

THE PROBLEM OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MAHAYANA

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Everyone knows that the origin of the Mahayana is a mystery. Suddenly, there appeared a number of sutras, all claiming to be *Buddha-vacana*, which criticize, in varying degrees of hostility, the Hinayana, and frequently refer to themselves as the Mahayana. Where did they come from, and why?

The usual answer, pioneered by Bareau¹ and augmented by Lamotte² and Conze,³ has been a *historical* one.

According to this view, the Mahayana has its sources primarily among the Mahāsaṃghikas.⁴ The school of that name held that the Buddha was infinite⁵ and *lokottara*,⁶ and two of its offshoots, the Prajñaptivādins and the Bahuśrutīyas, taught some form of the doctrines of *prajñapti* and *śūnyatā*.⁷

In addition, we have to recognize the influence of other schools: the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma at the back of the Prajñāpāramitā literature, according to Conze;⁸ and the *dhāraṇī-pitaka* of the Dharmaguptakas.⁹ Then there is the probable Zoroastrian influence on the Sukhāvātī-vyūha.¹⁰ And generally speaking, the impetus behind this new movement was the pressure of the laity, which the Mahāsaṃghikas were open to anyway.

Unfortunately, the argument goes, we have lost almost the entire canon of the Mahāsaṃghikas and their subschools, and we therefore have a very incomplete picture of the emergence of the Mahayana. But we can assume that it developed gradually out of this branch of traditional Buddhism, though not unaffected by a few extraneous influences.

This account, which is carefully argued and based on scrupulous scholarship, is very tempting. But when we examine it closely it appears even more full of holes than its proponents admit.

To begin with, it is exceedingly vague - so vague, in fact that it may be unfalsifiable. How, for example, are we to explain that the Mahāsaṃghikas agree with the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins in omitting *tathatā* (or *dharma-sthitatā*) from the list of *asamskrta-dharmas*?¹¹

If the *śūnyatā* wing of the Mahayana is influenced by the Prajñaptivādins, why does the term *prajñapti* occur only twice in the whole of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*?¹²

The Mahāsaṃghikas, though accepting the *mūlāvijñāna*,¹³ reject the teaching of *vāsanā* and *bīja*;¹⁴ yet the early Mahayana includes them,¹⁵ presumably taking them from the Sautrāntikas.¹⁶ So now we have to add this school to the Mahāsaṃghikas, Prajñaptivādins, Bahuśrutīyas, Sarvāstivādins and Dharmaguptakas as sources for seminal Mahayana ideas. This calls for an explanation that is stronger than the "missing evidence" thesis.

Similarly, at least four Mahāsaṃghika doctrines seem to be in direct conflict with the *śūnyatāvāda*.¹⁷ Not only that, but the Prajñaptivādins and the Bahuśrutīyas clearly split from the original Mahāsaṃghikas because of their teachings on *śūnyatā*. How is it, then, that the Mahayana manages to bring back together the Buddhology of the Mahāsaṃghikas and the *śūnyatāvāda* of their offshoots?

Again, the Gokulikas, who gave rise to the Prajñaptivādins and the Bahuśrutīyas, rejected the sutras and the Vinaya, and regarded the Abhidharma alone as the *Buddha-śāsana*.¹⁸ This does not square with the total reliance of the Mahayana on its own sutras, nor with the complete absence of a Mahayana equivalent of the Vinaya or Abhidharma (until very late).

Another question: how are we to explain the emergence of the Bodhisattva as the Mahayana ideal? The references to the Bodhisattva by the Mahāsaṃghikas are few, and the term is understood in the usual Hinayana sense of Śākyamuni before his enlightenment.¹⁹ Moreover, these references are

restricted to the Bodhisattva's birth - hardly Mahayana material. Scholars have frequently pointed out the importance of the Jātakas and Avadānas (this is part of the argument for the lay influence on the emergence of the Mahayana), as well as the occurrence of scenes illustrating the *pāramitās* on the *stūpas* at Sāncī, Bhārahāt and Amarāvātī. But we must assume that these were common Buddhist property. What we know of the Mahāsaṃghikas does not lead us to believe that it was this school that developed them.²⁰

Yet another question: if the Mahayana was influenced by the laity, or was even a concession to it, why does the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* say that it is practically impossible to understand the *śūnyatāvāda*?²¹ Why does the Saddharmapundarikā say that the Dharma is deep and difficult to know?²² These texts advocate considerable extensions and subtle transformations of the Dharma, not a dilution of it.

All of these points can be summed up very simply: many new ideas were available to Buddhists, some of which were particularly favoured or developed by specific schools. But it is not obvious that the Mahayana, which synthesised these ideas into a whole, is based on any one of these schools.

This is indicated by the fact, as Bareau notes,²³ that not one work of any Hinayana school mentions the Mahayana by name - the very word is entirely missing. And not only that, but the Mahayana sutras also do not refer to any specific school - they simply use their own blanket term "hinayana". Now if the Mahayana had evolved out of the Mahāsaṃghikas, is it not likely that there would be some reference to them, somewhere, at some time? But there isn't. Are the Mahāsaṃghikas and their offshoots included in the Hinayana or not? We just don't know - the Mahayana sutras are silent.

I suggest that a purely historical approach will never answer the questions I have raised. And this is not because we do not have the evidence to hand, but rather because we first need to answer the question: *how* and *why*

are the main strands of the Mahayana related (namely: Buddhology, the *Bodhisattva-caryā*, *śūnyatā* and *prabhāsvara-citta*)? This is a religious question, not a historical one. And as we indicated above, even if we accept that the Mahayana did grow out of the Mahāsamghikas and their offshoots (though personally I do not think it did), the question still remains of how the very different ideas of this tradition were united in the Mahayana.

Before going on to try and answer this basic question of the how and why of the Mahayana, we must be aware of two important facts established by recent scholarship.

First, the earliest Mahayana sutras were much shorter than the versions we have now. I have summarized the evidence for this elsewhere.²⁴ Here we need only mention the following vital points: the earliest Mahayana teachings were transmitted orally,²⁵ secretly²⁶ and probably in small groups.²⁷

Secondly, and following from the first point, the ideas and doctrines of the earliest strata of the earliest sutras cannot easily be placed in a linear order of development. The concepts of Bodhisattva, *śūnyatā*, *tathatā*, *Buddha-jñāna*, *pariṇāma*, *upāya*, *pāramitā*, *prabhāsvara-citta*, *Buddha-kāya* etc., are found with various senses, and in various relationships with each other, in different sutras.²⁸ As we discover how the texts themselves have evolved over the centuries, we find that we cannot use the later, established senses of these terms to understand their usage in the earliest strata. Lancaster, for example, has shown that the concept of *upāya* in the first Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* Prajñāpāramitā is mainly restricted to the Bodhisattva's use of *upāya* to gain enlightenment for himself. This is very different from the way the concept is used in the later recensions of the same text.²⁹ I have shown that the earliest layer of the *Saddharmapundarīka* is not unduly critical of the Śrāvakas (i.e. the Hinayana), and that it says that even *avaivartika* Bodhisattvas cannot know the range (*viśaya*) of the *Buddha-jñāna* - not at all what one

would believe from reading the expanded Nepalese version that we now have.³⁰

The fact is that *all* the seminal Mahayana concepts of the Mahayana are found early on, but with an extremely uneven development in the various texts. The simplest way of explaining this is to postulate a *multi-origin* of the Mahayana. But this is not primarily a historical claim, but a religious one. I propose a *three-fold transformation* of Buddhism, the interactions of which gave rise to the many-faceted phenomenon we call the Mahayana. These transformations are:

1. A *fragmentation of transmission*. By a division of labour, some monks specialized in the sutras, some in the Vinaya, some in the Abhidharma, some in the Jātakas and Avadānas.³¹ Each of these divisions created its own peculiar biases and developments.
2. The *dimensions* of the Buddhist tradition were also separated out and, more than that, extended. These dimensions are:
 - (a) *śīla*: Key terms: *viśuddha*, *punya*, *guna*, *kuśala-mūlā*, *pūjā*, *śraddhā*; Main theme: glorification of the Buddha; Base the *stūpa*
 - (b) *samādhi*: Key terms: (i) the nature of *citta*: *prabhāsvara-citta*, *bodhicitta*, *mūlā-vijñāna*, *āśraya*, *bīja*; (ii) the manifestations of *citta*: *ṛddhi*, *vikurvana*, *nirmāṇa*, *anubhāva*, *adhiṣṭhāna*; Main theme: magical and spiritual transformation; Base: the *aranyāyatana*.³²
 - (c) *prajñā*: Key terms: *Buddha-jñāna*, *śūnyatā*, *amatā*, *tathatā*, *dharmadhātu*; Main theme: *paramārtha*; Base: the *vihāra*.³³

3. The underlying *motif* of the Dharma was altered. It was now immeasurableness (*aprameya*) or infinity (*ananta*): the Buddha is infinite (*śīla* dimension);³⁴ *citta* and its manifestations are infinite (*samādhi* dimension);³⁵ the *prajñāpāramitā* is infinite (*prajñā* dimension).³⁶

I now present a hypothesis concerning the origin of the Mahayana, a hypothesis that is tacitly based on these transformations. I am in effect placing the emergence of

the new yana in a religious context, i.e., I am attempting to explain the how and the why of the Mahayana.

I suggest that there were separate groups of Buddhists, both monk and lay, which claimed direct contact with the Buddha, or some Mahāśrāvaka (e.g. the opening of the Ratnagūṇasamcayagāthā, or some Bodhisattva (e.g. Mañjuśrī in the Saddharmapundarīka). This was an inspirational, in some cases even visionary, contact that was extremely powerful, totally convincing to those who experienced it, and passed on from person to person (not unlike the Subud latihan). It was independent of any school or group of schools; in other words, it occurred spontaneously or by direct transmission among groups of Buddhists that belonged to many different affiliations.

The claim of the Mahayana sutras (which were, remember, originally concise oral teachings) to be *Buddha-vacana* is not, therefore, a propaganda device or a pious fiction. The authors of these works genuinely thought of themselves as channels for a *śāsana* that needed to make no appeal to existing teachings. That is why the sutras make no mention of schools by name.

The result of this new inspiration was the realization that the Dharma had been straitjacketed by conservatism; doctrinally, socially and most importantly, in its religious aspiration. The guiding force of the new awareness was *aprameya*.

But this realization was itself filtered through one of the three dimensions of *śīla*, *śamādhi* or *prajñā* (with varying combinations, of course; see the end of my Conze Festschrift article). The *stūpa*-based *śīla* groups were lay oriented; the more retired *śamādhi* groups were probably mainly monks but there may well have been lay members also; the *vihāra*-based *prajñā* groups were entirely composed of monks. All of these groups (which were separated geographically as well as being centred on different buildings or institutions, with all the social differences that these imply) contributed to the Mahayana. The Bodhisattva is in fact an amalgam of these three, which explains why, for example, the Prajñāpāramitā literature is obviously non-lay while Vimalakīrti is a wealthy merchant. And, of course,

these inspired groups could have any number of prior allegiances: Mahāsamghika, Prajñaptivādin, Bahuśrutīya, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivādin, Sautrāntika and so on. These traditional distinctions were irrelevant and were swept away under the inspiration of the new *śāsana*.

So the Mahayana has a multi-origin that is varied in time (some elements of it are very old, some very new), in provenance (some groups in the northwest, some in the southwest, some maybe even in Central Asia) and in religious dimension (i.e., *śīla*, *śamādhi* or *prajñā*). This is why the term *mahāyāna* itself is used so casually in the earliest sutras. Other terms such as *Buddha-yāna*, *eka-yāna*, *agra-yāna*, *udāra-yāna* etc., in fact occur more often. There are several instances in the Saddharmapundarīka, the text that is most concerned with this subject, where some recensions have one of these terms and other recensions have another.³⁷ The Astasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā has only one occurrence of *buddhayāna*,³⁸ but in its earliest stratum specifically says that the *mahāyāna* is *aprameya* and *ananta*.³⁹ The Sukhāvatī-vyūha sutras do not use the term *mahāyāna* once.

In fact, the Mahayana was not a school at all and did not evolve out of a school or schools. It was a transforming movement which accepted anyone regardless of his/her background, and in its earliest phases, at least, relied exclusively on its own independent inspiration. In this it is not unlike Pentecostalism, which includes both Catholics and Protestants, but which in the last analysis claims the Holy Spirit as its justification. And we know that, historically, Pentecostalism did not grow out of either Catholicism or Protestantism, but was rather a pan-Christian movement that spread by virtue of the shared experience of its practitioners. This is not to say, of course, that Pentecostalism does not have demonstrable roots in traditional Christianity. The point is that it does not need to go back to traditional Christianity as a source for its teaching. (Another analogy with the Mahayana might be Gnosticism, which was larger than Christianity but was also found within it but in fact is independent of it.)

We will not be surprised to find, therefore, that the Mahayana, like Pentecostalism and Gnosticism, used varied sources in order to flesh out its teaching. These included:

1. *reinterpretations* of the Nikāyas, including specific passages,⁴⁰ by those who were conversant with them;
2. *speculations* of every description from the more progressive schools (e.g. the Mahāsamghikas and their off-shoots);
3. *reassessment* of traditional techniques (e.g. the Prajñāpāramitā literature's radical re-orientation of Abhidharma practice);
4. *inclusion* of non-exclusive practices (e.g. the pāramitās; stūpa worship);
5. *acceptance* of foreign influences (e.g. Amitāyus; the Buddha image in northwest India).

We are asking the wrong question if we try and find an origin of the Mahayana (allowing for a few extraneous additions.) We will not find it among the laity or the Mahāsamghikas or among rebel monks or breakaway Abhidharmists or among the invading tribes of northwest India. All of these made a contribution, but the contribution of each was controlled by the multi-dimensional model of the Mahayana that existed from the beginning.

The multi-origin that I propose has, as one of its attractions, that it takes the Mahayana sutras themselves seriously. There was a reason why they claim to be *Buddha-vacana*. In an important religious sense, they are: they were received by the few and transmitted to the many. It is likely that the Mahayana's early spread was very rapid, and, like any inspirational movement, its adherents were tenacious and influential out of all proportion to their numbers. The bulky and somewhat laborious nature of the sutras as we now have them has obscured this possibility, as has the ponderous response of the traditional schools, which were probably barely aware of the new phenomenon. But hidden beneath all these textual elaborations and sectarian accretions is a simple and perennial truth: that the spring of spirituality is inexhaustible and wells up in the most unexpected places.

NOTES TO A. RAWLINSON "THE ORIGIN OF MAHAYANA"

1. A. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule* (Saigon: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955), esp. appendix III.
2. E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon 43, 1958), 689-95.

3. E. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), 195-98.

4. Additional support for this view comes from A. and H. Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1974), 1-3, who argue that this text arose from within the Mahāsaṃghikas.

5. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 58-59, thesis 6, 7, 8.

6. Ibid., 57, thesis 1. The *lokottara* theme is common to many of the sub-schools of the Mahāsaṃghikas (ibid., 76) - in fact, all the main tenets of the Lokottaravādins (ibid., 76-77) are also found among the parent Mahāsaṃghikas (ibid., 58-61). The exact significance of this is impossible to assess since none of Bareau's sources (Vasumitra, Bhavya, Vinītadeva, Paramārtha, Hsuan-tsang, Tāranātha) agree as to which school (out of the Mahāsaṃghikas, Ekavyāvahārikas, Lokottaravādins and Gokulikas) teaches what their relationship to each other is, or even whether they all exist (ibid., 75-77).

7. Ibid., 81-86.

8. *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature* ('S-Gravenhage, Holland: Mouton, 1960), 12.

9. If only because we need some explanation of why ch. 21 of the Saddharmapundarikā is entitled *dhāraṇī-parivarta*.

10. See M. de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'étude d'Avalokiteśvara* (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 1948) 86-95. Cf. E. Conze's review, reprinted in his *Further Buddhist Studies* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1975), 150-54.

11. See the list (Les Incomposés) given in Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 285-86.

12. At A i 16 and A vii 177 (all references are to Mitra's ed.), see *prajñapti* in E. Conze, *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature* (Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1973).

13. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 72 thesis 78.

14. Ibid., 79.

15. The two terms are common in the *Lakkāvātāra* (see D.T. Suzuki, *An Index to the Lakkāvātāra Sutra* (Kyoto: The Sanskrit Buddhist Texts Publishing Society, 1934); [reprinted by the Suzuki Research Foundation, n.d. for reference], and are seminal to the *Tathāgatagarbha* texts (e.g., Śrīmālādevīśimhanāda and Ratnagotravibhāga).

16. See P.S. Jaini, "The Sautrāntika Theory of *Bīja*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 22 (1959), 236-49.

17. Thesis 18 (Bareau, 61): "*Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, "Quand les Bodhisattva entrent dans une matrice (*garbha*), ils ne reçoivent pas les formes embryonnaires...comme leur *svabhāva*." Thesis 29 (Ibid., 64): "Les Srotāpanna peuvent comprendre la *svabhāva* de leur pensée (*citta*) et de leur choses mentales (*caitta dharma*)." Thesis 43 (Ibid., 67) [among the nine *asamskṛta-dharma*]: *pratītyasamutpādāṅgasvabhāva* and *mārgāṅgasvabhāva*. Thesis 71 (ibid., 71): "La causalité (*paccayatā*) est déterminée (*vavatthitā*)." In fact, the term *śūnya* occurs only once, as a synonym of *anātmya* (thesis 23, ibid., 62) - a purely non-Mahayana sense. There is no evidence whatever that the Mahāsaṃghikas held any version of the *śūnyatāvāda*. (Conze's references in *Buddhist Thought in India*, 198, are completely misleading - they are all to

later sub-schools of the Mahāsaṃghikas.) On the contrary, they seem to have held a sort of *lokottaradharmasvabhāva*.

18. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 79.

19. This is even true of the famous *daśabhūmika* section of the Mahāvastu (pp. 53-157 of vol. 1 of Senart's ed.). The connection between these ten *bhūmīs* and the ten *bhūmīs* of the later Mahayana is so tenuous as to be worthless as evidence of Mahāsaṃghika influence (see Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, 695).

20. The ascription of a *Bodhisattva-piṭaka* to the Bahusrutīyas - and also to the Dharmaguptakas - is a sticky point, but personally I do not find the evidence (Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 296-97) convincing:

(1) Paramārtha (6th century), Hsuan-tsang (7th century) and Harivarman (3rd century) do not agree with one another as to the composition of the Mahāsaṃghika canon.

(2) The existence of the *Bodhisattva-piṭaka* of the Bahusrutīyas is based solely on the following chain of reasoning:

(a) the Śātyasiddhisāstra makes this claim;

(b) it was written by Harivarman;

(c) it is a work of the Bahusrutīyas (according to Paramārtha).

This is very tenuous evidence, to put it mildly.

(3) Both Paramārtha and Hsuan-tsang are much too late for their assertions to be any more than pious traditionalism.

In other words, the argument that the Bodhisattva ideal emerged from the Mahāsaṃghikas is based on evidence that will support only a much weaker conclusion: namely that the Mahāsaṃghikas contained elements in their teaching that are sympathetic to the influence of the Mahayana (in the same way as a minor chord is sympathetic to a major chord).

No one, as far as I am aware, has ever suggested that the Bodhisattva ideal is derived from the Sarvāstivādins, even though the Abhidharmakośa (5th century) contains a very detailed account of the *Bodhisattva-caryā*. And the reason is clear: there is no obvious sympathy between Sarvāstivādin soteriology and that of the Mahayana. Hence the *Bodhisattva-caryā* portions of the Abhidharmakośa are either part of the common tradition of the Bodhisattva that we find in the Jātaka/Avadāna literature (of all schools), or they are themselves the result of the influence of the Mahayana on the Sarvāstivādins, and not the other way round. I suggest that the evidence for the influence of the Mahāsaṃghikas on the Mahayana is no stronger than that for the influence of the Sarvāstivādins, and should be interpreted in the same way; i.e. it is an element in the Mahayana but not the source of it.

To emphasize this point it is worth remembering that we have no way of explaining how it is that the earliest Mahayana sutras are evidently quite at home with such Bodhisattvas as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, whose very existence and names cannot be found in any traditional Buddhist school, Mahāsaṃghika or otherwise.

Such considerations lead me to the conclusion that the whole Bodhisattva ideal (in the specific Mahayana sense of [a] all beings are potentially Buddhas, and [b] there are innumerable Bodhisattvas working for the benefit of all beings) is of independent origin, i.e., it was based on a quite distinct experience of the Dharma (and the Buddha) that was then dovetailed into

traditional Buddhism - and thereby transformed it - by Buddhists who had to find something to hand their experience on. Their starting point was Śākyamuni as a Bodhisattva but they very quickly moved beyond this into a new dimension, where the Bodhisattva stands for a means of transformation that is so devastating as to be revolutionary. I see nothing in the Mahāsaṃghikas that can account for this departure (apart from their obvious openness to innovation, but this is not a sufficient explanation in itself).

21. E.g., A i 5-8.

22. E.g., ch.2, v.33.

23. *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 299. Even Buddhaghosa (5th century) and the Vibhāṣā (3rd century) are silent. As Bareau admits, this is odd, since on the whole the Hinayanists were very concerned to refute false views. It is sometimes claimed (e.g., by Lamotte, no less, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, 590), that the Mahayana is referred to by Buddhaghosa in his commentary on Kathāvatthu 17.6 and 18.1 under the name of the Vetulyas, also known as the Mahāsuññavādins (though one edition has the v.r. Mahāpunnāvadins); the terms *Vetulyavāda* and *Vedālja-pitaka* are also found in three late Theravādin texts (see *The Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* under *Vetullavāda* for reference) in which nothing is made clear except that the authors disapprove of them. I fail to see how any conclusion whatever can be drawn from these fragmentary assertions. Moreover, the supposed connection between the terms *vetulla/vetulya/vaitulya* on the one hand, and *vepulla/vepulya/vaipulya* on the other, which would then connect the Vetullavādins and the *vaipulya-sūtras* of the Mahayana, is extremely suspect. I have discussed this problem in Appendix II of my thesis, "Studies in the Lotus Sutra," 2 vols. (University of Lancaster, 1972). Bareau's own answer to this silence on behalf of the Hinayana school is simply that neither the Sarvāstivādins nor the Theravādins knew of the Mahayana because it arose around the second century A.C. far away from Kashmir and Sri Lanka. Indeed, there is little else he could say. By contrast, our view is that the Mahayana was a pan-Buddhist inspirational movement that swept through the continent like wild-fire. It did not consider itself to be a school and was, in turn, not regarded as one by the Hinayanists - they therefore ignored it (insofar as they bothered to find out about it in the first place).

24. A. Rawlinson, "The Position of the Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā in the Development of Early Mahayana," in L. Lancaster (ed.) *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems (Studies in Honor of Edward Conze)* (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1977) 3-34.

25. Evidence: (1) Chs. 1-9 of the Saddharmapundarīka never refer to writing the sutra, though they frequently mention the merit that follows from reciting it, chanting it, and holding it in mind. From Ch. 10 onwards, however, writing is mentioned (along with reciting, chanting, and holding in mind); (2) Chs. 30 and 31 of the Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā (the *avadāna* of *Sadāpraruditā*) is very similar to ch. 22 of the Saddharmapundarīka and ch. 33 of the *Samādhirāja* (see Rawlinson, "Position," 6, for details). This is best explained as three separate adaptations of a single *avadāna* - and such adaptations are to be expected in oral transmission; (3) the Kashgar and Nepalese mss. of the Saddharmapundarīka sometimes contain differences that

cannot be easily explained by scribal errors or emendations. Two verses from ch. 8 will illustrate this:

Nepalese (Kern-Nanjio ed.)

Kashgar (Toda transliteration)

Ullasā Sūtra - 107B

v. 37 *Samtarpayitvāna ca bhojanena
anekamūlyam ratanam ca dadyāt
buddhvo 'ttariye vāsanānti granthim
dattvā ca tasyeha bhaveta tustah*

*samtarpayitvāna ca bhojanena
anarghamūlyam ratanaṃ tasya dadyāt
bandhita ca antarīme nivāsane
granthīm kṛtvā ca bhaveta tustah*

v. 38 *so cāpi prakrāntu bhaveta bālo
utthāya so 'nyam nagaram vrajeta
so kṛcchrappṛāptah kṛpāṇi gavenī
āhāra paryeṣati khidyamānah*

*sa cāpi prakrānta bhaveta bāla
utthāya so nagara vrajeta anyam
ca kṛcchrappṛāpte kṛpāṇi vrajeta
āhārastrāni paryeṣamānah*

The most striking differences are: (1) the last two lines of v. 37, which are simply different ways of saying the same thing (as one would expect in oral transmission); (2) the last two lines of v. 38, which diverge very considerably judged by the normal standards of variations in mss., and must, in my view, represent slightly different recensions of the same story.

26. Evidence: (1) References to "my secret (*rahas*) that the Bodhisattvas should hold in mind (*āhārayantu*)" (Saddharmapundarīka, ch. 2, v. 139, of Kern-Nanjio ed. = v. 40 in Wogihara-Tsuchida ed.); and to "hidden/mysterious/esoteric speech" (*saṃdṛhābhāṣya* [28.10 of Kern-Nanjio ed.] or *saṃdṛhāvācāna* [ch. 2, vv. 143 and 144 of Kern-Nanjio ed. = vv. 144 and 145 of Wogihara-Tsuchida ed.]). The meaning of this phrase, and how it relates to the concept of *upāya*, is discussed at length in my thesis (cited in n.23 above), esp. n. 221; (2) Vv. 137ff of ch. 3 of the Saddharmapundarīka say that the highest truth (*paramārtha*; perhaps "real meaning") should only be taught to those who have seen many Buddhas, planted innumerable good roots (*kuśala*-[*mūla*]), have a firm resolve (*āpādhāyāśaya*), are full of vigour (*vīryavanta*), with a mind that is constantly suffused with friendliness (*sada maitrīcitta*), who have given away (*ateṣṭa*; possibly: "abandoned attachment to") their body (*kāya*) and life (*jīvitā*), whose morality (*sīla*) is flawless like a gem, who are endowed with pity (*kṛpā*) for all living beings, who are searching for all-knowledge ...etc., etc. This is the classic "minimal" description of the Bodhisattva, and though that term is not used in these verses (though "sons of the Buddha" is), it seems obvious to me that we are dealing with a special group (not unlike "those who are called to the Spirit," as the Pentecostals say).

27. This really follows necessarily from the fact that transmission of the new Dharma was both oral and secret. But additional evidence is the existence of self-contained parables, *avadānas* and *dharma-pariṇāyas*, in the early Mahayana sutras; (see Rawlinson, "Positions," 3-7). Independent works like this could only exist in such profusion if there were a relatively large number of groups amongst whom they circulated.

28. I have made a somewhat sketchy attempt to show this in my thesis (cited in n.23 above), paras. 1095ff. Also relevant here are pp.19-21 of my Conze Festschrift article (cited in n.24 above), in which I try to explain the occurrence of various concepts in the early sutras as the result of cross-

fertilization, so to speak, from the different strands that made up the Mahayana.

29. L. Lancaster, "An Analysis of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* from the Chinese Translation," Ph.D thesis (Wisconsin: 1968), 36-57. The main tenets of the thesis are summarized in L. Lancaster, "The Oldest Mahayana Sutra: Its Significance for the Study of Buddhist Development," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 8/1 (May 1975) 30-41.

30. See my thesis, paras. 425-53; summarized in my Conze Festschrift article p.8. The crucial passage is ch. 2, vv. 1-17, of which vv. 1-7 (in Śloka) expressly contradict vv. 8-17 (in Tristubh).

31. Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhistes*, 49-50; Rawlinson, "Position," 18.

32. This very useful term, which I have not found in any Sanskrit text, was suggested to me by A. Hirakawa, "The Rise of Mahayana and its Relation to the Worship of Stupas." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 22:57-106. The term occurs on p.85, and Hirakawa gives references to the second-century Chinese translation of the *Ugradattapariprocchāsūtra* (Taisho 12, no.322, p.20a; no.323, p.28a; Taisho 11 no.310, p.477c).

33. I have discussed these three dimensions in a slightly different context in "The Ambiguity of the Buddha-nature Concept in India and China," in L. Lancaster and W. Lai (eds.), *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet* (Berkeley: 1979).

34. E.g., "Homage to you, the infinite" (p.62 of Wayman's translation of the *Śrīmālādevīsīmaṇīnādasūtra*, cited above n.4).

35. E.g., "Le *Śūramgamasamādhi* est tellement immense (*apramāṇa*) qu'il révèle la toute puissance miraculeuse du Buddha et que d'innombrables êtres en retirent avantage" (E. Lamotte, *La Concentration de la Marche Heroïque [Śūramgamasamādhisūtra]* [Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1965], 140).

36. E.g., "This perfection of wisdom, Subhuti, is a great perfection, unlimited (*apramāṇa*), measureless (*aparimāṇa*), infinite (*ananta*)" (E. Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* [Bollinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973], 100, =p.45 of Mitra's ed.).

37. E.g., 132.11 of the Kern-Nanjio ed., where the Buddha says that there is only the *ekayāna*, the *buddhayāna*. But the reading *buddhayāna* is supported by only three Nepalese mss; another three have *mahāyāna*, which is also supported by the Gilgit ms. (Ga folio 50b = 61.29 of S. Watanabe, *Saddharmapundarikā* Manuscripts Found in Gilgit [Tokyo: The Reiyukai, 1975], pt.2). But *buddhayāna* is supported by the Kashgar ms. (folio 132a). (There is a gap in the Gilgit ms. Gb. here; and this second half of ch. 5 is omitted in Kumarajiva, so we have no reading from him either.) Similarly, Kern-Nanjio 82.10 has *mahāyāna* (supported by both Gilgit fragments: Ga 33b [=34.11 of Watanabe] and Gb 27b [=210.25 of Watanabe]), where the Kashgar ms. has *buddhayāna* (90a), which is supported by Kumarajiva (13c17 of the Taisho ed.).

38. Mitra's ed., p.319

39. Mitra's ed., p.23

40. See the clichés collected at the end of Lamotte's translations of the *Śūramgamasamādhisūtra* (cited in n.35 above) and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon 51, 1962); the passages noted by Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (cited in n.2 above), 650-52; the concepts and

passages noted by Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (cited in n.3 above), 196-221.