THREE SŪTRAS FROM THE SAMYUKTĀGAMA CONCERNING EMPTINESS

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Three sūtras in the Samyuktāgama (Taishō Issaikyō (T) 99) which deal, under various titles, with emptiness especially attracted the attention of the author of the Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa (abbrev. Upadeśa, T 1509), an authoritative interpreter of the Madhyamaka or Philosophy of the Middle. These are the Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra 'Sūtra on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word', the Mahāśūnyatāsūtra 'Sūtra on Great Emptiness' and the Samrddhisūtra 'Sūtra of Samrddhi', named after one of the Buddha’s disciples. Here are some quotations, accompanied by the explanations devoted to them by the Upadeśa.

I

Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra
(T 99, ch.13, p.92c 12-26)

In the Chinese translation of the Samyuktāgama made between 436 and 443 by Guṇabhadra, this Sūtra is entitled Ti yi yi k’ung ching 第一 真空 經, which presupposes the Sanskrit Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra. The early authors referred to it frequently

while leaving aside the final section of the work.

As far as I know, this Sūtra has no parallel in the Pāli Saṁyutta Nikāya; conversely, it is reproduced, with some variants, at the beginning of a sūtra which appears in the Chinese version of the Ekottarāgama (T 125, ch.30, pp.713c-12-714a 3), and the Abhidharma masters quoted several extracts from it in their original Indian text.

1. Evam maya śrutam / ekasmin samaye bhagavān kurusuviharati kalmāśadamyē nigame3 /

2. tatra bhagavān bhikṣun āmāntrayati /

3. dharmam vo deśayise adau kalyāṇam madhye kalyāṇam paryavasāne kalyāṇam svartam suvyānjanam kevalam pariśipram pariśuddhaṃ paryavādaṇaṃ brahmacaryam prakāśayisyey4 / yad uta paramār-

1. Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was residing with the Kuruś, in the village of Kalmāśadamaya.
2. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks.
3. I will teach you the Dharma which is good at the beginning, good in the middle, good at the end, of which the meaning is good, of which the letter is good, unique of its kind, quite

thāsūnyatāsūram / tac chṛṇita sādhu ca suṣṭhu ca manasikuruta bhāṣisyey5 /

4. paramārtha thāsūnyatāsūram katamam / caksur bhikṣava u-padyamānaṃ na kutationsid āgacchati / niruddhamānaṃ ca na kva cūt sannicayam gacchati6 /

5. iti hi caksur abhūtvā bhavati bhūtvā ca pratigacchati? /


5 Cf. Mahāparinirvāna, pp.120, 122, 126, 170; Nidānasamyoṭka, pp.147, 153, 157. The Pāli has tam suvātha sahuḥkam manasikarotka bhūsīsūmi (cf. D II, p.77).


7 Reading attested in the Kośabhāṣya, p.299, ll.13–14, and, with the variant pratītacchāti, in the Paṇjikā, p.582, ll.2–3. My translation is based on that of Gunabhadra in his Chinese version (T 99, p.92c, 17–18). 

complete; I will explain to you the most pure and correct brahmamic conduct, namely the Sūtra on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word. So listen; reflect well and as is fitting, I shall speak.

4. What is this Sūtra on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word? The eye, O monks, when it arises does not come from anywhere, and when it perishes does not go anywhere.

5. Hence the eye is not real but arises nonetheless;
6. asti karmastī vipākaḥ kārakaḥ tu nopalabhya iti imāṁ ca skandhāḥ niksipatī anyāṁś ca skandhāḥ pratīsamaddhārya anyatra dharmasamketaḥ

having arisen, it perishes.
6. There is action, there is fruition, but no agent exists which rejects these aggregates and assumes other aggregates, unless a metaphor

8  Reading attested in the Kōshabāya, p.129, II.9–11; p.468, II.20–2, and the Mahāyānasūtraśālapyāra, ed. S. Lévi (Paris 1907), p.158, II.21–2. The Pañjika, p.474, II.15–17, presents variants: iti hi bhikṣavā 'asti karaṁ / kārakas tu nopalabhya iti imāṁ skandhāṁ viṣayati / anyāṁś ca skandhā bpādāte / anyatra dharmasamketaṁ. This text should be compared to another canonical passage which appears in several sources.

Bimbāśārasūtra. In E. Waldschmidt, Bruchstücke buddh. Sūtras (Leipzig 1932), p.131, and Catuṣpaṭiṣat, ed. E. Waldschmidt (Berlin 1952–62), p.358: ayam sa ātmāḥ sa sahasraḥ / sahaḥ sa sahasraḥ / sahaḥ sa sahasraḥ / sahaḥ sa sahasraḥ. This text should be compared to another canonical passage which appears in several sources.


Mahāvastu, ed. E. Senart (Paris 1882–7), III, p.448, II.4–6: ahām so atra kārakaḥ / kārāpako / utthāpako / samuṣṭhāpako / ṣāyāyako / nikhēpakō / yo imām ca samskārāḥ niksipai anyāṁ ca ca skandhāḥ pratīsamaddhārya anyatra dharmasamketaṁ. All these texts deny the existence of the Ātman and its synonyms jiva, janu, poṣa, pūdga, maṇu, maṇava, kartā, kāraka, janaka, saṃjana, utthāpaka, samuṣṭhāpaka, veda, veda, pratīsamaddhārya. The being (saṃketa) has no substantial existence; it is only a name, a metaphor (saṃketa), to designate dharmas which have arisen from causes and conditions (pratīsamaddhārya, saṃketa). The paramāthāṣānyāta of which the Sūtra speaks here is none other than the saṃvāṣānyāta.

The Kōsabāya, ed. U. Wogihara (Tokyo 1932–6), p.707, II.13–16, has a good commentary on the present passage: kārakas tu nopalabhya iti viśṛṣṭaḥ / karmāṇaḥ kārakas nopalabhya / kārakas sa karaḥ iti / aha / ya imām c' aitiḥkāraḥ skandhāḥ niksipai śayāyāṁ ca ca parśtikān skandhāḥ pratīsamaddhārya upasamgrhāntāi dravyasana avasthiṁ / anyatra dharmasamketañc iti pratīsamaddhārya / Anyatra dharmasamketañc / / No agent exists: there is no author of

7. evam śrotarāṁ gṛhaṁ jhāvā kāyo mano vācyam /

of the Dharma is involved there.
7. With regard to the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, the same should be said.
8. I said: 'Unless a metaphor of the Dharma is involved there'. Here, the metaphor of the Dharma means (only) this: This being, that is, from the arising of this, that arises, that is to say the forma-

action. Of what kind would he be? Answer: an agent who rejects, who abandons, these aggregates, the aggregates of present existence, and assumes, takes on, other aggregates, the aggregates of future existence: an agent who would be presented as existing substantially. Unless a metaphor is concerned there: unless as a (simple) designation of dependent origination!

In the present passage samketa means metaphor, metaphorical designation, symbol. The early translators made no mistake over this and all of them rendered it in a manner equivalent to the expression anyatra dharmasamketaṁ 'unless in the case of a metaphor of the Dharma (in this instance the Pratīsamaddhā).

Tibetan version in Catuṣpaṭiṣat, p.339: chos su (or chos kyī) bīdar blags pa ma giogs pa. Guṇabhādra (T 99, p.92c 19): ch'u su shu fa 降保十法
Samghadeva (T 125, p.713c 17–18): ch'u chia hao fa 降保十法
Hsuan-tsang (T 1558, p.155b 27): wei ch'u fa chia 降保十法
Pamārtha (T 1559, p.306c 28–29): 降保十法世尊布施所立入 'except when, according to worldly usage to designate dharmas, it is said that they are a person (pudgala).

9  Evam ... vācyam is an abbreviating method frequently used in Buddhist Sanskrit; cf. Nidānaśānyukta, pp.106, 171, 187.
tions are conditioned by ignorance, consciousness is conditioned by the formations', etc., up to: 'Such is the origin of this whole great mass of suffering'.

Moreover, 'This not being, that is not; through the cessation of this, that ceases, that is to say the cessation of ignorance results in the cessation of the formations; the cessation of the formations results in the cessation of consciousness', etc., up to: 'Such is the cessation of this whole great mass of suffering'.

It should be noted that, in the phrase evam asya kevalasya mahato dukkhaskhandhasya nirodho bhavali, the Kośabhaśya, p.140, l.21-2, glosses kevala 'only, whole' with ātiṣyārahitā 'devoid of a self', and mahat, 'great' with anādaya 'without beginning or end'. The underlying teaching of the Pratītyasamutpāda is essentially a teaching on Non-self.

11. Thus spoke the Blessed One; the monks, delighted in mind, rejoiced greatly at the discourse of the Blessed One.

In this Sūtra, paramārthaśūnyatā is none other than the emptiness of beings (sattvāśūnyatā), the fundamental teaching of the Buddhism of the Śrāvakas. Taking this text as a basis, it

10. avyaḥ bhiksava ucye paraṁārthasūnyatā nāma dharma-paryayāḥ /

11. idam avocad bhagavān āttamanasas te bhikṣavo bhagavato bhāṣitaṁ abhyaṇandat /

10. The unabridged formula of the Pratītyasamutpāda in terms of 'arising' or 'origination' (samudaya) is well-known.

might be wondered if the Buddha ever taught anything but the emptiness of beings in the Tripitaka or, if he spoke of the emptiness of phenomena (dharmaśānyata), why he spoke of it so little. It is this question that the Upadeśa will attempt to answer.

Commentary in the Upadeśa*
(T 1509, ch.31, pp.294c 29 - 295a 17)

Question: If the emptiness of all dharmas (sarvadharmaśānyata) is truly true, why, in the Tripitaka, did the Buddha especially speak of impermanent (anitya), suffering (duḥkha), empty (śunya) and impersonal (anātman) dharmas? See the [Paramārthaśānyatāsūtra in which the Buddha says to the bhikṣus: 'I will propound to you the Dharma teaching (dharmaparyaya) entitled Paramārthaśānyata. What is that Paramārthaśānyata? The eye (caksus), when it arises, does not come from anywhere, and when it perishes, does not go anywhere. There is only action (karman) and fruition of action (karmavipāka); the agent (kāraka) does not exist. For the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, it is also the same'. Here, to affirm that on arising (dharman) do not come from anywhere and on perishing do not go anywhere, is to say that there are no eternal (nitya) dharmas and that they are all impermanent (anitya); there is only action and fruition of action, but the agent does not exist. Such is, in the Śravaka system, paramārthaśānyata. Why do you still speak to us of a sarvadharmaśānyata 'emptiness of all dharmas'?

Answer: The self (ātman) is the root of all the passions (kleṣa). At first one becomes attached to the five aggregates (skana- dhā) as if they were a self (ātman); then one becomes attached to external objects (bāhyavastu) as if they pertained to the self (ātmiyā). Bound by the self, one arouses craving (rāga) and hatred (dveṣa), and because of that craving and hatred, one performs actions (karman). When the Buddha says (in the Paramārthaśānyatāsūtra) that 'the agent does not exist', he is destroying the Ātman in every dharma. When he says: 'The eye, when it arises, does not come from anywhere, and when it perishes, does not go anywhere', he is affirming the impermanence (anityata) of the eye, etc. Indeed, 'that which is impermanent is suffering, and that which is suffering is devoid of self and anything pertaining to a self'13. Self and anything pertaining to a self not existing, the mind is no longer attached to any dharmas, and the mind having no more attachment (abhiniveśa)14 no longer incurs fetters (samyojana). Since it no longer incurs fetters, what point is there in propounding emptiness? That is why, in the Tripitaka, the Buddha especially speaks of the impermanent (anitya), suffering (duḥkha), empty (śunya) and impersonal (anātman), but speaks much less of the emptiness of all dharmas.

II
Mahāśānyata nāma dharmaparyāyāya
(T 99, ch.12, pp.84c II - 85a 10)

Prof. E. Waldschmidt, who rendered such eminent service to Buddhist studies, identified the original text of this Sūtra in a

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13 Cf. S III, pp.22, 82, 84; IV, pl.1: yad aniccam tam dukkhām, yam dukkhām tad anatāḥ, yad anatāḥ tam netam mama nesam āsmai na nesam atāḥ ti.
14 Abhiniveśa, māon par ē̄ś, chu 著, or chīḥ chū 執著, is a mental attachment to non-existent things.
This Sūtra was subsequently published, translated and profusely annotated by Chandrabhāgī Tīrīṣṭhī, *Funfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidānasamyukta*, Berlin 1962, pp.152-7. I venture to refer the reader to this excellent edition and will limit myself to translating a few extracts from this Nidānasamyukta *(loc. cit.*) and the Avijjāpaccayā *(S II, pp.60-3).*

Nidānasamyukta

4. mahāsūnyatādharmaparyāyāḥ katamāḥ / yad utāsmin satīdam bhavaty asyotpādād idam utpadyate / yad utāvidyā-pratyayāḥ saṁskārā yāvat samudayo bhavati / 4. What are these Dharma teachings called Great Emptiness? They are expressed thus: ‘This being, that is, from the arising of this, that arises, that is to say the formations are conditioned by ignorance; up to: ‘Such is

5. jāti-pratyayam jarāmaraṇam iti / itara ko jarāmaraṇam kas-ya vā jarāmaraṇam iti hi suhy praṣṭāra iti ya evam vaded ayām jarāmaraṇam asya vā jarāmaraṇam / yaś caivaṃ vadet taj jīvam tāc charīram anyaj jīvam anyac charīram / ubhayam etad ekam / vyāñ- janam atra nānā /
yãm brahmãcaryavåsa na bhavati / 

ity etåv ubhåv antåv anupagamyåsti madhayamå pratipad åryå lokottara yathabhûtå aviparitå samyagdåśthi / yad uta jåti-prayåyåm jåramaranånam / 

Avijjåpacca-yå 

2. avijjåpacca-yå bhikkhave / sanka-hårå / sanka-hår-apacca-yå viññånam / pe / evam etassa kevalassa dukkha-khandhasså samudayo hoti ti / 

3. katamåm nu kho bhante jåramaranåm / kassa ca panidåm jåramaranån ti / no kallo pani-hoti bhagava avoca / 

katamåm jåramaranåm kassa ca panidåm jåramaranån ti iti vå bhikkhu yo vadeyya / aññam jåramaranåm aññassa ca panidåm jåramaranån ti iti saying that the life principle is different from the body persists, the spiritual life is impossible.

There is a middle path which avoids these two extremes: it is the noble, transcendental, correct and right unperverted view, which affirms (simply) that old-age-death is conditioned by birth.

2. O monks, the formations are conditioned by ignorance, consciousness is conditioned by the formations, etc., up to: 'Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering'.

3. O Blessed One, what then is old-age-death and, furthermore, to whom does that old-age-death pertain? That question is not correctly put, answered the Blessed One.

O monk, if one were to ask: 'What is old-age-death and, furthermore, to whom does old-age-death pertain', or if one were to say: 'Other is old-age-death, and other is he to whom old-age-death pertains', the two propositions would be the same in meaning (in error) and different only in the letter.

O monk, as long as the false view which consists in saying that the life principle is identical to the body persists, the spiritual life is impossible. O monk, as long as the false view which consists in saying that the life principle is different from the body persists, the spiritual life is impossible.

O monk, the Thàtågata, having avoided those two extremes, teaches the Dharma by means of the middle in saying that old-age-death is conditioned by birth.

In short, to claim that old-age-death pertains to someone is a false view because there is an emptiness of beings (sattva-sûnyatå) in the sense that all the formations are devoid of self (åtman) and anything pertaining to a self (åtiyå). To claim that old-age-death is something is a false view because there is an emptiness of things (dharma-sûnyatå) in the sense that all dharmas are devoid of a self-nature (svabhåva) and marks (lak-
śana), whether general (sāmānyalakṣaṇa) or specific (sva-lakṣaṇa). The Upadeśa is categoric in this respect.

Commentary in the Upadeśa17
(T 1509, ch.18, pp.192c 26 - 193 a 6)

The Buddha says in the Ta ch'ung ching (Mahāsūnyatāsūtra): ‘The twelve causes (dvādaśanidāna) go from ignorance (avidyā) to old-age-death (jāramañña). To say: “This is old-age-death” (ayam jāramañña), to ask “To whom does old-age-death pertain?” (kasya jāramañña): all that consists of a false view (drṣṭi). With regard to birth (jāti), the action of existence (bhava), clinging (upādāna), thirst (trṣṇā), feeling (vedanā), contact (sparśa), the six bases of consciousness (sadāyatana), name-and-form (nāmarūpa), consciousness (viņñāna), the formations (saṃskāra) and ignorance (avidyā), it is the same. To say that the life principle is identical to the body (taj jīvam tace chari-ramp), to say that the life principle is different from the body (anyaj jīvam anyac charipam), both propositions, although different (in the letter), are false views’. The Buddha continued: ‘That the life principle is identical to the body constitutes a false view which is not that of my disciples. That the life principle is different from the body also constitutes a false view which is not that of my disciples’.

In this Sūtra, the Buddha proclaims the emptiness of things (dharmaśūnyatā). If one asks to whom old-age-death pertains, it should be known that that question is erroneous (mithyā) and that there is an emptiness of beings (sattvaśūnyatā). If one asks what is old-age-death, it should be known that that question is erroneous and that there is an emptiness of things (dharmaśūnyatā). It is the same for the other (links of the causal chain), up to and including ignorance (avidyā).

Elsewhere, the Upadeśa (ch.31, p.295b 27-8) classes the Mahāsūnyatāsūtra of the Saṁyutāgama among certain sūtras in the Tripiṭaka which categorically teach the dharmaśūnyatā.

III
Suññasutta and Saṁrddhisūtra
(S IV, p.54; T 99, p.566 21-c 1)

This point is not made by the Suññasutta of the Saṁyutta Nikāya (IV, p.54) which, when asserting that the world of beings (loka)18 is empty, merely means that it is empty of self (ātman) and anything pertaining to a self (ātmya). This text narrates a short dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda, which takes place in Sāvatthi. It is often evoked as proof of the non-existence of the Ātman19.

1. sāvatthi nīdaṇām / 1. The event took place in Sāvatthi.

2-3. atha kho āyasām Ānando / 2-3. Then the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One: ‘Empty is the world, empty is the world’, it is said, O Lord. Of what significance then, O Lord, is

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17 This passage is translated in the Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse II, Louvain 1949, pp.1079-81, in which the close relationship between the Mahāsūnyatāsūtra and the Avījāpaccayā has already been noted.

18 loka, understood as sattaloka ‘world of beings’.

4. yasmā ca kho ānanda suññam na va attaniyena va / tasma suñño loko ti vuccati / kīnca ānanda suññam attena va attaniyena va /

5-10. cakkhum kho ānanda suññam attena va attaniyena va / rūpā suññā attena va attaniyena va / cakkhuvisānāma suññam attena va attaniyena va / cakkhusamphasso suñño attena va attaniyena va / pe / yampidaṃ manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitam sukham va dukkham va adukkham asukham va / tam pi suññam attena va attaniyena va /

11. yasmā ca kho ānanda suññam attena va attaniyena the affirmation that the world is empty?

4. O ānanda, because there is an emptiness of self or of anything pertaining to self, it is said that the world is empty. What is, O ānanda, the emptiness of self or anything pertaining to self?

5-10. The eye, O ānanda, is empty of self or anything pertaining to self, visibles are empty of self or anything pertaining to self, eye-consciousness is empty of self or anything pertaining to self, eye contact is empty of self or anything pertaining to self, and so on. And to end, pleasant, unpleasant or neither unpleasant nor pleasant feeling which arises from mental contact is also empty of self or anything pertaining to self.

11. Therefore since, O ānanda, there is emptiness of

vā / tasma suñño loko ti vuccati / self or of anything pertaining to self, it is said that the world is empty.

In his Comparative Catalogue of the Chinese Āgamas and Pāli Nikāyas, p.223, Ch. Akanuma has compared the Suññasutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya with the Samrddhīsūtra of the Chinese Saṃyuktāgama (T 99, No.22, ch.9, p.56b 21-c 1). However, despite an obvious relationship, the Samrddhīsūtra differs notably from the former. It makes Samrddhi (the Samrddhi of the Pāli sources) the questioner of the Buddha; it multiplies the aspects (ākāra) of emptiness; finally and above all, it introduces a stock phrase on the essential nature (prakriti) of things which never appears in the Nikāyas, but which is common in the Prajñāpāramitā texts. Here again, we can attempt a reconstruction of the original Indian text.

1. evam mayā śrutam / ekasmin samaye bhagavān chārāvastyaṃ viharatītīn jatavane 'nathapīṭhadasyārāme /

2. atha samrddhir nāma bhikṣur yena bhagavāṃ tenopajāgama / upetya bhagavatpādaṃ śirasā vandīvaikāṇe nyasi / tatīkāma bhagavatān tam idam avocati /

3. śūnyo loka iti bhadanta uc-
is the world. To what extent is it said, O Lord, that the world is empty?
4. Thus questioned, the Blessed One said this to the monk Samuddhi:
5. The eye is empty; it is empty of perpetuity and changelessness; it is empty of self.
6. Why? Because such is its essential nature.

7. The visible, eye-consciousness and also that unpleasant, pleasant, or neither unpleasant nor pleasant feeling which arises with eye contact as its condition, is also empty, empty of perpetuity and of changelessness, empty of self.
8. Why? Because such is its essential nature.
9. It is the same for the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.
10. That is why it is said that the world is empty.
11. Thus spoke the Blessed One; the monk Samuddhi, having expressed his satisfac-

21 kiyatä, corresponding to the Pāli kistavaītä, is found in the Nidānasamuccya, pp.127, 168, 188.
22 The Pāli Suṇñasutta reproduced above merely says: cakkhu sūnām atena va attaniyena va. Here the formula is more developed and the Chinese version (T 99, p.56b 24-5) renders it by _FL_ (Tib. Bles-

23 In Chinese 所以者何。此无自性故。 The term pratīti (in Tibetan rä bzin, in Chinese 观照 仏) which plays such an important role in Brahmānic and

Hindu philosophical systems is, in the meaning of essential or original nature (or matter), practically unknown to the early canonical writings, but frequently appears in the Mahāyāna sūtras, particularly in the Prajñāpāramitā literature.

The phrase tat kasya hetoh. prakṛtir asayasa which appears here in §§ 6 and 8 of the Samuddhīsūtra, plays the part of a refrain in the definitions of the sixteen, eighteen or twenty śānyātār proposed by the large Prajñāpāramitā sūtras; Cf. Aṣṭadosāsahasrīkā (Trip. XIX, No.732, p.250, fol.135a 8-137b 5; T 220, ch.488, pp.480b 6-481a 1); Pañcavimśatisahasrīkā, ed. N. Dutt, pp.195, 112-119, 120, Śatasahasrīkā, ed. P. Ghos (Calcutta 1914), pp.1407, 110-114, 134.

The presence of this phrase in the Samuddhīsūtra of the Samyukta and its absence in the Suṇnasutta of the Samyutta Nikāyas raises a text-critical problem, and I would willingly believe that this phrase was introduced into the Samuddhīsūtra by a Mahāyānist interpolator. We know the degree to which the Chinese Ekottarīsūtra was also subjected to similar intervention.
dhya prakṛntah⁴ /

tion and rejoiced at the
discourse of the Blessed
One, went away.

The Pāli Suññasutta and the Sanskrit Samṛddhisūtra have
exactly the same significance. Both teach the sattvaśūnyatā by
presenting the six internal bases of consciousness (adhyātmāyatana) as being empty of self and anything pertaining to
self. The latter also stresses the impermanence (anityatā) of
those same bases by giving them as ‘empty of permanence
and changelessness’. Nevertheless, the author of the Upadeśa, allowing
himself to be impressed by the phrase, tat kasya hetoh,
prakṛtir asyaśā, sees in the second of these sūtras an affir-
mation of that emptiness of essential natures (prakṛtiśūnyatā)
referred to by the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras.

Commentary in the Upadeśa*
(T 1509, ch.31, p.282a 28 - b 11)

Prakṛtiśūnyatā, ‘The Emptiness of Essential Natures’. The Prakṛti
dharmas is eternally empty, but by assuming the karmic
series (karmaprabandha), it appears not to be empty. Thus the
Prakṛti of water (udaka) is cold (śīta) in itself, but if it is taken
near fire (agni) it becomes hot (uṣna), and if the fire is put out
it becomes cold again. It is the same with the Prakṛti of
dharmas: as long as the [karmic conditions] are not present, it is
empty (śūnya) and imperceptible (anupalabdha), like the Prakṛti
of permanently cold water; but when the conditions (pratayah)
are assembled, the dharmas exist like water which becomes hot

near fire. If the conditions lessen or disappear, there is no more
dhāraṇa, like boiling water which becomes cold when the fire is
extinguished. See what is said in the Sūtra¹⁵: ‘The eye (cakṣus)
is empty (śūnya), devoid of self (anātman) and of anything pertain-
ting to a self (anātmya). Why? Because that is its essential
nature (prakṛti asyaśā). The ear (śrotra), nose (gṛhāna),
tongue (jihvā), body (kāya) and mind (manas), colour (rūpa),
[sound (śabda), odour (gandha), taste (rasa), tangibility (spra-
stavya)] and dharmas are also like that’.

Objection: That Sūtra says that [the twelves āyatanas] are
empty of self and anything pertaining to a self (śūnyānā
ātmanā vātmyeṇa vā), in other words it is referring to the emptiness
of beings (sattvaśūnyatā), and not to the emptiness of things
(dharmasūnyatā). How do you see evidence in this in favour
of the emptiness of essential natures (prakṛtiśūnyatā)?

Answer: In that Sūtra, it is only a matter of Prakṛtiśūnyatā; it does not speak of the emptiness of beings (sattva-
śūnyatā) or of the emptiness of things (dharmasūnyatā).

The Prakṛtiśūnyatā is of two kinds:

1. In the twelve bases of consciousness (āyatana), there is
no self (ātman) or anything pertaining to a self (ātmya). The
emptiness proper to the twelve āyatanas consists of the absence
of self and the absence of anything pertaining to a self. That is
what is said in the Śrāvakā system.

2. As for the Mahāyāna system, it says this: The twelve
āyatanas, having no self or anything pertaining to a self, are
empty, and the Prakṛti of the twelve āyatanas not existing, is

⁴ With regard to this ending, compare Mahāparinirvāṇa, pp.118, 152, 186;
Nidānasaṃyuktā, pp.114, 176, 197.
* [Tr.’s note] - Translated by the author in Le Traité IV (op. cit), pp.210-15.

¹⁵ The Samṛddhisūtra quoted immediately above.
In short, in the opinion of the Upadesa, the Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra teaches only the emptiness of beings; the Mahāśūnyatāsūtra proclaims both the emptiness of beings and the emptiness of things; as for the Samṛddhisūtra, it affirms the emptiness of essential natures (prakṛti).

The shifts in meaning undergone in the course of time by the technical vocabulary of Buddhism did not escape the author of the Upadesa. In the canonical works, paramārthaśūnyatā is emptiness in the proper sense of the word, namely Anātman or the emptiness of beings (sattvaśūnyatā) devoid of self and anything pertaining to a self, while mahāśūnyatā is the great emptiness relating to both things and beings. In the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras of the Mahāyāna, paramārthaśūnyatā is the emptiness of the Absolute, i.e. of Nirvāṇa; mahāśūnyatā is quite simply the emptiness of the spatial regions. This is what results from the definitions supplied by the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā and the Śatasāhasrikā:

'What is the emptiness of the Absolute? Here the Absolute means Nirvāṇa, and that Nirvāṇa is empty of Nirvāṇa because it is neither eternal nor transitory. Why? Because such is its essential nature. That is called the emptiness of the Absolute.'

'What is great emptiness? The eastern region is empty of eastern region; the southern region is empty of southern region.}

[Ed.] — A more detailed bibliography can be found in the author’s five volumes of Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse (Publications de l’Institut orientaliste, Louvain and Louvain-la-Neuve 1949-80), the English version of which is virtually completed by the present translator and awaits publication in the same series.

Note: The above article originally appeared prior to the publication of Traité IV, the longest section of which is devoted to the 'Eighteen kinds of śūnyatā'.

26 Emended text of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā, p.196, ll.7-8; Śatasāhasrikā, p.1408, 11.15-20: tatra katamā mahāśūnyatā / pūrvā dik pūrvayā dīdā śūnyā / daksīnā dig daksīnayā dīdā śūnyā / yavad vidīsō vidīghhī śūnyā akāsaśāhīvināśīdā upādāya / tat kasya hetoh / prakṛtir asyaśā / iyaṃ ucye mahāśūnyatā /.

NOTICE

Just as we were going to press, we learnt with deep regret of the death of the French scholar André BAREAU, aged 71, on 2 March 1993. An appreciation of this Professor at the Collège de France and world renowned writer on Buddhism will follow in the next issue.