

# The Urtext of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (*MMPS*)

by Masahiro SHIMODA

## 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 *ātman*, which was one of the items of the *caturviparītadr̥ṣṭi* 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 *śrāvakas* 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 *caturviparītadr̥ṣṭi* of the *PMMPS* into their own pattern on the basis of the theory of *tathāgatagarbha* and use the term *ātman* 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*.