The Urtext of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra (MMPS)*

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INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ōchō has offered the suggestion, which still remains unexamined, that initially the first one third of the MMPS, ending with the chapter "Nikṣepa", might have been compiled. We on the whole agree with his suggestion because of the following two facts: 1) there are so many contradictions in the content of the former one third and the latter two thirds, not merely in regard to doctrine but also as regards historical background; and 2) in the three versions of the MMPS, two Chinese (Taisho No. 374=Ch.1, Taisho No. 376=Ch. 2) and one Tibetan (Peking No. 788=T), corresponding passages have in most cases been enlarged not at random but in the order Ch. 2→T→Ch. 1, and this direction is quite likely to suggest the circumstances of the compiling process of the MMPS.

The establishment of the primitive sūtra (PMMPS) as a prototype of the MMPS would solve the two problems mentioned above in a reasonable way. Firstly, the contradictions between the former and the latter parts could be regarded as the result of the transformation undergone in the course of the development of the MMPS from the PMMPS into the MMPS in its extant form. Secondly, the PMMPS could also function as a Idealtypus explaining the meaning of the direction of enlargement in the order Ch. 2→T→Ch. 1.

In examining the suggestion offered by Dr. Ōchō, we shall in this paper search for the PMMPS as it may be induced on the basis of the two above mentioned factors.

CONCLUSION

The PMMPS was composed of chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 (the
numbering follows Ch. 2) with the exception of some passages which must have been inserted in the course of the enlargement of the PMMPS. The supporters of the PMMPS were called dharmabhāṇakas. They had almost no saṃghas and usually traveled individually with laymen, including the caṇḍālas or untouchables, who did not accept pañcaśikṣāpadas and were armed with weapons. They were not rigorous in applying the Vinaya rules and were tolerant of those who violated the Vinaya. They had no intention of criticizing those who belonged to the Hinayāna vehicle and kept flexibly in touch with both monks and laymen.

The thought of the PMMPS as presented by the dharmabhāṇakas was the eternity of the dharmakāya. As an epithet of the Buddha, they accepted the term atman, which was one of the items of the caturviparitadṛṣṭi and had been strictly avoided in Buddhist literature.

The MMPS, on the other hand, is supported by people who call themselves bodhisattvas. They have settled in places connected with the stūpas and begun to build up an organization including laymen in which priority is given to the monks. They are more strict in keeping rules than the dharmabhāṇakas and draw a definite line between not only laymen but also violators of the Vinaya and the bodhisattvas themselves. They have started criticizing the srāvakas and have become intolerant of the caṇḍālas.

The bodhisattvas advocate the theory of tathāgatagarbha. They claim that all sentient beings have the essence of Buddhahood, or the dharmakāya, in their individual personality, but in the state of a cause, which they call buddhadhātu. They have remodeled the theory of the caturviparitadṛṣṭi of the PMMPS into their own pattern on the basis of the theory of tathāgatagarbha and use the term atman as an epithet of buddhadhātu.

Lastly, this PMMPS, completed as an Idealtypus, may well be identified as either the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra translated by An Fa xian (安法賢) or that translated by Zhi Qian (支謙), both of which are lost but recorded in the Chinese catalogue of translators of the Tripiṭaka.