

The Relationship between the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and the *Mahāsāṅghika*

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The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (MMPS) has several accounts, crucial to the theory of the text, which attests its kinship with the *Mahāsāṅghika* school (*Mśñ*). We will illustrate in this paper these accounts and suggest the close relationship between the MMPS and the *Mśñ*.

Before entering that discussion, we must mention the postulate that there are three stages in which the MMPS was progressively compiled. That is: (1) the first one third, roughly corresponding to the proto-MMPS (PMMPS) as reconstructed by the present author; (2) the second one third, the **Bodhisattvacaturdharmaparyāyaparivarta*; (3) the last one third, in which the *tathāgatagarbha* theory appears¹⁾. It is notable that all the accounts treated in the present paper are concentrated in almost the same section of the MMPS, ranging from the end of (1) to the beginning of (2).

[1] Allowance for Armament of the Laity

The MMPS has in the *Vajrābhedyakāyaparivarta*, a portion of stage (1), a rule to be observed by the laity (*upāsaka*) that seems so unique as to have no parallel in any other *Mahāyāna* scriptures.

[The Blessed one said] "The laity who are to guard the righteous teachings (**śādharmā*) should not accept the five precepts (**pañcaśīla*), and should not follow regulations for the laity (**upāsakavinaya*), but should be armed with bow and arrows, swords, and spears to defend the monks observing the good rules of conduct, possessed of good deportment and virtue" [*Kāśyapa* asked] "Among the monks...those who are accompanied with such guards as mentioned above should be called profane shaveling (**grhamuṇḍika*)." [The Blessed one said] "You should not in that way call them profane shaveling... Monks should travel surrounded by the laity armed with weapons. *Upāsakas* in this *Mahāyāna* should not accept the five precepts (**pañcaśīla*) but should be armed with weapons to protect monks. ...In a later time, after the *Tathāgata* has passed away, there will break out civil wars, causing the lands to be destroyed. In the corrupted world suffering from famine, some people will renounce home life and become shavelings. They will drive away and kill those monks possessed of **śīla*, **īryāpatha*, **guṇa*, and **gocara*. When those monks of good conduct travel along passes of villages, towns, and mountain areas, I [=Buddha] allow

them, being worthy of the name *ācārya* and *śilavat*, to be accompanied by guards armed with weapons in order to assure them of their safety of life."²⁾

This regulation, as I have previously discussed³⁾, shows us the historical background against which the supporters of the *MMPS*, *dharmakathikas*, acted. They were interested in going on pilgrimage, instead of settling down in a fixed monastery, and were in need of the help of the laity in order to be protected from dangers while traveling. The *MMPS* makes an exception for these monks to the rules appearing in *Vinaya* literature which prohibit monks from preaching to armed laymen. What attracts our attention most, however, is the unique agreement of this account with that of the *Mahāsāṅghikavinaya* (*MśV*). Only the *MśV* permits preaching to the armed laity.

You should not preach to the people armed with swords. ...However in case monks travel along dangerous and dreadful passes with people guarding them, and if asked to preach to the people, monks are permitted to do so without committing any offence, even if the people are armed with swords⁴⁾.

Similar regulations follow immediately the citation, such as when monks are guarded by laymen armed with bow and arrows, *daṇḍas*, etc.⁵⁾ These paragraphs show that the *MśV* had, at least in a time, a very similar setting and took the same attitude as the *MMPS* toward the behavior of the laity. Considering the fact that the other *Vinayas* admit of no exception in the case and the *MMPS* goes to the trouble of establishing a new regulation, the exception in the *MśV* must not have been known to the composers of the *MMPS*. They would, otherwise, have avoided making a new law simply by quoting the Buddha's words, saying "*yathoktaṃ bhagavatā vinaye*" or the like, as is done in other parts of the *MMPS*. If one would argue that there might be mutual influence between the *MMPS* and the *MśV* in this phrase, the direction of the influence should, amazingly, be from the *MMPS* to the *MśV*.

[2] *Anupūrvīkathā*

The *MMPS* mentions a gradual instruction (*anupūrvīkathā*), the type of which is so unique that no concordances have been attested in the *Nikāyas* or *Āgamas*. In the midst of the account cited above, the *MMPS* describes

as follows the behavior of immoral monks.

Even though a monk may be able to preach a speech concerning gifts (**dānakathā*), concerning good conduct (**śīla-*), concerning acts of merit (**puṇya-*), concerning speech of maturing the acts of merit (**puṇyavipākā-*)...,⁶⁾

The common and sole type of the *anupūrvīkathā* found in the *Nikāyas* is, of course, constituted by *dāna-kathā*, *śīla-k.*, *svarga-k.* But the same type of *anupūrvīkathā* as appearing in the *MMPS* is found in the *Mahāvastu* (*MV*).

Then this is a gradual instruction (*anupūrvīkathā*), namely *dānakathā*, *śīlakathā*, *svargakathā*, *puṇyakathā*, *puṇyavipākakathā*.⁷⁾

The last two items are just the same as those in the *MMPS*, and this again suggests the close association of the *MMPS* with the *Mśñ*, the school to which the *MV* belongs.

[3] Prohibition against Eating Meat

Now let us give a brief glance at a notable regulation laid down by the *MMPS* at the beginning of stage (2) of the text, which absolutely prohibits the fourfold assembly (*Catuḥpariṣad*) from eating meat.

[The Blessed one said] "A son of noble family. I never allow from now on my disciples to eat meat. How can I possibly give permission for the eating of meat when the alms is [to be regarded as] equal to the flesh of [your own] son? ...For another reason [than that of the Jain] I will instil a precept into your mind. I have established the regulation of keeping away from eating the meat considered as pure, fit to be eaten, from the three points of view [as not seen, not heard, and not doubted] (*trikoṭipariśuddhamāṃsa*). I also cast away the ten sorts of inedible meat excluded [from the vinaya of orthodoxy, which generally permits eating meat].... It [=the way of stinking accompanied by meat-eating] is just like the case, for example, where one's mind is not calmed when one eats the *Asa Soetida* plant (*Hiṅgu*) or garlic....⁸⁾

As I have previously explained, what interests us is the coincidence between the appearance of this new regulation and the establishment of the Order of the *MMPS*, which makes a clearer distinction between the Order and outcastes, e.g. *Caṇḍālas*, than the *PMMPS*, which is fairly gentle toward them. Eating meat is of course customary for *Caṇḍālas*.⁹⁾ Here, however, we will not follow the point, but compare the citation above with an account in the *MśñV*.

[The prohibited kinds of meats are enumerated as] the flesh of man the first, of *nāgas* the second, of elephants the third, of horses the fourth, of dogs the fifth, of crows the sixth, of hawks or eagles the seventh, of pigs the eighth, of monkeys

the ninth, of lions the tenth. Concerning garlic, any part of the plant is prohibited whether it may be leaves or skins, matured or green.¹⁰⁾

We can pick up two elements found in common between the two texts: First, the number of prohibited kinds of meats, ten in both texts, and second, both texts group meat-eating with herbs like a garlic. As to the former, only the *Pāli Vinaya* and the *MsñV* enumerate ten kinds, and as for the latter, only the *MsñV* associates the forbidding of eating meat with eating special sorts of herbs.¹¹⁾ We can consequently assume that this portion of the *MMPS* was composed under the influence of and for the modification of the *MsñV*.

[4] *Lokānuvartanā*

The *MMPS* has a large series of accounts, almost immediately following the parts mentioned above, which indicate that while the Buddha is actually a *dharmakāya* whose attributes should be described as *nitya*, *dhruva* and *śāśvata* (*śiva*), all the Buddha's appearances were only displayed in conformity with the way of the world (*lokānuvartnā*).¹²⁾

I [=the Buddha] show [the miracle of] having entering into a womb timely enough for both the parents to have a baby. Both the two [parents] may have an illusion that this is to be their baby. [However,] I have never been born by means of sexual intercourse for innumerable aeons. I am embodied in **dharmakāya*, not **āmiṣakāya*, for I am transcendent of a body produced by sexual intercourse. [However,] I have manifested a body born from a womb by sexual intercourse. This is conformity with the world. ...In each of the **Jambūdvīpas*, I manifest myself as having hair (**cūḍā*) and living beings have an illusion that I have hair. [However,] no one in this world along with its gods can cut my hair. ...This is just conformity with the world.¹³⁾

The similar accounts run on and on tracing the biography of the Buddha and the intention lies in making it clear that the appearance of the Buddha is only conformity with the world and that the reality of the Buddha is *dharmakāya* itself, irreducible to any kind of visible form. These accounts are to be identified with those of the *Lokānuvartanāsūtra* (*LAn*) in spite of the explanation of the *MMPS* that they are quoted from the *Śūraṅgamasaṃādhisūtra*. The *LAn* is, as has been shown¹⁴⁾, extant both as an isolated text in Chinese and Tibetan versions, and as an interpolated portion in the *MV*. We will cite two verses from the *MV*.

Though the body of the *Sugatas* is not produced by sexual intercourse, they make a show of mother and father; this is conformity with the world... They [=the Buddhas] cut off their hair (*keśa*), yet no razor cuts them; Their hair is like blue-black pigment; this is conformity with the world.¹⁵⁾

The two verses are clearly identical in form and content with the *MMPS* cited above. The *LAn* no doubt belongs to the *Msñ*, which is assured not only by the fact that it appears in the *MV* but by the way *Candrakīrti* quotes the *sūtra* in his works: he cites the *sūtra* as a canonical text of the *Pūrvaśailas*¹⁶⁾, one of the branches of the *Msñ*.

Lastly, we will refer to another account from the *LAn* in the *Catuḥstava* of *Nāgārjuna* that also affords a close parallel to the *MMPS*.

Neither disease nor impurity is in your body; it is not subject to hunger or thirst; and still in order to conform with the world, you have shown a worldly behavior. ...Your body is permanent (*nitya*), imperishable (*dhruva*), auspicious (*śiva*). It is the very law; it is the Victorious One. Still in order for the people to be converted [to the path of salvation], you show your passing away into *nirvāṇa*.¹⁷⁾

Compare this with the *MMPS*.

In the each of the *Jambūdvīpas*, I manifest myself as passing away to *nirvāṇa*. Yet, I never pass away to *nirvāṇa* in the way of *nirvāṇa*. Though sentient beings take me as passing away, the Tathāgata is always permanent (**nitya*), imperishable (**dhruva*), eternal (**śāśvata*). The way of manifesting passing away to *nirvāṇa* is [through] the nature of the Buddha.¹⁸⁾

We should always take into account the presumption that *Msñ* should, not exclusively, have much to do with *Mahāyāna* Buddhism despite a contrary opinion offered by some Japanese scholars. Regarding the relationship of some *Mahāyānasūtras*, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Daśabhūmikā*, with the *Msñ*, what *Avalokitaśrī* says should again be noted: he reports that these *sūtras* are being read in the *Pūrva/Aparaśaila* schools¹⁹⁾. Considering the close connection between the *LAn* and the *Mādhyamika*, as has been shown²⁰⁾, the concordance of the *MMPS* with the *Catuḥstava* is not at all accidental; on the contrary, it shows us that the *MMPS* was probably composed by some group associated with the *Msñ*.

We have attempted a rapid survey of the relationship not only in doctorines but also in historical background between the *MMPS* and the texts of the *Msñ*, and this examination shows us that there is mutual

dependence in the composition of the respective texts. This will serve as a good illustration of the situation where traditional and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism developed together, not separately.

- 1) I have previously attempted to prove this hypothesis at length in two papers: "Gennshi-nehangyō no sonnazai (The Urtext of the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra)", *Tōyō-bunka kenkyū-jo kiyō*, No.113 (Tokyo 1991a), pp.1-126.; "Daijō nehangyō to hōshakukyō makakashōe (Tathāgatagarbha and Buddhadhātu Used as Synonyms for Stūpa and Śariradhātu in the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra)", *Tōhōgaku*, No.82 (Tokyo 1991b), pp.129-118(L). I have discussed stages (1) and (2) in these above papers. Concerning the distinction between stages (2) and (3), I will present another paper. 2) *Peking* ed. (P) Mdo Tu 47b2-4; 49a7-8; b1-5. 3) Shimoda(1991a 19-33). 4) *MśñV*, Taisho Vol.22, 410a8-18. 5) *ibid* 410a21-c2. 6) P Mdo Tu 47b6-7. 7) *MV* iii 257.12-13; 408.15; 413.2. 8) P Mdo Tu 54b7-8; 55a5-8. 9) M.Shimoda, "Sanshu no jōniku saikō(Reconsideration of the trikoṭipariśuddhamāṃsa)", *Bukkyō-Bunka*, No. 25, (1989 Tokyo), pp.1-21; Shimoda (1991a 49-50; 104-105, n. 85). 10) *MśñV* 487a23-25. 11) Shimoda, "Higasi-ajia bukkyō no kairitu no tokushoku (The Origin of Vegetarianism in Buddhism of Far East Asia)", *Tōyō Gakujutu Kenkyū*, 29-4, (1990 Tokyo), pp.98-110. 12) P Mdo Tu 59bl-66b3. 13) P Mdo Tu 61b2-62a7. 14) S.Takahara, "Mahāvastu ni mirareru fukutoku-ron", *Fukuoka daigaku sanjūgo-shūnen kinen ronbunshū, Jinbunhen*. 1969, pp.117-141; P. Harrison, "Sanskrit Fragments of a Lokottaravādin Tradition", *Indological and Buddhist Studies*, ed. by L.A. Hercus et al., (Canberra 1982), pp. 211-234. 15) *MV* i 169.14-15; 170.2. This translation follows P. Harrison (1982 218). 16) *Māyama-kāvatāra*, ed. by L.de La Vallée Poussin, pp.134.3-135.12. 17) G. Tucci, "Two Hymns of the Catuḥstava of Nāgārjuna", *JRAS*, 1932, pp. 309-25, especially 318-20. cf. D.S.Ruegg, "Le dharmadhātustava de Nāgārjuna", *Étude Tibetaines*, (Paris 1971), pp.448-71. 18) P Mdo Tu 64a2-4. 19) P Dbu ma, Za, 321a3-4. cf. K. Sasaki, "Daijō jōza-bu ni tsuite" *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū*, 12-1, 1964, pp.150-153. 20) Harrison(1982).

〈Key Words〉 *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, Mahāsāṅghika, Lokānuvartanā, Anupūrvikathā.
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