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SHUNRYU SUZUKI

Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness

Zen Talks on the *Sandokai*

EDITED BY MEL WEITSMAN AND MICHAEL WENGER

Shunryu Suzuki



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THE END OF THE BUDDHA'S LIFE ACCORDING TO THE EKOTTARĀGAMA

André Bareau

Only one complete Ekottarāgama, corresponding to the Pāli *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, has come down to us and only in its Chinese translation by Saṅghadeva and dating from 397-8. It bears the number 125 in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* edition. This work contains a sūtra relating the last months of the Buddha's life, from his departure from Vaiśālī up to but excluding the moment of the Parinirvāṇa, and which hence partially corresponds to the Mahāparinirvāṇasutta. We should remember that this Ekottarāgama is of unknown origin and that several hypotheses have been proposed as to the school to which it belonged, the most likely being one of those emanating from the Mahāsāṃghikas without being able to be more precise.

We give here a full translation of this sūtra, then a study of it based on a comparison with several parallel texts, particularly the six extant versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, one in Pāli and well-known, another in Sanskrit edited by Ernst Waldschmidt and four which have come down to us only in Chinese translation.

* * *

1) (748c) Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was in Vaiśālī, in Āmrapālī's Park, with a great company of monks numbering five hundred. Gradually, while dwelling among men, he travelled around in order to win them over.

At that moment, the Blessed Lord turned round and looked at the town of Vaiśālī. Suddenly, he uttered this verse (*gāthā*):

(749a) 'I am now looking at Vaiśālī, for I shall not see it again and I shall not enter it again. Henceforth, I shall leave it and depart'.

2) Then, in the town of Vaiśālī, the people, having heard that verse, were greatly saddened. They followed the Blessed Lord, each shedding tears, and said to each other: 'The complete

cessation of the Tathāgata will occur shortly. The world will lose its radiant light'. The Blessed Lord said to them: 'Stop (*alam!*)! Stop! O men, do not be so greatly saddened. Phenomena are destructible; to wish to do something so that they are not destroyed is totally unreasonable. I have taught you four things the reality of which you have noted, and the Community of the four classes has also given this teaching on four things. Which are those four? All formations (*samskāra*) are impermanent (*anitya*), that is the first dharma. All formations are painful (*dukkha*), that is the second dharma. All formations are impersonal (*anātmaka*), that is the third dharma. Nirvāṇa is their cessation (*nirodha*), that is the fourth dharma. Such is the origin. In a short time, the Tathāgata will attain complete cessation. Know the origin of those four dharmas and explain their meaning (*artha*) to all living beings (*satva*).

3) At that moment, the Blessed Lord wished to act so that the people from the town of Vaiśālī returned to their homes. Immediately, he supernaturally created a great trench, and the Tathagāta, at the head of the company of monks, stood on one of its banks, while the local people were on the other bank. Then, the Blessed Lord threw his own alms-bowl (*pātra*) into space and gave it to those people, saying to them: 'Make some good offerings to that bowl, also make offerings to Dharma masters with eminent talents, and you will obtain immense happiness for a long time'. As soon as the Blessed Lord had made a gift of his bowl, he set out for Kuśinagara country.

4) At that moment, the people of Kuśinagara country were assembled in one place, in all more than five hundred Mallas, and they conversed thus: 'Let us all do an extraordinary thing together, so that after the end of our life our renown will spread far and our children and grandchildren will transmit it. Formerly, the Mallas of Kuśinagara had unequalled strength'. Immediately, they reflected as follows: 'What meritorious action can we perform?'

There was then, not far from the town of Kuśinagara, a large oblong stone, one hundred and twenty paces long and sixty paces wide. 'All together, let us raise it upright!' they said. They used all

their strength in trying to get it upright, but they were unable to do so or even get it to move, let alone lift it.

At that moment the Blessed Lord, having reached them, said to them: 'O young people, what are you wanting to do?' The young people said to the Buddha: 'Our intention was, having discussed it, to raise this stone so that, from one generation to another, our renown will be transmitted. We have spared no effort (749b) for seven days, but we have been unable to do anything so that the stone will rise or move'. The Buddha said to the young people: 'Sires, would you like the Tathāgata to raise that stone upright?' The young people answered: 'At present, it is just the moment when we wish only that the Buddha would place that stone appropriately'.

Instantly, the Buddha rubbed the stone with his right hand, then, having raised it and placed it in his left hand, he threw it into space and the stone reached the Brahma heaven. Thereupon, the Mallas of Kuśinagara, not seeing the stone any more, said to the Blessed Lord: 'Where has that stone gone now, we do not see it any more?' The Blessed Lord told them: 'That stone has now reached the Brahma heaven'. The young people said to the Buddha: 'When will that stone come to Jambudvīpa?' The Blessed Lord said to them: 'At present I shall tell you a simile, for the wise explain by means of similes. If a man were to go to the Brahma heaven, if he were to take that stone and throw it onto Jambudvīpa, it would take him twelve years to do so, but at present the Tathāgata, through the use of his supernatural power, will make it return in an instant'. Hardly had the Tathāgata uttered those words than the stone reappeared in space and a shower of divine flowers of several hundred kinds fell. Then the young people, more than five hundred in number, seeing from afar that stone coming, all fled and dispersed without any of them remaining on the spot where they were before. The Buddha said to the young people: 'Fear nothing! The Tathāgata himself knows the moment'. At that moment, the Blessed Lord held out his left hand, took the stone and, placing it in his right hand, stood it upright. Then the three thousand great thousands of worlds trembled six times and, in space, the hidden gods scattered all kinds of *utpala* flowers. Thereupon, the five hundred young

people marvelled (saying): 'That never existed before! It is utterly extraordinary, utterly unique! The supernormal power of the Tathāgata is truly unequalled! That stone is one hundred and twenty paces long and sixty paces wide, but with one hand he placed it on that spot'.

The five hundred young people said to the Buddha: 'Due to what might did the Tathāgata move that stone? Was it through the bases of supernormal power (*rddhipāda*)? Was it by using the power of his knowledge and wisdom that he placed that stone on that spot?' The Buddha said to the young people: 'I did not use the might of the bases of supernormal power, and neither did I use the power of knowledge and wisdom. Now, I used the might of my father and mother to place that stone on that spot'. The young people said to the Buddha: 'We did not know that the Tathāgata uses the might of his father and mother. What is this thing?'

The Blessed Lord said to them: 'I will now tell you a simile, for the wise explain by means of similes. O young people, know this, the might of ten camels is not like (749c) the might of a single ordinary elephant. Furthermore, the might of ten camels and an ordinary elephant is not like the might of a *karada* (?) elephant. Furthermore, the might of ten camels and an ordinary elephant with that of a *karada* (?) elephant is not like the might of a *kudhayana* (?) elephant. Let us imagine the might of ten camels, an ordinary elephant . . . and a *kudhayana* (?) elephant, it is not like the might of a *vāmana* (?) elephant. Let us calculate again: the might of that elephant is not like the might of a *kaṇeru* elephant. Let us calculate again the might of those elephants: it is not like the might of an *utpala* elephant. Let us calculate again: the might of many of those elephants is not like the might of a *padma* elephant. Let us calculate again: the might of many of those elephants is not like the might of a *kaumuda* elephant. Let us again calculate and compare: it is not like the might of a *punḍarika* elephant. Again let us calculate and compare: it is not like the might of a perfumed (*gandhin*) elephant. Let us again calculate and compare: it is not like the might of a *mahānāga*. Let us again calculate and compare: it is not like the might of a *nārāyana*. Again let us calculate and compare: it is not

like the might of a universal monarch (*cakravartin*). Let us again calculate: it is not like the might of an *abhiyukta* (?). Let us again calculate and compare: it is not like that of a bodhisattva occupying an empty place. Let us again calculate and compare: it is not like the might of a bodhisattva seated under the Tree of Enlightenment (*bodhivṛkṣa*). Again let us calculate and compare: it is not like the might of the body left by the father and mother of a Tathāgata. At present, it is by means of the might of my father and mother that I placed that stone in that spot'.

At that moment, the five hundred young people said further to the Blessed Lord: 'What, then, is the might of the bases of supernormal power (*rddhipāda*) of a Tathāgata?' The Blessed Lord said to them: 'Formerly I had a disciple named Maudgalyāyana. At that time, we stayed together in the village of the Bamboo Grove (*venuvana*) in Verañjā. There was then, over the whole territory of the land, an extreme famine, people ate each other and their whitened bones filled the roadways. Those who had left home to follow the Path obtained with difficulty food that they begged for. The company of holy ones was thin and its life forces were exhausted. Moreover, all the inhabitants of the village were starving and they had no further resources. Then Mahāmaudgalyāyana came to me and said to me: 'Now, in Verañjā, the famine is extreme and alms-seeking is impossible. The inhabitants are overwhelmed with misery and they have no further livelihood. Now, I have personally received from the Tathāgata this teaching: at present, under this ground, there is a spontaneous (*svayambhu*) earth-fat which is extremely perfumed and tasty. I merely wish that the Blessed Lord would allow his disciples to turn that earth-fat over so that it is above (ground) and people can eat it. Then the company of holy ones could (750a) fully regain their life-forces'. I then said to Maudgalyāyana: 'The worms that move in the earth, where do you wish to put them?' Maudgalyāyana said: 'A hand having the same aspect as that earth needs to be supernormally created, then used to turn that earth-fat, so that each of the worms which move there (could) be put on it'. Then I again said to Maudgalyāyana: 'According to which idea do you wish to turn that earth?' Maudgalyāyana said: 'At present, I shall turn that aspect of earth

just as a man turns the leaf of a tree, there is no doubt or difficulty.' I further said to Maudgalyāyana: 'Stop (*alam*)! Stop! O Maudgalyāyana! There is absolutely no need to turn that earth-fat. Why? If beings (*sattva*) see that, they will be so afraid that the hair that covers them will stand up and the temples of the Buddhas and deities will be demolished'. Then Maudgalyāyana addressed the Buddha, saying: 'I merely wish that the Blessed Lord would permit the company of holy ones to go to Uttarakuru to beg for their food.' The Buddha said to Maudgalyāyana: 'In that great community, there is no-one who possesses the bases of supernormal power. How could it go to beg for its food?' Maudgalyāyana said to the Buddha: 'Those who do not have the bases of supernormal power I will take and transport to that land!' The Buddha said to Maudgalyāyana: 'Stop! Stop! O Maudgalyāyana! What need is there for the company of holy ones to go there and seek alms-food? Why? In times to come too, there will be drought and famine, it will be difficult to obtain (food) by begging and men will no longer have colour. Then the notables (*śreṣṭhin*) and brahmins will say to the monks: "Why don't you go to Uttarakuru to beg for your food? Formerly, the disciples of the Śākya race possessed great bases of supernormal power. When, by chance, there was drought and famine, they all went together to Uttarakuru to seek alms, and they saved their lives themselves. Now, the disciples of the Śākya no longer have the bases of supernormal power, or even the supernormal power used by ascetics (*śramaṇa*)". Then they will scorn the monks, and that will cause the notables and householders (*gṛhapati*) to have thoughts of pride in their hearts and (in consequence) they will undergo an infinity of punishments. O Maudgalyāyana, know this, for these reasons, it is not appropriate for the whole company of monks to go alms-seeking there'. O young people, know this, Maudgalyāyana's bases of supernormal power had such virtue that, in order to calculate the might of Maudgalyāyana's bases of supernormal power, it is everywhere in the three thousand great thousands of worlds, without there being a gap or fissure (where it lacks). Nonetheless, it is not like the might of the bases of supernormal power of the Blessed Lord, who is an hundred times, a thousand times, millions of times and milliards of times greater,

so much so that it cannot be compared by means of a simile. The virtue of the bases of supernormal power of the Tathāgata cannot be measured'.

The young people said to the Buddha: 'What is the power of the wisdom of the Tathāgata?' The Blessed One said to them: 'Formerly I also had a disciple named Śāriputra, who was the foremost with regard to wisdom (*prajñā*). The ocean (*mahā-samudra*) is eighty-four thousand leagues (*yojana*) long and wide, and full of water. Moreover (750b) Mount Sumeru is eighty-four thousand leagues high and it enters the water by the same amount. Jambudvīpa is twenty-one thousand leagues from north to south and seven thousand leagues from east to west. To make a comparison now, by using the water of the four oceans as ink, Mount Sumeru as tree bark, the grasses and trees of Jambudvīpa as brushes, to act so that all the inhabitants of three thousand great thousands of worlds can write, in wishing to write a book on the actions of wisdom of the monk Śāriputra, O young people, know this, the waters of the four oceans (used as) ink, those brushes and people would gradually complete their existence without being able to act so that (that book on) the wisdom of the monk Śāriputra is completed. Therefore, O young people, he is the foremost in wisdom among my disciples. No-one is superior to Śāriputra in wisdom. By calculating that of the monk Śāriputra, the three thousand great thousands of worlds would be filled without leaving any gap or fissure. If one wished to compare the wisdom of the Tathāgata, it is an hundred, a thousand, millions and milliards of times greater, so much so that it cannot be compared by means of a simile. The power of wisdom of the Tathāgata is like that'.

5) Thereupon, the young people said further to the Buddha: 'Does there exist a power that surpasses that power?' The Blessed One said to them: 'There does indeed exist a power that surpasses that power. — What is it? — It is the power of impermanence (*anityatā*). Today, in the middle of the night, between two twin trees, the Tathāgata will pass away completely, drawn by the power of impermanence'. Then the young people, all together, shed tears (saying): 'The Tathāgata is going to pass away com-

pietely. Why so quickly? The world will lose its eye!

6) At that moment, the nun Kuṇḍalaketu, who was the daughter of the notable (*śreṣṭhin*) Varada, had this thought: 'I have learned that the Blessed One is going to pass away completely in a short time, the number of his days being exhausted. It is appropriate for me to go now to the Blessed One to pay him a visit and question him'. That nun then left the town of Vaiśālī and went to the Blessed One. From afar she saw the Tathāgata who, at the head of his company of monks and the five hundred young people, wished to go between the twin trees. Then the nun approached the Blessed One, bowed down at his feet and said to him: 'I have learned that the Blessed One is going to pass away completely in a short time'. The Blessed One said to her: 'The Blessed One is going to pass away completely today, in the middle of the night'. At that moment, the nun said to the Buddha: 'At present, I have left home to study the Path and I have not obtained the fruits (*phala*) which I desire, but the Blessed One is abandoning me and is going to pass away completely. I only wish that he would expound the Good Dharma (*saddharma*) to me, so that I may obtain the fruits which I desire'. The Blessed One said to her: 'Reflect now on the origin of suffering'. The nun further said to the Buddha: 'Real (is) suffering, O Blessed One! Real (is) suffering, O Tathāgata!' (750c) The Blessed One said to her: 'What meaning (*artha*) do you examine when you say "suffering"?' The nun said to the Buddha: 'Birth is suffering, old-age is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, sorrows, lamentations and torments are suffering, union with what one dislikes is suffering, separation from what one likes is suffering, in short the five aggregates of grasping (*upādānaskandha*) are suffering. It is because I examined that meaning that I said "suffering"'.

7) Then the nun, having reflected on the meaning, obtained three superknowledges (*abhiññā*) while she was sitting on her seat. She then said to the Buddha: 'I am not capable of seeing the Blessed One pass away completely. I only wish that he would permit me to pass away completely with him'. The Blessed One then gave his approval by remaining silent. Immediately, the nun rose from her seat, bowed down at the feet of the Blessed One and, in front

of the Buddha, flew off into space, where she performed eighteen transformations: she moved about, or sat down, or moved about again, her body emitted smoke and fire, it jumped and disappeared at her will without encountering any obstacles, or else it poured forth water or flames, filling all space. When the nun had accomplished innumerable transformations, she passed away completely in the sphere of Nirvāṇa without a remainder (*anavaśeṣanirvāṇadhātu*). Then, the Blessed One said to the monks: 'Among my listeners (*śrāvakas*), the foremost nun with regard to promptness of wisdom is the nun Kuṇḍala'.

8) The Blessed One then said to Ānanda: 'Go between those two twin trees and lay out a couch for the Tathāgata in such a way that his head would be at the north'. The other replied: 'Yes, O Blessed One'. Immediately, having received that order from the Buddha, he went between the two twin trees and laid out a couch for the Tathāgata, then he returned to the Blessed One, bowed down at his feet and said to him: 'The couch is laid out so that the head is at the north. It is suitable for you to know the (appropriate) moment'. Thereupon, the Blessed One went between those trees where the couch was laid out. At that moment, Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: 'For what reasons did the Blessed One say that his couch should be laid out, with its head pointing to the north?' The Buddha said to Ānanda: 'After my complete passing away (*parinirvāṇa*), the Buddhadharma will remain in North India. It is for that reason that I had my couch laid out pointing towards the north'.

9) At that moment, the Blessed One divided up his three robes (*tricīvara*). Ānanda then said to the Buddha: 'Why does the Tathāgata divide up his three robes today?' The Buddha said to Ānanda: 'It is because of my donors (*dānapati*) in future times that I divided up those robes. It is in wishing to act so that those men may receive merit (*punya*) that I have divided up my robes'.

10) At that moment, the Blessed One suddenly caused to issue from his lips a five-coloured light which illuminated the whole town. Ānanda then said to the Buddha: 'For what reason does the Tathāgata cause to issue from his lips (751a) that five-coloured light?' The Blessed One said to him: 'I have reflected in this way:

formerly, when the Enlightenment was not yet accomplished, those who dwelled for a long time in the hells swallowed balls of burning iron, or else they ate grasses and wood to make their four great (elements) (*mahābhūta*) grow, or else they became mules, asses, camels, elephants, horses, pigs or sheep, or else they became hungry ghosts (*preta*) and, to make their four great (elements) grow, their bodies had received a mouth as narrow as that of a foetus, or else they received divine happiness and they fed on spontaneous (*svayambhu*) ambrosia (*amṛta*). Now that I have become a Tathāgata, that I am enlightened regarding the Path through the power of my faculties (*indriya*), that I have received the body of a Tathāgata, for that reason I cause the five-coloured light to issue from my lips’.

At that moment, in a single instant, he caused to issue from his lips a marvellous light, superior to the preceding light. Ānanda then said to the Blessed One: ‘For what reason does the Tathāgata again emit a light, superior to the previous one?’ The Blessed One said to him: ‘I have reflected in this way: when the Blessed Ones, the Buddhas of the past, passed away completely, they left a teaching which did not endure for long in the world. I further reflected: by which means (*upāya*) can I act so that my teaching may remain in the world for a long time? The body of the Tathāgata is to be counted among diamonds (*vajra*); I wish to break that body into pieces (as small as) mustard seeds in order to disperse them in the world so that, in the future, donors (*dānapati*) who delight in faith (*śraddhā*) but no longer see the form of the Tathāgata, will take them and pay homage (*pūjā*) to them and, due to the assistance of that merit, they will be reborn into families of the four castes, into families of the four Divine Kings, among the Thirty-Three gods, among the Yāma gods, among the Tuṣita gods, among the Nirmānarati gods, among the Paranirmitavaśavartin gods, due to the assistance of that merit they will be reborn in the World of Desire (*kāmadhātu*), the World of Form (*rūpadhātu*) or the Formless World (*ārūpyadhātu*), or again they will acquire the Srotaāpanna Path (*mārga*), the Sakṛdāgāmin Path, the Anāgāmin Path, the Arhat Path, the Pratyekabuddha Path or the Path of the Samyaksambuddhas. It is for that reason that I caused the brilliant light to issue forth.’

11) Then, the Blessed One himself folded his *saṅghāṭi* into four thicknesses, placed it on the ground and (lay down) on his right side, his feet together, one on top of the other. Then Venerable Ānanda, much afflicted, could not help weeping and shedding a flood of tears. Furthermore, he questioned himself and reproached himself for not having yet achieved the Path and for still being attached by the fetters (*saṃyojana*) and (he said): Now, the Blessed One is going to abandon me and pass away completely. Who will be my support and my help?’

12) At that moment, the Blessed One, knowing (that), said to the monks: ‘Where is the monk Ānanda at present?’ The monks answered him: ‘The monk Ānanda is at present behind the bed of the Tathāgata, he cannot help lamenting and shedding tears. Furthermore, he is questioning himself and reproaching himself for not having achieved the Path and for not having severed his fetters (saying): ‘Now, the Blessed One is going to abandon me and pass away completely’. Then, the Blessed One said to Ānanda: ‘Stop, stop, O Ānanda! There is no need to sorrow, since mankind, animals and the world which they inhabit are all destined to destruction. You wish them to change, but that is impossible. With vigour (*vīrya*) accrued through zeal, think of the Good Dharma (*saddharma*) and cultivate it. Thus, (751b) in a short time you will come to the end of suffering and you will perform activities (*saṃskāra* ?) free of defilements (*anāsrava*). In the past, the Tathāgata Arhat Samyamsambuddhas also had assistants (*upasthāka*) like this one, and assuredly the Buddhas of the future, (as numerous as) the sand-grains of the Ganges, will also have assistants comparable to Ānanda. The noble (*ārya*) universal monarchs (*cakravartin rājan*) have four qualities (*dharma*) which did not exist previously. What are those four? When a noble universal monarch wishes to leave his realm, of people who see him there is none who is not joyful. When a noble universal monarch gives orders, of those who hear him there is none who is not joyful, they are in no way tired of hearing his orders. When a noble universal monarch remains silent, people who see him remaining silent are all joyful. Such are the four qualities possessed by noble universal monarchs and which did not exist previously. O monks, know this, Ānanda now also has four

qualities which did not exist previously. What are those four? If the monk Ānanda arrives in a large community while remaining silent, of those who see him there is none who is not joyful. If the monk Ānanda utters words, those who hear him are all joyful. If the monk Ānanda arrives in a group of the four classes, in a group of *ksatriyas* or brahmins, if he enters a group of ruling kings or householders (*grhapati*) all are joyful, they arouse thoughts of respect and they look at him without tiring. If the monk Ānanda utters words, they listen to his teaching of the Dharma without tiring. Such are the four qualities of that monk which did not exist previously'.

13) At that moment, Ānanda said to the Blessed One: 'What conduct should we follow with women? At present, when the time has come, the monks don their robes, take their bowl and beg for their food from one house to another, for the happiness and benefit of beings (*sattva*)'. The Buddha said to Ānanda: 'Do not look at each other (with them). If you look at each other, do not speak to them. If you speak to them, concentrate your mind'. Then the Blessed One uttered this stanza:

'Do not have relations with women, do not speak to them. Those who can keep themselves apart and distant then avoid eight difficulties'.

14) (751c) 'What conduct should we follow with the monk Channa?' The Blessed One said: 'Punish him by means of the law of Brahma (*brahmadharma*)'. Ānanda said to the Buddha: 'How do we punish him by means of the law of Brahma?' The Blessed One said: 'You should not speak to the monk Channa. You should not even say to him "That is good" or "That is bad", and that monk should not address you'. Ānanda said to the Buddha: 'But if he does not examine that matter correctly, will not the punishment for his faults be aggravated?' The Blessed One said: 'Simply do not speak to him, that is the punishment of the law of Brahma. If he does not redeem himself because of that, he should be led into the assembly, where people will judge him and have him expelled, but do not expose him to the (disciplinary) precepts and do not (participate) with him in a gathering of Dharma (teaching)'. Then, the Blessed One uttered this stanza:

'Those who wish to conduct themselves as foes with others, who do not return their enmity, think constantly of that, but do not speak to them, for those are (men) who corrupt those who are innocent'.

15) At that moment, the inhabitants of Kuśinagara learned that the Tathāgata was going to pass away completely in the middle of the night. Then, the inhabitants of the land went to the two twin trees, and having arrived, bowed down at the feet (of the Buddha) and sat to one side. Those people said to the Blessed One: 'We have just learned that the Tathāgata is going to pass away completely. How may we show him our respect?' Then the Blessed One turned to look at Ānanda. Immediately, the latter had this thought: 'At present, the body of the Tathāgata is exhausted by fatigue. He wishes to act so that I may transmit the homages of these (people) to him.' Immediately, Ānanda placed his knee on the ground, joined his hands and said to the Blessed One: 'Here are two families of this clan, one named Varada (?), the second named Subhadra, who now come to take refuge in the Tathāgata and the Community of holy ones. They only wish that the Blessed One will accept them as *upāsakas*. Henceforth, they will no longer kill living beings. Here again is the one named Tiṣya and the second, named Upatiṣya. Here also is the one named Puṣya and the second, named Kṛtika. Thus, they have all come to take refuge in the Tathāgata and only wish that the Blessed One will accept them as *upāsakas*. (752a) Henceforth, they will no longer kill living beings, but they will observe the five precepts'. Then the Blessed One expounded the Dharma to them in detail, after which he dismissed them to return home. Immediately, the five hundred Mallas rose from their seats, made the threefold circumambulation of the Buddha and departed backwards.

16) At that moment, the Blessed One said to Ānanda: 'I have received my very last disciples, namely, the five hundred Mallas of Kuśinagara'. Then the brahmin ascetic (*brahmacārin*) Subhadra arrived in Kuśinagara from another land. From afar he saw the five hundred men approaching and asked them: 'Where have you come from?'. The five hundred men answered: 'O Subhadra, know

this, the Tathāgata is going to pass away completely today, between two twin trees'. Subhadra then reflected thus: 'When a Tathāgata appears in the world, it is extremely difficult to meet him, since a Tathāgata appears in the world from time to time (as rarely) as *udumbara* flowers, which appear (once) in an hundred thousand cosmic periods (*kalpa*). At present, I still have some doubts (due to which) I do not understand all the articles of the Dharma. Only this ascetic (*śramaṇa*) Gautama can dispel my doubts. I can now go to this Gautama and question him on those meanings (*artha*)'.

Then the brahmin ascetic Subhadra went between the two twin trees, and having reached Ānanda, said to the latter: 'I have learned that the Blessed One is going to pass away completely today. Is that true?' Ānanda replied: 'It is an avowed truth'. Subhadra said to him: 'At present, I have doubts and I only wish that I be permitted to tell this to the Blessed One: "Other men cannot understand what is taught by the six masters. May I see the ascetic Gautama (in order to know) what he says?" Ānanda said to him: 'Stop, stop, O Subhadra! Do not importune the Tathāgata!' Thus, three times (Subhadra) again said to Ānanda: 'When the Tathāgatas appear in the world, it is extremely difficult to meet them. Just like *udumbara* flowers which appear from time to time, the Tathāgatas appear only from time to time. If I can now see the Tathāgata, it is enough if he can dispel my doubts. Why should I not be contented with what he will tell me concerning the meanings (*artha*) on which I would question him now? Moreover, O Ānanda, do not come with me to speak to the Blessed One. Once I have heard the Tathāgata, I will contemplate him unrestrictedly from one side, I will face and look at him endlessly, but today, even if I do not see him, present me (to him)'.

At that moment, the Blessed One, owing to his divine eye, from afar saw Subhadra who, turned towards Ānanda, was holding that conversation with him. The Blessed One then said to Ānanda: 'Stop, stop, O Ānanda! Do not prevent the brahmin ascetic Subhadra (from speaking to me)! Why? He has come to question me on the meaning, which is of great profit. If I expound the Dharma to him, he will win Deliverance'. Thereupon, Ānanda said to Subhadra: 'It is well (*sādhu*)! It is well! The

Tathāgata permits you to enter now and hear his Dharma'. As soon as Subhadra heard those words, he could not help jumping for joy (752b) and, having approached the Blessed One, bowed down at his feet and sat to one side. Then, Subhadra said to the Blessed One: 'At present, I would like to question you and I wish only that you permit me to'. The Blessed One then said to Subhadra: 'It is just the appropriate moment for you to question me'. Subhadra then said to the Buddha: 'Different ascetics (*śramaṇa*), O Gautama, know the means and procedures to win over many (people). They are Pūraṇa Kāśyapa, Ajita (Keśakambalin), (Maskarin) Gośalu, Pakudha Kātyāyana, Saṃjayin Vairuṭīputra, Nirgranthaputra. Do such men know the matters of the three worlds? Why do they not explain them? Among those six masters, is there a Conqueror (*jina*)? A Tathāgata?' The Blessed One then said: 'Stop, stop, O Subhadra! Do not question me on that meaning! Why do you importune me by asking if those men are Conquerors, Tathāgatas? Henceforth, while I am on this couch, I am going to teach you my Dharma. Pay great attention!' Subhadra said to the Buddha: 'At present, I will question you on the profound (*gambhīra*) meaning. I wish only that the Blessed One may speak of this to me at the appropriate moment'.

Thereupon, the Buddha said to him: 'I was twenty-nine years old when I began to study the Path, because I wished to win over beings. At the age of thirty-five, I studied among the heterodox (*tīrthika*) but, from then on, I saw no more ascetics (*śramaṇa*) or brahmins since, in their large company, there were none of the four fruits (*phala*) of the religious life (*śrāmaṇya*). O Subhadra, the world was entirely empty, there were no holy men (*arhat*) who had acquired the Path. It is in the holy Dharma and because of it that there are men who possess the holy Dharma, that there are those whose fruits of the religious life constitute fruition (*vipāka*). Why? Because all those who have the four fruits of the religious life as fruition owe that to the Noble Eightfold Path. O Subhadra, if I had not attained that supreme (*anuttara*) Noble Path, none of them would have attained the Noble Eightfold Path, and it is because I attained the Noble Eightfold Path that I accomplished the Path of the Buddhas. That is why, O Subhadra, you should seek the means (*upāya*) to attain the Noble Path'.

Subhadra again said to the Buddha: 'I also delight in hearing (talk) of the Noble Eightfold Path, and I wish only that you may disseminate it by expounding it'. The Blessed One said to him: 'What is called the Eightfold Path is right thought, right intention, right speech, right livelihood, right action, right vigour, right attention and right mental concentration. Such is, O Subhadra, what is called the Noble Eightfold Path.' At that moment Subhadra, while he was on his seat, obtained the perfectly pure Dharma eye (*dharmacakṣus*).

Thereupon, Subhadra said to Ānanda: 'At present, I have just, with much joy, obtained a great profit (*sulābha*) and I wish only that the Blessed One may accept that I become an ascetic (*śramaṇa*)'. Ānanda answered him: 'Now go yourself to the Blessed One and ask him to make you an ascetic'. Then, Subhadra approached the Blessed One, bowed down at his feet and said to him: 'I wish only (752c) that the Blessed One may agree to make me an ascetic'. Immediately, Subhadra's body became like that of an ascetic (*śramaṇa*), girded in the three robes (*tricivāra*) of the Dharma. At that moment, Subhadra contemplated the sight of the Blessed One and, while he was on his seat, his mind blemished by defilements (*sāsrava*) obtained Deliverance (*vimukti*). The Blessed One then said to Ānanda: 'Among my disciples, the very last is Subhadra'.

17) Then, Subhadra said to the Buddha: 'I have just learned that the Blessed One was going to pass away completely in the middle of the night. I wish only that the Blessed One may allow me to pass away completely before then, since I could not bear to see the Tathāgata pass away completely before (me)'. The Blessed One then acquiesced by remaining silent. Why? In the past, the Blessed Ones, the Buddhas (as numerous as) the sand-grains of the Ganges, (agreed that) the very last of their disciples could pass away completely before (them), after which those Tathāgatas passed away completely. This is the constant rule (*dharma*) of the Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, it is not by pure chance just now. Once Subhadra had seen that the Blessed One acquiesced, in front of the Buddha, his body straight, his mind correct, his attention fixed on what was in front of it, Subhadra passed away com-

pletely in the sphere of Nirvāṇa without a remainder (*anavaśeṣa-nirvāṇadhātu*). At that moment, the earth was shaken by six tremors. Then, the Blessed One uttered this stanza:

'All formations (*saṃskāra*) are impermanent (*anitya*), what is born will certainly die, but what is not born will not die. This cessation (*nirodha*) is supreme happiness (*sukha*)'.

18) The Blessed One then said to Ānanda: 'I order the monks that, henceforth, they no longer address each other (in terms) of Lord or Servant, superiors being called Honourable (*arya*) and inferiors called Wise (*bhadra*). They should consider each other as older and younger brothers. Henceforth, they should not be called by the name given to them by their father and mother'. Ānanda said to the Blessed One: 'By what names should the monks now call each other?' The Blessed One said to him: 'If an inferior monk addresses a superior monk, he should call him Venerable Senior (*āyusmant*), and a superior monk who addresses an inferior should call him by his clan (*gotra*) name. Moreover, monks who wish to choose a name for themselves should base it on the three Honourables. Such are my orders and my prohibitions'. Then, having heard the Blessed One's words, Ānanda was well pleased and applied himself to their practice.

* * *

The study of this text is based in the main on a comparison which should be made with parallel texts, particularly the six versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra. We would like to do so by referring to the fine work by Prof. Ernst Waldschmidt, *Die Überlieferung vom Lebensende des Buddha* (Göttingen 1944-8) and *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Berlin 1950 and 1951), as well as our own *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sūtrapitaka et les Vinayapitaka anciens II. Les derniers mois, le Parinirvāṇa et les funérailles* (Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris 1970 and 1971), and to our article on 'La

composition et les étapes de la formation progressive du Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra ancien' (*Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* LXVI, Paris 1979, pp.45-103).

The sūtra in the Ekottarāgama consists of eighteen episodes which can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) The Buddha's last look at Vaiśālī.
- 2) The affliction of the people of Vaiśālī.
- 3) The marvel of the river near Vaiśālī.
- 4) The marvel of the stone at Kuśinagara,
- 5) The affliction of the people of Kuśinagara.
- 6) The visit of the nun Kuṇḍalaketu.
- 7) The complete passing away of the nun Kuṇḍalaketu.
- 8) The Buddha's installation under the twin trees.
- 9) The dividing of the Buddha's robes.
- 10) Various marvels performed by the Buddha.
- 11) Ānanda's affliction.
- 12) The Buddha consoles Ānanda and praises his wonderful qualities.
- 13) The rules of conduct for monks concerning women.
- 14) Conduct to be used towards the monk Channa.
- 15) The visit of the Mallas from Kuśinagara.
- 16) The visit of Subhadra the brahmin ascetic.
- 17) The complete passing away of Subhadra.
- 18) The Buddha's final admonitions to his disciples.

Structurally, this sūtra is greatly differentiated from the six versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra (= MPNS) which, despite numerous and at times considerable differences between each other, on the whole present a strong resemblance, which a comparison with our sūtra will bring out.

In the first place, the Ekottarāgama (= EĀ) text contains only three episodes, the first three, located outside Kuśinagara, whereas the six MPNSs open with an account of events located in Rājagṛha, then continue with a narration of actions which occurred in Pāṭaligrāma, and which these six MPNS continue with numerous episodes located first in Vaiśālī then in the neighbourhood of that town, followed by several more spaced out along the road from Vaiśālī to Kuśinagara, where the Parinirvāṇa

of the Buddha and his funeral took place. Thus, our EĀ sūtra appears to have preserved a very archaic structure, concentrating on events located in Kuśinagara in the hours which preceded the supreme Passing Away of the Blessed One. We find confirmation of this in that only the three episodes which it locates in Vaiśālī concern the extreme end of the Buddha's last stay in that town and that one of the three, the last look at Vaiśālī, is also recounted by five of the six MPNSs. The other two, which follow on from this first episode, are found elsewhere in only one of these MPNSs, that which, moreover, differs from the others in its structure and through various characters, but the origin of which remains unknown. These three initial episodes located in Vaiśālī which, furthermore, are somewhat brief, were probably added quite late to the early version of the EĀ sūtra, which must have been reduced to a series of scenes with Kuśinagara as its setting.

However, this series itself was obviously established gradually, since it contains elements from very diverse periods. In fact, several of the episodes which it contains, not least by their length, are unknown elsewhere, in particular in the six MPNSs. These are, basically, the marvel of the stone thrown by the Buddha in Kuśinagara, including the long discourse praising the Blessed One's might, then the visit of the nun Kuṇḍalaketu and her complete passing away. The Pāli Canon is fully cognisant of a nun named Kuṇḍalakesī who was regarded by the Buddha as also being the foremost in promptness of intelligence, but it says nothing of her presence with the Blessed One in Kuśinagara at the moment of the Parinirvāṇa and it is also silent over her passing away. These three episodes, therefore, were thought up very late and so inserted in our sūtra. We should note, furthermore, that all three of them are placed at the beginning of the series of episodes set in Kuśinagara, which is very clear proof of their addition to an earlier version of the sūtra, which consisted of the following eleven episodes, which we will examine further on. It can even be supposed that this addition preceded that of the three scenes located in Vaiśālī and which must have been borrowed later from a text close to the only MPNS that recounts all three. Nonetheless, the three later episodes set in Kuśinagara may well have been inserted after those of Vaiśālī, since they are

precisely linked to the town of the Mallas. In fact, the first concerns an exploit, the intention of which is ascribed to the men of Kuśinagara, which requires the presence of the Buddha in that town, and the other two are based on the desire of the nun Kuṇḍalaketu to see the Buddha before his Parinirvāṇa, which leads her to hasten to the spot where it will take place. It is also understandable that the addition of these three episodes could well have been an insertion into an early version, between the three scenes located in Vaiśālī and the long series of those which already had the town of the Mallas as their setting.

It is also highly possible that the insertion of the two episodes introducing the nun Kuṇḍalaketu preceded by some greater or lesser length of time that of the account of the marvel of the stone and the discourse which follows. On the one hand, the tone is very different, much more faithful to the normal spirit of sūtras and lacking the supernatural elements of that account and discourse, the exaggerations of which seem truly ridiculous to us. Moreover, their inspiration is very different: the nun Kuṇḍalaketu conducts herself on the whole very much as will, a little later, the ascetic Subhadra, of whom she is in some way the feminine double. Since the episode of Subhadra's visit is well-known elsewhere, not only in the six MPNSs, but also in the two Saṃyuktāgamas, it is clear that it is at the origin of the invention of the two scenes in which the nun plays the main part. We are therefore probably right in supposing that these two scenes were added to our sūtra before the episode of the marvel of the stone and the discourse which followed it. This addition was nonetheless quite late, since these two scenes are unknown to other canonical texts that have come down to us.

Nearly all the other episodes, which are set in Kuśinagara, are found in the MPNSs and therefore belong to early versions of the EĀ sūtra. If it is compared to other canonical texts containing parallel scenes, we can apparently recognise various stages in the establishment of the series. The earliest episodes would be the following:

- 1) The installation of the Buddha under the twin trees (= 8).
- 2) The visit of Subhadra the ascetic (= 16).

- 3) The complete passing away of Subhadra (= 17).
- 4) The affliction of the inhabitants of Kuśinagara (= 5).

We should note, nevertheless, that this last episode has been displaced in our sūtra: instead of following immediately after the account, whether brief or detailed, of the Parinirvāṇa, it precedes it by far, since it is placed between the account of the marvel of the stone, accompanied by the discourse which this incurs, and that of the visit of the nun. In fact, it is presented as a kind of brief appendix to the Buddha's discourse after the marvel and is lead quite skilfully by the transition of the extraordinary power of the Tathāgata to that, even greater, of the impermanence which will cause the Parinirvāṇa. This displacement is linked, in all appearances, to the fact that our sūtra does not narrate, let alone mention in its place the supreme Passing Away of the Blessed One but concludes just before for reasons unknown to us.

A little later these early kernels were expanded by the following episodes, also narrated by the six MPNSs but absent from other canonical sources:

- 5) Ānanda's affliction (= 11).
- 6) The Buddha consoles Ānanda and praises his qualities (= 12).
- 7) The conduct to be used towards the monk Channa (= 14).
- 8) The Buddha's final admonitions to his disciples (= 18).
- 9) The visit of the Mallas from Kuśinagara (= 15).

Even later, two episodes were added and which appear only in three of the six MPNSs:

- 10) Various marvels performed by the Buddha (= 10).
- 11) The rules of conduct for monks concerning women (= 13).

Very much later, a brief scene unknown elsewhere, at least by the early canonical texts, was inserted: the dividing up of the Buddha's three robes, which immediately follows the installation of the Buddha under the twin trees and precedes the account of the marvels. This scene was clearly inspired by the homage rendered to three monastic robes presented to devotees as having belonged to the Buddha. Was one of those three robes the Blessed One's *saṅghāti*, the presence of which Fa-hsien, Sung-yun and Hsüan-tsang noted in the neighbourhood of the town of Hidda,

120 km east of modern Kabul? It is possible since, in order to explain the position of the dying Buddha with his head towards the north, in episode No.8 our sūtra attributes to him these significant words: 'After my Parinirvāṇa, the Buddhadharmā will remain in northern India'. Nonetheless, the Blessed One having certainly used a successive quantity of robes in the course of his long life and the veneration of relics having a greater propensity to increase the former for the satisfaction of an ever larger number of devotees, such pieces of material must have been offered for the veneration of the Buddhist faithful in many other places in India, and more particularly in northern India, from the first centuries of the Common Era.

The episode of the marvel of the river (No.3) clearly alludes to another relic of the Buddha, namely, the alms-bowl (*pātra*) which the former cast to the faithful of Vaiśālī as he left them, after having created an uncrossable trench in order to disengage from those importuners. Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang recount this legend in connection with their passage through that place, but neither of them note the presence of that relic or of a stūpa which might have contained it. Doubtless that object must have long since disappeared by their time and no material trace of it had been preserved thereabouts.

It is the same for the heavy stone raised upright by the Blessed One in order to demonstrate his superhuman might to the young Mallas of Kuśinagara. Neither Fa-hsien nor Hsüan-tsang saw that immense rock, an hundred paces long and sixty wide, and they make no allusion whatever to that object or its legend. Since it is difficult to believe that such a rock, which must have been clearly visible on the immense plain where Kuśinagara was to be found, could have disappeared in a few centuries without leaving the least trace, we can but think that this story of a marvel is purely imaginary and was not invented to provide a Buddhist explanation for some accident of terrain.

Relics of quite another kind are mentioned in the narration of the marvels performed by the Buddha in Kuśinagara (No.10), namely, the dividing up of the Blessed One's body into a multitude of particles intended for the veneration of the faithful, a

veneration due to which these last acquired immense merit in the form of rebirth among fortunate men or the gods, and finally as the fruits of holiness. This passage, absent in the parallel canonical texts, has the obvious aim of justifying the veneration paid to the bodily relics (*śarīra*) of the Buddha, that is, to the miniscule fragments of calcinated bones collected after the cremation of his body. This, it seems, is an allusion, not only to the sharing out of these relics into eight portions, as is recounted in the last chapters of the six MPNSs, but also doubtless to their distribution among several myriads of stūpas scattered by Aśoka over all his vast empire.

At the end of the same passage, it should be noted that the career of the Saṃyaksambuddhas is promised, alongside those of Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, to the faithful who pay homage to those bodily relics. This is an idea which, if it is not frankly Mahāyānist, is at least close to concepts of the Great Vehicle, but it is true that the EĀ, here and there, contains clearly Mahāyānist elements which were inserted quite late in the text of that collection. However, we should remark that, in the present passage, it is a question of a goal to be attained, that is, the Great Enlightenment which transforms the holy one into a perfect Buddha, and not of the long series of existences which precedes that event and prepares him, that Bodhisattva career which is in itself proposed as the ideal for adherents of the Mahāyāna. This means perhaps that this paragraph does not yet pertain to the Mahāyāna, but only to an intermediate stage between early Buddhism, what was to be called Hīnayāna, and Mahāyāna proper, a stage of which other early canonical texts, particularly those of the Theravādins, which remained resolutely refractory to Mahāyānist tendencies, have retained scarcely any trace. Doubtless we can see here an indication that the EĀ belonged to one of the sub-schools of the Mahāsāṃghika group, a group which was very important but which, alas, remains mostly unknown to us through a lack of documentation.

If several parts of our sūtra were conceived quite late or contain very late additions, others remained very faithful to early versions of the episodes which they narrate. Certain of them have even preserved for us the most archaic version of this or that

scene, as is clearly shown by a comparison with the parallel texts, in particular with the six MPNSs. This is so with the account of the Buddha's last look at Vaiśālī (No.1), taken without any modification from a version which has remained set in its most ancient form. It is the same for several scenes or groups of phrases pertaining to the following episodes: the installation of the Buddha under the twin trees (No.8), Ānanda's affliction (No.11), the Buddha's consolation of Ānanda (No.12), the rules of conduct for monks concerning women (No.13), the visit of the Mallas from Kuśinagara (No.15). The last four accounts, moreover, have only undergone modifications of little importance and have remained faithful to the oldest version in their essentials. This same fidelity is noticeable in respect of the other four episodes, despite more numerous alterations of details, behind which it is less easy to find the early text: the conduct to be used towards the monk Channa (No.14), the visit of Subhadra the ascetic (No.16), Subhadra's complete passing away (No.17) and the Buddha's final admonitions to his disciples (No.18). In contrast, the accounts of the affliction of the people from Kuśinagara (No.5) and of the marvels performed by the Buddha in Kuśinagara (No.10) have been considerably altered and belong to a more recent stage than the parallel texts in the evolution of the legend.

Despite these later, even much later and of considerable importance, additions and alterations, the EĀ sūtra has on the whole remained faithful to a very early version of the MPNS, even more faithful than the six MPNSs we have to hand. Not only has it preserved passages and even episodes from a version more archaic than those of these six texts, but its structure shows it to be from a stage clearly older than theirs in the formation of the MPNS. As we saw earlier, all the episodes it contains are set in Kuśinagara, apart from the first three, taken from an account of the Buddha's last stay in Vaiśālī, of which they constitute the extreme end. Hence, there lack all the preceding parts of the six MPNSs, which contain in full some fifty episodes, at times of great importance, spaced all along the road leading from Rājagṛha to Kuśinagara, via Pāṭaligrāma and Vaiśālī. Moreover, if it contains episodes absent in the six MPNSs, in contrast it ignores several which recount these last: the choice of Kuśinagara as the

site of the Parinirvāṇa, the Buddha's last words and, especially, the long series of those which narrate the Parinirvāṇa itself (an episode which is curiously missing in our sūtra), the Buddha's funeral and the argument over the relics, the importance and fame of which are undeniable. It has only seven episodes in common with the six MPNSs: the installation of the Buddha under the twin trees (No.8), Ānanda's affliction (No.11), the Buddha's consolation of Ānanda (No.12), the visit of the Mallas from Kuśinagara (No.15), the visit of Subhadra the ascetic (No.16), Subhadra's complete passing away (No.17), and the Buddha's final admonitions to his disciples (No.18), including the conduct to be used towards the monk Channa (No.14). Our sūtra has two further episodes in common with only three of the six MPNSs, among them the Pāli: the various marvels performed by the Buddha in Kuśinagara (No.10) and the rules of conduct concerning women (No.13), which indicates a common tradition with the Theravādins and Dharmaguptakas, without this proving a relationship between the school to which the EĀ belonged and those two.

If the structure of our sūtra shows that it pertained to a stage clearly prior to that where the six MPNSs were formed, it is in contrast later, according to appearances, than that of short series of certain sūtras in the Pāli Saṃyutta Nikāya and the Saṃyuktāgamas of the Sarvāstivādins and Kāśyapīyas, consisting of only three or six episodes. Our text has no episode in common with the Pāli sūtra, but it has three with the others: the installation of the Buddha between the two twin trees (No.8), Subhadra's visit (No.16) and his complete passing away (No.17).

Similar verification can be made by studying two other sūtras in the EĀ (T 125, 593a-b; 619a-624b) narrating a series of episodes from the eve of the Enlightenment to the Buddha's return to Kapilavastu: alongside several episodes manifestly conceived much later, we find in them many others whose text is at least as old, and sometimes older, than those of other parallel canonical accounts, in Pāli or Chinese translation; moreover, a certain number of episodes narrated by these parallel texts, particularly all those which are set in Rājagṛha, are totally lacking in our EĀ sūtra, which has thus remained more faithful than the others to a very ancient version of this partial biography of the

Buddha, limited to events which followed the Enlightenment.

This clearly shows that a study of the EĀ, which is little known, should not be neglected since, besides numerous incontestably very late elements, it also contains many other extremely ancient elements, even more ancient than those of the corresponding Pāli texts. It is therefore of importance to research and examine these data which have remained set in their archaic form if we wish to advance in our knowledge of the oldest stages of Buddhist literature and, in consequence, of the history of Buddhism in general.

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IS THE AṢṬASĀHASRIKĀ PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRA REALLY ARGUING AGAINST THE SARVĀSTIVĀDINS?

Yoshinori Onishi

INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras have been of enormous importance to the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Yet, it is not well understood under what circumstances, and with what intentions, these texts were actually composed. In fact, assumptions (rather than knowledge substantiated by evidence) often seem to form the basis for literature treating the rise and development of the Mahāyāna, especially with regard to the nature of its relationship with other early schools. The underlying aim of the present paper is to emphasise the importance of examining what the texts themselves have to say about this subject. More specifically, this paper aims at re-evaluating the relationship (if any) between the Mahāyāna and the Sarvāstivāda (which is distinguished by its theory of the substantiality of *dharmas*) on the basis of evidence found in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (henceforth abbreviated as Aṣṭa), which is considered the earliest Prajñāpāramitā sūtra (as well as the earliest of all Mahāyāna sūtras).

When discussing the early development of the Mahāyāna, especially with the Aṣṭa in mind, some scholars talk about 'the Mahāyāna critique of the Sarvāstivāda's notion of own-nature', as Harvey has done (P. Harvey, *An introduction to Buddhism*, Cambridge 1990, p.87). Another author writes:

The Mahāyāna. . . arose as an attempt to popularize Buddha-word and also as a reaction against the metaphysics of the Sarvāstivāda school which abandoned the anti-substantialist or anti-essentialist position. . . (D.J. Kalupahana in, J. Dhirasekera, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* 4, 3, Colombo 1979, p.450).

This latter statement involves at least two issues: the nature of the origin of the Mahāyāna and the question of whether the target of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras' criticism really was the