

# SKILFUL MEANS

A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism

Second Edition

MICHAEL PYE

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## SKILFUL MEANS

**‘Skilful means’** is the key principle of the great tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. First set out extensively in the Lotus Sutra, it originates in the Buddha’s compassionate project for helping others to transcend the ceaseless round of birth and death. His strategies or interventions are ‘skilful means’—devices which lead into enlightenment and nirvana. **Michael Pye’s** clear and engaging introductory guide presents the meaning of skilful means in the formative writings, traces its antecedents in the legends of early Buddhism and explores links both with the Theravada tradition and later Japanese Buddhism. First published in 1978, the book remains the best explanation of this dynamic philosophy, which is essential for any complete understanding of Buddhism.

**Michael Pye** is Professor of the Study of Religions at Marburg University, and author of *Emerging from Meditation* (1990), *The Buddha* (1981) and the *Macmillan Dictionary of Religion* (1993). He is a former President of the International Association for the History of Religions (1995–2000), and has taught at the Universities of Lancaster and Leeds.



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Two formal but no less grateful acknowledgements should be made; firstly to the Kōsei Press in Tokyo who kindly allowed me to base my quotations from *The Lotus Sutra* on their recently published translation (details below); and secondly to Edward Conze, both for his own incidental encouragement and especially for the loan of a privately circulated draft translation of *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, made by the late R. H. Robinson, which was particularly helpful in the formulation of quotations from that writing. To avoid misunderstanding, the above sources have not usually been quoted as such but freely and critically drawn upon, so that while the debt is great the responsibility lies here.

This writing has been a personal interest for so many years that readers may forgive me for adding thanks to my wife Christine for her many favours.

M.P.

## CONVENTIONS

- (i) Since Sanskrit is the lingua franca for Mahayana Buddhism, Sanskrit terms are freely used without necessarily implying a Sanskrit source. Some very common terms such as bodhisattva, nirvana, dharma, karma, buddha, and sutra are accepted as anglicised, and diacritical marks are omitted.
- (ii) Pali forms are sometimes used when the context demands it, and again some very common ones are anglicised, e.g. dhamma, sutta.
- (iii) When used with a capital D, Dharma (or Pali, Dhamma) refers to the teaching proclaimed by the Buddha. When used with a small d, dharma, or dharmas, (Pali, dhamma(s)), refer to factors of existence as defined in Buddhist analysis.
- (iv) Proper nouns have usually been given diacritical marks as required, e.g. Vimalakīrti, except for the commonly anglicised Mahayana, Theravada, Pali, and Hinayana.
- (v) Except in special cases romanised Chinese follows the Wade-Giles system. Romanised Japanese follows the Hepburn system.
- (vi) Since some terms from all of the above four languages are indispensable, because of changing contexts, equivalents have sometimes been given in brackets with the abbreviations; Skt. (Sanskrit), P. (Pali), Ch. (Chinese) and J. (Japanese). It is hoped that enough have been given to signpost the reader without ruining the text by putting them in all the time.
- (vii) Names of sutras frequently used are given in an easy conventionalised English form, such as The Lotus Sutra. The relationship between various names for the main sources will be clear from Appendix A. Names of writings referred to incidentally are italicised.
- (viii) Chapters of sutras referred to with Arabic numerals are chapters in Sanskrit texts or translations thereof. Chapters of sutras referred to with Roman numerals are chapters in Chinese versions or translations thereof. Chapters referred to in words, e.g. 'Chapter Eight', refer to chapters in the present work.
- (ix) Japanese names are given surname first, except in a few cases where it is a writer who writes in a non-Japanese language and uses initials.
- (x) Chinese and Japanese characters have been restricted to the appendices and notes.

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

During the last twenty-five years the idea of ‘skilful means’ has become quite widely known to students of Buddhism, and on many occasions I have been encouraged to think that my own study of the concept has played some part in this process. Some people prefer to use the Indian word *upāya*, meaning simply a ‘means’ or a ‘strategem’, whether employed by oneself or by others. Others prefer the longer expression ‘skilfulness in means’, which focuses on the special ability of an enlightened being, a buddha or a bodhisattva. Such great beings are believed to be especially competent in the use of appropriate stratagems to rescue others from ignorance and the entanglements of karma. The compact term ‘skilful means’, corresponding to the East Asian usage of Mahayana Buddhism, brings these aspects together in various ways, as is explained in the pages below.

The idea of ‘skilful means’ was developed during the formative period of Mahayana Buddhism in India at a time corresponding approximately to the emergence of Christianity in the western world. It was Mahayana, the ‘Great Vehicle’, which came to dominate the Buddhist culture of central and eastern Asia, following the Silk Road to China, and being carried further to Korea and Japan. Mahayana Buddhism is the basis for Chan, Zen or Sōn Buddhism and also of faith-oriented devotion, for example to the bodhisattva Guānyīn (Kannon-sama in Japanese) and the mythical buddha Āmítúo (Amida in Japanese). Indeed, all the major schools of Buddhism in the countries mentioned, as also in Vietnam, Tibet and Mongolia, are related in some way to leading texts of early Mahayana Buddhism in which the concept of skilful means plays a key role.

At the same time it has come to be widely accepted that the idea of ‘skilful means’ or ‘skilfulness in means’ sums up thought patterns which were also found in early Buddhism. Indeed it appears to reflect the impact of the historical Buddha himself. Thus the study of ‘skilful means’ is the study of the internal dynamics of Buddhist thought in general. The significance of this has not been lost on various writers who have approached Buddhism from the context of the dialogue between different religions. Once it becomes clear that religious concepts and rites, even central ones, are not fixed entities, but provisional constructs with a temporary function in the various spiritual paths which are followed by human beings, then questions about the interpretation of various religions and the interactions between them can be taken up in a new and creative way. The Buddhist idea of ‘skilful means’ is therefore a most important clue for the further development of this discussion, which is now in process.

Although research into the history of Buddhist texts and ideas has made considerable progress since *Skilful Means* was first published, the leading ideas presented in this book have not fundamentally changed. The work is

intended to be an exploration of those ideas. The purpose of this edition is therefore to make it available once again, in its original form, after many years of inaccessibility. Those interested in particular details will no doubt explore more recent editions and translations of individual Buddhist texts for themselves. There is also a need for more detailed studies about the use of the concept of skilful means in the various contexts of the differing Buddhist schools, a subject which was only touched on in Chapter 8. As an introductory example I may refer to my short essay on skilful means in the particular context of Shin Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> However the idea has been used by later Buddhist thinkers and teachers in many different ways, sometimes centrally, sometimes more incidentally, sometimes obscuring the pattern found in the early Mahayana sutras. It is to be hoped that specialists in various phases of Buddhist culture will look into this usage in more detail, while taking account of the original thrust of the idea. It was after all an idea which led not only into diversity of thought and practice but at the same time pointed towards the coherence and the deeper import of the 'great vehicle'.

The wider discussion mentioned above has so far been pursued mainly in the area of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, although there is no reason why other religious traditions should not be drawn in by those with the competence to do so. The religious culture of India is often regarded as multifaceted and flexible, though individual cults have a firm enough identity, while the style of religious practice in China and elsewhere in East Asia is widely understood to be particularly pragmatic, as in important respects it surely is. But 'skilful means' is not just about doing anything, anywhere, without coherence. Nor is it simply about the peripherals of religion, as is sometimes assumed. On the contrary, thinking about skilful means takes us to the heart of the matter. It is therefore entirely appropriate to consider the possible relevance of this idea, by analogy, to the theistic religions such as Christianity and Islam, which are widely perceived to be more strict in their conceptual structure. Yet both of these religions have an extremely subtle range of options when it comes to questions of interpretation and the precise manner of their spiritual appropriation, a range which is not limited to the mystical strands alone. The perception of conceptual strictness, which gives a false sense of security, should be questioned. It should be questioned because it does not correspond to the history of religions as it has so far run its course, because these are matters of contention within the religious communities themselves, and because it is a matter of urgency in world affairs for people everywhere to come to a more subtle understanding of their varied, yet mutually communicable spiritual inheritance. Positively speaking, the exploration of the subtleties of religion, through an exchange of the leading ideas which help to guide us through them, may yet prove to be of general educational value for humankind.

Various authors have participated in the wider discussion, but so far it is has been too inconclusive to yield a rounded bibliography. The growing literature can therefore best be identified through the internet, for example

via my own links located at the University of Marburg, in Germany. Suffice it to mention here philosopher John Hick's *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (1993) in which a chapter was devoted to the subject. I will be grateful to receive any further indications of this kind, so that they may be noted accordingly.<sup>2</sup>

While major debts were acknowledged in the first edition of *Skilful Means*, I would like to conclude by thanking most warmly all those who have encouraged me in my work since it was first published. Truly one is in receipt of undeserved merit, which is no-merit.

Michael Pye  
Marburg, December 2002

### Endnotes

- 1 'Other-power and skilful means in Shin Buddhism' in *The Pure Land (New Series)* 1, 1984, pp. 70–78.
- 2 Some ancillary writings of my own which had appeared up until 1978 were noted in the footnote to Chapter 9. Since that time I have written a few other relevant articles which may be of interest: 'Skilful means and the interpretation of Christianity' in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 10, 1990, pp. 17–22, 'Die "geschickten Mittel". Zur Dialektik der Ausdrucksformen in Buddhismus und Christentum' in M. Viertel (ed.), *Christentum und Buddhismus*, Hofgeismar 1998, pp. 41–64, and 'Die geschickten Mittel im Lotos-Sutra und im interreligiösen Vergleich' for the journal *Hôrin, Vergleichende Studien zur japanischen Kultur* (forthcoming).



# 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## *Buddhist skilful means*

The concept of 'skilful means' is one of the leading ideas of Mahayana Buddhism and was first used extensively in The Lotus Sutra and other writings treated below. In Mahayana Buddhism the various forms of Buddhist teaching and practice are declared to be provisional means, all skilfully set up by the Buddha for the benefit of the unenlightened. A Buddhist who makes progress himself comes to recognise this provisional quality in the forms of his religion, and though using the means provided for him he has to learn not to be wrongly attached to them. He leaves them behind, like a raft left lying on the bank by a man who has crossed a stream and needs it no more. An advanced follower of Buddhism, usually named by Mahayana Buddhists a *bodhisattva*, continues to use such provisional means in order to lead other living things towards nirvana. A bodhisattva is skilled in allowing the Buddhist religion to be spelled out in all its detail, while not being ensnared by the false discriminations of the unenlightened.

'Skilful means' is a conflated term which is based on Chinese and Japanese usage, as explained later, and which refers to the overall spectrum of meanings with which we are concerned. Since 'skilful means' is about the way in which the goal, the intention, or the meaning of Buddhism is correlated with the unenlightened condition of living beings, it brings out particularly clearly how Mahayanists thought Buddhism, as a system, is supposed to be understood. Once established, the term continued to be used down to the present day, admittedly with some vagaries. It is fair to say that the method of thought and practice summed up by the concept of skilful means is one of the fundamental principles of Buddhism as a working religion. Indeed a Japanese writer has claimed that it is hardly possible to discuss Mahayana Buddhism at all without reference to it.<sup>1</sup>

Strangely enough the matter has never been the subject of extended study in the west. 'Nirvana', 'bodhisattva', 'emptiness' (Skt. *śūnyatā*) and so on have all been considered in this way and that, but apart from occasional references and brief definitions 'skilful means' has scarcely been attended to at all. A concept which has been used to explain the very existence of Buddhism as a functioning religious system demands closer attention. Even in the east there do not seem to have been any extended studies, and this may be partly due to the fact that Mahayanists have rather tended to take 'skilful means' for granted as a natural principle with which to regulate their religion. In recent times there have been a few shorter articles in Japanese, which have been quite useful to the present writer.<sup>2</sup> However even the Japanese have rather tended to deal with it *en passant* in their voluminous commentaries, and this has prevented the concept

from emerging as one of central importance to Buddhist thought, in its own right.

When some years ago the writer visited the splendid headquarters of one of the lively new religions of modern Japan he was duly impressed with the architecture, the furnishings and the technology, the constant flow of people for counselling and devotions, the accessory organisations and the managerial efficiency, the obvious emphasis on cheerful prosperity and on daily personal well-being. It was radically unlike the dimly lit temples in the old style, their cemeteries crowded and overgrown, their mournful bells echoing the half-understood and half-forgotten secrets of traditional Buddhism. These notes of transience and quiescence were far from the minds of the coachloads of well-dressed and optimistically chattering housewives attending their modern mecca in central Tokyo. Their concern was rather with family affairs, schooling, cultural and leisure pursuits, and the elimination of factors inconsistent with well-being. Nevertheless beneath all the usual appurtenances of a modern religion this particular movement was concerned, my guide explained, to teach 'true Buddhism'. In reality there was here, he went on, no so-called 'new' religion at all, but an ancient one. Then how was the coexistence of these seemingly diverse directions to be understood? That, it was explained, is a matter of skilful means.<sup>3</sup>

This account was no modern simplification or sectarian perversion. The Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist text dating from about two thousand years ago, explained that the Buddha himself uses 'innumerable devices' to lead living beings along and to separate them from their attachments.<sup>4</sup> Such devices are formulated in terms of the relative ignorance and the passionate attachments of those who need them, but they turn and dissolve into the Buddhist attainment of release. Similarly the great celestial bodhisattvas or buddhas-to-be are characterised not only by their penetrating insight into the true nature of reality but also by a great compassion for suffering beings. They too deploy a range of methods for the salvation of the multitude, skilfully tuning them to a variety of needs yet consistently intimating the intention of nirvana. The release of all sentient beings is guaranteed in the nirvana of any one bodhisattva, a nirvana postponed and yet assured. For one thing the great vow of a bodhisattva bears all suffering beings along with him. For another thing, to imagine that one being or some beings could attain nirvana, and not others, would fall some way short of the radical teaching that all phenomena are equally void of persistent ontological status, or that, as The Lotus Sutra puts it, all things are nirvanic from the beginning.<sup>5</sup> The path of a bodhisattva is to know this, and at the same time to keep on playing the game of skilful means to save people from themselves. This style of thinking, in which insight (Skt. *prajñā*)<sup>6</sup> and means (Skt. *upāya*) are inextricably related, is the key to understanding the proliferation of new forms which the Mahayana has woven across half Asia.

It is also possible to look at skilful means not from the side of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who invent them, but from the side of the sentient beings who need them, that is, from the point of view of human beings

ignorantly entangled in the apparently ceaseless round of birth and death (Skt. *samsāra*). Indeed Sawada Kenshō reflected a common Japanese assumption about the matter when he concluded in a short article that there are two basic meanings to be remembered. The first is skilful means as invented by the Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings. The second is skilful means as used by sentient beings for the attainment of nirvana or release (J. *gedatsu*).<sup>7</sup> The means themselves are the same, of course, whichever idea is uppermost.

Whether considered as working downwards or upwards the skilful means are above all provisional. They not only need to be established from above but also to be superseded from below. As the beneficiaries become enlightened the expedients become redundant. This process may be a rather rough dismantling and debunking as in some corridors of the Zen tradition, or it may be a smooth transference from one level of meaning to another. Since the skilful means are initially tuned in to the needs of beings entangled in ignorance and *samsāra*, it is quite natural that release from these involves a subtle change in the significance or status of the very means which bring it about. In this sense the concept of skilful means involves the paradox that Mahayana Buddhism elaborates and proliferates itself without end as a religion of salvation and at the same time it tends towards its own dissolution.

Indeed the Mahayanists claim, and not without some justice, that 'skilful means' is the key to the understanding of Buddhism in general. Perhaps the most suggestive passages in this connection are those which narrate the Buddha's initial decision to teach at all (cf. Chapter Seven below). Without this decision the Buddhist religion would never have developed any articulate form whatever. It is therefore of great importance that Mahayanists interpret it in terms of the Buddha's skilful means. For them this key concept is the appropriate way in which to understand any phase of Buddhism which is supposed to derive from the Buddha's initiative, whether it be abstractedly conceptual, concretely narrative, or expressed as meditational practice. The 'answers' which Buddhism apparently offers, such as the teaching of cessation (Skt. *nirodha*) or nirvana, are devised entirely in terms of the problem and they are not intended to have any particular meaning beyond the attainment of the solution. Thus 'Buddhism', as a specific religion identifiable in human history, is a skilful means.

The pages which follow are a systematic attempt to get clear what a skilful means is.

### *The literature of skilful means*

The modern printed edition of the canonical writings of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism runs into a total of eighty five thick volumes. Many of these contain different versions of Indian writings which were translated several times by different people. Since all of these are preserved in the 'Great Store of Sutras' (J. *Daizōkyō*)<sup>8</sup> innumerable miles of print lie more

or less unused in East Asia itself and it is quite appropriate and indeed necessary for the student to be selective. Two criteria are adopted here, namely coherence of language, which means in practice restriction to works produced by one translator, and frequency of use of the writings. In this way a coherent and more or less manageable set of texts was defined, which may be taken as fairly representing the thought of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia.

As to the translator, the obvious choice is Kumārajīva, whose work dominates the transmission of Mahayana Buddhism from India to China. Much of his life was spent in Central Asia. He was born in 344 at Kucha, which lies about half way between Kashmir and the western end of the Great Wall of China, on the northern route through the Tarim Basin. His mother was a local 'princess' and his father was Indian. It appears that he was turned over to monastic life at the age of six or seven, and that he was instructed in Hinayana Buddhism in Kashmir and in Mahayana Buddhism at Kashgar. For about thirty years he lived at Kucha, but in 383 or 385 he was taken off to China by a Chinese military force, arriving eventually at Ch'ang An. He lived here probably from 401 until his death in 413, apparently in some style, working with others on translations of Mahayana texts from Sanskrit into Chinese.<sup>9</sup> Quite apart from his translating activity Kumārajīva played a leading role in discussions about the right understanding of Mahayana Buddhism, which had first arisen in the context of Indian Buddhism in general ('Hinayana') but which was now being stated in a language hitherto used for Taoist concepts. Since he has always been respected as a fair exponent of Mahayana his translations are a particularly useful basis of discussion.

There are some famous texts which Kumārajīva did not translate, for example, The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra, which is the first statement in anonymous sutra form of the mind-only or consciousness-only style within Mahayana Buddhism (defined eventually as the Yogācāra School, but having a wide influence on Tantric Buddhism and on Ch'an or Zen).<sup>10</sup> There are other sutras which he translated but of which a different translation is in common use in Japan today, for example, The Heart Sutra.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless it is his versions which are generally used for three of the most widespread Mahayana sutras of all, namely The Lotus Sutra, The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, and The Diamond Sutra. He translated two longer forms of The Perfection of Insight Sutra, namely that in '8000' lines and that in '25000' lines. He spent much effort, presumably, over the massive commentary on the latter, The Great Treatise on the Perfection of Insight, ascribed perhaps with greater piety than accuracy to the Mahayana thinker Nāgārjuna. With this belong three other works which also align Kumārajīva with Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika school, which was followed more specifically in China and Japan by the 'Three Treatise School'.<sup>12</sup> The three are The Middle Treatise, The Twelve Topic Treatise and The Hundred Treatise. In all his work covers both popular and intellectual aspects of Mahayana Buddhism. A brief introductory note on each of the works used here is given in Appendix A.

The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is simply not extant in Sanskrit, but on what grounds does an investigation of The Lotus Sutra follow Kumārajīva's version? There are two main reasons. The first is that it effectively became a religious text in its own right as far as the world of Sino-Japanese Buddhism was concerned and is to this day far more widely used than any Sanskrit original. The second reason is that the 'original' Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text is very unstable. For one thing there is still no agreed critical edition which adequately collates the various manuscripts and fragments, and in addition it has become clear that the sutra as a whole is the result of a piecemeal process of compilation which is still imperfectly understood (for a summary account see Appendix B). Even if one could be reasonably certain of distinct stages in the growth of the sutra in terms of verse passages, prose passages, and earlier and later chapters, it scarcely seems possible as yet to proceed backwards to an 'original' Lotus Sutra. Nor is there any particular stage in its presumed compilation at which one would have any strong reason to freeze the historical analysis in the interests of finally studying the ideas. If the text were taken at its largest extent it would be very difficult to define historically the persons for whom it was meaningful in that form, e.g. third century inhabitants of Kucha or eleventh century Nepalese. One would in any case have to locate it *after* the initial growth of Mahayana Buddhism, which is reflected in, and indeed known to us because of the gradual compilation of texts just such as this. There are also knotty problems about the interrelated growth of The Lotus Sutra, The Perfection of Insight Sutras and others, which are still most imperfectly understood. There is a continuous danger of circular arguments about the priority of this or that part of various texts and the way in which the same texts are carved up to reconstruct a compilation process. Because of this morass of little studied and probably permanently intractable problems the present enquiry into *an idea* shifted, or rather reverted, to the much more clearly defined and above all unified texts of Sino-Japanese Buddhism. The contents of the texts which Kumārajīva translated had a definite and coherent meaning for him and his associates; and they provide, in the form in which they are available to us, a significant sample of the ideas current among all later East Asian Buddhists. If specialists in some one or other of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit 'originals' have observations or qualifications about the pre-Chinese history of this idea, they will of course be of interest. It is anticipated however that such comments are most unlikely to affect the overall picture very much; and it may be assumed subject to correction that the main outlines of 'skilful means' thinking given below reflect not only Kumārajīva's mind (for he believed in what he translated) but also, since his reception of Indian Mahayana is generally taken to be intellectually accurate, present a fair impression of the meaning of the term in pre-Chinese Mahayana.

To some extent Kumārajīva put his own stamp on the writings which he translated. He was not a fussy literalist. It will be explained below, for example, that he was careless of the distinction between *upāya* ('means') and *upāya-kausālya* ('skill-in-means'). R. H. Robinson made a detailed study

of Kumārajīva's translation methods and concluded that the number and the type of mistakes in his work were not such as to lead to any significant misunderstanding of the original.<sup>13</sup> Robinson also studied what can be determined of Kumārajīva's own thought, on the basis of his words recorded by others and some correspondence with Hui-yuan, and concluded that Kumārajīva was broadly sympathetic to the Mahayana in general while placing a particular reliance on the Mādhyamika school of interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Since Kumārajīva had a clear grasp of Mahayana principles, the texts translated by him provide a coherent and reliable corpus for any avenues of investigation which are representative of East Asian Mahayana Buddhism in general.

The number of texts said to have been translated by Kumārajīva ranges from just over thirty to over one hundred (including no doubt false ascriptions to win prestige for some other translations),<sup>15</sup> but even on a low count it would be difficult to study all in equal detail. The second criterion of selection is therefore the frequency with which various writings were and are used. This cannot be exactly calculated, of course, but there is no doubt that the sutras already mentioned above were and are some of the most commonly used in Mahayana Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra and The Teaching of Vimalakīrti were widely current in Central Asia and China and are still very well known in contemporary Japan.<sup>16</sup> Their contents are familiar to both monks and laymen. Particular devotion is paid to The Lotus Sutra in the Tendai (Ch. T'ien T'ai) and Nichirenite sects of Japanese Buddhism. At the same time The Lotus Sutra is one of the classical statements of Mahayana universalism and is recognised as such by Buddhists of diverse denominations.<sup>17</sup> The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is not linked with any specific sect as such but it has always been particularly popular among laymen, perhaps because its leading figure, Vimalakīrti, is himself a layman. Because they are so well known these two texts form the main material for what follows.

The Lotus Sutra is, in an important sense, mainly about 'skilful means', and no apology is made for treating it in some detail in Chapters Two to Four below. The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is treated by itself in Chapter Five. It is shorter than The Lotus Sutra but provides an important link with The Perfection of Insight and dependent literature, which is taken up in Chapter Six. The Lotus Sutra is also taken up again in Chapter Seven where some passages are treated in the section on the Buddha's decision to teach *Dhamma* (Skt. *Dharma*). The purpose of this is to indicate the matrix of Mahayana principles in early Buddhism.

The Lotus Sutra and The Teaching of Vimalakīrti have a relatively large number of occurrences of the term 'skilful means', and these are to some extent concentrated in important chapters. In each case it is the second chapter which gives the tone for the writing as a whole, after a more or less mythological scenario has been painted in the introductory first chapter. In each case, too, the second chapter bears the explicit title 'Skilful Means'. As a brief generalisation one might say that in The Lotus Sutra the emphasis is

on interpreting the way in which the Buddha himself is believed to have taught, while in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* it is on the style of life of a bodhisattva following the path of the Buddha. Between them the two sutras also reflect quite well both the intellectual and the popular aspects of Mahayana Buddhism. The bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, for example, is supposed to be the epitome of the virtue of insight (Skt. *prajñā*), and his discussion with Vimalakīrti is a classical and not yet scholastic statement of the teaching of voidness (Skt. *śūnyatā*). The bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, by contrast, is particularly symbolic of the many forms taken by Buddhist compassion (Skt. *karuṇā*) in the popular mind, while the chapter in *The Lotus Sutra* describing the activities of this figure is one of the most popular pieces of all Mahayana writing. In some ways therefore the contents of these two writings are complementary and the manner of thinking summed up in the concept 'skilful means' emerges coherently from a study of them.

When it comes to *The Perfection of Insight Sutra* and the dependent literature, the criterion of frequency of use is not so clear. The outstandingly popular *Diamond Sutra* and *Heart Sutra* are very brief indeed and Kumārajīva's Chinese versions happen not to contain a single instance of the term under study, though they do need to be mentioned again later. Chapter Six below is based selectively on Kumārajīva's translations of the basic text of *The Perfection of Insight Sutra*, of the larger text in '25000' lines, and of the treatises mentioned above. It cannot be said that any of these are really popular. There is for example no Japanese rendering of these longer forms of the sutra, though there is of the shorter treatises.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless the principles of 'perfection of insight' thinking are widely current as a result of the general use of the shorter sutras and monastic use of the longer forms and the treatises. The term 'skilful means' itself is quite common in the longer texts and reflects the same usage as that found in *The Lotus Sutra* and *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*. There is a particularly strong emphasis on the relationship between 'skilful means' and 'insight', and a discussion of this in Chapter Six follows on most conveniently from the usage in *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*. In the same chapter some reference to the usage in the treatises establishes the links with Mādhyamika thought, which for Kumārajīva 'was simply Mahāyāna in śāstra form'.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of 'skilful means' does not lie buried in the texts mentioned above. If it is true that the texts represent in a general way the formative stage of Mahayana Buddhism as it was first conceived in India, even though the Chinese versions are at one remove from the originals, then general questions arise about the relationship between the Mahayana idea of 'skilful means' and pre-Mahayana Buddhism. These matters do not depend on minor questions of textual analysis (although a few come into it) but rather on an assessment of central characteristics of the Buddhist religion, and they are therefore raised in Chapter Seven below.

The texts studied have formed such staple reading and recitation material for later Mahayanists that the idea of 'skilful means' is relevant to many later Chinese and Japanese writings. It would take volumes to study in

detail even the explicit usage of the term in all the later texts, let alone to unravel the implicit ramifications of its influence. However some attempt has been made in Chapter Eight to link up with contemporary Buddhism by a survey of modern Japanese usage. No doubt there will be about 100 million corrections.

Finally, when the meaning of 'skilful means' has been sufficiently clarified in the Buddhist context itself, a brief and of course quite unhistorical attempt is made to lift the discussion into the wider world. This is done (in Chapter Nine) partly to dissipate the sensation of being forever imprisoned in historical data, and partly because it is felt that the style of thought uncovered here is indeed relevant to ways of interpreting life other than the Buddhist one.

### *Problems of terminology*

The phrase 'skilful means' has already been used here and there by western writers, but unfortunately it reflects a slightly confusing situation with respect to the underlying Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese terms with which we are concerned. Even that famous interpreter D. T. Suzuki showed some hesitation over how to bring the concept across into English.<sup>20</sup> Although the literal translation of the plain Sanskrit term *upāya* would be just 'means' and not 'skilful means', it is arguable that the best English to use in general discussion of the specifically Buddhist concept is 'skilful means'.<sup>21</sup> The case for this will now be presented forthwith, partly as a natural prolegomenon, and partly because it contributes to the overall development of the topic.

There is an ordinary Sanskrit word: *upāya*, which means 'means', 'expedient', 'stratagem' and the like.<sup>22</sup> The straightforwardly secular meaning of the term can be judged from the enumeration of four such 'means' of success against an enemy, namely: sowing dissension, chastisement, conciliation, and gifts.<sup>23</sup> An example of the quite ordinary use of the term may be found in the *Hitopadeśa*. In the tenth fable of Chapter IV, The Brahman and his Goat, the term is used of a trick devised by three robbers who managed to deprive a Brahman of a goat which he had bought for sacrifice. They simply asked him whether he was sure it was not a dog (which would count as unclean and quite unsuitable for sacrifice) and continued to ask him this until he became quite unsure of himself and finally abandoned the animal by the roadside.<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say this is far from being the same as the Buddhist usage, which is controlled by other central Buddhist concepts. In passing it is curious to note that the air of disreputability which has sometimes become associated with the Japanese equivalent, *hōben*, has a parallel already in the usage of the Sanskrit term. If there were an extensive living 'Sanskrit' Buddhism today its representatives would presumably have to make use of the same kind of arguments in this connection as Japanese scholars and apologists employ (considered in Chapter Eight below).

The Sanskrit word *upāya* also has, of course, a purely etymological history, and some writers have attempted to draw out the meaning of the word from the verb *upa√i*, meaning: to approach, to arrive at, etc.<sup>25</sup> However it seems quite inappropriate to draw conclusions for Buddhist doctrine from such a remote etymological basis, even if there is some general continuity of meaning. Not only does the ordinary meaning of ‘means’ or ‘device’ far outweigh any such considerations as a prolegomenon for considering the Buddhist meaning, but beyond this the Buddhist meaning itself must be sought in the context of meaning provided by the fundamental Buddhist texts in which it is used.

There are a few occurrences of the term in the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism (and the Pali equivalent to the Sanskrit is, as it happens, exactly identical: *upāya*) but these are massively outnumbered by the usage in early Mahayana texts. Since the Pali usage is so limited it can be left aside until Chapter Seven below which considers the relationship between the Mahayana concept of skilful means and the general character of early Buddhism.

In the early Mahayana texts the term *upāya* became a technical term in its own right. For this reason it is listed, with examples, in Edgerton’s *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, although Edgerton does indicate, unusually, that it ‘equals’ Sanskrit.<sup>26</sup> Some compound formations are also to be found, the most important of these being *upāya-kauśalya* (Pali: *upāya-kosalla*), which means ‘skill in means’, ‘skill in devices’, etc. Edgerton gives the meaning of this compound as ‘skill in expedients’. He also, rather surprisingly, quotes Kern’s very antiquated interpretation from the Lotus Sutra, namely ‘able management, diplomacy’, which would be very free indeed as a translation, though acceptable as a preliminary suggestion.<sup>27</sup> Edgerton goes on to say that the term ‘is extremely common everywhere’ (i.e. in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts, which are almost entirely Mahayana), ‘especially of the Buddha’s skill in devising means to impress and convert people’. The only other compound term listed in Edgerton’s dictionary is *upāya-kuśala* (Pali: *upāya-kusala*), an adjective related to *upāya-kauśalya* and meaning ‘skilful in expedients’. This term is very rare however and can be left aside.

So far then two main terms have been introduced, namely:

*upāya* = ‘means’, ‘device’, etc.  
*upāya-kauśalya* = ‘skill in means’, ‘skill in devices’, etc.

Neither of these is a literal basis for the English expression ‘skilful means’. What then is the justification for this latter? The first reason lies in the distance between the implication of the ordinary Sanskrit term *upāya* and the use of the same term, with all its associations, in Buddhist texts composed in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.

None of the English words: ‘means’, ‘device’, ‘expedient’, etc. really does justice by itself to the meaning of the word *upāya* as a technical term in Mahayana Buddhism. Moreover these English words tend to suggest a

lower degree of ethical responsibility than should fairly be ascribed to Mahayanists, even though there is admittedly a problem about the correlation of Mahayanist ethics and western approaches to ethics. One of the overall conclusions of the investigation to be reported later below is that it would be misleading to speak of *upāya* in a Buddhist sense as ‘just a means’ or ‘just a device’, with a strongly pejorative suggestion of deviousness. Indeed consistency with respect to the use of rather diverse means is precisely one of the claims maintained in The Lotus Sutra, as will be seen. For this reason, whatever the conclusions of an independent observer may be, it seems desirable to find a phrase for Buddhist *upāya* which does not tend to suggest a meaning which Buddhists themselves argue to be misleading. Above all a Buddhist *upāya* is something created on the responsibility of a Buddha or a bodhisattva who has perfected his ‘skill in means’ (*upāya-kauśalya*). Since a Buddhist *upāya* is above all something to be skilfully devised and applied it seems natural to draw in this idea of skill in order to characterise the specifically Buddhist concept. Hence it seems right to speak of Buddhist *upāya* as ‘skilful means’. This is not so colourless as mere ‘means’ and is sufficiently curious to act as a distinct technical term, in a manner which nevertheless remains quite appropriate to the original texts in which it is used. Of course translations of Mahayana texts in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit may want to follow the vocabulary more closely and use simply ‘means’ or ‘expedient’ for *upāya*. Translations have the advantage of a massive co-determining context. ‘Skilful means’ is proposed for use in discussion. The procedure here may seem to be rather bold to some. Curiously enough it finds significant further support in the Sino-Japanese Buddhist tradition.

The most usual Chinese term for *upāya* is *fang-pien* 方便, the characters for which are pronounced in Japanese as *hō-ben*. (Characters for all Chinese and Japanese terms are given in the index.) In a sense the Chinese and Japanese words *fang-pien* and *hōben* are the same. They *look* the same in their written form. This does not mean however that they are really quite the same in language history. The Chinese word, like the Sanskrit word *upāya*, is an ordinary word meaning ‘method’, or ‘convenient’ etc.<sup>28</sup> It had an independent existence apart from its use by the translators of Buddhist texts. The Japanese word *hōben* however, since it is drawn from the Chinese, could not possibly have had any existence prior to the importation of Chinese culture to Japan, which was inextricably bound up with Buddhism and Buddhist texts. Unlike the Chinese therefore it is in large measure a technical term from the beginning, though it did not entirely remain so.

Those who translated the Mahayana sutras into Chinese do not seem to have been very much concerned about the distinction between *upāya* and *upāya-kauśalya*. Dharmarakṣa, who composed the earliest extant Chinese version of The Lotus Sutra, favoured the term *shan-chüan fang-pien*,<sup>29</sup> while Kumārajīva preferred either just *fang-pien* or sometimes *fang-pien-li*.<sup>30</sup> In the texts studied Kumārajīva *never* used Dharmarakṣa’s phrase, probably

because he felt his own translation to be more succinct. Some justification for Kumārajīva's tendency to compression may be seen in the way in which the two related terms are used in the Sanskrit text. There too the distinction is not in practice very important. Since either term immediately evokes the other the persistent reader would tend to conflate them in his mind. Striking confirmation of this point is found in the fact that Kumārajīva was able to translate the title of the second chapter of The Lotus Sutra from *upāya-kausālyā* to *fang-pien*, even though the latter, considered pedantically, is equivalent only to *upāya*.<sup>31</sup> Thus when Kumārajīva said *fang-pien* he meant 'means (such as buddhas skilfully use)'. The same applies for *fang-pien* as a facility of bodhisattvas, as when it is said in Kumārajīva's translation of The Great Perfection of Insight Sutra (T223): 'If a bodhisattva, a *mahāsattva*, desires to attain supreme perfect enlightenment, he should learn the perfection of insight applying skilful means.'<sup>32</sup> Although the text literally says *fang-pien* it is evidently concise for '(while) applying (his) (skilfulness in) means'. Not the application of one particular device is meant here but the bringing to bear of the bodhisattva's special skill in means with respect to all particular means.

The Japanese word *hōben* (for *fang-pien*) is the only one of the various possibilities in Japanese which became established in really ordinary use. Numerous other synonyms may be offered (no less than fourteen in a modern Sanskrit-Japanese dictionary)<sup>33</sup> but these are only explanatory. Not only was the term *hōben* a technical term from the start, as mentioned above, it was also firmly established in Kumārajīva's sense because of the paramount influence of his translations by the time Buddhism came to Japan. Above all it was the concentrated usage in The Lotus Sutra and The Teaching of Vimalakīrti which gave its meaning for the Japanese. These two texts have been well-known and popular in Japan ever since the earliest period when they were associated with the seventh century Prince Shōtoku, the first Japanese national patron of Buddhism. Japanese scholars may have been aware of the wider usage of the word *fang-pien* in Chinese literature, as they are today, but the average Japanese was not. Moreover popular misuse of the term must post-date its introduction into the language and therefore some weight should be given to the Buddhist attempts to retrieve and maintain its properly Buddhist meaning (described in Chapter Eight). Thus from the Japanese point of view there is something to be said for giving the term a slightly special translation in English, and for not being satisfied with the weak generality of 'means' or 'device'. Indeed Japanese dictionaries sometimes define the meaning of *hōben* as *kōmyō na shudan*, which means precisely 'skilful means'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly the term *zengon*, the *zengon* of Dharmarakṣa's *zengonhōben* (Ch. *shan-chüan fang-pien*), is defined in a major Japanese dictionary of Buddhist terms as 'a skilful means' (*zengyō no gonbō*) and as 'having the same meaning as *hōben*'.<sup>35</sup> Thus the case for translating *hōben*, in even faintly Buddhist contexts, with the special phrase 'skilful means' is quite strong, and reinforces the decision to translate Kumārajīva's *fang-pien* in this way.

The overall situation can be set out in tabular form as follows:

	pre-Buddhist meaning	Buddhist meaning	post-Buddhist meaning
Sanskrit:	means, trick	means (but c.f. skill in means)	(ordinary meaning continues)
Chinese: <i>fang-pien</i>	method, convenient	(skilfully applied) means or skilful means	(ordinary meaning continues)
Japanese: <i>hōben</i>		skilful means	trick
English:		skilful means	

As for terms not included in the table, *upāya-kauśalya* should be represented in English by ‘skill in means’, and Kumārajīva’s *fang-pien-li* as ‘power of skilful means’.<sup>36</sup> In line by line discussion or literalistic translation of Sanskrit texts ‘means’ or ‘expedient’ may be demanded for *upāya* to distinguish it sharply from *upāya-kauśalya*, which explicitly adds the idea of skill to that of means. This literalism however, though not without uses on occasion, runs the very real danger of failing to bring out the important specificity of the term *upāya* as a Buddhist term. It also ignores the tendency of the *kauśalya* component to become inseparable from *upāya* in Buddhist usage, a development which culminates in Kumārajīva’s equation of the two. The best term for Kumārajīva’s *fang-pien* is ‘skilful means’. Granted the general coherence of the Sanskrit and the Sino-Japanese tradition, the best term for the concept in general discussions of Buddhism seems also to be ‘skilful means’. This special term can still be distinguished from ‘skill in means’ when necessary, but it brings in both the necessary associations in a convenient way for general purposes.

### Endnotes

- 1 Sawada Kenshō: ‘Bukkyō ni okeru hōben no shisō ni tsuite’ in *Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyū* 12 (1963) (沢田謙照, 仏教における【方便】の思想について, 仏教文化研究), p. 97. All Japanese names are given surname first.
- 2 Especially Sawada (see previous note); Masuda Hideo: ‘Hannyakyo ni okeru “hōben” no imi ni tsuite’ in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* No. 23 (1964) (増田英男, 般若經における【方便】の意味について, 印度學佛教學研究), pp. 112–17; Kumoi Shōzen: ‘Hōben to Shinjitsu’ in Ōchō Keinichi (ed.), *Hokke Shisō*, Kyōto, 1969 (雲井昭善, 方便と真実 in 横超慧日・法華思想). The following articles in denominational journals were not available: 大西泰信: 【方便】の「波羅蜜」加行に関する—考察 駒沢宗学研究 1 (1956), pp. 152–4; 越智淳仁: 究竟は方便なり in 密教学会報 6 (1967), pp. 25–29; 種田哲也: 往生論註に

おける般若と方便—特に阿弥陀仏論の論理的根拠に in 真宗学 27/28 (1962), pp. 167–178; 普賢大円：親鸞教学に於ける方便の意義 in 真宗研究 7 (1956), pp. 21–31. In 1974 an article in English by Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga appeared in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. I No. 1, pp. 51–72, entitled ‘The Concept of Upāya 方便 in Mahayana Buddhist Philosophy’. It picks out the general characteristics of the concept quite interestingly, though it must be said that the historical bearings are rather vague. In particular the thrusting back of the Mahayana concept of skilful means (Skt. *upāya*) into the initial development of Buddhism is carried through in a rather unhistorical way, as indeed it was in Alicia Matsunaga’s fascinating earlier volume *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation, The Historical Development of the Honji Suijaku Theory*, Tokyo 1969 (cf. my review article ‘Assimilation and skilful means’ touching on this very point in *Religion, Journal of Religion and Religions*, 1, 2 (1971)). The difficulty is that the term *upāya* is hardly used at all in the Pali texts, whereas it emerged as a technical term in the early Mahayana re-statements. Of course the Mahayana viewpoint is that this is how early Buddhism is to be understood, and there is much to be said for the viewpoint (cf. Chapter Seven below); but while it is right to stress the importance of the Buddha’s very decision to teach at all, it is misleading to suggest that the Buddha in person understood his work specifically in terms of *upāya* (article named above, p. 53) as there is no historical evidence for this whatever. The argument should be that the technical term ‘skilful means’ is one which the Mahayanists reasonably applied in retrospect to the fundamental character of Buddhism as it was first conceived. Another most important historical point is that the term *upāya* is very little used in texts ascribed to Nāgārjuna (the Matsunagas give not one explicit quotation), though it is quite common in the basic Mahayana sutras which *pre-date* his work. We can positively state that the equivalent *fang-pien* appears once only in the *Chung-lun* (T1546) and then not in the verses ascribed to Nāgārjuna but in the commentary (see Chapter Six below). Of course the concept of *upāya* is not unrelated to Nāgārjuna’s account of two kinds of truth, but the latter is historically secondary. It would in no way detract from the strength of the interpretative position (which is what the Matsunagas’ article really reflects) if the historical phases were more clearly and accurately delineated. Although the study presented here was first undertaken some time ago and is conceived along rather different lines, Alicia Matsunaga’s *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation* certainly underlines the importance of this whole subject for understanding Buddhism, and it contains much interesting material of which some is referred to again with gratitude below. Other works in European languages deal with the term skilful means (Skt. *upāya*, etc.) even more incidentally, although the first brief discussion was in the appendix volume of M. E. Burnouf’s pioneer translation of The Lotus Sutra, *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi, Vol. II Appendice (Mémoires Annexes)*, Paris 1852 (2nd ed. 1925), pp. 549 ff.

3 It should be noted that the explanation was not an official one, and the term was introduced when the discussion became one step removed from a direct account of practice and doctrine. The movement in question was the Risshō Kōsei-kai (立正佼成会), a modern ecumenically-minded lay movement based mainly on the Tendai-Nichirenite tradition. The term ‘skilful means’ (J. *hōben* 方便) was clearly present in the mind of the person concerned as a result of regular reading of The Lotus Sutra, which is to be considered in detail below.

4 T IX 5c (無數方便) cf. KSS 32. All references to The Lotus Sutra will give the location for Kumārajīva’s Chinese version in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (*The Tripitaka in Chinese*), ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, 1927, 1960<sup>2</sup> Tokyo, (abbreviated to T, followed by volume, page and horizontal column). A reference is also given to the recently published English translation by Kato, Soothill and Schiffer, abbreviated to KSS, which is the first integral translation of Kumārajīva’s Chinese text into a European language, entitled *Myōhō-Renge-Kyō The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law*, Tokyo 1971. Although some criticisms could no doubt be made, and the translation has not always been closely followed in quotations given below, it is quite adequate for the general orientation of English readers. Its use in quotations below is by kind permission of the Kōsei Publishing Company, Tokyo. (This translation has since appeared in a new edition

from John Weatherhill, Inc. Tokyo.) The present discussion does not assume responsibility for a general introduction to The Lotus Sutra or its contents, and is directed only towards the concept of 'skilful means'. Readers who wish to examine the wider context of this argument in the literature itself would be advised to begin with a reading of the above-mentioned translation, which is preferable to H. Kern's translation from a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text (the language in which it was originally composed), *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Law*, Oxford 1884 (Max Müller ed. *Sacred Books of the East* Vol. XXI), reprinted New York 1963. Kern's translation is now out of date and unsatisfactory for various reasons, although alas it has still not been superseded as a translation from Sanskrit. The KSS translation is admittedly from a Chinese version, but one which became important as a text in its own right.

- 5 T IX 8b, (諸法從本來常自寂滅相). 'All dharmas are themselves permanently nirvanic from the beginning', cf. KSS 54 'All existence, from the beginning, Is ever of the nirvana-nature.' The characters 寂滅 (J. *jaku-metsu*) used here are frequently used to translate the Sanskrit term nirvana, which is also often merely transliterated as 涅槃 (J. *nehan*) e.g. in the immediate context quoted here.
- 6 *Prajñā* is commonly translated 'wisdom', but 'insight' is marginally preferable as being less misleading. The former tends to suggest in English a body of accumulated knowledge, sometimes moralising, while 'insight' adequately conveys the idea of penetratingly seeing the true nature of things. Cf. below, Chapter Six, note 1.
- 7 Sawada Kenshō, *op. cit. Gedatsu: 解脱*.
- 8 For our purposes this is the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, cf. note 4, though of course earlier printed editions also exist.
- 9 Demiéville, P. et al. (eds.) *Hōbōgin, Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d'après les Sources Chinoises et Japonaises*, Paris and Tokyo 1929 ff., *Fascicule Annexe* p. 144. Some alternative dates are also given. Kumārajīva is the Indian form of his name, which is rendered in Chinese characters as 鳩摩羅什 and sometimes abbreviated to 羅什 (J. Kumarajū and Rajū, respectively). Cf. also Robinson, R. H. *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, Madison, Milwaukee and London 1967, pp. 72–73, for more details and variant dates.
- 10 Known to English readers through Suzuki Daisetsu's translation *The Lankavatara Sutra*, London 1932 and also his *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, London 1930.
- 11 The one mostly used is the version by Hsüan Tsang (T251); Kumārajīva's version is T250. These numbers identify works by the order in which they appear in the *Daizōkyō*, but the correlation of works with bound volumes is effected by means of a catalogue: *Hōbōgin's Fascicule Annexe* (note 9 above), or the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Mokuroku* in one small volume, Tokyo 1969.
- 12 三論宗 Ch. *San-lun-tsung*, J. *San-ron-shū*.
- 13 Robinson, *op. cit.* pp. 77–88.
- 14 *Op. cit.* pp. 88–95.
- 15 *Op. cit.* pp. 73–77. cf. *Hōbōgin, Fascicule Annexe*, p. 144, where 57 works are listed.
- 16 On archaeological evidence for the popularity of The Lotus Sutra in Central Asia and North-Western China (including a close association with the Teaching of Vimalakīrti) see Davidson, J. Leroy, *The Lotus Sutra in Chinese Art*, New Haven U.S.A. 1954, and on its importance in early Japanese Buddhism see De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, Tokyo 1935; and of course there are many miscellaneous indications for both writings.
- 17 The progressive specialisation of East Asian Buddhism into schools and sects did not make the use of particular sutras as tightly compartmentalised as one might at first imagine. The Lotus Sutra, for example, was by no means confined to the Tendai Sect and its derivatives, but continued to be known to Pure Land Buddhists and Zen Buddhists, and to have a broad cultural impact. The Heart Sutra is used more or less across the board. At the same time the result of any extensive study of ancient sutras does not necessarily directly reflect the mental activity of any one group of Buddhists empirically defined within society at one point in history. Results should rather be taken into account as a factor in long-term cultural impact. For example, although the three sutras specially used in Pure Land Buddhism are not examined in detail here, and although Pure Land Buddhists do not in practice make

*much* use of other sutras, one could still argue that the central ideas of Mahayana Buddhism in general, as expressed in the sutras which have been studied, are relevant to any really satisfactory understanding of the Pure Land denominations.

- 18 *Kokuyaku Issaikyō*, series of Japanese translations first published in the 1920s and 1930s, recently reprinted, *Chūganbu* Vol. 1. See also Ui Hakuju: *Ui Hakaju Chosaku Senshū*, Vols. 4 & 5, Tokyo 1968, containing the three shorter treatises. The *Kokuyaku Issaikyō* also contains a translation of the great extended form of The Perfection of Insight Sutra (*Daihannyakyō*, or *Daihannyaharamittakyō*) which takes up no less than three volumes of the *Daizōkyō* in Chinese (T220). Presumably this work has had some influence, although for this class of literature one could almost formulate a law that the shorter it is, the greater its influence.
- 19 Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 95.
- 20 See *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, (New York 1963, but first published in 1907) p. 64, 'The term *upāya* literally means expediency. The great fatherly sympathetic heart of the Bodhisattva has inexhaustible resources at his command in order that he might lead the masses to enlightenment . . . To reach this end he employs innumerable means (*upāya*) suggested by his disinterested lovingkindness'. Ibid. p. 260 f. (footnote): (after comparison with 1 Cor. XIII 2 and quotation from The Lotus Sutra) 'Upāya is a very difficult term to translate into English; it literally means "way", "method", or "strategy".' Ibid. p. 298 f. 'Upāya, meaning "expedient", "stratagem", or "device", or "craft", has a technical sense in Buddhism. It is used in contrast to intelligence (*prajñā*) and is synonymous with love (*karuṇā*). Suzuki then quotes from The Teaching of Vimalakīrti to indicate the connection with *prajñā* (the text appears later below), and gives a very generalised account of the concept typical of the style of *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. He goes on: 'In many cases, thus, it is extremely difficult to render *upāya* by any of its English equivalents and yet to retain its original technical sense unsuffered. This is also the case with many other Buddhist terms, among which we mention Bodhi, Dharmakāya, Prajñā, Citta, Parivarta, etc. The Chinese translators have *fang p'ien* (*sic*) for *upāya* which means "means-accommodation".' The miscellaneous use of diacritical marks, italics and capital letters in these quotations illustrates the messy process of anglicising Buddhist terms quite well. In general one may concur with the intention not to be happy with a common English word which fails to do justice to the special meaning of *upāya* or *fang-pien* in Buddhism. Note also that 'insight' and 'compassion' are adequate for *prajñā* and *karuṇā*, and better than 'intelligence' and 'love' which are not adequate. The question of analogies to skilful means outside Buddhism will be taken up again briefly in Chapter Nine below.
- 21 The Matsunagas, in the article previously noted (see note 2), say "'skilful means" is aoristic without further elucidation' (*op. cit.* p. 51), but then go on to use regularly the word *upāya* itself, which is of course equally 'aoristic without further elucidation'. The significance of the concept can admittedly only be made clear by looking into it at some length, whether we speak of *upāya* (and leave *upāya-kauśalya* out of it altogether) or whether we speak of 'skilful means' to preserve the relevant associations. It is presumably because it needs some elucidation anyway that people have begun to write about it. It is also misleading to equate *upāya* entirely with *fang-pien*, in view of Kumārajīva's conflation with *upāya-kauśalya* (see below). Moreover, it is remarkable that the article does not seem to contain any further reference to 'skill' at all. The general intention to stick to the word *upāya* seems to break down on page 70, where they are described as 'methods', and Lu K'uan Yü's translation (of *fang-pien*) as 'expedient method' is accepted without comment in a quotation from The Teaching of Vimalakīrti. It is also argued that 'such renditions (i.e. "expediency", "adapted teaching" and "skilful means") imply that *upāya* are inferior teachings bearing only a marginal relationship to Buddhist philosophy' (page 51), a view rejected in the present work.
- 22 Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford 1899, gives: 'coming near, approach, arrival, Bhartr; that by which one reaches one's aim, a means or expedient (of any kind), way, stratagem, craft, artifice,' and locates this usage in the *Mahābhārata*, *Laus of Manu*, *Yājñavalkya* and *Pañcatantra*. H. Grassmann's *Wörterbuch zum Rig-veda*, Leipzig 1873,

does not contain the term at all. Monier-Williams presumably consulted Böhlingk and Roth's *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch* St. Petersburg 1855, Vol. I, p. 988 which gives: 'Herbeikunft, wodurch man zu seinem Ziel gelangt, Mittel, Weg, fein angelegtes Mittel'. References here are wider than in Monier-Williams and include *Muṇḍakopanishad* 3, 2.4 and *Bhagavad-gītā* 6, 36. The last mentioned is in fact an explicitly religious usage, though one which naturally arises without becoming a technical term, to the effect that yoga can be attained by one who is self-controlled and who strives by means (*upāyataḥ*), that is, presumably, by appropriate means. The further exposition is not connected with this term in particular, and since it does not appear to be used otherwise in the text, it may be taken to be non-technical.

- 23 Francis Johnson, *Hitopadeśa: The Sanskrit Text, with a Grammatical Analysis, Alphabetically Arranged*, London 1884, p. 146. He also gives two related terms: *upāya-chintā*, the devising of an expedient, and *upāya-jñā*, skilled in expedients or fertile in resources. Monier-Williams also gives these terms; and the four means of success against an enemy as 'sowing dissension, negotiation, bribery, and open assault' which altogether add up to the same.
- 24 Johnson, *Hitopadeśa*, p. 90 (of text), line 2542. cf. Charles Wilkins, *Fables and Proverbs from the Sanskrit, being the Hitopadesa*, London 1885, pp. 251–2 and 256. The eleventh fable in the same chapter (*ibid*, pp. 253–6) gives a story about a lion with three attendants, a crow, a tiger and a jackal. One day the lion decided to give protection to a wandering camel whom he also took into service. After some time the animals began to suffer from a food shortage, and the crow, the tiger and the jackal began to plot, and suggested to the lion that the camel be used for food. The lion objected since he had given his word that the camel should be protected. The three plotters then devised a stratagem by which the camel would be brought to offer himself voluntarily as food for the others. Each one of them in turn offered themselves to the lion as food, but the lion each time refused. In this way the camel was constrained not to lag behind, and he also offered himself, but when he did so he was immediately fallen upon and killed by the tiger. This second story is supposed to explain the same principle as the first one given above, namely that people may often be brought to grief by placing confidence in knaves.
- 25 Kumoi, *op. cit.* pp. 324 ff. cf. also Sawada *op. cit.*
- 26 Edgerton, Franklin, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary and Grammar*, New Haven, 1953, *ad loc.*
- 27 In fact Kern mainly translated *upāyakaūśalya* as 'skilfulness', rather ignoring the *upāya* component. In the note quoted by Edgerton he goes on to say that *upāya* means an expedient, and that it also denotes the energy of *prajñā*, 'the latter being Nature, otherwise called Māyā', Kern, *op. cit.*, p. 30. Kern's interpretations should now be regarded as entirely antiquated, especially comments such as (p. 30) 'From the atheistic point of view the possessor of *upāyakaūśalya* can hardly be anything else but all-ruling Time; regarded from the theistic view he must be the Almighty Spirit.' Burnouf was more precise at an earlier date when he explained *upāya* as 'le moyen' and *upāyakaūśalya* as 'l'habileté dans l'emploi des moyens', *op. cit.* p. 550.
- 28 Giles, H. A. *Chinese-English Dictionary*, 1912, 1964, *ad loc.* gives rather crudely: 'convenient; the "good works" of Buddhism', plus some locutions stressing convenience or accommodation, e.g. 'If you are accommodating to others, you will find it an accommodation to yourself'. *Hsing fang-pien* (行方便) is given as 'to bestow alms, etc.' These all rather suggest that Chinese usage did not reflect the profounder aspects of Buddhist philosophy by the early twentieth century, although one further interesting phrase is 佛以慈悲為本，方便為門 interpreted as 'Buddha makes compassion the root and charity the door,—of salvation'. Mathews' *Chinese-English Dictionary*, Cambridge Mass. 1969 gives a few phrases following Giles, and for the term *fang-pien* itself writes as follows: 'convenient, from 隨方因便 that which is not strictly according to rule, but which is convenient. Used by Buddhists for good works, by means of which men are led into an appreciation of the deeper truths of Buddhist philosophy; now used generally of things beneficial.' The pocket-sized *Xīnhuá Zìdiǎn*, Peking 1971, does not use the term in the context of *fang* (方) or *fa* (法), but does use it to explain the meaning of *biàn* (便 i.e. *pien*) as 'convenient'. Sino-Japanese dictionaries are discussed in Chapter Eight below.

- 29 善權方便, frequently (see Appendix C). Suzuki translated this term as ‘skilful means’, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, p. 393.
- 30 方便 or 方便力. See Appendix C.
- 31 Wogihara, U. and Tsuchida, C. do not indicate any alternative manuscript readings for this, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtram, Romanized and Revised Text of the Bibliotheca Buddhica Publication*, Tokyo, 1934, p. 28, though the point may be subject to correction. Nor does N. Dutt in his *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtram with N. D. Mironov’s Readings from Central Asian Mss.*, Calcutta 1953. Anyway this is by no means the only case, for the next two occurrences in the text illustrate the point equally well. It is most unlikely that Kumārajīva’s manuscript gave *upāya* in all such cases. The footnote to this heading in KSS explicitly equates *fang-pien* and *upāya-kauśalya*, perhaps simply presuming that Kumārajīva’s is a correct translation of a Sanskrit like that now extant; the meaning is then given as ‘appropriate expedient or tactful method’, which shows the force of *-kauśalya* is not clearly appreciated. The translation of the chapter heading itself in KSS is ‘Tactfulness’, which is a good word for conveying an approximately correct impression without further explanations, but which does not really cover the sense of active, inventive, initiative demanded to cover the whole teaching activity of a Buddha. Kern translates this chapter heading merely as ‘Skilfulness’, and this is inadequate because there is no good reason for ignoring the *upāya*-element in the Sanskrit. Dharmarakṣa only had the *shan-chüan* (clever expedients) of *shan-chüan-fang-pien* (善權方便) at this point (T IX 67c), but this is probably an abbreviation for his own longer term.
- 32 若菩薩摩訶薩欲得阿耨多羅三藐三薩菩提應方便學般若波羅蜜迴向 T VIII 345a.
- 33 Ogiwara Unrai, *Bonwa Jiten* (荻原雲來, 梵和辭典), cited *ad loc.* by Kumoi (*op. cit.* p. 324, gives the following terms for *upāya*: 接近, 到着, 手段, 方策, 工夫, 策略, 技巧【漢訳】方便, 方計, 巧便, 權, 權方便, 如法, 因緣, 因緣方便.
- 34 巧妙な手段 cf. Chapter Nine below on ‘Spectrum of usage in dictionary entries’, and cf. also Chapter Two, note 3.
- 35 Oda, et al. *Bukyō Daijiten*, Tokyo 1954, 1972 (織田得能, 佛教大辭典) (p. 1059, 善巧の權謀・方便と言ふ如し).
- 36 This term (方便力) really lies between ‘skill in means’ which he had before him, and ‘power of means’ which seems a little too vague. If ‘skilful means’ is acceptable for Kumārajīva’s *fang-pien*, then ‘power of skilful means’ follows on naturally for *fang-pien-li*. But it should always be remembered that the inclusion of the ‘skilful’ component depends on understanding Kumārajīva’s terms in their overall Buddhist context from the Sanskrit texts to contemporary Japanese explanations, rather than on translating it as if it were just a miscellaneous Chinese word.

## 2 THE INITIAL TEACHING OF SKILFUL MEANS IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

### *Śāriputra's perplexity*

Taken as a unified text The Lotus Sutra seems on the face of it to offer a mysterious new doctrine heralded by fantastic celestial events. Indeed the elaborate description of the scenario, with a magisterial Buddha deep in meditation on the Vulture Peak, surrounded by a fantastic throng of *arhats* and bodhisattvas, not to mention the dragon-kings and others not often seen nowadays, makes tedious reading for some fast-moving moderns. The mythology will be taken up again below, but for the present immediate attention may be paid to the second chapter of the sutra where its main teaching is first directly stated. Other chapters of the sutra contain elaborations of the same teaching, partly in the form of allegories which will also be considered later including such famous tales as the burning house and the magic city.

In the Sino-Japanese tradition this second chapter has always had a special importance as the key to the understanding of the sutra as a whole. Usually it is coupled with Chapter XVI (Chapter 15 in Sanskrit texts)<sup>1</sup> which is given a final supremacy as the revelation of the true character of the Buddha. Given this standpoint of interpretation, which goes back to Chih-I, these two chapters have often been singled out for special liturgical use.<sup>2</sup> The doctrinal schematisations of this sort are not adopted here as a methodological basis. For one thing it is most likely that Chapter XVI (or 15) was not part of the earliest phase of the sutra's compilation, but even when the sutra was taken as a literary whole by Kumārajīva, the complex exegetical structures developed later were not as far as we know employed by him. Nevertheless, even leaving the doctrinal schemes aside, it is clear that Chapter II dominates the first part of the sutra, if not all of it. It has already been noted that Kumārajīva's title for it is precisely 'Skilful Means' (*fang-pien*).

The narrative framework is quite simple. Following on from the preparatory explanation in the opening chapter the Buddha rises from his contemplation and briefly explains to Śāriputra and the whole assembly the relation between the insight of the buddhas and their style of teaching. The audience, including Śāriputra who was supposed to be one of the wisest of his disciples,<sup>3</sup> fails to understand his meaning, and so Śāriputra, as spokesman, requests a further explanation. At first the Buddha demurs on the grounds that it would merely startle and perplex people, but when the request is repeated twice more he agrees to speak. At this point five thousand haughty members of the audience withdraw, believing that they have already attained what there is to attain, and then the Buddha begins again to expound at some length the doctrine of skilful means.

The theme is already briefly anticipated in the description of the heart-searching of the audience, and in Śāriputra's first request, although it does not appear in the repetitions of the request which stress instead the willingness of large numbers of the audience to hear a fuller exposition with respect. The perplexity of the audience has three aspects. Firstly, why does the Buddha now so earnestly praise the practice of skilful means?<sup>4</sup> Secondly, why does he say that the Dharma which he has obtained is so profound and difficult to understand?<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, what does this mean with regard to the one principle of emancipation leading to Nirvana, which has already been declared, and which is followed by monks, nuns, and lay devotees both male and female who seek to become *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*?<sup>6</sup>

In Śāriputra's request for further elucidation 'the supreme skilful means'<sup>7</sup> is again closely identified with the Dharma itself, and both are spoken of as the property of all the buddhas. Thus he asks: 'What is the cause and what the reason for so earnestly extolling the supreme skilful means and the very profound, mysterious Dharma of the buddhas, which is so difficult to understand?'<sup>8</sup> Reference to the skilful means and Dharma of buddhas in general is of some importance.<sup>9</sup> By contrast Śāriputra goes on to say, 'From of yore I have never heard such a discourse from the Buddha',<sup>10</sup> but this latter statement refers only to Śāriputra's experience of the present Buddha, and does not indicate the overall standpoint of the sutra. Similarly the audience as a whole was perplexed because hitherto only one principle of emancipation has been declared, namely the teaching of Nirvana, which they have already received. To the audience, including Śāriputra, a new teaching seems to be in the offing, but from the overall standpoint of the sutra's teaching the 'new' teaching is simply the teaching of all buddhas in all times and places. The newness is felt by the recipients of the teaching because it is they who differentiate and make progress. From the standpoint of 'the buddhas' however the apparently varied teaching is quite consistent. The effects of this dialectic upon the way in which traditional concepts of Buddhism are understood will be brought out in more detail below, but before going further something should be said about the sense in which the teaching of this sutra is supposed to be 'new'.

It is clear from the formulations already referred to and quoted that the very theme of the Buddha's discourse in The Lotus Sutra is supposed to be his skilful means, which is intimately connected with his Dharma and which he shares in common with all the buddhas. Apart from this theme there is indeed no particular 'content' to the teaching given. It is a sutra therefore not so much about doctrines in an assertive sense, but rather about the inner method of the Buddhist religion. For example there is little concern about whether there is an attainable goal, Nirvana, or not, but there is much concern about the whys and wherefores of such a goal being held out for people to entertain and about what they should do with it. As the questioners referred to above put it: 'We too on receiving this Dharma attain Nirvana. *But now we do not know to what this principle tends*'.<sup>11</sup> The sutra is about the correct use of existing religious procedures. It does not

propose the setting up of new religious procedures, though it perhaps encourages a certain widening of outlook with regard to permissible access-ories (see below). Since it is about a religious *method* it is not a speculative writing but an extremely practical, spiritual one. It is not about doctrines in the pedestrian sense that it sets out a series of doctrines for memorisation or assent. There are no new teachings as such which could be straightforwardly enumerated. Hence the reaction of some, on a first reading, that the much heralded ‘new’ revelation of the Buddha never amounts to anything much. Nevertheless, although there is no new ‘content’, what does emerge is a controversial new style for understanding the existing teaching, and in this sense the sutra is indeed about doctrine. This new style, which touches the very centre of what Buddhism is all about, is inextricably bound up with the elaboration of the notion of skilful means as that which above all characterises the observable activity of a buddha.

The material giving the Buddha’s exposition can be considered in three parts: the brief opening exposition which was not understood by the audience, the longer exposition in prose, and the longer exposition in verse. It may be recollected that the intention is to bring out the meaning of ‘skilful means’ as it stands in Kumārajīva’s Chinese version, and thus there is no impropriety in looking first at the prose sections even though historically it may be that the verse, or some of it, was composed at an earlier date.

### *The opening exposition*

Not surprisingly the brief opening exposition contains essentially the same three points of interest as the question of Śāriputra already commented upon, namely: the wisdom or insight of the buddhas, their method or means, and the question about how what is said about these relates to existing Buddhist teaching. Great emphasis is placed on the perfection of the buddhas, with regard to insight and skilful means, thus: ‘The *tathāgatas* are all already completely perfect in the *pāramitās* of skilful means and wisdom.’<sup>12</sup> The insight of a buddha or a *tathāgata* (these are of course more or less interchangeable terms) is said to be quite superlative and not shared by any other beings at all.<sup>13</sup> Their Dharma is ‘faultless and inscrutable, profound and mysterious’.<sup>14</sup> It ‘cannot be indicated’ and ‘the terms for it are characterised by nirvana’.<sup>15</sup> Their insight is ‘broad and great, profound and far-reaching’.<sup>16</sup> But while being inexpressible it also involves a grasp of the true nature of the multiple factors of existence.

This latter aspect of the Buddha’s insight found a clearly formalised expression in Kumārajīva’s version when he wrote: ‘Only a buddha together with a buddha can fathom the true nature of all dharmas: that all dharmas have such a form, such a nature, such an embodiment, such a potency, such a function, such a primary cause, such a secondary cause, such an effect, such a recompense, and such a complete fundamental whole.’<sup>17</sup> This list of the ten ‘suchnesses’ is not found *in toto* in any extant Sanskrit and it may be that Kumārajīva was improving on the text before him at

this point.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless the passage represents a rounding up of what is in principle also present in the Sanskrit and the author or authors of the latter were certainly also implying that recognition of the true character of all dharmas, that is of the multiple factors of existence, belongs to the stuff of buddhahood. The ten categories as formalised by Kumārajīva became an important list in the T'ien T'ai school of Buddhism because the founder of that school, Chih-I, used it as a basis for his famous phrase *I-nien san-ch'ien*, (J. *Ichinen sanzen*) meaning 'three thousand (worlds) in one thought'.<sup>19</sup> The main point of this formulation, which has been pondered and commented on down the centuries in the Sino-Japanese tradition, seems to have lain in a perfect, unitive, inner grasp of the real nature of all the diverse factors of existence.

The passage from the sutra quoted immediately above, whatever its precise pedigree may have been, is by no means out of character with the text as a whole. Indeed the same passage states that the various attainments of the Buddha enable him 'to enter deeply into the boundless and to accomplish all the unprecedented Dharma', and then goes on to say, 'The *Tathāgata* is able to discriminate everything, expound the dharmas skilfully, use gentle words and cheer up the hearts of all.'<sup>20</sup> As if to reinforce the juxtaposition the next sentence reasserts that 'Essentially speaking, the Buddha has altogether accomplished the infinite, boundless, unprecedented Dharma.'<sup>21</sup> Thus it *belongs* to the unitive insight of the *Tathāgata* that he is able to discriminate in a soteriologically effective way.

This double character of the Buddha's insight, its profundity and inaccessibility together with its formulation in teachings appropriate for releasing living beings from their attachment to this or that, is found also in the very first paragraph of this chapter of the sutra, which may now be quoted in full.

'The insight of the buddhas is very profound and infinite. Their school of insight is difficult to understand and difficult to enter, so that the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* cannot apprehend it. What is the reason for this? The buddhas have been in fellowship with countless hundreds of thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of buddhas, perfectly practising the infinite Dharma of all buddhas, boldly and zealously advancing, making their fame universally known, perfecting the very profound unprecedented Dharma, and expounding as opportunity served its meaning which is so difficult to understand. Śāriputra! Ever since I became Buddha I have widely discoursed and taught with various karmic reasonings and various parables, and I have led living beings to the abandonment of all attachments with innumerable skilful means. What is the reason for this? The *tathāgatas* are all already completely perfected in the *pāramitās* of means and insight.'<sup>22</sup> Thus these first two points are inextricable from each other.

The reference to *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* here raises the third point to be noted, namely the problem about how what is said in this sutra relates to existing Buddhist teaching. (*Śrāvakas* are 'hearers' or disciples of the Buddha, while *pratyekabuddhas* attain enlightenment alone and do not

proclaim it.) From the point of view of The Lotus Sutra itself that which the Buddha knows and the manner in which he teaches is something which he shares with innumerable buddhas. The problem, in so far as there is one, is that of the newness sensed by recipients of the skilfully differentiated teaching. It is a problem which only arises *within* the teaching activity of a single buddha. The *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* are presented as not appreciating the full context or the full implications of that to which they are attaining. They do not understand it, according to the paragraph quoted above, because it is too difficult to understand *and because* the Buddha uses skilful means! By the very nature of the case such methods give rise to an appearance of inconsistency which is perplexing enough until their true intention is recognised. In order to benefit from the 'tactful methods' or skilful means of the Buddha it is necessary not only to make use of them as they are at first presented but also to discern in them *that towards which they tend*. In any given case there will be a crisis point at which the provisional character of the method is about to become apparent. The crisis involves an initial perplexity with regard to that which has hitherto been assumed, and this perplexity in turn issues either in a successful transcending of the device or in a haughty refusal to make further progress. These alternative attitudes are dramatised in the departure of the proud monks already described.

This third point also finds particularly clear expression in the verse form of the brief opening exposition. These are the verses in question.

'You should know, Śāriputra,  
 That there is no inconsistency in the words of the buddhas.  
 In the Dharma which the Buddha expounds  
 You should conceive a great power of faith.  
 Now that the World-honoured One has preached the Dharma  
     for a long time  
 He must certainly proclaim the true reality.  
 To all the *śrāvakas*, and  
 To those seeking the vehicle of the *pratyekabuddhas*,  
 To those whom I have freed from the bondage of suffering  
 And who have reached nirvana,  
 I announce that the Buddha uses the power of skilful means  
 And points the way by teaching the three vehicles;  
 All beings have various attachments and  
 He leads them on to win their escape.'<sup>23</sup>

Here the very consistency of Buddhism has obviously been felt to be in question, and unless one has the insight of a Buddha oneself an act of faith is required to accept that there is a fundamental unity behind the various forms of teaching which are offered. Most important, the teaching of nirvana, which has been the inspiration of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, has to be recognised as being itself just one such form which, like all the others, has to be both used and transcended or superseded. There is

no further definable point at which the means themselves are either affirmed or rejected. Rather the affirmation and the rejection belong together in so far as they tend to emancipation. Only the combination tends to emancipation.

The famous 'three' vehicles are referred to here. Though not specified by name, the third is the bodhisattva-vehicle, and like the others it must be understood as being differentiated in accordance with the Buddha's skilful means. This point will arise again below.

*The longer exposition in prose*

The second, and slightly longer exposition in this second chapter of the sutra pursues the same themes in greater detail, but with an important new emphasis on the oneness of the Buddha-vehicle.

As conveyed in the mythological parts of the sutra, a countlessly reflected procedure is carried on by the buddhas of the past, the future buddhas, the buddhas at present active in innumerable buddha-lands and the Buddha presently speaking in The Lotus Sutra. Contrary to the popular view of the buddhology of The Lotus Sutra the present Buddha does not claim to be a unique super-buddha, but says, 'Now I too am also like them' (i.e. like all the other buddhas).<sup>24</sup> Like the other buddhas he knows the condition of living beings and teaches them accordingly, thus: 'Knowing that all living beings have many kinds of desires deeply implanted in their minds, I expound the Dharma in accordance with their basic disposition by means of various karmic reasonings, similes, verbal expressions and my power of skilful means.'<sup>25</sup> In spite of the variety in the form of teaching however, 'The purpose of all of these is to secure perfect knowledge of the one Buddha-vehicle.'<sup>26</sup> The whole passage is very closely parallel to those which precede it about other buddhas, past and future, and in other worlds in space. They *all* use skilful means for the sake of the one Buddha-vehicle.

Again and again it is insisted that the variety of teachings is all for the sake of the one Buddha-vehicle. Whatever the buddhas do always has the same purpose, namely 'only to make the Buddha-knowledge clear to all living beings.'<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this is why they appear in the world at all. Stated a little more elaborately, 'The buddhas, the world-honoured ones, appear in the world only on account of one very great karmic cause',<sup>28</sup> and that is, variously stated, 'to cause all living beings to open buddha-knowledge and gain purity', 'to manifest Buddha-knowledge to all living beings', 'to cause all living beings to awaken to Buddha-knowledge' and 'to cause all living beings to enter the way of Buddha-knowledge'.<sup>29</sup> The meaning of the Dharma which the buddhas expound is 'difficult to understand' but it is expounded 'as opportunity serves' by means of the various devices already mentioned.<sup>30</sup> This is because the Dharma itself cannot be understood by ordinary discriminative thought but only by buddhas.<sup>31</sup> The variety of teaching is therefore on the side of the recipients while the buddhas have but a single purpose. Were it not for this great karmic cause they would

not appear at all. As it is they appear rarely enough, just as the *udumbara* flower is seen only once in three thousand years.

It is in such a context that the tension between the various forms of the Buddha's teaching are to be understood. As before, the question is whether the various forms are consistent. Apparent inconsistencies are seen by the unenlightened, but consistency belongs to the Buddha, the Enlightened. Thus it is part of the respect shown by the unenlightened towards the Buddha to *believe* that his teaching is consistently true and contains no admixture of falsehood. 'Śāriputra,' says the Buddha, 'believe me, all of you; in the Buddha's teaching no word is false.'<sup>32</sup> This sentiment is repeated in another place in a way which clearly links the question of consistency and credibility with the idea of the single Buddha-vehicle, thus: 'Śāriputra! You should, with all your heart, believe and discern, receive and keep the word of the Buddha. No word of the *buddha-tathāgatas* is false; there is no other vehicle, but only the one Buddha-vehicle.'<sup>33</sup>

It has already been pointed out that the variety of teachings is said to be necessary because of the condition of living beings who 'have many kinds of desires deeply implanted in their minds'.<sup>34</sup> This state of affairs can also be presented cosmologically, as in the section now being considered. In the ancient Indian thought-world, in terms of which the Buddhist sutras were composed, time is divided into periods (*kalpas*) during which physical universes first develop and then decay. According to The Lotus Sutra 'The buddhas appear in the evil ages of the five decays, that is to say, decay of the *kalpa*, decay through tribulations, decay of all living creatures, decay of views, and decay of lifetime.'<sup>35</sup> In such times 'all living beings are very vile, being covetous and envious, bringing to maturity every root of badness.'<sup>36</sup> At such times therefore 'the buddhas, by their power of skilful means, in the one Buddha-vehicle discriminate and expound the three'.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, it may be remarked, since the buddhas themselves expound the three they are not without value, and one could not be satisfied with an easy polemical preference for one of the three. The following sentence is crucial for the whole dialectic of the matter and runs 'If my disciples who call themselves *arhats* or *pratyekabuddhas* neither hear nor understand that the *buddha-tathāgatas* teach only bodhisattvas, these are not the Buddha's disciples nor *arhats* nor *pratyekabuddhas*.'<sup>38</sup> The idea that the buddhas teach only bodhisattvas is used to bring about the necessary critique of the other two vehicles, but the bodhisattva-vehicle itself is still on the side of the three, that is, it still belongs to discriminatory exposition. Therefore the bodhisattva-vehicle is also required to be transformed and superseded by the one Buddha-vehicle which gives an equal validity to the other two. All provisional vehicles must give way to the final intention of the teaching or they lose their value altogether. It is only by being dismantled that they come to fruition. It is in this sense that the polemical relationship between the Mahayana and early Buddhism is to be understood. It turns on the spiritual state of the disciples themselves. The Lotus Sutra continues, 'Again, Śāriputra! You should know that those monks and nuns who claim that they have already become *arhats*

and say ‘This is our last bodily state before final nirvana,’ and thereupon do not again devote themselves to seek after supreme perfect enlightenment, are all extremely conceited.<sup>39</sup> The statement has a polemical edge, just like the story of the five thousand proud members of the audience who left the assembly, and presumably it illustrates a historical rivalry within ancient Buddhism. Nevertheless the interesting thing is again the dialectic implied in the subsequent, explanatory sentence, which runs ‘There is no such thing as a monk who has really attained *arhat*-ship if he has not believed this Dharma.’<sup>40</sup> It appears that ‘really’ attaining *arhat*-ship entails arriving at a recognition of the provisional and dispensable character of the attainment. It is the opposite of being conceitedly stuck. It involves a dialectical fluidity which allows a certain positive status to the means skilfully provided by the buddhas, for they are consistent; and which at the same time is not attached to these means, because the goal is indeed not the means but the supreme enlightenment of the buddhas themselves. This view of the matter is not at all a simple polemicism, as it involves neither the straightforward affirmation nor the straightforward rejection of the goal of *arhat*-ship as such. Rather it means that *arhat*-ship is appropriately used as a skilful means of the buddhas in so far as it is left behind to make way for the real. It is not ultimately a question of replacing one vehicle with another, as there is no other vehicle apart from the Buddha-vehicle. Nor should any mistake be made with regard to a supposed special position for the bodhisattva-vehicle, for ‘In the whole universe there are not even two vehicles, how much less a third.’<sup>41</sup>

*The longer exposition in verse (i)*

This part of Chapter Two of The Lotus Sutra consists of just over one hundred verses. Historically speaking the underlying Sanskrit of these verses may of course contain older material than the prose parts of the passages already considered, but as Kumārajīva’s version stands they consolidate and elaborate the themes already set out. Three more or less distinct sections may be discerned, the middle one corresponding to verses 77–95 in the Sanskrit, which according to Rawlinson may represent a later stage in elaboration than the others.<sup>42</sup> However that may be it will be appropriate in any case to treat the three sections one by one as they now stand in the Chinese.

Less is said at this point about the profundity of the Buddha’s insight, but his understanding of the condition of sentient beings is stressed at some length. For example,

‘What they entertain in their minds,  
All the ways they practise,  
All their many different desires,  
And their former karma, good and evil,  
The Buddha knows all these perfectly.’<sup>43</sup>

A more painful description of the state of unenlightened beings is found a little later, when they are said to transmigrate without hope in the six states of existence and to be deeply attached to the sixty-two false views. The latter arise out of concern with questions of ontological status, 'whether things are, or whether they are not', which means incidentally that it is absurd to read The Lotus Sutra as a quasi-theistic form of Buddhism or as if it introduces a new and un-Buddhist ontology.<sup>44</sup> It is not just a question of views, but also of attitudes:

'Self-sufficient and self-inflated,  
Suspicious, crooked and faithless in mind . . .  
Men such as these are hard to save.'<sup>45</sup>

In view of this analysis of the condition of beings, the teaching of nirvana is given as a skilful means.

'For this reason, Śāriputra,  
I set up a skilful means for them,  
Expounding the way to end all sufferings,  
And showing it by nirvana.'<sup>46</sup>

Yet the teaching on nirvana, even while given, is also dramatically withdrawn.

'Though I proclaim nirvana,  
Yet it is not a real extinction,  
Because all dharmas from the very beginning  
Are always nirvanic in themselves.'<sup>47</sup>

That is to say, the discursive spelling out of nirvana as a goal to be contrasted with ordinary existence is only necessary because sentient beings do not realise that the basic quality of all existence is nirvanic to start with. If they did realise it they would begin to feel the teaching to be contradictory, and so indeed it would be, were it not that as a skilful means of the Buddha it has its own rationale which requires not only that it be established or set up<sup>48</sup> but also that it be reduced and finally made redundant.

The teaching of nirvana is of course a central teaching of early Buddhism and for this reason, in view of the way in which it is treated here, there is a continued emphasis on the relationship between the two, or three, vehicles and the one or great vehicle (*mahāyāna*). Sometimes three vehicles and sometimes two are contrasted with the one, but the upshot seems to be the same. Thus:

'I have the power of skilful means  
To manifest the Dharma in three vehicles;  
But all the world-honoured ones,  
All of them, expound the way of one vehicle.  
Now let all this great assembly  
Be free from doubts and perplexities.  
The buddhas do not differ in their statements,  
There is one only and no second vehicle.'<sup>49</sup>

Early Buddhism is also referred to here in terms of the classification of the teaching in nine divisions. The nine referred to are: sermons (*sūtra*), verses (*gāthā*), former things (*itivṛttaka*), birth-stories (*jātaka*), marvels (*adbhuta*), origins (*nidāna*), parables (*aupamyā*), mingled prose and verse (*geya*) and expositions (*upadeśa*). The Chinese text partly transliterates and partly translates the Sanskrit terms given in brackets here.<sup>50</sup> Similar lists appear in other writings, though the nomenclature and the number of the items vary,<sup>51</sup> and it was a standard way of referring to the whole literary deposit of Buddhist tradition.<sup>52</sup> The point being made in the passage now considered is that the Buddha makes use of a variety of *genres* to suit a variety of dispositions. Although in principle the whole of early Buddhism has been referred to already in terms of the two or three vehicles, it is significant that the term *fang-pien* (*upāya*) is now explicitly applied to the nine-fold teaching here itemized. This brings home the fact that it is the way of understanding the whole Buddhist tradition that is at stake. In particular it should be noted that the nine-fold teaching is not rejected, any more than, as was pointed out above, *arhat*-ship is rejected. It is nevertheless seen in the new light of the dialectic of skilful means. Thus we read:

‘I expound these nine divisions of the Dharma  
According to the capacity of sentient beings,  
As a basis to lead them into the great vehicle;  
And that is the reason for expounding this sutra.’<sup>53</sup>

The present sutra is not in itself offering a new teaching, but it points out the real meaning or intention of the existing teaching in nine divisions. This represents an explicit broadening out of the way in which various aspects of Buddhist teaching are referred to as skilful means.

The same tendency can be observed at the end of this first section when the buddhas are said to use their skilful means to expound the Dharma and to convert innumerable living beings so that they enter the Buddhaway,<sup>54</sup> and then, synonymously, the beings are said to have attained the Buddhaway if

‘. . . having heard the Dharma, they have given donations,  
Or observed the precepts and been persevering,  
If they have practiced assiduity, meditation and insight . . .’<sup>55</sup>

These activities (the ‘six perfections’) are not here explicitly identified with skilful means, but the implication is certainly that they too play an analogous intermediate role between the condition of the living beings and the state of Buddhahood.

#### *The longer exposition in verse (ii)*

This same line of thought is now developed in detail in the second section (verses 77–95), which indeed is solely devoted to the enumeration of a great variety of practices, each of which is identified with the attainment of

the Buddha-way. The only difference is that in this section it is not the central teachings or the central practices of early Buddhism but a wide proliferation of simple devotional actions such as drawing or painting images of the Buddha or paying homage at stupas or shrines with 'flowers, incense, flags and umbrellas' or even employing others to perform music.<sup>56</sup> Indeed the stress is on the slightness of the action, such as singing the merits of the buddhas even with a low voice, paying homage to the painted images even with distracted mind and a single flower, or entering a temple with a distracted mind and calling but once on the name of the Buddha. By all of these, and more, one is able to attain the Buddha-way. The practices are extremely simple, but the perspective is long, as is apparent from the following quotation:

'Even boys, in their play,  
Who, either with reed, wood or pen,  
Or with the finger-nail,  
Have drawn buddha images,  
All such ones as these,  
Gradually accumulating merit,  
And perfecting hearts of great compassion,  
Have all attained the Buddha-way;  
If they only conjure up the figures of bodhisattvas  
They bring across countless creatures.'<sup>57</sup>

At the time the practice may seem slight and careless, but in retrospect the intentionality of it tending towards the Buddha-way is what is reckoned to count. Everything depends on the way the act is taken. Positively taken the most minor act can have a karmic effect which ultimately links up with the far-reaching merit of the great bodhisattvas, sweeping along countless living beings to emancipation. There is another fine statement of the same idea in this same section:

'Or those who have offered worship,  
Were it merely by folding the hands,  
Or even raising a hand,  
Or by slightly bending the head,  
By thus paying homage to the images,  
Gradually see innumerable buddhas,  
Themselves attain the supreme way,  
Extensively bring across countless creatures,  
And enter nirvana without residue,  
As when firewood is finished the fire dies out.'<sup>58</sup>

The Lotus Sutra teaches that the notion of nirvana and the whole nine-fold teaching of the Buddha is not to be considered as other than a means or more than a means, while at the same time it teaches that actions such as slightly bending the head are also to be understood in terms of the same dialectic. In any such case there is a tussle of meanings and it is a question

of not getting stuck in a provisional meaning but of resolving the tension in the right direction. Thus this section of Chapter Two represents a dramatic extension of the implications of the concept of skilful means.

Many of the practices referred to here are carried on also in non-Mahayana Buddhism, but the karmic connections are there taken in a somewhat more pedestrian way. On the one hand the promise of the simple action is not drawn out so dramatically, and on the other hand the more austere and ambitious aspects of Buddhist teaching are not criticised in the Mahayana fashion. The somewhat hierarchically ordered arrangement of the items of the Buddhist religion tends to be maintained in the Theravada form while it was laid low by the Mahayana. Nevertheless the continuities which exist in this area of popular devotion are difficult to evaluate and may be more significant than is at first sight apparent (cf. Chapter Seven on the general relevance of the concept *upāya* to Buddhism as a whole).

*The longer exposition in verse (iii)*

The third section of the longer exposition in verse contains a restatement of the traditional legend about the decision of the Buddha to preach to his fellow-men after he had attained enlightenment. This narrative sequence and its relation to the pre-Mahayana account of the same decision will be considered again in a later context, as it is one of the areas in which it is possible to see the explicit dialectics of the Mahayana cradled in the thought of early Buddhism. Briefly stated however, the narrative here explains that while the Buddha was at first reluctant to teach at all because of the profundity of his experience he was strongly entreated to do so by celestial beings. Upon this he agreed to do so, using his skilful means to frame the teaching in accordance with the condition of his hearers:

‘Then on remembering what former buddhas  
Performed by their power of skilful means,  
I resolved that the way which I had now achieved  
Should be taught as three vehicles.’<sup>59</sup>

After teaching in terms of various distinctions he finally judged it time to ‘honestly discard skilful means and only proclaim the supreme way’.<sup>60</sup> And as if to emphasize the appropriateness of this shift, a verse shortly following says:

‘In the same style in which the Dharma is preached  
By the buddhas of the three worlds,  
So also do I now  
Proclaim the undivided Dharma.’<sup>61</sup>

This stanza fascinatingly couples the plurality of the buddhas, already stressed above in connection with the first chapter of the sutra, with the not-divided-Dharma. It also emphasizes the *manner* of the activity of a buddha,

the term for style<sup>62</sup> suggesting a formalisation, almost a ritualisation, of this activity.

The idea of a progression within the Buddha's teaching is the seed for the later *p'an-chiao* systems developed in China, and adumbrated also in the *Wu Liang I Ching* (J. *Muryōgikyō*),<sup>63</sup> the sutra which commonly is used as a preface to The Lotus Sutra itself in the T'ien T'ai and dependent traditions. This development need not be considered here in detail but it is worth noting that the idea of two stages in the teaching, which later became several stages, is closely connected with the manner or style of the teaching. This style, based on skilful means, involves setting up a teaching based on discrimination and then resolving it in favour of the undivided teaching.

The term skilful means is related to both of these steps. It is sometimes felt that the theory of progression in the teaching of the Buddha is merely a justification for a new teaching which is being put into his mouth. Yet this would be a crude interpretation. The 'new' teaching does not have any 'content' in the sense in which this would be necessary for the charge to stick. The new teaching is rather about the style, direction and meaning of the existing teaching. The term skilful means explains the relationship between the initial setting up of the teaching and its resolution into the ultimate meaning of Buddhism. These two steps are two aspects of one movement of spiritual experience. They belong together, except that from the point of view of those being taught by the Buddha there seems to be a progression from one to the other. This progression is not only developed in the later *p'an-chiao* systems, but also comes out in The Lotus Sutra itself in the recognition by Śāriputra of his own development (in Chapter III of the Sutra) and in the parable of the returning son (see below, Chapter Three). In the present passage the main emphasis is of course on the Buddha's own recognition of what is appropriate to the developing situation. At the same time this itself implies that each step is in accordance with the readiness of his hearers. At first the stress is on their incapacity and the consequent teaching of the triple vehicle through the power of skilful means; only then they are considered ready to advance to the 'undivided Dharma'. The activity of the Buddha himself is consistent in its intention, and the progression merely reflects the way it must appear in the narrative form. Yet the two steps of the teaching represent a real enough progression on the part of the hearers, for they must move from an acceptance of the Buddha's teaching on the basis of ignorance to a rejection of it on the basis of enlightenment. The term *fang-pien*, skilful means, is the notion which demands this achievement, and thus without adding anything particularly 'new' in the sense of content it indicates what the existing teaching is really for.

The terminological details of the whole section reaffirm the main themes of previous parts of the chapter. The buddhas have 'faultless insight'<sup>64</sup> not only into the way things really are,<sup>65</sup> which they come to know on the 'throne of enlightenment'<sup>66</sup> but also specifically into the character of all living beings. They know their 'conduct . . . what they entertain in their deepest minds, the karma they have developed in the past, their inclinations

and zeal, and their capacities, keen or dull'.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand the wisdom which the Buddha has attained is 'wonderful and supreme'<sup>68</sup> while on the other hand 'all beings are dull in their capacities, attached to pleasure and blind with ignorance'.<sup>69</sup> Various terms for the unified meaning of diverse teachings in this context are 'the one vehicle',<sup>70</sup> 'the Buddha-vehicle',<sup>71</sup> 'the one-vehicle way',<sup>72</sup> 'this most wonderful supreme Dharma',<sup>73</sup> 'the unsurpassed way',<sup>74</sup> and 'the supreme Nirvana'.<sup>75</sup> These are all more or less synonymous and stand in a dialectical relationship to the divided or discriminated teaching.

The term nirvana needs special consideration because it is used, so to speak, on both sides of the fence. The 'supreme Nirvana' mentioned above has as its shadow the 'voice of nirvana' or more literally the 'sound of nirvana' heard at the very first preaching of the Buddha along with the teaching distinguishing *arhats*, the Dharma and the *sangha*.<sup>76</sup> All of these are on the provisional side. The 'Dharma of nirvana' is the constant teaching of the Buddha, in so far as he is teaching in a manner designed to end distress.<sup>77</sup> Strictly speaking the 'nirvana nature of all dharmas' is inexpressible, and it is only taught by the Buddha's power of skilful means.<sup>78</sup> Two different terms seem to distinguish subtly *Nirvana* as a cypher for the inexpressible, valuable meaning, and *nirvana* as that provisionally taught for the ending of ill.<sup>79</sup> Recognising the 'nirvana-nature of all dharmas' ultimately subverts the necessity for teaching nirvana as an end to distress and suffering, but the latter was first necessary and continues to be so for the benefit of living beings still 'sunk in suffering'.<sup>80</sup> It must be admitted that the reference to the possibility of the Buddha himself 'entering' nirvana instead of preaching makes use of the term for the discriminated nirvana,<sup>81</sup>—but then it is precisely such a nirvana which the Buddha transcends when he decides to preach! Because of the incapacity of beings he can only preach that which he himself has just had to refuse. Yet by so preaching on the discriminated side he can eventually bring others to the pure, balanced Buddhahood which carries the same rejection of the discriminated nirvana and the same compassion for beings still 'sunk in suffering'.

Another prominent feature of this section is the assertion of the universal intention of the teaching. This is formulated in the 'original vow' of the buddhas.<sup>82</sup> The vow runs:

'As to the Buddha-way which I tread,  
I desire universally to cause all living beings  
To attain the same way along with me.'<sup>83</sup>

The phrase 'all living beings' recurs constantly,<sup>84</sup> and the universalism is reinforced by the buddhas themselves being as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.<sup>85</sup> There are no doubt some beings who will scorn the teaching, and discernment is necessary to be able to benefit from it even though it is taught by skilful means.<sup>86</sup> But those who hear it need have no further doubts, since they know that the buddhas teach through skilful means and that they themselves will become buddhas.<sup>87</sup>

The role of the term *fang-pien* in this second chapter of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sutra is in its outlines a consistent one. Almost anything in the whole range of Buddhist teaching and practice can be described as *fang-pien* or skilful means. This applies not only to a Buddha-image playfully drawn with the finger-nail but also to such a central teaching as that of nirvana itself. If a narrative account is given of the intentions and actions of a Buddha, then *fang-pien* means that provisional teachings are established only to be dissolved in favour of 'the most wonderful supreme Dharma'. For this latter numerous synonyms are available, but it appears to be impossible to say anything directly about it. Only those things which work as *fang-pien* offer a way to indicate it, and in so far as they work, they bring about their own redundancy. If one turns attention to the development of the living beings under tutelage, the dialectic of *fang-pien* remains the same. The benefit which they reap from the discriminated teachings enables them to move forward to the undiscriminated. This move also involves perplexity and doubt, giving way to recognition and joy. The teaching about *fang-pien* offers no new 'content' in any ordinary sense. Rather it is about the nature, purpose, direction or style of Buddhist teaching and practice. It characterises the operation of the Buddhist religion.

### Endnotes

- 1 A synoptic table of chapters is given in Appendix B. Chapters for Sanskrit are always given in Arabic numbers because of their common origin, and chapters in the Chinese versions are always given with Roman numerals because of their accidental similarities with Chinese numerals.
- 2 On Chih-I see general works such as K. K. S. Ch'en's *Buddhism in China A Historical Survey*, Princeton 1972, but especially L. Hurvitz: *Chih-I (538–597) An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Buddhist Monk*, Brussels 1962, (*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* XII 1960–62). Some Japanese writers continue to give the dogmatic pattern for reference (*nimon-rokudan* 二門六段 i.e. two gates and six stages), as for example Ōchō Keinichi in *Hokkekyō Josetsu*, 法華經序說 Kyoto 1962 and 1972, pp. 116–7. However it would be a complete mistake to think that Japanese studies of The Lotus Sutra are always controlled by this idea, as western pandits sometimes assert. On the contrary, Japanese scholarship *per se* entirely accepts the historical perspective, although the traditional exegesis not unnaturally lingers in the religious world.
- 3 T IX 6b 'Although the Buddha says that I am the first in all this assembly of disciples (i.e. *śrāvakas*), now in my own wisdom I am in doubt and cannot understand: is this the final limit of Dharma or is it the way to progress there?' (於諸聲聞眾 佛說我第一 我今自於智疑惑不能了 為是究竟法 為是所行道) cf. KSS 39f. Śāriputra is traditionally supposed to have been converted aloxiangng with Maudgalyāyana and five hundred followers after an encounter with one of the original five hermits converted by the Buddha. He frequently appears in dialogues with the Buddha to represent the Hinayana standpoint in Mahayana writings. In The Teaching of Vimalakīrti he is made to seem rather foolish, worrying over where the assembly will sit down in Vimalakīrti's magically emptied room (Chapter VI) and being temporarily turned into a female by a goddess to whom he was rash enough to suggest that she might be better off as a male (Chapter VII).
- 4 T IX 6b 何故慙稱歎方便 cf. KSS 38.
- 5 T IX 6b 佛所得法甚深難解 cf. KSS 38.

- 6 T IX 6b 佛說一解脫義。我等亦得此法到於涅槃。而今不知是義所趣 ‘The Buddha has declared one principle of release and we too on receiving this Dharma can attain nirvana. But now we do not know what this principle implies.’ Cf. KSS 38.
- 7 T IX 6b 第一方便 cf. KSS 38. ‘Skilful means’ is used here throughout. ‘Tactful method’, which is usually given in KSS, though very suggestive, does not quite cover the idea of skill sufficiently, though of course tact does involve skill. For The Lotus Sutra alone ‘tactful method’ would probably do, for the tactfulness is mainly that of the Buddha towards all sentient beings. More generally it is not so adequate, for the bodhisattva needs to practice and perfect this skill to maintain his balancing act between nirvana and the salvation of others without fear; in such cases it really is ‘skill’ and not ‘tact’ which is required.
- 8 T IX 6b 何因何緣慳稱歎諸佛第一方便。甚深微妙難解之法。 Cf. KSS 38.
- 9 In Sanskrit the buddhas are tathāgatas (upāya-kauśalyam *tathāgātānām*, and then tathāgātānām *upāya-kauśalya* . . . Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* p. 32. The Chinese 諸佛 (equivalent to ‘buddhas’) used here is just an indication of the complete synonymy of these terms.
- 10 T IX 6b 我自昔來未曾從佛聞如是說 cf. KSS 38.
- 11 Or ‘what this principle implies’, see text and translation in note 6 above. Italics are of course added.
- 12 T IX 5c 如來方便知見波羅蜜皆已具足 Cf. KSS 32, but *pāramitā* surely goes with skilful means as well as with wisdom; and the plural seems to be required for 如來 (cf. also plural forms throughout this context in the Sanskrit). Wisdom here is 知 and 見, i.e. *jñānadarśana*, but may be taken as a synonym of 智慧 (*prajñā*).
- 13 The verse shortly after says that bodhisattvas are an exception (除諸菩薩眾 T IX 5c cf. KSS 35).
- 14 T IX 6a 無漏不思議甚深微妙法 cf. KSS 37.
- 15 T IX 5c 是法不可示，言辭相寂滅 cf. KSS 35: ‘This Law is inexpressible, it is beyond the realm of terms.’
- 16 T IX 5c 如來知見廣大深遠 cf. KSS 32–3.
- 17 T IX 5c 唯佛與佛乃能究盡諸實相。所謂諸法如是相。如是性。如是體。如是力。如是作。如是因。如是緣。如是果。如是報。如是本末究竟等. cf. KSS 33–4. The latter gives 諸法 as ‘All Existence’, and ‘dharma’ is only preferred here because it refers to the whole business of dharma-theory as this has become known to western students of Buddhism. Dharmas are factors of existence.
- 18 The Sanskrit is presumably not satisfactorily rendered by Kern, *ad loc.* Cf. a discussion of the whole matter in Hurvitz, *op. cit.* pp. 271 ff.
- 19 一念三千 Chih-I had a special way of calculating to this number, see Hurvitz, *op. cit.* p. 311.
- 20 T IX 5c 如來能種種分別巧說諸法。言辭柔軟悅可眾心。 cf. KSS 33.
- 21 T IX 5c 取要言之。無量無邊未曾有法。 cf. KSS 33.
- 22 T IX 5c 諸佛智慧甚深無量。其智慧門難解難入。一切聲聞辟支佛所不能知。所以者何。佛曾親近百千萬億無數諸佛。盡行諸佛無量道法。勇猛精進名稱普聞。成就甚深未曾有法。隨宜所說意趣難解。舍利弗。吾從成佛已來。稚稚因緣。稚稚譬喻。廣演言教。無數方便引導眾生。所以者何。如來方便知見波羅蜜。皆已具足。 cf. KSS 32. In this case ‘insight’ or ‘wisdom’ (KSS) is *prajñā*, cf. note 12 above.
- 23 T IX 6a 舍利弗當知 諸佛語無異 於佛所說法 當生大信力 世尊法久後 要當說真實 告諸聲聞眾 及求緣覺乘 我令脫苦縛 速得涅槃者 佛以方便力 示以三乘教 眾生處處著 引之令得出 Cf. KSS 37. ‘True reality’ (J. *shinjitsu*) is commonly contrasted with *hōben* in Japanese Buddhism, e.g. in the title of Kumoi’s article quoted in Chapter One above, note 2. Sakamoto, *op. cit.* p. 349 declares that the teaching first given over a long period was a skilful means (*hōben* 方便) with which the true reality (*shin-jitsu* 真實) may be contrasted. Remember however the earlier warning that this new or supreme teaching does not turn out to have ‘content’ in the same way as the earlier teaching had, but is no other than the declaration of the true character of the older teaching as skilful means.
- 24 T IX 7b 我今亦復如是 cf. KSS 46.
- 25 T IX 7b 和諸眾生有稚稚欲深心所著。隨其本性。以種種因緣譬喻言辭方便力而為說法。 cf. KSS 46. There does not seem to be any particular justification for a past tense.

- 26 T IX 7b 如此皆爲得一佛乘一切種智故 cf. KSS 46. Śāriputra's name is then repeated again here rather soon as if he is being pressed to take this point to heart.
- 27 T IX 7b 唯以佛之知見示悟衆生 cf. KSS p. 44. 'Reveal' is perhaps a little misleading to some readers, suggesting a revelation of what was not yet there, whereas the Buddha knowledge has always been there for people to awaken to. Two characters here conflate the 'manifest' and the '(cause to) awaken to' of phrases quoted just below (cf. note 29).
- 28 T IX 7a 諸佛世尊。唯以一大事因緣故出現於世。cf. KSS 44. Or 'come out'; in Japanese ghosts are said to 'come out'.
- 29 T IX 7a 欲令衆生開佛知見使得清淨故…欲示衆生佛之知見故…欲令衆生入佛知見道故cf. KSS 44.
- 30 T IX 7a 諸佛隨宜說法意趣難解 cf. KSS 43.
- 31 T IX 7a 唯有諸佛乃能知之 cf. KSS 43.
- 32 T IX 7a 舍利弗。汝等當信佛之所說言不虛妄。cf. KSS 43.
- 33 T IX 7c 舍利弗。汝等當一心信解受持佛語。諸佛如來言無虛妄。無有餘乘唯一佛乘。cf. KSS 48.
- 34 See note 25.
- 35 T IX 7b 諸佛出於五濁惡世。所謂劫濁煩惱濁衆生濁見濁命濁。cf. KSS 46–7.
- 36 T IX 7b . . . 衆生垢重。慳貪嫉妬成就諸不善根故。cf. KSS 47.
- 37 T IX 7b 諸佛以方便力於一佛乘分別說三。cf. KSS 47.
- 38 T IX 7b 若我弟子。自謂阿羅漢辟支佛者。不聞不知諸佛如來但教化菩薩事。此非佛弟子。非阿羅漢。非辟支佛。cf. KSS 47.
- 39 T IX 7 b–c 又舍利弗。是諸比丘比丘尼。自謂已得阿羅漢是最後身究竟涅槃。便不復志求阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。當知此輩皆是增上慢入。cf. KSS 47. 'Supreme perfect enlightenment' appears for the transliteration *amuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.
- 40 T IX 7c 若有比丘實得阿羅漢。若不信此法。無有是處。cf. KSS 47.
- 41 T IX 7b 十方世界中尚無二乘，何況有三。cf. KSS 46. Cf. also T IX 8a 十方佛土中唯一乘法 無二亦無三 除佛方便說 'In the buddha-lands of the ten directions there is only one vehicle of Dharma. There is no second and no third, except for the Buddha's exposition of skilful means.' The question of three vehicles and the relation of the third to the buddha-vehicle (sometimes seen as a fourth term and sometimes equated with the third) is a subject in itself. The position as stated here is thought to represent The Lotus Sutra accurately and briefly, but if some qualification were needed it would not affect the theory of skilful means particularly.
- 42 Rawlinson, A., Ph.D. thesis for the University of Lancaster. Similarly verses 37–40, which pick up the narrative about the exit of the conceited monks, are also said to be of a distinct type, but such matters are of no importance for the present discussion.
- 43 T IX 7c 衆生心所念 種種所行道 若干諸欲性 先世善惡業 佛悉知是已 cf. KSS 49.
- 44 T IX 8b 若有若無 cf. KSS 53. On this point cf. a clear statement by H. von Glasenapp in 'Der Buddha des "Lotus des guten Gesetzes"', *Jahrbuch des Lindenmuseums*, Heidelberg 1951, pp. 158 f.
- 45 T IX 8b 我慢自矜高 諂曲心不實…如是入難度 cf. KSS 54.
- 46 T IX 8b 是故舍利弗 我爲設方便 說諸盡若道 示之以涅槃 cf. KSS 54. To 'show' or to 'indicate' is sufficient for 示.
- 47 T IX 8b 我雖說涅槃 是亦非真滅 諸法從本來 常自寂滅相 cf. KSS 54. The first two lines are apparently absent in the Sanskrit, but they only prepare the way for the strong statement in the second two. This, and not some new quasi-monotheism, is the fundamental metaphysical position, if it is a position, of the sutra. This is such an important verse that Iwamoto's translation of the Sanskrit into current Japanese may be quoted as well: 一切のものは常に平安で最初から静かである i.e. 'all things are permanently at rest and peaceful (*shizuka*) from the beginning.' Sakamoto and Iwamoto, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 111. Cf. also note 78 below, quoting another formulation of this same idea.
- 48 Cf. the stanzas just quoted, especially 設. A deliberate intention is implied.
- 49 T IX 8b–c 我有方便力 開示三乘法 一切諸世尊 皆說一乘道 今此諸大眾 皆應除疑惑 諸佛語無異 唯一無二乘 cf. KSS 54. Cf. also note 41 above.

- 50 T IX 7c 或說修多羅 伽陀及木事 本生未曾有 亦說於因緣 譬喻并祇夜 優波提舍經 cf. KSS 49.
- 51 Conze is wrong to restrict the ninefold formula to Theravadins and Mahāsaṅghikas, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, p. 7, note 1.
- 52 Cf. also in a later context the phrase 無數諸法門 T IX 9b, cf. KSS 59: ‘countless schools of doctrine’, equated with the one vehicle, though admittedly referring to the teaching of future buddhas.
- 53 T IX 8a 我此九部法 隨順衆生說 入大乘爲本 以故說是經 cf. KSS 50.
- 54 T IX 8c, cf. KSS 55.
- 55 T IX 8c 若聞法布施 或持戒忍辱 精進禪智等 cf. KSS 55.
- 56 T IX 9a, cf. KSS 57.
- 57 T IX 9a 乃至童子戲 若草木及筆 或以指爪甲 而畫作佛像 如是諸入等 漸漸積功德 具足大悲心 皆已成佛道 但化諸菩薩 度脫無量衆 cf. KSS 57. The last two lines seem to be curious in KSS, so, with some hesitation, the interpretation of Sakamoto is followed here, *op. cit.* Vol. I p. 116.
- 58 T IX 9a 或有人禮拜 或復但合掌 乃至舉一手 或復小低頭 以此供養佛 漸見無量佛 自成無上道 廣度無數衆 入無餘涅槃 如薪盡火滅 cf. KSS 58.
- 59 T IX 9c 尋念過去佛 所行方便力 我今所得道 亦應說三乘 cf. KSS 63.
- 60 T IX 10a 正直捨方便 但說無上道 cf. KSS 65.
- 61 T IX 10a 如三世諸佛 說法之儀式 我今亦如是 說無分別法 cf. KSS 65. ‘Past, present and future’ in the latter is an explanatory gloss.
- 62 儀式 (see previous note).
- 63 無量義經 A first English translation prepared by various hands was published by the Rishshō Kōsei-kai, Tokyo 1974 under the title: *Muryōgikyō, The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and Kanfugen-gyō, The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue*. It is thought that the sutra may have been composed in China. See also below, chapter Four, note 22.
- 64 T IX 9b 無漏智, cf. KSS 59.
- 65 T IX 9b 知法常無性 ‘knowing dharmas to be permanently without specific nature’, cf. KSS 59. The whole context here has been variously interpreted, see Sakamoto’s notes, *op. cit.* Vol. I p. 354. It seems unlikely that the clause just below should be translated ‘the word abides for ever’ if it means that it is always to be conceived of as subject to karma (cf. Sakamoto). The permanence lies in Karma being fundamentally vacuous (緣起の法は自体が空であるから Sakamoto, p. 353). Cf. also explanatory footnotes in KSS, p. 60. This passage is a good example of the danger of a translation drifting into a metaphysics which was never really intended (contrast the leaving aside of ‘whether things are or whether they are not’, 若有若無, cf. note 44 above). One might tentatively suggest for 世間相常住 in its context: ‘the character of the world is always thus’. Iwamoto, *op. cit.* Vol. I p. 121, takes the passage to be about the unchanging character of the Dharma as teaching in the world, and not to be about dharmas as factors of existence at all.
- 66 T IX 9b 於道場知己 Cf. KSS 60. 道場 is a standard term for which KSS has ‘Wisdom-throne’.
- 67 T IX 9b 知衆生諸行 深心之所念 過去所習業 欲性精進力 及諸根利鈍 cf. KSS 61.
- 68 T IX 9c 我所得智慧 微妙最第一 cf. KSS 62.
- 69 T IX 9c 衆生諸根鈍 著樂癡所盲 cf. KSS 62.
- 70 T IX 9b 一乘.
- 71 T IX 9b 佛乘.
- 72 T IX 10b 一乘道.
- 73 T IX 9c 最妙第一法. Also described as ‘the mystery of all the buddhas’: . . . 是妙法諸佛之祕 . . . T IX 10b, cf. KSS 66–7.
- 74 T IX 10a 無上道.
- 75 T IX 9b 第一寂滅.
- 76 T IX 10a 是名轉法輪 便有涅槃音 及以阿羅漢 法僧差別名 cf. KSS 64.
- 77 T IX 10a 讚示涅槃法 生死苦永盡 cf. KSS 64.
- 78 T IX 10c 諸法寂滅相 不可以言宣 以方便力故 爲五比丘說 cf. KSS 64.

- 79 涅槃 for the discriminated teaching, and 寂滅 for final nirvana, or original nirvana. Cf. also the quotations in notes 46 and 47 above, and contrast 涅槃 with 真滅.
- 80 T IX 9c 衆生沒在若 cf. KSS 62.
- 81 T IX 9c 我寧不說法 疾入於涅槃 cf. KSS 63.
- 82 T IX 9b 諸佛本誓願 This is a common feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism of course, for every bodhisattva makes a great vow to serve all beings. It comes to greatest prominence in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition based on the ‘original vow’ (J. *hongan* 本願) of Amitābha Buddha and the temples named after this vow in Japan (J. *Honganji*).
- 83 T IX 9b 我所行佛道 普欲令衆生 亦同得此道 cf. KSS 59.
- 84 Preferable to ‘creatures’, to avoid misunderstanding. No doctrine of their creation is intended.
- 85 T IX 9b 現在十方佛 其數如恆沙 cf. KSS 60.
- 86 T IX 10b 當來世惡人 聞佛說一乘 迷惑不信受 破法墮惡道…以萬億方便 隨宜而說法 其不習學者 不能曉了此 cf. KSS 67.
- 87 T IX 10b 汝等既已知 諸佛世之師 隨宜方便事 無復諸疑惑 心生大歡喜 自知當作佛 cf. KSS 67.

### 3 STORIES ABOUT SKILFUL MEANS IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

#### *The burning house*

There are several allegorical stories in the Lotus Sutra which illustrate in various ways the principle of skilful means. Sometimes these are taken merely as attempts to justify the apparent emergence of the Mahayana as a schismatic school within Buddhism. Although there undoubtedly is an element of this, the main point of them seems to be rather the relationship between the articulated forms of Buddhist teaching, which are varied, and the ultimate intention of it, which lies beyond or behind those forms. The stories are not very systematically arranged and they may have been composed at various stages in the compilation of the sutra. For Sino-Japanese Buddhism however they are all of more or less equal status and for present purposes they may be treated together. The stories have been widely known in East Asia, partly no doubt because stories are easier to remember than philosophical dialogues, but partly also because they have often formed the subject of paintings.

One of the most widely known is certainly that of the burning house. It appears in the third chapter of the sutra, following on from the chapter on skilful means which it is intended to illustrate. Of all the chapters in The Lotus Sutra this one contains the second largest number of occurrences of the term skilful means (see Appendix C).

Since translations of the story of the burning house have now found their way into popular anthologies, and since it is rather verbose when given in full, a very brief summary of the story itself will suffice here. A wealthy old man has a great house with only one door. The house is in a decrepit state, and a fire breaks out, threatening to engulf all the man's children who are absorbed in play within the house. The old man calls them in vain, then resorts in desperation to skilful means (*fang-pien*). Knowing the kinds of things which they all like he calls out that there are goat-carts, deer-carts and bullock-carts waiting for them outside the door. Upon this they all come scrambling out of the house and are saved from the flames. The three kinds of carts are nowhere to be seen, but instead the old man gives to each one a still more splendid chariot, beautifully ornate and drawn by a white bullock.

The question is then raised, by way of comment on the story, as to whether the old man was guilty of a falsehood. Śāriputra's answer to this is that he was not, but it is not only this judgement which is interesting but also its justification. The emphasis is put not on the fact that the children received a better vehicle than intended, which might after all be taken to cover their failure to receive the specific kinds which were originally

promised. Rather, the discrepancy is justified by the fulfilment of the old man's intention to bring them out from the flames. Even if they had not received any cart at all it would have been inappropriate to speak of a falsehood, because the original thought of the old man was: 'I will get my children to escape by a skilful means.'<sup>1</sup>

Given the above fundamental line of interpretation, the giving of superior chariots equally to all does not appear inconsistent either. On the contrary, it is important because it subverts the distinction between the various kinds of vehicle enumerated in the first instance in order to get the children out of the fire. These were referred to in variety to begin with because the old man knew 'that to which each of the children is predisposed, and all the various attractive playthings and curiosities to which their natures will joyfully respond'.<sup>2</sup> When they all receive the same superior chariot in the end, this underlines the overriding consistency of the old man's action by contrast with the various inconsistent and ultimately irrelevant interests of the children.

After Śāriputra's initial answer that the old man is not guilty of falsehood there follows a longer allegorical explanation of the story. According to this the old man is the Tathāgata (the Buddha), the house is the world, and the children are the inhabitants of the world. These inhabitants are too blinded by their sufferings, and by their foolish attachments, to be able to be saved from the round of birth and death by a direct exposure to the spiritual power and wisdom of the Tathāgata. Hence he makes use of the three vehicles, namely the *śrāvaka-yāna*, the *pratyekabuddha-yāna* and the *buddha-yāna*, as a skilful means.<sup>3</sup> These three vehicles are identified with the goat-cart, the deer-cart and the bullock-cart respectively and the basic implication is that various paths within Buddhism are distinguished because of varying needs while all of them have the same fundamental intention and meaning.

There is a complication at this point because the third vehicle is referred to again as 'the great vehicle' (i.e. the *mahāyāna*), while one who follows it is a bodhisattva or a *mahāsattva*, that is an 'enlightenment-being' or a 'great being'.<sup>4</sup> At the same time the vehicle which all receive equally at the end is *also* called the *mahāyāna*.<sup>5</sup> This may seem, at first sight, to be polemics in favour of the third vehicle of the three, namely that of the bodhisattvas or *mahāsattvas* as opposed to those of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. However, such an interpretation would fail to take into account that the third vehicle, as a differentiated vehicle, is itself superseded in so far as all three are replaced by the single consistent vehicle. Any polemical interpretation would depend on a continued differentiation between the three. The real intention, despite the equivocal use of the term *mahāyāna*, seems to be to maintain a consistent interpretation which goes beyond polemics, and indeed this is brought out by the concluding comments in the text. Thus: 'There is no falsehood in first preaching three vehicles to attract all living creatures, and afterwards saving by the great

vehicle only.<sup>6</sup> It is only because of the inability of the beings to receive the Mahayana teaching<sup>7</sup> directly that ‘the buddhas, on account of their power of skilful means, in the one buddha-vehicle distinguish and expound the three.’<sup>8</sup>

The term ‘buddha-vehicle’ is used equivocally just as is *mahāyāna*. Sometimes it refers to the third of the three, as earlier,<sup>9</sup> but sometimes, as in the case quoted immediately above, it is not a further differentiated vehicle, neither a third nor a fourth. Rather it refers, in this special sense, to that single vehicle which takes over when the differentiated vehicles are seen in their true character as skilful means. This one buddha-vehicle, according to the parallel section in verse, brings bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas* alike directly to the ‘throne of enlightenment’.<sup>10</sup> Thus the buddha-vehicle which transcends the differentiated vehicles is also radically identified with them. As the verse goes on to say: ‘Apart from the skilful means of the Buddha, there is no other vehicle to be found.’<sup>11</sup>

This allegory confirms the pattern of thinking already observed in Chapter II of the sutra, and indeed the text introduces it as doing exactly that. ‘Did I not say before that the buddhas, the world-honoured ones, proclaim the Dharma by various karmic reasonings, parables, forms of words and skilful means, all for the sake of supreme, perfect enlightenment?’<sup>12</sup> The phrase listing forms of teaching occurs half a dozen times in Chapter II, as well as again here, and symbolizes articulated Buddhist tradition in general. The meditational or spiritual aspects of Buddhist religion, if these may be referred to separately from the conceptual formulations, are also treated as part of the whole matter to be understood in terms of skilful means. In the interpretation of the story we read as follows: ‘By these skilful means the Tathāgata entices living beings and says to them: “You should know that these three vehicles have all been praised by sages. You will be free in yourselves and not seek to rely on anything else. Riding these three vehicles you will use the perfect faculties and powers, the perceptions, the way, the concentrations, emancipations and contemplations, you will be happy in yourselves and gain infinite peace and joy”.’<sup>13</sup> Therefore, all in all, it is the Buddhist religion as a whole which is to be understood as arising from the Buddha’s use of skilful means.

In the verses the four noble truths are also brought into this context. The term skilful means is just slipped in with the second truth:

‘If there are any living beings  
Who do not know the origin of suffering,  
And are deeply attached to the cause of suffering,  
And cannot for one moment abandon it;  
For all their sakes  
I preach the way as skilful means,  
Saying that the cause of all suffering  
Lies in desire.’<sup>14</sup>

Of course if it is applied to one, the term skilful means could be applied to any or all of the four truths. In any case it is closely linked with the preaching of 'the way', which except when specifically defining the fourth truth, refers to Buddhist teaching as a whole.

This understanding of the four truths is reinforced by its context in a general argument about the teaching of nirvana.

‘Though I previously proclaimed  
That you would cross into extinction,  
It was only the exhaustion of birth-and-death,  
And really it was not extinction.’<sup>15</sup>

This is part of a concentration on the teaching about nirvana or extinction which becomes increasingly prominent in subsequent chapters of the sutra. The main point for the present is that the initial teaching of extinction is given because of the unenlightened beings' submersion in the sufferings of birth-and-death (equals Skt. *samsāra*). This contrasted differentiation between *samsāra* and nirvana was articulated as a skilful means, but in itself it is not 'Buddha-insight', which remains to be sought,<sup>16</sup> nor 'entire emancipation' nor 'the supreme way'.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The son who does not recognise himself*

Another well known story is that of the son who does not recognise himself, found in Chapter IV of the sutra. It is not told by the Buddha but by four senior monks, Subhūti, Kātyāyana, Kāśyapa and Maudgalyāyana, to express their recognition of the enlightenment predicted for Śāriputra and by implication for all *śrāvakas*.<sup>18</sup> Thus the emphasis in the story is on the recognition of the meaning by the disciples as much as on the exposition of it by the Buddha. This is recognised in Kumārajīva's title for the chapter: 'Faith and Understanding'.<sup>19</sup>

The story, though rather long, can be briefly summarised. A young man leaves his father and wanders abroad for years. He is reduced to utter poverty and later accidentally comes to the city where his father in the meantime has become very wealthy. The father recognises the son, but the son does not recognise the father. The father wishes to receive his son as heir to his new wealth but when he sends messengers the son is thoroughly scared by their attentions, fearing the worst. The father realises the psychological difficulty of the son and therefore changes his policy. He does not reveal his relationship to him but instead orders the messengers to set him free and arranges menial work for him to do. Gradually he gives him more responsibility and better pay, slowly building up his confidence until he can treat him as an adopted son and give him responsibility for the whole estate. At last the father, who is near the end of his life, calls together many witnesses and declares the whole story, revealing the true, original relationship.

Three actions of the father in the story are explicitly referred to as skilful means. Firstly, when he realises that the abject disposition of his son compared with his own high estate are simply too much for the son to cope with, ‘. . . out of skilful means he does not say to others, “This is my son”’.<sup>20</sup> Presumably this is because any such declaration would merely disrupt the situation which is about to be so carefully devised, just as the original attempt to have the son brought before him was counter-productive. Secondly, in order to attract his son ‘he sets up a skilful means’<sup>21</sup> which consists in allowing him to shovel dirt away for double wages. Thirdly the father himself puts on working clothes and goes to urge on the workmen. ‘By this skilful means he is able to get near to his son’,<sup>22</sup> so that he can offer him more wages and security, praise his diligence and intimate that he is willing to adopt him. Each of these three actions is necessary because of the disposition of the son himself, each involves a provisional disguising of the true situation (for even the shovelling away of the dirt is a task invented to serve the purpose), and when all is done each of the skilful means is superseded or redundant. Indeed they have to be set quite aside for the full realisation of the purpose to be brought about. As for the son’s disposition, it progresses from fear to perplexity and a degree of confidence, until finally satisfaction with what he thinks he has himself achieved through his diligent labour is replaced by joy over quite unexpected treasure.

In the interpretation given in the text itself, after the story, the rich father is identified with the Buddha while the son is taken to represent his disciples. The disciples declare themselves to be all, as it were, sons of the Buddha, and that the Tathāgata has always declared them to be his sons.<sup>23</sup> It was they themselves who had not recognised it, and therefore the Buddha, who knew that they took delight in lesser teachings, taught them according to their capacity by his power of skilful means.<sup>24</sup> Not that the Buddha himself simply acquiesces in the lesser teachings, for ‘the world-honoured one by his power of skilful means expounds the insight of the *tathāgatas*.’<sup>25</sup> It is the disciples themselves who can only partially understand and who therefore need formulations which provide a provisional satisfaction.

To some extent a polemical element is also involved, in so far as the disciples are made to admit that they were previously satisfied with inferior or lesser teaching,<sup>26</sup> which is treated as equivalent to the dirt which the poor son was happy to shovel away. At the same time the polemical element is recognised and superseded in the text itself, which goes on: ‘In this sutra he now proclaims one vehicle only; and though formerly in front of the bodhisattvas he spoke disparagingly of the *śrāvakas* who were pleased with lesser teaching, yet in reality he was converting them with the teaching of the *mahāyāna*.’<sup>27</sup> According to this standpoint, the Mahayana does not seek an exclusive differentiation of vehicles, some to be confirmed and some to be rejected, but rather it implies an inclusive universalism. Even though some sentences seem to give special eminence to the bodhisattva

vehicle, the final words of this chapter (in the verse sequence) present the buddhas' activity as follows:

‘According to how all the living beings  
In previous lives put down good roots,  
They have knowledge of the mature  
And of those who are immature,  
They take it all into account,  
Articulate it in their understanding,  
And following the way of the one vehicle  
They appropriately expound the three.’<sup>28</sup>

Leaving aside the polemical entanglements, and their resolution, the story clearly conveys also, just like that of the burning house, a general understanding of the nature of religious teaching in Buddhism. It picturesquely illustrates how certain elements in the teaching as a whole are less than ultimately true. However they are supposed not to be fraudulent, because they are psychologically necessary in the initial stages. Without a certain amount of dissimulatory packaging it would not be possible to convey the essence at all. One may surmise that if the ultimate contents of the packaging turned out to be disappointing or less valuable than the package itself then objections would be in order. The charge would be deceit. However the result given in the story is not a charge of deceit but an expression of surprise and gratitude and joy. The final decision or response in this connection is not a matter for the observer to judge as observer. What must be noted is that various aspects of graded Buddhist guidance are clearly thought of as provisional, and that they find their ultimate resolution and dismissal in the successful appropriation of the Buddhist meaning.

#### *The rain-cloud and other similes*

The leading parable of Chapter V is about a large rain-cloud which waters a variety of plants, and it is the plants or ‘herbs’ which have provided the chapter with its title: ‘The Parable of the Herbs’.<sup>29</sup> Although the variety of the plants and the amount of moisture they need is part of the point of the parable, the consistency of the rain is if anything more important, and it may be that the parable was originally expanded on the basis of a widely used simile found in Chapter I of The Lotus Sutra itself. One of the closing verses there reads:

‘The Buddha will pour the rain of Dharma  
To satisfy those who seek the way.’<sup>30</sup>

This chapter again contains some reference to the relationship between *śrāvakas* and bodhisattvas, but the main emphasis is on a much more general statement of the nature of the Buddha’s teaching. The opening passage states this quite clearly:

‘The Tathāgata is the king of all teachings and all the things which he declares are free from falsehood. He uses his insight-led skilful means with respect to all teachings and so expounds them. These teachings which he proclaims lead right into the stage of all-knowledge. The Tathāgata sees and knows all teachings and their final meaning, and he also knows what all living beings are doing in their inmost hearts. He penetrates these matters without hindrance, and having a profound understanding of all teachings he manifests perfect insight to all living beings.’<sup>31</sup> There is some equivocation in the original with respect to the term here translated as teachings, and it should perhaps more literally be rendered ‘law’ or ‘laws’. Yet this would have little meaning in English. The same term, representing Sanskrit ‘Dharma’, or ‘dharmaś’, can be used both for the normative teaching of the Buddha, his ‘Law’ or Dharma, and in the plural for the factors of existence into which the world of our experience is analysed in Buddhist thought. Though we might expect ‘King of Dharma’ (cf. Skt. *dharmarāja*) we definitely find in Kumārajīva’s version ‘king of dharmaś’, which Sakamoto takes to be ‘teachings’ in the plural.<sup>32</sup> This is moreover actually in agreement with the Sanskrit.<sup>33</sup> Sakamoto also takes that which the Buddha expounds by his skilful means referred to in the subsequent sentence to be various kinds of teaching such as moral teachings, the four noble truths, the teaching of dependent origination, and the six perfections.<sup>34</sup> In a sense the analysis of existence into its constituent factors is indeed included in such teachings, and it is in this full sense that the term ‘teachings’ is to be taken above. It includes all the denotable factors which the Buddha in his insight and skilful means points out. The Buddha has a freely discursive grasp of these which enables him to correlate the intention or final meaning<sup>35</sup> of given factors or teachings with the inmost dispositions of the living beings whom he teaches. There is no fraud, it is argued, in the sense that the discriminated teachings find their fulfilment, or their resolution, in perfect insight itself.

The parable is not really a story so much as an extended simile. A single great cloud pours down rain all over the world, giving moisture equally to plants, trees, thickets and forests of all sizes. Each organism develops in its own way, blossoms and bears its fruit, ‘yet although the same soil makes them grow and the same rain waters them the plants and trees are all different.’<sup>36</sup> The explanation, if not already obvious, is given in the text itself along the following lines. The Tathāgata is like the cloud and the great sound of his voice goes out over the whole world just as the rain-cloud does. He knows the dispositions and abilities of all the beings in the world, and proclaims the same Dharma to them all in various ways so that they can benefit from it. Only the Tathāgata can clearly perceive the stages in which living beings find themselves. They themselves do not understand this clearly, just as the plants and trees have no knowledge of their relative size. Nor can living beings immediately or directly accept the undivided Dharma, because they are hindered by the great variety of thoughts which they entertain. Hence the teaching is related to these thoughts and to

the practices which seem so indispensable to them. In reality however the Dharma is as unified as the rain-cloud. What then is the purport of this undivided Dharma, or to what does it tend? The answer is given in a couple of parallel formulations of which the first runs: 'The Dharma proclaimed by the Tathāgata is of one character and of one flavour, that is to say, it is marked with deliverance, non-attachment, extinction, and finally brings one to comprehensive knowledge.'<sup>37</sup> Extinction here does not mean annihilation but rather that nirvana of a Tathāgata with respect to which the dichotomy of annihilation or existence is no longer applicable. The second formulation is: 'The Tathāgata knows this Dharma of one character and one flavour, marked, that is to say, with deliverance, non-attachment and extinction, marked with ultimate nirvana and permanently restful extinction, ending in return to empty space.'<sup>38</sup>

The term skilful means does not occur explicitly in the prose form of the simile nor in the appended explanation, though it does appear in the introductory passage as quoted already above. It also appears twice in the verse form of the simile in direct explanation of its meaning.

'The Buddha's equal teaching  
Is like one sort of rain,  
But according to the nature of living beings  
What they receive is not the same,  
Just as these plants and trees  
Each take a varying supply.  
In accordance with this parable  
The Buddha makes things known through skilful means  
And with varying terminology  
He proclaims the one Dharma;  
While out of the Buddha's own insight  
It is like one drop in the sea.'<sup>39</sup>

The verse form of the simile also allegorises the different types of plants, making various kinds of disciples and *pratyekabuddhas* the smaller and larger herbs respectively, bodhisattvas the shrubs and especially advanced and effective bodhisattvas the trees. The polemical aspect is however of slight importance in this passage, and additional material in the Sanskrit text tradition plays it down still further. Admittedly the closing lines of Kumārajīva's verse say that the *śrāvakas* do not attain extinction, while those directly addressed are told that they will pursue the bodhisattva way until they become buddhas. On the other hand the unity and equality of the Buddha's teaching has already been thoroughly avowed by the whole chapter, and it seems consistent to say that the *śrāvakas* will not attain the final goal in their capacity as *śrāvakas*. Even the bodhisattvas are only predicted to buddhahood in this context after gradual discipline, and they are not equated with the buddhas over against the disciples.<sup>40</sup>

Extensions of this chapter which are not found in Kumārajīva's version contain two further similes. One speaks of a series of pots made out of the same clay by the same potter, but used for storing different things such as

sugar, ghee, curds and milk. The meaning is the same as that of the rain and the plants. The second is a longer story about a blind man who recovers his sight as a result of healing, and who thereupon thinks of his power to see as an unsurpassed achievement, only to be told that there is much else which he could still attain such as supernormal powers. It is of some interest that the four herbs used to cure his blindness are allegorised as 'voidness, signlessness, wishlessness and attaining nirvana',<sup>41</sup> so that in effect all of these must be supposed to be on the level of skilful means. The three vehicles are in this passage too said to be shown by the skilfulness in means of the Tathāgata,<sup>42</sup> and no matter what one's disposition or one's route there will only be one nirvana, and not two or three as Kāśyapa was wondering.<sup>43</sup> In general these extra passages do not seem to add anything of fundamental importance to the general position of the sutra, and since Kumārajīva did not include them they will not be considered any further here.

### *Stories of unexpected treasure*

The jewel is a regular image in Buddhism. The story of the son who did not recognise himself, discussed earlier, and told by the four head monks to express recognition of their newly found treasure, is prefaced by a simile of a jewel. They congratulate themselves on 'obtaining an incalculably rare jewel without themselves seeking it'.<sup>44</sup> The same simile of a jewel is used as the basis for two further stories in Chapter VIII and Chapter XIV.

The second of these, in Chapter XIV, is itself really little more than an extended simile. It tells of a powerful king who wins great victories and rewards his military men lavishly, according to their merit. All kinds of treasures are handed out, but only the jewel worn on his own head is kept back, as it would be astonishing indeed if he were to give away his own special emblem. At the very last, when his army is doing battle as never before, he does indeed disburse it as a present to them all. The interpretation is woven into the story itself and explains how the teaching of nirvana is among the preliminary rewards, while the final reward symbolised by the jewel on the king's own head is nothing less than The Lotus Sutra.

There is no mention of skilful means throughout the prose version of the story, but there are two occurrences in the verse account (and two other general occurrences in the chapter as a whole). As might be expected, the preliminary rewards are described as skilful means. This follows what is by now an accustomed pattern, except for the introduction of *sutras* into the picture as well as *dharmas*, to indicate the Buddha's teaching, thus:

'Seeing all human beings  
Suffering from pains and distress  
Trying to find deliverance  
And battling against the *māras* (evil demons),  
For the sake of all these living beings  
He proclaims numerous dharmas,  
Using his great skilful means  
He expounds all these sutras.'<sup>45</sup>

We then hear that when those who hear are ready for it the ‘Dharma-flower’, that is, The Lotus Sutra,<sup>46</sup> is also revealed, just as the king finally gave the jewel from his head.

Oddly enough however we find that at the beginning of the parable The Lotus Sutra itself also seems to be described as proclaimed by skilful means. As in many later sections of the sutra there is a stress on the qualities of those who proclaim or keep ‘this sutra’, meaning The Lotus Sutra, and the verse then continues:

‘I have attained the Buddha-way,  
And making use of skilful means  
I proclaim this sutra,  
So that they may abide in it.’<sup>47</sup>

The story seems to suggest that The Lotus Sutra is kept back until the end, like the king’s jewel; and yet at the same time it is not quite possible to say on the basis of the passages as a whole that the preliminary teachings are skilful means while The Lotus Sutra is not a skilful means. Rather, The Lotus Sutra is given in and through the skilful means and finally becomes apparent, for in the verse quoted the bodhisattvas are already abiding in The Lotus Sutra because of the Buddha’s use of skilful means.

The other story, in Chapter VIII, like the story of the son who did not recognise himself, is told not by the Buddha but by his disciples, indeed by no less than five hundred worthy ones (‘*arhats*’); though it is not explained whether they spoke in chorus or repeated it one after another. The occasion of the story is that the Buddha has predicted future Buddhahood for all of them, whereupon the story is told to express their feelings of surprise and joy at this. They are compared to a man who went to visit a friend, drank too much and fell asleep. On waking he wanders on to distant parts and finally gets into severe difficulties over feeding and clothing himself. He is content to labour very hard for little reward. Little does he realise that the friend in whose house he had got drunk had sewn a precious jewel into his garment before going off on business. When the friend comes across him again, and points it out to him, his worries are over.

Both the story and the explanation given are relatively brief. The *arhats* had laboured hard for a mere trifle, namely that which they supposed to be nirvana, forgetting in the meanwhile the goal of comprehensive wisdom, or all-knowledge. The Buddha has then declared the provisional nature of their achievement, thus: ‘Monks! That which you have obtained is not final extinction. I have long been encouraging you to plant roots of buddha-goodness, and by my skilful means I displayed a form of nirvana. But you supposed it to be the real extinction which you have obtained.’<sup>48</sup> In the verse ‘a small part of nirvana’ is contrasted with ‘real extinction’ or ‘true extinction’.<sup>49</sup> Thus the main goal of Buddhism is again put into question, or at least people’s thinking that they have attained it. The teaching of nirvana is here described explicitly as the Buddha’s skilful means. However the most famous story to put across this *critique* is the story of the

magic city, which also features a 'place of precious jewels', and to which we now come.

### *The magic city*

The story of the magic city in Chapter VII follows an account of a long-distant previous Buddha's decision to preach. This decision to proclaim the Dharma is presented on the same model as the decision by Gautama Buddha found in Chapter II of the sutra and of course in other Buddhist writings, and the matter will be discussed again below in Chapter Seven. It may be noted now however that the Dharma preached by this ancient Buddha of many aeons ago consisted in the first instance of the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination. As to the teaching of 'The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law', this was delivered later at the special request of sixteen bodhisattvas, as the text goes on to relate, who then in their turn are entrusted with its proclamation. The sixteenth of these is identified with the present Buddha in this world. The present Buddha in his turn predicts that there will be further generations who will similarly receive the teaching of nirvana, which will again be followed by the teaching of The Lotus Sutra.

Thus under ever-repeated circumstances there are always these two phases. Firstly there is the initial teaching of Buddhism, the same teaching which the gods entreated the Buddha of antiquity to expound when they said:

'World-honoured one, turn the wheel of Dharma,  
Beat the drum of Dharma, sweet as dew,  
Bring across the living beings in suffering and distress,  
Make manifest the way of nirvana.'<sup>50</sup>

This teaching is first given by a Buddha or a Tathāgata because he knows that living beings are strongly attached to pleasures and trifles, because his 'skilful means reaches deeply into the natures of living beings'.<sup>51</sup> It is therefore entirely for their sakes that he proclaims nirvana.<sup>52</sup> As to the second phase, this is the teaching of The Lotus Sutra itself, which assumes the initial teaching of nirvana etc. Under what circumstances does an individual Buddha proclaim The Lotus Sutra? 'If the Tathāgata knows that the time of his nirvana is near, and the assembly is pure, firm in faith and discernment, thoroughly grasping the dharma of voidness and deeply entering into meditation, then he will gather together all the bodhisattvas and śrāvakas to proclaim this sutra.'<sup>53</sup> If the present form of The Lotus Sutra is taken as a unity so that Chapter II may be adduced here as indicative of what a Buddha proclaims when it is time to take this step, it may be recalled that the new teaching is not so much a further teaching with separate, extra content. Rather it offers a view of the way in which the initial teaching of nirvana is supposed to be understood. In this further perspective the status of the initial teaching is made problematical, and it is this that the story of the magic city is intended to make clear.

In the story itself a band of travellers is crossing a broad expanse of dangerous country, to a 'Place of Precious Jewels'. They have an experienced guide, but the conditions are so bad and frightening that the travellers get tired out and wish to turn back. The guide finds this regrettable, bearing in mind the treasure which lies ahead of them, and magically creates a city for their rest and encouragement. The travellers enter the city and imagine that they have arrived at their destination (though according to the story it is first presented to them as a temporary resting place). After they have rested, the guide makes the magic city disappear again and summons the travellers onwards to their original goal.

The guide is a man described as having many many skilful means<sup>54</sup> and his creation of the magic city is one such. We may note the conscious deliberation involved: 'The leader, being a man of many many skilful means, reflected thus:'<sup>55</sup> and 'Reflecting thus, by his power of skilful means, he created a magic city more than three hundred *yojanas* across in the middle of their perilous road'.<sup>56</sup>

The interpretation of the story found in the text itself suffers from a slight confusion over twos and threes. The Buddha, who is of course the guide, is said to proclaim two nirvanas by his power of skilful means, so that living beings may stop for rest when they are on the way.<sup>57</sup> If beings get to reside in either of these 'two places' they are told that the place where they are staying is near to Buddha-insight and that the nirvana which they have attained is not the truly real.<sup>58</sup> We then read the familiar formula 'It is only that the Tathāgata by his power of skilful means, in one Buddha-vehicle differentiates and expounds the three.'<sup>59</sup> This state of affairs is said to be like the guide producing a magic city, which though itself not real is not far from the 'Place of Precious Jewels'. The mention of two nirvanas has led to a flutter of footnotes.<sup>60</sup> Reference to the Sanskrit makes it seem probable that 'two nirvanas' of the *śrāvakas* and of the *pratyekabuddhas* respectively was intended, though this is not explicitly stated in the Chinese.<sup>61</sup> Mention of these two nirvanas and of two places or 'stages'<sup>62</sup> leads on to the standard comment that the Buddha in one vehicle expounds the three. By contrast, the introductory passage, just before the parable is told, does not refer to three, nor, probably, to two in the sense of two preliminaries. When we read: 'There are not two vehicles in the world by which one may attain extinction; there is only the one Buddha-vehicle by which one may attain extinction,'<sup>63</sup> it means that it is incorrect to distinguish between an initial teaching of nirvana and an additional new teaching which would both lead to extinction. The verse explanation of the parable supports this line of thought, as when we read:

'The buddhas by their power of skilful means  
Differentiate and expound three vehicles;  
There is only one Buddha-vehicle and  
A second is proclaimed as a resting place.'<sup>64</sup>

Since only one magic city is referred to in the story it might have been simpler if the talk of plural 'nirvanas' and of 'three' had not been

introduced to the subsequent explanation. In the discussion of the twos and the threes it is easy to overlook how staggering this proposed way of assessing the teaching of nirvana must have seemed to those who had hitherto taken Buddhist teaching straightforwardly on the model of, say, the four noble truths. The point of the parable is that the teaching of nirvana as given in the four noble truths etc. is only a restful preliminary to the real attainment required. According to this story it is only by recognising the 'magical' character of that which is at first manifested, that the travellers are able to proceed to real extinction and Buddha-insight. At the same time there is no other picture of 'real extinction' than the original teaching of nirvana. The magic city is *intended* to be mistaken for the place of precious jewels. Nor is the ultimate 'destination' described in any way other than by the same sort of simile as that used for the initial teaching of nirvana, namely as a 'place of precious jewels'. This does not matter. What counts is that the narrative separation of the two draws attention to the provisional character of the initial teaching. This provisional character has to be recognised before its full intent can be realised.

#### *The Buddha's life-span and the story of the physician*

The story of the physician is found in Chapter XVI of Kumārajīva's Lotus Sutra, which is Chapter 15 of the Sanskrit manuscript tradition. In historical terms it probably does not represent a primary stage in the sutra's compilation, but once the complete work had come into existence and was translated into Chinese it came to be considered as the most important chapter of all. It is still used liturgically today, along with Chapter II, in a manner representative of the sutra as a whole. The status of the chapter in scholastic discussion and religious practice is not in itself a basis for discussion of it here, but naturally the importance which it acquired is not unconnected with its contents. It certainly does bring to a climax the message of the sutra already examined so far by relating it directly to the person of the Buddha himself. It raises questions about the nature of the Buddha relevant to many discussions of Mahayana Buddhism (which is often misunderstood at this point), and at the same time it contains in the short space of under two pages in the printed *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* no less than ten occurrences of the term *fang-pien* or skilful means. The whole of the subsequent remainder of the sutra only contains another four cases of the term.

Before coming to the story itself some attention must be paid to the opening portion of the text which the story then illustrates, and indeed first of all to the title of the chapter. The title is perhaps best to be translated as 'The Tathāgata's Life-span', although 'Length of Life of the Tathāgata' is also adequate and holds it more literally close to the Sanskrit.<sup>65</sup> It is very important to notice this precise formulation as well as some others in the body of the text because it is largely on the basis of this chapter that The Lotus Sutra is sometimes represented as replacing the human Buddha with an eternal, transcendent Buddha who is equivalent in his own being to the God of the main theist religions. Such an interpretation is not accurate.

The whole purport of this chapter, as will become clear in the details which follow, is to argue that the direct demonstrations of the attainment of enlightenment and of nirvana to be seen in the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni (i.e. the historical Buddha) are as much to be understood in terms of the concept of skilful means as his teaching *about* the four noble truths and nirvana. By contrast to the idea that the hero of this tale attained enlightenment after a certain number of years in a historical life, it is said that he had already attained true Buddhahood an incredibly long time previously. The purpose of saying this is to deflate the fixed idea that it took a small number of years. In other words the argument is conceived on an entirely dialectical basis. To think that the text here is gratuitously advancing the conception of an eternal Buddha on the lines of western theism, in a manner which would run contrary to the whole trend of Buddhism in general, both before and after the appearance of this text, would be to misconstrue it entirely.

The term sometimes translated as 'eternal' or 'infinite' means in fact 'immeasurable', and it is crucial to notice the difference.<sup>66</sup> 'Immeasurable' means exactly that one would not in practice be able to measure it; for Maitreya and the others assembled are asked whether supposing vast quantities of worlds were crushed into atoms, and then each atom were carried away from west to east one by one, they would be able to calculate the number of worlds so treated.<sup>67</sup> Of course, they would not be able to, and likewise the length of time which has passed since the Tathāgata attained supreme perfect enlightenment is so long that it cannot be calculated. The same however is true for 'all buddha-tathāgatas', it must be presumed, for this phrase implying the plural reality of many such is used in this very same chapter.<sup>68</sup>

The argument of the chapter as a whole arises out of a fantastic event described in the preceding one, Chapter XV.<sup>69</sup> While numerous bodhisattvas are promising that they will protect, read, recite and copy The Lotus Sutra after the passing away of the Buddha, the latter to their great astonishment says that there really is no need for them to be concerned. Why? Because there already are innumerable bodhisattvas ready to do it. These countless bodhisattvas then appear from out of the earth and establish themselves in a marvellous tableau. Not surprisingly this gives rise to considerable perplexity, and the Buddha assures Maitreya and the original assembly that all of these new arrivals were converted to Buddhism after the Buddha's own enlightenment. Even so, it does not seem possible that so many were converted in the mere forty years which have elapsed since the Buddha was enlightened. Maitreya and his disciples say that it is as if a young man of twenty-five were to claim numerous old men as his sons, while the latter recognised him as their father. Since such a thing seems inconceivable they beg the Buddha to explain, and it is this explanation which is given in Chapter XVI on the Tathāgata's life-span.

The preparation for what is about to be said is very similar to that in Chapter II. The disciples are in a state of perplexity, and they must be

prepared to receive what will be said with belief and discernment.<sup>70</sup> Three times the Buddha enjoins the disciples to receive his sincerely true word. Three times they promise to listen with belief and discernment. The occasion is solemn.

The Buddha then explains that although he is usually thought of as coming from the Śākya clan and renouncing his palace life, taking up a place of meditation not far from the city of Gayā and there attaining to enlightenment, the reality is that innumerable world-systems have come to be and passed away since he originally became a Buddha. Ever since an inconceivably long time ago he has been constantly teaching both in this world and in innumerable others. This marvellously different reality is termed 'the Tathāgata's power of mysterious supernatural pervasion' but how, we may ask, is it linked with skilful means.<sup>71</sup> The answer to this is that although the term 'supernatural' or 'divine' is thereafter somewhat neglected, the whole matter of deflating the historical view of the Buddha's life is explained further in terms of skilful means.

It is as skilful means that various other buddhas such as the Buddha Burning Light (Dīpaṅkara) are differentiated and described as entering nirvana.<sup>72</sup> The various details are framed in accordance with the capacities of those who are to be saved, and 'Again by various skilful means I proclaim the wonderful Dharma which is able to bring joy to the hearts of all the living.'<sup>73</sup> The matter is then related to the historical life-span of the Buddha, for 'Seeing that all living beings take pleasure in lesser teachings<sup>74</sup> and that their virtue is slight while their vileness weighs heavy, to these men I declare that I left home in my youth and attained supreme, perfect enlightenment. But I have really been like this ever since I became a Buddha. I make this proclamation only as skilful means to teach living beings and get them to enter the Buddha-way.'<sup>75</sup> In this way the understanding of Buddhist teaching in terms of skilful means which has already been more or less systematically advanced throughout the sutra is here applied to the Buddha's own life-story.

It is not surprising that this is applied to the end of the Buddha's life as well as to its opening, and so we read, 'Although it is at this time not a real extinction, nevertheless I announce my impending extinction. It is by this skilful means that the Tathāgata teaches and transforms the living.'<sup>76</sup> If the teaching of the Buddha's enlightenment is conceived and put forward to display the possibility of not being mentally entangled in trifles, the demonstration of his extinction, contrived though it is, is similarly necessary to prevent people from becoming complacent as a result of the Buddha's presence. In other words this too is dialectically conceived to take account of the psychological trends of living beings. Thus the Tathāgata is said to teach by skilful means that the appearance of buddhas in the world is very rare.<sup>77</sup> This is a widespread idea in Buddhist writings but it takes on a particular strength here because it is conceived in terms of skilful means.<sup>78</sup> Skilful means is the technical term which defines any particular piece of Buddhist teaching as being contrived in accordance with the dispositions of those

who are to hear it. And, to return to the Buddha's nirvana, 'That is why the Tathāgata, though he does not really become extinct, announces his extinction.'<sup>79</sup>

In this way therefore, both the two key points in the life of the Buddha, his enlightenment and his nirvana, are given out as skilful means in accordance with the needs of the living, for their deliverance. This is certainly the main thrust of the exposition when it is stated straightforwardly. It is this same point which is conveyed in the teaching that the length of the Tathāgata's life is of unimaginable and indefinite length. Let it be observed once again that it is not a question of there being no beginning at all to the Buddha's career as a Buddha, and neither is there any suggestion that the ultimate resolution is anything other than a genuine nirvana or extinction. It is in the context of the Buddha's teaching in many diverse ways that we read: 'Thus it is that since I became a Buddha in the very far distant past, my lifetime continues to persist without extinction through immeasurable *asamkhyeya kalpas*. Good sons! The lifetime which I attained originally by practising the bodhisattva-way is even now not yet finished and will still be twice what it was so far.'<sup>80</sup> This dramatisation of the immense length of a bodhisattva's, and a buddha's career is in effect being used as a narrative argument about the nature of the concepts of enlightenment and of nirvana.

The fundamental conception of the Buddha's teaching activity here moves between the same two poles which characterised it in the earlier chapters. On the one hand the dispositions of the living are varied and not altogether praiseworthy, and hence the Buddha 'teaches in a variety of ways, with karmic reasonings, parables and diverse terminology.'<sup>81</sup> At the same time 'The Tathāgata knows and sees the character of the triple world as it really is: no birth-and-death, no going away, no coming forth, no being in the world and no extinction, no reality and no falsehood, no being thus and no being otherwise. Unlike the view of the triple world held within the triple world itself, the Tathāgata clearly sees such things as these without mistake.'<sup>82</sup> To claim that something like monotheism is here asserted would be to maintain a view worse than those which the triple world normally maintains about itself. On the contrary, the last-quoted sentence keeps The Lotus Sutra firmly in the same area as the Perfection of Insight literature. It is this understanding of the nature of the world which subverts the standard view of the activity of a buddha. The standard view is provisionally accepted and encouraged through skilful means, but there comes a time when it is also necessary to indicate the redundancy of the terms in which the teaching is couched.

The initial exposition of Chapter XVI considered above is followed by a story to illustrate the argument. A physician is travelling abroad and in the meantime his sons drink some poisonous medicines and become delirious. When he returns he prepares good medicine for them. The ones who take the good medicine recover, but the others have quite lost their senses and refuse to take the good medicine. The father reflects, and decides upon a

skilful means<sup>83</sup> to make them take it. He warns them that he is very old and approaching death, then leaves for another country from where he sends a messenger back to report that he has died. The sons are overcome with grief, come to their senses and take the medicine which he had prepared. Hearing this the father returns and they are reunited. Immediately following the story the question is raised as to whether the physician in this case was guilty of a falsehood, and the answer returned is that he was not. Then the Buddha declares: 'I also am like this. Since I became a Buddha, infinite, boundless, hundred thousand millions of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeya kalpas* ago, for the sake of all the living I have declared by my power of skilful means that I must enter nirvana, and yet no one can rightly say that I have perpetrated a falsehood.'<sup>84</sup>

Since the story is not further explained in the prose text it must be taken as directly illustrating the argument already pursued before. The invented death of the physician puts the nirvana of the Buddha firmly at the level of provisional truth designed to match the psychological needs of the Buddha's followers. This is supported, it may be observed, by the story context of medicine and healing, a common way of conceiving the nature of Buddhism. The physician is 'wise and perspicacious, conversant with medical art and skilled in healing all sorts of diseases.'<sup>85</sup> The fundamental condition of the sons is one of health, and it is only the foolish imbibing of poison which makes the antidote necessary. The physician prepares the antidote, which is not otherwise necessary in itself. This is entirely consistent with the diagnosis-prescription pattern of the four noble truths, and indicates the pragmatic rather than speculative intention of Buddhism which has often been noted. This chapter, and this story, really represent a radicalisation of such an understanding of the Buddhist religion, because the Buddha's own entry into nirvana (that is, his death at the end of a lifespan of eighty years) is now treated as being a supreme skilful means to bring about regret and self-examination on the part of the living. The Buddha's influence is thenceforth not to be directly viewed, but is said to be continued only indirectly, in order to maintain the impressive story of his birth, his enlightenment and his death.

The concluding verses twice confirm that the Buddha's nirvana is given out as a skilful means to bring about right attitudes among the living. One of these cases explicitly brings in relic-worship under this umbrella, thus:

'By skilful means I manifest nirvana  
 Though really I am not extinct . . .  
 They all look on me as extinct  
 And everywhere worship my relics,  
 All cherishing tender emotions  
 As their hearts begin to thirst with hope.'<sup>86</sup>

This is important as bringing in the main focal point of Buddhist devotions from earliest times to the context of the thought of skilful means. It is

not only doctrinal concepts which are to be understood as skilful means but also ritual practice.

When the time is ripe and the people are ready in themselves the Buddha is said to reveal himself again, and here at last quite ambiguously:

‘And then I tell all living beings  
That I am always present here without extinction;  
I use my power of skilful means  
To manifest both extinction and non-extinction.’<sup>87</sup>

The observer cannot idly observe that the Buddha is extinct or not.

The pragmatic, soteriological criterion for every form of Buddhist teaching finds clear expression in the closing verses of the chapter:

‘I always know all living beings,  
Whether they practice the way or do not practice it;  
In accordance with what is required for their salvation  
I proclaim for their sakes a variety of teachings;  
I am always considering in my own mind  
What I can do to bring the living beings  
To enter the unsurpassed way  
And speedily accomplish their Buddhahood.’<sup>88</sup>

From all that has been said above, we may conclude that the Mahayana articulation of Buddhism as a working religion along these lines is altogether controlled by the concept of skilful means.

### Endnotes

- 1 T IX 13a (是長者先作是意) 我以方便令子得出 cf. KSS 86. This picks up the story itself.  
T IX 12c 我今當設方便令諸子等得免斯害。’, ‘Let me now setup some skilful means to get my children to escape this disaster’, cf. KSS 84.
- 2 T IX 12c 父知諸子先心各有所好。種種珍玩奇異之物情必樂著。cf. KSS 84.
- 3 T IX 13b 當得三乘聲聞辟支佛佛乘。cf. KSS 88. N.B. buddha-vehicle, rather than bodhisattva-vehicle, but see below.
- 4 T IX 13b, cf. KSS 89. Mahāyāna is always translated into Chinese as 大乘 (literally great vehicle’), while *mahāsattva* is transcribed (as is *bodhisattva*); thus there is a loss of the word-association between *mahāyāna* and *mahāsattva*.
- 5 T IX 13c 然後但以大乘而度脫之。cf. KSS 90. The Sanskrit term is used in discussion for familiarity’s sake, though it is translated (literally) into Chinese, and not transliterated. It is italicized to indicate that reference is being made to the text rather than to Mahayana Buddhism generally.
- 6 T IX 13c 無有虛妄。初說三乘引導衆生。然後但以大乘而度脫之。cf. KSS 90.
- 7 大乘法, Mahayana-Dharma.
- 8 T IX 13c 諸佛方便力故於一佛乘分別說三。cf. KSS 90.
- 9 See quotation in note 3 above.
- 10 T IX 15a 與諸菩薩 及聲聞衆 乘此寶乘 直至道場 cf. KSS 103.
- 11 T IX 15a 更無餘乘除佛方便 cf. KSS 103.  
Cf. T IX 15a 諸佛世尊 雖以方便 所化衆生 皆是菩薩 ‘Although the buddhas, the world-honoured ones, use skilful means, the living beings whom they convert are all bodhisattvas’, cf. KSS 104.

- 12 T IX 12b 我先不言諸佛世尊以種種因緣譬喻言辭方便說法。皆為阿耨多羅三藐三菩提耶。cf. KSS 82. ‘Supreme perfect enlightenment’ is given in transliterated form for *anuttara samyak sambodhi*, and should perhaps strictly be so rendered to convey what Kumārajīva’s readers had before them.
- 13 T IX 13b 如來以是方便誘進衆生。復作是言。汝等當知。此三乘法皆是聖所稱歎。自在無繫無所依求。乘是三乘。以無漏根力覺道禪定解脫三昧等。而自娛樂。便得無量安隱快樂。cf. KSS 88.
- 14 T IX 15a 若有衆生 不知苦本 深著苦因 不能暫捨 為是等故 方便說道 諸苦所因 貪欲為本 cf. KSS 104–5. This occurrence of *fang-pien* is not reflected by any equivalent phrase in Dharmarakṣa’s version or in the Sanskrit texts, and though Kumārajīva’s text may have been an archaic one this may be a gloss attributable to him. Verse translation is particularly prone to minor contractions or additions, to obtain the correct number of characters for a line, and precisely because these may not have seemed particularly important at the time they indicate how the text was being understood by the translator as he worked.
- 15 T IX 15a 我雖先說 汝等滅度 但盡生死 而實不滅 cf. KSS 103–4. Cf. also the longer passage just after the rehearsal of the four truths in this context T IX 15b, KSS 105. The term used for extinction here both times is the same: 滅, but it is used equivocally.
- 16 T IX 15a 令所應作 唯佛智慧 cf. KSS 104.
- 17 T IX 15b 一切解脫 和無上道 respectively, cf. KSS 105.
- 18 Cf. the whole introductory passage, T IX 16, KSS 116–7, and especially: ‘In the Buddha’s presence we now hear the prediction of *śrāvakas* to *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*’ (我等令於佛前聞授聲阿耨多羅三藐三菩提記.)
- 19 信解, translated in KSS as ‘Faith-Discernment’. Sanskrit has *Adhimukti*, ‘Disposition’. (The KSS note on the title of this chapter is very puzzling.)
- 20 T IX 17a 以方便不語他人云是我子。cf. KSS 120.
- 21 T IX 17a 設方便 cf. KSS 120. This is another example of the conscious devising and establishment (設) of skilful means.
- 22 T IX 17a 以方便故得近其子, cf. KSS 121.
- 23 T IX 17b 我等皆似佛子 and 如來常說我等為子, cf. KSS 123. Note that this is quite clearly understood as a simile arising out of the story, and is not an indication of incipient theism.
- 24 T IX 17c 佛知我等心樂小法。以方便力隨我等說。cf. KSS 124.
- 25 T IX 17b 世尊以方便力說如來智慧 cf. KSS 123.
- 26 T IX 17b 小法 (twice), cf. KSS 123. Cf. the term 小乘, *hīnayāna*, which could not be far from the minds of Kumārajīva’s readers.
- 27 T IX 17c 於此經中唯說一乘。而昔於菩薩前毀訾聲聞樂小法者。然佛實以大乘教化。cf. KSS 124.
- 28 T IX 19a 隨諸衆生 宿世善根 又知成熟 未成熟者 種種籌量 分別知已 於一乘道 隨宜說三。cf. KSS 137.
- 29 T IX 19a, 藥草喻, cf. KSS 139. The medicinal character of some plants has nothing whatever to do with the argument of this chapter, and seems to be an accidental association. Herbs, that is, medicinal plants, simply feature among other plants in a list of those watered by the rain.
- 30 T IX 5b 佛當雨法雨充足求道者 cf. KSS. Cf. also J. J. Jones, *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. I, p. 211.
- 31 T IX 19a 如來是諸法之王若有所說皆不虛也。於一切法以智方便而演說之。其所說法。皆悉到於一切智地。如來觀知一切諸法之所歸趣。亦知一切衆生深心所行。通達無礙。又於諸法究盡明了。示諸衆生一切智慧。cf. KSS 139.
- 32 Sakamoto, *op. cit.* p. 264, and note *ad loc.* takes it to be ‘teachings’ in the plural, もろもろの法 (教). It seems necessary to keep the plural for the subsequent cases of 法 and some equivocation between dharmas as teachings and as factors of existence seems unavoidable and not necessarily undesirable in a passage such as this.
- 33 Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* p. 114 line 7: *sarva-dharmāṅṅam rājā* . . .
- 34 Sakamoto, *op. cit.* note *ad loc.*

- 35 歸趣。Cf. sentence quoted earlier: ‘We too on receiving this Dharma can attain Nirvana. But now we do not know to what this principle tends.’ (T IX 6b 我等亦得此法到於涅槃。而今不知是義所趣。)
- 36 T IX 19b 雖一地所生一雨所潤而諸草木各有差別。cf. KSS 140.
- 37 T IX 19b 如來說法一相一味。所謂解脫相離滅相。究竟至於一切種智。cf. KSS 142.
- 38 T IX 19c 如來知是一相一味之法。所謂解脫相離相滅相。究竟涅槃常寂滅相。終歸於空。cf. KSS 143. ‘Nirvana’ and ‘extinction’ are more or less synonymous here. This simile is not concerned with the status of the initial teaching of nirvana. ‘The void’ is eschewed here because it is so often a mistranslation for *śūnyatā*. 空 is regularly used for *śūnyā* or *śūnyatā* but in fact Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* p. 116, have *ākāśa* in this case.
- 39 T IX 20b 佛平等說如一味雨 隨衆生性 所受不同 如彼草木 所稟各異 佛以此喻 方便開示 種種言辭 演說一法 於佛智慧 如海一滯 KSS 149. Cf. also a standard formula near the end of the verse, T IX 20b and KSS 151.
- 40 T IX 20b 汝等所行 是菩薩道 漸漸修學 悉當成佛 cf. KSS 151.
- 41 Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* p. 126: *śūnyatā nimitāprañihita-nirvāṇa-dvāraṃ*. The passage not contained in Kumārajīva’s version runs from the end of the first long verse section, and may be consulted (with caution) in Kern, *op. cit.* pp. 128–141.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 126: *tathāgata upāya-kauśalyena trīṇi yānāni deśayati*.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 123. The question follows other declarations that there is one vehicle, and not two or three.
- 44 T IX 16b 無量珍寶 不求自得 cf. KSS 117.
- 45 T IX 39b 見一切人 受諸苦惱 欲求解脫 與諸魔戰 爲是衆生 說種種法 以大方便 說此諸經 cf. KSS 286. Reference to a sutra within its own text is not unusual as readers are normally urged to keep it, recite it, copy it etc. It may be characteristic of secondary portions of a sutra in terms of its original compilation. There are other reasons for supposing this part to be rather secondary, e.g. reference to ‘the city of nirvana’ displayed as if it were extinction (T IX 39a 又復賜與涅槃之城言得滅度 cf. KSS 283) which must be a reference to the story in Chapter VII. Since Chapter VII comes before Chapter XIV (or Sanskrit 13) this may not seem surprising, but see also the discussion of compilation questions in Appendix B.
- 46 法華, cf. *passim* 此法華經。Hokekyō (法華經) is still the common Japanese name for The Lotus Sutra, though in a formal devotional context *Myōhō Renge Kyō* may be preferred.
- 47 T IX 39a 我得佛道 以諸方便 爲說此法 令住其中 cf. KSS 285. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* has 法 (Dharma), with 經 (Sutra) as a secondary reading. It does not affect the meaning because ‘this Dharma’ would still imply the previously mentioned ‘this Sutra’, and therefore ‘Sutra’ has been kept following KSS to bring out this implication clearly.
- 48 T IX 29a 諸比丘。汝等所得非究竟滅。我久令汝等種佛善根。以方便故示涅槃相。而汝謂爲實得滅度。cf. KSS 212.
- 49 T IX 29b 少涅槃分, contrast 實滅度 and 真滅。Extinction is meant in the sense of cessation, not annihilation, that is, cessation of karmic force. To some extent the different terminology helps to articulate the argument, but it never stabilised to the extent that 涅槃 (nirvana) came to be seen as a definitely lesser value than 滅度 (extinction). Thus Sakamoto, writing today, can still use one to explain the other thus: 滅とは煩惱の滅した涅槃を指し、即ち究竟真実の涅槃の意 (*op. cit.* vol. II p. 337, note).
- 50 T IX 24c 世尊轉法輪 擊甘露法鼓 度苦惱衆生 開示涅槃道 cf. KSS 183. Note that the same term is used again for nirvana.
- 51 T IX 25c 如來方便深入衆生之性 cf. KSS 189f.
- 52 T IX 25c 爲是等故說於涅槃 cf. KSS 190.
- 53 T IX 25c 若如來自知涅槃時到。衆又清淨信解堅固。了達空法深入禪定。便集諸菩薩及聲聞衆爲說是經。cf. KSS 189.
- 54 T IX 26a 導師多諸方便 cf. KSS 190.
- 55 T IX 26a 導師多諸方便而作是念 cf. KSS 190.
- 56 T IX 26a 作是念已。以方便力。於險道中過三百由旬。化作一城。cf. KSS 190.
- 57 T IX 26a 以方便力而於中道爲止息故說二涅槃 cf. KSS 191. This 中道 surely does not mean between the beings of the three worlds and the beings who have transcended the three worlds, as in Sakamoto’s note *ad loc.*

- 58 T IX 26a 所得涅槃非真實也。cf. KSS 191.
- 59 T IX 26c 但是如來方便之力於一佛乘分別說三。cf. KSS 191.
- 60 KSS p. 191, footnote, refers back to a previous footnote distinguishing between nirvana with residue and nirvana without residue. However this does not seem to be what is intended here. Sakamoto also gives this possibility, *ad loc.*
- 61 Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* p. 167=‘*dve nīrvāna-bhūmī . . . śrāvaka-bhūmiṃ pratyeka-buddha-bhūmiṃ ca.*’ KSS and Sakamoto both give this possibility too.
- 62 地, representing Sanskrit *bhūmi*, but in spite of the wider use of this word for the ten stages of bodhisattvahood, it may be infelicitous to translate as ‘stage’ here because the two ‘realms’ or ‘states’ as one might call them, of which it is a question here, are not consecutive ones.
- 63 T IX 25c 世間無有二乘而得滅度唯一佛乘得滅度耳。cf. KSS 189. KSS in fact translates ‘. . . there is no second vehicle . . .’, which supports the point being made here, that the passage is not referring to two specific *other* vehicles, that is, to two hinayana vehicles. However the statement also should be taken to mean not that some second vehicle is excluded from the point of view of the buddha-vehicle, but that it is mistaken to differentiate them, from the final point of view of the sutra.
- 64 T IX 27b 諸佛方便力 分別說三乘 唯一佛乘 息處故說二 cf. KSS 198. KSS gives alternative translations, one referring to two vehicles, and one referring to ‘a second’.
- 65 T IX 42a 如來壽量 cf. Kern, *op. cit.* p. 298, and Iwamoto, *op. cit.* p. 11 (如來の壽命の長さ), for *Tathāgatāyus-pramāṇa*. KSS translate ‘Revelation of the (Eternal) Life of the Tathāgata’, p. 307, clearly preferring to draw upon Dharmarakṣa’s 如來現壽品, T IX 113a, and adding the ‘Eternal’. A footnote develops this further: ‘The revelation of the eternal life of the Buddha in this chapter, which is the most essential of the Buddha’s teachings, gave Buddhist belief boundless strength’ (p. 307). There is clear reliance here on the idea of the *honbutsu* (本仏), the ‘original’ or ‘fundamental’ Buddha, which has a Tendai pedigree, but of which the exact meaning is possibly obscured by English terms such as ‘eternal’. (Cf. also the footnote on the title of chapter XV, KSS 291, where the term ‘Eternal Buddha’ is explicitly used, presumably for Japanese *honbutsu*.)
- 66 T IX 42-3, various cases, but especially 43c 或時為此聚說佛壽無量。This clearly brings out the dialectical nature of the proposition: ‘At times for all this throng, I proclaim that the Buddha’s life is immeasurable’. (cf. KSS 316). 無量 also appears in other Mahayana texts, as a translation of the name Amitāyus, meaning ‘Immeasurable life’, e.g. in the titles and texts of the ‘Pure Land Sutras’ 佛說無量壽經 (T360), the 佛說觀無量壽佛經 (T365), and chapter II of T665 which has the same title as Chapter XVI of The Lotus Sutra. The term 無邊, meaning ‘boundless’, is used only together with ‘immeasurable’ and should not be construed as having a different implication.
- 67 T IX 42b 於意云何。是諸世界。可得思惟校計知其數不。 , ‘What do you think? Is it possible to imagine and calculate all those worlds so as to know their number or not?’ Cf. KSS 308. Compare also the long opening sections of Chapter VII.
- 68 T IX 43a 諸佛如來。
- 69 T IX 39c-42a. The account is lengthy and does not need detailed comment as there are no examples of the term skilful means. Apart from being the narrative introduction to chapter XVI it is also the first chapter of the second part of the sutra according to the scholastic division into two equal halves of 14 chapters each. This makes Chapter XVI the main exposition of the second part, just as chapter II is the main exposition of the first part after a mythical preamble in Chapter I.
- 70 T IX 42b 信解, cf. KSS 307. This phrase appeared as the title of Chapter IV.
- 71 T IX 42b 如來秘密神通之力 cf. KSS 307-8. The Tendai interpretation of this phrase cited in KSS is anachronistic, however scholastically acceptable, for the *trikāya* doctrine was not yet formulated when The Lotus Sutra was composed. ‘Supernatural powers’ or ‘supernatural pervasion’, or perhaps ‘divine pervasive power’ if theistic connotations are not imported, picks up the Sanskrit term *adīṣṭhāna*, and is sometimes said to be linked with the idea of skilful means. It certainly falls into the general category of qualities and powers acquired by a bodhisattva or a buddha, but as in the case of ‘compassion’ (*karuṇā*) to which

the same general considerations apply, direct correlations with *upāyakaūśalya* are not common. At any rate in the texts studied here, *fang-pien* and *fang-pien-li* either enjoy a prominence of their own or are linked most frequently with the ‘insight’ of buddhas or of bodhisattvas. As seen below, this present discussion of the Buddha’s life-span, while drawing in 神通 in an incidental way, proceeds in terms of *fang-pien*.

Chapter XXVII of The Lotus Sutra stresses supernatural powers rather than skilful means (which there appears once only, and that in a list of seven *pāramitās* and other qualities, T IX 59c). By supernatural powers two princes show their contempt for spatial limitations and thereby convert their father the king to Buddhism. This emphasis on magical tricks is an important part of Mahayana Buddhism, and is no doubt in many ways parallel to the exercise of skilful means. However, although it also undermines any dependence on pedestrian literalism in understanding Buddhism, it does not lead into the profound central critique of religious language brought about by the sustained discussion of skilful means in The Lotus Sutra as a whole.

- 72 T IX 42b–c 我說燃燈佛等。又復言其入於涅槃。如是皆以方便分別。cf. KSS 309.
- 73 T IX 42c 又以種種方便說微妙法。能令衆生發歡喜心。cf. KSS 309.
- 74 Lesser teachings, (dharma) 小法; or small things, trifles.
- 75 T IX 42c 見諸衆生樂於小法德薄垢重者。爲是人說。我少出家得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。然我實成佛已來久遠若斯。但以方便教化衆生。令入佛道作如是說。cf. KSS 309f.
- 76 T IX 42c 然今非實滅度。而便唱言當取滅度。如來以是方便教化衆生。cf. KSS 311. In this case the term 滅 is used for extinction as skilful means, as well as for ‘real’ extinction. Often the term 涅槃 is used for the straightforwardly announced nirvana, as for the Buddha *Dīpaṃkara* (note 72 above). This present case means that no quite constant usage developed.
- 77 T IX 42c–43a 是故如來以方便說。比丘當知。諸佛出世難可值遇。cf. KSS 311.
- 78 Cf. also Chapter XXVII where a buddha is said to be as rare as the *udumbara* flower, and should therefore be visited when the occasion presents itself (see KSS p. 426), and also Chapter II where the preaching of The Lotus Sutra Dharma is said to be as rare as the *udumbara* flower (see KSS p. 43). The point is always related to human expectations. Buddhas could appear more often, it is implied, but familiarity would lead to indifference, and hence a contrived specialness, contrived by skilful means, has to be maintained. Cf. also Chapter II, KSS 66.
- 79 T IX 43a 是故如來。雖不實滅而言滅度。cf. KSS 311.
- 80 T IX 42c 如是我成佛已來甚大久遠。壽命無量阿僧祇劫常住不滅。諸善男子。我本行菩薩道所成壽命。今猶未盡復倍上數。cf. KSS 310–11.
- 81 T IX 42c 以若干因緣譬喻言辭種種說法。cf. KSS 310. This phrase occurs many times, especially in Chapter II, and indicates that the basic idea is really the same throughout the sutra, namely that Buddhism is a collection of different forms of teaching devised to communicate it to those who do not yet understand the point of it directly for themselves. ‘Karmic reasonings’, a free rendering for 因緣: explanations of causality inhuman experience.
- 82 T IX 42c 如來如實知見三界之相。無有生死若退若出。亦無在世及滅度者。非實非虛非如非異。不如三界見於三界。如斯之事。如來明見無有錯謬。cf. KSS 310. ‘No reality and no falsehood’ may seem strange in view of the many protestations that what the Buddha says is ‘real’ or ‘true’(實) and not ‘false’(虛) However, the point is that it is only necessary to say that the Buddha’s teaching is true and not false when someone is perplexed about the possibility of an inconsistency or falsehood in it. At such a time the initial differentiation between ‘real’ and ‘false’ is on the side of the person so perplexed, and is not part of the Buddha’s own view of the triple world.
- 83 T IX 43a 我今當設方便 cf. KSS 313. Note the conscious reflection involved here.
- 84 T IX 43b 我亦如是。成佛已來。無量無邊百千萬億那由他阿僧祇劫。爲衆生故。以方便力言當滅度。亦無有能如法說我虛妄過者。cf. KSS 313–4.
- 85 T IX 43a 智慧聰達明練方藥善治衆病。cf. KSS 312. ‘Wise’ here for 智慧 (= insight), following KSS.

- 86 方便現涅槃 而實不滅度…衆見我滅度 廣供養舍利 咸皆懷戀慕 而生渴仰心 cf. KSS 314.  
A distinction between 涅槃 and 滅度 is first apparent here, but then obscured.
- 87 T IX 43b 我時語衆生 常在此不滅 以方便力故 現有滅不滅 cf. KSS 315.
- 88 T IX 44a 我常知衆生 行道不行道 隨所應可度 爲說種種法 每自作是意 以何令衆生 得入無  
上慧 速成就佛身 cf. KSS 317.

## 4 MYTHOLOGY AND SKILFUL MEANS IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

### *Illumination of all worlds*

So far the more fantastic perspectives of The Lotus Sutra have been rather left on one side in favour of the more direct expository account in Chapter II and the string of illustrative stories which follow. This procedure is justified in that the account given so far has followed the main lines of exposition apparent in the sutra itself while paying special attention to the usage of the term skilful means. Readers of the sutra however will be aware that the overall scenario of this exposition includes quantities of mythological elaboration in which indeed western readers with none too much time sometimes get lost. Perhaps it is best to admit that the overall narrative framework by no means affords the dramatic coherence sometimes claimed for it, which is not surprising in view of the fact that it was undoubtedly the work of various hands over a long period of time.

Nevertheless the mythological perspective in which this sutra is cast, as indeed is Mahayana Buddhism in general, cannot be overlooked, and it has already appeared above in various incidental ways. People sometimes have the impression that Mahayana Buddhism is mainly an elaboration of the more fantastic elements of popular Buddhism, but this is a serious misunderstanding. In fact such elaboration is quite possible without any accompanying presence of the main thrust of the Mahayana, as can be seen in a generally contemporaneous work, *The Mahāvastu*, which shows much mythological enthusiasm but little intellectual penetration.<sup>1</sup> Mythological elements in Mahayana Buddhism are always related in the last analysis to its central grasp of what Buddhism means and how it works. One might argue long about what is orthodox and what is not, but a fair historical perspective has to recognise that this central grasp represents a plausible and respectable *possible* continuation of early Buddhism. It is neither a rationalisation which refuses to entertain mythological concepts nor a submersion in waves of irrelevant fantasy. This is not the place for a general account of mythology in Buddhism, but it so happens that three chapters of some importance in the Lotus Sutra, chapters I, XI and XXV, make use of the term skilful means in a manner which throws light on this subject. It must be admitted that in each of these chapters the term occurs once only, but each case is in fact a significant one, by contrast with its very occasional and incidental use in some other chapters. As the third of these chapters is about the famous bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, it will be convenient to follow up with some attention to another less known bodhisattva, Pūrṇa, who appears in Chapter VIII of The Lotus Sutra amidst the only cluster of

references to skilful means still not otherwise discussed. It will be convenient to mention also *en passant* one or two aspects of The Mahāvastu and of a Mahayana writing, The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra, which was translated by Kumārajīva. This approach provides a general context for the very special bodhisattva Vimalakīrti, who is the main figure in the text to be explained in Chapter Five below.

Those impatient with the prolific imagery of Mahayana sutras might dismiss the opening chapter of The Lotus Sutra as a wearisome preamble of little doctrinal interest. The Buddha himself does not begin to speak until Chapter II. Nevertheless what the Buddha is said to have done is as important for the understanding of Buddhism as what he is purported to have taught in words and although in this case the action is mythic in quality, the meaning of the myth is partially explicated within the narrative itself by the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Mañjuśrī is especially noted for his insight, and his recollection of past Buddha-events enables him to interpret those of the present. His explanation provides the link between the opening phantasmagoria of Chapter I and the doctrinal expositions of Chapter II.

The sutra first describes the Buddha enthroned in state amid a vast multitude of devotees including gods, dragons, humans and many others. First he preached ‘the sutra of innumerable meanings’<sup>2</sup> and entered ‘the *samādhi* of innumerable meanings’<sup>3</sup> (on which more below). He then sent forth from the circle of white hair between his eyebrows the ray of light which spurred on the throng to question his intention. The bodhisattva Maitreya asked the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī if he was able to explain it. The latter said it indicated that the Buddha intended to proclaim ‘the great Dharma’<sup>4</sup> and explained his interpretation by narrating the previous parallel occasion under the Buddha known as Sun-Moon-Light-Tathāgata.<sup>5</sup> This flashback technique, technically known as an *avadāna*, provides the narrative framework for the chapter as a whole. Maitreya and Mañjuśrī themselves figure within the story under different names and the present Buddha is clearly a new exemplar of the previous one. Only one case is referred to in detail, but the reader is given to understand that there was not merely one such former occasion but rather an impressively recessive series. The Buddhas named Sun-Moon-Light numbered no less than 20,000.<sup>6</sup> Indeed Mañjuśrī himself pronounces the principle in numberless generality: ‘Whenever from any of the former Buddhas I have seen this auspice, after emitting such a ray, they have thereupon preached the great Dharma.’<sup>7</sup>

The term ‘skilful means’ itself occurs but once only in the whole of Chapter I, and that right at the end of the stanzas. It does not occur in the equivalent prose passage. Yet in spite of its infrequency the term is here closely and importantly linked with the central symbol of the whole piece, namely the ray of light which marvellously issues from the circle of white hair between the eyebrows of the Buddha. On account of this link the whole mythological preamble emerges as an indirect anticipation of the teaching of the sutra as a whole.

Since Mañjuśrī can remember the significance of the light sent out in all directions by the ancient ‘Buddha of Light’, he is able to understand the intention of the present Buddha when he does likewise, ‘The present sign is like the previous omen’,<sup>8</sup> or, in the prose equivalent, it is ‘no different’.<sup>9</sup> What does the sign mean? In brief it means that the Buddha desires to preach the ‘Law Flower Sutra’, that is, The Lotus Sutra.<sup>10</sup> Or again ‘The present Buddha sends forth a ray of light, to help to reveal the meaning of true reality’.<sup>11</sup> There is a suggestive indirectness about the phrase, ‘to help to reveal the meaning of true reality’, and this may be compared with the rather noncommittal explanation partially quoted already and which in full runs: ‘The present sign is like the former auspice; it is a skilful means of the buddhas’.<sup>12</sup> The sign is itself an effective symbol of revelation, but it is not to be idly identified with that to which it tends. The ray of light illumines the whole conditioned world, and yet ‘the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma’ has not thereby been proclaimed, or at least not yet. Since this ray of light, this sign, which dominates the whole opening scene of the sutra, is explicitly identified as a skilful means, we may take it that the subordinate details are also to be understood in this light.

Two perspectives emerge. Firstly this miraculous ray of light, a skilful means of the buddhas, illuminates conditioned existence in all its multiplicity and correlates it with the consistent intention of the buddhas. Secondly, the present Buddha is linked through this skilful means with previous buddhas in a series of recurrent patterns. There is a mutual interaction and support between these buddhas stringing through the whole universe which takes especially interesting form in Chapter XI (see again below).

The one ray of light illuminates countless worlds, or so one may fairly gloss, for eighteen thousand is as good as countless when it comes to counting worlds. The ray itself is but ‘a single ray’,<sup>13</sup> ‘a single pure ray’,<sup>14</sup> and ‘a great ray universally radiated’.<sup>15</sup> Yet this one ray of light ‘illuminated eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern quarter, so that there was nowhere it did not reach’.<sup>16</sup> It touched the lowest hells and the highest heavens, displaying the karmic condition of living beings in all the six states, and illuminating the work of countless buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even the sutras or teachings of all those buddhas could be clearly heard.<sup>17</sup> The picture is developed in some detail in both prose and verse, but may be summed up in the verse:

‘Rare are the supernatural powers  
And insight of the buddhas;  
Sending forth a single ray  
They illuminate innumerable domains.’<sup>18</sup>

This illuminating ray however is not mere idle magic, nor a display of supernatural power for its own sake. It is related to the many ways in which existence is provisionally understood.

It was mentioned earlier that the emission of the ray of light is preceded in Kumārajīva’s version by reference to a ‘sutra of innumerable meanings’

and a 'samādhi of innumerable meanings'.<sup>19</sup> The pedigree of these phrases is obscure as it finds no precise confirmation in Dharmarakṣa's version nor in the available Sanskrit.<sup>20</sup> The traditional association with a specific text known as the *Wu liang i ching* (J. *Muryōgikyō*) is also of little help as this latter text was probably produced in China some time after Kumārajīva's text was completed, possibly indeed because someone thought 'it' ought to be extant.<sup>21</sup> The 'sutra of innumerable meanings' is also described as a *mahāyāna* sutra, this again being peculiar to Kumārajīva's translation.<sup>22</sup> The implication is that there is a great vehicle sutra or teaching which purveys an endless variety of meanings. The great exposition is consistent yet variegated. Similarly, in the case of the *samādhi*, the Buddha is said to sit cross-legged, 'his body and mind motionless',<sup>23</sup> yet cognisant of the innumerable meanings. The narrative repetition about the former Buddha has a parallel statement.<sup>24</sup> The verse passage adds that the 'sutra of innumerable meanings' was preached among the 'hosts of living beings',<sup>25</sup> and that it is for their sakes 'broadly differentiated'.<sup>26</sup> In spite of this extensive differentiation it is a single sutra and is linked with a single *samādhi*. Their stress on consistency in variety foreshadows a central theme of the whole sutra. It is thoroughly reinforced by the imagery of the single ray of light radiating through all aspects of existence. Indeed it is out of the concentrated mental state described as the *samādhi* of innumerable meanings that the marvellous ray of light is sent forth.

In the context of 'innumerable meanings' and the illumination of the inhabitants of all the worlds in their six states, it is not surprising that their progress towards Buddhahood is seen as comprising a great variety of practices. Those are listed at length in verses uttered by the bodhisattva Maitreya, who is able to see them all as a result of the illumination. They include such things as alms-giving, renunciation of the world, eremitical meditation, proclaiming the teaching to others, emitting radiance to save the denizens of hell, observing the precepts of Buddhism, persevering under persecution (a recurring theme in The Lotus Sutra), paying homage to relics and building stupas.<sup>27</sup> This is a very wide range of practices, some being elementary forms of devotion and others being parallel to the teaching and saving activity of the buddhas themselves.

As to the buddhas active in all the many worlds, Maitreya can observe them relating the teaching which they give to the numberless and variegated throng. Thus Maitreya says:

'And then I can see all the buddhas,  
The holy masters, the lions,  
Expounding the sutra  
Mysterious and supreme;  
Their voices are clear and pure  
And send forth softly sounding tones,  
Teaching the bodhisattvas  
In their innumerable myriads;

Their divine voices, deep and wonderful,  
 Give joy to those who hear.  
 Each in his own world  
 Proclaims the true Dharma;  
 By various karmic reasonings  
 And innumerable stories  
 They reveal the Buddha-Dharma  
 And awaken the understanding of all the living.<sup>28</sup>

The idea that *various* arguments about karmic connections, and innumerable illustrative stories are used to indicate the central teaching, is one which has already been observed to recur frequently in the context of skilful means, especially in Chapter II of the sutra. Here already there is also a distinction between the three ways of the *śrāvakas*, the *pratyekabuddhas* and the 'sons of the Buddha', that is, the bodhisattvas:

'If there are those who have met with suffering  
 And are weary of age, disease and death,  
 For these they proclaim nirvana  
 To bring an end to all sufferings.  
 If there are those who are in a state of happiness,  
 Having paid homage to the buddhas  
 And devoted to the quest for victorious Dharma,  
 For these they proclaim pratyekabuddhahood.  
 If there are sons of the Buddha  
 Disciplined in their various practices  
 And seeking for the supreme insight,  
 For these they proclaim the path of purity.'<sup>29</sup>

It will be noted that the three types of teaching are specifically correlated with the condition of those who receive it. In the story of the former Buddha the same is found again, though it is more precisely formulated. 'For those who sought to be *śrāvakas* he taught in accordance with the Dharma of the four truths, for crossing beyond birth, old age, disease and death, to ultimate nirvana. For those who sought pratyekabuddhahood he taught in accordance with the Dharma of the twelve causes. For the bodhisattvas he taught in accordance with the six pāramitās, to bring them to supreme, perfect enlightenment, and to the attainment of comprehensive knowledge'.<sup>30</sup> In one sense the three are differently evaluated: *śrāvakas* are at the most elementary level and bodhisattvas are the most advanced. Yet on the other hand these 'vehicles', as they are specifically called in the last stanzas of the chapter, are all in the same position with respect to the ray of light which illuminates them, or with respect to the previous buddha Sun-Moon-Light-Tathāgata who expounded them. All three find themselves superseded in terms of the new interpretation to be delivered following on the emission of the ray of light. The closing stanzas of Chapter I need to be quoted in sequence to gather up these points. Mañjuśrī says:

'I have seen the Buddha of Light long ago  
 Send out a ray, an omen like this.  
 Therefore I know that the present Buddha  
 Intends to proclaim the Dharma-Flower-Sutra.  
 The present sign is like the previous omen;  
 It is the skilful means of all the buddhas.  
 The present Buddha sends forth a ray of light  
 To help reveal the meaning of true reality.  
 All men should now know,  
 Waiting with folded hands and minds prepared,  
 The Buddha will rain down the rain of Dharma  
 To satisfy those who seek the way.  
 Of all those who follow the three vehicles,  
 If any one has a doubt or a regret,  
 The Buddha will do away with it  
 So that none whatever remains.<sup>31</sup>

The ray of light is the skilful means which both illuminates multiple worlds and differentiated activity, and prepares the way for the final appearance of consistent meaning. Thus although this Chapter I may seem at first sight like an irrelevant mythological scenario, its patterns reflect the same understanding of Buddhism which appears more explicitly in the main body of the sutra already discussed.

### *The equivalence of all buddhas*

Apart from the varied inhabitants of this and other worlds Chapter I of The Lotus Sutra also brought into view a large, indefinite number of buddhas. The ray of light illuminates eighteen thousand worlds all of which have their very own buddhas 'existing at present in those lands'.<sup>32</sup> Moreover the ray of light now emitted by 'the' Buddha is said to be quite equivalent to that sent forth long ago by the earlier buddha whom Mañjuśrī remembers, so that there is an equivalence in time-succession as well as in space. Similar scenes are present in Chapter XI and indeed are generally current in Mahayana Buddhism. How is it that buddhas can thus be multiplied endlessly while at the same time the very idea of a Buddha who lives for eighty years, attains enlightenment and enters nirvana, is itself undermined?

The idea of a series of buddhas is of course not unique to the Mahayana, nor even in a sense distinctively Buddhist; for the literature of the Jains includes the lives of a whole series of Jinās (conquerors) based on that of the historical founder-figure Mahāvīra.<sup>33</sup> In the Buddhist Pali Canon it is the traditional and more or less historical story of Gautama which is projected on to the accounts of presumed precursors in long distant time, as for example in The Mahāpadāna Suttanta of The Dīgha Nikāya.<sup>34</sup> While it is not impossible that legendary reminiscence of earlier holy men may have

provided some of the impetus for the development of such schemes, it is clearly to be understood mainly as a mythological construction which places a particular, known figure of authority in the context of endlessly renewed cycles of time. For Buddhism in general, regardless of sectarian divergences, such a picture already implies that being a Buddha is something more than simply managing to achieve enlightenment (Buddhahood) in one of one's lives. While the notion of achievement is maintained in the progression from first resolve to final Buddhahood, the regularity of the process of training through many existences until the final fruition meant that the appearance of Buddhas was seen as part of the way in which the universe is supposed to be. That this is so is clear from the fact that the stories are not a collection of the achievements of great spiritual leaders understood in their natural diversity from a historical, humanist point of view. On the contrary, the earlier buddhas are utterly devoid of distinctive individuality, and the phases of their life are introduced by the phrase 'it is the rule that . . .'.<sup>35</sup> It represents a certain stage in the apotheosis of the man Gautama, who comes to be represented not so much as a distinctive man with a message hitherto unknown or undiscovered, but as a special being unlike ordinary humanity, who did what he did because that is what buddhas do when they appear. This way of thinking is one of the presuppositions of Mahayana writings such as The Lotus Sutra, but it is a presupposition which was shared by all schools of Buddhism at the time.

The matter is massively extended in The Mahāvastu, which is neither a Theravada work nor yet Mahayanist, and where the number of buddhas listed as being those under whom the Buddha Śākyamuni (the historical Gautama) previously acquired merit reaches no less than five hundred.<sup>36</sup> These buddhas simply appear as a long list of proper names, which was presumably assembled by some particularly enthusiastic monk. The Mahāvastu also proliferates buddhas in spatial terms. Not only are there various buddha-fields (*buddha-kṣetra*) in the eastern quarter of the world, in the southern, western and northern quarters of the world, and in the nadir and the zenith of the world, but 'There are besides thousands of other buddha-fields and yet other thousands, of which one cannot reach the end in enumerating'.<sup>37</sup> The number of buddhas is only limited by the requirement to match up with human expectations. Rarity is important in itself so that humans do not complacently rely on the appearance of a buddha whenever they happen to be reborn, a point already observed to be important in The Lotus Sutra.<sup>38</sup> Moreover while many worlds are without a buddha at all, there is also a strict limitation to one buddha per buddha-field. There is a reason given for this too. 'If one man of vision were not equal to the conditions of Buddhahood, then two great-hearted Tathāgatas would be expected to appear. But men reject this notion of the inadequate nature of the great seers, and hence two valiant men are not born in one and the same field'.<sup>39</sup> Yet again it is the effect of the mythology on people's reactions which is the criterion for its character. Nothing must be incorporated which would reduce confidence in the overriding power of the Buddha's

achievement for the benefit of his followers and believers. This is not an idle cosmological speculation, but an entirely soteriological concept. Moreover there seems to be a tacit understanding that the total picture is essentially a contrived one.

It is not surprising that the composers of The Mahāvastu also expressed the view that a Buddha is essentially ultramundane (*lokottara*), and is manifested as a Buddha in human form for the sake of conformity with the world. This view is clearly formulated in the following statements taken from a well-known extended passage.

‘Although they could suppress the workings of karma, the Conquerors let it become manifest and conceal their sovereign power. This is mere conformity with the world.

It is true that they eat food, but hunger never distresses them. It is in order to provide men with the opportunity to give alms that in this respect they conform to the world . . .

They put on robes, and yet a Conqueror would always be covered without them and have the same appearance as devas. This wearing of robes is mere conformity with the world . . .

Although the Sugata’s corporeal existence is not due to the sexual union of parents, yet the Buddhas can point to their fathers and mothers. This is mere conformity with the world . . .

Although in the worlds both of devas and of men they condemn upholders of wrong beliefs, they yet resort to heretics. This is mere conformity with the world.

Although, for the sake of all beings, they have awakened to the unsurpassed enlightenment, they yet put on the appearance of a lack of zeal. This is mere conformity with the world.’<sup>40</sup>

The dating of the Mahāvastu is a complex matter as it was compiled over a long period, and it may be that in some respects it was influenced by early Mahayana writings. However it does illustrate how significant developments in ideas about the Buddha could arise organically on the basis of the earlier tradition. There is no reliance in The Mahāvastu on the Mahayana doctrine of ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*), and there is no radical polemic vis-à-vis earlier tradition, as there is in the Mahayana writings.

But although the concept of skilful means is not associated here in The Mahāvastu with the supra-historical view of Buddhahood, as it has been seen to be in the chapter on the Tathāgata’s life-span in The Lotus Sutra, nevertheless the whole pattern of world systems in time and space is so geared as to offer an overwhelming picture of the way the world ineluctably is, coupled with maximum stimulation for individuals to take advantage of present opportunity. The buddhology is tailored, and to a certain extent consciously so, to the way in which human beings tend to react.

The Mahāvastu also contains an instructive scene concerning sunshades. A throng of celestial beings (*devas*) are described as putting up sunshades in

honour of the Buddha who in response shows himself to be sitting beneath each and every one. Each *deva* believes himself to be particularly honoured and is not aware of the fictitious character of his own buddha, who is after all no different from all of the others whom he does not see. The story is not explained in the text itself, but it strongly suggests that the appearance of any one buddha in the world is essentially illusory and effected for the benefit of those who see him.<sup>41</sup>

A quite similar story is found in The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra, a Mahayana text translated by Kumārajīva into Chinese (see also Appendices A and G). Here the Buddha appears simultaneously on a vast number of lion-thrones prepared for him by various *devas*, but each *deva* sees only the buddha on the throne which he himself had prepared. Each one then proudly proclaims that the Buddha is sitting on his own throne and not on the throne of the others.<sup>42</sup> At the appropriate moment all the buddhas are revealed to all the *devas*, and one of them asks which is real, his own buddha or all the others which he can now see. The answer to this is that as all dharmas are void in their fundamental character, like a magical apparition, so all these buddhas who are not dependent on the superficially apparent co-ordination of dharmas are equally 'real'.<sup>43</sup> In reality all constituent factors of the world are fundamentally equal, and as the buddhas do not depart from the fundamental character of things so they too are fundamentally equal.<sup>44</sup> The apparent multiplicity of buddhas is brought about by special power which is simply withdrawn when no longer required, so that only one buddha is seen again.<sup>45</sup>

This writing also makes the equivalence of all buddhas plain in other ways. In one passage Śākyamuni rises up into the air to the height of seven palm trees, sits cross-legged and lets out a light which illuminates innumerable universes in the ten directions. The assembly then can see the innumerable buddhas of all these universes, all preaching The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra to their own assemblies, without adding or subtracting anything. This means that they are precisely equivalent to each other. Then in complementary fashion all those buddhas themselves rise up into the air to the height of seven palm trees, sit cross-legged and let out a light which illuminates innumerable universes in the ten directions. All the beings of those universes are then able to see the Buddha Śākyamuni.<sup>46</sup> This complementary reversal of the illumination has the effect of relativising the position of Śākyamuni. The degree of prominence which he enjoys is prominence relative to this present universe, the one in which his function is performed. Otherwise he is in principle identifiable with all or any other buddhas. Śākyamuni is indeed specifically identified with the Buddha Vairocana, in the Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra, and the two buddhas are said to have exactly the same length of life.<sup>47</sup> This is of special interest because the same link is also reflected in The Lotus Sutra.<sup>48</sup> In the former the power which makes this identification possible is the very power of the *samādhi* (concentration) which the sutra serves to extol. This power, which underlies the multiplication and identity of all the buddhas, equally real or

unreal, occupies in The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra the same position as the ray of light in Chapter I of The Lotus Sutra. That is, it is connected both with the consistency of a buddha's insight into the fundamental equality of all dharmas and with his skilful means or saving activity with respect to all living beings.<sup>49</sup>

One of the more striking, and certainly one of the more famous accounts of such relationships between buddhas is found in The Lotus Sutra itself, in Chapter XI, the chapter on the seven-jewelled stupa of the Buddha Many-Jewels (Prabhūtaratna). This chapter is really, *mutatis mutandis*, the Buddhist equivalent of a theophany, and the impression which it makes cannot be conveyed adequately at second hand. It has served as a basis for iconographical activity and is a chapter of some special interest in the study of The Lotus Sutra for general reasons.<sup>50</sup> In the present context it is important because it draws together many themes already pursued and links them with the idea of skilful means, thus affording another clue as to how the mythological patterns are to be understood.

First the stupa itself appears in the sky, bedecked with jewels and receiving the homage of multitudes of heavenly beings. From within it is heard a loud voice which testifies to the authenticity of Śākyamuni's announcement of The Lotus Sutra. This gives rise to great wonderment, and Śākyamuni explains that it is the 'whole-body'<sup>51</sup> of a Buddha named Many-Jewels who functioned in the distant past, innumerable worlds away to the east. As a bodhisattva he had made a vow that on becoming a buddha and attaining extinction he would cause the stupa containing his 'whole-body' to appear in every world where The Lotus Sutra is proclaimed, thus bearing witness to its authenticity and its excellence.

The assembled throng then wish to see the 'whole-body' of the extinct buddha within the stupa, and they are told that for this to be possible it will be necessary for the present Buddha Śākyamuni himself to draw back all the emanated buddhas<sup>52</sup> now preaching in many different worlds. To do this he sends out a ray of light from the circle of white hair between his eyebrows, just as in Chapter I, and illuminates all these worlds with their buddhas. These then return, direction by direction, and space is made for them to assemble in this very world of Śākyamuni Buddha which is levelled off and bedecked with jewels for their reception. Each one takes his place on a lion-throne beneath a jewel-tree, and when all are assembled Śākyamuni himself rises up into the sky where the stupa is suspended and opens the door with his right finger. The Buddha Many-Jewels is then visible to all, seated on the lion-throne in a position of meditation. Once again he certifies The Lotus Sutra, receives homage, and invites Śākyamuni to sit beside him on the same seat. (This motif of the two buddhas sitting side by side within the opened stupa became a regular iconographical subject.) All those assembled feel rather left behind and so they too are raised up to the sky by the Buddha's supernatural powers. From this shared vantage-point they too are urged to preserve and transmit The Lotus Sutra, for it is soon to be the turn of Śākyamuni to enter nirvana.<sup>53</sup>

The verse account which follows is a very briefly summarised repetition of the prose, followed by extended exhortations to preserve and to transmit The Lotus Sutra. These passages reinforce the equivalence of the various buddhas involved in the tableau, for if anyone proclaims The Lotus Sutra he will be deemed to have worshipped the Buddha Many-Jewels, and the Buddha Śākyamuni, and all the emanated buddhas.<sup>54</sup> Such a one will also be deemed to have seen all of these, who are again enumerated.<sup>55</sup> The exhortations seem to expand the closing lines of the prose account, but just at the point of climax between the description of the tableau itself and the beginning of the consequent exhortations there is a line of great importance which runs:

‘By this skilful means  
I cause the Dharma long to abide.’<sup>56</sup>

It may be that this case of *fang-pien* is an interpretative elaboration by Kumārajīva himself,<sup>57</sup> but however that may be it refers here not to some miscellaneous aspect of the scene but indeed to the whole story of the appearance of the stupa, the Buddha Many-Jewels, and the emanated buddhas. The purpose of the complete operation is to establish the meaning of Buddhism, and it is quite in line with the main teaching of The Lotus Sutra to see this phantasmagoria as being a skilful means. It is indeed most similar to the mythological preamble in Chapter I of the sutra, where the term skilful means does not itself appear on every line but where it is appropriately used to designate the whole.

A general tendency to mythological elaboration has been observed which is not peculiar to Mahayana Buddhism, and not necessarily always linked explicitly with the idea of skilful means. This general matrix of thought however implies that the number of buddhas is not itself important, nor is their length of life. Nor indeed is extinction, for the power of Buddha Many-Jewels’ vow persists in the differentiated world long ‘after’ his attainment of final nirvana. There is no aspect of Buddhist mythology or cosmology which necessarily demands to be understood in terms less subtly elaborating and deflating, or more persistently assertive, than the concept of skilful means in The Lotus Sutra suggests. Buddhas are very mobile, it would appear, and always in strictly appropriate ways, their appearance and their absence being regulated by the psychological requirements of those who are to benefit from either of these. Superficially these may appear to be rather like a series of magical tricks, and the term ‘supernatural powers’ is sometimes employed to describe a particular manoeuvre. The underlying conception however is that buddhahood lies at the fundamental level of the voidness and equality of all differentiated things. In these terms there is no concern about the number of buddhas, one, two or many. From the fundamental standpoint of The Lotus Sutra, that things are always nirvanic in themselves from the beginning, as stated in Chapter II,<sup>58</sup> it is as skilful means, fully consistent with this, that the worlds are illumined and the buddhas mobilised.

*Transformations of a bodhisattva*

It is a remarkable fact that after the important Chapter XVI (15) of the Tathāgata's life-span the term *fang-pien* only occurs four times in the remaining twelve chapters of The Lotus Sutra as translated by Kumārajīva. This is no doubt because of changes in subject matter, which in turn reflects the fact that these chapters represent late stages in the original development of the sutra (c.f. Appendix B). It is therefore of some interest that the only one of these occurrences which can also be paralleled in Dharmarakṣa's version is to be found in Chapter XXV (24), which is about the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. This bodhisattva is also commonly known by the Chinese name Kuan-yin and the Japanese name Kan-non, or, among the devout, Kannon-sama. In the Chinese text itself the name appears in a longer form, namely Kuan-shih-yin, and this is pronounced Kan-ze-on in Japanese. So much for general orientation; the name itself has been the subject of detailed discussion which need not be surveyed here.<sup>59</sup> Such a radiant and versatile figure as Avalokiteśvara or Kuan-yin is a good example of those celestial bodhisattvas who play an important part in the devotional side of Mahayana Buddhism. It is therefore of some interest to observe how the account of this figure fits into the main lines of thought of The Lotus Sutra, dominated as these are by the concept of skilful means.

References to the bodhisattva are found in various Mahayana texts, but most later developments of this saviour figure seem to assume the characterisation of Avalokiteśvara which is already found in The Lotus Sutra.<sup>60</sup> Indeed the chapter in question, Chapter XXV (24), which was certainly an addition to the main body of The Lotus Sutra and may even have first existed independently of it, has itself been a most influential text as a separate item. Even today it circulates separately, though in Kumārajīva's version, and as such is used in various Japanese denominations such as Zen-shū, Shingon-shū and Tendai-shū, under the title of *Kannongyō*. Although the term *fang-pien* itself only appears twice in the re-edited version which circulates, the way of thinking with which it is closely associated here has worked itself deep into popular Buddhism in Japan.

The characterisation of Avalokiteśvara or Kuan-shih-yin in this text has three phases, and the first of them portrays him as a miracle worker. Non-Buddhist sources may have influenced this development,<sup>61</sup> but however that may be, and it is certainly not proven, the account of Kuan-shih-yin as a miracle worker here is given in response to the question put to the Buddha about why the bodhisattva has this name. The answer given, by the Buddha, is that Kuan-shih-yin uses supernatural powers to deliver living beings who suffer pain and distress. Such supernatural powers are supposed to be available to buddhas and bodhisattvas generally in any case, and the stress here is on the compassion shown by this bodhisattva and the practical forms which it takes. Those in need should call upon his name for all they are worth and they will be delivered from such things as fire, flood, shipwreck in a land of demons, violent attack, robbers, and the bondage of

manacles and fetters, whether one is innocent or guilty.<sup>62</sup> These forms of deliverance have an obvious popular appeal and became a subject for illustration from the caves of Tun Huang onwards. The formula to be used is *Na-mo Kuan-shih-yin P'u-sa* (in Japanese: *Namu Kanzeon Bosatsu*), and is therefore very similar to the formula for calling on Amitābha Buddha.<sup>63</sup> In this chapter of The Lotus Sutra merchants carrying jewels along a perilous road are expressly encouraged to chant the formula addressed to Kuan-shih-yin in concert, because 'the Bodhisattva is able to give courage to all the living'.<sup>64</sup> One can imagine how relevant such a proposal must have seemed on the caravan routes of Central Asia, and in ancient China and Japan too as the sutra spread.

Such benefits which appeal to the basic instinct of self-preservation, are intimately juxtaposed with more spiritual benefits. These include being set free from the vices of carnal passion, irascibility and infatuation. Admittedly these problems are elementary in the religious life, but they seem to be widespread and persistent. To be truly set free from them as a result of bearing in mind the Bodhisattva Kuan-shih-yin would clearly be seen as a worthwhile first step in the training of Buddhists. Immediately associated with the above there comes a passage, much pondered in later times, which says that a woman devoted to Kuan-shih-yin will give birth to a son if she desires a son and to a daughter if she desires a daughter.<sup>65</sup> Petitions offered with respect to matters of such personal and social importance have far-reaching effects in religion and it is not surprising that sons and daughters arriving in this way are also confidently expected to be virtuous, sufficiently virtuous no doubt to cherish the devotional tradition. In this way a common human wish is linked to an encouragement of Buddhist virtue. Finally it is argued that anyone who reveres Kuan-shih-yin for only a moment will obtain innumerable blessings, equal to those obtained by a person who reveres innumerable other bodhisattvas. It belongs to the general style of the Mahayana that one can instantaneously receive an immeasurable amount of blessing in one moment which is precisely equal to the amount one would achieve by performing innumerable meritorious acts in a very long time. This is no more strange than that one can enter the Buddha-way by entering a temple with a distracted mind and calling but once on the name of the Buddha, as was observed in Chapter II of The Lotus Sutra.

The second phase of the characterisation of Kuan-shih-yin is firmly patterned on the activity of a buddha. The Bodhisattva Akṣayamati, who puts the questions in this chapter, now asks how Kuan-shih-yin wanders in this world, how he preaches the Dharma to living beings and how his power of skilful means may be described.<sup>66</sup> The Buddha answers with a long catalogue of the forms taken by Kuan-shih-yin: buddha, *pratyekabuddha*, *śrāvaka*, Brahma, Śakra, Īśvara, Maheśvara and many others including elders and citizens, monks and nuns, wives of elders and citizens, youths and maidens, gods, dragons and demons. All of these have in common that Kuan-shih-yin may appear as one such for the benefit of those who are to be saved by him in just that particular form. This is how he roams the

world, this is how he proclaims the Dharma, and this is the power of his skilful means. The list of transformations is not defined item by item as skilful means, but it is quite clear from the introductory question that the whole list is so understood. Skilful means is simply assumed to be the principle behind all transformations of the bodhisattva. Indeed it may be said to be the principle of his preaching of the Dharma in general, for which the benefits otherwise distributed are nothing other than a preparation. The first two phases of characterisation are intermingled in the concluding passages.<sup>67</sup>

The transformations of Avalokiteśvara were popularised and systematised far beyond those of any other bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, and the classifications have been very conveniently set out by Alicia Matsunaga.<sup>68</sup> Some of the forms taken by the bodhisattva seem to reflect in further ways the concept of skilful means. For example the eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, which has eleven extra faces above the main face of the statue, is sometimes said to represent 'eleven faces of *upāya* and one true face representing Absolute Truth'.<sup>69</sup> Or again, the thousand arms of the 'thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara' are supposed to represent the measureless skilful means which he uses to save sentient beings.<sup>70</sup>

One of the most popular series consists of no less than thirty-three different forms of Kuan-yin or Kannon, each with some distinct way of demonstrating the variety of ways in which Kuan-yin aids and saves sentient beings, or symbolising oneness or non-duality.<sup>71</sup> In Matsunaga's notes on these is found the interesting if drastic story about the Kuan-yin who nearly became the wife of a certain Ma-Lang. This Kuan-yin, appearing as a beautiful girl, managed to cut down the number of her suitors by demanding that they learn first the Kuan-yin chapter of The Lotus Sutra, then The Diamond Sutra, and then finally the whole of The Lotus Sutra. Ma-Lang was the only one who could stay the complete course, but the girl died immediately before the wedding leaving behind a total of twenty men more or less versed in the scriptures.<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to notice the implications of the selection of scriptures referred to in the story. For one thing it shows that the Kuan-yin chapter could be treated as a more or less independent entity. Then again it shows the close association held to obtain between Lotus Sutra thought and the *prajñā-pāramitā* tradition as represented by The Diamond Sutra.

Images of the bodhisattva scattered through Tendai and Shingon temples in Japan are even now the focal point of pilgrimage routes used for centuries. A handbook for one of these describes the pilgrimage as a skilful means (*zengyō-hōben*) for entering into the faith of this Kannon who saves the suffering beings of the world.<sup>73</sup> A modern Japanese booklet on the different forms of the bodhisattva, published by the 'Sunday School' (*nichiyō-gakkō*) of a temple in Hokkaidō, brings out the dialectic of the matter even more explicitly than in the sutra itself. It is out of compassion for sentient beings in the six states that Kanzeon (Kannon) takes on different transformations. The six Kannon, the seven Kannon, and the thirty-three

Kannon are skilful means (J. *hōben* = Ch. *fang-pien*), while the underlying body of the bodhisattva is a unity.<sup>74</sup> In the pilgrimage booklet quoted earlier, the underlying body or fundamental body is said to be the Buddha who fills the whole of the universe.<sup>75</sup> Since both of these booklets refer explicitly to the *Kannon-gyō* (that is, Chapter XXV (24) of The Lotus Sutra) and also use the term *hōben* even at this relatively popular level, it seems appropriate to understand the whole development and the present practice of the Kuan-yin or Kannon cult in terms of the dialectic of skilful means characteristic of The Lotus Sutra as a whole, even though the term itself only appears once, albeit in a key place, in the chapter in question.

The third phase of the characterisation links Avalokiteśvara with the buddhas. It is sometimes felt that Avalokiteśvara seems to supersede or supplant 'the' Buddha, but the action described in the closing passage of Kumārajīva's prose in Chapter XXV contradicts such a view. Akṣayamati speaks first to Śākyamuni and asks permission to make an offering to Avalokiteśvara. He then offers a costly pearl necklace, which Avalokiteśvara however declines to accept. Akṣayamati presses him to accept it, out of compassion.<sup>76</sup> Śākyamuni adds his voice and says that Avalokiteśvara should accept it, out of compassion for Akṣayamati, for the four groups of people present and for gods, dragons and many other types of beings. So Avalokiteśvara does accept it, out of compassion. He then divides it into two parts and offers one part to the Buddha Śākyamuni and one part to the stupa of the Buddha Many-Jewels (Prabhūaratna). In this way the symbolic offering which Avalokiteśvara receives on account of his many works of salvation is carried back to the presiding Buddha of The Lotus Sutra, Śākyamuni himself, and to the Buddha who had appeared in Chapter XI to certify the authenticity of Śākyamuni's preaching of The Lotus Sutra. Therefore the works of Avalokiteśvara are to be seen as part of the total setting in motion of the process of salvation, as this is conceived in The Lotus Sutra as a whole.

The courtesies with the necklace are significant also for another reason. Avalokiteśvara knows how to behave as a bodhisattva. He is of course not interested in receiving precious gifts, but out of compassion he will receive them. Once received, the necklace is redistributed to the buddhas. This means that in principle any offering to Avalokiteśvara is an offering to the buddhas, even if that is not the initial and explicit intention of the donor. The whole passage on the transformations of Avalokiteśvara is an exposition of the power of his skilful means, and it belongs to the total dialectic of his activity that the devotion which accrues to him, symbolised by the costly pearl necklace, is redirected to the presiding Buddha. This is the routine of skilful means: an endless elaboration of devices, in this case transformations, all of which find their ultimate validation in Buddhahood.

This famous bodhisattva is in a sense the epitome of Buddhism as a popular religion, and one might be tempted to contrast such a colourful cult as this with the more introvertly intellectual or 'philosophical' type of Buddhism found in The Perfection of Insight Sutras. Nothing could be

more misleading, as can easily be made clear by brief reference to The Heart Sutra in which Avalokiteśvara is also named. This text is widely used in Japanese Buddhism and it is so short that it can be regularly recited *in toto*, not only in temples but also in homes and schools (private schools only). It is also a source of quotations for gravestones, and like the cult of Avalokiteśvara or Kannon sama itself it is widely current in all denominations. The text in general use is attributed to the translator Hsüan Tsang,<sup>77</sup> but it was also translated earlier by Kumārajīva, and it bears a close relationship to a passage in the latter's translation of the Great Perfection of Insight Sutra.<sup>78</sup>

As far as the Sanskrit is concerned, Conze stresses the compassionate 'looking down' of the bodhisattva more than did Suzuki.<sup>79</sup> It may be that this is justified by the very association of the name of Avalokiteśvara with the thoughts which follow in the sutra, which are a famously succinct statement of the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). That is to say, the same bodhisattva who in The Lotus Sutra uses supernatural powers to deliver living beings who suffer pain and distress of all kinds, here surveys the five constituent factors of personal existence (the *skandhas*) and sees them to be empty, that is, as having no persistent ontological status in themselves.<sup>80</sup> As The Heart Sutra is a relatively late manifestation of *prajñā-pāramitā* thought the character of Avalokiteśvara as a deliverer must be taken to have been established in the minds of the creators and early users of the text. There is plenty of support for this connection in the *prajñā-pāramitā* literature generally, which is the matrix of The Heart Sutra in particular.

The connection is brought out more explicitly by an extra clause found in the translations both of Kumārajīva and of Hsüan Tsang,<sup>81</sup> which makes the opening passage run: ' . . . he perceives the five skandhas to be all empty, and does away with all afflictions and calamities'.<sup>82</sup> This form of the text identifies the skilful salvific activity of the bodhisattva with his perception of the fundamental emptiness of the 'beings' whom he delivers. It is of course also entirely consistent with the rest of the text which identifies form and emptiness etc.

The Lotus Sutra characterises Avalokiteśvara as a deliverer who uses supernatural powers and an exponent of the *Dharma* who uses skilful means. The Heart Sutra shows him as a bodhisattva who relies on the perfection of insight and perceives the true nature of the world in its emptiness. This combination is entirely appropriate as may be seen from the famous argument of another very widely used Mahayana sutra, namely The Diamond Sutra. According to this text (Kumārajīva's version) the attitude of a bodhisattva should be as follows: 'Whatever kinds of being there may be . . . I should get them to enter nirvana without remainder and let them cross away. Yet although incalculable, innumerable and limitless beings are led across in this way, in truth there is not one being who attains nirvana.'<sup>83</sup>

Neither of these two very short sutras contains an example of the term 'skilful means' which can be quoted in this context, but an entirely consonant

passage may be adduced from The Great Perfection of Insight Sutra, Kumārajīva's Chinese version of which is the natural home of the shorter pieces. It runs: 'When this *bodhisattva-mahāsattva* is practising the *prajñā-pāramitā*, by his power of skilful means he sees the living beings attached in their confusion to the five constituents. In what is impermanent they see permanence, in suffering they see pleasure, in what is impure they see purity, where there is no self they see self, they are attached to that which has no existence. This bodhisattva, by reason of his power of skilful means, and immersed in that which has no existence, plucks out the living beings.'<sup>84</sup>

The theme of transformations in general is widely current in Mahayana texts, and is not even exclusively Mahayanist.<sup>85</sup> There is a remarkable parallel to the chapter on Avalokiteśvara or Kuan-shih-yin in The Lotus Sutra itself, namely in Chapter XXIV which is about the bodhisattva Gadgasasvara.<sup>86</sup> By way of conclusion at this point some little known verses from Chapter VIII are the most appropriate. They arise in connection with a bodhisattva named Pūrṇa, who in the prose passage is already said to have mastered the teaching of voidness taught by the buddhas, and by his skilful means to have benefited innumerable beings.<sup>87</sup>

'Monks, listen carefully to me!  
 The way this buddha-son has practised,  
 Because of well-learned skilful means  
 Is quite beyond conception.  
 Because the bodhisattvas know  
 That people take delight in lesser teachings,  
 And quail before the greater insight,  
 They make themselves as *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.  
 By skilful means without number  
 They convert the various sorts of living beings  
 Declaring themselves to be *śrāvakas*  
 Still far from the Buddha-way.  
 They release innumerable beings  
 Who all attain complete realisation.  
 Even the unambitious and lazy ones  
 Are gradually brought to become buddhas.  
 They practise bodhisattva-hood as an inward secret  
 While outwardly they appear as *śrāvakas*.  
 Their desires are few and they despise the round of birth and death,  
 For in reality they are purifying their own buddha-land.  
 To the crowd they show themselves subject to the poisons of passion  
 And give the appearance of holding heretical views.  
 This is the way that my disciples  
 Use skilful means to bring across all the living.'<sup>88</sup>

Needless to say, the bodhisattva Pūrṇa is declared to be a fine example of this, and his future buddhahood is predicted. Such dissemblings and

ultimate intentions are also the main feature of the bodhisattva Vimalakīrti, a most entertaining figure characterised in a text independent of The Lotus Sutra and to which we now turn.

### Endnotes

- 1 Jones, J. J. trans. *The Mahāvastu* 3 vols. Pali Text Society, London 1949, 1952 and 1956 respectively, and Basak, Dr. R. ed. *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, 3 vols, Calcutta 1963ff. This work was compiled over a long period. Some parts have important parallels with the Pali Canon, explored by Windisch in *Die Komposition des Mahāvastu* (Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse d. K. sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Bd. XXIV No. XIV, 1909), while other parts, such as the extended discussion of ten *bhūmis* or stages in the career of a bodhisattva, may be later than the initial conception of Mahayana Buddhism. The Mahāvastu makes an interesting comparison with The Lotus Sutra, etc. because it is fully developed mythologically but without any central emphasis on insight and skilful means, and hence without any critique whatever of the received Buddhist tradition. Thus the famous account of the *lokottara* character of the Buddha remains mere supernaturalism, unlike the understanding of the Buddha in The Lotus Sutra, and unlike the disguises of Vimalakīrti (see more below). On the other hand the mythological elaboration, especially the projection of large numbers of buddhas, tends to subvert a pedestrian view of Buddhist doctrine, and hence to call for the conceptual break-through offered by the Mahayana. In this sense it is indeed a bridge work, as has often been remarked, though of course not in a tidy chronological sense. Various other references to this work will be found below.
- 2 T IX 2b 無量義經, cf. KSS 6. In full: 爲諸菩薩說大乘經。名無量義教菩薩法佛所護念。‘For the sake of all the bodhisattvas he preached the Mahayana sutra called’ ‘the innumerable meanings’, the Dharma for teaching bodhisattvas preserved and kept in mind by the buddhas.’
- 3 T IX 2b 入於無量義處三昧 cf. KSS 6.
- 4 T IX 3c 大法 cf. KSS 19. Also described in this context as 雨大法雨。吹大法螺。擊大法鼓。演大法義。‘pouring down the rain of the great dharma, blowing the conch of the great dharma, beating the drum of the great dharma, and expounding the meaning of the great dharma’. The ‘meaning’ here certainly picks up the phrase ‘innumerable meanings’: the innumerable meanings turn out to have ‘a’ meaning.
- 5 T IX 3c 日月燈明如來 cf. KSS 19, i.e. Candrasūryapradīpatathāgata.
- 6 T IX 3c 如是二萬佛。皆同一字。號日月燈明。cf. KSS 21, etc.
- 7 T IX 3c 我於過去諸佛曾見此瑞。放斯光已即說大法。cf. KSS 19.
- 8 T IX 5b 今相如本瑞 cf. KSS 31.
- 9 T IX 4b 今見此瑞與本無異。cf. KSS 25, ‘Now I see that this auspice is no different from the former one.’
- 10 T IX 5b 法華經 cf. KSS 31, and in the prose, T IX 4b 妙法蓮華經 ‘The Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma,’ cf. KSS 25. This latter of course is the same as the name of the sutra as translated by Kumārajīva, Ch. *Miao-Fa Lien-hua Ching* or J. *Myōhō Renge Kyō*. The narrative context links this with the ‘Great Dharma’ referred to earlier (see note 4 above); this implies that it is The Lotus Sutra which gives ‘the meaning’ of the previous teaching in many meanings.
- 11 T IX 5b 令佛放光明 助發寶相義 cf. KSS 31. ‘Now the Buddha . . .’ is in fact parallel to the previous verse ‘the present sign . . .’ (令相), and therefore I prefer to translate ‘The present Buddha’ which maintains the parallelism with previous buddhas. Cf. Sakamoto, *op. cit.* Vol. I p. 64: 今の相 and 今の仏。
- 12 T IX 5b 令相如本瑞 是諸佛方便 cf. KSS 31.
- 13 T IX 3b 一光 cf. KSS 17.
- 14 T IX 3c 一淨光 cf. KSS 18.
- 15 T IX 2b 大光普照 cf. KSS 9.

- 16 T IX 2b 照東方萬八千世界。靡不周遍。cf. KSS 7.
- 17 T IX 2b, cf. KSS 7, 'sutras or teachings': 經法 sutra teachings or sutra dharmas, apparently just 'dharmas' in the Sanskrit (cf. Wogihara and Tsuchida *op. cit.* p. 4).
- 18 T IX 3c 諸佛神力 智慧希有 放一淨光 照無量國 cf. KSS 17f. 'Domains' here for 國 which more literally would be 'countries', but cf. the previous expression 國界, and indeed earlier 世界 (cf. note 16 above). Dharmarakṣa has 佛土 at this point, T IX 63c. All these refer to a 'world' in which a Buddha is active, a *buddha-kṣetra*, cf. Étienne Lamotte's extended discussion in *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*, Louvain 1962, pp. 395ff. Note also the correlation of supernatural powers 神力 with insight 智慧, so that the former takes a position analogous to that of skilful means; and cf. earlier discussion of 神通 in Chapter Three, note 71.
- 19 References in notes 2 and 3 above.
- 20 Cf. T IX 63b.
- 21 This is T276. See also next note.
- 22 Dharmarakṣa refers to 'the extended verses' 方等大頌, T IX 63b, cf. Wogihara and Tsuchida *op. cit.* p. 4 '... mahānirdeśaṃ nāma dharma-paryāyaṃ sūtrāntaṃ mahā-vaipulyaṃ ...' These differences do not really affect the main argument below, though they do show that the basis for accepting the *Wu Liang I Ching* as being what is referred to here is very shaky indeed. Originally it must have referred in a general way to previous teaching by the Buddha, then particularly to extended teaching vouchsafed to bodhisattvas. The English translation now available (see Chapter Two, note 63) adopts the position that this sutra is an introduction to The Lotus Sutra, according to the T'ien T'ai (J. Tendai) tradition assumed in the KSS footnote on page 6. There is no Sanskrit original for this text, and it seems most unlikely that the Sanskrit referred to a specific writing as the 'Mahānirdeśa'. The alternative title 'Amitārtha' is simply a retrospective construct based on the Chinese, belonging to that class of invented titles for which Nanjio's catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka is rightly criticised by the editors of *Hōbōgirin*.
- 23 T IX 2b 身心不動 cf. KSS 6.
- 24 T IX 4a, cf. KSS 22.
- 25 T IX 4b 於諸大眾中 cf. KSS 25. The implication of this is that what is preached would be Mahayana in a broad sense and not in the narrower technical sense of that which is preached among bodhisattvas only.
- 26 T IX 4b 而為廣分別 cf. KSS 25.
- 27 T IX 3a-b, cf. KSS 12-17.
- 28 T IX 2c 又觀諸佛 聖主師子 演說經典 微妙第一 其聲清淨 出柔軟音 教諸菩薩 無數億萬 梵音深妙 令人樂聞 各於世界 講說正法 種種因緣 以無量喻 照明佛法 開悟眾生 cf. KSS 10f.
- 29 T IX 2c-3a 若人遭苦 厭老病死 為說涅槃 盡諸苦際 若人有福 曾供養佛 志求勝法 為說緣覺 若有佛子 修種種行 求無上慧 為說淨道 cf. KSS 11.
- 30 T IX 3c 為求聲聞者。說應四諦法。度生老病死究竟涅槃。為求辟支佛者。說應十二因緣法。為諸菩薩說應六波羅蜜。令得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提成一切種智。cf. KSS 20-1.
- 31 T IX 5b 我見燈明佛 本光瑞如此 以是知今佛 欲說法華經 今相如本瑞 是諸佛方便 今佛放光明 助發實相義 諸人令當知 合掌一心待 佛當雨法雨 充足求道者 諸求三乘人 若有疑悔者 佛當為除斷 令盡無有餘 cf. KSS 31.
- 32 T IX 2b 彼土現在諸佛 cf. KSS 7.
- 33 Recounted in the first part of the *Kalpa Sutra*, cf. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXII, trans. H. Jacobi. Mahāvīra himself was represented as the most recent of twenty-four who have appeared in the present cycle.
- 34 Cf. *Dialogues of The Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya)* Vol. II, T. W. and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, London 1910 and 1972. This has a series of seven buddhas while the *Buddhavaṃsa*, of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, has a longer series.
- 35 Cf. the last-mentioned text, *passim*.
- 36 Jones, *op. cit.* pp. 108ff.
- 37 *Ibid.* p. 98.
- 38 Chapter Three above, note 78 and context. Cf. also Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* p. 263.
- 39 Jones, *op. cit.* p. 96.

- 40 *Ibid.* pp. 133f. It is this view of the Buddha as *lokottara* which gives the name Lokottaravadins to the school of thought which The Mahāvastu represents, see the introduction by Jones and the opening of the writing itself. The whole conception has obvious analogies with the transformations of bodhisattvas discussed later below.
- 41 *Ibid.* pp. 218ff.
- 42 Lamotte, E. *La Concentration de la Marche Héroïque (Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra)*, Brussels 1965, pp. 126f.
- 43 *Ibid.* p. 129. T XV 630c 一切諸法皆空如幻 and 是諸如來皆是真實。云何爲實是諸如來本自不生。是故爲實。是諸如來令後亦無。是故爲實: ‘All dharmas are void, like a magical apparition . . . All the tathāgatas are real. Why are they real? From the beginning and in themselves these tathāgatas are not born; that is why they are real. These tathāgatas do not exist either now or in the future; that is why they are real. (etc.)’. Lamotte explains that the Tibetan version refers to the ‘irreality’ rather than the ‘reality’ of the tathāgatas, but as he says, it amounts to the same thing.
- 44 T XV 631a 是故諸佛名爲平等。梵王。是諸如來不過一切諸法如故。cf. Lamotte, p. 130f.
- 45 T XV 631a, whole context. The supernatural power is 神力, but the ability both to penetrate the equality of all things and at the same time to manifest his *rūpakāya* (色身) is ascribed to the *samādhi* which the sutra extols. Cf. Lamotte p. 131.
- 46 Lamotte, p. 264b. (T XV 644b).
- 47 Lamotte p. 267ff.
- 48 Lamotte points out (p. 167 n. 339) that the universe of Vairocana, named Pratimaṇḍitā, is referred to in Chapters 23 and 25 (Ch. XXIV and XXVII). In the first of these the bodhisattva Gadgadasvara is said to be the protector alike of those who are born in the *Sahā* world (this world) and of those born in the *Vairocanarāśmipratimaṇḍitā* world.
- 49 The term skilful means is found much less often in The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra, and discussion of the explicit usage is therefore left to Appendix F. Nevertheless the basic parallelism of thought is quite apparent.
- 50 W. Baruch made a special point of translating it in his *Beiträge zum Saddharmapūṇḍarikasūtra*, Leiden 1938. Chapter XI is the first chapter of substance after the break discerned in the sutra by Fuse. It is also the last point at which the Sanskrit and Chinese chapter numeration agrees. On these and related matters see Appendix B.
- 51 ‘Whole-body’, 全身, e.g. T IX 32c.
- 52 ‘Emanated buddhas’, 分身諸佛, e.g. T IX 32c, or literally ‘partial-body buddhas’, cf. preceding note.
- 53 For all the above, which is highly summarised as the details do not affect the meaning of ‘skilful means’, cf. KSS 235–243.
- 54 T IX 34a 其有能護 此經法者 則爲供養 我及多寶…亦復供養 諸來化佛 cf. KSS 246.
- 55 T IX 34a 若說此經 則爲見我 多寶如來 及諸化佛 cf. KSS 246. The emanated buddhas are defined here with a different term, difficult to translate briefly and suggesting a creative conjuring for soteriological purposes.
- 56 T IX 34a 以是方便 令法久住 cf. KSS 245.
- 57 There is no equivalent in the extant Sanskrit, nor in Dharmarakṣa’s version, though this does not indicate conclusively that Kumārajīva did not find it in the text available to him.
- 58 Cf. Chapter Two, note 47 above.
- 59 The second part of Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann’s *Introduction à l’Étude d’Avalokiteśvara* (Paris 1967, Presses Universitaires de France), is entirely dedicated to the problem of the meaning of the Sanskrit name and also surveys the relevant literature. In conclusion she offers the following comprehensive interpretation: ‘le Seigneur Brillant, Étincelant, ou (par extension) le Maître de la Lumière’ (p. 82). This is not intended to exclude secondary interpretations such as ‘the lord who looks down from above’ or ‘the lord who looks down in compassion’ (cf. p. 80). It is this latter aspect which is stressed by Professor Edward Conze with reference to The Heart Sutra and The Lotus Sutra in his *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (London 1958, George Allen and Unwin) where he writes on page 78: ‘Avalokiteśvara is called Avalokita because he “looks down” . . . compassionately on the world . . . He is called Lord (*īśvara*) because he has sovereignty over the world and power

to help suffering beings, as for instance explained in the famous twenty-fourth chapter of the *Lotus of the Good Law*.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese name Kuan-shih-yin 觀世音 was at one time supposed to be an incorrect corruption of the Sanskrit. But Europeans who stressed this were themselves mistaken in their reading of the Chinese as was pointed out by Carlo Puini in 1873 (*Avalokiteśvara Sutra, Traduction Italienne de la Version Chinoise avec Introduction et Notes*, in Atsume Gusa (Textes 6), Paris and London, pp. II–V). The Bodhisattva Kuan-shih-yin is the Bodhisattva who regards the cries of the world. As Puini pointed out, the name is explained in the text itself and moreover in a manner not inconsistent with the overall characterisation of the bodhisattva given also in the Sanskrit text, whatever the etymological niceties of the name itself. Kuan-shih-yin is the one who takes into consideration the voices or the prayers of the world, or as Burnouf also put it, ‘the lord who regards with compassion the beings suffering the evils of existence’ (Burnouf, *Lotus de la Bonne Loi*, p. 226).

60 Four such texts are reviewed by Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann (*op. cit.* pp. 36–56), namely *Lokeśvara-śataka*, *Kāraṇa-vyūha-sūtra*, *Mañjuśrīmūla-kalpa* and *Sādhana-mālā*. All are later than The Lotus Sutra, even by some centuries, and none seem to add anything of importance to the concept of skilful means. Conversely however, since The Lotus Sutra is the major early starting point for thought about Avalokiteśvara throughout Mahayana Buddhism the concept of skilful means cannot really be subtracted from any later discussion of this bodhisattva. The same applies to the iconographical developments studied in detail by Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann.

The earliest texts in which the bodhisattva appears are undoubtedly the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha-sūtra*, first translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema (147–186 A.D.), and the chapter of The Lotus Sutra now under consideration. It is impossible to say which of these two is the earlier, because even if the main part of The Lotus Sutra is earlier than the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha-sūtra*, the chapter on Avalokiteśvara, which was linked with The Lotus Sutra at an advanced stage in its compilation, could still have originated later. However the references in the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha-sūtra* are quite brief and incidental. They are mainly of interest as the probable starting point of a later more elaborate relationship between Amitābha, the central figure of this sutra, and Avalokiteśvara. The general context may be examined in Max Müller’s translation in *Sacred Books of the East* Vol. XLIX, Part 2, pp. 48 and 52. The first mention is of Avalokiteśvara as an interlocutor for Amitābha, here Amitāyus, and in the second case he is a light-spreading companion to the latter, along with Mahāsthāmaprāpta. The relationship between these figures is explored in the fifth chapter of Henri de Lubac’s *Amida*, Paris 1955, which also contains a detailed survey of the whole cult of Avalokiteśvara.

A few verses on Amitābha were eventually added to the chapter on Avalokiteśvara in The Lotus Sutra, though this must have been at a very late date indeed and they do not appear in Kumārajīva’s version (stanzas 28–33, cf. Sakamoto and Iwamoto III p. 269). More important was the elaboration of Avalokiteśvara’s role, along with the bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta, as a companion to Amitābha. The main text here is the *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching* 觀無量壽經 (J. Kanmuryōjyūō), first known in Chinese in the early part of the fifth century A.D. Iconography is closely related to meditation and the standard form in China and Japan where the Amitābha cult flourished in a triad with Amitābha in the centre and the two bodhisattvas to left and right.

Other texts and iconographical development show Avalokiteśvara as a figure of devotion both in his own right and in association with other representatives of the Mahayana pantheon. In some of these, especially in Tibet and Nepal, Avalokiteśvara was taken through into the tantric phase of Buddhism. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *op. cit.* esp. pp. 108–111, on the formula *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* addressed to Avalokiteśvara, the feminine double, Tara, evidences of symbiosis with Indian divinities, and eventually the veneration of the Dalai Lama as an incarnation of the bodhisattva and of the Potala as his proper residence. Other literature is noted there.

Another important text current all over East Asia is The Heart Sutra, in which the bodhisattva is firmly linked both with the mantric tradition and with perfection of insight thought. See further below.

- 61 De Mallmann, *op. cit.* p. 93, adduces an interesting parallel with the Avestan god Srausha in the *Zend-Avesta*.
- 62 Cf. KSS 404–6.
- 63 T IX 56c 南無觀世音菩薩 cf. KSS 406. The Amitābha formula is best known in its Japanese pronunciation: Namu Amida Butsu 南無阿彌陀佛. The same basic formula found innumerable uses in the Sutra of Buddha Names (T440 and T441), extensive recitations which Kumārajīva apparently never felt called upon to translate.
- 64 T IX 56c 是菩薩能以無畏施於衆生 cf. KSS 406.
- 65 T IX 57a, cf. KSS 406–7.
- 66 T IX 57a 云何遊此娑婆世界。云何而爲衆生說法。方便之力。cf. KSS 407.
- 67 Cf. KSS 409.
- 68 Matsunaga, *op. cit.* pp. 120ff.
- 69 *Ibid.* p. 124.
- 70 *Ibid.* p. 125.
- 71 *Ibid.* pp. 130–134.
- 72 *Ibid.* pp. 133f.
- 73 西国巡禮案内記 (*Saikoku Junrei Annaiki*, published continuously from 1933 onwards, by the Office of the Society for Places of Pilgrimage in Saikoku.) *Zengyō-hōben*: 善巧方便, p. 1.
- 74 繪入意譯觀音聖典 (*Eiri Ishaku Kannon Seiten*), 1958 in Hokkaidō. The basic body of the bodhisattva is defined as the *hontai* 本體, and the others as skilful means 方便, (on unnumbered introductory page).
- 75 *Op. cit.* p. 1. Again 本体 (equals 本體).
- 76 The character for ‘compassion’ (as it is translated in KSS) is 愍 (*ming*) meaning to sympathise with or take pity on, and is not the term often used for the more or less technical expression *karuṇā*. See T IX 57 b-c, cf. KSS 410.
- 77 T251 known as the *Hannya-haramitta-shingyō* 般若波羅蜜多心經 or as the *Hannya-shingyō* for short.
- 78 Kumārajīva’s version is T250. The association with the 習應品 (Chapter II) of Kumārajīva’s 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 (T223) is made by Nakamura (Hajime) and Kino (Kazuyoshi) in their jointly translated and edited *Hannya-shingyō, Kongō-hannya-kyō* (Iwanami Bunko 6285–6, Tokyo 1961), p. 16, note 3.
- 79 E. Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, (George Allen and Unwin 1958) pp. 78–9. Cf. also D. T. Suzuki’s discussion in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Third Series, (Rider & Co. 1970), pp. 222–238.
- 80 The Sanskrit has *svabhāvaśūnyā*, while the Chinese just has the single character 空 (*k’ung*) Japanese *kū*), see T VIII 847c 照見五陰空 (Kumārajīva’s).
- 81 According to Nakamura and Kino the evidence suggests that this clause was always present in Hsüan Chuang’s translation and that it was probably inserted by the translator himself, *op. cit.* pp. 18–19, note 8. But it is also present in Kumārajīva’s.
- 82 The additional phrase is: 度一切苦厄 T VIII 847c and 848c.
- 83 Nakamura and Kino, *op. cit.* pp. 42–44 (English by present writer). Cf. also E. Conze’s translation from the Sanskrit in *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, p. 25, and the whole general context explained there. The text is T235.
- 84 T VIII 412c. 是菩薩摩訶薩行般若波羅蜜時。以方便力見衆生。以顛倒故著五陰。無常中常相。苦中樂相。不淨中淨相。無我中我相。著無所有處。是菩薩以方便力故。於無所有中拔出衆生。
- 85 Cf. quotations from The Mahāvastu above, especially indicating how the Buddha dissembles his supramundane character in favour of conformity with the world. It is perhaps indicative of a general continuity in Buddhist thought that the one reference to *upāyakaūśalya* (skill in means) in The Mahāvastu is to be found in the section on ‘apparitions’ in the account of the tenth *bhūmi* (the *bhūmis* are stages in the development of bodhisattvas towards buddhahood, and the tenth stage is the last). In this section the various apparitions are usually produced by the Buddha, but he himself is presented as appearing in the form of the former king of Kalinga to a present king of Kalinga, and also as Indra. Whether the

Buddha himself is appearing in the form of someone else or whether the agents are produced more or less independently by his power as in the case of five thousand monks produced at once, the main point is that the apparitions are able to offer Buddhist teaching in a manner precisely appropriate to the situation. First the Buddha produces an ‘apparition’, and ‘then he who is skilful in his expedients explained to Upāli the words spoken by the apparition’ (Jones, *op. cit.* p. 140). So runs the introductory comment, relevant to the whole section. No reader of The Lotus Sutra would be surprised, either, by the subsequent concluding stanzas, translated by Jones as follows:

‘The Buddhas, who understand good and bad conduct, know all the thoughts of others. In their various existences they examine the dispositions of all beings.

‘By the gentle eloquent guidance of him who has insight into worth many men are converted by the understanding Buddha.

‘Those who have drawn nigh to the highest friend and are converted by his wisdom, are in no wise reborn, nor grow old, nor die.

‘All the wise Buddhas, with bodies all radiant, severally discover the profound way of life, which is of infinite light.’ (*Ibid.* p. 151.)

- 86 The distinction between bodhisattvas and buddhas is obscured here in that Gadgadasvara appears variously as a bodhisattva or as a buddha in conformity with what is required for the salvation of different men. The system, or rather the method, is exactly the same in principle as that of The Lotus Sutra as a whole, as may be seen from the assertion that to those who must be saved by extinction he reveals himself as extinct, a clear parallel to the thought of Chapter XVI (15), where the Nirvana of the Buddha was argued to be a skilful means.

The story of the bodhisattva Gadgadasvara is also firmly set within the authority of the Buddha Śākyamuni and the Buddha Prabhūtaratna. He too pays homage to both of these Buddhas before returning to his own land, having already presented Śākyamuni with a necklace on his arrival. At the same time the fact that he reports about his visit to his own ‘world-honoured one’ brings out once again the equivalence of all buddhas and the non-absolute quality of any one. Cf. KSS *ad loc.* for the whole chapter.

- 87 T IX 27c 又於諸佛所說空法。明了通達…而富樓那斯方便。饒益無量百千衆生。cf. KSS 202–3.

- 88 T IX 28a 諸比丘諦聽 佛子所行道 善學方便故 不可得思議 知衆樂小法 而畏於大智 是故諸菩薩 作聲聞緣覺 以無數方便 化諸衆生類 自說是聲聞 去佛道甚遠 度脫無量衆 皆悉得成就 雖小欲懈怠 漸當令作佛 內祕菩薩行 外現是聲聞 少欲厭生死 實自淨佛土 示衆有三毒 又現邪見相 我弟子如是 方便度衆生 cf. KSS 205–6. ‘Subject to passions’ is literally ‘having the three poisons’, and KSS is followed here in finding the expression too obscure to count as a translation. The three poisons are greed, anger and folly (貪, 瞋 and 癡), cf. Sakamoto, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 336. The point is not in the enumeration summarised by the expression ‘three poisons’ but in the submission of bodhisattvas to the strains and responses of ordinary human life.

## 5 SKILFUL MEANS IN THE TEACHING OF VIMALAKĪRTI

### *The skill of a Buddhist saint*

The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is a work which has been widely used among the schools and sects of Mahayana Buddhism, and Kumārajīva's Chinese version remains popular in Japan to this day.<sup>1</sup> One reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that the leading figure in it, Vimalakīrti, is a layman with whom other laymen in ordinary walks of life can identify themselves. As a layman however he is by no means the model of subservient piety which clergy the world over have traditionally preferred, but instead a devastating leveller. Leading monastic disciples of the Buddha dare not visit Vimalakīrti when he is ill, for fear of being worsted in debate on the meaning of the Buddha's doctrine. Only Mañjuśrī will go to see him, and when these two meet together the result is a major discourse on the Mahayana logic of equality associated with the term *śūnyatā* or 'emptiness'. Vimalakīrti is also a model of the skill required to cultivate the qualities of a buddha-to-be in the contingencies of daily life, and is famed for his ability to perform 'contradictory acts' as Lamotte has termed them.<sup>2</sup> The household life is supposed to be full of hindrances, but the portrait of this householder who is at the same time a freely ranging bodhisattva has proved to have great attraction for the practically minded. In all this the idea of skilful means (*fang-pien*) is closely associated with the way in which his behaviour and self-understanding are characterised.

The *tour de force* of the sutra is Vimalakīrti's encounter with Mañjuśrī, and it is in that context that many occurrences of the term *fang-pien* are clustered. Indeed Chapter V contains about two fifths of the total incidence of the term. The important opening chapters which set the scene and delineate Vimalakīrti's character have their fair share, but the remaining chapters have scattered cases only. Some very incidental usage refers to the skilful means of the Buddha himself, along the lines observed already in the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter XI for example we read that 'the skilful means of the buddhas are inconceivable'<sup>3</sup> and 'Śākyamuni Buddha certainly has ability in this clever practice of skilful means'.<sup>4</sup> In Chapter XIII however, the only other case in the whole of the last six chapters, we read: 'If someone hears a sutra like this, believes and understands, receives and preserves, reads and recites it, and by the power of skilful means he explains it in detail and makes its meaning clear for the sake of all the living, then because he has preserved the Dharma this will be called the worshipful celebration of the Dharma.'<sup>5</sup> In this case therefore it is the follower who is called upon to exercise skilful means, and indeed, by contrast with much of The Lotus Sutra, the usage in The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is mainly concerned with

skilful means as an ability commanded by bodhisattvas. It refers both to bodhisattvas in general and of course to Vimalakīrti in particular.

The main initial portrait of Vimalakīrti himself is given in the second chapter of the sutra, which is even entitled 'Skilful Means' (*fang-pien*).<sup>6</sup> He is described as an elder living in the city of Vaiśālī who has already made far-reaching progress in Buddhism. His many abilities have come to fruition under countless Buddhas in previous times and he has vanquished the evil tempter, Māra. We then find the concept of skilful means acting as a hinge between his own attainment and his service to others, when we read as follows: 'He had entered the gate of deep Dharma, was able in the exercise of insight, was thoroughly conversant with skilful means, had brought great vows to fruition, knew the mental tendencies of living beings, and could distinguish the sharpness or obtuseness of all their faculties.'<sup>7</sup> This means that he disposes of the kind of insight and knowledge which a Buddha has, and like a Buddha he is in a position to be active in many ways calculated to bring beings across from their ignorance and suffering.

There follows an extensive catalogue of the ways in which Vimalakīrti accommodates himself to the ways of the world, in order to bring out the meaning of Buddhist teaching in a manner suited to those who are in need of it. But this extremely varied list of activities is prefaced and concluded by the controlling term *fang-pien*. Thus the very fact of his living in Vaiśālī is due to his 'skilfulness in means', applied 'because he wished to save people'.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the list of his activities it is said that the town elder Vimalakīrti 'brought abundant benefit to living beings by the use of countless skilful means like these.'<sup>9</sup> The importance of these two occurrences can scarcely be exaggerated, for they mean that the content of the list occurring in between gives body to what is meant by 'skilful means'.

The portrait really shows Vimalakīrti as being 'in the world but not of it', if a phrase external to the tradition but unavoidably appropriate may be allowed. The appearances are of one sort and the realities of another. The appearance is of a layman living as a householder with wife and children, wearing decorative ornaments, and eating and drinking. The reality is of one who within the household life is not attached to the world, but who delights in continence, isolation and meditation. We read, in sum, of one who, though living in the world, cultivates the discipline normally associated with a religious ascetic. Such a vantage point may seem subversive of organised religion, for if this is a desirable style it might be asked what then would be the role of the religious who leave the world and renounce the household life. Indeed various aspects of monastic life are quite critically treated later in the sutra.

Nor does Vimalakīrti stay within his house. He is to be seen in lawcourts, businesses and schools, brothels, drinking houses and gambling dens. He converses with brahmans, officials and princes, with harem girls, with the ordinary people in general, and with the various kinds of deity. None of these activities however disturbs his resolute establishment in the great

vehicle. On the contrary he is able in each case to give just what is needed to those who are entangled in these various walks of life.

Immersion into some such aspect of everyday life is the device or means (*fang-pien*). The resolution of the device, the ripening of its fruit, seems to take place according to one or other of two principles. In some cases what is evil or unsatisfactory is steadily confronted by the unshakeable qualities of the bodhisattva, while in other cases the good which lies within samsaric existence is singled out and confirmed by his friendship and guidance. Thus the patience of the bodhisattva takes care of those who are spiteful or angry, a good result being achieved by the appropriate display of a relevant opposite. Or when the bodhisattva is with princes he takes a place of honour among them and brings out their qualities of loyalty and filial piety, thus confirming and developing a provisional good which is already present.

The first of these functions is particularly prominent at the beginning of the portrait which is based on the six perfections (*pāramitā*) as follows.

- (i) charity (*dāna*), ‘having incalculable riches he assisted the poverty-stricken’;
- (ii) proper conduct (*śīla*), ‘by observing the precepts with purity he assisted those who transgress’;
- (iii) patience (*kṣānti*), ‘by regulating his behaviour with patience he assisted the enraged and the angry’;
- (iv) vigour (*vīrya*), ‘with much efficient perseverance he assisted those who are shiftless or lazy’;
- (v) contemplation (*dhyāna*), ‘by single minded-contemplation he assisted those whose thoughts are in turmoil’;
- (vi) insight (*prajñā*), ‘with his steady insight he assisted those who are without wisdom’.<sup>10</sup>

In this way the six perfections which a bodhisattva is supposed to cultivate are made to be, not qualities to achieve in splendid isolation, but rather qualities which take their very meaning from the vices over against which they stand. The implication of this usage is clearly that the cultivation of these qualities for one’s own good is inseparable from their cultivation for the good of others. Each one of them is a skilful means relating both to an inadequacy or a vice on the one hand and to the goal of Buddhism on the other hand. In some Mahayana formulations *upāya-kauśalya-pāramitā*, or ‘perfection of skill in means’, was added as a seventh perfection, and there is an incidental case of this in Chapter I of The Teaching of Vimalakīrti.<sup>11</sup> However there is a sense in which such an addition is redundant if, as here, *all* the *pāramitās* (perfections) are seen as skilful means to begin with. In this passage the skill lies in displaying the appropriate facet or quality of the good way, within the evil world, in order to help those who need a specific form of assistance. Each one of these qualities is applied as an exercise in skilful means.

The other kind of case, in which an existent though provisional good is confirmed and developed by the bodhisattva, is also not without interest because it provides a rationale for positive correlations between Buddhist

teaching and various kinds of social action. The bodhisattva shares in law-making and in the defence of accused persons, he legitimises filial piety, supports education, warns against the dangers of brothels and bars, strengthens the patience of householders and the readiness of the common people to earn merit.

This social involvement has been important in two ways. For one thing it indicates that the life of the world has its own, albeit provisional, value of which the sincere Buddhist layman need not be ashamed. Secondly it is not unknown, for Japanese Buddhists at least, to identify themselves not merely with the ordinary inhabitants of society with whom Vimalakīrti so subtly consorts, but indeed with the latter himself. The understanding then advanced is that they are doing business without really being attached to it, etc., on the basis of 'gaining worldly profits without taking pleasure in them'.<sup>12</sup> The stress on aspects of ordinary daily life in this text is quite strong and noteworthy for an early Mahayana sutra. Reference to the advanced instruction of mythical gods, who are taught insight and the truth of impermanence, is by contrast relatively incidental.<sup>13</sup>

Finally the dangers to conceptual orthodoxy to which the bodhisattva exposes himself should not be overlooked. For one thing Vimalakīrti understands worldly writings, while continuing to rejoice in the Buddha-dharma.<sup>14</sup> This implies an acceptance of secular literature and concepts while maintaining a Buddhist viewpoint, which was surely of importance in the domestication of Buddhism in China and Japan.<sup>15</sup> Similarly it is said of the bodhisattva that 'He accepted all heterodoxies without transgressing against the true faith,'<sup>16</sup> with which should be taken the statement that 'He entered the halls of disputation to lead people on with the great vehicle.'<sup>17</sup> These indications are very brief, and indeed the whole chapter is remarkably concise, but they indicate in principle a whole theory of correlation between Buddhist thought and other systems of thought. The fundamental point is that Buddhism does not reject other thought systems, but associates with them with a view to maintaining the integrity of Buddhist thought itself. Thus it is in places of doctrinal danger or ambiguity that the Dharma emerges to new clarity.

This portrait of the specific bodhisattva Vimalakīrti is backed up at various other points in the text in more general ways. The very first chapter is not about Vimalakīrti himself but relates a discourse given by the Buddha when visited at Vaiśālī by another layman named Ratnakūṭa. Apart from some wide-ranging Mahayana phantasies the main point explained is that the so-called pure land<sup>18</sup> of a bodhisattva is set up for the sake of living beings in accordance with their natures. In fact the living beings and the various characteristics of a bodhisattva in training are all identified in turn with the pure land. In other words, things as we ordinarily know them can also be seen as the pure land. This is applied to the six perfections and also to skilful means, thus: 'Skilful means is the bodhisattva's pure land; when the bodhisattva becomes a buddha, those living beings who through skilful means are unimpeded with respect to all dharmas will be born in that

country.<sup>19</sup> The pure land of a buddha (as a bodhisattva becomes when his pure land is realised) is of ambivalent status. On the one hand it can be seen with all its variety and unevenness, that is, as our ordinary world is articulated to match the defective views of the unenlightened. On the other hand, when the bodhisattva's mind is pure, the land appears bejewelled and even. The ambivalence is demonstrated miraculously to Śāriputra when the Buddha taps his toe on the ground, and shows this present world as a purified Buddha country for a few minutes before letting it return to what we know as normal. Later on, in the famous Platform Sutra of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, this demythologised meaning was applied to the pure land of the Buddha Amitābha (of Pure Land Buddhism). The passage in question includes the specific quotation from *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* that 'In accordance with the purity of the mind the Buddha land is pure'.<sup>20</sup>

In Chapter I of *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* the pure land of a bodhisattva is not explicitly defined as a skilful means *per se*, but in Chapter VIII the theme is taken up again in a series of verses, one of which reads:

'Although he knows that all buddha-countries  
And all living beings are empty,  
Yet he always prepares a pure land  
For the salvific instruction of the multitudes.'<sup>21</sup>

This verse is of particular interest here because it lies in a series of verses on various aspects of a bodhisattva's activity which are all controlled by the concept of skilful means. Indeed, the passage is effectively a re-statement of the portrait of Vimalakīrti found in Chapter II. Vimalakīrti is asked who his mother and father are, etc. and he replies allegorically in the first verse of the series:

'Perfection of insight is the bodhisattva's mother,  
And skilful means, we may say, is the father;  
Of all the leaders of the multitudes  
There is not one who is not born from these.'<sup>22</sup>

Apart from a couple of more or less doxological stanzas, the closing passage further along repeats the same partnership of insight and skilful means.

'In accordance with what they require  
He gets them to enter the Buddha-way;  
By his good power of skilful means  
He can provide them with all they need.  
Thus his ways are uncountable  
And his practices have no limit;  
His insight is infinite  
And he brings to liberation a countless multitude.'<sup>23</sup>

The preparation of a pure land is but one of the many ways mentioned here in which a bodhisattva fulfils his function. Others listed in the other verses are too long to quote in full, but suggest a fantastic range of

transformations not only into various living forms but also in the elements, and as food and drink for the hungry.

Yet other transformations are referred to also in Chapter VI, which similarly concludes ‘This is named the entrance of insight and skilful means for a bodhisattva who abides in marvellous release.’<sup>24</sup> The main idea associated with this concept of ‘marvellous release’ is that the bodhisattva is able to manifest himself quite freely in any way necessary to help others. Even the tempting devils and tormenting oppressors who make life difficult for bodhisattvas in training may themselves secretly be bodhisattvas. By putting obstacles in the way of their colleagues, the argument runs, they help them to develop steadfastness. The net meaning of this rather severe description of mutual aid, the techniques of which are explicitly described as skilful means,<sup>25</sup> is presumably to encourage believers to interpret hardships as opportunities. In these varied and general ways therefore this writing supports the common Mahayana understanding of a bodhisattva as one who through his combination of insight and skilful means is able to save living beings.

It is in this context, already adumbrated in the discussion of Avalokiteśvara and others earlier, that the portrait of the legendary householder Vimalakīrti is to be understood. The special stress on his lay status and lay involvement, although it has often proved attractive to lay persons, is therefore not a petty anti-clericalism; for the mere fact that he dwells as a layman in Vaiśālī is a skilful means, a provisional state of affairs with a hidden meaning. Nor on the other hand should this be taken to imply an ultimately reserved position assuming the value of the homeless i.e. the monastic or ‘religious’, life by contrast with that of the householder. Indeed the monk Rāhula was taken to task by Vimalakīrti (Chapter III) for teaching the importance of abandoning the household life. One is not allowed to settle in the view that one or other of these alternatives represents some kind of a solution in itself. This means incidentally that an account of the ‘laicisation’ or ‘secularisation’ process which took place under the aegis of Mahayana Buddhism could easily be too facile. Both lay and monastic status have provisional meaning only, and that is why generally speaking both are maintained in Mahayana Buddhism.

### *Vimalakīrti's illness*

The portrait of Vimalakīrti is followed by the story of his illness which begins in Chapter II and provides the main narrative framework for the rest of the sutra. The first sentence is the key: ‘As such a skilful means he gave the impression of being ill in his body’.<sup>26</sup> This had the result that he was visited by numerous worthy lay people, kings, princes, brahmins, householders and various officials who all solicitously enquired about his welfare. When they visited him he took the opportunity he had created to preach the Dharma to them, in the form of a meditation on the body, which is a classic theme in Buddhism.

His exposition stresses the impermanence of body and its susceptibility to suffering. By his own feigned illness Vimalakīrti was himself a visual demonstration of his teaching. He uses the standard similes. The body is like foam, like a bubble, like a mirage, like a dream or an echo. Not only is it unstable, it is also unpleasant like a poisonous snake. One should take delight not in this perishing physical body but in the 'Buddha-body'.<sup>27</sup> 'The Buddha-body is the Dharma-body,' he goes on.<sup>28</sup> The Dharma-body arises out of the cultivation of all the qualities which a bodhisattva is supposed to cultivate.<sup>29</sup> Above all, he says, 'He who wishes to attain the Buddha-body and cut off the afflictions of all living beings should raise the thought of supreme, perfect enlightenment.'<sup>30</sup> The chapter concludes with the comment that Vimalakīrti had expounded the Dharma in a manner *appropriate to* those who came to enquire about his sickness.<sup>31</sup> Thus the positive teaching which he gave, about the Buddha-body or the Dharma-body, is framed to fit over against the negative account of the physical body arising out of his supposed illness. This short exposition is thus a representative example of the correlational method of Buddhist teaching.

The two subsequent chapters continue the plot of the narrative begun in Chapter II, only now instead of laymen going to call on Vimalakīrti we read of the perplexities into which the closest and leading disciples of the Buddha find themselves to be pitched. Chapter III begins with a fine irony as Vimalakīrti is supposed to say to himself that while he lies there in his (feigned) illness the compassionate Buddha will surely not leave him to suffer alone. Not surprisingly the Buddha reads his thoughts and plays the game by telling his disciples and bodhisattvas to go and visit the sick elder. It is a straight continuation of the skilful means set up in Chapter II. One by one the disciples demur, and to excuse themselves they each tell their story of an encounter which they had already had with Vimalakīrti and which led to their extreme discomfiture. It would lead too far afield even to summarise all of these one by one, but the principle which they have in common is that each time the disciple is shown as taking some aspect of the Buddha's teaching in a literal and pedestrian manner, which Vimalakīrti then reinterprets in terms of transiency and voidness. The cases of Kāśyapa, Subhūti and Maitreya are perhaps best known, through D. T. Suzuki's English summary of the sutra.<sup>32</sup> One further example may be given in a little detail here, namely the case of Ānanda, which is of special interest since it reflects the skilful means character of Vimalakīrti's own illness.

Ānanda was standing at the entrance to the house of a rich brahman, bowl in hand, when Vimalakīrti turned up and asked him what he was doing there. Ānanda explained that the Buddha was feeling slightly ill and that therefore he was trying to beg some milk for him. At this Vimalakīrti expressed great shock and told Ānanda to stop at once. The body of the Tathāgata was like diamond, he said. How could it possibly be susceptible to illness? The Buddha-body is freed from the conditioning of ordinary existence and does not suffer illness. Ānanda should be careful not to bring the Buddha into disrepute. Not surprisingly Ānanda is perplexed at this,

but fortunately for him a voice is heard from the sky, or space,<sup>33</sup> which affirms that Vimalakīrti, who after all is just a householder, is correct in what he says. The Buddha behaves in this way because he has come out into the world in order to bring across and release living beings. Nevertheless although what Vimalakīrti says is right, says the voice from space, Ānanda may take back some milk for the Buddha, discreetly, without feeling ashamed.

The illness of the Buddha is acted out on the side of the unenlightened, but at the same time it provides the occasion for indicating the true character of a Buddha-body. Kumārijīva does not here use the term *fang-pien* of the Buddha's illness, though it would obviously be appropriate. Interestingly enough, the same story is quoted in the vast 'Treatise on the Great Perfection of Insight' ascribed to Nāgārjuna and also translated by Kumārajīva (T1509). In this case the Buddha's request to Ānanda to fetch him some milk is explicitly declared by Vimalakīrti to be a skilful means.<sup>34</sup>

It will be noted that the declaration that an activity of the Buddha is a *fang-pien* or skilful means does not imply that it should be suspended. Vimalakīrti checks Ānanda in order to bring him to the realisation of what is going on; but the voice which confirms the correctness of what Vimalakīrti says goes on to instruct Ānanda to carry out his errand nevertheless. Vimalakīrti's encounters with the other disciples all bear a similar message. He seems to strike at the root of the renunciation of the household life, of begging for alms, of meditation and of teaching, all taken in a very straightforward manner by the disciples in question but reinterpreted in a contradictory way by Vimalakīrti. Thus, to Śāriputra, 'Meditation does not mean just sitting there . . . meditation means showing neither body nor mind in the triple world; meditation means not giving up the achievement of cessation yet maintaining the forms of worldly dignity; meditation means not discarding the Dharma of the Way, while at the same time being active in the affairs of the common people,' etc.<sup>35</sup> In another encounter Subhūti is permitted to receive the food offered to him by Vimalakīrti, 'if you do not see the Buddha and do not hear the Dharma'<sup>36</sup> or 'if you enter all false views and do not arrive at the other shore'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly he berates Maitreya for misleading people with talk about future states. The Buddha may have predicted the future buddhahood of Maitreya, but when he attains it so too will all beings, and when he is in complete nirvana so too will all beings be in complete nirvana. The reason for this is that 'the buddhas know that all living beings in the last analysis are in a state of nirvanic peace, that is, they are marked with nirvana and do not go into cessation all over again.'<sup>38</sup>

In this way, one by one, many items of doctrine and practice from the central tradition of Buddhism are restated in terms of their emptiness and their original nirvanic quality. The logic of equality which flows from this and which is typical of the Mahayana leads to the contradictory equation of monkhood and laity, leaving the household life and being immersed in the world, of saviour and saved, of future possibilities and latent states.

The followers of the Buddha should follow their practices and give their teachings, but always with a view to their dismantlement from within. The rationale for this is stated in some detail in the dialogue between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, the only one of the Buddha's followers who did feel ready to call on the sick householder. This discussion, which must now be examined, links up the important Mahayana concepts of 'emptiness', 'insight' and 'skilful means'.

### *Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī*

Mañjuśrī is a wise yet unpretentious bodhisattva. He has a fair respect for Vimalakīrti, whom he describes as 'hard to answer',<sup>39</sup> etc. and 'altogether accomplished in insight and skilful means'.<sup>40</sup> Vimalakīrti greets him with the words: 'You come well, Mañjuśrī. With the mark of non-coming, you come, and with the mark of non-seeing you see.'<sup>41</sup> Mañjuśrī replies in similar vein, as if to show that he understands what Vimalakīrti is up to, but then he casually suggests leaving the matter aside and goes on to ask about the householder's illness. It is as if he is prepared to go along with Vimalakīrti's dissembling in order to generate the discussion which will lead the assembled throng to enlightenment. The plot of the narrative is complicated by the fact that just before Mañjuśrī's arrival Vimalakīrti had magically emptied his room of all the people and objects which it contained. This was symbolic in itself and gives rise to a discussion of its own.

In the meantime Mañjuśrī plays the game and asks Vimalakīrti about the cause of his illness, how long he has been ill and how long his illness will continue. The last part of the question seems to imply that Mañjuśrī already recognises the illness to be deliberate. Since the reader of the sutra already knows that the illness is feigned, it is not surprising that Vimalakīrti now relates his illness to the sickness of all living beings. His illness arises because of the ignorance and craving of the world. When living beings are no longer sick the bodhisattva will also be free from sickness. The illness, already designated a skilful means, is said to arise through great compassion.<sup>42</sup> The workings of 'skilful means' and the workings of 'compassion', it may therefore be noted, follow the same track, namely that 'the bodhisattva enters birth-and-death (i.e. *saṃsāra*) for the sake of living beings.'<sup>43</sup> If we ask what the compassion of a bodhisattva is like, the simile used in this context is that the bodhisattva's attitude is like that of a father and mother towards an only son. 'When the son becomes ill the father and mother become ill too. If the son gets better, they get better too. It is the same with a bodhisattva. He loves all living beings as if they were a son. If the living beings are ill, then the bodhisattva is ill, if the living beings get better, the bodhisattva gets better too.'<sup>44</sup> The sickness of Vimalakīrti, it is stressed, has of itself no characteristics or 'marks', and is not dependent upon the body, mind or elements.<sup>45</sup> Yet the sickness of the bodhisattva is aligned with the sickness of the living beings which does arise because of

these. Thus the sickness of Vimalakīrti had two facets. On the one hand it bears the marks of the sufferings of the world but on the other hand it has no marks. As a skilful means Vimalakīrti's illness both follows the lines of the suffering of the world and bears within it the latent resolution of this suffering.

How is such a resolution possible? Or, as Mañjuśrī asked, how is a sick bodhisattva to be 'consoled', and how is he to 'tame his mind'? The explanation continues along the lines indicated. In so far as the sickness arises through ignorance and craving and in so far as the bodhisattva is sharing in the problems of all existence it is possible to speak as if it were real. In this sense it is said that the suffering arises from distorted ideas, and from passions, and from clinging to self. But ultimately there is no self, and therefore the bodhisattva (who is taking all beings with him) should relinquish the idea of self and the idea of living beings. Not only that, but having used the idea that the body is just made up of many elements or factors combining with each other,<sup>46</sup> his critical attention should now be turned to these factors, which he ought not to take more seriously than one takes the idea of self. After all, 'these factors do not know each other',<sup>47</sup> and 'When they arise they do not say 'I arise', and when they cease they do not say 'I cease'.<sup>48</sup>

The movement of this argument follows the standard pattern of the Mahayana reform. Early Buddhism had vigorously undermined any notion of a permanent soul or self, partly by stressing the various constituent factors which go to make up what seem at first in ordinary life to be important individuals, namely ourselves. The analysis and classification of these factors in turn came to be a haven, it seems, in which the monkish mind began to take a substitute refuge. In order to maintain the original drive towards liberation from mental attachments it became necessary to declare that these factors, or dharmas, were empty of 'own-being', that is, that they had no more substantial ontological status than any 'soul'. Similarly causality was declared 'empty' of connections so that the Buddhist system based on an analysis of cause and effect could not itself become an obstacle to liberation.<sup>49</sup>

The bodhisattva therefore must free himself from 'distortion', 'self' and 'dualism'.<sup>50</sup> To free oneself, or to 'depart from dualism' means 'not thinking of factors as inner or outer' and 'treating things with equality'.<sup>51</sup> This manner of treating things, or taking things, leads to a paradoxical rehabilitation of the notion of self which has just been attacked, for if we say 'What is equality?' the answer is that 'self and nirvana are equal' because 'self and nirvana are both empty' and they are 'indeterminate in nature'.<sup>52</sup> They are described as empty only because of the terminology otherwise used for them, which needs to be controlled or checked by the notion of emptiness.<sup>53</sup> When such an equalisation is realised there is no more sickness.<sup>54</sup> All that could remain would be 'the sickness of emptiness', in so far as one might be entangled in the notion of emptiness itself.<sup>55</sup> This 'sickness of emptiness' therefore also has to be treated with the notion of 'emptiness'.<sup>56</sup>

To use other words, the notion of cancelling has to be withdrawn simultaneously with the cancelling out of discriminations. In this way the bodhisattva must train himself to attend to the world even while he sees through it. He seeks nirvana not in some special recess, but in the fundamental equality of all factors of existence.

Withdrawing from one's attachment to emptiness is the final movement of the Mahayana dancer. It is spelled out again in the text. By the unreality of his own sickness, which, we should recall, is a skilful means, the bodhisattva recognises the unreality of the sickness of living beings.<sup>57</sup> But if while thinking this he should feel compassionately attached to living beings, he must discard the thought again.<sup>58</sup> If he does not, the compassion which he generates will be determined by clinging views which view life-and-death (Skt. *samsāra*) with disfavour. This is a limitation from which also he must be free in order to be able to preach to living beings in a way which will release them from their bonds. How can a bodhisattva maintain such a dynamic balance? The argument, which has been explained in summary form up to this point, continues with a passage on insight and skilful means (*fang-pien*) which needs shortly to be quoted in full.

First however there comes a reminder that even the ordinary standard components of Buddhist practice have to be taken properly; for 'To be greedily attached to meditation and concentration is the bodhisattva's bondage; but to be born as a skilful means is the bodhisattva's release.'<sup>59</sup> Kumārajīva's version here may be a conflation because we find a more elaborate parallelism in Lamotte's translation from the Tibetan version: 'To liberate oneself from existence without making use of salvific means is a Bodhisattva's bondage. Conversely, to penetrate the world of existence with the aid of salvific means is deliverance. To enjoy the taste of ecstasies, concentrations and contemplations without salvific means is a bodhisattva's bondage. Conversely, to enjoy the taste of ecstasies and contemplations with recourse to salvific means is deliverance.'<sup>60</sup> The meaning of this is that Buddhist practice can be either retrogressive or helpful depending on the status accorded to it and how it is used. The 'salvific means' (Lamotte's 'moyens salvifiques') referred to here are not other than the practices in question, and the phrase 'with the aid of' may be redundant, strictly speaking, because it suggests that there are some other unspecified means to go with the practices. The import is that one has to treat the practices and activities as 'skilful means', that is, one has to continue to make use of them while simultaneously not being greedily attached to them. Not to be attached to techniques of spiritual training is quite hard for would-be saints who seriously invest in them. Kumārijīva's phrase 'as a skilful means' brings out the meaning clearly, as one would expect, although he only has two half-sayings. Simply to try to get out of the world is bondage, but to immerse oneself in it as an exercise in skilful means brings deliverance.

The passage linking insight and means, which may now be brought forward, is set out in similar parallel statements.

(i) 'Again, insight without skilful means is bondage, but insight with skilful means is release.'<sup>61</sup>

(ii) 'Skilful means without insight is bondage, but skilful means with insight is release.'<sup>62</sup>

These four possibilities are then explicated in more detail as follows:

(i) 'What does it mean to say that insight without skilful means is bondage? It means that a bodhisattva disciplines himself in the teachings of emptiness, no marks and no action, decks out a buddha-land and brings on the development of living beings, but all the time has a mind full of clinging views. This is called the bondage of insight without skilful means.'<sup>63</sup>

The 'clinging views' referred to here are not perhaps as deplorable as they might at first sound. They are after all a form of love, clinging views such as may be connected with compassion, indeed 'great compassion', towards living beings.<sup>64</sup> In spite of the nobility of intention, however, the insight which informs such compassion may fall short of full insight or true insight precisely because of the compassionate involvement, if skilful means is lacking. Skilful means is required to achieve both thinking it important to save living beings while at the same time not looking at ordinary life with disfavour. The association of 'skill' is almost more important in Kumārajīva's concept of *fang-pien* here than is the notion of 'means'.<sup>65</sup>

The second of the various possibilities is explained as follows:

(ii) 'What does it mean to say that insight with skilful means is release? It means that a bodhisattva disciplines himself in the teachings of emptiness, no marks, and no action, and without weariness or repugnance, and then decks out a buddha-land and brings on the development of living beings without having a mind full of clinging views. This is called release through insight with means.'<sup>66</sup>

In this case the bodhisattva does all that he is supposed to do but without being attached to the matter. He is skilfully able to do it without particularly minding. He is not upset by emptiness; nor does he get ensnared by his own compassionate works.

The passage continues by commenting on the difference made by the absence or presence of insight, as follows:

(iii) 'What is meant by saying that skilful means without insight is bondage? It means that a bodhisattva plants many roots of virtue but persists in greed, anger, wrong views and all sorts of passions. This is called the bondage of skilful means without insight.'<sup>67</sup>

(iv) 'What is meant by saying that skilful means with insight is release? It means that he withdraws from greed, anger, wrong views and all sorts of passions, and plants many roots of virtue, which he turns over to supreme perfect enlightenment. This is called release through skilful means with insight.'<sup>68</sup>

Here the term skilful means seems to refer rather generally to the bodhisattva's practice. The bodhisattva begins to do what he is supposed to do, but without insight he cannot achieve the penetration into his own attitudes and activities which leads to release from them. In this case his skilful means does not have its true value, and he remains floundering in the world of discriminated objectives. At this level it is quite understandable that various kinds of emotional attachment continue to arise. Only through insight can he dedicate his activities to enlightenment.

The precise relationship between the terms 'insight' and 'skilful means' and the factors associated with them is not spelled out in great detail in the text. The main stress is simply on the need for both of them to be present in the bodhisattva's practice. Indeed the lack of either one has a similar effect, because if there is no insight the problem is a mind full of clinging views, while if there is no 'skilful means' the problem is entanglement in greed, anger, wrong views and passions. 'Skilful means' itself sometimes suggests the various forms of a bodhisattva's activity which may, or may not, turn out to be controlled by full insight and lead into 'supreme perfect enlightenment'.<sup>69</sup> Thus it is that insight, the recognition of emptiness and equality, is the key without which skilful means just goes astray or gets stuck at an inappropriate point. Sometimes, on the other hand, it is skilful means which represents the last subtle twist in the bodhisattva's own understanding of himself; for, given his recognition of true reality and given his ready acceptance of a bodhisattva's compassionate way of life, it remains necessary for him not to be taken in by all this as a view of the world and a life-style, so to speak, in which he might settle. Thus it is scarcely possible to say that one is more important than the other, or somehow prior to the other, and indeed the very search for a conclusion like this would betray an inappropriate desire for a universal last term or basic principle such as this text does not offer. All one can say is that the two are most intimately related.

A clearer differentiation appears in the remaining parallel sentences on the subject, where 'insight' has the meaning of a penetrative if static analysis, while 'means' has the meaning of well directed action.

(i) 'Yet again, seeing the body in terms of impermanence, suffering, emptiness and non-self, this is called insight.'<sup>70</sup>

(ii) 'To stay in birth-and-death even though the body is sick, bringing benefit to all and not getting disgusted or tired, this is called means.'<sup>71</sup>

(iii) 'Yet again, when seeing the body, to see that the body is never without sickness, and that sickness is never without the body, to see that the sickness is the body and that there is no renovation and no passing away, this is called insight.'<sup>72</sup>

(iv) 'To recognise that the body is sick and yet not to enter eternal cessation, this is called means.'<sup>73</sup>

These quotations bring out clearly the characteristic direction of a bodhisattva who, though he sees through the world and is not attached to

it, nevertheless is turned towards it and not away from it. This is not so heroic as it sometimes is presented. In terms of the emptiness and equality of the dharmas there could be no individual cessation while the rest of the world burns on. As Vimalakīrti told Maitreya, when one bodhisattva attains the supreme goal, so do all sentient beings. But it is easy to find oneself bound through developing insight without skilful means. It is the dynamic, free balance which requires skill.

The discourse by Vimalakīrti goes on to describe at further length the paradoxical character of the bodhisattva's course, freely moving in the world of life-and-death and in the discipline of Buddhism, while not being bound by any of it. He is conformed to the ultimate purity of all dharmas, and at the same time he is conformed to what is appropriate and manifests his body in the world. Finally the bodhisattva is called upon 'to gain the Buddha-way, to turn the wheel of Dharma, to enter nirvana, and *still* not to discard the way of a bodhisattva.'<sup>74</sup> Admittedly there are no italics in the original text, but it does seem rather different from the commonly met idea that a bodhisattva 'postpones' his nirvana! Vimalakīrti is indeed hard to pin down. This is because every form of religious language, when conceived in terms of skilful means, is first allusive and then disposable. This applies to 'teaching Buddhism', that is 'turning the wheel of Dharma', and it even applies to 'entering nirvana' as observed before in The Lotus Sutra. In short it applies not merely to the preliminary suggestions of the religious system, but above all to its fundamental assumptions and final terms.

### Endnotes

1 T475. Apart from the text itself, reference has been made to the following translations: Idzumi Hōkei's English translation in *The Eastern Buddhist*, serially in Vols. II-IV, 1922-1924; Jakob Fischer and Yokota Takezo, *Das Sūtra Vimalakīrti (Das Sūtra über die Erlösung)*, Hokuseidō Press, Tokyo 1944; Étienne Lamotte, *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśā)*, Louvain 1962 (translated from a Tibetan version, not from T475); Charles Luk, *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sutra*, Berkeley California 1972; Fukaura Masabumi's Japanese translation in the *Kokuyaku Issaikyō, Kyōshūbu VI*, Tokyo 1933 (国譯一切經・經集部六); Hashimoto Hōkei 橋本芳契, into Japanese from three parallel Chinese versions including Kumārajīva's, in *Yuimakyō no Shisōteki Kenkyū 維摩經の思想的研究*, Kyōto 1967; and finally a draft English translation in typescript by R. H. Robinson. Quotations given below are not dependent on any one of the above, for none seemed to be exclusively appropriate, but advice has been drawn from all to a greater or lesser extent. It is perhaps of interest that a brief outline of the sutra was given by D. T. Suzuki, with the words that 'it expounds the fundamental teachings not only of Zen but of Buddhism generally', in *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*. (The Ataka Buddhist Library IX), Kyoto 1938, pp. 175ff. The influence of the sutra in Japan is partly due to the fact that it is one of the three sutras on which Prince Shōtoku (seventh century statesman and patron of Buddhism) is supposed to have written commentaries. On the influence of the sutra in China see P. Demiéville's appendix 'Vimalakīrti en Chine' in Lamotte's *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*.

2 Lamotte, *op. cit.* p. 84. 'Mais sa présence ici-bas n'était qu'un artifice salvifique (*upāya*) pour convertir les êtres à la loi du Buddha et aux doctrines du Grand Véhicule. Théoriquement, il ne croyait ni aux êtres ni aux choses; pratiquement, il travaillait au bien

et au bonheur de toutes les créatures. De là ses actes contradictoires, relevant à la fois de la sagesse (*prajñā*) et de la grande compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), qui le font apparaître tour à tour comme un sceptique et comme un apôtre.’

- 3 T XIV 554b 諸佛方便不可思議。
- 4 T XIV 554c 釋迦牟尼佛乃能於此善行言便。
- 5 T XIV 556c 若聞如是等經。信解受持讀誦。以方便力為諸眾生分別解說顯示分明。守護法故。是名法之供養。 (‘Celebration’, i.e. in the sense of a religious offering or ritual reverence.)
- 6 T XIV 539a. Lamotte translates the Tibetan as ‘L’inconcevable habileté salvifique’, *op. cit.* p. 126, cf. the phrase 方便不可思議, in note 3 above. Cf. also the chapter title 顯不思議方便善巧品, T XIV 560c in the later translation by Hsüan Tsang (T474). The oldest Chinese version does not contain this idea, cf. T XIV 520c. Cf. also the tenth occurrence of *fang-pien* in the Śūramgamasamādhi-sūtra in Appendix F below.
- 7 T XIV 539a 入深法門善於智度。通達方便大願成就。明了眾生心之所趣。又能分別諸根利鈍。
- 8 T XIV 539a 欲度人故以善方便居毘耶離 The expression 善方便, unusual for Kumārajīva, presumably reflects an original *upāyakaṣālya*, cf. Lamotte *op. cit.* p. 127, but as it stands of course it can be taken simply as ‘good means’, or if we keep to our standard ‘skilful means’ for Kumārajīva’s *fang-pien*, then ‘good skilful means’. For Kumārajīva’s normal usage see the two immediately subsequent cases of the term, 以方便 T XIV 539b, and that quoted in the next note.
- 9 T XIV 539b 以如是等無量方便饒益眾生。
- 10 T XIV 539a 資財無量攝諸貧民。奉戒清淨攝諸毀禁。以忍調行攝諸恚怒。以大精進攝諸懈怠。一心禪寂攝諸亂意。以決定慧攝諸無智。
- 11 T XIV 537a 布施持戒忍辱精進禪定智慧。及方便力無不具足。 The formulation illustrates how *fang-pien* is appended to the initial unpunctuated list. The Tibetan version raises the number of perfections to ten, cf. Lamotte, *op. cit.* p. 99, an indication of relative lateness. Cf. also Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1932, p. 248, where he says that *upāya-kauśalya* was ‘subsequently raised to the rank of a *pāramitā*; but one could also see this as a demotion to being a mere item in a list. Dayal’s whole treatment of the concept is singularly disappointing, for he sees it as being mainly about tricks and frauds for propaganda. On the other hand he also includes a catalogue of definitions for the *saṅgraha-vastus* (kindlinesses which help to convert people), the *pratisamvids* (different kinds of knowledge of phenomena relating to the expression of Buddhist teaching) and *dhāraṇīs* (spells for protection), pp. 251ff. These are all rather loosely connected with skilful means in the general sense that they are aspects of a bodhisattva’s relations to others, and the references are scattered through a much wider range of texts than those considered here.
- 12 T XIV 539a 雖獲俗利不以喜悅。
- 13 T XIV 539b.
- 14 T XIV 539a 雖明世典常樂佛法。
- 15 This point is generally recognised. Cf. especially Demiéville’s piece mentioned in note 1 above. Kenneth Ch’an has summed it up well: ‘Incidentally, the layman Vimalakīrti is described in such a manner that he might easily be taken as a perfect Confucian gentleman, being pure in self-discipline, obedient to all the precepts . . . Such a way of life could indeed be a model for the cultivated conservative Chinese scholar and gentleman.’ *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey*, Princeton 1964, pp. 208f.
- 16 T XIV 539a 受諸異道不毀正信。
- 17 T XIV 539a 入講論處導以大乘。
- 18 Cf. Lamotte’s discussion of *buddha-kṣetra*, *op. cit.* pp. 395–404.
- 19 T XIV 538b 方便是菩薩淨土。菩薩成佛時於一切法方便無礙眾生來生其國。
- 20 T XIV 538c 隨其心淨則佛土淨 Cf. Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, Columbia University Press 1967, pp. 156 ff.
- 21 T XIV 550a 雖知諸佛國 及與眾生空 而常修淨土 教化於群生 The nearest to a complete identification is found in Chapter XI when the earth is suddenly made to appear most

magnificent and the assembled disciples to appear golden in colour. The dictum quoted earlier that ‘The skilful means of the buddhas are inconceivable’ is followed by the sentence, ‘In order to bring across living beings, they display differences in buddha-countries in accordance with what is appropriate’, T VIII 554b 爲度衆生故隨其所應現佛國異。Literally, it is the differences which are displayed, but the overall association of ideas certainly suggests that the very appearance of the buddha-country itself depends upon the skilful means of the buddha responsible for it. The same chapter gives an account of a miraculous perfume produced by Vimalakīrti by his ‘power of supernatural proficiency’ 神通之力 T VIII 554a. By such power he also brought the whole assembly with their ‘lion-thrones’ into the Buddha’s presence, T VIII 553b. Clearly the exercise of such supernatural power is to be thought of in the general context of skilful means, and Chapter XI is an example of the overall association of the two. However reference to such supernatural power of the bodhisattvas is not sufficient to indicate the meaning of skilful means. Conversely however, one might say that in so far as supernatural power is used as a mode of indicating Buddhist meaning it is to be understood as skilful means just as other forms of Buddhist communication are, such as the four noble truths.

- 22 T XIV 549c 智度菩薩母 方便以爲父 一切衆導師 無不由是生 Note that the male-female imagery plays only a slight role in the texts studied, although in later centuries it became somewhat more important without adding much to the basic concept of skilful means. The main points conveyed are the complementariness of insight and means, and the slight suggestion of an active role implied for ‘skilful means’ by its association with the male side. Cf. also Chapter Six, note 10.
- 23 T XIV 550b 隨彼之所須 得入於佛道 以善方便力 皆能給足之 如是道無量 所行無有涯 智慧無邊際 度脫無數眾
- 24 T XIV 547a 是名住不可思議解脫菩薩智慧方便之門。
- 25 T XIV 547a 以方便力教化衆生現作魔王。…以方便力而往試之令其堅固。‘By their power of skilful means, for the salvific instruction of the living, they appear as Māra-kings. . . . By their power of skilful means they go to test them to make them steadfast.’
- 26 T XIV 539b 其以方便現身有病。
- 27 T XIV 539b 佛身. This sutra predates a clear formation of the ‘*trikāya*’ doctrine, which contrary to the impression given by many textbooks is not typical of the early phase of Mahayana Buddhism.
- 28 T XIV 539c 佛身者即法身也。
- 29 These are all rehearsed itemised lists, and one of the items listed is, incidentally, skilful means. Since Vimalakīrti’s illness has just been prominently described as a skilful means, one implication may be that Vimalakīrti is giving rise to the Dharma-body or Buddha-body through his feigned illness.
- 30 T XIV 539c 欲得佛身斷一切衆生病者。當發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。
- 31 T XIV 539c 爲諸問疾者如應說法。
- 32 *Op. cit.*, see note 1 above.
- 33 T XIV 542a 即聞空中聲曰。The 空 is natural for ‘sky’ but it also means void(ness), i.e. *śūnyatā*.
- 34 T XXV 122b 此雖佛勅是爲方便。
- 35 T XIV 539c 不必是坐爲宴坐也。夫宴坐者。不於三界現身意。是爲宴坐。不起滅定而現諸威儀。是爲宴坐。不捨道法而現凡夫事。
- 36 T XIV 540b 若須菩提不見佛不聞法。
- 37 T XIV 540c 入諸邪見不到彼岸。This whole context supports the readiness of a bodhisattva to enter an area of doctrinal dubiety, referred to earlier.
- 38 T XIV 542b 諸佛知一切衆生畢竟寂滅即涅槃相不復更滅 Cf. the teaching of The Lotus Sutra that all dharmas are nirvanic from the beginning, Chapter Two above, note 47.
- 39 T XIV 544a 難爲訓對。
- 40 T XIV 544b 其慧方便皆已得度。.
- 41 T XIV 544b 善來文殊師利。不來相而來。不見相而見。
- 42 T XIV 544b 是疾何所因起。菩薩病者以大悲起。
- 43 T XIV 544b 菩薩爲衆生故入生死。

- 44 T XIV 544b 其子得病父母亦病。若子病愈父母亦愈。菩薩如是。於諸衆生愛之若子。衆生病則菩薩病。衆生病愈菩薩亦愈。The motif of father and son is also used in The Lotus Sutra, both as a simile and as a direct metaphor. It should be clearly understood that it is supposed to convey an understanding of the *relationship* between a bodhisattva (or buddha) and the world of living beings, but that it has no further implications of an ontological kind such as are often thought to be entailed by a theistic position.
- 45 T XIV 544c 爲何等相…我病無形不可見 etc.
- 46 I.e. dharmas, 法 (Ch. *fa*, J. *hō*).
- 47 T XIV 545a 又此法者各不相知。
- 48 T XIV 545a 起時不言我起。滅時不言我滅。
- 49 Cf. Th. Stcherbatsky's *The Central Conception of Buddhism*, London 1923, and *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, Leningrad 1927 and The Hague 1965, and various literature cited in Chapter Six below.
- 50 T XIV 545a 顛倒·我·二法。‘Dualism’: more literally, ‘dual dharmas’; it is sometimes argued that words ending in ‘ism’ are a new-fangled western invention, but there seems little doubt that what is meant here is the practice of thinking dualistically, for which the best brief English term is dualism.
- 51 T XIV 545a 離二法…不念內外諸法…行於平等。On the latter expression note that 行 is literally ‘proceeding’ or ‘coursing’ as bodhisattvas ‘course’ in the world.
- 52 T XIV 545a 云何平等…爲我等涅槃等…我及涅槃此二皆空…無決定性。
- 53 T XIV 545a 但以名字故空。
- 54 T XIV 545a 得是平等無有餘病。
- 55 T XIV 545a 唯有空病。
- 56 T XIV 545a 空病亦空。
- 57 T XIV 545a 如我此病非真非有。衆生病亦非真非有。
- 58 T XIV 545a 作是觀時。於諸衆生若起愛見大悲。即應捨離。
- 59 T XIV 545b 貪著禪味是菩薩縛。以方便生是菩薩解。
- 60 Lamotte, *op. cit.* p. 233, ‘Pour le Bodhisattva, se libérer de l’existence (*bhavamukti-pari-graha*) à l’exclusion des moyens salvifiques (*upāya*), c’est un lien. An contraire, pénétrer dans le monde de l’existence (*bhavaṅgaṭpraveśa*) à l’aide des moyens salvifiques, c’est une délivrance. Pour le Bodhisattva, goûter la saveur (*rasāśvādāna*) des extases (*dhyāna*), . . . des concentrations (*samādhi*) et des recueilements (*samāpatti*) en l’absence de moyens salvifiques, c’est un lien. Au contraire goûter la saveur des extases (*dhyāna*) et des concentrations (*samāpatti*) en recourant aux moyens salvifiques, c’est une délivrance.’
- 61 T XIV 545b 又無方便慧縛。有方便慧解。Fang-pien is translated throughout this section as ‘skilful means’, as argued for in Chapter One above, but of course one could argue simply for ‘means’ if a close literal accuracy were preferred to the overall usage and meaning in Kumārajīva’s versions. Similarly insight is given for 慧, while others might prefer ‘wisdom’.
- 62 T XIV 545b 無慧方便縛。有慧方便解。
- 63 T XIV 545b 何謂無方便慧縛。謂菩薩以愛見心。莊嚴佛土成就衆生。於空無相無作法中而自調伏。是名無方便慧縛。According to Lamotte the Tibetan version runs very differently, and he does not remark on this discrepancy. It runs: ‘Quand le Bodhisattva se dompte lui-même (*ātmanam niyamati*) par la pratique de la vacuité (*śūnyatā*), du sans-caractère (*ānimitta*) et de la non-prise en considération (*apraṇihita*), mais s’abstient (d’orner son corps) par les marques physiques primaires et secondaires (*lakṣaṇānuvyanjana*), d’orner son champ de Buddha (*buddha-kṣetrālaṅkāra*) et de faire mûrir les êtres (*sattvapariṭpācana*), c’est une sagesse non-assumée par les moyens salvifiques et c’est un lien.’ Pp. 233f. There is nothing in Kumārajīva’s version for the ‘s’abstient’ and no negative of any kind, so that the whole drift is different. The Tibetan version just seems to mean that the bodhisattva trains himself but does not go on to act for the salvation of others at all. Kumārajīva’s version by contrast means that a bodhisattva starts doing the things which he is supposed to do, training in emptiness and bringing on other beings, but gets tangled up in them because of his clinging views. In other words he fails to bring across living beings while realising that there are no living beings brought across. The pedestrian Tibetan version is probably secondary.

- 64 For 愛見 cf. note 58 above, 愛見大悲。Ota defines 愛見 as ‘loving people in an attached way’, *Bukkyō Daijiten, ad loc.*
- 65 So strong is this implication that one might expect the original Sanskrit to have been *upāyakauśalya* and not just *upāya*. There is in fact no direct evidence for the Sanskrit text at this point, although there is evidence for *upāya* alone in the opening clause quoted earlier, in the 1st *Bhāvanakrāma*, see Lamotte, p. 233, note 25. The later Chinese version has the idea of skill throughout this section by using the term 巧方便, see T XIV 569a–b.
- 66 T XIV 545b 何謂有方便慧解。謂不以愛見心莊嚴佛土成就眾生。於空無相無作法中。以自調伏而不疲厭。是名有方便慧解。Again the Tibetan version is different, cf. Lamotte *ad loc.*, and indeed comparisons with the other Chinese versions do not produce any consistency, cf. T XIV 526b and 569a. Fukaura, *op. cit.* p. 350, took the negative 不 with the whole of 以愛見心莊嚴佛土成就眾生. This is grammatically not at fault, but the original is ambiguous and Hashimoto is surely right to read, from Kumārajīva, 愛見心を以てせず. ‘Not (doing those things) with a mind full of clinging views’, if it is to be contrasted with the previous paragraph must mean, not just failing to do what bodhisattvas do, but rather *doing* all those things without getting tangled up in them through having a mind full of clinging views. ‘Skilful means’ and ‘release’ is all about doing what is to be done without getting stuck in it.
- 67 T XIV 545b 何謂無慧方便縛。謂菩薩住貪欲瞋恚邪見等諸煩惱。而植衆德本。是名無慧方便縛。
- 68 T XIV 545b 何謂有慧方便解。謂離諸貪欲瞋恚邪見等諸煩惱。而植衆德本。迴向阿耨多羅三藐三提。是名有慧方便解。
- 69 *Anuttara samyak sambodhi*, a standard technical phrase which Kumārajīva always keeps in transliteration.
- 70 T XIV 545b 又復觀身無常若空非我。是名爲慧。
- 71 T XIV 545b 雖身有疾常在生死。饒益一切而不厭倦。是名方便。
- 72 T XIV 545b 又復觀身不離病病不離身。是病是身非新非故。是名爲慧。
- 73 T XIV 545b 設身有疾而不永滅是名方便。
- 74 T XIV 545c 雖得佛道轉于法輪入涅槃而不捨於菩薩之道。是菩薩行。In full, ‘Even though gaining the Buddha-way, turning the wheel of Dharma and entering nirvana, he does not discard the bodhisattva way. This is the bodhisattva’s practice.’

## 6 SKILFUL MEANS IN THE PERFECTION OF INSIGHT LITERATURE

### *Insight and skilful means*

It is sometimes assumed that The Perfection of Insight sutras are either historically or doctrinally prior to The Lotus Sutra or The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, as if the latter were more popular offshoots off the main tree. Yet when all is said and done there is no clear knowledge about the dating of these early Mahayana sutras, so that precise historical relationships cannot be determined. They are all composite, and even rough attempts at dating consist mainly in pushing back presumed phases of growth into a plausible distance from the earliest Chinese versions. Above all, even though it may be possible to discern the main outlines of development within a single corpus, it really seems to be impossible to correlate with any sureness the presumed developmental phases of two or three sutras with each other. As to the contents, one party might take the more 'philosophical' parts to be the most fundamental, while another might take a system such as Chih-I's to show the supremacy of The Lotus Sutra. Yet the non-partisan observer finds difficulty in driving a wedge of any strength between the various materials to be considered. They are all neither other than nor less than thoroughly Mahayanist. There are certain differences of emphasis. It may fairly be said that The Lotus Sutra is more attentive to the role of the Buddha and the right way of understanding his appearance, his teaching and his nirvana. The Teaching of Vimalakīrti is more concerned with the polemics between the bodhisattva Vimalakīrti himself and narrower interpreters of Buddhism. The Perfection of Insight Sutras are mainly about bodhisattvas in general and their practice of the qualities which define them. Nevertheless all these writings have many features in common, including some important ones. In spite of various secondary elements all clearly contain the Mahayana teaching of voidness (Ch. *kung*, Skt. *śūnyatā*), all contain a radical critique of the received Buddhist tradition, and all take the concept of skilful means as a key to understanding the status or role of particular ideas or practices.

The literature of the 'perfection of insight' (Skt. *prajñā-pāramitā*) consists of various sutras which are more or less repetitious of each other, and which are mainly known to the English speaking world through the translations from Sanskrit made by Edward Conze.<sup>1</sup> As to the East Asian tradition, the Chinese versions by Kumārajīva are again of major, though not exclusive, importance. They include T223 and T227, referred to above in Chapter One, and consisting of 90 and 29 chapters respectively. The shorter of the two may be taken as a more or less standard form of the sutra, corresponding approximately to what is extant in Sanskrit as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*

*Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra*, so that for general context the reader may refer to Conze's translation of the latter.<sup>2</sup> Conze's text in thirty two chapters is based on mediaeval manuscripts which apparently have more in common with later Tibetan and Chinese versions than with Kumārajīva's earlier Chinese version.<sup>3</sup> If anything the term *upāya-kauśalya* ('skill in means') seems to have come to be used more frequently than when Kumārijīva translated what he had before him. Occurrences of the term *fang-pien* ('skilful means') have also been examined in T223 and some cases are adduced below. However T223 is a rambling and repetitive text and the usage does not importantly diverge from that of the shorter T227. In the two sutras together there is a total of about three hundred cases of the term, no mean score, and this means that there is an average of more than one case per printed page in the form in which they appear in the Taishō Tripitaka. Naturally some of the occurrences are grouped together in a particular context, and it is mainly such passages from T227 which form the basis for the discussion below.

The longer sutra is contained, by way of repetition, in a massive commentary entitled 'Treatise on the Great Perfection of Insight' (T1509, see Appendix A). This very long work is ascribed to Nāgārjuna, conceivably by a pious fiction, and it was translated by Kumārajīva between the years 403 and 405.<sup>4</sup> This was quite a feat, as may be illustrated from the fact that even Étienne Lamotte's massive three-volume translation into French, in over 1700 pages, covers less than one third of the original.<sup>5</sup> As a commentary it is still drawn upon by Japanese exegetes dealing with The Perfection of Insight sutras. However since it is itself by no stretch of the imagination a popular work it has not been exhaustively examined for occurrences of the term *fang-pien*. The concept of *fang-pien* in T223 and indeed T1509 has already been discussed in a brief and useful Japanese article by F. Masuda, but the present account will be seen to diverge somewhat from his argument.<sup>6</sup>

If The Perfection of Insight sutras themselves had not taken *prajñā* (Ch. *po-jo*, J. *hannya*)<sup>7</sup> for their titles, one might almost dare to rename them 'the perfection of insight and skilful means literature', so often does one find within them that these two terms are inseparably associated. This is not just a lexicographical fortuity, but arises from the key role assigned to 'skilful means' as a necessary complement to 'insight' along the lines already observed above in The Teaching of Vimalakīrti.

Similes in Chapter XIV of the smaller sutra stress this combination as being the key characteristic of a bodhisattva who wishes not to fall to the level of mere elementary discipleship.<sup>8</sup> Unless he is sustained by '*prajñā-pāramitā* skilful means'<sup>9</sup> he will surely come to grief, like a badly fired waterjar which will not carry water, or like a neglected sea-vessel which will not safely voyage. Similarly an old man aged one hundred and twenty, who is also ill, could not walk far down the road unless he were sustained by two healthy fellows. The two turn out to be none other than perfect insight and skilful means.<sup>10</sup>

There are cases where the pair of qualities is brought in as a synonym for the perfection of insight alone. Thus one who perfects insight is said to surpass all the saints, from those who definitely enter the path ('stream-winners'<sup>11</sup>) to those who individually win enlightenment (*pratyekabuddhas*, referred to earlier); while at the same time 'he also surpasses bodhisattvas who practice the perfection of giving but are without *prajñā-pāramitā* and have no skilful means.'<sup>12</sup> The same argument is given for the remaining four perfections of a bodhisattva: proper conduct, patience, vigour and contemplation.<sup>13</sup> In this way skilful means shares the controlling function of insight with respect to a bodhisattva's practice. The whole passage referred to here was further elaborated in the Sanskrit text translated by Conze, with several repetitions of the key pair of 'perfect wisdom and skill in means'.<sup>14</sup> A little later in Kumārajīva's version skilful means is declared to be that by which a bodhisattva can avoid being reborn among 'the long-lived gods', (which may sound quite pleasant but represents continued bondage in *samsāra*).<sup>15</sup> If we ask what this skilful means is, then the answer comes that 'it arises from the perfection of insight', so that 'even though he can enter *dhyāna* he is not reborn in terms of *dhyāna*'.<sup>16</sup> In sum, skilful means is the crucial concomitant of insight properly understood, as a result of which the bodhisattva is able to do what he is expected to do without getting caught out by it.

Other things also depend on this pair of qualities. The bodhisattva Sadaparudita in Chapter XXVII displays a remarkable earnestness by piercing his own arm and thigh as a preliminary to giving his present body for a sacrifice. The merit from this act will provide for him, in a future life, to be trained in perfect insight and skilful means, and following on from insight and means he anticipates attaining 'supreme perfect enlightenment, a gold-coloured body, the thirty-two marks, continuous and unlimited radiance, great compassion and great mercy, great rejoicing and great renunciation, the ten powers, the five fearlessnesses and four unobstructed knowledges, the eighteen uniquely attained dharmas, six supernormal powers, etc. etc.'<sup>17</sup> This list includes attributes of an advanced bodhisattva, and also characteristics of a 'great man' (Skt. *mahāpuruṣa*), that is, of a buddha, namely the gold-coloured body, the thirty-two marks and unlimited radiance. This body of blissful, compelling radiance, later organised under the much misunderstood 'three-body' doctrine, arises out of a bodhisattva's paradoxical combination of attainment and non-departure, based on insight and means.<sup>18</sup>

It is beyond argument that insight and skilful means are most intimately related, and this is stressed by Masuda Hideo in the article referred to earlier. He also argued however for a similarly close connection between skilful means and 'compassion', and it must be observed that this latter link is less evident if the matter is pursued strictly, for the term 'compassion' does not itself appear in any of the five quotations which he then adduced.<sup>19</sup> There are indeed passages *expressive* of compassion, such as 'By the power of his skilful means he proclaims the Dharma and he releases living beings

by the teaching of the three vehicles . . . by his power of skilful means he severs the attachments of living beings and peacefully establishes them.'<sup>20</sup> We are left therefore with the rather general point that 'skilful means' is used with respect to the work of saving and converting others and this is linked with the idea of 'great compassion'. The connection does not seem to be a close phraseological one such as is found in dozens of cases for skilful means and insight.<sup>21</sup> Masuda brings in the idea of compassion so that he can go on to argue that 'skilful means' has two meanings, one representing the movement from the ordinary world to 'true voidness' or 'true suchness',<sup>22</sup> and the other the movement from suchness to living beings, for their salvation. This is indeed a convenient way of beginning to talk about skilful means and one which is often found in brief explanations. Fortunately Masuda goes on to say that these two are to be conceived in a unitary way. His best illustration is from *The Treatise on the Perfection of Insight*: 'Skilful means is to see that there are ultimately no dharmas and no living beings, while saving living beings.'<sup>23</sup> He also adduces a passage in this context which does bring in the idea of compassion explicitly: 'Skilful means involves knowing that all dharmas are void because of thoroughly completing the perfection of insight, and taking pity on living beings because of great compassion. By the power of skilful means no deep attachment arises with respect to these two dharmas. Even though he knows that all dharmas are void, because of the power of skilful means he does not abandon living beings. Even though he does not abandon living beings he knows that all dharmas are in reality void.'<sup>24</sup> The terminology seems to overlap somewhat but that is because the argument moves forward. At first the paired dharmas are voidness and compassion, and skilful means is the key to their correlation without attachment to either. Then the focus of attention shifts precisely to the combining role of skilful means. Skilful means is therefore not just a synonym for a compassionate attitude towards the living. It refers rather to ability, or adeptness, in operating contradictory lines of thought on the basis of a unified intention. Although dharmas are void the bodhisattva does not abandon the living, and although he does not abandon the living he knows that dharmas are void.

This stress on the close association of insight and skilful means is of great importance over against popular conceptions of the idea as being one of mere expediency, as Masuda and other Japanese exegetes point out (cf. also Chapter Eight below). Nor would it be right to argue simplistically that the sutras now being considered have some kind of pure interest in insight or 'wisdom' for the specialised adept, while others such as *The Lotus Sutra* deal with the popular expedients of Mahayana Buddhism. For one thing, as has been seen earlier, *The Lotus Sutra* has a deeply unsettling effect on the central concepts of Buddhism, an effect brought about entirely because of the concepts of voidness and skilful means. *The Perfection of Insight* sutras on the other hand precisely do not allow individualistic navel-watching. The bodhisattva *must* use his skilful means to face both ways at once, and he must not get entangled in a particularist attention to insight or voidness

as if it were something different from everything else. Indeed his power of skilful means is what enables him to recognise, unflinchingly, the simple equality of voidness and the existence and needs of living beings.

*Skilful means as a way of taking things*

These assertions do not in themselves explain in what way skilful means helps to keep a bodhisattva upright in his path. For that one must look more closely at the argument of the sutra. Above all the point is that by his power of skilful means a bodhisattva is able to avoid making the mistake of ‘practising in characteristics’<sup>25</sup> or signs. This matter arises in the first chapter of the smaller sutra (T227) and though it may sound cryptic it is one of the subjects most frequently discussed when the term ‘skilful means’ is used.

The matter may be introduced by reference to the five constituents of empirical individuals, the first of which is form. ‘If a bodhisattva practises in terms of form he is practising with respect to a characteristic of things. If he practises in terms of the arising of form he is practising with respect to a characteristic. If he practises in terms of the cessation of form he is practising with respect to a characteristic. If he practises in terms of the abandonment of form he is practising with respect to a characteristic. If he practises in terms of the emptiness of form he is practising with respect to a characteristic. If he thinks “I am performing this practice” then this “practising” is a characteristic.’<sup>26</sup> The same reasoning is then applied to the other four constituents, up to consciousness. It will be observed that reference is made to ‘arising’ and ‘cessation’, which are perhaps the two most fundamental categories in terms of which Buddhists understand the phenomenal world, then to ‘abandonment’ which is the spiritual value most evidently counterbalancing the problem of ‘attachment’, then to ‘emptiness’ which is the most famous badge of perfection of insight thinking, and then to the very thought of one’s practising a practice at all. Finally the matter is related to *prajñā-pāramitā* and skilful means: ‘If he has the idea that one who practises like this is practising *prajñā-pāramitā*, then this practising is at the level of characteristics. One should know this bodhisattva to be one not yet well acquainted with skilful means.’<sup>27</sup>

The meaning of this is that the Buddhist analysis of experience into its various factors is all very well, but that the spiritual discipline of internalising this analysis, of making it one’s own, can alas go quite astray. The mistake is to get stuck in a perpetual review of the various characteristics of experience, even including the difficult and necessary ones such as voidness. Self-consciously rehearsing these is simply to walk about on the surface of the matter. It might seem important to maintain most carefully ideas like the five constituents of individual experience (Skt. *skandhas*) in order to ward off the thought of a permanent soul, and then indeed to entertain the idea of the voidness of these five constituents, from form to consciousness, as announced most famously in The Heart Sutra. What is

required above all however is to make use of some such account of things while not settling in it, not striving to maintain it and not rehearsing it. Even emptiness can come to be taken as a 'characteristic'. What is required is that the bodhisattva knows the emptiness of form while contemporaneously freeing himself from the concept which induces this knowledge. This demands the application of skilful means. That is to say, truly practising the perfection of insight demands knowing characteristics as means. Otherwise, however systematically they are pursued, the practising remains at the level of mere characteristics without turning them to spiritual advantage.

The same principle is expounded with respect to merit, for the correct transformation of merit into full enlightenment requires both the recognition of a pattern of merit and freedom from seeing it in terms of characteristics. It requires in fact the combination known as '*prajñā-pāramitā* - skilful means'.<sup>28</sup> The argument is rather spread out, but in summary it means that merit is no longer to be weighed in terms of the particular actions which originally seemed to be its justification. All meritorious actions are, so to speak, equidistant from enlightenment. When this recognition is internalised through the practice of insight and skilful means it is termed 'the great transformation', thus: 'This transformation achieved by a bodhisattva is called the great transformation; because of skilful means it outweighs the merit which can be achieved by a bodhisattva's cultivation of giving (i.e. the first perfection); why? because this transformation achieved by a bodhisattva is what is ensured by *prajñā-pāramitā*.'<sup>29</sup>

All the works of a bodhisattva are to be seen in this same light. The disciple Subhūti points out that if a bodhisattva increases or decreases in the perfections (the six *pāramitās*) he cannot approach supreme enlightenment because he would be thinking in discriminative terms. 'Quite so', replies the Buddha, 'For that which is beyond words there is no increase or decrease. When a bodhisattva who is well versed in skilful means practises the perfection of insight and disciplines himself in the perfection of insight, he does not ask himself whether he is increasing in the perfection of giving or decreasing in it, but thinks "This perfection of giving is but a name".'<sup>30</sup> This applies to the other perfections as well, even including the sixth perfection itself, which has a controlling function with respect to the others. The bodhisattva does not consider whether or not he is increasing in the perfection of insight, for this would be to depend upon its *name* and hence to fall short of it. Rather, if he is skilled in means, he practises it while at the same time recognising its status as mere nomenclature.<sup>31</sup> Thus skilful means is the ability to maintain a correct view of the status and role of religious language.

This is not to be understood as a kind of spiritual farewell, however, for 'The bodhisattva does not learn it by thinking, "I will practice the bodhisattva way and break off all discriminations in this present life". If he breaks off all these discriminations and does not yet entirely attain the buddha way, he will relapse into elementary discipleship. Your reverence! A bodhisattva's

great power of skilful means lies in knowing all these discriminated characteristics while not being attached to non-discrimination.<sup>32</sup>

Continued immersion in the world is the link between the ideal bodhisattva portrayed in these sutras and the picture given in The Lotus Sutra and The Teaching of Vimalakīrti. Sometimes it might seem, as above, that it is his own spiritual welfare which is at stake, and so in a sense it is. It is essential that the bodhisattva is neither trapped nor departs. He enters *ch'an* (Skt. *dhyāna*, J. *zen*) in such a way that he does not get himself reborn in accordance with this practice.<sup>33</sup> That is, he has to practise *ch'an* with skilful means in order not to get reborn among the 'long-lived gods'.<sup>34</sup>

More centrally stated, however, the bodhisattva practises the perfection of insight and sees all the factors of existence as they really are, but without seizing upon this realisation or attainment.<sup>35</sup> The Buddha continues to Subhūti: 'Because this bodhisattva does not abandon the multitude of living beings, he thus conceives his great vow. Subhūti, if the bodhisattva resolves not to abandon the multitude of living beings but to deliver them, entering the gate of deliverance of the *samādhi* of voidness, and the gates of deliverance of the *samādhi* of non-discrimination and non-action, then the bodhisattva will refrain from realising true reality in mid-course. Why? Because the bodhisattva is one who is maintained by skilful means.'<sup>36</sup> The style may be a little repetitive, even liturgical, but this is a clear expression of the ideal bodhisattva. He enters the three 'gates of deliverance' while refusing to leave the multitude of beings behind him. The paradox lies in recognising the voidness of all things, not taking them to be marked out by characterisation or subject to the workings of karma, while at the same time resolving to bring the multitude of living beings through with him. The piece continues: 'Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva desires to enter those deep contemplations, that is, the gate of deliverance of the *samādhi* of voidness and the gates of deliverance of the *samādhi* of non-discrimination and non-action, then the bodhisattva should first think as follows. All living beings have for long been attached to the characteristic of being living beings. They are attached to the idea that there is some existence that they get. When I attain supreme perfect enlightenment I will sever all these views by proclaiming Dharma; and thus I enter the gate of deliverance of the *samādhi* of voidness. Because this bodhisattva is so minded and has prior power of skilful means he does not realise true reality in mid-course, and he does not lose the *samādhi* of merciful compassion, rejoicing and detachment. Why? Because this bodhisattva is accomplished in the power of skilful means.'<sup>37</sup> This theme is repeated with the variation that the multitude of living beings have long been exercising themselves with the characteristic of selfhood.<sup>38</sup> From these passages it may be seen that it is not so much a question of a bodhisattva 'postponing' his attainment of nirvana in the sense of spending extra time in the miscellaneous service of others before proceeding further. The text articulates the matter graphically in saying that he does not realise his goal 'in mid-course', but this image must be rightly understood. Drawing the sentences a little more closely

together one might say that it is even while not relinquishing the living that he recognises the voidness of things. The bodhisattva does not exactly give up his nirvana. He steels himself not to aim for it, as it were, prematurely, as if he could attain it satisfactorily all by himself. When his shot drives home it bears with it the deliverance of all. Skilful means is the right judgement which makes this possible.

### *Mādhyamika connections*

The Perfection of Insight literature has a natural outgrowth in a series of treatises associated with the Mādhyamika school of Nāgārjuna and others.

The Treatise on The Great Perfection of Insight (T1509) has already been referred to because it is a commentary on the sutra. Three other treatises, all translated by Kumārajīva, form the textual basis for the Three Treatise School (Ch. San-lun-tsung, J. Sanron-shū). These are:

The Middle Treatise (T1564),  
 The Twelve Topic Treatise (T1568),  
 and The Hundred Treatise (T1569), (see Appendix A for details).

Of the three the most important is The Middle Treatise, for the simple reason that it contains the famous verses of Nāgārjuna. In this respect The Middle Treatise is parallel to the seventh century commentary by Candrakīrti in Sanskrit (the Prasannapādā), which contains substantially the same verses.<sup>39</sup> The Middle Treatise is therefore a basic source for the thought in terms of which Nāgārjuna, as a historical person, is defined.<sup>40</sup> It is also important for Kumārajīva, who thought of himself as carrying on the Mādhyamika tradition.

It must be admitted forthwith that there is only one occurrence of the term *fang-pien* in The Middle Treatise, and that by contrast with the sutras considered above this represents a very low average in a text which runs to thirty-nine printed pages in the printed Chinese Tripitaka. The single occurrence is not even in the verses themselves but in the commentary. It therefore offers no evidence that Nāgārjuna personally used the term. On the other hand the passage in question brings out very clearly the relationship between the idea of skilful means and Mādhyamika method.

The question put is: 'If the buddhas proclaim neither self nor non-self, if all mental activity goes into extinction, if the route of expression in words is closed, how do they get people to know the true nature of all dharmas?'<sup>41</sup> The answer runs: 'The buddhas have the power of countless skilful means, and the dharmas are indeterminate in nature; so to bring nearer all the living beings, the buddhas sometimes declare the reality of all things and sometimes their unreality, sometimes that things are both real and unreal, and sometimes that they are neither real nor unreal.'<sup>42</sup> Each of these four logical possibilities is considered to be wrong in itself, yet depending on the occasion each one may provide a provisionally true basis for the teaching of release.

Preceding sentences refer in a similarly ambivalent fashion to the teaching of 'self' and 'non-self'. The teaching of non-self is advanced to bring down the determinate view of self, while if a determinate view of non-self were held, the declaration of self would be made to unfix it. A bodhisattva intending to practice perfect insight fails to do so if he asserts the existence of self *and* he fails to do so if he asserts non-self.<sup>43</sup> Thus each of these alternative teachings has a role which is eventually to be superseded. Each is to be maintained by the bodhisattva, as it is by all buddhas, in a manner skilfully adapted to the needs of living beings, yet which betrays no trace of mental clinging. There is an interesting parallel to this in The Lankavatara Sutra, where the teaching of the *tathāgata-garbha*, the 'tathāgata-womb', is described as a skilful means devised because of the way in which the teaching of non-self is liable to be mistakenly received.<sup>44</sup>

It will be seen readily by those familiar with the Mādhyamika method that the role of any of the possible declarations about 'self' or about the 'reality' of things, selected by the buddhas through their power of skilful means, is quite analogous to the role of 'provisional' truth as contrasted with 'absolute' truth. This latter distinction is known within Nāgārjuna's verses themselves, and indeed his use of that distinction may explain why he did not use the term 'skilful means'. The parallelism of thought may be allowed to appear for itself by a brief quotation from the verses of Chapter XXIV in The Middle Treatise.

- (8) 'The buddhas depend on two truths  
When they proclaim the Dharma for living beings.  
Firstly they depend upon worldly truth  
And secondly upon the truth of the supreme principle.
- (9) If a person is not able to know  
The distinction between the two truths,  
Then he cannot know the principle of true reality  
In accordance with the profound Buddha-Dharma.
- (10) If he does not depend upon worldly truth  
He cannot attain the supreme principle.  
If he does not attain the supreme principle  
Then he does not attain nirvana.'<sup>45</sup>

This whole section of the verses is on the subject of the status of the four noble truths of Buddhism, and is a response to the 'Hinayana' criticism that Mahayana Buddhism undermines the 'real' importance of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.<sup>46</sup> Nāgārjuna's reply, apart from criticising the Hinayana position for inherent weaknesses, is to explain the Mahayana view of the nature of Buddhist method. In a sense it *does* undermine concepts such as Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and the four noble truths, if by this is meant that these are not themselves to be thought of as absolutes, immovables, or eternally existents. Positively however these items of Buddhist doctrine all have a provisional role at the worldly level. It would

be quite wrong to think that they are not required, because it is only on the basis of discriminated knowledge that 'the supreme principle' can be conveyed. The dialectic is exactly similar to that between the three 'discriminated' vehicles and the one vehicle or the undivided Dharma, which is explained in The Lotus Sutra. The only difference is that in the latter case it is explained in terms of skilful means. It therefore seems possible to claim a harmony of approach or understanding between the Mādhyamika text and the sutras considered earlier, so that it would be correct to assume an implicit acceptance of 'skilful means thought'.

Of the other two works linked with the Three Treatise School, The Twelve Topic Treatise, which is based on The Middle Treatise, is not particularly important in Japanese Buddhism, nor, according to Robinson, was it much quoted by Chinese writers.<sup>47</sup> It contains three incidental instances of the term *fang-pien* which are listed in the Appendix.

Of greater importance is The Hundred Treatise which Kumārajīva translated twice (in 402 and 404) and which he is said to have studied and recited particularly frequently.<sup>48</sup> The work consists of ten chapters commenting on verses by Aryadeva, the follower of Nāgārjuna. It contains several instances of the term *fang-pien*, including one within the verses themselves.

As early as the first chapter, on 'Dispensing with sin and happiness' there is an interesting point made with respect to what is 'auspicious' and what is 'inauspicious'.<sup>49</sup> Concern with what is auspicious and what is not is severely attacked as heretical. It is only 'foolish people without skilful means', who go about saying that one thing is auspicious and another not.<sup>50</sup> The reason for it is that they desire pleasure. Thus skilful means is identified here with the ability to be detached from whether things turn out gratifyingly or not.

The distinction between blessedness and evil is itself a problem which has to be dealt with. 'Evil can be got rid of by blessedness, but how can blessedness be got rid of?' says the commentary,<sup>51</sup> to which the perhaps rather cryptic answer is 'Marklessness is the supreme.'<sup>52</sup> Fortunately there is an explanation. 'Those who seek happiness will be born in the heavens, while those who seek evil will be born in the hells. That is why non-discriminative insight is the supreme.'<sup>53</sup> Although being born in the heavens might seem preferable to being born in the hells, neither represents the goal. The explanation continues: 'Marklessness means not calling to mind all the characteristics of things. It frees us from all grasping, so our minds are not attached to factors of the past, the future or the present.'<sup>54</sup> This is the standard Mahayana or Mādhyamika form, or rather critique, of dharmatheory, 'factors' here being dharmas.<sup>55</sup> The argument continues: 'Because all dharmas have no own-being, there is nothing on which they depend, and this is called marklessness. Because of this skilful means it is possible to discard happiness.'<sup>56</sup> In this way the insight into marklessness, into the nature of dharmas as being without any permanent characteristic of existence upon which they depend, is itself identified as the skilful means which leads to release.

The other passage of interest comes in Chapter IX, entitled 'Against Permanence'.<sup>57</sup> The line of Aryadeva reads, 'That which functions can be described in terms of: bondage, those who can be bound, and skilful means.'<sup>58</sup> The commentary goes on: 'Bondage refers to the passions and karma, those who can be bound refers to the living beings, and skilful means refers to the holy eightfold path. If the path is maintained and bondage is expounded, the living beings obtain release. Granted nirvana, there is nothing further to these three things which would (still) function. Or again, if there are no passions it means that there is nothing to which existence is attached. If there is no basis of existence a cause is not generated.'<sup>59</sup> The dialogue partner then compares nirvana to non-being, but the exposition continues: 'Where these three, bondage, those who can be bound, and skilful means, are absent, that is called nirvana.'<sup>60</sup> Thus 'nirvana' is the name given to the redundancy of the three functioning factors which all belong together. The main point of present interest is that in so far as the eightfold path is defined as a skilful means, much of the Buddhist religion is in principle so treated, for the eightfold path can be taken more or less as a summary at least of the disciplined structure of Buddhism as a practical working religion. It is the operation of the skilful means, that is, the eightfold path, with respect to 'bondage and those who can be bound', which brings about the resolution of all three factors in nirvana. Given that, there are no other karmic factors which carry on operating. It has already been seen earlier that central Buddhist concepts and practices are to be seen as skilful means. Now we find once again that Buddhism as a working system, 'that which functions', is entirely related to its problem, and does not claim any persistence or even any non-being beyond the solution of this problem. That is what is meant by describing the eightfold path, or as by now we might presume to say, Buddhism, as a skilful means.

From the examination of these cases we may conclude that although the number of occurrences in the treatises is relatively low, the idea of 'skilful means' found in them is consistent with that of the sutras considered earlier. It is also consistent with the general mode of thinking characteristic of the treatises themselves.

This is an appropriate point at which to raise, if perhaps not to solve, a problem which has ramifications beyond the scope of the present study. This question is whether the concept of skilful means can be considered entirely as an aspect of a religious *method*, or whether it is so closely associated with the concepts of insight and emptiness that it has material implications about the way the world is.

The question may seem simple but it is complicated by the fact that the Mādhyamika School in a general way places a high value upon its own method, while at the same time it is only concerned negatively or critically about the way the world is. In a certain sense it has to be admitted that the Mādhyamikas do not advance a position about the nature of the world, for not to admit this at all would be arbitrarily to misconstrue their account of themselves. On the other hand it would seem that not everything has yet

been said about their manner of not advancing a position, for it is possible both not to advance a position and not to be a Mahayanist or a Mādhyamika. Is there perhaps some way of taking seriously their non-advancement of a position while at the same time indicating how their mode of going about these matters has definite significance? Could there possibly be something about the way things are, which, if different, would have some effect on the way in which the Mādhyamikas go about them? To put it another way, granted that they are concerned above all with a certain manner of taking things, is it possible to conceive of anything about the way things are which would make it evidently more appropriate for them to take things differently? Their way of taking things is after all not everybody's way of taking things, and it does have something to do with the way in which they understand the nature of experience. As a general question this matter must be left herewith on the table. The present enquiry does not depend upon its solution.

With respect to the more specific question about skilful means it would be convenient if one could conclude that Mahayana Buddhism in general and Mādhyamika method in particular have no implications whatever about the way the world is. It would then follow that the concept of skilful means itself is not at all entangled in any such implications. However it does not seem to be settled beyond further discussion that Mahayana Buddhism and Mādhyamika method, positionless though they may be in an important sense, do in fact have no such implications. A short cut along those lines seems to be unacceptable at present.

The problem can also be approached in a different way, namely by distinguishing between the analysis and characterisation of experience in terms of dharmas, voidness, etc. as these are explicitly carried out in Buddhism, and discussion or exhortation about the nature of such analyses and concepts. If we look at the matter in this way it seems fair to maintain that 'skilful means' is about the nature and role of religious language. In other words 'skilful means' is a kind of clue about the appropriate way to put into operation the religion which one has, that is, in the case of the Mahayanists, Buddhism. Given the detailed exposition made above it seems right on balance to say that this is mainly what the idea is about. It enables one to pursue the Buddhist analyses in the right place and time, and in the right way. It stops one getting the perfection of insight wrong.

### Endnotes

- 1 The main translations in question are given in the bibliography below. A complete survey of the various texts and versions is given in Conze's *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature. Indo-Iranian Monographs No. VI*, Mouton and Co., 'S-Gravenhage 1960. In view of the magnitude of Conze's contribution one can only diverge from his consistent terminology with hesitation and regret. Thus, 'insight' is found below where he would use 'wisdom', as also above throughout, and following Erich Frauwallner's use of 'Einsicht' in *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*, Berlin 1956, Akademie-Verlag; 'characteristic' (相) corresponds to Conze's perhaps unnecessarily mystifying 'sign', for Skt. *nimitta* (defined in his own glossary of

*The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, p. 215, as '(1) Object of attention. (2) Basis of recognition of an object. (3) An occasion for being led astray by objects.', the third of these meanings being the special matter of Buddhist interpretation discussed again below); and thirdly of course while 'skill in means' is absolutely right for the Sanskrit *upāya-kauśalya* the English used below is 'skilful means' because this is thought better to express Kumārajīva's rather conflating Chinese term *fang-pien* 方便, as explained above in Chapter One.

- 2 Recently published in a corrected edition: *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary*, the Four Seasons Foundation, Bolinas 1973 (ISBN 0-87704-049-4) (distributed by Book People, 2940 Seventh Street, Berkeley, California 94710). These full details are given because in the Appendix page numbers of occurrences of *upāya-kauśalya* corresponding to Kumārajīva's *fang-pien* are given to aid general orientation. It should be remembered however that the one is *not* a translation of the other.
- 3 *Ibid.* pp. xi–xii. Relations between the various versions may be pursued in Lewis Lancaster's *An Analysis of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāparamitā-sūtra from the Chinese Translations*, Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1968.
- 4 Cf. Robinson, *Early Madhyamika in India and China*, p. 76.
- 5 Étienne Lamotte, (trans.) *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, 3 vols. Louvain 1944–.
- 6 Details in Chapter One, note 2. Masuda begins by stressing the importance, with skilful means, of not being attached to characteristics (相), and then goes on to discuss the connection with insight, compassion and voidness.
- 7 般若 The Chinese 若 is usually transliterated *jo*, e.g. in *Hōbōginin, Fascicule Annexe*.
- 8 In Kumārajīva's version Chapter XIV actually begins with these similes, running from the middle of page 185 in the Conze translation (the middle of his Chapter 14). Reference below is always to Kumārajīva's chapters, etc.
- 9 T VIII 560b 般若波羅蜜方便。
- 10 T VIII 560c. This is an unusual simile, and although no gender is given (二健人) the presumption must be in this case that they are male, which suggests that at the time this text was created there was no general assumption that *prajñā* and *upāya* were thought of as male and female respectively. The latter idea is a late and quite secondary line of thought which does not particularly add anything apart from re-confirming the link between the two concepts. Cf. Chapter Five, note 22.
- 11 'Stream-winners' (須陀洹), the first of four classes of disciples which also include the happy terms 'once-returner' and 'never-returner', followed by *arhat*.
- 12 T VIII 573a 亦勝菩薩離般若波羅蜜無方便行檀波羅蜜。
- 13 T VIII 573a 亦勝離般若波羅蜜無方便行尸羅波蜜羸提波羅蜜毘梨耶波羅蜜禪波羅蜜。
- 14 *Op. cit.* pp. 242–3; each perfection is spelled out separately, with its own reference to skill in means, and as the texts reconverge Conze's translation recalls once again that such a bodhisattva 'surpasses also the Bodhisattvas who are not skilled in means'.
- 15 T VIII 574a 須菩提。菩薩如是學者。不生長壽天。何以故。菩薩成就方便故。'Subhūti, the bodhisattva who trains like this does not get reborn among the long-lived gods. Why? Because this bodhisattva accomplishes skilful means'.
- 16 T VIII 574b, in full: 何等為方便。所謂從般若波羅蜜起。雖能入禪而不隨禪生。'What is this skilful means? It can be called that which arises from the *pāramitā* of insight; (so that) even though he can enter *dhyāna* (*ch'an*) he is not reborn in terms of *dhyāna*.' Conze's overall result for this and the immediately preceding passage varies slightly: 'For there is his skill in means, and endowed with that he does not get reborn among the long-lived Gods. But what is that skill in means of a Bodhisattva? It is just this perfection of wisdom. And he applies himself to this skill in means in such a way that, endowed with it, the Bodhisattva enters into the trances without being reborn through the influence of the trances.' *Op. cit.* p. 250. In Kumārajīva's version skilful means is to be conceived of in terms of the perfection of insight but is not absolutely identified with it, as in the above.
- 17 T VIII 582b–c 是人當為我說般若波羅蜜方便力。我隨中學當得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。金色之身三十二相。常光無量光。大慈大悲大喜大捨。十力四無所畏四無礙智十八不共法。六神通... 'This man', who will do the exposition of insight and skilful means, is another bodhisattva named Dharmodgata. For the whole story, cf. Conze, *op. cit.* pp. 277ff at length.

- 18 Probably the main cause of widespread misunderstanding comes from Chapter X of D. T. Suzuki's book *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, which is one of the most widely used sources of general knowledge about Mahayana Buddhism. Although this was first published in 1907, it was republished in 1963 with a commendatory essay by Alan Watts who alas missed a great opportunity to put it into historical perspective and to guide the unwary. Chapter X, 'The Doctrine of Trikaya', suffers from two major defects. The first defect is an inordinate desire to make use of Christian terminology, e.g. in the sub-title '(Buddhist Theory of Trinity)', while overlooking that the Christian doctrine of Trinity arose as an attempt to deal with ontological problems, about God in his relation to the world, the two natures coinhering in the person of Christ, etc. The second defect is that the whole account is based on the assumption that it was Āsvaghoṣa who first recorded the *trikāya* doctrine on the basis of existing Mahayana tradition as early as the first century before Christ. In fact The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (*Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun*, J. *Daijōkishinron* 大乘起信論 T1666, in T XXXII) was almost certainly erroneously ascribed to Āsvaghoṣa, and indeed cannot be dated in any way prior to AD 550, the year of the first Chinese 'translation'. On the general position see Y. S. Hakeda's *The Awakening of Faith*, New York and London 1967, pp. 3ff. The first documented statement of the *trikāya* doctrine as usually formulated (*dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, *nirmāṇakāya*) is to be found in the fifth century AD in Asanga's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, then also in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra*, see J. Nobel's 2 volume edition and translation by that title, (Chapter III in Chinese, but not extant in Sanskrit). Of course the whole concept is based on various anticipations which do go back further in Mahayana and indeed Buddhist thought generally, the most obvious one being the three-fold formulation in The Laṅkāvatāra Sutra (giving *dharmatā-buddha*, *vipāka-buddha*, (or *niṣyanda-buddha*) and *nirmāṇa-buddha*), discussed in detail by Suzuki in *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* (1930), pp. 308ff.
- 19 Masuda, *op. cit.*, p. 114a. In conclusion he writes (p. 114b); 'As shown above the word *fang-pien* 方便 is used in the Prajñā Sutra 般若經 in a manner which links it both with the view of emptiness 空觀 (great insight 大智) and with great compassion 大悲, or rather the word *fang-pien* itself is used to bear the meanings both of the view of emptiness and of great compassion . . .'
- 20 *Ibid.* p. 114a (T VIII 280c) 以方便力而為說法，以三乘法度脫眾生。…以方便力斷眾生愛結安立眾生。The term 'compassion' (大慈大悲 i.e. 'great mercy and great compassion') does in fact appear in a further passage which he quotes from the Treatise on the Great Perfection of Insight, but it is not closely associated with *fang-pien*.
- 21 Perhaps Masuda shows slight unease himself in the expressions he uses: 'that is, linked with the standpoint of compassion' (*ibid.* p. 114a) and 'none other than compassion' (*ibid.* p. 115a). His claim that the link between skilful means and both insight and compassion have been demonstrated in terms of the etymology of the Sanskrit term *upāya* also seems to be unwarranted in terms of what is adduced. To bring in the root *upa/i* and to speak of *upāya* as bearing the meaning of 'to approach' or 'to arrive' may contribute to our background understanding in a very, very general sense, but it scarcely demands the doctrinal pattern which follows. Cf. also Chapter One above, page 12 and note 25.
- 22 *Ibid.* p. 115a. 真空和真如。
- 23 *Ibid.* p. 115a (T XXV 697c) 方便者畢竟無法亦無眾生而度眾生。
- 24 *Ibid.* p. I 15a-b (T XXV 262c) 方便者具足般若波羅蜜故知諸法空、大悲心故憐愍眾生。於是二法以方便力不生染著。雖知諸法空方便力故亦不捨眾生。雖不捨眾生亦知諸法實空。
- 25 Or as Conze says, *op. cit.* p. 86, etc., 'coursing in signs'. 行 means to 'go' or 'course', but above all, in religion, to 'practice', that is, to practice that review of the nature of existence which plays a role in Buddhist meditation. 相 translates both *lakṣana* and *nimitta*, here the latter, and may be taken to refer to the differentiated characteristics of the phenomena which we experience, by which we recognise them. Cf. note 1 above.
- 26 T VIII 538a 菩薩若行色行為行相。若生色行為行相。若滅色行為行相。若壞色行為行相。若空色行為行相。我行是行亦是行相。The printed text has 壞 'ruination', but two Sung editions have 離 'abandonment' which makes better sense.

- 27 T VIII 538a. 若作是念。能如是行者。是行般若波羅蜜。亦是行相。當知是菩薩未善知方便。
- 28 Cf. T VIII 548b, where the phrase occurs three times, *prajñā-pāramitā* being transliterated, followed by *fang-pien* to make one more or less unified concept (般若波羅蜜方便)。
- 29 T VIII 549a 是菩薩迴向名為大迴向。以方便故。勝於有所得菩薩布施福德。何以故。是菩薩迴向為般若波羅蜜所護故。For the extended argument cf. Conze, *op. cit.* pp. 127ff. His excellent term 'transformation' is followed here for: 迴向 (=Skt. *pariṇāmanā*) often thought of rather pedestrianly as a more or less calculated transfer of merit to others.
- 30 T VIII 567a 如是如是。須菩提。不可說義無增無減。善知方便菩薩行般若波羅蜜修般若羅蜜時。不作是念。檀波羅蜜若增若減。作是念。是檀波羅蜜但有名字。
- 31 T XVIII 567a, as preceding with 般若 檀。
- 32 T VIII 567b 是菩薩不如是學。我行菩薩道於是身斷諸相。若斷是諸相未具足佛道。當作聲聞。世尊。是菩薩大方便力。知是諸相過而取無相。(Subhūti is speaking)。
- 33 T VIII 574b 雖能入禪而不隨禪生。
- 34 T VIII 574a 菩薩如是學者。不生長壽夭。何以故。菩薩成就方便故。
- 35 T VIII 569a 能如是學亦不取證。‘He can learn like this and not seize upon realisation.’
- 36 T VIII 569a 是菩薩不捨一切眾生故。發如是大願。須菩提。若菩薩生如是心。我不應捨一切眾生。應當度之即入空三昧解脫門無相無作三昧解脫門。是時菩薩不中道證實際。何以故。是菩薩為方便所護故。Non-discrimination: i.e. not attending to things as having characteristics—literally, the *samādhi* of (things) not (having) characteristics (無相)。For the whole passage, cf. Conze, *op. cit.*, p. 225: ‘For the Bodhisattva has not abandoned all beings. He has made the special vows to set free all those beings. If the mind of a Bodhisattva forms the aspiration not to abandon all beings but to set them free, and if in addition he aspires for the concentration on emptiness, the Signless, the Wishless, i.e. for the three doors to deliverance, then that Bodhisattva should be known as one who is endowed with skill in means, and he will not realise the reality-limit midway, before his Buddha-dharmas have become complete. For it is this skill in means which protects him.’ Conze refers to the standard gates of deliverance, the third of which (‘The Wishless’) is also known in Chinese as 無願, but Kumārajīva’s text is different here.
- 37 T VIII 569a–b 復次須菩提。菩薩若欲入如是深定。所謂空三昧解脫門。無相無作三昧解脫門。是菩薩先應作是念。眾生長夜著眾生相。著有所得。我得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。當斷是諸見而為說法。即入空三昧解脫門。是菩薩以是心及先方便力故。不中道證實際。亦不失慈悲喜捨三昧。何以故。是菩薩成就方便力故。It may be observed that although the expression used here is 方便力 rather than just 方便 it does not really make any difference to the basic line of thought beyond just adding the association that skilful means is a ‘power’. With or without the ‘power’ it is skilful means which a bodhisattva has at his disposal to determine correct practice. Passages such as these reinforce the conviction that *fang-pien* for Kumārajīva includes by implication all of ‘(power of) (skill in) means’, which can fairly be conflated to ‘skilful (operation of) means’ or just ‘skilful means’.
- 38 T VIII 569b.
- 39 Cf. Robinson’s discussion in *Early Madhyamika in India and China* pp. 30ff. The small variations do not affect the substance.
- 40 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 39ff.
- 41 T XXX 25a 若佛不說我非我。諸心行滅。言語道斷者。云何令人知諸法實相。
- 42 T XXX 25a 諸佛無量方便力。諸法無決定相。為度眾生或說一切實。或說一切不實。或說一切實不實。或說一切非實不實。
- 43 T XXX 24c 如般若中說菩薩有我亦非行。無我亦非行。
- 44 Cf. D. T. Suzuki, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, p. 69. ‘No, Mahāmāti, my Tathāgata-garbha is not the same as the ego taught by the philosophers; for what the Tathāgatas teach is the Tathāgata-garbha in the sense, Mahāmāti, that it is emptiness, reality-limit, Nirvana, being unborn, unqualified, and devoid of will-effort; the reason why the Tathāgatas who are Arhats and Fully-enlightened Ones, teach the doctrine pointing to the Tathāgata-garbha is to make the ignorant cast aside their fear when they listen to the teaching of egolessness and to have them realise the state of non-discrimination and imagelessness. I also wish, Mahāmāti, that the Tathāgatas preach the egolessness of things which removes

all the traces of discrimination by various skilful means issuing from their transcendental wisdom, that is, sometimes by the doctrine of the Tathāgata-garbha, sometimes by that of egolessness, and like a potter, by means of various terms, expressions and synonyms.’ Note also the reappearance here of the simile of the potter found in Chapter 5 of The Lotus Sutra, (Sanskrit only), c.f. Chapter Three above.

- 45 T XXX 32c–33a (8) 諸佛依二諦 爲衆生說法 一以世俗諦 二第一義諦 (9) 若人不能知 分別於二諦 則於深佛法 不知真實義 (10) 若不依俗諦 不得第一義 不得第一義 則不得涅槃
- 46 For the general context cf. Jacques May (*trans.*) *Candrakīrti: Prasanna-padā Madhyamakavṛtti, Douze chapitres traduits du sanscrit et du tibétain*, Paris, 1959, *ad loc.*
- 47 *Op. cit.* p. 33. This in spite of Seng-jui’s judgement that it was ‘concise and to the point’, *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 49 T XXX 168c 吉不吉。
- 50 T XXX 168c 汝愚人無方便。強欲求樂。妄生憶想。言是事吉。是事不吉。
- 51 T XXX 170c 依福捨惡。依何捨福。
- 52 T XXX 170c 無相最上。Marklessness means not having characteristics, as earlier, but the briefer term is kept to maintain the pungency.
- 53 T XXX 170c 取福人天中生。取罪三惡道生。是故無相智慧最第一。Non-discriminative is used for 無相 here when it qualifies insight. Cf. note 25 above. Since the word is used with a variety of functions it is difficult to translate with a single terminology.
- 54 T XXX 170c 無相名一切相不憶念。離一切受。過去未來現在法心無所著。Or: ‘Not-having characteristics means not calling to mind all the characteristics of things . . .’
- 55 Cf. the explanations given in the context of Vimalakīrti’s encounter with Mañjuśrī in Chapter Five, above.
- 56 T XXX 170c 一切法自性無故。則無所依。是名無相。以是方便故能捨福。
- 57 T XXX 17b 破常品 or perhaps ‘Permanence exposed’ (i.e. for what it is, namely, an illusion). Robinson inexplicably ignores the 破 in this and other cases, *op. cit.* p. 33.
- 58 T XXX 180c 縛可縛方便異此無用。
- 59 T XXX 180c 縛名煩惱及業。可縛名衆生。方便名八聖道。以道解縛故。衆生得解脫。若有涅槃。異此三法。則無所用。復次無煩惱。是名無所有。無所有不應爲因。
- 60 T XXX 180c 若縛可縛方便三事無處。是名涅槃。This sentence in the commentary seems to be a subtle qualification of the interlocutor’s close association of nirvana and non-being (無). The point would be that when the eight-fold path (the skilful means) has led to the release of those who are bound, there is nothing further which requires or is patent of discussion; one may therefore call it nirvana.

## 7 SKILFUL MEANS IN PRE-MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

### *The decision to proclaim Dhamma*

If the concept of skilful means is of such central importance in early Mahayana Buddhism the question inevitably arises as to what role it played in early Buddhism or even in the teaching of the Buddha himself. As far as the latter is concerned it must be stated forthwith that there is no evidence whatever that the Buddha himself ever used the terminology of skilful means. On the other hand, it is very difficult to make any definite statement in any case about what the Buddha taught in person and what belongs to later explication and schematisation. Even if there were more information than is in fact available about the pedigree of the terms 'means' and 'skill in means' it would probably still remain a matter of judgement as to whether the idea should be associated with the person of the Buddha or not. The fact of the matter is that we cannot say that the Buddha himself used these terms, while at the same time the terms themselves say something about the nature of his teaching which it would be very difficult to dissociate from the initiator of the Buddhist tradition.

Historically speaking the precise point of emergence of skilful means terminology must lie in the impenetrable mists of textual studies in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit sutras with their early Chinese versions. In what has preceded, the Chinese versions have been used as more or less coherent unities. No attempt will now be made to unravel the process by which the Sanskrit originals were originally compiled. Even if it could be shown, for example, that there were some portions of some texts in which the terminology were less important and that these portions were particularly early, it would not really change very much. The general situation would still be that the idea of skilful means, as presented above, was widely current in the early stages of the Mahayana. As far as the history of religious ideas is concerned this leaves the general question as to how this idea is to be related to pre-Mahayana Buddhism in general. Questions of early and late are complex, and though the Pali Canon of the Theravadins does not necessarily have a special claim to hoary doctrinal purity it does provide a developed and rounded alternative tradition reaching back to Buddhist origins. Above all therefore, how does the Mahayana concept of skilful means relate to the Buddhism represented by the Pali Canon of the Theravadins?

It is immediately striking that the term skill in means occurs only rarely in the Pali Canon, and then incidentally or in late texts. This means that it is not possible to develop a history of the idea on the basis of terminological details.<sup>1</sup>

Typical of the general situation is that there is only one case in the whole of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Even that one case is found in the *Sangīti Suttanta* which is scarcely of central importance within the *Dīgha Nikāya*, for it is simply a recital of lists of doctrinal concepts arranged on the principle of their numerical order, as in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. Among the 'threes' we find 'three kinds of skill: skill in progress, skill in regress, and skill in means'.<sup>2</sup> These terms may be presumed to be technical in the sense that all such itemised terms are more or less technical, but they remain undeveloped as concepts. A similar case is found in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. Here the same three terms are in use when in Hare's translation we read of a monk who 'is unskilled in entering, in leaving, in approach'. Any such monk who also 'has no wish to attain unattained skill in Dhamma, preserves not his skill attained, nor stirs to persevere . . . cannot attain unattained skill in Dhamma, nor increase his skill therein.'<sup>3</sup> The converse is then also given, so that one who is skilled can attain. Hare's 'skill . . . in approach' is *upāyakuṣalo* (=Skt. *upāyakauśalya*), so we perceive that while Rhys Davids stressed the integrity of the word *upāya* by freely explaining it to be 'means of success', Hare preferred to bring out the etymology of the word in his English translation. This was pursued also by some Japanese writers (cf. Chapter One, note 25). Admittedly the related terms *āya*, *ap-āya* and *up-āya* do indicate that the derivation from the root *i*, 'to go', or at least the play on words, was probably once in somebody's mind. Nevertheless it seems a slender basis on which to construct the meaning of this idea. It appears that the three terms are concerned with the spiritual attitude of a monk. If we take them together with the other three of the six mentioned above, 'wishing to attain' etc., the text demands at one and the same time persistence of intent and agility of spirit. This is not without interest for the subject of skilful means in general, but unfortunately both the passages in which the triplet occurs remain isolated and obscure.

The only other direct reference to skill in means of any real interest is in the *Nāvasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, where the wise man who knows *Dhamma* is compared to the skilful boatman who has the ability to ferry others across a dangerous river. There are those who do not understand the meaning of Dhamma, and when they find themselves in a strongly flowing river they are swept away, unable to help themselves or others. The good teacher on the other hand is:

'As one who boards a sturdy boat,  
With oars and rudder well equipt,  
May many others then help across,  
Sure, skilful knower of the means.'<sup>4</sup>

The great interest of this occurrence is that skilful knowledge of means is here related to the bringing across of others, which is of course a constant theme in Mahayana Buddhism. In this sense it may be said to complement the famous simile of the raft, referred to below. The image of the boat and the boatman bringing people across the river is very clearly presented, but

unfortunately the special term in which we are interested is just thrown in without very much elucidation or development.

The term *upāya* by itself also occurs a few times in the Pali Canon, but hardly rises to the level of a regular technical concept. It is after all just an ordinary word for 'method', 'means' or 'device' in Sanskrit, so it would be hardly surprising if the Pali equivalent (which happens to be identical) were never to appear at all in such a large corpus of writing.<sup>5</sup> Some of the *Jātaka* occurrences, which are few enough, link one or other of the terms with *paññā* (Skt. *prajñā*), and this is not without interest because, as has been seen, this is one of the links which is important in the early Mahayana texts. However there is insufficient reason to presume these cases to be significantly pre-Mahayana.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the term *upāya* is not explicitly connected with early or central features of the Pali Buddhist tradition, and it is not developed in any complexity.

In view of the relative paucity of usage in the Pāli writings, the emergence of the terms *upāya* and *upāyakauśalya* to a position of major importance in the early Mahayana is striking. This is not evidence in itself however for significant discontinuity between Mahayana Buddhism and early Buddhism, whatever reasons there may otherwise be for stressing the discontinuities. On the contrary, the way in which the term comes to prominence in the Mahayana reflects characteristics of early Buddhism which are themselves generally reckoned to be of central importance. For this reason it is necessary to consider not so much the admittedly limited and miscellaneous usage of the terms as such, but rather certain well-known passages in the Theravada Canon where it so happens that the terms themselves do not appear. The passages which are adduced below indicate that there is a coherent matrix in pre-Mahayana Buddhism for the emergence of the more or less technical terminology of skilful means. They show that there was a real continuity in the way in which the nature and intention of the various specific forms of Buddhist teaching were supposed to be understood.

The first passage from the Pāli Canon to be taken up in this way is the story of the Buddha's decision to teach Dhamma (Skt. *Dharma*), when he was entreated to do so by the god Brahmā. The story is given in the section entitled *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya-Piṭaka*<sup>7</sup> and also in the *Ariyapariyesanasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.<sup>8</sup> It is a narrative sequence quite fundamental to Buddhism, and as the theme is also elaborated in both Chapter II and Chapter VII of The Lotus Sutra it is very important for the present argument. It will be seen that in some ways the special teaching of The Lotus Sutra is a more dynamic articulation of principles already present in early Buddhism, a view adumbrated before in the treatment of Chapter XVI of The Lotus Sutra (Chapter Three above).

The story in the *Mahāvagga* is preceded by reference to the Buddha's enlightenment, and followed by the beginning of the teaching itself and the founding of the *sangha*. The link with the founding of the *sangha* is no doubt the reason for the inclusion of the cycle in the *Vinaya-Piṭaka* in the

first place, which after all is otherwise mainly concerned with the rules of monastic discipline. The repetition of the story in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is found in the context of a longer discourse on Dhamma. Like the *Mahāvagga* it also includes an account of the proclamation of Dhamma to Upaka the naked ascetic, who was not convinced, and to the five ascetics who accepted it. The parallels in The Lotus Sutra are not verbally close, but they are elaborations which clearly presuppose the familiar tale. The main aspects of the decision to teach are paralleled but the meaning of the story is more clearly articulated by the concept of skilful means.

The simple outline of the story is that the Buddha, on attaining enlightenment, is at first not inclined to teach Dhamma. On the contrary he inclines towards 'little effort'. The reason is that while the Dhamma is deep and subtle the people who would hear it are too engrossed in sensual pleasure and steeped in ignorance to recognise its value. The god Brahmā Sahampati realises this and regrets what the Buddha is thinking. He appears miraculously in the world and pleads with the Buddha to teach nevertheless. There are those, he argues, who through not hearing Dhamma are decaying, but who on hearing it would grow. The Buddha listens to this entreaty and when he surveys the world with a Buddha's eye perceives the variety of levels, faculties and dispositions of men. These are compared to a pond of lotuses, some of which grow up through the water and rise undefiled above it. Thereupon he decides after all that he will teach Dhamma. Even so, it is still important to him to consider who might be able to understand the Dhamma 'quickly', and this is another evidence of the recognition that there is a problem about relative degrees of understanding among different people. There follows the teaching to the five former companions, a teaching which includes (in the *Mahāvagga*) the teaching of the middle way and the four noble truths of ill, the uprising of ill, the cessation of ill, and the eightfold path towards the cessation of ill.

The Lotus Sutra in Chapter II contains this same story with some different details, and with a greater stress on the reflectiveness of the Buddha on what he is doing. Thus he is portrayed as recollecting 'what former buddhas performed by their skilful means'.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind he conceives of proclaiming the way in three vehicles, and is encouraged by the buddhas of the ten directions. It is then stressed that to do this is to follow all the buddhas and to use skilful means. Men of little wisdom take delight in petty teachings and lack confidence that they can attain buddhahood. Hence skilful means are necessary. The Buddha then goes to *Vārāṇasī* and teaches his five former companions. The nirvanic character of all existence (of all *dhammas*) cannot be stated in words and so he teaches them by using skilful means. This 'turning of the wheel of the Dharma', it is said, gives the 'sound' or promise of nirvana and the 'differentiated terminology' for *arhat*, *dharma*, and *sangha*.<sup>10</sup>

The original story, which was the common property of all Buddhists, already contained the idea that there is a problem about communicating *Dhamma* to anybody. Yet in spite of the Buddha's hesitation, he did go on

to articulate his teaching to the five ascetics. The Lotus Sutra is simply drawing out the implications of this tradition when it emphasises the Buddha's initial refusal to teach at all, and then argues that through skilful means it became possible and worthwhile.

As to the final intention of the teaching, 'the supreme way' or 'the undivided Dharma', this is in itself inexpressible in words, but is realised when the Buddha 'honestly discards skilful means'.<sup>11</sup> It has already been seen that when this takes place it is not some new form of articulated teaching which appears in place of accommodated forms, but rather the secret lies in the very discarding of the hitherto cherished concepts such as nirvana. The real meaning of the Buddha's teaching can only be recognised in so far as one appreciates that it is at first formulated in a manner appropriate to the entanglement of the hearers in passions and ignorance. The formulations which make possible the escape from passions and ignorance are themselves only necessary in so far as they lead to the disentanglement. As the Theravada text similarly says, the *Dhamma* itself is 'tranquil' and 'beyond dialectic'.<sup>12</sup> This relationship between the articulated form and inexpressible goal finds many echoes in other famous Theravada passages, for example in the simile of the raft and in the discussion of the undetermined questions (on which see again below). Indeed in a broad sense at least it is not even peculiar to Buddhism. What is special to Buddhism is its built-in position in the legendary narrative about the very founding of Buddhism as a religion. And what is special to the Mahayana form of the story is the introduction of the term skilful means (or 'skill in means') when it is a question of communicating the inexpressible. This term emphasises at once the difficulty and yet the possibility of the communication of Dharma. It is also a check or reminder to ensure that the form of the communication does not fail to be converted into the full realisation of its intention.

The same story of the Buddha's decision to proclaim his message is found again in Chapter VII, as was mentioned above in Chapter Three in connection with the story of the magic city. Here the hesitation of the Buddha is dramatised at great length.<sup>13</sup> The Dharma finally proclaimed is the traditionally central teaching of the four truths and the twelve links.<sup>14</sup> There follows in due course the characteristic break-through of The Lotus Sutra with the assertion that the term 'nirvana' is of limited value. It is firmly linked to the deplorable state of living beings, thus: 'The Tathāgata's skilful means enters deeply into the character of living beings and he knows that they wilfully delight in trifles and are deeply attached to the five passions; for their sakes he proclaims nirvana, and if they hear it they will receive it in faith.'<sup>15</sup> At the same time this should not be construed as an easy polemical slapping down of a 'hinayana' teaching. The status of any form of the Buddha's teaching is ambiguous. On the one hand we read: 'In the world there are not two vehicles for attaining extinction; there is only the one Buddha-vehicle for attaining extinction.'<sup>16</sup> But on the other hand we also read: 'Only by the Buddha-vehicle will they attain extinction; there

is no other vehicle remaining apart from the teachings of the *tathāgatas*' skilful means.'<sup>17</sup> It is quite natural and appropriate that there should be 'skilful means' teachings given by all the buddhas, for otherwise there would be no discernible teaching at all. It is not a question of this teaching competing with that. All the provisional teachings lead into the Buddha-vehicle, or to state it more precisely, they are dismantled in favour of the one Buddha-vehicle which was the sole consistent intention from the beginning.

It must be admitted that the tale of the Buddha's decision to proclaim the Dharma is more elaborated in the two versions in The Lotus Sutra than in the Theravada texts, although the latter also have mythological elements. What matters is that the fundamental relationships between the Buddha, his own inward realisation or attainment, his form of teaching and those taught remain consistent in all the versions. These relationships are glossed in The Lotus Sutra by the concept of skilful means which helps to articulate them. The concept of skilful means does not distort the original tale. Rather, the original tale is a natural home for it.

A natural complement to the stories of the Buddha's decision to proclaim the Dharma is found in some famous verses of Nāgārjuna. The verses on the two kinds of truth were already quoted in Chapter Six above because of the parallelism of this line of thought to the idea of skilful means. The point was that the Buddha's teaching has to be understood as operating at two levels, at a worldly level, and at the level of its real meaning or supreme principle. The true reality can only be known through worldly teaching, but knowing the difference between the two levels of truth is also indispensable. The stanzas continue (in The Middle Treatise):

- (11) 'Failure to see emptiness correctly  
Leads the dull-witted to do themselves an injury,  
Just like someone who misapplies magic  
Or does not handle a poisonous snake properly.
- (12) The world-honoured one knew this Dharma  
To be so deeply mysterious,  
That the dull-witted could not attain it,  
And therefore he was reluctant to proclaim it.'<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless the verses are based on the premise that he did proclaim it, and therefore, as in the more elaborated stories, the key lies in the correct discernment of the status of the 'worldly' articulation of the Dharma. In this sense the Mādhyamika account has the same matrix in pre-Mahayana Buddhism as that which The Lotus Sutra had earlier claimed.

This fundamental conception of the manner of the Buddha's beginning to teach has far-reaching implications. A teaching which relates to diverse needs in a differentiated world clearly requires a great flexibility and this was legitimated by the way in which the Buddha's own activity is understood. The flexibility of Buddhist teaching has many aspects. For one thing

it is expressly permitted to be translated into many languages,<sup>19</sup> and the use of any one language, whether it be Pali or Chinese, as a kind of special holy language is secondary. A great variety of literary forms is accepted as appropriate in all schools of Buddhism, and it has been seen that in The Lotus Sutra the various genres of Buddhist teaching are all conceived in terms of the Buddha's skilful means. Even the rules of religious practice submit to many re-adjustments. The laxity of the Mahāsaṅghikas and the Mahayanists has found its way into the histories of Buddhism, but the analogous flexibility of Theravada discipline is often overlooked. In general it is fair to say that the idea of a differentiated yet consistent teaching was the basic style of pre-Mahayana Buddhism anyway, presumed to stem from the Buddha himself. Skilful means is the Mahayana name for this style.

### *Buddhist correlational technique*

In the discussion of The Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Chapter Five above) it was observed that the model bodhisattva was associated, as part of his skilful means, with the main forms of secular life. For one thing he had a distinct social involvement, expressing solidarity with all normal forms of life. He also understood secular literature while maintaining a Buddhist standpoint, and even 'accepted all heterodoxies without transgressing against the true faith'.<sup>20</sup> It was pointed out that this implies in principle a whole theory of correlation between Buddhism and other thought systems which is controlled by the idea of skilful means. The practical working out of such correlations means that Buddhism does not reject other thought systems but associates with them, with a view to realising the intention of the Buddhist system. The striking thing is that this mode of correlation may involve a paradoxical, provisionally positive acceptance of ideas which are quite different from and even contradictory to the central intention or meaning of Buddhism itself.

This phenomenon can be illustrated from the Theravada Canon although it is not yet there related to the concept of skilful means. To begin with it is only necessary to link up with the argument offered in Alicia Matsunaga's book *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*.<sup>21</sup> The whole of her first chapter brings out very well the tendency of early Buddhism to convey Buddhist teaching in terms borrowed from elsewhere and on the strength of aspirations which are in themselves not particularly Buddhist. She refers particularly to the *Tevijja Sutta*<sup>22</sup> of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, in which the Buddha adjudicates upon the best method to be pursued in order to attain union with the god Brahmā. This positive attitude to what is a non-Buddhist goal needs careful attention, especially as it ultimately is seen to be related after all to the goal of Buddhism.

It is two young Brahmans who ask the Buddha's opinion about the best method to attain union with Brahmā, that is to say, the best method from among those offered by Brahman teachers versed in Vedic doctrines and

practice. The Buddha replies, true to form, by criticising the speculative vagaries of those who claim to offer union with Brahmā while they themselves have never seen him. Then he criticises ritual exercises and stresses instead the importance of the cultivation of certain qualities referred to as those of the *Brahma vihāra*, of the dwelling of Brahmā. These qualities are four which have since become of regular importance in Buddhism, namely: love (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathy with joy (*muditā*) and serenity (*upekkhā*). To cultivate these, it is argued, 'is the way to a state of union with Brahmā'.<sup>23</sup>

The point of interest about this tale is that the Buddha is shown as teaching the best way to attain a state with which Buddhism is otherwise not concerned. There is more to this than meets the eye. The situation is clarified by a different story in the *Dīgha Nīkaya*, namely that of the high steward (*Mahā-govinda Suttanta*) who also led his followers into union with Brahmā.<sup>24</sup> It turns out that the steward was none other than the Buddha in a previous birth, so that again it appears that the Buddha personally accepts responsibility for a positive evaluation of the goal of union with Brahmā. Nevertheless, the Buddha goes on to say, rebirth in the Brahmā-world is a lesser achievement than nirvana. His own religious system is different because it 'conduces wholly and solely to detachment, to passionlessness, to cessation of craving, to peace, to understanding, to insight of the higher stages of the Path, to Nirvana.'<sup>25</sup> It is further defined as the eightfold path.

Matsunaga explains that this correlation of the teaching about how to attain union with Brahmā, here given in a form stressing moral and spiritual cultivation, and the teaching of the eightfold path leading to nirvana, is a method of teaching designed to begin where the audience is and then to lead them on towards enlightenment. She goes so far as to link it specifically with the term *upāya*, although this does not appear in the texts, and states the dialectic clearly as follows:

'This method of teaching non-Buddhists by instructing them in an idealized practice at their own level of understanding is a peculiar Buddhist device known as *upāya* or 'skilful means'. First the minds of the audience must be conditioned to the practice of virtue and from that point it is a simple matter to lead them to accept Buddhism and the path to Enlightenment'.<sup>26</sup>

Although the term *upāya* is anachronistic here, strictly speaking, the way of thought which it represents surely is not.<sup>27</sup> The interest and value of Matsunaga's work lies precisely in the fact that she is able to discern a consistent thread in the way in which Buddhism as a religion was able to draw in and make use of so many elements of Indian, then Chinese, and then Japanese culture and religion to serve as preliminaries to its own teaching. Presumably the same would apply to Tibetan Buddhism. This 'philosophy of assimilation' as she calls it, is entirely consistent both with the procedures of Buddhism tied up with the term *upāya* and also with the style of the teaching of the Buddha as this is characterised in the pre-Mahayana sources.

That Buddhist thought moves in such a fashion is relevant to every context in which central aspects of Buddhism are found to be somehow correlated with other kinds of religious belief or culture. For example, the same general principle seems to apply to the relations between Theravada Buddhism and the popular belief systems of the countries in which it has prevailed. Recent studies by Spiro, Tambiah and Gombrich have made it quite clear that the central or 'orthodox' belief system is highly tolerant of many beliefs and practices which in themselves have implications inconsistent with a strict or refined grasp of Buddhist doctrine.<sup>28</sup> It is with such elasticity that Buddhism actually functions as a living, working religion.

The relations between Buddhism and popular beliefs go back a long way, indeed probably to the beginnings, and an account of particular interest in connection with the present discussion is T. O. Ling's *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*<sup>29</sup> in which he attempts to characterise and locate the role of the personification of evil in Buddhism, Māra. Māra is not essential to Buddhist doctrine in at least one important sense, for it is quite possible to state the four noble truths, etc. without any reference to him at all. On the other hand it appears that he was invented specifically by Buddhists on the basis of various mythological antecedents. As well as the fallen gods, the *asuras*, he is closely associated with a whole variety of malignant spirits, *piśācas*, *yakkhas* and *rakkhasas* (Skt. *piśācas*, *yakṣas* and *raṅṣasas*) who populated the Indian imagination in general, and whose modern successors are found in the *yakās*, the *nats* and the *phis* of Ceylon, Burma and Thailand respectively. Buddhism did not and does not discourage belief in any of these spirits, but the key is that in so far as they are gathered up in the coordinating symbol of Māra they are led to defeat through the Buddha's enlightenment, when he vanquished all the malignant forces which Māra could summon together. It is striking that Ling began his discussion of how the Māra symbol functions with a quotation from T. R. V. Murti, writing on the Mahayana: 'It is possible to utilize any means appropriate to the person . . . for leading him to the ultimate truth. There is no limit to the number and nature of the doctrinal devices that may be employed to realize this end'.<sup>30</sup> For Ling himself, 'Māra is a symbol whose roots are in popular demonology . . . Such a symbol would have a particular appropriateness for the purpose of leading towards the ultimate truth those whose native mental world was largely coloured by demonological ideas.'<sup>31</sup> Ling then describes the practical use of Māra-related terminology in a passage too long to quote but finely illustrative of skilful means thought, and then concludes as follows: 'The matter may be summed up by saying that the Pāli Buddhism of the Canon does not close the frontier of thought where it touches animism and popular demonology; it allows it to remain open, but controls it from the Buddhist side, and for Buddhist purposes. The means by which such control of this frontier between popular demonology and Buddhist doctrine and methods is maintained is the symbol of Māra, the Evil One.'<sup>32</sup>

It is fascinating to see that the term *upāya* is nowhere adduced from the materials used by Ling in this study, and yet when he brings it in from

Murti's writing on the Mahayana it fits like a glove. This demonstrates again that the very character of early Buddhism and of Theravada Buddhism is entirely consistent with skilful means thought. The implication of this is that correlations between Buddhism and other thought systems should also at least be considered in terms of the skilful means dialectic. One should not restrict attention to the unsophisticated village beliefs in spirits and so on, which anthropologists find particularly interesting. The persistent attempt by intellectual Theravada Buddhists to correlate their system with rational Western humanism, thus giving a kind of 'modernist' Buddhism, is in principle based upon the same correlational method.<sup>33</sup> The same applies to the correlation between Buddhism and political symbols, from the ancient symbol of the wheel-turning monarch onwards to other involvements more characteristic of the present. Whatever the value of these suggestions it is clear that there was a natural context in Buddhist correlational procedures in general, in which the Mahayana concept of skilful means was able to develop.

#### *The persistence of Buddhist meaning*

The proliferation of varied forms of teaching, practice and devotion, and the provisional acceptance of thought-forms not ultimately required by Buddhism, lead eventually to questions of selection and control. For all its accommodations and flexibility Buddhism does not altogether disappear in a general *mêlée* of miscellaneous religious and other cultural activities. Or indeed, one may admit that it perhaps sometimes has so disappeared, but yet a recognisably Buddhist tradition has maintained itself through many centuries in truly diverse cultures. If Buddhism is so tolerant of many modes of expression and accepts so many diverse starting points in non-Buddhist culture, how does it maintain a grip on its own central meaning?

If we turn immediately to the concept of skilful means, as this has been examined above, we might say in summary that an apparently inadequate vehicle is accepted because latent within it is the possibility of its being transformed or resolved into a fully Buddhist meaning. To the early Mahayanists this was understood precisely because they had terminology for it, the terminology of skilful means. Because they understood it they were able to take a particularly relaxed view of cultural diversification. There could always come a day when, for some person or other, the skilful means arrives at its true destination of Buddhist meaning. The idea entails that every item of Buddhist communication has incorporated within it the requirement that it should eventually be dismantled. Thus skilful means involves not only proliferation but also, as has been seen, a critique of accumulated tradition. No statement of the religion should persist in arrogant self-assertion, and every provisional entanglement is liable to be deflated into pure Buddhist meaning. In principle the Mahayanists applied this critique even to their own terms, although it might be argued that not all Mahayanists have since maintained this degree of consistency.

The question now remaining is whether there is also an underlying matrix for this aspect of skilful means thought in early Buddhism. Once again there is no help to be found in a merely terminological enquiry, but there are some extremely well-known passages which have a bearing on the subject, including the famous similes of the arrow, the pith, the water-snake and the raft. These passages show that there was a clear note of conceptual constraint and directedness, and also that perception of true Buddhist meaning was understood to depend upon critical awareness and spiritual attainment.

It may seem curious, in seeking antecedents to Mahayana Buddhism, to speak of conceptual restraint. The point is that Buddhism takes form in accordance with the karmic status and dispositions of those who require it, while at the same time it does not advance intellectual systems extraneous to the requirements. One might adduce the obvious case of the Mādhyamikas' claim not to advance a position, but in principle the same holds good for Mahayana in sutra form, in spite of the *use* of mythology etc. This is because Buddhism taking a form *is* skilful means, and nothing else. If this underlying conceptual restraint holds good for Mahayana Buddhism it is also a distinct current in Theravada Buddhism, as is seen in the famous simile of the poisoned arrow. This is found in the *Lesser Discourse to Mālunḱyā* (*Cūḷa-Mālunḱyasutta*) in the *Majjhima Nikāya*.<sup>34</sup> The context is the discussion about the famous undetermined questions, to which the Buddha refused to give an answer. The problems are about four topics, namely whether the world is eternal or not, whether the world is finite or not, whether the life-principle is the same as the body or not, and whether or not the Tathāgata exists after death, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not. Mālunḱyāputta is a questioning monk who puts these problems to the Buddha, saying that he should either give answers to them or admit that he does not know the answers. The Buddha however replies that this was never part of his programme when inviting monks to follow the path, and nor did Mālunḱyāputta himself stipulate that these things should be explained when deciding to follow the path.

To demand answers to such questions before following the path of the Buddha would be to behave like a man who is pierced by a poisoned arrow and who refuses to have it drawn out by the surgeon until all possible questions about where it came from have been answered in detail. Saving the man from the effects of the wound and the poison is not dependent on knowing who shot it, where he came from, what the arrow is made of, etc. etc. Similarly 'the living of the Brahma-faring' is neither dependent on the view that the world is eternal nor on the view that it is not eternal. However the world may be, whether eternal or not, it is sure that there is birth, ageing, death and suffering, and it is to these facts of existence that the Buddha offers a solution. The speculative questions are irrelevant, and therefore they remain unanswered.<sup>35</sup>

The undetermined questions appear also in *The Delectable Discourse* (*Pāsādika-suttanta*) in the *Dīgha Nikāya*.<sup>36</sup> Here they are treated similarly and

it is argued that all comments on the various possible opinions about the beginnings and the hereafters of things should be 'expunged'. Of particular interest is the reference in this context to the Tathāgata's knowledge of past existences. Such knowledge is by no means brought forward simply because it is available. On the contrary, 'If the past mean what is true, what is fact, but what does not redound to your good, concerning that the Tathāgata reveals nothing. If the past mean what is true, what is fact, and what does redound to your good, concerning that the Tathāgata knows well the time when to reveal it.'<sup>37</sup> It is on this principle and this principle alone that stories about the past are used in the Buddhist religion. Since the same criterion is supposed to apply to information about the present and the future, it provides a rationale for the inclusion of some of the nine or twelve types of teaching traditionally listed as taught by the Buddha, namely at least for *jātakas*, *nidānas* (former occasions) and *vyākaraṇas* (predictions of future destiny). On the other hand this rationale has a selective application. Not just any story at all will do, but only stories which gear in eventually to the final meaning of Buddhism. It will be recalled that these various types of teaching were explicitly described in The Lotus Sutra as skilful means.

To give a further example of this from the Theravada Canon, there is a passage in the *Bhayabherava-sutta* of the *Majjhima-Nikāya* about why Gautama frequented lonely places in the forest. This might seem to imply that he himself, for all his claims, was still not yet free of attachments and aversions. Indeed the first reason given, early in the *sutta*, is that he went in order to conquer fear, by testing it out and waiting for nothing to happen; hence the title: *Discourse on Fear and Dread*.<sup>38</sup> Yet, on being freed from the three 'cankers' (*āsavas*) of sense-pleasures, becoming and ignorance, this should really no longer be required. So two better reasons are given. The first is that he is enjoying 'an abiding in ease here and now'.<sup>39</sup> The second, which is particularly relevant to the present argument, is that he is 'compassionate for the folk who come after'.<sup>40</sup> What does this mean? Miss Horner quotes the commentary as follows: 'The young men of family, gone forth from faith, seeing that the Lord dwells in the forest, think that the Lord would not undertake forest lodgings if there were not something to be known, something to be got rid of, something to be developed, something to be realised—so why should not they? And they think that they should dwell there. Thus do they quickly become endmakers of anguish. Thus there comes to be compassion for those who come after'.<sup>41</sup> It appears from this that the Buddha is understood as going into the forest as a demonstration of practice, and not any longer because it has value in itself. In principle, though of course not explicitly, this anticipates the Mahayana argument that the very nirvana of the Buddha was undertaken as a demonstration that the ending of ill is possible. In a small way this passage indicates a mode of thinking characteristic of pre-Mahayana Buddhism (whatever the date of the commentary) which made possible the Mahayana formulations themselves.

According to its own intention Buddhist teaching is pragmatically or soteriologically orientated rather than being speculative. This character of the teaching is entirely consonant with the way in which the Buddha is represented as having begun to teach at all. He did not begin to teach for fun, nor in order to solve miscellaneous questions of a speculative kind, not to offer a theory of the universe, but rather to bring release to beings entangled in ignorance and suffering. In what sense Buddhist teaching may be said to be 'empirical', as the apologists love to claim, is a question on its own. However that may be, Buddhist teaching is related to a particular problem and a particular end. Since the teaching of the Buddha is like this, and was known from the beginning to be like this, it was quite appropriate for the Mahayanists to say that its articulation in some form is to be understood as skilful means. In this way the Mahayana stresses that it is a teaching differentiated according to needs and fashioned entirely in the light of the problem and its resolution.

Even granted the constraints of this pragmatic approach to the articulation of doctrine, the Buddhist disciple is still made aware of a rather large quantity of 'Dhamma'. In his own personal development each disciple is faced with the problem of seeing what really matters. The simile of the pith is of interest here, found in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, in the *Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Pith* and the *Lesser Discourse on the Simile of the Pith* (*Mahāsāropamasutta* and *Cūḷasāropamasutta*).<sup>42</sup> There is a large pithy tree of which the pith itself is quite desirable. There are monks who though making some progress nevertheless run into various snags in the spiritual life and fail to take hold of the pith. Some become famous and then indolent, others achieve moral perfection and become indolent, others achieve success in concentration and become indolent, yet others avoiding these traps attain knowledge and insight but still exult in this and become indolent. These are like those who take hold of the branches and leaves, the young shoots, the bark and the softwood of the great pithy tree, but fail to take the pith. As to the pith itself, the definition is as follows: 'That, monks, which is unshakable freedom of mind, this is the goal monks, of this Brahma-faring, this the pith, this the culmination.'<sup>43</sup> It is a question of discerning an elusive meaning which is all too easily but wrongly identified with various subsidiary attainments.

When the principle is expounded in the lesser discourse the brahman Piṅgalakoccha responds with a string of similes which indicate that the Dhamma has to be perspicaciously and correctly understood: 'It is as if, good Gotama, one might set upright what had been upset, or might disclose what was covered, or might point out the way to one who had gone astray, or might bring an oil lamp into the darkness so that those with vision might see material shapes—even so is *dhamma* made clear in many a figure by the good Gotama.'<sup>44</sup> In this case the Buddha himself is seen as playing a part in aiding discernment. But it is not as if it were simply a question of setting out pure unencumbered doctrine from the beginning. The same simile is used elsewhere in the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, where

we read: 'without having cut off the bark of a great, stable and pithy tree, without having cut the softwood, there can be no cutting out of the pith . . .'<sup>45</sup> Thus although one should not become entangled in the preliminaries they are nevertheless indispensable.

If one function of the concept of skilful means in the Mahayana is to bring out that the same teaching may be wrongly or rightly understood by those who receive it, and that the same item of doctrine may be both a barrier and a door depending on how it is used, there are even sharper anticipations of this in the Pali writings. An example is found in the *Discourse on the Parable of the Water-snake (Alagaddūpamasutta)* in the *Majjhima-Nikāya*.<sup>46</sup>

In this exposition a distinction is made between two kinds of men who master Dhamma. That which they *all* master, in a sense, is nothing less than the whole conceptual system of the Buddhist religion. It is referred to as a whole string of varieties of teaching: 'Discourses in prose, in prose and verse, the Expositions, the Verses, the Uplifting Verses, the "As it was Said", the Birth Stories, the Wonders, the Miscellanies'.<sup>47</sup> This is a list of nine types of teaching which a Buddha is supposed to give, similar to that given in Chapter II of The Lotus Sutra, where all are referred to in the context of the accommodated teaching of the Buddha. The Lotus Sutra goes on to say: 'I expound this nine-fold Dharma accommodating it to all living beings with the basic intention of leading them into the Mahayana (i.e. the great vehicle), and that is why I am expounding this present sutra (i.e. The Lotus Sutra)'.<sup>48</sup> In the same context there is the distinction made between 'the dull who delight in petty dharmas'<sup>49</sup> and the 'sons of the Buddha, whose minds are pure'.<sup>50</sup> Needless to say it is the latter who will see the great vehicle in the nine divisions and who will accomplish the Buddha-way.

In the *Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake* the distinction between the two kinds of men is not dissimilar. Both receive the nine-fold teaching. Firstly there are 'foolish men' who indeed 'master' Dhamma in a sense. But they do not test its meaning by 'intuitive wisdom'. On the contrary they simply master the form of the teaching 'for the advantage of reproaching others and for the advantage of gossiping'. Moreover, the text goes on, 'they do not arrive at that goal for the sake of which they mastered *dhamma*'. The others by contrast do test the meaning of Dhamma by 'intuitive wisdom'. They do not master Dhamma for the sake of reproaching others or in order to gossip about it, and they achieve the intended goal.<sup>51</sup>

The difference between the two kinds of men is that the ones grasp the teachings badly or wrongly, while the others grasp the teachings well. This is like grasping a water-snake. If it is grasped too low down, on a coil or on the tail, it is able to turn and bite its captor bringing death or great pain. If on the other hand the snake is first secured with a forked stick it can then be properly seized just below the head, and then it is not dangerous. Thus the monks are supposed to understand the *meaning* of what the Buddha teaches.<sup>52</sup> The same teaching can have two quite different outcomes depending on whether or not one presses through to its real purport. It is

no accident that Nāgārjuna used the same simile of the snake with respect to the teaching of emptiness, as quoted earlier, and that the ambivalent status of the teaching was linked with the hesitation of the Buddha about saying anything at all.<sup>53</sup>

To return to the Theravada text, there is a further well-stressed distinction between those who are 'unskilled in the *dhamma* of the pure ones' etc. and those who are 'skilled in the *dhamma* of the pure ones'.<sup>54</sup> A 'pure one' is one who has got rid of the conceit of his own persistent existence, and who thereby becomes 'untraceable' like a Tathāgata.<sup>55</sup> But if the monk has to grasp rightly the Dhamma which he has mastered discursively, and make his own the skill of the pure ones, this is only possible because the Dhamma from the beginning was taught in an appropriate way. What does this mean? It means that it had to be taught in an articulated and discursive fashion, that is, the wheel of the Dhamma had to be set in motion; yet also that in a Dhamma taught thus discursively to the ignorant, some kind of initiation into the central meaning was also essential to lead them into that real knowledge which characterises only the trackless. The Theravada text states this too: 'Thus, monks, is *dhamma* well taught by me, made manifest, opened up, made known, stripped of its swathings. Because *dhamma* had been well taught by me thus, made manifest, opened up, made known, stripped of its swathings, those monks who are perfected ones, the cankers destroyed, who have lived the life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, attained their own goal, the fetter of becoming utterly destroyed, and who are freed by perfect profound knowledge—the track of these cannot be discerned'.<sup>56</sup>

The adducement of these various passages is not intended to show that the teaching of the Mahayana sutras and of the Pali Canon is the same with respect to particular items of doctrine, or even that the Mahayana movement in general is consistent with the doctrinal norms of Theravada Buddhism. Those are questions in themselves. What does appear, and it may have a bearing on such questions, is that there is a profound consistency in the manner in which the style and intention of Buddhist teaching is understood. In particular, it has just been observed that there is a common concern with the question of discerning the real meaning of the elaborate tradition of doctrine and practice. This is viewed as a task in the development of the Buddhist disciple himself. Early Mahayana writings such as The Lotus Sutra bring it out particularly clearly by their use of the concept of skilful means. At the same time this call to the discernment of real meaning was already at home in pre-Mahayana Buddhism.

This part of the argument may be concluded by reference to the very well known parable of the raft, which has no skilful means terminology but which is probably the clearest and simplest statement of skilful means procedure in the Theravada Canon. It is given in the same context as the simile of the water-snake.<sup>57</sup> The story is simply that of a man who crosses a great stretch of water by means of a raft made of 'grass, sticks, branches and foliage'. When he arrives at the other bank he considers what to do

with the raft which has been so useful to him. Should he carry it with him on his head, or on his shoulder, or should he just leave it on the beach or push it back into the water behind him? The Buddha explains that though the raft has been very useful for crossing the water the right thing to do now is indeed to leave it behind and walk on without it. In the same way Dhamma is 'for crossing over, not for retaining'.<sup>58</sup>

There is little detail in the story, and perhaps it is fair to draw attention to the miscellany of materials which go to make up the raft: 'grass, sticks, branches and foliage', clearly what is to hand and what is required. This symbolises the ready acceptance of raw materials and invention of forms noted earlier. Conceptual restraint is seen in the pragmatic use of the raft to arrive at the other bank, for Dhamma has no other referent in the story. Finally the function of the raft has to be correctly discerned before the journey proceeds beyond. It was for crossing over, not for retaining, and therefore it is left at the beach in favour of an unimpeded departure.

The sutta goes on to say that monks, 'by understanding the Parable of the Raft, should get rid of (right) mental objects, all the more of wrong ones.'<sup>59</sup> This point was taken up again in *The Diamond Sutra* with a special twist as follows: 'That is why one should not seize on dharmas and one should not seize on non-dharmas. It was with this meaning that the Tathāgata always taught you monks: "Those who know that I taught Dharma as analogous to a raft should discard dharmas indeed, but still more so non-dharmas."<sup>60</sup> The Theravada text distinguished between good and bad mental objects (dhammas), while the Mahayana text has shifted the ground to dharmas as existent and dharmas as non-existent; that is, not only should one not seize on dharmas as existent but above all one should not seize on them as non-existent. In this way *The Diamond Sutra* is consistently applying the critical principle of seeing Dharma as a raft not only to pre-Mahayana dharma-analysis, but also to the polemical Mahayana account of dharmas as non-dharmas. In both texts however the main point is the same, namely that Buddhist analysis is not to be pedantically maintained, but used and discarded. The central premiss was already present in the Theravada text, namely that Buddhist Dhamma itself, in general and as a whole, is to be treated as a raft.

Applying this analogy to the treasured concepts of a religious system in which one has a life-long involvement is a hard thing to do, and this is why the Mahayana critique became necessary. In effect *The Lotus Sutra* taught, for example, that the concept of nirvana is a raft to be left behind. It was to develop and maintain this critique that the concept of skilful means was born. It is by skill that a buddha or a bodhisattva knows when to establish and when to dismantle a specific form of teaching. It is as a bodhisattva himself that the follower is required to discern that what he was given must finally be abandoned. Only as the ambiguity of skilful means is fully used can initial progress be completely resolved into attainment. In this sense forms of Buddhist teaching are not only selected for their appositeness,

they are also controlled by their final intention, whatever the initial appearances may be.

It has emerged that Buddhist teaching is offered after some hesitation. It seeks forms which are appropriate to the recipients who are rooted in diverse cultural contexts. In spite of its rich variation of form, the teaching is not uselessly speculative but pragmatically related to its goal. Its meaning must be correctly grasped. Although the teaching is indispensable it is eventually disposable. It is in these ways that all knowledgeable Buddhists understood the workings of their religion. For the Mahayanists in particular, these procedures were gathered up in the idea of skilful means.

### Endnotes

- 1 Cf. F. L. Woodward *et al.* *Pali Tipitakam Concordance*, 1952ff, Pali Text Society, *ad loc.*, for the references. Tilak Kariyawasam has a chapter on *upāyakaūśalya* in a Ph.D. thesis entitled *The Development of Buddhology in the Early Mahayana and its Relation to the Pali Nikayas*, Lancaster Univ. 1973, in which he notes the same few references available and then summarises usage in various Mahayana writings. Kumoi Shōzen, *op. cit.* (Chapter One, note 2), has a more complex argument in which he tries to show that pre-Mahayana Buddhism thought of *upāya* as means by which people approach the goal of Buddhahood, while Mahayana Buddhism thought of it as means provided by the Buddha from the point of view of the Buddha. The number of references available scarcely supports this argument however, the *Sutta Nipāta* case (see below) could be said to contradict it, and the *Jātaka* references have to be taken as anticipations of the Mahayana usage. Moreover he admits on page 327 that both aspects of skilful means thought are present in the Mahayana usage. In short it is not possible to argue for two clear phases in the development of this idea, one in the Pali Canon and one in Mahayana texts.
- 2 J. E. Carpenter (ed.) *Dīgha Nikāya* 1910, Vol. III p. 220, *Tini kosallani, aya kosallam, apāya kosallam, upāya kosallam*. T. W. Rhys Davids translated: 'Three proficiencies, to wit, proficiency as to progress, regress and the means of success.' *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part III, p. 213.
- 3 E. Hardy (ed.) *The Anguttara-Nikāya Vol. III Pancaka-Nipata and Chakka-Nipata*, Luzac and Co. for the Pali Text Society, London 1958, pp. 431ff. 'Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu na āyakusalo hoti, na apāyakusalo hoti, na upāyakusalo hoti, anadhigatānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ adhiḡamāya na chandam janeti, adhiḡate kusale dhamme na sārakkhati, sātaccakiriyāya na sampādeti.  
'Imehi kho bhikkhave chahi dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu abhabbo anadhigatam vā kusalaṃ dhammaṃ adhiḡantum adhiḡataṃ vā kusalaṃ dhammaṃ phātikātum.' The converse follows on in parallel.  
'Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu āyakusalo ca hoti, apāyakusalo ca hoti, upāyakusalo ca hoti, anadhigatānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ adhiḡamāya chandam janeti, adhiḡate kusale dhamme sārakkhati, sātaccakiriyāya sampādeti.  
'Imehi kho bhikkhave chahi dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu bhabbo anadhigatam vā kusalaṃ dhammaṃ adhiḡantum adhiḡataṃ vā kusalaṃ dhammaṃ phātikātun ti.' Translation by E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings, Vol. III*, Luzac & Co. for the Pali Text Society, London 1961.
- 4 D. Andersen and H. Smith (eds.) *Sutta-nipāta*, Luzac & Co. for Pali Text Society, London 1913, 1965, p. 56:

'Yathā pi nāvaṃ daḷham āruhitvā  
piyen' arittena samaṅgibhūto  
so tārāye tattha bahū pi anne  
tātrūpayannū kusalo mutimā.' (verse 321)

Andersen and Smith also give the variant reading *-upāya* at *-upāyannū*. Translation by E. M. Hare in *Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists, Sacred Books of the Buddhists Vol. XV*, 1945, Oxford University Press, London, p. 47.

- 5 The 'Vedabba-Jātaka', Jātaka No. 48, is probably such a case, though Tilak Kariyawasam quotes it to illustrate Buddhist skill in means. The story is of a brahmin who knew a charm which brought the seven precious things raining from the skies at a certain conjunction of the stars. The bodhisattva, i.e. the Buddha in a former life, was his pupil, and one day the two of them were taken prisoner by robbers who sent the bodhisattva off for a ransom, keeping the brahmin. The bodhisattva warned the brahmin not to repeat the charm or else a calamity would befall him, but as it just happened to be the right conjunction of the stars the brahmin thought he would escape more quickly by showering riches on the bandits. Unfortunately a second band of robbers fell upon the first, and as the time of the conjunction was past the brahmin could not satisfy them also with treasure. The second band slew the brahmin, killed all the first band of robbers and seized the booty. Then they fought among themselves until only two were left. One of these brought poisoned rice for the other, who slew the former and then ate the poisoned rice, thus leaving nobody. The bodhisattva returned, found the various bodies and the treasure, and reflected that a misguided use of means for selfish purposes leads to disaster. The main point of the story as reflected in the commentarial prose seems to be that *self-will* leads to disaster, so that the story is not really about skilful means. On the other hand since the story itself really illustrates that going about things the wrong way leads to disaster it could be taken as an illustration of the concept of 'skilful means' if one already had the concept in mind. For the story in full cf. E. B. Cowell (ed.) *The Jātaka*, (1895ff.) 1969, Vol. I, pp. 121ff. Cf. V. Fausbøll (ed.) *The Jātaka*, Luzac & Co. for Pali Text Society London 1962 Vol. I pp. 252ff., beginning 'Anupāyena yo atthanti'.
- 6 E.g. Jātaka No. 214: 'In a previous life too the Tathāgata had insight and skilful means', cf. Cowell, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 121; Fausbøll, *op. cit.* Vol. II p. 173. See also Jātaka No. 463 in which the Buddha is said to have 'great wisdom! wide wisdom! ready wisdom! swift wisdom! sharp wisdom! penetrating wisdom! his wisdom hits on the right plan for the right moment!' (this latter being *upāyapaññā*), Cowell, *op. cit.* Vol. IV p. 86; Fausbøll, *op. cit.* Vol. IV p. 136. In the story the ship's captain Suppāraka, representing the Buddha in a former life, is also described as 'wise and skilful', (cf. *Sutta Nipāta* 321, quoted above!) but the story does not really illustrate the concept of skilful means. Jātaka No. 478 also describes the Buddha as skilled in means, not only as the Buddha but also in previous lives. It also refers incidentally to another story as an *upāya*, namely the story of Nanda in Jātaka No. 182. This latter story does not itself use the technical terminology at all, but it probably comes nearest to the Mahayana sense of skilful means. In brief, it tells how the Buddha trained a disciple named Nanda, said to be his younger brother, who hankered after a beautiful lady. The method was to show him five hundred beautiful nymphs in the heavens and then to say that he could win these by living as an ascetic, which Nanda pledged to do. The Buddha tells all the other disciples, and Sāriputta puts it to Nanda that if he is living the ascetic life in order to win the nymphs he is no different from a labourer who works for hire. Nanda hears this from so many other disciples that he is finally put to shame and genuinely works to make spiritual progress. When he becomes an arhat he comes to the Buddha and offers to release him from his promise, whereupon the Buddha replies that if Nanda has achieved sainthood he, the Buddha, is thereby released from his promise. Cf. Cowell, *op. cit.* Vol. II pp. 63f. The logic of this story is analogous to that of the deal done by the devas with Mara in The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra, see Appendix F below.

The dating of the *Jātakas* is however very uncertain. The verses upon which they are pegged may be very old, and the idea of a *jātaka* as such is also very old, as is evidenced by the illustrations at Bharhut and Sanchi. According to Cowell however the prose commentary containing the stories themselves, as well as the introductory and concluding comments (in which most of the above cases are found) cannot be put as pre-Buddhaghosa. This seems extreme and the text as we have it must have had a long evolution before his

- time. Winternitz says however that ‘much of the prose assuredly belongs to the Christian era’, M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II (1933) 1971, Russell & Russell, New York, pp. 113ff. All in all these few references certainly cannot be counted as significant pre-Mahayana materials for the study of the idea of skilful means.
- 7 I. B. Horner (trans.) *Book of the Discipline Part IV*, Sacred Books of the Buddhists Vol. XIV, Luzac & Co., 1962, esp. pp. 6–10.
  - 8 I. B. Horner (trans.) *The Middle Length Sayings I*, Luzac & Co. 1967, pp. 210ff.
  - 9 T IX9c 尋念過去佛 所行方便力 Cf. KSS p. 63.
  - 10 T IX10a 諸法寂滅相 不可以言宣 以方便力故 爲五比丘說 是名轉法輪 便有涅槃音 及以阿羅漢 法僧差別名 Cf. KSS p. 64 N.B. KSS adds the gloss ‘(the first) Rolling of the Law-Wheel’, but this seems to be gratuitous. ‘Differentiated terminology’: 差別名。
  - 11 T IX10a 無上道：無分別法：正直捨方便。 Cf. KSS p. 65.
  - 12 Horner, *op. cit.* p. 211.
  - 13 Cf. KSS p. 170ff.
  - 14 Cf. KSS p. 184, and also cf. p. 194.
  - 15 T IX25e 如來方便深入衆生之性。知其志樂小法深著五欲。爲是等故說於涅槃。是人若聞則便信受 N.B. 知 is misprinted as 如 in T. Cf. KSS pp. 189f.
  - 16 T IX25c 世間無有二乘而得滅度。唯一佛乘得滅度耳。 Cf. KSS p. 189.
  - 17 T IX25c 唯以佛乘而得滅度。更無餘乘。除諸如來方便說法。 Cf. KSS p. 189.
  - 18 T XXX33a (11) 不能正觀空 鈍根則自害 如不善呪術 不善捉毒蛇 (12) 世尊知是法 甚深微妙相 非鈍根所及 是故不欲說 Cf. also J. May, *Candrakīrti: Prasannapadā*, *ad loc.*
  - 19 A fact given prominence by Edgerton in his grammar of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, see the opening paragraphs and documentation there.
  - 20 T XIV539a 受諸異道不毀正信。 It was pointed out before that Vimalakīrti was an important model in the acculturation of Buddhism in China (Chapter Five, note 15 and *ad loc.*) but of course the idea of skilful means had an effect on this process through other channels as well. A most interesting case is the application of the notion by Hui-yüan, roughly contemporary with Kumārajīva, to the relations between Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism: ‘It is said in a sūtra: “The Buddha is naturally endowed with a divine and wonderful method to convert (all) beings by means of expediency (*upāya*), widely adapting himself to whatever situation he may meet. Sometimes he will become a supernatural genie or a saintly emperor Turner of the Wheel (*cakravartin*), sometimes a chief minister, a National Teacher or a Taoist master.”’ Quoted in E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, Leiden 1972, p. 310. Hui-yüan’s overall argument is quite complex and links up with the idea that the early Taoist saints were really Buddhists in disguise; the whole matter should be followed up in Zürcher’s treatment.
  - 21 Cf. Chapter One above, note 2.
  - 22 Matsunaga, *op. cit.*, pp. 10ff. Cf. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part I.
  - 23 Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* pp. 301ff.
  - 24 Cf. Matsunaga, pp. 12f., and Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part II.
  - 25 Rhys Davids, *op. cit.* p. 280.
  - 26 Matsunaga, *op. cit.* p. 13.
  - 27 Cf. Chapter One above, note 2.
  - 28 Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism, A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering*, Englewood Cliffs 1967, and *Buddhism and Society; A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*, Allen & Unwin 1971; S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, Cambridge 1970; R. F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice; Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, Oxford 1971.
  - 29 T. O. Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, London 1962. James W. Boyd’s *Satan and Māra*, Leiden 1975, does not affect the present discussion. Cf. also an earlier application of Ling’s book in a related context, Michael Pye and Robert Morgan (eds.) *The Cardinal Meaning, Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity*, The Hague 1973, pp. 40f.
  - 30 Ling, *op. cit.* p. 72, quoting T. R. V. Murti’s *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Allen & Unwin 1955, p. 246.

- 31 Ling, *op. cit.* p. 78.
- 32 *Ibid.* pp. 79ff.
- 33 Gombrich, *op. cit.* pp. 40ff, esp. p. 55f, perhaps drives too much of a qualitative wedge between orthodox Sinhalese Buddhism and recent modernist developments which might be 'heading towards the first genuine syncretism in Ceylonese Buddhist history', p. 25. After all, the latter correlate certain contemporary needs with central Buddhist roots, just as the traditional orthodoxy of the villages did and does. It is surely better to see Buddhism as *regularly* syncretistic, as the wider history of Buddhism demands, although of course care must be taken over the term 'syncretism'.
- 34 See I. B. Horner (trans.) *The Middle Length Sayings* Vol. II, 1957.
- 35 T. R. V. Murti, *op. cit.* has argued that the undetermined questions are an important antecedent for the Mādhyamika method in general, and there is no doubt much truth in this. There is also the theory that the questions are left undetermined because they are in themselves fundamentally misconceived, e.g. existence or non-existence are not alternatives which are appropriate when considering a Tathāgata *post mortem*. However not only is this theory not advanced in the text now being considered, it would seem to attract the criticism of the analysis which *is* advanced. In any case what is stressed here is simply that the proliferations and correlations of Buddhist teaching are not intended to float off into miscellaneous speculations without good reason.
- 36 See Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha Part III*, pp. 127ff. It will be observed that the formulations vary. The one given earlier simply followed the text under discussion.
- 37 *Ibid.* p. 126.
- 38 See I. B. Horner (trans.) *The Middle Length Sayings* Vol. I, 1954, pp. 26f.
- 39 *Ibid.* p. 30.
- 40 *Ibid.* p. 30.
- 41 *Ibid.* p. 30, note 4.
- 42 *Ibid.* pp. 238ff.
- 43 *Ibid.* pp. 244f.
- 44 *Ibid.* p. 253.
- 45 *The Middle Length Sayings* Vol. II, p. 104.
- 46 *Ibid.* Vol. I. pp. 167ff. Tilak Kariyawasam, *op. cit.*, also refers to this passage, but note that the Theravada text does not explicitly refer to *upāya*. It is analogous to *Jātaka* No. 48, see note 4 above, as Tilak indicated.
- 47 *Ibid.* p. 171.
- 48 T IX8a 我此九部法 隨順眾生說 八大乘為本 以故說是經 Cf. KSS p. 50.
- 49 T IX7c 鈍根樂小法。
- 50 T IX8a 佛子心淨。
- 51 Horner, *op. cit.* pp. 171f.
- 52 *Ibid.* p. 172.
- 53 See note 17 above, and *ad loc.*
- 54 *Ibid.* pp. 174ff.
- 55 *Ibid.* p. 179.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 182.
- 57 *Ibid.* pp. 173f.
- 58 *Ibid.* p. 173.
- 59 *Ibid.* p. 174, 'wrong ones'; *adhammā*, cf. the Mahayana text below.
- 60 T VIII 749b 是故不應取法。不應取非法。以是義故。如來說汝等比丘。知我說法如筏喻者。法尚應捨何況非法。 Cf. also E. Conze's discussion in *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, Allen & Unwin 1958, pp. 34ff, where the distinction between a moralistic and a metaphysical interpretation of *dhammas* is brought out clearly. Does Conze perhaps make a little too much of the idea of a 'hidden meaning'?

## 8 THE TERM HŌBEN IN MODERN JAPANESE

*Colloquial Japanese: uso mo hōben*

The Japanese term for skilful means is *hōben*. This is the Japanese pronunciation, it may be recalled, for precisely the same two written characters which form the original Chinese word *fang-pien*. Since the Chinese Buddhist texts studied above have been widely current in Japan for many centuries it is interesting to see how this term is now used both among Japanese people in general and among those who are self-consciously Buddhist.

If the average Japanese is asked what is meant by the term *hōben* he may be at a loss as to how to answer. The reason for this varies according to the person. Some persons simply do not recognise it in relative isolation, in speech. Some of those who do recognise it and know it to be a Buddhist term are not sure what it means. Others who recognise it and have some idea of what it means are unsure how to begin to explain it to a western questioner. In general the slight uncertainty of reaction no doubt is connected to the fact that the word is not very commonly used in daily speech. Unlike the Sanskrit and Chinese originals it is not an ordinary obvious word for 'method' or 'device' (which would be *hōhō* or *shudan*, etc.). Nevertheless, the term is available in the vocabulary of most Japanese and it is found in children's dictionaries.

An entirely different impression is obtained if one asks about the expression *uso mo hōben*, that is, 'even an untruth is a means'. This expression is generally known and arouses no feeling of difficulty. If an explanation is pressed for in detail one receives an illustration of ambiguous behaviour, usually of a kind deemed to be socially necessary. One example is the case of the father of a very young child whose mother has died. He explains to the child that the mother has gone away on a very long journey so that the child, who has no previous experience of death, and does not know what it means, can gradually become accustomed to the sustained absence of the mother. In a sense such an explanation is an evasion of the truth directly stated, but it is felt to be an inevitable one because in practice the plain truth would be incomprehensible to the child. What to a non-participant observer appears to be an untruth is felt to be the effective form of communicating the real state of affairs, namely that the mother is absent in a sustained manner. Another illustration is the case when someone is secretly trying to remain on good terms with two other people who are themselves mutually inimicable. This is of course what diplomacy is often about, but the application of the expression *uso mo hōben* is, in this context, intended to suggest that an untruth may become inevitable because of the regrettable

ill-feeling between the two unfriendly parties. The untruth is perpetrated by the mediator, but the reason for it is not any lack of moral uprightness on his own part but rather the relative weakness of the other two.

It will be known to those who have lived in East Asia that this is not a question of rare cases of great moral conflict. On the contrary, these illustrations reflect the whole style of living together which is not characteristic of, say, Western Europe. The avoidance of face-to-face contradictions is of axiomatic importance. It is achieved by allowing divergent contexts to demand their own various and contradictory responses. That these varied responses contradict each other does not surprise the oriental observer of his fellows. Consistency, he would presume, is to be sought in another realm, somewhere behind the scenes, not in anything so mundane or transient as what people say to each other in acceptable conversation. Of course it would be impossible to show that this style of conducting relationships is the result entirely of Buddhist concepts, though it is also difficult to think that the latter have had no influence on such matters. In the case of Japan there is a close symbiosis of social and religious styles in this respect. Certainly Buddhism as a working religion fits easily enough into the general social rules which have just been briefly described. On the other hand articulate Buddhists are not very happy about the phrase *uso mo hōben*. The two illustrations given above show that the term *hōben* in this phrase does have some relationship to the meaning of the term in Buddhism. On the one hand an untruth described as a *hōben* is perpetrated because of the needs of those towards whom it is directed. On the other hand it is considered not to reflect an inconsistency on the part of the one who initiates it. Nevertheless those who think of themselves as positively Buddhist, and who take pains to articulate the meaning of Buddhism, consistently reject the phrase *uso mo hōben* as being contrary to the Buddhist meaning of *hōben*. Even though the popular usage is not entirely dissonant with the Buddhist meaning there is some justification in the Buddhist reaction. To understand this a closer look at the expression *uso mo hōben* is necessary.

The illustrations given have so far been interpreted in a positive ethical sense at least in so far as no doubt has been cast on the fundamentally good intentions of the persons involved. Indeed it is hard to imagine that a Japanese Buddhist would particularly object to the use, on occasion, of an untruth in situations such as those described. The saying 'even an untruth is a *hōben*', however, is in itself simply a general proposition which can easily be understood as giving approval to falsehoods whenever it seems convenient. Buddhists certainly wish to dissociate themselves from it in this sense. The position can be brought out clearly by considering two possible English parallels.

The most obvious parallel is the expression 'telling a white lie'. Westerners may debate about whether there are any circumstances under which it is justifiable to tell a 'white lie' and this is not the place to start such discussion much less to encourage the telling of white lies (lest any reader misunderstand). The hidden personal assumption of the writer is probably western

to the point of naturally preferring the hard line, even to the extent that hurtful truth is expressed. Nevertheless there is of course a possible case for 'telling a white lie', and circumstances of great stress where a white lie might in fact be beneficial to the person who hears it present the strongest situation in which such a course can reasonably challenge the ethical desideratum of strict adherence to truth. If the white lie is not to be excluded on principle the question of its justifiability must turn on the relation between the enormity of divergence from truth and the extent of the benefit to the other party. Unfortunately a decision which does justice to the complexity of a situation does not spring automatically from the phrase 'white lie' in itself, which could equally well be applied much more vaguely to petty lying in the service of self-interest. Hence westerners are usually reluctant to extend toleration to 'white lies' without any qualification. This general vagueness, and in particular the lack of any directed control over intentionality is exactly what is worrying to a Buddhist about the phrase *uso mo hōben*. A Buddhist 'skilful means' may in itself be an inaccurate description of a state of affairs, but it is nevertheless a controlled one.

The second English phrase worth reflecting on briefly is 'honesty is the best policy'. This is just the opposite of *uso mo hōben* in the sense that it encourages consistency with fact whereas the Japanese phrase allows inconsistency with fact. Nevertheless, the English phrase is really based on an utterly dubious if not always consciously devious ethical stance. The implication is that one should tell the truth because it will lead to one's own benefit, at least eventually. Admittedly it may sometimes be of some wider social value in the sense that the advantages of 'going straight' might provide a basis for the rehabilitation of criminals. Nevertheless the main implication of the idiom is that telling the truth does not commend itself simply as a categorical imperative but because it is supposed to lead to a desirable state of affairs for the person concerned. In this respect it is not different in principle from the use of untruths as devices to ease social disharmony. It might be argued that it is preferable if the best policy also happens to coincide with statements of brute fact, but the self-centred motivation seems to be the primary implication. The un-Buddhist aspect of such a line of thought or action is that it is centred upon a desired future situation for one's self, however much it may be beneficial for others as well.

These two English parallels are of course not present in the mind of the Japanese speaker, but they have been adduced to illustrate to the English reader the character of the phrase *uso mo hōben*, and the way in which a reflective Buddhist feels unease with respect to it.

It may be noted furthermore that the Japanese term *uso* itself is rather vague. It can refer to an intentional untruth. However it is far less rude than the term 'lie' in English, and Japanese speakers of English have to take care not to say 'lie' when they would naturally and not necessarily impolitely say *uso* in Japanese. This holds even when intentionality is imputed, but the word is also used to refer to cases when a person is simply mistaken without any intention to deceive. Analogously, in English, 'I am telling the

truth' can mean both 'what I say is factually correct so please take note of it' and 'I am not saying this with the object of deceiving you'. When a former prime minister of Japan uttered the dictum *uso wo iimasen* (I do not say falsehoods) it was a rather vague and generous claim to reliability.

Because of the vagueness of the term *uso*, and because *uso mo hōben* can so easily be used to justify telling untruths for the sake of a rather general interest almost indistinguishable from self-interest, this popular usage is not able to offer a satisfactory reflection of the Buddhist meaning of *hōben*. The phrase *uso mo hōben* simply does not rise to the dialectic implied by the term *hōben* in a truly Buddhist sense. The falsehood is not controlled by its dissolution into truth. It is not revelatory of that which would validate it. It is not a refractive symbol of the real (*jitsu*).<sup>1</sup> It cannot be said to be 'not other than the real', as demanded for example in the formula *gon-jitsu fu-ni*, 'the provisional and the real are not two'.<sup>2</sup> A mere falsehood can remain all too easily on the side of self-centred unenlightenment. Thus the phrase *uso mo hōben* is both the main colloquial context for the term *hōben* and an embarrassment to articulate Buddhists who see it as bringing the idea of skilful means into disrepute and aligning it with mere arbitrary expediency. This whole state of affairs indicates to the observer that the term can easily be misunderstood in this way, but that from the Buddhist point of view it is not supposed to be. Buddhist corrections will be given more attention shortly, but first the spectrum of general usage should be completed.

#### *Spectrum of usage in reference works*

The Japanese are great lovers and users of dictionaries, great encyclopedists, and great believers in the contents of reference books. The very complexity of the written language ensures that children become accustomed to the physical procedure of looking up words from an early age, and much more thoroughly than, say, their English counterparts. There are in principle two types of Japanese dictionary. One type is arranged phonetically, and while it gives a brief explanation of the meaning of the word it is also used to find out which are the correct characters for writing it. Such dictionaries are sold in their millions. Countless schoolboys have their own dog-eared *kokugo jiten* ('dictionary of the national language'). Countless families have their own copy of the *Jikai* or the *Kōjien*, two of the most famous dictionaries of this type, whose pleasant names mean literally, if subliminally, 'Sea of Words' and 'Grand Garden of Words'. The other type is the *kan-wa* dictionary, that is, the Sino-Japanese dictionary, which lists Japanese words of Chinese origin according to the proper arrangement of the characters, and gives the pronunciation and meaning. These too range from simple word lists for children to the great Morohashi dictionary which, because of the intimate relationship between the writing systems of the two languages becomes in effect a dictionary of Chinese literature. Alongside these two types of dictionary are the many-volumed

encyclopedias covering subjects ancient and modern which also serve as reference dictionaries.

The entries for *hōben* in Japanese dictionaries, which because of their wide use may be taken as genuinely reflective of public usage, bring out quite clearly the spectrum of meanings from the specifically Buddhist to that which Buddhists specifically reject. Indeed an example of a Buddhist writer stepping into this arena to criticise the entry in a major dictionary will be given later.

The simplest dictionaries do not indicate any Buddhist meaning at all. A *Kan-wa* dictionary for middle-school children gives:

‘a temporary measure,  
a method which suits the circumstances.’<sup>3</sup>

A similar one also based on the ‘characters for general use’<sup>4</sup> gives:

‘means,  
temporary measure used for achieving an abjective.’<sup>5</sup>

A third designed along similar lines has the following:

‘a purely temporary course of action, suiting the circumstances and intended to realise something desired,  
a measure,  
example: *uso mo hōben*.’<sup>6</sup>

A fourth popularly designed dictionary, but rather larger and containing characters beyond those taught in compulsory schooling has:

‘a method suiting the circumstances,  
something used once only,  
example: *uso mo hōben*.’<sup>7</sup>

The overall view of *hōben* here is of a makeshift course of behaviour designed to suit the circumstances, or in other words, expediency pure and simple. In two cases the phrase ‘even an untruth is a means’ is explicitly adduced as an example of appropriate usage.

The above-mentioned dictionaries are really designed for those working to master their own writing system and do not in any sense claim to be Sino-Japanese reference works. They simply reflect popular usage. A very well known single-volume *kan-wa* dictionary (Kadokawa) has the following entry:

‘occasion (*the dictionary illustrates this with a quotation from a Chinese dynastic history compiled in the T’ang period*), (Buddhism) measures provisionally devised by the Buddha for the guidance of living beings, measure, expedient,  
(colloquial) opportuneness.’<sup>8</sup>

It is evident that the popular usage here appears in the last two explanations. The Buddhist usage is specifically mentioned, though in a very introductory

and unambitious way. No quotation is felt to be needed, perhaps because there is too wide a variety of contexts which might be known to a culturally accomplished Japanese. The first sense given, by contrast, is really not a very common one, and it is provided with a literary source proving its genuine Chinese pedigree. It is surely not without accident that this part of the entry is simply an abbreviated form of the first part of the entry in the great Morohashi *kan-wa* dictionary. It gives the literary basis in classical Chinese but in a fairly digestible form. It then moves from what to the average Japanese user of the dictionary is relatively little known, through the Buddhist usage which is imperfectly known, to the colloquial usage which needs no quotation or even explanation, but merely needs to be listed.

The standard Morohashi *kan-wa* dictionary is authoritative in a sense, though its influence on mainstream Japanese usage is difficult to assess. Two basic meanings are given. The first is defined as ‘occasion’ or ‘opportunity’, with the literary quotation illustrating this which was referred to above.<sup>9</sup> The second is the Buddhist sense, defined as follows:

‘(Buddhism) measures provisionally administered by the Buddha for the guidance of living beings. By extension, emergency measures, expedient methods’.<sup>10</sup>

It will be noted that the independent meaning for *fang-pien* of ‘means’ or ‘convenience’ referred to by Sinologists and in Sino-English dictionaries<sup>11</sup> is not given independently here, but is entered only as an extension of the Buddhist meaning. For the Japanese compilers at least, the Buddhist meaning seems to be treated as if it were more important than the meaning ‘occasion’, even though it is listed second, for the explanation just quoted is followed by two quotations from Chinese Buddhist writings. These are not however a mere illustration of usage. They both contain ‘etymological’ interpretations of the term *hōben* (i.e. the Chinese *fang-pien*), of the sort which have entertained Chinese and Japanese *literati* for centuries. It goes almost without saying that the really valid historical starting point for explaining the term as a Buddhist term should be its use in Chinese Buddhist texts as the translation for a Sanskrit original. Didactic Sino-Japanese tradition however allows that any term which consists of two characters in Chinese can be ‘explained’ in terms of its constituent characters. Such explanations are themselves mainly of interest to us as indicating how the explainers wished or wish to understand the term. Since the two explanations adduced in Morohashi are themselves not identical their parallel form and divergent trend can be most easily expressed in a simple table as follows.<sup>12</sup>

	<i>fang</i> (J. <i>hō</i> )	<i>pien</i> (J. <i>ben</i> )
<i>Daizōhōsū</i> <sup>13</sup>	method	expediency
<i>Hokke Monku</i> <sup>14</sup>	Dharma	use (application, function)

This method of explaining the meaning of *hōben* is still used with variations in modern Japanese writings (see below in another context), in accounts of Buddhism prepared for foreigners, and even in uncritical secondary accounts by westerners.<sup>15</sup> As far as the present discussion is concerned the main point of interest here is that the Morohashi dictionary operates quite definitely in terms of Chinese scholastic tradition, without quoting from the fundamental Mahayana sutras which introduced the concept into China as a specifically Buddhist concept in the first place. The dictionary's own direct definition of the term does not contain anything more specifically and accurately Buddhist than the entry in the single-volume *kan-wa* dictionary quoted just before. Though it is of course correct as far as it goes, it would seem that it should be just as open to criticism by Buddhist scholars as the entries in smaller dictionaries.

The *kan-wa* dictionaries based on Chinese characters as such provide a spectrum of explanations running from the Chinese literary sources and scholastic Buddhist tradition to the contemporary colloquial. What about dictionaries of Japanese words arranged phonetically, that is, *kokugo* dictionaries which contain both native Japanese words and Japanised Chinese words, not to speak of compound words based on elements of Chinese origin but put together in Japan, and words of European origin such as *gasu-sutōbu* (gas-stove) or *kasutādo* (custard)? It will be sufficient to bring reference here to three such dictionaries including two of the most famous, namely the *Jikai* and the *Kōjien*, referred to already. The *Jikai*, which is slightly shorter, offers the following:

- (1) '(Buddhism) skilful measures used for the salvation of living beings by buddhas and bodhisattvas; (skilful measures) (winning over by skilful means) (the bow of skilful means),
- (2) An expedient measure used for achieving an objective, means, method, instrument; (arms are no more than an expedient measure).<sup>16</sup>

By contrast with the cases given so far the Buddhist meaning is given first and the general meaning is given second. The phrases in brackets are phrases illustrative of use, without being quotations. For the Buddhist meaning the phrases are of course from Buddhist writings and are in fact formulations of Chinese origin. For example, the term translated just above as 'skilful measures' is *zengon-hōben* (Ch. *shan-chüan fang-pien*), the term used to translate *upāya-kauśalya* in the first Chinese version of The Lotus Sutra.<sup>17</sup> As far as the second meaning is concerned it is notable that the compilers did not demean themselves by entering the colloquial expression *uso mo hōben*, but preferred something which displays at least a wider reflection on civilisational matters.

A similar dictionary, but one which specialises in traditional Japanese allusions, is the *Shinchō Kokugo Jiten*. This gives the same two basic meanings, in the same order, and following almost verbatim the formulations of the *Jikai*. The phrases in brackets are replaced by allusions to Japanese

literature, and the article is then after all completed with the phrase *uso mo hōben*<sup>18</sup>.

Thirdly, the *Kōjien*, a somewhat larger but still a single-volume dictionary in general use, has to be considered:

- (1) ‘(Buddhism) (Sanskrit *upāya*) (a) skilful measure for the teaching and guidance of living beings, (b) a form of teaching set up provisionally to tempt people into the true teaching.
- (2) An expedient measure used to attain an objective, means, deceit.’<sup>19</sup>

This basic entry is followed by three more compound phrases which reflect the two fundamental meanings in miscellaneous ways.<sup>20</sup> It will be seen that the same double set of meanings is given, first the Buddhist one and secondly the general one. The Buddhist part is given with a little more elaboration than in other cases, not least by the introduction of the Sanskrit *upāya* rather than by any prior indication of a Chinese literary use. The quotation above may even do less than justice to the original for the simple reason that the order of words in Japanese usually has to be more or less reversed when they are rendered into English, and this plays havoc with emphasis based on word order. As a result, the two subdivisions of the Buddhist meaning may seem to be very similar indeed. The distinction which is being emphasised is the stress on the ‘living beings’ in the first one (‘living beings’ comes first in the Japanese), who are so ignorant as to *need* such skilful measures; and ‘the true teaching’, or ‘the teaching of reality’ (*shinjitsu no kyōhō*, which again comes first in the Japanese) which is really the main point of the second one. *Shinjitsu*, for which translations rightly waver between ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, is, so to speak, the omega-point of Mahayana Buddhism. It is that which transcends discriminative thought, and indeed precisely that to which *hōben* stands in a dialectical relationship.<sup>21</sup> Admittedly this relationship is not particularly clearly pointed out in this short dictionary entry, and its importance suffers further by association with the second general meaning given, which ends with the word ‘deceit’ (*tabakari*). Even though the phrase *uso mo hōben* does not appear, this angle is sufficiently covered by the term ‘deceit’, and by one of the illustrative compound phrases, namely *hōbendango*, ‘liars’ dumplings’ eaten ceremonially to erase the lies of the preceding twelve months.<sup>22</sup>

In sum the *kokugo* dictionaries also reflect a spectrum of usage from the popular to the more literary and historical. They are different from the *kan-wa* dictionaries however in showing no interest in any independent Chinese origin for the word, while the meaning ‘occasion’ (*kikai*) does not appear at all. The Buddhist meaning, briefly explained, is always given first, reflecting no doubt the persistent influence of Buddhist writings on the Japanese language ever since the beginning of the literature. It must not be forgotten that not only did the Japanese never know a Chinese language uninfluenced by Buddhist ideas and terminology, but the early intrusion of continental culture was spearheaded by Buddhist texts such as The Lotus Sutra, which were used very frequently in public ritual as well as in

temples.<sup>23</sup> At the same time there is a clear recognition of a more general use of the term to mean 'expedient', 'method', 'means', and even 'deceit'. This links up both with the general meaning of the term *fang-pien* in Chinese and with the popular usage in Japan which, although it does not appear in every dictionary, can be best summed up by the phrase *uso mo hōben*. Now that the general range of usage has been spelled out, at least in this summary form, more detailed attention can be paid to the way in which articulate Buddhists themselves relate to and comment upon this usage.

#### *Response of Buddhists to general usage*

Both the phrase *uso mo hōben* in particular and the whole tarnishing of the Buddhist concept of skilful means with the extended general implication of mere expediency are rejected by Buddhist writers. This statement is based on the content of numerous conversations, but can also be illustrated by varied written documents.

Take first a popular and readable book by the founding president of the Risshō Kōsei-kai, Niwano Nikkyō.<sup>24</sup> Niwano is the genial spiritual leader of a few million devoted followers for whom Buddhism is a matter of explicit day-to-day importance and not just a cremation service. His books are printed in large numbers and it is fair to suppose that they are widely read. In a single-volume commentary on The Lotus Sutra, which is the primary scriptural basis for the movement, he went to some length to counter the popular view of skilful means as a more or less dishonest device by referring to another 'etymology' of the term. 'If we look up the character *hō* of *hōben* in a dictionary we find that it means 'dead square' (*masshikaku*) and thus also 'correct' (*tadashii*). *Ben* means 'measure' (*shudan*). Therefore the term *hōben* means 'correct measure'. It is a pity that the way of understanding it has gradually become distorted as for example in the expression *uso mo hōben*. Originally it meant a teaching device which exactly fits the person and the circumstances.'<sup>25</sup> This etymology is of the same sort as that noted above in connection with the great Morohashi dictionary but seems to be very close to an interpretation current in Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>15</sup> Were the ancient interpretations perhaps devised originally with the same practical intention as Niwano's, namely to safeguard the serious Buddhist meaning? In this particular case it is directed specifically against the phrase *uso mo hōben*. It should be admitted that the term *shudan*, translated 'measure' here and earlier, is itself not entirely unassociated with the idea of 'stratagem', 'device', and the like, though the element of expediency would have to be brought out fairly specifically with a qualifying term such as *ichiji no*, 'temporary', etc. The English term 'measure' is perhaps just a little more straightforward than *shudan*, but it is kept as a translation here because the whole tenor of Niwano's explanation is to stress the correctness and lack of deviousness involved.

Naturally there does remain the question of the inconsistency apparent between the *hōben* and the objective considered in itself, all protestations

notwithstanding. But against this two things may be said, which reflect things said in conversation by the above quoted writer. For one thing, it is argued people cannot be taught the truth of Buddhism except by the use of *hōben* through which the full truth is indeed displayed. This of course follows the line of thought within The Lotus Sutra itself. It is only because of the ‘trace’ Buddha that we can know of the ‘essential’ Buddha.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the criterion for distinguishing between a genuine *hōben*, which is ethically acceptable, and a trick, which is not, lies in the intention of the person who establishes the measure in question. If the intention is one of love, as of a father to his children, and if it leads to the wisdom or insight of Buddhahood, then it is a genuine Buddhist skilful means. If the intention is to deceive or to cheat someone then of course it is completely different. The criterion does assume the truth of the ‘truth’ towards which the skilful measure leads people, and its validity depends upon that truth. At the same time the independent observer can see for himself that it is an honest claim to validity, since it rules out real cheating by definition. If it is understandable that such a useful concept as skilful means should have been misunderstood, as Buddhists would say, by those who see things largely from a selfish point of view, then it is also required of the observer that he take note of the protestations of articulate Buddhist leaders and recognise that *hōben* are both necessary and controllable within the Buddhist system. Indeed it is quite clear that, for Buddhists, if a skilful means does not lead consistently into the truth with which it is related, it is simply invalid.

A more academically conceived argument was developed by Kumoi Shōzen whose article ‘Hōben to shinjitsu’ (‘skilful means and true reality’) was referred to earlier.<sup>27</sup> He too was concerned to correct misapprehensions in Japanese usage. His starting point was the entry in the *Kōjien* dictionary referred to above and in the popular phrase *uso mo hōben*.<sup>28</sup> His conclusion however is to reject this usage and to stress the connection with insight or wisdom. ‘Speaking generally, have we not been misinterpreting the term *hōben* in various ways? Even leaving aside the generally current colloquialism *uso mo hōben* the meaning of *hōben* has usually been presumed to be ‘substitute’ (*kari no mono*), ‘a mere device’ (*tan naru shudan*) or ‘method’ (*hōhō*). But is it really right to interpret *hōben* in this sense of expediency? From the Buddhism of the *Āgamas* onwards to its high tide in Mahayana Buddhism, *hōben* thought has been seized on as the content of wisdom. It may even be said to have signified the internal characteristic of Buddhawisdom. It was certainly not the mere expedient method or device which it is commonly supposed to be . . . *Hōben*, that is to say, skilful means (*zengyō hōben*), in so far as it takes its origin in the wisdom of the Buddha cannot be conceived of apart from its connection with wisdom.’<sup>29</sup>

Sawada Kenshō had argued similarly a little earlier in *Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyū* (Studies in Buddhist Culture). *Hōben* is usually taken to mean a ‘measure’, a ‘temporary measure’ or a ‘means’, he says, but he goes on to argue that the real Buddhist meaning is deeper than that. After a brief survey of the development of the term he concludes that it has two basic

meanings. It refers both to the system of manifestations which the Buddha provides for the salvation of beings, and also to the system of methods used by these beings in their attainment of nirvana or release. Thus it certainly does not have the mere meaning of device or measure. On the contrary, the term can more or less be equated with the term Mahayana.<sup>30</sup>

Another voice is that of Masuda Hideo who published his article on usage in *The Perfection of Insight Literature* at about the same time. After stressing the connection between skilful means and insight, he concluded as follows. 'The term *hōben* has come to be associated with vulgarised meanings such as *uso mo hōben* although really it affords great possibilities with respect to the investigation of Buddhism, and particularly the bodhisattva way of the Mahayana. I think it is necessary to wash away the meanings which have nowadays become attached to the word and re-establish its original, fundamental meaning.'<sup>31</sup>

In such ways as the above, various Buddhist writers find it necessary to try to turn the tables against the distortion of the meaning of *hōben* in the popular mind. A similar effect is found, though not explicitly argued for, in some discussions of the term in encyclopedias where a named authoritative writer is asked to write a short article.<sup>32</sup> In two such encyclopedias of the nineteen thirties, which, it should be emphasised, are general encyclopedias and not specifically on Buddhism, the term is explained entirely in the Buddhist sense. One of these may be quoted in full.

'*Hōben (Buddhism)*. Two meanings, one as compared with insight and one as compared with reality. In the first, knowledge leading to suchness is called insight, while knowledge tending towards the benefit of others is called skilful means. In accordance with this the whole of Buddhism, whether Mahayana or Hinayana, is a skilful means. In the second, that which signifies the return to the ideal is termed true reality, while that which is established as a substitute and maintained temporarily is termed skilful means. Popularly it means a measure, and in this sense the Hinayana is an expedient teaching if it is a gate leading into the Mahayana. Similarly the three vehicles were established in order to lead into the one vehicle, so that these two are expedient teachings.'<sup>33</sup> It will be seen that there is only the slightest nod of the head towards the popular meaning here, and even then it is equated with the polemical use which it sometimes has within Mahayana Buddhism. The basic meaning is given in terms of its dialectical relationship with either insight (*hannya*,=Skt. *prajñā*) or true reality. In terms of the basic meaning the whole of Buddhism is to be understood in terms of skilful means.

The other article is longer and contains a summary account of the term in the 'Hannyakyō' (i.e. sutras of the *Prajñāpāramitā* class) and in *The Lotus Sutra*. It stresses firmly the interdependence of insight and means:

'... based on the correct knowledge of insight, not sinking into signless, non-discriminated voidness, but bubbling up just at the point where the denial of discriminated marks is penetrated, to plant and train all good

virtues, this is skilful means. Thus skilful means is an emergence from voidness to being, it is an amplification and an application. Therefore skilful means must be accompanied by insight. Similarly voidness is realised through skilful means, and therefore a coursing in voidness which forgets skilful means is not the bodhisattva way but a relapse into Hinayana.<sup>34</sup>

Passages such as these, which indeed reflect passages in the ancient sutras studied earlier, show that Buddhists conceive of the whole idea of skilful means as intimately related to that of insight, or equivalent terms for the omega-point of Buddhism. On the one hand the intention of the Buddhist system as a whole is the criterion for controlling the establishment and operation of skilful means. On the other hand, coursing in voidness without skilful means is inadequate, or, voidness is only to be realised by the route of skilful means, or, the whole of Buddhism as a working religion is skilful means. Such is the tenor of twentieth century Mahayanist views.

### *Hōben in sectarian Buddhism*

The sectarian development of Mahayana Buddhism displays a rich interweaving of traditions, and subtle shifts in the relative importance of the main sutras and symbols. The writings of patriarchal figures such as Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, Chih-I and the Ch'an masters in China, and in Japan Kūkai, Hōnen and Shinran, Dōgen, Nichiren and so on, take on an importance of their own in defining the shape and the meaning of the tradition. It would be a task in itself, one both massive and intricate, to trace the fortunes of the term *hōben* within the huge literary deposits which have resulted. At this point it will suffice to note what seems to be one regular characteristic of contemporary sectarian usage in Japan.

It has been seen that in principle any formation of Buddhism may be interpreted in terms of *hōben*. The tendency of sectarian devotion however is not to understand the central symbols of the sect in question as *hōben*, but to leave this term for interpreting the symbols of other sects and various peripheral practices common to all the sects. It must be admitted that this proposition can only be tentatively advanced, partly because of the sheer mass of data for living Buddhism in modern Japan, partly because a complete discussion would involve correlating different levels of articulation within even one sect, and partly because leading persons in a Buddhist group are themselves not always certain about whether or where they wish to draw the line between what is *hōben* and what is not. Nevertheless it is evident that the previously documented response of Buddhist apologists to popular usage is not always entirely backed up by the nature of sectarian usage, and the impressions to be offered below suggest that some Buddhists think of *hōben* as being mere devices for the ignorant which have little to do with the true Buddhist doctrine and practice which they themselves cultivate. The matter can be briefly illustrated with respect to Tendai/Nichirenite, Shingon, Sōtō Zen and Shinshū Buddhism.

The Tendai (Chinese: T'ien T'ai) system formed by Chih-I in China is not really under discussion as such here, because Chih-I himself seems to have understood The Lotus Sutra and Mādhyamika principles to apply to all the various means at the disposal of Buddhists.<sup>35</sup> As to the Tendai foundation in Japan, this was really more of a comprehensive national church than a sect (if these terms may be used<sup>36</sup>), and it was partly from within its broad embrace that the more distinctive sects emerged. However there are two lines of thought formulated by Chih-I and transmitted in Tendai Buddhism which had a particular effect on later Buddhism relevant to the present discussion. One was the *p'an-chiao* (Japanese *hankyō*) system of arranging sutras in a sequence of graded importance or development. The other was the division of The Lotus Sutra into sections for exegetical purposes.

The *p'an-chiao* system does not need to be described in detail as it is given in various books,<sup>37</sup> but we may recall that the main point of it is to make The Lotus Sutra the final culmination of the Buddhist teaching and to relegate other sutras to the realm of provisional truth. This is not necessarily inconsistent with the basic idea of skilful means. It all depends how one understands The Lotus Sutra itself. Properly understood the sutra has no new content at all. It simply makes clear, in terms of the teaching of skilful means, how Buddhist teaching is to be treated. Understood in this way it does not present a usurpation of any kind, or a sectarian self-assertion. Stated in terms of the *p'an-chiao* scheme, it could be said that The Lotus Sutra is only needed in the final position because of the intervening stages. These in turn were required because the initial teaching of the Buddha, the first of the five stages in Chih-I's system, was not understood. It is only because the teaching had to be unrolled in various provisional forms that The Lotus Sutra was finally required to roll them back together again. However it is far from clear that all subsequent devotees of The Lotus Sutra understand it in this way, even though they may pay homage to the memory of Chih-I. Rather they see the sutra as a simplified focus for an absolute devotion superior to other forms of devotion. This is true especially for the various Nichirenite sects and groups, because there is no doubt that the net effect of Nichiren's work was to reinforce the tendency to pay exclusive devotion to The Lotus Sutra as a sacred writing.<sup>38</sup>

This tendency is undergirded also by the second line of thought bequeathed by Chih-I, namely that The Lotus Sutra should be divided up into sections for exegetical purposes, and that in particular a major distinction should be made between the first fourteen chapters and the second fourteen chapters (of Kumārajīva's version). The first half of the sutra then is the realm of the 'trace' Buddha, while the second half is the realm of the 'essential' Buddha, the first dominated by the chapter on skilful means, the second by the chapter on the unlimited life of the Tathāgata.<sup>39</sup> It has already been shown most interestingly by Alicia Matsunaga how this concept influenced the idea of *honji-suijaku*, which eventually helped to regulate the relations between Buddhist bodhisattvas

and the indigenous Shintō gods in Japan (*kami*).<sup>40</sup> In Nichirenite Buddhism the distinction between *shaku* ('trace') and *hon* ('essential') had the special effect of taking the second part of the sutra out of the realm of skilful means and turning it into an absolute focus of devotion. As a result of this there sometimes seems to be a finality and a fixity about some forms of devotion to The Lotus Sutra or to the *honbutsu*, that is, the so-called eternal Buddha, which belie the internal message of the sutra itself. This trend seems to be the result of a rather inflexible acceptance of Tendai tradition. Chih-I's systems are taken as being in themselves a plan of salvation, instead of being recognised for what they are, namely exegetical devices. Concomitant with this stress on a new absolute point of devotion is the tendency to view other Buddhist sects with some suspicion, following the lead of Nichiren himself, and to emphasise The Lotus Sutra as being the only vehicle of salvation. It is ironical that Nichiren, who criticised Amidism and Shingon for setting up misleading alternatives to the central meaning of Buddhism, not only provided a new mantra and a new mandala but also created a focus of devotion which was itself so easily open to misinterpretation.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand it should be admitted that Nichiren and his various followers have had an undeservedly bad press among western observers.<sup>42</sup> Nichiren himself was a subtle mediaeval theologian, and many of his modern followers have a view of Buddhism at least as broad as that held in other Buddhist sects.

The main counterpoise to the Tendai school in the early formative period of Japanese Buddhism was Shingon Buddhism, a system of tantric elements consolidated by Kūkai (774–835) on the basis of Indian and Chinese models. Shingon has complex rituals involving the physical symbolism of gestures (*mudras*) and mandalas, especially the *Taizōkai Mandara* and *Kongōkai Mandara*, painted on *kakemono* and used as focal points for meditation.<sup>43</sup> All forms of Shingon ritual have as their ultimate objective the identification of the adept with the cosmic Buddha named as Dainichi Nyorai (Skt. Vairocana Tathāgata) and identified with the *dharmakāya* itself.<sup>44</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the 'three mysteries' of the esoteric teaching (*mikkyō*) namely body, speech and mind, have also been termed the 'three skilful means'.<sup>45</sup> Kūkai himself stressed the immediacy of the identification with Dainichi Nyorai, and wrote of 'attaining enlightenment in this very existence' (*sokushin jōbutsu*)<sup>46</sup>. Enlightenment and wisdom are to be found in one's own mind 'because it is originally pure and bright', stressed Kūkai, on the basis of the opening argument of the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*, the centrally important writing of the sect.<sup>47</sup> When asked in the sutra about the nature of this 'wisdom', the Buddha Dainichi (Mahāvairocana) himself replies: 'The enlightened mind is the cause, great compassion is the root, and skilful means is the ultimate.'<sup>48</sup> At the same time Kūkai had a distinct sectarian consciousness, strengthened no doubt by his personal toil in establishing the Shingon system over against an influential Tendai establishment which itself allowed of esoteric practices within its limits. One of his important writings was *The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury* in which

he elaborated ten stages of spiritual development. The system is analogous to the *p'an-chiao* systems. Although the concept of skilful means is not explicitly applied, it is argued that the Buddha produces a variety of medicines out of compassion for beings in various imperfect states. The whole idea is exactly consonant with the concept of skilful means found in The Lotus Sutra. Parables in the same sutra are unavoidably recalled by the statement that men are unaware of the treasure which they possess and the rhetorical question: 'If they refuse to take the medicines that have been offered, how can they be cured?'<sup>49</sup> The first nine stages are medicines 'to sweep away the dust covering the surface of the mind and dispel its illusions,' but then comes the turn of the Shingon teaching or practice itself. 'Only in the Diamond Palace are men able to open the inner treasury and receive the treasures therein.'<sup>50</sup> The practices and ideas otherwise current in the Buddhism of the time were fitted in by Kūkai with the later stages of the scale, but the final conclusion is that 'the Shingon teaching is the ultimate Truth, transcending all other teachings.'<sup>51</sup> The first nine stages of development are all seen as 'stepping stones' towards the next, but Shingon Buddhism by contrast is the supreme truth revealed by the Dharmakāya Buddha. It is this emphasis no doubt which makes it difficult for Shingon Buddhists today to conceive of the central Shingon concepts and practices themselves as being skilful means.

When it comes to the relationship between Shingon Buddhism and various popular forms of religion it is a different story. Shingon has always been very closely interwoven with indigenous practices of various kinds, just as tantric Buddhism was closely entangled with shamanism in Central Asia. Historically, the relationship between buddhas and *kami* elaborated under the formula *shinbutsu-shūgō*, similar to the *honji-suijaku* theory referred to above, is a clear example of the ability of Mahayana Buddhism to assume and dominate popular forms of religion. Whether this phase should be understood explicitly in terms of skilful means is open to question, but as a procedure it has obvious affinities with this way of thinking.<sup>52</sup> In modern times Shingon is still intricately bound up with popular religion. Mount Kōya, the mountain fastness of the sect, is the beginning and end of a pilgrim circuit running mainly round the island of Shikoku, and of which most stopping places are Shingon affiliated temples. Kūkai, or Kōbō Daishi as he is respectfully termed, is himself the centre of an elaborate cult. Pilgrims visit his tomb on Mount Kōya. They may perform the exercise of one hundred circumambulations, which in practice means hurrying backwards and forwards between the front of the tomb, where reverence is paid, and a stone marker post some metres to the side. The life of Kōbō Daishi is a tale told with great marvel in many editions, simply written and lavishly illustrated. Kōbō Daishi charms (*o-mamori*) are bought to ward off illnesses and other misfortunes, and this along with the use of spells (*majinai*, Sanskrit: *dhāraṇī*) is simply the Shingon version of a common thread in Japanese religion in general. How is this flourishing yet touristic and incidental religion to be understood in the context of the mystical writings

of Kūkai himself and what has it to do with ‘attaining enlightenment in this very existence’? They have all been described to the writer as skilful means (*hōben*) designed to develop the faith of the people in general, who because of the pressures of time and economics cannot enter into the system at a more profound level. They are thought of as the elementary stages of a progressive spiritual development, just as are the non-Shingon forms of Buddhism.

Thus once again in the context of a distinct sectarian development there is a reluctance in everyday discussion to concede that central formulations of the Shingon tradition itself are skilful means (though an interpretation of Shingon probably *could* make out a case for this). On the other hand the concept is used to justify practices of popular religion, which at first sight might seem to be mere casual superstition and to have little if anything to do with enlightenment or wisdom.

In Sōtō Zen one meets the admission that all is *hōben* except for *zazen* itself. For many members of the Sōtō sect this may be just a matter of denominational pride in the achievements of the patriarch Dōgen. It may also be argued however that the position makes sense in so far as *zazen* itself is a point at which an articulated differentiation of means does not take place. *Zazen* considered by an independent observer might look like having the status of a means, but *zazen* carried out existentially passes beyond the elaboration of means. Such an interpretation reflects the self-dissolving nature of Buddhist skilful means when these are properly used. By all accounts, *zazen* truly practised is an effortless, perfect living of suchness, being no longer a technique or a method, nor even a symbol, but a direct and undifferentiable statement of buddhahood. On the other hand it is possible for a person to practice *zazen* in good faith on the basis of denominational loyalty, but with a sad lack of perfection. There are those who train for monkhood out of family reasons, there are those who seek in *zazen* a recreation and a relaxation which will stand them in good stead in the bustle of secular life. In a sense *zazen* is being used, and indeed this is not in itself disallowed. It seems difficult to maintain however that a *zazen* meeting which contains all the criss-crossed elements of human motivation does not operate as much on the level of skilful means as on the level of the perfection of insight. The danger of mere denominational assertion might be reduced by a greater readiness to apply the *hōben* dialectic explicitly to *zazen* itself.

In Shinshū, the Pure Land Buddhism in the line of Shinran, one meets a similar reluctance to conceive of the central workings of the faith (which is what it is) as skilful means. Some facets of the written tradition suggest that it should be so understood. Admittedly, just as Dainichi Buddha is identified in the Shingon tradition with the *dharmakāya* itself, so too in Shinshū is Amitābha or, in Japanese, Amida Buddha. Is it of any importance that a further distinction is made here between the *hosshō hosshin* (*dharm*a-nature *dharm*a-body) and the *hōben hosshin* (skilful means *dharm*a-body), and that Amida is defined as the latter?<sup>53</sup> One of Shinran’s own stanzas suggests that the Vow of Amida, which is the central soteriological agent of the

religion, is to be thought of as a skilful means, or perhaps indeed as *the* skilful means:

‘The Divine Power and the Original Vow!  
The Perfect, Clear, Firm, and Fulfilling Vow.  
Inconceivable is the Compassionate Means.  
Take refuge in the Truly Unfathomable One.’<sup>54</sup>

Yet the main drift of Shinran’s teachings was perhaps rather to stress the expedient character of all that went before. Thus:

‘In all the life-time teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, the attainment of Enlightenment in this world is called the Path of Sages, which is also called the Path of Difficult Practice. In this path there are the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, the Gradual and Abrupt teachings, the teachings of the One Vehicle, Two Vehicles, and Three Vehicles, the Expedient and Real teachings, the Exoteric and Esoteric teachings, and the teachings of Vertical Going-out and Vertical Transcendence. These are all ways of self power, or provisional, expedient teachings (*hōben gonmon no dōro*) expounded (by Bodhisattvas) in the stage of benefiting and teaching others.’<sup>55</sup>

An even sharper distinction is made in another stanza from the *Jōdo Wasan*:

‘In the temporary expedients (*gonke no hōben*) of the Path of Sages  
Sentient beings have remained long,  
Only to suffer transmigration in various existences.  
Take refuge in the One Vehicle of the Compassionate Vow.’<sup>56</sup>

It is this latter usage which reflects the most common *de facto* attitude among Shinshū believers, and hence we see that once again there is a tendency to shift from the formative usage of the idea of skilful means. Instead of skilful means being a concept with which to understand the role of each and every vehicle of Buddhist meaning, it is used to refer particularly to those symbols or systems which are dialectically rejected in favour of the new truth. When Amida’s Vow is the ‘one vehicle’ (*ichijō*), as in the stanza quoted above, it tends to appear as a new, positive exclusivism. As in the other schools of thought the pressures of denominational organisation and of individual piety reinforce this tendency.

This very brief sketch of attitudes towards the idea of skilful means in the context of some varied sectarian traditions is intended mainly to reflect the tenor of conversations with their living representatives. No attempt has been made to document systematically the vagaries of the term *hōben* in the sectarian literary traditions. However there seem to be two trends of interest. Firstly, popular practices of peripheral interest to Buddhism are described as *hōben*. Secondly, there is a tendency to see what others do as *hōben*, implying that it is a *mere* skilful means, and to hypostasise one’s own central symbols or practice as a final resolution or summation of Buddhist teaching or Buddhist meaning. Both of these trends to some extent reflect and reinforce the popular way of understanding *hōben* against which

Buddhist writers otherwise react sharply when attending specifically to the term.

One single conclusion about contemporary usage is therefore not possible. The term *hōben* is generally known among those who are self-consciously Buddhist, but its fundamental meaning as once given in the major Mahayana sutras tends to be overshadowed by the sectarian influences. Moreover while there are explicit variations at the official doctrinal level there is also variation in the manner in which different individuals understand the same forms of religion. Two people in one organised religious context will make use of the same materials very differently. One will use them for self-definition and self-assertion. Another, or the same person at a later date, will use them without this kind of affirmation or attachment, as skilful means in a truly Mahayana manner. The observer must always reckon with a coexistence and miscellany of use and misuse, as it might seem to be from a purist point of view. Similarly one should always bear in mind the possibility of a long-term dialectic of skilful means, not only expressed doctrinally but also articulated in a particular sectarian social form. With Buddhism, one might say, it does not matter if it is not fully understood or resolved until later.

### Endnotes

- 1 *Jitsu* (実) is normally opposed to *gon* (権), the provisional.
- 2 権実不二 The relationship between *gon* and *jitsu* is really a parallel to the relationship between *hōben* and *shinjitsu*, as may be seen immediately by reference to the standard Japanese dictionaries of Buddhism. (権実=權實)
- 3 Hoikusha, *Chūgaku-kanwa-shinjitēn* (保育社・中学漢和新辞典, Tokyo 1964). The entry runs: 一時的なてだて。つごうのよい方法。
- 4 The 'characters for general use' or 'general purpose characters' (*Tōyō Kanji* 当用漢字) are a list of characters stipulated by the Japanese Ministry of Education as being those to be taught in compulsory schooling. They number 1850 in all and the different ways in which they are allowed to be read number just over three thousand. Further information on the use and the spread of these characters may be found in the present writer's *The Study of Kanji* (Hokuseidō Press, Tokyo 1971). The two characters which form the word *hōben* are officially supposed to be introduced in the second and fourth years of primary schooling, which means that the components of the term under study are easily available to every Japanese child. Moreover, as is seen from the fact that entries from the elementary dictionaries adduced in the text can be given at all, the term itself is reckoned to be a rather ordinary one.
- 5 Chūkyōshuppan, *Tōyō-kanji-jiten* (中教出版・当用漢字辞典, Tokyo 1961). The entry runs: てだて。ある目的のために利用される一時の手段。
- 6 Ōbunsha, *Tōyō-kanji-jiten* (旺文社・当用漢字辞典, Tokyo 1961). The entry runs: 望みをなしとげるために、いちじだけ使うつごうのいいやり方。てだて。例：うそも方便。
- 7 Kyōiku-toshō-kenkyūkai, *Tōyō-kanji-jiten* (教育図書研究会・当用漢字辞典, Tokyo 1959). The entry runs: つごうのよい方法。そのときかぎり使うもの。例：うそも方便。
- 8 Kadowaka, *Kanwa-chūjiten* (角川, 漢和中辞典, Tokyo 1965). The entry runs: 機会. (quotation omitted). (仏)仏が衆生を導くために、仮に設けた手段。手段。まにあわせ。(俗)好都合。
- 9 Morohashi, *Dai-kanwa-jiten* (諸橋轅次, 大漢知辞典). The following entry consists of the term *hōben-bukuro* (方便囊) which means 'an occasional bag (for carrying things)'.

It should also be noted that more extensive explanations of the term *hōben* are in fact given under the term *hōben-mon* 方便門, which is said to be synonymous with *hōben* and identifiable with Buddhism (*bukkyō* 仏教). However *hōben-mon* is already a slightly more technical term and not confluent with a word used in ordinary speech, as is *hōben*. For this reason attention is restricted to the way in which *hōben* is treated.

- 10 The term translated 'occasion' or 'opportunity' is 機会 (J. *kikai*). The entry for the 'Buddhist' meaning runs as follows: 佛が衆生を導くために施すかりの手段。轉じて、臨機の處置・便宜の方法をいう。
- 11 See quotations above in Chapter One, note 29.
- 12 The associations between the characters are of some importance, being stronger in the first text than in the second:

<i>fang-pien</i> :	方	便
<i>Daizōhōsū</i> :	方法	便宜
<i>Hokke Monku</i> :	法	用

There is a proper sense in which character associations can be taken into account in a linguistic assessment of meaning. I.e. for modern Japanese the character *hō* 方 bears with it something of its use in words such as *hōhō* 方法 (method) *hōshin* 方針 (policy) and *hōsaku* 方第 (plan; means), while the character *ben* 便 reminds one of *benri* 便理 (convenient) and *benji* 便宜 (expedient), and even *ben-jo* 便所 (toilet, or literally 'convenient place'). Special tests would be necessary to assess the precise weight to be placed on any sub-liminal character associations. Perhaps they tend if anything to be overestimated by foreigners, sinologists and Japanese pedagogues.

- 13 *Daizōhōsū*, Ch. *Ta Ts'ang Fa Shu* (大藏法數).
- 14 *Hokke Monku* (法華文句), i.e. *Myōhōrenge-monku*, Ch. *Miao Fa Lien Hua Wen Chū*, (妙法蓮華文句) T1718. One of the more famous writings of Chih-I (智顛), known in Japan as Tendai Daishi (天台大師).
- 15 Inada and Funabashi, *Jōdo Shinshū*. This book, in English, argues that the *hō* of *hōben* means *hōsei* 方正 or 'correct', while the *ben* means *kōmyō* 巧明 or 'skilful', p. 100. This rather confused 'etymology' is reproduced in Joseph J. Spae's *Christian Corridors to Japan*, Tokyo 1965, p. 33, where *hōben* as such is defined as 'expedients, i.e. partial understanding' and then more satisfactorily as 'the correct, adapted way which leads to salvation'. The explanation is based on Pure Land Buddhist tradition going back to the Chinese patriarch T'an Luan, J. Donran 曇鸞.
- 16 *Jikai* (辞海, Tokyo 1968). The entry is: (1) (仏) 仏菩薩が衆生救済のために用いる巧みな手段。(善巧方便) (方便引入) (方便の弓)。(2) 目的おとげるために用いる便宜の手段。てだて。方法。道具。(武力は方便に過ぎない). The bow of skilful means is a metaphor for skilful means, stressing the conscious directing activity of the Buddha who 'feathers an arrow' for his bow, c.f. Heibonsha's *Daijiten*, Tokyo 1936, Vol. 23, p. 131.
- 17 善權方便 cf. Chapter One, note 30.
- 18 *Shinchō-kokugo-jiten* (新潮国語辞典, Tokyo 1965), *ad loc.*
- 19 *Kōjien* (広辞苑, Tokyo 1963). The entry is: (1) (仏) 梵語 *upāya* (イ) 衆生を教之導く巧みな手段。(口) 真実の教法に誘い入れるために仮に設けた法門。(2) 目的のために利用される便宜の手段。てだて。たばかり。
- 20 The term *hōben-dango* (方便団子) 'liars' dumplings' is referred to again below. *Hōben-bukuro* (方便囊) is the same as that given in Morohashi and reflects an incidental Chinese usage. *Hōben-riki* (方便力) 'power of skilful means' is an expression frequently occurring in Buddhist texts, such as The Lotus Sutra, c.f. Chapter One, note 37.
- 21 The Morohashi *Dai-kan-wa-jiten* entry for *hōben-mon* referred to in note 9 above contains a fine quotation from Chih-I's *Hokke Monku* where he speaks of 'opening the gate of skilful means to reveal the mark of true reality' (開方便門示真實相). Indeed the phrase *hōben* to *shinjitsu* 'skilful means and true reality' appears now and then as a sub-heading in modern books on Buddhism.
- 22 Cf. the *Kōjien* entry on *usotsuki-iwai*, 'liars' ceremonies'.
- 23 Cf. de Visser's *Ancient Buddhism in Japan, passim*.

- 24 Niwano founded the Risshō Kōsei-kai in 1938, seceding from the Reiyūkai (靈友会). Cf. also Chapter One, note 3 and *ad loc.*
- 25 Niwano Nikkyō, *Hokekyō no Atarashii Kaishaku* (法華經の新しい解釈, 'A New Commentary on The Lotus Sutra'), Kōsei Press, Tokyo 1966, p. 96.
- 26 These terms reflect acceptance of the traditional Tendai pattern of exegesis. The 'trace' Buddha (*shakubutsu* 迹仏) is the historical, but merely provisional Buddha, while the 'essential' or 'basic' Buddha (*honbutsu* 本仏) is the Buddha whose duration of life is unlimited, that is, the 'real' Buddha. Cf. also below under the heading *Hōben in sectarian Buddhism*.
- 27 Cf. Chapter One, note 2, above.
- 28 Kumoi, *op. cit.* p. 323.
- 29 Kumoi, *op. cit.* p. 350.
- 30 Sawada, *op. cit.*, cf. Chapter One, note 1, above.
- 31 Masuda, *op. cit.* (cf. Chapter One, note 2 above), p. 117.
- 32 Not all encyclopedias follow this pattern. For example, Heibonsha's *Daijiten* (大辭典) (Tokyo 1936) has shorter unnamed entries, that for *hōben* being in Vol. 23, p. 130. Basically this is like the *kokugo* dictionaries already treated as it gives two meanings, the Buddhist one and the general one (measure, method, expedient, deceit). The Buddhist meaning as given here strongly stresses that *hōben* are expedient doctrinal devices. It quotes from The Teaching of Vimalakīrti along these lines, ignoring the dialectics with 'insight' in that sutra considered in Chapter Five above. It also quotes from the Heike Monogatari, where various appearances of a deity are said to be so many *hōben* (方便區區). If this entry is strongly biased towards taking *hōben* as mere expedients it is fair to add that it is followed by a whole series of compound words including *hōben*, thus giving generous space to the ramifications of the idea. At least one modern encyclopedia, by contrast, *Nihon Hyakka Daijiten* (日本百科大辭典) (Tokyo 1955), has no entry for *hōben* at all.
- 33 *Kokumin Hyakka Daijiten* (国民百科大辭典) (Tokyo 1936), volume 11. The entry runs: ほうべん (佛) 般若に対すると、眞實に対するとの二意前者は眞如に達する智を般若、利他に向う智を方便という。之によれば大小乗一切の佛教は方便。後者は究竟の歸旨を眞實、假を設け暫くにして發するを方便という。俗にいうてだて、之によれば小乗は大乗に入るの門なれば方便教。三乗は一乗に通ずる為に設けたものであるから之も亦方便教。
- 34 *Daihyakka Jiten* (大百科事典) (Tokyo 1933), Vol. 23, p. 422. (般若經に於ては) 般若の正智に立ち、空の無相無分別に沈没することなく、差別相の否定に徹するところに涌き出づる、諸の善徳を植修することを方便といふ。故に方便とは空から有への出動であり、擴充または應用である。かふる方便は必ず般若に伴ふべきものであり、空は方便によって生かさるものであるから、方便を忘れた空行は菩薩道ではなく、聲聞に墮落したものとす。 *Shōmon* is rendered Hinayana in translation for the sake of clear reading.
- 35 Yet there is a strangely secondary use of the term *fang-pien* in his major work on meditation, the *Mo Ho Chih Kuan* (摩訶止觀 J. *Makashikan*, T1911). This contains reference to five sets of five points of preparation for meditation, known collectively as preparatory skilful means (*ch'ien fang-pien* 前方便) and adding up to the 'twenty-five skilful means'. These are listed in Hurvitz, *op. cit.* and include a variety of physical and mental preparations. Cf. also the Japanese translation *Makashikan*, ed. by Sekiguchi Shindai (関口真大), Iwanami Bunko, Tokyo 1967, Vol. I, pp. 196ff and 377ff.
- 36 The problem of classifying religious groups belongs partly to the sociology of religion as well as to the phenomenology of religion. The church/sect distinction going back to Ernst Troeltsch is now antiquated, but modern refinements are equally unsatisfactory as yet. The term 'church' though often loosely used in journalism touching on East Asia is quite inappropriate for Buddhist organisations except in the most vague and general sense, and is probably best eschewed altogether. 'Sect' is used here without any intention of technical precision.
- 37 The best account is in Hurvitz, *op. cit.* because he also gives systems other than Chih-I's. The five stages in Chih-I's system include the first brief but unfortunately incomprehensible statement of the Buddha's teaching (*Kegon*), Hinayana teachings (*Agon*), preliminary Mahayana teachings which indicate the provisional character of the preceding (*Hōdō*), the

teaching of the perfection of insight (*Hannya*) which overcomes the differentiation between the two preceding, and finally the Nirvana and Lotus Sutras (*Hokke-Nehan*) which announces the Buddha-hood of all and the immeasurability of the Buddha's life, (terms in Japanese). One of the most interesting precursors of Chih-I in this connection is Tao-sheng (道生, fl. 397–432) who wrote the oldest Chinese commentary on The Lotus Sutra which is still extant. He asserted the universality of Buddha-nature and also stood for sudden rather than gradual enlightenment. Of particular interest here is his division of the Buddha's teaching into four kinds or aspects (perhaps anticipating Chih-I's 'four principles' or 'four methods' rather than the *p'an-chiao* classification). These were 'the good and pure (善淨 *shan-ching*) wheel of dharma', 'the skilful means (方便 *fang-pien*) wheel of dharma', 'the true reality (真實 *chen-shih*) wheel of dharma' and 'the residue-less (無餘 *wu-yü*) wheel of dharma' (c.f. Hurvitz, *op. cit.* p. 198). This might make the skilful means teaching look rather elementary, but the point is that skilful means leads into true reality and the conclusion or final resolution of the matter is 'without residue', that is, without karmic remainder.

- 38 This statement could of course be qualified in various respects, especially taking account of Nichiren's own use of many Buddhist scriptures in his writings (the *Kaimokushō* is a prime example), and bearing in mind that other important sutras such as The Heart Sutra are very well known to some of his devotees.
- 39 The overall arrangement is much more complex, with subdivisions going down to individual chapters. It is explained in Ōchō Keinichi's *Hokekyō Josetsu* (横超慧日：法華經序説), Kyōto 1962, p. 116; and in G. Renondeau's *La Doctrine de Nichiren* (Paris 1953) p. 242–3 (note), and of course in many other places.
- 40 Matsunaga, Alicia, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*.
- 41 See Nichiren's criticisms, especially of Hōnen, in the important *Rishō Ankoku Ron*, (French translation by G. Renondeau in T'oung P'ao). Nichiren's mandala is reproduced and explained in Renondeau's *La Doctrine de Nichiren*, pp. 180–1.
- 42 E.g. strictures by Sansom in a piece appended to Sir C. Eliot's *Japanese Buddhism*, London, 1964.
- 43 See especially Tajima Ryūjun, *Les Deux Grands Mandalas et la Doctrine de l'Esotérisme Shingon*, Tokyo and Paris, 1959, (Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise, Nouvelle Série, Tome VI).
- 44 In a sense this is a curiosity because the whole point of the term *dharmakāya* was to refer to an ineffable principle of buddhahood by contrast with the more or less speakable and tangible *sambōghakāya* and *nirmanakāya*. Dainichi Nyorai by contrast acts as a revealer. However it would be fair to observe that the 'bodies' here are not so much muddled as identified, which in the last analysis is consistent with any form of the *trikāya* doctrine.
- 45 Ui Hakuju, *Bukkyō Konsaisu Jiten*, article *san-hōben* (三方便) *ad loc.* Note also 'nine *hōben*' (九方便) referring to preparatory rituals only.
- 46 即身成佛, translated thus by Y. S. Hakeda in a recent study entitled *Kūkai, Major Works*, New York and London 1972. The phrase is the title of one of Kūkai's writings.
- 47 The Japanese name for the sutra is *Dainichikyō* (大日經, T848).
- 48 Quoted by Hakeda, *op. cit.* p. 87.
- 49 *Ibid.* pp. 157ff. The first varieties of medicine mentioned represent Confucianism, popular Taoism and Hinduism, explicitly referred to also by Nichiren as skilful means in the *Kaimokushō*, which is indeed a somewhat similar writing, (cf. Renondeau, *La Doctrine de Nichiren*, p. 67).
- 50 Hakeda, *op. cit.* p. 161.
- 51 *Ibid.* p. 161.
- 52 Cf. Matsunaga, *op. cit.*
- 53 *Jōdo Wasan* (Ryūkoku Translation Series IV) Kyōto 1965, p. 31 note. The distinction goes back to T'an-luan (J. Don-ran) and is a standard subject of discussion in Shinshū theology.
- 54 *Jōdo Wasan*, p. 66.
- 55 *Kyō Gyō Shin Shō* (Ryūkoku Translation Series, III) Kyōto 1966, p. 179.
- 56 *Jōdo Wasan*, p. 104.

## 9 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Skilful means is not quite so tidy a concept as a systematic investigator might hope. The materials studied above show that it is sometimes of central importance and sometimes rests in a merely secondary niche. However as far as the history of religious ideas is concerned the main meaning must be taken as that which it had in the early Mahayana texts. Even though this was not necessarily always understood by later Buddhists, who may have used the term in a derivative and perhaps misleading way, the fundamental idea can no longer be entirely subtracted from our understanding of any later phase of Buddhism. This view is reinforced by the argument advanced above that the idea in any case had a natural starting point in the very nature of pre-Mahayana Buddhism.

Sometimes specific teachings or entertainments, invented by the Buddha or by bodhisattvas in order to help ordinary beings on their way, are referred to as skilful means. Sometimes the idea finds concrete reference in particular practices which one performs in order to make spiritual progress. One should not think however that skilful means are therefore just elementary or peripheral aspects of Buddhism. For one thing the fact that the idea seems to come up in the two divergent ways just mentioned is deceptive. They are but two different ways of speaking about the same total range of elements in the articulation of Buddhism as a working religion. This deeper undercurrent becomes evident if one tries to itemise all the things referred to now and then as skilful means in the main texts studied. It simply transpires that all possible ways of giving expression to Buddhist Dharma are to be so understood. This applies to elementary or peripheral devotions but also to central matters such as the four noble truths and the story of the Buddha's life, including his final nirvana. It also applies to special Mahayana ideas such as that of the bodhisattva bringing across other living beings, for it is by his skilful means that he does this while not being attached to the characteristics of the process. How could a bodhisattva free others if he were bound himself by the problem of their deliverance? Thus in terms of skilful means a bodhisattva's true practice and the deliverance of others belong together. The Mahayanists saw the whole Buddhist religion as a vehicle for 'crossing over' and for 'bringing over', which are inseparable. In short, Buddhism is skilful means.

When we speak of 'the Buddhist religion' we do well to remember that it probably never was a single set of concepts and practices, however much our long historical perspective may press us to simplify it in this way. Of course there were dominant formulations and techniques which have persisted throughout, but the great strength of Buddhism as a cultural force has lain in its positionless, mediating, method. It has always thrived on control through syncretism. Syncretism is not a Buddhist word for these

correlation procedures, but skilful means is. It is because Buddhists understand the functioning of their religion in terms of skilful means, or if not, then instinctively along the lines which the term skilful means sums up, that they have been so easily able throughout history to acclimatise their religion in diverse societies. On the one hand they are able to show patience in accepting heterodox and even contradictory tendencies in their surroundings, and on the other hand they are both persistent and sophisticated with regard to the eventual recoupment of Buddhist meaning. This does not imply that Buddhists do not resort to polemics, as is popularly but erroneously supposed. On the contrary it means that the appraisal of Buddhist polemics is particularly complicated.

Skilful means may be described as a hermeneutical control for Buddhists, in the sense that it allows for expressions of Buddhism to be developed while indicating that they are not to be misapplied or taken wrongly. An expression of Buddhism is supposed to be aligned with the karmic condition, and thus the culture, of those for whom it is intended, while bearing hidden within it the implication that they are already nirvanic in quality from the beginning. Such an expression of Buddhism is a skilful means. In so far as it is properly understood by those for whom it is intended, if they are not conceited, do not get tangled up in it, do not practice it 'as a characteristic', etc. then its initial ambiguity should be resolved into the original or final Buddhist meaning, leaving the empty shell of the device, whatever it was, behind. Of course similar devices will be used repeatedly throughout Buddhist history, which may give an air of cultural conservatism in some cases. This is because even though an expression of Buddhism understood as skilful means bears within it the seeds of its own dismantling, others similar to it need to be continuously reconstituted for successive Buddhists. The same principle allows enough room for creative modernists. It is of course difficult for the mere historian of religion to distinguish at any one time between truly operating skilful means and the fossilised jetsam of former times. After all, the normative discernment of skilful means entails an interpretative activity within the tradition, that is to say an activity analogous to what in the western world is known as theology. It was activity of this sort in which the composers of the early Mahayana sutras were engaged, when they used the term skilful means to indicate the way in which their Buddhist tradition ought really to be understood.

While Buddhism certainly does function in this way at the socio-cultural level, and this may indeed be the most evident aspect of the matter to historians and other observers, it should not be overlooked that the resolution of the ambiguities of skilful means takes place in the experience of successive individuals. This means that while phases of tradition and patterns of acculturation naturally form the materials for much of the activity of interpreting Buddhism, it is also possible to reflect upon the matter in a less time-bound way. Whatever the truth may be about the recurrence of buddhas, ordinary individuals do recur in the sense that they follow each other countless along analogous patterns of development. The expressions

of Buddhism include words such as *anātman* or *śūnyatā*, stories and legends, political patronage, the language of rites and yoga, temple bells and cemetery stones; but all these expressions undergo shifts of meaning in the context of individual development. At first they are not understood, but they are acceptably present in a world which seems more or less definitely existing. Later they come to be understood, but their disappearance, together with that of the transitory world, is anticipated. So it is that all religious language and symbolism comes to be de-literalised. This maturation can be understood in terms of skilful means, namely as a move from profligate differentiation towards an inward consistency. This explains why it is quite appropriate for many ritualised individual predictions of Buddhahood to be made in The Lotus Sutra, once the principle of skilful means has been expounded and understood.

The idea of skilful means may operate in various ways at a varying pace. Fundamentally it refers to the very nature of the Buddhist religion. But the speed at which this is expressed and worked out varies in accordance with socio-cultural conditions. The reflective insights of early Mahayana were only possible on the basis of lengthening historical perspective. For example, it would not have been possible to say that the nine literary forms of Buddhist teaching were skilful means until these nine forms had all been elaborated and itemised. It was later quite natural for Chinese Buddhists to give expression to the same basic idea in terms of *p'an-chiao* theories of various kinds. In modern times it may be appropriate for Buddhists to align themselves with the historical understanding of the development of Buddhist literature, which does not in the least conflict with the concept of skilful means provided by the early Mahayanists. The main point remains that, once the tradition was sufficiently extended, it was possible for individual Buddhists, at varying speeds, to come to an understanding of the historical diversity within the tradition in terms of skilful means. Exactly the same applies with respect to the geographical diversification which Buddhism accepted from the start. The individuals influenced by Buddhism in any one context of cultural syncretism come to recognise, at varying speeds, the inward meaning or intention of the expressions which Buddhism adopted. In the meantime the contexts in which these recognitions take place continue to exist as long as the same socio-cultural conditions obtain; this is for the benefit of further persons involved. The teaching is never dismantled just because one individual has understood its character as skilful means. It remains in existence for others to see through. When the socio-cultural conditions change, then new expressions of Buddhism may be expected, as for example in both China and Japan today.

To anyone who has read this far the idea of skilful means may prove suggestive in the interpretation, or perhaps the better appreciation, of a whole range of religious phenomena: religious language and ritual in general, religion in its social and psychological outworkings, even those aspects of religion which to the rationalist appear as fabrications and frauds. In particular an understanding of the way Buddhism moves among all the

other socio-cultural factors in its world, sharpened by the concept of skilful means, provides a clue to the provisional and ambiguous character of all syncretisms. It is relevant to the interpretation of all religious and ideological systems which proliferate themselves through new forms of communication acceptable to their changing environment. This means, in effect, all the great religious and religio-ideological systems which the world has ever seen; though admittedly not all operate with the same patient acceptance of heterodox tendencies or the same persistent sophistication in the eventual recouplement of their underlying intention.

It is easy to observe that the proponents of every religious and ideological system are continuously engaged in identifying the true meaning of successive expressions of their tradition. Every system has its narrow-minded conservationists of literal form and its tolerant if not woolly liberals, tussling between them over the meaning which their tradition bears. The matter is always complicated by the varying pace of change in the perspective of individuals. The idea of skilful means has a potential application, if the protagonists care to transfer it, to many an ideological or theological controversy. This is because every such system really requires both relentless criticism of the received forms and expressions while maintaining and indeed bringing out the meaning. Skilful means implies that there is a time to articulate a particular form or expression and a time to relegate it or dismantle it.

There is a sense in which every religion is pitched into the world, having its time and place, meeting the circumstances and bearing a meaning which is addressed to those circumstances. Every religion which can be named is what Lessing called a 'positive' religion, positively present in the world and thereby subject to historical relativism. An approximate contemporary of Lessing, the Japanese writer Tominaga Nakamoto, saw different religions but the same principle. Indeed our common knowledge of the physical universe in modern times now raises the inescapable probability that all specific religions will eventually disappear, without trace. The transmission of religious meanings depends therefore on a kind of suspense between the appearance and departure of a specific form. The ability to handle this suspense, speaking now very generally, is analogous to the skilful means cultivated by a bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism. Putting it another way, it is in tune with the way of the world to understand any expressions of religion in terms of provisional articulation and eventual dismantling, the meaning being given first in alignment with the 'karma', that is, the history, the society and the psychology, and then coming to fruition while the expression itself vanishes with them.

It would lead too far actively now to attempt the interpretation of a quite different religion in terms of this Buddhist concept. Different readers would no doubt prefer to consider different cases. The main religion of the writer's own society is Christianity, and it seems that in that connection at least there are many interesting matters which arise. Indeed the analogy between skilful means and some Christian materials has already been pointed out in

print by earlier writers in a peripheral way. It is notable that recent decades have seen among Christian theologians one of the most sustained attempts in history to dismantle a religious tradition from within. Perhaps never before have the original and subsequent forms of a religion been so severely and systematically reviewed by international teams of professional theologians who nevertheless seek not to discard the persistent meaning of the tradition in question. Perhaps never before have so many religious leaders shocked so many religious followers. But the crisis has been great, and still is, at least in part because there is no concept adequate to articulate the debates except in terms of various forms of orthodoxy or betrayal. There is no concept traditional to Christianity which has enabled people to speak adequately of the relations between the proliferation and disposal of the various elements which have gone into the making of Christian religion. On the other hand it is readily evident to most westerners who have the concept of skilful means brought to their notice that Christianity provides natural analogies to the Buddhist procedures understood as skilful means.<sup>1</sup>

It should be admitted that the idea of skilful means does introduce a certain initial stress for those brought up in the western world. The three monotheistic religions which have dominated the west, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have all appeared to be quite uncompromising in their account of what is true and what is false. The westerner might feel moved to say that he does not want to be tricked into understanding; to which the eastern Buddhist replies (has replied) that if he were, he should not complain, but be grateful. In any case the western traditions themselves are not necessarily quite what they seem to be. For one thing there is the question of inexpressibility as a truth-value, particularly in the context of the substantial mystical tradition in the west. It is perhaps even more important, if less obvious, that the element of contrivance in all western religions has never been properly characterised or understood. This refers not only to the acting and story-telling by which religion is elaborated and carried on in general, but also specifically to the fundamental self-understanding of the three religions mentioned as being historically occasioned. Of course, the religions have often been described as false or illusory; but, without assigning levels of value at this moment, they ought to be critically appreciated as *contrivances of truth*.

In the meantime skilful means remains a way of understanding Buddhist method. Although it has been treated more or less peripherally in modern writings, there seems little doubt of its general importance in Buddhism. It offers a coherent rationale for the diverse cultural and social proliferations of Buddhism. It makes sense both of the intellectual and experiential aspects of understanding. Moreover it has surely gone beyond Buddhism in a tightly defined sense to influence the art and politics of East Asia. There are many concepts and practices which may convey the meaning of Buddhism, but no one of them can finally pin it down. Buddhism needs to be understood as a working religion. The strength of Buddhism lies in its method as skilful means.

## Endnote

1 The problem to which one may refer for simplicity's sake as that of speaking about the essence of Christianity is probably best solved not by referring to particular doctrinal statements but by identifying the characteristic style or method with which it meets otherwise existing structures. It took its birth in a critical, ambivalent stance towards Jewish religion of the time, and while it later accommodated itself to dominant social forms in many ways it has again and again thrown up a reformatory concern for the rightly directed use of religious belief and practice. Christianity has always had a subtle relationship to its contextual religious and ideological systems, especially if we take its more naive protagonists as parts of a more complex overall phenomenon. This can be observed in the earliest syncretisms evidenced by the New Testament materials, through the Apologists and right down to modern times. Moreover, there has always been a fascinating symbiosis of literalism and non-literalism, as for example in the resurrection stories, but also in many other matters. Again, even leaving on one side the elitist stratifications found in Gnosticism, Christianity has always recognised in one way or another that change and maturation are appropriate in the Christian's own understanding of his religion. It seems reasonable to suggest therefore that particular expressions of Christianity in a situation, in a life, in a society, in fact have a status quite analogous to that ascribed to the various expressions of Buddhism. That is, they are expressions quite necessarily particular to the occasion and dispensable with it. They disappear ultimately with the individual historical circumstances in which and for which they were conceived. Seen in this perspective the idea of skilful means may be relevant to central questions such as the function of language about God. It might also facilitate a 'christology' appropriate to the relativism of the modern world and, as it were, ready to give way with the world. Such an approach would no doubt be full of pitfalls and it would be a distortion to pursue them further here, but it may be helpful to note that the writer has attempted some other groundwork elsewhere. Specific attention is given to the syncretistic proliferation of religion in 'The Transplantation of Religions', *Numen* XVI, 3 (1969), 'Syncretism and Ambiguity', *Numen* XVIII, 2 (1971), and 'Assimilation and Skilful Means', *Religion* I, 2 (1971). Presuppositions of the appraisal of religions in the perspective of historical relativism are considered in 'Aufklärung and Religion in Europe and Japan', *Religious Studies* 9 (1973); and in Ernst Troeltsch, *Writings on Theology and Religion*, Duckworth 1977, co-translated and co-authored with Robert Morgan (cf. especially the section on 'Interpreting religious traditions' in the essay 'Troeltsch and the Science of Religion', which comments on Troeltsch's own major essay translated as 'What does "essence of Christianity" mean?'). Finally, there is a direct approach to the problem of transferring hermeneutical concepts from one religion to another in the essay 'Comparative Hermeneutics in Religion' in *The Cardinal Meaning, Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity*, The Hague 1973, co-edited with Robert Morgan.

## APPENDIX A BRIEF NOTE ON THE MAIN TEXTS USED

T numbers and Vol. numbers refer to the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*.

T262 (in Vol. IX) 妙法蓮華經

Ch. *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*

J. *Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō*

Eng. Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

Conventional J. *Hokekyō*

Conventional Eng. The Lotus Sutra

Cf. Sanskrit *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra*

T262 has seven 'rolls' and 28 chapters, while the Sanskrit has 27 chapters (cf. table in Appendix B). Cf. also T263 and 264 and discussion of relationships in Appendix B.

T475 (in Vol. XIV) 維摩詰所說經

Ch. *Wei-mo-chieh-so-shuo-ching*

J. *Yui-ma-kitsu-sho-setsu-kyō*

Eng. Sutra of the Teaching of Wei-mo-chieh

Conventional J. *Yuimagyō*

Conventional Eng. The Teaching of Vimalakīrti

Cf. Sanskrit *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* (only quotations extant)

T475 has three 'rolls' and 14 chapters, while the Tibetan differs (cf. Lamotte, *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*, p. 79).

T642 (in Vol. XV) 佛說首楞嚴三昧經

Ch. *Fo-shuo-shou-leng-yen-san-mei-ching*

J. *Bus-setsu-shu-ryō-gon-zam-mai-kyō*

Eng. Sutra of the Buddha's teaching on the Śūraṅgama-samādhi

Conventional J. *Shuryōgongyō*

Conventional Eng. The Śūraṅgama-samādhi Sutra

Cf. Sanskrit *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* (only fragments extant)

T642 consists of two 'rolls' and is not divided into chapters. It should not be confused with T945.

T223 (in Vol. VIII) 摩訶般若波羅蜜經

Ch. *Mo-ho-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ching*

J. *Ma-ka-han-nya-ha-ra-mitsu-kyō*

Eng. Great Prajñā-pāramitā Sutra

Conventional J. *Daihannyakyō* (but N.B. not T220 in Vols. V-VII),  
*Daibongyō* or *Daibonhannyakyō*

Cf. Sanskrit *Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*

T223 consists of no less than twenty-seven 'rolls' and contains 90 chapters.

On relations between Prajñā-pāramitā texts cf. Conze's *The Prajñā-pāramitā Literature*.

T227 (in Vol. VIII) 小品般若波羅蜜經

Ch. *Hsiao-p'in-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ching*

J. *Shō-bon-han-nya-ha-ra-mitsu-kyō*

Eng. Shorter Prajñā-pāramitā Sutra

Conventional J. *Shōbongyō*

Cf. Sanskrit *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*

T227 consists of ten 'rolls' and 29 chapters, while Conze translated from a Sanskrit text in 32 chapters (*The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary*). *Hōbōgirin* gives the official name of this sutra as being identical with 223, but the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Mokuroku* enters it as here, and so does Vol. VIII itself.

T235 (in Vol. VIII) 金剛般若波羅蜜經

Ch. *Chin-kang-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ching*

J. *Kon-gō-han-nya-ha-ra-mitsu-kyō*

Eng. Diamond Prajñā-pāramitā Sutra

Conventional J. *Kongōkyō*

Conventional Eng. The Diamond Sutra

Cf. Sanskrit *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*

T235 consists of one 'roll' only; for the Skt. text, translation and commentaries cf. Conze and Tucci in *Serie Orientale Roma* Nos. XIII and IX respectively.

T250 (in Vol. VIII) 摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經

Ch. *Mo-ho-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ta-ming-chou-ching*

J. *Ma-ka-han-nya-ha-ra-mitsu-dai-myō-ju-kyō*

Eng. Sutra of the Great Prajñā-pāramitā's Great Bright Spell

Conventional J. *Daimyōjukyō*

Conventional Eng. The Heart Sutra

Cf. Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*

T250 covers less than a page. A different version (T251 by Hsüan Tsang) is more commonly used and contains the name 'Heart Sutra' in its title. But cf. also an important parallel passage in Kumārajīva's T223, TVIII 223a.

T1564 (in Vol. XXX) 中論

Ch. *Chung-lun*

J. *Chū-ron*

Eng. The Middle Treatise

T1564 consists of four 'rolls' and may be compared to Sanskrit *Madhyamaśāstra* in so far as both contain Nāgārjuna's Middle Stanzas, on which they are commentaries. The authorship of the Chung-lun commentary is

discussed in Robinson's *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, who concludes that Kumārajīva himself has much responsibility for the final Chinese text (pp. 29ff.).

T1568 (in Vol. XXX) 十二門論

Ch. *Shih-erh-men-lun*

J. *Jū-ni-mon-ron*

Eng. The Twelve Topic Treatise

T1568 consists of one 'roll' only and was attributed to Nāgārjuna.

T1569 (in Vol. XXX) 百論

Ch. *Pai-lun*, or *po-lun*

J. *Hyaku-ron*

Eng. The Hundred Treatise

T1569 is a commentary in two 'rolls' on stanzas by Āryadeva, a follower of Nāgārjuna. The commentary is ascribed to Vasu, whose identification is otherwise uncertain, cf. Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 33.

N.B. Occurrences of the term *fang-pien* 方便 in the above writings are catalogued in Appendices C–F below.

## APPENDIX B

# HISTORICO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA

The above examination of the concept of skilful means was based on the premise that Kumārajīva's Chinese version of The Lotus Sutra may fairly be viewed as a literary unity. There is a historical appropriateness to the premise, but it is of some importance to locate that literary unity in its proper context in the history of the sutra's emergence. Moreover, as there is no adequate introduction to the Lotus Sutra presently available in English, the following very brief perspective may also be of some general use to readers.

The critical study of the text of The Lotus Sutra may be said to have begun in China, for the editors of the third Chinese version discussed in a preface the manuscripts which they consulted (see below). Modern study of the text however really began when the first Sanskrit manuscripts were collected in Nepal in the early nineteenth century, since when the discovery and comparison of various manuscripts has been slowly advanced with the co-operation of scholars in various countries. A general account of the European discovery of Buddhist Sanskrit literature may be found in G. Welbon's *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters*. As far as the text of The Lotus Sutra is concerned the main landmarks of progress are the Sanskrit editions published by Kern and Nanjio (1908–1912), by Wogihara and Tsuchida (1934-5) and by Nalinaksha Dutt (1953). (Details of these and other works mentioned below will be found in the bibliography.) The first of these used several Nepalese mss. and also indicated variations in a Central Asian source known as the Petrowski Manuscript. The Wogihara-Tsuchida edition was based on Kern-Nanjio but referred also to the Chinese and Tibetan versions. The Kern-Nanjio edition was most severely criticised by W. Baruch in his *Beiträge zum Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra* (1938). It is most unfortunate that his own edition ('Das Manuskript einer Neuausgabe des Saddharmapūṇḍarikasūtra's liegt nach mehrjähriger Arbeit druckfertig vor.' p. vii) never saw the light of day. Baruch also recorded his deep suspicion of the Wogihara-Tsuchida edition, based as it was on Kern-Nanjio, although it appears that he never examined the work in detail. Wogihara-Tsuchida was reviewed in detail by F. Weller in the *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 1937, Nr. 2, pp. 118–125. Nalinaksha Dutt's edition was based on the two previous editions, but took note of readings from Central Asian manuscripts collated by N. D. Mironov, cf. the latter's 'Buddhist Miscellanea II: Central Asian Recensions of the Saddharmapūṇḍarīka', JRAS 1927. Because of the dependence of the later traditions on Kern-Nanjio, Iwamoto Yutaka was still able to describe it as the '*editio princeps*' (Sakamoto and Iwamoto, *Hokekyō*

Vol. 1, 1962, p. 396), in his review of Lotus Sutra studies. It is a sorry state of affairs that there is not an up-to-date critical edition which commands general confidence and which makes use of all of the available sources. Even the Chinese versions, which have been available for long enough, have never been properly collated with the Sanskrit manuscript tradition.

As to translations from Sanskrit, it must be recognised that the pioneer translations by Burnouf into French (1852) and by Kern into English (1884, not 1909 as indicated by Iwamoto, *op. cit.* p. 396) preceded even the first critical edition of the text itself. They reflect only a section of the manuscript tradition as a whole. Kern's translation also suffers from more general terminological defects and although it first appeared in the prestigious *Sacred Books of the East* series edited by Max Müller, and was recently republished in unrevised form, it should only be used with great caution to obtain a general indication of the contents of the sutra. The best English translation for general use at present is that of Katō, Soothill & Schiffer from Chinese, see Chapter One, note 4. There are no up-to-date translations from Sanskrit in European languages, though readers of Japanese can make use of Iwamoto's critically annotated translation, *op. cit.*

The general position with regard to the relationships between the various texts and versions is as follows:

<i>Texts</i> ( <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit</i> )	<i>Versions</i> ( <i>Chinese and Tibetan</i> )
I (a) Gilgit ms., Kashmir, three-quarters of whole text, 5th–6th century A.D.	
(b)	<i>Cheng-fa-hua-ching</i> 正法華經 (J. pronunciation: <i>Shōhokkekyō</i> ) T263, Chinese version by Dharmarakṣa, 286 A.D.
(c)	<i>T'ien-p'in-miao-fa-lien-hua-ching</i> 添品妙法蓮華經 (J. pronunciation: <i>Tenbonmyōhōrengekyō</i> ) T264, Chinese version by Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta, 601 A.D. (revising T262, see below)
(d)	<i>Dam-pa'hi chos pad-ma dkar-po</i> <i>shes-bya ba theg-pa chen-po'hi mdo</i> , Tibetan version by Surendrabodhi and Sna-nam Ye-śes sde
(e) Nepalese mss., various mss. dating from 11th century A.D.	
II (a)	<i>Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching</i> 妙法蓮華經 (J. pronunciation: <i>Myōhōrengekyō</i> )

T262, Chinese version by  
Kumārajīva, 406 A.D., based on  
ms. from Kucha in Central Asia

- (b) Central Asian mss., various  
fragments from fifth century  
onwards including lengthy  
Petrowski ms. from Kashgar

The table is based on a similar table in Iwamoto, *op. cit.* p. 412, and further bibliographical and other information, especially on the various manuscript fragments which have been discovered, can be found in his review as a whole.

Note that the Gilgit ms. is not complete, and even that of it which remains after a deplorable dispersal has not yet been assimilated in a critical edition. The Tibetan version is said to be close to the late Nepalese mss. Since the Central Asian mss. are also fragmentary, the Chinese versions are a most important source of information. It is of particular significance that Ib (T263) and IIa (T262) fall into different groups.

Baruch strove to group them the other way round, relating T263 to the Central Asian manuscripts and T262 to the Nepalese group, but there are many inconsistencies in his treatment of T262. Ic (T264) is secondary. Its position in group I arises only from the fact that it contains some additions and 'corrections' typical of that group, for the text in general follows Kumārajīva's form of translation.

Some attention must now be paid to the relationships between the three Chinese versions. The first, by Dharmarakṣa in A.D. 286, was made more or less redundant by the much more widely used translation of Kumārajīva. The differences between the two no doubt arise partly because Kumārajīva was a mediating thinker who wished to express the meaning of the sutra in clear and direct Chinese. Whether this meant that his version was more faithful or less faithful to his original Sanskrit is a complex problem. A more faithful translation could be at the same time less useful for textual information. Unfortunately, since the manuscripts which the two translators used are not themselves available little progress can be made on this matter.

Of immediate interest however is the fact that Kumārajīva seems to have made use of a manuscript which was different from that which underlies T263. The preface to the third Chinese version states this explicitly. Indeed the writer of that preface claimed to have seen two different manuscripts of The Lotus Sutra in a sutra store house. One of these was written on palm leaves and the other in a script used in Kucha, where Kumārajīva lived for thirty years. The latter manuscript, it is said, agreed very closely with Kumārajīva's Chinese version. The palm leaf manuscript, on the other hand, agreed with Dharmarakṣa's version. Although Dharmarakṣa's version appeared first it should not be thought that the manuscript used by him necessarily represented an earlier form of the textual tradition. The only real evidence which we have about this is to be drawn from a comparison of the contents and arrangement of the two versions. As will be indicated below

the likelihood is rather that the manuscript underlying Kumārajīva's version represented the earlier form of textual tradition.

The producers of the third version, T264, attempted to iron out the differences of content and arrangement which the first two versions displayed. For this reason it was called the *T'ien-p'in-miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*, that is, the *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching* with additional material. The preface mentioned earlier not only refers to manuscripts close to those which the earlier translators must have used, but also gives important evidence about variations of content and arrangement with respect to which they themselves had to adopt a policy. They also refer to others before them who added to Kumārajīva's version. The passage is so important that it must be quoted. The numbers in brackets indicate the *T'ien-p'in*/Sanskrit chapter numeration for every reference, excepting of course for the Devadatta chapter which has no separate number in those texts.

'In former times the Tun Huang *śramaṇa*, the Indian Dharmarakṣa, in the generation of Wu of the Chin dynasty, translated the *Cheng-fa-hua-ching*. In the later Ch'in, at the request of Yang Hsing, Kumārajīva made a new translation, the *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*. When we examined the two translations we found that they are not the same text. Dharmarakṣa followed the palm leaves, while Kumārajīva followed the Kucha text. We also investigated the sutra store and looked closely at two books, one on palm leaves which agrees exactly with the *Cheng-fa* and one in Kucha script which is just the same as the *Miao-fa*. Furthermore, there are some neglected places in Dharmarakṣa's leaves while Kumārajīva's text has no such gaps. Nevertheless what is lacking in Dharmarakṣa's is the verses of the P'u-men-p'in 普門品 (24), while what is lacking in Kumārajīva's is half of the Yo-tso-yü-p'in 藥草喻品 (5), the beginnings of the Pūrṇa-p'in 富樓那品 (8) and Fa-shih-p'in 法師品 (10), the Devadatta-p'in and the P'u-men-p'in (24) verses. Kumārajīva transposes the Chu-lei-p'in 囑累品 (27) before the Yo-wang-p'in 藥王品 (22). Both put the *Dhāraṇī*-p'in (21) after the P'u-men-p'in (24). There are some other points of divergence which cannot be recorded in detail. As to the Devadatta-p'in and P'u-men-p'in verses, we observe that former worthies have continued to give them out, following the fashion of adding what is lacking. Furthermore, we respect received tradition and make this pattern our rule. In the first year of the Jen Shou period of the Great Sui dynasty, Bitter-spirits year, at the request of the *śramaṇa* Shang Hsing of the monastery P'u-yao-ssu, I re-examined the Indian palm leaf text together with the Dharma masters Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta at the monastery Ta-hsing-shan-ssu. The beginnings of the Pūrṇa-p'in (8) and the Fa-shih-p'in (10) were also lacking in the text we examined. We have re-added the other half to the Yo-tso-yü-p'in (5), inserted the Devadatta-p'in into the T'a-p'in (11) made the *Dhāraṇī*-p'in (21) follow the Shen-li-p'in 神力品 (20), and restored the Chu-lei-p'in (27) as the conclusion at the end.'

(T IX 134b-c).

Kern quoted Nanjio's translation, but although he realised that Kumāra-

jīva may have used an older manuscript (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, p. xxi) he did not draw out the full significance of this preface. Baruch also failed to do so because of his prejudice against the possible value of Kumārajīva's version (*op. cit.* pp. 32–35). Even Iwamoto, who like Kern, also quoted the preface, came out with a preference for T263's closer literal similarity with *later* Sanskrit manuscripts and irrelevantly criticised the use of Kumārajīva's version by present day 'fanatics' (*op. cit.* p. 409). It will be observed that the preface refers to no less than *five* previous stages in the textual transmission of which three are no longer available to us. These are: the 'palm leaf' manuscript, Dharmarakṣa's translation, the Kucha manuscript, Kumārajīva's original translation (which we will hasten to call Kumārajīva I before anybody comes up with *Ur-Kumārajīva*), and Kumārajīva's translation with the verses added to Chapters XII and XXV by the 'former worthies' (which we may call Kumārajīva II). Baruch treats this latter information as if it suggests that plenty of other changes were made to Kumārajīva's original version (*op. cit.* p. 35) but there is no evidence for this at all, and indeed it seems unlikely that such changes would have gone unremarked. The information contained in the preface, plus what is known of the texts which survived, enables us to compile the following table. It indicates the presence or absence of six portions of text.

	Kucha text	Kumā- rajīva I	Palm- leaf ms	T263, Dharma- rakṣa	Kumā- rajīva II (= T262)	T264, T'ien p'in	Extant Sanskrit
Latter half of ch. 5	—	—	in	in	—	in	in
Passage near beginning of ch. 8	—	—	—	in	—	—	—
Passage at beginning of ch. 10	—	—	—	in	—	—	—
Verses of Devadatta chapter (11, or XII in T262)	—	—	in	in	in	in	in
Verses 1–26 ch. 24, (ch. XXV in T262)	—	—	—	—	in	in	in

Verses 27–33  
of ch. 24,  
(ch. XXV in  
T262)

— — — — —  
in

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The most important fact demonstrated by this table is that none of the passages in question appeared in Kumārajīva I or the Kucha text, while all are found in the later Sanskrit manuscripts except for the two extra passages peculiar to T263. The question is whether people were leaving things out or putting things in. It is often supposed that Kumārajīva simply left things out, and that the full-blown Sanskrit manuscripts, to which Dharmarakṣa's earlier Chinese version more nearly approximates, are the measure of the original text. This view arises for two reasons. One is that Dharmarakṣa's version is known to be older and hence naively thought to represent 'the' original Sanskrit more accurately than Kumārajīva's version. However there is no *a priori* justification for this assumption. The other reason is the unfortunate term 闕 which was used in the preface quoted above to describe the absence of certain passages. Literally speaking the translators may appear as the agents in 'omitting' passages, but the real implication of the term may be more restrained, namely that the passages are 'lacking'. Admittedly the very fact that the *T'ien-p'in* version made up some of the lacking passages might imply that they considered them to have been omitted; but on the other hand they did not make up all 'lacking' passages.

There are in fact strong reasons to presume that the passages were not omitted, but added. None of the passages in question is represented by a disruption when it is not present. Nor is there any specific reason to suppose that any specific passage was omitted by anybody, whether by accident or on purpose. On the other hand the whole psychology of sutra transmission is precisely to hand down, with reasonable circumspection, everything which posterity may need. Hesitant additions gradually come to be established, acceptance coming by fits and starts. Thus the *T'ien-p'in* editors wanted to put in all that should be put in, having looked over what was available. They approved of the 'former worthies' who added verses to Kumārajīva I, and they followed suit. They also touched up the text in other ways, for example by adding to the chapter on Avalokiteśvara a short exchange between two bodhisattvas of 62 Chinese characters, (not indicated in the table above). The verses on Amitābha (verses 27–33 chapter 24), found only in the Sanskrit texts, are another example of exactly the same process taking place elsewhere, representing an addition which just happened not to gain currency in China at the right time.

If this general supposition is correct it is quite clear that Kumārajīva I, and the Kucha manuscript, represented an older textual tradition than that carried forward by the 'palm leaf' manuscript and T263. The only thing which Dharmarakṣa's version 'lacks' are the Avalokiteśvara verses (chapter 24, verses 1–26), but we also *know* that these were coming in at a later date,

being contributed for example to Kumārajīva II (our present T262). Kumārajīva I however lacked no less than four items contained in T263. It does not matter in the least that T263 pre-dates Kumārajīva I by just over a century. The point is that compilation was further advanced in the manuscript used by Dharmarakṣa than in the manuscript used by Kumārajīva. Kumārajīva must have known of Dharmarakṣa's existing version, which he chose not to copy. He may have had access to manuscripts such as Dharmarakṣa used; that we do not know. Could it be that he actually preferred the text from Kucha?

T263 has *some* relationship to the Nepalese manuscript tradition, though not a perfect one, but it seems to have been treated by the Chinese not only as a dead translation but also as a doubtful textual tradition. The *T'ien-p'in* editors incorporated materials from elsewhere, but only used T263 where it was corroborated by the 'palm leaf' manuscript. Thus they did not take up the passages in chapters 8 and 10, and since these now turn out not to be in the Nepalese manuscripts either they deserve to be congratulated.

The numeration and arrangement of chapters also provides evidence which strongly supports the view indicated above. Before commenting on details however there follows, for general reference, a synoptic view of the chapter headings and numbers of Kumārajīva's version (T262) and the extant Sanskrit text. The contents of each chapter correspond to that in the column opposite except where otherwise indicated, except for minor variations.

<i>Kumārajīva's Chinese version</i>	<i>Extant Sanskrit</i>
I Introduction	1 The occasion
II Skilful means	2 Skill in means
III An allegory	3 An allegory
IV Faith-discernment	4 Disposition
V Parable of the herbs	5 Herbs ( <i>plus extra material</i> )
VI Prediction	6 Prediction
VII Parable of the magic city	7 Parts played in a previous life
VIII Prediction about the five hundred disciples	8 Prediction about the five hundred monks
IX Destiny of those training and trained	9 Prediction
X Expositor of the Dharma	10 Expositor of the Dharma
XI Beholding the precious stupa	11 Appearance of a stupa
XII Devadatta	— ( <i>includes XII opposite</i> )
XIII Exhortation to hold firm	12 Fortitude
XIV Carefree life	13 Carefree life
XV Springing up out of the earth	14 Appearance of bodhisattvas from the gaps of the earth
XVI Duration of life of the Tathāgata	15 Duration of life of the Tathāgata
XVII Discernment of merit	16 Allocation of merit

XVIII	The merits of joyful acceptance	17	Exposition of the happiness of heartfelt conversion
XIX	The merits of an expositor	18	Benefits received by an expositor of the Dharma
XX	The bodhisattva Never-despise	19	Sadāparibhūta
XXI	The divine power of the Tathāgata	20	Demonstration of the super-human powers of the Tathāgata
XXII	The commission ( <i>equals</i> 27)	21	Spells ( <i>equals</i> XXVI)
XXIII	The original story of the bodhisattva Medicine-king	22	The part of Bhaiṣajyarāja in a previous life
XXIV	The bodhisattva Wonder-sound	23	Gadgadasvara
XXV	The universal gate of the bodhisattva Regarder-of-the-cries-of-the-world	24	Śamantamukha ( <i>plus extra verses, verses</i> 27–33)
XXVI	Dhāraṇī ( <i>i.e. spells, equals</i> 21)	25	The part of King Subhavyūha in a previous life ( <i>equals</i> XXVII)
XXVII	The original story of King Resplendent ( <i>equals</i> 25)	26	Samantabhadra's encouragement ( <i>equals</i> XXVIII)
XXVIII	Encouragement of the bodhisattva Universal-virtue ( <i>equals</i> 26)	27	The commission ( <i>equals</i> XXII)

The chapter headings of T264 follow those of T262, except that Chapter XII of T262 does not appear as a chapter in T264, and the titles of chapters XV and XVI in T262 are shortened in T264 where they appear as XIV and XV. Chapter VIII is referred to in the preface quoted earlier as the Pūrṇa Chapter, Pūrṇa being the name of the bodhisattva most referred to, but T264 follows T262 in the printed text today. The chapter headings of T263 naturally display more variations when compared with those of T262, but the details need not detain us.

It will be noticed that from Chapter XI/11 onwards the numeration of chapters does not coincide as between T262 and the Sanskrit text, and care should be taken not to confuse them. This is partly because the chapter on Devadatta was for some time treated as an independent chapter, as it still appears in T262, whereas in the present form of the Sanskrit it has been incorporated into Chapter 11. Both T263 and T264 already made this conflation, and therefore they too have a total of twenty-seven chapters only. Baruch's treatment of this matter, *op. cit.*, is hopelessly impaled on the later Chinese rationalisation that Kumārajīva or unspecified redactors separated an original Chapter 11 into two parts. The matter cannot now be pursued in detail, but the most widely held view is that the Devadatta chapter was a relatively late addition to the sutra, and that this is illustrated by its separateness in T262. Indeed it has been doubted whether Kumāra-

jīva's original work, Kumārajīva I, contained the chapter at all. Sasaki Kōken has concluded that it was probably inserted some time in the late fifth century or in the sixth century A.D. (in Mochizuki Kankō (ed.) *Kindai Nihon no Hokke Bukkyō*, Kyoto 1968, pp. 564–570). However that may be, the peculiarity of Kumārajīva's version in this respect is a further indication that it is based on a manuscript in an older state than that used for T263.

The arrangement of the last seven chapters needs special consideration. Kern's diagram to illustrate this (in the introduction to his translation), and others made by Japanese authors, are far from clear. In the following table the numeration of the Chinese versions is given in Roman numerals and the numeration of the extant Sanskrit is given in Arabic numerals. In addition the numbers of the equivalent Sanskrit chapters are given in brackets for each Chinese version, so that the easy way to compare the arrangement is to look at the Arabic numerals only. It will be seen that T264 is exactly equivalent to the Sanskrit, while the other two versions indicate displacements which are indicated by asterisks.

<i>T262</i>		<i>T263</i>		<i>T264</i>		<i>Sanskrit</i>
XXII	(27)*	XXI	(22)	XXI	(21)	21
XXIII	(22)	XXII	(23)	XXII	(22)	22
XXIV	(23)	XXIII	(24)	XXIII	(23)	23
XXV	(24)	XXIV	(21)*	XXIV	(24)	24
XXVI	(21)*	XXV	(25)	XXV	(25)	25
XXVII	(25)	XXVI	(26)	XXVI	(26)	26
XXVIII	(26)	XXVII	(27)	XXVII	(27)	27

Firstly, chapter 27 seems, in the textual tradition followed by Kumārajīva, to have preceded chapters 21–26. It is usually concluded from this (e.g. Kern, *op. cit.* p. xxi) that it formed the conclusion of the sutra at some time when it consisted of twenty-one chapters only. This hypothesis is supported also by the character of the contents of chapter 27 which is clearly a chapter of conclusion, and also by the contents of chapter 20 which are natural enough for a penultimate chapter. It is likely therefore that chapters 21–26 circulated at first as a kind of appendix to the main body of the sutra until finally the concluding chapter was moved along in order to appear at the *de facto* end. If this is so it is a third indication that, even though T263 is older as a translation than T262 Kumārajīva used a manuscript which had a more ancient arrangement.

The second displacement is that of chapter 21. If the order of precedence for antiquity of arrangement is: T262, T263, T264 and extant Sanskrit, then it is tempting to conclude by analogy with the above that chapter 21 was moved back to its present position in T264 (and Sanskrit) at some point later than the compilation of the manuscripts used for the previous Chinese versions. The motive for this may have been to range the chapter as nearly as possible with earlier chapters having a similar import. It may be objected that chapter 21 is rather a unique chapter in that it deals with the giving and listing of spells or talismanic formulae. However the point of the spells is that

they protect those who keep The Lotus Sutra in their memory or in a book, and it may be argued therefore that the chapter is not so much interested in the spells themselves, but rather in the people who keep and transmit The Lotus Sutra. In this respect it displays a significant community of interest with chapters 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19, all of which deal with the life-style, the problems and the solaces of expositors of The Lotus Sutra. Again, it might be supposed that if someone were re-arranging chapters in this way a position between chapters 19 and 20 would have been more appropriate. However, chapter 20, as was noted above, was one of the concluding chapters of the earlier body of the sutra, and therefore it would have been natural to hesitate to push chapter 21 back before that while yet wishing to move it back as far as possible among those chapters known to have been appended. All the other remaining chapters are concerned with various great bodhisattvas, etc., and so it would be quite appropriate for the chapter on spells to be made to precede them. There seems to be no particular reason why the displacement should have been made the other way round, i.e., from the present position in the Sanskrit to the position between chapters 24 and 25 which is represented in the two earliest Chinese versions. If the two displacements are thus or similarly to be accounted for, it may further be concluded that the order of the last six chapters of T262 is most likely to be the order in which they were originally appended to the earlier and shorter sutra.

All in all, there are three distinct reasons for presuming that the text which Kumārajīva used represents the most ancient stage of the textual tradition about which we have knowledge. Firstly, it contained significantly less materials than the other stages that we know about; secondly, the chapter on Devadatta was still numbered separately; and thirdly, the arrangement of the last seven chapters is the most archaic stage known to us in the process of their incorporation into the whole. Dharmarakṣa's version by contrast is of positive importance for the very different reason that it represents a *later* stage of textual tradition at an *earlier* date, which has implications for the overall dating of the sutra (see below).

The variations of content and arrangement have already led to a discussion of some aspects of the compilation of the sutra. Further clarification of this process depends on an examination of more detailed characteristics of the text. This was first attempted by Fuse Kōgaku who published his results in a work entitled *Hokekyō Seiritsu Shi* (i.e. 'History of the Formation of The Lotus Sutra') in 1934. His general conclusions have been accepted by Japanese scholars down to the present day, and he summarised them himself in 1966 in an article for the general public entitled 'Hokekyō Seiritsu no Rekishi' (see bibliography). Fuse used both the Chinese versions and the Sanskrit of Kern and Nanjio. It is conceivable that a complete collation of more recently discovered fragments would provide a text which might yield slightly different conclusions. However, Iwamoto *op. cit.* pp. 417 ff., surveying the linguistic evidence recently, could only find hints that the sutra first stemmed from the Maghada district, or at least from eastern India, and offered no suggestions for a new linguistic approach to the problem of the

compilation of the sutra. Note also that Rawlinson has made a detailed study (*op. cit.*), mainly on the basis of the Sanskrit text, and independent of Japanese research. The discussion below is based on Fuse's approach.

Fuse gave three reasons for distinguishing a major fissure in the sutra between chapter 9 and chapter 10, as follows:

(i) In chapter 10 the word *pustaka* appears for the first time to refer to 'the sutra' alongside the words *sūtra* and *dharmaparyāya* which had been used in the preceding chapters. This is significant because while the two latter words can refer to 'teaching' whether written or not, the term *pustaka* definitely implies a written sutra. (Kern translated it as 'book', *op. cit.* p. 214, etc.)

(ii) Chapter 10 also sees the introduction of three new forms of devotion to the sutra which imply its existence in written form. These are 'chanting' in the sense of reciting from a text, 'copying' and 'honouring', i.e., with flowers and so on. Forms of devotion to the sutra mentioned in the earlier chapters such as memorisation, recitation (from memory) and explanation, did not imply that it existed as a text. Indeed the assumption was that the sutra was heard from the mouth of the Buddha himself.

(iii) Finally there is a new emphasis in chapter 10 on the *cāitya*, a shrine within which is deposited a copy of the sutra, as opposed to the *stupa*, which is a repository for the relics of a Buddha. Indeed, in spite of the very significant magical stupa which appears in chapter 11, there is in chapter 10 a specific recommendation to the effect that a *cāitya* is as valuable as a *stupa* and should be so honoured.

These three facts are not merely incidental differences of vocabulary, but they betray rather a new and different point of view from which it is possible to look back and speak of the sutra as a physical entity, indeed as an already existing book. On the basis of this evidence and many other considerations about the contents of the various chapters Fuse concluded that the main part of the sutra was compiled in two main stages, namely (in the Sanskrit numeration):

I: chapters 1–9, and chapter 17 (which he thought displayed an approach similar to the early chapters).

II: chapters 10–20 and 27 (excluding the Devadatta section and excluding chapter 17 referred to above).

He also compared the prose and verse portions of the chapters in question. Whereas Burnouf had argued for the priority of the prose, Fuse agreed with Kern's later judgement that the verse was written first, at least as far as the first part of the sutra was concerned. In the second part he found no sufficient reason to reckon either as predating the other. (Chapters 21–26 contain no significant verse of early date. The stanzas of chapter 24 have been referred to already, and apart from these there are some nine stanzas scattered among chapters 21, 22 and 25, all of them being brief sentences of address).

Altogether then, Fuse saw the growth of the sutra as having had four main stages. They are, with the approximate dates which he assigned to them, as follows:

I: chapters 1-9 and 17, verse;	1st century B.C.
II: chapters 1-9 and 17, prose;	1st century A.D.
III: chapters 10-20 and 27 (except the Devadatta chapter and 17);	circa 100 A.D.
IV: chapters 21-26;	circa 150 A.D.

To these may be added a fifth stage which would include the Devadatta section and other small additions. Nearly all of these must have been in existence before 286 A.D., the date of Dharmarakṣa's translation.

If Fuse's analysis of the main stages of growth is right, we have to take the original nugget of The Lotus Sutra as having consisted of the verses of chapters 1-9, or as some part thereof. (Fuse's association of chapter 17 with these earlier chapters is, I think, of incidental interest rather than of fundamental importance.) It is within these portions that the original growing point of the sutra is to be discerned. It may be that one more step forward can be taken by means of a simple form-critical approach. Chapters 1-9 include four main types of material, namely: (i) an introduction, namely the occasion (*nīdāna*) of a preaching to be given by the Buddha; (ii) the preaching itself, given directly; (iii) stories (*aupamya*) which illustrate the meaning of the preaching in an indirect, allegorical way; (iv) announcements or predictions (*vyākaraṇa*) concerning the future destiny of those hearing the preaching. Although there are one or two anomalies in the arrangement as it now stands, there seems little doubt that the thread running through chapters 1-9 was spun in terms of these four main types of material and that the various chapters contribute in their various ways to a coherent literary whole. There is only one chapter of which it could reasonably be argued that it once stood alone as an independent unit, and that is chapter 7. Moreover, this chapter, alone of the chapters in question, contains within itself all four of the main types of material which are found in chapters 1-9 as a whole. It is a story set in the distant past, entitled *Pūrvayoga* (i.e. 'Parts played in a previous life'), and it is in effect a miniature Lotus Sutra. Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the ideas characteristic of The Lotus Sutra as a whole were first intimated in that fairly short writing, in a manner which did not in itself provide too stark a doctrinal challenge, and that these ideas then fired the imagination of a reader or readers skilled enough to expand them into the more grandiose scheme of chapters 1-9? The alternative, namely that someone conceived the extensive contents of chapters 1-9 as a unity, without working on the basis of an existing scriptural stimulus, seems to be unattractive in terms of the psychology of sutra writing. However this is only a hypothesis which may serve to stimulate further investigations on these or similar lines. It may be that linguistic evidence will rule out this particular suggestion, but it is high time that form-critical methods were applied to Buddhist documents.

The above considerations all have some implications for the dating of the sutra. It should be remembered that we are speaking throughout of presumed Sanskrit manuscripts on which the Chinese versions are based. The Chinese seem to have been more concerned to follow what they took to be authoritative sources than to make fresh compilations themselves. The changes made by the editors of T264 were made in order to improve Kumārajīva's version in accordance with authoritative sources. The changes in arrangement considered above must then have been completed in the Sanskrit manuscript tradition long enough before the production of T264 for them to have had time to become authoritative. Indeed, one of the adjustments, namely the shifting of chapter 27, must have taken place, analogously, some time before T263 was produced in A.D. 286. Before that date the additional chapters had to have been added and have come to be considered worthy of being treated as an integral part of the text. Bearing in mind that T263 is not the oldest stage in textual tradition, even of the full-length text, of which we have knowledge, this can scarcely have happened later than the early years of the third century A.D. Furthermore, since the additional chapters are not particularly closely associated with each other, it is not intrinsically likely that they were all composed and added at once. On the contrary, it is likely that they were added piecemeal. This demands if anything the postulation of a longer period of time and it seems not at all unreasonable to suppose that it began during the second century A.D. rather than the third. The three earlier stages of the growth of the sutra outlined by Fuse, however they need to be adjusted in detail, must be presumed to have been composed during the preceding century or so. To this may be added the general principle of contemporaneity with similar writings. L. de la Vallée Poussin pointed out that the sutras relating to Amitābha were translated into Chinese in 148 and 170 A.D. and display a buddhology as developed as that of The Lotus Sutra ('Lotus of the True Law', Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* VIII). It is also widely thought that the Perfection of Insight literature was begun around the turn of the millennium. Thus Fuse's dating must be about right.

It remains unclear to what extent The Lotus Sutra became the centre of a particular cult in India. It has already been indicated that in the third phase of its development, represented by chapters 10–20 (with the exceptions noted) devotion to the sutra was believed to bring merit, while its devotees clearly thought they had to reckon with various trials and hardships. Watanabe Shōkō has called attention particularly to this group of people, who produced and promoted the sutra, and his emphasis is praiseworthy since it is all too easy to treat the sutra merely as a unit in a scriptural tradition, forgetting the real people to whom it was important. (*Nihon no Bukkyō*, pp. 183f.)

One of the points made by Watanabe is that the story of the millionaire and his poor son, who rose from utter degradation to enter finally into the inheritance of his father's possessions, would be inconceivable in terms of the Indian caste system. Moreover, although the caste system was not observed

within the Buddhist sangha itself, it was not denied by them with regard to society in general. For this reason the story may be thought to have arisen in some kind of separate community lying apart from the influence of Brahmanism (*ibid.* p. 184). Against this it may be pointed out that there are wider problems about the development of Buddhism in relation to Brahmanism strictly conceived; while at the same time there is no doubt that in other respects The Lotus Sutra makes free use of widely current Indian terminology. The inventiveness of the storyteller should also not be overlooked. After all, to take a close parallel, in what real society could the details of the story of the burning house be set?

Watanabe also suggested that since the representation of Devadatta as the teacher of the Buddha in former times is quite contrary to the normal Buddhist account of him as a straightforward enemy of the Buddha, there may have been a time in the development of The Lotus Sutra when the community among whom it was important was to some degree separated from the main line of the Buddhist tradition (*ibid.* p. 184). Against this it might be argued that the story about Devadatta is intended to make a point which is fully consonant with the teaching of The Lotus Sutra as a whole, in that it asserts the future Buddhahood of one in whose case it would be precisely not expected. Along with the story of the daughter of the Nāgaking, the story of Devadatta adds a polemical pointedness to the doctrine that all beings will become Buddhas. Thus there is no reason why the Devadatta chapter should indicate the existence of an isolated group any more than that the existence of the sutra as a whole should do so.

In sum neither of these suggestions seems to be particularly compelling or indeed particularly informative. Watanabe seems to be too anxious to paint The Lotus Sutra as being the concern of an outcast community which in turn harshly rejected the doctrines of others. He notes, somewhat exaggeratedly, the polemics against 'Hīnayāna' Buddhism (*ibid.* p. 184), but fails to complement this by recognising for example that Śāriputra, representative of the earlier wisdom, is the first of whom future Buddhahood is predicted in terms of the new teaching. He fails also to do justice to the subtlety of the relationship between the three vehicles and the one Buddha vehicle. Is it possible that Watanabe is influenced in this approach by his image of a contemporary movement based on The Lotus Sutra, namely the Sōka Gakkai, of which he appears to disapprove? It is perhaps significant that widely differing types of piety can be inspired by the sutra today, and this in itself should make us hesitate to draw too quickly the portrait of the group among whom The Lotus Sutra was at first important almost two thousand years ago. Rather than having been the sole standard of an exclusivist sect, it seems far more likely that The Lotus Sutra was carried along as one Mahayana text among many. Several important Mahayana texts give the impression that they alone offer the real meaning of Buddhism, and those written in sutra form regularly fail to make mention of their fellows; but the general overlapping of ideas leaves little room for doubt that they sprang up and were cherished in the context of a widespread Buddhist tradition and not in narrow con-

venticles, each being passed with greater or less interest from community to community.

A commentarial tradition specially devoted to The Lotus Sutra does not seem to have developed in India. The only Indian writing especially devoted to it of which there is any trace is a commentary ascribed to Vasubandhu (fourth century A.D.). Two Chinese translations have survived, but according to Ōchō there is no attempt in this work to relate the contents of The Lotus Sutra to the Yogācāra doctrines for which Vasubandhu is famed (*Hokke Shisō*, p. 293). This is not necessarily surprising in view of the general character of the extensive systematising literary activity for which the Yogācārins are equally remembered. With regard to this, E. Conze said, 'A great deal of what they wrote consisted in just 'working up' traditional fields of knowledge, such as the Abhidharma or the Prajñāpāramitā . . .' *Buddhist Thought in India*, p. 250. The commentary in question also seems not to have had the influence on later Buddhism which Vasubandhu's works on the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* and the *Sukhāvātyūha Sūtra* had on the Huayen (J. Kegon) and Pure Land schools respectively. Indeed Ōchō wonders whether the commentary was really by Vasubandhu at all (*op. cit.* p. 213). It may be added that according to Watanabe the Tibetan canon of Buddhist scripture contains various treatises and commentaries from the Gupta dynasty, but nothing of Indian origin on The Lotus Sutra (*Nihon no Bukkyō*, p. 185).

In spite of the relative lack of early commentary, there is no doubt that The Lotus Sutra quickly came to be considered a Mahayana sutra of major importance along with others. Its influence can be seen in the frequent use of themes drawn from it in the Buddhist iconography of central Asia and north-western China (cf. J. L. Davidson, *The Lotus Sutra in Chinese Art*) and in the respect which the Chinese accorded it during the introduction of Buddhism to that country. It was not until the time of Chih-I (538–597) that a more specialised doctrinal basis for the later sects associated with The Lotus Sutra was clearly laid. Some see his approach to the relations between the various sutras and the analysis of their contents as a departure from the way in which The Lotus Sutra had been understood up till then, while others see it as a justifiable elaboration in terms of Mahayana Buddhism. But that is a question which goes beyond the present discussion.

## APPENDIX C

### OCCURRENCES OF *FANG-PIEN* IN THE LOTUS SUTRA

The following is a list of all the occurrences of the term *fang-pien* 方便 in Kumārajīva's version of The Lotus Sutra (T262), giving page numbers in T Vol. IX, and following his chapter numeration. Alongside are shown the appropriate equivalents in T263 and also the page numbers of the English translation by Kern, Soothill and Schiffer (KSS) for general context.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page ref.</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>T263 equiv.</i>	<i>KSS</i>
1	5b	I	67c	31
2	5b	II	67c	32
3	5c	II	68a	32
4	5c	II	—	32
5	6a	II	68c	32
6	6b	II	68c	38
7	6b	II	68c	38
8	7a	II	—	43
9	7b	II	69c	45
10	7b	II	69c	45
11	7b	II	—	46
12	7b	II	—	46
13	7b	II	—	47
14	7c	II	70a	48
15	7c	II	70a	49
16	8a	II	70b	50
17	8a	II	70b	51
18	8b	II	—	54
19	8b	II	70c	54
20	8c	II	71a	55
21	8c	II	—	55
22	9a	II	71c	59
23	9b	II	—	59
24	9b	II	72a	60
25	9b	II	72a	60
26	9b	II	—	61
27	9b	II	—	61
28	9c	II	72b	63
29	9c	II	72b	63
30	9c	II	72b	63
31	10a	II	—	64
32	10a	II	72c	65
33	10a	II	—	65
34	10b	II	73a	67
35	10b	II	—	67
36	10c	III	—	70
37	11a	III	74c	74

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page ref.</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>T263 equiv.</i>	<i>KSS</i>
38	11a	III	74c	74
39	11a	III	—	74
40	11b	III	—	75
41	12a	III	—	81
42	12b	III	75b	82
43	12c	III	75b	84
44	13a	III	—	85
45	13a	III	75c	86
46	13a	III	75c	86
47	13b	III	75c	87
48	13b	III	76a	87
49	13b	III	76a	87
50	13b	III	—	88
51	13c	III	76b	90
52	14b	III	77b	97
53	15a	III	78a	101
54	15a	III	—	103
55	15a	III	78b	104
56	15a	III	—	104
57	17a	IV	—	120
58	17a	IV	80b	120
59	17a	IV	—	121
60	17b	IV	81a	123
61	17c	IV	81a	124
62	18a	IV	—	128
63	18a	IV	—	129
64	18c	IV	82c	134
65	18c	IV	82c	134
66	19a	V	—	139
67	20b	V	84c	149
68	20b	V	85a	151
None in Chapter VI				
69	25c	VII	92b	189
70	25c	VII	—	189
71	26a	VII	—	190
72	26a	VII	92c	190
73	26a	VII	—	191
74	26a	VII	92c	191
75	26c	VII	93c	196
76	27a	VII	94a	197
77	27a	VII	—	198
78	27a	VII	94b	198
79	27b	VII	94b	198
80	27b	VIII	94b	201
81	27b	VIII	94c	201
82	27c	VIII	95c	203
83	28a	VIII	96a	205
84	28a	VIII	96a	205
85	28a	VIII	96a	206
86	28b	VIII	96b	207
87	29a	VIII	97b	212
88	30a	IX	98b	218
89	31c	X	—	229
90	34a	XI	—	245

No.	Page ref.	Chapter	T263 equiv.	KSS
None in Chapter XII				
91	36c	XIII	—	268
92	38a	XIV	—	277
93	38c	XIV	109b	281
94	39a	XIV	109c	285
95	39b	XIV	110a	286
None in Chapter XV				
96	42c	XVI	113c	309
97	42c	XVI	—	309
98	42c	XVI	—	310
99	42c	XVI	—	311
100	42c	XVI	114a	311
101	43a	XVI	114b	313
102	43b	XVI	114b	314
103	43b	XVI	114c	314
104	43b	XVI	114c	315
105	43c	XVI	115a	317
None in Chapter XVII				
106	47b	XVIII	—	339
None in Chapters XIX—XXIV				
107	57a	XXV	129b	407
108	58a	XXV	—	413
				(see below)
None in Chapter XXVI				
109	59c	XXVII	—	423
110	61b	XXVIII	—	434

Case no. 108 is located in the verses of Chapter XXV, which probably did not form part of The Lotus Sutra as Kumārajīva himself originally translated it (cf. Appendix B). For case no. 51 there is a misprint in the T263 parallel on 76b.

Of the parallels in T263, some use close equivalents rather than the term *fang-pien* itself. Even so there are forty-one cases (or forty excluding case no. 108) which have no specific parallel in T263. On the other hand there are twenty cases in T263 which are not found in T262, as follows: Ch. II, 70a; Ch. III, 79a; Ch. IV, 81a, 81b; Ch. V, 84a, 84c, 85b, 86b; Ch. VII, 90b; Ch. VIII, 95b, 96a, 97b; Ch. X, 100b; Ch. XI, 102c–103a; Ch. XIV, 112a, 112c, 112c; Ch. XV, 114b; Ch. XVII, 118a; Ch. XXI, 127a; (N.B. following T263's chapter numeration in this case). All in all it is fair to conclude that the term was more important for Kumārajīva, because he used it more often and more consistently.

The spread of occurrences by chapter in Kumārajīva's version is as follows:

I	1
II	34
III	21
IV	9

V	3
VI	0
VII	11
VIII	8
IX	1
X	1
XI	1
XII	0
XIII	1
XIV	4
XV	0
XVI	10
XVII	0
XVIII	1
XIX-XXIV	0
XXV	1 (or 2)
XXVI	0
XXVII	1
XXVIII	1

This distribution indicates that the main usage of the term is concentrated in the chapters which Fuse took to represent the first phase of the growth of the sutra (cf. Appendix B). Thus there is a statistical base to the reader's general impression that it is a leading theme of the opening series of chapters in particular. The only chapter outside the first group which has a significant number of occurrences is Chapter XVI (= Skt. 15). Not surprisingly it is also the main chapter in the later part of the sutra to pick up again the other leading themes of the sutra, the critique of the concept of nirvana, the nature of the Buddha's teaching, etc. The account of Avolakiteśvara in Chapter XXV has only one occurrence in the original prose part, as was admitted in Chapter Four above; however it is an important single occurrence, as explained earlier, and the whole conception of Chapter XXV closely mirrors that of the bodhisattva Pūrṇa in Chapter VIII, where there are several relevant occurrences. The general pattern of occurrences is not contradicted by Dharmarakṣa's usage. The only noteworthy flurry of extra occurrences outside the first phase of the sutra is in his chapter 14, and in those cases there is no extra support in the extant Sanskrit texts to presume an *upāya* or *upāyakauśalya* which Kumārajīva might perchance have disregarded (cf. Wogihara and Tsuchida, *op. cit.* pp. 262ff.) Thus all in all, apart from indicating the textual basis of the earlier discussion, the list of occurrences shows that whether one conceives of the sutra doctrinally, giving the traditional prominence to Chapters II and XVI, or whether one conceives of it historically along the lines of Fuse's theory or some refinement of it, the concept of skilful means plays an irreducibly leading role.

## APPENDIX D

### OCCURRENCES OF *FANG-PIEN* IN THE TEACHING OF VIMALAKĪRTI

Lamotte has provided a detailed concordance of all extant historic versions (*op. cit.* pp. 21ff.); and the reader may easily find the general context for cases of the term 'skilful means' in any of the various modern translations mentioned in Chapter Five, note 1. The following is therefore simply a list of all the occurrences of the term *fang-pien* 方便 in Kumārajīva's version (T475), giving the page reference in T XIV and the location by chapter.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page ref.</i>	<i>Chapter</i>
1	537a	I
2	538b	I
3	538b	I
4	538b	I
5	538c	I
6	539a	II
7	539a	II
8	539a	II
9	539b	II
10	539b	II
11	539c	II
None in Chapter III		
12	542c	IV
13	543c	IV
14	544b	V
15	545b	V
16	545b	V
17	545b	V
18	545b	V
19	545b	V
20	545b	V
21	545b	V
22	545b	V
23	545b	V
24	545b	V
25	545b	V
26	545b	V
27	545b	V
28	545b	V
29	545b	V
30	547a	VI
31	547a	VI
32	547a	VI
33	547b	VII
34	549a	VIII
35	549c	VIII

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page ref.</i>	<i>Chapter</i>
36	550a	VIII
37	550b	VIII
None in Chapter IX		
None in Chapter X		
38	554b	XI
39	554b	XI
40	554c	XI
None in Chapter XII		
41	556c	XIII
None in Chapter XIV		

The locution *fang-pien-li* 方便力 occurs in six of the above cases, namely nos. 1, 13, 30, 31, 37 and 41. It could perhaps be maintained that this phrase is preferred when it is a question of a bodhisattva directing his salvific activity towards living beings, but there are so many cases in Kumārajīva's usage when this is referred to with *fang-pien* alone that there does not seem to be an importantly distinct function for *fang-pien-li*.

## APPENDIX E

### OCCURRENCES OF *FANG-PIEN* IN THE PERFECTION OF INSIGHT SUTRAS ETC

The following is a list of all the occurrences of the term *fang-pien* 方便 in Kumārajīva's version of the Shorter Prajñā-pāramitā Sutra, T227, giving page numbers in T Vol. VIII, chapter locations, and cross-references to Conze's English translation from Sanskrit (abbreviated as C), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary*. The latter may be used for indications of general context, but it should be remembered that the texts translated by Kumārajīva and by Conze were by no means identical. A cross-reference does not necessarily imply an *upāya* or an *upāya-kauśalya* for Conze's text, though of course there usually will be one. The chapter numeration is also different. An x in column four (Insight) indicates that Kumārajīva closely associates *fang-pien* with the perfection of insight, as e.g. in the linked phrase 般若波羅蜜方便. An x in column five (Power) indicates that the case in question is 方便力, or 方便之力, 'power of skilful means', rather than just 方便 'skilful means'.

No.	Page ref.	Chapter	Insight	Power	C
1	538a	I	x		86
None in Chapter II					
None in Chapter III					
2	543c	IV	x	x	109
None in Chapter V					
None in Chapter VI					
3	548b	VII	x		129
4	548b	VII	x		129
5	548b	VII	x		129
6	549a	VII			132
7	549a	VII			132
8	549b	VII			132
9	549b	VII			132
None in Chapter VIII					
None in Chapter IX					
None in Chapter X					
10	556c	XI			167
11	556c	XI			167
12	556c	XI			167
13	556c	XI			167
14	557b	XI			169
15	557b	XI			169
16	557b	XII			170-1
17	557b	XII			170-1
None in Chapter XIII					
18	560b	XIV	x		185
19	560b	XIV	x		186

<i>No.</i>	<i>Page ref.</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Insight</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>C</i>
20	560b	XIV			186
21	560c	XIV	x		186
22	560c	XIV	x		186
23	560c	XIV	x		186
24	560c	XIV	x		187
25	560c	XIV	x		187
26	563a	XV	x		195
27	563a	XV	x		195
28	563a	XV	x		196
29	563a	XV	x		196
None in Chapter XVI					
30	566a	XVII	x		209
31	566c	XVII			211
32	567a	XVII	x		212
33	567a	XVII	x		212
34	567a	XVII	x		212
35	567b	XVII		x	215
36	567c	XVII	x		217
37	569a	XVIII	x		224
38	569a	XVIII			225
39	569b	XVIII		x	225
40	569b	XVIII		x	225
41	569b	XVIII		x	226
42	569b	XVIII		x	226
43	569b	XVIII		x	226
44	569b	XVIII		x	226
45	570b	XIX			230
46	570c	XIX			232
47	570c	XIX			232
48	571a	XIX	x		234
49	573a	XX	x		242
50	573a	XX	x		243
51	573a	XX	x		243
52	574a	XXI			250
53	574b	XXI	x		250
None in Chapter XXII					
None in Chapter XXIII					
None in Chapter XXIV					
54	579a	XXV	x	x	272
55	579a	XXV	x	x	272
56	579a	XXV	x	x	273
57	579a	XXV	x	x	273
None in Chapter XXVI					
58	580b	XXVII		x	278
59	580b	XXVII		x	278
60	582a	XXVII	x	x	283
61	582a	XXVII	x		283
62	582a	XXVII	x		284
63	582b	XXVII	x		285
64	582b	27	x	x	285
65	582c	27	x		286
66	583c	27	x	x	290
67	584a	27			290
68	584c	28	x		293

No.	Page ref.	Chapter	Insight	Power	C
69	585b	28	x		295
70	585b	28	x		295
71	585b	28	x		295
72	585b	28	x		295
73	585b	28	x		296

It will be observed that over half of the above cases link the term *fang-pien* with the idea of the perfection of insight, which supports the stress on this link noted in the discussion above. 'Power of skilful means' represents just under a quarter of the cases, and it seems to be little other than a variant of skilful means as far as Kumārajīva was concerned.

The Great Prajñā-pāramitā Sutra, T223, contains 225 cases of the term *fang-pien*, as follows.

- Chapter I: 219b, 220a, 220a  
 Chapter II: 221b, 221b, 221b  
 Chapter III: none  
 Chapter IV: 225b, 225b, 225b, 225c, 225c, 225c, 225c, 226a, 226a, 227c  
 Chapter V: none  
 Chapter VI: none  
 Chapter VII: none  
 Chapter VIII: 233b, 233b  
 Chapter IX: 235c, 235c  
 Chapter X: 237a, 237a, 237b, 237b, 237b, 237b, 239a  
 Chapter XI: 240a, 240a, 240a, 240a, 240b, 241a, 241a  
 Chapter XII: 242c  
 Chapter XIII: none  
 Chapter XIV: 244b, 244b  
 Chapter XV: 246c  
 Chapter XVI: none  
 Chapter XVII: none  
 Chapter XVIII: 250a  
 Chapters XIX–XXX: none  
 Chapter XXXI: 280c, 280c, 281a, 282c, 282c, 282c, 282c, 282c  
 Chapter XXXII: none  
 Chapter XXXIII: none  
 Chapter XXXIV: 286c, 286c  
 Chapters XXXV–XXXVIII: none  
 Chapter XXXIX: 299b, 301a, 301a, 301a, 301a, 301a, 302a, 302a  
 Chapter XL: none  
 Chapter XLI: 304b  
 Chapter XLII: 307c, 307c, 307c, 307c  
 Chapter XLIII: none  
 Chapter XLIV: none  
 Chapter XLV: 315c

Chapter XLVI: 320a, 320a, 320b, 320b, 320b

Chapter XLVII: 321a, 321a, 321a, 321a, 322a, 322a, 322b

Chapters XLVIII–L: none

Chapter LI: 330a, 330a, 330a, 330a, 330b, 330b, 330b, 330b, 330b, 330c,  
330c, 331a, 331a, 331a, 331b

Chapter LII: none

Chapter LIII: none

Chapter LIV: 336b, 336b, 336b, 336b, 336b, 336b, 336b, 336b, 336c, 336c, 336c,  
336c, 336c, 337a, 337a, 337a, 337a, 338c

Chapter LV: none

Chapter LVI: 342a, 343a

Chapter LVII: 344a, 344a, 345a, 345b, 345c, 345c, 345c, 345c, 346c, 346c,  
346c, 346c

Chapter LVIII: none

Chapter LIX: none

Chapter LX: 350c, 351a, 351a 351a, 351b

Chapter LXI: 352b, 352b, 352b, 353a, 353a, 353b

Chapter LXII: 356a

Chapter LXIII: 357b, 357b, 357b, 357c

Chapters LXIV–LXVI: none

Chapter LXVII: 364c, 364c

Chapter LXVIII: none

Chapter LXIX: 368c, 369b,  
372a, 372b, 373a

Chapter LXX: none

Chapter LXXI: 378b, 378b, 378b

Chapter LXXII: none

Chapter LXXIII: 380a, 380a, 380a, 380a, 380a, 380a, 380a, 380b

Chapter LXXIV: none

Chapter LXXV: 385b

Chapter LXXVI: 387c, 387c, 388b

Chapter LXXVII: none

Chapter LXXVIII: 392c, 394b, 394b, 394c

Chapter LXXIX: 398b, 398b, 398c, 400b, 400c

Chapter LXXX: 401a, 401a, 401a, 401a, 401a, 401b, 401c, 401c, 401c, 402a,  
402a, 402b

Chapter LXXXI: 404b, 404b, 404b, 404b, 404b, 404c, 404c, 405a, 405a

Chapter LXXXII: 407c

Chapter LXXXIII: 409c, 410a, 410a, 410a, 410b

Chapter LXXXIV: 412b

Chapter LXXXV: 412c, 412c

Chapter LXXXVI: 414b

Chapter LXXXVII: none

Chapter LXXXVIII: 416c, 416c, 418a, 418b, 418b, 418b, 418c, 419a, 419a,  
420a, 421a, 421b

Chapter LXXXIX: 422b, 422b, 422b, 422c, 422c, 422c

Chapter XC: none

The usage in this sutra closely reflects that of the shorter sutra (T227), and no attempt has been made to correlate them in detail. However, each case has been examined and there is no doubt that the main themes are entirely consistent. The close association between skilful means and the perfection of insight is equally striking in the longer sutra, while it is not possible to document a similarly close connection with 'compassion'. Of course skilful means is analogous to compassion in so far as it is directed towards the salvation of living beings. Among the large number of cases listed above, one case (410b) makes supernatural powers 神通 dependent upon the power of skilful means 方便 (as is also sometimes found in texts not presently under close study, e.g. in T245 at T VIII 827a). One other case in the list links skilful means with spells (*dhāraṇī*), but only in so far as both issue from the perfection of insight (T VIII 418b: 常行般若波羅蜜得大方便力及得諸陀羅尼). Thus special powers and magic spells contribute little to the basic definition of skilful means. As in the shorter sutra, skilful means entails not practising with respect to characteristics (237a–237b), that is, e.g. practising *dhyaṇa* (*ch'an* or *zen*) without being reborn accordingly (225b–225c), yet getting others to enter *dhyaṇa* (250a). It means not suffering from conceit (282c), and again and again it means bringing across living beings while practising that insight into the voidness of all things which subverts the necessity of so doing.

The occurrences of the term *fang-pien* in the three treatises referred to in the discussion in Chapter Six are as follows:

The Middle Treatise (T1564), T XXX 25a.

The Twelve Topic Treatise (T1568), T XXX 166b, 167b, 167b.

The Hundred Treatise (T1569), T XXX 168c, 170c, 180c, 180c, 180c.

## APPENDIX F SKILFUL MEANS IN THE ŚŪRAMGAMASAMĀDHI SUTRA

Only fragments of this sutra exist in Sanskrit, but it was among the earliest Mahayana sutras to be translated into Chinese. The first translation of A.D. 186 is now lost, but various others remain, notably that of Kumārajīva entitled *Shou-leng-yen san-mei-ching* 首楞嚴三昧經 J. *Shuryōgon-zanmai-kyō*).

The sutra and version in question is No. 642 in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* and should not be confused with an eighth century *Śūramgasūtra* (T945) which has been widely used in East Asia and also translated into English. Kumārajīva's version of the sutra, T642, with which we are here concerned, has been translated into French by Étienne Lamotte in *La Concentration de la Marche Héroïque*, Volume XIII in the series *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, 1965 Brussels (Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises).

The term *fang-pien* appears ten times in the sutra and Lamotte regularly translates it as *moyen(s) salvifique(s)*, except on one occasion (Lamotte 177) where he has *artifice salvifique*. In one case he supplies the term *l'habilité* and glosses his translation from the Chinese with the term *upāyakauśalya*, even though there is no full equivalent to this in the text itself (Lamotte 160, T XV 634a). Kumārajīva sometimes translates *upayakauśalya* as *fang-pien-li* (方便力), and this term does in fact appear in two of the other contexts in question. On each of these occasions however Lamotte simply glosses with the term *upāya*. The first time he translates 'par la force des moyens salvifiques' (Lamotte 123, T XV 630a), following the parallel phrases in the context which also contain 力 (*force*). The second time (Lamotte 199, T XV 638a) he translates 'recourant à un moyen salvifique', this time obscuring the 力. On each of these occasions the complete phrase is 以方便力 which could perhaps best be rendered as 'by the power of his (their) skilful means', though of course Lamotte's varied treatment (though not the varied glosses) may be said to be justified by the contexts.

A brief note on each of the ten occurrences follows.

(i) (T XV 629b, cf. Lamotte 118) Here 'a good knowledge' of *fang-pien* is one of the many excellent qualities of the *bodhisattva-mahāsattvas*. It is closely associated (indeed more closely than the translation suggests) with a knowledge of all languages, the phrase running 善知一切言辭方便 (cf. also (iii) below).

(ii) (T XV 630a cf. Lamotte 123) Here four bases of manifestation (現) are listed, namely: the power of deep wisdom (深慧力) which manifests the

turning of the wheel of the Dharma, the power of skilful means (方便力) which manifests the entry into nirvana, the power of *samādhi* (三昧力) which manifests the division of relics, and the power of the original vow (本願力) which manifests the disappearance of the Dharma. The parallelism implies that all of these are closely associated, and it will not go unnoticed that they are to do with the foundation of the workings of Buddhism as a religion.

(iii) (T XV 631b, cf. Lamotte 136) Knowledge of ‘all means’ is again stressed here as in (i) above, but so too is ability or skill (善能) an aspect which seems to have been omitted altogether in Lamotte’s translation (the complete phrase runs 善能了知一切方便). The last half of this phrase suggests, incidentally, that in the case of (i) above the 一切 should be taken with the 方便 as well as with the 言辭.

(iv) (T XV 631c, cf. Lamotte 138) The phrase is 善知一切方便迴向 in which comprehensive knowledge is again a keynote (cf. (i) and (iii) above). Lamotte rather opaquely translates ‘Bien connaître toutes les applications des moyens salvifiques’. It may be however that 方便 is here qualifying 迴向 (cf. Lamotte’s own gloss *upāyaparināmana*) which should then be translated ‘expedient transfers [of merit]’. This would indicate the appropriate use of the incalculable amounts of merit referred to in the previous sentence.

(v) (T XV 634a, cf. Lamotte 160) This case also includes the notion of ability (能) and makes the knowledge of *fang-pien* the continuation of a bodhisattva’s development after he has completed the six perfections. This is no doubt the reason why Lamotte glossed it as *upāyakaṣālya* as noted above.

(vi) (T XV 634a, cf. Lamotte 160) cf. (v) above.

(vii) (T XV 635a, cf. Lamotte 177) A certain Brahmarāja is said not to appreciate the skilful means used by a bodhisattva (不解菩薩所行方便) Cf. the following.

(viii) (T XV 635a, cf. Lamotte 177) This picks up the preceding phrase and refers to the other Brahmarājas (i.e. *all* the others, 餘諸梵王) who *do* understand. What they understand is ‘the wisdom-and-means of a bodhisattva’ (菩薩智慧方便). This is a clear association of this pair of qualities.

(ix) (T XV 638a, cf. Lamotte 199) One of the cases of 方便力 discussed above. The wider context of this case is discussed further below.

(x) (T XV 645a, cf. Lamotte 272) Here ‘the inconceivable [virtue] of skilful means’ (方便不可思議) is listed as one of twenty inconceivable virtues (二十不可思議功德). It is noteworthy that *fang-pien* in this list is closely associated with other important virtues such as merit, knowledge, wisdom and eloquence (cf. the above cases).

The basic position of this sutra, if it is ‘a position’, is the same as that of all the sutras discussed above. That is to say, it is fundamentally concerned with the bodhisattva’s insight into the voidness and thus the identity of all dharmas, coupled with his activity of differentiating these same dharmas for the sake of aiding beings attached to this or that point. The sutra contains a variety of dialogues and itemised lists and lays special stress on the *samādhi*

referred to in the title, which is however neither more nor less than the state of concentration maintained by buddhas and bodhisattvas. Of the ten occurrences of the term *fang-pien* in Kumārajīva's version, seven are in lists (see above). The other occurrences are in two narrative contexts which merit brief attention here.

The first (containing cases vii and viii above) is a story of a previous existence of the Buddha Śākyamuni, then still a bodhisattva. He is in his palace surrounded by his harem when he is visited by numerous heavenly beings. One of these, who is said not to have grasped the principle of *fang-pien*, asks why the bodhisattva is so wise yet continues to be attached to his royal status and to his pleasures. The answer is given by others of the heavenly beings who by contrast *have* understood the wisdom or insight and the *fang-pien* of the buddhas. They explain that he is in reality not attached to his royal status and his pleasures, but that he appears as a lay figure in order to educate beings and bring them to maturity. He appears as a bodhisattva, yet all the while he has already attained buddha-hood in other realms where he is proclaiming the Dharma. The ignorant inquirer then asks what *samādhi* it is which makes it possible for him to perform these feats, and the answer is of course that it is the *Śūraṅgama-samādhi* (Lamotte 178; T XV 635a).

This identification is important because it indicates that the dual basis of insight and means is fundamentally associated with the *samādhi* so generally praised in this sutra. Other lengthy sections extol the bodhisattva's ability to do two things at once as a result of this *samādhi* (E.g. Lamotte 124ff, 131ff, 141ff, 242ff, 245ff). The principle is that he conforms himself to the things of the world without being sullied by them. (Lamotte 138; 'Se conformer aux choses du monde, sans en contracter la souillure', T XV 631c 順諸世法而不染汚). An example of the application of the principle is his ability to demonstrate experience of pleasure in the company of musicians without losing within himself the concentration (*samādhi*) of the recollection of the Buddha (Lamotte 139; T XV 631c 於衆伎樂現自娛樂而內不捨念佛三昧; the term 現 seems to be slightly obscured in Lamotte's translation, for the point must be that the bodhisattva is able to manifest or make a show of enjoyment in order to effect a solidarity with those attached to enjoyment. In the same way he can manifest various infirmities, making himself lame, deaf, blind or dumb, in order to bring beings to maturity. (Lamotte 139. T XV 631c 示現種種癱殘跛蹇聾盲瘖啞以化衆生.) Some of the occurrences of the term *fang-pien* occur within lists of these abilities, which suggests that *fang-pien* itself is just one accomplishment among many. However, when the term emerges to centrality as in the narrative considered above, it seems to be a way of referring to all such abilities or activities in principle. The similarity of this line of thought with that of The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, and the Avalokiteśvara chapter of The Lotus Sutra, is quite evident.

It was also noted in the above case that *fang-pien* was related to the wisdom or insight of the bodhisattva. The second narrative context containing the term in this sutra (case ix above) illustrates this fundamental

relationship rather deftly. The story is a battle of wits between Māra (the devil) and some *devas* who encourage him to raise the thought of supreme perfect enlightenment, that is to say, to enter on the path of bodhisattvahood. (Lamotte 199; T XV 638a). Māra attempts to trick the *devas* by offering to do so on condition that they in turn renounce the thought of enlightenment, which under the circumstances would seem to be an appropriate *quid pro quo*. The *devas* call his bluff, and by their power of skilful means declare that they have renounced the thought of enlightenment. Māra in turn then has to produce the thought of enlightenment, but is thereby defeated because in so far as one being produces the thought of enlightenment all others do so equally. The identification arises because the thought of enlightenment is without differentiation. (T XV 638a 若一菩薩發菩提心。一切菩薩亦同是心。所以者何。心無差別。於諸衆生心皆平等; Lamotte (199) translates 菩提心 as *bodhicitta* and 心 as *citta*). In this way Māra's ruse unwittingly brings about its own defeat, but it is through *fang-pien* or skilful means that this result is realised. The logic of the skilful means is that the *devas* begin by accepting the differentiation in terms of which Māra's threat is real, but they use the situation which seems to be produced thereby in order to move to non-differentiation, in terms of which Māra's threat is no threat at all.

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