

# The Motif of *Upasatha* Quoted in the *Mahāyāna-Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and *Aśokāvadāna*

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

It has been indicated so far that the preceptors and followers of the *Mahāyāna-Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (*MPS*), which is well-known as one of the sūtras of Tathāgatagarbha thought, compiled the sūtra with the intention of restoring the precepts of Buddhism and rigidly enforcing them on the Buddhist Sanghas which had rather degenerated at the time<sup>1)</sup>. A profusion of evil deeds, such as the storing of eight kinds of prohibited things, eating the meat of animals, dealing in goods, etc., are listed in the sūtra. These deeds seem to have been prevalent among bhikṣus even though they did, of course, go against the teachings of the Sūtras and Vinayas. The *MPS* denounces them without any reservation, and it is to be imagined through descriptions in the *MPS* that there must have been some conflicts between the group of the *MPS* and other members of Buddhist sects which were not so strict in keeping the rules. The *MPS* has been elucidated from the standpoint of the theory of Tathāgatagarbha, but there still remains the question of identifying its historical position in the chronology of Buddhism. This is partly due to the fact that the accounts in the *MPS* have not been sufficiently compared with other Buddhist literature. The *MPS* has not a few quotations from other Buddhist texts, through the comparative study of which we may clarify its historical position. We will point out in this paper that in the context of warning against the decadance of Sanghas, the *MPS* presents the motif of *uposatha* which is widely known in the tradition of the Sarvāstivādins.

## 1. AN INCIDENT OF THE *UPOSATHA* IN THE *MPS*

In the fourth chapter of the *MPS*, entitled "On Life-Span 寿命品" in Fa Xien's 法顯 version, the main theme of which is to make it clear that

the bodhisattvas who are to exert themselves to the utmost in the teaching of the *MPS* have to show mercy on every living being as the Buddha did, a dialogue between the Buddha and Kāśyapa, one of his main disciples, attracts our attention. It goes as follows :

Kāśyapa asks : Then, O Blessed One, when the ordained attendants *bsnyen par rdsogs pa'i 'khor dag pa rnams* assembled at the meeting of "*uposatha*" *gso sbyongs* held on the 15th, why did you allow Vajrapāṇi, the king of demons *gnod byings gyi rgyal po lag na rdo rjes*, to crush the boy *gzhon nu* who was, without accepting the precepts and with the body unclean, not invited to the meeting and was listening to it secretly by the wall in a corner? Vajrapāṇi committed a severe sin since he killed the boy.....

The Blessed One replis : Clansman, you should not say such a thing. The boy was in fact a phantom *sprul ba*. I created Vajrapāṇi by magic to destroy the boy with the intention of destroying and expelling those who are to ruin the sacred Dharma, but it is not right to kill anyone who ruins righteous Dharma or is even an *icchantika*<sup>2)</sup>.

This dialogue is in a context which declares that there occurred no actual murder in the history of Buddhism since the buddhists should take mercy on everybody without exception. This suggests that the *MPS* must have known of some event handed down to its age and reinterpreted it from its own viewpoint.

## 2. THE DISPUTE AT KOSAMBĪ IN THE *AŚOKĀVADĀNA*

The motif mentioned above reminds us of an episode known as "the dispute at Kosambī" found in some texts of the *Aśokāvadāna*. Let us take up an abstract of the episode from Sūtra No. 640 of the *Samyuktāgama*, one of the Chinese versions of the *Aśokāvadāna*<sup>3)</sup>.

The Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha, was about to be annihilated when a meeting of *uposatha* was held on the 15th. There was only a single Arhat named Xio Luo Ta 修羅他 (Sradha?) among a huge number of monks who gathered at Kosambī. There was also a single monk named Disciple 弟子, who was deeply versed in the Tripiṭaka 三藏. Disciple was going to make a recitation of the Prātimokṣa 波羅提木叉 and said to the bhikṣus there, "I who have mastered the Tripiṭaka am the head of this Sangha but I have not yet learned the

Vinaya. Is there any person who is able to recite the *Prātimokṣa* for me?" At the time, Xio Luo Ta addressed himself to Disciple, saying, "I will make a recitation of the *Prātimokṣa*. I am possessed of all the commandments regulated by the Buddha." One of Disciple's pupils became so angry at these words that he killed Xio Luo Ta. A demon named *Daṇḍimokṣa* 大提木佉 smashed the murderer's head with a *Vajra* 金剛杵, a weapon of thunderbolt on its frame. The murderer monk expired<sup>4)</sup>.

We find the same description in the *A Yu Wang Chan* 阿育王伝, another version of the *Āśokāvadāna*<sup>5)</sup>. The outline of the episode is that there was a meeting of *uposatha* held on the 15th where a monk was killed by a demon with a *vajra*. These two motives are almost the same as that of the *MPS*.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE *MPS* AND *ĀŚOKAVADĀNĀ*

Previous studies to date have shown that this episode mentioned in the *Āśokāvadāna* is one of the main sources of the eschatology of Buddhism which spread in later times and was systematized in the *Mahāsaṃnipāta*<sup>6)</sup>. Other conflicts at Kosambī which developed into acts of violence are found in a different form in a sūtra of the *Āṅguttaranikāya*, and *Majjimanikāya* and in a Vinaya text<sup>7)</sup>. Buddhaghosa explains that the incident was caused by a confrontation between the Vinayadhāras and Dharmakathikas<sup>8)</sup>. It is also reported in the field of archaeology that *Ghoṣitārāma* at Kosambī was occupied by Buddhist monks for nearly a thousand years and that the religion itself passed from Hinayana to Mahāyāna in the course of time<sup>9)</sup>. Kosambī seems to have been a stage on which ancient Buddhists of different sects played out various dramas, including tragedies, so as to gain a dominant position. We may safely say that there did occur some serious event at Kosambī as described in these works.

The episode of Kosambī presented in the *Āśokāvadāna* can be considered a legend of the Sarvāstivādins because of two facts: one is that one of the group of Sarvāstivādins in Mathura composed the *Āśokāvadāna*<sup>10)</sup>, and the other is that this legend was also handed on to the *Mahā-Abhidharmavibhāṣaśāstra* 阿毘達摩大毘婆沙論<sup>11)</sup>, the main canonical

text of this sect. But this episode does not appear either in the *Divyāvadāna* or *A Yu Wang Jing* 阿育王經, and we can consequently regard it not as an original account but as one added in later times. This fact may help us to classify the literature of the *Aśokāvadāna*.

It must be noted that the *MPS* is contemporary with Sutra No. 640 of the *Samyuktāgama*, the *Wu Yu Wang Jing* 無憂王經, because it was at almost the same time that Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 brought it to China and translated it as Fa Xien translated the *MPS*. The *MPS* is compiled with the intention of warning against the degenerated condition of Sanghas, as has already been mentioned, and the degenerated state of Sanghas in the *MPS* is closely similar to that in the *Aśokāvadāna*. Taking these facts into consideration, we may safely say that the authors of the *MPS* accepted the legend of a group of Sarvāstivādins and transformed it in accordance with their own theory. It is clear at least that the *MPS* was composed in relation with the district of Mathura or a sect of the Sarvāstivādins<sup>12)</sup>.

- 1) K. Mizutani, "A Religious Consciosness in Buddhism", *JIBS*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1960, pp. 606-609; R. Mochizuki, *Studies on the Mahāyāna-Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (Tokyo 1988).
- 2) Tibetan version (Peking ed., Vol. 32, 40a-b), Chinese version (Taisho No. 374, Vol. 12, 380c; No. 376, Vol. 12, 864a-b).
- 3) "No. 640 of the *Samyuktāgama*" has been shown to be a version of the *Aśokāvadāna* called *Wu Yu Wang Jing* 無憂王經 and to have gotten mixed into *Samyuktāgama* in the process of compilation. See 呂澂「雜阿含經刊定記」『内学』1, 1924, pp. 102-105.; Shodo Hanayama, "Zo-agon-kyo no A-i-ku-o hiyu ni tsuite" (Japanese), *Ōkurayama-Gakuin Kiyo* 1, 1954.
- 4) Taisho No. 99, Vol. 2, 178c-179c. On the subject of Vajrapāṇi, Lamotte's work is instructive: E. Lamotte, "Vajrapāṇi en Inde", *Mélanges de Sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demiéville*, BIHEC, Vol. XX (Paris 1966), pp. 113-159.
- 5) Taisho No. 2042, Vol. 55, 127c.
- 6) R. Yamada, *Daijō-bukkyō seiritsu-ron josetsu* (1959 Kyoto), pp. 584-592.
- 7) AN. ii, p. 239.; MN. i, p. 320.; *Mahāvagga* X (Kosambaddhaka) etc.; K. Tsukamoto, *A History of the Early Buddhist Order* (Tokyo 1966), pp. 267-271.
- 8) *The Commentary on the Dhammapada* (PTS), I. 5., pp. 44-55.

- 9) S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London 1967), pp. 81-82.
- 10) Przyluski, *La légende de l'empereur Açoka* (Paris 1923), pp. v-ix, 93, 116.
- 11) Taisho No. 1545, Vol. 27, 918a-c.
- 12) MPS has some other quotations, and one of them has been identified with a verse of the *Udānavarga* (29.24); See D. S. Ruegg, *Le Traité du Tathāgatarbha du Bu Ston Rin Chen Sgrub*, PEFEO Vol. LXXXVIII (Paris 1973), p. 84, n. 1. Our examination has shown that there are also verses to be identified with the *Udānavarga*. The *Udānavarga* is said to have been composed by Dharmatrāta, a member of the Sarvāstivādins. It is desirable to distinguish between Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin, but we cannot do so in this paper. Considering that this episode is concerned with Mathura, it is more likely to have been transmitted by Mūlasarvāstivādins. See L. Schmithausen, "Zu den Rezensionen des Udānavarga", *WZKSO*, XIV, 1970, pp. 47-124.
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