

## The Problem of the Buddha's Short Lifespan

Guang Xing

### Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha's lifespan is discussed in many Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras. An analysis of these texts shows that it became a problem when the Mahāyānists emphasized more and more the merit of the Buddha as a result of Bodhisattva practice. The authors of these texts tried to solve the problem by saying that the lifespan of the true Buddha in fact is infinite. The historical Buddha is only a manifestation for the sake of sentient beings through skilful means. These discussions finally contributed to the formulation of the saṃbhogakāya, the reward body of the Buddha.

**Keywords:** short lifespan, infinite lifespan, Śākyamuni, Mahāyānists

The problem of the Buddha's short lifespan is reflected in many Mahāyāna sūtras. In sūtras such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Avataṃsaka* and the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, a special chapter is devoted to the explanation of the issue.

The cause of the problem is the dichotomy between the Buddha's great merit<sup>2</sup> and his short lifespan. The Mahāyāna developed two closely connected concepts, namely its Buddhological variant along with the bodhisattva ideal. The bodhisattva ideal stresses on the arduous training that a bodhisattva endures on his way to Buddhahood. This involves the practice of the six perfections<sup>3</sup> on the ten bodhisattva stages<sup>4</sup> which take three asaṃkhyeya kalpas to complete.<sup>5</sup> According to Mahāyāna, a bodhisattva acquires immeasurable merit during this long period of time before the attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>6</sup> As a reward for such great merit, the Buddha enjoys a long blissful life with marvellous attributes such as limitless light. However, when the Mahāyānists applied this theory to Śākyamuni Buddha, they found that the historical Buddha lived only eighty years on earth. They found further that the Buddha encountered many

unpleasant occurrences.<sup>7</sup> This was indeed troubling to the Mahāyāna adepts. But the Buddha's long life span had already been conceived by the compilers of the early sūtras such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. It mentions that the Buddha could have lived for a kalpa or to the end of the kalpa if he so wished, but he had deliberately given up his life at the request of Māra.<sup>8</sup> The compilers of the sūtra thought that the Buddha could have lived for a kalpa. The Mahāsāṃghikas then built on this idea and maintained that the lifespan of the Buddha was limitless. However, Vasumitra's treatise does not offer any doctrinal support or explanation for this position. Kuiji, the commentator on Vasumitra's treatise, understood the Buddha of limitless lifespan as the saṃbhogakāya.<sup>9</sup> Kuiji was an eminent disciple of Xuanzang, the translator of Vasumitra's treatise. Thus, we may safely assume that to at least a significant extent, Kuiji was in agreement with the view of his master.

The problem of the short lifespan of Śākyamuni is mentioned in at least seven Mahāyāna texts. These include: the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi*, the *Avataṃsaka*, the *Suvarṇaprabhāsaśūtra*, the *Tathāgatapratibimba-pratiṣṭhānusamsāsūtra*, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, and the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*.

The chapter on the lifespan of the Tathāgata in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* states clearly that the Buddha lives forever, but for the sake of sentient beings he made a display of entering into parinirvāṇa.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, since I have attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of asaṃkhyeya kalpas, and during that time I have remained here constantly without ever entering parinirvāṇa. Good men, originally I practised the bodhisattva way, and the lifespan I acquired then has yet to come to an end, and it will last twice the number of years that have already passed. Now, however, although in fact I do not actually enter parinirvāṇa, I announce that I am going to adopt the course of parinirvāṇa. This is an expedient means which the Tathāgata uses to teach and convert living beings.<sup>11</sup>

Thus according to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, the lifespan of the Buddha is in fact immeasurable and it is only a skilful means for the sake of sentient beings that he

announced his parinirvāṇa.

In the *Śūramṅamasamādhisūtra*, the question of Śākyamuni's lifespan is posed by the Bodhisattva Dṛdhamati.<sup>12</sup> The Buddha told him that his life span is the same as that of the Buddha Vairocanaśmipratimaṇḍitavikurvaṇarāja, who lives in a universe named Pratimaṇḍita in the Eastern region thirty-seven Buddha lands away from this Sāha universe. Then Dṛdhamati travelled to that Buddha by supernatural power to enquire about his lifespan. That Buddha replied that his lifespan was of seven hundred incalculable cosmic periods<sup>13</sup> and said: "My lifespan is exactly the same as the lifespan of the Buddha Śākyamuni." At this point, it is stated in the text: "Then the whole assembly, on learning that the life span of the Buddha was so inconceivable, experienced great joy and, filled with astonishment, said to the Buddha: Bhagavat, the supernatural power of the Buddhas is astonishing and all their practices are inconceivable. Even though in this universe,<sup>14</sup> you manifest a very short lifespan, in that universe,<sup>15</sup> your lifespan lasts for seven hundred asaṃkhyeyakalpas!"<sup>16</sup> It is clear that there were followers who were unhappy about the short lifespan of Śākyamuni and this sūtra thus addresses the problem by an attempt to answer the question.

The chapter on the lifespan of the Buddha in the *Avataṃsaka* is very short.<sup>17</sup> It is said that one *kalpa* in the Sahā world, the land of Śākyamuni, is a day and night in the world of bliss, the land of Amitābha Buddha. One kalpa in the world of bliss is a day and night in the world of Vestment Banner, the land of the Buddha Adamant. This series goes on past a million zillion worlds. One kalpa in the last of these worlds is a day and night in the world of Supreme Lotus, the land of the Buddha Supreme in Goodness, which is filled with great bodhisattvas such as Samantabhadra. Although the text does not specify how long the life span of the Buddha in the world of the Supreme Lotus is, it nonetheless implies the infiniteness of his lifespan. Thus, it indicates that the lifespan of the Buddha is in fact limitless.

In the second chapter of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsaśūtra*, which also deals with the lifespan of the Buddha, it is said that in the past, the bodhisattva Ruciraketu had made offerings to hundreds and thousands of Buddhas and planted the roots of virtue.<sup>18</sup> He reflected on why the lifespan of Śākyamuni Tathāgata was only eighty years. He

realized that the Buddha taught two causes for long life, namely abstaining from killing and making offerings of food. And the Tathāgata practised non-killing in many hundreds of thousands of asaṃkhyeya kalpas. He had also completed the ten good dharmas and made limitless offerings of food including his own body, bones, marrow, flesh and blood. While the bodhisattva was reflecting thus, the four Buddhas of the four directions appeared and told Ruciraketu that, in fact, the lifespan of the Buddha is limitless: "Just as the water in the sea is immeasurable, the lifespan of Śākyamuni Buddha is, like the height of the mount Sumeru, immeasurable."<sup>19</sup> Here the author attempted to answer the question of short lifespan of Śākyamuni by resorting to legend.

The *Tathāgatapratibimbapraṭiṣṭhānusāsāsūtra* is a text praising the merit of making Buddha images, such as having a long life and being free from illness.<sup>20</sup> In the latter half of Devaprajña's translation, it also mentions the problem of the short lifespan of the Buddha. It is stated in the text: "At that time, in the assembly, there was a person, who had not awakened the mind of Mahāyāna, who doubted whether the Tathāgata made Buddha images in the past. If he did, then why was his lifespan so short and full of suffering, his land full of impurities?"<sup>21</sup> The sūtra answers this question by saying that the Buddha possesses an eternal body, the dharmakāya. It is for the sake of sentient beings that he made a display of illness, not to mention attaining nirvāṇa. In fact, the Buddha does not have to undergo all these experiences, while he enjoys a blissful infinite lifespan abiding in a pure land.

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* mentions the short lifespan of Śākyamuni in comparison with the past Buddhas.<sup>22</sup> It is stated, "Ānanda thought that in the past, Buddhas such as Ratnapuṇḍarīka and Dīpaṃkara were all born in the world at a good time. They had immeasurable long life spans and benefited numerous sentient beings. Śākyamuni Buddha was born into the world at a bad time and had a short life span. Can he even save all his disciples?"<sup>23</sup> In another place the text also states, "The life spans of the Buddhas are different, some are long and some short. The life span of Buddha Vipāśyin was 84,000 years, Krakucchanda's 60,000 years, Kanakamuni's 30,000 years, Kāśyapa's 20,000 years, but the life span of Śākyamuni was less than 100 years. The life span of Maitreya will be 84,000 years. The light of Śākyamuni

Buddha is only one zhang while the light of Maitreya is ten li."<sup>24</sup> Why was the life span of Śākyamuni so short? The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* attempts to answer the question by saying that there are two kinds of life span and light, one is manifested and the other is concealed. The manifested form is real and limitless, and the concealed form, which is for the sake of sentient beings, is limited and measurable.<sup>25</sup> What the author has tried to express is that the actual life span of the Buddha is limitless and immeasurable. This consists of the manifested form, but for the sake of sentient beings the Buddha made a show of having lived for eighty years only. The latter consists of the concealed form. The śāstra gives four reasons why the life span of Śākyamuni should be limitless. (1) Saving people's lives is the cause of long life. The Buddha saved the lives of an entire village in the past. (2) Practising non-killing is the cause of long life. The Buddha practised not only non-killing, but also showed compassion for all sentient beings. (3) Bodhisattvas obtain long life through the practice of the *prajñāpāramitā*s and other virtues. The Buddha has accumulated great virtues by practising them throughout many lives. (4) Among all types of lifetimes, the life of the Buddha is the foremost. On account of all these merits, the life span of the Buddha should be limitless, but in order to instruct sentient beings, the Buddha made a display of either long or short life spans.

The author of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* attempted to answer the question of the Buddha's short life span with logical arguments drawing support from traditional belief. Mahāyānists frequently sought to reconcile paradoxes thus, as they did when introducing new ideas by compiling a new sūtra. The Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* functions primarily to address this problem, as it is particularly devoted to the exposition of the idea that the Buddha is eternal. In the text, "Mahākāśyapa said, how can the Tathāgata be considered eternal granted the Buddha's statement of 'It is like the blowing out of the lamp that the fire will not be found anywhere; so is the Tathāgata when he entered into nirvāṇa."<sup>26</sup> This indicates that Mahākāśyapa as a representative of the conservative Hīnayāna schools opposed to the Mahāyānist idea of the eternity of the Buddha. Therefore, in the chapter on the diamond body, the sūtra states that the body of the Tathāgata is eternal because it is an indestructible diamond body, and a dharmakāya. It is not a defiled body sustained by food. Then Mahākāśyapa said to the Buddha, "World Honoured One, I have never

seen such bodies as the Buddha described and what I have seen is only the body sustained by food which is to be decomposed into dust. Why? Because the Tathāgata will enter into (final) nirvāṇa."<sup>27</sup>

There are two possible reasons underlying the appearance of Mahākāśyapa and his questions concerning the eternity of the Buddha's body in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*.<sup>28</sup> First, Mahākāśyapa played an important role in the so-called Hīnayāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. It was he who lit the fire of the funeral pyre and witnessed the body of the master being burnt. Mahākāśyapa was also the leader of the Saṃgha after the Buddha's death and presided over the first Council. The compilers of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* employed him as one of the main interlocutors in order to give the new sūtra authenticity as it bore the same title as the Hīnayāna version. A second factor, one of utter most importance in our study, consists of Mahākāśyapa's representation of the conservative Hīnayāna schools. This is explained by his question concerning the Buddha's entry into nirvāṇa, one typical of early Buddhism. The simile of lamp flame compared to nirvāṇa is found even in the *Samyuttanikāya*. Mahākāśyapa's question concerning the eternity of the Buddha most probably reflects the general attitude of the Hīnayāna schools in contrast with the Mahāyāna position when the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* was composed. The Sarvāstivādins, for instance, held the view that the physical body of the Buddha was subject to human conditions such as birth, old age and death. Hīnayānists such as the Sarvāstivādins must have objected to the Mahāyānist declaration that the Buddha is eternal. Consequently, this question became one of the serious issues of debate and contention between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna schools. Perhaps the former school held that there was an urgent need to compose a sūtra in order to address the whole matter in an authentic way.

There were already a number of Mahāyāna sūtras in existence which devoted a chapter to the problem of the Buddha's life span. Other sūtras put forward arguments for the eternity of the Buddha before the composition of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, as discussed above. But the compilers or authors of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* must have thought this insufficient, and they composed a sūtra to address this problem specifically. This is also supported by the

three central themes of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*: (1) the Buddha is eternal because the dharmakāya exists forever; (2) the mahāparinirvāṇa has four attributes, but eternity is the core; (3) all sentient beings including the icchantika<sup>29</sup> have the buddhadhātu.<sup>30</sup> The first theme directly addresses the problem while the second functions to bolster the first. The third theme is a further development of the first two.

The second theme is a reinterpretation of the concept of "nirvāṇa" found in early Buddhism. According to the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, the *mahāparinirvāṇa* has the four attributes of eternity, happiness, self and purity. Among them eternity is described as being the most important.<sup>31</sup> This may be explained by the belief that pure self-nature<sup>32</sup> of all dharmas is nirvāṇa and this pure self-nature is nothing but tathatā. So the concept of the "mahāparinirvāṇa" means eternal quiescence and thus it is the same as the dharmakāya, but represents different aspect of one Buddhahood. The mahāparinirvāṇa is the aspect of tranquillity of Buddhahood while the dharmakāya is the eternal principle, the fruit of the same Buddhahood. Therefore, to say that the Buddha entered into nirvāṇa does not mean that the Buddha was no more, like a fire gone forever without a trace, but that the Tathāgata abides eternally in quiescence.

The third theme is developed from the idea that the dharmakāya is eternal and abides in every sentient being. The sūtra states: "The buddhadhātu is the Tathāgata, the Tathāgata is the Dharma, which is eternal."<sup>33</sup> In another place the sūtra explains by way of similes that the buddhadhātu in all sentient beings is one and eternal. It is said: "The buddhadhātu of all sentient beings, in the same way, is one and eternal and without change, although (sentient beings) take up different bodies in the saṃsāra."<sup>34</sup> From the perspective of sentient beings, the Tathāgata is the buddhadhātu, and from the angle of Buddhahood, the Tathāgata is the dharmakāya. So the whole Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* explains the idea that the Buddha is eternal.

This analysis shows that the short life span of Śākyamuni became a problem when Mahāyānists began emphasising more and more the merit of the Buddha as a result of the doctrine of long Bodhisattva practice. It can be seen that although the sūtras and the śāstras employed various means to resolve the problem, it remained unsolved

since the fact that Śākyamuni lived on earth for only eighty years cannot be changed. This problem is closely related to a number of other problems such as the Buddha's bad karma, which is a subject of debate between the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Sarvāstivādins on the physical body of the Buddha. All these problems finally led to the formulation of the saṃbhogakāya, the reward body of the Buddha. With the advent of the concept of the "saṃbhogakāya" the theory of the three bodies of the Buddha was formulated. The saṃbhogakāya represents the aspect of the Buddha's merit as manifested in boundless light and limitless lifespan. It includes many other attributes via the enjoyment of dharmas with the assembly of great bodhisattvas. While the historical Buddha is considered only a transformation body<sup>35</sup> through which he made a show of being born in North India, attaining enlightenment and then entering into parinirvāṇa. Whatever, short lifespan or troubles he encountered are considered as skilful means to save sentient beings. In the ultimate sense, Buddhas never suffer. This aspect of the Buddha is designated the nirmāṇakāya, which can manifest itself in any form anywhere in order to help sentient beings attain nirvāṇa. The dharmakāya is the essence of Buddhahood, the realization of the true nature of all dharmas, as well as the principle of the universe, and it is therefore the support of the other two kāyas. The theory of trikāya is so important for the explanation of Mahāyāna teachings that it is found in many Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras, and it exerts a tremendous influence on Buddhism in India, China and other Buddhist countries.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are some Chinese characters and Romanized Sanskrit terms in this paper. If your computer does not support these characters, please download the relevant fonts and install them first. To download GBK Chinese font to browse with IE, please click [here](#). To download Sanskrit font to browse with IE, please click [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> mahāpuṇya

<sup>3</sup> The six perfections (pāramitās) are charity (dāna), morality (śīla), forbearance (kṣānti), effort (vīrya), meditation (dhyāna), and wisdom (prajñā). See Charles Muller edited *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*.

<sup>4</sup> The ten bodhisattva stages (bhūmi) are: 1) huanxidi - The "stage of joy" (pramuditā); 2) ligoudi - "freedom from defilement" (vimalā); 3) faguangdi - the "stage of emission of light" (prabhākārī); 4) yanhuidi - The "stage of glowing wisdom" (arcismatī); 5) nanshengdi - The "stage of overcoming the difficult" (sudurjayā); 6) xianqiandi - The "stage of manifestation of reality" (abhimukhī); 7) yuanxingdi - the "stage of far-reaching" (dūramgamā); 8) budongdi - The "immovable stage" (acalā); 9) shanhuidi - The "stage of wondrous wisdom" (sādhumatī); and 10) fayundi - the "stage of the dharma-cloud" (dharma-megha). See Charles Muller edited



*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism.*

<sup>5</sup> It is stated in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* that the Śrāvakayāna and the Mahāyāna are different in five ways: (1) the initiative mind for enlightenment (bodhi), (2) the learning and teaching of the Dharma, (3) the skilful means, (4) the activity of converting and saving people, and (5) the period of time required for enlightenment. The *śrāvakas* practise the first three aspects with the purpose of benefiting themselves, for the attainment of nirvāṇa. They do not make much effort to convert and save people so they do not have much merit. The period required for liberation is also short, namely three lifetimes. The Mahāyānists are quite different. They practise the first three aspects for the benefit of others, they spend their lives converting and working toward liberating individuals thus acquiring great merit. The period required for liberation is very long, namely three mahāsaṃkhyeya kalpas. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.31, 591b-c.

<sup>6</sup> The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* states: "The Buddha had accumulated immeasurable merit during the countless kalpas and when all are considered, no human being is comparable. Great causes result in great rewards. Again, the Buddha, in countless lives, practised all kinds of austerities and made offerings to beings with his own head, eyes, marrow, brain, let alone country, wealth, wife and children. (He) had practised and completed all kinds of discipline (śīla), all kinds of forbearance (kṣānti), all kinds of energy (vīrya), all kinds of meditation (dhyāna) and pure, indestructible and inexhaustible wisdom (prajñā). It is due to the power of the reward from these actions that (the Buddha) had such marvellous attributes." Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.25, 121b-c. The translation is mine.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Devadatta's rebellion, illness like stomach troubles and backaches, the Buddha's return with an empty bowl from a Brahman village.

<sup>8</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.1, 15c; *Dīghanikāya* ii, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Yao Zhihua, (ed.) *Yibu zonglun lun (Samayabhedavyūhacakra)*. Taiwan: Foguang publication.1996, 165.

<sup>10</sup> According to Buddhist Catalogues, there were six translations of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, but only three are in existence. The first translation (正法华经) was made by Dharmarakṣa in 28, the second by Kumārajīva in 406, and the third is a revised and enlarged edition by Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta in 601. Among the three, Kumārajīva's is the widely used in Chinese Buddhism.

<sup>11</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.9, 42c, line 19-24. This translation has been adopted from Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, 1993, 227, with some changes.

<sup>12</sup> The sūtra was translated by Kumārajīva. É. Lamotte, (tr.) *Śūraṅgamasamādhisūtra, the Concentration of Heroic Progress*. English translation is made by Sara Boin-Webb, London: Curzon Press. (French original 1965) 1998, 235-238.

<sup>13</sup> asaṃkhyeyakalpa

<sup>14</sup> in the Sāha Lokadhātu

<sup>15</sup> in the Pratimaṇḍita Lokadhātu

<sup>16</sup> É. Lamotte, *op. cit.*, (1998), 238.

<sup>17</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.9, 589c. There are three Chinese translations of this sūtra. The first of the three extant Chinese translations of the *Avataṃsaka* was conducted by Buddhahadra in 418-420 CE, and the second by Śikṣānanda in 695-699 CE. The third consists of only a partial translation, namely the Gandhavyuha by Prajñā in 796-

798 CE. We focus here mainly on Buddhahadra's translation because it is the earliest and the other two translations are revised and enlarged editions. Śikṣānanda's translation has five additional chapters in comparison to Buddhahadra's translation though the main body of the sūtra is largely the same. The added chapters are: two, three, four, five and twenty-seven in Śikṣānanda's translation. Prajñā's translation corresponds primarily to the last chapter of the first two. It is in forty fascicules, but the first thirty-nine are expanded on the basis of the last chapter of the first two translations: the Entry into the cosmos (dharmadhātu), and the last fascicule corresponds to chapter thirty-one of Buddhahadra's translation and chapter thirty-six of Śikṣānanda's translation: the practice of universal good.

<sup>18</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.16, 335c. There are three Chinese translations of this sūtra. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.16, No.663 was translated by Dharmarakṣa in the Northern Liang dynasty 397-439 CE. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.16, No.664 is a combination of three translations edited by Baogui: Dharmarakṣa's translation, Jī ānagupta's translation in the Northern Zhou 557-581 CE and Paramārtha's translation in 548-569 CE. The latter two translations are lost. T16, No.665 was translated by Yijing in 700-712 CE.

<sup>19</sup> The translation is mine. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.16, 335c-336b: “一切诸水，可知几滴；无有能数，释尊寿命。诸须弥山，可知斤两；无有能量，释尊寿命。”

<sup>20</sup> Amongst the three Chinese translations of the *Tathāgatapratibimbapraṭiṣṭhānusaṃsā-sūtra*, T16, No.692 was translated under the Eastern Han dynasty 25-220 CE, T16, No.693 under the Jin dynasty 317-420 CE, and T16, No.694 by Devaprajñā in 691 CE. In the latter half of Devaprajñā's translation, the dialogue is mainly conducted between the Buddha and Bodhisattva Maitreya concerning the merit of making Buddha images. However, in the middle of this dialogue, the sūtra mentions that a person doubted whether the Buddha did make images in the past and thus bad karma was introduced. They were most probably inserted into the text later when the bad karmas became an issue of debate. According to Bunyiu Nanjio (tr. *A Catalogue of The Chinese Translation of The Buddhist Tripiṭaka*. Delhi: Classics Indian Publications, 1989, p.76), there is also a Tibetan translation of the sūtra similar to the first two Chinese translations.

<sup>21</sup> The translation is mine. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.16, 794c-795a: “尔时，会中有未发大乘心者，皆生疑念：如来过去为造佛像为不作耶？设若作者，云何寿命而有限极、有病、有苦，所居国土，多诸秽浊，不得清净？” This is probably a good indication that the followers of Hinayana schools opposed the idea of eternal Buddha of the Mahayana school.

<sup>22</sup> The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* was translated by Kumārajīva. There is debate amongst scholars as to its authorship. Lamotte has first questioned its authorship. However, Yinshun, believes that the author of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* is Nāgārjuna. He puts forward eight points in support of his assertion. (1) As the text was translated by a committee, even if additions were made, they were not necessarily the work of Kumārajīva. Further, the phrases in the text such as "in Chinese we say..." were provided by the translators for the convenience of the Chinese audience, and were not "fabrications" on the part of Kumārajīva. (2) The tradition that claims

the existence of a version of the text in one thousand fascicles is unfounded. Evidence suggests that the original text contained one hundred and thirty-six fascicles. (3) Kumārajīva may have learned the Mahāyāna tradition of Kashmir and the work of the scribe Shengyu on the project contains errors. (4) The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* selects from a number of divergent views, affirming the interpretations of various schools, and is not necessarily biased in favour of the Sarvāstivāda. (5) The Sarvāstivādins did not have a *Kṣudrakapiṭaka* and made little use of stanzas and legends. But the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* makes extensive use of these materials as a legitimate vehicle for Buddhist doctrine. The jātika and avadāna materials are taken from throughout India, and are not limited to Northern India. In fact, the author is intimately connected with Southern India. (6) Nāgārjuna lived to an old age and may have quoted from works of his disciple Aryadeva. Further, Nāgārjuna's early and later works may differ stylistically. Hence, stylistic differences alone are insufficient evidence to support the claim that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* and the *Madhyamakaśāstra* are the works of different authors. (7) The fact that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* is not mentioned in late Indian and Tibetan *Madhyamaka* works may have resulted from the temporary discontinuity of Nāgārjuna's learning in the history of Buddhism. (8) The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* and the *Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā* are consistent, they are not the works of two different authors. This abstract is cited from his article "The author and translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*" in *Dongfang Zongjiao Yanjiu (Journal of the Oriental Religions)*, ii, 9-70.

<sup>23</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.25, 124b. The translation is mine.

<sup>24</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.25, 311c-312b. *Zhang* (丈) and *li* (里) are Chinese measurements, one *zhang* is 3.33 metres and one *li* is 500 metres. The translation is mine.

<sup>25</sup> The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* explains quite clearly why the life span of Śākyamuni Buddha was short while asserting that the real life span of the Buddha is immeasurable. It states, "If the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant good roots but, living in poverty and lowliness, will become attached to the five desires and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Thus Come One is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind." Burton Watson, (tr.) *The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, 227. The author of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* may have consulted the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* or have had this sūtra in mind.

<sup>26</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.12, 390a. 迦叶复言：“如来云何名曰常住？如佛言曰：“如灯灭已，无有方所。如来亦尔。既灭度已，亦无方所。” The translation is mine.

<sup>27</sup> The translation is mine. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.12, 382c-383a：“世尊，如佛所说，如如是等身，我悉不见，唯见无常，破坏微尘，杂食等身。何以故？如来当入于涅槃故。”

<sup>28</sup> There are three Chinese translations of the sūtra. The first (T12, No.376) was

---

translated by Faxian in 400-420, the second (T12, No.374) by Dharmakṣena in 423. The third one (T12, No.376) is a revised version.

<sup>29</sup> those who do not have good roots

<sup>30</sup> the potential to become buddhas

<sup>31</sup> Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.12, 596a.

<sup>32</sup> svabhāva

<sup>33</sup> The translation is mine. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.12, 445c : “佛性即是如来，如来即是法，法即是常。”

<sup>34</sup> The translation is mine. Taisho Tripi aka, Vol.12, 539b : “众生佛性亦复如是：虽处五道受别异身，而是佛性常一无变。”

<sup>35</sup> nirmāṇakāya