmi*.[106]

Although not explicit in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, statements such as these are pregnant with the doctrine of one final vehicle, for they suggest that some practitioners produce the thought of enlightenment and commence their careers as bodhisattvas after they have become arhats.

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[105] *bodhisattvaniyāmam avakrāmati// evaṃ hi subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caraṇn avinivartanīyāṃ bhūmim avakrāmati// Pañca (D)*, 107 ln.6-11.

[106] *santi mahāsattvā ye prathamacittotpādenaiva bodhisattvaniyāsam avakrāmanti/ avinivartanīyabhūmau vā avatiṣṭhante/* Ibid., 66 ln.15-16.

6.5.3 Irreversibility associated with *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* by means of prediction.

In the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* irreversibility is often associated with the certitude that dharmas are not produced, but usually in an indirect manner—i.e., by means of prediction. For example,

> Endowed with this kind of certitude, Subhūti, a bodhisattva-mahāsattva is predicted to unsurpassed full enlightenment.[107]

Another passage in T.224 that also associates receiving one's prediction with the certitude that dharmas are not produced is significant, as it suggests that the relationship was established relatively early:

> When I scattered the five flowers on Dīpaṃkara I immediately acquired the certitude that dharmas are not produced and received my prediction.[108]

As discussed in chapter 2, several passages in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* show that receiving one's prediction was of great concern to the audiences of the *sūtra*. The association of the certitude that dharmas are not produced with prediction may have enabled Mahāyāna theorists to incorporate what was seen as a necessary stage in the career of all bodhisattvas into the path, even when no buddha was physically present to impart a prediction.[109]

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[107] *evaṃrūpayā subhūte kṣāntyā samanvāgato bodhisattvo mahāsattvo vyākriyate 'nuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau, Pañca (K)*, Pt.5 : 18. The relationship between *anutpattikadharmakṣānti* and receiving one's prediction is well established in other texts. For a list or references see Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 1787. See also Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 145.

[108] T.224 p458b04-05: 如我持五華散提和竭羅佛上，即逮得無所從生法樂於中立，授我決

[109] See quotation from *MPPŚ* in section 5.4.3.2 above.

6.5.4 Logically, bodhisattvas who have entered the bodhisattva-*niyāma* must be irreversible

We have thus seen how the association of irreversibility with the second phase of the bodhisattva's career is made in at least two ways: (1) by means of equating the irreversible *bhūmi* with the fixed condition of a bodhisattva; and (2) by means of associating the cognition that marks the beginning of the second phase (i.e., the certitude that dharmas are not produced) with prediction.

From one point of view, this is entirely logical. Once bodhisattvas abandon all defilements during the first phase of their career and advance to the second phase, there could have been no reason for them to "fall back" to the first phase, since the very function of the first phase was to achieve a goal they had already fulfilled. From another point of view, however, it seems illogical to say bodhisattvas enter the irreversible *bhūmi* on attaining the second phase, for they could never have arrived there if they were not already irreversible in the sense of possessing the skill-in-means to avoid actualising the fruits of the *āryan* path. Were they not irreversible, they would have realised arhatship, and in theory would have passed into *parinirvāṇa* at the end of their lifetimes. Thus, by implying that bodhisattvas must be irreversible before they attain the irreversible *bhūmi*, the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* seems to draw a distinction between *avinivartanīya* and *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* that is not found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. This is an important distinction, and one that we will return to in chapter 8 as we discuss the Lamotte's "problem of the *avaivartika*."

Another implication of this position is that it is tantamount to saying that all bodhisattvas are irreversible, and that there is essentially no difference between a "reversible" bodhisattva and a *śrāvaka*. Consider a person who produces the thought

of enlightenment (thereby becoming a bodhisattva) but does not train in the perfection of wisdom, and is therefore unable to apply skill-in-means to his or her practice. Such a person cannot avoid actualising the fruits of the *āryan* path, and thus, despite being a "bodhisattva," he or she he will never attain buddhahood, but only arhatship and *parinirvāṇa*. According to this interpretation, "reversibility" is not about any weakness of will or forsaking the aspiration to attain highest enlightenment, but about engaging in a mode of practice that is essentially the same as that of *śrāvaka*s and which brings the same results.

6.5.5 The irreversible stage in the *daśabhūmi* system.

Having argued that in the more developed soteriology of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* the irreversible *bhūmi* is a phase of the bodhisattva's career that cannot be entered unless the bodhisattva is already irreversible, it now only remains to be shown why the irreversible *bhūmi* features as the seventh or eighth stage in the various *daśabhūmi* systems.

Since the ten *bhūmi*s are mentioned (but not enumerated) in several biographical *sūtra*s,[110] it is possible that it represents an early idea that was formulated independently of the concept of a two-phase bodhisattva career. Nevertheless, since all *daśabhūmi* systems appear to include an irreversible *bhūmi*,[111] the mapping of the two phases onto the ten *bhūmi*s may have occurred quite early. As we saw in chapter 5, in each system the irreversible *bhūmi* is posited as either the seventh or the eighth *bhūmi*. Thus, in these systems, the first phase corresponds to either the first six or seven *bhūmi*s, and the second phase to the remaining *bhūmi*s.

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[110] See Hirakawa, "The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism," 65 n.67.

[111] Even in the "*Bhūmiparikarma*" chapter of the longer *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, which does not name the *bhūmi*s, it is implicit that the seventh is the irreversible *bhūmi*. See Section 5.2.2.2.2 above.

Since, as we have shown, in terms of abandonments the first phase corresponded to the levels of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, it would have been natural to posit a system of Hīnayāna *bhūmi*s corresponding to the "reversible" bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. The only problem would have been how many Hīnayāna *bhūmi*s to count. Nalinaksha Dutt reports that Pāli sources traditionally count the stages of progress as six, namely: (1) *gotrabhū*; (2) *sotāpattimagga*; (3) *sotāpanna*; (4) *sakadāgāmi*; (5) *anāgāmi*; and (6) *arahatta*.[112] He also finds evidence with which to relate the four fruits of the *āryan* path with *vihāra*s three to eight in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, and *bhūmi*s one to six in the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*. In each case, Dutt says this means that:

> the higher knowledge and attainments, which Bodhisattvas claim and which, according to the Mahāyānists, are beyond the capacity of the Hīnayānists, are to be attained in the last four bhūmis [or *vihāra*s, in the case of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*].[113]

He even goes so far as to state that:

> If the additional features of the Mahāyāna account of the first six bhūmis be left out, one may reasonably say that the description of the six bhūmis is simply a Sanskritised form of the Pāli passages, which deal with the stages of sanctification.[114]

While this may be a simplistic view of a complex situation, it is nevertheless a reasonable one. One problem with it, however, is that it only explains those *daśabhūmi* systems that count the irreversible *bhūmi* as the seventh. Although these include most systems, the system that was eventually to become dominant, i.e., that found in the works of Haribhadra, counts only the last three *bhūmi*s as the second phase in the bodhisattva's career. This can be explained, however, by the addition of the *pratyekabuddha* level to the basic list of six enumerated by Dutt. If the Hīnayāna

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[112] Dutt, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 133-134.

[113] Ibid., 106.

[114] Ibid., 86.

levels are enumerated as six, then the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* would be the seventh, as it is, for example, in the "*Daśavyavasthāna*" chapter of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. On the other hand, if, through the inclusion of the *pratyekabuddha* level, they are enumerated as seven, then the *avinivartanīya-bhūmi* would be the eighth, as it is in the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* and the many other works that follow its system.

It might be objected that in the longer *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* seven *śrāvaka bhūmi*s and one *pratyekabuddha bhūmi* are enumerated, making a total of eight Hīnayāna *bhūmis*, which would imply that the irreversible *bhūmi* would have been the ninth, a position that is not attested anywhere. The list of eight Hīnayāna *bhūmi*s occurs at several places in the longer version, for example:

> The bodhisattva-mahāsattva, beginning with the first thought of enlightenment, coursing in the six perfections, passes beyond the eight stages with his knowledge and vision. Which eight? The stage of bright vision, the lineage stage, the eighth-lowest stage, the stage of vision, the stage of refinement, the stage of being free from passion, the stage of having completed what was to be done, and the stage of a *pratyekabuddha*. Having gone beyond these eight stages with his knowledge and vision, he enters, by the knowledge of the aspects of the path, the *bodhisattva-niyāma*, and through the cognition of the knowledge of all aspects he abandons the last residues of the defilements.[115]

However, since this list of eight is not attested in the extant Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma* literature, it may be somewhat anomalous, and therefore may not have exerted any influence on any of the surviving *daśabhūmi* systems. Nevertheless, if we subtract the first member (which may not have been considered an actual stage) and the last member (which, we have argued, may have been optional) the

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[115] *bodhisattvo mahāsattvo prathamacittotpādam upādāya ṣaṭsu pāramitāsu carann aṣṭau bhūmīñ jñānena ca darśanena ca atikrāmati. katamā aṣṭau? śuklavidarśanabhūmi gotrabhūmir aṣṭamakabhūmi darśanabhūmis tanubhūmir vītarāgabhūmiḥ kṛtāvībhūmiḥ pratyekabuddhabhūmiḥ. īdṛśaḥ sa imā aṣṭau bhūmīñ jñānena ca darśanena ca atikramya mārgākārajñatayā bodhisattvanyāmam avakrāmati. bodhisattvanyāmam avakramya sarvākārajñatājñānena sarvavāsanānusandhikleśaṃ prajahāti/ Aṣṭādaśa 55-70*, 184. Cf. *Pañca (K)* Pt.5 : 154-155; Conze, *Large Sutra*, 540-541.

remaining six members do constitute a list attested in the *abhidharma* literature.[116] Correlating this six-member list with the first six stages in the *daśabhūmi* would make the irreversible *bhūmi* the seventh, while once again adding the *pratyekabuddha-bhūmi* to the list and making the correlation would make the irreversible *bhūmi* the eighth.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* calls the eight stages beyond which the bodhisattva passes "common stages" (共地), clearly implying that they are traversed by both bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas*. The fact that the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* interpretive tradition considers them exclusively Hīnayāna stages, while according with the soteriological doctrines of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika school, does not appear consistent with the two-phase bodhisattva path suggested by numerous passages in the *sūtra*. Lamotte recognised this when he wrote:

> Haribhadra's interpretation establishes a definite division between the śrāvaka stages (the first eight on the list, Śuklavipaśyanā, etc.) and those of the bs (No. 10 on the list). However, in so doing, it runs directly counter to the spirit and intentions of the Prajñāpāramitā and the Mahāyāna. Undoubtedly bodhisattvas have their own stages (Pramuditā, etc.), but they can also occupy the stages of the career of the śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas.[117]

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that the goal envisaged by the authors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s for the bodhisattva underwent a period of development between the composition of the shorter and longer versions of the sūtra. Initially the bodhisattva's goal was a state called *sarvajñatā*, which may have been understood as

[116] T.1463 p801b20-25; Cf. Lamotte, *Le Traité*, 2379.

[117] Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 219.

all-knowledge in a metaphorical sense; i.e., highest enlightenment did not entail knowing all the conventional phenomena in the world, but it did entail knowing the mode of existence of all phenomena. There was, however, no obvious distinction made between this goal and that of the *arhat* in terms of abandonments, suggesting perhaps that arhats (such as Subhūti) also gained *sarvajña*. In the later, longer versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, arhats are clearly still said to gain all-knowledge, but at the same time we see the goal of buddhahood redefined in accordance with a somewhat more popular sense of omniscience, i.e., buddhas not only see the sameness of all phenomena but also the aspects of every knowable thing.

Several passages in the *sūtra* make it clear that the bodhisattva's career consisted of two phases—one in which he or she passed through the milestones of the *āryan* path, and another which consisted of going beyond it. The point of separation was the entrance into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. An important precondition had to be fulfilled by bodhisattvas before they could enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva; namely, abandonment of all defilements. While the methods for abandoning the defilements were the traditional means such as the thirty-seven wings of enlightenment etc., through their skill-in-means bodhisattvas avoid actualising the fruits of the *āryan* path. Instead, they pass beyond them by regarding them with knowledge and vision.

In the third part of the chapter, the certitude that dharmas are not produced was discussed. It was argued that it should be understood as a special kind of conviction. Two difficult passages concerning the relationship between this conviction and the attainments of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* were explained.

In the last part of the chapter, the irreversibility of bodhisattvas who have progressed to the second level was investigated. It was argued that although it was logically necessary for bodhisattvas who had advanced to the second level to be irreversible, it was also necessary that they had also been irreversible prior that level. If they were not, they would not have possessed the skill-in-means necessary to advance beyond the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*. This led to the conclusion that being a reversible bodhisattva was tantamount to being a *śrāvaka*. Finally it was argued that the second phase of the bodhisattva career corresponded to the last three or four *bhūmi*s in order to establish a correlation between the *bhūmi*s of the first phase and the stages in the career of a *śrāvaka* (and *pratyekabuddha*).

7 INFERRING IREVERSIBILITY FROM SIGNS

What, O Lord, are the attributes, signs and marks of an irreversible bodhisattva, and how can we know whether a bodhisattva is irreversible?[1]

Subhūti

7.1 Introduction

The arguments that have been presented until now have described the irreversible bodhisattva as a phenomenon that was once an important normative ideal in the lives of the audiences of early Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, but which later became an abstract and remote concept within systematised, or "institutionalised" Mahāyāna. In chapter 4 it was theorised that this development may have occurred during a period of increased production and dissemination of Mahāyāna sūtras as a result of certain discourses being eclipsed by those that were less contested and more structured. Our investigations in the preceding chapters also suggest that this change may have been driven by a need to develop a soteriological doctrine that more clearly distinguished the career of the bodhisattva from that of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*.

[1] *atha khalvāyuṣmān subhūtirbhagavantametadavocat - avinivartanīyasya bhagavan bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya ke ākārāḥ, kāni liṅgāni, kāni nimittāni? kathaṃ vā bhagavan vayaṃ jānīyāma ayamavinivartanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattva iti? Aṣṭa*, 161 ln.2-4.

We have not yet however considered the impact of important developments in Buddhist epistemological thinking that occurred during the same period. This chapter will therefore examine post-Dharmakīrtian interpretation of the signs of irreversibility as "valid evidence" (*samyag-liṅga; rtags yang dag*), in particular, the implication that irreversibility meant merely that a bodhisattva was *capable* of attaining highest enlightenment, but was not *assured* of doing so.

7.1.1 Chapter outline

By way of introduction to the topic, the chapter begins with an overview of the signs of an irreversible bodhisattva by reproducing the shortest, and perhaps earliest, recension of our *locus classicus*—that found in the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*. This is followed by a presentation of Dharmakīrti's axiom that the production of an effect cannot validly be inferred based on the existence of its cause. We then turn to Haribhadra's important citation of a verse from the *Pramāṇavārttika*, in which he implies that the signs taught in the *sūtra* are capable of functioning as a basis for validly inferring that a bodhisattva who displays them is irreversible. The consequences of this position will then be examined in a discussion of some of Haribhadra's major Tibetan commentators. It will be argued that Gelugpa commentators allow for more than one interpretation of the signs, including one which is essentially pre-Dharmakīrtian in nature, but which allows for more significant inferences to be made.

7.2 Overview of the Signs

7.2.1 Enumeration

Full lists of the signs as they are enumerated in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* and the *Āmnayānusāriṇi* are given in the appendices. Their key differences and similarities are summarised as follows:

(1) The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s enumeration of forty-four signs is based primarily on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*. As mentioned in chapter 1, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* contains a number of peculiarities that result from its attempt to match the signs with specific stages in the bodhisattva's career as envisaged by the Yogācāras. The first twenty signs are said to be possessed by bodhisattvas on the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) and are broken down into groups of eleven, six, two, and one, corresponding respectively to the heat (*ūṣman*), summits (*mūrdha*), forbearance (*kṣānti*) and supreme quality (*agradharma*) stages of the path of preparation. The next sixteen signs, which correspond to the sixteen moments of forbearance and cognition on the path of seeing, are said to be possessed by bodhisattvas in the post-meditative state after they have cognised those sixteen moments while in meditative equipoise. The last eight signs, which do not occur in the "Signs" chapter, are said to be possessed by bodhisattvas who have reached the eighth *bhūmi* on the path of cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga*).

(2) The *Bṛhaṭṭīka*'s system of thirty-five signs, as the full title of the work indicates,[2] is based on the three longer versions of the *sūtra*. The enumeration is more natural than that of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, since it only includes signs that occur in the

[2] *Ārya-śatasāhasrikā-pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-bṛhaṭ-ṭīkā* (To. 3808)

"Signs" chapter and because it subdivides the text based on occurrences of the refrain:

> Subhūti, a bodhisattva endowed with these characteristics, these signs and these marks should be borne in mind as irreversible.[3]

Each time the refrain occurs, the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* counts a sign.

(3) The *Āmnayānusāriṇī*'s system of nineteen signs is similar to that of the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā* in that it separates the signs based on occurrences of the same formulaic refrain, except that it does so according to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. The fact that it counts a lower number of signs is mainly due to the fact that the refrain occurs less frequently in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, with several signs being grouped together by each occurrence.

7.2.2 The *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* version

The shortest, and possibly the earliest, version of signs occurs in the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*. The text reproduced below is based on Conze's English translation.[4] I have not attempted my own translation since, as Akira Yayuma, editor of one of the text's two recensions, writes:

> The language of the *Rgs* is perhaps even more corrupt and difficult than that of the *Mahāvastu-avadāna*... [and] contains a great many forms and constructions peculiar to the Rgs—prosodically, phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, stylistically, and lexically.[5]

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[3] *ebhiḥ subhūte ākārair ebhir liṅgair ebhir nimittaiḥ samanvāgato 'vinivartanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvo veditavyaḥ/ Aṣṭa*, 161 ln.11-12.

[4] Conze, "Verses on the accumulation of precious qualities." Among the many manuscripts and Tibetan and Chinese translations of this text, Akira Yuyama has identified two recensions. Conze's translation is based on Recension B, editions of which have been edited by E. Obermiller and P. L. Vaidya. See reference list for publication details.

[5] *Prajñāpāramitā-Ratnaguṇasaṃcaya-Gāthā*, ed. Akira Yayuma, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), xx.

The breaking up of the text and numbering of the signs has been done in accordance with a commentary by the eighteenth century Mongolian scholar, bsTan-pa'i-sgron-me.[6]

The "Signs" chapter of the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*

[1] Irreversible bodhisattvas are free from the perception (*saṃjña*) of multiplicity (*nānātva*).

[2] They speak suitably (*yuktabhāṇī*)

[3] They do not take refuge with outside *śramaṇa*s or *brāhmaṇa*s.

[4] Skilfully, they forever avoid the three lower realms.

[5] They exert themselves on the ten wholesome paths of action.

[6] Disinterested in material things (*nirāmiṣu*), they instruct the world in dharma.

[7] They take delight exclusively in dharma.

[8] They always speak gently.

[9] Whether standing, walking, lying, or sitting, they are fully mindful (*susaṃprajāna*); yoked, they only look ahead, their thoughts not wandering.

[10] They are clean, and wear unsoiled garments.

[11] They are purified and separated from the three types of evil actions [of body, speech and mind].

[12] They are bulls of men (*vṛṣabha*) who do not desire gain, but always desire dharma.

[13] They have passed beyond Māra's realms.

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[6] bsTan-pa'i-sgron-me, *Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa yon tan rin po che sdud pa dang de'i 'grel pa sbas don dsal ba'i sgron me bcas*, (Mundgod: Drepung Gomang Library, 2005), 201-207.

[14] They are not led astray by others.

[15] They meditate in the four concentrations, but they do not use those concentrations as a support [for rebirth in the heavens].

[16] They do not desire fame.

[17] Their minds are not overcome by anger.

[18] If they become householders, they are never attached to their property.

[19] They do not seek to earn their livelihood in the wrong way.

[20] They do not practice black magic (*abhicāramantra*).

[21] They do control women with spells (*istriprayogamantra*).

[22] They do not predict the birth of a son or daughter.

[23] Due to effort in the supreme perfection of wisdom they are free from quarrels and disputes.

[24] Due to the firmness of their loving minds they desire all-knowledge.

[25] Their thoughts are always inclined towards the teachings.

[26] They have forsaken rebirth in barbarian lands.

[27] Free from doubts about their state (*bhūmi*), they are as stable as Mt. Meru.

7.2.3 Four observations on the list of signs

Several observations regarding this basic list are worthy of mention.

First, the fact that several of the signs appear to function as the bases for significant expansion in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, even in its earliest Chinese translation, suggests that the above list represents a very early version. Signs 13, 14 and 27, for example, are the bases for extensive passages in T.224 in which bodhisattvas demonstrate their commitment to their goal despite Māra's attempts to dissuade them, while Sign 23 is

the basis for a long list of worldly matters about which irreversible bodhisattvas do not speak.

Second, in addition to these elaborations, both the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the longer versions of the *sūtra* use of the formulaic refrain (see Section 7.2.1 above) to distinguish the signs and group them together. There is, however, no such system in the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*.

Third, there is almost nothing about the signs that is characteristically Mahāyāna. With the possible exception of Signs 1 and 24, all the signs could be qualities of exemplary *śrāvaka*s. In particular, they mention nothing about the irreversible bodhisattva's desire to attain highest enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Nor is there any of the overt polemicism in the form of statements that we typically find in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* about irreversible bodhisattvas not falling to the level of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s.

An explanation for this apparent affinity with the doctrines of Mainstream Buddhism may be Tilmann Vetter's argument that the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* was originally produced by *śrāvaka*s, and then later transmitted to bodhisattvas.[7] However, while the above list of signs does indeed suggest that the "Signs" chapter may have been first taught by, as Erich Frauwallner put it, "mystics [who] did not concern themselves with the goal of universal buddhahood,"[8] this does not imply, as Vetter claims, that such persons may have been *śrāvaka*s. As I have argued in chapter 3, it seems more likely that the audiences and authors of the "Signs" chapter identified themselves as bodhisattvas, but at such an early stage their goal was the

[7] See Vetter, "Once again on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism."

[8] Ibid.: 71.

attainment of *sarvajña*, and the bodhisattva ideal did not emphasise attaining it in order to liberate all beings.[9]

A fourth observation is a point that was already made in chapter 3, but bears repeating: the signs do not appear to be a set of criteria with which to separate the bodhisattva community into two groups—irreversible and reversible. Rather, they appear to be qualities to be emulated, or a code of conduct to be followed.

7.2.4 Haribhadra's innovative interpretation

With these points in mind, let us consider two innovative interpretations of the signs by Haribhadra. The first is that he provides additional information in order to give each sign a Mahāyāna character. The second is that he interprets the signs as a logical basis for inferring whether or not a bodhisattva is irreversible.

(1) In the *Sphuṭārthā*, Haribhadra provides additional information for each sign in order to explain how each is acquired.[10] The effect of this additional material is to make the signs into qualities that could not be possessed by a *śrāvaka*, thereby giving them the Mahāyāna character that they lack in their *sūtra* presentation. To illustrate, his treatment of the first five signs is now given. Haribhadra's additions to the basic text of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* are underlined, with rGyal-tshab-rje's explanation of those additions are included in square brackets.[11]

> [The signs of irreversibility of bodhisattvas who abide on the stages of Heat etc. are:]
> (1) Turning away from phenomena such as form and so forth <u>through recognising that they have no self-existence (*svabhāva*)</u>

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[9] Support for this position that the liberation of all beings was little emphasised in early Mahāyāna can be found in Egil Fronsdal's comparison of several passages in the *Dào-xíng* with corresponding passages in the later Sanskrit *Aṣṭa*. See Fronsdal, "The dawn of the bodhisattva path", 23-25.

[10] Haribhadra follows the enumeration system of the *AA*.

[11] See rGyal-tshab-rje, *rNam bshad snying po rgyan*, 442-443.

(2) Extinguishing doubt through gaining perfect faith [by the force of wisdom arisen from meditation that takes emptiness as its object]
(3) Extinguishing rebirth in the eight inauspicious circumstances: namely, birth (a) with mistaken views, (b) in hells, (c) as a hungry ghost, (d) as an animal, (e) where one does not hear the buddha's speech, (f) in an outlying country, (g) with incomplete sense faculties, being stupid and mute, and (h) as a long-life god, from having fulfilled one's prayers [through the power of compassion].
(4) Enjoining of oneself and others in virtuous dharmas due to compassion.
(5) Generosity and so forth dedicated to other beings as the object through exchanging oneself with others.[12]

(2) The second of Haribhadra's innovations provides the point of departure for the investigation undertaken in the remainder of this chapter. In Haribhadra's view, the signs should be treated as *logical* signs, or evidence, on which to base valid inferences about the irreversible status of bodhisattvas who display them. Commenting on the formulaic refrain ("Subhūti, a bodhisattva endowed with these characteristics, ..."), Haribhadra says:

> "to be borne in mind" [means that] based on the axiom [in *Pramāṇavārttika* I.7]:
>
> > the arising of an effect that is inferred from the totality of causes [as the reason] is called an essential identity [sign], because it has no dependence on any further object,
>
> [irreversibility] is to be ascertained by the appropriate application of inference.[13]

By referring to *Pramāṇavārttika* I.7 in this way, Haribhadra is clearly saying that the signs taught in the *sūtra* are to be interpreted as correct evidence (*samyag-liṅga*),

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[12] *(1) svabhāvāsaṃvidyamānatvena rūpādi-dharmma-nivṛttir/ (2) avetya-prasāda-lābhena vicikitsā-kṣayaḥ/ (3) praṇidhāna-samṛddhyā mithyādṛṣṭi-naraka-preta-tiryag-upapatti-buddha-vacanāśravaṇa-pratyanta-janapadotpādendriya-jaḍa-mūka-bhāva-dīrghāyuṣka-devopapattaya ity aṣṭākṣaṇa-kṣayaḥ/ (4) kāruṇikatayā sva-para-kuśala-dharmma-niyojanaṃ/ (5) parātma-parivarttakatvena para-satva-viṣaya-pariṇāmita-dānādi/ AA-Vivṛti*, 70.

[13] *dhārayitavya iti hetunā yaḥ samagreṇa kāyātpādo'numīyate / arthāntarānapekṣatvāt sa svabhāvo'nuvarnitaḥ // iti nyāyād yogyatā'numānena niścetavyaḥ / AA-Ālokā*, 666 ln.23-26.

since, among the three types of correct evidence, they are an instance of inference by way of essential identity.

It should be noted that Haribhadra's interpretation of the signs mentioned in the *sūtra* as "correct evidence" in the Dharmakīrtian sense is unusual. The following table showing the various choices made by the translators of some different Chinese and Tibetan translations of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s suggests that the terms *ākāra*, *liṅga* and *nimitta* were considered virtually synonymous and that they usually had the meaning of "example" (比), "appearance" (相; 貌) or "conduct" (行) rather than "logical sign" or "reason" (which was usually rendered into Chinese as 因[14]).

Table 7.1 Chinese and Tibetan translations of *ākāra, liṅga and nimitta*

	ākāra	*liṅga*	*nimitta*
Lokakṣema (道行 T.224)	比	相	行
Zhī Qīan (大明度 T.225)	比	相	行
Kumārajīva (小品 T.227)	相貌		
Kumārajīva (大智度論 T.1509)	行	類	相貌
Xúanzàng (大般若 T.220(5))	行	狀	相
Mokṣala (放光般若 T.221)	相	行	像貌
Tibetan *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*; recast *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*	*rnam pa*	*rtags*	*mtshan ma*
Tibetan *Śatasāhasrikā*; original *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*	*rnam pa*	*tshul*	*mtshan ma*

[14] See, for example, Xúan Zàng's translation of the *Nyāyapraveśa* by Śaṃkarasvāmin, esp. T.1630 p11b06: "A reason has three aspects"(因有三相). Cf. tr. Musashi Tachikawa, "A sixth-century manual of Indian logic," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1971).

In order to understand why Haribhadra chose to interpret the signs in this innovative way it is necessary to review Dharmakīrti's position with respect to inference about the future. This will be undertaken in the next section.

7.3 Dharmakīrti's denial of inference of the production of an effect

7.3.1 Classification of types of reason

Dharmakīrti's two-fold division of instruments of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) into inferential (*anumāna*) and direct (*pratyakṣa*), corresponding respectively to the conventionally and ultimately real, is well known, and need not be discussed here.[15] His classification of the reasons (*hetu; gtan tshigs*) by which an object of inferential knowledge is established into three types is also well known. As he writes in the famous first verse of the "Inference for oneself" (*svārthānumāna*) chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*:

> [Reasons] are of exactly three types because the necessity of invariable concomitance (*avinābhāva*) [of a reason with what it establishes] is restricted [to just those three types of reason]. [Any property] other than those is a false reason (*hetvābhāsa*).[16]

The three types of reason Dharmakīrti refers to in this verse are explained in subsequent verses as depending on three types of concomitance, namely, causality (*kārya*), essential identity (*svabhāva*) and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*).[17]

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[15] For a recent scholarly discussion, see John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, (Somerville: Wisdom, 2004).

[16] *PV*, I:1 ; *hetustridhaiva saḥ / avinābhāvaniyamāddhetvābhāsāstato'pare // Pramāṇavārttikam*, 170 ln.3-4.

[17] " The three reasons are those that have the characteristic of being a product, a essential identity or non-apprehension." *ta eti kāryasvabhāvānupalabdhilakṣaṇāsatrayo hetvaḥ/* Ibid., 171 ln.10.

7.3.2 Natural relation, or *svabhāvapratibandha*

Dharmakīrti's threefold classification of valid reasons was based on a theory of three types of invariable concomitance. The key to understanding this theory, and why it allows for the inference of the existence of a cause based on the production of its effect, but not vice-versa, is the important concept of "natural relation" or *svabhāvapratibandha.*[18]

When Dharmakīrti says:

> there is a fire in this place, because there is smoke[19]

he makes use of what he sees as the natural relationship between smoke and fire to enable him to establish the so-called forward pervasion (*anvaya-vyāpti*)[20] necessary for a valid inference to be made. For Dharmakīrti, it is no accident that smoke occurs only where there is fire, since, by their nature, all effects have the natural property of being produced from their respective causes. Since smoke is, *by nature*, pervaded by the property of having been produced from fire, Dharmakīrti can validly infer that a place that possesses smoke must also be a place that possesses (or, strictly speaking, possessed) fire.[21]

Likewise, in another well-known example:

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[18] The following summary is necessarily brief. For a more detailed treatment of *svabhāvapratibandha*, see Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, Ch.3.

[19] *PV-Vṛtti: yathā 'gniratra dhūmāt / Pramāṇavārttikam,* 171 ln.10.

[20] Among the three modes of a reason that must be established in order for it to form the basis of valid inference, the forward pervasion says that the probans (i.e., the reason, or sign) must be completely pervaded by the probandum (i.e., what is to be established). Dharmakīrti writes: "Pervasion is the pervading property's (i.e. the probandum's ; *vyāpaka*) presence in that [which is pervaded (i.e., the probans ; *vyāpya*)]." *vyāptirvyāpakasya tatra bhāva/* Ibid., 171 ln.8.

[21] This was, of course, not a maxim unique to Dharmakīrti—other schools of Indian philosophy also held that causes could be inferred from effects, though they differed with regard to the philosophical applications of the theory. See, for example, the views of the Navya-nyāya school in Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922-1955), 343-354.

this is a tree, because it is a *śiṃśapā*[22]

the property of being a tree naturally pervades being a *śiṃśapā* because if something is a *śiṃśapā*, it is *by nature* a tree. On this basis, the fact of being a tree can be validly inferred with respect to anything that is established as being a *śiṃśapā*.

Both of these examples are cases of logical deduction and can be expressed in classic syllogistic format:

(1) All places where smoke exists are places where fire exists. This is a place where smoke exists. Therefore it is a place where fire exists.

(2) All *śiṃśapās* are trees. This is a *śiṃśapā*. Therefore it is a tree.

However, although being a tree is a natural property of *śiṃśapā*s, being a *śiṃśapā* is not a natural property of trees, since it is possible for something to be a tree and yet not be a *śiṃśapā*. Similarly, although being a product of fire is a natural property of smoke, being a "producer of smoke" is not a natural property of fires, since there are some fires that do not produce smoke. Thus, the inference:

this is a place where fire exists; therefore it is a place where smoke exists

is not valid, since it depends upon the establishment of a pervasive relationship of the form,

all places where fire exists are places where smoke exists

which we know from the observation of smokeless fires is not established as a relationship of pervasion.

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[22] *PV-Vrtti* : *vṛkṣo 'yam śiṃśapātvāt* / *Pramāṇavārttikam*, 171 ln.10-11. *Śiṃśapā* is the Sanskrit name for the *Dalbergia sissoo*, or the Aśoka tree. See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1069c.

Not only does the pervasion not hold in the case of fire and smoke, Dharmakīrti extends the rule to all causal relationships. To put it another way, since in general the existence of a cause is not necessarily pervaded by the existence of a particular effect,[23] there is no natural relation (*svabhāvapratibandha*) between the cause and the effect. Thus, the axiom that a reason (*hetu*; in this case, the existence of a cause) must be pervaded by the property to be proved (*sādhya*; in this case, the existence of a particular effect) does not hold, and no inference of effects from causes is allowable.

7.3.3 Why effects cannot be inferred from causes

The inability to deduce the production of a specific effect even when the full complement of causes is observed to exist is made clear by Dharmakīrti in his auto-commentary on the *Pramāṇavārttika*. He writes:

> But why is it that the effect itself is not inferred from the totality of causes?
>
> > [8.] There is ambiguity in [inferring] an effect that is dependent upon the fruition of the potentials that are outcomes of the totality [of causes], because an impediment is possible.
>
> For it is not the case that causal elements produce their effect just because they are complete, since the arising of an effect depends upon the fruition of the potentials that arise from the totality [of causes]. And because of the

[23] It is important to realise that it is the inference of a *particular* effect that cannot be inferred. It does not mean that it is not possible to infer that a fire, or any other causally efficient thing, will not produce some kind of effect. A causally efficient thing by definition must produce an effect; however, there is no certainty what that effect will be. In Dharmakīrti's ontology, all ultimately existent things are said to be able to perform a function (*arthakriyā*). As it is stated in the chapter on perception (*pratyakṣa*) in *PV* III:3ab "Whatever is able to perform a function exists ultimately." (*arthakriyāsamartha yat tad atra paramārthasat* / *Pramāṇavārttikam*, 64 ln.3.) This ability to perform a function is an ultimately existent (or real) thing's ability to produce an effect. As Masashi Nagatomi explains: "Only objects able to participate causally in the production of other phenomena are real." (Quoted in Georges Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality*, (Albany: SUNY, 1997), 66.)

> possibility of an impediment in the meantime, there is no inference of an effect.[24]

To understand this axiom more clearly, it is helpful to look at rGyal-tshab-rje's explanation, in which he gives an example of the inference of the production of a sprout of wheat:

> [Consider] that subject [i.e., a complete collection of assembled causes—grain of wheat, water, fertiliser, moisture, warmth, etc.]. With respect to the inference of the production in that place of the resultant sprout of wheat, the pervasion is not definite. The reason is because the production of that effect from that [causal collection] is related to, and dependent upon, increasing changes in the potentials of successive moments of that collection. [This conclusion] follows because it is possible for the collection to also act as locus for an impediment to the production of the sprout.[25]

In other words, rGyal-tshab-rje is saying that just because all the necessary causes and conditions required to produce a sprout of wheat exist, there is no guarantee that a sprout will arise, since the continuum of causes that otherwise leads to the sprout's production may at some stage come to include something that is inimical to that production (e.g., disease, extreme weather conditions, etc.), and prevents it from occurring.

7.3.4 Soteriological reasons for Dharmakīrti's position

There were, of course, good soteriological reasons for Dharmakīrti to allow for a potential impediment to interrupt a causal chain of events. As Karl H. Potter explains, all Indian religious philosophers who accept the possibility of some sort of liberated state (*mokṣa*) need to posit a route to its attainment from a state of bondage

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[24] English translation from Richard P. Hayes and Brenden S. Gillon, "Introduction to Dharmkīrti's theory of inference as presented in the Pramāṇavārtttika Svopajñavṛtti 1-10," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1991): 11.

[25] *de chos can/ gzhir 'bras bu nas kyi myu gu bskyed pa dpog pa la ni khyab pa ma nges pa nyid yin te/ khyod las 'bras bu de bskyed pa khyod kyi tshogs pa skad cig snga ma dang/ phyi ma'i nus pa rnams gong nas gong du 'gyur ba dang 'brel zhing ltos pa'i phyir/ khyab pa yod par thal/ khyod kyang yin de bskyed pa la 'gal rkyen gyis gegs byed pa dang bcas pa yang yin pa'i gzhi mthun dag srid pa'i phyir ro/* /rGyal-tshab-rje, *rNam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, (Mundgod: Drepung Loseling Library Society, 1989), 101.

(*saṃsāra*). Those that Potter calls "progress" philosophers"[26] do so through recourse to "causal chains" that specify the causal relationships that lead to freedom. Then, he says,

> once the relevant chains have been identified, the philosopher's problem is then to show that the relationships between the members of such sequences are neither too strong or too weak—not so strong as to render our function as agents irrelevant, not so weak as to render us unable to count on the regularity of those relationships continuing in the future.[27]

In *Pramāṇavārttika* I.8, cited above, Dharmakīrti is allowing for a causal relationship that is not too strong. A relationship that was too strong would not allow for intervention in the cycle of death and rebirth.

All Buddhists accepts the twelve links of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) as a description of how a person continues to experience the suffering of rebirth in *saṃsāra*. Since the first of these links, ignorance (*avidyā*), is a necessary condition for all the remaining links, Buddhist philosophers hold that if the chain can be broken at this point, suffering can be averted. Potter explains the relationship as follows:

> to avoid an occurrence one must see to it that a necessary condition for the occurrence does not occur.[28]

Thus, just as fire is a necessary condition for the production of smoke, ignorance is a necessary condition for the arising of suffering. Furthermore, just as where there is no fire there can be no smoke, if ignorance can be overcome by means of wisdom,

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[26] Karl H Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 94.

[27] Ibid., 97.

[28] Ibid., 49.

suffering cannot arise.[29] In order to allow for the possibility of freedom from the bondage of *saṃsāra*, Dharmakīrti needs to hold that even if all the conditions for future suffering are present, just as the causal chain resulting in a sprout of wheat can be interrupted to prevent its occurrence, the twelve links can also be interrupted by means of wisdom.

There is, however, another aspect to the situation. In the same way that the causal chain that results in suffering can be interrupted, there is also no guarantee the causal chains that "path" philosophers hold can lead a person to freedom will not also meet with some impediment. Where then, does that leave our notion of the irreversible bodhisattva who is assured of attaining full enlightenment? Has Dharmakīrti implicitly rejected the concept of the irreversible bodhisattva, who is, by definition, destined to progress to enlightenment, without falling to the path of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*? To investigate the matter further, we return now to Haribhadra, who was active approximately 150 years after Dharmakīrti.

7.4 Haribhadra's "weak" interpretation of irreversibility

As mentioned in section 7.2.4 above, through his citation of *Pramāṇavārttika* I.7, Haribhadra is clearly saying that the signs taught in the *sūtra* are to be interpreted as capable of serving as the bases of valid inference since, among the three types of correct reason (*samyag-liṅga*), they are a case of inference by way of essential identity (as in the example of the *śiṃśapā*). They are not a case of inferring the effect from a cause, which, as we have shown, is not permitted according to Dharmakīrti. Instead, it is merely the *suitability* for a particular effect to occur

[29] For Dharmakīrti, ignorance meant conceptualisation—in particular conceiving of oneself as a subjective "I," distinct from an objective "that." Through countering these two erroneous concepts by means of the wisdom that cognises the unreality of dualism, the practitioner interrupts the causal chain that results in rebirth in *saṃsāra*.

which is inferable, since only this suitability is a natural property of the causal collection.

Once again we turn to rGyal-tshab-rje's gloss in *Elucidating the Path to Liberation* (*Thar lam gsal byed*) for an illustrative example:

> [Consider] the subject, the assembly of a complete collection of causes—[grain of] wheat, water, fertiliser, warmth, moisture etc. In a place where these phenomena are established, an inference regarding the suitability of the arising of their result—a sprout of wheat—is rightly called [a case of] an essential identity reason because the three modes [of a correct reason] are established, and [because] the production of the effect, a sprout of wheat, from its cause, without further dependence on other objects, i.e., causes and conditions, from the mere establishment of itself [i.e., the causal collection], the substantial [cause] for the suitability for the production of that [effect] has already arisen.[30]

In other words, Dharmakīrti and rGyal-tshab-rje are saying that although we cannot validly infer that the result, namely, a sprout of wheat, will arise in a place where all the causes are assembled, we *can* validly infer that the collection of causes is *suitable* to produce a sprout of wheat, since such suitability is a natural property of the causal collection, just as being a tree is a natural property of *śiṃśapās*.

Thus, although it is not permitted to infer that the result, namely highest enlightenment, will *definitely* occur based on the fact that a bodhisattva possesses one of the signs of irreversibility mentioned in the *sūtra*, Haribhadra is saying that we can infer that a bodhisattva who possesses such a sign *is capable* of attaining highest enlightenment. Clearly, this is a much weaker statement than the claims made in the *sūtra*s that irreversible bodhisattvas are assured of attaining enlightenment, and it suggests that Dharmakīrti may have devalued the signs of

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[30] *rgyu nas dang chu lud drod gsher sogs tshogs pa tshang ba'i tshogs pa chos can/ khyod las rang phyogs kyi chos su grub pa'i gzhir/ rang 'bras nas kyi myu gu skye rung bar rjes su dpog pa gang yin pa de ni rang bzhin gyi gtan tshigs yin par brjod rigs te/ de sgrub kyi tshul gsum gang zhig/ khyod las rang 'bras nas kyi myu gu skye ba ni yang rgyu rkyen don gzhan la mi ltos par rang grub tsam nas/ de skye rung gi rjes su skyes pa'i phyir/* rGyal-tshab-rje, rN*am bshad thar lam gsal byed*, 101.

irreversibility. This issue will be further investigated the in discussion that follows later in the chapter on Tibetan interpretations of Haribhadra's position.

7.5 Lineage and irreversibility

First, however, in order to better understand those Tibetan interpretations, it is helpful to consider a related topic—that of lineage (*gotra*)—since the way in which this topic was dealt with in earlier literature is similar to the way Tibetan scholars interpreted irreversibility. Of particular importance is the difference between fixed (*nitya*) and unfixed (*anitya*) lineage, which, as we shall see, parallels the difference between irreversible and reversible bodhisattvas.

7.5.1 Indeterminate lineage and unfixed lineage

The notion of lineage is found in two well-known Mahāyāna *sūtra*s—the *Saṃdhinirmocana* and the *Laṅkāvatāra*. The *Saṃdhinirmocana* speaks of three lineages: *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha* and *tathāgata*.[31] It also mentions persons belonging to the *śrāvaka* lineage who later become bodhisattvas,[32] but it does not mention anything about the lineage of such *śrāvaka*s being "unfixed" (*anitya*; *ma nges pa*). The *Laṅkāvatāra* speaks of five types of lineage, adding "indeterminate lineage" (*aniyata-ekatara-gotra*) and "no lineage" (*agotra*) to the three mentioned in the *Saṃdhinirmocana*.[33] It then goes on to explain how persons belonging to those three lineages may be recognised by way of their physical reaction (e.g., shedding tears, horripilation, etc.) when they hear teachings specifically pertaining to each of the three vehicles. Persons of indeterminate lineage are said to be those who desire

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[31] See To.106 19b

[32] See To.106 19b-20a

[33] See *Laṅka*, 27 ln.18-20. Tr. Daisetz Suzuki, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, (London: Routledge & Sons, 1932), 56.

to join in the practices of all three vehicles when they hear them taught.[34] It is important to note that there is no suggestion that the lineage of such persons is changeable—it is merely unknown.[35] Thus, it is appropriate here to translate *aniyata-ekatara* as "indeterminate," rather than "indefinite" or "unfixed."

It is interesting to speculate on what function the concept of lineage was created to serve. The authors of *sūtra*s such as the *Saṃdhinirmocana* and the *Laṅkāvatāra* may have seen it as a necessary condition for the attainment of each of the three types of enlightenment. Such a view is, I think, supported by the fact that after the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, *tathāgata* and *aniyataikatara* lineages are explained in the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the *sūtra* describes how "incorrigibles" (*icchantika*) cannot attain *nirvāṇa*. On the assumption that this is also a description of persons who were *agotra*, we can see how the concept of lineage may have been created to fulfil a need to posit some sort of necessary condition, without which none of the three types of enlightenment was possible. Whether or not it was also originally a polemic device created by Mahāyānists in order exclude certain types of practitioner from highest enlightenment is difficult to say.

It is also difficult to determine whether the authors of these *sūtra*s considered lineage to be a necessary *and sufficient* condition for enlightenment. More specifically, did they see persons of the bodhisattva lineage as destined to attain highest enlightenment, regardless of what circumstances might arise? The lack of a distinction between fixed and unfixed lineage suggests the possibility that they may have thought so.

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[34] *aniyatagotrakaḥ punarmahāmate triṣvapyeteṣu deśyamāneṣu yatrānunīyate tatrānuyojyaḥ syāt* / *Laṅka*, 28 ln.11-12.

[35] Nor, for that matter, is there any suggestion that the four other types of lineage, although known, are changeable.

The views of later exegetes on the matter, however, are somewhat clearer. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, for example, Asaṅga mentions four causes (*kāraṇa*) that could prevent a bodhisattva who possessed the bodhisattva lineage from attaining enlightenment.[36] This clearly indicates that he did not see lineage as a sufficient condition for highest enlightenment, and may even suggest that he thought all three lineages were unfixed, in the sense that they could change or be lost in certain circumstances. Haribhadra, on the other hand, makes a distinction between lineages that are fixed, in the sense of unchangeable, and those that are not. In the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* he speaks of:

> the lineage of *śrāvaka*s, *pratyekabuddha*s, and *tathāgata*s that is fixed because it cannot be lost even in extreme conditions, [and] the lineage of *śrāvaka*s etc. that is unfixed because it can be stolen by conditions (*pratyaya*).[37]

Thus, by the time of Haribhadra, the notion of indeterminate lineage (*anitya-ekatara-gotra*) no longer seems important, possibly because it had been reinterpreted and replaced by the notion of *anitya-gotra*, meaning persons whose lineage was known but not fixed. Since bodhisattvas of unfixed lineage were liable to change their lineage under certain conditions, the concept seems very similar to the idea of the reversible bodhisattva. Likewise, being a bodhisattva of fixed lineage appears to have meant that one was guaranteed to attain highest enlightenment, and thus was tantamount to being an irreversible bodhisattva. With this in mind, let us now consider the classifications of different types of irreversible bodhisattva made by some prominent Tibetan scholars.

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[36] *caturbhiḥ kāraṇairevaṃ gotrasaṃpanno'pi bodhisattvo na śaknotyanuttara samyaksaṃbodhimabhisaṃboddhum /. B-bhūmi*, 7 ln.14-15.

[37] *idaṃ niyataṃ śrāvaka-pratyekabuddha-tathāgata-gotraṃ mahadbhir api pratyayair ahārryatvād, idam aniyataṃ śrāvakādi-gotraṃ pratayair hāryatvād ... AA-Ālokā*, 77 ln.19-21.

7.5.2 Bodhisattvas who are irreversible but do not display signs of irreversibility

A not insignificant problem confronted Tibetan exegetes who wrote on the signs of irreversibility in accordance with the interpretive schema of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. On the one hand, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* teaches that the signs are not displayed by bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation (*sambhāra-mārga*).[38] Yet on the other hand, several scriptural sources indicate bodhisattvas are irreversible from the first production of the thought of enlightenment. The *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, for example, states that:

> There are bodhisattvas who simply by means of the first production of the thought of enlightenment enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva or stand on the irreversible *bhūmi*.[39]

In order to reconcile the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s and the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, Tibetan commentators were therefore forced to adopt the position that some bodhisattvas could be irreversible without displaying any of the signs of irreversibility.[40] The basic cause of the problem appears to have been the need, noted above,[41] to synthesise the *pañcamārga* system of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* with the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s, which make no mention of such a system. Compounding the problem was the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra's* position that bodhisattvas

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[38] See section 7.2.1 above.

[39] *santi bodhisattvā mahāsattvā ye prathamacittotpādenaiva bodhisattvanyāsam avakrāmanti/ avinivartanīyabhūmau vā avatiṣṭhante/ Pañca (D)*, 66 15-16. Cf. *Śata*, 272 ln.7-9.

[40] My own explanation would be that the passage represents the beginnings of the "one final vehicle" (*ekayāna*) theory, and that that bodhisattvas who enter the fixed condition of a bodhisattva immediately upon producing the thought of enlightenment refers to those who had already attained arhatship by means of the *śrāvaka* path. However, since this may have implied an "easy" path to the fixed condition of a bodhisattva, such an interpretation was possibly not acceptable to the *AA*'s commentators.

[41] See section 5.2.1.

only begin to display signs of irreversibility once they reach the path of preparation (*prayoga-mārga*), an idea that was surely unknown to the *sūtra*'s authors.

In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss two approaches to the problem: that of mKhas-grub-rje, who makes a distinction between two types of irreversible bodhisattva—those of fixed and unfixed lineage—and that of Tsong-kha-pa who does not, but who solves the problem by means of a direct appeal to scripture. Both of these approaches are similar, however, in that they posit a special latent trait possessed by all irreversible bodhisattvas and which is the cause of their displaying the signs.

7.5.2.1 mKhas-grub-rje's two types of irreversible bodhisattva

mKhas-grub-rje posits two types of irreversible bodhisattva: those who are irreversible by the force of lineage (*rigs kyi stobs kyis phyir mi ldogs pa*) and those who are irreversible by the force of realisation (*rtogs pa'i stobs kyis phyir mi ldogs pa*).[42]

The former he defines as:

> irreversible from full enlightenment from the [initial] production of the thought of enlightenment due to being fixed in the Mahāyāna lineage,[43]

while the latter are:

> irreversible by the force of the production in their continuums of the special Mahāyāna realisations.[44]

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[42] rGyal-tshab-rje makes the same classification in *Theg mchog sgo dbye*, but not in his main Prajñāpāramitā commentary, *sNying po'i rgyan*.

[43] *theg chen du rigs nges pas sems bskyed pa tsam nas rdzogs byang las phyir mi ldog pa'o/* mKhas-grub-rje, *Rtogs dka'i snang ba*, 237.

[44] *theg chen gyi rtogs pa khyad par can rgyud la skyes pa'i stobs kyis phyir mi ldog pa'o* / Ibid.

From these definitions, it is apparent that mKhas-grub-rje sees two reasons why a bodhisattva may be irreversible: he or she is either (1) fixed in the Mahāyāna lineage from the initial production of the thought of enlightenment; or (2) possesses the "special Mahāyāna realisations" (to be discussed below). Since it is implied in this two-fold classification that the second type of irreversible is *not* fixed in the Mahāyāna lineage, the classification can also be thought of as a simple division of bodhisattvas into those whose lineage is fixed and those whose lineage is unfixed. The two types of irreversible bodhisattva will now be discussed.

(1) To support his claim that some bodhisattvas are fixed in their lineage from the initial production of the thought of enlightenment, mKhas-grub-rje cites the following verse from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*:

> The marks of [the Mahāyāna] lineage are stated to be: from the outset of practice, compassion, resolute conviction, forbearance and dedication to virtue.[45]

We have already seen earlier in this chapter how the *Laṅkāvatāra* distinguishes between the three types of person through their physical reaction to hearing teachings pertaining to the three vehicles, and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* III.5 seems to represent a similar attempt to establish a person's lineage based on observable behaviour. Another well-known example is a verse from the *Daśadharmaka Sūtra*, often quoted by scholars,[46] that describes how a bodhisattva's lineage can be known by marks (*mtshan ma*).

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[45] *MSA* III.5: *kāruṇyamadhimuktiśca kṣāntiścādiprayogataḥ / samācāraḥ śubhasyāpi gotre liṅgaṁ nirūpyate / Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, ed. Sylvain Lévi, (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1907; reprint, Kyoto : Rinsen Book Co., 1983), 11.

[46] See 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa, *Bstan bcos mgnon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi mtha' dpyod shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i don kun gsal ba'i rin chen sgron me*, Kun mkhyen bla ma 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i gsung 'bum, Vol. NYA, (Mundgod: Drepung Gomang Library, 2000), 124. Dharmamitra cites the verse at To.3796 47a.

> Just as fire can be known from [the presence of] smoke, and water can be known from [the presence of] water fowl, the lineage of wise bodhisattvas can be known from [the presence of] marks.[47]

The problem with mKhas-grub-rje's citation of *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* III.5 is that it is not specifically about fixed lineage. Indeed, as in the cases discussed above, it is possible that the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* does not make such a distinction—perhaps seeing all lineages as either inherently fixed or inherently unfixed. Nevertheless, the verse does say that there are bodhisattvas who possess the Mahāyāna lineage "from the outset," and it is perhaps this quality that mKhas-grub-rje wants to emphasise, while making the assumption that the verse refers to Mahāyāna lineage that is fixed.

(2) mKhas-grub-rje's second type of irreversible bodhisattva is one who, at the time of producing the thought of enlightenment for the first time, is not fixed in the Mahāyāna lineage and therefore not irreversible. However, when such bodhisattvas gain the special Mahāyāna realisations which apparently occur on the path of preparation if they are of sharp intelligence (or later, if they are not), they are able to display the signs of irreversibility that are mentioned in the *sūtra*.

mKhas-grub-rje's position thus accords with that of Haribhadra, who states that there are certain bodhisattvas whose lineage is initially not fixed, but who become irreversible when they reach the aids to penetration stage (i.e., the path of preparation):

> certain [bodhisattvas] who, though not definite in a lineage (*anitya-gotra*), because of their sharp intelligence, become fixed as irreversible even at the aids to penetration stage, due to inconceivable special skill-in-means.[48]

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[47] *du ba las ni mer shes shing/ /chu skyar las ni chur shes ltar/ /blo ldan byang chub sems dpa' yi/ /rigs ni mtshan ma rnams las shes/* To.53 167b; Cf. T.310 p152a13-14

[48] *kaścid aniyata-gotrako 'pi tīkṣṇendriyatayā nirvedhabhāgīyāvasthāyām apy acintyopāya viśeṣād avaivartikatve niyata. AA-Ālokā*, 41 ln.11-13.

Thus, through this two-fold classification of irreversible bodhisattvas, mKhas-grub-rje is able to solve the problem outlined above, and account for the existence of bodhisattvas who are irreversible on the path of accumulation yet do not display any of the signs of irreversibility. In short, such bodhisattvas are irreversible on account of their fixed lineage, but they do not display the signs of irreversibility because they have not yet attained the special Mahāyāna realisations that are the cause of displaying the signs.

mKhas-grub-rje also explains that the two types of irreversible bodhisattva are not mutually exclusive categories, since a bodhisattva who is irreversible through the force of lineage eventually becomes irreversible through the force of realisation. He writes:

> Although [a bodhisattva] is irreversible through the force of lineage, there is no contradiction in him attaining irreversibility though the force of realisation... [But] as long as [that bodhisattva] does not attain irreversibility through the force of realisation, he does not attain the signs of irreversibility which are explained here.[49]

In other words, he is saying that bodhisattvas who are irreversible through the force of lineage become irreversible through the force of realisation when they attain the special Mahāyāna realisations and begin to display the signs taught in the *sūtra* since the signs only pertain to the latter.[50]

7.5.2.2 Tsong-kha-pa's citation of scripture.

Tsong-kha-pa does not distinguish between bodhisattvas of fixed and unfixed lineage and appears to argue that *all* bodhisattvas are irreversible from the path of

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[49] *rigs kyi stobs kyis phyir mi ldog pa yin kyang/ rtogs pa'i stobs kyis kyang phyir mi ldog pa thob pa la 'gal ba med de/... ji srid rtogs pa'i stobs kyis phyir mi ldog pa ma thob kyi bar du 'dir bshad pa'i phyir mi ldog gi rtags 'di dag 'thob pa min no/* mKhas-grub-rje, *rTogs dka'i snang ba*, 237.

[50] *rtogs pa'i stobs kyis phyir mi ldogs pa ni 'dir bshad pa'i rtags rnams kyis dpogs pa yin no /* Ibid.

accumulation. To support this claim, he quotes Dharmamitra, who asserts that although bodhisattvas at this early stage are irreversible, they do not have the qualities that would allow others to also ascertain their irreversibility (i.e., they do not display the signs). In the *Golden Garland* Tsong-kha-pa writes:

> In the *Prasphuṭapada* it says, "If one posits as the main reason [for being irreversible the fact that] one's own continuum is definite, then even the aids to liberation *kuśalamūla* is indeed said to be irreversible. However, [it is not taught] since here [on the path of accumulation] there are no qualities that cause conviction in others that conforms with one's own realisation [or irreversibility]...." In brief, [Dharmamitra] explains that although [the bodhisattva] is fixed, there is no sign.[51]

To be precise, Tsong-kha-pa states that although bodhisattvas do not display any signs of irreversibility on the path of accumulation, they are nevertheless irreversible from the time they produce "gold-like" *bodhicitta*.[52] This accords with Haribhadra's statement in the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* that such *bodhicitta* is immutable,[53] and his statement in the *Sphuṭārthā* that gold-like *bodhicitta* is produced at the middling stage of the beginner's level (*ādikarmika-bhūmi*).[54] Since Tsong-kha-pa interprets this as the middling stage of the path of accumulation[55] he asserts that all bodhisattvas except the lowest of novices are irreversible, even though they do not display any of the signs of irreversibility.

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[51] *tshigs gsal las/ rang gi rgyud nges pa'i rgyu mtshan gtso bor mdzad pa zhig na thar pa'i cha dang mthun pa'i dge ba'i rtsa ba 'di yang phyir mi ldog par brjod mod kyi rang gi rtogs pa dang 'tsham par gzhan yid ches par byed pa'i yon tan rnams 'di la med pas na de'i phyir... mdor na nges kyang rtags med pas so zhes 'chad do/* / Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, vol.2 : 323. Cf. *Prasphuṭapada* : To.3807 f.72A

[52] *gser lta bu'i sems bskyed kyang de nas yod pa'i phyir ro/* Ibid., vol.2 : 324 ln.2-3.

[53] "[The second type of bodhicitta] is like refined gold [that does not change] because the basis [*āśaya*] of benefit and happiness of the six *pāramitā*s does not change in the future or the present." *kalyāna-suvarṇopamaḥ saṭ-pāramitā-saṃgṛhītasya hita-sukh'āśayasy' āyati-tadātvayor vikārābhajanād AA-Ālokā*, 25 ln.16-17.

[54] "The first three are included on the small, middling, and great stages of the beginner's level" tatrādyāṃ trayo mṛdu-madhyādhimātratayā ādikarmika-bhūmisaṃgṛhītāḥ/ *AA-Vivṛti*, 12.

[55] See Sparham, *Golden Garland*, 201.

Tsong-kha-pa's position appears less sophisticated than mKhas-grub-rje's. Whereas mKhas-grub-rje argues that the signs of irreversibility cannot be displayed by bodhisattvas who have not attained their cause (i.e., the special Mahāyāna realisations) Tsong-kha-pa's position is a simple appeal to scriptural authority—no actual reasons are given as to why bodhisattvas cannot abandon their bodhicitta. It is also noteworthy that, through his reference to "gold-like" bodhicitta, Tsong-kha-pa implies that a bodhisattva's irreversibility is simply a function of the immutability of his thought of enlightenment. As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, this does not appear to be the position of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, where even immutable bodhicitta will not prevent a bodhisattva from falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* and realising arhatship, if he lacks the perfection of wisdom and skill-in-means.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that although the idea that bodhisattvas are irreversible long before they begin to display the signs may appear to be a somewhat contrived and isolated view aimed at upholding the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s position that bodhisattvas only begin to display signs of irreversibility on the path of preparation, an opinion similar to that of the Tibetan scholars just discussed is also expressed in a much earlier work that is apparently unrelated to the exegetical tradition of Haribhadra, namely, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, where it is said that

> although from the first production of the thought of enlightenment the bodhisattva is called irreversible, because he is not endowed with the signs of irreversibility, he does not receive his prediction.[56]

[56] T.1509 p580a10-11 是菩薩雖從初發心以來名阿鞞跋致；阿鞞跋致相未具足故，不與授記。

7.6 Tibetan interpretations of Haribhadra

If being irreversible does not necessarily entail displaying the signs of irreversibility, it may be wondered what quality an irreversible bodhisattva must possess in order to display the signs. While we have seen that according the mKhas-grub-rje, it is the so-called "special Mahāyāna realisations," this was only one of several positions adopted by Tibetan scholars, as will be shown below.

In this section, four different, yet overlapping, positions will be examined—those of Bu-ston (1290 – 1364), Tsong-kha-pa (1357 – 1419), rGyal-tshab-rje (1364 – 1432) and mKhas-grub-rje (1385 – 1438). We begin the examination with a discussion of their different views on: (1) the relationship between the signs taught in the *sūtra* and the special cause that each scholar posits as necessary and, in some cases, sufficient for a bodhisattva to attain highest enlightenment; and (2) what exactly is to be inferred from the signs. Having thus understood how these scholars variously framed the problem of inferring irreversibility from signs, we will then be in a position to better compare their positions.

7.6.1 The fundamental quality possessed by all irreversible bodhisattvas

None of the Tibetan commentators under discussion say that irreversibility is directly inferable from a bodhisattva's possession of the signs of irreversibility taught in the *sūtra*.[57] Instead, they posit the existence of a fundamental quality that acts as a special cause for the attainment of enlightenment, but is also related to the signs in some way. They do not, however, all posit the same fundamental quality. Nor do they posit the same kind of relationship between this quality and the signs taught in the *sūtra*. These differences will now be discussed.

[57] An exception is Tsong-kha-pa's position with respect to the very first sign mentioned in the sūtra, which is itself the fundamental quality that is the special cause of enlightenment.

7.6.1.1 Tsong-kha-pa's "epitome of the signs" (*rtags kyi gtso bo*)

Tsong-kha-pa calls this fundamental quality the "epitome of the signs" (*rtags kyi gtso bo*). He defines it as follows:

> one should know that the epitome of the signs is: (1) the wisdom that turns back from adhering to the true existence of [all phenomena] from form up to the knowledge of all aspects, through realizing that they have no inherent nature; and (2) the great compassion indicated by it, i.e., the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom.[58]

This wisdom that turns back from adhering to the true existence of form etc. is none other than the first sign in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*'s enumeration. Tsong-kha-pa says the other signs taught in the *sūtra* are "mere parts" (*cha tsam*) of this epitome of the signs. Although he does not explicitly say so, Tsong-kha-pa's terminology (*rtags kyi gtso bo; cha tsam*) suggests he holds that the epitome of the signs pervades all the other signs. This would imply a concomitant relationship between a bodhisattva's possession of one of the "part" signs and possession of the epitome, similar to the way in which the quality of being a tree pervades *śiṃśapā*s. However, as we shall see, although Tsong-kha-pa's position implies the existence of such a concomitance, this does not necessarily mean that he holds that it is something that can be directly observed.

7.6.1.2 Bu-ston's "special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise"

For Bu-ston, the fundamental quality is:

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[58] *de yang gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar ngo bo nyid med par rtogs pas de dag la bden zhen ldog pa'i shes rab kyis mtshon pa'i snying rje chen po ste thabs shes rgyun shin tu brtan pa gnyis ni rtags kyi gtso bo yin la* / Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, vol.2, 325.

> the cause of irreversibility—the special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise.[59]

Bu-ston also posits a pervasion relationship between this fundamental quality and the physical and verbal expressions (*lus ngag gi tha snyad*) that are taught as the signs of irreversibility in the *sūtra*. Unlike Tsong-kha-pa, however, Bu-ston shows that he believes it to be a cause and effect relationship when he writes:

> the physical and verbal expressions that are the *effects* of meditative equipoise.[60]

In other words, if a bodhisattva possesses any of the signs, then it follows that he must also possess the fundamental quality of the special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise, just like a place that possesses smoke must also possess fire.

7.6.1.3 mKhas-grub-rje and rGyal-tshab-rje's "special wisdom" and "special method"

The positions of mKhas-grub-rje and rGyal-tshab-rje are similar to those of their teacher, Tsong-kha-pa. Both speak of special wisdom (*shes rab khyad par can*) and special method (*thabs khyad par can*) as the fundamental qualities. These would appear to be the special Mahāyāna realisations mentioned above in mKhas-grub-rje's definition of bodhisattvas who are irreversible by the force of lineage. mKhas-grub-rje defines these two qualities respectively as "the wisdom arisen from meditation that is a powerful opponent to the grasping at a self of phenomena"[61] and

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[59] *phyir mi ldog gi rgyu mnyam gzhag gi spangs rtogs khyad par can* / Bu-ston, *Collected Works of Bu-ston-rin-chen-grub*, (n.p., 1997 ?), vol.18 : 283b.

[60] *mnyam gzhag gi 'bras bu lus ngag gi tha snyad rnam* ... Ibid., vol.18 : 283b.

[61] *chos kyi bdag 'dzin la gnod byed stobs ldan du gyur pa'i sgom byung gi shes rab khyad par can* / mKhas-grub-rje, *rTogs dka'i snang ba*, 238.

"the method that lacks any opportunity for the arising of attention to one's own welfare."[62]

Neither mKhas-grub-rje nor rGyal-tshab-rje specifies the relationship between the signs taught in the *sūtra* and the fundamental qualities. rGyal-tshab-rje does, however, posit what appears to be a cause-and-effect relationship between the fundamental qualities and what he calls "special physical and verbal expressions" (*lus dang ngag gi tha snyad khyad par can*). Curiously, these special physical and verbal expressions do not include the signs of irreversibility taught in the *sūtra*. Instead, they refer respectively to shedding tears and horripilation when the bodhisattva thinks of the unbearable sufferings of sentient beings, and the teaching of emptiness and all the aspects of the Mahāyāna path. According to rGyal-tshab-rje, when these special physical and verbal expressions are observed in another person, their possession of special wisdom and special method can be inferred.[63]

To summarise, although they specify it in different ways, all four scholars posit the existence of a special fundamental quality that is the cause of bodhisattvas' not being liable to turn back from highest enlightenment; i.e., the actual quality that makes them irreversible. Tsong-kha-pa and Bu-ston also explicitly posit it as the quality that enables bodhisattvas to display the signs of irreversibility. Tsong-kha-pa's terminology suggests that the relationship between this special quality and the signs is one of identity, while for Bu-ston it is one of cause and effect. rGyal-tshab-rje and mKhas-grub-rje do not explicitly specify a pervasive relationship between the fundamental quality and the signs of irreversibility, though rGyal-tshab-rje states

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[62] *rang don yid byed skye ba'i go skabs med pa'i thabs shes khyad par can dang*/ Ibid.

[63] See rGyal-tshab-rje, *rNam bshad snying po rgyan*, 339-440.

that it is the cause of "special physical and verbal expressions" that include tears of compassion and so forth.

It should be pointed out that Haribhadra did not posit any such special quality. It will be recalled that he simply said that a bodhisattva's suitability to attain highest enlightenment is inferable from his possession of the signs mentioned in the *sūtra* and that the inferential process involved was one of essential identity.

7.6.2 What is inferred from the signs

Haribhadra's Tibetan commentators held differing views with regard to what was actually to be inferred from the signs. These will now be discussed.

7.6.2.1 rGyal-tshab-rje's position

Let us begin with rGyal-tshab-rje, since his position most clearly accords with Haribhadra's. rGyal-tshab-rje writes:

> it is inferred that through [the bodhisattva's possession] of the potent cause, complete enlightenment is suitable to occur.[64]

Thus, based on the possession of the special qualities of method and wisdom (which it will be remembered are inferred from the observation of special verbal and physical behaviour such as shedding tears etc.), rGyal-tshab-rje says that we can infer that complete enlightenment is suitable to occur for that bodhisattva. Although clearly consistent with both Haribhadra and Dharmakīrti, this is a very weakened interpretation of irreversibility.

rGyal-tshab-rje's position also reminds us of Haribhadra's conception of bodhisattvas whose lineage is unfixed, which it will be recalled from section 7.5.1

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[64] *rgyu nus pa mthu can gyis rdzogs pa'i byang chub 'byung rung dpag pa yin no/* rGyal-tshab-rje, *rNam bshad snying po rgyan*, 440.

above was considered a necessary condition for highest enlightenment, but which could be lost under certain circumstances. Such bodhisattvas, just like rGyal-tshab-rje's irreversible bodhisattvas, are merely capable of attaining highest enlightenment, and may encounter conditions that cause them to turn back from highest enlightenment. Given such a weak definition of irreversible bodhisattvas, it may be wondered in what sense it is even appropriate to call them "irreversible."

7.6.2.2 The positions of Tsong-kha-pa, Bu-ston and mKhas-grub-rje

Perhaps because they were unwilling to accept the consequences of Haribhadra's interpretation, Tsong-kha-pa, Bu-ston and mKhas-grub-rje apparently do not take him at face value, for they take a point of view that differs somewhat from that of rGyal-tshab-rje.

Let us first consider Tsong-kha-pa. He does not see the signs as indicating that their possessor is merely *capable* of uninterrupted progress to enlightenment; rather, he sees them as indicating that the bodhisattva will definitely progress to highest enlightenment without falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*. He writes:

> Both the *sūtra* and *śāstra* say that uninterruptedly not turning back is what is inferred from the signs.[65]

Elsewhere he makes it clear that this not turning back is *certain*, not just suitable to occur:

> Not turning back from effecting the attainment of buddhahood is the meaning of not turning back. Furthermore, since all persons of the three vehicles eventually get enlightened, it is not just that—it is effecting the

[65] *mdo bstan bcos gnyis ka las bar ma chad du phyir mi ldog pa kho na rtags kyi dpag bya gsungs pa dang/* Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, vol.2 : 325-326.

> attainment of uninterrupted [progress]. Thus, even temporarily, not turning back to the extremes of existence and of peace [of *nirvāṇa*] is certain.[66]

Like Tsong-kha-pa, Bu-ston and mKhas-grub-rje also consider that definite irreversibility from full enlightenment is what is inferred. Bu-ston writes:

> It follows that the subject, a bodhisattva of sharp intelligence who abides at the level of aids to penetration, is not liable to turn back from full enlightenment due to possessing the twenty signs [of irreversibility pertaining to that level].[67]

mKhas-grub-rje not only states that the bodhisattva will not turn back from highest enlightenment, but also explains how the qualities of special method and wisdom ensure that turning back does not occur:

> It follows that the subject, that bodhisattva, is not liable to turn back from full enlightenment because of being a bodhisattva who is endowed with special method-and-wisdom in which there is no way for attendance to one's own welfare to arise, and apprehension [that is] a special wisdom arisen from meditation that becomes a powerful antidote to grasping at a self of phenomena.[68]

To summarise, for rGyal-tshab-rje, establishing that a bodhisattva is in possession of special method and wisdom allows one to infer that he or she is capable of attaining full enlightenment. For Tsong-kha-pa, on the other hand, it is the certainty that the bodhisattva will attain full enlightenment without falling even temporarily to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* that is inferable. The views of the other two scholars appear similar to that of Tsong-kha-pa, although, as we have noted in the case of Bu-ston, they may express the fundamental cause of irreversibility in a

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[66] *sangs rgyas thob par byed pa las mi ldog pa ni gang las mi ldog pa'i don no/ / de yang thegs pa gsum gyi gang zag thams cad mthar 'tshang rgya bas de tsam ni ma yin gyi bar ma chad du thob par byed pa'o/ des na gnas skabs su yang srid pa dang zhi ba'i mthar mi ldog pa nges pa'o/* Ibid., 325.

[67] *byang sems gang dag nges 'byed yan lag la gnas pa dbang rnon chos can/ de 'dir rdzogs pa'i byang chub las phyir mi ldog pa yin te/ rtags nyi shu dang ldan pa'i phyir/* Bu-ston, *Collected Works of Bu-ston-rin-chen-grub*, vol.18 : 283b.

[68] *byang sems de chos can/ bla med rdzogs byang las phyir mi ldog ste/ rang don yid byed skye ba'i go skabs med pa'i thabs shes khyad par can dang/ 'dzin pa chos kyi bdag 'dzin la gnod byed stobs ldan du gyur pa'i sgom byung gi shes rab khyad par can dang ldan pa'i byang sems yin pa'i phyir/* mKhas-grub-rje, *rTogs dka'i snang ba*, 238.

different way. It is helpful to think of these scholars as disagreeing over the status of the bodhisattva's fundamental irreversible quality. For rGyal-tshab-rje it is merely a necessary condition for enlightenment, while for the others it is a sufficient condition.

7.6.3 How the inference is made

Having shown how Tibetan scholars differ with regard to what is to be inferred from the signs of irreversibility, it will now be argued that their views are not incompatible. This is often an important exercise for Gelugpa scholars, for whom the views of Tsong-kha-pa and his chief disciples must always be seen as consistent. I show how this is possible provided one is willing to accept that both logical deduction and recourse to scriptural authority as valid methods of inference with respect to two types of phenomena—the hidden (*lkog 'gyur*) and the very hidden (*shin tu lkog 'gyur*).

7.6.3.1 The three elements of a syllogism

It will be recalled that Haribhadra claims that the signs are correct logical signs that allow inference based on an essential identity relationship. In order for a sign to be a correct logical sign, it must satisfy three conditions, known as the three elements of a syllogism. The three elements are:

(1) the existence of the reason in the subject;

(2) the pervasion of the reason by what is to be established; and

(3) the pervasion of the opposite of what is to be established by what is not the reason.

For convenience, in this discussion I will only deal with the first and second elements, because when the forward pervasion holds, the counter pervasion also holds.

7.6.3.2 The position of Bu-ston

Bu-ston says that the existence of the reason in the subject can be established by direct perception. Just as the existence of smoke in a place where the existence of fire is to be proven can be established by direct perception (i.e., the smoke is seen with one's eyes), the possession of the signs by a person who is to be proven as irreversible is also established by the senses. The pervasion, he says, is established by way of one's own experience. He holds that bodhisattvas who possess the special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise know from their own experience that possession of the signs inevitably follows. He expresses his position regarding the way the three elements are established as follows:

> The existence of the reason in the subject is established by direct perception, since the physical and verbal expressions that are the effects of meditative equipoise are the reason, and they are established by direct perception. As for the pervasion—with respect to one's own physical and verbal expressions, one ascertains that they are pervaded by the cause of not turning back, the special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise.[69]

Thus, for Bu-ston the inference of irreversibility in another person is only possible for people who are themselves irreversible bodhisattvas.

7.6.3.3 The position of Tsong-kha-pa

Tsong-kha-pa appears to be at odds not only with Bu-ston but also Haribhadra when he states that the signs are not correct logical signs that establish their theses by the

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[69] *phyogs chos mngon sum gyis grub ste/ mnyam gzhag gi 'bras bu lus ngag gi tha snyad rnams rtags yin la/ de mgnon sum gyis grub pas so/ khyab pa ni/ rang gi steng du lus ngag gi tha snyad la/ phyir mi ldog gi rgyu mnyam gzhag gi spangs stogs khyad par can gyis khyab pa nges pa yin no/* Bu-ston, *Collected Works of Bu-ston-rin-chen-grub*, vol.18 282B-283A.

"power of fact" (*dngos po stobs shugs*)[70]. This is an expression that means that it is possible to establish the three elements of the syllogism by means of direct perception or some other process of inference that does not rely upon appeal to authority. Tsong-kha-pa holds that this is not possible in the case of the signs of irreversibility. He writes:

> With respect to these [signs] it is not appropriate to present them as signs that ascertain [their theses] through the valid cognition of the three elements [of a valid reason].[71]

He makes it clear that for people who do not possess the yogic power of directly seeing others' minds, the three elements of the syllogism that must be established in order to make a valid inference concerning the irreversible status of another person can only be established through appeal to scriptural authority:

> Thus, they [i.e., non-yogins] establish the three elements of a syllogism purely from scripture, because, if they accept it [i.e., the scripture] as the right position, valid cognition follows.[72]

Tsong-kha-pa's reason for taking this position is that other people's minds are a very hidden phenomenon (*shin tu lkog 'gyur*), and thus the existence of the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom cannot logically be inferred to exist in another person. He writes:

> If those of inferior realisation [i.e., those without the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom] infer [irreversibility in another person] from merely the verbal and bodily expressions, this is mistaken. It is uncertain whether cognising irreversibility from special expressions [such as horripilation etc.] is unmistaken, because the internal realisations [that are

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[70] Some texts contain the variant reading "*zhugs*" for "*shugs*." See for example, mKhas-grub-rje, *Tshad ma sde bdun gyi rgyan yid kyi mun sel*, (Sarnath: New Light Publication, 1988), 279.

[71] *'di dag la tshul gsum tshad mas nges pa'i rtags kyi rnam gzhag ni byar mi rung ste/* Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, vol.2 : 326..

[72] *des na 'di dag gis sbyor ba'i don gsum lung 'ba' zhig las 'grub cing lung yang khas blangs pa las tshad mar 'gro ba'i phyir/* Ibid.

> the bodhisattva's] irreversible [quality] are extremely hidden phenomena for that person [of inferior realisation].[73]

Since it is only through reference to scriptural authority that the observable physical and verbal behaviour that constitutes the signs described in the *sūtra* indicates the existence of the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom in another person, it is not possible to use logic to deduce that another person is an irreversible bodhisattva.

Tsong-kha-pa allows the possibility of a bodhisattva inferring for himself that he is irreversible, but even in this case the inference seems to be based on belief in scripture, and not a logical deduction, since it is only by such belief that the pervasion can be established. He writes:

> If a person who is not liable to turn back sees the aforementioned epitome of the signs [i.e., the extremely stable continuums of method and wisdom] in their own continuum, ... a mental state that thinks, "now, it is certain that I, uninterrupted by other vehicles, will attain highest enlightenment" will arise.[74]

The first element of the syllogism is established by the bodhisattva observing that he possesses the two extremely stable continuums of method and wisdom. However, Tsong-kha-pa does say that *all three* elements of the syllogism are established through belief in scripture,[75] and since the pervasion is the same regardless of whether the existence of the epitome of the signs in the continuum of the bodhisattva is established through belief in the *sūtra* (in the case of another person) or through the direct observation of one's own mindstream (in the case of oneself), it

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[73] *rtogs pa dma' pa dag gis ni lus ngag gi tha snyad tsam zhig las dpog na 'khrul zhing/ tha snyad khyad par can phyir mi ldog gi rtogs pa la mi 'khrul ba ni ma nges te/ phyir mi ldog gi nang gi rtogs pa ni gang zag de la shin tu lkog tu gyur pas so/* Ibid.

[74] *phyir mi ldogs pa'i gang zag gis kyang rang rgyud la sngar bshad pa'i rtags kyi gtso bo de'am/ ... da ni bdag gis bla med byang chub theg pa gzhan gyis bar ma cad du 'thob par nges so snyam pa'i blo skye ba dang/* Ibid.

[75] *sbyor ba'i don gsum lung 'ba' zhig las 'grub cing ...* Ibid.

is therefore likely that he would consider even a bodhisattva's inference of his or her own uninterrupted progress to complete enlightenment as based on belief in scripture.

The key features of Tsong-kha-pa's position may be summarised as follows. There are two types of sign: (1) the epitome of the signs, which is Tsong-kha-pa's somewhat creative interpretation of the first sign listed in the *sūtra*, and which is the main reason for saying that a bodhisattva is not liable to turn back; and (2) special verbal and physical behaviours, which are the other signs listed in the *sūtra*. Both can function as a basis for inferring that a bodhisattva will definitely attain enlightenment without the interruption of falling into a Hīnayāna path. Neither, however, allows one to do so by means of logical deduction. Since it is a very hidden phenomenon, the existence of the first in another person can not be established except through recourse to the authority of the *sūtra*. Even if one were to directly observe the existence of the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom in one's own continuum, one cannot, according to Tsong-kha-pa, logically deduce one's own irreversibility, since the forward and counter pervasions still rely upon belief in scripture in order to be established.

7.6.3.4 rGyal-tshab-rje and Tsong-kha-pa compared

It now becomes clear how the positions of Tsong-kha-pa and rGyal-tshab-rje are not as contradictory as they first appear. While there does appear to be a real difference between them over whether the existence of special method and wisdom in the continuum of other persons can be deduced from observing their behaviour or whether one must rely on belief in scripture, there is no real contradiction with respect to their rGyal-tshab-rje's position that irreversible bodhisattvas are merely

capable of uninterruptedly progressing to highest enlightenment and Tsong-kha-pa's position that they are assured of it. Tsong-kha-pa would agree that it is only possible to ascertain the capability of such progress if one relies purely on logic, but since his claim that the bodhisattva will definitely attain enlightenment without falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* is based on belief in scripture, his position is not inconsistent with that of rGyal-tshab-rje.

7.7 Conclusion

In earlier chapters it was argued that the function of the signs of irreversibility was to articulate the characteristics of an ideal bodhisattva. From the basic list of signs reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, we can see that many were simple forms of upright behaviour that, had they been adopted, would have presented a positive image of the early bodhisattva movement. Consider, for example, the descriptions of irreversible bodhisattvas who "exert themselves on the ten wholesome paths of action," "always speak gently," "wear unsoiled garments" and "do not seek to earn their livelihood in the wrong way." In contrast with these outwardly observable behaviours however, some of the signs describe inner qualities. For example, "being free from the perception of multiplicity," and "being free from doubts about their state" are not necessarily marks by which others could determine whether or not other people were irreversible bodhisattvas or even exemplary members of the bodhisattva community.

This does not necessarily mean that Haribhadra's interpretation of the signs as logical reasons is inappropriate. In general, inferences made with respect to oneself can be just as valid as those in which others are the subject. However, as we saw from the way *ākāra*, *liṅga* and *nimitta* were translated into Chinese, Haribhadra's

interpretation does appear to have been somewhat unconventional. It is perhaps because Haribhadra was steeped in the traditions of Indian logic in a way that the translators of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s into Chinese were not that inspired him to interpret the *sūtra*'s use of *liṅga* in the Dharmakīrtian sense of something that logically "marks" the existence of another phenomenon. Whatever the reason, having interpreted the *sūtra* as talking about *logical* signs, he then had to say which of the three types they were. Since causes do not have the natural property of definitely producing their effects, Haribhadra had no choice but to classify the signs as essential identity signs that merely indicate a cause's potential to produce an effect. This, as we have shown led to an interpretation of irreversibility was much weaker than that which was probably understood by earlier Buddhists. In effect, Haribhadra was saying that irreversibility was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for highest enlightenment. Although the association of this idea with the term *avinivartanīya* may have been new, the concept itself was not. As we have shown, the idea of a necessary but insufficient cause for enlightenment is similar to the way in which lineage was understood by Asaṅga in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.[76]

By the time Tsong-kha-pa and his contemporaries wrote on the topic, Mahāyāna soteriological doctrines had developed to the extent that the signs of irreversibility were not so much a description of a paragon to be emulated as much as they were a scholastic problem to be solved. Many texts presented apparently conflicting points of view that had to be reconciled. Some, for example stated that bodhisattvas were irreversible from their first production of the thought of enlightenment, while others said that bodhisattvas only began to display signs of irreversibility once they reach the path of preparation. There was also the well-established tradition discussed in

[76] See section 7.5.1 above.

earlier chapters of this thesis that held that bodhisattvas stand on the irreversible *bhūmi* when they reach the eighth *bhūmi*. Another position, alluded to in Tsong-kha-pa's statement about what is actually inferred from the signs (see 7.6.2.2), but not discussed in this chapter, was that due to their innate purity of mind all sentient beings will eventually attain highest enlightenment—the only question is whether or not their progress will be "interrupted" by the two Hīnayāna paths. The task of Tibetan scholars such as Tsong-kha-pa was to present the signs of irreversibility in such a way that all these views, including that of Haribhadra, were harmonised.

As we have seen, Tsong-kha-pa manages to do this by saying that bodhisattvas who display the signs of irreversibility will in fact progress to highest enlightenment without falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha*, but this is not something that can be known by logical deduction. It is a valid inference, but it is not established "by the power of fact" (*dngos po stobs shugs*), but by belief (*yid 'ches*) in scripture. Since this method of knowing so-called "very hidden" (*shin tu lkog 'gyur*) phenomena is permitted by Dharmakīrti (though it lacks the status of fully-fledged inference),[77] Tsong-kha-pa is not in conflict with Haribhadra or rGyal-tshab-rje.

To better understand the difference, it may be helpful to employ a distinction made by Henry Barker between certitude and certainty.[78] The term "certitude," is used by Barker in a psychological sense to describe an individual's subjective feeling of assurance that may or may not be amenable to logical proof (should such an attempt at proof even be made). In this category, we might include the certitude that

[77] See *PV* I:217. See also Tom Tillemans, *Scripture Logic Language*, (Boston: Wisdom, 1999), 37-47.

[78] Henry Barker, "Certainty," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.3* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910).

bodhisattvas who display signs of irreversibility are destined to attain buddhahood. On the other hand, Barker uses "certainty" to describe a conviction that is arrived at based on evidence and logical argument, and to which any person who is presented with the same evidence and logic would assent. In this category we might include mathematical theorems, the deduction of the existence of fire based on the existence of smoke, and the view that bodhisattvas who display signs of irreversibility are capable of attaining highest enlightenment.

Finally, we note that the view that inference was a less-than-certain method for knowing the inner qualities of a bodhisattva is to be found in a text that predates Dharmakīrti. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* states that the direct perception of buddhas is the only truly reliable means for knowing whether a certain person is endowed with the bodhisattva lineage:

> These signs of the lineage of bodhisattvas are merely rough and inferential. Only buddhas can see the actual situation with direct perception.[79]

From this statement it may be concluded that Haribhadra's application of Dharmakīrtian logic to the signs of irreversibility was perhaps unnecessary and that Tsong-kha-pa was quite right to maintain that irreversibility was a very hidden phenomenon, only knowable by fully enlightened beings.

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[79] *tānīmāni bodhisattvasya audārikāṇyānumānikāni gotraliṅgāni veditavyāni / bhūtārthaniścaye tu buddhā eva bhagavantaḥ pratyakṣadarśinaḥ / B-bhūmi*, 6 ln.18-19.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

> One foe … is infinitely worse than even Māra the Evil One, and that is Impermanence which, once realized, may sap the will of even the strongest. The Buddhists of this period longed as much as everyone else for a permanent achievement which can no more be lost. This longing crystallized itself in the concept of an "irreversible Bodhisattva."
>
> Edward Conze[1]

8.1 Chapter summary

In this final chapter, I begin with a brief synopsis of the arguments that have been presented in the preceding chapters. I then consider the extent to which my goal of explaining the development of the concept of the irreversible bodhisattva in Indian Mahāyāna literature has been achieved. The remainder of the chapter is taken up with further discussion of some of the recurrent themes in the thesis and their implications. Five themes have been selected; namely, (1) the need for certainty in the context of a path that spanned numerous lifetimes; (2) validating explanations of irreversibility; (3) the irreversible bodhisattva as an ideal; (4) exegesis and the identification of a work's implied audience; and (5) the problem of certifying spiritual progress.

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[1] Conze, "The development of Prajñāpāramitā thought," 133.

8.2 Thread of the argument reviewed

We began in chapter 1 with an outline of the scope and importance of the topic, followed by a discussion of several methodological issues. Then, in order to provide the necessary background for the investigation undertaken in the rest of the thesis, a survey of Sanskrit terms that connote notions of irreversibility was conducted in chapter 2. Much of chapter 3 was then devoted to developing theoretical support for the position that the function of the irreversible bodhisattva in early Mahāyāna was to provide a normative ideal for people who identified themselves as bodhisattvas. It was then argued in chapter 4 that although both ordinary and irreversible bodhisattvas were features of the institutional reality of the early *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition, when Mahāyāna texts became more widely shared from the early fourth century onwards the entry-level bodhisattva replaced the irreversible bodhisattva as an ideal. The result was that the ordinary human bodhisattva was eventually unable to find a place in a more systematised or "institutionalised" Mahāyāna. In chapter 5 we began to examine some of the components that made up the systematised bodhisattva path, in particular the irreversible *bhūmi*. It was argued that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* used the term to refer to the "state" in which a bodhisattva could undertake the traditional practices of the *śrāvaka* without actualising the results of the *āryan* path. This was shown to be quite different from the sense in which it was also used to describe the seventh or eighth "stage" in the various *daśabhūmi* systems. In chapter 6 it was shown that the interpretation of the irreversible *bhūmi* in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* was the developmental link that allowed it to be posited as a fixed stage in the career of the bodhisattva. Finally, in chapter 7, changes in the interpretation of the signs of irreversibility in accordance with Dharmakīrti's axiom that future effects are not inferable from present causes

were discussed. It was shown how some Tibetan commentators still saw such an inference as possible, although it was a certitude based on faith in scripture, rather than certainty based on deductive logic.

8.3 How the basic thesis question has been addressed

In chapter 1 it was stated that the basic goal of this thesis was to trace the development of the concept of the irreversible bodhisattva in Indian Mahāyāna literature. To do so has always been an ambitious undertaking given the statement by perhaps the twentieth century's greatest Western scholar of Buddhism that "the problem of the *avaivartika* is one of the most obscure of the Mahāyāna."[2] While not claiming to have completely removed the obscurity surrounding the topic, I nevertheless aim to show in the following paragraphs that some of the major issues have at least been clarified, and a useful foundation for further study has been established.

8.3.1 Lamotte's "problem of the *avaivartika*"

It is worth reflecting for a moment on why Lamotte found the irreversible bodhisattva obscure, and why for him it was even a problem. Like many other problems in Buddhist Studies, where the difficulty often lies in identifying the way key words were understood in the past, Lamotte struggled to reconcile the terms *avaivartika* and *avaivartika-bhūmi*, which, somewhat counter-intuitively, sometimes seemed to refer to quite different concepts. It will be recalled that Lamotte appears to accept what he understood to be the solution set forth in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, i.e., that certain types of bodhisattva could be "correctly" or "incorrectly" labelled as irreversible. Correctly labelled irreversible

[2] Lamotte, *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, 185 n.209.

bodhisattvas were those who had reached the eighth *bhūmi*, while incorrectly labelled bodhisattvas had not. If Lamotte's "problem of the *avaivartika*" can be summarised in a few words, it was his difficulty in determining the contexts in which bodhisattvas are "*avaivartika* correctly so called" and those in which they are "*avaivartika* incorrectly so called."[3] However, rather than think of bodhisattvas as being correctly or incorrectly labelled as irreversible, the approach I have taken in this thesis is to assume that all labels were correctly used for those who applied them. When writers at different times described a bodhisattva as irreversible they obviously meant something by the term, and one of the tasks undertaken in this thesis is to try to understand what it was they meant.

Lamotte's problem has, I think, been solved insofar as the origin of the distinction between bodhisattvas who were *avaivartika* and those who stood on the *avaivartika-bhūmi* has been identified as the formulation in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* of a two-phase version of the path—the first corresponding the career of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*, and the second which was a phase beyond those two levels. Positing entrance into the second phase as equivalent to attaining the irreversible *bhūmi* created a contradiction that it seems could only be resolved by separating the meanings of *avaivartika* and *avaivartika-bhūmi*, for if bodhisattvas were not already *avaivartika* (in the sense described in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*) before reaching the *avaivartika-bhūmi*, they would have actualised *nirvāṇa* midway (*āntara*), and never arrived there.

[3] See ibid.

8.3.2 The bodhisattva path in early Mahāyāna and the meaning of avinivartanīya

While the discovery that the authors of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* interpreted the concept of the irreversible *bhūmi* in a way that differed from that of the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* may help us to solve Lamotte's problem, it is not, I feel, the most interesting finding to come out of the research. Rather, it is the fact that the paths of the bodhisattva and *śrāvaka* have a lot more in common in the shorter *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* than has generally been recognised. Whereas the longer version presents a bodhisattva path that was clearly distinguished in terms of its structure and goal from that of the *śrāvaka* path, in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* the paths have enough in common to make us rethink our understanding of the differences between the early bodhisattvas and *śrāvaka*s and their respective paths.

The idea that the earliest Mahāyānists conceived the bodhisattva path as largely coinciding with that of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* suggests that they saw all three paths as having the same structure, same milestones and, possibly as even resulting in the same abandonment of defilements.[4] But bodhisattvas progressed on the path in a different way—their application of skill-in-means meant not making anything into a sign or a basis, with the result that they avoided actualising the fruits of the *śrāvaka* path, instead attaining the "all-knowledge" of a fully enlightened buddha. Thus, the idea that the bodhisattva and *śrāvaka* paths were originally the same, but were traversed by means of different *yāna*s, suggests that "vehicle," after all, may still be the best translation of *yāna*.

[4] See section 6.2.2.2

Such an interpretation of irreversibility also suggests that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s use of the word *avinivartanīya*, which although literally meaning not liable to turn back, is rather peculiar, for it does not mean that, perhaps due to the strength of their resolve, irreversible bodhisattvas avoid "turning back" or regressing to an earlier stage of the path. Rather, its principal use is simply to describe the mode of practice in which bodhisattvas avoid actualising the fruits of the *āryan* path. Perhaps it was for rhetorical purposes that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* chose to describe bodhisattvas with the ability to apply skill-in-means to their practice as *avinivartanīya*, since it may have implied not only that to become a *śrāvaka* was a regressive step, but also that the ability to avoid taking such a step was a fixed and permanent condition.

The reinterpretation of the path by the authors of the longer version of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* bears the mark of a scholastic attempt to reconcile a revised concept of highest enlightenment with an earlier description of the bodhisattva's goal as a kind of mystical "all-knowledge." Having formulated a path of two fixed phases, the first of which corresponded to the abandonments of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, and the second of which involved abandonments unique to the bodhisattva, it was, as I have shown, only a short innovative step to correlate those phases with the *daśabhūmi* system by enumerating six stages in the career of the *śrāvaka*, adding one stage for *pratyekabuddha*, and then equating the last three stages with the irreversible *bhūmi*.

8.3.3 The pre-*Aṣṭasāhasrikā* concept of the irreversible bodhisattva

The fact that the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* attached a somewhat non-literal meaning to *avinivartanīya* suggests that there may have been an earlier, more literal

usage of the term (or one of its synonyms such as *avivartya*, etc.). It is therefore not unreasonable to look for the original sense of the term in pre-Mahāyāna literature. As has been argued at several points in the thesis, the Dīpaṃkara myth may represent such a source, for it presents the future Śākyamuni as the prototypical irreversible bodhisattva whose prediction may have served to legitimate the "rule" of Śākyamuni by showing that he had, in the manner of kings, been anointed by his predecessor.

However, of the two connotations of irreversibility—immutability and assuredness—prediction principally concerns the latter. In other words, the future Śākyamuni was irreversible in the sense that his enlightenment was assured. But what he is not liable to *turn back to* is not explicit. The myth does not mention anything about a *śrāvaka-yāna* or *pratyekabuddha-yāna*, suggesting that the idea of the irreversible bodhisattva's inability to turn back to either of these soteriological options was not part of the original, pre-*Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, sense of irreversibility.

8.4 Discussion of recurrent themes

Having restated some of the major findings of the research, we now turn to a discussion of the some of the other findings and their implications.

8.4.1 The concept of irreversibility as a response to the need for certainty

Our survey in chapter 2 revealed that the concept of the irreversible bodhisattva may have drawn on, and possibly contributed to, a number of similar ideas in Buddhism, including the irreversibility of *āryas*, who were assured of not taking rebirth in the lower realms as they traversed a spiritual path that took many lifetimes. But why

was it necessary for Buddhists to posit an *āryan* path that spanned many lifetimes in the first place?

George Bond has identified three types of teachings that describe the arhat ideal and convincingly argued the case for their chronological development.[5] In the group of teachings that depict the first stage in the development of the ideal, arhatship was considered relatively easy to attain, with many stories of monks attaining *nirvāṇa* "in this very life" (*ditthe va dhamme*). In the second group, the goal is described as something that can only be attained by progressing through a series of stages in which practitioners gradually destroy all the outflows (*āsravas*) that stand between them and arhatship. In the third group, there is an important development, namely the path is now considered so hard that progress is considered to usually take many lifetimes. Four stages of the path were thus identified, beginning with the *srota-āpanna*, who was destined to attain arhatship within seven lifetimes.

If Bond's theory is correct, then it is likely that the idea of the predestination of those who had entered the *āryan* path was a response to practitioners' need for a spiritual attainment that would not be lost at death, thus allowing them to reach the more advanced stages of the path without having to start at the beginning in each lifetime. As Bond expresses it:

> the scheme of the four paths or noble persons has significance because it offers hope to those who are on the way but have not yet reached arahantship. ... Not reaching the goal in this life need not be a source of disappointment, for a person could look forward to continuing his progress in future lives. The stream-enterer, for example, could be certain both that he would not be reborn in an inferior state, i.e., as an animal, a ghost or in hell,

[5] See Bond, "The development of the arahant ideal."

> and that he would have the opportunity and ability to reach enlightenment in future rebirths.[6]

Plausible though Bond's description of the development of the arhat ideal is, he does not speculate on why the path may have been prolonged. Buswell and Gimello, however, have suggested that a long path may have been a result of "a breakdown in religious praxis."[7] In other words, since it became increasing hard to point to persons who had attained the goal as a result of engaging in the traditional practices, the conclusion was that more time was needed, and the goal was therefore postponed to a future lifetime. However, it is also possible that this lengthening of the path was due to a breakdown in the certification process. As we saw in section 2.4.2, the certification of arhatship appears to have depended upon recognition by other arhats. But if the very status of those whose role it was to certify arhatship in others was being questioned, this would have made it difficult for anyone to be certified as an arhat. By postponing arhatship to a future lifetime the problem of certification could also have been postponed.

Whatever the reasons behind the prolonging of the path, it is likely that in such circumstances the *srota-āpanna*'s condition of being predestined, or "fixed" (*niyata*) may have replaced arhatship as the real goal for practitioners. We have seen that the most soteriologically focused canonical work of the Sarvāstivādin school, the *Jñānaprasthāna*, not to mention the encyclopaedic *Mahāvibhāṣā* both begin with a comprehensive treatment of *laukikāgradharma* (which was held to be the immediate cause of becoming an *ārya*), suggesting that the attainment of this stage may well

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[6] Ibid.: 233.

[7] Buswell and Gimello, "Introduction," 19.

have been the primary goal for Sarvāstivādins.[8] However, while the Ābhidharmikas formulated elaborate theoretical explanations for the "irreversibility" of *srota-āpanna* as well as the circumstances in which the other three types of *ārya* could not fall from their attainment, the development of explanations to justify the irreversibility of the irreversible bodhisattva appears to have been somewhat less systematic. This will now be discussed.

8.4.2 How irreversibility is explained

At several places in this thesis we have discussed the attempt by Buddhist philosophers to make explicit the basis on which irreversible bodhisattvas are distinguished from their reversible counterparts. We have seen, for example, the way Bu-ston considered the signs of irreversibility to be the results the special abandonments and realisations of meditative equipoise, while Tsong-kha-pa considered the first of the signs to *actually be* that fundamental quality that made a bodhisattva irreversible (while the other signs were its mere parts). We have also seen how some Tibetan scholars posited "special method and wisdom" as the basic quality of irreversibility, where method referred to the bodhisattva's great compassion and wisdom to his or cognition of emptiness. We have also observed that in the *Prajñāpāramitā* account of the myth, Dīpaṃkara recognised that Megha possessed the necessary qualities for a prediction of enlightenment to be made.[9]

With the possible exception noted at the end of section 5.4.3.2 (which was really just an admission that some bodhisattvas could receive a prediction without having attained the certitude that dharmas are not produced, and not an admission that they

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[8] "By opening his work with this stage of the path, Kātyāyanīputra is explaining that the transmutation of the worlding into a saint is the highest aspiration of the Sarvāstivādin school." Buswell and Jaini, "The development of abhidharma philosophy," 109.

[9] See section 2.5.3

did not, at the time of prediction, have some other sort of special quality that justified their prediction), the above examples indicate that all explanations of irreversibility depend on positing the possession of a special quality. However, the way in which possession of this quality was verified underwent a cycle of change.

As we have seen in chapter 5, not all Buddhists believed that the Buddha was omniscient (*sarvajña*), and even if they did, this did not necessarily mean they believed he cognised every knowable thing. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that whatever was attributed to him was deemed to be true, and on that basis, a prediction (assuming it could be established to have occurred) must have been considered a guarantee of future enlightenment. Given that the future Śākyamuni received his prediction on the basis of his possession of some sort of special quality, later, when a prediction was considered something that all bodhisattvas needed to attain,[10] bodhisattvas who wished to attain a prediction (or perhaps demonstrate that they had received one in an earlier lifetime) also had to show that they possessed the special underlying quality of an irreversible bodhisattva. Although this initially may have been thought of as an unshakeable resolution to attain highest enlightenment, as we have seen, for the authors of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* the strength of one's resolve was not sufficient to attain highest enlightenment. For no matter how strong their resolve may be, if bodhisattvas lacked skill in means, they would never attain highest enlightenment. It is for this reason, perhaps, that another quality came to be posited as an infallible cause of attaining highest enlightenment, namely the certitude that dharmas are not produced. This realisation is occasionally mentioned

[10] As Nattier writes, "The story of Dīpaṃkara's prediction of the future Śākyamuni's eventual attainment of buddhahood came to play an especially important role in Mahāyāna circles, where aspiring bodhisattvas interpreted the story as an indication that they too must be reborn during the time of a living buddha and receive a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) in his presence." Jan Nattier, "Dīpaṃkara," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan Reference, USA, 2004), 320.

in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, but it is in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* that it becomes systematised, when it is said to mark a bodhisattva's entrance into the fixed condition of a bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas who possess this quality are therefore said to be irreversible.

However, the idea that any quality could guarantee that a bodhisattva would certainly attain enlightenment is inconsistent with Dharmakīrti's axiom that future results are not inferable from present causes. A seed is necessary for the production of a sprout, as are water, sunlight, soil etc., but they do not guarantee the production of a sprout. Thus, while unshakeable resolve, or the certitude that dharmas are not produced, or even the signs of irreversibility taught in the *sūtra* may have been viewed by some as sufficient causes guaranteeing that the possessor would attain highest enlightenment, the impact of Dharmakīrti's position on valid inference meant that the best that could be said was that the possessor was capable of attaining highest enlightenment. Although a much weaker interpretation, it was based on valid deductive reasoning, and was, as we have seen, that adopted by Haribhadra.

Although Tsong-kha-pa posits the possession of what he calls the "epitome" of the signs as a sufficient cause that guarantees a bodhisattva's future enlightenment, he is forced to appeal to scripture to support his argument that bodhisattvas who possess this quality will definitely attain highest enlightenment since it is not something that can be observed in other people. Even if one observes it in oneself, its capacity to guarantee future enlightenment is also a very hidden phenomenon, and thus only "knowable" by means of faith in scripture.

To summarise then, the epistemological support for claims for irreversibility begins and ends with faith. While the prediction by an authoritative figure forms the basis

on which irreversibility is initially validated, many centuries later Tsong-kha-pa argues that it is only through faith in authoritative scriptures that the signs of irreversibility function as a valid basis for inferring irreversibility in both oneself and others. If, as has been argued, it was indeed the case that there was greater interest in irreversible bodhisattvas in early Mahāyāna, this may suggest that faith in the word of the Buddha was a sounder basis of knowledge in pre-Dharmakīrtian times.

8.4.3 The irreversible bodhisattva as an ideal

It has been argued that the irreversible bodhisattva was viewed as an ideal by both the implied audience and actual audiences of the "Signs" chapter. However, evidence was also presented to show that another version of the ideal eventually became more widely accepted—one in which irreversibility, in the sense of being predestined (*niyata*), was an essential quality of *all* bodhisattvas. This, it was argued, resulted in the popularisation of a less attainable form of the bodhisattva ideal. Some of the implications of this shift with respect to the normative function of the ideal will now be discussed.

8.4.3.1 Varieties of the bodhisattva ideal

Although there does not appear to be any commonly used Sanskrit equivalent for the expression "bodhisattva ideal," it has been often used by writers in the field of Buddhist Studies and beyond[11] for over a century to refer to just about any particular quality or collection of qualities that they think represents the essence of the

[11] See, for example, Phillip A. Lecso, "The bodhisattva ideal and organ transplantation," *Journal of Religion and Health* 30, no. 1 (1991). Lecso discusses the ideal bodhisattva's willingness to sacrifice his body in order to benefit other beings.

bodhisattva. Harry Oldmeadow has summarised traditional and modern accounts of the ideal as follows:

> There is no shortage of either traditional accounts or scholarly explications of the *bodhisattva* ideal and of the path to be followed by its adherents. Let us state the matter briefly. The bodhisattva is one who voluntarily renounces the right to enter *nirvāṇa*, who, under certain inextinguishable vows, undergoes countless rebirths in the samsaric realm in order to devote his/her energies, in a spirit of boundless compassion, to the deliverance of all beings down to "the last blade of grass." The *bodhisattva* is committed to the practice of the six *pāramitās* (perfections), particularly the all-encompassing ideal of *prajñā* (wisdom). The *bodhisattva* advanced on the path becomes an exemplar of sacrificial heroism and moral idealism as well as an aspirant to complete enlightenment.[12]

However, as we have observed, the resolve to liberate all sentient beings from the sufferings of *saṃsāra* does not feature among the qualities of the irreversible bodhisattva described in the "Signs" chapter. But rather than conclude that the irreversible bodhisattva was not a normative ideal, it would be better, I think, to conceive of the irreversible bodhisattva portrayed in the "Signs" chapter as just one particular version of the paradigm. In other words, we should avoid speaking of *the* bodhisattva ideal as if there is, and only ever has been, one. As Linnart Mäll has rightly observed:

> The image and ideal of the bodhisattva were considered differently in different schools and texts and the development of it has a long history.[13]

Reginald Ray, for example, has shown that there are varieties of the ideal to be found in different *sūtra*s. The ideal bodhisattva of the *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā-sūtra*,[14] for example, was the forest dwelling ascetic, while that of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*

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[12] Harry Oldmeadow, "Delivering the last blade of grass: Aspects of the bodhisattva ideal in the Mahāyāna," *Asian Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1997): 183.

[13] Mäll, *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, 53.

[14] Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 260-266.

was the householder.[15] Luis O. Gómez also distinguishes several types of ideal bodhisattvas, including the "supernatural" bodhisattva ideal, which he says is exemplified by well-known celestial bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara, and the "natural" bodhisattva ideal, which is exemplified by the human bodhisattva. Between these two is the "ethical" bodhisattva ideal who functions to bridge the gap between the supernatural and natural bodhisattva paradigms.[16] The bridge is possible since, in Gómez's view, despite their different capacities for doing so, both the ordinary human bodhisattva and the celestial bodhisattva share the same ethic of working to liberate all sentient beings from the sufferings of *saṃsāra*.

8.4.3.2 Degrees of normativity

It is helpful to think of these various ideals as being normative to differing degrees. The more qualities humans are capable of emulating, the more normative, I would argue, is the ideal. From this perspective then, the irreversible bodhisattva described in the "Signs" chapter is a highly normative version of the ideal. Wearing clean robes and observing the ten ways of wholesome action are clearly ways of behaving that ordinary people can emulate. Similarly, the two ideals described by Ray, as well as the human bodhisattva ideal described by Gómez, can also be described as highly normative versions of the ideal. However, Gómez's celestial bodhisattva ideal, or even the sacrificial hero described by Oldmeadow, are less normative, since, although people may venerate them or aspire to become like them, it is much harder to emulate their actions.

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[15] Ibid., 446.

[16] See Luis O. Gómez, "From the extraordinary to the ordinary: Images of the bodhisattva in East Asia," in *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Steven C. Rockefeller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 145.

8.4.3.3 The receding ideal

The idea that a ideal can be both attainable yet out of reach has been explained by W. D. Niven. On the one hand, an ideal must, by definition, be attainable, since as Kant says, "an ought implies a can,"[17] and therefore "an ideal which is absolutely and inherently unattainable cannot be an ideal."[18] On the other hand, were it to be attained, it would no longer be an ideal. Thus, an ideal that many people are seen as having fulfilled may stand in need of redefinition, so that it once again becomes out of reach (but still theoretically possible), thereby promoting the moral progress of those who aspire to the ideal.

We have already seen how the ideal of arhatship came to be redefined in a way that made it much harder to attain, possibly as a result of becoming devalued by the imperfect behaviour of those who were supposed to have fulfilled the ideal. The eventual triumph of the more glorified version of the bodhisattva ideal found in *sūtra*s such as the *Daśabhūmika* over the more attainable version in the "Signs" chapter may, in addition to the reasons given earlier in the thesis, be seen as a result of this need to redefine an ideal that had become too attainable. However, if the revised bodhisattva ideal had in effect become unattainable, it was only temporarily so, for in the context of countless lifetimes, the possibility of becoming a bodhisattva in a future lifetime remained for those practitioners who cultivated the necessary merit.

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[17] Cited in W. D. Niven, "Ideal," in *Encylopaedia of Religion and Ethics Vol. 7*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 88.

[18] Ibid.

8.4.3.4 Does the bodhisattva ideal define Mahāyāna?

Throughout this thesis we have used terms such as "Mahāyāna," "early Mahāyāna," and "institutional basis of Mahāyāna" as if the notion of what constitutes Mahāyāna were settled and widely accepted. However, as Jonathan Silk as shown,[19] since Mahāyāna is basically a rhetorical category set up in opposition to another rhetorical category (i.e., Hīnayāna) it can therefore be notoriously difficult to define as a tradition to which many Buddhists, both past and present, have thought of themselves as belonging.

Although Paul Williams has warned against attempting an essentialist definition of Mahāyāna,[20] since it has been claimed that the bodhisattva ideal is "the very heart of the Mahāyāna,"[21] it is worth examining whether the ideal can usefully be applied to the task. I therefore propose incorporating the bodhisattva ideal as a variable in the following definition of Mahāyāna:

> an institution in which a form of the bodhisattva paradigm functions as a popular normative ideal.

This definition is similar to the one set forth by Hubert Durt, namely:

> the soteriological movement, divided into many tendencies, which developed within Buddhism with the aim of promoting the conduct of the Bodhisattva as the ideal of practice for the followers of the movement.[22]

Both definitions leave the bodhisattva ideal itself undefined. Treating it as a variable in this way allows for different expressions such as those we have identified above. Both definitions also recognise the institutional nature of the bodhisattva ideal,

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[19] See Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?"

[20] Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 2.

[21] Robert A. F. Thurman, "The Buddhist messiahs: The magnificent deed of the bodhisattvas," in *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Steven C. Rockefeller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 66.

[22] Cited in Silk, "What, if anything, is Mahāyāna Buddhism?" 359.

though the definition I have proposed makes it more explicit. To express it in the language of John Searle: Mahāyāna exists when there is community consensus that provides the *context* for certain behaviours of members of that community to *count as* emulating, or at least striving to emulate, the bodhisattva ideal.

We have shown that there can be little doubt that the imagined authorial community that produced the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* fits our definition, and it is therefore justifiable to speak of them, as we have done, as Mahāyānists. However, let us consider two potentially problematic cases to see whether our definition of Mahāyāna can be maintained.

The first is the case of the superhuman or "celestial" bodhisattva paradigm. How could any human action count as that of a bodhisattva who was, by definition, superhuman? By applying Gómez's argument that the ethical ideal of the bodhisattva is present in the superhuman ideal, however, it may perhaps be argued that persons who worship or otherwise engage in devotional practices associated with superhuman bodhisattvas are Mahāyānists to the extent that they try to emulate the ethical dimension of the superhuman bodhisattva ideal. They may, moreover, see themselves as emulating what they consider to have been the actions of superhuman bodhisattvas in their former, more human, lifetimes. However, were they to simply pray to such bodhisattvas for their help in achieving non-religious goals, it may be inappropriate to consider them Mahāyānists; yet the fact that those persons would nevertheless still probably identify themselves as Mahāyānists only serves to highlight the rhetorical and polemical nature of the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna dichotomy.

The second is the case of the Theravādin kings who are reported to have taken the bodhisattva vow and proclaimed themselves bodhisattvas.[23] There is no doubt that a version of the bodhisattva ideal exists in Theravāda Buddhism. It is also the case that certain actions such as vowing to attain buddhahood in the presence of a living buddha count as becoming a bodhisattva, and in that sense it can also be said that the institution of the bodhisattva exists within Theravāda. To the extent that this practice of Theravādin kings proclaiming themselves bodhisattvas was institutionalised it could be argued that a Mahāyāna subgroup once existed in Theravādin Buddhism. But since there is no evidence that the bodhisattva ideal has ever been a popular normative ideal in Theravāda, or that these kings subsequently engaged in any practices that could be considered distinctively Mahāyāna, it would be inappropriate to call Theravāda a Mahāyāna tradition.

To sum up, although it is conceivable that there some people who think of themselves as Mahāyānists, but for whom there is no form of the bodhisattva ideal that they look upon as normative (and therefore, according the above definition, are not Mahāyānists) the above definition still has its strengths. The main one is that it allows us to clearly imagine a beginning of Mahāyāna; i.e., a moment when Buddhists collectively began to model their behaviour on a normative ideal that they saw as not only distinct from that emulated by their coreligionists, but one that they called "(irreversible) bodhisattva," that they promoted in new texts, and that they saw as attainable, if not in the present lifetime, then in a future one.

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[23] See Samuels, "The bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda," 405-406.

8.4.4 Interpretation of texts

One of the contributions this thesis has made to the field of Buddhist Studies is the establishment of a theoretical foundation to support claims that early Mahāyānists identified themselves as bodhisattvas. Although, to some scholars, such a claim may seem intuitively obvious from an "emic" reading of the *sūtras*,[24] the theory is nevertheless important for the way it offers the potential to compare the worldview, and indeed the self-view, of the actual audiences of a work at different periods in its history. Here, we shall consider the way in which the self-identity of audiences of a work may change as a result of exegesis.

When Buddhist exegetes comment on earlier works, they draw on a much broader range of beliefs, presuppositions and textual sources than did the authors of the works on which they commented. As a result of this greater "knowledge base," it is inevitable that the implied audience of the commentarial work will differ, sometimes greatly, from that of the earlier work. Yet both works are intended to be read in conjunction; indeed, the two will often form a single text. The question then arises as to whether actual audiences are required to identify with two different implied audiences, or whether it is possible for the exegete to redefine the implied audience of the earlier work in such a way that it conforms with that of the commentary.

As an example, let us consider Haribhadra's commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā* (hereafter: *Ālokā*). This is a work that draws together a number of works from earlier periods, and therefore potentially contains a number

[24] For an explanation of the 'emic', as opposed to 'etic', reading of a work, see D. S. Ruegg, "Some reflections on the place of philosophy in the study of Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 156-162.

of audience roles. For the sake a comparison however, we will consider only the implied audiences of the *Ālokā* and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, and even then we will only look at some of the more important factors that pertain to the implied audience of the "Signs" chapter and its commentary. The conclusions that we draw with regard to the implied audience of the *Ālokā* as a whole are therefore necessarily tentative. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the evidence tends to suggest an implied audience of the *Ālokā* who is more concerned with constructing a coherent Mahāyāna worldview than with inferring whether or not other people are irreversible bodhisattvas.[25]

The most important difference as far as the present study is concerned is that, unlike the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* that we identified in chapter 3, the implied audience of the *Ālokā* is familiar with and accepts Dharmakīrti's axiom that results cannot be inferred from causes. "It" also accepts the appropriateness of applying Dharmakīrti's axiom to the "Signs" chapter. From this, it might be concluded that the *Ālokā*'s implied audience took the unconventional view of the irreversible bodhisattva as one who is merely *capable*, but not *assured*, of attaining highest enlightenment. However, it is likely that such a devaluing of irreversibility would have made it difficult for actual audiences steeped in traditional doctrines to identify with the *Ālokā*'s implied audience. Given the success of the *Ālokā*, it therefore prompts us to question whether such a view was in fact a significant part of the implied audience's identity.

We have made the claim earlier in the thesis that the mere fact that a work survived when the only means of reproduction was copying by hand means that the work can,

[25] Our conclusions will also tend to support those in Dreyfus, "Tibetan scholastic education."

to a certain extent, be considered "successful." On these grounds, the major works of Haribhadra might be considered particularly successful. Not only have the *Ālokā* and its abbreviated version, the *Sphuṭārthā*, survived in to the present day in the original Sanskrit, they continue to be much studied by Tibetan Buddhists monks, some of whom memorise the *Sphuṭārthā* in its entirety.

We have also argued that success implies that actual audiences must have seen the work as speaking to them in some way, and thus found it easy to identify with its implied audience. Yet we have also found evidence to suggest that the implied audience of the commentary on the "Signs" chapter may not find the signs particularly important. When used as logical reasons in a syllogism, they only allow for the inference of the capability of irreversibility. We may therefore wonder what kind of appeal such an interpretation of the signs could have had to actual audiences.

The explanation, I believe, is that this was not a problem since it is unlikely that there were any candidates for irreversible bodhisattvahood within the communities of actual audiences of the *Ālokā*. This is because, according to another important text in the *Ālokā*'s intertextual basis, the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, the signs of irreversibility are not displayed until bodhisattvas attain the path of preparation, and even then it is only bodhisattvas of sharp intelligence who do so. Most of the signs are not displayed until the bodhisattva reaches the paths of seeing and cultivation, a stage that would require the direct cognition of emptiness as well as a number of supernatural powers. Thus, despite the apparently mundane nature of many of the signs, in accordance with the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, the *Ālokā*'s implied audience considers irreversible bodhisattvas who display the signs of irreversibility to be extremely rare and advanced beings, and therefore unlikely to encountered in one's

community. In fact, it may be said that it is precisely the lack of opportunities to infer irreversibility (regardless of how it is interpreted) from the signs that allows actual audiences to identify themselves with the *Ālokā*'s implied audience. Any real opportunities to infer irreversibility from the signs are imagined to occur safely in the past or perhaps in the remote future, where there is no danger of identifying an actual irreversible bodhisattva who might not live up (or down) to the ideal. The appeal of the *Ālokā*, I believe, therefore lies in its ability to harmonise the logic of Dharmakīrti with the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*s (not to mention numerous other works) without the danger of harm from empirical evidence. Its implied audience sees the Mahāyāna worldview as coherent and all its texts and doctrines as harmonious, and it is this role that actual audiences were willing to adopt, thus making it a "successful" work.

There is, however, one problem that has not been considered. We have argued that the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was the bodhisattva who strived to emulate the irreversible bodhisattva ideal. At the same time we have suggested that the implied audience of the *Ālokā* was much more humble—one for whom irreversibility, if not bodhisattvahood itself, was too highly idealised to be a real possibility. But since the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is contained within the *Ālokā*, would that have not made it impossible for actual audiences to identify with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s implied audience?

It will be recalled that Iser explained how a single work may have various interpretations by means of an analogy:[26]

> two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough and the other will

[26] See section 3.3.4

> make out a dipper. The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.[27]

However, reader-response theorists disagree on how far this freedom to interpret a text extends to the identification of its implied reader. If Iser is saying that the implied reader, like the fixed stars in the sky, is purely a property of the text, then the only freedom enjoyed by actual audiences would be in "bridging the interpretive gap" between their own experiences and the implied audience role. If, on the other hand, it is not a property of the text (or only partly a property of it), and commentators like Haribhadra did indeed redefine it in accordance with the knowledge base of their day, then, it may be more useful to apply Stanley Fish's notion of a the "interpretive community," according to which, the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*-in-the-*Ālokā* may be seen as at least partly dependent upon the values of Haribhadra's discourse community.

The unwanted consequence of this position, however, is that our own identification of the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is dependent on our own modern Western academic interpretive community, and we have no way of objectively establishing that the earliest audiences saw it in the way we have imagined. While we may accept this consequence and say that our identification of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s implied audience is provisional, it is also possible to argue that Haribhadra does *not* actually redefine the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*—i.e., it remains the bodhisattva—however, the implied audience of the *Ālokā* sees itself as living in degenerate times, where bodhisattvahood was something to be aspired to in a future lifetime. Actual audiences in Haribhadra's time did not

[27] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 282.

therefore need to identify themselves with the implied audience of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*—just that of the *Ālokā* would have been sufficient.

To summarise, from a modern Western academic perspective, the implied audience of the *Ālokā* appears to be one for whom seeing the various Mahāyāna texts as harmonious is important. In particular, the views of Dharmakīrti, the soteriology of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, and the "Signs" chapter itself must be without contradiction. The price to be paid (or perhaps the benefit gained), however, is the loss of practicality. Irreversibility cannot be inferred from the signs because actual bodhisattvas who display the signs are too idealised to be encountered in real life.

8.4.5 How do we measure spiritual progress?

The bodhisattva path has been an important feature of the investigations undertaken in this thesis, but it is easy to overlook the fact that it is just a metaphor for spiritual progress that is goal oriented, linear, and graduated. Implicit in the path metaphor is the notion that a practitioner's progress is somehow marked by milestones that allow it to be measured and compared with that of other practitioners. In this final section, I will discuss both the importance and the problems associated with efforts to measure and certify spiritual progress.

8.4.5.1 Can hidden traits be inferred from observable behaviour?

It is not unreasonable to attempt to gauge unobservable latent psychological traits indirectly by means of observing behaviour. Indeed, the whole modern field of psychometrics, not to mention our systems of assessment in education, are built on the supposition that unobservable traits are reflected in observable behaviour. As we have seen, there was a tradition going back at least as far as the *Laṅkāvatāra* of determining a person's lineage based on observing his or her shedding of tears when

hearing the teachings pertaining to a particular *yāna*. Even earlier is the attribution to the Buddha of the "thirty two characteristics" (*dvātriṃśadvara-lakṣaṇa*) of a "great man" (*mahāpuruṣa*), which were regarded as the outward reflection of the Buddha's inner perfection.

These thirty two characteristics may have been considered more a more reliable indicator of spiritual achievement than any verbal or physical behaviour. As John Powers observes:

> A beautiful body was seen as a reflection of inner qualities that could be verified by the senses. Fools and charlatans can make themselves appear wise by mouthing words of wisdom but they cannot fake the body of a great man.[28]

This is a view with which Tsong-kha-pa appears to agree when he characterises observable behaviour as an unreliable basis for logically deducing another person's inner realisations. Tsong-kha-pa writes:

> It is uncertain whether cognising irreversibility from special expressions is unmistaken, because the inner realisations pertaining to irreversibility are extremely hidden phenomena for that person [who lacks the power to read others' minds].[29]

Tsong-kha-pa is saying that unless one possesses the yogic power to read others' minds it is impossible to know whether another person possesses the two extremely stable streams of method and wisdom. And even if one were able to ascertain such qualities in another person, the fact that he or she is destined to attain complete enlightenment without ever falling to the level of a *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* is not something that can be logically proven; it can only be established through faith in the teachings of the Buddha.

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[28] John Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 227.

[29] *rtogs pa dma' pa dag gis ni lus ngag gi tha snyad tsam zhig las dpog na 'khrul zhing/ tha snyad khyad par can phyir mi ldog gi rtogs pa la mi 'khrul ba ni ma nges te/ phyir mi ldog gi nang gi rtogs pa ni gang zag de la shin tu lkog tu gyur pas so/* /Tsong-kha-pa, *Legs bshad ser phreng*, vol.2 : 326.

mKhas-grub-rje takes a somewhat different position, and explains how the signs establish that a bodhisattva is irreversible from highest enlightenment. However, the proof he sets forth is unlikely to be of much practical use because, when trying to establish that a certain subject is an irreversible bodhisattva, it is first necessary for the person to whom the reason is presented (*phyir rgol*) to have already established that the subject is a bodhisattva of sharp intelligence who abides on the path of preparation.

mKhas-grub-rje presents two scenarios: (1) in the first case the person to whom the reason is presented has already ascertained that the subject is a bodhisattva and wants to ascertain whether he or she is a bodhisattva of sharp intelligence who abides on the path of preparation; (2) in the second, the person to whom the reason is presented has ascertained that the subject is a bodhisattva endowed with sharp faculties and wants to ascertain whether he or she is irreversible from complete enlightenment. He describes the two scenarios as follows:

> [The subject is] a bodhisattva of sharp faculties on the path of preparation, but the person to whom the reason is presented (*phyir rgol*) does not ascertain he is of sharp faculties and on the path of preparation, merely that he is a bodhisattva. Or alternatively, [the person to whom the reason is presented] ascertains [the bodhisattva] is of sharp faculties [and abides] on the path of preparation, but does not ascertain that it follows he is irreversible from complete enlightenment.[30]

Both scenarios imply that there exists some way to determine whether persons are bodhisattvas and their relative stages of progress. But mKhas-grub-rje does not explain how it is possible to recognise another person as a bodhisattva (much less one who is of sharp intelligence who abides on the path of preparation).

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[30] *byang sems sbyor lam pa dbang rnon yin pa la/ phyir rgol gyis sbyor lam pa dbang rnon yin par ma nges shing/ byang sems tsam yin par nges pa'am/ sbyor lam pa dbang rnon yin par nges kyang de nyid la rdzogs byang las phyir mi ldog pas khyab par ma nges par 'di/* mKhas-grub-rje, *rTogs dka'i snang ba*, 238.

8.4.5.2 Are spiritual realisations inherently unverifiable?

There appears to be a Buddhist tradition that certain spiritual realisations are only certifiable in others by those who themselves possess such realisations. We have seen, for example (in section 2.4.2), how the *Chabbisodana Sutta* teaches that arhatship was certified by those who were already arhats. In chapter 7, we also saw that Bu-ston claimed that the realisations of meditative equipoise were certifiable only by people who had themselves attained the realisations of meditative equipoise and had thereby established by means of their own experience the concomitance between displaying the signs of irreversibility. And, as MacQueen has speculated, the *dharmabhāṇakas*, who were the first teachers of Mahāyāna teachers, were bodhisattvas whose abilities extended to the recognition of *cittotpāda*, and hence bodhisattvahood, in others.

Traditional Buddhist discourse depends to some extent on accepting that certain persons are qualified to teach and that others are obliged to listen. While the authority to teach may derive partly from the recognition of academic knowledge, authority may also derive from what we might think of as relative progress towards enlightenment. In the former case comparisons between individuals may be verifiable in the form of examinations (e.g., the Tibetan *dge-bshes* exams), but measuring and comparing spiritual progress is much more difficult, and systems of certification may even break down completely. If, for whatever reason, this happens, then we have seen there are at least two possible solutions: (1) the bar may raised so high that no one can claim membership among the spiritual elite, which seems to be a rather permanent condition since only the elite would have the authority to lower the bar; (2) alternatively (or in addition) the problem can be postponed by formulating a path that extends beyond the current lifetime so that measureable

spiritual progress is not presently possible. It is curious however, that despite these two "solutions" having already been implemented several times in the history of Buddhism, many contemporary teachers do indeed derive their authority in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, to verify.

8.5 Final conclusion

The research undertaken in this thesis has led, I would argue, not only to a better understanding of what irreversibility meant to Buddhists of different periods, but because irreversibility is such an important feature in all presentations of the career of a bodhisattva, we have also been able to use it as a point of reference to compare some of the strands that make up the systematised bodhisattva path. Whether or not we should think of these different strands as pointing to a shared underlying path structure is not something that I have tried to determine in this study. Nevertheless, the principle of being able to compare paths by means of correlating the point at which spiritual attainments become immutable and the goal predestined has provided us with a useful tool for investigating how the bodhisattva path evolved.

It was stated in the introduction that this study was something of a prolegomenon, since it was basically structured around the overview (*spyi don*) of Tibetan textbooks on the subject. Much of what is traditionally covered by Tibetan monks who study the "Signs of Irreversibility" has therefore been left out. There has been no detailed discussion of each sign (as enumerated by the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*) or analysis of some of the debates generated by each sign. Nor has there been any discussion of spiritual progress from a Mādhyamika perspective, an important topic that is part of the study of the "Signs of Irreversibility" in Gelugpa monasteries. These remain topics for further investigation.

APPENDICES

1 Forty-four signs according to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*

1.1 Twenty signs displayed by bodhisattvas at the aids to penetration

(*Abhisamayālaṃkāra* IV : 40-44)

rūpādibhyo nivṛttiś ca vicikitsā 'kṣaṇa-kṣayau/
ātmanaḥ kuśala-sthasya pareṣāṃ tan-niyojanaṃ// 40 //

(1) turning away from form and so forth;

(2) extinction of doubt;

(3) [extinction of rebirth in] inopportune circumstances;

(4) oneself abiding in virtue and enjoining others to do so;

parādhāraṅ ca dānādi gambhīre 'rthe 'py akāṃkṣaṇaṃ/
maitraṃ kāyādy asamvāsaḥ pañcadhāvaraṇena ca// 41 //

(5) [the perfections of] giving and so forth based [exchanging oneself with] others;

(6) no hesitation regarding even profound matters;

(7) friendly [deeds of] body and so forth [i.e., of speech and mind];

(8) no meeting with the five hindrences;

sarvānuśaya-hānaṅ ca smṛti-saṃprajñatā śuci/
cīvarādi śarīre ca kṛmīṇām asamudbhavaḥ// 42 //

(9) destruction of all latent tendencies;

(10) mindful and alert;

(11) robes and so forth are clean;

(12) no worms in the body;

cittākauṭilyam ādānaṃ dhutasyāmatsarāditā/
dharmmatā-yukta-gāmitvaṃ lokārthaṃ narakaiṣaṇā// 43 //

(13) no crookedness in the mind;

(14) taking on the [twelve] ascetic practices;

(15) not miserly and so forth;

(16) progressing while yoked to the nature of dharma;

(17) seeking hell for the sake of the world;

parair aneyatā mārasyānya-mārgopadeśinaḥ/
māra ity avabodhaś ca caryā buddhānumoditā// 44 //

(18) not led astray by others;

(19) knowing "[This is the work of] Māra" when Māra teaches other paths;

(20) [engaging in] activity that pleases the buddhas.

1.2 Sixteen signs displayed by bodhisattvas on the path of seeing

(*Abhisamayālaṃkāra* IV : 47-51)

rūpādi-saṃjña-vyāvṛttir dārḍhyaṃ cittasya hīnayoḥ/
yānayor vinivṛttiś ca dhyānādy-aṅga-parikṣayaḥ// 47 //

(1) turning back from the perception (*saṃjñā*) of form and so forth;

(2) stability of the mind [of enlightenment];

(3) turning away from the deficient vehicles (i.e., Hīnayāna);

(4) complete extinction[1] of the branches of the *dhyāna*s and so forth;

kāya-ceto-laghutvaṃ ca kāma-sevābhyupāyikī/
sadaiva brahma-cāritvam ājīvasya viśuddhatā// 48 //

(5) lightness of body and mind;

(6) skill in using desire;

(7) always celibate;

(8) livelihood completely pure;

skandhādāv antarāyeṣu sambhāre sendriyādike/
samare matsarādau ca neti yogānuyogayoḥ// 49 //
vihāra-pratiṣedhaś ca ... //50a//

[1] Regarding this term Conze writes: "Editions read *parikṣaya*, Tib. Trsl. has *yongs su zad pa*, but A[ṣṭa] xvii 332 has *parijaya*, and the context demands it". Edward Conze, *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Orrente, 1954), 147.

(9) avoiding dwelling on, being occupied, or preoccupied with the skandhas and so forth;

(10) [avoiding dwelling on, being occupied, or preoccupied with] the hindrances;

(11) [avoiding dwelling on, being occupied, or preoccupied with] the accumulations;

(12) [avoiding abiding occupied or preoccupied with] the battle with the sense faculties and so forth;

(13) [avoiding dwelling on, being occupied, or preoccupied with] miserliness and so forth;

dharmmasyāṇor alabdhatā/
niścitatvaṃ sva-bhūmau ca bhūmi-tritaya-saṃsthitiḥ// 50b-d //

(14) not taking even an atom of dharmas as a basis;

(15) sure of one's own level, standing firmly on the three levels;

dharmmārthaṃ jīvita-tyāga ... / //51a//

(16) sacrificing [one's] life for the sake of dharma.

1.3 Eight signs displayed by bodhisattvas on the path of cultivation

(*Abhisamayālaṃkāra* IV : 59 ; not included within the "Signs" chapter)

utpāde ca nirodhe ca tathatāyāṃ gabhīratā/
jneye jñāne ca caryāyām advayopāya-kauśala// 59 //

Comprehension of profound

(1) production;

(2) cessation;

(3) suchness;

(4) the object of knowledge;

(5) knowledge;

(6) activity;

(7) non-duality;

(8) skill-in-means;

2 Thirty-five signs according to the *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*

To. 3808, ff. 225A ln.1 – 225B ln.1

(1)	*de bzhin nyid la gnyis su med par mthong ba*	seeing suchness non-dualistically;
(2)	*thams cad las phyir ldog pa*	turning away from all [dharmas];
(3)	*ston pa gzhan la rim gro byed pa la sogs pa chos ngan pa med pa*	not engaging in inferior religious practices such as venerating other [non-Buddhist] teachers;
(4)	*mi khom par skye ba med pa*	not rebirth in the [eight] inopportune states;
(5)	*mi dge ba'i las kyi lam spangs pa*	abandonment of the path of non-virtuous action;
(6)	*dge ba'i las kyi lam yongs su rdzogs par byed pa*	thoroughly completion of the path of virtuous action;
(7)	*sems can thams cad kyi don du pha rol tu phyin pa thams cad yongs su rdzogs par byed pa*	for the welfare of all sentient beings, thorough completion of all the *pāramitās*;
(8)	*sems can thams cad kyi don du gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis kyi chos kun chub par byed pa*	mastering the dharmas of the twelve categories of scripture for the welfare of all sentient beings;
(9)	*chos zab mo la nem nur med pa*	having no uncertainty about the profound dharma;

(10)	*lus ngag dang/ yid kyi las 'jam zhing byams par ldan pa*	gentleness and friendliness in physical, verbal, and mental actions;
(11)	*sgrib pa rnam pa lnga dang du mi len pa*	not taking on the five types of hindrance;
(12)	*bag la nyal ba rnam pa bdun med pa*	not having the seven types of latent tendencies (*anuśaya*);
(13)	*dran pa dang shes bzhin du ldan pa'i spyod lam can*	engaging in behaviour that is imbued with mindfulness and self-possession;
(14)	*gtsang sbrar spyod pa la sogs pa dang ldan pa*	engaging in conduct that is clean and pure;
(15)	*lus la srin bu'i rigs stong mi 'byung ba*	the [eighty] thousand types of worms not arising in one's body;
(16)	*lus dang ngag dang sems yongs su dag pa*	purity of body, speech and mind;
(17)	*dod pa chung la chog shes shing sbyangs pa'i yon tan la brten pa*	relying on the [twelve] ascetic practices, and being content with little desire;
(18)	*ser sna la sogs pa med pa*	not having miserliness and so forth;
(19)	*blo brtan zhing zab pa la sogs pa dang ldan pa*	possessing awareness that is steady and deep, etc.;
(20)	*bdud la sogs pas mi 'phrogs pa*	not robbed by Māra etc.;

(21)	*dring mi 'jog pa*	not putting into effect the ways [of others];
(22)	*shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa la brten pa*	dependence on the perfection of wisdom;
(23)	*bdud kyi las rtogs pa*	recognising the work of Māra;
(24)	*mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa thob pa*	attainment of the certitude that dharmas are not produced;
(25)	*phyir ldog pa dang phyir mi ldog pa*	turning away [from the levels of *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*] and not turning away [from highest enlightenment];
(26)	*bsam gtan dang ting nge 'dzin dang snyoms par 'jug pa'i 'bras bu la mi reg pa*	not reaching the fruits of *dhyāna*, *samādhi* and *samāhita*;
(27)	*gzugs la sogs pa'i chos thams cad lhur mi len pa*	not taking interest in any dharmas including form and so forth;
(28)	*pha rol tu phyin pa rnams la sbyor ba rnam pa bzhi phun sum tshogs pa*	excellence in the four types of practice with respect to the *pāramitās*;
(29)	*sbyin pa'i 'bras bu gzhan mi dga' bar 'gyur ba la sogs pa la mi re ba*	no wish that others are displeased etc. with the fruits of giving;
(30)	*rdo rje'i rigs lnga phyi bzhin 'brang ba la sogs pa'i dbang*	[possesses] the power of being followed etc. by the five *vajra* families;

(31)	*sngags dang bzo ngan pa la mi brten pa*	no dependence on spells or witchcraft;
(32)	*gtam ngan pa'i sbyor ba las ldog cing yang dag pa'i las dang bsam pa la 'jug pa*	turning away from the practice of bad talk, and engaging in pure activities and thoughts;
(33)	*rang gi sa la the tshom med pa*	no doubt about one's level;
(34)	*chos yongs su bzung ba'i phyir srog kyang yongs su gtong ba*	[willingness to] sacrifice even one's life for the sake of dharma;
(35)	*chos bzung ba rnams chud mi gson pa*	does not let those dharmas that have been apprehended go to waste.

3 Nineteen signs according to the *Āmnayānusāriṇi*

Excerpts from: To. 3811, ff. 217A ln.1 – 225B ln.6

(1)	*de bzhin nyid la gnyis su med pa mthong ba*	seeing non-duality in suchness;
(2)	*ston pa gzhan la yang dag par gus pa la sogs pa dman pa'i chos med pa*	not engaging in inferior religious practices such as venerating other [i.e., non-Buddhist] teachers;
(3)	*ngan song du skye ba med pa*	no rebirth in the lower realms;
(4)	*dge ba bcu la bdag nyid kyis gnas nas pha rol pho rnams de la yang dag par 'god pa*	having dwelt in [the practice of] the ten virtues oneself, enjoining others to do so;
(5)	*sems can thams cad kyi don du yan lag bcu gnyis pa chos yongs su tshol ba*	thoroughly investigating the twelve links [of interdependent origination] for the sake of all sentient beings;
(6)	*sems rnam par dag pa*	purity of mind;
(7)	*mos pa la sogs pa lhur byed pa*	striving for devotion and so forth;
(8)	*bdud la sogs pa rnams kyis mi 'phrogs pa*	not robbed by Māra etc.;
(9)	*pha rol pos rab tu khyer ba nyid kyis nyan thos la sogs pa'i sa la ltung ba med pa*	no falling to the level of *śrāvaka*s etc. due to being swept away by others;

(10)	*bdud kyis nye bar bstan pa la bdud kyi smra ba nyid rtogs pa*	recognition that what Māra teaches is just the doctrine of Māra;
(11)	*mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa thob pa*	attainment of certitude that dharmas are not produced;
(12)	*phyir mi ldog pa nyid*	irreversibility itself;
(13)	*bsam gtan gyi 'bras bu mi 'dod pa*	no desire for the fruits of *dhyāna*;
(14)	*'dod pa na spyod pa'i chos rnams la gnas par byed de zhes bya ba ni sems can gyi don mthong bas 'dod pa'i khams su skye ba zhes bya ba lhur byed pa*	striving for "rebirth in the desire realm" as a result of having seen that "effecting abiding in the dharmas of action in the desire realm" means [accomplishing] the welfare of sentient beings;
(15)	*phyag na rdo rje gnod sbyin gyi dbang po rtag tu phyi bzhin 'brang ba yang dag par shes par byed pa'i rgyu*	the power of the *yakṣa* Vajrapāṇi always following behind, which is the cause of effecting correct knowledge;
(16)	*smon lam ci lta bar skye ba la sogs pa sgrub par byed pa'i rnam par dag pa'i bsam pa nyid*	pure thought that effects the accomplishment of rebirth etc. in accordance with one's prayers;
(17)	*rang gi sa la the tshom med pa*	no doubts about one's level;
(18)	*chos yongs su bzung ba'i don du srog kyang yongs su gtong ba*	sacrificing even one's life for the sake of thoroughly apprehending dharma;

(19)	*yongs su gzung ba'i chos rnams la the tshom med pa*	no doubt about thoroughly apprehended dharmas.

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